

HARLEM'S KITCHEN

(WORKING TITLE)

"THE CHOSEN ONE"

Written by

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*"Harlem is not a place that people come to live. It's a place people come to be... It is a place you get to know inch by inch."*  
- Chef Marcus Samuelsson

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MANDEVILLE TELEVISION

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**ACT ONE**

INT. WHO CARES?? - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

Because all we care about right now is the face we're looking at. A MAN. CLOSE ON. Thinking. He's magnetic. A titan. In this man's face? We find strength, power, gravitas, genius, deceit and mucho swag -- a treasure chest of complications and contradictions. A slight shift of his head brings his eyes directly to camera. He's looking right at us. He smiles, boyishly through a weathered face. We are both massively charmed and wildly intimidated. This is ELLIS RICE. Early 60s. This is our world and he is the sun. Finally --

ELLIS

I'm just a humble cook from  
Alabama.

Ellis twists his gold pinky ring. A slight smirk lets us know he can't possibly believe his own bullshit. Neither do we...

MUSIC CUE: "Luchini" by Camp Lo. 

This classic heater SLAPS as we MOVE TO --

EXT. MALCOLM X BOULEVARD - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

The heart of Harlem. We find Ellis here carrying a bag of produce, signature Yankee hat slung low, head-to-toe DRIP in a swagged out Kaepernick hoodie and classic Tim's. He's greeted warmly along the way -- the mayor of Malcolm X Blvd.

ELLIS (O.S.)

I took a Greyhound bus from  
Gadsden, Alabama in 1973, landed in  
Harlem with fourteen dollars and  
one good shoe. I got a gig on the  
overnight cleanup crew at this  
Italian spot in the Village.

Ellis approaches a shady, beat up, blacked out VAN. He knocks on the door. A GUY opens, wary until he sees Ellis. Van Guy hands Ellis a MYSTERIOUS BROWN BAG. Ellis nods, continues --

EXT. RICE - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

Ellis cranks the steel gate that covers RICE.

ELLIS (O.S.)

Thirty years grinding away at the best restaurants in New York. Then I realized I was tired of making scratch for white chefs I could cook under the table. So, I opened up a little neighborhood spot.

As Ellis unlocks the door to his humble neighborhood spot --

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS (OUT OF TIME)

Welcome to our home for the series -- RICE!! The nicest and most impeccable neighborhood spot you've ever seen. Yeah, there are white table cloths. Yes, this is fine dining. But this restaurant has so much heart and so much soul. On the walls are portraits of Harlem's finest: Althea Gibson, Malcolm X, Thurgood Marshall, James Baldwin, Billie Holliday, etc. As Ellis retrieves a tape measure from his pocket --

ELLIS (O.S.)

I'm not a perfectionist.

He goes to a table, measures the distance between the salad fork and the dinner fork. *No good...* He corrects it.

ELLIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

As long as everything is perfect.

INT. RICE - KITCHEN - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

Ellis enters, empties the mystery bag on the prep table. A dozen live blue crabs spill out. SMASH TO --

INT. RICE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (OUT OF TIME)

A buzzing kitchen in the thick of dinner service. Burners flame. Cherry glaze rains down over searing duck. COOKS bark back and forth down the line. What looks like chaos to us is actually a finely tuned orchestra led by Ellis. *Remember those blue crabs??* Ellis puts the final touches on a sautéed crab dish. Simple. Soulful. Fucking genius.

*Note: Each featured dish on this show will be identified on screen with a stylistic CHYRON. Think Chef's Table. Our audience will know exactly what they're seeing on screen.*

Ellis walks the dish out of the kitchen into --

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

*On fire.* Precisely the place you want to be.

ELLIS (O.S.)

People don't know me outside of  
Harlem. But trust me -- I'm your  
favorite chef's favorite chef.

*Ooooh...* The swag on this fella. As Ellis makes his way  
through the dining room, he nods at various Harlem celebs:  
Diddy, Cam'ron, Dapper Dan. Hey, Neil Patrick Harris! CHEF  
MARCUS SAMUELSSON stops Ellis.

CHEF SAMUELSSON

Chef. This dish is unbelievable.  
The sauce is bananas. You gotta let  
me in on your connect.

ELLIS

Bruh, you know that's not  
happening.

*All love.* But Ellis moves on, drops the dish in front of WALT  
WILSON (50s). Walt is a childhood friend. The love-fest is  
cut short when Ellis notices FOUR DINERS unattended at the  
host stand. His pupils expand with rage.

ELLIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Everyone who walks through those  
doors is family...

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

MOS -- because Camp Lo still bangs -- and from a distant POV,  
Ellis berates the ever-loving shit out of the FRONT OF HOUSE  
MANAGER (30s). BACK TO --

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

Ellis looking straight into the camera again.

ELLIS

Everyone... Including the staff.  
(then)  
I didn't bring fine dining uptown  
for fame or Michelin stars.

CAMERA SHUTTER. And a BLINDING FLASH of light takes us to --

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT (OUT OF TIME)

And as that light fades, we see Ellis with his arms around Jay-Z and Beyonce, posing for a photo. BACK TO --

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - DAY (OUT OF TIME)

ELLIS

I do this for me. I do this for my family. I do this for Harlem.

INT. RICE - KITCHEN - DAY

Another day. Another dinner service prep. Now? We feature two CHEFS on the line. EDEN (30s) -- Sous Chef. And MARCO (30s). They're putting the final touches on their own beautiful dishes. We notice Eden glancing at Marco's from the corner of her eye. Their anxiety -- particularly Eden's -- is palpable.

EDEN

Looks good, Chef.

MARCO

Thank you, Chef. You too.

Marco turns to grab a garnish, and when he does? Eden splashes this Mfer's dish with salt. Yeah, Eden is 100% that bitch. Marco garnishes as Chef Ellis enters. The chefs slide their dishes forward. Ellis inspects Eden's first.

EDEN

Striped bass. Sous vide, seared.  
Pickled cranberries, shaved cashews  
for texture. Finished with yuzu and  
black salt.

ELLIS

That all?

*Gulp.* Ellis tastes, and we're on Eden as she lives and breathes with every bite, yearning for Ellis's approval. Ellis gives nothing away, wipes his mouth and moves on to --

MARCO

Sopa de pata. A nod to home.

ELLIS

(in Spanish)

You're gonna take me to El Salvador  
one day.

(tastes, then, in Spanish)

Soulful.

(MORE)

ELLIS (CONT'D)

But not up to your standards. Or mine. It's over-seasoned. Too much salt, hijo.

MARCO

Yes, Chef.

ELLIS

(to Eden)

The cashews don't work. Lose 'em.

(MORE)

*ELLIS (CONT'D)*

*We showed our daughters that black people can build something of their own.*

*CC eyes Ellis. Real love here.*

*CC*

*That was corny as hell, but I love you anyway.*

*WHIP BACK TO --*

*INT. RICE - KITCHEN - DAY (PRESENT DAY)*

*CC white-knuckles her rolling pin, rage filling her --*

*CC*

*Get your fucking hands off of me.*

*Whoa. Something has definitely gone wrong in this marriage. But what?? We follow Ellis as he retreats to --*

*INT. RICE - WALK-IN REFRIGERATOR - DAY*

*Ellis enters, shifts a box of produce, uncovering a pack of cigarettes. He sits on a milk crate. Light. Pull. Exhale. We want to know so much more about this complicated man, but we're SOL because the CAMERA begins to slowly PULL AWAY. And as it does? Something terrible happens. Ellis's left arm goes limp, cig dropping to the ground. He clutches at his chest -- small, breathy grunts. His face crumples with pain (*Yo, Director. Can we make this feel super first person and unlike any heart attack we've ever seen on TV, please?*). Ellis tries to get to his feet, but stumbles forward -- knocking shit off shelves as he goes down. He is literally fighting for his life. But we quietly pull away, continuing out to --*

*INT. RICE - KITCHEN - DAY*

*We float past CC, through the kitchen -- everyone unaware that Ellis is dying in solitude steps away. Damn.*

*ELLIS (O.S.)*

*And when I'm gone? I know I will have left something for my family. For Harlem.*

*SMASH TO --*

**HARLEM'S KITCHEN**

INT. ZADIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

ZADIE RICE. She's looking right at us too. We recognize Zadie as our chastened Front of House Manager from the teaser.

ZADIE  
I'm not happy. I don't know where  
it went wrong... I'm not happy.

REVEAL Zadie is looking in the mirror. Rehearsing. She is a woman who, from the outside, has it all together. But inside, a third-life crisis rages. A beat. Then, definitively --

ZADIE (CONT'D)  
I want a divorce.

Zadie readies herself. As soon as she opens the door --

INT. ZADIE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Her baby, ZARINA (3), is being shoved in her face by her US Attorney husband, VIJAY (30s).

VIJAY  
Here.

ZADIE  
(takes the baby)  
I thought you were taking Zarina to  
work today.

VIJAY  
Can't. Everything is blowing up.

ZADIE  
I gave the nanny off.

VIJAY  
Call Maria and tell her to come in.

ZADIE  
She has a thing with her daughter.

Vijay walks away, eyeing his phone. Zadie follows.

VIJAY  
I would love to take her to work.  
She loves to file. She was born to  
file, but I can't anymore.

Vijay is on the phone as they enter --

INT. ZADIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Vijay goes to the freezer, searches for food, phone to ear --

VIJAY (INTO PHONE)

I'll be there soon. Don't touch the  
plea agreement until I get there.

(hangs up, then)

We don't have frozen waffles?

ZADIE

They're poison.

VIJAY

They're fast.

ZADIE

It takes two seconds to make waffle  
batter.

VIJAY

That is what we call conjecture,  
and I don't have two seconds.

ZADIE

I can't take Zarina to work. We're  
slammed. We have 110 covers.

VIJAY

You work for your dad managing a  
restaurant. I work for the United  
States Government, and we're trying  
to put a State Senator away for 18  
USC 1343. It's a big deal.

(catches himself)

I'm sorry. That was dumb.

ZADIE

Super dumb. I also have to pick up  
my sister. She's coming home today.

VIJAY

Right. How are you feeling about  
all that?

ZADIE

Happy to see her. Nervous to see  
her. You know how she is. You know  
how she is with my mom.

VIJAY

You do too much.

ZADIE  
I'm the oldest.

VIJAY  
Drop Zarina off at day care.

ZADIE  
She got sick last time.

VIJAY  
Kids get sick.

A beat. He's stressed. She's stressed. This is marriage.

VIJAY (CONT'D)  
Okay, I could maybe slip away for  
an hour at lunch, watch little Z  
and you can pick up your sister.

ZADIE  
Don't worry. I'll figure it out.

Vijay grabs his stuff. Kisses Zadie -- kisses Zarina.

VIJAY  
You said you wanted to talk. Let's  
talk tonight. I'll grab Chinese on  
my way home. Pineapple fried rice.

Vijay hustles out the door. Zadie exhales.

ZADIE  
I hate pineapple fried rice.

A BLARING SIREN startles us and takes us to --

INT. PRISON - DAY

WTF?! Why are we in a prison? We go down a line of depressing  
cells, landing on a FEMALE INMATE (late 20s). A PRISON GUARD  
slips her a book -- Zora Neale Hurston's, "Mules and Men".

PRISON GUARD  
The book you wanted.  
(then)  
You've got eleven minutes before  
Watts comes through.

As the Guard walks off, the Inmate opens the book to find  
it's just a hiding spot for...*butter?? Huh?* She smiles --

MUSIC CUE: "Blow the Whistle" by Too \$hort. Because we can  
party even if we're in prison.

Now? We MONTAGE through an off-beat cooking sequence. The Inmate pulls various pieces of contraband from around her cell. But her contraband is different -- gouda. A country loaf. Tomatoes. She whips up a few insane grilled cheeses using only the rudimentary equipment she has on hand. Whoever she is, she has mad skills. As she takes a bite of a sandwich. Heaven.

CHRYON: \$50 Grilled Cheese. Gouda. Jersey Tomatoes. French Style Country Loaf.

She bags two. We END MONTAGE when our Prison Guard returns. The Inmate slips him the sandwiches.

PRISON GUARD (CONT'D)  
Gonna miss you, Rice.

*Did he just say Rice??* Yup. That's because this Inmate is NINA RICE -- the most mysterious and mercurial Rice daughter. PRISON GUARD WATTS arrives.

PRISON GUARD WATTS  
Rice. Exit interview with the Warden. Let's go.  
(then)  
Why does it smell like grilled cheese up in here?

INT. PRISON - WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Nina with WARDEN CARLBECK (40s) who reviews Nina's file.

WARDEN CARLBECK  
You did okay here. Found with contraband in your cell twice --

NINA  
(corrects)  
- Kumamoto oysters --

WARDEN CARLBECK  
- One altercation --

NINA  
- Bitch stole my oysters.

WARDEN CARLBECK  
What's your plan, Nina?  
(off Nina's shrug)  
Are you still experiencing bouts of depression?

NINA

I'm a black woman in prison.

WARDEN CARLBECK

That's an easy thing to fall back on.

NINA

Says the white lady who gets to walk out of here every night.

Brick. Meet. Wall.

WARDEN CARLBECK

You should have never been here in the first place. You're smart. And talented. You should be at Yale or working at your dad's restaurant.

NINA

My sisters have all that covered.

WARDEN CARLBECK

You've had more visitors than anyone in my time here. Your sisters, your dad. Your mom --

NINA

- Not my mom. She never came to visit. Three years. Not once.

WARDEN CARLBECK

My point is, you have people. Stick to them. Not the knuckleheads you used to run with.

(then)

At your sentencing you didn't apologize to the victim's family.

NINA

I was already going away for three. I'm not gonna apologize just because it's what people want. That's not me.

WARDEN CARLBECK

I hoped you'd have learned some personal accountability here.

NINA

This place is about survival, not rehabilitation. I survived. We done?

INT. RICE - KITCHEN - DAY

Marco and Eden. More prep work.

EDEN

I thought your dish was seasoned perfectly.

*THE NERVE on this chick...*

MARCO

Me too. I tasted every component.

EDEN

You know how my dad is.

*Umm... Did she just say dad?? We're loving this!*

MARCO

Yeah, he's usually right. He taught me everything I know. Doesn't matter -- you win, I win, Sis.

Marco collects bowls and a cutting board. We hang on Eden, feeling a little shitty before we catch up with Marco. He rounds the corner. In step, CC feeds Marco a peach slice before he can steal one. Family. We follow Marco into --

INT. RICE - WALK-IN REFRIGERATOR - DAY

Cigarette burned down to the filter. Produce strewn about. And Ellis, unconscious on the ground. Marco rushes over --

MARCO

(Spanish)

Wake up! Wake up, old man!

(nothing)

Help! Help!

As Marco dives into CPR, CC rushes into the fridge, followed by Eden. *Dafuq is going on??*

MARCO (CONT'D)

Call 911. He's not breathing.

EDEN

What?

MARCO

911.

EDEN

I don't have my phone. Mom!

CC is holding her phone. But she's frozen.

EDEN (CONT'D)

MOM!!!

CC snaps out of it, dials. SMASH TO --

EXT. RICE - DAY

On an ambulance, lights booming. A small crowd of HARLEMITES and TOURISTS have formed. Three EMT's hustle out of the restaurant towing Ellis. This is life or death right now. Eden, Marco and CC trail the Paramedics. They load Ellis --

MARCO

Is he alive?

EDEN

Of course he's alive.

EMT

You have to back away.

MARCO

We're not letting him go alone.

EMT

One person.

EDEN

Mom.

CC

Huh?

EDEN

Go.

One of the Paramedics helps CC in. They shut the doors behind her, and the ambulance speeds away. MOVE TO --

INT. ZADIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Zarina is on a play mat. A frustrated Zadie fruitlessly attempts to fix the vacuum. Then, to Zarina --

ZADIE

I went to Harvard. Ya think Barack ever unclogged a vacuum?

Baby Zarina holds up a truck, unimpressed.

ZADIE (CONT'D)  
You're right. Nobody likes to hear  
that shit.

Then, Zadie's phone begins to vibrate. Eden. Zadie answers.

ZADIE (CONT'D)  
What's up, Sis?  
(listens, concerned)  
Wait... What happened?!

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Nina steps through the gates. Freedom tastes good. She's expecting Zadie, but two of her friends roll up. Let's call them PORSHA and AMAIA. Because those are their names.

NINA  
Wasn't expecting to see you fools.

Porsha and Amaia aren't here to celebrate. They're somber.

NINA (CONT'D)  
What's up? What's wrong?

PORSHA  
Zadie called. We gotta take you to  
the hospital. It's your dad.

SMASH TO --

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

Speeding. CC watches as Ellis clings to life. The Paramedics break out the paddles. We PUSH IN on CC. Feel everything that she's feeling. Pain. Fear. Grief. Just live, dude. Just live so we can fix this. Just live so I can tell you I love you.  
*We shall see...*

**END OF ACT ONE**

ACT TWO

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - EMERGENCY WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Vijay holds Zadie's hand. CC has her arms around a tear-stained Eden. They wait. No news on Ellis yet.

CC  
(to Eden)  
He's fine. You know your dad loves  
the drama.

Eden nods. But we see worry on CC too. Marco has baby Zarina on his lap, doing something super cute that makes her laugh. It makes Zadie smile. A quick look between Marco and Zadie. *Family can be good, right?* Just then, a NURSE approaches. They all rise like: "this could be it."

NURSE  
No, I don't know anything. I  
just...I'm from Harlem. My parents  
took me to RICE when I graduated  
high school. It blew me away. Mr.  
Rice heard we were celebrating, and  
comped our meal. I'm praying for  
him.

CC hugs the Nurse like it's the Nurse who needs comforting.

CC  
I can't wait to remind him of this.

The Nurse nods, clears as GOLDA KATZ (20s) approaches. Golda is Eden's fiancé. Imagine Miley Cyrus if Miley Cyrus was one of New York's top sommeliers. Golda is BDE with a sprinkle of new-age mysticism. *Interesting combo.* She kisses Eden, then --

GOLDA  
This is awful. I'm so sorry.

As Golda hands CC a crystal. *Yes, a crystal --*

GOLDA (CONT'D)  
For you. It's a Jasper crystal. A  
supreme nurturer. It builds the  
spirit up during times of stress.

CC  
Very...thoughtful.

CC eyes Zadie like: "Dafuq I'm supposed to do with this?"  
Zadie shrugs: "Dafuq if I know."

GOLDA  
(re: Eden)  
I need to steal her for a second.

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Eden. Golda. Eden remains shaken.

GOLDA  
I can't imagine being there.

EDEN  
We're getting married this year.  
What if he can't... What if he's  
dead?

GOLDA  
We don't do that. We speak  
positivity into existence. Ellis is  
not dead. Close your eyes. Say it.

EDEN  
(closes eyes)  
He's not dead.

GOLDA  
No, he's not. Okay. There really  
isn't a worse time to bring this  
up, but can you compartmentalize?  
(off Eden's nod)  
Chef Delon is retiring from my  
restaurant. As I was about to say  
your name, Lily mentioned you as a  
poss replacement.

EDEN  
(subdued excitement)  
Your restaurant has a star.

GOLDA  
We talked about this, spoke it into  
existence. You are going to be an  
Executive Chef this year.

EDEN  
What about RICE?

GOLDA  
RICE isn't yours. It never will be.

EDEN  
But what if -- ?

GOLDA

- Your father is not dead.

(then)

You know how quickly these things move. My bosses can't let that spot sit open for long.

EDEN

I get it. I just... Right now...

Golda pulls Eden in for a hug.

GOLDA

I know. This sucks. Ellis is an epic dude who is gonna continue being epic. Guys like him don't die in refrigerators, okay. They get gored by wild goats in the Andes or something while foraging wild mushrooms.

(off Eden's laugh)

It's true.

EDEN

I love you.

GOLDA

You better.

ER DOCTOR (PRE-LAP)

Mrs. Rice.

MOVE TO --

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - EMERGENCY WAITING AREA - NIGHT

The entire gang huddled around an ER DOCTOR.

ER DOCTOR

Ellis suffered a major myocardial infarction.

VIJAY

A heart attack.

ER DOCTOR

He's stable. But his echocardiogram shows a significant blockage in the pulmonary artery. He needs surgery. Now.

MARCO

He'll live?

ER DOCTOR  
He's in very capable hands.

CC  
Can we see him first?

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - ELLIS'S ROOM - NIGHT

Zadie, Eden, Marco, Golda and Vijay enter. They eye Ellis hooked up to all types of shit that someone very smart will make look right. And scary. Ellis is weak, but still Ellis --

ELLIS  
Is this how y'all are gonna act at my funeral?

Marco is seriously troubled by seeing Ellis like this.

ELLIS (CONT'D)  
Hijo. It's no big deal. I'm sixty. I'm black. And I've been on my feet twenty hours a day for forty years.

ZADIE  
You don't go to the doctor.

EDEN  
You smoke. You said you quit.

MARCO  
He lied. I wondered why the squash smelled like cigarettes.

ELLIS  
(closes eyes)  
This is me praying for another heart attack. I'm fine. They're gonna crack me open, unblock the pipes -- boom. Back on my feet.  
(then, to CC)  
Come here, Baby.

CC does. With reluctance. He grabs her hand, but she doesn't make prolonged eye contact. She can't. Anger? Guilt for being angry? We don't know but we're hella curious.

ELLIS (CONT'D)  
It'll be okay. We always make it.

That hangs there a beat, more in those words than anyone else in the room can understand. Then --

NINA (O.S.)

This is one hell of a way to steal  
my shine.

They all turn to see Nina there. Everyone greets her warmly.  
Everyone except CC. Noticeably. Ellis glows.

MARCO

Welcome home.

NINA

Thanks, my dude. Missed you.  
(then, to Ellis)  
What's the deal? Tried to kick it  
before I got a chance to see you?

ELLIS

This face... You're home.

NINA

Mom.

CC

Nina. Made it in one piece, I see.

They hug. But watching it makes our fingers and toes cold.  
Nina regards her father again. The tubes. The monitors.  
Scary. All Nina can do is what she always does, deflect --

NINA

Enough of this teary-eyed BS. This  
is a celebration. I'm home. Dad  
used one of his nine lives. Let's  
put on some music. The usual?

Ellis nods. Nina pulls out her phone --

MUSIC CUE: "Bring It On Home to Me" by Sam Cooke.

Good God this is an incredible song. Ellis grabs Nina's hand.

ELLIS

Missed you, Kid.

The connection between these two is obvious. Special. Vijay  
eyes his vibrating phone --

VIJAY

Work. Gotta take this.

Vijay steps out of the room.

ELLIS

This one was an accident. But it was the best accident ever.

And now they start to dance. Ellis and Nina. Well, not dance because he's in a hospital bed. But you get it. It's contagious. Eden and Golda. Zadie holds Zarina, eyes Marco as he grabs CC for a dance. This is awesome. So we live here for a little while Mr. Cooke serenades us. Finally --

ELLIS (CONT'D)

Alright. Alright. Can I get a minute alone with my youngest?

He means Nina. A look between Zadie to Eden. But everyone obliges. They clear. It's just Nina and Ellis now.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

I spent a night in jail after the Yankees won the World Series in '77. Not my kind of party.

NINA

You just sit there and replay every mistake you've made in your life.

(then)

Your fifty-dollar grilled cheeses saved my ass. First thing you taught me how to cook.

ELLIS

At my first restaurant I washed dishes by the prep kitchen next to the risotto guy. Nobody likes making risotto because one second over, one second under? Garbage. Guy called out one day, boyfriend smashed him in the face with a Christmas tree stand because he taped over *General Hospital*.

NINA

Excessive.

ELLIS

Folks love their soaps. I stepped up, made the risotto. I never took notes. No timer. I just knew. Great chefs have that. I didn't teach you how to cook anything. Cooking is in you.

(then)

Come home. Work with me. I'm tired.

(MORE)

ELLIS (CONT'D)

I want to go Marlin fishing in Cabo or something else retired white folks do. You're going to take over RICE. You're my legacy.

Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. This knocks Nina back because --

NINA

I've spent my life avoiding that place. I'm the last person you --

ELLIS

- Eden is a good chef. I teach her. She learns. She's driven. But what's inside of you? Is not inside of her. Marco doesn't have the "it" -- the swag you and I have got.

(then)

I'm the youngest of six. When you're the baby, you come into a kitchen where everyone already has a place on the line. So, you rebel. You raise hell. Because that's how you get noticed. But, Nina, isn't it time to finally embrace what you were born to be?

As this lingers in Nina's soul, a couple of Nurses enter before Nina can respond.

NURSE

We need this young man for surgery.

Nina and Ellis eye one another. As the Nurses wheel him out.

ELLIS

You. You're the one. And... Don't let them steal my smokes.

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Zadie. Eden. Eyes on CC as she plays with baby Zarina.

ZADIE

You and I. We're going to have to hold this family together.

EDEN

What else is new?

ZADIE

That's serious surgery. We should look into a caretaker. We can't have Mom take it all on herself.

EDEN

We also have to referee her and Nina.

ZADIE

What else is new?

EDEN

I gotchoo.

Eden and Zadie do something with their hands. Something that shows sisterly affection TBD by our lovely and talented actors. Nina approaches eating a... Big Mac?

Sis.

ZADIE

Sis.

EDEN (CONT'D)

NINA

You saw that in there, right? Mom? She basically air hugged me. I haven't seen her in three years.

EDEN

What did you and Dad talk about?

NINA

...Just catching up.

Eden is a beautifully sharp and cynical little devil.

ZADIE

Cut Mom some slack. Extenuating circumstances. Plus, you two have been at war since you could talk.

EDEN

Not to mention, a convict daughter kinda shits on the image she's spent a lifetime cultivating.

(then)

Wait... When did you have time to go to McDonald's?

NINA

It was just sitting in a chair. Like... All alone.

Zadie and Eden groan. *THIS chick...* Off Eden and Zadie --

NINA (CONT'D)

It's good to be home. How's the whole domestic life stuff?

ZADIE

Me and Vijay are great. I'm happy.

EDEN

Just a humble servant of Dad's. Which... We need to talk about. We can't stay closed until he's back on his feet.

NINA

Stop. The man isn't out of surgery and you're trying to take his job.

ZADIE

You and Marco can handle it.

EDEN

A timeshare? You know that's not how a kitchen works. There needs to be one voice until dad is better.

ZADIE

Can I have, like, five hours until I have to think about all of this?

EDEN

Is this your decision or something?

ZADIE

(shakes Eden off, to Nina)  
What's your plan?

NINA

To finish this lonely, delicious Big Mac.

ZADIE

You can help me in the office until you figure stuff out.

NINA

Stuff?

ZADIE

Your life.

NINA

Can you say that with roughly 100 percent less shade?

EDEN

You know she can't.

ZADIE

Why are you always taking digs?

EDEN

I call it like I see it.

*What happened to all that "I gotchoo" shit??*

ZADIE

Whatever.

Annoyed, Zadie walks off. We follow her into --

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - SNACK ROOM - NIGHT

Marco is already there. Alone. He needed air. He doesn't look up when Zadie enters. She parks across the room. It's silent. But there's an electricity in this silence. How 'bout a...?

MUSIC CUE: Death Cab for Cutie, "*Transatlanticism*."

As our hearts melt, we cut back and forth between Marco and Zadie. And now? After a few heavy, heavy beats -- we INTERCUT this static scene with some salacious OUT OF TIME SHOTS:

- *Marco and Zadie's lips inches away from one another -- inhaling and exhaling one another.*

- *Zadie running her hands across Marco's abs. Yum, Yum.*

- *Kissing. Deep. Passionate. All over. Physical.*

Are we imagining this? Wishing for this? Is this what Marco wants? Zadie? *Are we in their heads??* In real time now --

ZADIE

I was going to do it -- tell Vijay  
I want a divorce.

Audience: *"Umm... Excuse me. What THE FUCK did she just say?"*

ZADIE (CONT'D)

We can't keep doing this.

*Doing what?! A beat. Then? Magnet -- Metal. Zadie and Marco shoot across the room to one another. We play the scene now -- putting together all of the little flashes. It's hot. And wrong. Marco lifts Zadie up on the counter, as we CUT TO --*

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Eden, Golda, CC and Nina. Zarina is asleep in Vijay's lap.

VIJAY

I should get her home. You know  
where Zadie is?

They don't. Vijay passes Zarina to Eden who immediately passes her to CC. We follow Vijay as he rises to look for Zadie. He gets closer and closer to the snack room. Our hearts race as he gets closer and closer. Finally, he enters -

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - SNACK ROOM - NIGHT

Where Zadie and Marco are NOT fucking. Close call.

VIJAY

I'm taking Zarina home.

ZADIE

Right. Good call. Thanks.

VIJAY

Text me know when dad gets out.  
(then, to Marco)  
How's your brother?

MARCO

He's good. Working hard.

VIJAY

He said he was taking Civics and wanted to ask me some questions about my job. Whenever. Happy to.

MARCO

Appreciate that.

Marco nods. Vijay goes. This is MAD awkward, no?

MARCO (CONT'D)

You have to make a choice.

ZADIE

I know. I will.

We follow Zadie into the hallway. As she approaches the family, she sees the SURGEON approaching. This is it. This is the news. And as we wonder how Ellis is doing, we have our --

**END ACT TWO**

**ACT THREE**

INT. ZADIE'S SUV - NIGHT

On Ellis. *Yes, Ellis.* Sitting in the back between Eden and Nina. *This is not a flashback.* But the somberness and silence is deafening. *But why??* Zadie drives. CC shotgun -- eyes on Ellis in the rearview. Off CC's face, we INTERCUT FLASHES --

INT. HARLEM HOSPITAL CENTER - WAITING AREA - NIGHT(FLASHBACK)

MOS -- *the family seated. The SURGEON approaches. He delivers devastating news. We can't hear but we can read lips: "Complications... Blood loss... Revived... DEAD." It's THE WORST news. This is all HYPERSTYLIZED and SURREAL. The sun has burnt out. Everyone crumbles. Except CC. She puts her arms around whoever is close, comforts them with her head high. She thanks the Surgeon as we RETURN TO --*

INT. ZADIE'S SUV - NIGHT

But now? Ellis is gone. *Because he is dead. We swear.* As their car pulls to a stop near their home --

NINA

Oh my god.

MOURNERS gathered outside the Rice house. Flowers and candles laid out. It makes our family emotional as they make their way to the door. It's overwhelming. CC turns to the crowd like FLOTUS. Then, dutifully -- the matriarch. Always.

CC

Ellis was a devoted husband and father. He considered you family. And he thought of his kitchen as Harlem's kitchen. Thank you.

A few cheers from the crowd. As the family enters the house --

CC (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)

Dear Lord. We don't ask for understanding...

INT. RICE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CC and her daughters, heads bowed, hands locked in prayer.

CC

...We ask for your guidance during this challenging time. We know Ellis has found peace next to you. I ask that you give his daughters strength to find that same peace in your plan. In Jesus's name we pray.

THE GIRLS

Amen.

But... What now? No one knows what to say or do. Then --

CC

Chicken.

EDEN

What?

CC

I bought a chicken from Dominic's. You girls need to eat.

ZADIE

You are not cooking for us.

CC

Nina, Dad made your bed for you.

NINA

We're fine. Sit.

CC

No.

The first crack. CC shakes it off. Then --

CC (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I should go to bed. Promise you'll eat something.  
(off the daughters)  
Goodnight.

INT. RICE HOUSE - ELLIS & CC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CC stands alone -- relics of her life with Ellis suffocating her. She doesn't take her clothes off, gets into bed. But she can't get comfortable. Her eyes are drawn to a nick in the wall. She's fixated on it. *Why??* Her attention is only drawn away by Ellis's phone ringing on his nightstand. CC eyes the caller: WILLA DOWD. CC recognizes, considers answering, but doesn't. Three missed calls from this Willa. *Hmmm...* Off CC --

INT. RICE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Eden and Nina eye photos while Zadie ends a call.

ZADIE

Harry's dropping off our produce order in the morning.

EDEN

For the restaurant that isn't open.

NINA

There is no RICE without dad.

ZADIE

There are fifty-eight employees whose livelihoods depend on us. Gerald's bar across the street is thrives because of our overflow -- not to mention the dozen undocumented workers, including Marco, that we can't just turn loose to fend for themselves.

EDEN

I can work on a menu tonight, acclimate the staff to my style.

ZADIE

Now we're talking about a permanent replacement. That should be Marco.

Eden is taken aback. Blindsided. She eyes Zadie as such. Nina sighs, she knows where this is headed so she starts looking through the cabinets for booze.

EDEN

You're serious? You didn't even blink.

ZADIE

It's not personal. I'm thinking logically.

EDEN

Marco is not family.

ZADIE

Dad would hate to hear you say that.

EDEN

Would he feel better about you choosing Marco over your own blood?

ZADIE

They have similar styles --  
elevated comfort food.

EDEN

How would you know? You made waffle  
batter. Once.

NINA

Does anyone drink in this house?

ZADIE

I may not cook but I have been  
keeping the restaurant on the level  
for years with zero credit.

EDEN

You're mom's favorite.

ZADIE

You're dad's favorite.

EDEN

(re: Nina)

She's dad's favorite.

NINA

(found something...)

What the fuck is Rumpel Minze?

ZADIE

Shut up.

EDEN

Shut up.

NINA

I'm going out for a drink. I can't  
be in this house listening to you  
two bitch like little baby bitch  
dolls. He'd want us to have a  
drink. He got wasted at Uncle  
Raymond's funeral. He had a flask  
of this weird booze that tasted  
like candy canes and Lysol.

ZADIE

Rumpel Minze.

EDEN

Rumpel Minze.

NINA

Right. I'm going out.

ZADIE

You sure that's the best idea?

EDEN

I'll go. Make sure she doesn't  
fight anyone.

NINA

Rude.

Zadie quickly assesses the situation --

ZADIE

Nah, you bitches need a chaperone.

INT. GINNY'S SUPPER CLUB - NIGHT

A swanky music venue below Harlem's iconic Red Rooster. A familiar tune: "*Truth Hurts*" by Lizzo. That's because Lizzo is on stage! Zadie and Nina are seated. Eden at the bar.

ZADIE

This feels weird -- being out when  
dad just died.

NINA

You don't have to be perfect all  
the time. Disappointing people is  
fun. I would know.

ZADIE

I know what you mean. When you said  
there's no RICE without dad. So, I  
need to make this transition as  
smooth as possible. And you know  
Eden has always been super  
competitive with me.

NINA

Because she looks up to you. If you  
got a new dress, Eden wanted the  
same ugly one.

ZADIE

Just back me when the time comes.

Nina nods but she's non-committal. Eden returns with drinks.  
The sisters take in a little Lizzo. As "*Truth Hurts*" ends --

LIZZO

I'm not from Harlem. But I know  
y'all lost a favorite son. I see  
you girls. This is for Chef Ellis.

Lizzo breaks into "Cuz I Love you". We just let the music play in this moment and the emotion play on our sisters' faces. It's wonderful, poetic. And it's cutting Nina deeply. We see her crack for the first time. She launches out of the booth, headed for the bathroom. Zadie starts after her, but --

EDEN

I'll go.

INT. GINNY'S SUPPER CLUB - BATHROOM - MINUTES LATER

Nina wipes tears away. Hates herself for crying. Eden enters.

NINA

I wasted three years I could have been spending with him.

EDEN

I want you on the line with me. I should be the successor. And you shouldn't be pushing papers around a desk as Zadie's assistant. You're a cook. Like me. Like dad.

NINA

I know how hard you've worked.

EDEN

I'm glad you're home. I'm glad you've got my back.

A YOUNG WOMAN (30s) emerges from a stall. The gravity here shifts INSTANTLY. They recognize this Woman. She recognizes them. There's serious tension here. Let's call this Woman --

PATRICE

You're out. That...seems fair.

Patrice brushes past Nina, quickly washes her hands, exits --

INT. GINNY'S SUPPER CLUB - NIGHT

On Zadie. Text from Marco: "I wish I could see you." As Zadie's fingers hover over the screen, she sees Nina exiting the bathroom, headed for the door. Eden approaches Zadie.

ZADIE

What's up with her?

EDEN

The fight that landed Nina in jail?  
The girl she --

ZADIE  
- I remember.

EDEN  
That's her sister.

Patrice is eye-fucking the oxygen out of Zadie and Eden.

EXT. GINNY'S SUPPER CLUB - NIGHT

Nina sits on the curb. Zadie and Eden exit, join Nina.

NINA  
Without him I don't have anyone.

EDEN  
That's not true.

ZADIE  
You have us.

They all pull in a little tighter now. This is what Nina needs. This is family. This is sisterhood. This is our show.

EXT. HARLEM - MORNING

Alive as the sun rises. No place like it in the world. 🌞🌍

INT. RICE - KITCHEN - DAY

HARRY, the produce king of New York, lands two boxes on the prep table. Nina scans through. Harry is bummed about Ellis.

HARRY  
I don't know what to say. Up and down my route this morning, every chef was bummed about Ellis.

ZADIE  
That would've meant a lot to him.

HARRY  
He meant a lot to Harlem.

ZADIE  
Dude, I've cried enough this morning.

HARRY  
Got it.  
(then)  
(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

I feel like a jerk bringing this up now, but last week's check bounced.

ZADIE

That... What? That doesn't make sense. I'll figure it out, make sure you're square.

HARRY

Appreciate it. And... I'm sorry.

Harry turns to go, then --

HARRY (CONT'D)

When's the service?

ZADIE (PRE-LAP)

Saturday doesn't give people much time to travel.

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - DAY

CC. Marco. Zadie. Eden. Nina. Funeral talk.

EDEN

Dad barely spoke to the family in Alabama.

MARCO

We should still give them a chance to come. Family is family.

NINA

My vote is for Saturday, get this over with.

ZADIE

Mom?

Fine. CC nods.

EDEN

I can't imagine dad left a will -- totally not his style. But did he say who he wants to take over?

CC glances briefly at Nina.

CC

No.

EDEN

Then we have to rely on the hierarchy. I'm next in line.

MARCO

That doesn't mean he would have chosen you. I really feel like I could step up and honor Ellis.

EDEN

And we know where my beloved eldest sister stands. Okay. Let's vote -- *myself*.

MARCO

You can't vote for yourself.

Eden points to her own hand -- which is raised over her head.

EDEN

That's two. Nina's with me.

ZADIE

No, she's not. She's with me.

NINA

I'm not with anyone.

EDEN

We talked about this.

ZADIE

We talked about this.

NINA

(fed THE FUCK up)

He didn't want you. Or you. Me. If he had a choice it would be me. That's what he said before he died. Don't worry. I don't want it.

ZADIE

Of course he did.

EDEN

That's stupid if it's true. But also moot. She doesn't want it.

NINA

Why would I? I want to bury dad and get the hell out of Harlem.

Nina stalks off. A beat. All eyes on CC. Then --

ZADIE

Mom, this has to be your call.

CC is distracted. Because Ellis is standing against the wall. No one sees him but CC. Get used to it.

EDEN

It's me. Or Marco.

Nothing from CC. Zadie grabs her coat, annoyed --

ZADIE

I'm going to find out why our checks are bouncing. Because that's my job -- to fix everything.

EDEN

Mom?

On Ellis as a knife -- *yes, a knife* -- whizzes by his head, narrowly missing him, sticking in the wall??? SMASH TO --

INT. RICE HOUSE - ELLIS & CC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

*Ellis. Against the wall. A knife. In wall.*

ELLIS

*How did you... Are you kidding?!!*

REVERSE REVEALING CC on the other end of that knife toss.

CC

I know what you're doing.

ELLIS

Know what?

CC

With her. Willa Dowd.

CC wags Ellis's phone at him -- evidence. Tosses it on the bed. The Shaggy defense isn't gonna work here, Bruh.

CC (CONT'D)

You're having an affair. Now tell me every goddamn thing I need to know -- RIGHT. NOW.

Off Ellis, stuck between a knife and a scorned woman, we --

**END ACT THREE**

ACT FOUR

INT. RICE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

It feels like all of Harlem is in this house right now. Friends, employees, family and strangers who consider themselves family pay respects to the Rices. CC accepts condolences -- always the queen. Nina is in the corner watching all of this as she eats a bag of --

CHYRON: Doritos... Cool Ranch.

But it all feels phony to Nina. *Fuck this...* As Nina slips out the door, we eye CC watching her go. Walt, Ellis's pal from the teaser, approaches CC.

WALT

How are you holding up?

CC

It's the girls I'm worried about.

WALT

They lost their dad, but there's nothing like losing a spouse.

CC

I don't know most of these people.

WALT

They feel like they know y'all. That restaurant gave people in Harlem something to believe in. But they don't know that you were the real force behind him. Behind the restaurant. He was my brother. If there's anything you need...

Walt flashes cash. CC can see the strings attached.

CC

Ellis did cooking expos on his one day off to pay back your criminal interest. And I'm trying my best not to think the bite you took out of us is what killed him.

WALT

Business is business. Family is family.

CC

No. Thanks.

WALT

I'm around. You know that.

Walt is gone as we MOVE TO the couch. On Eden and Golda --

EDEN

That kitchen was OUR thing. He chose a delinquent over me? And Zadie would rather have a dishwasher than her own sister.

GOLDA

The universe speaks clearly.

EDEN

I want to bring a Michelin Star to Harlem. My dad could never do it.

GOLDA

The approval of others is meaningless.

EDEN

I usually rock with it, but can you not with the new age bullshit right now?

GOLDA

My bad. What is it with your sister and Marco anyway?

EDEN

If I'm head chef then I'm her boss.

GOLDA

Unless there's something *more* going on between the two of them.

EDEN

That would be way too cool for Zadie. She's the most uncool.

(then)

I'm not giving up yet. Buy me more time with your people.

Eden is up with steam heading over to CC.

EDEN (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have come at you the way I did. This restaurant means a lot to me. I've bled for it.

CC

You're passionate. Like your dad.  
And you're grieving. We're all  
grieving. I understand.

EDEN

I love Marco. But Zadie is backing  
him to stick it to me. And, you  
know, I get that Zadie works hard  
but dad kinda ran the business.  
She's basically an assistant GM.

These words gut CC. She looks at Eden. Claire Huxtable.

CC

When my mom died I saw family I  
hadn't seen in years. You're tight  
with your uncles because Mom-Mom's  
death brought us together. This...  
I dunno... It's tearing us apart.

But it is. A beat -- then CC heads for the stairs.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Nina drinks a beer with Porsha and Amaia.

PORSHA

Looks like my girls took care of  
you in there.

NINA

Appreciate that.

PORSHA

No thing. Wasn't cheap, though.

NINA

I've got to come up with a plan. He  
was my only reason to be in Harlem.

AMAIA

Why do you hate your family?

NINA

I don't hate them. I just don't  
exactly fit in.

PORSHA

That's some spoiled-ass shit. You  
sound like one of them England  
princesses -- hating living in a  
palace with mad jewels.

Kinda on point.

AMAIA

You should come work with me.

NINA

You know I don't know anything about hair.

AMAIA

I shut down the salon a year ago. I got a connect. A good package.

NINA

Drugs? You guys sell drugs now?

PORSHA

Why are you saying that like a fed?

Nina is disturbed. This is disturbing. And it's like these old pals are holding a mirror up to Nina.

NINA

...That's cool. I'm good though.

(then)

I ran into Patrice at Ginny's.

*Gravity shift.* A beat. Porsha and Amaia share a glance.

AMAIA

Don't even trip. Her sister had it coming. You did what you had to do.

(then, weed)

Should we roll one? For Ellis?

Nina nods reluctantly. And as Porsha begins to roll one, the loose knot forming in Nina's stomach gets tighter and tighter. Who is she? Forward or backward??

NINA

I should go.

INT. BANK OF HARLEM - DAY

A frustrated Zadie with a BANK TELLER.

ZADIE

I don't have a death certificate. He just died. This is your screw up. There is money in our account. I can see it on my phone -- now, I just need you to verify that.

(nothing...)

(MORE)

ZADIE (CONT'D)

Can you possibly muster an ounce of sympathy for my situation?

BANK TELLER

(musters that ounce...)

It's unclear why a check would not have cleared. Unless it was written from the other business account which is currently overdrawn.

ZADIE

Other account?

BANK TELLER

Unless you have a death certificate for Ellis Rice or you are Willa Dowd, I can't --

ZADIE

- Stop. Who the hell is Willa Dowd?

INT. RICE HOUSE - ELLIS & CC'S BEDROOM - DAY

CC enters the bedroom. And from her POV, we see Ellis in bed, shirtless. He smiles wide as she enters.

ELLIS

You look so beautiful.

As CC breaks into a reluctant smile --

WOMAN (O.S.)

Thank you.

CC turns to see a WOMAN (40s) smiling at Ellis. It's like CC isn't there. But the reality is they're not there. CC watches as this woman disrobes, climbs into bed with her husband. They do stuff. Then? CC's attention is drawn to the phone ringing on the night stand. When she looks back? Gone.  
Caller: Willa Dowd again. Off CC, we MOVE TO --

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

CC approaches apartment 522. KNOCKS. The Woman from the bedroom answers. She's surprised to see CC there. The Woman swallows the lump in her throat. Then --

CC

Willa.

WILLA

Do you...want to come in?

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - WILLA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CC...and this...Woman. She is WILLA DOWD. Very unlike CC. Willa has a downtown Bohemian vibe.

CC

It was a heart attack. He went into surgery and never came out.

Willa wants to cry. But she's the side sitting in front of the main so she wisely stifles tears.

CC (CONT'D)

You two had a relationship for 20 years, I thought you should know.

WILLA

Why did you come? Of course I knew he died. Everyone in Harlem knows.

CC

Then, why were you calling?

WILLA

(should I say this?)  
I wanted to hear his voice.

On Ellis. Standing somewhere in the room. Looking directly into the camera.

ELLIS

You've reached Chef Ellis. You know I don't like to talk on the phone, but leave a message if you want.

Off Ellis back to CC. In a strange way, Willa is the only person who can truly comprehend what CC is going through.

CC

I need to decide who is best to carry on this family's legacy.

Willa is on the verge of saying something. CC clocks it --

CC (CONT'D)

What?

WILLA

It's something we talked about. His legacy. Nina. He always dreamed of Nina taking over the restaurant.

CC

She doesn't want it, hasn't earned it. She has a lot to figure out.

WILLA

Don't we all.

A beat. Silence. Then --

WILLA (CONT'D)

I know there's nothing I can say --

CC

- Like you said -- we all have a lot to figure out.

WILLA

I'm sure you'll make the right choice. When is the service?

CC

I don't think that's a good idea.

Willa breathes. Tough -- but she gets it. Then, pointed --

WILLA

We need to discuss other things.

*Code. Code. Code.*

CC

When I'm ready.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

CC exits, surprised to find Zadie waiting for her.

ZADIE

What don't I know?

EXT. MARCUS GARVEY PARK - NIGHT

Zadie. CC. On a bench.

ZADIE

Dad had another account in our name. He was making payments from it. Who is Willa Dowd?

CC

You already know what it is.

She does. Zadie's shoulders slump. Heart sinks. Mind blown.

ZADIE

How long have you --

CC

- I found out a few weeks ago.

QUICK FLASH: Ellis against the wall in the bedroom. The knife whizzing past his head. That's when.

CC (CONT'D)

It's not enough for him to have done what he did. He had to be so damn messy about it that I would find out. Now you. And we have to tell your sisters. She's not the first, she is who she is.

Zadie takes this in. It's a whole lot to take in.

ZADIE

I don't get it.

CC

Your father was complicated.

ZADIE

Not him. You. She isn't the first and you stayed? Be strong. Stand up for yourself. That's what you taught us.

CC

I took vows before God.

ZADIE

So did he.

CC

Because he broke his I should have broken mine? I thought about what he had done for his community, his family. And I did what black women have done for years -- I grinned. And I beared it. That takes courage. I may be old-fashioned, but I am not weak. We all have secrets. Big and small.

That lands on Zadie who is harboring some pretty big secrets.

CC (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. You should be able to grieve -- not deal with this too.

ZADIE

What's she like? The woman. Willa?

CC

She's... Not me.

(then)

Part of me just wants to burn that restaurant down.

ZADIE

Maybe Nina is right. Maybe we should let RICE go. Maybe we're pretending dad was perfect and we're a perfect family when that's obviously not the case.

CC thinks a beat.

CC

Then what will I have?

CC eyes Zadie with care. Motherly --

CC (CONT'D)

I sacrificed so you girls could be happy. Be happy. Are you happy, honey?

Off Zadie, SMASH TO --

INT. MARCO'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Hand. KNOCK. Door. Zadie's hand. Marco's door. He answers.

MARCO

Hey.

ZADIE

You were right. I need to make a choice. I've made my choice.

*Ermigod...* What is the choice??! Sorry, you'll have to wait until this Peloton commercial is over

**END ACT FOUR**

**ACT FIVE**

INT. MARCO'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Marco. Zadie. Electricity. Always. But she's on a mission.

MARCO

How's CC?

ZADIE

Better than she should be. Or pretending to be better. But I get it because I'm like her. You don't care what people think. You're passionate, emotional. I'm jealous. I admire you. And doing what we've been doing? It's the first time in my life that I have done the wrong thing. I have this fantasy of running RICE with you and sneaking off wherever to do whatever. It's awesome. Because it's not me. It's a fantasy. You deserve to be Head Chef without any of this.

MARCO

I don't want it if I can't have you.

ZADIE

That's stupid. Sometimes you have to use your head not your --

MARCO

- You should always follow your heart.

ZADIE

I let my mind wander. I lost focus of the promises I made.

MARCO

This is not the way either of us would have dreamed it. But it is what it is and it is UNAVOIDABLE.

Marco steps to Zadie. Close. Then, real close.

MARCO (CONT'D)

You're inside of me. I'm inside of you. I like being inside of you.  
(touches Zadie's face)

(MORE)

MARCO (CONT'D)

No matter what we say, we always  
end up where we end up -- looking  
at one another like this -- feeling  
what we feel.

*Exhale. Are you sweating?* I'm totally sweating. And it  
appears as if they might kiss. But --

ZADIE

I don't want to be like my dad.

MARCO

What does that mean?

ZADIE

It means I can't do this anymore.  
I'm married. I have a daughter. If  
you really care about me -- ?

MARCO

- I don't care about you. I love  
you.

He's never said that before. We know because of the look on  
Zadie's face. She swallows. Hard. And again --

MARCO (CONT'D)

Tell me you don't love me.

We hear the thick air escape Zadie's lungs. Finally --

ZADIE

It doesn't matter.

Marco takes a step back.

MARCO

That doesn't matter?

ZADIE

Let's just go back to being what  
we've always been. Family.  
Please... Please. I need you to say  
yes to that.

A beat.

MARCO

Family. Sure. Okay.

ZADIE

Good. Okay. Family.

One last look. Then, Zadie turns and goes. CUT TO --

INT. RICE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nina enters, eyes CC stress baking. Nina considers joining, but she can't. As Nina heads for the stairs --

CC  
(without looking up)  
I could use a hand.

That was the tiniest of olive branches. As Nina nods, we SMASH into another epic ~~ooking~~ baking MONTAGE.

MUSIC CUE: "Milkshake" by Kelis.

This time, it's CC as the maestro. Nina as the Sous Chef. These two work in unison. Maybe they're enjoying this?? We end the MONTAGE as CC sets the pie in the oven.

CHYRON: Sweet Potato Pie. 55 Minutes @ 350 Degrees.

CC (CONT'D)  
You like Rumple Minze?

MINUTES LATER --

Nina and CC sipping Rumple Minze -- the bottle between them.

NINA  
This is way worse than I remember.

CC  
Your father hated it so it was the only thing I kept in the house.

NINA  
Why did he choose me?

CC  
That's for you to figure out.

NINA  
Look, Mom, I want to come back to the restaurant. I will work my way up. Whatever you want me to do. With whoever you choose. I owe him.

A beat as CC eyes Nina. Always unfinished business.

CC  
You may owe him but you owe me too. An explanation. An apology. For what you put this family through.

NINA

You have no idea what I went through in there.

CC

This is what I mean. It's always about what happened to you conveniently leaving out the fact you brought this on yourself.

NINA

I got into a fight.

CC

You put that girl in a coma.

NINA

That just means I won the fight.

CC

You haven't changed.

NINA

You never came to visit me.

CC

You never asked.

NINA

You're my mother.

CC

You're the child.

*Two very different people.*

NINA

Why do you hate me?

CC

I could ask you the same question.

NINA

Okay. Me first. You've never tried to get to know me. I didn't come out worshipping at your feet like Zadie -- I didn't beg for your approval like Eden, and you have always looked at me like an alien that could not have possibly come from your body.

CC

I love you all the same. You mistake disappointment for hatred.

NINA

You're disappointed because you have a set idea of what a Rice daughter should be. Everything with you is about image. I don't get that. It's not real.

CC

Just because I don't walk around brooding all the damn time, I don't feel shit? You don't know how many times I've looked at myself in the mirror ashamed I let your father do the things to me that he did?

NINA

I was wondering when you'd start poisoning the well with dad.

CC rises. She's done with conversation.

NINA (CONT'D)

Don't go now. We're talking. Really talking. For once. Tell me. What horrible things did dad do to you?

CC

Stop.

NINA

Go ahead. Lay it on me.

CC

Stop talking.

NINA

No. We're finally getting somewhere.

CC takes a beat, steaming. Should she say it? Fuck it...

CC

What if I told you that your Father had a twenty-year affair? And now, I've got to clean it up. I've got to hold my head high when the last thing I wished for before he died was for him to be dead. Would that make you feel good?

(MORE)

CC (CONT'D)

To know that I'm tormented? Does  
that make me more real?

There's real pain in CC's face. Nina can see that, and she's  
trying to figure out if what her mother just told her is  
true. It is. True. Some air. A detente. *Maybe*. Until --

NINA

He was a great chef. He was a good  
dad. It would be unfair to expect  
him to be great at everything.

Wow. That was a reaction -- for sure. Just not a prototypical  
one. Nina is always Nina. For better or worse.

CC

One day you'll get it. I hope. You  
don't have to apologize, but I will  
never stop feeling sorry for you.

(then)

I didn't visit you because walking  
through barbed wire gates to see my  
daughter was a reminder of how  
deeply I failed as a mother.

(then)

I'm going to bed. I have to bury my  
husband in the morning.

She's gone. We hang with Nina, CC's words shredding up her  
insides. As we PUSH IN on Nina, we hear a choir singing  
"Amazing Grace". The MUSIC MOVES US TO --

INT. ZADIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lights out. But Zadie is wide awake, Vijay asleep next to her  
-- Zarina is asleep at the foot of the bed. Vijay rolls over,  
throws his arm around Zadie. Then, groggily --

VIJAY

I love you so much.

Zadie melts into this moment. This is the place where she  
needs to find happiness. For now? Zadie is settled.

EXT. HARLEM STREETS - NIGHT

Marco runs. He wipes sweat from his brow, but he can't wipe  
away the pain. Ellis and Zadie. Gone. So, he runs. Faster.  
Faster. *Faster...* MOVE TO --

INT. EDEN & GOLDA'S LOFT - NIGHT

Golda and Eden in bed. Both working. Then, out of nowhere --

EDEN

I'll never be as good as him.

She means Ellis. Golda regards her fiancé --

GOLDA

You don't have to be. You're you.  
And you're exceptional.

Golda kisses Eden. It gets hot. *Hotter*. Alright, we gotta go because this is getting ENTIRELY too hot for BS&P. MOVE TO --

INT. RICE - WALK-IN REFRIGERATOR - NIGHT

Still a mess from the tragedy we witnessed in our teaser. On Nina standing there. Taking it in. Emotions filling. Then, she starts cleaning up. First the cigarette, then the produce. Piece by piece, cleaning up. MOVE TO --

INT. RICE HOUSE - ELLIS & CC'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CC in bed. Thinking. As she closes her eyes, we MATCH TO --

INT. ABBYSSINIAN BASPTIST CHURCH - DAY

CC. Eyes opening. The long-awaited funeral. Harlem World has showed up and showed out for Ellis. The Boys Choir of Harlem sings as we land on the family seated at the front, steps away from Ellis's open casket. The girls' eyes are on CC.

EDEN

She hasn't cried. How is she  
standing -- let alone smiling?

ZADIE

I get it. She's numb. Your husband  
dies a couple weeks after you find  
out he's having an affair. What's  
the playbook for that?

NINA

She can't cry. Not in front of us.  
Crying is selfish.

Eden and Zadie eye Nina. CC's eyes are drawn to the back of the church when Willa enters. The girls notice.

ZADIE

This is bad.

EDEN

Mild understatement.

MARCO

(gets it)

Oh.

ZADIE

We've got to get her out of here.

CC

She's here. Let's not make a scene.

Willa is hanging in the back looking for a seat. Then, CC slides over, gestures for Willa to sit next to her. What?? CC's grace knows no bounds -- but it probably should.

WILLA

Thank you.

CC nods. As the choir finishes, REV. ROBERT TISDALE rises.

REVERENED TISDALE

We're here to say goodbye to a friend. A father. A husband. There are so many things we wish we could say to Ellis Fredrick Rice. But he would much rather tell us what we meant to him.

A projector drops behind the Reverened, and the lights dim. What we see on screen is what we saw in the teaser. Ellis looking directly into the camera. A *Chef's Table*-like doc.

ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR)

I do this for me. I do this for my family. I do this for Harlem. Because there is no other place like it. It welcomed me, introduced me to my wife. These streets helped raise my children.

(then)

Family is like a good sauce. Miss one ingredient? The whole thing is off. It's volatile. Temperamental. You have to watch it closely. Too much heat? It boils, reduces to nothing. Not enough? The flavor won't marry.

(MORE)

ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR) (CONT'D)  
But no matter how fickle, the sauce  
can always be fixed with time.  
Unless it breaks. When it breaks?  
It's gone for good.

Tears. Everywhere. All over our family. Except CC.

ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR) (CONT'D)  
Zadie is a genius. She could do  
anything she wants anywhere in the  
world. But she came home to us.

Off Zadie, we FLASH BACK TO --

*INT. RICE - WALK-IN REFRIGERATOR - DAY (THE PAST)*

*Ellis sits on a milk crate -- familiar spot. He and Zadie do inventory. Both in their own worlds. Out of the blue --*

*ELLIS*  
*Couldn't do this without you, Z.*

*He didn't look up when he said it. But it stops Zadie in her tracks. As Ellis's words invade Zadie's cells, BACK TO --*

*INT. ABBYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY*

ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR)  
Eden? There isn't a harder working  
chef on this planet.

Off an emotional Eden, we FLASH BACK TO --

*INT. RICE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (THE PAST)*

*After hours. No one around. Eden tirelessly perfects a dish. She thinks she's all alone, but Ellis is watching her.*

*ELLIS*  
*Can I get some?*

*She hands her dad a fork. They both taste. He doesn't say anything but Eden can see that Ellis loves it. BACK TO --*

*INT. ABBYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY*

ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR)  
Marco is the American Dream, and  
the son I never had.

Off Marco --

*INT. RICE - KITCHEN (THE PAST)*

*Marco washes dishes. Ellis approaches with a chef's jacket.*

*ELLIS*

*You start on the line tomorrow.*

*Ellis walks off. Marco goes back to washing dishes, but we see that he's totally thrilled.*

*INT. ABBYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY*

*ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR)*

*And Nina... I know she's gonna come back to us one day. People take all kinds of roads to get to the place they're supposed to be.*

Off Nina --

*INT. RICE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (THE PAST)*

*Twenty years ago. Ellis cooks. YOUNG NINA watches. That famous grilled cheese. He serves it to Nina with a smile.*

*INT. ABBYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY*

*ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR)*

*I'm just a humble cook from Alabama who fought like hell to keep the sauce from breaking.*

*And now? Willa's emotion is rising. She wrings her hands, taps her foot -- trying to fight off the inevitable. CC can't help but notice Willa's tapping and hand wringing.*

*ELLIS (ON PROJECTOR) (CONT'D)*

*And when I'm gone? I know I will have left something for my family. For Harlem.*

*As Ellis continues, we cut back and forth between Willa and CC. Willa trying her best not to cry, CC's rising anger watching Willa try not to cry. It builds and builds until CC sees a tear drip down Willa's cheek. CC's teeth grind as --*

*WILLA*

*D'you have a tissue?*

SMACK!!! CC slaps Willa across her face. It halts the whole damn funeral. Willa is horrified. A beat. Another. *Then CC starts choking Willa.* Our children rush into action, pulling their irate mother off of Willa.

CC

How dare you? No, you don't get to cry. Have I cried? Have you seen me shed one fucking tear? No.

Nina, Zadie and Eden *physically* drag their mother out.

CC (CONT'D)

How dare you?? After what I've put up with? You don't get to cry.  
(to the daughters)  
Let go of me.

And CC pulls away, storms out, CUT TO --

INT. ABBYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - VESTIBULE - DAY

CC, Zadie, Eden and Marco. Stunned silence. Then... Nina laughs. Hard. It's infectious. Everyone starts laughing. Nina walks over to her mom, extends her hand for a high-five. CC gives it to her. Then, Nina leans in and whispers --

NINA

I'm sorry.

That's not nothing. As Nina steps away, a breath. Some air.

CC

Everything I've done in my life has been about Ellis Rice. His shadow is so huge that it makes everyone feel like the only way to live is in that darkness. But that's not true. If it was -- true -- we might as well crawl up in that casket next to him. I've always been the heart of this family but now I am the head of this family. So, I need to choose a successor that keeps us together. Ellis wanted Nina. That makes no sense. She would be an irresponsible choice. But that's my choice. Nina. Nina is my choice.

NINA

What?

EDEN

You don't have to do what dad wanted.

CC

It's what I want. Because it's what we need. I choose Nina for no reason other than she can't do it without us. And we need her if we're going to turn this thing over to the next generation of Rices. It's what has to happen. For the family.

CC eyes them all. A whole host of emotions brewing.

CC (CONT'D)

We good?

Zadie glances at Marco, glances at Eden. A beat.

ZADIE

Okay.

MARCO

Congratulations, Chef.

EDEN

You're sure?

CC

I know how you feel. But what we've built is bigger than one person.

A beat as Eden considers, eyes her mom and her sibs.

EDEN

(punches Nina)

Don't screw this up.

CC

We won't let her.

NINA

I will do my best.

Damn... This family is making us feel real good.

MARCO

We should go back in.

CC

No. We're doing this our way.

MUSIC CUE: "A Change Is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke. The song plays through as we MOVE TO --

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

The family watches as Ellis's casket is lowered into the ground. Just them. We live on their faces --

SAM COOKE

*I was born by the river, in a  
little tent. Oh, and just like the  
river, I've been runnin' ever  
since...*

CC

His body may be down there, but his  
soul is in our kitchen.

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

And this is all out of time, and played mostly MOS. The funeral has moved to RICE.

SAM COOKE

*...It's been a long time comin',  
but I know a change is gone come.  
Oh, yes it will...*

CC and Zadie greet and seat out front. CUT TO --

INT. RICE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nina with Marco and Eden.

EDEN

What's the plan?

MARCO

Wait.

Marco grabs Ellis's hanging chef's coat. Nina lets Marco put it on her. It's a big deal.

MARCO (CONT'D)

Better.

(then)

We've got some quality pork belly.

EDEN

Personally, I'd go for the duck.  
Hard to screw up.

Nina eyes them -- she's got this.

NINA  
Grilled cheese.

As Eden and Marco share skeptical looks --

LATER --

The line is on fire again. But this time it's slower and more poetic. Now, Nina guides the orchestra, Marco and Eden by her side. Helping. Moving in unison.

SAM COOKE  
*... 'Cause I don't know what's up  
there -- beyond the sky...*

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

As CC delivers a couple grilled cheeses to a table.

CHYRON: Grilled Cheese. Gouda. Gruyere. Blue Crab. Heirloom Tomatoes.

After CC drops the plates off, we hang with her as she soaks all of this in. People aren't sad right now, they're laughing. Celebrating. That was Ellis's spirit. MOVE TO --

SAM COOKE  
*... It's been a long time comin',  
but I know a change gone come. Oh,  
yes it will...*

EXT. RICE - ALLEY - NIGHT

CC exits RICE. She takes a seat on *something* out there. When she looks down the alley, we WHIP PAN into another FLASHBACK - present CC in the foreground. In the background, it's her and Ellis dancing. Some time ago. It doesn't really matter. It was a time when the love between them was solid. Present-day CC smiles for what feels like the first time all episode as she watches the past. But as the smile fades slightly, we INTERCUT CC's shifting emotions with --

SAM COOKE  
*... Lord, there been times that I  
thought I couldn't last for long...*

INT. RICE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (OUT OF TIME)

Service is wrapping up, Nina, Eden and Marco pour whiskey into paper cups. Cheers. Job well done. Zadie walks by, glances at Marco. It's a long, stolen glance. But this time? As their eyes linger on one another? Eden notices. *Hmmm...* Zadie keeps it moving.

MARCO  
Nice work, Chef.

All smiles. But we're off Eden thinking Eden things --

EXT. RICE - ALLEY - NIGHT

Back on CC. Smile gone, worry growing on her face.

SAM COOKE  
*...But now I think I'm able to  
carry on...*

INT. RICE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT (OUT OF TIME)

Eden approaches Golda, sits down next to her.

EDEN  
You were right. This is never going to be my restaurant. I have sacrificed enough for this family. Tell your bosses I want to meet.

EXT. RICE - ALLEY - NIGHT

Back on CC -- worry turning to fear, and dread. And sadness.

SAM COOKE  
*...It's been a long time comin',  
but I know...*

INT. RICE - WALK-IN REFRIGERATOR - NIGHT

Zadie grabs a bottle of wine. Marco enters -- stops cold when he sees Zadie. Here they are. Eyes locked. Feeling what they feel. ALWAYS. And in a flash, Marco is over to Zadie, taking what's his. And she lets him. Not because she doesn't have a choice, but because she wants him just as badly. *FIRE...*

SAM COOKE  
*...A change gone come....*

EXT. RICE - ALLEY

We're very TIGHT on CC right now, her anxiety reaches its peak. And now? For the first time? She does something else we haven't seen her do all episode. She cries. Quietly. But the tears flow down her cheeks. It's sad. But also poetic. Beautiful. Cathartic. Inevitable. Then --

YOUNG MAN (O.S.)

Hey.

CC looks up to see the Young Man (19). We've never seen him, but she has. She knows exactly who he is.

CC

You should not be here.

YOUNG MAN

I'm tired of being hidden. I want to meet my sisters. I want what's mine.

SAM COOKE

*...Oh, yes it will...*

Oh. Hot. Damn. And just when we thought there were no more secrets to be had. All is not well that appears well with the Rices. With this restaurant. And this is our --

**END OF SHOW**