

#StopAsianHate

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ANIMATION

INT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

In pitch-black darkness, a single blinding light flares through a tiny peephole, illuminating a wide, frightened brown eye.

Intense sweat drips down NGUYEN THI QUYNH's permanent scars as the SOUND of gunfire echoes in the same rhythm as a dog barking; flinching at every BANG.

Quynh, 68, Vietnamese woman with a ridged face and pale skin, drained of color voided from the sun. She clings to her AGORAPHOBIC reality--a world confined to what she sees through her peephole.

INT. HALLWAY - QUYNH'S PERSPECTIVE - DAY

The narrow hallway outside her door warps into a dirt road.

TRANSITION:

EXT. MY LAI HAMLET - DAY (1968)

Vietnam 1968 in the hamlet of My Lai. Burning huts and lifeless bodies line the dirt road of Son My village.

Through the peephole of her memory, YOUNG QUYNH, just 15, peers out with the same wide, terror-filled eyes. Her innocent face is unmarred, yet her gaze reflects the horrors before her. Gunfire continues as she jolts to every BANG. Her eyes graze over to a mutilated Vietnamese VILLAGE GIRL being GANG raped.

Three AMERICAN SOLDIERS pass, rounding up VIETNAMESE VILLAGERS --mostly women, children, and the elderly. Among them, a MOTHER clutches her toddler, nervously buttoning her blouse. An elderly farmer shields his wife as she wails out the cries of her people.

The soldiers raise their M16s and FIRE! A volley of bullets erupts, and the villagers collapse in a heap.

Young Quynh hysterically covers her mouth trying to silence her cry as tears stream down her face. Beyond her peephole, reveals she is underneath a pile of DEAD BODIES. Her mother's lifeless body shields her from the multitude of bullets. Blood DRIPS down, mixing with her silent tears.

INT. HALLWAY - PRESENT DAY (2020)

The rhythmic barking of a dog jolts Quynh back. It is 2020, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of the hallway, a male MOVER (20s, masked) backs up a bookshelf into the apartment.

JAZZY with "Legally Blonde" hair, whose back is turned, wearing a hot pink dress and Jimmy Choo shoe knockoffs, is moving the bookshelf forward. A tiny Pekingese, JUJU, yanks at the mover's pants, BARKING sharply.

JAZZY

Juju, stop!

(to the mover)

Sorry, she doesn't like males.

Actually, she doesn't like most people but especially males.

They finally manage to get the bookshelf through the door and disappear.

When they reappear, it is revealed that Jazzy (22) is of Hawaiian mixed descent. Her bleach blonde hair reveals dark roots and she is explosively PREGNANT, wearing a hot pink mask to match her outfit.

The mover proceeds to carry more boxes in as Juju continues to growl and bark at him. Jazzy scoops Juju up.

JAZZY

Juju, behave! This man is helping us.

Juju licks her face, they canoodle, but as the mover passes, the BARKING resumes.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Quynh's trembling eye peers through her peephole. Each bark from Juju morphs into the echo of gunfire. Wind swirls around as the SOUND of a helicopter's chopper whirls overhead. Overwhelmed, Quynh pulls a blanket over herself, sliding to the floor in a fetal position, covering her ear, waiting for the noise to cease.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Sunlight filters through the curtains and birds chirp. Quynh remains curled up, her apartment frozen in an 80s time capsule. Cluttered bookshelves with travel books, a battered couch, and only a Roku for streaming Vietnamese TV.

INT. HALLWAY

The DELIVERY GIRL from "Asian Meals On Wheels" places a labeled BREAKFAST bag next to a cassette player attached to a cable wire underneath the door. She presses play.

Louis Armstrong's "What A Wonderful World" fills the air (or a similar song conveying calm, peace, and life is beautiful.)

SONG

*I see trees of green. Red roses
too. I see them bloom,*

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Quynh hears the song and presses against the door.

SONG

*For me and you. And I think to
myself, what a wonderful world.*

The soothing melody calms her down. Gradually, she reaches up and opens the door.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Quynh's hands reach out and pulls the bag inside. At the same time, across the hall, Jazzy steps out of her apartment in a sharp "Elle Woods" work outfit. She hears the music and notices Quynh's hand reaching through the door, rewinding the cassette. Excited to meet her neighbor, Jazzy approaches.

JAZZY

Hi--

Before she can finish, the door slams shut.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

Quynh places her meal down on the living room table and unravels the bag. She pulls out an unopened prescription bag, adding them to a growing pile, then opens her container of braised pork, and caramel hard-boiled eggs with garlic stir-fried water spinach over rice. The aroma soothes her nerves.

She turns on the TV remote. A NEWS REPORTER pops up as Quynh searches for her Roku remote.

TV REPORTER

Surveillance footage shows a group of gangs violently assaulting two elderly Asian women at the street market while bystanders look on.

Quynh freezes as the screen displays graphic images. Her mind spirals. Gunfire and chaos from her past resurface, blending with imagined street violence outside her window.

She checks the curtains, ensuring no light or sound seeps in, before retiring to the couch.

Fumbling for the remote, she switches to her favorite K-Drama dubbed in Vietnamese. The familiar scene drowns out the noise and she finally relaxes, eating her meal in comfort.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Jazzy arrives at her doorstep from work, Juju eagerly waiting behind the door. The familiar "Asian Meals On Wheels" delivery girl passes Jazzy, carrying a bag labeled DINNER.

The delivery girl places the bag by Quynh's door and presses play on the cassette. As Jazzy observes, Louis Armstrong's voice fills the hallway.

SONG

*I see trees of green. Red roses
too. I see them bloom,*

Jazzy opens her door and picks up Juju, who excitedly wags her tail. They greet each other with licks and kisses.

JAZZY

Hi sweetie! Ready for your walk?

She sets Juju down to grab the leash, but Juju scents the dinner aroma and darts toward Quynh's door just as Quynh opens it.

SONG

*And clouds of white. The bright
blessed day. The dark sacred night.*

Juju sniffs the food but Quynh snags it away. Juju starts licking Quynh's feet. Alarmed, Quynh shoos her off.

QUYNH

Shoo! Shoo!

Jazzy rushes over, leash in hand, but pauses.

JAZZY

Aww, she hardly licks anyone's feet. She must really like you.

Quynh, horrified, quickly kicks her foot back, and SLAMS the door shut. Jazzy is taken aback and picks up Juju.

JAZZY

Come on Juju, I don't know why you like her, she surely doesn't like us.

Juju whimpers softly.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Returning from their walk, Jazzy and Juju approach their door. Jazzy pauses, glancing over at Quynh's now-quiet door. She feels an uneasy pain in her stomach but shakes it off, unlocks the door, and steps inside.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Quynh munches her dinner—Chinese steamed fish and rice with garlic soy sauce while watching K-drama. A loud, frantic KNOCK interrupts her meal, mid-chew. The knocking grows insistent. She turns off the TV, sets her meal down, and tiptoes to the door.

The knocking abruptly halts. Quynh leans against the door, listening. Nothing. She cautiously peers through the peephole and sees Jazzy with a matching mask, frantically scribbling something down while clutching Juju with her LEASH attached. Jazzy's face is red, sweating, and breathing heavily.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jazzy finishes writing and notices the peephole darkens.

JAZZY

Ma'am!? Are you there? I think I'm going into labor. No one else is around. Please, I need your help.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Quynh murmurs to herself, shaking her head.

QUYNH

No! Nn no, no, no.

INT. HALLWAY

Jazzy SHRIEKS in pain and starts panic-breathing.

JAZZY

Ma'am, can you hear me? I can't take Juju with me. She seems to really like you. Can you watch her just for a little while? Please?

It's quiet now, sweat rolls down Jazzy's face when she hears CREEKS on the floorboard. Jazzy gets an idea, and bends over, gripping her stomach as she presses play on the cassette.

SONG

I see trees of green. Red roses too...

Jazzy waits anxiously. Just as she's about to lose hope, the door creaks open. Half of Quynh's face peels out.

JAZZY

Oh, thank God! My name's Jasmine, but people call me Jazzy. This is Jewels, but we call her Juju.

Quynh ignores the introduction, pushing the door slightly open to turn off the cassette. Suddenly, Jazzy's water breaks, splashes on Quynh's hand and the cassette player.

JAZZY

Oh my god, my water...I'm so sorry. I wasn't supposed to deliver yet, not until my sister arrived, but now I really need your help. Please watch Juju for me until my Joy comes out, I would really appreciate it!

Quynh shakes her head frantically, but before she can respond, Juju wiggles free and leaps inside, devouring the fish left on Quynh's table.

JAZZY

Juju, no! Oh my god, I'm so sorry! That's not beef, is it?

Quynh stammers, shaking her head again.

QUYNH

Nn, no... no, no.

Jazzy doubles over with another contraction and starts Lamaze breathing, one two, one two. Her phone PINGS.

JAZZY

Oh my god! My Uber's here! Please,
take care of her for me. Her treats
are in the bag and my contact is on
her collar. Please only feed her
dog food, okay?

Before Quynh can argue, Jazzy thrusts the doggie bag into her hand.

JAZZY

I'm so sorry. Thank you so much!
I'll be back as soon as I can!

She waddles off like a penguin, leaving Quynh perplexed, standing stunned in the doorway. She murmurs to herself.

QUYNH

Nn, no, no, no.

Quynh attempts to step out of the hallway but hears helicopters swirling and machine guns. She panics, shrinks back into her apartment, and slams the door shut.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

Quynh locks the door behind her. She scans the room and catches the dog lounging on the couch. The container is swipe clean. Quynh evil-eyes her. Juju responds with an innocent cute head-tilt puppy face charm, then plops her head down ready to unwind.

Quynh spitefully tosses the empty container in the trash. She plonks down next to Juju and turns the K-drama back on, keeping her emotional distance from the thief.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

The K-drama credits roll. Quynh turn off the Roku. Breaking news takes over the screen. A JOURNALIST reports.

TV JOURNALIST

Asian hate crimes are on the rise!
In our latest story, an Asian man
was attacked outside his home.

Quynh abruptly turns off the TV. Outside, she hears noises and peers through the curtains to see a group of FRIENDS laughing on the sidewalk. Frightened, she quickly closes the curtain and leans up against it trying to calm her nerves.

Juju trots over, leash in mouth, wagging her tail, ready for a walk. Quynh ignores her and looks at the clock, it's 8:59 PM. The clock CLICKS to 9:00 PM.

Quynh yawns and heads to her bedroom instead. Juju follows but the door slams shut right on her snout. Juju YELPS, heartbroken and alone outside her door.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The clock reads 3:04 AM. It clicks to 3:05 AM.

Late night, Quynh shuffles out in a dream-like state to use the bathroom, leaving her door AJAR.

INT. QUYNH'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Quynh, half-asleep, returns to her room, shuts the door, and crawls back to bed. Within seconds, Juju crawls up and snuggles next to her.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Sunrise dawns through a split in the window drapes. Quynh opens her bedroom door, and Juju eagerly follows, prancing around with her tail wagging. Quynh squints down at the dog still drowsy. Juju, tongue hanging out, holds up her leash in anticipation.

Quynh ignores her and shuffles into the kitchen. She grabs a glass, opens the fridge, and pulls out a water pitcher. Slowly, she pours herself a glass and takes a long, refreshing gulp.

As she lowers the glass, she notices Juju staring intently at it, licking her lips. Quynh glances at the glass in her hand. With a sigh, Quynh fills an empty bowl with water and places it on the floor beside Juju.

Juju sniffs it, takes a lick, then whimpers and pouts again, leash dangles from her mouth. She pounces toward the door, eager. Quynh deliberately looks away, pretending not to notice. Juju scampers back, determined, and places a paw over Quynh's foot. Quynh GRUNTS in response, annoyed.

EXT. QUYNH'S WINDOW APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Outside the apartment window lies a small patch of private grass.

Quynh's hands pop out of the curtains with Juju in hand and drop her. Juju lands on the grass, leash still trailing back inside.

INT. QUYNH'S APARTMENT WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Quynh, crouches down on the floor beneath the window, shielding herself from the world above. She clutches Juju's leash, listening intently to the sound of Juju urinating.

I/E - INTERCUT - QUYNH'S APARTMENT WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

Juju finishes peeing, shakes herself off, and tries to wander off but is constricted by the leash.

Quynh, sensing a tug, and the flow has stopped. She hoists up the leash.

Juju complies, her paws lifting off the ground dangling momentarily in midair.

At the window's edge, Quynh's hands reach out, quickly grab Juju, and pull her back inside.

INT. QUYNH'S APARTMENT WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

Quynh clutches Juju awkwardly in her arms. Juju, oblivious, licks her face enthusiastically. Quynh gasps, recoiling. She holds Juju at arm's length, both of them staring at each other, bewildered.

Suddenly, footsteps echo outside the door, snapping their attention toward the sound. Louis Armstrong's voice seeps through the door.

SONG

*I see trees of green. Red roses
too. I see them bloom.*

INT. HALLWAY

The cassette player continues as the door abruptly opens. Quynh grabs the bag and quickly shuts the door again, forgetting to rewind the cassette tape.

SONG

*And I think to myself, what a
wonderful world..*

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

Quynh sinks onto her couch and opens her breakfast, revealing it's her favorite, loco moco, with two sunny-side-up eggs, and a beef patty over rice, all drenched in brown gravy.

With her salivating mouth, Quynh grabs her fork and digs in. Just as she lifts the first bite to her mouth, she freezes. The sound of panting interrupts her bliss. Quynh glances over and sees Juju, perched on the table, staring intently at her, tongue out, licking her mouth. Ignoring the dog, Quynh turns back to her food. But before she can take a bite, Juju places her paws on Quynh's hand and lets out a mournful HOWL.

Quynh sighs, closes the container with a snap, and stomps to the kitchen. She comes back and pours the dog food into a bowl and drops it in front of Juju. Juju ignores it and yelps loudly, gazing up at Quynh with irresistible puppy eyes.

Quynh grunts and snidely throws a small piece of patty mid-air. Juju immediately snatches it and then begs for more.

Quynh places both the bowl and Juju on the ground. She guiltfully hurries to devour her food so Juju can stop taunting her.

She nearly finishes but stops, leans back on the edge of her seat, and with a sigh, her hand drops a big piece of gravy-drenched, beef patty into Juju's bowl. Juju wolfs it up. Quynh's hand remains dangling as she reluctantly pets Juju's head. Juju, delighted by the affection, happily devours the meal, tail wagging ever faster.

SONG

*Yes, I think to myself... what a
wonderful world... Oh, yeah...*

The tape CLICKS to an end and rewinds itself.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

Quynh is doing her high-knee and reach exercise following the Vietnamese TRAINER on TV.

VIETNAMESE TRAINER

(subtitle)

Opposite arms and hands reach up
and breathe!

Quynh mirrors the trainer's movement. She takes a deep breath and repeats. Juju remains on the floor, slumped.

VIETNAMESE TV TRAINER

(subtitle)

Okay, great job! And relax!
Remember to do these exercises
daily, especially during these
COVID hard times. Stay home, stay
healthy, wash your hands, and be
safe! Thank you for working out
with us. Until next time.

Quynh stops and wipes her sweat with a towel. She goes into the fridge and pours herself a glass of water. She then fills a bowl with water and sets it by Juju, who barely moves. Quynh curiously analyses Juju.

E/I. INTERCUT - QUYNH'S APARTMENT WINDOW

Juju is being lowered down with her feet dangling from the leash. She reaches the grass but remains slumped.

Quynh waits for the sound of pee but nothing. She jerks the leash but still hears nothing.

Juju lets out a skirmish howl.

Quynh's brow furrows.

Juju is rapidly being hoisted back up again.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

The clock reads 11:59 AM then it CLICKS to 12:00 PM.

Quynh rushes to the door and peeks through the peephole. She sees the delivery girl arriving.

INT. HALLWAY

Before the girl can place the lunch bag down, Quynh quickly opens the door, grabs the bag, and slams the door shut, leaving the girl with no time to react.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

Quynh hurries the food to Juju. She scrambles to open the bag, pulls out the teriyaki chicken, and drops it into Juju's bowl. Juju sniffs it but barely moves, and remains slumped. Quynh pushes the bowl closer, but Juju is nonresponsive. Quynh feels uneasy, uncertain of what to do. She looks at Juju, who softly squeals in pain.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

The clock reads 2:03 PM. CLICKS to 2:04 PM.

Quynh paces back and forth, and neither of them touched their food. Juju quivers on the couch. Quynh covers her with a blanket. Juju regurgitates on the blanket. Quynh manically cleans it up.

She then picks up her landline, struggles to read the numbers on Juju's collar, before finally dialing. The phone RINGS, no answers, and goes to voicemail.

JAZZY (V.O.)

Hi, you've reached Jazzy and Juju,
(ruff, ruff!) We can't come to the
pho-

Quynh hangs up, but the phone RINGS back immediately. She picks it up and responds in broken English.

QUYNH

Ello?

JAZZY (V.O.)

Ma'am, is that you?

QUYNH

Yes.

INT. INTERCUT - HOSPITAL/QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

JAZZY

Oh, thank god! I just got out of
labor. It was the longest, most
painstaking ordeal of my life!
Worse than law school. How's Juju?

QUYNH

She's fine. Nn no, no! She's sick.
She weak an shakin.

JAZZY

What!? What happened?

QUYNH

She not good. You have to come
back.

JAZZY

I can't right now. I'm still stuck
in the hospital. They have my Joy!
It's a girl, her name is Joy!

(MORE)

JAZZY (CONT'D)

And they say I have to wait for my stitches to heal. It hurts like a mother! But what happened to Juju?

QUYNH

I dunno. She vomit.

JAZZY

Vomit?

(contemplating)

Did you feed her something besides the doggie bag I left?

QUYNH

Yes. She no eat bag.

JAZZY

What did you feed her?

QUYNH

Loco moco.

JAZZY

Oh no, beef patties loco moco?

QUYNH

Yes.

JAZZY

She's allergic to beef. I'm so sorry, I thought I told you.

QUYNH

I dunno.

JAZZY

It's my fault. I should've been clearer. But she needs her medicine now. Can you go to my apartment?

QUYNH

(adamantly)

Nnn no, no, I can't!

JAZZY

Right, you don't have the keys. Okay, what if I call my vet? They can prescribe her medicine. You just need to pick it up at the CVS pharmacy down the street, yeah?

Quynh shakes her head.

QUYNH
No, no, no. I can't do that.

JAZZY
Please! Juju gets really sick with rashes and diarrhea. Last time she nearly died.

Jazzy's voice trembles with urgency.

JAZZY
It's just down the street on Jefferson. I promise I'll be back soon. -Oh! The nurse is here. I need to feed my Joysie now. Please promise me you'll get it or she'll die. I'll call you as soon as I call the vet.
(baby Joy crying)
Okay, I gotta go now. Talk to you soon. Thank you!

Quynh shakes her head as the line goes quiet. She hangs up and evil-eyes the dog. Juju slumps over, looking up at Quynh with big, pleading eyes, head tilts, switches eyebrows, and softly whimpers.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

The clock reads 2:55 PM; CLICKS to 2:56 PM.

The phone RINGS. Quynh picks it up.

QUYNH
Aello?

JAZZY (V.O.)
Hey, it's me again. How's Juju?

QUYNH
Not good.

INT. INTER CUT - HOSPITAL/QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

JAZZY
Well, I got the meds. They're ready for pickup at the CVS store now!

QUYNH
Can someone pick it up?

JAZZY

I wish! My sister doesn't arrive until next week. I wasn't supposed to be due yet, and I just moved here for work. I was going to law school when some moke knocked me up and now I have to support my new family without a dad.

(sniffling)

I don't really know anyone here.
I'm sorry...

QUYNH

(reluctant)

Okay.

JAZZY

Thank you so much! Seriously, this means so much. I'll make it up to you, I promise. Talk to you soon.

They hang up. Quynh paces back and forth, shaking her head. Juju's eyes follow but she is too weak to move.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

5:00 PM. It CLICKS to 5:01 PM.

Quynh stands by the peephole. She sees the delivery girl entering the hallway again.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Quynh cracks her door open just enough for her eyes to peek through the narrow opening.

QUYNH

Can you go pharmacy for me?

The delivery girl is taken aback by Quynh speaking.

DELIVERY GIRL

I'm sorry, Ms. Nguyễn. I have to stick to my route. With COVID, there are too many restrictions, and I've got a lot of deliveries.

QUYNH

Is there a service to deliver medicine?

DELIVERY GIRL

Yes, it's in your prescription bag.

QUYNH

Not me, someone else.

DELIVERY GIRL

Oh! I'm not sure, Ms. Nguyễn. You
have to check online.

Quynh grunts, grabs her bag, and abruptly slams the door shut.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

Quynh locks the door and turns to Juju on the couch, who is scratching miserably at her rashes.

Unsure of what to do, Quynh sets down the dinner bag and opens it. It's Chinese BEEF broccoli—definitely not suitable for Juju.

She pours Juju's treat into a bowl and nudges towards her, but Juju doesn't respond.

She opens her nearly empty refrigerator, grabs a carton of milk, and pours it into the bowl. Juju doesn't drink.

Frustrated, she rifles through her cabinet stocked with Asian remedies and retrieves her green Eagle Brand medicated oil.

Wearing gloves, she gently applies the oil to Juju's rashes. Juju squirms, bothered by the strong smell.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

It's 5:18 PM. CLICKS to 5:19 PM.

Quynh paces anxiously, watching Juju's worsening condition.

She ultimately grabs her scarf, mask, and jacket, and turns the doorknob, clutching it tightly. She takes a deep breath, closes her eyes, then swings the door open.

She lifts her foot out but freezes mid-air as distant sounds of helicopter blades, gunfire, and shouting erupted. Trembling, she pulls back and slams the door shut. The dog whimpers in distress.

Quynh shakes her head, thinking frantically. An idea strikes her. She scribbles a note, folds it, wraps herself in a blanket, and heads toward the door. She closes her eyes, takes a four-second deep breath, then opens the door again.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Quynh sprints down the hall, dodging bullets, slips the note under her neighbor's door, and hurriedly retreats to the safety of her apartment.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Disheveled, she locks her door and collapses onto the couch beside Juju, catching her breath. They exchange glances before Quynh turns on the TV. Her K-drama plays, she calms down, and the nerves begin to ease.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

7:43 PM. It CLICKS to 7:44 PM.

Quynh paces, stealing glances at the peephole out the hallway. It's eerily quiet. No word from the neighbor.

K-drama is still in the background. Juju is uncontrollably scratching herself. She struggles to get off the couch and stumbles to the floor. Panicked, Quynh picks her up and comforts her in Vietnamese.

QUYNH (SUBTITLE)

I'm so sorry, no one is coming to
save us.

Juju lets out a gassy fart, followed by diarrhea all over Quynh's arm.

QUYNH

Oh, dear.

Quynh rushes to the sink, scrubbing herself and Juju clean. She removes her soiled sweater and wraps Juju in a towel, snug like a burrito.

QUYNH

No scratching, not good.

Juju squirms, miserable. Quynh lays Juju on the couch. Feeling guilty, she resolves to try again! She bundles her scarf, jacket, and mask, and opens the door.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Quynh steps over and freezes mid-air. She takes her four-second inhale and exhales, repeating until her nerves calm down. Her foot slowly touchdowns on the floor.

She darts past the neighbor's door, then Jazzy's, turning a corner until she reaches the exit.

Standing and staring before the door, her heart races. She pushes it open, only to be stampede by bright lights and chaotic noise. Overwhelmed, she shrinks up, slams the door shut, and bolts back to the security of her apartment.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Quynh presses up against the door, defeated. Juju escapes her burrito towel and looks at Quynh with understanding eyes.

Quynh surrenders back on the couch next to Juju, resuming their place in front of the TV.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

7:56 PM. CLICKS to 7:57 PM.

Quynh strikes another idea. She tears open one of her prescription bags, rummaging through the bottles until she finds one labeled SERTRALINE.

Without hesitation, she pours several pills into her palm and downs them with a glass of water.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Clock CLICKS, 8:33 PM.

Quynh paces the room, restless. Her hands tremble as she waits for the medicine to take effect.

Juju lets out a regurgitating sound. Quynh spins around to see white foam bubbling from Juju's mouth. Panicked, she rushes to Juju, wiping the foam with anxious hands.

Quynh starts pacing in frantic circles but forces herself to stop. Determined, she grabs her jacket, mask, and scarf, wrapping it snugly. Closing her eyes, she inhales deeply—four seconds in, four seconds out—repeating the calming rhythm until she's ready.

QUYNH
(to Juju)
This is for you!

Eyes shut, she flings the door open, leaps out, and slams it behind her.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

She bolts down the hall like crossing a battlefield and turns the corner. She stops before the exit door, staring at it like it's a portal to another world. She closes her eyes, repeats her four-second breathing method, and murmurs under her breath.

QUYNH

This is for you!

She takes one final deep breath and swings the door open. She JUMPS out, ducks, and covers, clenching as the door swings SHUT behind her.

EXT. OUTSIDE WORLD - CONTINUOUS

Darkness presses in from all sides, only the streetlamp casts a harsh light on her. She squints, her eyes adjusting to the harsh glare.

The street is a ghost town. A single car rattles by, its clanking engine cutting through the jagged blade. Quynh shields her ears from the CLATTERING noise.

QUYNH

No, no, no!

The car vanishes into the distance, leaving only the whispering wind behind.

Quynh lowers her hands, scanning the deserted street. The stillness brings a fleeting sense of calm. She heads toward Jefferson Street, keeping her eyes glued to the ground. A SOLITARY MAN with an n95 mask walks toward her. She murmurs...

QUYNH

Nn no, no, no.

She ducks and covers as he passes by. Nothing happens. What a relief! She continues her petrifying walk. The once-bustling street is now a quiet abandoned forefront. This is calming.

EXT. JEFFERSON ST.

Quynh pauses at the intersection of Jefferson Street, scanning the area for signs of movement.

In the distance, the CVS sign glows like a beacon shining down from the gates of heaven, two blocks away. Summoning her courage, she charges forward, her gaze fixed on the ground.

Passing the first block, a MAN sneaks up behind her.

MAN

Hey, do you have a cigarette?

She panics and quickens her pace, her voice trembling.

QUYNH

Nn no, no, no.

The man chases after her.

MAN

Hey lady! I just wanted a
cigarette!

QUYNH

No, no, no.

Quynh breaks into a run but he catches up and BAM! He knocks her head down to the pavement. Her head skids across the concrete, sprawling, bleeding unconsciously. Quynh's face flickers in and out to LIVE-ACTION.

DISSOLVE TO:

Louis Armstrong's "What A Wonderful World" plays over a harrowing montage of REAL LIVE-ACTION security footage capturing attacks on Asian individuals across the U.S.

EXT. CULVER CITY STREET - NIGHT

A man asks an elderly Asian lady for a cigarette. When she shakes her head, he SLAMS her to the ground lying motionless on the street.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

An elderly Thai man, Vich Ratanapakdee, is tackled during his morning stroll. His head slams against a garage door, leaving him bleeding unconsciously on the ground.

INT. LUXURY APARTMENT LOBBY - DAY

Security footage from the lobby shows an old Asian woman outside being beaten. A man from inside the lobby looks on and does nothing. The security guard approaches the door and locks it, watching as she is left defenseless.

EXT. ATLANTA, GEORGIA - DAY

A man enters an Asian-owned massage spa, Golden Spa. GUNSHOTS echo as he exits calmly, moving to the next location.

INT. NYC SUBWAY - DAY

Michelle Alyssa Go is shoved onto the subway tracks by a stranger, and killed instantly by an oncoming train.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO, CA - DAY

Masked attackers with hoodies beat up two elderly Asian women in broad daylight, kicking them relentlessly as they begged for mercy.

EXT. VAN NUYS, CA - NIGHT

At a McDonald's drive-thru, thirty-one-year-old Nicholas Webber screams racial slurs at two Filipino sisters. His rage escalates to physical violence against their family members.

EXT. SAN ALEJANDRO, CA - DAY

The Ring camera captures two men attacking an elderly Asian man right in front of his home. Desperately trying to escape, the Asian man stumbles to the ground. The attackers show no mercy, continuing to assault and rob him.

INT. YONKERS, NEW YORK - NIGHT

An old Asian lady waits for the elevator with her cart. A man enters and beats her to a pulp. She tirelessly raises her arms to block him. He yells out racial slurs, punching and kicking her 125 times as she lies helplessly on the ground.

The music fades into silence.

Title card appears:

#StopAsianHate

EXT. JEFFERSON STREET - NIGHT

Quynh lies lifeless on the cold pavement, blood pooling down her forehead.

INT. QUYNH'S LIVING ROOM

Juju senses something is wrong. She scratches desperately at the door, barking frantically. Her cries echo in the empty apartment as she scratches and digs, trying to reach Quynh.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Quynh's point of view. Her eyes open up to a blurry silhouette. She blinks several times adjusting her eyes. The figure sharpens into Jazzy's smiling face, cradling BABY JOY.

JAZZY

Hi, you're awake now. Look! It's my baby girl, Joy. She's so happy to meet you.

Quynh's head swathed in bandages, her face bruised and swollen on one side.

JAZZY

You've been unconscious for several days now. They finally caught the bastard that did this to you. How are you doing?

Quynh recollects her thoughts.

QUYNH

Chuchu!

JAZZY

Juju? She's doing great!

Jazzy investigates the room, ensuring they're alone.

JAZZY

I knew you'd ask for her, so I brought you a surprise.

She lifts her oversized red Gucci knockoff purse onto the bed and pulls out Juju.

JAZZY

I had to sneak her in here so she could see you.

Juju immediately leaps onto Quynh and excitedly licks her like a lollipop. Quynh painfully enjoys it. Jazzy pulls Juju back.

JAZZY

Take it easy Juju. She's hurt.
 (to Quynh)
 She misses you so much! If it
 wasn't for you Juju would've died!

Quynh shakes her head.

QUYNH

No, I did not-ting.

JAZZY

Yes, you did! You saved her. You
 slipped that note to our neighbor
 before you collapsed. She came out,
 saw you, and called 911, and got
 Juju the medicine she needed.
 Because of your note, you saved
 Juju's life. And because of you, I
 made it to the hospital in time to
 have my baby Joysie. You saved all
 of our lives.

Jazzy lifts baby Joy and Juju, presenting them to Quynh.

Quynh's point of view: the trio adoringly beams down at her,
 filling her vision with warmth and peace. Her eyes flutter
 shut as exhaustion pulls her back into sleep.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Louis Armstrong's song plays on the cassette. The delivery
 girl leaves as Jazzy walks in with her younger SISTER, Juju
 on a leash and baby Joy in a stroller.

They all look across the hall at the cassette player playing
 and the dinner bag... Somber mood. Juju awaits for Quynh to
 open her door. Jazzy to her sister.

JAZZY

We haven't seen her in weeks since
 she been back. Juju misses her.

Juju eagerly wags her tail, staring at Quynh's door. The door
 cracks open slightly. Juju's ears perk up and wag faster.

A hand quickly grabs the bag and turns off the cassette. Juju
 dashes towards her, but the door slams shut in Juju's face.
 Juju squeals, scratches the door, and waits. She scratches
 again, wags her tail, barks, and waits.

JAZZY

Come on Juju, she's not opening it.

Juju barks, squeals, wags her tail and waits. Her eyebrows perk up and she decides to press her paws PLAY on the cassette player, which resumes the music.

Juju barks softly, wagging her tail with renewed hope, staring at the door. She prances around, barks, wags her tail and stares at the door again. She waits patiently but nothing.

JAZZY

Come on Juju, it's time to get in.

Juju lingers, her gaze fixed on the door, wagging her tail. The music ends and rewinds itself. Juju shrills like a wounded dog, feeling dejected slowly turns around. Jazzy tears up.

JAZZY

I'm so sorry Juju.

Jazzy kneels, opening her arms for Juju. Juju sullenly trudges towards her. Suddenly, a CLICK of the doorknob turns. Jazzy freezes and Juju's ears perk up, eyes snapping at Quynh's door as it CREAKS open. Jazzy and Juju's faces light up! Juju looks back to Jazzy for approval.

JAZZY

Go! Go on, I think she's ready for you now!

Juju barks excitedly, gallops down the hall, and dives straight into Quynh's apartment just as the door closes.

Jazzy radiates with delight, her eyes welling with tears, knowing better days are to come...

FADE OUT.