SHADOWS IN THE MIST

FADE IN:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark. A crescendo of sensual moans, groans, flailing extremities, heavy breathing of WOMAN, late 20s, W-F with a MAN, B-M, late 20s having sex. Facial features not defined.

ON FLOOR

A gradual reveal around bed shows women's heels, jeans, panties, bra, men's shoes, briefs, overturned wine glasses.

Rhythmic bed movement forces bed covering onto floor.

Body extremities flash through screen.

ON NIGHTSTAND

Smartphone vibrates but does not interrupt action.

INSERT PHONE SCREEN

"CYNTHIA"

HOLD

EXT. SUBURBAN LOS ANGELES CHURCH - DAY

SUPER: "THREE MONTHS LATER"

Wedding day. CHAUFFEUR in tuxedo stands at limo at curb, various autos, a full parking lot.

INT. CHURCH

Guests are seated. The WEDDING PARTY is at altar.

MINISTER; 50s, BM; MICHAEL WEST, GROOM, BM, 30s, Bride, CYNTHIA FIELDS, BF, late 20s; LEON WEST, BEST MAN, BM, mid 30s; CARLA 20s, Maid of Honor, BM; Bridesmaids 20s, VARIOUS

IN CENTER AISLE PEWS

STEPHANIE CHAMBERS, WF, late 20s, BLONDE; LEAH CHAMBERS, mid 20s; TREVOR, WM, 20s rivet gaze. Leah grasps sister's hand.

MINISTER

And so Michael West, now professing your eternal love, do you take Cynthia Fields to be your lawfully wedded wife; to love, cherish and honor her 'til death separates you?

MICHAEL

I do.

ON STEPHANIE

She tears up. Leah hands her a tissue.

AT ALTAR

MINISTER

And Cynthia Fields, professing your eternal love, do you take Michael West to be your lawfully wedded husband, to love, cherish and honor him 'til death separates you?

CYNTHIA

I do.

MINISTER

Then by the power vested in me by the state of California, I proclaim you are husband and wife. What God hath joined, let no one tear apart. Michael, you may kiss your bride.

Michael and Cynthia exchange a passionate kiss.

Guests applaud. Stephanie, Leah and Trevor do not.

The recessional proceeds.

Stephanie and Michael's eyes meet. He struggles to ignore her. Trevor and Leah stare him down.

AUDIENCE RISES

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - DAY

Show bride and groom, post wedding activity, guests mingle.

Stephanie, Leah and Trevor exit. All walk away from church.

Michael sneaks looks in their direction as they walk away.

EXT. SOUTH L.A. RESIDENCE - DAY

SUPER: SOUTH LOS ANGELES, 7 MONTHS LATER

MODEST SOUTH LOS ANGELES NEIGHBORHOOD

A MERCEDES COUPE stands out, parked at curb amongst other vehicles, in front of a modest residence.

A tricked-out vehicle with music blaring cruises by.

INT. SOUTH L.A. RESIDENCE BEDROOM - DAY

ON TV SET 'In The Heat Of The Night' movie plays on TV,

A mentally + physically impaired, DANNY WEST, 20ish, wears LAKERS Shirt, sits in wheel chair, watches movie.

CARMEN, UNIFORMED LVN, 40's, looks on.

Danny mouths movie's dialogue "They call me Mr. Tibbs" scene.

Michael, in suit, Leon stand in doorway leading to hallway, both observe Danny. Leon grips a can of beer.

MICHAEL

All these years, it still hurts like hell to see him like this. He doesn't even know I'm here.

LEON

Naw, he knows, brother. But you do need to show your face more often, alright? Past month, we got - what, one damn call. One. Uno.

MICHAEL

Look, I've got this big case I'm --

LEON

-- Hey, it's ok, lil' Bruh. Hell, you're still in honeymoon mode, you're big time lawyer, gotta do lunch, golf, and shit. Plus, it's a long way from ritzy San Marino to the hood. I understand all that.

MICHAEL

You know it's Pasadena. And don't start, Leon. Not today. I'm here.

LEON

And we 'preciates yo' time, suh.

MICHAEL

You know what, every time I come here, you act like some self-righteous ghetto soldier sacrificing all for the damn motherland. And suggesting I'm a traitor for getting the hell outta here. Well, I don't feel one bit of guilt, understand? Not one. Damn.

LEON

No-no-no, I don't lay guilt on you. No-no. You do it to yourself.

MICHAEL

Bullshit.

LEON

Backatcha. Look, I'm proud of yo' ass but you act like if you come out here, you'll forget how to get out. It's always fifteen and done.

MICHAEL

LEON (CONT'D)

Offered? Offered?

That's crap. And I've offered to get you and Danny a place anywhere you want. So don't act like I'm just looking out for myself. Don't.

LEON

MICHAEL

You ain't never heard me say Yeah, right. that. Never. Nev-verrr.

LEON (CONT'D)

I belong here. But 'fore Mama died, I promised to care of YOU guys. Guess that was me succumbing to the big brother caretaker complex. See, I know a few polysyllabic words.

MICHAEL

C'mon, you could do a hell of a lot better, if you just --

LEON

-- Oh, hell here comes the Church sermon. I do alright. This is home. Understand? It's like Mama's still here. I can't leave. I can't. MICHAEL

LEON (CONT'D)

I know that.

Home? Look, I miss Mama too.
But I keep her inside here.
(points to heart)
Nobody wanted all of us out
of here more than she did.

Leon takes a long swig of his beer.

Danny glances at them then resumes watching TV with nurse.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Look. I didn't come by to --

LEON

-- I know. But you need to spend more time with Danny. He's doing okay... knows every word to that movie. It's his favorite.

MICHAEL

I'll, I'll make more time. I just hate this damn house.

FROM HALLWAY

Michael leans into hallway, stares toward closed bedroom door at far end. He grimaces, clenches his fists, closes his eyes.

BACK STORY: (BLACK & WHITE)

Ethereal. A BOY, BLK, 6, in school clothes, with backpack on, approaches closed bedroom door. Boy reaches door, extends right hand, grabs doorknob, turns it, starts to open door.

A bright, blinding light flares, fills screen.

END BACKSTORY:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michael looks spacey, dazed.

LEON

Hey, you alright?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I'm fine. Look, I'd better go. Traffic's gonna be a bitch.

Michael goes to Danny, kisses his forehead. Danny looks up, flashes a wide smile. Michael leaves the room. Leon follows.

LIVING ROOM (CONTINUOUS)

AT FRONT DOOR

LEON

Looks like the newlywed life is working out for you and Cynthia. She's a real sweetheart. Took y'all long enough. Four years. But you two belong together.

Michael nods. Smiles.

LEON (CONT'D)

Oh, by the way, I'm really sorry 'bout you losing you friend.

Michael nods, reaches for doorknob, turns to Leon.

DISTANT GUNFIRE RIPS.

Michael freezes. Michael doesn't flinch.

LEON (CONT'D)

That was down the block.

Michael exhales. He and Leon exchange a long silent gaze.

EXT. PASADENA FUNERAL CHAPEL - DAY (MORNING)

SUPER: "NEXT MORNING"

A black hearse sets at curb, with MOTORCYCLE escorts.Michael drives up, parks across from chapel, hesitates then exits car, starts across street to door, enters.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Michael enters, walks down aisle to open white casket. Mourners, mostly white; gaze at him; some whisper.

ON CHAMBERS FAMILY

Front Seats NICHOLAS CHAMBERS (NICK) WM, 50s; ROSE CHAMBERS, 50's; Leah. Leah spots Michael, and exhales.

Nick turns to see Michael. He frowns. His jaws clench. Michael stares ahead; solemnly continues to casket.

Nick leaps up, fists clenched. Rose reaches for him. Michael stares down at Stephanie. Nick rushes toward Michael.

MRS. CHAMBERS

Nick, Please.

NICK CHAMBERS

MRS. CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

You get your black ass out. Nick. Oh my god.

Now. I mean. Go.

Audible gasp from mourners.

Nick grabs at Michael. Michael wheels to face him, knocks his hands away. Rose and others hurry to restrain Nick.

MRS. CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

No. Nick, please. Not here.

NICK CHAMBERS

This black ass... he's the goddamn reason she's lying there, dead. He killed her.

MRS. CHAMBERS

Nick, Don't.

NICK CHAMBERS

MRS. CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

You're disgracing her memory.

Stop it.

TWO MEN, One WM, One BM, 40s, in black suits, rush Michael.

Michael steps back, points a warning finger at them, shakes his head 'no'. They halt.

Michael takes a long view of Stephanie, slowly leaves.

Leah is distraught, stares at Michael until he disappears.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (NOON)

Michael watches interment from his car at roadside.

AT BURIAL SITE

It's true.

Chambers Family and mourners are at graveside.

Ceremony ends. All begin leaving.

AT CHAMBERS FAMILY CAR

Leah spots Michael, enters limo, glances, limo pulls away.

Michael exits, carries white roses to gravesite. He stares at casket, places roses atop. Attendants wait at a distance.

EXT. PASADENA HIGH-RISE OFFICE BLDG - DAY (AFTERNOON)

INT. NODEL, STANDFORD & OAKES LAW FIRM- DAY

A RECEPTIONIST, KAY, F, 30s. Others enter, exit area.

KEVIN NODEL, WM, 50s, in suit slacks, white shirt, loose tie, enters from inner office, goes to receptionist.

KEVIN

Kay, is Michael back yet?

RECEPTIONIST

No, Mr. Nodel. Should I call him?

KEVIN

No, that's fine. If he comes in, just send him to Conference Room B.

Phone sounds. Receptionist nods yes, answers.

RECEPTIONIST

Good afternoon. Nodel, Standford and Oakes. How may I direct your call? Sure. One moment, please.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

THREE MALE & THREE FEMALE ATTORNEYS, various ethnicities, sit at table piled with legal folders, laptops, carafes, mugs.

Talk is energetic. Kevin Nodel enters, takes a seat.

AT TABLE

Trevor HALE WM, late 20s, Ivy-League type; ELAINE SNOW, BF, 30 with others. Trevor and Elaine are Michael's friends.

KEVIN

Where was I, Trevor?

TREVOR

The Orlando case, how to deal with Justice and that U.S. Attorney prick, what's his face?

KEVIN

Right. Starr. You know, actually, I'd like to wait for Michael, since this is his baby. Ah, Elaine, when's the prelim on Weaver?

ELAINE

Thursday, ten am, downtown LA.

KEVIN

Good. How's the case shaping up?

ELAINE

No problems. Listen, about Michael. I suggested he take the rest of the day off. He was really despondent when I earlier spoke to him.

KEVIN

I understand. Let's just ...

Room door opens. A somber Michael enters. All are surprised.

ELAINE

Michael.

KEVIN

You're back. You alright?

Michael nods yes, sits, forces a flash smile, exhales. A male fellow lawyer pours him a cup of coffee.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

You know you don't have to be here. I mean, we can...

A male fellow lawyer pours Michael a cup of coffee.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

We can discuss Orlando tomorrow.

MICHAEL

No, no. Ah, nothing's going to change by then. I'm, I'm fine.

KEVIN

Well, I did want to discuss Orlando. I mean, I know you've developed some strategies.

Michael is non-responsive. Elaine jumps in.

ELAINE

Ah, if it's alright with Michael, I know the case very well. We've discussed it at length. So...

Michael nods. The other women exchange catty glances, they eye Elaine, who returns their glares.

KEVIN

Fine with me. Go ahead.

ELAINE

Well, Rafael Orlando was charged under RICO, his bank accounts seized by the U.S. Attorney.

TREVOR

Hijacked is more like it.

ELAINE

True. A move to deny top legal representation to Mr. Orlando. So, months ago, we anticipated this, right? Michael devised a plan that protects the firm's interests and Mr. Orlando's due process.

MALE ATTORNEY

Guess that rules out pro bono.

TREVOR

That was never a question.

MALE ATTORNEY

That was a joke, Trevor. Okay?

Others laugh. Michael, Elaine and Trevor are not amused. They wait for laughter to subside.

ELAINE

The idea is brilliant. Michael had Mr. Orlando, pay a mega-retainer, then periodic payments into, essentially, a special prepaid plan of sorts, which we can offer to other high-profile clients.

FEMALE ATTORNEY

But are we on solid ground?

KEVIN

What are your thoughts?

FEMALE ATTORNEY

Well, the last thing we need is Justice breathing down our necks.

ELAINE

They certainly won't like it but it's perfectly legal.

KEVIN

Hell, then. Beautiful. Let's just be damn sure we're standing on granite, which I think we are. The client wins, and we win, as long as we cover all of our ass-sets.

Laughter.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

And make sure we allow plenty of margin for the unexpected.

ELAINE

Right.

Elaine casts a "kiss my ass" look at her female detractors.

KEVIN

I like it, Michael.

Michael nods, then slowly stands, takes a deep breath.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry. Excuse me.

KEVIN

Are you okay?

Michael nods 'yes' but leaves. Others watch.

Elaine stands, follows. More catty glances are exchanged.

EXT. LAX AIRPORT - DAY

The roar of jet engines; planes land.

INT. LUGGAGE AREA - DAY

REGINALD SWINSON, BM, early 30s, dapper, with briefcase, steps away from others, dials a number on his smartphone.

REGINALD

Hey, beautiful, it's me.

(waits)

'Bout five minutes ago. Listen, meet me in an hour. I'm staying at the Airport Hilton.

(pause)

No, I can't wait two hours. Make it one. C'mon, Don't make me wait in some hotel room. Great. See ya.

INT. MICHAEL'S LAW OFFICE - DAY

Elaine stands near Michael who leans against his desk

MICHAEL

I was the only black face there. Damn, that surprised me. I mean --

ELAINE

-- Hmmm. Surprises me, too. By the way, Trevor wasn't there, right?

MICHAEL

Right.

ELAINE

Go on.

MICHAEL

But I didn't notice I was flying solo, until Chambers started in on me. I mean, he came unglued.

ELAINE

That is just so craaazy.

MICHAEL

It was unreal. I'd worked in his
firm for years and came that close
 (gestures with fingers)
...to calling me a nigger.

ELAINE

Michael, what? No way.

MICHAEL

You'd think. But I was there.

ELAINE

But I don't understand. Why was he so angry. Sounds like he totally hates your guts. But why? Because of... you and Stephanie's past?

MICHAEL

What else? You should've seen him. He actually accused me of causing her death.

ELAINE

Her death? What in the world did he mean by that? And how did she die?

MICHAEL

I don't know what he meant. All I've heard is cardiac failure. Trevor says he doesn't know either.

ELAINE

Why don't you know? You guys broke up a few years ago but talked to --

MICHAEL

-- We hadn't seen each other since before Cynthia and I were married.

ELAINE

Hmmm. Okay. Okay.

MICHAEL

I wish Trevor had never told me she'd died. I do. I even regret he introduced us at UCLA, years ago.

Brief silence. Elaine takes a step away then turns back.

ELAINE

You were never over her. Don't deny it. We both know it's true. It is.

MICHAEL

I was. I mean, I am.

ELAINE

Okay, counselor. Okay.

MICHAEL

Why're you looking at me like that?

Elaine shakes her head.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I started to not go. But I didn't want to later wish I had.

ELAINE

I'm surprised Trevor didn't go.

MICHAEL

I can't imagine her dead. I can't. I just want to know what happened.

ELAINE

You sure Trev doesn't know? C'mon.

MICHAEL

What can I say? I mean --

ELAINE

-- That doesn't make sense.

MICHAEL

If he knew, he'd tell me. He dated Leah, until a year ago.

ELAINE

Well, I hope this doesn't sound insensitive, but --

MICHAEL

-- But what? What is it?

Elaine hesitates.

ELAINE

How did she --

MICHAEL

-- How did she what?

ELAINE

How did she look? I know looks are altered when a person is --

MICHAEL

How did she look? Why?

ELAINE

Michael, I'm sorry if I --

MICHAEL

-- It's ok. It's a natural question, not knowing details about how she died. I did get an uncertified copy of the death record.

ELAINE

And?

MICHAEL

Cardiac arrest, due to pulmonary embolism. But I always knew she was in great health. Always.

ELAINE

So, how could you be blamed for that? No, they're hiding something.

MICHAEL

I'm just numb, right now.

ELAINE

You should've called me, you know. We could've taken a long drive... talked things out.

MICHAEL

I sure could've used that.

ELAINE

I know. Listen, Michael, whatever you need, whatever, I'm here. Okay?

MICHAEL

Thanks. That means a lot. It does.

Elaine gives Michael a lingering gaze. Kevin barges in.

KEVIN

Sorry, I'll get back to you.

Elaine steps away. Michael stands, steps forward.

MICHAEL

No, no, come on in.

ELAINE

(To Michael)

I'll talk to you later.

KEVIN

This'll only take a second.

ELAINE

No-no-no, I've got a deposition.

Elaine leaves.

EXT. AIRPORT HOTEL - DAY

INT. HOTEL ROOM

Reginald is in unbuttoned shirt. There's a knock at door. He uses breath spray, opens door.

Cynthia is at door in a business suit. Reginald embraces her, tries to kiss her. She turns her cheek to him.

REGINALD

Entre vous, moi cherie. Damn. You look good, lady.

Good to see you.

Cynthia flashes a half-smile, enters, and walks past. Reginald closes the door. Cynthia keeps her distance.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

How's San Francisco these days?

REGINALD

Miserable. You're here, and I'm there. Damn, you smell delicious.

CYNTHIA

Reginald, stop it.

REGINALD

I wanna kiss you all over, girl. Dessert before dinner, right?

CYNTHIA

Stop clowning. You need to button your shirt before you catch cold.

REGINALD

Clowning? Not hardly. Hold up. I got something for you. Don't peek.

Reginald dashes to dresser, grabs an item, conceals it.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Something black, something silky soft and sexy, just like you.

Reginald reveals a black negligee. He winks.

CYNTHIA

Who's that for?

REGINALD

Who is it... For you, like I said.

CYNTHIA

Reggie, I didn't come here to get laid. I have a husband I love, and who makes damn good love to me.

REGINALD

Whoa, whoa, whoa. I see, I see. Right, right. Uh-huh.

CYNTHIA

I've got a meeting in Long Beach in an hour. I just wanted to say hi.

REGINALD

A meeting? What's all this, babe?

CYNTHIA

Babe? Reggie, are you high? Why're you acting and talking like this?

Cynthia steps toward door. Reginald cuts her off.

REGINALD

Hey, I miss you, girl. I'm even thinking of moving back to LA.

CYNTHIA

Oh, really? Well, it's a big city.

REGINALD

Hold down your excitement, okay?

CYNTHIA

Reggie, you've misunderstood me.

REGINALD

Misunderstood? Mis-under-stood?

CYNTHIA

Sorry if you feel I've used you.

REGINALD

Used? Nobody uses Reginald Swinson. Let me establish that. You can't dump me like yesterday's garbage.

CYNTHIA

Dump you? We were only friends.

Reginald grabs Cynthia's wrist. She yanks it away.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Don't even think about it. Don't get physical with me. I swear.

Reggie backs away, thrusts both hands in air.

REGINALD

Alright. You go to your meeting. And we'll talk when you get back.

CYNTHIA

Back? I'm not coming back here.

REGINALD

You're just tired, maybe a little depressed. It'll pass. I promise.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

We've always been friends. Friends? What's with you? You --

REGINALD (CONT'D)

-- Friends? You-made-me-love-you. You know it. I know it. C'mon, don't do this.

CYNTHIA

What? Oh, my god.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - DAY

Cynthia opens door, steps into corridor.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Goodbye, Reggie.

REGINALD

You know you want me. You know it.

Guests in corridor react. Cynthia reaches elevator.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

A grim-faced Cynthia approaches Carla.

CARLA

What's wrong? That was quick.

CYNTHIA

Not quick enough. Let's go. Should've taken you with me.

CARLA

Tried to tell ya.

INT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - DAY (EVENING)

Michael sits in his car.

A BLACK LINCOLN SEDAN

Sedan, with dark windows, pulls up, stops inches from his rear bumper. Michael turns, looks back with "WTF" expression.

EXT. MICHAEL'S AUTO - DAY (EVENING)

The sedan eases away. Michael steps out, tries but fails to read license plate. He reenters his car.

EXT. PASADENA LUXURY CONDO COMPLEX - NIGHT (DUSK)

INT. CONDO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael enters with briefcase and mail, walks past living room to dining area, puts briefcase on the table.

Michael scans mail; tosses it onto a long dining table.

CONDO KITCHEN

Michael looks in fridge, grabs a beer, he closes door, starts to open beer then puts it back in fridge.

LIVING ROOM

Michael plops on sofa, leans back, closes his eyes.

INT. CONDO MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michael sits on the bed, then stands, and leaves the room.

HALLWAY

Michael walks to and enters a second bedroom.

SECOND BEDROOM

Michael flips on the light, walks to and opens the closet. He uncovers a box hidden on the top shelf and opens it.

INSERT PHOTOGRAPHS

Michael removes and examines photos of Stephanie and himself in various places. He grows emotional.

Michael hears front door open. He hurriedly puts photos in folder, conceals them back on shelf, leaves room.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Strained silence. Michael sits at one end of long table. Cynthia sits at other end. The two exchange furtive glances.

More silence. Finally ...

MICHAEL

Must've had a long meeting.

Too long. I then drove Carla back to the office.

MICHAEL

Sorry 'bout that.

Long pause.

CYNTHIA

How was your day?

MICHAEL

Her divorce final yet?

CYNTHIA

Otherwise, my day was fine. And not yet, to answer your question. She and Bruce are fighting over property. And she's still upset you're not taking her case.

MICHAEL

Why? I'm not a divorce lawyer. Carla knows that. Besides, even if I were, how could I choose her over Bruce, or vice-versa.

CYNTHIA

'Cause she's my best friend.

MICHAEL

Okay, I give up.

CYNTHIA

C'mon, I know you're not a divorce lawyer. I was only kidding.

Cynthia gazes at Michael. He avoids her stare.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

I almost forgot. You attend the funeral?

MICHAEL

Yes. I told you I would. Right?

Cynthia waits. Michael doesn't offer any more.

CYNTHIA

Well, how was it?

MICHAEL

How was it?

I mean --

MICHAEL

-- Let's see. There was a casket, a dead body, mourners, flowers, a eulogy - the usual.

CYNTHIA

Wow. Sorry my simple-minded question upset you, your honor.

MICHAEL

I'm not upset. It's just that I'm not in the mood for a play-by-play.

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

You said that already.

More silence, a focused stare from Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

You still upset from last night?

MICHAEL

Last night?

CYNTHIA

Yes, last night. The test showed I wasn't pregnant. That is what you wanted, right?

MICHAEL

I don't want to talk about it now.

CYNTHIA

'Course not. You know, things have gotten worse since you learned about the death of your friend.

MICHAEL

What? That is not true.

CYNTHIA

Just how well did you know her?

Michael stands, starts away from table.

MICHAEL

What's that got to do with it?

You say she was just a... friend?

MICHAEL

She, Trevor and I were at UCLA. We are all part of a large group of pretty close friends. You know that. Why are you making something out of this?

CYNTHIA

Making something? Is that possible?

MICHAEL

There you go with the sarcasm.

CYNTHIA

Sarcasm? Me? There was a casket, a
dead body, mourners --

MICHAEL

-- You asked how was a funeral.

CYNTHIA

I haven't had an up day, myself.

Cynthia takes her plate to kitchen. Michael's cell rings.

MICHAEL

Hello. I'm listening.

(listens)

Be there in twenty minutes.

Cynthia returns. Michael grabs his jacket heads to the door.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Gotta meet a client.

Michael walks back, kisses Cynthia on the cheek, leaves.

The home phone rings. She answers.

CYNTHIA

Hello. Hello. Hello.

No response. Cynthia hangs up, leaves room.

EXT. PASADENA LUXURY HOTEL - NIGHT

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Michael enters, takes a seat, checks his watch.

FROM CORRIDOR

ANDREW, 20s, WM, enters lobby, while talking on his cell.

He reaches Michael.

ANDREW

Excuse me. Are you Michael West?

MICHAEL

Who're you?

ANDREW

You can call me Andrew.

MICHAEL

I can call you Sue. Are you Andrew?

ANDREW

Yeah. Someone wants to talk to you. (extends phone)

MICHAEL

Who is this? What's going on?

Andrew keeps phone extended. Michael hesitates then takes phone. Andrew steps away.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hello.

LEAH (V.O.)

Hello, Michael.

MICHAEL

Leah? You were going to meet me.

PHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN MICHAEL AND LEAH

Leah is in a posh bedroom, on her cell, eyeing door.

LEAH

Too risky. Father would have a coronary even if he knew I was talking to you at all.

MICHAEL

What would he do to you?

LEAH

It's not me I'm worried about.

MICHAEL

I see. Answer something for me.

LEAH

First, I so apologize about today.

MICHAEL

I don't know that man I saw today. Why does he blame me for Steph's death? And just how did she die? She was fine when I last saw her.

Silence.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Leah?

LEAH

I'm here. You're asking a lot.

MICHAEL

A lot? I loved her, once.

LEAH

And she loved you. Never stopped.

MICHAEL

Then tell me. I've seen the death record. It doesn't give any detail.

LEAH

This isn't easy for me, okay?

MICHAEL

I'm sorry. But I've got to know.

LEAH

I can only tell you she died of cardiac arrest.

MICHAEL

C'mon, so does everyone, actually. I know that much already.

LEAH

Look, a week before she died, all Steph talked about was you. She so wanted to see you... talk to you.

MICHAEL

About what?

LEAH

(hesitates)

I'm not sure.

MICHAEL

Not a good answer. Leah, Please. Don't hold back. C'mon.

LEAH

She was wondering how you were, if you'd forgotten her. She regretted letting dad break you guys up.

MICHAEL

Why does he hate me, Leah?

Silence. Michael grows impatient.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Why does he blame me?

LEAH

I've said enough. I've got to go.

MICHAEL

Leah. What the hell's going on?

LEAH

Michael, I just wanted you to know Steph wished things could have been different.

MICHAEL

Had she been sick? Tell me.

LEAH

Goodbye, Michael. Live your life. You're better off not knowing.

MICHAEL

What the hell does that mean? And why did you ask me to come here?

LEAH

I had planned to meet you. But --

MICHAEL

-- But what?

LEAH

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Goodbye, Michael. Leah. Leah.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Goodbye.

Phone disconnects. Michael pauses, hands phone to Andrew.

INT. MICHAEL'S CONDO MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

INSERT: "CLOCK 12:10 AM."

Michael and Cynthia are asleep. Michael tosses and turns.

DREAM SEQUENCE (BLACK and WHITE)

Michael is at Stephanie's funeral. He approaches casket. Mourners all stand, laugh, point at him.

AT CASKET

Nick Chambers stands, approaches, points a handgun at Michael.

In casket, Stephanie's eyes open wide. She raises up and smiles, reaches out both arms.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

MASTER BEDROOM

Michael bolts up, in a sweat; he struggles to breathe, clutches his chest. He gets up, leaves room.

ON CYNTHIA'S FACE

She remains still but her eyes are open.

INT. NODEL, STANDFORD AND OAKES RECEPTION AREA - DAY

INT. TREVOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Elaine and Trevor stand near his desk, talking.

TREVOR

Guy's an asshole... but one with deep pockets, right? And he's in deep shit. Deeep.

ELAINE

The perfect client, right?

TREVOR

Perfect. Boy, I love this country.

Michael enters.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Michael. Come on in.

ELAINE

You need to see me?

MICHAEL

Later. I need to talk to Trev.

ELAINE

No problem. I'll be in my office.

Michael and Elaine's eyes meet as she passes, leaves.

TREVOR

What happened to 'good morning'?

MICHAEL

Alright, good morning. That better?

TREVOR

Damn. What's eating you?

MICHAEL

You.

TREVOR

Me?

MICHAEL

You know more than you've told me.

TREVOR

What are you talking about?

MICHAEL

I'm talking about Stephanie, damn
it. Why won't you tell me?

TREVOR

Honest, I don't know a thing.

MICHAEL

You're still screwing Leah. She must've told you something more.

TREVOR

Wait-wait-wait. Wait a minute. I know how you're feeling, but --

MICHAEL

-- She called me last night.

TREVOR

Oh, yeah? She called?

MICHAEL

Says Chambers would go nut-so if he knew she was even talking to me.

TREVOR

Well, hell she's probably right.

MICHAEL

But she could have at least answered some questions for me.

TREVOR

And she didn't?

MICHAEL

Hell no.

TREVOR

Look, I'll try again to get her to open up. But whenever I ask about it, she just shuts down. Totally.

MICHAEL

Hell, forget it. Just --

TREVOR

-- Now what does that mean?

Michael slumps onto a chair near desk. Trevor sits.

MICHAEL

I'll get a certified internal M.E. report, even medical records.

TREVOR

How? If Nick Chambers didn't want them to, the CIA couldn't get that.

MICHAEL

He doesn't control everything.

TREVOR

Damn near. You know that. You used to work for him. I'm not lecturing you but don't let this consume you.

MICHAEL

Easy for you to say.

TREVOR

No. I just care about my friends.

MICHAEL

He accused me of causing her death.

TREVOR

And that bother's the hell out of me. Chambers a nationally-respected lawyer. He's too smart for that.

MICHAEL

You would think.

TREVOR

Look, stop by my place tonight, about eight. Okay?

MICHAEL

What for?

TREVOR

You'll see when you get there. Just don't lose sight of what you have.

Michael gives Trevor a long stare then leaves, office.

EXT. HIGH RISE OFFICE BLDG - DAY

INT. "WEST MEDIA" OFFICE SUITE - DAY

KRYSTAL, BF, 20 walks down corridor and enters ...

INT. CYNTHIA'S EXECUTIVE OFFICE - DAY

Cynthia sits at her desk, looking over files.

KRYSTAL

Ms. West.

CYNTHIA

One sec, Krystal. I'm --

KRYSTAL

-- I'm sorry. There's a gentleman at my desk.

CYNTHIA

A gentleman. We've seen those.

KRYSTAL

He says he's your brother.

CYNTHIA

My brother?

KRYSTAL

Thought I'd come tell you, seeing as how you don't have a brother.

Reginald enters, steps around Krystal, carrying roses.

A startled Cynthia stands, goes to door, takes roses, hands them to a stunned Krystal.

CYNTHIA

It's okay Krystal. You may go. Give a rose to each lady in the office.

Reginald gives Cynthia a hard look, then a creepy smile.

Krystal closes door, returns to front of her desk.

REGINALD

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Those were for you, my princess.

Stop. Stop.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing here?

Reginald takes a deep breath.

REGINALD

C'mon, you're gonna make me think you're not happy to see me.

Cynthia steps closer, aims a laser stare.

CYNTHIA

This is my damn business. I don't play this shit. Leave.

REGINALD

Okay, I'll leave. I'll leave. But be honest. You need a real man, not some intellectual pussy that can't give you what you want and need.

CYNTHIA

Go.

REGINALD

Changed your mind about leaving him, yet? It's never gonna work.

CYNTHIA

I said go. Get the hell out.

Reginald takes a single step backward.

REGINALD

It's dangerous, playing with a
man's heart. You know that?

CYNTHIA

You're insane. You're stalking me?

REGINALD

You made me think you loved me.

Cynthia goes to her desk, reaches for her phone.

Reginald moves to door, a demented smile on his face.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

You're making a mistake. Michael's no good for you. He never was. He prefers vanilla to chocolate.

Reginald opens door as Carla enters office.

CARLA

Oops.

CYNTHIA

Come on in. He's leaving.

REGINALD

For now. Say hello to Michael.

Carla reads Reginald as he leaves. Cynthia goes to her desk, sits staring blankly. Carla stands with her arms folded.

INT. MICHAEL'S CONDO BATHROOM - NIGHT

Michael shaves, completes last strokes, washes his face, grabs a towel, dries, stares into mirror.

Michael turns to see Cynthia in doorway behind him.

MICHAEL

Didn't hear you come in.

CYNTHIA

Sorry if I scared you.

MICHAEL

You didn't.

CYNTHIA

Of course not. Startle you, then.

Cynthia chuckles and walks away.

MASTERBEDROOM

Michael is in jeans and jacket, Cynthia still in her business attire. She leans against dresser.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

How was your day?

MICHAEL

Eh, so, so. Yours?

CYNTHIA

Routine, except for a problem with an old friend. I was --

MICHAEL

-- Listen, sorry for running. I'm meeting Trevor tonight.

CYNTHIA

Sure. Before you go, guess what?

MICHAEL

I give.

CYNTHIA

Mother called. She and Dad offered us their Palm Springs place for the weekend, if we can --

MICHAEL

-- Wow, that is big of them. They throw in one of the Bentleys, too?

CYNTHIA

Okay. I realize you and Mom don't like each other, but --

MICHAEL

-- Like? She hates me, thinks I'll never provide her little girl the life she always had. She's right.

Both move around, alternately circling each other

CYNTHIA

Are you serious right now?

MICHAEL

I'm not making anything up.

CYNTHIA

The best I can say about that is --

MICHAEL

-- Best? No, no. Give me the worst. I'm used to the worst you can say.

CYNTHIA

Is this from some play you're rehearsing for or something? I mean, it's like --

MICHAEL

-- Let's not get off the subject. I want hear what you were going to say about the Palm Springs thing.

Cynthia hesitates, she shakes her head.

CYNTHIA

Look. What you think about what mother thinks is dead wrong. Those are your thoughts, not hers. But it doesn't matter what she thinks. You married me, not her.

MICHAEL

I don't want to get into this.

CYNTHIA

Right. I'm sorry. You're still consumed with grief. Whatever is going on with us is --

MICHAEL

-- Don't start with that again.

CYNTHIA

I mean what's not going on.

MICHAEL

Whatever, it's been longer than this weeks — more like months.

CYNTHIA

At least we finally agree.

Michael starts for door, stops, turns back.

MICHAEL

Don't start with the sarcasm.

CYNTHIA

I'm not. I just want us to --

MICHAEL

-- To what? To what?

Be more than roommates.

MICHAEL

Roommates? Roommates?

CYNTHIA

We have to decide what will happen to us. We can't go on this way.

MICHAEL

I told you I didn't want kids, not for a while. And I told you I wouldn't make a fortune overnight.

CYNTHIA

No-no-no. Excuse me. This isn't about having kids. And it's certainly not about money. No.

MICHAEL

Right.

CYNTHIA

It isn't. That's a burden you've placed on yourself. It's a mask you choose to hide behind.

MICHAEL

You say that, but I know better. You make me feel like --

CYNTHIA

-- Like what? Like what Michael?

MICHAEL

Like I don't measure up.

CYNTHIA

I don't believe I'm hearing this.

MICHAEL

Believe it. You compare me to your father. The years we dated, you --

CYNTHIA

-- When? When have I ever said anything remotely like that. When?

MICHAEL

Not verbally, but you think it. You think it. You do. Well, I'm me. I don't need reminding of how rich your folks are.

This is crazy. All I did was fall in love with you. No matter how successful you are, you act like you're one step from the ghetto.

MICHAEL

That's not true, and you know it.

CYNTHIA

We'll do two-hundred-seventy-five thousand this year. That's not exactly minimum wage, Michael.

MICHAEL

It's not what it used to be.

CYNTHIA

Say that to Leon and Danny, okay? Nothing is? But it grows every month. Michael, you're running away from something. So, stop. Just stop. You've made it. Okay? Jesus.

MICHAEL

I've got to go.

Michael exits room. Cynthia follows.

CYNTHIA

Go on. Run away. We're only talking about our marriage... our lives.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael and Cynthia head to living room.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Everything on your terms, right?

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michael reaches door, exits, closes door behind him, leaving Cynthia in tears.

EXT. PASADENA STREETS - NIGHT

Michael drives Colorado Blvd.

INT. TREVOR'S HOME - NIGHT

Trevor, a drink in hand, opens Condo door. Michael enters.

TREVOR

On time, as usual.

Trevor points to sofa. Michael follows.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

What're you drinking? I have --

MICHAEL

-- Nothing for me. Why am I here?

TREVOR

Whoa, I'll get to that. Wine?

MICHAEL

Just tell me or I'm leaving.

TREVOR

Damn. C'mon. Relax a little.

Trevor glances toward an inner doorway, then at Michael.

ON INTERIOR DOORWAY

Leah emerges, shocked to see Michael.

MICHAEL

Leah.

Thick silence. Leah stares, showing surprise and disgust with Trevor. She grabs her purse from counter, turns to face him.

Trevor strikes an apologetic demeanor.

TREVOR

Leah, please don't leave.

LEAH

Forgive me Michael. It's not you. It's Trevor's deception. I'll --

MICHAEL

-- No. Stay. I'll leave. I had no idea. I'll find answers on my own.

TREVOR

Wait, Michael. Leah, this doesn't make sense. Let's all sit down. C'mon, guys. Please. Please. Sit.

LEAH

You don't know what you're asking me to do. You don't. You just --

TREVOR

-- Just what? What I know is, Michael deserves more. Stephanie would want that. You know it.

Seconds pass. Leah sits, pauses then ...

LEAH

I just wish she were here. Stephanie wasn't just my sister, she was my best friend. Oh, God.

Trevor move closer to Leah, places his arm on her shoulder.

LEAH (CONT'D)

(pained)

Michael, before I say anything, promise me something.

MICHAEL

What?

LEAH

Promise you won't blame me for whatever happens.

MICHAEL

Whatever happens? I don't --

LEAH

-- Just promise. Otherwise --

MICHAEL

-- Okay, okay. I promise. But what do you mean, blame you? For what?

LEAH

I know I'll regret this. I just know it. I should just leave.

(long pause)

Stephanie ... did die of cardiac arrest. I know I've --

MICHAEL

-- You told me this before.

LEAH

I know, but it did happen. But she died during childbirth. Stephanie died giving birth to your son.

Michael and Trevor.freeze in Stunned silence. Finally...

No. No. No way. Wait a minute. Wait, she died having a baby?

LEAH

No. Not just a baby, Michael, your son. She died having your son.

MICHAEL

What? She ... that's not possible.

Michael slumps onto sofa then stands, leaves room. Trevor buries his face in his hands.

TREVOR'S BATHROOM

Michael bends over basin, flushes his face with cold water. He grabs a towel, dries his face, stares into mirror shaking his head, closes eyes, turns away.

INT. TREVOR'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael returns.

MICHAEL

God, this is... Damn. Whoa, I just can't believe Steph wouldn't have said something. I can't.

LEAH

Think. There were plenty of reasons for her not to, Michael. Plenty.

MICHAEL

Like your father?

LEAH

For one.

MICHAEL

No, not for one, the biggest one. I just can't believe this.

LEAH

Believe me, the baby is very real. And he's absolutely yours.

MICHAEL

My god. The baby... is he okay? I mean... what's his name? Where is he, and --

LEAH

-- He's fine. His name is David Michael Chambers, twenty-one inches, nine pounds at birth.

MICHAEL

Nine? When was he born?

LEAH

Ten days ago. July fifteenth, at eleven fifty-eight p.m. Exactly.

MICHAEL

Now, I know why your father said what he said. How is the baby?

LEAH

It's David. His name is David. And he's fine. He's just fine.

Michael sits, his hands thrust to both sides of his head.

MICHAEL

What's your father planning to do?

Long pause, deep breaths, as reality sets in.

LEAH

He hasn't seen David yet. He refuses to, but he will. He has no choice. He'll probably insist on putting him up for adoption.

MICHAEL

Adoption? Wait, Stephanie assured you I'm the father? You're sure?

LEAH

She hadn't been with anyone since you, hardly anyone before you.

Michael stares at Leah.

MICHAEL

So, I'm left to accept that. I mean. I do. Oh, my God. Damn.

LEAH

There's little doubt. Believe me.

MICHAEL

I want to see him... the baby. David. I know your father's going to do everything he can to stop me. TREVOR

Michael, right now you're thinking emotionally. I understand that. But what can you do? Think about this.

MICHAEL

Think about what?

TREVOR

About Cynthia, your wife, for starters. And do you want a battle with Nick Chambers? He'll crucify you and sell tickets to the burial.

Michael stands, starts for door.

MICHAEL

I've gotta go. I've gotta go.

TREVOR

Hey, listen, stay here for while, alright? Talk this thing through.

MICHAEL

I'm fine. I'm fine.

Trevor and Leah watch Michael leave.

EXT. COLORADO BLVD - NIGHT

Michael drives, stops at a light ignores signal change. A driver behind him honks. Michael eases away.

INT. ELAINE'S CONDO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Michael stands staring at an oil painting, lost in thought.

Elaine touches his shoulder, from behind him. He turns.

MICHAEL

Sorry for stopping by so late.

ELAINE

No. You really do need to talk.

Elaine and Michael sit on sofa. He leans back, closes his eyes for a moment. Elaine caresses his hand.

MICHAEL

The past few days have been hell. I can't deal with anything else.

I am just stunned. I mean, this is the one thing we never considered when we talked the other day.

MICHAEL

I know. On the way over, I kept turning things over in my mind, thinking back... remembering.

ELAINE

I recall you saying you last saw her a few months before you and Cynthia were married, right?

MICHAEL

True.

ELAINE

And?

MICHAEL

And what?

ELAINE

And the obvious.

MICHAEL

You mean, did we make love?

ELAINE

That is the question, right?

MICHAEL

Yes. Yes. I'm not proud of it. But it happened.

Silence.

ELAINE

Michael, I'm not judging you.

MICHAEL

You don't have to. I'm judging myself. Period. That's it.

ELAINE

Well don't. The important thing now is to try and see all that's happened as clearly as possible.

MICHAEL

Sure. That's easier said than done.

I know it is. But are you convinced you're the father?

MICHAEL

Convinced? Well, let's say I don't have any reason to question it.

ELAINE

Look, I'm not trying to cast doubt on Stephanie's representation, inasmuch as they are indeed hers.

MICHAEL

Then, let's assume they are. But you think Leah could be lying?

ELAINE

I don't know. Neither do you. We only know what Leah said was allegedly told her by her sister.

MICHAEL

I don't see that she'd have a reason to lie about it.

ELAINE

I agree. It's just that I have the luxury of a different perspective, Michael. Being a woman helps, too.

MICHAEL

I know you're only thinking of Me. But it adds up... the months. When we saw each other, it was to say goodbye. We talked then --

ELAINE

-- Michael, please. You don't have to explain that.

MICHAEL

Hard part was, I was still working for her father. There'd be times we'd see each other and ...

ELAINE

Is that why you resigned his firm?

MICHAEL

Mainly. The other was, he changed when he learned Steph and I were more than friends.

You thought he'd react otherwise?

MICHAEL

Maybe. He's a power in liberal politics... lifetime NAACP member.

ELAINE

Michael, those lines still exist. Want to turn a white liberal into a conservative? Screw his daughter, let alone get her pregnant.

MICHAEL

I know, now.

ELAINE

If you loved her, why didn't you marry her? Maybe a better question is why did you marry Cynthia?

MICHAEL

Cynthia and I were friends forever, since we were kids. We always had fun, talked about anything. She's beautiful, warm, caring, and --

ELAINE

-- So is my grandmother. Why did you marry her? Did you love her?

MICHAEL

Of course. It's just that --

ELAINE

-- Of course? There is no of course. I feel like I'm prying and I don't mean to. The point now is deciding how to deal with all this.

MICHAEL

You mean, telling Cynthia?

ELAINE

Sooner or later, she will find out. I'm surprised she hasn't already. It's best you tell her. Trust me.

MICHAEL

I don't know what the hell to do. I can't just walk up to her and say Hey, baby, I know I said I didn't want kids now, but I've got a son.

I know. Wish I had the answers. It hurts to see you go through this. I know how badly you want to rush right out and see your son but --

MICHAEL

-- I'm trying to process all this.

ELAINE

It's not a good idea to confront Chambers until you know more. Get some answers for yourself.

MICHAEL

Two weeks ago I thought I had problems. I was complaining about having the Orlando case assigned to Judge Keel's court.

ELAINE

Michael, we just... you just have to think this through. You were traumatized by Stephanie's death and now the baby.

Silence. Elaine moves closer to Michael. She appears turned on, leans in closer, tries to sound upbeat.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Everything will work out.

MICHAEL

Right.

ELAINE

You'll be alright. I promise.

MICHAEL

Can I get that in writing?

ELAINE

Any time you want.

MICHAEL

I should be going. I owe you.

Michael stands. Elaine does also.

ELAINE

No. Friends aren't friends unless they're there when you need them.

You're a real friend. 'Course you knew that, already.

ELAINE

Well, I had an idea.

Both start for front door. Elaine turns, as if she's just thought of something.

MICHAEL

What is it?

Elaine disappears for a second then returns, with her right fist clenched. She grasps Michael's right hand.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What is it?

MICHAEL'S OPEN HAND

ELAINE

Elaine smiles, holds her hand over his, moves it away, revealing a door key. He looks up.

ELAINE

When you need a quiet place.

MICHAEL

Elaine, thanks but I don't ...
I mean, it's sweet of you but --

ELAINE

-- Until the crisis is over, whether I'm here or not.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

Michael clutches key, hugs Elaine, kisses her on the cheek, turns opens door.

ELAINE

Be careful. See you tomorrow?

MICHAEL

Right.

Elaine closes door, places security chain, leans against door, closes her eyes, begins massaging her breasts, slips a hand down to unbutton jeans, eases hand inside panties ...

INT. MICHAEL'S CONDO BEDROOM - NIGHT

INSERT "ALARM CLOCK 1 AM"

Michael and Cynthia are asleep. Cynthia's back is turned to him. He's lying on his back.

ON MICHAEL

Michael is having a sensual dream. He tosses, gyrates.

ON CYNTHIA

Cynthia's eyes are open but she pretends to still be asleep.

Michael bolts awake, sits up, glances towards Cynthia.

MICHAEL

(whisper)

Damn. Oh, shit.

Cynthia stirs, turns toward Michael, rubs her eyes.

CYNTHIA

What's wrong?

Cynthia reaches to turn on lamp.

MICHAEL

No, don't. I'm alright. Just a bad dream. Go back to sleep. Go on.

Michael leaves room, goes to bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Michael stands at mirror, staring at himself.

INT. CONDO KITCHEN - MORNING

Cynthia, in business suit, pours two cups of coffee, orange juice. Places Danish rolls on plate with fruit.

Michael, enters in business suit.

MICHAEL

Thanks, sweetheart. Looks good.

Cynthia returns juice to fridge, but doesn't respond.

Michael stops behind his chair.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Sorry for waking you last night.

CYNTHIA

Must have been a helluva dream. You were moaning and groaning.

MICHAEL

Oh? Was I?

CYNTHIA

Was it about me?

MICHAEL

I don't really remember it.

CYNTHIA

Oh, I see. Okay.

MICHAEL

Anyway, I gave some thought to what you said last night.

Both sit, begin to eat.

CYNTHIA

What part?

MICHAEL

All of it.

CYNTHIA

Is that right?

MICHAEL

We do need to communicate better.
And I'm the main reason we haven't.

Cynthia looks skeptical. Michael takes note.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I see that look.

CYNTHIA

Just wondering what all this means?

MICHAEL

Well, means I haven't done enough to show how much I love you, how much I want our marriage to work.

CYNTHIA

I see. Wow. Seems I've waited forever to hear you say that.

And I'm sorry I haven't. I know, I've been very self-centered.

CYNTHIA

Michael, I do hear you. I do. It's just that at this point, I'm not so sure it isn't too late. I've --

MICHAEL

-- Too late? What do you mean?

CYNTHIA

I'm worn down. After you left, I thought about this past year.

MICHAEL

What about it?

CYNTHIA

How I've been made to feel that nothing I do is right. Nothing.

MICHAEL

And I'm truly sorry about that.

CYNTHIA

I've done nothing to make you treat me like a field hand, blaming me for your feelings of inadequacy, accusing me of wanting more than you could provide. But I started thinking maybe it WAS my fault.

MICHAEL

I'm saying I was wrong. I admit it.

CYNTHIA

Right. It's strange but that's why I may feel and appear skeptical.

MICHAEL

I don't understand.

CYNTHIA

I'll tell you. Last night you were the Michael I've come to know since our wedding. We haven't reached one year, yet. Think about that. And this morning, you're suddenly contrite, apologetic. You're all new and improved. What happened?

Michael gives Cynthia a hard stare.

That's just the way I feel.

CYNTHIA

Fine. But merely saying the words doesn't wipe away what's happened. It doesn't work that way.

MICHAEL

And I realize that, okay?

CYNTHIA

Then you realize I can't pretend everything's suddenly perfect. Words are important but it's actions that count much more.

The home phone rings. Cynthia stands, answers it.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Hello. Hello.

No response. Cynthia stares at receiver.

INSERT: Phone receiver screen. "NO I.D."

Cynthia hangs up, flashes a puzzled look.

MICHAEL

What was all that?

CYNTHIA

No one said anything. No I.D.

Silence. Michael goes to Cynthia, grasps her shoulders. The two exchange uneasy eye contact.

MICHAEL

Got to run. When you talk to your mother, accept their offer.

CYNTHIA

Wait a sec. If your attitude toward my mother has changed, then I know something's up. 'Cause we know --

MICHAEL

-- No-no-no. I just think we should get away from phones, computers, all the traffic.

CYNTHIA

Uh-huh. Okay. Okay. So, I'll tell her we accept, then.

And let's invite your folks over for dinner Sunday, and go to Palm Springs next weekend.

CYNTHIA

What? Repeat that.

MICHAEL

They're always inviting us over.

CYNTHIA

You're kidding. Am I dreaming?

MICHAEL

Nope, we're both wide-awake.

CYNTHIA

I'm afraid to push it, but since
you're having a conversion --

MICHAEL

-- Say it.

CYNTHIA

I still want to be a mother.

MICHAEL

(taken aback)

I never said I absolutely never,
ever wanted kids. I mean --

CYNTHIA

-- So, what are you saying, now?

MICHAEL

We can... work through this, okay? (kisses Cynthia) Promise. I promise. Hate to run.

CYNTHIA

Michael leaves. Her cell phone sounds.

INSERT SCREEN: "PRIVATE"

CYNTHIA

Hello?

REGINALD (V.O.)

Don't hang up. Don't hang up. Friends call each other, right?

CYNTHIA

Stop. Stop harassing me.

REGINALD (V.O.)

Harassing? Don't set me up like that. I just want to talk to you.

CYNTHIA

Not now.

REGINALD (V.O.)

Okay. Okay. When?

CYNTHIA

When you accept reality.

REGINALD (V.O.)

I have, already. Have lunch before I leave. We can meet anywhere.

CYNTHIA

Goodbye Reginald. Have some pride.

REGINALD

Pride? I've got pride. You'll see.

Cynthia disconnects, stares at phone, shakes her head.

INT. TREVOR'S LAW OFFICE - DAY (MORNING)

Trevor is at his desk, on phone.

INTERCUT: BETWEEN TREVOR and MICHAEL

INT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - DAY

Michael is in his car.

TREVOR

Thought you were meeting Kevin.

MICHAEL

I can't make it. Cover for me.

TREVOR

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Michael.

C'mon.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

You're blowing it. I'm saying this as a friend, alright?

Do it, okay?

TREVOR

In case you've forgotten, Kevin's name is still on the door, and our checks.

MICHAEL

We can do meet tomorrow.

TREVOR

If you say so. How're you?

MICHAEL

Okay. Sort of.

TREVOR

How'd Cynthia take the news?

MICHAEL

I'll talk to you later, maybe grab lunch. I'll call 'ya.

TREVOR

You didn't tell her, did you?

MICHAEL

TREVOR (V.O.)

Later. Gotta go.

Wait. Where are you?

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I have to do what I have to do.

TREVOR

Michael, don't be stupid.

INT. TREVOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Elaine enters. Trevor stands, reaches for his jacket.

TREVOR

I think he's about to do something.

ELAINE

Something stupid?

TREVOR

Yeah, as in really, really stupid.

ELAINE

Uh-oh, like what? What?

TREVOR

Not sure, but I've got a hunch.

Trevor stands, grabs his coat and heads for his door.

ELAINE

Where're you going?

TREVOR

Tell you when I get back.

ELAINE

I'm coming with you.

The two leave. Trevor closes door behind him.

INT. HIGH-RISE OFFICE SUITE RECEPTION AREA - DAY

WALL SIGN

CHAMBERS, STANDFIELD & OAKES LAW FIRM"

Michael approaches receptionist, MIA, 35. She's on phone. Michael waits until she finishes.

MIA

Chambers and Oakes. One moment please. Michael.

MICHAEL

How've you been, Mia?

MIA

Busy. Good to see you. How are you?

MICHAEL

Surviving. That's about it.

MIA

You've been on my mind. I was at the funeral. I saw what happened. It was just awful. No excuse.

A STAFF LAWYER approaches.

STAFF LAWYER

Michael West.

Michael ignores the guy, continues with Mia.

MICHAEL

Is the ol' man in?

MIA

Not yet.

MICHAEL

When do you expect him?

MIA

Well, I spoke with his secretary a moment ago. She doesn't expect him 'til noon. You two speaking again?

MICHAEL

Not exactly. I'll be back later.

MIA

I take it there's no message.

MICHAEL

Right.

MIA

You take care of yourself.

Michael leaves.

AT LAW BUILDING'S ELEVATOR

Michael waits. The door opens, revealing Trevor and Elaine.

TREVOR

Damn. Michael. Well, no shit.

MICHAEL

What the hell?

TREVOR

Good question. You nuts?

Michael walks past them but is cut off by Trevor.

ELAINE

You shouldn't have come here.

MICHAEL

Listen, I don't need chaperones. I know what I'm doing. Okay?

TREVOR

Like hell. What happened up there?

MICHAEL

Nothing. He wasn't in.

Trevor throws up his hands, turns away for a second.

Michael, please. Get the facts first. This isn't like you.

TREVOR

We're only trying to help, okay?

ELAINE

We can check birth records, find out what hospital the baby was born in, for starters, go from there.

TREVOR

If Steph named you as the father, you may have a basis for action.

ELAINE

Michael, that does make sense.

MICHAEL

Maybe. Maybe.

ELAINE

Let's go somewhere we can talk.

INT. PASADENA, LAKE AVENUE RESTAURANT - DAY

Michael, Trevor and Elaine have lunch. Michael never eats.

TREVOR

Let's stop dancing around this.

MICHAEL

Who's dancing?

TREVOR

Okay, I am. The last thing you need is a confrontation with Chambers.

MICHAEL

I want to ask about his grandson.

TREVOR

That's dumb. D-U-M-B. Then what?

MICHAEL

I want him to know I know.

ELAINE

So send him a Hallmark card, Michael. Please, for goddsake.

(MORE)

ELAINE (CONT'D)

All we're saying is you've got to be smarter. Think about it.

Michael stares at a male waiter at a distant table. The waiter is serving a YOUNG WOMAN, WF, late 20s, white dress.

The woman resembles Stephanie.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

We've always stuck together, right?

Michael is distracted. A stunned expression grips his face. Elaine and Trevor exchange disturbed looks.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Michael. Michael.

MICHAEL

What?

ELAINE

You okay?

No response.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Michael.

Michael turns to Elaine then back. The woman is gone. He signals the waiter who comes over.

WAITER

Yes, sir. May I help you?

MICHAEL

The woman you were speaking to at that table.

(points)

WAITER

I'm sorry. Which table, sir?

MICHAEL

That one.

WAITER

There must be some mistake, sir.

MICHAEL

I saw you. She wore a white dress.

WAITER

Not at that table, sir.

Michael.

(to waiter)

Thanks. That'll be all.

The waiter leaves, looks back at Michael.

MICHAEL

I know what I saw.

ELAINE

Okay. Forget about it. Forget it.

MICHAEL

Now you're humoring me.

ELAINE

Who was it you thought you saw?

MICHAEL

Forget it.

TREVOR

Michael.

ELAINE

Emotional trauma is real. You may need to --

MICHAEL

-- To what? Is this where you tell me I need a shrink or something?

TREVOR

It may help. Or do you believe only white folk need shrinks?

MICHAEL

Thanks for lunch...

(stands)

...and the unsolicited advice.

ELAINE

Michael, C'mon. Sit, Please.

Michael starts away.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Michael.

TREVOR

Let him go.

I'm worried about him. I've never seen him like this before.

TREVOR

Neither have I. Mike see's himself as some damn superman. He's got to come to grips with this by himself.

ELAINE

He can't. It's clear, he can't.

Tears well in Elaine's eyes. Trevor notes it with interest.

INT. SANTA MONICA RESTAURANT - DAY

Cynthia hardly eats, stares out at view of pier and ocean.

CARLA

Maybe he has changed. So, just give him the benefit of the doubt. Huh?

CYNTHIA

Hmmm. Maybe. I mean --

CARLA

-- You don't believe him, do you?

CYNTHIA

I don't know. I thought about something I saw on Oprah once.

CARLA

Uh-oh, that thins it out. What?

CYNTHIA

So, there was this woman who wrote a book about cheating husbands.

CARLA

Just how big was that book?

CYNTHIA

Right, I know. Anyway, she said one clue was a sudden and positive change in attitude and behavior.

CARLA

I can tell you all about that. They get real sweet and considerate all of a sudden. I call it a microwave conversion. It's really guilt, girl, if you ask me.

CYNTHIA

That's how I felt this morning.

CARLA

Answer me. You think he's cheating?

Long pause, Carla leans forward. Cynthia glances away.

CYNTHIA

No, I mean... sure, we've got problems, but Michael wouldn't --

CARLA

-- Say what, girl?

CYNTHIA

Michael wouldn't cheat.

CARLA

Look, I love Michael. You know that. But he's got a dick, right?

CYNTHIA

Girl, you're crazy. You are... I
hear what you're saying, but --

CARLA

-- Hey, I'm the one in middle of a divorce. I'm not saying all men are alike. Some are bigger than others.

CYNTHIA

Girl.

Cynthia swats at her, pushes her empty plate aside.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

I don't know what to think. Things are worse since his... friend died.

CARLA

I'll get to that, but I just can't help thinking about how long you two have known each - back to high school. Of course you were both just friends then. And --

CYNTHIA

True.

CARLA

But it became a whole lot more, through most of your years at USC, even though he was at UCLA. CARLA (CONT'D)

CYNTHIA

Except for that brief breakup Don't remind me. right after he started at that first law firm.

CARLA (CONT'D)

But you two heated up again, like I mean heated.

CYNTHIA

You could say that.

CARLA

Anyway, back to his friend that died. How good a friend was she?

CYNTHIA

They were in law school together. That's all I really know.

CARLA

Uh-huh. Well, anyway.

CYNTHIA

I've got to believe things will be different, and not because I want that. I'll have to wait and see.

CARLA

And what about your ah, brother?

CYNTHIA

Girl, I'm so stupid. Reggie and I have been friends since school.

CARLA

That's how you saw it. Plus, he never liked Michael. But, I'm telling you, he saw it another way, the way most men see it. They can't help it. Testosterone, girl.

CYNTHIA

I didn't see that until too late.

CARLA

You ever fuck him?

CYNTHIA

Whoa, Carla. Shhhh. 'Course not. He may have kissed me once or twice.

CARLA

He kissed YOU.

CYNTHIA

Yeah.

CARLA

But you didn't kiss him back. It was like one them ol' Baptist Church holy kisses, I reckon.

Cynthia shakes her head at Carla's blunt talk.

Carla stares without blinking.

CYNTHIA

Look, it wasn't a real kiss.

CARLA

Girl, you can be so naive. Listen, all they gotta do is get a whiff.

CYNTHIA

A whiff?

CARLA

Don't play dumb. They get a whiff, and it's boiing. Bone City. You gotta use the anatomy test.

CYNTHIA

What's that?

CARLA

Does he have a --

CYNTHIA

-- Don't say it. I know.

CARLA

Look, I'm probably not the person to be talking to you about this. I have a slightly prejudiced view.

CYNTHIA

Just a little.

CARLA

The only man I don't have a bad opinion of is my birth father.

CYNTHIA

You never knew your birth father.

CARLA

I rest my case.

EXT. WAYFARER'S CHAPEL - DAY

SUPER "DAYS LATER"

Michael stares past the wooden fence, towards ocean.

ON WOMAN

A YOUNG WOMAN, WF, late 20s, approaches to enjoy the view.

WOMAN

This is so beautiful.

Michael turns to see she's pregnant.

MICHAEL

Yes, it is.

WOMAN

I can't stay away. It's just so peaceful. You come here often?

MICHAEL

Yes. I mean, I used to. I used to.

The woman smiles then walks on. Michael turns back to gaze at ocean. Soon, he walks away.

EXT. SOUTH L.A. PARK PLAYGROUND - DAY

Leon and half dozen boys (10-12 yrs.) play basketball on outside neighborhood court.

SEAN, 13, BM, has hyper-aggressive attitude.

LEON

C'mon Sean. You can't foul like that. You'd be outta of a real game in two seconds. You gotta set a clean pick so he can get to the hoop. C'mon, try it again.

SEAN

Let him pass me the ball. I was the open, man. He can set a pick.

AT FENCE

Michael drives up, parks, gets out, walks to fence to watch game. Leon spots him, holds ball, turns to him and waves.

SEAN (CONT'D)

You walked. You can't do that.

LEON

Zip it Sean. You guys practice free throws. And behave yourself, okay?

Leon tosses ball to Sean, walks to fence.

LEON (CONT'D)

What's up? Surprised to see you.

MICHAEL

Got any future Lebrons out there?

LEON

Maybe. Main thing is just keeping 'em alive long enough to find out.

MICHAEL

Well, you're doing a great job.

LEON

I was hoping to see ya, right? You skipped our 'one on one' Saturday.

MICHAEL

Oh, yeah. Right. Ah --

LEON

-- Hey, no problem. I called but...

MICHAEL

You didn't leave a message?

LEON

Nah. You know what I think of substitutes for human interaction — cell phones, texting, Facebook. People boasting about thousands of friends they never met. But I digress. So, what's up? You okay?

MICHAEL

I'm fine. Why?

LEON

C'mon, Mikie. Don't try to bullshit big brother, okay?

MICHAEL

Drop the Mikie. I stopped by the house. Carmen said you were here.

LEON

Cool. Wassup?

When are you going to take me up on my offer?

LEON

Don't change the subject. Is it you and Cynthia?

MICHAEL

I'm not changing the subject.

LEON

Then answer me.

MICHAEL

What was the question?

LEON

Don't pull that lawyer shit.

MICHAEL

I'm okay. She's okay.

LEON

Mikie, I knew you when you were still peeing in your diapers so --

MICHAEL

-- Please, don't call me that. Pops used to call me that. I hate it.

LEON

What's the deal with you two?

MICHAEL

Nothing. All couples have problems.

LEON

But it's less than a year. She's smart, beautiful, in business.

MICHAEL

I know that.

LEON

Y'all oughta be bangin' twenty-four-seven. She playin' around?

MICHAEL

No, nothing like that. Not at all.

LEON

Okay? You dickin' around on her?

No. I mean... No.

LEON

Hell, either you are or you aren't. Or you were, past tense. So, is it 'bout that chick that died?

MICHAEL

We'll talk next weekend at Danny's birthday party.

LEON

Uh-huh. That's it, ain't it?

MICHAEL

Look, I'll see you next week.

Michael starts away.

LEON

Hell no. We're gonna talk now. I'll turn my stars loose. You buy lunch.

EXT. MICHAEL & CYNTHIA'S CONDO - NIGHT

INT. CONDO LIVINGROOM

Cynthia appears solemn. She enters, closes door, places her briefcase down, kicks off shoes, starts for master bedroom.

MASTER BEDROOM

Cynthia removes her suit jacket, tosses it on the bed, leaves the room, starts down corridor.

CORRIDOR

Cynthia passes second bedroom. The home phone rings. She enters second bedroom, grabs phone.

CYNTHIA

Carla. - No problem, I just got in.
 (removes earring)
No, that's okay. Are you crying?

INT. CARLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A teary, angry Carla paces in living room. Her face is bruised. Furniture is strewn around room.

INTERCUTS BETWEEN CARLA AND CYNTHIA

CARLA

It's Bruce. We had a big fight when He stopped to pick up clothes and just went crazy. Said if I didn't stop the divorce he'd kill me.

CYNTHIA

He said what? He threatened to kill you? Had he been drinking?

CARLA

Yeah, but it came from somewhere else. I won't take it. If he comes near me again, I'll shoot his ass. I swear to god. You know I will.

CYNTHIA

I know. Wait. I'm coming to get you. You can spend the night here.

CARLA

No. No. I'll be okay.

CYNTHIA

No. I'll be there in ten minutes. Call the police.

CARLA

They won't do a damn thing.

CYNTHIA

Call the Police, Carla. Now.

Cynthia hangs up phone, hurries to leave room.

INT. TREVOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Michael and Trevor stand near front door. Michael holds a photo. Leah stands near the sofa looking on.

MICHAEL

I don't know what to say.

INSERT PHOTO OF BABY

Michael stares at the photo. Leah steps closer.

LEAH

It's the least I could do. I wish there was more, Michael.

I want to see him. Maybe you could get him and ...

LEAH

Michael, the baby's watched constantly. There's just no way.

MICHAEL

We'll see.

Michael slips the photo inside his jacket pocket and leaves.

INT. MICHAEL'S CONDO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cynthia and Carla, both in bathrobes, sit on the sofa. Michael, in his pajamas, stands nearby.

CARLA

I'm sorry for imposing like this.

MICHAEL

Didn't make sense for you to stay at home tonight.

CYNTHIA

That's what I told her.

MICHAEL

Calling the police was smart too. I can't understand Bruce losing it.

CARLA

I never thought he'd do a lot of things. But this is...

CYNTHIA

Listen, it's getting late.
 (stands)
I'll get some towels for you.

CARLA

I appreciate you guys being here for me. I just hope the fool doesn't figure I'm here and...

MICHAEL

Get some rest. And don't you worry. You stay here until they find him and arrest him.

CYNTHIA

Michael's right.

MICHAEL LOOKS ON

Cynthia and Carla leave the room. Michael remains.

GUEST BEDROOM

Carla turns back the covers on the King-size bed. Cynthia places Carla's overnight case atop the dresser.

CARLA

I always said if any man ever hit me, I'd kill him. I mean it.

CYNTHIA

I hope it doesn't come to that.

CARLA

I'm not trying to sound tough, that's just the way I feel.

CYNTHIA

It's a shame. You meet a guy, fall in love. You can know someone for years and then you're strangers.

CARLA

Not strangers. Enemies, girl.

CYNTHIA

Makes you question your own sanity, your power of perception. Hell, I guess love really can be blind.

CARLA

And often stupid.

Both laugh. Carla tear up, Cynthia goes to console her.

CYNTHIA

It's gonna be alright. You'll get through this. You will. You will.

CARLA

I hate wishing for days of my life to pass. But I want this over.

CYNTHIA

I know. I know.

CARLA

I'm okay. You go on to bed.

Cynthia walks to end of bed, unzips Carla's clothes bag, removes her dresses and turns toward the closet.

CYNTHIA

I'll hang these up for you. There's plenty of room. Michael only keeps a few things in here. He uses the third bedroom for an office.

Cynthia opens the closet door and hangs the dresses inside.

CARLA

I could've done that.

CYNTHIA

It's no problem.

CARLA

I really love your place. It's so roomy and beautiful.

Cynthia starts to close the closet door.

CYNTHIA

Thanks. But I'm ready for a house.

Cynthia notices a a photo on the floor and picks it up.

CARLA

What is that?

Cynthia stares at the photo and grimaces.

CARLA (CONT'D)

You look like you just saw a ghost.

Cynthia hands the photo to Carla.

INSERT PHOTO

Michael and Stephanie on Catalina Island, in embrace.

CARLA (CONT'D)

That's Michael. Who's the woman?

CYNTHIA

I'm not sure, but I think I know.

CARLA

She looks so not black. I mean ...

Cynthia throws open the closet door and begins searching every shelf. She tosses items to the floor.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Doesn't look like a recent picture of Michael, though.

CYNTHIA

Doesn't matter. He's been lying.

Cynthia finds large 8 x 10 photos of Michael and Stephanie. She hands one to Carla who reads an inscription on the back.

CARLA

To Michael, love Stephanie. She's the one that died. I read about her. Her father is Nick Chambers.

CYNTHIA

(teary)

He said she was just a classmate from UCLA. Like hell, she was.

CARLA

Oh, Michael, Michael.

CYNTHIA

He's been hiding her damn pictures in my house, all this time.

CARLA

Girl, you know how men are about old girlfriends' pictures.

CYNTHIA

Doesn't explain the lies. He never mentioned her. Why? Tell me why?

Cynthia grabs the photos and bolts towards the bedroom door.

CARLA

Cynthia, wait.

CYNTHIA

For what?

CARLA

Look, you know how sentimental Michael is, right? I can't imagine him throwing away anyone's picture.

CYNTHIA

Especially these. How do I know he wasn't screwing the bitch all along? This explains the past year.

CARLA

Oh my god. Just do me a favor and wait 'til I leave tomorrow.

(MORE)

CARLA (CONT'D)

It's a selfish request but I can't take any more 'Housewives' drama tonight.

Cynthia and Carla embrace.

MASTER BEDROOM

Cynthia is in bed. Michael gets in, wearing pajama bottoms.

MICHAEL

I still can't believe Bruce. It's so out of character.

Michael removes his bottoms, tosses them onto a chair.

Cynthia turns out the lamp, and turns her back.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

No goodnight kiss or ...

Cynthia doesn't move, doesn't respond.

MICHAEL (CONT'D.) (CONT'D)

Okay, goodnight.

EXT. ALTADENA OFFICE BLDG - DAY (MORNING)

INT. OFFICE BLDG. CORRIDOR - DAY

ON OFFICE DOOR WITH FROSTED GLASS and STENCILED NAME "J.T. 'Bones' Johnson, Private Investigator.

INT. J.T.S OFFICE - DAY

Office décor circa 1949 re Humphrey Bogart's 'Sam Spade'.

Michael sits gripping his briefcase, in a wooden chair in front of a vintage desk with rotary phone, lamp, pen set.

J.T. JOHNSON, BLK, 45, thin, in horn-rimmed glasses, double-breasted suit, gold pocket watch,; sits behind desk.

A rotating fan is on the credenza. Johnson holds photos.

INSERT PHOTOS

NICK CHAMBERS and CHAMBERS GATED RESIDENCE

JOHNSON

Very well. Now where were we?

Excuse me?

JOHNSON

Let me see if I have this right, Mr. West. Ah, you want me... ah, my firm to stake out, or otherwise surveil this particular residence.

MICHAEL

Right.

JOHNSON

Very good. Very good. We can do that, yes sir. And you want us to keep an eye out for this gentleman whose picture I have here... keep you informed as to his goings and comings, and that of his infant grandson. How'm I doing?

MICHAEL

You're a quick study.

JOHNSON

Thank you, sir. Now, may I inquire as to the name of the suspect? Ah, the object of our surveillance, that is?

MICHAEL

That doesn't matter, does it?

JOHNSON

Well, it seems a natural inquiry, given my line of bid'ness. I mean, you want me to perform this service, which I am sure is of, ah some importance to you, and I want to know all the facts. Hmmm. This face... it, it does look familiar, I must say.

MICHAEL

His name is Nick Chambers.

JOHNSON

Ah, yes. I know him. I know of him. He has some huge cajones in this town, in California - the country.

MICHAEL

That bother you?

JOHNSON

'Course not. I am a professional. Danger is my middle name. Just a little joke. Ah, a little "dick humor" — private dick, that is.

MICHAEL

All you have to do is monitor him, and keep me informed.

JOHNSON

You sure you don't want his residence bugged, hidden cameras, video? I do embrace technology, despite appearances. Full service.

MICHAEL

I only want what I asked for.

Stands.

JOHNSON

Just one thing more, Mr. West.

MICHAEL

What's that?

JOHNSON

Why me? I mean, I appreciate your bid'ness but I normally don't get clients of your caliber, on a regular basis, you understand.

MICHAEL

A friend sent me. Said you were discreet, professional, damn good at what you do.

JOHNSON

I agree with that, my brother.

MICHAEL

And that you --

JOHNSON

-- I'm also not given to naiveté. Given the subject, I suspect you rightly concluded I was perhaps the only one on the west coast who would ... how should I say this — accept this considerable challenge, the compensation notwithstanding.

You are very perceptive.

JOHNSON

I thank you, my brother.

Johnson stands, walks around the desk.

JOHNSON (CONT'D)

By the way, I customarily require a retainer of --

MICHAEL

-- No problem. Of course.

Michael opens his briefcase, lifts clip of \$100 bills.

JOHNSON

My secretary normally handles this detail, however she's off shopping. (clears throat)

MICHAEL

Will a thousand do?

JOHNSON

Ah, yes. Yes sir. A thousand to retain, and in cash no less. Bless you. And one... ah, one-fifty per day plus reasonable expenses.

MICHAEL

Reasonable.

JOHNSON

Oh, yes sir. Very reasonable. Most definitely. Yes sir.

Johnson accepts the cash, tosses it onto his desk. Michael starts for door. Johnson follows.

MICHAEL

You have one of my cell numbers. That's the only one to use.

JOHNSON

Right.

MICHAEL

I'll speak with you on Monday.

JOHNSON

Definitely. Most definitely. You have a great day now. Yessir.

You too.

The two shake hands. Michael leaves. Johnson closes door, retrieves cash, stares at it, fans through bills, smiles.

INT. STANDFORD, NODEL LAW BLDG. - DAY

In Elaine's office, she stands behind her desk holding a photograph. Michael stands in front looking on.

ELAINE

He's gorgeous. How are you?

MICHAEL

Part of me wants to embrace it all. Another wants to get in my car and drive away as far as I can.

ELAINE

And you still haven't told Cynthia.

MICHAEL

The moment never seems right.

ELAINE

How do you think she'll react?

MICHAEL

She'll...explode. I may lose her.

ELAINE

Because you never told her about Stephanie, or because she's white?

MICHAEL

Maybe both. But more of the former.

ELAINE

If you tell her everything, there's a chance to make things right. If you don't and she finds out...

Trevor enters the room.

TREVOR

(excited)

Listen, you guys.

ELAINE

Whoa, whoa, whoa. slow down.

TREVOR

Guess who's in Nodel's office.

MICHAEL

Nodel, right? Okay. We give up.

TREVOR

Nick Chambers.

ELAINE

Chambers? Here? Chambers?

MICHAEL

You're kidding.

TREVOR

Closed door, no less. This firm and Chambers' firm are mortal enemies.

ELAINE

That's an understatement.

TREVOR

Right. That's why we were so glad to get Michael and the deep pocket clients he brought, like Orlando.

MICHAEL

Whatever. I've got real work to do.

TREVOR

You're a lawyer. Today is Friday. You need some down time anyway.

MICHAEL

I'm not a banker or doctor. Later.

Michael exits. Trevor follows him out.

Elaine slips baby's photo into her desk drawer.

INT. MICHAEL'S CONDO - DAY

Carla and Cynthia at kitchen table. An "unmade" Cynthia wears only a bath robe. Carla is dressed. Both sip coffee.

CARLA

I remember how excited I was, the night before our wedding.

CYNTHIA

I know.

CARLA

Rehearsal was great... folks were on time. All of time. On time.

CYNTHIA

Right, for once, huh?

CARLA

True, true. Dinner was great, and we partied for hours. Mrs. Carr made us all promise to go straight home. But, of course, we weren't about to do that.

CYNTHIA

I do remember that.

CARLA

Bruce and I pretended to go home --

CYNTHIA

-- Y'all didn't have to pretend, everybody knew what was up.

CARLA

I'm sure. We went for a long drive out PCH — almost to Ventura. Moon was out. Stars. We talked about everything — our future.

(tears)

CYNTHIA

Hey, you okay?

CARLA

Then, we had to hurry back so we could get in before midnight.

CYNTHIA

I know.

CARLA

We weren't supposed to see each other 'til the ceremony. We made it by ten minutes. Thought we were gon' get a ticket. It was so funny.

CYNTHIA

You still love him, don't you?

CARLA

With apologies to Tina Turner, what's love got to do with it?

(MORE)

CARLA (CONT'D)

Whatever we had is gone, after four years. I didn't know about the booze, the women, the lying.

CYNTHIA

I am so sorry. So sorry.

CARLA

It was all an act. It was.

Long pause.

CARLA CONT'D

I just wanted my marriage to work. My mother was divorced twice, I never knew my real father.

CYNTHIA

It's not fair. You pour your heart into a relationship and, then ...

CARLA

I don't know. Maybe the signs are there all along. We just don't want to see them.

CYNTHIA

You know, I hate to admit that, but it's true. We ignore them.

CARLA

Girl, I don't mean to bring you down, too. You and Michael have a chance to heal whatever's wrong.

CYNTHIA

Well, iIf a man lies, he'll cheat, okay? It destroys trust. Destroy trust and the marriage is dead.

CARLA

But all you know is that he has pictures of an old girlfriend, who happens to be white. Right?

CYNTHIA

White, blue, yellow... he lied. Before we were married, we talked about old lovers, past sexual partners. He never mentioned her.

CARLA

Maybe there was no sex.

CYNTHIA

And the Pope is Baptist. You saw that closet. It's a shrine. It is. So you tell me.

CARLA

Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

He finds out she's dead — and who knows what from — and he goes into a tailspin. And —

CARLA

-- And what? It's natural to grieve. Wait. You don't know what she died of? I just heard that.

CYNTHIA

No. And stop defending him.

CARLA

I'm not defending him. I'm defending you. I don't want to see this destroy you. The only thing to do is confront him on it.

CYNTHIA

I plan to do just that. I'm more angry now than last night.

CARLA

Just make sure.

There's a knock at the door.

CARLA (CONT'D)

I think I hear Jimmy. Thanks for everything. I love ya, girl.

CYNTHIA

Love you. You gonna be alright?

CARLA

Sure. Bruce is in custody, for a while anyway. Jimmy wanted to whack him. I had to beg him not to.

CYNTHIA

Must be nice having a big brother.

CARLA

Sometimes. Other times, I'd settle for an older sister.

INT. ELAINE'S OFFICE - DAY

Elaine stares down at photo of Michael's son.

INSERT PHOTO

Michael enters. Elaine slips photo into her desk. Michael takes a seat.

MICHAEL

I've got to end this. Got to.

Elaine stares at Michael with look of deep concern.

INT. MICHAEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Michael enters, briefcase in hand, closes door.

Cynthia stands between living room and dining room. She walks to Michael, stops a few feet away.

MICHAEL

Hi, sweetheart. Where's Carla?

CYNTHIA

Gone. They arrested Bruce.

Michael tosses his jacket and briefcase onto sofa.

MICHAEL

Damn. I hate they couldn't work things out. I really like Bruce.

Silence. A stare off.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What time are your folks coming over on Sunday?

Cynthia doesn't reply as Michael approaches. She walks to dining table, gets a corrugated shipping box, returns.

Michael stares at box, his face reflects apprehension.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

What's that?

ELAINE

Here, open it.

Michael takes box, slowly opens it.

Cynthia fights back tears.

What the...

INSERT BOX CONTENTS

A pair of blue infant booties, a photo of Michaels' son.

Michael looks faint.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Where did this come from?

CYNTHIA

Our front door, and addressed to me. No more lies, Michael. Whose baby is this? Whose? The truth.

Tears cascade from Cynthia's eyes.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Tell me this is not your baby.

MICHAEL

Sweetheart, I --

CYNTHIA

Damn you. Tell me, Michael. Look at me. Look at me. You look at me.

MICHAEL

Please, listen to me. I'm not really sure. I mean ...

Michael starts toward Cynthia. She backs away, hands up.

CYNTHIA

No. Don't you touch me.

Cynthia leaves room, returns with Michael's photo folder. She lifts 8 x 10s of Michael and Stephanie.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Is this the mother of YOUR son? This is the two of you, right?

MICHAEL

Cynthia, please. Let me explain.

CYNTHIA

Explain? Explain what? That you say didn't want a child, but another woman had your son less than a year after we were married?

But that's not --

CYNTHIA

-- I'm no Einstein but I do know Arithmetic. You fucked her right before our wedding.

MICHAEL

No, I swear, I had no idea until days ago.

CYNTHIA

You had no idea you screwed her?

MICHAEL

That's not what I meant. Look, I was going to tell you but --

CYNTHIA

Of course you were. Bullshit.

MICHAEL

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

The truth is I'm not sure he's --

Truth? Not sure he's yours? Really? Go straight to hell.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Please, sit down. I'll tell you everything, I swear.

CYNTHIA

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I can't fight a dead woman. I'm sorry. I...

Cynthia starts ripping up photos. Michael freaks out.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Cynthia. No. Don't. Please.

Michael lunges for photos.

CYNTHIA

You want them? Here they are.

Cynthia tosses pieces onto floor. Michael falls to his knees, tries to reassemble pieces.

MICHAEL

Why? They're just pictures.

CYNTHIA

My god, look at you. You're on your knees. My god. Damn you, Michael.

They're just pictures.

Michael, places torn pieces onto coffee table, then sits on floor with a blank stare.

Cynthia rakes pieces back onto floor, bolts from room.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cynthia removes clothes from her closet, tosses them into a large suitcase and a clothes bag.

Michael enters room.

MICHAEL

What are you doing? You can't, Cynthia. I love you.

Cynthia pauses, aims a cold hard stare.

CYNTHIA

Why did you marry me? You should've married her. I wish you had.

MICHAEL

I married you because I love you. You know that. I love you.

CYNTHIA

Love? Really? What did she die of?

MICHAEL

Sweetheart, this isn't the way I ... Come here, please.

CYNTHIA

What did she die of? A broken heart? Some incurable disease, maybe suicide? What?

MICHAEL

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

No, she --

She what?

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

She died during childbirth.

Cynthia's jaw drops.

CYNTHIA

Oh, my god. Oh, my god. She died having your baby?

I had no idea she was pregnant. It happened before we married.

Cynthia closes her suitcase, zips the clothes bag.

CYNTHIA

I'll get the rest later.

MICHAEL

Cynthia. I'm not perfect. We did promise, for better or worse.

CYNTHIA

You want to talk about vows, huh? Really? Do you? What about honesty? Start there. Don't talk about vows.

MICHAEL

Alright. Run to daddy. But we have to work out our own problems.

CYNTHIA

Forget it, Michael. It won't work. You can't turn this back onto me.

Cynthia grabs her clothes, leaves room. Michael follows.

MICHAEL

Please? We love each other.

HALLWAY

Michael grabs Cynthia's arm. She pulls away.

INT. LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT

CYNTHIA

Maybe you can deal with it. I can't Our marriage is a lie.

MICHAEL

I've been faithful to you.

CYNTHIA

You love her. You have wet dreams about her. Didn't think I knew? I can't compete with a dead woman.

MICHAEL

I love you.

CYNTHIA

Goodbye, Michael.

Cynthia opens door, leaves.

Michael stands in doorway, staring then ...

INTERCUTS BETWEEN VARIOUS ROOMS

Michael drifts from room to room, alternately sits, stands, nods, drinks wine, beer, sits on sofa with head in hands.

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Michael splashes water on his face, dries then stares into mirror at his beat-down appearance.

The door CHIME sounds.

Michael is startled, turns, stumbles to open front door.

LIVING ROOM FRONT DOOR

Elaine is stunned looking at Michael. He motions her in.

INT. CONDO'S KITCHEN - DAY

Michael sits at table. Elaine pours coffee.

ELAINE

I'm so sorry, Michael.

MICHAEL

I was going to tell her. I was. But somebody beat me to it.

Show Elaine glance away.

ELAINE

I feel so badly for you.

MICHAEL

I've lost two whole days. And I don't care. You sure it's Monday?

ELAINE

I'm sure. When I couldn't get you on the phone, I knew something was wrong. Nodel is upset you missed the hearing on Bayless.

(MORE)

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Plus, the Assistant U.S Attorney wants a meeting on Orlando.

MICHAEL

I don't care, right now.

ELAINE

I covered for you with Judge Timmons... told him you had a death in the family.

MICHAEL

Thanks. Thanks. In a way, it's true. My marriage is dead.

ELAINE

We've got to get you cleaned up. Smells like a damn brewery in here. I didn't know you drank.

MICHAEL

(groggy)

I don't, or I didn't.

Elaine caresses Michael's hand.

INT. ELAINE'S OFFICE - DAY

Elaine sits on edge of her desk. Trevor paces in front.

ELAINE

Sit down.

Trevor keeps pacing.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Sit. You're driving me nuts with the pacing already. Jeez.

TREVOR

What do you think Nodel's gonna do?

Elaine aims a hard stare.

ELAINE

Forget Nodel.

TREVOR

Forget Nodel?

ELAINE

I'm more concerned about what Michael will do.

TREVOR

So am I.

Elaine sees Michael walk past her open door, carrying two large file boxes. She calls out.

ELAINE

Michael.

Michael continues. Elaine and Trevor follow.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE - DAY

Michael places boxes on his desk, opens drawers and begins removing personal items.

TREVOR

Michael, what're you doing?

ELAINE

Don't tell me you quit. Did you?

MICHAEL

No. I was fired.

ELAINE

Fired? You're kidding.

MICHAEL

Nick Chambers always gets his way. You have to give him that.

ELAINE

Nodel tell you that?

Michael looses a loud exhale.

MICHAEL

Didn't have to. Listen, I'll be back tomorrow to get the rest of my stuff. I've got to get the hell out of here.

Michael places a handful of folders in his briefcase.

ELAINE

This is crazy. Where're you going? You want to talk? Let's talk.

INSERT INSIDE BRIEFCASE

A 9mm pistol.

Not now. Maybe later.

Michael closes briefcase, starts for door. He stops, turns back to Elaine.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You still have that picture?

ELAINE

Picture? Didn't I return it?

MICHAEL

I don't think so.

ELAINE

It's probably on my desk. Do you want it now?

MICHAEL

I'll call tonight... get it later.

ELAINE

I'm so sorry. This makes no sense.

TREVOR

Don't worry. I'll get everything boxed up for you.

Michael leaves.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A DOCTOR, BLK, 50's, folder in hand, enters an inner office to a waiting Cynthia. He smiles as he peruses folder.

DOCTOR

Well, you're still pregnant.

(smiles)

Why did you want another test?

CYNTHIA

I just wanted to be sure.

DOCTOR

You can be very sure. We'll soon have the pictures to prove it.

The Doctor notes Cynthia's appearance.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Are you alright?

CYNTHIA

I'm fine. I'm fine.

EXT. CYNTHIA'S OFFICE BLDG - DAY

INT. CYNTHIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Cynthia sits on sofa. Carla stands nearby.

CARLA

He's called you three times this morning, right?

CYNTHIA

We have nothing to talk about.

CARLA

Aren't you gonna tell him you're pregnant? You knew two weeks ago.

CYNTHIA

Not now. He's already a father.

CARLA

He's got to know sooner or later.

CYNTHIA

Only if there is a child.

CARLA

Stop. What are you saying, girl?

EXT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - DAY

Reginald enters driving a rental car.

RETURN TO CYNTHIA"S OFFICE

CYNTHIA

I'm leaving now... headed to my folks. I'm staying with them while I look for a new place.

CARLA

Crap. I'll walk down with you. I've got a meeting with my lawyer later.

CYNTHIA

This isn't exactly what we dreamed about, huh?

CARLA

That's for sure.

INT. UNDERGROUND GARAGE - DAY

Cynthia and Carla enter garage, start away in opposite directions to their cars.

CARLA

I'm not through talking to you about all this. Call me.

CYNTHIA

Didn't think you were. I will.

CARLA

Call me. We'll go shopping.

Cynthia forces a weak smile, heads to her car. She clicks key fob, starts to open driver's door.

INSERT A MALE HAND

Hand pushes against her door.

REGINALD(O.C.)

Happy Monday.

Cynthia wheels around to face Reginald.

CYNTHIA

What the ... What're you doing?

REGINALD

You know I can't take no.

CYNTHIA

What do I have to do to get you to leave me the hell alone?

REGINALD

Stop yelling, for starters.

CYNTHIA

Get the hell out of my way.

Reginald grabs Cynthia's shoulder.

REGINALD

Hold on.

CYNTHIA

(resisting)

Stop. Get your hands off me.

REGINALD

The least you could do is talk.

Reginald grabs Cynthia by both shoulders.

CYNTHIA

Stop, you dickless bastard.

CARLA (O.C.)

Hey, asshole.

Reginald wheels around.

ON CARLA

Carla's .25 automatic is clutched in both her hands and aimed at Reginald's forehead from four feet away.

CARLA CONT'D

Touch her again, so I can blow your goddamn dick off. Do it, asshole.

REGINALD

Shit. Whoa. Don't shoot, please.

CARLA

You whoa, you bastard.

Carla's finger tightens on the trigger. Cynthia shows shock.

REGINALD

Please, please take it easy.

CARLA

On your knees.

REGINALD

My knees? C'mon, now Sister.

CARLA

I said on-your-knees. Do it.

Reginald, whimpering, slowly submits and lowers himself to his knees. Cynthia looks on, eyes widened.

REGINALD

Please, Sister. I'll just leave.

CARLA

Sister? What's my name?

REGINALD

Ah, I don't know.

CARLA

It ain't Sister. As far you're concerned right now, it's GOD.

Cynthia exhales a deep breath.

CARLA CONT'D

I should make you kiss her feet, while you're down there, but I don't wanna ruin her shoes. Get up.

A trembling Reginald stands, revealing his pee-stained trousers.

CARLA

Back away you sonofabitch. Move.

CYNTHIA

Don't shoot him. He's not worth it.

REGINALD

Don't shoot. I'm leaving. Okay?

CARLA

Oh, you're leaving alright.

REGINALD

I am. I am!.

CARLA

And don't stop until your ass is back in San Francisco.

Reginald, despite shaking, tries to look cool retreating.

CARLA CONT'D

Okay, try me, 'cause I am in the mood to shoot anything with a dick. So, you haul your ass.

Reginald trips racing to his car.

CARLA (CONT'D.)

I said run. Run!

REGINALD

I'm running, I'm running!

A slow grin covers Carla's face. She returns to a stunned Cynthia who is leaning against her car, clutching her chest.

CYNTHIA

Girl, you scared me more than you did him. Where'd you get that?

CARLA

I've always had it.

Carla puts the gun in her shoulder purse.

Both laugh, Reginald tears for exit, burning rubber.

EXT. UPSCALE RESIDENCE PASADENA - DAY

A black cargo van is parked at curb several yards from entrance to a gated estate.

Michael's Mercedes pulls up behind van. He gets out, goes to van, taps on tinted passenger window.

"Bones" Johnson leans over, opens passenger door.

JOHNSON

Brother West. Brother West.

MICHAEL

Sorry about such short notice.

JOHNSON

No problem. I'm at your service.

Michael observes monitors and other hi-tech equipment.

MICHAEL

Very impressive.

JOHNSON

Thanks. Just a little update, since you're here. The subject hasn't arrived but --

MICHAEL

Mr. Johnson, the reason I wanted to see you right away was to tell you I won't be needing your services any longer.

JOHNSON

Oh? I don't understand. I haven't given you a single report yet.

Right, I understand. But that's okay. And you keep the retainer and bill be for the time you've spent.

Bones is taken off guard.

JOHNSON

Right. Well, sure. I'll do that. I certainly hope all this indicates positive developments for you.

MICHAEL

Thank you. Listen, it was great meeting you, and perhaps we'll do business in the future.

The two shake hands. Michael exits, returns to his car. Johnson watches him in his side view mirror.

MICHAEL'S CAR

He sees Johnson pull away. Michael drives onto Chambers' driveway, to estate entrance and stops.

He hesitates then picks up his cell phone and dials.

INT. CHAMBERS HOUSE - DAY (EVENING)

Posh interior. In living room area. The phone rings. Leah enters through an interior doorway, answers phone.

LEAH

Hello.

INT. MICHAEL'S CAR

INTERCUTS BETWEEN MICHAEL AND LEAH

MICHAEL

Leah, I'm here to see my son.

LEAH

Where are you?

MICHAEL

In your driveway.

LEAH

Are you insane?

Leah hurries to a window, looks out, sees Michael's car.

I'm not leaving until I see him.

Leah backs away from window.

AT THE GATE

Gate opens. Michael drives through.

INT. CHAMBERS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michael stands waiting, looks anxious, starts to pace.

Leah enters, carrying the baby, wrapped in a blanket. Michael approaches them. She motions him to sit.

Leah sits next to Michael, folds back blanket to reveal the baby in a blue outfit, smiling and cooing.

LEAH

He's a good baby... hardly cries, sleeps all night.

Michael is tentative. He takes baby, cradles him, touches his head, face and hand.

MICHAEL

This doesn't seem real.

LEAH

It's almost like we're a family, sitting here.

MICHAEL

(distracted)

I'm sorry. What was that?

LEAH

Nothing. He's definitely your son.

Michael looks at Leah, then the baby. He mouths baby's name, strokes his face, kisses his forehead.

LEAH (CONT'D)

You'd better leave before --

MICHAEL

-- I know.

Michael is reluctant but hands the baby back to Leah.

He leaves, visibly affected by his visit.

INT. UPSCALE NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Cynthia and her parents are at dining table, eating.

MRS. FIELDS, BLK, 50s, 'MR. FIELDS, BLK, 50s, listens to banter between daughter and wife.

MRS. FIELDS

Your father and I want you to know we'll help with whatever you decide. We know an excellent attorney, dear.

CYNTHIA

Mom, I'll let you know if and when I'll need one.

MRS. FIELDS

If? Surely you won't reconcile with a man whose morals allow him to father some child with a --

CYNTHIA

-- Mother, please. Don't force me to defend Michael. I don't care to talk about it just now.

MRS. FIELDS

Honestly, I'm really not surprised by this. I told your father it wouldn't last a year. I'm sorry.

CYNTHIA

Mother --

MRS. FIELDS

-- Oh, I know he's done quite well, getting out of that god-awful South Central. It's a good thing you never got pregnant. This way there're no ties. Thank God.

CYNTHIA

It's South L.A. mother. And there's a lot more there than gangs there. You should leave these hills and visit it sometimes.

MRS. FIELDS

Visit South Central? Don't be silly. Why on earth would I?

CYNTHIA

Most people there are no different than people anywhere else. They work hard and want the best for their families, too.

MRS. FIELDS

Sure, dear.

Cynthia sighs. She and her father exchange knowing glances. He looks over at his wife, puts down his fork.

MRS FIELDS

Give yourself a few weeks, maybe a month to purge your system and you'll be fine. I promise you.

CYNTHIA

Can't we just have dinner?

MR. FIELDS

I'll second that. I'm starving.

MRS. FIELDS

Well. I was only ...

Cynthia puts down her fork, stands.

CYNTHIA

Excuse me.

Cynthia leaves room. Her mother stands.

MRS. FIELDS

Cynthia Lynn Fields.

MR. FIELDS

Please, just leave her alone. And her last name is still West. She's got to work through this, with our love, not our interference. I know you mean well, but just butt out, sweetheart.

Mrs. Fields sits back in her chair, looses loud exhale.

EXT. FIELDS HOUSE - NIGHT

A hand lifts the brass knocker and raps on the door.

INT. FIELDS HOME - NIGHT

Mr. Fields opens door, steps outside.

MR. FIELDS

Michael, let's talk here.

MICHAEL

Mr. Fields, I --

MR. FIELDS

-- I'm glad I was the one who answered when you called.

MICHAEL

So am I.

MR. FIELDS

She's not ready to see you.

MICHAEL

I do understand, but won't she at least tell me herself? She has to talk to me sooner or later.

MR. FIELDS

Michael, I'm sure at some point, she will. It's just that right now is not a good time.

MICHAEL

Well, when is a good time?

MR. FIELDS

Look, I sincerely hope you kids work things out. But in the end, I'm going to support my daughter.

MICHAEL

I understand that.

MR. FIELDS

Good. The important thing is, your coming here suggests you want to save your marriage. That's my take.

MICHAEL

I do. More that anything.

MR. FIELDS

Good.

MICHAEL

She knows I love her.

MR. FIELDS

My advice, for what it's worth --

-- No, no. I value your advice. I wanna hear it, please.

MR. FIELDS

Well, my advice is, be patient but respectfully persistent, if that makes sense.

MICHAEL

It does. It does, and I will.

MR. FIELDS

Good.

MICHAEL

Ah, sir thanks for letting me come over. It means a lot.

MR. FIELDS

No problem. Just do what's right.

The two shake hands. Michael leaves.

INT. ELAINE'S CONDO - NIGHT

Elaine dials a number and waits.

ELAINE

C'mon, Michael. Be there.

And waits. Elaine hangs up, disappointed.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING GARAGE - NIGHT

Michael in his car, grips his 9mm pistol. He turns it towards himself, thumb on the trigger, closes his eyes.

FLASHBACK (B&W)

INT. SOUTH L.A. RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON

A 6 YR. OLD MICHAEL, BLK, moves down a dimly-lit hallway to a partially opened door.

He arrives. The door CREAKS open, the light is blinding.

MICHAEL'S FATHER (at 35), without a shirt, sits on edge of bed with a handgun to his temple.

ON DOOR OPENING

The instant door opens, he fires.

INT. BEDROOM

The distorted gunshot reverberates, the father is thrust back onto the bed.

ON MICHAEL

Michael emits a SILENT SCREAM. He thrusts both hands to his head, and keeps screaming.

Young Michael's face is absorbed in a blinding light that fills screen.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. HIGH RISE FLOOR CORRIDOR - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Michael exits elevator, walks down corridor to offices of Nick Chambers.

Lights are on, door is open. Michael enters.

INT. INNER OFFICE

Inside, Michael removes gun from his waistband, checks it and returns it.

INT. NICK CHAMBERS' PRIVATE OFFICE - NIGHT

Nick Chambers sits at his desk, sipping coffee.

The telephone RINGS several times. Chambers ignores it.

CHAMBERS OUTER OFFICE

Michael moves to Chambers' door. He removes and grips gun, takes a deep breath.

INT. CHAMBERS' PRIVATE OFFICE - NIGHT

Chambers examines a file folder.

The gun slide sounds. Nick Chambers looks up, is shocked to see Michael's gun aimed at his head.

CHAMBERS

Oh, shit. Michael, no. No. Please. What are you doing? Please.

MICHAEL

I'm here to kill you. That's about all there is to say.

Michael is eerily calm, soft-spoken, almost robotic.

Chambers is frantic, he raises his hands to his chest.

CHAMBERS

(halting)

Michael, please. Put the gun away. Please. You don't want to do this.

MICHAEL

Did you say please? The great Nick Chambers is begging? You're begging me, really? What's changed?

CHAMBERS

Don't do this. Look, I was wrong. It was the grief. It made me say things I didn't mean. You can understand that.

MICHAEL

Sure. Sure I can.

CHAMBERS

Michael. You're no killer. C'mon. Put the gun away. Please.

MICHAEL

You've done all you can to ruin me... sent that package to my wife, got me fired.

CHAMBERS

Michael, no. I didn't.

MICHAEL

Now, that meeting with Nodel, that surprised me. Nodel hates your damn guts but you got him to fire me.

CHAMBERS

That's not true. I swear to God.

MICHAEL

You accused me of murder.

CHAMBERS

No, that's not ... I mean --

MICHAEL

-- All the time, you knew Stephanie died in childbirth. You knew I was the father. That was your problem. Your grandson is black. That's it.

Chambers wipes beads of sweat from his brow.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
You felt betrayed, right? Right?
This is the point where you confess all you know. jJust clear your conscience, like in the movies.

CHAMBERS

Michael, you know I'm no racist. You worked for me.

Michael steps closer, tightens his grip on gun.

MICHAEL

You're the worst kind.

CHAMBERS

What kind?

MICHAEL

What kind? The kind who smiles, pats us on the back, or on the top of the head, supports liberal causes to mask your guilt, and makes damn sure the world knows. You betray true, non-racist white folk, who are sincere.

CHAMBERS

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Michael ...

Just listen.

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

But you know me. You know --

MICHAEL

-- Yeah, I know you alright.

CHAMBERS

I'm no racist. You know that.

Michael aims a cold stare.

Truth is, I'd prefer you just wear the white sheets and the pointy hoods with the little eyeholes, so we don't have to guess about you, although black folk don't need all that to see through the facade.

CHAMBERS

You're wrong. Look, I belong to the NAACP. I'm a Lifetime Member. I give to the United Negro College Fund. Racists don't do that.

MICHAEL

I'm not going to kill you for being a closet racist. I'm going to kill you for what you've done to me. Stand up. Stand the hell up.

Michael motions Chambers up and away from desk.

Chambers' knees weaken, he slumps to floor, pleads.

CHAMBERS

Michael. I'll do whatever you want. Just don't shoot me. Don't, please.

Michael stares at Chambers, then his focus is drawn to a picture of Stephanie on the credenza.

Michael returns to Chambers, takes aim. Chambers bows his head, cowers and whimpers.

Michael focuses on picture again. Chambers raises his head.

CHAMBERS (CONT'D)

Look, Michael, I can give you money. I'll cut you in on the Bascom offshore bank deal. It's worth millions. Judge Keel and two other federal judges are in on it. Please, Michael, I swear.

Michael smiles, reaches into his coat pocket with a free hand, lifts a micro-cassette recorder. He holds it up.

MICHAEL

Now, you just try and stop me from getting my son. And you WILL place him prominently in your will.

Michael lowers gun, backs away to, door. Chambers collapses.

EXT. WEST FAMILY SOUTH L.A. HOME - DAY

SUPER "TWO WEEKS LATER"

INT. LIVING ROOM DAY

Michael sits on sofa. Danny, in black suit and tie, is in his wheel chair. Leon, wears a dark suit with white shirt.

Michael kneels next to Danny's wheel chair

MICHAEL

Danny, I am very proud of you. I love you so much. I hope you do understand I'm leaving California, but I will be back. I promise.

Danny frowns.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I promise. And one day, after I get settled again, you can come, too.

Danny smiles, throws his arms around Michael's neck.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'd better go, alright? I'll be back. I promise. Okay?

Michael stands, walks to Leon who stands in doorway.

Carmen, LVN watches with tears in her eyes.

LEON

She still won't talk to you?

MICHAEL

No. I can't blame her. I screwed up. It's my fault. This part of my life is over. And it hurts.

LEON

I'm older, but I always looked up to you. Big brothers need a big brother, too. You've always been a fighter. But I'm your link to what's real. I keep you from getting too far out there ... I try to keep you connected, understand? I know you think you gotta do this.

MICHAEL

Understood. Sometimes --

LEON

-- Sometimes what?

Leon motions Michael out into hallway.

INT. HALLWAY (CONTINUOUS)

MICHAEL

Sometimes, starting over is all you can do. Anyway, the moving company's coming tomorrow. I'm storing most of my stuff 'til I get a place in Atlanta.

LEON

I still say you coulda' picked some place closer than Atlanta. That's the other side of the world, man.

MICHAEL

Past Pasadena, anyway.

LEON

A little. What about my nephew?

MICHAEL

I plan to be a father to him. But, I've got to put my life on track, first. I'm not running away, okay?

Brief silence.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

And I'm so sorry about Sean. We not only have to worry about bad cops and white supremacists killing us. Too often, we're killing ourselves.

LEON

That's why I'm so scared to get close to 'em. Any day, I could lose one. If not to drugs, to a damn bullet. But somebody's got to stay close to 'em. That's the only way.

LEON (CONT'D)

Sean was his mom's second and last son. Her oldest was killed by the cops, two years ago. They claimed he had a gun It was a cell phone.

Michael and Leon embrace. Emotion-filled silence.

I love you, big brother.

LEON

I love you. Let me hear from ya'.

Michael returns to room, embraces Carmen.

MICHAEL

Thanks, for everything.

NURSE

You're welcome.

Michael hugs Danny again.

Danny looks up, grabs Michael's hand and squeezes. Michael fights back tears then turns to leave.

LEON

Before you go, there's something you need to know — something I shoulda told you a long time ago.

MICHAEL

That I'm adopted, right?

Leon doesn't smile. Michael's smile fades.

LEON

It's about Pops.

MICHAEL

Pops? What about him?

LEON

'Fore she died, Mama told me things, things she knew you weren't ready to hear. Look, Pop loved us, Michael. He loved Mama, too.

MICHAEL

Loved us? If he loved us, tell me why he blew his damn brains out.

Long silence, extended look-aways - looks at Danny. Both return to hallway.

INT. HALLWAY (CONTINUOUS)

LEON

All I can do is tell you what Mama told me. You gotta let it go, man.

You didn't see it. I did. And tell me why he left Mama to raise three kids on a maid's wages, here in this hellhole? Where was the love? Mama died of grief.

LEON

Mama was a diabetic. And she had high blood pressure. That's what killed her. I don't expect you to understand. I didn't at first.

MICHAEL

What do you understand?

LEON

I understand that daddy had this damn pain so deep inside of him, it broke him down. It destroyed him. He was dead long before he fired a shot. You hear me?

MICHAEL

I'm listening.

LEON

That day, like every day, he'd been walking all over LA looking for work, after three years of no job. A day earlier, he found out his liver was shot. He was dying from too much booze ... tryin' to forget he didn't have a job and couldn't support his family, that he had to look to his wife for every dime that came into the house.

MICHAEL

How did killing himself help us?

LEON

Mama told me he just couldn't stand to look in her eyes one more day, and feel less than a man. It was his damn pride, Michael. I know it doesn't make what he did right, but he was at the bottom of this damn pitch-black pit. And he didn't have the education to change things, and he couldn't find a way out.

MICHAEL

So he took the easy way out.

LEON

Easy? It wasn't easy at all. And I know he didn't realize what it would do to us. One thing he did though, he tried to take care of us, tried everything he could.

MICHAEL

Maybe I was too young to remember that part. But, I remember... I remember walking down that hallway and opening that door, Leon.

LEON

I saw it too. Who do you think came and got you after you started screaming? I'm the one who had to go in and check him. Listen, he did what he could. He made sure what money there was, went for Mama and us, and nothing for himself.

Michael turns to walk away then stops. He stares at a picture of his parents on a near wall.

LEON CONT'D.

He even bummed the booze. And all he talked about was us, us getting an education. Well, at least you listened. He'd be proud of you. He wasn't this lazy, shiftless stereotype who didn't want to work or, didn't give a damn about his family. He used to read to us all the time, even though we could read better than he could. And he was proud of that. He did love us. I just wish he was here... Mama too.

Michael's eyes overflow.

Leon wipes away tears and motions for Michael to follow him farther down hallway. Michael follows.

HALLWAY

They walk to what was their parent's bedroom. Leon and Michael stand at the closed door.

ON CLOSED DOOR

Michael grips the doorknob then hesitates. He closes his eyes, lowers his head.

ON BOTH BROTHERS

Leon grips his shoulder.

Michael opens door, turns to Leon and both enter.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM

The room is dark. Leon walks to window, peels back curtains, opens the blinds.

AT WINDOW

Light spills in, filling room. The room is immaculate. It appears remodeled to appear better than any other room.

Michael and Leon stand at foot of the bed looking around. Michael focuses on spot where he last saw his father.

A moment later, Michael and Leon leave room, and leave the door wide open.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

MICHAEL

All my life, this has been like a giant shadow. I've felt like I was walking around in a thick, heavy mist. But I could always see shadows in the mist.

LEON

It's gonna take some time. It's taken a lifetime to get here. You've done a lot for me and Danny. Maybe my helping you deal with this, is something I can give you.

Michael embraces Leon again. He takes a half step back.

MICHAEL

I love you, brother.

LEON

Hey, we've done more hugging and talking 'bout all this love stuff in one day than in twenty years.

All laugh then Michael walks to the front door. At front Door Michael stops, takes a last look back.

See you in a minute.

LEON

In a minute. We'll be here.

Michael leaves. Leon watches him drive away.

INT. CYNTHIA'S OFFICE - DAY

Carla hands Cynthia a large white envelope.

CARLA

From Michael. Messenger delivered it just now.

Cynthia examines envelope while Carla waits. Sits back.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Well?

CYNTHIA

Don't you have something to do?

CARLA

No.

Cynthia stares at her for a long second.

CARLA (CONT'D)

I'm not leaving.

Carla sits in front of desk. Cynthia opens letter, begins reading to herself.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Dear Wife I deeply regret our life together has come to an end. I blame myself. Deep inside I really did want children. I now realize my reluctance was based on fear — fear I might father a child like my brother, Danny, whom I dearly love. I'm ashamed for not being honest, and not honoring the warm and loving person that is Danny.

Cynthia looks away then continues reading.

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D.)

I've been masking a lot of fears.

The biggest is my fear of waking up

and finding my so-called success is all a dream. That my father's fate has become my own. As for Stephanie, I loved her, once. I didn't tell you about our relationship because I was afraid

Cynthia takes a drink from a water bottle on her desk.

of what your reaction might be.

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D.) (CONT'D)

I've now decided to put California behind me. In a couple of days, I'll be gone. I wish you the best, and all the things you deserve. I will honor any settlement requests, and provide any help you require. All my love, all my life, Michael.

Cynthia slides the letter to the forward edge of her desk. She swivels, stares out her office window.

Carla steps forward a picks up the letter.

INT. BONAVENTURE HOTEL - DAY

Elaine and Michael are seated in lobby.

ELAINE

Michael, you've never been to Atlanta. I know it's a dynamic city and region but there're so many places between Cali and --

MICHAEL

-- I'll really miss you.

ELAINE

Then take me with you. I'm serious. We're too good a team to break up.

MICHAEL

I can't argue with that.

ELAINE

We could start our own firm.

MICHAEL

Look out, don't tempt me.

ELAINE

I've been trying to do that for years. You never noticed.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, what did you say?

ELAINE

I said... Oh, what the hell. My timing is lousy but, Michael, I love you. I love you, Michael. I've tried to be discreet, not reveal my feelings. And I shouldn't be saying this now. But, screw pride. I'm in love with you. And I have been for a long time. Okay, I've said it.

MICHAEL

Elaine, I --

ELAINE

-- Don't say it. Just understand. All I have is yours. All you ever have to say is that you want it. All you ever have to do is take it.

Elaine kisses Michael firmly on the lips. He holds her and she prolongs kiss.

MICHAEL

Elaine --

ELAINE

-- It's okay, Michael. You don't have to try and salvage my pride.

MICHAEL

It doesn't need salvaging.

ELAINE

You're sweet. Anyway, I'm not the only one with the hots for you.

MICHAEL

What do you mean?

ELAINE

Your friend, Leah, made a stunning confession to Trevor this morning.

MICHAEL

Confession? What confession?

ELAINE

It was she who sent the box with the photo and booties.

MICHAEL

She what? Leah?

ELAINE

According to Trev, she admitted she was always jealous of her sister, even now. She hopes to convince you to marry her and adopt Stephanie's baby. Trev couldn't believe it.

MICHAEL

What? I can't believe it. Leah?

Silence. Michael is taken aback.

ELAINE

I know you have to go but --

MICHAEL

-- This is unbelievable.

ELAINE

Promise you won't forget me.

Michael looks dazed.

MICHAEL

I promise. I promise.

Elaine and Michael stand, kiss again. Elaine starts away. Michael starts away in the opposite direction.

Elaine turns back.

ELAINE

No. Stay here until I'm gone. Alright? Oh, I almost forgot.

Elaine reaches into her attaché, removes an envelope and hands it to Michael.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

I had placed it in my credenza.

Michael opens envelope, glances at photo of his son.

Elaine blows him a kiss and walks away. Michael watches and waits until she's gone from view.

EXT. ROSE BOWL PARKING LOT - DAY

Nick Chambers' white Mercedes is in vast empty parking lot.

NICK CHAMBERS (O.C.)
Just remember, you were never here
and we never talked about this.
When you're done, I want you back
in New York as fast as you can get
there. Understood?

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)
Understood. I'm surprised you're handling this yourself.

NICK CHAMBERS (O.C.) Nobody, especially this clown, threatens me and lives.

A black Lincoln Town Car drives up.

P.O.V. HIDDEN OBSERVER

Through binoculars, the occupants of the vehicles are observed. Chambers' conversation is overheard on a speaker.

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.) Consider it done. I've got tickets for Carnegie tonight. And I never miss Carnegie.

A MAN IN A BLACK SUIT exits Chambers' Mercedes and enters the Lincoln. The Lincoln leaves.

Chambers' car drives away, in opposite direction.

EXT MICHAEL'S CONDO - DAY

SUPER "TWO HOURS LATER"

Michael's car is in front of his condo complex.

INT. MICHAEL'S CONDO - DAY

INTERCUTS

INT. CONDO LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michael holds a vase with a dozen roses. He places it on floor near front door. He then walks from room to room.

MASTER BEDROOM

Michael walks to bedroom. He pauses in doorway and looks around room.

LIVING ROOM

Michael stands in middle of living room, walks to door, exits and closes it.

EXT. MICHAEL'S CONDO - DAY

Michael exits gate, walks to his car, enters and drives away just as ...

CYNTHIA'S CAR

Cynthia's car approaches, stops at curb in front of condo. She gets out, starts to entrance.

INT. MICHAEL'S CONDO - DAY

Cynthia enters, sees the roses. She stops. Tears swell. She picks up the vase, removes a small card.

INSERT CARD

"Forever, Michael"

Cynthia carries flowers to dining table, removes a single rose, clutches it to her chest.

She walks through house, room to room.

MASTER BEDROOM

Cynthia opens closet, sees Michael's clothes are gone.

She leaves room, returns to living room, crying, and still carrying the single rose.

FRONT DOOR

Cynthia opens door and comes face to face with Michael.

Cynthia is startled. The two stare. She steps closer. They embrace and kiss.

Cynthia steps back inside, appears to have second thoughts.

CONDO LIVINGROOM

CYNTHIA

I thought you'd gone.

MICHAEL

I had. I couldn't remember locking the door. So I came to check it.

Awkward. Michael sees the rose in her hand.

CYNTHIA

I don't know what to say.

MICHAEL

Do you... I mean, is there any way can you ever forgive me?

CYNTHIA

I want to, but I'm trying to deal with all this, Michael. The hurt is too deep.

Michael steps closer.

MICHAEL

I understand. But I still love you.

CYNTHIA

Michael --

MICHAEL

-- More than anything or anyone. I want a place in your heart again.

EXT. FRONT OF CONDO COMPLEX - DAY

The black Lincoln is parked behind Michael's car. A uniformed chauffeur is at the wheel.

EXT. CONDO GROUND FLOOR ENTRANCE

Michael and Cynthia exit main door.

CYNTHIA

I need to tell you something.

GUNSHOTS RING OUT.

Two muted gunshots sound. The entrance Door glass explodes.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Michael. Michael.

Michael grabs Cynthia, forces her to the ground, covers her.

GUNMAN IN BLACK SUIT

Yards away, a man in a dark suit with a gun outfitted with a silencer, slumps to his knees, falls face forward.

ON BONES JOHNSON

Just behind the shooter, J.T. 'Bones' Johnson approaches, holsters his gun, kneels next to the dead man, checks pulse.

AT CONDO ENTRANCE

Michael and Cynthia stand clinging to each other.

Johnson goes to check them.

JOHNSON

I hope you don't mind. I just hate leaving loose ends. And there's no extra charge. And I've got one more loose end — a big one — to tidy up.

Johnson smiles, removes his cellphone, dials 9-1-1.

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)

9-1-1 Operator, what's your emergency?

Michael and Cynthia hug each other and kiss, and kiss, and kiss for a good long while.

AERIAL OF SCENE

FADE TO BLACK.