

NOT EASILY BROKEN

Screenplay by
Brian Bird

Based on the Novel by T.D. Jakes

Writer's First Draft
May 15, 2006

The SCREEN is filled with a heavenly WHITE glow as we begin HEARING some love anthem -- something along the lines of like Whitney Houston's "I BELIEVE IN ME AND YOU."

FADE IN:

EXT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - ESTABLISHING - DAY (1994)

And the white glow becomes blue sky, and we FIND the tip of a church steeple reaching to heaven. And as we WIDEN we see that it's attached to a small, white clapboard church somewhere in the suburbs of a big city. A SIGN out front tells us where we are and the late-model cars parked out front tell us when: the early 1990s. And as the CAMERA continues its move, we settle on a WHITE ROSE in the f.g.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY (1994)

Which becomes an entire BOUQUET of WHITE ROSES. And then the CAMERA will carry us to soft CLOSE UPS of a wedding ceremony in progress:

SUNLIGHT streaming in an stained glass window and pointing to an ornate cross on a church wall.

The lapel of a tuxedo jacket, adorned with a tie made of a colorful African fabric.

The beautiful train of a wedding gown surrounded by white rose petals on the red carpet.

Two black hands, one soft and feminine, and one masculine and athletic lighting a unity candle.

An open Bible in a strong BLACK MINISTER'S hands.

A handkerchief wiping tears from old black eyes in the audience.

A glistening diamond ring is slipped by the masculine hand onto a soft, feminine finger.

Two pairs of moist lips meet in a passionate kiss.

As the SONG ENDS, we'll WIDEN from the kiss to reveal handsome, sturdily-built, tuxedoed DAVE JOHNSON, probably 25, embracing his gorgeous, not-much-younger bride, CLARICE CLARK-JOHNSON. And as they hold their kiss for what seems like too long, we see that we are in a nicely appointed sanctuary filled with happy, mostly black WEDDING GUESTS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Fade hairstyles on the men and Anita Baker bobs on the women date us to the early 1990s.

ANOTHER ANGLE

They are all presided over by larger-than-life BISHOP WILKES, dressed in ministerial robes with colorful Afrocentric accents. He taps Dave on the shoulder.

BISHOP WILKES

How about saving some for the
honeymoon, brother?

Dave and Clarice break their clutch, slightly embarrassed, and the audience erupts in LAUGHTER and a few HOOTS and HOLLAS from some of the men, including handsome, young Best Man BROCK HOUSEMAN, the lone Caucasian member of the wedding party. And he's the got an all-business-up-front-party-in-back mullett going for him, which puts him right out of college, and not yet quite legit.

Dave and Clarice now turn to face the Bishop. He smiles at them broadly and holds up his Bible again.

BISHOP WILKES (CONT'D)

Dave... Clarice, before I present you as husband and wife, there's one last lesson I want to leave with you as you begin your life together. A wise king named Solomon once said this:

(reading from Bible)

"It is better to have a partner than go through life alone. Share the work, share the wealth, for if one falls down, the other is there to pick him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one by his side. And in bed, two can warm each other at night. But one alone, shivers all night long. By yourself, you are unprotected. But with a partner you can face the worst the world has to offer. But even better is a cord of three strands because it is not easily broken."

(beat, closing his Bible)

My brother, my sister... I'll be honest with you. Life is gonna do its best to beat you up. And it's hard to keep the good in a good marriage when bad things happen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Bishop then retrieves a gold-colored, braided cord, and places one end around Dave's shoulders and then drapes the other end around Clarice's shoulders.

BISHOP WILKES (CONT'D)

This is a three-stranded cord. The two of you represent the first two strands, but God represent the third. And as long as you stay close to God and His family, I promise your marriage will be a three-stranded cord that nothing in this world can break.

And as Dave and Clarice nod that they understand the admonition, we'll FIND Clarice's 50-something, very strong-willed mother, MARY CLARK, or MAMA as we will come to know her, sitting all by herself in the front row. And she's watching these proceedings with uncertain, skeptical eyes.

And we'll PRELAP the smooth sounds of BLACK wedding DJ and the end of some R & B number like "AIN'T NO WAY."

DJ (V.O.)

All right, give it up for sister Aretha.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - RECEPTION HALL - DAY (1994)

The place has been decorated for a wedding reception. Tables, linens, disco ball and rotund DJ with his sound system set up in front of a dance floor packed with guests, including Bishop Wilkes, who is mixing it up with his WIFE.

DJ

Step aside, peeps. DJ Supersize comin' at you now with a special dance request.

The wedding guests begin clearing the dance floor.

DJ (CONT'D)

Time for the bride's own mama, Mrs. Mary Clark, to step on the floor with her new son-in-law.

Mama smiles coyly as she takes to the floor.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DJ CONT'D)
 (suggestively)
 Lord have mercy, Mrs. Clark. Could
 you be my mama... 'cuz I love the
 way you cookin' tonight.

Which draws HOOTS and HOWLS from across the hall. She waves
 him off with mock humility.

CLOSER ANGLE

At the edge of the crowd, Dave is standing with his new bride
 and his best man Brock, with whom he trades a hesitant look.

DAVE
 Oh, damn.

CLARICE
 (rolling her eyes)
 Please. She ain't gonna bite you.

Dave starts moving sheepishly out onto the floor. Brock
 calls after him and doing his best Vanilla Ice impression.

BROCK
 I got your back, dawg.

Clarice elbows Brock in the ribs as Dave joins Mama to the
 APPLAUSE of the wedding guests.

DJ
 This one goes out to all you mamas.
 From my man, Babyface.

Mama plasters on a smile and puts her arms around Dave's
 neck. He puts his hands appropriately around her waist, as
 the DJ throws the switch on a tune like "SONG FOR MY MAMA."

And they dance together for a long moment as Clarice and some
 of her bridesmaids watch, their emotions brimming over the
 beautiful scene.

CLOSER ANGLE

Mama pulls in close and begins to talk in hushed tones to
 Dave, her manufactured smile never leaving her face.

MAMA
 Welcome to the family, baby.

DAVE
 Thank you, Mrs. Clark.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAMA

(admonishingly)

Boy, I know you did not just call me "Mrs. Clark." I expect you to call me "Mama." Just like I expect you and my Reesie at my house every week for Sunday dinner.

DAVE

(taken aback)

Yes, ma'am.

MAMA

Just like I expect you to learn how to hold a job, keep food on the table, and stay away from all them ghetto-pass-carryin', crack-dealin' street hustlers you used to run with. I don't care if you did graduate from college, I will not see my baby girl have anything less than the life she deserves.

DAVE

No, ma'am.

MAMA

And one more thing. You a man, so you probably can't help yourself, but if I ever catch you puttin' your eyes on some little Miss Thang who ain't my daughter, I will personally come over there like Jesus and pluck them out. Are you feelin' me?

A shell-shocked Dave looks at her for a long moment. There's a lot he would like to say, but he thinks better of it.

DAVE

I feel you.

Mama's smile says that's exactly how she wants it to be. Just then, Clarice taps her mother on the shoulder.

CLARICE

My turn, Mama.

MAMA

Yes, it is, baby.

(patting Dave on cheek)

This boy and me gonna get along just fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And with that, Mama moves off into the crowd. As Clarice and Dave begin to dance, the DJ transitions us into Lionel Richie's "THREE TIMES A LADY." Clarice notices that Dave is a little shaken by his encounter with Mama.

CLARICE

I know Mama can come on a little strong.

DAVE

More like a Mack truck.

CLARICE

She just wants the best for me.

DAVE

I know.

CLARICE

(smiling seductively)
But she ain't comin' where we goin' tonight.

Which quickly snaps Dave out of his funk.

DAVE

Did I mention how good you look in that dress?

CLARICE

Yes. But do you know how good I'm gonna look out of it?

DAVE

(eyes heaven gratefully)
Thank you, Jesus.

And as they share an expectation of intimacy that only a new groom and bride can share, Clarice will pull Dave into a kiss. And suddenly, it will be as if they are all alone in the world, with space and time SPINNING AROUND THEM. And we will begin to hear Dave's REMEMBERING VOICE as the song continues to play.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When I was growing up on my Granny's knee, we were poor as church mice. Scratch that. The church mice were the rich ones. We were the church rats. But it didn't matter because Granny raised me to know right from wrong.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And before she passed on, God rest her soul, she worked her fingers to the bone makin' sure I could get out the hood, makin' sure I could be a college boy. And she was the only woman I ever worshipped until the day I met a young lady in college who could make Halle Berry want to eat her heart out.

DISSOLVE TO:

PHOTO ALBUM MONTAGE:

- A) DAVE IN HIS COLLEGE BASKETBALL UNIFORM.
- B) CLARICE IN HER COLLEGE CHEERLEADING OUTFIT.

DAVE V.O.)

Clarice was the most beautiful woman I had ever laid eyes on. And together we were goin' places in this world. Someday, she was gonna be the Donald Trump of Dallas, and I was gonna coach Longhorn basketball. This was a lady a brother would go to war for. A lady a man could pledge to be faithful to, and yes, to keep his eyes from getting plucked out for.

- C) CLARICE SHOWING HER ENGAGEMENT RING TO HER GAL-PALS.

- D) CLARICE AND DAVE IN THEIR WEDDING ATTIRE POSED WITH BISHOP WILKES AT THE FRONT OF THE SANCTUARY.

DAVE (V.O.)

As Bishop Wilkes, my childhood pastor, had said... she was a woman to have and to hold, and to cherish until you breathe your last.

- E) DAVE AND CLARICE DRIVING OFF IN THE BACK SEAT OF A LIMO WITH THE "JUST MARRIED" HANGING OFF THE BACK END.

- F) DAVE AND CLARICE TOASTING CHAMPAGNE GLASSES ON THE DECK OF A CRUISE SHIP.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And that's exactly what I did. On our wedding night, it was me, Clarice and a little bit of heaven. And we didn't come up for air for two days.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

With all your hopes and plans and
dreams right out in front of you
like that, the honeymoon can last
forever.

G) DAVE AND CLARICE POSING IN FRONT A "JUST SOLD" REAL ESTATE
SIGN IN FRONT OF A SMALL BUNGALOW -- THEIR FIRST HOME.

H) DAVE AND CLARICE SITTING AT THE SUNDAY DINNER TABLE WITH
MAMA IN HER HOUSE. AND WE'LL PUSH IN ON DAVE'S FORCED SMILE.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DAVE'S PANEL VAN - DAY - TRAVELING (PRESENT DAY)

We're still CLOSE ON Dave, only now he looks a dozen years
older in a work shirt that marks him as working class. A few
more worry lines around the eyes. A few gray hairs dusting
his temples. And somehow "THREE TIMES A LADY" never quit
playing. In fact we're now hearing it on the car radio. But
as Dave drives along, he is deep in thought.

On the other side of the boulevard, a Police cruiser zooms
past, its SIREN WAILING, pulling Dave out of his thoughts.
He inadvertently flips the radio dial to a NEWSTALK station.

DAVE (V.O.)

But just like the Bishop said, life
has a way of knocking the hell out
of you.

We'll PULL OUTSIDE the van far enough to read the sign on the
side of his truck. "ALL-PRO JANITORIAL & CARPET CLEANING."

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY - LATER

Dave's van pulls into the driveway of a nice, upper middle-
class home in a neighborhood full of similar homes. (This is
not the starter home we saw them buy, but a step up into the
suburbs). A recent model Cadillac V-Series is already
sitting in the driveway, with one of those magnetic signs
plastered on the door: "HASTINGS PROPERTIES & REAL ESTATE."

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - MOMENT LATER

Clarice, still looking as girlishly trim and put-together as
she did on her wedding day, is noshing on a salad at a sit-up
bar in the well-appointed kitchen while reading *House
Beautiful* magazine. She's dressed smartly in a sexy blouse
and skirt as Dave enters. He brightens when he sees her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Damn, girl. All those curves and me with no brakes.

CLARICE

Hey, baby.

Dave crosses over, moves in for a kiss. But she turns her cheek to him.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Sorry. I just touched up my face.

Dave shrugs it off. Gives her a peck on the cheek.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

How was your day?

Dave opens the fridge, and pops the top on a bottle of beer.

DAVE

I had to do the bank building myself because two of my boys called in sick. I tell you, Reesie, why I let you talk me into starting my own business I'm still trying to figure out.

CLARICE

(slightly irritated)

Baby, we been over all this. Coaching JV football wasn't puttin' us in this zip code. You just got to do a better job of hiring the right people.

Dave has heard this lecture before and Clarice can see he's tired of it. She softens her approach.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Besides, you think I want my big, strong chocolate kiss waxin' floors for a livin'? I want you in the executive suite where you deserve to be.

Dave gives her a reluctant smile. The sweets worked.

DAVE

I know, Boo.

He comes around behind her. Starts massaging her shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE (CONT'D)

Whaddya say we forget all that nonsense tonight and get us little quality time?

She melts a little at his touch, but remembers her job.

CLARICE

Oh, that sounds so good. But I got to show houses tonight.

DAVE

What about tomorrow?

CLARICE

That's no good either. It's my real estate board dinner. You promised to sit with Mama while I sit up at the main table, remember?

DAVE

(blanching at reminder)
Oh, shit, that's right.

CLARICE

(looks at him askance)
I know I did not hear you cussin' in this house about Mama.

Clarice puts on her colorful real-estate blazer.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

I tell you what. If you show Mama a nice time, somebody gonna get his freak on Saturday night.

She nibbles on his ear a little. Dave's jelly. Clarice knows it. Right where she wants him.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

I'll even throw in one of those lacy numbers that gets you all weak in the knees.

Dave looks her in the eye, hopefully.

DAVE

Maybe we could also... you know... talk about the future.

CLARICE

Let's not go there, baby. You know I'm not ready for that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She gives him another peck on the cheek and exits. His countenance falls as he watches her go.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN CONDOMINIUM HIGHRISE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

As we SWOOP DOWN over Dallas after dark, it's all glass and prisms of light, especially in the priciest piece of real estate in town, the 40-story Trinity View condo building.

INT. BROCK HOUSEMAN'S DOWNTOWN CONDO - NIGHT

We're CLOSE ON the timer of fancy blender whose jar contains water and some kind of protein powder. The timer hits 6:15 p.m. and the machine suddenly whirs to life, blending up its contents into some kind of green health drink.

And we'll WIDEN to see that we are in a gourmet kitchen in very upscale bachelor condo with skyrise views on three sides. The place looks like a Bang & Olufsen store threw up -- leather furniture, modern art, giant plasma screen TV on the wall and all the digital trappings.

At that moment, the front door opens and Brock Houseman enters, looking as fit and handsome as ever, his college-boy mullett replaced with close-cropped George Clooney hair. He throws off his expensive suit coat and loosens a tie as he crosses over to his telephone on the kitchen counter.

He punches in a phone number, then his voice-mail code, and puts the phone to his ear as he pours his smoothie into a glass and begins chugging as he listens.

COMPUTER VOICE (OVER PHONE)
Four new messages...

He punches a key to listen.

FEMALE VOICE #1 (OVER PHONE)
(flirty and sexy)
Hey, Cowboy, it's Vickie. It's been too long since the last time we hooked up. I got the hot tub heating up in case you're lonely tonight.

Brock gulps weakly and steels his courage.

BROCK
Stay strong, bro.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He pushes a key and we hear the ERASE tone. Then the next message begins to play.

OLDER FEMALE VOICE (OVER PHONE)

Hi, sweetie pie, this is Mom. Are you getting my messages? Something must be wrong with your system. Anyway, my friend Sophie has this really lovely niece who sings in the church choir and you won't believe what she does for a living -- she's a professional bowler. Isn't that fun? Anyway, I thought maybe I could have the two of you over for dinner Friday and --

Brock sighs and punches to ERASE the message.

BROCK

Sorry, Mom, I'm having my finger nails ripped out that night.

And then yet one more feminine voice comes on the line.

FEMALE VOICE (OVER PHONE)

Hi, Brock... this is Partygirl 229 Remember me from Singles Chat-dot-com? I got your number from Surferdude 102 who it got it from a friend of his who knows how to track people down. I was thinking we could meet for drinks and --

Brock punches the ERASE button, looks at the phone horrified.

BROCK

Okay, now I'm officially scared.

Finally a voice he wants to hear comes on the line.

DAVE (OVER PHONE)

Yo, B, it's Dave. Reesie's working tonight. If your lawyer ass ain't too busy, what do you say we get our hoops on? Holler back at me.

Brock smiles, relieved, as he hangs up the phone.

BROCK

(like a black guy)
Now that's what I'm talking about.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

We're HIGH and WIDE on an imposing downtown hospital with heavy Catholic influence on the facade. As we PUSH IN, we FIND an ambulance parked at the emergency entrance. And just at that moment, its SIRENS and LIGHTS come on and it peels away from the hospital on its way to only God knows where.

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - P.T. CLINIC - NIGHT

We're CLOSE ON a bare leg with a fresh surgical scar at the knee joint engaged in a knee-extension exercise, and WIDEN to see an OLDER MALE PATIENT painfully raising his leg as a pretty, perky physical therapist in her early 30s coaches him through it. She is not a stone fox, but Meg Ryan sexy -- despite the perspiration on her brow and the fatigue of a long shift in a busy PT clinic

JULIE

Just a few more, Jerry. Before you know it, you'll have that new bionic knee out on the dance floor.

OLDER MALE PATIENT

It hurts like hell.
(mischievous smile)
Maybe you could kiss it and make it better.

JULIE

(rolls eyes, teasingly)
Behave yourself.

She calls to a passing PT ASSISTANT.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Electrical stim, then ice for Mister Hound Dog here.
(smiling at Jerry)
On second thought, no stimulation.
He's already had enough of that.

Julie trades another smile and a wink with Leonard as the PT Assistant takes over for her.

ANOTHER ANGLE

TRACK Julie over to the bullpen where she hands Jerry's chart to a middle-aged, humorless-looking OFFICE SUPERVISOR.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Okay, Nick, who's my next victim?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The supervisor just stares at her -- flatly.

JULIE (CONT'D)

It was a joke. That would be where
I say something funny and you make
this little noise called a laugh.

SUPERVISOR

We got a memo from corporate.

JULIE

What'd it say? They taking away
our vending machine? No more
Little Debbies at snack break?

He hands her the memo. Her smile fades as she reads it.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Part time? Are you kidding me?
The patient load is higher than
it's ever been.

SUPERVISOR

Costs are up. We're going to have
to figure out a way to see same
number of clients in half the time.

JULIE

Cheap-frigging-HMO. What's next --
instead of Viagra, a Popsicle stick
and duct tape?

SUPERVISOR

I'm sorry, Julie. I don't know
what to tell you.

JULIE

I'm raising a 12-year-old son. How
do I replace this income?

SUPERVISOR

Look, you're my best therapist.
I'll try to throw some freelance
work your way.

JULIE

Don't bother. I'll just sell one
of my organs. Who needs two
kidneys anyway?

She throws up her hands in frustration and crosses out.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - NIGHT

A shiny black BMW with high performance tires pulls into Dave and Clarice's driveway and HONKS its horn. From inside, some clean-enough-for-radio RAP SONG from a high-end sound system.

INT. BROCK'S BMW - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

Brock, now dressed in ratty gym clothes, is sitting in the car, RAPPING along with the song throbbing on the Blaupunkt, when the passenger door opens and Dave slides in. He's also wearing sweats, and carrying a basketball. Brock offers his fist to Dave for a knuckle-bump.

BROCK
(loudly over Rap song)
What up, D... how you doin'?

Dave can hardly hear him over the radio.

DAVE
Hey, Grandmaster Flash, you wanna
chill the jams before one of my
white neighbors has a heart attack.

BROCK
Sorry, bro. My bad.

Brock turns down the volume. Dave chuckles as Brock backs his car out of the driveway. This sort of black/white repartee is obviously something that's part of their friendship.

INT. BROCK'S BMW - TRAVELING - NIGHT - A MOMENT LATER

They have now left Dave's neighborhood and are proceeding toward downtown, the skyline closing in out the window.

BROCK
Glad you called me tonight, man.

DAVE
Saved from another lonely night in
that million-dollar penthouse, huh?

BROCK
It's two million, but who's
counting? Besides, I could be
hitting it with any number of
ladies if I wanted to.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROCK (CONT'D)

I'm just taking a little break right now to get my head straight, you know what I'm saying? Long as I got my "Good Times" reruns, it's all good.

Dave doesn't know whether to laugh... or be weirded out.

DAVE

Tell me you do not watch "Good Times."

BROCK

I love that show. It reminds me of when I was just a shorty living in the ghet-to.

DAVE

Please. A white trash trailer park ain't no ghetto.

BROCK

(winking at Dave)

I know, but I'm just trying to keep it real for my main homey, ya'll.

DAVE

(chuckling)

Has anybody ever told you that you are one strange Caucasian?

BROCK

(dropping black patois)

This coming from a black guy who lives in the whitest neighborhood in the city.

Brock smiles, offers his palm. Dave has to give him some skin on that one. These guys have a real bond.

CUT TO:

EXT. HASTINGS REAL ESTATE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

A classy real estate office building with lovely landscaping and a sign matching the magnetic placard on Clarice's Cadillac, which is just now pulling into a parking spot.

INT. HASTINGS REAL ESTATE - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

When Clarice enters, she is instantly waylaid by MICHELLE, her sassy, brassy, late-20s black assistant who has opinions on every subject and is not shy about sharing them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE

Okay, girlfriend, here's the four-one-one.

She hands Clarice a file folder and points through a window into her office where an upscale, professional-looking black couple, THE REIDS, are waiting.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Mr. Superior Court Judge in there is married to Miz chi chi art dealer and they are looking to get up into a new zip code.

CLARICE

Where do they want to look?

MICHELLE

Hillwood.

CLARICE

That's a nice zip code.

MICHELLE

Go get the money, sister girl. We about to get paid.

Clarice gets a wry smile. And she crosses into her office.

CLARICE

Mr. and Mrs. Reid, I'm Clarice Johnson. So nice to meet you.

And we begin HEARING some jam like 50 Cent's "PLACES TO GO" --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - CLOSE ON BASKETBALL - NIGHT

As it SLAMS THROUGH THE NET, and then WIDEN to see we're in an inner-city gymnasium in the middle of a shirts-and-skins pick-up basketball game.

Dave comes down hard, having just slammed-dunked the ball over a tatted-up, street-looking black dude in his 30s we'll come to know as DARNELL GOODEN. Dave thumps his bare, sweaty, chiseled chest proudly and exchanges high-fives with bare-chested Brock and then a couple of his other African-American TEAMMATES. Darnell is fuming.

DARNELL

That was charging, dawg!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Gimme the lane if you don't want my
foot in your hind parts, homey.
(motions for the ball)
Ball!

Darnell casts an angry look at Dave. One of the other players chunks the ball to Dave who takes it to the baseline.

Dave takes the ball in, tossing it to one of his teammates, a really BIG DUDE with a perpetual smile, and we'll TRACK him as he begins dribbling the ball down court as Darnell and his team get back on defense. And for a long time, it's all passes and shiny bodies slamming into one another. And then Dave gets the ball back and sees Brock in the open in three-point territory. And the action we'll STROBE into:

SERIES OF SLOW-MOTION SHOTS

A) Dave fires a chest past to Brock.

B) Darnell sees what's happening and moves into action.

C) As Brock goes up for his shot, a black fist flies INTO FRAME and connects with his face -- hard.

D) Brock slams to the floor and the ball goes rolling out of bounds, and we'll be overtaken by REAL TIME once again.

Brock jumps to his feet, blood gushing from his nose, and immediately charges Darnell. And soon they are a whirling dervish of flying kicks and punches, and Dave and some of the other players immediately rush in to break it up.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Yo, knock it off! Break it up!

Finally Dave and a teammate are able to pry them apart and Brock and Darnell both come out of the tussle spitting mad.

BROCK

(glaring at Darnell)
What the hell was that, man?

DARNELL

(thrusts a finger at Dave)
Nigger wanted street rules.

DAVE

You better check yourself, brother.
You ain't in the prison yard no
more!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rage fills Darnell's eyes and he suddenly charges Dave, pinning him to the wall before Brock and the others can pull them apart. Dave is quaking with frustration, disbelief.

DAVE (CONT'D)

What is your problem, fool?

DARNELL

You, college boy, strollin' up in here with your suburb-livin,' white ass-kissin' nose in the air...

(pointing at Brock)

... bringin' this lil' Jimmy Crack Corn which you.

Dave flares at this and trades an uncomfortable look with Brock, but thinks better of fanning the flames.

DAVE

Come on, brother, we homeys from way back. Why you got to sweat me like that?

DARNELL

You used to be good people when you wasn't too good for the hood. But forget this shit! I ain't rollin' with no Uncle Tom!

Darnell picks up the ball and fires it to the Big Dude, who no longer has a smile. Darnell starts to walk off. Brock tries one last appeal.

BROCK

Let's just finish the game, Darnell. No harm, no foul.

DARNELL

(turning back, glaring)

Shut up, punk! Go back to Starbucks!

With that, Darnell is out of there, leaving nothing but frustrated looks all around, especially from Dave and Brock.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBURBAN EXECUTIVE HOUSE - NIGHT - A LITTLE LATER

We're in the beautiful, elegantly appointed foyer of a suburban mini-mansions. Clarice enters with The Reids from the living room and we TRACK them as they move through.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. REID

I assume the sellers are looking for full price?

CLARICE

We can try, but I doubt they'll come down from one-point-seven.

MRS. REID

Nor should they. I love the balance and harmony of this place. It has perfect *Feng Shui*.

CLARICE

Right down to the warm earth tones and east-facing front door.

MRS. REID

I'm glad we have the same tastes.

CLARICE

(smiles, gratified)
Me, too.

MR. REID

If you ask me, it all sounds like mumbo-jumbo.

Mrs. Reid rolls her eyes and shares a smile with Clarice.

CLARICE

My husband said just about the same thing when we were picking out our home. I think the term he used was... "load of bull."

MR. REID

(chuckling)
Good man. What line of work he in?

Catching Clarice off guard. She has to think how to answer.

CLARICE

Oh, he... uh... runs his own building management firm.

MR. REID

Tell him I like the way he thinks.

CLARICE

(averting his eyes)
I will.

Mrs. Reid grabs her by the elbow and starts up the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. REID

Come on, Clarice. I wanna see how
my *chi* flows in the master bedroom.

And the two of them head upstairs, Clarice's confident smile
returning. And we'll PRELAP the sound of a coach's WHISTLE.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - MOVING WITH A DIVING BODY - NIGHT

The lean, young body belongs to 12-year-old BRYSON SAWYER and
he knifes into the water.

WIDER ANGLE

And we now know we are watching a 50-meter freestyle race
between several adolescent boys in an Olympic-size pool in an
outdoor swim stadium with bleachers and stadium lights
lighting up the night sky.

TRACKING ANGLE

Bryson hits the opposite wall a half-length behind the
leader, but coming out of his flip turn, he turns on the
afterburners and easily zooms into the lead. He hits the
wall in first place, a length ahead of the next best swimmer.
And a mother's shrill voice pierces the air.

JULIE (O.S.)

Whoo-hoo! Bryson! You-da-man!

ANOTHER ANGLE

As Bryson climbs out of the pool, we can see he's a good-
looking kid with an innocent face. He looks up to see his
mother, Julie Sawyer, rushing over with a towel. He looks
over at some of the other teenage swimmers, whose mothers are
pulling similar stunts. They all look completely humiliated.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Way to go, Sweetheart! You rock!

BRYSON

Mom, stop. It's embarrassing you
slobbering all over me like this.

JULIE

Oh, excuse me for gettin' a little
worked up because my twelve-year-
old son just cleaned the clocks of
a pool full of high school
freshmen.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE (CONT'D)

Buster, you won't ever be too big
for your speedos for me to love on
you. Got it?

BRYSON

(sighs, impatient)

Fine.

Julie grabs his chin and forces him to look her in the eye.

JULIE

And why is that?

BRYSON

Can we do this later?

JULIE

Nope. Give it to me.

He rolls his eyes, then quietly gives her the response she
wants -- a routine they clearly have been through many times.

BRYSON

Because it's just you and me, Mom.

Her eyes glisten with love.

JULIE

That's right, baby. Just you and
me against the world.

Their moment is interrupted by COACH SPINELLO, a thick, good-
looking man in his late-twenties.

COACH SPINELLO

Hey, Bryson, nice heat. Got any
idea what your time was?

BRYSON

I don't know. Around twenty-three
seconds?

COACH SPINELLO

Try twenty-one and nine-tenths.

BRYSON

Whoa.

COACH SPINELLO

You're dang-right-whoa. That's a
high school varsity time, bro.

Bryson looks at his mother, amazed. She beams.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE

I'm not saying anything, Coach.
I'm supposed to keep my trap shut.

COACH SPINELLO

(smiles, then)

So how do you feel about adding the relay on Saturday? I want you to swim the free-style leg with the fourteen-year-olds.

BRYSON

(as in "totally cool")

That would be totally ridiculous.

COACH SPINELLO

I'll take that as a "yes."

(turns to go, then remembers something)

Oh, Mrs. Sawyer... ?

JULIE

Miss Sawyer.

COACH SPINELLO

Sorry. The team mom asked me to remind you we still need your check for the new club warm-up suits.

JULIE

I'm sorry. Completely slipped my mind. I'll bring one Saturday.

COACH SPINELLO

Sounds great.

The coach bumps knuckles with Bryson and crosses off. Bryson gives Julie a probing look. But she switches gears on him.

JULIE

You know what I'm in the mood for?
Burger Cabana.

But as she busies herself with packing up his stuff, he keeps his eye on her. That check thing bothers him.

CUT TO:

INT. BROCK'S BMW - TRAVELING - NIGHT

They guys are chillin' with Gatorade and the windows down as they drive back from the Y in Brock's sweet ride. But Dave is clearly still fuming about his run-in on the court.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

I've known Darnell from knee-high to a Pontiac. I don't know why he has to do me like that.

Brock looks at Dave and smiles knowingly. They've had this conversation before.

BROCK

Seems pretty simple to me. You stole his college scholarship and he's still ticked off about it.

DAVE

I didn't steal nothing from nobody. The brother got caught dealin' crack and lost his scholarship. I earned mine fair and square.

BROCK

Still, I know how he feels... being the better athlete and all.

Dave gives him a look of disbelief.

DAVE

Better athlete, my ass. Now you the one smoking crack.

Brock smiles. Dave knows he's been had.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Somehow it all got messed up. Two shorties knockin' around the hood, dreamin' about being Michael Jordan. One ends up a broke-ass bail-jumper. The other one ends up gettin' a piece of the pie.

BROCK

Victim of his circumstances.

DAVE

Shit, that ain't circumstances, that's choices. Circumstances is tidal waves and hurricanes. Choices is "Should I or shouldn't I sling this crack?"

(winking at Brock)

"Should I or shouldn't I punch this white Superstar in the nose?"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROCK

No, circumstances is having no father around to teach you how not to smoke crack because the government forgot to fix the levies and a hurricane just flooded your house. You got to have boots to have bootstraps, brother.

DAVE

Look at you, all white and liberal and trippin' like you a member of the Rainbow Coalition.

Brock has to laugh about this.

BROCK

I guess you're right. Life isn't fair. Otherwise, some butt-ugly sucker like you doesn't end up with a fine lady like Clarice while a rich, handsome dude like me is till trollin' singles bars.

Dave gets his chuckle on.

DAVE

No, you a troll 'cause you afraid of commitment.

BROCK

True.

DAVE

Besides, I ain't playing any violins for you, Vanilla Ice.
(smile fades a little)
Married life ain't all that anyway.

Brock looks at him or a long moment.

BROCK

What are you talking about? You guys are doing great, right?

Dave realizes he said that out loud, pulls it back.

DAVE

Yeah, we good. Things is good.

Brock stews on that a beat, decides to probe a little deeper.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROCK
How's that other thing between you?

DAVE
(avoiding his eyes)
It's all good. We working on it.

But the look on Brock's face says he isn't buying it.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT - SAME TIME

And Brock's BMW passes a beat-up looking, late-model Nissan Sentra going in the opposite direction.

INT. JULIE'S NISSAN - TRAVELING - NIGHT - SAME TIME

We're CLOSE ON the radio as some Big Hair, Corporate Rock song like "DUST IN THE WIND" is playing. And we'll WIDEN to see that Julie is driving the car with Bryson sitting next to her. He notices how preoccupied she is.

BRYSON
How come you're not singing?

JULIE
What?

BRYSON
Usually I have to stick my head out the window to drown out your voice when this song is playing.

Julie looks at him for a long moment, hesitating.

BRYSON (CONT'D)
What's wrong, Mom? You have to tell me. You were the one who made up the "no secrets rule" after Dad left. Not me.

JULIE
(sighs, then)
You're right, Bry. Look, I don't want you to worry about this, but the HMO is cutting back my hours. But I already have some ideas for how to make some more money.

BRYSON
(without missing a beat)
Yeah, it's called basic math.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYSON (CONT'D)

If you make less, you have to spend less. I'm gonna drop out of swim club. It's too expensive.

JULIE

Whoa, we are not even going there, you understand me? I'll eat Cup O' Noodles three times a day before you miss one minute of swim club.

Bryson tries not to let on that he's relieved by this -- but it's clear that he is. Something hopeful hits him.

BRYSON

Maybe Dad will come through with his child support.

Julie almost goes with skepticism, but thinks better of it.

JULIE

Maybe he will.

Which seems to lift his spirits.

BRYSON

Cup O' Noodles are pasta, right?

JULIE

Loosely.

BRYSON

Good. Coach Spinello says I need to start carbo-loading before meets.

Julie smiles at his pluck. She loves this boy.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

A bedroom decorated out of the Pottery Barn catalog. Dave enters quietly, and sees that Clarice is already in bed with her back turned toward his side. He quietly slips out of sweats and climbs into bed, cuddling up against her.

DAVE

You awake, baby?

He kisses her shoulder, trying to arouse her.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I got a big thing for you, baby, and it gettin' bigger by the moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She turns further away from him. His face falls.

CLOSER ANGLE

We see that she is indeed awake, but in no mood to cooperate. And we'll HEAR the CRACK of a ball coming off a bat.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY - THE NEXT DAY

WE'RE CLOSE ON A BASEBALL as it is grounded hard across the dirt toward a handsome, honey-toned kid, maybe 12, who is playing second base on a rundown inner-city field more dirt than grass. The boy, CARLOS, gets into position to scoop it up, but the ball has eyes and squirts between his legs.

WIDER ANGLE

"Coach" Dave is holding the bat, and his assistant, Brock, is shagging the balls at home plate, and it's clear that we are in the middle of a Little League team practice. The team is a Fat Albert gang of various shapes and sizes, some raggedy, some street-hearted. Besides Carlos, we'll come to know a few of them as JAYLEN, DARIUS, MARCUS and DESHAWN. Dave calls out to Carlos, slightly annoyed.

DAVE

Carlos! How many times I got to tell you, son? Keep your hind end down. You gonna catch the ball on your chin if you pokin' at it like it's a bug!

Which causes a round of SNICKERS from around the infield. Dave hits a pop fly which shortstop Deshawn has to race back to catch. When he snags it cleanly, he begins strutting around, show-boating.

DESHAWN

Who's your daddy now, suckers?

CARLOS

Please, Baby A-Rod, stop actin' like you meant to catch that ball. You luckier than a crackhead with a five-dollar scratcher.

More HOOTS, HOWLS and AD LIB trash talk from the other boys. Dave and Brock trade a weary look.

DAVE

All right, bring it in!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANOTHER ANGLE

Some boys sprint in and gather around Dave and Brock, others drag in huffing and puffing. All are jabbering.

JAYLEN

Say, coach, when can I show you my curve ball?

DAVE

When you're eighteen.

JAYLEN

Why I got to wait that long?

BROCK

'Cause that's when you'll be an adult and your mama can't sue us for you blowin' out your arm.

Generating some SNICKERS from some of the other boys.

DESHAWN

Coach Cracker snapped your ass!

JAYLEN

Shut up, fool!

Brock gives Dave a "let it go" look. But it ain't happening.

DAVE

Deshawn, are you feelin' sick?

DESHAWN

No, coach.

DAVE

Well, you must be sick because you got diarrhea of the mouth, boy.

Now Deshawn gets his dose of derisive CHUCKLES.

DAVE (CONT'D)

(putting arm around Brock)

I want to tell you all something. Coach Houseman here is my main man. He's saved my butt more times than I want to admit, and if I had to go to war, he's the only man in the world I would trust to get my back.

(beat, then)

Deshawn, what race am I?

Deshawn looks a little confused. Like it's a trick question.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DESHAWN

Black?

DAVE

Wrong. I'm human first, then I'm black. There's only one race of people, little brothers. The human race, and there are two kinds of people. Good ones and bad ones.

(a beat, to Deshawn)

So, D, what race is Coach Houseman?

DESHAWN

(happily thinks he has it)

White!

Brock throws Dave a smile. Dave gives a sigh.

DAVE

We'll have to work on that later.

(blows his whistle)

All right. Wind sprints.

Which causes GROANS of protest from all over, especially from plump Marcus, a pear-shaped boy with a tiny, tiny head.

DARIUS

Marcus can't run. He too fat.

MARCUS

I ain't fat. My mama say I just got big bones!

DARIUS

Boy, yo butt so fat if you farted it would take 'til next week to come out!

Huge LAUGHTER and lots of "skin" is slapped among the boys.

DAVE

I like that, Darius. You been playin' the dozens, haven't you?

DARIUS

Yeah, Coach. I keep it tight.

DAVE

Well, guess what? You so pretty, if anybody beats you on one of these sprints, I'm gonna make you wear a dress in Saturday's game.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave blows his WHISTLE and the other boys take off running. Darius' cocky smile melts and he turns and joins the race. Brock turns to Brock and shakes his head.

BROCK

Damn, you're good. Way better than my little league coach. He used to check our cups before every game. Your coach ever do that?

DAVE

What do you mean "check?"

BROCK

You know, stick his hand down there, move it around a little, make sure it everything was good.

DAVE

(long askance look)
No wonder you so messed up.

Brock laughs at him. He got him again. But suddenly Dave's demeanor darkens. Brock sees that Dave is looking off in the distance and follows his eyes to:

THEIR POV

Darnell is approaching with a couple of what, in the inner-city city, could be described as a "ho's" in painted on jeans on his arm. He is chugging from a forty-ounce malt liquor and staring at us with red, dead eyes.

BACK TO SCENE

Dave stares back, anger brewing in his eyes.

BROCK

What's Darnell doin' here?

DAVE

Come to watch Carlos play ball, I s'pose.

Sparkling a look of surprise from Brock as Darnell walks up.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Ya'll not welcome here with that King Cobra, brother.

DARNELL

Shut up, bitch! I can come up in this piece and see my boy anytime I want.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Not drunk on your ass, you can't.
It's a bad influence on the boys.
And it's against league rules.
(eyeing the "ho's")
Now get outta here with your
wannabe mack daddy entourage, or
I'll make it so you never see your
boy play ball.

If looks could kill, Dave would be a dead man. Darnell hates on him for a long moment, then throws up his hands.

DARNELL

Fuck it. Whatever.

One of Darnell's ladies snaps her thong at Dave as if to say "don't you wish," then Darnell crosses off with them.

BROCK

You never told me he was Carlos' father.

DAVE

He's his daddy. But that's a long way from bein' his father.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER

We're CLOSE ON A LADY'S SHOE rocking up and down. It's a nice, dress shoe. Something an older woman might wear to church. And we'll WIDEN to see Mama, sitting on the sofa, dressed to the nines, her arms and legs crossed impatiently. She's a decade older, but she hasn't lost any of her spit.

Clarice enters from the hallway leading to the master bedroom, adjusting her earrings. She looks stunning, dressed in the kind of gown you don to win an award. She looks at her watch, then goes to the window and looks out.

CLARICE

Where is Dave? He knew we had to leave by five-thirty.

MAMA

Honestly, girl, you need to keep a shorter leash on that man.

Clarice ignores this, tries to change the subject.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

How do you like my new dress, Mama?

Clarice has a little too much décolletage showing for Mama's taste. She crosses over and pinches her lapels together.

MAMA

Lord have mercy, girl, are you tryin' to give the players a free show? We need a safety pin. This thing ain't got buttons where a Christian girl need buttons.

Clarice brushes Mama's hand away, slightly annoyed.

CLARICE

Mama, would you stop?

At that moment, the front door opens and Dave walks in, home from practice, looking all sweaty in his coaching clothes.

DAVE

Hey, baby, I'm home. What do you say we go grab a bite to --

He freezes when he sees them both. He's clearly forgotten something. What that is suddenly dawns on him.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I'm just gonna need me a minute.

Without waiting for the shoe to drop, he hustles down the hallway and into the bedroom. Mama gives an exasperated sigh

MAMA

That man is steppin' on my last nerve.

CUT TO:

INT. CLARICE'S CADILLAC - TRAVELING - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Dave is now in his nicest suit and putting pedal to the metal as a frosty Clarice sits next to him while Mama stews in back. They come to a stop. An ambulance, lights and SIRENS BLARING, flies through the intersection in front of them, headed to some emergency. But they don't seem to notice.

Dave tries to win back some brownie points as the light turns green. He gives her dress the once-over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Damn, Boo, are you ready for the red carpet or what? And Mama Clark, may I say, you are looking like a fine Nubian Queen tonight.

Clarice and Mama's expressions don't change.

CLARICE

David, you knew how important this night was for me. Do you realize what an honor it is to be the Salesperson of the Year?

DAVE

I know, baby. I'm sorry.

CLARICE

And now we're gonna be lucky if I make my entrance before they start servin' the little egg rolls.

DAVE

I didn't mean to forget. I just got caught up with practice.

Mama decides to break her silence.

MAMA

What I know, young man, is you got a priority problem. You need a priority transplant. Why you wastin' your time with all those little gangsters with their drawers hangin' all out? All they are is a bunch of thieves training to be crackheads like their daddies.

(beat, then)

Ask me, the only reason a black man ever gets out the ghetto is because a strong woman is there to keep his ho-mongerin' butt in line.

DAVE

All due respect, Mama... not all men are like your ex-husband.

Which sends a chill through the car. She glares at him.

MAMA

Maybe not all. But without your granny and my daughter ridin' herd, you sure woulda been.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave is bristling. Knows what he'd like to say, but can't. Clarice decides to offer an olive branch. Sort of.

CLARICE

All I know is, if you put in as much time on your business as you do with those boys...

(she touches his arm)

... you might be able to get out of the dungarees and look this fine every day.

As Dave drives them through the next intersection, he turns to accept her peace offering --

DAVE'S POV - OVER CLARICE

From out of nowhere, a PICK UP TRUCK is barreling toward the passenger side of their car.

EXT. DOWNTOWN INTERSECTION - HIGH ANGLE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The truck SLAMS into the Cadillac at full speed in a sickening impact which feels like a nuclear shock-wave.

INT. CLARICE'S CADILLAC - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

And inside, it's instantly all grinding metal and flying glass and everything goes into SURREAL SLOW-MOTION as Dave sees the truck cave in Clarice's side of the car, and everything begins spinning as Dave and Clarice's heads bounce into deployed air bags. And things keep spinning for a few more revolutions until the car suddenly jolts to a stop and we return to REAL TIME.

Dave looks over at Clarice and we PUSH IN on him. Everything FADES TO BLACK and goes DEATHLY SILENT and stays that way for what seems like an eternity until we begin making out a frail, moaning, weeping voice.

MAMA (O.S.)

Oh, Sweet Jesus. Oh, Sweet Jesus.
Lord have mercy.

Suddenly, we FADE BACK UP as Dave comes back to consciousness and realizes what has just happened. Mama is in the back seat, holding her head in her hands and still moaning after Jesus. He looks over at Clarice who is unconscious.

DAVE

Reesie, talk to me. You okay, baby?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

No response. He checks her pulse, and listens to her chest.

DAVE (CONT'D)
That's good, you breathin' strong.
You keep breathin', baby.

Dave puts his hand on Mama's shoulder. She shaking. Weak.

DAVE (CONT'D)
You all right, Mama?

MAMA
I think so.

DAVE
I got to get us some help.

Dave tries to open his door. It's jammed. He puts his shoulder into it. This time it opens.

EXT. DOWNTOWN INTERSECTION - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dave staggers out of the car, a little woosy, and moves around to the other side. He's got glass cuts all over his face and a nasty bump emerging on his forehead. In the b.g., other cars are stopping and ONLOOKERS are rushing over.

DAVE
(yelling out)
Please, somebody call 9-1-1!
Somebody get us some help.

A MALE ONLOOKER crosses over, just hanging up his cell phone.

MALE ONLOOKER
It's okay, guy. Help's on the way.

ANGLE ON PICK UP TRUCK

A ratty-looking TEENAGER, who has so many facial piercing he looks like he fell into a fishing tackle box, emerges from a smoking truck that has fared even worse than the Cadillac. He has bumps and scratches, but appears not to be too badly hurt. He is dazed and confused as he paces back and forth.

TEENAGER
I didn't see the red. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I was just reaching for
my cell phone.

ANGLE BACK ON CADILLAC

By now, other onlookers have made their way to the car.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

My wife's pinned in, and my mother-in-law's still in the back.

The first onlooker manages to yank open Mama's back door.

MALE ONLOOKER

Let me help you out, ma'am.

MAMA

(panicky)

No, just get my Reesie out.

Dave comes over to comfort her.

DAVE

Mama, we gonna get her out. This man gonna let you lie down in his car until our ambulance comes.

The man gives Dave a nod that says "absolutely." Reluctantly Mama lets the man help her climb out of the car and escort her slowly over to his car. One of the other onlookers spots something on the ground he doesn't like.

MALE ONLOOKER #2

You got fuel leaking.

Dave looks at the leaking fuel. His face fills with dread.

INT. CLARICE'S CADILLAC - NIGHT - SECONDS LATER

Dave slides back in the front seat next to Clarice. She is still out cold. Dave looks and sees how wickedly pinned her leg is by the twisted metal. He gently pats her cheek.

DAVE

Clarice, baby, can you hear me?
Boo, I need you to wake up.

After a few beats, her eyes flit open and she suddenly realizes what's going on. She looks at her leg and her eyes and voice fill with tears and panic.

CLARICE

Jesus, my side hurts so bad. And my leg... I can't feel my leg!

DAVE

I know, baby. We gonna get you out of here real soon.

She claws at the door, but it's useless. She begins sobbing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

I'm so scared, David! I don't
wanna die! I don't wanna die!

Dave gets as good an angle on a hug as he can to comfort her.

DAVE

Shhh, baby, I ain't gonna let
nothin' else happen to you.

On the sound of HYDRAULICS and CRUNCHING STEEL --

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERSECTION - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON the JAWS OF LIFE cutting through steel. WIDEN to see two FIREMEN working the rig as Dave stands by. In the b.g., an ambulance, firetruck and police cars are now on the scene.

FIREMAN

Almost there, Ma'am. Hang on just
a little longer.

A beat later, the passenger door falls to the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

Clarice is now on a gurney, her leg and neck immobilized. The paramedics slide the gurney into the back of an ambulance. Mama is already there with a LADY EMT.

PARAMEDIC

(into shoulder radio)
Thirty-six-year-old African-
American female with obvious leg
fractures and possible concussion.
BP ninety-five over sixty.

As Dave climbs in, he looks at Mama and finds there is no love in her eyes. The paramedics slam the doors shut.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - TRAUMA UNIT - NIGHT - LATER

DOUBLE DOORS slam open with the force of Clarice's gurney. TRAUMA NURSES and DOCTORS receive it from the paramedics. Dave and Mama try to follow them, but a nurse stops them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

I got to go in there with her! She needs me!

TRAUMA NURSE

We'll take good care of her, sir.

She notices that Mama is looking very fatigued and examines a nasty gash on the side of Dave's head.

TRAUMA NURSE (CONT'D)

Besides, you all could use a little TLC yourselves.

CUT TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - E.R. - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

We're facing two emergency room beds, partitioned by a curtain. On one side, Dave is sitting with his shirt off, getting his head wound stitched up by an E.R. DOCTOR. Dave is clearly worried. Next door, Mama is reclining in the bed, wearing a hospital gown and a heart monitor.

ANGLE ON DAVE'S BED

E.R. DOCTOR

(as he works on Dave)

How you doin' over there, Mrs. Clark?

From the other side of the curtain comes the reply.

MAMA (O.S.)

I told that other doctor -- some Filipino or Chinese or some damn thing -- I do not need these wires hangin' all up offa me. I just need to be with my baby girl.

The Doctor trades a knowing look with Dave.

E.R. DOCTOR

Just a precaution, ma'am. We just need to monitor your heart a while longer.

Just then one of the Trauma Doctors we saw earlier enters and crosses to Dave's bed. He's wearing surgical scrubs and a serious expression. He relieves the E.R. Doctor.

TRAUMA DOCTOR

Give me a moment, Gerald.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The E.R. Doctor takes his cue and crosses off.

DAVE
(quickly alarmed)
What is it, Doc? What's happenin'
with Clarice?

TRAUMA DOCTOR
We've got her stabilized, Mr.
Johnson, but we've got a long night
ahead of us

The curtain partition between the beds immediately draws back and Mama is staring at them intently.

MAMA
It's already been a long night.
What else you go to say?

TRAUMA DOCTOR
Her leg is badly fractured. But
what has me more concerned at the
moment is that she ruptured her
spleen, which means she's bleeding
internally. As bad as the leg is,
we've got to get in there and stop
that bleeding first.

MAMA
Oh, dear Jesus, we need you.

DAVE
(emotion welling up)
I don't care what it takes, or what
it costs, you've got to fix her,
Doc. You got to fix her.

The Doctor gives him an understanding nod and exits. Dave and Mama sit in silence for a long moment.

MAMA
If we wasn't in such a hurry,
maybe this wouldn't have happened.

Mama lays back on her bed. Dave doesn't reply. He can't.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

Dave, his head bandaged, his face weary, hovers over Clarice's bed in the wee hours of the morning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Clarice is in a post-op anesthetic twilight, her leg is elevated in a cast and in traction. Behind Dave, Mama is SNORING softly in a recliner, as the Trauma Doctor enters, checks the charts.

TRAUMA DOCTOR

You got one tough cookie here, Mr. Johnson. Before she went under, she kept telling me I was not allowed to remove any of her body parts without her permission.

DAVE

(smiling)
That's my Reesie.

TRAUMA DOCTOR

The tear in the spleen was small enough to patch. It should heal up in a week or so. But the leg's another matter.

DAVE

How bad is it?

TRAUMA DOCTOR

We had to put pins in three places. She's not going to be able to bear weight on it for a good a month.

DAVE

She won't be happy to hear that. She's gonna wanna get back to work the moment she gets out of here.

TRAUMA DOCTOR

Mr. Johnson, this is a very severe injury. If she doesn't want to have to park in the handicapped spot the rest of her life, she is going to need months of rehabilitation. You need to make her understand that.

Dave sighs, not looking forward to that assignment.

DAVE

Maybe you could give me some of them drugs you used to keep her knocked out.

The Trauma Doctor smiles and exits the room. Dave looks over at Mama. Still catching sawing logs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He leans over Clarice, gently brushes her hair with his fingers and whispers encouragement to her even though he knows she can't hear him.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I love you, Boo. Somehow we gonna get through this.

As he kisses her on her forehead, PUSH IN on her closed eyes.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY - NEXT MORNING

ON THOSE SAME EYES. They slowly open, red, disoriented as she gets her bearings. And WIDEN to see that Dave has not left her side. His heart skips to see her coming to.

DAVE

Good morning, beautiful.

Clarice's concern grows when she sees her leg in traction.

CLARICE

(weakly, tearing up)

Oh, David. What did they do to my poor leg?

DAVE

Shhh, baby. You may not be able to go through any metal detectors for awhile, but we gonna get you back in them short skirts real soon.

CLARICE

How soon?

DAVE

Soon enough.

Clarice looks around the room, suddenly panicky.

CLARICE

Oh, dear God, where's Mama?
Please tell me she didn't --

DAVE

She's fine, Reesie. Crotchety as hell. I made her take a cab home to get some sleep 'cause the nurses were about to run her out of here on a rail.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Clarice smiles a little. At that moment, the world's largest Teddy Bear enters the room, manhandled there by Brock.

CLARICE

Good Lord, that better not be for me.

BROCK

You kidding?
(points at Dave)
This is for my boy over here.

Brock thrusts the Teddy Bear at Dave.

CLARICE

This is what I brought for you.

He pulls a flower arrangement from behind his back and hands it to her. She smells the flowers and smiles.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

They're gorgeous, B. Thank you.

BROCK

So are you, sweetie.

Brock gives her a kiss on the cheek.

BROCK (CONT'D)

(mock flirting)
Especially in that sexy hospital gown.

CLARICE

Please. You gonna set off my blood pressure.

Dave smiles. These are some special friendships.

CUT TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dave and Brock. A walk and talk. Dave's looking reflective.

BROCK

I'm sorry this happened to you, bro. Really makes you count your blessings.

DAVE

Yeah. How you always just a blink away from losing them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They ponder this for a beat. Don't want to dig much deeper.

DAVE (CONT'D)

So, Coach Cracker, how you feel about takin' over the team for awhile? Think you can handle those little thugs all by yourself?

BROCK

Hell yes. When they find out I'm really the brains of the operation, they'll be eating out of my hand.

(beat)

Plus, I'm gonna bring some Popeye's for game snack.

Dave chuckles. That ought to do the trick.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGHRISE ADVERTISING FIRM - OFFICE - DAY

A good-looking account executive in his late-30s, TED SAWYER, is busy drawing in a sketch pad. He's deep in creative mode because there are several sketches for some ad campaign taped all over the walls. The door opens and an attractive, young secretary with legs for miles, KATE, pops her head in.

KATE

Ted, you have a visitor. I tried to tell her you're on a deadline --

TED

(not looking up)
Who is it?

KATE

(with attitude)
The ex-Mrs. Ted Sawyer.

Julie pushes past Kate into Ted's office. She's in her P.T. work clothes -- dowdy compared to a fashion plate like Kate.

JULIE

I didn't think the future ex-Mrs. Sawyer would mind me barging in.

KATE

I wouldn't know what you mean.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE

Both of you working on a weekend?
Trust me, Bambi, you're not the
first secretary Ted's bumped uglies
with in the copy room.

Kate looks at Ted, aghast. He gives her a reassuring nod.

TED

Give us a minute, Kate.

Kate flips her hair indignantly and exits. Ted eyes Julie.

TED (CONT'D)

I know I'm supposed to ask to what
I owe the pleasure... but I don't
feel like pretending.

JULIE

Me either. Only reason I'm here is
because the HMO cut back my hours.

TED

That's a shame. Maybe you should
to get a better job.

JULIE

Maybe you should grow some *cajones*
and stop being a deadbeat dad. I
could care less that you don't feel
any obligation to the mother of
your child. But the three-thousand
dollars in back child support you
owe your son makes me want to break
your kneecaps -- and believe me, I
know how to do it.

TED

You know I just started with this
firm a few months ago and that I
was in between jobs for awhile.

JULIE

Stop banging every skirt you see
and you won't get fired so often.

He glares at her for a long beat. He then retrieves a
checkbook from his desk drawer and begins to write a check.

TED

I can only afford two-hundred right
now. I'll try to send some more in
a few weeks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE

(takes check from him)
I'd say "thanks" but that's usually reserved for somebody who does something for you without having their arm twisted.

She goes to the door and turns back.

JULIE (CONT'D)

You know, Bryson is really coming along with his swimming. In fact, he has his first meet later today.
(beat, then)
It might be nice if he knew his dad gave a damn.

Guilt fills Ted's eyes. Julie opens the door to find an insecure, nosy Kate standing there, eavesdropping. Julie gives her a condescending smile and then exits past her.

CUT TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Clarice's room is now filled with flowers and Get Well gifts. Dave examines a card from one of the arrangements.

DAVE

This one's from Michelle.
(reading)
"Roses are red, violets are blue...
Girl, we holdin' your big ass real estate trophy so you better get well soon."

But it's a reminder of her loss and the reality of her situation. She looks away, tears filling her eyes.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Don't cry, Reesie. We gonna get through this.

CLARICE

(flashing on him)
We ain't the one with the leg twisted up like a damn pretzel.

DAVE

You're right, baby.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

Why did this have to happen?
Everything was swimmin' along so
perfectly. It was gonna be my big
night, standin' up there, gettin'
that award, showin' the world that
I've arrived. That I am somebody.

DAVE

Baby, don't do that. You been a
somebody to me since the first day
I met you. You're my somebody.

She looks at Dave, thinking about that, and holds back from saying what she really wants to say. It's not lost on Dave. A KNOCK at the door interrupts the moment. They turn to see a winsome black woman in her 40s, CARMEN MCATEE, wearing a colorful African kaftan and her hair in dreads. She's a big woman, but all the equipment's in the right proportions.

CARMEN

Dave and Clarice? I'm Carmen
McAtee, from the counseling center
up at Emmanuel Fellowship.

Clarice wipes her eyes, throws on a smile as Carmen enters.

CLARICE

Excuse my face. I never got to put
on my war paint today.

They all shake hands and AD LIB greetings.

CARMEN

Bishop Wilkes asked me to come pay
you a visit.

Dave and Clarice trade looks.

CLARICE

Really? Wasn't that sweet of him.
I'm surprised he heard about the
accident so soon.

CARMEN

Well, your mama was bendin' his ear
all morning' about it.

DAVE

We haven't really been comin' to
church lately.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARMEN

Yeah, she told him that, too.

Awkward moment for Dave and Clarice. Not for Carmen.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

How is that leg feeling? Looks like one big item for the prayer chain right there.

CLARICE

Thanks, but I'm sure there are other people in the church in more dire prayer need than me.

CARMEN

Well, we did have one young brother from the gospel choir stick a communion cup up his nose trying to impress his girl, but I think this leg is still takin' home first prize this week.

Clarice can't hold back a smile over that image. However...

CLARICE

Please thank the Bishop for his concern, but we're fine... really. You must have other people you need to visit.

CARMEN

Nope. Just you.

To Clarice's surprise, Carmen pulls up a chair and smiles.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Why don't we read some scripture. Do you have a favorite passage?

As Carmen pulls out a bible, Dave and Clarice exchange flabbergasted looks.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

I'm feelin' a little drowsy. As long as we can stay away from all the begets and begats.

DAVE

And anything dealin' with locusts and pillars of salt and shit...

(catching himself)

Excuse me, Lord.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Carmen gives them a smile that says "sure."

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY - WEEK LATER

An encased, elevated leg is the first thing through the automatic doors. A black LADY NURSE with a pushy, "talk to the hand" attitude is guiding Clarice out into the sunshine in her wheelchair. Mama and Dave follow not far behind, Dave loaded to the hilt with flowers and presents.

MAMA

I hope you rented a decent car,
David.

DAVE

I brought my work van.

MAMA

Work van? Boy, are you outta your
mind? We can't put this girl up in
some nasty old janitor van. What
she gonna do, sit in a mop bucket?

CLARICE

Mama, it's okay. It's got a back
seat I can lay down in.

PUSHY NURSE

I don't care what car ya'll brought
up in here as long as you pulled it
up to the drive.

Dave gets a busted look on his face and his non-response speaks volumes.

PUSHY NURSE (CONT'D)

Oh, hell no. Don't tell me ya'll
forgot to pull it up to the drive.

DAVE

Sorry. I didn't know I was
supposed to.

PUSHY NURSE

Son, what do you think this is,
Disneyland? This ain't no tram
ride. If you think I'm gonna push
this damn chair all over this
parking lot, you need to be in the
looney wing with a lithium drip.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Humiliating beat for Dave, then:

DAVE

I'm just gonna need me a minute.

Dave hustles past them, struggling to juggle all the Get Well loot in his arms.

THEIR POV

Dave's butt making that back-and-forth power-walker motion.

BACK TO SCENE

The Nurse is enjoying the view.

PUSHY NURSE

(salaciously)

Hmm-mmm. Look at that tight little ass. I'd like to bounce a silver dollar offa that ass and make me change for the vending machine.

OFF Clarice and Mama's looks of shock and awe --

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY - SOMETIME LATER

Dave pushes Clarice's wheelchair into their bedroom. They are home. Clarice takes in the place with a sigh.

CLARICE

Home, sweet, prison.

DAVE

Come on, baby. We gonna make it real nice for you.

CLARICE

Well, if I'm gonna be trapped up in here for the next several weeks, there are going to be some changes.

DAVE

What changes?

CLARICE

No offense, but this just ain't your forte. Get my cellphone. I need a sister.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY - THE NEXT DAY

Clarice is sitting in bed in a silk robe with her leg up. She has her face on and an eager look in her eyes. A little desk has been set up next to the bed. Dave shows Michelle into the room. She's carrying a file box. As soon as she and Clarice see each other, they do this girlfriend SQUEAL and Michelle rushes over to her. Clarice holds out her hand.

CLARICE

Fly me some fingers, girl.

Michelle and Clarice happily go through the routine of wiggling their fingers together. Clarice notices Dave watching them, amused, from the door.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Please, if you and your crew be bumpin' butts together, we can fly some fingers.

DAVE

I like it. Looks kind of nasty though -- in a good way.

Clarice waves him off and looks at Michelle.

CLARICE

You sure you don't mind working out of the "home office" for a minute?

MICHELLE

You kidding? Kickin' it with my home-girl? It'll be like we havin' a get-rich slumber party.

(remembering something)

I almost forgot.

She opens the box and pulls out a beautiful crystal trophy shaped like a triangle and hands it to Clarice.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

To the Salesperson of the Year.

It takes Clarice's breath away. She almost tears up as she runs her fingers across the inscription.

CLARICE

I have died and gone to heaven.

Dave is happy for his wife. And hopeful.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY - LATER THAT DAY

We're CLOSE ON Clarice. She has turned away the world and her demeanor is dark, frustrated, angry. WIDEN to discover a discouraged-looking Michelle, holding her file box, standing at the door with a grim Dave.

CLARICE

Who was I kidding? I can't sell no damn real estate from a bed. The Reids laughed me off the phone when I asked them if they'd mind comin' here to write an offer sheet.

MICHELLE

Forget about them. They just uppity ass black folk who think they shit smell like perfume. I bet Monday gonna go a whole lot smoother.

CLARICE

There isn't gonna be any Monday. Thanks for givin' this a try, Michelle, but just tell everybody at Hastings I'm outta the game.

MICHELLE

You are not out the game, girl. Mr. Hastings says you take all the time you need. And if you need more time after that, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

CLARICE

Or jump off it.

Dave gives Michelle look indicating that she should go.

MICHELLE

Okay, I'm outta here, but I'm gonna be blowin' up your cell real soon.

Clarice doesn't respond. Dave and Michell trade another look and she exits sadly down the hall.

DAVE

Boo, can I get you any --

CLARICE

You go, too.
(off his hurt look)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE (CONT'D)

I don't wanna see or talk to
anybody right now. Not even you.

An unnerving thing for him to hear. And PRELAP a DOORBELL.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - NIGHT - THAT EVENING

Dave opens the front door and Mama is there, suitcases in hand, looking very ill-tempered.

MAMA

Why I had to hear about my Reesie's
heart breaking from her rather than
from the man s'posed to protect her
makes me want to slap somebody.

She drops her two suitcases at Dave's feet.

MAMA (CONT'D)

You can put those in the guest
room.

DAVE

Look, Mama, I appreciate your
concern, but we been married twelve
years. I think I can take care of
my own wife. Clarice had a rough
day, but we gonna get by just fine.

Mama gives a little sarcastic snort.

MAMA

Let me break it down for you. If
things was all jiggy as that, then
I wouldn't be here, would I? Now
move your butt and let me take care
of my daughter.

The look in her eye makes Dave a little afraid. He steps
aside and lets her by.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Brock enters the gym and passes the group of players we met
earlier. Apparently they are done working out.

BROCK

Hey rookies, where ya'll going?
Who wants some dribbling lessons?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Big Dude just shakes his head and points down court.

BIG SMILING DUDE

We tried to get our game on, but
somebody hoggin' up half the court.

Brock turns and is surprised to see Dave shooting hoops all by himself at the other end of the gym. And given his sweat factor and fatigued look, he's been here awhile.

ANGLE ON DAVE

He slam dunks the ball and the whole backboard shudders. As he turns back the court, a basketball is fired at him from o.s. and he catches it, surprised. We ADJUST to see Brock.

BROCK

Dude, either Clarice is making the
world's fastest recovery... or you
got your walkin' papers.

DAVE

(glowering)
Don't ask.

BROCK

Mama?

Dave answers by firing the ball back at Brock.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - DAY - THE NEXT DAY

A race is under way in the b.g. and the stands are full of
CHEERING parents.

ANGLE ON WARM UP AREA

Julie is organizing Bryson's warm-up bag as Bryson does some stretching nearby. She sees that he keeps looking over his shoulder at the stadium entrance. It makes her sad for him.

JULIE

Hey, did you get a look at that
other team's warm up sweats?
Yellow and chartreuse. I'm having
a very gruesome flashback of a
college pizza and beer party.

The little attempt at humor doesn't really register with him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYSON

You think Dad's gonna make it? I emailed him and left a message on his voicemail.

JULIE

(sighing)
I don't know, Bry.

Bryson covers his true feelings with a brave smile.

BRYSON

No big deal. He probably has to work. I bet he'll come next week.

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)

First call. Two-hundred Individual Medly

BRYSON

(as he yanks off warm ups)
That's me. I'm going to go hurl in the bathroom first. Then I'll see you at the finish line.

Bryson crosses off. Julie watches him go for a long moment. This kid is so brave and full of so much life. Just then, her cell phone RINGS. She looks at the caller ID, answers.

JULIE

Hey, Boss, what's up?
(beat, then brightening)
Are you kidding? I'm all over it.

She finds a pen in her pocket and finds an empty soda cup.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Okay, go ahead.
(writing on cup)
You're a life-saver, Nick. Remind me to give you a quickie on Monday.
(oh shit)
Yes, actually that was a joke.

She hangs up, and gives a little victory pump of her fist.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JULIE'S NISSAN - TRAVELING - DAY

Julie is driving slowly through the same neighborhood we saw Brock driving his Beamer in earlier.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE
 (checking out houses)
 Okay, Julie, welcome to Stepford.

A white Hummer being driven by a blond lady yuppie comes whipping around a corner and Julie has to take evasive action to avoid it. The lady gives Julie a look that says "what are you doing in this neighborhood?" Which pisses Julie off.

JULIE (CONT'D)
 (derisively)
 Nice tank, Barbie. Where do your kids play soccer - Iraq?

And we PRELAP one of those annoying KNOCKS at your door (five quick knocks followed by two long ones).

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mama comes the door and answers it. Julie is standing there with her bag of P.T. gear and a friendly smile. Mama gives her the once-over.

MAMA
 Go away. We ain't buyin' nothin.'

Julie looks a little confused. Dave now comes to the door.

DAVE
 It's okay, Mama. I got it.
 (to Julie)
 Can I help you?

Julie looks at a little sheet of paper.

JULIE
 I hope I have the right address.
 I'm Julie Sawyer. You called for
 an in-home physical therapist.

Dave looks at her, now getting it. Mama throws up her hands and grouses as she retreats within the house.

MAMA (O.S.)
 Physical therapist? Little bitty thing like you? What do ya'll work on -- hamsters?

DAVE
 Sorry about that. I'm Dave Johnson. Please come in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Julie crosses in with her gear.

JULIE

I actually did work on a hamster once. In school. Wrung the poor little thing's neck. Now I'm only allowed to work on humans.

Dave doesn't know whether to laugh -- until Julie gives him a wry smile -- which gives him permission to chuckle.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mama enters the room first, followed by Dave and Julie. When Clarice sees her, she does not try to cover her downcast demeanor like we've seen her do before.

DAVE

Reesie, this is Julie Sawyer. She's the physical therapist we asked the hospital to send over.

CLARICE

I didn't ask them. You did.

Julie gives Dave a reassuring look. Mama is watching her like a hawk from the corner of the room. Already doesn't like what she sees. Julie sets down her gear and pulls up a chair next to the bed.

JULIE

Clarice, after what you've been through, I know the last thing you want is some stranger in your life. So let's just start by talking.

Clarice turns and eyes her knowingly.

CLARICE

I ain't looking for anyone to psychoanalyze me either.

JULIE

Good. Because I'm not looking to get sued for masquerading as a psychologist either.

Clarice's affectation remains flat and Mama remains skeptical. But Dave has to smile a little on that one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE (CONT'D)

But talking about how you're feeling emotionally can help me design a better plan for getting you back up on that leg again.

Clarice's eyes fill with tears of frustration.

CLARICE

You're asking how I feel? I feel like damn Humpty-Dumpty sittin' in a million pieces at the bottom of the wall. In the last two weeks, my life has gone from top of the world to complete shit! That's how I feel!

Mama's not biting her tongue anymore. She lasers in on Julie.

MAMA

Okay, Miss Sunshine, that is about all of this nonsense I'm gonna put up with. Can't you see you makin' things worse? Time to scoot that perky little behind outta here.

But intervention comes from a surprising source.

CLARICE

No, Mama. It ain't her fault. She's just doing her job.
(to Dave, Mama)
Give us some time alone. Please.

Mama starts to say something, but thinks better of it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - DAY - AN HOUR LATER

Julie has her gear bag in hand and Dave is escorting her out.

DAVE

I'm worried about her. I've never seen her so...

JULIE

Depressed?

Dave nods sadly as they come to the front door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE (CONT'D)

A little depression is normal in these cases. She's been through a very traumatic experience. Soon as she sees she's making progress, she'll snap out of it. I promise.

DAVE

Thanks for being gentle with her.

JULIE

You're a good husband to want her treated gently, Mr. Johnson.

DAVE

Please call me Dave, Mrs. Sawyer, It doesn't make me feel so old.

JULIE

In that case, it's Miss Sawyer.
(smiles, offers hand)
And I'm Julie.

Dave smiles and reciprocates with a warm handshake. Julie then exits out the front door. But someone is watching.

ANGLE ON LIVING ROOM

Watching from a rocking chair is Mama. And as begin HEARING a tune like Luther Vandross' "HERE AND NOW," we can see that Mama didn't like that exchange one little bit.

DISSOLVE TO:

A MONTAGE OF SCENES

A) INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Another visit by Julie, and this time, she has Clarice working with hand weights, making rowing motions with her arms... keeping her from upper body atrophy.

B) And yet another session with Clarice -- this time raising and lowering her non-injured leg. Hip work. And we begin HEARING Dave's remembering voice again.

DAVE (V.O.)

Something's always confused me about the story of Adam and Eve. God made man first and gave him a whole bunch of instructions. Work, cultivate, protect.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But God never gave Eve any instructions. Not one. It all fell on Adam.

C) EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY

Dave returns to his team and his boys greet him happily, crowding around him, giving him "Bash Brother" high-fives, including one from Brock.

D) Darnell watching the whole scene from inside his beat up old Hooptie (station wagon) parked on the street next to the field. He takes a drag from a joint, and drives on a park.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And ever since then, a man has been defined by the roles he performed. By how good he worked and cultivated. By how good he protected his wife and children.

E) INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

As Dave is transferring Clarice from her wheelchair into their bed, he tries to give her a peck on the cheek, but she's in a testy mood and wants no part of it.

F) INT. BROCK HOUSEMAN'S DOWNTOWN CONDO - NIGHT

Brock comes home from work to discover his phone blinking "13 Messages." He sighs and pushes the "Delete All" button.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The world has always wanted men to be heroes. But somewhere that all changed. I'm not sayin' all the changes were bad. Lord knows, inequality no matter what kind, needs to stay dead and buried.

G) EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Clarice is sitting in her wheelchair on the front porch, reading her "House Beautiful" magazine when Dave pulls up in her beautifully repaired Cadillac. Good as new.

H) INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Dave holds Clarice's hand as the Trauma Doctor we remember from earlier cuts off her cast and removes the exterior rods. Clarice grimaces when she sees her wicked scars and how withered her leg has gotten.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Women started bein' their own heroes. Maybe because their men forgot how to be, or maybe because they didn't want to be protected anymore.

I) EXT. DOWNTOWN SWIM STADIUM - POOL - DAY

At the swim stadium, Bryson wins yet another race and his swim club teammates all do a congratulatory pile on him when he climbs out of the pool.

J) INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Julie pays another P.T. visit. Now the real work begins. Slowly, painfully manipulating Clarice's leg. Mama is hanging out nearby. Can't bear to watch.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

When Clarice and I first married, she treated me like I was her Zulu prince. And I wanted nothing more than to protect and cherish her. But when she started being the real bread-winner, that all began to change.

K) And now Clarice is sitting on an exercise bike slowly pedaling. Then faster. Even faster.

L) Clarice is in her wheelchair in the living room. As Dave and Mama watch, Julie hands her a cane. At first Clarice doesn't want to try it. But Julie gives her an encouraging "you can do it" smile. Finally, Clarice plants the cane in front of her and pulls herself up into a standing position. She can't believe it. She's up on her own two legs.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

See, when the world takes away a man's reasons for bein' a man -- when he loses his self-identity, purpose, passion and self-respect -- somehow things always go wrong. That's one lesson my Granny never prepared me for.

Then she takes a step and a breaks into a broad victory smile. Even Mama has to smile about this. And Dave gives Julie a look of thanks as the SONG and our MONTAGE ENDS.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Dave, carrying Julie's gear, is walking out to her car.

DAVE

Sometimes I never thought I'd see her back on her feet. I don't know how to thank you, Julie.

JULIE

Well, first you can send a "Happy Letter" to my boss, telling him you've never met a more skilled and professional physical therapist.

DAVE

(smiling)

Done.

Julie opens her trunk and Dave stows her gear.

JULIE

Second, Clarice needs several more weeks of therapy and I need the cash, so please don't cut me off.

DAVE

Wouldn't think of it.

Julie climbs into her car. Dave hovers at her door. Julie looks up at him and looks at him sincerely.

JULIE

You know, I've been doing this a long time. Most spouses bail by about the third session. You being so supportive of Clarice is more important to her progress than you realize.

DAVE

Maybe you could write Mama one of them happy letters about me.

She gets a giggle from this and looks at him appreciatively.

JULIE

Well, I gotta pick up my son. See ya, Monday.

She goes to turn her key. A gruesome GRINDING NOISE comes from her engine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE (CONT'D)

Shit!

(catching herself)

Sorry. My frigging battery is
always doing this!

She tries the ignition again. More GRINDING, then a horrible
CLUNKING NOISE. Dave raises his eyebrows.

DAVE

I know a little about cars, and
that ain't no dead battery sound.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - MOMENT LATER

Clarice and Mama are having some tea at the kitchen table
when Dave enters and grabs some keys off the rack.

DAVE

Julie's car's dead. I'm gonna run
her home.

MAMA

How come the girl can't call a tow
truck?

DAVE

Because she's gonna be late to pick
up her boy.

MAMA

Maybe she shoulda thought of that
before comin' over here in that
broke-ass car.

Dave gives Clarice a look like "somebody's about to be hurt."

CLARICE

Dave's right, Mama. We can't make
her late for her boy. Besides,
this girl has been here for us, and
we can return the favor.

Dave gives Clarice a kiss on the cheek, which this time she
receives, and heads for the door. Mama feels slighted.

MAMA

Ain't my driveway gettin' all oilyly
from some little made-in-China car.

CUT TO:

INT. CLARICE'S CADILLAC - TRAVELING - DAY

The sun is sinking as Dave and Julie drive through downtown.

JULIE

I really appreciate this. I've never been late to pick Bryson up. I'm sure he doesn't notice, but I'm trying to keep my record perfect.

At that moment, they pass by a storefront business whose ALARM BELL is ringing. They don't seem to notice. Dave is preoccupied with question he doesn't quite know how to ask.

DAVE

Look, it ain't none of my business, but how did you... I mean, what happened to --

JULIE

How did I end up a single mother?

Dave gives her an apologetic nod.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Believe me, I wish the story was more dramatic than it is. Like I'm widowed because my husband died on Flight 93 or something. Truth is, I'm just a middle-class cliché.

DAVE

What do you mean?

JULIE

Ted and I -- that's my ex-husband -- were the perfect little yuppie couple. We met at SMU, got married after graduation, got our careers started, saved up for a house, and then had Bryson.

(beat, sighing)

But then I found out Ted had this disease called "Ashley Syndrome."

DAVE

Ashley Syndrome? What's that?

JULIE

You get it from being attracted to twenty-two-year-old pole dancers named Ashley.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE
(suddenly getting it)
Oh. Sorry. Didn't mean to pry.

JULIE
It's okay. We've been divorced for two years. I used to chop up cucumbers every night and think of him. I'm down to once a week now.

Which makes Dave chuckle. She enjoys it his laughter. Dave can feel her eyes on him. He points out the window.

DAVE
Is this the swim club?

JULIE
(looking, nodding)
Yeah. Pull in here.

EXT. DOWNTOWN AQUATICS CLUB - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The Cadillac pulls up to a confused-looking Bryson.

INT. CLARICE'S CADILLAC - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Julie rolls down her window for Bryson.

JULIE
Hi, Bry.

Bryson looks in warily. Sees a big black dude driving.

BRYSON
Mom, please tell me this is about car trouble and we're not being kidnapped or something...

Dave bursts out laughing. Julie realizes how this looks.

JULIE
Oh, God. No, Bryson, this is Dave Johnson. His wife is my patient. Remember? The ones in the accident.

BRYSON
Oh, yeah. No offense, sir.

DAVE
(still chuckling)
None taken, little man. You just watchin' out for your mama.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE

(to Bryson)

I'm afraid it's a little worse than the battery this time. Dave offered to give us a lift home.

BRYSON

Cool.

Bryson opens the back door and slides in. Bryson checks out the leather seats as Dave pulls back onto the boulevard.

BRYSON (CONT'D)

Dude, this is a nice ride.

DAVE

Thanks. You shoulda seen it six weeks ago.

BRYSON

Mom, we need something like this instead of that crappy Sentra.

Dave trades a smile with Julie.

DAVE

So your mom says you like King Kong up in that pool.

BRYSON

Mom should stop talking so much.

JULIE

Excuse me.

BRYSON

She thinks I'm gonna be like some Olympic gold medalists someday and I'll get all this endorsement money and then she can mooch off me.

JULIE

It could happen.

DAVE

See, now I'm the wrong man to talk swimmin'. Only freestyle I know about is rappers spittin' rhymes on a street corner. But you stick a basketball or a baseball in my hand I got the skills to pay the bills.

Somehow this has touched a nerve in Bryson. Julie notices.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYSON

I've only played baseball once. My dad took me to the park to play catch a couple years ago.

Dave looks at Bryson in rear-view mirror. The kid is looking out the window. Julie gives Dave a "sorry about that" look.

DAVE

Tell you what. I got this Little League team I coach. Any time your mom wants to bring you by, I can hook you up with a few pointers.

BRYSON

(brightening)

That would be totally ridiculous!

Dave looks at him, a little confused.

JULIE

It means "cool."

DAVE

We practice over at Eastside Field. So you might... stand out a little, if you know what I'm sayin'.

BRYSON

Guess I'll have to work on my tan.

Dave gives Julie a smile. Smart kid. She should be proud.

CUT TO:

EXT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGLAOW - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Cadillac pulls up to a clean, modest little house on lower middle-class street full of similar homes. As Bryson gets out with his swim bag, Julie follows Dave to the trunk. When he opens it, she quickly grabs her gear bag.

DAVE

See, now the way it works is, the man's s'posed to carry the bags.

JULIE

Except when the woman needs to show she isn't totally pathetic.

DAVE

I insist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

After a long beat, she relents. Hands him the gear.

TRACKING ANGLE TO FRONT PORCH

As they cross to the house, Bryson is already opening the front door. He calls back to Dave.

BRYSON
See ya, Coach.

DAVE
Keep it tight, Bryson.

Bryson scampers inside as Dave and Julie get to the porch.

JULIE
Soon as I get inside, I'll call a
tow, get my car out of your hair.

DAVE
Look, I know a guy who runs a
repair shop. Why don't you let me
get him to take a look.

JULIE
(suddenly concerned)
That's really sweet, but I can't
really afford a big repair bill --

DAVE
Trust me. This guy owes me.
(offering his hand)
And Clarice and I owe you.

After a long beat, she shakes on it reluctantly.

JULIE
Thank you. I mean it.

It's awkward for a beat. She leans in and gives him a grateful kiss on the cheek, then enters and closes her door. Dave stands there for a moment feeling strangely exhilarated.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - GARAGE - NIGHT - LATER THAT NIGHT

TIGHT ON wheel blocks, and WIDEN to see Julie's car has been pushed into Dave's garage and is up on Jacks. Dave slides out from underneath on a dolly, holding on to some engine part. He's got grease on his hands and face.

CUT TO:

EXT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGLAOW - NIGHT - EVEN LATER

With a little grease still on his face, Dave is at Julie's front door. He places Julie's car keys in a mailbox hanging near the door. And tucks a note in the screen door.

TRACKING ANGLE TO CAR

Dave crosses back to the street where Brock's Beamer is waiting with the engine running. As he does, we now see that Julie's Sentra is parked in her driveway.

INT. BROCK'S BEAMER - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dave opens the door and slides in next to Brock who is dressed in what looks like pajamas and a tee-shirt.

BROCK
That must be one special physical therapist to interrupt my beauty sleep like this.

DAVE
She is.

BROCK
You think she's seein' anyone?

DAVE
Just drive, fool.

Brock shrugs it off with a smile and guns the accelerator.

EXT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGLAOW - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The porch light comes on and the door opens. Julie finds the note just as the Beamer is driving off. Confused, she opens the note and we read it with her over her shoulder.

DAVE (V.O.)
Julie... I didn't want to wake you. All you needed was a new solenoid, so I was able to fix it myself. Hope it won't give you any trouble for awhile. Blessings... Dave.

As she watches the Beamer disappear around a corner, Julie gives a stunned smile that just says "wow." And we'll HEAR the sound of church BELLS RINGING.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

The service has not yet begun, but the pews are filling up as Bishop Wilkes -- looking a little older and wiser than when we last saw him -- is down front greeting his parishioners.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Clarice looks stunning in her best church dress and hat as she slowly enters with the aid her cane. Dave, in his best suit, is at her side. Mama, also looking lovely, follows behind, AD LIBBING greetings with acquaintances like a mother hen. Michelle, already there with her handsome husband TODD, stands up in her pew and gasps when she sees Clarice walking.

MICHELLE

Lord Jesus, I'm having a vision!

She rushes over and embraces Clarice, and they both have to work hard to hold back their tears.

CLARICE

Hi, sister girl.

MICHELLE

Look at you! Walkin' like Black
Miss America down the runway to get
your crown. We need some praise
Jesus music up in this place!

Bishop Wilkes crosses over to Dave who is standing back from the happy reunion. Greets him with a warm handshake.

BISHOP WILKES

Wonderful to see you in church,
Dave. Sister Wilkes and I been
prayin' for you every day.

DAVE

I know Mama Clark been givin' you
the four-one-one since the
accident.

BISHOP WILKES

Oh, yes. But we haven't just been
prayin' since the accident. I been
prayin' for you since the day I
married you and Clarice.

(winking at them)

Anybody I tie the knot for gets on
my special list.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Which takes Dave aback. Bishop notices the pain in his eyes.

BISHOP

I hope you know we're always here
for you. Twenty-four-seven. If
God's family is only for Sundays,
then we a pretty flimsy family.

DAVE

(thinking about this)
That's straight, Bishop. Thanks.

Dave watches as the Bishop crosses off, and we begin HEARING
a kicking Gospel tune, perhaps something like Kirk Franklin's
"BLESSING IN THE STORM" which will carry us through:

SERIES OF MOS SHOTS

- A) A vibrant church choir in their colorful robes in all
their wonderful glory, singing the song we're hearing.
 - B) A young girl singing a solo in the middle of the number.
 - C) Michelle and Todd lifting their hands in praise as the
song continues.
 - D) Bishop Wilkes preaching the word with authority. He wipes
his brow and his tears as he preaches. That's what happens
when the Holy Ghost comes over a prophet.
 - E) Mama speaks back the Bishop as he makes a point she likes.
 - F) Clarice looks up at the cross at the front of the church.
Being in church does her heart good.
 - F) Dave staring straight ahead, thinking. Distracted.
- And as the SONG CONCLUDES, we'll...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - DAY - LATER

As services are letting out, Dave escorts Clarice and Mama
into the sunshine where they AD LIB well wishes with several
parishioners. Colorful, eccentric, Carmen McAtee spots them
and crosses over excitedly.

CARMEN

My Lord, can I get a witness over
here? Look at you, Clarice. It's
good to see you in church, sister.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

Hi, Carmen. Nice to see you, too.

As Carmen engages Clarice, we'll ADJUST to FIND Dave. He turns and spots something that gets his attention.

DAVE'S POV

A Caucasian WOMAN with her back turned to us. From this angle, her curvy build and hairstyle look exactly like somebody we've seen before. She's just cleaned up in a Sunday dress and high-heels.

BACK TO SCENE

A smile grows on Dave's face. He can't believe it. He taps the woman on the shoulder.

DAVE

Julie?

The woman spins around. It's not Julie -- not even close. In fact, she's a little ugly for somebody so shapely.

WOMAN

Excuse me?

DAVE

(surprised, disappointed)

Sorry. I thought you were somebody else.

Looking for a quick escape, Dave sees Michelle's husband, Todd, and takes the opportunity to get real friendly. ADJUST to find Clarice and Mama. Dave's little *faux pas* hasn't been lost on them. They trade a look, before Clarice puts on a smile for another well-wisher who has come over to greet her.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Mama has prepared one of her traditional Sunday Dinners with all the fixings -- turkey, stuffing and sweet potato pie. Only there's not much talk going on as they eat in silence.

CLARICE

That was some real "soul food" we got in church today. We need to start goin' more often.

But Dave hasn't really heard her. His mind is elsewhere.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Pass them Butter Beans, baby.

Clarice silently pushes the bowl of beans his direction. She can feel Mama's eyes on her, but chooses not to look.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

That evening, Dave is brushing his teeth, while Clarice is rubbing the scars on her leg with some Vitamin E cream.

Clarice takes a deep breath for the courage to say something that has been on her mind.

CLARICE

This scares me, David.

DAVE

What scares you?

CLARICE

This. The silence between us. It's like we're a couple of ghosts floating around this place.

DAVE

I don't like it either.

CLARICE

I know I been really distant with you since the accident. It's just I didn't know how to deal with what I was feelin.' There were some days I wished I could just stay asleep and never wake up.

DAVE

I know.

CLARICE

But what scares me even more than that is you pullin' away from me.

Their eyes meet for a long moment. Dave doesn't know what to say. And his lack of a response speaks volumes to Clarice.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

I want to talk to someone about it.

DAVE

You mean like a counselor?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

Would you do that for me? For us?

Dave sits next to her on the bed and pulls her into his arms.

DAVE

Sure, baby.

CLARICE

I just want us to go back to the way it was before the accident. Before it all got messed up.

But as Dave continues to hold her, the doubt in his eyes says things have been messed up for a lot longer than she thinks.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY

We'll CLOSE ON a painting which depicts a rather-dark complexioned Jesus, and then we'll PAN ACROSS several framed diplomas with a lot of "PHD" this and "MARRIAGE & FAMILY" that and all bearing a name: "CARMEN MCATEE." And then we'll FIND a very uncomfortable Dave and Clarice sitting on a leather couch across from Carmen. She has a clipboard on her lap and is wearing an especially colorful lady's dashiki.

CARMEN

I want to give both of you some love for having the courage to come in today. It means you want to make your marriage work. And frankly that isn't easy these days.

Dave and Clarice both nod, awkwardly.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Clarice, let's start with you. Why don't you give your view of what's going on in your relationship.

CLARICE

Well, since the accident I know I've been depressed and we haven't talked very much. It just seems like our whole marriage Dave was always Johnny on the spot with me. But lately, he seems distracted... like he's somewhere else.

Dave just stares at her. Can't believe what he's hearing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

How can you say that? I been by your side through this whole thing.

CLARICE

I'm not talking about physically. I'm talking about emotionally.

DAVE

Well, maybe somebody's gettin' in the way of that.

CARMEN

What do you mean by that, Dave.

Dave glances at Clarice and she flashes him a "don't go there" look. Dave pulls back.

DAVE

Never mind.

This little exchange wasn't lost on Carmen.

CARMEN

You know, this works better if we're all honest with each another.

Dave looks at Clarice. This time she doesn't meet his eyes.

DAVE

It's her Mama. She been livin' with us since Clarice got out the hospital. If I'm "somewhere else," maybe it's 'cause I'm trying to get away from her bein' all up in my grill about everything.

CLARICE

That's not true.

DAVE

Yes, it is, Boo. No matter what I do, I can't please the woman. And it ain't just since this accident. It's been our whole marriage.

CLARICE

Well, maybe we should talk about why Mama is displeased. Like your lack of discipline when it comes to takin' care of business with your building maintenance company.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

It ain't no building maintenance company. Don't make it out like it's better than it is. I'm a glorified janitor. If I'm always buggin' over it, it's 'cause I hate every damn minute of it.

CARMEN

Dave, if you hate it so much, why keep doing it?

DAVE

Ask her.

Clarice looks at Carmen hoping she'll be an ally in this.

CLARICE

He was a high school coach making twenty-six-thousand dollars a year. If we were ever gonna be able to move up in the world, he needed to be more ambitious. So we had him start his own company.

CARMEN

Who is we?

CLARICE

Us. Him and me.

Dave just rolls his eyes on that one.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Unless you Shaquille O'Neal, there ain't room for fun and games for a black man. A black man has to work ten times harder just to get to the starting line.

DAVE

Even if it means havin' to give up what you love?

CLARICE

Yes. Where were you goin' with it, David? You were a junior varsity coach for ten years. I'm sorry to say this, baby, but ain't nobody at the U.T. was blowin' up your phone to come coach the Longhorns.

This one hurts. Dave looks away from her, ashamed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARMEN

Dave, what was it you loved best about coaching?

DAVE

(fighting his emotions)
 Bein' with them boys. Helpin' them get past the curveballs life was throwin' at 'em. Helpin' them believe they could be somebody.

CARMEN

You mean, kind of like what a daddy is supposed to do with a son?

Dave looks up at her sharply. A light comes on for him.

DAVE

Yeah, just like that.

But now Clarice is rolling her eyes.

CLARICE

Oh, please. Let's not drag out that tired old topic.

CARMEN

What topic is that?

Clarice seems frozen by the question.

DAVE

Go ahead. Say it, Clarice.

Another long beat before it all comes gushing out.

CLARICE

Fine. You wanna talk about it? I know exactly what you after. Every time, you put your hands on me, I know what you want. You want babies. Family.

DAVE

What's wrong with that?

CLARICE

Because we been over it a million times. It's not what I want. I'm not ready to give up all the places I wanna go in life.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Besides, look at us, trying to keep our marriage together. You think a baby's gonna solve our problems?

Dave looks at her for a wounded moment.

DAVE

I used to. But now I don't know.

This is tough thing for Clarice to hear.

CARMEN

Okay, I know this is painful, but I think we're getting somewhere.

But both Dave and Clarice's faces say they are not so sure.

CUT TO:

INT. CLARICE'S CADILLAC - TRAVELING - DAY

Dave and Clarice ride along in their own raw spaces, not saying anything. Some NEWSTALK SHOW, playing on the radio, is suddenly interrupted by a long TONE, and then:

ANNOUNCER (OVER RADIO)

This is a test of the emergency alert system. This is only a test. If this had been an actual emergency, an official message would follow.

But neither Dave or Clarice seems to have noticed.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DUGOUT - DAY

Brock is in the dugout speaking on his cell phone while Dave is hitting infield-outfield practice to the boys in the b.g.

BROCK

Thank you, ma'am. I'll let him know.

Brock hangs up his phone and gives a sigh.

ANGLE ON DAVE - MOMENT LATER

Brock sidles up to Dave just as he hits a long outfield fly.

DAVE

What his mama say?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROCK

He's harassing the kid now. She's afraid to let him come to practice.

DAVE

(beat, frustrated)

What's that fool tryin' to do?
Guarantee his kid turns out just like him?

He calls out to Jaylen in the outfield.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Jaylen, move to second. Carlos ain't comin.

Just then, Brock notices something o.s., chuckles.

BROCK

Either somebody missed the turn to the good side of the tracks or we got company.

Dave follows his line of sight to:

THEIR POV

Smiling Julie and Bryson striding toward us, waving, calling.

BRYSON

Hey, Coach!

BACK TO SCENE

If it's possible for a black man to blanche, Dave does.

DAVE

Lord almighty, I never thought they'd actually come.

BROCK

That's the physical therapist?

Dave nods. Brock checks her out -- bumper to bumper.

BROCK (CONT'D)

You know, I'm feelin' a little leg cramp. You think she'd rub it out?

DAVE

(irritated)

Put your tongue back in your mouth, fool.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANOTHER ANGLE

As Julie and Bryson arrive at home plate.

JULIE

Hi, Dave. I hope you don't mind,
but he wouldn't take "maybe next"
week for an answer.

DAVE

No, that's cool. That's great.
Bryson, glad you could make it.

Brock quickly bumps past Dave, offering his hand.

BROCK

You must be Julie. Dave and
Clarice talk about you all the
time. I'm Brock, assistant coach
and Dave's best friend. I'm sure
he's told you all about me.

JULIE

(blankly)

No... sorry. But nice to meet you
anyway.

Just then fat Marcus calls out to Dave from first base.

MARCUS

Yo, coach. Who's the little soda
cracker?

Dave offers Julie an apologetic look, then calls to the boys.

DAVE

This is Bryson Sawyer. He's gonna
be workin' out with us today.

BRYSON

(trying out his cool)

What's crackin' ya'll?

VARIOUS REACTIONS

Around the diamond -- from stunned to skeptical to jaws
hanging open.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY - LATER

Bryson is now standing at second base, wearing a glove,
looking ready for action, but unsure of what to do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

All right, Bryson. I'm gonna hit you a ground ball and then you go to first with it.

BRYSON

Gotcha, Coach.

Dave hits a roller to Bryson. Dave hits it so softly, it dies on the dirt about five feet in front of him. Bryson walks over, picks it up and tosses it to the first baseman.

DAVE

Good pick up, Bryson! Way to read the ball!

Bryson looks a little disappointed and some of the boys are snickering in their gloves.

DESHAWN

Yo, Coach, what is this? Tee-ball? My 'lil sister could have made that play and she blind in one eye.

Which ignites a round of CACKLES across the diamond. Dave promptly hits a scorching line-drive at Deshawn, which he has to duck in order to avoid getting his taken off.

DAVE

Maybe we should try out your 'lil sister at shortstop.

Deshawn gives Dave a worried look, then turns to Bryson

DESHAWN

Nice play, little white dude.

ANGLE ON STANDS

Julie is watching and her concern turns into a smile.

BACK TO SCENE

DAVE

Okay, Bryson, infield fly.

Dave hits a tall pop fly out to second base. As Bryson tries to get a read on it, he moves one way, then another, then turns in a circle trying to keep his eye on the ball. Finally he sticks up his glove and the ball falls right on -- HIS HEAD. It dazes him momentarily, but he recovers quickly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYSON

I'm okay. I'm okay.
 (looking around confused)
 Are there like millions of gnats
 flying around my head?

Dave and Brock exchange concerned looks.

DAVE

Hustle in here. Coach Brock gonna
 break open the ice pack.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY - EVEN LATER

Bryson is in the on-deck circle with a bat in his hand. Brock has just finished throwing batting practice to Darius. Dave plops a batting helmet down on his Bryson's head, smiling.

DAVE

We don't any more of them gnats.

Bryson reciprocates with a smile.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Okay, get in there. Keep your eye
 on the ball. Level swing.

Bryson step in the batter's box. Out in the field, lots of AD LIB CHATTER and RAZZING from the players: "Hey batter-batter-batter" with "Yo, Twinkle Toes" in there somewhere.

BROCK

Here we go, Bryson. Nothing fancy.

Brock winds up and fires the ball to the catcher, Marcus. Bryson doesn't even get the bat off his shoulder, causing a chorus of BOOS from the field. Jaylen calls from second base.

JAYLEN

What you waitin' for, batter? An
 invitation in the mail?

BRYSON

I thought it was outside.

MARCUS

Boy, that was so down the middle
 Amtrak coulda sold seats on it.

Brock winds up and fires in another pitch. This time it is outside and Bryson swings right through it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Now that was outside.

DARIUS
Yo, Twinkle Toes, where coach find
you -- cheerleader camp?

ANGLE ON STANDS

Now Julie is concerned, and biting her nails nervously.

BACK TO SCENE

This time Brock does the reprimanding, glaring at Darius.

BROCK
Hey, Darius, wasn't that you who
missed the cutoff throw Saturday
and threw the ball into the stands?
I'll bet that old lady still has a
bump on her forehead.

Now Darius is the target of derision and trash talk, like
"Oh, boy, he tagged you straight up," etc.

DAVE
Let's go, Bryson, you can do this.
Focus on the ball like it's the
finish line in that pool.

Bryson gives him a nod, steps back into the box. Brock steps
onto on the mound, winds up and we'll go into SLOW-MOTION as:

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) The ball comes sailing in.
- B) Bryson narrows his eyes.
- C) Here comes his bat.
- D) Here comes the ball.
- E) The bat impacts with the ball with a loud CRACK.
- F) There goes the ball. A rocket shot.
- G) Marcus throws off his catchers mask, astonished look on
his face.
- H) Darius can clearly be seen mouthing the word "shit."
- I) Brock follows the trajectory with his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J) Julie has her hand over her mouth, holding her breath.
 K) Dave, with a very pleased look on his face, as
 L) The ball clears the low fence in right field. Home run.
 We'll come back to REAL TIME as Julie cheers from the stands.

JULIE
 Whoo-hoo! Bryson! Put a hurt on
 that ball!

Dave and Brock rush over and give Bryson excited high-fives.

DAVE
 Now that's what I'm talking about!

BROCK
 You went yard, dude! I can't even
 go yard!

But it's his peers who really count. Very black Marcus offers his hand to very white Bryson.

MARCUS
 You for real, dawg.

BRYSON
 Thanks, man.

A moment that makes Dave and Brock very proud.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY - SOMETIME LATER

Practice is over. In the dugout, several of the players are chatting quietly with Bryson. He's the man. And we'll ADJUST to FIND Dave and Brock stowing equipment near home plate as Julie crosses to them.

JULIE
 I can't tell you both how much this
 meant to him today.
 (looking at Dave)
 And to me.

A look not lost on Dave. Brock looks up at the sky, sighs.

BROCK
 You know, Julie, it's starting to
 get dark, and this isn't the safest
 neighborhood. Why don't you let me
 walk you and Bryson to your car.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE

Uh, sure... okay.
 (looking again at Dave)
 Thanks again, Dave.

DAVE

(long beat, meaning it)
 My pleasure.

BROCK

Julie, I was thinking... if you
 ever need to reach us...

As Brock leads Julie away, he hands her a business card.

BROCK (CONT'D)

... in case Bryson wants to come to
 practice again. Or if you ever just
 want to talk about, you know...
 baseball... you can always give me
 a ring on my cell phone.

As Dave watches them go, shaking his head, Brock turns and
 gives him a really annoying wink.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN HOUSING PROJECT - HALLWAY - NIGHT - MOMENT

We're MOVING through a trash-strewn corridor and FIND a beat-
 up-looking door. Nasty-sounding RAP plays somewhere o.s. A
 BLACK HAND knocks on the door. After a few beats, it opens
 and a red-eyed Darnell stands there, shirt off, tatted up.
 Behind him, marijuana smoke hangs in the air and we can see
 the "ho" we saw earlier. She buttons her blouse, adjusts her
 skirt so as not to show off the goods.

DARNELL

What the hell you want?

ANGLE INCLUDING

Dave and he has a loaded-for-bear look in his eye.

DAVE

If you wanna beef, G, then let's
 get it on. But don't kill your
 boy's future 'cause you got a
 problem with me.

DARNELL

Ain't none of your goddamn business
 what I do with my boy.
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARNELL (CONT'D)

You ain't nothin' but a minstrel show. Go put on some shoe-polish, nigger. Your white's showing.

DAVE

How you gonna hate on a brother just for gettin' his shit together?

Darnell has no answer for this. Just keeps staring.

DAVE (CONT'D)

You better knock that victim chip off your shoulder or someday Carlos gonna end up where ya'll did.

DARNELL

(eyes narrowing)

Your punk-ass would know all about that, wouldn't it?

DAVE

When you gonna stop blamin' the world for not punchin' your college ticket, Darnell? Nobody forced you to sling no crack. That ain't nobody else's shit. It's all on you.

This bites. Hard. Darnell's eyes are cold and hard.

DARNELL

Fuck you.

So that's how it is. Dave shakes his head.

DAVE

From now on, I'm pickin' Carlos up for practice. And you better stay the hell out of the way.

Dave turns walks away from Darnell.

DARNELL

Next time you come up in here, nigger, come strapped 'cause I'm gonna drop your ass.

Dave never looks back. Darnell slams his door.

EXT. DOWNTOWN HOUSING PROJECT - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

A three-story housing unit. All broken glass and pimped-up rides out front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave exits through a door with a sign: "NO ANIMALS ALLOWED."
He trades looks with a young black crew on the stoop. They
look at him like "who's this alien mofo?"

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

When Dave enters, Clarice and Mama are clearing the dinner
dishes. Dave and Clarice trade a look which says they aren't
talking to each other. Dave's a man of few words right now.

MAMA

You want me to warm you up a plate.

DAVE

No thanks.

Dave's cell phone RINGS. He looks at the caller ID.

DAVE (CONT'D)

It's work. I'll take it outside.

As Dave exits, a slight look of alarm comes over Clarice.

JULIE (OVER PHONE)(V.O.)

Dave, forgive me for intruding...

CUT TO:

INT. JULIE'S NISSAN - TRAVELING - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Bryson has his head jacked into an Ipod and is getting his
dance on, as Julie drives and talks on her cell phone.

JULIE

(into phone)

But this kid is higher than a kite,
and he's not gonna give me any
peace until I ask you something.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. JOHNSON HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Dave paces as he talks on his cell phone.

DAVE

Ask me what?

JULIE

He says he owes you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Tell him he can pay me back by
getting to the Olympics someday.

JULIE (OVER PHONE)

I don't think that'll be enough.

In the car, Bryson pulls off his earphones, grabs the phone.

BRYSON

Coach, after your game Saturday,
can you come to the Swim Stadium?

DAVE

How come?

BRYSON

You taught me how to hit a
baseball. Now I gotta teach you
how to freestyle.

Julie grabs the phone back, rolls her eyes at Bryson.

JULIE

So what do you say, Coach?

DAVE

(chuckling)

I say the boy could sell fried
chicken at a family reunion.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Clarice has come to the kitchen window and is looking out.

HER POV

While we can't make out Dave's conversation through the
window, he seems to be chatting happily with someone.

BACK TO SCENE

Clarice turns and sees Mama watching her from the doorway.

MAMA

I don't know what that man has on
his brain right now, baby, but
livin' with your raggedy ass daddy
all them years... I got a guess.

Mama exits to the living room. Clarice doesn't respond.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRIVATE MASSAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Dave is prone on his stomach on a massage table in a room lit by candles and accented with SOFT, SENSUAL MUSIC (something like "SEXUAL HEALING"). We TRAVEL from his contented face along his side to his hind parts, covered by a small towel.

ANOTHER ANGLE

His back is covered with oil, and now petite, yet strong WHITE FEMALE HANDS begin running down his naked back in a suggestive (but shot very discreet) way. Her fingers linger at his towel line teasingly. We catch a glimpse of a short, sexy silk robe. Dave moans as she whispers in his ear. Dave then turns over on his back and looks up at us.

HIS POV

The sexy woman is Julie. She smiles seductively and begins to loosen the belt of her robe.

BACK TO SCENE

Dave closes his eyes, receiving some mysterious pleasure.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT - SAME TIME

We're CLOSE ON DAVE'S face and he is being shaken awake, and we WIDEN to see Clarice is the one doing the shaking.

DAVE

What's wrong? Why you shakin' me?

CLARICE

You was moanin'. I thought you was havin' a heart attack.

DAVE

I... I musta been dreamin.'

Clarice lifts the sheets, looks south of his stomach. A hint of disgust glints in her eyes.

CLARICE

Yeah, I can see what kind of dream you was havin'.

DAVE

(busted, embarrassed)
Go back to sleep.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He turns his back to cover his arousal. She stares at him for a long moment, then it hits her. She turns to see a cell phone on her night stand. Silently, she opens the phone and pushes a button.

POV - PHONE

We're looking at the "CALL LOG" screen and the most recent call on the list is from: "SAWYER, JULIE."

BACK TO SCENE

Clarice stares at the screen for a long beat, then quietly returns the phone to the night stand, falls into her pillow.

ANGLE ABOVE BED

The two of them, their backs turned to each other, both awake. Both thinking, worrying.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HASTINGS PROPERTIES & REAL ESTATE - DAY

Clarice, dressed sharply in an attractive pants suit, enters with the aid of her cane. When her co-workers see her, they begin to applaud and many offer hugs and AD LIBBED greetings. Michelle is waiting for her at the end with open arms.

MICHELLE

Girl, you a sight for sore eyes.

Clarice offers her a modest, grateful smile.

CLARICE

Time to get back to work.

INT. HASTINGS REAL ESTATE - CLARICE'S OFFICE - DAY - LATER

Michelle is excitedly bringing Clarice up to speed. Clarice watches out the window as she listens.

MICHELLE

(handing her files)

So I managed to get the Hodsons, Lowrys and Svensons lined up to see properties this weekend.

(saving best for last)

And check this. The Reids made an offer through another agent and it fell out of escrow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But Clarice doesn't react. Michelle looks puzzled. She pulls up a chair and locks in her girlfriend radar.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Okay, girl, where is your head at?

Clarice turns and looks at her blankly.

CLARICE

I'm sorry... ?

MICHELLE

I just told you the Reids are still in play, and you look like you on Mars. What is goin' on?

CLARICE

(trying to cover)

It's nothing. I'm fine.

MICHELLE

Don't make a sister go Oprah on your ass.

Clarice takes a deep breath, then decides to give it up. The burden mists up in her eyes.

CLARICE

I think Dave is steppin' out on me.

MICHELLE

(gasping, disbelief)

Oh, honey, are you sure?

CLARICE

I can see it in his eyes.

MICHELLE

Hmm-hmm. It's always in them eyes.

CLARICE

I don't know what to do. I know what Mama would tell me to do. What she herself did... walk out and not look back. I feel like throwin' up just goin' there.

Michelle moves in closer to her.

MICHELLE

Now you listen to me. I ain't lettin' you Wait to Exhale on me, girl. Dave's too good a man to lose.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Last thing you wanna do is
something you can't take back.

(beat, soberly)

Trust me, I know.

CLARICE

Don't tell me Todd be tappin' on
something.

MICHELLE

(hanging head)

No. It was me who was tappin.'

CLARICE

I had no idea, Michelle.

MICHELLE

Ain't somethin' a sister wants in
the church bulletin. The reason
I'm tellin' you to hang onto your
marriage no matter what is because
that's what my man did for me. I
was out gettin' my freak on, and he
could have kicked me to the curb.

(hangs head, tears coming)

But he didn't. He prayed that God
would fill the need I had in me
that was causing me to stray. He
prayed for his prodigal wife to
come home. And for the forgiveness
he would need if I ever did.

CLARICE

And did he? Did he forgive you?

MICHELLE

It was hard. It took a long time.
But that's a secret about how God
works. He makes possible what the
world says is impossible. My
husband didn't give up on me, and I
don't ever want to sacrifice his
heart like that again.

Clarice looks at her for a long moment, tears welling up.

CLARICE

I'm glad for you, Michelle. But I
don't think I have it in me to do
what Todd did.

OFF Michelle's worried look --

CUT TO:

INT. DAVE'S PANEL VAN - DAY

Dave is parked on the street out front of the Downtown Aquatics Club. He watches as families enter the stadium. He sighs and starts his engine, but changes his mind, turns off the key. He screws up his courage and opens his door.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Electricity in the air. Packed bleachers. Bryson comes out of the locker room in his brightly colored warm-ups and makes his way over to wear Julie and some of the other parents are waiting with his teammates.

JULIE

Babe, you sure you're not taking on too much, swimming five events?

BRYSON

It's regionals. Coach needs me.

Julie pulls him in for a hug and a hair-tousle.

DAVE (O.S.)

Hope you don't mind a little extra pressure.

Julie and Bryson spin to see Dave standing there.

BRYSON

No way! Coach, you made it!

DAVE

You swimmin' for the gold, young man. I wouldn't miss it.

Now the color drains from Bryson's face, replaced by dread.

BRYSON

I'm not feeling so good. Excuse me... I don't wanna hurl on you.

He rushes off to the locker room. Dave looks concerned.

JULIE

(not to worry)
He does that all the time.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY - LATER

Dave and Julie are sitting together in the packed stands. We HEAR the DRONE of an AIRPLANE overhead.

OUR POV

A single-engine plane trailing an advertising banner reading:
"THE GREATEST TRAGEDY IS INDIFFERENCE... THE RED CROSS."

BACK TO SCENE

But Dave and Julie are too engrossed in the meet to notice.

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)
Fifty freestyle. Heat seven.
Swimmers to the blocks.

They watch excitedly as Bryson makes his way to his lane. Dave yells out his support.

DAVE
Yo, Bryson, remember you King King
up in this pool!

Some of the parents around them stare at Dave, annoyed. He may be a little over the top, but Julie appreciates it.

JULIE
You know, his father has never once
seen him swim.

DAVE
His father's a stupid man.

JULIE
I'm afraid Bryson won't be able to
look you in the eye if he doesn't
place in this race.

DAVE
Please, this boy does not need to
impress me. He's already a
champion just bein' here.

JULIE
I know that. But try convincing
him.

And the sound of the STARTER GUN will take us into:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) We're UNDER WATER as Bryson hits the pool and we'll track his progress from this angle for several strokes.

B) And now we're at the edge of the pool looking across all eight lanes and watching the swimmers. Bryson and another boy are just a nose ahead of the pack.

C) Dave and Julie are watching breathless as parents all around CHEERING and SCREAMING.

D) UNDER WATER, Bryson hits the turn wall one stroke behind the leader and a few strokes ahead of the next best swimmer. Bryson's flip turn is perfect.

E) Now we're half way back to the finish line and Bryson begins to turn on the afterburners. He catches the leader.

F) CLOSE ON FROM ABOVE Bryson and the leader. Nose and nose.

G) Dave is now cheering with the rest of the parents, but Julie has her eyes closed. Can't bear to watch.

H) At the wall, it's a photo finish for Bryson and the other swimmer. Too close for us to call.

ANNOUNCER (OVER P.A.)
 Judge's ruling... winner heat
 seven... by two-one-hundredths of a
 second... Bryson Sawyer.

I) In the stands, Dave and Julie go bananas, hugging spontaneously before pulling apart, looking slightly awkward.

ANGLE BY POOL

A proud Coach Spinello is already wrapping Bryson in a towel.

COACH SPINELLO
 You got these high school boys
 looking over their shoulders. No
 mercy, right Kiddo?

BRYSON
 No mercy.

Julie and Dave rush up. Coach looks at Julie, dead serious.

COACH SPINELLO
 You need to start thinking Junior
 Olympics for this boy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE

I will.

The coach crosses off. Dave pulls Bryson into a bear hug.

DAVE

Now that's what I'm talkin' about!
Boy, you were off the chain!

BRYSON

Thanks, Coach. But I still got
four more races this afternoon.

DAVE

First, call me "Dave." I ain't the
coach today. You the coach.
(holding his chest)
And if you expect me to sit through
four more races like that, I'm
gonna need me some heart pills.

Bryson is beaming. So is Julie.

BRYSON

Mom, coach says I need to carbo-
load before my next heat. Can Dave
go with us to Grazianos?

JULIE

Honey, I'm sure Dave's has a busy --

Dave cuts her off with a hand on her shoulder.

DAVE

I'd love to go.
(puts arm around Bryson)
All the carbs you can eat. My
treat.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN PIZZA PARLOR - DAY - LATER

We're TIGHT ON some n.d. video game. Lots of BEEPS and BELLS, and WIDEN to see Bryson and a few of the other swimmers in their warm ups, dropping quarters in a wall full of machines in a pizza joint with a family atmosphere.

ANGLE ON TABLE

Dave and Julie are chatting freely, picking at the last slivers of a pizza together in a quiet booth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE

So if you loved being a high school coach so much, why did you quit?

Dave looks at her for a long moment.

DAVE

You the second person who's asked me that this week, and I don't have a good answer.

JULIE

Well, if you ask me, life is too short not to follow your bliss.

DAVE

My what?

JULIE

Bliss. Your thing. Your passion. The one thing you do better than anything else. I've always believed you should do what you love, and not worry about the money. If you do what you were born to do, the money will take care of itself.

(remembering something)

Course, that hasn't exactly panned out with this cheap-frigging-HMO I work for, but you get my point.

Dave has to chuckle at this. She gazes at him long moment.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Dave, I hope you won't take this the wrong way, but as a single woman, I'm sort of an expert.

DAVE

On what?

JULIE

Good men. The "'Til Death Do Us Part" type. The protect and cherish type. Me and my single friends sit around bitching about how all the guys like you are already taken.

(sighing sadly)

Clarice is a lucky woman. She has no idea how hard it is find a man like you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave thinks a beat, then ventures into taboo territory.

DAVE

Sometimes I wish I wasn't... taken.

Julie looks at him for a long moment.

JULIE

What are you saying?

DAVE

I'm not sure. But I need to find out.

They look into each other's eyes and the implications hang in the air. A door CHIME RINGING draws their attention to:

ANGLE ON FRONT DOOR

Brock just entering in his best Saturday casual. As he crosses into the restaurant he does a double-take when he sees Dave and Julie looking at him from a private booth.

BACK TO SCENE

Dave hangs his head. The moment is over. Brock walks up to their table, surprised, confused.

BROCK

Dave, what are you doing here?

DAVE

I could ask you the same thing.

BROCK

I live across the street.

Oh, right. Dave and Julie trade awkward looks. Julie jumps up, trying to put her best cover on things.

JULIE

Nice to see you again, Brock.
Bryson invited Dave to his meet.
Team ordered too many pizzas and we
needed an extra stomach.

BROCK

Oh. Cool.

JULIE

I'm gonna go check on the boys.
Dave, thanks again for coming. It
was really great of you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She offers her hand, and he receives it. It all looks very harmless, but their touch lingers for longer than it should. Then Julie crosses off. Brock eyes Dave suspiciously.

BROCK

You wanna tell me what the hell's goin' on here, brother.

Dave doesn't like his tone, but doesn't want to play games.

DAVE

Don't get all self-righteous with me. Not with the way you was droolin' all over her at practice the other day.

BROCK

Hey, time out. That's not the point. I get to drool all I want. I'm not the one who's married.

DAVE

What are you -- my mama?

BROCK

(beat, that hurt)

No, I'm the guy who's supposed to have my best friend's back, and I don't want to see him do something stupid and screw up his life.

But Dave is numb, even to this.

DAVE

My life's already screwed up. I appreciate your concern, but I don't want your advice on this.

As Dave crosses off, Brock watches him sadly, wounded.

TRACKING ANGLE

FOLLOW Dave over to Julie and Bryson at the video games.

BRYSON

Hey, Dave, you want to get your brains blown out in Neo Geo?

DAVE

(chuckling)

I'll have to pass on that. And I'm gonna need a raincheck on the rest of your races this afternoon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRYSON

How come?

DAVE

(looking at Julie)

I got me some stuff to work out.

BRYSON

That's cool. How about next week?
I got an AAU meet. I'll bring my
gold from today to show you.

DAVE

I'd like that, son.

Dave ruffles his hair. He gives Julie one last look, before exiting.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Dave enters somberly. The curtains are drawn shut and the only light comes from lit several candles. Dave lays his cell phone on the nightstand, then sits on the edge of his bed and puts his head in his hands.

CLARICE (O.S.)

You didn't notice the candles.

Dave looks up to see Clarice in sexy nothing of a nighty, poised on her cane near her vanity. Dave is not only surprised to see her -- but surprised to see her like this.

DAVE

Reesie...

CLARICE

(best come-hither voice)

Remember the candles when we first
got married? They were always my
signal. "Green light, baby. I'm
gonna whip somethin' on you."

Clarice begins to limp slowly toward Dave with her cane, her wicked scars more visible than ever on her bare leg. Dave looks at her, deeply conflicted.

DAVE

Are you sure you wanna do this?

She gingerly climbs on the bed and begins rubbing his shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

I sent Mama on an errand. We need this. I think it's why we arguin' so much. We need to get back to the lovin' part of our marriage.

DAVE

What about your leg?

CLARICE

I'll be careful.

She begins to kiss him on the neck. But he doesn't respond.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Oh, baby, I want you so much.

She tries to nibble on his ear. This time, he stops her.

DAVE

Reesie, you don't have to do this.

She pulls back on the bed, wounded, desperate, paranoid.

CLARICE

It's my scars. I'll put some make up on 'em so you don't have to look at 'em.

DAVE

It's not your scars.

Now her hurt turns to betrayal and explosive rage.

CLARICE

It's because you having an affair, isn't it, you bastard?

DAVE

What?

CLARICE

With Julie Sawyer.

DAVE

That ain't true.

CLARICE

You think I haven't noticed the little phone calls? The way you look for her in a crowd? The way you light up when she's around? What is the truth if you ain't hittin' it with that woman?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave looks at her with a mix of confusion, guilt in his eyes. She's not wrong. After a long moment, he sighs.

DAVE

It ain't gone as far as an affair.
But I can't lie to you. Things
ain't been right for us in a long
time... and I do feel somethin' for
this girl. For Julie.

Big tears of resignation form in Clarice's eyes, and she covers herself with the bedding -- as if ashamed of her body.

CLARICE

It's worse than affair. She's taken
your heart from me, and that ain't
somethin' I can do anything about.

Neither of them says anything for a long time.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Are we over, David?

DAVE

(eyes welling up)
I don't know, Reesie.
I gotta do some thinking.

Dave turns and exits quietly. Clarice falls back into her pillow, sobbing. And we'll FIND his cell phone resting on the night stand and begin HEARING a soulful R&B tune (perhaps something like Luther Vandross' "I WHO HAVE NOTHING").

INTERCUT:

MONTAGE OF MOS SCENES

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - DAY

Dave returns to the empty gym and begins shooting hoops all by himself. And he pushes himself really hard.

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - DAY

Bryson steps up to the blocks for his final heat as Julie looks on proudly in the b.g. And we'll see the PUFF OF SMOKE from the starter's gun and Bryson dives into liquid blue.

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - DAY

Dave makes a basket and turns to see someone else there with the same agenda as him. It's Darnell. They stand facing each other for a long moment... dueling with their eyes. Dave finally fires the ball to him -- an invitation to a little one-on-one game. Darnell smirks. Let's do this.

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - BLEACHERS - DAY

Julie's in the bleachers, cheering, screaming, willing Bryson onto victory.

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - DAY

Darnell tries to fake Dave with the ball, but Dave doesn't go for it, so Darnell drives right through him hard. Dave falls on his back, slamming his head on the court and Darnell scores. Dave pops back, up rubbing his head, and holds out his hand for the ball. Now it's his turn.

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - POOL - DAY

We're TRACKING CLOSE on Bryson as he swims for all he's worth. With every turn of his head for a breath, we see confidence, determination to win in his eyes.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Mama enters the room with a shopping bag and a rosy disposition. Then she sees Clarice, eyes red with tears, in her bathrobe sitting disconsolately on the floor next to her bed. Mama's face falls. She knows what this is about. She been there, done that.

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - DAY

Dave is driving the lane. When he hits the free-throw line, he leaps toward the basket, Michael Jordan style, higher and higher until his knees are almost at the level of Darnell's head. And as Dave slams the ball through the basket, his foot catches Darnell square on the face. When Dave lands, Darnell is wiping blood from his mouth, smiling at him.

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - POOL

We're still TRACKING Bryson as he makes his final flip turn. And then suddenly we're trying to catch back up him because he has picked up his pace. And now we can see that he is a full length ahead of the next best swimmer.

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - DAY

Dave makes a desperate attempt to cut off Darnell's path to the basket, but misses and slams into the wall -- leaving blood and sweat marks on the wall. Smiling, he turns back to Darnell with his own war-wounds -- a bloody nose.

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - POOL

As parents and his teammates are rooting him on along the edge of the pool in the b.g., Bryson is all by himself out front of the pack and he hits the wall for the win.

ANGLE ON BLEACHERS

Julie goes wild with joy and begins hugging everybody around her. But then Julie feels a need to look down at the pool.

HER POV

A crowd has gathered around Bryson's lane. Something's wrong. Bryson's not getting out of the water.

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - DAY

Darnell is dribbling the ball when Dave bats it out of his hand. They both go diving after the ball at the same time, and both get their hands on it. It's what's called a "jump ball" and they both roll around on the floor, wrestling each other for the ball. Finally, they both look at each other, realizing how foolish this all is... and begin laughing.

EXT. SWIM STADIUM - DAY

Julie is panicking as she tries to fight through the crowd. And then the gauntlet opens up and she sees Bryson on the pool deck. A small group of people are hovering over him and a wet, drenched Coach Spinello is pushing on his chest, over and over, yelling something, tears rolling down his face. And a horror she's never felt before washes over Julie's entire being.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Mama helps a disconsolate Clarice into her bed and pulls the covers up. And then notices a flashing light on the night stand -- Dave's cell phone. She goes over and looks at it.

CLOSE ANGLE ON PHONE

The caller ID display reads: "SAWYER, JULIE."

BACK TO SCENE

Mama scowls. She presses POWER button and turns the phone off. She sets it back down with a self-righteous look. And as she does, our SONG and SERIES OF SCENES will end.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN GYMNASIUM - SAME TIME

Dave and Darnell are bloodied, bruised and completely spent from their duel and sitting in heaps against the wall.

DAVE

I'd call that a draw, homey.

DARNELL

Man to man, nobody listenin'... who gets that scholarship if we was still back in the day?

DAVE

(beat, thinking)

You, dawg. Hands-down. World always gonna love a shooter more than a big man. Plus, you just a better player.

Darnell savors these words for a long moment.

DARNELL

So you think all the shit I been through is my own fault?

DAVE

Shit comes down on everybody. You can either let it keep you on your ass. Or you can choose to get past it. To beat it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARNELL

What makes you Dr. Phil on the subject?

Dave sucks in a bitter breath, reminded of where he at.

DAVE

Trust me, you ain't the only one with problems. In some ways, you got no idea how good you got it.

DARNELL

You talkin' about Carlos.

DAVE

You ever heard the story about the man who had no shoes?

DARNELL

No.

DAVE

He felt sorry for himself until he met a man who had no feet.

(with deep longing)

Don't waste a minute to be that boy's daddy. It's the only thing that really matters in this life. Hundred years from now, you gonna be dead and gone. But Carlos gonna have a grandson who remembers his great-grandpappy, Darnell Gooden. You still got a chance to make that a good memory.

DARNELL

(nodding soberly)

That's some real shit, ya'll. And here I been jealous of you all these years for gettin' that scholarship instead of me.

DAVE

Brother, I'd trade that scholarship and everything I've ever had for a son like Carlos.

Now Darnell has a question for Dave.

DARNELL

So when life knock you on your ass, how do you get back up?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave is taken aback by the question, and right now, it's clear he doesn't have a damn clue how to answer.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Daylight has ebbed as Dave walks in slowly, depleted and defeated, still wearing his sweats. Mama is there in the living room, standing by Clarice's side, waiting for him. There's fire in her eyes that we haven't seen before.

MAMA

Sit your butt down, young man. We gonna have a little come-to-Jesus meetin'.

CLARICE

Mama, let's not do this.

DAVE

Let her speak, Clarice. She always had her own vote in this marriage. Why change things now?

Clarice turns and glares at Dave.

MAMA

Now you listen to me. However you gettin' your itch scratched by this little white hoochie-mama Ho, it ends right now, or you can pack your philanderin' ass up and get outta Dodge.

CLARICE

Mama, it's more complicated than that.

MAMA

(never takes off him)

No it ain't, Reesie. What is wrong with you, boy? You got this beautiful black wife standing over here, and you do the bumpty-bump with a white girl? You must be addicted to BET and them foul-mouthed rappers and their nasty little white fly girls.

Dave has kept his mouth shut as long as he's going to.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

Now it's your turn you listen to me, you angry, bitter, man-hating old woman. Whatever is happenin' between me and Julie Sawyer -- and I ain't saying I even know what that is -- it has nothin' to do with her damn skin color.

Mama takes off her wig, puts up her dukes. Fighting mad.

MAMA

Where is that skank? I'm gonna knock both ya'lls into next week.

Just then, the house PHONE RINGS. Dave and Mama glare at each other. It RINGS again. Finally, Clarice sighs and goes to answer it. Mama puts her wig back on, still fuming.

CLARICE

(answering phone)
Hello.

BROCK (OVER PHONE)

(somber, sober)
Clarice, it's Brock. I need to speak with Dave.

CLARICE

It's not a good time right now, Brock.

BROCK (OVER PHONE)

This is really important, Clarice. There's been an accident.

CLARICE

Accident?

Which changes things and perks up Mama's ear. Clarice looks at Dave with deep concern and hands the phone to him.

DAVE

(into phone)
What is this? Who had an accident?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Brock is pacing a room full of empty waiting chairs with his cell phone to his ear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROCK

Julie has been trying to call. She finally tracked me down when she couldn't reach you on your cell.

Dave checks his pockets, realizes he doesn't have his phone.

DAVE

Why? What happened?

BROCK

There's no easy way to say this, man, but Bryson... he's gone.

DAVE

Bryson's gone? What the hell does that mean?

Despite what's happening between them, Clarice pulls in close to listen with him.

BROCK

In his final race, he went into the wall too hard. He hit his head. They tried to revive him... but he never regained consciousness.

Dave feels like he's been punched in the gut. Clarice pulls away from the phone, covering her mouth with her hand.

CLARICE

Oh, sweet Jesus.

BROCK

I'm at All Saints. I think you better get over here.

Dave slowly hangs up the phone. He's in shock.

CLARICE

I'll go with you.

DAVE

What?

CLARICE

I want to go with you. Just 'cause I have a problem with that woman doesn't mean I can't look past it at a time like this.

Can a black man look red? If so, Dave does right now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE

(exploding)

For God sake, Clarice, what kind of man do you think I am? You think I'm gonna go over there and get my flirt on with a woman who just lost her only child?

CLARICE

I didn't mean it like --

DAVE

(hating this even more)

You know what? Hell no. I don't want you coming with me. Not if gonna do me like that.

Dave grabs a jacket off a coat rack and starts for the door. Clarice is frozen. Now it's Mama who fires the big gun.

MAMA

Young man, I don't care if Sweet Judy Blue Eyes lost a whole damn bus load of children, if you walk out that door, Clarice will not be here when you come back.

Dave stares straight at Clarice. She does not meet his eyes.

DAVE

Clarice has to do what she has to do. And so do I.

With that, Dave walks out.

CUT TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dave has caught up with Brock and they are weaving in and out of hospital staff traffic.

BROCK

She's pretty messed up, bro. Her parents are driving up from Houston. The hospital didn't know what to do with her because she refused to leave until the funeral home comes for the... for Bryson.

DAVE

Where is she now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BROCK

Only place I could think of better
than the lobby.

CUT TO:

INT. ALL SAINTS HOSPITAL - LITTLE CHAPEL - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

Dave enters a quiet little wood and stained-glass refuge in the heart of the hospital. Julie is sitting in the front pew with her head in her hands. When he sees her, Dave's heart hurts for her.

DAVE

(softly)

Julie?

Julie looks at him through red, liquid prisms. She rushes to him, sobbing, quaking, her voice hoarse with emotion.

JULIE

Oh, Dave. My baby's gone. My baby
boy is gone.

Dave lets himself hold her tight and she takes every bit of his warmth, his strength... because she desperately needs it.

DAVE

I know, honey. I am so sorry you
couldn't reach me. I should have
been there. At the meet. Maybe I
could have done something.

JULIE

It all happened so fast. It keeps
playing in my head. Over and over.

It comes out in gasps and she plays it again n her mind.

JULIE (CONT'D)

He's winning the final heat, and
I'm screaming louder than I ever
have. But he doesn't get out of
the pool right away like he always
did. I'm thinking he's goofing
off. Then Coach Spinello is
jumping in the water, pulling him
onto the deck, pounding on his
chest. Then we're riding in the
ambulance and they're using the
paddles on him.

(breaking down again)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE (CONT'D)

He was just lying there with his eyes closed like when I watched him sleep as a baby. His little chest would rise with every breath. So peaceful. But it wasn't rising anymore. I thought if I could just rock him and sing to him, he would wake up and be okay.

Dave holds her even tighter, stroking her hair.

DAVE

There's nothing you could have done for him, honey. But he in God's arms now. He woke up in God's arms.

JULIE

Do you really think so?

DAVE

I know so, Julie. That boy was made for a better place than this.

Just then, Ted and his "assistant" Kate enter the chapel. As opposed to his cool, controlled manner the last time he saw him, he is now a wet emotional noodle.

TED

Oh, Julie, sweetheart, Kate and I came as soon as we heard.

He rushes into Julie's arms and falls into her arms, sobbing. It's awkward. Dave and Kate, the outsiders, give each other an uncomfortable look

TED (CONT'D)

How could this be happening? I was going to come to his swim meet. I really was. And then I got hung up on an account. Oh, God, why didn't I go see him? Now it's too late.

She pushes back from him, and suddenly she has her emotions in check. She is in charge.

JULIE

Listen to me, Ted. Right now, I don't give a damn about all your regrets. The only thing that matters is that we hold it together long enough to honor Bryson the way he deserves to be honored.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULIE (CONT'D)

After that, you have the rest of your life to think about what a selfish bastard of a father you were.

Ted sobers up quickly. He nods, wiping his eyes. She knows he's right.

TED

When can we... can I see him?

JULIE

Tomorrow. They're gonna have a private viewing for him at funeral home. You can see him then.

TED

Julie, I'm sorry. I really am.

JULIE

I know.

Ted turns and exits the chapel with Kate. As soon as the door closes, Julie crumples into a pew -- as if it took every last bit of her energy to hold things together for Ted. Dave sits down next to her, puts his arm around her.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Dave, what am I gonna do? What am I gonna do?

DAVE

We gonna get through this, Julie. I promise.

And as she turns and sobs on his chest --

CUT TO:

EXT. MAMA'S BUNGLAOW - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

A small, neatly groomed house in a gentrified neighborhood with a lawn and garden manicured by hand. The kind of place your very proud grandma would live. Clarice's Cadillac is in the driveway.

INT. CLARICE'S CHILDHOOD ROOM - NIGHT

The door opens and a hand turns on the light. Mama enters, followed by Clarice, and carrying two overnight bags. The room is immaculately preserved, right down to the cheer-leading trophies elementary school pictures on the shelves and the stuffed animals on the bed little girl's canopy bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

Mama, I need to be at home.

MAMA

No, Reesie. Until we can figure out how to get that sorry excuse for a man out of your beautiful house, you gonna stay here where I can look after you.

CLARICE

I'm not ready to do this.

MAMA

Yes you are. You a strong, independent woman just the way I raised you. I did it. And you gonna be able to do it, too.

Clarice sighs, too weary to argue, and sits down on the bed.

MAMA (CONT'D)

Now you get settled in. You gonna feel a whole lot better when you have a piece of my famous Sock-It-To-Me cake.

Mama exits. Clarice balls up into a fetal position on the bed, clutching onto one of her old Teddy Bears.

CUT TO:

INT. DAVE'S PANEL VAN - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Julie rides along in numb reflection as Dave drives her home.

JULIE

I used to drop Bryson off at Sunday School, and he'd come home with all these bible stories. After Ted left, Bryson would pray at night for him, asking God to forgive him. But I haven't been to church in years. I don't even know who to ask to do the service. I don't want Bryson in some musty funeral home. I want to celebrate his life.

DAVE

If you don't mind, I think I know some people who can help. And celebrate is what they do best.

EXT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGLAOW - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

Dave's van pulls up into Julie's driveway, where a midsize car is already parked.

ANOTHER ANGLE

As Julie gets out of the car, an OLDER COUPLE gets out of the sedan and rushes to her. They are her parents, and Julie falls into her mother's arms, and they both sob right there in the driveway, as Julie's father tries to comfort them.

JULIE

Oh, Mommy, he's gone! What do I do? My Bryson's gone.

And Julie's father gives Dave a sad nod of thanks, and begins ushering his grieving wife and daughter toward the house. Dave knows she's in safe hands now.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Dave enters quietly. The place is dark, empty, lonely.

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT - MOMENT LATER

Dave walks in slowly and flips on a light. He sees that Clarice's vanity is open and empty, that some of her dresser drawers are open and empty. Without taking his clothes off, he slowly lies down on their bed and stares at the ceiling. And as he does, we'll begin HEARING the mournful, soulful sounds of a small gospel ensemble singing something like Kirk Franklin's "HOLD ME NOW."

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MEMORIAL PARK - HIGH AND WIDE - DAY

A carpet of green overlooking the city. A resting place for the dearly departed, dotted with headstones. And we'll CRANE DOWN to FIND a grave-side gathering surrounding a casket.

CLOSER ANGLE

And as we PAN the very black, singing faces of the GOSPEL ENSEMBLE, we now know who Dave has helped Julie turn to, and the song will take us into:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) We're CLOSE ON a lovely casket, and ADJUST to see a beautiful wreath of flowers and then a framed photograph of a smiling Bryson Sawyer -- his eyes staring straight out at us, almost immortal.

B) We PAN the front row of seated mourners... a red-eyed Ted on one end with Kate standing behind him... then Julie's mother and father, and then finally Julie, with Dave in his best black suit, standing behind her.

C) A very sober Coach Spinello and several of Bryson's teammates, all dressed in their matching swim club warm ups, file past the casket, and the coach lays Bryson's gold medal atop the casket.

D) We PAN the very white FACES of the larger gathering of mourners who have gathered -- friends, extended family, schoolmates -- and two black faces -- Bishop Wilkes, dressed in his most colorful, hopeful ministerial robes, and Carmen McAtee, with her dreads done up with ribbons.

E) Dave turns to see Brock arriving with Darius, Deshawn, Marcus and Jaylen -- all dressed respectfully in dress shirts and ties. Dave moves to them and shakes each of their hands, before embracing Brock in a long hug.

F) Brock escorts his little leaguers past the casket, and each one leaves an offering for Bryson -- a bat, a baseball, a glove, and finally a team jersey with the name "SAWYER" in letters on the back.

G) Tears stream down Julie's face as her son is honored. Dave puts his strong hand on her shoulder for support. She reaches up and takes it and holds on for dear life.

H) Coach Spinello comes to the front of the gathering and reads from some typed pages -- the eulogy.

I) And as the SONG ENDS, so will our SERIES OF SHOTS as Bishop Wilkes now steps up to the casket and faces the gathering.

CLOSER ANGLE

Before the Bishop begins, he looks with confusion at Dave standing with Julie's hand on his. But Dave can't, or won't look at him, so he turns his attention to Julie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BISHOP WILKES

Julie, as a pastor, nothing has ever prepared me to do the funeral of a child. Not because I'm feeling any pity for Bryson today. From what you've told me, he was a young man of strong faith, and I believe they throwin' a big "welcome home" party up in heaven for him right about now.

Which prompts a few, tearful smiles from the gathering, especially from Julie.

BISHOP WILKES (CONT'D)

But for those of us left behind, we're always left with a single question... "Why?" Folks, there are no easy answers to "why?" All we can do is turn to God and say, "I don't understand why this happening. What do I do now?"

(looking at Julie)

Julie, while none of us can carry your sorrow for you, I want you to know God loves you and so does his family. And my church stands ready to offer you some great big shoulders to cry on any time of the day or night.

Julie nods thankfully. Then the Bishop's eyes are drawn to something o.s.

HIS POV

Clarice, dressed in black, limps up on her cane close enough to listen, but not far enough to be part of the gathering.

BACK TO SCENE

The Bishop looks at Dave who is still looking down and is clearly unaware of Clarice's presence. He thinks for a long beat, then opens up his Bible.

BISHOP WILKES (CONT'D)

Julie, I don't know if you're familiar with the book of Ecclesiastes, but there's a passage I want to read that I hope you'll keep close to your heart.

(reading)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BISHOP WILKES (CONT'D)

"It is better to have a partner
than go through life alone."

ANGLE ON DAVE

He's jolted to attention by what he's hearing, remembering.

BISHOP WILKES (O.S.) (CONT'D)

"Share the work, share the wealth,
for if one falls down, the other is
there to pick him up."

ANGLE ON CLARICE

She's listening, too, trying to remember something from a
long time ago.

INT. EMMANUEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

We're in church, a dozen years earlier, as a younger Bishop
Wilkes binds the gold-braided cord around Clarice and Dave's
shoulders on their wedding day.

BISHOP WILKES (V.O.)

"But pity the man who falls and has
no one by his side. In bed, two
can warm each other at night. But
one alone, shivers all night long."

EXT. MEMORIAL PARK - ON CLARICE - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

As she listens, it all comes flooding back. And so do some
tears of regret.

ANGLE BACK WITH GATHERING

The Bishop continues the reading.

BISHOP WILKES

"By yourself, you are unprotected.
But with a partner you can face the
worst the world has to offer."

(looking right at Dave)

"But even better than that is a
cord of three strands because it is
not easily broken."

Dave has this unexplainable urge to look away from the
Bishop. And when he does, he sees:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HIS POV

Now he also sees Clarice standing near a tree, looking straight at him. And she gives him a tearful nod.

BACK TO SCENE

Dave doesn't know what to do with his feelings and the Bishop has not missed this connection. He turns back to Julie.

BISHOP WILKES (CONT'D)

Julie, what this is sayin' is that we need a buddy system. One is not only the loneliest number, it's also the riskiest. It's our family and friends who make up the first two strands of a three-stranded cord. But God makes up the third.

(beat, thinking)

And it just occurred to me that maybe God does answer the "why" questions. Maybe the way he does that is by giving us three-stranded cords in our lives to encircle us with love and care... no matter what the world throws at us.

And as Julie smiles a watery, thankful smile, Dave is looking more confused than ever.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MEMORIAL PARK - DAY - A LITTLE LATER

As the gathering breaks up, Dave is seeing Julie to a hearse in the b.g., and the other mourners are scattering to their cars, we FIND Clarice still standing by her tree, thinking.

CARMEN (O.S.)

It took me awhile, but I think I I'm starting to put the puzzle pieces together.

Clarice turns to see Carmen walking up.

CARMEN (CONT'D)

Dave with Julie Sawyer over there, and you standing way over here.

Clarice nods soberly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE
(sadly, bitterly)
Mama had me move in with her until
we can figure out what to do.

CARMEN
He gettin' his cake and eatin' it,
too?

CLARICE
I don't think it's gone that far
yet, but Mama says it's only a
matter of time.

Carmen sort of gives a little half-chuckle.

CARMEN
Your Mama sure does a lot of
talkin', doesn't she?

CLARICE
I guess so.

CARMEN
Clarice, I been wonderin' about
something since you first came in
for counseling.

CLARICE
What's that?

CARMEN
When did your daddy leave?

CLARICE
He didn't leave. Mama tossed him
out 'cause she suspected him of
cheatin' on her.

CARMEN
Suspected?

CLARICE
Well, later when I was grown, he
admitted to me that he had cheated.
He picked up with a lady after he
moved out of our house.

CARMEN
After?

CLARICE
Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARMEN

Maybe it's just me, but it seems
like the acorn hasn't fallen very
far from the tree.

Clarice looks at her for a long, puzzled moment, but then something begins to dawn on her.

CUT TO:

INT. JULIE AND BRYSON'S BUNGALOW - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Light is fading out the windows. A small gathering of family and friends, including Julie's parents, are mingling over food and conversation in her modest little house. Dave sits by himself across the room from where Julie is getting an earful from an ECCENTRIC AUNT with poor funeral etiquette.

ECCENTRIC AUNT

Do you remember the time you had me
over to sit when Bryson was two?
That little rugrat nearly killed
me. I was trying get him out of
the tub and he actually bit me.

Julie looks like she's suffocating.

JULIE

I'm sorry, Aunt Janet, but I can't
do this right now.

Aunt Janet is offended and crosses off. Julie looks at Dave

JULIE (CONT'D)

Can you drive me back to the
cemetery?

Dave looks at her confused for a beat

JULIE (CONT'D)

I just need to spend some time
alone there.

DAVE

Sure.

CUT TO:

INT. MAMA'S BUNGLAOW - CLARICE'S ROOM - DAY

Mama is HUMMING as she dusts Clarice's childhood trophies on a bookshelf, when Clarice comes to the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLARICE

Do you remember when I won that one, Mama?

Mama spins happily to see that her daughter is home.

MAMA

(setting trophy back down)
I remember every last one of your accomplishments, baby.

Clarice crosses in and examines the trophy.

CLARICE

I think this one was after Daddy left because you said it was the first time you saw me smile in a month of Sundays.

MAMA

That was good riddance to bad rubbish. Let's not dredge up all them bad memories.

Clarice sets the trophy back and catches Mama by the arm.

CLARICE

No, Mama... let's.

Mama pulls her arm free and gives Clarice a puzzled look.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

How come you never told me that Daddy didn't start havin' an affair until after you rode his ass out the house?

MAMA

I ain't havin' this conversation.

CLARICE

Why not?

MAMA

Because my bedroom drama with your daddy ain't none of your business.

Which pushes a nerve in Clarice. A big nerve.

CLARICE

(exploding)
Excuse me?! I think it is my damn business when you all up in my koolaid about my marriage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAMA

That's 'cause you don't know men like I do. I'm just lookin' out for my baby. See what that man did to you, swappin' gravy with some little white trash biscuit.

CLARICE

You missin' the big picture here. My marriage is on the rocks. Who the hell cares what color she is?

But Mama is on a roll.

MAMA

Men are like nasty ass little chiggers. You got to hold a match to their behinds to get 'em outta your hair. To keep 'em from gettin' under your skin.

It's almost like Clarice is seeing Mama like she's never seen her before. Shriveled, sad, bitter, pathetic.

CLARICE

Mama, you sound like Jaws when you talkin' about men. You like a man-eating shark up in here. Who made you so angry and bitter? Was it Grandma Clark? Was it Grandpa?

Clarice has flirted with an emotional trip wire. Mama's eyes flare for an instant, but then she pushes it all back down.

MAMA

I am a strong, proud, independent black woman.

Now Clarice is suddenly feeling pity for her mother.

CLARICE

I don't know what dark secrets you hidin' in your heart, but in all your lessons to me about how to be a strong, proud, independent black woman, you left something out.

MAMA

What?

CLARICE

You forgot to teach me how to love people.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Panic washes over Mama's face She has no answer for this.
Clarice kisses Mama on the cheek.

CLARICE (CONT'D)

Mama, I was wrong to yell at you.
And I didn't mean to disrespect
you. But from now on, I'm gonna
find out how to do that. I'm gonna
start learnin' how to love my man.
And I'm gonna pray for you.

MAMA

What for?

CLARICE

That it ain't too late for you to
learn how to love people, too.

With that, Clarice turns and walks out. Mama tries to
"harumph" it all off and return to her dusting chores. But a
beat later, she crumbles onto the bed in private agony.

CUT TO:

INT. DAVE'S PANEL VAN - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Dave is driving as the city lights dance off Julie's face as
she stares blankly out the window. A NEWSTALK HOST is
pontificating on the RADIO.

NEWSTALK HOST (OVER RADIO)

Now here's a nice story for a
change. The Justice Department's
latest national crime survey
estimates that murder and attempted
murder fell more than forty percent
from 1975 through 2006.

Wincing, Dave looks over at Julie. He changes the dial to an
EASY LISTENING station. Something like Clarence Carter's
"SLIP AWAY" is currently in rotation.

JULIE

Dave, can you drive me up to the
overlook?

DAVE

You mean after the cemetery?

JULIE

Instead of. I changed my mind. I
want to go look at the stars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dave gives her a smile that says "no problem."

CUT TO:

INT. DAVE'S PANEL VAN - POV FRONT WINDOW - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

We're looking over Dave and Julie's shoulders at a sea of twinkling city lights as the van creeps to a stop at the edge of an overlook. By this point, something like The Temptations' "Just My Imagination" is playing on the radio.

JULIE

I forgot how beautiful this was.

Dave is about to turn off the key, when Julie stops him.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Can we just leave it playing? I like this song.

DAVE

Sure.

Julie opens the door and gets out.

EXT. CITY OVERLOOK - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Julie is standing at the front of the truck, looking up into the night sky, when Dave joins her.

THEIR POV

The firmament in all its glory. A billion shining diamonds.

JULIE (O.S.)

Bry and I used to come up here and look for The Big Dipper.

DAVE (O.S.)

Down in the city, I never realized the light blocks all this out.

The SILHOUETTE of a pointing hand comes INTO FRAME, and we follow to a familiar cup-shaped constellation.

JULIE (O.S.)

Look, there it is.

BACK TO SCENE

They are both looking up in wonder. Julie is still in her black funeral dress. Dave notices that she's shivering.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVE
You're cold. Here.

He takes his suit jacket off and wraps it around her shoulders. She snuggles closer to him for more warmth, putting her arm through his. Just then, she remembers a little ditty and sings a line.

JULIE
"Follow the drinking gourd..."

DAVE
(smiling)
What do you know about the drinkin'
gourd?

JULIE
Let's see. I guess that would have
been our fourth grade report. He
chose the Underground Railroad.

They both laugh a little at this. Then there's a long moment of silence. She begins to weep quietly again.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Did you remember your inhaler?

DAVE
(looking at her, confused)
Excuse me?

JULIE
I was trying to remember the last
thing I said to him before his
race. That's what I said to him.
"Did you remember your inhaler?"
Not "I love you, Bryson." Not "I'm
so proud of you." Not "You are a
bright shining star and I'm so
lucky to be your mother."
(tears really coming now)
Oh, God, why didn't I say those
things to him? Why?

She collapses into his arms again and he holds her for a long moment, before she pulls back far enough to look into his face, the starlight glistening on her wet face.

Dave's heart is thumping in his chest as she reaches up and strokes his face. The magnetic connection between them, born of mutual need, is just too strong. She puts her other hand on his face and pulls him into a very chaste kiss.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They look into each other's eyes again as if testing whether or not that just happened. And then Dave takes her soft features into his hands and pulls her into a more real kiss.

And the world begins SPINNING AROUND THEM as she pulls in close, conforming her body to his and the kiss becomes passionate, hungry. But then, the SPINNING begins to slow as we begin to make out a familiar song... "THREE TIMES A LADY" playing on the car radio.

And then we are no longer swirling around them, but STOPPING just as Dave breaks the kiss and pulls away from her. His eyes are drawn to the car window and the memory of that song.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Dave?

DAVE

(frozen with guilt)

I'm sorry. I just can't do this.
For more reasons than I can count.

JULIE

It's my fault. I was just trying
to feel something, anything besides
this big black hole in my heart.

DAVE

I know you do, Julie. And Lord
knows, you deserve that. But not
this way. Not with me. We both
been flirtin' with a fire that
gonna only end up burnin' a lot of
people.

Julie somehow musters a smile through her tears.

JULIE

See, you're doing it to me again.
The reason I want you so badly is
the reason I can't have you.
Because you're a gentleman. The
most gentle man I've ever met.

And as he smiles through his own tears and wipes hers away,
we begin HEARING his remembering voice once more.

DAVE (V.O.)

Until that moment, I don't think
I'd ever felt like a true man.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHNSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

When Dave enters in his funeral clothes, he's surprised to see Clarice there, still in her funeral dress, sitting in the lamp light, reading a Bible.

DAVE
Clarice, I need to --

CLARICE
No, Dave, let me go first Dave.
Please.

Dave nods and sits on the arm of the sofa.

CLARICE (CONT'D)
I been round and round with my heart today, and I want you to know two things. First, Mama has lost her voting privileges in this marriage.

DAVE
Damn. That's a big one.

CLARICE
(fighting back tears)
And second. I'm home. No matter what you decide to do, I'm not giving up on this marriage until it's dead. Or until we are.

DAVE
(chokes back his emotions)
I was about to tell you the same thing.

She rushes into his open arms and they hold each other like they haven't held each other in a long, long time.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I used to beat my head against the wall, tryin' to figure out what my purpose was. And I looked in a lot of wrong places to find it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY - WEEKS LATER

We're HIGH ABOVE the diamond, as if watching from heaven, as a little league game is in its final moments.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The bleachers are packed with CHEERING fans, penants have been hung all around, and some Dad PLAY-BY-PLAY MAN is on the microphone.

PLAY-BY-PLAY MAN (OVER P.A.)
 East Side is down to its final out
 with the score tied at 5. Looks
 like this playoff game may be goin'
 to extra innings, ya'll.

CLOSER ANGLE

Carlos is leading off at third base while Dave is coaching third, Brock is coaching first, and the rest of the East Side team is biting their nails in the dugout.

PLAY-BY-PLAY MAN (OVER P.A.) (CONT'D)
 The batter is Darius Jones.

As Darius steps up to the plate, the opposing infielders move up to play the bunt. Dave gives him a shout-out.

DAVE
 They playin' the bunt, D. Hit it
 hard. You King Kong up in this
 piece.

Dave gives him a sign. Darius wags his head "okay."

ANGLE IN THE BLEACHERS

Clarice is sitting in the front row. She shakes a little NOISE-MAKER.

CLARICE
 Whoo hoo! Pitcher's got a rubber
 arm!

And then we'll ADJUST to FIND Darnell, sitting not too far away, looking good. Looking clean. No forties. No Ho's.

DARNELL
 Come on, boy. Show me the money!

BACK TO SCENE

The opposing pitcher goes into his windup, and here comes the pitch, and Darius talks the biggest swing of his life -- BIG FOUL BALL. The CROWD MOANS.

DAVE
 That's all right, son. You got 'em
 scared now.

Dave gives him another sign. Darius wags his head again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The opposing first and third basemen play back a little deeper. The pitcher winds and fires it in again. But this time, Carlos begins dashing home and Darius squares around to bunt, and lays down the perfect little dribbler which rolls right past Carlos as he slides in home for the winning run.

PLAY-BY-PLAY MAN (OVER P.A.)

It's a squeeze play. Carlos Gooden slides home safe. East Side Wins! East Side wins!

VARIOUS ANGLES

As a ROAR goes up in the bleachers, the East Side boys all pour out of the dugout and pile on Carlos at home plate. A dirty, dusty human pyramid.

Dave and Brock run in and jump on the pile. Lots of high-fives and AD LIBBED celebrations.

DAVE (V.O.)

But if you want to know the purpose of a thing, you can't ask the thing to tell you. A car doesn't know why it's a car. Only the manufacturer knows what it was made to do. And I guess that's the way it is with God.

Darnell races out of the bleachers and to home plate, pulling Carlos from the bottom of the pile -- givin' him a high five, followed by a hug.

And as the rest of the stands empty, Clarice is content to watch from here. But something tells her to turn around. And when she does, she sees Julie sitting at the top of the stands all by herself. They exchange a nod which doesn't say all is forgiven -- but that a truce has been declared.

DAVE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He didn't just make Dave Johnson to be a husband, or a coach, or a friend, or a daddy. Those are just roles. Not who I am as a man.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE BY FIRST BASE

Darnell is examing Carlos' glove.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DARNELL

You got to put some oil over here
or the laces gonna break.

(beat, then)

I had my laces break in a game
once. Ball popped right out.
Ain't nobody ever told me about
oilin' a glove.

CARLOS

I'll remember that. Hey, Dad, you
wanna hit some me pop flies?

Darnell looks at his son, breaking out in a broad smile.

DARNELL

Let's do it.

ANGLE IN BLEACHERS

Brock climbs the last few steps and straddles the row right
below Julie. She looks a little melancholy.

JULIE

Thanks for inviting me today,
Brock. It's nice to be out in the
sunshine for a change.

Brock smiles.

BROCK

I thought I should offer to walk
you to your car. This ain't the
safest neighborhood, you know.

Now Julie musters a little smile.

JULIE

I'd like that.

BROCK

By the way, I don't have a date for
the team party. You interested?

JULIE

(looking uncomfortable)
I don't think I better. It's still
too weird. But thanks.

BROCK

Okay.

JULIE

But I wouldn't mind coffee later.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Which perks Brock right up.

ANGLE IN DUGOUT

As Dave packs up the gear, Clarice watches from the bench.

CLARICE

All these years, I never knew you
were such a good coach. You oughta
do more of it.

DAVE

(smiling)
Thanks, Boo.

CLARICE

I think you gonna make a pretty
good daddy someday, too.

He looks at her, trying not to read too much into it.

DAVE

I hope so.

CLARICE

In fact, try about seven and a half
months from now.

And as Dave's jaw drops and Clarice smiles a big happy smile
and Dave takes her into his arms, we'll PULL UP and BACK into
that big heavenly WIDE SHOT and look down on cords of three
strands happening all over the field.

DAVE (V.O.)

But I guess sometimes God has to
let life turn you upside down... so
can learn how to live right side
up.

FADE OUT.

THE END