



## A FATHER'S LOVE

Bernard Mersier

FADE IN:

**INT. VIVIAN HOUSE - TEENAGE TIFFANY BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Whimpers echo softly through the well-kept room, a stark contrast to the horror that just unfolded. Underneath the covers of her bed, teenage Tiffany lies trembling, with her light brown eyes filled with fear.

Her long black hair is frizzy and sprawled across the pillow, a testament to the turmoil she just endured. She's been violated by the one person who was supposed to protect her- her father.

Michael, a twisted man with dark skin and a scraggly beard, is standing by the bedroom door, zipping up his pants, with a look of satisfaction on his face as he stares at his daughter.

MICHAEL

This is so much easier than dealing  
with your mother.

Teenage Tiffany completely covers her head, ashamed and terrified that her father finds pleasure in such a heinous act.

VIVIAN (O.S.)

Michael, are you on your way to bed?!

MICHAEL

In a second! I'm locking up the house!

He licks his lips, keeping his eyes locked on teenage Tiffany.

VIVIAN (O.S.)

Hurry up!

MICHAEL

(Snickers)

Don't even think about trying to tell  
your mother. Because as long as I stay  
doing to her what I do to you, she'll  
never believe you. Besides...

(Cocky laugh)

What type of father would rape his own  
child?

He walks off humming, leaving Teenage Tiffany alone with her thoughts.

Her eyes are red and swollen from crying, slowly coming from under the covers, sniffing.

Reaching for her diary and pen on the nightstand, she opens the book.

A tear falls onto the page as she begins writing.

TEENAGE TIFFANY (V.O.)

How can a father take what's precious from his child? God... Please send me a sign. Your child can't endure this abuse much longer.

Placing the diary back on the nightstand, she curls up under her blanket, unable to sleep, unsure if he'll return.

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. FRANCINE HOUSE - THE BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Teenage Bernard is in the spacious basement of his mother's new home, taking out his aggression on a punching bag.

He's wearing shorts, and his light brown skin is covered in sweat.

He takes a few more swings before taking a break, rubbing his hand across his long strawberry-blonde cornrows.

He picks up his water bottle and takes a sip with anger outlining his face as he breathes heavily, lowering his head.

Francine, his mother, comes downstairs wearing something casual with her jet-black hair in a ponytail.

She pauses at the bottom of the stairs, looking at him with love and concern.

FRANCINE

Are you okay?

Taking another sip from the bottle, he faces her, wiping the sweat from his face.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Why wouldn't I be okay?

FRANCINE

I'm glad you found another outlet to release your anger.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Ma, I don't have anger issues.

FRANCINE

Who do you expect to believe that lie?

Teenage Bernard places the bottle down, cracking his knuckles and sucking his teeth.

TEENAGE BERNARD

It's not a lie.

She walks over to him and places a hand on his shoulder.

FRANCINE

Son.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Ma, I'm okay. Just let me get back to my workout.

FRANCINE

Let it go. What happened in California has nothing to do with Detroit.

He lowers his head.

TEENAGE BERNARD

What makes you think I'm still dwelling on what happened there?

FRANCINE

Look me in my eyes and tell me you're not?

He turns around with his head down.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Look at me.

TEENAGE BERNARD

...Why?

FRANCINE

No matter what happened out there, I'm still the same woman who loves you and would die for you at the drop of a dime.

Slowly, he lifts his head with tears ready to fall to the floor as he looks into his mother's eyes.

TEENAGE BERNARD

It wasn't right.

Francine hugs him.

FRANCINE

I had to provide for my child. I have  
no regrets.

Teenage Bernard turns his head to the side, blushing.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I understand. I just... I hate the  
fact there was nothing I could do.

She smiles, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

FRANCINE

You're doing something now. You're  
being strong for your mother.

He turns his head back, looking at her with a soft smile.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Okay.

FRANCINE

Okay?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Yeah, okay.

Francine put her hands up as if she was ready to box.

FRANCINE

Don't make me beat the brakes off you.

Teenage Bernard put his hands up, surrendering, taking a few  
steps back.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Okay.

FRANCINE

Are you ready for school?

TEENAGE BERNARD

(Sighs)

I guess.

Francine raises an eyebrow.

FRANCINE  
Where's the positive attitude?

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Ma, you know as well as I do it's  
about to be a bunch of pretend tough  
guys and hot to trot-

She places a finger on his lips, stopping him.

FRANCINE  
Hot to trot, what?

Teenage Bernard lowers his head, sighing.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
I'm sorry.

FRANCINE  
What did I tell you about women?

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Truth or lie. You respect her because  
you don't know her.

FRANCINE  
That's my boy. Are you hungry?

TEENAGE BERNARD  
I'll probably get something after my  
workout.

She gives him a soft right hook to the jaw, and he turns his  
head, smiling.

FRANCINE  
Work on that defense. If I was a man,  
I would've knocked you out.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
(Laughs)  
A man wouldn't get that close.

They gave each other a hug.

FRANCINE  
Make sure. I'll leave you something to  
eat on the table.

Teenage Bernard smiles.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Thanks, ma.

She hits him on the chin before walking off, leaving him to focus back on the punching bag, throwing a few more punches.

**INT. VIVIAN HOUSE - THE KITCHEN - MORNING**

Teenage Tiffany sits at the table with her head low, playing with the eggs on her plate.

Vivian is making Michael's plate. She's short, plump and has beautiful brown-skin, moving gracefully to be in her early thirties.

She walks over to the table and places Michael's breakfast down.

Michael comes into the room wearing a suit, smiling ear to ear, taking a seat at the table.

Teenage Tiffany keeps her head low, looking at him with her eyes.

Vivian gives him a kiss on the cheek.

VIVIAN

Feeling good this morning?

MICHAEL

After a wonderful night, yes.

Vivian blushes, hitting him lightly on the arm.

VIVIAN

Don't talk like that in front of her.

Teenage Tiffany drops her fork and stands up, prepared to leave.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

I'll be leaving.

Vivian looks at her with concern in her eyes.

VIVIAN

You barely touched your food.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

I'll eat lunch.

Michael looks at her with a sly smile, winking.

MICHAEL

You should eat your food. You need energy to make it through the day.

Teenage Tiffany runs out of the room, leaving Vivian and Michael alone.

VIVIAN

What has gotten into her?

MICHAEL

Maybe it's not what, but who?

VIVIAN

Shut your mouth. She's not doing that.

MICHAEL

You don't know what she's doing when we're not around.

VIVIAN

I know she's not doing that. She knows she can talk to me about anything.

Michael takes a sip of his juice, clearing his throat.

MICHAEL

I need to get going.

He stands up, ready to walk away, and Vivian grabs his arm.

VIVIAN

Wait, before you go.

He turns around and gives her a kiss.

MICHAEL

What?

VIVIAN

What do you have planned for tonight?

Giving her another kiss, he stares at her with his bedroom eyes.

MICHAEL

You'll find out.

He makes his way out of the room, leaving Vivian blushing,



fanning herself.

VIVIAN

That man can't get enough of my  
goodies.

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. FRANCINE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Teenage Bernard is by the front door wearing his school  
uniform, aggravated.

Francine walks up filled with life wearing something casual.  
Pausing, she can sense something is wrong with him.

FRANCINE

What's wrong?

TEENAGE BERNARD

I don't wanna go.

FRANCINE

(Sighs)

Here you go. Why are you so negative?

TEENAGE BERNARD

I'm not negative. I just don't wanna  
go.

FRANCINE

Why?

TEENAGE BERNARD

We should've stayed in California.

FRANCINE

You'd prefer fighting your entire life  
instead of moving away and creating  
something better?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Yup.

FRANCINE

Did you go to sleep making yourself  
believe that?

He lowers his head, sighing.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Why do you even care?

She places her hands on his shoulders.

FRANCINE

Don't question why I care about anything going on with you. How can you say you have love for me, but you're questioning why I care about you?

TEENAGE BERNARD

...I love you. I just-

FRANCINE

Then, trust the decision I made.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I trust you.

FRANCINE

Learn to let go, Bernard. This is our chance at a new life. Why do you wanna continue living in the past?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Because I know it'll come back around. She embraces him with a hug.

FRANCINE

When you constantly think of negativity, it finds a way to you. Son... Let California go.

TEENAGE BERNARD

It's hard, ma. It's hard letting go of what you went through.

FRANCINE

My previous life was buried the day we moved. It won't remain buried if my son keeps relapsing.

She releases him, staring into his eyes.

TEENAGE BERNARD

...I'm sorry.

FRANCINE

Don't be sorry about how you feel.

Just let the past go so you can live.

TEENAGE BERNARD

...I can do that.

She gives him a kiss on his cheek.

FRANCINE

You never know. You might meet a nice girl.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I don't have time for girls.

FRANCINE

You better make time. A handsome man like you will have the girls all over him.

TEENAGE BERNARD

(Laughs)

Let's go.

The two laugh, walking out of the house.

#### **INT. THE CLASSROOM - MORNING**

Teenage Bernard is standing in front of the classroom, annoyed, looking around at the students, sucking his teeth.

The teacher is sitting behind her desk, and low chatter from the students is heard.

Teenage Tiffany is sitting at the back of the class, staring at Teenage Bernard in awe, but she's doing her best to not to let it be known.

Derrick, the class clown, is in the row next beside Teenage Tiffany.

He's playing with his short dreadlocks, looking at her every few seconds, waiting to crack a joke.

TEACHER

Bernard, how about you tell us a little something about yourself?

TEENAGE BERNARD

There really isn't much to tell. I moved here from California because of family issues. I played for

the football team, and I love video games. I'm not really looking for friends, so...

(Shrugs shoulders)

That's about all I have to share.

The teacher and class are silent.

Derrick glances at Teenage Tiffany seeing her expression indicating she has a crush on Teenage Bernard.

DERRICK

Uh, oh. Tiffany is plotting to give it up already.

The classroom breaks out laughing, and Teenage Tiffany lowers her head, ashamed.

Teenage Bernard looks at Derrick with an attitude for a split second before focusing on Teenage Tiffany.

TEACHER

Everybody settle down. And you, young man. You must love spending time in the principal's office. Come up here and get your slip.

Derrick gets up from his desk and makes his way towards the teacher with a cocky attitude.

Teenage Bernard stares him down, his expression firm. Derrick gets his slip and walks toward the door.

He prepares to walk out, and then he stops, turning back around to look at Teenage Bernard.

DERRICK

Watch it, Bro. She's trying to give you some cat the whole school is friendly with.

The class breaks out laughing again as Derrick walks out of the room.

Teenage Bernard nods as he makes his way to a desk three seats in front of Teenage Tiffany.

TEACHER

Everybody settle down. Take out your math books, and turn to page twenty.

While everyone is doing what the teacher said, Teenage Bernard turns to look at Teenage Tiffany with her head down.

He can't put his finger on it yet, but he sees something in her he likes.

**INT. THE LUNCHROOM - AFTERNOON**

The loud talking of students fills the air.

Teenage Tiffany is sitting at a table alone, eating her lunch, staring at the people looking at her, shaking their heads.

Kevin, the bulky baldhead dark-skinned bully is at a table with some girls, eating his lunch while talking trash about other students.

Teenage Bernard and Derrick enter the room, and Teenage Bernard has his eyes locked on Teenage Tiffany.

DERRICK

You're gonna love it here. We have the best basketball team. The football team is okay, but you can help improve that.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Why is she sitting alone?

Derrick looks around and spots Teenage Tiffany.

DERRICK

Who, easy pickings?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Is that her name?

DERRICK

Her name is Tiffany.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Why do you call her easy pickings?

DERRICK

Three seconds alone with her, you'll be sleeping with her.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Have you got some from her?

DERRICK

No.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Then you shouldn't call her that. Now, why is she sitting alone?

DERRICK

The guys won't sit with her because everybody already hit it. The girls won't sit with her because she's a homewrecker.

TEENAGE BERNARD

All of this is facts?

DERRICK

Well... No, but-

TEENAGE BERNARD

I thought so. I'll sit with her.

DERRICK

What? Why? There's a table full of girls-

TEENAGE BERNARD

I'll talk with them later.

He makes his way over to Teenage Tiffany's table and takes a seat across from her, smiling.

TEENAGE BERNARD (CONT'D)

How are you? My name is Bernard.  
What's your name?

She looks up at him, trying not to blush.

TEENAGE BERNARD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, did I say it in a different language?

TEENAGE TIFFANY

I'm Tiffany.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I know.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

So, if you know, why did you-

TEENAGE BERNARD

I wanted to see if the voice matched  
the beauty.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Look at you running some game.

TEENAGE BERNARD

If that's what you call telling the  
truth, then yes, I am.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

(Soft laugh)

Boy, get outta here.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I'm serious.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Thank you for the compliment.

TEENAGE BERNARD

No need to thank me. I should be  
thanking you for speaking to me.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

I'm shocked you wanna talk to me. I'm  
sure you heard the stories.

TEENAGE BERNARD

That dude was trying to tell me some  
nonsense, but I wasn't listening.

She lowers her head.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

It's true, to an extent.

He grabs her hand, and she lifts her head, her eyes meeting  
his.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I'm not the one to judge. I wanna get  
to know you as a person.

Derrick and Kevin make their way over to the table, stopping  
behind Teenage Bernard.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

...Are you serious?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Yes.

He gets ready to kiss her hand, and Kevin places a hand on his shoulder.

KEVIN

I wouldn't do that if I was you. You don't know how many loads she wiped off with that hand.

Teenage Bernard turns his head, looking back, confused.

TEENAGE BERNARD

What?

KEVIN

You don't wanna taste all the guys in school, do you?

Teenage Bernard stands up and gets in Kevin's face.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I really don't care what you're saying. So, do me a favor. Leave.

KEVIN

(Cocky laugh)

You don't care what I'm saying? Tiffany, you better-

Teenage Bernard grabs him by the collar and slams him on the table, beginning to choke him.

Teenage Tiffany and the other students are stunned. Derrick tries pulling him off but doesn't succeed.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I told you to leave! You need to learn respect! I don't care what she does, if it's true or not! Learn some respect!

He begins hitting him, and Kevin breaks free, starting to fight him back.

The students cheer on the brawl as security tries to get through the crowd.

DISSOLVE TO:



**INT. THE PRINCIPAL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Teenage Bernard is twiddling his thumbs, sighing softly with a minor bruise on his face.

Teenage Tiffany walks in and sits next to him.

Teenage Bernard turns to look at her.

TEENAGE BERNARD

You okay?

TEENAGE TIFFANY

That was something different.

TEENAGE BERNARD

(Soft laugh)

I know, right? I'm suspended on the first day of school.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

I'm talking about you beating him up. What set you off?

TEENAGE BERNARD

I'll tell you one day.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Why can't you tell me now?

TEENAGE BERNARD

I need to know something.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

What's that?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Would you call me?

TEENAGE TIFFANY

And that's all you want?

TEENAGE BERNARD

I wanna get to know you for personal reasons. If you're talking about sex, that's the last thing on my mind.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

You don't like girls?

TEENAGE BERNARD  
I love girls.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
So, why-

TEENAGE BERNARD  
You're more than a mattress.

Speechless by his words, all she can do is stare at him.

TEENAGE BERNARD (CONT'D)  
Hand me your phone.

She pulls her phone out and hands it to him.

Francine enters the room as he finishes placing his number in her phone.

He hands her the phone back and then looks at Francine.

TEENAGE BERNARD (CONT'D)  
I'll be with you in one second, ma.

FRANCINE  
Okay.

She walks out.

Teenage Tiffany is looking at his number, confused.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
What does this mean?

TEENAGE BERNARD  
It means what it says.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
...You're my man?

He stands up.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Think about it. You just remember  
you're more than a mattress.

He walks out, leaving her to think hard about what he said and how he labeled himself.

She places the phone in her pocket.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

I'm more than a mattress? I wish I could believe that.

**INT. FRANCINE HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Francine is sitting on the sofa, drinking a cup of tea. Teenage Bernard enters the room and sits beside her.

FRANCINE

How did you get into a fight on the first day of school?

TEENAGE BERNARD

You know I have that issue with women being disrespected.

FRANCINE

Someone disrespected the girl sitting with you?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Yes. It made me think about...

He put his head down, breathing heavily.

FRANCINE

I keep telling you those days are gone. I'm no longer-

There's a knock at the door.

Teenage Bernard gets up and walks to the door.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Who is it?

EARL (O.S.)

Can I come in?

Teenage Bernard is shocked.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I know damn well.

He flings the door open and grabs Earl by the collar, pulling him into the house, pinning him up against the wall.

Earl is wearing a wife beater and jeans, his body a shadow of what it used to be, ravaged by drugs and alcohol.

His Afro is in shambles, and he desperately needs to shave his mountain beard.

TEENAGE BERNARD (CONT'D)  
What the hell are you doing here?!

EARL  
Son, let me-

TEENAGE BERNARD  
I'm not letting you explain shit! I should kill you.

Francine rushes over and places a hand on Teenage Bernard's shoulder.

FRANCINE  
He's not worth it.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
We're not free!

FRANCINE  
Let him say his peace so we can finally be done with him.

Teenage Bernard holds him for a few more seconds before releasing him.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Three minutes.

Earl fixes his clothes, staring at his son.

EARL  
I can accept that.

Teenage Bernard gets ready to swing, and Francine holds him back.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
You have no choice but to accept it!

EARL  
I know how you feel. You still need to understand I'm your father, and you should show me some respect.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Two minutes.

EARL

Fine. Fran, I'm truly sorry for what I put you through.

FRANCINE

These apologies hold no value. Continue, so we never have to deal with you again.

EARL

I can respect those words.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Can you respect those words? You have no idea what the word respect means. A man with respect wouldn't beat on his wife, causing her to turn tricks because his weak ass couldn't earn his own money. A man with respect wouldn't beat on his son because he got his ass beat on the streets. You respect that?! Don't you dare use that word around me!

EARL

You're a better man than me. All of what you said is the truth.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Why are you here?

EARL

Hopefully to rekindle the love my family had for me before things went bad.

TEENAGE BERNARD

(Loud laugh)

You had a drink or two before you came?

EARL

No drinks or drugs. I've been clean.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Then I suggest you confide in God. That's the only person who'll forgive you.

FRANCINE

Let me talk to him alone.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Why? You know how he's cut? I'm not leaving you alone with him.

FRANCINE

I'm sure he won't do anything. Just give us five minutes, and he's gone.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Are you sure?

FRANCINE

Do this for your mother.

Teenage Bernard looks at Earl, dying to punch him in the mouth, but because he loves and respects his mother, it prevents him from doing it.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Fine.

FRANCINE

It'll be okay.

Teenage Bernard stares at Earl with a tight mean mug, sucking his teeth.

TEENAGE BERNARD

And you call yourself a man?

He walks off, leaving Francine and Earl alone.

Francine looks at Earl with a slight smirk.

FRANCINE

Bernard isn't the little runt you used to beat on. That's why I asked him to leave before he returned the favor.

EARL

My baby boy is growing into a good man. His father was a stand-up man before I got hooked on that stuff. But I'm a changed man now, and I need my family to stay clean.

He tries hugging her, and she quickly pulls out her pearl handle .45.

FRANCINE

Don't get close to me.

He steps back with his hands up, stunned, looking into her eyes.

EARL

Whoa! When did you start carrying a gun?

FRANCINE

The blessed day I fully turned my back on you. I vowed I'd never allow anyone else to do what you did to me.

EARL

I wish it didn't go down that way.

FRANCINE

You wish you didn't cause me to lose countless good jobs because of your insecurities? You wish I wasn't turning tricks while you sat back getting drunk? You wish you didn't beat me every other day because you felt like it? You know what?

(Scoffs, sighs)

I wish the first beating would've knocked some sense into my head right then and there. But at that point in my life, I thought I needed a man. When in reality, all I needed was my son.

EARL

There's nothing I can say about that.

FRANCINE

No.

EARL

I'll be on my way.

FRANCINE

Have a blessed life if that's the path you're on.

EARL

One last thing before I leave.

FRANCINE

What?

EARL

You can't tell me deep down inside you  
still don't love me.

FRANCINE

I love the man I married. You think  
about that and let it register as you  
walk out my door and my life.

Earl doesn't respond, making his way out of the house.

Taking a deep breath, Francine walks back to the sofa and  
sits, placing the gun down beside her.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Thank you, Lord, for helping me beat  
the demon that darkened my door.

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. VIVIAN HOUSE - TEENAGE TIFFANY BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Teenage Tiffany is lying across her bed, pouring her heart  
into her diary. The words flow like a river of pain and hope,  
a testament to her inner turmoil and newfound strength.

TEENAGE TIFFANY (V.O.)

I can't believe I met someone who  
views me for more than sex. Is this my  
blessing from God? If it is, thank you  
for answering my cries.

Suddenly, the door creaks open, and Michael stands there with  
a sinister smile, wearing a T-shirt and jeans, holding a  
bottle of vodka.

He takes a sip from the bottle he's holding, with his eyes  
locked on Teenage Tiffany with a predatory gaze.

MICHAEL

Mama's gone. Are you ready to give  
Daddy some honey?

Teenage Tiffany stands up.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

You stay away from me.

MICHAEL

(Laughs)  
What did you say?



TEENAGE TIFFANY

You heard me. You stay away from me.

Michael, nowhere near taking her seriously, takes another sip from the bottle, with his laughter echoing in the room.

MICHAEL

You think because you met this new boy, he can save you? This is all you're good for. There's nothing special about you. You're a whore, and that's all you'll ever be. Now, get on the bed so Daddy can give you some good loving.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

You'll never touch me again.

She tries to walk out, but Michael places the bottle down and grabs her, slapping her across the face.

The pain stings, but Teenage Tiffany refuses to cry, her resolve unbroken.

MICHAEL

You disrespectful tramp! I don't know who you think you are, but you're still my personal tramp! Lay down-

In a swift and unexpected move, Teenage Tiffany knees him between his legs, dropping him to his knees.

As he writhes in pain, she grabs the bottle and hits him over the head.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

No man would enjoy doing what you've done to me for years to his own child! I hope the pain you're in continues, even while you burn in hell!

With those words, she walks out of the room, leaving Michael on the floor, a broken man in more ways than one.

**INT. FRANCINE HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - LATER**

Teenage Bernard, Teenage Tiffany and Francine are sitting on the sofa.

Francine grabs the box of tissues and hands them to Teenage Tiffany.

She takes a tissue from the box and wipes her eyes.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

(Sobbing)

Thanks for letting me come over.

TEENAGE BERNARD

You don't have to thank us.

FRANCINE

Calm down, honey.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

I still have to go home, and he'll be there.

FRANCINE

I'm trying to understand how your mother doesn't know what he's been doing to you.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

She's so caught up with him that she doesn't pay me attention. Even if I were to tell her, she wouldn't believe me.

FRANCINE

I've been down that road. I know exactly how you feel.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

You do?

FRANCINE

When the people you love betray you, you grow a pain deep inside that hurts more than anything imaginable.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Why can't people understand me the way you two do?

FRANCINE

Well, you have us now, and we won't judge. If it makes you feel better, you can look at me as your mother.

Teenage Tiffany doesn't respond, but the love and acceptance in Francine's words are a balm to her wounded soul.

Francine gives her a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)  
I'll leave you two alone.

Francine walks off, Teenage Bernard moves closer to Teenage Tiffany.

She looks at him with a soft smile.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
I really do appreciate this.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Don't worry about it.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
God, I don't wanna go back to that house.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Who said you were going back tonight?

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
What?

TEENAGE BERNARD  
You can sleep in my room, and I'll sleep down here. Or you can sleep down here, and I'll sleep in my room. Whatever you decide, you're staying here with us for the night.

Teenage Tiffany doesn't respond, but the weight of his words and the safety they offer are a comfort to her weary heart.

TEENAGE BERNARD (CONT'D)  
(Soft laugh)  
I see why you act so shy now.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
Yeah. Can you tell me why you stood up for me in the lunchroom?

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Because of what my mother went through.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
What happened?

TEENAGE BERNARD

If my father wasn't beating on her in front of me, he had her turning tricks. It was all bad. So, we had to move.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

That's the family matter you were talking about?

TEENAGE BERNARD

Yeah. Any man treating a woman like trash, but she's doing everything in her power so her family can survive, I consider you less of a man.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

That explains why you did it.

TEENAGE BERNARD

Listen. I'm about to make us something to eat. Figure out where you wanna sleep.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Can I ask you something?

TEENAGE BERNARD

What?

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Can you sleep with me? Not on something sexual, but hold me. I feel secure with you.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I can do that if it makes you happy.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Thank you for-

He gives her a gentle kiss, and as he pulls back, she's in a state of awe, her heart filled with a warmth and safety she's never known before.

Teenage Bernard stands up.

TEENAGE BERNARD

I told you, stop thanking me. Figure out where you want us to sleep, and I'll be back with the food.

As he walks off, Teenage Tiffany closes her eyes and puts her hands together to pray.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
Lord, I thank you.

**INT. VIVIAN HOUSE - TEENAGE TIFFANY BEDROOM - AFTERNOON**

The rage in Michael's eyes is intense as he reads the pages in her diary, holding a bottle of vodka.

He throws the diary down on the bed and takes a deep swig from the bottle before leaving the room, with his heart filled with a storm of emotions.

Vivian comes into the house.

VIVIAN (O.S.)  
Tiffany! Tiffany, are you here!

As Michael comes down the staircase, he runs into the panicked Vivian.

He takes a sip from the bottle with a mix of emotions in his eyes, locking them on her.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)  
Is Tiffany here? The school called and said she didn't attend today.

MICHAEL  
They called me, too.

VIVIAN  
Then why do you seem so calm?

MICHAEL  
Because I have a good idea where she is.

VIVIAN  
Where?

Michael takes another sip from the bottle, pushing past Vivian with a determined stride.

MICHAEL  
I'm about to go get her now.

Vivian stands confused for a few seconds, with her heart filled with a mix of emotions.

She continues her way upstairs, making her way to Teenage Tiffany's room.

She walks in and sees the diary on the bed.

She walks over and picks it up, opening it, and her heart sinks as she reads the first page.

CUT TO:

**EXT. FRANCINE HOUSE - LATER**

Outside Francine's house, the sun is shining, and the birds are singing. Teenage Bernard is cutting the grass with his shirt off, revealing his muscular frame.

He takes a break and wipes the sweat from his face.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
I'm almost done, ma!

FRANCINE (O.S.)  
When you get done, there's some food  
in the kitchen on the table!

Michael appears behind Teenage Bernard, holding a bat behind his back.

MICHAEL  
Are you Bernard Mersier?

Teenage Bernard turns to look at him.

TEENAGE BERNARD  
Yeah. Who are-

Before he can finish his sentence, Michael quickly hits him in the stomach with the bat, dropping him to his knees.

He kicks him over and begins beating him.

MICHAEL  
You're the bastard who turned my  
personal tramp against me?! That's my  
honey you're trying to get!

Teenage Bernard covers up, moaning in pain as Michael beats him.

Francine runs out, letting off a round in the air.

Michael stops beating him and drops the bat, holding up his hands in surrender.

Francine shoots him in the leg, and he falls to the ground screaming, holding his leg in pain.

Francine rushes over to Teenage Bernard and drops to her knees, shaking him, but he doesn't move.

FRANCINE

Come on, baby, get up! You're stronger  
than this!

Teenage Tiffany comes running out of the house, screaming, rushing over to the two.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Oh my God!

FRANCINE

This clown hurt my baby!

Teenage Tiffany looks down at Michael.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

You bastard!

Francine looks up at her.

FRANCINE

This is the man who did those things  
to you?

TEENAGE TIFFANY

Yes.

As Francine stands up and takes aim at Michael, a police car pulls up and comes to a screeching stop.

Vivian and an officer get out of the car.

The officer quickly aims at Francine.

OFFICER

Freeze!

Francine keeps her aim on Michael.

FRANCINE

I'm registered to carry a firearm!

OFFICER

I understand that, ma'am. I still need you to put the weapon down.

FRANCINE

Look at what he did to my only child! What would you do?!

OFFICER

Ma'am, I know how you feel, and I would do the same. Just listen. If you kill him now, it'll be cold-blooded murder. You'll never be able to see your son again.

Teenage Tiffany grabs Francine's hand, lowering her arm.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

He's not worth it.

Francine drops the gun and begins crying as Tiffany gives her a hug.

The officer rushes over to check Teenage Bernard's condition.

#### **INT. THE HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

Indistinct talking can be heard over the intercom and from the nurses and doctors walking through the hall.

Outside Teenage Bernard's room, Teenage Tiffany is by the door waiting for Francine to come out, praying Teenage Bernard is doing good.

Francine comes out of the room, wiping the tears from her eyes.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

How is he?

FRANCINE

The doctors said he's doing fine, but he hasn't opened his eyes. I want my baby to open his eyes and talk to me.

TEENAGE TIFFANY

He will, ma. He's a strong man. I'm blessed he came into my life.

Vivian comes walking down the hall.



VIVIAN (O.S.)  
Are you okay?

Teenage Tiffany and Francine turn to look at her.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
I'm not going back with you.

VIVIAN  
Baby, I had him arrested. As soon as he gets out of the hospital, he's going straight to jail. Why didn't you tell me?

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
Even if I told you, you would've brushed me off.

VIVIAN  
That's not true. I would've-

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
Continued being his personal-

Francine places a finger on Teenage Tiffany's lips.

FRANCINE  
Go in the room with Bernard. I'll take care of this.

TEENAGE TIFFANY  
Okay, ma.

Teenage Tiffany walks into the room, and Francine walks over to Vivian.

FRANCINE  
So, you're supposedly the mother?

VIVIAN  
What are you talking about? I am her mother.

FRANCINE  
No, you're a woman who was blessed with a child and doesn't appreciate her. A real mother would've known something foul as that was being done to her daughter.

VIVIAN

You don't-

FRANCINE

I know you because I was like you. Do you know the real meaning behind having a child?

VIVIAN

To love and protect, letting no harm come their way.

FRANCINE

When did you lose the meaning?

Vivian doesn't respond.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

Don't think I'm judging you because the good book says, 'Don't judge until you judge yourself.' Since I was like you, I can tell you what I'm saying. The only difference between us is the man in this hospital who defended your daughter. He made me realize one thing my mother told me. Do you wanna know what that is?

VIVIAN

What?

FRANCINE

Nothing comes before my child. I'll die for my child before I let anything happen to him. You let that sit on your mind.

Francine walks back to the door and then turns around, looking at Vivian.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

If my daughter wants to go with you, she's more than welcome. But I highly doubt she wants to return to the woman who put a pedophile before her own flesh and blood.

With those words, Francine walks into the room, closing the door behind her, leaving Vivian sobbing, shaking her head.

FADE TO BLACK:

BLACK SCREEN:

TEN YEARS LATER...

**INT. AUDITORIUM - AFTERNOON**

The room is packed with people in silence, digesting the words Tiffany is saying.

She's standing on stage behind a podium wearing a two-piece black business suit.

Off to the side is a table with a large portrait of her, and copies of the book she published.

TIFFANY

That's how I overcame my issue and was able to write my book, 'You're More Than a Mattress.'

The room applauds her, with faces filled with admiration and respect.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Thank you. Now, I would like to bring out my mother.

Francine walks on stage wearing something casual, with her face filled with love and pride.

She walks over to Tiffany, and they hug.

Francine walks up to the mic.

FRANCINE

I'd like to say I was also a victim of beatings and rape, but I overcame the issues. With the help of the Lord and strength, you can overcome anything. But in my case, there's one more person who helped me realize things needed to change.

TIFFANY

I think I know who you're talking about.

FRANCINE

Of course.

TIFFANY

And I thank God as well as you for bringing him into my life. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce you to my husband. Mr. Bernard Mersier.

Bernard walks on stage wearing a white suit. He gives Francine and Tiffany a hug and kiss.

FRANCINE

This is the man who made me realize not only am I a woman who deserves respect, but I'm also a mother.

TIFFANY

He's the man who got me out of the situation I was in. Without him, I don't think I would be alive.

BERNARD

You two are funny.

FRANCINE

He's still shy after all these years. He hates compliments on his good deeds, thinking he shouldn't smile.

TIFFANY

I know how to make him smile.

BERNARD

(Laughs)

Come on now.

TIFFANY

When we get home, you know what time it is.

The people laugh.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Always know you're more than what a person makes you out to be.

The room applauds as they start clearing out.

FRANCINE

I'm proud of you.

TIFFANY

With the right guidance and people who

love you, you can do anything.

FRANCINE

Now, who told you that?

BERNARD

I'm glad I'm the center of y'all conversation.

TIFFANY

You know you love it.

FRANCINE

I don't know why he's acting brand new.

BERNARD

What do you know about somebody acting brand new?

TIFFANY

You have no idea about the new things I want you to do to me tonight.

FRANCINE

And on that note, I'm about to head home. Y'all some freaks.

BERNARD

That's your daughter-in-law.

Francine walks off stage.

TIFFANY

Well, Mr. Mersier? What do you want for dinner tonight, aside from me?

Bernard doesn't respond, his face filled with love.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

Oh, you're acting like me now, getting silent?

BERNARD

I'm nothing like you. Thank-

She grabs him by the head and gives him a kiss. As she pulls back, he looks at her, smiling.

TIFFANY

You know the rules. I love you.

BERNARD  
I love you, too.

TIFFANY  
Let's get home. One of your meals is  
hot and ready.

BERNARD  
(Laughs)  
Here you go.

The two look at each other and smile as they hold hands,  
walking off stage, with their hearts filled with love and  
admiration.

FADE TO BLACK:

END CREDITS: