

MIC CHECK; KARAOKE LOVE

Original IP Written and Created by

Gregory Bonds

A widowed single mother finds unexpected love through a karaoke app, only to discover the charming man behind the mic is a manipulative player with a hidden agenda—forcing her to risk everything to reclaim her voice, her heart, and her future.

Gregorybonds@gmail.com
408-387-9421
WGA #2253107

FADE IN:

INT. CARLA'S HOME, BEDROOM, ATLANTA, GA - MORNING

Buttery SUNLIGHT streams through sheer curtains onto a WALL with a Salesperson of the Month plaque. It lavishes on CARLA KING, 30s, assertive, funny, and decisive, as she lies awake in a half-empty bed.

She reaches her arm over an EMPTY SPACE and lingers there. Light lands on a drawer with a past due MORTGAGE BILL.

She sits up, composed. Practiced. She glances to a picture of her and her late husband laughing on a dresser with CANDLES on it.

CARLA
(to picture)
--Mornin', Babe...

She picks it up, studies it a beat too long, then sits it, face down. Her daughter, EPIPHANY KING, 5, cute in pajamas, enters.

EPIPHANY
You didn't sleep again?

CARLA
(automatic, light)
I slept, what?

She didn't. Her phone chimes; it's work. She checks immediately. Her RADIO BLARES her wakeup.

DJ PAPA BEAR (O.S.)
--It's 102.9 KWJB FM in your AM.
You've got ya Papa Bear and I've
got ya EWF 'cause Baby, you are a
winner! C'mon, now!

The song (Think: YOU ARE A WINNER, by Earth, Wind, & Fire) plays as Epiphany sings with "air mic" in her hand.

EPIPHANY
--C'mon, Mamma! Whoohooo! Cha-cha-
cha-chaa, cha-cha-cha-chaa!

She dances to the funky beat. Carla's joy at this pushes away her glum vibes and she jumps out of bed, "air-mic" in hand and joins her for the song.

CARLA

*--When you're feelin', that you're
movin' up...*

EPIPHANY

*--Always someone tryin' to make you
stop!*

CARLA KING

*--When you're fillin', fillin' up
your cup...*

EPHIPHANY

*Aye, someone come's 'round, spill
every drop!*

MONTAGE:

They dance, sing, and get ready for the day. Both select outfits from respective CLOSETS. Carla holds up two pairs of shoes; one is Nike; Epiphany grabs the other, 'Saysh' by Alison Felix.

Both have a "mini-concert" in the BATHROOM mirror. They end the song in sync, then slap high-fives.

INT. CARLA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM WINDOW - MOMENTS LATER

SILENCE as Carla looks impatiently out her bay window, then at her WATCH; it shows 8:02 am - no Camp bus. Epiphany stands quietly at the ready next to her.

EXT. CARLA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A DAY CAMP BUS pulls off. Carla in her doorway, waves to Epiphany, she waves back. Carla eyes the DRIVER, sternly taps her watch and gives the "you're late" look. The Driver honks.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Carla moves efficiently, packs her lunch, checks her emails as coffee brews.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carla in the MIRROR, fluffs hair, opens a perfectly organized makeup kit. She gazes into the mirror, smiles, and applies makeup.

CARLA

(to self)

--Hello Young Lady. Ya know you're bad-ass, right? Hm? Ya know that you're fully capable, fully-loaded, and ya *kick major ass*? Did ya know that? Hm? Hmm? Well--ya' do.

She pumps fist, smirks, and applies lipstick.

EXT. CARLA'S HOME, OVERVIEW - MOMENTS LATER

A garage door rises and a Black Mercedes Benz convertible backs out, revs engine, and drives off.

Carla drives in silence, then her hand hits the radio button; a love song comes on. She immediately pushes another station. The local DJ blares into her morning scene as she drives.

DJ PAPA BEAR (O.C.)

--Alright-right, you hurrdd me! Me need the best of the best Karaoke singers Atlanta's got--no fake-ass Milli Vanilli's up in here! We're goin' all out! This Friday night--Club Fez--Be there!

Carla ROLLS HER EYES, scoffs, then turns it off. At a STOPLIGHT, she sees a COUPLE laughing in one car, and a MAN singing along to music in another. She almost smiles, stops herself.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS, STERLING'S OFFICE - MORNING

STERLING JAMES, 30s, Morris Chestnut good looks, in meeting with ALAN, Asian, 30s, App Developer, and his DEV TEAM. He's under pressure to secure funding or launch metrics.

ALAN

--Engagement's up 300% since we even announced Mic Fest. The harvest is there, Sterls, we just need influencers, you know--real singers to make it blow up.

STERLING

Yeah, I'm listenin', I'm listenin', literally. I'm watching the profiles, too. I need to find the real deals out there to really set this off.

He ponders, grabs his jacket.

STERLING (CONT'D)
I need Dot's coffee. Tell Thaddeus
to call me soon as he gets in.

He exits the office, leaves Alan and the team working over the App.

INT. DOT'S COFFEE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Carla pays for her morning Brew, tries to exit when the door is opened for her by Sterling as he enters. His CELL PHONE conversation keeps him from really noticing Carla.

STERLING
(holding door)
--We gotta get it up, Thaddeus!
We've been in Beta far too long
already, Bro--

Carla brushes by him, a little flustered by his "Morris Chestnut" good looks. He does not even look at her as he holds the door.

CARLA
--Oh, thank you. I--

STERLING
--You're stallin' me, Thaddeus!
This is what I pay you for, Brah...

He keeps talking and walks right into the coffee shop. Carla looks behind her as the door swings closed in her face.

CARLA KING
Hmm, a real gentleman...

EXT/INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT OFFICE BLDG, OVERVIEW - MOMENTS LATER

Carla pulls into the SPOM (Sales Person of the Month) parking space. Car door opens and two black high-heeled shoes are set out, then filled with her feet.

Follow black heels and stockinged legs as they stride up the stairs, through a LOBBY, and into an elevator as people pass by.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The 5th floor elevator doors open and out strides "Carla The Closer"; stylish business attire, "Black Girl Magic" emanating, she briskly walks the isle separating cubicles.

A nerdy co-worker stands on the phone, SETH, 20s, tall, Jewish Afro, young "Howard Stern" type, nods, watches her stride by, tries to keep his composure.

SETH

--Morning.

CARLA

Morning.

He sniffs for her perfume as she passes, and loses it. **DAYDREAM/SLOW MOTION.** He daydreams, sees Carla pass in full sexy KISS GEAR & MAKEUP: guitar, heels, face paint.

She strums, sticks out a long KISS tongue, kicks a leg with a big KISS boot at him; he snaps out of it.

END DAYDREAM.

A co-worker, AMY, 20s, drops her pencil when she sees Carla walk by.

AMY

--Morning!

CARLA

Morning.

INT. CARLA'S CUBICLE - MOMENTS LATER

Carla reaches her desk, clicks on computer, takes sips of coffee from a "COFFEE is for CLOSERS" Mug, and settles in. Her phone rings; she almost dribbles on herself, takes the call.

CARLA

--Thank you for choosing GAB
Entertainment, this is Carla.

A pause of silence.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Hello?

INT. IICHI-KUUCHI (ITCHY-COOCHIE) COMPANY, TOKYO - INTERCUT

FUMIKO SUZUKI, 20s, *Japanese Accent*, sits at her computer, a calendar and U.S. Map on screen. She sips from a Starbucks coffee cup as a busy office mills in the background.

FUMIKO

--Oh, ha! Hi Carla, you-you sound
just like
(beat)
I thought you were a recording, ha!

CARLA

Oh, ha! Yeah, yeah, I actually get
that a lot, thanks. How can I help
you? Who am I speaking with?

FUMIKO

Yes-yes, um, I am Fumiko Suzuki,
with Iichi-Kuuchi Group, and we--

CARLA

--I-I'm sorry, excuse me. What--
which group are you calling from?

FUMIKO

Oh, yes-yes, um, the Iichi-Kuuchi
Group? We are largest manufacturer
of Feminine products in Japan. We
desire a quote for our Las Vegas
tradeshow; we are coming to
America, you can say, hehe.

Carla stops herself from laughing out loud, clutches phone to chest, regains composure.

CARLA

--Ahem. Very, very good Fumiko. I'm
Carla King, I'll be happy to assist
you.

INT. GAB CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPT. KENJI'S CUBICLE - MOMENTS
LATER

Busy CS department, milling employees in background, phones
ring. The local R&B station plays low in background.

D.J. PETEY WHEATSTRAW (O.C.)

--It's ya Boy, Petey Wheatstraw,
and I gotta get ya' out to the big
Karaoke contest! We got big money
on the table courtesy of Atlanta's
own Starchild Studios.

(MORE)

D.J. PETEY WHEATSTRAW (O.C.) (CONT'D)
 Keep it right here for all the
 details, baby!

KENJI TAKAHASHI, Japanese, 29, Service tech--cool, centered type, sips coffee. His computer shows E-INVITES to his 30th Birthday party to people in a KARAOKE APP, including "NIKKITA-MATATA".

He glances up and sees buddy, CSR Rep TOMMY, 20s, sharply pressed shirt and tie, approaching; a ritual fist bump as he arrives.

TOMMY
 --What up, Dog? Happy Monday,
 what's crackin'?

KENJI
 Hey, T. Yes it is. My Birthday
 week's in *full effect*, my man.

TOMMY
 Oh, shiiit, that's right, it's ya'
 Birthday Friday, huh? Let's get it
 poppin' then fool, what up??

KENJI
 Heck, yeah, I'm sending invites to
 Mic Fest riight now...

He clicks the mouse, sends out E-invitations.

TOMMY
 What?? You doin' that Karaoke
 shit, again, Hashi? You be serious
 about that singin', huh?

KENJI
 I'm tellin' you, T, the Ladies love
 it. They're lucky I'm not single
 because--

TOMMY
 --What? Yo' ass single as a Dolla'
 bill. Quit dreamin' and get that
 booty, homie. Ya' can't sing no-
 way!

KENJI
 Ahh, but I can, though, T. They
 call me Mr. Smooth. I'm like, a
 Japanese Babyface, son, please!

TOMMY

Quit beggin', you ain't Keith
Sweat...

Tommy leans in.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Hey, speaking of the Ladies, you
see your girl, Carla, come through?

KENJI

No--I missed her? Was she looking--

TOMMY

--Bro, you did. She was. Walking
'round here lookin' like Gabrielle
Union, *shiiit!* Waitin' on Seth
right now for the perfume report.
You know I got five on Chanel No.
5, hahaa!

KENJI

What's today, Monday? I got five on
D & G!

TOMMY

I'm waitin' on Nikki to walk
through; I need *my* mornin' ray of
Chocolate sunshine.

KENJI

Exactly how many rays do you have,
T? Anyway, I was too busy listening
to this Kawaii sing--

TOMMY

--Hawaii? Sing?

KENJI

No, Kawaii. It means she's cute--
she's a cutie--

TOMMY

--Who? Where she at? I'll be the
judge of that, lemme see...

Kenji shows his SCREEN, a beautiful girl sings Karaoke on a
KARAOKE APP.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

--Ohh, snap! Who 'dat, K? She sound
good. You cheatin' on Carla's ass
already?--

KENJI

--Aye, aye

(beat)

I'm not trying to date her, Bro,
just hear her sing.

INT. CARLA'S CUBICLE - MOMENTS LATER

Carla wraps up her sales call as "Bestie", Account Exec and all-around Glam Doll, NIKKI NELSON, 30s, walks up to her cubicle, immediately clocks her.

CARLA

--Excellent, Fumiko. Yes, yes, I'll
get a proposal to you, asap, I
mean, as soon as possible. Yes,
yes. Okay, will do, Bye now--err,
Sayonara now, heh!

She hangs up, laughs, greets Nikki.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Hey, Girl.

NIKKI

You been up since four, haven't
you?

CARLA

(not looking up)

Five.

NIKKI

That's not better.

CARLA

It is when things get done.

NIKKI

You sold another event?

CARLA

Naw, not yet, but if I pull this
one off, Baby...cha-ching! I need
that right now. What's up with you,
Tricky Nikki?

NIKKI

Well, funny you should ask. You
bring lunch today?

CARLA

Uhh, yeah, but...nooo.

NIKKI
(excited)
Good, come with me, then, my treat.

CARLA
Huh? Ohhh, wait a minute--what the hell are you up to?

NIKKI
Whaaa? Nothin'. I just want you to, um, meet somebody--

CARLA
--Oh, no, no. Nooo. I remember last time you set me up--

NIKKI
--Whaaa? C'mon, I'm treatin'--

CARLA
(British accent)
--Umm, that's gonna be a strong no from me, Ryan Seacrest. Thank you though, Luv!

NIKKI
(laughs)
Girl, bye. It ain't always about you. He's for me this time, I just need backup. My Wing Girl!

They both laugh.

INT. FUSION BAR & GRILL - LUNCHTIME

The restaurant is upwardly mobile and full of Business people having lunch. Carla and Nikki sit at a table with a WAITER waiting on them.

NIKKI
--So, we'll have two Rose' Spritzers, Shrimp Salads, and the Crab Cakes please, thank you.

Waiter takes her menu, gives a sexy smile, walks off.

CARLA
Alrighty then, Girl, you really are treatin' today.

Nikki checks her watch, looks around at the Bar entrance. She looks nervous, anxious. Carla notices.

CARLA (CONT'D)
Sooo--what's wrong with you, Nikki?
Why you lookin' around like that?

NIKKI
(nervous)
Welllll...

CARLA
Girrl, don't get me caught up in no--
-

NIKKI
(excited)
--Ohhh...okay. In a few minutes, I
expect a tall, fine-ass, chocolatey
hunk of man to walk right through
that doorway, just fa' me--

CARLA
--Who? What? Who is it? What 'chu
mean just for you? It ain't yo
Birthday!

NIKKI
Ohhh, just somebody I met recently
(beat)
I just hope I recognize 'em, hard
to see with the dark background and
shit--

CARLA
--What?? You said you--

NIKKI
--And his ass better be tellin' the
truth, too.

CARLA
Huh?? You met 'em, but you don't
now 'em--

Suddenly, Bar doors open and in walks TAD JOHNSON, late 30s,
a portly, "chocolatey" man in conservative business attire,
glasses, Clef Note lapel Pin. He's got a single Rose.

NIKKI
--Oh shiiit, I think that's him!

Carla checks him out.

CARLA

Who? Him? Haha! I don't think so.
He is *not* Tall and Fine, Girl,
though he is quite Chocolatey, I--

Tad sees Carla. Carla smiles at him, waves, as he heads her way.

NIKKI

(whispering)
--I know, but--hey, don't do that!
Look away! Look away!

INT. STARCHILD RECORDING STUDIOS, LOBBY - SAME TIME

R & B Music, Urban Studio setting, monitors, video screens dotted around lobby walls. Well appointed leather seating, furniture. Wall of Gold, some Platinum CD's.

INT. SOUND BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

An R&B ARTIST in sound booth hitting smooth, melodic notes.
An ENGINEER nods to the beats.

INT. RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

PHONE RINGS. Receptionist CYNDI, late 20s, Gatekeeper to the Studio, steps quickly behind a semi-circle desk to answer.

Studio Head, Sterling, escorts Singer, GAIL JACKSON, 30s, through the lobby.

STERLING

--No, yeah, no, we'll definitely
take care of you--got a state of
the art facility, too. We'll make
you sound even better than you
already do, if that's possible, ha.
I mean, if anyone can, we can.

GAIL

Well, thank you, Mr. James. You
definitely seem fully equipped to
handle my needs
(beat)
You don't seem to be lacking in any
respect, Sterling. Can I call you
Sterling?

STERLING

Oh, uh, yeah, sure, sure, uh, Ms.,
Mrs.?

They stop near the reception desk, Cyndi hangs up her call,
takes in their conversation.

GAIL

Gail. You can call me, Gail.

Sterling seems oblivious to Gail's flirtatious tone as she
proffers her hand, gives a slightly flirtatious look. Cyndi
takes notice and grabs a MIC FEST FLYER off her desk.

STERLING

Well, Gail, thanks for the tour
request. I hope we can win your
recording business--

CYNDI

--Oh, Boss, perhaps she would be
interested?

Cyndi hands him the FLYER showing MIC FEST.

STERLING

Ah yes, that's right, good lookin'-
out, Cyndi
(to Gail)
Gail, you should come to our event
Friday night. There'll be plenty of
other vocalists there singing their
hearts out, too, sooo...

He offers the flyer, she reads, looks interested.

GAIL

Ahh, this does look like fun. This
Friday, huh?

STERLING

Yeah, yeah, hope to see you there.
Bring that golden voice of yours,
you know, show us whatcha workin'
with, hm?

GAIL

Well, if you'll be there I'll stop
by, Sterling.

He shyly laughs, finally notices her flirting.

STERLING

Okaaay. Well, uh, I'll see you there. Uh, have a nice afternoon, Ms. Gail.

She walks to the door, pauses and turns to see if he's checking her out; he is, they both are. She exits.

CYNDI

--Aye, that's a good lookin' chick right there, Boss!

STERLING

Yeah, yeah, she fine, true that, but--

CYNDI

--She was feeling you, too. I can't believe you didn't

(beat)

If I wasn't straight I'd be all over that!

He glances her over.

STERLING

Yeah, well, sometimes I wonder, Cuz.

(laughs)

--No, no, I told you, there's a method to my madness. I was playin' clueless on her ass but I know her skirt's already fallin'. She probably got gold-digger panties on under there, anyway--

CYNDI

--Gold-digger? Shiii, I'll be a prospectin' muthafucka, then!

STERLING

Ahh, but not if you don't have to dig for it though, Baby-girl. I told you, Fam, I don't love these Diggers, but I certainly will do the dance for that booty, you feel me?

CYNDI

Humph, you think you bad.

STERLING

Aye, that's what they tell me!

He throws up his hands, smirks.

STERLING (CONT'D)

Look, all I'm sayin' is they after money, stature, and power, and let's face it, Booty. Same as me. But until I put a Ring on it, only one of us can win at the game, sooo--
-

CYNDI

--Well, yo' ass better start lookin' for the real ones then, Cuz. Ya keep smashin' these thirsty-ass projects, drainin' the bank account, yo' ass gon' wish you had a real rich one.

STERLING

Oh, great, thanks, Cuz--

CYNDI

--And, you ain't gettin' no younger.

STERLING

Believe me, I ain't stoppin' till I meet the show-stoppa. Until then, I'm slaying' all comers.

Cyndi tosses his mail up on her desk.

CYNDI

I know you see the books. You ain't gettin' no richer, and the bills ain't stoppin'. I'm jus' sayin' Cousin, I need my job security.

STERLING

Aye, look, the company's financially good. I mean--we a'ight
(beat)
Okay, okay, we a lil' short. But only on account of gettin' the App up. But, we're there now! Just a matter of Marketing, and, and--

CYNDI

--Cash. You know we got Mic Fest Friday, that's like, Five-Grand. You got another Ten-G's for--

STERLING

--I know, I know. Look, I just need to get through Quarter-finals. We're outta Beta-mode already, goin' live in a few days--it's all gravy from there, Cousin. Believe me, 'errybody's gonna be singing on my App.

CYNDI

(smiles)

Good. I'm orderin' lunch, then...

INT. FUSION BAR & GRILL, ATLANTA - SAME TIME

Tad zeroes in on Nikki's table, sees Carla waving, a big smile on her face.

CARLA

--Ohhh, sorry, I think

(pause)

Oh, he is, Girl, look! He's coming over--

NIKKI

--No!! Look away! Look away!!

Tad arrives, proffers his Rose to Carla.

TAD

--Well, uh, hello. You, you must be, uh...

Not sure, he struggles to pronounce her name.

TAD (CONT'D)

Uh, Nikki-ta-ma-tata? Is, is that how you--

NIKKI

--Yes! Yes, that's right! Very good! *She's* Nikkita-matata and I'm Carla, her Bestie!

Nikki shakes his hand, Carla looks on in shock. Tad offers his rose again, to Carla.

TAD

Great, I, I really couldn't tell from your profile picture, I thought she was

(beat)

(MORE)

TAD (CONT'D)
I'm really glad to meet you, uh,
Nikkita-matata.

CARLA
Oh, I, Um, I'm glad to meet you,
too, uh? Uhh??

TAD
Oh, Tad, err, sorry--TAD-OOWWW, I
should say, haha. You know, like Ta
daaaa!?

Carla looks confused as he stands with his arms wide out.

TAD (CONT'D)
It's--that's my stage name.

Nikki quickly facilitates the confusion.

NIKKI
Ohhh, that's what you meant by your
stage name, Nikkita-matata! That's,
that's, really cute, Girl...

Nikki begs Carla with PLEADING EYES. Carla shyly accepts his
rose.

CARLA
Oh, uh, thank you, Tad-oww. Um, can
I call you, Tad?

TAD
Sure, sure. You can call me
anything you want, pretty Lady.

Tad smiles hard, Nikki tries to keep from laughing, Carla
tries to play along.

CARLA
Oh, it's, um, nice to meet you,
finally, Tad. Um, thank you so much
for the Rose, but--

NIKKI
--Tad! Uh, Tad-doww, I'm also
Nikkita-matata's Secretary, and,
uh, I need to apologize. I totally
forgot...

She gets up, gently puts her arm around his and walks him
away from the table and toward the doors as he looks back at
Carla.

NIKKI (CONT'D)
Nikki, Nikkita-matata, has to get
to an emergency meeting right now,
and--

TAD
--Emergency meeting? But, she's
right here, uh, right there. I'm
actually lookin' at her, she-she's
right over there!

NIKKI
Yes, yes, she is, and you'll allow
me to reschedule her for you very,
very soon, right?

EXT. EN FUSION BAR & GRILL, SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

They exit the Bar arm in arm, Tad tries to object as Nikki
ushers him down the sidewalk a bit.

TAD
--That was really rude of her to,
to--

NIKKI
--I'm really sorry, Tad-oww. It's
kind'a my fault. I'm, um, still
kind'a new on the job, you know,
huh? But, hey, hey, keep those
fires burnin' man, that's sooo
cute!

TAD
But, but--

NIKKI
--Just hit me up, uh--hit *her* up on
the App, and we'll get you
rescheduled, really quick. I gotta
get back to lunch--to the meeting,
but, we'll see you soon!

He looks at her closely.

TAD
Heyyy, wait a minute...are you two
Cousins or something? You look, you
kind'a look just like--

NIKKI
--Uh, yeah! Umm, she thought you
were a little taller, too, haha.

(MORE)

NIKKI (CONT'D)
 I gotta go. Good to finally--good
 to meet you Bro, see you soon!

She scurries back into the Bar, shakes her head.

NIKKI (CONT'D)
 --I gotta do better on that damn
 App!

INT. IICHI-KUUCHI INTL. SALES OFFICE, TOKYO - SAME TIME

Fumiko in front of a whiteboard, stands next to her Manager and Uncle, BUCHO ICHIKAWA, 50s, a Hearing Aide in ear. Other MALE SALES REPS pay attention.

BUCHO ICHIKAWA
 --I mean I want our booth filled,
 filled with Americans. Everywhere,
 Americans-Americans-Americans!
 Understood, Fumiko?

FUMIKO
 (bows)
 Yes, yes, Bucho Ichikawa. May I
 propose after a long day at
 Tradeshow, perhaps the Americans
 will enjoy a great big party on Las
 Vegas Strip? I have--

BUCHO ICHIKAWA
 --Oh-hoho, Strippers? Las Vegas
 Strippers?! Yesss!! Very good,
 Fumiko! Yes, please, approved!
 Please book twelve--

FUMIKO
 --No! Bucho Ichikawa, I meant--

The Reps begin chanting and clapping in unison.

SALES REPS
 --Oh-hoho! American Strippers!!
 Strippers! Strippers!

Fumiko grabs a ruler, smacks it hard on the table and looks around, sternly pointing the ruler at everyone. The Sales reps quickly recoil.

FUMIKO
 No! No Strippers!
 Strip!! Las Vegas Strip!

BUCHO ICHIKAWA
 No, no Strip Club?? I, I thought
 you said Strippers...

Taps hearing aid.

FUMIKO
 No, I have something better than
 Strippers, Oji
 (beat)
 Singers!

They all mumble their disagreement.

BUCHO ICHIKAWA
 That's not better than Strippers...

FUMIKO
 Karaoke Contest at our Booth in Las
 Vegas, Oji!! The Americans will
 love, love!

BUCHO ICHIKAWA
 Ohhh, Karaoke! That's good, Fumiko!
 That's Shachou Kuuchi's favorite,
 Karaoke and Saki, you know.
 Though, he can't sing worth a shit,
 haha-ohho!

FUMIKO
 Yes, yes, Oji, I dooo know. I have
 good connection working on it in
 America, even as we speak!

INT. EN FUSION BAR & GRILL - MOMENTS LATER

Carla at the table, mouth open, half laughing as Nikki
 returns. Behind her, Tad's head bobs as he looks in through
 the Bar door windows, then resigns and walks away.

CARLA
 --What was that? Nikki, what was
 that??

Nikki laughs hard, sits.

NIKKI
 I'm--I'm sooo sorry, Girl, I had
 to! I couldn't help it--once he
 thought I was you! Bahahaaa!

Laughing, Nikki sips her drink.

CARLA

--Don't laugh, it ain't funny!

NIKKI

(still laughing)

Okay, okay. That was Tad. I met him online, on an App, and--

CARLA

--What? Wait, a dating App? You, you couldn't tell what the man looked like in a damn dating App, Nikki??

Nikki tries to stop laughing.

CARLA (CONT'D)

And what's yo' ass doing on a dating App, anyway? Not enough Brother's around here? I mean, straight ones?

NIKKI

Nooo, it's a Singing App. You know, Karaoke? Here...

She pulls out her cell phone, swipes for Apps, logs into a KARAOKE APP. Does a little Demo as they talk.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

My last Boo got me on it, you know, cause he like singin', and, well, I like men who sang, sooo...

CARLA

What? You sing Karaoke on a stage, live?

NIKKI

No, not no mo', Baby. It's some kind'a alphabet Appy thingy.

CARLA

'The hell you talkin' 'bout, Nikki?

NIKKI

(laughs)

It's a new App, but it's gonna work for everybody real quick, but hunty, it works fa' me right now!

She logs into the APP. It lights up with various LOGO colors and she shows Carla some sexy male singers' PROFILE PICTURES, and shows her own profile.

CARLA

Wow, these guys look great--

Nikki scrolls the APP U/I.

NIKKI

--They fine, girl, and they from everywhere, every country. It's a world-wide studio in my hands--

CARLA

-Hey! What is this, Nikki? Why the hell is there a picture of me and you on your profile?! 'The hell they supposed to know--

NIKKI

--Um, because sometimes I'm me, but sometimes I need to be you, Boo. I'm jus' sayin'...

EXT. SIDEWALK, OUTSIDE FUSION BAR & GRILL - MOMENTS LATER

A WALK & TALK, as they exit the Grill and head back to the office. Passers-by on either side take notice of the two striking Women as they stroll down the sidewalk.

CARLA

--Okay, wait-wait, you're tellin' me you can sing on this App, but you're not tellin' me how that turned into a friggin' date with yo' Boy Tad, there, Tricky Nikki! C'mmmmon?

NIKKI

Well, you get to see singers' profile pictures, their videos, if they put 'em up--but sometimes they don't be puttin' up their real shit, Girl, and--

CARLA

--Wait, wait, so, lemme get this straight; you sing with other people, whom you don't know, and then flirt with 'em based on their looks, which may or may not be real? Is, is that right?

NIKKI

And the voice, don't forget the voice! But yeah, pretty much...

CARLA

Hmmm, how original. No, creative--
No-no, wait, how 'bout *crazy*!?

A car honks, Nikki smiles, blows kisses as it passes by.

NIKKI

Naw, Girl! Normally you just sing
Duets and shit, but when I posted
my profile picture and hit a few
notes--'cause I can--shiiit, them
dogs started comin' out, Hun-ty! I
got all kinds 'a fans and shit.
And, well, you know--

CARLA

--You do *not* actually hook up with
them, Nikki!?

NIKKI

You should try it, girl.

CARLA KING

Nikki!

NIKKI

Whaaa? I'm tired of being single.
Shit--I ain't tryin' to be alone
out here, Carla. I'm not widowed.
I'm in my thirties, and I like
dinners, romantic getaways, and
shit. I like--

CARLA

--What are you sayin'? You really
are Tricky-Nikki?

NIKKI

I mean, one thing led to another,
and another, and well, most
recently, uh...Tad-owwww!

She throws her hands out like Tad did.

CARLA

Most recently?? Daaang, you such a
Hoe, Nikki!

Another car honks at them, they both laugh.

NIKKI

Now see, if you was datin', you'd
know already.

(MORE)

NIKKI (CONT'D)

A girl's gotta use *everything* to
get a *leg up* on the competition!
You even *know* the Real-Man-to-Real
Woman ratio 'round here?? It's
Atlanta!

Both laugh and walk into the GAB office building.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT, CARLA'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Carla paces around her desk, Nikki checks her KARAOKE APP
MESSAGES on her cell phone as she sits across from her.
Multiple messages from guys line up on her APP SCREEN.

CARLA

--So, how does it work, then? I
mean, how do you sing duets if
you're not on the same stage?

NIKKI

I don't know all that technical
stuff, I just sang and look cute,
cause it's a live video thingy
goin' on.

CARLA

Live video? They can actually see
you singing?

NIKKI

Yep. Videos, pictures, whatever you
put up--how you think I be gettin'
'em hooked, Boo? Once they hear the
voice that go with this face--or
yo' face, or whatever face I put up
there, shiiii!

Carla sits, logs into computer and googles Karaoke. ON SCREEN
shows HISTORY OF KARAOKE IN JAPAN. She reads, then leans back
in her chair and lights up with an idea.

CARLA

(to self)
--Japan. Hmm.

NIKKI

There's this Karaoke thing tonight,
Mic Fest, Carla--

CARLA

--No.

NIKKI

You don't even know what it is?

CARLA

I know it's not for me.

NIKKI

They be all-in, it's a whole
Karaoke culture thang going on.
'Course, I'm just there for the
fine-ass men, especially if they
sang, 'namsayin?

Carla ponders this, gazes at the Google results.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

I mean, when's the last time you
did somethin' that wasn't work or
sleep?

CARLA

I don't have time for 'anything
else', I've got a daughter, a
Mortgage--real life.

NIKKI

You've got a life. You just not
livin' it.

CARLA

Nikki, I really don't
(beat)
Rodney and I used to sing all the
time. I just can't--

NIKKI (O.C.)

--Rodney would want you to, Carla.
Buryin' yourself in all that work,
for how long now? I see you.

Carla glances her, knowingly. Hesitates.

CARLA

I-I don't know, I--

NIKKI

--Seriously. When's the last time
you did somethin' that wasn't about
survivin', huh?

Carla pauses. That hits.

CARLA

I--Honestly, I don't even know what that would be.

Carla glances her knowingly.

NIKKI

It's not healthy. Just because you a Widow don't mean you--

(pause)

You know that old sayin', get busy livin' or get busy dyin'?

CARLA

I know, I know

(resigns)

I wouldn't even know where to start.

NIKKI

--Ya need to come out! Let me introduce you to my Karaoke peeps. Ain't nobody gon' hurt you, Boo-boo. You might even find somebody you like, ha!

CARLA

Okay, okay!

(ponders)

Yeah, I, I think I can hang out with you

(beat)

If I don't have to listen to your ass sing all night.

NIKKI

Girl, please, I slay, hun-tee!

Both laugh.

INT. DOUBLETREE HOTEL, CLUB FEZ - LATER THAT NIGHT

There's a party going on. R & B Music fills the Club with beats that make your body move. Beautiful, upwardly-mobile people wear vibrant colors, sip on colorful drinks.

The dance floor is full of sexy patrons who dance, mingle. Conversations all around perimeter tables. The DJ works the turntables.

Carla and Nikki, dressed to the sexy 9's, turn heads from guys and girls as they enter the room and follow their Host to their booth. A walk-and-talk.

HOST #1

--And you'll find all your
International peeps here for the
Quarterfinals. You got your Chinese
peeps over there
(points)
Japanese and Korean peeps over
there...

He points to large party tables full of Asian singers and
party-goers around several tables.

CARLA

Damn! That's half the room!

HOST #1

Not quite. You got your Finns over
there. Now, they--

CARLA

--Finns? As in, Finnish? Finland??

HOST #1

Yep. The Finns actually host the
biggest Karaoke shows in the whole
world. Who knew, right?

They're seated and given a menu. The Host starts to walk off.

NIKKI

--Uh, excuse me, Monsignor! We're
ready to order, *now*, thank you very
much. Just back that ass up...

He backpedals to the booth.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

We'll have two LIT's, two shots of
Patrone, and
(to Carla)
Whatchu' havin', Girl, I'm
treatin'.

CARLA

Dang, you fixin' to get your drank
onnn!

NIKKI

Huhh? You see this sea of people in
here?? You better get your order in
now, or find yo' ass swimmin' to
the bar later! I get my drinks
delivered on intervals, Baby,
shiiit...

She pulls a \$100 bill out of her bosom, kisses it, hands it to Waiter, who gingerly accepts it with two fingers.

CARLA

Okay, I'll go with a Long Island Ice Tea, too.

NIKKI

(to Waiter)

Make that 6 LIT's, then, keep the change, and keep the drinks comin' every hour, and don't make me come look for yo' ass!

She pulls another \$100 bill out, the Waiter's eyes go big, he snatches it and runs off with their order. Carla tries to relax, to get into party mode.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

--Alright, Nikkita-matata, you better warm them chords up. I'm gettin' your ass on the Mic tonight, cause---

CARLA

--What? Ha, no way! I'm not getting up there, no thank you. You're the real Nikkita-matata, you go right ahead, Boo.

NIKKI

Girl, please, look around you--see all these guys in here? They all on the App--but can't sang. Well, half of 'em can't, anyway. They tryin' to score, just like me. And ya better watch half the women in here, too, okaaaay?

Both laugh.

CARLA

I'm not looking to score, Nikki, I told you, I'm okay. Now, you got me out here, what the hell do you expect to show me I haven't already seen, huh?

Suddenly, Master of Ceremonies, "MC SUCH & SUCH", 30s, is on the Mic. The Club's panel of Big Screen TVs come to life around the room, showing Karaoke booths hidden behind a big curtain.

MC SUCH & SUCH
 --Ladies and Gentlemen, and Mic
 Fest Fans from across Atlanta, It's
 yo' boy, MC Such & Such, and it's
 time. Let's get ready to
 SAAANNNGGG!!

Club goes wild with applause, lights go down, confetti
 streams everywhere as the competition begins.

INT. NIKKI'S BOOTH - INTERCUT

NIKKI
 --Okay, okay, Girl, here we go...

CARLA
 Huh? What? Here we go, where?
 What'chu you talkin' 'bout, Willis?

MC SUCH & SUCH
 --Here we go, now! Can I get all
 our Quarter-Finalists to come on up
 to the stage when I call ya names.

INT. KENJI'S BOOTH - SAME TIME

In a booth across the room, Kenji and Tommy sit drinking.
 Birthday Cone hats on, a Cake with candles, cards, glitter,
 and Drinks scattered the table.

They both eye Gayle as she arrives and walks through the room
 towards the stage, dressed to kill.

TOMMY
Daaaang! That girl finer than a
 mutha!

KENJI
 Yeah, she's a Bijo alright, but--

TOMMY
 --A B-Hoe? What kind'a chuckwagon
 hoe is a--

KENJI
 --Noo, Bijo. like B-Joe. It means
 she's a beautiful Lady, T.

TOMMY
 Man I gotta get my Japanese game
 right. Hey, K', look. Is that? Is
 that Carla and Nikki over there?--

KENJI

--Where? Yeah, baby! I knew it! I invited Nikki hoping she'd bring Carla--she did! Yesss!

TOMMY

What? you know good n twell you can't hit that.

KENJI

Ahh, my Brotha from anotha...I'm not trying to *hit* that-- I'm trying to *keep* that! She's the kind you keep, Tom-Tom! She a *hit it and keep it*. You feel me?

MC calls names for the competition. Kenji takes off his hat.

MC SUCH & SUCH

--K-Day!

KENJI

Okay, here I go, Bro. Check your guy out.

TOMMY

--What? That's you? K-day?? Bahaha!! You can't sing, fool! I gotta see this--

MC SUCH & SUCH

--Nikkita-matata.

INT. CARLA'S BOOTH - INTERCUT

Nikki gets up, primps.

NIKKI

--Okay, here I go, let me show you how I get down--

CARLA

--Hey, wait, is that K-day guy, is that Kenji? Our Kenji from work??

NIKKI

Yep, he invited me. It's his Birthday weekend. Girl, he been tryin' to get at me for the longest, but I don't date co-workers, uh, uh, noooo!

She heads to the stage. Carla watches just as Sterling enters the club and is escorted to the stage, right past her table.

CARLA
(mumbles)
--My goodness, you again...

He SLOW MOTION glances her, raises an eyebrow. She almost gasps as she watches him pass.

CARLA (CONT'D)
--Who exactly are you, you tall
hunk of--

The Host returns with the first round of drinks, startles Carla out of musing, places drinks on table.

HOST #1
--Oh, that's Mr. James--

CARLA
(startled)
--Oh shit!!

HOST #1
His Studio sponsors the
competitions every year, and--

CARLA
--I didn't even see you!!

HOST #1
Oh, haha, sorry, I tend to just pop
up like that, it's what I do. It's
my job, hehe.

CARLA
Well, unless you wanna lose it
(beat)
Don't do that shit again!

Tommy walks up to Carla's booth, takes Nikki's seat.

TOMMY
--Hey now, Carla! I didn't know you
was into Karaoke. You sing, girl?

CARLA
Hey, Tommy. What are you--oh,
that's right, you and Kenji, Uh, K-
day, celebrating his birthday, huh?

TOMMY

Yeah, yeah. Half the office is here celebratin'. Seth and Amy's table's over there somewhere, too

(leans in)

It's the only way he could get us to listen to his ass sing, ha!

The MC calls for attention.

MC SUCH & SUCH

--Now, as y'all know, the winners tonight will be into the Semi's, and could win a Finals trip to Vegas for the Championship, so pull out your *sanging* hats, and ya' betta blow us away--or in Atlanta yo' ass will stay, hahaaa!

Applause from crowd, lights go down, Sterling steps out front.

MC SUCH & SUCH (CONT'D)

But before we get started tonight, how 'bout a huge round of applause for our money-man, ha-ha! Mr. Sterling James, and his StarChild Studios, our sponsor for Mic Fest for the last five years running, y'all!

Big applause from the crowd, Sterling modestly waves. Nikki takes him in from behind, up and down, glances to Carla, who sips her drink, wide-eyed, takes him in from the front.

MC SUCH & SUCH (CONT'D)

Mr. James, a word or two, please?

STERLING

Oh, yes, yes thanks, uh, Such & Such. Thank you, everybody. We're happy, again, to help highlight the incredible talent and diversity we have in our beautiful city, and I want to take this opportunity to make a very special announcement here, with you, our loyal singers and musicians.

Carla, sipping, takes a good listen and long look at Sterling as he stands next to a sponsor's digital LEADER BOARD for contest. Various stage names are scrolled.

STERLING (CONT'D)

--We've been in Beta mode for a couple of weeks, but I'm now happy to announce that we've partnered with a software developer and we're going live with our Worldwide Karaoke App next week. You'll be able to sing with Karaoke singers all over the world!

A DEMO MONTAGE on the club's big screens showing SINGERS from around the world (Tokyo, New York, London) connecting via the App.

STERLING (CONT'D)

With our new App, anyone—from Tokyo to Atlanta—can duet live with anyone, anytime. The world's your stage.

Crowd loudly claps approval, Kenji and Nikki are excited, Carla takes more note of Sterling.

STERLING (CONT'D)

--So, soon you'll be singing Karaoke wherever you want to, whenever you want to; on your cell phone or your computer, in your car, in your bathroom! Anywhere, anytime, 24/7, 365!

He hits a few notes to a popular song (think Smokey Robinson, BEING WITH YOU) as the girls sway to his dulcet tones.

STERLING (CONT'D)

--I don't care what they think about me and, I don't care what they say...I don't care what they think that you sound like, we're gonna get you to sing...

Kenji watches him with envy.

KENJI

(to self)

--Mukatsuku! He's all kakko tsuke sugi, then shiretto shiteru like he didn't just emotionally seduce every girl in here with his sad-boy falsetto. Riajuu ka yo. I need a drink...

INTERCUT:

Sterling leaves the stage to loud applause, Carla's eyes follow him as she sips. He's met by Gayle. Carla watches closely as they talk.

MC SUCH & SUCH
 --Alright! Let's get this party
 started! Our first Vocalist hails
 from the great state of
 Pennsylvania, put your hands
 togetha' for Ms. Nikkita-matataaaa!!

APPLAUSE as cameras follows Nikki into a booth and zoom in for the big screen TVs to broadcast throughout the club.

All fall silent, lights drop. Cameras zoom on Nikki. Curtains pull back to show her with a Mic. Suddenly, the rhythmic beats of (think Adina Howard's 'FREAK LIKE ME') ring out.

Mic in hand, she begins a slow gyration dance out of booth, onto the stage like a veteran, paces around the dance floor, catches eyes from GUYS & GIRLS. She slays her performance.

NIKKI
 --*I need a freak in the mornin',
 freak in the evenin', just like me!*

She glances at Sterling. He glances back, wide-eyed. Gayle tugs his arm and they walk off.

NIKKI (CONT'D)
 --*I need a rough-neck Brotha' that
 can satisfy me, just fa me!*

INT. CARLA'S BOOTH - INTERCUT

Tommy ogles Nikki as she sings. Carla looks shocked as Nikki finishes her performance.

TOMMY
 --What?! Did she just sing that??

CARLA
 No! Evidently, she just *sang that*,
 wow!!!

They both claps hard as Nikki struts back to the booth, looking around to make sure she's catching eyes, sexy-walkin' as she goes.

NIKKI
 --Did I slay, Baaaatch? What??

TOMMY

--You friggin' murdered! Slayed!
Beat that shit up, Girl--you sang
like a pro, moved like a hoe,
lookie-here, I--

NIKKI

--Whatchu you doing here, Tommy?!

TOMMY

What? You know we're celebratin' my
Boy's--

NIKKI

(threatening)

--Well, make sure yo' ass do it
from over there! I ain't forgot
that shit, Nugga--

TOMMY

--Huh? That-that was like, ten
years ago, Nikki! At some point you
get over it, daaamn! I told you I
didn't know that shit was...

She reaches for him, he quickly hops out of her seat.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

--Okay, okaaay! I'm outta here,
anyways. Peace out, Carla.

NIKKI

Yeah, that's right, keep it movin',
with yo' sick ass!
(to Carla)
Don't ask, Girl.

INTERCUT:

MC SUCH & SUCH

--And nowww, we bring to the mic,
hailing from the golden state of
Georgia, by way of San Francisco,
California, it's K-daaay!!

Big applause as Kenji enters a booth, party hat on, camera
zooms in. All fall silent, lights drop as smooth R&B sounds
of (think Babyface's 'WHIP APPEARL') fall.

Carla's eyebrow raises as she hears him sing.

Kenji glimpses Nikki's booth, see's Carla paying attention,
he slowly moves around the room, over to Seth and Amy's
table, they cuddle as he sings to them.

He leans in to sing to the couple just as Amy exhales a cloud of marijuana smoke from a bowl she holds; he waves smoke away, staggers past the table, keeps singing.

INT. CARLA'S BOOTH - INTERCUT

CARLA

--Awww, look at them! I didn't know those two were an item, that's sooo cute!

Kenji moves around the room, towards Carla's booth.

NIKKI

--Okay, here he come, Girl. He gon' be tryin' to serenade a bitch after that performance. He been crushin' hard, but he ain't my...

Kenji walks up to their booth, looks Carla in the eyes, sings soulfully, directly to her, totally ignoring Nikki.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

(mumbles)

--What the?--

KENJI

--Aye, youuu, got that whip appeal, so come on and work it on me...

Carla looks at Nikki, Nikki looks at Kenji, smirks.

NIKKI

Well, happy birthday to yo' ass, too, then! Ain't this a bitch?

Carla blushes as Kenji sings directly to her a moment longer, ignoring Nikki. Carla gives him a big smile.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

--Really? Really?? Shiii--she don't want no dick! I'm losin' to a celibate bitch that don't even want the dick?! Dayumnnn!

INT. SETH AND AMY'S BOOTH - SAME TIME

Tommy sits with Seth and Amy checking out the performance. They pass the self-contained 'Bowl of weed' stealthily around the table, puffing, passing among each other.

TOMMY

(exhales)

--Damn! My Boy is really doin' the damn thang...

SETH

(blows smoke)

I didn't know he could sing like that...

AMY

I didn't know he was after The Closer!

(puffs)

That's sooo cute!

Kenji ends his song at the next table, singing to that couple, as if he was singing to just anybody. Carla takes notice of him, takes him in, then dismisses the thought.

Kenji returns to his table, excited to have sung to Carla. He whispers to Tommy.

KENJI

--Dude, did you see that? That was a total natsukashii moment, it--

TOMMY

--A naka-sushi what??

KENJI

Natsukashii - nostalgic. Reminded me of my high school crush days, just waiting for a smile back, then she totally smiled at me. That's gotta mean something, right?

TOMMY

(grins)

Right, because a friendly smile always means take me on a date, Kenji.

KENJI

It's all about reading between the lines, my man.

TOMMY

Exactly. Be confident, smooth, and just a little bit mysterious. But maybe leave off the Party Hat next time.

Kenji grabs for his hat.

KENJI

--No, I did not just do that!!

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT CONFERENCE ROOM - NEXT DAY

Carla adamantly pitches her Iichi-Kuuchi project to Boss, MR. MORGAN, 40s, WHITE. Nikki, and Sales Exec KAREN MORGAN, WHITE, 30s, and REPS take notes as she paces in front of a big digital whiteboard.

MR. MORGAN

--I just don't think *Karaoke* is going to cut it, Carla, I mean, c'mon, it's...Karaoke. I, I don't think--

CARLA

--And I don't think you're looking at the big picture, here, Chief-- their Culture!

MR. MORGAN

But, it's Vegas, Carla. It's a \$100,000 budget, in Vegas. How the hell is Karaoke gonna guarantee--

CARLA

--An ROI? Foot traffic? Engagement for our Client? Boss--there's fewer things in Vegas that draw a bigger crowd than the casinos, fights, shows, and--

NIKKI

--And strip clubs! Don't forget those! Plenty of traffic there, I'm jus' sayin'...

CARLA

Thanks, Nikki. But after that: drunk people singing Karaoke will always bring traffic to your booth. And with this kind of budget, Chief, we can actually build out...

She clicks a button and virtually rips a page off the digital whiteboard, shows diagrams and sketches of a two-story "Karaoke Box" structure, separated into four rooms.

CARLA (CONT'D)

--Thiss!

All take in the visuals. Karen rolls her eyes, gets up, walks to the big screen, Carla eyes her sharply.

KAREN

What, what the hell is that? A, a--

CARLA

--It's a Karaoke Box, Karen.
Each room is soundproof and
operates independently, with
microphones and control panels for
Karaoke machines in each room...

Carla clicks in to show the details of the rooms. Nikki stands up, claps.

NIKKI

--Wow, Girl. You really nailed this
one, well done! Well, Mr. Morgan,
looks like Vegas it is, huh??

MR. MORGAN

Well, hold on now, hold on--

KAREN

--Yeah, just hold on there--

MR. MORGAN

--Silence, Karen.

KAREN

O-okay, Uncle, okay...

CARLA

I've done the research, Boss, I'm
practically an expert. Karaoke is
like a national pastime in Japan. I
mean, it's the birthplace of
Karaoke, for goodness sake.

Carla at whiteboard, everyone eyes her diagram, Karen looks closely.

KAREN

Is that, is that a
(pause)
Bar??

CARLA

Yes! Very good, Karen, finally
something you can recognize.

NIKKI
(mumbles)
AA meetings are free...

CARLA
--It even has a self-service drink
Bar out front for plenty of Saki,
or whatever you swig these days,
yes.

Mr. Morgan looks over the paperwork.

MR. MORGAN
--Well, it looks like you've
certainly done the work on this,
Carla. I'm impressed with your
profit margins here, too. You do
realize we only have one shot at
this proposal, and I have to say
it's probably the biggest we've had
in our two years of operation--]

CARLA
--It *is* the biggest, Sir. They'd
fly in from Japan and we'd put on
the best Karaoke party ever,
American style.

The Sales team all glance at Mr. Morgan, he ponders.

CARLA (CONT'D)
I promise you, Boss; this will win
them over. I mean, Saki and Karaoke
in Vegas? What could be more fun,
more engaging after a long day on
the tradeshow floor?

He ponders a moment. Carla eyes him. Silence as he looks over
the paperwork, then resigns.

MR. MORGAN
--Okay, okay, we'll go with your
proposal.

CARLA
--Yes!!

MR. MORGAN
Unless somebody else has a better
looking plan, with better margins
for the budget?

Carla looks around the table, and at Karen with that "don't dare raise your hand" look. Everyone dips heads to avoid her gaze.

MR. MORGAN (CONT'D)
--Okay, then, it's a go. Let's get this drawn up and ready to submit first thing tomorrow.

Everyone celebrates the win.

MR. MORGAN (CONT'D)
--Carla, you're on point on this, and you're showing some great potential here. I'm sure I don't have to tell you the kind of commission you'll earn if we pull this off--

CARLA
--I do! Believe me, I, I do--

MR. MORGAN
--Not to mention the Director of Accounts spot I need filled.

Carla shows a gleam in her eyes. Karen glances her jealously, Carla beams her back.

CARLA
Yes, Sir, I'm well aware--

MR. MORGAN
--Good, then. Make sure you've got every detail covered.

CARLA
Yes!! Thank you, Chief, you won't regret this. I'll get everything going and submitted immediately, Sir--

MR. MORGAN
--And, I want you to personally check that Karaoke Box thing out. We can't afford mistakes, problems, or anything on this; get it done, ya heard?!

She slowly turns to the camera, smirks at his "ya heard" comment, then laughs and winks at Nikki. Nikki mouths back, "VEGAS BABY!" pumps fist.

INT. CARLA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Carla on the couch with a plate of Spaghetti, Fried Fish, and a side salad, nibbles at plate.

Suddenly, ON SCREEN her phone buzzes with an incoming call from her office relay, she dismisses dinner and picks up.

CARLA
--Hello, this is Carla.

INT. IICHI-KUUCHI INTERNATIONAL LTD, TOKYO - INTERCUT

Fumiko is reviewing Las Vegas nightlife on her computer screen.

FUMIKO
--Hiii, Ms. Queen!

CARLA
Fumiko?

FUMIKO
Yes, yes, It is I, Ms. Queen, I--

CARLA
--Actually, it's Ms. King, Fumiko, but--

FUMIKO
--Oh? How so? You are Woman, you cannot be King, must be Queen. I call you, Ms. Queen, no?

Carla does a slow turn into the camera, raised eyebrow.

CARLA
Uh, no, Fumiko, I'm
(beat)
Why are you calling me now?

FUMIKO
Oh, I sorry, I forget time difference. I have good news I wish to tell you!

CARLA
Okaaaay, what do you want to tell me, Fumiko?

FUMIKO

Yes, yes, I tell you good news; we have selected your Company proposal for our Las Vegas event, Yay!

CARLA

What?? I mean--the budget and all was approved, everything?

FUMIKO

Yes, everything approved already, my Boss loves Karaoke! You will send final invoice for approval, uh, ASAP, no?

CARLA

No! --I mean, yes!! Yesss, Fumiko, ASAP! Thank you! Well, I'll, I'll get to work on this immediately.

FUMIKO

Thank you, Ms. Queen, I go now, bye, bye--

CARLA

--No, Fumiko, it's King, not...

A sudden click on other side ends the call. Carla looks at phone, shocked, then elated.

CARLA (CONT'D)

--Yes, yesss, Ms. Fumiko! You can call me whatever you want, long as that contract is signed, sealed and delivered, Baby! Cha-ching! Hey, heyyy!

Slides off her couch, grabs her past due MORTGAGE BILL, and does a little happy dance.

INT. DOT'S COFFEE HOUSE - MORNING

Carla is next in line at the counter, prepares to pay for her order, but hears a familiar voice behind her.

STERLING

--I've got hers. My treat for the Lady today, if she'll allow it?

She turns to see Sterling, her mouth drops open, she quickly shuts it.

CARLA

--Oh, goodness, thank, thank you,
uh, Mr.?

STERLING

James, Sterling James, but please,
call me Sterling.

She turns to the clerk and nods to keep from blushing, then
back to Sterling.

CARLA

Thank you, Sterling.

She grabs coffee, Bagel, nods to Sterling and turns to walk
out. She suddenly diverts to an open table, sits rigid, back
to counter. She talks to herself, frantically.

CARLA (V.O.)

What am I doing? I don't know this
man from Adam! OMG, if he walks by
me, I swear. If he doesn't
recognize a real Queen when he--

STERLING

--Hello, uh, you look familiar,
have I met you? I don't know, maybe
at Mic Fest or something? I usually
don't--

CARLA

--Yes! Uh, yes, I was there Friday,
supporting a friend. I, I don't
recall seeing, uh, meeting you, but
yes, I was there.

STERLING

I thought so. I see a lot of faces
wanting to break into the music
industry, but yours--

CARLA

(taken aback)

--Excuse me? I'm no contestant, I'm
a serious businesswoman, not some
amateur looking for a break.

Sterling throws hands up.

STERLING

No offense meant, Ms.? Mrs.?

CARLA

Queen--I mean, King! Carla King.

STERLING
Regardless, Ms. King, I won't often
forget a face like yours.

CARLA
(blushing)
Oh, I--

He pulls up a chair as she nervously fiddles with her hair.

STERLING
Can I sit? I mean, you waiting on
someone? I don't want to--

CARLA
--No! I mean, no. I'm, uh, just on
my way to work. This is my usual
stop. Coffee is for closers, you
know, ha!

STERLING
Closers, huh? So, what do you do,
if you don't mind?

He sips coffee, looks at her with interest. She relaxes a
bit, sips coffee.

CARLA
Well, umm, I'm in Entertainment
Productions.

STERLING
Oh? What kind of productions?
You're a filmmaker, Act, Sing,
what?

CARLA
Ha! You said sing. You don't know
how many times that's come up this
week, ahh, man!--

STERLING
--What, you sing?

CARLA
Well, truth be told, I do a lil'
somethin' somethin' on the mic, you
know. but--

STERLING
--Really? Well, you should come by
the Studio sometime.

He hands her a business CARD.

STERLING (CONT'D)
We're right here, downtown Atlanta.
Launching a new Karaoke App this
week.

They eye each other.

CARLA
Karaoke? Ha, I'm a serious singer,
I don't do Karaoke. That's for
kids, isn't it?

STERLING
--What?

INT. FUMIKO'S HOUSE, JAPAN - LATER

Fumiko in pajamas, with Udon, Rice Cakes, and Saki, WATCHES
T.V., which is interrupted by a Weather Report.

WEATHER LADY
--Where Tropical Storm Wanda Jean
is actually strengthening in the
North Pacific and is expected to be
unprecedented in strength, a direct
result of global warming...

Fumiko's face goes aghast.

WEATHER LADY (CONT'D)
--We're going to watch for your
travel plans from Japan to the West
Coast of the U.S. for the next
several days and keep you
updated...

FUMIKO
What?? Nooo! Las Vegas!

She drops Udon, runs to computer table, logs in, types direct
message addressed to Carla.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT SALES OFFICE - INTERCUT - LATER

Carla at desk, ON SCREEN gets incoming DM from Fumiko, reads.

CARLA (V.O.)
--What? I don't--a storm? What the
hell's she talking about?

Types back ON SCREEN: "NOT A PROBLEM, WE GET STORMS ALL THE
TIME, COME ON OVER!".

Fumiko frantically types back ON SCREEN: "NO, CARLA QUEEN, THIS BIG GLOBAL WARMING STORM, NO AIR-TRAVEL FROM JAPAN NEXT WEEK, MAYBE!!"

CARLA (V.O.)
 --Oh, shiit; that can't be true,
 Fumiko! Drop the Saki, back away
 from the computer...

Carla types back ON SCREEN: "I'M SURE IT'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, I WILL CHECK ON THIS AND GET BACK TO YOU ASAP!". She closes DM. Ponders.

She opens a new Window to the WEATHER CHANNEL website. Clicks into Regional Weather Forecast, the North Pacific. A look of concern as 'Hurricane Wanda Jean' simmers ON SCREEN.

CARLA
 --Naw, no way. It's, It's just not
 gonna do that
 (beat)
 You wouldn't do that to your Girl,
 mess with my money? Would ya',
 Wanda Jean? Hm? Naw...

A look of hopeful worry on her face.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT - BREAK ROOM - LATER

Kenji enters, stops in doorway when he sees Carla at the Coffee station with a stack of papers. He checks himself, looks around, and walks up to pastry table.

Carla juggles the stack of papers, her coffee, and then her ringing phone. She's about to drop everything when--

KENJI
 --Got it!

He swiftly takes the top stack of files from her arms.

CARLA
 --Oh, thanks, Kenji.

KENJI
 Well, looks like someone is having
 a morning.

CARLA
 Tell me about it. This Iichi Kuuchi
 deal is huge and I--

She almost trips over a chair leg--Kenji steadies her by the elbow, instinctively protective.

KENJI

--Whoa, hey, let's get you sitting down before you take out half the office.

She laughs.

CARLA

--Kenji, hey, so, I was like, totally shocked to hear you sing Friday night, I mean, c'mon guy, you've been holdin' out!

KENJI

Oh, thanks, thanks, Carla. I uh, enjoy trying to sing a lil bit, yes--

-

CARLA

--Trying? Ha! Babyface himself would've loved that performance. Sooo, did it work? You think she noticed?

KENJI

Huh? Did what work? Who notice what? What--

CARLA

--I thought it was very creative; Nikki doesn't always pay attention to every guy, but if you totally ignore her, ha, brilliant.

KENJI

Ohh, oh, yeah. Yeah, she's, uh, pretty good at ignoring--

CARLA

--Mannn, it must be nice having someone who really wants to get with you like that. I mean, in a real way, you know? It's hard to find real men, sincere men. Someone who wants to work together, build up some stuff together, you know what I mean?

KENJI

I know what you mean, I--

CARLA

--She's really lucky you're feelin' her like that. I mean, most guys just wanna hit-it-and-quit it, you know? Somebody that's serious like you are? Phffft, I'd live for that, yeah.

KENJI

Yeah, live for that. Well, I feel like she never even noticed I was really singing to her, you know, so--

-

CARLA

--Oh, I think she noticed, alright. Did you see the look on her face when you sang to me and not her?! Ha! Fire. You guys are gonna make me get back on the Mic, too, I tell ya, you both were sooo good!

KENJI

Thanks, Carla. The App makes it pretty easy to just jam, so--

CARLA

--Hey, speaking of Apps, that Sterling guy from the Studio invited me for a tour. Maybe I can use 'em for my project. He's launching a new Karaoke App, right?

KENJI

--Who? Oh, *that* dude, the wanna be Denzel? Him? He's probably got 'em lined up around the corner, nahmsayin'.

CARLA

Hmm, well, be that as it may, this is business and I need this promotion. If he can provide Sound Service and video coverage for my event I might actually be able to enjoy Vegas while we're there. Who knows, maybe I'll get lucky and find a guy that's crazy for me, ha!

She sips coffee. He stumbles at saying more.

CARLA (CONT'D)

'Aight, I gotta get back to work, I'll see ya, K-Day.

She grabs her stack of papers, pivots and walks off. He eyes her as she walks away, drops his head in resignation.

INT. STARCHILD RECORDING STUDIOS - LATER

Cyndi scopes Carla pulling into the Studio lot through the big window. Carla parks and enters, Cyndi greets her.

CYNDI

--Hello, welcome to StarChild Studios, how can I help you?

CARLA

Hi, yes, I'm Carla Queen--King!

(mumbles)

Damnit Fumiko.

--Sorry, Carla King. I'm here for Mr. James?

Cyndi takes Carla in, likes what she sees, looks in her book and mumbles.

CYNDI

Yes, yes you are...

CARLA

I'm sorry, excuse me?

CYNDI

Oh, sorry, my bad--yes, I do see you here, Ms. King, with an open invitation, no less, hmm.

Glances.

CYNDI (CONT'D)

Please, have a seat, make yourself comfortable, I'll make Mr. James aware of your arrival.

Excited, she scoots off. Carla watches her disappear around a corner, down a hall.

CARLA

Hmph...

INT. STERLING'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Cyndi enters Sterling's office, interrupts a meeting with Tad and Alan, all are laughing, just kickin' it.

CYNDI

--Boss! Boss, She's here.

STERLING

(startled)

Who? Who's here?? My Ex?? Friggin'
Gabrielle Union?? Who? Who's here??

CYNDI

She's here. Dots' Coffee House
Girl!?

STERLING

--Oh, shiiit!

He startles in his seat, adjusts tie, shuffles papers, straightens desk. Cyndi straightens his tie, turns to Tad and Alan, who, amazed at his response, lean back in their chairs.

CYNDI

--I'm gonna need you guys to do a
hard exit once she's in, no goofy
shit, you hear me?

Both sit up in their chairs, recoil, and nod heads in agreement.

TAD

Who-who the hell is this Lady? You
guys jumpin' like the Queen's come
a' callin', or something?

Cyndi grabs his arm, stands him up, turns him to look out the interior window to Lobby, Alan gets up to look, too, she points.

CYNDI

--Her.

ALAN

--OMG

(beat)

It *IS* Gabrielle Union!!

STERLING

Don't be silly, that's not
Gabrielle. But I gotta tell ya, she
may as well be.

Cyndi smiles, scoots out to get her. Tad gets up, starts walking out.

TAD

--Uhh, I got a, uh, call to make. I gotta go--

ALAN

--What? You--you don't wanna see Gabrielle up close? In person?

TAD

What? Naw, I-I saw her in the movies, I'm good, I'm good--gotta get this call in.

STERLING

(surprised)

What?! Okay, okay, whatever. You guys just gimme some space, gimme some space--

ALAN

--What the hell you all excited for, Sterls? Whatcha got going here, huh? A little date brewin', hmm?

They all look again at Carla through the window as Cyndi brings her over, Tad glances Sterling, quickly exits the room, heads down the hall.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS - SAME TIME

Cyndi, stepping quickly with Carla pacing behind, opens door for Carla's entry. Alan prepares to exit, takes in Carla.

ALAN

--I'll, uh, I'll get that locked down by Friday, Sterls, I'll send paperwork

(to Carla)

Good day, Miss.

STERLING

Thanks, Alan, see you for lunch next week, Bro.

(to Carla)

Ahh, Carla, come on in, please.

Offers Carla a seat, Cyndi and Alan at door, smiling. Sterling tries to head-nods them out.

CYNDI

--Boss, can I bring Lemonade? Anything?

STERLING
No, no, Cyndi, thanks--

CARLA
--Yes! Yes, actually, Cyndi, my
throat is a little parched today, I
would love a cool drink, thank you.

Cyndi smiles, leaves the door open, Sterling re-seats.

STERLING
So, wow, Carla, to be honest I
didn't think you'd take me up on a
visit, I--

CARLA
Oh? Why's that Sterling? Why
wouldn't I?

STERLING
Well, I just thought maybe you'd be
too busy, or maybe you had a studio
already, or--

CARLA
--No, I don't, actually. I'm
Producing my first Karaoke event
and looking for some professional
pointers on a Sound System for a
Karaoke Box.

STERLING
Okay, okay. So, you don't have a
studio and you're producing a
Karaoke event. Well, that's
something we do very well here.

CARLA
Yes, yes, so I understand.

STERLING
So, what do you think of all this?

CARLA
Of what? The Karaoke?

STERLING
Yeah. The people chasing their
little dreams, hoping to be the
next big thing. I mean, it's just
karaoke.

CARLA
(sharply)
Is it, Sterling?

Carla frowns as he casually sips his drink. He give pause.

CARLA (CONT'D)
I don't think it's about just that.
Some people just love music.

STERLING
Sure. But love of music doesn't pay
the bills, does it?

CARLA
No, but it does put into words
things people can't just say, Mr.
James.

She narrows her eyes. He smirks, leaning in slightly.

STERLING
What? You don't think half these
contestants are trying to Duet with
me, get my attention?

CARLA
Are they?

STERLING
I don't sing with strangers.

Carla studies him carefully, something shifting in her
expression.

EXT. ANNIE NELSON SUMMER DAY CAMP - DAY

An overview of the Summer Day Camp.

INT. DAY CAMP - DAY

TEACHER, 35, at desk with kids around her. Epiphany on the
floor with three other KIDS, 5-7. A huge Playhouse in the
center, kids all around swoop up different Play Figures.

KID #1
--I'm the 'Real State Man'!

EPIPHANY
I'm the Mom, she's the Boss!

KID #2

Well, I-I'm the Daddy. He's got money, and--and a job, and--and--

EPIPHANY

--No! You can't be my Daddy, he's in Heaven already...

Kid #2 pauses a moment.

KID #2

--Well

(pause)

Well, I'm the Boss, then. You can't be both! Teacher!!

EPIPHANY

No! Mommy is the Boss! You can't...

She begins to well up, tears forming in her eyes. Teacher arrives.

TEACHER

--What's going on, huh? Ohh, playing house, are ya? Well, that's fun!--

EPIPHANY

--He, he's trying to be the Daddy, but he can't be! Daddy is gone already!

Teacher takes it in, careful with her words.

TEACHER

Ohhh, your Daddy is gone already, Epiphany?

Epiphany calms down, a bit.

EPIPHANY

Mom says he's already waitin' in Heaven for us when we get there. He...he drove his car there to wait for us!

TEACHER

Aww, yes, yes, he is!

(leans in)

Can you just imagine the big house he's got for you and Mommy? Wowww!--

KID #2

(quietly)

--Your, your Dad's in Heaven
already? My, my Grandpa's in
Heaven, too. Okay, okay, but can I
still be the Boss?

Teacher glimpses Epiphany.

EPIPHANY

Okay, okay, you be the Boss--you
can be Boss at work, but, I'm the
real Boss at home, Mom says.

Teacher smiles, pats her heart, adoringly.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS - SAME TIME

STERLING at his desk with Carla.

STERLING

--I mean, no one's gonna know the
Karaoke Box sound system better
than we are. You really should let
us draw up a proposal, I'd love to
win you
(gasp)
Win your *business*--I, I'm sorry, I--

Carla glances him.

CARLA

--Are you flirting with me, Mr.
James?

Eye contact, silence. Cyndi returns with Drinks, sets them
both up, smiling knowingly.

CYNDI

--Boss, is there anything else I
can do for you here?

STERLING

Uh, no, Cyndi, thank you,
appreciate 'cha.

She smiles at Carla, takes the tray, exits room and closes
the door. Carla sips lemonade, clears her throat.

CARLA

--Whew. Needed that, my throat's
been a little sensitive, sorry.

(MORE)

CARLA (CONT'D)
So, what's this, now, you want to
bid on the Sound System for my
Vegas event, you say?

STERLING
Well, I'm just sayin' no one's
going to do you better than me
(gasps)
I mean, no one's goin to give you a
better *deal* than we are, here at
StarChild!!

Carla takes note of STERLING, he sweats at the brow,
straightens his tie.

CARLA
Sooo, do you *do* all your clients
better than the competition,
Sterling?

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Sterling walks Carla to the front lobby. Tad peeks out his
office window blind as they walk past his office.

TAD
She's got some nerve...

INT. STARCHILD LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Sterling walks behind Carla, checks her legs and ass out,
makes comical faces of astonishment, joy, as they walk into
the Lobby.

STERLING
--Yeah, I, uh, really appreciate
you coming in, Carla. I'm sure
you're gonna love my proposal, I
mean, I'm fully equipped to handle
you
(gasps)
I mean--Ugh!

Carla stops, glances him sharply, shakes her head. He dips
his head in embarrassment.

CARLA
My needs, Sterling? I'm sure that's
where you were going, right?
(MORE)

CARLA (CONT'D)

Well, that may be true, but your contract better be tighter than your conversation today, Playa, or you can keep your equipment. Good day.

Sterling and Cyndi watch her walk to the exit. She does not turn back to check if he's watching.

CYNDI

She didn't look back. Now see, that's a sign of a classy chick right there, Boss

(beat)

--You prob'ly leave her alone, Baha!

He's stuck-like-Chuck as he peeps Carla get into her Mercedes through Lobby window blinds. Cyndi shakes her head.

CYNDI (CONT'D)

Mm, mm...you're sprung--

STERLING

(still peeping)

--What? You crazy, I ain't trippin' on her, I--

CYNDI

--Shiiii, you still stuck-on-stupid, look atcha! All hangin' out the window like a little puppy. If ya had a damn tail, it'd be waggin' right now.

STERLING

Yeah, yeah, I'm just tryin' to get us paid. Just pull up my contracts, will ya?

He parts the blinds, watches her drive off.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT - BREAK ROOM - DAYTIME

Carla and Nikki at a table. Carla replays messages, moments, inconsistencies. Nikki watches her.

NIKKI

You're doin' that thing...

CARLA

No...I'm paying attention.

NIKKI

To what?

CARLA

I'm telling you he's giving me
Player vibes

(beat)

He's not who he says he is.

NIKKI

So what--you're just gonna stop
talking to him?

CARLA

No.

(beat)

I want to see who he really is.

NIKKI

And how exactly are you planning to
do that?

Carla ponders.

CARLA

Well, he seems to perform
differently depending on who he
thinks he's talking to. Different
version for different people.

NIKKI

So, which one have you been talkin'
to, then?

CARLA

That's what I'm going to find out.

NIKKI

How?

CARLA

We give him someone new. We bait
him.

NIKKI

Ah, Okay. That's actually pretty
smart.

CARLA

Someone he thinks he can control.

NIKKI

Ahh,

(beat)

(MORE)

NIKKI (CONT'D)

I know exactly who can do that. My
Alter-ego's been itchin' to hit the
streets.

CARLA

Your alter ego?

NIKKI

Babe, If we're gonna do this, we're
gonna dot it right. I got someone
new for ya, don't you worry.

CARLA

Good. And grab Kenji and Tommy,
too. We're going to need them for
my little plan.

NIKKI

Okay, but wait. You're already in
with him, why now?

CARLA

Because I ignored signs before
(beat)
I'm not doing that again.

INT. CARLA'S HOME - EVENING

Carla carries a sleeping Epiphany into her bedroom, tucks her
into bed, kisses her forehead, and mumbles a prayer. Epiphany
stirs.

EPIPHANY

--Good night, Mama.

CARLA

Oh, Good night, my little Princess.

EPIPHANY

Mama

(beat)

I prayed you catch a good Man for
us. I want you to be happy.

Carla's heart melts, it shows on her face. She strokes her
hair.

CARLA

I-I am happy, Baby. You make me so
very, very happy, sweetheart.

EPIPHANY

That's not what I mean, Mama.

CARLA

Thank you, Baby. I think Mama is getting close, but they gotta be really special, Sterling, actually, to get introduced to you.

EPIPHANY

Sterling, Mama? What's that?

CARLA

Good quality, baby, really good quality. And if he's not, he doesn't stand a chance of meeting you.

Epiphany reaches over to touch a framed picture of her parents on her nightstand.

EPIPHANY

Do you miss him, Mom?

Carla freezes for a moment.

CARLA

Of course, Baby. Everyday...

EPIPHANY

Then why don't you ever talk about him.

She was not ready for that. She does not answer. She kisses her again, reaches and turns off the light.

INT. CARLA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carla at computer with a glass of wine, cheese and crackers. She pays bills from a dwindling BANK ACCOUNT. She glances a FINAL NOTICE on her mortgage, a little worry on her face.

She then logs into the KARAOKE APP, hits a few buttons, sees MONTAGE of the profiles, singers, and songs.

CARLA

--Okay, let's see how this all works. Build a profile, hmm.

Sees profiles with flags from different Countries.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Wow! This *is* worldwide.

She types "Nefertiti31" for a stage name, clicks "upload profile picture", ponders.

CARLA (CONT'D)
Well, I'm certainly taking a cue
from you tonight, Miss Nikki...

ON SCREEN: Selects a beautiful headshot of Actress Gabrielle Union.

CARLA (CONT'D)
There, that oughta throw 'em off
and leave 'em hangin'...

ON SCREEN: She clicks on available songs, then "Recommended Songs". She dons her headset, sips wine.

CARLA (CONT'D)
Well, might as well get on with
it...

ON SCREEN; scans song from the playlist.

CARLA (CONT'D)
--Hmm, a variety of singers on the
same song, okay. Let's try this
one.

She clicks and the music (think Alicia Keys 'IF I AIN'T GOT YOU') fills her headset with piano and dulcet tones. She relaxes, sits back, hums, sings.

CARLA (CONT'D)
*--Some people live, for the
fortune, some people live, just for
the fame.*

She relaxes more, belts out an emotional rendition. She grabs a picture of her Husband off the wall, dances, kisses picture. Tears well in her eyes by the end of the song.

CARLA (CONT'D)
--I love you, Baby. I'll learn to
love again, I promise, but this
song, this song is dedicated to
you.

She saves the song in her folder, but stops herself from posting it. She abruptly shuts down the App.

INT. CARLA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Carla, watching TV on couch, eating Popcorn. ON SCREEN; her Tablet lights up, rings with company relay showing a VIDEO CALL, from IICHI KUUCHI. She picks up.

CARLA

--Fumiko?

FUMIKO

Yes! Yes, Mrs. Queen! It is I,
Fumiko. I am sorry for calling,
but, I am worried, Queen.

Carla leaves the couch, takes tablet over to kitchen area..

CARLA

What is it, Fumiko?

FUMIKO

Mrs. Queen, mm

(pause)

I get very big promotion if I plan
good Karaoke event for my Shachou
in Las Vegas, but, the storm, I
don't think--

CARLA

--I, I'm sorry, your what h-hole?

FUMIKO

My Shachou. Oh, shit,

(gasps)

So sorry, Ms. Queen, mm, my
President! My Shachou!

CARLA

--Shachou

(into camera)

N-nn, Nacho. Okay, okay, I, I got
that. Look, Fumiko, I've been
meaning to get back to you. I
think, I think we may need to pivot
till the storm passes--

FUMIKO

--Pivot? I cannot dance, Ms. Queen,
I can sing, a little, but--

CARLA

--Nooo, I mean, you know, change
the plan. I was thinking, we can't
beat Mother Nature, She's kick-ass,
and She's pissed from all the
Global Warming, no doubt, but,
maybe we can get around Her with
technology.

FUMIKO

I like Tech, Ms. Queen! Please,
please, go on!

CARLA

Well, I was thinking, we can take
this event online, you know,
Global, through the web, until the
storm passes.

FUMIKO

You mean, like, streaming platform?

CARLA

An App, Fumiko, a Karaoke App. I
can arrange to take our little show
to the internet, open it up to
every American, hey, we'll have
everybody singing worldwide!

She opens the APP on her laptop and shares her SCREEN showing
the app interface to Fumiko.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Look! We'll get your Branding out
there, sponsorship--

FUMIKO

--You, you mean every American
Woman will see our show on the
internet?

CARLA

Iichi-Kuuchi will be the talk of
the Feminine product world when
we're through, Fumiko.

FUMIKO

Ahh! You are brilliant, Ms. Queen!!
Fumiko is very happy. I must run it
through my Bucho, but--

CARLA

--Wha--what?? Did you say it had to
go through your--

FUMIKO

--Bucho! Buch-o, my immediate
Supervisor, Ms. Queen. He is also
my Uncle, hehe.

A click ends the call.

CARLA

(to self)

--Good, good, Fumiko, you go
through your Buch-hole and we'll
both get promotions! Girl power!
Yes!

INT. STARCHILD RECORDING STUDIOS - SAME TIME

Sterling at the front desk going over contracts with Cyndi.
Tad enters the Lobby.

TAD

--Boss, you guys seen the news??

STERLING

Ahh, shit, what did Tyler do now?

TAD

No, no, it's some kind a Global
Warming super-duper storm or
something over the Pacific. I heard
about it on the news 'couple days
ago, but it was, like, a tropical
storm, but now...

Cyndi tunes the big screen in lobby to Network News. Screen
shows headline news, bottom scroller reads "Hurricane Wanda
Strengthens".

CYNDI

--Shit! Is it gonna be like a
Tsunami, or somethin'? I can't be
havin' to reschedule all these
flights in for Mic Fest!

Panic comes over Sterling's face.

STERLING

--The show!! Shit!

He turns, dashes off down the hall to his office. Cyndi and
Tad return to the TV Weather Report as Kenji and Tommy enter
the lobby.

CYNDI

--Oh, hello, welcome to Starchild
Studios, I'm Cyndi, how may I help
you Gentlemen?

Both take her in, up and down, glance at each other.

KENJI
Hi, we're uh--

TOMMY
(steps in)
--Hello there, Queen. I'm Tommy,
I'm Kenji's, uh, K-Day's Manager,
it's a sincere pleasure to meet you
today.

He proffers hand, she accepts, he kisses her hand, she
smiles. Kenji looks surprised.

CYNDI
--Ohhh, a Gentleman, I see. Oh
yeah, K-Day, I heard you killed it
at Quarterfinals, Congratulations.

KENJI
Oh, thank you, I really--

TOMMY
--Yeah, yeah, um, Miss Cyndi, my
Boy needs some studio time to
practice, and uh, we're wondering
if Denzel, uh, Mr. James, is
available for a tour?

TAD
(laughs)
A tour? Sterling? Haha, I don't
think so. Mr. James doesn't do
tours, uh, that is, unless your
skirt is about yea-high, haha!

Kenji and Tommy turn to each other and laugh.

INT. STERLING'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Sterling logs onto his computer, hits a couple of strokes,
picks up a phone, dials out.

INT. STARCHILD LOBBY - SAME TIME

KENJI and Tommy with Cyndi and Tad.

TOMMY
--Sooo, Ms. Cyndi, who's butt do I
need to kiss to get a tour, then,
hmm?

CYNDI

Oooh! Usually mine, Shuga, but today you gonna have to kiss, uh, ask Tad, here. Mr. James isn't available.

TAD

Who, me? I-I guess, I guess I could do it. I got like, fifteen minutes, sooo--

TOMMY

--Uh oh, wait a minute, big man, I was hoping Cyndi here would--

KENJI

--We'll kiss it! Uh, take it--err, take you, Tad, thanks.

Kenji smiles, Tommy frowns, mumbles.

TOMMY

Cock-blockin' ass...

Cyndi smiles at him, Tad leads both men through the lobby.

INT. CARLA'S DESK, GAB ENTERTAINMENT - INTERCUT

Carla stares at her cell phone's headshot of Sterling as it rings. She picks up.

STERLING (O.S.)

--Hey Carla, eh, what's up?

CARLA

Heyyy, Sterling. Glad you called, wanted to check in, make sure we're all set for the Sound Demo?

STERLING

Uhh, um, about the Semi's--

CARLA

--Yeah, I just wanna be sure we're on top of this, can't give my boss any reason not to promote me next Quarter, you feel me?

STERLING

Uh, yeah. I gotta talk to you about the Weather, I--

CARLA

--What? Weather? Really, Sterling?
It's Summer time, it's Atlanta.
It's Vegas; it's gonna be hot. I
don't know what else to say--

STERLING

--Carla, listen. There's a
freakishly huge storm building over
the Pacific and--and, I don't know,
it may mess up flights in for the
Vegas Finals. It's suppose to be
that big, but--

Carla starts to crumble a bit.

CARLA

--Nooo! Don't you tell me that,
too! Are you serious? If Iichi-
Kuuchi can't get over here, what
the hell am I gonna do, Sterling?

STERLING

I don't know, I--

CARLA

--My Boss is going to kill me if I
don't

(beat)

If we lose this account, have to
cancel, if we have to *refund* this
job! I need this bonus, I--

STERLING

--I know, I know, but, it's a storm
shutting down travel--

CARLA

--It doesn't matter! Can't you see?
We already allocated! We rented, we
spent, hired you--to my Boss, it's
gonna look like I cost the company,
like I failed to foresee the risks,
the weather or something! I could
lose my home if this doesn't work!
I--

STERLING

--Bullshit, they can't blame you
for a storm, Carla!

CARLA

They will, Sterling!! Somehow, I know his Niece will find a way to pin it on me. Shit, I'll be friggin' Wicked Witch of the Weather before she's through pumpin' him with Hater-Aide.

STERLING

I don't know what they expect from you, but--

CARLA

--Heyyy! Can we go online with your App? I, I, was just telling my client--

STERLING

--You mean, do your Karaoke event on our App?

CARLA

--Yeah, yeah! You're launching this week, right? We've got the budget, we can do online competitions till the weather clears, no? You think we can do that?

STERLING

Wow, that's actually brilliant. We've been in Beta for a month now, but we're launching. I suppose we can host it online, get my Engineer to launch your competition on the new platform to--

CARLA

--To open the competition up to the world?

Sterling looks amazed.

STERLING

You are an amazing Lady. Can we talk about it over drinks tonight?

CARLA

Why, yes! Yes we can, Mr. James.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS - SAME TIME

Tad, with Kenji and Tommy trailing behind, walking down a hallway, sound booths on either side, past the control rooms.

TAD

--Yeah, we launch this week so this place 'll be booked solid, glad you guys came in now.

KENJI

Cool, cool. So, seems like a great place to work, huh? How is it here? Boss must treat you guys good, huh?

TAD

Who? Sterling, uh, Mr. James? He 'aight, no complaints. Of course, he gets all the ladies, but hey, when you roll like he does, well...

KENJI

Yeah, he must have a harem, huh?

TAD

--Pfhh, heck yeah, I mean, have you heard the man sing? He sound like Luther--well, almost. I mean, it is Luther--big Luther, big Luther, not little Luther. Yeah, he got some cuties, but you should 'a seen the one he had in here yesterday, ho-ho, man.

TOMMY

Really, was she bad-ass? What she look like? Like Cyndi out there? That girl works for me!

TAD

Well, if you like the Gabrielle Union-type, you know, she was the one. I think she stuck up, though.

KENJI

Stuck up? Ah, one of those high-society types, huh?

TAD

Well, no, not really. I, I actually met her on our App Beta test. Well, kind'a met her, we were suppose to have lunch but--

TOMMY

--Wait, you said she looked like Gabrielle Union?

(to Kenji)

(MORE)

TOMMY (CONT'D)
That's our girl, Hashi. That's
gotta be Carla.

TAD
--Carla? Nooo, her name was Nikki,
Nikkita-Matata, on the App,
actually.

Kenji and Tommy slowly turn heads, look at each other.

INT. DOUBLETREE HOTEL, CLUB FEZ - THAT NIGHT

Sterling in a booth, surprised, as the Waiter leaves another
DISH. Carla talks and eats voraciously as he watches in
amazement with a simple drink in front of him. She pauses.

CARLA
--Am I talking too much? I feel
like, I'm just jabberin' away here--

STERLING
--No, no, you're good. I--

CARLA
--I guess I feel comfortable with
you, I dunno--

She devours a chicken wing.

STERLING
I did say drinks, though, didn't I?

CARLA
--We've got so much to do, I, I
just need to--

Carla finishes the last Wing, slides her plate to the side
and primps before going into complete "business mode".

CARLA (CONT'D)
--Eh, hem. Okay, so, just to go
over things, Mr. James--through
your Studio, we're pivoting for the
Semi's, going online in three days
to boost my Client's Brand
awareness, and hosting everything
on your platform, is that right,
Sterling?

She eyes him intently. He opens up his Pad with the APP on
it, shows a mock up of a DEMO page. He shows her.

STERLING

Uh, yeah, yeah. I brought a--

CARLA

--And if the storm persists we'll be able to negotiate you completing the Finals, online, right?

STERLING

Yeah, yes--

CARLA

--And, barring that, completing the Audio service for our Karaoke Box, in Vegas, IF the storm allows my clients to travel as planned...with no penalties if the Karaoke Box thing doesn't happen?

Carla leans in, raises eyebrow. Sterling takes a sip of his drink and takes her in.

STERLING

Yes.

She leans out, speaks softly, smiles sexily at him.

CARLA

Well, then, problem solved. My only question to you, Sterling, is--what are we waiting for?

INT. CARLA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Carla hums, cell phone raised overhead, earbud chord dangles down. Two fingers pinch and straighten from the top, all the way down, left and right earbuds separated. No tangles.

CARLA

--Perfect.

She dons earbuds and pushes "Live Join" on her selection. (think 'BEST PART', Daniel Caesar & H.E.R.) streams from her phone. She Hums. She moves, dances. She sings.

CARLA (CONT'D)

--If you love me won't you say
somethin'...If You love me won't
ya...

She sees herself in the video. She sings, then notices a "Join" from another Singer. She immediately kills her video feed.

The Video screen splits, and a beautiful Black face pops up, grooving, waiting to sing, next her Gabrielle Union picture.

Singer, STEPHANIE B. 30s, from the U.K., dreamy eyes that flutter with each note, huge Afro, a Siren. She hums in the background. Carla takes a breath and joins her, finally.

CARLA (CONT'D)

*--You're the coffee that I need in
the mornin'...*

STEPHANIE B. & CARLA

*--You're my sunshine in the rain
when it's pourin'...*

Stephanie B. sings as the video solo's on her. She SLAYS!
Both sing, dance, and twirl to the beat.

STEPHANIE B.

*--I just want to see how beautiful
you are; you know that I see...I
know you're a star...*

CARLA

*If life is a movie then you're the
best part...*

EXT. NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN OVERVIEW - NIGHT

Hurricane Wanda seen from RADAR VIEW. 90 MPH winds whip the Seas, Lightning and Thunder flash and roll through the night.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT, CARLA'S CUBICLE INTERCUT - NEXT DAY

A busy office. Carla is on the phone with Fumiko.

CARLA

*--I'm telling you, It's on, Fumiko.
We just need to come up with a
couple of songs, you know, get the
world in on at least two classic
songs everybody knows, and then--*

FUMIKO

*--And then the real R&B takes over,
Ms. Queen?*

CARLA

What? Did you say R&B?

FUMIKO

Yes, of course. Um, my people, my Boss, really like the Rap and R&B, and Fumiko is huge fan, Ms. Queen. It would very much please my Bucho, my Boss, to sing your Music; he no-like Rock & Roll so much.

Carla looks amazed and is pleasantly surprised.

CARLA

Wait a minute--you're telling me you don't want any, any Backstreet Boys, you know
(sings)
I want it that way...

FUMIKO

No.

CARLA

No? No-no, Idina Menzel
(sings)
Let it go, let it go?

FUMIKO

--Oh-hoo, you can sing, Ms. Queen!! No. Please, you must sing for my Bucho, this will be fantastic!

CARLA

Me? No, I can't, I'm not gonna sing for your Buch-ho, Fumiko--

FUMIKO

-Yes, yes! Can you sing Alicia Keyes? Umm, Erykah Bad-hooo?

CARLA

Badu. It's Ba-du

FUMIKO

What Fumiko say?

CARLA

I, can't, I
(beat)
Yeah, yeah, I guess I can--

FUMIKO

--Yesss! I tell my Uncle Bucho we are all set for live, online auditions and our ads run world-wide, no?

CARLA

No--Yes! Yes, Fumiko. Now go, run
tell that!

FUMIKO

Ms. Queen?

CARLA

Run, tell that. You know? Martin,
Lawrence? Sorry, go tell your boss
to warm up those vocal chords,
Fumiko, ha!

I/E. NIKKI'S CAR, CITY STREETS - DAY

Hard funky BEATS as Nikki's Lexus bails down the street, two
heads boppin' to the beat, one is not. KENJI in the front
seat, peeps TOMMY bouncing in the back, shakes head.

He turns to Nikki, who's dressed like it's Friday Night, head
bobbin', ready to turn heads in her "Stunna" outfit, shoes
and a Blonde wig as she drives.

KENJI

--Okay look, Nikki, remember
Carla's plan in here, don't try to--

NIKKI

--Boy, bye. I don't need no
instructions from you on this. All
y'all alike, Asian, Black, it don't
matter, show ya a little tits and
ass, and shiii--

KENJI

--Nikki, please--

NIKKI

--Then ya act like ya wanna be a
Homie after ya hit it, I mean, damn--
-

KENJI

--Please. Can we just stick to the
plan.

Nikki pulls into the StarChild parking lot.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT, CARLA'S CUBICLE - SAME TIME

Carla is on the phone with Sterling.

CARLA

--So I need your engineer to get those two songs on the platform today, we need to start the online auditions tonight--

STERLING

--To get the Ads in front of the masses for your client to see you're delivering?

CARLA

Hmm, completing my sentences already, Sterling? How endearing-- but I need that engineer's work done, today.

STERLING

I'll get him right on it, they'll be on the App tonight.

CARLA

Good. There's also a ten-thousand dollar Prize to the top two performers of each song, and--

STERLING

--What?? That's twenty K! Shiii, that'll get me--uh, a lot of people, singin' on our App!

CARLA

Yes, yes, that's the idea! I want everyone, everywhere, in every Country, singing and uploading to the App!

STERLING

I'll get right on this.

Sterling hangs up, gets a greedy gleam in his eye.

CARLA

(to self)

I bet you will, Sterling.

I/E. STARCHILD STUDIOS - SAME TIME

Nikki struts up the walkway and into the Studio Lobby. Cyndi at desk with a CLIENT as she enters.

CYNDI
 (to Nikki)
 --Hello, I'll be right with you.

NIKKI
 Not a problem, Shuga.

Nikki browses the CD's on the wall while Cyndi finishes with her client. Sterling bursts into the lobby, startling Nikki. She looks him up and down, dreamily.

STERLING
 --Where's Thaddeus??

CYNDI
 He's due back in a few. Can you help this Lady out, please?

NIKKI
 --Shiii--my name is Thaddeus, right now...

He sees Nikki, does a double-take, looks her up and down.

STERLING
 --Yes, yes, I believe I can. My goodness! Look at you! Exactly how can I do you
 (gasps)
 Err--*help* you today? Sorry.

Nikki gives him a very sexy smile, bats her eyes.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME TIME

Carla on a Video call with Fumiko and her Uncle/Bucho, BUCHO ICHIKAWA. He stares blankly at the screen, as if frozen in time with his mouth open, trance-like.

CARLA
 --And now, we're able to feature singers from all over the world! Your Brand, Mr. Ichikawa, will be world-wide to the Karaoke community tonight!

BUCHO ICHIKAWA
 (to Fumiko)
 --Can I sing with her, please?

FUMIKO

Yes, Uncle, yes, she is available
on the platform. You can sing with
her.

CARLA

Who--who, me? Uh ,yeah, yeah, sure.
I'd, uh, love to sing with your,
Bucho, sure, ha.

Bucho Ichikawa is transfixed on Carla's Beauty and presence.
Fumiko takes notice, waves hands in front of his eyes as he
stares blankly at screen.

FUMIKO

--Oji?

BUCHO ICHIKAWA

Oh-ho-ho, I want to sing with
Gabrielle Union--I'm a Bad Boy,
two! Get it? Huh? Huh? Baha!

FUMIKO

Uncle!! She's not Gabrielle--

BUCHO ICHIKAWA

--She's sooo beautiful...

Carla blushes, smiles, then laughs.

CARLA

That's so cute! Yes, Mr. Ichikawa--

BUCHO ICHIKAWA

--You, you can call me Buchooo...

CARLA

Uh, okay, Bu-Buchooo...I would be
honored to sing with you. The main
thing is, storm or not, we'll see
you in Vegas when the storm blows
over, agreed?

BUCHO ICHIKAWA

--Yes, yes, Gabrielle, agreed.

Carla smiles, Fumiko laughs.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS - SAME TIME

Nikki flirting hard with Sterling, who's wide open to her
sexual connotations.

NIKKI

--And I'm a need some private instructions, now and again, Mr. James, do you offer that service?

STERLING

Hell yeah, I can service you. I mean--of course! Of course I do. My private lessons, though, are not for the timid, I must warn you, Ms., Ms., uh?

NIKKI

Oh, uh, um, Minaj.

STERLING

Oh, like, Nikki, right?

NIKKI

Yeah, yeah, but, she can't drop it like I can.

She swivels around and drops all the way to the floor, jiggling all the way back up.

Sterling's jaw drops as he makes a face at Nikki's butt. He glances to Cyndi at her reception desk.

STERLING

--Uh, Cyndi--hold my calls for the next 35-45 minutes, please.

He turns and offers his arm to Nikki, she accepts and they walk down the hall. He whispers in her ear, Nikki giggles. Cyndy shakes her head as they disappear down the hall.

Tad enters the studio and sees Sterling walking down the hall with his arm around a sexy woman's backside.

TAD

--Hmph, he got another one, huh?

CYNDI

Yep, another one bites the dust...

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT CONFERENCE ROOM - NEXT DAY

Carla at the helm of her big Launch meeting. Nikki, Mr. Morgan, Karen and the rest of the SALES TEAM at the table.

CARLA

--Sooo, I'll be going over the platform later today at StarChild, so get those vocal chords warmed up, we're going live tonight!!

KAREN

Did-did you say you actually need Karaoke singers?! Cause I love to sing, Carla! I, I can belt out a mean Muskrat Love! You gotta let me on the Mic! I--

NIKKI

--Karen, um, I don't care what you sound like, personally, but this competition is for real singers. I mean, there's big bucks on the line, so don't even--

CARLA

--No, no, let Karen sing! The more singers, the better! Everyone, just log onto the App tonight, I don't care what you sound like or look like, we need traffic on that site!

NIKKI

And I get to keep the money when I win?

CARLA

Yes! As long as you're not an employee of Starchild Studio, you can win and keep any prizes and monies.

Nikki nods her head, smacks her lips.

CARLA (CONT'D)

--Now, I've picked two generic songs everybody should know for the competition, but you can sing anything you like!

Chatter spreads around the table.

MR. MORGAN

--Alright, alright everyone, you heard her: I want everybody, and your Grandparents, on that App tonight, singing your hearts out.

(MORE)

MR. MORGAN (CONT'D)
Let's give Carla our full support
on this project, and maybe, just
maybe when this is over, we'll have
a big party in Vegas, Baby! Ya
heard?!

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Nikki corners Carla outside the conference room.

NIKKI
--Girl, I need to talk to you!

CARLA
Um, can we talk later? I gotta get
to StarChild for my--

NIKKI
--That's what I'm talkin' 'bout!
That Sterling dude, he, he's--don't
you even care what I found out?

CARLA
--I do, I do, but I gotta go! Call
me tonight!

Carla scoots off, hurries down the hallway. Nikki calls after
her.

NIKKI
--Sterling ain't so sterling,
Carla!

CARLA
What? Call me tonight!

EXT. STARCHILD STUDIOS PARKING LOT - DAY

Carla pulls in and parks, gets out, and heads into the
Studio.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS. LOBBY - SAME TIME

Sterling speaks in the lobby, a dozen EMPLOYEES all stand
around listening.

STERLING

--And, while Tad is finishing up the tech side, I want you guys to go home and get on that App tonight, sing your freakin' hearts out. Call ya' peeps, call ya' cousins', hell, even call ya' Grandma, just get 'em on that app! The more singers we get this week, the more money I, err--we make.

Employees mumble amongst each other, doubtful, hesitant.

TAD

I'll have everything done in an hour or so, and--

Carla enter the studio lobby, Tad freezes up. She sees the gathering and stops in her tracks when she sees Tad. Her mouth drops. Everyone responds to Tad's stop, looks around.

STERLING

--Ah, the Lady of the hour is here. Everyone, I want you to meet our client for this project; this is Carla King with GAB Entertainment.

Various heads nod, smiles all around at Carla. A handclap breaks out from a starry-eyed employee. Everyone joins in.

STERLING (CONT'D)

Carla, c'mon over, I want you to meet my Engineer. This is Thaddeus, he'll take good care of the Platform for you.

Tad remains frozen. Carla stutters over.

CARLA

Uh, thank you, thank you all, uh--

STERLING

(to Tad)

--Let's get her all caught up, shall we, Thaddeus?

Carla glances Tad, face flush with embarrassment. She tries to hide it.

CARLA

T-Thaddeus, nice to, uh, meet you.

She shakes hands vigorously. He gingerly shakes, eyeing her with distrust.

STERLING

--Listen, why don't you two get updated in my office. I'll be in as soon as I finish up here--

CARLA

--Oh, no. I, I don't mind waiting for you, Sterling, I--

STERLING

--Nonsense, Tad's the man, he won't bite ya! At least, I don't think, haha!

Tad and Carla glance at each other.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT - BREAK ROOM - NEXT DAY

Nikki with Kenji and Tommy at a table sipping coffee, leaning in.

NIKKI

--Nigga, please, if I tell you he a man-whore, he a man-whore. He don't care 'bout Carla.

KENJI

--She was right! This fool's really doing it! He's gonna grab the account, and the prize money?!

NIKKI

Don't be jealous, Kenji--He don't care 'bout nothin' but his friends, Dickie and his Ducats--

KENJI

--Dasai! That's what this is. It's not jealousy - it's recognizing the danger of a man who uses vibrato like a love potion.

NIKKI

--Yeah, he on the App, too, King Luther, phff--His ass got a profile on Carla's profile, too. He tryin' to win the Scrilla!

TOMMY

This mothafu--

NIKKI

Um, hm. I mean, you guys don't
known how hard it was

(pause)

Literally, to get through that
mission. Y'all owe me one, I--

TOMMY

--Wait. So, you tellin' me you
didn't give-in to 'em, Nikki?

NIKKI

--Of course not, daaang! I--

TOMMY

--Morris Chestnuts didn't make yo'
ass wanna--

NIKKI

--Ha, he wish! I was on a mission

(pause)

A mission to smash his asssss!!

KENJI/TOMMY

What??

NIKKI

Hahaaa! I had that fool dancin' in
his chair! He was practically buck-
naked on the couch, I was--

KENJI

--You're lying, Nikki.

She winks at Kenji, turns to walk out, Tommy trails behind
her, wanting to know.

TOMMY

--Nikki--You, you didn't--

NIKKI

--Totally smashed!

TOMMY

You didn't, you--

NIKKI

--Broke his desk, too!!

TOMMY

Nooo! Don't tell me that--

NIKKI

--Broke the chair, first!

She walks out, laughing. Tommy looks back to Kenji, who shakes his head.

KENJI

Man, you're beefin' one day, trying to get in her pants the next. You're never going to get that, Dog.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS - LATER

Carla with Tad. They are not meshing.

TAD

--Naw. Uh, *hell* naw. Why should I? You guys were all--

CARLA

--You gotta believe me, Tad! I, I didn't mean to disrespect you, I really was helpin' my girl, uh, Nikkita-matata out--

TAD

--And so now you expect me to just, just roll over, huh? Mannn! See, see

(beat)

This is the very reason Brothas like me turn to White girls.

Carla does a slow, slow turn to the camera.

CARLA (V.O.)

--'The eff he just say??

Carla is eye-to-eye with Tad, a stalemate. ON SCREEN Her cell phone goes off, flashing Nikki's headshot. She glances Tad.

CARLA

--Uh, I gotta take this call, it's Nikki--Oops!

TAD

--That's her? That's her?? You tell her I said I don't appreciate--

CARLA

--Ex-excuse me, Tad.

Carla quickly walks out the office, takes Nikki's call in the hallway.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER - INTERCUT

Carla posts her back against the wall outside Sterling's office.

NIKKI

--I'm tellin' you, you were right!
His ass ain't shit! He a player,
don't let that smooth taste fool
you, Girl! He--

CARLA

--Wait, wait a minute--how the hell
do you know all this, Nikki?

NIKKI

What?? I, I
(pause)
Uhh--

CARLA

--You went to see him one time and
all of a sudden you know all this
about him?

NIKKI

Uhh, I uhh. You see--

CARLA

--Yeah, yeah, I think I do see.
You're jealous, ha!

NIKKI

Whaaa?? No! Hell naww, girl, I--

CARLA

--I send your--your alter ego in to
bait him...and now you want him for
yourself? I saw the way you checked
him at Mic Fest--

NIKKI

--I do not want his skank ass,
Carla, I'm tryin' to protect you
from--

CARLA

--Well, then, how do you know all
this??

Nikki pauses, considers her words.

NIKKI

Okay, okay!--

CARLA

--Ah, ha! I knew it! You do want him! What's wrong, Nikki? Not enough dates for you on your freakin' singing App?

NIKKI

I'm tryin' to warn you, Carla--

CARLA

(intense)

--Well do me a favor and let me handle my shit! I got my own doubts, but If something's wrong with him, I will be the one to make that determination, not you!

INT. STERLING'S CONDO - EVENING

Sterling sings on the App and ends a soulful rendition of (think Luther Vandross' 'If This World Were Mine); he slays it. He saves it on his profile and shares it to the world.

STERLING

--Hahaaa! That's gonna score big-time! Now, who can I invite to the dance?

His phone interrupts his scheming.

INT. CARLA'S HOUSE, INTERCUT

Carla paces the floor as the phone rings, trying to remain calm. Sterling answers.

STERLING

--Yello'!

CARLA

Heyyy, Sterling! Sooo, how are you?

STERLING

Carla! I'm-I'm doing great! Getting ready to sing-I mean, watch people sing on the app! Uh, how are you?

He leans back at his desk with a beer, takes a swig.

CARLA

Good, good. Listen, I wanted to let you know our Client has upped the prize money for the contest, we're adding a new category! Best two duets can win up to fifteen-grand each now!

He chokes, spits beer out all over his computer screen, gags!

CARLA (CONT'D)

--Sterling?

STERLING

(chocking)

--Wha, what?? Fif--fifteen thousand, did you say? Each??

CARLA

Yes. Are you okay, Sterling? You sound a little choked up--

STERLING

--No, no, I. I just uh--

CARLA

--Okay, great. Well, listen, I gotta get on the platform, check the stats and stuff, so we know who wins all this cash. But, here's the kicker; nobody's gonna know about the extra money until we spring it on them at the Finals, ha! Whoever wins the most votes for any Duet will get a very big surprise!

STERLING

--Wow! Yeah, yeah. Okay, well, uh, let's catch up on this tomorrow, then, shall we? I gotta get some uh, paperwork done.

He's got that greedy gleam in his eye again.

CARLA

Okay, sounds good, I'll see--

A sudden click on Sterling's side abruptly ends the call. Carla looks at her phone in disbelief.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Daaang! This motherf--I knew it.

INT. CARLA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carla logs into the App platform and checks the stats. Sees the graphs and charts, everything is up.

CARLA
--Alrighty, then, looking good!
Now, let's see who's singing.

She clicks over to the App's GAB feed, shows live-streaming performances from all over the world. She clicks the official Song Selection tab. Her eyes widen to see all the uploads.

CARLA (CONT'D)
Oh, my goodness, wow!! All these
singers!

INT. NIKKI'S CONDO, INTERCUT - SAME TIME

Nikki on phone with Kenji. She's got her headset on, App open, and a glass of wine.

NIKKI
--Carla wanted me to find out all
his stage names--I'm a bust his ass
while he singin'--

KENJI
--How're you going do that if he's
got a bogus profile up?

NIKKI
Oh, you let me handle that shit.
Like I said, y'all alike! Didn't
you say this Thaddeus dude runs the
App?

I/E. STARCHILD STUDIOS - NIGHT

Nikki pulls into the parking lot, walks with purpose into the lobby. Cyndi is just closing up the lobby as Nikki walks in.

CYNDI
--Oh, hey, I remember you! Mr.
James is not in right now--

NIKKI
--Oh, that's okay, shugga, I'm here
to see, uh, Mr. Thaddeus, he here?

Cyndi looks at her curiously, picks up her phone and dials.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS, TAD'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Tad works on the GAB Platform when his phone rings.

TAD

--Hey, Cyndi, you outta here for the night?

CYNDI (O.S.)

Yeah, I am, but I don't think you are. You got company up front.

TAD

What? At this hour?

CYNDI (O.S.)

Yeah, and you better come get her cause I'm leavin'.

TAD

Her?

INT. GAB RECEPTION DESK - CONTINUOUS

Cyndi glances Nikki as she hangs up and grabs her purse, begins to walk out.

CYNDI

--Make yourself comfortable, he'll be right out for you. Bye.

Nikki tries to fluff herself in the lobby window. Tad walks in all cheerful, then freezes when he see's Nikki. Nikki's mouth drops to see Thaddeus is Tad.

TAD/NIKKI

--You kiddin' me??

He pivots around, walks off. Nikki scurries after him.

NIKKI

--Oh my God, wait, wait, wait! Mr. Tad, err, Tad-oww!

TAD

--What? You don't have enough heartstrings to tug, Nikkita-matata?? Huh? You need some more Brothas to play?

She catches up to him. He stops.

NIKKI

--Oh, goodness, no, no, I--

TAD

--Why are you here?

He looks at her, seriously. She pauses, dips her head, gets serious.

NIKKI

--I'm here

(sighs)

I wanna apologize. I don't know what came over me that day. I, I just been, just--I'm just lonely...

Tad looks at her doubtfully.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I really am. You just don't know what it's like out here, Mannn!

He relaxes, becomes more approachable, even sympathetic. She steps closer to him.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

I'm single, in my 30s--err, late twenties--and tryin' to find somebody who--

TAD

--Who cares for you? Who loves you? Tryin' to find somebody who can recognize his Backbone when he meets her?

She looks at him, surprised. He puts his hand on her shoulder.

TAD (CONT'D)

Naw, I don't know what that's like, at all. I'm 30, I'm single, got a few things goin', but naw, I wouldn't know about that stuff.

NIKKI

You, you actually know what I mean, Tad--err, Tadow?

TAD

You, you can call me Tad. Yeah, I do. You know how hard it is to find a good woman these days?

They look each other in the eyes.

TAD (CONT'D)
C'mon, maybe I can help you out.
Step into my office.

She smiles and follows Tad, checking his booty as she goes, smiling.

INT. STERLING'S CONDO - LATER

Sterling typing frantically at his computer, creating a third profile.

STERLING (V.O.)
--There, that oughta do it. Three
different profiles, one distinct
voice, I can't lose! Cha-ching!
Now, let's bust a note!

He clicks the Feed, sees several Female singers, scrolls, see's Carla's Profile and headshot.

STERLING
--Whoaa! Hey there, Miss--
Nerfertiti31, huh? I know good and
well Gabrielle ain't doing Karaoke,
but...

He clicks on her song and Carla's rendition of (think Alicia Key's 'IF I AIN'T GOT YOU') plays.

STERLING (CONT'D)
--Wow, she got pipes, too! I'm just
gonna bookmark you, Miss
Nefertitties--err, Nefertiti. I'll
get back to you later.

INT. NIKKI'S CONDO - THAT NIGHT

Nikki, in front of her computer, in her red lingerie, exhales a cloud of smoke from a fat joint. She sips from her wine glass as she loads the App on her computer.

NIKKI
(to self)
--You ain't seen nothin', Playa.
(MORE)

NIKKI (CONT'D)

Play with my girl like that, got us
at each other's throat over yo
trifflin' ass, huh, Mr. King, slash
Big Luther, slash phony-ass exec,
slash wanna be Boris Kodjoe-ass. Uh
huh, just hold on...

She clicks into the app, to GAB's Platform, and sees the
official songs. She clicks over the submissions and videos,
see's Denzel's headshot.

INT. STERLING'S CONDO - SAME TIME

Sterling exits his bedroom and heads back to the desk. He
wears a sexy bathrobe, a speedo, and nothing else. He pours a
shot of Tequila and chases with a beer. He shudders.

STERLING (V.O.)

--Blagggh! Ta'Killiya! Now, where's
she at...

He types Nikkita-matata in the search field, her profile
comes up, and he settles in to give her a sexy show and tell.

INT. CARLA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Carla continues clicking on random performances. This time
from Atlanta. The video loads and plays a new song submission
from M'Baku.

CARLA

--Really? M'Baku, as in Wakanda?
Okay Mr. M'Baku, let's see what ya
got.

His performance of (think Baby Face's 'EVERY TIME I CLOSE MY
EYES) sends Carla swinging. She glances her late husbands'
picture on a table and stops herself from remembering, from
crying.

She walks over and gently turns the picture's gaze away from
her, walks back and puts on her headset, with purpose.

CARLA (CONT'D)

(to self)

It-it's time to move on, Girl.

She joins Big Luther's invite to sing, pours out her soul,
matching his amazing performance, note for note.

INT. STARCHILD STUDIOS, INTERCUT - SAME TIME

Nikki and Tad at his desk checking the site stats. He stares hard at Nikki, clicks the override button, feeds Sterling's naughty performance directly to Carla's timeline. Nikki smiles.

INT. CARLA'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Carla's duet with M'Baku ends as she notices a personal invite pop up on her screen.

CARLA (V.O.)
 --What's this? Who the hell is Big Luther?

She clicks on the invite, ON SCREEN a picture of Denzel fades as the funky sounds of (think Genuine's 'PONY') start up; the submission is a video!

A dark silhouetted figure is on camera, bath robe open at the waist, dark lighting. You can tell he's Black, and in shape, but not much else. Carla is curious, watches as he grinds.

CARLA
 --Wow! Who the hell is this??

INT. STARCHILD STUDIO S, TAD'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Nikki and Tad lip-locked in his office, kiss frantically.

NIKKI
 --I never knew you felt like this about me...

TAD
 You didn't give me a chance to show you--

NIKKI
 --Well, you got the chance now, big daddy!

They kiss and embrace, madly. He stops, looks at her intently.

TAD
 --Wanna break my desk?

Nikki kisses him passionately, squeezes his buttocks, and backs him to the desk. Her CELL PHONE goes off, ON SCREEN she see's "K-Day" flash.

NIKKI

--Oh, shiiit! I was supposed to be
(answers)
Hello?

KENJI (O.C.)

--Nikki! What're you doing? You
there yet? Did he do-the-do on ole'
boy? Did you report back? What?
What??

NIKKI

Yeah, yeah, uh, we was just, uh,--
let me call her now, bye.

She hangs up, sits on Tad's lap, and calls Carla.

INT. CARLA'S CONDO, INTERCUT - SAME TIME

Carla is riveted to the screen as Big Luther gyrates to the
song and sings. Her mouth drops when he opens his robe
completely.

CARLA

(to self)
--Oh--my--goodness!

Her cell goes off, SHOWS NIKKI calling.

CARLA (V.O.)

--Shit! Now, Nikki? Really??

She answers, irritated.

CARLA

--What, Nikki?

NIKKI

Carla, listen, I know you think I
want yo' Man, but I don't. I got my
own man, now. Yo' boy Sterling is a
sterling silver hoe. And I would
never betray you for some dick,
anyways, and you should know that--

CARLA

--It's not that I don't believe
you.

NIKKI

No-no. I tried to tell you, but now
I gotta show yo' ass. Tad?

She hands the phone to Tad.

TAD
Uh, hello, Nikkita--uh, Carla, this
is Tad. Listen--

CARLA
--Tad?? I, you mean, you--Nikki
came to you?

TAD
Yeah, yeah, she did. She told me
everything. Listen, Nikki is my
Woman, now...

Nikki sits on his lap and kisses his cheeks as he talks.

TAD (CONT'D)
I'm only doing this for her--

CARLA
--Wha-what? You and Nikki?--

TAD
--That's right, Boo. I don't want
you no more, I'm good. I'm only
doing this for my sugar-pie. Shit,
I'll tell 'em it was a glitch in
the matrix or somethin', he don't
know no better.

CARLA
Doing what? What are you two up to?

Nikki snatches the phone from Tad.

NIKKI
--Look, Bitch, just open your App,
look on your timeline, and tell me
what the hell you see, right now?

Carla goes back to her APP, scrolls her timeline. Big Luther
still dances in the dark.

NIKKI (CONT'D)
--You should be lookin' at Morris
Chest-nuts' ass dancing in the
dark.

CARLA
--What? Who is this? And how the
hell do you know--

NIKKI

--Sterling. And because his ass think he singing and dancin' fa' me.

CARLA

--What do you mean? How could--

NIKKI

--Just hold on, keep watchin'...

Tad hits the LIVE DUET button, nervously.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

--Wait for it, wait for it...

Suddenly Big Luther is illuminated to the full on Carla's screen and on the APP FEED for everyone to see. He's almost butt-naked in a speedo, gyrating, but doesn't know it.

Carla sits flabbergasted at Sterling. ON SCREEN Nikki types in the comments section on her phone and the text appears on Carla's screen: NOW, TELL ME YOU LOVE ME, BABY, HOW MUCH MONEY WE MAKIN' OFF THIS CONTEST?

Carla's ON SCREEN shows Big Luther's reply; I LOVE YOU AND YOU ONLY, TWO SONGS, WE SPLIT \$15k, NOW, TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES! YOU PROMISED. Carla dips her head in disappointment.

CARLA

--This muthafff--Does he know I can see him?

NIKKI

No, he think the filter is still on. He think it's Nikki Minaj he's dancin' for, with his stupid-ass.

Both are silent for a moment as Carla realizes.

NIKKI (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Carla, but I had to show you who you dealin' with. I been tryin' to tell you, I--

CARLA

--I, I kinda' believed you. I just
(beat)
How did you find out?

Nikki hits 'FACETIME' on her phone, her live feed shows on Carla's phone, she accepts, they are face to face.

NIKKI

--Whatchu' mean you believed me!?
You-you put me through this shit
for nuthin', Carla?! What the efff--

CARLA

--I-I'm sorry, Nikki, I'm sorry.

Carla gets emotional, tears up. They both do.

CARLA (CONT'D)

I-I just been, you know, just--

NIKKI

--I know you miss him, Carla. I
know 'Piph misses her Daddy,
but...but don't you think it's
time?

CARLA

I know, I know, Nikki. I've
been...afraid. Afraid to even dare
hope for someone to--

(resigns)

And then when I do let my guard
down, when I do open up...

Both wipe tears away, calm down.

NIKKI

You can't be trustin' every Don
Juan that comes around sniffin'.
You betta recognize--

CARLA KING

--You're right, Nikki, thank you.
How-how did you even find out?

NIKKI

K-Day'--err, Kenji, Boo.

CARLA

--what??

NIKKI

He's the one feelin' you, for real.
Shiii--I thought I was his secret
Crush, humph. He got eyes for you
and knew this fool was a fake all
along--

CARLA

--Kenji?? He did this? For me?

NIKKI

Yep. Evidently, his ass been
feelin' you for a while, Girl.
That's why he was serenadin' yo'
ass at Mic Fest, and ignoring me. I
knew it was somethin' cause,
hmpf...

CARLA

Wow, I-I feel like, like shit. I--

NIKKI

--You better quit shittin' around
and get with that Man!

INT. CARLA'S HOME - NIGHT

It's quiet. Carla sits on the couch, shoes off, phone in
hand, but in near darkness. She's not scrolling, not
searching, just sitting with it.

On the table a photo of her husband. She looks at it, not
with pain, but with understanding.

CARLA

(softly, to self)
I didn't lose you...
(beat)
I just stopped living.

That realization lands as she exhales--deep, releasing the
pain she's carried inside for a long time.

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT, BREAK ROOM - NEXT DAY

Nikki and Tommy stand near the door eyeing Carla as she sits
in a quiet corner with Kenji at a table, both deep in
thought, oblivious to the chatter around them.

TOMMY

--I think they're doin' the damn
thing!

NIKKI

--Yeah, she looks pretty darned
relaxed, too. This is good, this is
good!

EXT. STARCHILD STUDIOS PARKING LOT - SAME TIME

Screeching tires as CARS swerve into the lot. Angry HUSBANDS and BOYFRIENDS get out, some with sticks and bats. A JEWISH guy, 20s, looks around, sees WHITE and BLACK GUYS, all ages.

JEWISH GUY

--What-what...what're you guys doin here? Are, are we?--is, is this the guy?, I--

BLACK GUY

--You, too?? Yeah, that's his ass. Let's see if he wants to dance butt-naked now...

INT. STARCHILD LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Sterling looking out the bay window to the parking lot. Cyndi next to him shaking her head as she packs her belongings, exits down the hallway.

CYNDI

--Um, hm--told yo' ass, Cuz...

Sterling is left "stuck on stupid, watching the parking lot fill with protesters. A local Atlanta NEWS VAN pulls in. A CAMERAMAN and REPORTER hop out, begin to report.

Sterling runs to Cyndi's desk, puts on the local news to the big screen.

EXT. STARCHILD STUDIOS PARKING LOT - SAME TIME

A REPORTER, 30, prepares to go live as the angry mob grows. He pulls over a bat-wielding PROTESTER to interview.

REPORTER

--Excuse me, Sir, Sir! Evidently, you are not a fan of Mr. James' Starchild Studio?

WHITE GUY

--Fan?? Hell naww, he's been singing and dancing to our girls, so, we come to do a little dance with him.

INT. STARCHILD LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Lobby BIG SCREEN shows news report, and a video capture from the App: Sterling, dancing in his thong.

STERLING

--Ohh, shiiit!!!

INT. GAB ENTERTAINMENT - BREAK ROOM - SAME TIME

Kenji and Carla share coffee. Kenji glances around, sees Nikki and Tommy turn away like they are not interested.

KENJI

--When you called us in, I knew we had to stop him. No way I was gonna let him hurt you. You don't deserve being treated like that, Carla--

CARLA

--No. No I don't. Nobody does. Listen, Kenji, I'm sorry. I never even guessed you had interest in me. I-I guess I was so focused on business, I-I'm sorry. I didn't recognize, I--

He puts his hand on her shoulder.

KENJI

--None of that matters now. The storm is passing. We'll all be in Vegas next month, and I, uh--I'd like to hang out with you if that's possible.

Carla's heart melts, it shows on her face.

KENJI (CONT'D)

I-I want to get to know you, Closer--
-I mean, Carla! I--

CARLA

(laughs)

--I-I think that's possible. I would like that, very much, Kenji.

She leans over to kiss him softly on the cheek. A hushed "WOOO" reverberates around the room. She looks to see all eyes on them, gives the eye; the room quickly falls silent.

Kenji is stuck with his eyes closed, lips still puckered. She leans back over and continues the kiss, on the lips this time.

Amy sits in the corner with Seth.

AMY

Ohhh, he kissed The Closer!

SETH

No, The Closer most definitely
kissed him. Sorta like this
(kisses her)

Tommy and Nikki watch Carla and Kenji from the doorway. Tommy begins a slow clap, several join, then all join in the applaud.

NIKKI

Awww, will you look at that?

TOMMY

Yeah, yeah--they look like two
little puppies. I'm happy for my
Boy
(beat)
Say, any chance you and I can--

NIKKI

--No. I'm taken. Me and Tad got a
thang goin' on. He coming to work
for us now, we don't need
Sterling's fake ass--

TOMMY

--What??

NIKKI

My Tad's gonna finish the
competition for us in Vegas 'soon
as the storm passes.

She turns to leave the room, he follows.

TOMMY

--What?? Tad? Naw, naww, nawww,
Nikki! How the hell did big man get
the--

NIKKI

--Yep, met him at the studio, had
him butt-naked in his office before
his door closed--

TOMMY

--What?? You did not!

NIKKI

Yes I did! Broke the man's desk,
too--

TOMMY

--No! Nooo!!

NIKKI

Broke his chair, first...

TOMMY

Nooo!!

FADE OUT.