



Written by Eric Gross

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

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

The images ramp up in intensity.

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

CUT TO:

**INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

Harsh green white fluorescent lights.

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

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

AN ELECTRIC RAZOR.

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

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

Tight as he closes his eyes.

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. BATHROOM - DAY**

The closed eyes of a scrawny little black boy.

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

CORA

All done.

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

CORA (CONT'D)

C'mon. You look cute.

LAWRENCE

I wanna look tough.

CORA  
Well I think you look very  
handsome. And tough!  
(beat)  
Send the next one in.

Lawrence sulks out of the bathroom.

**INT. HALLWAY - SAME**

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

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

GUS  
Mom wrecked your dome!

NATE  
Nigga look like a black teddy bear.

Lawrence's teenage sister, LISA, slaps Nate.

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

NATE  
He look adorable!

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

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

Gus pushes Lawrence against the wall.

CORA (O.S.)  
Get your butt in here!

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

**THE LIVING ROOM.**

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

He drinks hot tea as he watches the evening news.

Lawrence plops down on the floor in front of him.

ON THE TV --

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

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

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

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

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

#### **EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DAY**

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

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

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

And then BAM -- The doors explode.

All 14 Tureauds pour into the city.

BEGIN CHICAGO MONTAGE.

Loud immigrant shopkeepers hawking their wares.

Curbside preachers hocking theirs.

Street musicians playing broken instruments with raw fingers.

Hustlers working a con. Or having been worked.

Mafia dons mingling with shoe shine boys.

Lawrence thrills after catching a high five from a pimp.

And he can already feel it deep in his bones:

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

END MONTAGE.

**EXT. BUTCHER SHOP - ESTABLISHING**

Polish signage. Sausage links hang in the window display.

**INT. BUTCHER SHOP - SAME**

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

Gus and Lawrence stalk the aisles with their father.

GUS

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

LAWRENCE

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

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

GUS

Because shut the hell up.

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

LAWRENCE

This ain't ribeye.

NATE SR.

Chuck.

(off Lawrence's look)

Just as good. Half the price.

LAWRENCE

Doesn't sound as good. Chuck.

(screwing up his nose)

Chuck.

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

Lawrence, powerless, puts the package into the cart.

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

A POLISH BUTCHER (50's).

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

BUTCHER  
Gotta lot of mouths to feed, *boy*.

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

NATE SR.  
(meekly)  
What's a man without a family?

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

LAWRENCE  
Boy? Say that again. I dare you.

NATE SR.  
C'mon Lawrence. Let's go.

LAWRENCE  
He can't talk to--

NATE SR.  
I said let's go!

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

# **EXT. CHICAGO STREET - SAME**

Lawrence walks with his father.

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

WHAP!

Nate Sr. slaps Lawrence's face. Hard.

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

Luckily his pride holds back the tears. Barely.

NATE SR.

Know your place. Do you hear me?

Lawrence feels his cheek, red hot.

LAWRENCE

What happened to sticking up for  
what you believe?

NATE SR.

(fury)

Do. You. Hear. Me.

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

#### **INT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DAY**

An elevator bank in disrepair.

GUS

This shit again?

NATE SR.

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

LISA

Last one up's a rotten egg.

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

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

A SCREAM.

#### **INT. TUREAUD APARTMENT - LATER**

Chaos.

Couch overturned. Silverware strewn about. Drawers emptied.

The place has been ransacked.

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

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

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

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

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

An impasse.

POLICEMAN  
We'll be in touch.

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

POLICEMAN #2  
We'll be in touch.

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

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

LATER.

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

ROY  
And you didn't say anything?

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



NATE SR.

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

GUS

(sotto)

You gotta be kidding me.

CORA

Gus. Watch your mouth.

ROY

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

GUS

We gotta get it back!

NATE SR.

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

The brothers put a lid on the simmer.

But the water clearly still boils.

**INT. TUREAD APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Blue moonlight spills into the small bedroom.

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

Roy puts a pistol in his jeans.

**EXT. PROJECTS/INT. CAR - NIGHT**

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

LAWRENCE

I'm coming with y'all.

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

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

I'll tell Mom.

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

**INT./EXT. CAR - NIGHT**

The four brothers in a beat up Pinto.

**INT. CAR/EXT. UNDERPASS - NIGHT**

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

Lawrence's eyes go wide with fear.

**EXT. LIQUOR STORE - MARCY AVE. - NIGHT**

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

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

**I/E. CAR - SAME**

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

ROY  
(to Lawrence)  
Stay here.

LAWRENCE  
I'm coming with y'all.

ROY  
Stay here!

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

**EXT. ALLEY - SAME**

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

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

GUS  
You know what we want.

NATE JR.  
You stole our TV.

THUG #2  
 Fuck outta here. We didn't steal  
 your 32 inch Magnavox with the  
 broken dial and crappy sound.

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

The two thugs look at each other.

THUG #1  
 It's no trouble at all.

WHAP!

Thug #1 sucker punches Roy in the head.

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

Nate Jr. hits the thug with a bat.

Thug #2 takes on Gus, overpowers him.

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

#### **INT. CAR - SAME**

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

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

#### **EXT. STREET - SAME**

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

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

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

A SHOT RINGS OUT.

CRASH TO WHITE.

We hear the sound of water boiling.

VOICE  
You ready?

FADE IN:

**INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - KITCHEN - DAY**

A large industrial kitchen.

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

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

LAWRENCE TUREAUD (now 19, compact and muscled).

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

CALVIN  
Lawrence, you ready?

Lawrence snaps out of it.

LAWRENCE  
Ready.

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

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

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

CALVIN  
You'd rather be back in the  
projects?

LAWRENCE  
Whatcha know about the projects?

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

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

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

CALVIN  
How's that?

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

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

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

**INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - LUNCH LINE - LATER**

Lawrence and Calvin serve an endless line of CADETS.

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

LAWRENCE  
The hell is Dingbats?

CALVIN  
Fresh little disco south side.

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

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

This is SGT BLOTNIK (40's).

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

LAWRENCE/CALVIN  
Yes sir.

Lawrence ladles some gruel onto the sergeant's plate.

BLOTNIK  
Don't be shy now.

Lawrence silently serves up another scoop.

MATCH CUT TO:

**A MUD PUDDLE.**

A boot crashes into it, spraying mud everywhere.

**EXT - SWAMP - DAY**

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

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

Lawrence and Calvin are near the back.

BLOTNIK screams through a megaphone.

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

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

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)  
Something funny?

LAWRENCE  
Picturing the devil spunk, sir.

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

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

SGT BLOTNIK  
Nice steady swings now.

The troop resumes hacking away at the brush.

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

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

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

LAWRENCE  
Just don't call me boy.

Blotnik's eyes narrow with fury.

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

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

And so he defiantly shakes his head.

LAWRENCE  
No, sir. I do not.

BLOTNIK

Very well.

(to the troops)

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

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

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)

All yours.

(to the trees)

As are these.

LAWRENCE

What?

BLOTNIK

That's right.

(beat)

Or are you not special?

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

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

And Lawrence is the bull's eye.

CLOSE on his face, as the blood rises.

He winds up.

And takes a swing.

WHOOOOSH. CHOP.

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

He winds up, takes another swing.

WHOOOOSH. CHOP.

His breathing gets heavy, resolve spreads across his face.

WHOOOOSH. CHOP.



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

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

LATER.

Lawrence has felled his first tree.

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

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

WHOOSH. CHOP.

# **INT. BARRACKS - DUSK**

The troops ready themselves for a dusk run.

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

# **EXT. FOREST - DAY**

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

CHOP. CHOP. CHOP.

And with every chop we see glimpses from his past:

-The polish butcher disrespecting his dad.

-The police shrugging off their duties.

-His brothers fighting the thugs.

-And, finally, Lawrence raises the pistol.

CHOP!

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

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

But maybe, just maybe, no longer defining him.

CHOP!

**EXT. SWAMP - DUSK**

Blotnik leads the troops on a dusk jog.

BLOTNIK  
You fall in line, you offer  
deference, that's how you win.  
(beat)  
You stand out? You speak up? You  
lose.  
(beat)  
I want you to see what happens to  
those who stray from the herd.

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

Lawrence chopping away.

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

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

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)  
That's enough.

Lawrence keeps chopping.

BLOTNIK (CONT'D)  
I said: that's enough!

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

LAWRENCE  
One more oak I need to take down.

The platoon snickers.

BLOTNIK  
Roll out!

Blotnik and the troops leave the forest.

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

**INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT**

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

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

He hobbles to the bathroom.

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

#### **BATHROOM.**

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

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

He closes his eyes.

MATCH CUT TO:

#### **EXT. POOL - UNDERWATER - DAY**

Lawrence underwater, his eyes closed.

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

#### **EXT. MOTEL 6 - DAY**

A cloudless blue sky. Heat shimmers on the pavement.

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

Along the perimeter are a few WHITE FAMILIES.

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

CALVIN

How'd you end up here anyway?

One of the white families gets up and leaves.

LAWRENCE

We drove together, man.

CALVIN

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

A beat. Lawrence just looks up at the sky.

LAWRENCE

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

CALVIN

Course.

LAWRENCE

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

(beat)

All folks could talk about  
afterwards was how it started.

CALVIN

So?

Lawrence turns to his friend.

LAWRENCE

How it started don't really matter.

(beat)

What matters is how hot it burned.

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

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

MOTEL MANAGER

Afternoon fellas.

The cadets completely ignore him.

MOTEL MANAGER (CONT'D)

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

CALVIN

Yeah yeah. We get it.

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

CALVIN (CONT'D)

C'mon man. Let's eat.

LAWRENCE

Be there in a second.

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

MOTEL MANAGER

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

A long beat.

LAWRENCE

You should be afraid.

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

MOTEL MANAGER

Mr. Alston, right this way sir.

This stops Lawrence in his tracks.

LAWRENCE

(to the manager)

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

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

#### **INT. BUS - DAY**

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

CADET #1

No way. Barbecue.

CADET #2

Chinese. Got just the place.

CADET #3

Long as we get dessert, I'm set.

Cadet #3 and Cadet #1 low five.

CADET #2

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

CALVIN

Whatcha think Lawrence?

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

CALVIN (CONT'D)  
Lawrence?

A long beat. The cadets look to their warrior.

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

**EXT. STREET - DAY**

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

**EXT. DMV - DAY**

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

CUT TO:

INSERT: CHANGE OF NAME FORM.

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

**INT. DMV - SAME**

Lawrence speaks with a portly DMV WORKER.

LAWRENCE  
I need a reason?

The DMV worker furrows her brow at the form.

DMV WORKER  
Suppose not.

After a long beat --

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

DMV WORKER  
Whose mouth?

LAWRENCE  
Everyone's.

The DMV worker stares back at him. Is he crazy?

We push in on Lawrence's face.

He doesn't blink. He doesn't hesitate. He doesn't waver.

Because he's no longer Lawrence.

DMV WORKER

Very well.

The woman stamps the form. CA-CHUNK!

DMV WORKER (CONT'D)

Have a nice day, Mr. T.

**EXT. DMV - MOMENTS LATER**

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

**MR. T.**

He nods solemnly. And then takes in the new day.

The street looks different. More vibrant, more saturated.

In fact, everything looks different.

MR. T (V.O.)

Change a little, and the world  
changes with you.

FADE TO:

**EXT. CHICAGO - DAY - ESTABLISHING**

We see a bustling city block full of commerce and activity.

A green light moves traffic along revealing a large  
department store.

**INT. WOOLWORTH'S - DAY**

Mr. T, now 23, tries on a high waisted paisley zoot suit.

Next to him is a BLACK STORE CLERK (70's) who holds a few  
pieces of clothing for T to audition.

STORE CLERK

Ain't that the truth.

MR. T  
Lemme see that hat.

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

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

STORE CLERK  
You look like a pimp.

MR. T  
That fly huh?

The clerk's eyeballs hit the ceiling.

STORE CLERK  
That silly.

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

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

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

STORE CLERK (CONT'D)  
Much better.

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

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

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

PRELAP: Ca-Ching!

**CASH REGISTER - MOMENTS LATER.**

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



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

MR. T

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

PHYLIS

They're very nice.

MR. T

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

PHYLIS

If you say so.

MR. T

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

(pantomiming necks)

Criiik. Criiik. Criiik.

Phylis gives in, smiles a bit.

PHYLIS

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

MR. T

What's that supposed to mean?

Phylis closes the register. Leans in closer.

PHYLIS

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

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

MR. T

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

Phylis smiles.

PHYLIS

Ornithologist huh?

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

PHYLIS  
Enjoy your purchase....?

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

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

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

**EXT. WOOLWORTH'S - DAY**

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

MR. T  
Footlong. Mustard, relish.

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

FRAT BOY #1  
Will you look at this?

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

FRAT BOY #1  
A nigger sandwich. Yuck!

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

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

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

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

OFFICER #1  
There a problem here?

FRAT BOY #1  
No sir. Just heading home.

OFFICER #2  
How bout you? There a problem?

MR. T  
(biting his tongue)  
No sir.

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

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

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

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

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

MR. T  
I ain't do nuffin.

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

After not finding anything, they release him.

OFFICER #2  
Enjoy the rest of your evening.

The police get back in their squad car.

VENDOR  
Pay it no mind, brother. On me.

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

MR. T  
Lost my appetite.

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

**EXT. SMALL STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT**

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

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

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

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

Maybe the world has him outmatched. Outgunned. Defeated.

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

CUT TO:

**INT./EXT. CAB - NIGHT**

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

**EXT. DINGBATS - NIGHT**

For Chicago's nightlife, this is mecca.

Upbeat funk pulses from inside.

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

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

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

MR. T

My brother, lemme holla at you?

BITOY

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

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

MR. T

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

Bitoy looks at him askance.

BITOY

Head chef?

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

BITOY  
Calvin's a line cook.

MR. T  
What?

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

T is floored.

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

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

Bitoy takes pity.

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

**EXT. BACK ALLEY - LATER**

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

CALVIN  
You never embellished your resume?

T grandly gestures across his face and body.

MR. T  
This my resume right here.

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

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

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

CALVIN

I remember.

MR. T

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

CALVIN

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

MR. T

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

(popping his collar)

Worth every penny.

CALVIN

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

MR. T

With grace and cunning and inimitable poise.

CALVIN

Ain't enough to get you into Bats.

MR. T

We'll see bout that.

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

CALVIN

Don't forget the little people when you king.

MR. T

No real king does.

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

MR. T (CONT'D)

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

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

**EXT. DINGBAT'S - NIGHT**

T makes his way to the front, approaches Bitoy.

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

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

MR. T  
Tell you what. Let's wait for the  
line to die down.

BITOY  
(dismissive)  
Yeah. Let's.

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

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

MR. T  
What's so funny?

DOLLED UP LADY #1  
Darlin, this ain't Wicker Park.  
This is DingBats.

MR. T  
So?

DOLLED UP LADY #2  
So the line *don't* die down at  
DingBats.

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

DOLLED UP LADY #1  
But I wouldn't worry. Smart fella  
like you? You'll find a way in.

The ladies snuff their cigarettes out, head back inside.

CLINK!

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

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

**INT. DINGBAT'S - NOT EVEN MOMENTS LATER**

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

And everyone looks amazing.

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

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

DOLLED UP LADY #1  
See you made it.

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

DOLLED UP LADY #1  
And what's that?

Charm dial cranks to 11.

MR. T  
Do you like champagne?

**BAR - FIVE SECONDS LATER.**

It's busy.

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

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

**FIVE MORE SECONDS.**

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

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

WAITRESS  
Corner banquette. Hammond.

MR. T  
I gottta grab the order for Dalton.



WAITRESS

So why you wastin' my time?

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

MR. T

Why indeed?

(finding the bartender)

Forgot two champagnes. For Hammond.

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

**DANCE FLOOR - HALF A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE LATER.**

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

Does the music bump? Hell yes.

Does the couple look fly? You better believe it.

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

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

BITOY

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

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

BITOY (CONT'D)

Fuck me.

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

DOLLED UP LADY #1

Let's get outta here.

MR. T

Great minds think alike.

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

**FRONT OF CLUB.**

Bitoy scraps with a few BIG BAD DUDES.

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

BITOY

Fellas. Tranquilo. I'm sure we can -

WOMP!

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

All hell's about to break loose.

**EXIT DOORS.**

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

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

GIRL

The hell you doin'?

MR. T

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

T cracks his head. Left. And right.

And then barrels into the melee, pure adrenalized anger.

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

Then starts pummeling Lou, the ringleader.

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

And T conducts the orchestra.

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

Eventually, the BAD DUDES regroup a few yards away.

MR. T (CONT'D)

If you feelin' froggy, better jump.

LOU VINER

This ain't over.

MR. T

No?

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

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

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

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

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

BITOY  
What's that?

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

MR. T  
An audience.

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

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

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

And with that, T heads into the Chicago night.

#### **INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING**

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

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

#### **INT. BATHROOM - SAME**

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

DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (O.S.)

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

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

So fresh. So clean.

INT. DINGBAT'S - DAY

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

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

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

RON BRISKMAN

Closed. Lunch starts at noon.

MR. T

Didn't come for lunch.

Though lunch sounds pretty good.

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

BITOY

Mr. T! In the building!

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

BITOY (CONT'D)

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

RON BRISKMAN

So you're the guy responsible for this mess?

MR. T

I'm the guy who controlled it.

A tense silence.

RON BRISKMAN

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

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

MR. T  
I came to offer my services.

RON BRISKMAN  
Demolition?

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

RON BRISKMAN  
Dingbats already has a body  
guarding the front.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ron sizes up the eager man and his offer.

RON BRISKMAN  
What's the catch?

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

Ron scratches his face.

RON BRISKMAN  
I'll think about it.

MR. T  
My man!

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

**EXT. CHICAGO STREET - LATER**

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

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

**INT. WOOLWORTH'S - DAY**

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

WHITE MANAGER  
Can I help you?

MR. T  
Nah man. Just browsing.

The white manager looks uncomfortable. He lingers.

WHITE MANAGER  
Just browsing. Of course.  
(beat)  
That's a lovely hat.

T knows where this is going.

MR. T  
Bought it here last week.

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

MR. T  
You ask all your customers for  
receipts?

WHITE MANAGER

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

MR. T

I look like I need your protection?

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

**HER REGISTER.**

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

PHYLIS

Dapper Dan returns.

MR. T

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

PHYLIS

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

MR. T

Beauty and brains! Knew we had something in common.

PHYLIS

(blushing)

What can I help you with?

MR. T

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

PHYLIS

Okay.

MR. T

Need em in just the right order.

PHYLIS

The right order?

MR. T

And only you can give em to me.

PHYLIS

Me?!?

MR. T

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

Phylis finally gets it, rolls her eyes.

PHYLIS

Are you always like this?

MR. T

Sometimes I'm persistent.

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

MR. T (CONT'D)

So whatcha think?

PHYLIS

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

MR. T

Flattery will get you everywhere.

PHYLIS

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

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

MR. T

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

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

PHYLIS

Anywhere?

MR. T

Anywhere.

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



**INT. CHURCH - DAY**

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

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

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

T leans back, clearly not in his element.

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

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

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

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

CONGREGATION  
Respect.

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

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

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

**EXT. LAKESHORE DRIVE - LATER**

T walks with Phyllis.

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

He grabs her hands. They are clearly getting closer.

**INT. APARTMENT - DAY**

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

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

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

A smile spreads across his face.

**EXT. DINGBAT'S - NIGHT**

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

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

Bitoy and Ron watch and smile.

**INT. DINGBAT'S - END OF THE NIGHT**

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

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

BITOY  
In those narrow ass stalls?

MR. T  
Girl was flexible. And creative.

Bitoy cracks up.

CALVIN  
So what'd you tell her?

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

BITOY  
And so she up and left?

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

CALVIN  
Sloppy thirds!

BITOY  
Y'all dating now or what?

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

Calvin and Bitoy nearly double over with laughter.

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

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

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

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

MR. T  
Deal's a deal, Ron.

RON BRISKMAN  
Prolly time to put you on payroll.

T pick up a huge drumstick.

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

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

**EXT. NAVY PIER - DUSK**

T and Phylis look out over glorious Lake Michigan.

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

MR. T  
That's crazy far!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MR. T  
The past is the past.

PHYLIS  
They're your *family*.

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

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

FLASH BACK TO:

**EXT. CHICAGO STREET - NIGHT - 1965**

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

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

*The thug's eyes go wide in horror.*

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

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

FADE IN:

**THE WATER.**

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

MR. T

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

(beat)

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

(beat)

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

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

MR. T (CONT'D)

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

(beat)

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

(beat)

*I want it all.*

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

PHYLIS

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

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

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

**INT. DINGBAT'S - KITCHEN - DAY**

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

T and Bitoy polish off the last of their gumbo.

MR. T  
Calvin, this is something else.

BITOY  
You got a gift, brother.

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

Calvin fishes out some papers and diagrams from a backpack.

BITOY  
What's this?

CALVIN  
(ta dah)  
TCB. A restaurant that caters to  
the upscale urban sophisticate.

MR. T  
TCB? What the hell's a TCB.

CALVIN  
Taking Care of Business. But also  
T, Calvin, Bitoy. We always talk  
about doing our own thing. Why  
don't we?  
(showing his diagrams)  
I'd run the kitchen. Bitoy would  
handle marketing. And T you're the  
face. It's all right here.

T and Bitoy peruse the materials.

BITOY  
Damn man. You really thought this  
thing through.

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

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

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

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

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

Ron enters with a stack of envelopes.

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

The men table their entrepreneurial discussions for now.

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

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

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

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

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

Bitoy raises a glass. All four men cheers.

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

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



CALVIN  
Ali was out of shape.

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

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

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

RON BRISKMAN  
He's high profile. And spends  
accordingly.

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

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

MR. T  
I think I lost my appetite.

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

MR. T (CONT'D)  
I said 'I think.' Turns out I was  
wrong. One of the rare instances.

PRELAP: A Funkadelic track grooves us into --

# **INT. DINGBAT'S - NIGHT**

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

In a corner banquette we see a private party:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CLICK/FLASH!

A PAPARAZZO pops off a few rounds from his Pentax.

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

PAPARAZZO  
Who should I be taking photos of?

MR. T  
Yours truly.

PAPARAZZO  
A bodyguard. I don't think so.

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

T puts his hand over the shutterbug's camera.

PAPARAZZO  
I got a right to be here, man.

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

The paparazzo begrudgingly departs.

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

LATER.

The crowd has thinned.

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

ENTOURAGE MEMBER  
Big man wants a word.

MR. T  
Bout what?

ENTOURAGE MEMBER  
The fuck I'm supposed to know?

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

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

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

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

MR. T  
I'll let the server know.

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

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

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

Leon slowly breaks into a smile, diffusing the situation.

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

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

MR. T  
I hope it doesn't.

LEON SPINKS

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

MR. T

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

LEON SPINKS

This town. Right.

(long drink)

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

(beat)

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

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

LEON SPINKS (CONT'D)

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

(beat)

Or if you just running your mouth.

MR. T

(dead serious)

I got what it takes.

(a smile)

And I'm running my mouth.

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

LEON SPINKS

I want you to work for me.

MR. T

C'mon man.

LEON SPINKS

I'm serious.

And, indeed, his face shows as much.

MR. T

I got a good thing here at Bats.

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

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

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

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

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

Spinks takes a gold chain off his neck.

MR. T  
I can't --

LEON SPINKS  
Try it on.

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

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

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

He most definitely could get used to it.

**INT. ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY**

Phylis has one scoop. T has three.

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

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

PHYLIS  
Maybe you shoulda worn makeup.

Phylis smears ice cream on his nose.

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

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

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

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

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

A beat as the sparring subsides.

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

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

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

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

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

**INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

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

MR. T

Where's the last place you left em?

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

LEON SPINKS

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

MR. T

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

(under his breath)

No one can understand you anyway.

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

**EXT. HOTEL - ALLEY - NIGHT**

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

MR. T

This some bullshit!

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

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

MR. T

The hell's that mean?

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

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

MR. T

Ain't gonna be the side man long.

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

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

MR. T

Just waiting for the right moment to seize the crown.

But that time will have to wait.

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

**INT. RUNDOWN RESTAURANT - DAY**

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

The neglect is so strong, you can smell it.

REAL ESTATE AGENT  
Previous tenant didn't invest so heavily in upkeep. But that's why it's such a steal.  
(taping on a wall)  
Got good bones.

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

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

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

REAL ESTATE AGENT  
The location does get excellent foot traffic, gentleman.

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

REAL ESTATE AGENT (CONT'D)  
And the neighborhood is full of...your customer base.

MR. T  
Our customer base?

REAL ESTATE AGENT  
(struggling)  
Afro-Americans.

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

CALVIN  
We'll get back to you ASAP.



**EXT. RUNDOWN EMPTY SPACE - SAME**

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

CALVIN  
We can make it work.

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

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

CALVIN  
What's the matter?

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

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

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

MR. T  
The hell? Reverend Jessie Jackson?

ACTIVIST  
He's gonna run for president.

BITOY  
C'mon now.

ACTIVIST  
Someone's gotta be first.

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

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

PRELAP: Sounds of a large crowd.

**EXT. STADIUM - NIGHT**

Establishing of a large arena.

**INT. STADIUM - SAME**

A ferocious blood-hungry crowd.

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

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

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

MR. T

Got a bad feeling about this.

BIG ENTOURAGE DUDE

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

(reacting to the ring)

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

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

This perks T up.

**RING.**

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

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

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

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

Spinks adds fuel to the fire by raising his fist.

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

**QUICK CUTS:**

-Flash bulbs pop.

-Faces hit with fists.

-Bodies thump the ground.

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

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

MR. T  
Steeeeeeerike.

Paparazzi train their cameras at the dapper bodyguard.

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

And suavely poses for the photos.

#### **INT. HOTEL ROOM - PRESS CONFERENCE - DAY**

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

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

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

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

T relishes the opportunity. And he starts grandstanding.

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

MR. T  
Leon Spinks is a warrior.

#### **INT. CLUB - NIGHT**

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

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

**INT. LIMO - NIGHT**

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

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

**INT. GYM - DAY**

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

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

**INT. HOTEL ROOM - PRESS CONFERENCE - SAME**

The press now snaps photos of T!

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

FLASHBULB POP takes us to --

**EXT. DINGBATS - DAY**

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

CALVIN  
 Hole. Lee. Shit.

Bitoy looks over Calvin's shoulder:

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

BITOY

(reading)

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

CALVIN

Our boy's famous.

BITOY

Chicago famous.

CALVIN

Still.

BITOY

Still.

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

BITOY (CONT'D)

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

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

**INT./EXT. LIMO - DAY**

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

CALVIN

(re: the chains)

What's up with the hardware?

MR. T

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

Calvin and Bitoy ponder T's newfound philosophy.

BITOY

Save some gold for us!

MR. T

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

CALVIN  
Speaking of, I signed the lease.

MR. T  
Lease?

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

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

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

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

#### **EXT. DINGBATS - NIGHT**

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

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

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

MR. T  
One second.

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

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

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

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

Bitoy and Ron watch from the side.

BITOY

Look like the sideshow's become the  
main attraction.

POP! FLASH!

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

Seems like everyone wants a piece of T.

**INT./EXT. CAR - SAME**

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

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

And then peels out.

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**

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

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

MR. T

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

(listening)

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

(listening)

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

(listening)

You have a think on it.

He hangs up.

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

JESSE JACKSON (ON TV)

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

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

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

MR. T  
I will be respected.

**EXT./INT. LIMO - NIGHT**

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

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

Tasteful? No. Insanely over the top? Yes.

A DRIVER with a feathered earring lowers the partition.

DRIVER  
Where we headed to this evening?

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

**EXT. TCB RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

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

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

BITOY  
The hell is he?

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

**EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT**

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

MR. T (O.S.)  
Need a ride?

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



PHYLIS  
What's all this?

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

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

MR. T  
Not my style.

PHYLIS  
(noting the feather)  
And this is?

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

This stings.

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

MR. T  
The hell you talking about?

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

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

MR. T  
You riding with me or not?

After a tense staring contest.

PHYLIS  
Good luck at the opening.

He strides back to the limo and slams the door.

**EXT. TCB RESTAURANT - SAME**

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

BITOY  
That mutherfucker.

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

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

In which he has tucked a Colt Hammerless .45.

**INT. LIMO - NIGHT**

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

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

MR. T  
My kingdom is just splendid.

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

DRIVER  
Guys. Please refrain from --

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

**EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - SAME**

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

**EXT. LIMO - WINDOW - SAME**

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

**EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR/INT. LIMO - SAME**

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

The sunroof opens. And out pops Mr. T.

MR. T

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

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

**EXT. TCB RESTAURANT - LATER**

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

CALVIN

We need to do something bout this!

DON MAGIC JUAN

Damn right. This a party or a wake?

CALVIN

(pulling T aside)

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

MR. T

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

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

MR. T (CONT'D)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lou.

They lock eyes.

Lou reaches for his pistol, aims at T.

BITOY  
(running)  
No!

A SHOT RINGS OUT.

The crowd scatters. Lou runs off into the night.

T looks at his chest: no sign of injury.

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

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

CALVIN  
Call an ambulance!

MR. T  
No time.

T runs to the limo.

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

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

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

Calvin lugs Bitoy into the backseat. The limo driver manages to get into shotgun. T floors it, leaving a plume of scorched tire smoke in his wake.

# **I/E. CAR - NIGHT**

The commandeered limo speeds down Ontario Street, weaving in and out of the few cars on the road, red lights be damned.

MR. T  
Hold on. Hold on.

Bitoy moans. The disco ball flickers across his pained face.

CALVIN	DRIVER
Hurry up!	Slow down!

# **EXT. HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER**

The limo screeches into the emergency room entrance. T and Calvin fireman carry Bitoy into the hospital.

The driver stands there, not sure what to do.

# **INT. HOSPITAL - SAME**

MR. T  
Help!

Two ATTENDINGS appraise the scene, quickly ready a stretcher, already cutting off Bitoy's bloody clothing.

ATTENDING #1  
Losing blood fast. Prep an OR!

T and Calvin watch as their friend recedes into the bowels of the hospital, his fate uncertain.

# **INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATER**

Florescent lights hum over a bizarre tableau:

T in a fur coat, gold chains, feathered earring. Calvin in a suit. Both men are covered in their friend's blood.

MR. T  
Calvin. I'm...I didn't --

CALVIN  
Please. Just keep your mouth shut.

And just then, a DOCTOR comes through the doors.

T and Calvin look up, fear in their eyes.

**INT. HOSPITAL - ROOM - SAME**

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

BITOY

Hell of an opening night, huh?

T shakes his head.

MR. T

That man's days are numbered.

BITOY

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

(beat)

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

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

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

BITOY (CONT'D)

I need a favor.

MR. T

Anything. *Anything*. Name it.

BITOY

Don't tell anyone I'm here.

(beat)

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

T and Bitoy look at each other, smile.

CALVIN

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

**EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING**

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

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

CALVIN  
(despondent)  
Yeah. Lucky us.

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

Calvin pushes him. Hard.

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

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

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

CALVIN  
I think I see pretty clearly.

He points a finger dead in T's chest.

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

Calvin walks away angrily.

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

**INT. APARTMENT - DAY**

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

T walks in.

PHYLIS (O.S.)  
T.

He looks up to find Phylis, teary-eyed.

MR. T  
What are you --

PHYLIS  
I heard about Bitoy. I'm sorry.

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

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

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

PHYLIS  
I --

He angrily waves her farewell explanation away.

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

He furiously heads to --

#### **THE BEDROOM.**

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

PHYLIS  
You wanna ruin your life again?

MR. T  
This is about honor. About respect.

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

T slams the wall, barely missing Phylis' face.

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

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

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



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

But she's out the door.

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

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

Then smashes the framed photo with the butt.

FADE TO:

**INT. APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING**

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

MR. T  
Phylis?

No answer.

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

**EXT. CHICAGO WATERFRONT - DAWN**

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

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

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

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

**INT. CHURCH - DAY**

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

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

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

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

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

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

And something stirs in T.

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

#### **INT. CHURCH - OFFICE - LATER**

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

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

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

T turns around, startled.

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

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

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

MR. T  
 My father was a preacher.

REVEREND HARDY  
 That right?

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

MR. T (CONT'D)

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

(shaking his head)

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

(beat)

I vowed to never go down like that.

Hardy puts his hand on T's shoulder.

REVEREND HARDY

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

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

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)

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

MR. T

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

REVEREND HARDY

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

MR. T

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

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

REVEREND HARDY

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

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

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)

Something you need to see.

**INT. HOSPITAL - RECEPTION AREA - DAY**

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

NURSE  
They're waiting for you.

MR. T  
I'm gonna hang back.

Hardy pushes him forward.

**PEDIATRIC CANCER WARD - SAME**

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

The sickness is palpable, overwhelming.

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

MR. T  
What do we...do?

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

T looks to Hardy: Who exactly is that?

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)  
C'mon.

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

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

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

MR. T  
I'm Mr. T.

YOUNG GIRL  
Mr. T?

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

MR. T (CONT'D)

(beat)

Mr. T. That's me.

The two kids giggle a bit.

YOUNG BOY

Mr. T. That's silly.

MR. T

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

(eating his fist)

Yum yum yum yum yum yum.

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

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

#### **INT. A DIFFERENT HOSPITAL - DAY**

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

And without a word, Calvin leaves.

MR. T

Calvin?

He turns to Bitoy.

BITOY

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

MR. T

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

BITOY

Sadly not much of a body right now.

MR. T

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

(re: the therapist)

Maybe she can fix your dancing.

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

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

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

BITOY  
C'mon. You woulda done the same.

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

Bitoy narrows in on him.

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

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

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

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

MR. T  
So do I. So do I.

T hugs Bitoy and leaves.

#### **HALLWAY.**

T sees Calvin a few yards away.

He nods at him. Calvin nods back.

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

**EXT. CITY STEET - DAY**

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

But this time, he's all alone.

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

Chicago takes all comers.

But the question from when he was Lawrence still remains:

Where does he fit in?

And that's when he comes across --

**INT. CHURCH - DAY**

CHOIR  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

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

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

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. HOSPITAL - DAY**

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

MR. T  
There you go! There you go! There  
you go! My turn.

T does an insane dance which cracks the kids up.

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. CHURCH - ANOTHER DAY**

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

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

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. HOSPITAL - ANOTHER DAY**

A large black hand and a small one.

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

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

T falls down onto the ground.

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. CHURCH OFFICES - LATER**

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

REVEREND HARDY

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

MR. T

But baptized?

REVEREND HARDY

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

MR. T

Cross the T's. I like that.

He crosses himself.

MR. T (CONT'D)

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

REVEREND HARDY

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

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

REVEREND HARDY (CONT'D)

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



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

MR. T

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

REVEREND HARDY

The Mr. T way?

And off that quintessential grin we cut to --

**INT. DINGBATS - DAY**

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

RON BRISKMAN

Bats is perfect for a documentary.

DEVIN BERRY

I'm scouting for a *location*.

RON BRISKMAN

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

Devin looks at the ceiling.

DEVIN BERRY

Not a ton of room to rig lights.

RON BRISKMAN

You kidding me? You want lights?

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

RON BRISKMAN (CONT'D)

Pretty sweet huh?

Right then, T pushes through the door.

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

MR. T

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

RON BRISKMAN

Baptism? You?

MR. T

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

RON BRISKMAN

Not sure that's how baptisms work.

MR. T

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

Ron rubs his meaty face.

RON BRISKMAN

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

T pulls Ron into a bear hug.

MR. T

My man!

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

DEVIN BERRY

What kinda baptism has an  
afterparty?

RON BRISKMAN

(shaking his head)

Mr. T's.

**EXT. DINGBATS - SAME**

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

DEVIN

Devin Berry.

MR. T

NBC?

DEVIN BERRY

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

(beat)

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

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

DEVIN BERRY  
 You'd be perfect for it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

DEVIN BERRY  
 Always gotta be a first.

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

MR. T  
 Good luck with your show.

#### **INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY**

Bright light pours through stained glass windows.

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

#### **BACKSTAGE.**

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

REVEREND HARDY  
 You alright?

MR. T  
Just hoped my family would come.

Hardy gets up. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

REVEREND HARDY  
You have a bigger family now.

**PEW - LATER.**

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

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

MR. T  
I do.

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

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

The Reverend gently dunks him in the tank.

**UNDERWATER.**

The sound cuts out.

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

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

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

And then we see a hand on his back.

HER VOICE (O.S.)  
Congratulations.

He turns around. And there she is: Phylis.

**EXT. CHURCH - SAME**

MR. T  
Why'd you come?

PHYLIS  
To congratulate you.

MR. T  
For what? Getting dunked in water?

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

She smiles at him. And he takes another risk.

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

PHYLIS  
We're traveling on different roads.

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

She gives him a hug. But no answer.

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

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

T looks through the sun dappled trees.

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

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

Phylis kisses his cheek. Heads to her car.

MR. T

Phylis!

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

MR. T (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming.

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

**EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DAY**

T walks through his old stomping grounds.

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

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

NATE JR.

Look who it is.

GUS

What's good, Lawrence?

MR. T

Mr. T.

Gus and Nate Jr. crack up.

NATE JR.

Right. Mister T. I forgot.

GUS

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

NATE JR.

Uppity ass nigga.

MR. T

Good to see you too.

GUS

Why you even come around here?

MR. T

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

GUS  
If you say so.

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

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

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

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

And with that, he heads inside.

**INT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - SAME**

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

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

**INT. APARTMENT - LATER**

T and Cora drink tea.

CORA  
It's good to see you, Lawrence.

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

MR. T  
Place looks the same.

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

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

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

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

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

MR. T  
 Heard he's gunning for president.

CORA  
 First time for everything.

Cora comes in close. A secret.

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

MR. T  
 What are you talking about?

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

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

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

He tries to hold back the tears.

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

Cora comes in close.



CORA

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

She grabs his face in her hands.

CORA (CONT'D)

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

She releases his face. And holds his hands.

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

And something occurs to him.

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

MR. T

(quietly)  
First time for everything.

#### **EXT. ROBERT TAYLOR PROJECTS - DUSK**

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

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

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

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

#### **INT. PEDIATRIC CANCER WARD - DAY**

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

SICK BOY

World's Toughest Bouncer?

MR. T  
That's right. The prize money goes  
to this hospital. This floor. This  
is for you. For all y'all.

Hardy watches T with the kids. He smiles proudly.

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

The kids nod earnestly.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
(deadly serious)  
Now listen up. And listen good.  
Because I have two words for you.  
Two words that gonna change your  
life. Right here. And right now.  
(beat)  
Are you listening?

The crowd is rapt, hanging on his every word.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
DANCE PARTY!!!

Hardy presses play on a boom box.

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

T spins around, does his best Saturday Night Fever.

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

MR. T (CONT'D)  
There you go, there you go, there  
you go! Any one got the number of a  
good linoleum supplier? This  
floor's been demolished!

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

MR. T (CONT'D)  
What's the matter?

CHLOE  
Don't feel like dancing.

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

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

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

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

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

T looks over at Chloe who watches him intently.

CHLOE (CONT'D)  
Make sure to smile.

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

#### **INT. TCB'S - KITCHEN - DAY**

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

MR. T  
What's cooking?

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

CALVIN  
Bouillabaisse.

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

CALVIN  
Good to know.

A long beat.

MR. T  
Calvin. I --

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

CALVIN (CONT'D)  
Even when it didn't make sense.  
Even when we knew - we knew! - you  
were looking out for number one.  
But we believed in you.  
(beat)  
As foolish as that may be.

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

MR. T  
You're right. I owe you an apology.  
I took you for granted. I'm sorry.

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

MR. T  
Just keep it under wraps. Got a  
reputation to uphold.  
(beat)  
But I mean it, Calvin. I owe you.

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

MR. T  
Anything. Name it.

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

MR. T (CONT'D)  
I got you.

T rolls up his sleeves. Starts dicing.

CALVIN  
Ron told me you're gonna be on TV.

MR. T  
World's Toughest Bouncer. I'll  
prolly get my ass whooped. But we  
can parlay the exposure into  
raising funds for the hospital.

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

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

Calvin sees his turn, his self-awareness.

CALVIN  
Then we gotta get you back in  
fighting shape.

MR. T  
We?

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

MR. T  
You'd do that for me?

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

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

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

**EXT. CITY STREET - EARLY MORNING**

Calvin and T run as the city sleep.

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

MR. T  
Nothing gonna stop me.

CALVIN  
We'll see bout that.

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

MR. T  
What we doing here?

CALVIN  
C'mon.

**INT. CONDEMNED BUILDING - SAME**

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

CALVIN

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

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

MR. T

The hell is this?

CALVIN

Eat it.

MR. T

Eat it?

CALVIN

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

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

He grabs a clove. And chomps it down.

We linger on his pained contorted face.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

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

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

MR. T

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

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

CALVIN

We'll see bout that.

(beat)

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

T takes a deep breath.

**ABANDONED BUILDING - LATER.**

An empty room with copper wires hanging from the ceiling.

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

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

CALVIN (CONT'D)

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

T wipes his dusty face: you fucking kidding me?

BEGIN BREAK THROUGH MONTAGE.

An empty room.

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

Another room.

T bursts through the wall, this time upright.

A third room.

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

Cross section of the building.

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

END MONTAGE.

**EXT. LAKE MICHIGAN - SUNSET**

T and Calvin skip stones over the majestic lake.

CALVIN

You ready for this?

MR. T

These guys won't know what hit em.

(beat)

Can't thank you enough.

CALVIN

Just make us proud.

MR. T  
No doubt. We going places, homeboy.

CALVIN  
Yeah right. "We."

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

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

CALVIN  
Back in the day? All I ever hoped  
for was to make it out the Greens  
in one piece.  
(beat)  
Never thought I could be a cook. Or  
a chef. Or own a restaurant. To  
live a life beyond what was right  
there in front of my face.  
(beat)  
It just never occurred to me. A  
poor black kid in the north side of  
Chicago just fighting to survive.

Calvin looks at his friend.

CALVIN (CONT'D)  
Win or lose, big things still  
comin' your way. I know that. And  
you know that. Life will go on  
regardless of who is the World's  
Toughest Bouncer. How much does one  
measly TV show mean anyway?  
(beat)  
Well. To that kid in the projects.  
That kid who doesn't realize that a  
black man can make something of  
himself in this world. Something  
big. Something special.  
(beat)  
To him?  
(beat)  
To him...it means everything.

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

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

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



**INT. APARTMENT - DAY**

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

*TV SCREEN: A lion roars on the African plains.*

T is calm. Methodical.

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

*TV SCREEN: A lion chases a heard of wildebeests.*

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

And then something stops him in his tracks.

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

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

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

We push close on T's face.

**BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

We hear a buzzing.

T looks in the mirror.

His nostrils flare. Ferocity oozes out of him.

And now the buzzing redlines, distorting, as T drags the clippers over his Afro.

Clumps fall off like shell casings from a machine gun.

Until finally the last bit is gone.

His head pops back into frame, the mohawk complete.

And now more then ever before, we can see it --

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

**EXT. TV STUDIO - DAY - ESTABLISHING**

Contestants, fans, crew, and executives stream in.

**INT. STUDIO - DAY**

A studio set outfitted with different "contest stations" a la *American Gladiator*.

CAMERAMEN push mobile tripods mounted with oversized Ikegama BetaCams around the perimeter.

In this circus-like atmosphere, BURLY DUDES compete for the title of "World's Toughest Bouncer."

Two AIR BRUSHED ANNOUNCERS do stand ups to camera.

**ANNOUNCER #1**

Here we are at the first ever  
"World's Toughest Bouncer"  
competition. The contest consists  
of three events. The Bounce, The  
Blast, and The Box.

**ANNOUNCER #2**

For the bounce, each contestant  
will throw a 115 pound stuntman as  
far as he can. The Blast will see  
our bouncers navigating a bar-like  
obstacle course and then blasting  
through a 4 inch door. And the box  
will feature the highest point  
winners from the previous contests  
duking it out in a 16 foot ring.

**ANNOUNCER #1**

Let the games begin!

**CORNER STATION.**

Cushy gymnastic mats laid out on the ground.

We see BOUNCERS heaving small STUNT MEN. It's an intimidating  
- and bizarre - spectacle. (And it really did happen.)

T walks up to the station with his STUNTMAN. They fist bump  
each other in solidarity.

But before T hurls the small man across the floor, a DRUNK  
GUY in the crowd starts acting out.

DRUNK GUY

Will you look at this darkie? I've  
never any seen anything like this.  
You got a blind barber? Good Lord.

The blood rises in T's face. He wants to teach this dude a  
lesson he won't soon forget. Calvin comes up behind him.

CALVIN

Forget him, man. Just do what you  
do. Do what you do.

MR. T

Oh I'm gonna.

Mr. T picks up the stuntman, takes a running start and --

HEAVES HIM AS FAR AS HE CAN.

The stuntman lands on the tumbling mat.

A REFEREE rushes over and measures the distance, yelling the  
score to a table-side SCOREKEEPER.

T's name appears about halfway down the leaderboard.

T is furious. Calvin massages his shoulders.

MR. T (CONT'D)

Got inside my head.

CALVIN

Get him outta there. Remember. This  
ain't just about you, man. You dig?

MR. T

(distracted)

Yeah man.

CALVIN

(dead serious)

Do you dig?

T turns to him. Solemnly nods.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Then act like you know.

CUT TO:

QUICK CUTS OF VARIOUS BOUNCERS THROWING STUNTMEN.

REFS MEASURE THE DISTANCES.

THE LEADERBOARD RAPIDLY FLIPS OVER.

FANS ERUPT IN APPLAUSE.

CUT TO:

**INT. STUDIO - LATER**

A different station.

A large obstacle course with freestanding walls erected.

We see a MASSIVE BOUNCER barrel his way through the course; around the bar, slaloming through stools and tables, until he comes to a wall.

The Wall.

He hurls himself against it with all his might.

Nevertheless, he only breaks through the first two sheets.

**NEARBY.**

T warms up with Calvin.

CALVIN

Most of these guys are finishing  
around twelve, thirteen seconds.  
That's fast. Real fast.

(beat)

But if you're gonna make it to the  
Box, you can't be fast. You gotta  
be lightning.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Next up. Mr. T. To the Blast.

CALVIN

Luckily I brought some good luck.

Calvin reaches into his fanny pack and pulls out a whole  
clover of garlic.

MR. T

You gotta be kidding me?

Calvin shakes his head; afraid not.

T grabs the clove. Takes a big ass bite. His eyes water. His  
nose runs. And steam comes out of his ears.

He's ready.

**THE BLAST SET.**

Overhead lights flicker.

We hear the sound of a freight train approaching.

And here it comes.

In SLOW MOTION.

T's body pulsing as he turns, pivots, and speeds through the course.

And as he approaches the wall, he screams.

And launches himself through the dry wall, shattering all 4 pieces. Dust and debris everywhere.

The crowd goes fucking nuts.

And his time appears on a screen overhead: 9 seconds flat.

Calvin rushes over to him.

CALVIN

You did it! Holy shit! You did it!

MR. T

I ain't eating no more garlic!

Calvin smiles, brushes drywall off him.

CALVIN

Only in my sautés. Only in my sautés. Let's get you sorted.

They move to the bleachers for a water break.

BOOMING VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. T!

Standing nearby is a gargantuan Hawaiian bouncer.

TUTEFANO

You think you special? You not special. You think you strong. You not strong.

(beat)

Maybe you are tough bouncer in Chicago. But in the world? No. There is only one toughest.

(chest beat)

Tutefano.

He growls at the men as they head to the bleachers.

MR. T  
Who the hell was that?

CALVIN  
More like what. Tutefano Tufi.  
Three hundred twenty pounds of pure  
spam, eggs, and anger.

MR. T  
Thought Hawaiians were chill.

CALVIN  
Must be from the angry island.

They walk to the bleachers to recuperate and strategize.  
The contest is getting heated.

**LATER.**

T stretches in the corner. The final event fast approaching.

As he stretches, an affable black reporter approaches him.  
This is future sportscaster BRYANT GUMBEL (mid 20's).

BRYANT GUMBEL  
Here we have our second place  
contestant from Chicago, Illinois.  
A bouncer at the famed nightclub  
Dingbats, Mr. T!

MR. T  
How you doing, Brian?

BRYANT GUMBEL  
Bryant. With a "T." Like you! And  
doing great. We've got a hell of a  
contest on our hands. How're you  
holding up?

MR. T  
I feel fantastic. Gonna feel even  
better when I win this thing.

BRYANT GUMBEL  
Speaking of, you're set to face off  
against Hawaiian native Tutefano  
Tufi, an imposing presence to say  
the least. What are your thoughts  
coming into this final round?

MR. T  
I just feel real sorry for him. I  
pity what I'm gonna put him  
through. I pity the fool.

CUT TO:

**INT. WELL APPOINTED LIVING ROOM - DAY**

On a TV set, we see T giving his interview to Bryant Gumbel.

A buff young Italian with a shiny black coif watches the television. Behind him, a massive framed poster for *Rocky*.

You guessed it. This is SYLVESTER STALLONE (27).

He laughs at the cocky brawler on TV. And then leans forward to watch even closer, an idea forming in his head.

BACK TO:

**THE FIGHT.**

The lights dim. Fans place bets. Bartenders sling drinks. Cigar smoke hangs heavy in the air.

A Roman coliseum awaiting the final two remaining gladiators.

ANNOUNCER #1  
Time for our main event, The Box.  
The winner of this competition will  
be crowned World's Toughest  
Bouncer.

ANNOUNCER #2  
The first one to get knocked out of  
the ring loses. Let's introduce our  
competitors.

ANNOUNCER #1  
Hailing from Hawaii, weighing 320  
lbs, Tutefano Tufi!

The crowd erupts in cheers.

ANNOUNCER #2  
And from right here in Chicago, our  
hometown hero, Mr. T!

A mix of cheers and boos. T takes a look around at his beloved Chicago. And then, he kneels and prays.

As he does, we cut to various people watching the TV program:

- Ron and Bitoy at Dingbats.
- Sick children at the Hospital.
- Reverend Hardy in his office at the Church.
- Leon Spinks at his gym.
- The Tureauds at the Robert Taylor Projects apartment.
- Phylis at her sister's place.
- Even Sly Stallone.

Everyone's got their own version of Mr. T. But only one man can step into the ring.

A bell rings.

ANNOUNCER #1

Here we go!

T steps into the makeshift ring with Tufi.

They start to grapple.

The STUDIO AUDIENCE scream themselves raw from the rafters.

CAMERAMEN rotate along the perimeter documenting -

T, getting his ass handed to him by the massive Hawaiian.

He's thrown around the ring like a rag doll.

He tries to put Tufi in a headlock but can't even get his arms around the Hawaiian's dome.

Tufi, with very little effort pushes T back, almost knocking him out of the ring. T barely manages to stay in bounds.

Tufi smiles: this is gonna be a cakewalk.

ANNOUNCER #2 (O.S.)

T better start playing defense  
quick or this fight's gonna be over  
before it even started.

But T doesn't back down.

Instead, he swings at the Hawaiian, landing a punch that bloodies his nose.

The crowd gasps in shock.



No one, including Tufi, was expecting that.

MR. T  
Aloha muthafukka.

Tufi starts wildly swinging at T, who has to rapidly dodge the attack, for any blow from the big man would surely send him flying.

T moves to the edge of the ring.

Tufi lunges for him but T manages to duck the attack.

Tufi almost skids out, hangs on for dear life.

T once again weaves around the perimeter. Tufi shoots for his legs but T jumps up, sending Tufi to the ground.

Now Tufi is royally pissed.

He corners T, puts him in a sleeper hold.

TUFI  
That all you got *boy*?

T looks toward the ceiling, the studio lights streaking his vision. Is this it? Is this the end?

He sees glimpses of the crowd, booing, cheering, screaming - ALL IN SLOW MOTION.

And in the very back of the rafters, a YOUNG BLACK BOY with his MOM.

We cut TIGHT on this boy, whose eyes say it all:

*Don't give up. Keep fighting.*

T explodes out of the hold and starts pummeling Tufi.

The Hawaiian doesn't even know what hit him.

MR. T  
My name ain't boy.

THWAP!

MR. T (CONT'D)  
It's Mr. T.

ROUND HOUSE KICK!

MR. T (CONT'D)  
First name: Mister.

TWO UPPERCUTS.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
Middle name: Period.

A FURIOUS LEFT HOOK.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
Last name --

A POWERFUL BODY BLOW.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
T!

And with that, Tufi falls back, lands just outside the ring.

ANNOUNCER #1 (O.S.)  
Holy moly! Mr. T wins. Mr. T wins!

The crowd goes wild at the come-from-behind finish.

T raises his fist.

He is now officially the World's Toughest Bouncer.

A swarm of cameramen, fans, well-wishers, and others flock to the champ. He is adored.

In the background, we see Calvin. He's happy for his friend. Tries to congratulate him but can't make it past the throng.

And a knowing look spreads on his face.

This is the last time they'll be on even ground. The last time as equals: two black men from the Chicago projects making a name for themselves.

For T has begun his ascent into the stratosphere.

FADE OUT.

**OVER BLACK.**

Sounds of a cafeteria.

FADE IN:

**INT. HOSPITAL - PEDIATRIC CANCER WARD - DAY**

A dozen kids eat lunch. A humdrum day.

Until a set of double doors explode open, producing a hero.

He's wearing his famous attire: combat boots, tuxedo pants, leather vest, gold chains, feathered earrings, mohawk.

The kids scream with ecstatic joy at T.

He hugs and high fives them.

MR. T  
I missed you too.

KIDS  
You won! You won!

MR. T  
Couldn't have done it without you.  
All of you.

The kids cheer.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
And I sure hope that you've been  
training as hard as me. I'm gonna  
need to see some serious progress  
on yall's dance moves. No half  
steppin' or I'm gonna be royally  
PO'd. Now whose got some fresh  
steps to show me.

A kid eagerly raises his hand.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
Go on!

The kid shows T his dance moves. It's less than stellar.

Regardless, T applauds vigorously.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
That's what I'm talking about.  
Putting James Brown to shame! With  
a little confidence, you can do  
anything! You can do everything!

CHLOE (O.S.)  
Easy for you to say.

T turns around to find Chloe. The skeptic. The one who sees through his inspirational act.

CHLOE (CONT'D)  
You're Mr. T.  
(not impressed)  
(MORE)

CHLOE (CONT'D)  
World's Toughest Bouncer.  
(resigned)  
We got nothing. No chains, no  
boots, no mohawk. No chance.  
(beat)  
Nothing.

T takes this in. And it's a lot.

Half of Chicago has tried to beat him up but this 13-year old girl with Hodgkins Lymphoma lands the hardest punch:

Right in his heart.

And he knows what he has to do.

He kneels down, right in front of Chloe, inches from her small pale face.

MR. T  
You're absolutely right.  
(beat)  
I wear this armor to *protect*  
myself. To *project* myself.  
(a long beat)  
But these chains don't make me.

T takes off a chain and puts it over Chloe's head.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
They don't speak for me.

He puts a chain on another kid.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
They don't define me.

Another head, another chain.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
They aren't the whole story.

He takes off all his chains. And one by one places them on the heads of the children.

MR. T (CONT'D)  
Because even without the chains --

**INT. BATHROOM - A LITTLE LATER**

T looks in the mirror. Trembling.

MR. T (V.O.)  
Even without the boots.

T brings the buzzer into frame.

MR. T (V.O.)  
Even without the swagger.

**EXT. BATHROOM - SAME**

The sick kids, now all wearing multiple chains, have their ear to the door.

QUICK CUT TO:

**INT. BATHROOM - FLASHBACK**

*Lawrence Tureaud, all of 11 years old, his eyes closed while his Mom cuts his hair.*

*Could he ever imagine what he would become?*

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. BATHROOM - PRESENT DAY**

His eyes closed. He opens them.

And takes a buzzer right to the top of his mohawk, not even an inch away.

Will he lose his power once his hair is gone? Will it change his world?

A deep breath.

And then he drags the clippers over his head.

MR. T (V.O.)  
Even without the hair.

T is now bald.

We push in closer on his face, seeing all of it: The resolve, the determination, the fight, the compassion.

MR. T (V.O.)  
I am still --

He looks right at us. With intensity. Ferocity.

MR. T

Mr. T.

And then: a hint of that smile.

CUT TO BLACK.

Bill Wither's "Lean on Me" starts to play.

We see footage of the real Mr. T as Clubber Lang in Rocky 3.

**CARD: AFTER WINNING "WORLD'S TOUGHEST BOUNCER," MR. T BECAME A FILM AND TV STAR OF INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM.**

We see footage of Mr. T as B.A. Baracus in the A-Team. We see footage from the classic 80's PSA "Be Somebody or Be Somebody's Fool." Mr. T wrestles Hulk Hogan at Wrestlemania.

**CARD: IN 1995, Mr. T WAS DIAGNOSED WITH T-CELL LYMPHOMA, A FORMIDABLE FOE.**

We see footage of T in the hospital. Surrounded by kids, rooting for their hero to overcome the disease.

**CARD: BUT IT WAS NO MATCH FOR HIM. SINCE BEATING THE DISEASE, MR. T CONTINUES TO INSPIRE COUNTLESS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WITH HIS FAITH, HUMOR, AND HUMILITY.**

We see Mr. T with a bunch of cancer survivors.

**CARD: HE DID, HOWEVER, GROW BACK THE MOHAWK.**

And now the real Mr. T.

In his late 60's. And still every bit as amazing.

We push in on him as he smiles that classic smile.

FADE TO BLACK.