

UNTITLED 50 CENT PROJECT

Written by

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Winter's 2nd Revision
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DARKNESS. The soft rumble of a motor idling the only sound.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I read a story once where a man walked into hell and the only way he could get out was by not lookin' back when he left. Turned out temptation got the best of him and he fucked it all up, had to stay there forever. Well I was born in hell and I'll tell you one fuckin' thing. When my time comes? I ain't lookin' back.

We HEAR the KA-CHACK of a clip being jammed into a pistol and on screen appears:

SOUTH JAMAICA - QUEENS, NEW YORK

EXT. CHECK CASHING STORE - JAMAICA AVENUE - NIGHT

Late. Quiet. Run-down neighborhood. A stolen Suburban idles near a Check Cashing store, lights on but gates down, closed for business. PAN the Suburban's bumper-sticker: "My Child Was Student of the Month at Garden City Middle School!"

INT. CHEVY SUBURBAN - CONTINUOUS

The occupants: five African-American males and a Guest. In the driver's seat is KERYL, 23. Next to him sits ROMEO, 18, who tokes on a huge spliff, a Glock .9mm in his lap.

KERYL

C'mon, lemme get that shit.

Romeo passes the joint to BAMA, 23, Southern accent, who holds another .9mm -- In the back, MARCUS, their 25 year old leader, holds an Uzi. In between him and TYRELL, 22, sits RODRIGO, a trembling Colombian about 30.

MARCUS

(to Rodrigo)

One more time I'ma run this down. We gettin' out this car, we gonna walk to that side door. You gonna knock the code, you ain't gonna say a motherfuckin' word. Comprende?

RODRIGO

Si. Yes. Please no shoot me.

MARCUS

That's up to you, motherfucker.

Marcus presses the Uzi against Rodrigo's temple, leans in:

MARCUS

Try any shit I'll paint that store
with your fuckin' brains.

(then; to the others)

Let's do this.

As they all pull ski masks down over their faces...

INT. CHECK CASHING STORE - NIGHT

A chain-smoking KOREAN MAN, 50s, sits at a table, counting machine WHIRRING as it spits out stacks of HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS. Nearby, two KOREAN WOMEN tie the stacks with bands.

Across the room, a Colombian GUARD watches a Tony Robbins infomercial on TV. A few beats, then a coded knock on the side door. RAP. RAP. RAP-RAP-RAP. The Guard approaches the peephole, his .45 pistol still in its holster.

GUARD'S POV THROUGH PEEPHOLE - Rodrigo stands outside, holds up a Nathan's bag. As he unlocks the door...

GUARD

Fuck you been, I'm starvin' in--

BAMMMM!!! The door kicks in violently, knocking the Guard backward nearly off his feet. The Korean Women SCREAM, throwing up their hands as Marcus & Co. pile in.

MARCUS

Fuckin' move I'll blow your fuckin'
heads off!

In a flash, Bama is on the Guard, .9mm jammed in his eye. He quickly takes the .45, forces the guy to his stomach as Tyrell shoves Rodrigo to the floor next to him.

While Romeo covers the Women, Marcus produces a nylon duffel bag. Workmanlike as the Grinch, but ten times faster, he fills it with the cash. As he loads the money:

KOREAN MAN

Goddamn cocksucker!

TYRELL

Shut the fuck up!

At the table, Marcus cleans out the counting machine, shoving the bills into the duffel bag. Bama nudges the Korean Man.

BAMA
Where the rest at?

KOREAN MAN
That all, no more!

ROMEO
(glancing at his watch)
Sixty seconds!

MARCUS
A-ight, we done.

BAMA
Fuck's the rest of the money?!

MARCUS
We got what we need, let's go!

BAMA
Lemme grabs the Lottos.

MARCUS
I said let's--

Just then, another Colombian GUARD appears in the front doorway, raises a sawed-off shotgun...

KA-BLAMMM!!! A huge hole is blown in the wall inches from Bama's head. With the Women screaming, Bama holds his shattered eardrum as Marcus sprays the Uzi at the Guard, taking him out. Marcus shoves the duffel into Romeo's hand.

MARCUS
Go!! Go!!

As Romeo bolts off, Tyrell covers the room while Marcus grabs Bama, carrying him out the door with one arm.

EXT. DARKENED STREET - NIGHT

In panic mode, Romeo sprints to the Suburban, tosses the duffel in. Marcus rushes up holding Bama, Tyrell following.

KERYL
Fuck happened in there?!

MARCUS
Help me get him in!

Romeo and Tyrell help Marcus lift Bama, pile in after him.

MARCUS
Drive!! Go!! Go!!

As they screech off, SIRENS blare in the distance and we...

CUT TO:

A CHERRY TOP LIGHT -- spinning wildly, flashing in the dark. The CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal it's on an AMBULANCE that screeches down the Van Wyck Expressway. On screen appears:

1976

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

MARCUS (V.O.)
I was born in 1976, same year as
the Bicentennial.

Laying on the gurney is KATRINA, 15, pretty, African-American and very pregnant; she moans loudly, in full labor. Her MOTHER, 40s, holds her hand as a PARAMEDIC checks her vitals.

KATRINA
It hurts! Ohhh! Motherfucker!!

MOTHER
I did it nine times, baby, I know.

And as Katrina continues moaning...

MARCUS (V.O.)
The little girl on the gurney's my
moms. She's fifteen years old.

INT. KATRINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A cramped room; Stevie Wonder & Charlie's Angels (the TV show) posters on the wall, clothes everywhere. With her three SISTERS asleep nearby, Katrina lays awake, staring at a mirrored disco ball hanging from the ceiling.

MARCUS (V.O.)
I never knew for sure who my pops
was - she never really talked about
him at all. She always told me I
was the immaculate conception.

Suddenly the disco ball starts glowing; a bright, other-worldly light fills the room, reflecting off Stevie Wonder's sunglasses. It washes down over Charlie's Angels, alighting Katrina's face as she sits up in bed.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I guess I liked that better than the truth, which was probably that he was some no-account nigga from the hood.

INT. TACO BELL - DAY

Katrina, now 19, scoops meat into a row of taco shells.

MARCUS (V.O.)

It didn't really matter anyway - with my moms around, I didn't need no dad. See most girls her age woulda gone on welfare, let the government pay their ass, but Katrina Philips wasn't about that shit.

INT. TACO BELL - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Katrina punches her time card, opens her pay envelope, glances at the check - \$89.00. She frowns slightly.

MARCUS (V.O.)

She assessed her options, tradin' fast food for fast money.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - QUEENS - DAY

Katrina, 22 and blinged-out, leans into a Monte Carlo full of white COLLEGE GUYS. The DRIVER hands her a \$20; she slips him a foil packet of coke. As he pulls away, Katrina heads back to her spot on the corner, sips a Sprite. Further up the block, a hard-looking hustler we'll come to know as TOPCAT, 28, gives her a subtle nod.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Time she was twenty two, she had her own house and a brand new Buick Regal -- for me, every day was Christmas with my moms.

EXT. TOYS 'R US - PARKING LOT - DAY

Marcus, now 8 and wearing a thick gold chain, running suit and bright white sneakers, holds an armload of toys as he follows Katrina toward a shiny black '84 Buick Regal.

MARCUS

Can we go to Carvel?

KATRINA

(checks her beeper)

I gotta make a stop first, baby.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - QUEENS - DAY

With rap music on the radio, the Regal sits parked at the curb, Marcus in the passenger seat playing with a "Mr. T" A-Team action figure. Nearby, Katrina stands arguing with SLIM, rail thin, Geri-curved, 20s. Topcat, the hustler we met earlier, mediates.

KATRINA

Nine times I told this motherfucker stay on his side the boulevard!

SLIM

You own this fuckin' street?
Opportunity knocks, I take the sale, bitch.

KATRINA

(lunges at him)

Who you call bitch, motherfucker?!

Katrina slaps and scratches at Slim; he tries to fight back.

TOPCAT

Whoa, whoa!

SLIM

Don't push me, girl - I will fuckin' beat your ass!

Topcat separates the two of them.

TOPCAT

Chill now, fuck you doin'?! You don't do that shit out here!

KATRINA

Lionel Richie-lookin' motherfucker.

Topcat gives them hard looks. Things calm down, then:

TOPCAT

Here's how it's gonna be. Trina works the south side of Brewer and you stay the fuck 'cross the street.

SLIM

Bitch be pickin' my pocket.

TOPCAT

(reaching for his gun)
Fuck I just say motherfucker?

Topcat stares him down, ice-cold eyes. A few beats, then:

TOPCAT

Now get your bony ass back there.

Slim shoots Katrina a look, then crosses the street.

KATRINA

Pussy ass nigga.

TOPCAT

Take it easy. Everybody gonna eat.

Topcat looks over, notices Marcus sitting in the car. He crosses to him, leans inside, smiles.

INT. KATRINA'S REGAL - CONTINUOUS

TOPCAT

Hey lil' homey, who you got there?

MARCUS

Mr. T.

TOPCAT

Mr. T?! I ever tell you 'bout the time I whupped his ass?

MARCUS

You buggin'. Mr. T is bad.

Topcat smiles, pats Marcus' head as Katrina gets in the car.

KATRINA

I'm droppin' him off, I'll be back later.

TOPCAT

Time's money, Trina.

Topcat crosses off. Katrina settles in. Marcus is quiet.

KATRINA

Y'all right baby boy?

MARCUS

Why was you fightin' with that man?

KATRINA

Who, Slim? He was tryin' to take somethin' belonged to me baby, and you can't let people do that. You gotta be strong.

MARCUS

I don't like when people fight.

KATRINA

What you worried about? Don't you know I'd never let nothin' happen to you? Look at me, baby.

(off his look)

I will always protect you.

MARCUS

I know.

KATRINA

C'mon now, let's get some Carvel.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Now in pj's, Marcus sits on the couch eating Carvel ice cream with six other BOYS and GIRLS ranging from age 12 to 25.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Though Katrina had her own crib, a lot of time I stayed with my grandparents and my eight aunts and uncles -- shit, some of them niggas weren't much older than me.

UNCLE SPORT, 17, and GRANDPA attempt to hook up a new VCR.

UNCLE SPORT

You plugged it in output. You gotta use input.

GRANDPA

Shut your ig'nant mouth 'for I input my boot up your ass.

The CAMERA DRIFTS to THE FOYER, where Katrina and Marcus' Grandma, now 50s, are in the midst of a hushed argument.

GRANDMA

He don't need your money, Katrina,
he needs you.

KATRINA

He got me. I'm here, ain't I?

GRANDMA

And when you go get yourself in
jail, then what?

KATRINA

I ain't goin' to jail, will you
stop sweatin' my ass?

GRANDMA

Don't you use that lang--

Katrina looks, noticing something. Grandma turns to see what it is - Marcus is watching them. They trade looks. A truce.

GRANDMA

Marcus, say goodbye to your mama.

Marcus approaches. Katrina kneels down, smiles.

KATRINA

I'll see you Saturday, okay, baby?

MARCUS

Can we get the Atari?

KATRINA

I told you we could, didn't I?
(off Marcus' smile)
Now gimme a kiss.

Marcus kisses his mother; she hugs him, exits.

EXT. KATRINA'S HOUSE - LONG ISLAND - NIGHT

Late. Katrina pulls the Regal into the driveway of a neat ranch style home on a quiet suburban street.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Turned out I never did get that
Atari -- Katrina didn't show up
that Saturday.

INT. KATRINA'S HOUSE - LONG ISLAND - NIGHT

Katrina enters the foyer, flips on the light. And as soon as she closes the door...

SLIM APPEARS from behind it, slipping an electrical cord around her throat. Knee in her back, he YANKS violently on the cord, lifting her off her feet. Katrina flails wildly, kicking, scratching, eyes bulging. Slim tightens his grip.

MARCUS (V.O.)

That was the day they found her
body.

EXT. KATRINA'S HOUSE - LONG ISLAND - DAY

A few KIDS on bicycles look on as two UNIFORMED MEN from the Coroner's office remove Katrina's corpse in a body bag.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Just like that, my mom's life
ended. Life as I knew it ended too.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Near a meager Christmas tree, the family sits around in robes and pj's, looking on as Marcus unwraps a few simple presents.

MARCUS (V.O.)

With my grandpa on disability and
eight other kids to feed, shit like
Atari was a thing of the past.

Marcus opens a gift - a bag of small green plastic Army Men.

EXT. ROCKAWAY BOULEVARD - DAY

Bookbag over his shoulder, Marcus walks to school past boarded-up storefronts; garbage, broken glass everywhere.

MARCUS (V.O.)

In addition to me, that summer
there was another new arrival in
Queens -- crack swept through like
a hurricane. Some folks said it
was the worst thing ever happened
to the hood...

SIRENS in the distance, Marcus side-steps a filthy, pregnant CRACK HO, who stands with a few other emaciated FIENDS.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Some said it was the best.

A HUSTLER drives by in a gleaming '85 Bonneville, dripping with gold jewelry as rap music BLARES from his stereo.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

The BELL rings; KIDS pour out of the graffiti-covered school, including Marcus and CAMERON, a skinny kid in glasses about his own age. In contrast to Marcus' hand-me-downs, Cameron is well dressed, wearing a brand new Starter jacket.

CAMERON

...then Rambo grabs the Chinese dude and hits him like pow!!

MARCUS

Who, the first dude?

Across the street, some older KIDS hang out smoking, boom-box cranked. Their ringleader, KENNETH, a scary-looking, light-skinned, redheaded bully about 13 spots Cameron.

KENNETH

Yo, yo, Cameron. Hold up!

CAMERON

(nervous)

Nah man, I gotta go home.

MARCUS

(to Cameron)

Who that?

KENNETH

Yo, lemme holla at you a second!

CAMERON

Run Marcus!

Marcus and Cameron take off running. Kenneth starts chasing them, but can't dodge the traffic to cross the street.

KENNETH

I catch you little nigga that jacket is mine!

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - STREET - DUSK

Marcus and Cameron sit quietly on the curb, carving their names in the blacktop with nails.

CAMERON

You ever think about your moms?

MARCUS

I dunno, sometimes.

CAMERON

Shit's messed up.

Marcus half-shrugs. A few beats, then:

CAMERON

Wanna play skelly?

MARCUS

Okay, lemme get my cap.

They stand. Just then, the street lights come on.

CAMERON

Aww, man.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Cameron was a rarity in the hood, a kid with somethin' almost no other kid had - a moms and a dad.

Across the street, CAMERON'S FATHER, 35, pokes his head out of the screen door of a small, neatly-kept house.

CAMERON'S FATHER

Cameron!

CAMERON

I know. See you tomorrow, Marcus.

Marcus watches as Cameron crosses the street and goes inside.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Every night when that street light came on, it was time for Cameron to go in. I hated that fuckin' light.

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - STREET - NIGHT

Marcus stands alone in the deserted street, throwing rocks at the street light's bulb. After a few tries with no success, he sits, takes a small plastic Soldier from his pocket. He plays with it a bit, then after a while starts talking to it:

MARCUS

What 'chu worried about, man?
You gotta be tough. Don't you
know I'll always protect you?

Marcus sits alone, the sound of SIRENS in the distance...

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - SCHOOLYARD - DAY

In the garbage-strewn schoolyard, rap music plays from a nearby boom box. Marcus looks on with a few other KIDS as a GIRL break-dances on a piece of cardboard.

KID #1

KID #2

Pop-lock like you did before! That shit crazy.

Just then, outside the fence, a commotion. Marcus looks, sees Cameron surrounded by the bully Kenneth and his boys.

KID #1

Oh snap, Cameron in trouble now.

As Kenneth tries to yank off Cameron's jacket, Marcus reaches in his pocket. He squeezes the plastic Soldier, then purposefully strides across the schoolyard onto the street.

KID #2

Where you goin', Marcus?

MARCUS (V.O.)

Growin' up in the hood it's a
constant battle to get nice things.

Barely missing a step, Marcus grabs a loose six-inch piece of concrete from the sidewalk around a tree.

MARCUS (V.O.)

It's a bigger battle to keep 'em.

Marcus approaches Kenneth, whose back is to him as he roughly yanks off Cameron's starter jacket.

MARCUS

Hey!

Kenneth turns and... WHAMMM!! Marcus SMASHES him across the face with the concrete. A gash immediately opens over Kenneth's eye, blood pouring down his shirt as he goes down.

MARCUS

Touch him again I will fuck your
ass up! All you motherfuckers!

Kenneth crawls to his feet, runs off. His gang suddenly gets very quiet. Marcus stares them down - no one has the balls to challenge him. He leads Cameron back to the schoolyard...

MARCUS (V.O.)

Over the next few years, I made a reputation for myself with the other kids. And in the hood, reputation is the cornerstone of power.

EXT. ROCKAWAY BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus, now 12, walks down the street. He stops to look in the window of "Value World Shoes", where a sharp-looking pair of Adidas' is on display with a price tag of \$75.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The problem with a reputation's you gotta live up to it. And it's hard lookin' fly wearin' Pro fuckin' Keds.

Marcus looks down at his own ratty sneakers and heads off.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

A dejected Marcus walks down the street, which is dotted with crack HUSTLERS and FIENDS. On the corner, looking like a million bucks, Topcat leans on his '88 Caddy Seville, smooth-talking a neighborhood HOTTIE. As Marcus passes by:

TOPCAT

Yo, how you doin', b.g.?

MARCUS

I'm a-ight.

As the Hottie crosses off, Marcus approaches Topcat.

TOPCAT

Look at you, all grewed up. So what's happenin', brother?

MARCUS

I dunno. Goin' to school.

TOPCAT

Educate thyself, your mama'd be proud. So you need anything?

MARCUS

Nah.

TOPCAT

Ah, see now you lyin' to Topcat.
Everybody need somethin'.

MARCUS

(shrugs; shy)

Tryin' to hold some Adidas'.

TOPCAT

Sneakers, that all? Shit, I'll
have you rockin' sneakers and some
new gear.

EXT. QUEEN'S PLAZA MALL - DAY

With Marcus in the passenger seat, Topcat pulls the Seville into the mall parking lot, rap music thumping.

MARCUS (V.O.)

There's two sure ways to get a
kid to do somethin'. Take away
what they already have or give
'em somethin' they want.

INT. QUEEN'S PLAZA MALL - MONTAGE

In a shoe store, Marcus tries on new Adidas'; Topcat pays in cash from a thick wad. Another store; Marcus picks out a Starter jacket, matching hat. In a jewelry store, Marcus reluctantly picks out a gold chain; Topcat nods it's okay.

MARCUS (V.O.)

You wanna make friends, givin'
somethin' they want works a whole
lot better.

INT. MCDONALD'S - DAY

Nearly empty. Eating a Big Mac, wearing his new clothes, Marcus sits across from Topcat, who smokes, but doesn't eat.

TOPCAT

Tell you man, your moms? That
there was a special lady. And
smart? Shit. She loved your
ass too, you know.

MARCUS

I know.

TOPCAT

(a few beats; then)
Like your new threads?

MARCUS

You trippin'? They great.

TOPCAT

Tell you what... nah, forget it.

MARCUS

What?

TOPCAT

Nah, you too young.

MARCUS

No I ain't, what?

Topcat feigns that he's thinking it over, then "caves".

TOPCAT

A-ight, but only cause your moms
was a friend of mine. Instead of
you askin' for fish, how you'd like
if I give you a pole instead?

(off Marcus' confusion)

What I'm sayin' is how'd you like
to be able to buy all this shit
yourself. Matter fact, how you'd
like to be able to buy anything
you want?

MARCUS

Shit yeah.

Topcat looks around, then leans in.

TOPCAT

Here's the thing then, man to man.
You know what crack is, right?

(off Marcus' nod)

Well you should never ever do that
shit, it fucks you all up. But
long as there's other niggas stupid
enough to do it, why not turn that
to your advantage?

(looks around; pulls
out a vial)

See this little shit?

(MORE)

TOPCAT (cont'd)

You can stand on Brewer thirty seconds, sell it to a fiend for ten dollar.

MARCUS

Ten dollar for that?

TOPCAT

Tell you what else. He got the paper, that same fiend gonna come back in two hours buy another.

MARCUS

Shit.

TOPCAT

(smiles; then)

A-ight, here's I'ma do, I'ma hook you up, give you a tryout.

TOPCAT

(holds up vial)

We go back to Brewer, I'ma give you five of these. Every four you pump for me, you pump one for yourself, keep the money. That's a ten dollar profit.

MARCUS

Whoa.

TOPCAT

This a big opportunity little man, you sure you can handle it?

MARCUS

Hell yeah.

And as Marcus and Topcat shake hands, we FREEZE FRAME:

MARCUS (V.O.)

From that moment, I was addicted to crack. Not doin' it -- sellin' it.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

As Topcat looks on from down the block, 12-year-old Marcus stands amidst a few other Hustlers ranging from age 16 to 25.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Every afternoon from three to six I was out on the street.

A gypsy CAB pulls up; the PASSENGER waves Marcus over. He approaches, trades crack for cash; the Cab pulls off.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

CLOSE ON A CLOCK - 6:12 p.m. Marcus enters, passing Grandma, who smiles at him as she makes spaghetti.

MARCUS (V.O.)
I told my grandma I joined some
bullshit after-school program.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus is on the street; a shaky FIEND, 20s; approaches with a handful of crumpled-up singles.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Most hustlers wouldn't take
singles, but me, I'd take fuckin'
pennies that's all a fiend had.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - BASEMENT - DAY

Using a phone book to lean on, Marcus uses a steam iron to neatly press a stack of bills into crisp, flat notes.

MARCUS (V.O.)
I got so obsessed with money I used
to iron the bills out, count how
much I had over and over and over.

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM - BASEMENT - DAY

Marcus sits on the bed, finishes lacing up his old pair of Pro Keds. He grabs his bookbag, exits.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Marcus enters the kitchen, says goodbye to Grandma, who serves Grandpa waffles at the table.

GRANDMA
Got your chess club today, baby?

MARCUS
Yeah, till six.

GRANDPA

Boy a genius.

Marcus exits.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The fucked up thing is for all the green I was holdin', I couldn't let my grandparents know about it.

EXT. CAMERON'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

As Cameron acts as look-out, Marcus slips off his Keds, then pulls a Hefty bag out from behind the garage.

CAMERON

Come on Marcus, hurry.

From a small selection of brand new pairs of sneakers, Marcus removes a pair of snow white Adidas' from the bag.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I stashed my real sneakers over behind Cameron's garage.

And as he starts changing his sneakers...

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Marcus and a few other Hustlers stand around a boombox, which blares NWA. One of them, a scary, droopy-eyed thug we'll come to know as JUNEBUG, 16, bops his head to the music.

MARCUS (V.O.)

It was right around this time I first got into rap. I mean once NWA dropped they shit, every nigga I knew was rhymin'.

JUNEBUG

Yo, you feelin' this shit?

MARCUS (V.O.)

For the first time we heard music that truly reflected our lives...

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus and Cameron make their way down the street, passing a Hustler who raps as a few others look on.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Hustlers, fiends, even little kids
wanted to be rappers. Me and my
friends'd fuck around in the yard,
write our own verses.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Marcus, Cameron and a few other 5th GRADERS look on as one of them, LEONARD, raps to a tired, old-school beat.

LEONARD
My name is Leonard and I'm here to
say/That I'm the best rapper in the
world today...

MARCUS (V.O.)
The difference was I took it
serious, actually worked at it.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - SCHOOLYARD -

The same KIDS are gathered near Marcus, who raps to a beat. He's colorful, clever and very talented, but way too hardcore for a 5th grader, with lyrics about crack, murder and pussy.

A TEACHER walks by on her way into the school, overhearing Marcus as he raps. And on her appalled expression...

MARCUS (V.O.)
But much as I liked rappin', it
was sort of just a hobby -- nothin'
gave me a rush like makin' money...

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus, now 15 and wearing new clothes and jewelry, works the street. Nearby we see Junebug, now 19, in a tense discussion with a THUG in a Yankee's cap.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Not that hustlin' didn't have its
down-side. There was fierce
fuckin' competition.

A strung-out WOMAN pulls up in a car; Marcus and two other Hustlers race to make the sale.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - NIGHT

With other Hustlers nearby, Marcus sells to Kenneth, the schoolyard bully, who now has a scar over his eye.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Plus there was always the po-po to worry about.

HUSTLER (O.C.)

Five-0!!

Kenneth runs off. Marcus bolts behind a parked car, ducks down as a POLICE CRUISER passes by.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus sells to a Fiend. Nearby, talking on a pay phone is the THUG in the Yankee's cap.

MARCUS (V.O.)

But your biggest problem was one you might not even know you had...

A rusty Nissan rolls to a stop. As casually as if he's buying a newspaper, Junebug emerges from the back, walks to the Thug in the Yankee cap...

MARCUS (V.O.)

Beef with another nigga.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

Junebug empties a Glock into YANKEE CAP'S body, finishing him off with three head shots. As blood pools on the sidewalk, Junebug locks eyes with Marcus, then jumps back in the Nissan, which screeches off.

MARCUS (V.O.)

It's some fucked up shit, but as they say, no risk, no reward. And by the time I was 15, I had more "reward" than I could hide.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

As Marcus, Junebug and a few other Hustlers look on from down the street, Topcat stands talking to a shifty-looking, gold-toothed hustler we'll come to know as ODELL, 27.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Cash, jewelry, I even had my own
Kawasaki I'd ride to school every
day. But all that shit was nothin'
compared to what some niggas had.

In SLO-MO, a midnight blue Rolls Royce pulls over near Topcat and Odell. From up front step two hard-looking gangstas in their 20s -- MAJESTIC, shaved head, and BREEZE, dreds. They look around, then open the rear door for LEVAR CAHILL, late-30s, dressed from head to toe in leather and diamonds.

MARCUS (V.O.)

In the New York coke trade, not
even the Colombians were bigger
than Levar Cahill.

As Majestic and Breeze look on, Levar greets Topcat and Odell, who smiles broadly, flashing his prominent gold teeth.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Fuck, that nigga was the New York
coke trade, the gangsterest nigga
there was.

HUSTLER #1

Whoa, check that fuckin' ride.

JUNEBUG

Rolls ain't shit. Bentley, that's
my fuckin' car.

Just then, from down the block:

TOPCAT

Marcus! Yo Marcus!

Topcat waves Marcus over. He starts over, tentative.

JUNEBUG

Oooh, look at this nigga. Fresh
off the step, now he hangin' with
the big dawgs.

Marcus approaches nervously. Levar turns to Topcat.

LEVAR CAHILL

Who this little nigga?

TOPCAT

You remember Trina, right?

(off his confusion)

Trina?

LEVAR CAHILL
(flash of recognition)
Oh yeah, right. Right.

TOPCAT
This here her baby boy.

LEVAR CAHILL
Word?

Levar smiles broadly, looks Marcus over approvingly.

TOPCAT
Little nigga move more weight than
five of these other motherfuckers.

ODELL
True dat, boy a worker bee.

From down the block, Junebug looks on, clearly jealous at the attention Marcus is getting from the big man.

LEVAR CAHILL
So you out there grindin', makin'
me money?

MARCUS
Yeah, I... You like a God to me,
Mr. Cahill.

LEVAR CAHILL
(smiling broadly)
Like a God? Little nigga I'm
God, Buddha and motherfuckin'
Allah rolled into one.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

Marcus pulls up on his motorcycle, parks it outside.

MARCUS (V.O.)
I went home that night in a daze, I
mean meetin' Levar Cahill was like
meetin' a movie star, even better.

We see a makeshift cardboard license plate as Marcus takes his backpack and heads off toward the school entrance.

MARCUS (V.O.)
I still wasn't thinkin' straight
when I left for school next day.

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

STUDENTS wait on line to go through a metal detector, placing their bags on a table to be searched. Marcus approaches.

SECURITY GUARD

Bag.

Marcus hands over his backpack. The GUARD opens it, pulls out a notebook, gym clothes, a pair of hi-tops with rolled up socks stuffed inside. He pulls out the socks - and out spill a dozen CRACK VIALS. Marcus looks as shocked as the Guard.

MARCUS

Oh fuck.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - LATER

As a few TEACHERS and STUDENTS look on, a COP leads a handcuffed Marcus to a waiting POLICE CAR.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The truth is I wasn't sneakin' that shit inside, I never hustled at school. I had hid it in there weeks ago and forgot all about it.

INT. COURT - DAY

Marcus, head bowed, stands with his LAWYER before a JUDGE as Grandma and Grandpa look on from the spectator section.

LAWYER

It's a first offense, your honor, he's fifteen years old. He was holding it for a friend.

JUDGE

(thinks a beat; then)
He'll pay a fine of five hundred dollars and I'm recommending he be suspended from school for two weeks. And Mr. Philips?
(off Marcus' look)
If I ever see you in my courtroom again you will go to jail.

Marcus nods, crosses with his Lawyer to his Grandparents.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I know this sounds twisted, but
I blamed gettin' caught on my
grandparents. Way I saw it, if I
didn't have to hide my shit, this
never woulda happened.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marcus sits on the couch across from his Grandparents.

GRANDPA

Is that what you wanna be, a damn
disgrace?!

GRANDMA

A boy your age, Marcus. And you
have such intelligence.

GRANDPA

What about your future?

They keep talking, but we can't hear them at all.

MARCUS (V.O.)

For a kid in the hood, the future's
the shit you see in Star Wars.
Shit, most niggas I know catch a
bullet way before they're 30, so
what kinda future is that?

TOPCAT (V.O.)

(game show host voice)
So here's the deal...

INT. GAME SHOW SET - FANTASY SEQUENCE

On the set of "Let's Make a Drug Deal", Marcus stands with
Topcat, who's dressed and acts like a cheesy game show Host.

TOPCAT

You can stand on the corner, hustle
crack and have enough money for a
Mercedes in six months...

Topcat nods toward his lovely game show ASSISTANT, in bikini,
heels and fur as she fawns over a Mercedes 450SL.

TOPCAT

Or you can bust your black ass,
go to college for twelve years and
maybe have enough left over for a
down payment on a Ford fucking
Escort.

Topcat gestures to his other ASSISTANT - a fat, middle-aged
HOUSEWIFE gesturing to a shitty Ford Escort.

TOPCAT

So what's it gonna be Marcus, door
number one, the Mercedes, or door
number two, the Escort?

THE AUDIENCE is packed with YOUNG BLACK MALES.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

You crazy nigga?! Number
one!

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2

One! Get that coochie too!

BACK TO MARCUS, who stands with Topcat thinking it over.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Not much of a choice, is it?

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

With his back to the camera, wearing a brand new track suit,
Marcus finishes dressing, lacing up his sneakers.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Truth is getting caught did do me
some good.

CLOSE ON his hands as he puts on some jewelry.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Now that it was all in the open,
it forced me to decide who I was
and who I wanted to be.

He clips a beeper on his waist, slips a .380 in his pocket.

MARCUS (V.O.)

At the end of the day, all things
considered...

The adult Marcus, 18, turns and looks directly INTO CAMERA.

MARCUS

I'm a fuckin' hustler, baby.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Softly rapping to himself, Marcus stands at his designated spot on the street, a few other Hustlers up the block. (NOTE: Whenever possible, we should see Marcus rapping to himself out of habit, the way some people hum.)

MARCUS (V.O.)

With my purpose in life now clear,
I moved out my Grandma's and quit
school -- now I could be on the
street all day.

A Toyota Celica pulls over. Marcus runs to it, leans in the window. The driver is a shaky white BUSINESSMAN, 30s.

BUSINESSMAN

Let me get two purple tops.

MARCUS

Buy four, I give you five.

The Businessman nods. Marcus makes the sale.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - (LATER THAT) NIGHT

The street is crowded with traffic. Marcus makes a sale to a FIEND, five others lined up behind him.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Fuck, it was busy I'd grind all
night, wouldn't even go home to
sleep.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - (THE NEXT) MORNING

Dawn. Marcus, still in the same clothes, dozes on a bench, the only hustler on the street. The same white BUSINESSMAN pulls up in the Toyota. Marcus makes the sale.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I was master of the fast flip.
I'd buy three and a half grams
from Topcat...

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

In boxers and strapless T, Marcus watches "New Jack City" on video as he fills purple-topped vials with crack rocks.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Cook it, bag it up and pump it.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus makes a sale to Kenneth, the schoolyard bully, who at 21 has become a thin, hollow-eyed crack fiend.

MARCUS (V.O.)
I'd take that money, buy seven
grams.

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Topcat, clearly having been woken up, makes a sale to Marcus.

TOPCAT
(yawning)
Fuck time is it?

MARCUS (V.O.)
Seven turned to fourteen, fourteen
to twenty eight and so on.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Hot. Summer. The street is packed with cars, Hustlers, Fiends and regular PEOPLE just hanging out.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Before long that three and a
half grams was like Jack and the
Beanstalk. Shit grew so big I had
to expand, put together my own
crew.

POV -- THROUGH A SERIES OF CAR DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOWS

MARCUS (V.O.)
There was Antwan, a sharp-dressin',
ball-breakin' nigga from Harlem...

ANTWAN, slick, well-dressed, 16, leans in the car window.

ANTWAN
Yo son, you buyin' or drivin' round
the block? I know you didn't wave
me over to suck my dick or did you?

MARCUS (V.O.)

Romeo, who'd fuck a Cocker Spaniel
it didn't bite him first...

ROMEO, 17, small, horny, leans in the car window.

ROMEO

Hey girl, you fine, you know that?
Tell me what 'chu need baby.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Keryl, a fat little nigga who
talked more shit than Don King...

KERYL, 16, fat, leans in the car window.

KERYL

Fuck dawg, I got whatever you need.
All these other niggas come see me
when they need they shit.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Finally there was my boy, Tyrell.

TYRELL, 18, muscular, leans in the car window.

TYRELL

What up yo, how you doin'?

MARCUS (V.O.)

Straight up, dependable, my second
in command.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Marcus and the Crew stand together looking INTO THE CAMERA.
Each holds a stack of fanned-out CASH in his hands.

MARCUS (V.O.)

This was my dream team - my
brothers - five niggas dedicated
to one thing and one thing only --
gettin' paid.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Pouring rain; thunder. In the living room, Romeo channel-
surfs, smokes a joint. At the table, Marcus raps to himself
as he, Tyrell and Antwan play dominoes for money, drink 40s.

ANTWAN

C'mon nigga, will you go 'for
mushrooms start growin' out
your ass?

TYRELL

Fuckin' strategizin' here.
(beat; then to Marcus)
Will you stop fuckin' singin' so's
I can think?

MARCUS

(laughing)
You either got the bone or you
don't, motherfucker.

Tyrell makes his move. Marcus SLAMS down his last domino.

MARCUS

Boo-yah!!
(cackles; grabs money)
Strategize my dick you dumb-ass
nigga, I knew you was gonna throw
that shit!

TYRELL

You knew shit, motherfucker.

A KNOCK at the door. Marcus crosses, looks out the peephole.

KERYL

It's me yo, open up.

Marcus opens the door. Keryl stands there, soaked from head
to toe. The guys SCREAM with laughter as he enters.

ANTWAN

Look at this Free Willy
motherfucker all wet -- I told
you he live in the ocean!

KERYL

Fuckin' rainin' out, motherfucker.
Yo, you hear about Levar Cahill?
Got his ass arrested, yo.

MARCUS

Oh, fuck.

TYRELL

What's this fuckin' mean?

The Crew all looks to Marcus.

MARCUS (V.O.)

What it meant was Levar was goin' away... but that didn't mean for a second he wouldn't still be runnin' things.

EXT. CHELSEA PIER - MANHATTAN - DAY

Under a sign reading "Bon Voyage Levar", dozens of Hustlers and their scantily-clad GIRLFRIENDS board a huge party boat.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The big question was who'd take over his day-to-day -- and my man Topcat seemed like the logical choice.

INT. PARTY BOAT - NIGHT

The packed boat cruises the Hudson River, the lights of Manhattan glistening behind it. Music, dancing, Cristal flowing, tuxedo-clad WAITERS serving giant shrimp. Off to the side of the dance floor, the camera finds

MARCUS,

champagne in hand as he takes in the opulence. Nearby, a very sharply-dressed Topcat nuzzles his GIRLFRIEND'S neck as Odell, the gold-toothed Hustler, talks to some other PLAYERS.

TOPCAT

(playful; biting her neck)
Tonight is the night, baby.

Topcat's GIRLFRIEND giggles. Just then, the Crowd parts. Levar approaches with his bodyguards Majestic and Breeze.

LEVAR CAHILL

(to Topcat; as they hug)
Get a room motherfucker. Manhattan ain't but a quarter mile away.

TOPCAT

Yo g, it ain't too late. You want I'll get this motherfucker turn this boat around, drive it straight to motherfuckin' Africa.

LEVAR CAHILL

And live over there with them jungle niggas? I'll do my time.

They all laugh. Levar winks at Marcus, then:

LEVAR CAHILL
Y'all know Majestic, right?

TOPCAT
Yeah, yeah. What up, b?

MARCUS
'Sup.

MAJESTIC
My nigga Breeze.

Breeze just nods. Levar looks over toward the DJ, gestures for him to cut the music. The CROWD groans.

DJ
All right yo, simmer down, our
guest of honor wanna holla at
you a bit.

As the Crowd hoots and hollers, Levar crosses the dance floor, Guests patting his back as he goes. He takes the mic.

LEVAR CAHILL
Y'all havin' a good time?
(the Crowd screams)
What?! All them niggas back in
Queens can't hear y'all!
(they scream louder)
How 'bout them niggas in Brooklyn?
(they scream even louder)
Fuck them Jersey niggas, who give a
fuck about them.
(the Crowd laughs)
On the real though, we all know
why we're here and that's to say
goodbye to my ass.

GIRL IN CROWD (O.S.)
We love you Levar!

LEVAR CAHILL
I love y'all, too. Main thing
though's even though I'm gone, I'ma
always be around in spirit. And
just to make sure y'all don't
forget that, I'm appointin' someone
to remind y'all...

Marcus looks at Topcat, Odell and the other older Hustlers, all looking on in anticipation. Topcat breathes in, squeezes his Girlfriend's hand. Clearly he thinks he's the one.

LEVAR CAHILL

Majestic, c'mon up here, son.

The Crowd goes WILD as Majestic crosses the dance floor. Topcat and the others do their best to hide their emotions, applauding with everyone else, but clearly they're pissed.

MAJESTIC

(into mic)

Hey yo, what up, how y'all doin'?

Let's give it up for Levar...

Marcus looks at Topcat, doing his best to hide his anger. And as Topcat stalks off...

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

With Junebug working down the street, Marcus is in mid-sale to a Fiend as he talks to Tyrell, Antwan and Keryl.

MARCUS

I'm tellin' you man, there was mad fuckin' money on that yacht. Diamonds and gold like a fuckin' pirate ship.

TYRELL

Word?

MARCUS

Forget about the pussy, yo, there was bitches there was off the fuckin' hook.

ROMEO

Sign me up for that shit.

MARCUS

One day we get there, b, we all will long's we stick together.

TYRELL

I heard that.

KERYL

I read about some pirate ship crashed right off the harbor there in Brooklyn.

ANTWAN

Fuck you talkin' about?

KERYL

Back in the day, fuckin' slave ship
filled with jewels and shit.

MARCUS

Probably the one brought your
monkey-ass relatives.

KERYL

(off their laughter)
Fuck you niggas, one day I'ma scuba
dive, fuckin' find that shit.

MARCUS

(points across street)
Well meantime there's a fiend over
there wants to give you ten dollar,
so whyn't you go fuckin' get it?

KERYL

I'm serious yo, they gonna put up a
statue of my ass.

Marcus shakes his head as Keryl crosses off...

MARCUS (V.O.)

The difference between me and
niggas like Keryl is they'd
dream about doin' bigger shit...

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Topcat opens a wall safe, removes a kilo of cocaine.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I'd fuckin' do it.

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Topcat enters the living room. Marcus sits on the couch,
a paper bag on the coffee table in front of him.

TOPCAT

(hands him the kilo)
Full bird son, you movin' up in the
world.

MARCUS

If it ain't up, it's down.
(nods to the paper bag)
Thirty thousand in there.

TOPCAT

Makin' my new boss a rich nigga.
I need to count this shit?

MARCUS

What you think?

Topcat smiles, crosses to a bar. Grabs a bottle of Hennessy.

TOPCAT

Little Henry?

MARCUS

Fuckin' ten in the mornin'.

TOPCAT

Well excuse me, motherfucker, you
plannin' on flyin' a airplane?

Marcus smiles. Topcat pours half a rocks glass of Hennessy.
He downs it, pours another. Sits back on the couch.

MARCUS

So I was thinkin' after I pump
this shit, I'm gonna get me one
of them Land Rovers.

TOPCAT

Big ride for a little nigga.
(smiles; a few beats)
You know I'm the one taught your
moms how to drive.

MARCUS

Word?

TOPCAT

Parkin' lot there at the beach,
Riis Park. We'd go out there in
the winter it was all empty, icy
and shit. She'd be skiddin' that
fuckin' thing all over the place.

Marcus smiles. They sit in silence a while, then:

MARCUS

Ever hear what become of that nigga
killed her ass?

TOPCAT

(shakes his head)
Slim? Thought he went down south
somewheres, then I heard Cali.

(MORE)

TOPCAT (cont'd)

I woulda popped that motherfucker,
fed his dick to my dog.

MARCUS

You ever find where he is, you
gonna let me know, right?

TOPCAT

Nigga probably dead by now anyway.

Topcat sips his Hennessy; his eyes get misty.

TOPCAT

She was a beautiful girl, your
moms. A special girl.

Marcus looks at him. They sit there in silence.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus, Antwan, Keryl, Tyrell and Romeo work the boulevard,
selling to Fiends on the street and in cars.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Over the next few weeks, me and
my boys was grindin'.

EXT. CHECK CASHING STORE - DAY

A line of neighborhood PEOPLE, welfare checks in hand,
stretches clear out the door.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Best days were the first and
fifteenth when the checks came in.

As FIENDS emerge, cash in hand, they join another line around
the corner... the one to buy crack from Marcus and Tyrell.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Not that it was all easy. See
when you work the street, it's
jungle rules...

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

With his crew nearby, Marcus stands on a corner. Across the
street, a Fiend pulls up in a car, waves him over. But
before Marcus can cross, Junebug hustles up, takes the sale.

MARCUS (V.O.)

And in the jungle, you either fight
or get eaten alive.

The Fiend pulls off. Marcus approaches Junebug.

MARCUS

Fuck you doin', that's my sale.

JUNEBUG

Get out my face, nig--

POW! Marcus punches Junebug in the mouth, knocking him down.

JUNEBUG

(reaching for his gun)
Motherfucker! I'ma cap your ass.

Marcus kicks him in the face, then jams a .9mm in his cheek.

MARCUS

How you gonna do that? You gonna
take on all of us?

Junebug looks up - Tyrell, Romeo, Keryl and Antwan stand aiming guns at him. Junebug deflates. As Marcus takes his gun and rifles his pockets for money, a BMW pulls to the curb, Breeze driving, Majestic next to him.

MAJESTIC

Fuck you doin'?

MARCUS

Nigga took my sale.

MAJESTIC

So you robbin' him?

MARCUS

I'm takin' what's mine.

MAJESTIC

(chuckling)
We all on the same team, Marcus.

JUNEBUG

(scrambling to his feet)
School this nigga!

BREEZE

(chuckling)
Look like he schooling you, son.

As the BMW pulls off, a humiliated Junebug turns to Marcus.

JUNEBUG

I'ma see about you, motherfucker.

In response, Marcus kick him in the ass. And as Junebug stumbles off, a Fiend approaches. Marcus makes a sale...

MARCUS (V.O.)

Within seventeen days, I flipped that key -- twice. Finally I had the cash I needed to be somebody.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - SHOWROOM - DAY

As a SALESMAN waits on a CUSTOMER nearby, Marcus, looking like a high school senior with a knapsack, circles a '94 Land Rover. He spots SALESMAN #2 walk by with some brochures.

MARCUS

Excuse me.

The guy ignores him, continues on his way. Marcus frowns, looks at the clock - 2:20 p.m.

TIME DISSOLVE:

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - SHOWROOM - LATER

2:43 p.m. Marcus stands at the Land Rover rapping to himself as the first Salesman finishes with the Customer, who exits.

MARCUS

Excuse me, can I get some help?

SALESMAN

I have some calls to return.

MARCUS

I wanna buy this car here.

SALESMAN

Me too, kid.

The Salesman heads off. Marcus stands there a beat, then looks around, spots the SALES OFFICES, heads toward them.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

JACKIE, 40s, a polyester-clad sales manager with a bad comb-over, sits at his desk talking into the phone.

JACKIE
So I'll talk to my guy at BMW...

Marcus appears in the doorway.

MARCUS
You the manager?

JACKIE
(hand over mouthpiece)
Yeah?

MARCUS
I'm tryin' to buy a Land Rover.

JACKIE
Talk to one of the salespeople.
(into phone)
You sure you wanna go with silver?

MARCUS
I did already, they treatin' me
like I'm invisible.

JACKIE
We're very busy here, son.
(into phone)
I'm sorry, you said silver, right?

As Jackie continues his call, Marcus approaches the desk, unzips his knapsack. He turns it upside down -- dozens of rubber-banded stacks of CASH spill out. Jackie looks at the money, stunned. He hangs up the phone, looks at Marcus.

JACKIE
What'd you say, a Land Rover?

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

As Jackie looks on, Marcus drives the Land Rover off the dealership lot, lurching and screeching as he heads off.

MARCUS (V.O.)
One thing about cash is it will
get a motherfucker's attention.
(MORE)

MARCUS (V.O.) (cont'd)
I didn't even know how to drive and
I left there with a car. Cat even
lent me dealer plates till I could
manage to get a license.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus beams as he sits in the driver's seat of the Land Rover; Antwan, Keryl, Tyrell and Romeo check it out.

ANTWAN
Will you look at this shit?!

KERYL
That is a hype fuckin' ride!

MARCUS
Power moon roof, fuckin' leather.

ROMEO
The coochie you gonna get with
this, nigga!

MARCUS
Check it out, all Alpine-d up.

Marcus hits the stereo; rap blares.

TYRELL
Good for you, b, you fuckin'
deserve it.

INT. LAND ROVER - DAY

His Crew riding with him, Marcus cruises Rockaway Boulevard, rapping along with the stereo. On the street, GIRLS look over; some wave, shake their asses. Our guys go crazy.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Fuck Bank of America, a nigga from
the hood'll wear his money on his
back. Clothes, jewelry, cars.

Marcus passes Junebug on the corner, who shoots him a look of pure, bitter envy.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Way we look at it, what good's
ownin' shit if people can't
fuckin' see it?

EXT. CLUB STARLIGHT - NIGHT

A crowded club, PATRONS spilling out onto the street. Marcus and the Crew, now dressed to go out, pull up in the Land Rover, park it around the corner.

MARCUS (V.O.)

That night we took Antwan out for his birthday.

INT. CLUB STARLIGHT - NIGHT

Music pumping. HOTTIES pack the dance floor, GANGSTAS, HUSTLERS and NEIGHBORHOOD GUYS everywhere. As the CAMERA PANS the CROWD, we find Marcus in

THE VIP SECTION,

a hottie named KEISHA hanging all over him as he pours Cristal. At the table with him, also with GIRLS, are Romeo, Tyrell, Keryl and guest of honor Antwan.

MARCUS

Seventeen, nigga. Old enough for the Army now.

ANTWAN

Fuck that, I'm already at war.

KERYL

You at war with my nose, that stink-ass fuckin' cologne you wearin'.

TYRELL

(as they laugh)

Can you see this nigga in the Army?

ROMEO

(mocking Antwan)

Excuse me sergeant, these boots come in purple?

More laughter. Marcus raises his glass:

MARCUS

Happy birthday, dawg.

They all toast. Just then, a commotion at the front door. Marcus and the guys look over to see DARIUS CLAY, 30s, wearing heavy gold chains and a leather pork-pie hat. As he enters with a small entourage, the CROWD swarms him.

MARCUS

Fuck, check it -- Darius Clay.

KEISHA

Who?

ANTWAN

You fuckin' serious?

MARCUS

Nigga's one of the biggest record
producers in the world.

The music continues as Darius disappears into the crowd.
After a while, the DJ takes the mic.

DJ

Y'all ready for some free-style?
(the Crowd cheers)
Aight, let's give it up for
Dangerous.

Marcus watches a GANGSTA RAPPER (Dangerous) take the stage,
start free-styling. His face changes as the CAMERA PUSHES in
on him -- does he wish it was him up there? He looks over at
Darius Clay, who's taking in Dangerous from a table across
the way. After a beat, Marcus starts to head off.

KEISHA

Where you goin' baby?

Marcus crosses off to the men's room...

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus finishes taking a leak, then crosses to the sink,
where another GUY is washing his hands. They finish, reach
for a towel at the same time, look up at each other...

CAMERON

Marcus?

MARCUS

(as they hug)
Cameron! Shit, what up, doe,
whatchu doin' home?

CAMERON

Spring break, you know. Here with
some people from school.

MARCUS
Come sit by us, VIP.

INT. CLUB STARLIGHT - LATER

As Darius watches another RAPPER free-style lame gangsta shit, we PAN TO THE VIP SECTION. Cameron has now joined the group, but Keisha is over at the bar.

MARCUS
This here was my fuckin' nigga,
yo. Math class, algebra and shit?
I copied everything off his ass.

CAMERON
You would've done some work, you
might've passed on your own.

MARCUS
I know how to count nigga, that's
all the math I need.

ANTWAN
(toasts with champagne)
I heard that.

Just then Tyrell approaches, leans in to talk to Marcus.

TYRELL
Lemme get your keys, yo.

MARCUS
Where you goin'?

TYRELL
Nowhere, back seat, man, this bitch
over there itchin' to go.

Marcus looks - a really HOT GIRL busting out of spandex waits at the edge of the VIP section. Marcus hands over the keys.

MARCUS
Make sure that jimmy nice and
tight, you bust a nut on that
leather you gettin' the whole
fuckin' thing detailed.

Tyrell chuckles, takes the keys, exits with the Girl.

DJ
A-ight, give it up for Chilly T!

Moderate applause for the lame GANGSTA RAPPER.

KERYL

Chilly T. This nigga sucks.

ANTWAN

Whyn't you rock the mic, then?
Call yourself Chili Fries.

KERYL

Fuck you, nigga.

They all laugh. Cameron turns to Marcus.

CAMERON

You still rappin'?

MARCUS

I dunno, not really. Fuckin'
around.

ROMEO

Fuck that, you can't shut this
nigga up half the time.

CAMERON

Like when we were kids.

LEILANI (O.S.)

Cameron, we're leavin'!

Cameron looks over -- on the dance floor, LEILANI, 19, stands with a few other college students including CHARLENE, a very pretty neighborhood girl the same age; Marcus checks her out.

CAMERON

Hold up, I gotta get my coat.

MARCUS

Who the fuck is that?

CAMERON

It ain't like that, she's just a
friend from school.

MARCUS

(re: Charlene)

No, no, the one in the blue dress.

CAMERON

I don't know, her friend. Great
seeing you, man.

MARCUS

You too bro, don't be a stranger,
call a nigga.

Cameron nods, crosses off with Leilani to get his coat.
Marcus approaches Charlene, pulls her arm.

MARCUS

Where you goin', it's early.

CHARLENE

It's two o'clock in the morning.

MARCUS

Not everywhere. Shit, in Hawaii
it's probably only lunch time.

CHARLENE

(thinks a second; then)
Actually it's dinner time in
Hawaii, but unfortunately we're
not there.

MARCUS

I could make that happen real quick
if that's where you wanna go.

CHARLENE

I'm going home to sleep.

MARCUS

So I'll come by, help you relax.

CHARLENE

Thanks, but I don't play that.

MARCUS

Where you from, 'round the way?

CHARLENE

Baisley Houses.

MARCUS

Project girl.

CHARLENE

Not for long, I got plans in life.

MARCUS

That's cool. So lemme get your
number, I'll hit you up.

CHARLENE

Look, you're very cute, okay, but I have a boyfriend.

MARCUS

You got a boyfriend, where is he? You was my girl I'd be right there at your side.

CHARLENE

He's away at college.

MARCUS

College? Girl I could teach you more in one night than he'll learn in fifty years of college.

From across the dance floor, Leilani calls out.

LEILANI

Charlene, come on!

CHARLENE

I really have to go. Can I have my arm back, please?

MARCUS

Hold up, c'mon, how I get to see you again?

CHARLENE

Close your eyes and dream?

Charlene crosses off. Marcus stares after her as if he's in a trance. Keisha approaches, notices him looking.

KEISHA

Who the fuck is that bitch?

MARCUS

Get off my dick.

Marcus turns his back on her, heads back to the VIP section.

EXT. CLUB STARLIGHT - (LATER THAT) NIGHT

Over the sounds of moaning, the Land Rover is rocking, windows fogged as Tyrell fucks the Hot Girl from the club.

INT. LAND ROVER - BACK SEAT - CONTINUOUS

Out of breath and sweaty, Tyrell pulls his pants on as the Girl finishes straightening herself out.

TYRELL

Damn girl, I knew you was a little fuck machine soon I saw you.

HOT GIRL

You fucked me so nasty, baby.

TYRELL

Well gimme your number, I'll come by do it again. You ready?

The Girl nods. Tyrell opens the door, steps out and...

EXT. LAND ROVER - STREET - CONTINUOUS

GANGSTA #1

Out the fuckin' car nigga!

GANGSTA #1 grabs Tyrell, jams a .9mm against his head. As he shoves him to the street, the Hot Girl screams, runs off...

GANGSTA #2

Where's the fuckin' keys?!

TYRELL

I... my... my pocket.

GANGSTA #1

Give it up, motherfucker!

As Tyrell fumbles for the keys, Gangsta #2 looks around.

GANGSTA #2

Fuck it, just do this nigga, c'mon!

And just as Gangsta #1 raises his gun to Tyrell's head...
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Shots ring out from behind.

It's MARCUS, approaching, blasting away with his .380, his Crew behind him reaching for their guns. Gangsta #2 takes off as Gangsta #1 fires back, hitting ANTWAN in the head. He goes down, bleeding.

KERYL

Fuck!!

Marcus keeps firing, then Gangsta #1 takes off running too, disappearing up the street. As Keryl helps Antwan, Romeo and Marcus runs up to Tyrell, still on his knees.

MARCUS

It's okay, yo, you're all right.

ROMEO

(to Marcus)

Yo man, I know them fuckin' niggas!

Marcus turns to Keryl, hovering over Antwan.

KERYL

Call a fuckin' ambulance!

MARCUS

Fuck that, get him in the car.

As a crowd of Patrons gather from the club, Keryl and Romeo load Antwan into the Land Rover, blood pouring from his wound. And as the rest of the Crew piles in, Marcus takes off, police SIRENS in the distance...

MARCUS (V.O.)

We took Antwan to a hospital in the Bronx, told 'em he got shot by a group of niggas tried to rob him... he died the next day.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S CEMETERY - QUEENS - DAY

A few dozen MOURNERS stand near a coffin as a PRIEST reads from a bible. Marcus & the Crew fight back tears.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Much as we tried to hide it, losin' our boy hurt like hell. And in the hood, when someone hurts you... you fuckin' hurt them back.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - (LIVING ROOM) NIGHT

Still in their funeral clothes, Marcus, Romeo, Tyrell and Keryl sit around drinking.

ROMEO

I'm tellin' you thens was Rockaway niggas, I seen 'em over there.

MARCUS

There it is then, we roll on up.

KERYL

Who gonna do it?

MARCUS

I will.

TYRELL

Fuck that, them niggas is mine.
Pull me out the car like that?
Shit. Just get me a clean gat.

MARCUS (V.O.)

When you roll with a crew, you
gotta be willin' to die for each
other. You gotta be willin' to
kill for each other too.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - QUEENS - NIGHT

Late. Quiet. A group of four GANGSTAS, including the two from the attempted jacking, stand bullshitting on a corner. A stolen Honda Accord cruises by unnoticed, Tyrell at the wheel, Marcus next to him, Keryl and Romeo in back.

INT. HONDA ACCORD - NIGHT

TYRELL

That's them, right there.

ROMEO

I told you motherfuckers.

KERYL

Pull over, pull over.

MARCUS (V.O.)

A few nights later, we found them
niggas at the projects in Rockaway.

Unseen by the Gangstas, Romeo pulls over in front of a parked MOVING VAN about 30 yards up the street. Marcus produces a Glock .9mm, hands it to Tyrell, who looks around nervously.

TYRELL

You sure this is cool?

MARCUS

It's cool, yo. You take this gat,
you walk up real slow, keep it at
your side. You get up close...

Marcus notices Tyrell is trembling. A beat, then:

MARCUS

Fuck it, you know what? Lemme show
you how to pop these niggas.

And before anyone can say a word, Marcus is out of the car.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - QUEENS - CONTINUOUS

Quiet and calm, Marcus walks toward the Gangstas as the Crew
looks on from the Honda. As he gets within ten feet:

GANGSTA #1

Hey yo, what up? Who you here--

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
Marcus empties the clip into the Crowd; the Gangstas go down,
writhing, screaming. As he calmly walks back to the Honda:

MARCUS (V.O.)

If I didn't have the respect of my
crew already, I sure as shit did by
the time I got back in that car.
From that moment on, they knew I'd
never ask them to do anything I
wouldn't do myself.

INT. HONDA ACCORD - CONTINUOUS

Marcus gets in. Tyrell and the others look at him, stunned.

MARCUS

You wanna drive, motherfucker?

Romeo snaps out of it, puts the car in gear and pulls off.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus and the Crew stand outside working the street.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Nobody fucked with us after that...

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Marcus sits at the table laying out dozens of bundles of CASH. Topcat enters with three kilos of coke.

MARCUS (V.O.)
We was ridin' high...

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

With a few Hotties hanging with them, Marcus, Keryl, Tyrell and Romeo put crack into vials, watching "Scarface" on DVD.

MARCUS
Makin' mad fuckin' money.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

With the crew nearby, Marcus leans in the window of a Dodge Caravan, sells a few vials to a huge black guy with a goatee.

MARCUS (V.O.)
We were pumpin' hard all day...

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

With the sounds of a party out the window, Marcus fucks the shit out of a neighborhood HOTTIE.

MARCUS (V.O.)
And pumpin' even harder at night...

EXT. MARCUS' APARTMENT BUILDING - POOL AREA - NIGHT

A wild party is in progress; music, forties, food. GIRLS are everywhere, many topless, splashing in the pool.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Before long, the whole crew was
livin' in my building. It was like
havin' our own fuckin' castle --
and I was the king.

As the CAMERA PANS the group, we find Marcus in a lounge chair, the HOTTIE he was just fucking massaging his shoulders. Romeo approaches with a shopping bag.

ROMEO

Yo, check this out.

He removes an Uzi from the bag.

MARCUS

Fuck, where you get this?

ROMEO

Nigga K-Dog, two hundred dollars.

Just then, Marcus' beeper goes off. He checks it, gets up.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marcus stands at the counter mixing a drink as he finishes dialing his cell. In the living room, Keryl and Tyrell check out the Uzi while Romeo starts grinding with a GIRL.

MARCUS

(into phone)

S'up, it's me.

EXT. MERRICK BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Topcat sits in a red BMW, talks on his cell.

TOPCAT

Drop what you doin', meet me down
Merrick, we takin' a ride.

INTERCUT MARCUS AND TOPCAT

MARCUS

When, now?

TOPCAT

Fuck I just say?

Topcat clicks off. Marcus hangs up, looks at Romeo, now making out with the Girl on his couch. As he exits:

MARCUS

Take that bitch down your own crib.
Fuckin' stink up my couch?

EXT. ACE AUTO BODY - LONG ISLAND CITY - NIGHT

A deserted, industrial area. Topcat and Marcus pull up in the BMW. Several other luxury cars are already there.

MARCUS
Fuck's this shit?

TOPCAT
Damn if I know.

INT. ACE AUTO BODY - NIGHT

Topcat and Marcus enter the huge garage, where Majestic, Breeze and about two dozen other HUSTLERS are waiting. Breeze pulls down the gates, locking them all inside. The Hustlers exchange wary looks. Majestic scans the group.

MAJESTIC
So I know y'all are askin' yourself
what the fuck's goin' on here --
I'd be askin' myself that very
same question.

Majestic paces among the group. It's very tense.

MAJESTIC
See the thing's this -- when you
work for McDonald's, you can't buy
your burgers from White Castle,
right? Now why is that?

Majestic stops at a nervous-looking Junebug.

JUNEBUG
Ain't part the same company.

MAJESTIC
See even though you might get a
better deal buyin' from White
Castle, in the long run it fucks
everybody in the franchise, you
feelin' me?

Majestic scans the group. They nod.

MAJESTIC
See right there then, that's why we
here. One of you motherfuckers
been buyin' from White Castle.

Majestic looks at them, lingers on Topcat. We play the tension, then he motions for the group to follow him. In the next room, hanging from the chains of a ten-ton auto body straightener, is the horribly beaten and bloodied ODELL, duct tape over his mouth. Breeze crosses to him.

MAJESTIC

This nigga Odell been in business
for himself, buyin' his shit from
the Colombians instead of us.

Breeze yanks the piece of duct-tape from Odell's mouth.
He starts blubbering, crying, gold teeth flashing.

ODELL

No man, that ain't how it is,
please listen to me! Please!

BREEZE

(backhands him)
Shut your fuckin' mouth!

Majestic approaches. Odell sobs like a baby.

MAJESTIC

Far as I'm concerned, you owe these
niggas here a whole lot of money.
Now how you gonna pay it back?

ODELL

(crying; sobbing)
I'll do whatever you say, tell me,
man! Please, I'll do it! Please!

As Odell sobs, Majestic looks at Breeze. Together they do a
well-rehearsed routine for the benefit of the Group.

MAJESTIC

What we gonna do, how this nigga
gonna pay these gentlemen back?

BREEZE

How 'bout he pay 'em in gold?

MAJESTIC

You right, motherfucker, them shiny-
ass teeth!

ODELL

No!! No!! Please!!

As the Group exchanges looks, Breeze crosses to a tool board,
methodically chooses a pair of 11-inch diagonal pliers. He
approaches Odell, who screams, wriggling on the chains...

ODELL

No!! No!!

WHAMM!! Breeze punches Odell square in the face, jamming the pliers into his mouth. As he grips a tooth, we hear a sickening CRUNCH through Odell's screams. Breeze yanks hard on the pliers, pulls a bloody gold incisor out of Odell's head by the roots. Odell SCREAMS in agony.

BREEZE

Relax nigga, you only got but ten more 'fore I put that bullet in your brain.

Breeze jams the pliers in again. And as Odell SHRIEKS in agony, the CAMERA PANS the group, settling on Marcus.

MARCUS (V.O.)

If you play with fire long enough, you will get burned.

EXT. MARCUS' APARTMENT BUILDING - DAWN

Topcat drops Marcus off at the curb. He crosses to the front door as the BMW pulls off down the street.

MARCUS (V.O.)

And in the crack game, heat comes in many forms.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Marcus opens the lobby door. And as soon as he steps inside:

DEA AGENT #1

Freeze! Hands in the air!!

Marcus is slammed against the wall, spread-eagled. The lobby is swarming with DEA AGENTS, guns drawn.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The first thing I thought was they knew about Odell, but that shit just happened like an hour ago.

DEA AGENT #2

Hey asshole, remember me?

Marcus turns around. DEA AGENT #2 looks familiar...

FLASHBACK - A SERIES OF STILL B&W SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS

CLICK. Marcus on the street. CLICK. Marcus leans into a Dodge Caravan. CLICK. He exchanges crack for money. CLICK. The Driver is DEA AGENT #2, the huge, goateed black guy.

BACK TO SCENE

Marcus is handcuffed.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Turned out this had nothin' to do with Odell -- they had a warrant to search my crib.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A handcuffed Marcus sits as the DEA AGENTS ransack the place, emptying contents of drawers on the floor. On the coffee table are 2 ounces of cocaine, cash and a dozen crack vials.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Lucky for my ass I was light on product and didn't have too much incriminatin' shit lyin' around.

DEA AGENT #3 (O.S.)

Look what I found. Locked and loaded.

AGENT #3 emerges from the bedroom with Romeo's loaded Uzi.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Incriminatin' shit of my own, that is.

And as Marcus is led off, we see his toy plastic Soldier among the debris on the floor.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Wearing a suit and tie, Marcus stands with his LAWYER before a female JUDGE, who reads from a piece of paper.

JUDGE

Mr. Philips, you are hereby sentenced to a term of no less than three years in a Federal penitentiary.

The Judge bangs her gavel. Marcus turns to face his weeping Grandma, who sits with his Grandpa and the Crew.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I guess there's no such thing as a
good time to be goin' to jail, but
this shit was fucked.

INT. PRISON - DAY

Wearing an orange jumpsuit, carrying his prison-issue blanket and toiletries, Marcus is led past the cells.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I had had it all and lost
everything.

The mostly black INMATES hoot at him from behind bars.

INMATE #1

Ooohhh, look at this little nigga!

INMATE #2

Whatchu do boy?!

MARCUS (V.O.)

Worst of all they sent me to Ohio,
where I didn't know a fuckin' soul.

Marcus enters a cell, sits on a cot across from a sleeping INMATE. The door closes behind him with a heavy CLANG.

INT. PRISON MESS HALL - DAY

Bustling; lunch time. Marcus sits alone eating, a few extra salt packets on his tray.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The thing about prison's that
everything's a test. Niggas read
you, then they try you.

As Marcus eats, an inmate in a red SKULL-CAP approaches.

SKULL CAP

Yo man, I get some of that salt?

MARCUS (V.O.)

Someone asks you for somethin',
even if they friendly about it?
Bullshit, they sizin' you up.

The guy reaches for a salt packet. Marcus knocks his hand away, stands up.

MARCUS

Fuck off, motherfucker.

The hall goes quiet; INMATES look over to see how this will play out. A brief stare-down, then Skull Cap crosses off.

MARCUS (V.O.)

First it's your salt, then it's your food, next thing you doin' some nigga's laundry.

Marcus sits down, goes back to his meal.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Whatever you do, you gotta send a message, nip that shit in the bud.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

INMATES lift weights, play basketball. Off in a corner, the camera finds a twitchy, crazy-looking inmate we'll come to know as BAMA, 21, doing dumbbell curls, HOWLING like a wolf as he does. Nearby, Marcus does pull-ups, ignoring him.

ACROSS THE YARD Skull Cap and three other Inmates watch Marcus from around a weight bench. One of them hands Skull Cap a shiv, which he slips under a towel. Very casually, the group crosses toward Marcus, whose back is turned as he does pull-ups. Bama, the howler, senses what's happening. As Skull Cap nears Marcus:

BAMA

Watch your back, nigga.

Bama HOWLS as Marcus drops off the bar, sees SKULL CAP charge him with the shiv. Skull Cap SLASHES, catching Marcus in the shoulder with the blade, but Marcus side-steps, SLAMS his fist into Skull Cap's face, taking him down. As Marcus beats the shit out of Skull Cap, one of his Crew charges in, but...

BAMA

(howling like a wolf)

Ow-ow-ooooowwww!!!!

WHAMMM!! Bama slams a dumbbell across the guy's head, taking him out. And as the other Crew Members charge, Bama joins the fight, swinging the dumbbell wildly, holding them off with Marcus. And as GUARDS swarm in...

MARCUS (V.O.)

Though my shoulder was cut pretty bad, in the end it was more than worth it. Word spread quick that I wasn't someone to fuck with.

INT. PRISON - MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Marcus mops the filthy floor. At the other end of the room, Bama mops also.

MARCUS (V.O.)

What I couldn't figure out was this crazy motherfucker.

Marcus works his way near Bama. They work in silence, then:

MARCUS

Why'd you help me, man?

BAMA

I don't know. I like fightin'.

MARCUS

Got beef with them other niggas?

BAMA

(howling)

Nope-nope-noooooooooo!!

Bama laughs; Marcus stares at him. They keep working.

MARCUS

Where you from?

BAMA

Down South, how about you?

MARCUS

Queens, New York. Name's Marcus.

BAMA

I'm Bama.

MARCUS

You from Alabama?

BAMA

North Carolina.

MARCUS

Why they call you Bama, then?

BAMA

Cause "Lina" sound stupid.

Marcus nods. They continue mopping. Bama twitches.

MARCUS (V.O.)

By total accident my first week there, I had hooked up with the craziest nigga in the place.

INT. PRISON - RECREATION ROOM - DAY

Months later. As a group of other Inmates sit nearby playing cards, Marcus plays checkers with Bama, who makes a move.

MARCUS (V.O.)

But crazy or not, havin' a friend made the months pass a lot quicker.

BAMA

Ow-oooooh! King my black ass!

As Marcus kings Bama's checker, a GUARD approaches:

GUARD

Philips, you have a visitor.

INT. PRISON - VISITOR'S AREA - DAY

A row of phones separated by Plexiglass. While other Inmates talk with VISITORS, Marcus enters, spots Cameron. He sits, picks up the phone, smiles. Cameron does the same.

CAMERON

I brought you a cake with a file in it, but I got hungry on the way and ate it.

MARCUS

Thanks for comin' down here man. I appreciate it.

CAMERON

Of course, are you kidding? So how you doing?

MARCUS

Hangin' in there. How about you?

CAMERON

Good, you know. Graduate next month, got accepted to St. John's.

MARCUS

Yeah, I got your letter. Law school now, huh?

CAMERON

I figured with friends like you, I'll always have clients.

MARCUS

Not me b, this is the last time for this shit.

CAMERON

What do you mean?

MARCUS

Mean I ain't gettin' caught again.

Cameron nods. A few beats, then:

CAMERON

So what do you do with yourself all day?

MARCUS

Work in the mornin', group therapy, shit like that.

CAMERON

What about at night?

MARCUS

Nothin', you know. Just chill.

CAMERON

So how about instead of you serving time, why not let time serve you? Get your GED. Read. Write.

MARCUS

Fuck I'ma write?

CAMERON

Anything, I don't know. Write lyrics. Like when we were kids?

(off Marcus' chuckling)

What, you were great.

MARCUS

That was just fuckin' around.

CAMERON

You have talent, Marcus.

The guys get quiet. Finally, Marcus changes the subject:

MARCUS

Ever see that girl anymore, the one
in the blue dress? Charlene?

CAMERON

(shakes his head no)
Leilani transferred.

Marcus nods. An awkward moment. They sit in silence.

CAMERON

I didn't come here to break your
balls, okay? I just think you
could do more with your life than
stand on a corner selling drugs.

Marcus looks at him awhile, finally smiles.

MARCUS

You know anybody else talked to me
like that I'd pop 'em in the teeth.

CAMERON

You don't want to hit a lawyer,
brother. I'll sue your ass from
now till forever.

INT. PRISON - MACHINE SHOP - DAY

Marcus works a lathe, other Inmates working nearby.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Though I didn't tell him, Cameron's
visit gave me a lot to think about.
Besides dealing drugs, music was
the one business that could give me
the lifestyle I wanted with none of
the risk. Money. Power. Pussy.

INT. PRISON - RECREATION ROOM - DAY

Marcus sits with Bama and some other Inmates watching a
gangsta music video on television.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I mean watch TV, half these motherfuckers are paper gangstas, singin' about shit they only seen in movies -- I was livin' it every day. I decided right there to formulate a plan.

INT. PRISON - MARCUS'S CELL - NIGHT

Marcus lays on his cot listening to a Discman, rapping to himself as he writes lyrics in a notebook. Bama sits nearby cleaning his sneakers.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I'd bust my ass, work on my music and within five years move me and my crew into the rap game. For the meantime, though, the crack game was still how I planned to eat.

EXT. HIGHWAY - OHIO - DAY

A Greyhound Bus heads down the road, passing a sign that says "New York". Through a window we see Marcus, still wearing his Discman, rapping to himself.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Before I knew it, my time was up and I hit the ground runnin'. First thing I did was make a demo of some shit I wrote inside.

INT. HOME RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

A makeshift recording "studio", with blankets for a sound booth. Marcus raps into a microphone over a simple beat.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Second was scam a meetin' with Darius Clay.

EXT. DC PRODUCTIONS - PARKING LOT - DAY

A small, nondescript building in Queens. As Marcus stands across the street, Darius Clay pulls up in a Mercedes, parks it in the lot. As he heads toward the building...

MARCUS

Mr. Clay, can I talk to you?

DARIUS CLAY

Ain't that what you doin' now?

Darius doesn't break stride. Marcus walks alongside him.

MARCUS

Yeah, I... I'm a rapper, my name's Marcus Philips.

DARIUS CLAY

Son, you ain't no rapper, 'cause if you was a rapper, I woulda heard of you. What you are is a wanna-be.

MARCUS

(holds up tape)

Whatever, yeah... I got a demo.

DARIUS CLAY

Pop it in the mail with a letter.

MARCUS

But I'm here now. You ain't got two minutes?

DARIUS CLAY

I ain't got one.

Darius leaves him standing there, starts into the building.

MARCUS

Would you have left Tupac in a parkin' lot with a tape in his hands?

DARIUS CLAY

(smiles; keeps walking)

You ain't no Tupac.

MARCUS

How do you know?

Darius stops in his tracks. Turns around. A beat, then:

DARIUS CLAY

Two minutes.

INT. DC PRODUCTIONS - STUDIO - DAY

Marcus sits at a sound board with Darius Clay and his producer, TONY CASH. They listen to the demo a while (a very rough version of "I'm a Rider") then Darius shuts it off.

DARIUS CLAY

It's some real tight shit, but it's raw, know I'm sayin'?

TONY CASH

You got natural talent, but what you need to learn are the rudiments of song writing.

DARIUS CLAY

And for the record, you ain't no damn Tupac.

MARCUS

(smiles)

School me then, that's why I'm here.

DARIUS CLAY

Good. Now any song, any melody, is broken up into bars, right?

And as Marcus listens intently...

MARCUS (V.O.)

That weekend there was a party for me at the community center. It was great bein' home.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - CATERING HALL - NIGHT

CLOSE ON -- a banner reading "Welcome Home Marcus". PULL BACK TO REVEAL the entire Crew, along with Topcat, Majestic, Breeze and several dozen other GUESTS, applauding as Marcus enters. They converge on him with hugs.

ROMEO

Welcome back, dawg. We missed your black ass.

As a RAPPER takes the mic and freestyles, Marcus crosses to the bar with Romeo, who hands him a bottle of Cristal. Tyrell approaches in a new suit, looking sharper than ever.

MARCUS

(as they hug)

Look at this nigga, fuckin' Denzel
over here! How you doin' man?

TYRELL

Gettin' my money.

ROMEO

That's some real shit there, wait
you see this nigga's ride.

TYRELL

New Lexus. Cherry fuckin' red.

MARCUS

Now you biggin' up on me, huh?

TYRELL

I'm in charge, man, I--

(catches himself)

I mean with you away, you know what
I fuckin' mean.

Marcus clocks Tyrell's attitude, but before he can say anything, Keryl approaches -- about 40 pounds lighter than last we've seen him.

KERYL

There's my nigga!!

MARCUS

Oh fuck, they stop feedin' your
ass?!

KERYL

Dick Gregory, fuckin' protein
powder.

TYRELL

Now we can't call him fat no more.

ROMEO

Now he just a dumb motherfucker.

They all laugh. Across the room, the Rapper finishes up.
The DJ takes the mic...

DJ

Marcus, come on up here.

(off his reluctance)

C'mon, say a few words!

The CROWD cheers. Marcus heads to the DJ, grabs the mic.

MARCUS

Yo, how y'all doin'?

(the Crowd cheers)

First off, I wanna say thanks to ya'll, I fuckin' missed your asses.

TYRELL

Missed you too, dawg.

MARCUS

Well I'm back now and we ain't goin' no place but up. Where my niggas at?

(the Crew goes wild)

I said any gangsta niggas in the house?!

(even wilder)

This is for you.

A beat starts. The CROWD starts bouncing, then Marcus kicks in with "I'm a Rider". THE CROWD goes wild; Marcus owns the place. He finishes up to thunderous applause, crosses to...

INT. MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Marcus enters, heads to a stall, opens the door...

INT. STALL - CONTINUOUS

...just as Topcat finishes snorting a spoonful of heroin.

MARCUS

Sorry, I--

(notices the heroin)

Fuck you doin'?

TOPCAT

Little h, that's all. Want some?

MARCUS

Since when you do that shit?

TOPCAT

Fuckin' wired man, unwindin' a bit.

Topcat steps out of the stall. An awkward moment.

TOPCAT

You look good, b, come see me.
I'll get you back in business.

Marcus nods; they hug stiffly. Topcat wipes his nose, exits.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Great as it was to be home, what
you gotta remember about bein' away
is this -- much as you think it
won't -- the world outside keeps
turnin' without you.

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marcus cops a half a kilo from Topcat.

MARCUS (V.O.)

With my cash reserves near empty,
I saw Topcat the next day. I got
some product on consignment and
went right to work.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - NIGHT

A series of CUTS: With Junebug working the street nearby,
Marcus & the Crew sell to various Fiends.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I was fuckin' possessed, I hardly
even slept. But hard as I worked
at the crack game, I worked twice
as hard at my music.

INT. DC PRODUCTIONS - STUDIO - DAY

As Darius Clay and Tony Cash work the sound board, Marcus
wears headphones, rapping into a microphone over a beat.

MARCUS (V.O.)

My life became a blur of pumpin'
crack, writin' lyrics and recordin'
demos. Half the time I didn't even
know what fuckin' day it was.

A BLINDING FAST LOOP OF REPETITIVE SHOTS

Marcus hustles on the street; Marcus in his apartment writing
lyrics in a notebook, Marcus recording in the studio.

MARCUS (V.O.)

In a few months Bama was out and he joined the crew. Say what you will bout a country-ass nigga, but these motherfuckers have a work ethic.

EXT. 141ST STREET - CRACK HOUSE - DAY

As Keryl acts as lookout, Bama sells crack from a small hole in the door to a line of FIENDS who wait outside.

MARCUS (V.O.)

In addition to runnin' a house he found, Bama took it on himself to branch out into insurance scams.

INT. U-HAUL OFFICE - DAY

Bama stands at the counter filling out paperwork.

MARCUS (V.O.)

He'd rent a U-Haul, max it out on liability insurance, then rent a limo and pack it with fiends.

EXT. MERRICK BOULEVARD - DAY

A black stretch LIMO rolls down the street.

MARCUS (V.O.)

At the appointed time...

SCREECH...CRASH!! A 14-foot U-Haul driven by Bama appears out of nowhere, rear-ends the LIMO at a very moderate speed.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Every one of them niggas would have severe back and neck injuries.

The FIENDS, all dressed in party clothes, stagger from the limo exaggeratedly holding their back and necks.

MARCUS (V.O.)

We'd give 'em each a grand for their trouble, send 'em to fugazy doctors we lined up, then collect when the insurance money rolled in.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Bama sits on the bed talking on the phone as an ELDERLY LADY, 80s, sits in a chair nearby, purse on her lap.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I finally got called in when Bama started kidnappin' niggas. I mean this motherfucker was snatchin' people we knew!

BAMA

Yo, Edgar, I got your Grandma, you wanna see her again lemme hold twenty thousand.

(hands phone to old lady)

He wanna talk to you.

INT. RESTAURANT - BACK ROOM - DAY

As a BODYGUARD stands nearby, Marcus and Bama sit across a table from Majestic and Breeze.

MAJESTIC

So what's this shit, your boy here ain't makin' enough money?

MARCUS

It ain't like that, it's--

MAJESTIC

Shit gotta stop, this ain't the wild west, motherfucker.

BAMA

Fuck that man, all I'm tryin'--

BREEZE

(cutting him off)

Nobody talkin' to you, nigga.

MARCUS

(to Breeze)

Take it easy, a-ight?

(to Bama)

Go wait outside.

BAMA

You sure?

MARCUS

Go.

Bama gets up, HOWLING as he exits. As soon as he's gone:

MAJESTIC

Fuck's wrong with this nigga?

MARCUS

He's a little fucked-up, a-ight?

MAJESTIC

Little fucked-up? Pay attention.
Nigga like that get you killed.

MARCUS

He's ambitious, that's all, he
likes makin' money.

MAJESTIC

And what about you?

MARCUS

What about me?

MAJESTIC

I hear you over that studio every
day, that tells me you ain't
tendin' to business.

MARCUS

I'm earnin' more than ever.

MAJESTIC

Well see it fuckin' stays that way.
And keep that country-ass nigga on
a leash.

On Marcus.

EXT. MEDICAL BUILDING - DAY

Marcus pulls up in a brand new Mercedes, parks.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Later that day I dropped Bama at
the doctor for his own fake claim
from the U-haul shit.

Bama wears a phony neck-brace; Marcus helps him from the car.

MARCUS

I'm serious yo, you don't start chillin' you'll be wearin' one of them shits for real.

BAMA

I'm the wolfman dawg, fuck you worried about?

MARCUS

(play shoves him)

I'm serious, motherfucker.

Bama laughs as they head to the building.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Marcus reads a magazine, Bama next to him twitching. From behind the desk, the RECEPTIONIST reads the sign-in sheet.

RECEPTIONIST

Elijah Samuels?

(off Bama's look)

The doctor will see you.

As Bama disappears inside, the Receptionist calls out:

RECEPTIONIST

Charlene, I'm goin' to lunch.

CHARLENE (O.S.)

Bring me back a Diet Coke?

As the Receptionist exits, she is replaced at the desk by Charlene, the girl we met earlier at Club Starlight. As she busies herself with paperwork, Marcus smiles and approaches.

MARCUS

Excuse me.

CHARLENE

(not even looking up)

Can I help you?

MARCUS

Yeah, I'm here 'cause of a broken heart.

(she looks up)

I met this girl at a club a few years back but she wouldn't give me her number.

Charlene's jaw drops.

CHARLENE

Oh my God.

MARCUS

How you been?

CHARLENE

Good, good, you know...

MARCUS

Still in college?

CHARLENE

I took some time off, I'm thinking of going to nursing school.

MARCUS

Well like I said, I got this broken heart here.

CHARLENE

That sounds a little advanced for me.

MARCUS

You seem like a smart girl, I bet you could handle it. Still got a boyfriend?

CHARLENE

Not at the moment.

MARCUS

(touches his heart)

So can I call you, make an appointment for this thing?

Charlene debates it, then smiles, writes her number down.

CHARLENE

Office hours are Saturday nights only. And I don't take Medicare.

Bama emerges as Marcus smiles, takes the slip of paper.

MARCUS

I'm feelin' better already.

Marcus exits with Bama. On Charlene.

INT. MERCEDES - LATER

Parked near a McDonald's, Marcus and Bama eat, just hanging out. Across the street, a gleaming black BMW sedan pulls up.

MARCUS
Check this shit.

A LARGE COLOMBIAN MAN in a suit emerges from the Beemer, heads into the Check Cashing Store with a briefcase.

MARCUS
Colombians. Use that place to
launder money.

BAMA
Real Tony Montana shit.

As they eat, Marcus looks down the block, spots

JUNEBUG

emerging from a bodega, heading their way. Quietly, Marcus slips his .9mm from his waistband.

BAMA
'Sup?

MARCUS
Bitch-ass nigga Junebug.

We play the tension as Junebug passes. Marcus stares at him, then goes back to eating in silence with Bama. Finally:

BAMA
Till I came here you know I never
really had no friends.

MARCUS
That's cause you a crazy-ass nigga.

BAMA
I'm serious, yo. Thanks for
stickin' up for my ass.

Marcus nods, says nothing. They continue eating...

MARCUS (V.O.)
When you run a crew, you can rarely
afford to show your men kindness,
not even for a second.

(MORE)

MARCUS (V.O.) (cont'd)
Especially in the crack game, where
a second can mean the difference
between ridin' in a limo or ridin'
in a hearse.

EXT. CHARLENE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A black stretch limo is parked at the curb; its DRIVER stands waiting. Marcus emerges from the building with Charlene, who wears a beautiful dress. As the limo pulls off, we see that it's being followed by a White Bronco with tinted glass.

INT. WATER'S EDGE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

With the Manhattan skyline glistening in the background, Marcus and Charlene sit at a romantic table for two. They toast with champagne, then begin eating.

CHARLENE

So let's see. Champagne, limo,
fancy restaurant. I guess you
must be an investment banker or
something.

MARCUS

Somethin' like that.

CHARLENE

That why you got your boys over
there watching your back?

At a nearby table, we see Bama sitting with Keryl.

MARCUS

(smiles)
Does it matter?

CHARLENE

Depends how far this goes.
(a few beats; then)
Tell you the truth, I suppose I
already know what you do.

MARCUS

But you went out with me anyway.

CHARLENE

Guess I have a thing for bad boys.
But not too bad.

Marcus smiles.

CHARLENE

So why would a guy like you be interested in someone like me?

MARCUS

Someone like you? You're beautiful.

CHARLENE

Working girl, straight-laced.

MARCUS

I like someone challenging, I dunno. Someone I can talk to.

CHARLENE

Challenging, huh?

MARCUS

To a point.

Charlene smiles. They continue eating.

EXT. EAST RIVER - NIGHT

Marcus and Charlene walk along the water.

CHARLENE

So how'd you get into... investment banking, is it?

MARCUS

Family business, I had no choice.

CHARLENE

Your daddy was a player?

MARCUS

My moms.

CHARLENE

Your mother?!

MARCUS

Maybe that's why I like strong women.

Charlene smiles. They continue walking. Ten paces behind, we see Bama and Keryl following.

CHARLENE

They gonna be with us all night?

MARCUS
(smiles)
Not all night.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus and Charlene sit on the couch; soft music; nightcaps.

CHARLENE
So when you said before you had no
choice but to get into the game,
what'd you mean by that?

MARCUS
It's where I'm from, you know. You
play the cards you're dealt.

CHARLENE
But sometimes you can trade the
ones you were dealt for new ones.

MARCUS
That's what I'm plannin' on doin'.

CHARLENE
What do you mean?

MARCUS
Music. I been developin' my
skills, workin' with Darius Clay.

CHARLENE
Seriously?

MARCUS
Sent my demo out this week, tryin'
to get a record deal.

CHARLENE
Really? That's great.

MARCUS
(a few beats; then)
So why didn't you give me your
number that night?

CHARLENE
I told you I had a boyfriend and...

MARCUS
And what?

CHARLENE

Nothing. It's corny.

MARCUS

Come on, what?

Charlene looks at him.

CHARLENE

'Cause I knew if we were meant to,
one day we'd meet again.

Marcus looks at her, then:

MARCUS

I don't think that's corny at all.

And as they kiss...

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The lights are dim. Marcus carries Charlene into the bedroom, gently places her on the bed. Slowly, they continue to kiss as they undress each other and begin to make love.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Marcus sleeps alone in his bed. After a few beats, he stirs, looks at the clock -- 2:18 a.m. He notices a light on in the living room, gets up to investigate.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus emerges in boxers. On the couch, wearing his shirt is Charlene, who wears headphones, eyes closed as she listens to music. Marcus comes up behind her, touches her. She jumps.

CHARLENE

Jesus, you scared me!

MARCUS

(chuckling)

Whatchu doin', where'd you go?

CHARLENE

I wasn't tired, so I came out here.

MARCUS

Whatchu listenin' to?

Charlene smiles, holds up a CD -- "Marcus Philips - Demo".

MARCUS
Nah, gimme that.

CHARLENE
No, I love it, it's great.

MARCUS
You like it? Really?

CHARLENE
Are you crazy? You're really
talented, you have a gift.

Just then, the phone RINGS. Marcus checks the number.

MARCUS
I gotta take this.

CHARLENE
Some other girl?

MARCUS
(shoots her a look; then)
Hello?

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Topcat, high off his ass and covered with blood, stands holding the phone. He slurs as he speaks.

TOPCAT
It's me, fuck you doin'?

INTERCUT MARCUS AND TOPCAT

MARCUS
I'm chillin'. Wassup?

TOPCAT
I need you over here.

MARCUS
What's wrong, you all right?

TOPCAT
Just fuckin' get here!

Topcat clicks off. Marcus turns to Charlene.

MARCUS

I gotta take you home.

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Still high, Topcat opens the door, lets Marcus in. The place is a shambles. Marcus notices the blood, spots a hypodermic needle, spoon and small bag of heroin on the coffee table.

MARCUS

The fuck you doin' to yourself?!

TOPCAT

(plops on the couch)

I dunno, man. This motherfucker...

MARCUS

What motherfucker, who?

TOPCAT

It shoulda been me, son... it shoulda been me...

MARCUS

What you mean? Majestic?

TOPCAT

You don't know what the fuck you talkin' about, boy! Levar...

MARCUS

Levar what?

(puts it together)

So you got passed over, this is how you deal with the shit? You become a fuckin' junkie?!

Topcat shakes his head, vaguely nods to the kitchen. Marcus slowly makes his way inside, where we see SLIM, the hustler who killed his mother, lying dead on the floor with a kitchen knife plunged in his chest.

MARCUS

Who the fuck is this?!

TOPCAT

Nigga Slim, kill your mama. Saw him on the street, he came back around, I brought him up here.

Marcus lunges, grabs Topcat by the shirt, lifts him up.

MARCUS

Why didn't you call me?!

TOPCAT

I don't... I... I didn't--

MARCUS

I told you if you ever find this motherfucker let me know!

TOPCAT

I didn't have--

MARCUS

(shaking him)

You junkie motherfucker!

TOPCAT

(struggling to fight back)

Don't you talk to me like that, boy!

MARCUS

I ain't your fuckin' boy!

Marcus shoves him back on the couch hard. Topcat looks up at him, eyes tearing up. After a few beats...

MARCUS

What? You got somethin' you wanna say to me?

TOPCAT

I loved her too, motherfucker...
I fuckin' loved that girl.

Marcus looks at him, processing. An eternity, then...

MARCUS

C'mon, let's get rid of this shit.

And as he pulls some Hefty bags out of a kitchen drawer...

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAWN

Marcus enters, pours himself a drink, then sits on the couch.

MARCUS (V.O.)

We dumped the body in the weeds near the airport, then I dropped Topcat back at his crib.

INT. TOPCAT'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Topcat sits on the toilet, straps up, injects a huge shot of heroin. After a few seconds, he begins convulsing.

MARCUS (V.O.)

It was the last time I'd ever see him alive.

Topcat stops moving.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I never did ask him straight up if he was my father or not, but for all we'd been through I guess he may as well have been.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Closed to the general public. As few BODYGUARDS look on, Marcus enters with Tyrell, joining Junebug and about a dozen other HUSTLERS at a long table. At the head sits Majestic, Breeze next to him. Hennessy all around.

MAJESTIC

So I'll get right to it. I spoke to the big man, he sends his condolences. Topcat was a real nigga.

Majestic raises his glass. They all follow.

MARCUS

Rest in peace.

MAJESTIC

Obviously y'all are here cause some decisions have been made and this comes right from Levar himself.

Majestic scans the contenders, all looking on in anticipation. Finally, he turns to Marcus.

MAJESTIC

You takin' over for T-Cat, Tyrell here your number two.

TYRELL

(smiles)

I didn't know Levar even knew my name.

BREEZE

Levar know everything, nigga.

MAJESTIC

Any problems, let's air it out now.

Majestic trades looks with the other Hustlers, settling on Junebug, who does his best to hide his disdain.

JUNEBUG

Cool with me.

MAJESTIC

It done, then.

TYRELL

(to Marcus)

God bless, man, you deserve it.

MAJESTIC

Let's make some fuckin' money.

And as they raise their glasses, we hear the POP of a champagne cork and we're...

INT. CLUB STARLIGHT - VIP SECTION - NIGHT

Marcus stands filling the Crew's glasses from a bottle of Cristal as Charlene and a few other GIRLS look on.

MARCUS (V.O.)

What started out as a great day
got even better by the afternoon...

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marcus' phone rings. He answers.

INT. DC PRODUCTIONS - STUDIO

Darius Clay talks on the phone. Tony Cash stands nearby.

DARIUS CLAY

Genesis Records wants to make a
deal. They love your fuckin' demo!

INT. CLUB STARLIGHT - DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT

Music pumping; the dance floor is packed. Marcus and the Crew dance with their Girls.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I had no idea by night time I'd
wish it never happened.

EXT. BAR - BROOKLYN - NIGHT

With rap music emanating from within, Bama appears, peeks in the window. A few PATRONS drink at the bar, while at a table in the back, Junebug and a few other HUSTLERS have drinks. Suddenly, the door whips open. Bama enters, gun in hand, kerchief over his face.

BAMA

On the floor motherfuckers!

The Patrons do as they're told. Junebug studies Bama as he turns to the Bartender:

BAMA

Empty that fuckin' cash drawer!

As he starts complying, the ladies room door opens. A young WOMAN exits... instinctively Bama turns and fires...

BLAM!! BLAM!! Total chaos as the Woman goes down, blood splattering the wall behind her. And as Bama hauls ass...

MAJESTIC (V.O.)

You specifically said you would
curb this motherfucker!

INT. RESTAURANT - BACK ROOM - DAY

Still wearing the same clothes from the night before, Marcus sits before Majestic and Breeze.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I know, I just... Look, it ain't
like he did it on purpose, a-ight?

MAJESTIC

He shot a nigga's girl!

MARCUS

I didn't know where he was.

MAJESTIC

You didn't know? You gotta know
where your niggas at and what they
doin' at all times. Everything.

BREEZE

Got these Brooklyn niggas up our
ass now.

MARCUS

We were out, okay? He was supposed
to be with us, he didn't show up.

BREEZE

So what you're sayin' then's
you can't control this nigga.

MARCUS

No, it's just... It was an
accident...

MAJESTIC

We been through this before.

(as if to a child)

The nigga can't follow orders,
the nigga got to go.

(off Marcus' look)

What? You got a problem with that?

Marcus sits for a long time, says nothing.

MAJESTIC

You got twenty four hours.

Marcus nods, exits.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S CEMETERY - (LATER THAT) DAY

CLOSE ON -- a simple headstone:

Katrina Philips

1961-1984

PULL BACK to reveal Marcus seated before it, deep in thought.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I don't know why, but until that
day I never visited my mom's grave.
I sat there for hours, with
everything I ever wanted and
nothin' all at the same time.

EXT. ST. JOHN'S CEMETERY - QUEENS - DAY

Marcus walks alone through the headstones.

MARCUS (V.O.)

As I walked to my car, I still
didn't know what I was gonna do.

INT. MARCUS' MERCEDES - DAY

Parked outside the cemetery, Marcus sits in his car, dials
his cell. We hear a number RINGING.

INT. BAR/RESTAURANT - DAY

Majestic's cell phone RINGS. He checks the number, answers.

MAJESTIC

Go.

INTERCUT MARCUS AND MAJESTIC

MARCUS

It's me.

MAJESTIC

And?

MARCUS

Go fuck yourself. I ain't givin'
up my boy.

Marcus clicks off.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Just like that, we were renegades.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The whole Crew is there, in mid war council.

ROMEO

Are you out your fuckin' mind?!
How we gonna eat, man?

MARCUS

Same as always, keep on hustlin'.

KERYL

Majestic and that other
motherfucker run this game.

MARCUS

They run it, they don't own it.

BAMA

We can get our product down south.

MARCUS

Meantime, I'm gettin' an advance on
the record deal.

ROMEO

Enough for everybody?

MARCUS

It ain't a lot, but it should
tide us over.

No one says a word. Marcus looks at Tyrell.

MARCUS

You're bein' awful quiet.

TYRELL

It's fucked up, man. These niggas
don't play around.

MARCUS

(re: Bama)

Whatchu want me to do, give his ass
up?! If it was any of ya'll I'da
done the same fuckin' thing!

(a few beats; then)

The door's wide open. Anybody
wants to go, now's your chance,
no repercussions.

(off their looks)

We're this fuckin' close to gettin'
outta this shit, I'm recordin' this
album and I'm gonna blow up. We
all will if we just stick together.

The guys exchange looks. A long time, then:

ROMEO

A-ight, I'm in.

KERYL

Too far to back out now. Let's do
this shit.

Tyrell looks at Bama, shakes his head.

TYRELL

Crazy ass nigga, whatchu go and
do now?

And on Marcus' smile...

INT. DC PRODUCTIONS - STUDIO - DAY

Marcus stands in a sound booth singing into a mic.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Over the next few months, I worked
my ass off in the studio.

INT. DC PRODUCTIONS - STUDIO

Marcus signs some papers as Darius Clay looks on.

MARCUS (V.O.)

The advance came in, but between
lawyers, managers and Darius Clay,
there wasn't much left over.

Darius hands Marcus a check. He looks at it, frowns.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - NIGHT

A cold night. Marcus and the Crew stand around outside.

MARCUS (V.O.)

On the street things weren't much
better. Not only did we have to
watch our backs...

A FORD TAURUS drives by slowly. Marcus and the Crew stick
their hand under their coats. The FORD drives off.

MARCUS (V.O.)

It was also harder than ever to
come by product.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Wearing an expectant look, Marcus lets Romeo and Bama inside.

BAMA

(takes out a package)
Quarter key, that all he had.

MARCUS (V.O.)

If there's one thing I learned in life, it's this -- as complicated as things seem, they could always get more complicated.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - BEDROOM

Marcus sits on the couch writing in his notebook, working on his raps. After a beat, Charlene comes out of the bathroom. She sits next to him, says nothing. After a while:

MARCUS

Why you so quiet, shorty?

Charlene looks at him, holds up a home pregnancy test strip - its center is bright BLUE. Marcus processes it, then:

MARCUS

How far are you?

CHARLENE

About twelve weeks.

MARCUS

Twelve weeks? What about your period?

CHARLENE

I was spotting, I'm sorry...
(starts crying)
I didn't plan this.

MARCUS

That's not what I'm sayin'.

CHARLENE

What are we gonna do, we have no money...

MARCUS

My record's comin' out, it's gonna blow up.

CHARLENE

You don't know that, Marcus.

MARCUS

I thought you believed in me.

CHARLENE

I do. It's just--

Charlene breaks down crying. Marcus holds her.

MARCUS

A-ight, forget that shit for now.
In a perfect world, what would you
do?

CHARLENE

Marcus, we have nothing! This is
far from a perfect world.

MARCUS

I'll make it one, answer the
question.

CHARLENE

(looks at him; then)
In a perfect world? I'd have your
baby.

MARCUS

Then that's what we're gonna do.

EXT. CHECK CASHING STORE - JAMAICA AVENUE - NIGHT

Same shot as the opening. The stolen Suburban sits near the
Check Cashing Store, Keryl alone in the driver's seat:

INT. CHECK CASHING STORE - NIGHT

As the Koreans count out CASH, the Guard approaches the
peephole, his .45 pistol still in its holster.

GUARD'S POV THROUGH PEEPHOLE

Rodrigo stands outside, holds up a Nathan's bag.

GUARD

(as he unlocks the door)
Fuck you been, I'm starvin' in--

BAMMMM!!! The door kicks in violently...

EXT. CHECK CASHING STORE - NIGHT

Keryl sits in the Suburban, looking toward the store. Suddenly, the gunshots -- the shotgun BLAST followed by the RAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT of the Uzi.

Within seconds, our GUYS come charging out. Romeo sprints to the Suburban, tosses the duffel bag inside. Marcus approaches with Bama, Tyrell following.

KERYL

Fuck happened in there?!

MARCUS

Help me get him in!

Romeo and Tyrell help Marcus lift Bama into the back.

EXT. DESERTED STREET - NIGHT

A desolate road near JFK. Tyrell's Lexus, Marcus' Mercedes and a Bronco parked nearby. As Keryl screeches up in the Suburban, the Crew jumps out, adrenaline still pumping.

TYRELL

We fuckin' did it!!

Like a well-oiled machine, the guys scatter to their cars as Romeo empties a gas can over the Suburban's upholstery. Marcus tosses the duffel in his trunk, starts to get in.

MARCUS

My crib, tomorrow, 11 o'clock.

With that, Romeo tosses a match in the Suburban. It goes up in flames with a WHOOSH as the Crew take off in their cars.

EXT. MARCUS' APARTMENT BUILDING - (LATER THAT) NIGHT

The street is quiet, deserted. Marcus pulls up in the Mercedes, finds a spot near the building.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Whoever said money can't buy happiness shoulda been me on that ride home.

He gets out, crosses to the trunk, POPS it.

MARCUS (V.O.)

My music was on track, I was gonna be a father... For the first time in a long time it felt like everything was gonna be okay...

And as he leans in and grabs the duffel, A FIGURE appears from behind a parked car, raises a gun. Marcus senses something, bolts with the duffel bag, but...

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Bullets tear into his body; he contorts, keeps running, tries to grab his own gun, but...

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! More shots; he collapses to the street, drops the bag, blood gushing from his wounds. And as he loses consciousness, the FIGURE calmly approaches, takes aims at his prone body...

BLAM! Another shot rips into Marcus' jaw. And as the FIGURE grabs the duffel and bolts, Marcus' blood pools on the street. And as the CAMERA MOVES IN on his eyes...

TOPCAT (V.O.)

(game show host voice)

Hey hey hey! Let's give a warm welcome back to Marcus Philips!

INT. GAME SHOW SET - FANTASY SEQUENCE

Over the sounds of wild APPLAUSE, we're back on the set of "Let's Make a Drug Deal". The adult Marcus stands with Topcat, who's now dressed in a white tuxedo.

TOPCAT

Congratulations, Marcus, you've made it all the way to our bonus round!

We HEAR a series of BELLS, WHISTLES, other SOUND EFFECTS.

TOPCAT

And here's how it works. You can cash out now and chalk yourself up as another NYPD statistic...

Topcat nods toward his lovely game show assistant -- it's KATRINA, Marcus' mom, glowing all in white, standing beside her Buick Regal. She holds a gift box, smiles...

KATRINA

I got you the Atari, baby.

BACK TO TOPCAT

TOPCAT

Or you can risk it all and go back
to a very uncertain future...

Topcat gestures to his other Assistant -- a fat, middle-aged
NURSE who stands beside a wheelchair.

TOPCAT

So what's it gonna be Marcus, door
number one or door number two?

THE AUDIENCE is again packed with YOUNG BLACK MALES, but
unlike before, they're all bullet-riddled and bloody --
murder victims, including a laughing, bloody Antwan.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

Stay here nigga! Who you think you
are?

ANTWAN

Ain't nothin' back there for you!

BACK TO MARCUS, who stands with Topcat thinking it over.

TOPCAT

What's it gonna be, Marcus?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

As Charlene, Grandma, Grandpa and Cameron look on, a DOCTOR,
30s, hovers over Marcus, who's wrapped like a mummy, jaw
wired, tubes and wires protruding everywhere.

DOCTOR

(snapping his fingers)
Marcus? Marcus.

Very slowly, Marcus opens his swollen eyes, tries to focus.

DOCTOR

Hey, you're still with us.
(beat; off Marcus' look)
You're in pretty bad shape and I
know you can't talk, but I want you
to try and squeeze my hand, okay?

Marcus looks at him blankly.

CLOSE ON MARCUS' FINGERS -- They don't move. Charlene cries.
Finally... he squeezes the Doctor's hand.

GRANDMA
Thank you Jesus.

CHARLENE
Oh my God.

DOCTOR
Go back to sleep, you're gonna make
it.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A few weeks later. Marcus, thin, weak, legs in a cast, head wrapped, jaw wired, sits in a chair looking out the window.

MARCUS (V.O.)
In the weeks followin' the
shooting, I did nothin' but think.
With nine bullet holes in me,
there wasn't much I could do.
Though my jaw was shattered and I
could barely talk, I was still
amazingly lucky - whoever Majestic
sent to kill me fucked it up pretty
good.

Charlene, now noticeably pregnant, enters with a malted.
She unwraps a straw, holds it to his mouth.

CHARLENE
Here baby, sip this.

The phone RINGS. Charlene crosses and answers.

CHARLENE
Hello?... Hold on.
(turns to Marcus)
Genesis Records?

Marcus nods, takes the phone.

MARCUS
(through wired jaw)
Lo?

Marcus listens a while, hangs up. Charlene looks at him.

MARCUS
They droppin' me.

Charlene crosses, gives him a hug...

MARCUS (V.O.)

For months after, I refused to see any of my crew -- as their leader I couldn't afford to let them see me in a compromised position.

EXT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - DAY

Rural; the middle of nowhere. With Marcus in the passenger seat, Charlene pulls up and parks a beat up Chevy near a small, run-down cottage.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I sold my car, scraped together some cash, then moved us up to a small house in the Poconos.

Marcus gets out of the car on crutches - though his jaw is no longer wired, he's extremely thin.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I had lost sixty eight pounds.

Charlene reaches into the back of the car, removes a car seat with an INFANT strapped in.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Aside from Charlene and our new baby Michael, I didn't have a fuckin' thing.

INT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - DAY

Dingy; hardly any furniture. Marcus and Charlene sit at the table eating dinner, the BABY asleep in a crib nearby.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I was in exile.

INT. PHYSICAL THERAPY OFFICE - DAY

As a PHYSICAL THERAPIST guides him, Marcus slowly walks between two parallel bars.

PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Easy. Use the supports, come on.

Marcus frowns, keeps walking. He's clearly in pain.

MARCUS
(slurred; stiff jawed)
We been doin' this for weeks.

PHYSICAL THERAPIST
It may take years, Marcus.

INT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - DAY

A dejected Marcus sits watching Jerry Springer. Outside, Charlene pulls up in the Chevy.

EXT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - CONTINUOUS

Marcus limps outside as Charlene takes the baby out of his car seat.

MARCUS
Hey.

CHARLENE
Can you take him?

Charlene hands Marcus the baby. He winces from the weight.

MARCUS
Ah. Fuck.

CHARLENE
(grabs the baby)
Give him to me. Go back inside.

MARCUS
Fuckin' shoulder.

INT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - CONTINUOUS

Marcus limps back inside. Charlene follows with the baby and a bag of groceries. As they put them away in silence, the phone RINGS. Marcus lets the answering machine pick it up.

TONY CASH
(over answering machine)
Marcus, it's Tony Cash, you there?

CHARLENE
You wanna get that?

Marcus shakes his head no.

TONY CASH

(over answering machine)

Just so you know I left Darius, I'm
out on my own now. Hit me up,
let's talk.

The machine cuts off. They continue putting away the
groceries in silence. After a while...

CHARLENE

You gonna call him back?

MARCUS

For what?

CHARLENE

I dunno. To talk about recording?

MARCUS

Recordin'?! I can barely fuckin'
talk!

CHARLENE

So that's it then? This is it?

MARCUS

Fuck you talkin' about?

CHARLENE

This! This place, this life! Is
this it for us?

MARCUS

I'm in fuckin' pain, Charlene!

CHARLENE

What about me, you don't think I'm
in pain?!

MARCUS

I almost fuckin' died!

CHARLENE

And you're acting like you did!

Marcus stops in his tracks.

CHARLENE

I know you hurt, Marcus, I can't
imagine how bad, but it can't be
worse than what I feel when I see
you giving up on yourself.

(MORE)

CHARLENE (cont'd)
(several beats; then)
You don't lose a fight by getting
knocked down, baby. You lose by
staying down.

Marcus looks at her. After a long time, he crosses, puts his arms around her.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Charlene was right. Everything I
ever got was 'cause I busted my ass
to get it.

INT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - BEDROOM - DAY

Wearing sweats and a T-shirt, Marcus sits on the edge of the bed slowing tying his sneakers.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Why should gettin' better be any
different?

And as some driving music kicks in, we're in a MONTAGE...

INT. GYM - DAY

Marcus enters the gym. Slowly, he lifts weights, just the bar at first. He grimaces in pain.

INT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - DAY

Marcus lays on the floor, plays with Michael as Charlene makes dinner.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Marcus stands before the mirror slowly working his jaw muscles, forcing his mouth to form words through the pain.

INT. GYM - DAY

Marcus walks on a treadmill. Lifts weights again -- this time there's more than just the bar.

EXT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - DAY

Leaves are changing color. Marcus walks in the yard with Michael, now several months older.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

Shirt off, Marcus does pull ups; he's gaining weight and muscle. We see him on the treadmill -- running.

INT. COTTAGE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus speaks into a mic, recording himself rapping. He plays it back, seems satisfied with the results.

INT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Weeks later. Marcus stands drinking a protein shake.

INT. GYM - DAY

Marcus bench presses real weight; he looks like his old self.

EXT. WOODS - POCONOS - DAY

With snow on the ground, Marcus runs, throwing punches like a boxer. And as he nears the house, we:

CUT TO:

INT. TONY CASH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Tony sits reading the paper. The phone RINGS. He answers.

TONY CASH

Hello?

MARCUS'S VOICE

(over telephone)

They put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

And on Tony's smile...

INT. RESTAURANT - POCONOS - DAY

Marcus sits with Tony eating lunch.

TONY CASH

So what's the plan, man? Whatchu gonna do with yourself?

MARCUS

Haven't really thought about it.

TONY CASH

You like it up here?

MARCUS

Yeah, it's a-ight.

(off Tony's look)

It fuckin' sucks, okay?

Tony laughs, pushes his plate away.

TONY CASH.

Obviously I didn't drive all the way up here to talk about real estate. So you got my message I left Darius, right?

MARCUS

What happened?

TONY CASH

Good guy, different vision.

Marcus nods. A few beats, then:

TONY CASH

I think you should focus on recordin' again.

MARCUS

For who? Genesis dropped my ass.

TONY CASH

Fuck Genesis, record for the street.

(off Marcus' look)

Mix tapes, bootlegs, sell 'em right there on the sidewalk. You got a buzz man, people already know who you are. Fucked as it is, gettin' shot got you more press than any fuckin' record deal.

MARCUS

Some fuckin' publicity stunt.

TONY CASH

I got a studio right in my basement, we can work in private. It's quiet, isolated, away from all the bullshit.

(MORE)

TONY CASH (cont'd)

You do a record, we drop it, do
another, drop that a month later.
You're back from the dead man,
your shit'll be everywhere.
What do you say?

And as Marcus mulls his decision:

MARCUS (V.O.)

Much as you hear the term used,
there's no such thing as a gangsta
rapper. Truth is you can't be
both, at least not effectively.
You're either a gangsta or a rapper
and each one requires your full and
total dedication. I decided that
day to put the thug life behind
me -- I was now a rapper.

Marcus looks Tony in the eye.

MARCUS

When do we fuckin' start?

And as one of Marcus' songs kick in...

INT. TONY CASH'S HOUSE - STUDIO - DAY

A small in-home studio. As Marcus stands in the sound booth
rapping into a mic, Tony works the sound board.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Within a week, I started workin'
with Tony night and day. We began
with some shit I wrote in the
hospital.

Over the song Marcus is recording, we see the following:

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

Marcus poses for a PHOTOGRAPHER, shirt off.

MARCUS (V.O.)

A month later we had eighteen
tracks, made our own independent
album.

CLICK. The Photographer takes Marcus' picture, which we see
on the cover of a mix tape CD titled "Bulletproof".

MARCUS (V.O.)

Since the crack game was what I knew best, I decided to use those same skills in the record business. I was the supplier...

INT. TONY CASH'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Bama sits at a table, inserting CDs into jewel cases.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Bama was in charge of packaging...

EXT. TONY CASH'S HOUSE - DAY

Keryl and Romeo load cases of "Bulletproof" into the Bronco.

MARCUS (V.O.)

And Keryl and Romeo handled distribution...

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Wearing shades, dressed sharp, Tyrell leans against a new Jag parked on the corner.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Though I hated to see him go, Tyrell decided he'd rather take his chances on the street. Within days my shit was all over New York...

EXT. STREET CORNER - QUEENS - DAY

Keryl and Romeo pull up in the Bronco, park near a sidewalk CD stand. And as they unload cases of "Bulletproof"...

MARCUS (V.O.)

Street corners...

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

The dance floor is packed. Bama and Romeo cross the room, hand the DJ a CD. The DJ takes it, nods.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Clubs...

EXT. PARK - QUEENS - NIGHT

TEENAGERS hang out, Marcus' music playing from a boom box.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Parks... Instead of crack, it was
now my music floodin' the city.

INT. TONY CASH'S HOUSE - STUDIO - DAY

Marcus at the mic; Tony at the board. The Crew looks on.

MARCUS (V.O.)
As for me, I kept in the studio,
doin' six more records in seven
months.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

At a different sidewalk CD stand, we PAN across a row of
Marcus Philips bootlegs, all with different covers.

MARCUS (V.O.)
Even still I knew I could do more.

INT. MARCUS' APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

With BET on the television, Charlene serves pizza as Marcus,
Keryl, Tony and Romeo sit around bullshitting. Bama sits on
the floor playing with the Michael, now a toddler.

MARCUS
What we need's a record to grab
people, get they attention.

ROMEO
Dawg, you all they talkin' about
out there.

TONY CASH
Maybe so, but we're talkin' about
gettin' to the next level.

MARCUS
Create some controversy.

CHARLENE
Thanks, but I think I've had more
controversy than I can stand.

MARCUS

You know what I mean.

As they ad-lib goodnights, Charlene exits to put Michael to bed. On TV, a lame gangsta video plays. Bama watches it.

BAMA

Check these lame-ass niggas.

ROMEO

That ain't gangsta.

BAMA

(to Marcus)

You seen more shit in a afternoon
than these niggas seen in they
whole lives.

The guys watch in silence a while, eat their pizza, then:

MARCUS

That's it.

KERYL

What is?

MARCUS

That's I'ma sing about, all the
shit happened to me.

TONY CASH

What?

MARCUS

Pumpin' crack, gettin' shot. I'll
name names and everything.

ROMEO

You fuckin' buggin'?

TONY CASH

Sure you wanna do that?

MARCUS

Fuck 'em, what they gonna do?

And as the guys look at him:

MARCUS (V.O.)

Far as I'm concerned, if Bama
never said nothin' intelligent
ever again, it wouldn't matter.

(MORE)

MARCUS (V.O.) (cont'd)

In his own crazy way, he had just given me the idea that would change our lives. Three days after finishing that pizza, I laid down a new track in Tony's basement.

CUT TO:

INT. TONY CASH'S HOUSE - STUDIO - DAY

As Tony works the board, Marcus records a song similar to "Ghetto Q'uaran" appropriate to the movie in which he names names and talks about real events in his life. As it plays:

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

A SERIES OF SHOTS: At a sidewalk CD stand, Keryl and Romeo deliver cases of the new bootleg.

MARCUS (V.O.)

What started as an independent record hit like nothin' I'd ever done, I mean it spread like a fuckin' gasoline fire.

KIDS in the park hover around a boom box listening in disbelief to the song; a local RADIO DJ holds up the bootleg, talks into the mic; a sidewalk CD Hustler hawks the bootleg on the street.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Suddenly everybody was talkin' about me, and not just fans either.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Majestic and Breeze sit in the BMW, listening to the CD. They don't look happy.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Truth is, I didn't give a fuck.

INT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - NIGHT

Cameron sits at the kitchen table, in mid-conversation with Marcus, who's sits across from him going over some papers.

CAMERON

...so aside from that, it's a standard contract. Tony'll make the rounds, call us from L.A.

Marcus nods. He looks up at Cameron, senses something.

MARCUS

What else on your mind?

CAMERON

I got a call from the District Attorney's office. They're still investigating the shooting.

MARCUS

(chuckles)

Why they waste their time? They know I ain't gonna testify against fuckin' Majestic.

CAMERON

That's the thing though... they don't think it was him.

MARCUS

Obviously it wasn't him literally, it was some nigga work for him.

Cameron says nothing.

MARCUS

What?

CAMERON

Look, this is some really confidential shit, okay?

MARCUS

Stop talkin' to me like a lawyer, b. What?

CAMERON

(leaning in)

The Bureau of Prisons has wiretaps in all maximum security facilities, it allows them to monitor high-level prisoners. After you had your problem, told Majestic to fuck off? He called Levar Cahill to get permission to have you killed.

MARCUS

So there it is.

CAMERON

Levar said no. He told 'em to back off of you and Bama.

MARCUS

What? Why?

CAMERON

I have no idea.

On Marcus.

INT. COTTAGE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

As Charlene sleeps beside him, Marcus lays awake in bed. After a few beats, he gets up, checks the baby, then exits.

MARCUS (V.O.)

For days after that conversation, I tried to make sense of this shit.

EXT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - NIGHT

Marcus sits outside, alone on the porch steps.

MARCUS (V.O.)

By the code of the street, they had every right to kill me.

EXT. LEWISBURG PRISON - PENNSYLVANIA - PARKING AREA - DAY

A large maximum security facility. Marcus pulls up in a BMW, no Bodyguards. He parks, heads toward a guard gate.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Not only couldn't I figure out who shot me -- I had no fuckin' idea why Levar wouldn't allow it.

INT. LEWISBURG PRISON - VISTOR'S AREA - DAY

Marcus sits in a booth, telephone on the wall next to him. After a few beats, LEVAR CAHILL enters the glassed-in visitor's area in an orange prison jumpsuit. He takes a seat behind the Plexiglas opposite Marcus. Picks up the phone. Marcus does the same.

MARCUS

Thanks for seein' me.

LEVAR CAHILL

Thanks for comin'.

Marcus smiles. It's awkward.

MARCUS

So how you doin'?

LEVAR CAHILL

Survivin'... See you are too.

MARCUS

Yeah, well...

(several beats; then)

Listen, I know you can't really
talk... freely, you know, but...
I just wanted to thank you.

LEVAR CAHILL

For what?

Marcus looks away, doesn't know how to say it.

MARCUS

I did some shit, maybe made some
bad mistakes...

LEVAR CAHILL

Stepped on the wrong fuckin' toes.

MARCUS

Yeah.

LEVAR CAHILL

Well just so you know, my boys
weren't the niggas bent you up.

MARCUS

I know that... I don't know who was
gunnin' for me now.

Levar nods. A few beats, then:

LEVAR CAHILL

What's this shit I hear, you
singin' now?

MARCUS

Workin' at it.

LEVAR CAHILL

Sounds to me like you gotta figure
out who the fuck you are, son.

MARCUS

Yeah.

LEVAR CAHILL

You know you may not know it, but
me and your boy Topcat was pretty
tight at one time.

MARCUS

Word?

LEVAR CAHILL

Back in the day, came up together
right there in your old hood.

MARCUS

Well I know he thought the world of
you.

LEVAR CAHILL

(smiles)

You got a girl?

MARCUS

My baby moms.

LEVAR CAHILL

Baby, huh? Got a picture?

Marcus takes out his wallet, holds a PHOTO of Michael against
the glass. Levar smiles.

MARCUS

Name's Michael.

LEVAR CAHILL

(smiles)

Got your mama's eyes.

Marcus smiles, nods... then it hits him.

MARCUS

You knew my moms?

Levar looks at him.

LEVAR CAHILL

Much, much better than you realize.
(several beats; then)
Take care of yourself.

Levar hangs up. He touches his fingers to his lips, then to the Plexiglas. He gets up, crosses off into the prison without looking back. Marcus watches thunderstruck as he processes what he's just been told.

EXT. NEW YORK STATE THRUWAY - DAY

Marcus drives the Chevy, lost in thought...

MARCUS (V.O.)

The whole ride home my mind was racin', it was like my brain was on overload. If Levar was my father, I had to reinterpret everything I knew about myself -- not to mention everything that had happened.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus cruises the boulevard, checking out the FIENDS and HUSTLERS. He stops at a light, looks across the street where Junebug makes a sale to Kenneth, the high school bully.

MARCUS (V.O.)

I always assumed it was Junebug bent me up -- God knows the motherfucker had his reasons. But just when I made up my mind for sure... it hit me.

TYRELL

pulls up next to him in a gleaming new Jaguar, a HOTTIE at his side. Marcus looks at him a beat, then follows discreetly when the light changes.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Tyrell gets out of the parked Jag, looking like a million bucks. As he opens the passenger door for his GIRLFRIEND...

MARCUS (O.S.)

Tyrell.

Tyrell turns around, startled. Marcus is behind him.

TYRELL

Fuck, you fuckin' scared me, man!

MARCUS

(smiles)

Why'd you be scared of me?

TYRELL

I didn't expect you, fuck...
How you doin'?!

Tyrell hugs him. Marcus is stiff.

MARCUS

I'm a-ight.

TYRELL

This is my girl, Lena. Say hi to
Marcus.

LENA

Hello.

Marcus just nods. Turns back to Tyrell.

MARCUS

So how you been, seem like you
doin' real good.

TYRELL

Yeah, you know...

MARCUS

New car, new crib... Gettin' your
money?

TYRELL

(laughs uncomfortably)
Tryin', you know.

FLASHBACK - A QUICK SERIES OF CUTS

The night of the shooting. Marcus parks his Mercedes,
crosses to the trunk. Grabs the duffel. A FIGURE appears,
raises a gun.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

Marcus collapses, blood gushing from his wounds. And as he
loses consciousness, WE SEE the figure approach and take aim.

It's Tyrell.

BACK TO SCENE

TYRELL

So you wanna come in for a drink?

MARCUS

Nah, you go. Maybe another time.

TYRELL

Absolutely, man.

MARCUS

Absolutely.

(nods to Lena)

Nice meetin' you.

Marcus stands watching as Tyrell and Lena cross off toward his building...

EXT. REDNECK BAR - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Marcus stands with a TRUCKER type, 40s, looking into the trunk of the guy's car.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Later that night, I scraped
together whatever money I had
left and strapped myself up.

Marcus selects a .45 automatic from an open suitcase, tries it out, then pays the Trucker in cash.

MARCUS (V.O.)

Levar was right -- it was time
to figure out who the fuck I was.

EXT. COTTAGE - POCONOS - DAY

Marcus loads the last of several suitcases into the trunk of the Chevy, which is packed with moving boxes also. Charlene pokes her head out of the cottage's front door.

CHARLENE

Marcus, Tony called again.

MARCUS

Fuck it, don't worry about it.

CHARLENE

He left like six messages. He says
it's important.

MARCUS
I'll call him later.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Grandma fawns over Charlene and Michael as Marcus, Grandpa and Uncle Sport carry in boxes.

MARCUS (V.O.)
That day I moved us back to my
Grandma's. And though she made us
a big dinner...

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus and Charlene sit at the table with Grandma, Grandpa and Michael. Marcus doesn't touch his food.

MARCUS (V.O.)
...food was the last thing on my
mind.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - MARCUS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

As the phone RINGS upstairs, Marcus slips the .45 into his waistband, then slips on a Kevlar vest. A few beats, then:

CHARLENE (O.S.)
Marcus, it's Tony!

Marcus frowns. A beat, then he picks up the extension:

MARCUS
I got it!

Charlene clicks off. Marcus talks into the phone.

MARCUS
Wassup?

INT. KALEIDOSCOPE RECORDS - RECEPTION - LOS ANGELES - DAY

GOLD RECORDS, photos of MUSICIANS line the wall. Tony Cash sits on a couch talking on his cell phone.

TONY CASH
Fuck you been? I been callin'
for days.

INTERCUT MARCUS AND TONY CASH

MARCUS

I'm busy, I'm sorry.

TONY CASH

Fuck all that, I got good news.
Kaleidoscope heard the mix tapes,
they wanna sign you.

MARCUS

Fuck it, I'm not interested.

TONY CASH

What?

MARCUS

It's over man, I'm done with that
shit.

TONY CASH

Fuck you talking about?

MARCUS

You heard me.

TONY CASH

You realize what you're sayin'
here?

MARCUS

I know exactly what I'm sayin'.

TONY CASH

Look, let's talk about--

MARCUS

I gotta go.

TONY CASH

Marcus, just--

Click. Marcus hangs up on him.

INT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

On the couch Grandpa plays with Michael as Charlene and
Grandma look on. Marcus enters.

CHARLENE

What'd Tony want?

MARCUS

Nothin'. Business stuff.

Marcus starts slipping on his jacket, heads to the foyer.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

CHARLENE

You're going out?

MARCUS

I got some shit I gotta take care of.

CHARLENE

But we just got here.

MARCUS

I'll be back in a little while.

Charlene approaches, puts her arms around him to kiss him, then pulls back...

CHARLENE

You're wearing your vest?

MARCUS

It's nothin'.

CHARLENE

You're scaring me.

MARCUS

It's a-ight, relax.

CHARLENE

Marcus, what the hell--

Charlene stops, notices

MICHAEL

standing behind them. She looks at Marcus, then:

CHARLENE

Come say bye to daddy, baby.

Michael waddles over in his pajamas. Marcus picks him up.

MARCUS

Hey little man, you goin' to bed?
You know tomorrow we goin' to
Playland, go on some of them
rides, would you like that?

Marcus looks at Michael. Suddenly it hits him...

FLASHBACK

Same foyer. 8-year-old Marcus in pj's. Katrina kneels down.

KATRINA

I'll see you Saturday, okay, baby?

BACK TO PRESENT.

Marcus stands looking at Michael.

CHARLENE

You all right?

MARCUS

Yeah.

He hands Michael to Charlene.

MARCUS

I gotta go.

Michael gives Charlene a quick peck, then exits.

EXT. VAN WYCK EXPRESSWAY - NIGHT

Marcus drives the Chevy...

MARCUS (V.O.)

There's an old saying that he who
forgets the past is doomed to
repeat it. But hard as it was to
tear myself away from my son that
night, I had to address this shit
with Tyrell.

And as he pulls off at an exit...

EXT. TYRELL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Tyrell exits the building, crosses to his Jag parked on the
deserted street. He hits the remote. It BEEPS, then:

MARCUS (O.S.)
Don't fuckin' move.

Marcus appears from nowhere, his .45 pressed against Tyrell's temple. In a flash, he reaches under Tyrell's jacket, removes his Glock .9mm, pockets it. Tyrell trembles.

TYRELL
You motherfucker.

MARCUS
On your knees.

Tyrell drops to his knees, shaking.

TYRELL
Why you fuckin' doin' this, man?
I thought we were friends.

MARCUS
That's what I fuckin' thought.
At least have the balls to admit
what you did.

TYRELL
Fuck you!

MARCUS
Say it! Tell me how you fuckin'
shot me, how you left me for dead,
took that fuckin' money.

Tyrell trembles. Marcus presses the barrel of the gun into his forehead. Finally:

TYRELL
You woulda done the same fuckin'
thing, man!

Marcus looks at him, almost smiles.

MARCUS
I coulda done the same thing.

Marcus' finger starts to tighten on the trigger. Tyrell's eyes close. Marcus squeezes and...

CLICK.

The .45 is unloaded. Tyrell looks up at him, practically pissing himself.

MARCUS

The streets'll take care of you,
motherfucker. I'm done with your
ass.

As Marcus turns and heads back to the Chevy, we stay with Tyrell, who quietly removes a .380 from an ankle holster.

MARCUS (V.O.)

In many ways, the question of
who we are and what we'll be is
determined at birth.

Tyrell runs up behind him, gun drawn, aiming...

MARCUS (V.O.)

For me, the hood was in my blood...

MARCUS SPINS,

Tyrell's loaded Glock in his hand.

BLAM!

Marcus nails Tyrell with a shot dead center in the forehead.

MARCUS (V.O.)

But that didn't mean I had to let
it destroy me.

Tyrell collapses in a heap on the quiet, deserted street.
Marcus looks at him, then gets in the Chevy and pulls away...

EXT. GRANDMA'S HOUSE - DAY

With a duffel slung over his shoulder, Marcus kisses Charlene and Michael goodbye.

MARCUS

I'll call you when I get there.

CHARLENE

Be careful, okay?

MARCUS (V.O.)

The next day, I packed up and
headed to Los Angeles.

EXT. GUY BREWER BOULEVARD - DAY

Marcus sits in the back of a car service sedan, which heads toward the Van Wyck Expressway.

MARCUS (V.O.)
By some miracle, God really did
let me walk out of hell. For all
his power, though, it always
occurred to me...

At a stop light, he looks out the window. Junebug stands on the corner, staring at him. They lock eyes.

MARCUS (V.O.)
He never did figure out how to get
rid of the devil.

And as the car pulls off, we see Junebug through the back window, still staring. As Marcus turns and looks, Junebug "shoots" him with his index finger and thumb.

INT. KENNEDY AIRPORT - DAY

With the duffel over his shoulder, Marcus talks on his cell phone as he heads toward the security checkpoint.

MARCUS
(into phone)
Yeah, it's me. I'm on the three
o'clock flight.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Tony Cash talks on the phone.

TONY CASH
There'll be a car at the airport,
it'll take you to the hotel.

INTERCUT MARCUS AND TONY CASH

MARCUS
Listen, I got my boys with me,
that's cool, right?

TONY CASH
Yeah, whatever. Just get your ass
out here.

Marcus clicks off. We PULL BACK to REVEAL Keryl, Bama and Romeo up ahead, already past security. Marcus approaches the security conveyor.

SECURITY GUARD

Bag.

Just like in high school, Marcus places his bag on the conveyor. We play the tension as it goes through the x-ray machine. Finally, the Guard looks at him:

SECURITY GUARD

(smiles)

Have a pleasant flight.

And as Marcus crosses through security and disappears with the Crew into the airport, we...

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END