

the college dropout

Written by

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Based on a true story.



The College Dropout (Roc-A-fella Records, 2004)

BLACK.

We hear the rudimentary noises of an MPC machine. Someone's working hard at it...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT - BLACK AND WHITE

...That *someone* is KANYE OMARI WEST. He tinkers on a track. It's quiet. Just him and the MPC.

Nothing's working so he gets spontaneous and tries another beat... it starts vibin' with him.

All of a sudden, a stream of color comes out of his MPC and fills his room.

His music gets louder and builds up, up, up... As it plays, Kanye notices something outside the window.

He looks out and sees a circus of garish color in the sky.

A marching band plays "Through The Wire." His music is spreading the color to this black and white world. He sees a parade on the streets. It's all reminiscent of Takashi Murakami's pop art cover of Graduation --

KNOCK-KNOCK!

DONDA (PRE-LAP)
Wake up, Kanye...

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KANYE'S ROOM - MORNING

It wasn't real. It's what a young Kanye West (19) dreams of. Basquiat meets Spielberg. His head rests on the MPC.

DONDA (O.S.)
....Wake up, *Mari!*

CLOSE on KANYE's eyes as they slowly open.

KANYE
I'm up!

He rubs his eyes and sits up. Doesn't look quite like the Kanye we know now, this one has an infectious grin and childlike features.

DONDA (O.S.)
You better not be late again!

Kanye shakes his head, doesn't want to go. *Ugh.*

EXT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY - 1997

People mill about the busy campus located near South Chicago.

chicago state university, 1997

INT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - DAY

Students tune out PROFESSOR MILNER (44, tweed jacket).

But Milner hears a THUMP. A pounding, rhythmic drum.

THUMP-THUMP-THUMP!

It faintly sounds like the beat under "School Spirit." But it's not quite *there* yet.

We TRACK toward the back. Hands thump a desk, not a drum. Closer and closer until we reveal Kanye -- brash, impulsive, and crude in speech and manner.

PROFESSOR MILNER

Mr. West!

But it keeps going. Kanye's feeling the song in his walkman, lost in it.

KANYE'S POV: He *sees* pulsating, colored *sound waves* of his music in the air around him. His banging annoys a few students. Professor Milner walks over.

PROFESSOR MILNER (CONT'D)

(perturbed)

Please stop that!

Kanye notices him, stops, and takes off his headphones.

KANYE

Sorry, my bad.

PROFESSOR MILNER

Music class is on the other side of the campus.

Kanye nods as girls nearby laugh at him.

PROFESSOR MILNER (CONT'D)

Now back to Kafka. What did you guys think about *The Hunger Artist* and the meaning of the title?

(beat)

Kanye?

CLOSE on Kanye, as he nervously sits back in his chair. He hates reading. He tries to hide in plain sight and his professor *knows it*. Kanye shoots him a look: "Nah."

PROFESSOR MILNER (CONT'D)
C'mon, *I know* you have an opinion.

KANYE
Well, Stuart...It definitely sound like he need a sandwich or something.

A few students chuckle, smartass. Milner presses Kanye.

PROFESSOR MILNER
Did you even read it?

KANYE
Yeah, but why don't you ask Rachel. Looks like she's dying to answer.

RACHEL (19, sassy), Milner's best student, eagerly has her hand up.

PROFESSOR MILNER
(sighs)
Rachel--

RACHEL
(condescending)
Well, I *actually* read it. Kafka's commenting on the artist's hunger. He refuses food cause he wants a different kind of nourishment: public recognition and artistic perfection. The sad part is, this artist is delusional and will never get that.
(turns to Kanye)
Kinda like your music career.

Laughter. OHHS and AHHS. This is *her* territory. Self-conscious, Kanye withdraws in his chair.

INT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - LATER

PROFESSOR MILNER
All right, I'll see you guys Thursday. Don't forget to turn in your essays.

Students exit and put them on his desk as Kanye comes up.

PROFESSOR MILNER (CONT'D)
Where's your paper?

KANYE
I'mma miss this one. I'll get you
next time though.

PROFESSOR MILNER
This is the second one you missed.

KANYE
(smiles)
It might not even matter. Y'know,
this could be the week I finally
get signed.

PROFESSOR MILNER
Do the paper or I'm going to have
to talk to Donda.

Off Kanye, this threat wipes the grin off his face. PRE-LAP:
sounds of a drum machine...

school spirit

(These track titles are the chapters of our story)

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KANYE'S ROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON fingers forcefully tapping a drum pad on an MPC.

THUMP-THUMP-THUMP -- THUMP-THUMP-BOOM!

Kanye's been focusing for hours on a drum pattern. This is
his "control center" with a keyboard, MPC, crates of vinyl
records and a cluster of wires. "5 beats a day for three
summers." White walls, faded carpet. Nothing glamorous.

Nearby, there's a few vinyls: Wu-Tang, Madlib, J Dilla and
Aretha Franklin. He grabs Aretha's *Spirit In The Dark* album.

We see Kanye's process of creating a *song*. He listens. Skips
a track. This is the art of crate digging. He's trying to
find the *right* sample. "Spirit in the Dark" plays. Kanye bobs
his head, he FEELS it. Chops it up. Speeds it up. Aretha now
sounds like a chipmunk. Shakes his head. Changes a knob.
Plays it back. A rough, demo version of "School Spirit." He
sings a few words ("Alpha Step, Omega Step"), mumbles the
missing parts. Deep breath. Tries again. Unsatisfied.

Nearby, his homework assignment from Milner is untouched.

INT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - DAY

A discouraged Kanye exits class amidst a sea of students.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - DAY

Kanye listens to his eclectic mixtape on the bus. It reaches his stop and he gets off. His baggy clothes all call attention to him, but he hasn't figured out his style yet.

The poor urban sprawl of Southside Chicago is tinted by music emanating from the headphones in his ear as he walks home. Cold breeze blows the trees, the L train rumbles, old brick buildings with graffiti surround. There's a mix of beauty and harshness that gives Chicago its identity and soul.

+ As he passes 87th Street, he listens to Nina Simone's "To Love Somebody." Sees homeless digging through the trash.

+ He gets off at 83rd Street listening to Wu-Tang Clan's "C.R.E.A.M." He heads down South Shore Drive as pit bulls bark through a fence, but he only hears RZA's beats.

+ Now on 79th Street, he passes a CRACK ADDICT strung out near the bus stop. "I'll Fly Away" by The Humbird Family plays lightly.

+ As he passes a church, he listens to Luther Vandross. Some GANGSTERS approach. "What you lookin' at nigga?" He evades them by entering the church. He takes off his headphones to listen to a CHURCH CHOIR practicing.

+ As he nears his house, he sees OLD MAN OTIS (50's) humming a familiar song on his stoop. He nods at Otis...

Finally, he reaches home, with light blue peeling paint and a small set of stairs at the porch. He pulls letters out of the mailbox. He sees an ENVELOPE from DEF-JAM, but it reads: "RETURN TO SENDER." Off Kanye, disappointed.

EXT/INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KANYE'S ROOM - NIGHT

A woman approaches as BASS literally vibrates the door. This is DONDA WEST (48) hair braided, red lipstick, earrings, and possesses the elegance of Maya Angelou. Hard not to love her.

She opens the door. Kanye's working on the MPC...

DONDA

Mari. I got you dinner.

KANYE
 (laser focused)
 I ain't hungry Mom--

Kanye continues to figure out the beat.

DONDA
 You sure? Got your favorite...

She holds out a HUB'S BAG (a Chicago classic) with a CHEESEBURGER inside. He stops and lunges for it, but she pulls it away.

DONDA (CONT'D)
 Not yet. Let's talk first. I had a conversation with Professor Milner today. He says you haven't been reading and you didn't turn in your last four assignments. What's going on?

KANYE
 That class is booorring Ma. People literally be bringing pillows.

DONDA
 Stop it. It's literature. All you have to do is read. You chose this major, remember?

KANYE
 No, you did--

DONDA
 Mari. I'm the chair of the department and my son is flunking English. That's a big deal. Not just for me, but for you. Do you want to stay at the mall forever?

KANYE
 (sighs)
 Mom...

DONDA
 You told me you didn't want to do it forever. But if you don't finish these assignments and get that degree, that's where you'll be. OK?

Kanye nods. He gets it but has heard this before.

DONDA (CONT'D)
 And I talked him into letting you
 turn in the assignments late for
 partial credit.

KANYE
 (dutifully)
 Thanks, Ma.

Donda moves in and kisses his head. Frustrated, he sighs.
 She sets down the food and walks to the door.

DONDA
 Baby, I believe in you.
 (beat)
 You can do this.

And she exits.

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KANYE'S ROOM - LATER

A crumbled, foil burger wrapper sitting on his MPC. Kanye
 grabs his backpack and pulls out his Comparative World
 Literature BOOK. He starts reading, but his eyes keep
 shifting toward his MPC. Can't stay focused.

Fuck it. He hops on and starts working on a beat. This is his
 realm, his place of zen. He always gets lost in it...

And this is where we see his *secret power*. When he makes
 music, it comes alive through a cacophony of visions and
 vibrant colors in his head.

*Suddenly, his workstation becomes a rocket, miraculously
 flying up out of the house and past the Chicago skyline,
 above it all into the stratosphere, amongst the stars. His
 dreams are overwhelming.*

*He's amazed by the stars but in a flash -- he snaps back to
 reality, hitting the MPC in his room. He can really daydream.*

spaceship

INT. GAP STORE - NIGHT

...Sound of the corny department store music as we follow
 Kanye from the stockroom to the showroom of the Gap at the
 mall. He's the cashier. With a name tag.

MOMENTS LATER...

Kanye gives a CUSTOMER a receipt...

KANYE

Thank you for shopping with us. If you call this number and rate your experience with me, you could win a fifty dollar gift card.

She nods and exits. Kanye sighs. Store is pretty empty. He taps the counter -- creating a melodic drum pattern...

That's when his older Chicago rapper friends GLC (28) and CONSEQUENCE (25) enter.

GLC

Ye!

CONSEQUENCE

(looks around, to himself)
Shit's nice in here. If I was white, I could wear the fuck out of this shit. You get discounts?

KANYE

Naw, I'm part time.
(then)
Yo, what are y'all doing here?

GLC

We got good news --

KANYE

Oh word, what up?

GLC

So we went to the station to give Jason your tape...started rapping for a secretary and now I'mma be on Power 92 next week!

Kanye face falls. This wasn't the news he expected.

GLC (CONT'D)

Three minutes.

CONSEQUENCE

It was badass.

C daps him up as GLC can't stop smiling. Kanye's confused:

KANYE

What happened to my beat tape though?

GLC
Yo, you know how they are with new rappers and shit. They put it in the pile. Sorry.

KANYE
Oh. Aight.

He sits back, disappointed. GLC tries to cheer him up:

GLC
But they told me I need to bring a beat...And I know the dopest *producer* in town...

A jealous Kanye shrugs. He feels a little used.

KANYE
Just a beat. Aight. I might have something for you.

INT. GAP STORE - STOCKROOM - LATER

Kanye puts his beat CD into a worn out boombox as GLC sparks up a blunt and passes it to Kanye, who takes a hit. Kanye plays an *early "Spaceship"* demo. They nod their heads.

GLC
This shit g. This is my radio track.

Kanye smiles, but...

KANYE
Not so fast.
(beat)
We going to *rap for it...*

GLC
What the fuck?

CONSEQUENCE
Ohhh, this getting interesting...

GLC
Ye, but you said--

KANYE
We'll settle it like men. If you win, it's yours. If you lose, I'll just make you another one. But I *like* this one. Best verse wins.

CONSEQUENCE

It's fair. I'll be the judge.

GLC shakes his head. But perks up and starts spitting on it as "Spaceship" instrumental plays:

GLC

*I'll start...I didn't even try to
work a job. Represent the mob. At
the same time, thirsty on the
grind, Chi state of mind. Lost my
momma, lost my mind. Life my love,
that's not mine. "Why you ain't
signed?" Wasn't my time. Leave me
alone, work for y'all. Half of it's
yours, half of it's mine. Only one
to ball
Never one to fall. Got to get mine
Got to take mine. Got a Tec-9.
Reach my prime. Got to make these
haters respect mine.*

CONSEQUENCE

Ohhhhhh shit! Damn nigga! Fuuck!
You got your work cut out for you
Ye--

Kanye waits, thinking. A long beat. He mumbles to himself.

GLC

(laughs)

You ain't saying anything...Just
hand over the beat.

Finally, Kanye unleashes his freestyle:

KANYE

(focused)

*Let's go back, back to the Gap.
Look at my check, wasn't no
scratch...*

He mumbles the next line and goes silent.

GLC

C'mon Ye, it's mine--

KANYE

*...Takin' my hits, writing my hits.
Writin' my rhymes, playin my mind.
This fuckin job can't help him. So
I quit, y'all welcome...*

Now Kanye gains more steam now. GLC's intimidated by the passion in his words.

KANYE (CONT'D)

(points to them)

Y'all don't know my struggle. Y'all can't match my hustle. You can't catch my hustle. You can't fathom my love dude. Lock yourself in a room doing 5 beats a day for 3 summers! That's a different world like Cree summers. I deserve to do these numbers. The kid that made that, deserves that Maybach. So many records in my basement, I'm just waitin' on my spaceship.

CONSEQUENCE

OH FUCK!!! TKO! It's over!

GLC is stunned by Kanye's flow. Consequence bows down to him.

GLC

You win. Beat's yours.

KANYE

Y'know what? You can use it for the freestyle, but it's my song. Imma get those rhymes right first, then maybe you can slip it to the actual DJ at the station?

GLC

Yeah, yeah. Shits hot man. I'll see what I can do.

Just then, the door swings open -- the GAP STORE MANAGER (44, white) storms in, upset.

GAP STORE MANAGER (O.S.)

What the hell is going on back here, Kanye?

KANYE

Just taking my break.

GAP STORE MANAGER

If that's pot, I'm gonna have to suspend you.

KANYE

I'll save you the trouble. I quit.

Gap Manager shoots Kanye a look, shuts the door as Kanye and his friends laugh and head out...

GLC
 (laughs)
 Nigga, you just quit your job!?

Cue "Spaceship" by Kanye West: *"I've been working this graveshift. And I ain't made shit. I wish I could buy me a spaceship and fly past the sky."*

INT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - DAY

PAW! The "Spaceship" track cuts out as a testing BLUE-BOOK is dropped on his desk.

Kanye's eyes are fearful as his professor walks away. He slowly opens it and flips the pages. He's nervous to reach the end.

That's when he sees 66 circled in RED. D. Pissed, he abruptly gets up and rushes to Milner in front of the whole class. Milner is talking to Rachel as Kanye interrupts--

KANYE
 A "D"? How you gon' give me a "D"?!

PROFESSOR MILNER
 Didn't think you'd care about getting a D. I thought you were supposed to be signed already?

This sets Kanye off...

KANYE
 I gave you everything you asked for! This ain't fair.

PROFESSOR MILNER
 The assignment was to discuss a literary figure who shaped the 20th century. You turned in a paper about *Dr. Dre...*

KANYE
 He shaped the whole rap game as a rapper *and* a producer...

PROFESSOR MILNER
 That's not literature.

KANYE
 It's not *your* literature. I wrote about mine.

PROFESSOR MILNER

Well, quite honestly, I didn't think your thesis "worked."

KANYE

(gets louder)

Cause I don't want to write about your favorite authors. Everyone knows this shit's politics. The only reason why Rachel got an A is cause she sucks up to you. She probably regurgitated your lectures to you in her essay.

He starts a scene. Nearby Rachel is offended.

PROFESSOR MILNER

And what do you do? You undermine me in class. You interrupt. You're late. You miss assignments. Before you talk about her, you should look in the mirror. Cause she fits in, asks questions, and she's going to pass this class. You? Probably not.

KANYE

To pass, you want me to just repeat to you. I ain't with that. I ain't gonna fit in for a stupid grade!

The class sits uneasy as Milner de-escalates the situation.

PROFESSOR MILNER

Let's talk outside.

EXT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Milner tries to calm Kanye down.

PROFESSOR MILNER

I want to help you. My job is to get you a degree and open up your mind--

KANYE

Yet any chance you get, you close it. You want us all to think and mimic you in these papers, right?

PROFESSOR MILNER

No, that's not it.

KANYE

Yo, Mil, I don't need all this.
I'mma have an album...I'll be fine.

PROFESSOR MILNER

Well, right now you don't have an album...so you gotta look at the big picture and that starts with coming to class and doing the assignments.

Kanye rolls his eyes. Milner can tell he's losing Kanye...

PROFESSOR MILNER (CONT'D)

Look...I had a student a few years back. He was a King Prep basketball star. Daniel Jones. He could have gone straight to the NBA, but his parents wanted him to go to college. So he came here. It happened slowly at first. He missed a class here, a class there. Then he dropped out and went out for the draft...*And nobody picked him up.* He stuck around and got with the wrong crowd, now he's in the streets.

(beat)

That kid had talent just like you, Kanye. I didn't say anything to him and I should have. But now I'm trying to save you from being just another college dropout.

Kanye pushes back--

KANYE

Save me? I ain't no Daniel Jones. I got *something*. I ain't afraid of failing.

PROFESSOR MILNER

You should be. You're barely nineteen and you think you have it all figured it out. I've been there, man. If you don't take this seriously and you leave, then I can't help you anymore. You're on your own. And it's cold out there.

With his ego punctured, Kanye stands there frozen.

INT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - DONDA'S OFFICE - LATER

Donda has her reading glasses on and types up a school grant when an angry Kanye barges in--

KANYE
Ma, I need to talk.

DONDA
I'm a little busy--

KANYE
I can't do this shit anymore.

Donda relents.

DONDA
Shut the door.

Kanye closes the door and pleads with her.

DONDA (CONT'D)
What happened?

KANYE
This school, these teachers, they making clones. I ain't a clone. I'm not feeling this anymore.

DONDA
This is what you said about art school.

KANYE
I thought this would be different. But it ain't.

Donda sighs, but she doesn't want to give up.

DONDA
Take a deep breath.

KANYE
Ma, stop.

DONDA
Mari...

Kanye reluctantly takes a deep breath.

DONDA (CONT'D)
Feel better?

KANYE
No.

DONDA

C'mon. It's a rough patch. You're not a quitter, baby. You're strong. I can't imagine you not completing college.

KANYE

I know, but it's for you. It ain't for me.

DONDA

Tell me, Kanye, you have a job? No. That's right, you quit. If you ain't in college, you need to work as long as you live in my house. Unless you want to go live with your daddy in Atlanta...

Kanye drops his head, his shield of over-confidence falls. Donda leans forward.

DONDA (CONT'D)

It's hard out there, baby. Just ask your cousin Eddie.

KANYE

Mom, I sold that beat for eight thousand. I can make money.

DONDA

Yeah, and where is that money now? You spent it.

KANYE

I can sell another--

DONDA

But is it consistent? That was a year and a half ago. *What if you don't sell another one, then what?*

Donda drops a dose of reality as Kanye doesn't utter a word. But his jaw is stern, his eyes blaze with a steely determination...

INT. HAROLD'S CHICKEN - CHICAGO - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a sizzling fryer as someone pulls fried chicken out, tosses it on a plate, and sets it down in front of Kanye.

He scarfs down the piping hot food as NO ID (Dion Wilson, 26) watches him eat.

NO ID is always dressed down, a little thick, soft spoken, talks very little but when he does, he's straight up. He's a working class producer and Kanye's mentor.

NO ID
Damn, you hungry...You want to breathe a little?

Kanye wipes his mouth with a napkin, pushes his plate away.

KANYE
Listen, I finished my new demo. So who can we send it to?

NO ID is about to dig into his meal with his fork...

NO ID
I told you, I don't know man.

KANYE
C'mon, you always been telling me to get my beats right. Get my shit together. It's together.
(beat)
You've produced for Common, there's gotta be someone you can send it to.

NO ID
Let me grub, bro. Business after dinner.

KANYE
Give me some names...

NO ID
Ok, fine. I got dudes at So So Def, I know a guy at Priority. This A&R 'Hip Hop' from Roc-A-Fella owes me a favor. He's getting into managing. I'm meeting him tomorrow.

KANYE
Roc-A-Fella.

NO ID
Look, I ain't say they'd listen to your tape.

NO ID now pours his gravy on his creamy mashed potatoes and prepares to eat. Kanye stares at him blankly.

NO ID (CONT'D)
What?

KANYE
Call the Roc-a-fella guy. C'mon--

NO ID
Right now?

KANYE
I'll give you quarters.

EXT. HAROLD'S CHICKEN - CHICAGO - MOMENTS LATER

COIN DROP!

NO ID dials a number on the PAYPHONE (you know, those obsolete things now). Kanye stands next to him, anxious.

NO ID
He's not answering. I don't think
he's in his room.

It rings. No ID sees the desperation in Kanye's eyes. Then:

NO ID (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hop?

HIP-HOP (O.S.)
Yeah, who dis?

NO ID
It's NO ID. You busy right now?

INT. HAROLD'S CHICKEN - CHICAGO - LATER

NO ID dumps his tray as he sees a BMW pull up. Kanye quickly cleans crumbs off his shirt and brushes his hair.

KANYE
That's him. Let's go meet him at
the car.

NO ID
Why?

Kanye pulls out a CASSETTE TAPE.

NO ID (CONT'D)
You brought one? This is just like
a meet and greet. You can't do shit
like that--

KANYE
You never know...

EXT. HAROLD'S CHICKEN - CHICAGO - CONTINUOUS

NO ID greets HIP-HOP (29) big build with beard and hat. He's an important A&R manager at Roc-A-Fella. They slap hands.

NO ID
How you doin', Hop?

HIP-HOP
Freezing my ass off down here,
fuckin' Chicago. But I saw MJ at a
Bulls game. Who this?

NO ID
Meet Kanye West. He's an up and
coming producer...and rapper.

Hip-Hop fist bumps Kanye.

HIP-HOP
Bruh, I like your fuckin' name.
It's like Persian and shit.
Kanyee...

KANYE
Thanks but it's KAN-YAY. Nice to
meet you.

HIP-HOP
You too. Maybe Dion here can bring
you down to Baseline sometime to
check it out.

KANYE
(holds up tape)
Well, I got my demo right here if
you down to listen in your car...

Hip-Hop looks at NO ID: "WTF?"

NO ID
C'mon, one song man...

HIP-HOP
Uhhh, yeah. Suuure.

INT. HOP'S BMW - MOMENTS LATER

KANYE
This song dope, trust me.

He presses play. It's that beat he's been working on, but it ain't right. Nervous, Kanye waits for Hip-Hop's reaction.

HIP-HOP
 (bored)
 Mhmmmm....

He fast-forwards it to the end. Next song coming up.

KANYE
 Okay, that one was wack, but this
 next one...

HIP-HOP
 Yo D, I got somewhere to be...

KANYE
 (desperate)
 One more, please--

No ID clenches his teeth as Kanye plays it. He's stubborn. A soulful sample begins as those drums hype up the track. It's an early cut of "Two Words" by Kanye West. Hip-Hop withholds judgment until he raises the volume...

HIP-HOP
 You made this all yourself?

KANYE
 Yeah, you like it?

HIP-HOP
 I don't know if it's great, but
 it's something. Send me more stuff
 like this.

NO ID winks at a gleeful Kanye as the track lays over the next SERIES OF SCENES:

+ Professor Milner notices Kanye's empty seat in the class.

+ Hip-Hop pops in a Kanye DAT tape in his studio: "This better be good."

+ Professor Milner enters Donda's office and shuts the door.

EXT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - MORNING

Kanye exits and once again hears Old Man Otis humming next door. Kanye still can't figure out where it's from, but it's stuck in his head. That's when a CAMRY pulls up...

KANYE
 You make real money and you drive
 this junk?

NO ID
I was going to give you a ride to school, but there's always the bus...

KANYE
(joking)
I don't know, the bus lookin' nicer right about now.

Laughter as Kanye hops in.

INT. CAMRY - DRIVING - DAY

Smiling, NO ID has something he wants to say to Kanye.

KANYE
Why you keep looking at me like that?

NO ID
Cause I got some good news...

KANYE
What?

NO ID
So Hop has been sending your beats around town, man, and someone liked em.

KANYE
Who?

A beat.

NO ID
Jermaine Dupri...He might want a beat for his album.

Kanye's eyes flash. This is a big deal.

KANYE
Shut the fuck up. Are you kidding me?!

NO ID
Nah.

Kanye pumps his fist and kicks the dashboard with excitement.

KANYE
Am I going to meet him?

NO ID
No. He *might* want a beat. Might.

KANYE
(smiles)
Aight. I can give him that! I'mma finally sell another beat.

NO ID
It ain't sold until the check is cleared. Remember that.

KANYE
C'mon...How the fuck do you expect me to go to class now when you tell me shit like that?

NO ID pulls up in the parking lot of Chicago State.

NO ID
I'll call you if he decides to go forward.

KANYE
Okay. Finally, this is happening.

Kanye takes off as NO ID remarks:

NO ID
You're just nineteen, relax.

KANYE
(turns back)
Michael was five years old when he had his first hit with the Jackson Five.

NO ID
Michael Jackson???
(laughs)
Just have the beat ready.

INT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - DAY

Kanye enters from the back as the students leave. He's so late, class already ended. Professor Milner packs up.

KANYE
(under his breath)
Damn.

Then Milner glares at Kanye. It's just them two.

PROFESSOR MILNER
 (subdued)
 You missed the entire class...

Off Milner, disappointed...

PROFESSOR MILNER (CONT'D)
 ...I get it, you'd rather be in the
 music room than in here. You're
supposed to be signed soon. But I
 got one question for you.
 (Milner leans in)
 If you don't want to be here, why
 do you keep showing up?

Kanye doesn't have an answer. Just a lump in his throat.

PROFESSOR MILNER (CONT'D)
 At a certain point, you're going to
 have to make a decision...

Milner exits. Kanye feels small in the empty auditorium.

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KANYE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Kanye lies on his bed with the phone on his stomach, waiting
 for NO ID's call. A long beat. Then it rings!

KANYE
 (answers)
 Hello....no, she's not here. Yeah.
 I'll let her know.

Kanye sighs. A FEW HOURS LATER..

Kanye's asleep in his chair when the phone rings. He darts
 awake to answer it.

KANYE (CONT'D)
 Hello...

DONDA (O.S.)
 (half-asleep)
 It's one in the morning...

NO ID
 Kanye...

KANYE
 I got it Ma, it's for me.

DONDA
 Don't be having people call this
 late on a school night, Kanye.

Donda hangs up.

KANYE
You said 8.

NO ID
I got caught up.

KANYE
What happened?

NO ID
Jermaine wants the beat by Friday
at 10am.

KANYE
(intimidated)
Friday? That's like *today*--

NO ID
Shit, what time is it?
(beat)
Yeah, you have one ready, right?

KANYE
(lying)
Yeah. I'm almost done. I gotta go.

Kanye hangs up. The fear dawns on him. *He's not ready.*

But he jumps on his control center anyway. He isn't sleeping or eating until it's finished.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Kanye spending a whole day summed up in a few cuts: Hitting the MPC. Bobbing head. Shifting volume. Mixing. Listening. Mastering. Then he sends his song on AOL 3.0 dial up to Dupri's people...

INT. NO ID'S STUDIO - DAYS LATER

Kanye drops his bag as NO ID works on a new track.

KANYE
Did he like it?

NO ID
Nice to see you too, man.

KANYE
Well, did he?

NO ID
I don't know.

KANYE

When am I going to find out? Did I make it on the album at least?

NO ID

You're going to have to wait for the album to come out.

KANYE

Really, how long's that going take? Jermaine Dupri gonna do me like that?

NO ID

Don't worry about it. Go work on the next one.

Kanye looks around at the wall of tapes. He picks one up.

KANYE

(re: NO ID tape)

Is this your demo?

NO ID

Give me that!

Kanye laughs, hands it to NO ID.

NO ID (CONT'D)

This stays in the vault. Y'know I got your first tape lying around here somewhere...

NO ID starts looking through drawers...

NO ID (CONT'D)

"The Dr. Seuss of Hip-Hop." What was your first rap song called again?

KANYE

Green Eggs and Ham.

NO ID

That's it. I can't find it...

KANYE

Good. No one needs to hear that.

NO ID

But it was *different* man. Back when our moms introduced us, you surprised me. You still doin' it.

KANYE

Thanks.

Kanye glances at NO ID's paperwork for a beat sale. NO ID senses Kanye lingering...

NO ID

Yo, don't you got class or something?

EXT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - LECTURE HALL - MORNING

Kanye walks up to the class in-session and peaks in through the window. He puts his hand on the doorknob. Something stops him from entering...CUT TO

The Future. Chicago State Stadium. Graduation. Kanye in a black cap and gown. Sullen as he receives his diploma. We PAN to Donda beaming with pride. Kanye gives back his diploma and walks off stage.

Back to: his hand on the doorknob. But he doesn't open it. Something stops him. He takes off down the hall...

EXT/INT. TOWER RECORDS - DAY

Kanye waits outside when the MANAGER (55) opens the door. It's a quiet morning in the store.

MANAGER

Welcome to Tower Records.

He moves past him in a frenzy on the day of the album's release. He passes a cardboard cutout of JAY-Z as he heads to the NEW RELEASES section. He can't find the album. But then he sees a CLERK stocking the album. He snatches a copy of *Jermaine Dupri Presents Life in 1472: The Original Soundtrack*.

Kanye quickly scans the CD on the AUDIO PREVIEW DEVICE. He puts on headphones. A couple of people enter the store.

He plays TRACK 1: "(Intro) Turn It Out." Right as he hears the first sounds, it HITS him. *That's his song.*

KANYE

(loud)

Yes-Yes-Yes!!!

A few employees turn but Kanye doesn't care. He's grooving to his track. The manager is bothered by this.

KANYE (CONT'D)
 This is my fuckin' song! I got the
 intro!

The manager approaches Kanye.

MANAGER
 Sir, you're going to have to calm
 down.

KANYE
 (headphones on)
 What?! I can't hear you!

MANAGER
 We're going to have to ask you to
 leave.

INT. NO ID'S STUDIO - DAY

Kanye sets down a stack of Jermaine Dupri CDs.

NO ID
 You buy all the copies?

KANYE
 Yeah. I'm the first song. The
 first. Intros always set the tone.
 This is big.

NO ID
 It is...I got a few calls from Hop
 about your music. We got you a
 meeting in New York.

KANYE
 Who we meeting with?

NO ID
 Columbia. They heard your shit and
 word is they might want a deal.
 They flying us out there, first
 class.

Kanye's mouth drops.

KANYE
 Columbia? NAS is signed there. Oh
 shit, I knew it! I gotta get some
 new clothes. And I gotta tell my
 Mom...

NO ID watches Kanye freak out over this.

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Donda listens to Kanye's good news as he paces...

DONDA

Wow, baby...it's all so exciting.
And it's for real?

KANYE

It's so real. I got my first credit
so now the dominoes start falling.
They're flying me out to New York
tomorrow. Probably set a money deal
and get me working...

(Donda reacts)

That's cool right?

DONDA

Mari, New York is great. I mean,
it's fast.

KANYE

I know it's fast, but--

DONDA

--But it's your dream, you gotta
go, baby.

Donda meets eyes with Kanye. She's proud, but processing
this: *Is she losing him already?*

EXT. JFK AIRPORT ARRIVALS - DAY

Kanye and NO ID exit. Kanye looks fresh in new clothes,
shoes, and some flashy jewelry. NO ID is well dressed, more
conservative. No one recognizes them, nor should they.

Kanye goes down the escalator and sees it. A DRIVER holding a
sign that reads: KANYE WEST.

KANYE

Oohhhh! They got me a sign and a
driver. Shit, this is how the other
side lives.

INT. LIMO - MANHATTAN - DAY

Excited, Kanye peers out the window -- NEW YORK CITY!

KANYE

Yo, they bring a limo with
champagne. I know what this
means...

NO ID

Take it easy, man. Let's see what they say.

Kanye slaps the leather on the limo.

KANYE

You see this leather? This is full grain Italian leather. They ain't sending a limo like this for just anybody. We good. They're gonna have to convince me to sign!

NO ID

(re: touches leather)

It looks like regular leather to me.

Kanye grabs the champagne and pours himself some.

EXT. MADISON AVENUE - MANHATTAN - DAY

Limo pulls up and the driver opens their door. Kanye's hyped up in contrast to a subdued NO ID, who smiles politely.

INT. SONY/COLUMBIA OFFICES - BOARDROOM - DAY

A window overlooks Manhattan in this fancy boardroom. Kanye sits with NO ID when a few execs walk in. More importantly, MICHAEL MAULDIN (50's, African American) head of urban music and Sony President DON IENNER (60's, white) enter.

MICHAEL MAULDIN

Mr. Kanye West, I'm Michael Mauldin and this is Don Ienner, Sony President. Pleased to meet you.

KANYE

What's up guys!

MICHAEL MAULDIN

Dion, good to see you again.

NO ID

Hey Mike.

They take a seat.

MICHAEL MAULDIN

Kanye, we all listened to your work, and everyone here at Columbia was really impressed.

The other executives in suits nod.

DON IENNER
(out of touch)
Real good and soulful. Loved it.

KANYE
I hope so, I worked hard on that
shit.

Nervous laughter.

DON IENNER
Tell me, Kanye, where do you see
yourself in the next few years? We
have a ton of artists and your
talents could be used for all of
them.

KANYE
Are you kidding me? I'm an artist.

DON IENNER
Of course. You get what I mean.

No ID sighs. This meeting is getting off to a rocky start.

KANYE
Lemme tell y'all something. I ain't
just your regular producer/rapper.

DON IENNER
Wait, he's a rapper?

KANYE
I don't know what they told you.
Just watch. Let me prove to you I
can rap from the heart--

Execs squirm in their chairs.

MICHAEL MAULDIN
It's okay, Kanye--

Kanye spontaneously stands up and hops on the table. He
breaks into a song for the stoic execs. "He's not serious is
he," an exec murmurs.

KANYE
This one called, "Self-Conscious."
(then)
"Yo, yo, I'm so self conscious.

*Suddenly, all the lights go out except one and the conference
table becomes a huge stage. Like Madison Square Garden.*

A spotlight on Kanye. He begins performing for a screaming audience. He's lost in it...This is his reality.

KANYE (CONT'D)

That's why you always see me with at least one of my watches. Rollies and Pasha's done drove me crazy. I can't even pronounce nothing, pass that Versace. Then I spent 400 bucks on this.

(gestures to his chain)

Just to be like "nigga you aint up on this." And I can't even go to the grocery store. With some nes that's clean and a shirt with a team--

He is singing from the heart with an emotional vulnerability.

KANYE (CONT'D)

Man, I promise. I'm so self conscious. I have no idea what I'm doing in college. That major I'm majoring in don't make no money. But I won't drop out, my mom will look at me funny.

Kanye finishes as we come back to reality. It lands awkwardly in the room. Silence. All eyes on Kanye. *This audience didn't enjoy the outburst. Don and Michael sit back, confused. Then:*

MICHAEL MAULDIN

You done?

KANYE

Yeah, what you guys think?

NO ID buries his head in his hands. Kanye doesn't realize that he's making a jackass of himself.

MICHAEL MAULDIN

It's interesting.

Executives nod to spare Kanye.

MICHAEL MAULDIN (CONT'D)

But where do you see yourself with us?

KANYE

I'm gonna be honest. That's who I am. For real, I'm gonna be the next Michael Jackson!

Blank faces as a few scoff. Michael Mauldin cocks his head at Kanye, can't believe the nerve of this kid.

MICHAEL MAULDIN

Okay, we don't need all the hype. Where do you see yourself fitting in with our artists?

KANYE

What do you mean?

MICHAEL MAULDIN

What's your niche?

KANYE

I don't have a niche. I can produce anything.

Don sighs as Michael pushes Kanye now.

MICHAEL MAULDIN

Would you work under some of our producers like Jermaine on new music? You comfortable working for him? Collaborating?

KANYE

Seriously? I'mma tell you right now, I'm going to be better than Jermaine Dupri. C'mon guys, if I'm him in five years, I failed.

Michael Mauldin sits back, shocked. No ID kicks Kanye, but Kanye ain't getting the message.

MICHAEL MAULDIN

Wow, you are very honest.

KANYE

I don't want to talk about that though, let's talk about this deal. What are we thinking? Two records over two mill?

Shocked faces stare at him.

EXT. SONY/COLUMBIA OFFICES - LOBBY - LATER

Kanye waits with NO ID and admires the PLATINUM RECORDS on the wall. Prince. Destiny's Child. Nas. The Fugees.

KANYE

You think they're discussing my deal?

NO ID
 Seriously?

Then an ASSISTANT comes out.

ASSISTANT
 Mr. Mauldin has more meetings
 today. So, we'll call you.

Kanye's silent as he sees execs exit the boardroom and
 whisper about him. Watching their faces, their looks, it hits
 him. *This isn't how it was supposed to go. CUT TO...*

INT. CHEAP TAXI - DRIVING - DAY

Kanye inspects this dirty cab next to NO ID.

KANYE
 Damn, I can't believe they ain't
 give us a limo ride to the airport.

A beat. NO ID has to get something off his chest.

NO ID
 Yo, I gotta tell you
 something...You fucked up in there.

KANYE
 How?

NO ID
 Kanye, you know who Michael Mauldin
 is?

KANYE
 Yeah. Some nigga in a suit.

NO ID
 Are you crazy? That's Jermaine
 Dupri's father. And you go off
 talking shit about his son. These
 meetings are about building
 relationships. What were you
 thinking?

KANYE
 I didn't know he was his son. But
 I'm the artist. They trying to sign
 me, remember?

NO ID
 It's a dance, man. Your beats got
 you that meeting, not your rapping.

KANYE

Yo, I'm a star, these suits need to recognize.

NO ID

Cut the shit. If that's who you are, you're not going to make it.

KANYE

You think *I ain't* going to make it?

NO ID

Not pulling shit like that. You think you *there*, but you not *there* yet.

KANYE

Because I don't think like you. You're political, I'm not. I ain't gonna beg them.

NO ID

But you'll beg me: "Get me meetings, Dion." "Send my demo!"

KANYE

Fuck you. I'm actually trying to make it as a rapper. I'm not like you.

NO ID

Like me?

KANYE

I don't want my demo sitting in a drawer the rest of my life.

NO ID

Fuck you. I know what I can sell. My production. And your production is your only ticket in, but you don't even see it. You're too clouded by this other bullshit, like Italian leather. Let me tell you something, you better start playing by their rules or you're done.

This lands on Kanye, hard.

KANYE

(crushed)

So did I really blow it?

NO ID
 Yeah, you blew it. I can't get you
 a better meeting than that again...

No ID turns away from him.

KANYE
 Yo, I'm sorry Dion...

NO ID
 Nah. I'mma fall back...I can't do
 this managing shit anymore.

Off Kanye, disheartened as he stares out the window as they
 leave Manhattan. The colors he sees now are FADING...

PRE-LAP: a scored version of "Mystery of Iniquity" by Lauryn
 Hill, the song sampled in "All Falls Down."

EXT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - DAY

Kanye trudges in carrying luggage on a rainy Chicago day...

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - DAY

Kanye sets down his suitcase as Donda unpacks a grocery bag
 in the kitchen.

DONDA (O.S.)
 You get signed, baby?

Silence. It speaks volumes. She enters to see him with his
 head down. Rain drenched clothes.

DONDA (CONT'D)
 Mari, I'm so sorry...

Kanye perks up his jaw, he's hurt and embarrassed. She goes
 over and embraces him. It's comforting.

DONDA (CONT'D)
 Now you see why I think getting
 your education is important...

Kanye pulls away, vexed.

KANYE
 That's the last thing I care about
 right now. I need to focus on this.

DONDA
 You were promising me millions when
 you left.

(MORE)

DONDA (CONT'D)
Your grandpa was in the music
business. That's how it works. It's
unstable.

Kanye heads to his room, but Donda won't let this go.

DONDA (CONT'D)
Did Robin talk to you?

KANYE
Yeah, she did. And Al. Don't be
sending people to preach to me
about college.

DONDA
Okay. I just wanted you to hear
them out.

Kanye turns back and faces her.

KANYE
No. Ma, you're not hearing me. I'm
not going back.
(beat)
I'm dropping out. I'mma focus on my
music full-time.

Donda moves in closer, corners him like a boxer.

DONDA
No, no baby. It's your third
semester. I won't let you.

KANYE
You ain't gotta let me. I'm doing
it myself. I'm 19. I'm a man.

DONDA
(angry)
You a man now. Oh, really? So
you're going to start paying rent
now?

KANYE
Well, I guess-

DONDA
You're a "big man" now.

KANYE
I'll pay rent. I'll show you.

DONDA

You going to show me? Kanye, I know you're going through rejection, baby. See this for what it is. A pipe dream.

KANYE

What's wrong with dreaming big.

DONDA

Ask your dad how it worked out for him.

This one stings Kanye.

DONDA (CONT'D)

Now I don't want you to rush into a decision cause you feel bad.

KANYE

I'm not. I've been thinking about it for a while actually...

DONDA

Since when?

KANYE

Since I started there. I never wanted to go, Ma. I just did it for you.

(beat)

So you wouldn't be disappointed in me...

DONDA

Well, that's out the window now...

Donda begins to walk out, exasperated. Then turns back:

DONDA (CONT'D)

You know I did so much to get you in there. I sacrificed a lot for you, Kanye. Your tuition comes out of my paycheck. And this is how I get repaid? By you quittin'...

Donda tears up.

KANYE

Ma, don't cry...

DONDA

Never would have bought you that piano if I knew you were just gonna throw your life away.

KANYE

Don't say that.

DONDA

You don't understand, baby, education got me out of my mess. My father wasn't a nice man and I saw my brothers go into the streets. But college led me to opportunities I couldn't have even imagined for myself.

A beat.

KANYE

I get it, Ma. It's just not for me. I'm different. I got my own lanes opening up.

DONDA

But if it dries up? Then what? I done told you Kanye, this is a *big choice* that will affect the rest of your life. I'm worried about you.

KANYE

You don't have to worry about me. I don't need school...

DONDA

Oh Lord, that's what they all say. I see them all the time. One day in my class, next day working minimum wage at McDonald's.

KANYE

That's not me. I'm betting on myself. I can do this. I was in that room *this close* to the head of Sony. It's a matter of time. And trust me, when I make it, I'm getting you that Mercedes.

She's stubborn, but he wears her down.

DONDA

I don't need no Mercedes baby. I just want you to have a good life. Make something of yourself.

Kanye moves in closer, meets her eyes.

KANYE

I will. You just gotta give me a chance.

DONDA

But it's hard to be a black man and uneducated. You gotta work twice as hard.

KANYE

I will. I don't need college, I've had a professor in the house with me my whole life.

Donda sighs. His mind is made up.

DONDA

(chuckles, teary)

You sure know how to twirl a word.

KANYE

I learned from the best.

He smiles at her as she wipes a tear.

DONDA

What's your plan baby?

KANYE

I'mma work. Do whatever I gotta do. Pay my rent. And with my music, hustle harder than anybody ever has. Ma, I'll push through. Trust me.

Donda nods, agrees. She gathers herself and then:

DONDA

One year. I'll give you one year to make this music thing work. And if you don't make progress in a year, you re-enroll.

(beat)

Deal?

KANYE

Deal.

Donda fixes a look on Kanye as he exits to his room. We linger on her as she enters the kitchen. She pulls out the tomatoes and has a breakdown. PRE-LAP: "Mystery of Iniquity" as it plays over his **Hustlin' Montage:**

+ He becomes a telemarketer with a headset.

+ Kanye making beats at his home studio.

+ He's on the phone working a call as he doodles a bear on a spaceship on a piece of paper. *The sketch flies off the paper and into the air. He daydreams through his shift.*

INT. GREASY FAST FOOD JOINT - DAY

CLOSE ON an EMPLOYEE putting together a burger. Bun. Patty. Cheese. Pickles. Kanye closely watches his lunch being made. Donda's right, if this music doesn't work out, that's going to be him.

Then his new manager DERIC "D-DOT" (33, hustler) enters.

D-DOT

Sorry I'm late, how much time you got for lunch?

KANYE

Thirty minutes. And I wasted like ten driving here. You got the check Dot?

D-DOT

Yo, they taking forever with that check. It's coming, though. But I got good news: Foxy Brown wants a track for her album. And Jermaine Dupri wants some more too.

KANYE

I needed that! This gonna get me through my shitty Ohio calls.

D-DOT

What are you selling again?

KANYE

Fuckin knives. They flying me down there?

D-DOT

Well, no. They want the beats only. Just the DATS. Jermaine will handle the rest.

Kanye rolls his eyes: This is getting old.

KANYE

Yo, I want more than ghost production. Dion said I gotta start meeting these people.

D-DOT

Dion ain't here. This is what I got you. It keeps the lights on. Just be grateful and let me do the managing.

KANYE

(subdued)

Aight.

D-DOT

GLC told me something about a rap group you're in now?

KANYE

We called the Go Getters. Got Timmy G, GLC, and me. Gonna be the new wave NWA...

D-DOT

(chuckles)

New wave NWA? I don't think those two things go together.

(beat)

Man, just make sure your focus is on these ghost tracks, all right?

KANYE

I'll get em' done.

(stands up)

I gotta go, Dot.

D-DOT

Go sell them knives, "Go Getter."

The Hustlin' Montage continues:

+ Kanye, GLC, and TIMMY G record in his room. It's a blast. But Donda yells at them for being loud. They all laugh.

+ Kanye works the phone at the call center selling knives.

+ Kanye and Go Getters rap on a stage, wildin' out. PULL BACK to reveal a nearly empty bar.

+ Donda comes home to hear the BASS bumping like a club and a bunch of the guys with their girlfriends in the kitchen. One of them is smoking weed. She DROPS her bag at the sight.

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - NIGHT

Kanye walks GLC, TIMMY G and some of their friends out.

KANYE
Goodnight guys.

Kanye shuts the door. Donda sits in her bathrobe and curlers.

DONDA
Kanye, we need to talk.

KANYE
I'm tired, Ma.

DONDA
No, I'm tired. I can't get any
sleep in here with that noise. This
house has turned into a club.

KANYE
I pay rent.

DONDA
One of your friends was smoking
marijuana in my kitchen. Nah, ah.
You don't pay that much, honey.

KANYE
He's an idiot, Ma. I'm sorry. This
is my studio.

DONDA
No, this is my house. It's either
you or your music, Mari. So you
need to find a studio somewhere
else. Cause I can't be having all
these people and that noise.

KANYE
You know I can't afford studio
time...

DONDA
Then maybe you need to move out...

Silence as Kanye processes this.

KANYE
(hurt)
You kickin' me out?

Off Donda feeling his pain but knowing she has to do this.

INT. KANYE'S CHICAGO APARTMENT - DAY

It's a bare apartment with Kanye's studio equipment taking up most of the space. His mattress is thrown on the floor. They bring in the last of the boxes.

Donda takes off her BACK SUPPORT BELT, tired from moving.

KANYE

That's the last of them.

DONDA

(panting)

All those friends and none of them could help you move? Damn...

She picks up the lease and reads it over:

DONDA (CONT'D)

Looks like rent is due on the 1st of the month...a thousand big ones baby.

KANYE

How am I going to get my Pelle Pelle now?

DONDA

(reading lease)

It's called layaway baby. This is growing up. It will make you work harder...And, if you need anything, the landlord is down the hall. I don't know if that's a good thing.

KANYE

I get it. Don't be loud.

DONDA

Remember, it's not my house anymore. There are people on all four sides of you now.

KANYE

I know, Mom.

DONDA

Then you're good. I'm tired now. Gotta return that truck by 5.

KANYE

You're leaving?

DONDA

This is life on your own, Mari.
You'll get used to it.

It sinks in. Donda leans in and kisses him on the head.

KANYE

What am I going to do about dinner?

Donda smiles at him and holds up a FRYING PAN.

INT. KANYE'S CHICAGO APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a FRYING PAN soaked with grease next to a package of bologna. We PAN from this to Kanye at his recording station. He blasts 2001's "Still D.R.E" by Dr. Dre as he bites the drums. He's in the zone...

INT. NEARBY APARTMENT - NIGHT

A FAMILY sits at the dinner table as their GLASSES OF WATER vibrate like *Jurassic Park*. It's from Kanye's thumping BASS. The LANDLORD clenches his fork in anger...

INT. KANYE'S CHICAGO APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

BANG-BANG-BANG!

LANDLORD (O.S.)

(stern)

LOWER THAT SHIT!!!

Off Kanye, frustrated as he lowers it...

INT. SHITTY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kanye records with HOLLOW (28), a local Chicago rapper. Hollow has a ROLEX and CHAIN on. Kanye plays another new beat for him. It's the "Hey Mama" beat...

HOLLOW

This one is dope too, man. I want
both for my album.

KANYE

(smiles)

Glad you like them...

Hollow grabs a pipe and starts to smoke. But something else is on Kanye's mind...

KANYE (CONT'D)

Yo, before you hit that, I was wondering, when you was going to pay me?

HOLLOW

I need a little time, Kanye...

KANYE

(frustrated)

It's been two fuckin' weeks man. I need to make rent.

HOLLOW

I can't right now. Money's tight.

KANYE

(re: Rolex)

But you got a new Rollie though...

HOLLOW

(sighs)

Y'know, fine. This is all I have right now--

Hollow digs in his pocket and pulls out BILLS. He hands them to Kanye, who counts:

KANYE

It's only two hundred. You owe me a G.

HOLLOW

C'mon, I bought you lunch yesterday, man.

KANYE

Yo, this is *my business*. My income. If you can't pay--

HOLLOW

Ay, what about if I give you a gram?

Hollow holds out a baggie of crack rocks. Kanye glances--

KANYE

I ain't with that--

Kanye grabs the HEY MAMA BEAT CD and puts it in his bag.

HOLLOW

(heated)

Why you fuckin trippin', Kanye? Just leave the CD--

KANYE

Naw, you get what you pay for...

Frustrated, Kanye puts on his backpack and takes off...

INT. KANYE'S CHICAGO APARTMENT - TIMELAPSE

Seasons change from winter to spring as Kanye turns out beats over a few months...Kanye hasn't had much success. He goes to the fridge when he sees a NOTE slide under his door.

He picks it up and reads:

KANYE

(reads notice)

"You have been evicted from the premises for multiple disturbances, effective at the end of the month."

(beat)

Shit.

He can't go back to his Mom's house. Kanye digs through a drawer and pulls out Hop's business card. He dials a phone number. It's busy. He calls again.

KANYE (CONT'D)

Pick up-pick up-pick-up...

Nobody's picking up. He tries again, like he's calling a radio station. As it rings, Kanye notices an I LOVE NY shirt on the floor from his last visit. This gives him an idea...

KANYE (CONT'D)

Oh, now we gon get outta here.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Hurried, Kanye stuffs clothes into a suitcase and packs his tapes and recordings in his backpack.

INT. NEW YORK SUBWAY - NIGHT

Kanye struggles to gather his backpack and suitcase at his stop. He carries them up the stairs of the station...

EXT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Steam rises as Kanye exits the station and sees BASELINE STUDIOS ahead. He stares at the sign, in awe. This is the legendary recording studio of Roc-a-Fella.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye approaches reception as he carefully stashes his suitcase underneath one of the chairs. Hip-Hop spots him.

HIP-HOP

What the hell? Kanye, what are you doing here?

KANYE

I came to show you my new demo.

Hip-Hop notices the luggage and sees what's going on here. He pulls Kanye aside.

HIP-HOP

I heard your last demo already.

KANYE

I know, this one's new.

HIP-HOP

Then mail it. Don't come down here. What, did you fly down here just for this?

KANYE

Yeah. You like the production on the last one or what?

HIP-HOP

Uh, yeah. You crushed it.

KANYE

Well, if you like the production then let me show you some more.

HIP-HOP

Yo, there's more to it than that.

KANYE

Hop, I've sent you like 20 demos. You like the songs. I'm here now. Let me show you what I got.

That's when Hop's partner, GEE ROBERSON (29, ambitious yet down to earth), approaches.

GEE

Yo, Hop, we gotta start this session.

HIP-HOP

Okay.
(to Kanye)
(MORE)

HIP-HOP (CONT'D)
You shouldn't be here. It doesn't
work like this.

Gee watches Kanye beg for a shot.

KANYE
I know Beanie still lookin' for
beats.

HIP-HOP
How did you know that?

KANYE
(lying)
These other labels are trying to
bring me on. But I want Roc-A-
Fella...

HIP-HOP
*Really...*What labels?

KANYE
A bunch of labels. But I want a
shot with you guys.

GEE
You flew all the way up here from
Chicago just to possibly work with
us?

KANYE
Yeah.

GEE
Hop, maybe we should give him a
shot? Beans needs songs and the
kid's last demo had no loose beats.

A beat. Hip-Hop considers this. He nods. *Fuck it.*

HIP-HOP
(to Kanye)
OK. We're wrapping Beanie's album
this week. But shit, if you want, I
can give you a try out track,
tonight.

KANYE
You gassing me up, Hop?

GEE
He's not. If Beanie likes it, we'll
talk more productions.

KANYE
And if he don't?

HIP-HOP
Then it was nice knowing you. Just
bring all your DATS and show us
what you got.

GEE
Welcome to New York.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - MOMENTS LATER

Kanye enters with Hip and Gee as they make an introduction.

HIP-HOP
This is Beanie...

Then Kanye meets BEANIE SIGEL (26), a big, intimidating producer with tough eyes. They don't call him the Broad Street bully for nothing. He's straight from the streets of Philly.

BEANIE SIGEL
Look what we have here...

Beanie's Eagle's jersey and baggy jeans are the stark opposite of Kanye's preppy look: Gucci loafers, a yellow Polo, and tailored trousers. He double takes Kanye's outfit. Kanye goes for a fist bump but Beanie misses it.

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)
Show me what you got, pretty boy.

Kanye's slightly intimidated...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - LATER

Kanye plays him a song he's been working on. Hip nods, unsure of it. Beanie ain't feeling it as he rips his headphones off.

BEANIE SIGEL
Da fuck is this?

KANYE
It's gonna be dope.

BEANIE SIGEL
This is some wack shit. I ain't
havin this on my album. What the
fuck, Hop?

Beanie exits down the hall as Hip goes to calm him down.

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)

Who the fuck is that dude? I don't got time for amateurs.

HIP-HOP

Yo, trust me, Kanye will get it together.

In the studio, Kanye's nerves are high. Gee talks him up.

GEE

Yo man, this ain't Chicago anymore. It's the big leagues. Beans don't fuck around.

KANYE

If he don't like that one, I'll give him another one.

GEE

No-no-no. If your first doesn't hit, you're not going to get a second one. That's why we call it a "try out."

Gee walks away as Kanye stares at the MPC. He needs to make something from scratch. He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath and searches his dreams for inspiration...

INT. KANYE'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK - 1991

YOUNG KANYE (10). At Donda's faculty work party, he's the only kid there. He stops sketching in his sketchbook and watches Donda schmooze. Then someone brings a vinyl to the record player. GRAHAM NASH's Songs for Beginners.

She puts on the single "Chicago."

It plays. Kanye listens. Even as a young boy, this music affects him.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye snaps out of it. He found his inspiration. Gee goes through paperwork nearby as Kanye runs out of the studio.

GEE

Where you going!?

EXT. NEW YORK STREETS - NIGHT

Kanye sprints quickly into a nearby RECORD STORE...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

GEE

(to the receptionist)
I guess he's not coming back...

That's when Kanye bursts in with a big brown paper bag.

GEE (CONT'D)

What the fuck, dude? You can't be
leaving like that on studio time.
Beanie's already pissed.

KANYE

I needed to get this. Trust me.

Kanye REVEALS a VINYL RECORD from the bag. It's GRAHAM NASH's
Songs for Beginners album. Gee shakes his head: "Whatever."

Fearful, Kanye quickly puts together the beat that could be
his last. He chops up the sample "Chicago" into a song.

Then he hops on the DRUM MACHINE. He programs the drums over
the next ten minutes. He layers it on the sample.

LATER...Beanie enters as the folksy "Chicago" plays. Beanie
notices the vinyl record cover and shakes his head.

BEANIE SIGEL

They said it was ready. Just get it
over with.

(re: "Chicago")

And can you turn off this bullshit?

KANYE

It's the sample. I chopped it up.

Beanie rolls his eyes as Kanye hits the presets and it fades
into his version, what we know as "*The Truth*". It's a stark,
murderous beat, one of darkest, street beats of his career.

Kanye waits. If Beanie doesn't bite, he's done.

That's when Beanie starts feeling it, bumping his head. Hip
and Gee sway, when a beat hits, the room feels it.

BEANIE SIGEL

Hold up. Nigga, you made *this* beat?

Kanye nods.

HIP-HOP

Told you he'd deliver.

BEANIE SIGEL

It's hard. I can vibe with it. I'll take it.

(beat)

What else you got?

KANYE

Yo, I got hot beats, but I also got the lines.

They chuckle at this. The mood has lightened. Kanye pulls out his DEMO CD and plays it. They listen to Kanye's demo, impressed.

GEE

Damn. Who that spittin'?

KANYE

(obviously)

That's me.

BEANIE SIGEL

(confused)

You rap? What you rappin' about?

KANYE

Everything man. I'm more of a rapper than a producer.

HIP-HOP

You got that one beat you showed me on the phone? Jay heard it, thought it had potential.

KANYE

Jay-Z?

HIP-HOP

Yeah.

KANYE

Oh. It's right here--

Kanye plays an early version of "This Can't Be Life" track...

HIP-HOP

Yo, this is good. Reeal good. Leave it here so I show Jay tonight. He *might want that* for his Dynasty album.

Kanye's eyes light up when he hears that. *Jay-Z wants my shit?* Beanie looks at Hip-Hop sideways: "Really?"

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - DAY

Kanye enters as he notices someone inside. White shirt, Yankee hat, chain -- This is JAY-Z (30), larger than life. Kanye's tense now as he approaches...

HIP-HOP

If it isn't the man of the hour.
Jay just spit on your track, Kanye.

Kanye's gleeful as Jay-Z turns to him and gives him dap. He's frozen with delight.

JAY-Z

Good shit on that. You a real soulful dude.

KANYE

Thanks.

HIP-HOP

Play it for him.

Beanie sits in the corner, a little jealous that Kanye getting this attention from Jay. Beans is Jay's #1 protégé.

JAY-Z

(to Kanye)

Tell me what you think of this. Be honest.

Hip plays "This Can't Be Life." Kanye nods his head.

JAY-Z (CONT'D)

So what you think?

KANYE

Man, that shit tight.

JAY-Z

Yeah it is. You got good taste.

(to Hip)

I'mma bounce, boys, got a video to shoot.

Jay looks for his Bentley keys as Kanye watches. This is a rare face-to-face he may never get again. He presses:

KANYE

Yo, Jay...

(pause)

I could rap too.

Beanie and Hip heads turn when Kanye says that. Amateur move. Jay indulges.

JAY-Z
What you got?

Kanye grabs his CD from his bag.

JAY-Z (CONT'D)
No, I want to hear you straight.

KANYE
(nervous)
Aight.
(beat)
Yo, Yo.
(pause)
Ummm....Let me tell you, wait I'mma
start over...Yo. I'm killin y'all
niggaz on that lyrical shit.
Mayonnaise colored Benz, I push
miracle whips.

Jay-Z's eyes flicker when he says that last line.

JAY-Z
Man, that was cool. *Miracle whips.*
That's a good one.
(chuckles)
Take care fellas.

Jay-Z heads out with his entourage as Kanye stands there with Beanie and Hop.

BEANIE SIGEL
You had him but then you had to
rap. That's the last thing he's
going to remember.

HIP-HOP
There's a time and place Kanye.

BEANIE SIGEL
And no offense, those bars was
weak. Just make your beats brotha,
stay in your lane.

KANYE
But I'm a rapper too. I ain't gonna
hide that.

BEANIE SIGEL
Yo, you an ambitious kid. But Jay
don't see you like that, nobody
does. You ain't like us.

Kanye stomachs this reality, but rebounds.

KANYE
Cause I ain't a gangsta?

BEANIE SIGEL
(duh)
Yeah. Look at yourself bruh. You
look like a mannequin from the Gap.

He points at Kanye's tight shirt.

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)
Stay behind the boards, cause this
game will eat you up the way you
are.

KANYE
That ain't true.

BEANIE SIGEL
Really?

Beanie steps up nose to nose and spits a hard acapella rap in
Kanye's face to prove a point:

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)
*What you feelin' to rap about. You
never sell crack out your house. Or
put a gat to a mouth. Or put a fist
to your spouse. So how you gon move
the crowd. I bet a thousand that
you get booed out.*

This levels Kanye. Confirms his biggest insecurity of not
fitting in as a rapper. Rattled, he doesn't respond.

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye leaves with his backpack but Hip stops him and hands
him an envelope. It's a CHECK.

HIP-HOP
This is for you. And don't let
Beanie get under your skin. Just
put your head down and kill these
beats and you'll get more of that.

EXT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye exits Baseline and opens the CHECK to reveal the amount: 25K. It's the most money he's ever received. That much cash slaps a fat smile on your face.

INT. U-HAUL TRUCK - DRIVING - DAY

"A House is Not A Home" by Luther Vandross plays ("Slow Jamz" sample) on the radio as Donda drives. Kanye sits in the passenger seat and stares at his first CHECK.

KANYE

That landlord was a jerk.

DONDA

It was a quiet building.

KANYE

Whatever. New York is noisy anyway.

DONDA

Jersey, baby. You can't afford New York.

They pass a sign that says "NEW JERSEY 300 MILES"

EXT. HOBOKEN APARTMENT - NEW JERSEY - DAY

Traffic. Honking. New Jersey is loud. Kanye grabs the last box as Donda stands by the truck.

KANYE

Don't you just love it in there,
Ma? The windows, the view.

Donda starts tearing up.

KANYE (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

DONDA

At least I knew you were ten
minutes away in Chicago. Now you're
really gone.

KANYE

Ma, I'm a phone call away.

DONDA

I know. It's just, you're never
going to be my little Mari anymore.
You're really grown now.

Kanye moves in closer to hug her tight. She gives him a kiss.

DONDA (CONT'D)
Now you be careful out here, all
right?

KANYE
Ma, I'm from Southside Chicago.
These people better be careful
around me!

Laughter. Donda grabs his chin and stares him in the eye.

DONDA
Call your mother. Don't be a
stranger.

She wipes a tear as she lets go and gets in the truck. She starts it:

DONDA (CONT'D)
And go down to IKEA and get
yourself a bed with a bed frame.
This ain't Chicago, they got *big*
rats in Jersey.

She drives off as Kanye watches her go and she eyes him in her rearview mirror...

INT. HOBOKEN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kanye stares at the empty apartment with no furniture.

Homesick, Kanye stares at the distant New York City skyline in the window. This triggers an idea, as he hops on his ROLAND VS 1680 (A far cry from his 1997 setup) and starts to work on a new beat... "Homecoming."

INT. IKEA - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

Kanye eyes a bed on the showroom floor. He's deciding when he notices a beautiful young woman, SUMEKE (21, African-American) looking as well. She has curls, hips, and a sweet smile. He engages:

KANYE
I can't pick one. There's too many
options...

SUMEKE
(sarcastic)
Which one "represents" you?

KANYE
I just need a bed.

Kanye takes a seat on the bed, feels it out.

KANYE (CONT'D)
This one's cool. You guys have it
in blue?

SUMEKE
I don't work here.

KANYE
But you made it seem like--

SUMEKE
I was just playing.
(beat)
Sumeke.

She extends her hand out.

KANYE
Kanye.

SUMEKE
(chuckles)
What did we do to our parents to
deserve these names?

Laughter.

KANYE
I used to hate it, but now I love
it...cause only I have it. It's not
regular, y'know? People won't
remember a Bob or a Jane, but
they'll remember a Kanye...or a
Sumeke.

SUMEKE
I like the name Kanye.

KANYE
I like the name Sumeke.

She smiles.

KANYE (CONT'D)
You live out here?

SUMEKE
I'm from Chicago, born and raised.
Just out here visiting family.

KANYE

No way! I'm from Chicago, just moved out here. I'm a rapper.

SUMEKE

A rapper? I never met a real rapper before.

KANYE

Cross it off your bucket list, girl. I'm a producer too.

SUMEKE

You must be a real busy guy.

KANYE

Yeah, I am. But I do other things, like woo women in IKEA.

SUMEKE

This is you wooing?

Kanye nervously retorts.

KANYE

It's not working?

Sumeke smiles as her cousin ALEXIS (22) approaches.

ALEXIS

C'mon, let's go--

SUMEKE

I'll be right there.

ALEXIS

Oh, he's cuuute.

Alexis walks away. Kanye smiles as Sumeke's caught.

SUMEKE

That's my cousin. She's dumb.

(beat)

Well, I do gotta go, but maybe you can rap for me some time...

KANYE

Shit, I'll rap for your right now.

SUMEKE

Here?

Kanye coughs, then breaks out into it acapella:

KANYE

I met this girl when I was 3 years old And what I loved most, she had so much soul She said, "Excuse me, lil homie, I know you don't know me But my name is Windy and I like to blow trees" And from that point I never blow her off Niggas come from out of town, I like to show her off They like to act tough, she like to tore 'em off And make'em straighten up their hat 'Cause she know they soft And when I grew up, she showed me how to go downtown. In the nighttime her face lit up, so astoundin' I told her in my heart is where she'll always be.

She's impressed throughout as a few others gawk at this odd occurrence. Kanye will perform anywhere.

SUMEKE

That's really good. Who's the lucky girl?

After a beat:

KANYE

Chicago.

INT. HOBOKEN APARTMENT - DAY

Kanye's bed is up as he works on another beat...it feels special, but we're not quite sure what it is yet...

EXT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye and Gee take a break outside...

KANYE

I heard Jay doing a studio album next. What's up with that?

GEE

Remember, take it slow. We can't rush these things.

KANYE

I gotta level up and get on it.

GEE

You need to be patient. There's a hierarchy you have to respect.

(MORE)

GEE (CONT'D)
 It's politics with these producers.
 When it's your time, you'll know.

KANYE
 (sighs)
 Yeah, okay...

GEE
 Just focus on getting on Beanie's
 album. Don't worry about Jay.

INT. HOBOKEN APARTMENT - DAY

Kanye listens to Bobby Bland's "Ain't No Love in the Heart of the City." He pulls up an email from Hop on his laptop.

Schedule of recording. Kanye's first, then Beanie, then scrolls down to see: **JAY'S ALBUM 8-10pm.**

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - NEW YORK - NIGHT

Kanye and Sumeke tour the city as they listen to his mixtape on a walkman. Sumeke takes off her headphones.

SUMEKE
 Wow, this sounds really great. I
 can't believe you made this.

KANYE
 (shy)
 Thanks.

SUMEKE
 It's just, those sounds. How do you
 do it?

KANYE
 I just hear it and see it in my
 head.

SUMEKE
 C'mon, really, how do you come up
 with it?

Kanye pauses as they reach the center of Times Square.

KANYE
 It's in my head. To me, when I hear
 a sound, I see them. Like they're
 colors, y'know?

Sumeke smiles as Kanye opens up.

SUMEKE

I just wonder what it's like in your head.

KANYE

You know what? Listen to this.

Kanye grabs the headphones and slips them onto her ears. He brushes her hair back.

KANYE (CONT'D)

Ready?

(beat)

Now imagine this, all these lights and colors are moving to the music...

He presses play on his CD player. The original John Legend version of "Homecoming" by Kanye West plays. He guides our eyes to the lights of Times Square as he whispers in her ear.

Music builds.

Instantly, the Times Square screens and all of the lights now MOVE to Kanye's music. They GLOW like a hypnotizing James Turrell installation. Colors change with the soul, the bass, and the drums. She giggles as Kanye continues to whisper "Picture this."

The soul, the nostalgia, and the flashing lights are delightfully orchestrated. It's spellbinding. Enchanting. For a fleeting moment, she sees it as Kanye sees it: Synesthesia, where sounds evoke an experience of color.

He smiles watching her smile. Slowly, the music FADES. And then, we're back in the normal sounds of Times Square.

SUMEKE

That was incredible.

Kanye gives her a kiss to remember...

EXT. MADISON SQUARE PARK - NIGHT

Kanye and Sumeke walk the park carrying shopping bags (Ralph Lauren, Footlocker, etc.) as Kanye drinks a soda from KFC.

SUMEKE

So I just found out I was accepted into my major program.

KANYE

When are you done?

SUMEKE

Done? After I graduate in two years, then I got *two more* years of a master's program, then I have two years to get my certification, and *then* I can be a therapist.

KANYE

Wow, that's a lot of school. Why they gotta make you do all that? They should know how dope you are.

SUMEKE

I wish I was like you, but it's what I have to do if I want to help people in this field...

KANYE

It shouldn't be that hard is all. I could barely do a year let alone six.

A beat between them.

KANYE (CONT'D)

But I do want to help people too. With my music...

SUMEKE

How's that going?

KANYE

It's been a rollercoaster, that's for sure...I got this big Roc-a-Fella album session coming up where they see if they want my stuff.

SUMEKE

You'll do fine.

KANYE

Nah, but if they don't like it, I don't know what's next.

SUMEKE

First of all, how do you know they won't like it?

KANYE

It's competitive. There's different producers that have relationships with these artists, I don't. I need to figure out a way to show my stuff to Jay. He's gotta hear it.

SUMEKE

Look at Kanye West, name dropping
and shit.

Kanye laughs.

SUMEKE (CONT'D)

I don't see what the big deal is,
why don't you just play it for him?

KANYE

It don't work like that. He'd have
to be in the room and plus the
producers won't let me.

SUMEKE

I mean, I don't know. I just think
if you have music that you think is
good, I would just play it.

Kanye sips his soda. Maybe she's right...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - DAY - 5:55PM

Kanye enters with his Louis Vuitton bag, his tight polo, and
Italian loafers, unlike anybody there.

JUST BLAZE (22), Beanie's young prodigy, cooks up a beat in
the studio. Kanye watches through the window and listens as
Blaze finishes this hot track.

It's the beat that will become "Girls, Girls, Girls." It has
everybody in the studio feeling it.

BEANIE SIGEL

That's my fuckin' boy!

HIP-HOP

It's hot, man. Jay goin' to spit on
that tonight!

Everyone gives him love as he starts gathering his stuff.
This is a tough act to follow. Blaze has clout with them.

BEANIE SIGEL

Nah, stick around, maybe you can
fuck with Jay and Timbo later. It's
my birthday, we're gonna party
after.

JUST BLAZE

Oh, I'm down...

Beanie smiles. Kanye opens the door and Beanie's face sours.

HIP-HOP
What up Kanye--

BEANIE SIGEL
Sup.

KANYE
Happy Birthday, man.

BEANIE SIGEL
(subdued)
Thanks.

JUST BLAZE
Yo, Just Blaze, good to meet ya--

KANYE
Kanye.

BEANIE SIGEL
(re: Just Blaze)
Yo, Kanye, this guy dropped out of college too.

KANYE
From where?

BEANIE SIGEL
Princeton. Smart ass nigga.

KANYE
Cool.

Kanye gulps. Just Blaze is his age, same story, better school, and he FITS IN with these guys.

KANYE (CONT'D)
I'm ready to give you an album's worth, Beans...

BEANIE SIGEL
Slow down there. I'm tellin ya, Just Blaze has some jams and I got a lotta shit, just giving you a warning...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - LATER

Kanye's underwater as Beanie looks bored. He texts on his phone then looks up. Kanye plays the "Get Em High" beat.

KANYE

This one, trust you can rap over it
like this: *My freshman year I was
going through hella problems
'Til I built up the nerve to drop
my ass up outta college
My teacher said I'm a loser--*

BEANIE SIGEL

(scolding)

Yo, stop it. I don't want to hear
your raps in my session. All right?
I just want the beats. And I'm not
feeling that shit, anything else?

KANYE

(subdued)

I got a few more.

BEANIE SIGEL

Well, you got twenty minutes...

Kanye digs into his backpack. There's a CD marked in red:
"Dope Shit." He leaves it and grabs another one, **"Beanie
Beats: #2"**.

Kanye turns back as Hip does a hand gesture: "C'mon man."
Nervous, he plays another one and it's meandering. This is
his work in progress "Gold Digger," but Beanie ain't biting.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - CONTROL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Just Blaze chats with Gee as they watch Kanye struggle.

JUST BLAZE

Yo, this was the guy Hip was
hyping?

GEE

Kanye got mad beats.

JUST BLAZE

Yo Gee, sorry, but I ain't worried
about this foo. He's putting his
own raps over the beats. What kind
of producer does that?

Gee doesn't respond, watches Kanye, pulling for him.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - CONTINUOUS

As another beat plays, Beanie cuts it off--

BEANIE SIGEL

Yo, I just ain't feeling these, man. No offense. I think I got my album set.

KANYE

What about the drums on the first one you liked?

BEANIE SIGEL

I'm straight. Now I got my studio sesh with JAY right now, so you should start packing up.

Kanye grits his teeth. *Fuck*. But then he sees it. Outside the control room, an entourage enters the building. Big fuckin BODYGUARDS. It's fuckin JAY-Z. It's now or never. Kanye takes a deep breath as Gee opens the door.

GEE

Yo boys, Jay here, he wants that track, Beanie.

BEANIE SIGEL

Okay. Give me a sec.

Kanye takes his time getting his stuff as Beanie's impatient.

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)

Hip, put in that beat Jay wants.

Hip pulls a disc out labeled "**Jay's Beat.**"

HIP-HOP

Kanye, put this in for me, yeah?

Hip hands it to Kanye. He puts it in CD TRAY #2. Then Kanye discreetly grabs the "**Dope Beats**" CD from his bag and slips it into CD TRAY #1.

BEANIE SIGEL

(to Kanye)

Sorry, man, you gotta go.

Kanye's moving like a sloth right as Jay-Z enters the room. Jay wears a Gucci bucket hat.

JAY-Z

Happy birthday, Beans.

BEANIE SIGEL

(smiles)

Thanks, Jay.

JAY-Z
I heard you got a present for me.

BEANIE SIGEL
You gonna love it.

JAY-Z
Sup, Hop.
(to Kanye)
Sup, "Miracle Whips"

Kanye waves and smiles. Jay remembered that line.

BEANIE SIGEL
Hip, play it...

Hip looks to Kanye: "Press Play." Kanye gulps as he knows this is his only shot. But instead of playing Beanie's beat, Kanye presses play on CD #1. Jay-Z and the whole room listen. This is a big risk. And it can end badly.

The first track is an obscure sample, the opening of "Takeover." Beanie looks at Kanye. Shakes his head. A moment of tension.

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)
This isn't it. Shut that shit off.

But Jay bobs his head a little bit, he FEELS it. Just Blaze and Hip nod as well.

BEANIE SIGEL (CONT'D)
Sorry, Jay, that ain't the record.
I don't know what that is.

KANYE
That's mine.

Beanie's about to lose his shit as Kanye pushes it further.

KANYE (CONT'D)
I'll show you the next one...

BEANIE SIGEL
Nah, we're cool.

JAY-Z
I want to listen. Play it.

Kanye feels Beanie's glare on him now. He plays the next track that will become "Never Change." Jay ain't as physical with his reaction to this track.

JAY-Z (CONT'D)
All right. Another one.

Kanye plays another one as Jay and the group nod their heads. Beanie still ain't letting himself feel it. Jay can tell.

JAY-Z (CONT'D)

I like this one, what you think,
Beans?

BEANIE SIGEL

(shrugs)
It's aight.

JAY-Z

Another one.

Kanye plays the next one. It's "Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City." From the opening drums and sample, it enraptures the room. It's a powerful, hard-driving beat with vivid drums that even Beanie vibes with...

Kanye sees this, the power of his music. SUDDENLY, the FOUR WALLS of the STUDIO COLLAPSE! This song breaks down barriers.

But we're no longer in NY, but the heart of Southside Chicago.

The PALE BLUE color of *The Blueprint* cover begins washing over parts of the city, it's glorious...

+ KIDS are playing jump rope in the street, but when they hear the music, they stop and look to the sky as the PALE BLUE washes over their block...

+ BLUE COLLAR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS stop hammering as PALE BLUE washes them too, giving color to their harsh life...

+ GANGSTERS have GUNS drawn in a back alley of the city. A deal gone bad. But the music turns up and they put the guns down. They turn and listen as the PALE blue washes over them too...

+ Then WE SEE OLD MAN OTIS, an inspiration for the song, now singing instead of humming "Ain't No Love" hook as the pale blue washes over him...

+ Donda listens to it in her car, with tears in her eyes as the blue washes over her...her son's first big song...

+ Finally, WE SEE KANYE creating this song in his apartment in New Jersey, but the SOUL is everything from *Southside Chicago*...

You can't underestimate the POWER OF MUSIC...

We REWIND and now we're back in the studio. Everyone's listening. These are soul sounds they've never quite heard before. A strutting soul masterpiece.

The room buzzes now.

Jay finally cracks a huge smile as he slides his Gucci bucket hat over his head:

JAY-Z (CONT'D)
OOOOOOOOOOOH!

Everyone wilds out as Kanye finally is able to breathe. Beanie pouts silently. Just Blaze is in shock. Hip gives Kanye a fist. "Good shit." Gee smiles at him from the corner.

JAY-Z (CONT'D)
Start it over...

Jay gets up and heads over to the booth. The inspiration and energy in the room is palpable.

BEANIE SIGEL
You gonna record it right now?

JAY-Z
Yeahhhhh.....

Jay slips on the headphones and holds his index finger out. GO. Kanye rolls "Ain't No Love" beat from the top. It's the Jay and Kanye show right now and everyone else are spectators. Kanye CUES him--

JAY-Z (CONT'D)
(raps)
*Uh, Uhh, Listen first the Fat Boys
break up, everyday I wake up.
Somebody got a problem with Hov'
Whassup y'all niggas all fed up
cause I got a little cheddar....*

Kanye bounces his head, looking around, this is all surreal. He beams with quiet glee...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - LATER

Kanye mixes "Ain't No Love" as DAMON "DAME" DASH (30) enters. Roc-A-Fella's COO. Kanye instantly recognizes him.

DAMON DASH
Yo, you need to get out of here,
you on my studio time! I got
Timbaland coming in thirty minutes.

KANYE
 Sorry bout that. Just gettin' down
 the final mix for "Ain't No Love."

Kanye starts getting up, worried. Dame sizes him up.

DAMON DASH
 Wait, you that kid that gave all
 them beats to Jay?

KANYE
 Yeah...

DAMON DASH
 Yo, this nigga got classics to your
 beats.

KANYE
 Thanks.

DAMON DASH
 You know what? Finish up your
 track. No worries.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - CONTROL ROOM - LATER

Dame speaks with Gee and Hip-Hop as Kanye works inside.

DAMON DASH
 (re: Kanye)
 He wants a deal, huh--

HIP-HOP
 As both a producer AND an artist...

DAMON DASH
 Fuck does he think he is, Dr. Dre?

Both Gee and Hip turn to Dame, nodding their heads.

DAMON DASH (CONT'D)
 Well, he remind me of a blacker
 Babyface.

Laughter.

GEE
 But he don't do R&B. He's a rapper,
 Dame.

DAMON DASH
 (re: points inside studio)
 This kid with the tight clothes?
 Nah...

(MORE)

DAMON DASH (CONT'D)

(beat)

C'mon, we can run his beats and just throw Cam on everything.

HIP-HOP

I don't think so, he's pretty stubborn...

DAMON DASH

Well, we gotta to hold onto him. Jay love his beats and doesn't want to let him go.

(beat)

He just don't see him as a rapper.

Dame stares at Kanye as he passionately raps to a beat.

EXT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye makes a call outside on the payphone. First time he's been outside since morning. INTERCUT BETWEEN KANYE AND DONDA:

DONDA

Why are you calling me collect? Are you in trouble?

KANYE

Nah Mom. I just don't have change and I haven't been home.

DONDA

I left you three messages. You need to get a cell phone boy if you ain't going to go home. I've been missing you. And I heard that new Jay-Z song.

KANYE

What'd you think?

DONDA

Loved it. It was beautiful. Kids are playing it at school.

KANYE

They got me doing more songs now, so I gotta strike while the iron's hot, y'know? You get that money I sent you?

DONDA

Yes, Mari, I did. Thank you, baby. And I understand. It's Finals week anyways.

(MORE)

DONDA (CONT'D)
 I'll let you go, you sound busy...
 (then)
 I love you.

But Kanye already hung up. End with Donda holding the phone at home. "Never Let Me Down" is scored over the next scenes.

INT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - HALLWAY - DAY

Donda exits her office carrying a cupcake with a candle. Professor Milner passes her.

PROFESSOR MILNER
 Happy Birthday, Donda. I didn't forget.

DONDA
 (smiles)
 Thank you, David.

PROFESSOR MILNER
 Any big plans for tonight?

DONDA
 Grading. My presents are all these midterms.

PROFESSOR MILNER
 What about Kanye?

Donda shoots him a look: "C'mon now."

DONDA
 He's busy. Just me tonight.

PROFESSOR MILNER
 Have a good one.

Donda walks down the hall as she thinks of her son...

INT. HOBOKEN APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON answering machine as the red light blinks. Finally, Kanye comes home after ten days of straight living in the studio. He tosses his keys down and plays his message:

DONDA (V.O.)
 Mari...It's your momma...Missed you tonight for my birthday. Call me so I know you're alive. Love you, bye.

He sighs deeply. He missed it. *Fuck.*

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - NIGHT

Donda sits on her couch grading papers quietly when she hears a melodic LOUD DRUM BEAT: BOOM-BOOM-BOOM. Oddly enough, it's coming from Kanye's room.

She gets up and moves toward it. *Wait, is he home?*

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KANYE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Donda opens the door to REVEAL...nothing. Only a window open. She walks toward it and sees the next door NEIGHBOR hammering a nail in to his roof. She shuts the window.

She turns back and sees an ELECTRIC PIANO peeking out of a dusty box. She walks over to it. Admires it. We stay close on Donda as it takes her back...

INT. RADIO SHACK - DAY - FLASHBACK - 1991

A 14-year-old KANYE counts out his money. It's clearly not enough, the CASHIER can already tell. But Donda swoops in and pulls out a couple more bills to help him out. Kanye smiles as he carries his ELECTRIC PIANO out...

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - FLASHBACK - 1991

BING-BONG-BUM! The loud, annoying sounds of a kid who doesn't know how to use a piano. But Kanye keeps at it.

Donda comes in from the kitchen, bothered:

DONDA
Sounds good, baby. Almost got it!

Kanye keeps messing with it as the loud, odd noises continue, then we snap back to --

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KANYE'S ROOM - PRESENT

-- the SOUND STOPS. A lonely silence. We're back with Donda with watery eyes.

Her hands graze past the piano and the words "Kanye West" written on it in kid's handwriting with a Sharpie. She walks out and shuts the door behind her.

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - DONDA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Donda's asleep in her pajamas when LOUD KNOCKING wakes her. Worried, she grabs her bat and approaches the door. Opens it:

KANYE
Ma!!! Happy Birthday!

It's Kanye and Sumeke.

DONDA
You shouldn't have. It's late.

Kanye gives her a big hug and kiss.

KANYE
Took a red eye. I wouldn't miss it
for anything.

Donda smiles. Sumeke carries a PINK CAKE BOX in.

KANYE (CONT'D)
Now put the bat down.

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Donda blows out the candles as Sumeke claps!

DONDA
Thank you, baby, these means a lot
to me.
(to Sumeke)
Thank you, dear.

KANYE
I got you something, Ma...

Kanye hands her a wrapped gift.

DONDA
(smiles)
What's this?

She unwraps it. A CD, labeled "**Mama**" written in sharpie.

KANYE
It ain't a card or a normal gift.
It's a song I made for you. Play
it.

She struggles to turn on the CD PLAYER. Puts on her glasses.

DONDA

Mari, help me out, I don't know how
to work this thing--

Kanye laughs and goes over to help her put it in. He presses play on the freshly completed track. It's a demo version of "Hey Mama" without the lyrics.

KANYE

I'mma sing something for you...

DONDA

Ohhh, sure baby.

SUMEKE

He's been practicing the whole car
ride over.

Kanye looks his Mom in the eye. It's an intimate performance all for her. It's not as clean as the studio version -- it's raw yet still has a strong, stirring impact.

KANYE

*I wanna scream so loud for you,
cause I'm so proud of you. Let me
tell you what I'm about to do. I
know I act a fool, but, I promise
you I'm goin back to school. I
appreciate what you allowed for me.
I just want you to be proud of me.*

Donda's eyes begin to water as Kanye continues. It even awes Sumeke as she watches.

KANYE (CONT'D)

*I wanna tell the whole world about
a friend of mine. This little light
of mine and I'm finna let it shine,
I'm finna take yall back to them
better times. I'm finna talk about
my mama if y'all don't mind. I was
three years old, when you and I
moved to the Chi Late December,
harsh winter gave me a cold. You
fixed me up something that was good
for my soul. Famous homemade
chicken soup, can I have another
bowl? You work late nights just to
keep on the lights. Mommy got me
training wheels so I could keep on
my bike.*

*His voice grows more fragile. The light around him is red
like an intimate stage performance.*

KANYE (CONT'D)

And you would give anything in this world. Michael Jackson leather and a glove, but didn't give me a curl, And you never put no man over me, And I love you for that mommy can't you see? Seven years old, caught you with tears in your eyes, Cuz a nigga cheatin, telling you lies, then I started to cry. As we knelt on the kitchen floor. I said: Mommy I'mma love you till you don't hurt no more. And when I'm older, you ain't gotta work no more. And I'mma get you that mansion that we couldn't afford. See, you're unbreakable, unmistakable. Highly capable, lady that's makin loot. A livin' legend too, just look at what heaven do. Send us an angel, and I thank you. Just tell me what kind of S-Type Donda West like? Tell me the perfect color so I make it just right. It don't gotta be Mother's Day, or your birthday, for me to just call and say: Hey Mama.

Donda holds her hand on her heart.

DONDA

It's beautiful, baby.

She gives him a hug as Sumeke stands to the side.

DONDA (CONT'D)

Get in here, girl!

Sumeke goes in for the group hug. Donda kisses Kanye on the cheek. PRE-LAP: *"I Want You Back"* by The Jackson 5.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

"I Want You Back" turns into the instrumental of *"IZZO"* as Kanye works the control panel. Dame, Hip, and Jay feel it in the studio. Just Blaze and Beanie watch from the window.

IZZO (H.O.V.A) Montage:

+ Jay-Z records in the booth:

JAY-Z

*H to the Izz-o, V to the Izz-A /
Fo'shizzle my nizzle used to
dribble down in VA / H to the Izz-
o, V to the Izz-A / That's the
anthem, get'cha damn hands up!*

Kanye puts his hands up. Hip and Gee are going berserk as Jay finishes the verse and hops out. He tackles Kanye with a hug.

+ Stacks of *The Blueprint* sit on desks of every music press. "Album of The Year": The Source, XXL, Vibe, etc...

+ Kanye wears a camouflage jersey with gold chains as he dances with vixens in the I.Z.Z.O. Music video. "Move out of Jay's shot," a director chimes to Kanye.

+ IZZO hits #8 on the Billboard 100. Kanye's first Top 10 as a producer. Dame, Gee, Hip field calls: "Kanye's available"

+ Kanye now works in the studio with Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Common...

INT. CONGLOMERATE RECORDS - DAY

An EXECUTIVE sits across from Kanye...

KANYE

I just finished this new jam. It's track one.

An ASSISTANT plays the song for them. "Jesus Walks" plays.

KANYE (CONT'D)

Put it louder than that. We gotta feel it.

She puts it louder.

jesus walks

The Executive likes the beat, but becomes confused upon hearing the "Jesus Walks" chorus. He shakes his head. Kanye notices this... That reaction is something he expected. Expected to be told NO like so many before him.

Kanye's eyes are WIDE...

SLOWLY, we PUSH INTO HIS RIGHT EYE (à la "A\$AP FOREVER" video by Dexter Navy) as it reflects visceral SPIKE LEE-like FLASHES of history that Kanye's embedded into as he raps his iconic song:

He's in the crowd during MARTIN LUTHER KING "I HAVE A DREAM" SPEECH. He's RAISING HIS FIST along with the BLACK PANTHERS. He's sitting next to DONDA and his FATHER being arrested at a SIT-IN. He's next to ROSA PARKS on the BUS. He's rallying against the KKK and their BURNING CROSSES. He's a RUNAWAY in the field as other slaves watch...

And we stay on this plantation as WHITE DOVES burst ALL OVER THE PLACE. They EXIT Kanye's eyes and begin filling up this EXECUTIVE BOARD ROOM as the song builds to a CLIMAX.

Kanye's infused by the ENERGY of the song as DOVES surround him. These images are everything JESUS WALKS represents: the oppression and discrimination of being BLACK in AMERICA.

As the song finishes, the DOVES dissipate. Kanye sits there as the Executive gives his review...

EXECUTIVE

Well, we like the music, but not with a chorus like that. Are you willing to change it?

Kanye glares back at him.

KANYE

No. That's the song. It's going to stay that way.

INT. CAPITOL RECORDS - BOARDROOM - DAY

JOE "3H" WEINBERGER (20, white A&R) sits with Gee as EXECES praise Kanye, who's dressed in a polo, chain, and Gucci boots. It's a classic hype up meeting we all know.

CAPITOL EXEC #1

Kanye, we all think you're special. You're different and we value that.

Kanye grins big. He can taste the deal.

JOE 3H

He's going to change the game!

CAPITOL EXEC #2

Joe sent us your demo and what we heard was astounding, we want to put your rap career first. We love you as a producer, but more as a rapper.

CAPITOL EXEC #3

So, instead of wasting your time...

Capitol Exec #3 pulls out a contract from his binder and slides it across the table.

CAPITOL EXEC #3 (CONT'D)
 We'd like to get your signature on this right now. It's a three-album recording contract. We want to be in the Kanye West business.

They hand Kanye a pen as he looks through it. He slowly smiles and hands it to Gee. This time it's real.

CAPITOL EXEC #3 (CONT'D)
 Look it over. We don't want you to leave here without your signature.

JOE 3H
 Sign it. This is history.

Gee nods to Kanye: "It looks good." Joe grabs ahold of Kanye in excitement as Kanye puts his signature on the dotted line:

KANYE WEST

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye enters to applause by Hip, Gee, and NO ID. Gee pours Hennessy in Styrofoam cups and Hip hands one to Kanye.

HIP-HOP
 Fuckin' Capitol, man. We're all proud of you!

Some of them give him dap. No ID winks at Kanye.

GEE
 Good shit, Kanye...

Everyone drinks as Dame enters, excited.

DAMON DASH
 Capitol beat us to you man. Just make sure their deal ain't wack.

KANYE
 Gee checked it, it's good.

DAMON DASH
 Cool. Come to my office real quick, I want to show you something...

HIP-HOP
 We celebrating Dame...

DAMON DASH
It'll only take a second...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - DASH'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Dame points to the Platinum "I.Z.Z.O." plaque on his wall.
Kanye focuses on it.

DAMON DASH
Look at this, man. You doing
things. You don't want to catch a
brick! You gotta be under the
umbrella, you'll get rained on.

KANYE
You know you guys are like family.

DAMON DASH
I heard your new demo, man. Those
are some sick beats. We'd put that
out for you, if you wanted.

KANYE
Sorry, Dame, the new deal's
exclusive.

Kanye takes a sip of Hennessy. Dame has an agenda.

DAMON DASH
I know it's business, but how much
they giving you?

KANYE
C'mon, Dame...

DAMON DASH
Just tell me. It'll stay between
us. Man to man.

Kanye embarrassed to say, finally shares:

KANYE
All right. Three records
guaranteed. One mill upfront.

Dame does a spit take.

DAMON DASH
Holy shit! Take it, man! We
couldn't give you that. No way.
Them niggas at Capitol got crazy
money.

INT. HOBOKEN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sumeke helps Kanye pack his suitcase for Hollywood and pick out outfits from the bags of Ralph Lauren.

KANYE

(re: pink polo)

What about this one? I can wear it with my backpack.

SUMEKE

(re: polo & clothes)

I don't know if you can pull the that off. Maybe light blue? Damn, you got more clothes than me.

KANYE

I gotta have a new outfit every day. I'm a rapper for Capitol now. A week from today, I'll be in the studio in Hollywood. *Hollywood!*

Sumeke hears those words and she begins to tear up. She knows *all of this* could be the end of them.

SUMEKE

I'm going to miss you...

KANYE

Meke, don't worry, I'm flying you out with me. And we're shopping on Rodeo Dr. Givenchy, Balmain, Fendi. They ain't got those at River Oaks Mall.

SUMEKE

I like River Oaks Mall.

KANYE

But I'm finna take care you. It's the good life, so get used to it. Ain't no going back now. We're about to go party with Jay-Z.

He grabs the pink polo again, checks himself in the mirror. Sumeke watches, his star is burning bright.

KANYE (CONT'D)

Baby, I'm signed, I can pull anything off! I'm gonna be the best-dressed rapper in the game!

INT. NYC CLUB - NIGHT

Vixens, Rappers, and Jay-Z at his own booth with honeys everywhere. Kanye wears his pink polo and a backpack. Sumeke wears a dress. They both dance and have a blast.

Kanye's surprised to see Joe 3H enter.

KANYE
I'll be right back. Joe's here...

Kanye walks over to Joe 3H.

KANYE (CONT'D)
(grins)
Yo Joe, you come to party?

JOE 3H
Is there somewhere we can talk?

Kanye takes him to a private table with a few friends.

KANYE
(to friends)
Guys, can we get a minute.

The friends walk away.

JOE 3H
Well...
(beat)
You're going to hate me....

KANYE
What's wrong?

JOE 3H
They're pulling the deal.

KANYE
You're joking...
(beat)
Joe, I already booked studios,
bought clothes. I spent the money.

JOE 3H
I don't know what say. It got to
the president and he just said no.
I got off the phone with one of my
guys and it's over.

KANYE
But there was a contract. It's a
done deal. I signed it.

JOE 3H
I'm sorry, man.

KANYE
What happened, why they pull it?

Joe takes a beat. Gives up the truth.

JOE 3H
Y'know how you always say "you're trying to get in where you fit in." *Well, they don't know where you fit in* man. They said your style wasn't something they could sell right now. I'm sorry, bro. If I could sign you, I would. But there's no place for you at Capitol. They made that clear.

Upset, Kanye gets up before Joe can finish. He takes off--

JOE 3H (CONT'D)
Kanye!

EXT. NYC CLUB - STREET - NIGHT

Kanye angrily rushes out toward the street. He's exasperated as few people notice. He pulls out his Nokia cellphone and makes a call:

KANYE
Yo, Dion. Been a minute...can you talk?

NO ID (V.O.)
Ay, I'm in a session right now, what's up? You good?

He sounds busy. Kanye doesn't have the stomach to tell him.

KANYE
Yeah...I just wanted to say what up. Hope you're good.

Kanye hangs up and continues walking. He turns the corner and sees a MARQUEE for local concert venue: **"Beanie Sigel Tonight! SOLD OUT!"**

Off Kanye, emotionally pierced by this. He's FROZEN as pedestrians move at a time-lapse around him...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - DASH'S OFFICE - DAY

Subdued, Kanye sits across from Dame. We can see it on his face, he needs this deal. Dame finishes up a call and then turns his attention to Kanye.

DAMON DASH

This business is volatile. You just never know what's going to happen.

KANYE

So, what's it looking like?

DAMON DASH

It's good. Real good.

Dame stares at him with cold, dead eyes as he pulls out the contract and hands it over to Kanye.

KANYE

What is it?

DAMON DASH

One album. Not much up front, but we'll take care of you on the back end. And as a part of your deal, you'll do work for us as a producer.

Kanye exhales. He went from one million to nothing. He considers this, but takes the pen and signs.

DAMON DASH (CONT'D)

Welcome to Roc-A-Fella.

KANYE

When is my release?

DAMON DASH

Calendar is loaded. We'll figure that out. Once I know, you'll know. Go make us some hits.

KANYE

OK. And I'mma record my album at Baseline and LA if that's cool?

DAMON DASH

Yeah, man you're on the train. Just bill us for studio time.

Kanye sits back, let's out a small smile -- at least he's finally signed. PRE-LAP: more of "Mystery of Iniquity" by Lauryn Hill as it cross fades into an early version of...

all falls down

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

In a few CUTS, we see Kanye use "Mystery of Iniquity" to create the "All Falls Down" track. We hear several rough variations of it until he lands on the *right version*. Then he records for an audience: NO ID and Hip Hop watch Kanye spit in the booth.

KANYE

*Southside, Southside, we going set
this party off right. West side,
west side we going to set this
party off right. Man, she's so self
conscious, she got no idea what she
doing in college--*

BANG! Gee, now Kanye's full-time manager, hits the glass as Kanye's going hard in there. Gee never pulls punches.

GEE

We need to talk.

Kanye glares at Gee as he stops mid-flow and takes off the headphones, pissed.

KANYE

What the fuck! I was spittin' my
verse--

GEE

Lauryn's not going to clear the
sample so we can't use it.

KANYE

Why the fuck not?

GEE

She don't like your song and she
don't like that it could come out
before her song.

KANYE

When does her album come out?

GEE

I don't know. Her record company is
holding it.

KANYE

Yo, it's just a sample. I ain't
going lose this song. We need to
figure something out.

Gee pitches something Kanye:

GEE

Well, there is another option...Technically, we can still use the sample, but we gotta get someone else to sing her part.

KANYE

I'll get someone in here next week.

GEE

Trick is we have one day before the license on the sample expires. You can find somebody that quick?

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - MIDNIGHT

John Stephens or better known as JOHN LEGEND (23) sings the "When it all falls down" hook in the booth. It's good but it lacks the soul feeling. Kanye shakes his head.

KANYE

Legend, give me a little more soul.

JOHN LEGEND

Kanye, I'm sorry man, but I ain't hitting it. It ain't meant for me.

KANYE

You're probably right.

Kanye sits, head in his hand. He's running out of time.

JOHN LEGEND

Y'know it could use some real church soul. I'm doing overdubs for Syleena Johnson from Chicago across the street. She could be good for this.

Kanye lifts his head up with an idea.

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - LATER

SYLEENA JOHNSON (27) singing the hook in the booth. She's an R&B singer with a presence.

GEE

Take 19...

She sings a low-key rendition of it. Just like Lauryn Hill. But it's bland. Emotionless. Kanye knows it as he stops.

KANYE
 (to Gee)
 It's not working.

GEE
 It's a little late, man. We're
 burning studio money here. I think
 we should call it.

KANYE
 Nah, we gotta get this.

GEE
 It's late, Kanye...Syleena, you can
 go home.

Syleena exits the booth as Kanye's dejected.

GEE (CONT'D)
 We'll figure something else out.

But Kanye ignores him and chases after Syleena who grabs her
 bag from the mixing room.

KANYE
 Hey Syleena, you did great in
 there. *I fucked up.* Can we try it
 again? You can sing it your way.

SYLEENA JOHNSON
 Ye, I love you but I gotta go baby--

KANYE
 It'll only be a hit record if you
 do you. Give it all your energy.
 One more time, please. I need this.

Off Syleena, considering this...

MOMENTS LATER.

He rolls it again as she waits in the booth. He CUES her as
 she starts singing it soulfully like we know it today.

SYLEENA JOHNSON
*Oh, when it all, it all falls down.
 I'm telling you, oh, it all falls
 down. Oh, when it all, it all falls
 down. I'm telling you, oh, it all
 falls down...*

Kanye's eyes widen at the sound of her voice. He and the room
 can feel something different and wonderful happening. She
 smiles and continues singing. Kanye looks to Gee, playful:
 "Told you so."

"All Falls Down" by Kanye West (Feat. Syleena Johnson) plays over a recording montage over the next few months at the Record Plant in Los Angeles:

- + Kanye working with a choir for "We Don't Care."
- + Kanye sleeping in the studio.
- + Kanye mixing "Workout Plan."

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - DASH'S OFFICE - DAY

Dame reads an earnings report as his ASSISTANT hands him the Baseline studio bills. He goes through it...

DAMON DASH
What the fuck is all this?

ASSISTANT
That's part one of three.

She hands him two more envelopes. He's cycling through them.

DAMON DASH
(reading)
Beanie Sigel Freestyle. Kanye West
Beats. Kanye, GLC freestyle. This
is out of control.

ASSISTANT
We also have sample clearances
we've been billed for.

She hands him sample invoices.

DAMON DASH
All these samples for two songs?

Assistant nods yes. Dame shakes his head.

INT. RECORD PLANT - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Gee directs SOUND ENGINEERS and a few STUDIO MUSICIANS to go home.

GEE
Hey guys, tonight's recording
session is canceled. We'll be in
contact.

Kanye storms in--

KANYE
 (to engineers)
 No! You guys aren't going anywhere.

Engineers aren't sure who to listen to.

GEE
 Kanye, let's talk in the booth. You could use a break--

KANYE
 Fuck that! When were you going to tell me that Roc-A pulled my funds...

GEE
 Look, Dame just told me an hour ago that until further notice, Roca's budget is on hold for all artists except for Jay.

KANYE
 But I gotta finish my album.

GEE
 Kanye, we're half a million over--

KANYE
 But they financing Cam's album...

GEE
 He don't have all these samples. Aretha and Lauryn Hill ain't cheap. They can't afford these.

KANYE
 I'm going to be the biggest rapper in the world and no one's gonna know cause Roca Fella broke? I got a fuckin' deadline.

GEE
 Not anymore. Barring a miracle, they're not releasing it.
 (to engineers)
 Really, you guys can go home. We can't afford to pay you--

KANYE
 (to engineers)
 Fellas, don't even think about it. You're working. Tonight's session's on me.

GEE
 (shrugs)
 It's your money.

KANYE
 I'll go broke to make this album.

Engineers dare not say a word as Kanye paces and thinks:

KANYE (CONT'D)
 Gee, you can't make Dame release it
 as a part of my deal?

GEE
 If we force them to release it,
 they won't back it and it will
 tank.

KANYE
 But if I was Jay or Beanie they'd
 release it...

GEE
 Those guys have a history, a brand
 as rappers. You don't right now.
 They don't know where to fit you
 in. But I believe in you. I just
 don't sign the checks.

Kanye goes silent.

GEE (CONT'D)
 We overbooked on production right
 now. Fabolous wants a beat for a
 hundred K.

This irks Kanye and he gets louder as uncomfortable tension
 in the room builds as the engineers watch this unfold.

KANYE
 Yeah, but he's wack. I'm better
 than that. I ain't making beats for
 scrubs anymore...

GEE
 Well, that "scrub" is on the radio
 with a top ten hit. You don't want
 to make other people's music, fine.
 But if you want Roc-A's support,
 you need to make a song for radio.

KANYE
 Jesus Walks is a #1 song! All Falls
 Down is a #1 song!

GEE

Kanye, I'mma give you the truth. You need *that song*. The one song out the gate that markets you. You don't got it. You're right, you're fucking different, but that's why it's going to be even harder for people to accept you. Jay had "Dead Presidents." It set the tone for him as a rapper.

Gee has wanted to say this to Kanye.

KANYE

Ain't nobody on the radio better than my songs right now--

GEE

You sure about that? You wanna hear a number one hit?

Gee reaches into his bag and pulls out a CD. He pops it in. It's an early demo playing 50 Cent's "In Da Club." It's fuckin' great and it bumps. Even people in the room dig it.

KANYE

(jealous)

Holy shit, that's good.

GEE

One of my industry buddies slipped it to me. His name is 50 Cent.

KANYE

Where did he come from?

GEE

He blowing up out of nowhere. This dude was slanging in Queen's like 6 months ago. And now he's got an album dropping with Dr. Dre in a few months. Eminem heard a song off his demo and the next day Dr. Dre signed him to a million dollar record deal.

Hearing that depresses Kanye.

KANYE

That deal off one song? You know how many songs I got, Gee?

Kanye shakes his head.

KANYE (CONT'D)
 Fuck. What do I gotta do?
 (sighs)
 Am I ever goin' break through?

GEE
 Yeah man, you will.
 (beat)
 Think about it, you just need that
 one song.
 (points to his head)
 It's in there, nigga--

Off Kanye, challenge accepted. PRE-LAP: "Breathe In, Breathe Out" playing in raw form...

INT. RECORD PLANT - STUDIO - LATER THAT NIGHT

Kanye listens. There's no magic. Colors he sees are BLEAK and struggling to illuminate. He keeps rearranging the track. Gee watches his perfectionism get out of control. Engineers and studio musicians have been laboring for a long time.

KANYE
 Cut. I'm not feeling it. It's not
 awesome.

GEE
 Kanye...

KANYE
 (to engineer)
 No. We've been at this for nine
 hours. These trumpets need to be
 more bluesy. The rhythm is off.

GEE
 We'll get it.

KANYE
 It ain't working!

Kanye chucks his headphones across the room. He's creatively fried. We linger on his face, defeated.

KANYE (CONT'D)
 ...This is a waste of my time. Roc-
 A ain't releasing this shit. And
 this song sucks right now. It
 fuckin' sucks! You said I needed a
 #1 song, but maybe I ain't got it.
 (sighs)
 I'm tired. I'm going home...

Kanye starts packing his backpack as Gee and the others watch, silent.

INT. LEXUS - DRIVING - LATER

Kanye cruises down Hollywood Boulevard listening to the radio. Fabolous "Young'n (Holla Back)" plays. He scoffs then angrily shuts it off. *This shit better than my shit?* He'd rather not listen to any music.

KANYE'S POV: Exhausted, he struggles to stay awake. Streetlights grow hazy with roads empty, lonesome. His eyelids heavy, struggling to stay up. He closes them for a moment. And when he opens them...*he's dreaming again...*

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Kanye's standing outside of a lit up stadium. He hears HOLLERING coming from inside. He approaches...

That's when he sees it: People in caps and gowns. A big sign that says: "Congratulations Class of 2002." His face grimaces at this. Over the loudspeaker:

P.A. (V.O.)
Chicago State, Class of 2002!

Then everyone takes off their caps and TOSSES them above. People cheer. A BEAR MASCOT parades in front. The marching band plays "Through The Wire" just like earlier.

A few fireworks go off. Kanye's immersed in it. His eyes glisten, that could have been him. He missed it.

Suddenly, everyone turns toward him. Every face is now Kanye. All staring at him standing there alone, insecure.

But then...a THUNDERING CRASH is heard. The graduates rush toward the street and gasp...Kanye slowly approaches...

INT. 79TH & SOUTHSORE DRIVE HOME - MORNING

Donda peacefully lies asleep when the PHONE RINGS. She rolls over and answers it, groggily:

DONDA
Hello?

SUMEKE (V.O.)
Donda, Kanye was in an accident.

Donda jolts awake upon hearing those words.

DONDA
Where was the accident?

SUMEKE (V.O.)
(shaken)
In LA. I think he was driving. They
told me the car was totaled.

Sumeke breaks down as Donda maintains her composure.

DONDA
Do you know if he's okay?

SUMEKE (V.O.)
I don't know...

EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT

And we're back in the dream as Kanye reaches the accident. Everyone else stands around motionless as Kanye tries to help the VICTIM. But Kanye struggles because the victim's pinned in the car.

When the victim turns his head around, we see the victim is KANYE. Staring at himself. Helpless. For a moment, he's in shock, until it's broken up by the words--

PARAMEDIC (PRE-LAP)
Can you hear me? We're going to get
you out, okay?

EXT. HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD - NIGHT

The PARAMEDIC calls out to the bloodied Kanye, pinned in the car. Kanye's jaw is swole twice it's normal size with a large gash in his mouth. His front teeth askew. The PARAMEDIC attempts to pull Kanye out, but he's unconscious, trapped in the seatbelt and smashed metal...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - NURSES STATION - DAY

Donda and Sumeke rush in past the RECEPTIONIST (50's).

RECEPTIONIST
Excuse me ladies, you need to check
in first.

DONDA
I'm going to see my son!

Donda hurries away down the hall with Sumeke.

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - EMERGENCY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Donda reaches his room and sees a curtain surrounding him. She sighs and slowly approaches. She pulls back the curtain to see his disfigured, unrecognizable face. His head is swollen like a balloon. Kanye lies on the bed.

DONDA
(hand over mouth)
Kanye, baby...

Donda forces a smile, holding back tears.

KANYE
(mumbles)
Hi, Ma--

Kanye grabs Donda's hand and holds tightly.

KANYE (CONT'D)
(mumbles)
How do I look?

DONDA
Good, baby. You're going to be fine.

SUMEKE
(totally lying)
It's not so bad...

Sumeke leans over to hug him. Kanye smiles but can't really tell with his jaw.

KANYE
(mumbles)
I look like the Klumps.

It draws a chuckle from them as Donda smiles at Kanye's humor in these terrible circumstances.

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - EMERGENCY ROOM - LATER

DR. JAMES WELSCH (53, surgeon) discusses surgery with Kanye, Donda, and Sumeke.

DR. WELSCH
Now Kanye, your jaw was fractured in three places. There's so much blood, that we can't leave it like this. We need to reconstruct it.
(MORE)

DR. WELSCH (CONT'D)
 First, we'll re-break your jaw and
 wire it shut so it can heal
 correctly.

Kanye shakes his head...

KANYE
 (mumbles)
 Pap-ah.

SUMEKE
 Huh?

DONDA
 He wants paper.

Donda quickly hands him a pen and paper. Kanye writes out his
 question: **How long? I'm a rapper. I have to finish my album.**

DR. WELSCH
 We don't know. Everyone heals
 differently. It can be a month to
 six months. Depends on you and how
 the surgery goes.

Kanye furiously scribbles and shows him: **I WON'T GIVE UP.**

DR. WELSCH (CONT'D)
 (reading paper)
 I know, but I can't give full
 assurance you'll be able to sing or
 rap like yourself again.

Kanye looks to his Mom and nods no, "I can't do this." Welsch
 hands him a mirror.

DR. WELSCH (CONT'D)
 This procedure is the only way you
 have a shot of looking like you did
 before the surgery.

Kanye stares at his disfigured face. Repulsed. He puts the
 mirror down. He can't look anymore.

EXT. CEDARS-SINAI - SURGERY PREP ROOM - DAY

Donda holds Kanye's hand. His eyes water, scared.

DONDA
 You fall asleep. Wake up and you're
 better. It's just two hours. Okay?

Kanye nods as Donda leans in to kiss him. He whispers to her:

KANYE
I'm sorry, Ma.

DONDA
What?

KANYE
I'm sorry.

Kanye breaks down and starts crying...

KANYE (CONT'D)
I made the wrong choice. If I never
would have dropped out, none of
this would have happened.

Donda's heart sinks at his words but she holds back tears.

DONDA
Mari, stop it--

KANYE
I should have listened to you. And
I'm sorry I didn't graduate. I
would have graduated this year. I
didn't do it like I was supposed
to. If I don't wake up--

DONDA
(strong)
Don't be silly. Look at me. Kanye
Omari West, you look at me. Don't
be sorry. You can't go into this
surgery like this. Wipe those
tears. They're going to fix you up
in there and you're going to be
fine. And you're going to do it.
You proved me wrong, now just prove
everyone else wrong.

Donda gently caresses his face like only a mother can.

DONDA (CONT'D)
(then)
A real star shines from the
inside...

A teary-eyed Kanye digests that a moment.

KANYE
You were right.

DONDA
About what?

KANYE
 When I was little, you told me
 you'd be my best friend and now I
 know you really are.

This levels a teary-eyed Donda. Just then, Dr. Welsch interrupts:

DR. WELSCH
 It's time...

Dr. Welsch puts an anesthesia mask over Kanye's mouth.

DONDA
 I love you, baby...

KANYE
 (mumbles)
 I love you, momma...

She lets go of his hand. Off Donda as she watches them cart him into the operating room...

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Kanye's LA area family is gathered with Sumeke, Gee, and Donda. They talk as Donda pretends to listen, but her mind's on Kanye. She sees the clock, anxious. It's 11:17am already.

DONDA
 It's already been three hours.
 What's going on?

Sumeke grabs Donda's hand to comfort her.

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Complications as Kanye bleeds profusely from his mouth as a few surgeons rush to fix it. CLOSE UP of a wire being surgically inserted into his mouth...

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - WAITING ROOM - LATER

Thai food boxes fill the waiting room coffee tables as Dr. Welsch finally enters in scrubs. Donda gets up quickly.

DONDA
 Is he okay?

Sumeke stands up to hear the news.

DR. WELSCH

We had some complications. He had a few blood clots and the wire broke the first time leading to more bleeding...

Off Donda's face, ready to burst into tears...

DR. WELSCH (CONT'D)

So we had to put a plate in his chin. This may affect his speech and healing. But he's okay. He'll be really swollen and in a lot of pain for a while.

Right at that moment, Donda grabs the doctor and kisses him.

DONDA

Thank you! Thank you so much!

She leaves a lipstick imprint on his face.

DR. WELSCH

(smiling)

You can see him now. But with all the drugs, he's probably out of it.

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - ROOM 209 - DAY

Donda sits next to a sleeping Kanye. Sumeke is asleep as well. Donda has bags under her eyes, but she won't rest until he wakes up. She hears "I'm Walking On Sunshine" from inside the nurse's station. She gets up and walks to the door.

DONDA

Can you lower that? My boy is trying to sleep. We're not really in a "Walking on Sunshine" kinda mood right now--

The nurse quickly lowers it, but gives a dirty look.

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - ROOM 209 - NIGHT

Kanye's eyes slowly open. He sees Donda by his side.

KANYE

(smiles)

Mom...

DONDA

Yes, baby?

KANYE
What's that?

Kanye slowly lifts his finger across the room.

DONDA
What's what?

KANYE
That bear dancin'. What's he doing here?

Kanye's POV: A mascot bear is dancing. He's high as fuck.

DONDA
Mari, you got a lot of medicine in you right now. That's a teddy bear Sumeke got you.

A stuffed TEDDY BEAR sits on the table, like the bear from *The College Dropout*. Donda kisses him on the forehead.

DONDA (CONT'D)
I'm here if you need anything...

Kanye blows her a kiss as he falls back into his drug coma.

EXT. CEDARS-SINAI - ROOM 209 - NIGHT

Next day, GEE knocks at the door. Donda comes over.

GEE
Mrs. West? How is he?

DONDA
He's doing better but this ain't the time for business.

GEE
I'm not. I just want to talk to him. Is he up?

KANYE (O.S.)
(mumble)
GEE!

DONDA
(shakes her head)
He should be sleeping, but okay. I'm going to go get a donut.

Donda exits as Gee enters.

GEE

Yo, Kanye, I heard man, and I was worried. I'm sorry about the other night. You aight?

KANYE

(mumbles)

Yo, Gee, we outta here.

GEE

We outta here? What you talking about?

KANYE

This the same hospital Biggie was in. We outta here!

GEE

What's going on, dude? You on drugs?

KANYE

Yeahhhh. But just wait. Wait 'til I tell the world the story about my accident and what happened. I almost died! It's the best thing that could have happened to me cause I'm gonna speak from my heart! WE OUTTA HERE!

Gee is still puzzled as he just listens.

KANYE (CONT'D)

You understand what I'm about to create?

A day after a major surgery and this is Kanye's mindset.

GEE

You a legend, bro. You a real one. No doubt about it. But just get better okay, take it easy. You don't gotta worry about music right now.

Gee studies Kanye, whose swollen jaw and mouth betray his manic eyes. He's antsy...

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - ROOM 209 - NIGHT

Donda grabs her jacket, heading to the hotel to rest.

DONDA
I'll be here first thing in the
morning, baby...

Kanye nods, half asleep. She watches him and then exits...

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - ROOM 209 - MORNING

Kanye's eyes flutter awake. The morphine has worn off. It's dark in the room as the sun creeps in. His mouth still swollen. His eyes scan the room. Face grimaces, in severe pain. He wants to cry but won't.

He's stuck in his head. Voices swirl, executives, No ID, Donda, his professor: *"You're not a rapper."* *"Figure out who you're not."* *"Just another college dropout."* *"One song."*

All this noise rises up until it hits a crescendo and then goes silent.

On the faint, nearby hospital radio, he hears more 80's music. *"White Wedding"* by Billy Idol ends.

Next up, Chaka Khan's *"Through the Fire"* begins to play...

Gentle synths start. It's a corny, 80's musical choice. The melody from his dreams. It reminds Kanye of everything he's been through. His hands move to the beat.

He's alive.

And he appreciates it. There's an indescribable electricity in the air. He's impassioned about his journey. The chorus hits: *"Through The Fire, to the limit, to the wall."*

Every word hits. He attempts to sing along under his wire. Doesn't care who's listening. *He imagines fire all around him and he breaks through it.*

Then he pages his NURSE (35), who enters...

NURSE
What's wrong?

KANYE
Can you put it louder?

NURSE
The radio?

KANYE
Yes!

The Nurse walks over and raises the volume.

Chaka Khan sings: "Through the fire, through whatever, come what may." His eyes water. He made it through the fire. He sings it as a few nurses gather in to watch.

NURSE #2
Should he be doing this?

NURSE
You going to stop him?

His life is a *performance*.

He begins to TAP his BED TABLE. He's coming up with a beat. He closes his eyes, feeling it -- bouncing his head.

*"For a chance at loving you, I'd take it all the way
Right down to the wire. Even through the fire."*

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - DAY

PHONE RINGS as Dame picks it up. He's with Beanie. INTERCUT BETWEEN DAME AND KANYE:

DAMON DASH
What up?

KANYE
(mumbling)
Dame! It's Kan--

DAMON DASH
Yo, how are you man?

KANYE
I need a favor.

DAMON DASH
Sure man, anything.

KANYE
Yo, can I get my drum machine? Can you bring it to the hospital?

DAMON DASH
Kanye, rest bro. You can work after.

KANYE
Get me a drum machine up in here, Dame...

Kanye hangs up as Beanie questions Dame.

BEANIE SIGEL
Who was that?

DAMON DASH
Kanye.

BEANIE SIGEL
What did he want?

DAMON DASH
Nigga just got into a car accident
three days ago and he wants his
drum machine.

Beanie takes this in, impressed.

BEANIE SIGEL
I'd thought I never say this but
that kid is muthafucking gangsta.

Off Dame, in shock and awe as a smile comes over him.

INT. CEDARS-SINAI - ROOM 209 - DAY

Kanye sits up in his bed, as he programs "Through The Fire" into his MPC. He starts manipulating the speed. Newly energized with his heart swelling and nerves racing as he creates the drums. We hear rough parts of the song.

Donda enters with coffee in her hand, stunned. Few people on this earth would be working in this much pain, but his music overpowers everything.

KANYE
Ma, you think I could record in
here? I need a mic--

DONDA
Maybe we wait 'til we get home
before you do that. Rest, baby...

But he keeps tapping his MPC. Pouring out his frustrations, his pain, in one intense catharsis. His eyes are wide, glowing, focused as he finally finds that right chipmunk speed of sample that sends vibrations up spines.

The BEAT IS FULLY REALIZED. Colors dance around him in symphony now as "Through The Wire" plays:

through the wire

INT. W HOTEL - KANYE'S ROOM - TWO WEEKS LATER

Kanye has puffy cheeks and a swollen jaw. He's got headphones on in the booth as he gets ready to sing. No one believes he'll actually sing it. This is the Kanye West that bursts into the rap scene:

KANYE

*Yo Gee, they can't stop me rapping
can they? Can they, huh? I spit it
through the wire, man. There's too
much stuff on my heart right now,
man. I'll gladly risk it all right
now. It's a life or death
situation, man. Y'all don't really
understand how I feel right now,
man. It's your boy, Kanye to
the...Chi-Town what's going on...*

Gee, Joe 3H, Sumeke, and Donda watch in amazement...

KANYE (CONT'D)

*I drink a boost for breakfast, and
ensure for dessert. Somebody
ordered pancakes I just sip the
sizzurp. That right there could
drive a sane man bizzerk. Not to
worry Mr. H 2 the Izzo's back to
wizzerk. How do you console my mom
or give her light support?
Telling her your son's on life
support. And just imagine how my
girl feel.*

He mumble raps through the pain, through the actual wire in his mouth. It's not perfectly clear, but it's real.

KANYE (CONT'D)

*On the plane scared as hell that
her guy look like Emmett Till, She
was with me before the deal, she
been trying to be mine. She a delta
so she been throwing them Dynasty
signs. No use me tryin' to be lyin'
I been trying to be signed. Trying
to be a millionaire. How I use two
lifelines. In the same hospital
where Biggie Smalls died...*

He continues rapping the song with breathless passion. Then he bounces out of the booth as the infectious hook plays.

KANYE (CONT'D)

*Gee, we got our song! This is the
one that's going make Kanye West!*

He joyously does a victory lap around the room. The rest of the song continues to play over the next SERIES OF SHOTS:

+ Different DEEJAYS declare "Through The Wire by Kanye West" as the song continues to play.

+ Students across the country come to life as "Through The Wire" plays from their computer speakers in their dorm rooms.

+ Whether it's the suburbs, the streets, Midwest, East Coast or West Coast...the spirit of "Through The Wire" is felt...

+ RACHEL (snobby student from earlier) listens from a Chicago bar. She nods her head as the radio DJ announces: "That was 'Through The Wire' by Kanye West." Off Rachel's frozen face, realizing who that was. You don't forget a name like that.

INT. HAROLD'S CHICKEN - CHICAGO - DAY

Kanye and No ID are back in that same booth. Reminiscing.

NO ID

Yo "Through The Wire" is the first one everybody's hearing from you. But nah, not me. I remember your first day recording. Looking like a little gangster. Asking all these questions. That's where I heard the *real first one*.

NO ID pulls out a cassette tape with "**Green Eggs and Ham**" by **Kanye West**. *Dion finally found it*. Kanye grabs the ten year old tape -- it takes him back to why he fell in love with music in the first place.

KANYE

(re: tape)

I can't believe you found it, D...

NO ID

I can't believe I'm with the next rap superstar and we still eatin' at Harold's fucking Chicken.

Laughter.

NO ID (CONT'D)

So, you finished the album yet?

KANYE

I got one more song I want on it...

No ID nods. A beat. Then:

NO ID
 Enjoy it.
 (then)
 This time, *right now*, the time
 before the madness.

Then COODIE & CHIKE (30's), directing duo, call out Kanye. We PULL back to reveal his first MUSIC VIDEO SHOOT inside the restaurant where it all started.

COODIE
 Yo Kanye, we gotta grab this shot.

KANYE
 (to No ID)
 Umm...Well thanks for...thanks for--

Kanye struggles to find the words as NO ID embraces him. He's been there through everything. Kanye smiles and heads to the cameras for his "Through The Wire" MUSIC VIDEO SHOOT.

No ID hangs back and watches, genuinely proud.

COODIE
 Rolling!

EXT. MANSION PARTY - HOLLYWOOD - NIGHT - 2003

Welcome to a legendary Jamie Foxx party with every star in music. Kanye enters -- jaw swollen with his polo and Louis Vuitton backpack. It's his first big party on the scene.

He passes MISSY ELLIOT and her crew as he approaches the bar. Nearby, he notices PHARELL and Hugo, The Neptunes. As he looks toward the pool, he sees JAY-Z and BEYONCE, canoodling.

Kanye posts up near a wall as he sees JAMIE FOXX, (30's) greeting PUFF DADDY in a suit with a huge entourage around him. "Love you Puff." That's when Jamie notices Kanye. Then Jamie confides in someone before approaching Kanye.

JAMIE FOXX
 Man, they tell me you rap and
 produce for Jay-Z?

Surprised, Kanye quickly overcomes being star struck.

KANYE
 Yeah.

JAMIE FOXX
 People tell me you about to be on.
 How come I haven't heard your shit?

KANYE

I'm still working on it. But I heard you're trying to get on a song. I gotta song for you.

JAMIE FOXX

You gotta song for me? I have a studio in my living room if you wanted to do it sometime. Have fun.

Jamie walks away as Kanye continues.

KANYE

I got the song in my backpack. Let's do it right now?

JAMIE FOXX

(laughs)

Get the fuck outta here, you crazy!

Kanye smiles.

JAMIE FOXX (CONT'D)

You serious?

INT. JAMIE FOXX'S MANSION STUDIO - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jamie wears headphones in the booth as Kanye plays the Luther Vandross sample, "A House Is Not A Home." JAMIE'S MANAGER watches along with some ladies. Kanye presses RECORD. Jamie goes into overly soulful rendition. This is *not* the song.

JAMIE FOXX

*'She sayyyyyyyyyy sheeeeeee
wannnnnnnt soooooommmme Marvin
Gayeeeeeeeeeeeeee, some Luther
Vandrossssssssssssssssss.'*

Kanye abruptly stops the track.

KANYE

What are you doing?

JAMIE FOXX

I'm putting my R&B sauce on it. That's *the sauce*.

KANYE

Nah, don't do that cause you're going to screw up the song. Just sing it simple. It's hip hop.

Jamie's head sharply turns to his manager with a look: "Did this NOBODY just tell ME how to sing?"

JAMIE FOXX

Okay.

Jamie's manager goes in real quick to console him.

JAMIE'S MANAGER

Hey, I can just stop this right now.

JAMIE FOXX

Yo, it's Jay's boy. I'll just finish it.

KANYE

Ready?

Jamie nods. Then begrudgingly sings it how Kanye wants it. It's the song we know today as...

slow jamz

JAMIE FOXX

*She say she want some Marvin Gaye,
some Luther Vandross. A little
Anita, will definitely set this
party off right.*

"Slow Jamz" by Kanye West plays. That's when Jamie and Kanye notice the living room has filled up with the party guests and transformed into a club. Even the lights and color suddenly reflect the music...

Then we see a GRAPHIC of "SLOW JAMZ" quickly climbing above Billboard Charts all the way to NUMBER ONE.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY

SNAP! Camera flashes as Kanye stands holding the mascot head while wearing an oversized tweed jacket, looking down. It's the famous back cover of the album.

Then Kanye sits on bleachers with the BEAR MASCOT HEAD on. A photographer SNAPS another photo.

FREEZE as we PULL back to SEE it as the ALBUM COVER....

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - DAY

In Jay-Z's hands as he eyes the tracklist. Kanye sits there wearing his shiny, new ROC-A-FELLA CHAIN.

JAY-Z

Twenty Tracks. Goddamn Ye West! And you had to have these skits, huh?

Jay laughs in the iconic way we all know.

KANYE

It's the whole point of the thing. It's me.

JAY-Z

Holla! It's hot. I see you with your first #1 hit. Feels good, right? And that "Through The Wire" video was tight. I'mma premiere it at the 40/40 next week. Have a bash to celebrate your first one.

KANYE

That's dope. I really appreciate everything you doing.

JAY-Z

You got something special here...It took a while for us all to see it, but it's there...I remember what BIG's told me after my first album. We had a few drinks. I can still hear his breathing. You know how BIG's talked.

Jay imitates BIG's breathing. Laughter.

JAY-Z (CONT'D)

We was joking about something. But then he got serious. And he told me you gotta stay above water, y'know...He told me getting here seems hard, but the hard part is staying here. You have to treat everything like your first project. And it stayed with me. You gotta always stay hungry.

(beat)

Like back when you was just a kid in a polo.

Kanye grins. Nods. He soaks it all up from his idol.

JAY-Z (CONT'D)

Cause, when I released my first one, I was already working on the second.

Beat. Jay-Z leans back. His words linger. Kanye thinks...

EXT. CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY - DAY

Professor Milner exits the English building. As he crosses the walkway to the parking lot, he notices Kanye leaning on a black, shiny MERCEDES S-type convertible near the curb.

KANYE
Professor Milner...

Milner checks out the car, impressed. Then he approaches Kanye, who's holding something.

PROFESSOR MILNER
Kanye, good to see you. Donda told me about all your success. Congratulations.

KANYE
Thanks.

Kanye hands him the CD.

KANYE (CONT'D)
I made the album. I wanted you to have it.

Milner looks at the front cover. He smiles.

KANYE (CONT'D)
That'll be thirteen bucks.
(laughs)
Just kidding...Take care.

No more words need to be said. Kanye nods at Milner, who nods back, then walks away. Milner turns the CD over to see the track list. There's a post-it on it with a handwritten message from Kanye: *Professor Milner, thanks for the title.*

He removes the post-it to see the title:

the college dropout.

Milner grins at this and walks to his car.

Kanye waits for Donda and takes in his old school: students, lecture halls, bulletin boards.

We FOLLOW Donda as she exits the building, surprised to see Kanye...

DONDA
Mari...what are you doing here?

KANYE
Thought I'd surprise you.

DONDA
Don't you have an album to finish?

Kanye whips out another copy of his album and hands it to her. She beams with pride as she studies the cover.

DONDA (CONT'D)
I love it.
(then)
You doing a concert here in Chicago?

KANYE
Nah. I'm here to see you. Figured we could hang out. Just us.

DONDA
I got a night class...

KANYE
Cancel it.

Donda smiles. She probably will. Then Donda notices his transportation.

DONDA
Please don't tell me you spent your money on this car...

KANYE
It's not mine...

DONDA
A rental?

KANYE
It's not a rental, Mom. It's yours.

DONDA
No, you didn't--

KANYE
I bought it for you. I told you I was going to get you an S-type.

A beat. Donda soaks this in.

DONDA
You know I don't need this--

She can't believe it as she begins to tear up.

KANYE
Ma, don't cry -- you deserve it.

DONDA
It's not the car, baby...

Kanye approaches her. Donda turns to him and their eyes lock.

KANYE
Y'know...I couldn't have done any of this without you. This car is nothing compared to what you've given me.

DONDA
I love it baby, but you given me so much more. You showed me that it could be done. That you could fearlessly go after a dream and obtain it.
(then)
I'm just so proud of you.

Tears of joy. She kisses him on the cheek. He embraces her, buries his face in her chest. She holds him close to her. A small tear slips from him. "La-La-La-La" of *Hey Mama* gently plays on the score. They stay in this moment until:

KANYE
(wipes tears)
So what do you want to listen to?

Donda holds up his CD:

DONDA
(smiling)
I got this new Kanye West album...

INT. MERCEDES S-TYPE - DRIVING - MOMENTS LATER

Car drives off as Donda shifts the wrong gear. Car stalls.

KANYE
Ma, you sure you don't want me to drive?

DONDA
Baby, I'm sorry, but after your last accident, you ain't driving me ever again...

Laughter as Donda hauls ass in her Mercedes. We TILT UP to see the entire Chicago skyline at sunset...

INT. BASELINE STUDIOS - NIGHT

Kanye works at the mixing desk sporting a sweater, gold chain. It's the night of his video premiere. The night before his life changes forever. Gee's on the phone nearby.

GEE

Yeah, we're on our way!
 (hangs up)
 Dame told me we need to get down there, man. Everybody celebrating.

KANYE

Hold up, I just gotta get something out first...

GEE

Man, you don't gotta be working on a new song -- you got an album dropping!

KANYE

This track is calling out to me.

GEE

But on the night of your premiere party? Let's go pop bottles.

KANYE

I've been trying to fuck with this beat for years. I don't know, check this out. Tell me what you think.

Gee waits impatiently as he checks his phone. Kanye hops on the DRUM MACHINE and creates the drums.

THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-BOOM. The GROUND begins to RUMBLE...

And he knows it. Gee watches him closely, the laser focus. The fire in his eyes. Determination. Dedication. Motivation.

GEE

Ohhh...What you going to lay that over?

KANYE

Hold on...

Kanye loads in *Ray Charles at Newport* album. He works in the sample and mixes it. In front of a mixing board he'll always be the 19-year-old making beats by himself in his bedroom.

KANYE (CONT'D)

Ready?

Kanye's eyes have fire in them, like he's staring into Gee's soul. He hits play on the track that will be the basis for his next album: "Gold Digger" By Kanye West plays.

As we HEAR the SONG, the GROUND RUMBLES HARDER. This song is SEISMIC. Then a SMALL CRACK forms on the GLASS. Right before it shatters Kanye looks right at the camera: "Are you seeing this?" *CUT TO...*

The "Gold Digger" music video followed by a ten second fast-forward of his entire career (à la *Vanilla Sky*) until now...

...the present, where ocean waves crash on the sands of the Malibu shore.

malibu, 2021

We SLOWLY PULL BACK into...

INT. SHANGRI-LA STUDIOS - MALIBU - DAY

We see an empty control panel and headphones. That's when Kanye West takes a seat. He puts on headphones.

We hear the baseline of a new beat he's working on. A song you haven't heard yet. He closes his eyes and *imagines something you can't see...*

CUT TO BLACK:

the end.

CREDITS ROLL to "LAST CALL" by Kanye West. This song documents his journey as we see footage of the real Kanye.