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QUEEN SUGAR

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"Far Too Long"

Based on Characters in
Natalie Baszile's novel
'Queen Sugar'

Forward Movement
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ACT ONE

INT. BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

A bedroom bathed in the blue light of early morning. Two entangled lovers. One sleeps. The other, NOVA BORDELON, 37, earthy and elegant, gazes out of the window into the dawn.

She looks to the man beside her, watches him with affection for a moment. Then, rises and saunters across the modest room, gathering her clothes.

The tattoos and piercings that adorn her are on full display. As is her confidence. Even when no one's watching.

The man, CALVIN, very attractive, 37, stirs awake. They smile at each other. Their connection is deep. She sets her clothes down. An invitation. He rises from bed and goes to her. What looks like a long-held ritual begins.

He holds her skirt at her feet. She steps in. He slowly pulls it on. Smoothing it in back. Lingered. He places her bra on her, hooking it expertly. Places her blouse on her, and buttons each button carefully. Their faces close. Intimate.

He sets a sweater across her shoulders. While his arms encircle her, she reaches for him. He returns the embrace.

EXT. CALVIN'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Nova and Calvin walk to her car. Hand in hand. A quick kiss.

NOVA

Be good.

CALVIN

I won't tell you the same.

NOVA

You know better.

All smiles. She hops in and drives off. He watches her go.

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS, NEW ORLEANS - CONTINUOUS

Nova drives through the grand and tragic city of New Orleans. From the ornate mansions of the French Quarter to the row houses standing stout and proud. She maneuvers through the streets with ease until they become less and less populated.

Soon, she turns onto what was once a residential neighborhood now littered with ABANDONED STRUCTURES bearing the Katrina tattoo: an "X" and number codes signifying a search for life.

She pulls into the driveway of the only house on the block that's not boarded up. Her place is a ray of sunshine with potted plants hanging along the porch to welcome her home.

INT. BATHROOM - EARLY MORNING

We look into a mirror hazy with steam. A hand reaches to clear the frame. A woman appears. Bespectacled and pretty without make-up, she is CHARLEY BORDELON-WEST, 34.

She takes off her shower cap and stares into the mirror for a long moment. In no hurry, she takes off her glasses. Then, sighs as if she doesn't want to do what comes next.

She gently lifts her finger to her eye and places a contact lens on each pupil, blinking them into place.

We watch JUMP CUTS of this natural beauty transforming herself into the kind of woman who rules music videos and magazine covers. Concealer. Foundation. Eyeshadow. Eyeliner. Lashes. Bronzer. Blush. Lipgloss.

She pulls her hair into a chic top-knot and leaves us while calling out for...

CHARLEY (O.S.)

Davis! Micah! Time to go. Let's go!

INT. WEST RESIDENCE, LOS ANGELES - MORNING

Charley winds down a floating staircase of the post-modern architectural jewel that she calls home. The sophistication of the place suits her. Glass walls showcase a breathtaking view of Los Angeles as she enters the expansive living room.

CHARLEY

Davis! Micah!

DAVIS WEST, 35, enters. Six feet two inches of flat-out fine.

DAVIS

Micah! You heard your mother now.
Don't make her call you twice.

All of a sudden, we hear FOOTSTEPS. Charley looks to Davis and shakes her head. He smiles and shrugs as the teenager enters.

MICAH, 15, is a cross between bookworm and bombshell. She seems to have no clue that she's inherited her parents' good looks.

MICAH
Sorry, Ma. I was on the phone.

DAVIS
Newsflash.

A good natured eye roll to her father who smiles back at her as the close-knit threesome hurries out the door.

EXT. WEST RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Their housekeeper RAQUEL "ROCKY" ORTIZ, 50 and efficient, puts luggage in the back of Davis' Range Rover as the family crosses their circular driveway.

ROCKY
Have a good game, Mr. West.

DAVIS
Thanks, Rocky.

Micah goes to hug her Dad.

MICAH
Good game, Daddy.

He winks and slips her money, which she puts into her pocket with stealth caution. She then heads over to a mini-van where Rocky awaits her in the driver's seat. They pull off as Micah waves to her mom.

CHARLEY
See you tonight, pumpkin.

It's just Charley and Davis now.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)
You gave her money.
(off his guilt)
How does that help prove my point?

DAVIS
What was the point again?

CHARLEY
That we can't spoon feed her every opportunity. She needs to work for money. She's 15. She's gotta learn.

He swaggers over to his wife near her sleek convertible with a twinkle in his eye. After all this time, she can't get enough of him.

DAVIS

She takes after her mother. Top of her class. Smartest person in the room. I think she's learning fine.

CHARLEY

I mean learning real-life, Davis.

DAVIS

This is our real-life, baby.

(beat)

Ain't it good? Just let it be good.

A moment between them. He runs his thumb along the bridge of her nose to her lips. You can tell he always does that. A slower kiss now as they embrace in the California sun.

A stunning couple with a stunning child in a stunning house. The American dream on steroids.

He lets her go and they climb into their respective cars.

CHARLEY

Hit 'em where it hurts, baby.

DAVIS

Always.

They drive off in separate directions. Hip hop blasting from his car as he speeds down the road. She flicks on NPR.

EXT. BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA - DAY

We watch a slender man with a deep fatigue in his eyes. RALPH ANGEL BORDELON, 28, takes long swigs from a bottle of beer, smoking a cigarette like it's the last he'll ever have.

We pull back to find him on a plaza park bench. A zydeco duo plays nearby. His son BLUE, 6, runs over.

BLUE

We want another churro, Pop.

Ralph Angel flicks his cigarette, then grabs a churro from a small wax paper bag. He hands it lovingly to the boy.

RALPH ANGEL

Four for a dollar. You got two more, buddy.

BLUE
Those are yours though.

RALPH ANGEL
You have 'em. But take it slow, k?

BLUE
'Kay.

RALPH ANGEL
Now, every time these men finish two songs, you and Zack have a churro. Two songs, Blue. See if you can be disciplined. 'Member we talked about discipline? Don't move.

Blue nods to his father and to Zack, his Power Ranger.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)
How many songs?

BLUE
Two songs. Two songs, then churros.

Ralph Angel eyes a liquor store on the far end of the square. He kisses Blue on the forehead. The boy holds up Zack for a kiss too and the young father obliges with tenderness.

Then, Ralph Angel rises and crosses the plaza. Body language casual. Eyes anxious. Just before he enters the sliding doors of the store, he discreetly pats his hip. To make sure the gun is right where it should be.

INT. SMART MART LIQUOR STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Ralph Angel surveys the convenience store. Besides the bored young woman CASHIER behind the counter, the place is empty.

The cashier never looks up from her magazine as he walks to the back of the store and grabs one soda can.

With his eyes trained on her, he turns back up the aisle toward the register, plucking items off the shelf and dropped them into his sweatpants. With a tinge of regret on his face as he goes, there's nothing petty to him about this crime.

At the counter, Ralph Angel holds up the soda and tosses two dollars on the counter. Transaction complete.

As he turns to leave, the corner of a candy bar slips out of his pants leg, the foil rustling on the tile. She looks up.

CASHIER

Dude! Are you boostin'?

Ralph Angel is caught off guard. Before he can think, the girl picks up the phone. Oh no. It's all going wrong. No, no, no! In that split second, he makes a decision.

RALPH ANGEL

You know what's best for you,
you'll settle your ass down. This
ain't a game. You ain't the hero.
Open the goddamn register and give
it to me.

He places his hand on THE GUN at his waistband so she can see it. She takes her hand off the phone and stares at him.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)

Bitch, right now. Or I swear...

He glares. She opens the register. He lunges forward, grabs the cash in one smooth move, then BOLTS. Stolen food shaking up and down against his leg. The cashier yelling after him.

He pushes through the glass doors, eyes the plaza where Blue sits - and decides. He runs in the opposite direction.

TITLE CARD.

EXT. PLAZA RIOS - HOURS LATER

Ralph Angel watches Blue from behind a brick wall of an adjoining store. The boy has been crying. But his tears have dried now, along with crumbs from his churros. He lays on the bench, whispering to his Power Ranger, Zack.

It takes everything inside Ralph Angel not to scream. At himself. At his situation. No one is more disappointed in him, than him. He gathers himself and walks to his boy.

RALPH ANGEL

Hi, Buddy.

BLUE

Hi, Pop.

RALPH ANGEL

You did good. You did so good.

BLUE

I was discipline.

He hugs the boy. Tight.

BLUE (CONT'D)
Me and Zack are ready to go.

RALPH ANGEL
Yeah, let's go.

EXT. VIOLET'S HOUSE, ST. JOSEPHINE'S PARISH - DAY

Sweltering heat. Ralph Angel takes a sleeping Blue out of his beat-up pick up truck. He carries the boy toward an immaculately kept cottage-style home. Vegetables grow here. Flowers there. A large well-kept motor boat sits near a colorful swing set. An eclectic yard filled with life.

And in the carport, Ralph Angel finds his aunt, VIOLET, spunky and stylish at 60, sitting on a water cooler and laughing up a storm. She wears cut-off denim shorts and looks damn good for her age.

The younger man laughing with her certainly thinks so. He's HOLLYWOOD DESONIER, 40, the rugged, resourceful type.

They're having a good 'ol time as Hollywood works on VIOLET's gleaming white '72 Chrysler Imperial. They spot Ralph Angel making his way closer.

HOLLYWOOD
Wassup, Ralph Angel.

VIOLET
(going to Blue)
Oh, look at that baby.

Ralph Angel gently passes Blue to Violet.

RALPH ANGEL
He knocked out around Route 13.
Missed most the ride.

VIOLET
Anything?

RALPH ANGEL
(defeated)
Said maybe they'd bring on new men
in fall, but not now.

Violet pats Ralph Angel on the arm with affection.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)
(a hesitant beat)
I went picked up some money a
friend owed me though.
(MORE)

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)
Take this lil' bit, Auntie. Take
this. I owe you this, okay?

He hands her some folded bills. She looks from him to
Hollywood, who takes it all in with curiosity.

VIOLET
No, there. You keep it. Or you know
what? Give it to your Daddy. He
needs it more than me. Hollywood
takes good care of me. Put that up.

RALPH ANGEL
But for keepin' Blue and stuff.

HOLLYWOOD
That boy at home. Don't fret that.

Violet smiles at Hollywood. Then, heads into the house.
Hollywood turns back to the car engine.

RALPH ANGEL
Thanks, man.

HOLLYWOOD
Ain't nothin'.

RALPH ANGEL
When you hit the rig next?

HOLLYWOOD
Time's up Tuesday. Trying to get
one last weekend in. But she's
keeping me busy.
(beat)
Day and night.

RALPH ANGEL
Ah man! I don't wanna hear that!

HOLLYWOOD
(laughing)
I'm just sayin'! Shoot, you need
to go on and get yourself a good
woman. Make life sweeter.

RALPH ANGEL
Everybody's not like ya'll.

Ralph Angel heads inside.

INT. VIOLET'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He enters to find Blue still napping with his head on Violet's lap. Ralph Angel sits next to her. Down.

VIOLET

(softly)

It ain't easy what you doin'. Folks don't wanna give you a second chance. I know. They don't believe you can do it. But you can. You can, Ralph Angel. You paid your debt. You did your time. Just stay the course, baby. Do right, so right'll be done by you.

Ralph Angel nods.

EXT. SUNSET BOULEVARD - DAY

Charley zips through traffic, whizzing by BILLBOARDS of the latest blockbusters and hottest fashion. She eyes one in particular. Her husband looms large over the city hawking his sneaker line with his moniker stenciled across his chest: "DAVIS WEST: THE GENTLEMAN."

She smiles and pulls into valet outside a SWANKY RESTAURANT. Heads turn. She doesn't notice.

INT. RESTAURANT - A SHORT TIME LATER

Charley sits at a prime table with her friends, RENEE and LENA, 30s. Both heavily eyelashed and impeccably dressed.

CHARLEY

I mean, there'd be a camera here right now filming. I don't want my life on TV. I love it like it is.

RENEE

Maybe that's cause your man treats you like a friggin' queen. Pedestal, crown, the whole nine.

Charley just smiles into her salad. There's truth to that.

RENEE (CONT'D)

Ya'll fancy and you know it. And people need to see that positivity, Charley. We'll do the hair-pulling and name-calling. You'll bring the class and the romance.

(MORE)

RENEE (CONT'D)

Like that story. You know. How you and Davis met at the fraternity thing.

CHARLEY

Phi Beta Kappa isn't a fraternity, T. It's an academic...

LENA

Whatever it is, it ain't the club and it ain't outside the arena. Bottom line? Everybody doesn't have Davis West on their arm. Some of us? Real talk? Some of us have to play this game as hard as they play on the court. We need you on this, Charley. They really want you. You know that.

Just as Charley is about to respond, all three women's phones ring, buzz and vibrate. One by one, they react to what they read.

RENEE

What the -

LENA

No.

Its an alert from TMZ:

Player's Dirty Ball! LA Gladiators Star Players Caught in Away Game Sex Scandal.

All business, Charley quickly scans and doesn't see Davis' name. Her attention turns to her friends who are distraught.

CHARLEY

Let's go. We gotta get out of here.

CUT TO:

The women exit the restaurant to find the PAPARAZZI already swarming. Renee and Lena rush to their waiting cars like deer in headlights. Tears fall as they dodge lewd questions.

Charley walks calmly to her car and hands a large bill to the valet. Cool as a cucumber. As the photographers yell her name, she adjusts her sunglasses and drives away.

INT. NOVA'S PLACE - DAY

The kitchen table is draped with a white cloth. Various jars of SALTS and SHELLS and ROCKS adorn it. Plants all around.

Nova gently rubs oil on the tips of an ELDERLY WOMAN'S trembling hands while mumbling in French. Nova slowly opens her eyes when she's done.

NOVA
Just two dabs. No more.

ELDERLY WOMAN
It real bad, Miss Nova. You don't expect I need more?

NOVA
Two dabs only, sister. Faith fills in the rest.

When Nova releases her fingers, her hands stop trembling.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Mèsi, Jésus.

The Elderly Woman goes to pull out her pocketbook, but Nova gently stops her.

NOVA
Mais non. I won't take it.

Suddenly, there's a strong KNOCK from the front of the house.

NOVA (CONT'D)
Stay here, sister.

Nova crosses her living room. A colorful and exuberant decor. At the door is a white twenty-something COLLEGE STUDENT.

NOVA (CONT'D)
Listen. You knock like that again, I'm callin' somebody.

COLLEGE STUDENT
Yes, ma'am.

NOVA
What do you want?

COLLEGE STUDENT
Um, I heard you, um, sold... grass.

A long beat. Nova looks at him expressionless.

COLLEGE STUDENT (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I mean, I'm supposed to
say, um... "I Am Deliberate And
Afraid of Nothing."

NOVA
And where is that from?

COLLEGE STUDENT
From?

She shuts the door on him. And goes back to the kitchen.

NOVA
Okay, now, Mrs. Blange. Two dabs.
And also a few puffs on this when
you have pain.

Nova opens her cupboards and takes out a jar, wraps a joint
in a small piece of fabric and hands it to the woman.

ELDERLY WOMAN
It really helped me last time.

EXT. NOVA'S PLACE - LATER

Nova sits on her porch with her laptop. We see that she's
writing an op-ed column about a recent incident of police
brutality. We see her full by-line. OP-ED COLUMNIST for the
New Orleans Picayune newspaper.

RID, 25 and street-wise, drives up the street in an old Honda
Accord with brand-new rims. He hops out and heads to her.

RID
What up, Nova?

NOVA
'Sup, Rid.

RID
Need a half of capers.

NOVA
No halves. You know better.

RID
I'm low and I got hypes ready.

NOVA
How much you marking up these days?

RID
Twenty percent at the college.
Fifty in the business district
(off her disbelief)
Why not? They got it. Escalation
for risk.

NOVA
You'd make a killing on Wall
Street, brother. Third flowerpot.

He nods, lifts up the flowerpot, takes an ounce, leaves cash.
But, stops short of taking a flyer that's there as well.

NOVA (CONT'D)
Take it.

RID
C'mon, Nova.

NOVA
We need you at the rally. Be in
solidarity with your brothers and
sisters.

RID
I went to the last one!

NOVA
Well, there's another one. And I
swear, Rid, if I don't see you and
your crew up there, I'm cutting
ya'll off. And you know I got the
best. You'd want someone marching
for you. I can't believe I even
have to ask you, brother.

RID
You right. It just messes with my
head, ya know.

NOVA
Yeah, I know.

He heads out, but calls over his shoulder.

RID
What your fine-ass sister say about
that Gladiator shake-down?

NOVA
What you mean?

RID
 (almost to his car)
 Her man's team been having 5 on 1
 parties on the road.
 (off Nova's confusion)
 Five woes, one hoe. It's all over
 the news. You ain't heard?

NOVA
 Nah. We're not close like that.

RID
 Ain't gotta be. It's all over.

Off Nova, covering her concern.

INT. NEW ORLEANS AIRPORT - DAY

People from all walks of life rush through the terminal to get to their gates. They all pass ERNEST BORDELON, 69, strong and gray, as if he's invisible. His back is straight and his gaze focused as he pushes a trash can across the terminal.

INT. AIRPORT BREAK ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ernest opens his locker and takes off his uniform's button-up shirt. He puts on a well-worn cargo jacket and a faded Saints baseball cap.

Nearby two YOUNGER MALE WORKERS are laughing and talking smack as a commercial plays on TELEVISION. We see a SPOT featuring Davis, as dashing and dynamic as ever.

YOUNG MALE WORKER 1
 (watching TV)
 Rings gleaming now, but it's a wrap
 for number four.

YOUNG MALE WORKER 2
 (searching his cell phone)
 The League postponed tonight. Here
 it is... "In the wake of
 allegations by a 23-year old woman
 that members of the Gladiators
 basketball team engaged in group
 sex with her against her wishes on
 several occasions..."

YOUNG MALE WORKER 1
 (interrupting)
 How's it gonna be "against her
 wishes on several occasions," yo?
 (MORE)

YOUNG MALE WORKER 1 (CONT'D)

If it's against your wishes ain't
gonna be another occasion. These
thots be thirsty, I'm sayin'.

Ernest listens discreetly. Brow furrowed. When he closes his
locker door and slowly makes his way to the door, he touches
the brim of his cap toward the young men.

ERNEST

Good night to you.

YOUNG WORKERS

(respectfully)

Night, Mr. Ernest.

EXT. ERNEST'S LAND, ST. JOSEPHINE'S PARISH - LATER

Waist-high stalks of slender, emerald leaves outline both
sides of a dirt road. Ernest pulls onto a side road that
leads to a small clapboard house with chipped white paint and
parks his pick-up truck.

He takes a small cooler out of the truck and walks slowly
past a tractor turned on its side. Tools are nearby.

When he reaches the porch, a LAZY DOG lifts her head to greet
him. He bends down to nuzzle her. Rising, he looks out on his
sugar cane field that stretches a quarter of a mile in one
direction.

He looks upon the unkept clotted grounds with green blades
battling the dark soil below. His expression filled with
regret.

INT. ERNEST'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ernest dials the phone in his small, tidy kitchen. INTERCUT
CALL with the WEST RESIDENCE as housekeeper Rocky answers the
phone in the family's state-of-the-art kitchen.

ROCKY

(on guard)

West Residence.

NOVA

Hi... um... hello, This is Ernest
Bordelon. Is my daughter there?

ROCKY

Mr. Bordelon, let me check and see
if she's here.

We now see Charley and Micah sitting at the counter with MIRIAM, 40ish red-head and in a suit, in their immaculate chef's kitchen. Charley nods and takes the phone from Rocky.

CHARLEY

Hi, Daddy.

ERNEST

Checking on my girl.

CHARLEY

I'm here. I'm okay.

ERNEST

What's this all about?

CHARLEY

I feel so bad for him, Daddy.

ERNEST

Yep, it's bad business.

CHARLEY

It's these kids coming straight out of high school. No home training. No life skills. You hand 'em millions of dollars and say good luck. They marry riff raff. They live wild. And now they're messing up our livelihood, ya know?

Micah listens in.

ERNEST

Where's Micah?

CHARLEY

(she turns on the speaker)
She's right here. She's fine.

MICAH

Hi, Grandpa.

ERNEST

Hi, Princess.

CHARLEY

Davis is on a flight back. It's just a disaster for the team.

MICAH

There goes another championship.

ERNEST

What happens next? I know you got a plan going. You always have a plan.

CHARLEY

The talking points are that they are innocent until that woman proves otherwise. Apparently, she didn't go to the police right away and there is no rape kit or anything. The guys are saying they never laid eyes on her. Idiots. Someone should have said it was consensual because if she has even a shred of physical evidence, its a wrap.

Micah listens closely, taking in Charley's analysis like the good student that she is.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

In the end, these knuckleheads probably did something they weren't supposed to do and the league is probably going to institute some kind of investigative suspension. Then, Davis will have to start again. Build and break in a whole new team. I can't even... Anyway, there's a press conference with the owners, coach and Davis tomorrow to properly position the whole thing. We still have a few cards to play.

Miriam takes notes on everything Charley has said.

ERNEST

Sounds like you're really involved.

CHARLEY

I'm helping a little with strategy. Just a little. They asked.

Miriam smiles weakly at Micah.

ERNEST

I understand them asking.

Charley reacts to this. Embarrassed, she picks up the receiver.

CHARLEY

I know, Daddy. I have plans to come down soon.

(MORE)

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

I'm going to come help you with the farm. I am. But things are so up in the air right now. You understand.

Ernest nods. He's a proud man in a tough situation.

ERNEST

I just wanted to make sure you all were okay. That's all I called for.

CHARLEY

I'm gonna come and I'll fix everything when I get there, okay? I promise. Can I send you anything in the meantime?

ERNEST

No ma'am. I'm making due just fine.

CHARLEY

You don't have to make due, Daddy. I can send you what you need.

ERNEST

(beat)

I just need advice. And time. I need a little time.

CHARLEY

I'll come soon and give you all my time, okay? Let me just deal with this, okay?

ERNEST

Of course. Yes.

CHARLEY

Okay, Daddy. I'll talk to you in a bit, okay? Bye, Daddy.

ERNEST

Bye, Charley.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

INT. ST. JOSEPHINE'S ELEMENTARY - DAY

A semi-circle of chubby faced Black and Latino boys are in the hallway of the elementary school. We spot a boy we know. It's Blue in the middle of a heated conversation.

BLUE
... I don't know.

BOY #1
Well, what about a trampoline then?

BLUE
I don't think so.

BOY #2
How about a clown?

BLUE
No.

BOY #3
We can't make any promises.

The three interrogators walk away. Blue is shell-shocked. He walks down the hall, hurt. Then, looks up to find TRIN PHAN, 27, a pretty and petite Vietnamese teacher with a mega-watt smile. Judging from the attention from the students, she's clearly one of their favorites.

TRIN
Everything okay, Mr. Bordelon?

BLUE
Kris and Nick... Kris and Nick said they might not come to my birthday.

TRIN
Well, why not?

BLUE
I don't have a trampoline. We just don't have one.

That's all the permission he needs to let the tears flow.

TRIN
Okay. It's going to be okay.

She bends down to hug him.

INT. TRIN'S CLASSROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

Desks are arranged in a circle with her swivel chair in the middle. All of the kids raise their hands, totally engaged.

TRIN
Miss Sanchez?

SANCHEZ

9!

TRIN

Close, but no. Mr. Delacroix?

DELACROIX

10?

TRIN

No. Mr. Alvarez?

MR. ALVAREZ

14?

TRIN

Ladies and gentlemen, this was homework two weeks ago. We're not here to regurgitate information. We are here to learn. Miss Lacy, the definition of 'regurgitate' please. We learned it in the health lesson.

LACY

To throw up.

TRIN

Now place it in context please.

LACY

We are not here to just throw up information and not, like, know what it means and remember it?

TRIN

Very good. I'd like everyone to research the answer tonight and draw a picture of that number using variations of the third primary color. What color is that?

CLASS

Red!

She rises from her seat and the students begin to pack up.

TRIN

And Mr. Bordelon?

Blue looks up, wide-eyed.

BLUE

Ma'am?

TRIN

Thank you for the invitation to
your soiree this weekend. I'd be
more than happy to attend.

His smile can light up all 50 states. The kids are abuzz
with excitement.

EXT. ST. JOSEPHINE'S ELEMENTARY - MOMENTS LATER

A collage of grown-ups await their kids. The doors open,
emptying the children onto the lawn.

Blue runs to his grandfather, Ernest.

BLUE

Poppa! Guess what?

ERNEST

What, sir? Tell me everything.

Ernest lifts the boy into the truck as he sets up the story.

EXT. ERNEST'S LAND - LATER

Ralph Angel walks along a row of neglected sugarcane, towards
Ernest and his old pal, PROSPER DENTON, late 60s, in the
distance. The men are crouched low, measuring the rows of
cane and in discussion about the farm.

Blue, who plays nearby, spots his father. Ralph Angel opens
his arms wide for the boy, who runs and jumps into a hug.

BLUE

Pop, guess what? Ms. Phan is coming
to our house!

RALPH ANGEL

Who's Ms. Phan?

BLUE

My teacher. These guys were being
mean about coming to the birthday
party, but then Ms. Phan said she's
coming, so now everybody wants to
come now!

Ralph Angel looks to Ernest, who just chuckles.

BLUE (CONT'D)

So Pop, maybe we need balloons!

RALPH ANGEL

Blue, I told you if we did this we had to keep it under control. Pop can't spend a lot of money. And who was mean to you?

BLUE

The balloons I saw at the store with Poppa. Not the fancy ones. I was meaning the kinds we blow up by ourself. If those guys have balloons then they'll have more fun, I think.

ERNEST

What color you want, sir?

Ralph Angel takes in how easily Ernest overrides him, but says nothing.

BLUE

Red and purple! Oh, and maybe Mom can come help!

A darkness comes over Ralph Angel's face. His voice changes.

RALPH ANGEL

What I tell you, Blue?

Blue looks to his grandfather for help.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)

No. Look at *me*. What did I say?

BLUE

Okay.

Ernest looks back toward his work. Prosper takes his cue.

PROSPER

I'ma get on.

ERNEST

Thanks for the measurements.

PROSPER

Ain't nothing. It's a good tractor. Big as hell, but it'll fit.

ERNEST

We'll see about it.

Prosper gives Blue a high-five, tips his wide-brimmed hat to Ralph Angel, then leaves them alone.

ERNEST (CONT'D)

Anything?

RALPH ANGEL

(down)

Um, next month maybe, they said.

(a beat)

Thanks for picking him up so I could see about it.

Ernest shakes his head in disappointment.

ERNEST

Blue, go on in with your Daddy and wash up.

Ralph Angel has been dismissed. Blue runs to the house. But before Ralph Angel goes...

RALPH ANGEL

You getting a tractor, Pop?

ERNEST

Just talking about it. Gotta keep appearances.

A loaded beat. Then, Ralph Angel digs into his pocket.

RALPH ANGEL

Some money owed me came in. Here.

Ralph Angel presents the wad of cash to his father.

ERNEST

Come in from where?

RALPH ANGEL

(without hesitation)

Craps a few months back. I been on my dude over in the Ninth to pay up. Finally did.

Ernest looks at the money suspiciously.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)

Ain't enough for nothin'. Just a couple hundred. Help out around here a little maybe.

He continues to hold it out. Desperate for his father to take it. Ernest finally does. He puts it in his back pocket, gathers his measuring equipment and begins to walk toward the house with Ralph Angel, to the young man's relief.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)

(a beat)

I don't understand why he still asks for her. He knows how she is.

ERNEST

Every kid wants their mother.

Ralph Angel nods a little. Ernest looks out over his fields.

ERNEST (CONT'D)

You talk to Charley?

RALPH ANGEL

No. You?

ERNEST

Yeah. They're fine.

RALPH ANGEL

You know she ain't gonna let it be nothing but fine.

ERNEST

That's right.

They walk together through the green stalks toward the old house. Far from fine themselves.

INT. WEST RESIDENCE - NIGHT

It's late and Charley sits alone in her robe in the dark. The only light comes from the city outside and the TELEVISION. She watches a NEWS REPORT that recounts the day's events.

NEWS ANCHOR

"The Houston woman says the incident occurred three weeks ago after a game against the The Oaks. She claims to have gone to a hotel willingly with LA Gladiator point guard, Felix Evans, after a game three weeks ago. And while she was in his hotel room, three more players came in and sexually assaulted her."

We see images of the PLAYERS. We see footage of their WIVES, including Renee and Lena, caught out in public.

And we see a photo of the HOUSTON WOMAN, early twenties and blond. The PHOTO they use is a candid shot of her in a bar laughing and holding a beer.

SPORTS REPORTER

The Gladiator front office has launched an internal investigation along with the local authorities in both Houston and Los Angeles. While all players in question remain active, the league has placed the team under an ethics investigation. In the meantime, three time MVP Davis West faces an uphill battle in his quest for a fourth title with a team that is now in shambles.

Charley shakes her head in disgust and looks out at the view when we hear KEYS at the front door. She rises as Davis enters the house, duffel bag in hand.

They go to each other. Silhouettes against the wall of glass.

He embraces her, tight. Then he kisses her, holding her face in his hands. Her whole body responds, deepening the kiss.

When they come up for air, they look each other in the eye. Questioning.

DAVIS

All the work, babe.

CHARLEY

I know. But it's not over.

DAVIS

It is. I got what - maybe three more good years. I need a great team around me. I don't want to build this thing from scratch. Not again.

CHARLEY

They'll gut their contracts and bring in new guys. Good guys. You'll be back next season.

DAVIS

I don't know.

CHARLEY

You're not ready to retire, Davis.

DAVIS

No, but I may be ready to move. Oakland or Portland. Close enough with strong teams.

(MORE)

DAVIS (CONT'D)

It's the only way to get four. I gotta have four, baby. You know the plan.

CHARLEY

I know.

DAVIS

Maybe Atlanta or Charlotte. It'd be nice to spend some time with your family. Get a place in the south just for two or three years, right?

Charley isn't onboard, but puts her hand on his chest. He is hopeful. Desperate even.

CHARLEY

Whatever we need to do, baby.

Her words seem to soothe him. He unties her robe and slides it off her shoulders, then picks her up. Strong.

She wraps her legs around him, suspended against the glass.

A WIDE SHOT of the couple, intertwined against the CITYSCAPE.

INT./EXT. VIOLET'S HOUSE - DAY

Violet is on her porch shooting the breeze with the parents of the TWO DOZEN CHILDREN who've overrun her lawn.

Ernest holds court on the deck of the motorboat doing card tricks for a CUTE LITTLE GIRL. Blue watches along with the other kids.

Hollywood is working some hot dogs on the grill.

But all in all, the little boy's birthday party is a bust. No games, a few amateur balloons, nothing fun. The kids are restless.

Ralph Angel hurries out from the kitchen with a few things he sets on the folding table in the yard.

RALPH ANGEL

Chips if anyone wants. Sodas are right here.

A YOUNG MOTHER helps him set things down, flirting a bit. Kids reach for liters of soda like life-vests on the Titanic.

YOUNG MOTHER

Is there anything I can do to help?

RALPH ANGEL

Nah, thanks. Hot dogs'll be ready soon.

He introduces himself to new people who've just entered. A kid drinks a cup of soda then yells...

KID

This soda is hot!

YOUNG MOTHER

Do you have any ice?

RALPH ANGEL

Let me look.

He retreats to the kitchen, passing Violet on the way.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)

(leaning in)

You're the queen of partying. Can't you help me get this turnt up a little?

VIOLET

They're six. Ain't no turnin' up I know appropriate for six. Just feed 'em. Kids play. They'll loosen up.

But these kids are used to trampolines and video games and things that the Bordelons don't have. Ralph Angel looks at Blue who looks small and defeated around a group of rowdy and restless boys in the yard.

Then, a RUCKUS. Cheers coming from the front gate.

CHILDREN

Ms. Phan! Hi, Ms. Phan! You came, Ms. Phan!

Trin greets her students although her hands are filled with TWO LARGE BOXES. Ralph Angel rushes to help her.

RALPH ANGEL

Let me get that.

He takes the boxes while she bends down to greet her kids and wave to parents. Then, she follows him into the house.

TRIN

I don't believe we've met.

RALPH ANGEL

Sorry. Ralph Angel Bordelon. My aunt, Violet, usually picks Blue up. Blue's my boy. I'm his father.

TRIN

No apology needed. You go by Ralph or Angel?

RALPH ANGEL

It's Ralph Angel. All together.

TRIN

Okay. Well, can I help with anything, Ralph Angel? I brought a few things.

She reaches into the box and pulls out Cosco-size cases of popsicles and Kettle Corn.

RALPH ANGEL

Wow.

(off her look)

I'm not good at this.

TRIN

What do you have going? Hot dogs.

RALPH ANGEL

Ready in about 5.

TRIN

And then a cake or...

RALPH ANGEL

I have a cake. I have a thing that one of my father's workers brought. You're supposed to hit it and candy falls out, he said.

TRIN

A pinata! Oh, that's perfect. Then we're going to be just fine.

A FATHER comes into the kitchen, covering irritation. His DAUGHTER holds a hot cup of soda.

FATHER

Find that ice, bruh?

Ralph Angel is at a loss. There *is* no ice.

TRIN

We're doing something a little more
fun for ice.

She unwraps a popsicle and drops it in the daughter's plastic cup. The little girl squeals as the cup FIZZLES.

Ralph Angel smiles at Trin with gratitude. She smiles back.

CUT TO:

Ralph Angel and Trin work together to pull off the party. Kids happily drink soda with upside down popsicles while munching hot dogs.

She coordinates an impromptu game with lanes made of shaving cream on the lawn.

Ernest looks on with pride as Blue opens his gifts in the middle of a circle. Violet lights the candles on the cake. They all watch with love as Blue makes a wish, then giggles.

CUT TO:

Kids and parents begin to leave. All smiles. On her way out, the CUTE LITTLE GIRL approaches Ernest in a recliner.

CUTE LITTLE GIRL

Bye, bye.

No answer. She moves towards him, and we see him slumped over in an unnatural position.

CUT TO:

Ralph Angel stands over his father, distraught. Ernest's eyes are closed. He isn't responding.

Violet kneels, talking in his ears and holding his head.

Hollywood listens for breathing, preparing to perform CPR as the remaining folks in the house crowd around.

Trin is on her cell phone with 911.

RALPH ANGEL

C'mon, Pops. Can you hear me?

Blue is on bended knee at his grandfather's side, crying.

BLUE

Poppa! Wake up!

A parent tries to pull the boy away, but it's no use. He won't budge. Then, Trin steps in and picks him up.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Poppa! No! Please!

While holding him, she ushers the other parents and kids away from the family as Hollywood checks Ernest's airway.

TRIN

Let's take the children out of the way. Let's give some room here.

The parents and kids follow her orders while she tries to sooth Blue and monitor the ambulance.

CUT TO:

Violet and Hollywood jump in his car to follow the PARAMEDICS as Ernest is wheeled to the waiting ambulance. Ralph Angel looks around frantically for Blue and finds him in Trin's arms, terrified.

Ralph Angel and Trin exchange a look. One pleading for help. The other accepting with a nod.

RALPH ANGEL

Blue, I'll be back. It's gonna be okay. You stay here with, Ms. Phan.

BLUE

Daddy! I want to go!

RALPH ANGEL

You can't, son. I'll be back.

BLUE

I want to go with Poppa! Daddy!

Ralph Angel jumps in the ambulance right before the medics shut the doors. The sirens wail. Blue looks on, wailing too.

END ACT TWO.

ACT THREE

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Ernest lies in bed conscious but unresponsive. He's attached to tubes. His breathing is labored.

Nova stands over him with the palms of her hands over his ears. Her nose is touching his. She whispers to him with her eyes closed as the family looks on. Then, she places several seeds under his pillow.

Violet sits in a chair next to her brother's bed, clutching her rosary and praying as Hollywood stands behind her, his hands on her shoulders for support. He bends down to talk to her and speaks in low tones.

HOLLYWOOD
Where'd Nova learn her ways?

VIOLET
Her mother was into all that. It's real.

HOLLYWOOD
I don't doubt it.

Ralph Angel is in the doorway, in pain while watching Ernest. Hospital staffers walk back and forth in the hall, oblivious to their heartache.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ralph Angel is alone in the bright artificial light. With some difficulty, he decides to make a call. He presses a pre-set button on his cell. The screen reads "Darla." But the call won't connect. He finds a PAYPHONE and dials.

DARLA (O.S.)
Hello?

INTERCUT CALL with DARLA, 25, a dark-haired beauty. She holds one ear closed to maximize her hearing.

DARLA (CONT'D)
Ralph Angel?

He strains to hear her.

RALPH ANGEL
(stern)
Where are you, Darla?

All he hears is laughter and loud voices. She's clearly having a ball wherever she is. He should have known. Pissed, he hangs up on her.

DARLA
Ralph Angel?

We PULL BACK to find Darla, hurt by the lost call. She's in line at a supermarket with a gaggle of teenagers behind her.

At the hospital, Ralph Angel fumes. Then decides to make another call.

INT. VIOLET'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Trin wakes up in a strange house and takes a second to get her bearings. She rises from the couch and goes to check in on Blue, asleep in a back bedroom. She pulls a blanket over him.

Making her way through the house, she begins to clean up from the party. Taking down streamers, throwing away soda cans and putting things back in order.

She stops for a moment at an OLD WEDDING PHOTO on the living room wall. A YOUNG ERNEST is dashing in his military uniform, arm in arm with his BRIDE.

Trin gets lost in the photo. The young woman from long ago looks back at Trin with a hesitant gaze. The gaze of a woman fluent in solitude even when next to her husband.

The PHONE RINGS. She walks around the room until she finds it and answers. INTERCUT with Ralph Angel in the hospital.

TRIN

Hello?

RALPH ANGEL

Ms. Phan?

TRIN

Trin.

RALPH ANGEL

Trin. Hi. Is Blue okay?

TRIN

Sound asleep. How's your father?

RALPH ANGEL

He's got surgery in a few hours after some tests. It's a stroke.

TRIN

My God. I'm... I'm so sorry this is happening. I'm sure he's going to pull through. He's a strong man.

RALPH ANGEL

Yeah. Yeah, he is.

(beat)

I don't have anyone right now to be home with Blue. We're all here...

TRIN

Don't worry. I'll take him to school with me this morning.

RALPH ANGEL

Thank you. So much. I'll be there after school. When the bell rings.

TRIN

If you aren't there, I'll take him home with me. I'll text the address.

RALPH ANGEL

I don't know what to say. This is good of you.

TRIN

It's my pleasure.

They hang up. Trin sits alone in the dark.

Ralph Angel then dials again. It RINGS and RINGS.

INT. STAPLES CENTER/ MEETING ROOM - SAME TIME

Charley's phone BUZZES. In a gray form-fitting designer suit, she stands in front of SEVERAL OTHER WOMEN, including her pals from the restaurant Renee and Lena. All of the women are dressed conservatively.

They watch Charley's every move as if she holds the keys to the kingdom. She press a button on her phone to ignore the call without giving it as much as a look.

INT. STAPLES CENTER/CORRIDOR - SAME TIME

Davis, tall and muscular, wears a bespoke tailored suit and a serious expression. Hangers on, arena staff, team personnel and other players seem to part waters as he walks through.

He makes his way to double doors leading to a large room. We can see the PRESS assembled just beyond the doorway.

The HEAD COACH nods to him as if to say: "Ready?" Davis nods back.

The coach and FIVE PLAYERS file in with Davis in the lead.

A clamor as the players arrive. But they don't sit. The men stay standing, And then we notice that next to each player is an empty seat. The press are puzzled.

Then, in walks Charley. With determination, she heads directly to the raised platform. She takes her husband's outstretched hand. Together, they drip money and respectability. And they know it.

Behind Charley are the other wives, including Renee and Lena. They're all doing their best Charley impersonations, trying to exude confidence and charisma.

FLASHBULBS go off in a frenzy to capture the spectacle.

As everyone sits, Miriam and other team executives watch from the side of the room, observing with crossed fingers.

COACH

As you know, we're here to make a few statements. No questions today, folks. I'll begin by saying that I stand behind this team. And my hope is we can be allowed to play as a team while the various inquiries and investigations and what not are done. Give these guys that room and that respect as athletes please.
(a beat as the press yell questions)

Now, our captain, Davis West, will speak on behalf of the players.

Davis squeezes Charley's hand then leans into the microphone.

DAVIS

I want to say I stand by my teammates. I stand by these men. Private lives, private activities should be that - private. The fact that an adult consensual interaction has become a headline is unfortunate, but it doesn't change what we're here to do. We're here to play damn hard and win for our fans. To win for this city. To exhibit the best of athleticism for the entertainment and empowerment of those who love this game. I love this game. I love my wife. I love my teammates.

(MORE)

DAVIS (CONT'D)

And we are all going to let the legal process play out while we do what we came here to do. Now, excuse us -- we've got a game to win.

Davis is so suave and passionate in his statement that some of the press actually CLAP. Miriam gasps in awe and looks to Charley who is more weary.

Everyone on the stage rises to leave when a STRONG VOICE from the middle of the room calls out.

STRONG VOICE

Charley! Charley Bordelon-West! Are you okay with this? Are you okay with supporting alleged rapists?

The accused players and their wives begin to YELL BACK at the reporter who shouts them down. The room begins to spiral. Neither the coach or the executives or Davis knows what to do.

Until, we find Charley. Slowly tapping... tapping... tapping on a microphone. Tap... tap... tap. With each one, the room gets quieter as everyone starts to focus on her.

CHARLEY

I was asked a question. I'd like to answer.

Everyone settles. The spotlight is hers.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

Am I okay with this? No. No, I'm not. I'm not okay with years of sacrifice, of sweat, of trades, of practices, of peptalks, of losses, of roadtrips, of reporters, of injuries, of time away from home in the name of this game. I'm not okay with it. But we -- all of these women up here -- do it because we love our husbands. And our husbands love this game. Every family represented here believes in this team and in each other. And we will stand by each other while the investigation is underway. Davis and I support these families while we pray for the health and emotional safety of their accuser. We believe that we can all get past this to a better place.

And with that, she looks lovingly to Davis who places her arm through his, drawing her near. She leans in. It's a picture perfect moment. They dazzle. And in their glow all of the couples seem to sparkle with confidence too.

Camera flashes galore capture this stunningly effective demonstration of support and stagecraft.

EXT. SAINT JOSEPHINE - AFTERNOON

Blue stands outside the school building, staring up the street for the truck he knows. The last of the kids are exiting the pick-up area. All the children are gone now.

Trin leans against her car. She's been patiently waiting for him to decide when he is ready to go.

Finally, he gives up and walks over to her. She opens the passenger door.

INT. TRIN'S CAR - A SHORT TIME LATER

Blue peers out of the window as they turn onto a side street along a freeway barrier. Small houses dot the way. Not the best area. A random shopping cart is in the street.

But as they drive, the view changes. The homes become farther apart, on larger lots. The homes beam with pride of ownership.

EXT. TRIN'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Blue steps out of the car, clearly impressed.

The house is small and sweet with a bright red door, but it's what's behind it that has caught his fancy. The water. The green waves of the Gulf coastline.

Blue looks to Trin and she nods. Then he takes off to the shore lined with a row of boats anchored to a long dock.

We see what seems to be a small village with Laotian, Cambodian and Vietnamese families working and living there.

INT. SWANKY HOTEL SUITE, LOS ANGELES - AFTERNOON

Micah lounges in the living room of a designer hotel suite overlooking the STAPLES CENTER, flipping through channels.

Charley reads paperwork while talking on the phone at the desk nearby. She looks gorgeous and in control as always.

Micah reviews her mother up and down. Then adjusts her own blouse clumsily.

Davis enters from the bedroom with his game face on.

Charley and Micah look up and both smile.

MICAH
Aw shoot. They ain't ready.

DAVIS
(laughing)
They ain't never ready. What you want tonight, love?

MICAH
Um... well, I'm going to need a minimum 40 points.

DAVIS
C'mon, that's a given.

MICAH
Oh? Okay, confident tonight are we?

Charley walks over to join the fun.

DAVIS
(hugging Charley)
Any requests?

CHARLEY
I'd love an overage of assists. So we can drive home the whole "supporting your teammates" narrative.

DAVIS
Done.

Off all their smiles.

INT. STAPLES CENTER - LATER THAT NIGHT

It's Game Time. And it's a full house. MASSIVE CROWDS rock out to the latest hit song as cheerleaders sway on the court. It's clear that the Gladiators have known many bright days, their glory symbolized by banner after banner of championship flags hanging from the rafters.

The scoreboard reveals that we're in the midst of a good game. Davis commands the center of a circle as PLAYERS gather for a time-out.

Charley commands the center of the WIVES SECTION with Micah nearby. These five rows are close to the court and are as much a show as the game itself with seat after seat of the most gorgeous women in town.

The music stops and the game is back in play as REFEREES take to the court and the players set their formation. The buzzer buzzes and the play begins with Davis controlling the tempo and analyzing his opposition as he dribbles effortlessly down the court.

He splits the defense and passes the ball out to ANOTHER PLAYER then zigzags. When his teammate can't make the shot, Davis viciously yanks the ball out of the air for a rebound then DUNKS the ball hard over a player who cowers under him. The crowd goes nuts! Charley and Micah look at each other with pride. All the wives cheer along with the fans.

As the game continues, a few women start to look at their PHONES. Then we spy some fans looking too. And gasping. Many share with the person next to them.

Charley observes as more and more people around her and even on the other side of the stadium are distracted by their phones.

CHARLEY
(to Micah)
Who died?

Micah pulls out her phone and scrolls to investigate. Then freezes.

MICAH
Oh my God.

At the same time, people begin to BOO. Just a few at first. So low in tone that the players don't even notice. But as the jeers become louder, both teams look around at each other to figure it out. The booing gets louder. Then someone throws a cup on the court. Then another. FANS ARE THROWING THEIR CUPS, TRASH, CAPS AND SHIRTS AT THE PLAYERS. The refs call a time out.

We see snatches of what people are watching on their phones. GRAINY FOOTAGE of some sort. But we can't make it out.

Davis looks around and then he sees her. Charley.

She walks down the few steps to the court. Somewhat entranced. Laser focused on Davis. Her eyes are on fire. He's confused and upset.

She reaches the edge of the court but doesn't stop. She violates the sanctity of the sports world. She STEPS ONTO THE COURT.

Fans continue to hurl things at the players. The stadium is in TOTAL CHAOS.

Charley walks right up to Davis.

CHARLEY
(low, pained)
What did you do?

DAVIS
What the hell, Charley? What's going on?

She is all seething anger. It's taking every ounce of her restraint to hold back the tears. Her voice is indignant and clear.

CHARLEY
(stronger)
What did you do?

DAVIS
What are you *talking* about? What's happening, Charley?

He looks around the stadium and the littered court and the other players. And then he looks into the stands and sees Micah. She has tears in her eyes. He takes an involuntary step forward in concern for her. At this, Charley attacks Davis, slapping and hitting him.

CHARLEY
What did you do, Davis!?

Security rushes in. They secure Davis and stand between him and Charley.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)
You liar! You're a liar! What did you do? You're a lie, Davis!

An agonizing scene. And it's happening LIVE ON NATIONAL TV.

Off Micah, her hands covering her face in shame.

END OF ACT THREE.

ACT FOUR

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

A nurse tends to Ernest who is groggy while the family watches. He has deteriorated. Violet, Hollywood, Nova and Ralph Angel look worn and less groomed.

When the nurse leaves, Ernest motions for a set of FLASHCARDS sitting on the side table.

Ralph Angel obliges, then watches his father shuffle through the cards with his one good hand. A slow and painful action.

Finally, Ernest holds up a card with an image of a baby.

RALPH ANGEL
He's good. He's fine, Pop.

Ernest is frustrated. He shuffles through the cards. Violet goes to help him, but he doesn't want help. He finds a picture of a car. He holds it up. Ralph Angel and Nova try to understand what he wants to say.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)
The car is fine. The truck?

Ernest can't find what he needs to express himself. His loved ones are helpless. Ernest holds up the cards again. Both the car and the baby. This time aggressively. He wants more information.

NOVA
I think he wants to know where Blue is.

Ernest nods.

RALPH ANGEL
Oh, his teacher, Ms. Phan. She took him home from school to her house. She's very nice. I'm going to get him I just wanted to be here while you were in the procedure.

This calms Ernest. He nods in approval. To everyone's relief. Then waves Ralph away as if to say: go get him.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)
I'll see ya'll later.

Ralph Angel exits the room and is heading down the hallway through the visitor's area when Nova comes after him.

NOVA

Rah, bring him here. I'll watch after him.

RALPH ANGEL

I don't want him here. Nah.

NOVA

But, he wants to see him.

RALPH ANGEL

Yeah, but I don't want Blue to see him like this. The tubes and stuff will scare him.

NOVA

He'll be okay. I just think it'll help.

RALPH ANGEL

No, Nova.

And he leaves. She watches after him when the TELEVISION playing nearby catches her eye. She steps closer to get a better look and then reaches to turn up the volume.

It's a NEWS REPORT recapping the release of the GRAINY FOOTAGE that we saw briefly at the Gladiator game. This time the whole tape plays.

We see SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE of a hotel room hallway. Two players walk with a woman towards a guest room door. They kiss her and fondle her. Then try to open the room door but neither seems to have the key. They laugh and point up the hallway toward someone OFF-CAMERA. Then, three other players stumble into the frame -- led by Davis.

Davis grabs the woman by the waist, picks her up and puts her over his shoulder in one quick move. The other players laugh and give each other pounds.

Davis slaps the woman on the ass. Then leaves his hand there. She's laughing too. Someone produces the key and Davis carries her inside with the other players following behind.

Next we see tape of CHARLEY CONFRONTING DAVIS on the court amidst a barrage of sneers from fans.

Nova watches in disbelief. What a circus.

And then, a CLOSE-UP. Charley's face fills the screen as she screams: "What did you do?!" Tears welling in her eyes.

This view of Charley hits Nova in the gut. Her heart breaks at the sight of her sister like this.

The screen freezes on this image of Charley as the report ends. A WIDE-SHOT on Nova looking up to the TELEVISION, stunned.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Ralph Angel leaves the hospital. As he approaches his truck, he hears his name. And, to his shock, there is Darla.

They stand there for a beat, just looking at each other. She's nervous. He's taken completely off guard.

DARLA
I need to talk to you.

RALPH ANGEL
Are you out your mind?

DARLA
You won't call me back.

RALPH ANGEL
Have you actually lost it?

DARLA
I need to talk to you and you won't call me back. What am I supposed to do? I wanna talk to Blue.

He walks past her toward his truck.

DARLA (CONT'D)
You have the right to be that way to me. You do. But, please...

RALPH ANGEL
My father's in there. He can't talk. Can't move right. And you want to talk about you.

DARLA
No. I wanna talk about Blue.

She summons all her courage to challenge him.

DARLA (CONT'D)
I took a test for a job, a better job. The city is hiring.

RALPH ANGEL
Oh, the city's hiring addicts now?

DARLA
There's a program, and if you
finish it, you can apply for some
city jobs.

RALPH ANGEL
Why do I care?

DARLA
I did good. I applied for this
good job at City Hall. It's in the
new parking structure. Taking money
and giving tickets. The booth is
before you drive in, so I'd get to
work outside. Its \$15.75 an hour.
Full-time, with city benefits.

RALPH ANGEL
I don't care what you do.

DARLA
You called me that day. I
thought...

RALPH ANGEL
You thought wrong. Whatever you
thought, you thought wrong. Okay?

DARLA
I could start giving you money for
him. Maybe I could start seeing
him. Supervised. You could be
there. Or somebody else.

RALPH ANGEL
Oh, I could be there?

DARLA
I just mean...

RALPH ANGEL
You think I'm weak right now and
you can take advantage.

DARLA
I don't think that.

He climbs in and slams the door of the truck and starts the
ignition.

DARLA (CONT'D)

I want to see him. I have a right.

Wrong thing to say. He gets out of the truck.

He walks up to her close. His face almost touching hers. From afar they'd be mistaken for lovers. But the tears coming to her eyes tell a different story.

RALPH ANGEL

You're forgetting things.

DARLA

All I can do is make amends and move forward.

RALPH ANGEL

I'm not gonna let you come in and then leave him again. I couldn't help it then, but I can now. You know what I see when I look at you?

DARLA

Stop.

RALPH ANGEL

You know the picture in my head, right?

DARLA

Stop it.

RALPH ANGEL

I think my life's bad. Then, I think about yours.

He gets in the truck and drives away from her.

INT./EXT. NOVA'S PLACE - NIGHT

It's been a long emotional day. Heavy. We see it written all over Nova's face as she walks across her living room to answer the door. She's completely exhausted.

She looks through the peephole and rolls her eyes. When she opens the door, the COLLEGE STUDENT greets her.

COLLEGE STUDENT

Uh, hi.

NOVA

Yes?

COLLEGE STUDENT
 "I Am Deliberate And Afraid of
 Nothing." Audre Lorde.

We catch a glint of a smile in her eyes as she takes in two things. His correct attribution. And the BLACK SEDAN over his shoulder that has rolled up with the headlights off across the street.

NOVA
 Good. Come back tomorrow. I'm
 closed for the night.

COLLEGE STUDENT
 But I can buy from you direct? Not
 from that guy. The mark-up is
 crazy. You're stuff is homegrown
 and just... its just great...
 and...

NOVA
 Tomorrow.

He nods and turns away, startled to find a man approaching out of the darkness. It is CALVIN, who gives a stern look to the kid. The student stops in his tracks. Calvin takes out his badge. He's a cop. All the while, Nova stifles a chuckle.

CALVIN
 You have thirty seconds to
 disappear.

The kids runs to his car.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
 (light)
 At least you had the decency not to
 sell it right in front of me.

NOVA
 I'm offended. You know I respect
 the badge.

CALVIN
 Yeah right.

He drapes his arm over her as they go inside.

CUT TO:

He takes off his blazer in the living room revealing a SHOULDER GUN HOLSTER. She pours wine in the kitchen.

NOVA
 (calling out)
 To what do I owe this visit,
 Detective?

Calvin stands in the doorway and looks at her with concern.

CALVIN
 Brew tea tonight.

At this, her shoulders slump. She covers her face with her hands. He goes to her.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
 Why didn't you call?

Her face is buried in his chest.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
 You can call, Nova.

A beat then she straightens herself up and wipes her face. She tries to pull away, but he won't let her go.

NOVA
 I can't and I don't want to. That's
 my choice. Please respect it.

CALVIN
 How many years have I been
 respecting it?

She lowers her head and he holds her close.

INT. WEST RESIDENCE - NIGHT

The house is dark and quiet.

We find Micah sitting on her bed, scrolling through her phone. She's reading all the TWEETS about her parents.

All with a point of view that's either supportive or disparaging to one parent or the other. She watches the MEMES and GIFS of people making fun. She's hurting.

Then, her screen on her laptop comes alive with FACETIME. It's Violet.

INTERCUT with Violet on her cellphone via FaceTime.

MICAH
 Hi, Auntie Vi.

VIOLET

Hey, baby. Why aren't you all answering the phone?

MICAH

Um... some things happened here today. It's really bad.

VIOLET

I heard. I'm very sorry. It's unthinkable... I don't even know what to say. We're gonna talk it all through. I want to know everything. But I need you to listen to me right now, okay?

MICAH

Okay.

VIOLET

I need you to take charge and get your mother here by tomorrow.

CUT TO:

Micah stands at the doorway of her parent's stately master bedroom watching Charley sleep.

She walks in and sees a bottle of sleeping pills on her mother's night stand, alongside rumped tissues and her WEDDING RING. Micah takes it all in and then looks upon her mother with sadness.

She climbs into bed with Charley. Laying next to her and smoothing her hair in the dark.

INT./EXT. HOSPITAL ROOM - SAME TIME

Hollywood leans over Ernest as Violet watches. Hollywood touches his hand carefully. Ernest's breathing is labored. He looks worse than before.

HOLLYWOOD

Gotta go make this money, man.

Ernest nods.

HOLLYWOOD (CONT'D)

You know I gotta keep everything afloat or I'd be right here with ya'll. You know that.

Ernest knows. A look of tenderness passes between the two men. Hollywood squeezes his hand then turns away before his eyes give him away.

VIOLET
(to Ernest's nod)
Be right back, okay?

Hollywood and Violet walk arm and arm down the hallway.

HOLLYWOOD
I'm sorry, Vi.

VIOLET
It's okay. It's gonna be okay.

HOLLYWOOD
I put enough to cover a whole
week's tips in the icebox.

VIOLET
Hollywood...

HOLLYWOOD
I don't want you thinking about no
shifts and no kinda work right now.
Just focus on him, ya hear?

Just as she's about to reply, THREE MEN approach them. One is Prosper Denton, Ernest's old pal who we met earlier at the farm. The other two are younger. One Latino, ROMERO SALDANA, 43, tall and lean. The other White, REMY NEWELL, 35, strong and blonde.

PROSPER
(tipping his cap)
Violet. Hollywood.

They greet him and all the men shake hands while Prosper makes introductions.

PROSPER (CONT'D)
Violet, you know Romero. Was
working with Ernie and me season
before last with his men.

VIOLET
Of course. Hello. I haven't seen
you for awhile. Hi.

PROSPER
And this here's Remy Newell.
Manages the Landry farm over on the
Northside.

REMY
 (shaking her hand)
 We met briefly at the Yellow Bowl
 for his birthday, ma'am.

VIOLET
 Oh yes. Okay. Hello.

REMY
 How's he doing tonight?

Violet hesitates.

HOLLYWOOD
 Touch and go. Good moments and bad.
 Doctor just gave him some meds for
 the night so...

PROSPER
 Understood, understood. Just wanted
 to make show our faces. And tell
 you if you need anything at all,
 you holler. You hear me, Violet?

VIOLET
 It'd actually be a big help if you
 all could just look after the farm
 while the family is here for the
 next little while. If you could?

The threesome look at each other uncomfortably.

PROSPER
 Vi, you know he don't have a crop
 up this season, right?

VIOLET
 What do you mean?

ROMERO
 We haven't planted for the last two
 seasons.

HOLLYWOOD
 Why not?

REMY
 Crops have been paltry for the last
 few cycles and the prices --
 they're dropping across the board.

PROSPER
 He started last season but couldn't
 bring it in.

(MORE)

PROSPER (CONT'D)

And this season, the finances just didn't add up right for him to even plant.

Violet is floored.

VIOLET

What's he been doing out there everyday then?

The men don't want to answer.

ROMERO

(hesitantly)

He took a job somewhere. Wouldn't say where.

PROSPER

It's not on a farm. We know everybody. So.. I don't know. I do know it wasn't easy and he didn't do any of it lightly.

REMY

He's always working on a plan to get back up and running. And he will.

Off Violet, holding in her emotions.

EXT/INT. TRIN'S HOME - EVENING

Ralph Angel walks up to Trin's place, but stops short of the door. He fixes the collar on his jacket unconsciously.

His exhaustion matched only by his fascination with the neighborhood as he approaches her RED FRONT DOOR.

Trin answers with a genuine smile. Upon seeing her bare feet, he reaches to remove his shoes.

RALPH ANGEL

Sorry about the time.

TRIN

Don't be. Those hospitals. Hard to go to. Hard to leave.

This gives him pause. Like she got something exactly right.

RALPH ANGEL

I want you to know how much I appreciate this.

She heads to the back. He watches her walk away, then catches himself and turns his attention to the room.

TRIN
Have a seat.

RALPH ANGEL
I'm... I stink.

TRIN
I've been warned.

RALPH ANGEL
(sitting tentatively)
I never been over here. Lived in St. Josephine's all my life.

TRIN
(beat)
How's your father?

RALPH ANGEL
The surgery wasn't as successful as... we wanted it to be. There's blockages. Other problems. So... we wait. See how he responds. That's all they said really. They act like they know, but they don't know nothing more than us.

Both are lost in their own thoughts. Then, they exchange a smile to cover.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)
How was he today?

TRIN
Quiet. Definitely tired. He asked a lot of questions. About his grandfather. He really wants to see him.

RALPH ANGEL
I keep thinking if that was the right thing, you know? I didn't want him to see the ambulance, the hospital. He's already been through a lot. Traumatic stuff. I just want him to be a normal kid with normal kid thoughts. No drama. But.. that's not really working out.

TRIN
He's gonna be just fine.

Off Ralph Angel's worry.

RALPH ANGEL
 (a beat)
 You into feng shui?

He points to the red door.

TRIN
 I was experimenting. Door's the
 only thing that stuck.

RALPH ANGEL
 I was going to say... your
 arrangement's a little off.

TRIN
 Ha! Ya think?

RALPH ANGEL
 Awhile back when I was working,
 um... I'm between jobs right now.
 I was stripping this old lady's
 hardwood floors and she gave me an
 earful about putting everything
 back in its "balanced place."

TRIN
 Yeah, tried it. I felt like a
 hypocrite when I found out it's
 banned in China.

RALPH ANGEL
 Feng Shui's banned in China? C'mon.

TRIN
 They call it "a feudalistic
 superstition adverse to the
 communist party." Arrested some
 teachers of it there.

RALPH ANGEL
 I thought it was a real thing, a
 Chinese thing.
 (beat)
 You're not Chinese right?

TRIN
 Vietnamese.

RALPH ANGEL
 Right. Whole 'nother country.
 Sorry.

TRIN

Don't be. I know ya'll think we all look alike.

RALPH ANGEL

No! I meant...

TRIN

Ralph Angel, I'm kidding.

They chuckle, and then a quiet settles in.

RALPH ANGEL

We got a schedule worked out. I'm gonna drop him off in the mornings and my aunt Violet and my sister Nova are trade on picking him up.

TRIN

Sounds good. He's back here.

She heads the back of the house and he follows.

Down the hallway. Passing a bedroom where an OLD WOMAN sleeps, they enter Trin's cozy bedroom.

Blue is knocked out. They put on his shoes and sweater together while the boy sleeps. Ralph Angel picks up his son.

RALPH ANGEL

(whispering)

Thank you.

EXT. WEST RESIDENCE - MORNING

The estate is surrounded by PRESS VANS and SATELLITE TRUCKS. Journalists and photographers are camped outside the house.

INT. MICAH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside, Micah is busy at her desk finalizing arrangements on the phone as Rocky finishes packing.

ROCKY

Mija.

Micah covers the receiver and looks to her.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

Why you just booking to Atlanta? You need a full trip into the New Orleans airport.

MICAH

I'm gonna buy the second leg in Atlanta so no one can trace where we're going from here. You know those paparazzi have got people at the airlines. And we're flying out of Orange County not LAX. They won't follow us all the way there, I don't think.

ROCKY

My smart girl. Very good.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

We look into a mirror hazy with steam. A hand reaches to clear the frame. Charley has been crying.

She takes off her shower cap and stares into the mirror for a long moment. She removes her glasses. Takes a good long look at herself. Then, puts her glasses back on.

EXT. WEST RESIDENCE - A SHORT TIME LATER

TWO LARGE MEN exit the house and clear reporters from in front of the estate gates just before they open.

Rocky drives a RANGE ROVER out of the driveway. Paparazzi immediately follow behind.

Charley slumps in the back in a hoodie. Micah looks out the window defiantly.

INT. RALPH ANGEL'S TRUCK - MORNING

Ralph Angel and Blue drive for a while in silence. Blue's bookbag is on his lap.

BLUE

Papa's doing good?

RALPH ANGEL

He's hanging in there, buddy.

Off the silence.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)

I know you miss him. He's trying to get better.

BLUE
Is he passed away?

This stuns Ralph Angel.

RALPH ANGEL
No, he's not passed away.

BLUE
He died.

Ralph Angel pulls over.

RALPH ANGEL
No, Blue, he didn't die. He's in
the hospital.

BLUE
His eyes were closed already when
the ambulance took him.

RALPH ANGEL
But he woke up. He's in the
hospital trying to get better so he
can come home.

Ralph Angel realizes he never gave an adequate explanation of things, so wrapped up in his own grief. He focuses.

RALPH ANGEL (CONT'D)
He had a stroke. When that happens
your brain is hurt and everything
gets fuzzy. So the doctors are
taking care of him.

BLUE
I miss him a lot.

Blue begins to cry quiet tears. Trying to hide them from his father. Ralph Angels' heart rips right in two.

INT. HOSPITAL - A SHORT TIME LATER

Ralph Angel walks Blue through the halls.

RALPH ANGEL (V.O.)
He's going to be sleeping and we
don't want to wake him up. He has
a machine next to him that helps
him breathe good. It puts the air
right in his nose with a special
tube.

(MORE)

RALPH ANGEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We have to stay very quiet or the
doctors will kick us out. Okay?

BLUE (V.O.)
'Kay, Pop.

Outside Ernest's room, Ralph Angel picks up Blue and enters.

Ernest sleeps with the blinds closed. He appears weak and small. A single stream of morning light peeks through. CLOSE on Blue as they approach him.

Blue, in his father's arms, inspects Ernest. His eyes review his chest rising and falling, the medical bracelet, the machines. He leans further over toward his grandfather.

BLUE (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Poppa. It's Blue.

Ernest opens his eyes slowly, and smiles. Blue smiles back.

Ralph Angel sits with Blue in his arms on the side of Ernest's bed. Ernest tries to move his hand. Ralph Angel reaches for it first and holds on.

They all three sit quietly. Ernest gazing at Ralph Angel and Blue with pride and sadness both.

Then, Blue crawls out of his father's hold. Carefully, leans over and lays his head on Ernest's chest.

The old man can't move his arm. Ralph Angel moves it for him. Placing his father's hand on his son's cheek. The two men meet each other's eyes. And see love looking back.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Charley and Micah with their luggage in hand walk through the hospital halls with urgency when they see their WHOLE FAMILY in the hallway, clearly in mourning.

Nova holds a devastated Violet up. Ralph Angel holds Blue in his arms. The boy's head is buried in his father's chest.

Nova and Ralph Angel see Charley and Micah down the hall, and their tears begin to fall.

The family walks toward each other from both ends of the hall, meeting in the middle. They all reach out to hold each other up.

We know that Ernest is gone.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE

- Violet pulls a blanket over Micah in her guest room. Then walks through her house, turning off the lights. She goes to reach for a lamp in the living room and sees something THROUGH THE WINDOW. She opens the door and there is Hollywood. He's come back to be with her in this moment. He walks straight up to her and holds her tight.

- Nova sits in her car, troubled and emotional. We PULL BACK to find her car across the street from a large and lovely home in the French Quarter. And through the window we catch a glimpse of CALVIN and his CHILDREN, and a lovely woman who comes up and kisses him. She's clearly his WIFE. Domestic bliss. Nova observes the scene, expressionless. Then drives off.

- Ralph Angel puts Blue in bed. The little boy reaches for him, scared. Ralph Angel climbs into bed with his son, wrapping him in his arms. Comforting them both.

- Charley stands on the edge of her father's unkept fields, lit only by moonlight. She can't believe her eyes. She can't believe her life. She can't believe he's gone. She looks up to the heavens. Then, down at the soil. Then, across the fields.

CHARLEY

I'm sorry, Daddy. I'll fix it.

FADE TO BLACK.