

TWO-FACED

Written by

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OVER BLACK.

We hear the muffled bass of Billie Eilish's "Bad Guy."

JOY (V.O.)
It's over. It's all over.

JERALD (V.O.)
Poor, kid. You are sorely mistaken.
We're just getting started.

FADE IN:

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Colorful streamers sway from the ceiling. A variety of old yearbook photos hang on the walls. A few straggling STUDENTS enter the hotel ballroom in formal attire.

JOY ROBINSON (Black, 17) wears a tea-length dress and a corsage on her wrist. She's at the end of the hall, gripping a USB FLASH DRIVE. PRINCIPAL JERALD O'DONNELL (White, 46) stands at the other end of the hall, dressed like a 1940s mobster. A menacing smile on his face.

JERALD
Let the games begin.

Joy raises an eyebrow. Jerald suddenly breaks into a sprint and LUNGES at her.

FREEZE FRAME on Jerald in the air. A crazed look in his eyes.

JOY (V.O.)
Believe it or not, that man right there is my principal. He's a crazy, racist psychopath. You can almost see it in his eyes. The pure evil.

FREEZE FRAME on Joy. Her eyes wide, jaw dropped.

JOY (V.O.)
I stumbled upon a secret from his past. One that threatened to ruin his flawless reputation. It could have all gone away so easily. But it's never that easy.

Jerald lands on top of Joy. He yanks the flash drive from her hand. He rises to his feet, slips the device into his jacket pocket, and instinctively fixes his hair.

JERALD
You don't belong at Glen Cove, Joy.
Never have. Never will.

He scans the empty hallway. Jerald hurries away, disappearing into the ballroom.

JOY (V.O.)
Ain't that about a bitch.

CUT TO BLACK.

SUPER: Monday Morning. 5:30 a.m.

INT. ROBINSON APARTMENT - DAY

An alarm blares throughout a cramped two-bedroom apartment.

Joy jolts awake in her bunkbed, banging her head on the top bunk where her twin sisters, MINNIE and STEVIE (11), sleep soundly.

JOY
Rise and shine, ladies. Let's get moving.

She kicks the top bunk with her feet. Minnie rolls off the bunk and falls to the floor. Joy yawns.

JOY (CONT'D)
Do you want sausage or bacon?

MINNIE
(groans in pain)
Bacon.

CUT TO:

INT. ROBINSON KITCHEN - DAY

Minnie and Stevie sit restlessly at the kitchen table while Joy prepares breakfast. Waffles, bacon, and eggs galore.

Joy places two plates in front of the girls. Minnie's eyes dart back and forth between her food and Stevie's.

MINNIE
(to Joy)
You gave Stevie more bacon than me.

STEVIE
No she didn't, stupid face!

MINNIE

You're the stupid face!

JOY

If one of you has a stupid face,
the other one also has a stupid
face. So, do me a favor and shut
your stupid faces.

The front door bursts open. Joy's mother, GINA ROBINSON (40),
meanders inside, dragging her feet. Her waitress uniform is
stained with an assortment of breakfast items. She plops down
at the kitchen table, exhausted.

Joy pours a steaming cup of tea and serves it to her mother.

JOY (CONT'D)

Rough shift?

GINA

Baby, you don't even know the half
of it.

Gina takes a sip of tea, but it sounds more like a prolonged
slurp.

GINA (CONT'D)

Thank you for looking after the
girls.

Joy looks back at the twins. They bicker over the last piece
of bacon on Stevie's plate.

JOY

Ma, I have to be honest with you.
Your daughters are going to grow up
to be awful human beings.

GINA

(shrugs)

At least I got one good one.

She puts a hand on Joy's cheek.

GINA (CONT'D)

My baby. Soon-to-be-college-bound.
I'm so proud of you.

JOY

(wide smile)

Thanks, Ma.

Joy glances at the clock.

JOY (CONT'D)

I gotta go. Don't wanna miss the bus.

GINA

Don't forget to talk to the principal about that recommendation letter.

JOY

Going straight to his office when I get there.

GINA

You need that scholarship. Otherwise, I'mma be working twenty-four hour shifts to put you through school. I'll have to put the girls up for adoption.

The twins drop their utensils. Mouths wide open.

GINA (CONT'D)

I'm just playin' babies.

Gina looks back at Joy and shakes her head. She wasn't kidding.

JOY

Don't worry, Ma. It's in the bag.

Joy strides over to the fridge. She pulls out an extra plate covered with a paper towel. She places it in front of the girls and removes the paper towel, revealing an extra helping of BACON. Their eyes grow wide.

JOY (CONT'D)

Don't say I never did anything for you.

Joy winks at the twins, kisses Gina on the cheek, grabs her backpack and heads out the door.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Joy waits patiently among WORKING PROFESSIONALS and YOUNG PARENTS.

Earbuds in. Music on full blast. The music only partially drowns out the noise of her fellow commuters.

INT. CITY BUS - DAY

Joy pushes her way to the back of the crowded bus. She snags a free seat next to a SINGLE MOM and her BABY. The single mom forces Joy to hold the infant while she rummages through her purse. It immediately starts scream-crying.

Annoyed, Joy gazes out the window. The dirty, crowded inner city streets slowly turn into the spacious clean roads of the suburbs.

The bus speeds past a sign: WELCOME TO GLEN COVE.

EXT. GLEN COVE BUS STOP - DAY

Joy chases after the single mom and forces her to take her child back. Joy awkwardly pats her on the back, wishes her good luck, and proceeds to run in the opposite direction.

Without looking, Joy steps out into the street. A FLASHY MERCEDES BENZ comes to a screeching halt, nearly hitting her. A WOMAN IN WHITE (White, 40), reminiscent of an angel, sits in the driver's seat. She rolls down her window to speak to Joy. A smile on her face.

WOMAN IN WHITE

You better be careful, darling.
Wouldn't want you to get hurt.

JOY

Sorry, ma'am.

Joy steps out of the way. The Woman in White waves as she speeds off down the street.

EXT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The three-story modern building looks like it belongs on the cover of *Architectural Digest*. Joy bounds up the front steps, greeting her classmates.

INT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The student population is mostly white with a few sprinkles of color here and there. As Joy enters the lobby, she follows the sound of loud chants.

Members of For All People – or FAP – stand in front of the historic school mural. They hold signs and posters with the slogans "FAP Against Racism" and "FAP For Justice."

The school mural shows Christopher Columbus "discovering" America. Native Americans stand in the background, depicted as insensitive stereotypes.

Joy approaches JACK (17), a stereotypical dumb jock.

JOY
What's going on?

JACK
FAP wants the mural removed. They think it's racist.

JOY
It *is* racist. Not to mention inaccurate.

JACK
(shrugs)
Kristoff Columbus looks good though.

Joy starts to reply but decides it's not worth her time. The chants grow louder. The students grow rowdier. DARNELL JEFFERIES (Black, 55), the introverted vice principal and sole black staff member, musters up his confidence and pushes his way to the front of the crowd.

MR. JEFFERIES
Please quiet down, everyone. I understand the concern. I've been working with the school board for years to get this thing removed.

PROTESTER #1
Then why is it still here?

MR. JEFFERIES
It's a lengthy process. There are certain steps we have to take--

PROTESTER #2
If you really cared about ridding the world of injustice, you would have it removed now!

The chants resume. Mr. Jefferies tries to quiet down the crowd to no avail.

JERALD (O.S.)
Students, students. I hear you. I feel you. I see you.

Jerald stands in the entryway, hands on his hips. His stance mirrors that of Superman. Salt and pepper hair slicked back. Bright white smile on display. He's basically the George Clooney of Glen Cove High School.

He confidently strides toward the crowd of students.

JERALD (CONT'D)

I understand why this mural upsets you. It upsets me too.

He puts his hand on a FRESHMAN GIRL's shoulder. She swoons and faints from excitement. Jerald steps over her. He reaches the front, bumping Mr. Jefferies out of the way.

JERALD (CONT'D)

That is why I guarantee this mural will be removed by the end of the year!

The students erupt in CHEERS. Jerald soaks in the recognition. Mr. Jefferies slumps behind him.

JERALD (CONT'D)

Now, off to class. And take those FAP signs with you.

As the students disperse, Joy pushes her way through the crowd. She tries to get Jerald's attention, but Mr. Jefferies reaches him first.

MR. JEFFERIES

Hey, Jerald. You know, my brother could help us with the mural--

JERALD

Your brother? I don't think a mechanic will be able to help us.

MR. JEFFERIES

My brother's not a mechanic, he's--

JERALD

That's quite alright, Darnell. I'll figure it out myself.

Mr. Jefferies awkwardly nods and leaves. Joy taps Jerald on the shoulder.

JOY

Excuse me, Principal O'Donnell?

JERALD

Joy Robinson. We've been over this.
Call me, Jerald.

JOY

Right. Jerald.

JERALD

What can I, Jerald, do for you,
Joy?

JOY

I just wanted to remind you about
the letter of recommendation for
the Haines Foundation Scholarship.

JERALD

Oh, yes. I'll have it to you by the
end of the week.

JOY

Thank you, sir. I mean, Jerald.

JERALD

My pleasure. The Haines Foundation
has allowed so many African
American students to further their
education. They should be honored
to have you.

Joy beams. Jerald gives her a thumbs up.

JERALD (CONT'D)

Give my girl a pat on the head for
me.

Jerald winks at Joy. He proceeds to moonwalk into his office.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

DRAYA PETERS (Half Black, Half White, 18) stands front and
center while other STUDENTS listen attentively. She holds a
clipboard with a lengthy to-do list attached. The blackboard
behind her reads "PROM COMMITTEE."

DRAYA

Listen up! Since the school board
deemed our *Euphoria* theme "too
inappropriate," we have to make
some last minute changes.

FRANKIE (17) saunters into the room. Draya rolls her eyes.
She steps in front of him.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
Frankie! You're five minutes late.
What kind of committee do you think
we're running here?

FRANKIE
The prom kind?

DRAYA
Exactly. We've already gone over
several very important things on my
very important checklist. It is
never okay to be tardy.

Joy strolls into the room in the middle of Draya's rant.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
Hey, girl.
(to Frankie)
Like I was saying. Don't be late
again.

FRANKIE
What if it's an emergency? What if
I'm sick?

DRAYA
Then take some Emergen-C and sit
your ass down.

Frankie stalks to the back of the room while Joy settles in
the front row. She turns and mouths "sorry" to Frankie. He
grins at her.

Draya returns to her post at the front of the room. She
attempts to regain her composure.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
As I was saying before Frankie
rudely interrupted us, the new
dance theme is "Blast from the
Past." We have less than one week
to rearrange decorations. So, any
ideas?

Blank stares from the committee.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
Anyone? Anything?

Draya becomes increasingly agitated.

DRAYA (CONT'D)

Y'all won't quit talking all year long and now you got nothing to say? Well, I've got something to say. I never liked any of you. Screw every single one of you. You are dead to me. And I hope the death was slow and painful.

(beat)

Especially you, Frankie.

Defeated, Draya plops down in her chair. Frankie and the rest of the committee look terrified. Joy jumps up from her seat.

JOY

Alright! Meeting adjourned everyone.

The prom committee quickly gathers their belongings and leaves. Joy eyes Draya, confused by her outburst.

JOY (CONT'D)

What the fuck was that?

DRAYA

They deserved it.

JOY

You told them to die.

DRAYA

And the world will be better off.

Joy raises an eyebrow and looks at Draya expectantly.

DRAYA (CONT'D)

(sighs)

I'll apologize later. But right now I have more important things to deal with. Prom is going to be a disaster.

JOY

It'll be fine. We'll just put up some streamers and call it a day.

Draya slowly stands, her eyes filled with rage.

DRAYA

Streamers? Fucking streamers? Do you know what I went through to get decorations for our *Euphoria* theme? I literally ordered mints that look like Fentanyl.

Joy shakes her head.

JOY
That's just problematic on every
level. Drug addiction is a serious
problem.

Draya wails. Joy wraps her in a tight hug and awkwardly pats
her on the head.

JOY (CONT'D)
That's from your uncle.

Draya grins.

DRAYA
Did he show you his moonwalk?

JOY
Yes. And somehow I still think he's
cool.

Draya giggles. She pulls away from the hug, slightly calmer
than before.

JOY (CONT'D)
What do you need from me?

DRAYA
Old yearbooks. Maybe it'll inspire
some decoration ideas.

JOY
Fine. I'll talk to the yearbook
staff. But you know Rayne hates
you.

DRAYA
(sing-song)
Good thing she doesn't hate my best
friend.

Draya pinches Joy's cheeks. Joy shakes her off.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
I owe you.

JOY
Big time. Now stop telling people
to die and get rid of the mints.

Joy slings her backpack over her shoulder and struts out of
the classroom.

INT. SCHOOL YEARBOOK ROOM - DAY

A tiny room at the end of the hall on the third floor.

The yearbook editor, RAYNE RODRIGUEZ (Latinx, 16), gives an impassioned speech about journalistic integrity.

RAYNE

And furthermore we should not be
punished for searching for justice
in this cruel and unforgiving
world!

She slams her hand on the table, signaling the end of her rant.

REVEAL: There's only one other person in the room. Yearbook photographer SONYA KHAN (Pakistani American, 15) watches videos on TikTok. She suddenly looks up.

SONYA

Oh, I'm sorry. Were you saying
something?

Rayne groans.

A knock at the door. Joy enters the room.

JOY

Rayne, I need a favor.

RAYNE

Not now, Robinson. Can't you see
we're in the middle of a staff
meeting?

Joy scans the nearly empty classroom.

JOY

Where is the rest of the staff?

SONYA

Rayne scared them off.

RAYNE

I did no such thing. They just
simply took a leave of absence
after I showed up.

JOY

Look, this'll only take a minute. I
need to borrow some old yearbooks.

RAYNE

Why?

JOY

I'm helping out a friend.

RAYNE

Which friend?

JOY

You know, just like, a friend.

RAYNE

Yeah, I got that. I asked you which friend.

Joy looks down at her feet, avoiding eye contact.

JOY

(quietly)

Draya.

RAYNE

What was that?

JOY

(quietly)

Draya.

RAYNE

Come again?

JOY

Draya, okay! I'm helping Draya.

RAYNE

That's what I thought. I'm going to impolitely tell you to fuck off.

Rayne guides Joy back to the door.

JOY

Please, Rayne! I know you two don't get along.

RAYNE

She got Sonya and I kicked off the newspaper staff! She single-handedly ruined our lives.

SONYA

Correction. She ruined your life. I, personally, am enjoying my newfound free time.

Sonya walks over to the bookshelf. She begins collecting old yearbooks.

JOY

Thank you, Sonya.

(to Rayne)

You can't blame this whole thing on Draya.

RAYNE

She's a whistleblower. She blew the goddamn whistle.

JOY

Because you interrogated the lunch lady. And made her cry.

Rayne crosses her arms defensively.

RAYNE

They never proved that she *didn't* put something in that marinara sauce.

SONYA

Oregano. She put oregano in the sauce--

RAYNE

Draya is responsible for our resignation.

SONYA

We were definitely fired--

RAYNE

Working for the yearbook was our only other option.

Sonya hands over a stack of yearbooks to Joy.

SONYA

These range from '75 to '93. Go wild.

JOY

Good lookin' out, Sonya. I'll bring these back tomorrow.

(to Rayne)

Sorry about the newspaper.

Joy leaves the room. Rayne frowns.

INT. DRAYA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Posters of Beyoncé and Drake plaster the walls. A banner that reads 'The Future is Female' hangs above the closet.

Draya and Joy lounge on the bed. They aimlessly flip through the yearbooks. With each page flip, Draya becomes more revolted.

DRAYA
Fuckin' hippies.

Draya tosses the yearbook aside in frustration. She turns her attention to Joy.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
Please tell me the eighties were
better than the seventies.

JOY
Nope. Just white boys and mullets.

DRAYA
Ugh, I hate everything.

Draya leans back against her headboard and looks out the window. A mischievous smile creeps up on her face.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
Perfect timing.
(to Joy)
Come on.

Draya drags Joy over to the window and points next door. Her neighbor, AMY (White, 60), blasts "Gangsta's Paradise" by Coolio in her bedroom. She recites the lyrics like a pro. The girls are amused.

JOY
I'm almost impressed.

DRAYA
You should be. She's had at least
three glasses of wine by now.

Amy suddenly glances over toward Draya's bedroom. The girls quickly drop to the floor. They break into a fit of giggles, struggling to catch their breath.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
(abruptly)
Hey, you still need a prom date.

JOY

I told you, D. I'm going by myself.

Draya squeezes Joy's hand and stares at her intently.

DRAYA

Joy, I love you.

JOY

Aw, Draya. I love you, too.

DRAYA

But if you think I want you third-wheeling on my date with Sabrina, you must be outta ya damn mind.

Joy snatches her hand away.

JOY

I mean, I could go with Frankie.

DRAYA

I said you need a date. Not a Frankie.

Joy rolls her eyes. She resumes flipping through the yearbook.

DRAYA (CONT'D)

What about Trey? I think he just broke up with Victoria. Or maybe Harold? I know he has that snaggletooth. We can tell him to keep his mouth closed for the pictures.

Joy's face drops.

DRAYA (CONT'D)

Okay, fine. Maybe he can get veneers before Friday. That's a big ask though...

JOY

Draya. Shut up and look.

She points at a yearbook picture in the bottom right corner. In the picture, TWO WHITE STUDENTS laugh at their FRIEND in BLACKFACE.

JOY (CONT'D)
(reads caption)
"Sophomores Sullivan Chance and
Tripp Carney laugh at Jerald
O'Donnell who's Michael Jackson
costume was a big hit."

Bewildered, Draya grabs the yearbook from Joy.

DRAYA
No way. That can't be him.

Joy stands abruptly. She begins pacing back and forth.

JOY
I can't believe this. I thought
Jerald was down for us. I mean, his
name is Jerald.
(beat)
With a J.

DRAYA
Calm your tits. I'm sure he's
embarrassed by it now.

Joy stares at her, incredulous.

JOY
Are you actually defending that man
right now?

DRAYA
I've known the guy all my life. It
was a different time. Doesn't mean
he's a bad guy.

Draya stands, matching Joy's eye level.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
All I'm saying is, give him a
chance to explain before you go all
crazy.

JOY
(deep breath)
When did you become the rational
one in this friendship?

Draya glances at an imaginary watch on her wrist.

DRAYA
Precisely two minutes ago. Don't
worry. It never lasts long.

Draya plops down on her bed. She continues to mull over Joy's date options while Joy stares blankly at the yearbook photo.

INT. SCHOOL FRONT OFFICE - DAY

The bell RINGS. Joy sits outside Jerald's office, yearbook in hand. She closes her eyes and gives herself a pep talk.

JOY

Be rational and respectful. You still need that recommendation letter. Just show him the picture and let him explain. And do not, I repeat, do not call him a racist son of a bitch.

MRS. REESE (O.S.)

Honey, who are you talking to?

Joy opens her eyes to see MRS. REESE, the school secretary, staring at her.

JOY

Nobody.

The office door opens. Jerald and BRETT MORGAN (45), a businessman type, appear in the doorway.

JERALD

My girl, Joy!
(gesturing toward Brett)
This is my buddy, Brett. He was just stopping by to say hello.

BRETT

Nice to meet you, Joy.

JOY

You too.

Brett pats Jerald on the back.

BRETT

See you next week?

JERALD

You betcha.

Brett bids them farewell and exits the office.

JOY

(curious)
What's next week?

JERALD

Nothing too crazy. Just a little shindig with some old pals.

JOY

I'm guessing Draya's parents will be there?

JERALD

(chuckles)

Nah. It's not their scene.

He steps back inside his office. Joy follows.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Framed degrees are displayed on the wall. A picture of Jerald shaking Barack Obama's hand inside the Oval Office sits on his desk. Next to it, is a photo of Jerald and the Peters family at Draya's third birthday party.

Joy takes this all in as she sits down. Jerald leans back in his chair and kicks his feet up on the desk. He looks at her expectantly.

JERALD

So? What's up?

Joy looks down at the yearbook in her lap.

JERALD (CONT'D)

Is that an old yearbook?

JOY

Uh-huh. You were a sophomore, actually.

JERALD

Oh, boy. Let me see.

He pries the yearbook from Joy's grip.

JOY

There's, um, an interesting picture of you on Page 46.

Jerald flips through the pages excitedly.

JERALD

How embarrassing. How was my hair? Was my hair okay? I used a lot of gel.

He finds the page and immediately stops talking. He peers over the yearbook at Joy. An unreadable expression on his face.

JERALD (CONT'D)
Joy, I don't know what to say.

JOY
I thought I'd give you a chance to explain. It was a long time ago.

JERALD
That's no excuse. There is never an excuse for this kind of behavior. Never.

Jerald slams the book shut, causing Joy to jump.

JERALD (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I'm just...mad at myself. I was so young and uneducated.

He tucks the yearbook under his arm and walks around to the front of his desk.

JERALD (CONT'D)
I was just a kid trying to make my friends laugh. I was unaware of the historical context behind it. And for that, I am so very sorry.

JOY
Thank you. That means a lot.

JERALD
I hope you are able to forgive me.

JOY
(shrugs)
We all make mistakes, I guess.

JERALD
It is part of being human.

A comfortable moment of silence between them.

JOY
Well, I guess I should get going.
I'm late for anatomy.

She reaches for the yearbook, but Jerald SNATCHES it away.

JERALD

I think it's best if I keep this
here. You know, for safe keeping.

Joy's brow furrows. Jerald displays his pearly whites.

JERALD (CONT'D)

Off to class now, Joy.

Joy rises from her seat. She gives Jerald an awkward wave before exiting his office.

INT. HEALTH CLASS - DAY

The anatomy teacher, MR. MARTIN (probably 100), snores softly at his desk, while the class watches the Season One finale of *House*. In this particular episode, Dr. Gregory House meets up with his ex-girlfriend and her husband.

Joy sits at a desk in the back. She's nearly falling asleep herself when someone taps her on the shoulder. She turns to find TANNER (White, 17) sitting beside her. Sunglasses on, shirt collar popped.

TANNER

Are you still applying for the
Haines Scholarship?

JOY

Yes, I am.

TANNER

Oh, cool. Me too.

JOY

(laughs)
Good one.

TANNER

No really.

JOY

Oh.

TANNER

Jerald said I should apply. Just in
case.

JOY

In case what?

TANNER

I don't know. He said he didn't want the wrong person to get it.

JOY

(stunned)

Uh-huh. And when exactly did he say this to you?

TANNER

Like a month ago.

JOY

A whole month ago?

TANNER

Yeah. Well, good luck.

Joy shifts in her seat to face the projection screen. As she does, a particular line from Dr. House catches her attention. Dr. House: "Oh, he's good. If you can fake sincerity, you can pretty much fake anything."

Joy considers this. She grabs her backpack and rushes out of the room, inadvertently waking Mr. Martin from his sleep.

MR. MARTIN

No talking!

He immediately falls back into a deep sleep.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Joy barges into the office.

Jerald hovers over a PAPER SHREDDER. He holds the open yearbook in one hand, Page 46 in the other.

JOY

What are you doing?

JERALD

It was a mistake, Joy. A stupid, stupid mistake.

He puts the page through the machine. The photo turns to shreds. Jerald shuts the yearbook and tosses it to Joy. She barely catches it.

JERALD (CONT'D)

This is what you came for. Right?

Joy has no response. Jerald pats her on the back and walks toward his desk. He picks up his Obama photo, breathes on it heavily, and shines it with his sleeve.

JERALD (CONT'D)

I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, Joy. I've decided to recommend another student for the Haines Foundation Scholarship. Simply put, you are just not qualified.

Speechless, Joy shakes her head in disbelief.

JOY

No disrespect, but I'm more than qualified. You said you would--

JERALD

So sorry. You know, I hear Glen Cove Community College is a great institution for those who are financially unable.

Jerald holds out his hand for a handshake.

JERALD (CONT'D)

No hard feelings, right?

Joy stares at his hand with disdain. Her fists clenched.

JOY

(through gritted teeth)
Have a nice day, Principal O'Donnell.

JERALD

Come on, Joy. Call me--

But Joy is already out the door. It slams shut behind her.

JERALD (CONT'D)

Jerald.

Jerald laughs.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Joy wanders down the hall. Tears threaten to spill over her eyes when she suddenly bumps into Frankie. She ignores him and keeps walking.

Frankie raises an eyebrow. He jogs in front of her, blocking her path.

FRANKIE

Joy! Hey, look at me. What's wrong?

JOY

It's nothing.

FRANKIE

Doesn't seem like nothing. Who do I need to kill?

JOY

Don't take this the wrong way, but I don't think you're capable of killing somebody. You're like the size of a really big rabbit.

FRANKIE

First off, rabbits are consistently voted the cutest animal in the world. So, thank you. Second, I wouldn't personally commit the murder. I'd pay somebody to do it.

Joy cracks a smile.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

There she is. Look, you don't gotta tell me what happened. I just wanted to make sure you're good. You good?

JOY

I'm good.

FRANKIE

Good.

JOY

(smiles)

Good.

FRANKIE

I'm sure it's quite the story though. Whatever happened to you.

Joy's eyes light up.

JOY

You're right, Frankie. It is quite the story.

Joy sprints up the stairs. Frankie stares after her, both confused and amused.

INT. SCHOOL YEARBOOK ROOM - DAY

Rayne and Sonya argue over the yearbook format.

Joy BURSTS into the room. In a fit of rage, she kicks over a chair. Rayne and Sonya stare at her blankly.

SONYA

That felt unnecessary.

Joy hastily picks up the chair, returning it to its rightful place. She takes a moment to catch her breath.

JOY

I have a story for you.

Rayne and Sonya exchange glances.

RAYNE

We're listening.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL YEARBOOK ROOM - LATER

RAYNE

He shredded the picture? Right in front of you?

SONYA

That's a power move if I've ever heard one. It's kinda sexy.

Joy gives Sonya a pointed look.

SONYA (CONT'D)

And bad. Bad, Jerald, bad.

RAYNE

I can see the headline now.
"Principal Perfect Has a Bad Angle After All."

Rayne jots down notes.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

We'll have to visit his house to gather more evidence.

JOY

(chuckles)

Sorry. It sounded like you said we have to visit his house.

RAYNE

Your ears are working correctly.

Joy's smile falters.

JOY

I don't know if I'm comfortable with that. It feels like an invasion of privacy.

RAYNE

Look, Joy. I'm afraid I'm going to have to be blunt.

She puts a hand on Joy's shoulder.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

You gotta get rid of this nice guy act. If you want to be a journalist, you gotta get down and dirty.

JOY

Oh, I don't wanna be a journalist--

RAYNE

And if you want to be a really great journalist, you have to be willing to break a few laws.

SONYA

Fuck the police!

Sonya pins a picture of Jerald to the wall.

SONYA (CONT'D)

And fuck that dude, too.

Rayne and Sonya high five.

RAYNE

We start after school. Meet us in the parking lot at sixteen-hundred hours.

SONYA

That's four o'clock--

Rayne holds a hand up to silence her.

RAYNE

No. If she can't tell military time, then she's not a real journalist.

JOY
I don't want to be a journalist!

RAYNE
And with that attitude, you never
will be.

Rayne and Sonya gather their things and leave. Joy is left alone, baffled. She stares at Jerald's photo. Oddly enough, it seems to be staring back.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Draya stands with her head inside her locker. Her muted screams are still distinguishable. SABRINA (17) gently rubs her back.

Joy cautiously approaches them.

JOY
(to Sabrina)
What happened this time?

SABRINA
Calculus. She needs to pass this
test on Monday.
(whispers)
Or else she won't graduate.

DRAYA
(muffled)
I can hear you!

Draya emerges from the locker. Bloodshot eyes, cheeks stained with mascara.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
I am stressed the fuck out, man!

Draya stomps down the hall. Joy and Sabrina exchange looks and reluctantly trail behind.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
How does the world expect me to
plan the perfect prom and know
about shapes and shit? It's
physically impossible.

JOY
Dear lord. Please tell me you know
the difference between calculus and
geometry.

SABRINA

I've tried to explain it to her
several times.

DRAYA

It doesn't matter. I'm just gonna
talk to Uncle Jerry about it. He
won't let this happen.

Joy flinches.

JOY

Or you could just study really hard
and earn the grade yourself.

Draya lets out a HARSH LAUGH.

DRAYA

It's like you don't know me at all.

Draya takes a sudden detour into the bathroom. Sabrina and
Joy hover outside the door, debating the next move.

JOY

SABRINA

She's your girlfriend.

She's your best friend.

Sabrina sighs. She holds out her fist, indicating a game of
ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS. Rock. Paper. Scissors. Shoot.

Sabrina's paper beats Joy's rock. She silently celebrates her
victory, while Joy groans.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

Tell her I love her.

JOY

Don't make me slap you.

Sabrina skips away. Joy enters the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Joy checks the stalls while Draya attempts to fix her makeup.

JOY

Are you sure you want to get
Principal O'Donnell involved?

DRAYA

You back to calling him that?

Joy leans against the sink, crossing her arms. Draya applies
mascara.

JOY

I went to talk to him today. About the blackface.

DRAYA

And?

JOY

He destroyed the picture. Shredded it right in front of me.

DRAYA

Can you blame him? It's not a good look.

JOY

Also, I told Rayne.

Draya drops her mascara wand.

DRAYA

Are you insane? Why would you tell that psycho? She's gonna turn this into something it isn't.

JOY

O'Donnell told me I wasn't qualified for the scholarship. He's recommending someone else.

Draya takes a small, intimidating step closer to Joy.

DRAYA

Oh, I see. You're not mad about the blackface. You're mad about the scholarship.

JOY

No. Well, yes, but that's not why--

DRAYA

You tryna ruin his whole life because something didn't go your way?

JOY

You didn't see the look in his eye. Something's not right.

DRAYA

That's my uncle, Joy!

JOY

Play uncle.

DRAYA
Whatever, I don't want any part of
this.

Draya packs up her makeup.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
This shit storm will turn into a
shit hurricane before you know it.
(beat)
And I don't wanna see the
aftermath.

Draya storms out of the bathroom. Joy glares after her.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Joy walks down the hall, muttering to herself. She walks briskly past the principal's office, but she sees something out of the corner of her eye that causes her to backtrack.

Through the window, she spots Draya having an animated conversation with Jerald. He appears to listen to her intently. They smile and share a laugh.

Joy peers at the interaction, astonished. She turns and walks away in a bit of a haze.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

The school bell RINGS. Students exit the building. Joy searches for Rayne and Sonya to no avail. She pulls out her phone to send a text.

An eardrum-bursting CAR HORN sounds.

Joy covers her ears and follows the noise to a JEEP WRANGLER. Rayne and Sonya sit inside. Rayne's hand rests on the horn.

CUT TO:

INT. RAYNE'S JEEP - DAY

Joy climbs into the backseat.

JOY
I thought the goal was to not draw
attention to ourselves.

RAYNE
Chill. No one noticed.

A FRESHMAN walks past the front windshield. He rubs his ears and flips them off simultaneously.

JOY

Now what?

SONYA

We wait.

RAYNE

Jerald usually leaves his office around five.

JOY

That's an hour from now.

RAYNE

Good for you, Joy. You can tell time.

JOY

I'm just saying I woulda packed a snack or something.

Joy's phone rings. She frowns and answers the phone.

JOY (CONT'D)

Hey, ma.

INT. DINER - DAY

Gina wipes down tables with a rag. She cradles her phone with her shoulder.

GINA

Hey, baby. Can you make dinner for Minnie and Stevie tonight? Looks like I'm working the late shift again.

INTERCUT JOY/GINA

JOY

Sure, but I might be home a little late.

GINA

Where you at?

JOY

Oh, I'm just...doing some work for the yearbook.

(MORE)

JOY (CONT'D)

Joined the staff today. Can't have too many extracurriculars.

Gina swings the rag over her shoulder. She grabs a WATER PITCHER off the counter. She gives CUSTOMERS refills.

GINA

Look at my baby. Overachiever.

JOY

It's not that big of a deal...

GINA

(to customers)

My baby girl is going to Northwestern next year on the Haines Foundation Scholarship. It's very prestigious.

JOY

(groans)

Ma.

GINA

What? I can't be proud of my daughter?

JOY

I don't have the scholarship yet.

GINA

But you will. Said so yourself.

Joy looks down at her lap.

JOY

I gotta go, Ma.

GINA

Alright. Be safe, baby.

Joy hangs up the phone.

SONYA

Man. It's gonna be so awkward when your mom finds out you didn't get the scholarship.

JOY

(annoyed)

Oh, I'm getting that scholarship. With or without a recommendation from that jerk face.

SONYA

Jerk face? More like fine face, am
I right?

Sonya holds her hand out for a dab. Joy leaves her hanging.

RAYNE

Well, well, well. Looks like
Principal Perfect is taking off a
little early today.

Through the WINDSHIELD, the girls see Jerald emerge from the school. He waves to students lounging on the steps and marches toward the parking lot. He climbs into a CHERRY RED CONVERTIBLE and starts the ignition. The radio blasts DAVE MATTHEWS BAND. He puts the top down and proceeds to speed out of the parking lot.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

Here we go.

Rayne puts the Jeep in drive, following Jerald.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The girls trail Jerald at a safe distance. Jerald drives recklessly. He weaves in and out of traffic. Rayne struggles to keep up.

Jerald makes a sharp right turn onto a DIRT ROAD lined with massive oak trees. The never-ending road twists and turns until they finally happen upon their destination. A gated community.

The gate slowly opens as Jerald's car nears. The convertible races inside. Rayne revs the engine, launching the Jeep into the neighborhood before the gate closes.

INT. RAYNE'S JEEP - DAY

The girls stare at the view. Wide eyes. Jaws dropped.

Humongous two-story homes with white picket fences and bright green lawns. CHILDREN ride their bikes. COUPLES walk their dogs. Grins on their faces.

SONYA

I don't know how to say this
without sounding like an asshole,
but I thought teachers were
supposed to be poor.

JOY

They are. This doesn't make sense.

RAYNE

But it does. I did a little digging to prepare for our investigation. Jerald is a trust fund baby. His dad co-founded Buena Comida.

JOY

The Mexican food chain? A white dude founded that place?

RAYNE

Think about it. The guacamole has raisins in it. *Raisins*.

Jerald's convertible pulls into the driveway of a classic COLONIAL-STYLE home with navy blue shutters and a porch swing. An AMERICAN FLAG is displayed by the front door.

Jerald jumps out of his car and proceeds to walk inside. Rayne parks her Jeep a few houses down.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

Sit back and relax ladies. We could be here for a long, long--

Jerald reappears in the doorway, hands on his hips. He now wears a POLO SHIRT and FLANNEL SHORTS. He struts down his driveway and down the street.

JOY

Where is he going?

RAYNE

Only one way to find out.

Rayne puts the car in drive and follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. CUL-DE-SAC - DAY

Dozens of WHITE NEIGHBORS gather for a block party. Jerald mingles with guests. WAITERS serve hors d'oeuvres. BARTENDERS prepare mixed drinks at the bar. Several white folding chairs surround a microphone at the center of the cul-de-sac.

Joy, Rayne, and Sonya pop up behind a bush.

SONYA

It's settled. I'm moving here.
Either of you down to split the
rent?

JOY

We wouldn't fit in.

SONYA

Excuse you.

RAYNE

She's right. Look around.

Sonya scans the party, eyeing every single guest.

SONYA

Damn. It's whiter than a blizzard
in here.

An intimidating MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN struts up to the microphone wearing a conservative dress and pearls. She taps the mic and clears her throat, beginning to address the crowd.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Attention, everyone! Please find a
seat. It's time to get started.

The crowd quiets down and moves to the folding chairs.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN (CONT'D)

For those of you who don't know me,
my name is Mrs. Terri Kensington.
My husband, William Kensington, is
the mayor of our lovely Glen Cove.

A polite round of applause.

TERRI

He may be the mayor, but I'm the
president. The president of the
Cove Heritage Neighborhood
Association. Four years running.

NEIGHBOR BILL (40s) jumps up from his chair.

BILL

(chants)

Four more years! Four more years!

TERRI

Stop it, stop it. You're far too
kind. Please have a seat, Bill.

Like a well-trained dog, Neighbor Bill does as he's told.

TERRI (CONT'D)

Let's get to the agenda, shall we?
Now, I'm aware several of you have
children at Glen Cove High School.
Many of you have expressed concerns
about protests on campus. Lucky for
us, there's someone willing to
address that very issue tonight.
And he lives right here in our
special neighborhood. Please
welcome Glen Cove Principal Jerald
O'Donnell. Jerry?

The crowd gives him a warm welcome. Jerald basks in the
glory, flashing his million dollar smile. Terri hugs Jerald a
little too tight before she lets him take center stage.
Jerald speaks into the microphone.

JERALD

Thank you for having me. It's true.
There have been protests at Glen
Cove in recent days. Students have
brought forth concerns about our
school mural. Issues of historic
inaccuracy and insensitive
depictions of our Native American
friends.

Murmurs from the crowd.

JERALD (CONT'D)

However, that same mural has
welcomed thousands of students to
Glen Cove High School for the past
seventy years. This will all blow
over in time. But I assure you
this: the mural is here to stay.

The crowd bursts into applause and cheers. Outraged, Joy
jumps up from behind the bush.

JOY

(loudly)

What the actual fuck--

Rayne immediately yanks Joy back down behind the bush.
Neighbors look around wildly.

Terri gently pushes Jerald to the side, moving back in front
of the microphone.

TERRI

Thank you, Jerald, for that update.
I think we can all agree it would
be a shame for the mural to be
removed. Now, let's move on to the
next item on the agenda: The Summer
Soiree.

In the distance, Joy, Rayne, and Sonya crawl out from behind
the bush and away from the cul-de-sac.

INT. RAYNE'S JEEP - DAY

Rayne drives away from the cul-de-sac. Sonya snaps pictures
of the neighborhood while Joy boils with anger in the
backseat.

JOY

He's a liar. A goddamn liar. A
motherfucking liar!

RAYNE

Joy, pull it together. We're not
done here.

Rayne parks a few doors down from Jerald's house.

RAYNE (CONT'D)

I need you guys to go inside and
see what you can find.

JOY

You're not coming with?

RAYNE

Someone has to be the lookout.
Since Sonya has a way with the
camera--

SONYA

I took ninety selfies in under a
minute once.

RAYNE

--and you have some obvious anger
to resolve, I figure I should be
the lookout.

Rayne grabs a duffel bag from the backseat. She digs through
it, retrieves TWO PAIRS OF GLOVES, and hands them to Joy and
Sonya.

RAYNE (CONT'D)
Don't touch anything. Don't leave
anything behind.

Rayne UNLOCKS the car doors.

RAYNE (CONT'D)
And don't fuck this up.

SONYA
Would it kill you to say please?

Sonya begrudgingly gets out of the vehicle. Rayne gives Joy a slight nod of encouragement. Joy takes a moment to collect herself and exits the Jeep.

EXT. JERALD'S HOUSE - DAY

Joy and Sonya creep up to the front door. Locked. They check the windows next. Also locked.

They scurry around to the side of the house. They spot a window, half open. Joy suddenly stalls.

JOY
I don't think we should do this.

SONYA
Are you really gonna chicken out?
We already got out of the car.

JOY
It's a federal crime.

SONYA
So is taking someone else's mail,
but I read my neighbor's Cosmo
every month. Now, woman the fuck up
and let's go.

Sonya bends over and clasps her hands together. She looks at Joy expectantly. Joy groans and places one foot into Sonya's hands. Sonya hoists her through the window. She lands inside with a LOUD CRASH.

JOY (O.S.)
I'm okay!

CUT TO:

INT. JERALD'S GUEST BATHROOM - DAY

Sonya jumps down from the window. Joy cleans up the toiletries she knocked over upon entry. They look around, pleasantly surprised. Potpourri in a decorative bowl. Plush towels on the rack.

SONYA

Surprisingly clean for a dude. He's even got the foamy soap.

She starts snapping photos with her phone.

JOY

C'mon. Let's go.

Joy and Sonya exit the bathroom.

INT. JERALD'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sonya and Rayne enter the gigantic living space. A sophisticated yet modern aesthetic. THREE LARGE SELF PORTRAITS of Jerald hang on the wall behind the L-shaped sofa.

SONYA

Damn, Jerald. I see you with the natural lighting and the self love.

Sonya plops down onto the sofa.

SONYA (CONT'D)

Oh my god. Joy, you have to sit on this couch. Come sit.

JOY

Sonya, we do not have time for--

Sonya pulls Joy down next to her.

JOY (CONT'D)

Oh. This is nice. This is really nice.

Joy becomes distracted by a MANILA FOLDER on the coffee table. The label reads HAINES FOUNDATION.

SONYA

The coffee table's nice, right?
What kind of wood is this? Oak?

Joy swipes the folder from the table and examines its contents, finding files on previous Haines Scholarship recipients.

SONYA (CONT'D)
Anything good in there?

JOY
I'm not sure yet.

She closes the folder and tosses it to Sonya.

JOY (CONT'D)
Take pictures of everything in that folder. I'm going to find his bedroom.

Joy departs the living room while Sonya takes snapshots.

INT. JERALD'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joy peeks her head inside. She slowly steps into the room, taking in her surroundings. Neutral tones. Modern art design on the walls. The massive king-size bed is perfectly made.

Joy investigates the contents of the dresser. Then the side table. Nothing of interest. She huffs and pushes her way into the

CLOSET

Joy finds the light switch and flicks it upward, illuminating the room. Her jaw immediately drops.

The closet is the size of a small apartment. Color-coordinated shirts and jackets line the walls. Dozens of pairs of shoes are organized in cubbies. She opens a drawer to find an impressive watch collection.

Joy becomes distracted by her environment and bumps into a wall, knocking a SMALL BOX off of a shelf and onto the floor. A flood of POLAROIDs spill out of the box. Joy tilts her head. She squats down to examine the photos.

JOY
Jackpot.

The polaroids show white people in BLACKFACE. Each of them dressed as notable black entertainers and politicians. Joy becomes increasingly disgusted as she flips through the photos. She finds a photo of Jerald dressed as Barack Obama and flips it over. Handwritten on the back - *Blackface Party 2016*.

JOY (CONT'D)
Gotcha, O'Donnell.

She continues to skim the photos. She slowly realizes Jerald isn't the only recognizable face in them. AMY. BRETT. NEIGHBOR BILL. THE WOMAN IN WHITE. *They are all there too.*

JOY (CONT'D)
What the--

Joy's phone buzzes. She looks at the notification.

RAYNE (TEXT)
Jerald sighting. Get out now!

Joy promptly puts the polaroids into her back pocket. She returns the box to its spot on the shelf and rushes out of the closet.

INT. JERALD'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sonya takes selfies of herself on the sofa. Joy runs into the room, grabs her arm, and pulls her into the...

FOYER

They make their way to the front just as the door UNLOCKS. Their eyes widen. They rush into the coat closet, quickly closing the door behind them.

Jerald and Terri stumble into the house, sloppily making out. Terri pulls away, out of breath.

TERRI
Your speech was so hot, Jer-Bear.

He picks her up. She wraps her legs around his waist.

JERALD
You think so? I was honestly
worried about my hair. Did my hair
look okay?

TERRI
Amazing.

Terri grabs his hair and yanks it. She smashes her lips to his.

INT. COAT CLOSET - DAY

Joy and Sonya cringe upon hearing a series of muffled moans and grunts. Sonya lowers her voice, whispering to Joy.

SONYA
I'm gonna throw up.

JOY
(responding quietly)
Don't do it. Don't you do it.

The moans grow louder.

JOY (CONT'D)
You have to take a picture.

SONYA
I'd rather claw my eyes out.

JOY
Sonya. Take the goddamn picture.

Sonya grimaces. She gets her phone in position and pushes the door open just a tad. Through the door opening, she sees Jerald and Terri tangled together, fully-clothed. Sonya squirms and takes a series of photos. She quietly closes the door.

SONYA
I think...I think this ruined sex
for me.

JERALD (O.S.)
I'm going to make us some drinks.
I'll meet you in the bedroom.

TERRI (O.S.)
Don't keep me waiting too long.

Footsteps sound from outside the door.

JOY
This might be our shot.

She peeks through a crack in the door. No one in sight. Joy and Sonya tiptoe out of the coat closet and back into the...

FOYER

They creep quietly toward the door.

TERRI (O.S.)
 (yelling from upstairs)
 Oh, I almost forgot to ask.

Joy and Sonya hesitate. Terri's heels click-clack down the stairs. She returns to the foyer. Miraculously, Joy and Sonya have vanished.

TERRI (CONT'D)
 William is meeting with the Haines
 Foundation Board this week. Will
 you be there?

Jerald returns with two glasses of whiskey.

JERALD
 Nope.

TERRI
 Why not?

JERALD
 Those people have a negative impact
 on my aura. That's why. Plus, I've
 done my part. I wrote a
 recommendation letter today for the
 most qualified applicant. An all-
 star student. No one deserves it
 more.

TERRI
 Your niece's friend, right?

JERALD
 Ugh, no. Fuck her. I recommended
 Tanner Hollingsworth the Third.

Terri stares at him blankly.

TERRI
 But the scholarship is for black
 students.

JERALD
 How dare you assume that Tanner
 isn't black.

TERRI
 Jerry--

JERALD
 Terri, white students deserve to go
 to college just as much as black
 students. Don't you agree?

TERRI

Yes, but--

JERALD

Far be it from me to deny that
young white man of his dreams.

Terri takes a drink from Jerald. She downs it and puts the glass down onto the entryway table.

TERRI

Just take me upstairs.

JERALD

As you wish, my lady.

Jerald picks Terri up, hoisting her over his shoulder.

CREAK.

Jerald spins around, knocking Terri's head into the wall. She groans.

JERALD (CONT'D)

What was that?

TERRI

Jerry, I swear to god if you don't
take me upstairs right now.

Jerald takes one last look around the foyer before carrying Terri up the stairs. He grunts with each step he takes.

JERALD (O.S.)

Did you gain a couple of LB's?

Jerald's voice becomes more and more distant until a door slams shut at the top of the stairs. The foyer is silent.

The front window curtains suddenly slide open, revealing Joy and Sonya in their hiding spot. Sonya rocks back and forth on her feet, the floor creaking while she does.

SONYA

You'd think that a house like this
would have better flooring.

JOY

Let's just get the hell out of
here.

Joy and Sonya make a break for the front door. The OBAMA BLACKFACE POLAROID falls out of Joy's pocket onto the floor as they exit.

INT. DRAYA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Draya sits at the kitchen table, struggling to focus on her homework. Draya's mom, KEISHA (Black, 46), enters the kitchen in a bright power suit. She sets her briefcase on the counter.

KEISHA

Hey, baby girl. How was your day?

Draya is too distracted to answer.

DRAYA

Mom, what do you think of Uncle Jerry?

KEISHA

What do I think of him?

DRAYA

Yeah.

KEISHA

Jerald is...Jerald.

DRAYA

What does that mean?

KEISHA

It means, he's your father's best friend.

DRAYA

Isn't he your friend too?

Keisha smiles, but it doesn't reach her eyes.

KEISHA

He's never quite been a friend of mine.

Keisha kisses Draya on the forehead and exits the kitchen. Draya frowns.

She pulls out her phone, scrolls through her contacts, and hits dial.

INT. SCHOOL YEARBOOK ROOM - NIGHT

Joy, Rayne, and Sonya enter. Joy's phone rings. She looks at the screen. Draya's calling.

SONYA

You gonna get that?

Joy hits the decline button and slips her phone into her back pocket.

JOY

No. It's just Draya.

(to Rayne)

How did you get a key to the school?

RAYNE

The news never sleeps, Robinson.
But the janitor does. I stole the key during his afternoon nap.

MINNIE (O.S.)

I really don't wanna be here.

REVEAL: Minnie and Stevie push past the teenagers, entering the room.

RAYNE

To be fair, we don't want you here either.

JOY

Shut up, Rayne.

(to Minnie and Stevie)

I promise it won't take long. We just have to take care of a few things. You have to promise not to tell Ma I brought you here, alright?

Stevie and Minnie glance at each other. They look back at Joy, crossing their arms. Joy sighs.

JOY (CONT'D)

Fine. What do you want?

STEVIE

Twenty bucks.

JOY

Does it look like I have twenty bucks?

MINNIE

It doesn't look like you even have five bucks.

STEVIE

She actually has six dollars and seventy cents in her wallet. I checked.

Stevie whispers into Minnie's ear.

MINNIE

(to Joy)

Six dollars and seventy cents plus extra bacon with breakfast for the next two weeks or we walk.

JOY

Deal. Now stop talking and go sit in the corner.

Minnie and Stevie do as they're told. Joy turns her attention back to Rayne and Sonya.

JOY (CONT'D)

Do you think we have enough for an exposé?

SONYA

Oh, we have more than enough.

RAYNE

The real question is, are you willing to take the risk?

Joy glances at the CLOCK. 7:19 p.m. Then, her eyes linger on the picture of Jerald pinned to the wall.

JOY

Let's take the motherfucker down.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

- Rayne furiously types away at a computer. Three empty cups of coffee sit next to her.
- Sonya posts the scandalous affair photos on Instagram through an anonymous account.
- Joy makes copies of the blackface polaroids.
- Sonya sleeps on a desk. Stevie and Minnie draw on her face with permanent marker.
- The printer works in overdrive.

- Dozens of articles sit on the desk. Jerald's blackface photos are displayed on the front page. The title: "Two-Faced." The author: Anonymous.

- The girls beam at their work.

- The clock now reads 11:08 p.m.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. ROBINSON APARTMENT - DAY

Bacon SIZZLES in a pan. Joy stands next to the stove. Minnie and Stevie watch happily from the kitchen table.

Gina enters the apartment, immediately taking in the smell.

GINA

Bacon again, huh? You are such a
good big sister.

Joy glares at the twins. They return mischievous smiles.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Jerald's convertible speeds into the lot, coming to a screeching halt in his parking space. He steps out of the vehicle, beaming from ear to ear. He gleefully skips up the front steps.

A STUDENT ATHLETE leans against the front door. Jerald holds up his hand for a high-five. The student athlete stares at his hand with repulsion.

STUDENT ATHLETE

Guess you ran out of makeup.

She slaps his hand away and enters the school. Jerald stumbles for a moment, confused. He clears his throat, straightens his tie, and fixes his perfectly coifed hair.

INT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Loud whispers fill the lobby. Copies of the blackface polaroids hang on the walls. Students and faculty huddle in packs reading the exposé. Two teachers, MS. MORTON and MRS. YARBOROUGH, stand side-by-side. Mrs. Yarborough reads the article thoroughly causing Ms. Morton rolls her eyes.

MS. MORTON
I don't know why you're reading
that. It's filled with lies.

MRS. YARBOROUGH
The facts are on the page, Debra.
Check this out, he's even sleeping
with the mayor's wife!

Ms. Morton snatches the exposé from Mrs. Yarborough and scans the page. She's visibly disappointed.

MS. MORTON
But...he said I was the only person
he was sleeping with.

Jerald confidently strides into the building. Ms. Morton immediately marches up to him and SLAPS him across the face. She huffs and walks away.

JERALD
(yells after her)
What the hell was that?

Jerald rubs his bright red cheek. He laughs it off and turns to the students.

JERALD (CONT'D)
Women. Am I right?

His smile quickly fades upon noticing scowls from the school population. He glances around the lobby, eyes landing on the exposé in the hands of a HIPSTER STUDENT. Jerald yanks the article from her and flips through it. The color drains from his face.

JERALD (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
No. No. No. No. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!

Jerald hastily grabs every exposé in sight. He rips down the photos plastered on the walls.

HIPSTER STUDENT
Don't like the way you look? You
racist piece of shit.

Students echo the hipster, yelling expletives. For the first time, Jerald looks fearful as the teenagers angrily crowd around him. He races into his office, hiding from the growing flock of young people.

Joy, Rayne, and Sonya (with faint marker on her face) stand at the end of the hall, watching the scene unfold from afar. Rayne literally gives them pats on their backs.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Joy strolls into homeroom. Draya reads the exposé at a desk in the back. She surveys the room, appearing somewhat anxious, until she locks eyes with Joy. Joy immediately averts eye contact and claims a seat next to Frankie. He leans over, resting an arm on her desk.

FRANKIE
I know what you did.

JOY
What?

FRANKIE
"Two-Faced."

JOY
That wasn't me.

FRANKIE
Fine. You don't have to tell me.

JOY
Good. Because I have nothing to tell.

FRANKIE
Uh-huh.

JOY
I don't.

FRANKIE
Of course not.

Frankie sits upright. He taps his pencil on the desk. Joy scribbles in her notebook.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
Nice weather outside.

JOY
Yeah. A little windy.

FRANKIE
Heard it might rain later.

JOY
I've got an umbrella in my locker.

FRANKIE
Right next to the blackface photos
of Jerald.

Joy stutters. Frankie smirks.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
Relax. I won't tell anybody.

JOY
It's not you I'm worried about.

Joy glances back at Draya. Suddenly, a voice speaks over the INTERCOM.

MRS. REESE (V.O.)
Joy Robinson to the principal's
office. Joy Robinson to the
principal's office.

The class hears incessant yelling in the background over the intercom.

MRS. REESE (V.O.)
For the love of God, please hurry.

The intercom abruptly turns off. Joy's classmates mutter while she gathers her things.

FRANKIE
I'll walk with you.

JOY
No. I've got this.

She reaches over and gives Frankie's hand a squeeze before exiting the room.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Jerald furiously paces back and forth. Arms crossed. Sweat on his brow. Face beet red.

There's a knock at the door. Mrs. Reese timidly pokes her head inside.

MRS. REESE
Joy Robinson is here to see you.

Jerald sits down at his desk. His normally perfectly coifed hair hangs in his face.

JERALD
How do I look?

MRS. REESE
A little red...

JERALD
Nobody asked you, Delilah.

MRS. REESE
You just asked--

JERALD
Why are you still here? Send her in.

Mrs. Reese scurries away from the doorway. Moments later, Joy arrives. She sits opposite Jerald, stone-faced and ready for war.

JERALD (CONT'D)
Joy.

JOY
Principal O'Donnell.

Jerald leans forward on his desk, clasping his hands together. He lowers his voice.

JERALD
Why don't you just come clean?
Admit what you did. It'll be better
for you in the long run.

JOY
And what exactly did I do?

Jerald pulls out the OBAMA BLACKFACE POLAROID from his pocket. He tosses it on the table.

JERALD
You broke into my house. Stole
private photos. Published them for
the school to see.

JOY
I'm afraid none of that rings a
bell.

JERALD
This is a crime.

JOY

(shrugs)

It's only a crime if someone gets caught.

Jerald grimaces.

JERALD

Look. I'm trying my best to be nice because you're best friends with my niece--

JOY

Play niece. She's half black by the way. But, I guess you don't see color.

Jerald leaps out of his chair. He moves over to Joy, leans down and intimidatingly whispers in her ear.

JERALD

Listen up, you little shit. You think you're gonna destroy me? Huh? You thought wrong. I'm gonna destroy you. I'm gonna make you wish you never left the hood. I'm gonna make you wish you had joined the army. I'm gonna make you wish you had a twin so you could pin the crime on her--

Mrs. Reese opens the door. Jerald instantly changes his demeanor.

JERALD (CONT'D)

(to Joy)

And that's why you continue to be one of my very favorite students.

(to Mrs. Reese)

Yes, Delilah?

MRS. REESE

Mrs. Kensington is on the phone for you.

JERALD

Thank you. Tell her I'll just be a minute.

Mrs. Reese nods and exits. Jerald proceeds to finish his threatening spiel.

JERALD (CONT'D)
I'm gonna make you wish you were
never fuckin' born, kid.

Joy picks at her nails, unfazed.

JOY
You think the mayor knows about the
affair?

JERALD
(points to the door)
Get the fuck out of my office.

JOY
Gladly.

Joy pushes past Jerald, but she pauses in front of the door.

JOY (CONT'D)
Oh, and Principal O'Donnell? I'll
be going to college with or without
that scholarship. I don't know how
yet...but I know that I sure as
hell don't want any help from you.
(nods to the phone)
Tell Mrs. Kensington I say hello.

Joy leaves. Jerald refocuses his attention to the phone,
takes a deep breath, and answers.

JERALD
(into phone)
Hey, Ter-Bear.

He immediately pulls the phone away his ear. Terri yells
through the receiver, going on a prolonged rant. Then,
suddenly, the line goes dead. Jerald sighs, hangs up, and
contemplates his next move.

JERALD (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Delilah! I need all students in the
auditorium for an emergency
assembly. Now!

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

A packed room. Students chat amongst themselves. Joy squeezes
her way through a crowded row of seats, finding a spot in the
middle.

The stage lights rise. Jerald steps up to the podium. Upon his appearance, the audience boos loudly. Jerald clears his throat and speaks into the microphone.

JERALD

You all have every right to be upset with me. I took advantage of your trust.

STUDENT #1

Racist!

STUDENT #2

Get off the stage!

More students yell from the audience. Jerald dodges random items of food thrown from the crowd. He frantically glances around the room, seemingly looking for a way out-- when suddenly, he breaks into a dramatic COUGHING FIT.

The crowd watches uncomfortably as he hacks on stage.

JERALD

I'm sorry. Oh, I'm so sorry. It must be a side effect of the cancer.

The audience mumbles.

JERALD (CONT'D)

I apologize for burdening you with this truth so abruptly. I received the diagnosis three months ago. I was trying my best to keep this to myself. I don't deserve your pity after the things I've done.

Joy rolls her eyes. She slinks down in her seat, covers her mouth, and disguises her voice.

JOY

(yells)

What kind of cancer?

Jerald searches the crowd for the person who asked the question, but he's unsuccessful.

JERALD

Colon. Doctors say that it has spread to my brain. I'm afraid I might not have long left. Two, maybe three years tops. The fact that I might not get to see some of you graduate breaks my heart.

(MORE)

JERALD (CONT'D)

After all, I do consider each and everyone of you my children.

Jerald bursts into tears. Mrs. Reese runs onto stage with a box of tissues. He quietly thanks her and wipes his damp cheeks.

The crowd buys it. Students hold back tears.

STUDENT #3

We love you, Jerald!

STUDENT #4

We know you didn't mean it! You're the best!

The audience rises to their feet. They start to chant.

CROWD

Jerald! Jerald! Jerald!

JOY

You gotta be kidding me.

An irate Joy remains seated, barely able to contain her exasperation. She looks back at Rayne and Sonya, neither of whom can hide their bewilderment.

Joy then shifts her attention to Draya. She stands on the other side of the auditorium with her peers. An unreadable expression on her face.

Finally, Joy returns her focus to the stage. Jerald beams triumphantly.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - DAY

Teachers and faculty enjoy light conversation at generic-looking tables. In the corner, Mr. Jefferies sits alone. He flips through the newspaper. A coffee stain visible on his dress shirt.

Joy, Rayne, and Sonya barge into the room. Mr. Jefferies promptly tries to hide behind his paper.

SONYA

Mr. Jefferies. We can see you.

Mr. Jefferies drops the paper. Clear annoyance on his face.

MR. JEFFERIES

Oh. Hi, girls.

RAYNE

Please don't take this the wrong way, but where the hell have you been?

MR. JEFFERIES

Around.

JOY

Around where?

MR. JEFFERIES

Not that it's any of your business, but I had a family emergency. Turns out, my brother's wife--

RAYNE

We don't have time to pretend to care. Are you aware of everything that's happened today?

MR. JEFFERIES

Vaguely.

Mr. Jefferies takes a long sip of his coffee.

JOY

Well? Are you going to do anything about it?

MR. JEFFERIES

About what?

RAYNE

Jerald. He's faking a cancer diagnosis to distract from his blatant racism.

MR. JEFFERIES

I try not to get involved in school matters.

RAYNE

That's literally your job.

Mr. Jefferies, feeling prying eyes, peers around the room. He signals for the girls to lean closer. They oblige. He lowers his voice.

MR. JEFFERIES

Look. Those pictures pissed me off too, but politics are involved here. That man has been tryna get rid of me since the day I got here.

(MORE)

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)
All I gotta do is step outta line
once and...

He uses his hand to make the CUTTHROAT GESTURE.

SONYA
(confused)
He's gonna massage your neck?

MR. JEFFERIES
He's gonna get me fired.

JOY
What about the school board? Can't
they do something?

MR. JEFFERIES
(loudly)
The school board won't do shit!

Mr. Jefferies coworkers whip their heads around, giving him
daggers. He shields his face with one hand.

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)
Superintendent Powell has been
trying to take down O'Donnell since
she was appointed.

JOY
Why?

MR. JEFFERIES
It's plain and simple. She's sick
of his privileged ass. The only
reason O'Donnell has this job is
because his daddy is the school
district's biggest donor. It's
shitty, but that's just the way it
is.

He stands abruptly from his chair.

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)
I'm afraid there's nothing I can
do.

Mr. Jefferies drags his feet toward the door but stops short.
He looks at the determined students with sad eyes.

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)
If it makes you feel any better,
I've always thought the guy
deserved a nice, swift punch in the
face.

With one last look at the girls, Mr. Jefferies disappears from the lounge. The girls exchange devastated glances.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Hungry students swarm the space. Joy, Rayne, and Sonya move down the lunch line, trays in hand. The LUNCH LADY plops peas onto Rayne's plate. They glare at each other, forcing Sonya to drag Rayne away.

The girls spot an unoccupied table near the window and claim the seats. Joy stabs at her food with her fork. Frustrated, she throws her utensil down onto her plate.

JOY

How can one person have so much power over people?

Rayne simply points to her skin.

RAYNE

That's how.

SONYA

And having a dick doesn't hurt.

JOY

Maybe. But does he have the balls to go up against us?

Rayne and Sonya exchange glances.

RAYNE

(smirks)

To be honest, I always thought he was overcompensating for something.

The girls break into laughter.

Frankie takes notice from a few tables over. He bids farewell to his friends, grabs his lunch tray, and saunters over. With a curious look on his face, he attempts to insert himself into the conversation.

FRANKIE

What's so funny?

Still chuckling, the girls ignore him.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Was there a joke? I like jokes.

Joy glances out the window into the courtyard. She suddenly stops laughing.

JOY

What the...

Joy rises from the table and bolts out of the cafeteria. Sonya, Rayne, and Frankie run after her.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

A beautiful enclosed space with various flowers and plants. A three-tier traditional limestone FOUNTAIN is mounted in the middle of the courtyard.

Nearby, CHEERLEADERS man a table with a LARGE BANNER attached to the front. It reads "HELP OUR FEARLESS LEADER. DONATE TODAY." Jerald's framed headshot sits in the center of the table.

CYNTHIA (17), an overly peppy cheerleader with an overly peppy ponytail, accepts a TWENTY DOLLAR BILL from a LOVESICK SOPHOMORE.

CYNTHIA

(to Lovesick Sophomore)

Jerald's health is dependent on loyal students like you, Craig.

LOVESICK SOPHOMORE

My name's Greg--

CYNTHIA

Thank you so much, Craig. See you around.

Cynthia waves the Lovesick Sophomore away.

Joy charges into the courtyard and beelines for the table. Sonya, Rayne, and Frankie trail behind.

JOY

Cynthia, what the fuck are you doing?

CYNTHIA

Nice to see you, Joy. Would you like to donate?

JOY

No!

CYNTHIA

A dollar goes a long way.

JOY

The man is a monster. Why are you hosting a fundraiser for him?

CYNTHIA

He's not a monster.

JOY

Blackface. Recommending white students for a black scholarship. Having an affair with the mayor's wife. Need I go on?

CYNTHIA

I think he's just a man who's been blinded by his own privileges in life. He shouldn't have to die because of that.

JOY

He's lying about the fucking cancer! He's lying!

Cynthia crosses her arms.

CYNTHIA

Joy, everyone knows you're just upset about the scholarship. Sucks to suck.

Joy launches at Cynthia, but Frankie grabs her by the waist and carries her out of the courtyard. Sonya and Rayne stay behind. They glare at Cynthia.

RAYNE

Hey, Sonya. What's the term for someone who thinks they know everything when in actuality they know nothing?

SONYA

Know-it-all?

RAYNE

No.

SONYA

Braggart?

RAYNE

Nope.

SONYA
Oh, stupid-ass-bitch.

RAYNE
That's the one.

Rayne knocks over the can of donations. She proceeds to flee the courtyard with Sonya.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Joy stomps down the hall. Frankie jogs to catch up.

JOY
Leave me alone, Frankie.

Frankie cuts her off, blocking her path for a second time this week. This amuses Frankie.

FRANKIE
We gotta stop meeting like this.

Joy rolls her eyes and attempts to brush past him.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
Wait! I just wanna help. Tell me
how I can help.

Joy glances at the TRASH BIN beside her. She spots several copies of the *Two-Faced* exposé crumpled up inside. She exhales.

JOY
You can't. Game over. He wins.

FRANKIE
You can't just give up.

JOY
I have no choice, Frankie! That man
will always win. No matter who he's
up against.

FRANKIE
But he's never been up against Joy
Robinson before. And from what I
heard, she ain't no punk.

They gaze into each other's eyes. They slowly lean in, preparing for a fairytale moment, until--

DRAYA (O.S.)
Oh, hell no. Absolutely not. Step
away from her, Frankie!

Draya stands at the end of the hall. She gives Joy an
apologetic look.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
I'm the only one who gets to
comfort my best friend after this
shitty day.

On the brink of tears, Joy sprints over to Draya and hugs her
tight.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry. I should've listened
to you.

JOY
I'm sorry, too.

Frankie rocks back and forth on his feet, awkwardly watching
the exchange.

DRAYA
Fuck off, Frankie.

FRANKIE
Yep.

Frankie takes off down the hall. Draya turns to Joy.

DRAYA
Look, you don't owe me an apology.
You were right. I was just too
blind to see it. He manipulated me.
He manipulated everyone. It's our
turn to manipulate him.
(beat)
Together.

JOY
What did you have in mind?

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL YEARBOOK ROOM - DAY

Rayne stares straight ahead, embarrassed. Sonya dances wildly
around with room with HEADPHONES on.

SONYA

(singing)

Why men great 'til they gotta be
great.

(yells to Rayne)

I'm listening to Lizzo!

RAYNE

You don't say!

SONYA

(singing)

I'm a hundred percent that--

RAYNE

Bitch!

SONYA

Yasss! Get into the Lizzo spirit!

RAYNE

No, I mean there's an actual bitch
in the room.

Joy and Draya enter the room. Sonya ignores them and
continues to dance.

DRAYA

Rayne, didn't your parents teach
you to be polite?

RAYNE

Yes. They also taught me to be
honest.

JOY

Everyone just take a step back and
calm down. Sonya, stop dancing!

Sonya pauses mid-twerk. She reluctantly takes off her
headphones.

JOY (CONT'D)

(to Rayne)

Draya and I came up with the
perfect plan to take down
O'Donnell. For real this time.
I know you two don't like each
other. But for the sake of taking
down the devil himself, would you
please try and tolerate each other?

DRAYA (CONT'D)

We record the whole thing and send it over the superintendent. If we have proof, the school board can't ignore it.

RAYNE

What if we're wrong? What if he's not lying?

DRAYA

He is.

Draya suddenly becomes very interested in her shoes. She wanders over to the other side of the room and props herself up onto a desk.

DRAYA (CONT'D)

He rubbed his neck.

RAYNE

Excuse me?

DRAYA

Jerald used to babysit me when I was a kid. When my mom and dad went on business trips.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. DRAYA'S HOUSE - DAY

YOUNG DRAYA (8) runs throughout the house. She wears a Princess Tiana costume. YOUNGER JERALD (36) chases after her donning a MASK.

DRAYA (V.O.)

We used to dress up and run around the house. Something my parents never did with me.

Younger Jerald pops up behind the dinner table, startling Young Draya. She bumps into the CHINA CABINET, knocking an ANTIQUE CERAMIC GRAVY DISH off the top shelf. It shatters on the floor.

DRAYA (V.O.)

I'd accidentally break something every time. But every time, he'd lie and say it was his fault.

Younger Jerald RUBS THE BACK OF HIS NECK while he explains the broken dish to Draya's parents, YOUNGER EDDIE (White, 36) and YOUNGER KEISHA (Black, 36). Young Draya clocks this.

DRAYA (V.O.)
He gets nervous when he lies. Rubs
the back of his neck. He did it
today too. In the auditorium.

INT. AUDITORIUM - EARLIER

Draya watches Jerald's speech from the audience. She observes as he rubs the back of his neck, then breaks into a coughing fit. Her jaw drops.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SCHOOL YEARBOOK ROOM - DAY

Draya twiddles her thumbs.

DRAYA
He's lying about having cancer. And
he should get what he deserves.

Joy gives Draya's hand a squeeze. Intrigued, Rayne taps a pencil on her desk.

RAYNE
It's not a bad idea. The dinner, I
mean.

Draya manages a small smile. Rayne reciprocates.

SONYA
So, no poison?

The girls glare at Sonya.

INT. DRAYA'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jerald and EDDIE, now 46, roar with laughter. They sit on one side of the dining room table. Keisha and Draya sit across from them, clearly annoyed. Keisha takes a long sip from her wine glass.

EDDIE
And then our buddy shit his pants.

JERALD

Shit everywhere! On the walls. On the ceiling.

Jerald nearly cries from laughing so hard.

JERALD (CONT'D)

The best part is that he works in sanitation now.

Eddie howls. Jerald directs his attention to Keisha.

JERALD (CONT'D)

How is that delightful next-door neighbor of yours?

KEISHA

Amy? I think she's doing okay.

JERALD

Good. You know, we run into each other from time to time. She always has the sweetest things to say about you, Keisha. I mean, how could she not? You are...perfect.

He looks at her with hungry eyes. Keisha looks away.

KEISHA

(changing the subject)

Jerald, Draya told us about the protests at school. Over the mural.

JERALD

It has been an eventful couple of days at Glen Cove. That's for sure.

KEISHA

How do you plan on handling it?

JERALD

Well, the students have made their position on the issue clear. The mural will be removed by the end of the year.

DRAYA

I thought you changed your mind about that.

JERALD

Of course not, Draya. Don't believe everything you hear.

Draya winces. She adjusts the collar of her shirt, accidentally hitting the TINY MICROPHONE attached to her clothing. Audio feedback reverberates into Draya's...

BEDROOM

Joy, Rayne, and Sonya crowd around a laptop. They listen intently to the dinner conversation. Joy holds a microphone of her own.

JOY
(into microphone)
D, forget the mural. Mention the assembly.

RAYNE
When is she gonna bring it up?

JOY
Give her time.

CRUNCH.

Joy and Rayne glance at Sonya. She munches loudly on potato chips.

SONYA
What? They can eat, but I can't?

Joy shushes her and refocuses her attention on the laptop.

CRUNCH.

Joy yanks the bag of chips from Sonya's hands and pushes her hard. Sonya falls off the bed, landing on the floor with a THUD.

DINING ROOM

The noise startles the dinner party.

KEISHA
What was that?

EDDIE
I don't know. I'll check.

Eddie begins to depart from the table.

DRAYA
No!

The adults glance at Draya curiously.

JOY (V.O.)
(through earpiece)
Books! Tell them it was your books!

DRAYA
I mean, my books. They must have
fallen off my desk.

EDDIE
How would you know that--

DRAYA
Daddy, this chicken is delicious.

Draya points to the food on her plate. Eddie, now distracted,
returns to his seat.

EDDIE
Thank you, sweetheart. I spent
hours trying to get the seasoning
right.

JERALD
You did good, pal.

Jerald takes a bite of the chicken on his plate.

JERALD (CONT'D)
(mouth full)
Anyway like I was saying, those
protests have been somewhat of a
nuisance. But they've died down
over the past couple of days.

DRAYA
Probably because everyone is
worried about you.

EDDIE
Why would they be worried?

DRAYA
I thought you knew, Daddy. Uncle
Jerry has cancer. He told the whole
school today during an assembly.

Mid-gulp, Jerald chokes on his wine. Eddie pats him on the
back. A look of concern on his face.

EDDIE
Cancer?

JERALD
I have a tiny bit of cancer, yes.

EDDIE

And you didn't tell me?

JERALD

I didn't want you to worry.

EDDIE

How long have you known?

JERALD

Six months--

DRAYA

I thought you said it was three.

Jerald eyes Draya. She innocently takes a bite of her own chicken.

JERALD

You're right, Draya. Feels like six though.

DRAYA

(to Eddie)

It's colon cancer, Daddy. Already spread to his brain and everything.

Eddie drops his fork. His eyes begin to water.

JERALD

Aw, buddy. Don't cry.

EDDIE

You can have my colon. Take it.

KEISHA

I don't think it works like that, honey.

EDDIE

Well, something has to work. I'll call my friend, Jason. He's a surgeon over at Sinai Grace.

KEISHA

A plastic surgeon.

EDDIE

I don't see you coming up with any suggestions, Keisha!

KEISHA

Yell at me again! I dare you!

Jerald stands from the table abruptly.

JERALD

Keisha, calm down. You people can be so loud.

DRAYA

What's that supposed to mean?

Jerald ignores her. The insensitive quip goes right over Eddie's head, but Keisha gives him a death stare.

JERALD

I don't want to ruin the night by talking about my stupid cancer. C'mon! We were having a good time.

Keisha glances toward the kitchen.

KEISHA

Eddie did make a triple chocolate cake. It's delicious.

EDDIE

Only because I used your recipe.

Eddie and Keisha's demeanors soften. They hold hands across the table. Jerald stares at them with disdain.

JERALD

You do make quite the team. But let's not forget the reason you two met in the first place.

EDDIE

Yeah, yeah. Thank you for daring me to ask her out.

JERALD

To be fair, I didn't think you'd actually do it.

EDDIE

You just wish you had asked her out first.

JERALD

Maybe.

Jerald takes a long swig of his wine. He walks around the table and places a hand on Draya's shoulder.

JERALD (CONT'D)
Isn't that crazy, Draya? If I had
been braver that night...I could've
been your father.

Draya stands unexpectedly, shaking Jerald's hand off her
shoulder.

DRAYA
I have to go to the bathroom.
Please excuse me.

Draya exits the room at a normal pace before SPRINTING up the
stairs. She barges into her...

BEDROOM

The microphone immediately emits a HIGH-PITCHED SCREECH. The
girls cover their ears while Sonya turns down the volume on
the laptop.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
You guys hearing everything?

SONYA
Unfortunately. Please tell your dad
that wine is meant to be sipped not
slurped.

Draya plops down on the bed.

RAYNE
You gotta get to the point.

JOY
She's right, D. You have to get him
to say that he lied.

DRAYA
It's not that easy, okay? It's not
like he's going to admit that he's
an asshole in front of my parents.

JOY
Tell your parents that you need to
talk to him about a school matter
in private.

RAYNE
Please. No one would believe that
Draya wants to talk about school.
(to Draya)
No offense.

Draya's face suddenly pales.

DRAYA

I think I'm going to be sick.

Draya sprints out of the room. Joy sighs and follows her into the...

BATHROOM

She closes the door behind her. Draya stands in front of the sink, splashing water on her face.

JOY

You aren't pregnant, are you?

Draya scowls. Joy sits on the toilet seat lid.

JOY (CONT'D)

I know this is hard, but you have to do it.

DRAYA

He's done so much for me, Joy.

JOY

He also lied to you. He lied to me. He lied to his best friend. Who knows what else he's lying about?

There's a knock at the door.

JERALD (O.S.)

Draya? I came to check on you. You've been up here an awfully long time.

DRAYA

Uh, I'll be right out!

Draya hastily grabs a towel and wipes water off her face.

JOY

(whispers)

Shit. I don't think we're recording anymore. I need you to distract him.

DRAYA

(whispers)

And how do I do that?

JOY
(whispers)
Get him to talk about himself. He
loves doing that.

Draya takes a breath, opens the door and steps into the...

HALLWAY

Draya swiftly closes the bathroom door.

DRAYA
(sing-song)
Hey, Uncle J. What's up?

JERALD
I was wondering if you still needed
help with your calculus teacher? I
can talk to her tomorrow.

DRAYA
Oh. I'm good actually. Think I'm
just gonna study. It's only fair.

JERALD
What's the point of having a super
cool principal uncle if you don't
take advantage?

DRAYA
Like I said, I'm good. Thank you
though.

Jerald nods.

JERALD
Well, I've had one too many glasses
of wine. Gotta relieve myself.

Jerald puts his hand on the bathroom door handle. Draya's eyes grow wide. She quickly grabs Jerald by the shoulders and whips him around. His back faces the bathroom door.

DRAYA
I was hoping we could talk
actually.

JERALD
About what?

DRAYA
Everything. The pictures. The
cancer you don't have.

The bathroom door opens slightly. Joy pokes her head out into the hallway. Draya notices and immediately pulls Jerald into a tight hug.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
(over-enthusiastic)
I care about you, Uncle J. I want
to help you.

Joy tiptoes behind Jerald. She scurries down the hall and back into Draya's room, accidentally closing the door with force.

The noise causes Jerald to jump. He pulls away from the hug and glances around the hallway suspiciously.

JERALD
Is someone up here?

DRAYA
Don't change the subject. You can
tell me, Uncle J. We tell each
other everything.

Jerald runs his fingers through his hair.

JERALD
You don't understand. I had no
choice but to lie.

DRAYA
There's always a choice.

JERALD
You saw the way everyone was
looking at me.

Draya stares at him, slightly frightened. He smirks.

JERALD (CONT'D)
Kinda like the way you're looking
at me right now. Like I'm some sort
of monster.

He chuckles, trying to ease the tension.

JERALD (CONT'D)
Draya. It's still me. Same old
Uncle J.

DRAYA
Same old Uncle J. Blackface and
all.

Jerald hesitates.

JERALD

Those pictures were from a long time ago.

DRAYA

I didn't realize last year qualified as a long time.

JERALD

Look, I can only apologize for my actions so many times.

DRAYA

That's the problem! You haven't apologized at all!

JERALD

Why should I? It's not like I'm racist. My best friend's wife is black.

DRAYA

Jesus.

JERALD

Draya--

DRAYA

You recommended a white student for the Haines scholarship. Over Joy.

Jerald takes a step back, exasperated.

JERALD

Of course. Fuckin' Joy. Your little friend is ruining my life.

DRAYA

She's just doing what's right.

JERALD

You tell that little bitch to stay in her lane.

DRAYA

Don't call her that.

JERALD

You want me to call her something worse?

Draya studies him carefully. Fury in her eyes.

DRAYA
Like what exactly?

Jerald grinds his teeth. The word on the tip of his tongue – but he doesn't say it. Instead, he takes a step back.

JERALD
Good luck passing calculus.

Jerald disappears down the staircase. Draya stands frozen, breathing staggered. She slowly slinks back inside the...

BEDROOM

The girls look at her sympathetically. She blinks back tears and avoids eye contact.

DRAYA
You got what you needed, right?

Draya collapses to the floor, breaking down into tears. Joy sits next to her, pulling her into a warm embrace. Rayne and Sonya join them, forming a group hug. The girls sit on the floor in silence.

INT. ROBINSON APARTMENT - NIGHT

SUPER: Friday Evening. 6:00 p.m.

The local news airs on the living room television. Gina sits on the couch braiding Minnie's hair. Stevie appears from her shared bedroom and clears her throat.

STEVIE
May I have your attention, please!
Presenting the prettiest girl in
the whole world. My big sis, Joy
Robinson.

Joy wears a tea-length dress. Her makeup is fully done, hair pinned into an updo. Gina and Minnie marvel at her transformation.

STEVIE (CONT'D)
I did her makeup!

JOY
I let her put my lipstick on. And
then I took it off and did it
myself.

Gina stands from the couch. She affectionately puts her hands on Joy's cheeks.

GINA
You look fabulous, baby.

JOY
Ma, I have to be honest with you--

GINA
You didn't get the scholarship.

Joy's jaw drops.

GINA (CONT'D)
You've been sulkin' around here for days. You thought I wouldn't notice?

JOY
O'Donnell recommended someone else.

GINA
Screw that guy.

Minnie and Stevie gasp.

GINA (CONT'D)
Don't repeat that, girls.
(to Joy)
Baby, it's okay.

JOY
But we can't afford--

GINA
Let me worry about that. You should be worried about having a good time tonight.

Gina pulls out her iPhone.

GINA (CONT'D)
Now, give me your best Tyra.

She snaps photos, creating an impromptu photoshoot. Joy poses for the camera. The doorbell rings.

MINNIE
Oh, is that the boy?

STEVIE
It better be.

GINA
Girls, behave yourselves.
(to Joy)
(MORE)

GINA (CONT'D)

I'm surprised you found somebody to go with so last minute.

Gina opens the front door to reveal Frankie. Wearing a suit with a skinny tie and a fedora, he holds a box with a corsage inside.

FRANKIE

Hi, ma'am. I'm here to take your daughter to the prom. If that's okay with you. Oh, shit. I mean, shoot. Should I have asked for your permission? Maybe I should just go...

GINA

You must be Frankie. Please come in.

Gina steps aside, letting Frankie inside. His jaw drops as soon as he sees Joy. Distracted, he walks straight into a LAMP. He rubs his face and tries to hide his embarrassment.

FRANKIE

Wow. You look, you look--

STEVIE

Spit it out, dumb dumb.

MINNIE

She looks amazing!

JOY

(to Frankie)

These are my sisters, Minnie and Stevie.

Minnie yanks Frankie by the arm, pushing him onto the couch. Minnie and Stevie stand in front of him, arms crossed.

MINNIE

Exactly what are your intentions with our sister?

FRANKIE

Oh, well--

STEVIE

Because she's a queen who deserves a king.

FRANKIE

I agree--

MINNIE
Are you a virgin?

FRANKIE
Excuse me?

STEVIE
Answer the question, Frankie. If
that's even your real name.

GINA
Girls, that's enough. Let him
breathe.
(to Frankie)
They're protective.

Stunned, Frankie stands from the couch and moves beside Joy
who stifles a giggle.

FRANKIE
It's okay. They're...cute.
(to Joy)
I got you this.

Frankie takes the corsage out of the box and slides it onto
Joy's wrist.

JOY
It's beautiful.

FRANKIE
Just like you.

Minnie makes an over-exaggerated gagging noise. Gina slaps
her upside head. She starts to scold her, but something
catches her eye on the television.

GINA
Baby, look. They're talking about
the Haines Foundation.

She turns up the volume.

ON SCREEN

News anchor NIKKI HAMILTON (40) reports from the news desk.

NIKKI HAMILTON
This just in, the Haines Foundation
is under investigation by the FBI.
This, after previous scholarship
recipients claim they only received
a portion of the money they were
promised.

A photo of the BOARD OF DIRECTORS appears in the over-the-shoulder graphic next to Nikki's head. Among them is Jerald's friend, Brett.

NIKKI HAMILTON (CONT'D)

We reached out to the Haines
Foundation for comment, but they
did not immediately respond.

BACK TO SCENE

Joy's eyes grow wide.

JOY

Holy shit.

Gina turns off the television.

GINA

Nun-uh. You better watch your
mouth, little girl. We don't speak
like that up in here.

JOY

My bad. I'm just...surprised.

GINA

Well, thank goodness you don't have
to be involved in that mess. A
blessing in disguise.

JOY

Yeah, I guess.

GINA

You two better get going. Don't
want to miss the pictures.

JOY

Let me just grab my purse.

Joy disappears into her bedroom. She reappears moments later with a small SILVER CLUTCH. Gina guides Joy and Frankie out the door. She yells after them.

GINA

Don't come back pregnant!

The twins join Gina in the doorway.

MINNIE

I don't think he's a virgin.

Gina laughs and shakes her head.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Joy and Frankie walk toward his mom's MINIVAN. He opens the passenger side door for Joy.

FRANKIE
Sorry about the ride.

JOY
(distracted)
It's fine.

Frankie eyes her carefully.

FRANKIE
We're not gonna make the pictures,
are we?

JOY
Just gotta make one stop first.

Joy and Frankie get into the van and drive off.

EXT. CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL - NIGHT

Draya and Sabrina wait at the entrance. Draya wears an extravagant gown that could be mistaken for a wedding dress.

Joy struts up to the hotel, slightly out of breath. Draya grunts in frustration.

DRAYA
Where were you? You missed the
pictures! And the party bus!

She gapes as Frankie appears behind Joy.

DRAYA (CONT'D)
Please tell me Frankie is lost.

JOY
He's my date.

Draya groans.

DRAYA
(to Frankie)
Why won't you go away?

JOY
Keep it together, D.

DRAYA

I thought you were coming with Jake.

JOY

Why would you think that?

DRAYA

Because you said you were coming with someone I wouldn't want to murder.

JOY

Draya. Be nice.

Draya rolls her eyes. She looks Frankie up and down.

DRAYA

You don't look awful.

FRANKIE

I'll take that. You look lovely.

DRAYA

I mean, that's obvious.

Sabrina puts an arm around Draya and nods toward the door.

SABRINA

Shall we?

Joy contorts her face, letting out a series of grunts in an attempt to get Draya's attention.

SABRINA (CONT'D)

Oh shit. I think Joy's having a stroke.

FRANKIE

I'll get her some water!

DRAYA

Don't try to be a hero, Frankie. She's fine. Right, Joy?

Joy gives a thumbs up.

DRAYA (CONT'D)

(to Sabrina)

You go ahead. I gotta help Joy fix her makeup.

SABRINA

Suit yourself.

(to Frankie)

C'mon, Frankie. You get the first dance.

FRANKIE

Let's waltz back into yesteryear, madam.

DRAYA

Ugh. And to think I was just starting to like you.

Sabrina kisses Draya on the cheek.

SABRINA

See you inside.

Sabrina and Frankie enter the hotel. Draya and Joy speak in hushed tones.

JOY

I did a thing.

DRAYA

A good thing or a bad thing?

JOY

An interesting thing.

DRAYA

Can we go to jail for this thing?

JOY

No. Not unless the cops find out about the other thing.

DRAYA

Do I need to know about the thing?

JOY

Which thing? The first thing or the second thing?

DRAYA

The first thing. I already know about the second thing.

Joy considers this.

JOY

I'm not sure how you'll react.

Draya links her arm with Joy's.

DRAYA

I trust you. Now, let's do the damn thing.

Joy and Draya share a smile before marching into the hotel.

INT. CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL - NIGHT

The hotel lobby is overrun with high school kids dressed in vintage formal attire from every decade. Joy and Draya walk toward the ballroom.

Jerald enthusiastically greets students by the ballroom door. When he spots Joy and Draya, his smile fades for just a moment. Joy's grip tightens around her clutch.

JERALD

Joy. Draya. You ladies look lovely.

JOY

Thank you.

Draya ignores him. She walks ahead of Joy and enters the ballroom. Jerald's eyes remain focused on Joy.

JERALD

Enjoy your night.

JOY

I will.

Joy grins. She brushes past him and sets foot into the

BALLROOM

The room is an overwhelming blast from the past. A JUKEBOX plays vintage tunes in the corner. Peace signs and smiley faces are scattered on the walls. Students have the option to pose beside cardboard cutouts of Sonny and Cher or Kid n' Play.

Joy examines the room in awe. She joins Draya by the door.

JOY (CONT'D)

Draya, this place looks--

DRAYA

It's a hot mess. The streamers are green instead of blue, the disco ball isn't authentic, and to top it all off, the jukebox is on the wrong side of the room. I specifically said to put it on the left side.

JOY

It looks perfect, okay?

Joy's smile fades to a frown as she notices Jerald sauntering toward them.

JOY (CONT'D)

Let's just try to enjoy the night before we have to deal with some serious shit.

She grabs Draya's arm and tugs her onto the dance floor to join their dates, missing Jerald by just a hair. His gaze stays fixated on them from afar.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - LATER

The dance floor is jam-packed. Joy, Draya, Frankie, and Sabrina dance with their peers. Whitney Houston's voice fades into the tunes of a modern pop song. Draya is less than pleased.

DRAYA

Who the fuck put this song on the playlist? The theme is Blast from the motherfuckin' Past!

SABRINA

What you got against my girl, Billie?

DRAYA

You mean Billie 'I was born in the 2000s like the rest of us' Eilish? This song is messing up my theme!

FRANKIE

I thought you didn't like the theme.

DRAYA

Frankie, why do you constantly insist on talking?

JOY
D, chill. I'll go change the song.

DRAYA
Thank you. Throwbacks only.

JOY
Got it.

Joy walks briskly over to the jukebox, passing Mr. Jefferies at the punch bowl. The miserable vice principal pulls out a FLASK and spikes the juice. A LANKY SENIOR approaches and reaches for the ladle, but Mr. Jefferies slaps his hand away.

MR. JEFFERIES
No, no, son. This is adult juice.

Joy arrives at the jukebox. She chooses a new song selection, but the jukebox continues to play "Bad Guy" by Billie Eilish. Joy frowns. She hits the side of the jukebox repeatedly with her clutch.

JERALD (O.S.)
What did that jukebox ever do to you?

Joy spins around. Jerald stands behind her, hands in his pockets.

JOY
It's broken. Keeps playing the same song.

JERALD
It's a good one.

JOY
I'm gonna go find somebody to fix it.

Joy starts to walk away, but Jerald stops her by gently grabbing her arm.

JERALD
Can we talk?

JOY
No.

JERALD
It'll only take a second. Please?

Joy looks over at the dance floor. Her friends are too distracted to notice her current predicament.

JOY

Fine.

Jerald leads her out of the ballroom.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

A few stragglers enter the ballroom as Jerald guides Joy to the end of the hallway. He takes a gander around the deserted area and lowers his voice.

JERALD

I think we can both agree this has gone far enough. Let's call a truce.

JOY

A truce?

JERALD

We forget about the events of the past week. All of it. The pictures, the petty arguments. I'll even write you that recommendation letter.

JOY

(scoffs)

You should really watch the news more often.

JERALD

Why would I watch the news when I can get all my information through my Twitter feed? You act like an eighty-year-old woman.

JOY

And you act like a fifteen-year-old boy.

Joy takes a step forward.

JOY (CONT'D)

Principal O'Donnell--

JERALD

Jerald.

JOY

Principal O'Donnell, you have a whole school of students who look up to you.

(MORE)

JOY (CONT'D)

They admire you more than anyone.
But how can you expect them to
respect someone who's a liar, a
cheater, and an actual criminal?

Jerald narrows his eyes at her. He rubs the back of his neck.

JERALD

I don't know what you're talking
about.

JOY

That's okay. The police will tell
you.

JERALD

Police? What are you--

JOY

They probably don't have great
health care in prison. Good thing
you aren't actually sick.

Joy takes a FLASH DRIVE out of her clutch. She holds it up
for Jerald to see.

JOY (CONT'D)

Or, at least, that's what you told
Draya.

She brushes past Jerald, marching toward the ballroom doors.
Jerald clenches his jaw.

JERALD

Joy. Give me the flash drive, Joy.

Joy keeps walking. Jerald breathes heavily and raises his
voice.

JERALD (CONT'D)

Give me the fucking flash drive!

Joy whips around to face Jerald.

JOY

It's over. It's all over.

JERALD

Poor, kid. You are sorely mistaken.
We're just getting started.

A menacing smile appears on his face.

JERALD (CONT'D)
Let the games begin.

Jerald breaks into a sprint, lunging at Joy. He TACKLES her to the ground and yanks the flash drive from her hand. He stands, slips the flash drive into his jacket pocket, and instinctively fixes his hair.

JERALD (CONT'D)
You don't belong at Glen Cove, Joy.
Never have. Never will.

He scans the hallway. It's empty. Jerald hurries away, disappearing into the ballroom.

Joy lies on the floor, motionless. She stares up at the ceiling. The light nearly blinding her until someone steps into her eye-line.

MR. JEFFERIES
Ms. Robinson. What are you doing on
the floor?

JOY
Oh, you know. Just thinking.

Mr. Jefferies helps Joy to her feet. She's slightly disheveled now.

JOY (CONT'D)
I should go back inside.

She fixes herself and starts toward the ballroom.

MR. JEFFERIES
Did he take the bait?

Joy stops in her tracks. She turns around. A smile creeps up on her face.

JOY
Like a big ass catfish.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

SUPER: Two Hours Earlier.

Frankie leans against his mini-van in the otherwise empty parking lot. He looks around, keeping watch.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Joy sneaks inside. She rummages through Jerald's desk drawers, not quite sure what she's looking for. Suddenly, she notices a BLINKING LIGHT coming from the BOOKSHELF.

Joy approaches the bookshelf, discovering a PERSONAL LAPTOP wedged between two books. She grabs it and attempts to log-in. She guesses a variety of passwords: JERALD. DRAYA. GOOD HAIR. GREAT HAIR. PERFECT HAIR.

Joy sighs in frustration. She glances around the room for clues, eyes landing on the photo of Jerald and the Peters family at Draya's third birthday party. She looks closer. Jerald isn't focused on the camera-- he's focused on Draya's mom. Joy raises an eyebrow and attempts one more password: KEISHA.

She's in.

JOY
(whispers)
What a freak.

Joy immediately searches through the laptop files. She comes across an email thread between Jerald and Brett. Bank account information. Money transfers. It's all there. Jerald and Brett were working together.

Off Joy's reaction--

EXT. RICHMOND HILLS - NIGHT

Frankie's minivan speeds past the RICHMOND HILLS WATER TOWER. The suburban streets are virtually empty.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The minivan slows to a stop in front of a quaint home in a quiet neighborhood.

INT. JEFFERIES HOUSE - NIGHT

A mostly gray living area with minimal decorations. A FRAMED PHOTO of Mr. Jefferies and his BROTHER sits above the fireplace.

Mr. Jefferies wears a baby blue tuxedo and one dress shoe. He grunts as he crouches down and peers under his worn-down recliner.

MR. JEFFERIES
Where is that damn shoe?

The doorbell rings. He mumbles under his breath as he struggles to stand up. Mr. Jefferies meanders to the front door and opens it to find Joy and Frankie standing on his porch. He stares at them, wildly confused.

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)
What?

JOY
We need your help.

She holds up the FLASH DRIVE. Mr. Jefferies looks at them, intrigued. He steps aside and lets them in.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Joy shakes Mr. Jefferies's hand.

JOY
It's your turn now.

Mr. Jefferies grins. They stride toward the ballroom.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

Joy joins Frankie, Draya, and Sabrina on the dance floor.

DRAYA
Where were you? Is everything okay?

JOY
It will be.

Mr. Jefferies steps up on stage. He waves Mrs. Reese over in a hurry. She holds TWO PLASTIC CROWNS and a SMALL ENVELOPE. Mr. Jefferies takes the envelope and takes his place in front of the microphone.

MR. JEFFERIES
Settle down, everyone! It's time to
announce prom king and queen.
Principal O'Donnell, if you could
please join me on stage.

Students erupt in applause. Jerald, calm and collected, joins Mr. Jefferies on stage. They shake hands.

JERALD
Thank you, Darnell.

Jerald attempts to release Mr. Jefferies's hand, but Mr. Jefferies holds on tight and continues to speak into the mic.

MR. JEFFERIES
Jerald, we know the past few weeks have been rough for you, and we wanted to do something special in your honor.

JERALD
Is that so?

MR. JEFFERIES
Yes. I truly believe that you should get everything you deserve.

Jerald tilts his head. He covers the microphone with his hand.

JERALD
What are you doing?

MR. JEFFERIES
I think you should be recognized for the things you've done. So, I called my little brother.

JERALD
Your brother--

MR. JEFFERIES
Well, half-brother. Same mom, different dads. Point is, I told him about everything you've done for the school. For the students. He wanted to come talk to you about it.

Jerald lets out a harsh laugh.

JERALD
What's the mechanic want to talk about? How to fix a radiator?

MR. JEFFERIES
He's not a mechanic. He's the mayor.

Jerald's eyes grow wide.

The ballroom doors BURST OPEN, and as if he heard his illustrious title, MAYOR WILLIAM KENSINGTON (Black, 50), glides into the room like a true politician. Beside him stands SUPERINTENDENT TRACY POWELL (Black, 40). Rayne and Sonya serve as their escorts.

Draya glances over at Joy, who doesn't seem at all surprised.

DRAYA

Holy shit.

(to Joy)

Did you do this?

JOY

Maybe.

Mayor Kensington shakes hands with students as he and Superintendent Powell stroll up to the stage. Rayne and Sonya join their friends in the audience.

JERALD

(to Mr. Jefferies)

I don't know if this is necessary.

MR. JEFFERIES

It's completely necessary.

Students, please welcome Mayor

William Kensington and

Superintendent Tracy Powell.

The students APPLAUD. Jerald plasters a fake smile on his face.

JERALD

(through his teeth)

What do you know?

MR. JEFFERIES

Only what I need to know.

Mayor Kensington and Superintendent Powell reach the stage. The mayor gives his brother a big bear hug before turning his attention to Jerald, who looks like he may piss himself at any moment.

Mayor Kensington shakes Jerald's hand tightly.

MAYOR KENSINGTON

Jerald O'Donnell, it's a pleasure to meet you. I'm surprised we've never met. Us being neighbors and all.

JERALD

You do stand out like a sore thumb.

(beat)

You know, because you're the mayor.

The mayor studies him.

MAYOR KENSINGTON

My brother told me about your illness. I'm so sorry to hear you're not doing well.

JERALD

Well, we all have our bad days. Who knows? The cancer could be gone tomorrow.

MAYOR KENSINGTON

I bet.

The mayor's grip around Jerald's hand grows tighter. Jerald manages to slip his hand away. He looks over to Superintendent Powell.

JERALD

Tracy, good to see you.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL

It's Superintendent Powell.

JERALD

Right. Superintendent Powell.

MR. JEFFERIES

Superintendent Powell, you look lovely this evening.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL

Oh, Darnell. You can call me Tracy. Shall we get this started, then?

JERALD

Get what started?

Mayor Kensington smiles his perfect politician smile and steps up to the microphone.

MAYOR KENSINGTON

We are here tonight to celebrate the end of your high school career. For that major accomplishment, I'd like to congratulate all of you.

WHOOPS and HOLLERS from the crowd.

MAYOR KENSINGTON (CONT'D)

Your principal seems to have quite the influence on you all. He's bright, charismatic, hopeful. He seems to represent the change we need in America.

PROM GOER #1 (O.S.)

Hell yeah, he does!

PROM GOER #2 (O.S.)

Jerald for president!

The students start to chant. The mayor takes in their reaction and glances at Superintendent Powell. She motions for him to finish his speech.

MAYOR KENSINGTON

Alright. Settle down, settle down.

The chanting ceases.

MAYOR KENSINGTON (CONT'D)

The faith you all have in your principal is admirable - but also troubling. Unfortunately, our role models do not always live up to our expectations. In fact, my office received some startling news this evening.

(to Jerald)

Would you like to tell them, Jerald. Or should I?

Jerald freezes. He looks down at the crowd of students. They stare at him expectantly.

JERALD

I, uh--

MAYOR KENSINGTON

Are you stuttering because you're ashamed? Or because you're not sure which thing I'm talking about? After all, you've done so many things.

Mayor Kensington holds up a FLASH DRIVE, identical to the one Jerald stole earlier.

MAYOR KENSINGTON (CONT'D)

Do you know what I'm talking about now?

Jerald's jaw drops. He frantically reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out his own flash drive. He looks at it closely. Written in permanent marker are the words: Fuck You.

He scans the audience, meeting Joy's gaze. She holds her middle finger up high. Smirk on her face. Mayor Kensington spots Rayne in the audience.

MAYOR KENSINGTON (CONT'D)
Miss Rodriguez, if you would please
join us.

Holding a PORTABLE SPEAKER, Rayne pushes her way through the crowd and hops on stage. She takes the flash drive from Kensington and inserts it into the speaker. Jerald's voice booms throughout the ballroom, repeating his words from the night before.

Jerald glances at the students, whose facial expressions shift from confusion to pure disgust. The recording plays out in full. When it ends, the students remain silent.

MAYOR KENSINGTON (CONT'D)
Thank you, Miss Rodriguez. You're
one hell of an investigative
reporter.

Rayne puts a hand over her heart. She jumps off the stage and rejoins her friends. Superintendent Powell steps closer to Jerald.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL
Mr. O'Donnell, you are hereby
suspended indefinitely pending a
police investigation.

JERALD
Police investigation?

Superintendent Powell gestures toward the end of the stage where TWO POLICE OFFICERS stand.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL
Surely, you didn't think you'd get
away with stealing scholarship
money.

JERALD
I have no involvement with the
Haines Foundation.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL
Interesting. I didn't mention the
Haines Foundation.

Superintendent Powell crosses her arms.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL (CONT'D)
Besides, we have paperwork that
proves otherwise.

JERALD
(laughs nervously)
This is all one big
misunderstanding.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL
Mr. O'Donnell, I'm going to be
honest with you. I don't give a
flying fuck.

The audience murmurs. Sonya's eyes light up and she leans
over to Joy.

SONYA
I want to be her when I grow up.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL
(to Jerald)
You are a grown-ass man who has had
everything handed to him on a
silver platter, and yet, you still
tried to take advantage of the
hardworking people around you. The
world doesn't owe you shit. You,
Mr. O'Donnell, are what's wrong
with humanity.
(to police officers)
Please take him away.

The police officers storm the stage and begin to read Jerald
his Miranda Rights. Mayor Kensington holds a hand up,
signaling for the officers to wait. He looks Jerald dead in
the eye. His politician smile fading by the second.

MAYOR KENSINGTON
(whispers)
You ever try to fuck my wife again,
and I will see to it that you die
in prison. It would be incredibly
easy to arrange.

The police officers cuff Jerald. He resists arrest as they
try to drag him off the stage.

JERALD
You can't do this. I'm Jerald
O'Donnell.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL

We are very aware of your name,
Jerald. And so are the authorities.

Jerald looks as if he's going to scream, but instead, he starts to cry.

MR. JEFFERIES

For God's sake, man. Just leave.

The police escort Jerald off the stage and through the quiet crowd of teenagers. He keeps his head down as students follow him with wary eyes.

Without warning, Jerald halts. Blinking away tears, he looks up and locks eyes with Joy, then with Draya. His eyes pleading for help. Draya puts an arm around Joy in solidarity.

POLICE OFFICER #1

Let's go.

Jerald doesn't budge.

POLICE OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

Did you hear me? Let's go.

Jerald nods slowly. Then suddenly, using his shoulder, Jerald STRIKES the officer in the jaw. He ELBOWS the other one in the gut causing him to topple over. With his wrists cuffed behind his back, he makes a run for it, sprinting out of the ballroom. While the cops struggle to gather themselves, Joy bolts after Jerald.

DRAYA

Joy, don't!

Sonya and Rayne apprehensively approach the police to help them. Sonya holds her hands up, her speech somewhat resembles a robot.

SONYA

We are here to help you. Please do
not pull your weapons.

As chaos ensues among the students, Mr. Jefferies immediately jumps in front of the microphone.

MR. JEFFERIES

Don't anybody else move! And don't
touch the punch, Joey!

JOEY, the lanky senior from before, pours himself a glass of Mr. Jefferies 'special' punch. He shrugs.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Joy emerges from the ballroom. Her eyes dart around the immediate area, searching for Jerald. She catches a glimpse of him bolting into the stairwell. She quickly follows.

INT. HOTEL STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Jerald stumbles up the stairwell. Joy enters, clumsily removes her heels, and jets up the steps barefoot.

JOY
O'Donnell! Stop!

Jerald ignores her, continuing to sprint up the never-ending staircase. He frantically glances over the railing, spotting Joy about two floors below. Jerald finally reaches the top of the staircase and barges through the rooftop door, ignoring a sign that reads: CLOSED FOR CONSTRUCTION.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF - NIGHT

The skyline sparkles in the distance. PATIO CHAIRS line the rectangular-shaped SWIMMING POOL. Jerald staggers around looking for a place to hide. His ears perk up at the sound of footsteps in the distance. He immediately ducks behind a patio chair.

Joy charges onto the rooftop. It's quiet, almost serene. She slowly scans the area, searching for Jerald. She hesitantly ventures toward the pool.

Jerald pops up behind Joy, but she doesn't notice. His eyes are crazier than before, reminiscent of Jack Torrance from *The Shining*. He grabs her by the neck, putting her into a CHOKEHOLD. Joy pulls at his arm, gasping for air.

JERALD
(whispers harshly)
You made my life a living hell and
now you're going to pay for it.

With all his force, he shoves Joy into the pool. She lands in the water with a giant SPLASH. Jerald gazes at his reflection as the ripples slowly come to a standstill. A twisted smile appears on his face.

Joy emerges from the surface, inhaling sharply. She swims toward the edge of the pool and pulls herself out of the water. She nearly keels over, attempting to catch her breath.

JOY
(panting)
What the hell is your problem?

JERALD
Fuck. Honestly, I assumed you
couldn't swim.

JOY
You were trying to kill me?

JERALD
I was just trying to get rid of
you. If death is the only way to do
that, then fine by me.

JOY
You are a psycho!

JERALD
No, Joy. I'm simply trying to make
the world a better place.

JOY
How exactly? By discriminating
against people? By stealing from
people less fortunate than you?

JERALD
You're the problem here, Joy!
Everything points back to you!
Everything was fine and dandy until
you dug your dirty little nose into
my business! You turned everyone
against me!

JOY
You did that all on your own.

JERALD
You really are a pain in the ass,
you know that? I put my entire
being into this school. And for
what? So some little black kid like
you could destroy me? I don't want
you in my school. I don't want any
of you in my school. You're
nothing.

Joy PUNCHES Jerald square in the face. He collapses to his
knees, blood gushing from his nose. She stares down at him
angrily.

JOY

No. You're nothing.

The police burst through the rooftop door, guns drawn. Mr. Jefferies is right behind them. The officers survey the scene, immediately lowering their weapons.

Jerald writhes around on the ground in pain. Joy stands next to him with her hands up. Mr. Jefferies smiles at the sight in front of him.

MR. JEFFERIES

A nice, swift punch in the face.
Well done, Miss Robinson.

Joy, drenched and disheveled, massages her hand. She manages a small smile.

INT. HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

Students stir in the audience as Mayor Kensington gives a full CAMPAIGN SPEECH on stage. Superintendent Powell stands to the side, utterly appalled.

All eyes shift from the mayor to the entrance as the ballroom doors open. Joy and Mr. Jefferies enter the venue. A TOWEL drapes Joy's shoulders and she holds an ICE PACK on her hand. Her clothing and hair are still damp. Draya, Frankie, Sabrina, Rayne, and Sonya immediately crowd around Joy, bombarding her with questions.

Mr. Jefferies steps aside, gives Joy a slight nod of approval, and returns to the stage. He taps his brother on the shoulder, signaling for him to finish up his speech.

MAYOR KENSINGTON

Well, students. Enjoy the rest of
your prom. And remember, vote
Kensington 2020.

Mayor Kensington moves aside, handing over the spotlight to Mr. Jefferies. He steps up to the mic.

MR. JEFFERIES

So, here's the deal. Principal
O'Donnell has officially been taken
into custody. We understand that
this may have been somewhat
traumatic for all of you. If anyone
is in need of counseling, Ms.
Anderson will be available for
sessions. Good night and good luck.

Mr. Jefferies suddenly remembers the envelope in his hand. He quickly opens it.

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)

By the way, your prom king and queen are Todd Gibson and Cynthia Miller. See you Monday.

(to Mayor Kensington)

See you at momma's birthday.

Mr. Jefferies tosses the envelope to the ground, struts off the stage, and leaves the ballroom without another word.

Jake, wearing his LETTERMAN JACKET over his tux, kicks the jukebox. A NEW SONG starts playing – and as if nothing ever happened – students dance and laugh. Rayne, Sonya, Frankie, and Sabrina join them. Joy and Draya move to sit at a nearby table. They watch their classmates from afar.

DRAYA

Well shit.

Joy nods, unable to form a sentence. They sit in comfortable silence while their peers dance the night away.

INT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL – DAY

Joy waves at her classmates as she walks down the hall.

JOY (V.O.)

There were some minor changes at Glen Cove after that. In the wake of Principal O'Donnell's departure, Mr. Jefferies was named interim principal.

Mr. Jefferies carries a SMALL BOX labeled "STUFF" into the now-empty principal's office. He sets the box onto the desk and looks around the room. He sits in his newly designated chair and sighs happily.

JOY (V.O.)

Mr. Jefferies was so impressed by Rayne and Sonya's investigative work that he even allowed them to rejoin the newspaper. Much to the dismay of the other staff members.

In the newspaper room, Rayne berates a fellow NEWSPAPER STAFF MEMBER for a poorly written article. She crumples up the paper and tosses it. Sonya takes photographs of the argument. She quickly gets bored and takes photos of herself instead.

JOY (V.O.)

But everything else pretty much stayed the same. It's funny how quickly people can forget the bad things. Like they never happened.

Mrs. Reese takes down a framed photo of Jerald hanging in the school's entryway. She tucks the frame under her arm and walks past Frankie. He leans against the lockers while Joy puts her books away. They share a sweet smile. Draya sprints up to them, waving a piece of paper in the air.

DRAYA

I passed! Joy, I passed!

Joy and Draya jump up and down in celebration.

DRAYA (CONT'D)

Fuck geometry!

JOY

(incredulously)

Calculus.

DRAYA

Whatever. I passed. My parents are taking me out to dinner to celebrate.

JOY

Really?

DRAYA

Well technically, it's more of a 'we're sorry for letting a psychopath babysit you for all those years' dinner. Either way, I'm not paying.

Suddenly, a voice speaks over the INTERCOM.

MRS. REESE (V.O.)

Joy Robinson to the principal's office. Joy Robinson to the principal's office.

Joy groans and hits her head against her locker.

FRANKIE

(smirks)

I thought you'd be spending less time in the principal's office.

JOY

Yeah, me too. See you guys later.

Joy shuts her locker and walks away--

--but she returns, planting a kiss on Frankie's lips.

Draya can't help but smile. Joy takes a step back from Frankie, grins, and struts away, leaving Frankie and Draya alone.

FRANKIE

Congrats on passing calculus--

DRAYA

Why are you still here?

Frankie leaves immediately.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Mr. Jefferies and Superintendent Powell engage in small talk. There's a knock on the door. Joy pokes her head inside.

MR. JEFFERIES

Joy. Please come in.

Joy walks into the office.

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)

I was just telling Tracy about how you brought the O'Donnell matter to my attention. To everyone's attention.

JOY

It was nothing really.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL

It's everything, Miss Robinson. Thank you.

MR. JEFFERIES

I was also telling Tracy that you were prepared to apply for the Haines Foundation Scholarship.

JOY

Yeah. I guess that doesn't matter much anymore.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL

Maybe not.

Superintendent Powell moves to stand directly in front of Joy. She crosses her arms.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL (CONT'D)
But I'd be more than happy to write
a recommendation letter for any
scholarship you apply for.

Joy is taken aback.

JOY
Really? But you don't even know me.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL
I know enough. Especially after the
events of the past week. The
recommendation is yours if you want
it.

JOY
(smiles wide)
Thank you. That means a lot.

Mr. Jefferies slow claps.

MR. JEFFERIES
Lovely. Now if you ladies don't
mind, I have a lot to do. Turns out
O'Donnell is a racist criminal who
also did the bare minimum at work.

He gets settled at his desk and points toward the door.

MR. JEFFERIES (CONT'D)
Joy, do you mind escorting the
superintendent out of the building?

JOY
Sure.

SUPERINTENDENT POWELL
Keep up the good work, Darnell. Who
knows? We might have to knock the
'interim' off your new title.

Mr. Jefferies adjusts his posture and straightens his tie.
Joy leads Superintendent Powell out of the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL - FOYER - DAY

Joy and Superintendent Powell walk toward the exit. They pass a group of a dozen STUDENTS in smocks. With PAINT BUCKETS and BRUSHES in hand, they march toward the school mural.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

An ATTORNEY leads Jerald through a crowd of JOURNALISTS and PHOTOGRAPHERS.

The former principal sports a new, shaggier hairdo. With a twinkle in his eye, he grins from ear to ear. As they reach the courthouse doors, he turns and waves to the cameras.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Quiet chatter fills the crowded courtroom. Jerald and his attorney sit up front. Terri sits in the back row wearing sunglasses and an oversized hat.

A JUDGE enters and sits in her designated seat behind the bench. She settles in, hovering her GAVEL over the sound block.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL - FOYER - DAY

Crouched down, a student hovers his PAINT BRUSH over a paint bucket. He dips it repeatedly into the white paint.

JUDGE (V.O.)

All rise.

Paint drips steadily from the brush as the student RISES to his feet.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Jerald RISES along with the rest of the courtroom occupants. He brushes his hair out of his face. The judge looks him up and down. An unforgiving look on her face.

The judge reads the sentence, but we don't hear the punishment. Instead, we hear GASPS and CRIES echo throughout the courtroom.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. GLEN COVE HIGH SCHOOL - FOYER - DAY

A TEENAGE GIRL GASPS as a TEENAGE BOY brushes paint on her nose. She playfully pushes him away and joins her peers in front of the mural.

The teens begin covering up the offensive painting with a fresh coat of white paint. Stroke after stroke, Christopher Columbus's face slowly disappears. Students erupt in CHEERS.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom erupts in ANGER. The judge pounds her gavel and the noise eventually subsides. She zeroes in on Jerald.

JUDGE

Mr. O'Donnell, I hope you realize
how fortunate you are.

Jerald offers a small smile and RUBS THE BACK OF HIS NECK.

JERALD

Yes, ma'am. I do.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END