

(UNDENIABLY THE BEST)
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UNDENIABLY THE BEST

FADE IN:

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS - DAWN - AERIAL

A slow aerial over Beverly Hills as the sun rises.

Sprawling estates tucked into the hills. Long driveways.
Hidden gates. Perfection designed to be seen from nowhere.

The city below hums faintly—far away, irrelevant.

EXT. REED ESTATE - DAWN - AERIAL DESCENT

The camera drifts toward one estate larger than the rest.

Manicured grounds. Infinity pool. Glass walls catching first
light.

Silent. Untouched.

The camera lowers into the backyard—

A single garden light still on.

EXT. REED ESTATE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

MIGUEL, the gardener, waters a small section of soil.

The grounds don't need it.

The house behind him—massive, dark, waiting.

He turns off the hose.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A warm, lived-in kitchen that's trying not to look like a
magazine spread.

A cereal box sits open like it gave up.

JACOB REED (15), sharp-eyed and quiet, scrolls his phone with
the expression of someone who already knows adults are full
of it.

LUCY REED (10), bright and emotionally tuned-in, draws in a notebook. Her picture: a family of four. Two stick-figure parents are on a stage. The two kids are in the audience.

Lucy adds a tiny trophy between the parents.

Jacob clocks it.

JACOB
You made them famous again.

LUCY
They are famous.

JACOB
They're... on TV.

Lucy doesn't look up.

LUCY
That's famous.

Jacob scrolls. A headline flashes:

OSCAR NOMINATIONS – LIVE TODAY

Jacob's thumb pauses.

Lucy hums softly, making little applause sounds while she draws.

JACOB
What's with the clapping?

LUCY
Practicing.

JACOB
For what?

Lucy finally looks at him, dead serious.

LUCY
For when we have to be happy.

Jacob stares at her a beat, thrown.

From the hallway, a voice:

ELENA (O.S.)
Lucy-shoes.

ELENA REED (40) enters in sweats, hair up, face clean, still beautiful in a way that annoys the universe. She's not "movie star" right now—she's mom on a schedule.

She kisses Lucy's head, then Jacob's.

Jacob allows it.

ELENA (CONT'D)
Big day?

JACOB
Depends.

Elena pours coffee. She clocks Jacob's phone.

ELENA
No doom-scrolling before school.

JACOB
It's not doom. It's...
(reads)
"Awards Season Bloodbath."

Elena smirks, trying not to care.

ELENA
That's adorable.

Lucy holds up her drawing.

LUCY
Mommy, are you nervous?

Elena considers, honest but careful.

ELENA
No.

Lucy narrows her eyes like she's a tiny detective.

LUCY
Liar.

Elena laughs despite herself.

ELENA
Okay—maybe a little.

Lucy nods, satisfied. Like she just restored order.

A thud upstairs.

DANIEL REED (42) appears in the doorway, already dressed, already composed. The kind of man who looks like he irons his thoughts.

He leans in and kisses Elena. Not performative. Familiar. Real.

DANIEL
Morning.

ELENA
Morning.

A beat of quiet intimacy—

Until Jacob speaks, without looking up.

JACOB
They're announcing nominations
today.

Daniel pours coffee, casual.

DANIEL
So I've heard.

Lucy looks between them.

LUCY
Can you both get nominated?

Daniel and Elena share a glance.

ELENA
It's... possible.

LUCY
Then what?

Daniel smiles.

DANIEL
Then we celebrate.

Jacob finally looks up.

JACOB
And if only one of you gets
nominated?

Another glance. Slightly sharper this time.

DANIEL
Then we still celebrate.

Jacob holds the look like a judge holding court.

JACOB

Okay.

He goes back to scrolling.

Lucy adds something to her drawing: a little crack down the stage.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE – DRIVEWAY – MORNING

The family piles into the car.

Daniel loads backpacks. Elena checks lunch bags. Their teamwork is smooth—too smooth, like they've rehearsed being normal.

Lucy gets into the back seat next to Jacob.

LUCY

If they nominate both of them, that means they have to pick who's better.

JACOB

They already do that.

LUCY

That's mean.

JACOB

It's Hollywood.

Lucy thinks on that like it's a foreign language.

LUCY

Are we Hollywood?

Jacob looks out the window.

JACOB

We live near it.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - MOVING - MORNING

Elena drives. Daniel rides shotgun.

A morning radio host chatters.

RADIO HOST (V.O.)
Big day! Oscar nominations drop in-
we'll see if the Reed-Reed power
couple makes history-

Elena turns the volume down, too fast.

Daniel notices. Doesn't comment.

Jacob notices. Definitely comments.

JACOB
They said "power couple" like it's
a job.

Elena smiles in the mirror.

ELENA
Ignore it.

JACOB
Hard when everyone at school treats
it like the Super Bowl.

Lucy leans forward between the seats.

LUCY
Are there snacks at the Oscars?

Daniel laughs.

DANIEL
Probably.

Lucy brightens.

LUCY
Then it's not all bad.

Jacob smirks-then catches himself smiling and kills it.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL DROP-OFF – MORNING

Elena hugs Lucy.

Daniel hugs Jacob.

The hugs are slightly different.

Lucy clings. Jacob tolerates.

Jacob pulls back and looks at Daniel.

JACOB

If Mom gets nominated and you
don't...

Daniel's face stays calm.

DANIEL

What about it?

Jacob studies him, trying to find the real answer.

JACOB

Nothing.

He walks off.

Daniel watches him go, unsettled.

Elena walks up beside Daniel.

ELENA

Teenagers.

Daniel doesn't take his eyes off Jacob.

DANIEL

He's paying attention.

ELENA

He's always paying attention.

That lands.

CUT TO:

INT. TALENT AGENCY – OFFICE – DAY

Daniel sits across from MARTY SHAW (50s), his agent-sharp suit, sharper instincts. Marty's desk is minimal: contracts, calendars, quiet war plans.

Marty slides a printout of awards predictions.

Daniel doesn't touch it.

MARTY
You're in every top five.

DANIEL
Predictions don't vote.

MARTY
Perception does.
(beat)
Your wife is surging.

Daniel's jaw ticks once. Almost imperceptible.

DANIEL
Good.

Marty holds Daniel's gaze.

MARTY
I'm not your therapist.

I'm your agent.

So I'm going to say this clean—

Marty leans in.

MARTY (CONT'D)
They love a narrative.

And the "perfect marriage" is a narrative..

until it isn't.

Daniel's phone buzzes.

A text from Elena:

"School drop-off was weird. Jacob asked something."

Daniel stares at it too long.

MARTY (CONT'D)
You want my advice?

Daniel looks up.

DANIEL
I already know it.

MARTY
Say it.

Daniel exhales.

DANIEL
Smile. Be gracious. Don't flinch.

Marty nods.

MARTY
And at home?

Daniel doesn't answer.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP – DAY

Elena sits across from TESSA KLINE (40s), her publicist. Tessa is friendly in the way a shark can be friendly. She's all warmth—until she's not.

Tessa slides her phone over: a clip from entertainment news.

TV PUNDIT (ON PHONE)
If Elena Reed gets nominated, it's a lock— but if Daniel Reed gets nominated too? That's a marital cage match—

Elena's smile is tight.

ELENA
That's disgusting.

TESSA
It's oxygen.
And oxygen spreads fires.

Elena sips coffee, controlled.

ELENA
We're not doing "cage match."

Tessa nods politely like Elena just said something adorable.

TESSA
Of course not.
We're doing "supportive."
We're doing "historic."
We're doing "love."

Elena studies her.

ELENA
And if only one of us gets
nominated?

Tessa pauses half a beat too long.

TESSA
Then we protect the brand.

ELENA
We're not a brand.

Tessa smiles.

TESSA
You are in public.

Elena's phone buzzes.

A message from her mother, VIVIAN MORETTI:

"CALL ME BEFORE THE ANNOUNCEMENT."

Elena stares at it, annoyed and—somewhere deeper—triggered.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — LATE AFTERNOON

Jacob is home first. Backpack tossed. Shoes kicked off.

He turns on the TV. News coverage: nominations count down.
Analysts, graphics, suspense like a hostage situation.

Jacob watches, expression blank.

Lucy enters, still in school uniform, hugging her notebook.

LUCY
Is it happening yet?

JACOB
Soon.

Lucy climbs onto the couch beside him, too close.
Jacob doesn't move away.

LUCY
If Mommy wins, will Daddy be sad?

Jacob thinks.

JACOB
Dad doesn't get sad.

Lucy looks at him like he's stupid.

LUCY
Everybody gets sad.

Jacob doesn't argue.

From the hallway, Elena enters—home now, hair still up, trying to look casual like today isn't a landmine.

Then Daniel enters behind her.

They stop when they see the kids already watching.

Lucy sits up straight, like this is church.

LUCY (CONT'D)
Okay.

Everybody sit.

And—

(whispers)

be normal.

Jacob snorts.

Elena laughs.

Daniel tries to laugh.

Everyone sits.

The TV volume rises.

The world narrows to an envelope.

ON TV – LIVE ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
And now... the nominees for Best
Actor are—

A name. Not them.

Another name. Still not them.

Elena's hand finds Daniel's.

Daniel squeezes.

Lucy claps once, premature.

Jacob shoots her a look.

Lucy clamps her mouth shut like she's been caught committing
a crime.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
...Daniel Reed—

Elena gasps, genuine. She grabs Daniel's face, kisses him
hard.

Lucy cheers.

LUCY
YES!

Jacob's eyes widen—proud.

Daniel smiles, stunned.

Then—

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
...Elena Reed—

Silence.

A beat where the room forgets how to breathe.

Then Lucy SCREAMS and starts clapping like her life depends
on it.

LUCY
YOU BOTH WON! YOU BOTH WON!

Elena's eyes fill.

Daniel's smile holds—just a hair too tight.

Jacob watches them both.

Not the TV.

Not the nominations.

Them.

Daniel and Elena lock eyes.

A moment too long.

A moment that says:

Now what?

INT. LIVING ROOM — MOMENTS LATER

Phones explode—texts, calls, vibrations across the couch like insects.

Lucy spins in circles, dizzy with joy.

Jacob stands, overwhelmed.

JACOB

So... who do they want to win?

Elena opens her mouth—

Daniel answers first, calm.

DANIEL

That's not the point.

Jacob nods like he accepts it.

JACOB

Okay.

He turns and walks down the hall.

Elena watches him go, worried.

Lucy runs to her notebook and flips to her drawing.

She looks at the crack she drew on the stage.

She adds another one.

INT. REED HOUSE — HALLWAY — NIGHT

Jacob's bedroom door shuts.

Not slammed.

Worse. Quiet.

Daniel stands frozen in the living room, phone buzzing in his hand.

Elena watches the hallway, guilt creeping in.

Lucy skips past them, still glowing.

LUCY
Grandma Vivian says she's coming
over.

And Grandpa Robert.

And Nana Margaret.

And Uncle Sal sent fire emojis.

Elena stiffens.

ELENA
Sal?

Lucy nods.

LUCY
He says big wins need big dinners.

Lucy runs off.

Daniel and Elena share a look.

DANIEL
That was fast.

ELENA
It always is.

CUT TO:

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM — NIGHT

Jacob lies on his bed, phone in hand.

Group chat from school:

"YOUR PARENTS ARE GOING TO WAR LOL"

"WHO YOU ROOTING FOR?"

Jacob types. Deletes. Types again.

Finally sends nothing.

He tosses the phone aside, stares at the ceiling.

INT. REED HOUSE – KITCHEN – LATER

Elena opens wine. Pours too much.

Daniel watches, clocking it.

DANIEL
You okay?

ELENA
I'm fine.

A beat.

DANIEL
That wasn't the question.

Elena sets the bottle down harder than necessary.

ELENA
I don't want tonight to turn into...
whatever this is becoming.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
Neither do I.

Silence stretches.

ELENA
But it already has.

Daniel exhales slowly.

INT. REED HOUSE — FRONT DOOR — NIGHT

The doorbell rings.

Daniel opens it to reveal ROBERT REED (70s)—distinguished, sharp-eyed—and MARGARET REED, warm but wary.

Immediately followed by VIVIAN MORETTI (late 60s)—polished, commanding, wrapped in designer confidence.

Hugs. Air kisses. Overlapping congratulations.

ROBERT

History.
(to Daniel)
You did it.

VIVIAN

They both did it.

Vivian locks eyes with Elena—pride mixed with something unresolved.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

About time they caught up to you.

Elena smiles tightly.

Margaret notices.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — CONTINUOUS

They settle in. Wine glasses clink.

Vivian gestures grandly.

VIVIAN

Two nominations in one household.

That's not luck.

That's genetics.

Robert chuckles.

ROBERT

Craft.

Not genetics.

Vivian bristles.

VIVIAN
Please. Audiences don't applaud
craft.

Daniel senses the tension.

DANIEL
Can we not turn this into—

The doorbell RINGS again.

Elena freezes.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT DOOR — CONTINUOUS

Daniel opens it to SAL MORETTI (50s)—charismatic, dangerous, impeccably dressed. He carries an expensive bottle of wine like it's a peace offering.

SAL
Danny.

Congratulations, kid.

Sal hugs Daniel too long. Then kisses Elena's cheek.

SAL (CONT'D)
I told you—star power.

Vivian beams.

VIVIAN
Sal, behave.

SAL
I am behaving.

This is me behaving.

Lucy runs up and hugs Sal.

LUCY
You said fire emojis!

SAL
Because this is fire.

Sal looks around the room.

SAL (CONT'D)
So which one of you is bringing
home the gold?

The room goes still.

Daniel smiles politely.

DANIEL
That's not how we're thinking about
it.

Sal raises an eyebrow.

SAL
Sure it is.
Everyone is.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING AREA - NIGHT

Dinner is served.

Conversation is polite-until it isn't.

ROBERT
When I was nominated, I didn't let
it distract me.

Vivian scoffs.

VIVIAN
And how did that work out?

Robert stiffens.

ROBERT
I worked.

VIVIAN
You waited.

Elena jumps in.

ELENA

Okay—
we're not doing this.

Sal smiles, amused.

SAL

No, no.
Let them talk.
This is legacy stuff.

Daniel clenches his jaw.

DANIEL

Sal—

SAL

I'm just saying—
one of you is about to become
immortal.

Elena's fork pauses mid-air.

Daniel notices.

So does Margaret.

Lucy looks between them, confused.

LUCY

What's immortal?

No one answers.

Jacob enters the room quietly, sits.

JACOB

It means people don't forget you.

Lucy considers that.

LUCY

Do they forget the other one?

Jacob shrugs.

JACOB

Sometimes.

That lands like a dropped plate.

INT. REED HOUSE — BACK PATIO — NIGHT

Daniel steps outside for air.

Elena follows.

They stand apart, the city humming beyond the fence.

ELENA
He shouldn't have come.

DANIEL
He was always going to.

Elena folds her arms.

ELENA
This feels wrong.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
It feels... loud.

They stand in silence.

ELENA
Do you ever think about how we
started?

Daniel looks at her.

DANIEL
Acting class?

She smiles faintly.

ELENA
You hated me.

DANIEL
I thought you were effortless.

ELENA
I thought you were impossible.

A beat.

Daniel's voice softens.

DANIEL
We were better then.

Elena meets his eyes.

ELENA
We were poorer.

He almost laughs.

The sound of laughter from inside bleeds out—Sal telling a story.

Daniel looks away.

DANIEL
I don't want to lose you to this.

Elena swallows.

ELENA
I don't want to lose myself.

They stand there—two truths, no solution.

FLASHBACK BEGINS

INT. ACTING STUDIO — DAY (20 YEARS AGO)

A dingy room. Folding chairs. A chalkboard that reads:

SCENE STUDY — TRUTH OVER TECHNIQUE

Young actors mill about.

YOUNG DANIEL (22) sits rigid, script marked obsessively.

YOUNG ELENA (20) laughs too loudly, full of nervous confidence.

The INSTRUCTOR points.

INSTRUCTOR
Reed.

Moretti.

You're up.

Young Daniel looks irritated.

YOUNG DANIEL
I already prepared the—

INSTRUCTOR
Good.

Now forget it.

They step into the space.

A simple scene. Two people meeting for the first time.

They begin—awkward, guarded.

Then Elena misses a line.

YOUNG ELENA

Sorry—

can we start again?

Daniel exhales, annoyed.

YOUNG DANIEL

It's fine.

They restart.

Something shifts.

Elena stops acting.

Daniel stops thinking.

They lock eyes.

The room disappears.

They're no longer performing.

They're listening.

The instructor smiles.

INSTRUCTOR

There.

That's the work.

Young Daniel forgets his next line.

He laughs—embarrassed.

Young Elena smiles, surprised.

They just... look at each other.

The class fades away.

FLASHBACK HOLDS –

Young Daniel and Young Elena standing in possibility.

Before awards.

Before pressure.

Before comparison.

Just two people discovering they're better together.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE – BACK PATIO – NIGHT (PRESENT)

Daniel and Elena stand exactly as they did in the flashback—facing each other.

But now—

The silence is heavier.

More at stake.

Daniel reaches for her hand.

She lets him.

For now.

INT. REED HOUSE – KITCHEN – MORNING

Morning light. Too bright for how quiet it is.

Elena stands at the counter, phone facedown, untouched coffee.

Daniel enters, already dressed, already somewhere else.

They move around each other with practiced politeness.

DANIEL

Sleep?

ELENA

A little.

A lie. They both know it.

Lucy enters, backpack on, chipper on purpose.

LUCY
Grandma Vivian says if you win
she'll cry on TV.

Elena winces.

ELENA
We're not talking about winning.

Lucy frowns.

LUCY
Then why is everyone else?

Jacob enters last. Hoodie up. Guarded.

JACOB
There's a poll online.

Daniel freezes.

DANIEL
A poll?

JACOB
"Who deserves it more."

Elena closes her eyes.

ELENA
Who made it?

JACOB
Everyone.

Daniel reaches for his coffee, misses the handle slightly.

Lucy looks between them.

LUCY
Do we have to pick?

Jacob doesn't answer.

EXT. SCHOOL – MORNING

The kids exit the car.

Lucy hugs Elena tight.

LUCY
I don't want you to be sad.

Elena crouches.

ELENA
I won't be.

Lucy studies her.

LUCY
Promise?

Elena hesitates—just a flicker.

ELENA
Promise.

Jacob slams the door harder than necessary.

Daniel watches him go.

DANIEL
I'll talk to him.

ELENA
He doesn't want a speech.

Daniel nods. He knows.

INT. ENTERTAINMENT NEWS STUDIO — DAY (INTERCUT)

Montage—fast, merciless.

— Split-screen graphics: DANIEL vs. ELENA

— Headlines: "Love on the Line?"

— Analysts debating chemistry, sacrifice, legacy

— Old clips replayed out of context

TV ANALYST
Daniel Reed is the craftsman.

Elena Reed is the heart.

The Academy has to choose—

INT. TALENT AGENCY — DAY

Daniel watches a muted TV replay.

Marty stands behind him.

MARTY
They're turning it into a
referendum.

DANIEL
On what?

MARTY
On value.

Daniel looks up.

DANIEL
Whose?

Marty doesn't answer.

MARTY
Look—
you don't need to respond.
But you do need to be seen.

Daniel exhales.

DANIEL
Seen doing what?

MARTY
Being... undeniable.

That word hangs.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP — DAY

Elena sits with Tessa again. The mood is sharper now.

TESSA
You're trending higher.

ELENA
I don't care.

TESSA
You should.

Elena leans in.

ELENA
I care about my kids not thinking
we're in a cage match.

Tessa softens—slightly.

TESSA
Then don't flinch.

ELENA
From what?

TESSA
From wanting it.

Elena looks away.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — AFTERNOON

The house is quiet.

Jacob sits on the stairs, phone in hand.

A message pops up—from Sal.

SAL: Proud of your parents. Big moment. Tell your mom I said
congrats.

Jacob stares at it. Uneasy.

He doesn't reply.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — STUDY — LATE AFTERNOON

Daniel works at his desk. Script pages. Notes.

The door opens.

Sal steps in, unannounced.

SAL
Hope I'm not interrupting
greatness.

Daniel stands immediately.

DANIEL
You are.

Sal smiles, holds up his hands.

SAL
Relax.
I'm not here to talk shop.

Daniel doesn't sit.

DANIEL
Then why are you here?

Sal takes in the room—books, awards tucked away, discipline everywhere.

SAL
Because you look like a man
pretending he doesn't care.

Daniel stiffens.

DANIEL
I don't need help.

SAL
Nobody thinks they do.

Sal steps closer—still friendly.

SAL (CONT'D)
You and Elena are family.
Family shouldn't tear itself apart
in public.

DANIEL
We're not.

Sal raises an eyebrow.

SAL
Yet.

Daniel's jaw tightens.

DANIEL
If you're offering something—

SAL
I'm offering peace.

Daniel laughs—short, humorless.

DANIEL
That's never what you offer.

Sal's smile fades just enough to show truth.

SAL
I offer solutions.

Silence.

SAL (CONT'D)
Think about it.

Sal leaves.

Daniel stands alone, shaken.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Elena paces. Phone in hand.

Daniel enters. She clocks his face.

ELENA
He came, didn't he?

Daniel doesn't answer.

ELENA (CONT'D)
Daniel.

DANIEL
He talked.

Elena's eyes flash.

ELENA
About what?

Daniel hesitates. That's the mistake.

ELENA (CONT'D)
About what?

DANIEL
About keeping things... clean.

Elena laughs—sharp.

ELENA
Clean?

That's his word for dirty.

Daniel runs a hand through his hair.

DANIEL
I didn't agree to anything.

ELENA
But you listened.

That lands.

DANIEL
You think I want him involved?

ELENA
I think part of you doesn't hate
the idea of winning.

Daniel snaps back—controlled, but cutting.

DANIEL
Don't do that.

ELENA
Don't do what?

DANIEL
Turn this into a moral test you
already passed.

Elena steps closer.

ELENA
I passed because I never asked for
help.

DANIEL
Neither did I.

ELENA
You just never needed it.

Silence.

That one hurt.

INT. REED HOUSE — HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

Jacob stands in the shadows, listening.

He hears everything.

INT. LIVING ROOM — CONTINUOUS

Daniel lowers his voice.

DANIEL
Do you want to win?

Elena answers immediately.

ELENA
Yes.

Daniel is stunned by the honesty.

ELENA (CONT'D)
And I hate that I do.

And I hate that admitting it feels like betrayal.

Daniel swallows.

DANIEL
I want to win too.

They stand there—truth finally exposed.

No yelling.

No tears.

Just the realization:

They are no longer aligned.

CUT TO:

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM — NIGHT

Jacob lies awake.

He opens the poll again.

He scrolls.

Stops.

Types.

Deletes.

Finally clicks "I don't care."

He locks the phone.

Stares at the ceiling.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — BEDROOM — NIGHT

Daniel and Elena lie in bed, backs to each other.

Awake.

Separate.

Elena whispers.

ELENA

We didn't used to be like this.

Daniel answers quietly.

DANIEL

We didn't used to be measured.

Silence.

The space between them feels infinite.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — KITCHEN — MORNING

Tension with toast.

Daniel stands at the counter, measuring coffee grounds like a chemist.

Elena scrolls her phone, jaw tight.

Enter MIA PARK (28) – Elena’s assistant. Hyper-competent, underpaid, caffeinated.

She stops short when she senses the room.

MIA
Okay. Temperature check—are we
“good morning” or “silent
resilience”?

Daniel looks up.

DANIEL
Good morning.

Elena doesn’t look up.

ELENA
Silent resilience.

Mia nods, marks it mentally.

MIA
Copy that.

Lucy enters, backpack on.

LUCY
Mia, are my parents fighting?

Mia freezes.

Daniel and Elena look at her.

MIA
Uh–no. They’re... competitively
communicating.

Lucy considers this.

LUCY
Is that like fighting?

MIA
It’s like fighting in nicer shoes.

Lucy nods. Accepts it.

Jacob enters, hood up.

JACOB
I’m walking today.

ELENA
It's raining.

JACOB
I'll survive.

He leaves.

Silence.

Mia clears her throat.

MIA
So-hair, makeup, interviews, and
one very uncomfortable podcast
where they ask "Who's the better
actor?"

Elena grimaces.

ELENA
Cancel it.

MIA
I tried.
They said no.

Daniel looks up.

DANIEL
Who?

MIA
The internet.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE — BACKYARD — MORNING

MIGUEL (50s), the gardener, trims hedges with monk-like calm.

Daniel steps outside, coffee in hand.

MIGUEL
Morning, boss.

DANIEL
Morning.

Miguel gestures to the hedges.

MIGUEL
You want them even...or honest?

Daniel blinks.

DANIEL
What?

MIGUEL
Even looks good from far away.
Honest looks messy- but it grows
better.

Daniel stares at him.

DANIEL
You been talking to my wife?

Miguel smiles.

MIGUEL
I listen.
I don't interfere.

Miguel snips a branch. It falls.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)
You prune too much; nothing blooms.

Daniel watches the branch on the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. ELENA'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Elena drives. Mia rides shotgun with a tablet.

MIA
Okay-here's the plan: smile,
support Daniel, deflect
competition, do not blink when they
ask-

ELENA
Mia.

MIA
Yes?

ELENA

Be honest.

Mia hesitates.

MIA

You want real honest
or Hollywood honest?

ELENA

Real.

Mia exhales.

MIA

They want you to cry.
Or deny ambition.
Or say something graceful that
hurts later.

Elena nods.

ELENA

And if I don't?

MIA

Then they'll decide for you.

Elena grips the wheel.

CUT TO:

INT. TALK SHOW GREEN ROOM – DAY

Daniel sits alone, tie loosened.

His assistant, KEVIN (30s), hovers nervously.

KEVIN

They're going to ask about Elena.

DANIEL

Of course they are.

KEVIN

Should we prepare something?

Daniel thinks.

DANIEL

No.

KEVIN

That wasn't a question.

Daniel looks at him.

DANIEL

If I prepare, I perform.
If I perform, I lie.

Kevin nods like that made sense.

KEVIN

Okay.
Raw truth.
On daytime television.

A beat.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

We're all going to die.

CUT TO:

INT. TALK SHOW SET - DAY (INTERCUT)

Split screen: Daniel on one show, Elena on another.

Parallel questions. Parallel smiles.

HOST

How does it feel competing with
your spouse?

Daniel smiles carefully.

DANIEL

We're not competing.

Cut to Elena.

HOST (ON ELENA'S SHOW)

Be honest—do you want to win more
than he does?

Elena pauses—just long enough to
matter.

ELENA

I want us to survive it.

That clip goes viral instantly.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – EVENING

The family watches the clip replay.

Lucy looks proud.

LUCY

Mommy won that question.

Daniel forces a smile.

Jacob doesn't.

JACOB

That wasn't the question.

Elena looks at him.

ELENA

What was?

Jacob stands.

JACOB

Who matters more?

He leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD – EVENING

Daniel stands with Miguel again.

Miguel waters plants.

MIGUEL

People clap for flowers.
They don't clap for roots.

Daniel watches water soak into the dirt.

DANIEL
Which one lasts?

Miguel shrugs.

MIGUEL
Depends who's watching.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elena removes makeup in the mirror.

Daniel enters, hesitant.

DANIEL
Your interview-

ELENA
I meant it.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
I know.

Silence.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
They're starting to see us
differently.

Elena meets his eyes in the mirror.

ELENA
We're starting to see us
differently.

That's worse.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

Lucy sits on the floor, drawing again.

This time, the parents are farther apart on the stage.

The trophy sits between them.

Too big.

She erases it.

Draws them holding hands instead.

But the eraser smudge stays.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE - NIGHT

The house glows softly.

Inside—quiet fractures.

Outside—Miguel finishes up, turns off the lights.

He looks back at the house once more.

Shakes his head gently.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE - MORNING

Rain against glass. Soft, relentless.

Elena moves through the kitchen on autopilot—coffee, backpacks, routine—like repetition might hold the family together.

Lucy sits at the table, drawing again. The eraser smudge on her page is darker today.

Jacob's chair is empty.

Daniel enters, scanning for Jacob without meaning to.

DANIEL

Jacob.

No answer.

Elena checks the hallway.

ELENA

Jacob, we're leaving in five.

Nothing.

Daniel frowns, heads toward Jacob's room.

MOVE TO:

INT. JACOB'S BEDROOM – MOMENTS LATER

The room is untouched... but wrong.

Jacob's hoodie is gone.

His wallet is gone.

And his PHONE sits on the desk—face down.

Daniel flips it over. Dead screen.

He taps it. Nothing.

Elena appears in the doorway, instantly reading Daniel's face.

ELENA

No.

Daniel looks around, controlled panic rising.

DANIEL

He left his phone.

Elena steps in like the room is radioactive.

ELENA

He wouldn't—

Daniel checks the closet. A few hangers swing, empty.

Lucy appears behind Elena, small.

LUCY
Where's Jacob?

Elena kneels, voice too calm.

ELENA
He... went out early.
We're going to find him.

Lucy's eyes fill.

LUCY
Did we make him sad?

Elena can't answer that.

Daniel grabs keys off the dresser like he's grabbing air.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE – DRIVEWAY – DAY

Rain. Gray sky. The world washed clean of glamour.

Daniel and Elena rush to the car.

Lucy stands under the porch light, hugging herself.

Mia appears with her phone already out, umbrella useless.

MIA
Okay—Jacob's location services—

Daniel holds up Jacob's dead phone.

DANIEL
He left it.

Mia stares, as if someone removed gravity.

MIA
Who leaves a phone?

Miguel stands in the yard, pruning shears in hand, rain soaking his hair. Calm, almost reverent.

MIGUEL
Someone who wants to disappear.

Elena turns sharply.

ELENA
He's not disappearing. He's—
(cannot find the word)
He's... our son.

Miguel nods like that's exactly why.

Daniel opens the driver's door.

DANIEL
Lucy stays.

Lucy steps forward, panicked.

LUCY
No—

Elena crouches, grips Lucy's shoulders.

ELENA
You stay with Mia. With Miguel.

You're safe here.

Lucy clutches Elena.

LUCY
Bring him back.

Elena kisses her forehead.

ELENA
We will.

Daniel and Elena climb into the car.

Mia watches them go like she's watching an ambulance.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR — MOVING — DAY

No radio. Daniel drives fast, careful, white-knuckled.

Elena scrolls her own phone like it's a weapon—texts, calls, nothing.

ELENA
His friends—no one's answering.

Daniel's eyes dart—street signs, turns, memory.

DANIEL
Where would he go?

Elena thinks. A beat.

ELENA
He's not running away.

Daniel glances at her.

DANIEL
Then what is he doing?

Elena swallows.

ELENA
Evacuating.

That word lands.

Daniel's grip tightens.

DANIEL
From us.

Elena doesn't deny it.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS — DAY

They pass billboards—faces of Daniel and Elena smiling back at them like a taunt.

UNDENIABLY THE BEST is plastered everywhere now in someone's headline font.

Daniel's jaw clenches.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR — MOVING — DAY

Elena stares out the window, remembering.

ELENA
He asked me once... if we were
Hollywood.

Daniel keeps driving.

ELENA (CONT'D)
I said no.

A beat.

ELENA (CONT'D)
Maybe that was the lie.

Daniel exhales.

DANIEL
Where did we used to go... when we
didn't know where to go?

Elena's eyes shift—something old waking up.

ELENA
The studio.

Daniel glances at her.

DANIEL
Acting studio?

ELENA
The one we met in.

Daniel's face tightens—like the memory hurts to touch.

DANIEL
That place doesn't exist anymore.

Elena looks at him.

ELENA
Exactly.

CUT TO:

EXT. GHOST STUDIO SITE — DAY

A construction fence. A sign:

LUXURY RESIDENCES COMING SOON

A glossy rendering of a perfect building that hasn't been born yet.

Behind it: steel bones, hollow floors, exposed beams—an unfinished cathedral to money.

Rain makes everything shine.

Daniel parks illegally. They get out.

Elena stares through the fence, breath shallow.

ELENA

This is it.

Daniel studies the skeletal structure.

DANIEL

It looks... expensive.

Elena's laugh is small and bitter.

ELENA

It used to smell like sweat and fear.

They find a gap in the fence.

Daniel looks at her.

DANIEL

Trespassing.

Elena nods.

ELENA

We're good at it.

They slip inside.

CUT TO:

INT. CONSTRUCTION SITE — DAY

Echoing emptiness. Wet concrete. Hanging plastic sheets that flap like ghosts.

Their footsteps sound too loud.

They move cautiously, scanning shadows, calling softly.

ELENA
Jacob..

DANIEL
Jacob!

Nothing.

They climb a metal stairwell. The structure groans.

Elena grips the rail tight—more for steadiness than safety.

The higher they go, the colder it feels.

Steel and glass on the outside.

Hollow and raw on the inside.

CUT TO:

INT. CONSTRUCTION SITE — SECOND LEVEL — DAY

An open floor with exposed studs. A dark corner where something could hide.

Daniel steps forward.

DANIEL
Jacob—this isn't funny.

A sound: a faint scrape.

They freeze.

Daniel moves toward it.

Then—

A FIGURE emerges.

Not Jacob.

A young man, early 20s, drenched in rain, clutching a worn script like a life raft.

FAN / ASPIRING ACTOR (20s) stares at them, stunned, thrilled.

FAN
Oh my God.

Daniel and Elena freeze—pure panic trapped behind famous faces.

FAN (CONT'D)
You're—
you're them.

Elena forces a smile that costs her something.

ELENA
Hi.

The fan steps closer, giddy, oblivious.

FAN
I knew it!
I KNEW you'd come here!

Daniel glances past him—searching for Jacob in the shadows.

DANIEL
Listen, we're—

FAN
This is where legends were made.
It's like... holy ground.

Elena's eyes flick to Daniel: play along.

Daniel's jaw tightens. He nods, performs.

DANIEL
Yeah. Holy.

The fan shivers with excitement.

FAN
I'm an actor too.
I'm—
I'm doing a monologue.
For auditions.

Elena's smile tightens further.

ELENA
That's great.

Daniel can't do this.

DANIEL
We actually—

The fan interrupts, already in it.

FAN
Please. Thirty seconds.
I don't get chances like this.

Daniel looks ready to explode.

Elena gently touches his arm—not now.

Daniel swallows rage, becomes the gracious power couple.

DANIEL
Thirty seconds.

Elena's eyes shine with tears she refuses to spill.

ELENA
Go ahead.

The fan takes a position like it's a stage.

Daniel and Elena stand there—smiling—while their son is missing within a hundred feet.

The fan begins a monologue about ambition and love and being seen.

His words are earnest.

Cruel.

FAN
(monologue)
"I didn't want the world.
I just wanted someone to look at me
and know I existed—
and when they finally did,
I realized the cost—
I realized I'd traded the one
person
who loved me before I was
anything..."

Elena's eyes flicker—hit.

Daniel's throat tightens.

The fan finishes, breathless.

FAN (CONT'D)
So... what did you think?

Daniel is near breaking.

Elena answers first, voice gentle, weaponized grace.

ELENA

I think... you meant every word.

The fan beams.

FAN

That's— that's the best thing
anyone's ever said.

He reaches for his phone.

FAN (CONT'D)

Can we take a picture?

Daniel's smile cracks.

DANIEL

No.

Too harsh. Too real.

Elena steps in fast.

ELENA

Another time, okay?
We're... dealing with something.

The fan finally notices.

FAN

Oh—
I'm sorry.
Is everything—

Daniel steps toward him, low voice.

DANIEL

Did you see a teenage boy?
Hoodie. Quiet.
Did you see him?

The fan blinks, recalibrating to reality.

FAN

I—I saw someone upstairs.
Third level.
Near the old window frame.

Daniel doesn't wait.

He bolts.

Elena follows.

INTERCUT – INT. REED HOUSE – STUDY – DAY

Sal sits in Daniel's chair like it belongs to him.

Phone to ear. Calm. Dangerous.

Multiple screens open on a laptop—PR trackers, entertainment blogs, polls.

Sal speaks softly, as if ordering dinner.

SAL
Yeah. Push that story.
Make it look organic.

He scrolls.

A headline draft:

“DANIEL REED: COLD CRAFTSMAN, LOVING BUT DISTANT”

Sal smirks.

SAL
No, no. Don't lie.
Just... emphasize.

He clicks another tab:

ELENA REED ODDS SURGE – “HEART OVER TECHNIQUE”

Sal's expression turns satisfied—like a man watching an investment grow.

SAL
This is legacy.
This is money.
This is family.
(beat)
And I don't lose.

He ends the call, leans back, looks at the walls.

SAL (CONT'D)
(to himself)
They think this is art.

His phone buzzes—Vivian's name.

He answers.

SAL (CONT'D)
Yeah. I'm on it.

CUT TO:

INT. CONSTRUCTION SITE — STAIRWELL — DAY

Daniel and Elena climb fast, slipping slightly on wet metal.

Elena's breath is ragged.

ELENA
Daniel—slow down!

Daniel doesn't.

DANIEL
He's here.

They reach the third level.

CUT TO:

INT. CONSTRUCTION SITE — THIRD LEVEL — DAY

Wind whips through exposed beams.

Rain sprays in from open sides.

There's an old section still standing—an interior wall that somehow survived demolition.

Faded paint.

A ghost of the old studio.

Daniel steps cautiously.

DANIEL
Jacob?

A faint sound.

A sniff.

A breath held too long.

Daniel rounds a corner—

JACOB sits on the floor, back against the surviving wall.

He's soaked, shaking—not from cold alone.

In his hands: a SMALL OLD DEVICE—an old camera or phone,
something offline.

Daniel drops to his knees.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Jesus—
Jacob.

Elena rushes in, tears finally spilling.

ELENA

Baby—what are you doing?

Jacob looks up.

Not angry.

Worse: resolved.

JACOB

I needed... quiet.

Daniel reaches for him.

Jacob doesn't move away—but he doesn't lean in either.

DANIEL

You scared us to death.

Jacob nods like that was the point.

JACOB

Good.

Elena flinches.

ELENA

Why would you—

Jacob holds up the device.

JACOB
Because you don't hear anything
unless it scares you.

Silence.

Jacob presses a button.

A VIDEO begins to play—grainy, old.

YOUNG DANIEL and YOUNG ELENA in acting class.

Laughing. Listening. Alive.

No trophies. No branding. No strategy.

Just two people discovering each other.

Daniel stares, stunned.

Elena's hand flies to her mouth.

Jacob watches them watch it.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Do you remember them?

Elena tries to answer—nothing comes.

Daniel's throat works.

DANIEL
Of course I—

Jacob cuts him off quietly.

JACOB
Not the story you tell.

The people.

Elena's eyes stay on the video.

ELENA
We were...
(a whisper)
we were soft.

Jacob nods.

JACOB
You were safe.

Daniel's eyes fill.

DANIEL
We still are.

Jacob finally looks at him—sharp.

JACOB
No.

That single word is the horror.

Not a monster.

Not blood.

A child telling the truth.

Elena kneels, close, careful.

ELENA
Jacob... come home.

Jacob looks at her.

JACOB
I don't want you to be famous.

I want you to be here.

Elena breaks—quietly, completely.

Daniel's face collapses. The mask is gone.

DANIEL
I'm sorry.

Jacob watches him—testing if it's real.

Daniel doesn't add anything.

No speech.

Just presence.

Jacob nods once.

He stands.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — BACKYARD — DAY (COMEDIC/PHILOSOPHICAL INTERLUDE)

Rain pours.

Mia stands under the patio overhang with two laptops open, hair frizzing, eyes wild.

Lucy sits beside her, clutching a blanket, watching Mia like she's a malfunctioning robot.

Miguel stands in the rain, no umbrella, watering plants that don't need watering.

Mia speaks like she's in a command center.

MIA

Okay—if Jacob is smart, he'll ping
a tower.
If he's not smart, he'll connect to
Wi-Fi.
If he's very smart, he'll do
neither.

Miguel looks at her calmly.

MIGUEL

He is very smart.

Mia glares.

MIA

Can you not be... Zen right now?

Miguel holds up a withered leaf from the ground.

MIGUEL

This leaf—
if you chase it in the wind, you
never catch it.

Mia stares.

MIA

I don't have time for leaf
metaphors.

Miguel gently places the leaf in her palm.

MIGUEL

Some things are meant to be lost...
so they can be found differently.

Mia's throat tightens unexpectedly.

Her "assistant" mask slips—just a crack.

MIA
My brother ran away once.

Miguel nods, still in the rain.

MIGUEL
Did he come back?

Mia swallows.

MIA
Yeah.
But he wasn't the same.

Miguel's voice is soft.

MIGUEL
Neither were you.

Mia looks down at the leaf, rain sound filling the space.

Lucy quietly takes Mia's hand.

Mia squeezes back—automatic, human.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR — NIGHT

Rain pounds the roof.

Daniel drives more slowly now.

Elena sits beside him, exhausted, eyes swollen.

Jacob sits in the back seat, centered between Lucy's booster seat and an empty space that feels like the old family.

No phones.

No radio.

Just windshield wipers.

The silence begins hostile, full of what was said.

Then becomes exhausted—too tired to fight.

Then becomes real—room for truth.

Jacob stares out the window.

Elena's voice is barely there.

ELENA

I'm sorry.

Jacob doesn't look at her.

JACOB

I don't need sorry.
I need... normal.

Daniel nods, eyes on the road.

DANIEL

We don't know how.

Jacob finally looks forward, watching his parents as if they're students.

JACOB

Learn.

The wipers keep time.

Daniel's grip loosens on the wheel.

Elena exhales a breath she's been holding for months.

The rain makes everything sound far away.

For the first time in a long time—

They are all in the same car.

The same reality.

Together.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — STUDY — NIGHT

The house is quiet in the way only rich houses get quiet—thick, insulated, deceptive.

Rain taps the windows.

Daniel stands in the doorway of his study, not entering yet.

Inside, SAL MORETTI sits behind Daniel's desk again.

Comfortable.

In control.

A tumbler of whiskey rests on a coaster Daniel never uses.

Sal scrolls on his phone, unfazed.

SAL
You lock the front gate now.
That's smart.

Daniel steps in, closes the door behind him.

Doesn't sit.

DANIEL
You're done.

Sal smiles without looking up.

SAL
With what?

Daniel moves closer, voice low.

DANIEL
With the calls.
The stories.
The pressure.

Sal finally looks up—curious, amused.

SAL
Daniel...

I'm helping.

Daniel shakes his head slowly.

DANIEL
You're investing.

Sal doesn't deny it.

He gestures to the chair across the desk.

SAL
Sit.

Daniel doesn't.

SAL (CONT'D)
You don't win by standing.

Daniel steps closer—now the desk separates them.

DANIEL
My son disappeared today.

Sal's expression flickers. Just a flicker.

SAL
I heard.

That lands.

DANIEL
You heard fast.

Sal exhales, measured.

SAL
People talk when money's involved.

Daniel leans forward, palms on the desk.

DANIEL
What money?

Sal sets his phone down carefully. This matters now.

SAL
The money that comes after.

Daniel waits.

SAL (CONT'D)
Prestige opens doors.
Doors open deals.
Deals turn into protection.

Daniel's voice tightens.

DANIEL
Protection from what?

Sal smiles—gentle, terrifying.

SAL
From becoming irrelevant.

Daniel straightens.

DANIEL
You sabotaged me.

Sal tilts his head.

SAL
I corrected a narrative.

DANIEL
You painted me as cold.

SAL
You are cold.

That one lands clean.

SAL (CONT'D)
Not cruel.
Not bad.
Just... distant.

Daniel clenches his jaw.

DANIEL
You did it so Elena would win.

Sal doesn't flinch.

SAL
Elena winning is good business.

Daniel laughs once—sharp, bitter.

DANIEL
There it is.

Sal leans back.

SAL
You think this is about you losing?

Daniel steps back, shakes his head.

DANIEL
I think it's about my family being
collateral.

Sal's smile fades.

SAL
Family is collateral.
Always has been.

Daniel stares at him.

DANIEL
You don't get to decide that.

Sal stands now. Slowly. Dominant.

SAL
I already did.

A beat.

SAL (CONT'D)
Look—
I like you.
I respect you.

Daniel doesn't respond.

SAL (CONT'D)
But Elena winning means leverage.
Means safety.
Means when the next storm comes,
your kids don't feel it.

Daniel's eyes burn.

DANIEL
My kids already feel it.

Silence.

Sal studies Daniel now—really looks at him.

SAL
You're willing to lose everything..
to feel clean?

Daniel answers immediately.

DANIEL
I'm willing to lose this.

Sal scoffs.

SAL
Easy to say when you haven't lost
yet.

Daniel reaches into his pocket.

Pulls out his phone.

Places it on the desk.

DANIEL

Stop.

Sal stares at the phone.

SAL

Or what?

Daniel meets his eyes.

DANIEL

Or I go public.

That lands hard.

Sal's expression changes. This is real now.

SAL

You wouldn't.

Daniel's voice is steady.

DANIEL

I will.

SAL

You'll destroy her chances.

Daniel swallows.

DANIEL

I know.

Sal steps closer—danger now beneath the calm.

SAL

You think she'll forgive you?

Daniel doesn't answer.

SAL (CONT'D)

You think your marriage survives
that?

Daniel's voice cracks—just slightly.

DANIEL

I don't think it survives you.

That's the line.

The truth.

Sal stares at Daniel, measuring him.

SAL
You're not built for this fight.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
I'm built for a different one.

Sal picks up his jacket.

SAL
If you do this...
there's no coming back.

Daniel holds his ground.

DANIEL
Good.

Sal pauses at the door.

Turns.

SAL
One last thing.

Daniel looks up.

SAL (CONT'D)
You don't win awards by being
honest.

Daniel answers quietly.

DANIEL
I don't want to win them.

Sal studies him one last time.

Then—without another word—leaves.

The door shuts.

Daniel stands alone in the study.

Hands shaking.

He sinks into the chair he refused earlier.

Head in hands.

He has chosen.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — BEDROOM — LATER

Elena sits on the bed, towel around her hair.

Daniel enters.

She looks up immediately—knows something changed.

ELENA
You talked to him.

Daniel nods.

ELENA (CONT'D)
And?

Daniel sits beside her.

A long beat.

DANIEL
I told him to stop.

Elena's breath catches.

ELENA
Daniel—

DANIEL
And I told him I'd expose
everything if he didn't.

Elena freezes.

ELENA
That would destroy—

DANIEL
I know.

Silence.

Rain outside.

Elena's eyes fill—not with anger.

With fear.

ELENA
Why would you do that?

Daniel turns to her, raw.

DANIEL
Because I don't want to win if it
means our son has to disappear to
remind us who we were.

Elena covers her mouth.

Daniel continues—no defense, no pride.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
If you hate me for it...
I'll live with that.

Elena stares at him.

Long.

Then—

She reaches for his hand.

Holds it.

Not forgiving.

But understanding.

ELENA
We're going to lose everything.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
Maybe.

Elena exhales.

ELENA
Then we lose it together.

They sit there, hands locked, terrified.

But aligned.

For the first time in a long time.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — KITCHEN — MORNING

Sunlight. Calm that feels undeserved.

Elena flips pancakes. Lucy sets the table.

Jacob sits quietly, present but guarded.

Daniel enters, phone buzzing nonstop. He silences it without looking.

Lucy notices.

LUCY
You're not answering.

DANIEL
I will later.

Lucy nods, satisfied.

Jacob watches—files it away.

INT. ENTERTAINMENT NEWS — DAY (INTERCUT)

A different tone now.

— Analysts hesitate

— Headlines soften, then turn

— Phrases like “unsubstantiated rumors” and “internal conflict.”

TV HOST
Reports suggest behind-the-scenes
tension surrounding—

Cut off mid-sentence.

CUT TO:

INT. TALENT AGENCY — DAY

Daniel sits across from Marty again.

Marty looks tired. Real tired.

MARTY
You didn't tell me.

DANIEL
I didn't want advice.

Marty nods—accepts that.

MARTY
Sal's people pulled back overnight.

Daniel waits.

MARTY (CONT'D)
That vacuum gets filled fast.

DANIEL
By what?

MARTY
Suspicion.

Daniel exhales.

MARTY (CONT'D)
You know what they're saying?

Daniel shakes his head.

MARTY (CONT'D)
That you torpedoed Elena
to look noble.

Daniel stiffens.

DANIEL
That's insane.

MARTY
It's believable.
That's worse.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP — DAY

Elena sits with Tessa.

Tessa is unusually restrained.

TESSA

I need to ask you something.

And I need a real answer.

Elena nods.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Did Daniel try to sabotage you?

Elena doesn't answer immediately.

She thinks of Jacob.

The video.

The rain.

ELENA

No.

Tessa studies her.

TESSA

That's not what the narrative wants.

ELENA

Then the narrative's wrong.

Tessa exhales, impressed despite herself.

TESSA

You're going to take a hit.

ELENA

I already did.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — STUDY — AFTERNOON

Elena stands alone in the study.

She opens Daniel's desk drawer.

Inside: old acting notebooks. Handwritten notes. Messy, earnest.

She flips through them.

Stops.

A page labeled: Why I Act.

It reads, simply:

To listen.

Elena closes the notebook. Breath catches.

Decision forming.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL — AFTERNOON

Jacob waits alone after practice.

A couple of kids whisper nearby. He ignores them.

Daniel pulls up.

Jacob gets in without being asked.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR — MOVING — AFTERNOON

Quiet.

Then—

JACOB
You really told him to stop.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
Yes.

Jacob studies him.

JACOB
Even if it costs Mom?

Daniel doesn't dodge it.

DANIEL

Yes.

Jacob looks out the window.

Long beat.

JACOB

That's... really stupid.

Daniel almost smiles.

DANIEL

Yeah.

Another beat.

JACOB

Thank you.

Daniel swallows.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Elena sits with Vivian.

Vivian is mid-lecture.

VIVIAN

You're letting him define the
story.

Elena stays calm.

ELENA

I'm defining myself.

Vivian scoffs.

VIVIAN

By losing?

Elena looks at her mother—really looks.

ELENA

By remembering.

Vivian stiffens.

VIVIAN
Remembering doesn't keep you
relevant.

Elena nods.

ELENA
It kept me alive.

That stops Vivian cold.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

Daniel and Elena sit on opposite sides of the bed.

Not fighting. Processing.

ELENA
They think you're the villain now.

Daniel shrugs.

DANIEL
I can live with that.

Elena turns to him.

ELENA
I can't let that be the story.

Daniel listens.

ELENA (CONT'D)
Not because of the Oscar.

Because of Jacob.

Daniel waits.

ELENA (CONT'D)
Tomorrow—

I'm doing one interview.

Daniel's eyes widen slightly.

DANIEL
Alone?

Elena nods.

ELENA
I won't defend you.

And I won't accuse you.

Daniel searches her face.

DANIEL
What will you do?

Elena answers quietly.

ELENA
Tell the truth.

INT. REED HOUSE — KITCHEN — MORNING

Lucy eats cereal.

LUCY
Are you famous again today?

Elena smiles softly.

ELENA
Maybe less.

Lucy thinks.

LUCY
That's okay.

Less is quieter.

Elena kisses her head.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STUDIO — DAY

Elena sits across from a respected interviewer.

No graphics. No hype.

INTERVIEWER
Rumors suggest tension between you
and your husband.

Elena breathes. Steady.

ELENA

There's tension between who we are
and who people think we should be.

The interviewer leans in.

INTERVIEWER

Did your husband try to undermine
you?

Elena doesn't rush.

ELENA

No.

A beat.

ELENA (CONT'D)

He reminded me why I started.

That's it.

No spin.

No tears.

The interviewer nods—recognizes something real.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — EVENING

The family watches the interview together.

Silence when it ends.

Jacob exhales.

JACOB

That was... normal.

Elena smiles.

Daniel takes her hand.

Lucy claps once.

LUCY
I liked that better than the
shouting people.

They all laugh—quiet, real.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE — NIGHT

Miguel trims hedges again.

Daniel stands nearby.

MIGUEL
Storm passed.

DANIEL
For now.

Miguel nods.

MIGUEL
Strong roots don't mind wind.

Daniel looks back at the house.

Lights on.

Family inside.

DANIEL
I hope so.

Miguel smiles.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Miguel, go home, it's late!

MIGUEL
Yes senior Reed this is the last
one.

Miguel smiles again.

Daniel shakes his head, turns and walks away.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — HALLWAY — NIGHT

Jacob passes Daniel.

Pauses.

JACOB
You don't have to fix everything.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
I know.

Jacob hesitates—then hugs him.

Not long.

But real.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — MORNING

A rare stillness.

Daniel makes eggs. Burns one. Shrugs, serves it anyway.

Elena pours coffee. Real coffee. No phones.

Lucy hums. Jacob reads.

It almost looks... normal.

LUCY
Are you both home today?

Elena and Daniel exchange a look.

ELENA
Mostly.

Lucy nods—files that under win.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET – DAY

Daniel jogs. Slow. Unmeasured.

No earbuds.

He passes a neighbor who waves but doesn't stop him.

Daniel breathes. Exists.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – DAY

Elena sits with her laptop open—not to social media.

An email waits.

From THE ACADEMY (OFFICIAL).

Subject line:

“Regarding Appearance & Presentation – Oscar Ceremony”

She hesitates.

Clicks.

We don't see the text—just Elena's face.

Careful. Alert.

CUT TO:

INT. TALENT AGENCY – DAY

Daniel sits across from Marty one last time before Oscar night.

Marty is gentler now.

MARTY
You're still nominated.

Daniel nods.

MARTY (CONT'D)
Which means... they still want the
story.

Daniel waits.

MARTY (CONT'D)
You don't have to go rogue.
You can just... show up.

Daniel looks at Marty.

DANIEL
And pretend nothing happened?

Marty doesn't lie.

MARTY
And let time do what it does.

Daniel considers that.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Elena stands alone.

Daniel enters.

She closes the laptop.

DANIEL
Everything okay?

Elena studies him.

ELENA
They offered us something.

Daniel tenses.

DANIEL
Sal?

ELENA
No.
Worse.

Daniel waits.

ELENA (CONT'D)
A "moment."

Daniel almost laughs.

DANIEL
Of course they did.

Elena nods.

ELENA
They want us seated front row.
Together.
Cameras ready.

Daniel exhales.

DANIEL
And?

Elena swallows.

ELENA
And if one of us wins... they want
the other on stage.

Silence.

That's the trap.

INT. REED HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They sit.

The weight of it settles.

DANIEL
That turns us into the ending.

ELENA
It turns us into proof that
everything worked out.

Daniel shakes his head.

DANIEL
When it hasn't.

Elena looks torn—not tempted by fame, but by closure.

ELENA
It would end the story.

Daniel answers softly.

DANIEL
Or erase it.

CUT TO:

INT. JACOB'S ROOM – EVENING

Jacob packs for a school trip.

Elena watches from the doorway.

ELENA
You excited?

JACOB
Yeah.

A beat.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Are you guys going to the Oscars?

Elena enters.

Sits on the bed.

ELENA
Yes.

Jacob nods.

JACOB
Are you going as... characters?

Elena freezes.

ELENA
What do you mean?

Jacob shrugs.

JACOB
Like the version of you that
everyone expects.

Elena searches for the right answer.

ELENA
We're still deciding.

Jacob zips his bag.

JACOB
Don't decide too late.

That's it.

He goes back to packing.

Elena sits there, stunned.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE — BACKYARD — NIGHT

Miguel waters the garden again.

Daniel joins him.

DANIEL
They want a show.

Miguel nods.

MIGUEL
They always do.

DANIEL
If we refuse, it looks like guilt.

Miguel shuts off the hose.

MIGUEL
If you perform, it becomes a lie.

Daniel exhales.

DANIEL
Is there a third option?

Miguel considers.

MIGUEL
There always is.
It just doesn't look good on
camera.

Daniel smiles faintly.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Daniel and Elena sit on the bed again.

Closer now.

ELENA
If I win... and you're not there—

Daniel stops her.

DANIEL
If you win,
I'll be proud.

Elena studies him.

ELENA
That's not the same as standing
with me.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
I know.

A beat.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
But standing for you might mean
stepping back. What matters most is
that I love you and my children.

Elena's eyes fill—not with fear.

With clarity.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — HALLWAY — LATER

Lucy peeks into their room.

LUCY
Are you fighting?

Daniel smiles.

DANIEL
No.

LUCY
Are you pretending?

Elena answers this time.

ELENA
Not tonight.

Lucy nods, satisfied.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Elena opens the laptop again.

Types a reply.

We don't see what she writes.

She hits SEND.

Daniel watches—doesn't ask.

They sit together.

No music.

No screens.

Just breathing.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY – NIGHT

Oscar banners hang in the distance.

Lights. Anticipation.

But our house remains quiet.

Grounded.

INT. REED HOUSE – FOYER – NIGHT

Suit bags. Dresses. Shoes lined up like weapons.

Elena zips Lucy's small overnight bag.

Daniel adjusts his cufflinks, stops, removes them. Puts them back in the box.

Elena watches.

A beat.

ELENA

You don't have to.

Daniel meets her eyes.

DANIEL

I can.

He tries a smile.

It lands like an apology.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE – DRIVEWAY – NIGHT

A black SUV idles.

Mia stands under an umbrella, clipboard in hand, trying to look like this is normal.

It isn't.

Miguel is at the edge of the yard, raincoat on, watching them load in.

Lucy runs to him and hugs him.

LUCY
Wish us luck.

Miguel gently fixes her hood.

MIGUEL
Luck is loud.

Lucy frowns.

LUCY
What's quiet?

Miguel smiles.

MIGUEL
Home.

Lucy nods as if she understands.

She hugs him again and climbs into the SUV.

Jacob follows, hoodie up, expression unreadable.

He pauses by Miguel.

Miguel nods once.

Jacob nods back.

A silent agreement.

Daniel and Elena climb in last.

Mia shuts the door.

The SUV pulls away.

Miguel remains in the rain, still.

CUT TO:

INT. SUV – MOVING – NIGHT

City lights smear across wet glass.

No radio.

Elena's phone buzzes. She ignores it.

Daniel's phone buzzes. He ignores it, too.

Jacob watches them both.

Lucy leans into Elena's side, sleepy.

Daniel looks out the window like he's trying to remember who he was before the world watched him.

Elena reaches for Daniel's hand.

He takes it.

No words.

EXT. DOLBY THEATRE – NIGHT

A machine made of light.

Red carpet. Flashbulbs. Screams. Smiles.

The Reeds step out.

The crowd erupts.

It's love.

It's hunger.

Reporters rush them.

REPORTER

Daniel! Elena! How are you feeling?

REPORTER #2

Are you two making history tonight?

Daniel's hand tightens around Elena's.

Elena smiles—small, controlled.

ELENA

We're just here.

REPORTER #3

Together?

Elena looks at Daniel.

ELENA

Together.

They move on.

Cameras follow.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE LOBBY – NIGHT

Gilded, loud, warm with perfume and power.

Marty appears, suit perfect, eyes worried.

Tessa appears, same.

They converge like handlers at a zoo.

MARTY

Front row. Center.

Daniel nods.

TESSA

Remember—if the moment happens, we
don't hesitate.

Elena's smile doesn't reach her eyes.

Mia hovers behind them, silent, absorbing.

Lucy looks around, wide-eyed.

LUCY

It smells like hair spray and
money.

Jacob snorts despite himself.

Elena almost laughs.

Almost.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM – NIGHT

The Reeds are escorted to FRONT ROW CENTER.

A spotlight could find them blindfolded.

They sit.

Daniel and Elena in the middle.

A seat for Lucy beside Elena.

A seat for Jacob beside Daniel.

Yes—this is unusual.

But tonight, the Academy wants the story.

Cameras swing past, linger.

Daniel feels it. Elena feels it.

Jacob feels it more.

Lucy waves at a camera instinctively.

Elena gently lowers her hand.

ELENA

Not now.

Lucy nods, solemn.

ON STAGE – NIGHT

A host delivers jokes.

Laughter. Applause.

The Reeds smile on cue.

Their smiles are professional, not fake.

There's a difference.

Cutaways keep landing on them.

They are the event inside the event.

INT. FRONT ROW – LATER

The ceremony moves.

Awards. Clips. Applause.

Time blurs.

Daniel leans toward Elena, barely audible.

DANIEL
If it happens...
I'll do it.

Elena doesn't respond.

Daniel watches her face.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
For you.

Elena finally looks at him.

ELENA
I know.

Her voice is calm.

That's what scares him.

CUT TO:

INT. REED HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — NIGHT (INTERCUT)

Miguel sits on the couch, rain jacket still on, watching a live stream on the TV.

Mia sits beside him, laptop open, fingers hovering uselessly.

On the coffee table: Lucy's drawings, scattered.

Miguel watches quietly.

Mia watches like she's bracing for impact.

CUT TO:

INT. AUDITORIUM — NIGHT

A presenter approaches the microphone.

We feel the room tighten.

This is the category.

A camera sweeps toward Daniel and Elena.

Holds.

The presenter begins speaking.

We do not focus on the words.

We focus on the Reeds.

Daniel straightens.

Elena's eyes flicker to Jacob.

Jacob sits still, older than fifteen for one second.

Lucy grips Elena's hand.

Elena squeezes back.

INT. FRONT ROW – CONTINUOUS

Elena's phone BUZZES in her lap.

She had forgotten it was there.

She looks down.

A single message from Jacob's phone.

No emoji. No drama.

Just:

JACOB (TEXT): You don't have to do anything for them.

Elena's breath catches.

Daniel notices the change in her face.

He leans in.

DANIEL

What?

Elena shows him the screen.

Daniel reads it.

His throat tightens.
The camera is still on them.
The world waiting.
Elena nods slightly to herself.
Decision made.

ON STAGE – NIGHT

The presenter lifts the envelope.
Applause begins before anything happens.
The camera remains on the Reeds.
The entire theatre knows where the “moment” is supposed to be.

INT. FRONT ROW – CONTINUOUS

Daniel prepares to stand.
Muscle memory.
Expectation.
Elena places her hand on his thigh—not romantic, not possessive.
A quiet stop sign.
Daniel looks at her.
Elena speaks, barely moving her lips.

ELENA

No.

Daniel blinks.

DANIEL

Elena—

Elena keeps her eyes forward.
The camera watches.
Elena’s voice is almost nothing.

ELENA
Third option.

Daniel understands.

It hits him like a relief he didn't know he needed.

He nods once.

Elena stands.

The camera catches it.

A ripple in the audience.

Not applause.

Confusion.

Daniel stands too.

Jacob stands with him.

Lucy stands, clutching Elena's hand.

Elena doesn't look at the stage.

Doesn't wave.

Doesn't smile.

She simply turns and walks toward the aisle.

Daniel follows.

Kids between them.

Four people exiting a myth.

ON STAGE – NIGHT

The presenter's mouth opens.

We do not hear the name.

The sound drops into muffled distance as the family moves.

Applause swells.

Or maybe it doesn't.

We can't tell.

We are with the Reeds.

INT. AISLE / AUDITORIUM – NIGHT

They walk past stunned faces.

Past polite smiles that don't know what to do.

A camera operator tracks them, tries to find an angle that makes it noble.

There isn't one.

It's just a family leaving.

Lucy looks back once.

Elena gently turns her forward.

ELENA
Keep walking.

Lucy obeys.

Jacob's face is steady.

Daniel's eyes are wet.

He doesn't wipe them.

INT. LOBBY – NIGHT

They emerge into the lobby like survivors.

Marty rushes over, panicked.

MARTY
What are you doing?

Elena doesn't stop walking.

Two sentences max. She uses one.

ELENA
Going home.

Tessa appears, eyes wide.

TESSA
Elena—this will—

Elena finally stops.

Looks at Tessa kindly, exhausted.

ELENA

Let it.

Then she continues.

Mia watches from behind a rope line—caught between jobs and humanity.

Their eyes meet.

Mia nods once.

Elena nods back.

EXT. DOLBY THEATRE — NIGHT

They exit into rain.

Not heavy—just enough to ruin hair and optics.

Perfect.

The cameras outside scramble.

Reporters shout questions.

REPORTER

Elena! Daniel! Why are you leaving?

REPORTER #2

Are you okay?

REPORTER #3

Did someone win?

Elena doesn't answer.

Daniel doesn't either.

They get into the SUV.

Door shuts.

Silence.

The world is locked out.

CUT TO:

INT. SUV – MOVING – NIGHT

Windshield wipers.

No radio.

No phones.

Lucy rests her head on Elena's shoulder.

Jacob stares out the window.

Daniel watches the city retreat.

Elena's hand finds Daniel's again.

He takes it.

Their hands stay linked.

Not for the cameras.

For survival.

CUT TO:

EXT. REED HOUSE – LATE NIGHT

The SUV pulls into the driveway.

The house is dark except for a single backyard light.

Miguel is out back.

Watering plants.

Even though it's raining.

INT. REED HOUSE – BACK DOOR – LATE NIGHT

They enter quietly.

Shoes off.

No one speaks.

They move through the house like they're returning from war.

Lucy holds a paper in her hands.

A new drawing.

She clutches it like proof.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD – LATE NIGHT

Soft rain.

Garden lights dim and warm.

Miguel stands by the plants, watering can in hand, calm as ever.

He sees them and doesn't react big.

Just nods.

MIGUEL
You made it back.

Elena nods.

ELENA
Yeah.

Daniel's eyes flick to Miguel's watering can.

DANIEL
It's raining.

Miguel shrugs gently.

MIGUEL
Habit.

They stand there. Four silhouettes under a small light.

Lucy steps forward and holds up her drawing.

LUCY
I made a new one.

Elena takes it.

The drawing: four stick figures standing together in a garden.

No stage.

No trophy.

No crack.

Just grass, raindrops, a little light.

Jacob looks at it.

Something in him softens.

Daniel sits on the back steps.

Elena sits beside him.

Jacob sits between them—close enough to touch both.

Lucy sits at Elena's side, leaning.

Miguel sets the watering can down and stands near the plants,
a quiet guardian.

Rain continues.

A long silence.

Not hostile.

Not performative.

Just exhausted.

Real.

Elena's voice is barely above the rain.

ELENA
We're still here.

Daniel nods.

DANIEL
Yeah.

We are.

Jacob exhales.

Lucy closes her eyes.

Miguel turns off the garden light.

The family remains—dim silhouettes against the quiet house.

No applause.

No music.

Just presence.

FADE OUT.

THE END