

I am Larrika

The true story of Larry DeWayne Hoy Sr.

written by

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>FADE IN:

EXT. MISSISSIPPI COUNTRY ROAD THROUGH THE WOODS - DAY

A dirt path winds through thick woods with golden light pouring between the pines. GENEVA, 17 years old, heavily pregnant, walks slowly, one hand on her back, the other cradling her round belly.

She wears a faded dress. Her feet are swollen and dusty. Her breathing is labored. But her face is soft, hopeful.

GENEVA

(softly praying)

Lord please let this child be a girl, so I can teach her how to be a woman and give her a life that she deserves.

She pauses by an old sycamore tree, placing both hands on her belly now, tears in her eyes. Her voice cracks but remains tender.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

I promise I'll protect her... even if I'm the only one who does.

Geneva winces as a jolt of pain shoots through her.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

Oh-Lord...

She leans against the tree, breathing through the pain. A wet spot begins to grow on the hem of her dress.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

(whispers)

It's time...

Her water breaks. A flock of birds bursts from a nearby tree like an omen. Geneva gasps and grabs her belly.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

Hold on, baby. Hold on.

EXT. NORTHWEST MISSISSIPPI REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER - NIGHT -
FEBRUARY 16, 1979

A small hospital building under a cloudy Southern sky. The neon sign flickers faintly. It's late.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT - 10:54 P.M.

GENEVA HOY (17), young, sweat-drenched, wide-eyed, clenches her jaw through a final push.

A DOCTOR and TWO NURSES surround her. One holds her hand, whispering encouragement. Geneva's eyes dart wildly, her legs shaking.

NURSE

One more, Geneva. Push for me. You got this.

Geneva cries out. With a wet, startling cry — a baby is born.

DOCTOR

It's a boy.

Geneva collapses back, her head spinning.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

This story of mine starts with my birth. I was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, on February 16th, 1979, at 10:54 p.m.

A nurse hands the baby — LARRY DEWANE HOY — to Geneva. Her trembling hands receive him.

GENEVA

(whispering)

I'm gonna give you your daddy's first name, Larry.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My mother's name was Geneva Hoy. She was seventeen when she brought me into this world full of confusion and hatred. She never knew what life would lead me to.

INT. SMALL COUNTRY HOUSE - DOG WALK ROAD, DUBLIN, MS - NIGHT

A modest wooden home tucked off a dirt road. Inside, warm but dimly lit. MS. SIS (early 50s), wiry and gentle, rocks in a chair with baby Larry in her arms.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

We lived with a lady named Ms. Sis. Everyone called her that. She raised my dad when his mama couldn't. We became family.

INT. SMALL HOUSE - DAY

GENEVA sits with PEANUT (in his 20s, thin, distracted), as he rocks baby Larry clumsily.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My dad - everyone called him Peanut. Ms. Sis had raised him like her own, and now she did the same for me. She spoiled me. Carried me everywhere. Said I wouldn't stop crying unless she held me.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

LATE 1979 - FALL

Geneva lies on a twin mattress. Larry in a bassinet beside her. She stares at the ceiling, her hand resting on her belly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

A few months after I was born, Mama got pregnant again. With my little brother, Kevin.

MONTAGE - FLASHES OF TIME

- Geneva walking with Larry on her hip, stomach beginning to show.
- Peanut slipping into the house at night while Geneva paces.
- A marriage certificate on a table beside a flickering candle.

INT. SMALL CHURCH - DAY

Geneva and Peanut stand at a modest altar. A preacher says the final words of a rushed ceremony. Geneva wears a simple white dress. Larry is in her arms.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

They got married before Kevin was born. That's why I have Mama's last name - Hoy. Kevin got Daddy's last name - Garner.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - NIGHT - FEBRUARY 16, 1980

FEBRUARY 16, 1980

Geneva screams again. Another birth. Another nurse rushes to her side.

NURSE
He's coming fast!

A newborn baby's cry pierces the room.

DOCTOR
It's a boy.

Geneva gasps through the pain.

GENEVA
He's born... same day as Larry.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
My brother Kevin was born exactly one year later - on my birthday. February 16th. Two years. Two babies. Two different daddies in one man.

INT. SMALL HOUSE - DAY

SPRING 1983

Peanut storms in. Geneva is holding Kevin while Larry plays quietly on the floor.

GENEVA
You smell like perfume.

PEANUT
Don't start with me, Geneva.

GENEVA
Who is she?

PEANUT
I ain't doin' this tonight.

GENEVA
You think I don't know? I ain't stupid.

EXT. BACKYARD - BY THE FENCE - CONTINUOUS

Peanut is backed against a splintered fence. Geneva strikes him across the face. Scratch marks redden his skin. He tries to duck, but she hits harder.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

He wasn't faithful. He wanted to bring another woman into the house. While Mama was there raising his two sons. She wasn't going for that.

Geneva pushes him again. He stumbles back. Neighbors peek through blinds.

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

She whooped him by that fence. That's the day he learned - my mother was a fighter. She wasn't playing about her family.

INT. ANOTHER HOUSE - DAVENPORT, MS - DAY

LATE SPRING 1983

Geneva sits alone on the floor of a mostly empty room. Larry crawls nearby. Geneva folds clothes and wipes her eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Soon after, we moved to Davenport, leaving daddy with Ms. Sis. I don't know who we lived with. Maybe no one. Maybe Mama just needed to get away.

INT. SMALL HOUSE - EVENING

Geneva stands by the phone, clutching the receiver with a tense look on her face.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

She made calls. Packed clothes. Kept a smile for us. But I saw through it.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Geneva tucks Larry and Kevin into a mattress on the floor. She strokes their hair.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

She didn't want to move back into her parents' house. I know that. But she had no choice.

Geneva stares out the window. Silent tears. Larry watches her.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I knew she loved us. Even when she
was falling apart... she was Momma.

INT. EMPTY HALLWAY - DREAMLIKE

Larry walks alone. Voices echo around him.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I was born a boy named Larry. But I
was never her son. I was her
daughter, Larrika. Trapped inside a
body the world didn't recognize.

FADE TO BLACK:

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
If you've faced tough times, know
you're not alone. This story is
mine... but it might be yours too.

FADE IN:

EXT. SMALL HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - MORNING

The sun blazes gently down on a quiet Mississippi day. GENEVA sets two packed duffle bags on the porch.

She kneels, dressing her two boys: LARRY on her left hip, KEVIN on her right. She lifts them both into her arms, embracing them tightly. Her eyes are distant, but her arms are strong.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I remember that day. Clear as the
sun above us. Mama wrapped her arms
around us like we were the only
thing keeping her upright. And
maybe we were.

She rocks slightly, eyes on the horizon. Waiting.

Then — the distant sound of a vehicle crunching over gravel. An old white Fred Sanford pickup truck rumbles down the dusty road and stops in front of the house.

INT. OLD PICKUP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Behind the wheel sits an OLD MAN - tall, partially shaven, a weathered face. He wears worn-out work boots, overalls, and a faded cap. He lights a hand-rolled cigarette, puffs.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't know who he was. But Mama walked right up like she'd been waiting for him.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Geneva walks to the driver's side window. They speak briefly. Then she turns back and starts loading the truck herself - the old man doesn't move.

She returns, gently leading her boys forward.

GENEVA

This is my Daddy. We're going with him.

She opens the passenger door, lifts Larry into the middle seat, and places Kevin on her lap.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I sat beside him. Ernie Hoy. My grandfather. He smelled like old smoke and chewed rolled-up tobacco. Prince Albert in a can.

INT. TRUCK CAB - DRIVING - LATER

The road stretches endlessly. Trees blur past. Larry dozes, head on Geneva's shoulder.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

The drive was long. Boring. I nearly fell asleep. Until we pulled up to something I'd never seen before.

EXT. COUNTRY PROPERTY - DAY

A sprawling white house. Trees everywhere. People moving with purpose: women doing laundry, and men tending the yard.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

It was Booga Bottom, Mississippi. A
country world with a name only
black folks could make up.

Apple trees. Pear trees. A peach tree in bloom. A garden
bursting with vegetables. Hogs grunting behind a fence. Dogs
barking, cats napping in the shade.

Larry stares, wide-eyed.

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

I was scared of those hogs. But I
was also mesmerized. It was like an
enchanted world.

The pickup stops. Geneva gets out and starts unloading. This
time, others come to help.

INT. YARD - MOMENTS LATER

SUMMER THROUGH FALL 1984

Geneva and the boys are introduced around.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

That's when I met my grandmother.
Maddie D. Hoy. Everybody called her
Ms. Red. Though I never saw
anything red about her.

MADDIE D. HOY early 40s, short, big-breasted, with plaited
hair and missing teeth, stands in the doorway. She eyes
Geneva and the boys, then turns away.

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

She wore wigs, made her own
clothes, and had dentures she only
used for church or when she was
going shopping. But she could cook.
Lawd, could she cook.

One by one, the HOY FAMILY gathers.

- JAMES HOY, with a thick afro and a stare that lingers too long.
- WALTER HOY, with a jerry curl and bifocals, soft-spoken and cool.
- GARRY HOY, the tallest, youngest, always moving like he had a secret.
- AARON HOY, wiry and odd. A butterfly collar shirt half buttoned, sagging dress pants with huge cuffs.

Tennis shoes crushed at the back, worn as house shoes. Eyes red. Nose sharp.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Aaron looked strange. Something about him felt off, even then. I couldn't look away.

Then comes DOROTHY HOY, sweet and lighthearted, with an awkward, high-pitched laugh.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Aunt Dorothy was the baby girl. Pretty too, with a laugh like a chicken getting tickled. But she was kind.

INT. YARD - CONTINUOUS

Geneva hugs an approaching woman tightly - AUNT FLUKY.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 And then there was Aunt Fluky. She didn't live there. She was married, lived in Davenport Mississippi with her husband Jude and her kids - Mike, Niecey, and Tommy.

FLASHES OF MEMORY:

- FLUKY HANDING OUT ICE CREAM TO THE KIDS.
- LARRY PLAYING TAG WITH COUSINS.
- GENEVA LAUGHING FREELY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A WHILE.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She was my favorite. My sunshine. My safe space. When she visited, everything felt better.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - EARLY-MID 1980S - DAY

A sprawling rural property off a dirt road in Mississippi. No running water. Hogs grunt in the distance. Apple and pear trees stretch toward the sky. Dogs bark from under the porch. The heat hums like a living thing. A sagging clothesline sways with sun-bleached shirts. Chickens peck the red clay.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

In the early 80s, being in a new home and getting to know family you had never seen before was confusing as a kid. All I knew was that my brother and mother were my closest family, so I was very close to them, especially to my mother.

INT. BACK OF HOUSE - STORAGE AREA - DAY

Buckets lined up like soldiers. Average-sized white plastic containers stacked neatly. On closer inspection — they're old grease buckets. Some still smell faintly like fried pork chops and lard.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't like my new home at all. They used a lot of strange methods for drinking and bathing. There was no running water. So, they had these grease buckets — plenty of them. Cleaned out, sure, but I was disgusted that they used them for drinking water.

Larry sneaks a glance into one bucket. A mosquito floats on top. He scrunches his nose and backs away. He glances around to see if anyone noticed.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

GRANDDADDY, UNCLES, and WILLIE JOE (late 40s, lanky, with a limp and missing front tooth) load the old white Fred Sanford truck. Larry and KEVIN sit in the bed among the buckets and empty barrels, holding on tight as the truck jolts forward.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My brother and I used to tag along with my Granddaddy, uncles, and Granddaddy's friend Willie Joe. He stayed five miles deeper into the country.

(MORE)

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He always had a toothpick, a flask
 in his back pocket, and a story
 about the 'good old days'.

EXT. OPEN YARD - BACK OF TRUCK - LATER

The men dip buckets into a barrel of water. Two broken deep freezers without lids sit nearby, rusty and stained with streaks of rainwater and algae. The smell of warm metal and mildew fills the air.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 They'd haul water for everything -
 hogs, bathing, sometimes even
 drinking. If it hadn't rained in a
 while, we'd take turns filling
 those barrels, then dump that water
 into the deep freezers. Sometimes
 it took all day. Trip after trip. I
 remember my shoes soaked, and the
 mosquitoes eating us alive.

Larry tries to help lift a bucket. It sloshes and nearly tips. Willie Joe steadies him with a grunt.

WILLIE JOE
 Get out the way, boy! Watch your
 step. This ain't city livin'.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 No, it sure wasn't.

EXT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Granddaddy talks to the store owner. A long hose snakes from the side of the building. Buckets line up like a thirsty army. Larry watches the water pour in - slow and steady - as sweat runs down his forehead.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 My Granddad went to all the little
 stores around - places that let him
 get water for free. Nobody had
 running water out there... but
 everybody had outhouses.

EXT. CHURCH IN THE WOODS - DAY

A dilapidated wooden chapel sits quiet among tall pines. Behind it, tucked near a brushy field, sits a rickety outhouse, its door hanging slightly off the hinges.

A rusted nail holds up crumpled newspaper. A trail of flies buzz like a warning.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Even the churches had outhouses. A small, separate place outside the building – just a wooden box over a deep hole in the ground. They were always far away from the house or church, tucked near the edge of a yard or a patch of trees. Sometimes people didn't use toilet paper – they used newspaper or rags. And those outhouses? They stank like death.

EXT. EDGE OF YARD - NEAR WOODS - SUNSET

A cousin hurries through tall grass, glancing around nervously. He clutches the NIGHT BUCKET with both hands. The shadows stretch long, and something rustles in the bushes, stopping him in his tracks.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

At night, they had something called the "Night Bucket." Someone had to go fetch it from the outhouse before dark, so you wouldn't run up on a snake or worse. I hated it. It was pitch black out there. You couldn't see anything in those woods. The only light at night was pole light.

INT. BACK BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bathroom is a ghost: a dry, rusted tub with cobwebs, a toilet with a cracked tank lid, a stained bucket in the corner. Larry kneels over it, holding his nose. Kevin waits his turn, shifting from foot to foot.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

We had a bathroom, but it didn't work. Just a bucket, a whole lot of prayer, and a hope that nobody missed. And God help you if the lid wasn't on tight – you'd smell it all the way from the porch.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Larry lifts a jug beside the grease bucket. He pours water into a glass and sniffs it first before drinking. He gags slightly but drinks anyway, grimacing. Geneva sits in the corner silently, eyes tired.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

For a kid, all this was wild.
Rainwater baths, outhouse runs,
grease bucket drinking water... I
couldn't understand how anybody got
used to it. But the Hoy family did.

EXT. BOOGA BOTTOM - NIGHT

Crickets scream like sirens. The trees sway under a pale moon. Larry lies on a squeaky porch swing, staring up at the stars. A dog howls in the distance. The wind carries a strange mix of manure, woodsmoke.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Country life had its beauty. But
the funk, the fear, and the
weirdness stuck with me. I wanted
magic - not mildew and mop water.
But this was my new world now. And
I had to survive it.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. HOY FAMILY HOUSE - SATURDAY MORNING

Fall 1983 through Winter.

The sun rises behind a wall of tall trees. The sounds of chirping birds mix with the rhythmic clang of tools. The yard is massive - sprawling trees, thick brush, and patches of dead brown grass.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My granddad Ernie Hoy was a hard-
working man. Real hard. He took
care of his kids and all the
grandkids under his roof. Saturday
morning? You didn't sleep in.

EXT. YARD - LATER

BOYS - including JAMES, GARRY, AARON, and WALTER - gather branches, and stack them. The yard is alive with motion. A pile of sticks grows in the corner, far from the neat woodpile.

ERNIE HOY, sturdy and focused, monitors them with sharp eyes and a leather belt folded at his side.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Every Saturday, the boys were up early. They had to cut, clean, rake, and burn debris on the yard. If it was on the ground, Granddaddy made sure it got picked up.

EXT. BACKYARD - FIRE PIT - CONTINUOUS

Dry branches crackle and burn in a controlled pit. Smoke rises steadily into the blue sky.

LARRY and KEVIN sit on a nearby log, legs dangling, watching everything with fascination.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Kevin and I were still small, so we stayed out the way. Granddaddy kept an eye on us. We just played in the backyard a lot.

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE - CLOTHESLINE - DAY

GENEVA and the other WOMEN hang clothes to the line with clothes pin. White sheets sway beside overalls and children's clothes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

The womenfolk? Always busy. Washing clothes by hand, pinning them up, scrubbing floors, cooking supper.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The sound of bubbling grease. MADDIE (Ms. Red) flips fried chicken in a cast iron skillet. The aroma fills the house - and leaks outside.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I used to love the smell of fried chicken when Grandma cooked.

(MORE)

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 You could smell it from out in the
 yard. It made the whole day worth
 it.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - AFTERNOON

GARRY returns from school, tosses his books onto the bench.
 He joins ERNIE, WILLIE JOE, and the other men near the truck.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Uncle Garry would come home from
 school and they'd all head to the
 woods - cutting trees, loading them
 up on the truck, taking the wood
 home, unloading the truck, and
 building the woodpile for us to use
 and to sell in the winter.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EARLY MORNING

Sunlight creeps through the moss-covered trees. A beat-up
 pickup truck rattles down the road. In the bed, bundled
 firewood stacked high. GRANDDADDY drives, Larry sits beside
 him, eyes sleepy but curious.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 It was white folks that knew my
 Granddaddy from way back. He used
 to help their daddies by bringing
 them wood. Selling the wood to
 them. Their young kids grew up
 knowing my granddaddy when they
 were young. Back when things
 were... complicated.

EXT. WHITE FARMHOUSE - DAY

A white man in his thirties waits on the porch. He waves as
 Granddaddy pulls up. The two men nod in quiet respect. Larry
 watches the exchange.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 When their daddies passed away,
 they still called my Granddaddy.
 Every winter, every harvest. They
 knew who to trust.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - AFTERNOON

Rows of white stretch into the horizon. Granddaddy and UNCLE GARRY chop cotton. Larry watches from a distance, sitting beside a water jug.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

When cotton season came, he worked on some of the white folk's fields too. That was income. That was survival. My uncles chopped cotton at their fields too. It was what they did. What our people did.

MONTAGE - ERNIE AT WORK

- ERNIE HELPING A NEIGHBOR CHOP COTTON.
- LIFTING SCRAP METAL ONTO A TRAILER.
- BUILDING A CHICKEN COOP FROM SCRATCH.
- DELIVERING FIREWOOD TO WHITE FOLKS.
- COLLECTING CASH FROM FAMILIAR HANDS, YEAR AFTER YEAR.

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

White and black folks hired him for everything - yard work, hauling, moving trash, clearing land, even building sheds. It was generational. A rhythm of post-colonial Southern life - white families owned the land, and we showed up with labor. My Granddaddy knew how to hustle. He was respected. By everyone. Especially the Hoy Family.

INT. FARM SHED - SUNSET

White landowner hands Granddaddy a folded bill. No handshake - just mutual understanding. Granddaddy nods, tips his hat. Larry notices how quiet the moment is.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

It was business. Seasonal and necessary. They had the land. We had the labor. That's how it went.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DUSK

Larry stands at the edge of the field, silhouetted by the setting sun. His granddaddy and uncles work in rhythm — like they've been doing this their whole lives.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

It was generational. For them. For us. White or Black — that rhythm of post-colonial Southern life kept turning. My Granddaddy kept showing up. And people kept calling.

INT. YARD - DUSK

A quiet moment. GARRY fumbles with a stick. AARON says something slick. Suddenly —

WHACK! A leather belt snaps through the air. ERNIE appears out of nowhere.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Granddaddy was a man of discipline. Straightforward, hardworking, and determined. And, if you didn't obey him, there'd be consequences. That belt. Sometimes an extension cord. Sometimes a water hose. Granddaddy didn't play.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - MORNING

A mailman steps up the porch stairs. Ernie stands slowly, already knowing what day it is. A clipboard is handed over, and without hesitation Ernie marks a big crooked "X" in place of a signature. The mailman tips his hat.

MAILMAN

Appreciate you, Mr. Hoy.

Ernie nods once, tucks the check into his shirt pocket, then sits back down and rocks slowly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My granddad couldn't read or write. But he didn't need to.

(MORE)

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Every first of the month, he signed his name with an 'X' and everybody still knew who he was. That 'X' was enough. We knew what it meant. Everyone at that time knew that African-American's who didn't know how to read or write, would sign with a crooked 'X'. It was a black-person thing that was passed down generation to generation of enslaved African folks.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER NIGHT

Ernie sits on the edge of the bed, rubbing the back of his neck slowly, head bobbing up and down. A hot water bottle sits nearby.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Over time, he got a pinched nerve in his neck. Always rubbing it. Nodding to relieve the pain. The doctor told him to use a hot water bottle. That didn't help.

Ernie applies BenGay to his neck. His grimace tells the story. He adjusts a soft foam neck brace in the mirror.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Then came BenGay. Didn't work either. The doctor gave him some sponged braces to keep his head level. But nothing seemed to fix it. It remained with him for the rest of his life.

EXT. BACK PORCH - EVENING

SPRING 1984

Larry watches Ernie walk slowly across the yard, neck brace on, belt still swinging at his hip.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 That neck slowed him down. But in my eyes, he was still strong. Never giving up. Still trying. Still standing. Still providing.

She pauses.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He was all right in my book.

A beat.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But he wasn't my daddy.

FADE IN:

INT. HOY FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

A quiet bedroom. Sunlight spills in from the window. A worn dresser. An unmade bed. LARRY, no older than 5, stands in front of the dresser mirror. He wears one of MADDIE HOY's curly wigs, slightly crooked on his head.

He twirls once, watching the hair move.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I remember when my mother caught me wearing my grandma's wig for the first time. That's when I first told her—I'm not a boy. I'm a girl.

Geneva walks in and freezes.

GENEVA
What in the world—?

Larry turns to her, not scared, just honest.

LARRY
I'm not a boy, Mama.

Geneva stares, shocked.

GENEVA
(Shocked)
What did you say?

LARRY
I don't see a boy when I look in the mirror. I see a girl. I'm not a boy.

Geneva sits on the bed, absorbing this. Her eyebrows knit. Still pretty shocked.

GENEVA
Really?

LARRY

Yes.

He looks down, then locks eyes with her.

LARRY (CONT'D)

You always call me a boy. You buy me boy stuff. I don't know why y'all cut my hair... or my fingernails. I don't like pants. I like dresses.

Geneva BURSTS OUT LAUGHING.

GENEVA

Boy, you know you crazy.

Larry stands still. Calm. Determined.

LARRY

Mama, I'm not crazy. Why don't I have holes in my ears like you and Dorothy?

Her laughter fades. She looks closer. There's something unshakable in his voice.

GENEVA

(soft)

You serious, aren't you?

Larry nods.

FLASHBACKS:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Larry (around age 3-4) sits on the floor surrounded by toy trucks and plastic army men. He frowns, pushes them away. He reaches under the couch and pulls out a pink sock, holds it up like treasure.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Geneva lays out jeans and a flannel shirt on the bed. Larry stands in the doorway holding one of her dresses - a soft, faded floral one. He hugs it to his chest.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Geneva trims Kevin's nails at the table. Larry sits beside them. Maddie, cooking in the background.

When Geneva reaches for Larry's hand with the nail clippers, he pulls it back and shakes his head firmly.

LARRY

Don't cut them! I want 'em long.

Geneva raises an eyebrow.

MADDIE

What's that boy fussing about?

GENEVA

He's gonna come around. Don't worry.

INT. GENEVA'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Geneva walks in and pauses. Larry is standing in front of her mirror, wobbling in her church heels - giggling. He stumbles, catches himself, then strikes a sassy little pose. There's a concerned look on her face.

INT. FRONT YARD - SUNDAY

Kevin runs past in muddy overalls. Larry walks behind in clean clothes, dragging a blanket, watching Kevin with disinterest. Geneva kneels, brushing Larry's hair, puzzled.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

(softly)

You sure you don't wanna go play with your brother?

Larry shrugs. Maddie watches and gives a questioning look to Geneva.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Geneva tidies up. She notices something missing from Dorothy's bedside table. She peeps under the bed and finds Dorothy's old beaded purse with Larry's toys. She quietly picks it up and stares at it.

LARRY (V.O.)

I didn't have words for what I was feeling - but I knew what I liked. Mama noticed before I ever said a thing. And she didn't scold me. She just... watched.

INT. PRESENT - HOY FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

GENEVA

(More to herself than
Larry, spacing back in)
Is that why you always wear my
shoes? Always taking Dorothy's
stuff? Always crying over pants...
and getting your hair and nails
cut?

Larry just looks at her.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't feel sad. I wasn't angry.
I just wanted her to understand.
And she did. She really did.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Geneva peeks through the house. Everyone's outside - hanging
clothes, working in the yard. The coast is clear.

She closes the door and takes Larry's hand.

INT. DOROTHY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Geneva grabs a red bottle of nail polish from the dresser.
She sits Larry down and paints his nails carefully.

GENEVA

Blow on them. Let 'em dry.

She smiles. Larry blows excitedly.

INT. MADDIE HOY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

She places the wig back on Larry's head. Then sits him
between her knees, brushing it slowly. She sprays oil sheen,
fluffing the curls. Then opens her mother's drawer.

She pulls out a pair of clip-on earrings. Snaps them gently
on his ears.

Then-white pearls. She places them delicately around his
neck.

They both stand in front of the mirror.

GENEVA

What do you see?

Larry looks at her. Then into the mirror. Then he turns to the side, hand on hip, and SMILES.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

Oh my God... I can't believe I got a girl.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

That was it. That moment. My heart exploded. I felt SEEN. Finally.

Geneva pulls him close.

GENEVA

(whispers)

I know you're my daughter, but people in this house are not going to see you as a girl, they're gonna see you as a boy. But, I know you're my daughter now, so let's keep this a secret between us.

Larry nods yes.

She pauses.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. NORTHWEST MISSISSIPPI ROAD THROUGH THE WOODS - DAY

A dirt path winds through thick woods with golden light pouring between the pines. GENEVA, 17 years old, heavily pregnant, walks slowly, one hand on her back, the other cradling her round belly.

She wears a faded dress. Her feet are swollen and dusty. Her breathing is labored. But her face is soft, hopeful.

GENEVA

(softly praying)

Lord please let this child be a girl, so I can teach her how to be a woman and give her a life that she deserves.

She pauses by an old sycamore tree, placing both hands on her belly now, tears in her eyes. Her voice cracks but remains tender.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

I promise I'll protect her... even if I'm the only one who does.

LARRY (V.O.)

She went to Walmart with her daddy.
Hid the doll under a pack of
undershirts like it was contraband.
Waited 'til nobody was watchin' put
it in her pocket... Then gave it to
me like it was the world.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Geneva lifts the bed skirt and pulls out the doll. Larry
lights up.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

She used to call me in and show me
where she hid my doll. That doll
was my whole world. Nobody knew but
us.

FLASHBACK MONTAGE:

- Larry playing with the doll under
the bed.
- Trucks and action figures tossed
aside.
- Geneva smiling, watching from the
doorway.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

They always gave me GI Joes and He-
Man dolls. But Momma... she gave me
her heart.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Geneva and Larry walk together, hand in hand. She reaches
into her pocket and hands him the doll.

She starts showing him how to walk like a girl. How to move
his hands.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

She even taught me how to walk like
a girl. How to gesture. When it was
time to go back home—I became a boy
again. Because that was our secret,
and more than that, those were the
moments that were just mine and
mama's and no one could enter that
little world of ours.

INT. CLOSET - LATER

Geneva opens the closet, pulls back some boxes. Hidden inside a hole in the wall: a bag of girl clothes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

There was a hole in the wall by the bathroom. Where a trunk used to sit. That's where she hid my girl clothes.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Geneva lays out some new clothes she never wears.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Folks never understood why she didn't wear her new clothes. But I did. She was saving them... for me.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET

Geneva and Larry walk back to the house, their shadows long on the dirt road.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I love you, Momma. For everything.
For listening. For believing me.
For seeing me.

She pauses.

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

When it came to my mom... whatever she said, it meant the world to me.
I adore my mom.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. HOY FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUMMER 1984

A small, dimly lit room in the middle of the house. A creaky single bed. The wind whistles against the thin windows.

Larry sleeps at the head of the bed, curled into GENEVA's chest. KEVIN is at the foot, wrapped in a thin quilt. Geneva pulls Larry close, arms tight around him.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

A couple of years passed. We had settled in, more or less. But I was still glued to my momma and my brother. Every night, I curled up next to her just to feel warm, to feel safe.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

Grandma MADDIE HOY sits in her rocking chair. ERNIE sits beside her, silent. Larry and Kevin stand awkwardly in front of them.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Then one day, Grandma called us out to the porch. Granddaddy was there, but he didn't say a word.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Geneva stands behind a curtain that separates the living room from the bedroom hallway. Her face is tight with concern. She peeks through just enough to listen.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Maddie leans forward, her voice sharp.

MADDIE

From now on, y'all don't call her Momma no more.

Kevin and Larry blink. Confused.

MADDIE (CONT'D)

Y'all call her Gene, now. And you call him Daddy, and me Momma.

She nods toward Ernie, who shifts in his seat but stays silent.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Kevin and I looked at each other—completely lost.

MADDIE

Her name is Geneva. You call her Gene now. Do you hear me?

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Geneva steps back into the shadows, eyes wide, lips trembling. She was shocked.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Larry and Kevin walk inside. Geneva meets them in the hallway and grabs Larry's hand.

GENEVA
(quiet but firm)
Listen to me, boy. I'm your momma.
My mama is your grandma. My daddy
is your granddaddy. Don't forget
that.

She crouches down to his eye level.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
But while we live here... do what
she says.

Larry nods slowly. His mother's eyes shine with pain.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
Say yes ma'am. Yes sir. Always.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Maddie watches from a distance as Larry re-enters the house.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I saw it on her face. My Momma was
shocked. Hurt. But she couldn't
fight it.

MADDIE
If I catch y'all calling her Momma
again—I'm gonna whip y'all.

Larry freezes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I didn't even know what a whipping
was. My momma never laid a hand on
us. But I found out quick.

INT. KITCHEN - DAYS LATER

Maddie sits in the kitchen window, watching Larry and Kevin play outside.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Grandma watched everything. Waiting
for us to slip.

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Larry runs up to Geneva, laughing.

LARRY
Momma! Look!

From the porch:

MADDIE (O.S.)
(Yelling)
She's not your mama. I'm your mama.
(Pause)
Bring me a switch.

INT. BACK BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Larry stands in front of Maddie, tearful. She raises a switch. *WHIP!* Red marks bloom on his arms as she is whipping constantly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
It took a lot of whippings for me
to say it. To call her Gene. Kevin
caught on faster. But me... I was
too close to my Momma.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry sits in silence. Geneva gently rubs salve on the red marks on his arms. Her hands shake.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I used to run to her crying,
showing her the marks. She couldn't
stop it. She was trapped.

EXT. BESIDE THE SHED - NIGHT

Geneva kneels beside Larry, hidden behind the old wooden shed.

GENEVA
It's okay, baby... Call me Gene.
Just while we're here.

She wipes a tear from his cheek.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
It's okay, baby.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER THAT WEEK

Larry stands before Maddie.

LARRY
Gene, can I go outside?

GENEVA
Okay boy.

Maddie smiles for the first time.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
The first time I called her Gene...
Grandma smiled. Like she'd won
something. But she didn't know—when
she was gone away from the house, I
still called my mama, Momma.

FADE TO:

MONTAGE 1:

- LARRY AND GENEVA STAND IN THE KITCHEN MAKING BREAKFAST.
MADDIE WALKS IN. AS SOON AS MADDIE WALKS IN THEIR SMILES
CHANGE AND TURN TO A COLD EXPRESSION.

LARRY
(taking the plate)
Thank you, Gene.

GENEVA HOLDS THE COLD EXPRESSION. MADDIE EXAMINES THEM AND
LEAVES.

THEY BOTH LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND GIVE A SILENT CHUCKLE.

FADE TO:

MOTAGE 2:

- LARRY PLAYS OUTSIDE WITH KEVIN AND FALLS DOWN. HE STARTS CRYING.

Geneva runs outside.

LARRY
Mama, I got hurt!

Maddie walks outside, following Geneva. She turns back in, gets her switch and gets back outside.

Meanwhile, Geneva holds Larry in her arms.

MADDIE
(approaching angrily)
I told you to call her Gene, not
mama!

Maddie start whipping Larry constantly while still in Geneva's arms.

INT. BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Geneva and Larry sit on the bed. She hugs him close.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I knew my grandmama wanted me to
treat her like my Momma and to love
her like I loved my Momma. But I
couldn't.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maddie glances at Larry. He avoids her eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I kept my distance. She watched me,
hoping I'd see her the same way I
saw my Momma. But I couldn't fake
that. That love... it wasn't for
her.

INT. PORCH - NIGHT

Ernie sits alone. Silent. Smoking. Not watching. Not intervening.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Granddaddy never said a word. Never
picked sides. He just stayed out of
it.

EXT. SHED - NIGHT

Geneva sits with Larry under the stars. He lays his head in her lap.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

She couldn't stop it. Couldn't protect me from the whippings. But she never stopped being my Momma. Never stopped holding me, even when the whipping might have hurt her.

She strokes his hair.

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

And I never stopped loving her for that.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI COUNTRY ROAD - EARLY MORNING

Summer 1985

The sun peeks above the treetops. The HOY HOUSE fades in the background as the yellow school bus arrives, brakes squealing softly.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - CONTINUOUS

GENEVA boards first, holding little LARRY's hand. KEVIN trails behind.

The BUS DRIVER, mid-50s, heavysset, smiles warmly.

BUS DRIVER

Mornin', Geneva. Got yo' babies today.

GENEVA

(nods, nervous)
Yes.

Geneva pauses, looks at the BUS DRIVER and MS. THURMOND (40s, dignified, warm eyes but guarded).

She clears her throat, lowering her voice.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

Look... I know this gon' sound crazy... but... my son? He ain't no boy.

Bus Driver and Ms. Thurmond exchange looks. A soft laugh escapes them both.

BUS DRIVER
(half chuckle)
What you mean, Geneva?

GENEVA
I mean what I said. He my daughter.
I feel it. I know it in my soul.

MS. THURMOND
(soft chuckle)
Oh, Geneva...

They laugh gently, thinking she's joking.

Larry's chest tightens. His little fists ball up. He watches his mama, who tries to explain further but they keep dismissing her.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
They laughed at my Momma. But she
was serious. And when they
laughed... somethin' inside me
boiled over.

Suddenly, LARRY stands up in the aisle. His little voice cracks with rage but full of conviction.

LARRY
I AM A GIRL!

The entire bus freezes. Laughter stops instantly.

Bus Driver's smile disappears. Ms. Thurmond stares directly at Larry now.

Larry stares back – defiant, breathing heavy, but fully present.

LARRY (CONT'D)
I'm not a boy. I'm a girl.

A long silence. The air gets heavy.

MS. THURMOND
(small smile, finally seeing)
Alright baby. Okay.

MONTAGE: "THE SECRET ROUTINE"

- INT. SCHOOL BUS - BACK SEAT - MORNING

Geneva sits Larry down at the very back of the bus. She pulls a large paper bag from under her coat - filled with neatly folded GIRL CLOTHES.

- Geneva quickly helps Larry undress from his boy clothes, tucking them away while glancing nervously around.

- She slides on a soft yellow dress with lace sleeves, little white socks, and small black shoes.

- Geneva smooths down the dress, gently brushes Larry's hair with a small comb, then quickly applies lip balm.

- Larry beams. His shoulders relax.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My Momma carried a bag every morning - full of girl clothes. She dressed me like her daughter right there on that bus.

INT. HEADSTART CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom bustles with children's noise. Alphabet charts line the walls.

LARRY, now fully dressed as a girl, sits with the girls playing house.

Teachers glance over occasionally, observing him quietly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Ms. Thurmond must've talked to the other teachers. 'Cause not long after, they brought me Raggedy Ann and Andy dolls. And I always picked Raggedy Ann. She was my Momma.

FLASH CUTS:

- Larry cradles Raggedy Ann gently.
- Ms. Thurmond watching quietly, approvingly.
- Another teacher whispers to Ms. Thurmond and nods.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Little Black girls jump rope with brightly colored barrettes bouncing in their hair.

Larry watches them longingly while fidgeting with his own short hair.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

All the girls had barrettes. Pretty barrettes. I didn't have any. So I started slippin' 'em in my pocket.

FLASH CUTS:

- Larry delicately unclips a pink barrette while a girl laughs, distracted.
- Back home, Geneva pulls handfuls of barrettes from Larry's pockets.

GENEVA

Baby... you can't wear these. Not here.

LARRY

Why not, Mama?

Geneva lowers her voice, glancing around the house nervously.

GENEVA

They won't understand, baby. Not here. They'll talk. And I don't want nobody hurtin' you.

Larry drops his head in silent frustration.

MONTAGE CONTINUES: THE SECRET LIFE

- INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNINGS

Geneva dressing Larry each morning before school.

- INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Larry laughing with the girls, playing dress-up with dolls, living freely as himself.

- INT. SCHOOL BUS - AFTERNOONS

Ms. Thurmond gently redresses Larry back into boy clothes before drop-off.

- INT. BUS DEPOT - MORNINGS WITHOUT GENEVA

When Geneva couldn't ride, Ms. Thurmond removes Larry from the bus before breakfast and changes his clothes herself - brushing his hair into soft ponytails.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

If Mama couldn't make it in the morning, Ms. Thurmond did it for me. She understood. She cared when others didn't. She was special to me.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Geneva folds girl clothes and tucks them carefully inside the hole in the wall behind boxes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Mama bought me those clothes or got 'em donated. But nobody in that house had a clue.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Larry sits on Geneva's lap, clutching her tightly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

But all that changed when Kevin started Headstart. Mama didn't want him telling what we were doing.

FLASH CUTS:

- Kevin staring confused as Geneva dresses Larry on the bus.
- Kevin asking questions Geneva couldn't answer safely.

EXT. HOY HOUSE - DAY

Geneva zips up Larry's boy jacket. She smooths down his hair one last time.

GENEVA

(whispering)
 Alright now... you my daughter in here-
 (points to his heart)
 -but out there... we gotta keep it secret, baby.

Larry nods, understanding far too much for his young age.

EXT. BACKYARD — EVENING

Larry sits beneath the large oak tree, staring up at the sky as fireflies blink.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was learning how to live a double life real early. Inside me was Larrika, waiting to come out. And Mama knew that too.

FLASH CUT:

- Larry spinning gently in the mirror, wearing a dress alone when no one's home.
- Geneva watching from the hallway, her hand pressed against her chest, both proud and broken.

INT. BEDROOM — NIGHT

Geneva hugs Larry tight, whispering softly.

GENEVA

Ain't nobody gon' ever take you from me, baby.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Living a double life wasn't easy. But Mama's love kept me whole. She saw me. She accepted me. She loved me exactly how I was.

FADE IN:

FALL 1985

INT. AUNT DOROTHY'S ROOM — MID-DAY

The room sits still, lit only by soft rays breaking through thin curtains. A few toys are scattered on the floor — simple plastic trucks, action figures, and a small worn blanket. LARRY sits on the couch, playing quietly, humming to himself.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I remember the day like it was yesterday. I was sitting in Auntie Dorothy's room. Playing. By myself. Thankfully not my doll.

The door creaks open. UNCLE AARON steps in, moving slow, deliberate. His eyes carry a strange gleam.

UNCLE AARON
 (soft, sweet)
 Hey baby... Hey sweetie.

LARRY freezes slightly, confused and uncomfortable.

UNCLE AARON (CONT'D)
 Look at you, sittin' there all
 pretty.

He steps closer, kneeling beside Larry. His hand slowly reaches out, gently rubbing Larry's arm.

UNCLE AARON (CONT'D)
 (whispers)
 You my little baby, ain't you?

He moves his hand to Larry's thigh, rubbing higher on the leg, his breath hot and close. Then he winks and blows Larry a kiss.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I felt fear... and disgust... all
 at once. I didn't understand what
 he was doing, but I knew it was
 wrong.

Larry flinches and pushes Aaron's hand away. But Aaron moves closer again, touching him once more.

UNCLE AARON
 Shhh... Don't be scared now.

Suddenly, Larry SCREAMS — loud and sharp.

UNCLE AARON (CONT'D)
 (shocked)
 Shhh!

Aaron jumps up and bolts out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LARRY runs into the living room, still panicked. He barely catches his breath when GENEVA comes rushing inside from the porch.

GENEVA
 (breathless)
 What's wrong?!

Larry is and shaking

GENEVA (CONT'D)
Come on baby, tell me what
happened!

She pulls him close, crouching down.

LARRY
(whispers)
Aaron was touching me.

Geneva's eyes widen. Her face instantly shifts from concern
to pure RAGE.

GENEVA
(stern)
Where is he?

She doesn't wait for an answer. She storms toward the back of
the house.

INT. BACK BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aaron stands near the dresser, pretending nothing happened.

GENEVA
(boiling)
What the FUCK you doing touching my
baby?!

Without hesitation, Geneva attacks him – punching,
scratching, clawing. Aaron tries to block but she fights
wildly, her hands flying.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LARRY listens as he hears the commotion escalate.

GRANDDADDY ERNIE enters the living room, silent but tense.
MADDIE follows behind.

INT. BACK BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

MADDIE rushes in, pulling Geneva off Aaron.

MADDIE
(screaming)
Why y'all fighting?!

GENEVA
(tears in her eyes)
He was TOUCHING my boy!

Aaron, panting, shirt torn, face scratched and bleeding,
DENIES it.

UNCLE AARON

She lyin'! I ain't done nothin'!

Suddenly Maddie turns cold, furious – at GENEVA.

MADDIE

Grab her!

Aaron grabs Geneva's wrists tightly, holding her down. Geneva struggles, hollering.

GENEVA

(screaming)

Let me GO!

Maddie storms to the closet, yanking out a thick leather belt.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LARRY struggles as someone grabs him from behind, trying to hold him back. He wriggles free and runs toward his mother.

INT. BACK BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Larry bursts into the room.

He sees Aaron gripping Geneva's arms, blood dripping from Aaron's torn face and scratched neck. Maddie raises the belt high and WHIPS Geneva across the back.

GENEVA

(yelling)

Ahhh! Stop!

LARRY

(sobbing)

STOP! LEAVE MOMMA ALONE!

Larry jumps on top of Geneva, trying to shield her with his tiny body.

MADDIE

(snarling)

Move boy!

She whips them BOTH now. Larry grabs at the belt with tiny hands, but he's too weak to hold it.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I wasn't strong enough to stop her.
 All I could do was lay over my
 Momma, hoping she'd stop beating us
 both.

Maddie keeps whipping nonstop.

GENEVA and LARRY cry together. The screams echo through the house.

Suddenly – GRANDDADDY ERNIE storms in.

GRANDDADDY ERNIE
 (roaring toward Maddie)
 Woman, have you lost your
 MOTHERFUCKIN' MIND!?

Maddie freezes. Ernie snatches the belt from her hands.

GRANDDADDY ERNIE (CONT'D)
 If you ever pull some shit like
 this again–

He cusses her out furiously. Then turns to Aaron.

GRANDDADDY ERNIE (CONT'D)
 And you – you sick motherfucker – I
 oughta knock your head off!

Aaron cowers in the corner. Geneva sobs silently, holding Larry tightly.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Night falls. The room is dim. Geneva and Larry sit on the bed. Their skin marked with red welts, their faces streaked with tears.

LARRY
 (whispers)
 Momma... I hate it here.

Geneva strokes his hair softly.

GENEVA
 (whispers back)
 I know baby. But this is the only
 place we got.

They hold each other tightly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 That's the day I started feeling
 trapped. That house became a
 prison. But no matter how trapped I
 felt... I had my Momma. And she had
 me.

They rock slowly, their breathing steadying.

FADE OUT.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (for audience)
 Sometimes, telling your truth is
 the bravest thing you can do.
 Speaking even when you're scared -
 is the way out, even as a child,
 speaking saved me that day... Not
 for so long though.

EXT. HOY FAMILY BACKYARD - DAY

SUMMER 1987

The sun beams over a quiet Booga Bottom afternoon. The yard
 sits still except for LARRY (around 7 now) and KEVIN playing
 near the large woodpile.

In the center of the yard, a big round block of wood sits on
 the dirt. Balanced across it - a long, flat wooden board. The
 boys have turned it into a makeshift seesaw.

LARRY
 Wheeee!

KEVIN
 (laughing)
 Push it higher!

The board rocks back and forth, squeaking slightly with each
 bounce.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 A year and a half had passed since
 that day with Uncle Aaron. He never
 touched me again - but he never
 stopped staring. Always staring.

The yard is empty except for the boys. The rest of the family
 is gone.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, Larry notices GENEVA stepping outside from the back porch.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then one day, everything changed.

Geneva walks slowly across the yard, her hand to her stomach. Larry watches closely – his eyes filled with quiet concern.

LARRY
(whispers to Kevin)
Gene is throwing up.

Kevin shrugs, distant and disconnected.

KEVIN
She always sick.

Larry, feeling a strong sense of responsibility, climbs off the seesaw and heads toward his mother.

EXT. BEHIND THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Geneva leans over by the shed, vomiting violently. Her body shakes with each retch. Tears stream down her face. The contents of her stomach land on the dirt – greenish, with slimy white foam floating over partially digested pinto beans.

LARRY
(terrified)
Momma... are you alright?

Geneva wipes her mouth, her face pale.

GENEVA
(voice breaking)
I don't know, baby... I don't know
what's goin' on with your momma.

She leans her back against the shed, eyes lifting to the sky as another tear falls.

Geneva opens her arms. Larry rushes into her embrace. They hold each other tightly in silence.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I was scared. I didn't know if I
was strong enough to take care of
her. But I had to try. Kevin stayed
distant, but me—I couldn't leave
her like that.

EXT. BACKYARD TO HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Hand in hand, Geneva and Larry slowly walk back toward the house.

INT. GRANDPARENTS' BEDROOM - LATER

The sun beams through thin curtains. Geneva sits in a chair by the window, pulling Larry onto her lap. They sit quietly, her arms wrapped around him.

GENEVA
(suddenly)
Baby... make me a promise.

LARRY
(innocently)
What's a promise?

Geneva takes a deep breath and explains gently.

GENEVA
It means... if I can't speak for
myself one day, you speak for me.
You protect me.

Larry turns and looks into her eyes, sensing the gravity of her request.

LARRY
I promise.

Geneva smiles with watery eyes and hugs him tightly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
That was the last time I hugged my
Momma in her right mind.

INT. HOY FAMILY HOUSE - SERIES OF DAYS

MONTAGE:

- Geneva sitting on the edge of her bed, rocking and talking to herself.
- Cutting her own hair unevenly in front of the mirror.
- Staring blankly at the wall while holding a comb.
- Larry calling out "Momma" as she walks away silently.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Every day after that, she changed.
She became distant. Like she wasn't
in her body no more. My brother and
I were lost. I called her
"Momma"... she would say, "Boy, I'm
not your momma."

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Family members bustle around like nothing is wrong. Geneva
sits quietly, folding towels mechanically.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Nobody acted like anything was
wrong. It was like they saw a robot
sitting there.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry stares at Geneva from across the room. Tears pool in
his eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I tried everything to reach her. I
hoped if I called her "Momma," she
would snap out of it. But she
didn't.

INT. BACKYARD - DAY

Geneva wanders barefoot through the yard, whispering to
herself. Larry watches from the porch, helpless.

INT. BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

Larry and Geneva play together, laughing, practicing how to
walk and gesture femininely.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

She taught me how to be myself...
how to be feminine. She called me
her secret daughter. Nobody else
knew. But now, she was becoming
unknown... Unbothered. Or maybe too
bothered.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

The moon glows above the house. Larry sits alone under the porch, holding his doll close.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Without her protection, Uncle Aaron started again. Touching me worse than before. There was nobody to fight him off.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Geneva sits still, unresponsive. Larry approaches, whispers:

LARRY
Momma... I miss you.

No response.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
But she couldn't hear me anymore.

EXT. WOODS BEHIND THE HOUSE - EVENING

A breeze blows as Larry sits on a log, staring into the woods.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I believe Grandma had something to do with it. I believe she did voodoo on my Momma.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Maddie watches Geneva closely, almost satisfied, while Geneva obeys commands mechanically.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
She always wanted to be our mother. She wanted that attention. That title. But I couldn't give it to her.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry stares at his mother during one of her spells, silently crying.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Even as a child, I couldn't
understand the bond she wanted. But
I knew what real love was. My Momma
gave me that.

INT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Granddaddy Ernie sits smoking silently, disconnected from the
chaos inside.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Granddaddy never stepped in. He
just stayed out of it.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry speaks directly to the audience now, almost breaking
the fourth wall.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I inherited my voice from my Mama.
My boldness. My refusal to back
down. And I carried that promise I
made to my Momma... all the way to
this very day.

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The front door stands open, creaking slightly in the wind.
AARON leans against the doorway, grinning. Outside, GENEVA
sits in a wooden chair on the porch, her eyes blank, mumbling
to herself in a daze.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Uncle Aaron started acting out. My
momma had her breakdown, and we
were left on our own.

AARON looks around, then slowly winks at LARRY and KEVIN.

AARON
(singsong)
Hey boys...

He blows a kiss. The boys look down, silent.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

He knew Momma wasn't there mentally anymore. And he loved it. He did what he wanted – sometimes, right in front of her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

AARON stands tall, facing the Larry.

AARON

Y.... y... y... y'all Momma's crazy. Sh.. she lost her goddamn mind. Just like a fucking bat.

He laughs loudly.

Outside, GENEVA rocks back and forth, oblivious.

LARRY sits frozen. Aaron steps forward, slowly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My uncle Aaron would say the most nastiest things, that a person could say to a child. To make us feel powerless and ashamed.

Suddenly, AARON lunges, digging in his nose, trying to smear boogers on LARRY'S shirt.

LARRY shoves him hard. As Larry tries to run, Aaron grabs his arm.

Larry still struggles to get away.

LARRY

(firm)
Leave me alone!

Larry struggles to push back – a quick scuffle. Aaron stumbles.

Aaron balances himself back.

AARON

C..cc...ccome here baby, I'ma make you my girl friend.

Larry finally shoves him away forcefully.

Then Aaron pulls Larry towards him.

LARRY
 (Screaming)
 Stop! Let me go.

Aaron leans over trying to kiss Larry in his mouth.

Larry manages to snatch his arm away from Aaron's grip and runs outside.

EXT. ROCK ROAD OUTSIDE HOUSE- CONTINUOUS

Larry runs towards the road in front of the house.

Aaron comes out, at the front door entrance peeping outside/stalking looking at Larry.

GENEVA rises from her chair and slowly walks towards the road, with vacant eyes. She walks past LARRY. He watches her with tears streaming down his face.

LARRY
 (softly)
 Momma...

GENEVA just keeps walking.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Sunlight comes in from the curtains. LARRY sits on the bed alone. The door creaks open. AARON enters quietly, sitting too close.

AARON
 (playful)
 Y..y.. Yyou miss me?

He puts a hand on LARRY'S arm. LARRY pulls away.

LARRY
 Stop.

AARON tries to touch his leg. LARRY shouts louder.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 (yelling)
 Stop!

From another room:

GRANDMA (O.S.)
Aaron! Leave that boy alone!

AARON chuckles, standing.

AARON
(grinning)
I...I...I'm just playing with the
boy.

He exits casually. LARRY curls up on the bed.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
It happened too often. Always him,
trying to claim me like I was his
own. He disgusted me. Unzipping his
pants in front of us at every
chance he got, blowing kisses,
calling me his girl friend and what
not.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

LARRY watches the other women in the family laugh and play.
AARON walks by, ignoring them - eyes only on LARRY.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
He didn't treat the other girls
like that. Only me. And I hated how
I looked. I knew I was a girl...
inside. But no one could see me.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

LARRY stares in the mirror. Tears stream down. He clutches a
tattered blanket to his chest.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I felt smothered, unseen and
unheard. Trapped in a family that
only saw a boy.

INT. PORCH - DUSK

KEVIN sits beside LARRY. They share a quiet moment.

LARRY
(soft)
Why me?

KEVIN doesn't answer - just squeezes LARRY's hand.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Aaron targeted me all the time.
 More than Kevin. Maybe he saw
 something in me I didn't understand
 yet.

INT. BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

LARRY curls into himself under a thin sheet, eyes wide open.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 But I survived. And that's what
 this is about - survival. Speaking
 truth. Giving voice to the girl I
 always was on the inside.

FADE OUT.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 If you've ever felt trapped,
 afraid, unseen - I see you. You're
 not alone anymore.

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

The sun bears down on a quiet, rural yard. A television hums faintly from inside. Birds are chirping. Everything feels calm.. too calm.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

LARRY and KEVIN sit cross-legged in front of the television, watching cartoons. Laughter from the TV contrasts the stillness around them.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Being a kid out there was hard.
 Real hard. I was stuck in a male's
 identity. The only one who knew I
 was a girl... was my momma. And she
 wasn't there anymore. Not really.

Suddenly, AARON enters the room. His presence shifts the air. The boys go silent.

AARON
 W..w..w..wwhat y'all watchin'?

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Every time my granddaddy, grandma, my uncles and aunty Dorothy were gone away from the house, he would never miss the chance to attack us. Most definitely me.

EXT. AROUND THE HOUSE - VARIOUS

LARRY walks slowly along the side of the house. His eyes are wary.

Suddenly - SPLASH! Water hits Larry's face.

He gasps, startled. AARON stands behind the shed, grinning.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

My uncle Aaron would hide in the shadows. He would hide behind doors, behind trees. He would even hide in the shed, waiting for me to walk close enough, and he would dash water on me, spit on me... and dig his nose wipin' boogers on me just for nothin'. Then he would laugh doing it. He kept doing that for many years.

INT. BACKYARD - DAY

KEVIN is on the ground by the apple tree. AARON looms over him.

AARON

(gruff)

B..b..bb.bring your ass here boy.

Aaron grabs him, and throws him on the ground, trying to pull Kevin's pants off. Then Aaron unzips his pants. Kevin struggles. In a flash Larry dashes into the frame throwing himself on Aaron's back.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

He picked on Kevin when he couldn't get to me. And I had to keep watch of my baby brother.

They wrestle Aaron off Kevin. Breathless, scraped, they run.

EXT. FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

KEVIN and LARRY run in different directions through the tall bushy fields. AARON stumbles after them, shirtless, clutching a Colt 45 beer bottle.

AARON
 (drunk, shouting,
 stuttering)
 Y..y...yy'all gonna be mine! You
 hear?

He stumbles, then turns back toward the house.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 He gave up. Got dressed. Took off
 to Alligator, Mississippi.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Larry lay on the bed, taking a nap. Laying asleep on his back. The creak of a door opening. Fainted sound of TV runs in the background.

A shadow looms. It's Aaron. Only in his underwear. He hovers over Larry and watches him sleep for a while.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I think I was in second grade when he became obsessed with me. That day... I couldn't fight him off. He got on top of me and sat down hard on my stomach. Both knees on top of my arms so that he could lock me under him.

Aaron leans over him, the smell of liquor strong. His eyes red, his breathing heavy. He grabs a pillow and presses it over Larry's face.

LARRY flails.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I was screaming. Trying to fight him off me. I tried to breathe, feeling like he was killing me. I thought I was gonna die.

Aaron pulls the pillow up—then tries to kiss him.

Larry jerks his head side to side.

Aaron presses the pillow back down.

Larry's muffled cries grow louder—

LARRY
(screaming)
Kevin help me!!

AARON
Y..y..y you gonna give it to me boy.

LARRY
(screaming)
Kevin! Help!!!

Suddenly, KEVIN bursts through the door and leaps onto AARON's back.

While KEVIN is on AARON's back, LARRY gets his arms free, and then they push Aaron off the bed, and run outside.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
My baby brother saved me that day.
I will never forget it.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Both brothers run hard, barefooted through the fields.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
We ran 'til we couldn't hear him no
more.

Aaron's outside chasing them through the fields in his underwear.

He keeps going after them but is slower than the boys.

AARON
(screaming)
Bb..bb..bbring y'all ass here.

The boys disappear. He Gives up and turns around.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

LARRY and KEVIN sit on opposite beds. Quiet.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Me and my brother never talked about what we were going through, we didn't need to, because that was the life that we were living out there in the house in Booga Bottom Mississippi. It was normal for us facing Aaron all the time in that house.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

GENEVA rocks in her chair, humming softly, lost in her world.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Our home should've been safe. But it wasn't. And deep down... we both knew we were born into hate.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

LARRY lies awake, tears running into his pillow.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Every child deserves love. Deserves peace. Looking back now... I know that. I didn't have it then - but I know what every child deserves.

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

A somber morning cloaks the house in a haze. Birds chirping. The breeze rattles a loose screen door. Stillness feels like warning.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

LARRY sits on the floor quietly playing with his toys.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

As a child... all of it was confusing and hurtful to me. I was broken down. Fighting grown men.

(MORE)

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And still... trying to understand
 that they were my own blood.

Suddenly, GARRY enters. His frame fills the doorway. Quiet.
 Mean. His eyes lock on Larry.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Aaron was the Pitbull. But then...
 there was Garry.

He approaches, silent. Without a word, he GRABS Larry's chest
 -rough, quick. Larry SLAPS his hand away.

LARRY
 (Stunned)
 Ouch! Stop, that hurts!

Garry pauses. His eyes glow dark and red. No smile. Just that
 same demonic stare as Aaron's.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I looked in his eyes and saw the
 Devil. Again.

He walks off, not a single word spoken.

EXT. BACK PORCH - DAY

Larry steps out cautiously. Garry passes Larry again. Just a
 glance. Larry winces.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 He never touched me like Aaron. But
 he was slick. He was real slick,
 grabbing me hard sometimes in my
 chest and because of his grabbing
 me so hard in my chest, I started
 growing breasts. And they didn't
 know I wasn't a boy.

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Larry stands in front of a mirror, shirt off. He quickly
 turns and pulls on a new shirt.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I was growing breasts. My uncles
 joked about it, laughing at my girl
 titties. But for me... it was proof
 that the girl inside was fighting
 to show herself.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Larry dances to music. Carefree for a moment.

Suddenly—GARRY grabs him from behind.

She SCREAMS.

He throws Larry on the bed. Larry's legs fly up. Garry climbs on top—fully clothed—but his body grinds against Larry's.

Larry fights. HARD.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

He threw me like I was nothing. Got on top of me... started hunching me like I was his woman too.

Larry turns his head. SCREAMS again.

Then—Garry STOPS.

He gets up. His eyes are bloodshot, red and burning with rage.

He leaves.

EXT. YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Larry stumbles outside, shocked. Garry sits alone. Looks at Larry like he is invisible, looking right through him, unbothered.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't understand why this kept happening to me, or why God didn't see this. I was being hurt by family members that were supposed to protect and love me. But I guess, God was gone.

FADE IN:

INT. LARRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The light from a small lamp glows softly. LARRY, around 8 years old, sits at the edge of the bed, staring out the window at the stars. His eyes are puffy from crying.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

When I was little, I didn't have the words for what I felt...

(MORE)

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 just an ache in my chest and a lump
 in my throat. Being touched and
 messed with by grown men—it broke
 something in me I couldn't explain.

He clutches his pillow tightly. His fingers tremble.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Telling a grown person, "Stop,"
 "Leave me alone," or "Get away from
 me"—that was my cry. And they
 didn't listen. Not once.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Little Larry stands in a corner, silent, while AARON—
 stuttering—leans too close.

AARON
 Y-y-y-you... you m-my lil' sweet
 th-thang, ain't ya?

He reaches out. Larry jerks away, breath catching. Aaron
 laughs like it's a game.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I stayed ready, 'cause with Aaron,
 you never knew. He'd smile at you
 then spit on you five seconds
 later. I lived in fear and unrest.
 The house was a warzone with my
 uncle Aaron around.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Young Larry walks alone under the stars. He looks up at the
 sky.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I used to beg God every night.
 Why'd He put me out here with these
 people? Why'd He take Momma's mind
 and left me and Kevin all alone?

He clasps his hands in prayer, tears rolling.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I asked God to bring my Momma's
 mind back. I asked Him to let me
 outlive all my uncles... so I could
 see each one of them in their
 casket... but God never answered.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry closes the door, sits cross-legged on the floor. He pulls out a small mirror and looks into it.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

When I looked in that mirror... I didn't see a boy. I saw her again. I saw *me*—the girl I truly was. And she smiled at me. Loved me like nobody else did.

He puts on a towel like long hair and twirls, laughing quietly to himself.

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

She wasn't touched. She wasn't dirty. She was pure. She was pretty. She was me.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Maddie walks by Larry changing shirts.

GRANDMA

Boy, you growin' girl titties like a woman!

She laughs. LARRY forces a smile, but his eyes drop.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

They didn't know it, but they saw her too, but they just didn't understand. And maybe that's why Aaron hated me so much. Maybe he saw her in me.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry stares at the ceiling, voice soft and full of sorrow.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I thought dying was easier than living this life. I used to wonder— who would miss me? Who even loved me? I was suicidal. I saw killing my self as the only solution out of that every day hell.

He curls into himself, whispering.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But the girl inside me kept me
 alive through it all. She was the
 only part of me they couldn't
 break.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Larry brushes his teeth, looking at himself in the mirror
 again.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Larry was the first one who saw
 her. He loved her and protected
 her. And shielded her from all the
 family members especially the
 uncles...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Larry, around 10, plays alone with sticks and dirt. The
 Southern summer hums around him, a faint lawnmower in the
 distance. From the back porch, MADDIE calls Larry, holding
 something in her hand.

MADDIE
 Come here, boy.

Larry stands, brushing dirt from his shorts. He trots up to
 the porch. Grandma holds out a worn out black wig.

MADDIE (CONT'D)
 Throw this wig in the garbage by
 the woodpile. I don't want to see
 it no more.

Larry watches her confused. Reluctant and hesitating to take
 the wig.

MADDIE (CONT'D)
 (Firmly)
 Go on now!

LARRY
 (softly)
 Yes Mamma.

He takes it. His hand lingers on the wig.

EXT. WOODPILE - MOMENTS LATER

Larry walks slowly toward the burnt garbage can near the woodpile. He stares at the wig, eyes clouding with emotion. Looks around.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I couldn't throw the wig away. That wig... it was me. It was her.

Larry lifts his shirt, tucks the wig underneath, and hurries back inside.

INT. BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Larry carefully locks the door. He tiptoes toward the bed, reaches beneath the mattress, and hides the wig under the mattress.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The house is silent. Larry looks around. No one is around. He moves toward the bedroom now.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Larry walks in the bedroom. He lifts the mattress up and pulls out the wig.

He turns on the old radio. Soul music crackles through the static. Slowly, lovingly, he puts the wig on.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
When I put it on... I saw her. The little girl I always was meant to be.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Larry dances in front of the mirror. Gentle, graceful, and free. Mimics the hand movements his momma once showed him. A smile breaks across his face.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I spun...twirled... swayed... smiled. She was untouched, whole and beautiful. She never got hurt or touched like Larry did.

INT. AUNTIE DOROTHY'S ROOM - FLASHBACK - EVENING

LITTLE LARRY, maybe 7, sits on the floor with G.I. Joe dolls. He watches AUNTIE DOROTHY (early teens), applying makeup while looking at the mirror.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I watched my Auntie Dorothy like
 she was paintin' a picture...
 makin' magic on her face.

Larry mimics her, touching his own cheeks and lips.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Radio hums. Larry now wears clip-on earrings and a white pearl necklace. He dabs a tiny bit of lipstick on his lips.

He twirls slowly, admiring the girl he becomes in the mirror.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She kept me sane. She gave me life.
 She gave me hope to be myself and
 to be free.

INT. BEDROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Music blares. Larry dances. Doesn't hear Grandma calling.

MADDIE (O.S.)
 Larry!

A beat. Then a butterknife slips into the doorframe. The door creaks open.

Grandma steps in. Stops cold. Larry freezes, he has his wig.

MADDIE (CONT'D)
 Cut that noise down boy... take off
 that wig! Didn't I tell you to
 throw it away!

Larry stands frozen, unable to say anything. With a very sad face.

Maddie doesn't yell and just walks away.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Larry clutches the wig close to his chest.

EXT. WOODPILE - EVENING

Back at the garbage can. Same routine. Larry tucks the wig back under his shirt, and walks back inside and puts the wig in his dresser drawer.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 She never said a word after that.
 But every time she wanted one of
 her old wigs thrown away, she would
 always call me for some reason.

INT. BEDROOM - DAYS LATER

Larry opens a drawer. The wig, hidden in a plastic bag, is still there.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Maybe she knew. Maybe she
 understood. Maybe, just maybe...
 she was protectin' me too...
 Maybe...

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY - LIVING ROOM

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Uncle Aaron was a constant presence
 that never left. I always had to
 tussle and fight with him.

The house sits in a heavy silence. Sunlight filters through thin, worn curtains. LARRY sits stiff on the couch. His legs twitch, ears tuned. Every door in the house is open.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I kept every door wide open - front
 and back and every room. I needed
 room to run when he came looking.

From the kitchen window, a flash of silver. A Colt 45 beer can rests on the porch railing.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 That beer always came before he
 did.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A pair of eyes flicker behind the curtain. LARRY peeks.

UNCLE AARON steps into view on the porch. Wiry. Bloodshot eyes. Sinister grin.

He leans into the window and blows a kiss.

LARRY is already gone.

EXT. FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

LARRY sprints toward the field. Dry weeds part as he dives into cover. Thorns scrape his arms.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I used to hide like a soldier in
military position - belly to dirt,
barely breathing heavy.

AARON steps into the yard. He whistles, low and playful.

AARON
L.L..L.Larry... you out here, boy?

LARRY tries to peek from the weeds.

Aaron spots him.

AARON (CONT'D)
F..f..fffound you.

LARRY bolts. AARON chases.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

LARRY runs into the woods. Passing trees. Branches slash past him. He doesn't look back.

He runs and gets toward the end of the woods and enters another field with tall grass.

Larry has nowhere else to run so he dives into the tall grass to hide.

He stays there in the weeds.

Aaron comes and stops at the end of the woods where Larry hides, unable to see him through the tall weeds.

He gets upset, and throws a mud boulder from the field into the tall grass where Larry is hiding. Trying to locate him, waiting for him to make a sound or move.

But Larry stays still. Out of frustration Aaron turns back into the woods walking away cussing.

AARON (CONT'D)
I..I...I'm a get your little ass
bboy. In due time.

Larry military crawls watching Aaron leave. He crawls toward the ditch, keeping an eye on Aaron going back into the woods.

INT. LARRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight spills through the window. LARRY lies tense in bed.

BANG! BANG! - someone pounds the back door.

AARON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
O...o..open up! You hear me!?

GRANDDADDY (O.S.)
Open that door, boy!

LARRY clutches his blanket, frozen.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I didn't want to let my uncle Aaron in because I knew what was coming. And what he was gonna do. But, if my granddaddy said, "open that door" I had to open it.

Larry gets up.

INT. BACK DOOR - NIGHT

Larry to the back door, unlocks and runs back inside.

Aaron stays and heads to the kitchen getting something to eat.

INT. LARRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT MOMENTS LATER

Then a silhouette appears at the bedroom door.

It's Aaron. He jumps in bed drunk. As soon as he jumps in and grabs Larry, they tussle under the covers. Aaron is aggressive with Larry. Larry gets upset.

LARRY
Get off of me, Aaron! You're drunk!

AARON
C..c..come here sweetie, I miss you!

LARRY
Stop touching me there!!! I'm so tired of you!

AARON
I..I..I..want you baby! You're
mine!

Larry shoves him away!

LARRY
Imma tell it! Let go of me!
(frowning)
Enough!

Larry jumps out and dashes out of the room.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

LARRY walks, barefoot and angry, through the kitchen to his
grandparents' room.

He nudges the door open and whispers.

LARRY (CONT'D)
(Whispering)
Mama

MADDIE
(Sleepy)
Hm?

LARRY
Uncle Aaron... He's touching me
again.

She doesn't sit up. Just pulls the blanket closer.

MADDIE
(Sleepy and grumpy)
Shut up! Don't tell nobody and go
back to bed.

LARRY stares.

Granddaddy stays asleep beside her undisturbed.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
My heart dropped. I thought that
since my grandmother didn't say
anything about the wigs, that she
was protecting me. But, I was so
wrong.
(Pause)
She was just evil towards my Momma,
my brother and me because she was
in control and we were just living
as guests in her house.

EXT. DITCH BY THE ROAD - DAY

LARRY tosses rocks into a deep ditch. Sharp, quick throws. His back is to the house.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I stayed close to that ditch.
It was the only place I could run
fast from.

FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE - A SCREAM.

KEVIN (O.S.)
No! Stop! NOOO!

LARRY jumps up and sprints toward the house.

INT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

KEVIN is on the floor, AARON pinning him down. KEVIN kicks and screams.

LARRY dives forward, grabs AARON by the hair, and yanks.

AARON yells and jerks back. KEVIN breaks free.

Both boys scatter in opposite directions and run out.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He cared about his hair. That's how
I got him off us. It was slowly
that I started learning how to make
it stop and confuse him.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

LARRY and KEVIN sit side by side, quiet. The air hums with crickets.

KEVIN draws in the low porch light. LARRY watches the road.

He leans his head on KEVIN's shoulder.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
We never said nothin'. But we knew
what "home" really meant.

FADE IN:

EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING

A faded red brick school stands under a cloudless Mississippi sky. The school bell rings in the distance. Kids pour off the yellow bus, laughing and shoving each other.

Larry steps off the back of the bus—head down, backpack slung low, moving with the weight of something deeper than teenage years should carry.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 By the time I got to 7th grade at Broad Street High in Shelby, I was already carrying a full-grown sorrow in my chest. On the outside, I looked like any other country boy, laughin' and playing. But on the inside, I was torn up—bad.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sweaty shoulder pads slam into lockers. Boys laugh and horseplay in the narrow rows. Larry sits at the far end, quietly wrapping his fingers with tape. One is bruised and bent—nail cracked halfway up.

He winces.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I was really good at football and so was my brother Kevin. But I hated it because it used to break my nails. I hated breaking my nails, the roughness, and what it tried to make me be. But between football and school, I didn't have to be at that house... anywhere around Aaron, and I was going to do anything to stay away from that house. So I kept playing, even when I didn't like it.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - SUNSET

Practice winds down. A few players do sprints. Larry jogs hard, sweat pouring. The sky bleeds orange and purple behind him. A whistle blows.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Sometimes, that field was my only way out. It didn't matter that I didn't love it. It kept me from being alone in that house with Uncle Aaron.

INT. HALLWAY - BETWEEN CLASSES - DAY

Locker doors slam, and the girls giggle. Larry leans against a locker talking to two girls. He's smiling and trying to be smooth while they flirt and touch his arm.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I had girlfriends and even lost my
 virginity to two of them on the
 same day. Folks would've thought I
 was some kinda player.. but it
 wasn't me, not really. That didn't
 excite me like it was supposed to.

INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM - STALL - LUNCH HOUR

Larry locks the stall. Sits on the toilet, lid closed. Buries
 his face in his hands and sobs silently.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 All my homeboys bragged about girls
 and sex, so I did it, too. I acted
 the part, but afterward, I just
 felt emptier and lonelier. I felt
 shallow because inside, I knew I
 wasn't one of them boys. I was
 their homegirl... But I couldn't
 tell no one.

EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

A group of teens pass around a bottle, laughing and talking
 loud under a streetlight. Larry leans against a tree at the
 edge of the group, cigarette in hand, eyes glassy.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 In Alligator, Mississippi, I
 started drinking, smoking weed,
 hanging out on porches and store
 fronts. Trying to be just one of
 the guys. But every time I got
 quiet, my heart screamed to tell
 the truth.

FLASHBACK - INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry lies awake, staring at the ceiling. The sound of a belt
 buckle. A door creaking, and heavy breathing.

BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

Larry turns his head away, blinking back tears. The laughter
 around him fades in his ears.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Sometimes, I wanted to tell them
 about Aaron. I wanted to talk about
 what he did to me and Kevin and
 what happened in that house. And I
 wanted to tell 'em...

(MORE)

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I wasn't their "dog" or their
 "bro." I was a girl-inside. Always
 had been, but I never seemed to get
 the words out.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - EVENING

The coach drops off players one by one. Larry sits at the back, staring out the window. The sun is low and golden across the cotton fields.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 After practice, the bus rides home
 felt like slow-motion death
 sentences. I'd cry on the way to
 that porch. I hated my life to the
 core of my soul. I hated the mask I
 wore for everybody who knew me as
 Larry.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Larry stares blankly at an open textbook. Kids laugh around him. A teacher's voice drones on, muffled. Larry clenches a pencil so tight it snaps.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I couldn't think straight. Couldn't
 focus on no math or English. Not
 after sleeping in that bed... with
 him creeping in with his hands all
 over me.

EXT. BRUNO'S STORE - NIGHT

Old neon buzzes above the rural corner store. Music bumps from nearby cars. Teenagers loiter and laugh. Larry sees Aaron near the doorway, holding a beer.

Aaron locks eyes with Larry and winks.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He started hanging out at Bruno's,
 where me and my friends went. Out
 there, he acted like a saint.
 Laughing and shaking hands,
 pretending like he was so harmless.
 But from across the lot, when
 nobody was looking, he'd wink at me
 just to make my skin crawl.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Larry fumbles a pass. Coach yells from the sideline. Larry doesn't care.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I stopped caring about football.
 Stopped caring about school. The
 pain was too big to keep hiding,
 so, I dropped out in the 8th grade.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Larry walks with a new group. Bandanas. Loud voices. A fight breaks out across the road. Sirens echo faintly in the distance.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I joined a gang. Started living
 wild. Drugs, violence, running
 these streets. Thought maybe if I
 was rough and strong enough... he'd
 leave me alone.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Larry lays in bed, wide-eyed in the dark. A faint creak. A shadow moves past the cracked door.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But no matter how rough I got and
 how much trouble I found, Uncle
 Aaron never stopped. He didn't care
 what I was. Or how broken I already
 felt.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The house is quiet. KEVIN sits at a cluttered table, drawing. His pencil scratches softly on the paper.

LARRY walks in slowly. But today, he's different.

He's wearing a wig, lipstick, and a pair of clip-on earrings. His posture is straight, proud, trembling just a little.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I was tired... Tired of hiding and
 tired of hurting. I just wanted
 someone, anyone, to see the real
 me.

Kevin looks up. Blinking, a small smile tugs at his face. He shakes his head, not in judgment, but in disbelief. Then he shrugs and returns to his drawings.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That was my baby brother. He didn't ask no questions. He just... let me be. And for the first time, I felt like I could breathe in that house.

INT. BEDROOM - ANOTHER DAY - AFTERNOON

LARRY stands in the mirror, adjusting the wig slightly. There's music faintly playing from a nearby stereo. She's radiant, a soft beauty peeking through the years of hiding.

From the other room—YELLING.

KEVIN (O.S.)
Stop! Stop, man!

LARRY'S eyes go wide.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aaron looms over Kevin. His back is turned, and he's cornering Kevin, voice low and vicious.

Suddenly—

Larry steps into the room, fully dressed as her true self.

Aaron turns and his face goes pale and eyes go wide.

LARRY
Leave my brother alone.

Aaron stares like he's seen a ghost.

AARON
Wh...wh..wh.who the hell are you?

LARRY
I'm Kevin's big sister.

Larry stands tall, hands on his hips, unwavering.

Aaron stammers. Then turns and bolts—right out the front door.

Kevin looks at Larry. They are both stunned. But for the first time, Aaron runs.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 He didn't know what to do with me
 like that. Dressed in my truth. He
 was scared. And for once, I wasn't.

MONTAGE - A WEEK WITHOUT GIRL MODE

- Larry walking through the house in boys' clothes.
- Aaron watching him coldly from the kitchen.
- Larry curled in a corner, arms hugging his knees.
- Aaron grabbing at him. Kissing. Rubbing. Whispering filth.
- Spitting on him. Laughing like it is nothing.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But the week I wasn't in girl
 mode... he came back full force.
 Grabbing me, spitting on me, trying
 to force himself on me. So then,
 one Sunday night, I had enough.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Darkness blankets the fields. Larry walks fast down the dirt road. The wind howls around her. Gravel crunches beneath her boots.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I didn't care how dark it was. I
 needed to get away. I walked to
 Alligator, Mississippi—to a club
 called Shelly Coopers.

INT. SHELLY COOPERS CLUB - NIGHT

There is noise of the crowd talking. Pool balls clack, and a deejay spins records behind a neon-lit booth.

Larry walks in, scanning the room.

To his left he catches Aaron already there. Already watching his every step.

Larry freezes.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I saw him. He was right there. Like
 he was waiting for me, and as if
 he'd beat me to it. My heart
 dropped.

Larry turns and bolts outside.

EXT. OUTSIDE SHELLY COOPERS - CONTINUOUS

Aaron follows, with his voice low, fake, and sweet.

AARON

B.. b..b..b..bbaby... come on.
G..g..ggo on back to the house.
I'll be there soon, sweetie.

He touches Larry's arm gently.

Larry recoils. Then SHOVES him hard.

LARRY

Don't touch me!

Aaron steadies himself. Reaches again.

Larry SHOVES him again—harder.

Aaron yells.

Larry SNAPS.

FIGHT SEQUENCE - FRONT AND BACK OF THE CLUB

- Larry punches Aaron square in the face.
- They tumble into a violent scuffle.
- Larry throws him into the dirt.
- Larry gets on top of him.
- Larry's hands wrap around Aaron's neck.

People rush out of the club, screaming.

BYSTANDER

Stop! That's your uncle!

Larry doesn't hear it. His face is pure rage. His hands squeeze tighter.

Aaron's face turns purple. His eyes flutter.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was done. He wasn't gonna touch
me again. Not ever.

Suddenly—TOMMIE NAWLS appears, throws his arms around Larry's neck from behind, pulling him back into a chokehold.

Larry gasps and lets go.

Aaron collapses, unconscious.

The crowd surrounds them. Sirens in the far distance.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 That was the night when it all
 finally ended. Uncle Aaron never
 touched me or Kevin ever again.

INT. DARK STREET - ALLIGATOR, MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A dimly lit street corner. Sirens echo faintly in the distance. A group of teens in oversized jackets scatter in the dark.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 After I whipped my Uncle Aaron's
 ass outside that club in Alligator,
 things didn't calm down for me. If
 anything, I spun out harder. I was
 lost in the streets, doing crimes
 and chasing chaos. And the law
 finally caught up.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Late 1996

The gavel SLAMS. A JUDGE looks down sternly from the bench.

JUDGE
 Five years. Three suspended. Two to
 serve at Mississippi State
 Penitentiary. RID program
 eligibility granted.

Larry stands tall but blank-faced, nodding slightly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 They gave me a shot. R.I.D.-
 Regimented Inmate Discipline.
 First-time offenders only. Do six
 months, follow every damn rule...
 and maybe walk out early on
 probation.

INT. MISSISSIPPI STATE PENITENTIARY - BUNK ZONE - DAY

January 1997

Steel bunks. Sweaty bodies. Military bark from the guards.

Larry walks in with a small duffel. He scans the whole scene and to his surprise, he finds familiar faces.

Former classmates from Broad Street High nod at him. They're wearing the same uniform. Gang signs flash, but there's peace in the room.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Some of the guys I knew from Shelby
 were in the program too. Opposite
 gangs, sure—but we had history.
 School hallways. Lunchroom brawls.
 There was respect.

INT. PRISON YARD - DAY

A group of inmates—young, wild, mixed races—laugh and shove
 each other while doing pushups sloppily.

They break into play-fighting. One guy flips a tire instead
 of jogging.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 We were reckless as hell. That
 whole zone didn't give a fuck. We
 bucked every chance we got.
 Morning, night—didn't matter.

INT. PRISON CAFETERIA - DAY

A narrow space packed with steel tables and clanking trays.
 Larry and his friends eat and joke loudly.

At the far end—a lone, bulky black GUARD walks in. It's D.I.
 GALLION.

He's solid muscle, jet black skin, bald, mean. A real
 monster.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 There was one man we didn't buck
 against. D.I. Gallion. Rumors
 swirled about him from the moment
 we were processed in Rankin County.
 Nobody wanted to believe it. Till
 we saw it live.

A loudmouth BULLY starts mouthing off at Gallion across the
 table.

BULLY
 I ain't doing shit, fuck you—

CRACK!

Gallion SLAPS him so hard the room freezes.

In one swift move, he lifts the man by the neck, chokeslams
 him straight through the table. Wood splinters. Gasps ring
 out.

He then yanks the bully up by the waistband, hauls him like luggage into a dark, locked room.

D.I. GALLION
GET THE FUCK OUT. RACKS. NOW!

The zone scatters. Dead silence.

SCREAMS ECHO from the locked room. The sounds of a one-sided beatdown shake the walls.

Then silence.

The door swings open. Gallion DRAGS the bloody bully by the arm, drops him beside his rack.

D.I. GALLION (CONT'D)
I don't give a damn what set you rep. On my shift? I'm the HEAD gang member.

He stares down every inmate. Then turns and walks away.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Nobody crossed him again. Ever. The moment he came on duty, you couldn't hear a pin drop.

INT. PRISON BUNKHOUSE - NIGHT

Sweat drips off faces. Two men—LARRY and a MASSIVE INMATE—circle each other. They THROW PUNCHES, connecting heavy shots.

Inmates chant. The fight escalates—until—

SMACK!

D.I. Gallion appears out of nowhere and SLAPS both of them hard.

He grabs them by the neck—one in each hand—LIFTING them clean off the floor.

EXT. GUARD STATION - CONTINUOUS

Gallion stands in front of both inmates.

D.I. GALLION
I ain't gon' beat your asses tonight. But squash that shit. I've been watching. You two get along when you want to.

He stares them down.

D.I. GALLION (CONT'D)
 You got weeks left. Make a choice.
 Squash it... or I'll smash both of
 you.

Larry and the other guy exchange a long look. Then a nod.

EXT. PRISON GATES - DAY

Six months later

Larry walks through the gates into freedom. A bag over his shoulder. Eyes forward.

EXT. CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

Larry hugs his AUNTIE FLUKY tightly. A warm moment. Relief on both their faces.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I moved to Clarksdale to live with
 my Aunt Fluky. I was finally out.
 Free from that prison... and far
 away from my Uncle Aaron. But
 peace? It still didn't come easy.

EXT. CLARKSDALE STREET - DAY

Sunlight spills across the cracked pavement as Larry walks home, his shirt sticking slightly to his back in the Mississippi heat. He's fresh out of prison, clean but restless, trying to walk straight but still tangled up in street life.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Uncle Aaron was a constant presence
 that never really left. I always
 had my fight or flight mode on,
 even when I wasn't locked up. Even
 when I got out.

He adjusts the bag slung over his shoulder, his eyes darting out of habit to scan the streets. Some things were different now. But that wired feeling—like the world could snap any minute—was still the same.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. IESHA'S HOUSE - EVENING

1998

Larry (18/19 years old) sits on the floor in front of the TV. His head's halfway braided. Iesha, his girlfriend, walks in and out of the room arguing on the phone. He's not listening. He's somewhere else.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I was still with Iesha, but it was falling apart like rusted porch steps. She was angry all the time, and honestly, so was I.

A knock on the door. Iesha's friend walks in, bringing another woman with her. Larry's braider stops mid-plait.

The woman—VETTE—stands in the doorway, hands on her hips, wearing tight denim shorts, a red T-shirt, gold hoop earrings that swing when she tilts her head, and leopard fur house shoes. Red lipstick pops against her smooth brown skin. She smells like cocoa butter and confidence.

Larry freezes mid-blink.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Damn. I ain't never seen anything like her before. I knew in that moment—I was gone. I was going to be hers, one way or another.

EXT. CLARKSDALE NEIGHBORHOOD - TWO WEEKS LATER - DAY

Larry walks along the road when he sees Vette coming toward him with one of her girlfriends. His pulse jumps.

Vette catches his eyes, smiles soft and sweet.

VETTE
 Hi!

LARRY
 What's down?

VETTE
 (smirking)
 You Iesha's boyfriend?

LARRY
 Yeah... but we on bad terms.

They walk side by side now, naturally falling into rhythm.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I told her I was interested. Told her me and Iesha were done for real.

(MORE)

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She didn't wanna start no mess, but
 she gave me her number anyway. Told
 me where she lived. And when I
 asked her name...

VETTE
 Vette.

She says it with a glimmer in her eye, and Larry stares just
 a second too long.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 That was it. I ain't never seen a
 smile like hers before. Something
 in her eyes told me I was finally
 safe.

INT. IESHA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Larry lies awake next to Iesha, eyes wide open in the dark.
 The ceiling fan hums overhead. He finally whispers into the
 night.

LARRY
 My uncle... did things to me when I
 was a kid.

Iesha shifts beside him but says nothing. The silence is
 thick. He stares at the ceiling, waiting for something more
 than sympathy. It never comes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Iesha didn't know how deep it went.
 And I couldn't explain it. Not
 fully. Not yet. My mind was drawn
 elsewhere, and she wasn't as fully
 involved as I wanted her to be. So,
 I guess it was time to let her go.

FADE TO:

EXT. VETTE'S WINDOW - NIGHT

Vette tiptoes across her bedroom, opens the window, and waves
 Larry inside. He climbs through quietly, grinning.

They whisper, laugh. Vette shushes him as they stumble across
 the room. Suddenly—a creak in the hallway. Her sister MIKI's
 voice echoes faintly from the other room.

MIKI (O.S.)
 Vette, what you doing?

Vette panics. Larry ducks into her closet. She slams the door gently. Silence.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I almost got caught so many times,
I started feeling like I lived in
that closet. But I didn't care. I
just wanted to be near her.

INT. AUNTIE FLUKY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sunlight filters through yellow curtains. Larry and Vette sit close on the floor, passing a joint back and forth. The ashtray is half full. Marvin Gaye plays low on the stereo.

They laugh about nothing. The moment feels safe.

Then, silence. A shared look.

One breath leads to another. And then, they make love—tenderly, awkwardly, like two people trying to forget the past by touching the present.

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

That day changed everything. After
that, she came over more. I snuck
through her window at night. We
started to build something real.

INT. VETTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

They lie tangled together beneath thin sheets. Vette rests her head on Larry's chest. He stares at the ceiling again.

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

But I never told her about the
little girl in me. The one I saw
every time I looked in the mirror.
I couldn't. I wasn't ready. And it
ate me up.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Larry and Vette enter the club hand in hand. They meet a bunch of friends and have drinks.

Flashes of them dancing and having drinks.

A masculine but gentle guy crosses them while they dance, and makes eye contact with Larry.

Larry keeps staring at the guy, and keeps getting distracted.

He keeps looking at the stranger, but also tries to distract himself by talking to Vette.

LARRY
(To Vette)
Let's get outta here.

VETTE
But we just got here.

Larry locks eyes with her.

LARRY
(Holding her closer)
But I've got better plans for us.

VETTE
(Giggles)
You're unbelievable.

INT. VETTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT CONTINUOUS

Larry and Vette enter her bedroom and talk in hushed voices so they don't wake anyone up.

VETTE
(undressing)
So, what's that plan you had for me?

Larry looks around, as if he's trying to come up with an excuse to have left the club.

LARRY
(Distant)
We could watch a movie.

VETTE
Seriously? You brought me home before the party even started. For a movie...?

LARRY
I just wanted to spend some alone time with you. Without all that noise.

VETTE
Okay..

She looks at Larry and understands something about him is off. But doesn't say anything.

A while later, as they watch the movie, Vette tries to get intimate with Larry, but he keeps getting away by making excuses.

Vette touches his arm playfully. Larry points toward the screen.

A few moments later, Vette has fallen asleep.

FLASHBACK:

Larry is in the club, and he sees the stranger, while he dances. And then he keeps looking back at him. His eyes follow the stranger.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was so confused. I adored Vette. She was a sweetheart, a diva. But, I felt really attracted to that guy at the club.

INT. CHURCH BATHROOM - NIGHT

Larry, now in pressed pants and a white shirt, leans over the sink. Tears spill down his face. His hands grip the porcelain. He looks into the mirror—

And sees not Larry—but her. The girl from childhood. Larrika.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I started going to church. I wanted answers. I was tired of lying to myself, tired of being confused. But every time I looked in that mirror, she was there. And I wasn't strong enough to tell anybody—not even Vette.

EXT. CLARKSDALE STREET - DUSK

Larry stands outside of Vette's house. He stands awkwardly. Vette stands in the doorway, arms crossed, trying not to cry.

VETTE

So, this is it? we're breaking up?

Vette stands there, teary eyes.

LARRY

Yes. I'm sorry.

VETTE

Why?

LARRY

I need answers from God. I need clarity. I don't want to feel lost like this.

Vette just stares at Larry trying not to cry but tears run down her cheeks.

Larry goes ahead and hugs her one last time.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I loved her enough to let her know that I needed to find myself. Told her I was getting saved. That I had to change.

He leaves, and keep moving forward, not looking back.

INT. FOUNTAIN OF LIFE COGIC - DAY

Sunbeams streak through stained glass. Larry sits in the pew, Bible in hand, looking down but not reading. Pastor Phillips preaches from the pulpit.

PASTOR PHILLIPS

God don't make mistakes, children.
But He will make a way.

Larry's jaw tightens. He looks up with glassy eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I became Church boy Brother Larry. I did everything right. But no matter how many suits I wore, or scriptures I memorized... I never saw Larry. I only saw her.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. FOUNTAIN OF LIFE C.O.G.I.C - SUNDAY MORNING - CLARKSDALE

The church is packed wall to wall. Ushers fan sweating women in thick stockings and white gloves. The Hammond organ hums beneath the fire of the preacher's voice.

PASTOR PHILLIPS (O.S.)
 When the devil knocks – don't
 answer! When temptation calls – let
 Jesus pick up!

People shout "Amen!" and "Say that!" from the pews.

Larry sits alone, stiff in a borrowed suit. His Bible is open, but his eyes are locked on the cross behind the pulpit. His foot taps – not from the music, but nerves.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I came to that church looking for
 peace. For a way to kill the thing
 inside me that I thought was wrong.
 I figured if I just prayed hard
 enough, fasted long enough, maybe
 the feelings would go away. Maybe
 the girl would die quiet.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - BAPTISMAL ROOM - NIGHT

The air is damp, still. Larry stands barefoot in a white robe, staring at the water in the baptismal pool. Deacon James steps forward with a smile.

DEACON JAMES
 You ready, Brother Larry?

Larry nods. But his heart pounds like a drum.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I thought maybe if I let them dip
 me in that water, I'd come up
 different. Stronger. Straighter.
 Fixed.

They pray and the Deacon lowers him into the pool. There's a splash.

Larry comes up gasping, water dripping from his face.

CONGREGATION (O.S.)
 Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord!

Larry wipes his face, trying to believe the feeling in his chest is salvation. But it ain't.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 But the thing was... she didn't
 drown. She came up with me.

INT. AUNTIE FLUKY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Larry sits in front of the mirror, eyes locked on his reflection. His church clothes lie on the floor in a heap.

He slowly pulls out a small cosmetic bag from under the bed. Lip gloss. A wig cap. A pair of silver hoop earrings.

He touches the earrings like they're holy.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Every Sunday I wore a tie. But every Monday night, I was in that mirror, whispering to her. Telling her I saw her. That I missed her.

He slides on the wig. Stares at the girl in the mirror.

She's quiet, but she's strong.

INT. FOUNTAIN OF LIFE C.O.G.I.C - WOMEN'S PRAYER MEETING - DAY

Larry slips into the back. He watches the women pray in circles, holding hands and speaking in tongues. He longs to join them.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't wanna be in the pulpit. I wanted to be with the women. I wanted to praise how they praised. Cry how they cried.

One woman, Sister Delores, turns and gives him a look.

There's no hatred, she's just confused.

Larry lowers his head and leaves before the final prayer.

INT. VETTE'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Larry knocks softly. The door creaks open. Vette stands there in pajamas, hair in a bonnet.

VETTE

You been gone a minute.

LARRY

I got saved.

She leans on the doorframe, eyeing him.

VETTE

You saved now... but are you happy?

He can't answer.

INT. CHURCH CHOIR ROOM - SUNDAY MORNING - DAY

The choir dresses in matching robes. Larry buttons his up slowly, watching as the women adjust their makeup and laugh.

Sister Keisha sits beside him.

SISTER KEISHA

You okay, Brother Larry?

Larry forces a smile.

LARRY

Yeah... just thinkin'.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was thinking about how I'd memorized the motions. Clapping, singing, shouting - but I still didn't feel whole.

EXT. SIDE OF CHURCH - LATE NIGHT

Larry walks alone under the yellow church light. The building behind him fades into silence. He steps into the shadows and slides off his tie.

He breathes.

For the first time all day.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I tried to fast the girl away.
Shouted til my throat bled. Cried
on altar after altar. But she
wasn't a demon. She wasn't no
curse. She was me. She was the part
I was told to hate... but God
hadn't made her by accident.

INT. AUNTIE FLUKY'S ROOM - DAY

Auntie Fluky watches as Larry sews up the hem of a skirt she doesn't recognize. She tilts her head but says nothing.

AUNTIE FLUKY
You still goin' to church?

LARRY
Every Sunday.

She nods, rocking in her chair.

AUNTIE FLUKY
As long as you talkin' to the Lord,
you gon' find your answer.

She doesn't ask more questions and just hums a hymn and lets him be.

INT. FOUNTAIN OF LIFE C.O.G.I.C - EASTER SUNDAY - MORNING

The church is radiant in pastel colors. Hats big as dinner plates. Larry sits in the pew, eyes forward.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Maybe I wasn't ready to come out to the world. But I was done lying to myself. I was Brother Larry in the church... but on the inside I was a sister.

INT. VETTE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - CLARKSDALE - 2000

A small oscillating fan hums. The room glows with a single bedside lamp. Vette lies on her stomach, flipping through a paperback romance. Larry paces near the door, nervously.

LARRY
Vette...

She looks up, sighs, sets the book down.

VETTE
Yeah?

He hesitates, then walks over to the mirror.

LARRY
You ever feel like... you pray and pray, but God just ain't answerin'?

VETTE
All the time. Don't mean He ain't listenin'. Sometimes He waitin' to see if you'll listen to yourself first.

Larry turns, surprised by her answer.

LARRY
You always gotta come with some
deep shit, huh?

VETTE
(*laughs*)
Boy, hush.

She pauses.

VETTE (CONT'D)
You got somethin' you need to say?

LARRY
I think I'm losin' my mind.

He sits on the bed, head in his hands.

LARRY (CONT'D)
I'm tryin' so hard to live right...
but every time I shut my eyes, I
see her. I feel her. It's like...
the more saved I get, the louder
she get.

VETTE
(*softly*)
She?

Larry doesn't answer.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOM - MORNING

Larry teaches a group of teen boys about *David and Goliath*. His voice is confident, but there's a twitch in his eye. A tension.

LARRY
...and David, he ain't have no
sword. Just a slingshot and five
smooth stones. But when you know
who you are in God, you don't need
nothin' fancy. You just need faith.

The boys nod.

Larry sees himself in them. Especially one boy - quiet, eyes on the floor, always lingering behind.

LARRY (CONT'D)

(gently)

That story? Ain't just about
fightin' giants. It's about facin'
the part of yourself you scared of.

The boy looks up. They lock eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I kept telling myself I was David.
But some days... I felt more like
Goliath. Big, ugly, and hated by
the world just for being me.

INT. AUNTIE FLUKY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry sits on the floor, legs crossed. Wig in his lap. A
small makeup mirror beside him. The TV plays *The Parkers*
rerun, but he isn't watching.

He touches the wig, brushes it slowly.

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

Sometimes, I put her on when nobody
was home. Not even Vette. Just me
and her. And in the quiet... I
wasn't scared. I wasn't sinful. I
was soft. I was safe.

Suddenly, footsteps on the porch.

Larry scrambles, tossing the wig under the couch and wiping
off lip gloss.

AUNTIE FLUKY (O.S.)

Larry, you in here?

LARRY

(quickly)

Yeah, Auntie! Just watchin' TV.

She walks in holding a plate of food.

AUNTIE FLUKY

You need to eat. Can't fast your
way into Heaven if you fall out on
the way.

LARRY

I'm not going to fall.

AUNTIE FLUKY

Well, is everything okay with you?

LARRY

No.

AUNTIE FLUKY

What's wrong, baby?

LARRY

I got a secret that is so hard for me to tell, and it's eating me up. I want to show it to you... My secret.

AUNTIE FLUKY

Okay, show me.

Larry goes into the bathroom.

Moments pass. He comes out in a pink tank top, a wig, and some makeup on.

She sets the plate down, unbothered. Larry stands in front of her, confused.

LARRY

(confused)

Why aren't you surprised, Auntie?

AUNTIE FLUKY

You're not the only that's like that in this family.

LARRY

I'm not?

AUNTIE FLUKY

No.

(Giggles)

No, you're not. You have relatives I grew up with before you was born. They was just like you.

LARRY

Really?!

AUNTIE FLUKY

Yeah. By day, they were masculine men, but at night, they was nothing but girls..

(pause)

Pretty ones too. And I used to go out to clubs with them, and I kept their secrets, until they died.

LARRY

So, will you keep my secret, too?

AUNTIE FLUKY

Yes, boy! Always.

LARRY

You're the second person who knows now.

AUNTIE FLUKY

Who was the first?

LARRY

Gene.

AUNTIE FLUKY

Your Mama?

LARRY

(laughs)

Yeah, my Mama.

AUNTIE FLUKY

When she knew?

LARRY

When I was little. She said keep it a secret before she lost her mind. So, I kept it a secret.

AUNTIE FLUKY

Okay, wow... Well, your secret's safe with me.

(pause)

But, you know you can't be that way around here. You was in a gang, and I don't want nothin' to happen to you. You're gonn' have to leave Mississippi to be who you are on the inside. You hear?

LARRY

Yes, I hear you.

Silence for a moment. Larry reaches over, and hugs his Auntie.

Then he sits back, smiling. Picks up the plate, and starts eating.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. AUNTIE FLUKY'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The ceiling fan turns slowly overhead. LARRY sits slouched on the couch, picking at the seam of his jeans. His face is tired but alert. AUNTIE FLUKY enters from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dish towel, eyes scanning him like she already knows what's wrong.

AUNTIE FLUKY
(sitting beside him)
Boy, you lookin' like your soul got tied up in knots.

LARRY
(staring ahead)
It's Vette. I love her, Auntie. I really do... but I can't keep doing this.

AUNTIE FLUKY
(slowly nods)
Mmm. This about her... or about you?

LARRY
(takes a long breath)
About me. About what's inside of me. It ain't goin' away no more. I've been trying to pray it outta me. Fast it outta me. But God keeps tellin' me... "This is you. This has always been you." I kept it buried under the person that folks needed me to be. But now I can't breathe under all that weight.

There's a pause. AUNTIE FLUKY looks at him, her eyes soft, the kind of love that holds even when it hurts.

AUNTIE FLUKY
God made no mistakes. He never did and never will. But sometimes... it takes us years to believe that. If she's in there, and she needs air, then let her breathe, baby.

LARRY wipes his eyes, swallowing the fear that still clings to his ribs.

LARRY
I can't come out here. Not in Clarksdale. Because the gang I'm in will kill me if they found out I'm gay.

AUNTIE FLUKY

Then maybe it's time to go.

LARRY

Go where?

AUNTIE FLUKY

You go anywhere, as long as it's not in Mississippi.

LARRY

Okay, if that's what I should do to be free I will do it. Because I don't want to hurt Vette.

INT. LARRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

On the bed, a small collection of women's clothing, a few makeup items, and a worn-out notebook. LARRY stands at the mirror, bare-chested, applying a dab of foundation to his cheek. His hands tremble slightly.

He steps back, examining his reflection—part Larry, part someone trying to come through.

LARRY

(whispering to himself)

Girl... what's your name?

Silence. Then, like something whispered from deep within:

LARRY (CONT'D)

Larrika... Larrika DuPree. That is my name!

Larry looks into the mirror, acting as Larrika

LARRY (CONT'D)

(To himself)

Okay, where do you want to come out of the closet at? What state and town?

He pauses, and hears a voice from within.

LARRY V.O

(Whisper, a voice from within)

New Orleans, Louisiana.

LARRY

Okay baby, New Orleans Louisiana it is. Let's do this Larrika!

He smiles faintly. It's the first real smile in a long time.

There's a knock on the door.

Larry opens the door. It's his childhood friend Darryl. Handsome, tall, and charming eyes. He steps in.

DARRYL

What's going on? You told me to come over, and that it was urgent. Is everything okay?

LARRY

It depends on when I show you, and tell you.

DARRYL

(confused)

Boy, you scarin' me. What is it?

LARRY

Hold on. Imma go to the bathroom, and then Imma show you, and tell you.

DARRYL

Okay.

Larry goes to the bathroom and a while later, he comes out transformed into Larrika.

Darryl is completely shocked with his mouth open.

LARRY

This is what I want to show you. My deep, dark secret. I know that you might be shocked and you may not even wanna be my friend any more. But this is who I am on the inside. I'm a girl named Larrika DuPree Hoy.

Darryl shakes his head in disbelief. He starts laughing. When he makes eye contact with Larry he sees that Larry is serious. Darryl stops laughing.

DARRYL

Is you serious, or is you crazy man.

LARRY

I'm very serious Darryl. I've been feeling this way since I was little. My mama knew about it and my brother Kevin knew.

DARRYL

Say what!?! They knew?

LARRY

Yes, and my Auntie Fluky knows now.

DARRYL

So how did she handle it? What did she say?

LARRY

She didn't flinch, she wasn't shocked. She accepted me with no hesitation, and told me I have relatives from before I was born who were just like me.

DARRYL

Wow!

LARRY

That's not all. There's one thing more that I want to tell you.

DARRYL

What is it?

LARRY

I was molested.

DARRYL

By who?

LARRY

By Aaron and Gary.

Darryl just sits there in silence looking at all the stuff that Larry owns as Larrika. They both sit in silence for a while. Half packed bags are lying in front of the bed.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I told Darryl what my Uncle Aaron and Gary did to me. And the more that I told him of my story Gary got angry and started cussing.

(MORE)

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

And I also told him what my grandmama said after I told her what Uncle Aaron did to me, and he started cussing even more. At last, I told him that I was leaving for new Orleans. That's when he went silent.

FADE TO:

INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

DARRYL

So you're going to New Orleans. So what about Vette? You leavin' her?

LARRY

I don't want to Darryl, I love her. But I got to. I need to be free, and I need to let Larrika breathe.
(questioning Darryl now)
Can you keep my secret?

DARRYL

Hell yeah Nigga!

They do a gang handshake, and embrace each other in a brotherly hug.

INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER THAT WEEK

A suitcase lies open on the bed. Dresses are folded carefully inside. A pair of heels rest at the top. Next to them—lipstick, eyeliner, cheap perfume. The whole bed smells like release.

LARRY sits on the edge of the bed, hands resting on his knees, looking at everything one last time.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I had been Larry for so long, I didn't even know what life could feel like without pretending. But the girl inside of me? She wasn't a whisper no more. She was yelling. And I had to listen. I owed her that.

He zips the suitcase. Stands up. Walks to the door, turns the light off behind him. The house falls into quiet.

EXT. CLARKSDALE BUS STATION - EARLY MORNING

A GREYHOUND bus idles outside. LARRY, dressed in jeans and a hoodie, stands with his suitcase. He watches the sun rise as mist curls over the pavement.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was leaving Clarksdale behind...
leaving Vette, leaving everything
that ever knew me as Larry. It hurt
more than I expected, but freedom
always comes with a cost. I didn't
know who I'd be on the other side—
but I knew who I couldn't be no
more.

He takes a deep breath and boards the bus.

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

I didn't leave because I stopped
loving Vette. I left because I had
to love myself more. This was about
survival. About truth. About
freedom. I wasn't running from
Mississippi. I was running to me.

FADE TO BLACK.

TEXT ON SCREEN: NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

EXT. NEW ORLEANS BUS TERMINAL - DAY

Sunlight bleeds through thick clouds as the bus doors hiss open. LARRY steps off, blinking into a brand new world. He breathes deep, clutching his bag, scanning the colorful chaos of downtown New Orleans.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

New Orleans ain't like anywhere
else. I was afraid—of hate, of
being rejected, of being clocked
and cursed out. But what I found...
was something different.

INT. SHARED APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MONTHS LATER

LARRY sits on a couch surrounded by new friends—young, wild, loud, and completely at ease. They're passing a blunt, laughing at something on the TV. His nails are freshly done, gleaming under the light. A beat. One guy looks down at his hand and raises an eyebrow.

GUY #1
Yo, my boy—those nails?

LARRY
(shrugs, bold)
Yeah. I'm a drag queen. Sometimes
I'm Larry, sometimes I'm Larrika.

The room pauses. Then—someone hands him the blunt.

GUY #2
Shit, long as you can roll and
pass, you good with me.

Laughter erupts. Tension evaporates. They move on like it was never a big deal.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I told them from the jump who I
was. Some didn't believe me. Some
didn't care. But there were no
secrets anymore. That was the
freedom.

INT. NAIL SALON - CANAL STREET - DAY

A bell rings as LARRY walks into a vibrant nail salon. Women gossip in the chairs. A fan hums in the background. He sits down, excited, bouncing his knee. The tech, a middle-aged woman with bright pink braids, smiles warmly as she takes his hand.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
That first time getting my nails
done... God, it felt like I was being
baptized. Like I was shedding Larry
one glittery fingertip at a time.

The file scrapes against his nails. His eyes start to glisten. She doesn't say a word. She just keeps filing.

INT. MCDONALD'S - CLAIBORNE AVE - NIGHT SHIFT

LARRY stands behind the counter, headset on, calling out orders. Customers shuffle through. His nails shine as he hands out a bag. Nobody blinks. One guy even winks at him.

CUSTOMER
Appreciate it, Queen.

LARRY smirks, turning back to the fryer.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was working as Larry. But those nails? They were all Larrika. And nobody at work said a thing. That's how I knew I was exactly where I needed to be.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREETS - NIGHT

A montage of nights out—LARRIKA strutting down Bourbon Street, heels clicking, wig bouncing, lips red like fire. A TRANS GIRL walks beside her, laughing, dancing, both glowing like streetlight sirens.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

That's how I met her—a trans girl from Atlanta. She noticed my nails and said, "Baby, you family?" I said, "Yes ma'am." That's how it started. Essence and I became close friends and she needed a place to stay. She was living in a shelter called "the New Orleans Mission." I told her she could come stay with me.

INT. LARRIKA & ROOMMATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is small, cluttered with dresses and wigs and wine bottles. Music blasts. LARRIKA and her roommate get dressed in front of the mirror—laughing, tucking, painting, transforming.

ESSENCE

You ever been with a man?

LARRIKA

(chuckles)

No. Not yet. I'm waiting... for someone real.

ESSENCE

(gently)

Don't rush, girl. The right one gon' come. And when he does, oh baby...

She fans herself dramatically. They both burst into laughter.

Montage of Essence and Larrika picking out their outfit for the day.

They both come from different directions and bump into each other in the middle of the room, both have an identical clothing iron.

LARRIKA

Girl what? We have the same iron!

ESSENCE

Write your name on it!

They both write their names on their irons with a marker.

INT. CLUB FUSION - NIGHT - ELYSIAN FIELDS

Strobe lights dance across sweat-slicked bodies. LARRIKA steps into the room like she owns it—dressed in fire-engine red, heels too high for the average girl, confidence dripping off her like perfume.

Men turn. One tries to touch her waist. She leans in with a coy smile—then walks away. She's not here to be taken. She's here to be seen.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I wasn't sleeping with men. I wasn't looking for validation. I was just living. Living so loud the old me couldn't keep up.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larrika sits in the living room watching TV.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

One thing I didn't tell about Essence was that she was trickin'.

Essence is running around the house. First she comes in with a fancy outfit.

Then she comes in wearing heels.

ESSENCE

Will you come walk me to the hotel?

LARRIKA

No... I'm not in the mood.

ESSENCE

Please, please! Larrika I need to get this money! It's only three blocks away!

LARRIKA

Look... This is the last time I'm
doing this for you girl.

ESSENCE

Thank you Larrika! You're the best!

LARRIKA

Okay, let's go!

As they begin to leave, Essence took a bag and stuffed it
with clothes and shoes.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT CONTINUOUS

Larrika and Essence walk towards the hotel.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Essence always had that bag with
her when she was going away for two
to three nights. And I hated
dropping her off to that hotel
because deep down I didn't like
what she was doing. But, she was my
friend and I was supposed to be
supportive.

Larrika walks Essence to the entrance of the hotel and leaves
from there walking towards a restaurant nearby at the same
street.

She gets seated and eats her food.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Essence walks in and directly goes to room 47 and knocks on
the door.

The door opens and Essence walks in.

ESSENCE

Hey baby. You're ready to have some
fun tonight?

THE TRICK

(looking her up and down)
Hell yeah, sexy! Damn, you're fine!
What's up with your girl Larrika?
She's thick!

ESSENCE

She don't do any of this. She has a job! She's not in this life deep like I am.

Essence puts her bag away. And goes to the bathroom.

As Essence left, the Trick made a line of cocaine on the dresser and snorted it.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

There are sounds of beating and throwing things around, and Essence screaming.

ESSENCE

Let me go you pig!

THE TRICK

Bitch! Where's my money?

ESSENCE

What money?? I was just in the bathroom. You're high! I don't owe you any money!

Slapping noises come from the room. The staff gets worried but then ignores and leaves as if it's a common occurrence.

There are more noises, and some moments later, Essence runs out the room. Her clothes are torn, and she can barely run in her heels.

INT. LARRIKA'S ROOM - DAY

Larrika's cell phone rings. She picks it up from the dresser.

ESSENCE (V.O.) PHONE

(Crying)

Larrika!

LARRIKA

Oh my God! Why are you crying?

ESSENCE (V.O.) PHONE.

Larrika, please come and get me. He raped me!

LARRIKA

You're still at the hotel?

ESSENCE (V.O) PHONE.
Yeah. But I snuck out of the room.
I'm barely dressed. Come quick!

LARRIKA
I'm on my way girl!

ESSENCE (V.O) PHONE.
Okay, quickly please!

Larrika disconnects the phone and immediately prepares to leave.

EXT. HOTEL STREET - DAY

Larrika walks fast toward the hotel and meets Essence there.

Essence's face is bloody and she is barely dressed. Her hair is a mess.

Larrika has a jacket that she puts on Essence as soon as she meets Essence and they leave immediately.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Essence sits in the living room. She is in tears and still shivering.

Larrika walks toward her with a first aid box and starts to clean her the blood off her face.

On the table, fresh clothes are placed with a towel.

Larrika finishes cleaning Essence's face and hands her the clothes and towel.

Essence leaves to go take a shower and Larrika starts to cook food.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Essence comes out of the bathroom still wet and shivering. She starts crying.

Larrika embraces her. They are both crying, while Larrika just hold Essence tightly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't have to ask her what happened. The marks, the blood, and the fear that I saw in Essence's eyes, it was no need for me to impose any further. I was embracing a friend. A woman like me. I loved her. 4-5 months later, she went back home to Atlanta, Georgia. And I never saw her again after that.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LARRIKA'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT - PHONE CALL FROM VETTE

ONE YEAR LATER

The room is quiet now. LARRIKA sits on her bed, the phone pressed to her ear. Her smile slowly fades as she listens. The voice on the other end is faint but urgent. Her brow furrows.

VETTE (V.O., PHONE)

I had an accident... I need you.
Please, just come be with me. Help
me.

Tears slip down her cheek. She stares at the heels by her door.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

That phone call... it shattered everything. I wanted to help her, I truly did. But going back... meant going back to my old self. And I wasn't sure I could survive that.

EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT

LARRIKA stands on the balcony in a silk robe, staring into the moonlight. A cigarette burns between her fingers. Her eyes are lost in a war.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

It was all a sacrifice. Coming to New Orleans, leaving Vette, walking into a life no one had promised me. But for the first time... I was living a life that was meant for me.

She exhales smoke into the dark and walks back inside.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

She walks into the room and there is a packed bag and bus ticket.

EXT. GRAYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

Larrika is now fully dressed as Larry boarding the bus. The look on his face is helpless.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Oftentimes, life isn't as simple as it seems. As much as I embraced my individuality, I had people emotionally attached to me whom I couldn't ignore. So, there I was, going back to my love, Vette... Only to help her get back on her feet and end the relationship forever.

INT. VETTE'S APARTMENT - CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT

A COUPLE OF WEEKS LATER

The room is dim. A small lamp casts a glow over the worn furniture. LARRY sits on the couch, hands clasped, nervous. VETTE paces nearby, holding his iron in her hand.

VETTE

(suspicious)

Larry... who is this name written on your iron? "Larrika DuPree"? Who the hell is this?

LARRY freezes. He glances up, unsure. His heart pounds. He takes a deep breath.

LARRY

(slowly)

That's me.

VETTE stops cold. Her face twists with confusion.

VETTE

What? No. Naw, Larry. Stop playin'. That's some bitch you messin' with in New Orleans, ain't it? That's why you always dippin' outta Clarksdale?

LARRY
 (shaking his head)
 No, Vette. Ain't nobody else.
 Larrika DuPree... that's really me.

She stares at him, disbelief hardening into anger.

VETTE
 What the fuck you mean it's you?
 That don't even make no damn sense.

LARRY
 Larrika... she's who I am
 sometimes. I've been keepin' that
 inside me for years.

VETTE
 (voice rising)
 So what, you some drag queen now?
 You out there dressin' up like a
 woman?

LARRY hesitates. Then, slowly, he lifts his hand and shows her his fingernails—natural but faint ridges still visible.

LARRY
 You see them lines? That don't
 happen for nothin'. That's from
 takin' off acrylic nails.

VETTE covers her mouth. Her eyes fill with tears. She backs away a step.

VETTE
 (Voice in shock)
 Oh my God... Larry. Are you gay?

LARRY
 No, Vette, I'm not gay. I ain't
 never been with a man. But this—
 this feelin' inside me—it's
 somethin' I can't turn off. It's
 like... I need to dress like a
 woman sometimes. I been fightin' it
 my whole life.

VETTE
 (shocked, hurt)
 Why you couldn't tell me?

LARRY
 I ain't proud I hid it. But I was
 scared. Of losin' you. Of losin'
 everybody.

(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

You the only one I ever truly trusted like this. But I gotta be real now.

He pauses. Looks down at his lap. His voice lowers.

LARRY (CONT'D)

I need you to know somethin' else too. I ain't never told you this before. When I was a kid... my uncle molested me, but the crazy thing about it is that I knew I was a girl before my uncle molested me. I was already this way for as long as I remember.

VETTE sits down hard on the couch, eyes wide.

VETTE

Larry...

LARRY

That's why I got into church. That's why I first broke up with you. I went to church to get answers about myself and about what the Bible said about people like me. But I knew, I was something different. I'm just a person who don't wanna be with a man looking like a man. I wanna be with a man, as I'm being a woman. That's the truth. I been carryin' that around in silence. And part of survivin' it was... bein' Larrika. I couldn't ignore her no more.

There's a long silence between them. VETTE wipes a tear from her cheek. Then she looks at him, steady.

VETTE

Larry... you the only man I ever loved. The only man I ever been with. The only man I want to have kids by.

LARRY

(stunned)

You still wanna have kids with me?

VETTE

Yeah. But you gotta promise me somethin'. Don't dress up here. Not in Clarksdale.

(MORE)

VETTE (CONT'D)

You know how folks talk. How dangerous it is. Just be Larry... here.

LARRY nods, and his heart feels light.

LARRY (V.O.)

I made that promise. Told her I wouldn't let Larrika out in Clarksdale. But after I told her the truth, somethin' strange happened—I fell in love with her all over again. 'Cause she accepted me. Even if she didn't understand, she didn't throw me away. We shook hands in agreement of the promise.

INT. BEDROOM - EASTGATE - LATE NIGHT

LARRY sits on the edge of the bed, staring into space. The house is quiet. The door is cracked open, a soft breeze drifting in.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

But no matter how much she tried... she couldn't make me un-feel what I felt. That need to be myself? That itch to breathe as Larrika? It was still there. Stronger than ever.

INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The hum of a box fan fills the room. VETTE sits on the couch, fidgeting with the hem of her T-shirt. LARRY walks in from the kitchen, a soda in one hand, half-smiling.

LARRY

What's up? You look like you got somethin' on your mind.

VETTE swallows hard. Her eyes glisten.

VETTE

I'm pregnant.

The words hang in the air. LARRY freezes mid-step, soda can lowering to his side.

LARRY

...You for real?

She nods quickly, almost defensive.

VETTE

For real. I took the test twice.

LARRY looks down, processing. His face shifts between shock, fear, and something softer. He sets the soda on the table and sits beside her.

LARRY

So... we gonna do this?

VETTE

We are doing this.

He exhales and nods slowly. He reaches for her hand.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

When she told me she was pregnant,
my chest got heavy. I loved her,
but I was already done with Larry
before I even met her. I was stuck
in a role I didn't want to play.
Now I had to play it even harder.

INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING (MONTAGE)

- VETTE, belly growing, cooks scrambled eggs while LARRY folds laundry in the corner.
- LARRY leaves a pile of bills on the counter, writing "Rent" in block letters on an envelope.
- VETTE leans against the counter, rubbing her back, watching him with unreadable eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Life at home became routine. Bills.
Groceries. Check-ups. I did what I
had to, but my mind kept drifting.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Fluorescent lights hum overhead. VETTE sits on the exam table, belly round. LARRY sits beside her, arms crossed but watching closely.

The doctor moves the Doppler wand, and the rapid heartbeat fills the room.

VETTE

That's our baby.

LARRY forces a smile. He reaches for her hand, giving it a squeeze.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was there for the appointments.
For the smiles. For the heartbeat.
But every time I heard it, I
thought, "You're gonna have to kill
Larrika for this family to work."

INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - NIGHT

The living room is dim. The TV plays softly. VETTE, heavily pregnant, sits with her feet up. LARRY laces up his sneakers.

VETTE

You going out again?

LARRY

Yeah, just with the boys. Won't be
late.

She stares at him, trying to read between the lines. He avoids her eyes.

EXT. STREET CORNER - NIGHT

Streetlights buzz. LARRY leans against a car with his HOMEBOYS. They drink from paper bags, smoke drifting into the night.

HOMEBOY #1

Man, you lucky. Baby on the way.

LARRY

Yeah. Lucky.

He laughs, but it's hollow. He takes a long pull from his drink.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Hanging with the homeboys was my
escape. I told myself it was just
to blow off steam. Truth was, I was
trying to sabotage the whole thing
without saying the words.

MONTAGE - ESCAPISM

- LARRY at a pool table, slamming balls into pockets, ignoring buzzing phone calls.
- Late-night drives with music blasting, windows down, city lights streaking by.
- Sitting in a car parked under a bridge, passing a blunt between hands.

— LARRY laughing too loud at nothing, while a text from VETTE lights up his phone: "Where you at?"

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I was doing everything in my power to make her want to leave me. But she stayed. No matter how far I pushed, she held on.

INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The baby is now a newborn. LARRY sits on the couch, bottle in hand, feeding his daughter while the TV plays quietly. His eyes are distant.

VETTE walks in, hair messy from exhaustion. She sits beside him, rubbing her temples.

VETTE
You've been gone a lot.

LARRY
I'm here now.

VETTE
That's not the point.

He doesn't answer. She watches him feed the baby, unsure which part of him she's looking at—Larry or the person she's never met.

MONTAGE - BACK AND FORTH

— EXT. CLARKSDALE GREYHOUND STATION - NIGHT

Rain streaks down the bus windows. LARRY, hoodie up, boards quietly with a small suitcase.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I never stayed put for long. New Orleans kept calling, and I kept answering.

— EXT. NEW ORLEANS - BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

LARRIKA in heels, neon lights reflecting off wet pavement. She laughs with friends outside a club. Music and voices swell.

— INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - DAY

VETTE in the kitchen, feeding the baby, eyes flicking to the clock.

— INT. GREYHOUND BUS - EARLY MORNING

Larry leans against the window, watching the Mississippi River roll past.

— EXT. NEW ORLEANS - CANAL STREET - AFTERNOON

LARRIKA steps out of the nail salon, admiring freshly painted nails.

— INT. CLARKSDALE LIVING ROOM - EVENING

VETTE folds laundry, toddler climbing over her lap. The TV plays, but she keeps glancing at the door.

— EXT. NEW ORLEANS - BACK ALLEY BEHIND CLUB FUSION - NIGHT

LARRIKA smokes, laughing with her trans roommate. The muffled bass of the club pulses behind them.

— INT. CLARKSDALE BEDROOM - NIGHT

LARRY stands in the dark, looking at Vette sleeping beside the baby crib. He sits on the bed edge, restless.

— INT. GREYHOUND BUS - WINTER NIGHT

Snow flurries swirl outside the fogged windows. LARRY's hands drum against his knees, nails still showing faint ridges from polish removed days earlier.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I told myself I was doing it for
me. That I needed air. But every
time I came back, it got heavier.
Every time I left, it got harder to
return.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

LARRY stands alone, cigarette in one hand, bottle of liquor in the other. The faint cry of the baby filters through the open window. He takes a drag and a sip, closing his eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 By the time the kids came, I was
 using heavy. It wasn't just to
 escape her anymore. It was to
 escape me.

INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - NIGHT

The front door opens. VETTE steps in, carrying their
 daughter, now a toddler, on her hip. Her eyes are sharp.

VETTE
 Your priorities are in the wrong
 spot.

LARRY looks up from the couch, still holding a glass.

VETTE (CONT'D)
 You put the money in the house
 first. Then whatever's left, do
 what you want.

She walks past him into the bedroom, shutting the door behind
 her.

LARRY sits frozen, her words cutting deeper than he'll admit.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 That was the night she put it
 plain. And she was right. I was
 losing everything. Not just her.
 Not just the baby. But myself.

INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

LARRY lies awake, staring at the ceiling. VETTE sleeps beside
 him, the toddler between them. The faint whimper of an infant
 comes from the crib in the corner.

He sits up, rubbing his face. Looks over at the crib. There's
 another child, a baby boy, only months old. He kicks under a
 soft blanket.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 It wasn't just one anymore. Now
 there were two. Two little people
 watching me, needing me, and I was
 still halfway out the door in my
 mind.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER THAT MORNING

LARRY measures formula, shaking the bottle, while eggs fry on the stove. The toddler sits in a booster seat, pounding a spoon on the tray.

VETTE enters, hair messy, still in her robe. She pauses, surprised to see breakfast on the table.

VETTE

You're up.

LARRY

Yeah.

He sets a plate in front of her. She watches him grab a grocery list from the counter and tuck it in his back pocket.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Something in me shifted after she said those words last night. "Put the money in the house first." I didn't change all at once, but I started listening.

MONTAGE - SABOTAGE YEARS (FLASHBACK STYLE)

- LARRY at a corner store, buying beer and lottery tickets with cash meant for bills.
- Picking a fight with VETTE over nothing, then leaving for hours.
- Standing her up on a planned date night, phone buzzing in his pocket.
- Sitting at a card table with homeboys, slapping down bills while the rent notice sits unopened in his jacket.

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

Before that night, I tried everything to make her want to walk away. Picking fights, blowing money, disappearing for hours. But she stayed. She stayed through it all.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - "I OWE A LOT TO VETTE"

The kids play on the floor - the toddler rolling a ball to the baby, who giggles. LARRY sits cross-legged between them, holding the baby steady.

VETTE watches from the doorway, arms folded. For the first time in a long time, she smiles at him.

He looks up at her, meets her eyes, and nods.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 She could've thrown me away a
 hundred times. But she didn't. I
 owe a lot to her for that. She
 didn't just wake me up to
 fatherhood — she gave me a reason
 to try.

INT. EASTGATE APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - FEAR OF EXPOSURE

LARRY and VETTE are cleaning up dinner. The kids are asleep.

VETTE
 You didn't come straight home
 yesterday.

He freezes, drying a plate slower than before.

VETTE (CONT'D)
 I ain't stupid, Larry. Don't make
 me find out things the hard way.

She turns away. He watches her back, his jaw tight.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 I was always scared she'd get mad
 enough to tell. One word from her
 and my whole life would be cracked
 open. I watched my tone. I kept my
 steps light. I was managing her
 moods like it was my job.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY - SHIFT INTO FATHERHOOD

LARRY pushes a cart with the toddler in the seat and the baby
 in a carrier on his chest. He checks prices on diapers, pulls
 out a calculator from his pocket, and puts a bag of chips
 back on the shelf.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 It started small. Diapers before
 snacks. Bills before beers.

INT. SMALL BARBERSHOP - AFTERNOON

The toddler squirms in the barber's chair. LARRY holds his
 shoulders steady, laughing when the boy pouts.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I started being there for the
 little things. The haircuts. The
 homework. The mornings.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The kids are on the couch, heads leaning on LARRY's arm as they watch cartoons. VETTE sits at the dining table, sorting mail. She glances over at them and keeps sorting without saying a word.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It didn't fix everything. But it
kept us steady. Kept me here.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT - FINAL REFLECTION

The house is quiet. The kids' toys are put away. LARRY sits alone, a small shoebox in his lap. Inside: a wig cap, lipstick, a faded photo booth strip with Vette, and a nail file with faint glitter.

He runs his thumb over the nail file, then looks straight ahead.

LARRY
(to the air)
Vette... I'm sorry for the things
Larry put you through. He did it to
protect me - to protect Larrika.

He swallows hard.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Larry and Larrika... two different
people. Same spirit. But Larrika
ain't gonna put up with the things
Larry did. If you don't love me, I
don't love you. But I love my
children. Always.

He looks toward the closed bedroom door, where the kids sleep.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Some of you know what it's like to
be stuck in a role you never chose.
To live behind closed doors and
hope nobody notices. I lived there
for years. And if that's you...
you're not alone.

He closes the shoebox and slides it onto the top shelf of the closet. The lamp clicks off.

MONTAGE - YEARS OF TRAVEL

— EXT. CLARKSDALE STREET - EARLY MORNING

Mist clings to the cracked pavement. LARRY tosses a duffel bag into the trunk of a beat-up sedan. VETTE stands in the doorway with her arms crossed, the kids peeking from behind her legs.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Sometimes I stayed in Clarksdale six months, maybe two years, before the urge got too strong. Before Larrika started pounding on the inside of my chest.

— INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Neon signs blur past as LARRY leans against the window, hood up, fingers drumming against his thigh. The bus hum drowns out his thoughts.

— EXT. NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

Bourbon Street alive with music and voices. LARRIKA in full glam steps out of a club, laughing with friends.

— EXT. LINCOLN, NEBRASKA - WINTER

Snow drifts across a small apartment building. LARRY, bundled in a heavy coat, carries groceries up the stairs. A WHITE GIRLFRIEND opens the door, kisses him quickly, and takes the bags.

— INT. TEMP SERVICE OFFICE - DAY

LARRY fills out paperwork at a folding table, fluorescent lights buzzing overhead. The recruiter shakes his hand, sliding over a stack of job tickets.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't always run to New Orleans. Sometimes I went to Lincoln, Nebraska. Stayed with one of my white girlfriends. Got work through a temp service.

— INT. SMALL NEBRASKA APARTMENT - NIGHT

LARRY counts cash at the kitchen table. He splits the bills — one stack in an envelope marked "VETTE", another shoved into a pocket beside a small bag of powder.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I was supporting Vette and the
kids... and my habits. Always both.

INT. SMALL BATHROOM - NIGHT

LARRY leans over the sink, nostrils flaring as he snorts a line of cocaine. He tosses back a shot, pops an ecstasy pill, and stares at himself in the mirror. His pupils are wide, jaw tense.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Cocaine. Alcohol. Ecstasy. I used
them to quiet the voice. To keep
Larry in the mirror instead of
Larrika.

He wipes his nose, breathing heavy. His reflection flickers in his mind — lipstick, lashes, wig. He blinks hard and turns away.

— INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

The phone is pressed to his ear. LARRY's voice softens.

LARRY
Hey, baby. Daddy loves you. I miss
you so much.

We hear a little girl's voice faintly responding. LARRY swallows a lump in his throat.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Even when I was gone for months, I
called almost every day. Told them
I loved them. Missed them.

CUT TO:

The kids — too young to grasp what's missing — more focused on their toys than his words.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
They were too young to understand
the war I was fighting inside.

MONTAGE - REPEATED PATTERN

- EXT. GREYHOUND STATION - VARIOUS SEASONS

Buses leaving in summer heat, autumn rain, winter snow. LARRY boarding each time, different jackets, same tired eyes.

- EXT. NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

Clubs, neon, laughter. LARRIKA's face glowing under streetlights.

- INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Curtains drawn. LARRY sits on the bed, high, staring at the floor, bag half-packed.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

For almost twenty years, I ran the same routine in any town, any state. Work, get high, disappear.

INT. CLARKSDALE BEDROOM - NIGHT

LARRY lies in bed beside VETTE. She reaches for him, but he turns onto his side, eyes open, distant.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

By thirty-three, I didn't want to touch a woman anymore. Not Vette. Not anybody.

He stares at the wall, the silence heavy.

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

I knew Larrika would come back one day. I just didn't know when.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - DAY

LARRY, in Larry mode, walks down Canal Street. He passes a man leaning against a storefront - tall, broad-shouldered, smile like sunlight. Their eyes meet briefly.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

That's when I had my second crush on a man. Pure physical pull.

— INT. SMALL NEW ORLEANS APARTMENT - NIGHT

LARRY paces, hands shaking, lines of cocaine on the table. He snorts hard, wipes his face, takes another hit.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I didn't tell him. Didn't tell anyone. I killed the feeling with pure cocaine. Over and over until the fire died down.

— MONTAGE - MONTHS PASSING

LARRY working odd jobs. Nights out with friends. More lines on the table. The man appears now and then in passing — a nod on the street, a laugh from across the room.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
It took months to get him out of my system. I told myself I was just staying true to the street code. Straight man. Always. Loyal to the image, the friends, the kids, the family.
(beat)
But never loyal to me.

INT. CLARKSDALE KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen light hums. VETTE stands at the sink, arms crossed. LARRY leans against the counter, hands in pockets. The kids' laughter filters in from the other room.

VETTE
I can't do this anymore.

He says nothing, just stares at the floor.

VETTE (CONT'D)
Twenty-three years, Larry. I've been holding this together by threads.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
We called it for good that night. Twenty-three years. Over.

— MONTAGE - POST-BREAKUP DRIFT

LARRY riding shotgun in different cars, faces of different women in the driver's seat.

Motel rooms in different towns – duffel bags and ashtrays.

Cocaine lines on coffee tables, half-empty bottles.

His eyes dulling over time.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I drowned in drugs. Moved from town
to town, girlfriend to girlfriend,
until I felt nothing at all.
Soulless.

EXT. LUFKIN, TEXAS - DAY

A dusty street, small-town storefronts. LARRY and a
GIRLFRIEND unload boxes from an old sedan.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I went to Lufkin, Texas, with
another girl. We made our way to
Nacogdoches, found our own place.

- INT. NACOGDOCHES APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dim light. LARRY sits at the kitchen table, head in his
hands, a line of powder waiting. The GIRLFRIEND watches from
the doorway.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I had two jobs. Still wanted to
die. Did drugs like there was no
tomorrow, hoping the overdose would
take me out.

- INT. TRAP HOUSE - DAY

Stacks of cash, plastic bags on a scale. LARRY's spot at the
table is empty.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Missed work for days. We fought all
the time.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The GIRLFRIEND slams a dresser drawer.

GIRLFRIEND
What is wrong with you?

LARRY's voice cracks.

LARRY
I hate myself.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I told her some of the demons in my
head. But not the one named
Larrika.

INT. APOSTOLIC CHURCH - SUNDAY MORNING

Sunlight streams through tall windows. The congregation sways to gospel music. The GIRLFRIEND grips LARRY's hand tight.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
She tried to help me. Prayed for
me. Took me to an Apostolic Church.

- INT. PASTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The PASTOR leans forward across his desk. LARRY sits stiffly in the chair, eyes darting.

LARRY
I've got a drug problem.

The pastor nods, places a hand on his shoulder.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I opened up about the drugs. The
whole church prayed over me.

- INT. CHURCH ALTAR - NIGHT SERVICE

Dozens of hands press on LARRY's shoulders, his head bowed, tears slipping down his cheeks.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I wanted the Holy Ghost so bad. I
never got it.

He walks out of the church alone, streetlights glinting off damp eyes.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I cut back on the drugs a little.
Went with the flow. But nothing
inside me changed.

INT. APARTMENT BATHROOM - NIGHT

LARRY sits on the closed toilet, head in hands. In the corner, a duffel bag with a wig peeking out. He stares at it for a long moment, then grabs a rolled-up bill from the counter and leans over a mirror.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
Every time she tried to breathe, I
fought her with drugs.

Close-up: His hands shaking as he snorts a line.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I couldn't pray her away. I'd been
running for decades. I was a woman
trapped in a man's body. And that
was never going to change.

INT. NACOGDOCHES APARTMENT - DAY

LARRY sits at the kitchen table, staring into a mug of coffee.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I knew my feelings for men were
real. My feelings for women were
something else.

- FLASHBACK - CHILDHOOD BEDROOM

A young LARRY sits on the floor, clutching a toy. The door opens, an UNCLE steps inside.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
My uncles pushed me toward girls.
Girls felt safer than men. Safer
than the way they touched me.

- FLASHBACK - TEENAGE YEARS

Teenage LARRY kissing a girl awkwardly, eyes elsewhere.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I got stuck that way. For years.

INT. TEXAS APARTMENT - NIGHT

The GIRLFRIEND sleeps. LARRY sits at the foot of the bed, fully dressed, shoes on, staring at the door.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

When I finally understood, I wanted out. I couldn't keep living in this shell, playing a part I never chose.

He grabs his keys. The door clicks shut behind him.

FADE OUT.

INT. LARRY'S APARTMENT - NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS - NIGHT

Dim light from a single table lamp pools over a cluttered coffee table - crumpled fast-food bags, half-empty beer bottles, a pack of cigarettes.

Larry slouches on the couch, staring blankly at the flickering TV. The low murmur of some late-night infomercial fills the silence.

His PHONE BUZZES on the armrest.

Larry picks it up, squints at the screen - UNKNOWN NUMBER. He hesitates, then swipes to answer.

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

Before I met my wife, I was with another girl.
Two jobs in Nacogdoches...
but drugs had me sinking deeper every day.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey... do you remember me?

Larry frowns, his brow furrowing.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I didn't. Not at first.

INT. LARRY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Larry shifts forward, elbows on his knees.

LARRY

Who is this?

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

I went to True Bible Way Apostolic Church... in Clarksdale.

Larry blinks, the name stirring something faint.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
She described herself.
Then... it clicked.

A small smile creeps across Larry's face.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We started talking every day.
Private. Secret.
While I was still with the other
girl.

Larry leans back, the first genuine light in his eyes in months.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A plain room lit by a single yellow lamp.
Thin floral curtains hang limp over the window.

Larry's Texas girlfriend drags his duffel bag inside. She sets it down without a word, keeping her back to him.

On the bed sits the WOMAN from the call - younger than Larry, but her eyes are sharp, warm. She smiles, a smile that softens him instantly.

Larry's gaze locks on her.
He moves toward the bed, his shoulders relaxing.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
She was my escape.
She didn't know about the drugs.
She didn't know how much I hated
myself.

Larry sits beside her. They talk in low voices. Her laugh breaks through the heaviness in his chest.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The chemistry came rushing back.
Like no time had passed.

The Texas girlfriend slips out the door without looking back.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A dark two-lane road stretches ahead.
The car's headlights carve a tunnel through the black.

Larry drives, one hand on the wheel, the other draped over the console. She sits in the passenger seat, hair catching the faint dashboard glow.

They talk quietly, laughter drifting into the hum of the tires.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

We left Texas that night.
 Headed for Bruce, Mississippi.
 I thought I was leaving my mess
 behind.

She leans toward him, shares a quiet confession.
 Larry's eyes flick to her, intrigued.

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

She told me one secret...
 and it made me think maybe I could
 tell her mine... someday.

The car disappears into the dark.

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - BRUCE, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

A modest, tidy living room. Sunlight spills in through lace curtains, dust motes drifting in the warm air.

Larry and SHE (future wife) sit on the couch, knees angled toward each other. A coffee table between them holds two steaming mugs.

They talk - voices low, intimate. Her hands move when she speaks, eyes bright but steady.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

We talked about things no one else
 knew. She shared one of her
 secrets, and I knew I could trust
 her with mine someday.

Larry watches her as if memorizing every detail - the way her hair falls over her shoulder, the faint smile after her sentences.

EXT. OXFORD COURTHOUSE - DAY

A small-town courthouse, white columns, and wide steps.

Larry and SHE walk out, holding a folded marriage certificate. Their hands brush - a hint of shyness mixed with excitement.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 We eloped in Oxford. There was no
 big crowd, just the two of us.

They stop at the bottom of the steps, looking at each other
 for a beat before laughing.

INT. CHEAP MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A queen bed with a faded floral bedspread. A lamp throws a
 soft, amber glow.

The bathroom door opens - SHE steps out in delicate lingerie,
 hair loose, eyes playful.

Larry freezes. His smile is polite, but his eyes drift -
 almost appraising her outfit more than her.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 She looked good. Too good. I wanted
 to be her... not be with her.

Larry swallows hard, masking the conflict inside. He forces a
 smile, moves closer.

They kiss, but his hands hesitate, his gaze flickering toward
 the mirror across the room.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I told myself it was nerves.
 But it wasn't.

INT. LIVING ROOM - FOUR MONTHS LATER - DAY

A small living room. The TV plays quietly in the background.
 A half-eaten sandwich sits on the coffee table.

Larry sits slouched on the couch, flipping channels. Then,
 without warning, he stops. His eyes drift toward the bedroom
 door.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 The urge hit me...
 and it was different this time.

He rises slowly, almost drawn forward. At the bedroom
 doorway, he pauses, glances over his shoulder like someone
 might catch him.

Inside - neat rows of women's clothes in the closet. On the
 dresser, a wig stand with long hair perfectly brushed.

Larry's fingers hover over the wig, trembling. He picks it up, inhales sharply.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I couldn't fight her anymore.

He puts the wig back, runs his hands over the fabric of her dresses. His eyes close. A deep, conflicted sigh.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Afternoon light streams through the window. The radio plays a soulful female ballad.

Larry hums along while rinsing dishes. His hips sway slightly to the rhythm.

WIFE enters, sets her purse down, and leans on the counter - watching him with a curious expression.

He notices, turns it into an exaggerated dance move, grinning.

She laughs and shakes her head, walking away.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
She thought it was just me being
funny.
She didn't know it was her catching
glimpses of Larrika.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The couple sits on the bed, talking. Larry gestures with his hands as he speaks - a subtle flick of the wrist, a soft hand movement.

She glances at his hands, her head tilted slightly. He notices her gaze, shifts posture quickly.

She looks away, distracted by something else.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
She never said anything.
But I knew she saw it.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STREET - NIGHT

A quiet street lit by dim yellow lamps. Larry's truck is parked crooked outside a small bar.

He stumbles out, high, lighting a cigarette. Across the street, laughter spills from another bar.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I started pushing her away.
Same way I did with Vette.

Cut to:

- Larry at a domino table with old friends in Clarksdale.
- Larry leaning against a wall, snorting a line in the shadows.
- Larry walking in at 3AM, avoiding the bedroom light.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

WIFE stands in the doorway, arms folded.

WIFE
We need to talk.

Larry doesn't look up from the couch.

LARRY
Nah... it's time to get a divorce.

She's taken aback, tries to speak, but he cuts her off with a raised hand.

LARRY (CONT'D)
I'm done. I can't do this anymore.

Her jaw tightens. After a long pause - she nods once.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I'd already decided.
Larrika was coming out.

INT. LARRY'S NEW PLACE - NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Sunlight slants through half-closed blinds.

Larry sits at a small kitchen table, rolling a cigarette.

His PHONE BUZZES across the table.

The screen lights up - COCO.

He stares at it, exhales, then answers.

WIFE (O.S.)
Hey... guess where I'm at?

INT. HAIR SALON - DAY - INTERCUT

WIFE sits under a dryer, chatting into her phone. Women around her gossip, laugh, sip sodas.

WIFE

I'm in the salon. These ladies are talking about their ex-husbands... how they stayed friends after divorce.

Larry smirks, shakes his head.

LARRY

Girl, why are you calling me?

WIFE

I just... I want us to be friends.

LARRY

We separated. I don't want to be no friend. Go on with your life.

WIFE

I just wanted—

LARRY

No, Coco. We're done. You're crazy.

She swallows hard, forces a smile for the women nearby.

WIFE

Then... maybe marriage counseling?

Larry's jaw works, but he lets the pause hang.

LARRY

..Okay.

INT. LARRY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Laptop open on the coffee table. The glow lights Larry's face.

On screen: a marriage counselor in a neat home office.

WIFE sits in her own video window, hair done, makeup on.

The counselor speaks warmly. Larry leans back in his chair, arms crossed.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 First session. I was already gone...
 dealing with two women at the same
 time.

The counselor asks a question. Larry forces a small smile,
 gives a vague answer.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I knew it wasn't gonna work. But I
 let her book the next one.

MONTAGE - COUNTDOWN TO DIVORCE

- LARRY MARKING OFF DAYS ON A WALL CALENDAR.

- WIFE TEXTING LONG PARAGRAPHS, LARRY'S REPLIES SHORT, ONE
 WORD.

- LARRY LAUGHING ON THE PHONE WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

- A CLOCK TICKING IN A QUIET ROOM.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 Twenty days... and it'd be final.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Larry walks out alone, papers in hand.

No smile, no sadness - just a deep exhale.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 It was done.

INT. SMALL HOUSE - LAUREL, MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT

An older ex sits beside Larry on a worn couch. They laugh
 quietly, drinks in hand.

In the corner - a garment bag, half-zipped. Inside, a glimpse
 of women's clothes.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
 And that's when I let her out.
 Larrika... for real this time.

Larry runs his hand over the fabric, eyes distant.
A faint, knowing smile.

FADE OUT.

INT. LARRY'S HOUSE - LAUREL, MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT

A small birthday cake sits on the kitchen counter. The candles are melted stubs. The room is quiet - no party, no laughter, just the low hum of the fridge.

Larry, 43, sits alone at the table. His phone glows beside him, but he doesn't touch it.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Forty-three. My birthday came and went... but the girl I'd been hiding? She wasn't a girl anymore. She was a grown woman. And she was coming out.

He stares at the cake, untouched.

CUT TO:

Larry in the hallway, leaning against the bathroom doorframe. His girlfriend's muffled voice calls from another room, but he doesn't answer.

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

I couldn't touch her anymore.
Couldn't be that man for her... or
for anybody.

The light from the bathroom spills across his face. His eyes are bloodshot.

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

Hours in here. Crying. Thinking
about ending it.

Quick flashes:

- Larry hunched over the toilet, sobbing.
- His hands covering his face under running water.
- A blurry childhood memory: his uncles' shadows looming.

He grips the edge of the sink until his knuckles whiten.

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

I knew exactly who I was. A woman
in a man's body. Wanting men. And I
hated myself for it.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Larry stands at the mirror. The overhead light is harsh, unflattering. His reflection looks back – tired, hollow.

Tears streak down his cheeks.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

I was ready to do it. Ready to go.

He closes his eyes. Breathes in slowly, the air shaking in his lungs.

Opens his eyes. Looks into the mirror.

LARRY

(quiet, to himself)

Larrika... you deserve a chance to live. Nobody knows you. They only know Larry.

His lips tremble as the words leave his mouth. A flicker of something new – resolve – cuts through the despair.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

If I was gonna die... they needed to know the truth first.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Larry sits on the couch, phone in hand. A cheap tripod is balanced on a stack of books. He hits record.

LARRY

(voice shaking)

My name is Larrika DuPree Hoy... and I'm transgender.

He stares into the lens for a long beat, then taps "Post."

The phone screen lights up almost immediately – PING. PING. PING. Notifications roll in faster than he can read them.

Close on:

- "We love you."
- "Be happy, Queen."
- "Proud of you, always."

Larry's jaw slackens. His eyes fill – but this time, not with pain.

LARRY (V.O.)
I thought they'd tear me apart. But
they didn't. They lifted me up.

He leans back into the couch, phone still in his hand, tears
streaming – but he's smiling.

LARRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Maybe... maybe Larrika could live.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The curtains are half-drawn. Sunlight cuts across Larrika's
face – this time fully visible on camera.

She props her phone on the tripod, hits record.

LARRIKA
(smiling)
This is me. Larrika DuPree Hoy.

No filter. No soft lighting. Just her.

LARRIKA (V.O.)
I didn't care how I looked. I was
just... proud to be seen as me.

Montage:

- Painting her nails a glossy pink.
- Carefully brushing color across her toes.
- Uploading the clip to social media.

Onscreen, likes and hearts climb in real time. Comments pop
up in English and Spanish, from strangers around the world.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And the world watched. Watched me
change. Watched me finally live.

INT. BURGER KING - MORNING SHIFT

The lunch rush is hours away. Fryers hum in the background.

Larrika stands with two MANAGERS by the counter, hands
trembling slightly.

LARRIKA
I'm transgender. I'm coming out.

The managers glance at each other, unsure – polite smiles.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

At first, they didn't believe me.

Cut to:

– Day 1: She slides a tray across the counter, nails painted bright.

– Day 2: Nails plus small gold hoops in her ears.

– Day 3: Nails, earrings, wig, full makeup – serving a Whopper with a radiant grin.

Her coworkers laugh and joke with her like nothing's changed.

A MANAGER holds up her old name tag.

MANAGER

You want me to change this?

LARRIKA

Yes. My name's Larrika.

Close on: a fresh tag with "LARRIKA" in bold black letters.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

They loved my new name. They loved me.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - AFTERNOON

A gray sedan pulls into the parking lot. Larrika sits behind the wheel, nails tapping on the steering wheel.

LARRIKA (V.O.)

Social media was one thing... but in person? That was different.

She steps out in "stud" clothes – fitted jeans, baseball cap – and walks inside.

Montage:

– Browsing the produce section, head down.

– Picking up milk in the dairy aisle.

– Passing other shoppers without a second glance.

Each trip, her chin lifts a little higher. Her smile lasts a little longer.

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

The more I went out... the stronger I got.

Cut to:

She walks through the automatic doors, sunlight washing over her, no disguise this time – nails gleaming, earrings catching the light, stride confident.

LARRIKA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Larrika finally took her place. On
the throne. Queen.

FADE TO BLACK.

LARRY'S ACTUAL REAL LIFE VIDEO FOOTAGE ON FACEBOOK, COMING
OUT OF THE CLOSET, CONFESSING TO THE WORLD THAT HE IS A
TRANSGENDER.

THE END.