


SANTA RITA



SUMMARY

A wide-angle shot of a two-lane asphalt road stretching into the distance in a desert landscape. The road has a yellow dashed center line and white solid edge lines. The surrounding terrain is arid with sparse, low-lying green and brown shrubs. In the background, dark, rugged mountains are visible under a heavy, dark, and stormy sky with swirling clouds. The overall mood is dramatic and ominous.

TITLE:

SANTA RITA

LENGTH:

10 MINUTE SHORT

GENRES:

DRAMA, LGBT

BUDGET:


\$15K

THEME

The bright bougainvillea, in some dialects, bears the name of the patron saint of forgiveness, reconciliation, and help in impossible cases. Robert Mueller, distanced from his friends, estranged from the man he loves, and ready to die, desperately needs a little of all three.

Santa Rita is about that forgiveness, and the life-saving power of hope.





STORY

SETTING



SUMMER 2001
Mojave Desert, Arizona

When an unexpected phone message interrupts his
meticulously planned suicide



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an alienated former skinhead chooses between
the safety of death and the danger of hope.

SYNOPSIS

Devastated by RAMÓN'S rejection and still grieving LISA, ROBERT heads into the Mojave to die. With him is his beloved bougainvillea, all he has left of Lisa.

While Robert drives, JAMES frantically calls anyone who might have heard from him. He urges Ramón to try to reach Robert, but Ramón, still deeply mistrustful, resists.

When a garbled message from Ramón comes through, Robert crashes his truck and destroys his phone. Unable to go forward, too close to the road to not be found, he hikes toward the nearest town.

The relentless sun beats him down. Within sight of a motel, he rests in the meager shade of a bush.

Robert cannot get up. Knowing he will die there, he tries to save the bougainvillea by planting it. He hallucinates from heatstroke, first the green plant in rich soil, then Lisa reassuring him. Disappointed by his failure but accepting his fate, he passes out.

A thunderstorm rises. Rain falls. Ramón appears, first furious and repeating his words on the night he threw Robert out of his bed, then gentle and concerned as he was in his message.

Cooled by the rain, Robert rallies, and sees reality. The plant is bone dry, and he is alone. Frightened, confused, but perhaps hopeful, he scoops up the plant and trudges toward the motel.




CHARACTERS

appearing on screen



Robert

A man with a shaved head and a goatee, wearing sunglasses and a black t-shirt, is sitting in the driver's seat of a car. He is holding the steering wheel with both hands. A small potted plant with pink flowers is on the dashboard in front of him. The background shows a green landscape through the car windows.

Disowned at sixteen, ROBERT washed up on LISA's doorstep. She took him in as her own, promising him brotherhood, family, and identity; he grew to be her trusted lieutenant. Meticulous, intelligent, intimidating, Robert played his role frighteningly well.

Years later, EDDIE dumped the cult to protect JAMES and PATRICK. Moved by Eddie's loyalty, Robert followed, but remained with Lisa to care for her through a long and ultimately terminal illness.

After Lisa's death, Robert moved across the continent to restart his life, taking with him a cutting the bougainvillea under which he scattered Lisa's ashes. Far from his roots, he began to flower, and fell in love with anarchist RAMON. When Ramón discovered his past, he rejected Robert in a rage that still haunts him, and Robert withdrew into isolation and despair.

A year and a half later, he has decided to end his hollow life.

Robert heads into the Mojave, relaxed, relieved, and ready to die.

Lisa



Wedded young and widowed young, LISA assumed control of her late husband's neo-Nazi cult. Years of fighting to keep his warped dream alive burned through her health and her finances, and she grew cynical, selling hate through the mail to keep the lights on in her crumbling Tampa home.

And then came ROBERT. She saw his potential and sheltered him while he grew into a formidable young man. He brought her a better type of recruit who could bring her ideology from the streets into legitimate politics, and with his vision for how nationalist politics could work in the borderless world of the emerging Internet, she could build an empire.

Her dream reawakened, but her health began to fail. She grew tired of the drama, tired of the people she had collected, and deeply, physically exhausted.

When Robert turned against Lisa's beliefs, her new dream shattered, but she could not let him go. He was a part of her, and she needed him.

In the last years of her life, she considered herself retired, and spent her time reading trashy novels and fussing over her plants. She passed in her sleep, untroubled by her past or anything she had done.

Robert scattered her ashes at her Tampa home beside those of her husband, under her beloved bougainvillea.

Ramón



His country gave away his home. The Army promised him a future, but gave him war, then spat him out for being queer. Veteran turned anarchist RAMÓN has been fucked by the world and everyone in it, and is ready to fuck it right back.

Except, perhaps, for ROBERT. A familiar darkness in Robert drew him, although he knew nothing of Robert's past. Robert's meticulousness, shyness, and inexperience challenged and complemented his own chaotic, gregarious, and sexually confident nature. Mutual infatuation blossomed into love, and Ramón began to let himself dream of forever.

Then, on the eve of the Battle in Seattle, a comrade warned him of Robert's connection to LISA. Certain he had been manipulated and betrayed, Ramón threw Robert out of his bed and out of his life.

A year and a half later, Robert appeared at the nursery where he works, but fled. Then, Ramón found Robert's belongings at a thrift store, all of them.

He read the signs, and despite his anger and bitterness, rang JAMES to warn him that something wasn't right with Robert.

James pleads with Ramón to call Robert, believing that Robert's love for Ramón will break through his isolation, but Ramón wavers, wondering:

Did Robert truly love him?

Does he still?

Can he forgive Robert for his past -
and will Robert forgive him?

CHARACTERS

in voiceover



James

The youngest of the group, JAMES had always been the one who needed saving. As the target of a brutal assault, he was the unwilling catalyst for EDDIE's rebellion and the implosion of LISA's cult. ROBERT was "Mr. Mueller" to him then, but rough years brought them closer. James knows Robert more intimately than anyone left alive - and now, Robert is the one who needs to be saved.

James speaks to anyone who may have heard from Robert: Patrick, his bitter ex. Jun, Robert's boss. Eddie, who is too busy with his four kids to keep in touch. Ramón, he knows, is the key.

Can he convince Ramón that he has the power to save Robert's life - and can he convince him to use it?

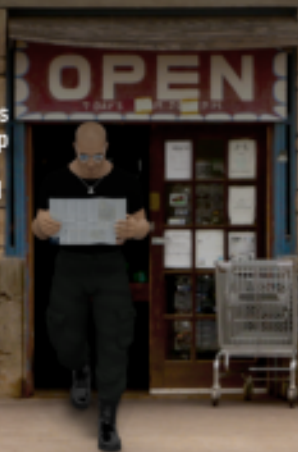


Eddie

Having once been the instigator of the walkout that destroyed Lisa's organization, EDDIE has grown up and mellowed out. He loves his friends, but time passes fast as a stay at home husband with two sets of twin girls, and he doesn't keep up with them the way that he used to. Eddie and his family and a farty old dog live in Lisa's old house in Florida, a gift from Robert and James.

Jun

Robert's boss JUN doesn't see him often. His team travel the Western states, installing and maintaining accounting software. When Robert tried to hand in his resignation, Jun refused it, convincing him to take vacation time instead. Good performers are hard to find and harder to retain, and Robert has been one of his best.



WRITER'S STATEMENT

The bougainvillea plant, known as Santa Rita in some dialects of Spanish, is a beautiful but deceptive thing. The showy flowers for which it is known are not flowers, but specialized leaves, evolved to direct pollinators to the tiny true flower within.

Santa Rita herself is known as the patron saint of impossible causes and hopeless circumstances, of the lonely, of those in marital strife – but also of reconciliation and forgiveness. She brought peace between the family of her murdered husband and their rivals to secure her dream of convent life.

It is this aspect of reconciliation and forgiveness which drove me to write Santa Rita. As an American expatriate, I have watched from the safety of Ireland as politically motivated hatred rips apart not only American society, but my own extended family – cousin against cousin, sibling against sibling, friend against former friend. As a queer trans person, I understand very well that some divides have no middle ground: between existence and nonexistence, there can be no compromise.

However, no war lasts forever. This will end. In the time after, we will need to build peace. How can we do this if we have dehumanized those who wished to dehumanize us? And while the fight goes on, how can we make a place for anyone to leave the side of our enemies and join us as allies if we do not practice radical forgiveness?

This question only appears to be the flower in Santa Rita. The shared neo-Nazi cult background of Robert, James, Patrick, and Eddie grabs attention as being obviously a place of hardness and hatred, but it is a science fiction principle applied in non-genre drama, an exaggerated form of a familiar culture which denies men their emotions, women their agency, and outsiders their humanity.

Beneath that, the root and stalk of Santa Rita present an alternative to the typical story wherein the lone hero takes all the actions to defeat the enemy and save the day. Robert cannot save himself from himself by himself. His chosen family must overcome their own conflicts to bring him back from the brink, culminating in Ramon's realization that his forgiveness of Robert is tied to his forgiveness of himself. This structure with multiple male characters whose role is cooperation, rather than competition or supporting a stronger male hero, demonstrates an alternative to alpha-male nonsense and the American myth of "rugged individualism".

Finally, I want to tell this story now (and many others later) so I can show queer characters as complex human beings. With few exceptions, LGBTQIA+ stories tend to be about coming out, transition, and victimhood, or are essentially heterosexual, cisgender stories with a rainbow skin. The best way to get better LGBTQIA+ representation is for us to write our stories ourselves. As one who has the time and inclination, I want to be part of that. I hope you want to be a part of that, too.

For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?

– bell hooks, in conversation with Maya Angelou, 1998

