

#indictment

Story by

Gina Prince-Bythewood

and

Reggie Rock Bythewood

Written by

Gina Prince-Bythewood

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - SOUTH INGLEWOOD, TENNESSEE - DAY

A semi rolls down the two-lane street of this dilapidated neighborhood on the outskirts. A part of America we never see. Country music PLAYS on an AM station. Through the windshield, up ahead, we see the flashing lights of a police car and a new BMW pulled over to the side.

We barely glance at the POLICE OFFICER standing at the driver's side window. As the truck rumbles past, suddenly POP! POP! POP! POP! In rapid succession. The SQUEAL of airbrakes pierces the air as the semi slams to a stop. Silence. And then the neighborhood dogs go crazy.

Through the rearview mirror, we see the YOUNG WHITE DRIVER laying crumpled on the ground and the BLACK POLICE OFFICER standing there, gun still drawn.

The WHITE TRUCK DRIVER climbs out, steps out into the street to get a better look. The Police Officer points his gun. His name is JOSHUA BELK.

BELK

Get back.

Truck Driver quickly climbs back into the semi. Grabs his CB.

Belk leans down, checks the Young Driver's pulse. Nothing. He looks around as BLACK RESIDENTS start to step out of their homes. Some hold camera phones. Eerily silent. Belk stands there for a beat, adrenaline pounding. Finally, he reaches into his patrol car for his radio...

Four police cars SCREAM into the neighborhood. EIGHT WHITE COPS scramble out. Quickly take in the scene. The crowd of gawkers has grown to fifty. Two cops walk to Belk and the deceased Driver. The other Police Officers step toward the GATHERING CROWD, already jacked. 0 to 60.

COPS

Get the fuck back!

Some in the crowd obey. Others ignore. Continue to record with their cellies. The Cops grow more agitated. 60 to 100.

COPS (CONT'D)

I said get the fuck back!

They shove a couple of TEENAGERS. One of them smirks.

TEENAGER

Payback's a bitch.

Cop shoves him again. Harder. Teenager tumbles to the ground. The crowd boils. Cop puts his hand on his gun. His partner lays a hand on his shoulder -- calm the fuck down. Teenager eyes the Cops with contempt. Stands. Raises up his hands.

TEENAGER (CONT'D)

Hands up don't shoot.

Others in the crowd follow suit, raise their hands, too. Tension escalates as the Young White Driver bleeds in the street, lifeless...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - PENN STATE - DAY

College playoffs. Harvard v. Penn. Only two Black players on the field. Number 42 is at the plate. Black, 18. TERRY is stenciled on the back of the jersey.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Bottom of the ninth. Two outs, tying run on second. Harvard down 0-1. Terry has two strikeouts on the day. Now looking at an oh-one count.

The pitch comes. Terry watches it whip past.

UMPIRE

Strike!

ANNOUNCER

Marcellus freezes Terry with the off-speed pitch for strike two. Season on the line. I'm sure the young freshman is feeling the pressure.

Terry steps out of the batter's box. Takes a breath, then steps back in. He points his bat towards the centerfield wall. The home crowd erupts in BOOS.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

Wow, what is Terry doing? That is some serious trash-talking. Don't see much of that in the Ivies. Crowd doesn't like it. Not sure I do either.

Pitcher smirks. Terry stares back at him. Pitch comes. Terry swings. CRACK! The ball flies off his bat like a rocket, soars over the fence for the win. His teammates go nuts. Terry drops his bat, jogs the bases. No joy in his face. The image suddenly freezes...

INT. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE - CARROLL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The frozen image fills a 50 inch plasma screen. JOHN CARROLL - white, 50's, leans against his cluttered desk, remote in hand. He looks at his colleague, JAMES RUIZ -- Latino, 40's, sitting in front of him. Gestures to the screen.

CARROLL

What do you see, Ruiz?

RUIZ

An arrogant asshole.

Carroll turns to the man sitting next to Ruiz. PRESTON TERRY sits comfortably in the leather chair. Now 30. Clean cut. Impeccably dressed. Everything about him is crisp - his suit, his cadence, his focus.

CARROLL

'That accurate?

PRESTON

Not entirely, sir.

CARROLL

So why go Babe Ruth?

PRESTON

Because once you tell someone how bad you're going to fuck them, you have to come through.

Carroll smiles.

CARROLL

You've been at Justice five months.  
'Yet to handle your own case.

PRESTON

(diplomatically --)  
Mr. Ruiz believes the best way for me to get acclimated is by sitting second chair.

CARROLL

I've been through a stack of resumes tonight.

(MORE)

CARROLL (CONT'D)

You all look the same. First in your class at an Ivy. Law Review. Perfect records at ACLU or LDF. All closers. What I need is a cleaner. I need the guy who points to the fence with two strikes on him.

He picks up a file on his desk.

CARROLL (CONT'D)

There's been another police shooting of an unarmed man today. South Inglewood, Tennessee. Governor called personally. She doesn't want another Ferguson. She wants an outside prosecutor to handle the investigation.

(then --)

Its a Black cop and a White kid.

No visible reaction from Preston.

CARROLL (CONT'D)

'This climate, only a Black man can indict this Black cop. If he's guilty. And even then, if the press doesn't eat your ass up, your own people will. James thinks you're too young, too green to handle it.

PRESTON

The only thing I care about is the truth. And my truth has no color.

RUIZ

That's a lovely naivete.

PRESTON

Thank you.

RUIZ

That wasn't praise.

PRESTON

Our new Attorney General said the challenge for all of us in this office is to not just represent the law and enforce it, but to use it to make real the promise of America, the promise of fairness and equality. Is she naive, sir? If so, I'm happy to wear that badge with her.

Carroll chuckles. Impressed. Sold.

EXT. UPPER-CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Spacious green lawns, foreign luxury cars in the driveways. A Camry pulls into the circular drive of a starter mansion with pillars. Preston steps out, walks to the front door. He rings the doorbell, then pushes open the door and crosses inside...

INT. TERRY HOME - CONTINUOUS

The foyer is nicely decorated. A little ostentatious. Preston follows the sound of the television...

An older man sits in a beat up brown leather recliner watching a football game on a sixty inch plasma. A FRAMED TITANS FOOTBALL JERSEY hangs on the wall next to it.

PRESTON

Hey Pop.

The Man turns. Smiles. He is QUINCY TERRY -- Black, 60's.

QUINCY

'Must have smelled your mom's cobbler.

PRESTON

Peach?

QUINCY

Berry. She's getting uppity on me.

Preston laughs.

PRESTON

Stopped by to tell you I have to leave town for a little while.

QUINCY

How come?

PRESTON

Just got my first case. Lead counsel.

QUINCY

Oh yeah? Where you headed?

PRESTON

Tennessee.

QUINCY

No shit. You gonna stay with your brother?

PRESTON

The government puts us up at a hotel.

(then --)

I think this is going to be a game-changer, Pop.

QUINCY

Congrats, Press. You deserve it.

Quincy's attention is drawn back to the football game.

PRESTON

Thanks...

QUINCY

Picked off! Let's go!

Quincy doesn't return to the conversation, transfixed by the game. Preston watches him...

INT. CANO HOME - KAI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

An explosion of purple and soccer gear. Poster of Serena Williams in mid-epic scream is pinned on the wall.

ASHE AKINO -- Black, 30's, is sprawled on the twin bed with her daughter KAI -- 6, ridiculously cute and full of swagger. Ashe has an aggressive sexiness about her. Intimidating for some. They play the card game "Speed." Lot of shit talking. Ashe slams down her final card, sticks her tongue out.

ASHE

Bam!

Kai's face clouds.

KAI

Lucky. One more game.

Ashe makes an "L" (loser) with her thumb and finger, puts it on Kai's forehead.

ASHE

Wait, what's that on your face?

Kai tackles her mom. They collapse in giggles. Ashe looks at her. Brushes a stray strand of hair off her face.

ASHE (CONT'D)  
Listen, Boogs, Mommy has to go out  
of town for work.

Kai's smile fades.

KAI  
For how long this time?

ASHE  
I don't know. But we'll Facetime  
every morning and every night,  
okay? Even though your face will  
probably break my iPad.

Kai's smile returns.

KAI  
Well, I get my looks from you.

Ashe laughs. Just then, a Woman appears in the doorway. PAULA  
-- pretty, mid-20's. She eyes the cards.

PAULA  
Hey Kai, how's the homework coming?

ASHE  
Its basically done.

KAI  
I just have one more page of math.  
I can do it in the car tomorrow.

Paula reacts. Not happy.

PAULA  
Well then its time for bed.

KAI  
What? No...

Kai looks to her Mom.

ASHE  
Hey Paula, we're good. We're just  
going to finish this game.

Paula tightens.

PAULA  
Her bed time is eight-thirty.

ASHE  
We can make an exception tonight.

PAULA  
(voice raising --)  
Look, you're not the one who has to  
drag her out of bed in the morning  
and get her to school on time.

Now Ashe tightens.

PAULA (CONT'D)  
Kai, I need you to start your night  
routine. Now.

Ashe looks at Kai. Her daughter's lip trembles. Ashe takes a  
deep breath, then gives her a kiss.

ASHE  
Its okay, Boogs. I love you. Go  
brush your teeth.

Kai hugs her, then walks to the bathroom in her room. Paula  
crosses out. Ashe follows. Closes the door behind her...

INT. CANO HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Paula moves down the hallway. Suddenly, a decorative vase  
SLAMS against the wall next to her head. She screams, leaps  
back as it shatters. Ashe steps to her. In her grill.

ASHE  
Raise your voice in front of my kid  
again and I'll give you a  
hysterectomy with my fucking fist.

ELI CANO -- Latin, 30's, rushes in. He is a cop. Muscular.  
Got some edge to him.

ELI  
What happened?

Paula quickly moves away, shaken.

PAULA  
I want her out of my house. Now!

Eli sees the broken vase. He takes Ashe by the arm, pulls her  
out the front door...

EXT. CANO HOME - CONTINUOUS

Eli pulls Ashe down the front steps. She jerks her arm out of  
his grasp. Pissed.

ELI  
What the hell, Ashe?

ASHE  
I told your bitch to back off.

ELI  
Don't call her that.

ASHE  
You kidding me? She's a child, Eli.  
Trying to play house. Kai has a  
mother. Remind her of that.

ELI  
By throwing a vase at her head?

Ashe takes a beat, then --

ASHE  
I flipped. I'm sorry.

ELI  
You need to see somebody. I'm  
serious.

ASHE  
I am. I will.

ELI  
You've been saying that for a year.  
I can't have this crazy shit.

ASHE  
You used to like crazy.

ELI  
Then we had a kid. It ain't  
healthy.

ASHE  
So you go get yourself wifey  
material? With the apron and dinner  
waiting for you when you get home?  
We both know you're bored as hell.

Ashe moves in closer.

ASHE (CONT'D)  
She know what you really like? How  
you like it?

Her words are having an effect on him. He doesn't move.

ASHE (CONT'D)

She know when you're inside her,  
I'm inside your head?

The front door suddenly opens. Paula stands there. Eli quickly steps back.

ELI

I gotta go check on my daughter.

He moves to the door. Ashe watches. Sudden sadness in her eyes.

ASHE

Tell her I'm gonna call tomorrow.

Eli closes the door. Ashe stands there. On the outside...

Daybreak crests over Washington DC...

INT. DULLES AIRPORT - TERMINAL - EARLY MORNING

The terminal is bustling, even at this early morning hour. Preston, in crisp jeans and a button-up, stands with his designer carry on, staring up at the TV tuned to CNN. The ANCHOR rolls through the top news stories.

ASHE (O.C.)

So you're their boy.

Preston turns. Ashe stands there. Beat up carry on in hand.

PRESTON

Excuse me?

ASHE

I'm Ashe. Akino. Your investigator.

Preston takes this in. Then, coolly --

PRESTON

Preston Terry. Your boss.

Ashe grins. Glances up at the TV.

ASHE

Story will hit local news first  
before national picks it up. And  
then only if there's video.

PRESTON

This is just the calm before the  
storm.

(MORE)

PRESTON (CONT'D)

We don't have the luxury of finding our footing. I need you to be tight and very good.

ASHE

Both boxes checked.

(then --)

And what's your steelo? How aggressive I go is up to you. I follow your lead.

PRESTON

Do your job the right way. By the book.

ASHE

Job the right way. Got it. Boss.

Preston looks back up at the TV. Ashe watches him.

INT. TENNESSEE AIRPORT - MORNING

The small regional airport is free from the chaos and crowds. A pretty, young White Woman stands near the exit. Lifts her eyes from her Blackberry. Smiles.

WOMAN

Preston Terry?

Preston and Ashe move toward the doors, pulling luggage.

PRESTON

Yes.

She reaches out a hand.

WOMAN

Hi, I'm Sarah Ellis. Aide to Governor Eamons. Welcome to Tennessee.

PRESTON

Thank you.

Sarah reaches out a hand to Ashe.

SARAH

Welcome.

ASHE

Ashe Akino.

PRESTON  
My investigator.

SARAH  
I'm sure you're eager to hit the ground running. The Governor was hoping to have a quick word with you.

PRESTON  
Of course.

He quickly straightens his collar.

INT. LIMO - SHORT TIME LATER

The limo sits parked at the red curb in front of the airport. GOVERNOR PATRICIA EAMONS -- White, early 50's, sits comfortably, cell phone at her ear, half-listening to the conversation on the other end. Preston and Ashe sit across from her.

GOVERNOR  
I wish you were here under better circumstances, but I do hope you'll get a feel for our southern hospitality.

Preston's voice takes on a slight Southern lilt --

PRESTON  
Born and raised in Virginia, ma'am.

GOVERNOR  
(approvingly --)  
A southern boy. Though y'all claim to be a Mid-Atlantic state now.

PRESTON  
(smiles --)  
Just the Northern Virginians.

She laughs. Ashe watches Preston with interest.

GOVERNOR  
Well, I want you to know I am fully behind this investigation. I have assurances from the department that you'll have their full cooperation.

PRESTON  
We appreciate that, ma'am.

GOVERNOR

I'm in the middle of a campaign and I'm not a fan of surprises, so I'd appreciate being kept up to speed. That said, I'm a busy woman, so if you need anything, just reach out to Sarah. She'll be more than accommodating.

Sarah hands Preston her card.

SARAH

I'll be at the hotel for the next few days.

GOVERNOR

I want to make sure I stay in front of this.

(smiles --)

Not that I expect White folks to start looting the local Cracker Barrel.

Sarah glances at Preston and Ashe. Preston smiles. Ashe does not.

EXT. SOUTH INGLEWOOD - MORNING

Pockets of White suburban wealth and confederate flags give way to a funhouse mirror reflection of blocks of abandoned buildings half-occupied. Holes puncture the street, buildings, and the souls of the Black people trapped here. A segregated powder keg just waiting for a match...

INT. MARRIOT HOTEL - PRESTON'S SUITE - LATE MORNING

TV is tuned to a local news report. The ANCHOR reports on last night's police shooting of JESSE CARR, a young college student, during a drug arrest. BENIGN VIDEO OF POLICE CARS AND POLICE TAPE.

Preston culls through the neat line of suits, pressed shirts, and ties now hanging in the closet. He pulls a couple of ties, matches them against the dress shirt he is wearing. His fly suit is his armor...

INT. MARRIOT HOTEL - ASHE'S ROOM - SAME TIME

A beat down suitcase sits open, still full up with clothes. Ashe sits on the bed with her Ipad, calling Kai on Facetime. It rings and rings. No answer. Ashe hangs up, disappointed...

INT. BELK HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATE MORNING

Single story home. Simply decorated. Furniture sets. Joshua Belk quickly pulls on his uniform, in a rush. His wife, KERRY -- 20's, sits on their unmade bed, watching. YOUNG KIDS splashing in a bath can be heard.

KERRY

What if it becomes a thing? Like all over the news?

BELK

This isn't like that. I didn't do anything wrong.

KERRY

You think that really matters?

BELK

I'm meeting with my union rep, they deal with this all the time. Its gonna be okay. We're gonna be okay.

KERRY

You sure?

BELK

Yeah. But if you don't get the kids ready to go in five minutes, I will be screwed.

Kerry smiles. Calls out to their kids...

EXT. SOUTH INGLEWOOD POLICE STATION - LATE MORNING

A row of police cars line the parking lot. Towering over them is a hulking military combat vehicle with SOUTH INGLEWOOD PD stenciled on the side...

INT. SOUTH INGLEWOOD POLICE STATION - SAME TIME

A large open room. A buzz of conversation and bullshit among the OFFICERS moving through. ALL ARE MALE. ALL ARE WHITE.

TWO COPS enter, pushing a cuffed BLACK MAN. An irate OLDER BLACK WOMAN follows. Screaming.

OLDER BLACK WOMAN

You better take those damn cuffs off! My baby didn't do anything.

COP

Your "baby" is twenty-five, and  
sold rock to an undercover. Now  
back up before I put your ass in a  
cell with him.

The Woman is pissed but shuts up. Preston and Ashe walk in.  
They get looks. Not hostile. Guarded. Curious.

SHERIFF DANIEL PLATT -- white, late 40's, stands with an  
OLDER MAN, white, late 60's. They share a joke. Laugh. The  
Older Man walks toward the doors. Gives a slap on the back of  
OFFICER CALEB BROOKS -- White, 30's, as he passes. Brooks  
forces a smile.

Sheriff Platt approaches.

PLATT

Can I help you?

PRESTON

I'm Preston Terry, attorney with  
DOJ Civil Rights.

PLATT

Should of known from the suit.  
We're strictly Men's Wearhouse down  
here.

PRESTON

This is my investigator, Ashe  
Akino.

Platt eyes her for a moment.

PLATT

How long were you on the Job?

ASHE

(small smile --)

Two years patrol, then got tapped  
by DEA. Worked Columbia and Mexico  
for six years.

Platt whistles, impressed.

PLATT

And you gave all that up for the  
cushy life.

ASHE

I like being my own boss.

Preston reacts.

PLATT  
So where do y'all want to start?  
Whatever you need.

PRESTON  
A conversation with Officer Belk.  
Then the crime scene.

PLATT  
(beat --)  
Not a crime scene 'til a crime's  
been determined.

Shit. A quick, reassuring smile.

PRESTON  
Absolutely right.

PLATT  
He's waiting for you in room two.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM 2 - SHORT TIME LATER

Belk sits in the hard plastic chair. Now tightly coiled.  
Preston and Ashe sit opposite him.

BELK  
I'm not talking without my union  
rep. Supposed to be here an hour  
ago.

PRESTON  
I've read your report. I just want  
to hear it from you.

Belk just stares back at him.

PRESTON (CONT'D)  
It's just a conversation.

Still nothing. Getting awkward real quick.

ASHE  
I've been where you're at.

Belk almost laughs at this.

ASHE (CONT'D)  
My second day on the streets, I'm  
out with my Training Officer. White  
dude. Routine traffic stop, only  
the kid in the passenger seat takes  
off running. So I give chase.

(MORE)

ASHE (CONT'D)

Catch him pretty quick but he starts fighting me. My T.O. just stands there watching, he wants to see if a girl can handle herself. I get the upper hand when suddenly the kid is reaching for something behind him. My T.O. is frozen, yells "Gun!" I pull out my piece and I shoot this kid in the chest. Only there's no gun...Seventeen years old.

Preston watches her as she talks. Seeing an unexpected side to her. Vulnerable.

ASHE (CONT'D)

But I told the truth. 'Least I have that.

BELK

You were cleared?

ASHE

Ruled justifiable. I reasonably feared for my life.

Belk takes this in, then --

BELK

It was a clean shoot.

ASHE

Tell me about it.

BELK

I'm on patrol. I see a White guy driving a new BMW. White guy in that neighborhood means drugs. So I hit my lights and pull him over. I approach the vehicle. Ask him a couple questions. Guy is belligerent. Refuses to answer. So I ask him to step out of the car. He refuses. So I put my hand on my weapon and ask him again. He finally complies, but as he climbs out he suddenly goes for my gun. Gets his hand on it. In that moment it was him or me. And I shot him.

PRESTON

Four times.

Ashe reacts to his tone.

BELK  
(beat, then --)  
Yes. Adrenaline I guess.

ASHE  
I know how it is.  
(then --)  
Was there anything substantiating  
your initial suspicions?

BELK  
I found a couple ounces of  
marijuana in my search of the  
vehicle.

PRESTON  
Was this search done before or  
after the shooting?

BELK  
After.

PRESTON  
You said "White guy in that  
neighborhood means drugs."

BELK  
Yes, sir.

PRESTON  
Was there a legitimate cause for  
the initial stop or was it all  
based on profiling?

Belk stares at him.

BELK  
I'm gonna wait for my rep now.

Ashe tightens in frustration.

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATE MORNING

Preston and Ashe walk toward the rental. Sheriff Platt steps  
outside.

PLATT  
You headed over?

PRESTON  
Yes.

PLATT

Let me get you an escort.

Before Preston can answer --

ASHE

We're good thanks.

PLATT

I'd feel a whole lot more comfortable. Pretty rough down there.

ASHE

Appreciate that. But its important we keep our investigation as independent as possible.

PLATT

Suit yourself.

INT. RENTAL CAR - SHORT TIME LATER

Ashe drives. Scans the local radio stations. Preston sits in the passenger seat.

ASHE

What's your music preference?

PRESTON

Depends on my mood.

ASHE

So what are you in the mood for?

PRESTON

Quiet.

Ashe turns off the radio.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

You got Belk to open up.

ASHE

That's my job.

PRESTON

You did it well.

ASHE

Wish I could say the same.

PRESTON

Excuse me?

ASHE

He's ready to give me his life story and you shut him down.

PRESTON

I don't do anything without a reason.

ASHE

Really? 'Cause it felt more like a rookie mistake.

PRESTON

Anything else?

ASHE

Yeah. I have more experience than you. That's why I'm here. So in the future, let me handle the interrogations.

PRESTON

I understand you like being your own boss, but that's not the case here. Like you said, you follow my lead.

ASHE

Wow. Only took you four hours to start swinging your dick. Most guys 'least wait a day.

PRESTON

I don't believe in wasting time.

ASHE

Neither do I. You're a smart brother. You've seen my file. So ask yourself, if I tell Carroll you don't know what the fuck you're doing, who goes and who stays?

They fall silent.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The dilapidated brick and broken cement lacks even a single tree. No sense of growth. Claustrophobic. Police tape circles the potential crime scene.

Preston and Ashe pull up. Climb out. Residents stop, take them in. Ashe ducks under the police tape, stares down at the blood that still stains the ground. She finally looks up. Moves in a slow circle as she takes in the environment around her. Preston watches her.

ASHE

No surveillance cameras. But someone saw something.

Ashe approaches a YOUNG WOMAN.

ASHE (CONT'D)

What's good, sis?

No response. A small crowd quickly forms.

ASHE (CONT'D)

Name is Ashe. I'm from the Department of Justice. Civil Rights Division. We're investigating the police shooting here yesterday. See anything?

YOUNG WOMAN

Nope.

ASHE

Know anybody who did?

YOUNG WOMAN

Yeah. The cop who shot him.

Laughter. A MAN, early 20's, steps up.

MAN

You looking for video?

ASHE

You got something?

MAN

Got the new "Star Wars." Not even out yet.

More laughter. Ashe smiles.

ASHE

Look, we're not police. We're investigating the police.

YOUNG WOMAN

You smell like police.

Preston notices a TEENAGER on a bike rocking a TITANS JERSEY. This is CORY -- Black, 17. Preston approaches. Takes on an edgier persona.

PRESTON  
You fuck with the Titans?

CORY  
That against the law?

Preston points at the jersey. NUMBER 44. TERRY ON THE BACK. THE SAME ONE THAT HANGS IN HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.

PRESTON  
My baby brother.

Cory looks at him.

CORY  
Whatever, man.

PRESTON  
Check it.

Preston pulls his cell phone, finds a photo of himself standing with a muscular brother with dreads. They favor each other. Cory stares at the photo, stunned. Others lean in for a look. Ashe watches.

CORY  
Mace is a beast. That's your fam  
for real?

Preston nods.

CORY (CONT'D)  
How come you're not in the league?

PRESTON  
Decided to change the world  
instead.

CORY  
Damn. You messed up.

Preston laughs. Cory cracks up, too. Ashe looks on, impressed by Preston's ability to connect.

PRESTON  
So what's this dude Belk like?

CORY

He's alright. Not like the white boys who roll through here knocking heads for nothing.

MAN

He's a sell out.

ASHE

You don't think the neighborhood could use Black cops?

MAN

Yeah. But he ain't hood no more. Moved to the suburbs. Wants to be one of them.

PRESTON

So what went down? Y'all saw something or heard something.

The crowd grows quiet again.

CORY

No one's got answers for you 'cause you're asking the wrong question.

PRESTON

So what's the right question --?

Just then, TWO POLICE CRUISERS turn down the street. They stop, sit idling. Watching. The crowd quickly scatters. Cory eyes them for a moment.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

Talk to us. We can protect you.

Cory laughs. He takes off. Ashe and Preston glance at each other, then down at the cruisers.

ASHE

They trying to intimidate them or us?

They stand there as the police cruisers slowly drive off.

EXT. CARR RESIDENCE - LATE DAY

Upper middle class neighborhood. The rental car is parked in front of a stately home...

INT. CARR RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - SAME TIME

A high school graduation photo of JESSE CARR. Boyish. Clean-cut. Smiling. A football. Poster of Kate Upton. Graphic novels. A banner from Middle Tennessee State. Greek letters.

ALICIA CARR -- White, mid-40's, stands at an ironing board, ironing a men's dress shirt. Preston and Ashe watch her.

ALICIA

The police have been here three times now asking me these same questions, meanwhile this man is still walking around free.

ASHE

I understand how you feel, ma'am --

ALICIA

No you don't. My son is dead.

Alicia catches their reaction.

ALICIA (CONT'D)

People seem put off by my anger. They're expecting something else.

ASHE

I'm sorry to ask you the same questions but we've taken over the investigation. So the police aren't investigating themselves.

Alicia quiets.

ASHE (CONT'D)

Do you know why your son was in that neighborhood?

ALICIA

I don't know. Good barbecue. Buying sneakers. There's a hundred reasons.

ASHE

What about drugs?

ALICIA

My son didn't do drugs.

ASHE

Did they tell you marijuana was found in his car?

ALICIA  
I don't care.

PRESTON  
The officer says he went for his  
gun.

ALICIA  
Jesse would never do that.

ASHE  
How do you know?

ALICIA  
Because I know my son. You can try  
to paint him as a criminal but that  
is not who he was. He was a great  
kid. He wanted to be in law  
enforcement. And he would hate this  
shirt. The funeral home said he  
should be in a suit, but all he has  
are T-shirts with comics on them.  
So I spent the entire morning  
shopping for this dress shirt he  
would never wear --

She chokes back a sob.

ALICIA (CONT'D)  
Jesus.

Ashe and Preston feel her anguish.

ASHE  
We're very sorry for your loss.

Alicia takes a deep breath. Anger restored.

ALICIA  
I didn't lose him. He was murdered.

INT. POLICE STATION - BREAK ROOM - LATE DAY

Belk fills his cup with coffee. Sees a plate of homemade  
cookies. Reaches for one.

VOICE (O.C.)  
Kitt's wife dropped those off.

Belk quickly pulls his hand back. Officer Brooks laughs.

CALEB  
Last ones tasted like shit and  
brown sugar.

BELK  
Someone needs to tell him.

CALEB  
He knows. He's too scared to tell  
her.

They laugh.

CALEB (CONT'D)  
You holding up?

BELK  
I'm alright.  
(beat, then --)  
It's tough.

CALEB  
It was him or you, right?

BELK  
Yeah.

CALEB  
Our job is to make it home to our  
families. No matter what.

Belk nods. Caleb crosses out.

INT. GAS STATION - LATE DAY

Outside the window, Ashe is at the rental car, pumping gas.

Preston stands in line, two bottles of water in hand. A WHITE  
GUY -- mid-20's, rocking sweats, steps up to the CLERK --  
White, 40's, to pay for his loaf of bread and cold cuts.

CLERK  
'That all, sir?

WHITE GUY  
Yeah.

CLERK  
Six-thirty-three.

WHITE GUY  
Oh shit.

The White Guy stares up at the television bolted above the counter. The Clerk turns to look. ON SCREEN, A LOCAL NEWSCAST PLAYS CELL PHONE FOOTAGE OF JESSE CARR LYING DEAD IN THE STREET. BELK AND OTHER OFFICERS STAND AROUND. Preston watches. White Guy pays, eyes on the TV. Preston steps up.

CLERK

That it, man?

PRESTON

Yes.

CLERK

Four-ninety.

Preston drops a five on the counter as CUSTOMERS wander to the front to watch the footage. Preston takes this in...

EXT. POLICE STATION - DUSK

Governor Eamons stands at a podium before LOCAL NEWS STATIONS, BEAT REPORTERS AND A SMALL CROWD. Preston, Sheriff Platt and Sarah stand behind her. Ashe listens from the side.

GOVERNOR

We support our law enforcement. I know that the majority are hard-working officers who risk their lives day in and day out. At the same time no one is above the law. A young college student has been killed. And when there are questions, I want answers. I personally reached out to the Department of Justice and asked for an outside prosecutor to ensure an impartial investigation into this matter, and Sheriff Platt has agreed. He, too, wants to make sure trust remains between law enforcement and the community --

A VOICE cuts through the crowd. The MAN is Black, 30's, well-groomed, rocks jeans, a fly hoodie and Tims. His name is KELVIN.

KELVIN

What trust?

The Governor smiles through the question.

GOVERNOR

I would like to introduce Preston Terry from the DOJ who will answer any questions. Thank you.

The Governor gives Preston a smile and a handshake. Preston steps up to the podium. Self-assured. Ashe watches him.

WHITE REPORTER

Is there any video of the shooting?  
Or any witnesses?

PRESTON

No video has surfaced. And no witnesses have come forward but its early in the investigation.

WHITE REPORTER

Can you confirm the officer's name is Joshua Belk?

PRESTON

We are not releasing his name at this time.

WHITE REPORTER

The public has a right to know.

PRESTON

Its department policy.

WHITE REPORTER

But he is Black.

PRESTON

I'm not at liberty to say.

WHITE REPORTER

We've all seen the cell phone footage. He's Black and the victim's White.

Kelvin speaks up again.

KELVIN

What I don't understand is why you're here? All the murdering of unarmed Black men in this country by police and this is the one the government is investigating?

WHITE REPORTER

So only black lives matter?

KELVIN

When is the last time you were pulled over by police and didn't know if you were gonna live through it?

PRESTON

Listen. As a prosecutor it is my job to ignore any personal biases and focus on the truth. But I will be honest with you. It can be tough. When I watched the recent video of Walter Scott murdered, shot in the back as he ran away from a child support payment, I was sickened. Sickened by the utter lack of humanity shown by the officer. And I was angry at the arrogance of his lie. He knew that there would be an assumption of innocence. Not because of blue. Because of White.

The crowd has grown quiet. Listens with rapt attention. Governor Eamons leans over to Sarah. Whispers --

GOVERNOR EAMONS

What is happening here?

But Sarah is listening, too.

PRESTON

Now, an anomaly has occurred. A Black police officer has shot and killed an unarmed White man. And they have sent in the calvary.

INT. CARR HOUSE - JESSE'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Alicia sits on her son's bed, watching the press conference on Jesse's TV...

PRESTON

(on TV --)

Is the calvary here to gain justice for the young White man, or to exonerate an innocent Black officer? We won't know until I have garnered all the facts of the case.

INT. BELK HOUSE - SAME TIME

Kerry Belk stands in the living room, watching the press conference as her TWO KIDS throw a football around her...

PRESTON

(on TV --)

But I am here because every citizen deserves a system that is fair and transparent. I am here because we are creating a generation of Americans who are quickly becoming disillusioned with the "racial progress" we like to tout. The fact that not one day into this case, it is about race.

INT. CORNER STORE - SAME TIME

A TV encased in a protective box plays above the counter encased in bullet proof glass. Cory stands with an ice tea and Skittles in hand, watching...

PRESTON

(on TV --)

But I am not disillusioned. I'm concerned, but not disillusioned. I am working this case as a prosecutor determining what happened that night between two men.

EXT. POLICE STATION - SAME TIME

PRESTON

And my success will be an example to all that we must see each other's humanity first. None of us will like the America we end up with if we don't all work harder to do that. That work begins today.

Crowd is mesmerized. Ashe stares at Preston, sees his genius for the first time. Sarah sees it, too. Preston steps from the podium. Kelvin approaches. Extends his hand.

KELVIN

Pastor Kelvin James.

A flash of surprise in Preston's eyes. Kelvin smiles.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

Yes, I'm a man of the cloth. My  
cloth just happens to be Sean John.  
(then --)  
Those were some powerful words.

PRESTON

I spoke from the heart.

KELVIN

I hope you're also here to listen.

PRESTON

Absolutely.

KELVIN

That's a lot harder to do.

Preston counters with charm.

PRESTON

Why do I feel a sermon coming on?

Kelvin laughs.

KELVIN

I'll save it for Sunday. Life  
Church. Ten a.m.

Kelvin crosses away. The Governor gives a smile and a wave to the cameras. As she turns away, her smile drops. She strides past Preston without a word. Sarah follows, then stops.

SARAH

You just made the rest of my day  
hell.

PRESTON

How is that?

SARAH

She worked all morning on that  
speech, and no one will remember a  
word of it.

(playful smile --)

You owe me for that.

Preston watches her walk away. Ashe catches it.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DUSK

Belk sits in the passenger seat of a Mercedes. In the driver's seat, his union rep, MICHAEL SASSER -- White, 40's.

BELK

How'd they get my name?

SASSER

If was never if, but when.

BELK

My wife says we've been getting calls from press. I need things to be normal. For my family.

SASSER

Your life is never going to be normal again Joshua. You need to understand that.

Belk reacts.

SASSER (CONT'D)

Under no circumstances do you talk to the media. And this prosecutor? You don't know his agenda. You don't talk to him without me. And you don't ever deviate from the language. "In the moment of engagement, I feared for my life."

BELK

I did.

SASSER

Good. The truth is easier to remember.

EXT. HOTEL - ASHE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ashe sits on the bed with her Ipad, dials Kai on Facetime. Phone rings, rings. Finally, Ashe hangs up, concerned...

INT. HOTEL - BAR - SHORT TIME LATER

Ashe walks in, heads for the bar. She is surprised to see Preston there. He drinks an orange juice, eyes on the TV. His press conference plays, intercut with the cell phone footage of Jesse on the ground. Ashe motions to the BARTENDER.

ASHE

I'll have what he's having.

Preston glances over.

PRESTON  
Its just orange juice.

ASHE  
So you just assume I'm a drinker?

PRESTON  
Educated guess.

ASHE  
I'm sort of offended.  
(then, to Bartender --)  
You can throw in some vodka.

A smile from Preston.

ASHE (CONT'D)  
Your speech surprised me today.

PRESTON  
You don't know me well enough to be surprised.

ASHE  
You're right. You and I need to find our rhythm. Right now we're just butting heads.

PRESTON  
You're the one banging. You judge too quickly.

ASHE  
I was police. It's what we do.

PRESTON  
You judged me too quickly. I'm not a sell out.

ASHE  
Did I call you one?

PRESTON  
You called me "their boy."

ASHE  
Fine. I apologize. I also thought you were gay. Sorry for that too, I guess.

PRESTON  
Why would you think that?

ASHE  
'Cause I got nothing from you when  
we first met.

PRESTON  
Maybe you're not my type.

ASHE  
(laughs --)  
I'm every guy's type.

PRESTON  
Wow.  
(then --)  
Anyway, I don't piss where I eat.

ASHE  
So what's your type?

PRESTON  
I'm waiting on my Michelle.

ASHE  
Obama?

Preston nods.

ASHE (CONT'D)  
She's dope. But why her?

PRESTON  
She's a woman who makes you seem  
like a better man.

Ashe takes this in. A little stung, but hides it well.

ASHE  
You couldn't handle me anyway.

Preston has to laugh. Then --

PRESTON  
The story you told Belk. Was that  
true?

A chink in Ashe's swagger. She takes a drink.

ASHE  
Yeah.

PRESTON  
How do you get over something like  
that?

Ashe shrugs.

ASHE

I know its gonna come back on me  
one day. Just don't want it coming  
back on my daughter.

PRESTON

How old is she?

ASHE

Six.

Ashe wants off this subject.

ASHE (CONT'D)

So your brother's one of the top  
backs in the NFL. That's kinda  
random.

PRESTON

I figured you already knew. Being  
such a good investigator.

ASHE

I know he's playing on Saturday.  
You taking me?

PRESTON

I told you. I don't piss where I  
eat.

She looks at him. Beat, then he cracks a smile. An unexpected  
spark. Preston rises up. Pulls a couple bills, drops them on  
the bar.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

I have this. You get the coffee  
tomorrow.

ASHE

You got it. Boss.  
(then --)  
You believe half the shit you said  
in your speech?

PRESTON

Half.

He crosses out. Ashe turns in her bar stool. A GUY eyes her.  
Starts to approach. Ashe shakes her head. He stops. Sits back  
down. Ashe drinks alone...

EXT. STREET - LATE NIGHT

Most of the street lamps are busted. And no one has bothered to get them fixed. The block is too hot, even at this late hour. YOUNG BROTHERS dot the corner. The occasional car stops briefly, then moves on. A GROUP OF TEENS ride bikes.

Preston pulls up in the rental. Climbs out. The suit is gone. He rocks Harvard sweats and a T-shirt. He glances around. The brothers on the corner eye him.

Cory rides a bike in slow, aimless circles.

PRESTON

Hey.

Cory tenses. Then recognizes him.

CORY

You lost?

PRESTON

I'm looking for you.

CORY

I don't talk to cops.

PRESTON

Already told you, I'm not a cop.

CORY

Look man, I got nothing to say.

PRESTON

I'm gonna see my brother this weekend. You want a signed football?

CORY

For real?

(then --)

You're straight bribing me.

PRESTON

You said I wasn't asking the right question. So what do I need to ask?

CORY

(beat, then --)

You need to go ask Miss Campbell.

PRESTON

Who's Miss Campbell?

CORY  
This lady in the Houses.

PRESTON  
What are the Houses?

Cory looks at him...

EXT. STREETS - SHORT TIME LATER

Cory pedals his bike down the deserted block. The rental car follows behind him. Cory stops in front of a jumble of battered apartment buildings called The Houses. The poverty is suffocating.

Preston pulls over. Climbs out. Looks at Cory.

CORY  
5D.

Then, he quickly pedals away. Preston stands by his car for a moment. Takes in the area. This block is fucked up. He hesitates, then starts for The Houses.

Suddenly, a fist connects with the side of his head and he drops. Preston struggles to find his bearings. Another shot to the face drops him again. He can't tell how many. Preston swings wildly, connects with something. He is rewarded with a vicious kick to his stomach. He drops again. And just as suddenly, they are gone. Preston struggles up, pulls open his car door, scrambles inside and locks the doors. He lays there. Shook...

INT. HOTEL - ASHE'S ROOM - MORNING

CNN plays on the TV. PUNDITS discuss the cell phone footage of Jesse Carr laying in the street. Ashe stands in the middle of the room, on her cell --

ASHE  
(into phone --)  
Eli, this is the third call Kai's missed from me. I don't know what the fuck's going on, but if your girl is behind this, swear to God I will beat the bitch out of her.

Ashe hangs up.

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - SHORT TIME LATER

Ashe punches a code on the keypad lock, pushes through the door, two coffees in hand...

INT. HOTEL - COMMAND - CONTINUOUS

The hotel room has been set up with computers and phones. A large bulletin board is mounted on the wall. Photos of Belk and Jesse are pinned at the top of it. Photos of the scene are up there as well.

Preston sits in front of the board. Staring. Below the photos of Belk and Jesse is a name, "Miss Campbell, 5D."

ASHE

Morning.

He turns. Gingerly. There is no mistaking the large bruise beneath his eye. He takes a coffee.

PRESTON

Thanks.

ASHE

What the hell? What happened?

PRESTON

I was sucker punched.

ASHE

By who?

PRESTON

I don't know. It happened so quick. I couldn't see anything. Or even how many.

ASHE

When was this?

PRESTON

Last night. Part of town called The Houses. I was following a lead.

ASHE

You what?

Preston has no intentions of repeating himself.

ASHE (CONT'D)

Why would you do that?

PRESTON  
I had an instinct.

ASHE  
You think I'm incapable of doing my  
job?

PRESTON  
No.

ASHE  
Then stop trying to do it for me. I  
do the investigating, you put the  
puzzle together. I can't keep  
chalking this shit up to you being  
brand-new.

PRESTON  
Look, I felt I made a connection  
with that kid with the jersey. I  
thought I could get some info if we  
talked one-on-one. But you're  
right. I should have talked to you  
about it.  
(small smile --)  
Let you get beat.

Ashe settles down.

ASHE  
You should see a doctor.

PRESTON  
Pride hurts more than my body. But  
thank you.

ASHE  
So what did he tell you?

PRESTON  
He told me to speak to a woman  
named Miss Campbell in 5D.

ASHE  
Which someone didn't want you to  
do.

PRESTON  
That is the conclusion I'm drawing.

Ashe rises.

ASHE  
Let's go find out what she knows.

PRESTON  
Curiosity almost got me killed.

ASHE  
I got a gun.

EXT. THE HOUSES - DAY

Ashe and Preston stand outside the car. Ashe looks around, takes in the environment. Cement and metal bars heighten the claustrophobia. ANGRY YOUNG MEN stand in clusters. LITTLE KIDS wander with too much freedom. They get looks. Some hostile, some could give a fuck. Preston is tight, but refuses to show it. They head inside...

INT. THE HOUSES - SHORT TIME LATER

The hallway is dimly lit. Sounds of reality TV ignorance bleed through the walls. Ashe knocks on the metal door of 5D.

VOICE (O.C.)  
Who is it?

ASHE  
We're from the Department of  
Justice. We're here to see Miss  
Campbell.

VOICE (O.C.)  
Department of Justice is with the  
government, right?

ASHE  
Yes, ma'am. We're investigating a  
shooting.

A long pause. Then the door slowly opens. A Black woman stands there, mid-40's. This is SHAMEEKA CAMPBELL.

INT. THE HOUSES - APARTMENT 5D - SHORT TIME LATER

The one bedroom apartment is cluttered but clean. Shameeka sits on her couch. Wears a visible melancholy. Ashe sits in a dining room chair across from her. Preston stands. TWO YOUNG KIDS sit at the kitchen table reading books.

SHAMEEKA  
(to Preston --)  
You're the one who was on TV.

PRESTON

Yes, ma'am.

SHAMEEKA

Sounded almost like a preacher.

PRESTON

I grew up in the church.

SHAMEEKA

Me too. But I don't go anymore.

ASHE

What do you know about the White kid who was just killed by the cop?

SHAMEEKA

The White kid?

Shameeka looks startled.

SHAMEEKA (CONT'D)

Why would I know anything about that?

ASHE

We were told to ask you the question.

SHAMEEKA

By who? I don't know why they said that.

ASHE

Do you know Officer Belk?

SHAMEEKA

I mean, I've seen him around, but I don't know him.

ASHE

What about the young man who was killed. Jesse Carr.

Shameeka stands.

SHAMEEKA

I'm sorry. I don't know anything.

Ashe and Preston share a frustrated glance. Then Ashe notices a FUNERAL PROGRAM IN FRONT OF A FRAMED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION PHOTO OF A YOUNG MAN. Ashe looks at it for a moment, then --

ASHE

When did you lose your son?

Shameeka freezes, then visibly deflates. She sinks back onto the couch.

SHAMEEKA

Thought that's why you were here.  
Should've known better.

ASHE

What do you mean?

SHAMEEKA

I can't talk about it.

ASHE

Who said that, your lawyer?

Shameeka almost laughs in disbelief. "What lawyer?"

ASHE (CONT'D)

The police?

Shameeka looks at them. Bingo.

ASHE (CONT'D)

Look, we're not police. Whatever  
you say, stays right here.

She hesitates.

PRESTON

Your son's death was never  
reported?

SHAMEEKA

Most of our kids don't make the  
news. Meanwhile this White boy is  
all over my TV.

ASHE

What did the police tell you?

SHAMEEKA

They knocked on my door and said  
they found Joey dead. No, sorry for  
your loss ma'am. No, are you okay,  
ma'am. They just said they needed  
to search his room. So they went  
through his things and found a bag  
of weed. Then another cop comes in  
and says I could go to jail for  
that, too.

(MORE)

SHAMEEKA (CONT'D)

They said I needed to be quiet while they do their investigation otherwise it could be obstruction and a judge will take away my kids.

ASHE

Have you heard any more about it?

SHAMEEKA

Nothing from police. But some people here are saying they had something to do with it.

ASHE

There were witnesses?

SHAMEEKA

Yeah. Just not the right kind.

INT. RENTAL CAR - SHORT TIME LATER

Ashe drives. Preston rolls in the passenger seat.

ASHE

Guess we figured out the right question.

PRESTON

Nothing she said has anything to do with our case.

ASHE

It has everything to do with it. The department is obviously corrupt.

PRESTON

Just because someone told her the police were involved doesn't make it fact.

ASHE

But a cop telling her to keep her mouth shut or they'll take her kids? If that's not a civil rights violation I don't know what is. We have to dig.

PRESTON

Look, I understand your instinct, but that's not why we're here.

Ashe looks at him.

ASHE  
I don't think you do.

PRESTON  
What?

ASHE  
Share my instincts. Cause I'm real  
fucking uncomfortable right now.

PRESTON  
Belk is the only brother in the  
department, in a city that's sixty-  
five percent Black. I'm  
uncomfortable. But we have to work  
the case we've been assigned. We do  
a great job, we have the leverage  
to open it up.

ASHE  
You can do that? Just forget what  
we just heard?

PRESTON  
I'm not telling you to forget. I'm  
asking you to be patient. Can you  
do that?

Long beat, then --

ASHE  
Sure.

INT. CORONOR'S OFFICE - LATE DAY

Preston stands next to Jesse's body. Shifts uncomfortably.  
The CORONOR runs through his findings.

CORONOR  
Four shots at close range. Two in  
the chest. One in the abdomen. One  
in the right hand. No other  
bruising or scratches. Cause of  
death, ballistic trauma.

PRESTON  
How close?

CORONOR  
Two to three feet.

PRESTON  
Angle?

CORONOR  
Slightly downward.

PRESTON  
How tall is he?

CORONOR  
Five ten. Belk is about six one. So  
both were standing.

PRESTON  
Fits with his story.

CORONOR  
(nods --)  
Autopsies don't lie.

Preston stares at Jesse. There is a youthfulness, innocence,  
in his face. Preston feels the sadness, finality, of death...

EXT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - PARKING LOT - DUSK

Ashe leans against the rental as FOUR OFFICERS head for their  
cars.

ASHE  
Y'all headed for choir practice?

They stop. Glance at each other.

OFFICER  
What do you know about choir  
practice?

ASHE  
I know I'm buying.

INT. BAR - DUSK

A nondescript spot full up with off-duty cops. War stories  
and hard laughter fly around like bullets. Ashe sits with  
THREE INGLEWOOD COPS at a table. They are three drinks into  
the raucous conversation.

ASHE  
...The informant knows he's fucked.  
He just tried to double cross the  
cartel by selling to us. But he's  
still refusing to talk. He tells me  
to shoot him, cause he's already  
dead. He's cursing at me, trying to  
piss me off.

(MORE)

ASHE (CONT'D)

So I tell him, "Look, I can't shoot you in the head, its against US policy but what I can do is shoot your nuts off." Suddenly I can't shut him up.

The cops crack up.

ASHE (CONT'D)

Nothing was as crazy as working the cartels.

Officer Brooks leans in.

BROOKS

Now you're working cops.

ASHE

Nah, I'm not rat squad. I'm not putting you in the box for a conversation. Hell I can ask you right now. What did you think when you came onto the scene?

Brooks glances at the others, then --

BROOKS

First thought was the crowd. Making sure we secure the area.

ASHE

You were the first one to talk with Belk. What did he say?

BROOKS

Said the kid went for his firearm. There was a struggle, and that he shot him.

ASHE

Do you believe him?

BROOKS

He's a good cop.

ASHE

What makes a good cop?

BROOKS

Guy who can handle himself. Protect his fellow officers.

ASHE  
 (nods --)  
 See, easy.

She takes a drink. Hesitates, then --

ASHE (CONT'D)  
 So what's the deal with the Houses?

BROOKS  
 What about them?

ASHE  
 I keep hearing its as bad as  
 Cabrini in Chicago.

BROOKS  
 Well, I personally never ran any  
 tours there --

He is suddenly jostled by OFFICER BREELAND -- white, late  
 30's. Its subtle but Ashe picks up on it. Brooks shuts up.

ASHE  
 Tours?

BREELAND  
 Just a stupid thing. Like a tour of  
 duty. Its rough.

VOICE (O.C.)  
 Ashe Akino?

Ashe glances up. A MAN in a suit stands there.

ASHE  
 Yes?

He hands her an envelope.

MAN  
 You've been served.

He quickly crosses out. Ashe stares at it confused. The cops  
 look at her.

BROOKS  
 Maybe its from the dude you shot in  
 the nuts?

They crack up.

INT. RENTAL CAR - SHORT TIME LATER

The car idles in the bar parking lot. Ashe sits there. Legal papers opened on her lap. She stares at them in devastated disbelief. Her cell phone is next to her, ON SPEAKER.

ASHE

I don't understand.

ELI (O.C.)

You need me to play back that voicemail?

Ashe doesn't respond.

ELI (O.C.) (CONT'D)

I keep making excuses for you, Ashe, but I can't anymore. I don't think you're okay.

(beat --)

I don't trust you.

ASHE

I would never hurt Kai. I'll get help. I promise.

ELI (O.C.)

Look, we can't talk about this anymore. You gotta talk to my lawyer.

ASHE

Eli, she's the only thing that makes sense.

Its quiet for a moment, then --

ELI (O.C.)

She matters to me, too.

He hangs up. Ashe breaks...

INT. TENNESSEE TITANS STADIUM - DAY

Seventy thousand strong. Cheering the gladiators on the field. MACEO TERRY, running back for the Titans, is having a monster game. A beast on the field. Demonstrative, bad-ass.

Preston and Ashe sit on the fifty yard line. Preston moves as his brother moves, seemingly connected, fully engaged. But he doesn't cheer. Ashe is quiet...

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Preston, Ashe and Maceo sit in VIP. Champagne bottles are on the table. Maceo rocks an expensive suit. Fills it out with swagger and playfulness. Ashe is on edge. Not shy about drinking. Preston sips on the free water.

MACEO

You're too pretty to be a cop.

ASHE

You're too pretty to play ball.

Maceo laughs. Preston leans back, uneasy with the flirtatious undertones.

MACEO

So what, you dig cuffing brothers?

ASHE

I dig cuffing bad guys. They come in all shades.

MACEO

Why?

ASHE

Cause I'm good at it.

MACEO

What makes you good?

Ashe eyes him. He is sincere. Preston is curious, too.

ASHE

'Cause I respect them. I understand how easy it can happen, going down that other path. I know the mind-set, but my moral compass is stronger.

Preston takes this in.

ASHE (CONT'D)

I'm sure you prep school Negroes have a different mind set.

MACEO

Nah. Press went to prep schools. I'm a hood cat.

PRESTON

You love to wear that like its a badge.

MACEO

Hell yeah. I fought for everything I got. Nothing was handed to me.

PRESTON

Wasn't a cake walk for me. Trust me, you had it easier.

MACEO

You know where this dude spent his summers in high school? The Alps. His best friend's daddy was a billionaire. I was lucky if I got a popsicle.

ASHE

How come you didn't go to private schools, too?

MACEO

Press got the brains. I got the brawn. But its all good. Our parents are living in a house I paid for.

PRESTON

Are you really going there?

MACEO

(shrugs --)  
I'm just saying...

Preston leans back. Tries to let that shit go. Then --

PRESTON

What's your shelf life, Mace? Five years? I'll be running Justice by then. And just getting started.

MACEO

Yeah, saw you on TV. How is it you always ending up playing for the wrong team?

PRESTON

Funny how Black folks on the sidelines are always the ones questioning loyalties.

MACEO

I've never been on the sideline.

PRESTON

Tweeting Black Lives Matter to your million followers makes you Jackie Robinson?

MACEO

At least folks know what side I'm on.

Ashe breaks it up with a laugh.

ASHE

Damn. Always thought I missed out being an only child but I guess not.

Maceo smiles.

MACEO

Nah, we go, but its all love. Right big bro?

Preston nods.

PRESTON

All love.

He rises up, turns to Ashe.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

We've got work to do.

ASHE

What? We just ordered. I'm not walking away from this fifty dollar steak.

Preston takes this in. Then shrugs.

PRESTON

I got it. Don't worry about it.

MACEO

I'll get her home.

Maceo smirks as Preston crosses out...

EXT. RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Preston strides to the rental, pissed. Hates the way his brother makes him feel. He stands there, wanting to punch something. Instead, he takes a breath, loosens his tie...

EXT. STREETS - LATE NIGHT

A chauffeured SUV rolls though the quiet streets...

INT. SUV - SAME TIME

Maceo eyes Ashe across from him. She eyes him back. Chemistry is crazy.

MACEO

You know he thinks we're fucking right now.

ASHE

So why aren't we?

MACEO

Cause if we do I won't respect you. And I think I like you.

ASHE

Maybe I don't wanna be liked right now.

Maceo smiles. Fights the temptation.

MACEO

You sexy as hell, sis. You also got the saddest eyes I ever seen. I don't know, maybe that's why I'm digging you.

Ashe takes this in.

ASHE

I appreciate the sentiment. But you're sounding like a bitch right now and that shit ain't sexy to me.

He is caught off guard. He laughs. Then ego kicks in. He pulls her to him. She pushes him back, straddles him. Kisses him. Takes control as they hit it. It is aggressive and hungry as Ashe struggles to feel something...

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT

Preston knocks on a door. Door opens. Sarah stands there.

SARAH

I was surprised to get your text.

Preston holds up a bottle of wine.

PRESTON  
You said I owe you.

Sarah ducks her head, shyly...

INT. HOTEL - SARAH'S ROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

Preston and Sarah sit on the couch. The bottle of wine is open on the coffee table.

SARAH  
It was politics or law school. I knew I wanted to make a difference in the world, but I also needed to make enough money to buy nice shoes.  
(laughs --)  
Shallow, I know, but its my one thing.

PRESTON  
I noticed your shoes at the airport.

SARAH  
No you didn't.

PRESTON  
Balenciagas.

SARAH  
Oh shit.

PRESTON  
I like nice things, too.

They share a smile.

SARAH  
Anyway, some people are made for the spotlight, like the Governor. I think I'm good behind the scenes. Making things happen.  
(then --)  
You were definitely born for the spotlight. You're special.

Preston smiles. She shakes her head, embarrassed.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
That was the wine talking.

She looks at their wine glasses. Hers is empty. His is full.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
I'm the only one drinking. Why  
aren't you drinking?

PRESTON  
I like to be in control.

They eye each other. A thirst fills the room.

PRESTON (CONT'D)  
What else is the wine saying?

Beat, then Sarah gets up, walks to him. She kisses him. He  
kisses her back. They are feeling each other. It is playful,  
curious. No romance. Just sex...

INT. HOTEL - ASHE'S ROOM - LATE NIGHT

The room is dark. Ashe sits on the floor, knees pulled up,  
arms wrapped around her head. Her gun is in her hand,  
comfortable and warm...

INT. HOTEL - SARAH'S ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Preston lays on the couch. Shirt unbuttoned. His eyes slowly  
open to the sound of Sarah arguing. He rises up, buckles his  
belt. Sarah paces into the room, cell phone at her ear.

SARAH  
(into phone --)  
This is bullshit, Dana. This is not  
how things work...  
(listens --)  
I don't give a shit about a heads  
up. That's too late. You're going  
to get me fired...  
(listens --)  
When is it running?

Beat, then she slams down her phone, quickly picks up her  
remote. Turns on the TV. Switches to a local channel.

PRESTON  
What's going on?

SARAH  
A video just hit.

PRESTON  
Of what?

He stares at the TV. ON SCREEN, grainy video of a family bbq. A "Congratulations" banner hangs crookedly between two trees. Black folks mill around drinking, laughing. Celebratory atmosphere. Camera finds Belk. Beer in hand. He is younger.

VOICE (O.C.)

A'ight fam, you just graduated from the Academy. Grown-ass man now. Any last words?

Belk holds up his badge. Smirks.

BELK

(on camera --)

Yeah, just got my license to shoot these crackers.

Family members laugh...

EXT. STREETS - MORNING

A long caravan of news vans snake their way into town. CNN, Fox News, MSNBC...

EXT. BELK HOUSE - MORNING

Simple one story, two bedroom. Middle-class neighborhood. The house is surrounded by NEWS CAMERAS. Shades are drawn. A police cruiser sits out front...

INT. BELK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Sheriff Platt sits on the couch as Belk quickly dumps the take out containers from last night.

BELK

I was drunk. Just popping off at the mouth. That's not how I really feel, sir.

PLATT

Hell I've said things sober that could get me fired. Nobody here is taking offense.

His wife Kerry hands Platt a glass of orange juice.

PLATT (CONT'D)

Thanks, Kerry.

She forces a smile, retreats to the doorway.

BELK  
What about the guys?

PLATT  
There's a box of saltines on your  
desk with a bow on it.

Belk smiles. Relieved.

PLATT (CONT'D)  
Unfortunately the media's not so  
forgiving.

BELK  
I can handle it.

PLATT  
I know you can. But I think its  
best you to take some time off 'til  
these DOJ folks finish their  
investigation.

BELK  
What?

Just then, CHRISTIAN BELK -- 5, runs in rocking a superhero  
cape and underwear. He dives on his dad.

BELK (CONT'D)  
(tight --)  
Hey son, not right now.

He looks over at Kerry, shoots her a look. Kerry quickly  
takes a hold of him.

KERRY  
I think you're missing some pants  
little man.

He giggles, wriggles away from her. Platt waits patiently.  
Belk is dying. Finally she corrals Christian out of the room.

PLATT  
Look. This is not a suspension. No  
one's saying you did anything  
wrong. But its gonna be a  
distraction and its gonna be  
impossible for you to do your job.

BELK  
I'll make a statement. Let people  
hear from me.

PLATT

Josh, you're turning into the story. Keep a low profile, keep your mouth shut and let this blow over. Trust me.

Belk is unsure. He is also in no position to argue.

BELK

Yes, sir.

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Preston strides down the hallway. In the clothes he was in last night. Ashe leans in her doorway.

ASHE

Morning.

PRESTON

Have you seen the video?

ASHE

Not a good look.

PRESTON

I've been in touch with the Governor's office. They want to know who leaked it.

ASHE

Me too.

He nods, starts to walk away. She hesitates, then --

ASHE (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a lawyer question?  
About another case?

Preston turns.

ASHE (CONT'D)

What are the grounds for sole custody?

PRESTON

For which parent?

ASHE

Does it matter?

PRESTON

In some cases.

ASHE

The father.

PRESTON

Proof the mother is unfit. Drugs, alcohol. Abuse. A threat to the safety of the child. A pattern of unaccountability.

Ashe takes this in.

ASHE

Thanks.

PRESTON

You know, it didn't mean anything to him.

Ashe eyes him, then smirks.

ASHE

Didn't mean anything to me either.  
(then --)  
Go finish your walk of shame. We got church.

INT. BELK HOUSE - LATE MORNING

Belk sits at his kitchen table. Pastor Kelvin sits next to him. His wife Kerry stands in the doorway.

BELK

I'm a good cop.

KELVIN

Yes. But that video says otherwise. Perception is reality. You need to change perception. Come to church. Make a statement in God's house. I'll stand with you.

Belk looks at him.

BELK

I'm not making any statements.

KELVIN

The media is a powerful thing Joshua. They can make the guilty innocent and the innocent guilty.

BELK

And an unknown pastor a star.

Pastor Kelvin looks at him. He smiles.

KELVIN  
You're under duress.

BELK  
My mind couldn't be any more clear.

The line in the sand has been drawn. Pastor Kelvin already knows his next move.

KELVIN  
Alright then. So be it, brother.

He crosses out. Belk doesn't move. Kerry looks at him.

KERRY  
You promised we would be okay.

Belk doesn't know how to respond.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Pews are packed with a youthful crowd. Some come in their Sunday best, others in casual clothing. They come here for the Word, from a preacher who looks and sounds like them. Media hover, promised a story. Preston and Ashe sit in the back.

Pastor Kelvin stalks the stage in a button shirt, jeans and Tims. He is at the peak of his sermon.

KELVIN  
Black America has been in a state of mourning for too long -- for Trayvon Martin, for Michael Brown, for Eric Garner, for Tamir Rice, for Walter Scott, for Freddie Gray, for Laquan McDonald, and for so many others. And still, White America can't fathom our reality. Even with the recent videos, they need explanations. Mike Brown just stole a pack of cigars. Trayvon Martin had traces of weed in his system. Walter Scott was running from a delinquent child support payment. Not one of those crimes carries the death penalty. But the police have weaponized our blackness. In their eyes, we are never unarmed. And now we add another name. Joey Campbell.

Preston and Ashe react.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

Seventeen years old. Killed two weeks ago. We heard about it. In the way its always been. Through whispers. The world doesn't know because the police aren't investigating. But the world is gonna know. I'm bringing out someone who needs our support. Shameeka Campbell. His mother.

Shameeka walks out. Tentative. Crying. The church gives her praise. Pastor Kelvin embraces her.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

Family. We know what its like to lose someone to the police. We also know that two wrongs don't make a right. Every parent wants their child home. So I'm bringing out another mother who needs our support.

Pastor Kelvin motions to the side. Beat, then Alicia Carr walks out. The crowd is stunned silent for a moment.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

This mother loved her child no less than anyone else. I know, its easy to think she doesn't have any real problems. She's White. But trust me. White skin does not protect you from heartache. It does not keep you from asking God to bring your baby back.

Pastor Kelvin takes Shameeka's hand and Alicia's hand.

KELVIN (CONT'D)

Family. Let's be united. Let's hold our corrupt law enforcement accountable. Let's get both these murdered children the justice they deserve.

Preston watches as a few tentative hands from the congregation reach out to the two mothers in fellowship. Alicia and Shameeka turn to each other, a shared grief only they can understand. They reach for each other, hold each other tightly. The church ERUPTS in praise. And with Pastor Kelvin, a star is born. NEWS CAMERAS RECORD THE SPECTACLE...

INT. BATTING CAGES - LATE DAY

Preston pushes earphones into his ears. Kanye West's "Black Skinhead" blasts. Press grabs a bat, hits "start" on the pitching machine. Fastballs come at him, eighty miles an hour. Crack! Crack! Crack! With each hit, we INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BELK HOUSE - GARAGE - SAME TIME

The 24 hour news cycle bleeds through the walls. Belk sits in his car, a seeming respite from the noise. He pulls something out of his glove compartment, stares at it. It is the FUNERAL PROGRAM FOR JOEY CAMPBELL...

INT. FUNERAL HOME - SAME TIME

A FUNERAL DIRECTOR carefully dresses Jesse's corpse in a Deadpool T-shirt and suit jacket...

EXT. STREET - SAME TIME

Three cars drive slowly down the block, stop at the police tape. Beat, then the doors open and TWELVE YOUNG WHITE MEN IN FRATERNITY SWEATSHIRTS climb out. They glance around, some nervously, then walk to the spot where Jesse's blood still stains. They put down candles, flowers, and photos. A small crowd of residents watch them silently...

INT. HOTEL - COMMAND - SAME TIME

Ashe pins something on the bulletin board, then steps back to reveal the word "TOURS" by a photo of The Houses...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Preston, shirtless, stares into the mirror, at the vicious bruises on his face and torso...

INT. BATTING CAGES - LATE DAY

Preston pounds the balls. He is tired but doesn't relent. His eyes are focused. Cold. A cleaner...

## INT. HOTEL - ASHE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Two dozen sunflowers sit on her desk. Ashe stares at the card, "Hope these brighten those pretty eyes of yours." Suddenly, her Ipad rings. Ashe picks up. Kai's face appears. Ashe's heart bursts.

KAI

Mommy!

ASHE

Hey, Boogs.

KAI

How come you didn't call? And how come you didn't say goodbye?

ASHE

I'm sorry about that.

KAI

But we didn't do our secret handshake. It keeps you safe.

ASHE

You're right. Let's do it now.

Kai turns to someone off camera --

KAI

Close your eyes Daddy.  
(back to Ashe --)

K.

Ashe and Kai do an elaborate handshake that ends with three kisses. Ashe smiles, fights her tears...

## EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Worn sneakers pound the pedals of a street bike. Cory glances behind him. His eyes mirror his panic. Behind him, an old beater guns its powerful engine. Cory pedals furiously, jumps the curb, heads into an abandoned lot. The beater follows, spits dirt as it skids.

Cory leaps off his bike and disappears into the maze of The Houses. The car slams to a stop and THREE FIGURES jump out, sprint after him.

Cory runs, chest burning, eyes desperately searching. Life or death. Sees a small hole in the base of a brick structure. Wiggles through. Pulls his knees up. Tears in his eyes. Tries to quiet his breathing. Hunted...