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THE INFAMOUS

Pilot
"One Hit Wonder"

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Network Draft
2/3/15

A+E Studios
In association with
Color Force

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TEASER

Images roll in silence. Grainy, black-and-white stock footage from the 60s. Images of terrible violence. Men fighting, throwing rocks. A black man and a cop in a full-on fistfight.

We're watching the 1965 Watts Riots. Scary, riveting, silent.

Then, abruptly, we hear the ROAR of guitars. It's Nirvana doing *Smells Like Teen Spirit*. Guitars rip.

Horrific images keep rolling, now to MUSIC. Beatings, fights, blood. Only now the violence feels different. Now that it's got a soundtrack, it's no longer scary. Now it looks fucking cool.

SHANNON (V.O.)
Music changes everything.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. BUICK REGAL - DAY

A WHITE DRIVER (40s) drums his fingers on a steering wheel along with a Marty Robbins song on the radio. He's muscular, jeans, hair cropped into a military style high-and-tight.

As he waits at a stoplight, he hears a faint sound. A THUMP, growing louder. Soon it's so LOUD, it's all he can hear. It's DRUMS and THUMPING BASS. NWA doing *Gangsta Gangsta*.

EXT. SOUTH CENTRAL STREET - DAY

A RED JEEP pulls up alongside the Buick, blaring hip-hop. The Buick and the Jeep sit at a light, Marty Robbins and NWA creating a CACOPHONY in the street. All around them are low-slung stucco buildings, palm trees, and smog.

GIANT LETTERS APPEAR, floating overhead: Early 90s

INT. BUICK REGAL - DAY

The White Driver listens to that beat THUMPING, so loud it literally RATTLES his side-view mirror. He looks over --

In the Jeep is a BLACK DRIVER. Hair in a fade, wearing a Starter jacket. The White Driver stares, annoyed. The Black Driver catches him STARING, rolls down the window, annoyed now too.

WHITE DRIVER
Can I help you?

BLACK DRIVER
Nah. Ain't nobody looking at you.

WHITE DRIVER
(frustrated)
What's your problem?

INT. JEEP WRANGLER - DAY

The NWA is LOUDER in the jeep.

BLACK DRIVER
You gonna have a problem, you keep
mad-dogging me.

The White Driver rolls his eyes, turns away. The tension's diffused...then the light changes. The White Driver SWERVES. CUTTING OFF the Black Driver, who SLAMS on his brakes, pissed.

INT. BUICK REGAL - DAY

The White Driver STOPS at the next red. He glances back, anxious to see Jeep pulling up. The light's red, he's stuck.

The men lean out their windows now. Angrier.

BLACK DRIVER
Yo, I know you didn't just cut me
off back there!

WHITE DRIVER
You were being a prick! I don't
waste my time with people like you.

BLACK DRIVER
Hold up. People *like me* -- ?

WHITE DRIVER
Settle down. I meant people who are
disrespectful.

BLACK DRIVER
Nah nah. You meant like black
people, didn't you?

WHITE DRIVER
No. And don't pull that race shit
with me --

BLACK DRIVER
Know what? I think maybe you lost.
Maybe you took a wrong turn off the
freeway, you think we in Brentwood--

WHITE DRIVER
I know where I am. And just cause
we're in a black neighborhood
doesn't mean you can act like --

Meanwhile the light's changed and Black Driver TAKES OFF mid-sentence, CUTTING OFF the White Driver now.

INT. JEEP WRANGLER - DAY

The Jeep SCREECHES up to the next light and STOPS. The Black Driver sees the Buick pull up. The two men eye each other, really on edge. For a moment neither one says anything.

Then white driver re-engages. ESCALATING the situation.

WHITE DRIVER
Go on. Keep pushing me. See what happens.

BLACK DRIVER
Are you threatening me, white-boy?

WHITE DRIVER
(more aggressive)
Hell yeah. I'll beat your ass right here in the street --

BLACK DRIVER
You wanna tussle? Let's go. There by the liquor store, motherfucker.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

The Jeep pulls to a liquor store. As the Black Driver gets out, the Buick pulls up -- ACCELERATING at the last second. The Black Driver HAS TO DUCK into the Jeep to avoid being hit.

INT. BUICK REGAL - DAY

The White Driver speeds off, relieved. Then he hears furious HONKING. He looks in the rearview, the Jeep's coming in fast. The Black Driver's holding up his hands, flashing GANG SIGNS.

The men speed down the road, WINDOWS OPEN AND SCREAMING:

BLACK DRIVER	WHITE DRIVER
You think that's funny, punk?! I will light you up! Pull over, you redneck piece of shit! Pull over!	You think you can intimidate me, you wannabe gangster motherfucker?! You might scare people back at the projects, <u>you don't scare me!</u>

Then the Black Driver produces a silver .9mm Glock.

BLACK DRIVER
You scared now?!

WHITE DRIVER
(yes)
Oh shit --

The White Driver ducks, SWERVING. Scared, he digs through his gym bag and produces a .45 Beretta.

The White Driver stays down. As his car CAREENS around the street, he blindly fires off 4 ROUNDS into the Jeep.

Beat. We don't hear any return fire. All we hear is that NWA THUMPING. The White Driver peeks up:

EXT. GAS STATION, SOUTH CENTRAL - DAY

The jeep is ROLLING SLOWLY across the street. It stops with a THUD against the wall of a gas station, music STILL BLARING. The White Driver approaches the car. Cautious, pistol aimed.

An ATTENDANT (20s) comes out of the station. The White Driver pulls a BADGE from of his pocket, holds it up in the air.

WHITE DRIVER
LAPD. Back inside.

The White Driver cautiously approaches the jeep, opens the door. The Black Driver SPILLS OUT, Jacket bloody, dead. The White Driver reaches in, shuts the engine off. Music CUTS.

The White Driver is OFFICER BILL SLIDELL.

AN HOUR LATER

A squad car is on the scene now. Yellow tape. Two PARAMEDICS put the Black Driver's body into an ambulance. A PATROL OFFICER (20s) speaks to Officer Slidell. Taking a statement.

BILL SLIDELL
At that point, I told him to stop harassing me. He became agitated...
(matter of fact)
Then he 117'd me, and I popped him.

The patrol officer scribbles. Another officer approaches.

PATROL OFFICER #2
Officer Slidell? I think you're gonna have to suck this one up.

The officer hands Bill the dead man's WALLET. In it is another GOLD BADGE. The black driver was a cop.

PATROL OFFICER #2
He was one of ours.

WE HOLD ON Slidell's face a moment, looking out at the dead police officer he just shot. Horror and shock.

PATROL OFFICER #1
(beat, awkward)
Do you -- want to revise any of this statement?

BILL SLIDELL
Yeah. Let me start over.

SLAM TO CREDITS.

ACT I

INT. SHANNON'S HOUSE, CRENSHAW - NIGHT

TIGHT ON: A man's EAR. Listening to music. A romantic old soul ballad by Sam Cooke. Maybe *Bring It On Home To Me*.

The ear belongs to SHANNON REESE. 35, black, handsome, well-dressed. Dining at a well-appointed house in South Central.

EVA (O.S.)
Who's voice is that? Is that Lou Rawls? It's smoother than Lou...

SHANNON
It's Sam Cooke.

Across from him is an absolutely stunning young black woman, EVA ADAMS (21). Spilling out of her top, listening too.

SHANNON
You know, I think this is the first record I ever bought. Anytime I hear him, I think about being back in the day. Barbecues in the backyard...

EVA
I don't know. There's something so sad about it. Ain't he the one died in the plane crash?

SHANNON
You thinking of Otis Redding. Sam Cooke was earlier. He was the first soul singer to really crossover.

EVA
What, like to white-folks you mean.

SHANNON
(while eating)
Yeah. Actually, Sam was a smart-ass businessman. He's got these two live albums, right? On *Live At The Copa*, he's playing this club full of *white-folks*, and he's singing real soft, holding back. *Then* he got *Live At The Harlem Square Club*. Tell me you heard that record...

EVA
I think I just got a greatest hits.

SHANNON

Girl, you got to get *Harlem Square Club*. On *that* one he's playing to the brothers, and he's screaming and wailing, doing his gospel shit. You listen to those two records, you see how smart Sam was. He knew he had to crossover to make real money. So he put on a *front* for white audiences, cause they couldn't handle the real him, you know?

EVA

For sure. Shit, that's just how it is when I'm working at the club.

SHANNON

How do you figure?

EVA

I got a look I give customers. I be looking at them like '*you my whole world.*' Really I'm thinking how I got to pick up diapers for Brian.

SHANNON

(beat)

Let me see the look.

EVA

Oh, you ain't *ready* for my look.

He puts down his fork. Gives her a look like -- *try me.*

Eva leans over. She pushes her breasts together, gives Shannon a look that is pure sex. We're sure they'll kiss -- Then she sits down, picks up her fork, resumes eating.

SHANNON

Damn.

EVA

Told you.

Shannon watches her eat for a moment. Speaks softer.

SHANNON

You know, Eva. I really been enjoying our time together...

EVA

(softer, intimate)

I think so too.

SHANNON

I think I'm ready for us to take the next step, you know?

EVA
 (heart racing now)
 I'm *definitely* ready.

Then Shannon reaches down ... and pulls out a fat briefcase.

SHANNON
 How bout we get you up out of that
 strip club?

He hands her a sheaf of papers. It's a RECORD CONTRACT.

EVA
 For real?

SHANNON
 Girl, I think you a star.

Eva LIGHTS UP, letting out a SCREAM. The pitch TRANSFORMS INTO:

INT. CONTROL ROOM, SHANNON'S RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

The SHRILL SCREAM of an early 90's synthesizer. Music BLASTS.

Shannon's at his studio mixing board. All around him is a DIY hip-hop scene. GANGBANGERS roll blunts, STRIPPERS on couches.

Shannon's the only one not partying. He stares through the glass, focused on EVA as she perform in the vocal booth. The producer's gaze is so intense it's almost voyeuristic.

From out of Eva's exquisite mouth comes some truly DIRTY RAP:

EVA (INTO MIC)
*Crenshaw girl/my skirt twirl as I work
 Squeeze these double-d's/bring you to your knees
 No sleaze, please/
 Only real niggas with hard cocks and treasury stocks.*

Shannon hears a soft SYNTH-SOUND that doesn't fit the hardcore rap. He nudges his engineer, GHOST (19. AKA: *The Juicy Jew*).

SHANNON
 Pull out the strings. We ain't
 making a Whitney Houston record.

As Ghost touches a knob on the mixing board -- HARD CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEYWAY, SOUTH CENTRAL - NIGHT

A '66 Cadillac Eldorado SPEEDS PAST. Rattling our camera.

INT. '66 CADILLAC - NIGHT

Behind the wheel is a handsome gangbanger dressed in blue, CARL 'CASSIUS' MASSEY (21). He's panicked, frantically dumps shit out the window as he drives -- baggies of weed, pills --

Headlight FLARE as Cassius ROARS into the street. He looks up, spins the wheel too late -- WHAM! The car fishtails, COLLIDING with a telephone pole.

Everything goes still. Silence. Cassius hears the WHINE of sirens. WHITE LIGHTS shine on him, a polite VOICE BOOMS:

OFFICER GANT (O.S.)
 Sir, this is the LAPD! With your
 right hand, please turn off the
 engine! Thank you very much, sir!

Then Cassius makes a huge mistake. He gets out of the car.

EXT. GAGE STREET, SOUTH CENTRAL - NIGHT

Cassius stares into BLINDING LIGHTS. The police are ominous silhouettes behind them. A quasi-fascist Orwell nightmare.

CASSIUS
 Yo, I didn't do nothing!

We're in the days before tasers, Cassius is instantly SWARMED by LAPD. Three white cops DOG-PILE him, swift, brutal. In the lead is OFFICER JASON GANT (35) a tan, muscular surfer.

As Cassius SCREAMS, as muscled bodies pile up, we PUSH IN on the HANDCUFFS, going tight around Cash's wrists. The cuffs keep tightening, going so tight that Cash starts to BLEED.

INT. BOOKING AREA, 77TH POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Cassius rubs his blood-smearred wrists. A BOOKING OFFICER (50s) silently strip-searches him, removing his shoes, belt, wallet, looking for drugs. It's humiliating, dehumanizing.

As Cash is stripped of piece after piece of jewelry, WE HEAR the cops who arrested him. CHATTING like he doesn't exist:

OFFICER GANT (O.S.)
 Where you thinking tonight? Zankou?

OFFICER FALES (O.S.)
 No, they use all that garlic on the
 chicken. They slather it in that
 shit.

The booking officer pulls down Cassius's pants, looking up his ass with a flashlight.

OFFICER GANT (O.S.)
 I could do a burger. How about
 In-N-Out?

CASSIUS
 (pants down, to booking officer)
 Yo, I want my phone call.

INT. CONTROL ROOM, SHANNON'S RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

Eva's done rapping, Shannon now mixes the track. Her voice sounds great, but for some reason Shannon isn't satisfied.

SHANNON
Nah. Something about the drum track
feels too soft to me...

A CHIRP sounds. Shannon pulls a flip-phone. His greeting:

SHANNON (INTO PHONE)
What you know?

Shannon abruptly SNAPS his fingers. Tense. The studio QUIETS.

SHANNON (PHONE)
Where'd it go down? ... Cash. We
got Capitol coming to the show
tonight. Focus.

Shannon's already walking out, ENTOURAGE MEMBERS fall in step behind him. FROGG (22) a hardcore CRIP in a blue bandana. And DON SOLOMON (28) a huge, 350-pound Samoan limo driver.

SHANNON (INTO PHONE)
Just tell me where you got
arrested ... Gage street, okay.
Anybody see you?

INT. LOBBY, 77TH POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Bill Slidell waits in the police station, anxious. He looks through glass at an office full of INTERNAL AFFAIRS AGENTS. One of the men glances out at him. Bill quickly TURNS AWAY.

Then Bill looks up to see a COMMOTION on the far side of the lobby, Shannon entering with his gaudily-dressed posse.

AT THE FRONT DESK -- Sergeant ED DANZIGER (40s) eyes a business card, suspicious.

SERGEANT DANZIGER
So you're not his lawyer...

Shannon stands before him. For some reason the producer has brought along an adorable young LATINO COUPLE (16).

SHANNON
His lawyer's in Cancun. I'm just
his producer.

Without blinking, Shannon pulls out a fat roll of HUNDREDS.

SHANNON
Now what's bail on a misdemeanor
possession? Twenty-five thousand?

The BAIL CLERK shoots Danziger a look. *Some producer.*

MOMENTS LATER

A pair of steel DOORS OPEN, Cassius is freed. The young rapper looks out at Shannon, relieved. Shannon RUSHES to his artist. He gives the boy a once-over, like an anxious father.

SHANNON

Lemme get a look at you. They didn't mess you up too bad?

Shan uses a pristine WHITE CUFF to wipe blood from Cash's forehead. Then he spots --

SHANNON

Goddamnit. Look at those wrists.

Cash's wrists are still covered in BLOODY CUTS. Cash points at Officer Gant, the fascist surfer-cop.

CASSIUS

The Kelly Slater-looking dude thumped me pretty good.

ON OFFICER GANT

Standing in the corner, talking to a nervous Bill Slidell.

BILL SLIDELL

It was just weird, man. He didn't look like a cop. He had the gold chains, that little skullcap thing...

OFFICER GANT

(puzzled)
He dressed like a *banger*?

Bill nods, unsure. As the question hangs there -- Shannon approaches with Cassius, his entourage, Sergeant Danziger.

Shannon's irate, calling out Gant in front of his boss.

SHANNON

Here he is, Sergeant. This man felt the need to abuse my artist over a nickel bag of weed --

Gant steps towards Cassius. Annoyed.

GANT

Sir c'mon. If he got injured, it was cause he resisted arrest.

Cassius instantly starts SHOUTING at the cops:

CASSIUS
 Hey yo, that's bullshit! They
 dogpiled me for no goddamn --

Shannon puts up a hand. In contrast to his artist, Shannon is a calm, controlled professional.

SHANNON
 Cash. I got this.
 (to Gant, fast)
 What Mr. Massey means is perhaps
 you forgot to double lock his
 handcuffs. That happens from
 time-to-time, don't it?

Gant's thrown by that. Danziger looks at him: *Well, did you?*

GANT
 Technically it's possible but --

Behind Shannon, Cassius GRINS. Shannon radiates calm.

SHANNON
 Either way, we'd like to file a use-
 of-force complaint. I also want a
 doctor to confirm the injuries.

SERGEANT DANZIGER
 (rolls his eyes)
 Sir. We can respect your client's
 rights but --

Shannon puts a huge hand on Cash's neck. Narrows his eyes.

SHANNON
 See, that's where you're turned
 around. He ain't a client. My
 artists are my family. You just
 disrespected my son --

SERGEANT DANZIGER
 Be that as it may, you can't just
 storm in here with your posse --

Shannon innocently motions to the Latino Couple.

SHANNON
 A posse? Sergeant, these are
witnesses. They wanna speak on the
 record about your man's behavior.

The Latino Couple nods. Officer Gant's getting a headache.

GANT
 Okay, look. We'll work with you here,
 but this could take a while --

SHANNON

I'll be in the complaints office.
This ain't my first rodeo.

The cops all watch as Shannon MOVES Cassius and the entourage into a small office. Behind Gant, Slidell WHISTLES:

BILL SLIDELL

Some lawyer.

SERGEANT DANZIGER

(shakes his head)

I don't get it. The guy's a damn
record producer.

EXT. 77TH STREET POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Doors open. Shannon HUSTLES Cash out of the station, arm around his star, protective. REPORTERS YELL questions as they pass.

REPORTERS

Cassius, have you ever smoked
crack?!/Cash, are you still
affiliated with the Crips?!

Shannon hurries Cassius into a WHITE LIMO. It RUMBLES off.

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY, DOWNTOWN CLUB - NIGHT

Shannon hustles Cassius down the dark, cramped hallway. Cassius, now channeling Muhammad Ali before a fight. We hear a MUFFLED CHANT offscreen. CASH-USS! ... CASH-USS!

As Cassius walks, men from his entourage keep handing him things. Bottled water. A towel. A bulletproof vest. A mic.

Cash pauses before stepping onstage. Turns to Shannon.

CASSIUS

How I look?

Shannon turns his discerning eye on Cassius's wardrobe. The boy's ugly orange Jordans. ... CASH-USS! ... CASH-USS! ...

SHANNON

Switch the shoes. Go with boots.

CASSIUS

Frogg didn't bring me no boots.

A beat. Shannon begins taking the boots off his own feet.

SHANNON

All good. You a ten and a half right?

INT. ONSTAGE, DOWNTOWN CLUB - NIGHT

The crowd ROARS as Cassius steps onstage, wearing Shannon's boots. The BEAT drops, Cassius raises a FIST overhead.

CASSIUS (INTO MIC)
Sup y'all. Raise up them hands if
you hate the muthafucking LAPD!

FROM THE WINGS

As Cassius RAPS, Shannon coolly watches his star. Wearing socks.

INT. BAR AREA, CLUB - NIGHT

A gangsta rap beat PULSES, we PULL BACK through a FIELD OF HANDS. We arrive on two CAPITOL RECORD EXECS watching by the bar. The only white faces in the club, they are:

MAYA SHAPIRO (32). A sexy, half-Jewish A&R who used to be a rocker. And KRIS BAXTER (35) Waspy, VP of A&R. Patrick Bateman with a coke problem.

Shannon watches as the executives scrutinize Cassius. It's so loud, everyone has to SHOUT. We see SUBTITLES when necessary.

MAYA
Some serious charisma, right?!

Kris nods, anxious to see Cassius brandishing an UZI onstage.

KRIS
Just tell me that gun's a prop!

SHANNON
Water guns! We spraypaint 'em
black. All part of the act.

Kris looks relieved. Onstage, Cash keeps rapping as he's SWARMED by female fans. Maya looks thrilled.

MAYA
I've seen enough! I think we could
use something edgy like this at
Capitol! How'd you feel about a
deal?! Take your business national!

Inside, Shannon does a backflip. Outside, he plays it cool.

SHANNON
Long as we find the right number!
Righteous.

KRIS
(grinning now)
Swing by the office next week!
(MORE)

KRIS (CONT'D)
 We love the record, we're dying to
 hear what you do next!

ONSTAGE -- Cash and his crew point machine-guns straight AT
 THE AUDIENCE. Pretending to blow away the crowd. *BANG!*

EXT. PARKING LOT, DOWNTOWN CLUB - NIGHT

Outside, the music is a THUMP. Shannon emerges from the club,
 fixing a cuff. He walks around the parking lot, feeling good.

Then he hears a NOISE. A high RHYTHMIC WHIR, like a dentist's
 drill. Shannon's ears PERK UP. He follows the noise to --

A CHOP SHOP

Under halogens, FILIPINO TEENAGERS strip a BMW. One of the
 kids takes the wheels off, the drill makes a RHYTHMIC PULSE.

Shannon stands there. Listening to the PULSE of that drill.
 There's a RHYTHM to it: *BZ-BZ--BZZZZZ...BZ-BZ--BZZZZZ...*

MATCH TO:

INT. CONTROL ROOM, SHANNON'S RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

The SAME RHYTHM has now become the DRUM TRACK to Eva's song.

Shannon's incorporated the industrial buzz into the track,
 giving it a more aggressive beat. Heads BOB in the studio.

SHANNON
 Eva, what you think?

EVA
 I love it.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, POLICE STATION - NIGHT

TIGHT ON: Lips up to a microphone. *Are we in the studio?*

SLIDELL'S LIPS (O.S.)
 Seeing officer Durant was deceased,
 I secured the area, then notified my
 station.

It's Bill, sweating, sitting with the panel of INTERNAL
 AFFAIRS BUREAUCRATS. It's a shooting review board. Leading
 the meeting is MARCIA, a woman with great big shoulder pads.

MARCIA FROM IA
 Thank you, officer Slidell ...
 Now, during the altercation, did
 you use any racially-charged
 language? Such as the word nigger.

Bill seems confident on this point.

BILL SLIDELL
No. I don't use that word. Ever.

MARCIA FROM IA
Did you in any way escalate the situation?

Then Bill shifts in his seat, uncomfortable. Yes.

BILL SLIDELL
No ma'am. He insulted me, so I may have spoken sharply. That was it.

The bureaucrats TAKE NOTES. Then comes --

MARCIA FROM IA
Did you identify yourself as a police officer?

Fuck. That's a big no. Bill leans into the mic.

BILL SLIDELL
Yes ma'am.

As the bureaucrats take more notes, Bill adds:

BILL SLIDELL
Just to be clear. From how Mr. Durant was dressed, his demeanor, I uh, took him to be a gang-member.

Marcia makes a quiet *mm-hmm* noise. Flips through Bill's file.

MARCIA FROM IA
I'm also seeing you've drawn your weapon a total of seventeen times? That's gotta be some kind of record.

One man SMILES. Bill bristles, getting confrontational. He hates taking shit from '*insiders*' (cops who work desks).

BILL SLIDELL
Ma'am, do you ever work south of the 10? Ever had to seize a rock house?
(her face, she hasn't)
The guys up at Hollywood Station, maybe they got the luxury of not drawing their guns. Down here, there's a war on. Hell, that's why they call this place *The Garrison*.

More notes being taken. *Issues w/ authori* --

MARCIA FROM IA
Speaking of nicknames. I understand you have one as well.

Bill, discomfort creeping in now. *Fuck.*

SLIDELL

We all do. It's part of initiation.

MARCIA FROM IA

What do other officers call you?

A beat. Bill *really* doesn't want this on tape. No choice.

BILL SLIDELL

They call me the Shit-Magnet.

MARCIA FROM IA

(the faintest smile)

Thank you, officer. We'll let you know.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

INT. MICHAEL'S ROOM - DAY

A tiny bedroom with a barred window. A busted Nintendo. The only thing of value: the pristine RECORD COLLECTION.

MICHAEL PRENTISS (18) sits on the bed, using a four-track and turntable, creating a SAMPLE. He wears headphones, we can't hear anything. But he moves his hands like a pro.

Michael reaches out to his records, STOPS -- There's a GAP in the collection. Between *Janet* and *The Jesus and Mary Chain*.

INT. HALLWAY, MICHAEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Michael walks down the narrow hall. He enters a bedroom, starts rifling through a woman's purse.

INT. KITCHEN, MICHAEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Michael's mother, DEANDRA (30s) cooks eggs on a stove. She looks up as Michael SLAMS her purse down on the table. Angry.

MICHAEL

Hey yo, I *know* you didn't just snatch all my MJ records.

DEANDRA

(keeps cooking)

Your *what?* Baby, I don't know what you talking about --

Michael pulls out a small roll of CASH from her purse.

MICHAEL

Stop lying. You got a fat bankroll in your purse, and the first is still a week away.

Deandra looks guilty -- *busted*. She turns on the GARBAGE DISPOSAL, drowning him out. She talks over the noise:

DEANDRA

I'm sorry baby, I had to pay for my prescriptions! I'll get you back.

Michael, annoyed, already stalking back to his room.

MICHAEL

Dammit, mom. You gonna steal shit, steal some Kraftwerk or something. Don't snatch my party records.

INT. MICHAEL'S ROOM - DAY

Michael enters, opening his closet. It's full of red hats, red khakis. Michael shoves a RED BANDANA into his pocket, checking himself out in the mirror. Michael is a Blood.

EXT. STREET CORNER, CRENSHAW - DAY

Under palm trees, another GANGBANGER waits with a duffel. This is LUKE WARD (17). Red bandana, red beads on his braids.

Luke hears an ominous RUMBLE as a Impala with tinted-windows PULLS UP. Luke looks around, steps inside. *A drug deal maybe?*

INT. IMPALA - DAY

Luke's in the back seat, up front are two BASEHEADS (20s). Twitchy like zombies. It's a miracle they can drive.

The junkies hand Luke some bills. Luke counts them, then pulls a .40 Beretta PISTOL from his bag. For a second we're sure he'll rob them. He lays the gun on the backseat.

BASEHEAD

It's clean?

The junkie reaches for it. Luke slides the gun away.

LUKE

Hold up. I better not hear you went out blasting Crips with this...

BASEHEAD

We look like soldiers? We just need to protect our stash.

A beat. Luke considers them. Then takes the money.

EXT. STREET, LUKE'S HOUSE - DAY

Luke steps out of the Impala, handing the junkies a mixtape.

LUKE

Here's a little bonus. They two MC's about to break out the pack.

BASEHEAD

(beat, considers the tape)
Cool.

The Impala RUMBLES OFF. Luke HURRIES back to his house with the money. Michael rolls up on a skateboard, troubled.

MICHAEL

You weren't giving our demo tape to no more crackheads, right?

LUKE
I'm hustling is what I'm doing.

Luke drops money through a HOLE in the screen door, CALLS OUT:

LUKE
Yo, Marcus. Got your cut!

From inside the house, they hear a GRUFF VOICE. An older male.

MARCUS WARD (O.S.)
A'ight.

Michael clicks his tongue, annoyed. Luke grabs a skateboard.

MICHAEL
Man. That tape has *my* address on it. They better not call the house.

Luke and Michael SKATE OFF down the block. Red bandanas hanging out their back pockets, blowing in the breeze.

Passing them on the street is a LOS ANGELES CITY BUS.

INT. LOS ANGELES CITY BUS - DAY

Passengers are all black, working-class. A few Hispanic construction workers. Amid them we find --

Shannon. He wears a suit, sticks out like a sore thumb. He sits with DEMO TAPES and a Walkman. Listening to SUBMISSIONS.

TIME LAPSE -- All the passengers ENTER AND EXIT as Shannon just sits there with his demos, listening.

Finally the bus reaches the end of the line and STOPS. Only Shannon and the BUS-DRIVER remain. *What's he doing here?*

Shannon approaches the driver. She looks up at him. A beat. Then Shannon takes his headphones off, puts them ON HER HEAD.

SHANNON
What you think mama?

This is ELLIE REESE (48). Shannon's mom. They're practically the same age. With headphones on, Ellie speaks WAY TOO LOUD:

ELLIE
Nah, I'm not feeling it!

SHANNON
Me neither.

EXT. SHANNON'S BLOCK, CRENSHAW - DAY

In the hood, KINDERGARTNERS wait on a corner. As the kids and their TEACHER cross the street, they all hold their HANDS UP, as if to say: *don't shoot*.

The camera WANDERS OFF to find Shannon behind Ellie, COVERING her eyes with his hands. After a moment, he pulls away his hands. Ellie opens her eyes, shocked.

ELLIE
You're getting out?

She eyes Shannon's house. A SOLD SIGN out front. Frogg and Don load his possessions into a U-HAUL. Shannon's moving out.

SHANNON
The album's selling. I sold the place to Charlie Hustle.

Ellie literally SCREAMS. Throws arms around her son's neck.

ELLIE
We are so blessed!

Shannon grins. Embarrassed in front of his crew of bangers.

SHANNON
I thought you'd be sad to see it go. Lot of memories in that house.

ELLIE
I ain't sentimental like you. That old pimp can have this place.

INT. LIVING ROOM, SHANNON'S HOUSE, CRENSHAW - DAY

Inside, Shannon boxes up his record collection. After a moment, He pulls out a record: On it is a photo of his mother, onstage with James Brown. *'The Mighty Ellie Reese!'*

Ellie once performed with James Brown. Now she drives a bus.

IN THE KITCHEN

Ellie packs up a box of cleaning products, HUMMING SOFTLY to herself. After just a few bars we can tell: Ellie can sing.

Abruptly Ellie STOPS. Feeling for something way down under the sink. Puzzled, Ellie pulls down a dusty little RING BOX. As Ellie BLOWS DUST off the lid -- HARD CUT TO:

EXT. CRENSHAW STREET - DAY

The U-HAUL RUMBLING through the hood, Shannon's Lexus follows.

They turn into a GAS STATION, where WORKMEN wash lowriders. In the distance, we can see LA's dividing line: The 10 Freeway.

INT. SHANNON'S LEXUS, GAS STATION - DAY

The U-Haul fills up. Shannon idles in his Lexus, listening to soul music with his mom, pleased. A BULLMASTIFF sits in back.

SHANNON

Y'know, the new crib is plenty big.
If this Capitol thing goes, I could
build you a little guest house...

Ellie turns to her son. Troubled.

ELLIE

Shan, baby. Is there something you
need to tell me?

Ellie pulls the RING BOX from her pocket. Inside is a baggie with two PEBBLES OF CRACK. Shannon's eyes bulge. He WHISPERS:

SHANNON

Jesus, Mama. The hell is that -- ?

ELLIE

You tell me. I found it under the
sink.

Shannon SNATCHES the baggie, exits. He throws the crack away like it's nuclear waste. He gets back in the car, speaks SOFT:

SHANNON

Take it easy. Remember when we moved
you to Baldwin Hills? We found some
shit from way back in the day --

ELLIE

(cross)
Oh, don't bullshit me. You're doing
so good right now. But you take one
wrong step --

He gives her a look: *okay, I'm gonna give you the real.*

SHANNON

Mama. Relax. I'ma be real with you,
cause I respect you. If I was still
slinging out of that house, you
wouldn't be finding no *two little*
pebbles, okay? You just found some
itty bitty leftovers is all.

Ellie eyes her son. Trusting that he no longer sells drugs.

ELLIE

Okay, baby. I just don't want what happened to me, happening to you.

On that cryptic note --

SHANNON

Don't worry. I ain't slipping.
Not for one second.

THEN, THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD, WE SEE SOMETHING OUT OF FOCUS:

- A MAN steps out of an idling black Chevy.
- He walks calmly to the car wash employees. Draws a SHOTGUN.
- BOOM. He FIRES point-blank. Blowing an employee's head off.

Shannon reacts. Panicking, throwing the car in REVERSE.

His side-view mirror SNAPS OFF against a POLE, his car SCREECHING to a stop. Shannon HOLDS Ellie down in the car.

A long beat. They both heave. Shannon's dog BARKS LIKE CRAZY. Ellie GLANCES up, Shannon pulls her head back down, HISSING:

SHANNON (CONT'D)

Wait till you hear the tires.

Ellie DUCKS. Waiting until she hears the SCREECH of the shooter's tires. At last Shannon cautiously opens his door.

EXT. CAR WASH, CRENSHAW - DAY

Shaken, Shannon steps out into CHAOS. A car alarm BLARES. One woman keeps SHRIEKING. And on the far side of the lot, some poor KID is lying there with his face blown apart.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHANNON'S NEW HOUSE, BEVERLY HILLS - DUSK

The dead quiet of Beverly Hills. Manicured lawns, big houses. In the stillness, we hear a Lexus and a moving truck RUMBLE into the driveway of a smallest house on the block.

Shannon exits, surveying his new neighborhood. Beverly Hills is so clean and quiet, it's almost surreal.

INT. KITCHEN, SHANNON'S NEW HOUSE - DUSK

Shannon puts his busted SIDE-VIEW MIRROR on the kitchen table. WE LINGER on the hunk of plastic as Shannon steps off.

Offscreen, Shannon starts giving his mom a tour of his home.

SHANNON (O.S.)

See how you step down there? They call that a sunken living room.

ELLIE (O.S.)
Oh, and look at that *pool*...

INT. SLIDELL GARAGE, SIMI VALLEY - DAY

FINGERS press play on a stereo. The sound of Navy Seal
CADENCE DRILLS blares from the speakers. A sergeant SHOUTS:

DRILL SERGEANT'S VOICE
*Out of blood and guts we grew/
We're a rough and ready crew!
Sound off/One-two-three-four!*

Bill Slidell is in his garage, doing BENCH PRESS to the
cadence drills. A product of the LAPD's militarized culture.

NOW: Bill cleans his blue LAPD UNIFORM. Polishing the
buttons. Taking pride in his appearance, but also a tad OCD.

INT. BATHROOM, SLIDELL HOUSE - DAY

Finishing his routine, Bill draws ANABOLIC STEROIDS from a
small vial into a syringe. He pulls his pants down, jabs the
syringe into a glute. As Bill starts injecting himself --

We hear a quiet KNOCK on the door. A TEENAGE GIRL outside.

BILL SLIDELL
Casey, I'm in here.

CASEY'S VOICE (O.S.)
Dad, can I borrow ten bucks?

Bill - the needle in his butt, still trying to be a good dad.

BILL SLIDELL
(calls out)
What do you need it for?

IN THE HALLWAY

Bill's daughter, CASEY SLIDELL (15) stands outside the door.
She has bright eyes, wears big 90's overalls.

CASEY SLIDELL
Me and Emily Dupree wanted to see
that gangster movie, *Good-Fellows*?

Beat. We hear the sound of the toilet FLUSH. The door opens
and Bill emerges. He fishes 15 BUCKS out of his wallet.

BILL SLIDELL
Sure, sweetie. Take fifteen.

Casey SNATCHES the money, psyched. She starts to run off.

CASEY SLIDELL
Thanks dad.

BILL SLIDELL
(stopping her)
Hey.

Casey turns. Bill TAPS on his cheek twice, like -- *forget something?*

Beat. Casey KISSES her dad on the cheek, runs off. We stay on Bill for a quiet moment as he SHUTS the bathroom door.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. 77TH STREET POLICE STATION, SOUTH CENTRAL - DAY

Bill SHUTTING the door of his Buick. He's now in uniform, in South Central. He walks to the station, ready to return to work. As he approaches the station, Bill instantly TENSES UP:

BILL SLIDELL
You gotta be shitting me.

A small PROTEST out front. BLACK MEN AND WOMEN hold picket signs emblazoned with the SMILING FACE of the cop Bill shot.

PROTESTORS (BULLHORN)
Justice for ... Damon Durant!
Justice for ... Damon Durant!

Bill PAUSES, unsure how to handle it. *Does he walk past them?*

Slowly, 3 WHITE COPS emerge from the crowd. Bill's relieved to see HIS CREW approaching. Officer Gant in the lead.

GANT
It's alright bro. We got you.

IN THE THICK OF THE PROTEST

FOUR LAPD COPS stand in a line, clearing a path for Bill. Three of them are thickset, masculine WHITE MEN. We linger on --

A young Latina woman, rookie cop ALICE CALDERON (20s). The way she carries her body--chest out, chin up--makes her look as masculine as any of the men. She watches as --

BILL'S CREW escorts him through the protest, pushing through bodies like a Roman phalanx. Bill stands tall, inwardly raging.

LEAD PROTESTOR (BULLHORN)
Look at him! Already back at work!
Not even a slap on the wrist! The
LAPD has no respect for minorities!

Bill winces, a FEMALE PROTESTOR gets up in his face, SHOUTS:

FEMALE PROTESTER

You sonofabitch. Damon was a hero.

That *really* pisses Bill off. He can't help himself.

BILL SLIDELL

I'm sorry, Ma'am. Officer Durant was no hero. He shot first. He antagonized *me*--

As Bill tries to continue --

LEAD PROTESTOR (BULLHORN)

The LAPD has blood on its hands!

Splat! From out of the protest, someone chucks a small can of RED PAINT. The paint ARCING, catching Bill in his chest, his back, leaving a long RED SLASH on his OCD-clean uniform.

Bill's WHIRLS, ready to explode. Instantly Alice Calderon reacts. She gruffly GRABS the protestor, TWISTING his arms behind his back, SHOVING him to the ground. Macho.

ALICE CALDERON

You. Sit your ass down on the curb!

Bill SEETHES, ready to throw a punch. Gant has to GRAB his arm, looking in Bill's eyes, intense, trying to de-escalate:

GANT

The second you react, they win.

This seems to reach Bill. He gulps anger, keep PUSHING through the crowd, showing restraint.

As the protest keeps raging, Bill and his three buddies enter the police station together.

One of the blue uniforms is streaked RED.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

INT. LOBBY, CAPITOL RECORDS BUILDING - DAY

A lavish display on the wall. 7 platinum CDs in a glass case.
'*Congratulations Poison! 7,000,000 Units Sold!*'

Shannon sits under it, in a lobby the size of Dodger Stadium.
He checks his watch, annoyed. A VOICE ECHOES:

ASSISTANT AT CAPITOL
Sir? They said you can reschedule?

NOW: Shannon PACES in the lobby, holding a flip-phone,
anxious. He gets Cassius's ANSWERING MACHINE:

CASH'S VOICE (THRU PHONE)
This is Cash. I'll holler back.

SHANNON (INTO PHONE)
(a sharp whisper)
Cash, don't do this to me. All of
Capitol's asking where you at, now
get your ass up here. It's the round
building with the spike on top.

Shannon hangs up, nervous.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, CAPITOL RECORDS - DAY

Shannon sits in a lavish conference room with Maya, Kris, and
5 OLD-GUARD RECORD EXECs. White, jewish men who do not get
hip-hop. Cassius is missing. The room is Antarctica-chilly.

SHANNON
Cash is just having some family
drama. He sends his apologies.

All eyes are on: ALLEN GARLAND (50's). An ex-lawyer whose
heyday was the Laurel Canyon scene. He stares at Cassius's
CD, skeptical. On it: Cassius is shirtless, holding an AK-47.

AGING RECORD EXEC
Is it true he was just *arrested*? We
keep reading about ties to the Crips.

Shannon shifts, playing defense. He eyes a Poison poster.

SHANNON
You telling me Brett Michaels never
seen the inside of a jail cell?

Finally Garland looks up, holding Cassius's album.

GARLAND
You're right, our artists live
hard. This is different.
(MORE)

GARLAND (CONT'D)

Your rappers seem to be in a kind of -- *Andy Warhol-world* where they're living out their art.

Allen reads from Cassius's liner notes. As white as it gets.

GARLAND

'Cock the glock, blast him dead two times?' ... Just how much of this is real, Mr. Reese?

Shannon smiles faintly. In the 90's, rap is still scary.

SHANNON

The song you're quoting. *Dead Two Times*. You know what it's about?

GARLAND

I can't say I do. The lyrics read like violence for violence's sake.

Shannon lowers his voice. He's a strong storyteller, and all the executives slowly LEAN IN as he weaves his spell.

SHANNON

This boy Cash knew, Stagger, got himself shot at the roller rink. As the coroner's loading him into a van, some real *hardcore* gangstas pull up. They whip out a shotgun and say: *open the back*. The Coroner tries to tell them the boy's already dead. Gangstas say: *that don't matter. We gonna kill him again.*

A SILENCE as the executives contemplate the sheer nihilism of that. Shannon has led them into darkness, he's about to lead them out. As he speaks, he becomes increasingly passionate.

SHANNON

You imagine that? *Kill him again?* Only way we could comprehend that shit was by *turning it into a song*. And because of our song, now rap fans heard about Stag in Oakland. They heard about him in Sacramento. That's what my music does. It ain't violence. It makes violence matter.

The executives, all deeply impressed now. Shannon pushes out his chair, ready to walk out. Taking the power back.

SHANNON

But if you want *Every Rose Has Its Thorn*, then okay. I'll take my gold-record-making ass over to Warners.

Maya smiles. Execs eye Allen. No one wants Shannon to go.

GARLAND
Mr. Reese. Hang on.
(as Shannon stops)
I admire your passion. And we *do*
want to be in business. But that'll
depend on two things.

SHANNON
I'm all ears.

Garland TAPS Cash's record with an index finger.

GARLAND
Tell Cash to dial back the bad
behavior. And deliver us more hits.
Gold is one thing. But a triple-
platinum follow-up? Even better.

The challenge has officially been issued.

SHANNON
Thanks for your time.

CUT TO:

INT. CASSIUS'S ROOM, IROQUOIS MOTEL - DAY

An interracial THREESOME in progress. Cassius lies on a scuzzy motel bed, getting a lap-dance from TWO STRIPPERS. Both girls cover their crotches with Cash's GOLD RECORD. Music BLARES.

THUMPTHUMPTHUMP. A loud BANGING on the door. Cash CALLS OUT:

CASSIUS
We busy!

The BANGING won't stop. Cassius angrily opens the door -- Shannon STORMS inside, eying the strippers.

SHANNON
Girls, pack your shit.

Cash BACKPEDALS, trying to put clothes on. Shannon follows, KNOCKING over the boombox. We see flashes of a fierce TEMPER.

SHANNON (CONT'D)
You think this is a game? I just
bought a *house*. I'm betting
everything on this label. On you --

CASSIUS
(backpedaling)
Will you chill out?! The record's a
hit. We gonna be fine --

SHANNON

Nah see, *I* think we want different things. I got all these dreams for you, you acting like some hood-nigga with nothing to lose.

Shannon has BACKED his shirtless star into the wall of the small room. Looming over him, intimidating.

CASSIUS

Maybe I didn't wanna be shown-off to a roomful of whitefolks, a'ight? It's like ever since we gone gold, everyone *expecting* shit.

That comment makes Shannon soften a little.

SHANNON

Does that scare you? That pressure.

CASSIUS

(thrown now)

What -- ? Hell no. I ain't scared.

Shannon glances out the door. Making sure no one can hear them. He lowers his voice nearly to a WHISPER:

SHANNON

Maybe you should be. I am.

CASSIUS

You scared? You.

Instead of shouting, Shannon starts opening up about his fears. This isn't something these men talk about, ever.

SHANNON

Yeah, dog. I'm scared they gonna say we a one-hit wonder. I'm scared we'll be back in the hood. 'Course I'm scared. Every nigga scared.

CASSIUS

(beat, softer)

I guess -- I'm a *little* scared.

SHANNON

Yeah? What you scared of?

CASSIUS

(pensive now)

I guess, like, I don't wanna end up like my cousin, you know? Some washed-up banger, no good to nobody.

Shannon, turning the conversation, sounding like a mentor.

SHANNON

The only way we can fight that shit is by staying hungry. Going to every meeting, crushing every track. You are still hungry...?

Cassius looks back, more determination in his eyes now.

CASSIUS

Starved.

SHANNON

Then from now on, do your job. 'Cause I can't be poor no more.

Shannon THROWS Cash his shirt. Star motivated, job done.

INT. SLIDELL'S SQUAD CAR - DAY

Slidell and Gant drive through Crenshaw, wearing wraparounds. They're the only white people in the hood. Bill looks out the window, eyefucking every black dude he sees. Thinking.

BILL SLIDELL

Here's what I don't get. We got the best department in the country. Yeah, a few guys are dirty. Maybe they're keeping a drop-gun in their war bag. But a cop flashing full-on *gang signs*?

GANT

You sure that's what you saw? Maybe he was just giving you the finger.

Bill struggles to flex his fingers into a GANG-SIGN.

BILL SLIDELL

He wasn't giving me the finger. He was kind of making an *R-shape*. Like this...

Just then, their radio CHIRPS THREE TIMES:

RADIO VOICE (O.S.)

All units. Code three. Thirteen-eleven Normandie. Shots fired--

Something CLICKS inside Bill. Like a sleeper agent activated:

SLIDELL (INTO RADIO)

Ten-four dispatch, Adam-12 on route.

EXT. ROCK HOUSE - DAY

A squat house with bars on the windows. Bill's car SCREECHES UP. Bill and Gant DART out, Bill draws a wheel-gun.

BILL SLIDELL
 (as he KICKS IN the door)
 LAPD! We're coming in!

INT. LIVING ROOM, ROCK HOUSE - DAY

The men sweep through with military precision. Bill's face -- *I am in my element*. He sees the room has ZERO FURNITURE (all been sold). Bill, clocking CRACK PARAPHERNALIA on the floor.

Bill approaches the CRACKED DOOR to a bedroom. He PEEKS through, spotting a FEMALE VICTIM (black, 20's) lying on the floor, flecked with blood. Bill WHISPERS back to Gant.

BILL SLIDELL
 Female vic. I don't have eyes on --

Th-Thunk! Two GUNSHOTS PUNCH through the door. Bill falls back as a HYPED-UP VOICE SCREAMS behind the closed door:

PERPETRATOR'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Get out pig! I ain't scared to die!

Thunk! Bill looks through the windows, sees a SQUAD CAR pulling up. TWO BLACK OFFICERS inside. Bill SCREAMS to them:

BILL SLIDELL
 Lake! Go around back!

The black officers make EYE CONTACT with Bill for a moment. Then they roll their window up. Refusing to back him up. Bill and Gant share a HORRIFIED glance. *This is our life now*.

GANT
 No way.

But Bill is still laser-beam focused, BURSTING out the front.

BILL SLIDELL
 Keep him busy.

EXT. ROCK HOUSE - DAY

WE STAY BEHIND BILL -- one long shot -- as he moves around the side of the house, ducking, gun drawn, listening to SCREAMS and the odd GUNSHOT as Gant defends himself.

PERPETRATOR'S VOICE (O.S.)
 You think I'm scared to die?!

Bill reaches the BACK DOOR. Deep breath. He TURNS the knob --

INT. ROCK HOUSE, BACK ROOM - DAY

Bill spots the PERP (shirtless, manic) from behind. Bill's pistol is pointed, but he can't shoot the guy in the back.

BILL SLIDELL
Sir! Put down the weapon!

As the man TURNS, Bill can see a BLOODY WOMAN lying on the floor beside him, her face has been BEATEN to a pulp. Sloppy TEARS roll down the man's cheeks, he SPUTTERS:

PERPETRATOR
(crying)
She been trying to play me.

At that, the Perp puts his pistol under his OWN CHIN, and --

BILL SLIDELL
Sir, don't you do it!

Crack! The Perp pulls the trigger, his head EXPLODING in a puff of crimson.

Bill stares in mute shock as the man DROPS. Beat. Then Bill quickly holsters his gun, RUSHING to the bloody woman.

Gant enters, seeing blood and WEEPING SORES all over the victim's face. It's grotesque. Bill is crouched, putting his hands over her mouth, seeing if he can safely perform CPR.

GANT
(stricken)
Dude. AIDS.

To his surprise, Bill says *fuck it*, puts his bare mouth onto the victim's bloody lips, giving CPR. Gant is repulsed.

For good or ill, Bill Slidell is always a man who will act.

EXT. ROCK HOUSE, CRENSHAW STREET - DAY

Bill barrels out of the house, covered in blood. Over his shoulder we see MEDICS wheeling the victim outside.

Bill STORMS into the empty street, turning circles, looking for the black officers who abandoned him. They're GONE.

WE GO TIGHT: On Bill's face as he turns circles, staring into the street, his lips and cheeks flecked with blood. He's seething, confused. His world no longer makes sense.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

EXT. BLACK BOX THEATER, PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A marquee reads *Cassius. One Nite Only!*

TILT DOWN to see Michael and Luke wearing SECURITY UNIFORMS. The boys carry poles, setting up a velvet rope before a show.

LUKE
Gimme one more. It has to be real
nasty though, that's my rule.

MICHAEL
A'ight. What's the subject.

LUKE
(thinking, grins)
Barbara Bush.

MICHAEL
You picking on the first lady now?

LUKE
Rules are rules. Time to show and
prove.

Luke starts to BEAT BOX, doing a goofy little dance as Michael RAPS about Barbara Bush. Neither boy spots the CONVOY OF GAUDY LOWRIDERS pulling into the parking lot behind them.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
*Crenshaw bricks I push
Seen the devil and it's Barbara's bush/
When you around, Babs, I'm misbehavin'
But you can't suck dick like Nancy Reagan/*

Luke erupts into CHEERS. Pumping his fist, CRACKING UP:

LUKE
Ho! My boy slaying two first ladies!

The boys hear a WHISTLE. Their boss, Mr. Casper (40s) eyes them, annoyed. Warm vibes vanish.

MR. CASPER
Mike. See if they need anything.

The boys turn. WE HOLD on their faces, TENSING UP. Stepping out of the convoy are a GANG OF CRIPS. All dressed in BLUE.

MICHAEL
That's a mob of Crips, man. Hide
that flag.

Luke shoves the red BLOODS BANDANA in his pocket. He squints at the Crips. It's Cassius and his crew. Shannon and Eva among them. Everyone is at the club for sound-check.

LUKE

Hold up. You know who that is...?
I just got an idea.

INT. BLACK BOX THEATER - NIGHT

Inside, the club's DJ, HUNCH (20s) sets up his gear. Luke and Mike burst in with their MIXTAPE.

MICHAEL

Yo Hunch. Put this through the PA.

HUNCH

Get outta here with that weak shit.

Luke watches Cassius disappear backstage. He dumps a baggie of ROCK on the mixing board. A beat. Hunch takes it, nods.

BACKSTAGE AREA

Luke and Michael emerge BACKSTAGE. They see Cassius in a tableau of hip-hop decadence. Weed and women. From the boys' faces, they've just seen the promised land.

Michael and Luke's MUSIC starts playing over the PA. It's a remix of En Vogue's *Hold On*. Only the bass is SO LOUD, you can barely hear the rap. Michael eyes the speakers, pissed.

MICHAEL

Man, that fool got the bass up too high. You can't hear shit.

ON CASSIUS -- with his crew. Michael and Luke stand BEHIND HIM, approaching with caution. Risking a conversation.

MICHAEL

Hey Cassius? We love the record, man. *Foot Soldiers* was inspired...

Cassius is in a bad mood. Quickly TURNS BACK to his boys.

CASSIUS

Yeah cool. So Frogg, do that thing tonight where the beat drops out...

IN THE CLUB'S MAIN ROOM

Shannon and Eva stand by a rack of clothes. Eva shows off a Mary J. Blige-style BRA. They steal glances at each other.

EVA

What you think of this one? For my guest spot on *The Wrong Ho*.

SHANNON
 (pulling clothes)
 Could do. But I thought we'd give
 you something *sultry*. Like, a man's
 shirt, unbuttoned to the belly.

Eva puts on one of the tops, unbuttoning it low.

EVA
 You mean like this?

WE STAY on Shannon. That En Vogue song is playing in the background, but it's so bad -- and the sexual tension so thick -- it's hard to tell if Shannon's registering it.

BACKSTAGE

Michael and Luke stand awkwardly behind Cassius, big fans. Luke can't take a hint.

LUKE
 Cash. You need an opener at *The Lodge*? 'Cause we got this duo...

At that moment Frogg spots the RED BEADS poking out the back of Luke's hat. Frogg's voice is a DEEP CROAK:

FROGG
 Yo slob.

A beat. Luke, Mike, Cassius instantly go silent. Luke TURNS --

LUKE
 What'd you say, nigga?

Cassius stands, KNOCKS off Luke's hat, revealing ROWS OF RED BEADS on his braids. Gangbangers in blue eye them. MURMURING.

CASSIUS
 You representing the Bloods dog?/
 What set you from, nigga?

Suddenly it's like we're in the Wild West. Violence is imminent.

MICHAEL
 Man it's cool. We just work here --

But it's too late. Men in blue are JOSTLING Luke.

CASSIUS/THE ENTOURAGE
 Claim, dog/Where you from?/Be a man!

It's a direct challenge to Luke's manhood. Luke looks Cassius right in the face. He pulls the RED BANDANA from his pocket.

LUKE
 I'm from the Almighty Crenshaw
 Bloods. And your album only got one
hot track. The rest is filler.

Michael lets out a huge SIGH. Then Don steps up and CLOCKS
 Luke in the face, KNOCKING him into a table, spilling drinks.

Instantly the entourage is on Luke, unleashing a FLURRY OF
 KICKS. Behind them, Cash HOLLERS, a self-conscious artist:

CASSIUS
 What you mean, filler?! My shit's
 wall-to-wall hits!

ON SHANNON. Bursting backstage, seeing the beat-down.irate.

SHANNON
 Be cool. Everyone be cool.

And just as it seems like the situation's diffused -- Luke
rises and SMASHES A GUITAR over the Samoan's head.

Don drops to a knee. As Frogg reaches for a 9mm -- CRACK! A
 GUNBLAST tears through the ceiling. Everyone turns. By the
 door, Mr. Casper holds a 12-gauge. An angry saloon-keeper.

MR. CASPER
 Luke. Michael. You're fired. Out.

Michael scrambles, pulling Luke for the door, fast.

CASSIUS
 This ain't over, slob.

Michael frantically shuts the door, leaving behind a dozen
 armed gangsters, all dressed in blue, all mad-dogging them.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM, POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The black officers who abandoned Bill -- LAMONT LAKE and EDWIN
 CHASE (30s). They stand at lockers, changing out of uniforms.

RACK FOCUS TO -- Bill and Gant, watching from across the room.
 Both cops are harrowed by what just happened. They WHISPER:

OFFICER GANT
 You wanna take it to Danziger?

BILL SLIDELL
 We rat them out, it'll make shit
 worse. Let's just talk to them,
 man-to-man.

Bill and Gant cautiously APPROACH. Keeping it civilized.

BILL SLIDELL
Lake. We gotta talk.

Lake and Chase glance at Bill. Then go back to their lockers. Literally pretending he doesn't exist, like little children.

OFFICER GANT
(rolls his eyes)
Good, guys. No-Ack us. Real mature.

Lake and Chase start leaving the room. Bill FOLLOWS, trying to rein in his anger.

BILL SLIDELL
You know the part of this that really pisses me off, Lake?

OFFICER GANT
Other than you almost killing us --

BILL SLIDELL
That prick I shot, he wasn't a cop. He was a fucking thug. But now that he's dead? Suddenly he's Mother Theresa.

Still Lake and Chase say NOTHING. Beat.

Out of nowhere, abruptly Bill REACHES OUT and grabs Lake's EAR. So sudden, it's weirdly comic. Gant GRABS Bill, startled.

OFFICER GANT
Whoa! Dude! Easy!

Lake turns to Bill, smiling but kind of freaked out:

OFFICER LAKE
Smart, Bill. Attack another black man. See what happens.

Bill knows Lake's right, STORMS OFF. We stay on Bill's face -- frustrated, impotent. Trying to figure his next move.

INT. LUKE'S LIVING ROOM, CRENSHAW - DAY

TIGHT ON: Duck Hunt. 8-Bit digital DUCKS flying onscreen.

Luke holds a Zapper, playing Nintendo. Behind him, Michael paces, annoyed, nervous.

MICHAEL
Yo, how can you just play *Duck Hunt* right now? We don't even got a job!

Luke is frustrated by a DIGITAL DOG laughing at him onscreen.

LUKE

Can you just chill? I'm trying to deal with this dog right now...

Michael hears the RUMBLE of an engine outside. He peeks out to see a BLACK BMW rolling up. Out of place. Ominous.

MICHAEL

Yo, somebody creeping...

Luke puts down the toy gun, goes to the window. He can make out DON SOLOMON at the wheel. The boys instantly react --

MICHAEL

Oh shit. Drive-by.

LUKE

The bedroom, the bedroom.

INT. LUKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

The two boys burst into Luke's bedroom. Panicking.

LUKE

It's alright. I got this.

From under the bed, Luke pulls out an Uzi. Mike's eyes bulge.

MICHAEL

Nigga, is that an uzi?

INT. LUKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Luke storms back in, trying to cock the uzi. He's not sure how. Michael doesn't know what to do, grabs a kitchen knife.

LUKE

Let's smoke these punk-ass crabs.

As the two boys brandish their weapons -- *Ding-dong!* The doorbell rings. The boys share a look.

Huh? People doing drive-by's do not ring the doorbell.

A beat. The doorbell rings again, twice. Very cautiously, Michael PEEKS out a side window. He motions to Luke's Uzi.

MICHAEL

Cover that up, Rambo. Shit.

Luke puts a couch pillow over the uzi. Michael cautiously opens the door. Don Solomon steps inside, a bandage over his head. The boys instantly TENSE UP. Don steps aside to reveal:

Shannon. Standing behind Don's massive frame. A tense beat.

SHANNON

Y'all heard of me?

MICHAEL

Yeah...

SHANNON

'Cause I ain't heard of you.

MICHAEL

I'm Michael. This Luke.

SHANNON

Why don't you boys have a seat.

LUKE

Man, you can't come up in here
telling us what to --

Don just raises an eyebrow. The kids quickly sit. Shannon brushes off a floral-print chair, sits in front of them.

SHANNON

What we got here is one of those
good-news, bad-news deals. The bad
news is: y'all kicked up dust with
some pretty heavy dudes.

Then Shannon pulls out the boys' mixtape.

SHANNON

The good news is: I thought your
demo was a'ight.

Off Luke and Michael -- sharing a startled glance.

Shannon's not here to kill them. He's here to sign them.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

INT. LUKE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Michael and Luke's mixtape sits on the living room table. The two boys both swallowing shock. Giddy. Shannon sits across from them, taking stock of the young rappers.

MICHAEL

Hold up. You actually *heard* that?

SHANNON

I heard it first in the club, only the bass was up too high.

LUKE

We didn't think no one was listening.

SHANNON

Nigga, I'm *always* listening.

Luke cracks a smile. Shannon holds up the tape.

SHANNON

Now before you go celebrating, let's be clear. Some of these tracks I connect to. Some I don't. Which of you had the verse: '*We from Crenshaw, split your ears like a chainsaw?*'

MICHAEL

That was mine.

Shannon motions for the door.

SHANNON

You want to wait outside a minute?

A beat. Michael doesn't move. Luke glances over, confused.

SHANNON

Michael, I need to speak to Luke.

Michael's face falls. It's Luke, the kid with the uzi under his bed, who has the talent.

EXT. LUKE'S HOUSE - DAY

The door opens. Michael steps out of the house. He stands on the porch for a silent moment. Staring out at the street.

INT. LIVING ROOM, LUKE'S HOUSE - DAY

Shannon looks at Luke. Talking in a low voice.

SHANNON
How old are you?

LUKE
Seventeen. You liked my verse?

SHANNON
Yeah. I really connected to all
your verses. Especially that track
Lionel. That one's good.

LUKE
Yeah I know.

By the door, Don rolls his eyes. Rappers and their egos.

SHANNON
What all d'you do for the Bloods?
Are you a soldier?

LUKE
Nah, I just do some straw-dealing.

Shannon's face clouds. Another mentor moment.

SHANNON
But you know that shit's for
suckers, don't you?

LUKE
(shrugs)
I dunno. Beats working at Foot
Locker.

Shannon leans in. Schooling Luke.

SHANNON
Oh yeah? What do you pay for the
guns, forty apiece?

LUKE
Fifty.

SHANNON
And you sell them for ninety?

LUKE
(softer, embarrassed)
Nah, seventy.

SHANNON
Okay firstly, somebody's ripping
you off...

Shannon, working gangbanger-economics in his head. He's fast.

SHANNON (CONT'D)

Still, that's twenty a gun -- times what, fifteen pieces a month? ... That's three hundred. Minus maybe a hundred in dues to the set...

Luke nods, trying to follow. Then it dawns on Shannon:

SHANNON (CONT'D)

Son, that's fifteen dollars a day. That's *two dollars an hour*. That's half what the Foot Locker dude makes. Only *he* ain't getting shot lacing up a pair of Keds. Feel me?

Luke nods, sheepish. At this moment, Shannon seems like the mentor-figure that Luke is sorely lacking.

LUKE

I feel you.

SHANNON

Seems to me, your life can go in one of two directions right now --

Then the front door OPENS. Luke's brother, MARCUS 'MURK' WARD (22) stands framed in the doorway, in full blood gear. The banger spots Don and Shannon, puts on his war-face.

Instantly Shannon tenses. Don tenses. *Do I stomp this guy?*

MARCUS WARD

Sup Luke. You sitting with enemies now?

LUKE

Marcus, *chill*. Mr. Reese is a just a record producer.

Marcus's eyes narrow at Shannon.

MARCUS WARD

I know who he is. He one of the first niggas to don a blue bandana.

Shannon frowns. He does not like being reminded of his past.

SHANNON

Mr. Ward, you're talking about some shit that happened back in the day--

LUKE

(blurts)

He *also* said you been ripping me off on the gun sales.

MARCUS WARD (CONT'D)
He said what now -- ?

Shannon's hands go up, defensive. Don takes a STEP FORWARD.

SHANNON
I didn't say nothing like that. I
only stopped by 'cause I think Luke
has a future in the music business.

Now Marcus just looks thrown. He sits by Luke, protective.
The boy positioned between two rival father-figures.

MARCUS WARD
You mean those *tapes*. Sounded to me
like a waste of his potential --

Shannon's face clouds. Luke and Marcus instantly FIGHTING.

LUKE	MARCUS WARD
Aw, come on Murk! You don't know shit about music --	Nigga, don't you raise your voice to me --

Shannon talks over them. Raising a hand, playing peacemaker.

SHANNON
Now -- now all I'm saying is he
talented. In fact, I'd like to give
Luke a deal to do some of those
tracks at my studio --

Luke's eyes widen. Feeling like he just won the lotto.

LUKE
You mean, like, a *paid* deal?

MARCUS WARD
(cuts them off)
Hold up. That's that studio on
Normandie?

Shannon nods, picking up the implication.

SHANNON
Yeah, we in a Crip hood. But my
studio's neutral ground. No banging.
Far as I'm concerned, my artists are
from LA and that's it.

LUKE
I can get with that...

SHANNON
(to Marcus)
All we need is signed consent from a
guardian first. Since Luke a minor.

Marcus, the hardcore banger, still looks conflicted.

MARCUS WARD
That's me. And to be honest, I dunno
about no *neutral territory* shit...

Then Shannon's BEEPER goes off. He's eager to wrap it up,
hands them each a business card.

SHANNON
Tell you what. We're having a get-
together at the pad. Why don't you
roll by, see for yourself how we
live? I know some dudes from Crenshaw
Almighty gonna be there too.

Marcus eyes Shannon's ADDRESS. He cocks his head, puzzled.

MARCUS WARD
Nine-oh-two-one-oh? Where that at?

INT. OFFICER DURANT'S APARTMENT - DAY

TIGHT ON: A FRAMED PHOTO of Officer Durant, the cop Bill
shot. He looks like a smiling family man. We hear KNOCKS O.S.

BILL SLIDELL (O.S.)
Hello, Ms. Durant?! Anyone home?

Beat. The door OPENS. Bill steps in, with an unlocking tool.

Bill eyes the room, disappointed. Officer Durant's apartment
is utterly normal. Not the pimped-out pad Bill hoped for.

As Bill starts an insanely thorough search, WE DO A 360-DEGREE
PAN. Images of Bill APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR through the apartment.

- First Bill's in the den. Unzipping Durant's sofa cushions.
- Next Bill's in the kitchen. Checking in the freezer door.
- Then Bill's by the dining room. Digging through the mail.

At last Bill reaches the stereo. Checking out the CD's. It's
all gangsta rap. NWA, CASSIUS, ICE-T. Bill picks up CASH'S
RECORD, puzzled. On the album is an inscription in red:

Damon
- *We going ghetto to the stars.*

Bill eyes that word 'we'. It seems so personal. He stares at
the album -- on it, Cassius holds an AK-47.

Bill's face, puzzled: *I know this asshole.*

EXT. SHANNON'S STREET, BEVERLY HILLS - DAY

In Beverly Hills, a WASPY COUPLE peers across the street,
puzzled. A DOZEN KEGS are being delivered to Shannon's house.

They can see CATERERS prepping for a party. In the driveway, Shannon steps out with his bullmastiff, king of his castle.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET, BEVERLY HILLS - DAY

A dog-collar marked '*Stubblefield*' JINGLES as a dog walks.

Shannon walks his bullmastiff past the wide lawns. WE HOLD on Shannon as he checks out houses, getting a feel for his ultra-clean new digs. Then -- Stubbs starts GROWLING.

SHANNON

What's wrong boy? What's up?

Shannon looks across the street. On someone's beautifully manicured lawn, three COYOTES are tearing apart his neighbor's dog. Working in a pack, ripping it to pieces. Blood goes everywhere. On the cut grass. On the sidewalk.

Shannon just stands there -- WATCHING. Deeply affected. As he watches, very slowly we begin to hear that romantic old SAM COOKE SONG, the song from his childhood, playing in his head.

...if you ever change your mind, about leaving me behind...

While Shannon watches these coyotes ripping that poor dog apart, for some reason he's thinking about his childhood.

Then A BEAT drops in. WE SLAM TO --

EXT. SHANNON'S HOUSE, POOL, BEVERLY HILLS - NIGHT

The most rocking HOUSE PARTY in Beverly Hills. Out by the pool, we PASS OVER a sea of people all BOUNCING IN UNISON TO HIP-HOP, everyone dressed entirely in black-and-white.

EXT. SHANNON'S HOUSE, FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Guests JOSTLE to get in. Luke and Marcus move up the line, clad in white tees. As they pass, a security guard BELLOWS:

SECURITY GUARD

Remember, black-and-white only.
Mr. Reese doesn't want any beefing!

INT/EXT. SHANNON'S HOUSE, VARIOUS - NIGHT

Luke and Marcus enter the backyard. Luke's face: *He's in Oz.*

People hook up in the jacuzzi. MODELS with platters of shots. Frogg DJ's, spinning Rakim's *Eric B is President*. Cassius and his entourage wear white suits, passing the mic around, rapping over the track. No one can keep up with Rakim.

CASSIUS/ALL (RAPPING)

*Taking off my coat. Clearing my throat/
The rhyme will be kicking until I hit my last note.*

Luke just stands there. Taking everything in.

SHANNON (O.S.)
You made it. What do you think?

Luke turns, see Shannon amid the black-and-white partygoers.

LUKE
This some Alice in Wonderland shit.

Marcus looks out at the lavish party, eyes hard. Unconvinced.

MARCUS WARD
You ask me, the place could use a
little *color*...

Shannon's brow furrows. Luke looks between the two men. Wants desperately to sign with Shannon. Shan TOUCHES Marcus's back.

SHANNON
Murk, why don't I give you a tour
of the house real quick, huh?

BY THE POOL-HOUSE

Shannon and Marcus walk through the party. Shannon's showing off his house. Murk is so stiff, even the upright way he walks screams: *I am the alpha in every situation.*

SHANNON (CONT'D)
Don't misunderstand. I respect the
crews. But Luke's got a big
opportunity here. If *even one* of his
songs pops, it could mean a ticket
out the hood for both y'all.

Marcus just shakes his head.

MARCUS WARD
Nah, see. That's where we disagree.
I don't want Luke getting out.

Shannon's smile fades.

SHANNON
How do you mean?

Marcus eyes the party with visible scorn.

MARCUS WARD
What, you gonna start playing
tennis with your neighbors? You
gonna have *brunch* up here, nigga?

Shannon looks at him like: *Aw Fuck.*

MARCUS WARD (CONT'D)
 I seen homies leave the hood. They
 get money, spend it all at *white*
 businesses. Turn their backs on they
 people, let the hood dry up and die.

SHANNON
 (increasingly frustrated)
 It ain't like that. I still got
 love for Crenshaw --

Marcus takes a SINGLE STEP towards Shannon. The situation is quickly becoming aggressive. A stand-off.

MARCUS WARD
 Nah. You wanted my answer. I ain't
 handing Luke over. My brother is
 right where he belong.

Shannon STOPS. His frustration turns to confusion, sadness.

SHANNON
 But you know if he stays in that
 life, he got like a one-in-four
 chance of dying -- ?

Marcus looks Shannon in the eyes. Hardcore. His next comment seems aimed directly at Shannon:

MARCUS WARD
 Then he'll die a man. Not like some
 whitewashed, fake-ass Crip.

Shannon STARES back at him. Like they're suddenly in a prison yard. A tense beat. Then Shannon looks away, backing down.

SHANNON
 A'ight. A'ight. You his guardian.
 I respect that. We don't need no
 hellified shit here...

Then Shannon's moving again. All charm, diffusing the tension.

SHANNON
 Let's go grab you a drink, huh?

Marcus nods, they move towards the POOL-HOUSE.

As Shannon passes Frogg, Frogg gives a TINY GLANCE to the party's DJ, Ghost.

IN THREE QUICK CUTS

- Ghost's fingers turn the music WAY UP.
- The pool-house door SNAPS SHUT behind Shannon and Marcus.
- Frogg steps up, LOCKING the pool-house door behind them.

INT. SHANNON'S STORAGE CLOSET - NIGHT

Marcus looks around, startled. Shannon's led him to a small storage closet. Waiting for them is Don, the 350-pound Samoan.

MARCUS WARD
(looks up, seeing Don)
Oh hell no --

Marcus RATTLES the doorknob. It's LOCKED. And now Shannon's face has CHANGED. He looks at Marcus with the *I-don't-give-a-fuck-about-you* glower of a man who's done time in prison.

SHANNON
Murk. Why you making me be the guy
I don't want to be?

Don moves faster than we expect, GRABBING Marcus with huge hands, SLAMMING him face-first into the floor.

Shannon is instantly upon him. BEATING Marcus relentlessly, over and over, in the stomach. It's nasty, a prison beating.

Finally Shannon lets up. Marcus, now beaten so badly that he THROWS UP all over the carpet. Shannon stands over Marcus, pulling something from his coat -- a single sheet of PAPER.

SHANNON
Sign the contract.

Shannon hands Marcus the paper. It's blank. Marcus wipes vomit off his chin. Cowed.

MARCUS WARD
This -- this is just a blank piece
of paper. Ain't no contract.

SHANNON
(ominous)
Don't worry. I'll fill it in later.

Marcus just lies there, staring at that blank piece of paper.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD, SHANNON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Music BLARING. Couples LAUGH. Women grind on the dance-floor.

Luke stands in the middle of lavish party, dancing with a BIG-HAIRED MODEL. He's in heaven, oblivious. After a moment, he spots Shannon moving towards him, fixing a cuff.

LUKE
(smiles)
We all good?

SHANNON

All good. Murk's just sitting down
with my legal team.

Shannon grabs TWO SHOTS off a passing tray. Hands one to Luke.

SHANNON

Cheers.

Luke grins, the two men down a shot together.

ACROSS THE PARTY -- Cassius glances through the crowd, eyeing
Shannon and Luke drink together. Cash's temperature rising...

ON SHANNON AND LUKE -- leaving their shot glasses on the
tray. Shannon, once again looking quite fatherly.

SHANNON

So what do you want, Luke?

LUKE

You mean like -- tonight?

SHANNON

I mean with your life. You're
slinging guns today, where you want
to be in a few years?

Luke looks around. It's hard for him to articulate himself.

LUKE

I ain't really thinking about all
that. I guess...I want *this*.

Shannon feels a kinship at that. A VOICE calls out, DRUNK.

CASSIUS (O.S.)

Yeah? Cause it's a long walk from
where you at to where I'm standing.

An awkward beat as Cash downs a shot. He turns on Shannon.

CASSIUS

So what's up, cuz? You brought this
trash-talking punk to the *house*?

Luke, getting nervous. Shannon, acting as stern referee. He
is *constantly* putting out fires.

SHANNON

He's *here* cause I don't like petty
shit disrupting business. Luke came
tonight to apologize. Didn't you?

Luke's pride makes an apology near impossible. Then he looks
around at the party. Finally he extends a hand, and MUMBLES:

LUKE

Sorry man. My bad ... We cool?

That's all he can muster. Cassius just drinks his drink.

CASSIUS

Yeah nigga. We cool.

But Cassius won't shake his hand. Shannon's annoyed. He takes his star by the arm, quickly PULLING him away.

BY SHANNON'S FENCE

Shannon has pulled Cash into a QUIET CORNER.

CASSIUS

Shan, this is some bullshit. He called us a one-hit wonder! How come you *never* take my side?

SHANNON

Cash. I'm saying this as your friend, as your partner. *You got to get your shit together, dog.*

ON STAGE -- Ghost SPINS. He eyes Shannon and Cash talking in the corner. The music's so loud, Ghost can't hear them.

The argument becomes more INTENSE. Shannon sticks a finger in Cash's chest. Finally Cassius SWATS Shannon's hand away. He grabs a GIRL and exits the party.

A long beat as Shannon returns to his boys.

GHOST

Cash is leaving already?

Shannon utters a little SIGH.

SHANNON

You know how he gets. This shit always blows over in a day or two.
(then, re: the music)
Cue up some Kid Frost next...

As GHOST turns the volume WAY UP -- we CUT TO:

INT. SLIDELL'S OFFICE, POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Silence. Bill Slidell slides Cassius's album into a stereo. Presses play. Gangsta rap starts BLARING from his speakers:

CASSIUS (ON CD)

*With a nine in my hand, I cap cops non-stop/
Vanish in the night, bend the corner in my drop-top.*

Bill's face: *it's like he just swallowed a turd.*

INT. GANT'S OFFICE, POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Officer Gant types at an old IBM. Bill pokes his head in.

BILL SLIDELL
Hey. That prick rapper you brought
in. Did he have a record?

OFFICER GANT
Massey? Oh, hell yeah. Something
like eight arrests, no convictions.

ON BILL. That gets his radar popping.

BILL SLIDELL
What'd he put down for an address?

EXT. IROQUOIS MOTEL, SOUTH CENTRAL - NIGHT

TIGHT ON: A sign for the Iroquois Motel.

Bill's squad car pulls into the dark motel parking lot. Next to a dented Cadillac with the license plate: *CASH1*.

INT. LOBBY, IROQUOIS MOTEL - NIGHT

Ding! Slidell rings a BELL. He's standing at an empty desk in a scuzzy, dim lobby with green walls. No one's coming. Bill looks around, seeing nothing but faux Native American art.

BILL SLIDELL
Hello -- ?

No answer. Bill goes behind the desk. There's a board of keys, only four rooms checked out, all on the second floor.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY, IROQUOIS MOTEL - NIGHT

Bill's shoes walk over dark carpet, down the dim hall.

WE STAY IN FRONT OF HIM as he pads down the hall, looking at room numbers. We can hear a radio in SPANISH somewhere.

Then Bill stops. Puzzled. He's spotted something in the hall.

REVERSE TO SEE -- in the hallway are two small SHAPES on the dark carpet. It's hard to make them out, but they look like sneakers. Bill keeps moving, curious. Picks them up.

It's a pair of roller skates.

Bill stands in the hallway, holding the roller skates, puzzled. He SPINS one of the wheels. For a moment, all we hear is that WHEEL SPINNING. Then Bill looks over his shoulder --

Behind him on the carpet are three small TRACKS. They weren't there before, because they're coming from Bill's right boot.

Because somewhere in this hallway, Bill has stepped in BLOOD.

Bill reacts fast. Drops the roller skates, draws a pistol. He has no idea what the danger is, where it's coming from.

He starts moving, fast, down the dim hallway, looking for the source of the blood. Bill finds a door-jam STAINED RED.

BILL SLIDELL
LAPD! Show me your hands!

No answer. Bill KICKS the door down.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bill enters to see two dead KOREAN GIRLS next to the bed. One's halfway wrapped up in a sheet, both of them are shot in the head and neck. A roller-skating bag beside them.

Bill starts clearing the room, gun drawn, looking for a shooter. Checking the bathroom, the closet. He finds no one. He checks the girls' vitals, then rushes out into the hall.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Bill rushes outside, keeps moving down the hall. He turns the corner -- There in the hotel hallway, face down: another BODY. It's a MOTEL CLERK, he's been shot through the chest.

Bill checks his vitals, he's dead too. Bill keeps moving. He spots one motel door that's HALFWAY OPEN.

BILL SLIDELL
LAPD! Hands!

INT. HOTEL ROOM NUMBER TWO - CONTINUOUS

There in the second room is Cassius, in bed with his girl.

Her face is mashed into the pillow, she was shot twice in the back. The bullet that killed Cassius passed through the small space between his nose and mouth, and blood still trickles down over his lips. His eyes are wide in surprise.

EXT. PARKING LOT, IROQUOIS MOTEL - NIGHT

Red-and-blue POLICE LIGHTS play off the Iroquois motel sign.

Bill watches BODIES loaded into an ambulance. A mirror image of the scene from our Teaser. Bill's crew of cops all emerge from the motel, Gant shakes his head.

GANT
Thanks a lot, shit-magnet.

EXT. POOL AREA, SHANNON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A NAKED VIDEO GIRL floats by gently on an inner tube. Music BLARES from the speakers, but the party is more-or-less over. Now it's just Shannon and his crew, most of them drunk.

Stragglers stumble out. Frogg rolls a final blunt. Shannon's by the pool, chats with Eva. Finally Don ANSWERS a flip-phone.

Don lumbers over to the stage, abruptly YANKING a plug, KILLING THE MUSIC. People look up in puzzled silence.

DON THE DRIVER

Shan. For you.

Don looks ashen. The giant flip-phone slowly MAKES ITS WAY to Shannon. The instant Shannon puts it to his ear -- CUT TO:

INT. MORGUE HALLWAY - NIGHT

Now WE'RE BEHIND Shannon and his entourage as they walk down a sterile morgue hallway. Halogens BUZZ and flicker, ominous.

INT. COLD CHAMBER, MORGUE - NIGHT

Inside a cold chamber, Cassius's body lies on a steel table. A CORONER is removing all of his GOLD JEWELRY and dropping it in a metal bin. His gold watch, his chains. *Plink. Plink.*

THROUGH THE WINDOW -- Cassius's crew appears in tableau in the hall. Decked out in jewels, staring at the dead star. Cassius's three-finger ring goes in the bin with a THUNK.

The BLOODY RING spells out two words: *Tha Battleground.*

EXT. HALLWAY, MORGUE - NIGHT

In the hallway, Cassius's crew each REACT in their own way.

- Frogg, the hardcore banger, starts PUNCHING a medical cabinet.
- Ghost, the white engineer, steps back. Shit just got real.
- Don Solomon, the Samoan, bursts into uncontrollable tears.

Shannon has no visible reaction, everything's internal. He just turns to Don, the Samoan's 350-pound frame SHAKES.

Shannon wraps Don in a HUG. We GO TIGHT on Shannon's hands, so small against Don's broad back. Like a child's hands.

There on Shannon's hand is that same THREE-FINGER RING. Spelling out the words: *Tha Battleground.*

END OF ACT V

ACT VI

EXT. GATES, HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - DAY [BEGIN SEQUENCE]

Images roll in silence. A black CROWD gathers by the gates of Hollywood Forever Cemetery. As a FUNERAL PROCESSION approaches in the distance, two GIRLS hold up a sign: *We Luv U Cash!*

In the silence, a VOICE. Ellie performing an a capella HYMN.

A-mazing grace...

INT. SQUAD ROOM, POLICE STATION - DAY [SEQUENCE]

In the police station, a WHITE BOARD is marked: *Victims.* PHOTOGRAPHS are taped up. The Iroquois Motel Clerk. The two dead Korean girls. Then Cassius and his girlfriend.

On another board, DANZIGER writes: *Persons Of Interest.*

Ellie's voice keeps SOARING. *How sweet...the sound...*

EXT. GATES, HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - DAY [SEQUENCE]

The crowd CHEERS SILENTLY as the procession APPROACHES. On ONE SIDE OF THE STREET, the crowd is dressed entirely in blue. CRIPS. On the other side, men are dressed in red. BLOODS.

That saved...a wretch like me...

INT. SHANNON'S BLACK SEDAN - DAY [SEQUENCE]

Shannon and Ellie drive to the cemetery, wearing black. Shannon looks solemn, resigned. Ellie SQUEEZES her son's hand.

INT. LOCKER ROOM, POLICE STATION - DAY [SEQUENCE]

Bill and SIX COPS grab shotguns and POLAROID CAMERAS off racks. Ready to run surveillance at the funeral.

...I once was lost...

EXT. GATES, HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - DAY [SEQUENCE]

BLACK SEDANS approach the cemetery gates. Cash's ENTOURAGE looks out at the crowd of Crips and Bloods. They pass COPS working crowd-control, holding shotguns.

Frogg's FIST emerges from a black sedan. Clenched in his hand is a BLUE BANDANA, blowing in the wind. All the Crips CHEER IN SILENCE. Across the street, Bloods watch with SCORN.

IN A SQUAD CAR -- Slidell SNAPS A PHOTO of the blue bandana amid the funeral procession. A tragic image of gangsterdom.

...But now, am found...

EXT. FUNERAL PLOT, CEMETERY - DAY [END SEQUENCE]

Ellie finishes singing, her voice a soulful CRESCENDO:

ELLIE
...was blind but now...I see.

In the graveyard, rows of blinged-out GANGSTERS looks up at her. Their decadent outfits surreal amid the marble tombs.

Shannon stands among them, wearing flamboyant sunglasses. As he watches his mother sing, for just a moment Shannon takes his sunglasses off. His eyes are stained with TEARS.

Then Ellie steps down. Shannon's glasses go back on.

Shannon stands, walks to the podium. As he walks, he cocks his head. He can hear a BEAT playing faintly in the street.

AT THE PODIUM

Shannon stands by a WHITE COFFIN. A picture of Cassius beside it. Shannon surveys the crowd, all those solemn faces.

SHANNON (INTO MIC)
 My name is Shannon Reese. I was Carl's producer. As a producer, the thing I try to do most, is *listen*. I hoped you could do that with me now. If we all could bow our heads and just...*listen* for a moment.

Funeral-goers share confused GLANCES. They bow their heads and LISTEN TO THE SILENCE. In the distance, we can hear the sound of HIP-HOP. Playing from a stereo outside the gates.

SHANNON
 Can you hear that? You know what that sound is? ... That's *Cassius* we're listening to.

It's Cassius's music playing from the distant street. In the crowd, Cassius's mom, LORETTA MASSEY (45) bursts into tears.

SHANNON
 Carl Massey was taken from us. But Cassius? Cassius can't never die.

As Shannon becomes more intense, fiery even, people start SHOUTING back to him, like they're in church.

SHANNON
 His was a voice that refused to be silent. A voice stronger than death--

FUNERAL-GOERS
Tell it! Tell it!

SHANNON

-- his records were weapons. They were a way for Cash to tell his story to his block, his city. Even in a world plagued by drugs and violence, Cash's music cried out: *I count. I will not be forgotten.'*

FUNERAL-GOERS

Oh no he won't!

Shannon touches the coffin, softens. Speaks to Cash's photo.

SHANNON

We're gonna miss you, homie. But you gave us something that can't never be taken. Your voice is forever in our hearts.

CUT TO:

THE COFFIN descending into the ground. Landing with a *THUMP*.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - DAY

A CHEER SOUNDS as the procession leaves the cemetery.

INT. SHANNON'S LEXUS, HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - DAY

Shannon's sedan glides through the crowd. A SILENT BEAT. Ellie's heard his lofty speech, now she gives him the real.

ELLIE

(glancing at her son)
It's gonna be a long road, getting the label back on top...

Shannon stares out at the crowd of kids.

SHANNON

Nah, you're thinking too small. Kids like Cassius, I want the whole *world* hearing their music. I don't want a record label. What I want's a takeover.

ELLIE

We got another boy to fill Cash's shoes?

Shannon stares out at the rap fans. That word 'we' leaves a strange taste. *Is Ellie the power behind Shannon?*

SHANNON

I got someone. But we can't settle for another artist. We need a star.

INT. BILL'S SQUAD CAR - DAY

CLICK-WHIR! Bill and Gant SNAP SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS as the cars pass. A photo of Cassius's MOTHER develops, Bill writes:

Dead Asshole's Mom.

Gant eyes TWO YOUNG BLOODS (20s). The gangbangers give Cash's entourage MIDDLE-FINGERS as the funeral sedans pass.

GANT

Get those two next. They look hardcore.

Bill points his Polaroid camera. *CLICK-WHIR!*

INT. POLICE STATION, SQUAD ROOM - DAY

The surveillance photos are now BLOWN UP on the white board. Under the heading '*Persons of Interest.*'

Danziger turns, CALLING OUT to the squad room full of cops:

SERGEANT DANZIGER

Guys, listen up. We got some POI's on the Iroquois killings. If you've seen any of these assholes around, do let us know.

Cops eye the photos, shaking heads. A HAND goes up in back.

ALICE CALDERON (O.S.)

Sir? I uh, know three of them.

Officers turn, surprised to see the fresh-faced, Hispanic rookie raising her hand. Alice Calderon.

SERGEANT DANZIGER

You wanna elaborate on that, rook?

Alice points first to the photos of FROGG AND DON SOLOMON.

ALICE CALDERON

The guys on Cassius's crew are Freddy Gibson and Don Solomon. They used to be on a hijack squad, now Don runs a limo company.

She points to the HARDCORE BLOODS that Bill photographed. One of the men has TWO BIG BRAIDS running down his back.

ALICE CALDERON

The Blood is Double-G. He's got beef with Cassius's crew. He's also maybe the best wallbanger in Crenshaw.

The white cops give her a dozen BLANK STARES. *Wallbanger?*

ALICE CALDERON
Graffiti-writing.

The cops nod. *Right. Graffiti.* Danziger raises an eyebrow.

ALICE CALDERON
We all went to high school
together. They're gangsters.

Bill knows a good thing when he sees it. Motions to Danziger:

BILL SLIDELL
She can ride with us.

EXT. SHANNON'S RECORDING STUDIO, PARKING LOT - DAY

White flower arrangements have been placed by the door to the recording studio. A dirty CHEVY pulls into the lot.

INT. LUKE'S CHEVY - DAY

Luke kills his engine. He looks out the stained windshield, at the studio. Unsure if he should go in.

Then Luke put a child's METRONOME on the dash. The metronome starts a beat. Ticking. *TICK...TICK...TICK...*

Luke shuts his eyes and starts to ROCK back and forth, alone in his car, RAPPING a cappella, psyching himself up.

(This is done in the spirit of 2Pac's *Brenda's Got A Baby*).

LUKE
*You hear 'bout Lionel? He had him a son
A loved one, they having fun watching reruns/
He work two jobs, bagging grocery
But money be tight, with three mouths to feed/
So he bought a piece, a new thirty-eight
Wanna increase his piece of the pie, his pay rate/
Sell the gun to a banger, yo, double your money
Tell his wife, don't worry honey, nothing funny/
They filed off the serial, that's the deal
Cops can't trace that shit back here/
The sale went down so easily,
Now ten bangers hollerin from round the way/
Straw man, straw man. Do us a favor?
A thirty-eight special, I'll hit up your pager/
And did I mention? The weapon?
It's just protection, don't be stressing.*

Abruptly a BEAT DROPS. It's raw, aggressive. CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO, BATTLEGROUND SOUND - DAY

Luke's now in the VOCAL BOOTH. Finishing the track with Shannon's production behind it. The beat ROARS. Luke's eyes are shut. He ROCKS back and forth, rapping INTO THE MIC:

LUKE

*Sell a few more pieces, get that money
 So what you do? Start chasing those honeys/
 Popping champagne now, life you enjoy
 'Til one of them girls say 'we having a boy'/
 Now Lionel got two families to feed.
 Rent, food, clothes, bills up to the ceiling.
 Just one quick choice to stop this sick feeling.
 Tell them you're picking up some black-and-milds
 Then say bye-bye to your wife and child/
 Now I don't know how your story end.
 Maybe you lying in the gutter, maybe you in the pen/
 Lionel I just don't know, it's anyone's guess
 'Cause the last day I saw you was the day you left us.*

The beat CUTS. Luke opens his eyes, heaving. He stares through studio glass, at Shannon. After delivering such a personal story, it's as if Luke is standing before Shannon, naked.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

Shannon just stares back through the glass, at Luke. He says nothing. But we can see it in his face: he's in.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK MARK'S HOUSE, CRENSHAW - DAY

CRACK! In the hood, an apartment door SPLINTERS OPEN. The three BLOODS from Cassius's funeral all SCATTER as Slidell and Gant BURST INSIDE, looking for suspects.

BILL SLIDELL
 LADP! Don't move!

BLOODS
 Five-O! Five-O!

WE STAY on one big Blood, DOUBLE-G (20s). He DARTS down a hall, sees Alice CHARGING through the back door. Blocking him off.

As Double-G instinctively grabs a LAMP off the desk -- *THUMP!* Alice POWER-STROKES him with a baton. Double-G goes down, Alice SHOVES a knee into his back, as brutal as any of the men.

Alice KNEELS into Double-G's back. He SCOWLS up at her:

DOUBLE-G
 Bitch, how I know you?

ALICE CALDERON
 We had algebra together.

TWO SECONDS LATER

THUD. Double-G's face SLAMS into the wall. Bill's behind him, FOREARM around his neck. Bill and Gant WHISPERING in his ear:

BILL SLIDELL
 We know it was you, Double-G --

OFFICER GANT

We know you had beef with Cassius's crew. Don't bullshit us now --

BILL SLIDELL

-- otherwise we drop you off in a Crip hood. That's a long walk home.

That freaks Double-G out. Bill RELEASES him from the choke hold, Double-G GASPS. Alice looks on, conflicted.

DOUBLE-G

Man, be cool! Our set got nothing to do with them killings! I just know what I heard --

(gulping air)

I heard Shannon Reese did it.

Bill raises his head, LOOKING UP. The last look on Bill's face is a faint SMILE. He's just taken his first small step towards redemption.

INT. CONTROL ROOM, RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

A door in the recording studio OPENS. Shannon stands in front of Luke, framed in the doorway. Shannon puts a hand on Luke's back, ushering the young man into the control room.

At the last second, just as Shannon is closing the door, he looks up directly at the camera. Looking right at us.

Then he shuts the door in our face.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF SHOW