

Cadillac Records



1 EXT. MISSISSIPPI COUNTRY ROAD. 1949. 1 *

Intense heat. Black field workers doubled over, sweating, struggle to keep going to the beat of the work song.

A sleek Cadillac glides down the road. The Workers stop -- to see the miracle of black men inside. *

2 INT. CADILLAC. (CONTINUOUS). 2

The air conditioner makes waves in the processed pompadour of the handsome black driver and billows through the slick silky suits of the other men. The black men in this caddy are cool, literally and figuratively -- the originators of the word.

The TEEN in the passenger seat plays with his diamond ring like a prism, making a spectrum of colors float across the ceiling. He's still young enough to chase rainbows.

3 EXT. SMALL TOWN. (CONTINUOUS) 3

The Cadillac glides past a couple of shacks. *

4 INT. CADILLIAC.(CONTINUOUS) 4

The TEEN clocks a broken down car with instruments tied to it in front of a juke joint. The pretty boy's eyes slide over the writing on the side, "Little Walter and the Jukes".

The dark handsome man at the wheel cuts his eyes mischievously at the teenager who could be his son.

DARK HANDSOME MAN

Damn shame, a big time record
artist like Lil Walter drivin'
around in a painted up soup can!

The other men laugh. The teen flashes a killer's grin.

TEENAGER

Lemme out, will ya?

DARK HANDSOME MAN

Hold on, son -

But the teenager has already stepped out of the moving caddy. The men in the caddy collectively, "Aw hell!"

5 EXT. JUKE JOINT. (CONTINUOUS) 5

The Teen looks into the car at the hillbilly musicians.

TEENAGER

Which one of you motherfuckers is
Lil Walter?

The toothless man fingering a harmonica looks up at him.

TOOTHLESS MAN

I am, fool!

The teenager pulls out a gun and blasts him.

6 INT. CADILLAC. (CONTINUOUS) 6 *

The Teen gets back in the caddy. They peel off. The men
"hmpf" and growl, "Why the hell you do that, Lil Walter?"

TEENAGER/LIL WALTER

He takin' money out my pocket!

MAN IN THE BACK OF CADDY

So he stealin' your gigs -

LIL WALTER

He's stealin' my name.

The Dark handsome driver, MUDDY WATERS, glares at Lil Walter.
Walter fingers his harmonica, feeling Muddy's disappointment.

MUDDY

That harp'll take you a helluva lot
farther than that heater will.

Little Walter flashes a grin. He blows his harp and sings a
Muddy song about violence and the lore they live "I'm Ready".

TITLES

7 INT. CHESS STUDIO/BLUES MUSEUM. PRESENT DAY. 7

Dissolve into Muddy's recording of "I'm Ready" over photos of
Lil Walter, Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon performing, 1950's.

Pull back to see other photos of musicians, hanging on the
wall of the Blues Museum/the old Chess recording studio.

8 INT. RECORDING ROOM 8

Muddy's song dissolves into yet another rendition -- Hip hop artists cover "I'm Ready".

9 INT. CONTROL BOOTH 9

THE PRODUCER
(pressing intercom)
I ain't feelin' it.

ARTIST
(over intercom)
I ain't feelin' it either. This is
my Granddaddy's music.

The ENGINEER, an old timer, picks up an old Willie Dixon cassette and puts it in the ancient tape player.

WILLIE V.O.
Hello, I'm Willie Dixon.

ARTIST
(over intercom)
What the hell is that?

ENGINEER
(pressing intercom)
Willie made it for groups tourin'
this museum. Maybe it'll help you
'feel' your ole granddaddy's music.

WILLIE V.O.
Welcome to the Chess recordin'
studio and Blues Museum. Blues are
made up of legends and truth. I'm a
tell you a little bit a both...
'Bout men who wanted but two things
in life -- to wax a record, 'an get
it played. It was Capone's
Chicago... Dress like you the man,
ride like you the man, fuck like
you the man, and be ready to take
anybody out, who says you isn't...

The Artists laugh in acknowledgement.

DISSOLVE TO:

10 INT. CLUB. 1950'S 10
Muddy, decked-out and at his sexiest, performs "Mannish Boy".

WILLIE V.O.
We were runnin' from Mississippi
plantations. Two, three generations
outta slavery...

CUT TO:

11 FOUND FOOTAGE OF LYNCHED BLACK MEN. 11 *

WILLIE V.O. *
We run off to play music. But we
was really just tryin' to find a
place that would let us be men.

10b INT. CLUB. 1950'S. 10b
Muddy performs "Mannish Boy" with a ferocity that drives the
women crazy and make the men cheer his bravado.

12 EXT. FIELD IN MISSISSIPPI. 1920'S 12
MUDDY, six, toils in the field. He's about to pass out. Mule. *
Muddy's GRANDMOTHER sings, keeping the field hands going.

MUDDY'S GRANDMOTHER
Let it carry you, Muddy.

Muddy catches his breath and hums, too. It does carry him.

WILLIE V.O.
That song'd get inside you. Make a
dead man stand up and haul cotton!

DISSOLVE TO:

12b EXT. FIELD IN MISSISSIPPI. 1930'S. 12b
Muddy, twenties, sees his Grandmother having trouble.

MUDDY
Get out the field, Grandma. *

She reluctantly leaves the field.

WORKERS SINGING

Oh Lawd, I'm tired, uuh *
 Oh Lawd, I'm tired a dis mess. *

Muddy works faster, giving his exhausted body to the rhythm.

13 EXT. STOVALL FARM. CHRISTMAS EVE. 13

Muddy's in line to get paid. Muddy argues with the overseer. *

OVERSEER

You still owe me for rent, food and *
 that mule you got on credit... *

MUDDY

It's Christmas. *

MR. STOVALL approaches with chickens and a Christmas smile. *

MR. STOVALL

(playfully to overseer) *
 You givin' my best field hand, *
 grief? *
 (handing Muddy a chicken) *
 Merry Christmas, Mud. *

MUDDY

Thank you kindly, sir.

MR. STOVALL

(giving Muddy a dollar) *
 You ever need anything, you *
 remember you belong to the Stovall *
 family.

He goes off to distribute more chickens to the field hands.

14 INT. JUNKYARD SHACK. DAY. 14 *

SHIRLEY ADAMS, eighteen, All American, blonde, pretty, kisses *
 LEN CHESS, dark, handsome and just 'off the boat' with a *
 hustler's charm. He pulls at her panties. She stops him.

SHIRLEY

When are we getting married? *

LEN

When I get the money -

SHIRLEY

Two can eat as cheap as one. *

LEN
You never been hungry -

SHIRLEY
Your family didn't have money and
they did fine.

He gives up trying to get into her pants.

LEN
My kid brother almost starved to
death.

SHIRLEY
Nobody starves to death! You're so
Russian. It stinks in here -

Shirley opens her purse and sprays perfume on the grimey
light bulb.

LEN
I'm Polish.

SHIRLEY
Same thing. Depressing!

LEN
My mother had a bad heart. She
couldn't make any milk for Phil.

SHIRLEY
And you think that's going to
happen to us?

LEN
No.
(cupping her large breast)
I bet you could feed half of
Europe.

She slaps him, playfully.

SHIRLEY
Anyway, your brother survived.

Len hears Gospel singing. He opens the window.

LEN
Barely. The one woman who could
nurse him wanted to get paid. An'
she knew how broke we was. We had
to keep the donkey in our shack to
keep us warm.

SHIRLEY

But your father found a way to take
care of his family -- just like
we'll find a way...

Len looks at her.

LEN

My father begged. He went down to
river and begged and when that
didn't work, he carried my brother
into the river, until that woman
stopped him and put Phil to her
breast... That ain't gonna be my
way.

Len closes his eyes for a beat, listening to the emotional
gospel singers. Shirley embraces him. They kiss and fall back
onto the couch.

15 EXT. CHESS JUNKYARD. DAY.

15

An expensive car pulls up.

INT. JUNKYARD SHACK. DAY.

Len and Shirley dress frantically as they watch Mr. Adams,
fifty and conservative get out of the car.

LEN

Run out the back gate.

They kiss goodbye.

EXT. CHESS. JUNKYARD. DAY.

Mr. Adams knocks on the front door. Len opens it.

LEN

Hi Mr. Adams. That car's a beaut!
Not too flashy. Says a gantseh
macher is behind the wheel.

MR. ADAMS

(inhaling the room)
Is my daughter here?

LEN

Of course not. I wouldn't take her
to this side of town.

Len notices Mr. Adams looking at the disheveled office. *

LEN (CONT'D) *
 You know Mr. Adams, I'm not stayin' *
 in this business. I'm savin' money *
 to open my own club, right here -- *

MR. ADAMS
 In a Negro neighborhood?

LEN
 It's gonna be for Negros.

Mr. Adams looks at him as if he's lost his mind.

LEN (CONT'D) *
 You start listenin' to that music, *
 (re; the gospel) *
 you won't wanna hear anything else! *

MR. ADAMS *
 What are you doing to Shirley? *
 taking her to negro clubs? Having *
 her down here? *

LEN *
 No sir - *

MR. ADAMS *
 I smell her perfume. Shalamar. *
 Fifty dollrs a bottle - *

LEN *
 I'm planning to marry her. *

MR. ADAMS *
 Is that suppose to make me happy? *
 What you need is a sensible girl, *
 who can roll up her sleeves and *
 help you with your business. That's *
 not my Shirley. I don't want you *
 seeing her again. *

Mr. Adams gets in his car. Len turns on Adams. *

LEN *
 You know what's fuckin' sensible -- *
 your car! Sensible and dull -- *

Mr. Adams is outraged. He starts his car.

LEN (CONT'D)
 That will never be my wife -- My
 wife'll drive a Cadillac. One for
 me and one for her -

*
 *
 *

Mr. Adams pulls off -

LEN (CONT'D)
 A new one every year!

*

16 EXT. LONELY MISSISSIPPI ROAD. DAWN. 16

Muddy and a FRIEND play guitar and sing as they walk.

A pick-up truck slows. Two REDNECKS with rifles inside. Muddy
 and his friend clock the coiled rope in the back.

*

REDNECK#1
 Get in. We'll give you a ride.

*

Muddy pulls the only card he has.

MUDDY
 We belongs to the Stovall family.

The Rednecks weigh Muddy's response. They peel off.

Muddy and his friend breath again. They walk in silence.

17 EXT. MUDDY'S SHACK. ANOTHER DAY. 17

A car pulls up. Muddy eyes the white man, LOMAX, with
 suspicion.

*

LOMAX
 Morgan Mckinlley?

*

MUDDY
 Yes suh?

Muddy's eyes drift to the recording device he's holding.

*

LOMAX
 I'm recording folk music for the
 Library of Congress.

*

*

LATER ---

Muddy plays his guitar and sings. Lomax is 'feeling' him.

LATER ---

Muddy listens to the recording, as if it were a miracle.

MUDDY

That's what I sound like, huh?

Lomax smiles.

MUDDY (CONT'D)

Feel like I'm meetin' myself for
the first time.

WILLIE V.O.

He was. An' he knew it was a man he
was meetin' an not an' ox yoked to
ole massa's plough.

18 EXT. LONE COUNTRY ROAD. DAY. MUSIC CUE. 18

On his way out of town, Muddy looks up at an ancient tree. *

WILLIE V.O.

Hard to leave Mississippi. You tied
to it with a big ole umbilical cord
that would just as well strangle
you as let you go.

The remnants of a tattered old rope sways from a branch.

19 EXT. LEN'S MACOMBA LOUNGE. GHETTO. DAY. 19

Black neighborhood. Len Chess opens the gates to his club.

A convertible canary yellow Cadillac pulls up. Leonard double
takes the hot red head inside, EVELYN ARON. *

EVELYN ARON *

Are you the owner of this club? *

LEN

Yeah? *

Evelyn shoots him a smile, behind movie star sunglasses.

EVELYN ARON *

Evelyn Aron. I make race records. *

LEN

Len Chess... You can buy a car like
that makin' race records? *

EVELYN ARON
 If you find the right singer. I'd
 love to know if you hear someone
 special.

*
 *
 *
 *

Evelyn hands him her card.

EVELYN ARON (CONT'D)
 There'd be something in it for you.

*

She's a step up above Shirley -- sophisticated, elegant and
 sexy as hell. He takes her card and watches her drive away.

*
 *

20 INT. MACOMBA LOUNGE. 1940. NIGHT.

20

Sonny Boy Williamson and Sunnyland Slim are playing a set.

Len's working a heavy bar, money's flying everywhere.

ENTRANCE -

*

A ragged ten year old boy sneaks in. He fondles a battered,
 cheap harmonica. We've seen his pretty face before.

PUSH IN ON THE BOY'S EYES -

His eyes focus on Sonny Boy Williamson.

INTERCUT THE BOY'S POV -

Close ups of Sonny's mouth and fingers on the harmonica.

CUT BACK TO:

The Boy expertly mimes Sonny Boy, blowing quietly.

Sonny Boy Williamson steps offstage to talk to a woman.

SUNNYLAND SLIM
 C'mon Sonny Boy. We need that harp!

The Boy takes his chance and jumps on stage.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
 (looking at the boy)
 Aw shit...

The crowd laughs at the little boy. He has a crazy sound --
 Louisiana swamp funk and Louis Jordan Swing. Slowly the crowd
 and the other musicians recognize the boy's musical prowess.

Even Len cranes his neck to see the boy over the crowd.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
Damn swamp rat done followed me all
the ways from Louisiana!

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Maybe you his Daddy!

Laughter.

THE BOY
(a thick Creole accent)
Maybe I'm his.

The audience 'oohs' and 'ahhs' at the boy's bravado.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
He but ten years old and he gonna
come in here huntin' heads.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Give the baby headhunter a shot!

The audience agrees. Len nods to Sonny Boy. *

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
Only head gettin' chopped is
your's, li'l bit. *

The two harmonica's battle. The crowd tosses money on stage.

LATER ---

21 INT. MACOMBA BAR.

21

Len gives the boy a coke. The Boy tosses a coin on the bar. *

LEN
It's on me...

The Boy studies him.

THE BOY
Ain't never seen a colored man
light as you.

LEN
I'm Jewish. *

THE BOY
That white? *

Sonny Boy sidles up to the bar with a Woman. *

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
That's somewhere's in between.

Len and Sonny Boy laugh. *

LEN
Chicago winters are rough. You
aughta go back home. *

LIL WALTER
I'm lookin' to hook up with a band. *

The Boy slides his eyes at Sonny Boy. Sonny Boy ignores him.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)
I can cook, wash clothes, iron -- *

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
What you want me to do, marry you?

The woman laughs.

LIL WALTER
Reckon, you can learn me somethin'.

SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON
Let your Daddy learn you somethin'. *

LIL WALTER
Can't learn me no harp... Nothin'
else I needs to know.

Sonny Boy finally smiles at the kid.

WILLIE V.O.
That Little Louisiana Swamp boy was
Little Walter, the greatest
harmonica player that ever lived
and the biggest motherfuckin' pain
in the ass.

22

EXT. BUSY CHICAGO STREET. DAY. 1943

22

Muddy, thirty, plays his heart out for tips. But his hat's empty. He's just background noise in the big bustling city.

WILLIE V.O.
Now, the acoustic guitar was fine
down south.

(MORE)

WILLIE V.O. (CONT'D)
 'Cause they was nothin' but miles a
 empty fields out your window. But
 in the city with all them
 streetcars an' automobiles you
 couldn't get yourself heard.

A SLICK PIMP checks Muddy out in his hillbilly overalls.

CITIFIED SLICK PIMP
 Nobody want that sharecroppin'
 music!

*

Muddy takes in these fast people with no time for his music.
 He sighs and looks up, as if to God, to find a way.

Instead of God, he sees an attractive but older woman,
 GENEVA, watching him from her window. He smiles his million
 dollar Muddy smile. She shakes her head at him.

MUDDY
 Why you wanna cut me like that?!

Geneva speaks proper English.

GENEVA
 You've been giving that same smile
 to girls all morning. You must have
 three addresses in your pocket.

*

*

He pulls out the addresses and lets them fly in the wind.

MUDDY
 But I'll always come home to -
 (reading her address)
 1456 Maxwell Street.

Now she smiles back.

GENEVA
 You're trouble.

*

He shrugs. He knows She's right.

*

23 INT. GENEVA'S BEDROOM.

23

*

WE TRACK PAST -

photographs of GENEVA WADE and her two boys CHARLES and
 DENNIS -- find Muddy and Geneva making love. She breaks away.

*

*

MUDDY
 What, baby?

GENEVA

You have to leave before they wake up.

MUDDY

Maybe they need a Daddy.

GENEVA

You are not Daddy material. *

Muddy throws his clothes on, hurt.

MUDDY

Why? 'Cause I don't talk good as you? They's a lot you don't know about me.

GENEVA

You're right I don't know anything about you, and I never did anything like this before. I'm just trying to take care of my boys -- but when I heard you down there --

Her words stop him at the door.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

it... it took me some place... good. And that's a powerful thing. *

MUDDY

I was thinkin' 'bout givin it up -

GENEVA

Don't...

He turns.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

Ever.

He comes to her, holds her face in his hands, grateful.

MUDDY

Never had a woman... believe in me like that. That's a powerful thing.

He kisses her and goes.

24 EXT. SAME STREET. TENEMENT WINDOW. ANOTHER DAY. 24

Geneva tosses an extension cord out of the window. Muddy catches it and attaches it to a cheap amp attached to an electrical pick-up fed to the sound board of his acoustic guitar (primitive electric guitar).

CLOSE ON -

Muddy's fingers. His electrified slide screams over the noise of the city. People stop and money flies into his hat. *

WILLIE V.O.
An' right there - that's how
Mississippi sharecroppin' music
turned into Chicago blues.

25 EXT. TENEMENT HALLWAY. MORE TIME HAS PASSED. FALL 1947 25 *

Muddy hauls a huge block of ice out of his ice truck. Suddenly, he hears a lone harmonica. It's beautiful. He stares down the block, listening to it, the ice dripping down his back. He puts the ice back in the truck and runs to the sound. *

27 EXT. CHICAGO STREET. 27 *

Walter, sixteen, plays a crowd. Muddy rounds the corner. His sound is Creole, Kansas City Swing and Memphis Blues. He changes harmonicas in the middle of a riff like a magician. Muddy can't help, but smile. *

28 INT. GENEVA AND MUDDY'S APT. 28

Lil Walter notices Geneva's six and seven year old boys laughing at how he's wolfing down his food.

LIL WALTER
Your Daddy sure can cook.

GENEVA
I'm going to run you a nice bath. *

LIL WALTER
Thank you, M'am.

The seven year old points to the gun in Walter's waistband.

GENEVA'S SON
Why you got a gun?

LIL WALTER
Accounta any good guys need
shootin'.

GENEVA'S SON
You mean the bad guys.

LIL WALTER
(in a deadly whisper)
I am the bad guy.

The boys look at each other, scared. Lil Walter winks.

MUDDY
Stop scarin' my boys now. An' let
me hear that harp.

Muddy has picked up his guitar and is starting to play.

Lil Walter blows his harmonica. Geneva's boys stare in awe.

Then, Lil Walter takes off in his own direction -- on a riff
from another time --- some crazy shit!

MUDDY (CONT'D)
Where the hell you goin' with that?

LIL WALTER
Follow me.

MUDDY
Nah, follow this here guitar, son. *

Suddenly, Walter stops playing. He cuts his eyes at Muddy.

LIL WALTER
You can play the shit outta that
guitar so I'll follow you anywheres
you want. But don't you ever call
me 'son'. I don't need no Daddy. *

Geneva returns with a towel. *

GENEVA
What you need boy is a Mama.
Someone to feed you, dress you and
tell you to get your stinky butt in
that bath! *

Geneva's sons laugh. Lil Walter's eyes warm to her. *

LIL WALTER

A man can't have too many Mamas.

Geneva and Muddy watch Walter disappear into the bathroom. *

MUDDY

He fits me, Geneva.

GENEVA

I heard.

29 INT. DINGY CHICAGO CLUB. NIGHT.

29

Sonny Boy Williamson and his band play. Suddenly, the sound of Little Walter's harmonica screams through the audience.

SONNY BOY

(to Walter)

You still a boy to me.

LIL WALTER

Ole man, wait 'til I lay this chromatic on you.

(changing harmonicas)

An' Muddy over here gonna slaughter your guitar picker.

SONNY BOY

Go on then.

The band on stage lets Muddy and Jimmy Rogers plug their guitars in. Muddy's band Rips it. They drive the crowd wild.

WILLIE V.O.

Muddy Waters, Lil Walter and Jimmy Rogers called themselves the All Star trio. But everybody else knew 'em as "The Headhunters", on accounta how they sliced their competition.

30 EXT. SAME CLUB. NIGHT

30

Sonny Boy exits. He opens his coat, revealing a belt of harmonicas, like shiny weapons. He sticks a wad of cash in. *

WILLIE V.O.

But there were other motherfuckers waitin' to cut you, too. *

A couple of thugs watch Sonny Boy from across the street. *

31 EXT. ALLEY. NIGHT. 31

WILLIE V.O.
Somethin' you gotta know about harp
players.

The thugs pull Sonny Boy in, and stab him to death.

WILLIE V.O. (CONT'D)
They fall hard.

Sonny's harmonicas spill across the pavement in slow motion
with his blood. A harmonica screams as it falls.

32 INT. SEEDY CLUB. ANOTHER DAY. 32 *

The club is just opening. A MYSTERIOUS BLACK MAN, with a bag
and wearing a hat that conceals most of his face, enters.

MYSTERIOUS BLACK MAN
I'm lookin' for those headhunters.

BARTENDER
They ain't playin' here tonight.

MYSTERIOUS BLACK MAN
They lurin' God fearin' women with
their devil music. *

He pulls a Woman's head from the bag and plops it on the bar.

MYSTERIOUS BLACK MAN (CONT'D)
I'm huntin' them. *

The Bartender screams. The Mysterious Black Man exits.

33 INT. MACOMBA LOUNGE. NIGHT. THE SCREAMING BLUES HARMONICA 33
CONTINUES.

Lil Walter plays Sonny Boy's riff, and stops a performance.

LIL WALTER
That's for Sonny Boy! *

CUT TO:

34 INT. BEHIND BAR. 34

MARSHALL
What's goin' on?

Len's seven year old son, MARSHALL, helps Len behind the bar.

LEN
They're gonna fight.

Marshall throws his Dad a fearful look -

LEN (CONT'D)
With their music.

CUT BACK TO:

35 INT. THE STAGE. 35

The band playing on stage holds their ground.

HARMONICA PLAYER
Find your own gig, motherfucker!

Muddy rips his guitar in defiance.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Let 'em play!

The GUITARIST on stage looks to Len.

CUT BACK TO:

36 INT. BEHIND BAR. 36

Len nods.

CUT BACK TO:

37 INT. THE STAGE. 37

The bands duel, forcing each other to play their best.

Muddy lets loose and destroys the Guitarist with his slide.
While Jimmy Rogers bury's the second guitar. The audience
screams it's support of Muddy. *

Marshall watches his father move to the music, like the rest
of the crowd. It doesn't matter that he's the only white one.

Lil Walter blows in the face of the other Harmonica Player. *

The Harmonica player, bigger than Lil Walter, swings at him.
Lil Walter flies off stage and pulls his gun. Shots ring out.

CUT TO:

A bottle is shot over the head of Marshall. Len throws him to the floor and lays on top of him, as the bullets whizz past.

CUT TO:

The crowd screams and rushes for the door.

Walter trains his gun on the Harmonica Player. But Muddy steps in front of him, before he can pull the trigger.

LIL WALTER

Get outta the way, Mud.

Walter's eyes are dead on the Harmonica player. Muddy sighs, knowing there's only one way to get his attention.

MUDDY

Son...

Lil Walter's eyes slowly slide to Muddy, cool, deadly.

LIL WALTER

I tol' you never call me that -

MUDDY

I know. But we family now -

Lil Walter smiles, but there's nothing warm about his smile. *

LIL WALTER

Sonny Boy use to say we family. *

Slapped the shit outta me for
stealin' a solo. I tol' him...

(cocking his gun at Muddy)

"Here's your Daddy."

Now Muddy is looking down the barrel of Lil Walter's gun.

MUDDY

I ain't tryin' to boss you... Hell,
you just too good to lose. *

(moving toward Walter)

Gimme the gun. *

LIL WALTER

You think I never used this 'fore?

MUDDY

But you don't need to tonight...

*

Muddy's in front of him, the gun at his chest, Lil Walter's eyes as hard as a killer.

*

MUDDY (CONT'D)

If that fool comes at you, I'll put the bullet in him my damn self.

*

Muddy reaches out and wraps his hand around the muzzle. Lil Walter lets go of the gun and bursts into laughter.

*

*

LIL WALTER

You a crazy motherfucker, Mud.

*

The Harp Player bolts for the door. Lil Walter laughs harder.

*

Muddy looks at the bar where Len is standing with his 44.

*

MUDDY

Get outta here. I'm a talk that white man outta callin' the police.

*

*

*

Muddy waistbands the gun and goes to Len. Muddy talks to Len the same way he talked to Mr. Stovall and the rednecks.

MUDDY (CONT'D)

I'm real sorry 'bout the damage, suh --

*

LEN

The damage? My kid's here!

*

MUDDY

Yes suh, it's a damn shame.

LEN

Just... get out!

MUDDY

Thank you kindly...

Muddy walks out.

38

INT. MUDDY'S APT.

38

Geneva holds a baby on her lap. Geneva's been crying.

*

Muddy comes through the door.

*

MUDDY

You know what that crazy Walter -

*

He stops dead when he sees the baby.

GENEVA

A woman came by, said she couldn't
take care of her anymore. Said she
was yours'.

Muddy kneels in front of Geneva, presses his head against her
knees. Geneva fights back tears.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

You better go get some diapers.

*

He gets up, kisses her gratefully and leaves.

39

EXT. STREET.

39

Leonard's car pulls up to Muddy's ice truck.

LEN

I been lookin' all over for you.

MUDDY

I'm just workin', suh. I thought we
was okay.

LEN

Stop talkin' to me like I'm some
damn plantation owner.

*

MUDDY

What the hell you want?

Len laughs.

LEN

I wanna put you on a record.

MUDDY

You kiddin' me.

*

LEN

No suh.

Now Muddy laughs.

MUDDY

We shoot up your joint an' you
wanna put us on a record?

LEN
Wasn't the first time. *

MUDDY
Well hell, when you wanna do this?

LEN
Right now. I booked the studio. *

MUDDY
Just gotta get my band -

LEN
No. Just you. Not that crazy harp
playin' motherfucker - *

MUDDY
But -

LEN
You wanna do this? *

Len opens the door to the passenger seat. Muddy jumps in.

40 INT. ARISTOCRAT RECORDING STUDIO. IN THE BOOTH. 40
Muddy sings "Can't be Satisfied".

41 INT. ARISTOCRAT RECORDING STUDIO. IN THE CONTROL ROOM. 41
Len watches Evelyn's reaction to Muddy. He's exciting her. *

WILLY VO
Here was this high society lady
diggin' some raunchy gutbucket
blues... Somethin' must've been
burnin' up inside of her to feel
Muddy way before anybody else did. *

EVELYN
He's fabulous.

She writes a check.

LEN
I don't want your money. I want in.
He offers her a check. She looks at it, then hands it back. *

EVELYN

You can't afford to gamble the way
I can. You're a family man -

*
*

LEN

You don't know what kinda man I am.
This music is about fuckin'. I'm
not talkin' 'making love. I'm
talkin' hike up your dress, doin'
it right here on the floor fuckin'.
I figure there's a market for that.

*
*
*
*
*

She leans in to take back his check -- a little too close.

*

EVELYN

Partner.

*
*

Her hair falls forward. He inhales.

*

LEN

Shalamar?

*
*

Evelyn nods, surprised.

*

EVELYN

Your wife wears Shalamar?

*

He shakes his head, 'no'.

LEN

I knew a girl once...

*

42 INT. MUDDY AND GENEVA'S APT. BEDROOM. MORNING. 42

*

Geneva turns up the radio, excited to hear Muddy's voice.

*

42b INT. MUDDY AND GENEVA'S APT. BATHROOM. MORNING. 42b

*

Muddy's in the shower. Geneva runs in and plugs the radio in.
Muddy peeks out of the shower

*
*

MUDDY

What you doin'?

*
*

GENEVA

It's you -- on the radio!

*
*

He listens. He hears himself and laughs, in a way he's never
laughed before. She laughs with him.

*
*

MUDDY
Get in here girl!

*
*

She protests. But he pulls her in the shower with him.

*

GENEVA
You're getting me all wet...

*
*

He sings along with his voice on the radio -- to her. She stops caring about getting wet. They make love in the shower as Muddy's voice swells over the radio.

*
*
*

44 EXT. SUBURBAN HOME. LEN'S HOUSE. MORNING.

44

*

A royal blue Cadillac pulls up in front of Len's modest ranch house.

*

Len's wife comes out carrying a suitcase and food. REVETTA is pretty and sensible, more ethnic than Shirley Adams and not as glamorous as Evelyn Aron.

REVETTA
A Cadillac?! Do we have enough -

*

LEN
Always with the 'Enough'. 'Enough' is what you ask for in Europe. In America the word is 'More'.

*
*
*

Muddy jumps out to help her with the suitcase.

MUDDY
I like the way your husband talks.

*

REVETTA
You must be Muddy Waters.

Muddy flashes his killer smile.

*

REVETTA (CONT'D)
I'm Revetta. I love your record!

*

MUDDY
Thank you, darlin'. You got a beautiful home.

*
*

REVETTA
It would be nice if Len could spend some time in it.

*

MUDDY

(trying to bail Len out)
Keep a home like that, man's gotta
work day and night.

LEN

Kids left for school already?

REVETTA

They waited as long as they could.
(touching his face)
You haven't slept and you're
driving all the way to Mississippi? *

LEN

Mmm. Did you make Babka? *
(looking in basket)
You're gonna love this Mud!

Revetta hangs on to him. *

REVETTA

I packed for a week. You think
it'll be enough?

LEN

Sure. *

MUDDY

She's asking when you gonna be
home, my man.

Revetta smiles at Muddy.

LEN

I dunno, baby. But there's a box in
the back seat with your name on it. *

She looks in the backseat. Opens the box. It's a fur stole.

REVETTA

Oh Leonard! Can we afford this?

LEN

Suits you better than that apron.
(kissing her)
We better hit the road.

He gets in the car. They drive off. *

45 INT. RADIO STATION. 45 *

A decked out Evelyn Aaron charms the white DISC JOCKEY. *

EVELYN *

I know you like Scotch. *

Evelyn hands the Disc Jockey a bottle of scotch. *

DEEJAY *

Thanks. Whole lotta records. Not *

enough air time. I try to be fare -- *

MUDDY *

(whispers to Len) *

Man don't need anymore liquor. *

Muddy points to some wrapped bottles in the corner. Len knows *

Muddy's right. He walks over to the DeeJay. *

LEN *

I gotta helluva mortgage. How about *

you? *

DEEJAY *

Sure. *

LEN *

Throw this record on the table, it *

pays off everybody's - *

EVELYN *

(nervous, where is this going?) *

Leonard - *

LEN *

It's math. People buy Muddy's *

record. I gotta make more. Now, I'm *

into you every month, an' I know *

you wanna be fare to the *

motherfuckers bringing you your *

Glenfidich an' your Johnny Walker'. *

Len pulls out his wallet and starts peeling off bills. *

LEN (CONT'D) *

But you gotta ask yourself do they *

really stand up to Jackson and *

Grant... *

The DeeJay picks up the money and walks into the studio.
Through the glass window we see him pick up his headset and
go back on the air.

DEEJAY
(on the air)
Here's the newest race music outta
Chicago. Want you folks to remember
the name -- Muddy Waters!

Off Muddy and Len's smile.

Evelyn turns on Len.

EVELYN
I don't bribe deejays. It shows you
have no faith in your talent --

MUDDY
He did get my record played.

EVELYN
He doesn't care about your music.
It's just money with him.

LEN
What else is there? Makin' a record
nobody hears an' fram'in' ' it up on
the mantle when you're starvin'.

EVELYN
You never get out of Poland. Do
you?

LEN
What you mean is -- I never get
into your America. Well, I'm here.

EVELYN
You're on your own.

LEN
What the hell does that mean?!

She walks out the door. Both men stand there, watching her
glide off in her heels. She's glamour from the back, too.

46 INT. MUDDY'S CAR. NIGHT.

46

They drive in silence down a dark country road.

MUDDY
What's Poland like? *

LEN
What's Mississippi like? *

Muddy laughs knowingly as their headlights shine on a sign,
"Entering Mississippi". *

MUDDY
Mississippi police ain't gonna like
you chaufferin' me. Let me drive. *

LEN
Fuck Mississippi police. *

MUDDY
Len, you wanna drive this road or
disappear off it?

Len thinks it over. He swerves to the side, pissed. *

47 EXT. LEN'S CAR. NIGHT. 47

Muddy drives. Len sits in the back, being chauffeured. A
police car drives beside them. *

48 INT. LEN'S CAR. NIGHT. 48

There's tension in the car as the white cops look them over.
Muddy nods to them. Finally, the police car peels away.

LEN
Our hotel's off the next exit. *

MUDDY
Our hotel? Don't tell me you booked
your ass in a colored hotel? *

LEN
It's ten bucks cheaper. *

Muddy laughs. *

49 INT. MUDDY'S HOTEL ROOM. 49

Muddy is cooking on a hot plate. Len is already eating.

LEN
You're a good cook. *

There's a knock on the door. Muddy opens it to three beautiful black women, one in a maid's uniform.

MUDDY
Well, hello.

*

MAID
We heard you on the radio.

*

MUDDY
Come on in.

The women hesitate.

MUDDY (CONT'D)
I don't bite.
(re: their looks to Len)
Neither do he.

*

LATER ---

PAN OFF EMPTY LIQUOR BOTTLES TO FIND --

A party. The girls dance and make out with Muddy as he plays.

*

Len drums on the table, entranced by the scene, Muddy's creating. Muddy's music is burning these girls up.

Muddy comes over to Len to coach him on his drumming.

MUDDY (CONT'D)
Big drop afterbeat. Wanna feel the
secon' an' fourth beat of the bar.

Len copies Muddy.

MUDDY (CONT'D)
There it is -- Chicago's heartbeat!

Muddy goes wild. Len is getting lost in the music, too.

50 INT. HALLWAY OF BLACK HOTEL.

50

Len exits Muddy's room. Muddy follows him out.

*

MUDDY
I can swing one of 'em your way.

*

LEN
I'm married.

MUDDY
An' they ain't redheads.

LEN
That's bullshit -

*

Muddy closes his door.

Len hesitates alone in the hallway. Muddy's music starts up again and the sound of the girls laughing.

Len takes out his key and goes into his room.

51 INT. MISSISSIPPI RADIO STATION. MORNING.

51

Len sits with the DISC JOCKEY over coffee.

DISC JOCKEY
(on the air)
We're comin' straight to you from
down in the Delta...

The Disc Jockey looks at Len, Len shrugs and checks his watch.

Muddy enters, obviously hung over.

The Disc Jockey brightens.

DISC JOCKEY (CONT'D)
... with Muddy Waters and his hit
record.

MUDDY
(in the mike)
It's good to be home. There's a
whole mess of bluesmen workin'
Mississippi fields. An' I wanna
thank Len Chess here for givin'
this one his chance to shine.

DISC JOCKEY
So does that mean your stayin'
where you are? 'Cause I know some
labels who'd love to snatch you up.

*

*

MUDDY
They can try all they want. I
belongs to the Chess family.

Off Len, moved.

*

53 INT. LEN'S CAR.

53 *

They ride in silence. Muddy chauffers Len. *

LEN

You think I'm a racist, 'cause I
wouldn't mess with those girls.

Muddy just shakes his head and smirks.

MUDDY

You married.

Len cuts him a look. They drive in silence for a while.

LEN

You got a power with that guitar.
It put three girls in your bed.

MUDDY

That's the magic of the blues.

LEN

If you could have that power over
white women we'd make a million -

MUDDY

We'd get me lynched.

LEN

Well, Evelyn sure enough liked you. *

MUDDY

That bother you?

It does.

LEN

I ain't a racist.

MUDDY

Don't worry. I ain't tryin' to get
into Evelyn's... "America". *

Len smiles at Muddy's innuendo. *

MUDDY (CONT'D)

There's a helluva lotta livin' that
gets done outside that place...
Seem a shame to waste your whole
life tryin' to get in. *

Len nods.

*

LEN
 There was this girl... meant the
 world to me. Y'know when you're
 still young enough for a girl to
 mean the world to you?

They both laugh in agreement.

*

LEN (CONT'D)
 I was gonna marry her. But her
 father said, I wasn't good
 enough...

MUDDY
 What was her name?

LEN
 Shirley Adams.

MUDDY
 Shirley Adams blues.

Muddy makes up a "Shirley Adams Blues". Len throws in verses.
 They both end up cracking up over it.

LEN
 What d'ya say we get rich?

MUDDY
 Long as you don't have me singin'
 the panties offa white women -

LEN
 Show all the Shirley Adamses of the
 world what kinda men we are. Who's
 your Shirley, Mud?

Their laughing, having a good time.

MUDDY
 Two crackers with a rope in the
 back of their pick-up.

*
 *

Len stops laughing. Muddy doesn't.

*

LEN
 Could you pull over.

*

Muddy pulls over. Len gets in the passenger seat.

*

MUDDY
We still in Mississippi. *

LEN
I know. But I wanna see you drive
your Cadillac past the state line. *

Muddy looks at him -- can't believe what he's hearing. *

LEN (CONT'D) *
It's your's, Mud.

MUDDY *
Stop your kiddin'.

Len just smiles at him. *

MUDDY (CONT'D) *
(stroking the dash)
Oh Lord, if this a dream don't let
me wake up! *

56 INT. KITCHEN. LATE NIGHT. 56 *

Little Walter finishes his dinner. He watches Geneva put
Muddy's baby in the crib. *

LIL WALTER *
You make a real nice home, Geneva. *

GENEVA *
Thank you, Walter. *

LIL WALTER *
That's why Muddy can go out an'
fetch the world. *

He gets up and watches her pull the covers over the baby. *

LIL WALTER (CONT'D) *
Who's takin' care of you? *

She thinks he's joking until he touches her arm. *

GENEVA *
Are you drunk Walter?

LIL WALTER *
You know I don't drink nothin' but
Pepsi Cola...

Lil Walter takes her in his arms. *

GENEVA
I'm Muddy's woman.

LIL WALTER
He got a lotta women. Figure he
could spare one.

GENEVA
Well, I'm just half a woman,
Walter. I can't give Muddy any
children of his own.

She pulls away from Walter, hiding her shame.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
Don't ever tell me about his women. *

Lil Walter sits down and finishes eating in silence.

58 EXT. EMPTY STORE FRONT. DAY. 58 *

Len reads the 'for rent' sign in the window, admiring the *
property. He lights a cigarette. Smiles and tosses the match. *

WILLIE V.O.
On a Sunday night, when no one
happened to be in Len's club, the *
Macomba mysteriously burnt down. *

59 INT. CHESS STUDIO 59

Len writes out checks as the carpenters build around him.

WILLIE V.O.
He put the insurance money into
this here recordin' studio.

CLOSE ON -

Len balancing his checkbook. Not enough money. He's worried.

REVETTA (O.S.)
I brought you lunch.

He looks up and sees Revetta, holding their little girl. He
kisses them and puts on his game face.

LEN

Hey baby. It's comin' along? Huh?

Revetta looks around, worried. There's still work to be done.

REVETTA

We're late on the mortgage, again. *

LEN

It's gonna have to wait. *

REVETTA

You're gambling our home. *

LEN

We won't lose it. I'll squeeze every fuckin' dime to make it work. *

MUDDY (O.S.)

Will you look at all this!

Len's face lights up when he sees Muddy.

LEN

Muddy!

(then, to his wife)

I won't let you down, baby. *

He kisses her and his baby girl and walks away to join Muddy.

OFF Revetta. He already has let her down. She leaves.

60

INT. CONTROL ROOM.

60

Len giving Muddy the tour. They enter the control room, Muddy checks out the 'state of the art' control boards -- a million buttons, like the control boards in "Star Wars".

MUDDY

Got enough buttons in here to fly to the moon! Sure one of these switches can't play the guitar. *

LEN

This is home, Mud. *

Muddy laughs. It's too good to be true.

MUDDY

Len, I wanna bring my band in. *

LEN

I can't afford that. And people
like you fine with just a guitar
and a base. It's all you -

*

MUDDY

It's old time.
(tapping the board)
And this here is the future. We get
Lil Walter in here, you might get
those white girls' panties!

*

61 INT. CHESS STUDIO. RECORDING ROOM. WEEKS LATER -

61

Jimmy Rogers plugs in his amp while Lil Walter looks over a
box of carefully wrapped harmonicas.

JIMMY

Don't get all excited. No matter
what Muddy say, that motherfucker -
(pointing to Len)
just think we sidemen.

*

*

LIL WALTER

Let me use your amp.

JIMMY

You playin' guitar?

*

LIL WALTER

I wanna hook it up to my harp.

Jimmy grins in awe.

JIMMY

(calling out to Muddy)
Watch out, Mud. Lil Walter's
getting electrified!

Len looks at Walter.

LEN

He's amplifyin' a fuckin'
harmonica?!

*

LATER ---

The band plays "She Moves Me".

*

Lil Walter and Muddy call and respond to each other, the
harmonica as loud as the guitar.

Walter's making him reach, running around like a kid with ADD -- switching harmonicas, tweaking his amp. And Muddy's coming up with gold.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM. *

Len and the engineer watch in awe.

LEN (CONT'D) *
It works.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM *

Then Muddy starts to sing. But Walter doesn't stop playing. Muddy cuts Walter a look, but Walter keeps playing -- not over Muddy's vocals, but supporting Muddy's vocals.

CUT BACK TO:

IN THE CONTROL ROOM. *

ENGINEER
He's blowing over Muddy's vocals,
I'm gonna cut -

LEN *
No. It's different.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM *

Muddy gets it and wraps his voice around Walter's harmonica. They play ducking in and out of each other. It's Magic. *

IN THE CONTROL ROOM. *

ENGINEER
You can't release a record with
harmonica all over the vocals -

LEN *
The drummer ain't gettin' the back
beat. Cut!
(to the drummer)
What the fuck you doin' on those
drums? Muddy an' Walter are workin'
their asses off. All you gotta do
is drive it home!

IN THE RECORDING ROOM *

A sweating Walter tries to hide a grin. But Jimmy sees it.

JIMMY
 Guess you just proved you ain't no
 sideman.

Walter lets himself smile.

ENGINEER
 Take two.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM. *

The drummer loses it again. Muddy throws the drummer a look -

LEN
 Cut!

IN THE RECORDING ROOM *

Len comes in and goes to the drums.

LEN (CONT'D) *
 Get the fuck outta the way, I'll do
 that!

Walter throws Muddy a look. Muddy shrugs.

ENGINEER (O.S.)
 Take three.

They start the song again with Len drumming. All three men
 feeling it together, this new sound, even Len's a part of it.
 We've never seen him happier. They finish, exhilarated.

MUDDY
 Whew!

LEN
 We got it!

MUDDY *
 Hey Len, Walter's gotta song.

Len looks over at Lil Walter.

LEN
 Then, you and Jimmy back him up.

Walter smiles from ear to ear and leads the band into "Juke".

CLOSE ON -

Lil' Walter's record as the Disc jockey puts it on.

DISC JOCKEY
We're playin' Lil Walter's, 'Juke'
Number one on the charts this week!

64 EXT. CHESS STUDIO

64

Muddy's beside Walter, beaming like a proud Papa. Len gets out of a brand new Cadillac and hands Lil Walter the keys.

The excited Teenager jumps into the car and peels out.

Len pats Muddy on the back.

LEN
You were right about that kid... I
want you to meet somebody.

65 INT. LEN'S OFFICE.

65

WILLIE DIXON sits on the couch. There's a bottle of whiskey and a glass in front of him.

LEN
Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters.

Willie rises to shake Muddy's hand.

WILLIE
I like what you're doin' with that
guitar.

MUDDY
Thanks. What you play?

Muddy pours himself a shot.

WILLIE
Bass.

Willie flips over another glass and pours one for Len.

MUDDY
Len don't drink.

Willie toasts Len and downs it himself.

LEN

Willie's gonna be our songwriter. *

Willie pours another drink. He's getting bleary eyed.

WILLIE

Every damn song out there sounds
the same. Muddy Waters needs to be
doin' somethin' that shows Him off. *
*
*

MUDDY

Well, lemme' hear what you got.

Len pulls a contract from his desk.

LEN

As soon as Willie signs up with us.

Willie stands up, almost falls over. He and Muddy laugh.

WILLIE

Whew!

Willie signs the contract, too drunk to read it.

LEN

Let's get started.

They exit Len's office.

WILLIE V.O.

Back then, I didn't realize nothin'
'bout copyrights. We were just
tryin' to get our songs on wax. An'
when our songs hit, we'd line up
for what the boss said we had
comin' minus what we owed the
plantation store. An' sometimes
we'd even get that Christmas
chicken -- a shiney new Cadillac.

66

INT. CHESS STUDIO. RECORDING ROOM -

66

It's dark, empty. Willie teaches Muddy 'HOOCHIE COOCHIE MAN'.

WILLIE

Here's your riff: Da-da-da-da-Da.

MUDDY

Ain't nothin' to that.

WILLIE

The gypsy woman told my mother/Da-
da-da-da-Da...

Muddy's recording of 'Hoochie Coochie Man' takes over.

WILLIE V.O.

Now, Muddy was Muddy, before I came
along. My words just told the
public who he was -- the cat every
man wanted to be an' every woman
wanted to love. An' Muddy he just
kept growin' into that man.

67 INT. MUDDY'S APT.

67

We see Muddy for the first time in his signature elegant
suit, with crisp white shirt.

CLOSE ON -

Muddy's hair perfectly coifed.

CLOSE ON -

Shades sliding over his eyes.

CLOSE ON -

Pearl handled 45. being pushed into his waistband.

CLOSE ON -

*

Muddy's guitar slung over his shoulder.

From this point on, Muddy's outward appearance is that of a
rock star. He's always 'put together' like he's on stage.

WILLIE V.O.

An' people started realizin', if
you could play a guitar an' sing
your ass off -- you could be badder
than Superman. An' that was a
strong feelin' for a black man in
the fifties.

68 EXT. CHESS STUDIO.

68

Muddy drives up in his Caddy, decked out. He honks at Len who's talking to a very big black man, HOWLIN' WOLF.

LEN

Mud! Want you to meet Wolf.

Muddy checks out Wolf's square attire and old station wagon.

MUDDY

(offering a handshake)

I hear we from the same place.

Wolf takes Muddy's superstar look in and smirks.

WOLF

That right?

They're immediate rivals.

LEN

Wolf just signed with us.

MUDDY

Welcome to Cadillac records.

Muddy gestures to the Cadillacs lined up in the street.

MUDDY (CONT'D)

Stay aroun' long enough, everybody gets one.

WOLF

This here car -

(patting his old car)

I own it. It don't own me.

LEN

Here's a hundred dollar advance -

*

WOLF

I don't borrow 'gainst the store.

*

The big man squeezes into his car.

WOLF (CONT'D)

Nice meetin' y'all.

Muddy and Len watch Wolf drive off, then crack up hysterically once his car turns the corner.

MUDDY
 (imitating Wolf)
 This here car. I own it, it don't
 own me. Motherfucker, think he's
 John Wayne!

LEN
 He can sing, though.

MUDDY
 An' I'm glad for him, 'cause he
 ain't gettin' any women on style.

They walk to the door.

MUDDY (CONT'D)
 My royalties come in for 'Hoochie
 Coochie Man"?

*

LEN
 I already gave that to you.

MUDDY
 How you figure?

*

LEN
 That Cadillac ain't free, Mud.

MUDDY
 Oh...

The wind has been knocked out of Muddy's sails. Len notices.

LEN
 You need an advance?

*

MUDDY
 Geneva wants a house.

LEN
 I'll take care of it.

MUDDY
 Thanks, Len.

Muddy walks back to his Cadillac in his slick suit and shades, gets behind the wheel of his shiny chrome, looks at himself in the rearview mirror. Takes off his shades and really looks at himself -- there's defeat in his eyes. He knows that Cadillac owns him.

Then, from some apartment, he hears himself singing. A smile slowly burns across his face. He lowers his shades and cruises off as women waive, "That's Muddy Waters!"

*

70 INT. CHESS. RECORDS. RECEPTION AREA. LATER.

70

*

Len walks in and sees a cop and a handcuffed Lil Walter.

WHITE COP

This boy your son?

LEN

What?

WHITE COP

He says, your his white Daddy.

Len smirks.

LEN

What's he done?

The cop gestures for him to look outside. Walter's new Cadillac is banged up and the doors are torn off.

LEN (CONT'D)

What the hell d'you do to the car I just bought you?!

LIL WALTER

It was hot so I took the doors off.

*

WHITE COP

(un-cuffing Walter)

That's a violation. If I see him driving without doors again, I'm taking him in.

71 INT. CADILLAC DEALERSHIP. UNDER MUSIC.

71

JUMPCUTS OF -

Walter, Muddy, Willie Dixon and Len try on all the new hot models, with boundless glee, jumping in and out of cars. Even Revetta tries on a Cadillac.

CUT TO:

LEN HANDING THE DEALER A CHECK.

CUT TO:

MUDDY, WALTER, WILLIE DIXON, LEN AND EVEN REVETTA PEELING OUT IN THEIR BRAND NEW CADILLACS.

72 INT. JEWELERY STORE. UNDER MUSIC 72

Muddy puts a diamond necklace on a beaming Geneva.

73 INT. ANOTHER JEWELERY STORE. UNDER MUSIC 73

Len buys a diamond necklace for a beaming Revetta.

74 INT. ANOTHER JEWELERY STORE. UNDER MUSIC 74

JUMPCUTS OF -

Muddy buying diamond earrings for many other pretty girls.

JUMPCUTS OF -

Muddy pouring champagne for girl after girl as they kiss.

75 EXT. MUDDY'S NEW HOUSE. UNDER MUSIC 75

Muddy, Geneva, her sons, Walter and Jimmy move the new furniture into their new house, so unbelievably happy!

76 INT. CONTROL ROOM. 76

Wolf records Dixon's song. Dixon plays bass. Muddy, Lil Walter, Jimmy Rogers and one of Muddy's sexy groupie girlfriends listen with Len.

Len focuses on Wolf's young guitar player, HUBERT.

LEN

Cut! You on the guitar, what's your name?!

Hubert squints up at the control room like God is talking to him. He's an innocent, jug eared, doe eyed, country boy.

HUBERT
Hubert, sir.

Lil Walter falls out laughing.

LIL WALTER
"Hubert!"

MUDDY
(slapping Walter)
Behave yourself!

But everyone else is about to crack up, too. *

Wolf notices how nervous his guitar player has become. *

LEN
Well, get it right, Hubert. *

Wolf looks up at the control room, to Len.

WOLF
Don't talk to him no more. You want
somethin' done, ask me. I'll tell
him what he has to be doin'.

Hubert raises his eyes to Wolf, grateful. Wolf just nods.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM. *

Lil Walter breaks the awkward silence, by handing his gun to
Len and suggesting he blasts Wolf.

LIL WALTER
Only thing you can do, man.

77 INT. RECORDING ROOM. 77 *

Dixon plays bass on Lil Walter's 'My Babe'. Walter sings to
some girls (early groupies) in the studio. The girls and the
band feed off each other. Lil Walter drives them wild. *

When the song ends, Len comes out of the control room.

LEN
Walter, I gotta talk to you.

LIL WALTER
What?

LEN
Let's go in my office.

Lil' Walter laughs at Len's seriousness.

LIL WALTER
Who died?

A beat.

LEN
Your mother.

The smile freezes on Lil Walter's face. *

LEN (CONT'D) *
I'm sorry. A deejay from New Orleans just called. Said your family's been searchin' for you.

LIL WALTER *
I didn't grow up with her anyhow.

He shrugs it off.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D) *
Let's get back in there -

LEN *
You need to take some time off.

LIL WALTER *
My Daddy gave me away when I was two days old. I didn't even see my Mama 'til I was grown. Hell, I spent more time with you than her. So, what I got to be tore up about? *

Lil Walter's smiling. But we can see a tinge of pain.

LEN
Go an' bury your mother, Walter.

Len starts to walk away.

LIL WALTER *
Hey Len, I need a new Cadillac if I'm goin' to see my people.

78 EXT. CEMETARY. UNDER MUSIC. 78 *

Lil Walter leans against his new Cadillac, away from the other mourners, he watches his mother's kin pour liquor on her grave. *

LATER -

79 LIL WALTER'S MOTHER'S GRAVESIDE. UNDER MUSIC. 79 *

Lil Walter sits by himself. He picks up the bottle of liquor on his mother's grave. He chugs it down, then gags.

A GRAVE DIGGER watches him. *

GRAVE DIGGER
That's dead man's liquor. *

LIL WALTER
I ain't took my first steps with her. I ain't say my first words to her, might as well have my first drink with the woman. *

He swigs the dead man's liquor.

CUT TO:

80 INT. LIL WALTER'S CAR - COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT. 80

"Pot" Strong, as young and pretty as Lil Walter, is driving. Walter tokes weed and plays his harp. Their both laughing.

LIL WALTER
I'm a school you on the harp. An' I don't give my secrets away. But you remind me a me when I was young *

POT STRONG
I'm the same age as you, motherfucker! You just generous, 'cause I'm sharin' my pot. *

80b EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT. 80b

Two white policemen pull them over.

They throw out the joint and waive the smoke away.

80c INT. LIL WALTERS CAR.

80c

Pot immediately becomes very respectful. He hands the Policeman his license.

POLICEMEN
Where you goin', Nigger?

LIL WALTER
Now you lookin' at the man's
license. You gots to know 'Nigger'
ain't the name his Mama give him.

Pot and the Policeman look at Walter like he's lost his mind.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)
Oh I'm sorry officer....

Little Walter just can't help himself.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)
It's 'cause you can't read.

CUT TO:

Cop#2 holds a gun on Pot, while a cuffed Walter is slammed face first over and over into the bloodied windshield.

POLICEMEN
(to half-conscious Walter)
He look like a nigger now?

But Lil Walter won't give in. He just keeps laughing.

CUT TO:

80d INT. LIL WALTERS CAR.

80d

The police car drives away.

Pot stares in horror at Lil Walter's destroyed face. Lil Walter checks himself out in the rear view mirror and smiles.

LIL WALTER
(to himself)
Now you look like the motherfucker
you is.

Lil Walter spits out a tooth.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)
Had no business bein' that pretty
anyways.

81 EXT. CHESS STUDIO. BEAUTIFUL DAY.

81

Muddy and Len exit the building as Lil Walter careens down the street. The windshield is cracked, the hood is dented.

A drunk Walter gets out.

MUDDY
Aw Walter!

LEN
What the hell happened to your
face?

LIL WALTER
I need a new car.

*

LEN
This was new, you wanna get drunk
and bust it up -- not my problem.

*

*

LIL WALTER
I gave you a number one record.

LEN
I gave you the chance to make a
fuckin' number one record.

LIL WALTER
Gave the lil' nigga a chance, huh?
Lil Nigga don't need no chance. I
can play motherfucker, I'm a
fuckin' king with this shit -

He reaches into his waistband. Muddy and Len back up, ready for him to pull a gun. But it's his harmonica.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)
I wanna new car.

Muddy grabs Lil Walter.

MUDDY
You need to get back on your Pepsi-
Cola, boy. 'Cause you sure can't
handle your liquor.

Lil Walter shakes Muddy off.

LIL WALTER

That Wolf, way he stood up for his
sideman. Maybe he could teach you
somethin', Mud.

*
*

82 INT. CLUB. NIGHT.

82

Muddy and Jimmy are setting up on stage. A tall handsome man
thirty year old CHUCK BERRY approaches Muddy.

CHUCK BERRY

I'm a big fan Mr. Waters.

MUDDY

Well, thank you.

CHUCK BERRY

Would you know how I could go about
making records, Mr. Waters?

MUDDY

See Len Chess. 47th and cottage.

CHUCK BERRY

Thank you, sir. I'm Chuck.

He offers his hand to shake.

CHUCK BERRY (CONT'D)

Chuck Berry.

Muddy shakes his hand.

MUDDY

Good luck to you.

He spots Walter coming in with Pot.

MUDDY (CONT'D)

Didn't think you'd show up.

Lil Walter steps on stage.

LIL WALTER

I want ya to hear this harp player,
Pot Strong -

Lil Walter pulls Pot Strong on stage.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)

I taught him everthin' I know.

MUDDY
 (suspicious)
 What'cha go an' do that for?

Lil Walter looks away.

LIL WALTER
 You an' Jimmy been good to me. But
 I wanna be a bandleader -

MUDDY
 I never told you how to play -

LIL WALTER
 You let me fly, Mud. But I'm still
 flyin' aroun' you. I just wanna
 make it right for me... *
 (gesturing to Pot)
 He gonna give you what you need. *

Lil Walter walks away.

JIMMY
 Did that motherfucker just quit?

Muddy looks like he just got sucker punched. He can't talk.

83 INT. MUDDY'S NEW SUBURBAN HOUSE. NEXT MORNING. 83 *

The doorbell rings. Geneva answers it. It's Walter.

GENEVA
 Hello Walter.

LIL WALTER
 He tell you? *

She nods.

His gaze goes to the mantelpiece. There are photos of Geneva and Muddy's family and a framed publicity shot of Walter.

GENEVA
 He said, "He felt like somebody
 took away his oxygen."

Lil Walter lowers his eyes. He takes his photo.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
 Why are you taking that picture -

LIL WALTER
On accounta what happened -

GENEVA
Your family, Walter... Always.

CUT TO:

84 INT. MUDDY'S BEDROOM.

84

Muddy stands by the window, watching Lil Walter walk away.

WILLIE V.O.
You see a Band's closer than
family. 'Specially for those cats
who never had a Mama or Daddy. So
when you lose that dude that gave
you that sound that nobody else
could, that felt you so good he
knew when to hold back or go buck
wild... Hurts more than losin' your
woman.

85 INT. CLUB.

85

Howlin' Wolf performs. This is the most exciting and
theatrical performance we've seen. It's crazy, avant-garde,
before it's time. Howlin' Wolf stalks the stage like a wild
animal. He howls, he leaps, he pounces. He transforms into a
terrifying creature, while he sings and plays the harmonica.

Muddy and Jimmy watch, impressed at how he works an audience.

JIMMY
Motherfucker gotta be a werewolf!

MUDDY
Why he wanna sweat when he can just
sing?
(re; the guitar player)
That Hubert's good... I want him.

JIMMY
You firin' me?

MUDDY
Hell no! I just don't feel like
playin' no more. I ain't like Wolf.
I'm tired of sweatin'.

*
*

He pulls some bills from his wallet.

MUDDY (CONT'D)

You tell Hubert I'll pay him twice
what Wolf's givin' him, an I'll let
him take solos -- not like that
showboatin' son-of-a-bitch.

He gestures to Howlin' Wolf, who's eating up the stage.

86

INT. ANOTHER CLUB. NIGHT.

86

Hubert and Jimmy are on guitar. Muddy sings and flirts.

Pot sneaks tokes between harp riffs.

*

Muddy spots Wolf in the crowd. He gestures for Hubert to take
a solo. Hubert does and kills it. The crowd cheers him.

MUDDY

Hubert Sumlin, ladies and
gentlemen.

Hubert beams shyly at the recognition, then he sees Wolf in
the audience, staring at him, hurt. Hubert looks away.

A girl tugs at Hubert's leg. She's obviously high.

HUBERT

What you want, miss?

POT'S GIRLFRIEND

You tell Pot I ain't leavin'.

HUBERT

(turning to Pot)
Pot, that girl says --

*
*
*

POT STRONG

(leaning over to his girl)
I want your things out my room when
I get home.

MYSTERIOUS BLACK MAN

You can't escape the eye of God -

*

Pot looks at the Man we last saw with the severed head.

MYSTERIOUS BLACK MAN (CONT'D)

He's huntin' heads tonight!

*

The Man pulls a shotgun from his coat and starts shooting up
the place. Everyone runs.

*

CHAOS.

But Hubert Freezes. The Mysterious Black Man aims at Hubert.

Wolf hurls a chair at the Mysterious Man. It hits him, but doesn't take him down. He escapes from the club.

Hubert still stands their, frozen.

HUBERT

Muddy.

Muddy comes out from behind a table.

HUBERT (CONT'D)

I don't think I wanna be in your band anymore.

As Wolf and Hubert walk out, Wolf leans into Muddy. *

WOLF *

You steal him from me again, I'll kill you. *

POT STRONG *

Muddy! *

Muddy turns to Pot who's standing behind the bar.

MUDDY

What? You quittin' too?

Pot opens his jacket. There's a big rose of blood blooming across his crisp white shirt.

Muddy and Jimmy run to him.

JIMMY

He got him -

But when they get behind the bar, they see Pot's Girlfriend crouched in the corner with a bloodied knife.

MUDDY

She got him. *

POT *

Am I dyin'? *

MUDDY *

Ain't nothin' but a love scratch. *

Muddy lifts a frightened Pot up and carries him out. *

WILLIE V.O.

Harp players don't end well. Don't ask me why. Some people say, they blow themselves to death, ridin' that harp all night long.

*

88 EXT. EMERGENCY ROOM.

88

Muddy wipes up the pool of blood in the back seat of his car.

Pot Strong is dead, his bloody body sprawled out on the sidewalk in front of the Emergency room.

An old car pulls up full of musicians. JAMES COTTON gets out and shakes his head at the dead harp player.

The Medical Examiner's truck pulls up behind him.

JAMES COTTON

Damn shame... That crazy motherfucker shot up another club. He said, he's hunting bluesmen.

JIMMY

Shit... Gotta get me a heater.

JAMES COTTON

Everybody does.

Little Walter's car pulls up. He rushes to his friend's body.

LIL WALTER

Pot!
(cradling Pot)
Aw man...

The M.E.'s crew approach with a stretcher and a black plastic bag, leaving Walter no time to grieve.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)

Who the fuck you gonna put in that garbage bag?!

JIMMY

They can't leave him in the street, Walter.

LIL WALTER

Where they gonna dump him? In a paupers grave - with no kinda marker?

MUDDY

Well, I got two hundred dollars to
my name. I'm still waitin' on my
royalties -

JIMMY

I got twenty.

LIL WALTER

I got seventy five -

All the musicians start adding up their money.

JAMES COTTON

Maybe y'all can scrape up coffin
money. But it ain't like down South
where you can put 'em in a field.
You gotta pay for it here -- an'
for the undertaker to put him on
ice 'til the plot's ready. An', we
don't got that kinda money.

The Bluesmen put away their money and watch the driver stuff
Pot into the plastic bag.

LITTLE WALTER

Take a good look y'all.. 'Cause
when you layin' in the street,
ain't nobody gonna claim you
neither. An' make your name now,
'cause these cheap motherfuckers
ain't payin' for your marker.

MUDDY

Nobody's gotta royalty check,
Walter. What the hell you want us
to do?!

LIL WALTER

More.

Little Walter jumps in his busted up car and peels off.

Muddy walks to his car.

JAMES COTTON

Hey Mud.

Muddy turns.

JAMES COTTON (CONT'D)

I don't wanna be disrespectful to Pot, but seein' as how you're gonna need a new harp player...

MUDDY

Sure. You can blow for me, Cotton.

MUSIC CUE - Chuck Berry's 'MAYBELLINE' plays.

89 INT. CHESS STUDIO. RECORDING ROOM - 89

Chuck Berry plays 'Ida Red' ('Maybelline') for Len, Willie Dixon and Muddy. They're impressed.

WILLIE

(whispering to Muddy)

91 He sound white. 91 *

Walter appears in the doorway. He can't help but move to Chuck's music. *

Chuck finishes.

LEN

That's different.

WILLIE

It's good. But that Ida Red sounds country. We need to blues it up. *

LIL WALTER

Blues?

Lil Walter laughs.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)

Ya'll worried 'bout that crazy motherfucker killin' bluesmen, when we aughta be puttin' a bullet in this here cat. 'Cause he just sliced our shit open and left it bleedin' on the floor...

Chuck's smile fades.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)

I wanna new car, Len.

Walter skulks off with his girl.

Chuck looks to Muddy, Walter's made him nervous.

MUDDY

(to Len)

You better record him. He's something new.

Len nods.

LEN

We gotta change that name or else that motherfucker who wrote Ida Red's gonna come after us for royalties. But I don't wanna blues it up, Willie. It ain't the blues. I don't know what the fuck it is. But we gonna record it.

Chuck smiles broadly. He knows he's on his way.

CUT TO:

92

INT. SOUTHERN CONCERT HALL.

92

Chuck and his band pull up to a HillBilly concert hall. Chuck strolls to the door. But the white BOUNCER stops him.

BOUNCER

Y'all can't come in here.

He points to the sign 'WHITES ONLY'. But Chuck points to his name in lights. *

CHUCK BERRY

I'm Chuck Berry.

BOUNCER

He's a country western singer. *

The Bouncer pulls out an over-exposed publicity shot of Chuck Berry. He could pass for white in this photo.

CHUCK BERRY

That's me.

Chuck pulls out his guitar and starts playing 'Maybelline'. The Manager comes out.

BOUNCER

Says he's Chuck Berry. *

MANAGER

Lemme' see some I.D.

Chuck Berry gives him his driver's licence.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
This licence says you an Indian.
This pin-up make you look like a
white man. What the hell are you?

CHUCK BERRY
Whatever I need to be to play in
your fine establishment.

MANAGER
You part con man, too.

The Manager laughs. Chuck laughs good-naturedly, too.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
You might sing country. But you
ain't doin' it here.

*

Chuck stops smiling.

*

93 INT. ALAN FREED'S RADIO STATION. DAY. 93

Alan Freed is listening to 'Maybelline' with Len and Chuck.

ALAN FREED
You got something real special.

CHUCK BERRY
You think you can play it Mr.
Freed?

Alan Freed looks at Len.

ALAN FREED
If I play it, I make you famous and
him rich. The question is, how bad
you want it?

Chuck looks at Len, "What's the deal?".

94 INT. CHESS STUDIO. LEN'S OFFICE. 94

Muddy, Willie, Len and Chuck listen to Freed on the radio.

ALAN FREED
(on the air)
Now some of you people might call
this 'race music'.

94a INT. ALAN FREED'S RADIO STATION. 94a

ALAN FREED
But I call it Rock n' Roll. And
it's too fun for anybody to sit
out, white or colored!

94 INT. CHESS STUDIO. LEN'S OFFICE. 94

MUDDY
(incredulous)
Did he just say what I thought he
said?

LEN
(jumping up)
God damn!

WILLIE
He just integrated the airwaves.

'Maybelline' plays over the radio.

LEN
we gettin' white panties now!

Muddy watches Len and Chuck raucously singing to Maybelline.
He's a little jealous.

*
*
*
*

95 INT. CONCERT. 95

Chuck Berry performs 'Johnny B. Goode' to a mixed crowd. A
velvet rope separates the black teens from the whites. Police
guard the ropes, making sure the line is not crossed.

The white policemen glare disapprovingly at the white girls
who look too infatuated with Chuck.

WILLIE V.O.
Chuck was playin' in segregated
cities. There was just a thin rope
to separate coloreds from whites
but a whole lotta history.

Chuck duck-walks across the stage, driving the audience wild.

WILLIE V.O. (CONT'D)
An' it just took one man duck
walkin' across the stage to change
all that.

*

The kids rush the stage, knocking the ropes over. The police can't control the crowd. The kids are all over the place, white, black, side by side, dancing with one another.

96 INT. LIL WALTERS CAR. 96

He's high and bouncing to Chuck's 'Johnny B. Goode'. He floors the gas and steers into the entrance of Chess Records. *

WILLIE V.O.
The Blues was a wild ride gassed
with sex an whiskey an'
testosterone.

97 INT. CHESS STUDIO. RECEPTION AREA. UNDER 'JOHNNY B. GOODE' 97 *

Walter's car crashes through. The Receptionist screams.
Lil Walter tosses his car keys to the stunned Receptionist.

LIL WALTER
Tell Chess I need a new car.

Lil Walter saunters out of the destroyed office.

CUT BACK TO:

98 INT. CONCERT. 98

The policemen angrily try to restore order, but they're overpowered by teenage hormones.

CUT TO:

Chuck, enjoying the teenagers' rebellion, revs them up more and gives it all he's got, playing to the white girls, too.

He's driven the kids so wild, the girls have climbed on the stage -- Chuck is ecstatic, but handlers whisk him off stage before the white girls can do the unheard of.

WILLIE V.O.
Chuck was givin' them white kids
the same ride only he was bucklin'
them into seatbelts, singin' 'bout
teenage things.

*
*
*

99 INT. MUDDY'S CAR. DAY.

99

Muddy drives his Cadillac with Geneva's now teenage son. He's playing with the radio. He finds Chuck Berry and moves to it.

GENEVA'S SON
Why can't you play like that,
Daddy?

MUDDY
It's just the Blues sped up.

Geneva's son shakes his head.

GENEVA'S SON
It's Rock n' Roll.

Muddy shoots his stepson a look.

GENEVA'S SON (CONT'D)
Whew! Len Chess got two hot cars!

As they pull up to Len's house. We see two brand new Cadillacs in the driveway, almost matching.

100 EXT. LEN'S NEW HOUSE. EVELYN ARON'S OLD NEIGHBORHOOD. 100

As Muddy gets out, he can't help but compare his older model Caddy to the flashy new twins in the driveway. *

101 INT. LEN'S LIVING ROOM.

101

Chuck and Len are watching American Bandstand, when Revetta leads Muddy and his stepson in. Chuck's on the show.

GENEVA'S SON
Chuck Berry! *

CHUCK BERRY
Is this your boy, Mud?

MUDDY
Yeah.

GENEVA'S SON
That your car out side? *

CHUCK BERRY
The cherry Red one? *

GENEVA'S SON

It's the most beautiful thing I
ever seen -

LEN

We got on American Bandstand. Can
you believe this?

MUDDY

That's really somethin'.

LEN

What's up?

Len pulls Muddy aside.

LEN (CONT'D)

Is everything okay?

MUDDY

Gotta mortgage payment, a paternity
suit, child support on my outside
kids. I can't book enough clubs.
Now, your accountant's tellin' me I
borrowed against my royalties -

We can hear Chuck singing. He's performing 'Rock N' Roll
Music' on American Bandstand. Chuck turns up the volume.

CHUCK BERRY

You're missing it, Len -

LEN

(to Chuck)

In a minute -

MUDDY

Wasn't we both s'pose to make it,
Len?

LEN

You made it, Muddy.

MUDDY

Not from where I'm standin'.

Len pulls a check book out from a drawer and writes a check.

LEN

Your records are gettin' sent back.
Your's, Walter's, Wolf's. If that
keeps happening, there is no Chess
records.

MUDDY

That's why there's a brand new
Cadillac in your driveway?

LEN

(pointing to Chuck)

He gave me that Cadillac. Me, you
and every motherfucker who cashes a
Chess Records check is ridin' on
that man's shoulders... And that
ain't good.

He gives Muddy the check. Muddy looks down at it and sighs,
relieved at the amount.

MUDDY

Thanks, Len.

LEN

In my book, you're still number
one.

*
*

Muddy smiles, hopeful.

But Chuck on Band Stand lets us know Muddy's ship has sailed.

*

CUT TO:

COVERAGE AND PHOTOS OF THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT AND EMMETT
TILL'S MUTILATED FACE UNDER "ROCK N' ROLL MUSIC".

WILLIE V.O.

They were lockin' up fine black
women for sittin' on buses and
stringin' up fourteen year old boys
for whistlin' at white women - Not
payin' any mind at all to Chuck who
was reapin' up their first born
with a thing called Rock n' Roll.

103 EXT. DINER. OFF THE HIGHWAY. 'ROCK N' ROLL MUSIC' STILL 103 *
PLAYS.

CLOSE ON -

Sign that reads, 'WHITES ONLY'. We track past the white
people inside eating to Chuck's band going around the
dumpsters to the back door of the kitchen to get their food.

CUT TO:

104 A GRASSY AREA ON THE HIGHWAY. UNDER "ROCK N' ROLL MUSIC" 104

Chuck Berry has made a little fire and is cooking his own food 'camp style'.

WILLIE V.O.

Three thousand dollars in his pocket and he'd be eatin' like a hobo 'stead of givin' those crackers his money.

105 INT. CHUCK'S CAR. NIGHT. UNDER "ROCK N' ROLL MUSIC" 105

WILLIE V.O.

An' sleepin' in his car.

Chuck tossing and turning in the back seat.

WILLIE V.O. (CONT'D)

Man saved a hundred thousand dollars the first year. Didn't drink, didn't gamble. Only had but one vice...

There's a tapping on his window. He opens his eyes and sees two pretty blondes looking in.

He opens the window.

CHUCK BERRY

Hello ladies.

BLONDE

You're Him, aren't'cha?

He smiles and opens the door. The girls giggle and jump in.

JUMPCUTS - UNDER ROCK N' ROLL MUSIC.

Of Wild, funny and uncomfortable sex in the backseat of a car with three people.

106 INT. HOTEL ROOM. NIGHT. 106

WILLIE V.O.

Chuck wasn't the only one lookin' for female talent.

The phone rings. Len answers it, shirtless.

LEN

All right. Bring her up.

He hangs up and throws his shirt back on. As he buttons it, There's a knock on the door.

WILLIE V.O.

Len was on a girl hunt, too.

He opens the door to a sultry coffee colored platinum blonde poured into a tight low-cut dress with a knock-out figure. She's in her early twenties, but hip as hell. GREG HARRIS, a black guy in his forties, ushers her in. *

GREG

Here she is.

LEN

(to the young woman)
Glad you could come by.

She just walks past Len.

LEN (CONT'D)

Can I get you a drink?

YOUNG WOMAN

You want me to just do it here?

The men look at one another. Len laughs.

LEN

Well, I am leavin' town tomorrow.

GREG

Baby, you don't have to be shy with him.

YOUNG WOMAN

I ain't shy.

She lowers her eyes, obviously shy.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

Just hard to do it if you ain't in the mood.

She walks into the bathroom and closes the door.

LEN

What's with her?

Then she cracks the door open, just a bit, to reveal a slice of herself, sitting on the edge of the tub.

The men tilt their heads to see what she's doing in there --

And then, her voice -- perfection, grit, sass, vulnerability and power comes from that little room that can barely contain her brilliance.

Her voice draws Len to the door. He leans in the doorway, watching her sing, mesmerized.

WILLIE V.O.

He was looking for a woman that
could go head to head with his men.
And he found her... Ms. Etta James.

*

Greg steps up to Len, beaming.

GREG

Told you she could sing.

107 INT. CHESS STUDIO. CONTROL ROOM

107 *

Muddy enters the control room.

ENGINEER

Hey Mud, when we gonna get you back
in here?

MUDDY

You ain't heard? My records ain't
sellin'.

ENGINEER

You'll always sell, baby.

MUDDY

Yeah, well... How's it goin' with
that sweet lil thing?

Muddy gestures to Etta.

ENGINEER

Sweet?

The Engineer flips the switch and we hear Etta yelling.

ETTA

Fuck you, Len!

Muddy laughs.

IN THE RECORDING ROOM. *

Etta starts gathering her things.

ETTA (CONT'D) *
I gave you a damn good track. I
ain't singin' it again -

LEN
My mistake. You ain't woman enough
for the song.

She turns on him.

ETTA
What?!

LEN
It's about bein' in love. What the
hell does a lil girl like you know
about that?!

ETTA
Oh, I been in love.

LEN
You ever have the motherfucker walk
off an' say you ain't good enough?

She turns her back to him, putting her jacket on.

LEN (CONT'D)
Fuck it, not only is he sayin' you
ain't good enough. He's takin' that
other bitch down the aisle, while
you're sittin' there watchin' the
rice get thrown on this perfect
fuckin' love that you ain't never
gonna touch... You know what that
feels like, baby?

ETTA
(her back to Len)
Gimme another one.

LEN
(up at the control room)
She wants another one!

ENGINEER (O.S.)
Take fifteen.

The music starts. Etta turns to the mike and Len is surprised to see tears streaming down her face. She sings the song with deep emotion, "All I Could Do Was cry".

Len smiles. He got it out of her.

CUT BACK TO:

IN THE CONTROL ROOM. *

Muddy looks at Len whose bursting with pride for his new protege, then his eyes go to Etta, singing.

ETTA SINGS
 "for them life has just begun...
 and mine is at an end."

OFF MUDDY -

feeling like the song's about him.

109 EXT. CHESS RECORDS. 109 *

Len drives off in his Cadillac. *

110 INT. LEN'S CAR. 110

As Len drives down the street, he sees a pool hall. Through the window, he spots Etta shooting pool.

111 INT. POOL HALL. 111

Etta's on the table alone, pocketing balls like a pro. *

Len enters.

LEN
 You play a mean game of pool.

She acknowledges Len, but doesn't answer him. She's pissed. *

LEN (CONT'D)
 I'm sorry if I brought back bad memories. But it was good for the song. You know what they say, success is the best revenge. This album comes out an' that ole boyfriend's gonna come runnin' -

ETTA

Wasn't cryin' over a boyfriend.

He smiles.

LEN

Girlfriend?

She hits him with the pool stick.

LEN (CONT'D)

Ouch...

He watches her pocket a ball.

LEN (CONT'D)

How'd you learn to play so good?

ETTA

My Daddy.

LEN

That's nice. It's hard to find time to teach your kids things. One of my biggest regrets, not bein' aroun' enough for mine.

ETTA

Never set eyes on him.

LEN

Thought you said he taught you.

ETTA

Taught myself. I don't wanna embarrass him when we meet.

LEN

Embarrass him? I'll tell you who's gonna be embarrassed -- your father. Cause he's gonna meet a god-damn superstar. And what is he? A nobody.

She smiles. Len smiles too, thinking he's cheered her up. *

ETTA

(as she sets up a ball)

See that picture on the wall?

Len turns to the picture of a very hip heavy set white man holding a pool stick.

LEN

Yeah?

She sinks the last ball on the table. He looks back at her.

LEN (CONT'D)

Your father's Minnesota Fats?

He watches her set up the balls again. She ain't kidding.

ETTA

I useta dream 'bout how I wanted it to be when we met. Like, we could bump into each other at a fancy restaurant, an' I'm all done up an' people wantin' to take my picture.

LEN

That ain't a dream. You're gonna cross over, girl.

ETTA

You think?

LEN

Promise.

She smiles. It's such an infectious smile, he can't help but catch it.

ETTA

You gonna promise that fancy restaurant, too? The one that's gonna serve that white man and his colored daughter.

Len's smile fades.

Etta downs her drink like a pro.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Get me a re-fill, baby?

He puts her glass back down.

LEN

You can sing the blues. You don't have to live 'em.

*

ETTA

What the fuck do you know, white boy -

Len grabs her.

LEN
 You play that hard act real good.
 But I see you.
 (softer)
 I see you.

There is a brief moment of intimacy between them. She looks away, embarrassed.

He lets her go and walks out. *

114 INT. RESTAURANT. NIGHT. 114 *

Len dines with Revetta. She looks at the dessert menu, while he writes checks. *

REVETTA
 I'm having Creme Brulee. Would you like the balanced books or the balanced life? *

LEN
 I'm sorry -- what? *

She puts down the menu and sidles up to him. *

REVETTA
 You're almost impossible to love. *

He slides a jewelery box towards her. It doesn't make her happy but she opens it and gushes over the diamond earrings. *

REVETTA (CONT'D)
 Oh Len, how did you know! *

He notices the tears in her eyes. *

LEN
 You don't like them? *

REVETTA
 I'm just so happy. I love them! *

She dries her eyes. *

REVETTA (CONT'D)
 Hey, I have an idea. Maybe you could teach me the books and we could balance them together. *

LEN

You just gotta reap the rewards.

He hugs her. But she puts on her glasses.

REVETTA

No, I want to learn. Who's this
Martin Luther King?

LEN

He organized the Montgomery bus
boycott.

Revetta looks at the check.

REVETTA

That's a lot of money.

LEN

I made my money off these people.
They should be able to sit in the
same restaurant as me.

REVETTA

We should buy our own integrated
restaurants all across the chitlin'
circuit.

LEN

Ain't a bad idea. At least buy 'em
out for lunch.

Len kisses her, jumps up and walks to the kitchen.

115 INT. SAME RESTAURANT. LUNCH.

115

The restaurant is empty, except for Etta and Minnesota Fats
at the only table with candle light and flowers. The other
chairs are stacked on top of the tables as the kitchen crew
prepare for dinner.

Len watches them from the kitchen.

Fats gets up and leaves. Len rushes to the table.

Etta's crying.

LEN

(protective)
What'd he say to you?

ETTA

He felt sorry I had Dorothy for a
Mama. He said I better watch she
don't steal my money.

*

LEN

What's wrong with that?

*

*

ETTA

He didn't even ask... if he could
see me again...

*

*

*

LEN

There's a whole lotta livin' goin'
on outside a Minnesota Fats. Seems
a shame to waste it runnin' after
him.

*

*

*

Etta looks up at Len.

LEN (CONT'D)

Muddy told me that once -- 'bout a
girl who dumped me. I know it seems
crazy a girl would ever dump me.

*

He makes her laugh.

LEN (CONT'D)

Muddy an' Walter grew up without
their mamas. Muddy sings that hurt,
but he don't nurse it. Walter
carries it like a baby -- feeds it
on whiskey an' smack. Let it go,
Etta.

She just looks at him, like a lost child.

118

INT. CLUB. STAGE.

118

*

Muddy plays "MANNISH BOY" to a half empty club. But Muddy's
still slick, elegant -- the Captain going down with the ship.

The Mysterious Man watches in the shadows.

He walks towards the stage and moves his head to James
Cotton's solo, the harmonica player makes eye contact with
him, thinking he's playing for a fan.

The Mysterious Man pulls a 38. And shoots the harmonica out
of James' mouth.

Screams. Chaos.

He continues to empty his gun in Cotton's face, until Muddy and Pat Hare knock him to the floor.

WILLIE V.O.

Said he caught his girl listenin'
to Muddy. It put the devil in her.
So, he cut her head off.

*
*
*

Muddy goes to Cotton, who's cheek is literally blown off.

*

WILLIE V.O.

Harp players just don't end well.

Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen" starts playing as Muddy cradles Cotton in his arms.

120 INT. CONCERT HALL.

120

*

Chuck plays "Sweet Little Sixteen".

*

An angry white cop, gets in Chuck's face and shoves him back on stage when he gets too close to the adoring white girls.

Chuck smiles defiantly in the white cops face.

CHUCK BERRY

It'd just kill you if I had a piece
of that, wouldn't it?!

121 INT. CHUCK'S CAR. NIGHT. UNDER SWEET LITTLE SIXTEEN

121

MORE JUMPCUTS OF -

Chuck having sex with a medley of white girls. He photographs them in sexually explicit positions. They morph into one another until Chuck is out of breath, laughing.

122 INT. PATROL CAR. DAY.

122

Two white Police Officers push Chuck into the backseat.

CHUCK BERRY

I didn't touch that girl!

POLICEMAN

Tell that to the judge.

The Policeman turns on his radio as he pulls out. The Beach Boy's "Surfin' USA" plays. The Policeman bobs his head to it.

CHUCK BERRY
They stole my song.

POLICEMAN
That's the Beach Boys, son. Got
nothin' to do with race music.

But "Surfin' U.S.A." is "Sweet Little Sixteen" note for note.

CUT TO:

123 INT. JAIL VISITING ROOM.

123

Chuck talks to Len through a glass.

CHUCK BERRY
They strung Emmet Till up for just
whistling at a white girl. They
must be thrilled they got Chuck
Berry.

LEN
It's a little more complicated. The
girl was fourteen.

CHUCK BERRY
And Jerry Lee Lewis has a thirteen
year old wife. How come he's not in
here with me?

LEN
The main thing is to get the judge
to set bail so we can get you back
in the studio. If we stockpile your
records, it won't affect your
income.

*
*
*

CHUCK BERRY
You want to get me some income, you
go after those Beach Boys for
stealing my song!

LEN
We've got our lawyers on it.

CHUCK BERRY
I'm getting sick and tired of
having white men getting credit
for writing my songs. It's bad
enough Freed gets two thirds of
'Maybelline'.

LEN

Alan Freed put you on the map.

CHUCK BERRY

And I was nice and quiet about the whole thing. But I'm done with being quiet... and nice?

Chuck bites off a smile and shakes his head.

*

124

INT. CHESS STUDIO.

124

*

Muddy, Jimmy and Lil Walter are in the studio, like old times. Etta stands in the doorway, watching the old pros.

WILLIE V.O.

"The goose that laid the golden egg" was locked up, so we all had to get in that studio an' find somethin' that would sell."

Lil Walter's still stylish, but he has the scarred, worn face of an addict. He notices Etta as he hooks up his amp.

LIL WALTER

Hey Li'l girl, who you belong to?

*

MUDDY

That's Etta. Len signed her.

ETTA

Ya'll mind if I watch? I grew up on your music.

LIL WALTER

Watch? Hell! C'mon over here, I'll teach you to blow.

MUDDY

Careful Etta, he ain't talkin' 'bout harmonicas.

They all laugh.

She sidles up to Walter and whispers.

ETTA

I wouldn't mind a little taste of what you're flyin' on.

Lil Walter gives her a surprised look.

LIL WALTER
You too pretty to be flyin' my way.

LEN (O.S.)
You don't need that amp, Walter.

Len has entered.

LIL WALTER
How the hell they gonna hear me?

LEN
Plenty harp players blow acoustic -

LIL WALTER
I ain't plenty harp players -

LEN
Everybody's records are gettin'
sent back. We need to do somethin'
different if we're gonna survive. *

LIL WALTER
What you think about this, Mud?

MUDDY
I think we need to make some money. *

LIL WALTER
Whatever you want boss.

INT. CONTROL ROOM.

ENGINEER
"Blues Before Sunrise. Take one."

INT. RECORDING STUDIO

Muddy sings. Walter interjects harp replies, squeezing the most out of his un-amplified harp with hand "wah wah's".

The guitars take over. They can't hear where Walter's going, and go off in another direction. Walter stops, frustrated.

LIL WALTER
I'm blowin' to who?! I gotta feel
it, otherwise I'm blowin' to
myself. Mud, can you hear me over
there?

LEN

Muddy don't need to follow you, you
just follow him.

LIL WALTER

What? I'm just a sideman now?

Len and Muddy don't say anything. Etta fidgets, uncomfortable
witnessing this great Bluesman reduced to being a sideman.

LIL WALTER (CONT'D)

C'mon, somebody tell me, am I just
here to give Muddy a nice ride?
I'll do it, hell. I'm broke as the
rest a you motherfuckers. But I'm a
need a bottle a gin, 'cause I like
a taste 'fore gettin' fucked.

*
*

There's an awkward silence in the room. He looks at Muddy.
He's looking for help. But Muddy's got nothing for him.

*

MUDDY

Somebody takin' care of Walter?

*
*

LIL WALTER

That's right... Take care a me.

*
*

A kid runs back in the room with a bottle of gin.

*

125 INT. RECORDING STUDIO. ANOTHER DAY.

125

Etta records "At Last".

INT. CONTROL ROOM.

ENGINEER

Most beautiful thing I ever heard.

Len watches her, mesmerized by her voice.

MONTAGE UNDER ETTA'S "AT LAST"

126 INT. CLUB.

126

A black couple dances to "At Last", lost in love.

*

128 EXT. PARK. 128

It plays on a radio, A white couple kiss on the grass.

129 INT. ELEGANT BEDROOM. 129

It plays on a radio as a couple have sex in silk sheets.

130 EXT. LEN'S HOUSE. 130

A transistor plays "At Last" in Len's garden. Revetta is working in her garden. The song brings tears to her eyes.

131 INT. CHESS STUDIO. ACCOUNTANT'S OFFICE. 131

Len is going over royalties with his accountant.

LEN

Take ten percent of Chuck's royalties an' move it to Muddy.

The Accountant gives him a look.

LEN (CONT'D)

Chuck ain't gonna miss it.

The Accountant changes the figures.

132 INT. CHESS STUDIO. HALLWAY. 132

Len hands Muddy a check.

LEN

Here's your royalties.

Muddy smiles, happy with the check.

MUDDY

Cool... Etta's tearin' up the charts.

LEN

Thank God for her... I been tryin' to get in touch with her for days.

MUDDY

I'll drive by her place.

LEN
Thanks.

133 EXT. SUBURBAN HOME. DAY. 133

Muddy's car pulls up. He bangs on the door. Nobody answers.
He goes to the back of the house and looks into the windows.

MUDDY'S POV. THROUGH THE WINDOW -

-- there's no furniture in the house.

LATER:

134 EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE. DUSK 134

Len breaks the window.

MUDDY
What the hell you doin'?

Len climbs inside.

LEN
Ain't gonna arrest a white man for
breakin' into a black woman's
house.

135 INT. ETTA'S HOUSE. DUSK 135

Len walks through the empty house.

136 INT. ETTA'S BATHROOM. 136

Len finds Etta on the floor, a needle still in her arm.

LEN
Etta!

But she's out. Len puts her in the shower and turns it on.

ETTA
Wha? What?

She flails.

ETTA (CONT'D)
Turn it off!

He turns it off. They're both sopping wet.

MUDDY (O.S.)

Len!

137 EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE. DUSK

137

Muddy looks through the window. Len comes out.

LEN

She's strung out.

MUDDY

Aw shit...

LEN

Geneva's a nurse, right?

MUDDY

I'll bring her over.

138 INT. ETTA'S HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

138

Etta sits huddled under a blanket, in front of a fire that Len has started. It's the only light in the room.

ETTA

First time I used this fire place.... Feel like I should have marshmallows or somethin'.

LEN

Marshmallows an' smack go real well together.

She sighs.

LEN (CONT'D)

You're gonna kill yourself, baby.

He sits beside her.

ETTA

I don't know how to fix it.

LEN

What happened to your furniture, your car --

ETTA
 My Mama sold what didn't get
 repossessed. They gonna take my
 house.

She leans against him, exhausted, lost.

LEN
 Put the house in my name.

ETTA
 What?

LEN
 You gotta trust me.

ETTA
 (she sings)
 Trust in me
 In all you do.

Len laughs. She laughs, too.

ETTA (CONT'D)
 Nobody trusts you, Len. Maybe
 Muddy, but that's about it.

He looks at the young woman nestled against him, shivering.

LEN
 Then it's kinda fucked up that I'm
 your best bet. I know a clinic,
 best place in the east coast -

ETTA
 (singing)
 Why don't you - you
 Trust me.

He puts his hand over her mouth, playfully.

LEN
 I'll pay for it.

She squints up at him.

LEN (CONT'D)
 Not a loan. A gift.

ETTA
 I must make you a lotta money.

LEN
Yeah... That must be it.

ETTA
I ain't stupid, I'm your number one bitch in the stable since Chuck got busted.

LEN
So now I've graduated from plantation owner to pimp?

He laughs.

LEN (CONT'D)
C'mere, lemme see what I got in my stable.

He lifts her face to his.

ETTA
(defiant)
What?

LEN
Pretty mouth.

ETTA
Damn straight.

LEN
Lots of pretty mouths in the world. A man can walk away from that once he's finished. But not from my number one bitch, unh, unh. 'Cause when you open that pretty mouth...

He runs his thumb against her lips.

LEN (CONT'D)
An' let that voice out, it makes a motherfucker's knees buckle.

He leans close and whispers in her ear.

LEN (CONT'D)
You crossed over. That's what I came here to tell you. You're on top of the charts an' you got a needle in your arm.

ETTA
I crossed over?

He nods.

ETTA (CONT'D)
Oh-my-God... Oh-my-God...

She's shaking with happiness.

LEN
Now, I'm not too keen on bein' a
pimp. An' I think the world knows
Etta James is far from bein' a
whore.

He picks up her junky works.

LEN (CONT'D)
So let's toss this shit. We'll
check you into a clinic in the
morning. Okay?

She nods. Tears of joy fill her eyes. "Trust In Me" swells on the soundtrack.

ETTA
Thank you.

She kisses him on the lips out of sheer excitement. It takes him by surprise. He kisses her back. And for a moment, their tired eyes just close as their mouths yield to each other's.

Headlights from a car move across their bodies.

CUT TO:

139 INT. MUDDY'S CAR. NIGHT. UNDER "TRUST IN ME" 139

MUDDY'S POV THROUGH WINDOW -
Of Len with his arms around Etta.

CUT BACK TO:

139b INT. ETTA'S HOUSE. UNDER "TRUST IN ME". 139b

Len and Etta feel the light and pull away, awkward.

LEN
Muddy's wife's a nurse. She'll stay
with you 'til morning.

He leaves.

140 EXT. ETTA'S HOUSE. NIGHT. UNDER "TRUST IN ME".

140

Len goes to his car.

Muddy comes out.

MUDDY

You sure you don't want me an'
Geneva to take off.

LEN

It's not what you think.

Muddy laughs.

MUDDY

That was just business?

LEN

Right.

MUDDY

You never hold me like that -

LEN

Cross over an' I'll jump in the bed
with you.

Muddy's smile fades.

LEN (CONT'D)

What?

Muddy shakes his head.

LEN (CONT'D)

What?!

MUDDY

Y'know how Walter calls you his
white daddy, 'cause you're always
gettin' him outta trouble. Then you
call him in the studio an' tell him
to give up his amp -- the sound he
spent his whole life makin'. He
woulda shot a man for takin' that.
But he gives it up for you... What
you in there tellin' that girl
who's got nobody in the world? That
you gonna take care of her?

LEN

An' how many strung out girls you
told that to, Mud?

Muddy nods. It's true.

MUDDY

An' how many times you told that
same shit to me?

LEN

What if I told you I had feelings
for her?

MUDDY

You're full of shit.

Len laughs.

LEN

Fine... I'm fuckin' her, I'm
fuckin' Chuck, I'm fuckin' you --
that's what you think, right?

Muddy looks away. He doesn't want to go there.

MUDDY

Well, that's what the blues is -- a
whole lotta fuckin'.

141 EXT. CHESS STUDIO

141

Two Uniformed Cops ridicule the four long haired white boys
un-loading their instruments.

CUT TO:

Muddy pulls up in his old, but well-maintained Cadillac.

POLICEMEN

Hey Muddy, looks like Chess got
himself a girl band.

The Policemen laugh. A thin young man with a guitar walks
threateningly towards the cops. Muddy heads him off.

MUDDY

Lemme help you with that, son.
Better things to do with a guitar
than clobber a cop with it.

The Guitarist does a double take.

GUITARIST
You're Muddy Waters.

MUDDY
You know me?

GUITARIST
Mick, it's Muddy Waters.

*

A young Mick Jagger turns around.

MICK
We're big fans.

GUITARIST/KEITH RICHARDS
You're the reason we got together.

The other two young men hustle in around Muddy and drop their instruments as if they've been on a pilgrimage and found their holy man. "Muddy Waters..." they whisper.

MICK
We even named our band after one of your songs -- "Rollin' Stone"

CUT TO:

143 INT. CHESS STUDIO. RECORDING ROOM -

143

The Rolling Stones record a cover of Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon's "I Just Wanna Make Love to you". Mick sings facing the wall.

INT. CHESS STUDIO. CONTROL ROOM

Muddy and Willie watch.

MUDDY
Why that boy singing to the wall?

ENGINEER
He's singing your song, Mud. You know how scared he must be, singin' for his idol?

Muddy and Willie laugh in amazement.

MUDDY
Idol, shit!
(hitting the intercom)
(MORE)

MUDDY (CONT'D)
 Hey Mick. It ain't my song today.
 It's your's. Go on an' Kill it.

And Mick Jagger turns away from the wall and does just that.

144 INT. RADIO STATION 144

CLOSE ON RECORD -- "SATISFACTION"

DISC JOCKEY
 The Number one record on the charts
 - -

"Satisfaction" plays.

145 EXT. PRISON - DAY 145 *

Chuck Berry exits the facility, he looks older, bitter. A lone photographer snaps a photo of him as he gets into a car.

WILLIE V.O.
 They locked Chuck up at the peak of his career. He couldn't record a damn thing. An' while he was on ice, America proclaimed a new king.

CUT TO:

146 INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE. SCREENING ROOM. UNDER "SATISFACTION" 146

The room is dark. Chuck turns on the television and channel surfs until he catches Elvis Presley performing. He stops and watches fascinated. *

147 INT. LEN'S HOUSE. DAWN. 147

Len is sleeping on the couch in his clothes, when the phone rings. He answers it.

LEN
 Somebody broke in? I'll be right down, thanks.
 (as an after thought)
 Who is this?

But the phone goes dead.

148 INT. BACK ROOM OF CLUB. UNDER "SATISFACTION". 148

CLOSE ON - DICE ROLLING. A SEVEN.

Lil Walter picks up the dice and shoots. He rolls a three.
The man who rolled the seven moves towards the money.

THE MAN WHO ROLLED SEVEN
Tough luck.

Lil Walter pulls his piece.

LIL WALTER
This here says my luck's just fine.

146 INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE. SCREENING ROOM. UNDER "SATISFACTION" 146

ON SCREEN -

Elvis is killing it. *

Chuck laughs.

CUT TO:

149 EXT. CHESS STUDIO. UNDER "SATISFACTION". 149

Len pulls up in his Cadillac. No sign of break in. He gets out, walks around to the back.

149 EXT. BACK OF CHESS RECORDS. UNDER "SATISFACTION". 149

Len checks the gate. It's locked. He sees four black guys coming out from the alley.

LEN
Hey you guys seen somebody tryin'
to break in here -

One Guy cracks Len in the jaw.

CUT BACK TO:

148B INT. BACK ROOM OF CLUB. UNDER "SATISFACTION". 148B

As Lil Walter reaches for the money another man picks up a lead pipe and swings it at Lil Walter's head.

CUT BACK TO:

146C INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE. SCREENING ROOM. UNDER "SATISFACTION" 146C

ON SCREEN -

Elvis performing.

*

CUT BACK TO:

149C EXT. BACK OF CHESS RECORDS. UNDER "SATISFACTION". 149C

Len pulls his gun, but another guy steps on Len's hand.

CUT BACK TO:

148C INT. BACK ROOM OF CLUB. UNDER "SATISFACTION". 148C

Lil Walter aims his gun, but the two men jump on him, pummeling him to the beat of "I Can't Get No Satisfaction".

*

149D EXT. BACK OF CHESS RECORDS. UNDER "SATISFACTION". 149D

Len getting beaten.

146D INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE. SCREENING ROOM. UNDER "SATISFACTION" 146D

ANNOUNCER ON T.V.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the King of
Rock and Roll.

*

*

*

Chuck laughs till he cries.

*

150 INT. MUDDY'S HOUSE. 150

Geneva opens the door to a beaten Walter.

GENEVA

Oh my Lord! We got to get you to
the hospital.

LIL WALTER

I was tryin' to get home.

GENEVA

You're home.

He collapses on the couch.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
I've gotta find Muddy.

She starts to go. But Walter grabs her hand.

LIL WALTER
I was waitin' for you to come get
me... They beat me like a dog.
Why'ntcha come get me?

GENEVA
I didn't know where you were,
Walter.

LIL WALTER
You shoulda looked harder, Mama.

Geneva looks at him, gets that he's somewhere else.

GENEVA
I'm right here now.

She kisses him on the forehead.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
Mama came and got you.

He sighs, like he's been waiting for this his entire life.

GENEVA (CONT'D)
Walter? Walter?!

She shakes him. But he's gone.

LATER ---

Muddy enters. He sees two men rolling his friend into a
plastic bag. Geneva stands by in tears.

MUDDY
He ain't garbage. Get outta here. *

Geneva ushers the men out. Muddy goes to Lil Walter. *

MUDDY (CONT'D)
I'm a get you a new suit, one of
them boxes with blue satin linin'. *
You gonna look slick, son. *

Muddy's voice cracks. He whispers to Walter.

MUDDY (CONT'D)
You was my best thing.

160 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM.

160

Len is in a hospital bed. Revetta sits beside him.

REVETTA

You're going to get yourself
killed. For what? They don't want
you there anymore.

*

LEN

We'll talk about it later. Hey Mud!

Len spots Muddy in the doorway.

LEN (CONT'D)

I'm real sorry about Walter.

Revetta hugs Muddy.

MUDDY

I almost lost two friends last
night.

(to Len)

How you feelin'?

LEN

Better than I look.

Wolf enters with a floral arrangement.

WOLF

There's a whole line of Bluesmen
waitin' to get in an' see if you
dead...

LEN

(laughing)

You mean if they still owe me
money.

(taking Wolf's flowers)

You the first man ever gave me
flowers.

REVETTA

They're beautiful! I'll get a vase.

She exits.

MUDDY

I know Walter musta been into you
pretty good. But he got anything
comin' to him?

LEN

You know how he spent his money.

MUDDY

You gotta pay for his funeral, Len.

LEN

I didn't say I wouldn't.

WOLF

Why he gotta pay for Walter's funeral? He ain't Walter's Daddy.

MUDDY

You never liked Walter, did ya?

WOLF

I don't like any colored man actin' like a boy, gettin' into so much debt he gotta take whatever's offered instead a figurin' out what his. That's why I left Mississippi.

*

MUDDY

You a big man. You can speak about Walter when he's dead? Huh?

WOLF

I'm speakin' 'bout the livin'. Act like a boy, you'll get treated like one. You wouldn't have to ask for anything, if you didn't spend your money on cars an' 'goodtime women. You can't even bury your friend.

*

*

*

LEN

I'm gonna pay for the damn funeral -

MUDDY

You lookin' for a fight, Wolf?

WOLF

I'm lookin' to help bury a fellow musician.

*

Wolf throws a wad of bills on the table.

WOLF (CONT'D)

Feels good not to have a Daddy. As much as I don't like you, Mud -- I want you to feel good like that, too.

*

Wolf exits.

Muddy looks at Wolf's money. He hates having to pick it up.

MUDDY
I killed Walter.

He looks up at Len. *

MUDDY (CONT'D)
I killed him the day I let you take
his amp.

CUT TO:

161	INT. STAGE.	161	
	Elvis sings Lil Walter's "My Babe". The white girls go crazy.		
162	INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR. UNDER ELVIS' "MY BABE"	162	*
	JUMPCUTS OF HANDS PREPARING LIL' WALTER'S BODY		*
	Applying make-up to his scarred and bruised face		*
	Slipping him into a sharp suit and tie.		*
	Slicking his hair back.		*
	Lifting him into his coffin with the satin blue lining.		*
	Placing a photo of him in his glory days on his chest. The song ends with the crowd applauding Elvis. The lid closes.		*
163	INT. CHESS STUDIO. RECORDING ROOM -	163	*
	Etta's rehearsing. Len walks in. Etta stops singing.		
	LEN So you're working on something behind my back? What happened to "Trust in me"?		
	She pulls him away from the other musicians.		
	ETTA And you're sellin' the company behind my back.		

LEN
That's the word on the street, huh?

She nods.

LEN (CONT'D)
When I started this business, you think anybody woulda let a black man get what I got done? The doors weren't open then. Now they are. A white man's got no business here.

*
*

ETTA
So where's that leave me?

LEN
You need to stop "Trustin' in me" and start "Trustin' in you".

ETTA
So this might be the last song I sing for you.

LEN
You better make it good.

She smiles at him, then looks up at the Engineer.

ETTA
Let's go!

ENGINEER
Take one.

The musicians play. Etta sings "I'd Rather Go Blind". It's a goodbye song to Len.

As she sings the emotion between them becomes too much for either one of them to bare.

As tears stream down Etta's cheeks. Len abruptly gets up and leaves.

164 INT. LEN'S OFFICE. (CONTINUOUS) UNDER "I'D RATHER GO BLIND" '64

Len enters his office, slams the door and locks it. He looks up at all his gold records and publicity shots of his stars, Muddy, Lil Walter, Chuck Berry, Howlin' Wolf, Etta. He starts taking the gold records down from the wall. Suddenly, he hugs onto the records and cries.

165 EXT. CHESS STUDIO. UNDER "I'D RATHER GO BLIND" 165

Len's Cadillac pulls away from Chess.

166 INT. LEN'S CADILLAC. UNDER "I'D RATHER GO BLIND" 166

The gold records are in the backseat. Len drives away, watching the studio get smaller in his rearview mirror.

WILLIE V.O.

Chess records had a hold on Len. It just wouldn't let him leave...

He coughs. He grimaces in pain. His knuckles tighten on the steering wheel. He veers off into the sidewalk and hits a lamp post.

WILLIE V.O. (CONT'D)

He had a heart attack before he could turn the corner.

167 INT. ETTA'S HOUSE. 167

MUDDY

I got some bad news for you, girl. He didn't leave a will. So that means everything he's got goes to his wife an' kids -- including your house. Now, Revetta's a good woman -

ETTA

It's all right, Mud.

Muddy looks at her. She gets an envelope.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Just this morning, this man came to the house. Gave me this.

Muddy opens it.

ETTA (CONT'D)

It's the deed to my house. He said, Len wanted me to have this in case anything happened... He didn't have time to leave a will, but he had time to think of me?

MUDDY
 (realizing)
 It wasn't just business. He loved
 you, Etta.

168 EXT. MUDDY'S CAR. DAY.

168 *

Muddy's car pulls up. He spots Willie Dixon, Jimmy Rogers,
 and other blues musicians hanging outside Chess records.

MUDDY
 What's goin' on?

JIMMY
 They say you need an appointment. *

WILLIE
 Appointment hell! My money's in
 there.

JIMMY
 They say they ain't givin' out
 anymore advances.

WILLIE
 They better let Muddy in. He built
 this place.

Muddy rings the buzzer.

VOICE OVER INTERCOM
 Can I help you?

MUDDY
 This is Muddy Waters.

VOICE OVER INTERCOM
 Do you have an appointment?

The crowd erupts, "No, she didn't!"

JIMMY
 I'm a get my car an' Lil Walter her
 ass! *

169 EXT. CEMETARY

169

Len's fresh grave. Muddy kneels beside it.

MUDDY

It's over, Len. There's no more record label. No more nothin'.

170 INT. MUDDY'S HOUSE. DAY.

170 *

Muddy watches television, when Geneva answers the door.

GENEVA

Hey Willie!

WILLIE

(to Geneva)

Get your ole man off that couch, we back on the road!

(to Muddy)

They came back for us, Mud.

MUDDY

Who?

WILLIE

Them English boys. They been tellin' all of Europe 'bout us. They want us to come over an' play.

MUDDY

I don't got money to be flyin' to England.

LEN

There gonna pay for everything.

CUT TO:

171 INT. PLANE.

171

Willie and Muddy sit next to one another. The Stewardess takes their champagne glasses.

MUDDY

I'm a little nervous, Willie.

WILLIE

What you nervous about? You been performin' your whole life.

MUDDY

Not for white folks. How'm I s'pose to know what they want?

WILLIE

They want you, Muddy.

PILOT (O.S.)

Prepare for landing.

172 EXT. AIRPORT. UNDER "YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT" 172
The plane comes into Heathrow airport.

173 INT. PLANE. UNDER "YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT" 173
Muddy and Willie wait in front of the door to disembark.

*

The door opens. We see Muddy and Willie's faces, their surprise, their absolute awe --

MUDDY AND WILLIE'S POV -- UNDER "YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT"

A plush red carpet is rolled out to meet their first step. English Paparazzi shoot them. A camera crew is filming them. Both men are overwhelmed by the attention.

PAPARAZZI

Mr. Waters! Over here, please!

Willie leans over to Muddy and chuckles.

WILLIE

They want you, Mr. Waters.

Muddy steps out, puts his shades on and flashes his smile for the photographers. Daddy Cool is back. The photo freezes. The color drains to black and white.

WILLIE V.O.

We sued Chess for back royalties. An' we did all right. 'Specially me. 'Cause I wrote all those hits that Muddy, Walter an' Wolf were singin'. So, when those Rock n' Rollers started coverin' 'em, I got paid. An' I'm still gettin' paid.

174 INT. CHESS STUDIO. CONTROL ROOM. PRESENT.

174

PULL OUT OF --

Muddy's black and white photo at Heathrow. It's on the wall.

WILLIE V.O.

I made enough to buy this studio.
They were gonna tear it down. But I
knew it was history.

*

The Guitarist puts an old bottle neck on his finger.

WILLIE V.O. (CONT'D)

We made a kinda music that could
grow into anything... Rhythm an'
Blues, Rock n' Roll, Hip-hop...
Whatever you playin' baby, just
sprinkle a little of us in it an'
it'll grow up big and bad. We the
Hoochie Coochie seed.

*

*

The Guitarist plays slide. The other musicians feel it and
join in. And the Artist wraps his voice around their sound
and the Willie Dixon's lyrics.

The Producer's feeling it. He watches the magic being made,
once again, at Chess Records.

*

FADE OUT

*

*