

GROWN MAN BUSINESS

by

Justin Britt-Gibson

12/08/07

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A BOY (pre-teen)

Short, slim, black. Cloaked in a black hoodie, eyes almost completely obscured. He faces us, reciting a passage from Mobb Deep's 'Survival of the Fittest.' His delivery is drilling, fearless. Behind him, a GRAFFITI ARTIST (same age) bombs a brick wall.

BOY

There's a war goin' on outside, no man is safe from...

(he continues; the lyrics are cutting, potent, honest.)

...My goal's to stay alive. Survival of the fit only the strong survive.

He walks away from us as the graffiti artist completes his latest creation, the titles: **GROWN MAN BUSINESS**.

CUT TO BLACK.

LEGEND: **HOUSING PROJECT, '91**

INT. HIMES UNIT - NIGHT

Monday night football on a 20' television. A bag of chips, a can of beer, a jar of baby food - all opened and exhausted on the table.

A PAGER rattles near the table's edge.

A MAN sleeping on the couch, his right arm holding his BABY BOY (2) against his chest.

The Man's eyes open -

JOE (early 20's)

Lean and boyishly handsome, his looks deceptive for a gang enforcer and corner dealer. He grabs the pager, careful not to wake the baby, COREY (barely a year old).

IN THE KITCHEN

Joe grabs the phone, dials, cradling Corey. Then -

PRINCE (O.S.)

Joe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE

Yeah.

PRINCE (O.S.)

It's Duke. He gone.

(beat)

Niggas from eighth street rolled by on
wheels, let loose. Pumped into him 'till
he had nothing left.

Joe processes the news, mournful, filled with malice for the culprits. His expression remains hard, neutral, like a rock.

PRINCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Joe, you there?

JOE

Yeah, I'm here.

PRINCE (O.S.)

Strap up. Be downstairs. I sent a ride.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Joe places Corey in his crib. He crosses to his bed, produces a .38 Revolver from under the pillow, tucks it in the waistband of his jeans.

PATTY (20's), his girlfriend, sleeps on the other side of the bed, inches from an opened Essence Magazine. Joe kisses her, lightly stroking her back. She stirs.

PATTY

(half awake)

Come to bed.

JOE

Gotta make a run. Back in a bit.

PATTY

You be careful.

Joe moves quietly, stops at the bedroom door. He takes one last look at his family, leaves.

OVER BLACK:

15 YEARS GONE

INT. '84 SEVILLE (NOW) - MOVING - NIGHT

JAY-Z on the stereo. Windows throbbing.

JAVIER (14)

Angelic features. Ebony on the outside. Salvadoran by blood. Growing before our very eyes. He sits in the passenger seat, gazing out the window. What he sees:

After hours on a mean street. The urban wild. A third world pocket of a major American city. Derelicts wrapped in blankets, making beds out of sewer grates. Pre-teens flank the corners, working the night shift. Boys hawk narcotics; girls peddle pussy. No law in sight.

As Javier continues to digest the view -

CUT TO:

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT (DAYS EARLIER)

Javier taking inventory in an aisle, toughing out the graveyard shift. He eyes a giant CLOCK above the meat section: "1:00 A.M.".

INT. GROCERY STORE - LATER

Javier in line behind fellow employees, waiting for his check.

INT. CITY BUS - NIGHT

Javier reviewing his check. His earnings read: "\$5.50/hr."

Off Javier -

CUT BACK TO:

INT. SEVILLE - NIGHT

Javier comes to, looks beside him -

TWIN (18)

Legal adult, a man since twelve. Tall, toned, handsome. A consciously smooth criminal.

He cuts the engine, opens the glove box, pulls out a .45 AUTOMATIC, unlocks the safety. He passes the gun to Javier, lights a cigarette, peering out the windshield, spots -

CONTINUED:

A BOY (17) in headphones, crossing the street with his PIT BULL. Harmless.

TWIN
You know him?

Javier shakes his head, clearly doesn't. Twin passes him a bandana.

Javier dons the bandana, conceals his face, gloves his hands.

EXT. STREET, GRIFFITH AVE - JAVIER - MOMENTS LATER

Marching for the boy, heart punching his chest. He trains the .45 on him, empties two heartless SHOTS.

The boy collapses onto the pavement, goes into shock. His PIT BULL barks, keeping a safe distance from his master's killer. He begins crawling on the cement, breathing his last breaths.

Javier follows close behind, trembling, .45 smoking in his grip. He FIRES again, paints the curb with brain matter.

A long, silent beat. Javier can't take his eyes off the boy. Then, he gags, nearly loses his food.

The Seville pulls up. Twin kicks open the door. Javier starts for the car in a daze, not quite there.

TWIN
Leave it!

Javier drops the .45, jumps in the Seville - already tearing off.

INT./EXT. '84 SEVILLE - MOMENTS LATER

Javier removes the bandana, looking through the rear windshield: the boy's corpse grows smaller. He turns to the road ahead, digests a new, unsettling reality: he is now a killer.

CASINO (O.S.)
Javier.

JAVIER (O.S.)
Yeah.

The Seville barrels down the boulevard, into the night.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CROSSHAIRS, tattooed on the back of a MAN's hands - a gang emblem.

The man stands over a hot stove. He cooks four dishes at once, makes it look easy. His features are sharp, strong, handsome, possessing a demanding presence. In a fairer world he'd be an actor.

CASINO

How old are you?

JAVIER

Fourteen.

This is CASINO (26), lord of the slum.

He throws a cigarette in his mouth, cranes his body, lights up over the range.

A YOUNG GIRL rolls a blunt, seated at the kitchen counter. Beautiful, slender, dressed twice her age.

LEILA (16), his lover.

CASINO

Javier. Where your family come from?

JAVIER

San Miguel.

CASINO

El Salvador. Gangster part of the world right there. Heard niggas 'round there get AK's right out the crib. What do you know about that?

JAVIER

(shrugs)

Never been.

Javier and Twin watch Casino slice vegetables. He's an artist with the blade.

CASINO

Never? Then where you born?

JAVIER

Four blocks up.

CONTINUED:

Casino smiles knowingly, flashes million dollar whites - two of which are gold.

CASINO
Eighteenth and Chester. Slumboy. Me too.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Twin cleans his plate, guzzles a can of beer. Casino chews slowly, eyes on Javier, who has hardly touched his plate. Leila takes an interest as well, intrigued by the quiet newcomer.

CASINO
Start the dishes, will you baby?

Leila does as she's told, eyes fixed on Javier. She struts into the kitchen.

Casino looks to Twin.

CASINO (CONT'D)
What's the update on Walt?

TWIN
Still short two stacks.

CASINO
You ain't get nothing from him?

TWIN
Just excuses.

CASINO
Fuck him, then. Boy ain't never gonna pay.
(beat)
Make sure you handle that.

Twin nods, accepting his assignment.

CASINO (CONT'D)
(re: Javier)
So, how'd he do?

TWIN
Shorty's a killer.

CASINO
S'that right?

CONTINUED:

TWIN
Got that cold blood.

Casino wipes his mouth. He grabs an object beside him, wrapped in terrycloth. He passes it to Javier, who unwraps it: a 9mm pistol.

CASINO
This grown man business, hear me?

INT./EXT. '81 SEVILLE/ HOUSING PROJECT - NIGHT

Javier, eyes enviously fixed on the CROSSHAIRS tattooed on Twin's hand. He thumbs a wad of cash, slaps a grand in the boy's palm.

CASINO (O.S.)
Peddling my product is your top priority.
School, family, girls - that's your
concern. Don't ever make them mine.

Javier exits the car.

The Seville peels out.

INT. HOUSING PROJECT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

CASINO (V.O.)
You a salesman, so sell. Spread the
word, branch out. We always growing...

Javier trudges down the hall, hesitation in every step. It feels like he's walking a mile.

At his unit door, he inserts the key.

INT. JAVIER'S UNIT, BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

CASINO (O.S.)
I want every mom, dad, brother and sister
in this city to know Casino's got the
best high money can buy...

Javier creeps inside. Two BODIES lie cuddled in bed, sound asleep. Javier moves to his mother's side, places the cash into her purse. He watches her sleep, glad to see her at rest - glad to be home.

INT. JAVIER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CASINO (O.S.)

The strap. That's your second priority.
You respect it and it's gonna respect
you.

Javier slips the pistol beneath his pillow.

CASINO (CONT'D)

Own your corner, like it's your property.
Make 'em fear you. Someone tries to take
your property, don't even hesitate. And
if you do end up making an example of
some nigga, make sure every other nigga
'round the way knows, so don't happen
again.

He sinks under the covers, trembling with chills, the night's events finally realized. He shuts his eyes, fights for balance, focus.

CASINO (CONT'D)

'Long as they fear you, they're gonna
respect you. It's how it works.

(beat)

Stay on your grind. Always be hustling.
If you ain't working, you better be
sleeping. That's all I ask. Sky's the
limit from there.

Finally, slow breaths, gradually coming down. Cool.
Assured. Initiated.

INT. MORGUE HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

Patty (mid-30's now), weathered by years of stress, deceitful men, rare periods of intimacy. She's in a hurry. Breath short, heels clapping the floor. She's praying silently, preparing for the worst. Arrives at two DETECTIVES flanking the double doors, expressions wearing bad news.

INT. MORGUE, EXAMINATION ROOM - EARLY MORNING

She sobs mascara onto a corpse: the boy Javier shot. COREY (18 now), her only son. Her body quakes with extreme bouts of sadness, anger, frustration - this is the most painful moment of her life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DETECTIVE #1 (O.S.)

The body was found around 11:45 last night on the corner of Griffith and Sixteenth.

(beat)

Ballistics reports he was shot three times at close range with a forty-five caliber hand gun. Murder weapon was left at the scene. No prints were found. We have yet to generate an ID on the weapon because the serial numbers were worn down. At this point it's untraceable.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Patty in a chair. Physically and emotionally drained. Across from her: the two detectives, hands around empty coffee cups, pens perched on blank pads. Waiting.

PATTY

Can I have some water?

Detective #1 pushes away from the table, moves for the cooler. #2 avoids eye contact with Patty, uneasy, eager to get the questioning over with.

Detective #1 returns with a cup of water.

PATTY (CONT'D)

Thank you.

She reaches into her purse, pulls out a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE.

DETECTIVE #1

Did your son have any enemies, Ms. Himes?

She shakes her head, tapping out two pills. She swallows both, chases them with water.

DETECTIVE #1 (CONT'D)

You sure there wasn't someone he didn't gel with at school, or around the neighborhood? Anyone.

PATTY

I'm sure.

DETECTIVE #2

Was he affiliated?

PATTY

Affiliated? Affiliated with what?

CONTINUED:

DETECTIVE #2

I assume you're aware of the high concentration of criminal activity in your area. It's no secret that street gangs -

PATTY

No. Corey was into his music and his schooling. That's it.

DETECTIVE #2

And you're absolutely positive -

PATTY

I'm his mother.

DETECTIVE #1

Where's Corey's father?

She rubs her temples, agitated, overwhelmed.

PATTY

He's...we separated when Corey was a baby.

DETECTIVE #2

Do you two maintain contact?

PATTY

No.

DETECTIVE #1

Where does he currently reside?

PATTY

Are y'all going find the one who did it?

The detectives pause, silenced by the million dollar question.

CUT TO:

INT. PATTY'S UNIT - DAY

Patty drinking on the couch, going through the motions. Wrathful, powerless. Her eyes move to the PHONE sitting on the nightstand.

PATTY (O.S.)

Ya'lls silence really scares me.

INT. COREY'S BEDROOM - PATTY - LATER

On her son's bed, thumbing through a scrapbook. Reliving memories of her only child. This is where the real pain begins.

PATTY (O.S.)

Says to me you really don't have any idea who killed my boy. That once I walk out that door, that's it. Case closed.

CUT TO:

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR - DAY

Patty walks uncomfortably among an aisle of caskets, led by a SALESMAN. She does not want to be here.

DETECTIVE #1 (O.S.)

With all due respect Ms. Himes, these cases aren't solved overnight. We're going to need some time on this one.

PATTY (O.S.)

How much time?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Patty hunched over the toilet bowl, vomiting, eyes flooded with tears. She hugs the bowl, losing her mind.

DETECTIVE #1 (O.S.)

Hard to say. Wish I could give you a definite timetable, but it varies from case to case.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. PATTY'S UNIT - LATER

She grabs the phone. Dials.

DETECTIVE #2 (O.S.)

We need you to understand that there's not much for us to work with at this point.

INT. AUTO BODY SHOP, COUNTER - NIGHT

The MANAGER answers the phone. He cradles it, looking out into the garage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DETECTIVE #2 (O.S.)

Without any witnesses, or a match on the murder weapon we're already flying blind. It would help if we had more from your end.

INT. AUTO BODY SHOP, GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

He marches past a series of cars in repair, mechanics toiling beneath them.

PATTY (O.S.)

(breathing heavy; breaking down)

If I knew anything I - you expect me to solve this on my own? What if the person you're looking for is already gone? Jesus you all scare me.

The mechanic stops at a sedan. Kneels below it.

JOE (mid-30's now)

Emerges from beneath the car, soaked in sweat and oil. His build is hard, muscular. An old SCAR runs the length of his cheek. His arms are adorned in a rich assortment of tattoos - - some from prison, some from the military. This man has lived.

DETECTIVE #1 (O.S.)

We understand your concern, but I'm here to tell you -

PATTY (O.S.)

Tell me the truth - please. I need to know. I need to know that you'll do everything you can.

(beat)

Tell me you're going to find the one who took my boy from me.

He towels his hands. Follows the mechanic.

DETECTIVE #1 (O.S.)

We're going to do our best.

INT. AUTO BODY SHOP, COUNTER - CONTINUOUS

Joe takes the phone. Listens.

INT. JOE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Low rent housing. Sparse furnishings and blank walls. Soulless and lonely. Joe emerges from the bedroom with a bag slung over his shoulder. He gives the place a once-over, switches off the light, leaves.

INT. JAVIER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

MYRNA (30's)

Salvadoran import. Working class features, but a natural beauty beneath the wear and tear. From the sound of her inflection she's still learning English.

She sits on the edge of Javier's bed, fiddles nervously with the money her son slipped into her purse the night before.

MYRNA
(low)
Javie.

No response. She rocks him gently.

MYRNA (CONT'D)
Javie.

Myrna grows impatient, removes the sheets.

He opens his eyes, gives her his attention. She brandishes the money, demands an explanation.

MYRNA (CONT'D)
Where did you get this?

He turns on his side, away from her gaze, closes his eyes.

JAVIER
Work.

MYRNA
From one shift?

JAVIER
Uh-hmm.

MYRNA
Baby, this is five-hundred dollars.

Javier is comatose. Myrna rocks him hard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MYRNA (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
Wake up. Where did you get this money?!

He sits up, wipes sleep from his eyes.

JAVIER
I already told you.

He moves for his drawer, picks out clothes.

MYRNA
So what? Did Mr. Folsom give you a bonus?

JAVIER
I quit.

MYRNA
Why?

JAVIER
'Cause I got a better job.

MYRNA
Doing what?

JAVIER
Parking cars downtown. At the Grand.

She gives him a look, smells bullshit.

MYRNA
How? You're not old enough to drive.

JAVIER
I got hooked up.

She lays the money down, senses it's wrong.

MYRNA
No. This is wrong. I want you to return it, wherever it came from.

Javier turns to her, awake now, tosses his clothes on the bed.

JAVIER
What? No -

MYRNA
After school, you will go to Mr. Folsom and ask for your job back.

CONTINUED: (2)

JAVIER

No!

He grabs the money, places it in her hand, closes it. He looks into her eyes, decided.

JAVIER (CONT'D)

This is my new job. We can start living on what you and I are making now, maybe start saving real money. Don't ask me to go back to minimum.

(beat)

We need this.

Myrna sighs, confused, tempted. She places a hand on him, wants to trust his word, kisses him.

MYRNA

I have to work. Don't be late for school.

She drops the money in her purse, exits.

Javier falls back onto the bed, passes out.

INT. HOUSING PROJECT, HALLWAY - MORNING

MARCUS (14), pushing his skateboard down the hallway. He glides though a maze of discarded wrappers, cigarette butts, beer cans and 40 oz. bottles. Total disarray.

He KNOCKS on the bars. Myrna opens the door.

MYRNA

Good morning, Marcus.

INT. JAVIER'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

She welcomes Marcus inside, calls out -

MYRNA

Javie! Marcus is here!

(to: Marcus)

He's in his room. Go on back.

She gathers her keys, walks for -

FELIPE (30's)

her boyfriend, slouched in a chair, shoveling Corn Flakes before 'The Today Show.' Bitter at the world, in no hurry to find a job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She wraps her arms around him from behind, kisses him goodbye. He remains glued to the television, unresponsive.

Marcus moves past the living room, dragging his board.

FELIPE
(re: skateboard)
You drag that board across your own
floor?!

MARCUS
No.

FELIPE
Then pick it up.

Marcus picks up the board.

Myrna: frozen in place, quietly embarrassed.

MARCUS
(low)
Motherfucker.

INT. JAVIER'S BEDROOM - MARCUS - CONTINUOUS

Enters, jovial, eager to get the jump on his partner in crime.

MARCUS
What up, boy?

Javier doesn't answer, savoring his sleep.

Marcus crosses to the window, draws the curtains, opens the window. The roar of the city floods the room, wakes Javier. Groggy.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Time for school, negro.

He grabs a towel off the bed, places it at the bottom of the door, plugs the opening. He sparks a JOINT. Offers Javier a hit. He accepts.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
Damn, kid what's up with the eyes? You
look dead.

Javier grabs the towel from the floor, throws it over his shoulder, tries to wake himself up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Where you been all weekend? Terrell had a little thing on Saturday. Your boy was dropping fools. Can't nobody see me on 'GOW'.

He draws twenty dollars, boastfully waves it in his friend's face.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Could've been yours if you answered the phone.

(noticing something)

No-uh!

Marcus launches under Javier's pillow. Steals the PISTOL. Javier grabs back. Marcus recoils excitedly.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Shit is heavy.

(carefully reading the pistol's label)

Jericho, nine-forty-one-F.

He stands in front of the mirror, poses with the pistol. Like they do in the movies.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Goddamn. You could really hot someone with this. How'd you get it?

Javier takes the pistol from Marcus, places it back under the pillow.

JAVIER

Don't worry about it.

Marcus steals back his joint.

MARCUS

Stole it didn't you?

JAVIER

No.

MARCUS

Liar. Yeah you did.

Javier moves past Marcus, disappears into the bathroom, starts a shower.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Marcus creeps to the bed, retrieves the gun. Back in front of the mirror, he levels the pistol, trains it on his image, unlocks the safety, draws back the hammer. Fakes a shot. Enamored.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - JAVIER AND MARCUS - MORNING

Exiting the apartment. Backpacks slung over their shoulders.

As the two reach the curb, an '84 Seville rolls to a stop. The windows roll down, Twin inside.

Javier moves for the car, reaches through the window. Trades a dap with Twin.

TWIN

Hey, partna'. You going to school.

Javier nods, disappointed.

TWIN (CONT'D)

(re: Marcus)

Who's that?

JAVIER

My boy Marcus.

TWIN

Tell him to skate.

Javier turns to his friend, eyes apologizing.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - MOMENTS LATER

The Seville screams from the curb. Leaves Marcus in its wake. He lowers his skateboard to the concrete. Kicks off.

INT. SEVILLE (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Twin lights a cigarette, offers Javier a smoke.

TWIN

You smoke?

JAVIER

Just weed.

TWIN

You high?

Javier smiles, looking away. Guilty.

CONTINUED:

TWIN (CONT'D)

Yeah you high. Ain't nothing wrong with a puff before bed, but keep your business and pleasure segregated, hear me? Blazed niggas can't count for shit. Try this.

Javier takes the cigarette, drags. COUGHS.

TWIN (CONT'D)

How you feeling?

JAVIER

I'm straight.

TWIN

That's not what I asked. How you feeling after last night?

Javier shrugs, unsure how to respond.

TWIN (CONT'D)

First time's a bitch. But, just like smoking jacks, it gets easier as you go. I threw up all night after my first time. Didn't sleep a wink. After that, I just saw it like this: me or them. Only people that matter out here is you and your family. Fuck friends. No such thing out here. They'll only get a muthafucka' killed, hear me?

Javier nods. He takes another drag. No cough.

TWIN (CONT'D)

You did what you did 'cause we had to know you had it in you. Can't be running out here with heart. Heart got no place 'round here.

Twin lowers the collar on his shirt, reveals an OLD GUNSHOT WOUND in his neck.

TWIN (CONT'D)

That's what heart gets you.

JAVIER

How'd you get it?

TWIN

Cat I knew around the way. Used to be tight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TWIN (CONT'D)

Then, after I started hustling, making
some bread, that's when he robbed me.
(pointing to wound)
Put one in here. Cleaned my pockets.
Cash, product, everything.

JAVIER

What'd you do?

Twin looks at him.

TWIN

Took care of it.

A beat as Javier shifts his focus to the road, heeding the
life lesson.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Students empty out of city buses, cars, file inside.

The Seville brakes at the curb.

INT. '84 SEVILLE - CONTINUOUS

TWIN

Open your bag.

Javier complies. Twin drops baggies full of marijuana and
cocaine inside.

TWIN (CONT'D)

Today's consignment. Start you off
light. If it's gone by the end of the
day, I'll make it heavier the next.
Don't let nobody know you're carrying.
Let business come to you. You know where
to put your strap, right?

Javier nods.

Twin grabs Javier's hand, fills it with a baggie and a bill,
bound together by rubber band.

TWIN (CONT'D)

Let the man at the door check your bag.
Make sure he finds this inside. Put your
phone on 'meeting'.

Javier nods.

CONTINUED:

TWIN (CONT'D)
You get a text from me, you respond,
aight? I'll holler at you later.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

The Seville peels out. Javier heads for the entrance. He furtively pulls his pistol, drops it in the bushes amongst an arsenal of hidden firearms.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Javier standing in line as other students have their bags thoroughly checked, proceeding through METAL DETECTORS.

A SECURITY GUARD checks Javier's bag. They exchange a look. The guard pockets the baggie and bill - currency for Javier's passage. The guard nods approvingly.

SECURITY GUARD
Have a good day.

INT. JOE'S CAR - MORNING

Joe taps ash into a the tray, takes a drag from his cigarette. He takes in a view of the city as his car crosses the bridge. It's been a while since both have seen each other.

LATER:

DOWNTOWN - JOE

Watching the drones rush to work in their suits and skirts, barking into their mobiles, tapping their Blackberries. Gradually the city devolves. Skyscrapers become tenement buildings, abandoned property. The people get darker, poorer. He's almost home.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. '91 SEDAN/STREET (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Rain assaulting the windshield. NWA on the radio. Mood vengeful.

Young Joe riding shotgun. ROSCOE (22), Joe's running mate, behind the wheel, smoking a joint, murder in his eyes. He offers Joe a hit, who passes.

A YELLOW LIGHT turns RED.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roscoe mashes the gas, burns through the intersection. An oncoming TAXI slams its brakes, honks in protest.

Joe looks to Roscoe: "are you crazy?"

ROSCOE
Fuck him. We gotta be someplace.

The Sedan edges a curb, parks.

Roscoe composes himself, wiping away tears.

JOE
You aight?

Roscoe rips the keys from the ignition, climbs out of the car, evasive.

ROSCOE
Yeah.

INT. DUKE'S BAR, BACK OFFICE (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Whiskey pouring into two highballs.

PRINCE (30's) scarred, prodigious, the next in charge, hands the glasses to Joe and Roscoe. He sits at the edge of Duke's desk, not quite ready to take the chair and assume command of his superior's organization.

PRINCE
Coroner says it's gonna be closed casket.
Wasn't nothing he could do to repair the damage.

(beat)

I don't know about ya'll, but I ain't had no old man to look up to, show me the way. But Duke, I looked up to Duke. Man gave me a home when I had none. Fed me, taught me how to work the corner, taught me how to be a man.

ROSCOE
Good man.

PRINCE
Great man.

He raises his glass. The soldiers follow suit, drink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PRINCE (CONT'D)
*So, guess ya'll wondering now what the
 hell it is we gonna do about it? Am I
 right?*

They nod.

PRINCE (CONT'D)
I mean, we all know who did it.

ROSCOE
Eighth Street.

Prince rises from the desk, sinks into Duke's seat, gets comfortable. He removes a gold chain around his neck, polishes it with a handkerchief.

PRINCE
Niggas been beefin' since the term was coined. And now they're thinking our spirits is low, that they got us running for the hills. Like cowards. Like Goddamn females. Only they made one big mistake: they ain't kill all of us. One thing I learned from Duke, somebody picks a fight with you, well you best start a war with them.

He pours himself another glass, throws it back.

PRINCE (CONT'D)
What I'm about to ask ya'll to do, it's gonna be messy, real loud. But necessary. When it's through there's gonna be a lot of heat around here. But it won't be no problem so long as ya'll ain't around when it comes, feel me?

JOE
Need us to lay low?

PRINCE
Just for a bit.

ROSCOE
(perfunctorily)
Whatever we gotta do.

PRINCE
Joe. Think you can handle it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Off Joe.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. JOE'S CAR (PRESENT) - DAY

Joe, pensive, drives by Patricia's building, rounds the corner.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Pre-lecture bustle. A Freshman class indulging in gossip, horseplay. Young and restless.

Javier scribbling through homework he was supposed to do the night before. A VOICE on the loudspeaker says the Pledge of Allegiance. Some stand. Most sit, talking amongst themselves.

A TEACHER, 30's, enters. Late. Face transmitting stress. She places her belongings on a desk, removes her coat, breathes.

Javier notes her arrival, picks up the pace.

Then, another VOICE on the loudspeaker, the PRINCIPAL:

PRINCIPAL (O.S.)

Good morning students and faculty. This is your Principal speaking. Before you begin your week I'd like to take a moment and remember a dear student we lost over the weekend. As some of you may, or may not know, Corey Himes, a high school senior and former varsity guard here at Kennedy was shot and killed on Griffith Avenue last night.

Javier freezes, pencil in mid-stroke. He keeps his eyes on the homework, remaining calm as the principal remembers the boy he shot last night.

FRANKLIN

No news on the suspects, but you are urged to come forward if you have any information that pertains to Corey's murder. Thank you and have a pleasant day.

The teacher stands before class.

CONTINUED:

TEACHER

Alright, pass last night's homework forward. If it's blank, make sure your name's on it.

Students groan as they comply, gathering their homework.

A STUDENT tosses his papers onto Javier's desk. Javier glances at it, steals the remaining answers. Lightning quick. Then, passes both papers forward.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Joe walks down the hall. Two small CHILDREN blaze past him, playful, unattended.

He stops at a unit. KNOCKS.

Patty opens the door, regards Joe's image, incredulous, yet relieved to see this man.

He remains silent, evasive, unsure what to say to the woman he abandoned fifteen years ago.

INT. PATTY'S UNIT - PATTY - LATER

On the couch, her hands keeping warm around a cup of coffee. Joe sits beside her. SHUGGIE, Corey's pit-bull sits by Joe's knees. They trade gazes, both equally curious about the other.

PATTY

That's Shuggie. Boy rarely ever left the house without him. Dog meant the world to him.

Joe shows Patty a pack of smokes. She waves them off.

PATTY (CONT'D)

Knock yourself out.

Joe lights up. He notes Patty, tapping out two pills, chasing them with coffee.

PATTY (CONT'D)

Puts me in a better mood.

Joe picks up a picture of Corey - in basketball uniform.

PATTY (CONT'D)

He was real good. Scouts from all over showed up for a couple of games.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE

I saw him in the newspaper, when he dropped fifty.

PATTY

You should've have been there to see it. It was like the whole gym exploded. I was so proud. But, you couldn't pull him away from that guitar. Quit ball after junior year. Said the only schools he'd consider were music schools. I thought it was stubborn.

Patty returns to silence, the grim reality of a life without Corey still washing over her.

PATTY (CONT'D)

Police had the nerve to ask if he was hustling.

JOE

Was he -

PATTY

Never.

JOE

What did they say about the weapon?

PATTY

I don't know, said it was a forty-five. One of them told me something about the serial numbers being worn off, so it was hard to match, or something. The hell do I know about guns? It's like nobody knows anything. And if they did, well...you know how it goes.

Joe nods, he does.

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Javier, tuning out as the teacher writes on the board. He senses something. Draws a mobile from his pocket - lighting up. He reads the screen. Rises from his seat, leaves. The teacher takes note, continues to write on the board, indifferent.

INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

Javier enters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COURTNEY (16, white)

emerges from a stall.

GIRL

You Javier?

JAVIER

Yeah.

GIRL

Courtney.

Courtney pulls a wad of cash from her pocket, offers it to Javier. He takes it, counts.

JAVIER

You're short twenty.

COURTNEY

Then put me on credit. Twin knows I'm good for it.

Javier hands the money back, moves for the door.

JAVIER

I don't. Come back with twenty.

COURTNEY

Okay.

She spits her gum in the garbage, blows past him. Locks the door.

JAVIER

What are you doing?

COURTNEY

Paying you what I owe.

Courtney gently guides Javier against the wall. She unbuckles his pants, gets to her knees.

COURTNEY (CONT'D)

Pull out when it comes. I hate the taste.

INT. PATTY'S UNIT, COREY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Patty prepares the bed for Joe, places the scrapbook on the windowsill.

CONTINUED:

Joe enters cautiously. His son's memories are everywhere. Posters of Jimi Hendrix, John Lee Hooker and Rage Against the Machine grace the wall. Countless basketball trophies line the dresser. Guitar pics litter the nightstand. APPLICATIONS for various colleges on the floor. A young life left behind.

Joe's eyes catch a Fender Stratocaster propped on it's stand by the bed, gives him pause.

JOE

Thank you.

PATTY

Don't say it again. He'd want you here.

JOE

No he wouldn't.

PATTY

He never hated you for leaving. I told him what happened and he understood. We both did.

She tries to keep it together.

PATTY (CONT'D)

It means a lot, you being here. I didn't know who else to call. After you went away...Corey - he was it. He was all I had. I know I'm supposed to be strong, but it hurts. God does it hurt. I just wish I knew who did it. I'd kill him - him and every other nigger he knows, just so they could feel what I feel. Boy, if I could do what you could do, well, I'd have done it.

Patty begins to cry. Joe inches towards her, wraps his arms around her. This is her release.

PATTY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

(beat)

Why would anyone want to hurt him? It don't make no sense.

Joe hangs with her, feels her pain, shows none of it.

EXT. CORNER - NIGHT

Javier deals to an unseen CUSTOMER in a car. The exchange is quick, furtive. Like magic. The car drives off.

LATER - JAVIER

Dealing to another CUSTOMER. Same execution, only faster. He's getting better.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - NIGHT

He steps off a city bus, walks for his building, comes upon Marcus, pulling tricks on his skateboard.

MARCUS

Where you been at?

JAVIER

(passing him by)

Working.

Marcus kicks the board into his hands, follows Javier. Curious.

MARCUS

Oh, yeah? For who?

JAVIER

Nobody you know.

They enter -

THE LOBBY

passing stragglers, tenants and finally a SECURITY GUARD - sitting behind a desk, lost in a magazine.

MARCUS

You're hustling for Casino, ain't you?

Javier shrugs, pleading the fifth. They stop at an elevator. Marcus pushes the "UP" button. They wait.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Whatchu' mean (mimicking his shrug)
Nigga, I saw you get in Twin's whip.

JAVIER

So?

CONTINUED:

MARCUS
So you're making bread.

Javier is tired of waiting, he taps the button again, opts for the -

STAIRWELL

They climb the stairs -

MARCUS (CONT'D)
How much you pulling?

JAVIER
None of your business.

MARCUS
Whatever. My cousin used to work for Casino. Dude made like half a G a day, easy.

JAVIER
Good for him.

They continue up the staircase, losing breath, passing a JUNKIE huddled in the corner, passed out under a blanket, high.

MARCUS
So. You gonna put a word in?

JAVIER
For what?

MARCUS
What do you think? I want a job.

They reach Javier's floor, slip into the -

HALLWAY

JAVIER
You don't want this job.

They arrive at a door. Javier inserts a key, opens it. He lets himself in, blocks Marcus's entry.

MARCUS
If you can do it, I can do it.

JAVIER
See you tomorrow.

CONTINUED: (2)

They trade daps.

MARCUS

Think about it, boy. Don't leave me hanging.

Javier slams the door. Marcus lays down his skateboard, kicks off, gliding down the hall.

INT. JAVIER'S APARTMENT - ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Javier drops his bag on the bed, unzips it. He ferries the remaining dope into a brown paper bag - there's hardly any left. He pulls a wad of CASH from his pocket, counts it, shakes his head, impressed with the day's take. He places the cash in an empty tissue box, save a few large bills.

A loud VIBRATION.

Javier draws his cell.

ON THE SCREEN: WASHINGTON AND FAIRVIEW. 10:30. SENDER: TWIN

He texts back : ALMOST OUT. NEED MORE.

Javier takes a deep breath, rubs his temples. Exhausted. He transfers the dope back into his bag, shoulders it.

HALLWAY

Felipe emerges from Myrna's room smoking a cigarette. He steps in the bathroom, lobs the cigarette into the toilet, stands against the door.

FELIPE

Why you home so late?

Javier ignores the comment, continuing for the door. There's a history of tension between the two.

FELIPE (CONT'D)

What? You don't hear me? You made your mom's worry.

Javier heads to Myrna's room, Felipe blocks his path.

FELIPE (CONT'D)

She's sleep.

JAVIER

Fuck out of my way. Felipe.

CONTINUED:

Felipe clears a path, helpless.

Javier creeps to his mother's nightstand. He gingerly slips the two bills into her purse.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Javier blows past Felipe, not a word.

FELIPE

Where'd you get the money?

Javier doesn't respond, continues for the door.

FELIPE (CONT'D)

Oh I see how it is. A little change in your pocket makes you a man. Think that gives you the right to disrespect me? I'm talking to you. Don't think 'cause I ain't your pops I got no say around here.

Javier is already out the door. Felipe stands alone in the hallway, emasculated.

INT. SUBWAY STATION - PLATFORM - NIGHT

A late night car. Littered with refuse from the day's passengers. Virtually empty save for Javier, slouched in a seat, gazing enviably at a YOUNG COUPLE at the other end of the car. Hands locked. The girl's head perched on the boy's shoulder. Seemingly comfortable in each others embrace. Dead asleep.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Javier slides a five dollar bill into a slot.

A CASHIER receives him behind bulletproof glass. The cashier examines Javier's face a moment, shakes his head with indifference. Then, places a pack of cigarettes through the slot.

EXT. WASHINGTON AND FAIRVIEW - NIGHT

Javier exchanges dope for cash to someone in a luxury car. The customers:

A WHITE COUPLE (20's), young, privileged, miles away from the high life downtown.

LATER - JAVIER

CONTINUED:

Pockets his fee, strikes a match to his cigarette. A 4X4 cracks him from behind. He falls hard to the concrete. A YOUNG THIEF (early teens) relieves his pockets of his dope, cash. He takes off running.

Javier draws his pistol, takes aim, FIRES into the thief's leg, drops him onto the cold cement.

On his feet, staggering for the thief - crying like a baby.

He takes his property back, trains his pistol on the teen, finger on the trigger - tempted, ultimately terrified. Then, he stalks away.

INT. COREY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe sits against the wall, smoking, knees drawn up, staring at Corey's bed. He grabs a pillow, drops it on the hardwood floor. He shuts off the lamp, lies down.

CUT TO:

INT. '91 SEDAN (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Joe loads his colt.

Roscoe reaches into the glovebox, retrieves his pistol, an eighth of cocaine. He snorts a line off the dashboard, checks his magazine, slams it into his pistol.

They peer out the window, into the bar standing beside them: four HOODS at the counter, smoking cigarettes, liquering up.

ROSCOE

How many you count?

JOE

'Bout five from here. Could be more in the back.

Roscoe takes a deep breath - he's scared shitless.

INT. BAR (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

GUN SHOTS tear into a HOOD, throwing him off the barstool, onto the floor next to a bloodied CORPSE.

Joe, mouth obscured by black bandana, moving past the hood - reaching inside his coat, attempting to retaliate. Joe blasts the man's firing hand, kicks away his pistol.

CONTINUED:

JOE
Where's your man?

HOOD
Fuck you!

Joe pops a kneecap, steps hard on the wound. The hood WAILS.

JOE
Where's your man?

He levels the colt over the hood's balls, FIRES. He CRIES mercy.

HOOD
(freaking out)
At his lady's! 31 Market. Jesus Christ!

That's all Joe needs from the hood, shoots him, point blank.

Roscoe stands over another HOOD - multiple wounds, groaning in agony.

Joe watches Roscoe struggle to finish him off.

JOE
Hey! Finish up!

Roscoe starts out of his daze, levels his pistol, trembling with fear. Finally, he shoots the man in the head, walks off, shaking his head to himself.

He passes by the bar, spots the BARTENDER, hugging his knees in the corner, praying he survives this God awful bloodbath. A tense BEAT.

ROSCOE
What about him?

Joe shakes his head.

Roscoe turns back to the bartender, he can't do it. Joe steps in, kills the bartender with two callous shots. He marches out.

JOE
Let's go.

Roscoe stands frozen in place, repulsed with himself, surrounded by bloodied corpses.

CONTINUED: (2)

He wants to fall to his knees, cry, beg for forgiveness; he is not Joe. Dealing death is killing him.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. COREY'S BEDROOM (PRESENT) - NIGHT

JOE (O.S.)

Let's go!

Joe, wide awake on his side. Then, a WHIMPER from the hallway.

INT. PATTY'S UNIT - JOE - MOMENTS LATER

Moving down the hall, sees Shuggie sniffing at the bathroom door, whining, clawing at the wood.

Joe opens the door -

Patty lies on her stomach, foam dripping from her mouth, into a puddle on the floor.

Joe looks to the counter: an empty bottle of pills.

He hurries for Patty, cradles her, slaps her face, attempting to revive her. She doesn't respond. A beat as Joe holds Patty in his arms, numb, vacant.

INT. STASH HOUSE - DAYS LATER - CASINO AND JAVIER (MONTAGE)

Moving down the hallway.

IN THE KITCHEN

Leila and another YOUNG GIRL count stacks of large bills, thumbs working overtime, punching calculators, scribbling totals in notebooks.

Javier watches Leila work, following Casino. They trade curious looks. She slows her count, almost loses her place. Then, she re-focuses on the money. Back to reality.

IN THE BASEMENT

TEENAGE GIRLS in surgical masks cut mounds of cocaine on steel tables. Others pack the substances into plastic bags. Daytime television plays on a wall-mounted plasma screen. A slight diversion from the workday tedium.

Casino introduces Javier to WORLD (30), associate and overseer to the stash house. They shake hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LATER

Casino grabs a dozen bags off the table, hands them to Javier, who puts them in his bag.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Javier pulls his cell out. It BEEPS silently. He rises from the desk, leaves. Unnoticed.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Courtney enters the BOYS RESTROOM. Javier follows.

INT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

Javier deals to a MAN in a robe. Tired eyes, manicured nails. A PIMP.

Amidst the exchange, Javier sneaks a glance at two WHORES smoking on the couch, bags beneath their eyes, noses red. They watch daytime television, minds elsewhere.

The Pimp pays Javier, sends him on his way.

EXT./INT. STREET/ BMW - DAY

A BOY (17) breaks into a BMW. The execution is a crime it's so effortless. This is RAOUL.

Another BOY (17) plays lookout. JAMES. Both soldiers for Casino.

Raoul hot-wires the car. The engine ROARS. James jumps in the passenger seat. The BMW takes off.

INT. TWIN'S GARAGE - DAY

A storage house for stolen goods. Stereos, DVD Players, televisions, cars.

Javier and Twin fire their pistols at paper targets. Practice.

The BMW comes rolling in, HONKING. Javier and Twin turn.

Raoul and James emerge from the car, proud, accomplished.

As Javier and Twin marvel at the purloined vehicle, Raoul and James grab pistols, FIRE at the targets.

INT. '84 SEVILLE (MOVING) - DAY

Twin rounds a corner. Javier observes from the front seat. Raoul shoots a rival CORNER KID - three callous shots. Breaks his drive-by cherry.

INT. '84 SEVILLE - NIGHT

Marcus dons a bandana. Twin smokes a cigarette, waiting.

Javier rides shotgun, audience to his friends initiation.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Marcus moves in on a YOUNG COUPLE, holding hands, taking a stroll. He draws the pistol, FIRES on the male. He goes down. The female CRIES for help. Marcus turns the pistol on her, FIRES.

CUT TO BLACK.

END MONTAGE.

FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING

Cold and cloudy. Thousands of headstones stand on rotting grass. Numerous inscriptions indicate early departures; teens, toddlers, babies - all buried much too early.

Joe and a few ATTENDEES watch GRAVEDIGGERS lower Patty and Corey's caskets into the dirt.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Joe ties Shuggie's leash to a bike rack.

TWO OFFICERS exit the stations. DISPATCH announces a 187 from their radios. The officers stroll to their cruiser, trading jokes, not a care in their world.

Joe watches the cruiser take off, unties Shuggie's leash, walks on. Resigned.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Joe enters, bumps shoulders with Twin - on his way out, jiving into his cell phone.

TWIN

Watch where the fuck you going.

CONTINUED:

Twin looks Joe up and down, stalks away, returns to his phone.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Limited space. Old school furnishings. A real hole in the wall. Framed photographs of James Brown, Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield on the wall.

A crew of OLD TIMERS play chess at a booth in the rear. A few others are glued to the television above the bar, slaves to the lottery numbers.

Joe grabs a stool. Meets eyes with the BARTENDER -

RETHA (30's)

Dark and full bodied. Pretty for a woman who's lived. Her sleeveless top reveals strong arms. "Jamal" is tattooed in cursive on her left shoulder.

She plants a napkin before Joe.

RETHA
What are you having?

JOE
Bud. From the bottle.

Retha pulls a beer from the ice-box, twists the cap. Joe takes a long, thankful swig. He pulls a pack of NEWPORTS. Fires up.

RETHA
Mind if I steal one?

Joe taps out a stick for Retha, lights her up.

RETHA (CONT'D)
You're a new face. Where you coming from?

JOE
Out of town.

RETHA
I hope you got a good reason to be here.

Joe's gazes straight ahead, evasive.

JOE
Funeral.

CONTINUED:

RETHA

Seems to be the only reason anyone visits
this part of town anymore. I'm sorry.
Were you close with the -

JOE

No.

Retha backs off. Point taken.

Joe clears the bottle. He shifts in his seat, restless.
Something vicious is stirring inside. A hunger for resolve;
a desire for retribution.

He rises, digs into his pocket.

JOE (CONT'D)

How much I owe?

RETHA

No. It's on me.

Joe watches her return to the register, back to her own
business. He wants to apologize, start the conversation
over. Doesn't know how. He pockets his money, leaves.

INT. COREY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Joe tosses his belongings in the duffle bag. No time for a
neat pack; the guilt, frustration, helplessness are
suffocating him. He wants out. Then, he freezes, eyes on
Corey's guitar. He lays a hand on it, caressing it, plucks a
string.

He hefts his bag, ready to leave, stops in his tracks as his
eyes fall on a SCRAPBOOK wedged between the bed and the
nightstand.

IN THE KITCHEN - JOE - LATER

Sitting by an open window, scratching Shuggie's neck. He
smokes a cigarette, leafing through the scrapbook, learning
about the life he missed:

News clippings report Corey's athletic career at Kennedy
High. Polaroids of Corey and Patty, happy together. Then,
he comes across a dated PICTURE OF HIMSELF, cradling BABY
Corey in his arms. The only picture of Joe in the entire
book.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A circle of MEN shout and cheer, fists wet with C-NOTES - bloodthirsty. They surround two PIT-BULLS, brawling to the death. Raw, bloody and inhumane. A decent living for these low lives.

Joe observes from a entrance. Shuggie sits beside him, curious about the carnage.

CHESTER (40's)

crouches near the center of the ring. Short and portly. Skin like cheap leather. A hustler way past his prime. He studies the combat with a steely confidences.

One of the pit-bulls locks its jaw on the competition, begins the end. The loser slowly dies, neck soaked in blood.

A faint smile creeps across Chester's face; his dog has won.

LATER

The crowd begins to empty out. The losing MASTER wraps his bull in a blanket, carries it out.

Chester towels blood from his bull's mouth, muzzles it. He rises, meets eyes with Joe. He links his bull to a leash, moves for the exit in a hurry, away from Joe.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CHESTER'S PIT BULL - NIGHT

Taking a leak on a light post. Chester shifting impatiently.

Joe and Shuggie are on their way, strides casual, brave.

Chester yanks his bull, scurries away. Judging by his build, he won't get far.

JOE

Why you running, big man?

CHESTER

'Cause last I saw you there was a strap in your hand and I still ain't got what I owe, never will. I'm broke.

JOE

That ain't what it looked like back there. I saw you collect. Shit, thought you'da grown into a better liar by now.

CONTINUED:

CHESTER

These winnings is all I got and they're
paying for my high. Leave me be.

JOE

I ain't holding, Chester. Slow down.

CHESTER

Hell no.

JOE

If I wanted to kill you, you wouldn't
have spotted me.

Chester slows, turns to face his alleged maker.

CHESTER

Whatchu' want then, Joe?

Joe walks past him.

JOE

Let's walk.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Joe and Chester on the side walk, catching up. Their dogs
pad beside them.

CHESTER

Scared the shit out of me, man.
Thought you was here to settle my debt
with Duke.

JOE

Under the bridge. Man's been gone too
long for me to care.

CHESTER

Where you been hiding?

JOE

Far enough to be a stranger.

CHESTER

I hear that. Thought for sure after what
I heard you did at Drew's I saw the last
of you. Damn shame what happened, but in
a weird way, I was glad it went down.
Long as you were gone and Duke was dead,
my slate was clean.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Chester shoots Joe a look, ensures he hasn't crossed the line.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

No offense.

Joe shrugs.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

What brings you back?

JOE

Some business. I need some iron. Know who's selling?

CHESTER

'Buncha cats. Whatchu' looking for?

JOE

Something light. Hard to trace.

CHESTER

That narrows it. Gonna cost you though. At least a few stacks. You got that?

Joe nods.

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Then you wanna talk to Moses. Only cat around here who specializes in the iron you're looking for. Lives on Twelfth and Boulder. Number nine, I think. Big killer. Remember Ray Ridley?

JOE

Yeah. Runs that Sixth Street crew.

CHESTER

Ran. He gone now. Moses mercked him in lock up. Cracked open his head with a 45-pound plate.

JOE

What Moses go in for?

CHESTER

Possession. Boy was on his way, too. He was a going to be contender. Had a manager and everything. Fast feet. Had this left. Shattered niggas.

(spotting his dealer
across the street)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHESTER (CONT'D)

Hey, I gotta roll. Do my thing. You want in on this?

JOE

Knock yourself out. Let Moses know I'm coming. Don't forget, now.

CHESTER

You know I got you.

JOE

S'all I wanna hear.

He gives Joe a dap, yanks his bull. Makes a dash across the street, craving his fix.

Joe lights a cigarette, tugs Shuggie. Trails off.

Chester meets a YOUNG DEALER on the corner. They begin the transaction.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, BASEMENT - NIGHT

Casino's soldiers getting fucked up on weed, booze and powder. A real party.

Javier sits in a barber's chair, nervous and eager. A GIRL (15) tattoos CROSSHAIRS on the back of his hand. He smokes a blunt for the pain.

Marcus stands beside him, provides emotional support. He snatches the blunt, tokes, chases it with a bottle of Malt.

Javier's eyes fall on Leila, holding a cocktail, gliding through the horde, looking for an exit. She discovers his gaze, sizes him up. Looks away, unimpressed.

LATER - JAVIER

On the couch, rubbing balm on his new tattoo, admiring the craftsmanship. He finds Marcus amidst the mob, spitting game to a young lovely.

Twin approaches with two beers. A MAN (18) in a blue Phillies cap trails close behind - tall, lineman's build. A white towel hangs over his left shoulder. MOE.

Twin hands Javier a beer. They tap bottles, drink. Twin makes introductions.

TWIN

This my boy Moe.

CONTINUED:

MOE
Heard good things.

They shake.

TWIN
You ever need a new strap. This the
nigga to talk to. Nines, glocks, Eagles -
whatever. Dude'll hook you up.

MOE
Let me know, son.

Moe and Javier trade daps.

MOE (CONT'D)
(to: Twin)
I'm out. Holla at me later.

TWIN
Still on probation?

MOE
Two weeks to go.

TWIN
Be good, nigga.

Twin takes a seat beside Javier.

TWIN (CONT'D)
You having fun?

JAVIER
Definitely.

TWIN
Hey, I'm proud of you. Ain't been here
long and you putting in good work out
there. Don't think nobody don't notice.
(beat)
Come on. Lemme introduce you to the
vets.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, GAME ROOM - LATER

Four LIEUTENANTS, Casino and World included, play poker -
drinking, smoking, shooting the shit.

Twin enters, trailed by Javier. Casino offers the kid a
chair next to him.

CONTINUED:

CASINO

You play?

Javier nods.

CASINO (CONT'D)

Speak up, now. This ain't Monopoly.
Pocket hurts if you lose.

JAVIER

I play.

Javier takes a seat, digs in his pockets. Casino stops him.

CASINO

Nah. First time at the table. My treat.

Casino pulls stake money from his pocket. A cool thousand.
He places it in front of Javier. Deals him in.

CASINO (CONT'D)

(to: Twin)

You in?

TWIN

What's buy-in?

CASINO

Stack.

TWIN

I think I got enough.

Twin pulls a grand from his pocket, counts it so everyone
sees, buys in.

CURTIS (25)

Dark and hefty, like a bear, eyeballs Javier.

CURTIS

How long he been on the corner?

CASINO

Two weeks. He learning fast, though.
Collects about two stacks a day.

HECTOR (27)

Salvadoran, all muscle, WHISTLES, organizing his cards.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HECTOR
You tryin' to work for me?

CASINO
Can't have him.

WORLD
He sure don't look the part. Kinda like
you used to be, C.

CASINO
Give him a few years. He'll have some
scars.

WORLD
So what you really doin' here? Putting
in them hours like you do? You work like
you Twin's age.

Javier shrugs.

JAVIER
Guess I'm hungry.

CASINO
Got to be.

WORLD
Everybody's hungry. Way you work though,
it's like you in a rush. You ain't
looking to get out are you?

Javier pauses, almost busted.

JAVIER
No.

WORLD
You know there ain't no out.

CASINO
Here we go. Nigga we too high to be
talking about this.

WORLD
I'm just letting little man know.
(back to: Javier)
Longer you hustle, deeper that hole gets.

Casino playfully trains his pistol on World.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CASINO
World, shut the fuck up.

World ignores the pistol, eyes locked on Javier.

WORLD
Just remember what I'm saying, hear?

Javier arranges his cards, a practical distraction from the veteran's word of warning.

JAVIER
Whatever.

Casino wraps an arm around Javier: he loves this kid.

CASINO
See? Your voodoo ain't working on this one. This my nigga right here.

Twin watches on with jealous eyes.

CURTIS
Hey, we playing cards? Who's in?

The men read their hands. Hector and World throw down their cards, fold.

Twin reads his cards, frowns, folds.

Casino looks to Javier.

CASINO
What about you? Staying?

Off Javier.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, GAME ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The bosses empty out, bested, each short a grand. Casino pays Javier, gives him a proud dap.

CASINO
Have fun with that. You earned it.

Javier nods, takes it to heart.

EXT. CASINO'S HOUSE, ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Javier smoking a cigarette, counting his winnings. He sits on the edge of the roof, takes in a majestic view of downtown. Only twenty blocks from where he stands, yet very far away.

LEILA

How many times you gonna count it?

Javier faces Leila, emerging from darkness. She joins him on the edge, rolling a spliff.

JAVIER

You been watching me?

LEILA

You got a lighter?

Javier gives her a lighter.

LEILA (CONT'D)

He let you win, you know.

Javier shoots her a look, pride diminishing.

LEILA (CONT'D)

He cheats. That's how he controls the game. Been doing it for years. That's how you won.

She offers him a hit, he waves it off.

JAVIER

Why'd he do it?

LEILA

He likes you. You make good money for him.

JAVIER

That why he likes you?

LEILA

I'm different. He loves me.

Three GUN SHOTS echo in the distance. A robbery, gang beef, who knows? Leila doesn't like it.

LEILA (CONT'D)

There they go. Can't never be quiet around here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAVIER

I don't even hear it anymore. But them
helicopters? Those I can do without.

LEILA

Glad I never got used to it.

JAVIER

Where do you live?

LEILA

Not around here.

Leila puts out her spiff, heads back inside.

Javier shakes his head. What was that?

A POLICE HELICOPTER roars overhead, searchlights canvassing
the slum below, looking for culprits.

INT. JAVIER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Javier enters furtively, closes the door behind him.

He turns on the kitchen light, opens the fridge. Felipe
charges him, holds a KNIFE to his throat.

FELIPE

Give it to me.

JAVIER

What are you talking about -

FELIPE

The fucking money.

Felipe goes for Javier's pockets, digs out his winnings. He
backs off slow, removes the knife.

FELIPE (CONT'D)

You don't tell, I don't tell. Be a shame
if she had to find out how her boy was
making bread. It'd break her heart.

Felipe pockets the money, places the knife on the counter.
He leaves Javier standing in the kitchen. Boiling.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - NIGHT

Twin's Seville skids to a stop. Javier slides in, ready to
explode.

INT. '84 SEVILLE - CONTINUOUS

Twin lights two cigarettes, passes one to Javier. He waves it off. Twin persists.

TWIN
Be cool, nigga.

Javier takes the cigarette, drags hard.

TWIN (CONT'D)
So where's he at?

Off Javier.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

Felipe sinks an eight-ball, smiles. His OPPONENT angrily drops his cue on the table.

FELIPE (IN SPANISH)
*Let me give you chance to win your money
back. Best out of five.*

The opponent peels off a C-note, throws it on the table. Storms off. Felipe calls after him, adds salt to the wound.

FELIPE (IN SPANISH) (CONT'D)
*Don't get mad. Guess I wasn't as rusty
as I thought.*

The opponent flips the bird passing Javier and Twin on his way out. They stand at the entrance, getting into character, watching Felipe giggle to himself. He throws back the rest of his beer, half-drunk.

Twin turns to Javier.

TWIN
That him?

Javier nods.

JAVIER
Yeah.

Twin moves to the bar, whispers to the BARTENDER, slips money in his pocket. The bartender rushes for the entrance door, locks it.

CONTINUED:

Twin moves for the pool tables, patrons clear a path. They've seen his face enough to realize it's smarter to turn the other way, give him room.

Felipe notes Twin's approach.

FELIPE

Sup, dog, you want to play?

Twin yanks a handful of Felipe's hair, disables him. He cuts into Felipe multiple times with a pocket dagger, maliciously punching through various points of his upper body. He reaches for Felipe's jeans pocket, rips out Javier's money, shows it to him.

TWIN

This yours?

FELIPE

Yeah.

Twin stabs Felipe again, he can hardly stand on his own.

TWIN

This yours?

FELIPE

No!

TWIN

If I gotta see you again, I'ma use my gun.

He slams Felipe's head on the pool table, wipes his blood on his own clothes.

The Bartender unlocks the door for Twin, lets him out.

Javier barely hides his shock, watches Felipe bleed on the floor. Their eyes meet. Javier looks away. There's no satisfaction in his revenge. He exits the bar, remorseful.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Myrna enters the hospital, hurried and anxious. She tugs Javier's hand, begs him to keep up.

INT. HOSPITAL, PATIENT ROOM - LATER

Myrna holds Felipe's hand. He lies in a bed, wrapped in bandages. Myrna wipes away tears, relieved he's still alive. Javier sits next to her, avoiding eye contact with Felipe.

CONTINUED:

An OFFICER (30's) stands at the foot of the bed, blank pad in hand.

FELIPE

(weak)

It happened so quick. It was like one minute I was drinking my beer and the next minute I was bleeding on the floor.

OFFICER

So you blacked out?

Felipe looks to Javier. The sight of this boy instills the fear of God. He returns his gaze to the officer.

FELIPE

Yeah. Yeah, I blacked out.

The officer hands Myrna a card.

OFFICER

Let me know if anything comes back to him.

He leaves.

Myrna holds Felipe's hand, tears streaming. He and Javier continue to exchange looks.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING, REAR ENTRANCE - AFTERNOON

Joe smoking by the entrance, waiting.

A MOTHER struggles through the doors, pushing a stroller. Joe comes to her aid, holds the door open for the woman and her INFANT.

WOMAN

Thank you.

Joe nods, drops his cigarette, enters.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING, HALLWAY - JOE - LATER

Moving down the hall. Faulty lights humming on and off. Leaky ceilings caked in mold. The walls are bombed by graffiti. In an art gallery, this would be a masterful installation. Up ahead -

A KID emerges from one of the units. He tucks a pistol into his waistband, drapes his hoodie over the handle, concealing his new purchase.

CONTINUED:

The kid greets Joe in passing with a nod. He looks no older than twelve.

Joe stops at a door. The number 9 hangs sideways above the peephole. He knocks.

A TITAN in a wifebeater answers the door. Jail ink, shifty eyes, too much muscle.

MOSES (30's)

He studies Joe.

MOSES

I help you?

JOE

Chester told me I should see you.

MOSES

Chester? You mean crackhead who owes me five-hundred dollars, Chester?

JOE

That'd be him.

MOSES

What you want?

JOE

Strap.

MOSES

How much you got?

Joe draws a thick wad of cash, rolled tight by a rubber band.

Off Moses.

INT. MOSES'S UNIT - CONTINUOUS

Sparse furnishings, garbage advertising fast food chains litter the floor. The space is forgetful, easy to abandon. A disassembled pistol lies on the coffee table. Next to it, a hammer and chisel for wearing down the serial numbers.

Moses unscrews a portion of the floor. Joe's eyes dart to the television: an episode of 'The Cosby Show.'

Moses removes hardwood, reveals a cache of weaponry. Pistols, shotguns, knives, hand-held explosives, an assault rifle fitted with a grenade launcher.

CONTINUED:

Joe hefts the assault rifle, levels it.

MOSES

Got that in Chicago. Man sold it to me turned out to be a UC, Fed related. White boy thought he had his man when I bought it from him. Nigga was too slow. You want it, I start at twelve thousand.

Joe smiles, lowers the launcher back into the floor.

JOE

How about something lighter.

MOSES

Straps. P226, Sig Sauer. Homeland Security and Navy SEALS shoot with these, very reliable. They're in limited production. The lowest I can go is fifteen, but it's bang for your buck no doubt.

Joe examines the weapon, checks the gate, tests the weight like a customer who knows his firearms. Moses is on to the next pistol, a .38 REVOLVER.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Old school, but it works.

He passes it to Joe. He holds it, releases the cylinder, takes it for a spin.

JOE

I used to run with this.

MOSES

Must've had good aim.

JOE

It was reliable.

MOSES

Costs a stack.

JOE

You got any .45's?

MOSES

All out. Sold four of 'em few weeks ago. But ain't nothing a .45 can do that these here can't do ten times better.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Joe produces a wad of cash, lays it on the table.

JOE

That's fifteen for the .38.

MOSES

I only asked for a grand.

JOE

The five's an extra something for telling
me where I can find homey with the .45's.
Figure I'll buy one off him.

MOSES

Don't even worry about. I'll hit up my
connec, get you one in a few days.

JOE

Or you could just tell me what I need to
know.

Moses smiles, realizes the score. He studies Joe, a tense
beat.

MOSES

You a cop?

JOE

Fuck the police.

Joe peels off more money, lays it on the table.

JOE (CONT'D)

That's another two thousand.

Moses looks at the money, tempted.

MOSES

What's the beef?

JOE

What do you care?

(pointing to the money)

This is your only concern.

Moses collects the money, counts it, over and over.

MOSES

Moe.

JOE

Where?

CONTINUED: (3)

MOSES

He all over the place, but nigga love him
some trim. Try Delilah's on Green.
You'll see him. Young dude. Real dark.
Always wearin' a blue Phillies cap.

JOE

You got a suppressor for this?

MOSES

(producing a silencer,
cartridges)

On me. Along with the cartridges.

Moses wraps Joe's pistol and suppressor in black cloth, hands them to Joe. He places the cartridges in a plastic bag.

JOE

That boy just left. He your son?

MOSES

Who shorty? Just another customer.

JOE

Looked young.

MOSES

Most are.

JOE

Where do I piss?

MOSES

Down the hall, hang a right.

Joe rises, moves behind Moses - storing his take in a shoebox brimming with cash.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Yup, I'm a Toys-R-Us to these little
niggas. So long as they got the pocket,
I got the business -

A silenced bullet cuts him off, exits through his skull and punches a hole through the sofa. He slumps awkwardly onto the coffee table, dies, hands squeezing the money.

Joe stands behind the corpse, lowers the smoking gun. A beat as he watches Moses bleed. His expression is cold, pitiless. This man's business is a factor in Corey's death.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

He quickly pockets the shells, covering his tracks. Scans the space, eyes a gym bag. Loads it with more cartridges and a few grenades, leaves. Ready for war.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Joe throws back a shot of whiskey. He signals for another one. Retha pours it. He sucks it down, lights a cigarette.

RETHA

You alright?

Joe shrugs, couldn't be better.

JOE

Me? Fine. You?

RETHA

Be better when I get another smoke off you.

JOE

Get your own.

Retha smiles. Joe shakes out a stick, she takes it.

RETHA

Thought I kicked it. That was three years ago. I was doing good 'till you came along.

Joe snickers.

RETHA (CONT'D)

Glad you think that's funny, but I ain't seventeen no more. These bad boys is killers. Claimed my dad.

JOE

Took mine, too. So I hear.

RETHA

And here we are. Ain't learned a damn thing from our folks.

JOE

I suppose. But if it ain't these that take you, it's something else.

RETHA

So fuck it, right?

CONTINUED:

Joe nods.

RETHA (CONT'D)
Retha.

JOE
Huh?

RETHA
My name. Retha.

JOE
Joe.

Retha hides her excitement. She barely knows this man, thinks she could love him.

RETHA
So how long you here for, Joe?

JOE
Don't know. Got some things to take care of before I go. You know how it is after funerals: lots of cleaning up to do.

RETHA
That's my dad talking. He'd always say, 'Retha, keep it neat, 'cause some other asshole's gotta clean up after you.' He was right, too. I'm still paying off that man's debt.

Joe pays his tab.

JOE
That help?

RETHA
Oh, big help.

He rises to leave. She calls after him.

RETHA (CONT'D)
Hey. Don't be a stranger. I'm here everyday.

Joe nods, exits. She watches him leave, very interested.

INT. JAVIER'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Myrna taps Javier awake. He barely moves, dressed in last night's clothes, utterly beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MYRNA
You have company.

JAVIER
Tell Marcus I'm sleep.

MYRNA
It's not Marcus. It's a girl.

Javier opens his eyes, unsure he heard his mother right.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Leila standing in the living room, taking in the apartment. She spies pictures of an infant Javier and Myrna on the mantle.

Myrna gathers her keys, purse, heads for the door. She switches off the television, calls out of Javier.

MYRNA (IN SPANISH)
I'm getting Felipe from the hospital! Be back soon!

Myrna trades an hurried smile with Leila.

MYRNA (CONT'D)
Hi. Have fun.

She leaves.

Javier stands in the hallway, looking Leila up and down.

She produces Javier's lighter, places it on the table.

LEILA
Sorry. Forgot I had it.

JAVIER
You coulda' kept it.

LEILA
I'm not a thief.

JAVIER
Casino know you're here?

LEILA
No. He's not my father, you know.

JAVIER
Didn't say he was -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEILA
I go as I please.

JAVIER
Chill.

A beat. The silence is awkward - young love always is.

LEILA
So, whatchu' up to? Wanna do something?

JAVIER
I gotta work later.

LEILA
But you ain't working now.

Javier shifts uneasy, knows this is a bad idea.

LEILA (CONT'D)
What? You scared of me?

He studies her, wary.

INT. ELECTRONICS STORE - DAY

Javier and Leila point plastic pistols at a wall-sized television, sampling the latest first-person shooter.

JAVIER
How long you know Casino for?

She ignores the question, finishes him off easy.

LEILA
That's twice I beat you.

JAVIER
I let you win.

LEILA
No you didn't. I beat you. Let's go again so whup your ass some more.

Javier puts down the gun, walks.

JAVIER
You got it.

Leila grabs a system beneath the display case, catches up to Javier.

CONTINUED:

JAVIER (CONT'D)
You're just gonna buy it.

LEILA
Why not?

She's already heading for the register.

INT. ELECTRONICS STORE - CONTINUOUS

Leila counts five-hundred dollars, hands it to the cashier. The cashier bags the system, holds it out for Leila.

LEILA
It's his.

The cashier passes it to Javier, who hesitates.

JAVIER
Hold up. Me? I can't let you do that.
You take it.

LEILA
I already got one.

The cashier drops the bag on the counter, moves on to the next customer. Leila walks away, strolls through the sliding doors.

Javier stands alone, staring at his gift, awful tempted.

INT. MALL - CONTINUOUS

Javier slings the gift over his shoulder, jogs up to Leila.

JAVIER
Yo, why you being all nice to me?

LEILA
I can't buy you something?

Leila slows by an athletic shoe store, glimpses a pair of kicks.

LEILA (CONT'D)
Oh shit, that's my color.

She heads into the store.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - MOVING - DAY

Javier and Leila seated in the far corner of the car. A cluster of shopping bags rest below her feet. The girl spent some money.

LEILA

No you weren't.

JAVIER

No joke. Moms woke up in her water and I was on my way out. Medics showed up. She had me right there in her bed.

LEILA

Your dad couldn't take her to the hospital?

JAVIER

He was gone before I got here. Got killed back in San Miguel.

A BEAT as Leila processes this; she doesn't pry: she's been there.

LEILA

You know, I lost my mom that way. She was sick even before she went into labor. Woulda' had a little brother if they made it.

JAVIER

Your dad raise you?

LEILA

Nah, locked up since I was six. I lived with my Auntie for a while until I went to juvie. When I got out, she didn't want nothing to do with me. Thank God for Casino.

Off Javier.

INT. LEILA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Leila switches on a light, reveals the layout: rich, spacious, excessive. Leather furniture, a home theater, artwork by Bua, luxury rugs. Casino has spoiled this girl. Javier is speechless.

She slips out of her boots.

CONTINUED:

LEILA

Shoes off.

JAVIER

Whose is this?

LEILA

Mine.

Javier kicks off his Nikes, surveys Leila's apartment, incredulous.

JAVIER

How much this cost?

LEILA

(shrugs)

Casino pays for it.

Leila drops her bags, turns on the stereo - M.I.A.

Javier puts his shoes back on, shakes his head.

LEILA (CONT'D)

What?

JAVIER

I can't be here.

LEILA

Don't trip. He's hardly ever here. Sit down.

Leila marches for the kitchen. She opens the fridge, junk food, champagne and not much else. She grabs an open bottle of Chandon.

Javier carefully takes a seat, adjusts to the leather, likes the feel. He looks behind him, on the wall are several blow-ups of half-naked women, their backs turned to the camera.

She returns pouring a steady stream into two glasses, hands him one.

JAVIER

(waving it off)

I'm good.

She doesn't move her hand, insists. Javier takes it. She sits beside him. They tap glasses. He gulps. Leila laughs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LEILA
Slow down. This is expensive.

Javier stops drinking, starts again, slowly.

JAVIER
Who are all the girls on the wall?

LEILA
Models, I think. Casino's into
photography.

She points the remote at the TV, switches on 'South Park.' She wants to make a move, chickens out, laughs at the television instead.

LEILA (CONT'D)
This show is hilarious. You ever watch it?

JAVIER
No cable.

Javier's phone rattles, he eyes the screen: "Twin." He answers it.

JAVIER (CONT'D)
Yeah.

TWIN (O.S.)
What's good?

JAVIER
Not much.

TWIN (O.S.)
We need you at the crib. Where you at?
I'll come scoop you.

Javier looks at Leila, thinks quick.

JAVIER
Don't worry about it. I'll meet you there.

TWIN
You sure?

JAVIER
Definitely.

CONTINUED: (3)

Javier disconnects, places the glass on the table, get on his feet, chop-chop.

JAVIER (CONT'D)

I gotta go.

He crosses to the door, jumps in his shoes, grabs the XBox.

She keeps her gaze on the television, feigns indifference.

LEILA

Oh. Okay.

JAVIER

(re: Xbox)

Thanks, for this. For real. I owe you.

She watches him close the door.

INT. CASINO'S BROWNSTONE - BASEMENT - JAVIER - NIGHT

Entering. Sees Twin, Marcus, James, Raoul and a few others around the pool table - trading jokes, loading pistols.

Two CHINESE PUSHERS (16, 17) sit blindfolded on the floor, their hands tied, faces bloodied and bruised.

Marcus moves to greet Javier.

MARCUS

Sup boy, you got your strap?

JAVIER

What're ya'll doing?

MARCUS

You ain't hear?

Javier shakes his head. Marcus laughs, delighted he's more informed than his friend is.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Fools was spotted on one of our corners.
They got warned. Guess they didn't hear us.

Casino comes walking down the stairs. The room goes silent. He moves to the pushers, kneels to their level, removes their blindfolds.

CASINO

Ya'll speak English?

CONTINUED:

They both nod, terrified. Casino turns to Twin.

CASINO (CONT'D)
They tell you where the stash is?

CHINESE HOOD #1
We told him everything.

Casino stomps on #1's head with the heel of his Timberland. The pusher tilts over, head streaming blood.

CASINO
I didn't ask you.

Casino continues the assault, kicking, stomping. Javier studies the faces of his crew: all grins and giggles, as if they're relishing in the brutality. It goes on longer than it should.

Finally, Casino stops, out of breath - boot and jeans a bloody mess. He uses #2's shirt as a doormat, cleaning his boot.

Casino spits on his victim, turns to Twin.

CASINO (CONT'D)
Well?

TWIN
(off-guard)
He told us.

CASINO
(pointing to #2)
Good. Take him with you. Make sure he ain't lying.

Twin checks the gate on his pistol, tucks it in his jeans, heads out. The boys follow.

Off #1, barely breathing.

INT. '84 SEVILLE - NIGHT

Javier rides shotgun, warms his hands, fighting off the nerves. Marcus, James, Raoul and #2 ride in the backseat, gearing up. Twin drives fast, focused.

Javier turns to #2, reads his panic. Then, fixes his gaze on the road ahead. They close in on a wall of bright lights. Billboards and storefronts advertise in Chinese. The Seville rolls into Chinatown.

INT. '84 SEVILLE - TWIN - NIGHT

Tapping the steering wheel to a beat in his head, ashes his fourth cigarette. The others sit impatiently, knees restless, watching the door to a meatpacking house -

Where Raoul stands against the wall, pistol trained on #2 - knocking on the door.

A hefty BODYGUARD opens the door, exchanges dialogue with #2. Then, the Raoul makes his move, trains his pistol on the gangster, forces him on the ground, relieves his pockets of all weapons.

Twin dons a bandana. The rest follow suit.

EXT. MEATPACKING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

They exit the car, make a mad dash to the building. Marcus and James brandishing lead pipes.

INT. MEATPACKING HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The crew climbs a long flight of stairs. Twin keeps his pistol jammed in the bodyguard's back, who leads the way. Javier is last up the stairs.

INT. MEATPACKING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rusted doors, torn carpeting, the dumps. They march down the narrow hallway. Javier glimpses a room along the way: off the boat hookers huddled in corners, drowning in their high, drained from a hard day's work.

INT. STASH ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Chinese immigrants, all female, hunched over metal slats, cutting and packaging heroine for distribution.

The crew bursts through the doors. Twin trains his gun on the OVERSEER (male, 40's), clears his pockets, finds a small pistol. The overseer curses in Chinese, spits in Twin's face. Twin responds, smashes his pistol against the man's skull. He falls hard, cowers. Twin wants to kill him, refrains.

The crew moves full tilt, clearing kilos from shelves, loading them into duffle bags. The employees watch quietly, indifferent.

CONTINUED:

Javier fills his bag, zips up, runs past Twin - pistol-whipping the overseer unconscious. Marcus and James pummel the bodyguard with lead pipes, luxuriating in the experience.

INT. DELILAH'S - NIGHT

A DANCER grinds the pole, bored, detached, performing for a dead room.

Moe emerges from the VIP area, arm hooked around a STRIPPER'S waist, hand wrapped around a bottle of Grey Goose. He spanks her, watches her walk towards the stage. He moves for the restroom. Joe follows.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Moe pissing in a stall. He lays a hand on the wall, steadies himself, faded.

He emerges from the stall, notes a urine stain on his ivory Jordans. He grabs his towel from over his shoulder, bends over, placing the bottle of Goose beside him, wipes away the stain. His ankle explodes. The BULLET blows through his wrist, mists his face with his own blood. He YELPS, topples, head over heels -

A HAND catches him before he smacks the floor, drags him across the tiles, back into the stall.

Joe props him against the wall, presses the hot barrel of his COLT under Moe's chin, draws back the hammer.

JOE
Scream and I kill you.

Moe bites his lip, draws blood - the pain is hell.

JOE (CONT'D)
Corey.

Moe shakes his head, trembling, dizzied.

JOE (CONT'D)
Listen to me. Cor-ey. Recognize that name?

Moe shakes his head again.

JOE (CONT'D)
Come on now - don't lie nigga, you know who I'm talking about. You know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Moe begins to cry - he really doesn't know.

JOE (CONT'D)
Someone got smoked on Griffith Ave last week. You know about that?

Moe nods.

JOE (CONT'D)
Say it, then. Say you know.

MOE
(weak; in severe pain)
I kn-kn -

JOE
Don't stutter.

MOE
I know!

JOE
There you go. Man who shot him had a forty-five. I hear that's your strap.
Am I lying?
(off Moe's nod)
Use words.

MOE
I...buy 'em - for my man.

JOE
Man ain't a name, son.
Tell me a name.

MOE
I can't....

JOE
(shaking his head)
You -

Joe moves for the bottle of Goose on the floor, grabs it, pours vodka on Moe's wounded ankle. He SCREAMS. Joe muzzles him, muffles the cry. A beat. Moe calms, as best he can.

MOE
T-Tw...Twin.

JOE
Twin?

CONTINUED: (2)

Moe nods.

MOE
(going into shock)
He...live on Baker. One-twelve....
Drives a Caprice. S-swear to...God.

Joe mulls it over. Nods to himself.

JOE
Okay. Okay, I believe you.

He releases Moe, dropping him onto the floor.

JOE (CONT'D)
I believe you.

A beat as Joe contemplates his next move. Then, he empties two shots through Moe's head, exits the restroom.

INT. THE DARK ROOM - JOE - NIGHT

Heading for the nearest exit, unseen, out of sight, like a ghost.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

A PATRON enters unfastening his belt. His eyes fall on Moe - face down on the floor, pooling blood. Dead.

EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON

Old-timers meditating over games of chess. Children recreating on the jungle gym. A cluster of brothers in a heated pick-up game.

Casino smokes on a bench, surveying the park activity.

Twin and Javier play cards at a table nearby, keeping a vigilant eye on their boss.

A TRIAD BOSS (late 20's) takes a seat beside Casino, eyes averted.

Javier and Twin eyeball his BODYGUARDS (late teens), heading for their table, shouldering backpacks.

TWIN
Be cool, aight? He's just giving the slant a chance to buy his product back.

CONTINUED:

TWIN (CONT'D)

Keep the strap tucked, pretend it ain't even there. This gonna be over real quick.

Twin and Javier furtively tuck their pistols beneath their thighs - just in case. The Bodyguards join the table. Twin deals them in. Tension is high. Then -

TWIN (CONT'D)

Ya'll watch kung-fu movies?

Neither responds, but heed the insult.

TWIN (CONT'D)

I watch kung-fu movies. Only the classics though. Gordon Liu, Jet Li, Jackie Chan - them some bad muthafuckas. Hollywood done fucked it up, put their dirty hands on a good thing. Wires and computer-trickerated nonsense. Killed it dead. Ya'll ever see 'Fist of Legend'?

One of the Bodyguards nods.

TWIN (CONT'D)

Yeah? That's the Jet Li I'm talking about. Nigga used to be a brawler. Cold killer. Damn shame what they done to him since.

All eyes turn to the bench: Casino and the Triad boss shake hands. The deal is done. Crisis averted. The bodyguards rise, pass Javier and Twin the backpacks.

BODYGUARD #1

You listen to hip-hop?

TWIN

Yeah.

BODYGUARD #1

Industry murdered that, too. Used to be the truth. Now? Bunch of Uncle Tom-ass niggas posing like they hood, bragging about bills and bling. Fuck that.

Twin smiles, steals himself from killing this man.

TWIN

Under the table.

The bodyguards reach under the table, retrieve their stash. He holds their gazes, dead serious.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BODYGUARD #1

Thanks.

TWIN

You're welcome.

INT. '84 CAPRICE - MOVING - DAY

Twin behind the wheel. Javier beside him. Casino counting the money from the backpacks.

CASINO

Pays for them slopes to fuck around and get caught on my block. Man didn't think twice about buying back his own merchandise. Even apologized for the trouble.

(laughs)

You believe that? Said he was sorry.

TWIN

What about their man? They ain't want him back?

CASINO

Nah. He paid for that too.

EXT. MARSHLANDS, NEAR THE AIRPORT - SUNSET

A 757 screams on its descent, sailing over the Caprice, parked at the foot of the marshlands .

Twin opens the trunk, inside: PUSHER #1 bound and battered.

TWIN

Make this quick. I'm starving.

Off Javier.

EXT. MARSHLANDS - MOMENTS LATER

Javier walks reluctantly behind the young pusher - lumbering through the grass with his hands tied, face wet with tears.

Javier reaches into his jeans, produces his pistol. He racks the slide.

The hood turns on the sound, sees Javier raise the pistol, takes off running.

CONTINUED:

Javier hesitates, lowers the gun, musters strength, wrath. Then, he FIRES a shot into the Pusher's back. He stumbles hard into the grass, struggles to get to his feet, desperate.

Javier marches forward, catching up. The hood worms away slowly, screaming from the pain. The process is grotesque, futile, all too real.

Javier stands over the boy. Another JET descends from above as he empties the clip - all eleven shots.

A beat of silence. Javier looks at the corpse, smoke rising from multiple wounds. He drops the pistol, loses balance - vomits.

INT. '84 CAPRICE - NIGHT

Twin smoking a blunt, quiet, listening to old school soul.

Javier slides in the passenger seat, feigns stability.

TWIN

We good?

Javier nods, in a daze.

TWIN (CONT'D)

Let's eat.

Twin fires up the engine.

INT. LEILA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Leila's phone rings. She jumps off the couch, answers it.

LEILA

Hello?

INTERCUT:

EXT. LEILA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Javier stands at the entrance, fiddling with the phone chord.

LEILA

Hello?

JAVIER

It's me. You alone?

Off Leila.

INT. LEILA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Javier sits on the sofa, head buried in his hands, like he just confessed his sins to a father. Leila puts a hand on his face, caresses it. She brings his head into her lap, strokes him.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Autographed pictures of professional athletes crowd the wall. Clumps of hair on the floor. Football on the television. Ohio Players clapping from the stereo, 'Is Anybody Gonna Be Saved?'

Casino getting a trim. The BARBER (50's) in the middle of a story.

BARBER

So he comes home, pops open a brew and goes looking for his woman - and he just got laid off so you know he needs some, right?

(off everyone's nod)

That's when he hears a commotion in the bedroom.

CASINO

Uh-oh.

BARBER

You know what I'm saying? So he's like, 'fuck this', goes to his closet and loads his gun intending on doing his woman and the negro sticking it to her.

Casino beams, he likes that part.

BARBER (CONT'D)

So he kicks down the door, like he Kojak or some shit, and what do you think he sees? His woman and her girlfriend doing all kinds of nasty. Straight out of the X-rateds.

CASINO

What'd he do?

BARBER

Best part. My man drops the gun and says, "Bitch, move your big ass over and save me some."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Casino explodes. Patrons follow suit, laughing with the ganglord.

The shop PHONE rings. The MANAGER answers it, brings the phone to Casino. He takes it.

CASINO

Yeah?

His smile quickly fades.

INT. LEILA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Javier and Leila asleep in bed, naked beneath the sheets, comfortable in each others arms.

Javier's mobile rattles on the nightstand. He rubs sleep from his eyes, answers it.

MOMENTS LATER

Leila awakens, notices Javier sitting hunched over at the edge of the bed, fully dressed. She runs her hands along his back.

He turns to her, concerned.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, BASEMENT - DAY

Morbid silence. Angry tears in almost every eye in the room. Casino's soldiers stand with their heads down, mourning the loss of one of their own.

Casino paces back and forth, holds Moe's Phillies cap in one hand, grips a bottle of Cognac in the other. Drunk.

CASINO

In my two years running shit I ain't lost a single one of ya'll. There ain't a motherfucka for eighteen blocks that don't know we hold it down. We family, you hear? Moment that hand gets inked makes us related. Means when one of you gets smoked, somebody done disrespected the whole unit. All of us.

(beat)

Somebody knows something I don't, it's time to speak up.

The silence continues.

CONTINUED:

CASINO (CONT'D)

Come on now. Nobody knows nothing. Was it beef? Over a bitch? What?

He turns to James, eyes hidden behind the brim of his black baseball cap.

CASINO (CONT'D)

James. Ya'll was tight.

James shrugs, shakes his head.

JAMES

Moe was good peoples.

CASINO

You right. Exactly why I'm having a hard time wrapping my head around this. He was good peoples.

He empties the entire bottle onto the floor, in memory of their fallen comrade.

CASINO (CONT'D)

To Moe.

He pitches the bottle at the wall. It shatters inches from a Marcus's head. Casino scans the faces of his crew, eyes imploring.

CASINO (CONT'D)

I want ears open and eyes behind you. Spread word. Some clique wants to battle, I'm first to know. Back to work.

The soldiers disperse. Casino confers with Twin.

CASINO (CONT'D)

Put Javie on Moe's pick-up.

TWIN

Think he's ready for that?

CASINO

He's green, but he's the only one 'sides you I got trust for right now.

Off Javier, standing silently in the corner.

INT. RETHA'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe fucks Retha from behind. He turns her over, looks into her eyes as she climaxes.

INT. RETHA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe smoking in a chair across from the bed, hunched over, pensive. Retha lies on her side, gazing at him.

RETHA

You okay?

Joe nods, clearly isn't.

RETHA (CONT'D)

Who did you bury out there?

Beat.

JOE

My boy, his mother.

RETHA

(realizing the gravity of
his grief)

Jesus.

JOE

He was just minding his business when someone put three bullets in him. Only witness was the dog he was walking. Police, well, they done gave up the moment they found him. As for her, it was all more than she could handle, so she followed him.

Retha looks like she could cry.

RETHA

I got a boy. Little older than yours. Jamal. He comes by once in a while to check in on me. Used to be real close. Now, it's like he's a different person. I know he thinks he's grown and all, but I still see my baby boy. I don't know what I'd do if someone took him from me. He's all I got to love.

(beat)

How long you been gone?

CONTINUED:

JOE
Fifteen years.

RETHA
Why'd you go?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSTONE (FLASHBACK) - BEDROOM - NIGHT*Joe looking into our eyes.*

JOE
Don't look good for you, Clyde. Your
niggas, they all gone. Every one of 'em.
Didn't have to be this way.

*Roscoe ties a MAN's hands. CLYDE (30's), chairman of the Eighth Street crew, gagged, trembling in his underwear, waiting to die.**His LADY cries through her gag in the corner, back against the wall, hands tied behind her back.*

JOE (CONT'D)
Duke never tried to move in on your
territory. He let ya'll be. We ain't
bother you, ya'll ain't bother us.
Things was peaceful before last night.
But you decided you was going to fuck it
all up. Push on corners that weren't
yours, take tribute that didn't belong to
you. All Duke asked was for you to step
off. He didn't insult you. He just
asked.

(beat)
The real bitch: some of them shots
reserved for Duke made their way to his
wife. Took her down with him. Shame.

(beat)
Roscoe.

*Roscoe looks at Clyde's lady, hesitates. He turns to Joe, eyes telling all: he can't do this.**Joe just looks at him, steady, menacing.**Roscoe gets the picture, marches for Clyde's lady, grabs her by the hair, presses the barrel to her head. FIRES.**Clyde SCREAMS. Joe empties all six bullets into him.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roscoe darts out of the room, hand over his mouth, vomit dripping through his fingers.

BATHROOM

He's over the toilet, dispensing what's left.

HALLWAY

Joe steps out, meets a BOY (11) in his pajamas. Clyde's son. They exchange looks.

BOY
Where's my dad?

Joe draws his colt, loads two bullets, draws back the hammer. A tense beat, then, he releases the hammer. Turns his back, stalking away.

BATHROOM - JOE

Grabs Roscoe, drags him out.

LIVING ROOM

He pushes Roscoe through the entrance.

Off Clyde's son, moving slowly into his dad's bedroom.

INT. '91 SEDAN - NIGHT

Joe throws Roscoe in the passenger seat. He takes the wheel, keys the ignition. Drives. He looks beside him, Roscoe explodes into tears.

Off Joe.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. RETHA'S APARTMENT (PRESENT) - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe in the chair, eyes to the floor. Retha gazes at him, digesting the account.

JOE
Things I done...killing...
(pointing to his heart)
Ain't nothing in here no more. Nothing.

Beat.

CONTINUED:

RETHA
Come back to bed.

Off Joe.

EXT. PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

A COMMUTER in a suit walks to his Mercedes, briefcase in hand. His eyes meet -

Javier, standing in the doorway next to the elevator, watching him.

The commuter disables the alarm, opens his trunk, expeditiously throws in his briefcase and slides in. He locks the doors as fast as he can, fires up the engine. Peels out.

Silence now, save for the structure's flourescents, buzzing ceaselessly. Then -

A BROWN SEDAN rounds the corner, parks. The DRIVER (40's, Latino) climbs out, walks away, neglecting to lock the door. He moves towards Javier, nods as he taps the down button for the elevator. Speaks with a slight accent.

DRIVER
Sorry to hear about Moe. He was a good kid.

Javier hands him a backpack. The driver checks it. He zips up, satisfied.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Drive safe.

The elevator bell chimes, opens. The Driver steps inside.

Javier walks for the sedan.

He opens the trunk, stares at kilos of cocaine, packed and stacked.

INT. SEDAN - NIGHT

Javier reaches under the seat, finds the keys, starts the car.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

The sedan draws up to the booth. Javier rolls down the window. The ATTENDANT (30's, Ethiopian) speaks his native tongue into his mobile.

Javier passes him an envelope. The attendant checks the contents: a wad of C-notes. He smiles at the kid, raises the turnstiles, returns to his conversation. The sedan spills out of the garage.

INT. SEDAN - NIGHT

Javier stops at a red light, nervous, completely on edge.

A POLICE CRUISER brakes beside him.

He fixes his gaze forward, avoids eye contact with the OFFICER in the car beside him.

The Officer turns to Javier, studies him.

Javier struggles to face forward - the pressure is murder. Finally, he looks to his left, trades gazes with the officer. A beat.

The officer nods to the light. Javier follows his gaze: the light is GREEN.

He foots the gas, lurches forward.

The cruiser changes lanes, driving behind Javier now. The SIRENS begin to flash, wail.

JAVIER

Fuck.

He steers the sedan to the curb. The cruiser screams past, in pursuit of some other offender.

Javier lays his head on the wheel, sighs.

EXT. STASH HOUSE - LATER

An abandoned row house: broken, unassuming, antiquated. Ideal real estate for housing millions in imported narcotics.

The sedan is parked idle in the backyard. Three young HOODS, QUENTIN, WOOD, NATE (late teens) unload the trunk, transport the kilos inside.

INT. WORLD'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office is modish, very white collar. Photos by Gordon Parks on the wall. Imported furniture. African idols. A bookshelf crammed with books. This is World's pride.

World twists the dials of a wall safe behind his desk. Javier sits before the desk, studies World's holstered pistol jutting out of his waistband. He turns to the kid.

WORLD

You're early. No trouble on the way?

Javier shakes his head.

WORLD (CONT'D)

Moe was always late.

He pays him.

INT. TWIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Twin on the floor, head between the legs of TRACY (17), his girl. She carefully braids his hair into cornrows as he watches football with HERB (18), another enforcer.

Twin's mobile rings beside Tracy, she answers it, hands it to him.

TWIN

Yeah...aight, I'm sending Herb over.

HERB

What?

TWIN

Go grab my load.

HERB

Fuck that, nigga. You do it.

TWIN

(watching the game)

I'm busy.

HERB

(resigned)

Gimme the keys.

Twin tosses keys at Herb.

CONTINUED:

TWIN

Drive slow. You fuck it up, I fuck you up.

Tracy snickers. Herb leaves, bitter.

EXT. TWIN'S BUILDING - NIGHT

Herb fires up the Caprice, takes off. Beat. An ENGINE rattles to a start a few cars behind - Joe. The car peels quietly from the curb, trails after the Caprice.

INT. JOE'S CAR - NIGHT

Joe watches Herb climb the stairs. Javier emerges from the entrance, passes Herb on his way down the staircase. They exchange nods, never halting stride - a quick and formal greeting.

Joe switches focus to Javier, tries to get a better look, but he disappears into the darkness.

INT. STASH HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

World stands over a hot stove, prepares his dinner: stir-fry vegetables, steak. He sips a glass of scotch.

LIVING ROOM

Wood gets cozy on the couch, places his pistol on the table. He turns on the football game, winding down.

World calls out from the kitchen.

WORLD (O.C.)

Tell them clowns downstairs to hustle up if they want in on this grub.

Wood rolls his eyes, already situated. He moves to sit up, feels a breeze. Turns to the door: open. Then, a HAND clasps his mouth shut from behind, it's strength is overwhelming, forces him back on the couch.

WORLD (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Wood! You hear what I said?!

World steps out into the living room holding his glass, witnesses Joe twist Wood's neck to a break. He goes limp, dies quietly.

A beat as the two exchange glances, consider their options. Then, World drops the glass, draws his glock.

CONTINUED:

Joe throws himself at World, guides his arm upward, sends a SHOT into the ceiling.

World launches a series of sharp jabs into Joe's gut, steals the wind out of him. Joe throws a hard elbow, repeats. World spits blood, a tooth. Joe controls his shooting arm, hurls it against the wall. The glock drops.

What follows is a brawl. No grace, or fancy footwork. Just two men desperately trying to kill each other with their bare hands.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Quentin and Nate load a duffle bag with Twin's consignment. Herb smokes a joint, waiting, perusing a comic book. Mobb Deep thumps from a Bose, muffling the fight upstairs.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Joe tackles World. They crash the stove, pots and pans collide, hot food scatters. World steals a kitchen knife, slashes Joe across the cheek. Joe grabs the knife hand, slams it down onto the hot stove. Worlds squeals, releases the blade.

Joe socks World across the chin. He presses the man against the counter, pounds his face pulpy - jab after jab. He locks his hand around his neck, squeezes.

World struggles to breathe, returns with a knee to the groin. Joe winces. World knees harder as Joe continues to choke him.

World knees him for a fourth time. Joe reels, grabs a fistful of World's hair at the same time. He kicks his knee, grounds him.

Joe forces World's head into the counter - repeatedly, with murderous force. The final blow kills him.

Joe's hands are covered in blood. World is slumped against the counter, on his knees. Joe catches his breath. He draws his revolver, lumbers for the basement.

INT. BASEMENT - JOE - NIGHT

Staggering down the steps, meets Herb, Nate and Quentin as they trade jokes. Their smiles quickly fade.

CONTINUED:

Joe shoots Nate, Quentin, one after the other. Their blood freckles Herb's face, who pisses himself. Joe turns off the stereo.

JOE

You Twin?

Herb is in shock. Joe grows impatient, CRACKS him over the head with the revolver - TWICE. He hits the floor, sobs. Joe is losing his mind.

JOE (CONT'D)

Your name!

HERB

Herb!

Joe shakes his head, picks him up by his shirt, pistol-whips him mercilessly. Herb returns to the floor a bloody pulp.

Off Joe, aggravated.

INT. TWIN'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Twin shouts at the television, disapproves of a call made by the ref.

TRACY

Hold still.

Twin's mobile rattles beside him. He reads the ID, answers it.

TWIN

Where the fuck you been?

INTERCUT:

HERB

Twin. You gotta come get me.

TWIN

What's wrong with you, man. You crying?

HERB

He's gon' kill me.

TWIN

Stop playing. Who?

CONTINUED:

HERB

I ain't playing. Says his name is Joe.
He says you know his boy, Corey.

TWIN

Don't know no Corey.

HERB

Yeah you do. Said ya'll met two weeks
ago on Griffith Avenue.

Memory registers; now he understands.

TWIN

Herb. Who you talking to?

HERB

I told you, man! You gotta come down
here.

TWIN

Or what?

Joe trains the gun on Herb, who SCREAMS.

The gun shot CRACKS in Twin's ear.

TWIN (CONT'D)

Herb? Herb!

Silence, then -

JOE

I got your attention, Twin?

Twin is at a loss. He's trembling.

JOE (CONT'D)

You awful quiet now. Tells me you're
scared. That's good. I need you scared.
Think of everyone you know - every
fucking body. Like Herb.
Ain't none of them safe, you hear me?
The God you pray to is running for his
life.

Twin hangs up the phone.

TRACY

Who was that?

Twin looks at her, concerned for the first time.

INT. STASH HOUSE - BASEMENT - JOE - NIGHT

Standing among the corpses, empty, detached, lost. He surveys the room: kilos of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, ecstacy - all neatly stacked on metal shelves. Enough narcotics to supply an entire community.

EXT. STASH HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe opens the trunk of his car, unzips Moses's gym bag.

AT THE DOORSTEP

Joe pulls the pins on TWO GRENADES, pitches them inside. They barrel through the living room, tumble down into the basement. Joe closes the door, heads back to his car.

INT. LEILA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Casino in bed with Leila. He tries to pull her to his side of the bed, wants some. She declines.

LEILA

Stop.

CASINO

Hell is wrong with you?

LEILA

I told you it's my week.

CASINO

Think I give a fuck?

His phone interrupts, rattling on the nightstand.

CASINO (CONT'D)

This ain't over with.

He answers it.

CASINO (CONT'D)

Yeah.

A beat as he listens to the news on the other end.

CASINO (CONT'D)

Yo, slow down.

Then, he hustles out of bed, dashes out of the room. He cries angrily from the hallway.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASINO (O.C.) (CONT'D)
WHAT THE FUCK?!!

EXT. STASH HOUSE - NIGHT

Sirens bathe the block in red and blue. Firemen scramble with the hose. Officers bark into their radios, take statements. Neighbors stand in their pajamas, watching the stash house burn to the ground.

A Cadillac rolls to a stop, not too far from the scene.

INT. CADILLAC - CASINO -CONTINUOUS

Watching hopelessly from the driver's seat. His supply is no more. His heart, hopes, dreams - all broken.

Medics wheel out body bags - members of his crew, presumably burned beyond recognition. Casino drives off. He's seen enough.

INT. TWIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Twin crashes into his television, rolls onto the floor. His faces is bloodied and bruised. He tries to get to his feet. Casino strikes him with a baseball bat.

Tracy cowers in the corner. All she can do is watch.

Casino kneels to Twin's level, looks him in his swollen eye.

CASINO
Just tell me you set it up.

Twin shakes his head, battered and weak.

TWIN
He called me...told me what I told you.
He told me what I told you -

Casino takes another swing, cracks him in the face.

CASINO
You really expect me to believe that?

He swings, connects.

CASINO (CONT'D)
Put yourself in my shoes. Would you
believe me? 'Cause what I'm thinking -
and you should know what I'm thinking -
is ya'll two is allies.

CONTINUED:

Another swing.

CASINO (CONT'D)

We're family! Gave you everything when
you ain't had a dime to your name.

Again.

CASINO (CONT'D)

Tell me you did it!

Twin doesn't answer. Casino grabs him by the ear, makes sure he's listening.

CASINO (CONT'D)

That's why you sent Herb, right? I
almost understand. We all want the
crown. It's how you tried to get it that
irks me.

Casino shakes his head, drops the bat, draws his colt, presses it against Twin's head.

CASINO (CONT'D)

I'm done with you.

Tracy comes to a boil, charges him. She grabs the bat, swats him from behind.

TRACY

Stop it!

Casino turns, socks her in the jaw. She falls hard to the floor. He moves for her - crawling away.

CASINO

You wanna go with him?

He trains the Colt on Tracy, presses the barrel to the back of her head.

CASINO (CONT'D)

You can go first.

Then, the HAMMER of a .45 cocks behind him, millimeters from his head. Twin holds it, barely standing. A beat as Casino studies Tracy, fearing for her life. He lowers his Colt, slow.

TWIN

Turn around.

CONTINUED: (2)

Casino does as he's told.

TWIN (CONT'D)

You can go 'head and wreck me all you want. But you point that shit at her, and I'll kill you.

Twin lowers his .45.

TWIN (CONT'D)

I know I fucked up. It's my fault what happened to Herb. But fuck you for thinking it was me who burned you.

Twin hands him the pistol, buys back his boss's trust. He wipes blood from his lip.

TWIN (CONT'D)

So, what we gotta do to make this right?

Casino comes down from his breakdown. His eyes are dancing. He's still processing the loss. He isn't well.

CASINO

Man took everything - the whole stash. Brought me down to zero. I worked hard for that. Years, man.

(beat)

Get rid of him. Just get rid of him.

Off Twin.

INT. PATTY'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Bottles of alcohol and peroxide on the rim of the sink. Blood-stained gauze in the bowl.

Shuggie sits at the doorway, watches Joe stitch his cheek. Not a wince. His method is studied, like he's done this before.

INT. JAVIER'S APARTMENT - JAVIER - NIGHT

Moving down the hall, opens the door to his bedroom.

Myrna wipes tears from her face. She gathers Javier's stash, assiduously places the product back in his bag.

CONTINUED:

MYRNA

Felipe is gone. He left this morning. I thought he was crazy for even considering. I begged him to not to leave.

She pitches the bag at his feet, parcels of his consignment spilling onto the floor.

MYRNA (CONT'D)

He told me everything.
(beat)
You lied to me.

Myrna cups her face, broken. Javier sits beside her, strokes her shoulder.

JAVIER

I'm just trying to help you.

MYRNA

I don't need your help. Not this way. You do business for evil men. Men like the ones who took your father from me - my husband!

Myrna turns to him, gives him a look he's never seen before. It's cold, disappointed.

MYRNA (CONT'D)

I want you to leave.

Javier loses his breath.

JAVIER

No. Don't say that, mami. You don't mean that.

MYRNA

I do, Javie. I want you to leave.

Javier tries to console her.

JAVIER

Don't say that. Please. I'm sorry. I won't do it again.

Myrna pounds on Javier, beating him off.

MYRNA

Get out of here!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She pounds harder, forces his bag into his hands, shoving him out - towards the door.

JAVIER

Mami what are you doing?!

MYRNA

Get out of here! I want you out!

She slams the door in his face, locks it, sinks to the floor, buries her head in her knees.

Javier bangs on the door, begs for Myrna to open up, like an angry child.

JAVIER

Come on. Open the door!

Finally, Javier kicks the door.

JAVIER (CONT'D)

Fuck you! You hear me? Fuck you! I hate you! I hate you!

Myrna just sits there, crying.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - JAVIER - NIGHT

Sitting alone on the curb, smoking. Homeless. He calls Leila, gets her answering machine. Doesn't leave a message. He pockets his phone, it RINGS. He checks the ID: "TWIN", doesn't answer it. After a beat, it RINGS again. Finally -

JAVIER

Yeah.

INT. '84 CAPRICE (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

The Caprice barrelling down the road. Twin drives, determined.

JAVIER

What happened?

TWIN

Boy's old man. He's the one did Herb, burned our stash.

Javier looks into the backseat: James and Raoul checking guns, gearing up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAVIER
How do we find him.

TWIN
Son's mom lives in Northwest Park. Gonna
ask if she knows.

INT. PATTY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Darkness, save for the television glowing in the corner. The nightly news on mute. Joe sleeps in a chair facing the door. Shuggie is curled up beside him. Then, the sound of FOOTSTEPS in the hallway, multiple pairs.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Twin and company move down the hall, bandanas obscuring their faces. Javier trades glances with an OLD WOMAN entering her apartment. She notes the procession with indifference, feigns like she didn't see it. The soldiers stop at the door. Twin knocks with the barrel of his .45.

INT. PATTY'S APARTMENT - JOE - CONTINUOUS

Opening his eyes. Shuggie is on alert. Another KNOCK. Shuggie moves for the door, Joe grabs the dog's collar, keeps him at bay. His free hand establishes a firm grip on the revolver resting on the nightstand beside him.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Twin clears the way. James kneels before the handle, unrolls a set of LOCK PICKS and two TORSION WRENCHES. He begins picking the lock.

INT. PATTY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Joe restrains Shuggie by his collar - SNARLING at the commotion behind the door. Dog and master listen as the door unlocks.

James kicks open the door. Joe FIRES through the dark, shoots the boy in the head.

Twin shuts the door. They all hesitate. James convulses on the floor, dies before them. Javier is sweating through his bandana.

Shuggie BARKS furiously. Joe drags him into the hallway, away from danger, as fast as he can.

CONTINUED:

Twin charges inside, fires aimlessly into the hallway - FIVE SHOTS. The walls fragment around Joe. A bullet grazes his arm, another strikes Shuggie. Joe fires back. The bullet tears into Twin's throat. He reels, trips over furniture.

Joe forces the wounded pit bull into the bathroom, shuts the door.

HALLWAY

Raoul looks to Javier, sees fear in his eyes, takes off into the room - BLAZING. Javier follows after him, takes cover in the kitchen, crouches near the stove.

Joe stands calmly, hidden behind the doorway of Corey's room. His eyes are on the wall. They follow Raoul's shadow - exposed by the errant muzzle flashes. Joe spins out, wastes no time firing two shots into Raoul.

Joe moves. Raoul crawls away, leaving a trail of blood on his way, swearing in Creole. Joe comes upon the fallen soldier, executes him, moves on.

LIVING ROOM - JOE

Sees Twin helping himself onto the couch, applying pressure to his throat, choking on blood.

Twin struggles to train his .45 at Joe. His strength fades fast. He drops the .45.

Javier listens behind the stove, terrified.

Twin is losing blood - and time. He looks at Joe, removes his bandana, ready to die.

TWIN

You know what's funny...I ain't the one
you're looking for. I saw it...
...watched your boy die. But I didn't do
it.

Joe puts the revolver to Twin's head.

JOE

Then who did.

Javier is losing it. He wants to make a move, doesn't have the courage. He's a coward.

Twin shakes his head, begins to tremble. Dies.

CONTINUED: (2)

Javier cries silently.

Joe darts for the bathroom, opens the door.

BATHROOM

Shuggie whines on his side, bleeding. Joe strokes him, comforting the dog through his final moments. His eyes open and close, fighting to stay. Then, they cease movement. He's dead.

LIVING ROOM - JOE

Gathers his belongings - anything that connects him to this place.

JAVIER IS RIGHT BEHIND HIM. He takes aim, finger on the trigger, lowers the gun. Impotent. He trembles in the big man's presence.

COREY'S ROOM - JOE

Grabs his son's guitar, places it in it's case. He scoops Corey's scrapbook.

LIVING ROOM - JAVIER

Quietly freaking out amongst his comrades' corpses. He inches towards Twin's corpse. Paces back and forth, cursing himself. He rips off his bandana, wipes away tears.

SIRENS cry in the distance. He peers out the window, sees CRUISERS racing for the building. In the sky, a POLICE CHOPPER glides in the same direction.

Javier steals one last glance at his crew, bails.

Joe returns. Sees the law, incoming. He turns to leave, then, TWIN'S MOBILE RINGS. He stops, hesitates. Beat. On the ID: CASINO.

He grabs it, exits the apartment.

INT. HALLWAY - JOE - NIGHT

Moving down the hall, listening.

CASINO (O.S.)
What's the status?

Joe doesn't answer, takes the stairs.

CONTINUED:

INTERCUT:

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, GAME ROOM - NIGHT

Casino smoking a joint, anxious, worried, coming apart.

CASINO

Hello?

(beat)

Twin?

JOE

No.

CASINO

Where's Twin?

JOE

Twin's gone. Who's this?

Casino grits his teeth, stress restored.

CASINO

I'm the man he worked for.

JOE

Good. Guess I come for you next.
Casino.

CASINO

Why the fuck you doing this to me, man?
What you want from me?

Joe climbs into his car. Drives with a wounded arm.

A phalanx of POLICE CRUISERS barrel in the opposite direction, screaming for the housing project.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Javier spills out of the building amongst a cluster of panicked tenants.

JOE (O.S.)

I want the one who did it. I want the one who did Corey. You give me that, I'll probably walk.

CASINO (O.S.)

How you know I ain't do it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE (O.S.)

You're top dog, son. Got too many people looking up to you to pull the trigger yourself.

Cruisers edge the curb of the building. Officers jump out.

Javier retreats back into the building, away from the law.

INT. HALLWAY - JAVIER - NIGHT

Pushing through tenants, heading for the front entrance.

CASINO (O.S.)

And you think after all you've taken from me I'ma do that? Just give up one of my own?

JOE (O.S.)

If you didn't take all I had first we wouldn't even be talking. Your boys would still be standing, business as usual.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING, REAR ENTRANCE - JAVIER - NIGHT

He bursts out, jumps off the loading dock. Runs.

CASINO (O.S.)

This eye-for-an-eye shit, I been there. I understand how you feel, but like you said, I got a lot of people lookin' up to me. And as much as I've lost, think of how much more I'ma lose if I hand one over.

JOE (O.S.)

Way I see it you got no choice. 'Cause if I don't get what I'm asking for I'm gonna keep on ^(MORE) taking things from you 'till I collect.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Javier runs for his life, never breaking his stride, heart punching his chest.

JOE (O.S.)

You got one day - yes, or no. After that, I spot Crosshairs inked on someone's hand, male or fucking female, I open fire.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE (CONT'D)

I open fire 'till there ain't nobody left. And you best believe, sooner or later, that fire's coming to your doorstep. I'm calling tomorrow. 'Round eight. You better pick up.

INT. JOE'S CAR - JOE - CONTINUOUS

Pulls beside a gutter, tosses the phone. Drives.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Casino slams a fist on the table, tilts it over. Chips spill onto the floor, cards disperse. He paces the room, thinking on his feet. Then, he grabs his coat off the chair, leaves in a hurry.

INT. RETHA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Retha drops her purse, keys onto the counter. It's been a long night.

BATHROOM

She stands in the shower, scrubs away the stench of booze, cigarettes, men.

KITCHEN

She smokes a joint, counts her tips for the evening - budgeting.

LIVING ROOM

She sits on the couch before a television, bites her nails, mind elsewhere.

BACK IN THE KITCHEN

She leans against the counter, cradling her phone:

RETHA

It's been a few weeks, Jamal. Please give me a call. It's momma.

She hangs up. A KNOCK at the door.

She opens it, regards Joe - shouldering his belongings. He leans on the frame, drained. Blood leaks from his sleeve, drips onto the floor.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Joe on the rim of the tub, hand wrapped around the neck of a whiskey bottle, drinking it down, numbing the pain. Retha on a stool, stitching him up.

RETHA

Hope I'm doing this right.

JOE

You got it.

She smiles.

RETHA

So how'd you get this? Or is it none of my business?

JOE

Someone's gotta answer for what they done to Corey.

Retha nods, registers the implications.

RETHA

And getting even, that's justice to you?

JOE

You've lived here long enough.

RETHA

My whole life.

JOE

Then you know the deal.

RETHA

Bullshit. It's why Corey grew up without his father.

Joe turns away, doesn't like where she's taking this.

RETHA (CONT'D)

(low)

Why Patty raised your boy alone.

Joe begins to shift, temper tested.

JOE

Fuck you talking about -

CONTINUED:

RETHA

Hold still -

JOE

You don't know me.

RETHA

I've seen enough. Think you're so different from others? Ya'll go out the same way: young and stupid.

JOE

I'm still here, ain't I?

RETHA

Because you ran.

Retha stops stitching, frustrated.

RETHA (CONT'D)

I don't even know what the hell I'm doing!

Joe puts down the bottle, picks up stitching where she left off.

RETHA (CONT'D)

Sorry. Didn't mean to go off.

JOE

Yeah you did.

Off Retha, her silence verifying Joe's point.

INT. LEILA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Leila watching Casino rifle through her closet, tossing clothes onto her bed. He emerges from the closet, his eyes wide and worried.

CASINO

Fuck you standing there for? Move.

LEILA

(confused)

Where are we going?

CASINO

You staying with me.

He stuffs a small bag with her clothes.

CONTINUED:

LEILA

Why?

CASINO

Ain't safe here alone.

LEILA

I don't want to go.

CASINO

Goddamn, girl, don't question me.

He pitches an outfit at her.

CASINO (CONT'D)

Get ready.

She walks to the bathroom in a huff -

LEILA

Whatever.

CASINO

And hurry up!

SLAMS the door.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

Javier in the back, head propped against the window, pensive - the only body in the car. He digs out his phone, drafts a text for "LEILA". Hits the "SEND" button.

INT. LEILA'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Casino sparks up a cigarette, takes a seat beside the dresser, cools off.

The WATER runs in the bathroom for what seems like an eternity.

Then, Leila's mobile rattles on her bed. He stares at it, annoyed. Marches for the phone, grabs it.

On the screen: "ONE MESSAGE RECEIVED." He turns to the bathroom door, still closed, opens the text, reads it. He sinks onto the floor, fixed on the message. We never see the text, and don't need to - Casino is hurt, betrayed.

He slowly walks to the bathroom, lets himself in.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - MORNING

Javier opens his eyes, groggy. The train is still moving. Morning sunlight pours through the windows as the car emerges from the tunnel. He's been sleeping for hours.

The train slows to a stop. Morning commuters flood the car. Javier gets off.

INT. RETHA'S BEDROOM - JOE - MORNING

Watching Retha sleep.

He grabs his coat, shoulders his belongings, takes a look at Retha, envying her peace. He leaves.

EXT. CASINO'S HOUSE, ROOFTOP - DAY

Casino paces near the roof's edge. His affect is apprehensive, agitated.

LATER:

He opens the front door, welcomes Curtis, Hector and a third MAN (20's) inside. We'll call him SHAW. All furtively carrying SAWED-OFF SHOTGUNS by their sides.

INT. MARCUS'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Marcus tucks his pistol in his waistband, dons a hoodie.

BATHROOM

His MOTHER bathes his two BABY BROTHERS. He kisses his mother, ruffles his brothers' hair.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - MARCUS - LATER

Slides into an idling car. MIKE (18) waits behind the wheel, drives off.

EXT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Javier on a bench, eyes locked on his mother - across the street, working like a dog behind the store windows. She washes a woman's hair, moves to the row of hair dryers, checks on another customer, multitasking.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Joe stands over his family's graves. He falls to his knees, nearly breaks into tears - the side effects to his reckoning painfully manifested. This is a broken man.

EXT. HAIR SALON - NIGHT

Early evening. Javier on the same bench. He watches his mother sweep the floors, take out the garbage, count her day's take. She's exhausted.

Then, Javier's mobile pulls him out of his daze. He checks the ID: "CASINO", hesitates, then -

JAVIER

Hello?

CASINO (O.S.)

Been a minute, son. Where you been hiding?

JAVIER

(nervous)

Nowhere.

CASINO (O.S.)

You aight? Don't sound too good.

JAVIER

I'm straight.

CASINO (O.S.)

Bad news. Twin's gone.

Javier perks up, realizes Casino doesn't know he was present for the enforcer's demise.

CASINO (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Left this world fighting. Can't nobody take that from him. But I don't need you sweating about it. I'm taking care of it. I just need you working, hear me?

JAVIER

Yeah.

CASINO

Good. Need you to do a pick-up tonight. Ten o'clock. Think you can handle that?

CONTINUED:

CASINO

I got it.

CASINO

That's my boy. Marcus will meet you there. Don't be late.

He hangs up. Javier sits there thinking, knows something's awry. He steals one last glimpse of his mother, vacates the bench.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Casino watches his phone, reads the time: "7:59." Waits.

Curtis, Hector and Shaw smoke cigarettes, trade stories, prep their shotguns. Mike and Marcus watch, slouched in their chairs.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Joe at a pay phone. He inserts some quarters, dials a number.

INTERCUT:

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Casino's mobile rings. The room goes silent. He takes a deep breath, answers it. A tense beat, then.

CASINO

The garage on Fenton. Bottom floor. Ten o'clock. Gonna have a black bookbag on him. Name's Javier. That's your man.

The line goes dead.

Joe exhales, hangs up the phone.

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Casino turns to Mike and Marcus - waiting for his word. He focuses on Marcus, penetrating, reads concern.

CASINO

Nervous?

Marcus shakes his head, lying. He tries to keep his attention on Casino, but the CLICKING and LOADING of shotguns only amplifies his anxiety.

CONTINUED:

CASINO (CONT'D)

Ain't easy what you got to do. Ya'll were tight, like brothers, like family. Me and you, we're family, too. Means we we got trust for each other, no matter what. But your boy? He slipped up. So, he can't be trusted.

Casino puts hand on his shoulder, easing the pressure.

CASINO (CONT'D)

He ain't family no more, understand?

Off Marcus.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT

A GLOVED HAND unzips a body bag, reveals Twin's corpse - frigid, vacant.

Retha stares at him, incredulous, fighting back tears. A DETECTIVE watches her react, waiting.

DETECTIVE

Is this him? Is this your son?

Retha shudders, looks like she's going to be sick. She begins to cry.

The Detective motions the Coroner to zip up the bag. He does. Retha stands there, trembling, her arms crossed tight - holding it all back.

RETHA

Where did you find him?

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

BILL O'REILLY and BERNARD GOLDBERG on television, bashing the left, giving props to the 2nd Amendment.

Curtis drinks a Vitamin water, shotgun resting in his lap. Hector browses an issue of KING MAGAZINE. Shaw listens to his iPod, in his own world.

Casino sits alone in the dining room, knees restless, praying for a happy ending. Then -

A KNOCK on the front door.

Casino rises from his chair, panicked. Everyone stops what they're doing, fall into character.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hector drops the magazine, grabs his shotgun, heads for the door.

Curtis sits up, lowers the volume, gets a grip on his rifle.

Hector opens the door, sees -

RETHA

Face filled with panic, soaked in tears. She looks beyond Hector, meets eyes with Casino. He already knows what this is about.

CASINO

Let her in.

INT. CASINO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Casino closes the door behind him. Retha paces the room, unable to sit.

CASINO

I'm sorry about, Jamal. He was good people -

Retha SLAPS him across the face. He just stands there, takes it.

RETHA

You buried him.

CASINO

Retha -

RETHA

Shut up!

(beat)

I tried so hard. Lord did I try - school, curfews, but nothing took. Because you were always there, setting a fine example for your nephew. All I would hear from his mouth is how he wanted be like Uncle Casey. And even though I never approved, I never told you how to live your life. Just so long as it didn't involve my boy.

(breaking down)

It was hell keeping him from you. And you didn't do a damn thing to change his mind. You just let him in. You let him die.

CONTINUED:

Retha falls onto the bed, too weak to stand. He puts a hand on her shoulder. She takes it, holds tight.

RETHA (CONT'D)

Worst part about it - I know. I know the man who killed my boy. I know why he did it. And I didn't tell the police because after feeling what he's been going through, I don't know if I blame him.

She lets go of his hand, leaves him sitting on the bed. Alone.

CASINO

Goddamn you for talking like that. You a traitor. Traitor to me, traitor to your boy. Goddamn traitor to your family!

She walks away from her brother, exits. He continues to roar, abandoned.

CASINO (CONT'D)

That's right, go on! I'm finished with you!

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE, STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Javier unzips a backpack, counts the loot. Marcus observes.

MARCUS

What you counting it for? Don't trust me?

Javier looks at him, continues to count. Marcus tries to keep cool. Javier zips up, done.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

All there?

Javier nods. Marcus gives Javier a dap.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

See you later.

Marcus moves for the exit. Javier stops him.

JAVIER

Yo, hold up.

MARCUS

(slightly agitated)

Yeah?

CONTINUED:

Beat. Javier is embarrassed, searches for the right words.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

What up?

JAVIER

It's my mom. She kicked me out.

MARCUS

For real?

JAVIER

(nodding)

I need a place to stay while I try to make this right. Didn't know where else to go.

Marcus is wracked with guilt, wants to tell his friend to run. Now.

MARCUS

Yeah. Yeah, don't even worry about it. Stay as long as you need to.

JAVIER

Thanks, man. You're helping me out.

Javier embraces him.

JAVIER (CONT'D)

So I'll see you later tonight, then?

MARCUS

(awkwardly)

Definitely...definitely. Late.

They part ways. Marcus exits. Javier descends the stairs.

INT. MIKE'S CAR - NIGHT

Marcus spills out of the structure, slides in. Mike's been waiting. Marcus is in a daze.

MIKE

Hey.

MARCUS

Yeah?

MIKE

What's the deal?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARCUS
He's on his way down.

Mike hands Marcus a pistol.

MIKE
You better wake up.

He fires up the engine, turns into the structure.

INT. JOE'S CAR - NIGHT

Joe smoking a cigarette, fingers tapping the cold steel of his revolver, pointed downward in his grip, occupying the passenger seat. Classic soul on the radio. His eyes express fatigue, angst, disconsolation. He wants this to be over, fears it never will be.

CUT TO:

INT. '91 SEDAN (FLASHBACK) - NIGHT

Joe parks at the entrance of his building, turns to Roscoe.

JOE
You alright to drive?

Roscoe nods, eyes fixed straight ahead.

ROSCOE
You know we going to hell, right? For what we done.

Joe doesn't respond.

ROSCOE (CONT'D)
I used to think I could handle this. I mean if you could, why couldn't I? And I ain't blaming you. I wanted the work. Thought it'd be easy. After tonight...well I ain't you, I know that. Don't know how you do it. You just turn off, like you're already dead.

(beat)

Prince used us. Lied right to our faces. All the damage we done, ain't as easy as just laying low for a while.

(beat)

You take care, Joe.

Off Joe.

INT. HIMES UNIT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Patty paces back and forth, Baby Corey crying on her shoulders. Joe stands at the door, watching. She catches his eye, shakes her head -

PATTY

I tried everything. He don't want no milk, he don't want no food. He just wants to fight.
(beat)
I need you to play.

JOE

Thought you hate that song.

PATTY

It's the only one you know how to play, right?

Joe nods.

PATTY (CONT'D)

I'm out of ideas.

JOE

Put him in the crib. I'll be right there.

MOMENTS LATER

Baby Corey, wailing in his crib.

Joe pulls up a chair, cradling the GUITAR Corey will inherit. He tunes it. Then, he strums a blues melody. The song: John Lee Hooker's "I'm Bad Like Jesse James." The lyrics are angry; the theme is revenge. Joe's voice is amateur, raspy, suitable for a blues singer. Corey doesn't understand a word, but the melody calms him, gradually induces sleep.

Joe stands over the crib, kisses Corey one last time.

JOE (CONT'D)

'Night son.

END FLASHBACK.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. JOE'S CAR (PRESENT) - JOE - NIGHT

Peering out into the lot, parked cars are his only company. No sign of the "bookbag".

Then, the groan of the STAIRWELL DOOR, swinging open, feeding out a young boy - bookbag slung over his shoulders. JAVIER.

Joe studies the boy, incredulous. His features are soft, innocent, angelic, like a baby's. He watches Javier post up beside the elevator, wait.

Joe takes a deep breath, gathers strength, courage. He checks the revolver's cylinder - all six chambers are loaded. He locks it in place. A beat. Now or never.

He jumps out of the car, moves for Javier.

JOE
Javier.

Javier spots the revolver in the man's hand. Reacts, dropping his bag. THEN -

A CAR screams around the corner, barrels for Joe and Javier - High beams blinding.

INT. MIKE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

MIKE
Yo, that's them! Do 'em both!

Marcus struggles to unlock the safety on his pistol, jittery. Mike takes note, shakes his head.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Little bitch. I knew you couldn't do it!

He steals the pistol from Marcus's hand. FIRES out the window.

INT. PARKING STRUCTURE - SAME TIME

A BULLET screams past Joe, punches the wall. He reacts, crashes the cement, rolls away.

Mike empties his pistol carelessly. Javier is hit in the multiple times, bullets ripping through him. He drops.

Joe levels the revolver as Mike continues shooting at him. He FIRES once, hits Mike in the head.

CONTINUED:

The car continues to accelerate. Sweeps past Joe and Javier. SMASHES INTO THE WALL.

Joe gets to his feet, walks for the car: Mike is dead. Marcus is slumped forward on the dashboard, face pummeled, bloodied beyond recognition. He looks behind him, sees Javier lying motionless.

EXT. PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

Joe's car barrels through the turnstiles.

INT. JOE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Joe drives frantically. He looks beside him: Javier is unconscious, losing blood. He slaps the boy hard, tries to keep him here.

JOE

Come on. Wake up, boy!

Javier doesn't react. Joe floors it.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Joe storms the lobby carrying Javier in his arms, pushes through nurses, patients, everyone. A MALE NURSE takes note, signals a COLLEAGUE.

LATER:

They ease Javier onto a gurney, wheel him forward.

Doctors surround him, checking for vitals. Joe follows closely behind.

They burst through the operating room, cut through Javier's clothes, get to work. Frenzied speeds. A NURSE guides Joe out of the room. He fights to stay. The nurse persists, forces Joe out.

He stands at the door, catches his breath, peering through the glass, watching the doctor's work. He looks at his hands: they're covered in blood.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Javier lies in a bed, breathes through an oxygen mask. His body is linked to a series of tubes. His chest is wrapped in a bandage.

Joe sits beside him, watching over.

CONTINUED:

JOE

When they gave you up, I thought about how I'd do it. Figured I'd look you in the eyes, make sure you got a good look at me. I was ready. Had my heart set. Then I saw you. Told myself 'this ain't him. He's too young to take my boy. He ain't a killer. Just a kid.'

(beat)

You probably didn't even know Corey.

(beat)

I was seventeen first time I took somebody. Worked for this man named Duke. Everybody loved him. Drove a Cadillac. Had more money than I ever seen. Closest thing I had to a father. One day he gave me a gun, told me to see a problem that needed fixing. Boy about fifteen. Little hustler who was stealing from him. So I fixed it. Didn't think nothing about it. Found him on a corner, laughing with his boys. I shot him twice, ran for blocks. It didn't matter. I could still hear his boys - screaming.

INT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Myrna runs through the sliding doors, in a panic. Her face is a mask of tears.

JOE (O.S.)

It does something to you, taking a life. You turn off. It's like you die, too. I look at you, I don't see me. I don't see those people you run with. You don't belong.

She asks a NURSE where her son is. He directs her to the front desk. She runs for it. The RECEPTIONIST gives her a room number.

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I see someone who don't know what he got himself into. And now you're in trouble, 'cause the minute you step outside, they gonna be coming for you. And they ain't gonna stop until you're dead.

She rushes through the bustle, breathless, fearing the worst. On her way to Javier's room, she passes Joe - walking in the opposite direction, leaving the hospital.

EXT. CASINO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe parks his car, exits.

We FOLLOW him from behind, moving for the house. Shaw sits on the stoop, smoking a cigarette, getting some air. Joe opens the gate. Shaw stands, curious about the stranger.

SHAW
Can I help you?

Joe draws on him. Shoots him through the head. He moves up the steps, enters -

INT. CASINO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Steps into the living room. Hector raises his rifle. Joe FIRES first, nails him to the wall.

A BULLET cuts through Joe's shoulder. He turns to the source, SHOOTS CASINO'S RIGHT EAR OFF.

Casino fires a wayward shot - deaf, disoriented. He drops the gun, stumbles out of the house.

Joe gives chase, but a GUNSHOT blasts through his collar bone, drops him.

Curtis races down the stairs, pumps his shotgun for the final blow.

Joe FIRES twice, kneecaps him. Curtis stumbles down the stairs.

Joe struggles to his feet as Curtis tries to level his rifle - PAINED. Joe puts the revolver to his temple, FIRES.

He clutches his wound, lumbers outside.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

In the distance, Casino staggers in the middle of the street, like a drunk.

Joe releases the cylinder, empties spent shells onto the sidewalk. He reloads, fast, clumsily - in severe pain. Casino's image grows smaller as he stumbles away, hand over what's left of his right ear. Joe FIRES at his target, misses. He proceeds, fires again -

The bullet punches pavement. Dogs bark, O.S. Neighbors curse from their windows, beg for peace.

CONTINUED:

Joe FIRES again, shatters a parked car's windshield - closing in on Casino. He shoots once more, nails Casino in the lower back. He falls to the ground, gets back up, limps.

SIRENS wail in the distance: the cops are en route.

Joe shoots Casino through the back again, drops him this time. He lurches for him, strength diminishing.

Cruisers speed down the block, closing in on the two gunmen.

Joe stands over Casino, who turns on his back, meets his maker.

CASINO
(out of breath; giggling)
You better drop it.
(beat)
Looks like we goin' to jail. See you
inside, Joe.

Joe turns, the cruisers are barely a block away. Then, he turns back to Casino, shoots him in the face. He drops the revolver, falls to the ground.

The cruisers brake before Joe.

Officers jump out, guns drawn, surround the two gunmen.

Officers YELLOW TAPE the perimeter, preparing the crime scene.

The entire neighborhood is watching.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL, PATIENT ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Javier's eyes open slowly, gradually focus on Myrna, sleeping in a chair.

JAVIER
(groggy)
Mami.

Myrna wakes up, rises, kisses him, puts a hand on her baby's head. She's never been happier to see him.

MYRNA
Javie?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAVIER
Mami... I'm hungry.

She smiles through the tears, relieved.

MYRNA
You scared me so much. I thought you
were...

JAVIER
I'm.... so-rry

MYRNA
Me too, baby. I'm sorry, too

JAVIER
Phone...

MYRNA
What?

JAVIER
My... phone.

MYRNA
(she finds his mobile)
I have your phone, honey. Who do you
need me to call?

JAVIER
Leila.

Myrna lowers the phone, shakes her head.

MYRNA
Oh no, baby.
(beat)
The police found her. Someone...hurt her
pretty badly. She's gone. I'm so sorry.

Javier closes his eyes. Myrna holds his hand. They cry
together.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRISON - DAY

Joe in prison blues, hunched over the edge of the bed,
confined to a cell. His hair is longer, a beard is growing.
Time has passed. Pictures from Corey's scrapbook crowd his
wall.

INT. JAVIER'S APARTMENT - DAY

Myrna stands at the door, gathering her belongings. She grabs two plane tickets and two passports off the counter, calls for Javier.

He emerges from his room, walks with a cane, still healing, a bit harder than before. He drags a large suitcase behind him. Myrna helps him.

She turns off all the lights. They leave.

The entire space is empty.

INT. PRISON - DAY

Joe watches the GUARD unlock the cell door, slide it open. The Guard steps back. Joe rises, steps out.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - DAY

Myrna and Javier stand at the curb. A CAB draws up beside them. The DRIVER hops out, hefts their luggage into the trunk. Myrna and Javier climb in the backseat.

The cab peels away from the housing project.

INT. PRISON - DAY

The Guard leads Joe down a long corridor. He passes other inmates. One gives him a look, tries to start trouble. He ignores the offense, gaze fixed straight ahead.

INT. CAB - DAY

Myrna and Javier in the backseat, gazing out their windows, watching their neighborhood pass them by for the last time.

INT. PRISON, VISITORS ROOM - DAY

The Guard enters first, leads Joe inside. He hesitates for a moment, whoever he sees gives him pause.

RETHA sits at a table, her eyes penetrating Joe.

He takes a seat before her, guilt-ridden, too ashamed to face her after all the pain he's caused.

Retha continues to look him in the face, mournful, angered, brave.

INT./EXT. CAB/STREET CORNER - DAY

The cab brakes at a red light. Javier spots a KID dealing to a CUSTOMER on the corner. Marcus.

Marcus glances over at the cab, his face scarred from the accident. He sees Javier in the cab.

Beat. The two friends exchange looks. Then -

Marcus nods to him.

Javier nods back. Their last goodbye.

The light turns green. The cab drives off.

INT. PRISON - DAY

Retha reaches her hand out to Joe's, takes hold. Joe is taken aback, speechless. He finally looks at her as she pulls his hand towards her. She strokes it lovingly - beginning to forgive.

CUT TO BLACK.

END

CONTINUED: