

JUSTIFIABLE BEATING

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. THE LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Silence embraces the library while the students study with the sun glaring through the windows.

Teenage Monica and Teenage Deena, two beautiful high school students prepared to graduate are sitting at a table across from each other.

Teenage Monica has a golden-brown complexion and soft brown eyes.

She's wearing a baggy jogging suit with her hair pulled up into a ponytail.

Teenage Deena is brown-skinned and petite, wearing a crop top and leggings.

She's playing with one of her long braids, looking at a flyer for prom.

Teenage Monica is hard at work with a stack of books resting beside her.

TEENAGE DEENA

What are you wearing to prom?

Teenage Monica doesn't look up, scribbling furiously in her notebook.

TEENAGE MONICA

I'm not going.

TEENAGE DEENA

Why? You only get one prom.

TEENAGE MONICA

Should I be impressed?

TEENAGE DEENA

It's not about being impressed.
It's about enjoying one last night
with the people you know.

TEENAGE MONICA

Uh-huh. Like I said, I won't be
attending.

TEENAGE DEENA

I know why.

Teenage Monica finally looks up, intrigued.

TEENAGE MONICA

Why?

TEENAGE DEENA

You're scared of leaving your
comfort zone.

Teenage Monica's expression hardens.

TEENAGE MONICA

What is my comfort zone?

TEENAGE DEENA

Those baggy clothes. Your basic
hairstyles. You're scared of being
free.

TEENAGE MONICA

Why should I...

(Finger quotes)

"Be free," as you call it, when I
already get enough attention?

Teenage Deena laughs, a genuine, amused sound.

TEENAGE DEENA

What attention?

TEENAGE MONICA

I'm the only graduating virgin.
Need I say more?

TEENAGE DEENA

As long as you know it's not your
looks.

TEENAGE MONICA

You ugly women love hating, don't
you?

Teenage Deena smacks her lips, unfazed.

TEENAGE DEENA

I'm far from ugly. Come with
something better.

TEENAGE MONICA

If you were worth the time, I
would.

TEENAGE DEENA

Whatever. You're going, right?

Teenage Monica sighs, clearly annoyed.

TEENAGE MONICA
Why are you so pressed?

TEENAGE DEENA
Going to prom without my best
friend wouldn't seem right.

TEENAGE MONICA
Uh-huh.

TEENAGE DEENA
Seriously. We do everything
together, so you have to come.

TEENAGE MONICA
I'll think about it.

TEENAGE DEENA
Girl, stop playing. You're going.

TEENAGE MONICA
I said I'd think about it.

TEENAGE DEENA
What? You'd prefer sitting at home,
staring at the walls?

Teenage Monica is silent, looking down at her nails, which
desperately need a manicure.

TEENAGE DEENA (CONT'D)
My point. When do you wanna go look
for a dress?

TEENAGE MONICA
I'll figure it out.

TEENAGE DEENA
I hope you don't pick something
tacky.

TEENAGE MONICA
You won't be picking it.

TEENAGE DEENA
What do you mean by that?

TEENAGE MONICA
Nothing, hotbox.

Teenage Deena laughs, throwing her head back.

TEENAGE DEENA
Oh, I'm a hotbox?

TEENAGE MONICA
And my best friend.

TEENAGE DEENA
Whatever.

Teenage Deena gets up and walks away, still laughing.

Teenage Monica smiles faintly, reaching across the table for the flyer.

Her fingers trace the elegantly dressed couple as a flicker of longing crosses her face.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THE LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Laughter and loud talking fill the room.

Teenage Craig and Teenage Jason are standing by their lockers, laughing and talking, wearing their basketball jerseys.

Teenage Craig is handsome, dark-skinned and tall with a Southern charm.

Teenage Jason is medium in height and light-skinned with hazel eyes and curly hair.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Who do you have lined up for prom?

Jason flexes his bicep in the mirror.

TEENAGE JASON
I don't know, I have a lot to choose from.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Living in that fantasy world again?

TEENAGE JASON
Fantasy? Look at me.

He flexes again, grinning.

TEENAGE CRAIG
So?

TEENAGE JASON
What female can resist these guns?

TEENAGE CRAIG
Apparently, a lot, considering you
don't have a date.

TEENAGE JASON
Hater. Why did you ask?

TEENAGE CRAIG
Just wondering.

TEENAGE JASON
I do have my eye on Monica.

Teenage Craig laughs, a short, sarcastic bark.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Is that right?

TEENAGE JASON
Who doesn't? But unlike them, I'll
be the one taking her to prom and
her virginity.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Oh, you think so?

TEENAGE JASON
I know so.

TEENAGE CRAIG
I doubt either scenario happens.

TEENAGE JASON
Oh, let me guess. You'll be the one
to do it.

TEENAGE CRAIG
I'm not saying that.

TEENAGE JASON
Good. You don't have a chance with
her anyway.

Teenage Craig strokes his thin goatee, interested.

TEENAGE CRAIG
What makes you think that?

TEENAGE JASON
You don't have the three things.

TEENAGE CRAIG
What are the three things?

Teenage Jason retrieves his wallet from his locker. He opens it and pulls out some money.

TEENAGE JASON

The body. The looks. And... The money.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Money?

TEENAGE JASON

Money makes women open their legs faster than you can flash it.

TEENAGE CRAIG

I believe you're using the wrong analogy. Money doesn't make "women" respond the way you're claiming.

TEENAGE JASON

They're all the same, bro. Don't get it twisted.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Monica isn't that way.

TEENAGE JASON

What makes you so sure?

TEENAGE CRAIG

You need the one thing you don't have if you're trying to date Monica.

TEENAGE JASON

I'm all ears.

TEENAGE CRAIG

The manners of a gentleman.

Teenage Jason laughs loudly.

TEENAGE JASON

Women these days don't know what a gentleman is. All they know is money, and they'll use their bodies to get it.

TEENAGE CRAIG

So... Why is Monica still a virgin?

TEENAGE JASON

I haven't put my game down yet.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Even with this so-called "game" you
claim to have. Nothing will happen.

TEENAGE JASON
Are you sure about that?

TEENAGE CRAIG
I know so.

Teenage Jason extends his hand, a challenge in his eyes.

TEENAGE JASON
Put something on it.

TEENAGE CRAIG
I'm not betting on that.

TEENAGE JASON
Because you know I'll win?

TEENAGE CRAIG
No. I, unlike you, don't view women
as objects to bet on.

Teenage Jason pulls his hand back, scoffing.

TEENAGE JASON
So, you're admitting I'm right?

TEENAGE CRAIG
You can think what you want.

TEENAGE JASON
I'll tell you how good it was.

TEENAGE CRAIG
You can't tell me what you'll never
know.

TEENAGE JASON
Watch what I tell you.

Teenage Craig pats Jason on the shoulder, still chuckling as
he walks off.

Teenage Jason stares after him, fuming.

TEENAGE JASON (CONT'D)
He hates the fact I'm right.

CUT TO:

INT. MONICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Teenage Monica is sitting on her bed writing in her notebook, with a book beside her.

Her mother, Gwen, enters the room.

GWEN

Have you decided on a dress?

Teenage Monica sighs, closing the notebook, looking at her mother annoyed.

TEENAGE MONICA

What is it with you and Deena?

GWEN

What?

TEENAGE MONICA

What's the big deal about prom?

GWEN

You don't consider this day important?

TEENAGE MONICA

Dancing with a bunch of people you barely speak to. The only thing on the minds of the guys is having sex. No, I don't consider it important.

Gwen's smile fades, replaced by a concerned look.

GWEN

Is that the real reason?

TEENAGE MONICA

Why wouldn't it be?

GWEN

Because you don't have a date.

TEENAGE MONICA

(Scoffs)

You don't think I can get a date?

GWEN

Oh, I know you can get a date. You're beautiful, like your mother. I just find it strange that you don't wanna go, that's all.

TEENAGE MONICA

There's more important stuff to think about.

GWEN

You need to have fun at some point in your life. Don't end up alone, relying on a toy for satisfaction.

Teenage Monica laughs, a short, sharp bark.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Go have some fun. You'll accomplish your goals.

TEENAGE MONICA

...I'll go.

GWEN

You'll probably end up meeting the one.

TEENAGE MONICA

I doubt it.

GWEN

Girl, go have some fun.

TEENAGE MONICA

Okay.

GWEN

I love you.

TEENAGE MONICA

I love you, too.

Gwen exits, leaving Teenage Monica alone in her room.

She stares at the ceiling, a flicker of something unreadable in her eyes.

TEENAGE MONICA (CONT'D)

I don't know why those two believe prom is about to change my life.

INT. THE HALL - NIGHT

The hall has glittering decorations hanging from the ceiling, casting shimmering light on the swirling mass of students on the dance floor.

Music blares from the speakers, punctuated by squeals of laughter and shouted conversations.

Teenage Monica enters, a vision in a fitted, powder blue dress that accentuates her curves.

Her long hair cascades down her back, and her eyes sparkle with a mixture of apprehension and defiance.

Heads turn as she walks in, causing guys to momentarily forget their dates to admire her.

She heads towards the refreshment table, intending to pour herself some punch. But Teenage Jason, looking awkward in a rented black tuxedo, intercepts her, already holding a cup filled to the brim.

Teenage Monica raises an eyebrow, a "what are you doing?" expression etched on her face.

TEENAGE MONICA

Excuse you.

Teenage Jason offers her the cup, with a nervous smile plastered on his face.

TEENAGE JASON

A woman with your beauty shouldn't pour her own punch.

TEENAGE MONICA

What?

TEENAGE JASON

This is a job for a gentleman.

She takes the cup skeptically, her gaze unwavering.

TEENAGE MONICA

You're treating me nice because...?

TEENAGE JASON

I always liked you.

TEENAGE MONICA

That's bullshit. This devastating body has you acting up.

TEENAGE JASON

I was thinking---

TEENAGE MONICA

You'd take my virginity tonight?

He clears his throat, embarrassed, letting out a forced, nervous laugh.

TEENAGE JASON
Why would you say that?

Teenage Monica takes a sip of the punch, her expression unreadable.

TEENAGE MONICA
Considering everyone in school knows I'm a virgin, it fits perfectly with the goofball expression on your face.

TEENAGE JASON
I'll be honest. My limo is outside. After the dance, we should go for a ride, have a drink or two. Maybe go down by the water---

TEENAGE MONICA
And give you some, right?

TEENAGE JASON
Nah. We could just---

TEENAGE MONICA
This conversation is over.

She turns to leave, but Teenage Jason grabs her arm, his grip surprisingly tight.

TEENAGE JASON
Girl, you know you want me.

TEENAGE MONICA
(Laughs)
If I wanted you, I could have you. Since that's not the case, let my arm go, please, and thank you.

Just then, Teenage Craig walks into the hall. He's wearing a sleek black suit, his dark eyes scanning the crowd.

He notices the tension between Teenage Monica and Teenage Jason and calmly walks over, unnoticed, positioning himself behind Teenage Jason.

TEENAGE JASON
Don't tease me, slut. The innocent role bullshit doesn't fool me.

Teenage Monica snatches her arm away, her eyes blazing.

TEENAGE MONICA
You got the wrong one. Get your
trifling ass away from me.

He reaches for her again, but Teenage Craig grabs him by the back of the neck, forcing him into a painful bend.

TEENAGE CRAIG
What's the problem?

TEENAGE JASON
What's wrong with you, man?

TEENAGE CRAIG
The fact that you're bothering her
is bothering me.

TEENAGE JASON
All of a sudden you care about her?

Teenage Craig squeezes harder, causing Teenage Jason to grunt in pain.

TEENAGE CRAIG
This conversation is over, right?

Teenage Jason nods frantically.

Teenage Craig releases him with a shove.

TEENAGE CRAIG (CONT'D)
Find you a girl who fits those
three things you told me about.

Teenage Jason stumbles, regaining his balance.

TEENAGE JASON
When did you start caring about
her?

TEENAGE CRAIG
Get moving.

TEENAGE JASON
I'll get you.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Yeah, okay.

Teenage Jason, defeated and humiliated, shuffles away into the crowd.

Teenage Monica stands there, a faint blush creeping up her neck, but she quickly composes herself.

Teenage Craig turns his attention to her, his gaze intense.

TEENAGE MONICA
I had that under control.

TEENAGE CRAIG
You probably did.

TEENAGE MONICA
I did.

TEENAGE CRAIG
A little extra help never hurts.

TEENAGE MONICA
Thanks.

TEENAGE CRAIG
No need for that. Enjoy the dance.

He turns to leave, but Teenage Monica grabs his arm, stopping him.

TEENAGE MONICA
Wait. Why did you help me?

He turns back, his eyes locking with hers.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Two important things about women that all men should know. One, she already knows if she wants you. And two, if she doesn't show interest, it's best to leave it alone.

TEENAGE MONICA
Out of all these girls you decided to rescue me?

TEENAGE CRAIG
I'm just making sure what I want is safe.

TEENAGE MONICA
And what is that?

TEENAGE CRAIG
You'll find out if you give it to me.

He releases her arm and walks away, leaving Teenage Monica speechless.

Teenage Deena looks radiant in a soft pink fitted dress, approaching Teenage Monica with a wide smile on her face.

TEENAGE DEENA

Sexy, sexy.

Teenage Monica doesn't respond, lost in thought, staring after Teenage Craig.

TEENAGE DEENA (CONT'D)

Hello?

Teenage Monica snaps out of her reverie, blinking.

TEENAGE MONICA

Huh? Hey, what's up?

TEENAGE DEENA

What's wrong with you?

TEENAGE MONICA

Nothing. Just a little stunned.

TEENAGE DEENA

Are you sure?

TEENAGE MONICA

Yeah. Let's get on this floor.

The two friends link arms and join the throng of dancing students, the music washing over them.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

It's a clear night with a slight breeze blowing. Limos, party buses, and nice cars fill the parking lot.

Teenage Monica and Teenage Deena emerge from the hall with laughter bubbling between them.

TEENAGE DEENA

See, you're having fun.

TEENAGE MONICA

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TEENAGE DEENA

And you left your comfort zone.

TEENAGE MONICA

(Laughs)

What made you think I was lame?

Teenage Jason and three other boys, reeking of cheap cologne and desperation, shamble toward them.

Teenage Monica and Teenage Deena exchange a look of disgust.

Teenage Jason is clearly drunk, taking a swig from a silver flask.

TEENAGE JASON

Are you ready to go on that ride now?

TEENAGE MONICA

You again? What do you want?

TEENAGE JASON

I was waiting for you. Let's grab some drinks and go by the water. Since your friend is with you, she can keep my boys occupied.

TEENAGE MONICA

I don't think we'll be doing anything with you or your boys. I suggest y'all get in your limo and use your hands to keep each other company.

TEENAGE DEENA

Low key, they already did.

TEENAGE JASON

(Takes a sip)

That's very funny, sluts. Look. We can give y'all two hours before we ditch y'all and move on to something better.

Teenage Monica steps right up to him, her eyes blazing with a controlled fury.

She slaps him hard across the face.

TEENAGE MONICA

That's the second time you disrespected me. Don't even think about going for a third.

TEENAGE JASON

Rubs his face with a twisted smile forming You're right. I'll take what I want now.

Teenage Jason lunges, grabbing her roughly, trying to force a kiss.

Teenage Monica struggles with elbows flying.

Teenage Deena, without hesitation, starts hammering Teenage Jason upside the head with her small purse.

The other three guys stand back, momentarily stunned.

Teenage Jason, fueled by alcohol and ego, keeps his grip on Teenage Monica, barely flinching from Teenage Deena's blows.

TEENAGE JASON (CONT'D)
Don't stand there looking dumb!
Grab her girl!

The three snap out of their trance and grab Teenage Deena, pulling her away from Teenage Jason.

The two women scream, struggling to break free as they're dragged towards a waiting limo.

Suddenly, Teenage Craig bursts out of the hall. Without a word, he grabs Teenage Jason by the collar and throws him aside.

The three release Teenage Deena, their attention now focused on Teenage Jason as he stumbles to his feet.

TEENAGE CRAIG
You're so desperate to get some
that you'll resort to this?!

Teenage Jason glares at Craig, wiping saliva from his chapped lips.

TEENAGE JASON
After I knock you out...
(Licks his lips)
...I'll finish what I was about to
start with that slut.

The two lunge at each other, a messy, desperate brawl erupting in the parking lot.

Teenage Craig manages to get Teenage Jason on the ground and starts pounding him, but the other three quickly jump on Teenage Craig, turning the fight into a four-on-one beatdown.

Teenage Jason, winded but enraged, stumbles back to his feet, taking another swig from his flask.

TEENAGE JASON (CONT'D)
Hold him down!

The three pin Teenage Craig to the ground, and Teenage Jason, with a cruel grin, stomps on Teenage Craig's ankle until a sickening crack echoes in the night air.

Teenage Craig screams in agony as Teenage Jason and his cronies turn their attention back to the girls, who are now huddled together, terrified.

TEENAGE JASON (CONT'D)
Back to you two. Get ready to---

The scene is shattered as teachers come running out of the hall, their voices sharp with authority.

The four scramble into the limo, which screeches off into the night.

Teenage Monica rushes to Teenage Craig, who is clutching his ankle, his face contorted in pain.

TEENAGE MONICA
Are you okay?

Teenage Craig groans, but forces a weak smile.

TEENAGE CRAIG
Don't worry about me. As long as you're okay, that's all that matters.

TEENAGE MONICA
Thank you. Once again, you didn't have to do that.

TEENAGE CRAIG
This time I had to. If you're not ready for sex, it should stay that way.

Teenage Monica leans down and kisses him softly on the cheek.

Other students pour out of the hall, murmuring in concern, while the teachers call the police and an ambulance for Teenage Craig.

CUT TO:

INT. THE HOSPITAL - LATER

Teenage Craig lies on a hospital bed with his ankle heavily wrapped.

Gwen and Teenage Monica are standing by his bed.

GWEN

Thank you for helping my daughter.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Any man would've done the same.

TEENAGE MONICA

You and I know that's a lie. The only way any other man would've helped me is if I'd given him some.

TEENAGE CRAIG

(Light chuckle)

That's true.

GWEN

Regardless, I appreciate what you did. Your parents taught you well.

TEENAGE CRAIG

The thanks would go to my grandmother. She's the one who taught me the rules of life as far as how to treat a female.

GWEN

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend.

TEENAGE CRAIG

No offense was taken. My grandparents raised me because my parents were going through domestic issues.

GWEN

I'm sorry to hear that.

TEENAGE CRAIG

It's fine. The situation helped me become a better man.

GWEN

At least you didn't let it hold you down. Well, I'll leave you two alone. Thank you, once again.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Not a problem.

Gwen walks out of the room, leaving Teenage Monica and Teenage Craig alone.

TEENAGE MONICA

I would've never thought that about your parents.

TEENAGE CRAIG

(Inhales deeply, sharply exhales)

Yeah, my alcoholic father beats on my mother, and my mother believes another man will never love her better than him.

TEENAGE MONICA

Why does she believe that?

TEENAGE CRAIG

She feels a woman should remain with one man no matter what to make things work.

TEENAGE MONICA

She's in denial of the truth.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Indeed. Watching those two growing up, I came to the conclusion I'd never take a drink.

TEENAGE MONICA

That's a wise choice.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Do you think so?

TEENAGE MONICA

If that's what made you the man you are now, yes.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Thank you.

TEENAGE MONICA

You're welcome. What did you mean when you said you wanted something from me?

TEENAGE CRAIG

Truthfully?

She stares at him, blushing.

TEENAGE MONICA

Duh.

TEENAGE CRAIG

I wanted to grab something to eat
and have a nice conversation, so we
could get to know each other.

TEENAGE MONICA

That's it?

TEENAGE CRAIG

That's it.

TEENAGE MONICA

You're in the hospital because you
wanted to go on a date?

TEENAGE CRAIG

(Laughs)

And get to know you better.

TEENAGE MONICA

Why didn't you just ask me out?

TEENAGE CRAIG

Good point.

TEENAGE MONICA

What have you learned?

TEENAGE CRAIG

When my ankle heals, hopefully,
you'll go on a date with me.

TEENAGE MONICA

I'll be waiting.

TEENAGE CRAIG

Really?

TEENAGE MONICA

Why wouldn't I? You're in here
because of me.

TEENAGE CRAIG

I'll hold you to those words.

She leans down and gives him a soft kiss.

TEENAGE MONICA

Just make sure you ask.

She turns and walks out of the room, leaving Teenage Craig smiling, despite the throbbing pain in his ankle.

CUT TO:

INT. GWEN HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - LATER

The living room is cozy.

Teenage Monica and Gwen are sitting on the sofa.

Gwen has a cup of tea resting on the table.

TEENAGE MONICA

What do you think about Craig?

Gwen picks up her cup and takes a sip

TEENAGE MONICA (CONT'D)

Well?

GWEN

He seems like a good man. I appreciate him helping you.

TEENAGE MONICA

But?

GWEN

It's something about his story.

TEENAGE MONICA

What about it?

GWEN

I can't put my finger on it.

TEENAGE MONICA

(Sighs)

Oh my God.

GWEN

What?

TEENAGE MONICA

How do you always find something negative in everything? You nagged me about going to prom, and because of that, I was almost raped, and a good man ended up in the hospital. Now, here you are searching for negativity. Why?

GWEN

I'm not looking for negativity.

TEENAGE MONICA

Yes, you are. He's a nice man, but there's something about him I can't place my finger on. I can't win with you. I believe I met someone who actually cares about me. If I didn't go to the prom, you would've complained. What do you want from me?

GWEN

It doesn't matter what I want. I'm just sharing my thoughts.

TEENAGE MONICA

Considering I came up just fine without a father figure, I don't see the difference between his situation and mine.

GWEN

Despite your father not being in your life, you had me. I made it my point to make sure you didn't come up like I did. But if that's the scenario you wanna use, you go right ahead. I'll keep my thoughts to myself.

TEENAGE MONICA

That would be a first.

GWEN

And it won't be the last. Technically, you're grown, so it's time you learned things without my help.

TEENAGE MONICA

I'm glad you know.

GWEN

Don't think I won't be here to protect you.

TEENAGE MONICA

I know you will. I just wanna give this a try.

Gwen smiles, trying not to cry.

GWEN

My baby girl grew up so fast.

Monica stares at her, trying not to cry.

TEENAGE MONICA

I'll always be your baby girl.

They embrace in a hug.

GWEN

My baby girl. I hope this works out for you.

TEENAGE MONICA

Thank you.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Teenage Monica and Teenage Craig are going on random dates before they end up getting married.

Monica finds out she's pregnant, and Craig is overwhelmed with joy.

END MONTAGE:

Five months later...

INT. MONICA AND CRAIG HOUSE - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Craig is sitting on the bed wearing a wife beater and shorts watching the basketball game with anguish on his face, rubbing his ankle.

Monica enters the room walking on sunshine, wearing a two-piece business suit that shows her five-month-old stomach.

She walks over to Craig and gives him a kiss on the cheek.

MONICA

How's my baby?

Her presence is annoying him.

CRAIG

I'm okay.

MONICA

Are you hungry?

CRAIG

Nope.

MONICA
What's wrong?

CRAIG
Just leave me alone.

MONICA
Attitude, much?

She brushes him off and then heads over to the closet.

Craig looks over with his eyes, sucking his teeth.

CRAIG
I'm bothered because I'm watching
my career I couldn't pursue.

She turns to look at him.

MONICA
What are you talking about?

CRAIG
Not being in the NBA.

MONICA
Baby, I understand your pain.
Sadly, there's nothing we can do
about that.

CRAIG
(Scoffs)
I should've let what was about to
happen go down.

MONICA
Are you serious?!

Craig doesn't respond.

MONICA (CONT'D)
(Scoffs)
Niggas will always be niggas, no
matter how much they claimed to
love you, only wanting one thing,
and after they get it, a woman
ain't worth shit.

She walks out of the room.

Craig gets up and follows behind her, stopping her on the
landing.

CRAIG
What the fuck does that mean?!

MONICA
Nobody asked you to intervene!

CRAIG
You're so stupid!

MONICA
Well, watch my stupid ass walk out
the door.

She snatches away, and he grabs her again.

CRAIG
Where are---

She slaps him hard across the face.

MONICA
Don't put your fucking hands on me!
You know damn well---

He backhands her, knocking her down the stairs.

She lands at the bottom not moving, moaning in pain.

CRAIG
What made you think you could talk
to me like you're crazy?! I'm the
man in this relationship! You
better remember that from now on!
Do you hear me?!

She doesn't respond or move.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Mo, get up! I'm hungry and you need
to get up and cook!

She still doesn't respond.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
Mo, don't let me tell you again.

He sees the blood leaking onto the floor underneath her.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
My baby.

He rushes off to call 911.

Monica remains on the floor, bleeding and moaning in pain.

CUT TO:

INT. THE HOSPITAL - LATER

Monica is on the hospital bed exhausted, with Deena beside her bed.

DEENA
What happened?

Monica turns her head away, avoiding eye contact. Her voice is barely audible.

MONICA
I don't wanna talk about it.

Deena's eyes harden.

DEENA
You don't wanna talk about it? You
lost your baby, and you don't wanna
talk about it?

Monica's gaze flicks back to Deena. A flicker of defiance briefly masks her pain.

MONICA
We got into it.

DEENA
And he had to put his hands on you?

Monica flinches, a subtle but telling reaction.

MONICA
Who said he put his hands on me?

Deena stares at her, disbelief warring with anger.

DEENA
So, you tripped over your own feet
and fell down the steps?

Monica swallows hard, her eyes fixed on some distant point on the wall.

MONICA
That's exactly what happened.

The silence hangs heavy between them, thick with unspoken accusations.

Deena's voice is laced with a dangerous calm.

DEENA

Are you comfortable with that lie?

Monica shuts her eyes, a single tear escaping and tracing a path down her temple.

MONICA

I'm comfortable because it's not a lie.

Deena leans closer, her voice dropping to a near whisper, almost conspiratorial.

DEENA

Does he still go to that bar you told me about?

Monica nods almost imperceptibly, her eyes still closed.

MONICA

Yeah.

The door creaks open, breaking the tense silence.

Craig enters the room, his face a carefully constructed mask of concern.

DEENA

(Through gritted teeth)

Mo---

CRAIG

How's she doing?

Deena turns her head toward Craig, her nostrils flaring. A barely contained snarl plays on her lips.

DEENA

We'll talk when you get back to work. All of a sudden, I feel sick.

She looks at Craig up and down, a silent promise of retribution in her gaze.

She drops eye contact, before stalking out of the room, brushing past him without a word.

Craig walks tentatively toward Monica, attempting to take her hand.

She recoils, snatching her hand away as if burned.

CRAIG

I know what you're thinking.
There's nothing I can say that'll
justify my actions.

MONICA

You're damn right. I lost our first
child because you had a moment of
rage fueled by alcohol and regrets
about helping the woman you claim
to love.

CRAIG

That's my fault. I was watching the
game---

MONICA

And you decided to take it out on
me?

CRAIG

I know I'm sorry---

MONICA

Do you understand my child is gone?
Why should I have anything to do
with you?

CRAIG

Because I love you and you love me.

Monica sighs, a sound filled with weariness and a deep,
resonating grief.

MONICA

Our child would still be in the
process of coming into this world
if that was true.

He gets down on his knee, his facade cracking to reveal a
raw desperation. He grabs her hand. His grip is too tight.

CRAIG

I know you don't want anything to
do with me. And I know no matter
how much I apologize, it won't
change the situation. But I swear
on my life, I'll never do this
again.

Monica looks at him, her eyes filled with a mixture of pain
and disbelief.

MONICA

The man I love would've never done this.

CRAIG

I am the man you love.

Monica breaks down, her body is oozing with sobs. She pulls her hand free from his unyielding grip.

MONICA

(Crying)

I can't believe you.

CRAIG

All I'm asking is for one more chance.

MONICA

Craig, you---

CRAIG

Just say yes. I'm begging you. Say you'll stay.

INT. MONICA AND CRAIG HOUSE - THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Monica is standing over the stove wearing something casual, humming a tune while cooking dinner.

Craig staggers in drunk wearing his construction uniform and holding a bottle of vodka.

His eyes are red, and he can barely hold the saliva inside his mouth.

He makes his way to the table and plops down on the seat.

CRAIG

What's cooking?

She turns around, walking over to him, smiling.

MONICA

Roast. Macaroni, green beans---

CRAIG

Okay, whatever.

(Takes a sip)

When will it be done?

MONICA

(Clears her throat)

It'll be ready in a matter of minutes. I'm waiting for the roast to get done.

He shakes his head disappointed, taking a swig from the bottle.

CRAIG

You've been here all day and my dinner ain't ready yet? What the hell were you doing?!

She takes a step back, nervous.

MONICA

I had to clean the house before I started.

He takes a swig and then slings the bottle across the room.

Monica shrieks, stepping back with a look of fear on her face.

CRAIG

I want my meal hot and ready after work! I don't wanna hear excuses!

MONICA

Craig---

CRAIG

Craig what?! Craig what?! That's not putting a meal in front of me!

He gets up and grabs her by the wrists, causing her to scream.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

I know why my meal ain't ready! You were in here fuckin' another man!

MONICA

Craig, I swear---

Releasing one of her wrists, he slaps her hard across the face.

CRAIG

Shut up! I smell another man on you! You wanna be with another man?! I'll make sure he wants the lights off.

She screams as he slaps her a few more times before throwing her into the island.

Falling to the floor, she continues crying with her hands over her face.

He takes his belt off and wraps it around his knuckles.

INT. THE OFFICE - MORNING

Monica is in her cubicle typing.

Pictures of Craig and Monica when they were happy are taped on the walls, along with sticky notes with various messages.

Monica pauses typing to make sure the bruise above her eye is covered.

Deena enters the room and walks over to Monica, placing a hand on her shoulder.

Monica jerks in fear, slowly turning around.

DEENA

Are you okay?

Monica laughs nervously, making sure the bruise doesn't get revealed.

MONICA

I'm fine. I didn't get a lot of sleep last night. You know how it is when the husband can't get enough of you.

Deena moves Monica's hair to the side and sighs, looking at the bruise.

DEENA

When does the wife get enough of her husband beating her?

Monica moves Deena's hand, ashamed.

Deena walks over to an empty cubicle, grabs a chair and then comes back placing it beside Monica.

MONICA

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

DEENA

Girl, everybody knows. He's no longer the loving high school sweetheart you fell in love with.

MONICA

He's under a lot of stress. I'm the woman of the house, so I should uphold my job as far as keeping the house clean and having dinner ready on time. Because I slack in those areas, we have our altercations.

DEENA

Mo, you can't believe what just came from your mouth.

MONICA

It's the truth. I don't focus hard enough on my duties as a wife.

DEENA

So, a beating justifies it?

Monica doesn't respond.

DEENA (CONT'D)

(Sighs)

I can relate to your situation.

Monica stares at her with glossy eyes.

MONICA

What do you know about my situation?

Deena pulls down the neck part of her shirt, just enough to see the scar on her chest from being stabbed.

Monica covers her mouth.

MONICA (CONT'D)

What happened?

DEENA

I was like you. I thought it was love and nothing else in the world mattered.

(Sobs softly)

Thank God I survived. I told myself there is no love in the world worth losing my life. When are you going to realize that?

Monica shakes her head in denial.

MONICA
It'll never go that far with us.

DEENA
I said the same thing.

MONICA
We love each other.

DEENA
He loves knowing his grip is so
tight you'll never leave. Can you
honestly tell me why you love him?

Monica doesn't respond, closing her eyes, letting the tears fall.

Deena places a hand on her shoulder, feeling her pain.

DEENA (CONT'D)
Don't let what happened to me, or
worse happen to you. You're
beautiful. Intelligent. You don't
have to take abuse while making
yourself believe it's love.

Deena gets up and walks away.

Monica remains with her head down, weeping low, wiping the tears from her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. MONICA AND CRAIG HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Monica is sitting on the sofa looking at old pictures of her and Craig in a scrapbook, wiping the tears from her face.

Craig comes in drunk wearing a basketball jersey and shorts, holding a bouquet of roses, leaning up against the wall.

CRAIG
Baby, I'm home.

She sniffles, wiping her eyes as she places the book down.

MONICA
Hey.

CRAIG

I know I was out of line last night, and there's nothing I can do or say to make you forgive me. But... I have something explaining I'll never do you wrong again.

She turns her head to look at him while pointing at her bruise.

MONICA

Do you think roses can heal this bruise? Do you think roses can heal the inner scarred tissue you embedded in me due to a lack of trust?

She lowers her head.

Craig walks over and kneels down, placing the roses next to her.

CRAIG

I understand what you're saying.

MONICA

What happened to the man I love? The man I gave my heart to without a doubt because I loved him like he loved me.

CRAIG

It's my fault you lost him. I lost myself somewhere. By doing that, I also lost my real, true love. That's why I have this.

He pulls out a ring box and opens it, revealing a diamond ring.

She covers her mouth, shocked.

MONICA

Oh, my God.

CRAIG

This day marks our anniversary.

MONICA

Craig---

He places a finger on her lips.

CRAIG

Don't say anything. Just know that
from here on, I'll never hurt you
again.

As tears fall from her eyes while she hugs and kisses all
over his face, the look of joy turns sour.

MONICA

What's that smell?

CRAIG

What smell?

She pushes him back.

MONICA

Unless you're searching for your
inner woman, which I highly doubt.
Why do you smell like perfume?

CRAIG

(Clears his throat)
Baby, I don't know what you're
talking about.

MONICA

Right. So all these scratches on
your neck mean what?

She picks up the roses and hits him over the head a few
times before standing up and walking away.

He stands up with an exposed look.

CRAIG

Baby, let me explain.

She pauses but keeps her back turned.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

I was with the fella's playing
ball, and I got scratched up
playing defense. Since my team won,
women were trying to hug me, so
that's why I smell like perfume.

She turns around, looking at him disgusted.

MONICA

You're so full of it. Why can't you
be a man for once and live up to
what you did?

His look turns serious.

CRAIG

Is that what you wanna hear?

MONICA

It's not about what I wanna hear.
It's about telling me the truth.

CRAIG

(Deep breath)

...Okay. I was with another woman
tonight. Actually, I've been with a
different woman for the past few
months. You won't do anything about
it because you know better, so get
that ass upstairs and get in bed.

MONICA

You're a worthless excuse of a man.
I'm glad you knocked me down the
stairs so I could lose our child.
It would've killed me to watch our
child see his father turn out to be
a worthless duplicate of his
father!

He charges at her, and she kicks him between the legs,
making him drop to the floor in pain.

MONICA (CONT'D)

You're so predictable. I'll be back
to collect my things, but my heart
you can keep. Let it remind you of
a good woman you ruined because you
weren't built to handle her.

She makes her way out of the room.

CRAIG

Monica! Monica, get back here! I'm
killing you! I swear to God, I'm
killing you!

CUT TO:

INT. GWEN HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - LATER

Monica and Gwen are on the sofa.

Monica is wiping the tears from her eyes.

MONICA

I can't believe this.

GWEN

I tried to tell you it was something about him.

MONICA

Mama, it's not the time for that.

Gwen looks at her.

GWEN

Do you enjoy getting smacked in the face with everything but the truth?

MONICA

How can you say that at a time like this?

GWEN

The same way you took those beatings. The same way you lost your child. Baby, I love you to death. How can you not listen to someone who's been around the world more than once?

MONICA

I'm a product of that old saying, "love is blind.

GWEN

(Laughs)

That's not what you're a product of. You're a product of stupidity.

MONICA

Mama, come on.

GWEN

You're a tad bit on the stupid side. You loved him for being your prince charming to the rescue. The good looks. The sex.

(Coy snicker)

How was the sex? I heard those tall boys---

MONICA

(Laughs)

Mama, please.

GWEN

(Laughs)

Sorry. But what you thought was love back then was nothing more than spur of the moment. You told me to let you handle it, and I did. Do you remember what I told you my mother told me?

MONICA

You told me a lot of things she said.

GWEN

A real man never puts his hands on a woman. A real man loves his woman for more than just an object. He loves her for being his woman, making sure he stands strong.

Monica sighs, shaking her head.

MONICA

What do I do now?

GWEN

Are you happy you're still alive?

MONICA

Yes.

GWEN

Then that's all that matters. Everything else from here on out is your new beginning.

MONICA

Thanks.

GWEN

No need to thank me. I should've stepped in sooner before it went this far.

MONICA

There's no one to blame but myself. He said the signs when he told me about his parents. I didn't expect him to go through the same phase. Hell, we're reliving his parent's relationship.

GWEN

You don't feel like I let you down?

MONICA

Mama, I let myself down. I remember when I asked him why his mother couldn't move on.

(Sighs)

Look at what's happening to me.

GWEN

I feel like I should've done something.

MONICA

Being here for me now is the best thing you can do.

GWEN

I love you, baby.

MONICA

I love you, too.

(Laughs low)

You don't mind if your baby stays here for a few days?

GWEN

No matter how old you get, this will always be your home.

They give each other a hug.

Gwen kisses Monica on the cheek and then makes her way out of the room.

Monica snuffles, wiping her eyes while pulling her phone out to call Deena.

MONICA

Hey. Can you meet me at my house in twenty minutes?

(Listens)

I'll tell you all about it when we link up. You still have the key I gave you, right?

(Listens)

Good. Okay, I'll see you there.

She hangs up and places the phone back in her pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. MONICA AND CRAIG HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - LATER

Monica enters the house and tries to creep upstairs while Craig lies on the sofa.

A bottle of vodka is resting on the table.

When she gets to the steps, he sits up and grabs the bottle, taking a sip.

CRAIG

It's about time you came home.

She turns around.

MONICA

This is not my home. That feeling left a long time ago. I was just naive and didn't hand the keys over.

He takes another sip and then stands up.

CRAIG

This is your home! Now, like I told you, get your ass up those stairs, get in bed and take what I have to give you.

Monica stares at him with a smirk, shaking her head.

MONICA

At one point, I loved you and didn't wanna lose you. My eyes are open now. I realize it was neither of those reasons. I was afraid to not love you because of what you would've done to me. I didn't wanna leave because I knew you would torment me until I came back. But here's something I know you're not expecting to hear. I'm no longer your recyclable object. I'm about to get my few things and start a new life. Without you!

CRAIG

You think it's that easy?! You think you can come in here all high and mighty without repercussions?!

MONICA

There's nothing you can do or say that'll knock me down.

CRAIG

You'll get knocked down if I come over there and go upside your head.

MONICA

You do what you need to do.

She starts to walk up the stairs, and he runs over and grabs her, causing her to turn around and push him back, followed by a slap across the face.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Don't you ever put your hands on me again! I'll be damned if I continue being your punching bag! You put another finger on me, and one of us has to go.

A sinister smile spreads across his face.

CRAIG

One of us has to go.

MONICA

That's what I---

He hits her with enough force that she breaks her neck on the rail, falling to the floor dead.

CRAIG

Get up! I've done worse than this!
(Kicks her a few times)
Monica?

DEENA (O.S.)

Mo?

Craig looks around in fear before running out of the room.

Deena enters and sees Monica lying motionless, and quickly runs over to her.

DEENA (CONT'D)

I told you!

Deena drops to her knees and holds her dead friend in her arms, rocking back and forth, crying.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BAR - NIGHT

In the somber atmosphere, jazz music is playing.

With the few customers, you can tell they're trying to wash away their problems with alcohol.

With each shot Craig takes, he shakes his head in sorrow.

CRAIG

I can't believe I did that.

Deena walks in with a stone-cold expression, making her way towards Craig.

She stops behind him.

DEENA

You're a worthless bastard.

Craig is confused, but he doesn't turn around to see the face behind the voice.

CRAIG

Who is that?

DEENA

Don't even look at me until I say so.

She pulls a snub nose out and cocks it, placing it on the back of his head, causing everybody in the bar to scream and drop to the floor.

He tries to turn around, and she presses the gun harder against his head.

DEENA (CONT'D)

What the fuck did I just tell you?!

CRAIG

What do you want?

DEENA

I want you to feel helpless. If I had the time, I'd beat your ass. But for now...

(Scoffs)

Savor these last few moments of your useless life.

Craig registers Deena's voice.

CRAIG

Listen. I didn't mean---

DEENA

You meant it. You meant every bruise you put on her, along with every ounce of her dignity you took, leading to her murder.

CRAIG

(Sobs)

I didn't mean to kill her. She said something that hurt my pride.

DEENA

Pride?! What man beats on a woman and then turns around and says he has pride?

CRAIG

I honestly can't tell you.

DEENA

Turn around and look at me. These eyes filled with hate will be the last thing you see.

He turns around with tears pouring down his face, staring into the barrel of the gun.

CRAIG

I guess I deserve this.

DEENA

You deserve a beating. You deserve a destroyed soul with the scars to match. That's what you deserve.

CRAIG

Can I say one more thing?

DEENA

What?

CRAIG

I---

She fires a round in his head, and he falls back against the bar before falling to the floor dead.

Everyone screams.

She takes his seat and picks up one of his shots, tilting it back.

Placing the gun on the counter, she waits for the police to arrive.

END CREDITS: