

135TH AND AVALON

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INT. SOLANO STATE PRISON - DARRYL'S CELL - DAWN

TITLE CARD: SOLANO STATE PRISON, PRESENT

DARRYL WILLIAMS (56) -- a thin, worn frame; a bald head -- kneels on a mat on the ground, facing the only window in the cell. He wears khaki pants and a plain white T-shirt and socks. His eyes are closed. The light from outside is a glowing pale purple -- the sun hasn't fully risen yet.

Behind Darryl, a PRISON GUARD stands just outside of the cell. He watches Darryl patiently.

DARRYL

(in Arabic)

... All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the universe. The most merciful, the most kind. Master of the day of judgment, You alone we worship, to You alone we pray for help. Guide us along the right path, the path of those whom You favored. Not of those who deserve Your anger and went astray. Ameen.

Darryl bows his head to the ground, indicating he has completed his first *rak'ah* of his morning prayer. He straightens himself again, continuing:

DARRYL (CONT'D)

(in Arabic)

Our Lord, upon You we have relied, and to You we have returned, and to You is the destination. Our Lord, make us not objects of torment for the disbelievers and forgive us, our Lord. Indeed, it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. Ameen. Allahu Akbar.

Darryl bows his head to the ground again, then stands and picks up his mat. He rolls it and places it under his arm. He then stands with his back to the Guard. We see now that Darryl is tall -- the kind of tall that would've been imposing in his younger years.

The Prison Guard unlocks the cell. He places handcuffs around Darryl's wrists and escorts him out of the cell.

I/E. WILLIAMS HOME - FOYER - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

TITLE CARD: LOS ANGELES, 1980

There is a BANGING KNOCK on the front door. MICHAEL WILLIAMS (19) approaches the door from a long hallway. He is short, lean, and sports a miniature Afro.

MICHAEL

Who's there?

MALE VOICE (O.C.)

This is the L.A. County Sheriffs Department. Please open up.

Alarmed, Michael unlocks the door frantically. He swings it open to see TWO SHERIFFS standing on the front porch. Behind them, another Sheriff shines a BRIGHT FLASHLIGHT into the house. In the background, Michael can barely make out two Sheriff's cars with flashing lights, parked at the end of the driveway.

SHERIFF #1

Are you Darryl Williams?

MICHAEL

What's going on?

SHERIFF #1

We have a warrant for the arrest of Darryl Williams. Are you him?

MICHAEL

No, no. That's my brother.

SHERIFF #2

Is he home, son?

Michael shakes his head.

SHERIFF #1

Do you know his whereabouts? Or when he will be home?

LIONEL (O.S.)

Michael, what the hell is going on?

Michael glances over his shoulder.

MICHAEL

Nothing, Daddy.

Suddenly, LIONEL WILLIAMS (47) emerges from the hallway. He is a tall, portly man with receding kinky hair and coke bottle glasses. Lionel sees the two uniformed Sheriffs and his face is washed over with terror.

LIONEL
Officers, what's going on?

SHERIFF #1
Sir, we're looking for Darryl
Williams. We have a warrant for his
arrest.

LIONEL
That's my son. What is he being
arrested for?

SHERIFF #2
Is he home, sir?

Michael looks at his father -- a mix of fear and desperation.
The first Sheriff watches Michael.

LIONEL
What's he done?

The first Sheriff is now impatient.

SHERIFF #1
Sir, impeding the arrest of a
suspect in a criminal investigation
is a crime.

LIONEL
I understand--

SHERIFF #1
So, I'm gonna ask you one more
time: Is Darryl Williams home?

He eyes Michael, who averts his gaze.

LIONEL
No. He's not home.

SHERIFF #1
I don't believe you.

The Sheriff reaches for Michael, grabbing his elbow.

SHERIFF #1 (CONT'D)
You're coming with us, boy.

Michael recoils from the Sheriff, who uses more force to pull
Michael out of the house towards him. Lionel tries to
intercede, but is blocked by the second Sheriff.

LIONEL

What are you doing? Let go of my son!

SHERIFF #2

Sir, please step back. Don't make things worse for you or your son.

MICHAEL

Let go of me! Daddy!

The Sheriff is trying to force Michael to the ground. The bright flashlight shines in Michael's face; he squints his eyes. Tears are rolling down his cheek.

A YOUNG DARRYL (24) -- tall, buff -- emerges behind Lionel.

DARRYL

Hey, let go of my brother!

Lionel turns to look at Darryl. He places a hand on Darryl's chest: *What did you do?* Darryl averts his father's eye contact.

DARRYL (CONT'D)

I'm Darryl Williams. That's my younger brother. Let him go!

The Sheriffs look at Darryl. They step away from Michael. They pull Darryl out onto the porch as Lionel watches.

The Sheriffs handcuff Darryl.

SHERIFF #1

Darryl Williams, you are being placed under arrest for the murder of Tonya Green. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in the court of law. You have the right to an attorney--

The Sheriff's voice FADES TO SILENCE. Lionel watches as Darryl is mirandized. Michael stands up, backing away from his brother and the Sheriffs.

Darryl looks at the ground. We hear the sound of a STEADY HEARTBEAT. Then, the VOLUME of what is happening comes back.

LIONEL'S POV -- Darryl is being dragged away from the porch. Lionel and Michael look on.

LIONEL

Where are you taking my boy?!

Darryl looks at his father and brother as the Sheriffs lower him into the backseat of their car.

CUT TO:

INT. SOLANO STATE PRISON - CELL BLOCK CORRIDOR - DAWN

The Prison Guard escorts Darryl down a long corridor. Many of the other inmates on the block still sleep, but a few stand. They watch as Darryl is escorted away. Some of them nod at him, in comradeship and acknowledgment.

INT. SOLANO STATE PRISON - DISCHARGE OFFICE - DAY

Darryl sits in a plastic chair. The Guard leans near the door. Darryl looks around the room with casual curiosity -- he's never been here before. The room is large, sparse: a few old wooden desks rest against walls decorated with fading posters. Some of the posters are inspirational; some of them are informational from the California Department of Corrections.

There's a KNOCK on the door. It opens. A small, balding man in a cheap looking brown suit steps in: THE ASSISTANT WARDEN (50s). He carries a folder, notepad, and pen.

ASSISTANT WARDEN
Williams. Today's the big day.

Darryl nods. The Assistant Warden pulls up a plastic chair, and sits across from him.

ASSISTANT WARDEN (CONT'D)
I'm going to be leading your
discharge today...

Darryl nods again.

LATER:

Darryl stands in jeans and a T-shirt with a paper bag sitting on the table next to him, and his prayer mat rolled underneath his arm.

ASSISTANT WARDEN (CONT'D)
Here's your paperwork and your bus
voucher. You're heading straight to
LA?

The Assistant Warden hands over a stack of papers. Darryl places them in the bag.

DARRYL

Yes, sir. I'm joining my family for the holiday.

ASSISTANT WARDEN

Good for you.

The Guard enters, holding an envelope. He hands it to Darryl.

PRISON GUARD

Here's the remaining funds from your account, inmate. Two hundred, thirty seven dollars and sixty two cents.

Darryl takes the envelope, opens it, and thumbs through the cash. He slips the envelope inside his jacket pocket.

PRISON GUARD (CONT'D)

Also, there is someone here for you in the visitor's parking lot.

Darryl's eyebrows knit together in confusion.

ASSISTANT WARDEN

I thought you said you were taking the bus home?

DARRYL

I am. I mean, that was the plan.
(to Prison Guard)
Who is it? You sure they're here for me?

The Prison Guard shrugs.

PRISON GUARD

All I know is there is someone in the parking lot who says they're here for you.

ASSISTANT WARDEN

Sometimes, parole officers come to give a ride to newly released inmates. But that's usually when they're being set up for transitional living.

DARRYL

Man, I ain't going to no halfway house. I got family waiting for me.

ASSISTANT WARDEN

Well, take care, Williams. Stay out of trouble.

Darryl shakes hands with the Assistant Warden and then idles.

PRISON GUARD

What you waiting for, man? You want to go back in a cell?

Darryl looks at him, before realization dawns: *He is free to leave.* He reaches for the door knob.

DARRYL

Hey, man, I don't know where I'm going...

The Prison Guard smiles.

PRISON GUARD

I'll help you out, for old time's sake, I guess.

Darryl frowns and steps out of the office.

EXT. SOLANO STATE PRISON - VISITOR PARKING LOT - DAY

Darryl stands at the doorway. In one hand, he holds the bag with his belongings. In another, his bus voucher.

He watches a black Ford Crown Victoria parked across the lot. He frowns and shakes his head. He turns to the Guard.

DARRYL

Man, I told them I was taking the bus. I got family waiting for me.

The Guard shrugs. Darryl steps out of the doorway. He stops. He looks around him: the sky; the high, barbed wire fencing; the cinder block buildings on either side. He looks past the parking lot to the road beyond it. He looks at everything except for the Guard, standing behind him. He keeps walking towards the Crown Victoria.

Suddenly, the Crown Victoria's driver's door opens. A short, lean Black man with balding salt-n-pepper hair steps out: AN OLDER MICHAEL WILLIAMS (51). Darryl stops walking. He registers the surprise. This isn't his parole officer; it's his younger brother.

A smile slowly spreads across his face. He gives a chuckle. The two men advance towards each other. Finally, their bodies clap together in a big hug. They stay this way for a while.

No words. Behind his glasses, Michael's eyes tear up. They pull away from each other, examining the other's face.

MICHAEL

It's good to see you, man.

DARRYL

Yeah. You, too.

Darryl places a hand on Michael's head, turns it from side to side.

DARRYL (CONT'D)

You got Daddy's hairline. You should just shave that shit off. Like I did.

Darryl runs a hand over his own smooth, bald head.

MICHAEL

Everyone's excited to see you. The whole family's coming over for Christmas dinner.

DARRYL

Linda too?

MICHAEL

Nah, man. But the kid's will be there. And you'll get to meet Jules.

Darryl nods.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

We got time before our flight. You wanna grab some breakfast? I saw an IHOP on the way here.

DARRYL

Yeah, that's cool.

Michael walks to the car. Darryl follows him. Michael gets to the driver's side, fumbles for the keys in his pocket.

DARRYL (CONT'D)

Yo, man, can I ask you something?

Michael looks up at his brother.

DARRYL (CONT'D)

What the fuck were you thinking, picking me up in a Crown Vic?

Michael begins laughing.

MICHAEL

Negro, this was all they had. I booked everything last minute.

DARRYL

Had me worried. Thought it was a P.O., taking me to a halfway house or some shit.

MICHAEL

Get in the car, man.

They both sink into the car. The engine starts. The rear break lights come on. The car backs out of its space. From inside, we hear the beginning of Ice Cube's "It Was a Good Day" start to play. The Crown Vic peels out of the parking lot.

CUT TO:

INT. IHOP - DAY

Darryl and Michael sit across from each other in a booth. Michael has been working on what was a large breakfast: remnants of eggs, bacon, sausage grease, and pancakes litter a big plate. He takes a sip of black coffee.

Darryl spoons some oatmeal into his mouth. He looks around at the other diners: an elderly couple sitting in a booth across the restaurant; a large family with very young children.

MICHAEL

You sure you don't want nothing else, man?

Michael gestures towards Darryl's half-eaten oatmeal and picked-through fruit bowl. Darryl shakes his head.

DARRYL

Yeah, I'm fine.

Michael checks his wrist watch.

MICHAEL

We should probably get the check and head out. The plane leaves in two hours, and we still got a ways to Sacramento.

Darryl nods and pushes his oatmeal away from him. He reaches into his jacket and pulls out the envelope with his cash. Michael holds out a hand to him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

DARRYL
Oh, I thought I should--

MICHAEL
Nah, man, this is my treat.

DARRYL
No, I should be the one treating you.

MICHAEL
C'mon, don't be ridiculous. Put that away.

Darryl slowly puts the envelope back in his jacket.

DARRYL
I appreciate you coming to get me. And, uh, paying for breakfast. And, you know, everything.

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL
You don't have to thank me. I'm just-- You're home for Christmas. This is crazy.

DARRYL
Yeah...

Michael waves down the WAITRESS, who comes over. She smiles.

WAITRESS
Can I get you two gentlemen anything else?

Michael shakes his head.

MICHAEL
Just the check, please.

CUT TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Michael and Darryl are standing along the pick-up curb, which is crowded with travelers. Darryl watches as individuals and families -- all with large suitcases -- wheel to family members' cars amidst warm greetings and big hugs.

A BLACK BMW SUV pulls up along the curb in front of them. From inside, someone HONKS its horn. Michael looks up and smiles.

MICHAEL

That's Jules.

He advances towards the car. A small woman with long, straight hair comes around from the driver's side: JULES KENDRICK-WILLIAMS (50). She smiles. Her and Michael hug and kiss.

Darryl approaches Jules.

DARRYL

Hello. It's nice to meet you.

Jules nods.

JULES

Yes, yes. Welcome... um, home.

She awkwardly advances towards Darryl. They embrace; Jules lightly pats Darryl on the back, not fully participating in the hug. She pulls away from him quickly.

JULES (CONT'D)

Well, are you boys ready to go?

Michael nods. They all clamor into the BMW. It drives off.

INT. JULES' BMW - MOVING - DAY

Darryl sits in the backseat, peering out of the window as they pass large, Mediterranean style homes.

In the front seat, Jules hums along offbeat to Patti LaBelle's "Lady Marmalade."

MICHAEL

(to Darryl)

We got one of the guest room's all made up for you, man. After tomorrow, I'll take you shopping, but there's some toiletries and a few clothes in there for you now.

DARRYL

All right. Thank you.

MICHAEL

No problem.

DARRYL

And I appreciate both of you letting me stay with you until I can, uh, get back on my feet. Right after Christmas, I'll begin looking for a job. I don't want to be burden to you for too long...

MICHAEL

You ain't gotta thank us. It's just good to have you home.

Jules looks at Darryl in the rearview mirror. Darryl meets her gaze, and she immediately looks away.

JULES

Home sweet home.

Jules presses a remote control button, and Darryl watches as the garage door of a nearby house rolls up. It's large, with a beautiful, lush Southern California garden on one side, and a perfectly manicured lawn on the other.

Jules whips into the garage, and slows the car to a stop.

INT. GARAGE, JULES' AND MICHAEL'S HOME - DAY

Michael looks over his shoulder at Darryl, smiling with pride.

MICHAEL

Ain't nothing like the old house on 135th, huh?

Darryl shakes his head.

DARRYL

Nope. Sure ain't.

Jules hits the remote control again, and the garage door closes. They all hop out of the car, Darryl grabbing his bag and prayer mat from the seat next to him.

INT. JULES AND MICHAEL'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY

Michael and Jules step into the house from the garage. Darryl is behind them.

VOICES (O.S.)
SURPRISE!

Darryl steps back. Michael and Jules step away from him, smiling.

Across the room, JASON (26) and ISABEL (22) -- Michael's children -- stand next to a large Christmas tree. Jason, who is dressed like a hipster and sports dreadlocks, holds a Christmas stocking with Darryl's name written on it. Isabel has wild curly hair and wears large, ironic nerd glasses. She holds a bundle of balloons, one of which reads, "WELCOME HOME!"

Darryl's face breaks into a smile.

MICHAEL
What y'all waiting for? Go give
your uncle a hug!

Jason and Isabel come to Darryl, embracing him in a hug at the same time. He bends down to wrap his arms around them.

DARRYL
I see y'all got your dad's height.

His niece and nephew laugh lightly.

DARRYL (CONT'D)
They're like, a perfect fifty-fifty
mix of you and Linda.

Michael smiles.

JULES
Let him come inside and sit down.

Everyone moves into the den, and sits across the various large leather sofas and couches in the room. A Christmas tree and a few other decorations make the space festive. Everything looks expensive. And well-ordered, the way a model home does. They all look at each other, but no one speaks, until...

ISABEL
So, how was the flight, Uncle
Darryl? Was it your first time on a
plane?

Darryl grins.

DARRYL

What? I've been in prison; not the Stone Age.

Everyone laughs loudly -- except for Jules, who offers a smile. The ice has been broken.

ISABEL

(sheepishly)

Sorry.

DARRYL

I'm just messing with you; I got a lot of time to make up for. The flight was fine.

JULES

Are you thirsty? We have water, juice, soda...

DARRYL

I'm good, thanks.

She nods.

JULES

Jason, Isabel -- did you decide what you're going to do about tomorrow?

DARRYL

Christmas plans?

JASON

Yeah, my mom had a dinner thing planned with her side, but that's before we knew--

DARRYL

How is Linda?

JASON

She's doing good.

JULES

Well?

ISABEL

We're going to spend Christmas here, but we may go over there for a bit.

JULES

Oh, OK. That works then.

DARRYL

Maybe I'll go with you. It'd be nice to see her.

Michael clears his throat.

MICHAEL

So, Izzy, how's the new job going?

ISABEL

Daddy, I've been working for the magazine for seven months.

MICHAEL

Oh...

FADE TO:

INT. JULES AND MICHAEL'S HOME - DEN - DAY

It's the next day: Christmas. Darryl sits in a long-sleeve button-up shirt and slacks, both of which are slightly too big for him.

He's got a stack of paperwork and pamphlets sitting next to him -- what he took from the Assistant Warden the day before. He reads a pamphlet titled, "CAL TRANS PAROLEE WORK PROGRAM."

The room is filled with the sound of the Jackson Five's "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" coming from the stereo in the entertainment unit.

We hear THUMPING FOOTSTEPS coming down the stairs. Jason and Isabel enter the room. Jason wears a button-up and skinny jeans. Isabelle wears a nice dress and cardigan.

ISABEL

I'm just saying -- you didn't need to treat her like that.

JASON

Treat her like what? I was honest from the start. We weren't exclusive. *She* caught feelings; I can't control her emotions.

ISABEL

I saw how you were with her on your birthday, Jason. You had feelings too.

JASON

No, I had an impression. That's not the same as feelings. An impression quickly fades.

Isabel stops and looks directly in her brother's face.

ISABEL

You are so full of shit!

Jason shrugs and heads into the kitchen. She turns to Darryl.

ISABEL (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas, Uncle Darryl! Can you teach this fool some sense please?

Isabel kisses him on the cheek. Darryl shrugs.

DARRYL

He has a point.

ISABEL

Oh, God, not you too.

Darryl smiles. Isabel goes to the tree, and picks up a large gift bag. She places it in Darryl's lap.

DARRYL

What's this?

ISABEL

We got you presents!

She picks up a large wrapped box, as well as a small gift card holder and places it at her uncle's feet. Darryl just stares.

ISABEL (CONT'D)

Oh, shit! Are you allowed to have Christmas presents? I totally forgot you're Muslim--

Darryl nods.

DARRYL

Yeah, of course. I just... wasn't expecting you to get me anything. I didn't get you guys anything.

Isabel sits next to him.

ISABEL

You're our present... Now open them! The big box is from Daddy... I want to see if he loves you more. The bag is from me and Jason. And the gift card is from Jules.

Darryl begins pulling tissue paper from the bag.

INT. JULES AND MICHAEL'S HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Darryl goes into the kitchen, where Michael and Jules are setting up hors d'oeuvres. Michael wears a nice sweater and black slacks; Jules wears a long dress and pearls. Her hair is elegantly curled.

JULES

The caterer should be here at 3PM to begin setting up. When did you tell people to arrive?

MICHAEL

Oh. Uh, 3PM... I think.

Jule sighs. *Typical.*

JULES

All right, well, hopefully this will hold people over until dinner. I'm surprised we were able to get the caterer to agree to make extra on such short notice.

Darryl clears his throat, catching their attention.

DARRYL

Thanks for the presents. The clothes are sharp, man. And the gift card is very generous, Jules.

Michael and Jules smile at him.

JULES

No problem! Merry Christmas.

She pulls a tray of deviled eggs from the refrigerator.

DARRYL

Mike, I was wondering if you wouldn't mind running me to a drug store real quick?

Jules turns to him.

JULES

Is there something you need? We probably already have it in the house.

DARRYL

Uh, I wasn't able to get anybody presents. I wanted to buy some Christmas cards and fill 'em out real quick.

MICHAEL

Oh, you don't have to do that. We know--

DARRYL

I want to.

Michael looks at Jules.

JULES

Yeah, go. I can ask Isabel to help me set this stuff up, I guess.

Darryl gives her a grateful smile. Michael claps a hand on his back and leads him out of the kitchen.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS ROOMS OF JULES AND MICHAEL'S HOME:

A) DEN - Darryl sits, talking to Jason and Michael while a football game plays. DOORBELL RINGS.

B) FOYER - Michael opens the door, and greets a group of aunties and cousins.

C) LIVING ROOM - Darryl is surrounded by this group of aunties and cousins. They hug and kiss him, and ask him questions. He smiles.

D) DINING ROOM - People line up, spooning dinner onto the plates from silver catering pans. Fancy versions of traditional soul food.

E) CAMERA PANS the LIVING ROOM, where the teens and young adults laugh and talk. It TRACKS to the FORMAL DINING ROOM, where a group of women are still eating dinner -- probably seconds -- and chatting. Then, to the KITCHEN, where some of the men stand and drink dark liquor and laugh loudly. Finally, to the DEN, where the kids play. Darryl watches the children, as they show off their new Christmas toys. His eyes twinkle -- a hint of watering. He laughs.

END OF MONTAGE.