

YOUNG. **WILD.** FREE.

I REALIZED IT WAS A BOMB, THEN IT EXPLODED...

OVER BLACK:

STOKELY
I have to let you go.

INT. WENDY'S. MANAGER'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

A drab, cramped broom closet masquerading as an office.

STOKELY, mid-30s and square as a CD case... slurping his Diet Coke... reclining in his stiff chair... staring straight at a 17-year-old sinewy black kid with a mean shiner hiding his left eye:

BRANDON HUFFMAN.

BRANDON
C'mon man that's some bullshit.

STOKELY
What choice do I have?

BRANDON
But he started it!

STOKELY
Doesn't matter. Company policy.
You both go.

BRANDON
You know that's rent money.

STOKELY
Brandon, you know I like you.

BRANDON
I don't know shit.

STOKELY
You're too bright to be working at
Wendy's anyway.

BRANDON
... I need this job.

STOKELY
I'm sorry. My hands are tied.

Defeated, Brandon removes his visor and tosses it onto Stokely's desk.

ROAD RUNNER (V.O.)
Meep, meep!

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Old cartoons playing on an even older television. Vintage Looney Tunes:

WILE E. COYOTE, fork and knife in hand, chases ROAD RUNNER, but suddenly screeches to a halt... There's a sign in the middle of the road:

WARNING
THE SURGEON GENERAL HAS DETERMINED
THAT CHASING ROAD RUNNERS MAY BE
HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH.

Road Runner circles back around, cracking the earth beneath Wile E. Coyote's feet before exploding away. Wile E. sinks into the earth, thwarted yet again.

CIARA laughs wildly. 5 with the mind of a 10-year-old, she's adorable and she knows it. A little asshole if we're being honest.

Her brother TREY, 7, punches her in the arm. He's that kid who comes home every day with brand-new scrapes and bruises.

TREY
Shut up, Ciara! I can't hear.

Not one to cry, Ciara strikes back with twice the *oomph*.

CIARA
You shut up!

JANICE
Both of y'all shut up.

Reclined on the couch: JANICE, 36. Eyes glued to her phone as she scolds her children. The slack jawline and deep, dark bags beneath her eyes add ten years to what must've been a gorgeous face in its heyday.

The front door swings open, and the fighting stops just as Brandon enters.

Ciara hops up from the dingy, salmon-tinged shag carpet to greet him, but he storms towards his room and *SLAMS* the door.

JANICE (CONT'D)
Hey!

TREY
You saw his eye?

CIARA
What happened?

TREY
How am I supposed to know?

A sharp, muffled *THUMP* seeps from beneath Brandon's door, sending a worried jolt through both kids.

JANICE
Brandon!

Seconds later, Brandon emerges from his room and heads into the

KITCHEN.

It's connected to the living room -- separated only by the counter.

He opens the freezer and takes inventory: nothing but a box of Eggos and what's left of a bag of store-brand fries.

JANICE (O.S.)
The hell's wrong with you?.. Boy,
I know you hear me...

Brandon examines his right hand, knuckles swollen and chafed, before grabbing the fries and pressing them against it. He winces.

BACK IN BRANDON'S ROOM...

The hip-hop posters taped haphazardly to the wall -- Tupac Shakur, NWA, Kendrick Lamar -- all seem to be... *staring...* in disapproval.

Staring at a freshly-made, jagged black hole in the old, cracked stucco...

We PUSH INTO the hole... into that darkness, until it grows and grows and there's nothing left but--

BLACK.

Young. Wild. Free.

BRANDON'S ROOM. LATER.

Eyes wide open, Brandon lies in bed, flat on his back. Arms outstretched; nailed to an invisible cross.

It's quiet for a change, save for the soft *clunka-clunka-clunk* of the rickety, wood-colored ceiling fan.

Brandon watches its blades whisk round and round, and their revolutions seem to slow down the longer he stares. Eventually, his eyes drift to the alarm clock resting on the night stand: *1:58 a.m.*

A faint *KNOCK* at his door... Ciara pokes her head inside.

CIARA
(whispering)
Brandon.

BRANDON
What.

CIARA
I wanna sleep in here.

BRANDON
Mama in her room, go in there and bother her.

CIARA
But I don't wanna.

BRANDON
That ain't my problem. Girl, go to sleep. You gone be passing out at school tomorrow.

CIARA
But I had a nightmare.

BRANDON
Another one, huh?

Ciara's got the sad face down to a science.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
... Hurry up.

She smiles and hops in bed beside him.

CIARA
Are you okay?

BRANDON
Yeah.

He sighs as he wraps his arms around her, his eyes still fixed on the rickety fan.

INT. KITCHEN. MORNING.

Breakfast. Cookie Crisp and Capri Sun.

Trey's asleep on his feet, but *somehow* Ciara's bouncing around like there's Red Bull in her bowl instead of milk.

BRANDON

Girl, sit your ass down and finish eating. Y'all gone be late.

Brandon looks as tired as Trey. He checks the cabinets, then the fridge. Wendy's leftovers. In other words, nothing.

TREY

You gone eat?

BRANDON

Yeah, in a bit.

Brandon makes his way into the

LIVING ROOM

and snatches their bookbags from the couch.

TREY

What happened to your eye?

BRANDON

(tossing them their bags)
Come on, let's go. That's the bus.
Ciara, finish drinking that milk.
(handing Trey some cash)
For lunch. Don't be buying no cookies and shit. Real food. Now move y'all asses.

He ushers the kids out before turning his attention to Janice's door. He doesn't bother to knock before he opens it. She's in bed, passed out.

He *RAPS* loudly against the wall; she rolls over, still half-asleep.

JANICE

What you want?

BRANDON

Go get some damned groceries, please. Your kids ain't got shit to eat.

JANICE

Aight.

BRANDON

Today, please.

JANICE

Boy, I said *aight*.

Brandon almost slams her door, but doesn't.

INT. COMPTON HIGH SCHOOL. ENGLISH. MORNING.

MRS. AUCKLAND, 30s, scanning the room full of blank faces with a look of disapproval.

MRS. AUCKLAND

I'm not trying to trick you.

The door creaks open and in saunters Brandon, bookbag slumped over his shoulder. She takes a good look at his eye, concerned, but greets him with a simple:

MRS. AUCKLAND (CONT'D)

Good morning... May I continue?

BRANDON

(taking his seat)

By all means.

Brandon opens his over-stuffed notebook. Flips to a page with an incredibly well-drawn sketch of a tropical landscape and wastes no time getting to work on it.

MRS. AUCKLAND

My ninth graders know this...

Nothing from the class.

MRS. AUCKLAND (CONT'D)

How about you, Brandon? Would it please your grace to give us all an example of a colloquialism? Your peers don't seem to realize how often they use them.

Brandon's eyes lock onto Mrs. Auckland's, but eventually shift back to his drawing.

BRANDON

... Nope.

Mrs. Auckland can't help but laugh. He's right, after all.

CAFETERIA. LATER.

Towards the end of one nondescript table: Brandon, sitting alone, ravaging his chicken.

APOLLO, 18, tall and athletic, approaches. Drops his lunch tray next to Brandon.

APOLLO

Slow down, boss, before you choke on that drumstick. They tried to give ya boy the smallest one but-- wait what the fuck happened to you?

BRANDON

Got in a fight... at work. Got fired.

APOLLO

... Damn.

BRANDON

I know.

Rather than pry, Apollo digs into his mashed potatoes.

EXT. COMPTON. SIDEWALK. AFTERNOON.

The long way home. It's a gritty neighborhood. The kind of place you wouldn't want your child walking through at night.

Brandon paces down the sidewalk, indifferent to Compton as it buzzes all around him. Dogs *BARKING*... traffic *HUMMING*... sirens *BLARING*... ambulances *WAILING*... helicopters *CHOPPING*... All building... *building*... a cacophony of *WHITE NOISE*--

EXT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. DUSK.

A cathartic plume of smoke followed by a slow, deep inhale.

Brandon, smoking on the steps that lead to his second-floor apartment. Trying his best to ignore the *MUFFLED RUCKUS* Trey and Ciara are causing inside. And doing a pretty good job until--

TREY (O.S.)

(the door cracking open...)

Brandon, we hungry.

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. KITCHEN. LATER.

The fridge door swings open as Brandon checks inside. He slams it shut... heads through the--

LIVING ROOM

CIARA

Can we order pizza?

--straight for Janice's door... and bursts

INSIDE.

BRANDON

Janice, are you serious?

She's still in bed, watching TV.

JANICE

What?

BRANDON

Fuck you mean *what*? You had one job.

JANICE

Watch yo mouth. I'm yo mama too, case you forgot. Sto' still open, ain't it?

BRANDON

Just give me the EBT.

JANICE

I ain't got it.

BRANDON

... Where is it?

JANICE

Gone.

BRANDON

We ain't eat four hundred dollars worth of groceries yet this month.

JANICE

Well... it's gone.

Brandon's glare is downright acidic.

INT. CORNER STORE. NIGHT.

Your typical south-central LA establishment, peddling everything from diapers to honey buns to Jack Daniels.

Brandon's in that aisle with all the cheap box dinners. He opens his wallet: roughly ten bucks. A five and some ones.

His head on a swivel, Brandon eyes ALI, the clerk, before stuffing several packs of Ramen Noodles in his pocket. On his way to the counter, he cracks open a bag of Hot Fries.

Ali's face is buried in his *Hustler* magazine.

ALI

What's up, B? That it?

BRANDON

(eating a hot fry)

Yeah, and some Newport 100s.

Ali doesn't bother to ask for ID as Brandon places the crumpled cash on the counter. Ali finally looks up.

ALI

Oh shit, what happe--

BRANDON

Damn, can I live?!

JINGLE. It's the door. Brandon's attention turns to the entrance. His eyebrows raise, curious...

... because SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE just walked inside...

ALI

Yo! You gotta take that off, sweetheart.

Whoever she is, she seems to give zero fucks about what Ali (or anyone else, for that matter) might think.

What with the fucking SKI MASK she's wearing and all...

It's certainly as chic as ski masks come, with a white wolf embroidered across its visage.

She looks like she just stepped from the spread of a *Vogue* ad: a tight leather jacket and ripped denim; bright-red Chuck Taylor sneakers; wild, curly brown hair creeping from beneath the nape of the mask; pink lip gloss glittering...

The girl strolls towards the frosted refrigerated glass doors as if this weren't the weirdest thing in the world right now.

She grabs a Sprite. Stuffs it in her cocaine-white purse.

BY THE COUNTER.

Brandon eats another fry, confused but intrigued.

ALI
Hey! Sweetheart! What the hell
are you doing?

BY THE SNACKS.

The girl grabs a honey bun. Stuffs it in her purse.

ALI
You do realize I can see you!

She's too busy singing to herself to care. She grabs a bag of Skittles. Stuffs it in her purse.

BACK AT THE COUNTER.

Brandon's almost finished his bag of Hot Fries. Might as well be popcorn.

ALI
Yo! You think this shit is funny?

Finally, the girl's eyes shift to Ali and Brandon. She makes her way towards the counter...

... whips out a Colt Detective Special 6-shot revolver, aimed straight for Ali, and--

BANG!

BRANDON
The fuck?! Whoa!

Ali's a petrified statue; that bullet flashed right by his head, eviscerating the cigarettes behind him.

The girl keeps the gun raised, shifting her aim back and forth between Brandon and Ali. Neither moves a muscle.

Brandon spies her right wrist: for some reason she's wearing two fancy gold watches that look exactly alike...

Finally, her soft, somewhat-sultry voice breaks the tension:

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE
Is this really *that* surprising? I
do have a ski mask on.

She puts her purse on the counter, her gun trained on Ali.

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE (CONT'D)
Well?... You've seen *Menace 2*
Society, right?

BANG! Another warning shot.

ALI
Alright, alright!

He gets to opening the register. She aims the gun at
Brandon. Surprisingly, he chuckles. *Just fucking perfect.*

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE
Something funny?

BRANDON
Yeah, the universe.

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE
... That black eye looks good on
you. I'll take the wallet.

BRANDON
It ain't shit in here anyway.

She snatches it from him. Examines it. Pockets it. Gives
him a real good look. His right eye in particular...

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE
What's in your pockets, Brandon?
(to Ali)
Nigga, I got eyes in the back of my
head, *ándale!*
(to Brandon)
That applies to you, too,
sweetheart. Put it on the counter.

Brandon sighs, embarrassed, before emptying his pockets and
placing the Ramen Noodles on the counter.

ALI
Seriously...

The girl explodes in laughter. She's nearly in tears, but
keeps the gun shifting between Ali and Brandon.

The money now in her purse, she tosses it over her shoulder.

Then she pushes up on Brandon. Uncomfortably close. Presses the gun to his temple, her eyes still on Ali...

Brandon takes a slow, deep breath.

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE

You're a funny dude, Brandon.
Thank you.

Without any ado whatsoever, she leans in, gun still to his head, and kisses Brandon squarely on the lips.

It's sensual, the type of kiss reserved for late night activities. Certainly not for strangers. *Certainly* not for victims. She bites his lip softly, then teases him with a short kiss for good measure. Electric.

Nice to meet you, motherfucker.

CLICK.

Brandon closes his eyes, oddly calm, expecting to be dead. But alas, he's still here. The revolver's out of ammo.

The girl smiles wide. Of course she has perfect teeth.

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE (CONT'D)

Two's my favorite number. See ya
round.

And just like that, she's gone.

Completely disarmed, Brandon stands, motionless. Bewildered, thunderstruck, *enthralled*... all at the same time.

EXT. CORNER STORE. LATER.

Red and blue light bouncing off the dirty brick wall. Two cop cars parked out front; the cavalry has arrived.

Brandon leans against one of the cruisers, half-listening to the OFFICER questioning him. He writes his personal information on the officer's notepad.

BRANDON

And I wanna help you help me, but I
can't tell you what I don't know.

OFFICER

Think for me... Tell me anything
you remember. Anything at all.

BRANDON

Why don't you just look at the security footage?

OFFICER

Your friend here says the camera's just for show. No tape.

BRANDON

Look man... Honestly, I saw the gun and my mind went blank. I wouldn't know her if she were standing right in front of me.

INT. COMPTON HIGH. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

MRS. MCCLEARY, 50s, scolding Brandon with her stare. She's got a look on her face that lets you know she quit putting up with bullshit from students ages ago.

MRS. MCCLEARY

You're fucking up, Brandon.

Brandon, his left eye looking much better, is barely listening; he's too busy sketching... *her*...

BRANDON

What you want me to say? I'm a graduate. That ain't enough?

... And damned if it isn't a dead ringer: the white wolf, the curls, the lips, the eyes... all shaded with a feather's touch. She stares up at him from the slightly-wrinkled page, alive in graphite.

MRS. MCCLEARY

You didn't apply for one school. Vocational. Technical. Nothing.

BRANDON

For what? I obviously ain't going.

MRS. MCCLEARY

Why even come to exit counseling if you've already got everything figured out?

BRANDON

Cause that's what they told me to do.

MRS. MCCLEARY

See, you're full of shit. Your grades are actually *pretty good*, and you're clearly a very talented artist... You can pretend like you're not listening, but I know you are.

BRANDON

(finally looking up)
... Fine, how can you help me, Mrs. McCleary?

MRS. MCCLEARY

... Do you have a job?

BRANDON

I thought that's what you were for.

MRS. MCCLEARY

Most of the opportunities that come across my desk require at least some work history.

Brandon carefully rips the sketch from his notebook. Places it on her desk.

BRANDON

You want a resume? Here.
(getting up)
Let me get back to class.

MRS. MCCLEARY

How about this... Let's meet next week and I'll see if I can find some internships you may be interested in. Deal?

BRANDON

... Sure, whatever.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE. MANAGER'S OFFICE. DAY.

Another drab, cramped office... This one's cluttered with old movie posters and folded standees.

DIANNE, 40s, keeps stealing glances at the wrinkles in Brandon's collared shirt. But she never drops her warm smile.

BRANDON

Not at all. I've got no problem working concessions. I'll clean the bathrooms. Whatever.

DIANNE

Any particular reason why you left your last job? You'd be making minimum wage here, too.

BRANDON

Free meals... Free *movies*...

That gets a small chuckle out of her.

DIANNE

(re: his eye)

Where'd that come from?

BRANDON

... Playing catch with my little brother. He's seven but he's crazy strong... Caught me off guard.

DIANNE

... Well, I think that's everything. If I could just borrow your drivers license -- student ID works, too -- I'll make a quick photocopy and we'll be done here.

BRANDON

(patting his pockets)

Oh... wait... uhhh--

Shit.

INT. LAUNDROMAT. NIGHT.

The monotonous *HUM* of clothes spinning in endless circles.

Brandon, stuffing two handfuls of wet, white laundry in a dryer... *SLAMMING* it shut.

LATER.

BRANDON'S FEET... tapping nervously.

HIS EYES... watching the clothes whip round and round...

THE DRYER... dizzying... blurs of white...

HIS EYES...

The hypnotic droll seems to be getting louder... *and louder... and LOUDER--*

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. HIS ROOM. DAY.

That familiar *clunka-clunka-clunk...*

Brandon, fast asleep, sharing his bed with piles of fresh, unfolded clothes.

His closed eyes twitch at the sounds of muffled *LAUGHTER* in the living room. He grunts angrily -- sleepy-speak for *it's too fucking early* -- before covering his head with a pillow.

BRANDON

Yo, shut up! Damn!

Brandon hurls his pillow against his wall; so much for sleep.

Overcoming the inertia, Brandon drags himself out of bed. Tosses on the nearest wife-beater he can find before heading into the

LIVING ROOM.

BRANDON

I ain't never seen a cartoon that funn--

Who the fuck is that?!

Red Chuck Taylor kicks... curly brown hair... perfect goddamned teeth...

It's *HER*.

Right there on the couch. Gorgeous as all outdoors in an *I-could-give-a-fuck-less* kind of way. And no older than Brandon.

She's got her arms wrapped around Trey and Ciara as they devour bowls of Frosted Flakes. They're all laughing their asses off at some joke Brandon's not in on.

SOMEONE QUITE STRANGE

I was worried we were gonna have to jump on your bed.

TREY

Cassidy's funny.

BRANDON

Cassidy...

CASSIDY

I see why you took those ramen noodles, y'all ain't have shit to eat!

BRANDON

What are you--

CASSIDY

Don't worry, we just got back from a grocery store adventure. You're welcome.

BRANDON

What?

KITCHEN. SECONDS LATER.

The fridge snaps open. It's packed: juices, fruit, Lunchables, almond milk, you name it. Brandon starts checking the labels...

CASSIDY

I know, Ciara's allergic to peanuts, she told me. Don't worry, everything checks out... They said they've never had almond milk before. I couldn't believe it. An almond's a *tree nut*, you know. So it's all good.

Brandon opens a cabinet; it's stuffed with bags of Hot Fries.

TREY

Your girlfriend's funny.

He heads back into the--

LIVING ROOM

BRANDON

She ain't my girlfriend.

--and takes a cautious seat on the couch.

CIARA

That's not what we heeeeeaaaard!

BRANDON

I don't care what you heard.

Cassidy heads towards the kitchen.

CIARA

Tell us about the fat, sloppy kiss!

TREY

Eewwwwwwwww!

BRANDON

Wasn't no kiss!

CASSIDY

Baaaabe!.. Would you like a bowl of Frosted Flakes?

BRANDON

No, I don't want no Frosted Flakes!

CASSIDY

It's already lunch time, you need to eat.

CIARA

Freeze, motherfucker!

Brandon turns to see Ciara wearing Cassidy's ski mask. *Fuck!* She's aiming her imaginary pistol straight at Trey, who feigns fright with both hands up.

TREY

(his best damsel in distress)

Pleeease don't shoooooot!

BRANDON

Yo!! Take that shit off! And watch your mouth, girl!

As Brandon reaches for Ciara, Trey snatches up Cassidy's purse and starts rummaging through it.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Trey, put it down. *Now!*

Trey knows to listen when Brandon talks like that.

CASSIDY

Chill out, it's not like there's a gun in there or anything.

BRANDON
Can we go outside for a second?

CASSIDY
(a mouthful of cereal)
Of course.

OUTSIDE. RIGHT AFTER.

CASSIDY
Look, I know what you're gonna say... And you're completely right... We *should* go on a real date. This was tacky on my part.

BRANDON
The *ffffuck* are you doing here?

CASSIDY
I came to see you.

BRANDON
I don't know you. And last time I saw you, you had a fucking gun to my head.

CASSIDY
So uptight! I mean it, you're an angry dude, man.

BRANDON
Getting robbed at gunpoint don't help... Really? No *I'm sorry bout all that, Brandon?* Nothing?

CASSIDY
Why? It happened. I gave you a story.

BRANDON
You gotta go.

CASSIDY
(pulling the wallet from her back pocket)
I just came to give you this. You were right, there was nothing in it worth taking... You look like an idiot on your license.

BRANDON
I ain't finna say *thank you*. I *should* snitch on yo ass.

CASSIDY
Give me your hand, Brandon.

BRANDON
What?

CASSIDY
Give me your fucking hand and I'll
go quietly, jeez man.

Reluctantly, Brandon obliges. Cassidy grabs the pen fastened
in her shirt pocket and bites off its cap.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
(writing on his hand)
When you realize that you can be
your own boss...

213-555-3268.

Cassidy makes her way down the steps.

BRANDON
Is that why you came?

She stops, and for a moment (and only a moment), her
expression darkens...

CASSIDY
... Why didn't you flinch?

BACK INSIDE.

Trey and Ciara, eavesdropping by the front door, book it back
to the couch *just* as Brandon comes back inside.

He makes his way to the couch and sinks in it; the kids share
a curious glance. Then...

KNOCK, KNOCK! Seriously?

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK! Nope, not getting up again.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

Brandon storms towards the door and yanks it open, ready to
rip Cassidy a new one--

BRANDON
What?!

LAMONT
Fuck you mean, *what?*

But it's LAMONT, 30s, tall and tatted, swallowing the doorway instead... He looks like he should be on someone's NFL team.

BRANDON

Man... What you want, Lamont?

LAMONT

Better watch who you talking to, youngblood.

BRANDON

I said *what you want?*

LAMONT

You wanna let me in? Or am I gone have to put my hands on you in front of these kids?

Brandon huffs... but lets him inside.

LAMONT (CONT'D)

(to Trey and Ciara)

Love me some Spongebob.

Lamont makes his way towards Janice's door. *BANGS* it with a clenched fist.

LAMONT (CONT'D)

Aye! Janice!

BRANDON

(to the kids)

Y'all wanna go to the park?

Trey's already slipping on some sneakers. They seem to know the deal.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Come on, let's go to the park. Ciara, go get your shoes.

EXT. PARK. DAY.

Brandon, smoking on a bench as Trey and Ciara roughhouse in the background. Relatively quiet for a Saturday at the park, until--

MARIACHI MUSIC echoes from a shitty PA system somewhere in the distance. Getting closer... The kids behind Brandon all stop what they're doing and race towards the street...

Soon enough, Trey and Ciara are right on Brandon's toes with empty hands out.

BRANDON
Y'all know I ain't got no money.

TREY
You got enough for ice cream. We
ain't stupid.

As Ciara starts to make that face--

BRANDON
Don't you start!

--he takes out his wallet. Looks inside. Nothing but the
same few dollars he had at the store that night.

CIARA
Hurry up!

BRANDON
Here's two dollars. Now go.

They sprint towards the truck. Brandon returns to his
cigarette.

AT THE TRUCK.

CIARA
Two dollars for one?!

TREY
You trying to cheat us!

ICE CREAM MAN
Two dollars. You don't want it, go
somewhere else.

Ciara's angry face is just as devastating as her sad one.

BACK ON THE BENCH.

Trey and Ciara come running back.

CIARA
His half's bigger than mine!

TREY
Nuh-uh!

They split an ice cream sandwich in half. Two young victims
of inflation.

BRANDON
That's all y'all got?

CIARA
You ain't give us nothing but two
dollars! And his piece is bigger!

TREY
Shut up, no it ain't!

BRANDON
Trey, give it here.

Brandon takes Trey's half and bites it: looks about even now.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
There.

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. AFTERNOON.

Brandon enters with the kids. They flock to the couch, and cartoons are on in an instant.

Brandon heads into the

KITCHEN

and grabs himself a Gatorade from the fridge. He takes a second before closing it to look at all the food.

TREY
Your girlfriend left her purse.

BRANDON
Oh yeah?

BRANDON'S ROOM. LATER THAT NIGHT.

Clunka-clunka-clunk...

Brandon dumps the purse's contents onto his bed: lipstick, Skittles, a compact, change... and a small Polaroid. A mom, dad, and daughter -- all white. No gun.

What's with this girl?

Just as he begins to examine the Polaroid--

JANICE
(bursting in his room)
Where'd all these groceries come
from?

BRANDON
You don't know how to knock?

JANICE
Boy, this is my house.

BRANDON
It's my house, too, if you forgot.

JANICE
I asked you a question.

BRANDON
Does it matter?

JANICE
Where you get the money from?

BRANDON
Again, does it matter? The fridge
is full for once in a blue moon,
you should be grateful. Ain't like
you helped put shit in it.

JANICE
I'm still yo mother.

BRANDON
Instead of worrying bout how we
eating how bout you worry about
getting some more fucking Lithium.
You keep letting that fuck nigga
Lamont get you off your meds.

JANICE
I ain't crazy.

BRANDON
Look at you! Starting shit over
what? Some food? After you blew
all our grocery money? If you
ain't crazy ain't no such thing.

JANICE
Don't you make me g--

BRANDON
Don't make you do what? You ain't
gone do shit!

MEANWHILE, IN THE KIDS' ROOM...

Trey and Ciara, pressed against the wall, listening to the muffled argument as it escalates. Ciara looks scared; Trey wraps an arm around her.

BACK IN BRANDON'S ROOM...

BRANDON

I take care of all this shit. I'm your mother. Them kids ain't my responsibility. But who's the one over here raising they asses? All you do is sit on your ass collecting unemployment checks.

JANICE

... You think you so fuckin' smart. I drove by ya job the other day... Excuse me, ya old job.

That caught him by surprise.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Cat gotcha sharp ass tongue now, huh? Where did the fuckin' money come from?

(noticing...)

Who purse is that?

..... *THUMP!* Janice pounds his door in a fit of rage.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Who fuckin' purse is that?!

Brandon's on his feet. Livid.

BRANDON

Get the fuck out... *Janice...*
I said *get the fuck out!*

Janice stands her ground for a moment before finally relenting. She *SLAMS* his door on her way out.

Bitterness in his eyes, Brandon watches the door. It's as if he can still see Janice, even through the wall.

He sits back on his bed. Buries his head in his hands. Then he notices it...

Smearred, faded, but still there... barely...

213-555-3268.

INT. 101 COFFEE SHOP. NIGHT.

Looks just like the diner from *Swingers* because it *is* the diner from *Swingers*.

... Packed with hipsters and Hollywooders, people who look like they're only here so they can say, *Oh, I've been there*.

Brandon and Cassidy share a corner booth. Cassidy's going to town on the absurdly tall stack of pancakes in front of her.

BRANDON

You think you got enough to eat?

CINDY, the waitress, appears with a milkshake.

CINDY

(to Cassidy)

Here you go.

CASSIDY

Thank you so much, Cindy.

CINDY

Let me know if you guys need anything else, okay?

CASSIDY

Will do... Chocolate peanut butter. This shit is bomb.

BRANDON

(putting the purse on the table)

... Look, I just came to give you back this. We're even now.

CASSIDY

Did you know this is the diner from *Swingers*?

BRANDON

What the fuck is *Swingers*?

CASSIDY

Nevermind.

(re: the purse)

Did you go through it?

BRANDON

... That your adopted family or something? In that Polaroid.

CASSIDY

I don't know. Is it?

She adjusts the strap of the cocaine-white purse hanging from her shoulder. Brandon finally notices it. It looks just like the other one. Cassidy just laughs.

BRANDON

More riddles. Okay, you know what? I did what I came here to do so enjoy your sumo wrestler meal.

CASSIDY

We both know that's not why you came.

BRANDON

(leaning in...)
... Why the fuck were you robbing a corner store?

CASSIDY

I needed money.

BRANDON

No... *why?*

CASSIDY

What you're really asking is *why me?* But you already know *why...* It's a dice roll.

Cassidy takes a huge sip of her chocolate peanut butter milkshake...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Random, absurd, obscene, fucked up things happen all the time, all around you. It was just your turn.

BRANDON

... That's supposed to be philosophy?

CASSIDY

I'm sure somebody said it already, I don't know. But I *do know* why you're really here. And it wasn't to ask me that.

BRANDON

Okay, Aristotle. Tell me why I'm here.

CASSIDY

Have you ever done anything you just *wanted* to do? When you felt like doing it? Without looking over your shoulder or asking another motherfucker if it was cool?

Brandon chews on that, but says nothing.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

You know what? I got lost on Google the other day and started reading about circus elephants. Of all things. And it's actually really interesting how they're trained. See, apparently when they're young, they tie 'em to a pole so they won't run away. They're too weak to break the rope or rip the pole from the ground so eventually they give up trying. Now, what's crazy is... when they grow up, they never try to escape when they get tied up at night. Even though it'd be nothing for them to just stampede right on out to freedom.

BRANDON

... I ain't no elephant.

CASSIDY

(standing up)
Let's get out of here.

BRANDON

You ain't gone pay?

CASSIDY

Cindy's coming. Or feel free to foot the bill. Your choice.

She's halfway out the door before Brandon finally decides go after her.

Just as they leave, Cindy arrives at the table, with nothing but *someone's* cocaine-white purse there to greet her.

I./E. CASSIDY'S '88 RED CORVETTE. MULHOLLAND DRIVE. LATER.

That famous winding, narrow road...

Cassidy's bending corners like a professional racer, clearly driving just a little too fast for Brandon's tastes... Tears for Fears' *Everybody Wants to Rule the World* setting the mood...

BRANDON

I don't think you drive fast enough.

CASSIDY

What?

BRANDON

I said, I don't think--

CASSIDY

Hold on!

She lowers the volume.

BRANDON

You know, *I* don't fuck with Nascar.

Cassidy eases off the gas.

CASSIDY

Happy? Did you know James Dean used to race his Porsche Speedster on this very road every night?

BRANDON

And I'm sure he flew right the fuck on off the cliff, whoever he is.

CASSIDY

That would've been a better ending.

BRANDON

... I ain't seen a tape player in... shit I don't know if I've ever seen one.

CASSIDY

I stole it... the tape. Makes me feel like I'm on some *Back to the Future* shit, ya know?

BRANDON

I'm riding in a stolen car...

CASSIDY

This is my car, Brandon. Relax, you have my permission. Now tell me something cool about yourself.

BRANDON

You seem to know everything already. How about you tell something cool about you?

CASSIDY

Well... I'm a rapper. My first CD's gonna be call *The High School Dropout*.

BRANDON

... Why did you kiss me?

CASSIDY

Do I have to have a reason?... Those kids... God, they're sweet. Couldn't stand the thought of them starving to death on your watch.

BRANDON

I told you I ain't saying *thank you*.

CASSIDY

Wasn't my money anyway.

BRANDON

You don't say...

CASSIDY

... And your mom's crazy? How'd that happen?

BRANDON

She's not crazy. She's just... Sometimes she doesn't do what she needs to do to control her mood.

CASSIDY

Sounds like an excuse. Is it hereditary?

BRANDON

What?

CASSIDY

Are *you* crazy?

BRANDON

Why the fuck am I talking about this with you? And where are we going? We been driving for thirty minutes for no apparent reason.

CASSIDY
 Why do we have to be going
 somewhere? You never seen *Dazed
 and Confused*?

BRANDON
 And that's relevant because?

CASSIDY
 You wanna do something? Fine.
 Let's do something.

She pulls over into a thin safety shoulder. Gets

OUT.

It's late, and in the distance, down below, the lights of Los Angeles blend together in a hazy, tungsten fog.

Cassidy pops the trunk... grabs a tire iron...

CASSIDY
 Get out.

BRANDON
 (through the door)
 The hell are you doing?

... and *CLOBBERS* the passenger side door.

CASSIDY
 Get out!

Brandon does as he's told.

BRANDON
 I knew you were crazy, but shit!

She *SMASHES* a window.

CASSIDY
 It's something to do, right?

BRANDON
 Why would you do this?!

CASSIDY
 It's just a car.

SMASH.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
 (passing him the iron)
 Here, you try.

BRANDON
 Fuck no.

CASSIDY
 Nigga, take this shit. Trust me,
 it feels great. You'll feel great.

Brandon takes it... stares at Cassidy's red Corvette in disbelief... The offer *is* appealing...

Fuck it. Brandon cocks back to swing--

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
What the fuck are you doing?!

Confused, Brandon freezes... Then Cassidy laughs.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
 I'm just fucking with you... *Hit it!*

SMASH. The side-view mirror's gone. Brandon exhales. *Did that just happen?*

Then he hits the car again... and again... and again.

He takes a step back to examine the scratched paint, crunched metal, and shattered glass, surprised with himself. Cassidy looks impressed.

They share a genuine laugh.

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. KITCHEN. MORNING.

Two eggs *SIZZLING* in a frying pan.

Janice cooks; Trey and Ciara sit at the counter, tearing into bacon, toast, and grits. There's even orange juice.

JANICE
 Wait for the eggs! Y'all know I
 can put my foot in 'em when I need
 to.

She takes the skillet off the flame.

JANICE (CONT'D)
 Watch out, they hot. Let 'em cool
 off for a bit... *Ciara!*

Ciara's already blowing on a forkful.

JANICE (CONT'D)
 (to Trey)
 How you like the grits, baby?

TREY
 Is this cinnamon or something?

JANICE
 If I told ya, I'd have to kill ya.

The front door opens. It's Brandon. Exhausted.

JANICE (CONT'D)
 Look what the cat dragged in!
 Where you coming from?

Cautious, Brandon remains by the door... watching Janice...

CIARA
 I bet he was with Cassidy.

JANICE
 Who's Cassidy?

TREY
 His girlfriend.

BRANDON
 She ain't--

JANICE
 And you ain't think I'd wanna meet
 her? Boy, I raised you better!

BRANDON
 It's too early for this, Janice.

JANICE
 ... So you just gone stand there
 and pout? Come eat, I'll fix you a
 plate.

LATER.

Brandon, standing at the counter, eating a bacon-egg-&-grits sandwich.

JANICE
 Just the way you like it, right?

BRANDON

Yep. Guess those groceries came in handy.

JANICE

Boy, you know I like to throw down on Sunday mornings.

BRANDON

I know you used to.

JANICE

Cheer up! We having a real family breakfast here. Sum'n we need to have a lot mo' often.

(to the kids)

Y'all would like that, right?

TREY & CIARA

Uh-huh!

Janice gives Brandon a smile.

JANICE

So how's everything going at Wendy's?

BRANDON

... *You know...* It's going.

JANICE

It's just going? Boy, you better be the manager soon, long as you been there... Either that... or it's time to find you a new job.

INT. COMPTON HIGH. ENGLISH. DAY.

Brandon, buried in his notebook, sketching away at another landscape. Something mountainous and polar.

Every once in a while, he looks up; a half-assed attempt to at least appear interested as Mrs. Auckland teaches.

BUZZ. Brandon pulls out his cell phone. Hides it under his desk while he reads the text:

Buellllerrr! come outside ;)

it's 10 am, wtf?

... so? wut else u got to do?

Two obnoxiously long car *HONKS* bleed through the walls, turning every head in class.

HALLWAY. AFTER CLASS.

Brandon knives his way through the human current towards one of the exit doors. He slips

OUT

unnoticed and spies Cassidy's busted red Corvette parked out front.

He picks up the pace and hops

IN.

BRANDON

... I'm supposed to meet with my guidance counselor.

CASSIDY

Now we have a meeting. And the first order of business is catching a matinee. You'd rather be in there?

She cranks the ignition.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Thought so.

OUTSIDE.

The Corvette speeds off.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE. LATER.

An art house theatre. Classic '50s cinema. *East of Eden*. Not a lot of folks in here.

Brandon and Cassidy share a bucket of popcorn.

BRANDON

(whispering)

Who knew you could be normal.

CASSIDY
 (very much *not* whispering)
 I love James Dean. And not for no
 bullshit hipster reasons, neither.
 He lived the perfect life.

BRANDON
 So that's James Dean.

CASSIDY
 He invented swag.

SOME GUY IN FRONT OF THEM
Sshhhhhhhh.

CASSIDY
Who the fuck you shushin'?!

Cassidy hurls all the popcorn in her hand at the guy. He doesn't dare turn around.

The movie continues... and, somehow, Brandon's hand and Cassidy's slowly begin to entwine. Wait... is this... a *real date*?

INT. CASSIDY'S '88 RED CORVETTE. DUSK.

The car chugs to a stop right outside Brandon's apartment complex.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: you can see Janice smoking on Brandon's favorite step.

There's a moment of eye contact between Cassidy and Janice. Two feral cats sizing each other up. A million unsaid questions and accusations compressed into a second.

BRANDON
 'Preciate the ride. Even though
 you did kidnap me.

CASSIDY
 Better than class. Everybody needs
 a little *me-time*, right?

BRANDON
 Technically I spent it with you, so
 I don't think it counts, but sure.

CASSIDY
 Shut up... So... See ya tomorrow?

BRANDON
 ... *After* school this time. I'm
 done in a month and I don't need
 you fucking that up.

Brandon gets out. Cassidy watches him as he--

EXT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. SAME.

--makes his way up the steps.

He acknowledges Janice with nothing more than a brief glance.
 Not that she's paying attention... she's still watching
 Cassidy, who flashes her a tight smile and waves before
 peeling off.

As Brandon reaches the front door--

JANICE
 She ain't nothin' but trouble.

BRANDON
 So are you.

JANICE
 Yo school called.

BRANDON
 So.

JANICE
 I ain't tryin' to argue... I
 straightened it out.

BRANDON
 Thanks.

JANICE
 ... It ain't easy, you know.

This turns Brandon around. She offers up a cigarette; he
 accepts and has a seat beside her.

JANICE (CONT'D)
 (lighting his)
 Being this way... I know I'm a
 fucked up mother. I don't blame
 you for what you think of me.

BRANDON
 Only thing I think is how I want
 you to be aight... You ain't
 fucked up.

JANICE

... But I'm crazy. Same thing.

BRANDON

I was just saying shit.

JANICE

I don't know why those groceries set me off like that... Wondering how we gone pay rent, stressin' over money. Stressin' over all kinds of shit. Always stressin'.

BRANDON

Don't worry bout that. Things always work out some way or another.

JANICE

That *sounds* good. But in real life, shit always seems to get worse when you least expect it.

BRANDON

All you need to worry about is ya'self. Getting ya shit in order.

JANICE

I know. And I'm gone do better. Startin' now.

BRANDON

First you gotta get rid of Lamont.

JANICE

It's always about him with you.

BRANDON

He's the one flippin' ya pills. How are you supposed to do better when you ain't really trying? Letting that bum-ass nigga tell you what to do... You either laying around sleeping all day, or running off somewhere with him... What about Trey and Ciara?

JANICE

... You right...

BRANDON

I ain't trying to be mean, Janice.

JANICE

I know. Can't help but love the things that hurt us, huh?

BRANDON

... You used to dance around the house all the time. And sing... and all kinda shit.

JANICE

(laughing)

I used to act up on 'em.

BRANDON

Ya legs still work, don't they? Get out the house for a change and use 'em. Without *that nigga*.

JANICE

Some *me-time*.

BRANDON

(*what are the odds?*)

... Exactly.

JANICE

Might shake a lil sum'n while I'm at it.

BRANDON

Hey, you still my mama, I ain't trying to hear all that!

Warm laughs with a side of smoke.

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. HIS ROOM. NIGHT.

Clunka-clunka-clunk...

Brandon... awake in bed.

EXT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE. AFTERNOON.

One of those old south-central Victorians, a holdover from a time when the area was inhabited by the affluent.

It wears its age on its sleeve... A dark burgundy coat that's chipped off in many places, revealing a layer of powder blue beneath it... barred windows, save for *one...* and an unkempt lawn, with weeds growing like wild African grass.

Derelict.

The Corvette pulls up out front; it matches the house in its own weird way.

INSIDE THE CORVETTE.

CASSIDY
I can feel you judging.

BRANDON
This is you?

CASSIDY
Don't worry I just need to pick something up.

Cassidy gets out and heads towards the door. Then she stops...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
You know, you can come in if you want. It's not a trap.

Brandon lingers for a moment... Weighing his options...

INT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. LATER.

Cassidy closes the front door behind Brandon. He's too busy looking around.

The living room's a lot like the house: large... old... in disarray...

Two CHILDREN, no older than 5, one black, one white, nap on the decrepit couch.

A TEENAGE GIRL, no older than 15, sits on the area rug, watching a tube TV that looks even older than the one at Brandon's house. She doesn't acknowledge Cassidy, and Cassidy doesn't acknowledge her. They actually kind of look alike. The girl eyes Brandon intensely.

As Cassidy leads Brandon through the living room, JORDAN, no older than 12 and scrawny for his age, pops up from his bedroom, aiming the Detective Special (yeah, *that* one) straight at Brandon.

JORDAN
(pulling the trigger)
Deserve's got nothin' to do with it!

CLICKCLICKCLICK... Good thing the gun's empty.

CASSIDY
Jordan! Give me that!

JORDAN
 It's not even loaded! Get off me!

Jordan evades Cassidy and sprints upstairs. Brandon watches him with wide eyes the whole way up.

CASSIDY
 I'll buy some bullets just for *you!*
Where the fuck am I right now?

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
 You never seen *Unforgiven*? He's obsessed with guns and westerns and shit. Probably my fault. Come on.

Cassidy leads Brandon into

HER ROOM.

He takes a seat on her bed.

Compared to the rest of the house, this room's relatively clean, save for a few dirty clothes strewn about. Movie posters all over the walls... VHS tapes and DVDs scattered all about...

Cassidy rummages through the top drawer of her antique oak dresser.

BRANDON
 Interesting family you got.

CASSIDY
 This ain't a family, this is an arrangement. We ain't related. Fuck this *family*. Except for the babies, they're sweet.

BRANDON
 ... Figured you'd be living under a bridge somewhere. Out in the wild where you belong.

CASSIDY
 A girl still needs her creature comforts.

BRANDON
 Who's in charge here?

CASSIDY

We are. Our foster "mom"... She's never here. We're nothing but a check to her.

BRANDON

... You got the only window without bars.

CASSIDY

That way I can climb out one day and never look back. Least it gives me the illusion of freedom... Found it!

A perfectly-rolled blunt. Long and bursting at the seams.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

I smoked my other travel blunt... You wanna light it up right quick before we go?

BRANDON

It ain't a travel blunt if we smoke it here... But fuck it.

She's already lighting it up. She puffs, puffs, and passes it to Brandon. As the blunt hits his lips--

LATER THAT NIGHT.

Riotous, intermittent laughter and '90s R&B (pumping from old laptop speakers) setting the mood. Brandon and Cassidy laying in bed. Close. High as fuck.

BRANDON

What time is? Weren't we supposed to go somewhere?

CASSIDY

Fuck, you're right. Is it too late?

BRANDON

I don't know. I don't feel like moving... Fuck I need a job.

CASSIDY

Hey, you saw *Set it Off*. Got another ski mask in the drawer.

BRANDON

Great suggestion.

CASSIDY
Oh wait, this my shit right here!

The song just changed to Loose Ends' *Hangin' on a String*.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
*You, you, you, you... / You got me
hangin' on a string now! //*

BRANDON
(joining in)
*Something, something, something /
Waaaaaiting, contemplaaaaaating! //*

CASSIDY
*No! Just no! You're butcherin' a
classic!*

She dances a little in place, still glued to the bed.

BRANDON
... You're gorgeous.

CASSIDY
Random. Sweet, too... But quit
while you're ahead.

BRANDON
I'm just saying.

Brandon deftly places his hand on her thigh and inches
closer... A shark... inching in for the ~~kill~~kiss...

CASSIDY
You think you're slick, huh?

Swerve.

BRANDON
I don't think anything. I just
know you're gorgeous, cool as fuck,
weird as fuck, and I want you.

CASSIDY
I think it's time I took you home,
Keith Sweat.

All Brandon can do is smile his frustration away.

EXT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Brandon stumbles his way up the stairs. Still buzzed.

He

ENTERS

the apartment to find that all the lights are out.

BRANDON

Yo!

LATER.

Brandon peeks inside Janice's room: she's gone.

LATER.

Then the kids' room: nope.

LATER, ON THE COUCH.

Sportscenter highlights on the TV... Brandon, half asleep.

He perks up at the sound of the door *UNLOCKING*.

Janice dances her way inside. She's all dolled up: tight yellow dress, high heels, make-up. Looks like she turned back the hands of time tonight.

She smiles wide at Brandon as she peels her heels off.

JANICE

(singing)

*Step in the name of loooooove, /
Clap in the name of loooooove. //*

(to Brandon)

Woo they wore me out up in there
tonight! How you doin', baby?

BRANDON

Uhhhh... I'm cool.

JANICE

Damn, I'm feeling lit!

(singing)

Groove in the name of looooooove. /

BRANDON

You forgetting something?

JANICE

What you mean?

BRANDON

Two extra lil niggas, bout yay
high, look a lot like you...

JANICE

Oh, they at Lamont's house. I
ain't know where you were.

(laughing)

I told him I needed to run an
errand for ya aunt and turned my
phone off. *Me-time*, baby!

BRANDON

Wait, go back. You left 'em where?

JANICE

I *had* to dance. My spirit needed
to. Don't worry I'm bout to go get
'em now, I just needed to change
outta this dress first.

BRANDON

(snatching the car keys)

What the fuck?! That's the last
place they need be! And you're
drunk! You can't be serious.

JANICE

I'm going!

Brandon's halfway out the door.

BRANDON (O.S.)

Go lay your ass down!

EXT. LAMONT'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

A small fixer-upper in the heart of Compton.

Brandon *BEATS* furiously on its barred front door.

Even at this time of night, aggressive *BASS* pumps through the
walls.

Eventually, a *TATTOOED WOMAN* cracks open the door.

TATTOOED WOMAN

Fuck you want?

BRANDON

Where Lamont at?

TATTOOED WOMAN
Who asking?

BRANDON
Open the door, my little sister and
brother in there... *Lamont!*

TATTOOED WOMAN
Alright, damn.

The woman lets him

INSIDE.

Heavily tatted with thickly-braided hair, she looks like she might have spent this past year in San Quentin.

Doesn't take long to see this place for what it is: a dope house. A haze of weed smoke saturates the dimly-lit living room, and there's a scale on the coffee table with a few ounces of weed beside it. Empty Corona bottles... trap phones... and a half-eaten peanut-butter-&-jelly sandwich...

A few random folks lounge around, smoking and listening to the music. No telling who they might be.

Brandon spots Trey and Ciara sleeping on the couch; he rushes to them.

BRANDON
Wake up. Trey, Ciara... come on.

They wipe their groggy eyes and follow Brandon, paying no mind to their surroundings.

Brandon glares at everyone else in the room.

TATTOOED WOMAN
Chill out. They fine.

BRANDON
(to the kids)
Come on. Hurry up.

He leads them

OUTSIDE

to Janice's SUV: a '95 Ford Explorer... helps them into the backseat...

BRANDON

Wait here for a second, okay? I'll be right back. Lock the door.

... and storms back

INSIDE.

BRANDON

Where Lamont at?... *Hey!*

No one answers. They actually seem amused by all of this.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Lamont!

Lamont enters from a bedroom.

LAMONT

You better have a real good reason for running up in my house yelling and shit.

BRANDON

They kids! Ciara's *fiiiive*.

LAMONT

And?

Brandon simply gestures: *Look around!*

BRANDON

It's bad enough that you got my mama fucked up. She grown, though. But ain't no way I'm letting Trey or Ciara near you.

(re: the sandwich)

You know she's allergic to that shit?

LAMONT

I ain't have to feed the lil niggas *shit*... And she obviously ain't eat it, youngblood. They was only here cause yo frail ass was nowhere to be found, or did you forget?

BRANDON

Just stay the fuck away from 'em.

LAMONT

(getting nose to nose)

Or what, *nigga?! What's crackin'?*

BRANDON
Get out my fucking face.

Lamont shoves Brandon into the wall.

LAMONT
You lost yo mind?

Brandon rushes Lamont, but gets rocked by a swift right hand... He collapses, blood gushing from his mouth... tries to stand... gets cracked with another blow...

No one else bats an eye.

Lamont snatches Brandon up... drags him towards the door...

LAMONT (CONT'D)
You lucky I like ya mama.

... and tosses him

OUTSIDE.

LAMONT
Fuck out my house.

Gasping and bloodied, Brandon's got nothing but spite in his eyes as he watches Lamont *SLAM* his door.

The *BASS*, heavy as ever, rumbles on, indifferent...

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Brandon, reclined on the couch as Ciara presses that same bag of frozen store-brand fries against his brand-new black eye.

Trey sits, Indian style, beside them, a napkin in his hand. He dabs it against Brandon's bloody, split lip as if he were a cut man.

TREY
You look shitty.

BRANDON
Hey.

CIARA
(giggling)
You do.

BRANDON
Girl, you are too much... *Ouch.*

TREY

Be still.

BRANDON

Aight, aight... I'm good now.
Y'all ain't gotta worry bout me.

CIARA

... I don't like Lamont.

BRANDON

Me neither. Go to bed, I'll be
straight. It's way past y'all
bedtime.

They moan, groan, and eventually trudge back to their room.

Brandon simmers in silence, unnaturally still, staring
blankly at nothing in particular.

INT. COMPTON HIGH. HALLWAY. DAY.

Brandon, freshly-bruised, still seething from last night,
stuffing some books in his locker. Apollo approaches, and
almost spit-takes when he sees Brandon's face.

APOLLO

Bruh! Why don't you just gone head
and tattoo a black eye on ya shit?
Save these niggas the trouble.

BRANDON

(chuckling softly)
Probably should.

APOLLO

What happened this time, boss?

BRANDON

Lamont.

APOLLO

That's the dope man who been
fuckin' ya moms, right?

Nigga, what?!

APOLLO (CONT'D)

Oh, my bad! You know I'm just
playin'... Seriously, you good?

BRANDON

I'm straight.

APOLLO

If you need me to ride out with you, let me know. I'm there. Sheeeiiiit I wish that nigga would try me like that! No sirrrrr--

MRS. MCCLEARY (O.S.)

Brandon!

Mrs. McCleary's marching towards him...

BRANDON

Here we go...

APOLLO

What happened?

MRS. MCCLEARY

Where were you?

Brandon keeps his face buried in his locker... hiding...

BRANDON

Something came up.

MRS. MCCLEARY

I went out of my way to pull some strings for you, the least you could do is show up when I--

BRANDON

(*SLAMMING* his locker)

Nobody asked you to do that, aight?!

She finally gets a good look at Brandon's face, his pain... But it doesn't take long for consternation to wipe away the worried look from her face.

MRS. MCCLEARY

Listen to me. And listen well. No one's going to help you if you're not willing to help yourself first.

The school bell *RINGS*.

MRS. MCCLEARY (CONT'D)

... Just get to class.

She marches off.

EXT. COMPTON HIGH. AFTER SCHOOL.

Brandon files out of the school's double-door entrance. Sees Cassidy parked out front, sitting on the hood of her Corvette. Makes his way there...

CASSIDY
(laughing)
Get your face smashed into a locker?.. *Kidding...* You wanna fill me in or nah?

BRANDON
... You still got that ski mask?

EXT. LOS ANGELES. DUSK.

The sun disappears below the mountains as, one by one, street lights illumine around the city...

EXT. LAMONT'S STREET. NIGHT.

The Corvette's parked a few houses down from Lamont's.

Even at this hour, the city's alive with the sounds of *BARKING* dogs, distant *AMBULANCES*, and *CHOPPERS*.

INSIDE THE CORVETTE.

Brandon and Cassidy, dressed in all black, scoping out the house...

CASSIDY
(shimmying the ski mask
over her face)
Looks like nobody's home.

BRANDON
Yeah, but we gotta hurry. Find his stash, get the fuck out.

CASSIDY
... I know how it works.

Brandon takes a second to check out his ski mask (... *or forever hold your peace...*)--

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
You said it yourself, he deserves it. And it's plenty other dudes around him who would do this, too.
(MORE)

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
 We'll be fine...
 (re: his ski mask)
 I'm sorry yours ain't cool like
 mine.

--before putting it on. He eyes Cassidy, intense.

EXT. LAMONT'S HOUSE. THE BACK DOOR. LATER.

A brick, *SMASHING* through the door handle. Crude, but effective. They're in.

BRANDON
 Yeah, don't worry bout the noise.

Cassidy stops for a second.

CASSIDY
 (re: the sounds of a
 nearby police *CHOPPER*)
 You think they're looking for us?

BRANDON
 Point taken, let's go.

They creep inside, into the

KITCHEN.

It's narrow and dark. Cassidy turns a light on. They're both wearing bookbags.

BRANDON
 What are you doing?

CASSIDY
 We can creep around in the dark and waste time or we can turn the light on and be done with it. Be outta here in five minutes.

She leads the way into the

LIVING ROOM.

There's just enough ambient light for them to see.

Cassidy spots some weed on the coffee table and quickly stashes it in the bookbag.

CASSIDY

You gonna stand there or you gonna help? This was your idea, ya know.

While Cassidy cases the living room, Brandon heads into the same door Lamont emerged from last time:

LAMONT'S ROOM.

He feels around the wall until he finds the light switch.

Clutter everywhere...

... And a medley of orange prescription bottles on the dresser: Xanax... OxyContin... Lortab... *Lithium*...

Brandon grabs the Lithium and stuffs it in his bag. Starts tearing the room upside down...

Doesn't take long for him to find a shoebox stuffed with rubber-banded bills. *Jackpot*. This'll easily cover rent for a few months.

MEANWHILE, JUST OUTSIDE...

A tan '93 Crown Victoria with tinted windows pulls into the narrow driveway, 808s *BOOMING* from the trunk...

Lamont's eyes narrow when he sees the light creeping through the curtains.

The tattooed woman from earlier is in the passenger seat.

LAMONT

Wait here.

TATTOOED WOMAN

What? Naw, bruh, I'm rollin' with you.

He grabs a Glock 26 from his stash-box... *COCKS* it...

LAMONT

Just shut the fuck up and sit still. Call the homies. And keep ya eyes open.

BACK IN LAMONT'S ROOM...

Cassidy bursts in.

CASSIDY
You hear that?

BRANDON
... Shit, we gotta get ghost...
Ummmm... Like *right now!*

CASSIDY
(digging through her bag)
Wait! This dude beat the shit
outta you in front of the kids.

She offers him the Detective Special.

BRANDON
I don't want that! I ain't tryin'
to shoot the nigga!

CASSIDY
Hellooo?! It's empty, remember? I
haven't touched it since last
night. But we can put the fear of
God in him. You know, like Jules
did Ringo... He already knows
we're in here, the lights are on.
We run out that back door, we'll
both fuck around and get shot...
You know I'm right. This is his
turn...

BRANDON
(taking the gun)
... *Fuck!*

CASSIDY
Come on, hurry up!

As they scramble to hide--

OUTSIDE.

Lamont creeps towards his back door... sees the broken
lock... stalks into his

KITCHEN.

LAMONT
I got a gang of niggas on the way,
so whoever you are, you better pray
you had sense enough to get the
fuck up outta here.

He whips around the corner, into the

LIVING ROOM,

his gun raised and ready to fire. But nobody's there...

You can feel his blood pressure rising... and rising... as he prowls through the room... Sweat pouring down his temples...

What was that?! He whips around-- Nothing.

Inches towards his bedroom...

Someone's in there, he can *feel it*...

Grips his pistol *tighter... choking it*...

LAMONT

You think you can take my shit and get away with it?!

The *CLICK* of a hammer cocking. The 6-shot pressed *this close* to Lamont's skull...

Brandon's got the drop on him...

BRANDON

(disguising his voice)

Yeah, I do.

(re: the pistol)

Drop it... *Nigga, drop it!*

The Glock 26 hits the carpet with a soft *thud*.

LAMONT

You better kill me.

BRANDON

Turn around... I said *motherfucker, turn around!*

Lamont turns... Brandon's got the gun aimed straight between his eyes...

BRANDON (CONT'D)

I could blow you brains out right now. Who would give a fuck?

LAMONT

I'll find you. And this bitch here, too.

SMACK! The revolver flashes across Lamont's eye socket, sending him straight to the floor. He writhes in pain.

CASSIDY

You'd stay right there if you were smart, Ringo.

She nods at Brandon. *Time to go.* They make for the door, bookbags zipped tight and strapped over their shoulders, but--

LAMONT

Tell Janice I said *what's crackin'*.

Brandon stops in his tracks...

CASSIDY

We gotta *go*.

LAMONT

Yeah, I thought it was you.

No sooner than the words escape his lips, Lamont catches a foot to the face... Then Brandon hammers Lamont with the gun... Once... twice... again... and again... and again...

He looms over Lamont... a grim reaper...

BRANDON

On second thought, I think I'll just kill you.

... the empty Detective Special by his waist, at the ready...

Lamont can barely gets the words out--

LAMONT

No... Chill out... *Please...*

BRANDON

Say that again?

LAMONT

I said... please... Don't shoot me man... Don't shoot me man...

BRANDON

I want you to remember this moment for the rest of your wack ass life.

Brandon raises the revolver for the kill-shot... and pulls the trigg--*BANG!*

Blood and brain matter splatter all over the dirty carpet.

Brandon and Cassidy *SHRIEK* in horror. For a second, they just stand over Lamont's fresh corpse in sheer disbelief.

WHAT. THE. FUCK.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Oh my God...

CASSIDY

No...

BRANDON

What the fuck?! You said it was empty!

CASSIDY

It was empty! I didn't load it, I swear!

BRANDON

What are we supposed to do?!

CASSIDY

We gotta go... Now!!!

She takes off. So does Brandon.

They sprint

OUTSIDE,

making a bee-line for her Corvette...

INSIDE THE CROWN VICTORIA...

The tattooed woman spots two shadowy figures bursting through Lamont's front door. Absolutely hauling ass.

She gets

OUT

of the car just in time to see a red, beat-to-shit 1988 Chevrolet Corvette zooming past.

I./E. CASSIDY'S '88 RED CORVETTE. SAME.

Brandon rips off his mask. So does Cassidy. Both drenched in sweat.

BRANDON
What the fuck?!

He looks to Cassidy, but she doesn't say anything.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
I just shot that nigga! I just
fucking *killed* that nigga! Fucking
with you! I don't even fucking
know you!.. *Fuck! Fuuuuuuck!*

A flurry of violent punches connect with the glove compartment. The airbag might deploy at this rate.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
But it's cool, right? Oh
yeeeeahhh. Everything's cool. *The
gun's empty.*

Cassidy's face hardens. Eyes welled with tears that aren't falling.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
... I'm going to prison... I'm
going to motherfucking prison.
Shit! That smart ass mouth you got
but now you don't know how to
speak... You a fuckin' mime all a
sudden... *Say something!*

Suddenly, Cassidy jerks the car off the street... into an alley... Kills the ignition...

BRANDON (CONT'D)
The fuck are you doing?! I ain't
bout to beat up ya car again, this
ain't that kinda situation... *Go!!*

Cassidy doesn't move. The tears are finally streaming; they betray her stoic expression.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
We gotta fucking go! You can't sit
here and have a breakdown...

CASSIDY
It was empty...

BRANDON
Cassidy!

Without warning, Cassidy lunges over the center console towards Brandon... Pours her soul into him with the most passionate kiss she can muster. She *needs* him to believe...

She pulls away for a moment and looks into Brandon's eyes: they're glazed with that teary film you get when you want to cry, but refuse to.

In their eyes, in that kiss... *understanding*.

CASSIDY

It was empty.

She kisses him again. It's subtle this time.

BRANDON

... What did I do?

Another delicate kiss. And another.

She maneuvers her way into the passenger seat... straddles him...

Another.

This time, Brandon reciprocates.

Cassidy struggles to remove her pants... Brandon struggles to recline his seat...

It's the most ergonomically-challenged sex anyone's ever had in a car. But they don't care...

Not in this alley. Not in this car. Not in this moment...

EXT. ALLEY. LATER.

Brandon and Cassidy, sitting on the hood of her Corvette...

Cassidy delicately folds a fifty-dollar bill into an airplane.

There's a homeless man sitting on a crate about twenty yards away... watching... They watch him, too.

CASSIDY

How long you think that guy's been staring at us?

BRANDON

I don't know. Least two hours.

CASSIDY

You think if I threw this, it would reach him?

BRANDON

It might.

She heaves it as hard as she can, but it nosedives.

CASSIDY

Close enough.

BRANDON

You just made his day.

CASSIDY

He needs it more than me. Least I know he's grateful. Two most underrated words in the English language? *Thank you.*

BRANDON

He ain't as bad off as he looks. Got plenty time, *freedom...* I gotta enjoy mine while it lasts.

CASSIDY

He deserved it.

BRANDON

... That's it?

CASSIDY

What else is there to say? I have no idea *how* it happened, but it happened. Can't change it now.

BRANDON

Our lives...

He can't even bring himself to say it.

Cassidy takes his hand. Brandon's eyes shift to her wrist... to those identical gold watches... Cassidy notices...

CASSIDY

We're not that important. Everybody thinks they're the star of their own movie. But no one else gives a fuck. No one's coming for you. For *us*. To them, he's just one less gangbanger they have to worry about. One less drug dealer... One less nigga... You broke the rope, whether you know or not.

BRANDON

What about Janice? You have no idea how she gets.

CASSIDY

... My dad looked for every excuse to beat my ass. Walk in front of the TV...

She *SMACKS* her hands together.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Don't finish your dinner...

(*SMACK*)

Play too much, get dirt on your clothes...

(*SMACK*)

... *Try to defend yourself...*

(*SMACK, SMACK*)

I tried to stab his ass in third grade. I'll let you guess how that turned out... But I ain't hate him... I was eating those punches by middle school.

She looks down at her watches...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Hated my mom, though.

BRANDON

How could she be worse?

CASSIDY

I mean she hit me, too. Sometimes she'd slap me, pull my hair... Or when she was really pissed she'd burn me with her cigarettes. But never in my face. Never where anybody could see it.

BRANDON

Shit...

CASSIDY

That's not why I hated her... My best friend in first grade gave me this crazy origami swan for Valentine's day. There was a sweet ass note written inside it, too. And I had the biggest crush on him. I brought it home, and put it on my pillow. That way I could dream about him that night, right?..

(MORE)

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

She ripped that shit into pieces soon as she saw it. Cursed at me while she did it, said she *wasn't bout to raise no lil hoe...* That was her in a nutshell. Anything I cared about... anything I was attached to... she took it away.

BRANDON

Two watches...

CASSIDY

The gods are gonna take their share. If it's important, you better have a back-up.

BRANDON

... So is there a back-up Brandon?

CASSIDY

(laughing softly)
Unfortunately, people are one-of-a-kind.

They stew on that for a bit as the faintest hint of pink creeps above the horizon.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Sun's coming up.

BRANDON

Already...

EXT. BRANDON'S STREET. DAWNISH.

The Corvette idles out front.

CASSIDY

Nothing... is going... to happen.
Just act normal.

Brandon laughs: *Yeah, coming from you.*

Cassidy reaches over him and opens his door... Kisses him... Reassuring...

He grabs his bookbag.

EXT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LATER.

Brandon, nerves racing, taking his time with each step...

When he reaches the door, he presses his head against it. Listening... The TV's on.

He

ENTERS

to find Janice asleep on couch, and *Judge Joe Brown* re-running for an absent audience.

She wakes up almost as soon he walks in... Like she's been waiting up all night for him... But she smiles when she sees him...

JANICE

Hey, baby.

... clearly unaware of what just happened last night.

BRANDON

... Hey.

JANICE

Come here, let me look at you. Trey told me what Lamont did.

BRANDON

It's nothing.

JANICE

It ain't *nothing*... I'ma strangle him. Puttin' his hands on my baby...

BRANDON

It wasn't a big deal.

JANICE

Well it is to me... I'm done with him... I know I said that before, but I'm gone do better by y'all, I promise. I'm gone call Dr. Walker... Start workin' again...

RING... It's Janice's phone. Brandon's eyes narrow ever so slightly... It RINGS... RINGS... RINGS... She picks it up, curious... but doesn't answer.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Your aunt. I'll call her back... You were with that girl again, weren't you? Was that where you were last night?

BRANDON
Naw, I stayed at Apollo's.

JANICE
... Of course.

BRANDON
(making for his room)
I need to get ready for school.

JANICE
You might forget sometimes, but I
do love you.

A sad, honest smile.

BRANDON
... I know, ma.

Brandon enters

HIS ROOM,

and softly closes his door. He lingers for a second. Her words... they got to him...

He takes off his bookbag... kicks it under his bed... *I'll deal with that later...*

Then his morning alarm *SCREECHES...*

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM.

Janice, sitting in worried silence, watching Brandon's door...

INT. COMPTON HIGH. PRE-CALC. DAY.

Something about polynomial functions. Brandon wouldn't know.

He's hidden in his notebook, sketching a barren desert landscape. Shading in sand dunes with the flat edge of his pencil tip. He draws a small cactus, but quickly erases it.

Apollo watches Brandon for a second. Something seems off... He discreetly taps him on the shoulder from the adjacent seat. Mouths the words:

APOLLO
You good?

Brandon scrambles to hide the gun. *But where?... Dresser?... Under the bed?... A shoebox?...*

... The wall...

He stuffs the 6-shot into that same black hole we saw him create earlier before hurrying into the

LIVING ROOM.

Janice is in the kitchen. *Going ape-shit.* Her bloody hands hurling every glass, pot, or pan she can get a hold of at the floor... at the wall... at everything.

Manic... Despondent... Manic again...

Trey and Ciara watch in frightened silence, scared to get too close.

BRANDON

Ciara, Trey, get in your room, *now!*

Brandon shields them as they hurry away from Janice.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Janice, calm down!

She's sobbing. *SCREAMING.* If you were a neighbor, you'd call the cops.

JANICE

No, no, no, no, no, no, no!

Well kid, time to win that Oscar...

BRANDON

... What happened?

CRACK. A brand-new hole in the wall courtesy of a cast-iron skillet.

Janice stops cold... turns... looks at Brandon, her eyes heat-seeking missiles... incredulous... probing... *realizing...* a calm before the shit-storm that's coming...

Uh-oh...

JANICE

You. It was you...

BRANDON

What are you talking about--

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 (dodging a glass)
Stop it!

JANICE
 You killed Lamont! I know it!

BRANDON
 What?! Lamont's dead?

Janice laughs. It's unsettling.

JANICE
 You sho'll ain't Denzel.
 (hurling another glass)
 Boy, lie to me one mo' time...

BRANDON
 I'm your son!

JANICE
 And you a murderer.

BRANDON
 I ain't have shit to do with that!

She grabs a knife... points it in his direction...

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 ... So that's how you feel?!

JANICE
 I know he hurt you but you ain't
 have to kill him--

BRANDON
Fuck Lamont!!

... Whoa...

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 That what you wanna hear?! He got
 what was coming to him! Whoever
 did it, I'm glad they did!

Her despair's starting to simmer... Morphing into a quiet
 rage... She's composing herself...

JANICE
 Get the fuck out...
 (remember when you told me
 that?)
Brandon...

(MORE)

JANICE (CONT'D)

I said *get the fuck out*. Before I call the police. I'll figure out sum'n to tell 'em.

BRANDON

But you love me, right? What was all that bullshit you was saying before?

JANICE

I do love you... But you have to go.

The knife's still pointed his way...

Brandon gets right in her face. *I fucking dare you...* The knife's *so close* to his chest...

BRANDON

You gone stab me?! Your own son?!
Over him?!

Cat-quick, Brandon snatches Janice's wrist. Squeezing it tight. *Drop the knife... Drop the knife... Drop the--*

TREY (O.S.)

Let her go!

Trey's back. He's a tough kid... Ciara creeps up behind him.

Shocked at himself, Brandon lets go. Janice drops the knife.

It gets crazy quiet. Like a fucking bomb's in the room...

JANICE

Get out.

So this is how it's gonna be?!

He takes one last look at the kids... Then...

BRANDON

There's money for rent in my dresser. In a sock...

Something cold comes over Brandon...

BRANDON (CONT'D)

And your Lithium too...

Janice is too worn out to respond. Everyone is.

INT. METRO BUS. NIGHT.

Brandon, sitting on the bus, his stuffed bookbag sharing the empty seat beside him.

His swollen, tear-glazed eyes fixed on the window, watching the city pass by.

KNOCK, KNOCK...

EXT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Brandon waits at the door... Eventually, it cracks open, and Cassidy appears from the darkness.

For a while they just stand there, nothing really needing to be said but:

CASSIDY

Hey...

They linger... We linger...

... Then a dog *BARKS... PANTS... BARKS* again... more *BARKING...* ferocious... chasing... sprinting... *BARKING...* louder... *louder... BARKING... LOUDER...* leading to--

EXT. STREET. INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT. NIGHT.

--where a GERMAN SHEPHERD races through the street. Hot on someone's trail...

A few OFFICERS on foot, booking it... Not far behind...

A BIT FURTHER DOWN THE STREET...

Brandon, ski mask over his face, leaping over a chain-link fence, into a

PRIVATE LOT.

BRANDON

Hurry up!

He reaches for Cassidy's hand as she drags her way over. She drops her bookbag as she lands... Doubles back to snatch it up...

They sprint... and sprint some more...

Hop onto a parked car... Then onto a pull-down ladder...
Climb up... onto

A ROOF.

... Then down on the other side... back onto

THE STREET.

They sprint... and sprint some more...

The *BARKS* growing increasingly faint...

BARKING... barking... barking...

As the dogs finally fade into ambient city noise, they stop to catch a breath.

CASSIDY
(gasping)
Easy, right?

Brandon gasps out a laugh.

INT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE. HER ROOM. NIGHT.

Brandon empties his bookbag onto Cassidy's bed.

A smorgasbord of green bills -- ones, fives, tens, twenties -- scatter themselves across the linen. Probably several hundreds bucks.

BRANDON
I juked the shit outta that dog!

CASSIDY
(laughing)
I saw! And I also saw you try to leave me for dead!

BRANDON
I told you to hurry up, I was waiting right there for you!

CASSIDY
Get this money off my bed, I'm tired.

BRANDON
(getting close...)
Is that right?

CASSIDY
I believe so.

This time, Brandon kisses her first. She gives one right back.

Back and forth... kissing... groping... primal... kissing--

LATER.

Brandon lays in bed, awake. Staring at Cassidy's ceiling fan as it spins quietly.

She's asleep, snuggled under his arm.

A rising *THUMP, THUMP, THUMP* rumbles rhythmically through the wall, commanding Brandon's attention. It continues like a drum loop: *THUMP, THUMP, THUMP...*

The hell?

Whatever it is, it's not enough to wake Cassidy.

Slowly, quietly, Brandon moves her arm and climbs out of bed... makes his way to her door... *creeeeaaks* it open...

... and slips into the

LIVING ROOM.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP...

Follow the noise...

The *PEW! PEW!* of canned, old-timey gunshots echoes from the tube TV. WILL KANE's shooting at MILLER's gang. *High Noon.*

Brandon spots Jordan, asleep on the couch, bathed in the TV's light.

Stay on track... Follow the noise...

He creeps across the room... through the

KITCHEN.

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP...

and finally into the

LAUNDRY ROOM.

There's an ancient, rusting Maytag washer and its companion dryer in the corner. The dryer rocks violently as its innards tumble, hitting the wall behind it with a persistent *THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.*

Sitting on top of the dryer, reading a *Jet* magazine: the teenage girl from before who ignored Brandon the first time he came over. Her eyes peek from above the pages as he enters.

BRANDON

I ain't mean to interrupt... I just... heard something.

TEEN GIRL

So this is both the first time you've talked to me *and* the first time you've seen the laundry room.

BRANDON

My bad.

TEEN GIRL

I don't care. I'm just letting you know that's not a good first impression. For future reference.

BRANDON

I'm Brandon.

TEEN GIRL

I know.

She returns to her magazine...

TEEN GIRL (CONT'D)

Let me guess, my sister didn't tell you my name.

BRANDON

Your sister?

TEEN GIRL

The one who looks like me. Curly hair. Been sleeping beside you. That one.

BRANDON

But...

TEEN GIRL
Oh, is that what she told you?

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP, THUMP...

TEEN GIRL (CONT'D)
You're dumber than you look...

And back to the magazine... She flips a page.

She's done talking, but it takes a second for Brandon to get the hint.

LIVING ROOM. LATER.

Brandon, quietly heading back to Cassidy's room...

... until he hears another *PEW! PEW!* on the TV...

He detours towards the couch... Searches around for a remote, careful not to wake Jordan, who's sleeping a few feet away...

No dice... As Brandon goes to the turn it off the old-fashioned way, something on the screen catches his eye... He stands in front of the TV, transfixed by the action:

Kane, pinned down by heavy fire... *PIERCE*, blasting away with his twin revolvers... One runs out of ammo... So he checks the other, but it's empty, too... *BANG!* AMY shoots him in the back...

It can't be. No, it can't be.

Brandon looks at Jordan. Then his eyes drift to Jordan's room...

PEW! PEW!

Wheels turning...

He stalks towards the door and

ENTERS

the dark room.

Turns the light on. It's a mess. There's so much shit on the bed it's no wonder Jordan's sleeping on the couch.

Brandon starts to search... First the dresser... then the cabinets... then the closet... then he spies a small toy box at the foot of Jordan's bed...

Starts digging through it... digging... and digging... until he stops dead in his tracks:

BRANDON
(softly)
No. No, no, no...

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM...

Kane's finally turning the tide on the TV.

Jordan's door opens, the light goes out, and Brandon re-enters...

He walks back towards the TV, sadness in his eyes... kneels in front of it...

PEW! PEW!

... and turns it off. It dies with static *CLICK*, leaving the room shrouded in--

BLACK.

An alarm clock *SCREECHES*, and we PULL OUT of the darkness... out of that jagged hole in the old, cracked stucco, into--

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. HIS ROOM. MORNING.

--where Trey slaps Brandon's alarm clock: 6:30 a.m.

He sits up. Wipes his eyes.

Time for school.

TREY AND CIARA'S ROOM. LATER.

TREY
(shaking Ciara)
Wake up.

CIARA
Uhhhhhhhhh.

TREY
Quit whining. Get yo ass up, come on.

BATHROOM. LATER.

Trey and Ciara, brushing their teeth.

KITCHEN. LATER.

Cap'n Crunch cascading into two bowls.

Ciara passes Trey the milk. They're both dressed and ready for school.

CIARA
Make one for mama.

TREY
I will. Go see if she's up.

Trey continues preparing the cereal as Ciara walks into

JANICE'S ROOM.

She's already up, sifting through her dresser drawers.

JANICE
Hey, baby. I heard y'all in the kitchen. I told Trey he ain't have to set that alarm so damned early, I was bout to come wake y'all up.

CIARA
You want some cereal, mama?

JANICE
I'd love some. Which skirt, the blue or the tan one?

CIARA
HMMMMMM... blue.

JANICE
Blue it is. Go on, I'll be in there in a minute.

Ciara runs back into the living room.

Janice lays the blue skirt across the bed before topping it with a white blouse. The ensemble is nice. Business casual.

INT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE. KITCHEN. MORNING.

A kitchen in dire need of cleaning.

The microwave *BEEPS*, and Brandon retrieves his Hot Pocket.

BRANDON
(dropping it onto a
napkin)
Shit.

He sucks his finger to dull the burning sensation. Then he finds a used plastic cup and washes it out. Fills it with tap water. Breakfast of champions.

Seems like he's in a rush.

CASSIDY (O.S.)
You're up early.

Cassidy enters. Makes her way to the fridge and opens it.

BRANDON
You need to go on another grocery
store adventure.

CASSIDY
Looking tired as fuck, dude.

BRANDON
... Couldn't sleep.

CASSIDY
... Why not?

BRANDON
Sometimes you just can't.

CASSIDY
You okay?

BRANDON
I was up... Just thinking about
that night. About what I did.

CASSIDY
Why?

BRANDON
Why not?

CASSIDY
I told you nothing was gonna
happen. And nothing happened. You
gotta stop dwelling on it.

BRANDON
Yeah...

CASSIDY

Cheer up, motherfucker! You're killing my vibe. And why are you wearing a backpack?

BRANDON

I gotta go to school today. I ain't been in two weeks. A nigga only had a month to go and I probably fucked it up.

CASSIDY

So that's why you're in here making this ghetto ass breakfast. Let me grab my keys, I'll drop you off.

BRANDON

Nah, that's cool. I'll take the bus. I need to clear my head.

He heads towards the front door.

CASSIDY

If that's what you want.

Brandon smiles, then he's gone.

Cassidy remains in the kitchen, digesting and dissecting everything Brandon just said...

EXT. STREET. LATER.

Brandon, walking down the sidewalk, lost in thought.

He spots a metro bus a bit further ahead and races to catch it.

EXT. BRANDON'S STREET. LATER.

The bus pulls away, revealing Brandon. Pensive, he stands, eyes locked onto his apartment complex...

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LATER.

It's quiet.

The front door opens, and Brandon enters.

BRANDON

Janice?

Nothing.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Janice, you in here?

He walks into

HER ROOM.

It's surprisingly clean: the bed's made, no trash lying around, no clothes on the floor...

KITCHEN. LATER.

No dirty dishes in the sink, save for three bowls and three spoons.

Brandon checks the fridge. It ain't stuffed, but it ain't empty, either: Capri Suns, almond milk, hot dogs, a pizza box with a few slices left...

TREY AND CIARA'S ROOM. LATER.

Brandon's sitting at the edge of their bed, taking in the room.

He spots a coloring book on the floor. Picks it up. Flips through it. Laughs at Ciara's terrible craftsmanship.

BRANDON
Damn, girl. You ain't even try.

He tries to lay back onto the bed, but his bookbag's in the way. It's as if he forgot he ever had it on. The realization sours his expression...

HIS ROOM. LATER.

Brandon stands by his door, staring at the hole in the wall...

No use delaying the inevitable...

Then he walks towards it, his legs moving themselves against his mind's will... Reaches inside, his right arm on autopilot... Retrieves the Detective Special.

He tosses his bookbag onto the bed... unzips it... and reaches inside...

There it is, plain as day:

Another Colt Detective Special... The same exact model.

He holds them, one in each hand, side by side.

You can feel Brandon's pulse quickening as he opens the cylinder of the murder weapon...

... his worst fears confirmed:

One shell casing... and one fresh bullet, still lodged in the chamber, waiting for a victim.

Brandon drops the guns... starting to break, guilt overtaking him...

BRANDON

I'm so fucking stupid...

Suddenly, there's the sound of the front door *CRACKING* open... Keys *JINGLING*... It's Janice.

Brandon freezes... listens... She's in the living room, oblivious to his presence...

He stands, quiet as a ninja, and edges towards his door... grips the knob... She's right there...

I should say something.

IN THE KITCHEN.

Janice pours herself a glass of water. She's looking well put-together. Blue was the right choice for the skirt.

IN BRANDON'S ROOM.

Brandon listens as Janice makes her way around the kitchen and living room.

What is she doing in there?

Finally, he hears the door *CLOSING*. She's gone.

He exhales as if he hadn't breathed once this entire time.

EXT. SIDEWALK. DUSK.

Brandon, sitting on the curb. The bookbag on the ground, wedged between his feet.

He's sweating. Nervous. Meditative. Looking straight ahead, through the rush hour traffic, at--

THE COMPTON LAPD PRECINCT.

There's a lull in the traffic -- a red light. Brandon stands... slings the bookbag over his shoulders... and crosses the street.

A squad car's pulling out of the driveway as he approaches, they nod curtly when they see him. He nods back.

50 yards away...

Getting closer to justice...

40...

Closer to peace of mind...

30...

Closer to decades in a 6" x 8" concrete cell with steel-reinforced bars...

20...

Closer to never seeing Janice, or Trey, or Ciara again without supervision...

10...

Something compels him to *stop*.

Brandon turns and starts in the other direction, speeding up with each step. As if every cop in the world were watching him at this very moment.

The precinct grows smaller and smaller in the distance as resolve returns to Brandon's eyes.

INT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Cassidy, laying on the floor, flat on her back. Relaxing. Smoking a joint as Aaliyah's *Back and Forth* plays on her laptop's speakers.

She turns when she hears the front door *SHUTTING*.

Brandon enters... crossing the living room...

CASSIDY

Had a good time without me today?

... ignoring Cassidy...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
Yo! Brandon!

... headed straight into

HER ROOM.

He drops his bookbag, unzips it, and immediately starts packing his shit.

Cassidy enters, a confused smile on her face.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
Yo, what's going on?

He just keeps packing...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
(laughing)
Okay, now you're being dramatic...
*White women call this the silent
treatment, and we let 'em think we
don't like it...*

and packing...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
You never seen *Kill Bill*?..
Jesus... For real, what's going
on?.. You can't sit there and
ignore me forever.

and packing...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
So you're leaving. Just like that?
Sayounara? Why the fuck are you
acting like an abused housewife?..
Hellloooo? Earth to Brandon!

At her wits end, she snatches the shirt out of his hand and throws it on the floor.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
What the fuck is wrong with you?

BRANDON
You wanna know what the fuck's
wrong?

He pulls one of the Detective Specials out of his bookbag.
Tosses it on her bed.

CASSIDY

God, get over it already! It's
done! It was a fucking mistake!

Then he grabs the other one... and tosses it on the bed, too.

BRANDON

Was it?

For once, Cassidy's at a complete loss for words. Searching
for the right thing to say...

That's what I thought.

He zips up his bookbag and barrels past her.

OUTSIDE. LATER.

Brandon storms out of the front door. Headed for the street.
Seconds later, Cassidy bursts outside, too.

CASSIDY

Brandon! *Brandon!*
(think, Cassidy, think...)
You wanna know why I kissed you?

He stops... listening... Right in the middle of the street.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Cause I knew you were just like me.
We're the same person.

BRANDON

No, we're not. You're a liar.

CASSIDY

You're the one lying. I *knew* why
you laughed... That's why. And I
know why you didn't flinch... I
felt it. Deep down, you know what
it's like. You're in on the joke,
too.

BRANDON

You made me kill somebody!

CASSIDY

No, *you* made you kill somebody!
You did that! You blame everybody
else, that's your thing!

(MORE)

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

But all I did was give you the green light to do what you *already wanted to do*. You pulled that trigger, not me. Why? Because you fucking *enjoyed* it. You can't lie to yourself, Brandon... Why'd you come back? You think these last two weeks have been any different? You got a taste and wanted more. And you fucking loved every minute. Because with me, you can do whatever you want.

BRANDON

I *want* to go home! I *want* to fix my fucking life! I *want* Trey and Ciara to have a childhood! I *want* my old mom back! I *want* to graduate! I *don't want* you to fuck that all up!

(it all sinking in...)

I don't want... *you*.

That hit her like a ton of bricks...

And now we see it... clutched in her right hand... one of the revolvers...

She aims it at Brandon... her hand shaking from some cocktail of desperation, fear, heartache, rage...

CASSIDY

You're important to me.

Each second feels like an eternity as they face each other... bathed in the warm glow of sodium vapor street light...

BRANDON

(re: the gun)

Which one is it?

CASSIDY

Does it matter?

BRANDON

You ain't gone shoot me.

She *SCREAMS*. Then:

CASSIDY

(laughing grimly, her bluff called)

... You're right, I'm not.

She puts the gun to her own head, tears welling in her eyes.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

You know, the best things always happen to the *worst* people. And everything else happens to the people who least deserve it...

... Brandon just smiles sadly.

BRANDON

You're ain't gone shoot ya'self, either.

CASSIDY

I promise I won't flinch...

And she doesn't as she--

CLICK...

Cassidy exhales.

BRANDON

You knew.

She bursts into laughter... The universe is hilarious, after all...

... Then she breaks down... never begging... *broken...*

Brandon watches her for a bit, his eyes hollow. Spent.

There's really nothing left for him here. So he turns and stalks into the night, leaving Cassidy right there... alone in the street.

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Janice, Trey, and Ciara... all on the couch, watching *House Party 2*.

Brandon enters. He stays by the door, not really knowing what to say.

Trey and Ciara rush to him, almost tackling him with hugs.

TREY & CIARA

Brandon!

BRANDON

What's up y'all? Y'all actin' like
I been away at war. I was right
around corner.

CIARA

I missed you!

BRANDON

I missed yo lil bad ass too, girl!

TREY

You can't have your room back.

BRANDON

We gone have to fight!

Brandon steals a glance at Janice. She smiles. So does he.

BRANDON (CONT'D)

What y'all watchin'?

TREY

House Party.

CIARA

House Party 2.

BRANDON

(heading to the couch)
The hell y'all know bout *House
Party 2?*

JANICE

(laughing)
The hell *you* know bout it?

Janice scoots over; he takes a seat. Trey and Ciara pile in
on top of him.

JANICE (CONT'D)

Boy, you lookin' slim. You ain't
been eatin'?

BRANDON

I'm well-fed, Janice.

JANICE

(standing up)
I got some chicken in the fridge,
let me go warm you some up.

She heads to the kitchen. He watches her as she walks,
assessing her condition.

His eyes shift to *House Party 2*, but it almost seems like he's looking *through* the TV, at some unknown movie playing on a screen just behind it.

INT. CASSIDY'S HOUSE. BATHROOM. NIGHT.

Cassidy, eyes red and swollen, stares at her reflection in the mirror. *Numb.*

Slowly she removes her shirt, revealing several scars scattered across her chest and torso:

Cigarette burns...

She just stands there... examining each and every one of them... until her expression grows so cold you could almost see frost on her breath.

Cassidy looks back into her own eyes, at the doppelganger in the mirror...

The other Cassidy returns the gaze, almost as if she were her own sentient being... *Her eyes even deeper...*

Her eyes even darker...

INT. COMPTON HIGH. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE. DAY.

BRANDON

So I can't do extra assignments?
Stay after school, nothing?

MRS. MCCLEARY

You've missed too much class. With
no excuse, mind you.

BRANDON

I know I fucked up, aight.

MRS. MCCLEARY

Then why are you in my office?

BRANDON

I'm trying to fix it.

MRS. MCCLEARY

There's nothing you can do to fix
it at this point. You're not going
to walk.

BRANDON

... Okay. I deserve that. So I'll be back next year...

MRS. MCCLEARY

... Not necessarily. If you want your diploma, you can finish out the year, then attend summer school. It won't be fun, but you can make up your credits and at least have it mailed to you.

BRANDON

Word?

MRS. MCCLEARY

Word.

BRANDON

Then I'll hit the Dollar Tree, re-up on pens and pencils and paper and shit.

MRS. MCCLEARY

Glad to hear it.

BRANDON

(standing)

I guess I should get to class.

MRS. MCCLEARY

Well, there may be one more thing.

BRANDON

Whatever you need from me...

She opens a drawer and retrieves an informational packet. It's from an indie videogame studio: IRLVNT Games.

MRS. MCCLEARY

(handing it to Brandon)

I need you to show up this time when I schedule an interview.

BRANDON

Seriously?

MRS. MCCLEARY

My son's the creative director there. They're looking for talented, young concept artists. Apparently Xbox or Nintendo...

(MORE)

MRS. MCCLEARY (CONT'D)
somebody big just acquired them,
 and lucky for you, they're
 expanding.

BRANDON
 This is a job?

MRS. MCCLEARY
 It's an internship. But it's paid.
 You've gotta crawl first. Do a
 good job, and who knows? Figured
 it would suit you.

She finally flashes a genuine smile. Brandon's speechless.

BRANDON
 ... Thank you.

MRS. MCCLEARY
 Don't thank me, bust your ass and
 don't embarrass me in front of my
 son. It's not yours yet.

Brandon nods. Right as he heads out the door--

MRS. MCCLEARY (CONT'D)
 I don't wanna see you in my office
 next year.

BRANDON
 ... You won't.

EXT. PARK. PLAYGROUND. DAY.

MARIACHI MUSIC blaring in the distance...

TREY
 Jump, you can make it!

Somehow, Ciara got *on top* of the monkey bars. Trying to walk
 across them like a tightrope.

BRANDON
 Don't jump! You gone bust yo face
 wide open! I got you when you get
 across.

Okay, not somehow, Brandon *helped* her up there. He's walking
 on the ground alongside her, ready to catch her at a moment's
 notice.

CIARA
 Both of y'all shut up!

Some other kid's PARENT looks on in disapproval. Brandon catches her judgmental eyes and sucks his teeth.

Fuck off, lady.

TREY
Almost there!

She makes it across. Brandon helps her down. Trey cheers.

CIARA
I win! *Pay up!*

Brandon grabs his wallet. But as he starts to open it:

BRANDON
You know you cheated, right?

CIARA
I got from one side to the other,
that's five dollars.

BRANDON
But you knew I wouldn't let you
fall, though. So really you set me
up.

There goes that angry face...

CIARA
Five dollars.

Brandon looks through his wallet; it's not as empty as it was before.

BRANDON
Lil hustling ass... Get two
sandwiches this time.

They run off towards the swindler's ice cream truck.

LATER.

Brandon shares a bench with Trey and Ciara. They both have ice cream sandwiches this time.

CIARA
You want some?

BRANDON
Naw, I'm okay. But thanks.

TREY
... Where's Cassidy?

CIARA
I liked her.

TREY
Me, too.

CIARA
Did you guys break up?

BRANDON
Yeah, we did. But we cool.

TREY
At least we got you back.

BRANDON
That's right.

CIARA
Can we go to the movies?

BRANDON
I already bought y'all ice cream,
damn! Shit, we can *rent* a movie.
Greedy ass...
(eyeing Ciara's ice cream)
You know what...

He swoops in and steals a finger's scoop of ice cream.

CIARA
(hitting Brandon)
Hey!

Brandon and Trey crack up.

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Brandon, sitting on the couch with Trey and Ciara, watching a rented movie:

Swingers.

On the screen, TRENT and SUE play Sega Genesis, and argue over *NHL '97*:

TRENT (ON TV)
There it is Mikey, check it out.
His head's bleeding. Check it out,
little Lane's legs are shaking!

TREY
This is funny!

Trey and Ciara are cracking up... and, after a bit, so is Brandon.

INT. CLOTHING STORE. DAY.

A young, female EMPLOYEE smiles at Brandon as he peruses a rack of discount shirts. He smiles back. She's cute.

You can tell he's gone clothes shopping like twice... ever.

Still, he examines every shirt. Trying his best to find something nice.

EMPLOYEE
You look like you're struggling over here.

BRANDON
I am.

EMPLOYEE
What are you looking for?

BRANDON
Just something nice. A button-up. Something simple. Cheap, if you feel me. Maybe some dress shoes.

EMPLOYEE
Don't worry, I'll take care of you.

She leads him to another rack. Whisks through a few shirts. Grabs a salmon pink one and holds it up to Brandon's chest.

Brandon studies the shirt as if it came from an alien planet.

EMPLOYEE (CONT'D)
See, something like this is real nice. Sleek. On sale. You can wear it to church, you can wear it in the office, but you can also switch it up and toss a navy blazer over it. Then you're ready for the club.

BRANDON
(laughing)
I don't know bout no blazers.

EMPLOYEE
Just saying. Do you like it?

BRANDON
... It works.

EMPLOYEE
Great. Now let's go check out some shoes.

EXT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. DAY.

Brandon, sitting on his favorite step, smoking. Watching the cars and the people pass by.

He spots Janice parking. Soon enough, she's heading up the steps towards him. Dressed to impress, she's got a few bags in hand.

BRANDON
How'd it go?

She takes a seat beside him. He offers her a pull.

JANICE
Fingers crossed, but this might be the one. The manager really liked me. I think. And I've worked retail before.

BRANDON
Ain't no *might*, you got this.

JANICE
I sho'll hope so this time... All this talk about me...

She digs into one of her bags...

JANICE (CONT'D)
... Don't let me forget to give you this.

... and retrieves a navy blue tie. Simple. Classic.

BRANDON
You don't need to be wastin' money like that on me.

JANICE
Stop it. I got it at Wal-Mart. Best twenty dollars I spent in a while.

(MORE)

JANICE (CONT'D)

I ain't bout to have my first-born out here lookin' crazy. You can't walk in there and *not* be sharp.

BRANDON

... Thanks, ma.

She returns the cigarette; he takes a deep drag.

JANICE

... This is nice.

BRANDON

It is.

INT. COMPTON HIGH. OFFICE. DAY.

Brandon's chocolate brown dress shoes, nervously tapping the linoleum floor.

He's looking sharp. The pink pops. The tie is perfect.

DESMOND, 30s, young-faced, sits in a chair facing him. It's a pretty informal setting.

BRANDON

I, uhhh... I had some personal stuff I had to take care of. But I'm going to summer school.

DESMOND

Normally, we wouldn't even interview someone who couldn't bother to graduate high school on time. But my mom said you were worth hearing out.

BRANDON

She was right.

DESMOND

Why?

BRANDON

Cause I can't afford to let you down. I can do people, places... You name it, I can draw it. I ain't really got no-- excuse me, I don't really have any formal trai--

DESMOND

I'm from here, remember, you can keep it real with me.

BRANDON

Fasho...

He opens a folder filled with sketches. Tries to hand it to Desmond. But Desmond declines.

DESMOND

I already have your resume.

He opens his dossier and hands Brandon a sheet of wrinkled notebook paper.

It's the sketch of Cassidy.

DESMOND (CONT'D)

Do you like videogames, Brandon?

But Brandon's attention, at least for this brief moment, is elsewhere...

THE SKETCH... She looks different. Fiercer. The casual glimmer in her eyes replaced with an intense, frigid gaze.

Is this really the same sketch?

Cassidy's still alive on the page... haunting... knowing... ephemeral... and peering out into the void, directly at us...

HALLWAY. LATER.

Brandon exits the office. Apollo's waiting for him.

APOLLO

... You gone leave me in suspense, boss?

BRANDON

Well, ya boy ain't gone graduate... But I got that job though!

APOLLO

Aaaaayyyyyyyyye!

Apollo bear hugs Brandon.

APOLLO (CONT'D)

Shit let's hit Mickey D's and celebrate on that dollar menu!

BRANDON

I would, but I gotta get back and watch Trey and Ciara.

APOLLO

All good. I'm proud of you, big dawg. For real. My nigga growin' up before my eyes!

BRANDON

Nigga, shut yo goofy ass up.

INT. METRO BUS. DAY.

Brandon, riding home in content peace, a slight smile on his face.

INT. CORNER STORE. NIGHT.

The tattooed woman from Lamont's is at the counter.

ALI

The Slims?

TATTOOED WOMAN

Yeah.

As she sorts through her wad of loose bills--

JINGLE. It's Brandon. She doesn't bother to look up.

They don't notice each other as Brandon makes his way to the snack aisle.

The tattooed woman pays for her cigarettes, and makes her way

OUTSIDE.

But as soon as she gets out the door, she freezes... a suspicious, knowing look on her face... her mind racing...

Her eyes locked on *something* a few yards away...

BACK INSIDE.

Brandon's at the register. Already eating his Hot Fries.

ALI

Thought you moved to China, man.

BRANDON

Shit been crazy.

ALI
 ... You got some more dollar
 noodles in your pocket?

Ali grins. He's *never* gonna let Brandon hear the end of that.

BRANDON
 (laughing)
 Ain't shit in 'em but lint, Ali.

ALI
 Newportts?

BRANDON
 Yeah. 100s.

Again, he doesn't ask for ID. Seems like they've picked up right where they left off. Brandon puts a twenty on the counter.

He pays and heads for the door, snacking on fries all the way

OUTSIDE.

It doesn't take long for him to freeze, too...

That busted red Corvette... parked right there, a few yards away...

Brandon peers into the window, she's not in the car...

Cautious, he creeps towards it... As he gets to the door:

CASSIDY (O.S.)
 I'll really shoot you this time.

Brandon turns to see Cassidy. But she doesn't have a gun...

Rather, two finger pistols. She raises both arms high in the sky, surrendering. *I come in peace.*

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
Kidding.

BRANDON
 ... For real...

CASSIDY
 Hello to you, too... You and those
 Hot Fries... How you been?

BRANDON
I've... been.

CASSIDY
Me too.

BRANDON
What do you want?

CASSIDY
Take a ride with me.

BRANDON
No.

He starts walking away.

CASSIDY
Come on, it'll be fun. I just
wanna talk. Come oooooon, it'll be
like our first date.

Brandon stops... considering... then:

BRANDON
Fine, but I'm driving. I don't
want you pulling no *Thelma and
Louise* shit on me.

CASSIDY
Look at you.

BRANDON
Yeah, I seen a few movies.

CASSIDY
Do you even know how to drive a
stick?

BRANDON
I can walk home or I can drive.
Your choice.

A huge, perfect smile... She tosses him the keys.

LATER.

The Corvette pulls away.

From the side of the building, the tattooed woman emerges,
watching intensely... her cell phone to her ear...

INT. CASSIDY'S '88 RED CORVETTE. LATER.

Brandon and Cassidy, riding in silence. Neither really knowing how to start the conversation... until:

CASSIDY
Where are we going?

BRANDON
Why do we have to be going somewhere?

Touché.

CASSIDY
... You were right.

BRANDON
About what?

CASSIDY
... Ya know... I've been coming to that store every night since you left, waiting for you to show up again. Had it all worked out in my mind. We'd get in the car. I'd drive out to the hills... We'd fight, kiss, fight some more... Winding our way up... And I'm speeding up the whole time... Going faster and faster and faster until you finally notice... And right when you speak up, tell me to slow down... I just floor it, like Louise. And maybe it cuts to black while we're still in the air, who knows? That would've been some gangster shit... But one night I was sitting outside, waiting... And I didn't wanna do that anymore. I just wanted to see you.

BRANDON
You could've just stopped by.

She flashes him a look: *You know me better than that.*

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Right. That ain't cinematic enough.

CASSIDY
It never is...
(searching for it...)
I'm sorry.

BRANDON
... Don't be. You gave me a story.

CASSIDY
A real ass story, don't front.

Brandon stops at a red light.

CASSIDY (CONT'D)
You should've ran that shit.
Street's empty.

BRANDON
I'll run the next one.

CASSIDY
Yeah, we'll see.

A tan '93 Crown Victoria pulls up in the left lane beside the Corvette.

BRANDON
... You know what's really crazy?
If I would've walked out that store
thirty seconds earlier, we would've
never met... I'd be graduating
too, but I'ma let it go.

CASSIDY
Shut up!... I'm glad you came in
when you did.

He flashes her a soft smile. Cassidy returns it, and as she does, her eyes shift focus to something over Brandon's shoulder...

The Crown Victoria... its tinted passenger window slowly rolling down...

BRANDON
... Me too, believe it or not...
(laughing)
Ali was giving me shit about those
Ramen noodles, so thank yo--

CASSIDY
(lunging, shoving him
downwards)
Brandon!!

BANG!--

EXT. STREET. SOMEWHERE IN COMPTON. SAME.

--BANG!--

FROM BEHIND:

An empty street. The two cars, side by side at the red light; the Crown Victoria on the left, the Corvette on the right. Flashes of white-hot light as...

--BANG! BANG!

The Crown Victoria *SCREECHES* away, leaving a plume of exhaust and tire smoke... Off into the night... Gone just as suddenly as it came...

The light turns green... but the Corvette doesn't go...

INSIDE IT...

Brandon, slumped over...

Then he *GASPS*... Sucking in all the air around him...

Disoriented... lost... covered in blood... patting himself, frantic. *Where'd they hit me... Where'd they hit me... Where'd they hit me...*

But he doesn't find any wounds...

Cassidy laughs weakly... gasping herself...

CASSIDY
Motherfucker.

BRANDON
No, no... Fuck! Fuck!

He stares in shock at Cassidy, trying to figure out what the fuck to do next...

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Hold on! It's a hospital not too far from here... Hold on!

Brandon floors it...

CASSIDY

(laughing)

You know... I'm Kane... right now.
Or maybe Ricky... Hard... to tell.

BRANDON

You ain't fuckin' Kane or Ricky!
Shut the fuck up, we gone be there
in a minute!

The Corvette streaks around a corner... almost drifting...
almost losing touch with the pavement...

CASSIDY

So... uptight... I did...
fantasize about... dying in a
car... This is what... I get...

Another weak laugh.

Brandon steals a look... she's fading...

BRANDON

Quit laughing!

She just laughs again...

He rips through a red light... wheels burning under the
chassy... then another...

A car swerves to dodge him, slamming on the *HORN*... But
Brandon doesn't even notice...

BRANDON (CONT'D)

Yo!... Okay, you can laugh again,
that's cool... Just keep
laughing... Ya know-- *hey!*... I
saw *Swingers* the other day. Shit
was funny than a motherfucker...
That nigga Vince Vaughn--

CASSIDY

Hilarious... right?

She laughs... Brandon zooms through another red light...
The car looks like it's about to fall apart...

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

Who knew you... could drive... like
James Dean?

BRANDON

We ain't far... You gone be
straight...

(MORE)

BRANDON (CONT'D)
 You gone be straight... Hey...
 Hey... Hey!... Cassidy!...
 Cassidy! Hey!!

Cassidy's head knocks softly against her window... eyes calmly staring out into the world... It almost looks like she's smiling...

Gone.

BRANDON (CONT'D)
Fuuuuuuuuuck!!

... Brandon bashes the steering wheel... it *HONKS*, mocking...

He explodes... letting everything go...

Driving as recklessly as ever...

EXT. STREET. SOMEWHERE IN COMPTON. SAME.

High above. Cassidy's old, red, 1988 Chevy Corvette nothing more than a small red dot on a sea of black asphalt...

Zooming past the other cars...

Racing towards a destination that doesn't matter anymore...

INT. BRANDON'S APARTMENT. LIVING ROOM. LATER.

It's dark.

You can hear the faint *clunka-clunka-clunk* of Brandon's ceiling fan even in here...

Brandon creeps inside. The blood still wet and sticky on his shirt... He peels it off as soon as he closes the door...

He meanders through the darkness... past his room... and *KNOCKS* softly on a different door...

TREY AND CIARA'S ROOM. SAME.

The kids wake up at the sound... and watch as the door *creeeeeaaaaks* open...

Brandon pokes his head in...

TREY
 (whispering)
 Brandon?

Without a word, Brandon makes his way towards their bed...

He crawls in... Ciara inches over, making space...

CIARA

You okay?

BRANDON

... *No.*

The word almost comes out as a question.

It's as quiet as it's ever been, as if all the world outside this room decided to take the night off, leaving nothing else for the three of them but their own thoughts...

Brandon watches their noiseless ceiling fan... mesmerized... or maybe stuck... or maybe just heartbroken... as it spins round...

and around...

and around...

and around...

and around--

BLACK.