

SOUL FOOD

Original Screenplay

by

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== Script Fly.com ==

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - MORNING

AHMAD, 12, chocolate complexion, is making his way down a busy hospital corridor, carrying a dozen roses in one hand and a Twix candy bar in the other.

Despite his haircut, Nike shoes, backpack, and trendy brand name clothes, Ahmad's sincerity makes it clear that he is not your average kid.

The activity in the hospital corridor is horrendous. Everywhere you look are sick patients in wheelchairs, patients on stretchers being wheeled past him, family members consoling one another, concerned doctors, and nurses. All of this is too much for a kid to bear, but somehow he stays cool.

He slows down when he sees room 226, then enters slowly.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ahmad stops in the threshold, quietly looking at the person he has come here to see. There is a look of great concern on his face. As he stands quietly, he begins to reflect on the events leading up to the present moment.

INT. OLD BALLROOM/WEDDING RECEPTION - NIGHT
(FLASHBACK/1996)

Well in progress inside this old ballroom on the south side of Chicago is a lively, crowded wedding reception--the place is smoky and packed with black folks. Family members, friends, and guests of the JOSEPH FAMILY are all dressed in their best duds and tuxedos. Mingling, eating, partying, a definite good time.

MOTHER JOE walks around the food table assisting--making sure guests at her youngest daughter's wedding are being served well.

AHMAD (V.O)

Everyone loved my grandmother, Mother Joe.

There is a long line of people anxiously waiting to dig into the large pots and plates of Mother Joe's renowned "soul food" that stretches across 4 long tables. Mother Joe, 73, a small woman with a big presence, is the solid rock in the Joseph Family.

AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

I once heard someone say they believed my grandmom didn't make one enemy in her life. And if she did, she probably invited them over for dinner, and after one taste of her deep-dish peach cobbler, they were sure grandmom's opponent made amends.

Walking around the dinner table, something on the dance floor catches Mother Joe's attention.

ANGLE

LEM DAVIS, the groom, is doing some sexual and distasteful dance moves with a young woman who is not his bride. Lem is 23 and tough-looking. His demeanor reads street. He is sloppy drunk, and the young woman is taking advantage of the situation by moving his hands on her butt as The Moments' song "SEXY MOMMA" blares from the speakers.

Mother Joe looks around, sees guests and family members watching, embarrassed. Mother Joe notices TERI, one of her three daughters, a bridesmaid today, standing near the dance floor. At 31, Teri is the family success story--a lawyer, and rich at that. Teri is shocked to witness the groom bumping and grinding. Infuriated, Teri heads toward the bathroom. Mother Joe senses trouble in the air.

ANGLE

AHMAD is uncomfortably dressed in a black tuxedo as he makes his way through the thick crowd. His boys, ranging from ages 11-13, follow close behind. The boys are laughing hysterically at Lem, Ahmad's uncle. They look closely at Lem's dance partner, admiring her butt.

AHMAD

Shake it... but don't break it!

The boys laugh. Suddenly, Ahmad collides into a woman. He looks up to find his grandmother, MOTHER JOE, looking down on him. Ahmad's boys scatter.

MOTHER JOE

Who's grandma's favorite grandchild?

AHMAD

I am, without a reasonable doubt.

MOTHER JOE

What will Ahmad do for grandma?

AHMAD

Anything.

Mother Joe glances over at Lem who is still dancing close with his female friend. Mother Joe has a plan.

MOTHER JOE

(assertively)

Go find your aunt Bird and tell her to get her butt out of here with her guests and her new boyfriend in this minute!

INT. BALLROOM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Ahmad pushes himself towards the women's bathroom where a crowd has gathered to hear the commotion going on inside. Ahmad begins pounding on the door. The door finally opens.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ahmad covers his eyes with his hand, peeking through the crack of his fingers. He steps into the women's bathroom.

AHMAD

Bird! Grandmom said get your black ass out there! And...

Ahmad's mother, MAXINE JOSEPH-SIMMONS, pushes her son out of the bathroom and slams the door shut.

Inside the bathroom, BIRD, the bride, is furious. Drop-dead gorgeous and in her early 20s, she is still trying to find herself in the world. Right now, pacing back and forth, she's ready to go out and kick some ass, but her huge, overweight friend, JADA, 20, is standing in front of the door.

TERI

Someone please tell me they're doing a new dance out there! If they get any closer, you'll need a crowbar to pry them apart.

Maxine, 35, is trying to stir Bird up. Eight months pregnant and ridiculous-looking in a white bridesmaid dress, she is the oldest and, ironically, the wildest of the Joseph sisters—a definite extrovert with a temper.

MAXINE

Bird, go out there and beat the bitch down! I got your back!

Bird is fuming. She looks at Jada.

BIRD

Jada, I'm giving you five seconds to
move your ass away from that door.

Jada doesn't respond. Bird can see there is no way she's
gonna move that much of a woman--Jada's hitting close to 250
pounds. But suddenly, Bird goes crazy and charges forward
with all her might. Boom!

Jada doesn't budge. Bird falls flat on her ass.

TERI

(looking down on Bird)

Don't turn out your wedding. You
wouldn't want to remember your day
like this, Bird. Remember, Lem was
once convicted!

Silence. Teri's comment has hit a nerve in Bird--everyone
knows it. Maxine breaks the tension, looking at Teri.

MAXINE

He had the audacity to invite his
bitch to their wedding.

TERI

I thought she was his ex-girlfriend?

MAXINE

Okay, ex-bitch! He is humiliatin' us
in front of friends and family.
Let's take our asses out there and do
somethin'!

After a moment, Teri hesitantly nods her head in agreement.

TERI

(awkward cursing)

Alright, let's go out there and beat
the bitch down!

Maxine and Bird yell out in excitement. The women storm out
of the bathroom. They're on a mission.

INT. BALLROOM - AFTERNOON

Maxine, Bird, and Teri enter the ballroom ready for action.
To their surprise, a crowd is gathered around the dance
floor, rooting and applauding. The ladies quickly begin to
push and kick their way through the thick crowd, the loud HIP-
HOP MUSIC pulsating around them. The sisters bum rush
towards the front, then stop in astonishment--

Then Ahmad squeezes his way to the front. A giant smile
crosses his face--

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ANGLE

Lem and Mother Joe are "cutting a rug" on the dance floor. Mother Joe is swift on her feet, wiggling her hips, imitating the latest dances of the young folks. The crowd claps loudly.

Maxine, Bird, and Teri are mesmerized. Smiles slowly appear on each of their faces as they watch their mother dance with the spirit of a young woman.

ANGLE

In the midst of the crowd, KENNY, Maxine's husband, 35 years old, a Denzel Washington type with a street edge, is witnessing this remarkable moment with MILES, Teri's husband.

Miles is a cool, laid-back, handsome man in his late 30s, in good shape, and sportin' a few distinguishing gray hairs.

KENNY

Mother Joe did it again.

MILES

Yeah, prevented a disaster.

The song comes to an end, and Lem and Mother Joe hug. The crowd applauds wildly.

ANGLE

Ahmad proudly watches his grandmother.

AHMAD'S (V.O)

My grandmother, Mother Joe, was the one who held my family together.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON (PRESENT TIME)

Intense pools of sunlight shine through slightly-opened window blinds, creating a surreal atmosphere. Still standing in the threshold, Ahmad comes out of his daze. He enters the room, silently placing his flowers on a table, then takes a seat in the chair next to the hospital bed.

He looks down at the frail old woman lying in bed, close to death--It's Mother Joe. He patiently waits for her to awaken.

Mother Joe's feeble body, with one leg lost and bandaged from a recent amputation, rests on top of her bed sheets. Her vigor and strength is gone.

AHMAD (V.O)

Everyone used to say that grandmom
and I had E.S.P.

(more)

AHMAD (cont'd; V.O)
'cause we always knew what each other
was thinking... I spent the first 4
years of my life sick, and my
grandmother took care of me.

INT. HOSPITAL/DELIVERY ROOM - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK/1981)

Ahmad, a 3 pound, screaming, pre-mature newborn, fresh out of his mama's womb is placed on an islet. The doctors place oxygen over his mouth, hook wires to his body, and insert an I.V. Two large cuts on Ahmad's head, resulting from a delivery error, are spewing lots of blood. Emergency surgery is about to begin. The doctor begins stitching the wounds.

AHMAD (V.O)
Because of complications during my
birth, doctors told my mother I would
never be able to walk. Of course,
grandmom did not once believe them.
She refused my therapy, braces, and
wheelchairs and knew that through
love and prayer, someday I would walk.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON
(FLASHBACK/CHRISTMAS, 1985)

The house is packed with distant and immediate relatives of all ages, celebrating, opening presents. Little Ahmad, 4 years old and still unable to walk, is hanging onto a couch to hold himself up.

Mother Joe walks into the action, looks at Ahmad, and calls him over to her. Then she moves back giving him distance. Silence sweeps the room. Everyone painfully watches Mother Joe encourage Ahmad to walk, ready again for disappointment. Ahmad's mom, Maxine, shakes her head in anger.

Little Ahmad turns to his grandmother. Focusing intently on her, he slowly takes a small step toward her. Holding out her hand, Mother Joe encourages him further.

AHMAD (V.O)
And finally, one Christmas...I walked.

Ahmad takes another step. Maxine and other family members are astonished. He takes another step...then another... before falling hard on his butt.

The family begins clapping joyously.

AHMAD (V.O)
(continuing)
I must've heard that story a million
times. And I still love hearing it.

EXT. OUTSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH - SUNDAY AFTERNOON
(FLASHBACK/1996)

CHURCH BELLS are ringing. End of Sunday worship service. The congregation is spilling out of the large Baptist church on the corner of this neighborhood street--Mother Joe's block. Old ladies with big hats, kids, deacons, all making their ways out of the church. The Joseph family is scattered throughout the crowd.

AHMAD'S (V.O)

I remember when we used to have
dinner at grandmom's house every
Sunday after church.

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A recent still PHOTOGRAPH... Mother Joe's house. A greystone building made of granite, with eleven rooms. Kenwood. A middle to upper-class south side black neighborhood in Chicago that is consider a historical landmark.

AHMAD (V.O)

Granddad and grandmom bought the big house in '64 for 50 grand. The Josephs was never short of dead presidents in the 60s cause granddad owned a laundromat, a barber shop, and a corner store, all on the same block on 75th Street. Not bad for a black man in the 60s, huh?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Another recent still PHOTO... A family portrait.. The entire Joseph family stands in Mother Joe's huge backyard where a beautiful, well-tended garden sits. Vegetables...tomatoes, cabbage, turnip greens, and hot peppers rest here.

AHMAD (V.O.)

The Joseph family is not as rich these days, but story has it that grandmom has a lot of loot stashed somewhere. But then there's no proof of it, 'cause grandmom don't believe in banks and no one's brave enough to ask her about it.

(beat)

Mother Joe and Uncle Pete, who hasn't left his room upstairs in 8 years, are the last ones living there.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S DINNER TABLE - A SUNDAY AFTERNOON
(FLASHBACK/1987)

Traditional Sunday dinner. Members of the Joseph family sit around their gigantic dinner table feasting, laughing, socializing. A younger Kenny, Maxine, Teri, Teri's first husband, Bird, Mother Joe, the grandchildren, and BIG MOM.

AHMAD (V.O)

Sunday dinner at the Josephs has been a tradition that was carried over from the south. It all started with the old kinfolks. They would gather after church to socialize and fill their bellies with food. It's been a tradition that the family moved north and kept this tradition going strong with strict discipline.

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INT. MOTHER JOE'S DINNER TABLE - NIGHT
(THANKSGIVING/1995)

The house is packed with family members eating, conversing. REV. WILLIAMS, who looks more like a street pimp than a reverend, is sporting a curl. UNCLE WARREN holds up the peace sign, actually asking for 2 dollars. COUSIN MACEO is eating chitlins. Cousins are arguing. Kids are giving a talent show. Confusion abounds. And that's how they like it.

AHMAD (V.O)

We would get together for Thanksgiving, Christmas, family reunions, and the house would be packed with family. They'd come with names like Cousin Maceo, Sims, Aunt Bunny, Pop, cousin Bee, St. Claire, Hamp. We'd have tons of food. Chitlins, fried chicken, black-eyed peas. And we would have contests to see who could eat the most... Rev. Williams, who is not even in the family, would always win.

SLOW MOTION: Kenny, Miles, and Lem angrily watch Rev. Williams kiss their wives. The Joseph sisters are trying to avoid kissing the reverend on the lips, but he skillfully makes lip to lip contact with them, enjoying every second.

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AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

Rev. Williams would stop by every other Sunday or holiday to bless the dinner...just so he could fill his belly with Mother Joe's soul food, and then he'd run after he had the satisfaction of "busting slops" with my mama and my aunties. I can see my dad now...

SLOW MOTION: Kenny is steaming hot, watching the perverted minister have his way with his wife's lips.

AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

He wanted to break Rev. Williams' neck!

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON (PRESENT TIME)

Ahmad comes back to the moment of reality, looks back at his grandmother, still asleep on her bed.

AHMAD (V.O)

That's how it used to be for the Josephs...before things fell apart. We were a family then.

(long beat)

My name is Ahmad Simmons and I know what's up. This is my story--my interpretation of what went wrong in the Joseph family.

Ahmad sighs and leans back on his chair looking at the ceiling. He begins to reflect.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S KITCHEN - SUNDAY AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK, May/1996)

Mother Joe, Maxine, and Teri are sweating their asses off in the hot kitchen cooking Sunday soul food.

AHMAD (V.O)

This particular Sunday in May, five weeks to this day, things begin to change for my family.

MONTAGE

- A) Collard Greens. Stems being broken off and rolled in a tight roll and cut into small strips.
- B) Pigs feet being washed under a faucet and put in the pot.

C) Yams being peeled and cut into 4 inch chunks.

AHMAD (V.O)

Grandmom used to love cooking. And you could see her pouring that love right into her meals by the cupful.

D) Catfish being rolled in corn meal.

E) Sweet potato biscuits. Hands effortlessly rolling dough.

F) Neckbones being washed and drained.

AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

There was always the smell of good food around the big house. Grandmom and my aunts would make everything from scratch.

MOTHER JOE'S DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

Miles is making sweet music on Mother Joe's old PIANO sitting in the corner of her dining room. It's easy to see the nostalgia in the house. Pictures and antique furniture dominate--Mother Joe's whole life is pretty much revealed in these belongings. Miles is doing a rendition of the Temptation's "My Girl," as Ahmad and his cousins sing along.

Teri steps in the threshold and watches this scene spitefully. Seeing her man behind a piano, obviously makes her angry. Upset, she disappears back into the kitchen.

MOTHER JOE'S BATHROOM

In the small, tight, confined bathroom, the newlyweds, Lem and Bird, are "bumping nasties." Bird is propped up on the bathroom sink as they pump away wildly. Lem is a screamer and Bird is trying her best to keep him quiet by covering his mouth first with her hand--then with her panties.

They build up to a climax.

MOTHER JOE'S KITCHEN

Maxine stops what she is doing and looks towards the hallway and the bathroom. What's that weird noise? Nothing. She continues cooking.

Ahmad enters the kitchen. He walks over to the table and sticks his finger in a bowl of stir cake mix and begins to lick his finger. He grabs a rag from the kitchen table and begins to wipe his hands dry. He places the rag down on the stove near the flames underneath a hot pot. Cooking, Mother Joe quickly removes the rag.

MOTHER JOE

Never place anything on a stove,
sweetheart You can burn the house
down.

Ahmad looks down at Mother Joe's leg which is extremely
swollen, bruised, and green. Two toes have been amputated.
He looks at Mother Joe cooking over the stove and notices her
hand being burnt by the flames and hot pan. Smoke rises.

AHMAD

Grandmom!!!

Everyone is startled. Maxine quickly shoves Mother Joe's
hands away from the pan. Bird, entering the kitchen,
immediately grabs a wet rag, a stick of butter, and wraps it
around Mother Joe's hands. They lead Mother Joe to a seat.
Teri checks her arm and feet.

TERI

Mama, you have been neglecting your
insulin again!

MAXINE

(to Ahmad)

Go watch the games with your daddy!

Worried, Ahmad hesitantly leaves the kitchen.

DISSOLVE TO:

MOTHER JOE'S DINNER TABLE - LATER

Everyone is seated around the dining room table, chattering
and piling their plates with food. Rev. Williams is present.
Mother Joe's hand is now bandaged. Everyone digs in.

REV. WILLIAMS

(chewing)

Slope, "do with what you have food."
Um hmm, Mother Joe, you know you
outdid yourself this Sunday.

BIRD

(proudly)

Mama calls it "compassion food"
because it bonds love ones together.

Maxine grabs her stomach in pain. No one notices.

MOTHER JOE

I dreamt of fishes last night.

Everyone stops eating and looks at Mother Joe. Afraid, Bird
and Teri look at one another.

LEM

What does that mean?

MAXINE

It means somebody in this family is pregnant or someone is gonna get pregnant, and it ain't me.

(patting her stomach)

My dream has already been counted for.

It is silent as Lem and Miles look at their wives.

KENNY

Never sweep the dust straight out the door...

TERI

If you do, you will sweep out good fortunes with it.

Teri smiles at Kenny who seems impressed. Jealous, Maxine interrupts Kenny and Teri's exchange.

MAXINE

As you see, our daddy was the most superstitious man you would ever meet.

KENNY

(mocking)

Yeah, you daddy was a crazy muthafu...

Maxine kicks Kenny underneath the table. Appalled at his mouth, the sisters angrily look at Kenny.

TERI

I remember when daddy would send us to the back room, and he would stand right here with his back to us, and tell us to change our voices and say anything we wanted. Then he'd guess which one of us three said what. And sho' nuff he guessed who said what every time! He said he knew us better than we knew ourselves, and let this game be a lesson that we would never get anything over on him or get away with s.h.i.t.!

Everyone laughs. Maxine jealously witnesses all of the attention Teri is getting. She wants to top Teri's comment.

MAXINE

When we got in trouble, we didn't have ordinary whippings, daddy would whip us with a razor-strap naked!

LEM

What kind of shit is that?

The sisters drop their forks in disgust at Lem's dirty mouth.

TERI

I asked him one day, "Daddy, why do you have to whip us that way?" He said--

MAXINE

(interrupting)

"I don't want to ruin those new clothes I bought you."

Everyone laughs. Teri gives Maxine a cold stare.

TERI

(to Maxine)

Are you finished?

Everyone stops laughing. Teri and Maxine stare one another down like old gunfighters. Mother Joe is concerned. Bird breaks the tension.

BIRD

Daddy used to scrub the back of my neck with Ajax.

Laughter again. Licking his fingers dry, Lem speaks.

LEM

Pops use to roll those dice too, huh?

Suddenly, the laughter dies again. Everyone is numbed by Lem's comment. He said the wrong thing. Mother Joe becomes emotional as everyone looks on. Bird kicks Lem under the table. A pause.

MOTHER JOE

(distraught)

We sometimes make bad choices in life. My husband's choice was gambling. And he was bad at it. We lost our first home! We had NOTHING. No money. No food....just the clothes on our back and the shoes on our feet. Maxine, you was just a baby, but I worked...on my hands and knees to help my husband make something out of nothing, AGAIN. And not once did I make a fuss about what he did. I had to stay strong...to save this family.

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Mother Joe's concerned look gets everyone's attention. 14

MOTHER JOE

(continuing)

Listen and remember...one finger
can't make no impact, but with five
fingers balled up, you can deliver a
mighty blow.

(makes a fist)

We have to be that fist.

MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE/2ND FLOOR - SAME TIME

A small tray with a plate of Mother Joe's soul food sits on the floor in front of Uncle Pete's bedroom door. The door slowly opens. A walking cane appears first from behind the door. Out of nowhere, Ahmad, Jason, and Kelly make a dash towards the door as the food disappears inside the room. Hoping for a glimpse of the old man, Ahmad sticks his foot in the door, preventing it from closing. He yells out in pain as it repetitively crushes his foot. Cursing, Ahmad begins to beg for Uncle Pete to stop bashing in his foot. Ahmad, removes his foot and watches the door shut in his face. The kids run away.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S DINING ROOM - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

The family at the table looks up from their plates at the ceiling. They can hear the kids running upstairs. Maxine angrily grabs "the broom" and stands on her chair. She begins to bang the broom hard against the ceiling.

MAXINE

They know better than to be runnin'
over mama's head.

Suddenly, the front door opens. Everyone at the table looks up to see who is it. It's a woman. She enters the living room carrying several suitcases.

The woman is about 18. And dressed like no one around here. Pretty and sexy with an edge, FAITH could give Bird a run for her money.

FAITH

What's up!!

Everyone is stunned--they drop their forks in shock. Mother Joe is joyful as she gets up and begins to hug this lost soul for dear life. Ahmad, Jason, and Kelly enter the living room to see what's all the commotion.

Faith and Ahmad make eye contact.

AHMAD (V.O)

Cousin Faith. The last time I saw her I was 10 years old. And what little I knew about her was that she was trouble with a capital T. She was grandmom's sister's daughter, or something like that, from Mississippi. The last we heard she was stripping and dancing in music videos in L.A. She decided to come back to Chicago to get reacquainted with the family. Bad news.

MOTHER JOE'S KITCHEN - LATER

The Joseph sisters are all huddled around the kitchen sink washing dishes, keeping their conversation to a minimum.

TERI

Why did she come back here?

BIRD

I don't know, but she belongs in L.A. She was born to be a video hoe.

The sisters laugh.

MAXINE

I'm not letting her stay here with mama again. You remember what happened last time?

Everyone looks at each other. They remember.

MAXINE

(continuing; a bit
envious)

Teri, you're the one living like a damn queen. You take hoochie mama in. You have the biggest house!

Teri didn't like Maxine's comment. Bird breaks the silence.

BIRD

Yea or nay.

MAXINE

Yea.

TERI

Nay!

Maxine and Teri look at Bird to break the stalemate.

BIRD

Yea.

Teri is pissed. Maxine grimaces in pain as she holds her stomach again. Upset, Teri walks out of the kitchen.

TERI

"I'm going to the drugstore to get
mama her medicine!"

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

An old basketball court sits above an empty gravel space behind Mother Joe's house. Kenny and Miles watch Lem smoke a phat joint while they shoot baskets and drink beers.

MILES

So, Lem, why did you get convicted?

Lem stops dribbling. He is sensitive about this subject, and it shows. Kenny notices this, so he changes the subject.

KENNY

Maxine tricked my dumb ass into getting pregnant again. She comes to me 9 months ago and tells me if we don't have another baby before she's 35, we'll never have another chance, "in case we change our minds," because she would have ran out of eggs--all 384 of those muthafuckas.

The men are definitely high.

KENNY

(continuing)

She says every year she's losing 12 eggs to periods 'cause the ovary loses one egg each time. Multiply 12 by her age at the time--34, subtract two for Ahmad and Kelly, you come up with 384 eggs.

Miles and Lem are on pins and needles listening.

KENNY

(continuing)

But I ain't stupid as I look. I did some research and shit. See, a woman has two ovaries! They take turns dropping eggs and shit. Divide 2 by 384 eggs which means...

LEM

She still have eggs left?

KENNY

Damn straight! 192 of those muthafuckas. Now, If she would have used up all 384 eggs by 34, with 2 healthy ovaries, she would have started her damn period at two!

The men burst out into a tremendous laugh.

FRONT PARKING AREA/MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Teri sits behind the wheel of her BMW, ready to back out amongst the tightly parked cars. Spotting a shiny new Lexus in front of her, Teri looks at the license plates, it reads, "KENNY." She is extra careful as she eases her car backward, then forward. After clearing the bumper, she accelerates. Too close after all, the cars scrape! Teri brakes, then eases her car back into her space, but the cars continue to scrape. Teri comes to a halt, hitting the steering wheel in anger at what she has done, then accidentally hits the accelerator. BOOM! The airbag bursts.

ANGLE - FRONT OF HOUSE

Maxine and the others step onto the porch to see what's causing all the ruckus. Maxine screams at the sight of her now-wrecked Lexus, then makes her way down the steps.

MAXINE

Teri! What did you do!!!?

Teri is in shock. She can't get a word out.

MAXINE

(continuing)

You did this shit on purpose, didn't you!?

Teri can't believe what she is hearing. Kenny, Miles, and Lem enter the front yard. Kenny begins to scream at the top of his lungs when he see his totaled Lexus.

Ahmad steps onto the porch. He watches his mother and his aunt Teri begin to argue.

AHMAD'S (V.O)

Now as you see Moms and Aunt Teri don't get along. Their rivalry started back in the 70s, before I was even born.

SLOW MOTION: Ahmad watches Teri and Maxine argue with vengeance.

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AHMAD'S (V.O.)
(continuing)

Aunt Teri was the one who originally went out with my daddy. They used to bump nasties, knock boots, and all that good stuff. That's before moms began to work her, "mojo."

INT. KENNY'S CAR/DRIVE-IN MOVIE - NIGHT (1979)

In the front seat, we see younger versions of Kenny and Teri. In love, Teri is leaning on Kenny as they eat a box of popcorn and watch the movie. Kenny is looking through his rearview window at Maxine, who sits in the back seat, smiling and giving him the eye.

AHMAD'S (V.O.)

A long time ago, there was a rule in the family. If anyone of the Joseph girls had a date, their beau had to bring along the entire family. Well, my dad was a bum then, couldn't make a dollar out of fifteen cents, so grandmom ask my moms, the oldest, to tag along--like a chaperone... just in case pops tried anything.

INT. ROLLER RINK - NIGHT (1979)

A packed roller rink. In the midst of the crowd, Kenny is trying to teach Teri how to skate as DISCO MUSIC pulsates around them. Maxine is showing off, zooming by, laughing and doing all the latest moves--the crazy legs and the big wheel, trying to impress Kenny. Kenny is looking at Maxine's butt in those tight jeans as she passes by.

AHMAD (V.O.)

I don't know if moms initiated this or not, but it turns out that dad couldn't resist mom's charm and crazy personality.

Maxine makes her way back around the rink, when she suddenly trips and falls on her butt a few feet away. Kenny doesn't hesitate. To his satisfaction, he quickly rushes over to Maxine's aid, leaving Teri behind. As Kenny helps Maxine to her feet, they have a special moment. Teri jealously looks on. She can't keep herself balanced. As skaters pass by, Teri screams and falls to her butt.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - AFTERNOON (1979)

Teri is walking down a street with a few friends when she notices something across the street. She sees Kenny's 1973 Cadillac. The windows are fogged. Teri makes her way over.

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The closer she gets to the car, the more she sees that Kenny is making out with another woman. Teri begins knocking on the window. The couple inside stops kissing. Hands inside the car begin to wash away the fog on the window. It's Maxine and Kenny all over each other. Teri is in shock. Maxine is speechless. There is a long pause. Feeling guilty, Maxine begins to roll down her window.

Suddenly, anger takes over Teri. Disgusted, she grabs Maxine by her hair like a mad woman, pulling out locks of hair. Maxine yells out in pain. Ready to retaliate, Maxine gives Teri a strong push in the face that sends her falling to the concrete street. Teri's books and papers fly everywhere. Maxine gets out of the car and the two sisters begin to go at it, "old-school fighting." They begin to swing, scratch, grab each other hair, and cry at the same time as they attract a crowd on the street.

ANGLE

Concerned, Kenny gets out of his cadillac. He can't help himself from smiling. These women are fighting over him.

AHMAD (V.O)

Moms stole my dad right underneath.
Aunt Teri's nose. Ever since then,
the two of them never got along.

MOTHER JOE (O.S.)

Cut out that mess!!!

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S PORCH - AFTERNOON

The sound of Mother Joe's voice brings Ahmad back to Maxine and Teri arguing on the sidewalk.

Maxine and Teri stop arguing. Mother Joe steps onto the porch and makes her way to the action. Suddenly, Maxine doubles over in pain. Alarmed, everyone rushes to her aid. Water begins to run down her legs.

MOTHER JOE

She's in labor!!

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - SUNDAY NIGHT

Ahmad and the entire Joseph family, minus Maxine and Kenny, are patiently waiting for news on Maxine's delivery. Ahmad seems to be the most nervous. He paces back and forth like a concerned father. This makes Mother Joe nervous and she tells him to have a seat. Suddenly, at the end of the hospital corridor, we see a nurse pushing a stretcher towards the waiting room. The family becomes concerned. As the stretcher gets closer, the family becomes more nervous. The stretcher get closer and closer.

The family is expecting the worse.

FAMILY'S POV

As the stretcher gets closer they see it is Kenny in labor wardrobe. He is groggy and slightly unconscious. The family is in awe. Everyone looks at the NURSE for answers.

NURSE

He fainted during the delivery.

Everyone is baffled.

NURSE

(continuing)

He's the father of a beautiful 7
pound--11 ounce baby girl.

The family claps in joy. Everyone bombards Kenny with hugs and kisses.

INT. HOSPITAL/BABY WARD - SUNDAY NIGHT

The family is happily ogling through the large glass window into the baby ward. They are smiling, talking baby talk, and waving to Kenny, who is holding his new baby girl.

AHMAD (V.O)

On top of the birth of my baby sister and Faith's unexpected appearance, no one would have ever guessed that today would be the last time my family would spend a Sunday dinner together again.

Ahmad looks around and notices that Mother Joe isn't part of the hoopla. He turns towards the waiting room where he sees Mother Joe asleep. He looks at her bandaged hand resting in her lap.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DR. BENSON'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

It is quiet. Mother Joe, with her hand still bandaged, sits on the bed while her three daughters are spread around the small hospital room. The family has just received the bad news about Mother Joe's health.

DOCTOR BENSON looks at Mother Joe staring off into space, not accepting what she has just heard. He dismisses himself. Maxine begins crying silently.

MOTHER JOE

I'm not getting my leg cut off!

TERI

(trying to control
her emotions)

Yes, you are! Mama, you are having
circulatory problems. There is no
blood flowing to your right leg.
You're diabetic. You don't keep your
sugar balanced, and you don't watch
what you eat...

Bird touches Teri on the shoulder, asking her to slow her
row. It becomes silent. Teri apologizes.

MOTHER JOE

I'm not going to let them cut my leg
off!

The sisters look at Mother Joe who's distraught. A long
pause.

AHMAD (V.O)

When I was a sick as a baby, my
grandmother took care of me. But
when grandmom got ill, things began
to fall apart.

INT. BEAUTY SHOP - DAWN

Bird opens the front door and walks into darkness. She turns
on the light. In unison, her employees shout, "Surprise!"
Confetti and balloons are thrown in the air. Led by Teri,
there are five employees, including Jada, here to celebrate
Bird's opening day at her new salon. Each of them bum rush
Bird with hugs and kisses. A big sign on the wall reads:
"BIRD'S BEAUTY SHOP."

Lem, Maxine, Kenny, Miles and the kids enter the shop behind
Bird. They are astounded at Bird's shop. This shop is chic,
glamorous--cushioned seats, luxurious furniture, and African
paintings. As if she has just conquered the world, Bird hugs
Teri for dear life.

TERI

Don't thank me. This shop is an
investment.

A crest-fallen look comes across Lem's face as he looks over
the classy establishment and listens to all his wife's
compliments. He jealously glances over at Bird. He has one
of those, "I have to get my shit together" looks on his face.

BIRD'S SHOP - LATER

Hair, nails, curlers, and combs. The saion is busy with many
sistas of all ages and styles. Gossip fills the air.

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Ahmad has found himself an after-school job--sweeping and doing janitorial work as he listens to the gossip.

The gossip suddenly ceases when a well-dressed brotha enters the beauty shop. His name is SIMUEL. He looks like one of those brothas who would model hair products in Ebony Men's Magazine. Tailored suit, this man is clean, and he knows it. Simuel passes by Ahmad.

SIMUEL

What's up, shorty?

Ahmad hesitantly speaks.

Simuel walks over to Bird and leans over to kiss her on the lips--but she moves her lips away in time. Ahmad watches this exchange.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

Damn, I have been looking under rocks and coffins for you. Got married, opened up your own shop, a brotha can't catch up with you no more.

BIRD

You were invited to the wedding.

SIMUEL

If I was there, I would have stood up right when the muthafucka ask if anyone here objects to these two people being married.

Bird doesn't comment. Simuel begins looking at Bird's ass.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

Damn, you're THICK! You were always the finest of all your sisters.

BIRD

You're lying. When I was young, my daddy always said that I was the ugliest.

SIMUEL

Your daddy was right, 'cause you must've been an ugly child to come out this beautiful.

Sweeping, Ahmad is trying to eavesdrop on Bird's conversation. Simuel reaches into his pocket and takes out a small box, a gift for Bird. Bird stops working and looks closely at Simuel.

BIRD

Simuel, I'm off-limits. I'm married now. What we had is over.

(teasing)

Furthermore, my husband's name is written all over my kitty kat.

Simuel gives a fake laugh. He places the gift in Bird's hand. Bird hesitantly opens the box--a sparkle comes on her face. Trying her best to contain it, she's impressed.

SIMUEL

You like that, don't you? Your man can't afford to buy you shit like this, can he? Oh, I forgot, he just got out of prison.

Bird's smile disappear.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

When you need me, call.

Simuel walks away as smooth as he come in. Everyone is watching Bird, who is overwhelmed by her gift. She looks up and sees Ahmad staring. Her smile disappears. She calls over one of her employees, JENNIFER, a shy young stylist, and hands the box to her--but she won't accept it.

BIRD

Do you want your job?

JENNIFER

Yes.

BIRD

Well, take the damn gift!!

She drops the box in Jennifer's hands. Jennifer opens the box and screams out in excitement. Everyone rushes over. It is an expensive bracelet. HAROME, our flamboyant hairdresser, is going crazy over it.

INT. TERI AND MILES' HOUSE - NIGHT

A large, luxurious, well-kept brownstone home. Dressed in a business suit and carrying a briefcase, Teri enters the kitchen. Miles and Jason are sitting down to eat dinner. Teri mechanically kisses each of them on the cheek.

TERI

Where is Faith?

Miles and Jason shrug. Teri takes a seat at the table.

JASON

Mama, is grandmom gonna get her leg cut off?

TERI

I don't know. I don't want to talk about that right now. Eat your food.

JASON

Miles, is grandmom gonna get her leg cut off?

This pisses Teri off. She drops her fork in anger. Miles signals Jason to eat.

MILES

(to Teri)

That civil case must be kicking your butt.

TERI

Another week of deliberation ain't helping. Plus the firm is still pushing me to be a partner.

Miles looks at Teri. She is too modest, and it irks him.

MILES

That's what you want, right?

Teri looks at Miles. A beat. She does want the world, she just don't want anybody reminding her.

TERI

I was thinking about your firm today. I know you make good money. But for 10 years, 75,000 a year is an insult to your intelligence. It's about time you ask for more money, and more incentives. You deserve better.

Miles can't believe what he is hearing. He's trying hard to stay cool. He gives Teri a cold stare and she backs down.

The DOORBELL RINGS. Expecting company, Jason quickly heads for the door. Miles eats silently. A pause.

TERI

(continuing)

There's money missing from our savings. Last week our balance was \$50,432, now it's...

MILES

(interrupting)

I took \$5,000 out. I used it for a down payment on studio time. I'm going to record a CD.

Teri can't believe what she is hearing.

TERI

A CD? I thought playing with that band once a week at that bar was just a hobby. Who's gonna buy your CD? Don't you have to be famous or something?

Miles drops his fork in disgust. He has had enough.

MILES

I can't believe this shit!

TERI

Miles, you're an entertainment lawyer. You could be making twice as much money if you were spending more time on your work than on your music. The firm you work for has a great reputation and many good clients. Instead, you spend more time on your music and those weak clients with no money and big dreams.

MILES

I don't want to argue with you, counselor, because I won't win!

TERI

Don't call me counselor!

MILES

It's my damn money!

TERI

\$18,132 dollars is your money.

MILES

(disgusted)

Tomorrow we're getting separate accounts!

TERI

No!!

Insecurity can be heard in her voice. She is threatened by his comment. She cools down.

TERI

(continuing)

For the books' sake, just let me know
when you make bank exchanges. Okay?

Teri reaches out and squeezes Miles' hands to make up.
Annoyed, Miles goes back to eating.

INT. KENNY AND MAXINE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wearing a comfortable negligee, Maxine is breast-feeding the
baby. Suddenly, the back door opens and Kenny enters,
carrying in several large boxes, taking the kitchen over with
cardboard.

MAXINE

What is all this!

Kenny opens up several boxes. He pulls out a computer,
printer, and keyboard. From another box, he pulls out a
brand new CD player. Then a new laser disc player.

KENNY

This is for the baby! IBM Power Book
computer. Top of the line. You have
CD-ROM, E-mail, fax, Internet and a
color 12600 laser printer. Mitsubishi
CD player--a 12 CD changer included.

MAXINE

(steaming hot)

Why in the fuck would she need a
computer, CD player, and a laser disc
player for? She is only 2 weeks old!
She can't even see shit!

KENNY

It may be a little too late for Ahmad
and Kelly, but you have to start 'em
off young. Look at Japan, the pre-
schools in Tokyo. The shorties over
there are way more advanced than the
shorties in the U.S. Know why?
Because they put them muthafuckas in
front of the computer the day after
they're born. Name me one Japanese
who ain't quick!

Maxine is looking at Kenny like he's crazy.

KENNY

(continuing)

You know that Japanese cat who works
for me at the garage.

(more)

KENNY (cont'd)

He brings his shorty to work, and every time that little FUCKER comes in my shop, he's telling me how to run my business and that muthafucka only 6 years old.

There is a knock at the door. Kenny opens it. Lem is standing before him. Kenny invites him in.

Maxine gets up and gives Lem a hello kiss on the lips. Kenny takes his baby girl. Maxine whispers into Kenny's ear.

MAXINE

I don't give a fuck about Su Lee, Bruce Lee, whatever the hell his name is. I want you to return all this shit. I ain't playin'.

Maxine leaves the kitchen. Lem and Kenny takes a seat.

LEM

(hesitant)

I got fired from my job. I lied on my application. They ask if you ever been convicted. I checked no.

Kenny looks into Lem's eyes and knows this is killing him.

Suddenly, the back door opens and Ahmad enters with his school bag. Ahmad and his father do their special handshake. Ahmad speaks to Lem and pours himself a glass of Kool-aid.

LEM

(continuing;
whispering)

I just got married, Kenny. I can't be unemployed. You know Bird, high-maintenance. Shit, she walks around the house in Chanel sandals. She wants to be like Teri--rich. That's why she is working her ass off 24-7 in her shop. And she will not take kindly to her new husband being jobless.

(beat)

You're a respectable businessman owning your own towing company. You and Miles got yourself together. I was hoping if you two know anybody or any job openings...I'll do anything.

Trying to eavesdrop, Ahmad finishes his Kool-aid.

KENNY

I'm always looking for drivers.

LEM

I need a hand, not a hand-out.

Kenny pats Lem on the legs.

KENNY

We'll find you something.

Lem smiles as if Kenny has lifted a burden off his shoulder. Kenny looks at his son trying to enter the conversation.

AHMAD

What's up?

Kenny gives his son that "this is grown folks business" look.

AHMAD

(continuing; jokingly)

Al'ight, but one day, you guys gonna need me.

Kenny gives his son a slap on the butt as he leaves the kitchen.

LEM

I have to find a way to explain this shit to Bird so she'll understand.

KENNY

Don't tell her. Pretend you're goin' to work everyday and come back like your corns is killing you. A woman--especially a black woman--don't want a nigga laying around. Even if your ass is watering the grass, fixing caps underneath kitchen seats, or doing other handy work around the house while you wait for that j.o.b., they still will consider you a triflin' nigga. Don't tell her.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - LATE AFTERNOON

Being wheeled off for surgery, Mother Joe is lying in a mobile hospital bed. Her nurse comes to a halt in front of the waiting room where the Joseph Family is. The anesthesia is taking its toll on Mother Joe, and she is unstable.

Ahmad watches family members hug and kiss Mother Joe. He watches Mother Joe whisper into Maxine's ear. Maxine turns to Ahmad, who is hiding behind his father. Concerned, Maxine calls Ahmad over.

== Script Fly.com ==
Afraid, Ahmad hesitantly walks up to the bed. Mother Joe reaches out to touch his chocolate face.

MOTHER JOE

Don't worry about me. I'll be find.
Just remember what I told you. What
you got going for yourself is inside
your head. They can't take that away
from you, nobody ever, 'cept by
killin' you, then it don't matter no
more 'cause you're dead.

Mother Joe gives a weak smile. She bends Ahmad's head down and kisses him on the cheek. Ahmad watches the nurse wheel Mother Joe off down the long corridor.

Silently, he watches the bed disappear into a tiny speck at the far end of the hallway.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - AFTERNOON

In the midst of haze and smoke from cigarettes, Ahmad watches his entire family impatiently wait for the result of the surgery. There are occasional glances and inspirational touches, as everyone waits.

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

The doctor and nurse hastily make their way down the hospital corridor towards the waiting room. From the look on their faces, something is very wrong. A surge of panic sweeps across everyone's face as they meet the doctor halfway.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry. There is a serious
problem.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Ahmad is pacing back and forth outside the ICU room. Expecting bad news, Ahmad doesn't want to enter the ICU. He wants to stay positive and strong. Then stops pacing, he can't take any more. He hesitantly enters the ICU.

INT. ICU

Family members are spread throughout the room, surrounding Mother Joe's bed. When Ahmad enters, they turn to face him. Ahmad is stunned when he sees everyone consoling one another.

As he walks further into the room, he sees Mother Joe lying on her bed, unconscious and hooked up to a variety of life-saving machines. Ahmad is shocked.

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All of his energy and hope is knocked out of him. Tears roll down his face as he cries for his best friend, Mother Joe. Maxine quickly walks over and begins to hug her son.

Maxine tries to lead Ahmad back to the corridor, but he refuses to leave. Teri, Bird, Miles, Lem, Faith, and the kids look on sympathetically. Ahmad begins to cry outloud. Kenny walks over to help console his son.

AHMAD (V.O.)

The doctors told my family that grandmom suffered a major stroke during her surgery and went into a coma. The news that day devastated the family.

(beat)

I didn't know what we were we going to do without Mother Joe.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON (PRESENT TIME)

Hazy sunshine cascades through the window blinds, splitting into shafts. Ahmad is staring out the window.

He comes back to the moment of reality. Ahmad looks at Mother Joe again, still asleep. Nothing. He gives a sigh and looks back out the window and continues to reflect.

INT. ALLEY - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK, 1996)

Ahmad is running in a neighborhood alley that has a row of house garages on both sides. Sweat pours off his young face as he runs as fast and hard as he ever has in his life.

AHMAD (V.O.)

All I could think about was that they sic'd the damn dog on me!

A pit bull is running a few yards behind, chasing Ahmad. Jaws wide open, the dog is ready to kill.

AHMAD (V.O.)

I could see them...laughing at me.

SLOW MOTION: Three young gang-bangers approach and watch the hunt with devilish grins, like Old West gunfighters.

Like an action hero, Ahmad slides over the hood of an illegally parked Buick, which is blocking his trail, and continues running down the alley. We suddenly hear BIONIC DOG sound effects from the old TV show The Bionic Man...the pit bull jumps over the Buick in one clean jump, landing on the ground, and continues his chase like a possessed animal.

AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

Suddenly, Mr. Wilson pulls out of his garage with his beat-up deuce and a quarter and...

An old Electra 225 quickly pulls out of one of the garages, striking the dog hard. The dog hits the pavement.

AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

..hits the son-of-a-bitch...I mean mutt. Bam! I thought the damn dog was dead.

The dog is knocked out cold...but suddenly, we hear BIONIC SOUNDS. The dog gets up and continues his hunt for Ahmad.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Mother Joe is watering her garden.

AHMAD (V.O)

I saw my grandmother in her backyard. All I could think about was getting to the yard where I'd be safe.

Ahmad enters the yard and closes the gate door. We hear the bionic dog coming. Suddenly, it jumps the 12 foot gate and comes after Ahmad and Mother Joe.

AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

My grandmom had that look on her face... that look you get when you want to beat somebody's ass.

SLOW MOTION: Mother Joe points the hose towards the charging dog and begins spraying fiercely. The BIONIC SOUND effect is going haywire. The dog runs back and jumps over the gate.

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Ahmad stands before his classroom, holding his paper. Classmates are cracking up because everyone knows this was exaggerated. Some of the pupils are chanting "Cu! Cujo! Cujo!" Ahmad continues reading.

AHMAD

(serious)

My grandmother saved my life and that's why she is my inspiration.

MRS. DAWSON, a teacher who doesn't allow for p. banging on the blackboard to quiet her pupils.

== Script Fly.com ==

She looks particularly at LOUIS, a chubby 12 year old, the class troublemaker.

MRS. DAWSON

Keep it up, Louis! And see you won't be graduating this June!

(to Ahmad)

Ahmad, what in the...

The SCHOOL BELL rings--saved again. Ahmad rushes to his seat to get his things. THERESA, fair-skinned, speaks to him.

THERESA

I liked your story, Ahmad. I'm sorry about your grandmother.

INT. SMALL COMMERCIAL PRINTING COMPANY - MORNING

Lem stands at a large front desk that reads: "PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT." The RUMBLE AND ROAR of printing machines is in the b.g. In his best suit and tie, Lem is here to find work.

A round white MAN, apparently the owner, approaches the front desk and hands Lem an application.

The man's impersonal attitude knocks the surge of confidence out of Lem.

LEM

Kenny Simmons recommended that I come down here to seek work.

MAN

(impressed)

Good! Kenny Simmons' company does a lot a good work for us on our trucks.

The Man walks away to leave Lem with his application.

SEAT

Lem is sweating over his application, making sure everything is just right. He stops at the question - "Have you ever been convicted of a felon?" He hesitates, contemplating whether to lie again or tell the truth.

PERSONNEL DESK

Lem nervously stands at the front desk. The man, wearing glasses, casually looks over the application. Lem watches his every expression. With a stern face, the man gets to THE question--checked "Yes." This hits him like a ton of bricks. He takes off his glasses and puts down the application.

MAN

(uncomfortable)

We will call you.

LEM

(frustrated)

Listen, there is a sign outside your door that says you are willing to train. Well, I got experience on presses--and I'm a quick learner! I can do the work.

MAN

(pause)

We'll call you.

The man walks away. Lem is emotionless.

EXT. BUSY NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - AFTERNOON

School has just let out and Ahmad is walking home with two of his classmates, Theresa and Louis. With school bags on their backs, they walk down a busy street.

THERESA

I want to be a pediatrician.

LOUIS

Why? Nobody wants to be a pediatrician.

THERESA

Because I always wanted to have a brother or a sister, and I like kids.

AHMAD

I want to be a businessman like my father. So I can tell people what to do and shit. And fire them when they're late.

THERESA

(to Louis)

Since you're so smart, genius, what do you want to be when you grow up or do you not have any goals whatsoever?

Louis can't answer that question. He is definitely a kid who has all the opportunities but no direction.

THERESA

(continuing)

Just like I thought, no brains. I don't know why I took the time out to develop a congenial relationship with you.

The kids come to a stop when they notice MILKBONE standing on the street corner up ahead. Milkbone brings fear in the three of them. At 17, he is the local drug dealer. He's making a transaction in front of a local corner store--Ahmad, Theresa, and Louis' destination.

AHMAD

Looks like we won't be going to the store today.

LOUIS

He don't scare me.

AHMAD

Yeah right, when did you get balls?

LOUIS

I always had them, just never let 'em hang.

AHMAD

(looking at Milkbone)

Look at him. I bet he is carrying his 9mm in his back.

LOUIS

So. Everybody carries a gun. If he mess with me, I'll get my brother's gat. Daddy didn't raise no sucka.

THERESA

You don't even have a daddy.

AHMAD

You talking all that shit, Louis. If you're so bad why don't you go over there...just like I thought! Sucka.

Louis is still, suddenly he makes his way across the street towards the store as Theresa and Ahmad watch in disbelief.

AHMAD

(continuing)

Fool. We can't let him go over there by himself.

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They make their way over towards the store behind Louis. To their dismay, Milkbone finishes his drug transaction and looks in their direction.

MILKBONE

Yo, shorty! Chocolate!

Scared, Ahmad stops in his tracks. He knows Milkbone is talking about him because he is the darkest of the three.

MILKBONE

(continuing)

Yo, kid! Bring me out some barbecue chips why you up in that muthafucka. Make sure they Ruffles, too. I don't fuck with that other bullshit!

Scared to death, Ahmad wonders who is going to pay for this.

INT. CORNER STORE - AFTERNOON

Ahmad is sweating at the cash register as Theresa brings him a bag of Hot Stuff barbecue chips. Having already paid for his candy, Louis has lost all his balls, he's scared out his mind. Ahmad hesitantly gives the counter lady a \$20 bill. Change \$18.65 cents. Scared, they all make their way outside.

EXT. CORNER STORE - AFTERNOON

Ahmad walks up to Milkbone, finishing another drug transaction, and hands him his chips. Milkbone looks at the bag and goes crazy.

MILKBONE

What the...nigga, I said Ruffles muthafucka! Not Hot Stuff!

Ahmad looks at Theresa who chose the wrong brand. Ahmad is pissing in his pants.

MILKBONE

(continuing)

Can't you read, nigga! Is that private school over there teaching you shit, or are you illiterate? Get the fuck out of here! Give me that!

Milkbone takes the bag of chips and the \$18.65 cents out of his hands. Searching for money, Milkbone goes into Ahmad's pants and takes out \$10 that looks like it's been through a washing machine. Ahmad is in disbelief because he didn't know he had \$10 in his pocket. The kids quickly walk away, leaving Milkbone cursing under his breath.

INT. BUSY AVENUE STREET - AFTERNOON

Ahmad, Theresa, and Louis are walking down a busy street. A HORN honking in their direction catches their attention. Ahmad notices his uncle Lem, dressed in a suit, behind the wheel of his Bronco. Lem signals Ahmad over for a ride.

INT. LEM'S BRONCO - AFTERNOON

Lem is driving down a busy street with Ahmad as Gene Cahn's "DON'T LET IT GO TO YOUR HEAD" plays on the radio.

AHMAD

Why you all G'd up today, Lem?

LEM

Long story.

AHMAD

I'm a very good listener.

LEM

Yeah, you're nosey too. If I tell you something, you have to promise you won't tell your aunties.

Ahmad nods his head, an oath.

LEM

(continuing)

I was fired from my job last week. So I'm trying to find another one. And it ain't going so well.

Ahmad takes in what Lem has just told him. After a beat--

AHMAD

You'll find a gig soon.

LEM

You think so, huh? You have a lot of confidence to be just a shorty.

Ahmad smiles. Lem's smile disappears as he becomes serious.

LEM

(continuing)

Did you know that I spent some time in prison?

AHMAD

(nods yes)

Grandmom told me. She said we shouldn't hold that against you 'cause we all make mistakes.

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Lem smiles at the thought of Mother Joe sticking up for him.

LEM

(inspirational)

Mother Joe. She is gonna be al'ight.
She gonna come out of her coma, watch.

Ahmad has a look of confidence.

AHMAD

I heard you were a big-time street
pharmaceutical, Lem.

LEM

When I was young and stupid, I used
to bag drugs for my cousin who was a--

AHMAD

Street pharmaceutical.

Lem laughs as he turns at an intersection, Ahmad looks out
his window and sees Milkbone standing at the same
corner...with Ahmad's money and all. Milkbone watches Ahmad
pass by him.

LEM

Always love yourself Ahmad for who
you are. Then you'll never be in the
same predicament that I'm in....
Mistakes you make now, you'll be
paying for the rest of your life.
Most of these young niggas out here
slanging, if you put a mirror in
front of them, they won't like what
they see. Always love yourself and
you'll be al'ight.

INT. MILES AND TERI'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Dressed in a revealing tank top and short shorts, Faith is
teaching her little cousin Jason the dance moves seen in a
music video that Faith is in on the family's large screen TV.
Faith is one hell of a dancer, transforming dance into an art
form.

Faith grabs Miles by the hands and pulls him out into the
middle of the floor. They all begin to chant, "Go Miles, go
Miles!" Miles begin to imitate Faith's version of the
"butterfly." Everyone laughs at Miles' two left feet.

Suddenly, the front door opens. Teri enters and stops in her
tracks at what she sees going on. Embarrassed, Miles and
Jason stop dancing. Teri looks closely at Faith's skimpy
wardrobe and then back at her family.

== Script Fly.com ==

Teri walks into the kitchen. Miles follows her.

MILES

How is Mother Joe?

TERI

(sad, hesitant)

Not good.

Faith fixes herself a drink. She has worked up a sweat.

TERI

(continuing; to Miles)

I won't be able to make it to your performance tonight.

This hits Miles like a shit of bricks. He is bothered. Teri doesn't even look sympathetic.

TERI

(continuing; knavish)

I'm swamped with work from the office. Sorry. Maybe, next week.

Miles has heard this too many times before. Faith sees he's disappointed.

MILES

You said that last week.

Teri snaps, slamming her briefcase down on the counter.

TERI

Miles, I'm not in the mood to argue with you about your music!

Angry, Miles leaves the kitchen. Teri turns and looks disapprovingly at Faith's wardrobe.

TERI

(continuing)

Did you find a job yet?

FAITH

No.

(smirking, finishing her Kool-aid)

It's hard for me to get motivated to look for a gig when I can't take labor seriously. Think about it, Teri, the common man and woman will spend countless hours and minutes of their life achieving absolutely, nothing but a paycheck. It does nothing for the soul.

TERI

(sarcastic)

There is a lesson in there somewhere.
How something so simple and
preposterous as DANCING can take the
place of the common work force in
society and make everyone joyful and
content.

Faith cracks up laughing...then suddenly turns serious.

FAITH

I don't like staying here any more
than you want me here. I didn't ask
for this shit, Teri. I'm getting my
own place.

TERI

(laughing)

I'm just dying to see what you are
going to get into this time, Faith.
You gonna run Mama's credit up again,
or make her co-sign for a car and
leave her to pay the notes?

FAITH

You have a very good memory, Teri.

TERI

...Or are you gonna get in trouble
and let her put up the house to post
your bail, then skip town?

(pause)

If you start any shit, Faith, I
guarantee you'll be on the next
Greyhound heading back to where you
came from!

Faith's smile disappears.

INT. HOSPITAL ICU - SATURDAY NIGHT

Teri, Miles, Bird, Lem, Faith, Maxine, and Kenny, who's
holding the baby, sit quietly around Mother Joe's bed.
Machines hooked all over her body, it's obvious she's still
in a coma.

AHMAD'S (V.O.)

Grandmom's illness was beginning to
take a toll on the family and no one
knows where to direct their anger,
but at one another.

(more)

AHMAD'S (cont'd; V.O.)

Grandmom always said a family abiding together in a time of need would make everyone strong. Funny how no one remembered those words, but me.

Maxine looks at her watch, breaks the silence.

MAXINE

It's getting late. I guess we should get an early start in the kitchen tomorrow.

Everyone is taken aback by Maxine's comment.

TERI

Maxine, you're not expecting to have a Sunday dinner tomorrow, are you?

Maxine is surprised that Teri asked such a question.

MAXINE

Why not?

TERI

Mama is in a damn coma for Christ's sake.

Teri and Maxine stare at one another. Kenny tries to add his input, but Maxine cuts him off like his words don't mean anything.

MAXINE

You fucked up my Lexus. I won't let you fuck up a 40 year old family tradition.

TERI

So this is about the Lexus?

MAXINE

No. This is about a whole bunch of shit!

TERI

(interrupting Miles)

Then tell me, Max. What? About my 5 bedroom brownstone, about daddy putting all his faith in me after you chose to marry my MAN at 19 and drop out of college? Or, is it about me graduating from law school? Then what, Maxine?

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Maxine is hurt and speechless. Miles tries to speak but is interrupted by Bird as if his input doesn't mean anything.

BIRD

Maybe we should wait until Mama is better and back at home with us.

A beat.

MAXINE

Hands in the air, of those who don't want to have a Sunday dinner tomorrow!

Maxine looks around. No one raises their hands. A smirk comes across Maxine's face. This is what she wanted.

MAXINE

(continuing; smiling)

Hands in the air, of those who would like to be sitting at a table tomorrow in front of some hot dressing, black-eyed peas, cornbread, fried chicken, greens, and egg pie. And chitlins.

BIRD

Chitlins? Tomorrow is not a holiday.

Maxine looks around. To her surprise, no one raises their hands. Maxine angrily looks at her husband who quickly raises his hands in the air. A pause.

TERI

I won't let you disrespect my mama, like she is already dead.

MAXINE

You get on my fucking nerves sometimes!!

Maxine gets up to go after Teri, her husband holds her down as the women begin to argue over Mother Joe's bed. Suddenly, everyone begins to argue and add their opinion.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Ahmad, Kelly, and Jason are sitting quietly listening to the adults argue inside. They watch a doctor rush into Mother Joe's room.

THE DOCTOR (O.S.)

I'm sorry! I'm going to have to ask all of you to leave, right now! We need it quiet! Please. Go!

Silence. Maxine and Kenny storm out first. Maxine quickly snatches Ahmad. She and Kenny drag the kids away and angrily walk away without saying good-bye.

AHMAD (V.O)

It was quite obvious that my mother and Aunt Teri's rivalry was motivated by envy. Teri was jealous of my mom and her life with my dad, and my mom was jealous of Teri and her success...success she abandoned to have a family. But now their competition was beginning to affect the family.

Baffled, Ahmad looks back at his cousin and family, all going their separate ways.

AHMAD (V.O)

(continuing)

My mom and Aunt Teri were only thinking about THEMSELVES. That was the first mistake. Grandmom spent her entire life thinking about all the family.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOTHER JOE'S KITCHEN - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Bird is sweating her ass off cooking alone in Mother Joe's kitchen. Food, supplies, and dishes are all over the kitchen and disoriented, as Bird slaves away, preparing the meal alone...the usual stuff...oxtail stew, fried chicken...

AHMAD'S (V.O)

What I remember most about Sundays is the smell of Mother Joe's fried chicken and the aroma of her sweet cornbread she made look like pound cake just so the kids would eat it.

Bird keeps cooking...mustard turnips, peas, hot water bread...

AHMAD (V.O)

Then she would mesmerize us with her stories and experiences.

Sweating, Bird opens the stove and pulls out a baking sheet with tea cakes. She stops when she hears the CHURCH BELL ringing--Sunday morning church is over. Bird is concerned, wondering whether her family will show for dinner.

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INT. MOTHER JOE'S DINING ROOM - SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

Bird and Lem sit alone at the big table waiting impatiently for her family to show up. The table is prepared, the food is steaming. The only other person present is Rev. Williams, chowing down on his food.

Lem sees his wife is very upset that no one else is present.

AHMAD (V.O)

But this Sunday, Mother Joe wasn't with us and no one showed up for dinner. It was the first time our traditional Sunday dinner was broken.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE/2ND FLOOR - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Bird places a tray of food in its usual spot on the floor in front of Uncle Pete's door. Bird looks at the doorknob, curious to see how Uncle Pete is doing. She quietly turns the doorknob but finds it locked. She knocks on the door, hoping for an answer. Nothing. She heads downstairs.

AHMAD (V.O)

So the house stayed empty--with the exception of Uncle Pete.

INT. BIRD AND LEM'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Bird, Jada, Harome, and NICOLE, another stylist, are on their lunch break and are here to chow--courtesy of Bird's disastrous dinner. They enter through Bird's back door.

Bird opens her refrigerator and takes out the left-overs.

HAROME

You cooked all this food and none of your people showed up? Girlfriend, I know you wanted to hurt somebody.

Jada grabs a cold piece of chicken and begins eating it.

JADA

We can help you get rid of some of this food--got to represent.

A loud NOISE is heard in another part of the apartment. It alarms everyone. They quiet down.

HAROME

What was that?

Bird gives a shrug. The noise occurs again, confirming that someone is in the house. Jada immediately grabs an eight-inch knife, to everyone's disbelief.

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The women arm themselves with brooms. Harome has an umbrella.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

They all creep into the living room, suspiciously looking around. The noise is heard again, coming from inside the bathroom where the door is closed. They walk over towards the door, two on each side of the threshold.

The door opens and they are on the intruder's ass. Attacking with the umbrella and broom until the intruder falls to the floor, yelling in pain. Harome drops the umbrella and jumps on the intruder's back and begin to swing like a woman.

Bird stops swinging and notices something. The intruder is her husband, Lem, clothed in only a towel.

BIRD

Stop! Stop!!

Harome stops swinging.

HAROME

Damn! Ain't you s'posed to be workin'?

Lem is frightened out of his mind as his towel falls to the ground, displaying his naked body.

Harome and the girls are in shock as they look down at Lem's dick. By the way these women are staring, he must be well-hung. Harome is even stretching his neck to get a peek.

HAROME

(continuing; to Bird)

Girlfriend, you got it going on!!!

Bird picks up the towel and tosses it towards Lem who covers himself up. She's pissed.

BIRD

Get in here!

Bird walks into the bathroom as Lem follows her close behind. She shuts the door. Harome looks at Jada and Nicole.

HAROME

Did you see that thang?

INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

LEM

I got fired.

Bird is in shock.

BIRD

You can't take working 9 to 5, Lem?
Did you quit? Are you in trouble
again?

LEM

They fired me because they found out
I lied on my application about being
convicted.

Bird finally calms down. She knows this isn't easy for Lem
to say. She sympathetically looks at him. A pause.

BIRD

Why couldn't you tell me that in the
first place, Lem?

LEM

I wanted to, but Kenny told me it
would be in your best interest that
you didn't know.

BIRD

Kenny!! You listened to Kenny! The
same man who fainted like a bitch in
his wife's delivery room?

Bird stops taunting and slows her roll. Bird can't help but
look down at her husband's dick for a second.

LEM

The system. It's bullshit! They
lock you up, and then expect you to
do something better with your life.
But when you get back out here, there
ain't nothing better 'cause the
crackers won't give you a second
chance. They leave you with nothing
but slangin' again. That's how the
white man set up the system. That's
how it's gonna be.

BIRD

Lem, don't you think we used up all
that "white man shit." White man
this, white man that. I'm sick of
black men using that as an excuse!!
It's tired!

LEM

(aggravated)

I have been on 6 muthafuckin'
interviews!! They won't hire me!!!
What in the fuck you know about 'being
a BLACK MAN!!

Bird_cools down a bit. A beat.

BIRD

(apologetic)

I don't....I'm sorry. I don't know what it's like to be a black man.

(beat)

Lem, my shop is doing well. I will take care of the bills, car note, whatever. Don't let this shit discourage you, baby. We'll find something. Keep searchin' through those want ads. I can talk to some people who may--

LEM

(insecure)

I don't need your help, Bird!

Bird is shocked by Lem's comment. She is hurt.

LEM

(continuing)

Don't worry, I will find a job.

BIRD

Baby, I'm not worried.

He looks at Bird who innocently looks on. A beat. Bird can't help but look at his dick once again.

LEM

And stop looking at my dick!!

Upset, Lem grabs his towel and covers himself up.

INT. ICU ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ahmad slowly enters the ICU where Mother Joe is unconscious, still hooked up to machines. With a book bag in his hand, he stares at his grandmother. Despite heavy traffic, no one notices him. He grabs a chair and sits next to her. Seeing her in this state, it's hard for him to control his emotions and stay strong. He begins to whisper to Mother Joe.

AHMAD

I know you think I been avoiding you, but I haven't. Every time I come by to see you, there's always lots of strange people around.

A smile appears on Ahmad's face. He looks back down at Mother Joe. She ain't moving. He looks away.

AHMAD

(continuing)

Anyway, I'm doing good in school. I can't wait for graduation. Mama told me yesterday she can't believe I'm gonna be in high school next school year....I know you're wondering how everyone else is doing.

Not knowing what else to say...he decides to tell all.

AHMAD

(continuing)

I think Aunt Teri is going kick Faith's ass. Nobody likes her but I don't know why. She's cool with me...Lem got fired from his job.

(beat)

...I didn't want to tell you, but we didn't have Sunday dinner yesterday. No one showed up....we need you grandmom....I better be going now. I have a lot of homework.

He gets up to walk away, but stops to say one last thing.

AHMAD

(continuing)

I was hoping when you get out of here, we can get started on your garden behind the house and get it ready for the summer. It's 'bout that time. Yeah, I know I hate that stuff, but I'll help you.

Ahmad looks at Mother Joe. He wants to kiss her, but he's afraid to touch her. He walks out as silently as he entered.

INT. JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

It's an intimate, classy, legendary R&B-jazz nightclub. Miles sits at the piano and microphone as he and his 5-piece band do their best rendition of Maze's "Love and Pain." Miles is singing his ass off to a packed audience, who's grooving with him.

FRONT ENTRANCE

Faith, dressed to impress in a revealing skin-tight dress, enters the smoke-filled club with a male friend. She begins grooving to the music immediately. She spots Miles singing. She and her date are led to a table up front. As the song ends, the audience gives a standing ovation.

Miles announces they're taking a break, then looks out into the crowd, surprised to see Faith waving to him and immediately taken aback by her beauty. He hasn't seen her like this. She is wearing that dress well.

Miles walks over to the bar, lighting a cigarette. Faith walks over with a smile on her face.

FAITH

That was the bomb! I'm serious, you was jamming! I didn't know you could sing like that, cousin!

Miles is a little embarrassed. Faith ask for a hit off his cigarette. She slowly takes a puff.

FAITH

(continuing)

You are good--better than your band.

MILES

(offended)

Excuse me?

FAITH

You have presence and showmanship. Your band is lacking in that category. Also your bass player and drummer weren't locking--their rhythm was off. These people out here wouldn't notice that, but I did. Remember, I'm a dancer. I know rhythm and motion.

Miles is impressed with her comments. He knows she's right.

MILES

We're working on it.

FAITH

I hope they are not serious musicians.

MILES

These guys have professional day jobs. They're friends of mine.

FAITH

Miles Davis put it best, "Music don't have any friends."

This hits Miles like a ton of bricks, he wants to be taken as a serious musician.

MILES

What do you know about Miles Davis?

FAITH

C'mon, jazz...R&B. I love all that shit. All that early 70s shit was heavily influenced by jazz. Earth, Wind, and Fire, Kool and The Gang, and Roy Ayers--now his shit was the bomb. Did you know he was responsible for bringing the Vibraphone into the so-called pop music arena?

Miles is laughing to himself, surprised at her knowledge. A quiet moment passes between them--they look at one another.

FAITH

(continuing; serious)

I have a message for you...Teri said she wouldn't be able to make it again tonight.

This hits him hard. He was looking forward to his wife's presence.

FAITH

(continuing)

Sorry.

MILES

She doesn't have any interest in seeing me do anything but make money.

(beat)

Hey, your date is looking over here.

FAITH

Fuck him. We're family. I'm talking to my cousin.

(beat)

I need to get my career together before I think about a man. I want to dance and choreograph the Oscars and shit, Broadway musicals. I've studied and read more books this year than I have in my entire life, even joined organizations. After all that shit, I learned that the only thing that keeps me sane is dancing. And I'm going to put every inch of my energy into it, so help me, Jesus.

Miles listens attentively. He's a bit inspired and it shows.

MILES

You want a drink?

Faith looks into his eyes. They're headed into new territory.

FAITH

Long Island Ice Tea.

He smiles and signals the bartender over. Faith notices a black man in his mid 30s, casually-dressed, holding a drink across the room.

FAITH

(continuing)

Look at him. He is a security officer who goes to great lengths to pretend to be more. You can tell by his shoes and cashmere overcoat. He's here tonight as all Thursday nights to get some ass. He may succeed because he has a nice car and pad, but it won't last, because he is too cheap, too boring and feeble-minded to excite anyone.

Faith comes out of her trance and looks at Miles.

MILES

Do you always read people like that?

FAITH

Yes.

MILES

Shit, I wonder what you think of me.

FAITH

I don't know what I think of you, Miles. That's what I like about you. I can't read you.

Miles is stunned by Faith's comment. Suddenly, Roy Ayers' "IN THE SUNSHINE" comes over the speakers.

FAITH

(continuing)

Ah, shit! This is my jam! Let's dance!

Miles hesitantly accepts as they head over to the small dance floor where a few folks are dancing.

They dance slow and close. Miles is quiet as his eyes do all the talking. He feels contentedly uncomfortable.

Faith's eyes are closed, letting her body take her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - AFTERNOON

With his book bag on his back, Ahmad is casually walking down a busy boulevard. Cars zooms by him. A city bus in the distance is making its way towards him. He quickly makes a dash to the nearest bus stop, a few feet ahead, to catch the bus. The large city bus pulls to his stop, doors open. The BUS DRIVER is a young woman, 26. Smacking on her bubble gum, she looks like she don't take no shit.

Ahmad tries to takes a step on the bus before...

BUS DRIVER

What in God's name do you think you're doing?

AHMAD

I have places to go, things to do.

BUS DRIVER

(chewing gum wildly)

No kids get on MY bus on weekdays, during the hours of 7 to 3.. Take your narrow ass to school!

The bus driver closes the door. She can't drive away because Ahmad looks too cute. She opens the door again.

BUS DRIVER

(continuing)

And say no to drugs!

The bus driver closes the door again and drives away.

Ahmad continues to walk down the sidewalk. A tow truck zooming by in lighting speed catches Ahmad's attention. In the truck he sees a familiar face. Ahmad becomes scared stiff, like he seen a ghosts. He slyly looks down the street, watching the truck zoom down the road on its way. Ahmad give a sigh of relief. He is not convinced that he is safe from his concern. He suddenly takes off running down the sidewalk. Running as fast as he ever has in his life, Ahmad enters an alley.

ALLEY

The alley is long, industrial, but that doesn't stop Ahmad from running like he's in the Olympics. Running at top speed, he draws closer to the end of the alley. Suddenly, he slows down. Concerned, he sees something up ahead. He stops in his tracks at what he sees.

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AHMAD'S POV

SLOW MOTION: The giant tow truck, shining, chrome rims, bright lights, tinted window, and a roaring machine enters the alley. MADDOG is printed on the truck in gold letters. We've never seen a tow truck like this. It's the same tow truck Ahmad saw on the boulevard.

In complete shock, Ahmad watches the truck slowly approach, making its way towards him. The engine is alive, roaring like an animal. Ahmad doesn't move as the truck keeps coming until it stop within inches of him. The truck is hovering over him several feet above.

AHMAD'S POV

The driver door opens. We only see the legs of the driver getting out, walking towards Ahmad. His identity is not revealed. Ahmad looks like he has seen the devil.

ANGLE

Who is this masked man? The man takes off his shades. It's Ahmad's father, Kenny.

KENNY
Going anywhere?

Frightened, Ahmad shakes his head no.

INT. KENNY'S TRUCK "MADDOG"/MOVING - AFTERNOON

Ahmad feels like he is riding on a stallion. The ROAR of the Maddog is getting Ahmad hyped.

AHMAD
(touching the
dashboard)
Maddog!!

Kenny has a concerned look on his face.

KENNY
So, are you gonna tell me why your
butt is not in school?

Ahmad begins to tell a fib before his dad interrupts.

KENNY
(continuing)
No tall tales please.

Ahmad becomes serious.

AHMAD

I went to the hospital to see if
grandmom came out of her coma yet.

(beat)

I had a dream last night that she
did. That's why I skipped school.
I wanted to go and see for myself.
Of course, it was just a dream.

Kenny sympathetically looks at his son.

KENNY

I'm very proud of you son.

AHMAD

For what?

KENNY

I know it's hard on you with your
grandmom in the hospital. But you're
taking this like a man.

AHMAD

But I cried though.

KENNY

So! Men sometimes cry.

AHMAD

I never seen you cry.

KENNY

(pause)

It's been a long time, but I cry. I
cried when the doctors told me and
your mother that you'd never walk.

Ahmad looks at his father who is reminiscing.

KENNY

(continuing; beat)

You're very strong, son. Stronger
than some of the other folks in the
family.

AHMAD

(thinking about it)

Grandmom would want me to be strong.
If I don't, she'd find out. E.S.P.,
remember?

Kenny smiles. He thinks about what his son have just said.

KENNY

Ahmad. What do you think grandmom is thinking about right now?

A beat.

AHMAD

She probably would want the family to stop fighting and have a Sunday dinner.

Kenny is speechless.

EXT. GRAMMAR SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Kenny pulls Maddog up in front of Ahmad's school. Ahmad looks out the window at the school. The playground is deserted and everyone is inside studying.

INT. MADDOG

Ahmad begins to get out of the truck. Kenny doesn't want his son to leave.

KENNY

Wait a minute. You want to hang out with me today.

A giant smile crosses Ahmad's face.

LATER

Kenny and Ahmad are high rolling down the street in Maddog.

KENNY

Look inside that glove compartment for me and hand me that black cassette tape.

Ahmad pulls out a cassette tape and hands it to his father.

AHMAD

Who is it?

Kenny puts in the cassette. Suddenly, James Brown, "Soul Power" kicks in loud. Ahmad watches his father begin to move and dance behind the steering wheel like James Brown.

KENNY

(like an announcer)

It's the hardest working man in show business, Godfather of Soul, Mr. Please, please, please.
(more).

KENNY (cont'd)

There is only two men in our generation, son, who can demand that you get off your feet and dance through their music. James Brown and George Clinton. Well, Clinton is bad but he borrowed J.B.'s entire horn section, Maceo Parker, Fred Wesley, so that makes J.B. the original hardest, and funkier brother dead or alive!

The two of them get into the music. Kenny begins to encourage Ahmad to sing along. Call and respond. Ahmad begins to sing the hooks, "Soul Power," and his father sings the fills, "I got to have it."

DI TO:

MONTAGE

Fast paced montage of Ahmad and Kenny towing cars. James Brown's "Soul Power" continues to play, LOUD. They tow wrecked cars, wrecked trucks, cars that need repair, vans, they jump a few cars.

EXT. KENNY'S TOWING COMPANY LOT - NIGHT

Kenny and Ahmad are walking towards a building with a large sign that reads "KENNY TOWING COMPANY." The lot is packed with tow trucks and employees. Cars are being towed in and out of the lot. Ahmad and Kenny enter the main building.

INT. KENNY TOWING COMPANY - NIGHT

Entering the shop, Kenny speaks to his assistant who's on the dispatcher getting information and dictating it over the two-way radio. Tired and overworked, Kenny takes a seat at his junkie desk. He looks at his son who is still fresh.

KENNY

Young blood, you have to promise me something. Don't tell your mother about today. If she found out you was hanging out with a bum like me instead of being in school. She would skin me alive. Like a squirrel. You ever seen a squirrel being skinned?

Ahmad shakes his head no.

KENNY

(continuing)

It's ugly. This is our little secret.

AHMAD
My mouth is sealed.

Kenny and his son do their special hand shake.

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SHOP - AFTERNOON

Hair and nails are being done. Gossip fills the air. Bird is the instigator as she helps Ahmad clean her work area.

DOORWAY

Simuel enters the shop--mean and clean--Versaci suit and matching tie. He immediately gets everyone's attention.

SIMUEL
(touching Ahmad's
head)
What up, shorty?

This time, Ahmad doesn't speak. To Simuel's surprise Bird rushes over to him. She drags Simuel over to her salon chair.

BIRD
Have a seat! Let me take your
briefcase, and relax.

Bird places Simuel's briefcase on her work station, grabs a couple of Jet magazines and hands them to him. In one quick flash she places an apron around him. Simuel has died and gone to heaven.

BIRD
(continuing; talking
a mile a minute)
Simuel, I'm gonna give you a free
haircut. I'm gonna hook you up.
What would you like, close fade
around the edges? What about a
slope, flat-top, Afro, or bald?

Simuel likes the generosity.

SIMUEL
You have an orgasm today thinking
about me when you was giving a perm?

BIRD
(serious)
I need a favor, Simuel.

This is what Simuel wants. A devious smile crosses his face. Ahmad watches Bird ask Simuel for a favor,

AHMAD (V.O.)

When I first saw him. I knew Simuel was up to no good. He had that look. He wanted Bird real bad. And he would do anything to get her. I knew it would only be a matter of time before something bad happened. But he did wear some phat suits though!

Bird finishes asking Simuel her favor. Smiling, Simuel begin to nod his head like, "I can do this." Simuel gets serious. He looks down at Bird's body.

SIMUEL

What you gonna do for me, Bird? This is Americ, and shit, nothing's free.

Bird stops smiling. She is speechless.

INT. MILES' CAR - AFTERNOON - MOVING

Miles is driving in a traffic jam as he cranks THE ISLEY BROTHERS in his cassette deck, he's grooving. He casually looks across the street when he notices a familiar face.

INT. SIDEWALK ACROSS THE STREET - AFTERNOON

Faith is having a big argument with a tall brotha with dreds. The DRED MAN is in his late 20s, Jamaican, the artsy type. He is carrying a bass guitar across his back. The argument between Faith and him looks fierce. Pedestrians stare.

INT. MILES' CAR - AFTERNOON

Cars are HONKING at Miles to go. Miles is contemplating whether to assist Faith or continue on his way. He looks back towards the sidewalk, the argument is now getting hostile. Concerned, Miles pulls over.

INT. SIDEWALK ACROSS THE STREET - AFTERNOON

Faith and the man are in a shouting match. Miles walks up to Faith and the man.

MILES

What's the problem?

FAITH

(surprised to see
Miles)

I'm five minutes away from the biggest audition of my entire life, and this so-called music man is trying to fuck me over!

Faith digs into her bra and takes out a \$10 bill. She gives the dred man \$50 total. It pisses him off that she has more money than she led him to believe. He angrily balls it up and throws it at her. She picks up the money.

FAITH

(continuing)

I'm gonna fuck you up, dred man!

Miles watches Faith, now cursing to herself. She closes her eyes and begins counting to 10 to calm herself down.

Then she looks at Miles. Lighting has struck. She gets an idea as she stares at Miles.

MILES

What?

FAITH

You can help me, Miles. They have a piano upstairs in the audition room. I have a tape with a phat beat. You can play anything to it.

Miles begins to decline.

FAITH

(continuing)

Please, cousin. I need your help! This is the biggest audition of my life. I'm begging you. I'd owe you, cousin. Please!

Faith gives Miles a look he can't turn down.

INT. AUDITION DANCE HALL - AFTERNOON

This large dance room has beautiful wood floors and giant windows facing the city skyline. Dressed in leotards and shorts, Faith stands in the middle of the room facing three white casting directors looking on. Faith is stretching and getting into character.

She looks up at the casting directors and nods that she is ready. She walks over to Miles.

ANGLE

Miles sits behind an old grand piano, watching Faith walk towards him. She pushes the play button on a cassette player next to the piano. Miles is more nervous than Faith, as if he's the one auditioning.

MILES

What do I play?

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Faith doesn't know how to answer this, so she says the first thing that comes to mind.

FAITH

Play something you can feel. Then I
will feel it.

She smiles as the MUSIC beat begins. It is a slow, moderate beat with a hip-hop flavor. Miles listens and begins playing, something bluesy. He watches Faith dance a slow modern and jazz dance. She is beautiful on her feet. Every step is precise, sensual, and organic. She feels his music as she dances her ass off.

Miles begins to get comfortable behind the piano, improvising his music to Faith's moves. They complement one another. Faith is becoming more intense, so is Miles, and they both finish to a finale. Faith is breathing intensely, her eyes still closed as Miles' music ends. Slowly, her eyes open. Faith turns and looks at him. They are both proud.

The casting directors look on. No one says a word, but their faces show it all. They are overwhelmingly impressed.

INT. HOSPITAL ICU - NIGHT

Teri, her son Jason, Miles, Faith, Bird, and Lem are seated around Mother Joe's bed. Mother Joe rests in her coma. Everyone has the look of doubt and faith at the same time as they wait patiently for Mother Joe to gain consciousness.

Suddenly, Maxine and her immediate family enters the room-- Kenny holding the baby, and Ahmad and Kelly. The tension is thick as Teri and Maxine look at one another. Teri becomes uneasy. She gets up, she kisses Mother Joe, grabs her belongings and leaves the room. Miles sighs. He shakes his head in pity as he grabs his things. He painfully says his good-byes as he leaves the room. Faith and Jason follow close behind.

FAITH

This is crazy!

Bird and Lem sighs as they stay put.

Ahmad sadly watches this whole scene.

FADE TO:

INT. LEM AND BIRD'S APARTMENT - EVENING

The front door opens.

LEM (O.S.)

Bird!

Lem enters into the dark apartment that has candles lit all over the place, creating a romantic, ghostly illumination. He is surprised and bewildered at the same time. He looks on the floor where flower pedals lead to the kitchen.

LEM

Bird, I have some great news!

INT. LEM AND BIRD'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lem enters the kitchen. He stops in amazement at what he sees. Dressed only in pumps and an apron tied at her waist, Bird is sipping Moet and looking sexy. She hands Lem a glass. He sizes Bird up and down. She looks good.

LEM

I found a gig.

Bird begins clapping in excitement. Lem sips his wine.

LEM

(continuing; proud)

Kenny called me yesterday and told me to ask about a job at the biggest in-house printing company in town. So I went in cold--they didn't know who the fuck Kenny Simmons was. So I knew I had to talk a big game. I told the man, next to the man, next to the man that I was the best man for the job. Finally, the boss looked at me, face red and shit, and said...you're hired. Right on the spot--like he knew, that I knew, that he knew, that I was his muthafuckin' man!

Bird walks up to Lem and gives him a big juicy kiss.

LEM

(continuing)

That's not the end of it. With enough hours, I can get in the union. Then, we are talking serious dollars.

Bird and Lem toast and take a drink.

Bird gives Lem a phat dookie kiss as she moves him over to the table. They both reach out and knock plates and glasses off the table in one quick stroke, sending them CRASHING to the floor. In an animalistic state, Bird rips off Lem's shirt and begins unbuckling his pants. He picks her up and places her on the table. They go at it. Suddenly, the table caves in. BAM! They are sent smashing to the floor with the table, but it doesn't stop them.

They continue "knocking boots."

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON (PRESENT TIME)

Ahmad sits quietly next to Mother Joe's bed. Thinking about everything he is telling us. He looks at Mother Joe and the flowers on her night table.

AHMAD (V.O)

Like I said earlier, it would be only a matter of time before something really bad happened. Funny how I was the only one who saw it coming.

INT. FACTORY PRINTING COMPANY - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

A large state-of-the-art printing company. Various skilled union men in uniform work behind their giant machines. The rumble and ROAR of the machines are like music.

ANGLE

Lem, the check man on a Heidelberg press machine, is sweating as he continuously folds and stitches large papers together, into a pile to be pressed by his CO-WORKER. Lem is obviously trained at this, working skillfully and swiftly.

Lem's co-worker is feeding the paper through the huge Heidelberg. He swiftly feeds the paper into the roller, watches it roll through the blanket and plate cylinder and over the hump to be pressed. Suddenly, a paper gets jammed inside the machine. The co-worker reaches down to stop the machine. With his free hand, he reaches between the plates to retrieve the jammed paper. Accidentally, he hits a button causing the machine to continue.

He lets out an excruciating yell that can't be heard over the ROAR of the machines.

Lem walks over toward the man to give him a new set of paper when he notices his hand being sucked in between the cylinder plate and press rollers.

The man yells out as the roller sucks in his entire arm. The intense pressure from the rollers in the machine causes the man's hand to explode as Lem watches. Blood flies everywhere and he screams out in pain.

Lem rushes over and pushes a red emergency button. He runs back to the injured man and hits the stop button, then the reverse button. He carefully eases the man out of the machine. The foreman and co-workers rush over to help. The co-worker's arm is crushed flat. The foreman quickly rushes the injured man away for treatment.

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Lem looks on in shock at all the blood. Another FOREMAN rushes over. Men walk over and quickly begin to clean the area. The foreman looks at Lem, shouting over the machines.

FOREMAN

Have you ever seen a man lose an arm before?

LEM

No!

FOREMAN #2

Look! I have a deadline. I have one man down and I need another to work this machine!

There is a pause. Lem is still in shock, but this is his big chance. The foreman waits for a response.

LEM

I can work this machine, foreman!

Lem is determined as he stares into the foreman's eyes. The foreman reluctantly moves aside. Lem steps forward, looking at the giant Heidelberg that stands bigger than he.

INT. FACTORY LUNCH ROOM - AFTERNOON

Lem sits alone at a table in the lunch room eating a sandwich, staring out a window where a group of his co-workers are talking and smoking.

Across the room, men in suits eat amongst themselves. Among the executives stands Simuel, who is heading out the door. Simuel notices Lem sitting alone. He walks over to Lem.

SIMUEL

(holding out his hand)

I'm Simuel Jackson. I work in sales and marketing. I'm one of the top executives in the department.

Lem, expressionless, shakes Simuel's hand. Lem is smelly and dirty, the total opposite of the man standing before him.

SIMUEL

(continuing; takes a seat)

I heard about what you did in the printing room. That was very brave. And I heard you ain't bad with a machine either.

LEM

I'm no stranger to hard work.

Lem doesn't want to be bothered, goes back to eating. Simuel sizes Lem up and down, he ain't impressed.

SIMUEL

I'm glad to hear that. Atlas Graphic and Arts always has room for more enthusiastic and hard-working employees. Especially brothas in the printing department...I'm no stranger to hard work myself.

Lem knows he is about to hear some arrogant bullshit.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

See, I'm like you, Lem. I come from the HOOD, too.

Lem stops chewing, offended by Simuel's comment.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

I didn't go to any Ivy League school. I went from Chicago State straight to corporate America. Bam! Here I am! I make 80,000 a year because I was 200% better than everyone else, and I continue to be 200% better. Those white boys didn't know what hit them. I'm no stranger to hard work either, Lem.

Lem isn't impressed.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

That's why we BROTHAS have to stick together--pull one another up in a time of need. The white man ain't gonna do it. And soon it will be your responsibility to help another brotha just like I helped you.

Lem is confused. He stops eating.

LEM

What are you talking 'bout?

SIMUEL

I pulled some strings here to get you this job.

Lem looks like he's lost all of his strength.

LEM

Kenny Simmons referred me.

SIMUEL

Who?

Lem's expression changes as sweat pops out of his forehead. Simuel is loving every minute of this. He goes for the kill.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

I know your wife, Bird. She asked me to hook you up a gig here in the print department.

Lem can't believe what he is hearing

SIMUEL

(continuing; laughing
reminiscing)

"Cola," that's what we used to call her back in the days, you know, since she had a body-shape like a...Coca-cola bottle. No disrespect, Lem--I used to get more ass than a toilet seat, but I'll always remember, "Cola," your wife. Damn! She know she can throw down.

Lem is fuming and Simuel knows he has him by the balls.

SIMUEL

(continuing)

I'm so glad your wife came to me in a time of crisis, Lem. I'm down for helping old friends, especially BROTHAS trying to make something out of nothing.

(beat)

Well, I better go, I don't want to be late for my lunch date.

Lem looks as if the wind has been knocked out of him. He can barely speak. Every inch of pride he had is gone.

INT. LEM'S BRONCO - AFTERNOON - MOVING

Lem is driving down the street like a madman on a mission. His conversation with Simuel has pissed him off, and we can see the hatred in his eyes. As he weaves in and out of traffic, Lem hears someone yelling out his name from the sidewalk. Lem looks in his rearview mirror and sees a familiar face. He pulls over and comes to a SCREECHING halt.

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The passenger door opens. With his book bag at his side and a smile on his chocolate face, Ahmad hops into the truck.

AHMAD

What up, kid?

Before Ahmad can close the door, Lem drives off, fast--burning rubber in the process.

LATER

Ahmad is in awe at Lem's anger. Lem continues to drive through heavy traffic like a madman.

AHMAD

Bad day at the office, huh?

Lem doesn't answer as they enter heavy downtown traffic.

AHMAD

(continuing)

Where are we going?

LEM

To the beauty shop!

In the midst of traffic, something across the street catches Lem's attention. He is in shock at what he sees. Suddenly, he burns rubber, cutting off traffic in the next lane, and quickly pulls over to the curve before coming to a SCREECHING halt. Ahmad is sent crashing into the dashboard.

Cursing, Ahmad looks up to see what Lem is looking at. Across the street, Bird is sitting in the window of a fancy restaurant with Simuel. A table for two. Flowers, champagne, music. They look like they are having a good time. Lem watches Simuel edge himself closer to Bird. He is talking shit, macking, obviously trying to woo Bird. Ahmad looks over at Lem who is steaming hot.

Anger and hatred building every second in Lem. Ahmad doesn't know what to do or say. Suddenly, Lem opens his glove department. Ahmad see a 9mm gun lying in the open. Shock, Ahmad loses his breath. Lem wants to pick up the gun, but Ahmad is watching him.

LEM

(continuing)

What?

Lem closes the glove department in a hurry, disguising his actions. Ahmad doesn't say anything. He doesn't want to see any trouble.

AHMAD

Yo! Lem, let's kick it, man. Forget them, kid. He ain't shit! Billy D Williams looking mutha...I have to get home anyway, man. Forget them. Take me home, Lem.

We've never seen Lem this angry before as Ahmad tries to persuade Lem to leave. Lem comes to his senses. He drives away.

INT. LEM'S BRONCO/OUTSIDE AHMAD'S HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

Ahmad hesitantly gets out of Lem's truck, speechless as he closes the door behind him. He turns to say something, but Lem drives off fast.

INT. LEM'S BRONCO - AFTERNOON - MOVING

Lem comes to a SCREECHING halt outside the fancy restaurant where he previously saw Bird and Simuel. Lem looks up.

ANGLE

Bird and Simuel are gone.

Lem is steaming hot. He quickly drives off on a mission.

INT. BIRD'S SALON - AFTERNOON

The front door of the saloon bursts open, slamming against the wall in a loud THUMP, alarming everyone inside. Lem enters and comes to a halt at what he sees. Simuel is sitting in Bird's chair, relaxing, conversing with her, and chilling as if he owns the joint. With a devilish smile on his face, Simuel and Bird look up. Bird senses trouble. Everyone is silent. Simuel gets up to defend himself.

Lem walks toward Simuel who starts walking toward him. In one quick motion, Lem grabs Simuel and throws him hard against the salon's wall-mirror. The mirror comes CRASHING down. Simuel is cut on the head. Blood is everywhere. Bird and the employees scream! It becomes silent as Lem waits for Simuel to make a move. He doesn't. Bleeding, Simuel stumbles towards the exit.

SIMUEL

See, Bird. You can take a nigga out of the ghetto, but you can't take the ghetto out of a nigga.

Simuel gives a smirk and walks out the door. His comment stuns Lem, who is speechless. At this moment, everyone in the shop believes Simuel.

In awe, Bird storms to her office.

BIRD'S OFFICE .

Lem enters the office, slamming the door behind him.

BIRD

What in the hell has gotten into you?
This is my place of business!

Suddenly, Lem knocks over paperwork, files, and boxes. Bird jumps back, speechless as she watches her husband stare at her. Tears build in his eyes.

LEM

(hurt)

You think I'm not even man enough to
find my own muthafuckin' job!

Bird is stunned that Lem knows the truth. She looks on sympathetically.

BIRD

Baby, I didn't mean to hurt you. I
was trying to help. I'm sorry.

LEM

Are you fucking him?

BIRD

What?

LEM

(yelling)

Answer me!! Are you fucking that
bitch Simuel? What did you have to
do for him to get me that
muthafuckin' job. Ain't no nigga
gonna give you nothing free!!!

BIRD

No! I agreed to go out to dinner
with him if he helped you get a job!
That's it, Lem! That's all that
happened!

Bird walks towards Lem to calm him down. Angry, Lem reaches out and slams Bird hard against the wall.

SALON

Customers and employees jump at the sound of the THUMP!

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OFFICE

Bird is in shock. Tears build in her eyes.

LEM

You stay the fuck away from me!

Restraining himself, Lem storms out of the office.

SALON

Bird's co-workers run back to their seats from eavesdropping as Lem walks out of the shop.

LATE AFTERNOON

There is chaos at the beauty shop. Teri, Maxine, Jada, and the employees are pounding on the bathroom door, trying to persuade Bird to unlock the door and come out. Bird is not responding.

SALON BATHROOM - LATER

On her knees, Bird is crying and vomiting into the toilet.

SALON LOBBY

Ahmad enters the salon for work. He is in awe at the shattered glass on the shop's floor and all the confusion.

AHMAD

What happened?

No one answers Ahmad. Maxine and the employees continue to pound on the bathroom door, trying to persuade Bird to come out.

ANGLE

Ahmad curiously turns towards the front desk, where he sees Teri

SLOW MOTION: Teri is beginning to blab away on the telephone.

AHMAD (V.O)

I know you're probably thinking, this is where the madness ends, right? Well, it didn't. What will blow a small inter-marital spat way out of proportion? When an extended family member butts their nose in your personal business and makes things even worse.

ANGLE on Teri who's on the phone.

TERI

(on the phone)

Hello. Blimp? This is Teri. Your damn cousin Teri. Listen, I need you and your HOMEBOYS to do me a favor. I want you to teach Bird's husband a lesson for putting his hands on her. Yeah, Lem! I want his jailbird a.s.s. out of my sister's life, you hear me? And no guns. What? I'm not paying you \$200 after I got you a two year parole for car theft last year. You owe me!

Angry, Teri hangs up the phone!

Maxine turns towards the front desk. She is interested in who Teri has just hung up from the phone with. Maxine walks over.

MAXINE

Who were you just talking to?

TERI

(hesitant)

Blimp.

MAXINE

Blimp!!! Our daddy's brother's crazy ass son, Blimp!!? I will kill anybody for \$200, Blimp!

Teri nods her head. Suddenly--

MAXINE

(continuing)

Bird!!!!!!!

EXT. LEM AND BIRD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Three large young men stand at Lem and Bird's front door, banging away. These men look like prison rejects, barely in their twenties. Pounding on the door is Blimp, 350 solid pounds as his two boys watch his back. The front door opens. Lem stands before them.

BLIMP

What's up, Lem?

LEM

Blimp?

BLIMP

I heard you beat up Bird and shit!

Lem is a bit worried--Blimp is hitting close to 400 pounds.

LEM

Where did you hear that from?

BLIMP

I got my sources.

Lem don't want any trouble.

LEM

Everythings cool. Its all good,
Blimp.

Blimp is not convinced. Lem slowly closes the door.

INT. BIRD AND LEM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lem walks back over to the couch when suddenly the front door comes CRASHING. Lem tries to take cover, but the door smashes against him, knocking him to the ground. Blimp grabs Lem with enormous strength and tosses him across the room, crashing against the TV stand. GLASS SHATTERS everywhere.

The men begins to stomp Lem like there's no tomorrow. Lem reaches out and trips one of Blimp's men, causing him to fall. Then Lem quickly grabs the man's arm, twisting it in one jerk, breaking it. The man yells out in pain.

From behind his back, Lem pulls out a 9mm and points it towards Blimp. Blimp and his men jump back.

BLIMP

(stomping his foot on
the ground in anger)

Shit!! I know I should have brought
my damn gat!

Lem gets to his feet. The fire in Lem's eyes reveals a flash of his angry past. He walks over and places the gun to Blimp's head as the other man, frightened, looks on.

LEM

I'll blow your fucking brains out,
Blimp! You hear me, say I won't.
Please! Just say I won't so I can
pull this fuckin' trigger.

Blimp says nothing. No room for heroes.

LEM

(continuing)

Say something. Please. Say anything.

Blimp is shaking his head no, because he wants to live. Suddenly, Lem looks in a mirror on the wall across the room. He sees himself, and he doesn't like what he is seeing--the old Lem Davis. He looks at the gun he is holding. He becomes still. He sighs. To Blimp's surprise, he slowly brings the gun down.

EXT. LEM AND BIRD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bird, Kenny, Miles, Teri, Faith, Maxine, and Ahmad jump out of Kenny's car and rush toward the house where police officers and an ambulance are spread. Everyone immediately notices Lem, handcuffed, being led to a police vehicle. Everyone becomes alarm.

Suddenly, everyone breath a sign of relief when they see cousin Blimp, also in handcuffs, and his cohort walking out of the house and being led to police vehicles. Ahmad rushes over to the officers, trying to persuade them to let Lem go.

Lem is emotionless as the officers lead him away. He catches sight of the family who looks stunned. He sadly looks at Ahmad, standing wide-eyed watching the whole scene. They stare at one another for a moment. Maxine sees this.

MAXINE

Ahmad, get back in the car!

Ahmad doesn't move. He and Lem keep looking at one another.

AHMAD'S (V.O.)

Lem kicked Simuel's ass. And supposedly he kicked Bird's ass too. So Aunt Teri called cousin Blimp to kick Lem's ass. But Lem kicked Blimp and his boy's ass. Now Aunt Bird wants to kick Aunt Teri's ass for calling Blimp in the first place. Sounds confusing, I can't even count on my fingers how many people got their asses kicked that day.

Ahmad watches his uncle Lem disappear inside the back of a police vehicle.

AHMAD (V.O)

The whole stupid incident landed Lem right back where he didn't want to be--jail. He and Bird split up over this. I was praying they wouldn't get a divorce.

Ahmad looks over and notices Bird now yelling and going at it with Teri. Family members are trying to break up the confrontation between the two sisters.

AHMAD (V.O.)

This whole situation, reminded me of my friends at school. The old "he said...she said." Things get all blown out of proportion and people get hurt. What I'm saying is, the adults in my family were acting like kids.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

The CHURCH BELL rings from down the street. Mother Joe's house is empty. The front door is closed, windows down, no familiar cars around, it's deserted. No Sunday dinner again.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE/2ND FLOOR

Teri is climbing up a long row of stairs, carrying a tray of hot food and drink. The house is silent, quiet, like death. Teri places the tray in front of Uncle Pete's door, puts her ear to the door--doesn't hear a thing. She knocks, no answer. She walks away.

INT. MILES AND TERI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dressed in loose pants and a T-shirt, Miles sits at the kitchen table with a small Casio keyboard and tape recorder. He's tired as he writes lyrics and musical notes. Someone entering the front door alarms him. He turns to see Faith. A cute grin crosses her face when she sees Miles.

Miles watches Faith enter the kitchen and take off her coat. He notices the tasteful lace bra that hugs the skin beneath her blouse. Faith turns around and notices him looking.

FAITH

Where is everybody?

MILES

At the hospital with Mother Joe.

Faith looks down at Miles' temporary work place.

MILES

(continuing)

Do you want to hear something?

FAITH
(taking a seat)
Lay it on me.

Miles rewinds the tape, hits play. A beautiful melodic rhythm and blues INSTRUMENTAL TRACK that is begging for lyrics. A piano solo begins. Soothing. Faith sits still, enjoying it. She closes her eyes and begins to sway, inhaling the music. Miles watches her, caressing her with his eyes. He stops the tape as Faith begins grinning from ear to ear.

FAITH
(continuing)
That was sweet. Music for your CD?

MILES
(smiling, proud)
Have you heard any news about your audition?

An enormous smile appears on her face. Miles is astounded. He gets up and thrusts his fist in the air.

MILES
(continuing)
Yes! Yes! Yes!

He hugs her.

FAITH
Shit, Miles! You're more excited than I am. Like you got the part.

MILES
I did. My adrenaline is pumping. I have been waiting to feel the way I feel right now for a long time.

FAITH
When your CD drops, you're gonna blow up, Miles. It's just the beginning for you.

Miles stares at Faith. She has something to say, but the words are difficult. She takes the conversation elsewhere.

FAITH
(continuing)
You want a beer?

MILES
Sounds good.

A FEW BEERS LATER

Faith and Miles sit at the kitchen table. Both are very comfortable, a little tipsy, chilling out.

FAITH

I'm moving out this weekend, Miles.

Miles isn't surprise, but genuinely concerned.

FAITH

(continuing)

Teri and I living under the same roof just ain't working.

MILES

Are you letting her run you out of here?

FAITH

Yes....Then again, I need my own space. I'm always on the go, and I can't stay in one place too long. After my mama died 4 years ago, there was no stopping me. My daddy had 5 kids from 5 different women, and he was always on the go.

(pause)

I guess I inherited that from him. I was the baby, so I could move around to live with any of my step-sisters and step-mothers at any time.

MILES

You'd stay with them?

FAITH

Yeah. Before I left for L.A. I would hang out with my step-sisters. We were all cool. There were no hostilities or anything like that. It's not like we didn't have a daddy or that he wasn't around. Daddy was just ole...ole school.

Miles stares into her eyes. She stares back.

MILES

You can't keep running, Faith.

Miles' words carry an intensity that rattles her cool. His eyes show he understands her pain--she chooses not to respond.

MILES

(continuing)

You knew the family wasn't too fond of you, but you came here anyway, for a reason....Stop pretending you don't need anyone in your life.

Faith is emotionless. There's nothing she can say. She looks at his face, his few gray hairs. For the first time, she feels their age difference--thanks to his wisdom.

MILES

(continuing)

Shit. I'm sorry. You're probably not in the mood to learn what you think you already know.

FAITH

No.

She reaches out and gives Miles a hug that shows how far they have come. Then pulls back and touches his hands gently. He's in awe as he watches her. She reaches to clutch him feverishly, then kiss him. Miles shakes his head no to her.

Faith looks at Miles. She reaches out to kiss him again. He is in awe. He backs away from her. They stare at one another. She kisses him again gently, then again much deeper.

She squirms over to him hungrily, arching her body on him. Miles is still. Her eyes are blazing as she leads Miles over to the window pane and they hungrily go at it.

She moves Miles' hands to her waist, pulling him more on her. Miles resists, then surrenders. He goes up her dress and begins to rip off her panties as she unbuckles his pants. They kiss like two people desperately in need of each other. She gasps as he enters her.

EXT. TERI AND MILES' HOUSE - NIGHT

Teri slowly makes her way up the front porch steps as Ahmad and her son Jason walk behind her.

Struggling with her keys, Teri stops at the front door. The keys fall to the ground. As she bends to pick them up, she stops at the sight of what she sees going on in the house.

TERI'S POV

Through the front window, Teri can see her husband and Faith going at it in kitchen. She is still--emotionless, as if the life has been pulled out of her. For a second, she can't move. Nothing. Stunned, Teri quickly picks up her keys.

She grabs her son and nephew, forcing them back down the stairs.

JASON

Where are we going, mama?

Trembling, Teri doesn't answer. She is trying to stop herself from bursting into tears.

AHMAD

What's wrong, Aunt Teri? I can't spend the night?

TERI

(trembling)

I'm taking you back home to your mother!!

Ahmad looks back towards the house to see what's going on, Teri grabs Ahmad before he can get a glimpse. Teri pushes the boys hard down the stairs towards the car.

INT. TERI AND MILES' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Miles quickly climaxes, then moves away from Faith. Each of them are speechless. Both in disbelief at what just happened. Miles pulls up his pants. In shock, Faith curses under her breath as she takes a seat. Miles quickly leaves the kitchen, as Faith spites herself for what happened.

INT. TERI'S CAR/IN FRONT OF MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Alone, Teri sits behind the wheel in the darkness outside the house she grew up in. The big house. It is dark and late...tears roll down her face. She cries uncontrollably. Her world is crushed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MAXINE AND KENNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

We see a large cake with 20 lit candles and "Happy Anniversary Maxine and Kenny" written on top.

Jada is carrying the cake into a dimly-lit living room filled with black folks in 70s clothes. We are at an "Anniversary/Red-light in the basement 70s party." Many of these people are new faces--friends of Maxine and Kenny.

Family and friends begin to clap as Maxine and Kenny take a big puff and blow out the candles on their cake. Everyone sings, "Happy Anniversary!"

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LIVING ROOM - LATER

We're now at the "red light in the basement" part of the party. The red dim lighting and smoky air create a soulful atmosphere. It's like a reincarnation of a 70s house party--incense, love beads, Afros, fish net on the ceiling. Marvin Gaye's "INNER CITY BLUES" is cranking on the stereo. People in 70s attire dance and eat, others just drink.

Ahmad walks through the party. Strange faces look down upon him. He sees his mother, Maxine and Kenny dancing slowly, like two kids in love. People on the dance floor are beginning to form a "soul train line."

Jada is practically grinding against the shortest man in the place. Because of her weight and the size of her dance partner, everyone in the crib is laughing at her--excessive body fat is jiggling. She lets the short man put his hands around her ass. The man's face is ramming into her titties.

Laughing, Ahmad moves towards the kitchen where Teri is standing in the threshold. She is tense, fuming, ready to explode. Ahmad speaks. Teri looks down at Ahmad.

She gives Ahmad a half-hearted touch. She has been drinking.

TERI

You should have been my son, Ahmad.
I should have been your mother.

Ahmad looks up at his Aunt Teri like she's crazy.

Teri stares back at her husband, then looks to the other side of the room and watches Faith, who's attracting spectators with her 70s dance.

Ahmad walks back through the crowd and over to his mother and father who are still dancing close. They are in love and it shows. Kenny reaches down and grabs Maxine's butt like the fellas use to do in the old days.

KENNY

Happy anniversary.

MAXINE

(blushing)

Thank you. Happy anniversary to you.

Kenny and Maxine looks down and see their son, Ahmad, invading their privacy. Kenny ease up on Maxine's butt.

MAXINE

(continuing)

Why don't we get the family in the kitchen now so we can talk?

Kenny walks away to tend to this.

EXT. KENNY AND MAXINE'S PORCH - NIGHT

Ahmad steps out on the porch. Rain is coming down hard. A car HORN catches his attention. He looks to the street where he sees Lem in his truck. Lem quickly signals him over. Ahmad is hesitant.

INT. LEM'S BRONCO - NIGHT

Lem is taking Ahmad a drive around the block asking him a bunch of questions. Kool and the Gang's "SUMMER MADNESS" is on the radio. Lem has grown a beard and is a nervous wreck.

LEM

What have they been saying about me?

AHMAD

(annoyed)

They haven't been saying nothing.

Lem is surprised to hear this, not what he was expecting.

LEM

Does it seem like Bird is missing me?
She broke down yet?

To Lem's disappointment, Ahmad hesitantly shakes his head no. Lem curses under his breath as he continues driving.

INT. KENNY AND MAXINE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kenny enters the kitchen where he sees Teri standing alone among the food, gin, and juice. She is crying.

KENNY

Teri? Are you okay?

Teri doesn't answer. Kenny walks over to her. Teri looks up, crying hard. Kenny is a bit awkward, but wants to help. Teri reaches out and begins hugging Kenny tightly.

TERI

This family is a mess. My life is a mess.

(beat)-

Someone told me a long time ago that they believe a person can't be complete until they have a relationship with themselves. Well, I don't really know the real me, Kenny.

Kenny begins to console Teri, trying to make her feel better. Teri smile, then reaches out and begins to hold him tighter. She is reaching out for help and Kenny is becoming uncomfortable as Teri gives him a small peck on the lips.

KENNY

Don't do that, Teri.

Kenny grabs her by the arms, stopping her. Teri comes back to reality. She backs away in shame, apologizing.

INT. LEM'S BRONCO - NIGHT - MOVING

Lem is still trying to get information out of Ahmad.

LEM

What did they cook?

AHMAD

(annoyed)

Cornbread, ham, catfish, cabbage, a whole bunch of stuff--I can't remember! Why are you asking me all this shit, man?

LEM

Fuck you, Ahmad, I ain't your role model!

AHMAD

Fuck you, Lem! You're full of shit!

Ahmad reaches out and gives Lem a shove. Lem shoves back.

LEM

(apologetic)

Ahmad! Listen!! I'm sorry I let you down! I let you down bad, kid!

Silence. Lem pulls over in front of Maxine and Kenny's house. Before getting out, Lem stops Ahmad.

LEM

(continuing)

But I didn't beat on your auntie--remember that. I don't hit on women! Your aunt Teri made that shit up all up about me. I didn't hit her. You believe me, right?

AHMAD

(hesitantly)

Bird explained to everyone later that you only pushed her.

LEM

Ah, shit! You thought I beat your auntie, didn't you? I can't believe this shit! How can you think that?

Ahmad doesn't respond. Still perturbed, he makes his way out of the car. Before slamming the door, Ahmad looks at Lem.

AHMAD

If you're hungry, I can sneak some food out to you.

Lem smiles--that's the best news he's heard all day.

AHMAD

(continuing)

Meet me in the back alley in twenty minutes.

INT. KITCHEN

Dressed in their old clothes, Maxine, Kenny, Teri, Miles, and Bird stand around the kitchen as the party continues in the living room. They begin to indulge in a heavy discussion.

MAXINE

We all knew that mama's health care wasn't going to cover her whole hospital bill.

There are sad faces among the family.

MAXINE

(continuing)

Between the five of us, we need to pitch in and take care of this, tonight!

No one responds right away.

KENNY

What about the money everybody in this family has been talkin' 'bout over the years? The large sum of money Mother Joe supposedly has been saving?

MAXINE

There is no money! It's a myth. Everything that mama had went into that house.

Silence.

MAXINE

(continuing)

Teri has more money than all of us here. I say she pays the hospital bill.

Staring at Miles, Teri directs her attention to Maxine. She can't believe what she is hearing.

BIRD

That is the stupidest thing I ever heard.

MAXINE

Easy for you to say, you got a beauty shop out of her.

Maxine's comment strikes a nerve in everyone, particularly Bird. Ahmad enters the kitchen. Everyone is too caught up in the conversation to notice him. He begins to prepare a plate for Lem. Teri has had enough.

TERI

I know how we can pay for mama's hospital bill. Sell the big house!

Everyone gets quiet. They're stunned that Teri could think of such a thing. Something strong has taken hold of Teri.

BIRD

We're not going to sell something mama and daddy took their entire life to own.

TERI

We can't agree on anything as small as deciding to have a Sunday dinner! Nobody is paying utilities at the big house but me. And we can finally put Uncle Pete in a home--like everyone's been talking about doing for the past 8 years.

BIRD

Mama would kill us for putting Uncle Pete in a nursing home.

TERI

We're selling the house!

MAXINE

We are not selling the house!

Kenny tries to speak but Teri interrupts him like his input doesn't mean anything.

TERI

In her living will, mama made me guardianship of her estate! This means, God forbid, if something should ever happen to her, or if she is ever incompetent--which is the state she is in now--she entrusted me to make the right decision for her.

BIRD

Who declared mama incompetent?

Silence.

MAXINE

Wait a minute! The only reason mama made you guardian of her estate is because you're a lawyer. You were married twice, your current marriage is a wreck, and you don't know how to talk to your son. How in the fuck can you make a right decision!?

MILES

Please, Teri, this is not the right decision...

Teri becomes enraged at Miles.

TERI

Shut the fuck up!!!

Everyone is taken aback by Teri's outburst.

BIRD

Let's vote, yea or nay.

TERI

We are not voting! The last time we voted. You voted that bitch--

(pointing towards the living room)

in my house! And what happened! She fucked my husband in my house!!

Everyone is in disbelief at what they have just heard. Everyone looks at Miles. Ahmad puts down his plate because he can't believe what he is hearing. Teri stares hard at Miles. Suddenly, she becomes enraged. She grabs a kitchen knife from the nearby table and lunges towards Miles. Miles jumps back in the nick of time. Bird and Maxine reach out to restrain Teri, but she finds a hole and keeps moving.

INT. KENNY AND MAXINE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Miles makes a dash into the living room. The guests scream when they see Teri chasing Miles with a knife. Teri lashes at Miles again--this time ripping his shirt. Guests scream.

Maxine yells at Ahmad and the rest of the kids to go back into the kitchen.

Suddenly, Teri goes after Faith who begins screaming. Faith jumps into the midst of the guests who are falling over one another to avoid being stabbed.

Faith jumps onto a couch, then a refreshment table, trying to avoid being cut as Teri keeps coming with the knife. Punch, cookies, and cake fly everywhere.

Kenny rushes over and jumps on Teri, crashing into the record player. He struggles with Teri over the knife before she gives up.

It is quiet as the guests watch this. Teri begins to tremble, then cry.

Everyone looks at Miles, who's in shock. Maxine looks at Faith beginning to cry like a baby, then back at Miles.

MAXINE

(to Miles)

Get out of my house!

Miles looks at Kenny who can't believe this is happening. Miles leaves. Ahmad watch Miles' leave.

Faith is crying uncontrollably as she apologizes to Teri and the family. Kenny begins to clear out the guests as Bird walks over to console Faith.

Everyone begins to leave...only the Joseph family members are left in the house.

Ahmad looks at his broken family.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Maxine, Kenny, and Bird anxiously make their way down the hospital corridor towards Mother Joe's room. They have obviously heard some good news.

INT. ICU - AFTERNOON

Maxine, Kenny, and Bird enters the ICU room. A doctor and nurse await them. They are stunned at what they see.

When Teri enters the room, no words are exchanged.

ANGLE - MOTHER JOE

She is conscious, no machines hooked up to her. She stares at her family.

DOCTOR BENSON

(whispering)

She is paralyzed on the left side of her body. She can't talk to you now. Hopefully, after a couple of weeks of rehab, she'll be able to communicate.

Overjoyed, Bird bends down to kiss Mother Joe on the cheek.

BIRD

Welcome back.

Maxine is next to kiss Mother Joe, then Kenny. Teri stands alone, watching this exchange.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON (PRESENT TIME)

Ahmad is sitting still in his chair next to Mother Joe's bed.

AHMAD (V.O)

The adults folded under pressure.
They were responsible for breaking up the family. Me! I stayed strong.
I was the only one who was not crazy or insane!

(beat)

And that's what happened to the Josephs.

Ahmad has finished telling his story. There are slight movements on the bed. Ahmad turns towards Mother Joe, finally awake from her sleep. A big smile appears on his face. She looks over at Ahmad. Mother Joe notices the roses on the nightstand. It brings a smile to her face.

She tries to speak, but it is difficult with the tube in her mouth.

MOTHER JOE

When I was sleeping, you were here plenty times, at my side, weren't you?

AHMAD

(smiling)

Yeah...E.S.P.

Mother Joe smiles.

AHMAD

(continuing)

Everyone was getting worried about you. Not me. I was expecting you to come around 'bout now 'cause my graduation is next weekend, and I knew you didn't want to miss that.

MOTHER JOE

I wouldn't miss your graduation for all the grease off a hog.

Ahmad can't help from laughing out loud.

MOTHER JOE

(continuing)

The family a mess, huh?

Ahmad's smile disappears.

AHMAD

A lot of bad things happened while you were away.

MOTHER JOE

So! If you let yourself be stopped when something bad happens, you won't be around when something good happens.

Ahmad thinks about this.

MOTHER JOE

(continuing)

I'm very tired, Ahmad. My soul is tired. I need your help. You have to get everyone together for a Sunday dinner again. It's the only thing left to save this family. You'd be surprised how many problems have been solved over filled bellies. 'Specially black folk. After a good meal, we're too tired to fight.

They laugh. Mother Joe nods Ahmad over. She wants to tell him a secret again. He bends down to listen as she whispers into his ear. As Ahmad listens, he begins smiling at what she is saying. She pulls him down to kiss his chocolate face.

Then suddenly, she begins to cough uncontrollably. Ahmad painfully watches this. The nurse quickly enters and begins to assist Mother Joe. Mother Joe begins to cough harder. Another nurse enters the room to assist. Ahmad grabs his bag and waits outside the corridor patiently, as more nurses come in to work on Mother Joe.

Suddenly, a doctor walks in the room. Ahmad sadly watches the doctor close the door in his face.

INT. MAXINE AND KENNY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Wearing his trademark backpack, Ahmad slowly enters his house, just home from visiting Mother Joe. He comes to a stop when he notices his mother sitting in the kitchen crying uncontrollably--his father, Kenny, consoling her.

At this very moment, Ahmad knows his grandmother is dead. He stands emotionless and in shock.

Maxine looks up and sees her son staring at her. From the pain he sees on her face, he knows his worst fears are true. His book bag falls to the floor.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

A bronze casket covered with flowers is being lowered into an open grave. In the b.g. a MINISTER says a prayer as the casket is swallowed into the ground.

ANGLE

Mourners are AD LIBBING call-response to the minister who continues reading his Scripture. There are at least 100 mourners--family and friends--present. Dressed in black are Kenny, Maxine, Ahmad, Kelly, Bird, Teri, Jason, and Faith.

Opposite the family are Miles and Lem.

ANGLE - AHMAD

Tears are rolling down Ahmad's cheek. He cries silently for his best friend as he watches the casket come to a halt in the ground. Ahmad looks up at his family. Everyone is avoiding eye contact with each other, choosing instead to watch the casket. Ahmad sees this. As the b.g FADES AWAY, Ahmad hears Mother Joe's words again.

MOTHER JOE (V.O)

If you let yourself be stopped when something bad happens, you won't be around when something good happens.

Ahmad comes back to the present. The minister finishes his prayer as the mourners break into a GOSPEL SONG.

Ahmad watches the casket come to a halt in the ground.

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Maxine quickly walks up to Mother Joe's House, then stops. She is shocked at what she sees on the front lawn.

She takes off her sunglasses to get a better look. A "For Sale" sign. She sighs and continues towards the house.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Maxine zooms past the living room and enters the kitchen. She is moving so fast she doesn't notice the weary old man dressed in a robe, sitting at the living room table.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Maxine is moving 100 miles an hour, taking out food from the fridge, pots and pans from the pantry. She suddenly stops in her tracks and puts everything down. "Did I see someone sitting in the dining room?" She walks back into the living room where she faces the man at the dinner table.

With uncombed gray hair, a long beard, and dressed in an old robe, an 70 year old man is sitting at the table, staring off into space. This man is UNCLE PETE. Maxine is astonished. She hasn't seen him in eight years. He is old and his sickness shows.

MAXINE

Oh, shit! Uncle Pete? You're out of your room!

Uncle Pete continues staring off into space as if he didn't hear a thing.

MAXINE

(continuing;
apologetic)

I'm very sorry that your dinner isn't ready yet. I'm running terribly behind schedule.

Uncle Pete opens his mouth to speak but no words come out. Mouth wide open, he tries again successfully, with a slow husky slur.

UNCLE PETE

Where is Louise?

MAXINE

Mama is gone, Uncle Pete. She passed on a few days ago.

Uncle Pete continues staring into space, and begins to ramble.

UNCLE PETE

When daddy was alive, me, Louise, and daddy used to raise cattle, goats, chicken, and hogs.

(more)

UNCLE PETE (cont'd)

Papa would slaughter 'bout three hogs, gut 'em, take the cut-up meat, and cure it in brine, and put in the smoke house. We made sausages, whatever. When daddy died, Louise kept the family together and made sure everything was fine with me and mama. I listened to my big sister.

(beat)

She used to take me to the creek to fish. She'd cook red snapper and mullets in a big iron pot sealed with lard or cooking oil and make fish sandwiches, y'know.

Uncle Pete looks back at Maxine.

UNCLE PETE

(continuing)

Louise gone now, I guess it's your turn to hold down the fort, Maxine.

Uncle Pete's comment sends shivers up her spine. It is Maxine's turn and it took Uncle Pete to make her realize it. She watches Uncle Pete go back to staring into space.

EXT. MALL CAFETERIA - AFTERNOON

Teri, Bird, and Maxine are eating lunch at a small table overlooking an extravagant shopping mall. There must be a thousand shoppers in this state-of-the-art mall as the women eat and talk among one another.

MAXINE

(to Teri)

We want that "For Sale" sign down off mama's lawn.

TERI

We have to pay her bills somehow, Maxine.

MAXINE

This ain't the way.

(beat)

I know you are mad at the world, but don't blame me, Kenny, Bird, or any of the rest of this family for what happened to your marriage.

Teri digs into her purse and tosses a fat envelope on the table. Maxine and Bird are in awe.

TERI

I filed a petition to officially be named guardian of mama's estate. Mama's doctor provided her medical records, coroner's autopsy, and statement enunciating her deceased to handle any of her business affairs. The court looked at the will, the affidavit, my petition, and appointed me executor and guardian.

The other women are in disbelief at what they are hearing. Maxine goes into her bag and brings out an envelope and tosses it on the table. Teri has a look of "I hope this is not what I think it is." Maxine smirks.

MAXINE

Well, my lawyer drew up a motion for a temporary injunction to cease and desist. There will be a hearing on June 29 challenging you as guardian of the estate. And I guarantee you, we are going to get a permanent injunction stopping the sale of this house!

Bird is proudly looking at Maxine. Teri is expressionless.

MAXINE

(continuing)

I didn't want things to come down to this, Teri, but I will be doing everything in my power to stop you from selling our house. I will fight you in courts. I will fight you in the streets. That sign is coming down!

Teri gives a fake smile, reaches into her purse, and takes out a \$50 dollar bill for dinner, then angrily walks away. Maxine and Bird watch her leave.

BIRD

I have to go to the washroom.

INT. BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

Bird sits helplessly on the floor, doubled over the toilet, vomiting again. Maxine enters the bathroom, knocks on the stall door. Bird comes out and walks over to the sink to clean herself. Bird is near tears.

BIRD

Lem is going to be a father.

MAXINE

(stunned)

You're the fish in mama's dream.

BIRD

(nodding yes)

I miss him so much, Max.

MAXINE

Your shop is doing well. You're making money. Your man is not. So what! Bird, you're a "black pearl," but you don't call your Ex..to help your husband find a job behind his back. A man has to be a man, you can't take that away from him, Bird. If you do, he has nothing.

(beat)

Remember, when a man is hard, he is really soft. When he is soft, he is hard. Mama told me that. A good marriage is when two people in love are working on somethin' together.

Bird takes in Maxine's words of wisdom, lifting her spirit.

BIRD

Teri and I always wanted to be like you, Max. Despite what daddy said about you getting married young and what happened between you and Teri, you and Kenny were happy, nobody could take that away from the both of you. Who would think 15 years later you two would still be together with 3 beautiful kids? You're so real.

Maxine listens attentively.

BIRD

(continuing)

Don't be so hard on Teri--she wants to be like you as much as we want to be like her. Maybe that's why Teri married twice. And why I got married right away, trying to be happy and real like you.

The women give one another a big hug.

INT. NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK - AFTERNOON

Ahmad, Theresa, and Louis are walking home from school. With backpacks filled with books, they are in a heavy discussion.

THERESA

If I had any money, Ahmad, you know
I'd loan it to you. I'm sorry.
Money's been scarce lately.

Louis displays his empty pockets to Ahmad.

LOUIS

What do you need money for? You in
trouble or something?

AHMAD

None of your biz-wax.

The three stop at the corner where they see Milkbone again,
standing across the street in front of the same corner store
with his boys. He's busy with a drug transaction. Ahmad
stops and looks over. He gets an idea.

Theresa and Louis are in disbelief as Ahmad makes his way
across the street towards Milkbone.

THERESA

What is he doing?

Ahmad stops on Milkbone's corner. He watches Milkbone and
his boys smoke a blunt and talk shit as he builds up the
nerve to speak.

AHMAD

Hey, Milkbone! Milkbone!

Milkbone turns around. He's pissed for being disturbed. He
doesn't remember Ahmad, so he curiously walks over.

MILKBONE

You calling my name, nigga?

Sweat is pouring down Ahmad's face. He's nervous as shit.

AHMAD

Yeah. You took \$28.65 from me about
3 weeks ago...and I need my loot back.

Milkbone is in disbelief at what he is hearing. He chuckles
a bit, displaying his yellow teeth.

MILKBONE

(trying to remember)

What? You crazy, shorty! Your
little change been long gone, fool.
This ain't no I.O.U. Get the fuck
out of here, chocolate!

Milkbone's boys crack up as he walks back over to join them. Ahmad isn't through yet.

AHMAD

Yo, Milkbone! Milkbone!

A blunt in his mouth, Milkbone turns around. Really pissed.

AHMAD

(continuing)

I need my loot today--plus interest.

Milkbone can't believe Ahmad's gall. He angrily walks back over towards Ahmad.

MILKBONE

(in Ahmad's face)

Are you deaf, muthafucka!

Milkbone grabs Ahmad by his collar and slams him against the side of the building. In a quick switch he takes out his 9mm, jamming it to Ahmad's head.

ACROSS THE STREET

Afraid, Theresa runs over towards the corner, yelling at Milkbone to stop.

Milkbone is on the edge as he yells into Ahmad's face.

MILKBONE

You better ask somebody! This is my muthafuckin' corner, chocolate. And nobody come on my corner talking shit 'bout I owe them some \$28.65 cents. That's pocket change to me, shorty, but a dime ain't too small for me to bust a 9mm cap in somebody's ass!

Milkbone is looking into Ahmad's eyes. He slows his row. Nothing he is saying is affecting Ahmad. This surprises him as he looks directly into Ahmad's face.

Milkbone stops yelling. He doesn't see fright or terror in the kid's eyes. This confuses him. Ahmad's face is emotionless. Milkbone is paralyzed.

Ahmad watches Milkbone put down his 9mm. Milkbone calls out to one of his boys.

MILKBONE

(continuing)

Sam! Give this nigga his \$28.65.

SAM and the rest of the fellas can't believe Milkbone is letting Ahmad off the hook.

SAM

What?

MILKBONE

I said give this muthafucka his \$28.65.

SAM

(to Ahmad)

Do you have change for a \$50.

Ahmad is surprised at what he is hearing. He is emotionless.

AHMAD

No, but you owe me interest.

MILKBONE

Give him the \$50, nigga!

Sam walks over and gives Ahmad the money. Ahmad looks back at Milkbone as he heads across the street.

MILKBONE

(continuing)

Don't let me see your face on my corner again, chocolate!

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ahmad sits at the head of a large conference room table overlooking Chicago's skyline.

We are at Miles' place of employment. Dressed in a business suit, Miles faces Ahmad.

AHMAD

When grandmom was in the hospital, she told me about the loot.

Miles' eyes widen in curiosity.

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SHOP - AFTERNOON

Bird is inquisitively looking directly into the camera.

BIRD

What loot?

INT. TERI'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Teri looks directly into the camera, appalled at what she has just heard.

TERI

You must be talking about the will?

EXT. LEM AND BIRD'S PORCH - AFTERNOON

Almost choking, Lem stops smoking a joint and shockingly looks at the camera.

INT. TERI'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Teri listens attentively to Ahmad. Ahmad sits at the large extravagant glass kitchen table as he engrosses himself in a large bowl of ice cream and cake.

AHMAD

I'm talking 'bout the money everybody around here in this family have been talkin' about for years. The loot! The dead presidents grandmom has been saving.

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Miles is sweating.

AHMAD

She wanted me to have the money. I'm talking mad dollars! Grandmom can save copper off a penny and she wasn't afraid to tell anyone she didn't believe in banks.

EXT. LEM AND BIRD'S PORCH - AFTERNOON

Lem is looking directly in the camera.

LEM

Where is...

INT. DANCE HALL - AFTERNOON

Faith looks directly in the camera.

FAITH

...the money, Ahmad.

INT. TERI'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

TERI

In a safe?

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SALON - AFTERNOON

BIRD

Underneath her mattress.

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

MILES

Where?

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SHOP -AFTERNOON

Ahmad is getting the royal treatment at Bird's beauty salon. Jada gives Ahmad a pedicure, Harome gives him a temple massage. Bird sits next to him waiting for his response.

AHMAD

It's at the big house.

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ahmad is aggressively chowing on his complimentary food. Miles listens attentively.

AHMAD

I need your help, Miles. I need you to help me maximize my income. I heard you can make a lot of money investing in high-tech stock. You know, Motorola, IBM...I'm just a shorty, so I need to be thinking 'bout my future. I even want a mutual fund.

Miles almost chokes at what he hears. He can't believe this 12 year old kid is talking about a mutual fund.

AHMAD

(continuing)

It's gonna take money to promote your new CD. Advertisements and street promotion can be a bitch. I'm willing to give you one-third of the loot, if you help me.

This shuts Miles up quick. What's that saying? "Money talks and bullshit walks."

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SALON - AFTERNOON

BLACK SCREEN. We hear a loud scream from a woman's lungs.

FADE UP. Bird is screaming. She is in shock at what Ahmad has just told her.

BIRD

Miles is no longer a member of our family. You can't trust him!

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

MILES

I'm the most trustworthy person you
will ever meet in you life, Ahmad.

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SALON - AFTERNOON

Bird is blabbing away 100 miles an hour.

BIRD

Go and tell Miles you made this whole
story up. Tell him grandmom didn't
save anything. It's a myth!

AHMAD

What about my future?

Ahmad slyly looks up at Bird. He is taking her in the
direction he wants her to go.

BIRD

We will find someone else to help you
with your finances.

AHMAD

Like who?

Bird looks up at the sky and pretends to be thinking.

AHMAD

(continuing)

Auntie Bird, why don't you take care
of my business affairs? Then I
give you one-third.

That's what Bird wanted to hear. She is surprised and overwhelmed.

INT. TERI'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Teri is wearing a serious expression as she listens to Ahmad.

AHMAD

Grandmom gave me the loot and I'd
like to use the money she saved to
pay off her bills.

A giant smile comes across Teri's face.

AHMAD

(continuing)

But...

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TERI
(worried)
But what?

AHMAD
I told my mother 'bout the money.

Teri squinches and curses at the mere fact that Ahmad had shared their secret.

TERI
And?

AHMAD
She told me not to tell a soul. She said that you were living like a damn queen and that you should pay grandmom's bill.

TERI
(angry)
That bitch said that?

EXT. LEM AND BIRD'S PORCH - AFTERNOON

AHMAD
I now understand the value of currency and what it does for a man's soul. Owning a thin piece of paper with a portrait of Hamilton and Franklin on the front can make a man feel like a king.

LEM
Yes, it can. But I'm very curious Ahmad of what motivates you to want thick pockets. I mean, you even look like your dick is hard. How much...

INT. TERI'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Teri looking at the camera.

TERI
...loot--

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

MILES
...did grandmom--

INT. DANCE HALL - AFTERNOON

FAITH
...leave--

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SHOP - AFTERNOON

BIRD
...behind?

INT. DANCE HALL - AFTERNOON

Ahmad looking directly into the camera.

AHMAD
Mad dollars, 'cause grandmom could
save copper off a penny, and she
wasn't afraid to tell anyone that she
didn't believe in banks.

EXT. LEM AND BIRD'S PORCH - AFTERNOON

Ahmad is talking to Lem.

AHMAD
Lem, I'll give you one-third of my
loot for your inconvenience, IF, you
let me deposit my loot in your bank
account. Call me stingy, but I need
to keep this on the down low.

Lem's prayers have been answered.

INT. DANCE HALL - AFTERNOON

Faith stops doing her exercises and looks at Ahmad.

FAITH
Ahmad, why in the hell are we
standing here! Let's go and get the
damn loot now!

INT. LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Miles is growing impatient as he waits for Ahmad to answer.
Ahmad is looking in his calendar book.

INT. TERI'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Teri impatiently waiting for Ahmad as he looks into his book.

INT. BIRD'S BEAUTY SHOP - AFTERNOON

Bird is panting as Ahmad looks through his book.

EXT. LEM AND BIRD'S PORCH - AFTERNOON

Every second of waiting is killing Lem.

AHMAD

Unfortunately I have a lot on my agenda today...and tomorrow. How 'bout Sunday...at three?

A big smile comes across Ahmad's face. He knows he has everyone by their balls.

INT. MAXINE AND KENNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

INSERT: A white invitation card with Maxine and Kenny's name and address on the front envelope. It reads: "YOU ARE INVITED TO A PHAT GRADUATION PARTY ON BEHALF OF AHMAD SIMMONS. SUNDAY AT 3:00 PM AT MOTHER JOE'S CRIB. SOUL FOOD AND DRINKS. IT'S GONNA BE DA'BOMB. DON'T FORGET A GIFT."

Maxine is holding the invitation and envelope with Ahmad's family's address on the front. She slams the invitation down on Ahmad's desk as Kenny enters the room. Ahmad is arranging things in his bedroom.

MAXINE

I don't remember discussing anything about a party.

There is silence as Ahmad looks at his parents, trying to figure a way out of this one. Ahmad goes into his drawer and takes out the crumpled fifty dollar bill he swindled back from Milkbone. He gives it to his mother.

AHMAD

Here is fifty dollars. And you can take back that Sega Saturn video game you got me for my graduation present. Use the money to buy food for my party.

Maxine and Kenny look at one another like "How did he know what we bought him?"

MAXINE

Sweetheart, I know you don't quite understand everything that's been happening, but things are very difficult right now with this family.

AHMAD

You never see me out there getting arrested, selling dope, or getting in trouble! I don't get into shit!

MAXINE

Watch your mouth!

Lem listens attentively, thinking. Weighing his options that are minimal. As Simuel waits for an answer, a smirk crosses Lem's face. He now has Simuel by the balls.

LEM

(spiteful)

Let me think about it.

Simuel is emotionless, all of his pride has been knocked down. He turns around and walks away.

LEM

(continuing)

Hey, Simuel. You know you're a sellout, right?

(Simuel faces Lem)

Shit? I never knew a brotha that used the white man as an excuse as much as you and is so eager to kiss their ass.

Lem begins laughing. Simuel angrily walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GRAMMAR SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - SUNDAY MORNING

A fiftyish, dark brown woman whose stern visage is magnified behind horn-rimmed glasses, stands at the podium facing the filled auditorium. This woman is the PRINCIPAL of Ahmad's grammar school. She clears her throat and continues reading the names of today's graduates. As each name is called, a student walks on stage, shakes her hand, and accepts his or her paper of honor.

ANGLE

Dressed in his miniature graduation gown, Ahmad hears, "Ahmad Simmons" blare across the speaker. Standing behind him, Theresa and Louis gives Ahmad a push onto the stage.

ANGLE

Maxine, Kenny, and Kelly immediately jump to their feet and applaud.

ON STAGE

Ahmad walks across the stage, pride covering his face. For the first time in his life, he feels a great sense of accomplishment. He shakes his principal and Mrs. Dawson's hand and accepts his diploma. Suddenly, an ear-piercing WHISTLE of appreciation wails across the auditorium.

Everyone looks back to see who the culprit is.

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ANGLE - LEM: Standing in the back. With his hand in his mouth, he continues to whistle in appreciation for his nephew.

ANGLE - AHMAD: A smile appears on his face.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S KITCHEN - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Maxine is sweating in the kitchen preparing Ahmad's graduation dinner. Ahmad watches this as he assists, preparing the easy necessities, like iced tea and Kool-aid.

Maxine is making the family favorites. MONTAGE:

- A) A HEN BEING WASH THOROUGHLY.
- B) ADDING SAGE TO THE DRESSING, CUTTING ONIONS UP FOR IT.
- C) SHREDDING CABBAGE LEAVES.
- D) A "SOCK IT TO ME" CAKE.

Maxine hands Ahmad the bowl of cake mix. He sticks his finger in it.

We hear CHURCH BELLS ringing the end of church service.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S DINNER TABLE - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Maxine, Kenny, Ahmad, Kelly, and Ahmad's little sister in her baby chair are impatiently sitting at the table with Rev. Williams, who's now sporting an Al Sharpton's perm. Decorations hang from the ceiling, congratulation signs are on the wall, the dinner table is prepared, and MUSIC fills the room...But there are no other family members present.

Maxine and Kenny sadly look over at Ahmad who hasn't given up hope..

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Looking at his watch, Miles is hastily making his way up the stairs towards the big house. He stops on the porch when he notices Bird approaching from the back of the house. They stop in their tracks, shocked to see one another.

BIRD

What are you doing here?

MILES

I was about to ask you the same question.

A car pulling up to the house catches their attention. Bird and Miles curse under their breath when they see who it is.

Teri breaks hard when she see Miles and Bird. Jason is sent crashing into the dashboard.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S HOUSE

Bird and Miles enter the living room. A smile appears on Ahmad's face. The sound of the front door opening and feet approaching can be heard. Teri, Jason, and Lem enter the living room too. No one says a word.

MAXINE

Food is getting cold.

Everyone hesitantly takes their usual seats, before they realize they don't like this seating arrangement. Teri moves away from Miles. Lem moves away from Bird. Not wanting to be next to Teri, he moves again. Bird doesn't want to be next to Teri either, so she moves again.

MAXINE

(continuing)

Sit goddamnit!

ANGLE

Faith enters the living room. She jumps out of her skin when she sees everyone present.

MAXINE

(to Faith)

Have a seat...There is something I want everyone here to see.

Maxine disappears into the kitchen. Everyone waits impatiently. Suddenly, Maxine re-enters the dining room. Uncle Pete timidly walks behind her, clean-shaven, dressed in a nice pair of jeans and shirt.

Everyone is shocked as Uncle Pete bashfully looks at his family. Teri can't believe what she is seeing. She stands up, but then suddenly faints, falling flat on her back. Everyone jumps to her aid.

LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Everyone is chowing down on soul food. The dinner table is ear-piercingly quiet as everyone watches Uncle Pete eat silently in his shell.

Miles looks over at Ahmad, trying to make eye contact. He whispers something about money. Ahmad gives Miles a look like "I don't know what you're talking about."

UNDERNEATH THE TABLE

Bird moves her leg across the table and begins to kick Ahmad's leg to get his attention.

ABOVE THE TABLE

Ahmad continues to eat, totally ignoring Bird.

UNDERNEATH THE TABLE

Bird gives Ahmad a hard swift kick with her pumps.

ABOVE THE TABLE

Ahmad yells out in pain. Everyone looks over, confused. Ahmad begins fanning his mouth as if "The food is hot."

Maxine picks up an empty bowl and whispers to Ahmad who is sitting next to her.

MAXINE

There's a pot of peas on the stove.
Can you heat 'em up for mama, please?

KITCHEN

Ahmad turns on the stove where the pot of black-eyed peas sits. He walks over and places the pot underneath the sink, sprinkling water on the peas, then puts the pot back onto the stove and dries his hand with a dish towel, placing it dangerously close to the flames on the stove. Then he walks back into the living room.

ANGLE ON TOWEL: It catches on fire.

DINING ROOM TABLE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

LEM

They asked me back.

Breaking the silence, everyone looks at Lem. They don't have a clue of what he is talking about.

LEM

(continuing)

I know ya'll think I'm still unemployed. Well, for your information, they asked me back. They know a skilled worker when they see one.

This is hard on Bird. She misses her husband and feels bad about this whole ordeal.

BIRD

Lem, I'm sorry about...

LEM

You didn't think I was man enough to get a job, did you? Well, they came to me, begging on their knees. Asking a brotha back to work.

MAXINE

Damn! What you want, her head, Lem?

LEM

(to Teri)

And I don't beat on women. But if you still want to bring your uncles, cousins, grandfathers, or any other of your relatives over to scrap, I swear I may just hurt somebody.

TERI

Don't torment me with your immaturity. It's hard enough for me to sit across from these two disgusting--

MILES

I can't take another second of your mouth! Take the house, the cars, anything you want.

LEM

You didn't think things would be rosy when you married this--

(pointing at Teri)
creature bitch, did you?

MILES

No, but I didn't expect bush weeds either.

TERI

Okay, I'm not perfect. Sue me. Fuck my cousin!

Rev. Williams can't believe what he is hearing around the table. He chokes on his food. Ahmad, Jason, and Kelly begin laughing out loud. Maxine gives them a cold look. They shut up quick.

AHMAD

(instigating)

Bird, when are you gonna tell everyone you're gonna drop a load in 8 months.

Lem spits out his food, almost choking. He looks at Bird.

AHMAD

(continuing)

She is pregnant. Haven't you noticed?

Maxine slaps Ahmad cross the head for spilling the beans.
Lem is speechless. Maxine can't resist adding her two cents.

MAXINE

C'mon, Lem? You didn't think your
black ass was shooting blanks, did
you? Shit! We are all extremely
happy your ass found a job!

The kids begin laughing. Lem sits still in awe. He and Bird
stare at one another. They both miss each other terribly,
their faces show this.

KITCHEN - SAME TIME

The flames have completely engulfed the towel. The towel is
touching the wall tile behind the stove. The angry flames
are spreading onto the wall.

DINNER TABLE - SAME TIME

Faith can't take anymore stares. She gets up from her seat.

TERI

Please go. Spare us.

MAXINE.

Wait! I'm ashamed of you, you're
from the south, so you know what
Sunday dinners means to this family.
Sit!!

Faith looks deeply at Maxine. She can hear the sincerity in
Maxine's voice--words of acceptance--just what she wanted to
hear.

Teri wants to go back to arguing with Miles. The rest of the
family sighs, tired of Teri's mouth.

TERI

(to Miles)

No one handcuffed you and forced you
to marry me. Back then you didn't
complain about marrying a woman who
makes more money than you.

MILES

This is what I'm talking about. I want a life more than numbers and bank accounts. I want support, encouragement. I want to be alive.

TERI

Then why did you marry me, Miles?

There is silence as everyone looks on. Miles can't really answer Teri's question. There is a long beat.

MILES

They say men looks for "the PERFECT" woman to marry...while women looks for a "man to PER-FECT." I don't know if that is true or not, but we both came out losers here, Teri.

Teri looks like she has heard the worst news of her life.

TERI

All my life I tried to do the right thing. Career, family, kids, house...

MILES

Exactly...not once did you mention love.

Teri is stunned by Miles' comment. Miles gets up to leave.

MAXINE

Miles, please...stay.

TERI

(pissed)
You're not mama.

MAXINE

No, but I'm your older sister.

TERI

Too late to play big sister.

KENNY

Ladies, let's save the bickering for your opening statements in the courtroom.

TERI

Big sister, huh? Just like big sister wants to keep all of mama's money to herself.

Ahmad slowly makes his way out of his chair without anyone noticing him. He heads toward the porch.

MAXINE

(baffled)

What are you talking about?

TERI

You know exactly what I'm talking about. The loot!

BIRD

(to Teri)

How did you know about the loot?

TERI

You know about the loot?

BIRD

(hesitantly)

Ahmad promise me a third of it.

Everyone at the table says at the same time, "A third?" Teri looks around, surprised that everyone knows about the loot.

MILES

Ahmad wants me to invest some of his loot for him.

BIRD

Wait a minute. You're not even in this family anymore. He asked me to invest the loot for him.

FAITH

Bird stop lying. Ahmad is investing his loot into a stage production.

KENNY

Let me guess, starring no other than, Faith Bailey!

Faith's face is saying this is true.

LEM

Shorty asked me to put his entire loot in my bank account.

KENNY

Damn! That loot is stretching pretty thin.

MAXINE

Wait a minute...the only reason all of you are here is because of some loot?

Everyone says "yes" at the same time.

MAXINE

(continuing)

Just like black folk! It took a funeral and some money to get us all back together again.

Everyone looks at Ahmad's empty chair.

MAXINE

(continuing)

Ahmad!!!

Ahmad slowly enters as everyone stares at him. There is silence. Kenny gets up to face his son.

KENNY

Where is the money, son?

Ahmad stops, looks around the table. Everyone is waiting.

AHMAD

It's underneath the couch in the living room.

Suddenly, everyone takes off toward the living room. Like a bunch of wild coyotes, everyone fights for room as they almost tear the couch apart looking for money. They find nothing as the kids, Uncle Pete, and Rev. Williams laugh out loud. Everyone looks at Ahmad, angry. Kenny carefully asks his son again.

KENNY

Son, again. Tell us where grandmom kept the loot.

Ahmad yells out at the top of his lungs.

AHMAD

There is no money al'ight!!! It's a myth!

Everyone is in shock.

AHMAD

(continuing)

Grandmom wanted me to get everyone together again! And I did! I 'see now this was all a mistake!!

Tears begins to build in Ahmad's eyes. The family sympathetically looks on. There is nothing but guilty looks on each and every adult face in the room. Kenny tries to console his son. They hug. A long beat.

Suddenly, Lem begins to sniff the air.

LEM

Do you smell something?

MILES

Something's burning. It's coming from the kitchen.

Everyone rushes towards the kitchen.

INT. MOTHER JOE'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Miles enters the kitchen first and jumps out of his skin at what he sees. He scurries his way past the kitchen threshold to avoid the angry flames spreading against the wall tile behind the stove, quickly moving to the adjoining wall. Grabbing a pot of water from the sink, Miles immediately tosses the water onto the flames--it doesn't do anything.

Kenny, Lem, and Teri enter the kitchen to help Miles. Miles begins to fill another pot of water. Maxine and Faith soon enters the burning threshold.

Bird begins to move the kids back, including Ahmad who's watching Lem and Maxine waft at the flames, trying their best to suffocate the fire.

Kenny grabs the stove and begins to move it away from the burning wall. A large pot of grease falls from the stove splashing everywhere.

Hit by the splashing grease, Bird yells out in pain. Lem yells for Bird to take the kids in the living room as he throw a pot of water on the grease.

The fire sticks to the grease, flames spread to the kitchen floor. The kitchen table goes up in flames. Faith quickly pushes Teri away from the table, preventing her from touching the flames.

Everyone works fiercely together with wafting and water, trying to control the growing fire. The fire begins to overpower and spread to the adjoining wall. Everyone panics.

TERI

Where is the extinguisher?

Maxine rushes to the pantry, searching through cabinets. She finds two extinguishers.

She hands one to Teri before a gulf of flame rises up from the floor between them, blocking Maxine inside the pantry. Teri immediately goes nuts with the extinguisher, killing the flames blocking Maxine. Kenny takes the extinguisher from Maxine.

Together, Teri and Kenny begin to kill the flames on the wall behind the stove and on the floor. And slowly but surely the flames die.

Lem and Miles are fighting the flames on the opposing wall trying to waft it out. Dust and smoke take over the air, making it difficult to see. Teri and Kenny yell for Lem and Miles to move out of the way before they kill the spreading flames with their extinguisher. The fire dies immediately.

Dust and smoke waft through the air. As it clears, we see Bird enter the kitchen, in shock at what she sees.

BIRD

Lem, you are on fire!

Lem looks at his body. He sees nothing. He looks behind and notices flames engulfing his back. He goes erratic. He uses his towel to swipe at his back, but the flames don't die. Maxine picks up Kenny's extinguisher on the ground.

MAXINE

I got you!

Chasing Lem to get a good target, Maxine aims and fires. She misses him entirely, instead striking Teri who is covered head to toe with carbon-dioxide foam. Miles rushes over behind Lem, rips off his jacket, and drops the burning jacket to the floor. Maxine aims her extinguisher and kills the fire.

It is quiet as the kids and grown folks look at one another, inspecting the damaged kitchen. The kitchen is destroyed.

Maxine walks over to the stove where she picks up a burnt kitchen towel near the stove. She angrily looks at Ahmad, the guilty one, knowing Mother Joe had warned him several times about placing towels near burning flames on the stove.

Everyone looks at Teri who now looks ridiculous covered with foam. Out of nowhere, everyone cracks up at her. She can't hold back her laughter either.

This is the first break of tension this family has had in a long time, and it feels good. Everyone continues laughing.

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AHMAD (V.O.)

Soul Food. African dishes served upon tables of African-Americans since the slave trade. Food made with feelings and care.

As the b.g. FADES AWAY, we hear Ahmad

AHMAD (V.O.)

(continuing; beat)

I now understand what soul food and those dinners meant. During slavery, black folks didn't have choices in life, so cooking became a way to express feelings, share love and nurture family. A time to share happiness and sorrow--unity and strength, things the old folk say is missing in today's families.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOTHER JOE'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

A sunny day. Ahmad, Teri, Maxine, Bird, and the grandchildren are planting vegetables in Mother Joe's garden.

LIFE. We see tomatoes, snap beans, cucumbers, turnip greens, and cabbage being placed skillfully in the soil.

AHMAD (V.O.)

Soul food to life is constantly feeding us and forcing us to grow.

UNITY. Ahmad looks around and sees Teri, Maxine, and Bird working together. In the distance, the men, Lem and Kenny are playing a game of basketball behind the yard.

AHMAD (V.O.)

(continuing)

Things got better for my family. Miles and Teri never got back together though. Their divorce was an ugly and vicious one, but it didn't stop Miles from coming around every now and then to fill his belly with soul food. Lem and Bird are back together, expecting their child any day now. We didn't sell the house, thank God for my mom and Aunt Teri's truce. And Faith still comes around.

NURTURE. The family places fertilizer in the soil, then begins watering the garden.

AHMAD

We didn't grieve grandmom's death for long. We felt there was a sense of completion in her life because she accomplished everything she set out to do.

(beat)

To build a strong family and leave her footprints.

ANGLE

A giant smile comes across Ahmad's face.

AHMAD

(continuing)

My name is Ahmad Simmons and I know what's up. This is my story.

FADE OUT:

THE END.

SCRIPT FLY