

Sunset on the Dogwood City

Episode 2 (Nov 22)

Scene 1

The sound of crickets, cicadas, and a racing heartbeat dominate the distant chatter and dishware of the Majestic Diner. Grady's voice fades in.

GRADY

Miss? Miss?....Hey Miss Clarissa.

Only the diner sounds remain. Clarissa catches her breath.

CLARISSA

I'm sorry. What?

GRADY

You good?

CLARISSA

Yeah. Just had another...vertigo thing. So weird.

GRADY

Sounds terrible.

CLARISSA

I been flying all my life and this is the first time I've ever dealt with something like this.

GRADY

You never had it before?

CLARISSA

It started as soon as I got here.

GRADY

Yeah, this city different.

CLARISSA

People keep saying that.

GRADY

As they should.

CLARISSA

Maybe these dizzy spells are genetic? My great grandma would get nauseous because of the crickets too.

GRADY

Really?

CLARISSA

Apparently.

GRADY

That's not genetic.

CLARISSA

How you know?

GRADY

The crickets get to me too.

CLARISSA

Oh good. I'm not going crazy.

GRADY

This is gonna sound weird so don't judge me...

CLARISSA

Okay.

GRADY

They remind me of death.

A beat.

CLARISSA

What?

GRADY

I said they remind—

CLARISSA

Yo okay man, what the fuck is going on?

GRADY

What you mean?

CLARISSA

My great grandma Madeline used to say that *exact* same shit.

GRADY

For real?

CLARISSA

You seem to know a lot me and my family, and you just happen to accidentally quote her?

GRADY

Clarissa, I promise I didn't know that.

CLARISSA

What do you want from me?

GRADY

I don't want anything from you. I want to help you—

CLARISSA

Yeah okay, help me how?

GRADY

I wanna make sure you tell the right story.

CLARISSA

Ooooooh I see. Look, we've already got enough researchers working on the film so—

GRADY

I'm not interested in a job. I'm interested in the truth.

CLARISSA

The truth about what?

GRADY

About your family.

CLARISSA

What about my family?

GRADY

I can only show you.

CLARISSA
Show me what?

GRADY
They're not who you think they are.

Samuel walks up.

SAMUEL
Hey y'all, here's that water...and here's that coffee, just like I like my businesses—black! Y'know what I'm saying?

(He laughs at his own joke. A beat)

Don't act like that wasn't good!

GRADY
Thank you, Sam...

A beat.

SAMUEL
What's up with y'all? What you do, Grady?

GRADY
Nothing.

SAMUEL
Clarissa, what he do?

CLARISSA
Nothing. Yet.

SAMUEL
Grady, don't be scaring the lil west coast tree hugger now.

GRADY
I ain't scaring nobody.

CLARISSA
And I'm not easy to scare.

SAMUEL
I heard that, Miss Gangsta! I love me a gangsta woman. You seeing somebody?

GRADY
Sam...

SAMUEL

I'm just asking! Ain't nothing wrong with asking.

CLARISSA

I don't have time to be messing with no man right now. Too much work to do.

SAMUEL

Well, you know what they say—all work and no play make a gangsta less gangsta.

CLARISSA

I'm positive that's not what they say.

SAMUEL

When that work slow down you know where to find me.

CLARISSA

Yep. At this diner.

GRADY

Hey Sam, you wanna go check on our food? Or another table or something?

SAMUEL

I know how to do my job, Grady. Don't hate 'cause I got game. I'll be back, Miss Bad and Bougee.

Samuel walks off.

CLARISSA

Okay. I'll bite. Show me.

GRADY

I can't show you right now.

CLARISSA

The hell you mean you can't show me right now?

GRADY

Could you meet me here tomorrow night at 8?

CLARISSA

This is starting to sound like bullshit.

GRADY

Miss Beaumont...I know you don't really know me. Some strange man in a strange city telling you strange things about your family. I know it sounds like bullshit, and I know being a sista in your profession, you probably deal with a lot of bullshit.

CLARISSA

I'd love a bullshit break, Grady.

GRADY

Me too. That's why you gotta trust me. I ain't here to hurt you. In fact, I respect you very much. You're one of the most gifted storytellers I've seen in a long time, and I know from your work that you wanna tell a story that matters. I know what I'm asking you is strange...but I think it's just as strange that you and your grandma hear the same horrifying sounds I hear. Sounds that nobody else seems to notice. Feel the same disorientation I feel. I don't think that's a coincidence. Tomorrow let me show you why.

A beat. Clarissa takes a deep breath.

CLARISSA

Fine. Here at 8?

GRADY

Yes! Thank you! Thank you! Please don't be late. Timing is important.

CLARISSA

Why?

GRADY

I keep telling you that I can't tell you.

CLARISSA

Or maybe you just won't tell me.

GRADY

Seeing is believing. And honestly, you wouldn't believe me otherwise.

Samuel approaches.

SAMUEL

Here's that food, y'all.

(He sets some dishes down)

And here's your grits with butter and cheese the way God intended it, Miss future ex-wife. Anything else y'all need?

CLARISSA

Actually, Sam, could I get this to-go, please? It's been a long night.

SAMUEL

I told you not to scare her off, Grady!

GRADY

She'll be back, I reckon.

SAMUEL

Well, they always come back to see Sam the man.

CLARISSA

Is that supposed to be you?

SAMUEL

Ooo hurt so good, baby.

CLARISSA

Boy bye.

Scene 2

An elevator dings and the doors slide open.

CONCIERGE

Hello again! Did you end up trying the Majestic last night?

CLARISSA

Yes I did. Going there again right now actually.

CONCIERGE

Liked it that much, huh?

CLARISSA

I'm not sure actually.

CONCIERGE

You try the hashbrowns like I told you?

CLARISSA

Yep. They were good.

CONCIERGE

Try the grits next and I think that should send you over the edge.

CLARISSA

I did actually and they were good too.

CONCIERGE

Well, it don't get no better than that.

CLARISSA

I hope you're not right.

CONCIERGE

Well, it's good you're giving it another shot. Oh and if you see a server in there named Sam. Tell him Trevor Jones say hey. He's the man.

CLARISSA

Uh, sure.

CONCIERGE

Okay see ya around.

CLARISSA

Yeah.

Clarissa walks out into the sounds of the city. Her phone begins to ring. She sighs.

CLARISSA

It'll be fine. It'll be fine. It'll be fine.

(She picks up)

Heeeey, Auntie.

BERNICE

Oh so she is alive after all.

CLARISSA

Hey yeah sorry I've missing your calls. It's been harder to adjust to the time change than I thought.

BERNICE

Oh okay. I was just making sure Henry found you okay.

CLARISSA

Yes, he did. Thank you for sending him to pick me up from the airport.

BERNICE

Better than Uber, right?

CLARISSA

That is true. Better than Uber.

BERNICE

Sound like you out and about now though. Where you headed?

CLARISSA

I'm uh...I'm headed to the Majestic Diner.

BERNICE

Oh yeah? You know I live right there, right? Right on the other side of the Presbyterian Church.

CLARISSA

Oh really...?

BERNICE

Yeah. Lemme meet you up there. It'll be good to see you in the flesh for once.

CLARISSA

Oh—uh—actually Auntie, I'm meeting a friend up there right now.

BERNICE

What friend?

CLARISSA

Um, just a—uh—a writer friend I know. We're just getting together to talk about the script.

BERNICE

Yeah...your mama told me you trying to plug up some holes in our script?

CLARISSA

What—no, it's not like that. I just wanted to do some personal research.

BERNICE

Clarissa. I'm one of the producers, and it's our family story. We already checked out the research for you. Was there something wrong with it?

CLARISSA

No, Aunt Bernice. I'm just being thorough as the director of this film.

BERNICE

Well, it wasn't easy or cheap getting this gala set up. I mean, it's the Dogwood Festival and we got a premiere slot for this live reading! Lots of eyes and pockets will be there so we don't need no setbacks at this point.

CLARISSA

Yeah I'm excited. It was jarring at first 'cause it came out of nowhere...but you made the magic happen like you always do.

BERNICE

You know us Beaumont beauties got that black girl magic.

CLARISSA

Uh, yeah...Okay well, I'm here so lemme let you go.

BERNICE

Let's get some lunch or dinner at Majestic this week since we both so close.

CLARISSA

Yeah let's do that.

BERNICE

If you like breakfast for dinner, you should try the hashbrowns.

CLARISSA

That's what everybody keep saying.

BERNICE

Everybody? You talking to a whole lot of people to not have time for your Auntie.

CLARISSA

It was just the concierge at the Highland Inn, Auntie.

BERNICE

Don't forget you in my city, now. Don't get so busy you don't have time for family.

CLARISSA

Yes ma'am.

BERNICE

Okay talk soon, baby.

CLARISSA

Bye.

The phone calls ends. Clarissa sighs deeply.

CLARISSA

That was fine, I guess.

She walks into the diner, which is surprisingly lifeless.

SAMUEL

Well, look who came crawling back. Couldn't stay away this eye candy, huh?

CLARISSA

Hey, Sam. Where is everybody?

SAMUEL

Oh they'll be here. The munchies will hit soon.

Oh okay. You seen Grady?

SAMUEL

Grady waiting for you back there. He already got coffee for you. You need anything else right now?

CLARISSA

I'm good. Not very hungry right now.

SAMUEL

Okay bet. I'ma take a smoke break before the rush. Just ring the bell if you need something.

CLARISSA

Thanks.

SAMUEL

Oh wait—before I go, what's your number?

CLARISSA

213, 321, mind your damn business.

SAMUEL

See, you ain't gotta be like that.

CLARISSA

Mmmm-hmm. Trevor Jones said hey, by the way.

SAMUEL

Where you see him at? That fool still got my DVD of Atlanta. The one with T.I. not Childish Glover.

CLARISSA

I'm sorry, Sam. I'm almost late to minding my business.

SAMUEL

Woooooow.

Clarissa walks away.

GRADY

Hey! I didn't know if you'd actually come or not. I got you coffee.

CLARISSA

What you got to show me?

GRADY

Oh, all business I see.

CLARISSA

Time is of the essence, right?

GRADY

Timing is important, yes. And we're almost there now.

CLARISSA

Almost where?

GRADY

Sunset. And I swear that has nothing to do with your film.

CLARISSA

Just a coincidence, huh?

GRADY

Maybe just fate.

CLARISSA

Why does it matter if it's sunset?

GRADY

What I have to show must be shown at sunset.

CLARISSA

WHY?

GRADY

It's a lot to explain.

CLARISSA

I swear if you're just wasting my time...

GRADY

I hope I'm not wasting either of our time.

CLARISSA

You better not be.

GRADY

That's honestly up to you.

CLARISSA

That doesn't make any sense.

Grady snaps a pocket watch open and closed.

GRADY

Okay. It's time.

CLARISA

Was that a pocket watch for real?

GRADY

A brotha can't have a pocket watch?

CLARISSA

I guess.

GRADY

Please follow me.

They both get up and walk a few steps. They open a door.

CLARISSA

Uh, these are the bathrooms, Grady.

GRADY

I know how improper this is going to sound, but please remember I'm not going to hurt you or be perverted. You can scream as loud as you need if you feel threatened. I assure you we're gonna want the privacy though. Okay?

CLARISSA

Hold on, one second. I need you to say hi to a friend for me.

She rummages through her purse and she cocks a gun

GRADY

Whoa! That's a gun, not a friend!

CLARISSA

Nah, she's my friend Bertha. She's gonna be my bathroom buddy. Before we go in here, I want you to understand if you decide to lose your mind, she will absolutely let you know.

GRADY

Okay. I understand. Um, nice you meet you Bertha.

CLARISSA

I heard about crazy ass Atlanta. If you stay ready, you ain't gotta get ready. After you.

GRADY

Okay. Would you prefer the men's or ladies' room?

CLARISSA

Grady...

GRADY

Okay. Men's it is.

The door opens and they take steps inside.

CLARISSA

So? What could you possibly be showing me about my family in here?

GRADY

Okay....um... would you please touch my shoulder?

CLARISSA

What?

GRADY

Just trust me. You have Bertha, and I'm not here to hurt you anyway.

CLARISSA

Okay...fine...

(She does it)

Alright, now what?

Suddenly, a cacophony of distorted sounds flood the space— crickets, cicadas, voices in terror, a crowd, heartbeats. Then, just as suddenly as it began, it vanishes.

CLARISSA

What the fuck—?!

GRADY

Hey, Clarissa—

CLARISSA

What the fuck did you just—?!

GRADY

Hey it's alright—!

CLARISSA

Talk right fucking now or I'll blow your fucking brains out!

GRADY

Hey! it's okay! Listen! Just step out and you'll see!

CLARISSA

See what?!

GRADY

Just step out of the bathroom!

CLARISSA

You first!

GRADY

Okay okay!

They shuffle around a bit and the door opens. The wind gently breezes and the sounds of people chatting, bluetooth speakers blasting, and dogs playing are heard.

CLARISSA

What the—?

GRADY

Do you recognize this place?

Clarissa begins to hyperventilate.

CLARISSA

What the—how the fuck did we get to Piedmont Park?! How is this happening???

GRADY

Honestly, those are very complicated questions. Let's start simpler.

CLARISSA

Okay, what the fuck is going on right now???

GRADY

Ask me instead why we're here.

CLARISSA

Okay, why the fuck are we here?!

GRADY

This is what Piedmont is now. But if you really listen...

They listen. The sound of crickets become increasingly loud as well as shrieks of crying overlapping each other. They fade away to the normal park sounds.

CLARISSA

What was that?

GRADY

That's the right question.

CLARISSA

What's the answer?

GRADY

I can't tell you the answers. I can only show you things, and you must ask the right questions. There's an art to separating the truth from the facts.

CLARISSA

What's your point?

GRADY

My point is Atlanta's not the city that you think it is. And especially for black folk, there's a lot of history here. And a lot of that history is trying to be erased...by your family.

CLARISSA

What are you talking about?

GRADY

I'm talking about you. I'm talking about me. I'm talking about your film.

CLARISSA

You're not making any sense, Grady.

GRADY

I know, but it's only the beginning.

CLARISSA

Beginning of what?

GRADY

Hopefully of a new, new Atlanta. One that you'll help build.

CLARISSA

How is my family trying to erase history?

GRADY

That's the right question.

CLARISSA

And you're not going to tell me the answer?

GRADY

It'll be better to just show you.

CLARISSA

Show me what, exactly?

GRADY

A version of Atlanta nobody talks about anymore.

CLARISSA

Why does this feel like a setup?

Grady chuckles.

GRADY

Touch my shoulder.

CLARISSA

Yeah...let's go back in the bathroom first.

They walk in and shut the door. The sounds of crickets accompany their teleportation.

End of Episode