

CRADLE TO GRAVE
Written by Constantin Derecas

Mob boss, Tony Carbone, is not the most trusting man when it comes to the care of his frail pregnant wife, Maria. She has been plagued by heart problems and Tony only entrusts her care to a specialist, Dr. Giovanni Salerno. They have known each other since they were kids living in the same rough neighborhood.

Maria has had a miscarriage in the past, due to her health problems, so when she becomes pregnant again, Tony Carbone takes all precautions to keep his wife and unborn son (their first) as closely monitored as possible.

Tony asks Dr. Salerno to carry his cell phone with him at all times. Dr. Salerno is well aware that Tony Carbone is a man to be feared and is expected to rush over should Maria need his medical attention. Before his shift at the hospital, Dr. Salerno checks up on Maria at home as she is complaining of mild discomfort. Dr. Salerno doesn't see cause for concern and tells her he will return tomorrow and goes to work.

That same day, a particularly bad day at the hospital, Dr. Salerno receives a call from the mob boss. His wife Maria continues to experience some discomfort. Dr. Salerno reassures the mobster that there's no need to worry and will arrive after his shift. The doctor adds that he may be late arriving to the mobster's house because the hospital is critically low on doctors as they are facing many emergencies this day.

This upsets Tony Carbone and he makes it very clear to the good doctor that his priorities must lie with Maria. "Don't ever disrespect me again". Tony angrily ends the call and Dr. Salerno prepares to leave as he knows Tony isn't a man to be trifled with.

Dr. Salerno calls the head nurse, Carmen Sanchez and asks her what the ETA is for the emergency en route and whether there is any update. "Ambulance should arrive any minute... All we know is we have a Jane Doe, a homeless woman, who has suffered a life threatening overdose". He suggests this is something an intern can manage with Carmen's guidance and tells her he has a house call to deal with. He tells her he will rush back as soon as he can.

Minutes later, in the parking lot, the doctor gets into his car when his cell phone rings. He checks the CALLER ID and notices that it is Carmen Sanchez. He curses and tosses the cell phone on the passenger seat, pissed off.

He drives to the parking gate and uses his parking pass to open the gate. He turns his car towards the street when an orderly runs out the hospital entrance toward his car.

Dr. Salerno stops the car.

The orderly tells him Carmen is trying to reach him and he is annoyed. Carmen comes rushing out the front door out of breath. Dr. Salerno quips, "Carmen, I said I'll be right back...Carbone is waiting for me"

"It's our Jane Doe...I don't think she's going to make it..."

"It's an overdose, Carmen...Not much else I can do"

"...John... She's pregnant..."

The doctor looks skyward, gets out of his car and asks the orderly to park his car and he follows Carmen back inside to deal with the emergency.

Back at the Carbone residence, Maria suddenly gets a sharp pain in her side and screams. Tony asks Maria to hold on. Dr. Salerno should be there any minute, he thinks. Tony calls Giovanni's cell phone but there's no answer. The phone rings in an empty car.

Back at the hospital, time has passed and Carmen consoles Dr. Salerno who was unable to save the life of the homeless mother. "You saved her babies, John... You did everything humanly possible under the circumstances...". Being upset, Giovanni forgets about Maria Carbone and the house visit!

An orderly rushes in... "Doctor Salerno, an angry man has just rushed his pregnant wife into emergency. He's asked for you by name"

Dr. Salerno's face goes white. He pats his clothes looking for his cell. "Oh my God, where's my phone?" he asks

himself. The panicked doctor asks head nurse Carmen to accompany him to the emergency...

Arriving, they find Mrs. Carbone writhing in pain, bleeding and exhausted. She begins to lose consciousness. Tony's eyes remain fixed on Dr. Salerno. No words are necessary to convey his anger. Dr. Salerno knows if anything should happen to Tony's wife Maria or their unborn son, the doctor's own life may very well be in danger. The crazed mob boss has ordered the death of others on far less!

Mrs. Carbone is immediately wheeled away but not before the mobster grabs hold of Salerno's shoulder, threatening Giovanni -- "Anything happens to them, I'm holding you fully responsible, you son of a bitch". Nurse Sanchez hears the threat and looks at the menacing bodyguards near the mob boss. This certainly paints a bleak picture and she understands the danger they both are in should this not go well.

Mrs. Carbone is put under. Dr. Salerno and head nurse Carmen try desperately to save Maria and her baby.

In the waiting room, Tony sits with a blank stare at the doors leading to the hospital corridors.

FADE TO BLACK

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16 YEARS LATER...

Dr. Salerno (hair graying) is having a drink at a bar with Carmen Sanchez and another doctor, psychiatrist Dr. Eugene Lowenstein. It is evident that the two men are best friends. Eugene announces he's getting married and asks Salerno to be his best man. Salerno jokes he cannot. When asked why? He makes a joke about not being part of the "tribe"... "Well, you'll have to convert of course". Eugene suggests however that may upset his Catholic "Godfather.."

"Oh, please don't remind me", Salerno says. They talk about that night, 16 years ago when Carmen and Giovanni saved his "Godfather's" boy. Carmen and Salerno look at each other somewhat nervously. They have some secret but they don't let on.

How is the boy anyways? Eugene asks. We learn Giovanni is still caring for the boy and his mother. We learn the boy has heart problems and the mobster's wife is in even worse shape (heart issues run in her family, Salerno suggests).

We learn that Dr. Salerno isn't Tony Carbone's friend (responding to a joke from Eugene) but he just knew him since they were kids and the mob boss trusts him.

Eugene jokes well let's hope the kid gets good medical advice or you'll be the one with "heart" problems...

We now find ourselves in the bedroom of the Carbone boy, Vincent Carbone, thin, sickly. He takes a cocktail of medication pills. He has been suffering with health related issues as we learned previously.

His mother knocks on his door and tells him Dr. Salerno has come to see him. She looks frail herself. Salerno asks Maria how she's doing. "Don't worry about me, John. Help my boy"

Dr. Salerno asks how the boy is doing and we learn he gets easily fatigued and retreats to his room, avoids people, doesn't play sports.

Tony Carbone is becoming dissatisfied with the lack of improvement in his son's condition and wondering if Dr. Salerno should subject his son to more tests and introduce the boy to other specialists.

Carbone is afraid the boy has inherited the heart problems from Maria, the boy's mother, who has been in and out of hospital and her condition is much worse now since the traumatic birth of Vincent 16 years ago. Perhaps they can perform some sort of genetic tests to make sure?

Dr. Salerno diverts the discussion away from any sort of physical tests and tells him Vincent's issues appear to be psychological. He exhibits classic Avoidant Personality Disorder and genetic screening would serve to only upset the boy and add to his stress levels. Dr. Salerno strongly recommends no such tests be conducted.

Doctor Salerno, who continues to be the personal doctor to the mobster and his wife, is adamant that the boy's racing heart and physiological symptoms are somewhat related to

his troubled birth but more about stress and anxiety due to his timid character. He has outright Social Anxiety.

Tony Carbone rejects the idea he has a "crazy son". Salerno, trying to hide his nervousness tells him he knows of a specialist that may be able to help him get over his psychological issues.

From the discussions in the bar, it seems Dr. Salerno is trying to keep the truth from his father for some reason.

What can it be?

Dr. Salerno promises Tony that he will work tirelessly to help his son's "problems" and will consult with the best specialists on his behalf.

Tony Carbone trusts Dr. Salerno wholeheartedly to manage the situation and has the utmost confidence in the abilities of his personal doctor to make things right.

Giovanni leaves to his car and throws his head back on his seat. He sighs and makes a cell phone call to Dr. Eugene Lowenstein and tells him ... "I need your help..."

Dr. Eugene Lowenstein meets with Mr. Carbone. Dr. Salerno is there to introduce the therapist who can diagnose the boy and help him.

Carbone doesn't trust this new guy and asks Giovanni (privately) why he couldn't find a Catholic to help his son. He assures him he's the best at what he does. This shows his distrust of people.

NOTE: maybe we can leave the above part out?

After a couple of sessions, Eugene confirms the Avoidant Personality Disorder as suggested by Salerno.

Later, Eugene expresses reservations about treating the boy further and doesn't want to do it. Salerno pleads with him to continue. Eugene reluctantly agrees to help his best friend but tells him. "John, sooner or later his father will realize the extent of his heart conditions...No amount of therapy will help the boy"

Dr. Salerno continues to buy time...

The mobster, ruling out any physical reasons for his son's behavior, begins to pressure the boy to get over his social awkwardness and start to grow out of it.

He won't tolerate weakness and he tells his wife Maria how can he have a son to take over the family "business" the way he is behaving (reading books, avoiding people, girls, sports and not willing to learn aspects of his "business")

His mother tells Tony "he isn't built like you, Tony. Maybe this life isn't for him". Tony accuses Maria of babying him too much and this will end up hurting him. "He needs tough love and can't survive by being weak".

This hurts Maria as she interprets these words as recognition that she is responsible for her son's problems in one way or another.

This guilt eats away at her. In her room she rests and her shaking hand opens some pills and she rests in bed, alone.

His father continues to try and teach his son aspects of his business in an effort to build his confidence and make him stronger. He is reaching an age where he can no longer show weakness and Tony's enemies will not be as merciful and he MUST try harder to get out of his shell.

The mobster gets increasingly impatient with his weak and timid son who actively avoids his father. The boy is ashamed of himself.

If not for the compassion of his mother, he would be a total mess. He escapes to the security of his room most times unwilling to face his increasingly demanding father. Mentally, Vince is a wreck.

Tensions between Vince's parents arise as Maria sticks up for her timid son and Tony blames her for raising a "wimp". He warns him the world will eat him alive. She is too weak and frightened of her own husband to fight him.

Her health is getting worse as her heart is unable to bear the stress of her son's treatment by his own father. She too feels helpless to remedy the situation.

After a particularly bad episode with Vince's father, who is trying to groom his son into his "organization", the

mother tries again to intervene but experiences chest pains. The stress is getting the better of her. She is admitted to hospital where she will remain for several days.

Maria will die in the upcoming days but before she dies, she has a heart to heart with Vince by her bedside. She tells the boy that she feels responsible for him and that his father, although well intentioned, is going to end up hurting the boy. She knows she doesn't have much time so in an effort to save him from his precarious situation, tells him to get away from his father and this mob life once he is able to do look after himself.

The boy pleads with his mom to keep fighting and that he will try harder to live up to his father's expectations. They cry. She tells him that she loves him and wants to rest.

The next day, she dies.

Devastated, the boy and his father have a final fight as the boy blames his father for the death of his mother. The father explains to the boy, he will end up as his mother if he doesn't find strength to own up to his responsibilities and face his fears instead of running away from them.

This is not meant as a threat but as a sincere plea from a father who has never known any other way of dealing with his hardships but through guts, courage and toughness. He doesn't want to spend his final days with the regret of having raised a son in constant fear of the world -- he is better off if the world fears him.

The boy is overwhelmed with emotion and grief, he runs to his room unable to handle everything being thrown his way. "Yeah, that's right run away..." his father booms reactively... "That's all you've ever done your entire life"

Vincent locks himself in his room, heart racing, he is perspiring. He opens his closet and retrieves a gun hidden inside. Vince sits on the edge of his bed, tears flowing down his cheeks. He takes the pistol and places it under his chin as he gazes into a family photo as we peer into the soul of his mother's pained face in the photo, forever frozen in time.

He closes his eyes when suddenly we hear the sound of his father knocking on the door. Apologizing profusely begging him to open the door. He tells his father he needs some time alone.

Tony leaves him, truly concerned for his son. Vince stares at his mother, reminded of their last meeting in the hospital. At that point, he decides to run away.

The boy packs some things and runs away that night.

Tony Carbone is extremely upset when he learns of his son's disappearance and orders a couple of his men to look for him. He wants him found before the funeral of his mother. He tells his men he doesn't want his enemies to know of his son's disappearance and to keep things quiet.

At the funeral, a rainy day, they bury Maria Carbone. The father is alone, a broken man. All meaning has left his life. He regrets the actions that have led to the disintegration of his family.

Hidden behind some trees outside the cemetery, someone is watching. It is Vincent, crying but not ready to return to his father. Nobody identifies him.

We follow Vince Carbone, who stays in cheap motels and spends his days reading books in the park. He decides to visit his mother's grave and is overcome with grief.

From the corner of his eye he sees a limo driving near the gate. It is Tony who sees the boy. He orders the driver to stop and let him out.

Tony calls out for the boy. The boy runs away. His father chases him down the street as Vincent, chest exploding makes his way into a bus. The door closes as Tony races closer.

Vince yells at the driver to drive away. Tony bangs on the door and curses to the driver to ... "Open the fucking door" ... Tony shows his gun holstered inside his jacket and the bus driver peels away...

"Who the hell was that? Should I call the cops?" bus driver asks. "No, it's just someone I owe money to... Just drop me off a few stops ahead"

Coughing and holding his chest, he collapses on a seat. Vince grabs some pills (hands shaking) from his knapsack and takes them with water from a water bottle.

The scene changes to an abandoned factory. We are now introduced to JACKSON BERENGER (16) who looks EXACTLY like Vincent but dressed differently. Jackson lives with his abusive foster parents but spends most of his days living on the streets, avoiding the abuse back home as much as he can, often running away for weeks at a time. The audience is not told of the boy's true identity and may be confused into thinking they are looking at Vincent.

He wears a cap and dark glasses so police don't bring him back home which they often do as he gets himself into trouble on the streets. His clothes are filthy; he doesn't look like he is taking much care of himself and is smoking weed and harder drugs.

Another boy is with him, SPYDER MALONE, a petty thief and loser who discusses a plan to break into people garages for power tools and selling them to pawn shops.

Jackson tells him he can't risk getting caught and being sent back home. Spyder assures him that won't happen. Jackson agrees and asks Spyder to meet him here same place tonight.

We follow Spyder who exits a pawn shop counting some cash. He finds a park bench and rolls a joint. An expensive car drives along and stops nearby. Two of Carbone's men come out and ask Spyder if they've seen this boy. They show Spyder a picture of Vincent but Spyder believes these thugs are looking for his friend Jackson.

"Nah, never seen anybody like that..." Spyder says. The mobster gives him a card with a number scribbled at the back. "If you see him," He hands Spyder a crisp 20 dollar bill ..."you call this number and I'll pay you a lot more"

Spyder walks away, determined to warn his friend that a couple of mobsters are after him. He runs through an alleyway and bumps into Vincent who appears to be hiding.

Perhaps he saw the mobsters and hid in the alleyway.

Spyder sees Vincent and says "Shit man, what the hell you doing here? A couple of serious dudes are looking for you"

Vincent looks up... "W-Who are you? Do I know you?"

Spyder replies, "Stop fucking around Jackson, I'm serious. These guys mean business..."

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about..." Vincent gets up slowly and starts to walk away and then briskly increases his pace, frightened.

"Jackson, where the hell you going..." Vincent starts to jog away.

"What the hell's wrong with you!" Spyder calls out...

"Fucking junkie..." Spyder thinks out loud.

That night, Spyder meets up with Jackson at the abandoned warehouse and asks him what the hell that whole episode was about. Jackson has no idea what he's talking about. He retells him about the gangsters looking for him and asks him why Jackson ran away when he told him earlier in the day. Jackson assures him this is the first he is hearing about this.

Later that afternoon, the scene switches to Vincent who is walking along the street to his motel where he is staying and recognizes the car of his father's men. He sees them coming out of the building. He ducks behind a corner and watches as the men drive off. Looks like someone tipped them off as to where Vincent is staying!

Vincent starts to breathe heavy, his heart races and he opens his medication bottle. It is empty. He turns back to the streets and sits on a bench winded, clutching his chest with his head down. The same car drives by and parks nearby. Vincent sees the men showing a picture to some homeless bums in a nearby corner.

Vincent gets up and staggers into a dark alley way and hides. He huddles on the ground and pulls out the crumpled photo of his mother and sleeps beside a dumpster.

That same night, Spyder and Jackson decide to break into people's sheds and steal some power tools. Someone turns on the light and the two boys get scared and run. A large man comes out with a gun and fires at them, killing Spyder but misses Jackson who narrowly escapes and hides in the same alley behind a large garbage bin. Beside him is Vincent as the two boys come face to face with each other

They look identical except for their clothing. Vincent's health seems to be deteriorating.

Jackson realizes this is the boy Spyder saw previously and mistook for him.

They start to put two and two together and learn they share the same birth date. They deduce they must be twins but how were they separated at birth, they wonder? They are desperate for answers.

They realize they are both on the run and decide to head for the abandoned factory for the night. They learn more about their backgrounds. One boy (Jackson) is escaping his foster dad, a mean drunk and one boy escaping his mobster father (Vincent) who Vincent blames for the death of his mother. Totally alone, they seek out answers together and establish a strong bond.

The next day, Vincent's condition worsens and Jackson, worried tells him he should go back to his father. Jackson tells him to get his strength back as he doesn't stand a chance in the streets without his medication. He sympathizes with Vince but tells him at least his father loves him. "If I was in your place, I wouldn't think twice", Jackson tells him.

"I know someone who can help me. He may be able to help us both to understand the truth about what happened to us". Vincent is almost carried to the hospital as he has become terribly weak. Jackson gives him some water and asks if he can go on. Vincent tells him he needs to rest awhile.

They eventually make it to the hospital parking lot where Salerno works and Jackson insists they go straight to emergency...

"No, we will wait for my doctor to return to his car, I can recognize it in the lot. He points to his Mercedes. "That

can take hours." Jackson tells him. "Yeah, but we've waited years... We can wait a little longer."

The afternoon turns to night and Dr. Salerno ends his shift and goes to his car. Vincent struggles to get up from behind some bushes. "Stay here, Jackson"... Vincent breathes hard, struggling to make it to the car.

"Dr. Salerno..."

Dr. Giovanni Salerno turns and sees Vincent standing there barely able to stand. "Oh my God, Vincent. Where the hell have you been? Are you alright?"

Vincent looks back at Jackson who emerges from the bush. Jackson approaches them.

"Dr. Salerno, is this my twin brother?"

Salerno, looks around, completely shocked. "I-I don't know what to tell you Vincent, I..."

"Just tell us the truth" Vincent pleads in tears.

"T-There's someone else I must call first..."

Vincent tells Dr. Salerno not to call his father. "No, your father doesn't know the truth. But someone else does. Please trust me"

The boys enter the car, Vincent collapses in the back.

Dr. Salerno calls Carmen Sanchez who is working, and asks her to come to his car. She does, she sees the boys seated in the back. "Get in Carmen..."

"Carmen, this is Vincent's twin" She is speechless. After the initial shock and guilt, she says "My God, they look exactly the same" the two adults begin to describe what happened that night.

She explains "Vincent, the night you were born, Dr. Salerno was on his way to help your mom at her home. Your father demanded Dr. Salerno check on her when she complained of some pain.

I stopped him that night to attend to another emergency to save your biological mother. She didn't survive that night but Dr. Salerno did everything humanly possible to save your lives.

"Who was she?" Vincent asks, crying

"I'm afraid we don't know. She had no ID and no next of kin. She was homeless and died of an overdose."

Addressing Dr. Salerno, Jackson says, "You mean, we were switched at birth? Why would you do that to us." Jackson's eyes start to water. "Do you realize my life has been a living hell living from foster home to foster home and always alone".

Carmen jumps in "Please this was my doing, Dr. Salerno didn't make the switch. Please understand this was an incredibly difficult decision I made to save Dr. Salerno's life"

She continues...

"Mrs. Carbone's condition worsened as Mr. Carbone was waiting for Dr. Salerno to arrive to his home. It was my fault that Dr. Salerno didn't make it there in time to deal with the emergency."

Dr. Salerno continues

"In the confusion, my phone was left in my car and I lost touch with your father. He was furious"

"Your mom was rushed to emergency and she was near death. Carmen and I managed to save her life but her baby didn't make it."

"I resigned myself to tell your father the truth but Carmen stopped me in the waiting room as I was about to tell him..."

Carmen jumps in "In a panic, I had taken baby Vincent from his incubator and placed Mrs. Carbone's tags on him, removing the old ones and reprinting them to place on the stillborn.

I managed both emergencies and had to think of something.

I'm so sorry I did what I did but I was certain your father would have Dr. Salerno killed for neglecting his wife in her hour of need.

This is my fault...

Vincent gasps in pain

"This has gone far enough...I am taking you in now Vincent. I'm calling your father..."

"NO, wait. Before you do, I need you to promise me you will help Jackson get off the streets. He cannot live this way. He can't be forced to stay in his abusive foster home"

"Vince, don't worry about me" a teary eyed Jackson says

"Vincent please, we have no time, your condition is too serious" Dr. Salerno begs.

"Promise me! You owe it to the both of us"

Carmen faces Dr. Salerno "Vincent, we promise..."

The scene suddenly transitions with Jackson in a hospital bed, and his health having improved dramatically (audience thinking we are looking at Vincent). He has assumed the identity of his twin. Tony Carbone visits him in tears... Terribly feelings of guilt overwhelm him.

Tony has been tricked into thinking Vincent is in the hospital bed!

A week later, Tony and Jackson are at the cemetery of Mrs. Carbone, a solemn moment. "We should go son..." Jackson tells him he needs a moment and to wait in the limo.

His father turns out of sight around the trees. The boy turns a few stones to a simple plaque on the ground...He reads the inscription ... It is the marked with the name of JACKSON BERENGER, with some sort of touching commentary (needs to reinforce the reveal, touching words that tie back to their bond??) and placed close to Mrs. Carbone. This is the final REVEAL in the story.

The final scene transitions to the final flashback in the car detailing the final words between Vince and Salerno + Carmen.

He tells the doctor and nurse to allow him to die as he can feel his time is up. He asks Salerno and Carmen to allow JACKSON to take his place in the hospital and assume his identity while Jackson's death certificate can be falsified.

He turns away and heads to the limo, in tears...

END