

BEAUTY SHOP

by
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MUSIC UP

FLASH of QUICK DISSOLVES: a little GIRL'S hands, coffee-colored, slowly braid hair, pulling unruly, nappy strands into neat rows, securing them with brightly colored plastic bobbles. The hands DISSOLVE into a TEENAGER'S hands, working a flat iron, pressing sections that curl in careful waves...

TITLES UP

...the hands DISSOLVE into a WOMAN'S hands, a simple gold wedding band, bracelets. They move quickly now, lightening speed, expert as they weave in strands of long hair to short, broken ends.

RADIO FADES UP as the hands DISSOLVE again. The ring is still there, the professional quickness. Only now the hair they work is BLOND and long, smoothed out into a silken sheet.

RADIO

(female DJ)

...another my heart's been broke
ballad from Justin. She was a
virgin, Justin. How freaky could
THAT have been? You need to get
with some honeys that have been
around. Show you how to turn it
out!

We PULL BACK to reveal GINA MORRIS, whose hands we've been watching. Gina smiles, shakes her head at the radio. There's a sexy, playful spark to her...and behind that a kind of innate wisdom.

The blond she's been working on is seated in plush, back alcove at JORGE CRISTOPHE'S upscale salon. Gina works with her own little radio playing next to her, the rest of the shop is pumping Enya. Next to the radio is a framed PHOTOGRAPH of Gina at her SISTER'S Beauty Shop in Chicago: the whole crew, plus Calvin, posing for a neighborhood shot.

Past her, we can see the salon. It's softly lit, flowers, mirrors and gold trim everywhere. White women are in various stages of getting their hair done, one with her head back in a sink, another covered in foils; a diamond collared chihuahua barks incessantly at the blow dryer being used on her OWNER. The STYLIST just grins, icily, and tries to ignore it. Evian bottles and Cappuccinos are evident next to each well-pampered client. Gina is the only black hairstylist (or patron) in the place.

RADIO

(continuing)

Besides, you wanna sing like a
black man? You better kick those
little white girls to the curb,
Mr. Heart-throb-

GINA

Oh, no, she didn't! She did NOT go there!

LYNN, (20's) is a wash girl at Jorge's; Georgia-born, a country girl, her accent is so thick NO ONE can understand her except Gina.

LYNN

She did! Oh, she went there, around the block... and back again!

RADIO

...you all know that's the biggest play out there. "My heart's broken. Come here and hold ma dick!"

Gina laughs out loud. Lynn doubles over. JOANNE MARCUS, the blond, society girl (early 20's) Gina's been working on, raises her head. Joanne is a Paris Hilton wannabe: a young Louis Vuitton sales rep with society aspirations and quasi-celebrity friends.

JOANNE

Did she just say what I THINK she said?

Joanne grabs her cell-phone, dials a number.

GINA

See, that's my GIRL! Lisa L. Z103. Nobody back in Chicago'd go off like this. She doesn't hold back.

LYNN

Mmm-Hmmmm. That woman has the guts to say whatever she thinks-

GINA

Right?

JOANNE

(into phone)

Nicole, Doesn't your father OWN that station, that rap-whatever one? Can you say 'dick' on the radio? Really?... I'm at Jorge's... When? He's DJing? I can't go...shit! No, I'm getting my implants done-

GINA

No, no. Joanne, don't do that-

JOANNE

Dr. Kopelin says a week to recover...yeah. He's loading me up with vicodin. Sure. I'll get extra. Yeah, I'll see you.

She hangs up.

GINA

Don't do it, girl. Don't get implants. You're a young, beautiful girl-

JOANNE

Look at YOU!

GINA

(sticking her chest out)

These are one hundred percent authentic, okay? Mind you, I LIKE having some cleavage, but I've seen too many girls with those fake, rock-hard titties that don't look right. One of them ends up moving to your neck, or it starts floating around to the back-

JOANNE

(cracking up)

Stop! Get OUT!

Joanne stands up, shakes her head and turns to look in the mirror. She gasps, both hands over her mouth. Her hair has been blown out, pressed into a sleek Japanese sheet of hair. She shakes her head, loving it.

JOANNE

(continuing)

Oh my God! GINA!

Gina smiles, proudly, making a few final adjustments to the hair. Other stylists in the front are peering in. JORGE CRISTOPHE, the long-haired salon owner, gets up from his seat in front. He thinks he's a black Jose Eber, Warren Beatty in Shampoo. He's an arrogant sell-out, a womanizing star. He glances in on Gina, just a quick look, but it burns with a muted jealousy.

JOANNE

(continuing)

I've never had anyone get this cut and the extensions just right. That stuff of yours is amazing...and believe me, I've tried everything.

Gina grins.

GINA

That's an old family recipe that I've messed with a little. All I'm gonna say is there's Avocado oil and a little bacon fat in the mix.

Outside, we see a Jaguar pull up. The valet opens the door for a Donna Karan-clad society wife, TERRI GREEN (mid 30's's). She fumbles for the keys, almost drops them. She smiles, embarrassed, slips a ten dollar bill to the valet.

Jorge stands at the door, waiting. He puts an arm around Terri, whispers something in her ear, smiling, charming her as he leads her to the back, pressing close.

JORGE

(to Gina)

Terri's here...

GINA

(under her
breath)

Jorge, I have to leave at four. I need to pick Valerie up from school-

Jorge gives her a cold shrug.

JORGE

What can I do? She wanted you...

His diction is perfect; his charming, sexy attitude dissolves around Gina. Gina takes a deep breath, trying to keep it together.

TERRI

Gina !

She turns to Terri. Takes a beat and smiles, genuinely glad to see her.

GINA

Terri! My girl!

TERRI

I just had the most AMAZING chakra treatment. Gina, I have to take you to see my healer.

Lynn hands her an Evian and a robe. She immediately pulls out a massive vial of pills and downs a couple. Smiles apologetically.

TERRI
 (continuing)
 It's not...what it looks like.
 They're herbal anti-toxins.

GINA
 I'll be right with you, Terri.
 Just relax.

Gina picks up her cell phone and dials, trying to keep it together.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Aunt Paulette? I need a favor.
 Yeah. I'm not getting outa here
 'till late-

Terri is gazing at Joanne's hair.

TERRI
 Joanne! You look gorgeous!
 (to Gina)
 That is beautiful!

Joanne smiles, can't take her eyes off herself.

JOANNE
 (to Gina)
 I got to run...
 (to Terri)
 I got your bag in. Come by the
 store tomorrow?

She flashes Terri a dazzling smile and spins out. Jorge pulls Gina aside:

JORGE
 (out of earshot)
 What did you do to Joanne Marcus's
 hi-lites? It's WHITE blond! I told
 you, CARMEL highlights-

GINA
 (to Jorge)
 Hey, she asked for that. She likes
 it.

JORGE
 She's going to a trade show at
 Saks with "Jorge" hair, do you
 understand?

GINA

Yeah, you want her to represent.
But I gotta say, I think the ultra-
blond is very Versace, very Gwen
Stefani-

JORGE

Don't question me, girl. You're
here to carry out my vision, you
understand?

Gina turns, eyebrows raised, to give him a LOOK, but he's
turned to leave. As he does, he reaches back and shuts off
her radio.

JORGE

(continuing)

I told you I don't want that
ghetto shit in here.

He spins and walks out, his distinctive, LONG HAIR tossed
back.

LYNN

Pay him NO mind...

Gina looks at her, nods, appreciating the solidarity. She's
so furious she can barely speak.

GINA

(aside, to Lynn)

Hey. I FEEL for him. Who was his
last big client? Jane Fonda?

Lynn cracks up.

LYNN

He's all hat and no cattle.

GINA

"All hat and no cattle." I like
that.

TERRI

Gina? Did you bring the stuff?

Gina reaches into a drawer and pulls out a jelly jar filled
with some kind of opaque goo.

GINA

You know I did...

TERRI

Thank god!

GINA

Look at you! You look gorgeous.

TERRI
Liar. But, bless you.

Gina starts on Terri, wetting her hair and slathering the goop from her jar on.

TERRI
(continuing)
I swear, the best thing Jorge ever did was to give you a chair here...what, about a year ago?

GINA
Moved from Chicago just six months ago-

TERRI
Is that all?

GINA
-six LONG months.

Gina laughs.

TERRI
How's your daughter? Where does she go again?

GINA
Atlanta Music and Art Children's school.

TERRI
You have to audition for that, right?

GINA
One out of three hundred kids who audition get in. We moved here as soon as we heard she got in-

Jorge sticks his head back in.

JORGE
Gina. Don't forget I need you in early. In Style magazine is doing a piece on the salon and we have three models to style-

Gina doesn't respond, just nods in a muted rage.

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S HOUSE - CASCADE ROW, "SWATS" - NIGHT

Gina is standing in her kitchen, food cooking on the stove while she does her AUNT PAULETTE'S hair. Aunt Paulette is a young, fifty-something, sharp and stylish.

DARNELLE, (25) Gina's cousin, a buck-wild party girl, sits to one side, looking out the window, clearly waiting for someone or something: NOT wanting to be here with her mother. VALERIE, Gina's nine year old daughter, is sitting on the floor, reading a giant tome: HISTORY OF MUSIC. They are mid conversation.

GINA

(going off)

He's just mad as hell that there's ANOTHER talented, black person in his universe. Not that HE'S all that talented. It kills him when ladies ASK for me.

PAULETTE

I don't know how you do it.

GINA

How I do it is... I do it for HER.
(re: Valerie)

PAULETTE

I know that school is not cheap.

GINA

What he's GOOD at is making a girl feel special, like you got IN somewhere there was a line. You walk out of there looking fly, looking DONE UP.

AUNT PAULETTE

YOU'RE the one making him look good.

DARNELLE

You gettin' robbed, Gina.

GINA

Trust me, when I open MY spot, I'm gonna be glad I worked there. I learned a thing or two from Jorge. That's what I want. The kind of place you go in, you feel pampered, taken care of-

PAULETTE

Girl's got to LOVE that.

GINA

-and then the next step is you have your own line of products. That's where he's not thinking ahead. I'm gonna develop a line of high quality boutique-

PAULETTE

-expensive-

GINA

-hair products with my name on them. Okay? Everything represents the experience you had there...your experience becomes the brand.

DARNELLE

And you make a cute paycheck from selling those products-

PAULETTE

And what would YOU know about a "cute" paycheck?

DARNELLE

-I'm getting taken care of-

PAULETTE

Yeah. That's the problem right there-

Valerie looks up from her book.

VALERIE

What's a "novelty act?"

They all look at her.

PAULETTE

It's...an act that's different. Fun.

VALERIE

It says here, before the forties, all the women who were musicians were novelty acts.

GINA

That means they weren't taken seriously.

Valerie nods. Gina and Aunt Paulette exchange a LOOK. The kid can be WAY too serious.

VALERIE

All the great composers were men.
Beethoven, Bach, Mozart.

She looks up at Gina with a vaguely pained expression.

VALERIE

(continuing)

Where were the girls?

GINA

Having babies. Doin' Mozart and
Bach's laundry.

VALERIE

There were no kids like me?

PAULETTE

Sugar, there STILL are no kids
like you-

GINA

Girls like you grew up and married
Mozart and Bach and got their
ideas stolen while they were
pushing out babies.

PAULETTE

So, take a lesson from your Mama
and always represent YOURSELF.

GINA

Not many men out there like your
Daddy was. Respectful, supportive-

Valerie sighs, puts her book down.

VALERIE

Can we go?

GINA

In a minute.

Gina turns Paulette around, motions to her hair. She's
cropped it in a short, elegant do.

GINA

(continuing; to
Valerie)

What d'you think?

VALERIE

(very serious)

It's a little bit too Halle Berry
at the Oscars.

Gina nods.

GINA

But it works for her?

VALERIE

Definitely.

Paulette gets up, looks in the mirror and smiles.

PAULETTE

Perfect! I LOVE it!

She pulls a set of keys out of her bag.

PAULETTE

(continuing; to Gina)

Here the church keys, baby. I'll see you later.

Gina gives her a big hug.

GINA

Thanks, Auntie. I appreciate you letting Valerie practice there.

Outside, we see a tricked out Chevy pull up. A bandanna'd, GANGSTA-type at the wheel. Darnelle jumps up out of her chair, checks herself in the mirror, tugging at a skin-tight mini and top.

PAULETTE

Got to be proud of SOMEONE.

Darnelle sighs, ignoring her mother: she's used to these pointed remarks.

GINA

(aside; to Darnelle)

That's your date?

DARNELLE

Mm-Hmm.

GINA

Cuz. Home-boy looks like a world of trouble.

DARNELLE

(out of Paulette's earshot)

That boy is feeling it, okay? And he's got bank, and we're goin' OUT.

GINA

You are crazy, girl.

DARNELLE
He's got a friend, Gina. Fine
looking young man-

Gina glances down at Valerie, who's listening.

GINA
You better GO, Darnelle.

Aunt Paulette shakes her head, furious, as she watches Darnelle wave good-bye and climb into the Chevy. Valerie stares at her mother.

GINA
(continuing)
Get your things. You've got an
hour to practice before dinner...

CUT TO:

INT. AME CHURCH - NIGHT

Church is empty. Valerie has started to play: warming up with scales and then launching into a Mozart sonata. She is shockingly good. Gina can't help but smile, gaze at her proudly. She sips on a cold soda and sits down next to her daughter on the piano bench, moved and captured by her playing.

VALERIE
(still playing)
Are you gonna start 'dating' and
all?

GINA
What gave you that idea?

VALERIE
In sex ed, they said all mammals
have sexual needs-

GINA
Except your Mama-

VALERIE
-and mating rituals.

GINA
You wanna talk about sex? Fine.
Ask me anything. But you do NOT
need to know about my...social
life.

She gives her a wink. Valerie starts playing again, her brow furrowed as she concentrates. Something is bothering her.

GINA

(continuing; gently)

I don't think I'm ready to date,
Valerie.

(a beat)

No one's EVER gonna replace your
Daddy. Okay?

OFF Valerie's quick, grateful glance, we-

INT. JORGE CRISTOPHE'S - DAY

Lynn and Gina are in the back, the radio on. Lynn is showing
Gina polaroids from a recent hair show.

GINA

YOU did that?

LYNN

Uh huh. Did a weave in front,
curled the back and laid in these
corkscrew extensions-

WE can't understand a thing she says but Gina seems to,
nodding and looking at the pictures.

GINA

You should get a chair here, Lynn.

LYNN

You think the Captain ovah there
would let my backwoods ass near
these ladies-

GINA

I'monna talk to him-

Behind them we can see a crew setting up to do the In Style
shoot. Gina picks up her apron and puts it on.

CUT TO:

INT. JORGE CRISTOPHE'S - LATER

A gorgeous, coltish MODEL is sitting on a plush fur draped
couch, decked out head to toe in YSL. Gina is styling his
hair, putting in soft layers around a fabulous, upsweep
creation. Next to her, Jorge works on another model. The In
Style fashion EDITOR glances at Jorge's work and then zeros
in on Gina's model.

EDITOR

I LOVE this.

Jorge hovers behind her, arms crossed, watching.

EDITOR

(continuing)

Jorge? I want to shoot this. Right here, in the chair. We can get the whole salon in the background.

The photographer steps in, ready to take the shot.

EDITOR

(continuing; to Gina)

And you are-?

JORGE

She's just an employee. I've worked with her to develop-

GINA

(holding out a hand)

Gina Morris.

She smiles, proud.

PHOTOGRAPHER

Gina? Just look up for a second, put your hand down, yeah, there, just to the right of her shoulder... great!

Gina looks up, scissors in hand, ready to smile for the camera, when Jorge steps in and takes the scissors from her, shaking his head. He makes a little scooting motion with his hands. The Editor and Photographer exchange a LOOK.

GINA

(slowly)

You don't want me in the picture.

JORGE

(like he's talking to a child)

Gina. This is a piece about MY shop-

GINA

(calmly)

But that's MY look. I just cut her hair AND styled it-

JORGE

(whispered)

AND you wouldn't be doing shit if I hadn't hired you.

Gina takes a deep breath, trying not to lose it, but wanting to hold her ground.

GINA

Hold on, hold on. I appreciate working here and all, but that's my creation. I'm just asking you to show me some respect -

JORGE

The sign out front says Jorge Cristophe's. Okay? You want respect? Go open your place.

Gina stares at him. Slowly unties her apron.

GINA

You know what? I can't do this anymore. Forget it.

There's dead silence in the room.

GINA

(continuing)

I AM gonna open my own place. And that's something your NOT gonna take credit for, 'cause I've BEEN making plans for a long time.

JORGE

Is that right?

GINA

That's right. YOU'RE the creative genius, go style your own shit for once.

She drops her apron on a chair.

GINA

(continuing; calmly)

I quit.

She turns and walks away, pushes the door open, lets it slam behind her.

JORGE

What do you know? You don't KNOW ANYTHING!!!

(shouting)

You're gonna fall flat on your ass, Gina!

When the camera FLASHES, he whips out a veneered, toothy smile... just in time.

EXT. JORGE CRISTOPHE'S - CONTINUING

OFF GINA, standing alone just OUTSIDE the shop, everyone looking after her. She freezes, shutting her eyes for a beat.

The weight of the moment hits her...and then her face opens up into a dazzling smile, the world suddenly opening up before her as she struts off with a Hell-With-That look on her face.

INT. GINA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The light is dim as Gina sits in front of her computer, poring over internet real estate listings. She looks at the clock. It's two fifteen AM. The radio is on softly, just music. Gina glances at a picture of RED, her husband; looks back at the computer.

She peers closely at the screen, as a list pops up:

GINA
(reading)
The CLIP JOINT... D-LUX
BEAUTY...The BEAUTY CALL? BOOTY
SHOP?

She laughs, shaking her head.

GINA
(continuing)
Dang. People get crazy with these
names-

She makes a note of something, doesn't notice Valerie standing in the doorway, in her nightgown, rubbing her eyes.

VALERIE
Mama?

GINA
Hey, Baby. What're you doin' up?

She turns the radio down.

VALERIE
I can't sleep.

She comes over to Gina and leans onto her lap.

GINA
You gotto try, you got school
tomorrow.

VALERIE
What are you doing?

She peers at the computer.

GINA
Reseaching real estate and
business agents. I'm gonna buy up
a beauty shop, baby girl.

VALERIE

Really?

GINA

Our own business. Look...I did a search on all the up and coming neighborhoods. See? I got a list of four shops already up for sale.

She shows Valerie another stack of papers.

GINA

(continuing)

And here's a business prospectus. I did a relevant comparison with businesses in various areas...projected an initial profit and loss based on a six chair enterprise, mid-range-

Valerie eyes glaze over. She stares at the computer.

VALERIE

Am I gonna have to leave Music School now?

Gina looks at her.

GINA

Why would you have to leave music school? That's the whole reason we picked up and moved here-

VALERIE

You lost your job, Mama.

GINA

I quit, okay? I quit for something better.

VALERIE

But what if you can't make the same kind of money at your own shop?

From Gina's LOOK, we know she's been worrying about the same thing; she takes a beat, smiles, plays it off for her daughter.

GINA

Valerie. You have only ONE thing to think about. School. Money is not your problem, okay? I got that covered.

Valerie nods.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Haven't we been okay?

Valerie yawns, nodding.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Go back to sleep. Stop thinking so
 much.

She gives her a big squeeze and a hug. Gina watches the door shut behind her, then peers at the screen again.

GINA
 (continuing; reading)
 "Cleopatra's Cute Cornrows and
 Cuts."

She smiles, shakes her head.

GINA
 (continuing)
 We'll skip that one...

CUT TO:

INT. BUCKHEAD BEAUTY SALON - ATLANTA

Gina holds Valerie's hand as a business agent walks them through a posh, spare and modern shop. It's all chrome and lucite. The clients are all upscale, white women. The hairstylists are too perfect, girls with fashion model looks. Gina stops to look at a bottle of the shops' own special, hair treatment. She examines the label and packaging with a critical, interested eye.

VALERIE
 It's very CLEAN. What do you think?

Gina turns the bottle over. Double-takes at the price.

GINA
 (shaking her head)
 Honey, we can't even afford their
 conditioner. I'll never get a loan
 for this place. C'mon. Let's go-

SMASH CUT:

INT. BUCKHEAD SALON - DAY

Another gorgeous salon. Clients wait while stylists rush around, working and talking. Everything is red velour, gold trim. Gina holds a folder with a description of the business and the building, plus the price. She reads it while they look around.

Glances down at Valerie, points to the asking price and shakes her head.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUBURN AVE. - "SWATS" - EVENING

Gina and Valerie are standing outside of KLASSI KUTS salon, a neighborhood beauty parlor, with a real estate/business AGENT. The current owner, MISS ANGELINE (70's African-American) is showing them around. It's a local crowd: a few older church ladies getting perms, some younger women, talking loud and laughing. A light-skinned, stately looking hairdresser, ASHLEY, eyes Gina, giving her a once-over. LOLA, the fiery Puerto Rican manicurist, exchanges a look with her. Gina nods to them: she gets it. They are sizing her up.

MISS ANGELINE

Twenty-three years I been here..

AGENT

You'll be inheriting a well established clientele...

MISS ANGELINE

...hard for me to say Good-bye but I got a double-wide waitin' fo' me in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. No more cold winters fo' me.

Gina looks back at the employees, again, catching the tension and curiosity in their exchanged looks. Lola steps up to her.

LOLA

Do hair?

GINA

Mmm-Hmmm.

LOLA

Where at?

GINA

Jorge Cristophe's. In Buckhead.

Lola snorts, impressed, but trying to hide it.

LOLA

So why you wanna buy this dump?

GINA

I got a plan. You see 'dump' I see potential.

Lola glares at her. Ashley, listening, comes over.

ASHLEY

Ooo. A visionary. How poetic.

GINA

(cool)

Poetic? Nah. Just smart.

She gives them a little nod, like, don't underestimate me, before turning back to the agent.

AGENT

I'm sure you've noticed how these couple of blocks are really changing...there's a Starbucks up on the corner, a GAP right down the block.

Gina looks at the cracked grout on a sink.

GINA

It's gonna take some fixing up.

AGENT

You're lucky to get in here at ghetto prices.

He looks at his listing.

AGENT

(continuing)

Twenty percent down...is gonna leave you with payments around twenty-two a month.

He holds the figures up to her. Gina looks at her own business plan. She looks around again, looks at Valerie and nods.

GINA

That sounds...like my number.

OFF GINA, grinning like crazy, we-

CUT TO:

INT. SOUTHERN MUTUAL SAVING AND LOAN - DAY

Gina sits across from a LOAN OFFICER, a woman in her forties who peers at her paperwork.

GINA

...I want to bring a little class to the neighborhood, let the ladies who come in feel a little special, a little Lenox Mall.

(more)

GINA (cont'd)

What I'm marketing here is an experience. Something absolutely unique and catering to the individual clients' needs. This neighborhood is turning a corner-

LOAN OFFICER

You do have a mark on your credit, you know. I don't think we can approve and fund a loan with-

GINA

Did you read my business prospectus? Letters of recommendation?

LOAN OFFICER

Impressive.

GINA

And the credit thing is only from back when my sister got her boyfriends' car in MY name and he was late on payments-

LOAN OFFICER

I can't approve this. Not for this much.

Gina leans back, eyes narrowed, looks at the woman.

GINA

(softly)

Watch me change your mind--
(reading her tag)
-Ms. Strugg.

LOAN OFFICER

I wish it was that easy-

Gina gets up, touches her hair.

GINA

This is NOT working for you.
You've got great bone structure.
The bangs are cutting off your face. You need hi-lites, not color.

A beat. Ms. Strugg stares at her.

GINA

(continuing)

You got a sink?

CUT TO:

INT. SOUTHERN MUTUAL SAVING AND LOAN - DAY - BATHROOM

Gina is doing Ms. Struggs hair. They've set up a mini parlor in front of the stalls. Ms. Strugg is teary eyed, mid-conversation.

MS. STRUGG

...everywhere in my life it's like that. I'm not good enough to be promoted here, Ralph doesn't want me cooking, says I ruin everything. It's like my whole self-esteem is just shot right now-

Gina hands her a tissue.

GINA

Remember what I said? If you want it, it's YOURS. You got to take it, make it happen! It's YOURS. Say it...this shit is MINE!

MS. STRUGG

Right, right...this shit is mine.

Gina spins her around, fluffs out her now-dry hair, and faces her to the mirror.

The woman staring back at her looks so different, Strugg gasps. Gina's done her make-up, too.

MS. STRUGG

(continuing)

I NEVER would have tried this-

GINA

See?

MS. STRUGG

...and it works! It's perfect!

Gina smiles.

MS. STRUGG

(continuing)

Oh, my God. You're a genius!

A beat while Gina watches her watching herself.

GINA

(calmly)

So. You think I'm gonna have ANY problem making my payments?

She smiles, a sly grin. KNOWS she's got her loan.

CUT TO:

EXT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP (KLASSI KUTS) - NIGHT

The shop is empty. Gina stands at the front door with the keys in her hand. She looks up and down the block. Across the street is a Radio Shack-type operation. There's a drugstore, barber shop and a mini-mart. Gina reads the code to the alarm, disables it and steps inside.

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - NIGHT

The lights are out. Gina stands alone in the dark, fiddling with the keys. She has the wide-eyed look of a kid at Christmastime. She flicks the dryers off and on, then tests out the sinks, spins the chairs...and smiles.

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - NIGHT

Gina is on a ladder, painting. Paulette is working on the opposite wall. Valerie stands below her, holding a paint tray: the old mirrors have been replaced, new sleek stainless steel counters put in.

Through the front window, we see a tricked out, bright red motorcycle pull up. Darnelle is straddling it. She struggles to park it, nearly falls over. Gina and Paulette exchange a LOOK.

GINA

I knew she'd show up.

PAULETTE

Three hours late!

Gina looks at her watch as Darnelle comes in.

DARNELLE

Gina. I'm sorry -

PAULETTE

Nice bike. Somebody buy that for you?

DARNELLE

It's P.J.'s. He LENT it to me.

Darnelle and Paulette exchange a quick glare, muted with unspoken hurt and resentment. Gina climbs down the ladder, excited, determined not to let these two get her down.

GINA

(to Paulette)

Gimme a hand with this.

Paulette helps Gina set up some glass-topped coffee tables; Darnelle kicks back and lights a cigarette. Gina leans over and turns up the radio. Music fills the air.

Gina stands back. Even half-way finished, we can see that the place is looking GOOD.

GINA
(continuing)
Look at this! Check it out!

She grins, proud.

GINA
(continuing)
Gina's Beauty Shop!

Paulette, feeling the excitement, holds out a fist. Gina taps it and they both howl.

PAULETTE
Girl! You're doing it!

VALERIE
I helped! I helped with the chairs!

GINA
Think about it. My OWN place. All of our peoples have always worked for someone else-

PAULETTE
-that's true.

GINA
-never get ahead that way. I'm tired of being someone's GIRL. Come on! I'm a grown-ass woman!

PAULETTE
Time for you to represent!

GINA
These girls are gonna come in for work tomorrow and they're gonna be blown away, you understand? They're gonna be thanking their lucky stars I bought the place...

OFF GINA, smiling, we-

SMASH CUT:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - MORNING

ANGLE ON: the HAIRSTYLISTS at Gina's new shop. They are staring at the uniforms that Gina (bursting with excitement) hands out and Lynn (from Jorge's) already has on. One of them holds up the pencil thin Versace-esque skirt and midriff top. (They're all in sweats and track shoes, comfortable, low-key ghetto.)

GIRL #1
A uniform?

GIRL #1
(continuing)
You want us to work with this shit
on?

GIRL #3
Forget this...

She grabs her bag, starts packing up her brushes and scissors. Girl #1 does the same, and Girl #2 follows.

Gina, dressed to the nines, polished and gorgeous, watches as they walk out. Besides Lynn, that leaves just Ashley and Lola.

GINA
O - kay...

Lynn winks at her.

LYNN
Better we find the rotten ones
now. Those're two eggs should
never been laid.

Lola and Ashley stare at her.

LOLA
Say WHAT?

ASHLEY
What'd she just say? I believe
that was english but I'm, frankly,
baffled-

Lynn speaks slowly and clearly.

LYNN
You ALL ARE LUCKY to work for
Gina.

GINA
(regaining her
momentum)
So...why don't you get changed-

The girls start wriggling into their uniforms. Ashley looks at herself in the mirror, seems half-way pleased. Lola looks pissed. Gina motions to Lynn, who does a little turn, modeling the outfit.

GINA

(continuing)

This is Lynn, everybody. She's gonna have a chair here. Just got her license but she's crazy talented. And you know I'm Gina.

She smiles, motioning around to the new decor

GINA

(continuing)

Nice, huh? We're gonna class this place up a little; things are gonna be different around here, okay?

LOLA

(under her breath)

I wanna hear THIS.

Gina doesn't catch it. She smiles, and goes over to the large chalkboard with prices marked for different services and starts to erase the amounts.

GINA

I'm gonna cut the prices -

Lola GROANS.

GINA

(continuing)

-to get more ladies in the door initially. THEN, once we generate some business, we can start raising them up.

She smiles at everyone. They stare at her, un-moved.

GINA

(continuing)

I'm sure you all have your routines here, but I'd like it if we sharpened things up. Okay? It's all about the look and the feel.

Ashley and Lola exchange a quick LOOK.

GINA

(continuing)

I'd like it if everyone could bring the client a water and offer them an espresso or cappuccino as soon as they step into their robes...

She holds up brand new black with gold trim bathrobes.

GINA

(continuing)

I'll show you all how to use the Cappuccino machine I set up in the kitchen. Okay? Also, no food on the new counters.

Lola is staring at Gina with obvious hostility at this point.

GINA

(continuing)

And last...I don't want no drama in here, okay? No boyfriends, sisters coming in having it out with you while you're at work here. Okay? So, you got a problem, you got something to say...you come to ME.

A beat.

LOLA

(under her breath)

Great. She wants a hi-class joint at ghetto prices. Figure THAT out.

Gina steps over to Lola, smiling.

GINA

You got something you wanna say? You can leave, too -

LOLA

(under her breath)

I can't afford to.

At that moment, Gina's first clients walk in: an exhausted looking MOTHER and her little girl. Behind her, an older woman, MRS. TOWNER, shuffles over to Ashley's chair.

Gina goes over to the mother and her little girl.

GINA

And how can I help you, Ma'am?

The woman looks around, a little uncomfortable.

WOMAN

Isn't this Miss Angeline's-

GINA

Gina's now. I'm Gina and whatever you need-

She pushes the little girl forward.

WOMAN

She need her first perm. Lookit this hair. Bad hair. Nappy as hell. That's from her Daddy's side.

Lynn stands waiting with a robe, not quite sure if a four year old needs one.

GINA

Lynn here can take care of you.

Gina winks at the little girl, who's clearly terrified. Lynn hesitates, then puts the robe on the child. She swims in it. Gina quickly rolls up the sleeves.

LOLA

What about her Evian? Aren't you gonna get her an Evian?

Gina looks at her long and hard.

GINA

No. I'm NOT. I'm gonna send YOU around the corner to get her a soda.

She pulls a couple of dollars out of her pocket.

GINA

(continuing; to
little girl)

What kind of soda do you like, sweetheart?

GIRL

Orange.

GINA

(to Lola)

One orange soda.

Lola gets up, rolls her eyes. Gina stops her.

GINA

(continuing)

EVERYONE who comes in here gets treated with respect, okay? They're paying...we're working.

Gina leads the little girl over to Lynn's chair.

She glances over just in time to see Mrs. Towner pop out her false teeth and lay them in a glass by the mirrors. Gina shudders, but nods and smiles at her.

ASHLEY
(screaming)
SAME THING, MIZ TOWNER?

MRS. TOWNER
Don' give me no Afro, girl. Jus'
keep my curls tight and neat-

Ashley nods, gets started. Gina steps over to turn the radio on and notices a slight flickering in the lights. She frowns, looks down at the outlets: they're old and the wiring is worn thin.

GINA
Damn. Got to replace that...

She gets up as the door swings open and DENISE and ROCHELLE step in: the wives of basketball players, they've moved on uptown, but still have family in the old neighborhood. They check themselves in the mirrors while they talk. Mmm-Hmm. Glossy lips, big jewelry, fine skin. Everything is DONE: the latest Prada, Gucci, Chanel. It's ALL there and they know it.

ROCHELLE
Oooo! Where am I?

DENISE
This ain't no Miss Angeline's.

ROCHELLE
Now I know I still got my buzz on
from last night!

They laugh, hi-five.

DENISE
That was a party, girrrl.

Lynn steps over to Gina, whispers.

LYNN
(quietly)
You know them girls? Players
wives. Hawks. I seen them around.

She whispers a name in Gina's ear.

GINA
Really? That's HIS wife?

Lynn whispers another name.

GINA
(continuing)
He's a damn good player.

She looks Denise up and down.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Home girls did good. Got
 themselves ball players.

She and Lynn exchange a smile. They KNOW these kind of girls.
 Gina steps over with robes and water.

DENISE
 Oh, that's okay. We get our hair
 done at 'Aspire.'

GINA
 I know that joint. Classy place at
 Peachtree mall.

ROCHELLE
 We were jus' givin' a shout to her
 Aunt Linda, lives down the block-

DENISE
 -thought she might be in here,
 gettin' her hair done.

Gina motions for them to sit.

GINA
 Lemme just put a little shine back
 in your hair. You don't like it,
 you don't have to pay.

The women exchange a look: why not? They jump right back into
 their conversation.

DENISE
 Ricky's wife had a drink in her
 hand steppin' outa the car-

ROCHELLE
 When does she NOT have a drink in
 her hand?

The girls keep talking as Gina slips on their robes; they're
 used to being taken care of.

DENISE
 And she wonders why her man
 doesn't come home after games.

ROCHELLE
 Mmm-Hmm. She steps out with a crew
 every night. She's rolling like
 that.

GINA
 Sounds like you ladies partied
 last night?

ROCHELLE
New York. Just got back in.

DENISE
Dinner at Nobu. Then out to
Cheetah.

GINA
Well lemme take an edge off that
jet lag.

Lola comes in, drops the orange soda on the little girls lap.
Rochelle recognizes her.

ROCHELLE
Lola? You always did my nails when
I was down here!

LOLA
Hey, Rochelle. What're you doing
back in the 'hood?

ROCHELLE
Just seein' family.

LOLA
Lemme do your nails.

Lola leads her to the manicure station. Rochelle holds up a
hand, letting Lola gaze at a fat, yellow diamond. One of many.

LOLA
(continuing)
Dang! You need some muscle walkin'
around here with that on!

ROCHELLE
My man gave that to me last week.

LOLA
What happened? What he do?

Rochelle gives Lola a playful slap. Denise turns to her as
well.

DENISE
No. REALLY. I been wanting to ask.
What DID happen?

ROCHELLE
Please. My husband is just a very
generous man.

Lola and Denise exchange a LOOK.

ROCHELLE
 (continuing)
 You all are EVIL.

Gina turns to Denise.

GINA
 (to Denise)
 I'm gonna deep condition this,
 okay?

Denise nods, sits down in Gina's chair.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Can I get you coffee? Cappuccino?

LOLA
 (under her breath)
 Cappuccino? Why'd they need a
 Cappuccino? She can go get them a
 Coke next door.

DENISE
 I'm good, I'm good.

Gina pulls out a jar of her Special Sauce and opens it up.

DENISE
 (continuing)
 What is THAT?

Gina smiles.

GINA
 My secret weapon.

Denise looks nervous.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Trust me. Okay? You gonna be at
 the game tonight, right? Forget
 the three-pointers, YOU are gonna
 stand out-

CUT TO:

INT. JORGE CRISTOPHE'S - DAY

Jorge is working in the back alcove with another STYLIST. He takes a quick glance at Gina's empty chair, then back to his CLIENT.

JORGE
 (to client)
 Let's wash you out...

He looks around.

JORGE
(continuing)
Where is...what's-her-name, the
wash-girl back here?

STYLIST
Lynn? Lynn went to work at Gina's
new shop.

We see this REGISTER with Jorge: a quick flash of resentment.

JORGE
(playing it off)
GINA'S new shop? That was quick.

He walks the client over to the wash sink.

JORGE
(continuing; under
his breath)
...didn't waste ANY time...

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

The radio is on. Lola is still working on Rochelle. Ashley is styling Mrs. Towner while the little girl fidgets in Lynn's chair. Two YOUNG WOMEN have come in, and they wait on Gina's couch. Gina spots them, picks up her speed a notch.

RADIO
...that's the thing. Tell me you
don't all have more respect for a
stubborn man, a man with a little
mean to him-

CLOSE ON: Denise's hair as Gina finishes it up. She's styled it and softened the whole thing.

ASHLEY
That's insane. She's confusing
stubbornness with self-respect.

LOLA
But a man who knows hisself is
gonna be hard-headed.

Denise's hair shines, silky, full of body.

ASHLEY
It's ignorant. She's-

GINA
-just a DJ playing music. Okay? I
love her. Woman speaks her mind...

Denise looks in the mirror, stares at herself. Clutches her bag.

RADIO

I'll let you think about that
while I hit you with this jam from
Ludakris.

MUSIC in BACKGROUND.

DENISE

(dramatic whisper)

Gina. Girl. You are amazing.

(shouting)

Rochelle?! ROCHELLE!!!

Rochelle, still getting her nails done, looks at Denise, double-takes and jumps over.

ROCHELLE

Oh my God. Lookit that hair! Is
that a wig?

DENISE

That's MY HAIR!!!

ROCHELLE

No! Stop! That's your HAIR!?

Rochelle turns an admiring eye to Gina.

ROCHELLE

(continuing)

Girl. I am booking you! When can
I get in?

GINA

Tomorrow? Ten AM?

ROCHELLE

Make it twelve. I'll be there.

As Gina sits down, working at lightening speed, The door swings open and the Catfish Lady, RITA, comes in with her cart of food. She's a heavy-set sister with DONE hair and bright clothes. Everyone greets her, shouts their HEYS and ABOUT TIMES.

RITA

(looking around)

What happened heah? Ivanah Trump
move in?

Howls of laughter.

CATFISH LADY

You got Ted Turner investing up in here? What? He foolin' around with a black girl? Want her to have a nice place to get her weave?

More laughter. Gina smiles at Rita.

GINA

What're you selling here -?

Rita takes her hands.

RITA

For you, baby, anything. Look at you! You're fabulous! You're breathing life in here! It's brilliant!

GINA

Thank you. Listen, if you want to set up food, you can go in the kitchen-

She's drowned out as the everyone starts shouting out orders: Lola, Ashley, Denise and Rochelle shout it out, throw their money down. Rita starts handing out heaping plates of greasy food. Everyone starts eating and talking at once. Energy is building, everyone is louder, getting comfortable. Lynn is the only one who waits. Gina gives her a little nod, a go ahead, and she gets a plate, keeps it on her lap.

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - EVENING

The place is a mess, everyone is gone. Gina stands alone, counting her money, looking around. Despite the rocky start, she's proud, smiling. She turns the music up and starts to clean...

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

The next day. The shop is sparkling clean. Lola and Ashley are both working while Lynn works the register and phone. Rita comes in with her food, and after her, TWO NEW WOMEN from the neighborhood. Rochelle is now seated at Gina's chair, getting HER hair done. Denise watches. Everyone grabs food from Rita, talking over the music on the radio. The song segues back to the DJ.

RADIO

(female DJ)

I heard something about Ludakris
and Lil' Kim. Now what would their
baby look like?

Rita laughs loudly. The others REACT, too. Gina smiles,
nodding.

RADIO

(continuing)

I can't stand all this talk about
Lil' Kim being like Pamela
Anderson. C'mon, now. Think about.
She got on wigs of every shape and
size, spike heels, fake eyelashes
for days. She's no Pamela
Anderson...

DENISE

Thas' right. Lil' Kim is my girl!
She's no Malibu Baywatch bunny.

RADIO

(DJ)

She's the next RuPaul!

Everybody cracks up.

LOLA

Mami is crazy!

RADIO

Seriously. Lil' Kim ain't trying
to be white...she's trying to be
a drag queen.

Everyone is reacts, laughing, talking.

DENISE

That Lisa L doesn't play!

ASHLEY

Lil' Kim is a girl from the
ghetto, trying to impress upon
everyone that she can go as far as
she wants now. I don't think it's
a statement about sexuality so
much as it is a statement about
money-

GINA

I think you all are missing her
HUMOR. C'mon. Biggie Smalls
brought her up from Brooklyn and
now she's just being as over done
as she can. Barbie doll style-

Everyone nods, says their piece. Gina is working as fast as she can, motioning to one of the waiting women to sit in her chair. She starts on the her, while still finishing Rochelle.

Rita's taken a chair and talks loudly over the radio to anyone who'll listen.

RITA

You like the peas? I did 'em up
with some brown sugar and curry
today...

In the middle of it all, the door swings open and a TEEN AGE BOY (eighteen, string-bean wiry and hyper) blasts through, a huge boom box pounding out an old school sounding rap. He does a spin, nearly falling over from the weight of the boom box; he lands in front of Gina, a finger pointed at her.

WILLIE

YOU! I've been watching you all
morning! My beautiful African
Goddess, YOU are gonna be in my
new video-

ASHLEY

Hey, Will.

LOLA

How you doin' Willie?

He turns it UP.

WILLIE

(shouting; to Gina)
You LIKE it? It's old school,
Krylon on the walls, Rock Steady
crew on the block, Sugar Hill gang
up on Clayton Powell Ave-

Gina reaches over and turns the music off-

GINA

You better watch yourself kid,
that thing weighs more than you;
gonna tip yourself over-

WILLIE

You like it? I want you IN it,
Honey Love! That's the latest
joint from Funkmaster W-

GINA

Okay, Funkmaster. Why don't you
take your music, go home and ask
your Mama to show you how to talk
to a lady.

(more)

GINA (cont'd)

That WAS your Mama I saw drop you
off at House of Stereo this
morning?

Ashley and Lola crack up. Willie falls to his knees in front
of Gina, undeterred. She steps back, surprised. This boy is
persistent.

WILLIE

Wait, wait, wait! Here me out.
That's just my day job. I seen you
and all I could think was, I have
to have her in my video-

GINA

C'mon, Funkmaster.

She starts leading him to the door.

GINA

(continuing)

I got grown-ups to deal with.

WILLIE

Wait! Wait! My Queen-

GINA

Queen? I like THAT. That's better-

She keeps pushing him.

WILLIE

Lemme at least hook you up with a
stereo. I can get you a leather
cased, chrome edged system in
these corners, sub-woofers half-
price-

GINA

Baby, you got the whole Old School
thing going on. I wouldn't want to
take time away from your music and
all. You just go on and work that
flavor.

She pushes him out the door and into the street, closing the
door behind her as he keeps rambling on. Just at Gina's
shoulder, a soft-eyed, middle aged woman waits. She has a
sweet smile, motherly grace about her.

LORRAINE

Gina? Lorraine Bradley.

Gina looks up from her busy work on the new client.

GINA

Lorraine!

She has no idea who Lorraine is.

LORRAINE

We met at your Aunt Paulette's church? I'm the work-to-welfare counselor.

GINA

Right! Lorraine!

Through the large front glass window, we see Darnelle walking up, Valerie in tow.

LORRAINE

We had a three-O'clock?

GINA

Of course! Sit down. Let me get you a robe...

She grabs a robe, slips it on, quickly. She's got her hands full now.

LORRAINE

I was thinking...maybe we could just do new braids-

The young woman (new client) taps her fingers, jiggles her water glass.

GINA

Beautiful. Braids.

Darnelle steps in with Valerie who runs up and squeezes her. Darnelle grabs Gina's arm.

DARNELLE

I got to talk to you-

GINA

Not now, Darnelle-

LORRAINE

Maybe shorter braids.

GINA

Sure, sure. Rochelle? I'll be right there-

Valerie tosses her back pack in a corner.

VALERIE

Guess what I played today? All the way through?

DARNELLE

Gina-

GINA

(to Darnelle)

Not right now!

DARNELLE

But it's important-

GINA

(to Lorraine)

I'm just gonna finish up here. Can I get you a Cappuccino?

LORRAINE

That would be lovely!

ROCHELLE

I'll take one those-

VALERIE

Beethoven's fifth!

GINA

That's GREAT, baby! I'll be right back!

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUING

Darnelle follows Gina into the kitchen while Gina slams down cups, pours out milk.

On the walls of the kitchen, Gina has tacked up family pictures: Valerie and Gina; Gina, Valerie and her husband, RED. A picture of RED, black and white, with the inscription ALWAYS THERE engraved on the frame. Gina shakes her head.

GINA

Damn! I need to staff up this place! I only got five clients in here and we got our hands full! Help me with this, Darnelle-

DARNELLE

The bike's gone. PJ's bike.

GINA

Where'd you leave it?

She hits the Cappuccino machine button. Nothing.

DARNELLE

On the street. In front of Lecanne's-

Gina crouches down and fiddles with the outlet.

GINA

What you want me to do?

DARNELLE

It might have got towed. If I file a stolen vehicle report, and it was towed, I'll have to get it-

Gina straightens up.

GINA

This has GOT to wait.

DARNELLE

I just need you to float me some cash-

GINA

Thought you were gettin' "taken care of"-

She hits the ON button on the Cappuccino machine. Suddenly, there's a loud POP.

CLOSE ON: the faulty outlet, it sparks and smokes. The ceiling lights flicker.

Gina freezes, then swings open the kitchen door and runs into the middle of the shop just in time to see-

GINA'S P.O.V.: The dryers short out, one by one: PFFFFT, PFFFFT, PFFFFT, PFFFFT... down the line until the last one is dead.

The lights flicker and then GO OUT. It's suddenly silent AND dark. No radio, no lights...no power.

ANGLE ON: Gina, trying not to panic.

VALERIE (O.S.)

Mama?

GINA

It's cool, it's cool. We got this handled! NOBODY MOVE!

We hear the NOISE of chaos in the dark: a CRASH, someone trips, a glass breaks...then cursing.

OFF GINA, wide-eyed-

CUT TO:

EXT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Gina steps outside, looks up and down the block, not sure what to do. One of the BARBERS from the shop down the block sticks his head out, shouts to Gina:

BARBER

Inspector's coming down the way in
a bit-

Gina curses under her breath, looks across the street, spots Willie in the middle of a sale at House of Stereo. She puts two fingers in her mouth and whistles...LOUD. Willie jumps. Gina points to him. He puts a hand over his heart, eyes wide: ME? Gina gives him a slow sexy nod, mouths: YOU.

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Willie is on his hands and knees; Gina watches as he hooks up a generator from the stereo shop. A candle is lit.

WILLIE

I'm not supposed to take this out
the shop-

GINA

I'll make it up to you.

WILLIE

Be in my video?

GINA

We'll see.

Gina hears movement, rustling. Turns around and spots Ashley and Lola packing it in for the day.

GINA

(continuing)

Wait, WAIT! Hold up everybody! I
didn't say we were closing down!

ASHLEY

We can't do hair without
electricity.

GINA

Just gimme a minute.

Lola ignores Gina and steps towards the door, swinging her bag over her shoulder. Valerie looks up at her Mother: what's she gonna do?

Gina's eyes narrow. She gets in front of Lola, who's startled by her sudden presence, blocking her exit.

GINA

(continuing)

You know something? I think we started off on the wrong foot. Let's try this again. Hi. My name is Gina. This is MY shop. I AM running things up in here.

LOLA

We can't work like this-

GINA

NOBODY is leaving until every client in here is DONE and looking fly-

LOLA

-without no juice-

GINA

-we'll be braiding and polishing with a dang flashlight if we have to, understand?

At that moment, the generator sparks, whirs, and all the lights flicker on.

GINA

(continuing)

What d'you know.

As Lola slams her bag down and huffs back to her station, we catch Denise, standing on top of one of the counters in a Karate pose. Rochelle is behind her, holding up a nail file.

WILLIE

Ooo! These girls is gettin' READY-

They quickly take their seats, trying to play it off.

ROCHELLE

Thought we were gonna have to throw down-

DENISE

-for some terrorism action.

ROCHELLE

She knows alla that Tae Kwan Do shit-

WILLIE
(to Denise and
Rochelle)

That's some "Kill Bill" feeling,
right there! I could use you both
in ma video.

Gina puts an arm around him.

GINA
Don't you have some stereos to
sell?

Starts walking him out.

WILLIE
I was thinkin' a little girl-on-
girl action. Maybe you and one of
them-

GINA
Mmm-Hmm. Okay. I feel you. I do-

She closes the door after him. We can see him continue to
yell from outside as Gina turns her attention back to the
shop. Darnelle is still hovering, still in need.

DARNELLE
Gina-

GINA
(annoyed)
Go get my purse. Take out seventy-
five bucks. Should be enough to
get the bike out from the tow shop.

Darnelle hugs her.

DARNELLE
Thanks, cuz.

She turns to go and Gina stops her.

GINA
I'm not banked-up like I was at
Jorge's, Darnelle. That was my
last float to you.

Darnelle nods, holds her hands up to Gina, grateful. As
Darnelle spins around out the door, she nearly runs smack
into the Health Department INSPECTOR, a terse, no nonsense
man in his fifties.

There's silence as he looks around, makes some notes. Gina
approaches with a big smile.

GINA

(continuing)

Hi, how you doing? I'm Gina and I
just bought the shop-

INSPECTOR

This generator is not up to code.
It's a violation.

He starts checking everyone's licenses, examining each station. The girls keep working, quietly, every eye on him. He goes up to the dryers, flicks them off and on.

INSPECTOR

(continuing)

These need to be replaced. I'm
also citing you for the discarded
equipment in the alley-

GINA

Wait, wait. The Salvation Army is
picking that up today-

He writes something down and rips off a ticket for her.

GINA

(continuing)

The dryers will be fixed tomorrow.
I swear.

He hands her the ticket and she reads it, incredulous.

GINA

(continuing)

Five hundred dollars?

LYNN

(under her breath)

They gots to rob people to justify
they jobs-

GINA

C'mon. You can come back and I'll
have it fixed by-

INSPECTOR

Two more of those and I shut you
down.

With that, he turns on his heel and walks off. Lynn peers at the ticket over Gina's shoulder.

GINA

Damn, Lynn. I'm gettin' bled here.

LYNN
You'll be okay. Just need to get
a couple more stylist-

GINA
-a dozen more clients, too. That's
right. Just need some busy chairs
to balance this out.

We catch Lola with a smug look.

LOLA
Rough havin' yo' own place-

Gina looks down: Valerie, doing her homework in a corner, is
all ears and eyes. Gina smiles.

GINA
Oh, we're doing just FINE.

Outside we see a Salvation Army truck pull up.

GINA
(continuing)
Great.
(to truck)
Your timing SUCKS.

The door opens and the truck driver steps OUT. JAMES is a
well-built, gorgeous young man. We can see his six pack
through his tank top. There's something meticulous and well-
groomed about him. His hair is braided in neat corn-rows. He
opens the door. Gina looks at his tattoos: prison "tats."

JAMES
Salvation Army pick-up?

GINA
The old counters and sinks.
They're out back, in the alley.

James pulls out a clipboard.

JAMES
Sign here.

GINA
How long were you down for?

He looks at her: nothing escapes this woman.

JAMES
Four months. Paroled out early on
voluntary rehab at the "Sally."

GINA
Possession?

JAMES

Why you got to ASSUME a brother's
down for possession?

Gina smiles.

GINA

Okay. So-

JAMES

(under his breath)
-illegal sale of restricted
narcotics-

Gina laughs, she's got him there. She looks at James, notices how all the women are staring at him. The hairdressers are listening in. A couple of young WOMEN on the street have stopped to look at James through the front window. Gina makes a mental note of it.

GINA

Nice braids.

JAMES

Do 'em myself.

GINA

Fo' real?

JAMES

Yeah. I was the guy on the block
who did all the homeboy's braids.

GINA

And you're not talking 'block' as
in "Jenny from the Block."

He laughs.

JAMES

There's always one.

She gives him a big, sexy smile.

GINA

Like yo' job driving the truck?

He looks at her.

JAMES

Better than doing time.

GINA

Mmm-Hmm. You sound like your ready
for a change, young man.

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

James is standing at the chair in the window, Gina at his shoulder. He's braiding one of the young women who'd been looking in. He's good and QUICK. She's in heaven.

At the back of the shop, Lola, Ashley and Lynn watch. Valerie hovers, fascinated, listening to the women talk.

LOLA

Uh-uh. That ain't right, a man looking that good.

ASHLEY

You think he's all man? He WAS the jailhouse braider.

LOLA

You think it's like THAT?

VALERIE

Like what? Like WHAT?

ASHLEY

Something about him...he's almost TOO good-looking.

LYNN

(to Valerie)

Like he got some swish down river.

Valerie looks baffled. Lola sucks in her gut, pushes her boobs to the TOP of her halter.

LOLA

Only one way to find out if Papi is buyin' what we're sellin'—

She steps over to James.

LOLA

(continuing)

I like that, papi. You're good with your hands.

James looks at her admiringly, but it's unclear just HOW.

JAMES

(friendly, but not too flirty)

Yeah? Thanks.

He looks at Gina, grins. Gina nearly falls over from his smile. When she looks up, three WOMEN have walked in off the street to watch James.

GINA
Can I help you?

WOMAN #1
He braiding hair?

WOMAN #1
(continuing)
I DO need my braids redone.

GINA
All right. Come on over here.

As she sits her down, we see two other WOMEN who are waiting for James's services.

GINA
(continuing; to James)
And by the way, you're hired.

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

Paulette is in with a gorgeous long wig on a styrofoam form. Gina is still working on Lorraine.

PAULETTE
That daughter of mine in here?

Gina and Valerie exchange a quick glance.

GINA
Yeah, for a minute.

PAULETTE
Don't be lending her any money, Gina.

VALERIE
She don't have any to lend.

GINA
I'm getting tapped out.

Lorraine, who's braids she's doing looks up.

LORRAINE
You'll make money. You hang in here. Trust me. I work with women and men who go from welfare to having successful businesses.

GINA
Really?

LORRAINE

It's all in your attitude. You got to be prepared to take losses in the beginning. Keep your perspective, okay? You have your OWN shop. That's a victory. That's success right there.

GINA

I'm looking at much more than this.

She winks at Lorraine.

GINA

(continuing)

You wait. I got PLANS...

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - NIGHT

The shop is closed. Gina is sitting at her desk, looking at eye-level at a row of high-end beauty products. She examines the bottles carefully, looks at the labels. In front of her she has a row of empty bottles, unique, interesting shapes and sizes. She examines them, makes some notes. Valerie is sitting at her feet, doing homework.

Outside, a truck pulls up; the side reads, JOE RAINEY, ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR.

GINA

Finally.

JOE RAINEY (30's, good-looking) walks in, loaded down with gear.

JOE

Hey. YOU'RE Gina?

He looks surprised.

GINA

Mmm Hmm. That's me.

(off his look)

What?

JOE

I didn't expect...I mean, the other lady here was...very different.

Gina smiles, can't help but check him out. This one is FINE in a hard-working, rough, real-man kinda way.

JOE
(continuing)
Is there a MISTER Gina-?

GINA
Morris. No. Not anymore.

Valerie, looks up, watches her mother carefully.

JOE
(checking her out)
I woulda been here sooner had I
known-

She laughs, then notices Valerie. Becomes business-like.

GINA
Like I said on the phone,
everything blew out this afternoon.

He nods.

JOE
Fuse box?

GINA
In the basement.

He disappears for a beat and Gina takes a quick glance in the mirror. She smooths her hair down, throws on some lip gloss. Valerie watches, a question forming-

GINA
(continuing)
Valerie. Quit! Okay?

VALERIE
Are you attracted to HIM?

GINA
(warning)
He's helping us. Go on. You got
homework.

She shoos her into the kitchen just as Joe comes back up the stairs, steps to her.

JOE
You got problems.

GINA
Hope you can fix 'em...

JOE
I think I can.

GINA

Really?

She leans closer as he starts sketching something on a pad.

JOE

(while he's drawing)

You need to re-wire alot of these conduit boxes. I'm gonna get some cable and start laying some lines so you can have power tomorrow.

GINA

(getting worried)

Okay.

JOE

When'd you take over here?

GINA

It's my first week.

JOE

Man. You gonna brighten this spot up.

Valerie steps out of the kitchen and right up to Joe.

VALERIE

Just in case you were thinking about it, my Mama is not ready to start dating-

GINA

Valerie! Get back in THERE! This is NOT a three-way conversation.

She pushes Valerie into the kitchen.

JOE

How old is she?

GINA

Nine. Going on forty.

JOE

Don't know what man would ever want to leave you and that pretty little girl.

GINA

Didn't have much choice. My husband died two years ago.

Joe feels bad. The sexy, flirt has just flown out of the room. But he's not fazed or thrown off.

JOE

Oh man. I'm sorry. I didn't know.

GINA

Yeah. It's been...hard. Raising our kid, being the one to bring it on home.

JOE

You seem like you can handle alot. Some women have that, a special something, like they can survive things a man never could.

She looks at him thoughtfully.

JOE

(continuing)

Seriously. Brother would just crawl up in the bed and pray for someone to come along and fix it all up for him.

Gina smiles.

GINA

Not YOU. I don't get that from you.

Valerie pokes her head in.

VALERIE

MAMA? We got to go practice. I'm waiting.

GINA

(under her breath)

And I'm TALKING.

She straightens up, takes a step back from Joe.

GINA

(continuing; looking away)

Look. I need this done. But I can't pay you right now...

JOE

We can set something up. Put you on a payment schedule. That way, I know I'll see you at least once a month.

Gina tries to hide her smile. He taps the dryers.

JOE

(continuing)

These are shot. You gonna have to get new ones.

He sees the look of terror and panic come over Gina's face.

GINA

No, no, no. Don't tell me that.

He writes a number down for her.

JOE

I know this equipment supply service where you could probably rent them for some kinda monthly fee. Shouldn't be too much.

Gina looks at him. She's moved by his genuine helpfulness.

GINA

Thanks, thank you. I really appreciate... everything.

He smiles. There's an awkward beat as he pauses, clearly wanting to say more, maybe even ask her out. He glances back at Valerie, smiles at her-

JOE

Take care of yo' Mama, now.

Valerie just glares in his direction as the door shuts behind him.

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Aunt Paulette is in, waiting while Gina does some final touches on her wig. Rochelle is in Gina's chair, waiting while her hair steeps in Special Sauce. The radio is ON. Ashley is doing a client, as is Lynn. A couple of neighborhood women wait their turn. The delivery MEN are setting up the NEW rental dryers. Radio is on LOUD.

PAULETTE

(to Gina)

I don't know, Gina. She didn't come home last night.

GINA

She's out having a good time.

PAULETTE

I got a bad feeling. I went by Leeanne's. She hadn't seen her.

At that moment, Terri walks in, head to toe Donna Karan. Everyone stops what they're doing...freezes.

LOLA
 (to Ashley)
 Friend of yours?

ASHLEY
 Uh-Uh.

It takes Gina a minute to look up from Rochelle's hair and spot her.

GINA
 Terri!?

Terri stands at the entranceway, flustered, not used to the vibe. Gina gets up, leads her in.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Terri? I didn't think I'd see you
 in these parts...

Terri sees her and throws her arms around her.

TERRI
 I MISSED you, Gina. I had to track
 you down!

Everyone looks on, surprise as Gina returns the hug, touches Terri's hair with warmth and familiarity. Gina ushers her to a chair, takes her coat and helps her into a robe. She hands her a bottle of Evian.

GINA
 You're due, Terri.

She nods, smiling.

RADIO
 (Female DJ)
 ...so everybody OUT there got some
 crazy idea about who they really
 are. What they want you to believe
 they are -

JAMES
 Amen! That's ONE thing I can tell
 you about being in prison-

Terri's eyes widen. PRISON!

JAMES
 (continuing)
 You in lock down, no TV, no
 distractions. You learn who in
 Hell you are-

RADIO

...speaking of the truth. I want to hear from YOU today. What you all feelin' here in the ATL?

TERRI

I just want to look good when George gets back.

GINA

He's away again?

TERRI

Yes. Five days in Hawaii. Maui.

Rochelle perks up, listening.

ROCHELLE

What's he do? Your man.

Terri looks at her; realizes she's being talked to.

TERRI

My husband? He's a sports lawyer.

DENISE

In Hawaii?

TERRI

They go there to work on deals and what not...

Denise and Rochelle exchange a LOOK. Lola raises her eyebrows.

LOLA

When was the last time he hit it?

TERRI

'Hit it?' What do you mean?

Lynn rocks her hips a little, in and out.

TERRI

(continuing)

Oh my God! THAT. No, no. It's nothing like that. It's just work. He works really hard-

ROCHELLE

A man takes a trip without his woman... it's a slap session. Trust me.

TERRI

George treats me very well. He always brings me gifts, jewelry-

JAMES

THAT'S a tip-off right there. A guilty man's gonna buy you shit. A man that's happy and settled, he ain't thinking about getting you NOTHIN.'

TERRI

(shocked)

I...I have to disagree-

Gina interrupts, trying to get the conversation off of Terri and her husband.

GINA

How's George Jr.? Still playing baseball?

TERRI

He's in Little League this year-

RADIO

(FEMALE caller)

... can't stand these Hos out there tryin' to get theirs from major athletes. Rape this, rape that...they wouldn't be talkin' shit if he was broke-down and flippin' burgers.

ASHLEY

How does she know what happens behind closed doors? Men with that much power can easily be tempted to take advantage of-

JAMES

Now THAT is a stereotype. Athletic men probably have more discipline and control-

LOLA

(flirting)

Ooo, he got IDEAS! Opinions! You get smart inside?

JAMES

Always was.

ROCHELLE

You gotto admit, we ALL know girls like that, makin' a play for the money-

JAMES

That's right.

RADIO

(DJ)

...talkin' athletes, you all saw that fight? YOU all see Lennox open up on that Russian guy?

DENISE

Lennox don't like girls.

ASHLEY

I never heard that.

DENISE

Where're his kids?

A beat.

ROCHELLE

She's got a point.

TERRI

Maybe he's just making a conscious decision, you know, not to overcrowd the planet...

DENISE

I don't think so. I don't get 'Tree Hugger' from Lennox Lewis.

At that moment Rita the Catfish Lady comes in and sets her cart up. Everyone starts hollering out their orders. She walks down the line of chairs, laying down paper plates laden with the greasy food. She stops at Terri.

CATFISH LADY

You hungry?

TERRI

Oh, I'm -

She's starving.

TERRI

(continuing)

-not really hungry. I mean, I don't really eat meat.

CATFISH LADY

I got some okra, some greens...

TERRI

Is there, is there alot of oil in that?

Darnelle laughs out loud. Catfish Lady stares at her.

TERRI

(continuing)

I mean, if you were going to take a guess at, say, how many grams of fat are in -

CATFISH LADY

Honey, these greens is just a flavor for the fat.

She puts a plate in front of Terri, with a side of yams and butter-thick cornbread. Terri is too intimidated to refuse. Everybody waits, WATCHES as Terri slowly, slowly takes a tiny bite. The whole room is quiet, staring as she eats.

TERRI

(surprised)

It's...it's GOOD.

She chews, the flavor slowly growing on her.

GINA

Better than that rabbit food you had every day-

TERRI

I want to get down to a size four-

DENISE

Why is it a white girl thinks she looks good all dried up?

TERRI

I'm not sixteen. I mean, at sixteen, I didn't mind having, you know, a figure.

ROCHELLE

But how come you see sixteen year old white girls tryin' to be all skinny?

Terri is nodding, leans back and motions for Rita to bring her MORE food. Her plate gets loaded down and she eats with relish.

TERRI

That's sad. Really.

ASHLEY

I was anorexic. Years ago, at boarding school.

Rochelle nearly chokes on her food.

ROCHELLE

No! I NEVER heard of no black girl
being anorexic!

ASHLEY

Well...I was. I was going to
school on scholarship with a lot
of wealthy girls-

DENISE

White girls! See the white rubbed
off on you-

TERRI

You know, I always DID want that
bottom, um, you know, the round
behind.

LYNN

'Bootylicious!'

LOLA

The JLo booty!

TERRI

Right! But George likes me thinner.

GINA

I don't know...you think George
would kick JLo to the curb?

Terri laughs at the thought. Suddenly, Jay Z's "A Dream"
comes on and Lola turns it up. She stands up, starts shaking
it to the music.

GINA

(continuing; to Terri)

Now THAT-

(pointing to Lola's
ass)

-is why you want to keep eating.

Lola dances, goes right up behind James. All the girls start
howling. He grabs her, starts dancing up close. Gina is
cracking up with everyone else, shouting and laughing as
James and Lola put on a show... when she spots Paulette, off
to the side on her cell phone. Gina can tell something is
very wrong.

PAULETTE

It's Darnelle...

EXT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Gina pulls up to the shop, Darnelle in tow. She gets out of
the car, and her cousin follows, dragging behind. Gina turns
to her.

GINA

You stay cool. Do NOT go off on your mother. Just let me handle it.

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Paulotte is at the reception area, having taken over for Gina while she went to get Darnelle. She's too upset to sit down, as Darnelle and Gina step in.

DARNELLE

Momma-

PAULETTE

Tell me something, Darnelle. How does a grown woman get into this kind of SHIT. What am I gonna do with you? I swear, Darnelle, I should have beaten you more when I still could!

DARNELLE

How's I supposed to know that bike was stolen?

PAULETTE

Not just stolen, but used in three armed robberies!

Everyone in the shop is listening.

GINA

Let's just settle down-

DARNELLE

BEFORE I got it-

PAULETTE

And how's ANYONE supposed to believe that?

VALERIE

You were in prison?

DARNELLE

Jail. Just for two nights-

PAULETTE

How are you gonna pay your cousin back and stay the hell out of trouble? Tell me! TELL ME!

Darnelle looks away. Lights a cigarette.

GINA

(calmly)

She's gonna work for me.

Darnelle coughs, stares at Gina, horrified.

GINA
(continuing)
Yeah, that's right. You're working
for ME now-

DARNELLE
Gina!?

Darnelle groans.

GINA
I am doing you a favor, Miss Thug
Life. Working is just not in your
DNA. But I'm gonna fix that. I
expect you to show up on time and
do like I ask.

Paulotte crosses her arms, enjoying this.

DARNELLE
I can't do hair.

GINA
You can do color.

Gina touches Darnelle's multi-hued hair.

GINA
(continuing)
Girl, I KNOW you can do color.
You're a different shade every
week!

Darnelle grabs her purse, furious.

GINA
(continuing)
It's that, or I bring you back
downtown and rip up your bail
check. I KNOW they haven't had
time to process it.

Darnelle freezes.

GINA
(continuing)
I expect you in at nine AM, cuz.
So get your How-can-I-help-You
smile on.

Lola saunters over, pretending to pick up a towel.

LOLA
(singing Mary J)
"No more drama in my life..."

GINA

YOU better get in the kitchen and out of my way, or I'll school you in some REAL drama!

CUT TO:

INT. BEAUTY SHOP - KITCHEN

Lola huffs into the kitchen, stops as she notices Gina's Special Sauce cooking up on the stove. She steps over, stares at the large pot, peers down at a hand-written RECIPE that Gina's left out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

CLOSE ON: Darnelle, sweeping up hair clippings with a look of total horror, and disgust.

Gina is pouring out her Special Sauce into a few of the fancy bottles to cool. Behind her, the door opens and Joanne steps in, with Terri at her side. Everyone stops and stares. Miss Thing is a sight: head to toe Gucci and Dolce Gabanna, hi-tech shades, a Louis Vuitton bag. She is Paris Hilton with a dash of Pamela Anderson. Nothing but shocking. Terri looks downright conservative and ordinary next to her. Joanne sees Gina and holds her arms out. Gina, surprised, thrilled, opens her arms.

GINA

Joanne! Lookit you!

JOANNE

Everybody is.

TERRI

I had such a great time here the other day! It was so...different. Such an organic... experience. I saw Joanne at Saks and told her she had to come see you.

Gina smiles at Terri, touches Joanne's hair.

GINA

You need some of my sauce.

JOANNE

I am STARVED for it. My hair feels like straw.

Gina hands her an Evian and guides her over to the chair by the window.

CUT TO:

INT. JORGE CRISTOPHE'S - DAY

Jorge is at the receptionist desk looking through the book.

JORGE

I don't understand. Joanne Marcus
was supposed to be here at four.

Behind him, we see his VIP alcove where Gina used to work. Her chair is still empty. He closes the book, smiles, putting on a brave face and sits down at one of the stations.

JORGE

(continuing; on cell)
Hi Cristina...is Joanne in? Yes,
it's Jorge...I was expecting her
at four for a touch-up...no,
that's okay. Just have her call me
back...

OFF Jorge, we-

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP -- DAY

ANGLE ON: Jorge, behind the wheel of his Mercedes, as he cruises past Gina's shop, slowing down enough so that he can see Joanne inside, sitting in Gina's chair.

CLOSE ON: Jorge, trying to keep it together as he speeds off-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - SAME

Nobody in the shop can take their eyes off Joanne. She lowers her shades and looks around.

JOANNE

(whispered)
You get anybody in here? Usher?
Jermaine Dupris? Any rappers?

GINA

Rappers? No...the ATL hasn't
discovered me-

LYNN

-yet!

GINA

-but they will. Maybe YOU can
swing that for me-

Terri goes over to Lola to get her nails done. Joanne lowers her glasses as she spots James.

JOANNE
WHO is that? Don't tell me he
works here.

GINA
That he does.

Lola peers over at Joanne's hands, sees the gorgeous Louis
Vuitton clutch she's holding.

LOLA
Cute.

GINA
Lola, this is Joanne Marcus.
Joanne is the Louis Vuitton rep at
Saks.

LOLA
Oh. She's a salesgirl. Don't look
like it.

JOANNE
WHAT is that supposed to mean?

Joanne clutches her purse.

LOLA
Relax. Nobody's gonna jack your
purse.

Joanne rolls her eyes.

JOANNE
I didn't think-

GINA
Lola? Can you get Joanne a water?
Get her a robe?

Gina turns the radio UP.

RADIO
...on BET after 'How We're
Living?' Yeah, just a regular,
round-the-way girl feelin' bad
about her saggin' butt. They
showed the whole implant surgery.
It was CRAZY! Since when do black
folks get plastic surgery? I mean,
besides Michael Jackson. C'mon! We
age well!

GINA
That's right. Black don't crack.

ASHLEY

It's a sign of wealth and prestige
to be able to look younger-

LYNN

Or rounder in the bee-oo-tee!

Joanne spins around.

JOANNE

I think if you want to get some
work done, why not?

She looks right at James.

JOANNE

(continuing)

What about you? Don't you think a
woman's beauty can be enhanced
with a little...work?

She crosses her legs. Uncrosses them. James looks at her
ample chest. Lola, doing a pedicure right next to him,
catches it all.

LOLA

Lookit this one making a play.

JAMES

(trying to be
diplomatic)

It depends on how it looks at the
end of the day.

JOANNE

Or, the next morning.

Lola coughs, pretends she's choking.

LOLA

I guess some people got to spend
money look cute! Others of us are
just born that way.

JOANNE

In case you hadn't heard, poverty
is SO not sexy.

Seeing that these two are NOT getting along, Gina gets Lola
up, pushes her towards the kitchen.

GINA

Lola, whyn't you go take a break-

Joanne steps over to James, watches him braid a client, while
her own hair steeps in the special sauce.

JOANNE

I'm liking that. You are good! Do you give back rubs?

At that moment the door swings open and the health INSPECTOR marches in with his notebook. Darnelle, who's doing hi-lites on an older WOMAN, turns her back, tries vainly to disappear. Everyone watches as he goes through the shop, Gina at his heels.

GINA

(to Inspector)

See my new electrical plan? New dryers?

He doesn't answer. Finally stops at Darnelle.

INSPECTOR

I don't see a license properly displayed here.

DARNELLE

(mumbling)

I was supposed to take my test on Friday, but I couldn't get a ride-

He starts scribbling out a ticket. Tears it off and hands it to Gina.

INSPECTOR

One more of those and I close you down.

Gina smiles, but shoots Darnelle a LOOK.

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

Joanne gets up, her hair a shiny panel of blond silk, with artful waves. Everybody Ooos and Ahhs. Gina smiles. Joanne goes to pick up her bag. Denise and Rochelle have popped in and settle down, spreading out. They stare at Joanne.

DENISE

And who's this?

ASHLEY

A client of Gina's from Jorge Cristophe's.

DENISE

She somebody's daughter? One of them kids Lionel Ritchie adopted?

LOLA

She's a sales girl-

ROCHELLE
Look like bank to me.

LOLA
That's the point. LOOKING like
money-

Just then, DEE walks in. Dee is a hard-up street girl. She's a local. At nineteen, she's seen her share of "the life." Lola and Ashley exchange a LOOK.

ASHLEY
I KNOW she's not letting HER in
here.

LOLA
I'd make HER shower up before I
touched her.

Dee hesitates at the door, Gina smiles, motions for her to step in. Ashley holds her hands up, shakes her head. Lynn is busy. Darnelle shakes her head at Gina, mouths NO WAY.

GINA
(whispered; to girls)
What is wrong with all of you? You
never had a bad day? I hope you
all never fall on hard times, the
way you act.

She grabs Dee and sits her down, gives her a robe and a water.

GINA
(continuing; to Dee)
Soon as I'm done washing you,
Darnelle here is gonna hook you up
with some color.

Darnelle's eyes WIDEN. Gina gives her a LOOK.

GINA
(continuing)
I'm gonna give you a little
Special Sauce here, fix your hair
up.

Gina holds up a bottle. She's glued on a clever, somewhat funny label: GINA'S SPECIAL SAUCE.

GINA
(continuing; to
Joanne)
You want some?

JOANNE
Are you finally selling it?

GINA
Fifty-five dollars...but I'm gonna
give you this one-

Joanne reaches for it. Gina holds it back.

GINA
(continuing)
Provided you talk it up. You KNOW
people, Joanne. You work at Saks.

Joanne looks at the bottle, looks at Gina. Gets it.

JOANNE
You want to turn this into
something.

GINA
That's right.

JOANNE
Something big.

GINA
That's the idea.

Joanne smiles, game. Leans over to pick up her bag...thinks
twice.

JOANNE
James? Do you mind getting that
for me?

Lynn and Gina exchange smiles. THIS one has got game. Lola
glares at her.

JAMES
No problem.

Joanne turns, following James out to her car, pulls out a
twenty and drops it on Lola's lap.

JOANNE
You look like you could use a
little...help.

Lola gets up, fists clenched, and tries to go after her. Gina
holds her back.

GINA
Settle yourself, girl.

LOLA
You watch. I'm gonna beat her down!

GINA

In whose shop? Talking about
you're gonna "beat her down." Not
HERE. Not in MY shop.

Lola tears herself away from Gina, cursing in Spanish and
settles down.

ANGLE ON: Joanne getting in her car. As she gets in and James
hands her her bag, she slips him her number.

JOANNE

Call me. Mr. Marcus is away alot
of the time.

James smiles, tucks the number in his shirt, but doesn't make
it clear one way or the other how he feels.

GINA

(watching; to
Lynn)

THAT is gonna be some crazy
drama, those two hook-up.

LYNN

The cell-y and the Saks girl.

Gina laughs.

GINA

"The Cell-y and The Saks girl" I
like that. Sounds like a bad movie.

ASHLEY

Just pray they don't give YOU a
part.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

Everyone has gone for the day. Gina is counting the register
while Darnelle finishes up on Dee.

Gina watches as Darnelle stands her up, turns her to the
mirror. Her hair is DONE, gorgeous with new coppery hi-
lights. Despite herself, Darnelle is smiling, touching the
hair, looking at how it catches the light: proud of her work.
Dee is grinning. She looks amazing, transformed.

GINA

(whispered; to
Darnelle)

Feels good, don't it?

Darnelle looks at her cousin. Nods. It's a moment. Unspoken,
subtle...there's been a shift in Darnelle's attitude.

They both watch Dee heads out, a new, self-assured step to her walk...

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - MORNING

Gina is working at her desk, a pile of papers and bills around her. Darnelle is helping her set up for the day. Valerie is doing homework at one of the counters.

VALERIE
(not looking up)
Mama? Are we poor now?

GINA
We are NOT poor. We have just had
some unexpected...expenses-

They are interrupted by a knock on the door. It's Joe. Gina lets him in.

JOE
Hey...

GINA
Joe! YOU come here to brighten
things up?

He winks at her.

JOE
Maybe one day you'll find out just
how bright I can be.

Gina smiles.

JOE
(continuing)
Hold on. I got something for you-

He ducks out.

DARNELLE
O-KAY! I see how it is!

GINA
Now don't go THERE yet.

DARNELLE
Mmm-Hmm.

When Gina looks up, it's just in time to see Joe wheeling in a small, upright piano. Gina's mouth drops open.

JOE

It's no Steinway, but I know your daughter's got to practice and this way she doesn't have to go to the church...

GINA

Oh, I couldn't accept anything-

JOE

Relax, it's from a house I been working on in Buckhead. They gave it to me.

GINA

I don't know...I owe you money and -

JOE

Just take it. I'monna set it up in the kitchen.

It's VERY hot as they gaze at each other.

GINA

Thank you. YOU know how to make a girl smile.

JOE

That's not the half of it.

GINA

Can I get you juice?

JOE

I'd love some!

Gina smiles, sashays to the kitchen. Joe is WATCHING and Gina catches it in the mirror.

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - KITCHEN

Gina opens the refrigerator, looks up and sees the picture of Red, her husband, staring at her, his arms around Valerie. She sighs, spills the orange juice as she's pouring.

GINA

Damn!

She grabs a towel, reaches up and turns Red's picture around so he can't "see" her. She finishes up...then has a moment. A beat, where she stares at the cardboard backing of the frame. She slowly turns the picture back.

INT. BEAUTY SHOP - SALON

Valerie sneaks up on Joe.

VALERIE

You brought us a piano?

JOE

Piano's for you, sweetheart.

VALERIE

(matter-of-fact)

You got ME a piano so you can have sex with my mother.

JOE

Whoa! No, no. Now hold on. Nobody said anything about THAT. I'd like to take your mother out...you know, for lunch or something.

Valerie looks at him carefully.

VALERIE

I don't know if she'd do that.

Joe leans down, getting eye-level with Valerie.

JOE

Tell you what. You look like a smart girl. I bet you can figure out that I'm a nice guy.

Valerie looks at Joe, looks at the piano, softening.

JOE

(continuing)

Maybe you need some music to go with that piano? Couple of CD's to inspire you?

Valerie can smell a bribe...but it's too tempting.

VALERIE

Tower Records opens in a half-hour.

OFF Joe, smiling, we-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

Everyone is in, Gina is working on a client when she looks up and sees Jorge, standing in the doorway.

GINA

Jorge!

Jorge opens his arms wide, and gives Gina a BIG kiss.

GINA
 (continuing)
 I KNOW you're not here for my
 weave.

He laughs, checking out the shop.

JORGE
 I just HAD to see what all the
 fuss was about. You stole my best
 clients, might as well find out
 why.

He gives her a wink. Gina tries to look as casual and relaxed
 as she can.

JORGE
 (continuing; looking
 around)
 I love it Gina. Did you do all
 this?

Gina nods.

JORGE
 (continuing)
 Fantastic. Very trendy, very SoHo
 Loft...

GINA
 Can I get you something? A coffee?
 Water?

JORGE
 No, no...I have to run. I was just
 in the neighborhood.

Gina and Lynne exchange a LOOK. Yeah, right. Jorge reaches
 out and takes both of Gina's hands.

JORGE
 (continuing)
 Really. I am so proud of you. I
 know how hard it is when you first
 start. Things break down, you have
 the Inspector on your back-

GINA
 Yeah, that dick has been riding me-

JORGE
 That's par-for-the-course. He
 always comes in twice when you've
 just opened.

Gina looks at him, carefully. He quickly changes the subject.

JORGE
 (continuing)
 You know, Gina. If you ever wanted
 your job back-

GINA
 Thanks Jorge. But I'm hanging in
 there.

JORGE
 I see. Of course.

GINA
 I mean, don't get me wrong. The
 money was crazy good at your shop.

He smiles, holds his hands up.

JORGE
 That's fine. I understand. If you
 ever change your mind -

He kisses her on both cheeks before he leaves. Lynn leans in
 to Gina.

GINA
 Funny. Did I say the Inspector had
 been in here twice?

Lynn shrugs. They exchange a puzzled LOOK.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Down the block from Gina's, Jorge pulls his Mercedes over to
 the curb. A MAN steps out from the barber shop, leans in to
 Jorge's window. Jorge quickly hands him a couple of large
 BILLS. As Jorge pulls away, the man turns, and we see that
 it's the Inspector...

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

The shop is half full. Lynn and Gina are chatting. Lola is
 doing her nails when a couple of James's Salvation Army
 parolee FRIENDS come in. They HUG each other, long and hard.
 Ashley, Lynn and Lola take NOTE.

JAMES
 Big Dog! 'S up?

RICK
 I'm cool. You?

JAMES
 It's too dang REAL out here.

They laugh.

MALIK

I hear you.

Gina nods to them.

GINA

(to James)

Friends of yours?

JAMES

Yeah. Gettin' their braids re-done.

GINA

(smiling)

Get them a water, James. Sec if they need anything. You know how we do.

MALIK

It's alright we here?

GINA

Of course! Spread the word!

LOLA

(getting up)

Oh it's just FINE. You all settle in-

RICK

So. Tell me, dog. What you pick up on, doing all these females hair?

Lynn and Gina exchange a LOOK. Lola is hovering by the men, checking them all out...and likewise.

JAMES

I'll tell you, brother. Women in their twenties talk about the guys, women in their thirties talk about the kids...and women in their forties talk about they divorce and the money they're gettin.'

LOLA

Mmm-Hmm. He's right! That's right!

Joe pops his head in, hands Valerie a couple of brand new CD's. He looks at Gina.

JOE

I'monna call you later.

Everyone in the shop, exchanges LOOKS as Joe gives Gina a long, significant smile before he leaves.

VALERIE

(to Gina)

Mom? I know you said you weren't ready to start dating, but he's really cool. I think you should go out with him.

GINA

Look at this. I'm getting dating advice from a nine year old-

JAMES

They start young.

LOLA

And what does that mean?

JAMES

I'm just saying. It's typical. Female any age gonna see what she can GET.

LOLA

Maybe the females you've been with-

GINA

Now that's crazy. We might talk about who's banked-up...but any woman, when you come down to it, is gonna tell you it's about the connection. It's about feeling loved-

LOLA

- appreciated.

RICK

A rich man's always got a pretty girl on his arm. That's just the way it is.

GINA

A man's got to have backbone...doesn't mean he's got to have money.

LYNN

Men gonna fish with something shiny, and women gonna get hooked.

Gina laughs. The phone rings, and Gina picks it up.

GINA

Yeah. That's me.

(lowering her voice)

I know, I know. I said I'd have it
but...I don't right now, I mean
today, this minute-

MALIK

(checking out Ashley)

What about you? You spoken for?

ASHLEY

(shy)

I've got someone special-

MALIK

What's he do?

ASHLEY

(evasive)

I'd rather keep my personal life
OUT of the shop.

Gina hangs up the phone and grabs her coat.

GINA

(to Darnelle)

Answer the phones for me. I got to
work something out.

Darnelle nods as we-

CUT TO:

INT. RENTAL COMPANY OFFICES

A large sign says EQUIPMENT RENTAL. Gina is standing in front
of the MANAGER, a heavy set man in his forties.

GINA

Look, I gave you half the deposit.

MANAGER

And I told you, we need seven
hundred dollars on the first.

GINA

Well, I just don't have that to
spare right now so we're gonna
have to work something out. I need
those dryers.

MANAGER

Work something out? Like what?

GINA
Like what? I'll tell you what. You
got a girlfriend? A daughter?

MANAGER
Yeah. A daughter.

GINA
She get her hair done?

He nods.

MANAGER
Yeah. Gets a weave.

GINA
Exactly. And how much do you end
up spending on her weaves?

MANAGER
I don't know. Eighty bucks a pop?

GINA
So there you go... seven hundred
dollars...nine weaves. Done.

She shakes his hand. He's not sure what just hit him, but
Gina's just bought herself a little time.

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

Darnelle is at Gina's desk when Joanne comes in.

JOANNE
Where's Gina? I've GOT to get my
hair fixed for tonight-

DARNELLE
She had kind of an emergency.

Joanna groans, annoyed.

DARNELLE
(continuing)
She'll be back, prob'ly in an hour.

JOANNE
I don't HAVE an hour. I'll have to
go somewhere else.

She turns and is about to walk out when Darnelle sees that
Lynn is free and grabs her back.

DARNELLE

Lynn could hook you up. She's
FABULOUS.

Joanne stares at Lynn.

JOANNE

I don't know...

Darnelle pulls out one of the robes, helps Joanne in it and leads her over to Lynn's chair.

JOANNE

(continuing; to
Lynn)

I just want it UP... something
kind of classic.

LYNN

Up? I can do you braids with a
straw set, throw in a couple of
curls, add a little bling to the
mix-

Joanne nods, not understanding a word she's said.

JOANNE

Yeah. Whatever. I'm kind of in a
hurry.

OFF Joanne, we-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

CLOSE ON: Gina, walking in the door. She surveys the shop and suddenly FREEZES.

GINA'S P.O.V.: Joanne Marcus is turned away from the mirror, talking a mile a minute to James and his parolee friends. Lynn is behind her, putting the finishing touches on an insane ghetto hair-do: Joanne has pieces and braids all twisted and wrapped into a structured creation, with tiny grease curls on her forehead.

Gina, meanwhile, is busy having a heart attack. She runs over just as Lynn is about to turn Joanne around to the mirror.

GINA

Wait, wait!!!

JOANNE

Gina! Did you know these guys were
all in prison together?

(more)

JOANNE (cont'd)
 These gorgeous men, ALL wrongly
 convicted for having, weapons and
 drugs!

GINA
 Joanne-

At that moment Joanne turns around and catches a glimpse of herself. She gasps. Everyone is waiting, seeing what she'll do.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Joanne...

Joanne tilts her head, looks at the sides, looks at the back...then smiles.

JOANNE
 You know, this is kind of COOL. I
 feel like Alicia Keys or something.

JAMES
 It's a good look for you-

MALIK
 Very good.

RICK
 Mmm-Hmm. You get a ghetto pass
 with that look, girl.

JOANNE
 Oh my God. I LOVE that! A "ghetto
 pass!" That's so cute!

She's laughing, loving all the attention.

LOLA
 Oh, please!

Gina can't believe it. Joanne gets up, looks at Darnelle.

JOANNE
 You were right. SHE-
 (pointing to Lynn)
 Is GOOD!

OFF GINA, exchanging a LOOK with Darnelle.

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - MORNING

Gina's P.O.V.: opening the door to her shop, Gina sees Joanne, with her ghetto hair, and lined up for Lynn, a couch full of young, trendy WHITE GIRLS with money to burn. Lynn gives Gina a huge smile. Gina steps over and squeezes her hand.

LYNN

I'monna be doing "ghetto fabulous" till the cows come home tonight.

GINA

Girl! I told you you were gonna get the props you deserve.

They tap fists as Gina goes over to the couch and starts giving the girls Evians and chatting them up.

GINA

(continuing)

Love those heels! Prada? And YOU got the legs for them. Uh-huh. And look at YOU! Look at your Dior bag. So fabulous!

Joanne is grinning. Gina gives her a big hug and Joanne pulls her aside.

JOANNE

I got your "hook-up" Gina.

GINA

(excited)

What do you mean? What, what? Tell me!

JOANNE

I talked to the head of marketing for Revlon's line of boutique products and I gave him a sample of your stuff...

She pauses for effect.

GINA

And? And?

JOANNE

He wants to meet with you.

Gina jumps up and holds a fist in the air.

GINA

Praise the Lord! Thank you, God, Thank you, Joanne! Thank you, my mother, rest her soul-

JAMES
'S going on with the acceptance
speech?

LOLA
Someone's happy.

ASHLEY
What's up, Gina?

Gina pauses.

GINA
You all are gonna be living large
when my unique line of Gina's
Special Sauce is out-

DARNELLE
Gina? Fo'real?

GINA
-and people will be coming here
from all over to catch the Gina
flavor!

Everyone is laughing and talking over each other, asking her questions. Except Lola, who's expression turns dark, strangely sullen...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - NIGHT

Darnelle is helping close up, looking at her watch. Valerie is eating her dinner at one of the counters, a CD walkman on, while Lynn does Gina's hair. Ashley hovers, helping Lynn.

LYNN
What time's he picking you up?

GINA
Any minute. Get in the back
there...my 'kitchen.' Is my
'kitchen' clean?

Lynn nods. Gina stands up: she looks incredible, a long sweeping ponytail down to her back.

ASHLEY
Woman, you know how to dress up!

Gina laughs.

GINA
Thank you, baby.

Outside, a car honks. Gina grabs her purse, nervous, leans over Valerie and lifts the headphones.

GINA
(continuing)
I'm leaving...

VALERIE
Have fun.

GINA
Lynn's gonna watch you-

VALERIE
I know.

GINA
What're you listening to?

VALERIE
(annoyed)
The piece I'm gonna do for my
recital...Mom! Go! He's waiting!

GINA
Okay, okay.

Gina takes a deep breath, straightens up and takes one last look in the mirror...

INT. RESTAURANT - BUCKHEAD - NIGHT

A small, romantic spot. Candles, good wine. Gina and Joe are leaning close.

JOE
...I tell you, it was hell MY
first three years. Ate alot of
beans and rice. A lot of Ramen.

She laughs.

GINA
I feel you. Least you don't have
a kid.

JOE
That daughter of yours. She's
something else.

GINA
Right? Just her own little person.
I mean, the girl was CONCEIVED to
Barry White and here she is, all
over Beethoven and Mozart.

JOE
She's different.

Gina nods, smiles thinking about her.

GINA
When she plays, it's like...magic.
I check myself, you know? Am I
one of these Star Search mothers
LOVIN' every sound out of their
tone-deaf kid? Then all I've got
to do is look around at everyone
ELSE listening to her and I know.
She is the real thing.

He smiles.

JOE
She's got a special Mama.

GINA
(flirting)
Oh, you think so?

JOE
(getting serious)
You know what I like about you?
You got real spirit. Nothing gets
you down. I mean, even when you
talk about a 'situation,' you can
laugh at it. See the humor.

GINA
Mmm-Hmm. I guess that's true.

He takes her hand.

JOE
You're something else, Gina-

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT - BUCKHEAD - NIGHT

Joe stands by the door of the car, opens it for Gina to get in. She pauses.

GINA
Look. I like you, Joe. But I got
a kid to raise, I got a
business...I don't think I'm ready
for-

Before she can finish, they're kissing. It's a long, nice
kiss. Gina pulls away, looks at him. Joe backs off, smiling.

JOE

I hear you, I do. No pressure.

OFF GINA, as Joe leans in for one more kiss, we-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Discussion is loud and lively. Gina is working on Joanne, whistling, a SPRING in her step. Everyone is laughing, teasing her.

GINA

...it WAS just a KISS. That's it!

ASHLEY

Yeah. Right.

TERRI

It's sweet! I think he's adorable.

LYNN

You are due for a lot more.

DARNELLE

I heard things were burnin' up
against his truck-

GINA

You heard WRONG!

Lola is doing her own nails, James and his friends are kicking back. Terri is on her way out the door.

ROCHELLE

(to Terri)

C'mon now. You GOT to figure he's
playing around-

TERRI

Oh, no. You just have a very
vivid...imagination.

DENISE

He's never home at night!

TERRI

That's the job! It's always been
that way-

ROCHELLE

You watch out! And take care, now!

Terri smiles, waves her Good-Byes.

RADIO

(DJ)

... a sad day in Atlanta when Peabo Bryson's personal stuff is on auction fo' the IRS.

JAMES

No!

RICK

Say it isn't so-

RADIO

(DJ)

...there was some raggedy haters there, goin' through his stuff...his Tumi luggage, his clothes-

GINA

Now, who's gonna bid for Peabo's clothes?

ASHLEY

That's just humiliating-

GINA

An how much're they actually gonna get? He owes, like, a million two, I heard-

JAMES

I heard more'n that.

RADIO

(DJ)

..and his Grammys!

(singing)

"...a whole new world..." Remember that? That shit was for Disney! Come on!

GINA

Somebody should go down there, get Peabo's Grammy back for him-

LOLA

People got no class.

GINA

Right? That's sad.

DARNELLE

Tacky. Peabo is Atlanta old school-

JOANNE

I don't even know who that IS!

They all stare at her, incredulous.

JAMES

Peabo Bryson.

JOANNE

Doesn't ring a bell.

LOLA

You're not getting any play being ignorant 'bout Old School-

JOANNE

Ignorant? Who are you calling
IGNORANT? You do NAILS for a
living!

LOLA

Yeah? And you sell bags! Least I
don't front like I'm rich when I'm
NOT!

GINA

Now hold on! You cool down-

LOLA

I worked my way up from Welfare-

JOANNE

Figures YOU'D be on Welfare.
Sucking the system dry when you
could be working.

Lola can't stand it. She gets up, gets in Joanne's face.

LOLA

Bitch, what'd you know about ME,
'bout how things have been for me?

JOANNE

I KNOW a tacky slut when I see
one-

Lola whips off her earrings, holds an emory board in her fist like she's gonna stab Joanne. All the ghetto girls in the shop let out an appreciative holler at this move. The men are laughing, can't believe it. Joanne jumps up and grabs a can of hair spray and holds it in Lola's face.

Gina steps in between them, breaking it up, and orders them, pointing her finger, to their respective chairs.

GINA

C'mon now! STOP!

A beat.

GINA
(continuing)
You two need to sit down and chill
the hell out.

Joanne turns her back. Lola does the same.

GINA
(continuing)
You all are in a Beauty Shop...and
that's just UGLY.

She looks at both of them.

GINA
(continuing)
I see what you got going on here.
You both look GOOD, rockin' the
minis, nails done, hair done. I'm
gonna tell you something right
now: when it comes to cute girls,
there's never just ONE, okay?
Never.

There's a silence as the two women fume. But there's a truth
to what Gina's saying and everyone continues to listen.

GINA
(continuing)
Don't be haters. Appreciate what
you both got going on, otherwise
you gonna make yourselves
miserable.

DARNELLE
That's some TRUTH right there.

Everyone looks at Gina. This girl knows how to READ a person
and HANDLE a situation. There's a sudden respectful quiet in
the shop.

And then Joanne gets up, her hair half done.

JOANNE
You fire her, or I'm walking out.

GINA
Come on, now.

JOANNE
I'M the client! She's not supposed
to-

GINA
Settle down, lemme finish your-

JOANNE

-talk to ME like that!

GINA

I'm not getting rid of any of my people, Joanne.

JOANNE

Then you're gonna lose a client.

GINA

(getting firm)

Look. No one's losing their job 'cause they have beef over some stupid shit. That's not right.

Joanne grabs her bag, starts gathering her stuff.

GINA

(continuing)

Joanne! Come on now.

Joanne turns, walks towards the door. Turns to Gina:

JOANNE

You can forget about your meeting with Revlon.

There's dead silence in the room. Everyone looks at Gina, at Lola...then at Joanne. Waits for Gina's reaction.

GINA

It's like that? Fine. I don't need to meet Revlon.

Joanne turns, storms out.

JAMES

Ooo. That's one angry little white girl.

ASHLEY

Right?

DARNELLE

She's crazy mad.

MALIK

'Cause she's NOT the real thing. No class.

RICK

That's right. Real class woulda left it. Dropped it.

James points to Gina.

JAMES
 THAT is real class, right there.

Everybody murmurs their agreement. Gina just keeps on working, not letting her disappointment show.

LYNN
 You okay?

GINA
 (to Lynn)
 Just a minor set-back. I'll find a backer for my shit... Nobody's gonna make me do something that's not RIGHT.

ANGLE ON: Lola, looking at GINA with appreciation...and real GUILT.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - MORNING

Gina opens up the shop to find Lola waiting for her, sitting alone by her chair.

GINA
 Lola! Good. Just the person I want to talk-

LOLA
 (stopping her)
 Gina, wait. I owe YOU an apology. Big time.

GINA
 Hey. It's okay. I know you and I haven't always seen eye-

LOLA
 No. Something else. I did something really messed up.

Gina stops. Waits. Lola slowly unfolds a piece of paper holds it up for Gina to see:

GINA
 (reading it)
 It's my recipe. My Special Sauce-

LOLA
 I...I sold it-

GINA
 WHAT?

LOLA

-to Jorge.

Gina stares at her, in shock.

LOLA

(continuing)

Gina, I'm so sorry. I didn't know what a big deal it was. He approached me a while back. The money was good and I thought you were a bitch-

GINA

Jorge has my recipe?

LOLA

You had it written down in the kitchen-

She looks down, genuinely remorseful.

LOLA

(continuing)

I know you're probably gonna fire me -

GINA

Let's hope there's a 'Gina's' to fire you FROM.

Lola looks away, feels horrible.

LOLA

What can I do? Is there anything I can do?

Gina just stares at her, too furious to blow up.

GINA

Just get out, Lola. Pack your shit, get out and pray he hasn't gone too far with this-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - AFTERNOON

Gina is pacing while hair gets done. Lorraine is there. James is braiding. Denise and Rochelle are in. Darnelle, Ashley and Lynn are both busy but they stop everything the second the door opens and Terri sweeps in, pulling off her scarf and coat. She pulls a flyer out from her purse. Everyone gathers around.

TERRI

I got it. There's a whole display of these up at the Neiman's beauty counters-

CLOSE ON: the flyer. It's a beautifully art directed shot of a jar of JORGE'S SPECIAL SAUCE. A gorgeous MODEL holds the JAR, and above her in large print it reads:

GINA

(reading)

"...Jorge's Special Sauce: premiering on sale at the Atlanta Hair Convention."

ASHLEY

The hair shows! That's next weekend-

Gina looks at the flyer for a beat. She sits back, crushed. No one's ever seen her like this, so thoroughly deflated.

LORRAINE

You got the shop, Gina. You got your business-

GINA

I been counting on THIS.

LORRAINE

You're smart. You'll figure it out.

Gina looks at the picture of the jar.

GINA

He did a nice job.

A beat. She taps the flyer. Holds it up.

GINA

(continuing)

That's my dream, right there.

James steps forward.

JAMES

Gina. We can go over there. Step up to him. We can break him down-

GINA

No, no. Thanks but, no. I'm not stooping to his bullshit; I'll figure out something else-

At that moment, the door opens and Lola walks in. There's a deathly silence as everyone stares at her: they ALL know. James shakes his head, disgusted.

Lola takes a deep breath, looks at Gina. It's taken alot of balls for her to come back in here.

LOLA

Gina, I know I REALLY messed up, but...you have to let me make it up to you.

The whole shop is mad-dogging her, listening.

LOLA

(continuing)

No one's ever...RESPECTED me like you do...nobody's ever put up with my shit, and stood up for me.

Lynn starts to come forward, like she's gonna throw Lola out. Gina stops her.

LOLA

(continuing)

I'll do anything. I'll work for free. I'll sell my car-

Gina stares at her. Points to the jar.

GINA

(quietly)

That's generations of knowledge in there. That's priceless! You understand? Nothing that special's ever gonna come my way again.

Lola looks away. A beat. Gina grabs an apron, throws it at Lola.

GINA

(continuing)

Get to work-

LOLA

Thank you, thank you! I won't let you down-

GINA

I'm not doing this for YOU, Lola.

A beat as Gina stares at her.

GINA

(continuing)

I give people second chances 'cause I hate stayin' mad. Uh-uh. I'm not doing that to MYSELF.

(more)

GINA (cont'd)

(a beat)

I don't know how all this is gonna play out, but you and I are not done.

CUT TO:

EXT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

James, Ashley, Lynn and Darnelle are outside, talking as Gina opens up. Lola hovers a step behind them.

GINA

I'm thinking I need to raise the prices right about now-

JAMES

What you got going is great word of mouth.

LYNN

You got a reputation now.

GINA

Yeah, I'm the cute, local corner shop, but it's not CRAZY busy. I need-

She stops, mid-sentence.

GINA

(continuing)

That's funny. My alarm's not working.

She pushes the door open-

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Gina opens the door of the shop and steps in. She freezes. Everyone behind her does the same: the whole shop has been trashed. Mirrors have been broken, chairs slashed, tables turned over. Gina runs to the register. It's been clawed open. All her petty cash is gone.

JAMES

Oh man!

DARNELLE

You been robbed.

GINA

(slowly)

Not just robbed-

LOLA

Run out.

GINA

That's right. That's exactly right.

They move through, crunching through broken glass as they look around.

Paulette arrives, Valerie in tow. Valerie gasps, bursts into tears. Paulette is open-mouthed, horrified. Gina grabs Valerie, picks her up and hugs her.

PAULETTE

Oh my Lord! Jesus! Who'd do this?

GINA

(knowingly)

Who'd want to see me put out.

It's not a question. Gina turns and looks at Lola. They know. They ALL do. Nothing more needs to be said-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

A squad car is out front. Two DETECTIVES (white, 30's) are talking to Gina, while James, Lynn, Lola and Darnelle start cleaning up the mess.

DET. #1

(taking notes)

...what missing valuables?

GINA

Cash, beauty supplies,
equipment...everything.

The two detectives exchange a look.

GINA

(continuing)

I have my suspicions -

DET. #1

You got drug debts?

GINA

Drug debts? No!

DET. #1

'Cause otherwise, this fits right
in with a series of neighborhood
robberies-

DET. #1

(continuing)

Tell us what you know, we'll run it, see if anything comes up.

GINA

Seems like you've got your minds already made up.

Gina sighs, defeated, worn out.

GINA

(continuing)

I got to get home, get Valerie ready for her recital tonight and I don't even have LAST quarter's tuition.

Lynn steps over.

LYNN

Lemme help clean this. We can get it set up again-

GINA

I'm DONE. I don't have it in me to keep going. I don't have the resources.

OFF GINA, devastated, we-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S HOUSE - CASCADE ROW, "SWATS"

Aunt Paulette and Darnelle wait while Gina puts finishing touches on Valerie's hair. Everyone is dressed in their Sunday best. Valerie's hair is a cascade of flowing waves, topped off with a small, golden musical notes clipped into the fall. Paulette and Darnelle try to compensate for Gina's somber mood.

PAULETTE

Baby, you look gorgeous!

VALERIE

Really?

DARNELLE

Oh yeah! Over the top gorgeous.

VALERIE

It's not too Beyonce?

PAULETTE

No, no.

DARNELLE
Only in a good way.

Valerie catches her mother's quiet gaze.

VALERIE
Are the cops gonna find whoever
did it?

PAULETTE
(to Darnelle)
Wasn't one of YOUR friends?

DARNELLE
Yeah, right. Thanks, Mama.

VALERIE
(to Gina)
You think it was Jorge?

GINA
I KNOW it was Jorge. But you got
to let the law take it's course.
Innocent until proven guilty.
Isn't that how it goes?

Gina sighs.

GINA
(continuing)
I told them to check into it...
we'll see.

Aunt Paulette leans down to Valerie.

PAULETTE
(to Valerie)
How about, after your recital, we
go get you a Sundae at thirty-one
flavors?

Valerie's face lights up.

VALERIE
Yeah!

She looks at her Mom, desperate to see her happy.

VALERIE
(continuing)
What do you think, Mom?

Gina forces a smile.

GINA
Sounds good, baby. You're the star.

She gives her a big squeeze. They all get up, Gina helps Valerie into her coat. Paulette hangs back, motions for Darnelle to lead Valerie to the car.

PAULETTE
(aside; to Gina)
You gonna tell her?

Gina looks at her Aunt.

GINA
Not tonight. I want her to enjoy this moment. Let her shine. They pick ten kids out of the whole school to do this-

Paulette nods.

PAULETTE
You gonna have to tell her.

GINA
What do I say? Baby, I let you down. No more shop. No more music school-

PAULETTE
You'll find the right way-

INT. MUSIC AND ART SCHOOL - EVENING

A huge auditorium. A panel of esteemed MUSIC TEACHERS are seated at a long table. Parents (mostly white and Asian) and coaches fill some of the seats. A young ASIAN BOY is playing the violin as Gina, Darnelle and Paulette take seats up front. The boy finishes playing and everyone applauds.

TEACHER
Next we have-
(reading)
Valerie Morris.

There's a beat...and then Valerie walks across the stage to the grand piano that's set up there. She pauses...and then begins to play.

We can see Gina become visibly moved by the first few subtle notes. She sits up, looks around at all the faces of everyone listening and she knows: it's pure magic. Her face is filled with emotion, with a sense of pride and...impending loss.

EXT. MUSIC AND ART SCHOOL - NIGHT

As Gina and Valerie are leaving, a TEACHER runs up to them: she's young, vibrant.

TEACHER
Mrs. Morris? So FANTASTIC to meet
you!

The teacher pumps Gina's hand, then Gives Valerie a big hug.

TEACHER
(continuing;
whispered)
You did great!

Valerie is beaming. Gina smiles, trying not to let her
heartbreak show.

TEACHER
(continuing)
She's SO talented. So gifted!

GINA
Right, right. She is special.

OFF GINA, looking at the teacher with a bittersweet smile,
we-

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - MORNING

As Gina approaches, one of the BARBERS from the shop down the
way sticks his head out.

BARBER
You're closing down?

GINA
That's right. Just packing up
what's left.

He shakes his head.

BARBER
Damn shame. You had some cute
girls in there-

INT. BEAUTY SHOP - CONTINUOUS

As Gina opens the door, she reaches down to picks up some
mail that's been shoved through the slot, doesn't look up for
a beat. When she does, she double-takes; GASPS. The shop has
been completely transformed. Lynn, James, Darnelle, Ashley
and Lola stand by proudly as Gina takes it in: everyone has
brought in their own furniture and equipment. The mirrors
have been replaced by funky, mismatched ballroom mirrors. The
coffee tables have been replaced. There are couches, rugs,
lamps and wall hangings. It's crazy and eclectic, but somehow
it works. The only thing that remains are the rental hair
dryers. Gina looks around, overwhelmed.

GINA
What...what the-?

JAMES
Welcome to the new and improved
Gina's.

She's moved and shocked.

LYNN
We got flat irons, curlers,
shampoo, conditioner-

LOLA
Nail supplies-

DARNELLE
Hair for weaves-

GINA
What'd you do? How did you-?

JAMES
Just raided our homes.

ASHLEY
We brought in all our OWN stuff.

Gina doesn't know what to say.

GINA
(slowly)
You all aren't letting me off the
hook, huh?

DARNELLE
(softly)
You've got a GOOD thing here, Gina.

A beat.

GINA
I don't know. I been looking
forward to a vacation on my couch,
feeling sorry for my poor, broke
self...

JAMES
(looking at his watch)
You may be broke... but we booked
you today-

LYNN
So get yo' work on!

GINA

How can we do this? I got no
MONEY-

Lynn puts an arm around Gina. In the BACKGROUND, we see Denise and Rochelle come in, check out the new look as they take their seats.

DENISE

I LOVE it!

ROCHELLE

You girls went buck wild with the
new decor!

The door swings open and Terri walks in, sits down at Gina's chair.

TERRI

Look at THIS! You redecorated.

GINA

Something like that-

Terri looks at her, carefully.

TERRI

I want you to do something
different, something new. Chop it
all off and give me...a shag.
Something Rock and Roll.

Gina stares at her.

GINA

What happened?

DENISE

Woman want a change like that, can
only mean one thing-

TERRI

I'm leaving George.

Gina stares, open-mouthed. The other girls REACT.

TERRI

(continuing)
He's been having an affair-

ROCHELLE

I KNEW it.

GINA

Terri! I'm SO sorry! You alright?
You cool?

TERRI
It's okay. I'm gonna be fine. Now
that I know.

ROCHELLE
See that? You yo' own woman now!

DENISE
Kick him to the curb!

Lola leans in to her.

LOLA
Can I get you a Cappuccino?

TERRI
That would be lovely...

GINA
(to Lola)
That thing hasn't EVER worked,
Lola-

JOE (O.S.)
It's working now.

Gina freezes as Joe steps out from the kitchen.

DARNELLE
(pointedly)
Joe helped hang all the new
mirrors-

ASHLEY
And he put some new light fixtures
in.

Joe steps over to Gina. Gina looks at him, touched that he'd
help out. Everyone is watching.

GINA
Hey. You. Thank you.

JOE
Just know...I'm around.

She nods, they look at each other, a long significant LOOK,
before he walks out.

OFF Gina, exchanging a grateful look with the girls, we-

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

Denise and Rochelle are talking a mile a minute, Terri is admiring her new, sexy look when two local GHETTO GIRLS walk in, babies in tow. ONE of them steps forward.

GINA

What can I do for you, gorgeous?

GIRL

I need my weave re-done, but I only got enough to do the front. If you could just hook up the front-

GINA

How much you got?

GIRL

Fitty bucks.

GINA

Fine. I'll do the whole thing.

GIRL

Really? You messin' with me?

GINA

Sit down. Put yo' feet up, little Mama. How old are you?

GIRL

Seventeen...

As Gina starts working on the girl, chatting her up, her baby wanders, toddling around. The girls pick him up, coo and tickle him. He giggles and laughs. The other GIRL hugs Lola and they start to chat: old friends.

LYNN

(aside, to Gina)

So? What's the plan, woman?

GINA

(smiling)

I got a mortgage due, I owe on the rentals, I'm overdue on Valerie's tuition... and there are but four ppeople in here.

LYNN

You're smiling.

GINA

Damn straight, I'm smiling. I LOVE this!

She starts laughing.

GINA
(continuing)
One day at a frickin' time. That's
how I'm feeling it. I'm open right
now, this minute...until someone
says otherwise!

Lynn starts laughing, holds a hand up.

GINA
(continuing; hitting
it)
That's my damn state-of-the-art
Business Plan!

At that moment, a statuesque WOMAN (African American, thirties) walks in. She seems local, but with a little more sophistication. Gina sits her down at her chair.

GINA
(continuing)
You from around here?

WOMAN
My cousin lives around the corner.
She told me you all could do me
right.

Gina looks at her carefully: something about her seems familiar. Gina starts to slather on some of her Special Sauce.

GINA
You've got a great full face. You
could carry off something with a
little more height-

WOMAN
Really-?

GINA
Let me try something-

At that moment, Rita comes in with her cart of food.

RITA
Praise Jesus! If it isn't my
favorite hair doctor! Miz Gina!
You gone and redecorated! I like
this...this FITS!

Gina grins as everyone starts shouting out their orders and eating Rita's food. The ghetto girls, the woman Gina's working on...everyone starts talking and commenting on how good the food is as they eat.

At that moment, Willie flies in, boom box on one shoulder, blasting his music, a video camera under the other arm.

GINA
Willie. Come on-

WILLIE
Wait! Wait! Hold up! It's my new cut! You owe me, Gina...I need your gorgeousness in my dang video!

GINA
I got clients here, my friend, you got to catch me some other-

WILLIE
Guess who's directing? Funkmaster Will himself!

Gina sighs, lets him go on, flirt with the girls: she's in a generous mood.

CUT TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Gina is done with the woman's hair: it is a gorgeous creation. One of her best. The woman is laughing and talking with Rita as she leaves, clearly pleased with her new look: Gina stares at the tip in her hand.

GINA
Miss Thing left me a nice tip!

Lynn looks at the bill, nods her approval.

GINA
(continuing)
Never got tipped like THAT at Jorge's.

LYNN
You hear from the cops?

GINA
Yeah. They went 'round to Jorge's and he had an alibi that checked out for the night I was robbed.

LYNN
I bet he did.

GINA
Right? Fuck him and his alibi and his Jorge Sauce. I'm right where I want to be.

Lynn looks at her, surprised to hear her say this.

GINA
 (continuing)
 For real. Look at everyone in here. I made a big difference for them, today.

James steps over, listening.

GINA
 (continuing)
 This is where I want to be. Give back right here.

LYNN
 Amen!

GINA
 With or without my product.

JAMES
 Hell with that. YOU the one that's 'special.'

He winks at her. Gina laughs, turns to everyone:

GINA
 Was I on the money to hire HIM, or what?

RITA
 Mm-Hmm. How much he get paid to say that?

As everyone reacts, laughing, Gina gazes around the shop with pride and we-

CUT TO:

EXT. JORGE CRISTOPHE'S - AFTERNOON

Jorge, his long curls carefully arranged around his shoulders, is working on a client. He doesn't see Gina as she marches into the shop. She sneaks up behind him. Startles him.

JORGE
 Gina! What a...surprise!

GINA
 Hair looks good, Jorge. You been using my stuff. I can tell-

JORGE
 I've been using MY sauce-

GINA
Cut the shit. I know what you did.

JORGE
Really.

They stare at each other for a beat.

GINA
I'd love to hear where it was you
were when my shop was torn up.

JORGE
If you must know, I was on a date
with Carla Rodriguez.

GINA
That latin model who comes in
here? Bull shit. That's a little
too much flavor for you-

JORGE
Ask her.

GINA
How much you pay HER? More or less
than the inspector-

Jorge becomes indignant.

JORGE
I do not have to stand here while
you abuse me-

Gina leans forward, menacing, but keeping her cool.

GINA
Abuse you? You been around too
many old white ladies if you think
THIS is abuse. Just know, Jorge,
it's gonna come around. I don't
know how, but you fucked with the
wrong girl. I may be knocked
down...but I am not OUT!

Gina turns, struts off. Jorge continues with his work, but we
can see that he's been shaken, rattled by Gina's confidence.

CUT TO:

EXT. JORGE CRISTOPHE'S - NIGHT

Jorge's is closed down for the night. We see him head away
from his shop, down the street. Before he can reach his
Mercedes, three men step out from the shadows. They walk
quickly, intercept Jorge before he gets to his car.

As they step into the light, we see it's James, Rick and Malik (his prison friends). They surround Jorge.

JORGE
Hey! Now hold on! You want money?
Here!

We suddenly hear a a distinct, mechanical WHRRRR.

JORGE
(continuing)
Wait! What do think you're doing-

CLOSE ON: a pair of hair clippers in James's hands.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Darnelle is finishing up color on a client, talking to Gina, when Aunt Paulette comes in with an armful of flowers, starts setting them in vases. Ashley, Lynn and James are chatting: no one's in for them.

GINA
(to Darnelle)
...date with Carla Rodriguez? Bold-
faced lie. To my face.

Darnelle shakes her head.

ANGLE ON: Lola, listening carefully.

At that moment, the Inspector steps in. He looks around, makes a couple of notes, and then bee-lines over to Darnelle. Gina follows him, pissed. He starts to write up a ticket when Darnelle reaches in her bag and pulls out a framed certificate, hangs it up by her station.

DARNELLE
(casually)
Forgot to put that up.

Paulette stares at the brand new LICENSE. The Inspector starts looking around for something else, scribbling on his pad...when Gina steps up to him, grabs the pad and rips it in half.

INSPECTOR
Hey! You can't-

Lynn is at Gina's shoulder.

GINA
You got on a nice suit for a
Health Department employee-

The inspector looks nervous, starts sweating, fumbling for his cell phone.

GINA
 (continuing)
 Go ahead. Call you boss. Report me, write me up. Then be sure and tell you're friend Jorge I said 'Hey' while you doin' that-

The Inspector, freaked out, quickly turns away with a-

INSPECTOR
 (mumbled)
 -everything looks fine.

GINA
 Damn straight, it does!

Gina gives him a hard, knowing look as he leaves. At that moment the SONG on the radio segues to Lisa L., the DJ.

RADIO
 (DJ)
 I got the 411 on the latest, fly spot to get ALL your shit DONE. I'm talking hair, nails...I'm talking HAIR! I wish you all could see the LOOK, the work of art I got going on here!

Gina stares at the radio, suddenly putting two and two together-

RADIO
 (continuing)
 It's called "Gina's Beauty Shop." That's right. Gina's in the hood. And it is the SPOT!

GINA
 It was HER!

ASHLEY
 No!

DARNELLE
 Lisa L was in HERE?!

GINA
 That woman, I did yesterday-

RADIO
 I'm telling you. You want flavor, you want class? Place was outrageous...

Gina starts laughing, howling.

RADIO
(continuing)
Auburn and 7th. Get yourselves
down there.

James and Gina Hi-five, Lynn hugs Gina, everyone is shouting
and yelling as we -

CUT TO:

EXT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

There is a line down the block to get in. We track along the
waiting crowd: there are trendy white girls, hip rock and
roll types, the ghetto fabulous, the local flavor, etc...

Willie is out front, playing his music for the crowd. He has
a hand-held digital camera and he tapes girls as they come
out, chatting them up, asking them to pose for him with their
new hair.

WILLIE
...telling you. It's gonna be the
next TRL video of the week. Soon
as my shit hits the charts. And
YOU, baby, are gonna be featured!

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - CONTINUOUS

The radio is booming. Every hairstylist has a line waiting
for them. QUICK, FRANTIC CUTS of hands braiding, scissors
cutting, hair being washed, rinsed, colored, braided...

RADIO
(DJ)
...talking reparations. How they
gonna figure that shit out? I'm
gonna tell you something...I'm all
for it, pay us back for slavery-

GINA
Uh-oh. My girl Lisa L is about to
get crazy with this-

RADIO
(DJ)
I WENT to Africa, okay? Thinkin'
they gonna embrace me, a big black
woman, a shade past coffee. Took
a look at me, said, DANG another
WHITE American!

Everyone in the shop is laughing, reacting.

RADIO

(continuing; DJ)

... so how MUCH African do we each HAVE? Lookit that one congressman from New York, the High-yellow one talkin' restitutions. What's HE gonna get? Looks like he got, oh, five dollars comin' to him!

GINA

No! She did NOT say that!

LYNN

Oh yes, child, she did!

Everyone is talking and laughing. Gina looks up to see Joanne PUSH her way into the shop. Gina stares her. Lola looks at her.

JOANNE

Gina. I just...I HAD to come.

She looks away, a little embarrassed, but playing it off with major attitude. She is NOT one to apologize.

GINA

Yeah. Everybody's here.

JOANNE

So? How long am I gonna have to wait?

Gina looks at her...wants to say something, but decides to let it go.

GINA

It'll be a minute. Sit down, Joanne. I'll get with you.

Joanne arranges herself, posing, aware of the hip crowd. At that moment, old Mrs. Towner walks in, shuffles straight to the line of waiting customers and sits down in front of Ashley. She pops her teeth out and sets them in a glass. Ashley looks at Gina. Gina nods, go ahead, do her.

ASHLEY

(shouting)

TRY SOMETHING NEW, MIZ TOWNER?

MRS. TOWNER

Hell no! You do what you always do! Don't mess wit' my style!

Gina and Ashley exchange a smile. MUSIC segues to:

RADIO

(DJ)

Okay...speaking of the Hawks...
you all know who our star forward
is-

Denise jumps up.

DENISE

(proudly)

She's talkin' about my husband!

RADIO

- I got dirt! He was spotted,
after hours, not with his lovely
wife, but with another lovely-

GINA

(under her breath)

Oh shit-

Everyone freezes. Denise is clutching her Gucci bag, starts
to stagger on her Prada heels. Rochelle grabs her elbow.

RADIO

(DJ)

- white girl, blond hair, big
titties...can you believe that?
I'd never think he'd go for
that...tell me she was frontin'
ghetto hair-

We CLOSE ON: Joanne, frozen, sinking down into her chair.
Slowly, one by one, everyone in the shop has noticed her;
heads turn slowly as Lisa I. continues:

RADIO

(continuing; DJ)

...fat rocks, Louis Vuitton hat
and purse-

Exactly what Joanne has on. Denise and Rochelle are staring
at her.

RADIO

(continuing)

...sad day for the ATL-

Denise picks up the radio, tearing it out of the wall, and
charges at Joanne, screaming. Rochelle is right with her.
Joanne backs up, looks over at Terri, whose getting her nails
done: a plea for help. Terri shakes her head, looks away.
Gina jumps in, grabs the radio. James helps her hold the two
women back. Ashley steps to Joanne.

ASHLEY

My advice to you, player, is
escape while you can. There's an
exit through the kitchen.

Ashley, Lynn, Darnelle and Lola are cracking up as Joanne gets on her hands and knees and sneaks out through the kitchen.

Gina, meanwhile, has managed to get everyone calmed down as she plugs the radio back in. Denise and Rochelle are going off, talking shit, venting to a group of women who've gathered around them. Terri has stepped over to put a comforting arm around Denise.

TERRI

Remember, now. You "kick him to
the curb." Right? Be strong!

At that moment Aunt Paulette walks in. Gina looks up.

GINA

Hey Auntie, I'll be with you in a
minute. Got a little drama here-

But Paulette walks past Gina and goes over to Darnelle's chair. Darnelle looks at her, surprised. Gina stares, catches the moment.

PAULETTE

(quietly)

Okay, daughter. Let's see what you
can do.

Darnelle looks her in the eye: it's a real moment of reconciliation, of trust. Darnelle swallows nervously, and starts on her mother's hair, as the music on the radio segues back to Lisa L.

RADIO

(DJ)

...don't forget, this weekend, we
got the Atlanta Hair Shows. You
wanna see the best stylists, the
best products, crazy hair...get
tickets-

ANGLE ON: Gina, who catches Lynn's eye. Darnelle looks up. Ashley stops what she's doing and looks at Gina. James looks up, too...everyone is smiling, thinking the same thing: an unspoken decision is made.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GINA'S BEAUTY SHOP - LATER

CLOSE ON: Aunt Paulette, admiring her new hair. We PULL BACK to reveal Gina's crew, each girl (and James) doing each other's hair, set up in a row like a conga-line. The shop is closed. Everyone is talking over everyone else, giving each other feed-back and direction when Valerie walks in, her backpack from school over her shoulder. Her mouth gapes open in surprise.

VALERIE

Mama? What is going on?!

GINA

Hey, baby! We're going to a show.

SMASH CUT:

INT. ATLANTA CONVENTION CENTER

We PAN ACROSS the room. Booths are set up from all the high-end, upscale shops. Lighting is individual, dramatic. Men and women crowd around the booths, getting their hair done, trying new products.

CLOSE ON: Jorge, his hair SHORN prison style. He lords it over a large JORGE CRISTOPHE display featuring the Special Sauce. The inspector hovers, checking each booth.

Suddenly, heads are turning, there's a murmur in the crowd...

The large double doors of the main ballroom swing open, revealing six striking FIGURES, backlit, their hair towering creations. They walk forward in SLO MO and into the light. It's Gina, Darnelle, Lynn, Ashley, Lola and James. They stop, let the whole damn place take them in. The hair is outrageous, insane: it's art. The crowd goes wild, talking and pointing...

CUT TO:

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - LATER

There's a crowd around the "Gina's" booth. Willie is projecting a back-drop of cool, dissolving digital images of women on the street, posing with their 'done' hair outside of Gina's. Rita is passing out food. There's a line for Gina, who's set up a chair. Lynn and Darnelle are working hair, while Ashley and James take down names for appointments. Paulette and Valerie help make change.

Directly across the floor is Jorge's booth, significantly less crowded.

ANGLE ON: Ashley, as she looks up, spotting someone, and waves. Gina follows her gaze as a gorgeous, dark-skinned BEAUTY approaches.

Ashley takes the beauty's hand, excited...and then plants a big kiss on her mouth. Gina stares, surprised but not letting on.

ASHLEY
(to Gina)
Gina? This is Roxanne, my
girlfriend.

Gina gives her a big hug.

ROXANNE
I've heard so much about you! You
are one special lady.

Gina smiles.

GINA
(to Roxanne)
Well, Ashley here is family.
(to Ashley)
She's gorgeous! You've GOT to let
me do her hair.

Roxanne nods, takes a seat while Ashley holds her hand. They are still talking when Joe appears. Sits down across from Gina. She pretends not to notice. Joe is grinning.

ASHLEY
Got to give him credit for
perseverance.

Gina finally looks up at Joe, with a smile.

GINA
And what can I do for you?

JOE
I was thinking, maybe you could do
me some braids.

GINA
Could do that-

JOE
And I'll pay you with dinner and
a movie.

Gina laughs.

GINA
You can pay me with CASH. And I'll
think about dinner and a movie-

They look at each other, grinning, all things suddenly possible.

They're gaze is broken by a sudden commotion at the front doors: making their way through the crowd are the two detectives, followed by three armed OFFICERS. They go directly to Jorge's booth.

Gina steps out, slowly walks through the crowd: Jorge is arguing with one of the detectives, who's trying to lead him out. By the time Gina is standing at his booth, one of the officers has been forced to cuff him. Her crew (along with a large crowd) has gathered behind her to witness Jorge's humiliation.

GINA
(continuing; shocked)
I can NOT believe it.

DET. #1
(to Gina)
Ms. Morris? You were right. We're booking him on breaking and entering, vandalism and grand theft.

GINA
How'd you finally figure it out?

The detective motion back, to Lola.

DET. #1
She broke his alibi. Brought the "friend" in who confessed. And then his prints matched. Easy.

Gina stares at Lola.

LOLA
(quietly)
I know Carla Rodriguez from way back. Just had to convince her it was worth it to tell the truth.

Gina gives Lola a grateful nod, then walks up to Jorge.

JORGE
I've got lawyers, I'm going to sue you for defamation-

GINA
Give it up. You got what you had coming. You the creative genius with the vision, remember? How else d'you think this would have gone?

Jorge glares at her.

GINA

(continuing)

Tryin' to run me out, steal what's mine. You did me a favor, Jorge. Helped me figure out I don't need anything but what I got right here.

She put a fist to her chest. Jorge stares at her, unable to come back with anything. The police lead him out. One of the detectives turns back to Gina.

DET. #1

(motioning to Jorge's booth)

He's not gonna be working for a long time. You're free to take back anything that's rightfully yours...we're shutting him down.

Gina smiles, notices Lynn, stopping the other detective.

LYNN

(pointing to the inspector)

I'd take a good look at HIM. Fool's been linin' his pockets.

Gina is about to step in and translate, when-

DET. #2

Yeah, I'd gotten a whiff o' the dung he's been muckin' in, all right.

He's got a country accent as strong and unintelligible as Lynn's. Gina laughs, can't believe it as Det. #2 heads for the inspector.

James, staring at Lola, steps up to her.

JAMES

(to Lola)

This is a GOOD look for you-

LOLA

(flirting)

Really? You think so?

JAMES

I've BEEN thinking so.

He nods, takes her hand and pulls her away. Valerie comes up to her mother, slips an arm around her waist, and points to James and Lola: they're kissing now, leaning against each other.

VALERIE
(whispered)

Look! Are they gonna have sex?

GINA

No! No one has sex until they're married. Remember?

VALERIE

I thought he was gay.

Lynn, Darnelle and Ashley are cracking up.

DARNELLE

Guess NOT.

Gina pulls Valerie close, an arm around her shoulder. She looks down at her, filled with love and pride.

GINA

Time to go, baby. I got to drop a check off at your school. The girls can cover here.

VALERIE

Now? Right now?

Everyone is looking at Gina, smiling, proud: they know what this means for her.

GINA

Right now. Nothin' else I'd rather do.

OFF Gina and Valerie, we-

CUT TO:

INT. PRISON - DAY

We follow an inmate in his 'blues' as he rounds a corner and joins a line of men waiting outside of a cell. We PAN DOWN the line of rough looking inmates, tattooed, pierced, scarred. At the end of the line, we finally catch sight of Jorge, standing over a chair, shaving one head after another with a pair of rusty clippers. Behind him, the Inspector sweeps up the clippings...