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The Jig is Up

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The Jig is Up

Written by

Alexis A. Franklin

A thesis screenplay presented to the
Faculty of the Department of
the School of Film & Television
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting

May 2017

THE JIG IS UP

A Screenplay

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Film & Television,
Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles, California

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

By

ALEXIS A. FRANKLIN

APPROVAL TO ADVANCE TO CANDIDACY

The following student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy
for an M.F.A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Screenwriting

Student: Alexis Franklin Date: 5/4/17

Committee Co Chair (690): *[Signature]* Date: 10/12/16

Committee Co Chair (691): *Patricia K. Meyer* Date: 5-4-17

Advanced Screenplay Project Title:

The Sig Is Up

Criteria for advancement to candidacy:

Student has demonstrated sufficient ability and knowledge to complete the thesis project.

Approved to Candidacy

Not Approved to Candidacy

Comments

ADVANCED SCREENPLAY PROJECT APPROVAL

The Advanced Screenplay Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting submitted by the candidate fulfils the requirements and standards set forth in the University Bulletin by the Division.

Screenplay Title: The Jig is Up

Student: Alexis Franklin Date: 5/4/17

Committee Co Chair: SCWR 690 BETH BERLIN

Signed: Beth Berlin Date: 5/4/17

Committee Co Chair: SCWR 691 Patricia K. Meyer

Signed: Patricia K Meyer Date: 5-4-17

Director of Graduate Screenwriting: Karol Hoeffner

Signed: Karol Hoeffner Date: 5/4/2017

Dean: Stephen Ulsky

Signed: Stephen Ulsky Date: 5/4/17

This feature length screenplay written by

Alexis A. Franklin

under the guidance of a faculty committee

from the School of Film & Television at

Loyola Marymount University, and approved

by the members of the committee, has been

presented to and accepted by the Graduate

School in partial fulfillment of the thesis

requirements for the degree of Master of

Fine Arts in Screenwriting.

Advanced Screenplay Project Committee:

Committee Chair: Beth Serlin



Committee Member: Patricia Meyer



Director of Graduate Screenwriting: Karol Hoeffner



Dean, School of Film & Television: Stephen G. Ujlaki



Date: 5/4/17

THE JIG IS UP

An original screenplay
Written by

Alexis A. Franklin

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FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

SUPER: **CLEVELAND, OHIO 1:19AM**

Loud speakers from TRICKED OUT CARS blast the latest HIP-HOP sounds as LOCALS crowd a residential block. Drinking, laughing and shooting the shit.

A street party is underway.

In the front yard of an abandoned house, BLAINE JEFFRIES (17) stretches her legs. Calm and reserved, she sticks out like a sore thumb.

Disconnected from the world around her, Blaine's HEADPHONES blast the latest hood favorite HYPE TRACK.

In the middle of the narrow street, A FOUR-WHEELER DIRT BIKE ZOOMS through, stopping in front of the main Crowd. The RIDER bounces the bike up and down on its back wheels.

Blaine locks in on one of the tires.

It slowly rotates, defying gravity and suspended in the air. Cycle after cycle, each revolution sends out a strong WHOOSH!

Then, Blaine's eyes quickly shift to...

MELO (40s), dressed in a blue, industrial workman's shirt. Recording him with a CAMERA PHONE, a local shot caller named SKUNK(26) eggs him on.

MELO

Is it on yet?

SKUNK

Hold on.

(then)

Alright, we're live now. No turning back!

Still underneath the sounds of her headphones, Blaine makes out what they're saying by reading their lips. She hangs on to every word.

CAMERA PHONE LIVE STREAM

MELO

Aye, Skunk, is America watching?

SKUNK (O.C.)
America's watching. The whole world
is.

MELO
America, Pakistan, Hong Kong,
whoever is out there watching.
Look, Lil' BB from up the street
disappeared when she heard she was
racing the OG--

SERENITY (O.S.)
She's here. No need for the trash
talking.

Skunk live scans the Crowd, landing on SERENITY (17). Arms
folded, Serenity stands ready for war.

SKUNK (O.C.)
Ohhhhh. We got Blaine's wing man
over here. You have anything to say
to the camera, Serenity prayer?

SERENITY
Really? With a name like Skunk?

Skunk drops the phone down to his waist.

Serenity shoots Skunk a mean eye roll, then glances across
the way to Blaine, a couple of houses down.

Blaine continues to stretch.

BLAINE'S POV

As the beat builds, Blaine gets more into the zone. HER ZONE.

She swings her eyes from PERSON to PERSON. As Serenity
approaches, Blaine zeros in.

Serenity's muffled voice creeps up.

SERENITY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Blaaaainnne.

Blaine diverts her attention back to the wheel rotation as it
speeds up, increasing with every second that passes.

SERENITY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Blaaaainne.

SKUNK
What's taking so long?

SERENITY

She's getting ready to take your money. Give her a minute!

Blaine, locked in.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

Blaine!

Just then, the four-wheeler CRASHES DOWN, colliding with the pavement. It PEELS off down the street and around the corner.

Serenity tugs at Blaine's arm. Blaine RIPS OFF her headphones.

BLAINE

What?

SERENITY

Everyone's waiting.

Blaine smirks as she walks off towards Melo and Skunk. With each step, the Crowd SPLITS down the middle like the parting of the Red Sea.

SKUNK

Here we go! Five hundred dollars on the table.

(to Melo)

You walkin' away the victor?

MELO

You already know!

Melo jogs in place parallel to a neighbors TRASH CAN propped at the curb -- the makeshift starting point.

SKUNK

Alright, we'll see.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(slurred)

To the victor go the spoils.

The Crowd turns to PRISCILLA (40s) as she struggles to stand in place.

SKUNK

Not tonight, Priscilla. Go ahead on with your shit.

PRISCILLA

I want to bet on the fight too.

SKUNK

How much?

PRISCILLA

Fifty?

He looks to Melo, then back to Priscilla.

SKUNK

You don't have no damn fifty dollars.

PRISCILLA

I do. It's the first of them month, ain't it?

She grabs at her bra -- a provisional wallet.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

Fifty on 'Lil CC.

Serenity smacks her lips. Skunk considers.

SKUNK

Alright, bet.

(to Blaine and Melo)

Let's Go! Finish line is the stop sign.

Blaine focuses in on the RED STOP SIGN about one hundred yards up.

HONK! HONK!

In the middle of the Crowd, Skunk hovers in the doorway of his OLD SCHOOL CHEVY, weighing down on his horn.

SERENITY

(to Blaine)

What's holding you back?

Blaine's eyes follow a YOUNG WOMAN who approaches Skunk. She throws her arm around his shoulder -- a LOUIS VUITTON BAG dangles off of her wrist.

The Young Woman reaches into the bag and hands Skunk a wad of cash.

Blaine's eyes the purse, longingly.

BLAINE

I'm ready.

The Party pulls in closer.

Blaine sizes up Melo. He's bigger, with longer legs, but he's old, and she knows it.

She grills him, a hint of playfulness behind her eyes. They line up, shoulder to shoulder.

MELO

Yeah, okay, Lil' BB.

SKUNK

Alright, let's go! Y'all know the rules. First to make it to the stop sign takes the cash. You ready?

BLAINE

Money on the table, isn't it?

MELO

(mocking)

Isn't it?!

(to Skunk)

Let's get it!

SKUNK

On my go.

Skunk DROPS the wad of cash on the ground, placing a foot on top of it. Blaine and Melo anticipate the count.

SKUNK (CONT'D)

On your marks.

(pause)

Get set.

(pause)

GO!

THEY TAKE OFF!

Blaine starts off strong, but a few steps behind Melo.

The Crowd SCREAMS as they sprint up the sidewalk, along with the race.

Blaine glances to Melo -- Serenity clocks it.

SERENITY

Stay in your lane, B!

Blaine catches Serenity's motivation. She shifts her attention back to the stop sign.

Everything else around it becomes BLURRED.

Tunnel vision.

With intensity building, Blaine kicks it into overdrive.

CAMERA PHONE LIVE STREAM

At the finish line, Skunk's WINGMAN records the finish with his CELL PHONE.

Blaine peels out in front of a tiring Melo.

SKUNK
Ohhhhh! Ohhhh!

In the blink of an eye, Blaine ZIPS across the finish line. Melo, a few paces behind.

The Crowd ROARS!

Skunk rushes Melo with the camera.

SKUNK (CONT'D)
What happened?!

MELO
(winded)
Whatever, man. Get your camera out of my face!

Melo FACE-PALMS Skunk's cell phone down to the ground.

END LIVE STREAM.

SKUNK
Really?

He fake jabs at Melo.

SERENITY
What did I say?! I told y'all, niglets!

She runs over to Blaine, now walking off her victory away from the crowd.

SKUNK
Aye! Come get your money Lil' BB!

An excited Blaine snatches the money from Skunk.

BLAINE
Always a pleasure--

PRISCILLA
Give me my money! I want my money.

Even more lifted than before, Priscilla slurs and stumbles through the Crowd.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)
Where you at, Skunk?

As she tries to elbow her way through, a HAND reaches out and SHOVES Priscilla down to the ground.

Some of the Locals point and laugh.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)
Who did it? Come on! Who was it?

A YOUNG BOY whips out his cell phone and begins recording.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)
Okay. I have something for all of
you bastards!

Priscilla reaches into a PLASTIC SHOPPING BAG and pulls out a plastic bottle. Predicting nonsense to come, some of the Locals take a few steps back.

Priscilla opens the bottle and WHIRLS the liquid contents towards the crowd.

CROWD
Ahhhh!

They try to dodge, but it's too late. The Young Boy wipes the liquid from his arm then smells it.

YOUNG BOY
Is this piss??

Priscilla stops, throws the bottle at the crowd, then runs down the street.

Some of the Locals chase after her.

Just then--

WHOOOP, WHOOOP! Sirens and FLASHING LIGHTS from a POLICE CRUISER bust up the party.

SKUNK
Oh shit! Rollers!

Skunk jumps into his Old School.

POLICE LOUDSPEAKER
Disperse immediately and return to
your homes, or you will be
detained.

The Crowd quickly disperses. Blaine and Serenity run in the
opposite direction, away from the commotion.

EXT. CITY STREET

Blaine and Serenity slow down, now walking at a steady pace.

BLAINE
You think I should have eased up on
him at the end?

SERENITY
You just won five hundred dollars
and you're worried about what,
exactly?

She shoots Blaine a side-eye.

BLAINE
Humility is important.

SERENITY
Why do you do that?

BLAINE
Do what?

SERENITY
You know what I mean. Who cares?

BLAINE
Look, one of us needs to be
worried. Every person I go up
against isn't going to take losing
their money lightly. You should be
keeping your eye out while I'm
racing.

SERENITY
I know. I got you. This is our
hood, though. Nobody's going to try
it on us.

BLAINE
You never know what Skunk is up to.
Every week, another fight.

Serenity ponders this.

SERENITY

Truth.

(then)

You know, I can say the same about
you.

Serenity playfully nudges Blaine's shoulder.

BLAINE

I know.

They share a laugh.

INT. ZORA'S CLEANING VAN - MOVING - NIGHT

ZORA JEFFRIES (47), refined and well intentioned, sings along
to GOSPEL MUSIC. A bucket of CLEANING SUPPLIES in the back
seat.

Zora bends a corner -- running right into Blaine and Serenity
walking down the street.

ZORA

I know that isn't...

EXT. CITY STREET

Blaine and Serenity walk along, oblivious to the van.

SERENITY

You looked like you were going to
blow it for a second.

BLAINE

Never. At least not when money is
on the table.

(then)

Thanks for helping me keep my head
in the game.

She tries to pass Serenity a couple of twenties.

SERENITY

I don't need your money.

BLAINE

Take the money. Everybody eats.

Serenity begrudgingly takes the money.

SERENITY

Fine. But only because Rico lied about giving me the money for my hair appointment.

BLAINE

(laughs)

That's because he had to buy diapers for his project twins. Oop--

She cups her mouth, as if her own words surprised her.

SERENITY

You know what?

Blaine throws her arm around Serenity. They continue walking.

BLAINE

You kind of set yourself up for that one.

SERENITY

Whatever.

She replays the video of the race on her cell phone.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

I'm posting it.

BLAINE

What? No.

Serenity dramatically presses send.

SERENITY

Too late.

BLAINE

You're sick. You know that?

INT. ZORA'S CLEANING VAN - MOVING

Zora switches lanes, closing in on the two.

Before Zora can make her move, the POLICE CRUISER from the party swoops in, almost jumping the curb.

TWO POLICE OFFICERS hop out of the car, closing in on the Blaine and Serenity.

OFFICER #1

Up against the wall, ladies!

BLAINE

For what?

OFFICER #2

Because, we said so. Let's go.

SERENITY

We didn't do anything.

OFFICER #1

Do you realize what time it is? You should be home. Curfew.

Officer #1 FLASHES a light in their direction. Blaine shields her eyes with her hand.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

You two were just over on Larchmere with the party, weren't you?

BLAINE

You can't detain us, we weren't doing anything. Are we free to go?

Zora quickly parks behind the police cruiser and charges towards them.

Officer #2 looks from Blaine to Serenity.

OFFICER #2

Alright, let's see some ID.

ZORA

Is there a problem, Officer?

BLAINE

(sotto to Serenity)
Shit.

Blaine and Serenity drop their heads low, weighing the outcome of Zora finding them helmed up by the Police.

OFFICER #1

This doesn't concern you, ma'am. Back in your vehicle.

ZORA

These are my daughters, Officer...

She eyes his badge.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Mark Griffith. This does concern me. Have they done something wrong?

OFFICER #1

They shouldn't be out this late at night. Curfew.

ZORA

I understand. I had to stay late at work and wasn't able to pick them up. I told them to walk home. I'm here now, and will make sure they get in safely.

A chilling beat as the Officers size Zora up. Just then, their RADIO sounds off from the cruiser.

POLICE RADIO (O.S.)

Unit number fifty-two, we have a four eighty-one reported and possible d-dub on the East Block of Larchmere.

Zora looks to Blaine and Serenity. Officer #2 slowly steps to and reaches inside the cruiser, grabbing the radio.

OFFICER #2

(into the radio)

Copy that.

Officer #1 CLICKS OFF his flashlight.

OFFICER #1

Be safe getting in tonight.

The Two Officers climb back into their car. Zora looks to Blaine and Serenity. Their eyes drop to the ground.

INT. ZORA'S CLEANING VAN - MOVING

Zora, Blaine, and Serenity ride in silence.

ZORA

You weren't out there running those races again, were you?

Blaine stares out of the window. Zora looks over to her.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Didn't I tell you before about gambling, Blaine? That could have ended very badly. Those cops were looking for a reason to haul you off to prison. Are you listening to me?

BLAINE

Yeah, Ma. I hear you.

ZORA

You hear me, but are you listening?

Zora glances into the rearview mirror at Serenity in the back.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Does your mother know where you are, little girl?

SERENITY

Yes, ma'am. She knows I'm with Blaine.

ZORA

Mmm hmm.

Zora pulls down a residential street, parking in front of a bungalow-style home. Serenity quickly grabs at the handle of the door.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Not so fast, Little Girl. Tell your mother to give me a call the first chance she gets.

SERENITY

Yes, ma'am.

ZORA

I'll be waiting.

SERENITY

Okay.

Serenity climbs out of the car. Zora stares through Blaine.

BLAINE

What?

Shaking her head, Zora puts the Van into drive and pulls off.

EXT. STREET

Zora pulls down a dimly lit, run down block on the East Side of Cleveland.

The car passes a torched, metal shell of what used to be a Pontiac Sunfire.

The houses on the street are old, worn.

Zora pulls into the driveway of their own tattered TWO-FAMILY HOME. Blaine hops out of the van and beelines straight for the front door.

ZORA
Come back here, Blaine.

Blaine shrinks, before turning back towards Zora.

BLAINE
Ma'am?

ZORA
We had an agreement. What was our agreement?

BLAINE
We agreed that I wouldn't gamble until I'm old enough to deal with the consequences on my own, as an adult.

ZORA
As an adult. On your own. When you're responsible for yourself, then you have my permission to do what you want, but as long as I'm responsible for you, you will abide by our agreement. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?

BLAINE
Yeah.

ZORA
Excuse me?

BLAINE
Yes, ma'am.

Zora looks on at Blaine -- her eyes fill with love, disappointment and anger, all at once.

Her tone lightens.

ZORA
You have a little under a year before you turn 18. Graduation is coming up this year. Prom, too.

Blaine responds with a less than amused glare.

ZORA (CONT'D)
Still no prom?

BLAINE
No prom.

Zora throws her hands up in surrender.

ZORA
Alright, fine. Your actions today will directly influence your life in the future, Blaine. All I'm asking you to do is to make smart decisions. Do you think that you can handle that for me?

BLAINE
Yes. I understand.

Blaine opens the back door, and grabs the cleaning supplies. Zora goes for the vacuum. Together, they head inside.

ZORA
I'm still going to have to tell your father.

BLAINE
Come on, Ma?

ZORA
You know I don't keep secrets from my husband.

INT. JEFFRIES HOME - CONTINUOUS

Blaine and Zora climb the stairs to the UPSTAIRS UNIT of the home. Zora uses her key to unlock the door before entering into the pristine home.

The interior, a huge contrast from its exterior. An all white living room commands the attention of the small space. Porcelain collectors' elephants of all sizes line the mantel.

Just off the entrance, BUTCH JEFFRIES (57) the man of the house, watches television in the dark. The blue light from the TV dances over his features, hardened by tests of time.

He calls out, answering each JEOPARDY question as it's read.

ALEX TREBEC (O.C.)
ALRIGHT, THE CATEGORY IS HYMNS.

DING! The clue is revealed.

ALEX TREBEC (O.C.) (CONT'D)
A CHRISTIAN HYMN AND A JEWISH
HOLIDAY HYMN ARE BOTH TITLED THIS,
ALSO THE NAME OF A 2009 TONY-
NOMINATED MUSICAL.

BUTCH
What is 'Rock of Ages'?

DING!

ALEX TREBEC (O.C.)
James--

CONTESTANT JAMES (O.C.)
What is 'Rock of Ages'?

ALEX TREBEC (O.C.)
Correct.

Butch laughs.

BUTCH
I need to be on this show.

Blaine rushes through.

BLAINE
Hey, Daddy!

BUTCH
Hey, baby girl. Wait, I thought you
were home already.

She fakes a yawn.

BLAINE
I'm so tired. Going to bed.

Blaine beelines down the hallway to her bedroom, shutting the
door behind her.

Zora stands in the doorway, vacuum in hand. Butch stands,
freeing the vacuum from Zora's grip.

ZORA
Your daughter is going to send me
to an early grave.

He kisses her cheek.

BUTCH
What did she do this time?

INT. JEFFRIES HOME - BLAINE'S BEDROOM

An overflowing bookshelf covers half of the wall in the simple, but feminine room. A string of white CHRISTMAS LIGHTS drape the window pane.

Standing at the foot of the bed, Blaine counts her earnings from the race before adding it to a ZIP-LOC BAG of money.

Using a SHARPIE, Blaine tallies up the new total on the outside of the bag: **\$1247.52**.

Satisfied, she replaces the bag underneath her mattress, undresses, then climbs into bed.

PING! Her phone goes off.

On the screen, a text message from "G-Money".

INSERT:

Can I see you tonight?

Blaine stares at the screen for a second, before closing out of the application.

She switches the setting on her phone to 'Do Not Disturb'.

Gripping 'Reasons and Persons' - Derek Parfit, she uses her phone's FLASHLIGHT to read in the dark.

INT. BLAINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Blaine jumps awake just as her bedroom door swings open, slamming against the wall.

Zora stands in the doorway, dressed and ready for the day.

ZORA

I called out to you three times
already. Get your butt up!

She disappears just as quickly as she appeared.

Blaine groans into her pillow, before grabbing for her phone.

Zora backtracks past the door.

ZORA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Off the phone and into the
bathroom, Blaine. I'm leaving for
work. Do me a favor and show up for
yourself today, okay?

Blaine sinks her face back into the pillow.

BLAINE
(muffled)
Have a good day at work, Ma.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Blaine passes her father's DEN on the way out. Butch sits on the edge of the sofa lacing up a pair of worn, steel-toe boots.

BLAINE
Have a good day, Daddy.

BUTCH
Come here, let me talk to you for a minute, Princess.

Blaine turns to him.

BUTCH (CONT'D)
Your mother told me that you were out racing again. Is that true?

BLAINE
Yeah.

BUTCH
Excuse me?

BLAINE
Yes.

BUTCH
How many more times do we have to tell you the same thing?

BLAINE
But--

BUTCH
I don't want to hear it. This neighborhood, these young punks, they're not the kind of people that you want to get caught up with.

BLAINE
You grew up in this neighborhood. They're *our* kind of people.

BUTCH

Exactly. Which means that I know the kind of negativity that they can bring.

Blaine interrupts with a deep sigh.

BUTCH (CONT'D)

Whether it's intentional or not. I want more for my daughter. Are we on the same page?

BLAINE

Yes.

BUTCH

This is my last time talking to you about it.

BLAINE

Okay, Daddy.

She turns to leave.

BUTCH

Another thing.

BLAINE

Yes, Daddy?

BUTCH

Did you win?

A smile creeps over both their faces.

BLAINE

You know I did.

BUTCH

That's my girl.

EXT. BLAINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Blaine steps out of the house, closing the door behind her. She hops down the stairs, walks down the dismal street.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

At the corner of the street, Serenity waits for Blaine.

SERENITY

You walk any slower and we're going to get caught in lock out.

BLAINE

Do we really care about that?

SERENITY

I see where you're going with this.

The two walk down the dilapidated, four-lane street. Empty buildings, boarded up windows and spray painted territory markings give way to the occasional neon green sign highlighting a CREDIT UNION or CHECKS CASHING.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

So, two things. One, Skunk posted your video to his Facebook page and has four hundred views.

BLAINE

No longer is money the root of all evil, I see. Getting attention from strangers inside your cell phone has far surpassed greed.

SERENITY

But, the video that I posted got two thousand views already.

BLAINE

No shit? Let me see.

Blaine reaches for the phone, but Serenity pulls away.

SERENITY

Nooo. Root of all evil, remember?

BLAINE

Two-thousand is a lot of views.

SERENITY

Thanks to me!

They approach an empty field.

A GROUP OF KIDS huddle around something in the grass, pointing and snapping pictures with their phones.

BLAINE

What's going on over there?

EXT. STREET - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Blaine and Serenity cut through the Group Of Kids. They push their way to the front, then freeze in place.

In the barren field lies the stiff, naked body of Priscilla, the street wanderer from last night's party.

With an intense glare of horror, Blaine stares into Priscilla's lifeless eyes that bulge out of her head.

Serenity GULPS.

BLAINE

Let's go.

Frozen in her tracks, Serenity doesn't move. Blaine grips her by the arm.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Let's go.

EXT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Blaine and Serenity approach the school. Other STUDENTS unenthusiastically file in.

SERENITY

Do you think she...

BLAINE

Let's not talk about it.

INT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL

Blaine and Serenity wait in line behind a handful of STUDENTS being guided through a FULL BODY METAL DETECTOR.

An older, male student, CLASS CLOWN (16, wry smile) her walks through the encasement. The detector sounds off a loud BEEP!

SECURITY GUARD

You got anything in your pockets?

CLASS CLOWN

Nothing besides my big--

SECURITY GUARD

Aye! Don't start your shit this morning. Do you?

CLASS CLOWN

It's probably just my belt.

Class Clown removes his belt and walks through again. This time, nothing.

CLASS CLOWN (CONT'D)

See.

He playfully snatches his belt, walks away and DAPS up his FRIEND as he goes.

Blaine walks through the detector without a hitch. Then Serenity.

INT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM

Blaine slouches down in her seat behind a FELLOW STUDENT.

At the front of the class, MR. MAVIS (late 30s), hides his worry behind a pair of horned-rimmed glasses. He paces back and forth as he lectures on mathematics equations.

Some STUDENTS talk amongst themselves; Others use their cell phones, all but ignoring the teacher.

A PENCIL flies from the rear of the room, bouncing off of the GREEN CHALKBOARD.

MR. MAVIS

Who threw that? I know it was you,
Kiwani!

KIWANI (17), lifts his head from his desk.

KIWANI

It wasn't me.

MR. MAVIS

Up. Get up, and get out!

KIWANI

I said it wasn't me!

Mr. Mavis opens the door.

MR. MAVIS

Security! I need you to remove a student.

KIWANI

Wow. Really?

He gathers his backpack, stands and leaves.

KIWAN (CONT'D)

You're wrong, Mr. Mavis. You're dead wrong.

MR. MAVIS

Yeah, well, if you didn't do it this time, you would have done it the next time. Out.

Mr. Mavis closes the door behind Kiwan.

MR. MAVIS (CONT'D)

Now, where were we?

Blaine follows along with Mr. Mavis until she receives another text from G-Money.

INSERT:

What happened to you last night?

Blaine glances around the room. Her eyes land on GREGORY (18).

Greg glances over his shoulder, smiling at Blaine. She coyly smiles back before replying.

INSERT:

Trouble with the 'rents. On lockdown for a while. What's up?

Blaine, so engulfed in her phone, doesn't hear when the Teacher calls out to her.

MR. MAVIS (CONT'D)

Miss Jeffries?

BLAINE

Yes?

MR. MAVIS

I asked you a question.

BLAINE

I'm sorry, Mr. Mavis. I've been having trouble hearing out of my left ear.

She cups her ear.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Can you repeat the question?

A few snickers from the class.

MR. MAVIS

I asked you to solve for x. Maybe you would have heard me if your iPhone was in my desk and not in your hands.

Blaine cuffs her phone into her pocket. She eyes the LINEAR EQUATION on the chalk board.

Just then, the bell RINGS!

Students pack up and leave. Blaine continues eyeing the complicated equation.

The room around her goes silent -- blurred.

BLAINE

Negative one.

Mr. Mavis nods, surprised. Blaine packs up her desk, then shrugs to the teacher.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Sorry, Mr. Mavis.

Before she reaches the door--

MAVIS

Blaine?

BLAINE

Yes.

MAVIS

Sooner or later you're going to have to get your head out of the clouds. You've got potential, more than a lot of kids here. Take responsibility for your life.

BLAINE

Thanks, Mr. Mavis.

She leaves.

INT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - BLAINE/SERENITY'S LOCKER

Blaine finds Serenity applying lipstick in the mirror in their shared locker. STUDENTS shuffle through.

BLAINE

Do you believe in omens?

SERENITY

What the hell is that?

BLAINE

A prophetic event or sign of some good or evil to come.

SERENITY

Why didn't you just say deja vu?

BLAINE

Because that's not what it--
Nevermind.

Serenity slams the locker shut; more than willing to change the subject.

SERENITY

Want to go off campus for pizza for lunch?

Blaine receives another text from G-Money. She opens it.

INSERT:

Call me when you're free. *wink emoji*

SERENITY (CONT'D)

Rico's going with his boys.

BLAINE

Alright, whatever. As long as you tell him I'm not interested in his lame friends.

SERENITY

That's because you're waiting on...

She reads the screen on Blaine's phone.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

...G-Money to make the first move.

BLAINE

It's not even like that.

SERENITY

Says you. Don't be naive, he likes you.

Serenity walks off. Blaine follows.

EXT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT

A pair of double-doors swing open -- Blaine and Serenity exit the building.

BLAINE
I'm not thinking about him.

SERENITY
What are you thinking about?

BLAINE
Money. Getting out of this hell.

SERENITY
I feel it.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
You're Blaine, right?

Blaine and Serenity turn to find FOUR TEENAGED GIRLS peering at them from the inside of late model sedan.

They're all dressed in track gear, with their high school logo, a BALD EAGLE embroidered over the left shoulder.

SERENITY
Who wants to know?

The driver of the car, EMORY PHILLIPS (18, white, hispter-type) lowers her shades -- stares Blaine in the eye.

EMORY
I hear you're the fastest runner on this side of the city.

BLAINE
What's it to you?

EMORY
I'm the fastest in my part of town up the hill. I want to race.

BLAINE
Not interested.

Blaine turns and walks off. Serenity follows.

PASSENGER GIRL leans her head out of the window.

PASSENGER GIRL
She's probably just scared she'll lose. There's no talent down here in the slums.

SERENITY

What did you just say?

Serenity backtracks towards the passenger seat.

BLAINE

Let's just go.

SERENITY

No. I want to know what she said.

Serenity arrives at the car, and PUNCHES Passenger Girl in the face.

Emory climbs out of the driver's seat as Blaine runs over and goes at Passenger Girl with Serenity.

Just as Emory reaches the action, Security Guard rushes out of the building.

SECURITY GUARD

Hey! What's going on here?

The Girls freeze.

BLAINE

Nothing, we were just heading home.

Security Guard eyes Emory and Crew. He clocks their school paraphernalia. Then speaks into his radio.

SECURITY GUARD

We have a situation in the B-Lot.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Parked in the driveway of a handsome, contemporary home situated at the end of a prominent cul-de-sac, Zora's cleaning van sticks out like a sore thumb.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

PLAQUES line the walls, congratulating the homeowner, SANDRA KINCAID, for outstanding global sales.

Zora sings along to Gospel Music as she vacuums the open-concept living room, just off the lanai.

When she wraps up, she checks her phone. On it, a voicemail from Sandra. It plays.

SANDRA (O.S.)

Hey, Zora, it's Sandra. Change of plans for the next month or so. I'm going to be in Tokyo longer than expected. I'll explain later.

A white and grey Husky, MACEIO, tiptoes into the room carrying its own leash. He stops at Zora's feet.

SANDRA (CONT'D)

Look, I need you to check in on the house and keep the dog fed and walked while I'm away. As always, you'll be compensated for your services. I have to go, but I'll check back in with you tomorrow. Thanks for always picking up the pieces for me, Zora. I'd be completely lost without you. I owe you one.

Zora looks to Maceio; she tilts her head in confusion.

RING! Zora's phone goes off. She quickly answers.

ZORA

This is Zora Jeffries.
(then)

Where is she? I'll be there right away.

She disconnects.

SANDRA

Hold that thought, Maceio. I swear this girl is going to give me a heart attack.

She grabs her bag before disappearing down the hall and out of the front door.

The dog whimpers.

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - DAY

Blaine and Serenity wait in silence.

The Principal's office door opens and PRINCIPAL VICTOR KEYES (42, white, Bill Nye-type) steps over the threshold.

PRINCIPAL KEYS

We're ready for you.

BLAINE

We?

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Blaine and Serenity step into the office to find Zora and Serenity's another, MARLO (late 40s) seated across from Keyes, heated.

Marlo shakes her head. Zora doesn't bother to turn to Blaine.

PRINCIPAL KEYS

Come in, have a seat.

BLAINE

I was just--

ZORA

Sit. Down.

Blaine and Serenity mope over, and pull up chairs.

A silent beat of tension cloaks the room.

Principal Keyes clears his throat.

PRINCIPAL KEYS

We can't keep looking the other way when you two get into fights.

BLAINE

They don't even go to this school. They came here looking for trouble.

Zora finally turns to Blaine, now staring a hole through her soul. Blaine drops her head down into her chest.

ZORA

(to Principal Keyes)

What the next step for us?

PRINCIPAL KEYES

Well...

He sits back in his chair.

PRINCIPAL KEYES (CONT'D)

We have no choice but to suspend all parties involved. Two weeks, minimum.

MARLO

Two weeks? They didn't go to their school picking a fight. Could you show a little leniency?

Keyes lets out a deep sigh.

BLAINE

This is bullshit.

ZORA

Watch your mouth, Little Girl.

Blaine shrinks.

ZORA (CONT'D)

(to Keyes)

Two weeks is harsh, wouldn't you agree? I mean, she's in her last year of school.

BLAINE

PRINCIPAL KEYES

Look, do I want to kick your girls out of here in the middle of the school year? No. But the school board has a zero tolerance policy on violence and they're not letting up on this one. An altercation of that magnitude could have ended very badly.

ZORA

There must be something more that we can do.

PRINCIPAL KEYES

I'm sorry. My hands are tied.

Blaine reaches her boiling point and storms out of the office. Zora rises from her seat.

ZORA

Have a good day, sir.

PRINCIPAL KEYES

See you in two weeks.

ZORA

(to Marlo)

Call me.

MARLO
Okay, girl.

EXT. INNER CITY HIGH - DAY

Just outside of the building, Zora catches Blaine by the arm.

ZORA
You don't get to cry wolf. Not on
this one.

BLAINE
I'm not. I don't care. What good is
a diploma gonna be, anyway? It
won't get me any money.

ZORA
Don't ever let me hear you say that
again. You had better care. No man
is going to want to be with a
dummy.

Blaine's demeanor shifts to a more relaxed state.

BLAINE
There it is.

ZORA
There what is?

BLAINE
I'm not like you. I'm not waiting
around for a man to sweep me off of
my feet and declare that will *have*
me. That was your dream. Not mine.

ZORA
Don't start this with me. Not
today. As long as you're my child,
you will graduate high school.

BLAINE
Whatever.

Blaine turns, paces towards the car.

BLAINE (CONT'D)
What am I supposed to do for two
whole weeks?

ZORA
I have something in mind.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME

Zora unlocks the door of a modernized flat. A few steps behind, Blaine follows her through the entryway, lugging an arm full of cleaning supplies.

ZORA

Take those to the master. Start in the bathroom. Clean it from top to bottom. Make up the bed, and don't forget the floor.

Blaine walks in, taking in the home.

BLAINE

You work here?

ZORA

Sandra Kincaid has been a client of mine for years. She works in Global Marketing and Sales for a big pharmaceutical company. She travels a lot, though.

(then)

Never found a man willing to put up with her schedule-- or that bossy attitude. A sad life.

Blaine marvels at the ARTWORK sprinkled throughout.

BLAINE

Sounds cool.

ZORA

Sounds lonely.

BLAINE

Better than having someone and still being lonely.

Zora stops -- turns to Blaine.

ZORA

The bathroom.

Off that, Blaine leaves.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - EN SUITE BATHROOM

Blaine clicks the switch next to the door. The lights flicker on. ELECTRIC SHADES on the floor-to-ceiling windows retract.

She takes a moment to digest it all, then gets started.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

After finishing up in the bathroom, Blaine enters back into the bedroom. She spots a WALK-IN CLOSET.

Her curiosity gets the best of her.

She pulls at the handle.

CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Blaine's widened eyes follow the lining of the shelf.

Designer dresses, shoes, and bags -- BAGS!

Then, right in front of her eyes.

A LOUIS VUITTON SPEEDY BANDOULIERE 35.

The bag sits, illuminated like a holy shrine.

BLAINE

Holy. Shit.

She gingerly removes the bag from the shelf.

Careful, Blaine slowly unzips it and pulls the bag close to her face. She takes in a deep breath, INHALING the brand new leather smell.

ZORA (O.C.)

What are you doing?

BLAINE

(startled)

What? Oh, nothing. I was just--

ZORA

You know better than to be going through this woman's things.

Blaine re-zips the bag, replacing it on the shelf exactly how she found it.

BLAINE

Are we leaving now?

ZORA

Walk the dog so that we can get out of here.

BLAINE

Why do I have to--

ZORA
Because, I said so.

Blaine brushes past Zora, leaving her alone in the closet.

Zora steps further into the closet, stopping at the dresses and blouses. She runs her hand down the sleeve of a SILK SHIRT.

When the moment catches her, she retracts her hand, shuts off the light and leaves out.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME

In the vast backyard, Blaine lets the dog lead her.

A whistle SQUEALS in the distance, catching her attention. She follows the sounds, deeper into the woods.

Just over a patch of TALL TREES, a stately SCHOOL BUILDING appears. As she ventures closer, she spots a TRACK TEAM practicing around a FOOTBALL FIELD.

She spots the girl from the fight, Emory, practicing high-knees with the OTHERS.

Blaine watches as Emory sprints around the track.

BLAINE
She's fast.
(to Maceio)
Not as fast as me.

She continues to watch, unsuspecting of Zora approaching.

Zora stands back, marveling at Blaine's eyes as they dance at the sight of this new school.

Blaine doesn't take her eyes off of Emory.

ZORA
Blaine.

BLAINE
(startled)
Yeah.

ZORA
Bring the dog inside so that we can get out of here. We need to finish the rounds for today.

BLAINE

Right.

Blaine and Maceio walk back into the direction of the house.

INT. JEFFRIES HOME - NIGHT

Zora, Butch and Blaine sit around the table, eating dinner.

ZORA

Blaine, do you have something that you want to tell your father?

BLAINE

Not really.

ZORA

Blaine?

BLAINE

Fine. I was suspended from school today, Daddy.

BUTCH

Come on, Baby Girl. We just talked about this today. I told you, no more races.

BLAINE

I wasn't racing.

ZORA

She was fighting this time.

BUTCH

A fight, Blaine?

(then)

Did you win?

ZORA

Butch!

He clears his throat.

BUTCH

You need to make better decisions in life, Baby Girl.

ZORA

You have to start thinking about your future.

BLAINE

I do.

ZORA

I'm not talking about that little money bag that you're hiding underneath your mattress.

BLAINE

You're went through my things?

ZORA

Anything in this house belongs to me and your father. Never forget that.

BLAINE

How can I forget when you constantly remind me?

BUTCH

Watch it.

Blaine forks her plate.

ZORA

I saw you eyeing that school today. Winston Bluff.

(then)

I might be able to get you in since I work in the district and all.

BLAINE

You mean like transfer me there?

ZORA

It's a great school. It'll look good on your college applications.

BLAINE

Who says I'm going to college?

ZORA

We do.

We do.

BUTCH

BLAINE (CONT'D)

(sotto)

When I'm eighteen, I'll do what I want.

ZORA

What's that?

BLAINE

I don't want to transfer. We don't even live anywhere near that school. How will I get back and forth everyday.

ZORA

The city bus runs straight up the hill. It'll drop you off right in front of the building. Or, I'll take you.

BLAINE

It's my last year in school. I'm not going to start over at some random school.

BUTCH

I'm afraid you might not have a choice. Two weeks is a too long of a timeframe to miss school.

BLAINE

I won't go.

Blaine stands to leave.

ZORA

Dinner isn't over.

BLAINE

I'm done, and I have homework. May I be excused.

Butch looks to Zora. She goes back to her plate.

BUTCH

Go.

Blaine leaves.

EXT. BARREN FIELD - NIGHT

Blaine runs for her life, occasionally glancing over the shoulder.

Behind her, a LEATHER GLOVED HAND, grips a SEMI-AUTOMATIC GUN. We don't see the body attached, only the hand.

The gap between the Two becomes narrowed, separated only by a yard or so.

Blaine looks down at her legs, desperate for them to speed up.

The UNSEEN PERSON attached to the Leather Gloved Hand gains traction.

Blaine looks back as the hand fingers the trigger of the semi-automatic.

Blaine's deep, shallow breaths halt.

She spots something in the distance, and inches closer towards it.

As she nears, Blaine realizes that it's the same DEAD BODY from before. Priscilla.

The head turns, now staring at Blaine with those bulging eyes. Blaine blinks, giving in to the circumstances.

She takes a final glance back.

POW!

The gun goes off.

INT. JEFFRIES HOME - BLAINE'S BEDROOM

Blaine gasps awake, in a cold sweat. When she catches her breath, she reaches for her phone.

On the internet, Blaine lands on the homepage for WINSTON BLUFF HIGH SCHOOL. Even the website is fancy; simple yet attention-grabbing.

Click after click, Blaine navigates through the user friendly page. She stops on a photo of the school's spirit day.

From right to left, the a DIVERSE BODY OF STUDENTS, proudly sport their school paraphernalia and painted faces, holding a Winston Bluff BANNER.

She hovers over **ACADEMICS**, then selects the link.

At the bottom of the list, she finds and selects the **REQUIRED READING** tab.

Her eyes light up when she finds Reasons and Persons - Derek Parfit amongst the list.

BLAINE

They teach us crap, but the rich kids get to learn real shit.

Blaine continues clicking. Now on the **ATHLETICS** tab.

Picture after picture shows the award winning Track Team.

In one picture, Emory poses with a LARGE TROPHY.

Blaine zeros in on the trophy.

INT. JEFFRIES HOME - KITCHEN

Blaine finishes off a glass of water then turns off the light and heads back to her room.

DEN - CONTINUOUS

Blaine notices a light coming from the den.

She moves closer, finding Zora at the end of the couch, on her knees in deep prayer.

She backs away, towards the stairs.

ZORA

Blaine?

BLAINE

Yes, Momma?

ZORA

What are you doing up? You okay?

Blaine enters the den. Zora stands.

BLAINE

Couldn't sleep.

ZORA

What's on your mind?

BLAINE

I'll do it. I'll do transfer.

ZORA

I knew you'd come around.

Zora smiles -- embraces Blaine.

INT. BOARD OF EDUCATION - DAY

In their best attire, Blaine and Zora patiently wait in the reception area of the bland office.

Zora eyes the Women behind the desk. One white and one black worker.

When one of the WHITE ADMIN WORKER steps out of the office, Zora approaches the desk where a BLACK ADMIN WORKER sifts through files.

ZORA

Excuse me, I'm sorry to bother you.

BLACK ADMIN WORKER

Oh, it's no bother at all. How can I help you?

ZORA

Between you and I--

Zora rubs the skin on the back of her hand. Black Admin Worker knowingly nods.

BLACK ADMIN WORKER

Of course.

ZORA

How likely is it going to be for my daughter's transfer to be approved based on me working in the district?

Black Admin worker looks around, making sure that the coast is clear. She proceeds.

BLACK ADMIN WORKER

You won't get approved. He's a stickler for students who live outside of the district trying to transfer in.

ZORA

Wow. Thank you for your honesty.

BLACK ADMIN WORKER

You know we have to stick together.

She leans in closer to Zora.

BLACK ADMIN WORKER (CONT'D)

Find a friend in the district and ask them if you can use their address. Tons of parents do it.

ZORA

(duly noted)
I appreciate that.

BLACK ADMIN WORKER

Good luck.

She smiles as Zora returns to her seat. Blaine leans in.

BLAINE

What was that about?

ZORA

Change of plans. Follow my lead.

INT. BOARD OF EDUCATION - SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE

Dressed in Sunday's best, Blaine and Zora sit across from GAMBIT STEELE (56) in his cluttered office. His navy blue, seersucker suit, tailored to perfection.

Gambit shuffles through a FOLDER of paperwork.

GAMBIT

Transferring in the middle of the school year can be a tough transition. Pair that with the fact that you're in your senior year, Miss Jeffries, and it makes me think that Winston Bluff might not be the best option for you.

BLAINE

I understand that it will be difficult, but I'm a fast learner. My grades are good. I know that I'll be able to keep up.

He flashes an empty smile.

GAMBIT

What is the reasoning behind the transfer?

ZORA

My husband and I have separated. I've moved into the Aurora district, and Blaine lives with me, full-time. She needs stability, now more than ever, and Pristine seems to be a great school.

GAMBIT

I see.

Blaine glances at her mother. Gambit continues to sift through the paperwork.

GAMBIT (CONT'D)

Everything seems to be lining up,
but, I'm afraid I'm missing proof
of address for your new residence,
Misses Jeffries.

ZORA

Right. I must have left it on the
counter before we left out this
morning.

(to Blaine)

I told you to remind me to grab it.

BLAINE

Slipped my mind. Sorry.

An awkward moment of silence as Gambit eyes the both of them.

INT. BOARD OF EDUCATION

An NALO WATERS (mid 40s, Black man with a chip on his
shoulder) enters through the glass doors. He has a muscular
build -- stoic, intimidating.

He approaches the receptionist's desk.

NALO

I'm here to see Gambit Steele.

WHITE ADMIN

The superintendent is still in a
meeting, and will be with you
shortly. Can I get you anything,
water or coffee, while you wait?

NALO

No, thank you.

He takes a seat in the waiting area.

INT. SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Over the intercom, the White Admin buzzes in.

WHITE ADMIN

Sir, your eleven o'clock has
arrived.

GAMBIT

Perfect. I'll be with him shortly.

Gambit enters information into the computer, Blaine fidgets her fingers. Zora peers at Blaine's hands, causing her to stop.

GAMBIT (CONT'D)

Do you have any skills that you will be bringing to Winston Bluff?

BLAINE

What do you mean?

GAMBIT

I mean, are you going to be an asset or liability to the Aurora School District?

Blaine shifts in her seat.

ZORA

Show him the video. She's a fast runner. She would look good on your track team.

BLAINE

I don't think that's a good idea.

GAMBIT

Why not?

BLAINE

I'd much rather focus on academics.

ZORA

Nonsense. Show him the video.

Blaine pulls out her phone and plays the video for Gambit.

He nods, impressed.

GAMBIT

Alright. I'm going to approve your transfer, pending those documents being dropped off to our office. Understand that we reserve the right to conduct home visits in order to confirm everything that we've discussed here.

(to Blaine)

I want to see you on that track field. I'll speak with the coach directly to make sure we're all getting our money's worth, right?

He belts out a venomous laugh. Blaine and Zora uncomfortably join in.

ZORA

Of course.

He pauses, and then stamps the application with a red, APPROVED insignia.

GAMBIT

You can start tomorrow.

INT. BOARD OF EDUCATION

Gambit walks Zora and Blaine out of the office.

GAMBIT

Welcome to the Aurora district, Blaine Jeffries. I think you'll like it here.

BLAINE

Thank you, sir.

Nalo rises from his seat. Zora and Blaine eye him as they shuffle out of the building.

RECEPTIONIST

Your eleven o'clock, Sir. Nalo Waters.

Gambit extends a hand. They shake.

GAMBIT

A pleasure.

NALO

Indeed.

GAMBIT

Why don't we get started?

Gambit leads the way back into his office. Nalo follows.

EXT. BOARD OF EDUCATION

Satisfied, Blaine climbs into the car, Zora right behind her. She hesitates before turning the ignition.

Blaine looks to Zora. In sync, they both let out a SQUEAL of excitement.

A BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKER passes by their car. They immediately fall stiff until he passes.

ZORA

I expect nothing but greatness from you. Twice--

BLAINE

Twice as hard. I know.

ZORA

As long as you know.

She starts the car, pulls off.

EXT. BLAINE'S HOUSE - DAY (NEXT DAY)

Blaine slowly creeps out of the side door of the house, careful not to slam the door shut.

Dressed for running, she stretches on the side of the house before taking off down the street.

EXT. STREET

Blaine races past the neighborhood park. It looks serene almost, a complete contrast from the rambunctious street party from a few nights prior.

EXT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL

Blaine circles her former school. It's empty -- too early for any sign of life.

With the sun creeping over the horizon in the distance, the lights inside the building flicker on.

She stops to catch her breath.

INT. BLAINE'S HOUSE

Blaine enters through the front door. She runs right into Zora, prepping for the day ahead.

ZORA

Where were you?

BLAINE

I went for a run.

ZORA

Good. I laid out clothes that I think might be nice for you to wear.

INT. BLAINE'S ROOM

Blaine finds a nice WHITE BLOUSE, KHAKI SKIRT and MARY JANE SHOES neatly laid out on her bed. She scrunches a brow at it, and instead rummages through her closet.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Blaine quickly shuffles down the busy street, towards the CITY BUS STOP.

She uncomfortably pulls at the bottom of the khaki skirt, hoping to somehow make it longer.

As she approaches the glass enclosure, she checks the time on her cell phone. Dissatisfied, Blaine searches her cell's internet browser for a BUS SCHEDULE.

Just then, the CITY BUS creeps into eyesight. It comes to a rolling stop a few feet away.

The retractable door SWINGS open, and Blaine steps on board.

Inside, Blaine inserts her MONTHLY BUS PASS into the feeder before taking her seat towards the middle of the bus, across from the back door.

INT./EXT. CITY BUS - MOVING

The landscape of the city changes from the dilapidated inner-city, plagued with HOMELESS STREET DWELLERS and ABANDONED BUILDINGS, to the picturesque scenery of MANICURED LAWNS and sprinkled about FENCED-IN ESTATES of Suburbia, USA.

Earbuds in, Blaine rests her head against the window.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Nalo and Gambit make their way through the empty halls.

GAMBIT

First order of business, I need to introduce you to Principal Briar.

(MORE)

GAMBIT (CONT'D)

She's going to be your go-to for all student information that you need to conduct your investigations.

NALO

She?

GAMBIT

Yes, she. Is that going to be a problem for you?

NALO

No problem at all. As long as the check clears.

GAMBIT

Good.

He stops at the ADMINISTRATION OFFICE. With one hand on the doorknob...

GAMBIT (CONT'D)

Depending on the results you yield, the job may continue throughout next school year as well, so I would suggest that you play nice with Briar.

Gambit steps into the office.

Nalo furrows a brow, not entirely excited about the job that lies ahead.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

Gambit bypasses the FRONT DESK, barging straight into the PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE.

He finds PRINCIPAL ABIGAIL BRIAR (early 40s, elegant and refined) with an exposed bra, applying deodorant to her pits.

BRIAR

What the hell gives you the right to--

GAMBIT

Come on, Abigail, my school, my rules.

BRIAR

Your school? This is my school,
Gambit, don't you forget that. My
school, my babies.

Gambit fake poses, with a framed picture of Abigail and a
group of STUDENTS. Abigail ignores it.

She shoots Gambit a death glare, finishes buttoning her
blouse and sits.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

You're going to get the reaction
you're looking for one of these
days.

She looks to Nalo.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

Whomever this man is, I hope that
he's here to help you find more
money for that new scoreboard that
we talked about.

GAMBIT

No, he's not. But, he will be your
new best friend. Nalo Waters,
Abigail Briar.

NALO

Nalo Waters of Nalo Waters
Investigations.

Nalo extends a hand to shake. Instead, Briar folds her arms.

BRIAR

Investigations?

GAMBIT

He's the new district investigator.

BRIAR

Wait a minute, now. Investigator
for what?

GAMBIT

The board's on my ass about the
illegals. We need to do something
about it.

BRIAR

You can't possibly mean investigate
the students.

GAMBIT

Not the students so much as the information they provide to us.

BRIAR

Unbelievable.

GAMBIT

Let's just call this a little insurance to avoid another *mishap* like last yaers.

Principal Justice shifts in her seat.

BRIAR

Antonio Parker slipped through the cracks, but he was an anomaly. It wasn't our fault that we couldn't reach his mother, or that she couldn't keep her phone in service. I can assure you that we will never have another mishap like that again. So long as you're thoroughly screening the transfers.

GAMBIT

Then I guess we're on the same page.

Gambit won't budge. Briar gives in.

BRIAR

Alright. What's the plan?

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - DAY

Blaine steps down off of the City Bus, just outside of the gated school. She inches closer as OTHER KIDS file in.

She takes a deep breath before proceeding.

GAMBIT (V.O.)

We'll start with the athletes and work our way up. The goal is to confirm that Winston Bluff's students do in fact live in the Aurora district.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH

Blaine crosses the threshold into Winston Bluff.

Clean and welcoming halls give way to a delightful aroma that tugs at her nose. To the right of her, a GROUP OF CHEERLEADERS setting up shop for a BAKE SALE.

GAMBIT (V.O.)

As long as the information matches up, there will be no problems.

From behind, a STUDENT ATHLETE sporting a LETTERMAN JACKET rocking the school colors, black and gold, bumps into Blaine.

STUDENT ATHLETE

Sorry.

He smiles, then quickly turns to catch up with his fellow ATHLETES. They laugh and joke around as they go.

PRINCIPAL BRIAR (V.O.)

And what if we find that the parents lied about their residence?

Blaine spots a sign leading to the BATHROOM. She heads inside.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - BATHROOM

Blaine shuffles into a stall. She pulls out a pair of black sweats, white tee and sneakers, then quickly changes into them. She stuffs her Mothers' preference down to the bottom of her backpack.

GAMBIT (V.O.)

Well then, we'll be left with no choice...

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH

Blaine emerges from the bathroom, comfortable and gleaming.

GAMBIT (V.O.)

We'll have to prosecute them to the fullest extent in which the law will allow.

Blaine eyes a printed off class schedule, then navigates her way to class.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Concerned, Principal Briar, looks to Nalo.

GAMBIT

I'll leave you to it.

With that, he disappears on the other side of the door. Briar stares at Nalo.

NALO

The list.

BRIAR

Of course.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - CLASSROOM

The bell RINGS just as Blaine squeezes through the rows of desks, finding an empty one near the window.

The teacher, DARREN CHADWICK (mid 30s, vibrant, engaging) stands at the front of the room, waiting.

He glances at his watch, not a second before SIMEON GREY (17) barges through the door.

SIMEON

My bad, Mister C. The ladies couldn't keep their hands off of me in the hall.

CHADWICK

Yeah, I'm sure. Tell your mother I said hello next time, okay?

The class erupts into laughter.

SIMEON

You're a hater, Mister C. But, I'm going to let you have it.

CHADWICK

Take your seat, youngin'.

Chadwick glances into Blaine's direction.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Alright, listen up. We have a new student in the classroom.

He scans his STUDENT ROSTER.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Would you like to introduce yourself?

BLAINE

I'm good. Thank you.

He laughs.

CHADWICK

The new ones are always a little shy. I won't force your hand. Everyone, this is Blaine Jeffries. Make sure you do a good job at welcoming her to Psychology class, Eagle style.

One-by-one, until in unison, each of the student shoots Blaine a kind 'hi'. She smiles, warmly.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Miss Jeffries, I'm going to have you pair up with--

He glances the room.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Emory Phillips to get you caught up. Is that okay, Miss Phillips.

Emory, the driver from the car filled with Girls, breaks her gaze from her phone.

EMORY

(unconvincing)

Yeah, sure. Whatever.

BLAINE

That's not necessary. I'm sure I can catch up on my own.

CHADWICK

Nonsense. No child left behind here at Winston Bluff.

BLAINE

Okay.

CHADWICK

Now that that's settled, raise your hand if you were able to finish last night's readings.

The Entire Class raises their hands, surprising Blaine.

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Good. Let's get started.

He walks over the board and scribes.

INSERT: **THE INVISIBLE GORILLA: HOW OUR INTUITIONS DECEIVE US**

CHADWICK (CONT'D)

Blaine, you might be lost for a while, but bear with us. Now, who can tell me why this piece was written?

Without raising her hand.

BLAINE

It was written to show us that our minds don't work the way that we think that they do.

CHADWICK

Excellent. I'm impressed. Anyone care to elaborate?

Simeon's hand shoots in the air.

SIMEON

We only see the world through our own perspective. How we interpret the world has everything to do with the lived experiences, and people we encounter.

EMORY

Exactly. Two people can witness the same event and may take away something completely different than the other.

CHADWICK

I'm loving where this conversation is going. What else?

Emory glances over her shoulder as Blaine focuses, now captivated by the conversation.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - HALLWAY

In an empty hall after school, Blaine marvels at a GLASS ENCLOSURE of Winston's FORMER STUDENTS and their accolades. TROPHIES, MEDALS and CERTIFICATES line the shelves.

EMORY

Careful not to punch the glass.

BLAINE

I was just--

Emory laughs.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

A lot of talent has come through
this school.

EMORY

Why aren't you at practice? Coach
is expecting you.

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - TRACK FIELD

An eight-lane TRACK circles the high school's football field.
A row of BLEACHERS line each side.

A whistle SQUEALS in the distance.

COACH KINJOY DREW (40s) walks through, giving the nod of
approval to RUNNERS practicing HURDLES, stretches, and take-
offs.

Coach Drew spots Blaine seated in the bleachers. She walks
over.

COACH DREW

Why aren't you practicing?

BLAINE

I didn't realize I would be running
today. I don't have the clothes to
practice.

COACH DREW

Are you a runner, Jeffries?

BLAINE

I'm a runner.

Coach Drew turns to leave.

COACH DREW

Then start stretching, Jeffries.
We're going to see what all the
hype is about.

He steps down off of the bleachers.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Nalo parks his car in front of a single family home on a quiet street near the school.

He reaches over to the passenger seat and grabs a file folder of "Morgan Howard". He bypasses Morgan's headshot and lands on her home address.

Nalo holds the address up, comparing it to the house in front of him. When the numbers match up, Nalo climbs out of the car. He walks up and KNOCKS on the door.

After a moment, the door opens. MRS. HOWARD (47) opens the door sporting an oversized shirt and boyfriend jeans -- soccer mom at heart.

MRS. HOWARD
May I help you.

NALO
You must be Mrs. Howard.

MRS. HOWARD
Who are you?

NALO
I'm here on behalf of Winston Bluff
High School.

He passes her a LEAFLET detailing Winston Bluff's routine home visits.

NALO (CONT'D)
We need to confirm that Morgan
Howard lives at this address.

She suspiciously eyes him.

MRS. HOWARD
(into the home)
Morgan!

MORGAN (O.S.)
Yeah?

NALO
That won't be necessary.

MRS. HOWARD
It's fine. No trouble. Anything to
help keep our schools running
smoothly, right?

MORGAN (15, brace face) peaks her head into the foyer.

MORGAN

Yeah?

NALO

All the proof that I need. I'll get out of your hair. Thank you for your cooperation.

MRS. HOWARD

Anytime.

Mrs. Howard closes the door behind her. At the stairs Nalo lights a cigarette. He takes a drag then steps down, retreating to his car.

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - TRACK FIELD

After the Girls finish their warm-up run, they help each other stretch on the grass. Blaine struggles with some of the stretches.

Coach Drew exits the school, carrying a pair of sweats, a Winston Bluff t-shirt and sneakers.

She tosses them to Blaine.

COACH DREW

Suit up, Jeffries.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-Two-by-two, the Runners face off in quick sprints.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)

Worry about getting your legs up and let gravity do the rest.

Blaine wins some. Loses some. It's all apart of the game.

Coach Drew leans over the gate watching on. She yells out to Blaine.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)

Keep those arms close to your body, Jeffries!

Blaine straightens her posture, then continues running with better form.

After a sprint around the entire track, Blaine bends over, exhausted. Emory instead shows her how to catch her breath standing up, with her arms over her head.

Blaine vomits underneath the bleachers. The Team playfully laughs at her.

Blaine sits off to the side in an attempt to regain her composure, as the TWO RUNNERS who finished last complete their SUICIDE RUNS.

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - TRACK FIELD

Now in sweats and sneakers, Blaine lines herself up at the starting point on the track.

The rest of the Team stands to the side, up against the wired fence.

COACH DREW

Blaine Jeffries meet the team.
Team, this is your new running mate. She comes highly recommended, so we're going to get to see it first hand.

Blaine nods to the Team.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)

Have you had any formal training before now, Jeffries?

BLAINE

No. Just street foot races mostly.

One of the girls, CHRISTIAN (17) laughs.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

What's funny?

CHRISTIAN

You. If the big girls table is too much for you, I'm sure they still have room for you down the hill where you belong.

BLAINE

How about I show you where I belong?

COACH DREW

Hey! I won't have any of this nonsense. You're a team. You better get used to it.

Blaine and Christian eye each other.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)

Let's get it out of your system now. Both of you, come on. One race. Four-by-four.

BLAINE

Okay, but--

COACH DREW

Runners, on your mark.

Blaine quickly hops in formation. Christian walks over.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)

Set.

The girls ready themselves. Coach Drew BLOWS the whistle.

Blaine and Christian take off! Coach Drew times the race with a STOPWATCH, while the other Girls look on and CHEER. Mainly for Christian. Emory watches intently.

Blaine pulls out ahead of Christian early on.

They bend a corner on the track.

Christian rolls her ankle and SLAMS down on the pavement.

EMORY

Ouch.

Over her shoulder, Blaine clocks the advantage she has over her opponent. She speeds up, widening the gap between the two.

Blaine boastfully crosses the finish line, then decelerates.

Coach Drew stops the watch on **47.65** seconds.

COACH DREW

Impressive.

Blaine basks in the glory.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Ms. Jeffries. You failed.

BLAINE
(winded)
I don't understand.

COACH DREW
Your victory. Is it sweet?
Everything you imagined?

The Team tenses up.

Christian limps over and rejoins the group.

BLAINE
Yes, it was.

COACH DREW
While you were gloating, you missed
an opportunity to help your
teammate. We're a team. All on one
accord.

Blaine lowers her eyes, hiding the shame.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)
There will always be opportunities
to outshine someone on your team.
The ego desires recognition.
There's no place for the ego on my
team, Miss Jeffries. Am I making
myself clear?

BLAINE
Yes.

COACH DREW
(to the Team)
That goes for all of you.

TEAM
(in unison)
Yes, Coach Drew.

Coach glances over the Team.

COACH DREW
Good practice today. Get dressed.
I'll see you tomorrow.

They leave her standing on the field.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - LOCKER ROOM

Emory changes out of her practice clothes. Blaine finds an empty locker.

EMORY

You did alright out there.

BLAINE

Ha-ha. Very funny. I embarrassed myself in front of the whole team.

EMORY

Don't worry about that. Coach has had that same talk with every one of us at some point or another.

BLAINE

Really?

EMORY

Really.

Some of the RUNNERS from the team walk by.

RUNNER #1

Way to make a fool of Christian, new girl.

Blaine hesitates, hanging on the backhanded nickname.

RUNNER #1 (CONT'D)

Just kidding.

The Girls laugh in unison.

RUNNER #1 (CONT'D)

It's about time someone showed up goodie-two-shoes. We could use talent like you on the team. See you around.

She turns to leave. The Others follow behind her.

RUNNER #1 (CONT'D)

By the way, Coach wants to see you, New Girl.

Blaine looks to Emory, who shrugs her shoulders, unknowingly.

INT. PRISTINE HIGH - COACHES OFFICE - DAY

Just off of the locker room, Coach Drew watches an episode of SPORTS CENTER on a small flat screen perched adjacent to her TROPHIES, MEDALS and PICTURES from her running days.

Blaine KNOCKS on the door.

COACH DREW
Jeffries. Come in.

She powers the television off.

BLAINE
You wanted to see me?

COACH DREW
You looked good out there.

BLAINE
Thank you. It's nothing, really.

COACH DREW
Modesty gets you nowhere in life, kid. But you're right. You run wild, too lose. You need training.

BLAINE
Training?

COACH DREW
Regionals are one month away. I'm pretty sure that I can have you ready to by then. It takes hard work -- discipline.

BLAINE
I don't know if I'm cut out for--

COACH DREW
What are excuses?

BLAINE
It's not an excuse--

COACH DREW
Excuses are monuments of nothingness, that build bridges to nowhere.

Coach Drew flips the TV back on. Off of Blaine's blank stare.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)
You can go now.

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH

Blaine exits the building through a set of double doors. She checks her cell for the time, then makes her way towards the bus stop.

EXT. BUS STOP

As Blaine approaches the bus stop, Emory pulls up to the curb and rolls down the window.

EMORY
You need a ride?

Panicked, but trying to play it cool, Blaine bypasses the bus stop.

BLAINE
No, I'm good. Thanks, though.

EMORY
You sure? I was just going to grab pizza. You should come with.

The CITY BUS arrives. It stops -- the doors swing open.

BLAINE
I'm sure. I had a big lunch. Going to try to walk it off.

The BUS DRIVER retracts the door and pulls off.

EMORY
Suit yourself. See you tomorrow.

Emory pulls off. Once her car is out of site, Blaine doubles back to the bus stop.

She plops down on the bench then opens a PAPER BUS SCHEDULE.

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - PARKING LOT

Nalo saunters towards the stately building. He carries a stack of STUDENT FILES.

A late model TESLA TRUCK pulls right up to the front door.

Superintendent Gambit Steele steps out cupping a MANILA ENVELOPE.

GAMBIT

Nalo. How is the investigation coming?

NALO

So far, no hiccups. I'm heading in now to swap out some files to continue with house visits.

GAMBIT

Good, good. You never can be too sure. You know?

NALO

Of course.

Nalo gazes at the Tesla.

NALO (CONT'D)

Hell of a car you have there.

GAMBIT

Fresh off the production line.

NALO

Must have cost you a pretty penny.

GAMBIT

One-hundred, forty-two thousand.

Nalo whistles.

NALO

I need your job.

GAMBIT

Work hard. Most importantly, you have to care. You have to want to make a difference, you know?

Gambit's phone PINGS! He checks it.

GAMBIT (CONT'D)

Do me a favor and drop this off in Briar's mailbox. It's the budget for next year. She's been pestering me for it, maybe she'll be happy for once.

NALO

Sure thing.

GAMBIT

I have to run. Good seeing you.
Looking forward to results from
you.

Gambit climbs into his Tesla, and rides off.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH

Nalo walks the empty hallway.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - ADMINISTRATION OFFICE

Nalo enters the office. He slides the envelope into Briar's
shelf on the WALL OF MAILBOXES.

Nalo reconsiders, then grabs the envelope, this time opening
and reading its contents.

He skims the page. At the bottom...

INSERT:

SUPERINTENDENT SALARY: \$198,433.

NALO

Holy shit.

Nalo slides the documents into a COPIER. Once the set of
copies print out, he returns the envelope to Briar's mailbox.

COACH DREW (PRE-LAP)

Alright, ladies. Let's wrap it up
for the night.

EXT. TRACK FIELD - DAY

Coach Drew blows her whistle.

Together, the Team begins breaking down hurdles.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Blaine moves at a snail's pace getting dressed.

EMORY

Good job out there.

BLAINE

Thanks, I guess. My body hurts.
Coach hates me.

EMORY

You'll get used to the pain. But
you're wrong. Coach is just coach.
(then)
Hey, tonight is the only free time
that I have to go over the reading
list. I can come to your place
after this.

BLAINE

My place?

EMORY

Yeah, you can come over as long as
you don't mind running into my
mom's weekly yoga class tonight.

Blaine scrunches a brow.

EMORY (CONT'D)

You know, mindfulness, centering
yourself, focused breathing-- Wait,
you've never heard of yoga?

BLAINE

(she lies)
Yoga? Of course I've heard of it
before. I love Yoga.

Emory nods in agreement at first, then shoots Blaine an all-
knowing side-eye.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - BATHROOM STALL

Gripping her phone, Blaine crouches over the toilet.

BLAINE

I've never heard of yoga before.

SERENITY (O.C.)

Of course you have.

BLAINE

I'm pretty sure that I haven't. I'm
at a complete disadvantage.

SERENITY

You're being dramatic. Check your
phone.

DING! Blaine receives a text message.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

I just sent you a Youtube crash course. Just use awareness as a talking point if it comes up again.

Blaine opens the video.

EXT. STUDENT PARKING LOT

Blaine joins Emory at her car.

EMORY

Everything okay?

BLAINE

Yeah. You ready to get out of here?

EMORY

For sure.

They hop in.

EXT. EMORY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Blaine and Emory walk through the tree-lined walkway leading up to Emory's front door.

Emory unlocks the door and enters.

INT. EMORY'S HOUSE

Blaine steps in behind Emory.

The open and rustic floor plan is of the home is inviting. Tranquil music dances throughout.

Emory tosses her bags onto the couch and beelines straight for the fridge.

EMORY

Want anything? Water? Lemonade?

BLAINE

Water is fine.

EMORY

We have cookies and I'm pretty sure I can sneak us a bottle of wine.

BLAINE
What kind of cookies?

Using an oven mit, Emory removes a warm plate of cookies from the oven.

EMORY
Walnut - Chocolate chip.

BLAINE
Yes....yes.

Down the hall, a door OPENS and out walks Emory's mother, CLEM (46), ushering in remnants of positive energy and vibes.

As the door closes, a group of voices can be heard chanting.

VOICES
Ommmmmm...ommmmm.

Clem closes the door behind her, and heads for the kitchen.

EMORY
Hey, Mom.

CLEM
Hey, love muffin.

Clem embraces Emory with a hug and kiss.

CLEM (CONT'D)
When did you get in?

EMORY
Just now. This is Blaine. She's new on the team.

CLEM
A pleasure to meet you, Blaine.

Clem scoops Blaine up for a hug, catching her off guard.

BLAINE
Nice to meet you as well. You have a beautiful home.

CLEM
Thank you. That's very kind of you to say.
(to Emory)
I like this one.

She nudges Emory on the chin before grabbing a bottled water from the fridge.

Clem heads back out of the kitchen and down the hall.

CLEM (CONT'D)
Keep an eye on that one, Blaine.

She winks at Blaine before disappearing back downstairs.

INT. NALO'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Parked outside of a CONVENIENT STORE, Nalo sits in his car, puffing on a cigar.

Clipboard in hand, he uses a pen to cross a name off of his investigation list.

The next name on the list --

INSERT:

BLAINE JEFFRIES

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT

Zora enters with a handful of mail.

Maceio greets her at the door.

ZORA
Hi, Macey.

Zora sifts through the pile of mail.

She stops at letter from WINSTON BLUFF HIGH.

Removing it from the pile, Zora places the remaining envelopes on a desk near the door.

The dog whines at her feet as Zora RIPS open the letter.

ZORA (CONT'D)
I know, boy.

INSERT:

Dear Mrs. Jeffries,

Your transfer student Blaine Jeffries, has been scheduled for a home visit on Saturday, April 15th @ 4:30PM.

WINSTON BLUFF would like to thank for your cooperation.

GO EAGLES!

ZORA (CONT'D)
Damnit! That's tomorrow.

The dog BARKS!

ZORA (CONT'D)
Alright. Let's get you fed.

Zora leads Maceio into the kitchen.

INT. EMORY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM

In the loft-style bedroom, Blaine and Emory sprawl out on the king sized bed.

They take turns with the plate of cookies and a bottle of RED WINE, while nose deep in their own books.

Blaine finishes a page, then closes the book.

BLAINE
Let me know when you finish chapter seven.

EMORY
You're not at seven already, are you?

BLAINE
Guilty.

EMORY
What are you, gifted or something?

BLAINE
No. I like to read. No big deal.

Blaine uncomfortably shifts on the bed.

BLAINE (CONT'D)
If I were gifted, I think I'd know it by now.

EMORY
Whatever it is, I think your dope.

BLAINE
Thank you.

They share a lingering gaze.

EMORY

Oh, forgot to tell you. Bradley is having a party this weekend. You should come with me.

BLAINE

Who's Bradley?

EMORY

Quarterback of the football team, and the hottest guy at Winston Bluff.

BLAINE

Sounds cool. I'm down.

EMORY

Then it's settled.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

Books in hand, Blaine walks through the hallway with a little pep in her step. She flashes a glowing, soul resonating smile as she passes each niche group of STUDENTS.

The JOCKS.

The FASHIONISTAS.

The NERDS.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Nalo parks in front of Blaine's cover home.

He ashes a cigarette, climbs out of his car, and treks to the door. He rings the doorbell, but no answer. He follows up with a couple of knocks.

Next door, an ELDERLY NEIGHBOR (70s) pulls into the driveway. Once out of her car, she yells over to Nalo.

ELDERLY NEIGHBOR

She's not in. Can I help you with something?

NALO

I was hoping to speak with the lady of the house. Do you know when she'll be back?

ELDERLY NEIGHBOR

Who knows? She's never home more than a month out of the year. She has people that come in and handle all of her business dealings. Who are you?

Nalo smiles.

NALO

Just an old friend, looking to reconnect.

ELDERLY NEIGHBOR

Does the old friend have a name?

NALO

Mike Stewart. We're old college buddies.

ELDERLY NEIGHBOR

I will let her know you dropped by, Mr. Stewart. You have a business card or something?

NALO

That won't be necessary. I'll send her an e-mail. Thanks anyway.

Nalo leaves. Elderly Neighbor watches as he goes.

INT. LOCKER ROOM

The Track Team waits outside of Coach's office -- the door is closed and the lights are shut off. Blaine and Emory arrive.

EMORY

Coach called. She had an emergency. Tonight's practice has been cancelled.

A few groans from the Team.

TEAMMATE

We need all the time we can get.

BLAINE

Let's just enjoy the day off.

TEAMMATE

Easy for you to say, coach's pet. Some of us actually have to work for what we have.

BLAINE

I don't? You don't even know me.

TEAMMATE

I know plenty. Trust.

EMORY

Alright! Regionals is in two weeks.
Stretch tonight. We need to level
up. Come ready tomorrow.

The Girls file out. Emory turns to Blaine.

BLAINE

Let's get out of here.

EXT. STUDENT PARKING LOT - DAY

Blaine and Emory walk toward Emory's car.

EMORY

Where do you want to go?

BLAINE

Do you trust me?

A beat of silence. Blaine's jaw drops. Emory laughs.

EMORY

Of course I trust you.

BLAINE

Good. Let me drive.

EMORY

What?

BLAINE

Give me the keys?

Emory hesitates, then tosses the keys to Blaine.

INT. EMORY'S CAR - NIGHT

Blaine stares out at the familiar landscape.

EMORY

Where are we going?

Blaine turns down the street of her suburban cover house.

EMORY (CONT'D)

I want you to see where I live. You don't mind if we study at my place, do you?

Emory smiles.

EMORY (CONT'D)

No. Not at all.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - CONTINUOUS

Blaine walks Emory around and to the back of the house.

EXT. BACKYARD

Blaine and Emory bypasses the decorated pati. They approach a sliding door off the living room.

Blaine grips the handle and enters.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME

Emory steps through the house, admiring the different SCULPTURES and PAINTINGS.

EMORY

Cool house.

BLAINE

Thanks.

Blaine plops down in the sofa.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Let's get started.

EMORY

What? No tour?

BLAINE

It's kind of late, my mom will be home soon.

EMORY

Don't play coy with me, Jeffries.

Emory drops her bags on the floor and heads to the back.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - MASTER BEDROOM

Emory heads straight for the closet.

BLAINE
What are you doing?

EMORY
Is this your parents' room? They
have great taste!

She opens the door for the closet.

EMORY (CONT'D)
Whoa. Now this is what I'm talking
about.

BLAINE
We shouldn't be in here.

EMORY
Do you ever try on your mom's
clothes?

BLAINE
Never. Let's go.

EMORY
Aw, come on. You're no fun.

Emory steps up on a stool, pulling down a HAT BOX.

She takes the lid off, revealing a gold, lace BOUDOIR HAT.
Her face beams with joy as she tries on the hat.

EMORY (CONT'D)
How do I look?

BLAINE
Silly.

They share a laugh. Emory spots the SHELF OF BAGS.

EMORY
Oh. My. God. You're mother owns
these? You're parents must have
bank or something.

BLAINE
Something like that.

Emory grabs hold of the haloed Louis Vuitton Bag.

EMORY

I can't believe your mother owns one of these. You have to wear this to the party. The whole team will be wearing our bags. I bet it'll get Nick's attention. He did ask me about you.

BLAINE

Who's Nick?

EMORY

Tall guy on track team. He's newly single too.

BLAINE

Not interested.

EMORY

You should be. I hear he has a big--

BLAINE

Not interested.

Blaine frees the bag from Emory's grip and replaces it on the shelf.

EMORY

Sorry. I just thought...
(then)
You like guys, right?

Blaine struggles to find the words. Emory steps in closer.

EMORY (CONT'D)

Or do you like girls?

Blaine tenses up.

BLAINE

What? No. I'm just not--

Emory kisses Blaine. Blaine kisses back, at first, then pulls back. Emory kisses her again. This time, Blaine relaxes into the kiss. Emory pulls back.

EMORY

You definitely like girls.

Emory smiles and walks out of the closet.

BLAINE

I don't--

EMORY

I'm ready to get started whenever
you are.

Left standing alone, Blaine grazes a finger across her lips.

INT. NALO'S TRUCK - DAY

Nalo turns out of the school's parking lot and spots Blaine waiting at the stop, back pack in tow.

Nalo quickly does a U-TURN, and parks, hidden from view.

NALO

Where are you going, Blaine
Jeffries?

EXT. BUS STOP

Blaine shuffles through music on her phone as the BUS arrives at its stop.

She climbs on, pays and takes her seat, completely oblivious to Nalo, who has now pulled up behind the bus.

When the bus takes off, Nalo follows in behind it.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - HALLWAY

The school is mostly empty. A JANITOR pushes an industrial MOP BUCKET into a utility closet.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

At her desk, Briar reaches for an old cup of coffee and sips. She frowns at the taste, as reads over the BUDGET DOCUMENTS.

Briar flips back and forth through the papers before retrieving an accountant's calculator from her top drawer.

She adds up the numbers, then compares it to the number on the paper. The two don't add up.

Briar rubs a temple with the palm of her hand. She reaches for the phone and dials.

After a single RING, the automated voicemail picks up.

BRIAR

(into the phone)

Hey, Gambit, its Briar. Look, I'm going over the documents that you dropped off and there seems to be a few discrepancies in numbers. Give me a call when you get this.

She disconnects the line.

INT./EXT. NALO'S MUSCLE CAR - LATER

Nalo keeps his distance behind the bus. It stops in front of a gas station.

Nalo watches in anticipation as TWO PASSENGERS file out -- neither of them being Blaine.

The door slides shut, the bus continues. Nalo follows suit.

Nalo's car is cut off by a SMART CAR. He SLAMS on his horn.

The bus slides through a YELLOW LIGHT at in intersection, leaving Nalo stuck at the RED LIGHT.

NALO

Damnit!

Nalo impatiently taps at the steering wheel. The light to turns GREEN. He dangerously weaves in and out of traffic to catch up to the bus. He pulls up to the side and finds an empty bus -- no Blaine.

Nalo quickly WHIPS another U-Turn, backtracking down in the opposite direction.

He spots Blaine walking and bobbing her head with her ear buds in.

NALO (CONT'D)

There you are.

He drives slower than the speed limit, keeping his distance as Blaine turns down a residential street.

Blaine does a routine quick glance over each shoulder. She notices the car. Nalo falls back. He instinctively parks on the street.

Blaine's body language shifts, as she speeds up her pace.

She looks back again and the car is gone. Blaine ducks off into the driveway of a RANDOM HOUSE, taking a short cut to the next street.

EXT. SERENITY'S HOME

Blaine hurriedly shuffles down the street and up onto the enlarged front porch, still toting her oversized backpack.

She checks to make sure that the coast is clear, quickly knocks on the door and then enters.

INT. SERENITY'S HOME

Blaine walks through the modest home.

BLAINE
Serenity!

From upstairs, Serenity yells down.

SERENITY (O.S.)
Up here.

INT. SERENITY'S HOME - BATHROOM

Blaine finds Serenity in the bathroom, flat-ironing her hair.

SERENITY
(jokingly)
The prodigal daughter has returned.

BLAINE
Stopp it.

SERENITY
Look at you.

She takes a step back, looking Blaine over from head-to-toe.

SERENITY (CONT'D)
Something's different.

BLAINE
You play too much.

SERENITY
I mean it. You don't have time for us little people now that you went off and made a new life for yourself. What's going on??

BLAINE

I think I'm being followed.

SERENITY

So, you decided to lead them to my house? Smart move.

BLAINE

I couldn't go home. What if it's the school?

SERENITY

Speaking of, they must be keeping you busy up there.

BLAINE

Between trying to catch up for class and track practice, I barely have time to sleep.

SERENITY

Enough time for Miss Emory.

An awkward beat. Serenity shifts.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

Oh, are we still on for this weekend? I need you to help me find an outfit for a date.

BLAINE

Did we have plans?

SERENITY

You forgot.

BLAINE

It's just, there's this big party going on.

SERENITY

So, you're flaking?

BLAINE

No.

Serenity shoots Blaine a "really?" side-eye.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Okay, maybe. But I want you to come with us.

SERENITY

Us?

BLAINE
Emory and I.

Serenity and Blaine lock eyes through the mirror.

SERENITY
Okay.

BLAINE
You'll go?

SERENITY
Yeah, why not? I've never kicked it
with white people before.

Blaine laughs.

BLAINE
It's going to be so much fun!

INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Blaine shuffles through waves of SHOPPERS. She enters into
the LOUIS VUITTON store.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LOUIS VUITTON STORE

At the cash register, Blaine pulls out her bag of money, and
counts it out to the SALES LADY.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Dressed in Sunday's best, Blaine and Marigold sit across from
Nalo.

Nalo meticulously sips from a cup of tea.

Zora looks to Blaine then clears her throat.

NALO
Thank you for taking the time to
sit with me.

ZORA
Of course. May I ask why this home
visit was scheduled?

NALO
Miss Jeffries--

ZORA
Misses Jeffries.

NALO
Misses Jeffries, there have been a lot of complaints from families in this district about students using fake addresses to transfer into the school district. Home visits are a way of keeping this issue under control.

ZORA
Clearly we live in this school district.

NALO
Clearly.

He takes another sip of tea.

NALO (CONT'D)
I stopped by the other day, and one of the...one of your neighbors mentioned that the person who this house belongs to is out of town most of the year.

ZORA
Which neighbor? Must have been Denise. Hasn't been the same since the stint in the psych ward last year.
(to Blaine)
Remind me to stop in to check in on her with a cake.

BLAINE
Will do.

ZORA
Mister...?

NALO
Just call me Nalo.

ZORA
You're in my home. I'd prefer to know your last name.

NALO
Nalo Waters.

She politely smiles at him.

ZORA

This is clearly my home. My daughter does live here.

NALO

Of course.

(to Blaine)

How has the adjustment been for you?

BLAINE

Fine.

NALO

You don't speak much, do you?

Blaine just stares.

NALO (CONT'D)

I see. Good to hear.

Nalo finishes off his tea.

NALO (CONT'D)

Well, it's clear that you aren't the bad guys or the illegals here.

BLAINE

I wouldn't call people doing what they need to do for a real education bad guys either.

NALO

Right. Well, however you want to define them, it doesn't seem to be the case here, so I'll get out of your hair.

Nalo folds over his notepad. Stands to leave.

As he walks down the hall, the phone rings. Zora ignores it.

NALO (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to get that?

ZORA

The answering machine will pick it up.

The machine picks up.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Zora? Are you there? Listen, I need you to add something to the list of items you're going to send me.

ZORA

Blaine, See Nalo out, will you?

Zora quickly picks up the phone.

ZORA (CONT'D)

I'm here.

Nalo's eyes question Zora, but Blaine steps in. She opens and holds the door wide opened for him.

BLAINE

(sarcastically)

Thanks for keeping our school safe from the illegals. Good bye.

Nalo takes the hint, and leaves.

INT. NALO'S MUSCLE CAR

Once inside of his truck, Nalo considers the events that just transpired. A light bulb goes off in his head.

He starts the car and pulls off.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME

Zora wraps up the call.

ZORA

I will get that sent to you, right away.

(pause)

Bye now.

She disconnects, then stares at Blaine. They both pause. Blaine takes a deep breath.

Zora and Blaine excitedly hug. Blaine pulls away.

BLAINE

Can you take me to Emory's?

ZORA

You've been seeing a lot of that girl lately.

Blaine plucks grapes from the FRUIT PLATTER on the table.

BLAINE

She's helping me with school work.
But there's a party tonight. I want
to go.

ZORA

Who's party?

BLAINE

A guy on the track team.

ZORA

Will his parents be there?

BLAINE

Of course.

Zora eyes Blaine for a beat.

ZORA

Alright. Get your things.

INT. ZORA'S CLEANING VAN - DAY

Zora parks in front of Emory's house. Blaine clicks her
safety belt unlocked.

ZORA

I want you to be careful, Blaine.
You spending so much time and
getting close with this girl, I
don't want you to compromise this
opportunity that you have.

BLAINE

She's my friend.

ZORA

She can't be your friend if your
relationship is rooted in a lie,
sweetie. Stick with Serenity.
That's your real friend.

Blaine looks to Zora. She opens her mouth to speak, but
retracts. Then--

BLAINE

F-Y-I, Serenity will be there, too.
I'll see you at home, Mother.

Blaine climbs out of the car.

INT. CLEMENTINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Now dressed to the nines and ready to party, Emory and Blaine do a mirror check.

BLAINE
Serenity should be here soon.

EMORY
Cool, can't wait to meet her.

Clem KNOCKS and then walks in with Serenity.

CLEM
Serenity's here.

SERENITY
(to Clem)
Thank you.
(to Blaine)
Heyyy.

BLAINE
Heyyy.

CLEM
I'll leave you ladies to it.

She exits.

BLAINE
Serenity, Emory. Emory, Serenity.

They hug.

EMORY
Nice to finally meet you. Blaine talks about you all the time.

SERENITY
Nice to meet you too.

They all smile.

BLAINE
Who's ready to party?

EMORY
Whew!

Blaine reaches into her backpack and pulls out her new LV BAG. She throws it over her shoulders and poses.

BLAINE

I'm ready whenever you are.

Serenity's eyes widen.

SERENITY

Where the fuck did you get this?!

She snatches it from Blaine.

BLAINE

Be careful!

Serenity unzips then smells the inside of the bag.

SERENITY

This is real!

Blaine flashes a huge smile.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

Alright--

She hands the purse back over to Blaine.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

How did you get it?

BLAINE

I bought it.

SERENITY

With what money?

Blaine looks away. Serenity folds her arms.

SERENITY (CONT'D)

With the money that you've been saving? Wow.

EMORY

I think it's cute. Good for you. If you don't treat yourself, who will?

Blaine smiles, continues modeling the bag. Serenity watches as Emory encourages Blaine.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

TEENS dance through the party to a mixture of POP and HIP-HOP sounds. Some sip from beer cans.

In the kitchen, a GROUP OF JOCKS cheers with a shot of BOURBON.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - PATIO

Blaine watches as a BLONDE (17) removes her bikini and DIVES into the pool. She laughs as the girls' FRIENDS cheer her on. A CREEPY TEEN video records on his cell.

Blaine glances around the backyard. She notices that most of the PARTY has disappeared inside the house.

She steps back into the kitchen through the sliding door.

INT. HOUSE PARTY

Blaine weaves through the party. She stops and pulls TRACK GIRL away from tongue kissing the school QUARTERBACK.

BLAINE
Have you seen Emory?

TRACK GIRL
I think she went upstairs.

Blaine walks toward the stairs.

INT. BATHROOM

Blaine opens the bathroom door to find Emory making out with NICK -- the host of the party.

Blaine quickly closes the door and descends the stairs -- can hardly believe her eyes.

Emory chases after her.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Blaine and Serenity wait at Emory's car.

BLAINE
Can you just take us home?

EMORY
There's no need for hurt feelings.
It's not what it looks like.

Blaine stares her down.

EMORY (CONT'D)

Okay it is what it looks like, but--
that means nothing to me.

SERENITY

I'm sure you probably said that
about Blaine, too.

BLAINE

Look, you can do what you want, I
don't care. I just want you to take
me home.

EMORY

Fine. Just give me the keys.

BLAINE

I don't have them.

EMORY

They're in your purse.

BLAINE

No, they aren't.

Emory grabs hold of the handle.

EMORY

They are. I slid them in earlier.
Let me just--

Blaine pulls back harder.

Emory finishes with a strong pull, this time, tearing the
handle.

BLAINE

Are you fucking kidding me?!

EMORY

Sorry. Look just, they're here.

Emory retrieves the keys from the bag. Blaine turns toward
the car.

SERENITY

Look, let's just get out of here.

EMORY

Fine.

They get into the car.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Emory pulls up to the Suburban Home. The car silent the entire way home.

EMORY

I'm sorry about the purse and everything.

Blaine looks at her, then she climbs out of the car, slamming the door shut behind her.

SERENITY

Blaine isn't someone to toy with. She's never liked anyone like you before.

EMORY

You mean a girl?

SERENITY

That's exactly what I mean. You can't just toy with her emotions and think it's okay. Stay away from her if you don't plan on doing right by her.

Serenity climbs out of the car.

Emory backs out of the driveway and pulls off.

EXT. BLAINE'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Nalo steps up onto the porch. He knocks on the door. After a moment, Butch emerges. He cracks the screen door.

BUTCH

What can I help you with?

NALO

Afternoon, sir. I'm here on behalf of the College Track & Recruiting Division of Ohio. I was given your information from Winston Bluff High. Is your student Blaine in?

BUTCH

No, she's not home right now.

NALO

But she does live here, right?

BUTCH

You got the right place. You say you're looking to recruit her for track?

Edward steps out onto the porch.

Does this include a scholarship?

NALO

As long as everything works out, we're open for discussion.

BUTCH

You have a card or a number that I can take down?

NALO

That won't be necessary. I'll be at the school tomorrow. I can see her there.

BUTCH

Tell me your name again?

NALO

James Dean.

The two exchange a strong grip.

BUTCH

I'll be sure to let her know you stopped in.

NALO

If you wouldn't mind, I would much rather surprise her at school. We pride ourselves on relationship building between the students.

BUTCH

Understandable.

NALO

Hey, it was nice meeting you, brother.

BUTCH

Same to you. I look forward to getting to know you.

NALO

Let's hope so.

Nalo turns to leave.

INT. NALO'S MUSCLE CAR - DAY

Once inside, Nalo makes a PHONE CALL.

NALO
I got something. Meet me at this
address. One-Five-one...

INT. LOCAL DIVE BAR - DAY

Principal Briar walks through the door, ushering a streak of sunlight into the dimly lit hole-in-the-wall.

Seated in a secluded booth in the corner of the bar, Nalo waves her over.

BRIAR
Why are we at a bar in the middle
of the day?

NALO
I thought I'd bring you to my neck
of the woods for a change of pace.
What are you having?

The BAR TENDER (50s) waits on standby.

BRIAR
(to the Bar Tender)
Double shot of tequila, please?

NALO
Whew. Long day?

BRIAR
Don't ask. So, what did you find.

NALO
One of your top athletes is an
illegal.

BRIAR
Which one?

NALO
Blaine Jeffries.

He slides a file folder on Blaine across the table.

BRIAR
The new transfer?

NALO
That's the one.

Briar scoffs. She checks her watch.

BRIAR
She's set to run in a meet today.
Had Gambit been doing his job
correctly, we wouldn't be in this
situation.

NALO
If I had to guess, then I'd say
Gambit Steele has been doing
everything but his job.

BRIAR
What do you mean?

NALO
Come on. You can't expect me to
believe that you don't know.

BRIAR
Know what?

The Bartender sets Briar's double down in front of her.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
Thank you.

NALO
What you all have been up to with
the education funds.

Briar stares at him confused, then it finally clicks.

BRIAR
Are you accusing me of laundering
federally issued money?

Nalo throws his arms up -- guilty. Briar takes the folder and
stands to leave.

BRIAR (CONT'D)
Watch yourself, Mr. Waters. And
stick to doing the job. We're not
paying you to entertain yourself.

She downs the double shot.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

Good work.

She leaves.

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - BATHROOM - DAY

A TOILET flushes. Blaine steps out of the stall and washes her hands at the sink. The door opens, Emory walks in. They lock eyes through the mirror.

Blaine breaks their glance and turns off the water.

BLAINE

Bathrooms must be your thing.

EMORY

I've been calling you.

BLAINE

I've been busy.

She pulls a paper towel from the dispenser on the wall.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - HALLWAY

Zora approaches the bathroom door. The stressed voices of Blaine and Emory can be heard through a slight crack in the door.

Zora listens.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - BATHROOM

Blaine tosses the paper towel in the trash. She tries to leave but Emory blocks the doorway.

BLAINE

Move.

EMORY

Make me.

They stare each other down.

EMORY (CONT'D)

Fine. If you want to be a baby about this, fine.

Emory raises her hands in surrender.

BLAINE
You're a liar.

EMORY
I never lied to you.

BLAINE
I thought that you were gay.

EMORY
No, you assumed that I was. You never asked, and I certainly did not tell you that.

BLAINE
You sure made it seem that way.

EMORY
Look, it was just a kiss. If I knew you'd fall in love, I would have never did it.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - HALLWAY

Zora furrows a brow in confusion. She quickly turns to leave.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - BATHROOM

Emory walks into the stall, locking the door behind her.

Blaine opens her mouth to speak, but fights it. She turns towards the door, but pulls back, again. Just as she finds the words, Emory begins to pee.

Blaine decides against saying anything, and leaves.

EXT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - TRACK FIELD - DAY

A small affair of sorts. This is the qualifier race. Not many in the audience.

Blaine and Emory stretch on opposite sides of the track. Coach Drew walks by, helping each RUNNER with their form and stretches.

A warning shot goes off. Blaine and OTHER RUNNERS line up for the 4x4.

Principal Briar arrives and approaches Coach Drew.

Blaine's eyes follow the movements of their lips. Principal Briar looks back to Blaine, continues talking.

Coach Drew, combative at first, gives in.

BRIAR
(slowed)
Wait until after the race.

POW! The race is underway!

Blaine takes a lead early. She runs hard and fast, as if this is the last race she'll ever run.

Other Runners gain on her, but she pulls out to an even bigger lead.

Soon, Blaine demolishes the lap, and crosses the finish line with a huge gap between the second place Runner.

Coach Drew approaches.

COACH DREW
You broke a record, kid. Fastest
four-by-four run at Winston Bluff.
I'm proud of you.

BLAINE
Thanks, coach.

Blaine catches Principal Briar staring into their direction.

BLAINE (CONT'D)
Why is Principal Briar here?

COACH DREW
They know where you live, Blaine.
Unfortunately, you're being kicked
out of Winston Bluff.

Coach Drew's mouth continues to move, but everything around Blaine slows. She squints her eyes, tries to focus, but hears nothing except WHITE NOISE.

Blaine doesn't let Coach Drew finish before she walks off.

COACH DREW (CONT'D)
Blaine!

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

Blaine plops down on the wooden bench inside of the glass enclosure.

Using her phone, she scrolls to her mother's contact. She changes her mind, then finds Serenity's number and calls.

She quickly decides against it and ends the call.

Defeated, Blaine replaces the phone back in her pocket.

After a beat, Zora's moving van rolls to a stop, inches away.

Blaine considers, then climbs into the car.

INT. ZORA'S CLEANING VAN - MOVING

Zora turns to Blaine. Blaine diverts her attention to the outside landscape -- anything to avoid this conversation.

ZORA

I talked to your coach.

BLAINE

Not my coach anymore.

ZORA

They're sending you back to Central Memorial for the rest of the year.

BLAINE

Whatever.

She slips her earbuds in.

Zora continues to drive, but can't help herself. She reaches over and yanks Blaine's earbud out.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Can this wait?

ZORA

Watch your tongue. I'm still your mother, little girl.

(beat)

What's going on with you and Emory?

BLAINE

Nothing.

ZORA

I overheard you two in the bathroom, and I think--

BLAINE

It's bad enough that I have an investigator following me around, prying into my life. I don't need you doing it to.

ZORA

I'm your mother. I think I deserve to know if my only daughter is gay.

The words pierce Blaine. She whips her head into Zora's direction.

BLAINE

Pull the car over.

ZORA

For what?

BLAINE

Stop here. I'm getting out.

ZORA

I will do no such thing.

BLAINE

I wouldn't be in this situation if you hadn't forced me to go to this school. These are your dreams, not mine. Just because you feel like Dad and I ruined your life doesn't mean you get to dictate mine.

Taken aback, Zora pulls off to the side of the road.

ZORA

I never said that you or your father ruined my life.

BLAINE

You don't have to say it. You live it. Everything you do, everything you say, you make it very clear that the only family that you have is the reason you haven't gone far in life. Thanks, Mom, I get it. I won't fuck my life up the way you fucked up yours.

Taken aback, Zora can't bring herself to respond.

Blaine gathers her backpack and climbs out of the car.

BLAINE (CONT'D)

Don't bother waiting up for me.

She slams the door shut, leaving Zora to her own guilt.

INT. WINSTON BLUFF HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Drowning in a desk full of paperwork, Briar shuffles from her computer to a large stack of file folders.

After a beat of staring at Blaine's file folder, Briar removes her frames, and stands.

She walks over and closes the door. Back at her desk, Briar pulls a vintage bottle of Whiskey. She doesn't bother finding a glass, instead opting to drink straight from the bottle.

A DOUBLE KNOCK at the door. Startled, Briar replaces the bottle and finds Nalo on the other side of the door.

BRIAR

Come in.

She paces back to her desk.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

What do you need?

Nalo steps into the office holding a handful of student folders. He places them down on the desk. Briar sits.

NALO

These are the remaining files on the students.

BRIAR

What do you mean remaining?

NALO

I decided to step away from the investigations.

BRIAR

Why?

NALO

Another gig.

Briar suspiciously eyes him.

BRIAR

You've found another gig more lucrative than this one?

NALO

It happens.

BRIAR

This is about the budget, isn't it?

NALO

There's no honor in turning a blind eye to someone grossly taking advantage of federal and taxpayer money to support their own lavish lifestyle. Blaine made a very good point. Kids in other schools in the city could benefit tremendously from a portion of the money he's stealing. Parents might go to jail for this.

BRIAR

What about my kids here? Don't they deserve to have a quality education?

NALO

If you can't see how kids at Central Memorial, Jefferson, and other low income schools are worse off than the kids here at Winston Bluff, then I don't want to waste any more breath trying to explain it to you.

He turns to leave. His hand reaches the handle of the door.

BRIAR

Wait.

Nalo turns to Briar.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

What can we do?

INT. JEFFRIES HOME - DAY

Curled in bed underneath the draft from the opened window, Blaine reads.

A KNOCK at the door.

BUTCH (O.S.)

Blaine, it's me.

BLAINE
Come in, Daddy.

Butch enters and sits on the edge of the bed.

BUTCH
Your mother told me what happened.

BLAINE
Nothing new there.

BUTCH
I'm sorry, baby girl.

BLAINE
You've done nothing wrong.

BUTCH
I'm afraid that I did. That investigator came snooping around the other day. Claimed he was a recruiter. Wanted to get you off to college on scholarship. I don't know how he knew where to come, but I definitely confirmed it for him.

He looks to Blaine, almost pleadingly. Blaine takes his hand in hers.

BLAINE
It's okay, Daddy. At least I don't have to keep up the lie anymore.

BUTCH
I'm going to fix this. Don't worry pumpkin.

BUTCH (CONT'D)
In the mean time, you need to be getting dressed.

BLAINE
Come on, Daddy. Please don't make me go back to that school.

BUTCH
You only have a few weeks left. Finish strong. It'll be over soon.

Blaine folds her arms.

BLAINE
I guess you're right. I've got nothing else to lose.

BUTCH
It'll be okay, champ.

Butch pinches her on the cheeks.

BUTCH (CONT'D)
Be ready to go in twenty.

He leaves.

INT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The bell RINGS and the halls clear. The double doors open as Blaine enters.

She enters through the metal detector, barely acknowledging the SECURITY GUARD that waves her through.

Blaine slowly walks down the hall. She approaches ROOM 103 and enters.

INT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM

At the front of the class, Mr. Mavis watches as Blaine coyly walks to the only empty seat in the front of the classroom.

Mr. Mavis nods to Blaine giving her the okay to sit. She obliges, and sinks into the chair.

EXT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

School's out. The doors of the building swing open and WAVES OF STUDENTS file out.

When the crowd clears, Blaine exits.

EXT. STREET

Walking home, Blaine spots Serenity walking with a GROUP OF FRIENDS. She runs to catch up.

BLAINE
Serenity!

Serenity says goodbye to her friends and waits for Blaine.

SERENITY
Welcome back to the trap.

BLAINE
Sucks, right?

SERENITY
It's not so bad.

An awkward beat of Blaine regretting her words.

BLAINE
Look, I know that I got a little
bit caught up with the new school
and friends.

SERENITY
You calling them your friends?

BLAINE
I thought we were. I lost sight of
who and what's important. Never
again.

Serenity looks off into the distance.

SERENITY
You want pizza? Gino's just opened
around the corner. I've been
waiting for you to try it.

Blaine's eyes light up.

BLAINE
Really?

SERENITY
Really. Come on, let's go.

They start walking. Just then, Nalo's RED FORD BRONCO pulls
up to them.

Blaine spots him.

SERENITY (CONT'D)
Who is that?

BLAINE
Winston Bluff's investigator. The
one who got me kicked out.

Nalo steps out of the truck.

SERENITY
What does he want?

NALO
Miss Jeffries.

BLAINE
I have nothing left for you to investigate. What else do you want to take from me?

NALO
I did a little research. This time, in your favor.

BLAINE
I don't need any favors from you.

NALO
You might. I found out that you can still run in the race. You just have to get your school registered before the end of the week.

BLAINE
Who told you to do that?

NALO
I felt bad. I know you worked really hard to win. You deserve it just as much, if not more than those kids over at Winston.

BLAINE
I don't need your pity. Especially since you're the reason I'm here.

Blaine walks off. Serenity doesn't follow.

SERENITY
Blaine.

Blaine stops, mid pace.

SERENITY (CONT'D)
You want opportunity, here's your opportunity. This is your chances at redemption. Don't blow it.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Blaine runs through the neighborhood.

EXT. STREET

After her run, Blaine walks home. In front of her, Skunk BLASTS music from his old school with the doors opened.

SKUNK

Lil' BB. Where you been? The hood's been missing you.

BLAINE

I've been around.

As she approaches, the flat screens inside the car catches Blaine's attention. Skunk takes notice.

SKUNK

Oh yeah, two eight inches in the headrests, playing live t.v. Name somebody who's outdoing me, Lil' BB. I'll wait.

Blaine steps in closer. On the screen, the local news plays.

REPORTER

In recent news, Superintendent Gambit Steele is under a lot of fire after two different sets of books surfaced pertaining to the budgets of Winston Bluff High and the Cartonia School district. Stay tuned as this story develops.

Blaine stands, shocked.

INT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - COMPUTER LAB - DAY

Blaine and Serenity sit in front of a computer monitor.

SERENITY

Are you sure you want to do this?
If your heart's not in it--

BLAINE

I'm sure.

Serenity uses the mouse to click on the SUBMIT button at the bottom of the screen.

INSERT:

CONGRATULATIONS! YOUR SCHOOL IS NOW REGISTERED TO RACE!

Blaine and Serenity turn to each other.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Blaine and Serenity run DRILLS in the middle of the street in front of Blaine's house.

Zora's Cleaning Van rolls down the street, bypassing the two. She pulls into the driveway of their home and climbs out, carrying a bag of groceries.

ZORA

Blaine, help me carry these groceries inside.

Blaine jogs over to her mother.

BLAINE

Hey, Momma.

ZORA

Hey, baby. Hi, Serenity.

SERENITY

Hi, Misses Jeffries.

Blaine relieves Zora of the bag and turns to leave.

ZORA

Wait a second. I want you to know that I heard you the other day and I'm sorry. I just want you to do better than I did.

BLAINE

You did a good job raising me. But, now it's time for me to start making my own decisions.

ZORA

I guess you're right.

(then)

So, you're still racing?

BLAINE

Yeah, I am.

ZORA

Good.

Zora smiles and kisses Blaine on the cheek.

ZORA (CONT'D)

Let's get these groceries inside.

INT. CENTRAL MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

A sea of STUDENTS uncomfortably sit in the plastic seats while Principal Keys paces on the stage, dragging the cord attached to the microphone as he goes.

The Students are separated by classes -- each TEACHER watches over their section like prison guards on a cell block.

PRINCIPAL KEYS

With that being said, effective immediately, Central High will begin implementing a no cell phone policy.

The entire Audience erupts into GROANS.

PRINCIPAL KEYS (CONT'D)

Simmer down, simmer down. We've warned you all about using your phones during school hours and since some of you have a hard time adhering to the rules, you've messed it up for everyone.

Blaine glances to the left, locking eyes with Serenity. Serenity rolls her eyes into Principal Keys' direction. Blaine shakes her head.

PRINCIPAL KEYS (CONT'D)

Moving forward, your cellular devices will be collected by your homeroom teachers upon arriving for school in the morning.

A COUPLE OF TEACHERS finds each others' eyes in the crowd. Previously unaware of the new duties, exhaustion creeps into their eyes as they rub their temples and drop their heads.

PRINCIPAL KEYS (CONT'D)

Now that that's out of the way, before we dismiss you, we'd like to take a moment to send a student off with well wishes. Blaine Jeffries will be running in this year's statewide track meet.

Blaine sinks into her chair.

PRINCIPAL KEYS (CONT'D)

Where is she? Stand up for us, Blaine. Who's student is she.

Blaine's teacher, Mr. Mavis points to her.

MR. MAVIS

She's my student. Here she is.

Blaine stands.

PRINCIPAL KEYS

We have faith that you'll bring
Central Memorial the recognition
that we deserve. That all of you
deserve. Let's give it up for
Blaine Jeffries.

The Crowd breaks out into applause. Blaine surveys the faces
around her. A smile creeps onto her face.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

On the single-lane bike path, Blaine runs through a series of
warm up drills. With her earbuds in, she tunes the world out,
pushing her body to the limit.

She begins a circuit of HIGH KNEES.

COACH DREW (V.O.)

Worry about getting your legs up
and let gravity do the rest.

Where she struggled with the exercise before, Blaine carries
out the movements effortlessly now.

She gears up for sprints.

COACH DREW (V.O.)

Explosiveness is key.

Blaine runs a series of 200 meter sprints -- each one,
quicker than the one before.

The sun begins to dip low into the horizon as Blaine
continues to push herself.

EXT. CITY PARK - NIGHT

Still at it, Blaine paces herself, casually jogging around
the trail.

She comes to a huge pothole in the track and jogs around it.

In the parking lot next to the park, a SEDAN pulls in and
parks. Principal Briar steps out.

Blaine watches then removes her ear buds as Briar approaches.

BRIAR
You look good out there.

BLAINE
Thanks.

An awkward beat as Briar searches for the words.

BRIAR
You know that what happened wasn't personal, right? As a matter of fact, if it were up to me, none of this foolishness would have ever happened. I'm sure you've got wind of what's going on at school...hell, all of Cleveland knows about the debacle.

Blaine just stares at Briar, then--

BLAINE
Look, I'm in the middle of something, so, if you don't mind.

BRIAR
Right, of course you don't want to talk to me. You're running for Central Memorial now.

BLAINE
Yep.

Blaine begins her descent down the grassy hill towards the JUNGLE GYM in the park. Briar, right behind her.

BRIAR
What if I told you that I can make all of this go away?

Blaine stops in her tracks.

BLAINE
What are you talking about?

BRIAR
I'm talking about the race. How'd you like to run on behalf of Winston Bluff?

BLAINE
But, I don't go there anymore.

BRIAR

A minor detail that we can get around. Look, you've got the talent, we all know that. You got caught up in a technicality. I won't hold it against you that you live here.

Briar looks around -- decrepit houses line the street surrounding the park. The streets, littered with waste.

Blaine hangs her head, focusing in on the sun-scorched grass beneath her feet.

BLAINE

There's nothing wrong with this place. This is my home.

BRIAR

You and I both know that isn't true.

Briar flashes a condescending smile.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

Come back and race for Winston Bluff. Myself and Coach Drew have spoken with a few top recruiters for college. We can provide a future for you. Get you out of this place.

BLAINE

Thanks for the invitation, but I'm not interested.

BRIAR

The race is in a few days. Take some time to think about it. Where do you see yourself in all of this when the smoke clears? It's your move, Jeffries.

Briar turns to leave.

BRIAR (CONT'D)

Coach Drew will be expecting you.

With a furrowed brow, Blaine watches Briar trot to her car.

EXT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

With two cups-of-joe in hand, Blaine cross-references an address typed in her cell phone, comparing it with the building in front of her, nestled on a busy, four-lane road just off of I-90 East.

She approaches the dwelling, and arrives at apartment number 4 on the ground level. She presses her ear up against the door. Rumbling is heard on the inside.

She knocks.

The door swings opened -- Nalo stands on the other side, half-asleep and barely shaven.

BLAINE

I didn't mean to interrupt.

NALO

How the hell did you find out where I live?

BLAINE

You're not the only one that knows how to do a little detective work.

He side-eyes her.

NALO

What do you want, kid?

BLAINE

Do you have a minute? I brought coffee.

She raises the two take-out cups in her hands.

NALO

I don't drink coffee.

EXT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING - NALO'S RED BRONCO

Nalo and Blaine sit on the rear bumper of his truck. Nalo takes a drag of his cigarette. Blaine coughs, then fans the smoke out of her face.

NALO

Why are you here?

BLAINE

Principal Briar offered me the chance to run for Winston at the race this weekend.

Nalo scoffs.

NALO

Let me guess, too much backlash from scandal?

Blaine responds with all-knowing silence.

NALO (CONT'D)

They need something to shift the focus. You winning that race for them will do just that.

BLAINE

She said that there would be recruiters there for me.

NALO

Welp. They're good at what they do, I have to give them that.

Off of Blaine's puzzled glance into the distance...

NALO (CONT'D)

What do I have to do with all of this? I'm the reason you're in this situation.

BLAINE

I heard that you quit investigating for Winston Bluff. I just thought that--

NALO

You thought that you would show up to my doorstep and that I would tell you to forget Winston Bluff and do the right thing? Well, you came to the wrong place, because that's the last thing that I'm gonna tell you.

He stands, tossing the cigarette butt to the ground.

NALO (CONT'D)

This world can be a cruel place, kid. I'm sure I'm not saying anything that you don't already know, look at where you live.

(MORE)

NALO (CONT'D)

I've lived long enough figure out the fact that when somebody offers you an olive branch, you grab hold of it and use it to get ahead. I fumbled a lot of opportunities in my day. Don't end up like me.

BLAINE

But--

NALO

No buts. I need to get back. Good luck with your decision.

He takes the cup of coffee from her hands as he leaves. She throws her arms up in a light protest.

INT. BLAINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Blaine cascades down the hallway. In the living room, she finds Zora and Butch. Butch wraps his arm around Zora.

ZORA

(to Blaine)

The choice is yours.

She nods toward the TWO TRACK UNIFORMS hanging on the wall -- one for Central Memorial High, the other for Winston Bluff.

Blaine considers this.

EXT. STATE COLLEGE TRACK FIELD - DAY

A CROWD of hundreds fill the stands, all rooting their team on with school paraphernalia.

POW!

A warning shot goes off. RUNNERS begin to trickle towards the starting point.

The intercom opens up.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Next up, we'll have the acclaimed four-by-four race. Eight of the fastest runners from all over the state of Ohio are here to prove their superiority in the sport.

The cheers grow louder as the Runners reach their places. Emory, one of the runners, stretches her legs in her lane.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
Runners, take your marks.

One-by-one, each runner lines up on the starting blocks. Emory glances over her shoulder. Just then, Blaine jogs to her lane, adorned in Central Memorial High's uniform.

IN THE CROWD

Butch leans over to Zora and Serenity. He points into Blaine's direction.

BUTCH
There she is.

They turn to her.

ZORA
My baby girl made the right decision.

BUTCH
She's not a baby girl anymore.

Zora smiles at him.

ZORA
Don't I know it.

OFF TO THE SIDE

Principal Briar takes notice of Blaine's choice. She turns to leave, not bothering to stay for the outcome.

ON THE TRACK

Intensity levels heighten between the Runners as the Crowd begins to silence itself.

Head down, fingers in place on the blocks, Emory shifts her eyes a few lanes over to Blaine. Blaine clocks the glance but doesn't acknowledge it.

Blaine focuses on the finish line. Everything around her BLURRS. Tunnel Vision.

A bead of sweat falls from her chin.

BANG! THEY'RE OFF!

Blaine falls into third place early, on the tail of Emory at the number two spot.

IN THE CROWD

Serenity nervously looks to Zora.

SERENITY
Come on, Blaine!

ON THE TRACK

Blaine gains on, and ZIPS past Serenity. The Crowd goes wild!

Feeding off of the energy, Blaine PEELS OFF. She's neck and neck with the SHORT RUNNER, who still holds the lead.

Just as they close in on the finish line, Blaine taps into a reserve of energy and laps Short Runner.

She drops her chin, claiming victory over the others! The Crowd squeals with excitement.

FADE TO BLACK.