

WAIT

Written by

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First Draft

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BLACK SCREEN: A school bell rings and there is a cacophony as children gather their things in the rush to leave school for the day. A teacher's voice shouts above the din in a vain effort to catch the children before they leave.

TEACHER (O.S.)
Don't forget the drawings of your
family for the next class!

The screaming and happy clamour continue.

FADE TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

CAMILIA (6) and her brothers NELSON (7) and RODNEY (5) exit the school building. Their mother MINT, 33, who has been waiting outside for them, takes Nelson and Rodney's bags and wipes the sweat from Nelson's face. Camilia looks up at her mother.

MINT (SUBTITLE)
(To Nelson and Rodney) You're all
sweaty.

NELSON (SUBTITLE)
Rodney was chasing me.

Rodney smiles.

CAMILIA (SUBTITLE)
And me.

Mint continues to fuss over Nelson and Rodney, getting another tissue from the packet to wipe Rodney's face. Camilia wipes her face with her forearm.

MINT (SUBTITLE)
I'm going to have to wash your
uniforms again.

All four walk down the path out the school gate. As they move away, the sound of the boys' chatter becomes indistinct. Mint listens to them.

NELSON (SUBTITLE)
Mummy can we get ice lollies?

RODNEY (SUBTITLE)
(To Mint) We made flags today. I
did a red and green one with stars.

NELSON (SUBTITLE)
You just coloured them in.

Camilia follows at the rear. The voices of her brothers drift off as she trails behind them.

INT. CORNER SHOP - AFTERNOON

Nelson, Camilia and Rodney stand by the floor freezer and heave its door open. Nelson and Camilia hold their faces over the cold air laughing. Rodney can't reach yet.

Nelson and Rodney pick out ice lollies and Camilia chooses a Magnum. She still has her schoolbag on. Looking pleased with herself, she trots down the aisle to her mother but Mint's face is impassive. Camilia stops in her tracks, her face falls a little.

At the counter Nelson and Rodney are holding ice lollies. Camilia has a gummy snake.

CASHIER (O.S.)

That's four dollars twenty.

CAMILIA (SUBTITLE)

(To Mint in Burmese) It's four dollars twenty.

Mint takes the money out of her bag as Camilia watches. The boys unwrap their ice lollies. Camilia smiles at the cashier, who smiles back.

As they leave Camilia waves goodbye to the cashier.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Camilia, Nelson and Rodney play stone, paper, scissors on the staircase of the city hospital. Mint stands at the top of the stairs.

MINT (SUBTITLE)

Don't sit on the floor it's dirty.

The children look up at her, then carry on playing as Mint turns and walks away.

Camilia is still eating her gummy snake. They are in their school uniforms. As each wins a round, they move one step down. When one of them reaches the bottom of the flight of stairs, they are declared the winner and all three start again from the bottom, working their way back up.

Camilia runs to her mother who is sitting on a chair in the waiting area near the top of the stairs.

CAMILIA

Mummy can I have a drink?

Mint is holding all three school bags around her lap. She turns Camilia's bag with the water bottle pouch facing towards Camilia. Mint looks absent and distant. Camilia takes her water bottle herself and drinks. She runs back to the game.

NELSON

No you were on that step!

CAMILIA

You moved.

NELSON

Yeah but you were there, wasn't she?

RODNEY

Yeah you were.

CAMILIA

But I told you to wait.

Camilia sits on the step she wants, two steps above Nelson, and raises her hand in readiness for a round.

NELSON

No! You always do that!

Nelson moves up the number of steps he thinks he should be from Camilia. Camilia moves in reciprocation. She looks behind at Nelson as she passes him. Rodney looks at both of them and bolts up so as not to be left behind. Nelson moves again. Camilia raises her hand. The children carry on playing.

INT. MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The children's father, SEINE, 33, emerges from the corridor where his office is. He has his briefcase and looks ready to leave. He sees the family at his place of work again and double takes.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Camilia sees her father.

CAMILIA

Daddy!

INT. MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

At Camilia's cry, Seine walks towards the children.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Camilia and the boys run towards Seine. He picks Camilia up and cuddles her. She looks triumphant, high up in her father's arms.

CAMILIA
(In English) I won two games!

NELSON
No you didn't!

Seine isn't really listening.

Mint watches him from the waiting area but doesn't get up. Seine glances very quickly at her and looks back at the boys. He smiles, a little forced, as he squats and puts Camilia down. Nelson, Rodney and Camilia all look happy.

INT. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

The family drive home. The children are in the back and Mint is driving. Chirpy children's music plays on the car's cassette player. Seine sits silently in the front passenger seat as Mint drives.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DUSK

Camilia, Nelson and Rodney play stone, paper, scissors on the staircase of the hospital. Mint sits in the waiting area.

INT. MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DUSK

Seine leaves his office. He isn't surprised to see the family in the foyer. He stalks over with grim purpose.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DUSK

Camilia runs to her father. The boys stay seated on the stairs. Camilia hugs her father's legs and hangs on as he lopes towards Mint.

Mint stares straight ahead at nothing. There is an uncomfortable silence between Camilia's parents.

SEINE (SUBTITLE)
You shouldn't bring them here. The hospital is not a playground.

Mint continues to stare straight ahead, saying nothing. Her face is set. After a pause

SEINE (SUBTITLE) (CONT'D)
I left the keys... I'm not coming...

He stops. He doesn't know what to say. Camilia is thoroughly confused. She looks from Seine to Mint. Mint's face is impassive but agitating to look at. She looks old and young, lost and hardening.

INT. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

The family drive home. No music plays on the cassette player. No one sits in the front passenger seat.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Camilia, Nelson and Rodney play stone, paper, scissors on the staircase of the hospital. Mint sits in the waiting area and looks at her watch.

CAMILIA

I did it first and you changed.

NELSON

No I didn't. My hand was like this.

CAMILIA

You're lying. I was stone and Rodney was scissors and you were like this. (Makes a half scissor shape)

NELSON

No I was going to do stone too.

RODNEY

Your stone is like a scissors.

NELSON

I don't wanna play anymore. You two always cheat.

Nelson storms off towards their mother. Rodney follows him and the boys hang out with Mint in the waiting area.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - EARLY EVENING

Camilia sits on the stairs with her exercise book doing her homework. Nelson and Rodney are sprawled and limp on the seats by their mother, one of them is draped across Mint's legs, the other is reading a comic book.

INT. STAIRS MAIN HOSPITAL HALLWAY - EVENING

The children resume their game. It is now evening and through the window the city lights dilute the dark promise of the night sky. Inside the hospital too, the lights mask all human emotion - pain, suffering, hope - in a uniform fluorescence.

Camilia and her brothers are on the upward leg of their game. Nelson is two steps from the top, Camilia a step below him and Rodney is two below her.

Mint sees a woman, a nurse, on the other side of the foyer and half rises from her seat. At that moment, Seine enters the foyer from a corridor and embraces the nurse in a familiar but tentative way. Mint walks across the top of the stairs to take a closer look. As she nears Seine and the nurse, he turns suddenly to see Mint.

Mint stands fixed. Seine sees his wife and his children playing in the background. The nurse, his mistress, shies back a step, then looks defiantly at Mint.

Camilia stops suddenly as her brothers continue to play. She looks behind her. She sees her mother ten metres away, her father further back. She vaguely sees other people. She sees her mother's face. Camilia's brothers remonstrate with Camilia.

NELSON

Camilia! Stop breaking the game!

RODNEY

Yeah.

Camilia is dazed.

FADE TO BLACK.

BLACK SCREEN:

Videogame noises pierce the blackness, and the sound of sizzling fades up. It soon becomes a cacophony.

INT. LIVING ROOM SMALL APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Camilia, Nelson and Rodney are playing a videogame. They are still in their school uniforms, sprawled on their bellies on the floor. From the kitchen comes the noise of things frying, vegetables being chopped, the fridge opening and closing.

The children argue about whose turn is next on the videogame.

CAMILIA

It's my turn. (Grabbing the remote control).

NELSON

No. You had two go's before.
(Refusing to let go of the control).

Their argument becomes heated. Mint comes out of the kitchen and shouts at them in Burmese.

MINT (SUBTITLE)
 You're soiling your uniforms! Get
 changed and stop fighting!

They continue to argue.

She turns back into the kitchen to attend to the frying.

The children's argument gets out of hand and they start to scream. Rodney gets knocked in the head as Nelson and Camilia wrestle for the control. Rodney starts crying loudly.

INT. KITCHEN SMALL APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Mint is crying as she stands in front of the wok. It is sizzling hard. She is at her wit's end. The noise of frying, TV games and screaming children grows even louder and is deafening. Mint walks out of the kitchen.

INT. LIVING ROOM SMALL APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

In the midst of arguing with Nelson, Camilia sees her mother come out of the kitchen from the corner of her eye.

MINT (SUBTITLE)
 (In the background, with a glance
 at the children as she walks out)
 I'm leaving.

Camilia turns vaguely to see her mother open the front door and walk out. She stops pulling at the control and stands stock still, staring at the door. She waits for ten seconds but her mother doesn't re-emerge. Nelson has wrested the control free of Camilia's hands and sits back down to play.

Camilia is suddenly scared. She bolts out the front door.

INT. FOYER BETWEEN APARTMENTS - AFTERNOON

Camilia sees no one in the foyer between the apartments and walks to the fire exit stairs. She opens the heavy door.

INT. STAIRWELL - AFTERNOON

Camilia looks for her mother. She follows the stairs as they wind down, floor after floor, and after five flights she finds her mother walking slowly, steadying herself with one hand against the wall as she descends, sobbing.

CAMILIA (SUBTITLE)
 (In Burmese) Don't go mummy.

They stand looking at each other for a long moment. Camilia's heart is in her mouth.

Then, Mint turns slowly. She walks back up the stairs.
Camilia breathes out as her mother takes the first step up.

Camilia looks round at her mother at each flight as they
climb up, checking that Mint is still behind her.