

CRUCIAL

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. NIGERIA - ANIKE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Cluttered. The definition of "Humble Beginnings".

Sick and in bed is MONITA (58). Tired eyes. Tired expression.

Labored breathing.

Rubbing on her hand and looking anxious is her son, JACAB (23). Tank top t-shirt. Flip flops. Board shorts.

Something, or someone catches Monita's attention by the door.

MONITA

You don't have to go for me.

And for the first time, we meet --

-- ANIKE (25). Slim. Confident and stoic. Two bags of luggage by her feet.

ANIKE

I have to go. I'll send money back for your treatments.

MONITA

My baby. We are all so proud of you.

Anike makes her way to her mother's side. Kisses her on the forehead.

ANIKE

Don't worry mother. We will get you the treatments you need.

INT. U.S.A. - FIRST AMERICAN BANK - LOBBY - DAY

Behind the secretary's desk sits --

-- MILA (33). African American. Shy and overwhelmed. Pounds away at her keyboard. Data entry.

Out of his office struts HARRISON GILBERT (50). Arrogant. The type of guy who spends a little too much time in the mirror.

In his hand is a stack of manila folders and papers.

He arrives at Mila's desk with a smile.

HARRISON

Mila, I need you to take care of
this for me.

He drops the stack onto her desk with a thud. Mila flips
through it --

MILA

This is the Carter Loan.

HARRISON

Sure is. I need you to put it
together and have it on my desk in
the morning.

MILA

But I'm just --

HARRISON

-- You can handle it. Have
confidence.

MILA

Isn't this... your job?

HARRISON

I thought we were a team? If you
can't handle the workload --

MILA

-- No I can do it. Just thought
you'd want to handle it. It's a
pretty big deal.

HARRISON

I would. But I've got a tee time.
Potential new client. You'll do
fine.

He struts off down the hall.

INT. DORIS' OFFICE

Plush. Immaculate.

DORIS (35) sits behind her desk. Sophisticated and confident.

Across from her are TWO BUSINESSMEN. Everyone stands with big
smiles on their faces.

Doris comes from behind her desk and shakes both of their
hands.

DORIS

We look forward to helping you
build your business. And once
again, thanks for choosing First
American Bank.

She leads them to the door. As soon as they're gone --

-- Doris turns and completes a brief, but ecstatic
celebration.

INT. LOBBY - LATER

FIONA (26) pushes the mail cart. Despite her professional
appearance, it's clear she parties hard on the weekends.

She arrives at Mila's desk. Studies the pile of work that
Mila attempts to get from under.

FIONA

Again?

Mila sighs.

FIONA

You should tell that dude to go
fuck himself.

MILA

He's my boss Fiona.

FIONA

In that case, tell him to go screw
himself. You know. Show him some
respect.

Mila can't help but smile.

Fiona pulls out a stack of mail. Hands it to her.

As Mila thumbs through it --

FIONA

You deserve a drink. Happy hour.
You and me.

MILA

I'm gonna be here late.

She raises a handful of the papers to drive the point home.

FIONA
Where's your boss that he's too
busy to do his own work?

MILA
Golf course.

FIONA
Figures.

Fiona sighs.

FIONA
We've still got a few hours left in
the work day. Give it some thought?

MILA
Okay.

FIONA
Don't work too hard. They pay you
to be a secretary.

Fiona pushes her cart down the hall.

INT. EXCLUSIVE RESTAURANT - OUTDOOR PATIO - EVENING

A place that sells \$50 salads.

HALF EMPTY. PATRONS eat and sip from glasses of vintage wine.

Seated alone at a table and enjoying her Cobb Salad is Doris.

She washes down her salad with a sip of her white wine.

Moments later a tough looking guy enters the patio area --

-- and takes a seat at Doris' table.

His name is CHUCK (40). Neck tats. A few too many rings on
his fingers. Sinister.

He plucks a piece of bacon out of Doris' salad. Eats it with
a grin.

DORIS
If you're hungry, I can order you
something.

CHUCK
My question is, how can you afford
such fine dining when you owe
Mookie thirty five large.

Doris leans in. Whispers --

DORIS
If your boss wants his money, it's
important that I keep up
appearances.

CHUCK
How is a salad with eggs in it
gonna get Mookie his money back?

DORIS
It's called a Cobb Salad.

She takes a sip of her wine.

CHUCK
All I know, is the super bowl was a
month ago. Which means you're late
on your debt.

Doris puts her wine back on the table.

DORIS
I'm working on it. I've got a few
things that I'm putting together --

Chuck picks up her wine --

-- and chugs it. When it's gone, he shows his appreciation
with an exaggerated sigh.

CHUCK
Not bad. I prefer a good shot of
Jameson myself. What did this glass
set you back?

DORIS
The price wasn't listed.

CHUCK
Ahhhh. The old, "If you have to ask
you can't afford it" huh?

He picks a piece of egg out of her salad. Eats it.

CHUCK
You have a week from today to pay
off your debt. Got it?

He stands. Wipes his hands on his jeans. Exits.

Doris pushes her salad away from her. No longer hungry.

She sighs and looks around to see if anyone was watching.

INT. NEDDY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Quaint and humid.

Bagging a mound of cocaine at the kitchen table are --

-- COBRA (22). Born troublemaker. His childish good looks are his secret weapon.

-- VERB (20). One glance and it's obvious this guy has already had a hard life.

-- GRANDMA NEDDY (60). Warm and hospitable. If not for the mound of coke, you'd think she just returned from church.

They work in silence until --

-- Fiona busts through the front door and stumbles into the kitchen. Drunk.

FIONA

If it isn't the workin' folk.

Neddy regards her with a face of disappointment. She and Fiona lock eyes.

Neddy never takes her eyes off Fiona as she speaks --

NEDDY

Boys, how about you take a break.
Go get yourselves some fresh air.

COBRA

Yes ma'am.

Cobra and Verb know what's about to go down. They scurry to leave before they get caught in the cross fire.

As soon as they're gone --

NEDDY

Where have you been?

FIONA

Happy hour. With work friends.

NEDDY

Why are you out drinking on a
Tuesday night?

FIONA
Tough day at work. Wanted to let
off some steam.

NEDDY
You work in the mail room.

FIONA
So?

NEDDY
Don't you want better for yourself?

FIONA
That's why I went to happy hour.

NEDDY
Sit down.

Fiona hesitates.

NEDDY
Don't make me ask you again Fiona.

Fiona takes a seat at the table, across from Neddy.

NEDDY
If you want something, you're gonna
have to work for it.

FIONA
What do you think I'm doing in the
mail room.

NEDDY
I think you're coasting. You should
have moved up by now.

FIONA
My boss is an asshole.

NEDDY
Maybe you're not applying yourself.

FIONA
How do you know if I'm applying
myself?

NEDDY
Because if you were, you'd be
taking classes instead of getting
drunk on a weeknight.

Fiona jumps out of her seat. Lumbers down the hall --

FIONA
Sage advice from my drug dealing
grandmother.

INT. HOSTEL - ANIKE'S ROOM - LATER

A run down room in the run down part of town.

Anike takes a bite from a candy bar and chases it with a sip from her bottled water.

She unpacks her few belongings.

With a sigh, she stares at her bed. Debating the risk/reward of actually sleeping in it.

INT. MILA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Mila sits on the floor with her back against the couch.

Dressed in her pajamas. Paperwork scattered all around her.

Sounds of two people having the most acrobatic sex of all time echo from the back room.

By the look on Mila's face, the sex has been this loud for quite some time.

Mila attempts to stay focused. Rummages through the paperwork. Finds what she's looking for. Reads it.

The sex sounds stop.

Mila smiles. Jots down notes.

In the doorway appears AUNT PATTY (48). Track marks on her arms. She wears only a tank top.

It struggles to contain her breasts.

She sips from a glass of water as she glares at Mila.

After an awkward couple of moments, Mila can feel her gaze.

She looks up --

PATTY
What is that? Homework?

MILA
It's a loan application.

PATTY
We gettin' some money?

MILA
It's not for us.

Patty exhales.

PATTY
So why are you doing it? Thought
you were a secretary?

MILA
Did you want something?

PATTY
You just gonna spend your whole
life in this apartment readin'
papers?

MILA
It's my job.

PATTY
Some job.

Mila tries to return her focus to her work.

PATTY
Wanna know what I think?

Mila ignores her. Sorts through paperwork.

PATTY
I think you're too shy. You don't
know how to take what you want.
That's why you don't ever have no
man.

MAN (O.S.)
Bring yo' fine ass back in here.

This delights Patty.

PATTY
See. I take what I want. That's why
I got a man back there. Givin' me
what I need. And you're out here
readin' papers.

Patty turns and sashays back to the bedroom.

Mila tries to hide it, but rage builds inside of her.

INT. FIRST AMERICAN BANK - LOBBY - MORNING

Mila sits at her desk. Sips coffee. Exhausted.

The paperwork for the Carter Loan sits by her keyboard.

Harrison enters. Coffee mug in hand. Whistling. Greets Mila with a huge smile.

HARRISON

Did you get that Carter Loan done?

Mila hands it to him. He smiles.

HARRISON

You look exhausted. Hope you didn't stay up too late working on this.

MILA

I had a tough time getting to sleep. My aunt was making a lot of noise last night.

HARRISON

You need more money so you can get your own place.

Mila's eyes perk up at the thought of a raise.

MILA

You think you could --

HARRISON

-- It's not really up to me. Gotta go through the board.

Holds up the Carter Loan.

HARRISON

Thanks for this. I'll review it and see if any changes need to be made.

Mila watches as he struts down the hall. Whistling.

Anike enters the bank. She gets in line. There's AN OLD LADY in front of her.

As she waits, she surveys the bank. Take stock of the entrance. Notices the exit.

Sizes up the OVERWEIGHT SECURITY GUARD at the door.

She also takes a moment to count the amount of open teller windows. Four.

The Old Lady in line in front of her steps up to a teller window.

Anike is next.

She checks her watch. It's 11:47 AM.

Another teller window opens and Anike steps up to it. A YOUNG FEMALE TELLER welcomes her with a smile.

TELLER

How can I help you today?

ANIKE

I'd like to open up a savings account.

TELLER

Okay great. But I'm afraid I can't help you with that. You'll need to see a manager.

ANIKE

Oh. How long do you think that will take?

The Teller looks past her.

TELLER

It looks like our managers are occupied right now. But once they're done it should only take ten to fifteen minutes.

ANIKE

I'll have to come back. I don't have time right now.

The Teller hands her a brochure.

TELLER

I totally understand. But this may help you prepare for when you come back.

Anike takes the brochure.

ANIKE

Thank you.

Anike walks towards the door. She counts her steps as she goes.

When she reaches the front door --

ANIKE
 (To herself)
 One hundred and twenty six.

She walks out.

INT. BREAKROOM

Doris waits for the Keurig to dispense her coffee.

Harrison enters. More smug than usual.

 HARRISON
 Hello Doris.

 DORIS
 Harrison.

 HARRISON
 I heard about that deal you closed
 yesterday. Congratulations.

 DORIS
 Thank you. How's the Carter Loan
 coming?

 HARRISON
 Great. I'm pretty close to locking
 it up.

 DORIS
 Don't you mean your secretary is
 close to locking it up?

Harrison smiles.

 HARRISON
 It's a team effort. She knows the
 benefits of making me look good.

He pulls a bottle of water out of the fridge.

 HARRISON
 I hear they're going to be making a
 decision on Vice President pretty
 soon. No hard feelings when I win,
 okay.

 DORIS
 Your confidence is cute.
 Unwarranted. But cute nonetheless.

HARRISON

On the plus side, if the whole "Vice President" thing doesn't work out, you can always fall back on your looks. For a woman your age, you still have an incredible figure.

He winks, and exits the breakroom.

Doris takes her coffee mug. Repulsed.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

Anike sits on the outdoor patio to a coffee shop. Across the street is the entrance to the First American Bank.

She sips a coffee. Watches the entrance to the bank.

CUSTOMERS enter and exit the bank.

Mila and Fiona exit the bank and walk down the street.

Anike checks her watch. It reads: 6:03 PM.

She gets up and follows them down the block.

INT. BAR - LATER

An after work bar. Low lighting. PROFESSIONALS sip beers and craft cocktails.

Seated at the bar are Mila and Fiona. Fiona sips a margarita.

Mila drinks a vodka tonic.

FIONA

But what happens if he becomes Vice President?

MILA

Hopefully he'll remember all the work I've done and give me a promotion.

FIONA

You don't really think that's going to happen, do you?

Mila shrugs. Sips her drink.

FIONA
He's an asshole. And he's lazy.
That's a horrible combination.

MILA
He probably won't even get the
promotion.

FIONA
If not him, then who?

MILA
What about Doris?

FIONA
The ice queen? Yeah right.

MILA
She's not that bad.

Fiona laughs out loud. Takes a gulp of her drink.

MILA
What?

FIONA
She tried to have me fired my first
week.

MILA
No? Really?

FIONA
I lost some of her mail. Big deal.

Mila laughs.

On the opposite end of the bar, Anike watches intently.

Attempting to listen in on their conversation.

MILA
I'm sure she was just having a bad
day.

FIONA
That or she's a raging bitch.

Anike approaches --

ANIKE
Excuse me. Do you ladies work at a
bank?

FIONA
Yeah. Unfortunately.

Anike extends her hand --

ANIKE
My name's Anike.

She and Fiona shake hands.

FIONA
Fiona. This is Mila.

Mila and Anike shake.

Anike takes a seat next to them.

ANIKE
I just moved here. I'm looking for work.

FIONA
Well, I wouldn't recommend our bank. The place is a shit show.

MILA
Where did you move here from?

ANIKE
Nigeria.

MILA
You're a long way from home.

ANIKE
Yes. I came to America to find work so I can send money back home.

FIONA
You don't really want to work at a bank do you?

ANIKE
Is the pay good?

Mila and Fiona laugh.

FIONA
Depends. For the two of us, no. The money sucks.

MILA
But if you get to be a manager, the money gets better.

ANIKE

It sounds like the two of you don't
like your jobs.

FIONA

That would be an understatement.

The three ladies laugh and sip their drinks.

INT. DORIS' HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

An elegant bathroom. Ripped from the pages of a catalogue.

Doris soaks in a bubble bath. Sips red wine. Eyes closed.

Exhales.

The sound of broken glass destroys her serenity.

Eyes open. Alert. Fear. She looks around. Waits for another
sound.

It doesn't come.

A deep breath. She gets out of the tub. Wraps herself in a
towel. Steps out of the bathroom --

INT. MASTER BEDROOM

Just as elegant as the bathroom. Doris spared no expense with
this place.

She steps into the bedroom. Still dripping wet, despite the
towel wrapped around her.

Doris surveys the bedroom.

Nothing.

She listens for another sound.

Nothing.

She reaches under her bed --

-- and pulls out a baseball bat.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Doris creeps down the hallway. Baseball bat in hand.

She freezes. Listens.

Nothing.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

Doris makes her way across the living room. Alert. Hands tight around her baseball bat. Water dripping off her.

She surveys the room.

Nothing.

She keeps going until she steps into --

INT. KITCHEN

She shivers from the breeze. Immediately turns to the window.

It's shattered.

Looks on the ground. Glass everywhere.

There's a rock. Wrapped around it and held by rubber bands is a note.

Doris makes her way to the rock. Careful to avoid the shards of glass. Picks up the rock. Takes off the note.

It reads:

6 DAYS

INT. FIRST AMERICAN BANK - MORNING

The bank is closed.

All of the EMPLOYEES stand in the lobby. Air of anticipation.

A PROCESSION OF SIX WELL DRESSED PROFESSIONALS emerge from the back offices. This is the Board of Trustees.

Amongst them is a regal woman in her 60's. Her name is MEREDITH. Smugness seeps off of her.

Meredith steps forward. All business.

MEREDITH

The Board understands that you all have work to do, so we will make this as quick as possible so that all of you can get back to work.

Doris and Harrison smile in anticipation.

MEREDITH

Your new Vice President will be --

She looks amongst the gathered employees. Dramatic pause.

MEREDITH

Harrison Gilbert.

Harrison celebrates.

Nobody else does.

Harrison struts up to the Board. Shakes all of their hands.

MEREDITH

All right folks. Everyone back to work. Time to open.

Doris marches up to Meredith.

DORIS

Can I speak with you for a moment?

INT. DORIS' OFFICE

Doris holds the door open as Meredith enters. Closes the door behind her.

DORIS

Seriously?

MEREDITH

We reviewed his work --

DORIS

-- Oh come off it. This is about me isn't it?

MEREDITH

Everything in the world doesn't revolve around you.

DORIS
You hate the idea of your own
daughter moving up at this bank.
Don't you?

MEREDITH
Then why did I give you this job?

DORIS
Keep me close. Hold me down.

MEREDITH
Don't be so dramatic.

DORIS
I quit. How's that for dramatic?

MEREDITH
Get over yourself.

Tense silence.

MEREDITH
You're not going to quit. Sit down
at your desk. Get to work. Prove to
the board that hey made the wrong
decision. Be an adult for once in
your life.

Meredith heads to the door. But just before she exits --

MEREDITH
If you want something in this
world, you have to take it. I'm not
always going to be around to hand
you everything.

Meredith lets herself out.

INT. LOBBY - DAY

Fiona hands Mila a stack of mail. As Mila takes it, something
catches Fiona's attention.

Doris is headed straight for them.

FIONA
Oh boy.

Mila looks over her shoulder just as Doris arrives.

DORIS
I need a drink. You ladies care to
join me for happy hour? My treat.

INT. BAR - EVENING

Doris, Mila, Fiona, and Anike occupy a table in the back
corner. All of them are drunk.

FIONA
Wait. She's your mom?

DORIS
Can you believe it?

FIONA
She did you dirty.

DORIS
Who you tellin'.

Doris dusts off the last of her drink.

MILA
Are you really going to quit?

DORIS
Might as well. I can't work for
Harrison. Guys a douche.
(turns to Mila)
I don't know how you do it.

MILA
Me either.

DORIS
Did I tell you about the time he
tried to guess my cup size?
Asshole.

ANIKE
Why don't you report him?

DORIS
For what? So I can always be "That
girl" and never work in banking
again. No thanks.

FIONA
I thought I was the only one he
talked to like that.

DORIS
You know he's married right?

FIONA
Yeah. I saw the ring. You ever met her?

DORIS
God no. I don't know that I want to meet her.

MILA
I met her.

Everyone at the table turns to Mila.

FIONA
Dish.

MILA
She's really sweet. I don't think she has any idea...

She trails off.

ANIKE
Idea of what?

FIONA
That he hits on anything in a skirt.

DORIS
Or a dress.

Doris turns to Anike.

DORIS
Forget getting a job. You should start your own business so you don't have to deal with these jackasses.

ANIKE
I don't know the first thing about starting a business. Especially not in America. I'm only here on a visa.

FIONA
This is America. All you need is some money to get started.

MILA

Maybe Doris can get you a loan from our bank. What type of business would you start?

ANIKE

I have no idea.

MILA

What do you like to do?

ANIKE

I like to cook.

MILA

A Nigerian restaurant. I'd go there for lunch every day.

DORIS

Restaurants are tough. They have a high failure rate.

FIONA

You'll have to think of something else. But once you get started, I'll leave the bank and come work for you.

MILA

Count me in.

DORIS

Hell, I'd probably have to take a pay cut, but you can count me in.

They ladies all laugh. Sip their drinks.

ANIKE

What if we...

She trails off.

FIONA

What if we what?

ANIKE

I don't know. Maybe we could just rob it.

FIONA

The bank?

ANIKE

Yeah. Why not? None of you like
working there.

Everyone laughs and takes another drink. Everyone except
Anike.