

UNTITLED LEE DANIELS MUSIC
PROJECT

by

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PRODUCTION -- REVISION

ACT ONE

OVER BLACK we hear "I CAN BE," a SOULFUL, JOYOUS GROOVE. It continues as we FADE UP.

1 EXT. FOSTER CARE CENTER -- PITTSBURG -- DAY 1

A brick building in a depressed part of town. Trash blows in the street. Graffiti tags buildings. **PEOPLE** s cuttle by.

In the middle of this, sitting on steps, shines **STAR**. Almost 18, white, stunning but, well... trash. She's dragging on a cigarette, a duffel at her side, listening to the **MUSIC** we've been hearing. Which comes from her **iPHONE**. She smiles at it.

STAR

I'm living for this, Alex.

A **GIRL'S FACE** smiles back on FaceTime. This is **ALEXANDRA**, 20, black, elegant -- a classic beauty exuding refinement.

ALEXANDRA

Still working on the lyrics, but I added your vocal at the end.

STAR

It's good, girl. It's really good.

ALEXANDRA

You think so?

STAR

I know so. It's fucking bad ass.

We hear a hint of Star singing to the music. It's heart-stopping. WE INTERCUT:

2 INT. BEDROOM -- UPPER EAST SIDE TOWNHOUSE -- DAY 2

Alexandra sprawls across her massive bed, FaceTiming with Star, but careful to frame out her glamorous surroundings.

ALEXANDRA

You should come to New York, Star.

STAR

(scanning the sad street)
Right, like me coming to New York is gonna happen anytime soon.

(CONTINUED)

ALEXANDRA

Well this video chat thing is getting tired. We gotta hit a studio and lay some tracks.

STAR

Studios cost money!

ALEXANDRA

Trust, girl, I have my ways.

STAR

You're right. We gotta at least be in the same city if we're gunna take it to the next level.

(looks at the building)

Gotta bounce. And deal with this system.

Star disconnects, moves into the building. END INTERCUT.

INT. FOSTER CARE CENTER -- DOWNTOWN PITTSBURG -- DAY

Star sits across from a bored, very thin **FEMALE COUNSELOR**. (30's) She reads from Star's file in a monotone voice.

COUNSELOR

Star. You've been through six foster families in the last two years alone. You steal. You're a habitual liar. You have no regard for curfews or rules in general. You called your last foster mother a "sad old blood clot that refuses to die."

Star tries not to laugh. A **MALE CLERK** (20) enters to collect mail.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

You set fire to a kiddie pool?

STAR

That was just one time.

The Sexy Clerk winks at Star. Star winks back seductively.

COUNSELOR

You clearly think you're better than everyone.

STAR

Not everyone. Just stupid bitches
like you.

The Clerk stifles a LAUGH. The Counselor SIGHS.

COUNSELOR

We're here to help you, Star.

STAR

Help me? Okay, then tell me where
my sister is.

COUNSELOR

I don't have that information.

STAR

Now who's the liar?

(then)

I'm sick of playing these games.
It's been five years. Where's my
damn sister?

The Clerk nods toward a FILE CABINET. Star's eyes fix on it.

COUNSELOR

Let me tell you something, Star.
Girls who can't adjust end up in a
bad way. You should know that. You
want to end up on the street? You
want to end up addicted?

(then)

Do you really want to end up like
your Mother?

STAR

DON'T TALK ABOUT MY MOTHER!

COUNSELOR

You fixin to make me call security?

STAR

I'm not gonna end up like her...
I'm gunna be *famous!*

COUNSELOR

(incredulous)

Famous?

STAR

Yes! For my music. What's inside
me.

(CONTINUED)

4.
3

3 CONTINUED: (2)

Clerk's hand hovers over a FIRE ALARM. Star nods at him. He pulls the alarm, ducks out. ALARM BLARES. Counselor heads out. Star races to the FILE CABINET. Finds a file labelled "SIMONE WILLIAMS." With an address in HARRISBURG, PA.

4 INT. BUS STATION -- TICKET COUNTER -- DAY 4

Star hands cash to a **CASHIER**.

STAR
One ticket to Harrisburg.

CASHIER
Round trip?

STAR
Hell no! Next time you see this face? It's gonna be on the cover of VANITY FAIR!

We begin the music to the song "*Cloud Nine*."

5 INT. GREYHOUND BUS -- MOVING -- DAY 5

Star sits with a bunch of **HOMELY LOOKING BUS RIDERS**. HER SISTER'S FILE is open on her lap. Inside is a PACK OF LETTERS. All unopened. All with the return address of MISS CARLOTTA BROWN IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA. Star opens one, curious. As she starts to read, she looks more and more intrigued.

A6 EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS -- HARRISBURG, PA. -- DAY A6

Star, lugging her duffel bag, walks along the tracks.

6 EXT. BUSTED HOUSE -- HARRISBURG, PA. 6

Star arrives in front of it. She steels herself, heads in.

7 INT. SAME -- CONTINUOUS 7

A disaster area. A random COCKATOO flies around TALKING.

STAR
Hello..? Simone?

The cockatoo replies "SIMONE!" Star hears a NOISE UPSTAIRS.

8 INT. UPSTAIRS BACK BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS 8

Star steps in. Freezes at what she sees: her sister **SIMONE** (16). But just a glimpse of HER TERRIFIED EYES. **HER FOSTER FATHER** (30s, muscled) holds her down, undoing his pants. Star blinks. The room transforms into --

9 INT. ND FANTASY SPACE 9

A SPOTLIGHT appears. It lands on STAR. She starts singing to the music. The SPOTLIGHT WIDENS. We now see ALEXANDRA. The girl that Star was FaceTiming with earlier. Harmonizing at Star's side. The LIGHT WIDENS FURTHER, hitting Simone, whom we now see clearly. She's 16, half-black, looking like the love child of Halle Berry and Marilyn Monroe.

They're all draped in pink Chanel, beaming with joy, reaching for each others hands. The CROWD in front of them goes wild.

10 INT. BUSTED HOUSE -- BEDROOM 10

Star blinks again. Her hand is raised over her head. In it: a KNIFE. There's BLOOD EVERYWHERE. And the source of it...a STAB WOUND in Simone's Foster Father's back. Simone pushes him off her, looks up at Star, terrified.

STAR

It's me. I told you I'd come back.

Simone recognizes her older sister, and breaks down, sobbing.

STAR (CONT'D)

I'm here baby. I'm here.

(looking at the body)

Get a shower, get your stuff. Now!

Simone runs out. Star grabs CAR KEYS and CASH from a dresser, pulls cash from the man's pockets, then dashes out.

11 OMIT 11

12 INT. OLD CHEVY -- DRIVING ON HIGHWAY -- SUNSET 12

Star drives a stolen '97 BLUE CHEVY; Simone rides shotgun, smoking weed, buzzed.

STAR

You're a little young for that,
dontcha think?

(off Simone's silence)

We're together. And this time
nobody's separating us.

SIMONE

But you killed him.

STAR

(blocking that out)

How long has he been doing that to
you?

(CONTINUED)

From Simone's look, a long time. They both look away ashamed.

SIMONE

What if they come looking for us?

STAR

They won't! Just put it out of your head.

Simone nods. Star HURLS her phone out the window.

STAR (CONT'D)

And we're not going to tell anybody what happened. From now on we focus on our dream. You still sing?

SIMONE

(smiles for first time)

Yeah. I still sing.

(remembering...)

We're gone be famous. Do you still sing?

STAR

(singing)

"Say my name, Say my name."

SIMONE

(laughs)

You crazy. How we gonna get famous, fool?

STAR

I gotta a plan. We start in Atlanta. The music scene there is rancid.

Simone stubs her blunt out. She's getting excited.

SIMONE

Where we gone live?

STAR

This lady Carlotta's there. She's been writing letters to social services sayin' she's our godmother.

(then)

Might be the only family we got.

Simone's eyes plead; this means more than anything.

13 EXT. HIGHWAY REST STOP -- NIGHT

13

The Old Chevy is parked. Simone sleeps in the passenger seat. Star is at the rear bumper. Unscrewing the license plate with the car key, while making a call on a burner phone.

ALEXANDRA'S VOICE
(picking up on other end)
Hello?

STAR
It's me! I left Pittsburg. Long story, but I gotta track phone now. I only paid for a few minutes, so I gotta be quick. I'm with my sister and we might have a place to crash in Atlanta. You in?

ALEXANDRA'S VOICE
Atlanta? And since when do you have a sister?

STAR
Explain later. You in or what?

14 INT. FOYER -- UPPER EAST SIDE TOWNHOUSE -- NIGHT

14

Alexandra puts Star on MUTE as **HER FATHER** (40s, black, swag, handsome -- but with a ton of face work) marches toward her past a wall of GOLD RECORDS.

ALEXANDRA'S FATHER
Get off that damn phone. Do you know how many girls your age would kill to sing back up for me?

ALEXANDRA
You gotta be kidding me.
(then)
You keep not getting it! I need to make stuff that feeds my soul, Dad!

ALEXANDRA'S FATHER
And my music doesn't do that?

ALEXANDRA
My soul! Not yours! When's the last time you even felt something when you sang your songs?

(CONTINUED)

ALEXANDRA'S FATHER

You talentless little bitch. You sound just like your mother. I'm a legend. A legend!

Alexandra's been punched in the stomach, can barely reply.

ALEXANDRA

Would you listen to yourself?
(then, pained)
You're suffocating me.

STAR'S VOICE

...Alexandra, you there? Say yes, girl. Come on...

Off Alexandra, looking trapped, as she considers the offer --

Simone, wide awake now, watches Star return to the car.

SIMONE

It took five years for your ass to show up.

STAR

Yeah well.
(then)
I tried. Every time I ran away, I was running for you. But no one would help me.

SIMONE

So I'm supposed to just follow you anywhere now?

STAR

Yes. I'm back and we gotta stick together. Be strong. Prove to the haters they don't know nothing. I'm somebody. You're somebody too.

Simone doesn't look so sure about this.

SIMONE

I miss Momma.

STAR

Let's get some sleep.

16 EXT. UPPER EAST SIDE -- STREET -- DAY 16

Next morning. The old Chevy is parked in front of a row of STATELY TOWNHOUSES. Star leans against the trunk, waiting. Finally, Alexandra appears in Manolo Blahnik heels, a vintage Lanvin top, and clothes stuffed in a Birkin bag.

STAR

Damn, you straight from a page of Vogue. But you shorter than I thought.

ALEXANDRA

And you're heavier than I thought.
(then)
I can't believe I'm doing this.

STAR

No second thoughts, girl. You're the special hot in the sauce.

Alexandra jumps in the car, sees Simone looking high.

17 INT. OLD CHEVY -- DRIVING -- DAY 17

They soar over the George Washington Bridge. Star drives, Alexandra rides shotgun. Simone's now in the back, eyeing Alexandra jealously.

18 EXT. CHEVRON GAS STATION -- DAY 18

Alexandra pumps gas for first time in her life. She breaks a nail struggling to put the lid back on.

19 INT. CHEVY -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS 19

Star smells her pits; she stinks. Looks in the back seat at Simone. High off her kite. Star grabs Simone's weed, worried. Alexandra gets in, pissed, sees what's going on.

STAR

When's the last time you pumped gas?

ALEXANDRA

Probably the last time you took a bath.

Star laughs. Touche!

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

We're 780 miles from Atlanta and we just spent our last twenty dollars.

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED:

STAR
What about your credit cards?

ALEXANDRA
Frozen. Guess my dad figured I'm
not coming back.

SIMONE
How we getting to Atlanta then?

STAR
(devilish smile)
Y'all gotta get schooled.

Star looks over at Alexandra's MANOLO HIGH HEELS.

STAR (CONT'D)
What size foot you got?

Off Alexandra, thinking that's a weird question --

20 INT. GO-GO BAR -- SKETCHY NEIGHBORHOOD -- NIGHT 20

PAN UP STAR'S BIG FEET jammed into Alexandra's MANOLOS. She go-gos fiercely, kicking **SKEEVY MEN** who get too close. Simone stands in the back of the bar, awestruck. Alexandra watches, mouth agape. Star waves a fistful of cash at them.

21 EXT. REST STOP -- EASTERN SEABOARD -- DAY 21

Alexandra and Simone watch as Star flirts with a **YOUNG TRUCKER** a few yards off. As they LAUGH, Star slides her hand into his jacket, lifting his wallet. She then pushes him away with a smile, makes some excuse, and returns to the girls.

STAR
And *that's* how you do it.

A22 INT. AM/PM -- DAY A22

Star teaches Alexandra and Simone how to boost groceries.

22 EXT. MOTEL -- NIGHT 22

The girls eat chicken wings on lawn chairs by the motel's pool. Simone, earbuds in, bops to music. Star counts cash. Star looks at Alexandra, who's clutching her bags.

ALEXANDRA
What? I'm not getting my stuff
stolen from this dive.

She then stakes a sip of Star's drink.

(CONTINUED)

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

Christ, what is this vomit?

STAR

I mixed grape juice and a wine cooler together. Less calories.

ALEXANDRA

That doesn't even make sense.

STAR

Everything ain't Prada and Fendi, Alexandra. You need to let your weave down, girl.

ALEXANDRA

(showing her roots)

It's real. Not all black girls wear weaves.

Alexandra tries to push Star in the pool. They LAUGH.

STAR

Okay, stop! Listen. We got two hundred thirty six dollars. Enough for this dump and gas to Atlanta. You good now?

(off Alexandra's smile)

Ever think when I hit you up on the 'Gram you'd end up like this?

ALEXANDRA

In a word... no.

(then)

But thanks for saving me. The music we're making, it's my new life. I'm not going back.

STAR

Your folks cool with that?

(off Alexandra's shrug)

How come you never talk about them?

ALEXANDRA

Because he makes me feel like I'm nothing.

(lying effortlessly)

My father's a surgeon. He loves going around saying how many lives he's saved. And my mother's dead.

STAR

At least you got a father.

(CONTINUED)

Simone takes out her earbuds, amazed by what she's heard.

SIMONE
That shit is dope!

Alexandra puts music on SPEAKER. We hear "I CAN BE" again, but more of it this time. They all start improvising lyrics.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
I can't breath... I can't take it,
it's so damn good!

Alexandra, excited, makes notes in her phone.

ALEXANDRA
Horn in first verse should be E
Flat... bridge legato... Simone,
bring the harmony at the chorus...

Simone does, letting it rip! Star looks on with pride.

STAR
Damn girl!

ALEXANDRA
Your sister is no joke.

As Simone crescendos, a BOTTLE SHATTERS right next to her.

VOICE FROM THE MOTEL
SHUT UP! SOME PEOPLE GOTTA GET UP
IN THE MORNING!

For some reason this cracks Star up, and for some reason Simone isn't bothered. Alexandra rushes to see if she's okay.

ALEXANDRA
It's not funny, Star.

STAR
Oh, she's alright.
(to Simone)
You alright, right?

Simone nods -- and her jacket falls open. Alexandra notices blood splatter on the tank top underneath.

ALEXANDRA
What's that, Simone?

Simone jerks to cover it. Star gives her a death stare.

22 CONTINUED: (3)

SIMONE
Barbecue sauce from those hot wings.

ALEXANDRA
[Looks more like blood to me.
EXPOSITION]
(yawns)
Okay I'm beat, I'm going to bed. I need my beauty rest for tomorrow.

STAR
That's right, girl -- Atlanta here we come.

Alexandra goes off. Star whips around to Simone.

STAR (CONT'D)
Simone, what did I tell you?

SIMONE
But it's the only undershirt I got!

STAR
I don't care -- you want people asking questions??
(then)
Everything about where we came from has to go! We focus on our dream.

SIMONE
Can I please have my weed back?

STAR
No.
(then)
Take that off and give it to me.

Simone removes her jacket and top, hands over the top. Star takes a lighter to it. As it catches fire we **END ACT ONE.**

ACT TWO

23 EXT. OLD CHEVY -- DRIVING ON HIGHWAY -- DAY 23

It approaches the ATLANTA SKYLINE. The girls HOOT AND HOLLER inside the car. **PRE-LAP A GIRL'S VOICE ANSWERING A PHONE:**
"God's Blessings Beauty Salon. GOD COMES FIRST..."

24 INT. GOD'S BLESSINGS BEAUTY SALON -- ATLANTA -- DAY 24

The salon occupies the ground floor of a town home. TWO STYLISTS work on **CUSTOMERS.**

(CONTINUED)

24 CONTINUED:

24

And just inside the front door sits receptionist **COTTON** (20, stunning, mixed-race). She's the voice we've heard answering the phone.

COTTON
(continuing on phone...)
Hey Juanita, how many units we
setting up this time? Six! Chile,
you might just have to move in.

She puts Juanita on hold, then speaks into her cell phone.

COTTON (CONT'D)
Boy, hold on. I'ma be at the club
tonight...

One of the stylists, **MISS BRUCE**, 40's, black, and a not-so-attractive drag queen, comes over, takes Cotton's cell phone.

COTTON (CONT'D)
Damn, Miss Bruce, I ain't up in
your business.

Another stylist, **DANIELLE**, 30s, black, chimes in.

DANIELLE
You tell her, bitch! Dragoon think
she second in command round here!

25 INT. CHEVY -- DRIVING -- DAY

25

Star slows the car in FRONT OF THE SALON. Alexandra and Simone look skeptical. Star checks the address.

STAR
This is it. You two stay here till
I figure out what's up.

SIMONE
(uncomfortable)
I'll come with you.

STAR
No. Stay here. Two minutes, okay?

Alexandra looks around at this shitty neighborhood.

26 INT. GOD'S BLESSINGS BEAUTY SALON -- DAY

26

The DOORBELL rings -- and all heads turn as Star comes in. She goes to Cotton at reception.

(CONTINUED)

STAR
Is Carlotta here?

COTTON
You find us on Groupon or something?

STAR
(looking around)
You'd be lucky to get on Groupon.

Cotton tries not to laugh. She likes her immediately.

COTTON
This Miss Carlotta's salon. She ain't here.

STAR
When's she coming back?

COTTON
Why ya want to know?

Star hands over Carlotta's letters. Miss Bruce reads one. Cotton reads another. They both look up at Star in shock.

MISS BRUCE
You one of Mary's girls?

Star nods. Miss Bruce and Danielle share a look. Then --

COTTON
(to Miss Bruce)
Who the hell is Mary?
(then to Star)
Carlotta's my mother.

MISS BRUCE
(to Star)
She's been looking for you and your sister for a long time.

Our girls arrive AT THE BACK OF THE CHURCH. Star approaches an **USHER**. He nods at the stage. Where a **GOSPEL CHOIR** waits.

Then **CARLOTTA BROWN** (40s, a voluptuous brown beauty) enters from the wings. She moves to a microphone -- and begins singing "**HAND ON ME**." Her voice soars over the **CONGREGATION**. Folks leap to their feet **SCREAMING** for Jesus!

27 CONTINUED:

27

Star and the girls move down the aisle. The closer Star gets to Miss Carlotta the more her mind FLICKERS BACK TO...

28 EXT. PITTSBURG HOUSING PROJECT -- DAY

28

10 years ago. **YOUNG STAR** and **SIMONE** (ages 8 and 6) sit on the grass singing into hairbrushes. Two little girls without a care in the world. At least it looks this way until we see...

A CORONER'S VAN parked at the curb. **M.E. WORKERS** load a **BODY**. We realize Young Star is trying to distract her baby sister. A **WOMAN** SOBS in the street, calling for the girls. A **COP** holds her back. As **HER FACE** comes into focus we MATCH CUT TO:

29 INT. MOUNT CALVARY CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST -- DAY

29

MISS CARLOTTA'S FACE IN THE PRESENT. The moment she notices the girls approaching. She blinks. Focuses. *Can God have answered her prayers...?* She finishes the song, tearing the roof off the place. Then brings Star and Simone to her bosom.

MISS CARLOTTA

Yes, God. Yes, God!

Star and Simone don't know what to make of her. Nor does Alexandra who shakes her head at the spectacle of it all.

30 EXT. CHURCH BACK YARD -- DAY

30

Short time later. The **CONGREGATION** stands around chatting. Miss Carlotta and Star eat hungrily, Simone sips sweet tea, and Alexandra stares at her uneaten fried food.

MISS CARLOTTA

Good singing always makes me hungry.

ALEXANDRA

My arteries are clogging just looking at it.

MISS CARLOTTA

You too young to have arteries, girl.

(then)

I can't believe you've never set foot in church.

ALEXANDRA

Nothing wrong with being an atheist.

(CONTINUED)

FOUR YOUNG BLACK MEN, in t-shirts with slogans, approach. Miss Carlotta smiles at **DEREK JONES** (20s, beautiful) and his **FRIENDS**. Derek nods, oozing sexiness.

DEREK

What's up, Miss C?

MISS CARLOTTA

DEREK JONES. I guess you and your boys stopped by for some food cause I certainly didn't see y'all here in service.

DEREK

We was busy working on a little activism, Miss C.

(to the beautiful girls)

Hey ladies. I live next door to Miss Carlotta.

MISS CARLOTTA

And he's always activating about something. What is it this time, boy?

DEREK

Racial inequality in the criminal justice system. We having a rally this weekend. Do you think you could convince some of your church friends to come by?

He hands her a FLYER that says "BLACK LIVES MATTER. Rally this Friday night at 8PM." Miss Carlotta isn't so sure but --

MISS CARLOTTA

I'll do what I can.

DEREK

I really appreciate it. Y'all have a wonderful day.

He smiles -- and his smile finally lands on *Alexandra*. She smiles back. Star clocks this... so does Miss Carlotta. Derek and his friends exit.

SIMONE

(tugging on Miss Carlotta)

So you're like our new mother?

MISS CARLOTTA

But y'all with foster folks, ain't you?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED: (2)

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)
(then concerned)
They treat you alright?

STAR
(lying like a pro)
Simone and me both got real lucky.

MISS CARLOTTA
And they let y'all take off school
to come see me?

STAR
I graduated early. Simone gets
home schooled.

MISS CARLOTTA
(to Alexandra)
And what kinda foster home you come
from?

ALEXANDRA
I'm not from the foster system. My
parents just think travel is a real
learning experience.

Carlotta looks over at the OLD CHEVY, parked nearby.

MISS CARLOTTA
Why those plates say South Carolina
if y'all coming from up north?

SIMONE
(excited to lie too)
It's my mother's car! She's from
South Carolina.

Carlotta looks at these three. They're full of shit.

STAR
The music scene in Atlanta is
supposed to be off the hook. We're
starting a girl group.

SIMONE
And we fixin' to blow up! Alexandra
writes our stuff and we sing them.

MISS CARLOTTA
(suddenly grim)
Your mother and me had a group.
Before you were born. Even had a
song make the charts.

(CONTINUED)

This blows their minds! Alexandra looks it up on her phone.

ALEXANDRA

What song? What was the name of the group?

STAR

You and my mother...?

SIMONE

How big a hit was it?!

MISS CARLOTTA

It don't matter. You bury that dream. Y'all want to sing? Come sing with me in church.

The girls look at each other: WTF?

ALEXANDRA

Church?

MISS CARLOTTA

Yes you little witch -- church.

(she studies them)

Look, why are y'all REALLY here?

You looking to stay with me?

Star and Alexandra look away. Simone smiles: YES.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

Okay then. Let's get home. We got a busy day tomorrow.

(off their confusion)

If you wanna stay with me, you gotta contribute. Our shampoo girl just quit. You know how to shampoo hair?

Carlotta grabs Simone's hand, moves toward the parking lot.

ALEXANDRA

She's battier than a fruit cake! Alexandra's not shampooing anybody's hair.

STAR

Patience, Princess. I gotta sick plan. Just gotta figure out how to put it in action. Come on.

Star pulls Alexandra toward the parking lot. As they go, something catches Star's eye. A **MAN**. Standing in shade of a tree. On his face, a simple smile. Star squints: **SIMONE'S FOSTER FATHER?** She blinks; he's gone. *We go off Star --*

31 INT. A BEDROOM ABOVE THE SALON -- NIGHT 31

The girls grimace at the tiny room. Miss Carlotta explains:

MISS CARLOTTA
The bed or the floor.

Alexandra is aghast. Simone turns to Miss Carlotta.

SIMONE
Can I sleep in your room?

Miss Carlotta smiles; takes Simone off. Star looks out the window. Still unsure if she saw Simone's Foster Father...

32 OMIT 32

33 INT. GOD'S BLESSINGS BEAUTY SALON -- DAY 33

Few days later. R. Kelly's "YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU" BLARES. Cotton juggles PHONES. **ROWS OF BLACK WOMEN** and **THEIR DAUGHTERS** gossip. Star hot combs a **CUSTOMER'S** hair, singing under her breath to R. Kelly. Cotton, listens, intrigued.

Star shoots a cranky look at Alexandra, who's shampooing a **CUSTOMER** nearby. Miss Bruce and Danielle note Star's look. Carlotta enters from upstairs.

MISS CARLOTTA
I gotta taste for grits.

MISS BRUCE
Praise the Lord. Morning,
Carlotta.

DANIELLE
Morning, Miss Carlotta,
Praise the Lord. God is good.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)
Ain't he good! All the time!
Alexandra, you bring me my apple
pie like I told you?

Alexandra brings her a McDonald's apple pie.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)
(feeling the pie)
Heat that up in the microwave for
me, baby.

Alexandra, going to do this, exchanges another look with Star. Miss Carlotta doesn't miss a beat.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)
You got some kind of problem, Star?

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

Simone enters from the kitchen, sweeping up hair.

SIMONE
Star hates the smell of burnt hair.

STAR
Simone, shut up.

MISS CARLOTTA
Star'll get past that.

To be obnoxious, Star begins singing loudly to R. Kelly. Then SCREAMS IN PAIN, holding her hand. Alexandra rushes over.

ALEXANDRA
What happened?!

STAR
Burned myself on this frikkin' hot comb!

STAR'S CUSTOMER
And burned a chunk of my hair off!!

Star's Customer tears off her smock, storms out.

COTTON
Roberta, you still gotta pay!

Cotton runs after her. Miss Bruce turns to Danielle.

MISS BRUCE
What I tell you about white girls hot combing?

Danielle snickers. Miss Bruce shakes her head in disgust.

STAR
What did you just say, bitch?

Customer's GASP. Miss Bruce is stunned.

STAR (CONT'D)
I'm sick of you two bible thumping whores!

ONE LADY pops her head out of the hair dryer, aghast. Star gets up in Miss Bruce and Danielle's faces.

STAR (CONT'D)
Y'all ratchet ass bitches wanna take this outside?!
(to everyone)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: (2)

STAR (CONT'D)

You don't know my life, how I grew
up, who was good to me -- black,
white, whatever --

MISS CARLOTTA

This is a business, ladies! Stop
this cussin' in my house!

(then)

Star, c'mon upstairs, let's talk.

Star, embarrassed by the whole thing, runs out the back door.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

Mouth just like her mother's.

SIMONE

What was our mother like, Miss
Carlotta? Am I like her too?

Miss Carlotta looks sadly at Simone, who is clearly high.

MISS CARLOTTA

Yes. You're fragile just like her.
Come on, let's walk off that buzz
you got. I'm going to church, I'll
tell you more about your mother.

Simone looks out the back, torn between Carlotta and Star.

34 EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS

34

Alexandra runs water from a hose over Star's burn. Star is
still embarrassed by her outburst in the salon.

STAR

And they say black people have it
hard.

Alexandra studies her dirty cuticles; it's all beneath her.

ALEXANDRA

They're more your people than mine
anyway.

This is pretty funny to them. Then Alexandra gets serious.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

Star, we've been here a week. I'm
shampooing goat hair, sleeping in a
bed with YOU and living on fried
apple pies. You might be used to
that, but I'm not.

(CONTINUED)

STAR

You calling me trash?

ALEXANDRA

You can call yourself whatever you want. I just want to start my life. But Big Mamma's working us like dogs! We gotta figure this out -- or I gotta go.

STAR

Yeah, well go on and run back to New York City! I got NOWHERE to run to.

(then)

Don't you think I been trying to figure it out? We just got to get to Jay Z.

(off Alexandra's confused look)

Or FUTURE. Or even Fifty's tired ass. They're all here in town! And just wait till they hear our music.

ALEXANDRA

Star, those people aren't just sitting at a desk waiting for you to walk in and blow them away.

STAR

How do you know they're not?

ANGLE ON the kitchen window, where Cotton eavesdrops.

ALEXANDRA

We got to get our faces out in the scene, build some kind of buzz!

(carefully)

Which is why I've been looking into amateur nights.

STAR

Amateur nights? We're not amateurs!

ALEXANDRA

Hold on, hear me out. There's a contest in Decatur I saw online. Where music industry people go. Including managers.

(then)

Just trust me on this.

(CONTINUED)

STAR

I don't trust nobody with nothing.

ALEXANDRA

I trusted you the minute I got into that whack ass car of yours!

STAR

Well maybe you shouldn't have! I did something last week.

ALEXANDRA

What did you do?

(off Star's silence)

Look, there's lots of stuff about me you don't know either. We met online -- but now we're IRL. We gotta start trusting each other.

(then)

What did you do, Star?

STAR

(changing the subject)

When's this contest?

ALEXANDRA

Tonight. We just need to get cute after work.

Off Star, deciding, we **END ACT TWO.**

ACT THREE

35 INT. DIVE BAR -- DECATUR -- NIGHT

35

That night. An amateur contest in progress. Star, Simone and Alexandra watch from the wings as **TWIN RAPPERS** are booted off the stage. Star gives Alexandra a look: this place is a dump.

A **BLACK HEAVYSET MC** (40s) then introduces a **BLIND WOMAN** who sings Dolly Parton -- and tumbles off the stage. Star **LAUGHS**. Until she sees Simone at her side, shaking.

STAR

You better not be high.

MC

And now welcome to the stage Alexandra, Simone and Star! Or as their initials spell out -- **ASS!**

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

35

IN THE WINGS Star whips around. The fuck did he just say? They head ON STAGE, and sing first couple bars of "LIKE A GIRL." From jitters or being high, Simone sings her ass off. Cotton, hiding in the back row, is blown away by them. The song continues COVERING THE CUT --

36 EXT. DECATUR STREET - NIGHT

36

The girls walk together, dejected. Star's pissed.

STAR

The only reason we lost is because Helen Keller fell off the stage.

ALEXANDRA

Rude.

SIMONE

We gonna win the next one.

STAR

Where were all the managers, huh?

ALEXANDRA

We just gotta keep at it.

STAR

No. We did it your way, now we do it mine.

(off their looks)

I'll tell you where we find a manager. Where every important man is on a Saturday night. They're throwing dollar bills at some poor girl's ass!

ALEXANDRA

No, Star, you cannot go-go in Atlanta. We're trying to brand ourselves. And if anyone sees you --

Cotton runs up to them out of breath.

COTTON

Girl, important men ain't at no go-go bars anyway.

STAR

Where'd you come from?

(CONTINUED)

COTTON

I saw y'all back there. You guys are incredible. Now, are you really looking for a manager?

The girls nod "Yes."

COTTON (CONT'D)

If you looking for important men -- they at the strip club. I know one, and it's full of industry people.

STAR

How you know?

COTTON

I'm connected. In certain ways.

ALEXANDRA

No. No strip clubs. No way.

STAR

She's right. I might go-go, but I don't show my cash and prizes.

COTTON

You won't have to. I can get you in the Champagne Room. That way you can set your limits. But don't tell my mother. That bitch is crazy.

ALEXANDRA

Star, don't do this. We have to think of our future. What if someone takes photos of you?

SIMONE

Look at them Kardashians! They show every hole they got and still they get famous.

STAR

Ha! That's right.
(nods, she's in)
When?

COTTON

It's gone cost you though -- 2% of your future earnings.

ALEXANDRA

Are you serious?

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED: (2)

COTTON
(totally serious)
My 2% includes being your personal
assistant and stylist too. Let's
face it, y'all need zushing!

ALEXANDRA
Excuse me, I am the last one to
need a stylist.

COTTON
Alexandra, we need to ratchet your
ass up a little.

Star LAUGHS. She loves Cotton's mouth. Alexandra does not.

37 INT. "CARLO'S" STRIP CLUB -- NIGHT 37

Later that night. The place is packed with **MALE CUSTOMERS and FEMALE DANCERS. JAHIL (HI-EEL) RIVERA**, 40s, drunk, slightly disheveled, but sexy as hell talks with **ANOTHER GUY** (40s).

JAHIL
Come on, Bobby. Just put me in
touch with him.

OTHER GUY
I'd like to help you out but...

JAHIL
But what? That kid needs someone
who can actually shape his career.
And I could book him in something
big. I'm not at liberty to say what
it is right now... but you'll like.

OTHER GUY
Look. You handled some legit acts --
but that was a long time ago, man.
This kid's gotta have somebody
who's in the game. I'd like to
help, but -- not with this one.

Off Jahil's defeated face **WE FIND** Cotton and Star, now crammed into one of Cotton's hoochie looks, entering.

38 INT. GOD'S BLESSINGS BEAUTY SALON -- NIGHT 38

The place is closed. Miss Carlotta counts cash. Alexandra, rushes in -- sees Simone asleep on a chair -- exhales.

MISS CARLOTTA
What are you in a flutter about?

(CONTINUED)

ALEXANDRA

Star told me to watch Simone and she ran off.

MISS CARLOTTA

You look like you got more troubles than that.

ALEXANDRA

I'm going to bed.

MISS CARLOTTA

You can go to bed after you comb out that weave.

Alexandra grits her teeth, heads over the comb the weave.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

Where's Star and Cotton?

ALEXANDRA

They went... bowling.

MISS CARLOTTA

Bowling? What do you take me for, girl?

ALEXANDRA

What do I do that seems to get under your skin?

MISS CARLOTTA

I want what's best for Star.

ALEXANDRA

What's best for Star is the music we're making. Have you listened to it? Or even asked Star about it? Or about anything else that matters to her? Like everything that happened once you were too "unfit" to take her and Simone?

Now she has gotten under Miss Carlotta's skin.

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

I read those letters you sent. You're trying to be big mamma now, but it's ten years too late.

MISS CARLOTTA

And you're trying to be somebody you're not.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED: (2)

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)
I've looked into you, Alexandra
"Whitfield." You runnin from
somethin, and using Star and Simone
to do it. I got your number.

Alexandra is taken aback.

ALEXANDRA
I'm done combing out this goat
hair.
(heading for the stairs)
And maybe I'm even done with
Atlanta too.

MISS CARLOTTA
Bye!

Alexandra goes off. Simone, pretending to sleep, smiles.

39 INT./EXT. REAR OF HOUSE/DEREK'S BACKYARD -- CONTINUOUS 39

Alexandra reaches for her stuff on hooks. Hears a NOISE
outside. Looks out rear door -- sees Derek through the door's
window. Pacing in the YARD NEXT DOOR. He feels her eyes,
looks over, smiles. She opens the door. The song "*I BRING ME*"
begins under scene.

DEREK
So you're gunna be living next door
to me, huh?

ALEXANDRA
Not for long. I'm done with this
pig pen.

DEREK
What did Atlanta ever do to you?
(off her silence)
I never got your name.

ALEXANDRA
That's because I didn't tell you.

Derek's unfazed by her brush off. It actually turns him on.
He eyes with hunger.

DEREK
You're a rude little girl.

Alexandra actually blushes. Embarrassed, she laughs.

(CONTINUED)

ALEXANDRA

It's Alexandra.

(then)

You really think you can change the world?

DEREK

I think I can make people's lives better.

ALEXANDRA

I'd like to do that with my music.

He sees a vulnerability in Alexandra. He smiles again.

DEREK

Alexandra, why don't you come over here so I can make you feel good?

Alexandra tries to stand her ground. Rolls her eyes.

ALEXANDRA

Eew. Can't you think of a better pick up line. So vulgar.

DEREK

It takes vulgar to know vulgar. Come over here.

Alexandra comes closer to him.

Star and Cotton scan the crowd. Cotton's eyes light up as she sees someone approach -- Jahil, now a little more drunk. He's with a **STRIPPER** who's hanging on his every word.

COTTON

Here comes one 'em. Talent manager. I think he's a big fish.

STAR

But he's talking to somebody already.

COTTON

Not for long.
(calling to the Stripper)
Michelle, girl, come here.

The Stripper looks over at Cotton; Jahil moves into the Champagne Room. Star, seeing her moment, runs into the --

41 INT. CHAMPAGNE ROOM -- CONTINUOUS 41

-- and locks the door. Which muffles the MUSIC from the club. Jahil turns, looks at Star, confused.

JAHIL
Where's Michelle go...?

STAR
[NEW DIALOGUE Oh, she just threw
up.
(off his look)
All over herself. A bad fish
burrito. I'm better anyway.]

He's not sure what to make of her.

JAHIL
You're new here?

STAR
Brand spanking.

She starts dancing for him. But he becomes distracted by his cell phone. Star begins singing now with "I Bring Me." Making the huge sound only she can make. Jahil looks up from his phone. As Star sings, the Champagne Room FALLS AWAY and we enter ANOTHER ONE OF HER FANTASIES...

42 INT. ND FANTASY SPACE -- NIGHT 42

Star continues singing -- but now to **70,000 SCREAMING FANS.**

43 INT. CHAMPAGNE ROOM -- NIGHT 43

Star finishes. Jahil's phone slides from his hand. Is that Vicodin he took playing tricks on him? He studies her.

JAHIL
Do you always sound like that?

STAR
(playing her part well)
Sound like what?

Jahil literally sweats, his mind reeling. But plays it cool.

JAHIL
Okay, I'm a little drunk. But that
was good. Very good.
(calculated beat)
And I have an idea. I manage
musical talent. Some big acts.

(CONTINUED)

STAR

Seriously?

JAHIL

I'm putting together the entertainment for a party, at Hunter Scott's. Good friend. You sing at it -- as good as you just did -- maybe I'll take you on.

STAR

For real? Hunter Scott's?? Wow!

(then)

I'm a package deal tho. Me and two other girls. We're a girl group.

JAHIL

Are the other ones as good as you?

(off her cocksure smile)

Call me tomorrow, we'll discuss it.

He hands her his card. Star runs out. Michelle rushes in.

MICHELLE

Where's that little bitch who snuck in here with you? She doesn't even work here, Jahil.

JAHIL

That little bitch is my future.

Jahil watches Star leave, his eyes, ferocious, alive --

JAHIL (CONT'D)

And no one's going to take it away from me this time.

Star runs from the club onto the street.

STAR

Cotton, dammit where are you...?!

She hears a COMMOTION, rushes to an ALLEY adjacent, sees Cotton block punches from a **GOOD LOOKING JOCK** (20s, white). Star jumps on him, clawing like an alley cat.

STAR (CONT'D)

Leave her alone!!!

ROUGHNECK

Leave HER alone?? You mean leave HIM alone! That little freak needs to tell people what's down there!

COTTON

(spitting blood, furious)
You knew exactly what was down there!

The JOCK is about to land another punch, but Star kicks him in the balls. He staggers off. Star helps Cotton up, grins.

STAR

I knew there was something I liked about you.

(then)

Come on, let's go home. We got to celebrate! You were right! And I caught that big fish!

COTTON

(grinning a bloody smile)
YES!!

Star helps a limping Cotton out of the alley way.

STAR

Who's Hunter Scott?

END ACT THREE.

ACT FOUR

45 INT. GOD'S BLESSINGS BEAUTY SALON -- DAY

45

Before the salon has opened. Miss Bruce and Danielle prep their stations. Cotton sits in reception with a black eye. Miss Carlotta comes down, in her robe and curlers. Simone follows close on her heels. Carlotta moves to Cotton.

MISS CARLOTTA

I know where you took Star last night.

(then)

You better not be doing what I think you were doing. I know what goes on there.

Cotton shoots an accusatory look at Simone.

(CONTINUED)

COTTON

We just went dancing at a club,
Momma!

MISS CARLOTTA

Stop lying, boy.

COTTON

Girl, Momma.

SIMONE

Wait, what?

Carlotta whispers to Cotton, but Simone listens.

MISS CARLOTTA

It's one thing that you wanna be a
girl.

SIMONE

Cotton's a boy!?!

MISS BRUCE

Wake up, Simone.

COTTON

Don't hate Bruce. 'Cause I can
pass, unlike your ugly ass.

MISS CARLOTTA

Shut up, cussing in my house!
(taking Cotton to a
corner)

You wanna be a woman? Alright. I
ain't got nothing against it.

(painful for her)

Look it, I know what goes on at
that club. I ain't new to the game.

COTTON

We found a manager down there.

Simone lights up. Star comes down now crunching potato chips.

SIMONE

Star! For real? We gotta manager?!!

Everyone turns to look at Star. Star looks at Miss Carlotta.

(CONTINUED)

45 CONTINUED: (2)

COTTON

Momma, he's in charge of the entertainment at a house party for Hunter Scott! That famous NBA player!

STAR

He wants us to sing at it. If we do good, he's gonna sign us.

Everyone waits for Miss Carlotta's ruling. Simone especially.

MISS CARLOTTA

And exactly who is this manager you found at a strip joint?

STAR

Jahil Rivera.

Off Carlotta, the blood draining from her face, we CUT TO:

46 INT. MANSION -- ATLANTA SUBURB -- DAY 46

An **ASSISTANT** leads Jahil into a **STUDY**, which is covered in **SPORTS ILLUSTRATED COVERS** and **BASKETBALL AWARDS**. Jahil is now sober, and better looking in daylight. But he's nervous.

HUNTER SCOTT (late 20s, white, corn-fed gorgeous, about 6'7") does layups, bare chested in sweats, by a fireplace. **HUNTER'S MOTHER ARLENE** (late 40s), a plain woman dressed in expensive clothes, looks out of place, smoking a cigarette on the sofa.

JAHIL

(giving Hunter a bear hug)
Hunter! How you doin', baby? Arlene
-- ageless as always.

Arlene smiles knowingly. There's history here.

ARLENE

(thick smoker's voice)
Stop lying. What did you come here
for this time?

JAHIL

Came to see my godson, Arlene.

Hunter is very fond of Jahil. He smiles too, but skeptically.

HUNTER

Jahil, my man. What's up? Where you
been?

(CONTINUED)

JAHIL

Doin' my thing. A little this, a little that, you know how it is.

(then)

Small thing, a favor. I've got these girls, three incredible singers. I'd like to add them to the line up at your party.

HUNTER

Another act? C'mon man, that last group you turned me on to was a train wreck.

JAHIL

Just a song. And this one girl especially. Wait till you hear.

ARLENE

Where'd you find them?

JAHIL

(lying without a beat)

Referred to me by an up and coming producer with impeccable taste.

(then)

Come on, Hunt. Do me a solid. I was your dad's best friend. One song. And you get it for free.

Arlene smiles at Jahil sympathetically. Hunter gives in.

HUNTER

Make sure you're on time, man.

(then)

And show up sober.

He claps Jahil on the back. Off Jahil's relieved face --

Star and Alexandra have been rehearsing for hours.

STAR

Why are you fighting me on this? We sing "Like a Girl" we don't sing "I Can Be."

ALEXANDRA

I just think "I Can Be" is much father along sonically, lyrically.

STAR

But that crowd will dig "Like a Girl." And Jahil is only giving us one song. *One!*

Simone enters, wearing a Catholic school girl type outfit.

STAR (CONT'D)

Where you been? And what the hell are you wearing?

SIMONE

My church outfit Miss Carlotta got me.

ALEXANDRA

Simone, we've been rehearsing for hours.

SIMONE

Chill, I'm warmed up from choir practice now.

STAR

Choir practice?

SIMONE

Miss Carlotta says singing for the Lord can save me. Miss Carlotta says the Lord can save all of us. Star, let's get saved!

STAR

Something's seriously wrong with you, girl.

SIMONE

Ain't nothing wrong with me. Miss Carlotta wants to be our new mother. She really loves us, Star.

STAR

I'm done with new mothers, I've had too many already!

(then)

You're not singing in anybody's church, Simone. And the only person that's gonna save us is that manager.

SIMONE

What'd you do with my weed?

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED: (2)

Star hands the bud over. Alexandra shakes her head in dismay.

STAR
You're a mess.

ALEXANDRA
(about Simone)
Star, this is getting nuts.

STAR
I can handle it.

SIMONE
(whispers to Star)
You ain't gotta worry about me.
Everything in the past is in the
past.

ALEXANDRA
Okay, stop. What is going on with
you two?

Star shoots Simone a look that says "don't say anything."

STAR
We need to rehearse. "I Can Be" is
tight. Let's do that one.

Alexandra SIGHS, plays "*I CAN BE*" off her phone. They once
again sing. THEIR VOICES ring over the neighborhood.

48 INT. JAHIL'S LOFT -- DOWNTOWN ATLANTA -- DAY

48

Next morning. Jahil is at his desk when the door opens and
Miss Carlotta enters. He looks up like he's seeing a ghost.

MISS CARLOTTA
Working from home these days?

JAHIL
You look good.

MISS CARLOTTA
We had an agreement. You tangling
in my life again.
(off his confused look)
Star. She's Mary's kid.

Jahil takes a moment to absorb this. It's obviously big news.

JAHIL
Deep.

(CONTINUED)

MISS CARLOTTA

What's so damn deep about that?

JAHIL

Because the minute I that girl
sing, I felt the same way I felt
when I first heard Mary.

MISS CARLOTTA

I ain't interested in the way you
feel. I am interested in some of
your business associates. My
attorney thinks the DA would be
too.

JAHIL

Don't threaten me, Carlotta.

(then, tries to reason)

You know, you could teach Star
everything you learned. And how not
to make the same mistakes. We'd
make a good team. We could rewrite
the past?

They vibrate with years of rage, maybe lust?

JAHIL (CONT'D)

She's good, Carlotta. Really good.
And if the other girls are half as
good -- we have the makings of a
supergroup.

MISS CARLOTTA

Tell that shit to the DA. Cause
that's who I'm calling if you don't
stay away from them.

JAHIL

I killed myself to make you and
Mary stars. I bet everything I had
on you two bitches! Mary blew it
because of the drugs. You with
gaining all that weight, never
showing up on time, acting like an
amateur. And who paid for it? Me!
My career. It's not happening again
Carlotta.

MISS CARLOTTA

You bet your ass it ain't.

(then)

My daddy always said you need three
things in this life.

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED: (2)

JAHIL

Oh yeah, what did your daddy tell you?

MISS CARLOTTA

You need your bible, your word and your gun.

She opens her shoulder bag to show him HER PISTOL.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

Stay away from them girls.

She exits. We go off Jahil, his eyes darkening. **END ACT FOUR.**

ACT FIVE

49 INT. BATHROOM AT MISS CARLOTTA'S -- DAY

49

A few days later. Star VOCALIZES in the shower while Alexandra sits on the toilet reading W magazine. Simone brushes her teeth in the sink, rinses, spits.

SIMONE

We are gonna kill it at this party!

STAR

Yessss we are, baby sister!

ALEXANDRA

Wait, is Cotton a boy?

STAR

Yeah but she's wants to be a woman. And she's hotter than us. So you better be careful with her around Derek!

ALEXANDRA

(all innocent)
Derek...?

STAR

Don't play me, girl. Last night you came in at 4 AM smelling like his after shave!

ALEXANDRA

(grins, then)
LEE I DON'T THINK FOLLOWING IS STILL TRUE... I TOOK OUT CARLOTTA FLIRTING...
Don't tell Carlotta.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

49 CONTINUED:

ALEXANDRA (CONT'D)

I think Big Mamma wants him. And she doesn't need another reason to hate me.

Cotton glides in, overhearing.

COTTON

And her bible study ends in half an hour. If we're not outta here before she comes back, she's crazy enough to lock us inside!

Cotton glides back out. Alexandra marvels.

ALEXANDRA

Damn, she looks good.

50 INT. JAHIL'S LOFT -- DAY

50

Later that day. The girls enter, amped for their big show. Star introduces them to Jahil, who's been waiting.

STAR

Yo. This is Alexandra. And this is Simone -- my sister.

Simone tenses. Alexandra shakes Jahil's hand properly.

ALEXANDRA

Nice to meet you, Jahil.

JAHIL

(to Star)

And we're good, you've rehearsed?

STAR

We're ready to slay this crowd.

JAHIL

You'd better be.

He looks at Simone having second thoughts. Cotton rushes in.

JAHIL (CONT'D)

(eyes lighting up)

Who's this?

SIMONE

That's Cotton. She's our cousin.

COTTON

(flirting with Jahil)

And their personal assistant.

(CONTINUED)

50 CONTINUED:

JAHIL
(walking them across loft)
Star described your measurements to
me pretty well, I think.

Gestures to a RACK OF SEQUINED DRESSES. With a distinctly
1999 look.

COTTON
Oh my God NO! NOO! Whitney dressed
better in her coffin!

Cotton pulls out her trusty scissors, etc. TIME CUT TO:

51 EXT. MANSION -- DAY 51

The girls step out of a limo looking SWEET in body hugging
outfits Cotton's worked up. They gawk at **GLAMOROUS GUESTS**
entering the mansion, from which HIP HOP blasts. Jahil offers
his elbow; Star takes it. They all move to the house.

52 INT. SAME -- DAY -- CONTINUOUS 52

The FOYER. A **BUTLER** takes coats. They move to **GUESTS** in the
LIVING ROOM. **CATER-WAITERS** move through. Cotton immediately
wanders off. Jahil spots Hunter, approaching.

HUNTER
Your look is very tight, dog, very
tight.

JAHIL
I do my best. Hunter, these are the
girls I talked to you about.
Simone, Alexandra -- and Star.

Hunter zeroes in on Star. Star returns the interest.

HUNTER
The stage is in the ballroom.
Ladies, you want a drink?

STAR
A drink wouldn't kill me.

JAHIL
One. And then we all meet in the
ballroom.

Hunter moves off with Star. Jahil watches, not happy.

ALEXANDRA
Where did Simone go?

53 EXT. SAME -- POOL SIDE BAR -- DAY 53

Simone downs a drink at the bar, then calls to the BARTENDER.

SIMONE
Another one, yo!

54 INT. SAME -- GLASS ATRIUM -- DAY 54

Star sips her drink, listening to Hunter.

HUNTER
Any jackass can run up and down a
court dunking balls. But to sing?
Take people inside their souls?

STAR
(expert flirt)
Speaking of balls...I been watching
your game. Dude, you have been
shooting enough bricks to build a
house.

HUNTER
Oh, I have, have I?

They both grin. But his face hardens when he spots someone.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

STAR
I gotta go to the bathroom anyway.

55 INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS 55

Hunter approaches a **WOMAN IN A CHINCHILLA JACKET** (20's).

WOMAN IN CHINCHILLA
You were supposed to send a car.

HUNTER
I did but you weren't ready.

WOMAN IN CHINCHILLA
Who was that you were talking to?

Hunter makes sure no one's looking, then sucker punches her
in the stomach, and yanks the chinchilla from her shoulders.

56 INT. SAME -- BATHROOM 56

Star is psyching herself up in the mirror. A race horse at the gate. Taking deep breaths. Nodding at her reflection. Her best friend. Once she's at full boil, she steps out --

57 INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS 57

-- SOMEONE GRABS HER ARM. Star swings around. It's Carlotta.

STAR

What the -- ?

MISS CARLOTTA

You look cheap.

(then)

You think he's gonna help you with your dream? He ain't gonna help you with anything but himself. Where is he?

Star tries to pass, but Carlotta blocks her.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

You think your name is what you are?

STAR

I need to get by.

MISS CARLOTTA

Your mother and I had your same dream.

STAR

I know.

MISS CARLOTTA

And we said we'd do anything -- anything -- to make it happen.

STAR

I've heard this!

MISS CARLOTTA

Well I ended up robbing stores! And Mary? That dream killed her.

STAR

It wasn't the dream! It was drugs! My mother was a junkie and I'm nothing like her!

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED:

For the first time we see Star break, tears form.

MISS CARLOTTA

I know you and Simone are runaways.

Star is stunned. How could Miss Carlotta know?

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

And Alexandra is playing you. She's telling you one thing about herself and the truth is something else!

Star tries again to get past Miss Carlotta.

MISS CARLOTTA (CONT'D)

If I need to hand you back to social services to keep you from trouble, I'll do it!

STAR

YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS YOU DIDN'T MAKE IT AND I'M GOING TO!! BECAUSE I'M SEXY AND YOUNG AND HAVE THE TALENT YOU NEVER DID!

MISS CARLOTTA

(calmly)

No, baby. I'm just trying to keep you from getting hurt. That man Jahil is the devil.

STAR

(wiping her tears)

I can't get hurt anymore.

(then)

Watching my mother die in front of me was just the beginning.

Hunter appears. Sees Star is upset. Looks at Miss Carlotta.

HUNTER

Is this woman bothering you?

Star's look says it all. Hunter drapes the Chinchilla on her, leads her off. Tears roll down Carlotta's face. ANGLE ON Cotton, down the hall watching. Not sure what to do.

58 INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

58

Alexandra holds Simone, who can barely stand. Star enters.

STAR

What the -- ?

(CONTINUED)

SIMONE
 (holds her mouth)
 I'm sick.

ALEXANDRA
 She's drunk [again???].
 Unbelievable...

STAR
 Dammit, Simone!

SIMONE
 (laughs, fucked up)
 We gone be stars, bitch!

ALEXANDRA
 (to Star)
 What are we gonna do?

Off Star wondering exactly that --

The LIGHTS IN THE ROOM LOWER and a SPOTLIGHT appears on stage. Jahil steps into it, his eyes scan the audience, landing on... Miss Carlotta. She's patting her shoulder bag. Where she'd told him she keeps her gun.

JAHIL
 Ladies and Gentleman. It's my
 pleasure to introduce three singers
 I recently discovered. Each with a
 pure, raw talent. Meet[WE SHOULD
 THINK ON THIS AS IT WILL BE IN
 PICTURE GIRL GROUP].

Star and Alexandra share a look. *Did he just name our group?* They head on stage, moving to their mics. Jahil steps to Hunter in the audience. Everyone waits for Simone. Star looks worried. Jahil's signals a **TECHNICIAN** to begin the track.

The MUSIC starts -- and Simone rushes on, taking her place at her mic. The girls begin singing "*I CAN BE*" -- now a fully developed song. Simone is shaky, but pulls it together.

Star spots Miss Carlotta in the audience, determined to prove herself to her. As she begins to sing, Carlotta's face changes. From disapproval to astonishment. Tears roll again. But now they are tears of shock and joy at Star's monumental talent. Star sees this. Carlotta nods her approval. Cotton looks over, clocks this, smiles. Nearby, Jahil is mesmerized by Star. He turns to Hunter.

JAHIL (CONT'D)

This is it. The last ten, fifteen years? I was asleep. Now I'm awake. And everything is possible. Everything.

Hunter eyes Star hungrily, almost oblivious to Jahil -- who is now fixated on SIMONE, who is trying her absolute best.

JAHIL (CONT'D)

But I'll have to replace the girl on the end. She's trouble.

Star, having proved herself to Miss Carlotta, turns her attention to Hunter. Using the lyrics as a seduction. The heat between them grows as the song progresses. The audience is now totally down.

And the girls know it. They reach for each other's hands -- just as they did in Star's dream! And just as Simone is about to hit her HIGH NOTE...

COPS SWARM INTO THE PARTY. Guests MURMUR. Are neighbors mad at the noise? But the Cops are moving toward Star and Simone.

In their wake, a **LONE FIGURE** follows, unrecognizable at first, his face in shadow. Until he looks up and we see -- **SIMONE'S FOSTER FATHER**. He gives a smile to both girls.

Star holds the terrified Simone close. We go off Star's doomed face. Is this dream over before it's begun?

END