

Sunset on the Dogwood City

Episode 6 (Nov 23)

Scene 1

The sound of grills and griddles harmonize with the buzz of orders being taken. Ladybug walks up. She has to have been smoking cigarettes since she was nine.

LADYBUG

It don't matter which copy you sign, honey. I hope you enjoyed your first Waffle House experience, Clarissa. It was nice to meet ya.

CLARISSA

Nice to meet you too, Ladybug. And ya know—I'm sorry I gotta ask, is Ladybug—?

LADYBUG

My real name? I get it all the time. My birth name is Trisha Ann, but I legally changed that shit because I feel like Ladybug captures my sweetness better.

CLARISSA

I see. And how'd you know it's my first time?

LADYBUG

You ain't know what an All-star was.

CLARISSA

That's fair. It's wild to me how everybody got good hashbrowns down here.

LADYBUG

Ours the best though.

CLARISSA

I think the Majestic Diner could give you a run for—

LADYBUG

Aw, please! Fuck Majestic and their janky ass hashbrowns! People want their shit covered, topped, and smothered!

RANDOM WAFFLE HOUSE WORKERS

(Vehemently agree)

CLARISSA

I—um...yeah I do want that.

LADYBUG

Besides, I almost married this idiot who works over there—avoid him like the clap. Name's Sam. He can suffocate inside of Satan's asshole.

CLARISSA

Oh really?

LADYBUG

Yeah. Old news though. I'm over it.

CLARISSA

I'm happy hear to it.

Suddenly, the sounds of crickets, cicadas, and a racing heartbeat begin to overwhelm Ladybug's voice. Clarissa pants heavily and then everything just as suddenly fades away.

LADYBUG

Honey...you heard me? I said you need a to-go box?

CLARISSA

Yes. I'm sorry.

LADYBUG

You got it. Whew...got some eye candy coming in at 6 o'clock. You're welcome.

Footsteps approach.

GRADY

Hello, Clarissa.

CLARISSA

Grady, what the hell you doing here?

LADYBUG

He alright to be here, baby?

CLARISSA

Yeah, he's fine...

LADYBUG

You let me know if you change your mind and he got a problem with that. I got your back.

Thank you, Ladybug. CLARISSA

Thank you...Ladybug. GRADY

Mm-hm. LADYBUG

Ladybug walks off. Grady sits.

I officially love Waffle House. CLARISSA

I mean...it does have food I suppose. GRADY

How did you find me? CLARISSA

I didn't mean to. GRADY

And yet here we are. CLARISSA

I'm sorry. I can leave if you prefer. GRADY

What do you want? CLARISSA

Do you uh...have you decided what you're gonna do? GRADY

No. CLARISSA

May I ask why not? GRADY

No. CLARISSA

GRADY

I know it's a lot..

CLARISSA

No, it's not just a lot. It's impossible, Grady!

GRADY

Nothing is impossible.

CLARISSA

I really don't know what you expect from me, man.

GRADY

I don't expect. I just hope.

CLARISSA

Hope what?

GRADY

That you'll do the right thing.

CLARISSA

There are more than one right things in this situation, you asshole.

GRADY

I know it mustn't be easy.

CLARISSA

It's the worst.

GRADY

I know what you mean. There's nothing like losing family.

CLARISSA

It's not just my family. It's my career, my professional credibility, my personal reputation—everything! This is the last thing I fucking needed.

A beat.

GRADY

Ya know, you're the first person I've met that gets sick like I do.

CLARISSA

Why did you choose to haunt me?

GRADY

I didn't. Like I said, I didn't mean to find you today, and I didn't mean to find you before neither.

CLARISSA

Oh so out of all the Waffle Houses you just happened to come to the one I'm at?

GRADY

Clarissa, for decades I've traveled around the city trying to find places where the sounds and smells of death don't overwhelm me. It can't be a coincidence that I get the most relief when I'm around you. And it can't be a coincidence that I was drawn to your work years before I ever knew why.

CLARISSA

You're not about to profess your long-lost love for me, are you?

GRADY

What? No.

CLARISSA

Okay good. I might've had to shoot you for real.

GRADY

I'm sure this establishment has seen it all.

CLARISSA

I do get the sense of that.

GRADY

Actually...Val is...was my long-lost love.

CLARISSA

Val? Really?

GRADY

I never told her—or anybody really. It was a different time, and...well....I was afraid.

CLARISSA

There was a lot to be afraid of back then.

GRADY

There's a lot to be afraid of now, but I wish I would've learned sooner not to let fear rule me.

CLARISSA

That seems a little manipulative right now.

GRADY

I promise I'm not trying to be.

CLARISSA

I'm sorry things went down like did, Grady. I'm sorry, but...I don't know. I just don't know.

Clarissa's phone begins to ring. She sighs.

CLARISSA

Hold on.

(She answers the phone)

Hey, Auntie.

BERNICE

Hey! Meet me outside when you're ready.

CLARISSA

Oh uh...okay. I'm not at the hotel right now though.

BERNICE

Oh I know that. I'm here at Waffle House.

CLARISSA

Uh...what?

BERNICE

I'm here to pick you up. You said you wanted to chat today about the script.

CLARISSA

I did, but I thought we weren't gonna meet for another forty-five minutes.

BERNICE

Well, that's just not how the timing worked out on this end.

CLARISSA

Do you just wanna come in here?

BERNICE

Oh Lord Jesus, no. I hate the smell of that place.

CLARISSA

Okay.

You been to Ponce City Market yet?

BERNICE

No.

CLARISSA

It's a beautiful spot to talk some things over.

BERNICE

Okay...sounds good.

CLARISSA

Okay. Hopefully see you sooner than later.

BERNICE

Okay bye.

CLARISSA

They hang up.

Who you meeting with?

GRADY

Grady... I have to go.

CLARISSA

Okay.

GRADY

Please don't bother me anymore.

CLARISSA

I understand. It was nice to meet you.

GRADY

I wish I could say the same.

CLARISSA

Clarissa walks away and exits the Waffle House.

Scene 2

Hello, Miss Clarissa.

DRIVER

She walks toward him.

CLARISSA

Oh hey...driver guy.

DRIVER

Henry.

CLARISSA

Henry. Right.

(He opens the car door)

Thanks.

AUNT BERNICE & MAYA

Surprise!

CLARISSA

Mom?! How—what are you doing here?! I thought you were flying in tomorrow morning?

MAYA

I wanted to spend a little more time with you before the Gala tomorrow.

CLARISSA

I can't believe it's already here.

The door closes.

MAYA

I know! This whole process has happened fast for me so I know it's been worse for you two.

BERNICE

Who you telling! All the more reason for us to celebrate! Henry, Ponce City Market, please.

They start driving.

MAYA

She was telling me a lot of influential faces gonna be attending your reading, Clarissa.

BERNICE

This stays in here, but two of Tyler Perry's executive assistants just confirmed not too long ago.

MAYA

What?! That's great!

CLARISSA

Yeah.

BERNICE

The producers were able to get a lot of fat cats in the room.

MAYA

You mean you were able to get a lot of fat cats in the room.

BERNICE

It wouldn't be like me to brag...but I woke up like this.

MAYA

Yes! I'm so proud of both of you! Especially my baby making big moves!

CLARISSA

Trying.

BERNICE

So Clarissa, you said you has some thoughts about the reading?

MAYA

Oh yeah! You never told me how the rest of your research went.

CLARISSA

It was interesting to say the least.

BERNICE

Okay...

CLARISSA

Well, when I talked with the archivists at Emory, AUC, and Auburn Research Library, they basically confirmed how Dogwood City met its end. There's clear evidence of Klan activity.

BERNICE

Of course.

CLARISSA

Dogwood City was trying to be bought out by white investors, but nobody wanted to sell except Winslow Beaumont. That's when Dogwood City citizens started protesting.

MAYA

Right and it escalated which led to the burning of Dogwood City.

BERNICE

Which is all in the screenplay...so...?

CLARISSA

Did you know that Winslow Beaumont was the biggest driving force of getting people to sell. In fact, he was the one to broach the idea in the first place.

BERNICE

Obviously, it was the right decision. Good for him.

MAYA

Yeah he was approached just like everybody else and tried to get people to see the business opportunity it was.

CLARISSA

No, he was the main one trying to coerce the people of Dogwood City. Have you heard of Grady Taylor?

MAYA

Who's Grady?

BERNICE

Wait, before we continue...Henry, please pull over. Now.

HENRY

Yes, ma'am.

A beat. He pulls over.

BERNICE

Please get out of the car, Henry.

HENRY

You want me to leave the car, ma'am?

BERNICE

Yes. An emergency production meeting needs to happen and we wouldn't want any unintentional leaks.

HENRY

Yes ma'am.

BERNICE

Turn off the radio, Henry.

HENRY

Yes, ma'am. Sorry, ma'am.

He turns off the radio and shuts the door.

BERNICE

Where are you getting this from?

CLARISSA

My research.

BERNICE

Who are your sources, Clarissa?

CLARISSA

Trusted sources.

BERNICE

Trusted sources?

CLARISSA

Why do people in this city hate the Beaumont name?

MAYA

What do you mean?

CLARISSA

Someone literally threw a drink in my face because they knew I was a Beaumont.

MAYA

Lord! Really?

BERNICE

They're just jealous of us.

CLARISSA

I really don't think anyone from the Clermont Lounge is jealous of us.

BERNICE

This is so unlike you, Clarissa. I tried to trust you, but you're—

CLARISSA

Have you heard of Grady Taylor?

MAYA

No, who is he, Clarissa?

CLARISSA

He's a man that Winslow was responsible for killing along with the burning of Dogwood City.

A beat.

MAYA

That doesn't make sense.

BERNICE

In fact, that's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard you say, Clarissa.

CLARISSA

Is it?

BERNICE

Absolutely.

CLARISSA

You're not even a little intrigued by that information?

BERNICE

They're lies fabricated by people who ain't got nothing better to do.

CLARISSA

You can look it up yourself. There are enough breadcrumbs to make a whole loaf.

BERNICE

Okay now that's the most ridiculous thing you've ever said.

CLARISSA

Our family legacy wasn't because we overcame the Klan and Jim Crow. It was because Winslow was at the white place at the white time and yet...we're about tell the world that we're some regular ole negro heroes?

BERNICE

Clarissa, enough! You're making some very big allegations with no proof whatsoever! That's not only unprofessional, but it's disappointing that you would allow the rumor mill to get the best of you, little miss I-wanna-be-a-real-director!

A beat.

CLARISSA
You knew, didn't you?

BERNICE
Clarissa, stop blowing things out—

CLARISSA
You knew!

MAYA
Did you know?

CLARISSA
Admit it! You knew this whole time and—

BERNICE
It doesn't matter!

A beat.

MAYA
Bernice...

BERNICE
Don't look at me like that! It doesn't matter!

CLARISSA
What do you mean it doesn't matter?

BERNICE
What he did for us matters! No family is perfect so let's just make the best outta what we've been handed. And I don't know if you've looked around, lots of people would gladly trade hands.

MAYA
This whole time you didn't tell me?

BERNICE
There was never an opportunity to just casually bring that up.

CLARISSA
Maybe when we were pitching the idea of a movie about our family legacy?!

MAYA

Anytime would've been a good time! I'm your sister!

BERNICE

Don't give me that bullshit. When Daddy died, who was the one who handled the estate while baby girl was out in California getting knocked up?

MAYA

Don't you—

BERNICE

Who was the one who saved us from going bankrupt without any help from "my sister"? Who's the one moving mountains and creating opportunities for her family to thrive? Me! I don't owe y'all trifling asses nothing.

MAYA

That's really how you feel?

BERNICE

What I feel is we have a great opportunity to shape our future. That one moment in ancient history doesn't define us.

CLARISSA

Lots of people would say it's not ancient history.

BERNICE

People are always gonna have something to say, Clarissa. You've been in this business long enough. Surely you know that by now. Let's not give them ammunition against us.

CLARISSA

But it's always worse if it comes out later.

MAYA

Clarissa... Filmmakers do it all the time, right? I mean...it's not lying to leave something out. It's artistic discretion.

CLARISSA

Artistic discretion...?

BERNICE

Right. It's a skill we all use at some point or another.

MAYA

Yeah like I've heard some things about how you've spent your time in L.A. that I know you haven't told me about—artistic discretion.

CLARISSA

What have you heard about me, Mom? I had a threesome with Silk Sonic? So what!

BERNICE

Good Lord, Clarissa...

MAYA

I'm just saying we all have a right to artistic discretion, honey. This shouldn't be any different.

CLARISSA

Artistic discretion, huh?

BERNICE

It makes the world go round.

A beat.

CLARISSA

I'm sure we're not the only family that's done that...

BERNICE

Right. You think the Jacksons don't use some artistic discretion?

MAYA

Yeah. That's why they're always gonna keep coming out with stuff about them.

BERNICE

Bottom line: people these days have short memories, they're bad researchers, and they just want to watch a great movie. We have a great movie. An inspirational movie. A dignified movie. And I know you'll take it to the next level with your priceless ingenuity. If you'll let it. But if we're naïve, we'll destroy everything we have worked hard for.

A beat.

CLARISSA

Winslow did try to save Grady...

BERNICE

Right! So let's honor his legacy. And our own. Are we good?

MAYA

It's not my favorite pill to swallow either Clariisa, but I think in the end it'll be worth it. After this, you'll have the clout to tell whatever story you want. What do you say?

CLARISSA

Alright...I'm good.

BERNICE

Alright! And I do wanna say for the record...I'm sorry for not telling y'all earlier. My only focus was to see us thrive in our black girl magic together. I love y'all so much.

MAYA

Love y'all too. Let's make some magic.

CLARISSA

Yeah. Love y'all too.

BERNICE

How about we celebrate with some drinks?

MAYA

Yes! I need a few after that.

CLARISSA

Yeah.

Bernice cracks her window.

BERNICE

Henry, thanks for your patience, honey. On to PCM, please. We need a drink.

He gets in.

MAYA

About three or four actually.

BERNICE

I know that's right.

They chuckle as they take off driving.

Scene 3

Clarissa listens to her voicemails.

VOICEMAIL

You have—three—new messages. First new message.

BERNICE

“Hey girl, this is your Aunt. You’re not passed out already are you? We did go hard on those margaritas though... ain’t it fun drunk-shopping at Ponce City Market? I can’t wait to see you tomorrow! I was thinking that I should send Henry to pick you up. Parking at Piedmont is gonna be horrendous. Just lemme know what time you wanna meet and I’ll send him by. Also, I decided to wear that purple and gold outfit I bought. I wanted to coordinate as a family, but I didn’t want to be too matchy. We’re not trying to be the Addams family. I sent you some pictures just for your reference. Good night!”

VOICEMAIL

Next new message.

MAYA

“Clarissa...this is your mother. I know you probably don’t wanna talk to me or your Aunt right now, but...I just wish you would’ve gone about this whole thing different. Thanks for your texts, but I wanna hear your voice. I wanna see you. Did you turn off sharing your location with me? It won’t seem to work and...well...I’m just worried about you, baby. Can we please talk soon? Or at least, text me your flight info when you’re headed back so I know you’re safe. Love you. Oh and actually, please keep Bertha on you. Bernice is pissed. I’m not saying shoot your aunt. I’m just saying I don’t know who she might send after you. Okay...call me please. Love you.”

VOICEMAIL

Next new message.

BERNICE

“After all I’ve done for your ungrateful ass, Clarissa! An email?!?! With only twenty-four hours’ notice?!?! You didn’t even have the decency to do it face-to-face! You better not ever ask for shit from me for the rest of your fucking life! I’ll see to it that you’ll never work in this city or any city ever again! Good luck directing reality shows on MTV for the rest of your lousy career!”

VOICEMAIL

End of new messages.

(Clarissa presses a button)

All messages deleted.

Clarissa locks her phone. The sounds of Piedmont Park envelop her. Bluetooth speakers, games being played, dogs yipping with joy. Suddenly, the sound of crickets and cicadas become overwhelming. The park sounds return.

GRADY

Clarissa?

Clarissa yelps.

CLARISSA

Grady! You scared me!

GRADY

This the last place I expected to find you.

CLARISSA

That's obviously not true because you found me.

GRADY

I know you told me to leave you alone, but again I promise I didn't—

CLARISSA

It's okay. I actually could use a friend right now.

GRADY

Yeah I can imagine...I went to the gala.

CLARISSA

How was it?

GRADY

It was...interesting.

CLARISSA

How?

GRADY

There was a lot of smiling and schmoozing on the surface, but it was truly hollow and underwhelming.

CLARISSA

I love and hate hearing that. Did anybody ask about me?

GRADY

Your Aunt said something came up and that you sent your regards.

CLARISSA

She would.

GRADY

It did seem strange. To everybody.

CLARISSA

I know my resignation will lead to a lot of questions. The right questions.

GRADY

You resigned?

CLARISSA

I couldn't be part of a cover-up. That would make me no better than Winslow or the people who hurt you.

GRADY

Wow... so what now?

CLARISSA

Well...for now, I'm just gonna focus on watching this sunset. Tonight, I'll get drunk. Tomorrow I'll fly back to L.A. and we'll see after that. You?

GRADY

I truly don't know. I think a sunset and a friend is all I can figure out so you're doing better than me.

CLARISSA

Right.

GRADY

It's gonna be a beautiful sunset today.

A beat.

CLARISSA

I can't help but feeling I messed up. Like maybe I threw away my life in a single moment.

GRADY

On that night, when all I could see and hear was death, I felt the same thing. But now, on the other side, I see it different. Somehow, there's less bitter and more sweet.

CLARISSA

I hope I get to the sweet part.

GRADY

If I know anything about you, you will.

CLARISSA

I need you to be right about that one.

GRADY
Have I steered you wrong yet?

CLARISSA
Absolutely.

GRADY
When?

CLARISSA
Majestic ain't got nothing on Waffle House.

GRADY
Those fighting words there now.

CLARISSA
I'm done fighting for a while.

A beat.

GRADY
Thank you, Clarissa. For taking a chance on me. I thought I'd never...well...thank you.

CLARISSA
I must say you gave a compelling argument by freakishly teleporting me.

GRADY
These days seeing doesn't always mean believing.

CLARISSA
I guess that's true.

GRADY
Just look at the elections.

CLARISSA
Only one problem at a fucking time, Grady.

GRADY
True.

A beat.

CLARISSA

You know what...I know what I'm gonna do when I get back.

GRADY

What?

CLARISSA

I'm gonna tell the real story of Dogwood City. The real story of you. Independently.

GRADY

That sounds amazing, Clarissa.

CLARISSA

I might as well, right?

GRADY

I know it'll be a home run. Your work has always been so fascinating and just...real.

CLARISSA

I guess real recognize real...which is bizarre to say because this whole situation has been fucking unreal.

They chuckle.

GRADY

Wow, just look at those colors.

CLARISSA

That is gorgeous.

GRADY

Yeah. Our city is more gorgeous than ever.

Clarissa's phone rings. She sighs and silences it.

CLARISSA

I just can't with that right now. It's getting dark, do you wanna—Grady? Grady??? Where did he...?

She sits in silence. She softly hears the sounds of crickets.

CLARISSA

You're right. Our city is more gorgeous than ever.

End of Episode