

Wickstead 1x01

1x01 - "Ashes"

written by

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- Monday 2nd June 2025 -

COLD OPENING

EXT. WICKSTEAD PROMENADE - EVENING

A gently lit promenade glows majestically with a picturesque warmth that can only be created for TV.

In the distance, the screeching of tires is preceded by a series of barks which only intensify as they do.

But first -

INT. CEDARS RESTAURANT - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Busy. Intimate. The beating heart of the village.

RAFE VEXLEY (27) sits across from BIANCA JONES (29), barely touching his drink. Her eyes are fixated on the window - not at him.

BIANCA

I didn't think you'd show.

RAFE

I almost didn't.

Their eyes meet momentarily, both haunted by guilt.

BIANCA

He's awake...

Relief - or fear, maybe both - stuns Rafe into silence.

Across the room, ROXANNE RIVERA (26) slams a bottle onto the bar harder than she needs to as she watches the three dots on her phone disappear, leaving only a single message sent by her - "I know who you are."

FINN VEXLEY (23) coughs to make his presence known.

FINN

That for me..?

ROXANNE

Sorry, yeah...

She hands it to him but he's already distracted by AMIR HADDAD (21) who passes him holding a tray filled with Levantine cuisine.

Their eyes linger for a beat too long, interrupted only by -

KAMAL

How many times do I have to tell
you to watch where you're going?

AMIR

Sorry baba, I was -

KAMAL

Save it.

EXT. WICKSTEAD - CEDARS RESTAURANT - EVENING

LAYLA HADDAD (23) walks briskly down the pavement towards the restaurant. Focused. Unaware. And yet a glint of terror clouds her eyes.

In the distance -

A CAR.

Fast. Swerving. Lights flashing and horn blaring.

Too late.

The car mounts the pavement and strikes Layla at full-force.

She crashes to the floor but the car doesn't stop.

INT. CEDARS RESTAURANT - DINING ROOM

Rafe glances at Bianca, his hollowed out eyes twitching.

BIANCA

He wants to see you.

Outside the window - headlights... bright and nearing
impossibly fast.

Roxanne looks up - bar tap still in hand but before she can
say anything -

The front of the restaurant explodes inward.

GLASS. FIRE. BODIES THROWN.

Bianca and Rafe are ripped from one another, a plume of smoke erupting around them and concealing Kamal who is thrown violently off the hood of the car just as it ignites.

An actual explosion, this time the blast rips through more than just the building – sending shockwaves through Wickstead and launching both Roxanne and Finn flying through the bar area.

EXT. WICKSTEAD - CEDARS RESTAURANT - EVENING

From the smoke, something spins through the air –

A single high heel. Scorched. Barely intact.

As smoke spills into the street, crowds begin to gather and from the masses, SAVANNAH RIVERA (28) rushes into view –

SAVANNAH

Roxanne?! Oh my God, Roxanne?!

Despite her attempts to fight him off, LEO VEXLEY (30) sweeps her off the ground and forces her head into his chest.

LEO

No, you can't... it's - it's not safe!

From a window overlooking Wickstead, VIVIAN VEXLEY (55) stares at the carnage – visibly shaken but fighting to keep composed.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. RIVERA HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

The kitchen is small but bright. A well-worn table surrounded by mismatched chairs. Photos on the fridge - all five sisters, no parents.

Savannah stands at the counter, making five packed lunches with assembly-line efficiency. MARIE RIVERA (21) silently helps, sliding finished ones into labelled bags.

Roxanne enters, dressed for work but hair still wet.

ROXANNE

How many times, I'm not twelve Sav;
I can make my own lunch.

SAVANNAH

(not looking up)
Last time you "made your own," you
took Kayla's and she worked a
double shift with nothing but a bag
of crisps.

TALIA RIVERA (16) bursts in, tying her school tie.

TALIA

Has anyone seen my history
coursework? It's due today.

MARIE

Coffee table. Under the magazine
and Roxanne's dress.

TALIA

(genuinely impressed)
How do you do that?

Marie just shrugs, leaving Roxanne to pull the dress into her hands - dumbfounded.

ROXANNE

I've been looking for that!
(throwing it at her)
Wash it and put it back in my
closet - I didn't say you could
borrow it.

KAYLA RIVERA (24) enters in fresh scrubs, exhaustion evident.

KAYLA

Now you know how me and Sav feel.

SAVANNAH
How'd you sleep?

KAYLA
Why don't you ask whoever came home
at 3 AM and slammed every door.

ROXANNE
Some of us have social lives.

SAVANNAH
And the rest of of us have
responsibilities.

ROXANNE
Don't start, Sav. It's too early
for another speech.

SAVANNAH
Then grow up and I won't have to
give one.

TALIA
Found it!
(inspecting them)
Hang on... these aren't my notes.

She pulls out pages of sketches - charcoal drawings of a
broken staircase and a silhouette.

MARIE
(tensing)
Those are mine.

She reaches for them but Talia pulls them away, still
studying.

TALIA
What are these? They look like-

SAVANNAH
Give them back to Marie. Now.

Something in Savannah's tone makes Talia comply.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)
Come on then, all of you - get your
things, we're going to be late.

She hands out lunch bags with finality. One by one, they take
them - a family ritual none will break, despite the tension.

As they file out, Marie lingers behind.

MARIE

I keep seeing them, Sav. The stairs. The silhouettes. It's getting clearer.

SAVANNAH

They're dreams, Marie. Just dreams.

But neither believes it.

INT. MERRICK HOUSE - CONSERVATORY - MORNING

Sunlight streams through pristine windows. Everything is immaculate, staged rather than lived in.

CLAIRE MERRICK (43) places a cup of tea on the glass table where NICK MERRICK (45) reads something on his tablet. He doesn't look up.

CLAIRE

I made you tea. Earl Grey.

NICK

(distracted)

Hmm? Oh. Thanks.

Claire hovers, awaiting acknowledgment that doesn't come.

CLAIRE

Will you be working late again tonight?

NICK

(still not looking up)

Probably. Governors' meeting.

Claire's smile falters almost imperceptibly.

CLAIRE

That's three this week.

Nick finally looks up, irritated.

NICK

What's that supposed to mean?

CLAIRE

(backtracking)

Nothing. Just... wondering if I should keep dinner warm.

ZACK MERRICK (23, athletic build, gentle manner) enters in gym clothes, followed by JODIE MERRICK (17, pristine school uniform) and MAX MERRICK (13, observant, unnervingly quiet).

NICK
Morning, troops.

JODIE
Morning, Dad.

MAX
Hi.

NICK
I'm heading out in five, be ready.

Their eyes search the room for Zack's.

ZACK
I'm taking them today, I've got the day off. I'm meeting Layla for brunch later.

CLAIRE
Layla Haddad? Kamal's daughter?

Zack nods as Claire brightens slightly.

NICK
You're sure that's wise? Dating a girl from a house like that?

Zack freezes. Not angry. Just... surprised but Max and Jodie — they roll their eyes, hard.

ZACK
What does that mean?

NICK
Nothing. Just... different values. Not everyone raises their children the same way.

CLAIRE
Nick.

NICK
It's not an insult. It's a fact.

ZACK
Well, she's smart. Kind. Not to mention the sort of girl who makes you want to be better. So whatever values her house taught her... I'll take 'em.

Nick doesn't respond.

ZACK (CONT'D)
(to his siblings)
You two ready?

They nod and gather their things, mouthing silent thank yous to Zack as they leave.

CLAIRE
(to Nick)
You could at least pretend. That you're interested. That you care.

Nick drains his tea and stands.

NICK
Pretending is your thing, Claire. I prefer results.

CLAIRE
Right, well don't forget we have dinner with the Vexleys on Friday.

Something flickers across Nick's face.

NICK
Reschedule. I've got-

CLAIRE
No. We've cancelled twice already. Vivian will think we're avoiding her.

NICK
(muttering)
Would that be so bad?

CLAIRE
What was that?

NICK
Nothing. Fine. Friday it is.

He stands, gathering his things and refusing to meeting her gaze; leaving her alone in the large house...

As the front door closes, her eyes drift to the liquor cabinet with an undeniable longing.

INT. WICKSTEAD HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - MORNING

Rafe paces outside of the hospital room, interrupted only by Bianca who steps out.

BIANCA
You're here early. Becoming a permanent fixture, aren't you?

RAFE
(uncomfortably)
Just... wanted to check in.

BIANCA
The nurses say his brain activity is improving.
(beat)
They're hopeful.

She studies him, curious.

BIANCA (CONT'D)
You still haven't told me how you knew Alfie.

RAFE
(evasive)
We crossed paths.

BIANCA
Must have been some crossing for you to visit every day for months.

Rafe shifts, avoiding eye contact and she notices.

BIANCA (CONT'D)
Are you free for lunch again today? I've got questions.

RAFE
I can't. Something to take care of.

BIANCA
Mysterious... I like it.

He almost smiles, then catches himself.

RAFE
How are you holding up?

BIANCA
(facade cracking slightly)
Some days I talk to him like he can hear me. Other days I scream into a pillow. Normal stuff.

RAFE
If you need anything-

BIANCA
Why do you care so much?

RAFE
(after a beat)
Someone should.

Their eyes lock and something genuine passes.

BIANCA
You know what's weird? I feel like
I can talk to you. A complete
stranger.

Guilt flashes across Rafe's face, quickly masked.

RAFE
I should go.

BIANCA
(calling after him)
Same time tomorrow, then?

Rafe doesn't answer, but his step falters. We know he'll be back.

INT. VEXLEY HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Vivian stands in her spacious, coldly elegant kitchen making a protein smoothie with practiced precision.

KARA VEXLEY (22, sharp eyes, watchful) enters, already dressed but with an air of resignation.

KARA
Mum..?

VIVIAN
(without turning)
If it's about the car, Leo's using
it.

KARA
It's not about the car. It's about
Dad.

Vivian's shoulders tense, almost imperceptibly.

VIVIAN
(warning tone)
Kara.

KARA

I found papers in the attic.
Medical stuff.

VIVIAN

(turning, cold)

This is what happens when you drop
out of university with no purpose.
You invent projects.

KARA

It's not a project...

VIVIAN

Your father died in an accident.
End of story.

KARA

And yet no body was officially
found?

VIVIAN

Because the car was burnt to a
crisp.

KARA

And Ms. Rivera?

VIVIAN

What of her?

KARA

Your best friend disappears months
after dad and you're not even
remotely suspicious?

VIVIAN

No.

KARA

Then why was he arranging a
paternity—

VIVIAN

Enough! You have no business
meddling in your father's affairs.

KARA

My father's or yours..?

VIVIAN

We're done discussing this. I have
a meeting to get to.

Vivian moves to leave, her composure perfect but brittle.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

Find something productive to do
with your day, Kara. This...
obsession isn't healthy.

As her mother exits, Kara pulls out her phone and sends a
single text: "Still on for today? I need to show you
something."

INT. MORGAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Violent coughs bring JOY MORGAN (26, scrubs, exhausted)
wading through the black smoke billowing from the kitchen.

Her eyes flash from the pan smouldering on the stove to
JOSHUA MORGAN's (52) unconscious body.

JOY

Oh my God, dad? Dad!

She turns off the stove, throws a towel over the burning pan,
and kneels beside her father.

JOY (CONT'D)

Dad, can you hear me?

Joshua's eyes flutter open, confused.

JOSHUA

Anika?

Joy's face falls.

JOY

No, Dad. It's Joy.

JOSHUA

(focusing)

Joy? I was making lunch. For your
mother.

JOY

(gently)

Mum's not here, Dad. She hasn't
been here for five years.

Confusion gives way to embarrassment.

JOSHUA
 (struggling to sit up)
 I knew that. I just... forgot for a moment.

JOY
 Let's get you up.

She helps him to a chair, professional instincts taking over as she checks his pupils.

JOY (CONT'D)
 Did you hit your head when you fell?

JOSHUA
 (irritated)
 I'm fine. Stop fussing.

JOY
 You could have hurt yourself or worse!

JOSHUA
 It was just eggs! I've been making eggs since before you were born.

JOY
 Dad, please...

Joshua looks away, pride wounded.

JOSHUA
 I'm getting worse, aren't I?

JOY
 (with forced optimism)
 You just forgot about the pan. Could happen to anyone. But we should speak to Dr. Haddad just to be safe.

JOSHUA
 No! Don't you dare. I don't need a doctor. I have you.

JOY
 This isn't up for debate. I have to get back to work in twenty minutes, and I'm not leaving you alone.

JOSHUA
 (bitterly)
 Why not? Everyone else has.

Joy stiffens, hurt... unnoticed by Joshua whose confusion deepens.

JOY
That's not fair.

JOSHUA
Is Jordan coming for dinner?

JOY
No, Dad. Jordan's in London.

JOSHUA
(nodding as if he knew)
Right. Of course.

Joy looks around at the mess, the burnt pan and her diminished once-proud father then simply blinks back tears.

JOY
Let's get you up, come on.

She reaches for her father, shoulders heavy with the familiar weight of responsibility.

INT. CEDARS RESTAURANT - NOON

The lunchtime rush is just beginning and KAMAL HADDAD (46) is overseeing the floor with a quiet authority.

At a corner table, Layla sits across from Zack, both slightly awkward but clearly interested in each other.

LAYLA
(teasing)
So you're surrounded by pretty girls everyday, gotcha...

ZACK
(playfully)
There's a bit more to personal training than that.

LAYLA
I'm sure there is. I just can't imagine spending all day in a gym.

ZACK
Says the woman who spends all day in a law office.

LAYLA
 (smiling)
 Touché. At least I get to argue
 professionally.

At the bar, Amir and Finn watch the date, amused.

FINN
 (mimicking Zack)
 And then I bench-pressed the ENTIRE
 building."

AMIR
 (as Layla)
 How fascinating! You must tell me
 about your protein shake regimen!

Kamal approaches the now giggling boys with arched brows.

KAMAL
 If you two are quite finished
 mocking my daughter...

AMIR
 Sorry, Baba. But look at them.
 "Beauty and the Brains..."

FINN
 ...and Zack.

They devolve into laughter again as Kamal shakes his head but
 he's clearly fighting a smile.

KAMAL
 Finn, instead of distracting Amir;
 why not let me add you to the
 payroll and make a productive man
 out of you yet. I mean you're
 already here every day.

FINN
 If the Hendersons ever decide to
 sell The Dancing Oak, I'm all yours
 Mr. Haddad.

AMIR
 And there's a very high probability
 of that, they've been gone what,
 two, three months now?

FINN
 Don't say that. They're coming
 back. They have to.

Amir catches something in Finn's tone, a vulnerability that wasn't there before.

AMIR
I was joking, mate.

Their eyes meet, hold for a beat too long. Finn breaks first, looking away.

FINN
Anyway, better go make sure we're ready for tonight...

AMIR
I'll walk you out.

They leave together. Kamal watches, thoughtful, before turning his attention back to Layla and Zack, who are laughing now, more at ease.

EXT. WICKSTEAD HIGH - CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

The three girls sit in the empty classroom after school hours. Jodie hunches forward, arms wrapped around herself. Talia gestures wildly as RANA HADDAD (16) watches quietly.

TALIA
—and that's why I know she didn't just leave. Especially not with Gregory Vexley. He was a monster.

JODIE
(hushed)
Don't say that so loud.

TALIA
Why? Because your dad might hear?
I'm just trying to tell the truth.

RANA
What truth?

TALIA
That women don't just vanish. That mothers don't just abandon five daughters to run off with drunk, violent men.

JODIE
People make choices—

TALIA
 Choices? She left us. Five girls
 under eighteen. No note. No
 goodbye. No forwarding address.
 That's not a choice, that's—

RANA
 (softly)
 That's fear.

They both look at her.

TALIA
 See? Rana gets it. Something
 happened that night.

JODIE
 But pursuing it... asking
 questions... it just makes trouble.
 If my dad finds out—

TALIA
 Finds out what? That his daughter
 has a brain? That she asks
 questions?

JODIE
 That I'm stirring up the past with
 you.

TALIA
 (bitterly)
 Right. Because I'm just the Rivera
 girl with the missing mum. The
 liability.

RANA
 (gently)
 That's not what she means.

JODIE
 I just want to keep everyone safe.

TALIA
 From what?

JODIE
 From... consequences.

Talia stares at her.

TALIA
 You know something.

JODIE

I don't—

TALIA

You do. Your dad told you something. Warned you.

JODIE

(cracking)

No he didn't. I just know what he thinks about gossip.

TALIA

And you listen to him? Like a good little daughter?

JODIE

Don't.

TALIA

What happens when you realise he's the door that shouldn't be opened?

JODIE

(defensive)

My dad didn't even know your mum.

TALIA

Didn't he? You sure about that?

JODIE

(standing up)

I'm done with this conspiracy theory garbage.

TALIA

Sit down, Jodie.

JODIE

No. I'm tired of you dragging us into your family drama.

TALIA

My family drama? Your mum pops pills like tic-tacs and your dad spends more time giving random women attention whilst ignoring his wife.

JODIE

(shocked, hurt)

That's not—

RANA
Stop. Both of you.

Jodie stands abruptly.

JODIE
I have to go.

RANA
(calling after her)
Jodie...

But she's already gone. Talia and Rana sit in silence.

RANA (CONT'D)
She not trying to minimise your
feelings, she just-

TALIA
Has a perfect little family. I
know..

RANA
That's not what I was-

TALIA
Whatever, I'll see you tomorrow.

She sweeps her bag over her shoulder and rushes away, leaving Rana alone with her notebook.

INT. CONSTRUCTION SITE OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Leo is reviewing blueprints when Rafe enters, bringing with him an immediate tension.

LEO
You're late.

RAFE
I'm here, aren't I?

LEO
(sliding over plans)
New security system for the east
wing. I need you to oversee the
installation.

RAFE
Why am I even on this job? You
don't need me.

LEO
Mum thought—

RAFE
Of course she did.

LEO
She's worried about you. We all
are.

RAFE
I don't need your concern. Or hers.

LEO
Then where do you keep disappearing
to?

RAFE
None of your business.

LEO
When you miss shifts and I have to
cover for you, it becomes my
business.

RAFE
Sorry to inconvenience you. Must be
hard being the golden boy.

LEO
(tired)
Don't start.

RAFE
Just tell Mum I'm handling the
system. And tell her to stop
interfering.

LEO
She does it because she cares...

RAFE
No, she does it because she's a
control freak who can't stand not
knowing every detail of our lives.

Leo sighs, running a hand through his hair.

LEO
Is it money? Do you need—

RAFE

What aren't you getting through
your thick skull? I don't need
anything from either of you.

He turns to leave.

LEO

(quietly)

Whatever you're mixed up in,
Rafe... don't let it drag you
under.

Rafe pauses, a flicker of vulnerability, then hardens.

RAFE

Too late for that.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. WICKSTEAD HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

Controlled chaos as Joshua is wheeled in on a gurney, Joy at his side. YASMEEN HADDAD (45) meets them, surprised.

YASMEEN
Joy? What happened?

JOY
Kitchen fire. Possible smoke inhalation, brief loss of consciousness.

She's professional but barely holding it together. Yasmeen notices.

YASMEEN
We've got him. Dr. Rivera...

Kayla steps forward, nodding reassuringly at Joy.

KAYLA
We'll take good care of him.

As they wheel Joshua away, Yasmeen turns to Joy.

YASMEEN
When was the last time you had a proper break?

JOY
(weak laugh)
I don't even know what that means anymore.

YASMEEN
Go get some air. Call someone. We've got this.

JOY
There's no one to call.

YASMEEN
(gently)
Your brother?

Joy's face hardens.

JOY
Jordan's made it pretty clear where his priorities lie.

YASMEEN

Joy...

She complies, stepping away to pull out her phone. Her hands shake slightly as she dials, only for it to ring several times before directing her straight to voicemail.

JOY

Jordan, it's me. Dad's in hospital again... It's getting worse and I - I can't... I can't do this alone anymore. Please just... just call me back.

She hangs up, hiding the moment of vulnerability - as brief as it was.

INT. SAVANNAH'S SALON (SLICK) - AFTERNOON

Savannah rinses a cloth under the tap before scrubbing viciously at a stain just as -

The door opens with its familiar chime, revealing Vivian who scans the empty chairs and untouched magazines.

VIVIAN

No appointments this afternoon?

SAVANNAH

Mondays are slow.

VIVIAN

It's Tuesday.

SAVANNAH

Then Tuesdays are slow too.

Vivian touches nothing but judges everything.

VIVIAN

You've done well for yourself.
Built something from nothing.

SAVANNAH

What do you want Vivian?

VIVIAN

(circling the space)
Your sister Talia has been making waves. Asking uncomfortable questions about my husband's disappearance.

SAVANNAH

You're here over ancient history?

VIVIAN

History has a way of becoming relevant again. Especially when young girls with big mouths start connecting dots.

She stops at a styling chair, running her hand along its back.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

Some dots shouldn't be connected, Savannah.

SAVANNAH

Don't threaten me Vivian.

VIVIAN

Not a threat. Curious teenage girls having a tendency to... stumble... into situations they can't handle? That's a threat.

Rage ignites a fire behind Savannah's eyes.

SAVANNAH

Try me, I dare you.

VIVIAN

I've buried more than one secret to protect my family, what's another?

The air crackles with tension. Savannah grabs a pair of scissors from her station and holds them to Vivian's throat but she remains unflinching.

SAVANNAH

And you only know a fraction of what I've done to protect mine.

Vivian places a finger on the scissors and pushes them back, the blades drawing blood as she does.

VIVIAN

Now now Savannah, let's keep our emotions in check lest I do it for you.

The door jingles, this time revealing Marie who is absolutely dumbfounded by the scene unfolding.

MARIE
 Ms. Vexley..?
 (noticing the scissors)
 Sav... what's going on?

INT. VEXLEY HOUSE - KARA'S BEDROOM - EARLY EVENING

Layla sits cross-legged on the floor, reading a folded document. Kara paces nearby, arms folded.

LAYLA
 So he never told anyone?

KARA
 It doesn't look like it, he wrote the date on the bag but it's untouched. Like he was going to do it. Then didn't.

LAYLA
 And you're sure it's you, not one of your brothers.

KARA
 I doubt it, it's dated a few years after I was born...

LAYLA
 Could be Finn?

KARA
 Flick's a spitting image of him, it's me...

LAYLA
 I mean you and Finn could practically be twins.

Layla looks back to the document, scanning the fine print.

LAYLA (CONT'D)
 Technically, if you open this and use it, you're violating consent protocols. He's dead.

KARA
 So's everything in this house.

LAYLA
 What does your mum say?

KARA

Nothing. Won't talk about him.
Won't say his name. Like her grief
gives her permission to erase him.

LAYLA

And your brothers?

KARA

Leo's a brick wall, Rafe... Rafe
barely talks to anyone these days..
and Flick's, Flick - he just
exists.

Layla frowns. Her own tension rising.

LAYLA

What're you hoping to find?

KARA

The truth.

LAYLA

And if it's not what you want to
hear?

KARA

Then at least it's honest.

INT. HOSPITAL - ALFIE MATHERS' ROOM - EARLY EVENING

A quiet, dimly lit room. Machines hum softly. ALFIE MATHERS
(29) lies still, unconscious. His face is peaceful now, but
his body tells another story - bruises, tubes, the fragility
of a man not quite here, not quite gone.

Bianca sits beside him, legs crossed under her, worn jumper
draped over her frame like armour.

A gentle knock. Kayla enters, clipboard in hand, calm but
purposeful.

KAYLA

(gently)

Bianca? Visiting hours ended twenty
minutes ago.

BIANCA

Just a bit longer?

KAYLA

I've already bent the rules three
times this week.

BIANCA
Has there been any change?

KAYLA
The increased brain activity is promising. But recovery from trauma like this... it takes time.

BIANCA
The police have given up. Did you know that? They've stopped looking for whoever did this to him.

KAYLA
I'm sorry.

BIANCA
Seven months. That's how long we've been engaged. Seven months, two weeks, and four days.

She twists the ring on her finger.

BIANCA (CONT'D)
We were supposed to look at venues next week.

KAYLA
(sitting beside her)
You can't put your life on hold indefinitely. It's not good for you.

BIANCA
What else am I supposed to do?

KAYLA
Take care of yourself. Eat. Sleep. Trust that we're doing everything we can.

She smiles. Kind, not patronising.

BIANCA
You always know what to say.

KAYLA
Not always.

Bianca catches the shift – subtle, but sincere.

LAYLA

Right, visiting's over. If I make another exception, the nurses union will form a coup.

BIANCA

Let them. I'll bribe them with biscuits.

KAYLA

(laughs)

Tempting. But no. Go home. Rest. Come back tomorrow.

Bianca lingers at Alfie's bedside, plants a kiss gently on his forehead and stands.

BIANCA

You come back to me, yeah? I'm waiting for you...

Kayla watches on, eyes glazing over but tears very much professionally suppressed.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - NIGHT

Moonlight cuts through the skeletal frames of unfinished buildings. Savannah leans against scaffolding, smoking, listening to the click of boots announcing LEO VEXLEY.

SAVANNAH

Took you long enough.

She flicks her cigarette away, leaving the embers to arc through darkness.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

Your mother paid me a visit today.

LEO

She visits a lot of places.

SAVANNAH

Tried threatening me... well Talia.

LEO

Maybe you should listen.

SAVANNAH

Like you listen?

(sharp laugh)

Like you do everything Mummy says?

LEO

Don't.

SAVANNAH

Don't what? Point out you're thirty years old and still jumping when she calls?

He steps into her space, angry.

LEO

You don't understand the pressure—

SAVANNAH

I understand perfectly. You're scared of her.

LEO

I'm protecting my brothers. My sister. The way you are yours.

SAVANNAH

Do you even know what from?

LEO

From the truth about him. About her. From all of it.

SAVANNAH

(suspicious)

What do you know, Leo?

He looks away but she touches his face, forcing him to meet her eyes.

LEO

My mother warned me about you...

SAVANNAH

Your mother warns everyone about me.

(beat)

Leo, if she touches one hair on my sister's head...

LEO

You'll what?

She tries to pull away but he grabs her hand, pulling her into a kiss and despite her initial reluctance, she returns it with more passion.

LEO (CONT'D)

Why do I have a feeling you only
ever do that to spite her...

SAVANNAH

That I do because I want to... this,
I do to spite her.

She lifts his shirt over his head, leading his hands to her
body and kissing on his neck. He lifts her off the ground and
into the wall, breathing intensifying—

LEO

How do we always end up back here
Sav?

INT. WICKSTEAD HIGH - HEADTEACHER'S OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

The school is quiet now — long past the final bell. Faint
birdsong filters through the blinds. Outside, corridors are
dark and hollow.

Inside: sleek desk, leather chair, neat shelves — and Nick,
still in his tie, looking over spreadsheets with the calm
detachment of a man who's built his life around routine.

A soft knock but the door opens without waiting to reveal
Vivian—

NICK

I thought we agreed no drop-ins.

VIVIAN

We also agreed on open
communication. But we both like to
pretend, don't we?

She closes the door behind her. Lock clicks.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

You've been distant.

NICK

And so you invited my wife and I to
dinner.

VIVIAN

She is my best friend, it would
have been suspicious not to.

NICK

No, you wanted to put me in my
place.

VIVIAN

Your daughter and her little friends are questioning things they shouldn't and bringing ghosts to my doorstep. You need to rein them in.

He stands now, closing the laptop – posture taut.

NICK

You think I haven't tried?

VIVIAN

Try harder.

NICK

Am I being managed right now? Is that it? We slept together and so I'm indebted to you? I do your bidding?

(beat)

That's not how this works, you want to expose this – it's not just my life that implodes, it's yours too.

Vivian approaches slowly – controlled, surgical.

NICK (CONT'D)

Claire's unravelling. My sons are avoiding me. And I can't do anything about any of it.

VIVIAN

Ah. There it is.

She steps closer. Their breath mingles. Dangerous.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

You want out. You're scared. Not of me – of being seen for who you really are.

NICK

You don't know who I am.

VIVIAN

Oh, I know exactly who you are. That's why I picked you.

Nick stares at her, seeing something cold and calculating he hadn't noticed before.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

So you'll handle it... before I do?

NICK
 (defeated)
 I'll see what I can do.

VIVIAN
 Good boy.

She takes his tie and pulls him into a reluctant and possessive kiss.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
 I'll see you Friday. Don't be late.

She leaves him standing there, questioning what he's become.

INT. CEDARS RESTAURANT - AFTER CLOSING - NIGHT

Amir wipes down tables. The restaurant is empty except for Finn, who sits at the bar nursing the last of his drink.

AMIR
 I'm locking up in five.

FINN
 (raising his glass)
 Plenty of time.

AMIR
 Shouldn't you be at The Oak? Making sure the locals aren't swimming in the beer taps?

FINN
 Callum's closing. He owes me.

AMIR
 (teasing)
 More like you owe him.

FINN
 Details.

A comfortable silence falls between them. Amir cleans the bar, hyperaware of Finn watching him.

FINN (CONT'D)
 You ever wonder what it'd be like?
 To leave this place?

AMIR
 Wickstead?

FINN

All of it. The families, the expectations, the weight of being a Vexley or a Haddad.

AMIR

Sometimes. But then I remember how my father built all of this from nothing. For us.

FINN

Lucky you. Having something worth staying for.

AMIR

What would you do? If you left?

FINN

Open a bar in Ibiza. Sleep with tourists. Come home at sunrise.

AMIR

(rolling his eyes)
Of course you would.

FINN

What, you don't think I could?

AMIR

I think you're full of it.

Finn laughs, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

FINN

Maybe that's all I am.

The moment stretches, deepens.

AMIR

That's not what I see.

FINN

(uncomfortable)
And what do you see Haddad?

AMIR

Someone hiding.

Finn's smile falters and he tries to break the moment.

FINN

And on that cheerful note, I'll leave you to your cleaning.

As he heads for the door, he pauses, back to Amir.

FINN (CONT'D)

Thanks. For letting me stay.

AMIR

Anytime.

Finn leaves. Amir watches him go, lingering longer than necessary, something unspoken in his expression.

END OF ACT TWO

KICKER

INT. MORGAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Joy helps Joshua settle onto the sofa, arranging pillows behind him. He seems fragile, confused.

JOY

The doctors said to rest. I've taken tomorrow off to stay with you.

JOSHUA

You shouldn't have to do that.

JOY

(tired smile)
Who else will?

The front door opens and JORDAN MORGAN (26) enters, expensive coat, designer luggage, the picture of city success.

Joshua's face lights up with recognition.

JOSHUA

My boy!

JORDAN

(taken aback)
Dad?

He embraces Joshua awkwardly, shooting a questioning look at Joy who moves to the kitchen; inviting him to join with her eyes.

JORDAN (CONT'D)

(hushed)
What happened? He looks...

JOY

Old? Sick? He's both.

JORDAN

I didn't realise it had gotten this bad.

JOY

(furious whisper)
How would you? You haven't been here!

JORDAN

I've been working-

JOY

So have I and yet I didn't
disappear without a single weekend
visit.

JORDAN

That's not fair—

JOY

No, what's not fair is me putting
my life on hold while you build
your career. What's not fair is me
handling every doctor's
appointment, every episode, every
moment he doesn't recognise me—all
while you post Instagram photos
from fancy restaurants!

JORDAN

(defensive)

I send money—

JOY

We don't need your money Jordan! We
need you!

She's shaking now, two years of resentment pouring out.

JOY (CONT'D)

I'm done. I can't be the only one
who stays. I won't be.

JORDAN

What are you saying?

JOY

I'm saying it's your turn to help.
Really help, not just sending
cheques.

JORDAN

(panicking)

I have a job, a life—

JOY

So did I, Jordan? I did too!

From the living room, they hear Joshua call out.

JOSHUA

Jordan? Are you still here?

The siblings stare at each other, at an impasse.

JOY

He remembers you. More than me
sometimes. Isn't that reason enough
to stay?

Guilt washes over Jordan's face as his father calls again,
more uncertain this time.

INT. MERRICK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CLAIRE sits alone on the sofa, wine glass in hand, staring at
nothing. The front door opens. NICK enters, removing his
coat.

CLAIRE
(too bright)
How was the meeting?

NICK
(beat, remembering the
lie)
Fine. Dull. You know how it is.

CLAIRE
(nodding)
I made lasagne. It's in the oven if
you're hungry.

NICK
(noticing her glass)
How many have you had?

CLAIRE
(defensive)
Just this one. It's been a day.

NICK
(softening slightly)
Bad?

CLAIRE
Jodie's teacher called. Concerned
about her grades.

NICK
(dismissive)
She's fine. You worry too much.

CLAIRE
Do I?

He doesn't answer, checking his phone instead.

NICK
I'm going to shower.

CLAIRE
(as he walks away)
Were you with her?

Nick freezes.

NICK
What?

CLAIRE
(bitter smile)
Nothing. Go shower. Wash it all
off.

Nick hesitates, then continues upstairs without addressing her accusation.

Claire finishes her wine in one gulp, then reaches into her pocket for a small pill bottle. She pops one, then another, washing them down with the last drops of wine.

Standing unsteadily, she knocks over the empty glass. It rolls across the coffee table and crashes to the floor, shattering.

Claire stares at it, too numb to care. She sways slightly, then stumbles toward the stairs.

MAX appears from the shadows of the dining room, having witnessed everything. Silently, he retrieves a dustpan and brush, cleaning up the broken glass. His small face is expressionless as he carefully disposes of the shards.

In the stillness, we hear Claire's uneven footsteps overhead, and the distant sound of Nick's shower—a family fractured, each in their own isolated space.

He looks up at the ceiling, listening to his parents' separate rituals, his eyes far too knowing for a child of thirteen.

END OF KICKER