

THE CHAIR

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. LAKE STREET AND CHICAGO AVENUE - NIGHT

1

MAY 2020

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA...

(in complete silence)

Through the eyes of our PROTESTER T, (27) we see swirling pockets of smoke engulfing scores of GEORGE FLOYD demonstrators. Rows of police fully equipped in riot gear violently disperse the political activists. Established storefronts are smashed, burning cars and the remains of looted remnants litter Lake Street. Protester T is suddenly hit with a slow-motion rubber bullet, that drops our eye view of the conflict slowly to the ground.

(dark silence)

We see scrambling feet running in all directions. Turning to the side, we see black clad formations of police advancing, drawing closer to Protester T.

Lake Street is on fire. Power lines drip molten rubber on those below. Flares and flash grenades clear the way for the advancing armored vehicles pushing the fleeing protesters down Chicago Avenue. Fighting through tear gassed eyes, Protester T staggers to stand and is pulled up into the retreating crowd of black and white protesters. Arms, legs and many mixed bodies scramble through the smoke as OUR gaze focuses behind the tanks and riot police. We see protesters of various classes and color left bleeding, handcuffed, beaten, arrested all because BLACK LIVES MATTER. The night is just beginning...

FADE TO:

2 INT. A. BLOCK BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

2

News coverage of a Nation on fire blares from the wall mounted TV in the small upstairs bedroom. JUANELL WASHINGTON (92), homeowner of 65 years sits covered in her favorite chair. Her son, CHILDS WASHINGTON, (62) retired postal worker, sits in her guest chair next to the bedroom door. He shakes his head at the disturbing TV images of social unrest flooding the airwaves. Juanell, a tiny framed, cocoa skinned, silver haired matriarch, mutes the volume, calming the room. She's about to speak when we hear commotion coming from downstairs.

(loud rumbling)

JUANELL

(startled)

What on earth was that?

She sits up, turning her head and straining to hear. She slides her bottom nightstand drawer open where we see a loaded chrome .38 revolver under several faded letters. She leans closer to the door listening for anything familiar coming up the stairs.

(downstairs door roughly opens and closes)

(in distinctive noises)

CHILDS

(standing -loudly)

Who's there?

Childs has removed his concealed 9MM. He steps into the hallway armed, only to see PASTOR FLO, (77) struggling to help the wounded Protester T up the stairs. Childs rushes to help both of them into a startled Juanell's bedroom.

JUANELL

(shaken)

What happened child?

They help Protester T gently down as she collapses on top of the bedspread. Pastor Flo removes her smoke drenched, foul smelling jacket. She opens Protester T's shirt, exposing her badly bruised shoulder.

PASTOR FLO

(calmly)

She was shot.

(protester T groans)

JUANELL

(standing over the bed)

Shot! Where's she bleeding?

PROTESTER T

(in pain)

With a rubber bullet MEEMAW.
(she groans again)

PASTOR FLO

(calmly)

Any higher, it would have been worse.

Pastor Flo, a retired nurse and close friend of Juanell, smoothly instructs Childs to gather some basics from downstairs.

JUANELL

(back in THE CHAIR)

What happened TYLISHA?

Pressing the ice pack on her badly bruised wound, TYLISHA, (30) drinks some of the water from Childs, handing the glass back to him before she talks.

TYLISHA

(angrily)

US. Us Meemaw, representing...
(moans)

Juanell reaches over and grabs Tylisha's hand and squeezes.

JUANELL
(coolly)
You feeling better?

Another gentle hand squeeze as Tylisha smiles at her heritage, this 92-year-old treasure supporting her, understanding her...

TYLISHA
(relaxing)
I am...

Pastor Flo and Juanell's eyes connect, a wily smile creeping over Juanell's face.

JUANELL
(playfully)
Good - Cuz your ass ain't staying
in my bed all night. You ain't 7
anymore.

The mood in the room lightens. Tylisha and Juanell's hands are still connected. Pastor Flo hands her some pain relief, which she accepts.

TYLISHA
(to Pastor Flo)
Thank you.

CHILDS
The first bedroom is open Tylisha,
why don't you rest in there awhile?

TYLISHA
(rising)
I think I will...

Pastor Flo and Childs settle Tylisha into the bedroom down the hall. They return to Juanell sitting in THE CHAIR.

CUT TO:

3 INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

3

Pastor Flo sits next to Juanell in the guest recliner, Childs drops back into his chair next to the door out of breath.

CHILDS
(winded)

Wow. My black ass is out of shape.

JUANELL
(snickering)
And old.

Childs smiles at her wit, at his mother's razor sharp remembrance and potent sarcasm.

PASTOR FLO
(relaxing)
We're not as young as you Nell.

JUANELL
Young? I'm old enough to remember so much more than fires and protests, girl.

CHILDS
DADDY'S stories? They were real?

PASTOR FLO
What are you two talking about?

Juanell unfurls from under her light cover reaching into her nightstand, she pulls out a couple of old letters.

JUANELL
David Earl, or LIL' DAVID to his friends and THE NETWORK.

Childs sticks his head out into the hallway. The door to Tylisha's room is cracked, the glow of a light flickering. He turns back to his mother and Pastor Flo.

PASTOR FLO
The Network? What on earth are you talking about, Nell?

JUANELL
Well, it all began with RANDY, the money part that is.

CHILDS
RANDY HART? I hear his name in my head from daddy. Wasn't he cut in half?

Juanell stiffens in her chair, Randy's death bringing back memories she's tried to forget.

PASTOR FLO
(pressing)

Cut in half? Randy Hart? The
Network? Stop playing girl.

Juanell looks at her son Childs and holds up a faded and worn business sized letter. She hands it to Pastor Flo who takes it gently from her friend.

JUANELL

What year did you move here?

Focused on the strange letter in her hand, Pastor Flo barely hears the question. We see that the letter is addressed to:

DAVID WASHINGTON 1441 IGLEHART AVENUE - SAINT PAUL,
MINNESOTA 55104.

Postmarked 1960 the .3 cents 1907 ARROWS TO ATOMS 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF OKLAHOMA STATEHOOD stamp has a return address of:

ARCHIBALD AUTOMOTIVE - 1000 HOLLYWOOD WAY - OKLAHOMA CITY,
OKLAHOMA 73084.

JUANELL

(louder)

Did you hear me, Flo?

Juanell's voice pierces the room, gaining Pastor Flo's attention.

PASTOR FLO

(startled)

Yes. Well, no.

(a. beat)

This letter is over 60 years old.

JUANELL

Read it.

Pastor Flo gently takes out the one pager, carefully unfolding the two creases. She scans the letter, her mouth dropping at its contents. Pastor Flo looks up at Juanell, then back to the letter.

PASTOR FLO

(stunned)

This is dated for this year, 2020.
What's going on...?

JUANELL

Now you know my memory ain't what it used to be, what with me being over ninety and all. I remember about fifty percent of things these days, the rest, too painful and best forgotten.

PASTOR FLO

Tell us what you do remember.

Childs leans back and closes his eyes, listening to the voice, the story. Its Black history as his mother settles back into THE CHAIR.

JUANELL

(pausing)

Child, "LET ME TELL YOU HOW IT WAS..."

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

4 EXT. UNION DEPOT TRAIN YARD - EARLY MORNING 4

JANUARY 1959

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA...

(train engines)

Several RUMBLING DIESEL engines punctuate the frigid morning air at the UNION DEPOT RAIL YARD. Last night's unexpected nor'easter encased the yard in ICE and SNOW, knocking out the lights and warning signals.

DAVID EARL, or LIL' DAVID, (30) to his friends, is following RANDY HART (28) cautiously on the ice-covered snow.

In the far distance, depot YARDMEN manually switch trains to different lines, wrong track lines. David Earl calls out to his friend Randy who's racing ahead.

(train horns)

LIL' DAVID

(timidly)

Slow down man.

Randy cuts through a new path of idle cars heading to the SCENIC BLUE.

LIL' DAVID
 (calling out)
 This is when you should turn.

Ignoring Lil' David, Randy continues down his own path,
 Lil' David slipping further behind.

(train engines)

CUT TO:

5 INT. DINING CAR - MORNING

5

The three BLACK dining car crew members have the famed SCENIC BLUE coach car ready for the spectacular PINK and WHITE breakfast service. Polished silver sugar tongs and Damask loom laced jacquard tablecloths grace the tables. White and light pink China plates and matching pristine coffee cups glisten. The properly placed silverware gleams.

Cut nosegay lilies, one pink, one white, complete the simple yet elegant table arrangement.

PHIL EWING, (37) an experienced MAXWELL BUILDERS RAILROAD employee takes off his serving jacket. He's about to head back to THE CREW'S shared sleeper cars talking on his way out.

PHIL
 (leaving)
 Anybody heard from Lil' David or
 Randy this morning?

No one has. KENNY GILES, (22), and FRED THE COOK, (34), both heard about the raid at DIRTY GIRDY'S the night before.

PHIL (CONT'D)
 I'm heading back to the sleeper.
 Keep an eye out for that snake
 CONDUCTOR for me.

THE CREW has Phil's back as he disappears thru the dining car gangway.

CUT TO:

6 EXT. UNION DEPOT YARD - CONTINUOUS

6

Lil' David and Randy rush to get to the Scenic Blue dining car literally on thin ice.

Randy, a smallish, light skinned hustler from Chicago, by way of Oklahoma, is thirty yards ahead of David Earl.

LIL' DAVID
 (snow blowing)
 I can't see shit. Where the fuck
 are all the lights?

RANDY
 (yelling back)
 I don't need lights. See that moon
 and those stars?
 (pointing to the north
 star)
 I use them for racing so...

LIL' DAVID
 (huffing)
 Come on man...

CUT TO:

7 EXT. BACK ROAD - NIGHT

7

SUMMER 1955

SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE OF OKLAHOMA, CITY...

(racing engine sounds)

The speeding muted colored car begins to blend into the black highway pavement as evening light gives way to night. Hauling a carload of moonshine, the two passengers race to their delivery destination.

LIL' DAVID
 (exasperated)
 Watch out man!

The GHOST swerves, barely missing hitting a county road marker sign. Randy is behind the wheel.

(gravel sprays - tires
 spin)

LIL' DAVID (CONT'D)
 (grasping the dash)

You about to kill us both nigger!

(engine racing)

RANDY
 (eyes fixed ahead)
 Don't be scared now soldier boy.
 This is what I do.

Kicking up donuts, banking at high speeds, gravel and rocks flying, Randy is drunk. They've barely missed barrel rolling twice.

(tires squealing)

LIL' DAVID
 (angrily at Randy)
 Motherfucker!

RANDY
 (unfazed)
 Ready for a new trick?

With that, Randy sharply cuts off of the back road and onto I 70 and the DEVIL'S CRACK. This stretch of highway is named so because of the constant, misty film of oil spewed in the air from the 12 oil pumps, coating the 5 mile stretch of I 70.

A patrol car hits its lights as Randy and Lil' David flash by. The patrol is in hot pursuit.

(patrol siren)

LIL' DAVID
 (looking behind him)
 I thought they couldn't see a
 Ghost.

Nicknamed the 'GHOST" by Randy, this 1952 HUDSON HORNET is outfitted with racing upgrades and custom modifications - capable of top speeds of 104 MPH.

RANDY
 (laughter)
 Even a Ghost has to peek out every
 now and then, you know - to say
 BOO.
 (patrol sirens)

Randy whips the Ghost into an open field, slinging the car one hundred and eighty degrees without losing throttle.
 (tires on dirt road sounds)

RANDY (CONT'D)
 (gripping the wheel tighter)
 Watch me son.

At these speeds, in only seconds both cars are face-to-face in a death stare. Lil' David braces for impact, Randy, fearless focuses straight ahead. The two cars move closer. Three hundred yards, two hundred yards...

CUT TO:

8 INT. PATROL CAR - THAT MOMENT

8

The patrolman is on the radio with his dispatch when Randy turns and heads directly at him.

DISPATCH (O.V.)
 Copy that car 28. What is the make?
 OVER?

PATROL CAR
 (into the radio)
 (frantic)
 It's a Hornet all right coming right at me. I can't make out who's driving or the tags. Wait...

The cops radio transmission ends. Unknown to Lil' David the Ghost has been outfitted with blinding dual headlights. Lil' David tenses up...

(clicking lights)

LIL' DAVID
 (scared)
 Nigger are you insane?

At that precise moment Randy switches on his dual headlights, blinding the cop. The Patrol veers sharply to his right, flipping over three times. The patrolman, thrown into a small, polluted pond, resurfaces as Randy and Lil' David speed back to Okmulgee.

(car flipping - water
splashing)

LIL' DAVID (CONT'D)

(angry)

That's the second time you've taken
my life in your hands. Have a gun
if there's ever a third.

The pair ride home silently. Lil' David never made another
run with Randy again.

END FLASHBACK:

9 EXT. UNION DEPOT YARD - CONTINUOUS

9

JANUARY 1959...

(engine noises)

Randy and Lil' David struggle to make their way to the
Scenic Blue on treacherous, ice-covered snow. Lil' David
cold, frustrated, late, yells to Randy who is yards ahead.

LIL' DAVID

(yelling)

Does it look like we're driving? My
feet are starting to freeze.

RANDY

We can't be late. Pick them dogs up
and mush.

(ominous music, louder
train engine noises)

LIL' DAVID

(falling behind)

About that.... hey, turn there!

Randy barely hears Lil' David, the distance between them
increased.

(louder train engine
noises)

RANDY

(calling back)

Hurry up man. Damn.

On a parallel track, engine #18 has been switched to the same track that Randy is on. Directed by the Yardman, engine #18 lumbers briskly between two idling freight cars in direct line with Randy.

(closer engine noises)

LIL' DAVID
(frantically shouts)
Randy, hold up man, watch out
there's a...

Engine #18 splits the two freight cars at the same time Randy steps onto the icy rail.

Randy steps awkwardly landing backwards on the train railing, instantly PARALYZED. Engine #18 slices Randy's immobilized body in half; his oversized coat catches in the engine wheels. His steaming bloody upper torso is dragged several hundred feet in the fresh snow.

(train breaking -
squealing)

The sudden trauma desensitizes Lil' David, sending him into shock. Numb, Lil' David continues walking towards the Scenic Blue, oblivious to the shouts and screams of people running to the bloody accident site. It's 4:40 AM.

(people yelling)

CUT TO:

10 INT. SECURITY OFFICE - MORNING

10

ST. PAUL UNION DEPOT TRAIN STATION

ONE DAY AFTER RANDY'S DEATH...

TOM FRY, (50) Maxwell Builder's chief security officer sits behind his desk. Numerous awards, an autographed baseball glove, and a picture of a German Shepard decorate the small office. Tom is talking with an eyewitness and first on the scene of Randy's accident yesterday. The large clock over Tom's desk ticks loudly...

(clock ticking)

TOM FRYE

So, all you saw was a black man walking away after Mr. Hart's accident?

WITNESS

It was dark, all the lights were out. I mean I saw one man, and I think I saw someone else too, but I can't be sure.

TOM FRYE

Someone else?

Tom takes out a depot map opening it on his desk.

TOM FRYE

Take a look at this map and point out exactly what you saw.

The witness points out the spots.

(loud clock ticking)

TOM FRYE

(looking at the map)

Are you sure?

The witness nods yes.

FADE OUT: