

**FADE IN:**

**INT. D.C. JAIL - CELL 14 - NIGHT**

**SUPER: "Washington D.C. - Christmas Eve, 1995"**

Six by nine. One flickering overhead bulb. A steel bunk. A lidless toilet. A sink.

The walls are layered in graffiti-names, dates, initials. Generations of men who passed through and left only what the concrete could hold.

GEORGE OWENS, 22, sits on the lower bunk. Broad-shouldered, his jailhouse blues strain tight across his chest.

He stares at the opposite wall.

His finger finds a name carved deep into the concrete. He traces it slowly.

His lips move--barely a whisper.

**GEORGE**

(to himself, quiet)

What's next... what's the plan...

He already knows there is no plan. He asks anyway.

Down the tier -- a VOICE punches through the tray slot in his cell door.

**INMATE (O.S.)**

Yo Reggie! Aye -- REGGIE!

George doesn't move.

**INMATE (O.S.) (CONT'D)**

Hit some of that Black Hole shit,  
man! Rare Essence! That's us, baby!

The slot snaps shut. Footsteps fade down the tier.

George pulls his hand from the wall. Leans his head back. Closes his eyes.

The cell starts to dissolve -- sounds pulling back, light softening at the edges.

His face is the last thing we hold.

**SMASH CUT TO BLACK.**

**FADE OUT.**

**INT. D.C. GENERAL HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - DAY (1972)**

SUPER: "Washington D.C. - Summer, 1972"

GEORGIA OWENS, 35, grips the bed rail through a contraction. Fierce. Sweating. Not a woman who asks for help.

Outside the glass - FRANCIS OWENS, 50, paces the hallway. Pressed button-down. Hands clasped behind his back. A man who survived World War II, looking terrified of a delivery room.

A NURSE appears in the doorway.

**NURSE**

Mr. Owens. You have a son.

Francis stops. Straightens. Walks through the door.

Georgia holds the baby. Eyes wet but jaw still set. She looks up at Francis.

**GEORGIA**

(exhausted, proud)

Come meet your boy.

Francis leans over them both. His large hand comes to rest on the baby's head. Gently. The baby settles.

**FRANCIS**

(quietly)

George. We'll call him George.

**GEORGIA**

That's what I said three months ago.

**FRANCIS**

(almost smiling)

And I'm agreeing with you.

Georgia shakes her head. Looks back down at the baby.

**GEORGIA**

(soft, to the baby)

Lord, what kind of world did I just bring you into.

**EXT. BURKE STREET, SOUTHEAST D.C. - DAY (1972)**

A quiet brick row house.

GEORGIA sits on the front porch in a lawn chair, baby GEORGE in her arms.

NEIGHBORS drift up the walk, curious, leaning in.

Georgia watches them carefully. She lets them look at the baby but doesn't let them hold him.

**INT. FRANCIS'S STUDY - DAY (1973)**

A room of order.

Books lined perfectly. Nothing out of place.

A framed military photograph hangs on the wall. A college diploma beside it. A WWII service medal in a wooden frame sits alone on the desk-like it belongs more than anything else in the room.

FRANCIS stands still, adjusting nothing. Because nothing needs adjusting.

**INT. HARRISON ELEMENTARY - CAFETERIA - DAY (1974)**

GEORGIA works the serving line in a white apron, hair pinned tight.

Children move past her in a noisy rhythm.

A COWORKER says something offhand. Georgia laughs-full, real, unguarded.

For a moment, she is not weighed down by anything.

**EXT. BURKE STREET - WIDE - EVENING (1974)**

The street is alive.

Children running. Radios spilling music from open windows. Women talking on porches. Summer heat hanging in the air.

Everything feels whole.

Everything feels permanent.

The camera slowly rises above the rooftops-

In the distance: a GUARD TOWER from D.C. JAIL.

Small. Still.

Always there.

Francis reads. Georgia fans herself. Baby George sleeps in a bassinet between them.

A NEIGHBOR, MS. HELEN, leans over the porch rail.

**MS. HELEN**

Georgia, that boy getting big. Look  
just like Francis.

**GEORGIA**

Don't tell him that. His head  
already big enough.

**FRANCIS**

(not looking up from his  
book)  
I can hear you.

**GEORGIA**

I know you can.

Ms. Helen laughs. Georgia fans herself. Francis turns a page.

Down the block -- kids chasing each other between the row  
houses. A radio in someone's window. The whole street humming  
with summer life.

Then Georgia's eyes drift. Past the children. Past the  
telephone poles. To the gray concrete tower rising above the  
rooftops two blocks over.

She looks at it a moment. Then back at her sleeping son.

**GEORGIA (CONT'D)**

(quiet, almost to herself)  
Francis.

**FRANCIS**

Mm.

**GEORGIA**

This boy is going to be something.  
You hear me?

Francis looks up from his book. Follows her gaze to the baby.  
Then back to her.

**FRANCIS**

I hear you.

**GEORGIA**

I'm not playing, Francis. Not one  
of mine is going near that place.

A beat. Francis looks at the sleeping baby.

**FRANCIS**

(firm, certain)  
He won't.

Georgia nods. Goes back to fanning herself.

The jail tower sits in the background. Patient. Silent.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

My mother and father came from the  
deep south. Came here with nothing  
but their hands and their word.  
They built a real home. A real  
family. The problem wasn't what  
they built.

The camera drifts off the porch. Off the family. Finds the  
jail tower.

**GEORGE (V.O.) (CONT'D)**

The problem was what was outside  
the front door.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. OWENS HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING (1978)**

Everything in its place. Books stacked perfectly. Family  
photos level on the wall. Jeopardy on the TV.

FRANCIS, 50s, sits in his armchair. The armchair. YOUNG  
GEORGE, 6, appears in the doorway, eyes on that chair.

Francis steps into the hallway. George moves fast -- slides  
into the chair, spreads his arms across the rests, puts his  
feet up.

Tries it on. Likes it.

Francis reappears. Doesn't break stride. Doesn't raise his  
voice.

**FRANCIS**

(eyes on the TV)  
That's my chair, son.

George is on the floor before the sentence ends. Comic book  
open. Like he was never anywhere else.

Francis settles into his chair. A beat. Then --

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

Good try though.

George looks up. Francis is watching Jeopardy. Not smiling.  
But not not smiling.

**INT. OWENS HOME - DINING ROOM - LATER**

The whole family at the table. Francis at the head. Georgia at the other end. George and YOUNG TASHA, 5, across from each other.

George reaches for his juice.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

Finish your plate first.

George puts it back. Picks up his fork.

**GEORGE**

(under his breath)

Every night...

**FRANCIS**

Every night what?

**GEORGE**

Nothing, sir.

**GEORGIA**

(hiding a smile)

Mm-hm.

Tasha pokes at her green beans. Pushes them to the edge of the plate. Francis clocks it without looking up.

**FRANCIS**

Tasha.

**TASHA**

Sir?

**FRANCIS**

Those green beans didn't do anything to you.

**TASHA**

I know, Daddy. I just don't --

**FRANCIS**

Eat them.

Tasha eats them. George stares straight at his own plate. But the corner of his mouth gives him away.

**TASHA**

(catching him)

Stop smiling, George.

**GEORGE**

I'm not smiling.

**TASHA**

Yes you are.

**GEORGE**

I'm chewing. My face does this when  
I chew.

**FRANCIS**

Both of you. Eat.

They eat.

**INT. OWENS HOME — UPSTAIRS HALLWAY — LATER**

Francis moves down the hall. Stops at George's door. Pushes  
it open.

Bed made tight. Books stacked. Floor clear. Francis looks it  
over. Steps back out without a word.

He stops at Tasha's door. Pushes it open.

Clothes everywhere. Dolls taking over. A stuffed animal on  
the pillow like it pays rent.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

Tasha. Come here please.

George appears at his own doorway. Arms folded. Front row  
seat.

Tasha shuffles up the hall, sees the look on her father's  
face, and slows down.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

(stepping aside so she can  
see)

What does this room look like to  
you?

**TASHA**

...Clean?

**FRANCIS**

Try again.

**TASHA**

...I was going to fix it after  
dinner.

**FRANCIS**

Fix it now. Before bed. Every  
night.

Tasha disappears inside. The sounds of reluctant tidying.

Francis turns. George is studying the ceiling with great interest.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

Don't get comfortable.

He heads downstairs. The moment his head drops below the landing, George lets out the smile he's been holding for ten minutes.

**INT. OWENS HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Georgia at the stove, wrapping up. Radio low. George drifts in and leans against the counter.

**GEORGE**

Mama. I'm still a little hungry.

**GEORGIA**

You ate a whole plate.

**GEORGE**

A growing man needs more than one plate.

**GEORGIA**

(side-eyeing him)

A growing man. You're six years old.

**GEORGE**

Six and a half.

Georgia shakes her head. Opens the cabinet. Pulls out a small foil-covered plate she set aside -- one extra piece of chicken. Sets it on the counter in front of him.

**GEORGIA**

Don't tell your father.

George takes the chicken. Bites into it. His whole face changes.

**GEORGE**

(mouth full)

You're the best person alive.

**GEORGIA**

I know that. Now hush and eat before he comes back down here.

George eats. Georgia wipes the counter. The radio plays something slow and easy.

From upstairs -- the muffled sound of Tasha reorganizing her room under protest.

**GEORGE**

(listening, then)

Mama, how come Daddy's so strict?

**GEORGIA**

Because he loves you.

**GEORGE**

He got a funny way of showing it.

**GEORGIA**

You'll understand when you're older.

**GEORGE**

That's what you say when you don't want to explain something.

Georgia stops wiping. Looks at him. This six-year-old who already sees too much.

**GEORGIA**

Your father grew up with nothing and nobody. Everything he knows, he built himself. He's trying to make sure you don't have to start from scratch the way he did.

George chews. Takes that in.

**GEORGE**

So the chair thing --

**GEORGIA**

That man worked thirty years for that chair. Let him have it.

George nods. Finishes his chicken. Georgia goes back to the counter.

**GEORGE**

(quietly)

I'm getting my own chair one day.

**GEORGIA**

(smiling at the counter)  
I know you are, baby. I know you  
are.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. LORTON PRISON COMPLEX — ENTRANCE — DAY (1974)**

SUPER: "Lorton, Virginia -- 1974"

A parking lot. August heat coming off the asphalt.

GEORGIA moves toward the entrance, handbag over her arm, jaw set. She has done this before.

Beside her, gripping her hand -- YOUNG GEORGE, 5. Good clothes. Polished shoes. He stares up at the building.

Concrete walls. Chain-link stretching higher than any fence he's ever seen. Guard towers at the corners.

He doesn't know what this place is. He knows something is wrong with it.

**GEORGE**

Mama, what is this place?

**GEORGIA**

It's where we're going to see your brother.

**GEORGE**

James lives here?

Georgia squeezes his hand. Doesn't answer. Keeps walking.

Metal stairs. A heavy door. A GUARD holds it open without looking at them.

**INT. LORTON PRISON COMPLEX — VISITING ROOM — CONTINUOUS**

Fluorescent lights. Folding tables bolted down. GUARDS along the walls. The smell of industrial cleaner over something older underneath it.

George stays close to Georgia's side. He watches everything - the other FAMILIES waiting, the INMATES filtering in through a door on the far side, all in the same clothes, all walking the same careful walk.

The burgundy drapes at the far end part.

JAMES, 18, steps through. He finds Georgia first. Then George.

Georgia opens her arms. James walks into them. Holds on.

**GEORGIA**

(low, into his shoulder)  
You eating? You sleeping alright?

**JAMES**

I'm good, Mama. I'm good.

**GEORGIA**

You don't look good. You look thin.

**JAMES**

Mama --

**GEORGIA**

I'm just saying what I see.

James pulls back. Looks down at George, who has been staring up at him the entire time.

**JAMES**

(crouching down)  
Hey. Look how big you got.

George says nothing. Just looks at his brother. Taking inventory the way children do.

**JAMES (CONT'D)**

You not happy to see me?

**GEORGE**

How come you can't come home?

James glances up at Georgia. She gives him nothing. He looks back at George.

**JAMES**

I got some things I gotta take care  
of here first.

**GEORGE**

What kind of things?

**JAMES**

Grown things. You'll understand  
when you're older.

**GEORGE**

Everybody keeps saying that.

James almost smiles. He straightens George's collar. Holds his small face in both hands for a moment.

**JAMES**

You be good, lil man. You hear me?  
Whatever Mama and Daddy tell you --  
you do it. Don't end up --

He stops. Looks around the room. The guards. The bolted-down tables. Then back at George.

**JAMES (CONT'D)**

Just be good. Okay?

**GEORGE**

(nodding)  
Okay.

A GUARD steps forward.

**GUARD**

Five minutes.

Georgia pulls James aside, speaks low and urgent -- bills, lawyers, things George can't hear. He watches them. Then looks around the room.

A little GIRL across the aisle, asleep on her mother's lap. An old man holding his wife's hand across the table, not speaking. Just holding.

George looks at the door James came through. The burgundy drapes, still now.

He looks at the door they came in through.

Two different doors. He doesn't understand why yet.

**GUARD (CONT'D)**

Visitation is over. Say your  
goodbyes.

Georgia holds James one more time. Long. James lets her.

When they separate -- James crouches back down to George. One firm hand on his shoulder.

**JAMES**

I'll see you, lil man.

He stands. Walks back toward the burgundy drapes. Pushes through.

They close behind him.

George stares at them. Waiting for James to come back through.

He doesn't.

**EXT. LORTON PRISON COMPLEX — ENTRANCE — CONTINUOUS**

Back across the gravel. Georgia moves. George walks beside her, slower, turning to look back at the building every few steps.

**GEORGE**

Mama. When is James coming home?

**GEORGIA**

A while yet, baby.

**GEORGE**

How long is a while?

**GEORGIA**

Long enough. Come on now.

George turns to look back one more time.

The heavy entrance door. Closed. Gray steel. It does not open.

**GEORGE**

He didn't do anything wrong, did he?

Georgia stops walking. Looks down at her son. Something moves across her face -- grief, guilt, love, the particular weight of a mother who has no good answer.

**GEORGIA**

He made some bad choices, baby.  
That's all.

**GEORGE**

Bad choices put you in there?

**GEORGIA**

(firmly)  
Yes. They do. Now come on.

She takes his hand. They walk to the car.

George looks back one last time at the door.

The camera stays on it. Steel. Riveted. Final.

It does not open.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. BABYSITTER'S HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — AFTERNOON**

Cluttered. Warm. The TV going to nobody.

The BABYSITTER, 60s, is deep in the couch -- housecoat, granny stockings rolled to the knee, snoring with her whole chest.

YOUNG GEORGE, 6, and YOUNG TASHA, 5, stand over her. They look at each other. This is not their first time here.

George taps her arm. Nothing. Taps harder.

**GEORGE**

Miss Ruth. We hungry.

Still nothing. He shakes her shoulder.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Miss Ruth!

She jolts awake. Grabs the armrest. Looks at the ceiling, the TV, the window -- then finally lands on the two children standing over her.

**BABYSITTER**

(genuinely lost)

Lord have mercy. How you two get in here?

**TASHA**

(to George, whispering)

She ask that every single day.

**GEORGE**

(whispering back)

Shh. Just let her get there.

The babysitter blinks. Something slowly arriving.

**BABYSITTER**

Y'all Georgia's kids.

**GEORGE**

Yes ma'am.

**BABYSITTER**

(hoisting herself up)

I know that. Come on.

**INT. BABYSITTER'S HOUSE — KITCHEN — MOMENTS LATER**

She opens a can of corned beef hash. Dumps it in a pan.  
George and Tasha watch from the doorway.

**TASHA**

(low)  
Not that again.

**GEORGE**

(low)  
Don't say nothing.

Two plates land on the table. Hash. White bread. Mayonnaise  
thick enough to tile a floor.

**BABYSITTER**

Eat up. Good for you.

She shuffles back to the living room. They sit. Tasha stares  
at her plate like it owes her an apology.

**TASHA**

George, I can't eat this.

**GEORGE**

Then don't eat and be hungry.

**TASHA**

It look like something from the  
bottom of a shoe.

**GEORGE**

Tasha.

**TASHA**

I'm serious --

**GEORGE**

I know you serious. Eat it anyway.

Tasha picks up her fork. Takes the smallest possible bite.  
Her face says everything.

**TASHA**

(chewing slowly)  
When Mama gets here I'm telling  
her.

**GEORGE**

Tell her whatever you want.

**TASHA**

You not even a little upset?

**GEORGE**

(eating, matter of fact)  
I'm very upset. I'm just eating  
anyway.

**INT. BABYSITTER'S HOUSE — UPSTAIRS BEDROOM — LATER**

Both of them on the floor, chins on the windowsill, eyes on  
the bus stop below. This is the operation.

**TASHA**

What time is it?

**GEORGE**

I don't know.

**TASHA**

You think she forgot?

**GEORGE**

Mama don't forget us.

**TASHA**

One time she forgot the --

**GEORGE**

That was milk, Tasha. We're her  
kids. It's different.

A bus pulls up. Doors open. People file out. Not her. Tasha's  
face falls.

**TASHA**

What if something happened to her?

**GEORGE**

Nothing happened to Mama.

**TASHA**

But what if --

**GEORGE**

(firm)  
Nothing happened to her. She's  
coming. Stop.

Tasha goes quiet. They watch. Another bus. Doors open.

GEORGIA steps off. Handbag swinging, already scanning the  
block the way mothers do.

**TASHA**

(pure relief, already  
gone)

MAMA!

She's off the floor and down the stairs before George can move. He watches Georgia look up, find his face in the window, and smile.

He exhales. Stands. Heads for the stairs.

From the living room below -- the babysitter, still asleep. The TV still talking to no one.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. LOVE JOY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- DAY (1977)**

Bright. Colorful. Small chairs, building blocks, finger paintings covering the walls.

YOUNG GEORGE, 5, stands in the doorway in his best clothes. He takes the room in the way he takes everything in -- quietly, carefully.

The TEACHER, pretty and warm, crouches down to him.

**TEACHER**

You must be George. I'm Miss Allen.  
Go ahead and find something to play  
with, okay?

George spots a pile of wooden blocks in the corner. Heads straight for them.

Already camped nearby -- BOY #1, light-skinned with a mole above his lip, and BOY #2, small with slanted eyes. They have most of the blocks claimed between them.

George settles in. Starts building with what's left. Makes it work.

The door swings open. The TRUMPET MAN strolls in -- tall, easy, carrying his case like rent is paid everywhere he goes.

Miss Allen sees him. Her whole face changes.

**TRUMPET MAN**

(to the room, barely  
glancing)

Alright, kids. Lesson's over. Go  
play.

Half the class cheers. George looks up from his blocks.

**GEORGE**

(to the kid beside him)  
We just sat down.

**KID**

Man comes every day. Soon as he  
walks in, class is done.

**GEORGE**

And she just lets him do that?

**KID**

(already up and walking  
away)  
Every. Single. Day.

George looks at Miss Allen -- laughing with the Trumpet Man,  
the whole class an afterthought. He looks back at his blocks.

He files that away. Adults don't always do what they're  
supposed to do.

**INT. LOVE JOY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- THE FOLLOWING DAYS**

DAY ONE -- Boy #1 walks over without a word, picks up two of  
George's blocks, walks back. Like George isn't there.

George watches him go. Rebuilds with what's left. Says  
nothing.

DAY TWO -- Boy #2 this time. Same move. George watches. Jaw a  
little tighter. Still nothing.

DAY THREE -- Both of them. Taking turns. It's sport now.

George sits with almost nothing. He looks at the two boys  
across the room. Then at Miss Allen -- already watching the  
door for the Trumpet Man.

Something settles in his face. Quiet. Certain. A decision  
made.

**INT. LOVE JOY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- THE NEXT DAY**

The Trumpet Man arrives on schedule. Miss Allen forgets the  
room exists.

George sits with his blocks. Boy #1 gets up. Crosses the  
room. Reaches down for George's stack.

George lets him take it. Watches him turn back.

Then George stands. Follows him. Calm. No rush.

Boy #1 doesn't hear him until George is right there --  
CRACK. The block connects hard across the back of his head.  
Boy #1 drops. Blood. The room freezes.  
Boy #2 scrambles to his feet. George turns toward him.

**BOY #2**

(hands up, backing away)  
Okay -- okay -- I'm done, I'm done  
--

He folds himself into the corner. George stands over him.  
Then steps back.

The Trumpet Man's FRIEND rushes over and grabs George by both  
shoulders.

**TRUMPET MAN'S FRIEND**

What is the matter with you?! You  
can't just --

**GEORGE**

(completely calm)  
He kept taking my blocks.

**TRUMPET MAN'S FRIEND**

That don't mean you -- you could've  
really hurt somebody!

**GEORGE**

I know.

The man stares at him. This five-year-old. Perfectly still.  
No tears. No panic.

He doesn't know what to do with that.

**INT. LOVE JOY ELEMENTARY -- PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE -- LATER**

Georgia sits across from the PRINCIPAL. George beside her,  
feet off the floor, hands folded in his lap.

**PRINCIPAL**

Mrs. Owens, George struck another  
student with a wooden block. The  
child needed medical attention.

**GEORGIA**

(to George, quiet and  
dangerous)  
What happened.

**GEORGE**

They kept taking my blocks. Every day. Three days in a row.

**GEORGIA**

And you couldn't tell the teacher?

**GEORGE**

The teacher was busy.

**GEORGIA**

Busy doing what?

**GEORGE**

Talking to the trumpet man.

Georgia looks at the principal. The principal looks at Georgia. A beat of mutual understanding neither of them will say out loud.

**PRINCIPAL**

(clearing his throat)

We'll be transferring George to Payne Elementary. Fresh start for everyone.

Georgia stands. Takes George's hand. Walks him out without another word.

**INT. LOVE JOY ELEMENTARY — HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS**

Georgia walks fast. George keeps pace. She hasn't looked at him yet.

**GEORGIA**

I should wear your behind out right here in this hallway.

**GEORGE**

They kept taking my stuff, Mama.

**GEORGIA**

So you bust the boy in the head?

**GEORGE**

I asked them to stop.

**GEORGIA**

When?

**GEORGE**

...In my head.

Georgia stops. Turns. Looks down at him.

**GEORGIA**

George Anthony Owens.

**GEORGE**

They took my blocks three days,  
Mama. Every day. And the teacher  
never did nothing because she was  
too busy with that man. So I  
handled it.

Georgia stares at him. Trying to find the right thing to say.  
The thing that doesn't also mean -- she understands.

**GEORGIA**

(pointing)

Don't you ever do that again.

**GEORGE**

Yes ma'am.

**GEORGIA**

I mean it.

**GEORGE**

Yes ma'am.

She takes his hand. They walk toward the exit.

George glances back at the school once. Not scared. Not  
sorry.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

First lesson I ever learned. Pain  
eliminates the predators.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. BURKE STREET -- FRONT STOOP -- DAY (1978)**

SUPER: "Capitol Hill, Southeast D.C. -- Summer, 1978"

Hot. Alive. Kids everywhere.

YOUNG GEORGE, 6, sits on the front stoop when CHARLIE appears  
at the gate. Worker's boots, tough-skin jeans, big forehead,  
bigger grin. He climbs the gate like it's a jungle gym.

**CHARLIE**

You George?

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**CHARLIE**

My uncle knows your brother. I live right down there.

He points down the block. George looks. Looks back at Charlie.

**GEORGE**

Why you got on work boots?

**CHARLIE**

What's wrong with work boots?

**GEORGE**

Nothing. We're just going to school, not a construction site.

**CHARLIE**

(completely unbothered)  
These are comfortable. You want to play or not?

George looks at him for a beat. Then gets up.

**GEORGE**

Yeah. Let's play.

**EXT. BURKE STREET — THE ALLEY — LATER**

A bicycle rim nailed to a telephone pole serves as the basket. George, Charlie, and a growing crew run the concrete.

DONALD, chubby and light-skinned with a birthmark on his cheek, calls for the ball.

**DONALD**

George! Right here, right here --

George passes. Donald catches, goes up, scores.

**CHARLIE**

(to George)  
How he always open? He can't even run right.

**GEORGE**

Because you always watch his feet. Watch his eyes.

**CHARLIE**

...Since when you know so much about basketball?

**GEORGE**

Since I started paying attention.

UMAR trots over, catching his breath. Neat clothes, tidy afro  
-- looks like he came from somewhere important.

**UMAR**

My father says I can only play  
until four.

**CHARLIE**

It's three-thirty, Umar.

**UMAR**

I know. I'm just telling you in  
advance.

**DONALD**

(bouncing the ball)  
Your father time every single thing  
you do?

**UMAR**

He's very organized.

**CHARLIE**

(to George)  
His daddy make mine look relaxed.

**GEORGE**

(low)  
Don't let my father hear you say  
that.

FICHE rolls up on his bike, skidding to a stop. Thin, quiet-  
eyed, wearing clothes a size too big.

**FICHE**

Y'all starting without me?

**CHARLIE**

You're always late, Fiche.

**FICHE**

I had to help my grandma with the  
groceries.

**GEORGE**

You good?

Fiche meets his eyes. Something passes between them --  
Fiche's situation at home isn't great and George knows it.

**FICHE**

I'm good. Let's play.

**EXT. BURKE STREET — BLOCK PARTY — EVENING**

The street is transformed. Tables of food. Speakers on the light poles. Earth, Wind & Fire rolling out over the whole block.

Adults fill the street. Women in their finest moving through the crowd like they know it. Men laughing loud. The whole neighborhood out.

George, Charlie, KEITH, CHUCK, and TOUCH sit on the brick stoop. Watching. Eating from paper plates.

At the center of it all -- the OLDER TEENS. MEL, TIM, DONNY, EARL. Moving through the party like they're on a different frequency. Girls drifting toward them naturally, effortlessly.

**CHUCK**

You see how Mel just did that? Girl walked all the way across the street just to talk to him.

**KEITH**

That's going to be me one day. Watch.

Everyone looks at Keith.

**CHUCK**

Man, ain't nobody going to sweat you. Your grandmother sees you talking to a girl in front of the house, she'll make you do extra prayer duty.

Everybody cracks up. Keith waves them off.

**KEITH**

Go ahead and laugh. Y'all going to see.

**CHARLIE**

(still laughing)

Keith, your grandmother got you on a leash. A real short one.

**KEITH**

She just looks out for me. Nothing wrong with that.

**TOUCH**

Nothing wrong with it, but you  
still on a leash.

More laughter. Keith shakes his head but can't help smiling.

George watches the older teens. Watches Mel say something low  
to a girl that makes her cover her mouth and look away  
smiling.

**GEORGE**

(half to himself)  
What do you think he said to her?

**CHARLIE**

Something we don't know how to say  
yet.

**GEORGE**

We'll figure it out.

**CHARLIE**

When?

**GEORGE**

When we're them.

Charlie nods. They both watch the older teens move through  
the party like they own it.

The music pumps. The block is alive.

Wide shot -- the whole street lit up and full and beautiful.

And there in the background, above the rooftops, above the  
speakers and the laughter and the good summer night --

The D.C. Jail tower. Watching. Patient as ever.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. ALLEY -- BEHIND THE OWENS HOUSE -- DAY (1980)**

Georgia leads George and Tasha down the alley, groceries in  
hand. Midday quiet.

Then -- distant but unmistakable -- the WAIL of a siren from  
D.C. Jail one block over. Long. Steady. Not a drill sound.

Georgia slows. Her eyes move to the end of the alley.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Mama, what's that siren?

**GEORGIA**

(already scanning)

Hush.

Footsteps. Hard and fast. Getting louder.

A MAN bursts around the corner -- 30s, shirt torn, breathing in ragged gulps. Wild eyes jumping everywhere at once. He sees them. Keeps running. Blows past them like a gust of wind.

Georgia steps sideways, pulls both kids behind her in one motion. They press against the alley wall.

The man disappears around the next corner.

Nobody moves. Nobody breathes.

Then -- a POLICE CRUISER rolls slowly into the alley mouth. Stops. The OFFICER leans out the window.

**OFFICER**

Excuse me, ma'am. You see a man  
come through here? Running?

Georgia looks at him. Plain face. Calm eyes.

**GEORGIA**

No sir. Haven't seen anybody.

The officer looks at the kids. George stares back at him. Tasha stares at the ground.

**OFFICER**

Alright. Thank you, ma'am. Y'all  
get inside.

The cruiser moves on. Down the alley. Gone.

Georgia watches it go. Then picks up her groceries and starts walking.

**GEORGE**

(catching up)

Mama. We saw him.

**GEORGIA**

Keep walking.

**GEORGE**

But you told the police you didn't

--

**GEORGIA**

George. Keep. Walking.

**INT. GEORGIA'S CAR — CONTINUOUS**

All three of them in. Doors closed. Georgia cranks the engine. Doesn't pull out yet.

George is watching her from the back seat. Working up to it.

**GEORGE**

Why did you tell him you didn't see anything when you did?

Georgia looks at him in the rearview mirror.

**GEORGIA**

It's safer to mind your business. You live longer that way.

**GEORGE**

But he escaped from jail. He did something wrong.

**GEORGIA**

Maybe he did. Maybe he didn't. That's not for us to decide.

**GEORGE**

Then who decides?

Georgia pulls out onto the street. Doesn't answer right away.

**GEORGIA**

Not us. Not today. Not in that alley.

George sits back. Turns it over. Not satisfied but not pushing anymore.

Tasha looks at Georgia from the front seat.

**TASHA**

I didn't see anybody, Ma.

Georgia glances at her. Then back at the road.

**GEORGIA**

That's right.

She looks at George in the mirror. Waiting.

**GEORGE**

(beat, then)  
I didn't see anything either.

**GEORGIA**

None of us saw anything.

She faces forward. Drives.

George watches the streets move past his window. Processing.

A world where the right thing and the safe thing are never the same thing.

He's eight years old and he already knows which one his mother chooses.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. BARBERSHOP - 15TH STREET S.E. - DAY (1981)**

Old school shop. A few chairs. Old men debating everything -- politics, women, sports, God. Nobody agrees on anything. Nobody stops talking.

YOUNG GEORGE, 9, sits in the barber's chair getting his cut. FRANCIS sits along the wall, arms folded, completely at home in the argument.

**OLD MAN #1**

Reagan don't care nothing about this neighborhood. Never did, never will.

**OLD MAN #2**

Wasn't Carter neither. At least Reagan honest about it.

**OLD MAN #1**

How is that better?

**FRANCIS**

It's not better. It just means you know who your enemy is.

The old men consider that. George watches his father in the mirror. Francis catches him looking and gives him a small nod -- pay attention, son. This is education too.

**EXT. 15TH STREET S.E. - CONTINUOUS**

Fall. Leaves down. Gray sky pressing low. Francis and George walk the strip toward home.

15th Street is doing what 15th Street does. A man in a doorway, nodding out. Two guys on a corner watching the block. A woman in a housecoat arguing with nobody. Someone selling watches from a cardboard box.

George takes it all in. Not scared. Curious. Like he's studying for a test.

Francis walks with his hands in his windbreaker pockets. He's seen this street his whole life. He watches George watching it.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

You see these people out here?

**GEORGE**

Yes sir.

**FRANCIS**

What do you see?

George looks at the strip again. Taking his time with the answer.

**GEORGE**

Men standing around. Not doing much.

**FRANCIS**

That's right. You know why?

**GEORGE**

No sir.

**FRANCIS**

Because at some point every one of those men made a choice. Wrong school, wrong company, wrong decision -- and that's where the road ended. Right there on that corner.

They pass a man slumped against a chain-link fence, arm out, eyes gone somewhere else entirely. George slows down to look. Francis keeps his pace.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

Keep walking.

**GEORGE**

(catching up)  
Is he sick?

**FRANCIS**

He made himself sick. There's a difference.

A DRUNK steps off the curb, cuts toward them.

**DRUNK**

Hey brother, let me hold something  
--

**FRANCIS**

(not breaking stride)  
Not today.

The drunk peels off. Francis doesn't even look at him.

**GEORGE**

Daddy, how come there's so many of them on this street?

**FRANCIS**

Because nobody ever told them what I'm telling you right now. Or somebody told them and they didn't listen.

**GEORGE**

What are you telling me?

**FRANCIS**

I'm getting to it. Don't rush me.

George almost smiles. They walk.

A group of men on the next corner -- younger, sharper, watching the block with a different kind of attention. George clocks them.

**GEORGE**

Those men are different from the others.

**FRANCIS**

How so?

**GEORGE**

They're not nodding. They're watching.

Francis looks at his son. Nine years old and already separating the junkies from the dealers by body language.

**FRANCIS**

That's right. And which ones you think end up worse?

George thinks about it.

**GEORGE**

The watching ones?

**FRANCIS**

The watching ones. Because they think they're running something. Right up until they're not.

**EXT. OWENS HOME - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER**

They turn in through the back gate. Francis stops before they reach the door. George stops with him.

Francis looks at his son for a moment. The full weight of what he wants to say gathering.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

Those guys out there selling drugs -- they won't last. Either they're going to prison or somebody's going to kill them. And half the time it's somebody they called a friend.

**GEORGE**

Their own friends?

**FRANCIS**

Friends will kill friends over a few extra dollars. Remember that. Which is why I need you to hear what I'm about to tell you.

**GEORGE**

Sir.

**FRANCIS**

You don't have friends. You have associates. Real friendship is rare -- rarer than you think at your age. Watch the ones who celebrate when you fail just as hard as when you win. Watch for envy. Men will smile in your face and envy you in their heart at the same time.

**GEORGE**

How do you tell the difference?

**FRANCIS**

Time. Time tells you everything.  
You just have to be patient enough  
to let it.

George nods. Taking it in.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

And stay away from drugs. I mean  
that. Drugs don't just damage your  
body -- they damage your judgment.  
And a man without good judgment is  
a man who can't protect himself or  
anybody he loves.

**GEORGE**

Yes sir.

**FRANCIS**

You say yes sir. I need you to mean  
it.

**GEORGE**

(meeting his eyes)  
I mean it.

Francis holds his gaze. Then puts his hand on George's  
shoulder once -- firm, brief -- and heads inside.

George stays in the yard a moment. Looks back toward the  
street. Then up at the sky.

He means it. Every word. He is nine years old and he means  
every word.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

I never forgot what my father told  
me that day. The question was --  
did I follow it?

Hold on Francis through the kitchen window -- moving through  
the house, at ease, in his world. A man who built something  
and knows it.

This is Francis Owens at full strength. Remember this face.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. BAY'S APARTMENT -- LIVING ROOM -- EVENING (1981)**

Small. Dim. Stephanie Mills on the radio. Georgia sits on the  
couch.

YOUNG GEORGE, 9, sits on a barstool at the little bar set, poking through playing cards he found on the counter.

BAY, mid-20s, leans in the kitchen doorway. Still the coolest man George has ever seen -- easy smile, smooth in everything he does. His friend ELI, short and thick-mustachioed, stands beside him.

**BAY**

(to Eli)

Come on, let me holla at you in the back real quick.

**ELI**

Say less.

They disappear into the back room. The door closes.

**GEORGIA**

(calling after him)

Bay, don't have us sitting out here all night.

No answer. The radio plays. George shuffles the cards. Georgia opens her purse, finds nothing interesting, closes it.

**GEORGE**

What they doing back there?

**GEORGIA**

Talking.

**GEORGE**

About what?

**GEORGIA**

Grown things. Play your cards.

George plays his cards. The music plays. A few minutes pass.

Then -- a smell. Sharp. Chemical. Creeping under the closed door like something alive.

Georgia's nostrils flare. Her jaw tightens. She looks at the door. Looks at George.

George looks at the floor. Something moves near the base of the bar stool.

**GEORGE**

Mama --

He's off the stool in half a second, backed against the wall.  
A SNAKE -- thick as a belt, four feet long -- slides slow and  
easy across the floor.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(loud)  
MAMA. There is a SNAKE.

**GEORGIA**

(feet up on the couch)  
Bay! BAY!

The back room door opens. Bay and Eli emerge.

They are walking like men on the moon. Slow. Careful. Eyes  
wide and glassy, like the lights are on but the whole city's  
been evacuated.

**BAY**

(seeing the snake,  
unbothered)  
Oh. That's just Chester.

**GEORGE**

Chester?!

**ELI**

(moving in slow motion  
toward it)  
He get out sometimes.

Eli picks Chester up like he's got all the time in the  
universe. Carries him back to his tank. George watches from  
against the wall, heart still going.

**GEORGE**

(to Bay)  
You got a snake and you didn't say  
nothing before we came over?

**BAY**

(slow, dreamy)  
He stay in his tank, lil bro. He  
cool.

**GEORGE**

He was not in his tank, Bay. He was  
on the floor by my feet.

Bay processes this. It takes a while to arrive.

**BAY**

...He must've got out.

**GEORGE**

I just said that.

Georgia has been watching Bay this whole time. The way he moves. The way he talks. She stands up.

**GEORGIA**

(quiet, controlled)

Bay. Look at me.

Bay turns to her. Smiles his easy smile.

**GEORGIA (CONT'D)**

What did you just do in that back room?

**BAY**

Nothing, Mama. Just talking to Eli

--

**GEORGIA**

Don't. Don't do that.

A beat. Bay's smile fades a little at the edges.

Then something shifts in his face. His jaw tightens. His hand grips the doorframe.

**BAY**

(low, strange)

Con cheeta...

**GEORGE**

What?

**BAY**

Con cheeta... con cheeta...

Getting louder. His knuckles white on the doorframe.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

(rising)

CON CHEETA --

He LUNGES at the kitchen table. Flips it. Everything airborne -- plates, cups, an ashtray, all of it crashing.

Georgia is already moving. Grabs George's coat off the barstool, shoves it at him.

**GEORGIA**

(fast, low)

Put your coat on. Right now. We're leaving.

**GEORGE**

What's happening to him --

**GEORGIA**

Coat. Now. Move.

Bay starts hitting the apartment wall. Denting it. Eli stands to the side, not alarmed, watching his friend lose his mind like it's something he's seen before.

Georgia gets George out the door.

**EXT. BAY'S APARTMENT - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS**

Georgia moves fast to the car. Gets George in. Gets in herself.

Through the apartment window -- Bay's silhouette. Moving erratic. Throwing something. Then still. Then moving again.

George can't look away.

**GEORGE**

Mama, what is wrong with him?

Georgia lights a cigarette. Hands not quite steady.

**GEORGIA**

He's been smoking that mess. That's what's wrong with him.

**GEORGE**

What mess?

**GEORGIA**

Something that takes your mind and turns it inside out. That's all you need to know.

**GEORGE**

Is he going to be okay?

Georgia pulls out of the parking lot. Doesn't answer right away. Smokes.

**GEORGIA**

He'll come down. He always comes down.

**GEORGE**

And then?

**GEORGIA**

(tired)

And then he does it again. That's  
how it works.

George looks back at the building as they pull away. Bay's window. Dark now.

Bay was the coolest man he ever knew. Silver Mustang. Brown suit. Walked into rooms like he owned them.

George stares at that dark window and can't quite put together what he just saw with the man he thought he knew.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

That was the first time I saw what  
the street does to somebody from  
the inside. I didn't have a word  
for it then. I just knew -- the  
coolest man I ever saw, and  
whatever that was, it had him.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. ELIOT JUNIOR HIGH -- MAIN HALLWAY -- MORNING (1984)**

SUPER: "Eliot Junior High School, Southeast D.C. -- 1984"

The hallway hits like a wave. Loud. Packed. A Grandmaster Flash record thumping from someone's boombox. Bugle Boy jeans. Ewing Adidas. Ocean Pacific shirts. Every kid performing some version of who they want to be.

GEORGE, 12, stands just inside the entrance. Taller now. Leaner. Taking it all in the way he always takes things in -- quiet, careful, reading the room before he moves in it.

This is not elementary school. This is something else entirely.

Down the hall -- two boys press a smaller kid against the lockers, hand out, waiting. The smaller kid digs into his pocket. Hands something over. The two boys move on like it's a transaction.

George watches. Files it away.

CHARLIE materializes from the crowd, worker's boots somehow still on his feet after all these years.

**CHARLIE**

George! Aye -- George!

George turns. Charlie pushes through to him, grinning like he owns the place despite having been here exactly as long as George has.

**GEORGE**

You still got those boots on.

**CHARLIE**

These boots never did anything to you. You see this hallway? This is a whole different situation from Payne.

**GEORGE**

Yeah. I see that.

**CHARLIE**

(low, nodding down the  
hall)

You see what just happened to that little dude by the lockers?

**GEORGE**

I saw.

**CHARLIE**

That's Boo and Jolie. They run this hallway. Press everybody for their lunch money.

**GEORGE**

Not everybody.

**CHARLIE**

Everybody who let them.

George looks at him. Charlie looks back. They both already know which category they're in.

**INT. ELIOT JUNIOR HIGH — ART CLASS — LATER**

George at a table, sketching. He's good -- natural, detailed. The kid next to him leans over.

This is MANDY. Block-headed, round-faced, permanent half-smile like he just heard the setup to a joke and is waiting for the punchline.

**MANDY**

Yo -- you drew that freehand?

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**MANDY**

That's cold. You from the Southeast side?

**GEORGE**

Capitol Hill. Burke Street.

**MANDY**

I'm on the Northeast side. 15th and C. I'm Mandy.

**GEORGE**

George.

From across the table -- GARY, big and broad, watching this exchange with great interest. He laughs at something Mandy said that wasn't particularly funny.

**MANDY**

(to Gary)

Yo Gary, this dude drew that whole thing freehand.

Gary leans over. Looks at the sketch. Laughs again -- louder this time.

**GEORGE**

(to Mandy, quiet)

What's funny about that?

**MANDY**

Nothing, man. Gary just laughs. That's what he does. Don't worry about it.

**GARY**

(still chuckling, extends hand)

Gary. I'm not laughing at you, I just laugh.

**GEORGE**

(shaking it, skeptical)

At everything?

**GARY**

Pretty much, yeah.

George looks at him. Something genuine underneath the big laugh. He files that away too.

**INT. ELIOT JUNIOR HIGH -- HALLWAY -- END OF DAY**

End of day. The hallway floods. Someone's boombox switches to Chuck Brown -- the Go-Go pocket groove hitting different from everything else, distinctly D.C., unmistakably home.

George moves through the crowd with Charlie. They pass a cluster of boys who carry themselves differently from the others -- relaxed, unhurried, commanding space without asking for it.

**CHARLIE**

(low)

That's Donald G and Big Clay.  
Northeast boys. Knockout kings,  
both of them. Ham's gym.

**GEORGE**

What about on our side?

**CHARLIE**

Moe and Donae. You don't want to  
see either one of them with their  
hands up.

**GEORGE**

Anybody getting money in here?

Charlie glances at him. The question lands differently than small talk.

**CHARLIE**

George --

**GEORGE**

I'm just asking.

**CHARLIE**

Some of these older dudes waiting  
outside after school. Runners go to  
school, hustle after. That's the  
setup.

**GEORGE**

Hm.

**CHARLIE**

Don't hm me like that. We just got  
here.

**GEORGE**

I know. I'm just paying attention.

Charlie looks at him sideways. George looks straight ahead. That same face from the classroom. From the barbershop. From every place he's ever been.

Taking it all in. Filing it away. Already thinking three moves ahead.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

Eliot Junior High was a training ground. The kids who couldn't fight got their lunch money pressed. The kids who could fight ran everything. And somewhere in between -- the ones who were watching it all, waiting to figure out which way the wind was going to blow.

The Go-Go keeps pumping down the hallway. The crowd moves around George like a river around a rock.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. CORNER STORE — SOUTHEAST D.C. — DAY (1984)**

Summer. Six boys on the curb outside the corner store. Nothing to do and all day to do it.

GEORGE, CHARLIE, CHUCK, DRE, LEO, and CHI. Twelve, thirteen years old. Sweating through their shirts, drinking sodas, watching the block like it owes them something.

**CHUCK**

We need to figure out how to make some money.

**CHARLIE**

We been saying that for two weeks. Nobody's come up with nothing yet.

**DRE**

I could cut grass.

**CHUCK**

Whose grass? Look around. Nobody on this block got a yard.

**DRE**

People in Virginia got yards.

**CHUCK**

We don't know nobody in Virginia.

**LEO**

My uncle said he'd let me run numbers for him on the weekend.

**CHARLIE**

Running numbers for a dollar fifty  
an hour? No thank you.

**LEO**

It's something.

**CHARLIE**

It's barely something.

George is quiet. Listening. Drinking his soda. His eyes move  
down the block.

Then -- a black CADILLAC rolls past. Slow. White leather  
interior catching the sun. Car phone mounted on the console,  
the man behind the wheel talking into it like he's got a  
boardroom on the other end. Black brim hat. Wire-frame  
glasses. Doesn't look at any of them.

All six boys watch it pass.

The Cadillac keeps rolling. Unhurried. Inevitable.

**CHI**

(watching it go)  
That's Birdie.

**CHUCK**

I know who that is.

**CHI**

Fifteen thousand a week. Just off  
this strip alone. And his partner  
Ryan's pulling the same thing on  
the other side.

Nobody says anything for a moment. The Cadillac disappears  
around the corner.

**DRE**

Fifteen thousand?

**CHI**

A week. Every week.

**DRE**

That can't be right.

**CHI**

My cousin told me. He knows  
somebody that works for him.

**CHARLIE**

Every week though. That's like --  
what is that a year?

**LEO**

Almost eight hundred thousand.

Everyone looks at Leo.

**LEO (CONT'D)**

I'm good at math.

Silence. Eight hundred thousand sits in the air above the  
curb like weather.

**CHI**

(quiet, certain)  
I want that type of money.

**CHUCK**

Same.

**DRE**

Yeah.

**CHARLIE**

I mean... yeah.

They all look at George. He's been staring at the corner  
where the Cadillac disappeared.

**CHI**

George?

George takes a slow drink of his soda. Sets it down on the  
curb.

**GEORGE**

Man drives a car like that, he's  
got problems we can't even imagine.

**CHI**

He's got fifteen thousand a week.  
That solves most problems I can  
think of.

**GEORGE**

Solves some. Creates others.

**CHUCK**

What kind of problems you got when  
you got fifteen thousand a week?

**GEORGE**

The kind that don't let you drive  
slow through a neighborhood in  
broad daylight without everybody  
watching to see where you're going.

A beat. Chi looks at him. Something flickers behind his eyes  
-- not agreement, but acknowledgment.

**CHI**

You sound like somebody's father.

**CHARLIE**

(under his breath, to  
George)  
He's not wrong.

**GEORGE**

(low back)  
Shut up, Charlie.

Laughter. The tension breaks. They go back to watching the  
block.

But George's eyes drift back to that corner. Where the  
Cadillac went.

He heard his mother's voice. Clear as anything.

Those people will kill you.

He heard it. He's still looking at the corner.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. GRANDPARENTS' HOME — HALLWAY — DAY (1983)**

Quiet house. The kind of quiet that comes with age and  
slowing down.

GEORGE, 11, moves carefully down the hallway, his GRANDFATHER  
leaning heavy on his shoulder. Old man. Thin now. Feet  
shuffling in small careful steps.

George absorbs the weight without complaint. Adjusts his arm.  
Keeps them moving.

**GRANDFATHER**

(breathless, slow)  
I got it... just give me a  
second...

**GEORGE**

Take your time, Pop-pop. I got you.

They make it to the bathroom door. George holds it open. His grandfather grips the frame, steadies himself.

**GRANDFATHER**

Thank you, son. Go on back now.  
I'll be alright.

**GEORGE**

I'll be right here.

**GRANDFATHER**

(a small smile)  
You're a good boy, George. You know  
that?

**GEORGE**

Yes sir.

**GRANDFATHER**

Don't just say yes sir. Know it.

The door closes. George leans against the hallway wall.  
Waits.

**INT. OWENS HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT AFTERNOON**

George comes through the front door, backpack over one  
shoulder. Normal afternoon. Normal everything.

Francis is in his chair. Not watching television. Not  
reading. Just sitting.

George stops. He has never seen his father just sit.

**GEORGE**

Dad?

Francis looks up. His face has something in it George has  
never seen there before.

**FRANCIS**

Sit down, son.

George sits on the couch. Sets his backpack down slowly.

**FRANCIS (CONT'D)**

Your grandfather passed away this  
afternoon. At the hospital. Your  
mother and grandmother are over  
there now.

George stares at him.

**GEORGE**

I was just with him. This morning.  
I walked him to the bathroom.

**FRANCIS**

I know.

**GEORGE**

He was talking to me. He said --

He stops. Can't finish it.

**FRANCIS**

(quietly)

He went peaceful, George. In his  
sleep. That's a mercy.

**GEORGE**

He didn't seem like he was going to  
--

**FRANCIS**

Nobody ever does.

Silence. The house feels different already. Like something  
structural has shifted.

**GEORGE**

Grandma know?

**FRANCIS**

Your mother's with her.

George nods. Looks at his hands. Then at his father.

**GEORGE**

You okay, Dad?

Francis looks at his son. The question surprises him -- not  
that it was asked, but how it was asked. Man to man.

**FRANCIS**

I've been better. But I'll be  
alright.

He reaches over and puts his hand on George's knee. Just for  
a moment. Then takes it back.

**EXT. GRAVESIDE -- DAY**

Gray sky. The family gathered around the open grave. GEORGIA  
holds her GRANDMOTHER, who weeps without sound -- the deepest  
kind.

George stands between Francis and Tasha. He watches the casket. Watches it descend.

His grandmother reaches out one hand toward it as it goes down. Georgia catches her hand. Holds it.

George watches his grandmother's face. Sixty years of a life built with one man. And now the ground taking him.

**TASHA**

(low, to George)  
You okay?

**GEORGE**

(low back)  
Yeah.

**TASHA**

You don't look okay.

**GEORGE**

I'm thinking about Grandma.

**TASHA**

What about her?

**GEORGE**

Who she is without him. She's  
always been somebody's wife. Now  
what?

Tasha looks at him. Then at their grandmother. The weight of that settling on her too.

Francis stands perfectly still through all of it. Back straight. Jaw set. The military posture holding everything in place.

But his eyes are wet.

George sees it. Looks away. Gives his father that.

**INT. OWENS HOME — LIVING ROOM — WEEKS LATER**

Francis in his chair. But something is different. A letter on the side table -- official-looking. Retirement papers.

Georgia leans in the doorway, arms folded. George comes down the stairs, catches the mood between his parents.

**GEORGIA**

You sure about this?

**FRANCIS**

Twenty-two years is enough. Time to be home.

**GEORGIA**

Being home is fine. Sitting in that chair all day worrying about these kids is something else.

**FRANCIS**

Let me worry about my children. That's my job now.

George looks at his father. Then at his mother. The house is changing. Everything is changing.

Time, the way it does, is accelerating.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. BURKE STREET - LATE AFTERNOON (1986)**

Fall. Leaves down. George, 15, sits on the front steps alone. watching the block the way he always watches things -- patient, reading.

Then -- the CHEROKEE turns the corner. Big tires. Star rims. Tinted windows. Truck phone glowing through the glass.

WARREN, late 20s, parks in front of his mother's house. Gets out with the phone still in his hand. Stocky. Low cut. Moves like a man who hasn't been surprised in years.

George watches him. Has been watching him every evening for weeks.

He stands up. Walks down the block.

**GEORGE**

Warren. Hey -- Warren.

Warren stops. Turns. Looks at George the way grown men look at boys who don't yet know the difference between asking and intruding.

**WARREN**

What's up, George? What you need?

**GEORGE**

I'm trying to get some work.

A beat. Warren looks him up and down. Head to toe. George holds still under it.

**WARREN**

How old are you?

**GEORGE**

Fourteen. Going on fifteen.

**WARREN**

(flat)

Stay in school. Get back up the street.

He turns and walks into his mother's house. Door closes.

George stands on the sidewalk. Jaw tight. He walks back up the block.

Charlie is on the stoop. Watched the whole thing.

**CHARLIE**

What he say?

**GEORGE**

Nothing.

**CHARLIE**

He told you no.

**GEORGE**

He told me to stay in school.

**CHARLIE**

Same thing.

George sits back down. Says nothing. Watches the block.

**EXT. BURKE STREET — EVENING — WEEKS LATER**

George on the steps again. The Cherokee pulls up again. Warren gets out again.

This time -- Warren looks up the block at George. Stops.

**WARREN**

George. Come here.

George looks at Charlie. Charlie shrugs. George gets up and walks down.

**WARREN (CONT'D)**

Come on inside for a minute.

**INT. WARREN'S MOTHER'S HOUSE — BASEMENT — CONTINUOUS**

Warren's MOTHER is upstairs watching television. His UNCLE moves around the kitchen overhead, footsteps on the ceiling.

Warren leads George down the basement stairs. Pulls a safe from behind the water heater. Opens it.

Rows of small zip-lock bags. George looks at them. Looks at Warren.

**WARREN (CONT'D)**

Each bag goes for twenty-five. I'm giving you twenty to start. You bring me back three hundred.

**GEORGE**

That's five hundred total.

**WARREN**

You keep two. I get three. Every time. No exceptions, no excuses, no short money. You understand what I'm saying to you?

**GEORGE**

I understand.

**WARREN**

You sure? Because understanding it sitting here is different from understanding it when something goes wrong out there.

**GEORGE**

Nothing's going to go wrong.

**WARREN**

(studying him)  
You always this confident?

**GEORGE**

I just know what I'm agreeing to.

Warren looks at him a long moment. Then closes the safe and heads upstairs.

**WARREN**

Come on outside.

**EXT. WARREN'S MOTHER'S HOUSE — CONTINUOUS**

Warren opens the back door of the Cherokee. Reaches in. Pulls out a wooden stick -- thick, smooth, worn from use.

He holds it where George can see it.

**WARREN (CONT'D)**

You see this?

**GEORGE**

I see it.

**WARREN**

This isn't a threat. It's a promise. You mess my money up -- I don't care what happened, I don't care who did what -- this stick finds you. You clear?

George looks at the stick. Then at Warren's face. Warren means every word.

**GEORGE**

I'm clear.

**WARREN**

Say it back to me.

**GEORGE**

I mess your money up, the stick finds me.

**WARREN**

And?

**GEORGE**

I'm not going to mess your money up.

Warren puts the stick back in the truck. Closes the door. Looks at George one more time.

**WARREN**

Go to school tomorrow. Handle this after.

**GEORGE**

I know.

**WARREN**

I mean it, George. I catch you out here during school hours, I take the work back. We clear on that too?

**GEORGE**

We're clear.

Warren goes inside. The door closes.

George stands on the sidewalk. Twenty bags in his pocket. The weight of them -- barely anything, physically. Everything else.

He looks up the block. Charlie watching from the stoop, reading his face from a distance.

George starts walking back. Slowly. Something has shifted in how he carries himself. He feels it and doesn't know yet what to do with it.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

That's what I told myself standing there. I'm in the game now. Fifteen years old, feeling like a man. I had no idea what I'd just walked into.

Close on George's face. The street noise around him. The block going on like nothing happened.

Because nothing has. Yet.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. 15TH AND INDEPENDENCE AVE. S.E. - NIGHT**

Drizzling. The strip looks nothing like it does in daylight - - deserted, streetlights bleeding into wet asphalt, the occasional figure moving in the shadows of doorways.

GEORGE and CHI walk it slowly. Hands in pockets. Collars up.

**CHI**

It's dead out here tonight.

**GEORGE**

Where is everybody?

**CHI**

Jump-outs been through. Ran everybody off. They'll be back when it clears.

**GEORGE**

So we just standing in the rain for nothing.

**CHI**

It's not nothing. Fiends don't stop because it's raining. They just move slower.

George looks up the block. Empty. Looks down. Empty. A car rolls through without stopping.

**GEORGE**

How long you been doing this?

**CHI**

Since last year. You just got to know the flow. Some nights it's all the way live, some nights it's like this. Either way you show up.

**GEORGE**

Every night?

**CHI**

Money doesn't take nights off, George.

George absorbs that. They walk. The rain picks up slightly then backs down.

Coming toward them through the drizzle -- a WHITE WOMAN, 30s, crying quietly. Beside her, a man CHI recognizes.

**MAN**

Chi. Hey -- what's good? She's having a rough night. She looking for a booster.

Chi looks at George. George reads it. He reaches into his pocket. Shows her a bag.

The woman looks at it. Then at George. Her eyes are red from crying -- or from something else, or both. She opens her purse. Counts out a twenty. Places it in George's hand.

**WOMAN**

(quietly)

Thank you, baby.

She and the man move on down the block. Gone into the rain.

George stands there. The twenty in his hand. He looks at it.

Chi wraps both arms around him from the side. Shaking him.

**CHI**

Now you're in the game! You hear me? That's your first one right there!

George doesn't celebrate. He looks at the twenty. Then up at the rain. Then back down the block where the woman went.

She's already gone. Just the wet street and the lights.

**CHI (CONT'D)**

George. You good?

**GEORGE**

(quiet)

Yeah. I'm good.

**CHI**

That's it. That's all it is. You do that twenty more times tonight, you go home with real money.

**GEORGE**

It's dead out here, Chi.

**CHI**

Then we come back tomorrow. Come on.

They head home through the rain.

**INT. OWENS HOME - GEORGE'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT**

The house is quiet. Everyone asleep.

George sits on the edge of his bunk. He takes the twenty out of his pocket. Smooths it flat against his knee.

He looks around his room -- Salt-N-Pepa poster. A picture of Al Capone cut from a magazine. His little star radio.

He gets up. Takes a thumbtack from his desk. Pins the twenty-dollar bill to the wall right next to Al Capone.

Steps back. Looks at it.

Lies back on his bunk. Stares at the ceiling.

And smiles.

That's the tragedy of it. How good it feels. How small it is. How normal.

One twenty-dollar bill on a bedroom wall. That's all it took.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. POTOMAC GARDENS - ENTRANCE - DAY**

From the street -- quiet. Just another apartment complex. Nothing to see.

Chi and George approach the entrance. Chi doesn't slow down.

**CHI (CONT'D)**

You ready?

**GEORGE**

For what? You said we were just coming to look around.

**CHI**

We are. I just want to know if you're ready.

George looks at the entrance. Then at Chi.

**GEORGE**

Let's go.

**EXT. POTOMAC GARDENS -- COURTYARD -- CONTINUOUS**

They step through -- and the whole world changes.

The courtyard is its own city. Three hundred people easy, moving in every direction at once. Transactions happening in plain sight. Men on benches. Women in doorways. Children running between it all like it's a Saturday afternoon -- because for them, it is.

George stops walking. Takes it in.

**CHI**

(watching George's face)  
Outside it looks quiet. Inside -- it's over.

**GEORGE**

This is four miles from the White House.

**CHI**

Four miles and a whole different planet.

George keeps looking. Men he recognizes from school -- wearing things he can't afford, moving with a confidence that didn't come from a classroom.

**GEORGE**

Those dudes went to Payne with us.

**CHI**

Half these dudes went to Payne with us. Come on, I want you to meet somebody.

Chi leads him to a man leaning against the building wall -- LOOCH. Big glasses drooping on his nose. Raspy voice. Jean jacket, worn jeans, scuffed boots. Looks like he needs help. Doesn't.

**CHI (CONT'D)**

Looch. This is my man George. Good people.

**LOOCH**

(raspy, measured)  
George. Where you from?

**GEORGE**

Burke Street. Capitol Hill side.

**LOOCH**

You know how to move or you just learning?

**GEORGE**

I'm learning.

**LOOCH**

(to Chi)  
Honest. I like that.

Looch moves off. Chi leans to George.

**CHI**

(low)  
Half these young boys out here driving Benzes and Pathfinders -- that's because of him. He looks like nothing. He's not nothing.

**GEORGE**

Got it.

Chi steers him toward a cluster of men near the basketball court. HERMAN steps forward -- medium build, metal rod in his left hand from an old police shootout, slight stutter when he speaks. Handshake firm as a door.

**CHI**

Herman, this is George. He's been moving for Warren over on the Southeast strip.

**HERMAN**

(looking George up and down)  
D-damn. You're a big youngin.

**GEORGE**

I get that.

**HERMAN**

How old are you?

**GEORGE**

Fifteen.

**HERMAN**

You in school?

**GEORGE**

Yes sir.

**HERMAN**

Stay there. I'm serious. You handle your business after three o'clock like everybody else. I catch you out here during school hours I don't want to see you out here at all. We clear?

**GEORGE**

We're clear.

Herman nods. Moves on. George watches him go.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(to Chi, quiet)

Every single one of them tells me to stay in school.

**CHI**

Because they didn't. Come on.

Across the courtyard -- SONY. Five-five, but the crowd parts around him like he's seven feet tall. Linen shirt, gators, glass of something in his hand. Moving through his own operation like a CEO doing a floor walk. JON JON two steps behind -- quiet, watchful, deadly still.

**CHI (CONT'D)**

(low)

That's Sony. He controls everything you see in here. Eighty thousand a week.

**GEORGE**

Eighty.

**CHI**

A week. Jon Jon next to him -- he's  
the one you really don't want to  
cross. Sony makes the money. Jon  
Jon protects it.

Sony passes close enough that George can see his face. Young.  
Younger than he expected for a man carrying that much weight.  
He glances at George -- quick, assessing -- then moves on.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

A city inside the city. Four miles  
from the White House. The President  
didn't know we existed. Or maybe he  
did -- and that was worse.

George and Chi sit on a bench. The courtyard moves around  
them.

Then -- shouting from the far end. A MAN sprints across the  
courtyard, wild-eyed, looking back over his shoulder.

Behind him -- another man. Closing fast.

The running man cuts around a building. Gone for a moment.  
Then reappears -- sprinting back around the other side.

Runs directly into the man chasing him.

The courtyard goes quiet. One held breath.

Five shots. Fast. Then silence.

The running man goes down. Doesn't get back up.

The men on the bench around George -- GLEN and two others --  
look over. Then burst out laughing.

**GLEN**

(waving it off)  
That's nothing. That beef been  
going on for weeks.

People in the courtyard start moving again. Like weather  
passed.

George stares at the man on the ground. Doesn't move. Doesn't  
laugh.

**CHI**

(to George, low)  
You alright?

**GEORGE**

He's not moving.

**GLEN**

He's not supposed to be moving.

More laughter from the bench. George looks at them. Then back at the man on the ground. Then around the courtyard -- three hundred people and the world kept going.

He doesn't laugh. He doesn't leave either.

He sits there. On that bench. In that courtyard.

That's the moment. Right there.

**CUT TO:**

**INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS -- MONTAGE  
(1986-1987)**

MUSIC IN: Rare Essence -- the Go-Go  
pocket groove, low and insistent.  
D.C.'s heartbeat.

MONTAGE -- QUICK, KINETIC, THE COLOR DRAINING SLIGHTLY FROM  
EACH SHOT:

-- THE GARDENS. George moving through the courtyard. He's faster now. More certain. The hesitation from his first night on the strip is gone. He knows who to approach, who to avoid, when to move and when to stand still. The work is becoming fluent.

-- A CAR LOT. Chi signing papers on a Mitsubishi Montero Jeep. Grinning like a man who just conquered something. Drives off the lot like he was born to it.

-- SAME CAR LOT. Chuck behind the wheel of a 300ZX, top down. His boy beside him, both of them laughing at something. Sixteen years old.

-- GEORGE'S ROOM. Night. Parents asleep. George on the floor with two shoe boxes open. Money. More than any fifteen-year-old should be touching. He looks at it. Closes the boxes. Slides them under the bed.

**INT. EASTERN HIGH SCHOOL -- HALLWAY -- DAY**

George moves through the hallway. Gucci knit sweater. Filas fresh out the box. Every week the outfit changes. Every week it gets sharper.

CHARLIE falls in beside him.

**CHARLIE**

Your brother buy you that sweater?

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**CHARLIE**

Which brother?

**GEORGE**

Frankie.

**CHARLIE**

Frankie's in South Dakota, George.

**GEORGE**

He mailed it.

Charlie looks at the sweater. Looks at George.

**CHARLIE**

From South Dakota.

**GEORGE**

He's thoughtful like that.

**CHARLIE**

(letting it go)

Your parents buying it?

**GEORGE**

So far.

**EXT. 17TH AND EAST CAPITOL STREET -- AFTER SCHOOL**

The daily car show. One side of the street -- girls in Coach bags, gold earrings, leather skirts, watching the traffic like a runway. Other side -- the cars. Maximas with the kit. Pathfinders on rims. 300ZX's with the T-tops.

And further back, idling -- the Benzes. The Range Rovers. The older money, watching the young money spend itself.

George and Charlie stand on the corner. Watching all of it.

**CHARLIE**

You know what I notice?

**GEORGE**

What?

**CHARLIE**

The dudes in the Benzes don't do nothing. They just sit there.

**(MORE)**

**CHARLIE (CONT'D)**

The young boys in the Maximas are out here showing off. The real money just watches.

**GEORGE**

(nodding slowly)  
Because they don't need anybody to know.

**CHARLIE**

Exactly.

**GEORGE**

The ones showing off are the ones who just got it. The ones sitting still been had it.

Charlie looks at him.

**CHARLIE**

You already thinking about which one you want to be.

George doesn't answer. Watches the block.

**EXT. POTOMAC GARDENS - ENTRANCE - LATE AFTERNOON**

**MUSIC FADES UNDER.**

George stands just outside the Gardens entrance. Alone for a moment. He pulls out a roll and counts it -- methodical, unhurried, the way someone counts something that belongs to them.

He finishes. Pockets it.

Then -- he looks up.

Directly into the camera. Directly at us.

Not performing. Not posing. Just -- looking. A fifteen-year-old boy who has walked through a door he cannot walk back through. Seeing us seeing him.

A beat.

Then he looks away. Turns. Walks back inside the Gardens.

The entrance swallows him.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. POTOMAC GARDENS - COURTYARD - AFTERNOON**

Herman moves through the courtyard with George beside him. Introducing him to faces, nodding at workers, taking the temperature of the whole operation in one slow lap.

They stop at a bench where three of Herman's runners sit -- CARLTON, BLOB, and two others. Young. Sharp. Watching George the way new additions always get watched.

**HERMAN**

This is George. He's been moving for Warren. He's with us now.

Nods around the bench. George nods back.

**CARLTON**

Where you from?

**GEORGE**

Burke Street. Capitol Hill side.

**CARLTON**

Southeast?

**GEORGE**

Born and raised.

Carlton seems satisfied with that. The others go back to what they were doing.

Herman watches George take in the courtyard -- the flow of it, who's moving where, what's happening at each entrance.

**HERMAN**

What do you see?

**GEORGE**

North entrance is the busiest. South is slower but steadier. East is where things go wrong most.

Herman looks at him. A beat.

**HERMAN**

How long you been in here?

**GEORGE**

Few weeks.

**HERMAN**

And you already reading the corners.

**GEORGE**

I pay attention.

**HERMAN**

(to Carlton)  
He pays attention.

Carlton shrugs like that's not the worst thing. Herman claps George once on the shoulder.

**HERMAN (CONT'D)**

Good. Because I need you moving faster than you been moving. You got p-product sitting too long. You can't be moving like a turtle out here.

The bench cracks up. Carlton, Blob, everyone in earshot.

**BLOB**

Turtle!

**CARLTON**

That's your name now, man. That's it. Turtle.

George looks around at the laughter. Looks at Herman.

**GEORGE**

I'm not a turtle.

**HERMAN**

Then stop moving like one.

More laughter. George shakes his head. Somewhere between annoyed and almost smiling.

The name is going to stick and he already knows it.

Sony crosses the courtyard toward them. Jon Jon a half step behind. The bench straightens without anyone saying a word.

**SONY**

(to Herman)  
This the new youngin?

**HERMAN**

George. Goes by Turtle now apparently.

**SONY**

(to George, flat)  
You got a problem with that?

**GEORGE**

I got a problem with moving slow.  
Not the name.

Sony studies him. The courtyard waits.

**SONY**

Smart answer.

He moves on. Jon Jon follows. The courtyard exhales.

**CARLTON**

(to George, low)

You passed.

**GEORGE**

Passed what?

**CARLTON**

Whatever that was. He walks away from most people without saying smart answer.

**EXT. POTOMAC GARDENS - COURTYARD - LATER**

Winding down. The courtyard thinning. Herman walks George toward the exit.

**HERMAN**

You in school?

**GEORGE**

Eastern High.

**HERMAN**

Good. Keep it that way. I see you out here before three o'clock on a school day, I send you home myself. We clear?

**GEORGE**

Warren told me the same thing.

**HERMAN**

Then Warren and me agree on something. You got all day after school to play in the mud. Don't waste what you got up here --

He taps his own temple.

**HERMAN (CONT'D)**

-- chasing money you can make just as well at four o'clock.

**GEORGE**

You went to school?

Herman stops walking. A complicated look crosses his face.

**HERMAN**

I did. For a while.

**GEORGE**

What happened?

**HERMAN**

(after a beat)

Same thing that's going to happen  
to you if you stop going. Now get  
out of here. Come back at four.

George heads for the exit. Stops. Turns back.

**GEORGE**

Herman.

**HERMAN**

What.

**GEORGE**

I'm not a turtle.

Herman's face doesn't move. But something behind his eyes  
does.

**HERMAN**

Four o'clock, Turtle. Don't be  
late.

George shakes his head. Walks out.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

Herman. Warren. Neither one of them  
wanted me out there during school.  
They'd take me back themselves.  
Same men who'd put a stick on you  
over their money -- they wanted me  
to graduate. Honor, in a world with  
none.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. POTOMAC GARDENS -- COURTYARD -- NIGHT**

Sony's 23rd birthday. The Gardens transformed -- music up,  
dice games running, champagne passing hand to hand. The whole  
operation at ease for one night.

Sony moves through it like he always moves -- unhurried,  
taking inventory. Linen shirt. Gators. Men stopping what  
they're doing just to shake his hand.

George stands near the wall with Carlton, watching.

**CARLTON**

You ever seen anything like this?

**GEORGE**

Not like this. No.

**CARLTON**

Twenty-three years old and he runs all of this. Every dollar in this courtyard touches him somehow.

**GEORGE**

How long he been at it?

**CARLTON**

Since he was younger than us. Started with weed. Built up from there. Man's got a mind for it.

Sony accepts a stack of bills from Herman -- rubber-banded, thick. Nods. Moves on.

Then -- a YOUNG WORKER, 18, drunk and glowing with it, throws his arm around Sony's shoulder. Big smile. Eyes bright.

**YOUNG WORKER**

(loud, genuine)

This my man right here! You hear me? I love this dude! He made it happen for all of us!

Laughter from the courtyard. Sony smiles. Puts his arm around the young worker briefly.

**SONY**

I love you too, lil bro.

**YOUNG WORKER**

I'm serious! Before Sony, I wasn't nothing! Now look at me!

**CARLTON**

(quiet, to George)

He's going to feel real stupid tomorrow when he sobers up.

**GEORGE**

Let him have it. It's a birthday.

The young worker finally peels off, still grinning, heading for his car at the corner. A black 280ZX. He digs his keys out. Still singing to himself.

George watches him go.

Then two sounds. Close together. Flat and final.

The young worker slides down the car door and doesn't get back up.

The courtyard freezes. One full second of nothing.

Then everything moves at once -- people scattering, shouting, the music cutting.

George hasn't moved. He's still against the wall. Looking at the corner where the young worker is down.

Carlton grabs his arm.

**CARLTON**

George. Come on. We gotta move.

**GEORGE**

He was just standing here.

**CARLTON**

George --

**GEORGE**

He was just standing right here  
saying he loved the man. Five  
minutes ago.

**CARLTON**

(pulling him)  
I know. Come on. Right now.

George lets himself be pulled. Moving now, feet working, but eyes going back over his shoulder toward the corner.

Across the courtyard -- Sony. Standing perfectly still in all the chaos. Face unreadable. Watching the same corner George is watching.

Their eyes don't meet. But George sees him.

Sees that nothing on Sony's face has changed.

That's the lesson. Not the shooting. That face.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. OWENS HOME -- FRONT PORCH -- EVENING (1988)**

Summer. The block winding down. FRANKIE, mid-20s, sits on the porch steps. Big frame going soft since the football days. He watches a car pull up.

GEORGE, 16, steps out of Chuck's 300ZX. Fresh. Confident. Moving different than he used to move.

Frankie watches him come up the walk. Doesn't say anything yet. Just watches the walk.

**GEORGE**

When you get in?

**FRANKIE**

This afternoon. Whose car is that?

**GEORGE**

Chuck's.

**FRANKIE**

Chuck from down the block? Chuck's sixteen.

**GEORGE**

Seventeen.

**FRANKIE**

Where'd Chuck get a 300ZX?

**GEORGE**

He saved up.

Frankie looks at him. George looks back. The lie sits between them like furniture.

**FRANKIE**

Come sit with me a minute.

**GEORGE**

I was just about to go in --

**FRANKIE**

George. Come sit with me.

George sits on the steps. Frankie goes inside. Returns carrying a Monopoly board under his arm.

**GEORGE**

What is this?

**FRANKIE**

Brother-to-brother game. Set it up.

**GEORGE**

(looking at the board)  
Frankie, I'm not twelve.

**FRANKIE**

Set it up.

George sets it up. They play. The block goes about its business around them.

**EXT. OWENS HOME - FRONT PORCH - LATER**

Thirty minutes in. The board tells the story -- Frankie's side stacked with properties and houses. George's side thin. And the little metal shoe on the Go to Jail square. Again.

**GEORGE**

(looking at the board)  
This game is rigged.

**FRANKIE**

Nobody rigged it. You just keep landing in the same place.

**GEORGE**

That's the dice, not me.

**FRANKIE**

Is it?

George rolls. Moves his piece. Lands on Go to Jail.

He stares at it.

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

Alright. Stop here. Count your money.

George counts. Two hundred dollars in play money. Frankie counts his. Twelve hundred.

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

You see where you kept landing?

**GEORGE**

It was the dice --

**FRANKIE**

Think about it like it's real life, George. Not the game.

Silence. The neighborhood sounds fill it -- someone's radio, kids down the block, a car rolling through.

George looks at the board. Then at his brother.

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

Are you dealing for Warren?

George doesn't answer immediately. Long enough that the answer is already in the air.

**GEORGE**

No.

Frankie waits.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(quieter)

...But I used to.

Frankie nods slowly. Like he already knew and just needed to hear it said.

**FRANKIE**

Who else?

**GEORGE**

Frankie --

**FRANKIE**

I'm not going to tell Mama and Daddy. Who else?

George looks at him. Makes a decision.

**GEORGE**

Herman. Out of the Gardens. But I'm not with him right now either.

**FRANKIE**

You think Herman cares about you?

**GEORGE**

He's not trying to hurt me.

**FRANKIE**

That's not what I asked. Do those men care about you -- about George, your life, what happens to you -- or do they care about what you can do for them?

George is quiet.

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

Because I'll tell you what I know.  
I ran with people like that when I  
was coming up. And not one of them  
-- not one -- showed up for me when  
things went sideways. They're not  
your friends. They're your  
employers. And the day you stop  
being useful, you're on your own.

**GEORGE**

I know that.

**FRANKIE**

Do you? Because knowing it and  
acting like you know it are two  
different things.

George has no answer for that.

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

If you got locked up tomorrow -- if  
something happened to you out there  
-- do you know what that would do  
to this family? To Mama? To Dad?

**GEORGE**

(low)  
Yeah. I know.

**FRANKIE**

Dad retired to be home. To be  
around you and Tasha. He gave up  
twenty-two years at that job so he  
could be here. You understand what  
I'm saying?

George looks at the house. The lights in the window. His  
father's silhouette moving in the kitchen.

**GEORGE**

I hear you, Frankie.

**FRANKIE**

Hearing me and listening to me  
aren't the same thing either.

A long beat. The board between them. Two hundred against  
twelve hundred. The jail square.

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

I know I'm not going to talk you  
all the way out of it.

**(MORE)**

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

You're too much like me and I  
couldn't be talked out of it  
either. So I'm going to say this  
instead --

He leans forward. Elbows on his knees.

**FRANKIE (CONT'D)**

Don't work for nobody. You hear me?  
Whatever you do -- do it for  
yourself. The minute you're working  
for somebody else, you're the one  
taking all the risk while they sit  
back and count the money. Get your  
own.

**GEORGE**

I need to start from somewhere.

**FRANKIE**

I know. And I'm going to help you  
do that. Give me a few days.

George looks at him. Surprised.

**GEORGE**

You're going to help me?

**FRANKIE**

I'm going to help you do it  
smarter. There's a difference. And  
George --

**GEORGE**

What.

**FRANKIE**

(straight at him)  
You keep landing on Go to Jail. In  
the game. In real life. At some  
point the dice aren't the problem.

George looks at the board one more time. Then starts putting  
the pieces away.

He doesn't argue. That's the most honest thing he's done all  
night.

**CUT TO:**

**INT./EXT. WARREN'S CAR - 1ST AND BATES STREET NW - NIGHT**

Warren drives. George in the passenger seat. The city at  
night sliding past the windows.

**WARREN**

We're just stopping past real quick. In and out.

**GEORGE**

Who we looking for?

**WARREN**

Man named Tee. Does business up here. Won't take long.

They turn onto Bates Street. Narrow. Row houses tight on both sides. And parked out front -- a pearl white 928 Porsche. White 190E Mercedes beside it. The cars alone tell you something about this block.

Men leaning on gates and parked cars. Not aggressive. Just present. The way men are present when they own a corner.

Warren rolls down his window.

**WARREN (CONT'D)**

Yo -- is Tee around?

**MAN ON GATE**

Tee's out of town. Be back Thursday.

Warren nods. Starts to pull off.

Then -- leaning against an orange Maxima across the street, bent over talking to someone inside the window -- a tall brown-skinned man straightens up. Bright smile. Young face. He glances over at the car.

Lifts his chin in a casual greeting. Goes back to his conversation.

George watches him.

**GEORGE**

Who's that?

Warren glances over. Pulls away from the curb.

**WARREN**

That's Rayful.

George looks back through the passenger window as they drive away. The man is still at the Maxima, talking, laughing at something. Just a man on a corner.

**GEORGE**

He looks young.

**WARREN**

He is young. Twenty-four, twenty-five. Something like that.

**GEORGE**

That's it? That's him?

**WARREN**

What were you expecting?

George doesn't answer. Faces forward. Watches the city through the windshield.

**GEORGE**

I don't know. Something different.

**WARREN**

They never look different. That's the thing. They look exactly like everybody else until they don't.

Silence. The car moves through the city. George thinking.

**GEORGE**

How much you think he's worth?

**WARREN**

More than either one of us will ever see. Why?

**GEORGE**

Just thinking.

**WARREN**

Don't think too hard about that. Men who think too hard about what somebody else has end up doing something stupid to try and get it.

George nods. Goes back to the window.

The street behind them. The orange Maxima long gone. Just the city.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

His peak net worth was fifty million dollars. I was ten feet from him and he looked like everybody else. That's the scariest thing about that world. Evil never looks the way you expect it to.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. OWENS HOME - GEORGE'S ROOM - EVENING (1988)**

George, 16, at his desk. Bay sits on the edge of the bunk, thin and restless, eyes moving around the room.

**BAY**

So you going to Kings Dominion tomorrow?

**GEORGE**

Me, Charlie and Bill. Early. Which is why I need this cut tonight. Barber shop already closed.

**BAY**

I can hit that for you. I got clippers.

**GEORGE**

You sure? I need it clean, Bay. I'm not trying to go up there looking any kind of way.

**BAY**

George. I know how to cut hair. Sit down.

George looks at him. Bay looks back. Steady enough. George sits.

**GEORGE**

I'll give you something for it.

**BAY**

(already getting the clippers)

Don't worry about it. You my little brother.

**GEORGE**

Nah. Here.

He reaches under the bed. Pulls out a small sack. Sets it on the desk without making it a thing.

Bay looks at it. Then at George. Something shifts in his face -- want overriding whatever hesitation was there.

**BAY**

(quiet)  
Alright.

He pockets it. Plugs in the clippers.

**INT. OWENS HOME - GEORGE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

George in the chair. Bay behind him, clippers going. Bay is talking -- stories from back in the day, football, women -- and George is half listening, watching himself in the small mirror propped on the desk.

Then Bay goes quiet. Still working. But something changes in the rhythm -- the clippers moving over the same patch. Again. Again.

George watches the mirror.

**GEORGE**

Bay. You're doing the same spot.

No answer. George turns to look. Bay's eyes have gone glassy. Not all the way gone -- just beginning the drift. The clippers running on automatic.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Bay. Hey -- Bay.

**BAY**

(surfacing, slow)

I got it... I'm fixing it...

He runs the clippers over the same spot again. George watches in the mirror. There is a bald patch on the side of his head that was not there before.

**GEORGE**

(standing up)

Bay, stop. Stop. Look at my head.

Bay looks. His eyes try to focus. He tilts his head like the angle might help.

**BAY**

I'll fix it. Sit back down.

**GEORGE**

You already fixed it twice. That's how it got like this.

He looks in the mirror again. One side of his head is clean. The other looks like something went wrong in a field somewhere.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(to himself)

Bill is going to clown me for a month.

**BAY**

(already drifting again)  
It's not that bad...

**GEORGE**

It's bad, Bay. It's real bad. It's  
okay. Just -- give me the clippers.  
I'll even it out myself.

Bay hands them over. Sits on the bunk. Within minutes he's  
nodding. George looks at his brother, then at his own  
reflection.

He turns off the clippers. Gives Bay the second sack he'd  
been holding. Bay pockets it without waking fully.

George kills the light and goes to bed.

**INT. OWENS HOME - GEORGE'S ROOM - 2 A.M.**

Dead quiet. George asleep.

Then -- the door. Hard.

**GEORGIA**

(urgent, low)  
Anthony. Anthony, get up. Right  
now. Come downstairs.

George is up before he's awake. Follows Georgia down.

**EXT. OWENS HOME - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS**

Francis in his undershirt and cut-off shorts, walking Bay in  
slow circles around the yard. Bay's eyes are open and seeing  
nothing. Shaking. Mumbling something that isn't words.

Francis presses a glass of milk into Bay's hand. Guides it to  
his mouth. Patient. This is not his first time doing this.

Georgia turns on George.

**GEORGIA (CONT'D)**

(teeth together)  
Did you give your brother something  
to smoke?

**GEORGE**

No --

Bay's head turns. He finds George's face through whatever fog  
he's in.

**BAY**

(slow, certain he's  
helping)  
Anthony. I'm not going to tell them  
I got it from you.

Silence.

Francis stops walking. Georgia goes very still.

George stands there. Nothing to say. Nowhere to go.

**GEORGIA**

(quiet, which is worse  
than loud)  
Go to your room. I will deal with  
you tomorrow.

George goes. Up the back steps. Through the kitchen. Up the stairs.

**INT. OWENS HOME - GEORGE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

He sits on the edge of his bunk in the dark. Doesn't turn the light on.

From the backyard below -- Francis's voice, low and steady, still walking Bay. The sound of his father handling something George put in his hands.

George listens to it. Doesn't move.

The street and the house have been two separate worlds his whole life. Tonight they are the same room.

He sits in the dark and knows it.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. GEORGETOWN - M STREET - AFTERNOON (1989)**

Saturday. Georgetown doing what Georgetown does -- tourists, boutiques, couples, money moving easy through the afternoon.

GEORGE, 17, and CHARLIE walk the strip. No agenda. Just looking.

**CHARLIE**

You ever notice how different it  
feels over here?

**GEORGE**

Different how?

**CHARLIE**

Like everybody's just... relaxed.  
Nobody watching their back. Nobody  
watching nothing.

**GEORGE**

That's what money does. Buys you  
the right not to watch your back.

**CHARLIE**

That's what I want. Not even the  
money. Just that feeling.

George considers that. They walk. Pass a newsstand, a shoe  
boutique, a restaurant with tables on the sidewalk.

Then -- the door to the National Jewelry Store opens. Two  
WOMEN step out. Late teens, early twenties. Put together.  
Moving with the particular confidence of women who didn't  
come here to be noticed but know they will be.

Charlie stops.

**CHARLIE (CONT'D)**

Aye -- Sandra?

The first woman -- SANDRA -- turns. Recognizes Charlie.  
Breaks into a smile.

**SANDRA**

Charlie! What are you doing over  
here?

**CHARLIE**

Just walking around. You remember  
me from the rec center job this  
summer?

**SANDRA**

Of course I remember you. This is  
my girl Diamond.

The second woman -- DIAMOND -- turns.

Chocolate complexion. Natural hair. Eyes that don't rush  
anywhere. She looks at George the way someone looks at  
something they're deciding how much attention to give.

George looks back. Forgets what he was about to say.

**GEORGE**

(finding it)  
Hey. I'm George.

**DIAMOND**

(slight accent -- Trinidad  
underneath the D.C.)  
Diamond.

**GEORGE**

That's your name or what you're  
shopping for?

Diamond looks at him. One beat. Then the corner of her mouth.

**DIAMOND**

My name. Though I wouldn't say no  
to the other.

**CHARLIE**

(to Sandra)  
You two live out this way?

**SANDRA**

No, we came to visit some friends.  
They're -- they're locked up. Over  
at D.C. Jail.

**CHARLIE**

Oh. Sorry to hear that.

**SANDRA**

It is what it is. We figured we'd  
come this way after, make a day of  
it.

George has barely taken his eyes off Diamond.

**GEORGE**

You from Trinidad?

**DIAMOND**

Originally. I've been here four  
years. How'd you know?

**GEORGE**

The way you talk. It's different. I  
like it.

**DIAMOND**

(studying him)  
Where are you from?

**GEORGE**

Southeast. Born and raised.

**DIAMOND**

Long way from Southeast.

**GEORGE**

Not that long. About twenty minutes. Worth it though.

Diamond looks at him again. That same measuring look. Something passing -- she's deciding.

**DIAMOND**

You got a pen?

**GEORGE**

No. But I've got a good memory.

**DIAMOND**

(a real smile now)  
That's either true or the worst line I ever heard.

**GEORGE**

Give me the number. You'll find out which one.

She gives it. George pulls out a pen from his pocket -- he had one the whole time -- and writes it on his jeans. Diamond watches him do it.

**DIAMOND**

You had a pen.

**GEORGE**

(not apologizing)  
I wanted to see if you'd give it anyway.

Diamond shakes her head. But she's still smiling.

She takes the pen from him. Writes her number on his hand anyway.

**DIAMOND**

Now you have it twice. Don't lose either one.

Sandra and Charlie are in their own conversation, not paying attention. Diamond looks at George one last time.

**DIAMOND (CONT'D)**

It was nice to meet you, George from Southeast.

**GEORGE**

You too, Diamond from Trinidad.

The women move off down the street. George watches them go.

Charlie appears beside him.

**CHARLIE**

You good? You look like somebody hit you.

**GEORGE**

I'm good.

**CHARLIE**

She gave you her number on your hand. That's a good sign.

**GEORGE**

I know.

**CHARLIE**

And on your jeans. That's a very good sign.

**GEORGE**

Charlie.

**CHARLIE**

What?

**GEORGE**

Stop talking.

He looks back down the street. Diamond and Sandra are half a block away. Diamond doesn't look back.

George looks anyway. Just once.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

Diamond. That was her name. And that's what she was. Something worth keeping. Something I didn't know how to protect.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. POTOMAC GARDENS -- BETWEEN BUILDINGS -- NIGHT**

SUPER: "Act Two-B -- 'Lord, Protect Me From My Friends'"

Cold. The courtyard thinning out for the night. George and BLOB horse around between two buildings -- shoving, laughing, the kind of nothing that fills dead hours.

**BLOB**

You can't catch me. Your legs too long, you can't even turn right.

**GEORGE**

Watch me.

George drops his coat on a bench. Takes off after Blob around the corner of the building.

Laughter. Footsteps. Around the building, between the dumpsters, back the other way.

George comes back first. Grabs his coat off the bench. Shrugs it on.

Blob appears, hands on knees, catching his breath.

**BLOB**

(laughing, winded)

Alright. Alright you got me.

George reaches into his coat pocket. His hand finds nothing.

He checks the other pocket. Nothing.

He goes still.

**BLOB (CONT'D)**

What?

George turns. Looks at the bench. Looks around the courtyard. Already clearing out -- backs turning, people heading inside.

**GEORGE**

(quiet)

Somebody got into my coat.

**BLOB**

What? When --

**GEORGE**

Just now. When I left it on the bench.

He walks the area. Checks under the bench. Around the dumpsters. The courtyard is almost empty now. Whoever it was is already gone.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(to himself)

Damn.

Blob watches him. Knows better than to say anything.

**EXT. OWENS HOME -- FRONT PORCH -- DAY**

December. Christmas lights going up on the block. FRANCIS is on a ladder against the front of the house, carefully running a strand along the roofline. Humming something to himself.

George sits on the porch steps watching the block. He's been sitting like this all morning. A man waiting for something he doesn't want to arrive.

Then -- the burgundy Mercedes turns the corner. Slow. Deliberate.

George is off the porch before it parks. Moving down the front walk, putting distance between himself and the ladder, between Herman and his father.

HERMAN gets out. JON JON. CHI. SYE. Four doors opening at once.

George meets them at the curb. Keeps his voice down.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Herman. Let me explain --

**HERMAN**

(low, flat)

Hey Turtle. You f-fucked up my money and didn't tell me.

**GEORGE**

I was going to come to you. I was trying to figure out what happened first --

**HERMAN**

You don't figure it out first. You come to me first. That's the rule. You know that.

**GEORGE**

I know. I just --

**HERMAN**

How much?

**GEORGE**

Three-fifty.

Herman's jaw tightens. Jon Jon hasn't moved or spoken. He doesn't need to.

Then -- the screen door of the house next door opens. BUNNY steps onto her porch. Nineteen. Poured into her jeans and a fitted top, natural hair up, not a care about who's watching because she doesn't need to care.

Herman stops mid-sentence.

**HERMAN**

(completely derailed)  
Damn. Who is that?

George looks. Looks back at Herman. The shift is total -- like someone changed the channel.

**CHI**

(already moving)  
That's Bunny. She's right there,  
let me introduce you.

Chi is across the yard and up the porch steps before George can blink. Working it immediately -- laughing with Bunny, gesturing back at Herman, smooth as a diplomat at a state dinner.

Herman watches this with a look of deep personal interest. Jon Jon, for the first time, almost smiles.

Sye leans to George.

**SYE**

(low)  
Chi just saved your life right now.  
You know that?

**GEORGE**

(watching Chi work)  
I'm starting to see that.

Chi waves Herman over. Herman smooths his jacket. Walks up the steps. Numbers exchanged. Smiles all around.

George waits at the curb.

Herman comes back down. The temperature between them has shifted -- still serious, but the edge is off. Bunny will do that.

**HERMAN**

(to George, almost an  
afterthought)  
Be down the Gardens tomorrow  
morning. Early. Work the bill off.

**GEORGE**

I'll be there.

**HERMAN**

And George. Don't let this happen again. Next time I come to your house --

He glances up. Francis on his ladder, back turned, carefully stringing lights, humming. Oblivious.

**HERMAN (CONT'D)**

-- I don't care who's standing there.

George follows his eyes up to his father. Back to Herman.

**GEORGE**

It won't happen again.

Herman nods. Gets in the Mercedes. Jon Jon. Sye. Chi -- one last wave up at Bunny's porch.

The car pulls away.

George stands on the sidewalk and watches it go. Then turns. Looks up at his father on the ladder -- adjusting a bulb, squinting at it, humming something from church.

Ten feet away and in a completely different world.

George watches him a moment longer. Then walks back up to the porch. Sits down. Says nothing.

**FRANCIS**

(not looking down,  
adjusting lights)  
Who was that?

**GEORGE**

Some guys from the neighborhood.

**FRANCIS**

Something wrong?

**GEORGE**

No sir. Everything's fine.

Francis looks down at him for one moment. Then back at the lights.

**FRANCIS**

Hand me that extension cord.

George picks it up. Hands it to his father.

The street is quiet. The Christmas lights blink on.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. BURKE STREET — IN FRONT OF WARREN'S HOUSE — DAY (APRIL 1989)**

SUPER: "April, 1989"

Warren is washing the Cherokee. Bucket, sponge, working methodically from hood to trunk. George comes up the block, hands in his pockets.

**GEORGE**

What's good?

Warren straightens up. Sets the sponge on the roof. His face has something in it George hasn't seen before -- not fear exactly, but a recalibration happening in real time.

**WARREN**

You hear what happened?

**GEORGE**

Hear what?

**WARREN**

The feds picked up Rayful this morning. His whole crew. His mother. His family. All of them.

George stops walking.

**GEORGE**

When?

**WARREN**

Early this morning. It's all over the news. They been building the case for over a year apparently.

**GEORGE**

The whole crew?

**WARREN**

Thirty-some people. They hit everything at once. Houses, cars, cash, all of it.

George takes that in. Warren picks up the sponge. Goes back to washing. Something to do with his hands.

**GEORGE**

What does that mean for --

**WARREN**

It means everything changes.  
Everybody who was eating off that  
supply chain is now scrambling. And  
when people scramble --

**GEORGE**

They get desperate.

**WARREN**

(nodding slowly)  
Watch yourself out there. More than  
usual. You hear me?

George nods. Looks down the block. The same street he's  
walked his whole life. Already feels different.

**INT. OWENS HOME - LIVING ROOM - THAT EVENING**

The television going. Francis in his chair. Georgia standing  
in the doorway between the living room and kitchen, arms  
folded, watching the screen.

NEWS FOOTAGE -- Rayful Edmond in handcuffs, flanked by  
federal agents, walking into the federal building. The  
ANCHOR'S voice over it: the largest drug kingpin arrest in  
Washington D.C. history. Thirty-three defendants. Seventeen  
million dollars in assets seized.

George comes in from the hallway. Stops when he sees the  
screen.

**GEORGIA**

(not turning around)  
See what I mean.

George looks at the television. At the man in handcuffs he  
stood ten feet from not long ago.

**FRANCIS**

(to the TV, reading  
glasses on)  
Fifty million dollars. That's what  
they're saying he made.

**GEORGIA**

And now look where he's going.

**FRANCIS**

He's twenty-four years old.

**GEORGIA**

Mm-hm.

She looks at George. George looks at the screen.

**GEORGIA (CONT'D)**

You know anybody mixed up in all that?

**GEORGE**

No ma'am.

Georgia studies him. The way she always studies him when she's deciding whether to push further.

**GEORGIA**

Good. Because whoever was connected to that man -- their whole world just ended tonight. Every one of them.

Francis takes his glasses off. Looks at the screen.

**FRANCIS**

The city's going to get worse before it gets better. The ones who were working under him -- they'll all be fighting over what's left. That's how it goes.

**GEORGE**

How do you know that?

**FRANCIS**

Because it's human nature. You take the top off anything and everything underneath starts fighting to be the new top.

The news moves on to the next story. Francis puts his glasses back on. Georgia goes back to the kitchen.

George stands there alone with the television.

MONTAGE -- D.C. STREETS, SPRING/SUMMER 1989:

-- Corners that used to move smooth now jumping with new faces, new crews, everybody claiming something. The easy rhythm gone.

-- Arguments at the Gardens that didn't used to happen. Men who used to nod now watching each other sideways.

-- A vigil on a corner George knows. Candles. A photograph. Someone else gone.

-- Warren, alone in his driveway, just sitting on the hood of the Cherokee. Not washing it. Not going anywhere. Thinking.

-- George moving through it all. Watching it change. Watching the temperature rise on every block he knows.

**END MONTAGE.**

GEORGE (V.O.)

When you take food from wild dogs, they start eating each other. That's what happened to D.C. after Rayful fell. The murder rate went through the roof. Everybody scrambling for what was left. The city got unsafe to walk through. And I was right in the middle of it.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. GEORGE'S CAR -- MOVING -- DAY (1989)**

George driving. Charlie in the passenger seat. Fresh off something that left a mark -- Charlie's lip is cut, one eye swollen and dark.

**GEORGE**

Tell me again exactly what happened.

**CHARLIE**

(jaw tight)  
Warren and Touch. Caught me coming out of the rec center. Three of them, one of me.

**GEORGE**

Warren did this?

**CHARLIE**

Warren watched. Touch did the work. Warren just stood there so I'd know who ordered it.

George drives. Doesn't say anything for a block.

**CHARLIE (CONT'D)**

George --

**GEORGE**

I heard you.

**CHARLIE**

Don't do anything stupid.

**GEORGE**

I'm not going to do anything stupid.

**CHARLIE**

That face you're making is not the face of someone who's not going to do anything stupid.

**GEORGE**

I'm fine, Charlie.

He pulls over. Stops the car.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Get some ice on that eye.

**EXT. VARIOUS STREET CORNERS -- DAY/NIGHT -- QUICK CUTS**

The retaliation. Sides hardening. Block by block the crew that grew up together is pulling apart -- Warren's people, Touch's people, George's people. Men who used to nod now crossing the street.

Charlie and George on their own corner, watching the shift happen in real time.

**CHARLIE**

You know what this reminds me of?  
When we were kids and somebody  
would knock over the ant hill  
behind the school. Remember how the  
ants would just scatter everywhere?

**GEORGE**

We're not ants, Charlie.

**CHARLIE**

We're scattering though.

George has no answer for that.

**EXT. SOUTHEAST D.C. STREETS -- NIGHT**

Late. George walks home from a girl's house, a FRIEND beside him.

**FRIEND**

Yo, cut through 16th. It's faster.

George looks down 16th Street. Dark. Street lights out the length of the block. Not a car. Not a person.

**GEORGE**

I don't like the look of it.

**FRIEND**

It's five minutes faster. Come on,  
it's late.

George looks again. His gut pulling one way. The hour pulling the other.

**GEORGE**

Alright.

They turn onto 16th. Walking. The darkness thick and total -- every street light dead, the block a tunnel.

George's eyes adjust. Scanning without thinking. Nothing moving.

Then -- at the far end of the block. Headlights. Not moving. Just sitting there, facing them.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(slowing)

Hold on --

The headlights lurch forward. A JEEP jumps the curb and comes up onto the sidewalk, cutting off the path ahead.

Two doors swing open. Two MEN out before the vehicle stops.

The first one raises his arm. Direct. A gun pointed at George's head from six feet away.

Click.

Nothing.

The man looks at the gun. One beat of confusion that George doesn't wait to see end.

He runs.

**VOICE FROM JEEP**

Don't let him get away!

George is already at full speed. Up the one-way street. Legs driving. The world narrowing to the next ten feet ahead of him.

The Jeep reverses. Tires screaming. Comes back around.

George sees the carry-out ahead. Lit up. People inside. He hits the door at full speed.

**INT. CARRY-OUT RESTAURANT — CONTINUOUS**

George crashes in. Stumbles. Catches himself on the counter. Three CUSTOMERS with containers of food stare at him.

Through the glass front -- the Jeep rolls to a stop outside. An arm extends from the passenger window. Gun pointing at the carry-out door.

Nobody inside moves.

A beat. Two beats.

**VOICE FROM JEEP (O.S.) (CONT'D)**

(muffled through glass)

No. Don't do it in there.

The arm pulls back. The Jeep idles a moment longer. Then pulls away. Taillights disappearing up the street.

The carry-out goes back to its business like nothing happened.

George straightens up from the counter. Looks at his hands.

They're shaking.

A CUSTOMER goes back to his phone. The CASHIER resumes her transaction. George stands in the middle of it, breathing.

**CASHIER**

(not unkindly)

You want something, baby?

**GEORGE**

(barely there)

No. No thank you.

He pushes back out the door. Stands on the sidewalk. The street empty. The night quiet again like nothing happened.

Because for the city, nothing did.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT — LATER**

George sits on the edge of his bed. Still. Phone in his hand. He dials.

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

(picking up)

Hello?

**GEORGE**

You hear anything about tonight?

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

...What happened tonight?

**GEORGE**

Somebody just tried to kill me on  
16th Street.

Silence on the line.

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

Are you hit?

**GEORGE**

No. Gun jammed.

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

George --

**GEORGE**

The friend I was with. He suggested  
that route.

Another silence. Longer this time.

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

You sure?

**GEORGE**

He knew that block was dark. He  
knew those lights were out. He  
pushed for that route when I said I  
didn't want to go that way.

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

(low)

That's your people, George.

**GEORGE**

I know who it is.

George sits in the quiet of his room. Looks at his hands  
again. They've stopped shaking.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

I thought about what Frankie told  
me. These guys are trying to kill  
me. But what got me -- what I  
couldn't shake -- wasn't who was  
after me. It was who sold me out.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. DIAMOND'S APARTMENT — KITCHEN — EVENING**

Small apartment. Clean. Warm. Smells like something good on the stove.

Diamond moves around the kitchen with the ease of someone who knows exactly where everything is. George sits at the small table watching her. His shoulders are lower than they've been all week.

**DIAMOND**

You're staring.

**GEORGE**

I know.

**DIAMOND**

It's rude.

**GEORGE**

I know that too.

Diamond sets a plate in front of him. Sits across the table.

**DIAMOND**

How was your day?

**GEORGE**

Better now.

**DIAMOND**

(not buying the  
deflection)

That's not what I asked.

**GEORGE**

Long. It was long.

**DIAMOND**

You always say that.

**GEORGE**

It's always true.

She watches him eat. He's hungry. The kind of hungry that isn't just about food.

**DIAMOND**

George. What is it that you  
actually do?

He looks up. She's looking at him directly the way she always does -- no buildup, no cushion. Just the question.

**GEORGE**

I provide a service to the  
community.

Diamond looks at him. Then laughs. Really laughs -- head  
back, hand on the table.

**DIAMOND**

A service to the community.

**GEORGE**

That's what I do.

**DIAMOND**

And the community -- are they  
grateful for this service?

**GEORGE**

Very. They keep coming back.

She shakes her head. Goes back to eating. Doesn't push  
further. But the lightness doesn't fully return.

**EXT. ANACOSTIA WATERFRONT -- EVENING**

They walk along the water. The city across the river. A quiet  
that doesn't exist on any block George knows.

Diamond's hand in his. George walks slower than usual.  
Everything slower.

**DIAMOND**

I like it out here. Makes the city  
feel far away.

**GEORGE**

It is far away.

**DIAMOND**

Not far enough sometimes.

They walk. The water moving. George looks at it.

**GEORGE**

Where would you go? If you could go  
anywhere.

**DIAMOND**

Home. Trinidad. For a while anyway.  
Just to remember what slow feels  
like.

**GEORGE**

What does slow feel like?

**DIAMOND**

(looking at him)

Like this. Exactly like this.

George looks at her. Then back at the water.

**GEORGE**

I could get used to this.

**DIAMOND**

Then get used to it. There's  
nothing stopping you.

A beat. Both of them knowing that's not quite true.

**INT. DIAMOND'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER**

Television low. Both of them on the couch. Diamond's head on George's shoulder. The city outside the window, muffled and distant.

George's jaw is unclenched. His eyes, for once, not reading a room for danger. Just watching television with a woman he trusts.

Diamond looks up at him.

**DIAMOND (CONT'D)**

You should just leave. Whatever it  
is -- just walk away from it.

**GEORGE**

I'm working on it.

**DIAMOND**

How long have you been working on  
it?

**GEORGE**

A while.

**DIAMOND**

Work faster, George.

He looks down at her. She's looking back up at him. No anger. No ultimatum. Just the truth between two people who care about each other.

**GEORGE**

I know.

**DIAMOND**

I'm serious.

**GEORGE**

I know you're serious.

**DIAMOND**

Because I'm not going to keep  
saying it.

**GEORGE**

(quiet)

I know that too.

Diamond looks at him one moment longer. Then puts her head back on his shoulder. The television plays. The city stays outside.

George stares at the ceiling. Somewhere under the ease of this room, in some part of him that never fully rests, the street is still running.

He knows what she's offering. He knows what it costs to take it.

He hasn't figured out yet how to pay that price.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. SAM'S BACK ROOM -- NIGHT (1991)**

A cramped back room. One bulb. SAM, 60s, sits at a table with a map of the Metro system spread in front of him. Thick fingers swollen with arthritis, but his mind is a different instrument entirely -- sharp, methodical, unhurried.

George, DRE, and ERWIN sit across from him. Charlie leans against the wall, arms folded.

**SAM**

The money train runs the same time  
every week. Has for eleven years.  
Not once have they changed it. Not  
once.

**DRE**

Why not?

**SAM**

Because nobody's ever taken it. You  
don't change something that's never  
been a problem.

**ERWIN**

Until it is.

**SAM**

(tapping the map)  
Armory station. Bottom level. Dre  
and Erwin go down. George stays at  
the top. In and out. Three minutes.

**GEORGE**

Three minutes.

**SAM**

Three minutes. Not four. You're not  
down and back in three minutes you  
abort and walk away clean.

Charlie pushes off the wall.

**CHARLIE**

I'm going to say what nobody's  
saying. What if something goes  
wrong down there?

**SAM**

Nothing goes wrong if everybody  
does exactly what I said.

**CHARLIE**

That's not how things work and you  
know it.

Sam looks at Charlie. Then at George.

**SAM**

Your man in or not?

**CHARLIE**

I'm not in. I'll drive.

Sam nods like that's acceptable. George looks at Charlie.  
Charlie looks back. This is the closest he'll come to saying  
don't do this.

**INT. SAM'S BACK ROOM — LATER**

Jumpsuits. Cheap work boots. Three Halloween masks on the  
table.

Dre picks up the Sylvester the Cat mask. Holds it up.

**DRE**

Sylvester. I can work with  
Sylvester.

**ERWIN**

(picking up Howdy Doody)  
Who is this even supposed to be?

**DRE**

Howdy Doody. Old puppet show.

**ERWIN**

Why does he look like that?

**DRE**

He's a puppet, man. Just put it on.

George picks up the third mask. Looks at it. Looks at the other two.

**GEORGE**

We look ridiculous.

**DRE**

We look unidentifiable. That's the point.

George pulls on his jumpsuit. Checks the .45 in his waistband. His hands are steady. His chest is not.

**INT. CHARLIE'S CAR — MOVING — NIGHT**

Charlie drives. The three of them in the back, masks up on their foreheads for now. Nobody talking.

George stares out the window. The city at night. The same streets he's known his whole life.

**ERWIN**

(quiet)  
Everybody good?

**DRE**

I'm good.

George doesn't answer. Keeps looking out the window.

**ERWIN**

George.

**GEORGE**

I'm good.

**CHARLIE**

(from the front, flat)  
Three minutes. Everybody remembers that. Three minutes and you walk.

**GEORGE**

We heard Sam, Charlie.

**CHARLIE**

I know you heard him. I'm saying it again.

Nobody argues with that.

**EXT. ARMORY METRO STATION - ENTRANCE - NIGHT**

Charlie idles at the curb. The station entrance quiet. Late enough that the foot traffic has thinned.

Dre and Erwin pull their masks down. Disappear into the entrance.

George gets out. Stands at the top of the escalator. Mask up still. Hands in his pockets. To anyone passing he's just a man waiting.

He counts. One thousand one. One thousand two.

A COUPLE exits the station past him. Don't look at him twice. He exhales.

Keeps counting. One thousand thirty. One thousand thirty-one.

The escalator is empty. The city hums around him.

One thousand ninety.

One thousand one hundred.

One thousand one hundred and --

Two figures burst up the escalator steps. Dre and Erwin. Sylvester the Cat and Howdy Doody sprinting hard, two heavy pillowcases swinging between them, coins clanking with every stride.

George is already moving. They hit the sidewalk. Hit the car.

**CHARLIE (CONT'D)**

(pulling out)

Down. Stay down.

All three in the back, below the windows. The car moves. Normal speed. Nothing to see.

No sirens. No lights. No one following.

Erwin pulls the Howdy Doody mask off. Starts laughing -- the release of it, everything held for three minutes coming out at once.

**DRE**

(Sylvester still on,  
muffled)

Can somebody get this off me --

George pulls Dre's mask off. Dre gasps air. They look at each other in the dark of the backseat.

Then George starts laughing too. Can't help it.

**CHARLIE**

(eyes on the road, not  
laughing)

Don't do that yet. Not yet.

They hold it. Barely.

**INT. SAM'S BACK ROOM -- LATER**

Coins and bills spread across the table. Sam counts with his arthritic hands, methodical as always. George watches him work.

When it's done -- Sam splits it four ways. George picks up his share. Holds it.

It's not nothing. It's also not what he expected it to feel like.

**SAM**

(packing up)

Clean. Just like I said.

**DRE**

Sam, you're a genius.

**SAM**

I'm a planner. There's a  
difference. Genius gets excited. I  
just think.

George looks at the money in his hand. Charlie sits against the wall again. Watching George. Reading him.

**CHARLIE**

(quiet, just to George)

You good?

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**CHARLIE**

For real.

George looks at him.

**GEORGE**

I'm good, Charlie. I just -- I want to understand why that felt the way it felt.

**CHARLIE**

How did it feel?

George thinks about that. Looks at the money.

**GEORGE**

Like something I was good at.

Charlie looks at him for a long moment. That's the thing he was afraid George was going to say.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

It wasn't really about the money. That's the honest truth. It was belonging to something. Something with a plan, a purpose, a role for me to play. That feeling -- that's the thing that's hardest to walk away from.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. BAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING — STANTON ROAD S.E. — DAY  
(1992)**

A worn mid-rise across from Eastern High. George stands on the sidewalk looking up at it. He's been here before. He's always hoping it looks different. It never does.

He goes in.

**INT. BAY'S APARTMENT — HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS**

George knocks. Waits. Knocks again.

Movement behind the door. Then it opens.

BAY. What's left of him. Gaunt in a way that changes the shape of a face. Eyes recessed and glassy. He's wearing a t-shirt two sizes too big, sweatpants, socks with a hole. He looks at George and something in him tries to assemble itself -- some old dignity reaching for the surface.

**BAY**

(pulling the door wider,  
casual as he can manage)  
Hey. What brought you to this part  
of town?

George looks at his brother. Works to keep his face where it  
needs to be.

**GEORGE**

Just came to check on you. You eat  
today?

**BAY**

I ate. Come in, come in.

**INT. BAY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The apartment is what the hallway promised. Clothes on every  
surface. Beer cans doubling as ashtrays, cigarette butts  
standing up in them like little gravestones. A mattress on  
the floor of the living room because at some point the  
bedroom became something else. The television on, volume low,  
talking to no one.

George sits in the one clear chair. Bay drops onto the  
mattress. Tries to sit up straight.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

You looking good, lil bro. You  
staying out of trouble?

**GEORGE**

I'm alright. What about you? You  
need anything?

**BAY**

Nah, I'm good. I'm good. I was just  
about to clean up in here actually.  
Was getting to it.

George looks around the apartment. Doesn't say anything.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

How's Mama? She still working at  
the school?

**GEORGE**

Yeah. Same place. She asks about  
you.

**BAY**

I'm going to come by. I keep  
meaning to come by. I just been --

He stops. His eyes go somewhere. Not sleep exactly -- more like a temporary interruption. His head dips. George watches him.

A moment. Two. Bay's head comes back up.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

(resuming, like nothing  
happened)  
-- I just been busy. You know how  
it is.

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**BAY**

Daddy still got that garden out  
back?

**GEORGE**

Every summer.

**BAY**

Man. He loves that garden.

Bay smiles at that. A real smile -- something from before all of this, breaking through for one second.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

You remember when me and Frankie  
used to steal tomatoes out of it?  
Daddy never could figure out who  
was doing it.

**GEORGE**

He knew.

**BAY**

(laughing softly)  
You think he knew?

**GEORGE**

Bay, Daddy knows everything that  
happens in a three block radius of  
that house.

Bay laughs. George laughs with him. For a moment the apartment is just two brothers talking.

Then Bay's eyes go again. Longer this time. His body leans. George reaches over and steadies him by the shoulder.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Bay.

Bay surfaces. Blinks.

**BAY**

(embarrassed, covering)  
I didn't sleep much last night.  
That's all.

**GEORGE**

I know.

He reaches into his pocket. Takes out forty dollars. Sets it on the mattress beside Bay's hand.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Get yourself something to eat. Real food.

**BAY**

(looking at the money)  
George, you don't have to --

**GEORGE**

I know I don't have to.

Bay picks up the money. Folds it. Looks at his little brother.

**BAY**

Thanks, lil brother.

George stands. Gets his jacket.

**GEORGE**

I'll come back next week.

**BAY**

You don't have to do that. I'm good.

**GEORGE**

I know you're good. I'll come back anyway.

He heads for the door. Hand on the knob. Stops.

Turns back.

Bay is sitting on the mattress with the forty dollars in his hand, watching George. That look -- he doesn't want him to go. He won't say it. He'd never say it. But it's there in his face, plain as anything.

The man who owned every room he walked into. Silver Mustang. Brown suit. Rick James on the radio.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Take care of yourself, Bay. For real.

**BAY**

(quiet)  
You too, lil bro.

George goes.

**EXT. BAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING — SIDEWALK — CONTINUOUS**

George stands on the sidewalk. Looks back up at the building. Bay's window. Curtain half drawn.

Eastern High across the street. Kids getting out for the day, backpacks, laughing, somebody's music carrying across the blacktop.

George looks at the school. Then at Bay's window. Two worlds on the same block.

He walks. Doesn't look back again.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT — NIGHT (1992)**

George on the phone. Leaning against the wall. Listening more than talking.

**RIHANNA (O.S.)**

I hear you been looking for new lanes. My sister moves hardware. Good prices, better product. I thought about you.

**GEORGE**

Hardware like what?

**RIHANNA (O.S.)**

Like whatever you need. Handguns, rifles, you name it. She sources them clean, moves them fast. You got the buyers, she's got the supply.

**GEORGE**

How long she been doing this?

**RIHANNA (O.S.)**

Long enough. She's not playing around, George. This is real product at real prices.

George looks at the ceiling. Thinking.

**GEORGE**

Set up a meeting.

**EXT. ALLEY — BEHIND THE OWENS HOUSE — NIGHT**

A Monte Carlo pulls into the alley. Tinted caravan behind it.

RIHANNA steps out. Mid-twenties. Fitted. Short hair. She moves like she's done this a hundred times and will do it a hundred more. Her sister stays in the caravan.

**RIHANNA**

(no preamble)

George. Good to see you.

**GEORGE**

Rihanna. You look good.

**RIHANNA**

I know. Come look at what I brought you.

She opens the trunk of the Monte Carlo.

George looks in. An assortment of firearms, laid out with the care of someone who knows their merchandise -- handguns in cases, rifles broken down, everything tagged. It looks professional. It looks legitimate.

Rihanna goes through them like a saleswoman at a trade show - - picking each one up, citing specs, citing prices. George listens. Studies each one. He's not dazzled. He's calculating.

**RIHANNA (CONT'D)**

The beauty of this versus what you been doing -- no corners, no fiends, no product that expires. You move these once, you're done. Clean money, George.

**GEORGE**

How many buyers you think I can reach?

**RIHANNA**

With your network? Easily forty, fifty people. These move at retail, you're doubling your money on each one.

**GEORGE**

And your sister -- she can keep up with that kind of volume?

**RIHANNA**

That's her business. She stays ready.

George picks up one of the handguns. Checks the weight of it. Sets it back.

**GEORGE**

I'll take ten to start. If they move like you say, we talk about more.

**RIHANNA**

(closing the trunk)  
Smart. We'll do good business, George.

She smiles at him. Warm. Confident. Convincing.

He should know better. He doesn't know better yet.

**INT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS -- DAYS LATER**

George moving through his network. Meeting after meeting. Showing the product. Taking money.

Then -- the calls start coming back.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT -- DAY**

George on the phone. His face says it all before a word.

**BUYER (O.S.)**

George. Man. These things don't fire. I took it apart -- it's a replica. A prop. You sold me a toy.

George goes still.

**BUYER (O.S.) (CONT'D)**

Is this a joke? Because it's not funny. People are asking questions, man. They think I set them up.

**GEORGE**

Give me a day.

**BUYER (O.S.)**

George --

**GEORGE**

One day. I'll make it right.

He hangs up. Sits with it.

Calls Rihanna. Rings through. No answer.

Calls again. No answer.

Drives by her usual spots. Nothing.

She is simply -- gone.

**INT. CHARLIE'S APARTMENT - EVENING**

George sits across from Charlie. The whole story told.  
Charlie looking at him.

**CHARLIE**

Replicas.

**GEORGE**

Every single one.

**CHARLIE**

And she's gone.

**GEORGE**

Like she was never there.

Charlie leans back. Runs his hand over his face.

**CHARLIE**

How many people did you sell to?

**GEORGE**

Ten buyers.

**CHARLIE**

Ten people who now think you either  
burned them or set them up.

**GEORGE**

I know what it looks like.

**CHARLIE**

George. Some of those people --  
they're going to want their money  
back. And some of them are going to  
want more than money.

George knows. He's been sitting with that all day.

**GEORGE**

I'll pay everybody back. Every one of them.

**CHARLIE**

With what? You spent the buy money.

**GEORGE**

I'll figure it out.

**CHARLIE**

(leaning forward)

George. That woman played you. She looked you in the eye and played you. You know that, right?

George is quiet for a long moment.

**GEORGE**

Yeah. I know.

**CHARLIE**

The worst part isn't the money.

**GEORGE**

I know what the worst part is.

Charlie looks at him.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

She'll be back. People like that always come back. And when she does --

**CHARLIE**

Don't.

**GEORGE**

I'm just saying --

**CHARLIE**

I know what you're saying. Don't.

George looks at the wall. Then back at Charlie.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

The street has a way of showing you a clean lane. Making you believe you found the thing that's going to change everything. And just when you're all the way in -- it pulls the rug.

**CUT TO:**

**INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - 1992-1993**

A sequence. Not montage -- each moment has weight. Each one lands separately.

GEORGE at different points in time -- phone in hand, doorway, street corner, kitchen table. Each time the same thing arriving in a different package.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT - PHONE CALL - NIGHT**

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

Leo got shot. In the carry-out on Wheeler. He didn't make it.

George sits down slowly. Leo. Who laughed too loud and did math in his head.

**GEORGE**

When?

**CHARLIE (O.S.)**

Hour ago. I just heard.

George sets the phone down. Sits in the quiet.

**EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY**

CARLTON finds George on the block.

**CARLTON**

You hear about Rio? They got him from behind. He's alive but -- George, they're saying he's not going to walk again.

George looks at the street. Rio -- who could outrun anybody on the block. Shot from behind. Not going to walk again.

**GEORGE**

(quietly)  
Where is he?

**CARLTON**

D.C. General. They don't know how long.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT - DAY**

George at the kitchen table when Charlie comes through the door. One look at Charlie's face and George already knows it's bad.

**CHARLIE**

Keith got hit at a red light on Benning Road. His girl was with him. She died right there. Keith's at the hospital -- they're saying it's bad, George. Real bad.

George puts both hands flat on the table. Keith. Who used to say the girls were going to sweat him one day. Who his grandmother kept on a short leash. Who prayed.

**GEORGE**

His girl died.

**CHARLIE**

She was gone before the ambulance came.

A beat.

**GEORGE**

I'm going to the hospital.

Keith lingers five days. On the sixth day -- he doesn't.

**INT. CHARLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Charlie sits on his couch, jacket still on. A scrape on his hand, dirt on his knees. Shaking slightly -- the kind of shaking that comes after, not during.

George sits across from him. Waiting.

**CHARLIE**

(still processing)  
Car came around the corner. I heard it before I saw it. Something in the sound -- I don't know. I just went down. Hit the sidewalk.

**GEORGE**

You went down?

**CHARLIE**

Tripped on something. Cracked sidewalk. I went down hard. And then everything just -- went over me.

He looks at his scraped hand. The thing that saved him.

**CHARLIE (CONT'D)**

Black rolled under a truck. He's okay. George, I was standing straight up one second before --

He stops. Can't finish it.

**GEORGE**

You're here.

**CHARLIE**

A cracked sidewalk, man. That's what it came down to.

**GEORGE**

You're here, Charlie.

Charlie nods. Looks at his hand again.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT — MORNING**

George asleep. His phone rings. And rings. He picks up.

**VOICE (O.S.)**

They found Chi. Under Susan's Bridge. Him and Antonio both.

George sits up. The voice keeps talking. He stops hearing the words.

Chi. Who stole his Matchbox cars when they were seven. Who walked him through Potomac Gardens for the first time. Who hugged him after his first sale and said now you're in the game.

George hangs up. Sits on the edge of his bed.

He doesn't move for a long time.

**EXT. GEORGE'S BLOCK — EVENING**

George and Carlton standing on the corner when the word comes down the block, person to person, the way news travels in that world.

**CARLTON**

(low, like he can't fully believe it)

Tim and Chuck. They found them in Chuck's Acura. Both of them. Shot from the back seat.

George goes very still.

**GEORGE**

From the back seat.

**CARLTON**

Whoever did it -- they let him in  
the car, George. Both of them did.  
Somebody they knew.

George looks down the block. The same block he's known since  
he was six years old. The same row houses, same corner store,  
same telephone poles.

Completely different world.

**EXT. CONGRESSIONAL CEMETERY -- DAY**

George stands at the fence of the cemetery. The same one they  
used to ride bikes past as kids. Cut through after school.  
Dare each other to touch the headstones in the dark.

He looks at it now.

More familiar faces inside these gates than out on the block.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

Congressional Cemetery. We used to  
ride our bikes through there, hang  
out after school, joke around  
between the headstones. Said we'd  
be there until dark. We were right.  
A lot of us ended up staying.

George turns. Walks away from the fence. Hands in his  
pockets.

He doesn't look back.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT -- EVENING (1993)**

George at the table. Two plates set. Food going cold. The  
door not opening.

He checks the time. An hour past when Rom said he'd be here.  
Calls his number. Rings through. No answer. Calls again.  
Same.

He tells himself Rom runs late. Always has. Since he was five  
years old on this block, always the last one to show, always  
with a story that made everybody laugh.

He falls asleep at the table waiting.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT -- LATE NIGHT**

Phone ringing. George jolts awake. Knocks over a glass reaching for it.

**BLACK (O.S.)**

(low, careful)

George. You hear from Rom tonight?

**GEORGE**

(half asleep)

No. He was supposed to come by for dinner. What happened?

Silence on the line. The particular silence that means the news is already formed.

**BLACK (O.S.)**

I heard Rom got killed tonight.

George stands up from the table.

**GEORGE**

That's not right. That's not possible. I just talked to him this afternoon.

**BLACK (O.S.)**

I know. I'm sorry, George. I heard it from two people. I didn't want you finding out from somebody else.

**GEORGE**

(quiet)

Let me call you back.

He sets the phone down. Stands in the middle of his apartment. The two plates on the table. The food cold.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT -- MORNING**

George sat up all night. He picks up the phone. Dials a number he has memorized for years.

ROM'S GRANDMOTHER picks up. Her voice already tells him what he doesn't want to know.

**ROM'S GRANDMOTHER**

(exhausted, grieved)

Hello?

**GEORGE**

Miss Louise. It's George. I'm  
calling about Rom. I heard  
something last night and I --

He stops. She is quiet.

**ROM'S GRANDMOTHER**

I'm sorry to tell you, George. Rom  
got killed yesterday evening.

George puts his hand against the wall. Steadies himself.

**GEORGE**

(barely there)  
Yes ma'am.

**ROM'S GRANDMOTHER**

He thought the world of you. Always  
talked about you. Said you looked  
out for him since he was little.

**GEORGE**

I tried to.

**ROM'S GRANDMOTHER**

Services are Thursday. I hope  
you'll come.

**GEORGE**

I'll be there. I promise.

He hangs up. His hand still on the wall.

Rom. Who George had watched since he was five years old  
running wild on the block. Who called him big brother. Who  
was reckless and loud and more alive than most people twice  
his age.

**INT. SMALL CHURCH -- DAY**

A sparse church. Folding chairs, modest flowers. The casket  
closed at the front.

George comes in from the back. Sees the casket and his legs  
slow before he tells them to. He finds a seat in the middle.  
Sits.

He sits there a long time before he can stand again.

When he does -- he walks to the front. Stands before the  
closed casket. His hand rests on the wood.

Nothing to say. Just his hand on the wood.

ROM'S GRANDMOTHER reaches up from the front row and takes George's hand as he passes.

**ROM'S GRANDMOTHER**

(low)

He loved you like a brother.

George squeezes her hand. Nods. Can't speak.

**EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT -- AFTER THE SERVICE**

The drizzle starting. People filing out to their cars.

George stands alone at the edge of the lot. Hands in his pockets. The rain soft and steady.

Charlie finds him. Stands beside him without a word. They look at the church together.

A long beat of nothing.

**CHARLIE**

(quiet)

You know who called it.

Not a question.

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**CHARLIE**

What are you going to do?

George watches the rain hit the asphalt.

**GEORGE**

Nothing.

**CHARLIE**

Nothing.

**GEORGE**

What am I going to do, Charlie? Go to war with people I grew up with? Get myself put in the ground next to him?

Charlie says nothing.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

I'm done. I'm telling you right now. I am done with all of it.

**CHARLIE**

You said that before.

**GEORGE**

(looking at him straight)  
Not after this. Not like this.

Charlie looks at him. Reads him. Nods slowly.

The rain comes down. They stand in it.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

There wasn't much I could do. Rom was a loose wire. They decided he needed to be fixed. In that world - that's justice. I knew who made the call. I called that man brother. That's the part I couldn't get past. Not the street. The brother part.

**CUT TO:**

SUPER: "Act Three -- The Bill Comes Due"

**INT. GEORGE AND DIAMOND'S APARTMENT --  
MORNING (1993)**

A modest apartment. Clean on Diamond's side, cluttered on George's. The newspaper open on the kitchen table to the classifieds, a few circles in pen -- warehouse positions, delivery routes, a security guard posting.

George sits at the table in a t-shirt and sweats. Beard coming in. He looks at the circled listings the way a man looks at a math problem he already knows he got wrong.

**DIAMOND**

You call any of those?

**GEORGE**

Not yet.

**DIAMOND**

George. They've been circled for a week.

**GEORGE**

I know how long they've been circled.

**DIAMOND**

So call.

**GEORGE**

The warehouse one pays eight dollars an hour.

**DIAMOND**

It's a start.

**GEORGE**

Eight dollars an hour, Diamond. I was making that in ten minutes.

**DIAMOND**

(steady)

You were. And where did that get you?

George has no answer for that. He looks back at the paper.

**GEORGE**

I'll call today.

**DIAMOND**

I've heard that.

**GEORGE**

(looking at her)

I said I'll call today.

Diamond pours her coffee. Doesn't push further. But they both know the distance between saying and doing.

**INT. GEORGE AND DIAMOND'S APARTMENT --  
AFTERNOON**

A knock. George opens the door.

ROM fills the doorway -- big grin, two grocery bags in each hand, his baby son LITTLE ROM on his hip.

**ROM**

Brought you some food since I know you all in here starving.

**GEORGE**

Nobody asked you to do all that.

**ROM**

Nobody had to. Move, let me in.

He pushes past George into the kitchen. Starts unpacking -- chicken, rice, vegetables, juice. George watches him.

**GEORGE**

You didn't have to do this, Rom.

**ROM**

(unpacking, not looking at  
him)

You got a baby coming, man. You  
think I'm going to let you be out  
here looking like this? When's the  
last time you got a haircut?

**GEORGE**

I've been busy.

**ROM**

Busy doing what? You don't do  
nothing no more. Which is fine --  
that's good actually -- but at  
least look decent while you're not  
doing nothing.

George almost smiles.

Little Rom squirms down from his father's hip and toddles  
toward George. George catches him. Lifts him. The baby grabs  
George's beard with both hands.

**ROM (CONT'D)**

See? Even he knows you need a  
shape-up.

**GEORGE**

(to the baby, soft)  
Don't listen to your father. Your  
father doesn't know what he's  
talking about.

He sits on the floor with the baby. Little Rom immediately  
starts pulling at his socks, trying to eat them. George lets  
him.

**ROM**

(watching from the  
kitchen, quieter now)  
You doing alright for real though?

**GEORGE**

I'm figuring it out.

**ROM**

Diamond good?

**GEORGE**

She's good. Better than me right now, honestly.

**ROM**

She always was. That's why you need to get right.

George looks at the baby on the floor between his legs. Little Rom has found George's shoelace and is focused on it with complete seriousness.

**GEORGE**

(quiet)  
I know.

**EXT. OWENS HOME -- FRONT PORCH -- AFTERNOON**

George on his parents' porch. Francis inside. Georgia in the doorway checking on them every so often.

Charlie and Gary on the steps. The old block. The old rhythms.

**CHARLIE**

You look different.

**GEORGE**

I grew a beard.

**CHARLIE**

It's not the beard.

**GARY**

You look relaxed. That's different.

**CHARLIE**

That's not relaxed. That's tired.

**GEORGE**

Can't it be both?

Charlie looks at him. Reading him the way he's always read him.

**CHARLIE**

You really trying to leave it alone?

**GEORGE**

I really am.

**CHARLIE**

How's that going?

**GEORGE**

Ask me again in six months.

Georgia appears in the doorway with a plate of food she somehow always has ready.

**GEORGIA**

You eating enough? You look thin.

**GEORGE**

Mama, I'm not thin.

**GEORGIA**

You look thin to me. Take this.

She hands him the plate. He takes it. She goes back inside. Charlie and Gary exchange a look.

**GARY**

(laughing)

Some things never change.

George eats. Looks at the block. The same block. Just quieter for him now.

An hour later he gets up and goes home. The visit shorter each time. Home means Diamond's apartment now.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

I wanted out. I really did. But out is a door that doesn't open from the inside. You have to be let out. And the street doesn't let you go. It just changes what it asks of you.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. OWENS HOME -- FRONT PORCH -- AFTERNOON (1993)**

George on the porch steps, newspaper in his lap, going nowhere fast.

A car he recognizes pulls up. He watches it park. Watches the door open.

RIHANNA. Heavier than before. Short hair now. Cigarette going. She moves with the same unhurried confidence as always -- the kind that comes from never having been wrong about herself, even when everything around her went sideways.

**GEORGE**

(not getting up)

Rihanna.

**RIHANNA**

(coming up the walk)  
George. You look domestic.

**GEORGE**

What do you want?

**RIHANNA**

To talk. That's all. Five minutes.

**GEORGE**

Last time I gave you five minutes  
it cost me six months of my life  
cleaning up the mess.

**RIHANNA**

(sitting down like she was  
invited)  
That was a misunderstanding. I came  
to make it right.

**GEORGE**

You came to make money. Don't dress  
it up.

She takes a drag of her cigarette. Looks at him.

**RIHANNA**

You got a baby coming. Bills that  
don't stop. And you're sitting on  
this porch reading a newspaper like  
that's going to fix it.

**GEORGE**

Don't do that.

**RIHANNA**

I'm not doing anything except  
telling you what you already know.

**GEORGE**

Say what you came to say.

She stubs the cigarette out on the porch rail. Leans forward.

**RIHANNA**

I have a connection. A dealer in  
Maryland with a license who moves  
product through straw buyers. We  
use a clean identity, go in legal,  
come out with real merchandise. No  
corners, no street exposure. Clean  
transaction, clean money.

**GEORGE**

You must be out of your mind. I am not walking into any store with my name on anything.

**RIHANNA**

Not your name. Somebody else's. I have documents. Everything clean on paper.

**GEORGE**

Clean on paper is not clean.

**RIHANNA**

Clean enough. George, I'm talking about real money. Not corners, not product, not any of the old stuff. One transaction. In and out.

**GEORGE**

You burned me before.

**RIHANNA**

(meeting his eyes)  
I know I did. This is different.

**GEORGE**

That's what you said last time.

**RIHANNA**

Last time I was working with my sister. This is my operation. I control every piece of it.

George looks at her. She holds his gaze.

**GEORGE**

I need to think about it.

**RIHANNA**

(standing)  
Don't think too long. This window doesn't stay open.

She leaves. George sits on the porch. The newspaper still in his lap.

**INT. GEORGE AND DIAMOND'S APARTMENT --  
NIGHT**

Diamond asleep. George at the kitchen table in the dark. Bills spread in front of him. Rent. Utilities.

**(MORE)**

**INT. GEORGE AND DIAMOND'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT (CONT'D)**

Baby things Diamond bought that he  
hasn't paid her back for yet.

He looks at the numbers for a long time.

**EXT. SOMEONE'S FRONT STEP -- DAY**

George and Rihanna with MARCUS, 30s -- an acquaintance of  
George's, a working man with a legitimate name and a clean  
record. Rihanna is talking. George watches her work.

She is extraordinary at this. Patient, warm, logical,  
relentless. She makes the unreasonable sound reasonable. She  
makes risk sound like procedure.

**RIHANNA**

(to Marcus)

There is no exposure on your end.  
Your name goes on the paperwork,  
you get paid for the use of it, and  
you never touch anything. George  
vouches for you, I protect you.  
Simple.

**MARCUS**

I don't know...

**RIHANNA**

Marcus. You trust George?

**MARCUS**

Yeah, I trust George.

**RIHANNA**

Then trust this. George would not  
bring you into something that put  
you at risk. You know that about  
him.

Marcus looks at George. George holds his eyes. Doesn't speak.

He should say no. He should send Marcus home.

He says nothing.

Marcus nods slowly.

**INT. MARYLAND GUN STORE -- DAY**

Clean store. Fluorescent lights. Glass cases. The OWNER  
behind the counter -- he and Rihanna have clearly met before,  
the transaction smooth in the way transactions are smooth  
between people who have done business.

George stands to the side. Watching. Not touching anything. Letting the paperwork work.

Background check submitted. Two-week wait. Legal on every surface.

Outside after -- George and Rihanna in the parking lot.

**GEORGE**

Two weeks.

**RIHANNA**

Two weeks. Then we move them and everybody gets paid.

**GEORGE**

And if something goes wrong?

**RIHANNA**

Nothing goes wrong. It's already done, George. The hard part is over.

She gets in her car. Drives off.

George stands in the parking lot. The strip malls of Maryland around him. The sky flat and gray.

He knows she burned him before. He did it anyway. He knows exactly why he did it.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

I had promised myself I was done. I meant it. But the bills don't care what you promised yourself. My son needed things. Diamond needed things. And Rihanna -- she knew exactly which door to knock on.

He gets in his car. Drives back toward D.C.

This is the last bad choice. And somewhere underneath everything, he already knows it.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. SOUTHEAST D.C. -- THE BLOCK -- EVENING (DECEMBER 1993)**

Cold. The block quiet the way it gets in December -- everyone moving faster, heads down, no loitering.

George stands with JARVIS near the corner. They've been out here an hour trying to untangle a problem that keeps getting more tangled.

**JARVIS**

Terry's crew is not going to wait much longer. They want either the product or the money and we don't have either one right now.

**GEORGE**

I know what they want.

**JARVIS**

And Marcus's people are saying the same thing. George, we're getting squeezed from two sides here.

**GEORGE**

I know. Give me a day to figure it out.

**JARVIS**

You said that yesterday.

**GEORGE**

(quiet, controlled)

I know what I said. Give me a day.

Jarvis goes quiet. They stand in the cold.

Then headlights. A caravan turning onto the block. George watches it. Recognizes it.

The caravan stops. The door opens.

RIHANNA steps out.

Fitted dress in December. Open-toe heels. No coat. She moves across the sidewalk like the temperature answers to her.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(low, to Jarvis)

Give us a minute.

Jarvis steps back. Rihanna stops in front of George. Takes a cigarette from her purse. Lights it without hurrying.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

(even, quiet)

You put me in a bad situation.  
Again.

**RIHANNA**

I heard there's been some confusion with the paperwork.

**GEORGE**

Confusion. You sold the receipts to people who were already my problem and made it look like I set them up.

**RIHANNA**

That's not exactly --

**GEORGE**

Rihanna. I have two crews who think I burned them. I don't have product, I don't have their money, and your name is nowhere in the conversation. That is not confusion.

She takes a long drag. Looks at him.

**RIHANNA**

(exhaling slowly)

Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it.

**GEORGE**

How?

**RIHANNA**

I'll make some calls. Smooth it out. I've done it before.

**GEORGE**

You've created it before too.

She studies him. Something in her eyes -- not guilt, not apology. Something more like assessment. Deciding how much he's worth managing.

She takes another drag. Cheeks filling. The smoke building.

And then she blows it directly into his face.

Full. Deliberate. Unhurried.

From the caravan -- laughter. The men inside watching, finding this very funny.

George closes his eyes. The smoke moving through him. He doesn't step back. Doesn't move.

Opens his eyes.

Rihanna is already turning away. Walking back toward the caravan. Hips easy. Not looking back.

George watches her go. The caravan door closes. Pulls away.

He stands there on the sidewalk.

Jarvis reappears beside him. They watch the taillights disappear. Then Jarvis looks at George. George looks at Jarvis.

Something passes between them. Dark. Certain.

Then they both start laughing -- not the funny kind. The kind that comes when a thing is so far past reason that laughter is the only language left.

**JARVIS**

(shaking his head)

She just --

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**JARVIS**

In front of everybody.

**GEORGE**

Yeah.

**JARVIS**

What are you going to do?

George stops laughing. Looks down the street where the caravan went.

**GEORGE**

(quiet)

Nothing. I'm not going to do anything.

Jarvis looks at him.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Go home, Jarvis. I'll figure out Terry's crew tomorrow.

Jarvis nods. Leaves.

George stands alone on the corner. The cold settling in.

**EXT. GEORGE'S BLOCK -- TWO WEEKS LATER -- MORNING**

George coming out of a carry-out, coffee in hand. CARLTON is across the street. He crosses over, face carrying something.

**CARLTON**

(low)  
You hear about Rihanna?

**GEORGE**

What about her?

**CARLTON**

They found her. Her and her  
bodyguard both. Last night.

George goes still.

**CARLTON (CONT'D)**

She's gone, George.

George looks at Carlton. Then at the street. Then at his  
coffee.

He waits to feel something. Grief. Shock. Relief. Guilt.  
Anything.

Nothing comes.

That is the thing that stays with him. Not the news. The  
nothing.

**GEORGE**

(after a long moment)  
Alright.

He walks home. Drinks his coffee.

The nothing walks with him.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. OWENS HOME -- LIVING ROOM -- EARLY MORNING (1994)**

Francis at his chair. Georgia in the kitchen. George still  
asleep upstairs.

A KNOCK. Hard. Not a visitor knock.

Francis opens the door. Three DETECTIVES fill the frame,  
badges out.

**DETECTIVE MILLS**

Mr. Owens. We have a warrant to  
search the premises.

Francis steps back. His face doesn't break -- military  
bearing holding everything in place -- but his eyes move to  
the ceiling. To the room above where his son sleeps.

They come through. Georgia in the kitchen doorway, dish towel in her hands, watching men open her cabinets and move her furniture.

**GEORGIA**

(to Francis, low)  
What is this about?

**FRANCIS**

(quiet)  
I don't know.

George appears at the top of the stairs. Takes in the detectives. Takes in his parents' faces. Comes down slowly.

**DETECTIVE MILLS**

George Owens?

**GEORGE**

Yes.

**DETECTIVE MILLS**

We need you to come with us.

Georgia steps forward. Mills holds up a hand -- not aggressive, just final.

**DETECTIVE MILLS (CONT'D)**

Ma'am. He'll be fine. We just need to ask him some questions.

George looks at his mother. At his father standing in the hallway, hands at his sides, watching.

**GEORGE**

(to Francis, quiet)  
Call a lawyer, Dad. Don't worry.

Francis nods once. George turns. Goes with the detectives.

**INT. INTERROGATION HOLDING ROOM -- DAY**

A small bright room with no door. A metal stool bolted to the floor. Nothing else.

George sits on the stool. Hands cuffed behind his back -- left hand in a cast from an old injury, the metal biting into the plaster.

A SLOT in the wall opens every two hours. A face appears.

**OFFICER (O.S.)**

Name?

**GEORGE**

George Owens.

The slot closes.

Two hours later. Slot opens.

**OFFICER (O.S.)**

Name?

**GEORGE**

George Owens.

Slot closes.

Six hours. No bathroom. Arms numb. The overhead light never changing. George sits straight on the stool. Doesn't lean. Doesn't give them the satisfaction of watching him deteriorate.

**INT. INTERROGATION ROOM -- LATER**

A real room now. Table. Two chairs. DETECTIVE MILLS sits across from George -- late 40s, patient, the kind of patience that comes from doing this for twenty years. His partner DETECTIVE CRANE stands near the wall, arms folded.

A folder on the table. Mills opens it. Slides a photograph across.

**MILLS**

You know this woman?

Rihanna's photograph. George looks at it.

**GEORGE**

I want a lawyer.

**MILLS**

You're not under arrest yet. We're just talking.

**GEORGE**

I want a lawyer.

**CRANE**

(from the wall)

George. You seem like an intelligent man. Intelligent men don't lawyer up before they understand what they're dealing with. Intelligent men listen first.

George looks at Crane. Then back at Mills. Says nothing.

**MILLS**

(sliding more papers)  
We have phone records. We have a name in her phone book -- yours. We have paperwork from a Maryland transaction that traces back to a false identity. And we have two people who say they got product from a chain that runs through you.

George looks at the papers. Doesn't touch them.

**MILLS (CONT'D)**

This is going to go one of two ways. You talk to us now and we have a conversation. Or we build the case without you and you don't get any say in how it gets told.

George says nothing. His face gives nothing. But behind his eyes -- working. Cataloguing. Every piece they just showed him, matching it against what they couldn't have found.

**CRANE**

(harder)  
You know she was already under investigation? Your friend Rihanna. FBI had a file on her. They were about to move on her apartment the morning she turned up dead. You think that's a coincidence?

Something flickers across George's face. Just for a moment.

**GEORGE**

I want a lawyer.

Mills closes the folder.

**INT./EXT. POLICE LINEUP ROOM -- DAYS LATER**

A standard lineup. Six men behind one-way glass. George is in it.

Mills watches through the glass as the FIRST WITNESS studies the line. A long time. Then --

**FIRST WITNESS**

I can't make a positive identification.

George doesn't know this. He stands in the line and waits.

Second lineup. Different witness. George waits again.

This witness studies each man. Passes over George. Points at another.

George is released. For now.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT -- WEEKS LATER**

George on the couch when his phone rings.

**MILLS (O.S.)**

Mr. Owens. We'd like you to look at some photographs. Routine follow-up.

Photo array. George is number four. The same witness from the second lineup, now looking at photographs instead of a live lineup.

The witness looks at number four. Looks at number seven. Points to seven.

Leaves.

George exhales.

**INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT -- WEEKS LATER STILL**

The phone again.

**MILLS (O.S.) (CONT'D)**

The witness has provided a supplemental statement. They'd like to revise their identification.

George sits down.

**GEORGE**

Revise it how.

**MILLS (O.S.)**

They're now identifying number four.

Silence.

**GEORGE**

Number four.

**MILLS (O.S.)**

Yes sir.

George hangs up. Sits very still.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

Indicted March 1995. The detectives found in Rihanna's papers everything that tied me to the guns and the false IDs. My attorney told me she was already under FBI investigation. They were hours away from raiding her apartment the morning she got shot. I've thought about that a lot. What she knew. What she was carrying. What died with her.

George sets the phone on the table. Looks at the wall.

The machinery of the system has found him. It is patient and it is thorough and it is already moving.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. D.C. SUPERIOR COURT -- HALLWAY -- DAY (DECEMBER 1995)**

SUPER: "D.C. Superior Court -- December, 1995"

George in a suit. Dark. Pressed. Georgia and Francis on the bench against the wall, Francis in his best clothes, Georgia with her hands folded in her lap.

George's ATTORNEY, BERNARD SHAW -- sharp, private bar, not a public defender -- leans close.

**SHAW**

Public defender called me this morning. The DA is still offering fifteen years if you plead today. Last chance before we go in.

**GEORGE**

I already told them no.

**SHAW**

I know what you told them. I'm telling you it's still on the table.

**GEORGE**

Fifteen years for something I didn't do.

**SHAW**

(careful)

George. The evidence they have --

**GEORGE**

Is circumstantial. You said so yourself. A photo ID that changed once already. Paperwork. No physical evidence putting me at a scene. I'm not pleading to fifteen years.

Shaw looks at him. A man who has been in enough courtrooms to know when a client has made up his mind.

**SHAW**

Alright. Then let's go win this.

**INT. D.C. SUPERIOR COURT -- COURTROOM -- DAY**

The courtroom. Wood paneling. Fluorescent light over everything. The JUDGE at the bench. Twelve JURORS in the box. George at the defense table, Shaw beside him.

The PROSECUTOR on his feet -- mid-40s, methodical, building brick by brick.

**PROSECUTOR**

Ladies and gentlemen, the evidence will show that the defendant participated in a conspiracy to acquire firearms through fraudulent means. Firearms that were then used in the commission of violent crimes. The trail leads directly to him.

George watches the jury. Reads each face. This is what he has always done -- read rooms, read people, calculate.

**TRIAL MONTAGE -- QUICK CUTS:**

-- A WITNESS on the stand. Shaw cross-examining. The witness's certainty developing cracks under pressure.

-- Shaw before the jury. Controlled. Precise.

**SHAW**

The identification was changed. The witness who placed my client at a scene could not do so in a live lineup. Only weeks later, under follow-up contact from detectives, did that identification change. You must ask yourselves why.

-- The PROSECUTOR on redirect. Methodical. Patient.

**PROSECUTOR**

The physical evidence recovered  
from the victim's residence links  
the defendant directly to this  
transaction. His name. His  
contacts. His fingerprints on the  
arrangement.

-- Georgia in the gallery. Hands still folded. Face steady.  
She has been steady George's whole life. She is steady now.

-- Francis. Sitting upright. Watching every word. His son's  
life being argued like a case study.

**INT. D.C. SUPERIOR COURT -- HOLDING AREA -- TWO DAYS LATER**

The jury is deliberating. George sits in the courthouse  
holding area.

He reads. Paperback -- doesn't matter what. Something to keep  
the mind from running in circles.

Puts the book down. Closes his eyes. His lips move -- barely.  
Not talking. Praying without performance. Just a man and  
whatever he believes in, in a holding room.

Opens his eyes. Picks the book back up.

A MARSHAL checks on him.

**MARSHAL**

You need anything? Water?

**GEORGE**

No. Thank you.

**MARSHAL**

Jury's still out. Could be a while.

**GEORGE**

I know.

The Marshal leaves. George reads.

**INT. D.C. SUPERIOR COURT -- COURTROOM -- LATER**

The jury files back in. Two days of deliberation. Every face  
neutral -- they've been instructed to give nothing away and  
they give nothing.

George stands. Shaw beside him.

Georgia and Francis in the gallery. Georgia's hands in her  
lap. Francis's jaw set.

The FOREPERSON stands. A woman, 50s, reading glasses, paper in hand.

**FOREPERSON**

We, the jury, in the matter of the  
District of Columbia versus George  
Anthony Owens, on the first count,  
find the defendant...

A breath. The whole room holding it.

**FOREPERSON (CONT'D)**

Guilty.

Georgia closes her eyes.

**FOREPERSON (CONT'D)**

On the second count -- guilty. On  
the third count -- guilty. On the  
fourth count -- guilty.

Shaw puts his hand on the table. George doesn't move.

Doesn't flinch. Doesn't turn. Doesn't let anything cross his face.

He stands perfectly still as the foreperson reads and the judge speaks and the marshals move toward him.

He looks straight ahead.

In the gallery -- Francis rises from his seat. His hands are shaking. He grips the bench in front of him to steady them. Georgia reaches up and takes his arm.

George doesn't see this. He has already looked away.

The marshals take him by each arm. He walks with them toward the side door. Even now -- walking with them, not being dragged -- maintaining the last thing he has left to maintain.

At the door he looks back once. Finds his parents in the gallery.

Francis nods. One time. Firm and quiet.

George nods back.

The door closes.

**INT. TRANSPORT VAN -- MOVING -- EVENING**

Christmas Eve. George in the transport van, wrists cuffed to the bench, watching the city through the mesh window.

D.C. at night. Decorated. Christmas lights on row houses. Families in lit windows. The city going on exactly as it always has.

George watches it pass.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. D.C. JAIL -- CELL 14 -- NIGHT (CHRISTMAS EVE, 1995)**

The cell we know.

Six by nine. One overhead bulb. Steel bunk. Lidless toilet. Sink with one working knob.

The graffiti on the wall -- MARCUS. 1988. T.L. + KEISHA 4EVER. DEON WAS HERE 1979. Names and dates and initials pressed into the concrete by men who sat in this same spot and left the only mark available to them.

GEORGE sits on the lower bunk. Back against the wall. Same position as the film's opening frame.

But now we know everything the opening only showed us the surface of.

We know the boy who rode bikes past Congressional Cemetery. The man who stood ten feet from Rayful Edmond and watched the world in the barbershop mirror. The son who handed his father an extension cord while Herman's Mercedes idled at the curb. The brother who pressed forty dollars into Bay's hand. The man who looked back once at Diamond walking down M Street.

All of it carried in the face sitting on this bunk.

George reaches out. His hand finds the wall. Finds MARCUS. 1988. Traces it the way we saw him trace it at the beginning.

He looks at the name a long time.

Then at the other names around it. Men who came before him. Men who were certain they were exceptions. Men who sat on this exact bunk and thought: not me. Not like this.

The world will say: he was always going to end up here. The block said it. The street said it. The system confirmed it.

Down the tier -- the tray slot opens.

**INMATE (O.S.)**

Hey Reggie! Aye -- REGGIE! Hit some  
of that Black Hole shit! Rare  
Essence, baby!

The slot snaps shut.

George doesn't move. Doesn't turn his head.

His hand still on the wall. On Marcus's name.

And then -- something shifts in his face. Not resignation.  
Not defeat. Something that has no clean name but looks like a  
man who has just decided something. Quietly. Without  
announcement.

Still here. Still thinking. Still George.

He pulls his hand from the wall. Leans his head back against  
the concrete. Looks at the ceiling.

Outside this cell, it is Christmas Eve. His mother is home.  
His father is home. Diamond is somewhere in the city. His son  
is somewhere in the city.

The world has not stopped.

Neither has he.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. D.C. JAIL -- VISITING AREA -- DAY**

A row of booths. Plexiglass dividers. Phones on both sides.  
The sounds of other conversations bleeding through -- men and  
their families, ten inches of plastic between them.

George sits on his side. Waits.

BAY appears through the door on the visitor side. He made it.  
That's the first thing -- he made it here. Thin, shuffling  
slightly, wearing a clean shirt that looks like he pressed it  
this morning for the occasion. Eyes that have trouble staying  
all the way open.

But he made it.

He sits down across the glass. Picks up the phone. George  
picks up his.

For a moment they just look at each other through the  
plexiglass. Two brothers on opposite sides of a divider,  
which is not so different from how it's always been.

**BAY**

(eyes wet, voice low)  
I never wanted this for you. You  
know that, right?

**GEORGE**

I know, Bay.

**BAY**

I used to think -- when you were  
little, when you were this big --

He holds his hand low, showing George's height as a child.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

I used to think you were going to  
be something. Doctor. Lawyer.  
Something real. You were smart  
enough. You were always the smart  
one.

**GEORGE**

You were smart too.

**BAY**

(shaking his head)  
Not like you. I always knew it.  
Mama knew it. Daddy knew it.

His head dips. A slow nod that isn't agreement -- the drug  
pulling him under for a moment. He surfaces.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

I wish you'd gone to college. Gone  
somewhere. Been a doctor or  
something. Got far away from all of  
this.

**GEORGE**

Bay --

**BAY**

I mean it. I look at you sitting in  
there and I think -- that's on me  
too. What I showed you. What you  
saw growing up watching me. I  
wasn't a good example.

**GEORGE**

You don't have to do this.

**BAY**

I know I don't. I want to.

His head dips again. Longer this time. George watches his brother's eyes lose focus and then fight back.

**GEORGE**

(gentle)

Bay. Look at me.

Bay looks up.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

I'm okay. I want you to hear that.

I'm okay in here.

**BAY**

(not quite believing it,  
but needing it)

Yeah?

**GEORGE**

Yeah. I'm reading. I'm thinking.

I'm going to figure this out.

Bay nods slowly. Something like relief moving through him.

**BAY**

Take care of yourself in there, lil  
brother. You hear me? Watch who you  
trust.

**GEORGE**

I know how to do that.

**BAY**

(almost smiling)

I know you do. Always did.

A GUARD signals -- visiting time winding down.

**BAY (CONT'D)**

I'll be back to see you. Next  
month.

**GEORGE**

Okay. Take care of yourself, Bay.  
For real.

**BAY**

I'm good. I'm good.

He stands. The glass between them making everything slightly unreal. Bay in his pressed shirt, thin shoulders, eyes that are losing the fight to stay open.

He waves at the guard. Turns to go.

George watches him walk toward the door. The shuffle in his step. The shirt he pressed this morning. The brother who was once a silver Mustang and Rick James on the radio -- brown suit, dark shades, the coolest man alive.

The door opens. Bay disappears through it.

George sits with the phone still in his hand for a moment after the line goes dead.

Then sets it down.

Looks at the empty booth across the glass.

He pressed his shirt. He made it here. That has to be enough.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. D.C. JAIL -- PAYPHONE BANK -- EVENING**

A row of payphones along a concrete wall. Other inmates on either side. George stands at his phone, receiver to his ear, waiting for it to connect.

It rings twice. Then --

**FRANCIS (O.S.)**

(picking up)

Hello?

His voice. George closes his eyes for half a second at the sound of it.

**GEORGE**

Hey, Dad. It's me.

**FRANCIS (O.S.)**

Hey, son. How are you holding up in there?

**GEORGE**

I'm okay. I'm good. How are you?

**FRANCIS (O.S.)**

I'm alright. Your mother's right here.

George can hear the house behind his father's voice. The television low. The sounds of home.

**FRANCIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)**

(quieter)

I wished we'd sent you off to military school when we had the chance. When you were young. We talked about it and then we didn't do it and I've been thinking about that.

**GEORGE**

Dad --

**FRANCIS (O.S.)**

I'm not saying it to make you feel bad. I just think it would have been different. Structure like that -- it would have suited you.

George listens. Something in his father's voice is different. Hoarser. Slower. Like a man carrying something heavy and trying not to show it.

**GEORGE**

Everything's going to work itself out, Dad. Don't worry about that.

**FRANCIS (O.S.)**

I know it will. You're strong. You always were.

A pause. The line between them. All the things that live in that pause.

**FRANCIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)**

We love you, son.

**GEORGE**

(quiet)

I love you all too. Tell Mama I love her.

**FRANCIS (O.S.)**

I will. You take care of yourself in there.

**GEORGE**

I am. I will.

They hang up.

George stands at the payphone a moment after the line goes dead. Hand still on the receiver.

He puts it back. Walks away.

**INT. D.C. JAIL -- PAYPHONE BANK -- ONE WEEK LATER**

Same payphone. George dials. It rings.

Georgia picks up.

**GEORGE (CONT'D)**

Hey, Ma. How's everything?

A pause. Shorter than it should be. Longer than he wants it to be.

**GEORGIA (O.S.)**

(voice low, barely there)

No, baby. Everything's not okay.

George goes still at the phone.

**GEORGIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)**

Your father passed away this morning. In his sleep.

From somewhere down the hall -- a GUARD'S voice, loud and final:

**GUARD (O.S.)**

LOCKDOWN. All inmates return to your cells. LOCKDOWN.

The tier begins to move around George. Men filing past. The machinery of the institution running on schedule, indifferent to what is happening at payphone four.

**GEORGE**

(into the phone)

Yes ma'am.

**GEORGIA (O.S.)**

(barely audible)

I love you, baby.

**GEORGE**

I love you too, Ma.

He hangs up the phone. The lockdown call coming again down the hall.

George walks to his cell. The door closes behind him.

**INT. D.C. JAIL -- CELL 14 -- CONTINUOUS**

He sits on the bunk.

No tears. Just stillness. The particular stillness of a man whose body has gone ahead of his mind -- the mind still back at the payphone, still hearing the voice.

He thinks about the backyard. Francis walking Bay in circles in the middle of the night. Patient. Steady. His WWII medal in a frame. The chair that was nobody else's chair. Jeopardy at seven. The Christmas lights going up every year on the same day.

He thinks about 15th Street. The leaves down. Francis walking with his hands in his windbreaker pockets, talking about men on corners, talking about the difference between friends and associates, talking about drugs clouding the thinking.

You don't have friends, son. You only have associates. Friends are rare.

He thinks about the barbershop. The nod in the mirror -- pay attention. This is education too.

He thinks about the extension cord. Hand it to me. And George handing it up to his father on the ladder while Herman's Mercedes idled at the curb.

All of it.

Francis Gene Winston. 1923 -- 1996. Who survived a World War and raised a family and built something out of nothing and never once stopped trying to tell his son what he needed to know.

George sits with all of it in the dark of Cell 14.

The tears don't come. Not yet. Maybe later. Maybe never.

Right now there is just the cell. And the quiet. And the knowledge that a man who loved him is gone from the world.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. D.C. JAIL -- CELL 14 -- DAY (FEBRUARY 13, 1996)**

**TITLE CARD: "ON FEBRUARY 13, 1996, GEORGE A. OWENS WAS SENTENCED TO 51 YEARS TO LIFE."**

The card fades.

The cell.

George on the lower bunk. Hand behind his head. Eyes on the ceiling. The same position we found him in at the very beginning of this film.

The same cell. The same bulb. The same graffiti on the wall -  
- MARCUS. 1988. DEON WAS HERE. T.L. + KEISHA.

But we have traveled the full length of a life to get back to  
this moment. We know what the opening didn't show us. We know  
the boy who became this man. We know every step that led to  
this bunk.

Fifty-one years to life.

George stares at the ceiling. A long time. The overhead bulb.  
The concrete above him.

Then -- his eyes move.

Slowly, as if he is remembering something, they drift to the  
narrow window set high in the wall. Just a slot. Just a  
rectangle of sky above the world.

Today the sky is gray. February gray, the kind that seems  
like it has always been this color and always will be.

George watches it.

Then -- a shift.

The gray breaks. Just at one edge. A thin strip of light  
coming through -- not much, not a revelation, not anything  
dramatic. Just light. The kind that was always there on the  
other side of the gray.

George's eyes find it and stay.

His lips move. Barely. The words going nowhere and everywhere  
at once.

**GEORGE (V.O.)**

The Department of Correction may  
have your body. But don't give them  
power over your mind. Imagination  
is your light.

The strip of light holds. George watches it.

The camera holds too -- on his face, on the light, on the man  
and the window and the thin strip of sky that nobody can  
sentence away from him.

This is not the end of George Owens. It is the beginning of  
the next part.

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**A F O R K I N T H E R O A D**

Based on the autobiography by George A. Owens

**TITLE CARD:**

"George A. Owens remained in prison for decades, fighting for his freedom.

He was granted the right of appeal under D.C. Code 11-721.

His mother, Georgia L. Owens -- his strength and umbrella through the worst of storms -- passed away in 2016."

**TITLE CARD:**

"This film is dedicated to

Francis Gene Winston

**1923 -- 1996**

and

Georgia L. Owens

**1937 -- 2016"**

THE END