ONCE UPON A TIME IN NEW JERSEY
by
Jason Daniels
EXT. PARK - NIGHT

It is a cold, dark, and silent January night in Newark, New Jersey. The wind whips as snow falls. A hooded young man, CALVIN PAUL, 17, sits on a bench, looking at Downtown Newark’s city skyline. He looks around the park, then looks to the sky, as he tries to hold back tears.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Calvin looks around the classroom, that is full of anxious seniors, ready to go home to enjoy their weekend. The English teacher, SANDRA CLARKE, 37, walks about the class.

SANDRA
Now according to Bradley, one of the engaging elements of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, is that they are not monstrosities of virtue, but rather people who are simultaneously accessible and elusive. They are made up of qualities and characteristics that we find within ourselves, while exhibiting an intensity that places them beyond our grasp. Ms. Washington.

A young woman, CRYSTAL WASHINGTON, 17, looks up at Sandra.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
Give me some characteristics, some traits, that make up a tragic hero.

CRYSTAL
Well, he must suffer more than he deserves. He must be doomed from the start, but bearing no responsibility for possessing his flaw.

SANDRA
Good. Can anyone else add on to that?

Calvin raises his hand.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
Okay, Mr. Paul.
CALVIN
Due to his inability to cope with unfavorable circumstances, he will be doomed to make a serious error in judgement, usually resulting in his demise. He’s even given the chance to redeem himself, but he must move, sometimes knowingly, to his defeat.

SANDRA
Very good.

Calvin looks over to Crystal and smiles. She gives him a smile back as the dismissal bell rings. Everyone scrambles to get out of the classroom. Calvin straps on his book bag and picks up his English Literature book.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
Hey, Calvin.

CALVIN
Yeah, Ms. Clarke?

SANDRA
You two keep it up. You’ll be walking across that stage in no time.

Calvin cracks a smile as Crystal walks up behind him.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
You guys enjoy your weekend.

CRYSTAL
You too, Ms. Clarke.

Calvin and Crystal exit the classroom.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Calvin and Crystal make their way down the crowded hallway.

CALVIN
So, what are you gonna be up to this weekend?

CRYSTAL
I think my cousin wants to go out to Jersey Gardens tomorrow. I don’t know.
CALVIN
Oh. Sounds like fun.

CRYSTAL
What about you? What are you doing?

CALVIN
My dad’s comin’ over. We’re probably just gonna play x-box.

CRYSTAL
You boys and those damn video games. I don’t see how y’all can do it.

CALVIN
(laughs)
You should come over and play with us.

CRYSTAL
(smiles)
Sorry, I don’t do games.

CALVIN
Whatever.

Crystal laughs as she walks up to her locker. She opens the locker as a young man, QUENTIN JACKSON, 17, comes up behind Calvin and smacks him in the back of the head.

QUENTIN
What up, fool?

CALVIN
What the hell is wrong with you? One day you’re gonna do that and I’m gonna turn around and smack you.

QUENTIN
Yeah, yeah. And how are you doing today, Ms. Washington?

CRYSTAL
Hey, Quentin, how are you?

QUENTIN
I’m good. You ready to roll, Calvin?

CALVIN
Yeah, let’s go.
Crystal puts her hair up and ties it with a black bandana. She tosses her books into the locker and closes it.

**CRYSTAL**
Hey, Calvin, you feel like walking me home?

Calvin looks a bit nervous.

**CALVIN**
Oh, no, I can’t. I have to, uh, I have to pick up my little brother.

**CRYSTAL**
Oh, okay. Well, I’ll see you two on Monday. Bye, Calvin. Bye, Quentin.

**QUENTIN**
Bye.

Crystal turns around and walks away. Calvin cracks a smile as she walks down the hall. He watches her until he looses her in the crowd of students.

**QUENTIN (CONT’D)**
You know that’s some bullshit, right?

**CALVIN**
I don’t even feel like goin’ there today, man.

**EXT. STREET – MOMENTS LATER**
Calvin and Quentin make their way down the street.

**QUENTIN**
I just don’t understand why you don’t tell her you like her, man.

**CALVIN**
I regret telling you. Why are YOU so worried about it? Trust me, I’m gonna tell her when the time is right.

**QUENTIN**
When the time is right? You know how many times I’ve heard that from you? When the time is right my ass. It’s ridiculous. You’ve liked her since junior year, Calvin.

(MORE)
QUENTIN (CONT'D)
We're seniors now, man. What the hell are you waitin' for?

CALVIN
I don't even know if she likes me like that.

QUENTIN (sarcastic)
Oh, yeah, she doesn't like you that. Askin' you to walk her home and shit.

CALVIN
Yeah, so what?

QUENTIN
So what? Let me school you real quick, son. If a member of the opposite sex asks you to walk them home, THEY LIKE YOU.

CALVIN
Look, I can't take the risk of tellin' her how I feel and messin' up our friendship. Making everything weird, you know?

QUENTIN
You realize you sound like a fag now, right?

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin and Quentin walk into a crowded elementary school courtyard and lean up against a tree.

QUENTIN
So, other than not goin' out with Crystal, what are you doin' this weekend?

CALVIN
My dad's comin' over. We're just gonna play some Madden. Chill out. You wanna come over?

QUENTIN
A chance to kill y'all in Madden AGAIN? Yeah, I'll come over.

CALVIN
Cool.
A dismissal bell is heard from inside the building. Moments later, children begin to pour out of the entrance. Calvin looks through the crowd. Seconds later, Calvin spots his little brother, AARON PAUL, 7, in the crowd of students.

Aaron walks over to where Calvin and Quentin stand.

QUENTIN
(to Aaron)
Well, look who it is. The black Bart Simpson.

AARON
Shut up, stupid.

CALVIN
(laughs)
Let’s go, man, dad will be at the house soon.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron, Calvin, and Quentin make their way down the street, which is now filled with elementary school students.

AARON
I’ll play you to a game of Madden later on, Cal.

CALVIN
Aight. I call the Steelers.

AARON
No, I call the Steelers!

CALVIN
Too bad, I called them first.

QUENTIN
Damn, Calvin, instead of bein’ out somewhere with Crystal, you’re gonna be playin’ video games with this lil’ peasey headed punk?

AARON
Who you callin’ peasey, dummy?

QUENTIN
Shut up. Grown folks is talkin’.
CALVIN
Man, will you leave that Crystal stuff alone? Look, Monday afternoon, I’ll walk her home and ask her if she wants to go out somewhere, okay?

QUENTIN
(sighs)
Aight, we’ll see.

CALVIN
Yeah, we’ll see.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

A woman stands at the sink, washing dishes. The woman is SHERYL ROBINSON, 39. She is dressed in baby blue nurse’s scrubs.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aaron, Calvin, and Quentin walk through the front door.

SHERYL (O.S.)
Hey, boys, is that you?!

CALVIN
Yeah, ma!

Sheryl walks from kitchen.

AARON
Hey, mommy!

Sheryl leans down and gives Aaron a kiss on the cheek.

SHERYL
Hey, baby. Hey, Quentin.

QUENTIN
Hello, Ms. Robinson.

CALVIN
Hey, ma.

SHERYL
You, we need to have a little talk.

CALVIN
About what?
Calvin and Sheryl walk into the kitchen and take a seat at the table.

CALVIN
What did I do?

SHERYL
It’s what you didn’t do. Didn’t I tell you, when you and your brother leave in the morning, to lock that front door? You know they just found three bodies, right down the street the other night?

CALVIN
Okay, and what does that have to do with us? We didn’t do anything.

SHERYL
Still ignorant to the ways this world works. What makes you think you have to be doing something to get killed? More than half of the people that are murdered are innocent bystanders, so unless you want me, you, or your brother to become apart of that statistic, lock the damn door.

CALVIN
Alright. I’m sorry. I’ll lock the door next time.

SHERYL
(smiles)
You better. How was school?

CALVIN
It was good. Ms. Clarke said if I keep doing what I’m doing, I’ll graduate with no problem.
SHERYL
Then keep doing what you’re doing. You have no idea how proud I am. I can’t wait until June to see you walk across that stage, boy.

CALVIN
Neither can I.

SHERYL
Oh, your father called. He said he’ll be headed over here as soon as he gets off.

CALVIN
Okay.

SHERYL
Well, let me finish getting ready for work.

Sheryl gets up from the table and gives Calvin a kiss on the forehead. Calvin smiles as she walks toward the back of the house.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Aaron, Calvin, and Quentin are on the couch, playing an intense game of MADDEN ’07. They are all into the game, screaming and shouting at the television. Seconds later, there are three knocks on the front door.

CALVIN
I got it.

Calvin pauses the game, gets up, and walks over to the front door. He opens the door and there stands GEORGE PAUL, 40. He smiles and walks into the house, pulling Calvin into a hug.

GEORGE
Hey, how you doin’, boy?

CALVIN
(smiles)
Hey, dad. I’m good.

George lets Calvin out of the hug and walks over to the couch. Aaron jumps up and runs up to him, hugging his legs.

GEORGE
Hey, baby boy. How’s my lil’ man doin’?
Aaron

Good.

Aaron lets go of George’s legs. George takes off his coat and sits it on the couch.

George

Ah, Mr. Jackson.

Quentin

Hey, Mr. Paul.

George

I see y’all started playin’ without me. I see how it is.

Calvin sits on the couch as Sheryl walks from the back, pulling on a coat.

Sheryl

Hey, George.

George

Hey, there, Nurse Robinson. How are you?

Sheryl

I’m fine. You got a minute?

George

(confused)

Yeah, sure. I’ll be back fellas.

George follows Sheryl to her bedroom.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, SHERYL’S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Sheryl walks into the room. George enters, closing the door behind him.

George

What’s up?

Sheryl

I just wanted to say thank you for staying with the boys tonight. They got me working the graveyard now and I hate leaving them here by themselves with all the craziness that’s going on out here.
GEORGE
Sheryl, you don’t have to thank me for staying with OUR kids. And you know anytime you need me, you can call.

George smiles.

SHERYL
Thank you. So, is Georgia still on this summer?

GEORGE
Yes, ma’am. I save about five-hundred more dollars and I have a down payment for a car.

SHERYL
That’s good. The boys are really excited about it.

GEORGE
Yeah, well, they haven’t seen my side of the family for a while, so it’ll be good for them.

SHERYL
Yeah. Alright, I’m gonna head out before I miss my bus. You take care.

Sheryl walks over to George and gives him a hug.

GEORGE
You be careful out there.

SHERYL
I will.

Sheryl lets him out of the hug. She smiles and exits the room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Calvin and George sit on the couch, playing x-box 360. Aaron lies at the other end of the couch, fast asleep. Quentin has gone home for the night. George lets out a long yawn.

GEORGE
Alright, Cal. Let’s call it a night.
Calvin kneels down beside the television and starts to disconnect the x-box. George looks at the back of Calvin’s head.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
You lookin’ a little rusty in the back, son. You want me to line you up real quick?

CALVIN
Nah, I’m good.

GEORGE
You still got those trimmers I gave you, right?

CALVIN
Yeah.

GEORGE
Well, you need to put those bad boys to use.

Calvin laughs and sits back down on the couch.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
So, you boys gonna be ready for Georgia this summer?

CALVIN
Yeah. That’s all Aaron ever talks about.

George nods and smiles.

GEORGE
How’s your momma been lately?

CALVIN
Good. She’s just been really overprotective lately.

GEORGE
She’s supposed to be. That’s her job. That’s OUR job. It’s a cold, cruel world out there, Cal. That’s somethin’ you need to understand, man. Things ain’t all peaches and cream out there, you know what I’m sayin’?

Calvin nods.
GEORGE (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
So, uh, between me and you. Is she seein’ anyone right now?

CALVIN
Why you wanna know?

GEORGE
Just answer the damn question, boy.

CALVIN
(laughs)
Nah, she’s not seein’ anyone.

George lets out a chuckle.

GEORGE
Yes, sir. Your mother’s a good woman. You’ll be lucky to find one half as good as her.

Calvin nods. George smiles as Calvin eyes a gold rope chain around George’s neck. Calvin smiles.

CALVIN
You still wear that thing, huh?

GEORGE
I never take it off. I need to get it cleaned. I want a new one this year. Fourteen carrot gold.

CALVIN
(laughs)
Yeah, okay.

GEORGE
Alright, let me get outta here before I miss my bus.

George stands to his feet and puts his coat on. Calvin stands.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
Tell your brother I love him and I’ll see him tomorrow.

CALVIN
Okay.

George pulls Calvin into a hug.
GEORGE
I love you.

CALVIN
Love you too, dad.

George smiles and lets Calvin out of the hug. He walks toward the front door.

GEORGE
Don’t forget to lock up.

CALVIN
I won’t.

GEORGE
Alright. See you tomorrow, son.

George opens the door and walks out in to the cold New Jersey night. Calvin smiles. He walks over to Aaron and scoops him up in his arms.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, AARON’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin walks into Aaron’s bedroom and over to the bed. He carefully puts Aaron in his bed, then covers him up. He smiles, then gives Aaron a kiss on the forehead. He turns off the light and exits the room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin walks into his room and sits on the edge of his bed. He pulls off his sneakers and lies back in his bed. He smiles, reaches over to his night stand, and turns his light off.

EXT. STREET - LATER

The night is cold and silent. Snow has begun to fall lightly. A New Jersey Transit bus begins to approach. The breaks squeal as the bus comes to a stop.

George stands up front, waiting to get off. The bus comes to a complete stop and George steps off of the bus.

GEORGE
You have a good night.

BUS DRIVER
You have a good night too, sir.
George starts to walk down the street as the bus pulls off. He puts his hood up to shield himself from the cold. He walks down about half a block when he hears music, blasting from a car in the distance. As the car gets closer, the music gets louder.

On the other side of the street, a black 1989 Cadillac Brougham zooms past George. It rides down another block, before turning around in the middle of the street. It speeds up, then slows down when it gets to George’s side. The tinted passenger window rolls down.

MAN
You got the time?

George keeps walking, as if he knows these guys could be trouble.

GEORGE
Nah, man.

The Cadillac speeds up on the sidewalk, blocking George’s path. Two MEN jump out of the car, brandishing handguns. One of the men puts a gun in George’s face.

MAN
Give me your mothafuckin’ wallet!

George puts his hands up and backs into a wall.

GEORGE
Whoa, whoa, whoa. Calm down now.

He hits George in the face with his gun.

MAN
Put your mothafuckin’ hands down!

The other man starts to run through George’s pockets.

GEORGE
Come on, man, I ain’t got shit to give y’all!

MAN
Shut the fuck up!

He pats around George’s chest. He reaches under George’s shirt and pulls out his gold chain.

GEORGE
(angry)
Hold on, now!
He punches George in the face and rips the chain from around his neck. George stumbles back. George balls his hand into a tight fist and punches him in the nose. He falls on his back as the other man rushes George into the wall.

Man 1 gets up and runs over to the tussle. George tries to fight both men off. Seconds later, a gunshot is heard. The struggle ends.

MAN 2
Oh, shit.

George backs into the wall, with a gunshot wound in his chest. He slowly slumps down the wall.

MAN
Get the rest of his shit.

Man 2 reaches down and pulls George’s wallet from the inside of his jacket pocket.

MAN 2
That’s it.

DRIVER (O.S.)
Y’ALL MOTHAFUCKAS HURRY UP!

Man 2 jumps into the back seat of the Cadillac as man 1 stares down at George. George’s breathing gets slower and slower. The man turns around and jumps into the passenger’s side of the Cadillac. It peels out and takes off down the street.

Sirens echo in the distance as George takes his last breath.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Aaron sits on the couch, playing x-box. Calvin walks from the back, rubbing his eyes. He looks around the living room with confusion.

CALVIN
(confused)
Dad get here yet?

AARON

Nope.

Calvin scratches his head and walks back to his room.
INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Aaron and Calvin sit at the table. Calvin talks on the phone.

CALVIN
(into phone)
He didn’t come in today? You sure?
Okay. Thank you.

Calvin hangs up the phone.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
They said he wasn’t scheduled to work today.

Aaron shrugs his shoulders.

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE - EVENING

The sun has set. Calvin sits on the steps, looking up and down the street. He takes a deep breath.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Calvin sits at the kitchen table. Seconds later, Sheryl steps through the front door.

SHERYL
Hey, baby.

She walks into the kitchen. She notices the disturbed look on his face.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
What’s wrong?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I haven’t heard from dad all day.

SHERYL
Maybe he had to work some overtime.

CALVIN
He wasn’t scheduled to work today.

Sheryl caresses his cheek.
SHERYL
Don’t worry, honey. Something probably came up. We’ll hear from him soon.

Calvin forces an uninspired smile. Sheryl gives him a kiss on the forehead and walks toward the back.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - MORNING
Sheryl washes dishes and Aaron sits in the living room, playing video games.

SHERYL
You hungry, baby?

AARON
Yeah. Can I get some waffles?

SHERYL
(laughs)
Sure you can, sweetie.

Calvin walks from the back of the house, looking like he just woke up.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Hey, baby. You hungry?

Calvin takes a seat at the table.

CALVIN
Yeah. You hear anything from dad?

SHERYL
No, not yet.

Calvin sighs.

AARON
You wanna play me in Madden, Cal?

CALVIN
Yeah, I’ll be in there.

SHERYL
You boys and those damn games.

Calvin laughs as the phone rings. Sheryl turns around and picks up the phone.
SHERYL (CONT'D)
(into phone)

Sheryl drops the plate and it shatters on the floor. Calvin stands to his feet as Aaron walks into the kitchen.

CALVIN
(concerned)
What? What’s wrong?

Tears start to roll down Sheryl’s cheeks.

SHERYL
(into phone)
Who would want to kill George?

Calvin’s face goes blank.

CALVIN
What?

Sheryl hangs up the phone and takes a seat at the table.

AARON
What’s wrong, mommy?

SHERYL
(hesitant)
Your father’s dead, baby.

Calvin closes his eyes and backs into the wall. Aaron starts to cry as Sheryl pulls him into a hug. Calvin starts to cry and shake his head no, as if what he just heard was a lie. Sheryl beckons for Calvin to come over to her and Aaron.

He is hesitant at first, but he slowly stands to his feet and staggers over to them. Calvin joins the embrace as they all try to comfort each other.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - MORNING

It is a quiet morning and the entire house is silent. The clock on Calvin’s night stand reads 6:59am. As soon as it hits 7:00am, the alarm starts to go off. Calvin’s outstretched arm violently bangs on the clock until it stops.
Calvin rises to the edge of the bed, sounding as if he doesn’t want to get up. He puts his face in his hands and takes a deep breath. His appearance has changed. It looks as if he has aged a couple of years and the patch of gray hair on his head, along with an unshaven face, doesn’t help.

He jumps to his feet, turns on his radio, and heads out of his room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, AARON’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin kicks Aaron’s bedroom door open.

    CALVIN
    Hey. Hey. HEY!

Aaron turns over and looks at Calvin with sleepy eyes.

    CALVIN (CONT’D)
    Come on, man. Get your ass up.

Aaron plops back down in his bed as Calvin exits the room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, SHERYL’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin pushes Sheryl’s door open.

    CALVIN
    Ma.

    SHERYL
    I heard you when you woke Aaron. What do I keep telling you about your mouth?

    CALVIN
    (as he exits)
    You wake his ass up then.

Sheryl takes a deep breath.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin walks back into his bedroom and over to his closet. He starts to scramble through the clothes on the floor. He throws some clothes on his bed, then reaches up top. He accidentally knocks down a shoebox from up top.
CALVIN
(to himself)
Shit.

As he kneels down to pick up the shoebox, it’s true contents are revealed. It is an unloaded glock .22, with a loaded magazine. Calvin picks up the gun and puts it back into the shoebox. He scoops up the magazine and puts it into the shoebox.

He takes the shoebox and puts it back up top. He grabs a rag and a towel, then heads out of the bedroom.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - LATER

Aaron and Sheryl are at the kitchen table, eating breakfast. Calvin comes from the back, fully dressed, and takes a seat at the table. Sheryl has made him a plate, but he ignores it.

SHERYL
Why don’t you eat something?

CALVIN
I ain’t hungry.

SHERYL
You should eat.

CALVIN
I said I ain’t hungry.

SHERYL
Fine.

CALVIN
You ready, Aaron?

AARON
Yeah, let me get my bag.

Aaron jumps up from the table and runs toward his room.

SHERYL
What time do you have to be to work?

CALVIN
Nine.

SHERYL
You only got twenty minutes. Don’t you think you should get going?
Calvin ignores her question.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
I spoke to your aunt Vera yesterday. She asked me why you never call her. She also asked if you’re ever planning to go back and finish school.

Calvin sighs.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
It was just a question. A very good question. Everyone keeps asking me if you’re going back to school.

CALVIN
Everyone needs to mind their fuckin’ business.

SHERYL
Calvin, you should really consider going back. To get your diploma. You have no idea how that feels.

CALVIN
How many times do I have to tell you, I am NOT goin’ back to school? School ain’t gonna help with none of these bills, is it? I ain’t even gonna waste my time.

SHERYL
I’m just saying, Calvin, you only had a few months left and you just dropped out.

Calvin slams his fist on the table.

CALVIN
Like I said, school ain’t gonna help with shit around here. I’m NOT GOING BACK. I wish you would get that shit through your head.

Calvin gets up from the table and storms out of the house. Sheryl stays seated, looking upset. George’s death has obviously taken it’s toll on her also. Aaron comes running back into the kitchen.

AARON
Where’s Calvin, mommy?
SHERYL
He’s outside waiting for you, baby.
Come here and give mommy a kiss.

Aaron gives Sheryl a kiss on the cheek.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
You have a good day, honey.

AARON
You too, mommy.

Aaron runs out of the kitchen and out of the front door.

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Aaron steps out of the house to find an agitated Calvin waiting for him.

CALVIN
How many times do I have to tell you, out of the house by EIGHT? Do you know what time it is? You’re gonna make it to school on time, but I might be late for work.

AARON
(smiles)
I can’t help it. Mommy makes good breakfast.

CALVIN
Life’s a big mothafuckin’ joke to you, ain’t it?

Aaron’s smile fades.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
Come on, let’s go.

INT. SUPERMARKET - LATER

There is a man up front talking to a CUSTOMER. The man is GERALD GRADY, 55. Calvin walks into the supermarket, trying to dodge Gerald. Calvin gets away with it for a few steps, before he is spotted by Gerald.

Gerald excuses the customer and heads for Calvin. Calvin knows he’s been spotted, but he keeps walking. Gerald walks beside Calvin and stops him.
GERALD
Excuse me? Do you have the time?

CALVIN
(agitated)
Twenty after nine.

GERALD
Okay. Do you see a problem with this situation?

CALVIN
If you talkin’ about me bein’ a little late, no.

GERALD
Late is late.

CALVIN
Well, you and I both know I’ll have all my work done by the time I clock out, so is this conversation necessary?

GERALD
That’s not the point. The boss wants this store stocked at a certain time.

CALVIN
Then I better go get started.

Calvin walks away in a disrespectful manner. Gerald shakes his head.

INT. SUPERMARKET, SHOPPING ISLE - LATER

Calvin is on a shopping isle, stocking the shelves with canned food. Down at the other end of the isle, Gerald walks by. He walks back as if something caught his attention. He looks at Calvin for a moment, then down at his watch.

Calvin looks back at him for a second, then continues what he is doing. Gerald walks down the isle to where Calvin is working and looks at Calvin’s float, which is full of canned food.

GERALD
Can I ask you a question?
CALVIN
(agitated)
Go ahead.

GERALD
You think you could move any faster?

CALVIN
If I could move any faster, I would.

GERALD
Well, I don’t know. You don’t seem to be applying yourself.

Calvin stops what he’s doing.

CALVIN
Let me ask you a question. Why is it that every time you wanna ask me a question, you start out with, “can I ask you a question?” Don’t you know that every time you come over here fuckin’ with me, you slow me down even more?

GERALD
Look, son-

Calvin slams what’s in his hands on the floor violently.

CALVIN
What?! I look like your mothafuckin’ son to you?! Don’t you ever call me your son! You ain’t my fuckin’ father!

Customers look at Calvin and Gerald as they pass. Gerald tries to calm Calvin down by putting a hand on his shoulder. Calvin shoves his hand away.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
Don’t you fuckin’ touch me, Gerald!
Don’t you ever put your mothafuckin’ hands on me!

GERALD
Okay, Calvin. It’s okay. Calm down.

Calvin starts to walk away.
CALVIN
Yeah, I know its okay. You can put
the rest of this shit up yourself
since your so pressed for time.

Calvin walks off of the isle. Gerald looks down at the float
and shakes his head.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL, COURTYARD - AFTERNOON

Calvin sits on a bench, outside of his old school. From the
inside, a bell can be heard. Calvin looks down at his watch.

CALVIN
(to himself)
Lunch time.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL, COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin sits on the bench, watching as students play
basketball, study, and gossip. A woman walks toward the
school, pulling keys from her purse. She is about to walk
past Calvin, but she stops.

SANDRA
Hey.

Calvin over to see that the woman is his old English teacher,
Sandra Clarke. She gives a confused look, as she tries to
remember who he is.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
I remember you. Calvin. Calvin
Paul.

Sandra walks over to the bench and takes a seat beside
Calvin.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
How have you been?

CALVIN
I been aight, you?

SANDRA
I can’t complain.

There is an awkward silence.
SANDRA (CONT’D)
It’s been a year since I’ve last seen you. What have you been doing with yourself?

CALVIN
Nothin’ really. Workin’.

SANDRA
I see.
(beat)
We all heard about what happened to your father. I’m sorry for your loss.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
Thank you.

SANDRA
(hesitant)
Can I ask you a question?

Calvin nods.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
Why did you stop coming to school? You had so little time left and you were doing so well.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I just...I wanted to be left alone. School didn’t matter. Nothin’ did.

SANDRA
I see.
(beat)
When are you coming back to finish?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I’m not.

Sandra looks at him with great disappointment.

SANDRA
I see. Well, you’re a grown man and I’m not going to sit here and try to give you a lecture on how important your education is. I will tell you this, though. Everyone is dealt their bad hands in life.

(MORE)
SANDRA (CONT'D)
That doesn’t give you an excuse to give up on yourself. I would’ve never, in a million years, pegged you as a quitter, Calvin.

Calvin looks away.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
I know you had a lot of people counting on you to walk across that stage. There’s still time for you to do it. You and I both know you can still do it.
(beat)
And I know your father would want to see you do it too.

He looks at her. From the inside of the school, a bell can be heard. They both look over to the school.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
Time for me to get back to class.
It was nice talking to you. I hope I’ll be seeing you soon.

Calvin says nothing. Sandra gets up from the bench and walks toward the school. Calvin watches her until she enters the building.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Sheryl sits in the living room. She looks as if something bothers her. Aaron and Calvin walk in through the front door. Aaron runs up to Sheryl and gives her a kiss as Calvin walks into the kitchen.

AARON
Hey, mommy. I don’t have any homework, so can I play Madden?

SHERYL
Sure you can, sweetie.

Aaron runs off toward the back as Sheryl walks into the kitchen.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Calvin rummages through the refrigerator.

SHERYL
Calvin, we need to talk.
CALVIN
Yeah? About what?

SHERYL
Mr. Grady called me today.

Calvin closes the refrigerator.

CALVIN
Fuck Mr. Grady. He’s lucky I ain’t beat his ass today.

SHERYL
What the hell is wrong with you, Calvin? You have a good job, but all you seem to do is bicker with this man. Do you know how close he was to firing you?

CALVIN
I don’t give a fuck. If he wants to fire me, let him fire me. I don’t care.

SHERYL
Yeah, that’s right, Calvin, you don’t care, you just don’t give a damn, do you?

CALVIN
Come on, man, I just walked through the door and you givin’ me shit already?

SHERYL
You know what? I am so sick of your shit. You walk around here like you’re the only one who had to deal with your father’s death. Guess what, Calvin? You’re not the only one. It has taken it’s toll on me and it has taken it’s toll on your brother. I understand you lost your father, but that doesn’t give you the right to treat us like shit. We loved him, just as much as you did.

CALVIN
NO, you DIDN’T love him. You didn’t give a damn about him. If you did, you wouldn’t have put him out.
SHERYL
(angry)
What the HELL do you think you’re talking about?

CALVIN
As a matter of fact, if it weren’t for you puttin’ him out, he would’ve been home with us, instead of dying at a fuckin’ bus stop!

SHERYL
(crying)
Do you hear the shit that is coming out of your mouth, Calvin? You need help! You need to see a psychiatrist!

Calvin kicks a chair over and storms out of the kitchen.

CALVIN
I ain’t tryin’ to hear this bullshit! You need a fuckin’ psychiatrist!

Calvin storms out of the front door and slams it behind him. Sheryl, in tears, takes a seat at the table.

EXT. ROOFTOP - EVENING

Calvin sits on a rooftop, alone, as he watches the sunset. He takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Aaron and Sheryl sit at the table, eating dinner. Calvin comes through the front door. He walks through the living room and past the kitchen, without saying a word, then disappears into the back.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin lies in his bed, staring at the ceiling. There are two knocks at his door.

CALVIN
What?

Sheryl pushes his door open.
SHERYL
Hey, baby. Aaron and I would really like to have you eat with us.

CALVIN
I ain’t hungry.

SHERYL
(pleading)
Please, Calvin, please?

Calvin sighs.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

There is silence as Aaron, Calvin, and Sheryl sit at the table, eating dinner. Aaron looks at Sheryl. Sheryl nods at Aaron, as if trying to push him on to do something.

AARON
(hesitant, nervous)
You wanna play Madden after dinner, Cal?

CALVIN
No.

Aaron looks down at his plate with disappointment.

SHERYL
Come on, Calvin. All your little brother wants to do is play a game with you.

CALVIN
I said NO.

Sheryl throws her fork on the plate.

SHERYL
You don’t want to do shit anymore, Calvin.

CALVIN
Here we go. You givin’ me shit because I don’t wanna play a game?

SHERYL
It’s not just that! You don’t eat, you don’t sleep. All you do is stay in your room. You haven’t even spoke to Quentin in almost a year!
CALVIN
Why are you so worried about what I do?

SHERYL
Because I’m your MOTHER, that’s why. It’s unhealthy, Calvin. You barely talk to us. It seems like you have a grudge against me for something I didn’t do. What did I ever do to you, Calvin? If I did anything to you, I’m sorry. But one day you’re going to have to realize that the men responsible for your father’s death are in prison, okay? Know that someday you’re going to have to move on. You’re gonna have to let go and let God.

CALVIN

SHERYL
(angry)
You need to watch what you say right now

CALVIN
We talkin’ about the same God who allowed those bastards to kill my father for thirty-five fuckin’ dollars?! That God?!

SHERYL
Lord, please forgive him.

Calvin slams his plate on the table, stands to his feet and looks to the ceiling.

CALVIN
Yes, Lord, please forgive me for what ever the fuck it was I did to you for you to take my father!

SHERYL
Calvin, you need to stop!

CALVIN
Y’all hear that? Neither can I! You know why?! ‘Cause God doesn’t give a shit about us! None of us!

(MORE)
CALVIN (CONT'D)
If he did, he wouldn’t allow none of the shit that goes on in these streets!

SHERYL
Calvin, it is not that bad.

CALVIN
Oh, come on! Have you taken a walk around our block lately? Mothafuckas is out here killin’ kids, man! Little kids! You think if he was any kind of God, he’d allow that kind of shit to happen?! NO! So the next time you wanna talk to me about lettin’ God, keep it to yourself!

Calvin swipes his plate off of the table. He goes to walk out of the kitchen. Sheryl bangs her plate on the table and stands to her feet.

SHERYL
Calvin, STOP! We are not done!

He stops and turns around.

CALVIN
I’m done talkin’.

He goes to walk away.

SHERYL
No! You do NOT walk away from me when I am talking to you!

He stops and turns around.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Now I have sat here and LET you take your anger out on this family because I felt it was your way of coping with your father’s death. But I am telling you it ends, right here, right now! I’m not asking you to let him go, Calvin, but what we need to do, what we all need to do, is make the best of the time we have left here.
CALVIN
(hesitant, crying)
I don’t wanna make the best of my
time here. I wish I was fuckin’
dead.

Her eyes fill with tears as Calvin walks away. Sheryl sits
down at the table, sobbing. Aaron takes her hand.

AARON
It’s okay, mommy.

INT. SUPERMARKET, SHOPPING ISLE – AFTERNOON

Calvin is on his usual shopping isle, putting cans on the
shelf. Gerald walks onto the isle and toward Calvin. Calvin
notices him coming and takes a deep breath. Gerald walks up
to Calvin.

GERALD
I spoke with your mother yesterday.

Calvin ignores him.

GERALD (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
She told me about what happened to
your father.

Calvin starts to look angry.

GERALD (CONT’D)
Look, I just wanted to apologize
for the way things went down
yesterday and, uh, you can take a
couple of days off to get yourself
straight. I’ll get Rick to fill in
for you.

Calvin says nothing.

GERALD (CONT’D)
Well, I’ll see you around.

Calvin watches Gerald as he walks off the isle.

INT. BUS – EVENING

Calvin sits in his seat, with his hood on, looking out of the
window. The brakes squeal as the bus comes to a stop.
People board the bus, paying their fare to ride. The bus pulls off as passengers find their seats.

Calvin continues to stare out of the window as a young woman takes a seat across from him. She sits her purse and a bookbag by her feet. The young woman, Crystal, glances over at Calvin for a second. She sits back in her seat, looking confused.

She looks at Calvin, trying to force words, but nothing comes out. She looks ahead for a moment, then back at Calvin.

CRYSTAL
(hesitant, nervous)
Calvin?

Calvin, confused, looks at her. His face goes blank as he starts to fidget in his seat.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
I thought that was you.

He avoids looking her in the eyes.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
It’s been a while since we’ve seen each other. How have you been?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
Okay. You?

CRYSTAL
I’ve been okay, I guess.

There is an awkward silence.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
I’ve been wondering if I’d ever see you again.

Calvin doesn’t say anything. Crystal takes a deep breath.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
I heard about what happened to your father. I’m sorry.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
Thank you.
CRYSTAL
I wanted to tell you that sooner, but I had no way to get up with you.

He continues to avoid looking her in the face.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
What happened to you, Calvin? It’s like you just disappeared. Where have you been?

Calvin looks down. He looks up and quickly presses the stop strip. The bus begins to come to a stop.

CALVIN
This is my stop.

He gets up and walks onto the isle. She grabs his arm.

CRYSTAL
Wait.

She pulls a pen and a piece of paper from her purse. She writes on the paper, then extends it to Calvin, as the bus comes to a stop. He hesitantly takes the paper.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
You should call me sometime. It would be nice to hear from you.

She gives him a faint smile. He nods and walks away. Crystal watches him as he exits the bus.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Calvin steps off of the bus and the doors close behind him. Crystal looks at him from the window as the bus pulls off. She waves at him as the bus rolls down the street. Calvin watches the bus for a moment, then walks away.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Aaron and Sheryl sit in the living room, coloring in coloring books.

SHERYL
(smiles)
You have to stay in the lines, sweetie.
AARON
Mommy?

SHERYL
Yes, baby?

AARON
(still coloring)
What's wrong with Calvin?

Sheryl stops coloring and looks up at Aaron.

SHERYL
(hesitant)
Nothing's wrong with him. It's just that...some people have a certain way of dealing with pain, that's all.

AARON
Is he gonna be okay?

SHERYL
(hesitant, smiles)
Of course he is.

AARON
Good.

Sheryl gives him a faint smile, then goes back to coloring.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin sits on the edge of his bed, staring at his dresser. He takes a deep breath and stands to his feet. He walks over to his dresser, where Crystal's phone number sits. He looks down at the number for a moment, then picks it up.

INT. WASHINGTON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The phone rings. Seconds later, Crystal walks into the kitchen and answers the phone.

CRYSTAL
Hello?

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin paces the room.
CALVIN
(nervous)
Hello, may I speak to Crystal?

INTERCUT - CALVIN’S BEDROOM/CRYSTAL’S KITCHEN

CRYSTAL
This is her. Who’s this?

CALVIN
Oh, it’s me. Calvin.

CRYSTAL
Oh, hey. What are you doing?

CALVIN
Nothin’ really. Just sittin’ around.

CRYSTAL
That sounds boring.

CALVIN
Yeah.

CRYSTAL
Well, we should do something. Go out somewhere. What do you wanna do?

CALVIN
I dunno, you?

CRYSTAL
Um, you know where Howell’s is?

CALVIN
Yeah, over on Walnut.

CRYSTAL
Why don’t you meet me there at around seven?

CALVIN
(nervous, hesitant)
Uh, yeah. I can do that.

CRYSTAL
Okay, I’ll see you then. Bye.

CALVIN
Bye.
INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Calvin clicks the phone off. He throws the phone on his bed and walks over to his dresser. He looks in the mirror. He looks at his reflection with disgust.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, BATHROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Calvin rummages through a drawer. He reaches deeper into the drawer and pulls out a pair of electric trimmers. He looks up at the mirror.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, BATHROOM – LATER

Calvin carefully trims his moustache. His face is now cleanly shaved. He clicks the trimmer off and places them on the sink. He gives a faint smile at his reflection.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Calvin runs around his room, getting ready for his evening out. He sits on the edge of his bed and puts his boots on. He stands to his feet and walks over to the mirror. He grabs his jacket from the back of the chair and heads out of his room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Aaron and Sheryl sit in the living room, watching television as Calvin walks from the back.

CALVIN

Be back later.

Calvin marches out of the front door. Aaron and Sheryl look at each other with confused looks.

INT. HOWELL’S COFFEE SHOP – EVENING

Crystal sits at a table, sipping hot chocolate. Seconds later, Calvin walks in. Crystal smiles when she sees him. He walks over to her table and sits across from her.

CRYSTAL

Hey.

CALVIN

Hey.
CRYSTAL
Thanks for coming.

CALVIN
I didn’t have anything else to do.

CRYSTAL
What have you been up to?

CALVIN
Nothin’ much, really. Just workin’.

CRYSTAL
Where do you work?

CALVIN
The Pathmark on Bergen.

Crystal nods.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
What about you? What have you been doin’ with yourself?

CRYSTAL
Nothing. Just taking a break before I start at Seton Hall in the spring.

CALVIN
I see.

She takes a sip of her hot chocolate.

CRYSTAL
How’s Quentin?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I wouldn’t know. Haven’t really spoke to him in a while.

CRYSTAL
About a year?

Calvin nods. She takes another sip of her hot chocolate.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
So, do you have a girlfriend yet?

Calvin fidgets in his seat a bit.
CALVIN
(nervous)
Huh?

CRYSTAL
(laughs)
A girlfriend. Do you have one?

CALVIN
Oh, uh, no. No girlfriend.

She nods.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
What about you?
(mumbling)
Do you have a boyfriend?

CRYSTAL
(laughs)
What did you say?

CALVIN
(clears throat)
Do you have a boyfriend?

CRYSTAL
No. No I don’t.

She laughs as Calvin gives her a nervous smile.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Can I ask you a question?

Calvin nods.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
What happened to your father?

Calvin’s smile fades.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
He, uh, he was walkin’ home from
his stop and these dudes saw him,
decided to rob him. Police said it
looked like there had been a
scuffle and that’s when they
probably shot him. For thirty-five
dollars and a...a fuckin’ chain.
CRYSTAL
Jesus, that’s terrible. Did the police ever catch them?

CALVIN
Yeah. They caught them a day after they robbed this lady in East Orange. The bullets matched the gun that was used on my father. That was it. Sixty years for all three of them.

CRYSTAL
Well, that’s good, right?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
They kill an innocent man for tryin’ to protect what’s his, what he has worked for.
(beat)
Sixty years ain’t shit for what they did to my father. I’d kill those mothafuckas myself if I could.

Calvin looks down. Crystal, somewhat shaken by how cold he has become, forces an uneasy smile.

EXT. WASHINGTON RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Calvin and Crystal approach the front steps of her house.

CRYSTAL
Well, here I am.

CALVIN
This is your house?

CRYSTAL
Yeah, this is it. Thank you for walking me home.

There is an uncomfortable silence.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Well, thanks for coming again. It was good to see you tonight.

CALVIN
It was good to see you too.
CRYSTAL
Are you going to be okay walking home? It’s a long walk from here to Eighteenth Street.

CALVIN
I’ll be aight.

CRYSTAL
Call me when you get in so I know you made it home, okay?

Crystal steps closer toward Calvin and stares him in the eye. She puts a hand on his cheek.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
There’s something different about you. Something in your eyes.

Crystal smiles, then turns around and walks away. Calvin looks as if he has something to say, but is having trouble saying it.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
Hey, Crystal.

She turns around.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
Are you doin’ anything Saturday night?

CRYSTAL
Not that I know of. Why?

CALVIN
(nervous)
Because, um, I was wondering if you...if you wanted to go out somewhere. Maybe to get something to eat?

CRYSTAL
(smiles)
Are you asking me on a date?

CALVIN
(hesitant, stammering)
No, well, maybe...yes.

CRYSTAL
Sure. I’d love to.
CALVIN
(relieved)
Okay.

CRYSTAL
Good night, Calvin.

CALVIN
Good night.

Calvin tries not to smile as she walks into the house. He turns around and starts to walk down the street.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Aaron sits on the couch, playing video games. Calvin walks through the front door. He walks over to the couch and takes a seat beside Aaron. Aaron looks at him like he’s crazy.

CALVIN
Where’s mom?

AARON
Sleeping.

CALVIN
Oh. Why are you lookin’ at me like that?

Aaron shrugs his shoulders.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
Can I play?

Aaron nods.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
I call the Steelers.

Aaron hands Calvin a controller and doesn’t say anything.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - MORNING

Sheryl is in the kitchen, washing dishes. Calvin comes from the back of the house and takes a seat at the kitchen table.

SHERYL
Hey.

CALVIN
Hey.
SHERYL
Where were you last night?

CALVIN
Just went for a walk.

SHERYL
Oh. You hungry?

CALVIN
Nah, not really.

SHERYL
(to herself)
Of course you’re not.

Sheryl accidentally cuts her finger open with a knife she is washing.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Ow! Shit!

Calvin jumps up from his seat.

CALVIN
What? What’s wrong?

Calvin walks over to the kitchen sink.

SHERYL
I cut myself.

Calvin takes a dish towel and wraps it around Sheryl’s hand. She looks at him like he’s crazy.

CALVIN
You need to be more careful. You go lay down. I’ll finish these.

Calvin notices the weird look Sheryl is giving him.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
What?

SHERYL
(hesitant)
Nothing, I just...

She smiles, gives him a kiss on the forehead, then walks away from the sink. Calvin watches her as she walks to her bedroom.
INT. SUPERMARKET, SHOPPING ISLE - AFTERNOON

Calvin is on his isle, doing his usual work. Gerald walks onto the isle. When Calvin notices Gerald, he sighs. Gerald stops at where Calvin is and scans his work area. Gerald looks at his watch.

GERALD
Is this all what’s left from the back?

CALVIN
(agitated)
Yeah.

GERALD
I see. Put a little pep in your step, huh? Good job, Paul.

Gerald walks past Calvin, toward the other end of the isle. Calvin looks confused for a moment, then resumes working.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Calvin walks down the street. He walks up to a crosswalk and is about to cross the street, but he stops. He turns around and looks down the street.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin stands at the front door. He hesitantly rings the doorbell. A moment later, the locks can be heard being undone from the inside. The door opens and there stands Quentin, looking as if he has just seen a ghost.

QUENTIN
(confused)
Calvin?

CALVIN
What’s up, Quentin?

Quentin looks as if he can’t believe his eyes. Out of nowhere, Quentin pulls Calvin into a tight hug. Calvin looks confused, but hugs him back. Quentin lets Calvin out of the hug and steps back.

QUENTIN
(excited, laughs)
Damn, Cal. It’s been a minute, boy.
CALVIN
I know.

QUENTIN
Come on, man. We gotta go out somewhere. Let me get my coat.

CALVIN
Aight.

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - LATER
Calvin and Quentin sit in a booth, eating as they talk.

QUENTIN
Nah. I don’t believe it. I refuse to believe it. You FINALLY stopped bein’ a bitch asked Crystal out?

CALVIN
Yeah, man.

QUENTIN
What she say?

CALVIN
She said yeah.

Quentin throws a french fry at Calvin.

QUENTIN
See?! What did I tell you? What the fuck did I tell you? I told you she liked your stupid ass, didn’t I?

CALVIN
Yeah, okay, you were right. You happy now?

QUENTIN
If you would have acted sooner, y’all would probably be married by now, dumb ass.

CALVIN
Anyway, what have you been up to in the past year?

Quentin’s smile fades.
QUENTIN
(hesitant)
Nothin’. Just wonderin’ if I would ever see my best friend again.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I’m sorry, man, I just...I was just goin’ through a lot.

QUENTIN
That’s what friends are for, man. To be there for each other during the bad times.

Calvin looks down.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
I didn’t know what to do. I called, you never answered. I came by, you never came out. After a while, I just figured you didn’t wanna be bothered. I just felt lost for a minute.

CALVIN
I know. I’ve neglected everyone that cared about me. Sometimes, I think about the shit I’ve put my mother and my brother through, and I just wanna die. This whole thing just fucked me up. It’s like I finally saw the world for what it really was, you know?

QUENTIN
(hesitant)
I never got the chance to tell you, but I’m sorry about what happened to your pops. Whenever I came around, he always treated me like family. I was sad to see him go, especially like that.

CALVIN
Yeah. But I’m gonna try, man. Try and focus on the future. Stop neglecting my family. My friends.

QUENTIN
What you tryin’ to say?
CALVIN
I’m tryin’ to say we boys again.

QUENTIN
We never stopped bein’ boys.

Calvin and Quentin smile, then tap knuckles.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN – LATER

Sheryl sits in the kitchen, reading a book, and Aaron is on the couch, watching television. Calvin walks through the front door. He walks into the kitchen.

CALVIN
Hey, ma.

Sheryl smiles at Calvin as he heads to the refrigerator.

SHERYL
Hey, Calvin. Where you been?

CALVIN
Oh, I was out with Quentin.

SHERYL
(surprised)
Oh, really. How is he?

CALVIN
He’s good. He said hello.

Calvin takes a seat across from Sheryl. She continues to give him a wide smile.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
What?

SHERYL
Who’s Crystal?

Calvin looks as if he’s never heard the name.

CALVIN
Who?

Calvin quickly gets up from the table, trying to get away from Sheryl. As Calvin flees to his room, Sheryl follows.

SHERYL
Who? What you mean, who? Boy, don’t play with me.
CALVIN
Come on, ma.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Calvin enters his room and tries to close the door, but Sheryl pushes it open. Calvin jumps on his bed and buries his head into his pillow. Sheryl stands, with her arms folded.

SHERYL
Don’t you, “come on, ma” me. Who is she?

CALVIN
(muffled from the pillow)
A friend from school.

SHERYL
A friend from school, huh? So, what time are you and this, “friend” going out on Saturday?

CALVIN
(muffled from pillow)
SHIT!

Sheryl takes a seat on the edge of Calvin’s bed and smacks him on the rear.

SHERYL
So, is she your girlfriend? Have you two had sex?

Calvin sits up.

CALVIN
No, ma. We haven’t had sex and she isn’t my girlfriend.

SHERYL
So, when am I going to meet her?

CALVIN
Meet her?

SHERYL
Well, I have to meet her. Make sure she’s not one of these little hot tales.

CALVIN
No, ma. She’s not like that.
SHERYL
So, should I thank her for this sudden change in your attitude?

CALVIN
What do you mean?

SHERYL
In case you haven’t noticed, you’ve been a completely different person for the past year.

Calvin looks down.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Hey, if she is, I welcome her. I’m glad to see you happy again. You’re gonna put all that hostility behind you. Get all that anger and hate out of your eyes.

Sheryl plays with Calvin’s hair. He smiles.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Now, tell me. Is my baby in love?

CALVIN
(snapping back quickly)
No! I mean...I don’t know. It’s too early to tell.

SHERYL
Okay, well, I still want to meet her.

CALVIN
You will.

SHERYL
When?

CALVIN
Soon.

SHERYL
Alright. I’m going to remind you that you said that you’re going to invite her over for dinner the next time I cook.

Sheryl jumps to her feet and walks out of Calvin’s room.
CALVIN
I ain’t say all that.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT – AFTERNOON

Aaron, Calvin, and Quentin are at a basketball court, just shooting the ball around.

QUENTIN
So, you ready for Saturday?

CALVIN
Yeah.

QUENTIN
Where y’all goin’?

CALVIN
Just out to eat. Somewhere nice.

QUENTIN
Somewhere nice? Shit, you better take her ass to White Castle.

Calvin throws the ball to Aaron.

CALVIN
And that’s exactly why you’re gonna be beatin’ your meat for the rest of your life. You don’t know how to treat a lady.

Calvin and Quentin walk over to some nearby bleachers and sit down.

QUENTIN
I’m tryin’ to help you out.

CALVIN
How the hell are you tryin’ to help me?

QUENTIN
I see it like this. You take her to a nice restaurant, she’ll be tryin’ to order all that fancy steak and lobster shit, right? Take her to White Castle and she’s limited to a sack meal.
CALVIN
Are you serious? I’m one for White Castle, but you’re tellin’ me to take the one girl, that I’ve liked since the eleventh grade, to White Castle?

QUENTIN
You listen to me, you won’t go home broke.

CALVIN
You’re a jackass. Anyway, you ain’t got to worry about it. I’m straight.

QUENTIN
You a stocker, man. You ain’t straight.

CALVIN
I have more than my work check to live off of.

QUENTIN
What? You ain’t dealin’, are you?

CALVIN
No. Hell no. I get SSI.

QUENTIN
Oh, okay. From your dad. I got you. How much do you get?

CALVIN
About six-hundred a month.

QUENTIN
Damn, I guess that would help a little bit. I wish I could get six a month.

CALVIN
Considering what I had to go through to get it, it’s not worth it at all. As a matter of fact, if I could give all that money back in return for my father, I would.
QUENTIN

Look, man, I know this shit has
been hard, but things can only get
better from here. Better days are
comin’, man, better days.

Calvin and Quentin both look up as music, from a car stereo, can be heard by the outside gates of the basketball court.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT, STREET - CONTINUOUS

A black 1999 Nissan Maxima pulls up beside the curb, with the music blasting. The car comes to a complete stop. Three young men, LIONEL, MARCUS, and ROB, jump out of the car. Rob bounces a basketball as they head into the basketball court.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - CONTINUOUS

Aaron continues to shoot the ball on the court. Quentin looks at the three young men as they walk onto the court. Quentin looks at them.

QUENTIN

Shit. These fools.

CALVIN

Who are they?

QUENTIN

Dudes from Bergen Street. Niggas think they run the West Side.

Calvin nods. Lionel eyes Quentin for a second, then walks over to where they sit.

LIONEL

Yo, my man, you know the rules. Y’all niggas gotta bounce.

Calvin looks confused.

CALVIN

What? We gotta go?

MARCUS

You deaf, mothafucka?

CALVIN

Why should we leave? This court is open to everybody.
QUENTIN
Come on, Cal. Maybe we should just bounce.

ROB
Listen to ya boy, dogs.

QUENTIN
It ain’t that serious, Cal. Let’s just go, man.

CALVIN
Nah, fuck all that. We’ve been playin’ at this court since we were six years old. Why should we have to leave?

LIONEL
Are you serious? Who the fuck is this kid? You know who I am? You know where you at?

Lionel turns his attention to Aaron. He starts to walk toward Aaron. When Lionel reaches Aaron, he pushes him, then snatches the basketball out of his hands. Lionel throws the basketball over the gates of the basketball court.

Marcus and Rob think it’s hilarious.

AARON
Hey!

CALVIN
What the fuck?

Calvin jumps from the bleachers and onto the basketball court. Quentin springs up after Calvin. Calvin walks into Lionel’s face.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
What’s your mothafuckin’ problem?

Lionel steps into his face as Quentin tries to hold him back. Marcus and Rob walk behind Quentin.

LIONEL
What the fuck you wanna do? I run this mothafuckin’ block.

Lionel lifts up his shirt to reveal a handgun.
LIONEL (CONT’D)
I suggest you bitches do like I
said and step the fuck off my
court.

QUENTIN
Come on, Cal. Shit ain’t worth it,
man.

Calvin looks over at Aaron, who looks scared.

AARON
Can we go home now, Calvin?

Calvin stares Lionel in the eyes for a moment, then walks
away. Aaron and Quentin walk after him.

LIONEL
Yeah. That’s what the fuck I
thought.

ROB
Pussy ass niggas.

Lionel, Marcus, and Rob laugh as Aaron, Calvin, and Quentin
step off of the basketball court.

EXT. STREET – CONTINUOUS

Calvin walks down the street, enraged. Aaron and Quentin try
to keep up with him.

QUENTIN
Calvin? Yo, Calvin? What’s wrong,
man?

CALVIN
Mothafucka. Should’ve beat his ass,
right there. He had a fuckin’ gun,
so what?

QUENTIN
Chill, man. The shit ain’t that
serious.

CALVIN
Nah, fuck that. My father told me
to never lay down for anyone!

Quentin runs in front of Calvin and stops him in his tracks.
He shakes him at the shoulders.
QUENTIN
You need to check this anger shit, man. He ain’t shit but a lowly base dealer. He ain’t worth it. Let it go. You got Saturday to think about, not that fool.

Calvin looks around for a second, then walks away. Aaron and Quentin walk behind him.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
See. Now what in the hell would you do without me?

CALVIN
Shut the hell up.

QUENTIN
Admit it, boo. Without me, you’d be another lost soul in Jersey.

Aaron and Calvin laugh at Quentin.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - EVENING

Sheryl sits in the kitchen as Calvin frantically runs around the house, preparing for his date. Aaron and Quentin sit in the living room, playing video games.

SHERYL
What are you looking for, Calvin?

CALVIN (O.S.)
SOCKS!

SHERYL
Look in your drawer. I put some in there this morning.

CALVIN (O.S.)
I already looked!

SHERYL
Slow your ass down and look again!

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin walks into his room and over to his drawer. He opens the drawer and pulls out a pair of socks.
INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin walks out into the kitchen, fully dressed, and Sheryl stands to her feet.

    SHERYL
    Aw, look at my baby. On his first date.

Sheryl licks her thumb and rubs Calvin’s cheek.

    CALVIN
    Come on, ma!

    SHERYL
    What you mean, come on, ma? You don’t wanna go to the girl’s house looking like who done it and why, do you?

    AARON (O.S.)
    Yeah, who done it and why!

    CALVIN
    Shut your stupid tail up.

Quentin laughs as he gets up from the couch.

    QUENTIN
    Well, people, I’m about to be out.

Quentin walks up to Calvin.

    QUENTIN (CONT’D)
    You have a good night. It’s long over due. And don’t forget what I said.
    (whispers)
    Sack meal.

    SHERYL
    Sack meal? Boy, get the hell out of here.

Sheryl raises her hand to hit Quentin, but he runs away.

    QUENTIN
    Bye, Cal. Bye, Bart!

    AARON
    Bye, stupid!
Quentin runs out of the front door and closes it behind him.

SHERYL
You better get going, mister. You don’t want to keep her waiting, do you?

Calvin smiles as Sheryl puts a hand on his cheek.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Look at you. Looking like your father.

Calvin smiles, kisses her on the forehead, then walks over to the couch.

CALVIN
Aight, Aaron. If I get home early enough I’ll whoop you in Madden.

AARON
Yeah, okay.

Calvin walks over to the front door.

CALVIN
Alright. I’ll see y’all later.

AARON
See you later, stupid.

CALVIN
Shut up. Bye, ma.

SHERYL
Bye, baby.

Calvin walks out of the front door, closing it behind him.

EXT. WASHINGTON RESIDENCE - LATER

Calvin stands in front of Crystal’s house, waiting. Seconds later, Crystal steps out of the front door. Calvin turns around. She looks as if she put the extra time into preparing herself for their date.

Calvin is speechless. She gives him a smile.

CRYSTAL
Hey.
CALVIN
(hesitant, nervous)
Hi. You look...you look nice.

CRYSTAL
Thank you.

Calvin gives her a smile.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT
Calvin and Crystal sit in a booth, eating as they talk.

CRYSTAL
Did you mother tell you we spoke?

CALVIN
(sighs)
Yeah.

CRYSTAL
What’s all that for?

CALVIN
Nothin’. She’s just all like, “when am I gonna get to meet her?”

CRYSTAL
And? What’s wrong with your mother wanting to meet me?

CALVIN
Nothin’, I guess.

Crystal smiles. A WAITRESS walks up to their table with a tall glass and sits it in front of Crystal.

WAITRESS
Strawberry milk shake for you.
(to Calvin)
You sure you don’t want anything?

CALVIN
Nah, I’m good.

WAITRESS
Okay.

The waitress walks away from the table. Crystal slides the milk shake in the middle of the table.
CRYSTAL
You should try this.

CALVIN
I’m okay.

CRYSTAL
Nooo, I insist.

Crystal picks up two straws, opens them, and puts them in the milk shake.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Come on.

CALVIN
(sighs)
Aight.

Calvin and Crystal both lean in to drink from the glass. They simultaneously drink from the glass until the milk shake is halfway gone. They both sit back in their seats and laugh.

CRYSTAL
That wasn’t so bad, now was it?

CALVIN
It was aight.

CRYSTAL
It was aight? You drunk most of it.

Calvin laughs. Crystal smiles at him, stirring the milk shake with her straw, keeping her eyes on him.

CALVIN
What? Why are you lookin’ at me like that?

CRYSTAL
You have gray hair. That was never there before.

Calvin runs his hand over his patch of gray hair.

CALVIN
Yeah, it, uh, it came in about six months after my dad died.

She nods and smiles. He faintly smiles back at her.
EXT. STREET - LATER

Calvin and Crystal stand on a street corner.

CRYSTAL
 Are you sure you wouldn’t have a problem with me meeting your mother?

A New Jersey Transit bus approaches.

CALVIN
 No. I guess I wouldn’t.

The bus comes to a complete stop and the doors open.

CRYSTAL
 Good...because she invited me over for dinner tomorrow night.

Crystal walks onto the bus, smiling from ear to ear, while Calvin stands there, confused.

EXT. PARK - LATER

There is a light snowfall as Calvin and Crystal walk through the park.

CRYSTAL
 So...what made you ask me out?

CALVIN
 What kind of question is that?

CRYSTAL
 I mean, you never asked me to go out with you anywhere when we were in school. What made you ask now?

CALVIN
 I don’t know...I...
(sighs, hesitant)
Ever since junior year, I guess I kinda had feelings for you.

CRYSTAL
 (laughs)
You “kinda” had feelings for me?
Calvin, embarrassed, looks away. She walks in front of him and stops him in his tracks. He avoids looking her in the eyes.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Look at me.

He ignores her request.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
(stern)
Calvin Paul, look at me.

Calvin hesitantly looks her in the eye. She places a hand on his cheek. She smiles, closes her eyes, leans in, and intimately kisses him. Calvin, for a moment, looks as if he is on the verge of floating.

When they part, he gives her a nervous smile.

EXT. WASHINGTON RESIDENCE - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin and Crystal approach the front steps of her house.

CRYSTAL
Thanks for dinner again.

CALVIN
Thank you for coming.

CRYSTAL
So, are you upset that I’m coming to meet your mother tomorrow?

CALVIN
Even though y’all snuck that one by me, nah.

CRYSTAL
Well, it serves you right. It shouldn’t have taken you so long to tell me you liked me.

CALVIN
Whatever.

CRYSTAL
(smiles)
Are you going to be okay walking home?
CALVIN
I’ll be aight. YOU better get inside before your parents start to worry.

Crystal gets closer to Calvin.

CRYSTAL
I think I figured out what it is I see in your eyes.

CALVIN
What’s that?

CRYSTAL
Hate, anger, pain. Behind all that, I can see that there’s still a little love left in your eyes.

Crystal steps a little closer to Calvin.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Call me when you get in, okay?

CALVIN
I will.

Crystal gives Calvin a kiss on the cheek, then turns around to walk inside her house. She unlocks the door, then turns around to Calvin.

CRYSTAL
Good night.

Calvin smiles.

CALVIN
Good night.

Crystal walks inside the house and closes the door behind her. Calvin turns around, then walks away.

INT. SUPERMARKET, SHOPPING ISLE – AFTERNOON

Calvin does his usual work on the shopping isle. Gerald walks on to the isle and up to Calvin.

GERALD
Hey, Paul, you had a break yet?

CALVIN
Nah.
GERALD
Well, come on out front. Some of
the guys are already out there.

CALVIN
Okay.

EXT. SUPERMARKET – MOMENTS LATER

Calvin and Gerald sit on a bench in front of the supermarket. Some of their CO WORKERS walk around, talking. Gerald picks up a brown paper bag. He reaches inside the bag and pulls out a sub.

He unwraps it and hands Calvin a half.

CALVIN
Oh, nah, I’m good.

GERALD
It’s from Cooper’s.

Calvin hesitates, but he takes the half of sub. Gerald smiles and starts to eat his half.

GERALD (CONT’D)
So, where did this certain spurt of energy come from?

CALVIN
What do you mean?

GERALD
What do I mean? You been draggin’ ass around here for six months. Actin’ all hostile and shit. Now you’re mister nice guy?

CALVIN
I haven’t really noticed a change.

GERALD
Shit, I have. You were a mean lil’ son of a bitch.

Calvin laughs and takes a bite of his sub.

GERALD (CONT’D)
What did you do on your days off?
CALVIN
Caught up with an old friend of mine. Took her out to eat.

GERALD
Her?

CALVIN
Yeah.

Gerald chuckles.

GERALD
I knew it had to be somethin’. You went and got yourself a female.

Calvin laughs.

GERALD (CONT’D)
I’ll be damned. Talkin’ ‘bout you ain’t notice a change. How long you been seein’ her?

CALVIN
About a week.

GERALD
Are y’all official?

CALVIN
Not yet.

GERALD
I see. Boy, I remember those days. When I first met my wife, I was sixteen years old. She was my first and my last. I’ll let you in on a secret. If you can keep her, keep her. You treat her like she is God’s gift to you. Don’t be like all these other fools out here with eight baby mamas. That ain’t the way to do it. You find that one girl, get married, have a family. That’s how you do it.

Calvin nods as Gerald takes another bite of his sub.

GERALD (CONT’D)
Tell me about her.
CALVIN
Well...her name is Crystal. I’ve liked her for a while now and it’s just...the way she looks at me sometimes...it just seems like nothin’ in this fucked up world can get me down. And her smile. I can’t even put it into words.

GERALD
Listen to you. My man, you in love. That is straight love talk right there. L-O-V-E.

Calvin and Gerald both laugh.

GERALD (CONT’D)
How’s everything at home?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
Things have gotten better.

GERALD
Look, man, I know how you feel. Losin’ your father at such a young age. It was around the time I met my wife when my father was killed. Murdered over some bullshit. It took me a while to get over it. I was just like you, angry at the world for my father’s death. I blamed everyone, even myself, but I started to realize that things EVENTUALLY do get better. They have to. You can’t let that anger and hate consume you, because if you do, it will destroy you from the inside, out. My wife told me that on our fourth date. Ever since then, the sun has always shined bright. There will always be better days, son.

Gerald pats Calvin on the shoulder.

GERALD (CONT’D)
Well, it’s about time for me to get my ass out of here and go home to my family.

CALVIN
Alright, Mr. Grady.
GERALD
You seein’ your lady friend anytime soon?

CALVIN
Yeah, I am. Actually, she’s comin’ over for dinner tonight to meet my mother.

GERALD
Damn, she wants to meet your mother already? Yeah that’s it for you. Once they meet moms, you stuck.

Calvin and Gerald both laugh.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - EVENING

Sheryl is in the kitchen, getting things prepared for dinner. There are three knocks at the front door. She dries her hands and heads to the front door.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sheryl opens the door and there stands Crystal.

CRYSTAL
Hello.

SHERYL
Hi, baby. You must be Crystal. Come on in.

Crystal walks into the house.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Let me take your coat. You can go ahead and have a seat on the couch.

CRYSTAL
Thank you.

Crystal takes off her coat and gives it to Sheryl, then takes a seat on the couch. Sheryl walks to the back of the house. Seconds later, Sheryl walks back into the living room and sits next to Crystal.

SHERYL
So, how are you?
CRYSTAL
I’m fine, thank you.

SHERYL
That’s good.

CRYSTAL
Is Calvin home?

SHERYL
Oh, no. He’s at the basketball court with his brother and friend. Just like a man to go play basketball, when he knows you’re coming to see him.

Crystal laughs as the oven timer beeps in the kitchen.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Oh, I better get that roast in the oven. Can you give me a hand?

CRYSTAL
Okay.

Sheryl and Crystal get up from the couch and walk into the kitchen.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Crystal opens the oven as Sheryl picks up a roaster pan from off of the table.

SHERYL
Would you believe me if I told you Calvin used to sleep in this?

CRYSTAL
Really?

SHERYL
When he came home from the hospital, he was too small for his bassinet, so his grandmother put blankets in this roaster pan and it was his bed until he was two months.

Sheryl slides the roaster pan into the oven, then closes it.
SHERYL (CONT’D)
So, are you guys boyfriend and girlfriend, or has it even got that serious?

CRYSTAL
No. He hasn’t asked me yet.

SHERYL
Girl, you’ll be waiting on Calvin forever. You know you’re the first girl, that I know of, that he’s been this serious with? Can you hand me those plates on the counter behind you?

Crystal picks up the plates on the counter and hands them to Sheryl. She starts to set the table.

CRYSTAL
Really? He’s never been serious with anyone?

SHERYL
He never really had a girlfriend. In fact, he hasn’t been sociable at all lately. He didn’t do anything but stay in his room all day. He even stopped talking to us for a while.

Crystal looks down.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
That’s why I’m glad you’re here now. Baby, whatever you’re doing, keep doing it. It makes my days knowing that he’s happy again.

CRYSTAL
He said he was happy?

SHERYL
No. You can just tell by the look on his face nowadays. When his father died, it tore him up. He couldn’t even bring himself to go to his funeral. He took it so hard, I thought that he’d never be the same again. He stopped eating. He never slept. To tell you the truth, I didn’t take it any better than he did.
Sheryl stops and takes a deep breath.

   SHERYL (CONT’D)
   It just seemed like so much went unfinished. He was planning to take
   the boys down to Georgia before he died. And I’ve never told Calvin
   this, but I think me and his father were about to get back together.

Sheryl trails off for a few seconds, then snaps back into the moment.

   SHERYL (CONT’D)
   So, how did you two meet anyway?

   CRYSTAL
   In school. We met in our junior year.

   SHERYL
   That’s another thing. I wish he would go back and finish school. Do
   you think you can talk to him for me? Let him know how important it
   is. Not only to me, but himself.

   CRYSTAL
   I don’t know. I can try.

   SHERYL
   Thank you. Well, I know you’re tired of hearing my mouth. Why
don’t you go down there and tell those boys to get their butts home?
   Dinner’s gonna be ready soon.

   CRYSTAL
   Okay.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron, Calvin, and Quentin shoot the ball around at the basketball court. Quentin grabs the ball.

   AARON
   Give me the ball, dummy!

   QUENTIN
   You gotta steal it from me.
Aaron kicks Quentin in the shin and takes the ball. Quentin rubs his shin in pain.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
Ow! You lil’ shit!

Calvin laughs.

CALVIN
Hurry up, Aaron. It’s almost time to eat.

QUENTIN
Fool, please. You ain’t worried about eatin’. You all anxious ‘cause Crystal comin’ over.

CALVIN
Shut the hell up.

QUENTIN
What? Don’t get mad ‘cause I’m tellin’ the truth.

Calvin takes the ball from Aaron and shoots it. He misses the shot, but when he goes to pick up the ball, he notices Crystal walking onto the basketball court. She walks up to Calvin and gives him a kiss on the lips.

CRYSTAL
Hey.

CALVIN
Hey. What are you doin’ here?

CRYSTAL
Waiting for y’all to come home so we can eat.

CALVIN
Oh.

CRYSTAL
Hey, Quentin.

QUENTIN
Hey, how you been?

Crystal gives Quentin a hug.

CRYSTAL
It’s been a while.
QUENTIN
You have yours truly to thank for that.

Calvin smiles.

CRYSTAL
And who is this fine young man here?

CALVIN
This is my little brother, Aaron. Aaron, this is Crystal.

AARON
You Calvin’s girlfriend?

CALVIN
Shut up, Aaron.

CRYSTAL
No, I’m not, sweetie.

CALVIN
Stop bein’ so damn nosey.

CRYSTAL
He was just asking a question. Are y’all almost done?

CALVIN
Give us five minutes.

CRYSTAL
Well, hurry up. Your mother’s waiting for us.

CALVIN
Aight.

AARON
Can I have a dollar, Calvin?

CALVIN
For what?

AARON
Some candy.

CALVIN
You and that damn candy.
CRYSTAL
Shut up and give him a dollar for some candy.

Calvin shakes his head reaches into his pocket. He pulls out a dollar and hands it to Aaron. He snatches the dollar out of Calvin’s hand.

AARON
Thank you!

CRYSTAL
Come on, lil’ man. I’ll take you to the store.

Crystal turns to Calvin.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Be done by the time we get back.

Aaron takes Crystal’s hand and they walk off of the basketball court.

QUENTIN
Damn, dog. She tryin’ to run shit and y’all ain’t even official yet. You about to be a lifetime watchin’ ass dude.

CALVIN
(laughs)
Shut the hell up.

They continue to shoot the ball. In the distance, music can be heard blasting from a car radio. Calvin and Quentin turn around to see the black Maxima parking on the street. When the car comes to a stop, Lionel, Marcus, and Rob jump out of the car.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT, STREET - CONTINUOUS

LIONEL
Man, what did I tell these punk mothafuckas?

MARCUS
Man, leave them niggas alone.

ROB
Yeah, man. Fuck those bitches. Let’s just roll this blunt.
Lionel, Marcus, and Rob walk onto the basketball court. They all take a seat on the bleachers as Calvin and Quentin continue to shoot the ball.

QUENTIN
These fools.

CALVIN
Fuck ‘em.

QUENTIN
So, when are you asking her out?

CALVIN
I was plannin’ on doin’ it tonight.

QUENTIN
Ohh, shit. You finally becomin’ a man, not bein’ all scared and shit.

CALVIN
Shut your dumb ass up.

Aaron and Crystal walk back onto the court. As they pass, Lionel eyes Crystal. Lionel blows out a little smoke.

LIONEL
Damn, girl.

Crystal rolls her eyes and continues walking.

MARCUS
Damn, dog. She played you.

Marcus and Rob laugh, but Lionel doesn’t find anything funny.

LIONEL
Fuck that bitch.

Aaron and Crystal walk up to Calvin.

CRYSTAL
Y’all ready?

CALVIN
Yeah. Let me get my stuff.

Calvin goes to pick up his things up off of the ground by the goal post. When he looks over to where Lionel and his friends are, he can see him eyeing Crystal.
LIONEL
(to Marcus)
Watch this shit.

Lionel jumps off of the bleachers. Marcus and Rob laugh. Lionel walks onto the court as Aaron, Calvin, Crystal and Quentin walk off.

LIONEL (CONT’D)
Hey, ma? What’s it gonna take for me to get in that ass?

Calvin turns around and takes a step toward Lionel, but Crystal stops him.

CRYSTAL
Don’t. Come on. Your mother’s waiting for us.

Calvin eyes Lionel for a second, then turns around to walk off of the court. Lionel laughs as he turns around, back toward his friends. He takes a couple of steps, then turns back to Crystal.

LIONEL
Stank ass bitch!

Calvin stops dead in his tracks. He tries to walk out of the basketball court, but he can’t. He drops the basketball, turns around, and marches toward Lionel.

QUENTIN
Cal.

CRYSTAL
Calvin!

Calvin acts as if he can’t hear them and continues toward Lionel. When Calvin reaches Lionel, he spins him around by the shoulder and punches him dead in the face. Lionel falls to the ground, as Crystal and Quentin run toward the fight. Aaron stands there, looking scared.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Calvin, STOP!

Crystal’s request is ignored as Calvin proceeds to give Lionel two brutal kicks to the face. Marcus and Rob jump off of the bleachers and run toward the fight. Lionel kicks Calvin away from him and jumps to his feet. When Calvin regains his balance, Lionel punches him in the nose.
Marcus and Rob run over to Lionel to hold him back, while Quentin tries to hold Calvin back. Calvin has a bloody nose and Lionel has a split lip.

MARCUS
Yo, chill, Lionel! We don’t need this shit right now!

LIONEL
Let me go! I’m gonna kill you, mothafucka!
(to Rob)
Get the FUCK off!

CALVIN
Fuck you!

A Newark police cruiser pulls up on the street, beside the basketball court. The POLICE OFFICER shines his light on the group.

POLICE OFFICER
Is there a problem?

QUENTIN
No, officer. No problem here.
(to Calvin)
Come on, Cal. Let’s get the hell out of here.

ROB
Lionel, let’s go. We don’t need no mothafuckin’ heat right now.

LIONEL
Get the fuck off.

Lionel glares at Calvin for a moment, snatches his arm from Rob, and walks toward the bleachers. Crystal sighs as the police officer pulls off, then looks at Calvin.

CRYSTAL
What the hell is wrong with you?!

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin and Crystal bust through the front door, followed by Aaron and Quentin.

SHERYL (O.S.)
The food will be ready in five minutes, guys!
CRYSTAL
Okay, Ms. Robinson!

Crystal pushes Calvin to the back of the house, toward his room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin and Crystal bust through his bedroom door. Crystal pushes Calvin on his bed with force.

CALVIN
Damn, what’s wrong?

Crystal slams his door shut.

CRYSTAL
What you did out there was stupid.

CALVIN
What was I supposed to do? Let him stand there and disrespect you like that?

CRYSTAL
So what, he called me a name. Big deal. Sometimes, you just have to let some things go. Now look at you.

Crystal unties a black bandana she is wearing in her hair and sits on the edge of his bed.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Lay back.

Calvin lies back in her lap. She uses the bandana to wipe blood from Calvin’s nose.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
You didn’t have to do what you did. It’s just stupid to go and fight somebody over something that ain’t that serious. I didn’t give a damn about what he said. You know who you acted like today?

CALVIN
Who?
CRYSTAL
Just like one of those tired ass, triflin’ fools on the street. And I know that’s not how you are. When we were in class together, I knew you were different from the rest of them. Please don’t make me think I was wrong about you.

Calvin remains quiet.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
You know your mother’s hurt about you not graduating, right?

CALVIN
Come on, Crystal, not now.

CRYSTAL
She just asked me to talk to you about it.

CALVIN
Well, she already knows how I feel about it.

CRYSTAL
Do you know how she feels? All she wants to do is see you walk across that stage and get your diploma. Do you think that’s too much to ask for from the woman who gave birth to you?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
No.

CRYSTAL
Then go back. It shouldn’t be that hard for you. Just think of the joy your mother will have as she watches you get your diploma.

CALVIN
I don’t know.

CRYSTAL
Well, will you at least think about it?
CALVIN
(hesitant)
Yeah, I’ll think about it.

CRYSTAL
Thank you.

She kisses Calvin on the forehead.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
Besides, no man of mine ain’t gonna be rollin’ around here without a diploma.

CALVIN
No man of yours?

CRYSTAL
You heard me. No man of mine.

Crystal intimately kisses Calvin.

SHERYL (O.S.)
You two! Come on, let’s eat!

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN – MOMENTS LATER
Calvin and Crystal walk out into the kitchen, hand in hand.

QUENTIN
It’s about time.

AARON
Yeah. Now we can finally eat.

Calvin and Crystal both sit down at the table.

SHERYL
Hold on, baby. I’m going to say a prayer first, then we can eat. Now, everyone join hands.

They all join hands and bow their heads.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Full of joy and thankfulness, we say thank you, Lord, from the bottom of our hearts. We look at the food that has been prepared by loving hands, we look into the faces of those that love us and whom we love.
(MORE)
All good gifts around us are sent from heaven about, and we will never forget who is our true provider. We thank you as you bless this food and bless this time together. Amen.

Everyone at the table gives a simultaneous Amen.

AARON
Now we can eat.

SHERYL
Boy, stop being greedy.

Aaron laughs as everyone makes their plate. Crystal makes a plate and hands it over to Calvin. Calvin smiles at Crystal, not noticing that Sheryl is smiling at him.

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Calvin and Crystal sit on the front steps of the house.

CRYSTAL
Your mother can throw down in the kitchen.

CALVIN
Yeah, she’s aight.

CRYSTAL
Aight? I wish I could cook as good as her.

Calvin laughs.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
She was telling me about your father earlier and how y’all were planning to go to Georgia.

Calvin looks down.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
Yeah.

CRYSTAL
You should still go.

CALVIN
Maybe.
CRYSTAL
It would be fun. Me, you, Aaron, Quentin.

Calvin doesn’t say anything.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
I know you miss him. I see what it’s done to you. You’ve never been this cold.

CALVIN
I just thought it would never happen to me. I never thought I’d lose someone so close to me and when I did, I just became angry. I finally saw the world for the fucked up place it is. He always would tell me one day I’d see, but I never listened to him. He tried to tell me a lot of things.

CRYSTAL
It didn’t just happen to you, Calvin. It could’ve happened to anybody. When something like this happens, the only thing you can do is focus on what needs to be done to make things better. You still have a lot of people here that love you. You got your mother, Aaron, Quentin. You got me. You don’t have to be angry anymore.

Calvin smiles. She smiles, gives him a kiss on the cheek, and rests her head on his shoulder.

CRYSTAL (CONT’D)
He’s still here, you know.

CALVIN
What?

CRYSTAL
Your father, he’s still here. He’ll always be here, as long as you remember him.

Calvin smiles and gives her a kiss on the forehead.
Calvin walks out of the supermarket’s front entrance. He walks onto the parking lot, then he notices Sandra, loading her trunk with groceries. He walks over to her car.

CALVIN
Ms. Clarke?

Sandra spins around.

SANDRA
Oh, hello, Calvin. You scared me. How are you?

CALVIN
I’m good. How about yourself?

SANDRA
I’m fine. What’s going on?

CALVIN
Well, I just got off work and I’m about to head home.

SANDRA
I see.

CALVIN
Here, let me help you with those.

Calvin proceeds to help load the groceries in Sandra’s trunk.

SANDRA
So, have you thought about what we talked about?

CALVIN
Coming back to school? Yeah, I have. A lot actually.

SANDRA
Yeah? And?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I decided that I’m going to go back and finish.

SANDRA
Really?
Calvin nods.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
(excited)
That is just great, Calvin. I’m so proud of you. That’s excellent news. When do you plan on coming back?

CALVIN
I don’t know. I was hoping you might have information on some classes I could take.

SANDRA
Okay. I’ll see what I can find out for you.

CALVIN
Thank you.

SANDRA
No, thank you. You just don’t know. You’ve made my day. I know you’re mother is so proud of you.

CALVIN
I haven’t told her yet, but I am when I get home. I know she’ll be happy.

SANDRA
I know your father would be happy too.

CALVIN
I know he is.

Sandra smiles at Calvin.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
Well, Ms. Clarke, I have to go, but I’ll see you soon.

SANDRA
Alright, Calvin.

CALVIN
You have a nice evening.

SANDRA
You too.
Calvin walks away from the car.

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE - LATER

Sheryl sits on the front steps of the house. Seconds later, Calvin walks up.

SHERYL
Hey, baby.

CALVIN
Hey, ma. What are you doin’ out here?

SHERYL
Well, it was a nice day, so I thought I’d come out here and sit for a while.

Calvin nods and sits down next to her.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
How was work?

CALVIN
Okay. How was your day?

SHERYL
My day was good. Dinner will be done soon.

CALVIN
Okay.

He looks down at the ground. Sheryl notices the look on his face.

SHERYL
What’s wrong, baby?

CALVIN (hesitant)
I know I haven’t done a whole lot to make you proud. I’ve taken my anger out on you and Aaron, when all y’all tried to do was love me.

SHERYL
Calvin, where-
CALVIN
(cutting Sheryl off)
I just wanted to tell you that I’m sorry. Instead of doing what I needed to do to make things better, I only made them worse. I just wanna let you know I’m done dwelling on what happened to dad. With that said, I’m gonna go finish what should’ve been finished a long time ago. I’m gonna go back and finish school.

Sheryl’s face goes blank.

SHERYL
Are you for real?

Calvin nods. She covers her mouth as her eyes begin to fill with tears.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
You don’t know how happy you’ve just made me.

CALVIN
I know it means a lot to you. I know it’s a little late in the year, but I’m gonna try to have that diploma for you by the fall.

She caresses his cheek.

SHERYL
I love you so much.

CALVIN
I love you too, ma.

She smiles and pulls him into a hug.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Aaron and Quentin sit on the floor, playing video games as Calvin and Crystal sit on the couch.

CRYSTAL
I don’t see how y’all can sit here and play this mess.
QUENTIN
It’s a man thing. Don’t worry about it.

CRYSTAL
Anyway. What did your mother say when you told her you were going back to get your diploma?

CALVIN
She ain’t say too much.

QUENTIN
Hey, let me know when you sign up for those classes.

CALVIN
Why?

QUENTIN
So I can come too.

CALVIN
You wanna go?

QUENTIN
Hell yeah, I’m goin’. My boy’s goin’ back to school. He’s not gonna be a dumb ass the rest of his life.

Calvin laughs.

CRYSTAL
I’ll be there too.

CALVIN
Really?

She smiles and takes his hand.

AARON
Can we go to the store?

CRYSTAL
What? Need more candy?

AARON
(playfully)
Maybe.
CALVIN
Man, don’t nobody feel like goin’
to the store. You been eatin’ too
much damn candy anyway.

CRYSTAL
Oh, shut up. Go get your coat,
sweetie. I’ll take you to the
store.

AARON
Okay!

Aaron gets up and runs out of the living room.

CRYSTAL
I’ll be right back.

She gives Calvin a kiss on the cheek and stands to her feet,
as Aaron runs back into the living room.

INT. MAXIMA - CONTINUOUS

Lionel, Marcus, and Rob sit inside the car. Lionel eyes
Calvin’s house, his face bruised and battered.

LIONEL
You sure this is the house?

MARCUS
Yeah, this is it.

ROB
You sure you wanna do this shit,
man?

MARCUS
Look, there's his bitch.

From the inside of the car, Aaron and Crystal can be seen
exiting the house. Crystal closes the door behind her.

LIONEL
Where the fuck is he at?

MARCUS
Shit, I don’t know.

LIONEL
Fuck it. Let’s just follow this
bitch.
Marcus starts the car.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Aaron and Crystal walk down the street.

    CRYSTAL
    You ate all that candy from yesterday already?

    AARON
    What? I like candy.

    CRYSTAL
    (laughs)
    I bet you do.

In the background, the Maxima slowly moves down the street.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin and Quentin sit on the couch. Calvin looks down at the ground.

    QUENTIN
    What’s up with you? Why you over there, bein’ all quiet and shit?

    CALVIN
    Oh, nothin’. Just feels like shit is finally the way it should be, you know?

    QUENTIN
    It’s just like I said. You about to go get your diploma, you got a girl that cares about you. Shit, from what I can see, she’s in love with your ass. Better days, dude.

    CALVIN
    (hesitant, laughs)
    Yeah, you were right. Better days.

    QUENTIN
    Negro, please. I’m always right.

Calvin gets up from the couch and walks toward his room.
INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin walks into his room and over to his closet. He reaches up top and pulls a shoebox down.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Aaron and Crystal continue to walk down the street, laughing amongst each other.

INT. MAXIMA - CONTINUOUS

Lionel eyes Aaron and Crystal as they continue to walk down the street.

    LIONEL
    Where the fuck is he at?

    ROB
    I don’t know, but you need to call this shit off.

    LIONEL
    Nah, fuck that. Pull over. I got somethin’ for his ass.

Lionel pulls a handgun from under the seat and cocks it.

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Calvin stands in front of a trash can, looking around. He looks at the shoebox in his hands and cracks a smile. He takes a deep breath and drops the shoebox into trash.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Aaron and Crystal walk down the street. Crystal laughs at Aaron, until she sees Lionel standing there, with a malevolent look on his face. Crystal looks at Lionel, with fear in her eyes. She looks down at Aaron.

    AARON
    What’s wrong?
EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Calvin is about to walk back into the house, until he is stopped dead in his tracks, by the sound of five gunshots ringing in the air. Calvin stands there for a moment, then runs into the house.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Quentin looks out of the window as Calvin runs in behind him. He looks at Calvin.

QUENTIN
You hear that?

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Calvin and Quentin walk out of the front door. People are standing outside of their homes, looking and pointing down the street. Calvin looks down the street, with a look on his face as if he is prepared for the worst. Calvin and Quentin begin to walk down the street.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Calvin and Quentin walk down to the corner. When they look down the street, they see a large crowd of people standing around.

CALVIN
Oh, no.

Calvin darts down the street and Quentin follows. Calvin reaches the crowd and trudges through. He breaks through the crowd, but what he sees next brings him to his knees. Crystal lies on the ground, with three gunshot wounds in her body.

Aaron has taken two bullets in the chest. Crystal breathes erratically.

CRYSTAL
(panicking)
Calvin.

Crystal’s breathing gets slower and slower as Calvin’s eyes start to fill with tears. Calvin takes hold of her bloody hand.
CALVIN
(shaken)
It's okay, baby. You're gonna be fine, okay?

Crystal's breathing gets slower and slower. Her grip around Calvin's hand loosens, then her hand falls from his. She closes her eyes and takes her last breath. Quentin steps through the crowd. Calvin looks as if he's about to lose it.

Calvin scoops Aaron up in his arms.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
He's still breathing!

QUENTIN
Oh, God.

Calvin starts to rock back and forth.

CALVIN
You ain't goin' nowhere, you hear me, little man? Stay with me.

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Sheryl steps outside of the house to see what's going on. Three Newark police cruisers and an ambulance zoom by, with sirens blaring. She starts to walk down the street as four more police cruisers zoom by.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Calvin sits there, with Aaron still in his arms, crying. The two police cruisers come to a screeching halt on the street, as the others approach. The POLICE OFFICERS jump out of their cars and break into the crowd. The ambulance pulls up on the street.

The crowd starts to come apart. Sheryl comes around the block to see Calvin emerge from the crowd, with his shirt covered in blood and with his eyes full of tears. Sheryl's face goes blank.

CALVIN
Mom.

SHERYL
Oh my God. Calvin!

Sheryl runs toward Calvin.
SHERYL (CONT’D)
Why is there blood on your shirt?!

CALVIN
Mom! Stop!

She continues to run toward him. When she reaches him, she
grabs him by the collar.

SHERYL
(frantic)
Answer me, God damn it! Why
is there blood on your shirt?
Where’s Aaron?
(a to the crowd)
AARON!
(to Calvin)
Where is your brother,
Calvin?!

The PARAMEDICS wheel Aaron out on a gurney and into the
street. Sheryl’s face goes blank when she sees Aaron on the
gurney.

SHERYL
Oh my God. Oh my God, no! Aaron!

Sheryl lets Calvin go and goes after Aaron, but two police
officers grab her.

SHERYL
Let me go, God damn it! That
is my son! Let me go, right
now! Take your God damn hands
OFF me!

POLICE OFFICER
I’m sorry, ma’am. We can’t
let you through.

INT. HOSPITAL, TRAUMA UNIT - NIGHT

Calvin and Sheryl sit, waiting. Calvin stares at the ground
as Sheryl rocks back and forth.

SHERYL
Lord, please don’t take my baby
from me. Not right now, Lord. He
hasn’t had the chance to experience
life.

A DOCTOR walks out of the room where Aaron was being treated.
Calvin and Sheryl both jump to their feet and run over to the
doctor.
SHERYL (CONT’D)
How is he? How is my baby?

DOCTOR
(sighs, hesitant)
We couldn’t stop his bleeding, Ms. Robinson.

SHERYL
No. Don’t you tell me that. Don’t you dare tell me that!

DOCTOR
He lost a substantial amount of blood.

DOCTOR (CONT’D)
There’s no easy way to say this.

SHERYL
No! You don’t tell me that!

DOCTOR (CONT’D)
Aaron didn’t make it.

Calvin closes his eyes as Sheryl drops to her knees, crying. Calvin tries to comfort her, but it doesn’t help at all. Sheryl lets out a long, bellowing scream of pain.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM – AFTERNOON

Calvin sits in the living room, staring at the floor, still wearing the blood stained shirt from the other day.

AARON (O.S.)
CALVIN!

Calvin looks around the room, only to realize that the voice he heard was all in his head. He puts his head in his hands. There are three knocks on the front door, but Calvin acts as though he doesn’t hear them. The door cracks open slowly, then Quentin steps in.

QUENTIN
Calvin?

Calvin ignores him. Quentin walks over to the couch and sits down next to him, taking a deep breath.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
I...I can’t even begin to tell you how sorry I am. I feel like I lost a little brother yesterday too.

(MORE)
And I’m, uh, I’m sorry about Crystal. How’s your mother?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I don’t know. She, uh, she locked herself in her room. She hasn’t been out all day.

QUENTIN
How are you?

Calvin shakes his head.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
You know, witnesses said that the shooter was ridin’ in a black Nissan Maxima. All we gotta do is go to the police. Tell them where they need to go.

CALVIN
Then what? Those mothafuckas get sixty years? Aaron and Crystal will still be dead, and my mother will still be in there, fucked up.

QUENTIN
(hesitant)
Look. I know it’s gonna be hard, but we’re all gonna get through this shit, aight?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
No. Not this time. I spent all this time tryin’ to get over what happened to my father. Tryin’ not to be angry anymore. I let all of those feelings of hate and anger go, thinkin’ things could actually get better. As soon as I did that, shit comes crashin’ back down, right on my fuckin’ head. I swear, it’s like happiness is a fuckin’ sin.

QUENTIN
You’re talkin’ like you ain’t got nothin’ to look forward to.

CALVIN
Me and my mother have to bury my baby brother. Crystal is dead. (MORE)
CALVIN (CONT'D)
What the fuck could I possibly have to look forward to? Nothing. Not in this life anyway.

QUENTIN
Not in this life? Come on, man. Don’t talk like that. Not after all you’ve been through.

CALVIN
I’m just tired, man. Tired of this fuckin’ place. Tired of suffering.

QUENTIN
You fight to rise above it. You don’t give in to it.

CALVIN
I’m tired of fightin’.

Quentin stands to his feet.

QUENTIN
Sounds like to me you tryin’ to give up on yourself. Is that what you’re tryin’ to do? Quit?

CALVIN
You hear anything I said? There’s nothin’ left for me to do. I might as well put a gun in my mouth and pull the fuckin’ trigger.

Quentin yanks Calvin up by the collar and slams him into the wall.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
Get off!

QUENTIN
(angry)
Take it back!

CALVIN
Get the fuck off!

Calvin spins Quentin around and slams him into the wall.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
You don’t get it! This shit ain’t no fuckin’ fairy tale! There is no happily ever after! This is a fucked up place we live in and I’m just...I’m tired of bein’ here.
Calvin lets Quentin go and walks back over to the couch.

QUENTIN
You CANNOT let this break you. What do you think your pops would say if he heard you talkin’ like this?

CALVIN
I don’t know, Quentin. I’m a fuckin’ dropout who couldn’t even protect his family. He would probably think I’m a piece of shit.

QUENTIN
That’s bullshit and you know it. You’re just tryin’ to make excuses for yourself.

CALVIN
Quentin, I think it’s time for you to go.

Calvin sits down on the couch. Quentin straightens himself.

QUENTIN (hesitant)
I guess that IS it, huh?

Calvin doesn’t respond. Quentin nods and walks over to the front door.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
You disappoint me, man.

Calvin continues to ignore him. Quentin looks down, then walks out of the front door, slamming it behind him. Calvin looks down at the floor and takes a deep breath.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM – EVENING

Calvin lies in his bed, staring at the ceiling. He hears a noise coming from the kitchen and sits up.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

Sheryl sits at the table, rocking back and forth in her seat, her eyes dried and irritated. Calvin walks into the kitchen and by Sheryl’s side.

CALVIN
Ma?
Sheryl ignores him.

CALVIN (CONT’D)

Mom?

Calvin’s eyes start to fill with tears as she continues to ignore him.

CALVIN (CONT’D)

Mommy?

Sheryl says nothing to him at all. Calvin gives up on talking to her and cries himself back into his room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM – NIGHT

Calvin sits in the corner of his room, holding Crystal’s black bandana. He clutches the bandana tightly as a tear falls from his eye. He puts the bandana down and picks up his gun. He picks up the magazine and loads it into the gun.

Calvin looks down at the gun for a moment, then closes his eyes. He takes a deep breath. He sits there for a moment, then opens his eyes. He looks down at the gun.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, BATHROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Calvin looks at his reflection in the mirror. He opens the medicine cabinet and grabs a prescription pill bottle, then closes the cabinet. He stares at the mirror for a moment, then punches the it. He stares at his broken reflection.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, KITCHEN – MOMENTS LATER

Calvin walks into the kitchen to find Sheryl, sitting in the same spot, staring into space.

CALVIN

Hey, ma. I’m gonna make you some tea, okay? It’ll make you feel better.

SHERYL

(trumatized)

Thank you, baby. That’s so nice of you.

Calvin smiles at her as he tries to hold back tears. He walks over to the cupboard and pulls down a tea cup.
He turns on the stove, then reaches under the sink for the kettle. He fills it with water and sits it on the fire.

He walks back over to the table and sits across from Sheryl.

    SHERYL (CONT’D)
    You are such a good son. I love you so much.

Calvin tries his hardest to hold back tears.

    CALVIN
    I love you too, mom.

Sheryl smiles back at him. Seconds later, the kettle starts to whistle. Calvin gets up from his seat and walks over to the kettle. He turns off the fire and drops a tea bag into the cup.

He pours the hot water into the cup and starts to stir the tea. He slips the prescription pill bottle out of his pocket, pops it open, then pours four pills into his palm. He drops them into the tea. As he stirs the tea some more, he silently cries to himself.

He wipes his face dry and turns around with a smile.

    CALVIN (CONT’D)
    Come on, mom. Let’s go in your room so you can have your tea.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, SHERYL’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin and Sheryl enter her bedroom. Sheryl takes a seat on the edge of her bed and Calvin hands her the cup of tea.

    SHERYL
    Thank you, baby.

    CALVIN
    You’re welcome. I’m going to take a nap now, okay?

    SHERYL
    Okay, sweetie.

Calvin exits as Sheryl sips the tea.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - LATER

Calvin pulls on a black hoodie. He picks up his gun, cocks it, and slips it into his waistband.
He is about to walk out of his room, until he notices Crystal’s bandana on the floor. He kneels down and picks it up.

He puts the bandana to his nose, inhaling Crystal’s scent. He puts it into his pocket and exits his room.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, SHERYL’S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin slowly pushes Sheryl’s door open. He walks to her bedside to see that she is sound asleep. He takes her hand.

CALVIN

(hesitant)

Hey, ma. I...I’m sorry for doing what I did. I couldn’t stand watching you go through the pain of losing another. When you wake up tomorrow, I’ll be gone too.

Calvin takes a deep breath.

CALVIN (CONT’D)

I just want to let you know that I’m sorry. I said a lot of things that I didn’t mean. I also want to thank you for everything that you’ve done for me and Aaron. Giving birth to us, taking care of us and...and staying strong.

(holding back tears)

And I just want to tell you I am so sorry for the way I treated you. I know you didn’t do anything wrong, but I still treated you like shit. If I could take it all back, I would. I really would. I just want you to know that I love you. There hasn’t been a time when I haven’t loved you and I hope...I hope you can forgive me for what I’m about to do.

Calvin leans down and kisses Sheryl on the forehead.

CALVIN (CONT’D)

I love you, ma and I’ll, uh, I’ll be keeping an eye on you.

Calvin exits the room.
INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Calvin walks through the living room, with a look of terrible anger on his face. He walks out of the front door and out into the cold New Jersey night.

EXT. STREET - LATER

It has started to snow. Calvin walks down the street with his hood on, trying to keep from the cold.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX (GEORGIA-KING VILLAGE) - MOMENTS LATER

Calvin approaches an apartment building. The building is one of two buildings in the area. Calvin stops walking and looks up and down the street. Seconds later, he spots the black Maxima, parked across the street.

He looks up and down the street, then creeps into an alleyway.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

Calvin crouches down in the alleyway, keeping his eyes fixed on the Maxima.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - LATER

Calvin sits, crouched in the alleyway as snow continues to fall. He shivers from the cold and amount of time he has been outside. Someone exiting the front entrance can be heard, followed by talking. Calvin peeks around the corner to see Lionel, Marcus, and Rob walk from the building.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX (GEORGIA-KING VILLAGE) - CONTINUOUS

Lionel, Marcus, and Rob walk toward the Maxima.

LIONEL
Where y’all niggas tryin’ to eat?

MARCUS
Shit, I don’t know. Crowns?
EXT. ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

A look of anger spreads across Calvin’s face. He pulls the black bandana out of his pocket and ties it around his head, concealing his face. He pulls the gun from his waistband, cocks it, then peeks around the corner. He creeps out of the alley.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX (GEORGIA–KING VILLAGE) - CONTINUOUS

Lionel, Marcus, and Rob walk up to the Maxima. As Marcus unlocks the door, Calvin approaches the group from behind. Rob’s eyes go wide when he sees Calvin, with gun in hand.

ROB
Oh, shit!

Calvin takes aim and opens fire on the young men. They frantically scatter as bullets tear into cars, shattering windows, setting off car alarms. Marcus and Rob take off running down the street as gunshots continue to ring out. Lionel runs on to the sidewalk.

Calvin runs on to the sidewalk after Lionel, firing random shots at him. Lionel draws his weapon, but he drops it into the gutter. Lionel frantically runs down the street. Calvin stops and takes steady aim at Lionel.

Calvin hesitates for a moment, then pulls the trigger. The bullet tears into Lionel’s ankle. He falls to the ground, screaming in pain. Calvin looks around, then walks toward Lionel, who cries in pain.

Lionel slowly crawls along the sidewalk as Calvin walks up to him.

CALVIN
(hesitant, shaken)
Turn over.

LIONEL
(in agony)
Come on, man! What the fuck did I do to you?!

CALVIN
Turn the fuck over!

Calvin kicks Lionel on to his back.
LIONEL
(scared, shaken)
Please.

CALVIN
Shut the fuck up!

Calvin leans down, putting the gun in Lionel’s face. Calvin hands shake as he fingers the trigger. Lionel starts to breathe heavy. He stares down the barrel of Calvin’s gun, wide eyed and shaking.

Silence. All that can be heard, is the howl of the wind, and Lionel’s breathing. Calvin fingers the trigger for a moment, then lowers his weapon, letting out a held breath. He looks down at Lionel, lowering the bandana.

Calvin looks down at Lionel for a moment, then walks away. Lionel lies on the sidewalk, crying, as sirens echo in the distance.

EXT. PARK - MOMENTS LATER

Snow continues to fall as Calvin walks through the park. He walks over to a nearby bench and takes a seat. The wind whips as snow falls. Calvin sits on the bench, looking at Downtown Newark’s city skyline.

He looks around the park, then looks to the sky as he tries to hold back tears.

GEORGE (V.O.)
I know you’re a little too young to understand all of what’s goin’ on right now.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM - NIGHT

CALVIN PAUL, 12 years old, lies in his bed, with a frown, tucked in for the night. George sits on the edge of his bed.

GEORGE
I just need you to understand that none of this is your fault. Things like this happen, you know? Don’t think that I don’t love your mother, ‘cause I do. It’s just that...things aren’t workin’ out for us right now.

(MORE)
Just because we won’t be together, don’t mean that we ain’t a family no more. We will still be a family you understand?

Calvin gives a hesitant nod. George takes a deep breath.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
This might be a hard time for you. Anger’s natural, grief is appropriate, but healing is mandatory. It’s time for you to step up. You’re the man of the house now. I need you to promise me that you’re gonna take care of your mother and your baby brother for me.

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I promise.

George smiles.

GEORGE
That’s my man. Come here.

George pulls Calvin up into a tight hug.

EXT. PARK - PRE DAWN

The snow has stopped. Calvin sits on the bench. He takes a deep breath and stands to his feet.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The sun is minutes away from rising. Calvin walks down the street, clutching Crystal’s bandana in his hand. He pulls the gun from his waistband, releases the magazine, then drops the gun into a nearby storm drain. He tosses the magazine into nearby trash can.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Calvin quietly creeps through the living room door, slowly closing it behind him.
INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, SHERYL’S ROOM – MORNING

Sunlight filters in through the window. Sheryl lies in her bed, sleeping like a baby. Calvin walks into her bedroom and over to her bedside. He looks at her for a moment, then smiles.

He leans down and gives her a kiss on the cheek.

INT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE, CALVIN’S ROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Calvin lies in his bed, staring at the ceiling. He takes a deep breath, then closes his eyes.

EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE – EVENING

Little children, some with their parents, play in front of their houses. Seconds later, Calvin steps out of the house. He takes a seat on the steps. He looks around at all the playing children on his block.

Seconds later, Quentin walks up. He takes a seat beside Calvin.

QUENTIN
What’s up?

Calvin shakes his head.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
(hesitant)
I thought that I’d come by to let you know that Lionel and his boys got locked up. Police scooped ‘em up early this morning.

Calvin nods.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
How you feelin’?

CALVIN
(hesitant)
I don’t know. Aight, I guess. Just tryin’ to figure out what to do now. Where to go from here, you know?
QUENTIN
Go through with what you set out to do. Keep shit movin’. Finish school, live life. For your dad, Aaron, and Crystal. For real, that’s about all you can do.

CALVIN
Yeah. I guess you’re right.

QUENTIN
Mothafucka, please. I’m always right. The hell you talkin’ about you guess I’m right.

Calvin laughs, holding back tears.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
Hey. This is the dawn of a new day, dog. We all gonna stay strong, because believe me when I tell you, we gonna get through this shit. All of us, you hear me?

Calvin nods.

QUENTIN (CONT’D)
That’s my boy.

Quentin smiles and pats Calvin on the back.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Sandra sits at her desk, in the empty classroom, grading papers. Seconds later, there are three knocks at the door.

SANDRA
Come in.

There door opens and Calvin steps in, with a bookbag over his shoulder. Sandra’s face lights up.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
(smiles)
Calvin Paul. What are you doing around here?
CALVIN
Just got out of class. Thought I’d come by and say hi. How have you been?

SANDRA
I’ve been good. How about yourself?

CALVIN
Good. Things have been good.

Calvin looks at his old desk and cracks a smile.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
Wow. May I?

SANDRA
Be my guest.

Calvin takes a seat at the desk.

SANDRA (CONT’D)
So...will you be ready to walk across that stage next week?

CALVIN
Yeah. It’s long overdue.

SANDRA
It sure is. How has your mother been?

CALVIN
She’s been good. She went back to work about two months ago.

SANDRA
Back at Saint Michael’s?

CALVIN
Yeah.

SANDRA
That’s good. That’s really good news. Sounds like things are really back in order now.

He nods and cracks a smile.

CALVIN
Yeah.

(beat)

(MORE)
CALVIN (CONT'D)
Well, I just wanted to come by because I never got the chance to thank you.

SANDRA
(confused)
For what?

CALVIN
For helping me realize what I needed to do, with going back to school and all.

SANDRA
Calvin, I didn’t do anything. Everything that happened was your own doing. With everything you were faced with, you managed to work through it. Most people would’ve given up in your situation.
(beat)
Your father would be proud.

Sandra gives him a smile. Calvin smiles and stands to his feet.

CALVIN
Well, I better get goin’. My mother’s waitin’ on me.

SANDRA
Tell her I said hi.

CALVIN
I will.

SANDRA
Alright, now. You keep in touch. Don’t be a stranger.

CALVIN
Aight, Ms. Clarke. I’ll see you around.

SANDRA
See ya, Calvin.

Calvin smiles and exits the classroom. Sandra smiles and resumes grading her papers.
EXT. ROBINSON RESIDENCE - EVENING

It is a warm, breezy August evening. The sun has set. Calvin sits on the steps, writing in a notebook. Seconds later, Sheryl opens the door.

SHERYL
Hey, Quentin just called. He said he’ll be over in a little while.

CALVIN
Okay.

Sheryl looks at the notebook with curiosity.

SHERYL
What are you doing?

CALVIN
Nothing.

She walks out of the house and looms over Calvin.

SHERYL
What are you writing?

CALVIN
(laughs)
Nothing, ma.

SHERYL
Will you just tell me what you’re writing?

CALVIN
(sighs, hesitant)
A speech. For graduation.

Her face beams with interest.

SHERYL
Really?

She takes a seat beside him.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Can I hear it?

CALVIN
You’re gonna hear it when I walk.
Sheryl frowns at him. Calvin looks at her for a moment, then sighs. He holds up his notebook.

CALVIN (CONT’D)
(hesitant, reading)
Adversity will be an occasional or consistent companion, for each of us, throughout our lives. No matter how hard we try, we cannot avoid it. The only question is how will we react when faced with it? Will our hardships be our stumbling blocks, or will they be our stepping stones? It is unavoidable. You can’t fight it. You must accept it. Develop the proper attitude, for as Ellis Havelock wrote, “Pain and death are a part of life. To reject them is to reject life itself.” Although pain is inevitable, suffering is optional. So know that our downfalls are the means of developing our strength. Know that if there were no winter, spring would not be so pleasant, and know, that even in our darkest hour, our souls are replenished and given the strength to continue and endure.

(beat)
That’s all.

SHERYL
(hesitant, smiles)
That was beautiful.

Calvin smiles.

SHERYL (CONT’D)
Come on inside. Dinner’s almost done.

She gives him a kiss on the cheek, stands to her feet, and walks into the house. Calvin stands and surveys his street for a moment. He smiles, closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and walks into the house.

FADE OUT.