

WHILE WE'RE YOUNG

Written by

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TagLine:

SOME DREAMS COST MORE THAN YOU CAN AFFORD.

A JoBo Production

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Logline

When a former high-school basketball prodigy who gave up his future to save his family inexplicably wakes up in an alternate life he built for himself, he must confront a teenage son he doesn't remember and decide whether to reclaim the family he left or keep the success he fought for.

INTRO / THE PRESENT IS A GIFT FOR THE FUTURE

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM – NIGHT – SOUTH SIDE CHICAGO

Packed. Loud. Local. No polish.

Banners peeling. Bleachers shaking.

This isn't ESPN — this is community.

MARCUS (17) at tip-off.

Gifted. Loose. Smiling.

He scans the stands —

MA waving like she's front row at the Finals.

TASHA (14) screaming reckless pride.

CHAD bouncing in his seat.

CELINE locked in on Marcus like she knows what's coming.

The ball goes up.

GAME SEQUENCE – QUICK, PHYSICAL

Bodies collide.

Marcus attacks the rim.

He lands wrong.

A sharp WINCE.

He looks straight to CELINE in the stands.

She shakes her head.

Not dramatic.

She already knows he's not coming out.

BENCH

Trainer tapes the ankle fast.

TRAINER

You sure?

MARCUS

I'm sure.

He's up before the tape settles.

FOURTH QUARTER

Marcus is on fire.

Not flashy — instinctive.

Like the game is the only place he's light.

Crowd going crazy.

Final buzzer.

THEY WIN.

BLEACHERS – POST GAME

Family flooding down.

Noise. Pride. Chaos.

TASHA

That's my motherfukan brother

MA

Tasha have you lost yo damn mind?

TASHA

Ma— sorry.

Marcus smiles. Normal. Home.

Celine steps in close.

Their heads touch.

Chad throws his arms around Marcus' waist.

CHAD

You killed 'em!

MARCUS

You see that last move?

CHAD

I'm stealing that.

CELINE finally reaches him.

She presses her forehead to his.

No words. Just relief.

OFF TO THE SIDE – A FEW STEPS AWAY

A MAN in a clean jacket watches.

Late 30s. Calm. Calculated.

He waits.

Then steps forward.

AGENT

Hell of a game.

Marcus clocks him — confused but polite.

MARCUS

Appreciate it.

AGENT

Name's Paul. I work with a few prep programs.

You ever thought about taking your game somewhere it can breathe?

Marcus glances back at his family.

MARCUS

Why would I do that?

AGENT

you're better than most kids I see at the next level.

He hands Marcus a card.

AGENT (CONT'D)

There's a prep school outside Kansas City.

Full ride. No cost.

Pipeline straight into Kansas.

Coach notices now. Watching.

Marcus doesn't say anything.

The agent clocks the hesitation.

AGENT

Think about it.

Exposure changes everything.

He steps away.

FAMILY – MOMENTS LATER

MA

Who was that baby?

MARCUS

Just... somebody talking

TASHA

Talking about what?

MARCUS

The game.

Coach approaches.

COACH

You played smart tonight.

Marcus nods.

COACH (CONT'D)

We'll talk next week.

Coach walks off.

Tasha clocks the tension.

TASHA

Whatever it is. they better not play with you.

MA

Tasha.

TASHA

That's my brother, ma.

Marcus forces a smile.

MARCUS

Ma... you cool if I ride with Celine?

Ma looks past him — straight at Celine.

That look mothers give that says I see you.

Before Ma can answer—

CELINE

(smiling, quick)

I'll make sure he wear his seatbelt, Mama.

Beat.

Ma studies her. Then—

MA

Alright.

To Marcus, already turning away—

MA (CONT'D)

Don't be out all night.

MARCUS

Yes ma'am.

Tasha smirks. Chad rolls his eyes.

Celine and Marcus walk off.

Marcus: hold on I need to grab something from the back

Marcus sneaks off and grabs some food from the teams spread in the back

Teammate:

Marcus!

Marcus

Startled.

Trying to hide the food

Damn, man you scared me. Don't you knock Brodie?

Says nervously half jokingly:

Teammate:

Let's go celebrate. This a big win, g

Marcus

Man I gotta ice this ankle

Teammate

You always got an excuse bro. When you gon come out withcha boy? You don't know how good it a make me look if you there.

Marcus

Next time my boy

Teammate

You say that every time

Marcus

You lucky I don't call a practice. Them boys out west ain't playing with us Friday. I gotta dip
Celine waiting on

Gives handshake

*Emotional beats:

Promise intact — for now.

Success shared, not abandoned.

The cost hasn't hit yet, but the weight is already forming.

This is the last moment before responsibility starts asking for more.

Scene 3. The drive. We should

CELINE'S CAR – NIGHT

Streetlights streak.

Radio up.

They're laughing.

No weight yet.

CELINE

This my song.

🎵 Wanna spend a perfect day with ya. Wanna lay with ya 🎵

She turns it up.

Sings loud and wrong.

CELINE (singing)

🎵 We should, we should, we should say fuck everyone... 🎵

Marcus laughs, happy.

They kiss.

Time pauses.

Marcus checks the clock.

Reality taps the glass.

MARCUS

Damn... I gotta get home.

She nods.

Not mad.

Just... life.

Scene 4: How much for your Future: The Cost

APARTMENT BUILDING – NIGHT

Marcus steps out.

CELINE watches him limp toward the door.

MARCUS

I wish I could stay out longer.

CELINE

I know.

He smiles — tired.

MARCUS

Text me when you get home.

She nods.

INT. APARTMENT – CONTINUOUS

Dim.

Too quiet.

Marcus freezes.

MA sits on the porch, holding an envelope.

She's been crying — but trying not to.

Marcus clocks it instantly.

MARCUS

Where Dad?

She hesitates.

MA

Where you think?

Beat.

He takes the envelope.

EVICTON NOTICE.

Not dramatic.

Just real.

Marcus swallows.

MARCUS

Again?

She shakes her head.

MA

I didn't want you worrying.

MARCUS

Take your time and get yourself together, Ma

They shouldn't see you like this

I promise I'll handle this. We gon be straight

She nods, trusting him like she always has.

Marcus looks down at the AGENT'S CARD in his hand.

He studies it.

Then —

He throws it in the trash.

Walks into the kitchen.

MARCUS

Who hungry?

Kids cheer.

Tasha:

I thought yo ass was never gon show up

Marcus

You and that mouth

Marcus exhales.

SCENE 5

THE CAGED BIRD begins to sing / THE SACRIFICE

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY – DAY

Lockers hum. Shoes squeak somewhere distant.

Practice is about to start.

MARCUS (17) stands with his COACH just outside the gym.

His ankle is taped. His eyes aren't.

Marcus struggles to speak.

MARCUS

(fighting tears)

Coach... I can't play Friday.

The Coach studies him.

COACH

Ankle that bad?

It should get better with treatment.

We got a few days.

Marcus shakes his head.

MARCUS

This ain't about basketball.

I gotta make money.

Got a job.

The Coach exhales — patient, concerned.

COACH

Son, I know things get tough.

But you got a real future in basketball.

Marcus breaks.

MARCUS

(eyes bawling)

No disrespect, but how the hell

am I supposed to focus?

I don't have a house to go home to.

We ain't got no food in the crib.

I'm supposed to act like everything's all good?

He wipes his face — angry at himself.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Nah.

What I'mma do is what a man should.

He storms off.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

Marcus turns the corner and nearly collides with CELINE (17), fresh out of practice.

Sweaty. Breathing hard. Still glowing.

She clocks his face instantly.

CELINE

You good?

Marcus doesn't hesitate.

MARCUS

We getting evicted.

Celine freezes.

CELINE

I'm so sorry...

You need anything?

I know my ma might have some resources

at the church—

MARCUS

Nah.

I'm getting a job.

She steps closer — careful.

CELINE

I know you wanna help your family,

but what about your future?

Marcus snaps.

MARCUS

Why the fuck everybody keep saying that?

Celine flinches — not offended, just hurt.

CELINE

Look, I'm not trying to say the wrong thing.

I'm just trying to help.

MARCUS

You speaking from a place of privilege

I ain't never had.

CELINE

Marcus, I know you hurt,

but you know that's not—

MARCUS

Yo, I'ma call you later.

He walks away.

Celine stays where she is.

She nods.

EMOTIONAL BEATS

Sacrifice feels necessary, not noble.

Marcus resents advice from those who don't understand.

SCENE 6

THE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM – NIGHT (YEARS LATER – ORIGINAL TIMELINE)

Mirrors Scene 1.

Same gym.

New banners.

Same peeling paint. Same community noise.

Packed. Loud. Proud.

JADEN (17) at tip-off.

Loose. Joyful. Confident.

He moves like Marcus — but freer.

Cleaner footwork. Better patience.

Respectful, but dominant.

Best player in the state.

Jaden looks up.

MARCUS' RETIRED JERSEY hangs from the rafters.

Not a shadow.

An honor.

The ball goes up.

GAME SEQUENCE

Jaden starts off cold.

Misses shots he usually hits.

He looks to the stands.

MARCUS sits alone.

Hands folded. Calm. No yelling. No coaching.

Their eyes meet.

Marcus gives a small nod.

That's it.

Jaden locks in.

And goes crazy.

Buckets. Vision. Control.

The crowd erupts.

FINAL BUZZER.

They win.

BLEACHERS / SIDELINE – POST-GAME

Noise. Chaos. Pride.

TASHA and CHAD rush the floor.

TASHA

Let's fucking gooooo!

MARCUS

Sis— this why I don't be sitting next to you

TASHA

My bad.

I get excited.

Let's f'n goooo!

Jaden laughs.

JADEN

TT don't lie —

was that not the greatest performance

you ever seen or what?

CHAD

It's up there.

Ya dad was a killer too.

Jaden looks at Marcus.

MARCUS

(reluctant smile)

Aight.

You was nice.

JADEN

That's all I needed.

Tasha grabs Jaden.

TASHA

Ain't no school tomorrow.

Come over later.

I'll cook your favorite.

JADEN

I know Dad gon' wanna celebrate,

so I'ma stick with him.

I can come over tomorrow?

TASHA

Sound like a plan, neph.

They do their handshake.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Don't be late.

JADEN

Yes ma'am.

Tasha and Chad peel off.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM – NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Crowd thinning.

Echoes of sneakers, laughter, pride.

Jaden talks with teammates nearby.

Marcus stands with COACH.

MARCUS

You know...

I don't think I ever thanked you
for delivering Jaden to us.

Coach smirks.

COACH

Only about a hundred times.

They watch Jaden laugh.

COACH (CONT'D)

He's the most talented kid we've had
since you.

Plays just like you did.

Marcus shakes his head.

MARCUS

Nah.

(smiles)

He's better than me

Beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I always knew he'd take this school
to places I couldn't.

Coach studies him.

COACH

Enough time's passed, Marcus.

You can forgive yourself.

Marcus exhales.

MARCUS

Forgiveness ain't the issue. Forgetting is

He watches Jaden again.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Coach nods.

COACH

All we got is time, son.

Jaden looks over — catches Marcus watching.

Marcus gives a small nod.

Jaden smiles back.

MARCUS

Yeah but never get that time back

Congrats on the win, Coach.

They shake hands.

TASHA

Don't forget — tomorrow.

Your favorite.

JADEN

I won't.

Handshake. They separate.

Jaden turns back to Marcus.

MARCUS

Yo... TT crazy.

JADEN

(laughing)

You know that.

Beat. Marcus looks around the gym one last time — the banners, the kids still shooting on the side court.

MARCUS

I'ma make sure they at the Final Four game though.

JADEN

As long as you there, Pops, we good.

Marcus smiles. That lands.

MARCUS

When have I missed a game?

Jaden shrugs — like, fair.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

C'mon.

Let's celebrate.

JADEN

How?

MARCUS

Ice cream.

JADEN

Ice cream.

They start walking.

AS THEY EXIT THE GYM

🎵 “While We’re Young” barely audible — distant, almost accidental.

Across the street:

A BILLBOARD.

DR. CELINE Washington

Therapy & Family Services

Don't mess up the children.

Marcus's eyes pass over it.

He doesn't stop.

Doesn't react.

But something registers — subtle, unconscious.

They disappear into the night.

EMOTIONAL BEATS (INTACT):

Presence over pressure.

Success without fantasy.

Love that survived cost.

Time named as antagonist

The future isn't perfect — it's earned.

SCENE 7: ICE CREAM MAN

EXT. DRIVE TO ICE CREAM PARLOR – EVENING

Marcus drives.

Jaden still buzzing from the game.

JADEN

Dad, I just made the Final Four.

Can we listen to something I like?

At least from this decade. Not this trash.

Marcus mock gasps — needle scratch.

MARCUS

Trash? Whaaaa.

This a classic album. Kick, Push — real theme music to a drive-by.

He Say She Say... come on, nah.

JADEN

I'm not trying to listen to these old niggas, man.

Marcus looks at him.

MARCUS

What I tell you about that word?

Jaden clocks it.

JADEN

My bad.

MARCUS

Damn right it is.

And respect the legends.

Jaden rolls his eyes, smiles.

They pull up.

EXT. ICE CREAM PARLOR – CONTINUOUS

They step out.

A HOMELESS MAN stands near the door.

HOMELESS MAN

Any spare change, sir?

Marcus reaches in his pocket.

Hands him his last \$5.

JADEN

Dad... why you always giving money to homeless people?

MARCUS

What type of question is that?

JADEN

I mean... you work for your money.

They just sit there begging all day.

Marcus stops walking.

Not angry — just firm.

MARCUS

Look. I'ma stop you right there.

I been there before.

We got evicted a couple times when I was your age.

I know what that's like.

Jaden listens now.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

If you think it's easy, you mistaken.

As far as I'm concerned, they got a job.

JADEN

What job?

MARCUS

Standing on a corner all day being judged.

If they see a hundred people, maybe four help.

Rain, sleet, heat — hours at a time.

Beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

What they selling?

Humility.

Maybe you need to buy some.

JADEN

I didn't mean it like that.

MARCUS

I know you didn't.

They walk again.

JADEN

I didn't know y'all were homeless neither.

MARCUS

Yeah.

I know that too.

Jaden thinks.

JADEN

I'ma get us out the hood, Pops.

I promise.

Marcus stops.

Looks around — people talking, laughing, living.

MARCUS

You think because we don't live in the suburbs, this the hood?

Jaden shrugs.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Look around.

It's all love out here.

Yeah... some days it ain't sunny, but it ain't so hard either.

A beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

This a community.

People look out for each other.

If you ever get lost — you good here.

JADEN

(smiling)

If I ever get lost, I'm going hoop.

Marcus laughs.

MARCUS

That tracks.

He nudges him toward the door.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

But it ain't your job to get me nowhere.

I just need you to be a kid as long as possible.

You take care of you.

I got us.

They enter.

INT. ICE CREAM PARLOR – CONTINUOUS

Jaden lights up.

MARCUS

This was your mom's favorite spot.

JADEN

Oooo. I know what I'm getting.

She always got rocky road. That's what you getting, Pops?

Marcus forces a smile.

MARCUS

Not this time.

Had a donut earlier. Ain't trying to be big back.

JADEN

Old people always trying to use our lingo

I'm getting everything.

MARCUS

You earned it, kid.

Marcus steps up to the register.

A flicker of unease.

He knows the card might decline.

A armor cracking — just a little.

EMOTIONAL BEATS (UNCHANGED):

- Humility taught, not preached
- Community established for later payoff
- Bond intact
- Strain visible, not loud

SCENE 8: IT ALL FALLS DOWN / DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

INT. SMALL APARTMENT – LATE NIGHT

Marcus enters.

Quiet. Heavy.

MARCUS

Do ya homework, kid. It's late.

He drops his keys.

Checks the mail.

His face tightens.

— PAST-DUE NOTICE: Lights, three months.

— GAS SHUTOFF WARNING.

He exhales slowly.

Checks his phone.

BANK APP

Balance: -\$11.03

No more moves.

The room feels smaller.

A familiar weight settles in — the same one from childhood.

Going from couch to couch.

Boxes.

No control.

MARCUS

(under his breath)

Fuck...

He bends forward, hands on knees.

Doesn't cry loud.

Just leaks.

From the other room—

JADEN (O.S.)

Yo, Pops... you good?

Marcus straightens. Wipes his face.

MARCUS

Yeah.

Stubbed my toe.

Silence.

The noise starts anyway.

You're ruining his future.

He needs better.

You're letting him down.

Be a man.

Marcus squeezes his eyes shut.

Shakes it off.

He grabs his phone.

Puts on music — grounding himself.

Shuffle.

“WHILE WE’RE YOUNG” starts playing.

He freezes.

Softly mouths along—

MARCUS

(whispering)

We should... we should...

Memories bleed in.

A car.

Streetlights.

Laughter.

A moment before life asked for everything.

He can’t breathe in here.

MARCUS (CONT’D)

Son... I’ll be back.

Need to get some bread.

We can watch a movie when I get back or something.

No answer. Jaden’s already asleep.

Marcus grabs his jacket.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING – CONTINUOUS

Rain.

Cold.

Honest.

Marcus steps outside.

He pauses at the door.

Then turns his back on it.

On the house.

On safety.

On the life he's barely holding together.

A LIGHTNING STRIKE rips across the sky—

— TIME FRACTURES.

EMOTIONAL BEATS :

- Armor finally cracks
- Poverty echoes across generations
- Choice feels necessary, not selfish
- Vulnerability triggers transformation

SCENE 9: BACK TO THE FUTURE / FATHER MCFLY

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL – NIGHT CELINE'S CAR. We should again (ALTERed timeline)

Quiet. Intimate. Still buzzing from the game.

CELINE

We should... we should...

They kiss.

Something shifts.

For half a second, the radio WARPS — like a tape dragged across a magnet.

Then it's normal again.

Marcus pulls back slightly.

MARCUS

I don't feel good.

CELINE

What's wrong?

MARCUS

I don't know. I can't explain it... my head.

CELINE

Maybe adrenaline wearing off from the game.

Somebody hit you in yo bean head.

She laughs.

MARCUS

Yeah, maybe.

I don't know. I ain't really trying to go home though.

CELINE

Now you know my dad ain—

MARCUS

Can you sneak me in?

I really can't go th—

CELINE

Yo lil begging ass.

If you wanted to be under me, you should've just said that.

MARCUS

Now you know I don't wanna leave my lil baby.

CELINE

That part.

Can we get some food first though?

I'm soooo hungry.

Marcus lifts his book bag.

INSERT — BOOK BAG

Stuffed with food.

— FOOD NEVER DELIVERED.

A couple months later.

Scene 10: who's future is it anyway?

INT. TASHA'S HOUSE – DAY

Celine stands at the door, bag on her shoulder.

CELINE

You good, sis?

They do their handshake — practiced, dumb, perfect.

TASHA

When have you known me not to be?

CELINE

Well if y'all need anything, you got my number.

TASHA

What you majoring in again?

CELINE

Cognitive science.

Or neuroscience.

TASHA

I don't know what that is,

but it sound like a lot of school.

CELINE

It kinda is.

I wanna be a psychologist.

Family and trauma type stuff.

TASHA

The way you dealt with my boneheaded brother?

You overqualified.

Celine laughs — small, nervous.

CELINE

Maybe I'll just do communications.

TASHA

When it's my turn,

I think I wanna do nursing.

CELINE

Why not a doctor?

TASHA

(laughs)

That's too much school for me.

Beat.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Plus...

I got a little brother to look after you know?

She swallows.

TASHA (CONT'D)

I'm a miss you.

CELINE

Girl, don't start.

I'm not dying.

Thanksgiving — I'll be back.

TASHA

I'ma have my owl write you.

CELINE

Promise?

Beat.

TASHA

Go be somebody, CeCe.

Celine smiles. Soft.

CELINE

I already am.

Tasha nudges her.

TASHA

Get out my house.

They hug — quick, real, not movie-long.

EXT. PORCH – CONTINUOUS

Celine steps outside.

She looks back at the door.

Not sad.

Just knowing.

CELINE

(quiet, to herself)

Alright then.

She walks.

SOUND BRIDGE:

Distant city noise dissolves into the steady hum of an AC unit.

SCENE 11: IT'S MY FUTURE AT STAKE

INT. CELINE'S APARTMENT – LATE AFTERNOON

Small. Clean. Lived-in.

Sun leans through the blinds like it's tired too.

CELINE sits at the table.

Laptop open to a half-finished grad school application.

The cursor blinks.

Judging her.

On the table beside it —

A TICKET TO THE GAME.

She flips it with her nail.

Front.

Back.

Front again.

Her phone BUZZES.

KENDRA (V.O.)

Celine. I know you fucking lying.

Why you not dressed?

You always do this.

CELINE

I'm just trying to be responsible.

KENDRA (V.O.)

Responsible don't look that fine.

Put on something cute and come outside.

The whole campus gonna be there.

And yes — fine men included.

We the baddest bitches in this school,

can we act like it for once... pleaseeeee?

Celine laughs despite herself.

CELINE

Chasing fine men is not how I got
to the top of the class.

KENDRA (V.O.)

That is not what I'm trying
to get on top of tonight.

CELINE

Bye. I'm hanging up.

KENDRA (V.O.)

Just hurry up.

The call ends.

Celine exhales.

Glances at the closet door like it owes her money.

INT. BEDROOM – MOMENTS LATER

Bed covered in options.

Celine holds up two shirts:

— Her SCHOOL SHIRT. Folded neat.

Smells like detergent and tomorrow.

— MARCUS' OLD JERSEY.

Soft at the collar. Numbers worn thin.

We recognize it — the same one later framed on Ma's wall.

She studies the jersey longer than she wants to.

Puts it on.

CELINE

(soft, to herself)

Girl, don't be stupid.

Her phone BUZZES again.

She checks it.

TEXT – KENDRA:

WE OUTSIDE. HURRY.

Above it —

TEXT – TASHA:

You going to that game to get yo man back or what 😂

Celine rolls her eyes.

Types:

TEXT – CELINE:

Mind your business.

She smiles anyway.

Locks the phone.

Takes the jersey off.

Puts it down.

Pulls the school shirt over her head.

Looks in the mirror —

Not for pretty.

For brave.

INT. BATHROOM – CONTINUOUS

Celine does her edges slow. Careful.

Music low on the counter —

something that feels like starting over.

She catches her own eyes in the mirror.

CELINE

Girl, what is wrong with you.

It's just a game.

She almost believes it.

Celine grabs her keys.

The ticket waits on the table.

Like a small dare.

She hesitates.

Then grabs it — last second.

EXT. STREET – NIGHT

The city alive.

Cars arguing with each other.

Celine watches a group of girls her age —

laughing too loud, too free.

She smiles.

Half envy.

Half hope

SCENE 12: is there a doctor in the house?

INT. ARENA – NIGHT

Crowd swelling. Bass thumping through concrete.

Celine finds her seat — breath a little quicker than she planned.

She scans the court.

Not for him.

Just... taking in the room.

KENDRA

Girl, why did you want to sit here?

CELINE

What's wrong with right here?

KENDRA

We with the lames.

Celine shrugs.

Then—

MARCUS steps into view on the opposite side of the floor.

He doesn't see her yet.

Celine's face does that small, honest thing people do

When the past walks in wearing the present.

She straightens her shirt —

The one she chose for herself.

The crowd rises.

Marcus looks up.

Their eyes meet.

She tries to look away.

She can't help but smile.

The sound dips —

Like the building forgot to breathe.

CUT TO:

GAME – MARCUS' PERSPECTIVE

Conference championship.

Lights. Noise. Pressure.

Marcus — star. All-American. National Player of the Year contender.

COACH

Hard work. Blood. Sweat. Sacrifice.

Marcus isn't listening.

He locks eyes with Celine across the arena.

COACH (CONT'D)

Marcus. Lock in.

MARCUS

(still staring)

I got this.

Beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I ain't never been this locked in.

The game's a war. Back and forth.

Final possession.

Marcus hits the game-winner.

Chaos.

Teammates swarm him —

But he's searching the stands.

SIDELINE – MOMENTS LATER

Reporter shoves a mic in his face.

REPORTER

New career high. Walk us through the game.

MARCUS

It's a conference championship against a rival.

If you can't get up for that, I don't know what to tell you.

Team effort.

Hands the mic back.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I gotta get moving.

CONCOURSE – CONTINUOUS

Celine stands with Kendra.

KENDRA

Girl... look who's coming.

Marcus approaches.

MARCUS

Hey, C.

KENDRA

You know him?

CELINE

At one point.

MARCUS

(to Kendra)

I'm Marcus.

KENDRA

(smiles)

I know who you are.

I'm Kendra.

Awkward beat. History in the air.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

So that's why you wanted to sit there.

She steps back.

KENDRA (CONT'D)

I'll give y'all a minute.

Nice to meet you.

She leaves.

MARCUS & CELINE

They stand there. Years between them.

MARCUS

You looked like you enjoyed the game.

CELINE

I would've enjoyed it more if my team won.

(opens hoodie)

See?

School shirt.

MARCUS

Ohhh.

I didn't know you went here.

CELINE

Is that why you kept looking around the crowd?

(mocking his search)

MARCUS

I might've checked the 'Gram a couple times.

CELINE

Just a couple, huh?

They laugh — easy, familiar.

Then—

MARCUS

Look... I owe you an apology

For how things turned out.

CELINE

I'm listening.

MARCUS

I couldn't focus at home.

Had to get away.

That's why I left, went prep.

I could just hoop without the extra.

CELINE

I'm not mad at that.

You did what you felt you needed to do.

MARCUS

You the only one who feels that way.

CELINE

I didn't say I agreed.

What you mean by that?

MARCUS

I don't even know the last time I been home.

We talk... kinda.

But I can tell they feel—

CELINE

Like you left them behind?

MARCUS

Yeah.

CELINE

Can you blame them?

MARCUS

Yes—

(beat)

Nah.

She holds his gaze.

CELINE

After the season you just left.

No heads up.

You didn't let anybody help.

MARCUS

I felt like I had to move.

It was always about y'all.

You ain't get my calls? My texts?

CELINE

Marcus, please.

I don't know if that makes you feel better

Trying to justify it like that.

MARCUS

That's what I'm saying, C.

If I stayed, I'd have to explain.

And I never wanted to do that.

CELINE

So we were just supposed to wait?

MARCUS

What you mean—

CELINE

After you left...

We lost the championship.

Beat.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I got your calls. Your texts.

I wanted to pick up.

Tell you what it felt like

Standing in an empty gym.

Walking out with nothing.

She exhales.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I typed a lot of messages I never sent.

MARCUS

...

CELINE (CONT'D)

That's when I learned —

Ball wasn't life.

It's a part of life.

Beat.

CELINE (CONT'D)

And I promised myself

I wouldn't wait on anybody

To start the rest of mine.

Marcus absorbs that.

MARCUS

It was a lot going on.

I think about it...

Maybe I made mistakes.

I don't know.

I just thought the end justified the means.

CELINE

(smiles)

Well... you ain't do so bad,

Mr. All-American.

Kendra catches Celine's eye from across the aisle.

Raises an eyebrow.

Celine gives a small "one second" nod.

MARCUS

I'd trade half of it

For my family to watch me play.

I don't even know the last time they seen me.

Maybe my first year.

CELINE

That gotta be tough.

Beat.

CELINE (CONT'D)

You good?

He deflects.

MARCUS

Wait—

You been keeping tabs on me?

CELINE

Boy, what?

(laughs)

MARCUS

You hungry?

You got a boyfriend you gotta get back to?

He sings it, soft.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

🎵 We should... we should... we shouldddd... 🎵

CELINE

(blushing)

You could just ask if I'm single.

Beat.

CELINE (CONT'D)

This one on me.

I know a spot.

She smiles.

CELINE (CONT'D)

And I'm always hunnnngggrryyyyy.

FADE OUT.

MONTAGE:

Trophies.

Degrees.

Houses.

Cars.

Trips.

Then—

A voice.

JADEN (V.O.)

Dad.

Abrupt stop.

SCENE 13: WHAT DIDN'T COME WITH ME /

DR. NOLAN SHAW DON'T MESS UP THE CHILDREN**

INT. LIVING ROOM – AFTERNOON (ALTERNATE TIMELINE)

Soft daylight through the window.

CELINE sits upright on the couch — hair tied back, glasses on, laptop open on her knees.

Multiple tabs open: work, calendar, travel.

MARCUS sleeps with his head in her lap.

Suddenly —

Marcus JOLTS awake.

Breathing off.

Disoriented.

A voice still ringing.

JADEN (O.S., distant)

Dad...

Marcus blinks. Tries to ground himself.

CELINE

Another one?

MARCUS

Yeah...

She waits. Patient.

CELINE

Same dream?

MARCUS

This one was different.

Just a voice.

CELINE

What it say?

MARCUS

Dad...

She studies him — a flicker of something defensive she doesn't fully name.

CELINE

Dad? Like father?

Why is that bad?

MARCUS

I don't know.

The kid sounded alarmed.

It felt like—

He trails off.

Marcus sits up slightly now. Something heavier settling.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I don't think this is a dream.

Beat.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Dreams don't hurt like this.

Celine watches him.

The joke-ready part of her disappears for half a second.

Then—

CELINE

(trying to understand, half-joking)

How you know it wasn't me?

I might've been whispering I need you, daddy in your ear.

MARCUS

Celine...

CELINE

What? It's true.

(laughs)

MARCUS

I'm serious.

CELINE

Okay. Sorry.

Beat.

MARCUS

I just feel like something's missing.

CELINE

Missing like what?

MARCUS

If I knew that, it wouldn't be missing, now would it?

A small chuckle escapes him.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I got all this.

I got you.

Why it still feel unfinished?

CELINE

We live a decent life.

She rests her hand on his chest.

CELINE (CONT'D)

Maybe we scared to start the part
we can't return from.

MARCUS

You talking baby again.

CELINE

I'm talking us, sir.

MARCUS

I watched my mom drown raising us.
Love didn't save her from being tired.

CELINE

At some point we gotta walk in our own shoes.

Love ain't supposed to save you.

It's supposed to make the tired worth it.

Marcus goes quiet.

Celine looks back to her laptop.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I don't wanna be the woman
who planned a whole life
and met it alone.

Beat.

Softer.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I believed in us.

I still do.

That's all she says.

Enough.

MARCUS

You wouldn't be.

I lost you once.

I ain't built to do that twice.

CELINE

You don't get to promise that
while staying afraid.

Long beat.

MARCUS

Soon.

CELINE

Soon is where people hide.

She lets it sit.

Then—

MARCUS

(smiling)

Just trust me... we can still practice, right?

What you say? You need me?

CELINE

You wanna be funny when I get serious, huh?

MARCUS

Aight, I see what's going on here.

Let me make you something to eat.

He stands.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You a lil hangry.

She smacks her lips.

CELINE

You always think I'm hungry.

Beat.

CELINE (CONT'D)

What you finna make?

Marcus grins and heads to the kitchen.

He opens the fridge —

bright, full, loud.

He stares.

Still foreign.

His PHONE RINGS.

He checks it.

His face changes. Still.

MARCUS

It's my mom.

She has cancer.

Celine doesn't hesitate.

She's already moving.

She wraps him up.

CELINE

We gotta go down there, right?

Marcus nods. Overwhelmed.

MARCUS

It's been a while.

She guides him back to the couch without fuss.

Grounds him.

Celine reaches back to her laptop — casual, decisive.

Clicks once.

CONFIRMATION: FLIGHT BOOKED – FRIDAY

Marcus notices now.

MARCUS

Celine—

She cuts him off — gentle but firm.

CELINE

We leave Friday.

Beat.

She softens it with a smile.

CELINE (CONT'D)

You was gonna have to face them sooner or later.

I don't think there's any love lost.

It's never been a real problem — just distance.

MARCUS

That's an oversimplification.

It might not be any lost love, but it's also no relationship there.

I send what I send, but it—

CELINE

Why you so flustered?

That's your family. They love you.

You can't run away from that.

Your mom needs you.

Forget the rest of it — it's time to put your big boy pants on.

MARCUS

Yeah... you're right.

She squeezes him.

CELINE

Plus they still like me.

I don't know about you.

A small smile finally breaks through his worry.

Celine stands.

Starts dancing lightly around the room.

Marcus watches her — anchored, unsettled, loved.

Emotional beats:

Marcus's body recognizes the absence before his mind does — the missing son registers as physical unease rather than memory. Celine grounds him without centering herself around him; she loves him, but she is not living on pause. This life is stable, successful, and full — yet something essential is missing, and no amount of achievement fills the gap.

SCENE 14: THE FUTURE'S HOME

EXT. MA'S HOUSE – DAY

Marcus sits in the car outside his childhood home.

Engine off.

Storm clouds bruising the sky.

Celine reaches over, touches his back — not pushing, just permission.

Marcus exhales. Opens the door.

INT. MA'S HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Marcus steps inside — freezes.

On the wall:

— HIS TROPHIES

— NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

— A FRAMED JERSEY he doesn't remember keeping

TASHA stands in RN scrubs.

Half smile. Half armor.

TASHA

Still give hugs or what... Golden Boy?

Marcus laughs, unsure, then pulls her into a hug.

CHAD

What's up, big bro.

MARCUS

Chad... damn.

Been a minute.

CHAD

I think I can take you now.

He mimics a crossover.

MARCUS

I'm sure you can.

These old knees ain't no good.

Marcus looks around.

MARCUS

Where Ma?

Chad points upstairs.

CHAD

Resting.

We was just about to hit the store.

Tasha was cooking today.

TASHA

Lasagna.

You still eat regular people food, right?

Or you only eat caviar now?

Mimicking proper voice

MARCUS

Man, I don't eat no—

MA (O.S.)

Tasha, leave that boy alone.

Ma appears.

Small. Strong. Tired.

MA

Come here, son.

It's been so longggg.

They embrace.

Marcus holds on a beat too long.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Celine and Tasha circle each other — cautious, warm.

TASHA

How was the flight?

CELINE

Nerve-wrecking.

TASHA

Turbulence?

CELINE

Girl, no.

That man was nervous as hell about coming down here.

Wouldn't let me rest.

It was cute... then it was annoying.

They laugh.

TASHA

He ain't been home since Dad.

Then he hear Ma sick... yeah.

CELINE

He miss y'all.

It's starting to get to him.

We even talking about moving back.

Tasha stops.

TASHA

Y'all moving back for real?

CELINE

Yeah.

I told Marcus I was cool giving up that residency back then...

but once I started my practice, I was coming home.

TASHA

Girl, I know that's right.

How he take it?

CELINE

(nervous laugh)

You know him.

He think he gotta fix everything first.

TASHA

Mm.

Maybe you the thing fixing him.

They bump shoulders.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Good.

I'm tired of sending you TikToks.

We can watch 'em in person.

You trying to go to the sto' with us?

CELINE

Only if they got Crunchy Kurls and Super Donuts.

I don't eat no caviar.

They laugh — sister energy forming.

BACK WITH MA & MARCUS

Marcus studies the wall again.

MARCUS

Where you get all this?

MA

Your sister.

Been collecting since you left.

Marcus, surprised. A little ashamed.

MARCUS

I ain't think y'all kept up.

MA

With you?

We watched every game.

Tasha argued with strangers online like she was your agent.

A small smile cracks Marcus' face — then fades.

MARCUS

This mean a lot, Ma.

But I came to check on you.

Ma sits. Tired, but grounded.

MA

Still running, Marcus?

She laughs.

He doesn't.

MARCUS

What the doctors say?

What stage is it?

MA

Baby, why you asking questions you can't control?

I start chemo soon.

This gonna be in the past.

MARCUS

You make it sound simple.

MA

Because fear don't pay bills.

Beat.

She looks at the wall — not proud, not sad. Just reflective.

MA (CONT'D)

You know...

I think about how much weight landed on you.

On all of y'all.

Marcus shifts.

MA (CONT'D)

You was still a kid.

So was Tasha.

Chad too — even though he hide it better.

Marcus looks up.

MA (CONT'D)

Your daddy worked every hour he could find.

Two jobs. Sometimes three.

Still wasn't enough.

By the time it caught up to him...

it already caught us.

She exhales. No tears. No dramatics.

MA (CONT'D)

I needed help.

And y'all stepped up before I even asked.

She looks at him.

MA (CONT'D)

I'm proud of all of you.

Every single one.

I never thought id have 3 college graduates

Beat.

MA (CONT'D)

You.

Tasha.

Chad.

She gestures to the wall.

MA (CONT'D)

Y'all survived something
grown folks don't make it through.

MARCUS

I didn't mind, Ma.

MA

I know you didn't.

Beat.

MA (CONT'D)

That's what I worry about.

Silence stretches.

MARCUS

Me and Celine thinking about moving back.

She real sure about it.

I'm just trying to make sure

I ain't coming back to do more damage.

Ma stands. Comes behind him.

Hands on his shoulders.

MA

What needs to be fixed?

Marcus listens.

MA (CONT'D)

She leans in.

MA (CONT'D)

Your sister got a lot in her chest.

She always has.

Don't mean she don't love you.

Beat.

MA (CONT'D)

That girl carried more than she should've.

Same as you.

She looks him dead in the eye.

MA (CONT'D)

I'm proud of how strong she is.

I just hate what made her that way.

Marcus nods.

MARCUS

I know.

MA

Do you?

He doesn't answer.

She pulls him into a hug.

Firm. Forgiving.

MA (CONT'D)

No matter where you stay,

this will always be home, baby.

Whatever you think you owe this family —

you paid it already.

Marcus closes his eyes. Breathes.

For the first time since arriving, his shoulders drop.

FRONT DOOR OPENS

Tasha, Celine, and Chad return — pizza in hand.

TASHA

Hope we not ruining y'all Hallmark moment,
but dinner served.

MARCUS

Thought you was cooking? You come back Clothes changed with a pizza how that work?

TASHA

I worked ten hours
and remembered I don't like y'all that much.

MARCUS

I was ready to put a lil caviar on my lasagna.

TASHA

Boy, you lucky I bought enough for you.

CELINE

Ungrateful ass.

She holds up snacks like trophies.

LATER

Dinner is filled with jokes catching up but warm family feeling

Marcus' shoulders stay down.

MARCUS

Y'all wanna walk?

Get dessert or something?

CHAD

Nigga, I'm going home.

MA

I need rest.

TASHA

I ain't doing nothing else

CELINE

You ain't even have to ask me.

They head toward the door.

SCENE 15: THE BUBBLE UNIVERSE THEORY / WHERE THE FUTURE COLLIDES

SCENE – NEIGHBORHOOD WALK – NIGHT

Streetlights hum.

Pavement still wet from rain.

Marcus, Celine, and Tasha walk slowly, ice cream cups in hand.

Unrushed. Familiar.

TASHA

So y'all really thinking about moving back?

MARCUS

Thinking is a strong word.

CELINE

He means yes, but he scared of the paperwork.

TASHA

Paperwork ain't what bite people.

Tasha's phone BUZZES.

She peels off to answer it, a few steps ahead.

Marcus and Celine fall into silence —

Comfortable, loaded.

CELINE

You okay in there?

MARCUS

Yeah.

Just weird seeing your whole life on one wall.

CELINE

At least they kept the good pictures.

MARCUS

I thought they was mad at me.

CELINE

They were.

They just love you more than they mad.

Beat.

MARCUS

You ever regret not hooping?

She didn't expect that.

CELINE

Every March.

MARCUS

Why you stop?

CELINE

You ask this twenty years later?

(laughs)

I don't know. Priorities just shifted.

Soft. Not accusatory.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I figured life was bigger than a scoreboard.

MARCUS

You were really good at it.

CELINE

Don't make it a funeral.

I chose something too.

They pass an OLD PARK —

The one they used to play at.

Celine nods toward it.

CELINE

I used to kill you in there.

MARCUS

What they say about memories?

They unreliable or something.

CELINE

I don't know what you talking about.

Ya girl had game.

Tasha turns back toward them.

TASHA

Y'all done being deep?

I'm getting sleepy listening to all this growth.

They laugh.

The air lightens.

Marcus lingers a half step behind.

He looks back at the park.

Like it's looking at him too.

Marcus, Celine, and TASHA walk together.

City noise. Foot traffic. Normal life.

Marcus slows — spots a familiar ICE CREAM SHOP.

MARCUS

(exhales, relieved)

This wasn't as bad as I thought it'd be.

Y'all in the mood for ice cream?

I got a good feeling about this place.

Celine smiles. Tasha shrugs.

INT. ICE CREAM SHOP – CONTINUOUS

Small. Crowded. Kids pressed against glass.

A FAMILY ahead of them in line.

Mom swipes her card.

DECLINED.

MOM

Damn... forgot a bill was coming out today.

The kids deflate. Dad pats his pockets, embarrassed.

Marcus steps forward casually.

MARCUS

Don't mean to intrude...

What's good here?

I was thinking rocky road.

KIDS

Oooo! That's a good one!

Marcus nods, already pulling out his card.

MARCUS

Make it four.

Actually— everybody.

The cashier rings it up.

Marcus hands the DAD a quick, slick handshake —

CASH folded clean inside.

DAD

Man, thank you— but—

MARCUS

It's good.

Appreciate the suggestion.

Outside.

EXT. ICE CREAM SHOP – MOMENTS LATER

Everyone eating. Kids laughing nearby.

Celine's phone buzzes.

CELINE

I gotta run to the bathroom real quick.

She heads inside.

Tasha watches Marcus a beat.

TASHA

So how you get lil mama back?

Me and her used to bond over

How much we didn't like you.

MARCUS

(half-smiles)

I'm still trying to figure that out.

TASHA

I saw what you did for that family.

That was nice.

MARCUS

Sometimes a bad week...

A small act of kindness go a long way.

TASHA

Mmm.

You always seem to throw that money around

Marcus clocks the shift.

MARCUS

I get the feeling

We not talking about that family anymore.

If you got something to say,

Don't beat around the bush.

Beat.

TASHA

Why you leave?

Marcus

And there it is

Tasha

Better yet you left and never came back

MARCUS

Time get away from you—

TASHA

Save that bullshit for reporters.

Marcus exhales. Drops the guard.

MARCUS

I was drowning.

Suffocated by everybody's expectations.

Dad was always working but it was never enough

I had to be the man

I didn't know what to do

I was only seventeen.

TASHA

And I was fourteen, Marcus!

She raises her voice — then reins it in.

TASHA (CONT'D)

I was 14

Who you think that burden fell on?

MARCUS

I just got bad advice

Beat

People I thought I could trust.

I got in touch with an agent—

Told me don't risk another injury.

Said he'd handle everything.

TASHA

So t hat fancy prep school we obviously couldn't afford..

MARCUS

Yeah.

Coach found out somehow.

Wasn't happy.

But he didn't tell nobody.

TASHA

So That's why ain't no pictures

Of your raggedy ass back at the school

MARCUS

I was trying to make a better life for myself

For all of us.

TASHA

We never asked for your money.

Beat.

TASHA (CONT'D)

I get it.

You made a mistake.

We all made some.

She looks away, then back.

TASHA (CONT'D)

But you remember when that kid

was bullying Chad?

Marcus nods.

TASHA

You remember what Dad told us?

MARCUS

Family protect family.

TASHA

Exactly.

I protected Chad my whole life.

I was by Dad's side when he passed.

(voice cracks, but she holds it)

Who protected me?

Marcus can't answer.

TASHA (CONT'D)

You might've wanted a better life.

Long beat.

TASHA (CONT'D)

I just wanted my big brother.

Silence.

Celine RETURNS, sensing the air.

CELINE

Everything okay?

TASHA

Just family shit.

A beat.

Tasha wipes her face quickly.

Tasha softens — just a little.

TASHA (CONT'D)

You know what I think?

Marcus looks at her.

TASHA (CONT'D)

I think when you left,

You stepped into a different bubble.

Marcus frowns.

MARCUS

Bubble?

TASHA

Yeah.

Where everything works for you.

Where choices don't hurt nobody else.

Celine listens. Still.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Problem is...

You don't get to live in a bubble forever

They all pop eventually

Marcus looks down.

Sniffs. Regroups.

Then—

She lightly SLAPS Marcus' arm.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Crying was not on my agenda today, Marcus.

She half-smiles through tears.

Marcus embraces her

TASHA (CONT'D)

You so annoying.

Marcus lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding.

Tasha steps back toward Celine.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Alright.

Let's go before I say something

I gotta apologize for later.

She walks ahead.

Marcus stays still a moment—

hit, but still standing.

The bubble holds

For now.

EXT. STREET / SIDEWALK – EVENING

The group steps out together.

MARCUS.

CELINE.

TASHA.

They haven't walked ten feet—

JADEN (O.S.)

TT?

Tasha freezes.

Turns.

A teenage boy stands across the street.

Basketball tucked under his arm.

Eyes locked on Marcus.

TASHA

TT?

Beat.

TASHA (CONT'D)

Boy, who is your TT?

Jaden steps closer. Confused. Desperate.

JADEN

Stop playing.

Then, louder—

JADEN (CONT'D)

Dad?

Everything stops.

Marcus' face drains.

MARCUS

Nah—

JADEN

It's me.

It's Jaden.

Celine clocks it instantly.

The resemblance hits her in the chest.

MARCUS

You got the wrong—

Jaden closes the distance. Reaches out.

JADEN

I been looking everywhere for you.

His hand touches Marcus' arm.

The world SHIFTS.

—FLASHES—

- A kid looking up in the stands
- “As long as you there, pops”

- Empty rooms
- A foster house door closing
- A voice calling Dad in the dark

Marcus yanks his arm back like he's burned.

Jaden recoils. Humiliated.

JADEN (CONT'D)

...Wow.

Silence.

TASHA

(low, to Marcus)

I ain't gon' lie...

She looks between them.

TASHA (CONT'D)

That lil nigga do look just like you.

Celine can't breathe.

MARCUS

Bab—

CELINE

Please don't touch me.

She steps back. Wrecked but composed.

CELINE (CONT'D)

I can't with you

Not right now.

Jaden backs away, eyes burning.

JADEN

You really don't remember me.

Marcus can't answer.

Jaden turns and RUNS.

Down the block.

Fast. Angry. Gone.

Disappeared into the night.

Marcus stands there.

Shoulders collapsing in real time.

Tasha clocks it immediately — and does what she always does.

TASHA

(laughing, deflecting)

Ahhh.

So this why your ass ain't wanna come back home.

Marcus looks at her, confused.

She lightly slaps his arm, trying to break it.

Marcus doesn't laugh.

Doesn't move.

Just stares at the space Jaden ran into.

MARCUS

Not right now, Tash.

That lands.

The joke hangs there, unfinished.

Tasha's smile fades — just a crack.

She clocks the seriousness.

TASHA

...Aight.

She steps back, giving him space she rarely gives.

Marcus' phone is already in his hand.

CELINE'S NAME.

He taps it.

RINGING.

Voicemail.

He exhales, sharp.

MARCUS

(into phone, rushed)

Celine—

Please call me back.

He pauses.

The words don't line up anymore.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I think I—

I don't know what's happening.

But I need you to—

He stops.

Swallows.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Please.

He hangs up.

Tasha watches him now — no jokes left.

Marcus grips his head.

Breathing changes.

FLASHES — fast, invasive: • A kid alone in a gym

• Empty stands

- “Dad...” without a body
- A PARK
- A BALL slapping concrete

Marcus looks up.

Locks in.

MARCUS

(under his breath)

Jaden...

He takes off.

Tasha watches him go.

For once — she doesn't follow.

CUT TO:

SCENE 15: MY FUTURE IS MY FUTURE

EXT. PARK – DUSK

A public court going quiet.

JADEN shoots alone.

Hard. Angry. No arc. Just force.

MARCUS approaches slowly. Careful not to spook him.

JADEN

How you find me?

MARCUS

I told you, you'd always find help here.

Figured this had to be the place.

Jaden doesn't look at him.

JADEN

Now you remember.

An UBER idles nearby. Waiting.

CELINE stands off to the side, clocking the energy.

MARCUS

I know you're mad.

But I need you to hear this —

Twenty minutes ago, I didn't even know you existed.

Jaden finally turns. Laughs once. Bitter.

JADEN

And that's supposed to help?

Marcus swallows.

MARCUS

I'm saying I didn't choose—

JADEN

—You chose everything after.

That lands.

JADEN (CONT'D)

You went back. Got with the lady from your jersey retirement?

You didn't look for my moms?

You just... went back stacked the odds in your favor and said forget the rest of us

You might not have known what was happening but you didn't disagree with the fucking results.

Marcus absorbs that. No defense.

MARCUS

I didn't teach you to talk like that.

JADEN

Apparently, Marcus You ain't teach me shit.

A beat. Then — venom.

JADEN (CONT'D)

I listened to the “GOAT” though.

🎵 I want you to be a father, I’m your little boy and you don’t even bother... 🎵

Sounds familiar? So save that preaching shit for somebody else

Silence. The words hang heavy.

Marcus nods. Accepts it.

MARCUS

I deserve that.

Jaden turns away. Breath shaking.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I don’t know how I ended up on the outside of your life.

I swear I don’t.

But now I do know what it feels like

To not have you.

That cracks Jaden.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

And I know that look on your face.

I wore it once.

Jaden breaks. Marcus hesitates — then reaches.

They embrace.

Not clean. Not cinematic. Real.

Marcus looks up — sees Celine.

MARCUS

(to Jaden)

Can you give me a minute, son?

Jaden nods. Steps away.

Celine now sitting on the park bench. Resigned to her faith

Marcus approaches Celine.

MARCUS

You heard all that?

CELINE

Mostly saw.

Heard enough.

Marcus searches for words.

MARCUS

I—

CELINE

You don't have to explain.

You finally stopped running.

I always wondered what it would cost you.

That hits him.

MARCUS

I didn't know how to be everything.

CELINE

I know

I never asked you to be

I just wish you'd told me what it was taking from you.

She glances at Jaden.

CELINE (CONT'D)

That boy clearly needs you.

Marcus nods.

MARCUS

And what do you need?

Celine exhales. Honest.

CELINE

Does it matter?

If you stay...

You'll resent me.

And you'll never forgive me for it.

Marcus steps closer.

MARCUS

You didn't ask to be in the middle of this.

CELINE

No.

I didn't.

A beat.

MARCUS

I've lived more life than I can explain.

And every time I thought I was strong —

You were the one who showed me I didn't have to be.

She almost smiles.

CELINE

I hear the "but."

Marcus nods.

MARCUS

But he's my son.

That's it.

Celine swallows hard.

CELINE

I used to imagine what our kid would look like.

Never thought I'd meet yours first.

Marcus can't answer.

MARCUS

I don't know how to do this without hurting you.

Celine steps back. Creates space.

CELINE

I'm not asking you to choose.

Go to him.

Go be who you are.

Marcus turns back toward Jaden.

Thunder RUMBLES in the distance.

Time fractures.

CUT TO BLACK.

****Emotional beats**:** Ownership. No clean ending. Choice with full knowledge.

EPILOGUE: SANKOFA UNCAGED
INT. ORIGINAL APARTMENT – MORNING

Soft morning light.

MARCUS jolts awake.

Breathing heavy. Disoriented.

He looks around.

No luxury. No alternate life.

Just home.

From the other room—

JADEN (O.S.)

Dad, we still working out?

I need to get some shots up before the big game.

Marcus sits up slowly.

MARCUS

What—

What time is it?

Jaden appears in the doorway, already dressed.

JADEN

It's time, Dad.

Marcus swings his legs off the bed.

MARCUS

Relax, dude. I'm coming.

Marcus scans the apartment again — grounding himself.

This is real.

MARCUS

(soft)

How you feeling, son? You—

JADEN

Dad... I'm trying to lock in.

It's been weird enough already.

We can have a Disney moment later.

Guarded. Not cruel. Honest.

Marcus nods. Takes it.

MARCUS

Yeah.

Right.

The game.

Stammering

EXT. PARK / PRACTICE COURT – MORNING

Early light. Empty court.

Jaden works. Focused. Sharp.

Marcus rebounds. Watches.

MARCUS

You looked good today.

Almost like me.

JADEN

Almost?

Smirks.

JADEN (CONT'D)

I'ma kill 'em.

First state championship in school history.

MARCUS

One game at a time, son.

Jaden catches his breath.

JADEN

You mind if I catch up with some of the team?

Marcus nods.

MARCUS

Nah. Go ahead.

Jaden jogs off.

Marcus

Ayo J!

Jaden

Turns to his father

Marcus

It's yo time, son

Marcus stays behind.

Watches him go.

The pride is there.

So is the work.

Marcus exhales. Eats it.

EXT. STREET – LATER

Marcus walks home.

Stops.

Across the street — a BILLBOARD.

CELINE.

Professional. Calm. Therapist.

He stares.

Recognition.

INT. APARTMENT – NIGHT

Marcus sits at the table.

Laptop open.

Tabs: Community College. Therapy.

Music low.

Phone in his hand.

TEXT – TASHA:

Love you, big bro.

You raising a helluva kid.

Attached photo:

Tasha and Jaden cooking.

Laughing.

Marcus smiles.

Above it — an older text:

You could've texted my friend back 😞

He exhales.

Scrolls.

Stops at Celine's name.

Older message:

CELINE:

Hey...

When's his next game?

Marcus stares.

Types:

FRIDAY

No smile.

No panic.

Just stillness.

He doesn't send it.

He doesn't delete it.

He sets the phone down.

The song plays.

🎵 "We should... we should..." 🎵

Marcus sits.

Sad.

Present.

No longer running.

CUT TO BLACK.