



Written by Eric Gross

RAPID FIRE MONTAGE of the Mr. T we think we know.

Clubber Lang in *Rocky 3*. BA Baracus from *A Team*. Dancing in the surreal 80's PSA *Be Somebody or Be Somebody's Fool*.

The images ramp up in intensity.

We see his unique mixture of hyper masculine aggression and Mother Theresa's compassion.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Harsh green white fluorescent lights.

Just peeking into frame, the top of his iconic mohawk.

We hear a buzzing sound. And that's when we see it:

AN ELECTRIC RAZOR.

But it's not a grooming instrument. Not this time.

This is a scalpel. Something that can erase your whole identity - your essence - with one false move.

Tight as he closes his eyes.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

The closed eyes of a scrawny little black boy.

He sits on a closed toilet as his mother, CORA TUREAUD (40's), puts the finishing touches on a homemade haircut.

CORA

All done.

The boy, LAWRENCE TUREAUD (11), opens his eyes to discover a misshapen Afro. His face crumples in disappointment.

CORA (CONT'D)

C'mon. You look cute.

LAWRENCE

I wanna look tough.

CORA

Well I think you look very handsome. And tough!

(beat)

Send the next one in.

Lawrence sulks out of the bathroom.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Scattered in the narrow hallway are eleven BOYS and GIRLS, Lawrence's siblings, all waiting for momma cuts of their own.

Two of Lawrence's brothers, NATE and GUS, give their younger brother a once over.

GUS

Mom wrecked your dome!

NATE

Nigga look like a black teddy bear.

Lawrence's teenage sister, LISA, slaps Nate.

LISA

Don't listen to em, Lawrence. You look adorable.

NATE

He look adorable!

Nate and Gus crack up. And even though he's younger, smaller, and outmatched, Lawrence won't go down without a fight.

LAWRENCE

Too bad Mom can't cut the ugly off your face.

Gus pushes Lawrence against the wall.

CORA (O.S.)

Get your butt in here!

Gus mad dogs his brother as he heads into the bathroom. Lawrence walks through the gauntlet into --

THE LIVING ROOM.

Sitting in front of the TV is NATE SR. (early 50's), a large stoic man. You can see the exhaustion dripping off his face.

He drinks hot tea as he watches the evening news.

Lawrence plops down on the floor in front of him.

ON THE TV --

WALTER CRONKITE (ON TV)
 Malcolm X, an African American
 minister and human rights advocate,
 was fatally shot today in
 Washington Heights. He was 39 years
 old. Memorial services will be --

As the broadcast continues, Lawrence turns to his Dad, who is clearly crestfallen.

NATE SR.
 Man's got nothing unless he sticks
 up for what he believes.
 (turns off the TV)
 Rest in peace, brother.

Nate Sr. heads to his room. He passes a framed photograph of him in army clothes in Vietnam. He looks strong and confident. That was then.

Lawrence watches the impression his father left on the La-Z-Boy slowly regain its shape. This is now.

EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DAY

Low income housing. Broken windows. Graffiti-covered walls.

You could fight your whole life to escape. And the projects would fight you right back.

James Brown's "I Got The Feeling" competes against Chicago's vengeful wind as we push in on the project doors.

And then BAM -- The doors explode.

All 14 Tureauds pour into the city.

BEGIN CHICAGO MONTAGE.

Loud immigrant shopkeepers hawking their wares.

Curbside preachers hocking theirs.

Street musicians playing broken instruments with raw fingers.

Hustlers working a con. Or having been worked.

Mafia dons mingling with shoe shine boys.

Lawrence thrills after catching a high five from a pimp.

And he can already feel it deep in his bones:

In 60's Chicago, you better be loud, flashy, and confident or risk a fate worse than death: being invisible.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. BUTCHER SHOP - ESTABLISHING

Polish signage. Sausage links hang in the window display.

INT. BUTCHER SHOP - SAME

The kids run through the aisles. Cora tries to wrangle as many as she can but she's outmatched.

Gus and Lawrence stalk the aisles with their father.

GUS

After I make the NBA, I'm gonna live on the top floor of Robert Taylor. Install my own elevator that goes straight to the top.

LAWRENCE

If you made the NBA, why would you still live in Robert Taylor?

Gus is stumped. So he slaps Lawrence upside the head.

GUS

Because shut the hell up.

Gus runs off. Nate Sr. picks out some chops, deposits them into a cart that Lawrence pushes.

LAWRENCE

This ain't ribeye.

NATE SR.

Chuck.
(off Lawrence's look)
Just as good. Half the price.

LAWRENCE

Doesn't sound as good. Chuck.
(screwing up his nose)
Chuck.

NATE SR.

When you pay for it, you can buy
ribeye. Till then you'll eat chuck.

Lawrence, powerless, puts the package into the cart.

They wheel on over to the checkout aisle where they find --

A POLISH BUTCHER (50's).

He packs up the meat. Nate Sr. hands him a few bills.

BUTCHER

Gotta lot of mouths to feed, *boy*.

Nate Sr's been down this road before. So he relents.

NATE SR.

(meekly)

What's a man without a family?

But Lawrence isn't having it. He picks up a can of stewed
tomatoes, ready to launch it at the storefront window.

LAWRENCE

Boy? Say that again. I dare you.

NATE SR.

C'mon Lawrence. Let's go.

LAWRENCE

He can't talk to--

NATE SR.

I said let's go!

Nate Sr. holds the door as the Tureauds exit. He shoots the
butcher a rueful look before embarking into the frost.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - SAME

Lawrence walks with his father.

LAWRENCE

If that man ever - EVER - mouth off
like that again, I'm gonna--

WHAP!

Nate Sr. slaps Lawrence's face. Hard.

And like that Lawrence is reduced to a scared child, the
shame and embarrassment powerful.

Luckily his pride holds back the tears. Barely.

NATE SR.

Know your place. Do you hear me?

Lawrence feels his cheek, red hot.

LAWRENCE

What happened to sticking up for
what you believe?

NATE SR.

(fury)

Do. You. Hear. Me.

Lawrence nods, glumly retreats to the back of the line with his Mom and sisters.

INT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DAY

An elevator bank in disrepair.

GUS

This shit again?

NATE SR.

I'd wash your mouth out with soap
but that'd be mean to the soap.

LISA

Last one up's a rotten egg.

The kids race up the stairwell. Except Lawrence. He's still too hurt from taking the brunt of his Dad's impotence.

Now that he's alone, he starts to tremble, the tears imminent. But his self-pity is interrupted by --

A SCREAM.

INT. TUREAUD APARTMENT - LATER

Chaos.

Couch overturned. Silverware strewn about. Drawers emptied.

The place has been ransacked.

Nate Sr. speaks with two WHITE POLICEMEN who nod, look around the apartment with disgust.

NATE SR.
 Magnavox 380. Thirty inches.
 (beat)
 Color set.
 (beat)
 Shouldn't you be writing this down?

POLICEMAN
 Projects are black holes. Once
 things disappear, they stay gone.

POLICEMAN #2
 Even if you had a description, what
 are we gonna do? Look for every
 black male in their teens and
 twenties? Hell, that could describe
 five of the boys right here.

NATE SR.
 My sons didn't rob this house.

An impasse.

POLICEMAN
 We'll be in touch.

NATE SR.
 You didn't take down my number.

POLICEMAN #2
 We'll be in touch.

The officers exchange a glance: this "case" doesn't merit the
 hassle of paperwork. Nate Sr.'s powerlessness fills the room.

And it wafts over to Lawrence, small and invisible, who
 watches from a corner.

LATER.

LAWRENCE
 I bet it was those stickup boys.
 From Marcy Ave. I seen them hanging
 round the back door.

ROY
 And you didn't say anything?

LAWRENCE
 Y'all wouldn't listen! No one ever
 listens to me!

NATE SR.

Enough! There are proper channels to deal with this. And God takes care of the rest.

GUS

(sotto)

You gotta be kidding me.

CORA

Gus. Watch your mouth.

ROY

He's right. Neither God nor the police gonna get our TV back.

GUS

We gotta get it back!

NATE SR.

As long as you live in my house, you live by my rules. Understand?

The brothers put a lid on the simmer.

But the water clearly still boils.

INT. TUREAD APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Blue moonlight spills into the small bedroom.

Lawrence opens his eyes to find Gus, Nate Jr., and Roy quietly packing a duffel bag with bats.

Roy puts a pistol in his jeans.

EXT. PROJECTS/INT. CAR - NIGHT

Gus, Nate Jr., and Roy get into a beat up Pinto. Just as Gus starts the ignition, Lawrence puts his hands on the dash.

LAWRENCE

I'm coming with y'all.

Nate Jr. gets out of the car, about to wail on his brother. So Lawrence plays his only trump card --

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

I'll tell Mom.

Nate Jr. looks to the car. Gus and Roy shrug.

INT./EXT. CAR - NIGHT

The four brothers in a beat up Pinto.

INT. CAR/EXT. UNDERPASS - NIGHT

The car creeps by a homeless camp: tents, boxes, shopping carts filled with detritus. Glimpses of scurrying bodies.

Lawrence's eyes go wide with fear.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - MARCY AVE. - NIGHT

Two THUGS exit the store. These are the stickup boys.

We slowly track with them from the seat of the car.

I/E. CAR - SAME

Headlights off, the Pinto inches down the boulevard, stops.

ROY
(to Lawrence)
Stay here.

LAWRENCE
I'm coming with y'all.

ROY
Stay here!

The Tureaud brothers exit the car, leaving Lawrence stewing about being unable to take part in the retribution.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Armed with bats, the Tureauds corner the thugs. But they aren't intimidated.

THUG #1
Look at these bitch ass niggas
want. Going to a batting cage or
some shit?

GUS
You know what we want.

NATE JR.
You stole our TV.

THUG #2

Fuck outta here. We didn't steal your 32 inch Magnavox with the broken dial and crappy sound.

ROY

Just give it back. Don't want no trouble.

The two thugs look at each other.

THUG #1

It's no trouble at all.

WHAP!

Thug #1 sucker punches Roy in the head.

The pistol comes loose from Roy's pants, lands near the car. Roy falls to the ground, catches a boot to the gut.

Nate Jr. hits the thug with a bat.

Thug #2 takes on Gus, overpowers him.

SLOW MOTION: The fight gets heated. Even though the Tureauds have the numbers, the thugs are battle-tested and vicious.

INT. CAR - SAME

As Lawrence watches the brawl, his heart nearly explodes out of his chest. His adrenaline pulsing, with no place to go while he's stationed in the car.

And just then, on the ground nearby, he sees the pistol.

EXT. STREET - SAME

Sound cuts out. All we hear is Lawrence's heavy breathing. The sodium vapor lights pulse softly.

Lawrence walks with the weapon at his side. Every head turns.

He cocks the hammer. All eyes go wide. Except for Lawrence's.

A SHOT RINGS OUT.

CRASH TO WHITE.

We hear the sound of water boiling.

VOICE
You ready?

FADE IN:

INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - KITCHEN - DAY

A large industrial kitchen.

CALVIN HOLLINS (21), a tall square shouldered black man, peels potatoes next to a boiling cauldron.

He looks over his shoulder at his fellow cook, our man:

LAWRENCE TUREAUD (now 19, compact and muscled).

Lawrence stares into a boiling cauldron of potatoes, transfixed by their agitated and heated state.

CALVIN
Lawrence, you ready?

Lawrence snaps out of it.

LAWRENCE
Ready.

The two men transfer the boiling cauldron to a large sink and pour it into a strainer. Steam envelops them.

CALVIN
Found a motel with a pool in
Kenosha. Few of us going on Sunday.
Wanna come with?

LAWRENCE
Too hot to do anything else round
this shit hole.

CALVIN
You'd rather be back in the
projects?

LAWRENCE
Whatcha know about the projects?

CALVIN
Raised in Cabrini Greens. Even
roaches hid when the sun set.

LAWRENCE
No shit? I was in Robert Taylor.
54th and State.

(MORE)

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)
 (they low five)
 Fine to live in the ghetto. Just
 don't let the ghetto live in you.

CALVIN
 How's that?

LAWRENCE
 My brothers used to think the
 height of success would be living
 on the top floor...of the projects!

CALVIN
 Penthouse is a penthouse. Which is
 where I'll be in no time at all.

The two men scoop potatoes into a tray. Penthouse sure seems
 a far cry from this slop kitchen.

INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - LUNCH LINE - LATER

Lawrence and Calvin serve an endless line of CADETS.

CALVIN
 See, I got this cousin. Work at
 Dingbat's. Says he can hook me up.
 Head chef. Got it all set up.

LAWRENCE
 The hell is Dingbats?

CALVIN
 Fresh little disco south side.

LAWRENCE
 I'd rather be the man than serve
 the man.

Speaking of the man, a refrigerator with legs and a buzz cut
 slaps his tray down in front of the two servers.

This is SGT BLOTNIK (40's).

BLOTNIK
 You two Cathy's sposed to serve,
 not gossip. Understand?

LAWRENCE/CALVIN
 Yes sir.

Lawrence ladles some gruel onto the sergeant's plate.

BLOTNIK
Don't be shy now.

Lawrence silently serves up another scoop.

MATCH CUT TO:

A MUD PUDDLE.

A boot crashes into it, spraying mud everywhere.

EXT - SWAMP - DAY

106 degrees with humidity. Flies like the pharaoh's plague.

A platoon of ARMY CADETS saddled with gear stand in front of a menacing thicket of trees.

Lawrence and Calvin are near the back.

BLOTNIK screams through a megaphone.

BLOTNIK
The collective.
(beat)
The collective guides us,
gentlemen.
(beat)
The individual is nothing. The
individual is no one. The
individual can perish. But the
collective endures.
(beat)
We may fight for our country,
gentlemen. But we die for the
collective. For when you are tired,
the collective is alert. When you
are weak, the collective is strong.
When you are hot, well, the
collective is hot too. Hot as devil
spunk. But nevertheless, the
collective endures. Now let's see
what the collective can do.
Proceed!

A few of the cadets grab axes and get to work on the thicket. But Lawrence cracks up. Calvin elbows him: shut the fuck up!

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)
Something funny?

LAWRENCE
Picturing the devil spunk, sir.

BLOTNIK
You got quite the imagination. Too
bad your imagination is of no use
to me or to your fellow cadets or
even the flies buzzing in the
putrid stale air.
(beat)
So see if you can imagine being
quiet, *boy*.

Blotnik walks away. The troops snicker at the dressing down.
A look of anger spreads across Lawrence's face.

SGT BLOTNIK
Nice steady swings now.

The troop resumes hacking away at the brush.

LAWRENCE
(a loud yell)
My name ain't boy!

Blotnik's jaw hits the ground. He drags it over to Lawrence.

BLOTNIK
Your name is cow shit on my boot.
The dregs of the spittoon. The scum
in the latrine. Your name...is
whatever I say it is.

LAWRENCE
Just don't call me boy.

Blotnik's eyes narrow with fury.

BLOTNIK
You aren't special. You're never
gonna be special. So you act
special, I see a problem. And when
I see a problem, I sure as shit
address it. You got that...boy?

Lawrence raises his head, and looks the sergeant dead in his
eyes. Deep down, he will hold on to that one sacred belief at
all costs: that he is indeed special.

And so he defiantly shakes his head.

LAWRENCE
No, sir. I do not.

BLOTNIK

Very well.

(to the troops)

Oh glorious day. Turns out we have a volunteer willing to clear all the brush for us. A most unexpected and fortuitous surprise. Put down your instruments. Raise canteen to lip. Enjoy the self-sacrifice of our most valiant savior.

The troops look at Lawrence in pity, knowing his punishment will be brutal. Blotnik hands Lawrence an axe.

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)

All yours.

(to the trees)

As are these.

LAWRENCE

What?

BLOTNIK

That's right.

(beat)

Or are you not special?

Blotnik gives the signal and the troops jog away, leaving Lawrence alone in the heat.

From a BIRD'S EYE VIEW, we see the trees like green-fledged darts stuck into a dartboard of dirt.

And Lawrence is the bull's eye.

CLOSE on his face, as the blood rises.

He winds up.

And takes a swing.

WHOOOOSH. CHOP.

The axe bites into the hard bark. With effort, Lawrence removes it. Inspects the incision. A small cut.

He winds up, takes another swing.

WHOOOOSH. CHOP.

His breathing gets heavy, resolve spreads across his face.

WHOOOOSH. CHOP.

From behind, we see his back muscles bulge with each swing.

AXE POV: The blur of the swing. Catches the wood. Cocked back 90 degrees. And again. And again. And again.

LATER.

Lawrence has felled his first tree.

He takes a look around: hundreds of trees towering over him.

LAWRENCE
(quietly, to the trees)
I'm coming for you.

WHOOSH. CHOP.

INT. BARRACKS - DUSK

The troops ready themselves for a dusk run.

Calvin looks at Lawrence's empty bunk. He contemplates the brutal punishment his friend is enduring for mouthing off.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Lawrence in a frenzy. Chopping like his life depended on it. And maybe it does.

CHOP. CHOP. CHOP.

And with every chop we see glimpses from his past:

-The polish butcher disrespecting his dad.

-The police shrugging off their duties.

-His brothers fighting the thugs.

-And, finally, Lawrence raises the pistol.

CHOP!

Lawrence recoils, his past clearly not past at all but pulsing out of him like hot blood from an open vein.

Pushing him. Daring him. Begging him. Taunting him.

But maybe, just maybe, no longer defining him.

CHOP!

EXT. SWAMP - DUSK

Blotnik leads the troops on a dusk jog.

BLOTNIK

You fall in line, you offer
deference, that's how you win.

(beat)

You stand out? You speak up? You
lose.

(beat)

I want you to see what happens to
those who stray from the herd.

The troops enter forest, expecting to find a defeated man.
But once they approach the clearing, they encounter a
different sight:

Lawrence chopping away.

BIRD'S EYE VIEW: Felled trees haloed around him, Lawrence the
ground zero of a blast radius.

Blotnik's face contorts into a rictus of pissed-offness.

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)

That's enough.

Lawrence keeps chopping.

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)

I said: that's enough!

His hands are blistered and torn to shreds. And yet Lawrence
doesn't even turn from the tree he's chopping.

LAWRENCE

One more oak I need to take down.

The platoon snickers.

BLOTNIK

Roll out!

Blotnik and the troops leave the forest.

As the sun dies a slow death, we see a silhouette of Lawrence
Tureaud as he swings away.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

It's lights out. The cadets in their beds.

Lawrence opens the door, welts the size of silver dollars cover his arms. His fatigues soaked with mud and sweat.

He hobbles to the bathroom.

As he does, the cadets start clapping. One by one. Until it reaches a fever pitch.

BATHROOM.

Lawrence strips naked, his body bruised and swollen. He turns on the shower, water washes over him.

And even though he's in tremendous pain, we can just barely make out the faintest of smiles.

He closes his eyes.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. POOL - UNDERWATER - DAY

Lawrence underwater, his eyes closed.

A constellation of bubbles float skyward. And suddenly Lawrence propels up to --

EXT. MOTEL 6 - DAY

A cloudless blue sky. Heat shimmers on the pavement.

A few of the cadets in the crystal clear pool, enjoying one of their precious days off.

Along the perimeter are a few WHITE FAMILIES.

Lawrence and Calvin post up on the lip of the pool.

CALVIN

How'd you end up here anyway?

One of the white families gets up and leaves.

LAWRENCE

We drove together, man.

CALVIN

You know what I mean. Either you ran into trouble. Or trouble ran into you. So which is it?

A beat. Lawrence just looks up at the sky.

LAWRENCE

You ever hear of the Great Chicago fire? Bout a hundred years back?

CALVIN

Course.

LAWRENCE

Burned from Sunday to Tuesday.
Killed hundreds. Displaced
thousands. Absolutely insatiable,
devoured everything in its path.

(beat)

All folks could talk about
afterwards was how it started.

CALVIN

So?

Lawrence turns to his friend.

LAWRENCE

How it started don't really matter.

(beat)

What matters is how hot it burned.

As Calvin ponders this, a WHITE COUPLE scowls at the black cadets in the water, packs up their things, exits.

A MOTEL MANAGER (white, 40's) walks over to the cadets.

MOTEL MANAGER

Afternoon fellas.

The cadets completely ignore him.

MOTEL MANAGER (CONT'D)

I'm afraid to inform you that our
pool is reserved for guests
currently staying at our --

CALVIN

Yeah yeah. We get it.

Calvin and the other cadets exit the pool, towel off.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

C'mon man. Let's eat.

LAWRENCE

Be there in a second.

The cadets go to change. Lawrence defiantly drapes his arms on the pool edge, daring the owner to say peep.

MOTEL MANAGER

Listen sonny, I'm afraid I'll have to call the authorities if you're unwilling to vacate the premises.

A long beat.

LAWRENCE

You should be afraid.

Nevertheless, Lawrence, with all the time in the world, gets out of the pool. As he leaves, a white family is ushered in.

MOTEL MANAGER

Mr. Alston, right this way sir.

This stops Lawrence in his tracks.

LAWRENCE

(to the manager)

How come I'm 'sonny' and he's 'Mr. Alston?'

The manager doesn't know what the hell he's talking about. But that's okay. A seed has been planted.

INT. BUS - DAY

The cadets wear civilian clothing. A few laugh and holler.

CADET #1

No way. Barbecue.

CADET #2

Chinese. Got just the place.

CADET #3

Long as we get dessert, I'm set.

Cadet #3 and Cadet #1 low five.

CADET #2

Oh I got just the spot for that. Massage parlor on South Brandywine.

CALVIN

Whatcha think Lawrence?

Lawrence looks out the window as the world swims by - a world full of threats. And possibilities.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
Lawrence?

A long beat. The cadets look to their warrior.

LAWRENCE
I'll catch up with you. Something I
need to take care of first.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The army bus pulls away to reveal Lawrence. He looks up at --

EXT. DMV - DAY

Lawrence walks with purpose towards the building, a drab
concrete slab you wouldn't set foot in unless you had to.

CUT TO:

INSERT: CHANGE OF NAME FORM.

OLDER WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Why wouldja wanna do that?

INT. DMV - SAME

Lawrence speaks with a portly DMV WORKER.

LAWRENCE
I need a reason?

The DMV worker furrows her brow at the form.

DMV WORKER
Suppose not.

After a long beat --

LAWRENCE
From now on, when anyone says my
name, the first word out their
mouth will be one of respect.

DMV WORKER
Whose mouth?

LAWRENCE
Everyone's.

The DMV worker stares back at him. Is he crazy?
 We push in on Lawrence's face.
 He doesn't blink. He doesn't hesitate. He doesn't waver.
Because he's no longer Lawrence.

DMV WORKER
 Very well.

The woman stamps the form. CA-CHUNK!

DMV WORKER (CONT'D)
 Have a nice day, Mr. T.

EXT. DMV - MOMENTS LATER

T walks into the bright cool day. He looks down at the form:

MR. T.

He nods solemnly. And then takes in the new day.
 The street looks different. More vibrant, more saturated.
 In fact, everything looks different.

MR. T (V.O.)
 Change a little, and the world
 changes with you.

FADE TO:

EXT. CHICAGO - DAY - ESTABLISHING

We see a bustling city block full of commerce and activity.
 A green light moves traffic along revealing a large
 department store.

INT. WOOLWORTH'S - DAY

Mr. T, now 23, tries on a high waisted paisley zoot suit.
 Next to him is a BLACK STORE CLERK (70's) who holds a few
 pieces of clothing for T to audition.

STORE CLERK
 Ain't that the truth.

MR. T
Lemme see that hat.

The clerk hands him a fedora. T profiles in the mirror, shifting angles to make sure it's fresh from every vantage.

MR. T (CONT'D)
Whatcha think patna?

STORE CLERK
You look like a pimp.

MR. T
That fly huh?

The clerk's eyeballs hit the ceiling.

STORE CLERK
That silly.

MR. T
I need the world to see me. To recognize. To take notice. To know that Mr. T has arrived.

STORE CLERK
Oh, they will. Here, try this.

The clerk gives him a porkpie hat. T models it in the mirror.

STORE CLERK (CONT'D)
Much better.

MR. T
I don't know. A bit subdued for my liking. Not tryin' be incognito.

STORE CLERK
Folks are gonna see you coming a mile away.

MR. T
That's the problem.
(beat)
Should be ten miles.

PRELAP: Ca-Ching!

CASH REGISTER - MOMENTS LATER.

T is in line. Ringing him up is a confident young cashier.

This is PHYLIS CLARK (late 20's). She is strong, confident, and poised.

MR. T

You ever see anyone walk outta here with threads this fine?

PHYLIS

They're very nice.

MR. T

You kiddin me? They're fresh, fly, and fabulous. Nice got nothing to do with it.

PHYLIS

If you say so.

MR. T

I say so! Minute I put these on, every neck from Lake View to Hyde Park will snap, folks be craning to get a good look.

(pantomiming necks)

Criiik. Criiik. Criiik.

Phylis gives in, smiles a bit.

PHYLIS

Clothes don't make the man. It's the other way around.

MR. T

What's that supposed to mean?

Phylis closes the register. Leans in closer.

PHYLIS

It means that a peacock is still a peacock without his feathers.

T doesn't get it. By way of explanation, she holds up a paisley shirt for T to see. Then expertly folds it.

MR. T

Listen. I ain't no ornithologist. But I know a beautiful and rare bird when I see one.

Phylis smiles.

PHYLIS

Ornithologist huh?

MR. T
 (shrugs)
 Big fan of the nature shows on PBS.

PHYLIS
 Enjoy your purchase....?

MR. T
 (gently grabbing her hand)
 Mister T.

And like that, T throws the bag of clothes over his shoulder.

You'd see him coming from 10 miles away.
 No question about it.

EXT. WOOLWORTH'S - DAY

T takes a step into the Chicago dusk, ready to conquer the world. He struts over to a BLACK HOT DOG VENDOR.

MR. T
 Footlong. Mustard, relish.

While the vendor prepares the dog, 3 WHITE FRAT BOYS stagger out of a nearby pub. They clock T and the vendor.

FRAT BOY #1
 Will you look at this?

FRAT BOY #2
 A nigger, a hot dog, another nigger.

FRAT BOY #1
 A nigger sandwich. Yuck!

MR. T
 Talk is cheap. How bout we dance?

T removes his jacket, ready to teach these guys that they should have had one less Guinness or stayed for one more.

But before he can pummel Chad, Thad, and Brad into frat soup, we hear the familiar "whoop whoop," the sound of da police.

Two WHITE OFFICERS exit a squad car, billy clubs readied.

OFFICER #1
 There a problem here?

FRAT BOY #1
 No sir. Just heading home.

OFFICER #2
How bout you? There a problem?

MR. T
(biting his tongue)
No sir.

OFFICER #1
Then why don't you fellas take your
asses on home.

The situation diffused, the frat boys drunkenly skulk away. T turns to leave as well.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
Not you, sonny boy.

Officer #2 grabs T, flips him around, and uses his billy club to pin him flush to a lamp post.

Officer #1 aggressively pats him down, ripping his shirt.

MR. T
I ain't do nuffin.

OFFICER #1
Then you got *nuffin* to worry bout.

After not finding anything, they release him.

OFFICER #2
Enjoy the rest of your evening.

The police get back in their squad car.

VENDOR
Pay it no mind, brother. On me.

The vendor holds out the foot long. T, doubled over, watches the squad car recede into the night.

MR. T
Lost my appetite.

T peels off a bill for the vendor and heads home, the pain and fury hanging thick as the humid Chicago air.

EXT. SMALL STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Barely a dorm room: cube fridge, hot plate, mattress on carpeted floor, water stains on the ceiling.

The only personal touch is a framed photograph of his family in front of the projects: the Tureauds in their Sunday best.

T stares at the photo; Even if it kills him, he'll prove to his family that he can make it. Hell, to the world.

We watch as this private and proud man slowly starts to shake and convulse, trying so hard to contain the hurt.

Maybe the world has him outmatched. Outgunned. Defeated.

We push in extremely close. Till we're inches from his face. Close enough to see his anger harden into resolve.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. CAB - NIGHT

The light and heat of the Chicago night reflect in the cab windows. T drinks it in until they reach their destination.

EXT. DINGBATS - NIGHT

For Chicago's nightlife, this is mecca.

Upbeat funk pulses from inside.

A group of WOULD-BE PATRONS wait outside. Manning the door is a suave short black man: JONNY BITOY (late 20's).

Everyone vies for his attention, for his blessing. He decides who gets into heaven and who remains in purgatory.

This dude is the man. T decides to take his chances.

MR. T

My brother, lemme holla at you?

BITOY

Line's in the back, *my brother*.

Bitoy kisses two FLY GIRLS on the cheek then parts the velvet rope for their entrance. T takes a step closer.

MR. T

Name's Mr. T. I'm friends with the head chef here. Calvin Hollins.

Bitoy looks at him askance.

BITOY

Head chef?

MR. T
 (beaming)
 That's right. Calvin's family.

BITOY
 Calvin's a line cook.

MR. T
 What?

BITOY
 Chopping veggies, grilling meats,
 plating appetizers. *Line. Cook.*

T is floored.

Bitoy greets two WELL-HEELED PATRONS. They press the flesh and enter. The night's just getting started.

But not for T, who takes in the disappointing news like a turd cherry on top of a shit sundae.

Bitoy takes pity.

BITOY (CONT'D)
 Listen man. Head to the back alley.
 I'll send him out for his 15.
 (shaking his head)
 Head chef, my ass.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - LATER

T and Calvin smoke cigarillos. Calvin sports a dirty apron.

CALVIN
 You never embellished your resume?

T grandly gestures across his face and body.

MR. T
 This my resume right here.

Even surrounded by dumpsters and fire escapes, he's still a sight to behold.

CALVIN
 Well, I ain't you. I'm working my way up. Learning the ropes. Putting in the time.

MR. T
 I don't wanna serve the man. I wanna be the man. Remember?

CALVIN

I remember.

MR. T

Good. Now get me *up in this*. Dance floor's just a piece of wood unless I'm groovin on it.

CALVIN

I can't do didley squat. Slip the bouncer a twenty.

MR. T

Dropped my very last cent on this here get-up.

(popping his collar)

Worth every penny.

CALVIN

How you gonna be the man without a dollar to your name?

MR. T

With grace and cunning and inimitable poise.

CALVIN

Ain't enough to get you into Bats.

MR. T

We'll see bout that.

T grandly stands up and busts a show offy spin move to emphasize the point. Calvin smiles.

CALVIN

Don't forget the little people when you king.

MR. T

No real king does.

Calvin extinguishes his smoke, puts his hairnet on. T frowns.

MR. T (CONT'D)

Such a crown, my humble compatriot, does not befit such a king. Alas, the hour is upon us. Time for revelry and merriment.

T struts to the front. T is pure charisma. Calvin would do anything for him. With a smile, Calvin heads inside.

EXT. DINGBAT'S - NIGHT

T makes his way to the front, approaches Bitoy.

MR. T

Calvin said I should give Dingbats
a taste of the Mr. T experience.

BITOY

Sound like a real treat. But I
think we'll manage without.

MR. T

Tell you what. Let's wait for the
line to die down.

BITOY

(dismissive)

Yeah. Let's.

Bitoy walks away to greet the CLIENTELE. T looks at him with
envy. Must be nice to have the town vying for your attention.

Two DOLLED UP LADIES on a smoke break giggle from nearby.

MR. T

What's so funny?

DOLLED UP LADY #1

Darlin, this ain't Wicker Park.
This is DingBats.

MR. T

So?

DOLLED UP LADY #2

So the line *don't* die down at
DingBats.

Off T's look: indeed the line snakes out a block deep.

DOLLED UP LADY #1

But I wouldn't worry. Smart fella
like you? You'll find a way in.

The ladies snuff their cigarettes out, head back inside.

CLINK!

The smoking exit has been propped open with a beer bottle.

T's got a choice to make: wait dutifully or seize the day.

INT. DINGBAT'S - NOT EVEN MOMENTS LATER

Lights strobe. Music pulses. The crowd is mostly black.

And everyone looks amazing.

Afros, platform shoes, bellbottoms. T's never seen anything like this. His mind is blown.

He bumps into one of the dolled up ladies who propped the door. She smiles seductively at him.

DOLLED UP LADY #1
See you made it.

MR. T
I needed to ask you something. Been bugging me since I saw you.

DOLLED UP LADY #1
And what's that?

Charm dial cranks to 11.

MR. T
Do you like champagne?

BAR - FIVE SECONDS LATER.

It's busy.

FLASHY MEN waving bills aren't even getting served. And even if he did get to the front of the line, T's broke as a joke.

And that's when he see it. Hanging from an open utility closet. A server's apron.

FIVE MORE SECONDS.

T, now wearing the apron, approaches a WAITRESS who has a full tray of drinks.

MR. T
These for table six? Dalton's tab?

WAITRESS
Corner banquette. Hammond.

MR. T
I gottta grab the order for Dalton.

WAITRESS

So why you wastin' my time?

She leaves in a huff and heads to a very busy corner table.

MR. T

Why indeed?

(finding the bartender)

Forgot two champagnes. For Hammond.

Don't sweat it. I'll bring em.

DANCE FLOOR - HALF A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE LATER.

T and his girl boogie oogie oogie till they just can't boogie no more.

Does the music bump? Hell yes.

Does the couple look fly? You better believe it.

Do they set the dance floor ablaze? C'mon now.

T leans in for a kiss. But a hand firmly grabs his shoulder.

BITOY

Let's go. You're out of here.

But before Bitoy can kick T to the curb, a fight breaks out.

BITOY (CONT'D)

Fuck me.

Bitoy runs to contain it. T looks back to his girl.

DOLLED UP LADY #1

Let's get outta here.

MR. T

Great minds think alike.

T grabs her hand, parts the sea as they head to the exit.

FRONT OF CLUB.

Bitoy scraps with a few BIG BAD DUDES.

The ringleader of this group is LOU VINER (30's, good ol' boy with a boulder-sized chip on his shoulder).

BITOY

Fellas. Tranquilo. I'm sure we can -

WOMP!

A haymaker to Bitoy's temple send him to the floor. The other BAD DUDES jump into the fray.

All hell's about to break loose.

EXIT DOORS.

A night of magic and romance awaits just beyond them. But in the background, T can barely make out the white dudes stomping on Bitoy and a black bartender.

T closes his eyes. This is a tough one: But he knows what he's got to do. He starts rolling up his sleeves.

GIRL

The hell you doin'?

MR. T

Fight's only a fight if it's fair.

T cracks his head. Left. And right.

And then barrels into the melee, pure adrenalized anger.

Throws the bad dudes off Bitoy - literally saving his ass.

Then starts pummeling Lou, the ringleader.

Blow after blow after blow: a chaotic symphony of punches, bites, kicks, screams, and head butts.

And T conducts the orchestra.

Bitoy gets to his feet, helps T finish off the ones who are either too drunk or too stupid to know when to quit.

Eventually, the BAD DUDES regroup a few yards away.

MR. T (CONT'D)

If you feelin' froggy, better jump.

LOU VINER

This ain't over.

MR. T

No?

T raises his fist. The bad dudes assess their options. Then haul ass out of dodge.

BITOY
 (out of breath)
 Was that the Mr. T experience?

MR. T
 I grew up in Robert Taylor. Twelve
 brothers and sisters.
 (beat)
 This was just batting practice.

BITOY
 Tell you what, come through any
 time you want. Drinks on the house.

MR. T
 Don't need a drink. But y'all got
 something else I could use.

BITOY
 What's that?

T looks around. Despite the fight, the club is still packed.

MR. T
 An audience.

BITOY
 (laughing)
 What's your real name, man?

T grabs his derby, dusts it off, and puts it on just so. And
 after a long windup, here comes the pitch:

MR. T
 First name: Mister. Middle initial:
 Period. Last name: T.

And with that, T heads into the Chicago night.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The TV is tuned to a PBS nature documentary. David
 Attenborough-style narration plays over footage of a peacock.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (V.O.)
 The blue peafowl - Pavo cristatus -
 is a large brightly colored bird.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

T primps in front of the mirror. He picks out his small Afro,
 shaping it into a perfect globe.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (O.S.)

The male, or peacock, is adorned with a fan-like crest of feathers and goes to great lengths to impress a potential mate. These feathers raise into a gorgeous display during courtship.

He puts on a small silver chain with his military dog tags. Sprays some cologne and bunny-hops into it.

So fresh. So clean.

INT. DINGBAT'S - DAY

The bar still in disarray from last night's fight.

A puffy-faced ginger takes inventory on a notepad. This is burly RON BRISKMAN (late 40's).

T walks in. Ron looks up at his flamboyant visitor.

RON BRISKMAN

Closed. Lunch starts at noon.

MR. T

Didn't come for lunch.
Though lunch sounds pretty good.

Bitoy comes out of a storage room with a few boxes.

BITOY

Mr. T! In the building!

Bitoy sets down the cases and gives T a big hug.

BITOY (CONT'D)

Ron, this is the baddest man in the whole damn town! Saved my ass last night. Took on a half dozen men!

RON BRISKMAN

So you're the guy responsible for this mess?

MR. T

I'm the guy who controlled it.

A tense silence.

RON BRISKMAN

Well, I'd hate to see what happens when things get out of control.

Ron goes back to taking inventory. Bitoy shrugs: I did my best. But T is undaunted.

MR. T
I came to offer my services.

RON BRISKMAN
Demolition?

MR. T
I'm talking bout workin' that door.
Keepin' the riff raff out, the
razzle dazzle in.

RON BRISKMAN
Dingbats already has a body
guarding the front.

MR. T
(thousand watt smile)
Maybe it's time to add a face.

RON BRISKMAN
(to Bitoy)
Gonna let him say that with you not
even ten feet away.

BITOY
It'd free me up to focus on
marketing and promotion.

MR. T
I mean no disrespect. I'd empty the
spittoons to get in at Bats.

RON BRISKMAN
Can't add to the payroll right now.

T considers the dilemma. Then comes up with an idea.

MR. T
Tell you what. You cover my meals,
I'll work for free. You don't see
an uptick, you cut me loose. No
iffs, ands, or butts -- besides
mine, tossed out on the curb.

Ron sizes up the eager man and his offer.

RON BRISKMAN
What's the catch?

MR. T

No catch. I ain't tryin to get over on you. You got a special place here. I just wanna be a part of it.

Ron scratches his face.

RON BRISKMAN

I'll think about it.

MR. T

My man!

T grabs Ron into a bear hug that is not entirely welcome.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - LATER

T proceeds with his back-slapping smooth-talkin' high-steppin' campaign for mayor of Chicago.

He's on a high and isn't afraid to let everyone know.

INT. WOOLWORTH'S - DAY

T marches confidently into the clothing store to find Phylis. And just then, a stuffy WHITE MANAGER approaches.

WHITE MANAGER

Can I help you?

MR. T

Nah man. Just browsing.

The white manager looks uncomfortable. He lingers.

WHITE MANAGER

Just browsing. Of course.

(beat)

That's a lovely hat.

T knows where this is going.

MR. T

Bought it here last week.

WHITE MANAGER

You wouldn't happen to have the receipt would you?

MR. T

You ask all your customers for receipts?

WHITE MANAGER

Sir, we've had merchandise go missing recently. This is for your protection as well as ours.

MR. T

I look like I need your protection?

The white manager is shook. And T leaves him that way.

HER REGISTER.

Phylis folds clothing for a CUSTOMER and hands her the bag. T approaches, a bit deflated from the previous encounter.

PHYLIS

Dapper Dan returns.

MR. T

Couldn't stay away if I tried.
You're the most gorgeous cashier in all Chicago.

PHYLIS

Hate to dash your dreams but the cashier part is temporary. Just till I'm done with business school.

MR. T

Beauty and brains! Knew we had something in common.

PHYLIS

(blushing)

What can I help you with?

MR. T

I have a few items I'm looking for. Seven or so.

PHYLIS

Okay.

MR. T

Need em in just the right order.

PHYLIS

The right order?

MR. T

And only you can give em to me.

PHYLIS

Me?!?

MR. T

I can't find you in the phone book.
Didn't catch your last name.

Phylis finally gets it, rolls her eyes.

PHYLIS

Are you always like this?

MR. T

Sometimes I'm persistent.

A CUSTOMER sets down some items. T steps aside, just barely.

MR. T (CONT'D)

So whatcha think?

PHYLIS

What do I think? I think you're
flashy and clever and cute.

MR. T

Flattery will get you everywhere.

PHYLIS

But perhaps that's just armor.
Armor to protect you from fortune's
slings and arrows. Or maybe armor
to keep something hidden.

She taps his chest. And he's dumbfounded. Vulnerable even.

MR. T

I'll tell you what. Let me take you
out. Anywhere your heart desires.
You don't have the best date of
your life, I'll disappear. Poof!
Gone! Vanished! Bye bye!

Phylis can tell he won't quit. As does the customer, who is
awkwardly caught in between.

PHYLIS

Anywhere?

MR. T

Anywhere.

The customer looks back and forth, curious to see how the
courtship will play out.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

All black congregation. A high energy affair. T and Phylis are in the back. T leans over to Phylis.

MR. T
(whispering)
How long do we have to stay here?

PHYLIS
Until you learn a thing or two.
Which means we may be here all day.

T leans back, clearly not in his element.

MR. T
My old man was a preacher. I've
done my time in Church.
(beat)
C'mon. Let's go to a steak house.

Phylis, with one look, shuts down that proposal.
So T sits back in the pew, crosses his arms.

On the alter, a tall grey haired preacher delivers a sermon.
This is REVEREND HENRY HARDY (60's).

REVEREND HARDY
How do we find favor with God? Is
it through prayer? It is. Is it
through faith? Without question.
But what about our deeds? What
about how we conduct ourselves? Not
just how we feel and think. But how
we act. How we treat others.
(beat)
What is it that makes us shine
bright even in the darkness? Even
in times of doubt?
(beat)
Aretha knew. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Say it
with me now.

CONGREGATION
Respect.

REVEREND HARDY
That's right. Respect. We rise
together or not at all. And so
respect is crucial.
(beat)
For the world. For ourselves. For
each other. And especially for
those less fortunate.
(MORE)

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)
 To give love when it's so far away,
 to give hope when it's all but
 impossible, is to open the doors to
 the kingdom of heaven.

T perks up. Maybe this guy does have something useful to say to him after all.

EXT. LAKESHORE DRIVE - LATER

T walks with Phyllis.

REVEREND HARDY (V.O.)
 For it is only when we give love,
 when we give hope, when we give
 respect, that we receive it back.

He grabs her hands. They are clearly getting closer.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

REVEREND HARDY (V.O.)
 For with respect, there is nothing
 a man cannot do. Without it, there
 is little that he can.

T looks at the photo of his family dressed up for Church. From behind the glass frame, they stare right back at him: What's he worth? What's he done in this world?

A phone rings. T picks it up, listens to the other end.

A smile spreads across his face.

EXT. DINGBAT'S - NIGHT

Crowds lined up a block deep. And T works the door.

He's a natural: Ladies love him. Guys wanna be him.

Bitoy and Ron watch and smile.

INT. DINGBAT'S - END OF THE NIGHT

T, Bitoy, and Calvin drink tumblers of Scotch. A huge plate of food in front of T. Ron in the background, counting cash.

MR. T
 No joke. In the men's bathroom.
 Accommodating two gentlemen!

BITOY
In those narrow ass stalls?

MR. T
Girl was flexible. And creative.

Bitoy cracks up.

CALVIN
So what'd you tell her?

MR. T
Told her I don't take issue with a
lady plying her trade.
(beat)
But Bats is a classy establishment.
I can't have a working girl tarnish
our hard earned reputation.

BITOY
And so she up and left?

MR. T
Not before offering her services to
yours truly.

CALVIN
Sloppy thirds!

BITOY
Y'all dating now or what?

MR. T
I don't take my honey where I make
my money.
(beat)
Got her number though.

Calvin and Bitoy nearly double over with laughter.

MR. T (CONT'D)
For Ron! Not for me. Come on now.

RON BRISKMAN
Hey! I'm a happily married man.
(beat)
Still have that number?

T smiles broadly. Ron comes over to the table, watches with concern as T tucks into his plate of chicken and stuffing.

RON BRISKMAN (CONT'D)
At this rate, you're gonna eat me
into the poor house.

MR. T
Deal's a deal, Ron.

RON BRISKMAN
Prolly time to put you on payroll.

T pick up a huge drumstick.

MR. T
'I'll think about it.'

Ron rolls his eyes at his words being used against him.
T tears into the drumstick: Mmm Mmm Good.

EXT. NAVY PIER - DUSK

T and Phylis look out over glorious Lake Michigan.

PHYLIS
I used to go the beach here with my family. My brothers would swim real far out. To that break point there.

MR. T
That's crazy far!

PHYLIS
My Mom would barely let me wade in past my shoulders. She'd say:
'Phylis. Let the boys be brave. You stay safe and close.'
(beat)
So I'd sneak back after school. Strip down to my undergarments. And I'd swim. Lord, would I swim. Till I was blue in the face and I couldn't swim no more.
(pointing)
I could make it all the way out to the second dinghy.

MR. T
What? Why? You could have died!

PHYLIS
To prove that I could.
(beat)
No one's gonna tell me what I can and cannot be. Not my family. Not my Church.
(kisses his forehead)
Not even Mr. T.

MR. T
Wouldn't try. Wouldn't even try.

T picks up a handful of pebbles. Skips one along the surface.

MR. T (CONT'D)
My brothers and I used to have
these stone skip competitions here.
Battle royales. It was the one
thing I could beat em at. Lord
knows that got under their skin.
(beat)
Once got six in a row.

PHYLIS
Knew I was with you for a reason.
(a turn)
What happened between you guys?

T stays silent. Skips a stone. It ricochets across the water.

PHYLIS (CONT'D)
You don't see them. You don't talk
about them. It's like they don't
exist.

MR. T
The past is the past.

PHYLIS
They're your *family*.

T looks out over the city skyline, chewing over what is
obviously a difficult subject.

MR. T
When I was 11 years old I did a
terrible thing.

FLASH BACK TO:

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT - 1965

*Lawrence, the future Mr. T, raises the pistol at the thugs
who stole from his family.*

We see - but don't hear - his brothers scream.

The thug's eyes go wide in horror.

MR. T (V.O.)
I mistook violence for courage.

In a wide shot, we see the muzzle flash shock the dark street white - just for a second - and then black.

FADE IN:

THE WATER.

A stone skims across the calm surface, the ripples fanning out in wider and wider circles from the point of contact.

MR. T

Two years of juvvy, then ROTC. When I got home, my brothers couldn't even look me in the eye, they felt so guilty for what happened.

(beat)

That guilt turned to resentment. That resentment to anger. My Pops split around that time. I think they blamed me for destroying the family.

(beat)

So I moved out. Tried to make a new life. Become a new man.

The ripples on the water dissipate back into a flat calm surface, the stone throw now a distant memory.

MR. T (CONT'D)

My family never accepted that. They resented me for wanting more when they were just trying to get by.

(beat)

Well, I'm not okay with getting by. I'm not okay with good enough.

(beat)

I want it all.

Phylis gently places her hand on the back of his neck, proud of him for opening up.

PHYLIS

No one gets out of childhood without scars. No one.

But T can't meet her eye. It's too painful. Instead, he looks down at his hand: The last pebble, smooth and round.

He side arms it across the Great Lake. As hard as he can.

INT. DINGBAT'S - KITCHEN - DAY

Pots on boil, sauté pans heating up garlic. Calvin maneuvers around the kitchen like a pro.

T and Bitoy polish off the last of their gumbo.

MR. T

Calvin, this is something else.

BITOY

You got a gift, brother.

CALVIN

Glad you like it. But I wanted y'all to sample something besides my gumbo.

Calvin fishes out some papers and diagrams from a backpack.

BITOY

What's this?

CALVIN

(ta dah)

TCB. A restaurant that caters to the upscale urban sophisticate.

MR. T

TCB? What the hell's a TCB.

CALVIN

Taking Care of Business. But also T, Calvin, Bitoy. We always talk about doing our own thing. Why don't we?

(showing his diagrams)

I'd run the kitchen. Bitoy would handle marketing. And T you're the face. It's all right here.

T and Bitoy peruse the materials.

BITOY

Damn man. You really thought this thing through.

CALVIN

Tried to. But I can't do it myself. Not without y'all.

T looks over the plans, thrilling to Calvin's ambition.

MR. T
 This is a beautiful thing, man.
 (quoting the Reverend)
 We rise together. Or not at all.

BITOY
 Hell yes. I'm in. All in.

The three men cheers. This plan has them excited, finally a place to channel their ambition and skill sets.

Ron enters with a stack of envelopes.

RON BRISKMAN
 What's with the excitement? I
 expect my staff miserable at all
 times.

The men table their entrepreneurial discussions for now.

CALVIN
 Just happy to be young, black, and
 handsome.

RON BRISKMAN
 And paid.
 (handing Bitoy a check)
 We've increased weeknight crowds
 thanks to your promoting.
 (a check to Calvin)
 And since you took over, the
 kitchen is humming.

Ron goes to grab a sweet potato off T's plate.

MR. T
 Wouldn't do that I was you.

RON BRISKMAN
 (a check to T)
 Since you've been on the door,
 waiting in line's almost as much a
 draw as being inside!

Bitoy raises a glass. All four men cheers.

RON BRISKMAN (CONT'D)
 Got a slight change of plans
 tonight though. We have a VIP
 coming through. Leon Spinks.

BITOY
 Leon Spinks! God damn! That man
 took the belt off Ali.

CALVIN

Ali was out of shape.

BITOY

Still. That gap-toothed nigga can throw a punch.

RON BRISKMAN

His energy in the ring is matched by his energy in the club. So Bitoy, you're on door. Mr. T, you're his bodyguard.

MR. T

What?! You gotta be kidding me? I ain't playin' second fiddle.

RON BRISKMAN

He's high profile. And spends accordingly.

MR. T

I'm not a baby sitter, Ron. I need to be where the action is.

RON BRISKMAN

There'll be more action than you know what to do with.

MR. T

I think I lost my appetite.

Ron goes in for a potato wedge. T bats his hand away.

MR. T (CONT'D)

I said 'I think.' Turns out I was wrong. One of the rare instances.

PRELAP: A Funkadelic track grooves us into --

INT. DINGBAT'S - NIGHT

Laser lights pulse, comb, and drift on all the beautiful people of late 70's Chicago.

In a corner banquette we see a private party:

6 bottles of booze, 5 young women, 4 entourage members, 3 plates of ribs, 2 magnums, and a partridge in a pear tree.

Holding court is heavy weight champion LEON SPINKS (28).

He wears a white fur coat because...he's heavy weight champion Leon Spinks.

T stands nearby, sizing up Spinks and feeling less than. After all, no showboat likes to be out-showboated.

Two GROUPIES try to bum rush the booth but T cuts them off.

MR. T
Whoa now. Private party. You can't be back here.

The disappointed groupies retreat back onto the dance floor, swallowed up by the feverish crowd.

CLICK/FLASH!

A PAPARAZZO pops off a few rounds from his Pentax.

MR. T (CONT'D)
You taking photos of the wrong guy.

PAPARAZZO
Who should I be taking photos of?

MR. T
Yours truly.

PAPARAZZO
A bodyguard. I don't think so.

MR. T
I ain't no bodyguard. I'm Mr. T.

T puts his hand over the shutterbug's camera.

PAPARAZZO
I got a right to be here, man.

MR. T
You got the privilege to be here. And it's bout to be revoked you don't shoo off.

The paparazzo begrudgingly departs.

Spinks clocks this exchange, impressed by T's composure.

LATER.

The crowd has thinned.

But T remains vigilant about guarding the party. An ENTOURAGE MEMBER taps T on the shoulder.

ENTOURAGE MEMBER
Big man wants a word.

MR. T
Bout what?

ENTOURAGE MEMBER
The fuck I'm supposed to know?

T, making sure there's no imminent trouble, heads to the banquette. He finds Spinks wobbling from fatigue and booze.

LEON SPINKS
I been watching you. You work this club like I work the ring.

MR. T
I guess we both excel in our natural environment.
(beat)
Name's Mr. T.

LEON SPINKS
I like that. My name's Leon *Spinks*.
But you can call me *Leon Drinks!*

MR. T
I'll let the server know.

T goes to leave. Leon gets up and grabs his shoulder.

LEON SPINKS
Nigga, don't you turn away from me till I'm done speaking to you.

Ugh oh. Is this gonna get ugly? Even though Leon has 75 lbs on him, T doesn't back down.

Leon slowly breaks into a smile, diffusing the situation.

LEON SPINKS (CONT'D)
C'mon now. We good. We good.
(beat)
Listen, man. Ever since I beat Ali, everyone wants a piece. When you're the champ, everyone wants to hang.
(getting closer)
They think it'll rub off on 'em.

Spinks is so close, T can smell his hot liquored breath.

MR. T
I hope it doesn't.

LEON SPINKS

You got a mouth on you. I like that. But you run it too much, could get you in trouble.

MR. T

Ain't worried bout that. I take all comers in this town.

LEON SPINKS

This town. Right.

(long drink)

See, folks round here think they fly cuz they stack Chicago money or smash Chicago pussy. But I'll let you in on a little secret.

(beat)

Try stepping in front of bright lights. Screaming fans. Cameras everywhere. Whole country watching. Across from a man who wants nothing more than to make you bleed.

T considers this. And it's true. He and Spinks do swim in entirely different ponds.

LEON SPINKS (CONT'D)

That's when you know if you got what it takes.

(beat)

Or if you just running your mouth.

MR. T

(dead serious)

I got what it takes.

(a smile)

And I'm running my mouth.

Leon likes T's swagger. This guy has something.

LEON SPINKS

I want you to work for me.

MR. T

C'mon man.

LEON SPINKS

I'm serious.

And, indeed, his face shows as much.

MR. T

I got a good thing here at Bats.

LEON SPINKS
You'll have a better thing with me.

Leon inspects T's little silver chain with his dog tags.

LEON SPINKS (CONT'D)
Da fuck is this?

MR. T
From my army days. So I never
forget where I came from.

LEON SPINKS
Maybe that's where you came from.
But this -- this where you goin.

Spinks takes a gold chain off his neck.

MR. T
I can't --

LEON SPINKS
Try it on.

T bows as Leon anoints him with a gold chain, his first.

LEON SPINKS (CONT'D)
Feels good doesn't it. Precious
metal dripping from your neck.
(closer, more intense)
The weight. The shine. You could
get used to it couldn't you?

T stares back at Leon, trying to keep his cards close to the
vest. But this much is clear:

He most definitely could get used to it.

INT. ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY

Phylis has one scoop. T has three.

PHYLIS
A bodyguard? What about the new
restaurant? Calvin and Bitoy?

MR. T
Rising tide lifts all boats.
Besides, I applied to be a cashier
at Woolworth's but they said I
wasn't pretty enough.

PHYLIS
 Maybe you shoulda worn makeup.

Phylis smears ice cream on his nose.

PHYLIS (CONT'D)
 And just so you know, I gave notice
 at Woolworth's.

MR. T
 What? Why didn't you consult me?

PHYLIS
 Consult you?! Did you consult me
 before becoming Leon's guard dog?

MR. T
 I'm his right hand man. And
 besides. That's different.

PHYLIS
 Why? Because I'm a woman?
 (beat)
 Listen. I don't need you to take
 care of me. I make my own money.
 I'm about to finish my MBA.
 You won't be the only one with
 letters in your name.

A beat as the sparring subsides.

MR. T
 I'm proud of you. You're making
 moves. Just wanna make sure I'm
 part of those moves.

PHYLIS
 You know I adore you, T.
 But don't let it go to your head.
 It's big enough already.

MR. T
 Humble ain't in Mr. T's vocabulary.
 Mr. T needs that bigger stage.
 Those brighter lights. Not just the
 Chicago humdrum. Anything worth
 doing is worth overdoing.

PHYLIS
 Since when does Mr. T speak about
 himself in the third person?

MR. T
 That's what makes Mr. T, Mr. T.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. T along with some entourage dudes scour a massive hotel suite, turning over every nook and cranny.

MR. T

Where's the last place you left em?

A bathrobe-clad Spinks is laid out on his large king size bed. He is denture-less and gums his responses.

LEON SPINKS

If I knew that, they'd be in my mouth by now. Dumb ass mahfukka.

MR. T

Aight. We'll find em. Don't stress.

(under his breath)

No one can understand you anyway.

Leon sucks his thumb. T shakes his head. Pathetic.

EXT. HOTEL - ALLEY - NIGHT

T and a big entourage dude sift through a dumpster. Soiled sheets, rotten food, and - what was that? - hopefully a cute little mouse. But most likely not.

MR. T

This some bullshit!

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

You can't suck on the teat without gettin' in the mud.

MR. T

The hell's that mean?

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

Means you the side man. Not the main man. So keep looking.

MR. T

Ain't gonna be the side man long.

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

That's the battle cry of side men the world over.

MR. T

Just waiting for the right moment to seize the crown.

But that time will have to wait.

Instead of a crown, he finds the lost dentures, covered in what is hopefully lobster bisque. But most likely not.

INT. RUNDOWN RESTAURANT - DAY

A WHITE REAL ESTATE AGENT shows Bitoy, Calvin, and T a prospective space for their new restaurant.

The neglect is so strong, you can smell it.

REAL ESTATE AGENT

Previous tenant didn't invest so heavily in upkeep. But that's why it's such a steal.

(taping on a wall)

Got good bones.

Calvin and Bitoy walk around the space, trying to envision their new restaurant. T couldn't care less.

BITOY

Probably have to demo these walls, make room for extra seating.

CALVIN

The kitchen's gonna need all new appliances. New heating/cooling.

REAL ESTATE AGENT

The location does get excellent foot traffic, gentleman.

All four men walk to the windows where they see a group of black POLITICAL ACTIVISTS canvassing and putting up fliers.

REAL ESTATE AGENT (CONT'D)

And the neighborhood is full of...your customer base.

MR. T

Our customer base?

REAL ESTATE AGENT

(struggling)

Afro-Americans.

T's about to teach this punk a lesson about how great food is color-blind. But Calvin grabs his arm.

CALVIN

We'll get back to you ASAP.

EXT. RUNDOWN EMPTY SPACE - SAME

T, Calvin, and Bitoy confab outside the "restaurant."

CALVIN
We can make it work.

BITOY
Does have "good bones." And
services our "customer base."

Calvin and Bitoy chuckle at the agent's tone deaf racial play. T is silent.

CALVIN
What's the matter?

MR. T
This place is crap. All the places
we've seen are crap. We need
bigger. Better. Bolder. Otherwise
why even bother?

CALVIN
Because it'll be ours, man. It'll
be *all ours*.

T shrugs. A YOUNG BLACK ACTIVIST hands out political flyers.

MR. T
The hell? Reverend Jessie Jackson?

ACTIVIST
He's gonna run for president.

BITOY
C'mon now.

ACTIVIST
Someone's gotta be first.

The activist runs off, handing out more fliers. Bitoy and Hollins trash their fliers, hail a cab.

But T stays behind, mulling over the flier. A charismatic black man mounting a grass-roots political campaign in Chicago. That's an audacious and bold play to T.

PRELAP: Sounds of a large crowd.

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Establishing of a large arena.

INT. STADIUM - SAME

A ferocious blood-hungry crowd.

In the ring, Spinks punishes a large Italian bruiser. This is GEORGE MOSTRADONIA (32).

The crowd is very clearly divided along racial lines: white folks cheer for Mostradonia, black folks for Spinks.

T, dressed in a three piece suit, sits with the Spinks camp. He monitors the crowd, not liking what he sees.

MR. T

Got a bad feeling about this.

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

Well, get a good feeling. We're about to get that belt.

(reacting to the ring)

That's it Leon! Keep him on the ropes. One two, one two. Make him pay. One two, one two.

T looks into the crowd. Among the screaming contorted faces, there are loads of paparazzi and press.

This perks T up.

RING.

Spinks puts the final touches on Mostradonia. Two body blows and an uppercut sends the Italian to the ground.

The crowd goes nuts: half in celebration, half in anger.

The REFEREE calls it, Spinks the victor. Beer cans rain down. The entourage escort the champ away from the pre-riot.

As they head towards the bowels of the stadium, a few ANGRY WHITE FANS start shouting at Spinks and company.

Spinks adds fuel to the fire by raising his fist.

T and the entourage try to keep the mob at bay. But it's no use. A scuffle breaks out.

QUICK CUTS:

-Flash bulbs pop.

-Faces hit with fists.

-Bodies thump the ground.

While the entourage rushes Spinks to safety, the press descends on the post-fight brawl. T smells an opportunity.

He hoists one of the felled brawlers by his shirt and bowls him into a group of WHITE RIOTERS, splaying the group all over the floor.

MR. T
Steeeeerike.

Paparazzi train their cameras at the dapper bodyguard.

T unrolls his sleeves. Wipes his brow with a handkerchief. Carefully places it in his suit pocket.

And suavely poses for the photos.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY

At a Marriott, Spinks gives a press conference to some local reporters and paparazzi. T hangs behind him.

LEON SPINKS
I was just doing what I do, you know. Never intended the fight to spill outside the ring.

The press keeps probing but Spinks has had enough. He hates these things.

LEON SPINKS (CONT'D)
Sorry. I gotta get back to training. Talk to my man here.
(to Mr. T)
Have at it.

T relishes the opportunity. And he starts grandstanding.

REPORTER SCRUM
Who are you? What happened out there? Were you scared?

MR. T
Leon Spinks is a warrior.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Spinks pounds a bottle of Courvoisier. T stands watch. Some groupies approach but they don't wanna talk to Spinks. They want T! He hams it up for them.

MR. T (V.O.)
 And there are those who will stop
 at nothing to see him fall.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

Spinks partakes of HOOKERS and blow. T looks on, disgusted.

MR. T (V.O.)
 So as his protector, it is my duty
 to guard him at all costs.

INT. GYM - DAY

Spinks trains. He's definitely lost a step. But not T, who, sports a three piece and more gold chains. He gives an interview to a REPORTER, regaling him with stories.

MR. T (V.O.)
 And when summoned, I answer the
 call. For I am my brother's keeper.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - PRESS CONFERENCE - SAME

The press now snaps photos of T!

MR. T
 Aside from the Lord above, there is
 no protection greater than I: Mr. T

FLASHBULB POP takes us to --

EXT. DINGBATS - DAY

Calvin and Bitoy sit outside the club in the early afternoon sunlight. They sip coffee and read the Tribune.

CALVIN
 Hole. Lee. Shit.

Bitoy looks over Calvin's shoulder:

INSERT of T at the fight, looking fierce and fly and a force to be reckoned with.

BITOY

(reading)

Most of the action took place outside of the ring after Mostradonia was felled in the sixth. The melee, however, was contained by a bodyguard named Mr. T, pictured above. He's been spotted all over town with Spinks. We'll be keeping an eye on this promising young upstart.

CALVIN

Our boy's famous.

BITOY

Chicago famous.

CALVIN

Still.

BITOY

Still.

A stretch limo pulls up and parks in a loading-only zone.

BITOY (CONT'D)

Hell no. You can't park here, man.

The window lowers down revealing T, smiling like a shark.

INT./EXT. LIMO - DAY

T pours cognac into three chalices as they drive around. We note that he has on more gold chains.

CALVIN

(re: the chains)

What's up with the hardware?

MR. T

You want to have success you gotta project success. So I've started livin' by the golden rule: The man with the most gold rules.

Calvin and Bitoy ponder T's newfound philosophy.

BITOY

Save some gold for us!

MR. T

Course. I move up, y'all move up.

CALVIN
Speaking of, I signed the lease.

MR. T
Lease?

CALVIN
Taking Care of Business. Our
restaurant. Soft open next week.
Get that word of mouth going.

Calvin shows T a flyer announcing the opening of TCB. It offers up: *an appearance by Chicago's very own Mr. T!*

MR. T
TCB. Right. Let's take care of that
business later. Now we celebrate.

The three men cheers their newfound success.
But only one of them has his photo in the paper.

EXT. DINGBATS - NIGHT

Spinks gets out of a limo. T clears a path for the fighter.
But the fans aren't there for Spinks. They're there for T.

And he works it. Signing autographs, slapping backs, kissing
cheeks. Spinks grows impatient.

SPINKS
C'mon nigga. I ain't payin you to
style and profile.

MR. T
One second.

SPINKS
Not one second. Now. You testing my
patience, little man.

Little man? T pivots on his spats and faces the heavyweight.

MR. T
You're not in your ring anymore,
Leon. You're in mine.

Spinks stares him down. Then heads inside, choosing not to
put too fine a point (or punch) on it.

Bitoy and Ron watch from the side.

BITOY

Look like the sideshow's become the
main attraction.

POP! FLASH!

The paparazzo T met in the club now snaps photos of him.

Seems like everyone wants a piece of T.

INT./EXT. CAR - SAME

Parked down the block is a truck with its headlights off.

Lou Viner, the aggrieved bruiser from T's first night at Dingbat's, watches from the driver's seat.

And then peels out.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

T sports a fur coat and flashy shoes. As he gets ready, he speaks on a long corded phone, pacing around.

In the background, the TV is tuned to a speech by Jesse Jackson, who is speaking about the need for the Democratic party to empower young black entrepreneurs and businessmen.

MR. T

No Leon. That's what I'm worth. You got a problem, find someone else.

(listening)

I'm sure there are plenty of photogenic Afrocentric charismatic diplomatic idealistic militaristic supercalifragilistic bodyguards around town.

(listening)

Not what I'm saying. No. No. No!

(listening)

You have a think on it.

He hangs up.

And while Jackson continues his call for black empowerment, T opens a closet revealing more gold chains than a Zales.

JESSE JACKSON (ON TV)

Black Americans will be acknowledged. Will be courted. Will be respected. For I am my brother's keeper and he is mine.

And now we're let in on a truly special ritual:

T puts on gold chain, after gold chain, after gold chain. He finally looks up in a mirror, armored and brilliant.

MR. T

I will be respected.

EXT./INT. LIMO - NIGHT

T hops into a limo. And, corresponding to his largesse, this one is far more ostentatious than the previous one.

Racing stripes. Neon ground effects outside. A disco ball inside. Black lights illuminating a full bar.

Tasteful? No. Insanely over the top? Yes.

A DRIVER with a feathered earring lowers the partition.

DRIVER

Where we headed to this evening?

T slowly looks up, a mischievous gleam in his eye.

EXT. TCB RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The formerly rundown space has been converted into a stylish restaurant. And Bitoy and Calvin preside over the launch.

The promise of an appearance by Mr. T has brought out PRESS, FANS, and GROUPIES, all hoping to catch a glimpse of Chicago's Native Son. Who is nowhere to be found.

BITOY

The hell is he?

CALVIN

He'll show. I'm sure he just got tied up. He'll show.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Phylis walks out of her apartment complex. She's dressed nicely but conservatively for the TCB opening.

MR. T (O.S.)

Need a ride?

She looks up to see T leaning against the limo. He now sports the feathered earring.

PHYLIS
What's all this?

MR. T
If you're gonna jump in the pool,
why not make a splash?

PHYLIS
Maybe a swan dive would be more
elegant than a cannonball?

MR. T
Not my style.

PHYLIS
(noting the feather)
And this is?

MR. T
I won't apologize for my true
colors being brighter than the
average man's dull hues.
(twists the knife)
Average woman's, too.

This stings.

PHYLIS
I like who I am. And I sure don't
feel the need to wear a mask every
time I step outside.

MR. T
The hell you talking about?

PHYLIS
(re: the getup)
I'm talking about this.
(re: the car)
This.
(beat)
All of it. Your persona is taking
over your person.

He gets right up close to her. Within striking distance.

MR. T
You riding with me or not?

After a tense staring contest.

PHYLIS
Good luck at the opening.

He strides back to the limo and slams the door.

EXT. TCB RESTAURANT - SAME

The crowd starts to grow impatient. Calvin hands out free samples from their menu. Bitoy hands out free drinks.

BITOY
That mutherfucker.

CALVIN
He'll show. He gave his word.
(to the crowd)
Mr. T is on his way. In the mean
time, enjoy our Jibarito sandwich.

Calvin hands out the delicious Puerto Rican delicacy. One is given to a white man with a low slung cap. He drops it in disgust on the ground, grinds it with his boot.

In which he has tucked a Colt Hammerless .45.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

T has picked up a few new friends; notorious Chicago pimp DON 'MAGIC' JUAN and three of his SEXY EMPLOYEES.

DON MAGIC JUAN
See, a king need three things. A
faithful steed. Loyal subjects. And
a secure castle. Otherwise his
kingdom is in danger.

MR. T
My kingdom is just splendid.

T polishes off a bottle of cognac, throws it out the window.

DRIVER
Guys. Please refrain from --

MR. T
Shut the fuck up and drive.
(beat)
Hard to get a faithful steed in
Chicago, god damn!

EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - SAME

The limo cruises past the Robert Taylor projects, T's old home. The run down government housing reflects over --

EXT. LIMO - WINDOW - SAME

T looks out ruefully at the projects as they swim by his face. We push closer and closer and closer.

EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR/INT. LIMO - SAME

The limo party kicks into high gear. A few more passengers. A crack pipe passed around. Pills and powders of all stripes.

The sunroof opens. And out pops Mr. T.

MR. T

Y'all niggas ain't just live in the ghetto. The ghetto's livin' in you. No one can imprison a man if his mind is free! You hear me?

A few project denizens scream their worship. And a few stare at the spectacle that against all odds emerged out of this abject poverty.

EXT. TCB RESTAURANT - LATER

T staggers out of the limo with a bottle of champagne. Don Magic Juan follows. Calvin approaches him with urgency.

CALVIN

We need to do something bout this!

DON MAGIC JUAN

Damn right. This a party or a wake?

CALVIN

(pulling T aside)

It's getting outta control. How they gonna experience the restaurant if we don't --

MR. T

Restaurant? These folks ain't here for a restaurant. They here for *me*!

T climbs up on a nearby table. The unruly crowd goes nuts.

MR. T (CONT'D)

Have a good look. Have a good look, Chicago. Soak. It. In. Because I'm here for a good time --

A few members of the crowd start shoving each other, trying to touch their gold-chained hero.

MR. T (CONT'D)
 -- not a long time.

T smashes his bottle on the ground. A shoving match breaks out near the front. Bitoy and Calvin try to contain it.

Low Slung Cap pushes through the mosh pit. His hat is knocked off finally revealing his identity: Lou Viner.

Someone throws a brick into the window. Shattered glass sprays everywhere. A riot erupts.

T stage dives from the bench directly into the crowd, flattening a half dozen people. When he gets up he sees -

Lou.

They lock eyes.

Lou reaches for his pistol, aims at T.

BITOY
 (running)
 No!

A SHOT RINGS OUT.

The crowd scatters. Lou runs off into the night.

T looks at his chest: no sign of injury.

And then to the ground: Bitoy, clutching his stomach.

BITOY (CONT'D)
 (straining)
 I...I'm --

CALVIN
 Call an ambulance!

MR. T
 No time.

T runs to the limo.

MR. T (CONT'D)
 We got an emergency.

DRIVER
 No sir. I don't get paid to --

With one hand, T grabs him and throws him out.

And just then, a DOCTOR comes through the doors.

T and Calvin look up, fear in their eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL - ROOM - SAME

Bitoy is laid up with tubes and IV's and stitches. He opens his eyes to find his two best friends.

BITOY

Hell of an opening night, huh?

T shakes his head.

MR. T

That man's days are numbered.

BITOY

I been stabbed, punched, kicked,
and bitten. May as well add shot.

(beat)

What happened to you, T? Where were
you? We needed you there.

T opens his mouth. But for once, the gift of gab eludes him.

Bitoy puts his hand on T's shoulder, too much pride to hang him out to dry any more than necessary.

BITOY (CONT'D)

I need a favor.

MR. T

Anything. *Anything*. Name it.

BITOY

Don't tell anyone I'm here.

(beat)

Don't want these chicks I'm messing
with to visit at the same time.

That'd be dicey.

T and Bitoy look at each other, smile.

CALVIN

Rest up, playboy. You'll be on your
feet spittin' game in no time.

EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

T and Calvin watch the sun rise. It should be a beautiful moment. But the painful memory of the night still lingers.

MR. T
We lucked out. Few inches and he
woulda been a goner.

CALVIN
(despondent)
Yeah. Lucky us.

MR. T
C'mon. Let me buy you breakfast.

Calvin pushes him. Hard.

CALVIN
Breakfast? I don't want breakfast.
Save your fuckin breakfast, okay.
(pushes him again)
I'm sick of it. The suits, the
shoes, the chains, the attitude.
All of it. I don't want anything to
do with Mr. T anymore.

MR. T
Calvin. You ain't seein' clearly.

Calvin gets right up in his face. About to clean his clock.

CALVIN
I think I see pretty clearly.

He points a finger dead in T's chest.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
I see *exactly* who you are.
(beat)
Stay away from me.

Calvin walks away angrily.

And there's nothing T can do or say to bring him back.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Adorned with the trappings of recent success: A larger TV,
expensive stereo equipment, flashy clothing.

T walks in.

PHYLIS (O.S.)
T.

He looks up to find Phylis, teary-eyed.

MR. T
What are you --

PHYLIS
I heard about Bitoy. I'm sorry.

They hug. He stays in her embrace, his only comfort.

MR. T
I'll make it right. Gonna make all
of it right. That I promise.

And that's when he sees: her suitcase. Half packed.

PHYLIS
I --

He angrily waves her farewell explanation away.

MR. T
Save it. Got business to attend to.

He furiously heads to --

THE BEDROOM.

T roots around his closet, strewing clothing everywhere. He finds a shoebox. Which he opens to reveal a pistol.

PHYLIS
You wanna ruin your life again?

MR. T
This is about honor. About respect.

PHYLIS
Please. This is about ego. A
bruised fragile ego.

T slams the wall, barely missing Phylis' face.

MR. T
The man saved my life. Took a
bullet for me. If I am not my
brother's keeper, who will be mine?

Phylis gathers the rest of her things before T can do any more damage to the apartment. Or to himself. Or to her.

MR. T (CONT'D)
Tell me! Tell me Phylis. You know
so much, then tell me that. Huh?
(MORE)

MR. T (CONT'D)
Huh?!? If I am not my brother's
keeper, who will be mine?

But she's out the door.

T faces the family portrait. All he wants is their respect,
their adoration, their love. From them. From everyone.

But right now he's just a furious man. Alone in a room with a
gun. And he takes a long hard look at the weapon in his hand.

Then smashes the framed photo with the butt.

FADE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

Laying fetal on the couch, T slowly opens his eyes.
Maybe it was just a nightmare?

MR. T
Phylis?

No answer.

And then he sees his bloody clothing from the night before,
sending a shudder down his back.

EXT. CHICAGO WATERFRONT - DAWN

As the sun rises over Lake Michigan, the Chicago skyline is
revealed in silhouette. It's peaceful and serene.

But it stands in sharp contrast to T as he walks along the
waterfront, his mind turbulent with shame and self-doubt.

And as he walks, we see the city change block by block. From
extreme poverty to extreme wealth and back again.

A man's destiny is never rock solid in the windy city.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Reverend Hardy once again at the podium. A rapt congregation
listen to his impassioned words.

REVEREND HARDY
In times of crisis, times of pain,
you can rely on the love of God.

T shuffles into the church, pads over to a corner.

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)
 Indeed, it is especially in these
 trying times, times of suffering,
 times of doubt, times of fear -
 that you must not avert your gaze.

T sees it plain: Here's a man who commands an audience,
 without bluster or bravado.

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)
 It is precisely in this time that
 you must look into the light and
 feel his love.

And something stirs in T.

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)
 For it will set you free.

INT. CHURCH - OFFICE - LATER

T paces outside of the church's modest office area.

There are photos of a young Reverend Hardy at the March on
 Washington. With Jesse Jackson. Meeting with Dr. King.

REVEREND HARDY (O.S.)
 Civil rights movement was born in
 the church.

T turns around, startled.

MR. T
 I didn't realize you were...I'm
 Phylis's...Wondering if she's been -

REVEREND HARDY
 I know who you are. I'm afraid I
 haven't seen her.

T smiles shyly. Looks at some of the religious paraphernalia.

MR. T
 My father was a preacher.

REVEREND HARDY
 That right?

MR. T
 Seminary school and everything. But
 he got drafted. Went to Vietnam.

(MORE)

MR. T (CONT'D)

Used to say 'our debt to the country's just as important as our debt to God.'

(shaking his head)

Country didn't feel the same way though. After he came home, never could quite get a foothold. No work. No money. No respect.

(beat)

I vowed to never go down like that.

Hardy puts his hand on T's shoulder.

REVEREND HARDY

'To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.'

T's never heard the Baldwin quote. But it sure floors him.

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)

You know, I think you could find real comfort here. Real sanctuary.

MR. T

Spent half my childhood in Church. The Lord'll be just fine I never set foot in one again.

REVEREND HARDY

Church isn't just a physical space. It's an idea. It's service, it's gratitude, it's love.

MR. T

I was just looking for my girl. Thanks for your time, Reverend.

T offers his hand. Hardy shakes it. But doesn't let go.

REVEREND HARDY

I been doing this a long time. Long time. And I come to find that people come here for one of two reasons: either because they lost something or they found something.

Hardy looks deep into T's eyes. And sees what we see: a frightened man adrift at sea, desperate for safe harbor.

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)

Something you need to see.

INT. HOSPITAL - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Hardy and T walk in. A NURSE greets the reverend.

NURSE
They're waiting for you.

MR. T
I'm gonna hang back.

Hardy pushes him forward.

PEDIATRIC CANCER WARD - SAME

KIDS, ranging from 8 to 14, populate the hallway. A few are tethered to IV's. Some are bald. Most are frail. And we note that the majority are black or Hispanic.

The sickness is palpable, overwhelming.

T is not prepared for this. He takes the reverend aside.

MR. T
What do we...do?

REVEREND HARDY
You don't need to *do* anything. You just need to *be Mr. T*.

T looks to Hardy: Who exactly is that?

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)
C'mon.

The reverend says hello to some of the CHILDREN, leaving T alone, nervous, on unsure footing.

GIRL VOICE (O.S.)
Who are you?

T turns around to find a YOUNG BOY and YOUNG GIRL. They look up in wonder at this flamboyant man.

MR. T
I'm Mr. T.

YOUNG GIRL
Mr. T?

MR. T
That's right. First name Mister. Middle name period. Last name T.
(MORE)

MR. T (CONT'D)

(beat)

Mr. T. That's me.

The two kids giggle a bit.

YOUNG BOY

Mr. T. That's silly.

MR. T

Oh you think that's silly? Last man
thought my name was silly ended up
feasting on a knuckle sandwich.

(eating his fist)

Yum yum yum yum yum yum.

The kids, despite their difficult reality, beam with joy,
eating up T's larger-than-life persona. And T can feel this
very special alchemy: his ability to turn a sad child happy.

This sacred power - and the responsibility to nurture it -
will stay with him for the rest of his life.

INT. A DIFFERENT HOSPITAL - DAY

Bitoy works with a PHYSICAL THERAPIST. Calvin stands nearby,
encouraging the slow progress. T comes in.

And without a word, Calvin leaves.

MR. T

Calvin?

He turns to Bitoy.

BITOY

We all make mistakes. How you deal
with them makes the difference.

MR. T

And here I thought you were just a
face. Turns out you a brain too.

BITOY

Sadly not much of a body right now.

MR. T

Slow and steady, man. You'll be
good as new in no time at all.

(re: the therapist)

Maybe she can fix your dancing.

BITOY
She's a physical therapist. Not a
miracle worker.

The two men smile. The mood a bit lighter. But T's got
something heavy to get off his chest.

MR. T
What happened the other night. That
was...I never properly thanked you.

BITOY
C'mon. You woulda done the same.

MR. T
You saved my life. And it won't be
in vain. That I promise.

Bitoy narrows in on him.

BITOY
You wanna repay me? Then forget
about that punk. Forget about eye
for an eye. Flip the script, T.

T nods. Everything in him says: Fight. Never back down.
But he sees the wisdom.

BITOY (CONT'D)
Just like I'm learning to stand
tall on my own, you gotta learn how
to stand tall on your own.

PHYSICAL THERAPIST
If you will excuse us, sir, we have
some work to do.

MR. T
So do I. So do I.

T hugs Bitoy and leaves.

HALLWAY.

T sees Calvin a few yards away.

He nods at him. Calvin nods back.

It's not reconciliation, but it'll have to do for now.

EXT. CITY STEET - DAY

Just like the opening montage where the Tureauds walked to Church, T takes in the sights and sounds of Chicago.

But this time, he's all alone.

Sure, the city still hums: immigrants and native sons, businessmen and homeless, con men and the recently conned.

Chicago takes all comers.

But the question from when he was Lawrence still remains:

Where does he fit in?

And that's when he comes across --

INT. CHURCH - DAY

CHOIR

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

A choir enthusiastically sings. T watches from the back, overwhelmed by the community, the pageantry, the energy.

He joins a section near the back and starts clapping in beat.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

T claps as one of the SICK KIDS performs a dance routine.

MR. T

There you go! There you go! There you go! My turn.

T does an insane dance which cracks the kids up.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - ANOTHER DAY

T now dances in the choir. Singing, clapping, and having a ball. A lightness to him.

A woman grabs his hand and raises it high. Tight on their hands, joined together.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ANOTHER DAY

A large black hand and a small one.

T "arm wrestles" one of the sick kids, making it competitive.

But then all of a sudden, T lets the sick kid come from behind and pin T's arm to the bed.

T falls down onto the ground.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH OFFICES - LATER

T lays on a couch. He's found a new home.

REVEREND HARDY

All who stray, all who sin, the
Lord accepts back into his flock.

MR. T

But baptized?

REVEREND HARDY

It's not your past doubt that
defines you. It's your current
faith. And you gotta commemorate
it. Make it official. Dot the I's,
cross the T's.

MR. T

Cross the T's. I like that.

He crosses himself.

MR. T (CONT'D)

Wonder what my Pops would say if he
could see me now.

REVEREND HARDY

I bet he'd be proud of you.
Just like I'm proud of you.

T gets a bit choked up. Having paternal validation is not
something he's used to.

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)

It would mean a lot to the young
brothers and sisters in our
congregation, seeing a man of your
acclaim doing this.

T mulls it over. Maybe this is redemption. Rebirth.

MR. T

Okay. But we do it the Mr. T way.

REVEREND HARDY

The Mr. T way?

And off that quintessential grin we cut to --

INT. DINGBATS - DAY

Ron walks around the club with a slick producer who wears a blazer and turtleneck. This is DEVIN BERRY (late 30's).

RON BRISKMAN

Bats is perfect for a documentary.

DEVIN BERRY

I'm scouting for a *location*.

RON BRISKMAN

Hey, just spitballing here. You're the TV hotshot. I'm just Chicago's premiere nightlife impresario.

Devin looks at the ceiling.

DEVIN BERRY

Not a ton of room to rig lights.

RON BRISKMAN

You kidding me? You want lights?

Ron flips a switch. A smoke machine spews out fog. Electric lights pulse and strobe.

RON BRISKMAN (CONT'D)

Pretty sweet huh?

Right then, T pushes through the door.

He's backlit by the laser glow. We pan up, revealing him in a gorgeous tailored suit. He looks amazing.

MR. T

Ron, I need a favor. I wanna throw a party. After my baptism.

RON BRISKMAN

Baptism? You?

MR. T

Not just any baptism. But the baptism of the year! We gonna blow the steeple off the church!

RON BRISKMAN

Not sure that's how baptisms work.

MR. T

If committing to God ain't a reason to celebrate, I don't know what is.

Ron rubs his meaty face.

RON BRISKMAN

You can have the space. But you pay the food and bar.

T pulls Ron into a bear hug.

MR. T

My man!

T whirlwinds out. Meanwhile, Devin Berry, the slick producer, is completely awestruck at this force of nature.

DEVIN BERRY

What kinda baptism has an afterparty?

RON BRISKMAN

(shaking his head)
Mr. T's.

EXT. DINGBATS - SAME

T waits outside for a cab. Devin joins him. Hands out a card.

DEVIN

Devin Berry.

MR. T

NBC?

DEVIN BERRY

I'm a television producer. Scouting locations for a new show.

(beat)

World's Toughest Bouncer. Maybe you'd be interested?

MR. T
 Bouncer? I ain't no bouncer.
 (that smile)
 I'm Mr. T.

DEVIN BERRY
 You'd be perfect for it.

MR. T
 That turtleneck cutting off your
 circulation? I shake, rattle, and
 roll. But I don't bounce. Those
 days are over.

T goes to hail a cab. But Devin cuts him off.

DEVIN BERRY
 Here are some of the guys we've got
 so far. Check em out.

Devin reaches into his suitcase and presents T with some
 headshots/mugshots of the show's "contestants."

We see burly men of all shapes and one size: BIG.

MR. T
 (perusing the stack)
 Not a single brother in the mix.

DEVIN BERRY
 Always gotta be a first.

This stops T in his tracks. But just for a moment. And as a
 cab approaches, he's in the wind.

MR. T
 Good luck with your show.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Bright light pours through stained glass windows.

A large crowd of well dressed CONGREGANTS mill about in the
 pews. T's baptism is a big deal in Chicago.

BACKSTAGE.

Hardy prepares his remarks. T, dressed in a sharp suit,
 nervously paces back and forth. He looks out into the crowd.

REVEREND HARDY
 You alright?

MR. T
Just hoped my family would come.

Hardy gets up. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

REVEREND HARDY
You have a bigger family now.

PEW - LATER.

T with Reverend Hardy. A tub of water in front of them.

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)
Do you accept Jesus Christ as your
Lord and Savior?

MR. T
I do.

REVEREND HARDY
Then upon your profession of faith,
I baptize you in the name of the
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

T takes a deep breath, looks around. Loads of well wishers.
But no Tureauds. No Calvin. No Bitoy. And no Phylis.

The Reverend gently dunks him in the tank.

UNDERWATER.

The sound cuts out.

It's a rare quiet moment for T. It's calmer here. More
manageable. But he knows he can't stay. And so --

Finally, T rises from the tub, water streaming down his body.

The congregation applauds passionately and church members,
fans, and the Chicago glitterati crowd the stage.

And then we see a hand on his back.

HER VOICE (O.S.)
Congratulations.

He turns around. And there she is: Phylis.

EXT. CHURCH - SAME

MR. T
Why'd you come?

PHYLIS
To congratulate you.

MR. T
For what? Getting dunked in water?

PHYLIS
For taking a risk. Committing to a higher power isn't easy. Requires faith, humility, and sacrifice.
(beat)
So I can only imagine how tough this was for you.

She smiles at him. And he takes another risk.

MR. T
So you'll come back? It'll be different now. *I'm* different now.

PHYLIS
We're traveling on different roads.

MR. T
Only reason I'm here is you. Please? Phylis? Please. I need you.

She gives him a hug. But no answer.

T looks past the Church. It's a beautiful day, sunlight pouring down from above. But it's tinged bittersweet for T.

MR. T (CONT'D)
I spent so much of my life vowing I'd never be like my father.
(beat)
And now that he's no longer here, I'd give anything - any damn thing - for just one look from him that says: Lawrence, you did ok.

T looks through the sun dappled trees.

MR. T (CONT'D)
But he's no longer here. And neither is Lawrence.
(beat)
Just Mr. T.

PHYLIS
Once the world gets a load of Mr. T, they won't know what hit em.

Phylis kisses his cheek. Heads to her car.

MR. T

Phylis!

She turns around. A long moment between them. So much that he wants to say. But he settles for --

MR. T (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming.

She blows a kiss at him. He grabs it. And holds it tight.

EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DAY

T walks through his old stomping grounds.

He's changed. But the projects sure haven't.

He approaches a corner where a few guys throw dice against a wall. His two brothers, Gus and Nate Jr., are in the mix.

NATE JR.

Look who it is.

GUS

What's good, Lawrence?

MR. T

Mr. T.

Gus and Nate Jr. crack up.

NATE JR.

Right. Mister T. I forgot.

GUS

Thought you just hung round the Gold Coast? Pretending you one thing when you actually another.

NATE JR.

Uppity ass nigga.

MR. T

Good to see you too.

GUS

Why you even come around here?

MR. T

Because this place is still a part of me. Whether I like it or not.

GUS
If you say so.

Nate Jr. and Gus keep shooting dice. T can't get through to them. So he walks away. But something occurs to him --

MR. T
What I did? All those years back.
(beat)
Wasn't your fault.

Nate Jr. and Gus look up at him. This is not something they talk about. Unwritten rule.

MR. T (CONT'D)
Just wanted you to know.

And with that, he heads inside.

INT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - SAME

The elevator. Out of commission. Always out of commission.

So he calmly takes the steps till he's at the floor, his floor. After a deliberative moment, he knocks on a door.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

T and Cora drink tea.

CORA
It's good to see you, Lawrence.

He allows it. From her. But only from her.

MR. T
Place looks the same.

CORA
Not much changes around here.
But you on the other hand.

MR. T
Trying to stand out in a world that
wants you to blend in.

CORA
(lovingly)
And you sure do. You sure do.

T smiles. He sees a political flyer for Jesse Jackson on a nearby table. He picks it up, frowns skeptically.

CORA (CONT'D)
 Reverend been up and down these
 projects. Puttin' in the work.

MR. T
 Heard he's gunning for president.

CORA
 First time for everything.

Cora comes in close. A secret.

CORA (CONT'D)
 Like watching your youngest son
 gets baptized.

MR. T
 What are you talking about?

CORA
 I got the invitation. Couldn't
 believe it. Had to see for myself.

MR. T
 (flabbergasted)
 Why didn't -- How come --

CORA
 It was a beautiful ceremony.
 (laughing)
 The boy whom I couldn't beg to sit
 still in Church. Getting baptized.
 (beat)
 And what an event. Musta been half
 of Chicago in that church! Seems
 like this whole town loves Mr. T.
 (a source of pride)
 But I loved him even when he was
 just Lawrence.

He tries to hold back the tears.

MR. T
 No one ever paid any attention to
 Lawrence. No one cared about him.
 (beat)
 But they pay attention to Mr. T.
 They respect Mr. T.
 (beat)
 And if they don't? Well, they sure
 as hell will. That's a fact.

Cora comes in close.

CORA

Your father and I knew you were bigger than these walls. Than this block. We knew we couldn't contain you. That you'd make it outta here. That you'd make a difference. That you'd dream big dreams.

She grabs his face in her hands.

CORA (CONT'D)

But how those dreams turn real.
 (touching his heart)
 How you take what's in here and bring it out there. That's not up to us. None of us.
 (whispering in his ear)
 It's up to you.

She releases his face. And holds his hands.

T realizes just how much his Mom actually did see him. And what was inside him -- and that she still does.

And something occurs to him.

He picks up the Jesse Jackson flyer. Contemplates the audacity you must have to be black and mount a campaign for President in the early 1980's.

MR. T

(quietly)
 First time for everything.

EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DUSK

T walks to a nearby payphone. He picks up the receiver.

He looks back at the projects: they nearly swallowed him up, devoured him whole.

And in this moment he knows - KNOWS - that this is the last time he'll ever set foot here.

He fishes out a card from his wallet: Devin Berry. NBC.

INT. PEDIATRIC CANCER WARD - DAY

The sick children are huddled around T, in total awe.

SICK BOY

World's Toughest Bouncer?

MR. T

That's right. The prize money goes to this hospital. This floor. This is for you. For all y'all.

Hardy watches T with the kids. He smiles proudly.

MR. T (CONT'D)

But I need your support. I need you to believe in me. Because I believe in you. And I can't be strong unless y'all are strong. Ya dig?

The kids nod earnestly.

MR. T (CONT'D)

(deadly serious)

Now listen up. And listen good. Because I have two words for you. Two words that gonna change your life. Right here. And right now.

(beat)

Are you listening?

The crowd is rapt, hanging on his every word.

MR. T (CONT'D)

DANCE PARTY!!!

Hardy presses play on a boom box.

Earth, Wind, and Fire's "Boogie Wonderland" fills the once sterile hospital.

T spins around, does his best Saturday Night Fever.

The kids scream and dance, their pain temporarily banished by this charismatic man. He cheers them on.

MR. T (CONT'D)

There you go, there you go, there you go! Any one got the number of a good linoleum supplier? This floor's been demolished!

Everyone's having a ball. Except for one pale girl in the corner. This is CHLOE (12).

MR. T (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

CHLOE

Don't feel like dancing.

MR. T
 Maybe cuz you haven't found the
 right partner yet.

T kneels down and holds out his hand. She doesn't budge.

CHLOE
 Easy for you to have a good time.
 You can leave whenever you want.
 Not us though.

Hardy taps T on the shoulder. There's a small camera crew
 there from a local news station.

The camera crew snaps some photos of T with the kids.

T looks over at Chloe who watches him intently.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
 Make sure to smile.

She walks away. T continues to play with the children as the
 cameras click away. But her words gnaw at him.

INT. TCB'S - KITCHEN - DAY

The restaurant. Fixed up and now open for business.
 Calvin chops vegetables. T comes around the corner.

MR. T
 What's cooking?

Calvin looks up, then back to the task at hand. He's not
 ready to let T off the hook.

CALVIN
 Bouillabaisse.

MR. T
 If it tastes half as good as it
 smells, you got a winner.

CALVIN
 Good to know.

A long beat.

MR. T
 Calvin. I --

CALVIN
 You got some nerve, man. We
 supported you, T.
 (MORE)

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Even when it didn't make sense.
Even when we knew - we knew! - you
were looking out for number one.
But we believed in you.

(beat)

As foolish as that may be.

T wants to clap back. But he takes a different approach.

MR. T

You're right. I owe you an apology.
I took you for granted. I'm sorry.

CALVIN

An apology. From Mr. T. Never
thought the day would come.

MR. T

Just keep it under wraps. Got a
reputation to uphold.

(beat)

But I mean it, Calvin. I owe you.

CALVIN

Yeah? Well, there is something you
can do for me.

MR. T

Anything. Name it.

Calvin hands him a few onions. And a paring knife. T smiles.

MR. T (CONT'D)

I got you.

T rolls up his sleeves. Starts dicing.

CALVIN

Ron told me you're gonna be on TV.

MR. T

World's Toughest Bouncer. I'll
prolly get my ass whooped. But we
can parlay the exposure into
raising funds for the hospital.

CALVIN

That's good to hear, man. The
giving back part. Not the ass
whoopin' part.

MR. T
 (shrugs)
 I'm outta shape. Let my head get
 too big. Neglected my body.

Calvin sees his turn, his self-awareness.

CALVIN
 Then we gotta get you back in
 fighting shape.

MR. T
 We?

CALVIN
 You reppin' Bats. You reppin' TCB.
 Hell, you reppin' Chicago. Can't
 have you makin' us look bad.

MR. T
 You'd do that for me?

Calvin looks at his friend. He'd still do anything for him.

CALVIN
 Don't forget the little people when
 you king.

T smiles, the onions giving him cover for his watery eyes.

EXT. CITY STREET - EARLY MORNING

Calvin and T run as the city sleep.

CALVIN
 When I'm done with you, you'll have
 a legitimate claim to World's
 Toughest Bouncer.

MR. T
 Nothing gonna stop me.

CALVIN
 We'll see bout that.

They approach a condemned building boarded up with planks.
 Calvin pulls some off to make an entrance.

MR. T
 What we doing here?

CALVIN
 C'mon.

INT. CONDEMNED BUILDING - SAME

Light streams through the cracks. Calvin leads T through the dilapidated building.

CALVIN

Most of these guys are bigger than you. Stronger than you. But we got a secret weapon.

Calvin zips open his fanny pack (it's the 80's!) and pulls out a few cloves of garlic.

MR. T

The hell is this?

CALVIN

Eat it.

MR. T

Eat it?

CALVIN

It'll make you angry. An angry Mr. T is a force to be reckoned with.

T doesn't like it. Not one bit. But he'll do it.

He grabs a clove. And chomps it down.

We linger on his pained contorted face.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Taste the pain. Does it control you? Or do you control it?

The veins in T's head bulge. But he soldiers on.

MR. T

I'm so mad I could kill a brick or stab a rock!

Calvin walks over to a piece of dry wall. He pushes on it, testing its durability.

CALVIN

We'll see bout that.

(beat)

Most people encounter an obstacle? They move over it. Or under it. Or around it. But not Mr. T.

T takes a deep breath.

ABANDONED BUILDING - LATER.

An empty room with copper wires hanging from the ceiling.

All of a sudden, T comes crashing through the wall, falling onto the dusty ground. He's covered in dry wall.

Calvin peaks his head through the Mr. T-shaped hole.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Thatta boy. Once we're done with this floor, we can do the basement.

T wipes his dusty face: you fucking kidding me?

BEGIN BREAK THROUGH MONTAGE.

An empty room.

T pummels through the wall and again falls on the ground. Calvin picks him up, dusts him off.

Another room.

T bursts through the wall, this time upright.

A third room.

T breaks through the close wall and keep running till he breaks through the far wall. Calvin applauds.

Cross section of the building.

We rapidly dolly with T as he breaks through wall after wall after wall, not even stopping to catch his breath.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SUNSET

T and Calvin skip stones over the majestic lake.

CALVIN

You ready for this?

MR. T

These guys won't know what hit em.

(beat)

Can't thank you enough.

CALVIN

Just make us proud.

MR. T

No doubt. We going places, homeboy.

CALVIN

Yeah right. "We."

MR. T

Calvin, I mean it. I go to the top,
you go to the top.

Calvin skips a stone. He knows the score. He's not a fool.

CALVIN

Back in the day? All I ever hoped
for was to make it out the Greens
in one piece.

(beat)

Never thought I could be a cook. Or
a chef. Or own a restaurant. To
live a life beyond what was right
there in front of my face.

(beat)

It just never occurred to me. A
poor black kid in the north side of
Chicago just fighting to survive.

Calvin looks at his friend.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Win or lose, big things still
comin' your way. I know that. And
you know that. Life will go on
regardless of who is the World's
Toughest Bouncer. How much does one
measly TV show mean anyway?

(beat)

Well. To that kid in the projects.
That kid who doesn't realize that a
black man can make something of
himself in this world. Something
big. Something special.

(beat)

To him?

(beat)

To him...it means everything.

Calvin walks away leaving T alone. But not really alone.

He's on the shoulders of all who came before him.

And, for maybe the first time, he knows it.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

The TV is on, tuned to T's favorite: The Nature Channel.

TV SCREEN: A lion roars on the African plains.

T is calm. Methodical.

He pulls his old combat boots from his army days out of his closet. Laces em up.

TV SCREEN: A lion chases a heard of wildebeests.

Now the chains. All of em. He throws em on carefully, one after the other after the other. Commemorating Spinks and Dingbats and that bouncer life.

And then something stops him in his tracks.

TV SCREEN: The Mandinka tribe of West Africa on a hunt.

PBS NARRATOR (ON TV)

Noted for their distinct dress and hair, the Mandinka tribe of Mali has remained true to their indigenous ways in spite of the encroachment of the West.

TV SCREEN: We see the tribe members carefully stalking antelopes. They all wear MOHAWKS.

We push close on T's face.

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

We hear a buzzing.

T looks in the mirror.

His nostrils flare. Ferocity oozes out of him.

And now the buzzing redlines, distorting, as T drags the clippers over his Afro.

Clumps fall off like shell casings from a machine gun.

Until finally the last bit is gone.

His head pops back into frame, the mohawk complete.

And now more then ever before, we can see it --

First name: Mister. Middle name: Period. Last name: T.

EXT. TV STUDIO - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Contestants, fans, crew, and executives stream in.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

A studio set outfitted with different "contest stations" a la *American Gladiator*.

CAMERAMEN push mobile tripods mounted with oversized Ikegama BetaCams around the perimeter.

In this circus-like atmosphere, BURLY DUDES compete for the title of "World's Toughest Bouncer."

Two AIR BRUSHED ANNOUNCERS do stand ups to camera.

ANNOUNCER #1

Here we are at the first ever "World's Toughest Bouncer" competition. The contest consists of three events. The Bounce, The Blast, and The Box.

ANNOUNCER #2

For the bounce, each contestant will throw a 115 pound stuntman as far as he can. The Blast will see our bouncers navigating a bar-like obstacle course and then blasting through a 4 inch door. And the box will feature the highest point winners from the previous contests duking it out in a 16 foot ring.

ANNOUNCER #1

Let the games begin!

CORNER STATION.

Cushy gymnastic mats laid out on the ground.

We see BOUNCERS heaving small STUNT MEN. It's an intimidating - and bizarre - spectacle. (And it really did happen.)

T walks up to the station with his STUNTMAN. They fist bump each other in solidarity.

But before T hurls the small man across the floor, a DRUNK GUY in the crowd starts acting out.

DRUNK GUY

Will you look at this darkie? I've never any seen anything like this. You got a blind barber? Good Lord.

The blood rises in T's face. He wants to teach this dude a lesson he won't soon forget. Calvin comes up behind him.

CALVIN

Forget him, man. Just do what you do. Do what you do.

MR. T

Oh I'm gonna.

Mr. T picks up the stuntman, takes a running start and --

HEAVES HIM AS FAR AS HE CAN.

The stuntman lands on the tumbling mat.

A REFEREE rushes over and measures the distance, yelling the score to a table-side SCOREKEEPER.

T's name appears about halfway down the leaderboard.

T is furious. Calvin massages his shoulders.

MR. T (CONT'D)

Got inside my head.

CALVIN

Get him outta there. Remember. This ain't just about you, man. You dig?

MR. T

(distracted)

Yeah man.

CALVIN

(dead serious)

Do you dig?

T turns to him. Solemnly nods.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Then act like you know.

CUT TO:

QUICK CUTS OF VARIOUS BOUNCERS THROWING STUNTMEN.

REFS MEASURE THE DISTANCES.

THE LEADERBOARD RAPIDLY FLIPS OVER.

FANS ERUPT IN APPLAUSE.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO - LATER

A different station.

A large obstacle course with freestanding walls erected.

We see a MASSIVE BOUNCER barrel his way through the course; around the bar, slaloming through stools and tables, until he comes to a wall.

The Wall.

He hurls himself against it with all his might.

Nevertheless, he only breaks through the first two sheets.

NEARBY.

T warms up with Calvin.

CALVIN

Most of these guys are finishing
around twelve, thirteen seconds.
That's fast. Real fast.

(beat)

But if you're gonna make it to the
Box, you can't be fast. You gotta
be lightning.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Next up. Mr. T. To the Blast.

CALVIN

Luckily I brought some good luck.

Calvin reaches into his fanny pack and pulls out a whole clover of garlic.

MR. T

You gotta be kidding me?

Calvin shakes his head; afraid not.

T grabs the clove. Takes a big ass bite. His eyes water. His nose runs. And steam comes out of his ears.

He's ready.

THE BLAST SET.

Overhead lights flicker.

We hear the sound of a freight train approaching.

And here it comes.

In SLOW MOTION.

T's body pulsing as he turns, pivots, and speeds through the course.

And as he approaches the wall, he screams.

And launches himself through the dry wall, shattering all 4 pieces. Dust and debris everywhere.

The crowd goes fucking nuts.

And his time appears on a screen overhead: 9 seconds flat.

Calvin rushes over to him.

CALVIN

You did it! Holy shit! You did it!

MR. T

I ain't eating no more garlic!

Calvin smiles, brushes drywall off him.

CALVIN

Only in my sautés. Only in my sautés. Let's get you sorted.

They move to the bleachers for a water break.

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. T!

Standing nearby is a gargantuan Hawaiian bouncer.

TUTEFANO

You think you special? You not special. You think you strong. You not strong.

(beat)

Maybe you are tough bouncer in Chicago. But in the world? No. There is only one toughest.

(chest beat)

Tutefano.

He growls at the men as they head to the bleachers.

MR. T
Who the hell was that?

CALVIN
More like what. Tutefano Tufi.
Three hundred twenty pounds of pure
spam, eggs, and anger.

MR. T
Thought Hawaiians were chill.

CALVIN
Must be from the angry island.

They walk to the bleachers to recuperate and strategize.
The contest is getting heated.

LATER.

T stretches in the corner. The final event fast approaching.

As he stretches, an affable black reporter approaches him.
This is future sportscaster BRYANT GUMBEL (mid 20's).

BRYANT GUMBEL
Here we have our second place
contestant from Chicago, Illinois.
A bouncer at the famed nightclub
Dingbats, Mr. T!

MR. T
How you doing, Brian?

BRYANT GUMBEL
Bryant. With a "T." Like you! And
doing great. We've got a hell of a
contest on our hands. How're you
holding up?

MR. T
I feel fantastic. Gonna feel even
better when I win this thing.

BRYANT GUMBEL
Speaking of, you're set to face off
against Hawaiian native Tutefano
Tufi, an imposing presence to say
the least. What are your thoughts
coming into this final round?

MR. T

I just feel real sorry for him. I
pity what I'm gonna put him
through. I pity the fool.

CUT TO:

INT. WELL APPOINTED LIVING ROOM - DAY

On a TV set, we see T giving his interview to Bryant Gumbel.

A buff young Italian with a shiny black coif watches the television. Behind him, a massive framed poster for *Rocky*.

You guessed it. This is SYLVESTER STALLONE (27).

He laughs at the cocky brawler on TV. And then leans forward to watch even closer, an idea forming in his head.

BACK TO:

THE FIGHT.

The lights dim. Fans place bets. Bartenders sling drinks. Cigar smoke hangs heavy in the air.

A Roman coliseum awaiting the final two remaining gladiators.

ANNOUNCER #1

Time for our main event, The Box.
The winner of this competition will
be crowned World's Toughest
Bouncer.

ANNOUNCER #2

The first one to get knocked out of
the ring loses. Let's introduce our
competitors.

ANNOUNCER #1

Hailing from Hawaii, weighing 320
lbs, Tutefano Tufi!

The crowd erupts in cheers.

ANNOUNCER #2

And from right here in Chicago, our
hometown hero, Mr. T!

A mix of cheers and boos. T takes a look around at his beloved Chicago. And then, he kneels and prays.

As he does, we cut to various people watching the TV program:

- Ron and Bitoy at Dingbats.
- Sick children at the Hospital.
- Reverend Hardy in his office at the Church.
- Leon Spinks at his gym.
- The Tureauds at the Robert Taylor Projects apartment.
- Phylis at her sister's place.
- Even Sly Stallone.

Everyone's got their own version of Mr. T. But only one man can step into the ring.

A bell rings.

ANNOUNCER #1

Here we go!

T steps into the makeshift ring with Tufi.

They start to grapple.

The STUDIO AUDIENCE scream themselves raw from the rafters.

CAMERAMEN rotate along the perimeter documenting -

T, getting his ass handed to him by the massive Hawaiian.

He's thrown around the ring like a rag doll.

He tries to put Tufi in a headlock but can't even get his arms around the Hawaiian's dome.

Tufi, with very little effort pushes T back, almost knocking him out of the ring. T barely manages to stay in bounds.

Tufi smiles: this is gonna be a cakewalk.

ANNOUNCER #2 (O.S.)

T better start playing defense
quick or this fight's gonna be over
before it even started.

But T doesn't back down.

Instead, he swings at the Hawaiian, landing a punch that bloodies his nose.

The crowd gasps in shock.

No one, including Tufi, was expecting that.

MR. T
Aloha muthafukka.

Tufi starts wildly swinging at T, who has to rapidly dodge the attack, for any blow from the big man would surely send him flying.

T moves to the edge of the ring.

Tufi lunges for him but T manages to duck the attack.

Tufi almost skids out, hangs on for dear life.

T once again weaves around the perimeter. Tufi shoots for his legs but T jumps up, sending Tufi to the ground.

Now Tufi is royally pissed.

He corners T, puts him in a sleeper hold.

TUFI
That all you got *boy*?

T looks toward the ceiling, the studio lights streaking his vision. Is this it? Is this the end?

He sees glimpses of the crowd, booing, cheering, screaming - ALL IN SLOW MOTION.

And in the very back of the rafters, a YOUNG BLACK BOY with his MOM.

We cut TIGHT on this boy, whose eyes say it all:

Don't give up. Keep fighting.

T explodes out of the hold and starts pummeling Tufi.

The Hawaiian doesn't even know what hit him.

MR. T
My name ain't boy.

THWAP!

MR. T (CONT'D)
It's Mr. T.

ROUND HOUSE KICK!

MR. T (CONT'D)
First name: Mister.

TWO UPPERCUTS.

MR. T (CONT'D)
Middle name: Period.

A FURIOUS LEFT HOOK.

MR. T (CONT'D)
Last name --

A POWERFUL BODY BLOW.

MR. T (CONT'D)
T!

And with that, Tufi falls back, lands just outside the ring.

ANNOUNCER #1 (O.S.)
Holy moly! Mr. T wins. Mr. T wins!

The crowd goes wild at the come-from-behind finish.

T raises his fist.

He is now officially the World's Toughest Bouncer.

A swarm of cameramen, fans, well-wishers, and others flock to the champ. He is adored.

In the background, we see Calvin. He's happy for his friend. Tries to congratulate him but can't make it past the throng.

And a knowing look spreads on his face.

This is the last time they'll be on even ground. The last time as equals: two black men from the Chicago projects making a name for themselves.

For T has begun his ascent into the stratosphere.

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK.

Sounds of a cafeteria.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL - PEDIATRIC CANCER WARD - DAY

A dozen kids eat lunch. A humdrum day.

Until a set of double doors explode open, producing a hero.

He's wearing his famous attire: combat boots, tuxedo pants, leather vest, gold chains, feathered earrings, mohawk.

The kids scream with ecstatic joy at T.

He hugs and high fives them.

MR. T
I missed you too.

KIDS
You won! You won!

MR. T
Couldn't have done it without you.
All of you.

The kids cheer.

MR. T (CONT'D)
And I sure hope that you've been training as hard as me. I'm gonna need to see some serious progress on yall's dance moves. No half steppin' or I'm gonna be royally PO'd. Now whose got some fresh steps to show me.

A kid eagerly raises his hand.

MR. T (CONT'D)
Go on!

The kid shows T his dance moves. It's less then stellar.

Regardless, T applauds vigorously.

MR. T (CONT'D)
That's what I'm talking about. Putting James Brown to shame! With a little confidence, you can do anything! You can do everything!

CHLOE (O.S.)
Easy for you to say.

T turns around to find Chloe. The skeptic. The one who sees through his inspirational act.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
You're Mr. T.
(not impressed)
(MORE)

CHLOE (CONT'D)
 World's Toughest Bouncer.
 (resigned)
 We got nothing. No chains, no
 boots, no mohawk. No chance.
 (beat)
 Nothing.

T takes this in. And it's a lot.

Half of Chicago has tried to beat him up but this 13-year old girl with Hodgkins Lymphoma lands the hardest punch:

Right in his heart.

And he knows what he has to do.

He kneels down, right in front of Chloe, inches from her small pale face.

MR. T
 You're absolutely right.
 (beat)
 I wear this armor to *protect*
 myself. To *project* myself.
 (a long beat)
 But these chains don't make me.

T takes off a chain and puts it over Chloe's head.

MR. T (CONT'D)
 They don't speak for me.

He puts a chain on another kid.

MR. T (CONT'D)
 They don't define me.

Another head, another chain.

MR. T (CONT'D)
 They aren't the whole story.

He takes off all his chains. And one by one places them on the heads of the children.

MR. T (CONT'D)
 Because even without the chains --

INT. BATHROOM - A LITTLE LATER

T looks in the mirror. Trembling.

MR. T (V.O.)
Even without the boots.

T brings the buzzer into frame.

MR. T (V.O.)
Even without the swagger.

EXT. BATHROOM - SAME

The sick kids, now all wearing multiple chains, have their ear to the door.

QUICK CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - FLASHBACK

Lawrence Tureaud, all of 11 years old, his eyes closed while his Mom cuts his hair.

Could he ever imagine what he would become?

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - PRESENT DAY

His eyes closed. He opens them.

And takes a buzzer right to the top of his mohawk, not even an inch away.

Will he lose his power once his hair is gone? Will it change his world?

A deep breath.

And then he drags the clippers over his head.

MR. T (V.O.)
Even without the hair.

T is now bald.

We push in closer on his face, seeing all of it: The resolve, the determination, the fight, the compassion.

MR. T (V.O.)
I am still --

He looks right at us. With intensity. Ferocity.

MR. T

Mr. T.

And then: a hint of that smile.

CUT TO BLACK.

Bill Wither's "Lean on Me" starts to play.

We see footage of the real Mr. T as Clubber Lang in Rocky 3.

CARD: AFTER WINNING "WORLD'S TOUGHEST BOUNCER," MR. T BECAME A FILM AND TV STAR OF INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM.

We see footage of Mr. T as B.A. Baracus in the A-Team. We see footage from the classic 80's PSA "Be Somebody or Be Somebody's Fool." Mr. T wrestles Hulk Hogan at Wrestlemania.

CARD: IN 1995, MR. T WAS DIAGNOSED WITH T-CELL LYMPHOMA, A FORMIDABLE FOE.

We see footage of T in the hospital. Surrounded by kids, rooting for their hero to overcome the disease.

CARD: BUT IT WAS NO MATCH FOR HIM. SINCE BEATING THE DISEASE, MR. T CONTINUES TO INSPIRE COUNTLESS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WITH HIS FAITH, HUMOR, AND HUMILITY.

We see Mr. T with a bunch of cancer survivors.

CARD: HE DID, HOWEVER, GROW BACK THE MOHAWK.

And now the real Mr. T.

In his late 60's. And still every bit as amazing.

We push in on him as he smiles that classic smile.

FADE TO BLACK.