

EXT. BERKELEY, CA - ESTABLISHING

The streets of Telegraph Ave. bustle with school kids, hippies, cool kids, artists, self-proclaimed identity posters, bright mosaic colors, smells of hookah, marijuana, and pachouli, cafe patrons, street performers and college students. With their West Coast stride, Berkeleyites push pass MYRNA. In her late-60s, she experiences a big city for the first time. She's a clever simple woman with cracks in her hands and dirt under her nails.

EXT. BERKLEY, CA - MORNING

Myrna ping-pongs down Telegraph Ave., suitcase in tow.

MYRNA V.O.

I'm a farm girl. I grew up sowing and tilling the good earth. It's in me. It's my calling. My mam and pap both were farm people and so were theirs. I thought it would live on in my children. But no, they took after their father. That man had to have a brick tied to his leg or he'd float away. Not one of my children got my soul - the love for the land, the animals, and fresh crisp air. Boyd, my husband, liked store-bought food. Not because he thought it was good or better than my food but because he liked to be served. I smile thinking about him checking his reflection in a fancy restaurant knife with a stupid cloth napkin tucked under his chin. All that's done now. Just memories, even before I sold out to the oil man.

EXT. BERKELEY, CA - MORNING

The sun rises quickly, the bus blurs pass, the flowers bloom instantly in front her, people move faster than time, Myrna remains out of sync.

MYRNA V.O.

Boyd had a 'Negroes-done-come-up' attitude. After Montgomery, it hit him that we could eat at any restaurant in town. He woke the whole house shouting 'NEGROES DONE COME UP. WE DONE ALL COME UP.' That night he'd make us get all dressed up for some white lady

cooking in town. I'd order a salad and mouth across the table, 'Just because it's white don't make it good.' He'd chuckle and say 'maybe but them curtains are rather choice.' He had an eye for "stuff." When he talked about opening his own restaurant he'd say 'You'll do all the cooking Missy', that's what he called me, 'and I'll put the place together, make it shine like a place in the big city.' Boyd took some pride in having a "lady's eye." He liked things to look effortless and simple. I liked to make things look hospital clean. He would come back around after me and put the house back in his way.

The street is busy with traffic. Bicycles ride along the sidewalk to begin their day. The street is quite settled.

MYRNA V.O. (CONT.)

Shelton, my youngest, 7 or 8 then, followed after him the most. Boyd and Shelton would walk ahead along Main St. hand in hand. Our little revolution. All six of us eating an artichoke-like we knew how. As the population grew people got to know him, he would say he owed his Sheriff's appointment later a Commissioner appointment to those walks Thursday nights down Main St.

Myrna switches her scarf-bag into her other hand memorizing the craftsman-style house with beautiful hibiscus trees.

MYRNA V.O. (CONT.)

The woman at the counter called me clever when I took my scarf off my neck and rolled the fruits and vegetables up in it. I've always been a clever girl. Lotte, my neighbor back home, said 'only clever people survive in the big city.' She also said Berkeley was a bit queer and it was not like New York or Chicago. I wasn't really sure what all that meant. But as I walked away I heard the cashier say, 'Go with love.'

EXT. BERKLEY, CA - MORNING

Myrna consults a piece of paper in her hand.

SHELTON CARROLL 330 ACTON ST., BERKELEY CA

MYRNA V.O.

Shelton is my youngest. Like my other children, he chose a military path to get out of Mississippi. He studies the law. His father would be proud of that. We thought Boyd would move us out the South, but he died before that could happen. His death ate at the children. See Boyd was shot and left to die on a dirt road by a strung out thief. Yes, the thief was probably some kind of way about the Black town commissioner telling him this and that but I'm sure Boyd didn't see it like that. "This junk all over the town," was the last thing he was on about while on his way out the door to deal with "a kid off his rocker." Shelton changed when that boy was released from prison after a year. He became a man - plain mean, inconsolable and blinded by vengeance. We were all lucky they never crossed paths before Shelton shipped out.

Berkeley houses line up perfectly like dollhouses. Myrna sits on a nearby bench. She watches the quiet of the morning and all the disconnected pieces moving through the day.

MYRNA V.O.

If you asked the children, we were poor. We ate mostly from the land, re-used handmade clothing, patched cars, and appliances. No more Thursday night restaurants after Boyd's death. Instead, I'd send them all a little money every month for college. At first, they'd send it right back saying I needed it more than them. But I'd just say the farm had a good harvest and there was enough for everyone.

EXT. SHELTON'S HOUSE - DAY

Myrna stands in an unkempt dead yard. A YOUNG MAN runs out.

The young man pulls his bike from the side of the house.

Myrna holds out her piece of paper.

Myrna watches the Young Man ride off recklessly into the street.

INT. SHELTON'S HOUSE - DAY

Myrna walks in the house.

MYRNA

Hellooooo.

MYRNA V.O.

I guess Shelton lives with 4 or 5 other guys. I think he told me one guy sleeps in a closet.

YOUNG MAN 2 runs down the stairs books under his arm.

MYRNA

Shelton.

YOUNG MAN 2

Oh man, awesome. Hold on.

(yelling)

Shel. Shel. Shel.

MAI, a young college student, sticks her head out of a bedroom. She yells down the stairs

MAI

He left already. He'll be back after class.

Mai goes back in her room.

YOUNG MAN 2

Maybe wait in the kitchen. Shel will give you the ropes when he gets here. He's kind of the boss around here.

MYRNA

And the restroom.

He points in the opposite direction.

The young man writes a note on the corkboard: MAID

He pins \$10 dollars on top of the note.

INT. BATHROOM

Myrna hesitates to put her bags down.

MYRNA V.O.

This is that queer life.

Myrna opens the cabinets under the sink. She pulls out a rag and a bottle of cleaning spray.

MYRNA V.O. (CONT.)

When Shelton was old enough he would find a way not to wear hand-me-downs or drive his papa's old truck. He'd never let me find out. He'd never tell me to my face but I knew nothing we had was good enough. I would watch him behind the barn going in with one set of clothes and coming out with another. He came home with a new car once. He gave me some cockamamie story about the car being a piece of junk that he'd been fixing up at his friend Jimmy's house. But I knew he was working two jobs to pay it off. By then it was just me and Shelton. And I guess if it made the boy happy let him have it. Out of all my children, he's the one that I was certain would leave and never return.

Myrna cleans the bathroom floor on her hands and knees. A rapid KNOCK on the door bounces through the bathroom walls. Myrna opens the door.

TOMAS

Hi. I'm Tomas.

MYRNA

Hello. I'm Myrna. I'm...

TOMAS

Is it cool or should I go upstairs?

MYRNA

Go ahead, young man. It's no good on your system to hold it too long. Which way is the kitchen?

Tomas points to the kitchen.

Myrna grabs her bags.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Myrna unwraps her scarf on the kitchen table.

Tomas picks up a bunch of sage from the table. He takes a little piece and rubs it on his neck.

MYRNA

I would do that as a girl when I had a date but with lavender.

TOMAS

The women in Argentina make wonderful smells from the herbs in their garden.

MYRNA

That's where your people are from?

TOMAS

Yes, I'm here for school like Mai and Shelly.

Tomas places a few cleaning items on the table.

TOMAS

A couple of things Shelly and I keep in our room.

MYRNA

Thanks but I don't usually use gloves to clean house.

Myrna holds up her hands.

TOMAS

It ain't never too late.

Tomas grabs her hands. He wraps her hands around his face.

TOMAS (CONT.)

I got some mango oil upstairs. Apply it every day and those lines will look 20 years old again.

Myrna puts the cleaning items on this side of the sink and sets to a high pile of dishes.

MYRNA V.O.

The boy's nice and all but it's distracting to have someone else in your space. Nice boy, I suppose. None of my children were very sweet people. Shelton was the most agreeable, but you'd push him over the edge and you'd never bring him back. It took a good sleep for him to calm down. Maybe this city has mellowed him - turned him into a better person. I would like that. I would like to know my son's a good man.

Myrna looks at all the photos on the refrigerator. She cleans, time moves quickly. People come and go from work and school.

MYRNA V.O. (CONT.)

Honestly, I know very little about Shelton. He calls every now and then - putting on the airs. He called once right out of the army, I'm pretty sure he was crying. Scared. Sometimes decisions could overwhelm him. He could spontaneously burst into tears. His voice trembled as he asked 'should I re-enlist.' After he helped me pay off the mortgage on the farm he thought I should build a new house on it. 'What an old woman need a new house for?' He had been lucky so far in the army doing mostly administrative tasks. He's lazy but smart. If he really wanted to afford a better life he needed an education. I finished high school, but Boyd, God help his soul, barely finished primary school. A boy on a hustle turned into a man on a hustle. All my children did some kind of schooling. I was proud of that even if they turned their backs on the land.

She opens the refrigerator to find only boxed food, soda, and alcohol.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Mai, 20, places \$30 on the corkboard. She writes a little arrow on the note.

MAI AND SHELLY AND TOMAS

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mai walks into the kitchen in a long knee length T-shirt and Converse with a little belly bump under it.

MAI  
Hello, I'm Mai.

Myrna touches the belly bump.

MAI  
We're all excited to have you. Let me know if you need anything.

Mai pulls out a large glass of milk and takes a few vitamins.

MYRNA V.O.  
Maybe Shelton didn't get my letter?

MYRNA  
The baby needs to eat.

MAI  
I'll go out after a bit.

MYRNA  
Outside food. Nonsense. I was going to make myself a little snack. Do you want to join me? You can bring your books down and study at the table.

MAI  
Computer. I'm a Comp Sci major.

MYRNA  
Comp Sci?

MAI  
Computer Science.

MYRNA  
Well. I guess I can figure out what that is. Girls in my day became teachers or nurses. To be honest both of those things seemed like the same things I already did at home. So I ran a farm. No real education just learned on the job.



MAI

My parents had a farm back in Vietnam.

Mai shoves a cookie in her mouth. Myrna stares at Mai's freckles and chubby cheeks.

MYRNA

You look a little like my older sister.

MAI

Yeah.

MYRNA

Yeah we was told she took after our grandfather on our mama side.

MAI

Do you have a picture?

MYRNA

No, maybe, later... Okay, enough shooting the shit. Go get your books...computer.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Mai, Myrna, and Tomas eat, discuss the weather and other niceties. Mai taps on her computer in the background.

MYRNA V.O.

Shelton never responded to my letter. I assumed he was upset. He hadn't called or returned a phone call since I sent it. Two months ago. Nothing. He won't care about the farm or the old things. The past he used to say, 'leave it there right where it is. Push the future into the past cause the future is all we need.' Between the house sale, his father's pension and retaining the mineral rights from Mr. Big O, I'm a fat lady. Maybe Shelton and I will find a nice place to buy on the block.

INT. SHELTON'S ROOM

Myrna holds a laundry basket. She stares into a mirror with photographs of Mai, Shelton, and Tomas.

MYRNA V.O.

None of my children get along. Not one of 'em chose the same city. They've all offered for me to come visit except for Shelton. I guess they got the sense that the farm became too hard. They were right, though I would never admit it to them, it has been lonely these last years.

Mai walks in.

MAI

Are you okay?

Myrna wipes her tears.

MYRNA

Just old.

MAI (CONT.)

Yes, that's Shelly, you'll meet him later. He's the center of our world.

Mai holds up a ring on her finger.

MAI (CONT.)

And Tomas's boyfriend/partner. They'll probably get married after we get a divorced.

MYRNA

Shelton's baby?

MAI

Oh no. See we're all orphans, for the most part. Tomas was raised in some Catholic orphanage in some small border town. My parents died a few years back. We all met the first day of school. I came to the US with the baby's father but he's no longer in the picture. Shelton being the oldest just brought us into his world and cared for us all. He's not really an orphan his mother's in Mississippi but I think it's bad blood there or something.

Myrna tears well up again.

MAI (CONT.)

That photo was on our wedding day last month.

Myrna smiles with slanted eyebrows.

MAI

I'm off. Don't worry about my room.

Mai points across the hall.

MYRNA

Sure.

MAI

Thanks for breakfast.

Myrna continues to clean.

MYRNA V.O.

Bad blood? I'm his Mama. I had no choice. He couldn't stay in that tiny town. It was suffocating him.

Myrna picks up the unopened letter she sent Shelton from the dresser.

MYRNA V.O.

Shelton, after his father died got caught in the streets, hustlin', gambling, hangin' with the wrong crowd just like his daddy back in the day but times were different. Kids were doing more than puffing their chests out and trying to be the king of the jungle. Kids were killing kids. One day I just saw in his eyes nothing, blank and dark and I knew he had to get out of the town. Boyd had a tight grip on that kind of thing, we never had any trouble with the other children but Shelton was always the smart one, impatient, bored, always on the verge of transforming into some night creature looking for prey. But I only could do so much with 5 kids and a farm. Well, when he turned 18, I packed all his stuff on graduation and left it outside on the porch. His brothers took it from there maybe even with some force. Not sure what

happened but ultimately he enlisted. He called home a few years later crying, he said, 'Ma I actually thought about killing a kid, back then, you know.' I cried when he said, 'I'm going to be alright. You ain't never going to have to worry about me. I'm going take care of you from now on. So Pop can know it was me that got you out of Mississippi.'

Myrna cleans her face in the mirror. She catches her reflection embedded among the makeshift family.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Myrna watches Mai. Mai braces against a doorframe in a confrontation with her half naked ROOMMATE, 19.

ROOMMATE

Get the fuck out of here that could be anybody's.

MAI

This is the 5th time I've asked you not to use my stuff.

ROOMMATE

Get the fuck out of my room you stupid fucking foreign cunt. I told you it wasn't me.

Tomas walks up next to Mai.

MAI

He keeps letting his skanky girlfriends use all my stuff in the bathroom.

Myrna stands across the hall. She watches the scene.

ROOMMATE

You stupid Mexican fag. You and your weird fucking orgy club. Don't tell me how to live. Get the fuck out of my room.

The Roommate pushes Mai. Tomas grabs him and pushes him down on the floor. Tomas holds his fists firmly.

TOMAS

Get up!

Myrna quickly swoops into the room with a large broomstick. She presses it into the bare chest of the roommate. She pushes him back on the ground.

MYRNA

If you know what's good for you;  
you'll stay down and give up this  
mess.

ROOMMATE

Who the fuck is this raggedy ass old  
b...

Myrna clocks him over the head with the stick.

MYRNA

Apologize.

ROOMMATE

Sorry.

MYRNA

Alright now, we're done here.  
Everybody go on about your business.

Myrna, Tomas, and Mai exit.

MAI

I always thought he had a thing for  
Shelly.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Myrna, Mai, and Tomas drink coffee and eat cake at the  
kitchen table.

SHELTON, 27, master of the domain, slick in his suit yet too  
cool in his gauge, walks in distracted from the day.

SHELTON

Mama.

Myrna gets up from the table.

Shelton coldly greets his mother.

MYRNA

I sent a letter.

Shelton moves to the table to sit down.

TOMAS  
I thought... My apologies.

Mai and Tomas get up and hug Myrna.

MAI  
Mama?!

MYRNA  
I made some dinner.

Myrna puts together a plate of food down for Shelton.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Tomas grabs Shelton's hand at the dinner table. Shelton pulls back.

Myrna hands Shelton the letter.

MYRNA  
It's all in the letter. I sold the farm. Everything's gone.

Shelton takes a bite of food.

SHELTON  
Everything.

MYRNA  
I got the paperwork in my bag for you to look at.

SHELTON  
Well it was time.

Shelton smiles.

EXT. EAST OAKLAND - DAY - THREE MONTHS LATER

Myrna and Shelton walk up to a house. Shelton pulls out the key to open the door.

Tomas helps Mai slide down from the truck.

Mai and Tomas walk arm and arm into the house.

Shelton comes out and sits on the front stairs.

TOMAS

How is it?

SHELTON

A shit hole.

Tomas grabs his hand. Mai puts her head on his shoulder.

MAI

Our shithole.

Myrna comes outside with a bucket. She throws the bucket of water on the porch and starts sweep-mopping.

Mai, Tomas, and Shelton jump up, with smiles.

MYRNA V.O.

In the night, sitting on my porch back in Mississippi, on my farm, I would miss my children terribly. I would imagine them rolling around in the fields laughing and jiving each other. And it would bring a smile to my face. As I sat there drinking coffee and I listened and waited for the locusts to settle. I would look at my land for miles right below the ocean blues and blood oranges of the setting sun. It all became so quiet and still. There's only so much thinking you can do about the past. You could forget about the future. You could be satisfied with everything up until that moment. And I would think this... Of what was yesterday I will meet again anew tomorrow until then this is all I have at present.