

RISE OF THE UNICORN (First 10 pages)

by  
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(Adapted from the novel)

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BEGIN OPENING CREDITS

The first 24 seconds of "Tokyo Blue" by Najee, plays in a loop as the credits roll. The last credit is an image of a unicorn. The music and the image fade out.

**BLACK SCREEN.** A gentle breeze with an occasional wind chime is heard and a title card fades in.

TITLE CARD: UNI - CORN, noun (yoo-ni-kawrn)

A second card fades in.

TITLE CARD: A mythical creature that seeks purity & light and has the power to heal.

Both cards fade out.

OLD TIRED MAN (V.O.)  
Unicorns is real and they hide in  
plain sight. Ask the kids. They  
know. They know...

END OPENING CREDITS

EXT. SMALL 3-STORY APARTMENTS, SUN VALLEY, CA - EARLY MORNING

The flashing lights of emergency vehicles reflect off walls and closed windows. CAPTAIN DIANE POWELL, 40's, white, red-hair, talks into her radio.

CAPT. POWELL  
He's got a console and screen  
right?

RADIO VOICE (V.O.)  
Yes, ma'am.

CAPT. POWELL  
Okay, then get that thing up  
there! Let's go!

A nearby drone lifts off into the sky and we hear two people in mid-conversation. A WOMAN (ARLENE) and a MAN (GUS).

(CONTINUED)

ARLENE (O.S.)

For Thanksgiving? I... I don't know. Uh, turkey, I guess. The dark meat... with gravy, if it's good.

GUS (O.S.)

That's the gospel truth. If the gravy ain't right, don't much else matter.

INT. - APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

ON GUS'S LIPS.

GUS

My favorite part? Rum cake.

NEGOTIATOR, AUGUSTUS 'GUS' MARTIN, Black, unshaven, a bit unkempt and more than world-weary is crouched in the hallway.

GUS (CONT'D)

Yeah, my momma's rum cake ties everything together. That's when it feels like home.

INT. BRADLEY APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

With a **grotesquely swollen left eye**, ARLENE NELSON, white, points a pistol at the head of her stepson, JUSTIN BRADLEY, white, (10), from behind a raggedy couch.

Justin is expressionless and staring at his father, RAY BRADLEY, white, wearing a bloody T-shirt and brandishing a belt on the other side of the room.

In a crooked 8 x 10 frame on the wall is a yellowed photo of a younger, smiling Ray in his Double-A Montgomery, Alabama Biscuits baseball uniform.

RAY

I done told you... you get that off a him! I ain't gon' bother you

--

EXT. BRADLEY APARTMENT - HALLWAY

Gus watches on a small television transmitter. He maneuvers a joy-stick to change the camera angle of the drone as one of the POLICE OFFICERS adjusts his bullet proof vest.

Gus sees the video image of the living room behind the door he's facing - from the 3rd story window and to Arlene's right. Neither she nor Justin is visible on-screen as they are hidden from the drone's view.

**BACK AND FORTH FROM APARTMENT INTERIOR TO BUILDING HALLWAY.**

GUS

-- RAY! I asked you to stay quiet. Now, Arlene? How ya coming? I want to help you and everybody get through this so --

ARLENE

-- No! Stop trying to handle me! You all show up now. Finally! Where was you when I needed help?! I told y'all I needed me a restraining order on him 3 times! 3 different times! Ain't nobody do nothin'! Telling me he had to commit something first even though I **told y'all** what he was!

GUS

Arlene? I understand. I'm sorry the Police couldn't get you what you needed when you needed it. Restraining orders can be tricky -- trickier than they need to be. But if you really want him to pay, you gotta know this -- this won't get you what you want.

Gus' cell phone vibrates. He grabs it and looks. The display reads: **"Move subject to her right and cause to stand. Positioning shooter now."**

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING, STREET LEVEL

Capt. Powell is flanked by Officer STEVE PETERS (Stevie Pete) and other COPS in COVID masks.

(CONTINUED)

They are watching the same video images as Gus. She looks at her watch. It's 8:38am.

CAPT. POWELL

Tell him nothing fancy and to get this shit over with Stevie Pete. I don't want 'multiple suspects gunned down' headlines blasted all over the morning news and Twitter.

OFFICER PETERS

Yes sir -- ma'am. Okay, our shooter is in position.

Officer Peters speaks into a voice activated device.

OFFICER PETERS (CONT'D)

Transmission's good. We'll keep watch on our side.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING ROOF ACROSS THE STREET

The LAPD SNIPER takes aim at the window Arlene is to be maneuvered to.

INT. NELSON APARTMENT

Gus - hallway; Arlene & Ray are inside the apartment.

ARLENE

Goddamn right he's gonna suffer!  
After what he done!

GUS

Arlene? You gotta let us take care of it. You don't want to hurt anybody. Justin's a good kid, right? Not his fault he's Ray's son. He's not Ray. You gotta think this thing through.

RAY

I ain't force her daughter to do shit! Y'all get in here and shoot this stupid cunt!

GUS

Shut up Ray!

Gus whispers into his cell phone to send a voice text.

(CONTINUED)

GUS (CONT'D)  
No "period". Hold shot(".".) Going  
in(".".)

Gus puts the phone away and quickly kisses a pendant hanging from the gold chain around his neck before putting it away.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Arlene? I need to come in there.  
My boss said I need to assess the  
situation and she's on my ass. I  
know how you feel but she's making  
me and she's in charge. Now... I  
do not have any weapons on me. I  
promise. Is it okay if I come in?

ARLENE  
No, you stay on out there! I just  
need to think for a minute!

RAY  
Bitch, that's 55 seconds more'n  
you can handle!

GUS  
ARLENE! I see what you mean about  
Ray. He is a pain in the ass. I'm  
sick of listening to him myself.  
How about I come in there and make  
him shut up?

RAY  
Me? She's the fuckin' problem. You  
get in here and do your goddamn  
job!

Gus signals to the cops in the hallway to stay put. He turns the knob and pushes the door open gently, but it's stopped by a door chain. Gus speaks through the small opening.

GUS  
Arlene. Think now...  
Thanksgiving's gonna come around.  
Who's gonna help your daughter if  
we don't handle this the right  
way? Who's gonna help Stacey,  
Arlene?

Tears fall from Arlene's eyes but she does not wilt. Her rage returns and she cocks the hand gun. Ray is seething.

EXT APARTMENT BUILDING - STREET LEVEL

Speaking into a walkie-talkie on a secure channel, CAPTAIN WALTER LOGAN, white, (50's), hard-ass, talks to the sniper.

CAPT. LOGAN

Keep your eyes peeled. If she points that gun in Martin's general direction, you take her ass out!

EXT BRADLEY APARTMENT

GUS

Don't panic on me Arlene. I'm gonna pop this door and then come in by myself. No weapon. I want to help you help Stacey, Arlene. Just me by myself... moving real slow.

Gus hits the door with his right shoulder. On the second try the chain breaks and Gus steps into the living room.

RAY

Well look at that. They sent a nigger.

Gus maintains direct eye contact with Arlene and closes the door.

GUS

How we doing Arlene? I'm Gus. Guess you know that. Captain thought it'd be better if we were all in the same room. No gun like I promised. Just me.

ARLENE

You being in here don't change nothin'. It ain't gonna undo what he done to me... to my baby.

GUS

You're right Arlene. Me being here won't fix what Ray's done. You've had a rough go. I can see that. I came in here because my boss told me to help Stacey.

(CONTINUED)

ARLENE

Why ain't they believe me when I  
told 'em what he was?!?

GUS

Wish I had an answer that'd make  
sense Arlene. Messed up as it is,  
sometimes the law just moves too  
slow.

RAY

(imitating Gus)

*"Sometimes the law just moves too  
slow."* That all you got? That's  
you working your magic? You make  
that bitch put that pistol down  
and you do it now!

Never taking his eyes off of Arlene, Gus calmly speaks.

GUS

Toughest thing about my wife  
leaving me Arlene... was me having  
to admit that I picked 'wrong.'  
She needed fixin' and I thought I  
could do it. Now what I didn't  
know was that I was broken too.  
And who really needed fixing was  
me. Hardest part? On some level, I  
thought all that foolishness was  
what I deserved. Now here you are,  
beat on and dragged in the mud  
'cuz you thought you could put  
polish on a turd and make it  
shine. Didn't you Arlene?

RAY

The fuck is this?!? Shoot her you  
stupid fuck!

Gus turns calmly, to Ray and slowly walks toward him.

GUS

Thing is, Ray always hated you  
Arlene. He knew you could'a done  
better if you ever chose to. So  
this - this 'tough guy' beat you  
down, kept apologizing and doing  
it again, 'til he finally decided  
he'd start in on your daughter. He  
pretended to be a big man even  
though he was just... this.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)



CONTINUED: (2)

GUS (CONT'D)

See, if he ever let up, he knew  
you and that boy right there would  
see he wasn't shit. Look at him.

With his back to Arlene, Gus stops directly in front of  
Ray.

GUS (CONT'D)

Got a weapon in his hand and me in  
his face, but you know what  
Arlene? He won't do nothing 'cuz  
he knows I can see him for what he  
is.

(to Ray)

Isn't that right?

Ray considers taking a swing at Gus.

GUS (CONT'D)

You might want to drop that strap.  
I'm feeling threatened.

After a beat, Ray drops the belt and looks away.

GUS (CONT'D)

Face the wall.

Gus lets Arlene see him reaching for his handcuffs. He  
starts cuffing Ray on the wall next to his old photo.

RAY

The fuck are you cuffing me for?  
That bitch has a gun at my --

GUS

-- No she don't Ray. Way I see it,  
she's pointing the gun at you and  
protecting herself. Cuz you kept  
beating on her and because of what  
you did to her daughter.

RAY

Fuck you nigger.

GUS

(whispers to Ray)

Guess what Ray? Soon, some of the  
brothas are gonna be fucking you.  
Won't that be something?

(to Arlene)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GUS (CONT'D)

Now, since the gun was for self defense maybe you don't need it now and you can hand it over to me. That okay with you Arlene?

Gus turns to face Arlene. She releases Justin and breaks down.

ARLENE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to --

JUSTIN

-- It's okay. I knew you wouldn't hurt me.

Limply extending the gun forward, Arlene stands to walk around the couch to hand it to Gus. Gus sees a red dot jittering as she enters the sight line of the sniper...

GUS

Arlene. Don't --

Like a shot, Gus flies toward Arlene, tackling her as a bullet whizzes through the window striking the television.

RAY

Aw fuck!

Gus gets up and goes to the window signaling 'all clear' and then picks up the gun from Arlene who is shaken but unhurt. A disgusted Justin stares at Ray for a beat before going to comfort Arlene.

EXT. TOLUCA LAKE

Sitting on one edge of a bench, DR. WINSTON JONES, Black, lean, tall and bald, snaps out of his reverie. He stares at the ducks in the lake.

At opposite end of the bench sits CATHY O'BRIEN, white, professional, (40s). She weakly wipes sweat from her forehead while dropping bread crumbs. Her name tag is on the jacket of her business suit. They share a cordial smile.

EXT. VISTA NATIONAL BANK

2 WORKERS in light blue jumpsuits, (JIMMY & LISA) are doing normal maintenance activities to the bank exterior.

(CONTINUED)

Jimmy comes down from a ladder as 2 MORE WORKERS (MANUEL & GEORGE) come around from the rear of the bank.

INT BANK LOBBY

The ever-cheerful PATRICK HENRY, Black, (70s). The semi-retired 'ladies man' sits in the waiting area next to his walker. Bank employee, ANGELA GUTIERREZ (30s) walks over.

ANGELA

Good morning Mr. Henry. Well aren't you sharp today? How've you been?

Mr. Henry removes his fedora.

MR. HENRY

Fine. Not as fine as you, but I'm still on this side of the grass.

Angela gives him a playful wink.

ANGELA

Don't you start - I'm gonna be a married woman.

MR. HENRY

When you get snapped up?

ANGELA

Well, not yet. One of these days though... Need a little help?

MR. HENRY

Naw. I got it.

Mr. Henry stands, leaning on his walker for support. He exchanges nods with the very gaunt FARHAD AHMADI, who is seated facing the parking lot side of the bank.

ANGELA

Someone will be right with you, sir.

(to Mr. Henry)

After you.

MR. HENRY

Oh no. After you.

Angela smiles and begins walking. A serene Mr. Ahmadi reaches into a fanny pack but does not pull anything out... yet.

(CONTINUED)

Angela checks her watch. It's 9:10am. Mr. Henry follows mischievously watching Angela's bouncing behind.

MR. HENRY (CONT'D)

(Sotto)

Look at gawd...

A UNIFORMED GUARD comes from behind the teller side of the bank carrying a MONEY BAG. GUARD # 2 has his hand on his weapon and stands by the Teller door. The 2 guards walk toward the back lobby doors to the parking lot and exit.

There is a muffled GUNSHOT. Then another.

EXT. TOLUCA LAKE

Dr. Jones calmly but quickly holsters his weapon. The now deceased Cathy O'Brien faces the lake with blood oozing from her chest. The last bread crumbs are gobbled as ducks and seagulls tentatively come back toward her.

With a gloved hand Jones closes her eyelids and begins walking away. He pulls out a cell phone, sees it's 9:11am and hits 'redial'.

JONES

We're in play. You good? Guards are gone right?... On my way to you guys now. Remember, we need at least two. Out.