

SOULILOQUY

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FADE IN:

EXT./INT. DOWNTOWN NEW ORLEANS (SUMMER) - DAY

DONNY BELMONT (40) engulfs the screen with a smile greedy for more space on his face and spirits higher than the white puffs above. Dressed in a white suit, he walks the sidewalks elated, like usual - each step for him a bounce on cemented trampolines. As he exaggeratedly swings his arms in correspondence to his legs, the camera notices a singular dyed blue rose in his calloused and worn hands. An avid musician, primarily a pianist and a singer, his hands seem to be struck in a permanent state of "veinyness". Unbothered by his surroundings - the regular public glances of annoyance and a genuine disinterest in the opinions of others or those who despise him, he seems truly happy.

INT. RIVERSIDE APT'S - CONTINUOUS

Rose in his back pocket, Donny enters the lobby of the building. Ignoring the mail boxes, he grabs a ring of rusted keys from his side pocket. Finding the right one instantaneously, he unlocks the door and walks towards his home on the same floor.

INT. BELMONT'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

He enters his apartment, roughly 900 or so square feet with 2 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms.

DONNY
(calling out)
Diana?

DIANA (O.S.)
Home already, honey?

DONNY
Yeah, baby. Rehearsal was cut short
today.

DIANA (O.S.)
Can you go check on your son? He's
going through lady troubles.

DONNY
About damn time for that boy.
Cooking dinner?

DIANA (O.S.)
Fried fish and collard greens.

DONNY

Do you need help after I deal with
whatever Arlo needs?

DIANA (O.S.)

You can help me set the table.

DONNY

Sure!

Donny walks past the living room. The room, evidently the most spacious in their home, seems rubbed off from the interests of a musician. An upright black piano stands proudly, albeit unpolished, next to an obnoxiously cubed box of a TV with a bent antenna that stretches towards the ceiling. Next to the TV is a wooden stand, crafted by Donny (noticeably absent of decent craftsmanship, but he's proud of it) which rests a turntable and a box of vinyl records. Opposite the TV are two typically basic armchairs, with one of them being much more worn than the other.

INT. ARLO'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ARLO BELMONT (17) sits at his bed, staring at a poster of Donny Hathaway, completely absent from reality and the presence of his father. The afroed miniature version of his dad in appearance, the posters of soul musicians in Arlo's room suggest that his musical interests mimic his father's. Posters of Ray Charles, Curtis Mayfield, Etta James, Aretha Franklin, Lou Rawls, Jill Scott and Lionel Richie should also be caught by the camera. Little streaks of light gleam from his eyes to the bottom of his face from his tears. Arlo's hands gently shake from loss; his shoulders are hunched, his breathing is shallow, and his lips tremble. Donny sits next to his son, clearly sympathetic towards his flesh and blood.

The two sit in silence for a little while as Donny contemplates what to say.

DONNY

How'd she do it?

ARLO

I saw her with another guy.

DONNY

White fellas?

Arlo nods. Donny sighs.

DONNY (CONT'D)

She tell you she love you?

Arlo nods.

DONNY (CONT'D)
Did you love her?

ARLO
Yeah.

Donny sighs.

DONNY
I ever tell you about Jill?

ARLO
Aunt Jill?

DONNY
Not her - *my* high school special
somethin-somethin.

ARLO
I don't think so.

DONNY
Spent 2 years with this lady - man,
she was like Hades met Aphrodite.
Her parents had it made - and her
eyes looked like these emerald
portals into some tropical forest-
ass dimension -(laughs) but no
woman ever looked or looks as
beautiful as your mother though,
don't you forget that.

Arlo nods.

DONNY (CONT'D)
I kissed her hand everyday, I
called her beautiful, I bought her
flowers - I would throw my body
over the muddiest of mud puddles so
her shoes would stay clean, you
know. And I bought her those damn
shoes too by saving up shoe shining
her father's damn Oxfords! But the
lady still left me.

Arlo looks up at his father.

DONNY (CONT'D)
Did you love your girl
unconditionally?

Arlo nods.

DONNY (CONT'D)
Did you give up on her?

Arlo shakes his head "no".

DONNY (CONT'D)
Did you cheat or hit her?

Arlo shakes his head "no".

DONNY (CONT'D)
Well then, son, you did all that
you could do.

ARLO
I should've made more time for her.
I should've told her I loved her
more. I should've-

DONNY
No, Arlo. Never defend a cheater.
Those people don't belong in
relationships. They don't belong in
your head. It don't matter how
pretty her face was - Everyone is
only as attractive as their souls.
What can you miss or be attracted
to when it's clear she don't have
one?

ARLO
What am I supposed to do, dad?

DONNY
You got all these thoughts shooting
out of your head. "I shoulda done
this", "I shoulda done that", "I
shoulda seen this coming" - they're
all shooting in all these
directions. They're bouncing off
the walls and the floorboards and
they're making you go crazier and
crazier 'cause you can't count 'em
and you don't know where they're
going. What you need to do is start
thinking about yourself, so your
thoughts are gonna shoot into your
heart and help you heal it. Focus
on loving yourself, man.

ARLO
What's there to love?

DONNY

Aw damn, Arlo. You're my son, and I'm the sexiest man alive! And your mother is the sexiest woman alive! You got it all! You got the best genes!

ARLO

I get bullied everyday, I have no friends, the only person who made me feel good about myself left me for another guy; what do I got that I can be proud of?

DONNY

You got music, Arlo. You got music in you. You just don't know how to be proud of it, yet - or how to use it. And what're you doing getting into relationships when I haven't even taught you how to treat a woman yet?

ARLO

What?

DONNY

(towards the open door)
Diana!

DIANA (O.S.)

Huh!?

DONNY

Get in here!

DIANA (O.S.)

You said you'd help set the damn table!

DONNY

Arlo and I need your help with something, first!

Donny takes out the blue rose as Diana walks towards the room.

DIANA BELMONT (39) emerges into the doorway, looking visibly annoyed. Donny's face brightens.

DONNY (CONT'D)

I got you a rose.

Diana takes the rose.

DIANA

Aw, Donny that's sweet. Why is it blue?

DONNY

'Cause it reminded me of you.

DIANA

How?

DONNY

It must've been made in a lab somewhere because it's too pretty to grow in nature.

Diana laughs. Arlo cringes.

DIANA

(to Arlo)

Your father is cornier than all hell!

Donny leads his wife out of the room, beckoning Arlo to follow him. Donny sits behind the piano and cracks his knuckles while looking eagerly at both the keys and Diana.

INT. BELMONT'S HOME, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

DONNY

(to Arlo)

If you do what you love, son, the people you'll end up loving more than anything will come to you and join the fun. And when they do come to you and they save you, like your mother did, you have to make sure that every now and again, just in case they forget, that you're grateful for them.

Donny plays a soulful and skillful riff on the piano.

DONNY (CONT'D)

(to Arlo)

I try to make your mother the happiest woman in the world 25/8. And when I fail, she's still happy, because she knows I tried so damn hard. And I don't try because I'm afraid of losing her; I try because I love her.

Another riff.

DONNY (CONT'D)
(to Arlo)
That's why you gotta make sure
she's the one, son. That's why she
got to prove to you that she's the
person that's deserving of your
effort. Love isn't good enough of a
reason to stay with a girl because
it could be infatuation or
limerence - like puppy love; if
she's costing you your mental
health, or she doesn't try to make
you happy, hit the road, Jack, and
don't you come back to her no more!
Know your worth and you'll find
someone who knows your worth too.

Donny plays the beginning to "Give Your Love" by Stevie Wonder.

DONNY (SINGING) (CONT'D)
(to Diana)
Give your love
Give your love to only me
Give the chance I need
To let you see
You will be the other half of me

Donny plays the song in its entirety. His voice is comparable to a mixture of Seal's in "It's a Man's Man's Man's World" and Tyrese's in "Shame".

Arlo looks at his dad with a sense of excited inspiration and determined hope.

Donny stands and hugs his wife after he finishes. Their embrace makes it visibly evident that the two are truly still in love.

DIANA
I love you, Donny.

DONNY
I love you, Diana.

Donny walks over to the kitchen to set the table. Diana sits down at the armchair next to Arlo, clutching the blue rose.

FADE TO:

INT. BELMONT'S HOME - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: 12 YEARS LATER

Diana (51) sits at the armchair in a black dress, sobbing, while clutching the blue rose. A wet, closed umbrella is propped up next to the armchair.

RAYNE YOUNG (30) stands behind her with a pale hand on her shoulder. Brown haired and blue eyed, she hangs her head in distress. Arlo (30) sits in the arm chair next to his mom, holding her hand tightly.

DIANA
(to Arlo)
I hoped you listened to every word
he told you.

ARLO
I did, mom.

DIANA
I hoped you listened to every last
damn word because he is the
smartest and most thoughtful man
I've ever known and he wanted to
teach you all he knew.

ARLO
He taught me so much.

Diana cries more. Arlo grips her hand harder.

DIANA
I hope you learn to love your life
as much as he did. I hope you learn
to be happy. That's all he ever
wanted for you.

ARLO
I know, mom. He was the greatest
father I could've had.

Diana turns to Rayne.

DIANA
(to Rayne)
Take care of my son, okay?

RAYNE
I will. I promise.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE INTERSTATE, ARLO'S CAR - NIGHT

Arlo and Rayne drive down the illuminated interstate. Rayne, more gorgeous than gorgeous herself, sniffles every now and again. The reds around her eyes seem to make her already sharp diamond eyes burst out with more elegance and beauty.

The two sit in silence for a while. Arlo, surprisingly, seems almost unbothered.

RAYNE
I'm going to miss him.

ARLO
Me too.

RAYNE
He was the nicest and happiest guy
I knew.

ARLO
(chuckling)
He was the type of man who'd cut
off his leg for you to use as a
back scratcher if you asked him to.

RAYNE
Yeah...

Rayne starts to cry again. Arlo puts an arm around her shoulder to comfort her. She clutches his arm and sobs.

Arlo slows slightly as they approach a downward slope. He switches to the rightmost lane for his exit, I-29 North. The exit is the type that circles around from the right, so he begins to slow down to make the sharp curl. As he does, he takes a second to look forward into the continuation of the interstate. Trapped in darkness, he frowns at its almost sinister and lonely appearance. He's never not taken the exit before, so he has no idea where the road leads.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. DOWNTOWN NEW ORLEANS (SPRING) - DAY

Arlo Belmont (30) walks down the sidewalks that his father bounced off of for so many years prior to his death. His head hangs ever so slightly, and his hands are hidden shyly in his pockets. He appears to contrast the mood and energy that his father would always vibrate on the streets of New Orleans. One note of similarity to draw is that neither men ever hid their emotions from their physical appearances. Arlo enters a cafe.