

BABY STEPS

Written by

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Based on a True Story

FADE TO BLACK.

1 BLACK SCREEN: 1

SUPER: "Based on a True Story"

CUT TO:

2 BLACK SCREEN: 2

SUPER: "For my Parents"

FADE IN:

3 INT. TERRELL'S BEDROOM - DAY 3

The year is 1987. The time on a Sony Dream Machine reads 5:59 AM. The alarm goes off. It is now 6 o'clock and an arm reaches out from under the covers to turn it off. After a deep breath, TERRELL ADAMS (17) hops out of bed and puts on a pair of fleece sweatpants, running shorts, a hoodie, and a sweatband.

TERRELL ADAMS is a model student with outstanding grades, leadership in extra-curricular activities, and service-learning experience in the community. His primary goal is to graduate at the top of his class and receive a full scholarship to play college football.

4 EXT. TERRELL'S HOUSE - DAY 4

Terrell goes on a run around his middle-class suburban neighborhood. The sun is just starting to rise. Terrell power-walks back to his house to walk the dog.

5 INT. TERRELL'S HOUSE - DAY 5

Terrell takes a quick shower and throws on the clothes that he already laid out. He rushes down the stairs, grabs his keys, and leaves the house.

CUT TO:

6 INT. BEDROOM - DAY 6

At 7:45 AM, KATHERINE MITCHELL enters a bedroom door abruptly. A New Edition poster is hanging on the wall surrounded by paintings and hand-drawn portraits. She almost trips over pom-poms near the doorway.

KATHERINE

Journee! Get up! You're going to be late for school! (beat) And look at this room! I almost broke my damn neck! Get up, I said! You better not miss that bus! I'm leaving for work.

JOURNEE MITCHELL is seventeen years old with brown, golden skin and thick, curly hair. She is the average height of 5'6 with a slim, muscular build from gymnastics and cheerleading. She is outgoing and can make friends with anyone she encounters.

KATHERINE MITCHELL (47) is a devoted mother and workaholic who has been a nurse for over twenty years. She is sometimes impatient and short-tempered but will do anything for her children. One of her proudest qualities is her ability to work around the clock and maintain a lovely home.

Journee sits up in her bed sluggishly and looks at her clock. She picks up her alarm clock and sighs because it was not set the night before. She rushes to get ready quietly without making too much noise.

Journee is afraid she will awaken her drunken father, DAMIEN, from his slumber after working third-shift.

DAMIEN MITCHELL (55) is a recovering alcoholic who works overnight at a warehouse operating forklifts and other machinery. Like Katherine, he is also short-tempered and spends most of his time at work or playing golf.

Journee's parents think she still takes the bus every morning, but her boyfriend picks her up at her usual stop to avoid suspicion.

DISSOLVE TO:

7 **EXT. HOME - DAY**

7

A school bus arrives at a stop sign and lets three students on.

Terrell arrives a few minutes after and parks his blue 1984 Chevrolet Cavalier. He honks his horn and sits there humming to the radio, which is playing "I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me)."

Journee runs down the street and hops into the car.

8 INT. TERRELL'S CAR - DAY

8

JOURNEE

Good morning, handsome.

Journee kisses Terrell on the cheek. Terrell sighs and puts the car in drive.

TERRELL

Next time, I'm gonna leave you
NeNe.

Terrell hates being late and prefers to always be early. He always threatens to leave Journee every time she is late, but never does.

They drive through downtown Wilmington passing a local coffee shop and antique stores.

Journee and Terrell make it to school just in time for homeroom each morning.

Terrell likes to get extra studying done to prepare for the day, while Journee often gossips with her friends or goes off to practice cheers with her teammates.

FADE TO:

9 INT. WALTER GRANT SR. HIGH - DAY

9

Journee waits for her best friend, TOYA NEWALL, to come into the rowdy classroom. She is always around twenty minutes late.

TOYA NEWALL (17) is Journee's longtime best friend since elementary school. Toya moved to Journee's neighborhood in Wilmington, NC when they were in the second grade, and they have been best friends ever since. TOYA does not have any hobbies but loves to socialize and work at McDonald's with her friends after school.

JOURNEE

Damn, girl. I thought you were
never gonna get here.

TOYA

Yeah, you know how I am. I can't do
that early bird shit like ya' boy
over there.

JOURNEE

Shit, tell me about it. I can hardly get my ass out of bed and he has time to do a full workout AND eat breakfast?!

Journee and Toya laugh and high-five each other.

Journee glances at Terrell from across the room, who is too busy reading to notice his surroundings.

The bell rings for class to begin. Terrell shuts his book swiftly and looks up. He catches Journee in the corner of his eye and smiles at her as she is already watching him in a daze.

Journee blows Terrell a kiss and turns around.

CUT TO:

10 EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

10

Terrell stands in the hallway beside the door and waits for Journee to exit the classroom.

Terrell and Journee hug each other.

TERRELL

I'll see you at lunch, okay?

Journee nods, looking up at him.

Terrell kisses her on the forehead and they begin walking in opposite directions.

CUT TO:

11 INT. DOM'S DINER - DUSK

11

After school, everyone meets at the local hangout spot, Dom's Diner. Terrell and Journee do not arrive until around 5:30 PM like the other athletes since they have practice after school.

Journee, Terrell, and the rest of the popular students arrive.

They find their usual spot in the back and sit at the booths.

Journee typically orders a vanilla milkshake with a BLT sandwich. Terrell's usual order is a burger with a large plate of fries that he shares with Journee.

Terrell keeps a large water bottle with him at all times but normally finishes the rest of Journee's milkshake before it completely melts.

JOURNEE

Girl, I'm starving! Coach had us running extra miles because a few of the girls came late to practice!

TOYA

See! Hell nah. You'll never catch me running for shit. You can maybe get a lil' jog out of me, but that's about it.

JOURNEE

Oh, trust me...we know! Look at all that ass you got.

They both laugh, with Terrell snickering a little louder than the two of them.

TOYA

And what the fuck are you laughing at, Mr. Olympian?

Toya picks up a fry from his plate and throws it at him.

The three of them laugh as Terrell dusts the salt off his shirt.

TERRELL

Man, ain't nothin' wrong wit' a lil' workout every now and then. You just gotta find your rhythm.

TOYA

Oh, I'ma find it. As soon as you hook me up wit' one of yo' fine ass friends! Ouu-wee!

Toya does a little bounce and they all laugh.

TERRELL

Uhn Uhn! You're not bringin' yo' crazy ass nowhere near my guys.

Journee nudges Terrell.

JOURNEE

All those boys are weak sauce! They wouldn't know what to do wit' my girl, okay?

Journee and Toya high-five, giggling.

TERRELL

Yeah, whatever. We'll see about that at the Homecoming Dance.

TOYA

Damn, right!

Toya does her bounce dance again and they all laugh.

Terrell slurps the last bit of Journee's milkshake as she laughs with the rest of the table.

CUT TO:

12 INT. JOURNEE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

12

Terrell calls Journee just as she climbs into bed.

The phone conversation intercuts between two locales.

JOURNEE

Right on time. Hey, darling.

INTERCUT: JOURNEE'S BEDROOM/TERRELL'S BEDROOM

CUT TO:

TERRELL

Hey, baby. Of course. How are you feeling? You excited about the dance coming up?

ANGLE ON:

JOURNEE

Yes, I can't wait to be with you. I know you'll look all grown up and dapper. I'm just anxious because I haven't had time to get myself together. Ugh!

ANGLE ON:

TERRELL

Just chill, NeNe. Don't stress yourself out. Especially not over some high school dance. I want you to have a great time and enjoy yourself. I know you're gonna look so beautiful.

ANGLE ON:

JOURNEE

Hmm...

TERRELL

What?

JOURNEE

Nothing. Just making a mental note.
I want to remember to call and
thank your parents for giving birth
to you. They made a wonderful
decision.

TERRELL

(Laughing)

Stop it. You're so dramatic.

JOURNEE

I'm DEAD serious.

TERRELL

Well, remind them to give me a lil'
pat-on-the-back every now and then.
God!

JOURNEE

Hey, I know you're under a lot of
pressure right now, and I know
their expectations don't help...but
you really are amazing 'Rell! You
just need to learn how to relax a
little.

Terrell takes a deep breath.

TERRELL

I know. You're right. I just have a
lot riding on me. So much I want to
accomplish. I feel like as soon as
I start to slow down, the next
nigga's gonna catch up and beat me.
Then I'll be too late. Niggas
hardly get an opportunity to do
anything great. The spots are
limited. Usually one, MAYBE two.

JOURNEE

The Tortoise and the Hare.

TERRELL

Exactly! See. I'm the fucking Hare.