

ATLANTA

"PILOT"

Written by
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EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

TITLES: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY - 2006

INT. OFFICE - DAY

We are close on **EARNEST MARKS'** face. He looks tired and stressed. His face is tight. His eyes are glassy with exhaustion, probably. He looks struck by something. That feeling of "is this happening to me?" that people get when something unimaginable happens, good or bad. He looks down as the DEAN speaks.

DEAN (O.S.)

Mr. Marks..?

Earnest doesn't move.

DEAN (CONT'D)

I really can't stress the severity of this situation enough. Full scholarships from Princeton are few and far between and in light of what's happened, you're lucky you aren't in jail...Mr. Marks?

Nothing.

DEAN (CONT'D)

You're obviously a very bright young man. The accusations against you aren't light. And it would behoove you to be a little more cooperative. Everyone else seems to have made up their minds and I'm trying to get a full picture. Now, please start from the beginning.

Another nothing. The dean is getting impatient.

DEAN (CONT'D)

For the past thirty minutes you've said a total of five words to me: two yeses and an "I don't know" to be precise. The door's closing on hearing your side of the story. What you have to say for yourself.

Earnest quickly breathes in deep. Everything shifts to Earnest as he stares at the dean. Everyone in the room freezes.

EARN

I woke up.

Silence.

EARN (CONT'D)

That's it.

Papers rustle, zippers yelp, etc. We can hear the dean starting to pack up his things.

DEAN (O.S.)

Johanna, please note Mr. Marks refused testimony. Make sure his RA is made aware of his exit. Also, Call Mr. Suen and let him know I'm twenty minutes away.

We see the dean leave as Earnest sits there. We never see his face.

JOHANNA

This way, Mr. Marks.

He doesn't move. Two police officers walk into the doorway.

JOHANNA (CONT'D)

Mr. Mar-

TITLE: ATLANTA

[“BOBBY JOHNSON” BY QUE STARTS HARD AS “ATLANTA” COMES UP.]

EXT. ATLANTA - DAYBREAK

The sun is rising over Atlanta. It's a hot day. Already in the seventies. You can see kids walking to school and a car with heavy bass cruise by. Birds. It's a really pretty spring day.

INT. EASTLAKE APARTMENTS - DAY

“Emmit Smith” is still playing in the background. The neighbors have it on repeat. It's all bass. Middle of the scene is switches to “Danny Glover” by Young Thug.

EARNEST (27) is in bed and staring at the ceiling as his girlfriend **VAN (25)** sleeps in the fetal position next to him.

Van starts to move. She turns over and hits him in the face. He keeps staring.

VAN
(eyes still closed)
What'd you dream?

EARN
A new one.

She lifts her head up sleepily. Kinda excited.

VAN
What happened?

EARN
I was swimming in a pool, but it was like the ocean. And I was swimming through the seaweed, but it was people's hands instead of seaweed. And this girl was swimming with me and told me to swim above the hands cause if they grab you they drown you-

VAN
Who's the girl?

EARN
I dunno.

VAN
What she look like?

He thinks.

EARN
She was fat and not very interesting.

VAN
...okay.

EARN
Then we get out of the pool. And it was behind this big house and the house had these creepy statues in it. They all looked scared. So I just sat down and looked at the ground.

VAN
Hm.

EARN

Then the house caught on fire. And we kissed.

VAN

The girl?

EARN

Yeah.

Silence.

VAN

Hm.

EARN

Jealous?

VAN

No. Disappointed.

EARN

She's not real.

VAN

No, I'm disappointed in the story. I thought you said she was fat and annoying. Then you're making out with her?

EARN

In the dream I wasn't super handsome, so this was the best I could pull.

VAN

I hate everything that just happened here.

She turns to get out of bed. He pulls her back and kisses her.

VAN (CONT'D)

My morning breath.

He smells it. Hard. From her mouth.

EARN

(eyebrow raised)

Ahhh "the devil's perfume".

VAN

(laughing)

What is wrong with you?!

EARN
They don't know.

They start to kiss. Heavy. Stuff is happening beneath the covers. He starts kissing her neck and she breathes out heavy. He did something that she's down with. He continues.

VAN
(exhale)
Say you love me.

Earn chuckles a bit. Then, she stops him.

EARN
Wha?

VAN
Why'd you laugh?

EARN
Cause you always ask me that. And I'm like "of course".

VAN
Then just say "I love you".

EARN
I love you.

A moment. She gets out of bed. She's not pissed, it's just that the mood is wrong now. She walks in the bathroom.

VAN (O.C.)
(from the bathroom)
You remember you have Lottie tonight, right?

He did not.

EARN
Of course.

VAN
I have parent-teacher tonight. I can't have her.

EARN
I got her. After work.

VAN
You're still working at the airport?

EARN

I just still show up. They haven't noticed I'm not working.

VAN

If you're gonna stay here, I need your help with the rent, Earn.

EARN

You'll have my half tonight.

She dips back in the bathroom.

EARN (CONT'D)

What time are you coming back?

VAN

Prob around eleven.

EARN

That's late. Taking the parents to Magic City afterward? Follies?

VAN

I have a date.

Silence. She planned that. But you can't tell if this is a tactic to get Earn to react or if she's actually over him and just being mean to him while he stays with her. He tries to come up with something to show he's cool with it...but he fails. He just gets out of bed instead.

INT. LOTTIE'S NURSERY - DAY

Earn comes in and sees **LOTTIE (1)** is already awake in her crib.

EARN

Look who's already awake!

He picks her up and kisses her.

EARN (CONT'D)

You're with me tonight. Mommy's going on a date with some dude.

(baby talk)

Fuck this dude, right?

There's a part of "Danny Glover" that reminds me of baby talk (2:03). He does it in sync to the baby. She laughs.

INT. MARTA TRAIN - DAY

*This is all one shot until Earn gets to the top of the stairs.

Earn is listening to music on some headphones. He's got the whole section to himself, so his feet are up on the seats. Listening to "Brad Jordan" by Isaiah Rashad, Earn bobs his head. You can only hear the song.

A **GIRL** sitting on the train is eating hot fries and staring out the window. A girl in a **HEAD WRAP** walks on from a different car. A **DUDE** is closely following Head Wrap. He's trying to get her back to the other car. Head Wrap is pissed. She screams at the other girl. The other girl has a "get this hoe out my face" demeanor. Earn watches quietly.

It starts to get physical. Earn's had enough. He gets up and solemnly walks onto the next car. But you can still see them arguing through the window behind him. Earn's back is to them, so he doesn't see what we see. The Hot Fries girl pushes Head Wrap hard into her seat. Head Wrap falls into the seat behind her. She's livid now.

Head Wrap pulls out a gun.

BANG.

Earn drops on the floor of the car. We can hear everything now, his earphones are off. He's pulled off his earphones. Head Wrap has shot Hot Fries and has turned to the dude she ran in with. His hands are up. They are yelling at each other.

DUDE

Bitch, what's wrong wit you?! You
betta gimme that muthafuckin gun
for-

She shoots him.

The train has stopped and people start running off. Earn runs off and up the stairs away from the commotion. He stands with some kids off to the side and watch as police and security run in. Head Wrap yells as GUNSHOTS go off. They shoot her.

Earn stands there watching. Three cops step off the train. They congratulate each other (high fives, hugs, etc.). A local news crew has somehow already set up. They interview one of the cops for what seems to be three seconds. They shake hands, and everyone leaves.

The kids filmed all this on their phones. They kinda chuckle and walk off after the commotion.

KIDS

Fuck/Daaammn, homie/ Shit was
crazy shawt.

The bloody bodies lie on the train still. The train starts up again and leaves. Earn stares.

INT. HARTSFIELD AIRPORT - CREDIT CARD STAND - DAY

Earn and **SWIFF (27)** stand next to their station. They're both in a blue blazer and ties. Swiff is looking at his phone. The banner above their station says "DELTA SKYMILES: FREE TRIP ANYWHERE WITH SIGN UP!" There's a heavysset older black woman, **LORETTA (54?)**, wearing the same tie and blue blazer. Loretta looks like a sweet old grandma type. She's speaking with this older white guy. He's filling out a form.

Earn sees a dude rushing past. He tries him.

EARN

Excuse me, sir-

A DUDE

Fuck off.

EARN

I know, right?

Earn steps back with Swiff.

SWIFF

We shut Compound down, my nigga.
Me and my cousin had like eight
bottles in dat bitch. Lef out with
like, three hoes. Each, my nigga.
And we was supposed to hit two-
dollar Tuesdays at Ultimate, but he
had to see his P.O. back in Florida
on Monday. I'ma go anyway. You
wanna come?

Earn stares off, lost. Swiff vines himself.

SWIFF (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(filming)

Bitch niggas be like.

Swiff turns the phone on Earn.

SWIFF (CONT'D)

Hey, Earn. Say something.

Earn slowly turns to camera. Holding his scowl the entire time.

SWIFF (CONT'D)

Perfect.

The Vine video on his phone now has Swiff saying "Bitch niggas be like" then Earn slowly turning to camera.

EARN

Van's dating other guys, Swiff. She's gonna kick me out. I'm broke. And I can't sign anyone up cause I'm not an old lady.

SWIFF

You can't sign anyone up because you refuse to lie to people. You better stop letting niggas walk over you and get this money.

Loretta is talking to a white UGA student looking kid with glasses.

LORETTA

You look just like my little nephew, baby. That's a sign. You supposed to sign up for me.

STUDENT

This'll get me a free flight anywhere?

LORETTA

Yeah, baby! And I'll give you an extra flight too. But only if you promise to keep flirting with me.

STUDENT

Oh Loretta, stop.

She tickles him playfully. The student laughs, flustered.

SWIFF

This bitch is amazing.

Loretta stands behind the student's back while he fills out the form. She then turns to Swiff and Earn and silently pretends to fuck the student in the ass. Tongue out, "rocker" fist up. Earn and Swiff stare.

SWIFF (CONT'D)

Fuckin crazy. I'd still smash.

(then)

You listen to that Paper Boy yet?

Shit is good.

EARN

(not looking)

Who?

SWIFF

Paper Boy? "I got that paper, boy"?

He got that mixtape coming out

Friday. Supposed to be hot.

Swift plays Earn a video called "Paper Boy", by the artist Paper Boy:

The video starts outside of the EASTLAKE APARTMENTS. There's a group of men bouncing to the beat. Some hold stacks of cash, some smoke blunts:

PAPER BOY

PAPER BOY/ ALL ABOUT MY PAPER, BOY/

GOT MY TEAM TO SERVE A FIEND FROM

CALI TO DECATUR, BOY.

Paper Boy raps in a basement as men with their faces covered by white masks stir pots filled with a powdery/soupy mix. They show the mix to camera.

PAPER BOY (CONT'D)

PAPER BOY/ LAME, YOU JUST A HATER

BOY/ IF IT AIN'T BOUT KILOS AND

THEM ZEROS, SEE YOU LATER, BOY.

Cut to: Paper Boy is on a bike riding around the neighborhood. But instead of tossing newspapers, he's tossing bricks of cocaine. Fiends rush out and grab the coke. They cry with joy and mouth "thank you!" It's pretty funny, but kinda fly too. Earn stares at Paper Boy.

SWIFF

Tight, right?

EARN

That's my cousin.

SWIFF

Paper Boy? Furreal? Are you guys cool? Cause you're gonna wanna get in there before he gets signed.

EARN
(watching the video)
He shouldn't sign.

SWIFF
Is this expertise from interning at
fake record companies?

EARN
All record companies are fake.
They're unnecessary. What's a
record company gonna do for him
that he can't do himself?

SWIFF
Uhhhh....dat money? I heard they
already offering him like seven
figures.

Earn stares. Gears turn. He gets a text.

EARN
Fuck. Billy.

SWIFF
Someone figured out you're not
working.

Swift vines Earn's face.

SWIFF (CONT'D)
(to the camera)
THIS NIGGA FIRED! Do it for the
vine!

He turns camera to Loretta. She rams the air with her tongue
out.

INT. BILLY'S OFFICE - DAY

Earn stands in front of Billy's desk. **Billy (30)**, bro-ey
Mexican dude, walks in from behind. He's the kinda guy who
swears you're on the same team when he's really the enemy,
but too much of a pussy to own up to being the enemy.

BILLY
What's up, man!

They awkwardly hug. Then it kinda transitions into Billy
giving Earn a weird shoulder massage.

BILLY (CONT'D)

What ever happened to me, you, and the baby mama's getting weekend drinks man?

EARN

I work a double shift here on Saturdays.

BILLY

Grindin'. Me too. Tryin to get this bonusssss. Gotta put that Ace Hood on repeat.

For a moment he plays "Huslte Hard" by Ace Hood on his shitty Best Buy speakers.

EARN

We're not allowed to listen to music on the floor.

BILLY

(faux anger)

That's right! And I better not catch you!

Billy laughs then mouths "I don't care".

BILLY (CONT'D)

Ey, you seen this? Shit is wild.

Billy sits at his desk and plays a Video on Worldstar. Earn walks over and looks. It's video of the shooting on MARTA.

EARN

(walking away)

I've seen it.

BILLY

Crazy, right?

EARN

Not really. Why'd you call me in?

BILLY

Right. Well, I'm gonna be honest man. Your sign ups haven't been getting approved. You gotta approach people you feel will more than likely be approved.

EARN

Profiling.

BILLY

Profiling?! No, no, no. United American Credit does not support discrimination of a person based on outward appearance in any way, shape, or form.

EARN

That's exactly what you're asking me to do.

BILLY

No, I'm asking you to get your approvals up. Loretta doesn't profile. And she's killing it. Been killing it.

We see a wall of photos of Loretta winning "Best Seller" since like...1994. She's gone through two other managers. Earn notices the very first photo on the wall is in black and white and from 1959. Two white men shake hands. Loretta is in the background, but by her dress it seems as if she's one of their servants. She's staring at them very creepily. She looks the exact same age.

EARN

(to himself)

The fuck?

BILLY

I know. Black don't crack, right? Have to be honest dude. We're gonna have to let you go if these numbers can't move. Think you can do it without profiling? I think you can.

Earn just stares.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Alright. I'm gonna need your login password for your company email.

EARN

Fuck you, Billy.

BILLY

(picking up the phone)

Okay. We can skip right to security-

EARN

No. That's my password. "Fuck you Billy".

Billy looks at him. Then types something into the computer. A moment. Then looks up with an approving nod.

EXT. GLORIA AND RILEY'S HOME - DAY

Earn knocks on a door. An older man, Earnest's dad **RILEY (55)** opens the door, but doesn't open the gate in front of the door.

RILEY
Son.

EARN
Hey dad. Where's mom?

Earnest's mom **GLORIA (50)** sits in the back on the couch.

GLORIA
Hey Earn.

EARN
Hey mom. How are you?

RILEY
Good. How are you, Earn?

EARN
Good.

RILEY
Good.

They silently nod at each other for too long.

EARN
You gonna invite me in?

RILEY
(laughing)
No.

EARN
Why?

RILEY
I can't afford it.

EARN
Come on, you think I'm here for money?

A knowing silence.

GLORIA

We do. Yes.

EARN

I came here to find Alfred. And to know if you could hold Lottie tonight for a bit. I got some business...and her mom's going on a date.

GLORIA

Really? Good for Van. Glad she's moving on.

EARN

You do know that I'm Lottie's father and your son, right?

GLORIA

I'm team Van. You had your chance.

RILEY

When you were describing yourself you forgot "eats all our food" and "raises my internet bill like I ain't supposed to notice".

EARN

Number one: Mrs. Daniels shouldn't have a key to this house. I told you that. I'm gonna use her Alzheimer's to my advantage.

RILEY

That's wrong, boy.

GLORIA

(horrified)
Jesus in heaven.

EARN (CONT'D)

Number two: I'm in and out. You barely notice I was here.

RILEY

Nigga, you ain't a ninja. There was a turd the size my fuckin head waiting for me when I got home. You supposed to be a genius, you can't remember to flush?

GLORIA

You leave droppings. Like a bear. I took a look. You better eat something real.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Instead of all them candies and cookies and whatever other stuff was in there.

EARN

Did you break it up with a stick or something? What's wrong with you?

RILEY

Alfred's in the Glenwood apartments. At least that's where we helped him move in last. Offered him your room, but you know Al. Didn't want help.

EARN

I'm trying to help him.

RILEY

Tends to be the other way around.

As they talk, neighbors pull in to their driveway playing "Paper Boy" from their car.

EARN

Things change.

RILEY

No they don't.

GLORIA

(out the door)

TURN IT THE FUCK DOWN.

RILEY

(re: Gloria)

Exhibit A.

EARN

Alfred made this song, by the way.

GLORIA

Well tell him to turn it down.

EARN

Not how it works, but I'll let him know. Lottie needs to be picked up at three.

RILEY

From where?

EARN

Why don't you have mom ask Van.
Since they're such good frie-

GLORIA

Van just texted where to go. We're
good.

RILEY

We're good.

Earnest nods and heads out.

INT. GLENWOOD APARTMENTS - DAY

ALFRED (35) is playing video games on the couch. **DARIUS (30)** is in the refrigerator scavenging. He's got on an apron and is making cookies. Darius holds a carton of milk.

DARIUS

Is this milk bad?

ALFRED

(staring ahead)
What are you using it for?

DARIUS

Drinking.

ALFRED

Yeah, it's bad.

KNOCK at the door. Alfred and Darius look at each other. Alfred grabs a forty-five from under the sofa seat. Cocks it. Darius ties the towel he was holding around his mouth like a bandit, then holds a pan in attack mode.

Alfred slowly opens the door. It's Earnest.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Earn.

EARN

Wasup Al.

It's all awkwardness. The pause where the hug should be is enough. Earn spots the gun.

EARN (CONT'D)

You knew I was coming?

Alfred opens the door. Earnest walks in and sees Darius standing there, ready to attack.

ALFRED
That's Darius.

Earnest nods. Darius nods. Earnest walks in and looks around.

EARN
Nice place.

ALFRED
No it's not.

Darius comes over with a plate of cookies. Earnest takes one.

EARN
Thanks. All I had was some chips for breakfast.

DARIUS
Something to drink?

EARN
Milk, I guess?

Darius looks at Alfred. Alfred nods like "I guess give it to em". Darius goes.

EARN (CONT'D)
So how's it been-

ALFRED
Fuck you want, man.

EARN
Why does everyone think I want something?

ALFRED
Everybody wants something. People aren't nice. Even when they are, that's just the long version of wanting something.

Darius gives Earnest the glass of milk. While Alfred is talking, he tries to dunk the cookie in the milk. The cookie sticks in the milk, as if it was mud. He puts it down.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
Rich people don't like me. They're nice to me cause I'm the doorman and have complete access to the building when it's time to rob them.

(MORE)

ALFRED (CONT'D)

When was the last time you were nice to a girl you weren't trying to fuck?

EARN

This morni-

ALFRED

And wasn't over sixty.

Earnest gives up. He's right.

DARIUS

Your cutoff is Sixty? That's the good pussy.

EARN

Okay. What do you do, Darius?

DARIUS

Just slather it with KY mostly.

EARN

Okay, gross. I meant your job.

Darius thinks about it.

DARIUS

You know what...me too.

They stare at each other for a moment.

EARN

I feel as though our relationship will be me not understanding what you say.

DARIUS

(smiling, like they figured it out)

Yeah.

EARN

So..."Paper Boy". The hood anthem.

ALFRED

You know. Trying to get this money. Eating.

EARN

Yeah. Me too.

ALFRED
By doing what? Getting kicked out
of Princeton?

Earnest looks up.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
Yeah. I know what happened-

EARN
No you don't.

Earn's whole demeanor changes. There's a weird stand off.

EARN (CONT'D)
Can we talk somewhere, cause-
(gesture to Darius)
Who is this guy?

ALFRED
I'm fine with talking here.

DARIUS
I'm Darius.

Darius quietly walks over to Earn, concerned.

DARIUS
(honestly confused)
...we met over by the door when you
first walked in-

EARN
I know who you are.
(to Alfred)
I'm not asking for money. I wanna
be your manager. I can help.

ALFRED
How are you gonna help me? Aren't
you homeless.

EARN
Not real homeless. I'm not
walking around using a rat as a
phone or anything.

ALFRED
Well, that wouldn't make you
homeless. That'd make you crazy.

DARIUS
Not if it worked.

Earn and Alfred look at him.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

If you could get a rat to work as a phone you'd be a genius. There's five rats for every person in New York alone. Everyone could have an affordable phone.

(then)

Maybe the tail's an antenna...

Darius thinks, then starts to draw something. Earn turns away.

EARN

Look, don't sign a deal.

ALFRED

I need the money.

EARN

We'll get money. I guarantee there's more money in the long run.

ALFRED

What "long run"? I'm a thirty five year old rapper who's never been ten minutes outside the perimeter. I'ma cash out.

EARN

I'm not dumb. You're older, you have no real fanbase, you're not white and/or selling sex.

ALFRED

I'm selling sex.

Earn is confused.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(to Darius)

Track twenty-eight.

Darius plugs his phone into a shitty boombox.

BOOMBOX

MUCKIN. MUCKIN./ THAT'S MASSAGE
PLUS FUCKIN. FUCKIN./ THAT'S
MUCKIN. WE MUCKIN. MUCKIN.

He turns it off.

ALFRED

See, the concept is-

EARN

I think I caught the concept. Track
Twenty eight? Lotta skits?

ALFRED

Yeah. But it's different. Mine are
funny.

EARN

Uh-huh. I'd take 'em out.

ALFRED

Good thing you're not my manager.

EARN

I still got connects from Diamond
House. Promoters. People who manage
big artists now. I know what I'm
doing.

ALFRED

See, you think you're slick. You
came in here like you're saving me.
But really I'm saving you. Again.

EARN

I can get you on the radio. That's
what you're missing.

ALFRED

I'ma be real with you. You haven't
been great. I haven't seen or
heard from you since the funeral.
And the first thing I do hear from
you is "let's get rich!" off my
work. Usually I'm the one
defending you, but I can't do it
anymore.

Alfred plops on the couch and starts playing video games
again. Earn heads for the door. He stops.

EARN

I can get you on the radio.

Alfred continues playing video games, seemingly unaffected.
Earn walks out the door.

DARIUS

You good?

(then)

He's right, tho. You don't need no
label yet.

Alfred pauses the game.

EXT. HOT 107 RADIO STATION PARKING LOT - DAY

Earn anxiously waits on the side of the building. **DAVE (28)**, a young white guy, exits the building and approaches

DAVE
(excited)
My nigga! What's good?

Dave slaps Earn on the back while Earn reacts uncomfortably.

EARN
Hey man.

DAVE
I haven't seen you in like two years. I heard you were back. What happened? I thought you were Ivy league.

EARN
Yeah I was up there. Wasn't for me. Did some work up north, then west coast. Moved back two years ago. My daughter's here so-

DAVE
(interrupting)
Oh shit, right. You still with that girl Van?

EARN
Yeah. Kinda.

DAVE
She is bad. Don't let her out. Niggas be lurkin.

Earn is visibly offended at this point but Dave doesn't seem to notice or care.

EARN
Yeah, whatever. Have you ever heard the song "Paper Boy"?

DAVE
"Paper Boy" by Paper Boy? Hell yeah I've heard that. Shit is fire. Streets is loving it.

EARN
(relieved)
You guys should play it on the
radio then.

DAVE
Yeah, for real.

Both nod in agreement for a moment while looking at each other.

EARN
Nah, but seriously y'all need to
play "Paper Boy".

DAVE
My nigga, if it were up to me?
Yeah. But you know KP picks all the
music.

EARN
Well tell him to play it. It's
important.

DAVE
Well I mean KP will usually spin
some records for some scratch up
top.

EARN
How much?

DAVE
Half stack.

EARN
Five hundred dollars? Am I buying
the station?

DAVE
Everybody's gotta eat, right?
That's just how it goes.

EARN
I don't have five hundred dollars
to give. I got fired today and I
still gotta pay rent. My parents
locked me out of their house. Like
those meth commercials, only not
funny.

DAVE

Sorry, my nigga. You know how it is out here. He usually charge a full C.

EARN

Fuck! I need this man.

DAVE

It's probably for the best, man. Music is gross. Alright, if you're around come by the booth. I'm taking over for the Dirty Boyz tonight at six. Keep it locked!

Dave walks back towards the entrance to the radio station. A group of black employees head toward the door at the same time. DAVE engages them in small talk. EARN can slightly hear DAVE talk to the employees. DAVE's voice is much more professional and a different pitch. Almost a surfer tone.

DAVE (CONT'D)

(To employees)

What's up, my dudes. Whaddup bro!

Earn thinks about this. He then notices **JANITOR (57)** pushing a cart of cleaning materials nearby through the parking lot.

EARN

(to JANITOR)

Hey.

(gesturing towards DAVE)

That guy ever called you "nigga"?

JANITOR

(condescending laugh)

Yeah right. I'd break my foot up his ass.

Janitor continues on his way.

EXT. PIEDMONT PARK- DAY

Earn sits on a park bench, deep in thought. Then **CHRIS BOSH MAN** walks up and sits down next to him.

CHRIS BOSH MAN

Troubles?

Earn looks up.

EARN

Yeah.

CHRIS BOSH MAN

Do tell.

Chris Bosh Man is making a Nutella sandwich on his lap. It's messy.

EARN

I think I'm a loser. I think I'm just supposed to lose. It's in front of me and I can see it, but I just...I'm not supposed to have it. I can't even be a good father.

CHRIS BOSH MAN

(looking out)

Resistance is a symptom of the way things are. Not the way things necessarily should be. Actual victory belongs to people who simply do not accept failure. You've accepted your losses. That's why you feel like you've failed.

A moment. Then, slowly, the man brings the sandwich to his mouth and bites into it. Creepy.

EARN

Who are you?

Chris Bosh Man chuckles.

CHRIS BOSH MAN

Who do you think I am?

EARN

You a basketball player?

CHRIS BOSH MAN

I don't think so.

They both sit quietly as he eats the sandwich.

CHRIS BOSH MAN (CONT'D)

Bite my sandwich.

EARN

No thanks.

His smiles fades.

CHRIS BOSH MAN

Nigga...if you don't bite this sandwich.

There's tension.

INT. GLORIA AND RILEY'S HOME - EVENING

Riley walks in the front door with Gloria behind him holding Lottie. They're holding Chick-Fil-a bags. They turn on the light and find Alfred sitting on the couch with Darius and a casserole pan.

Shit! RILEY GLORIA
Jesus in heaven.

RILEY
Boy, how'd you get in here?

ALFRED
Ms. Daniels let me in. Gave me
some lasagna.
(lifts the pan)
Took a bite. It's cat food.

GLORIA
(offering her bag)
You must be starving. Have some of
this, baby.

DARIUS
What? No!

ALFRED
(to Darius)
She was calling me "baby".
She was offering her food.

Darius nods, understanding. Riley walks in.

RILEY
So Earn found you. Ask you for
money?

ALFRED
Nah. Talked about some business.
He knows I might be in some money
soon. And Darius and I were
thinking there might be more if I
wait. But I wanted to make sure
ya'll were straight first.

GLORIA RILEY
You ain't gotta worry about us. We're good.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
Does he know you're sick?

GLORIA
Who said I was sick?

ALFRED
You just did. You also left a pamphlet on the table.

RILEY
Hood Sherlock.

Alfred and Darius look at each other. Alfred pulls out his phone and starts recording a voice memo.

ALFRED
Mixtape name: Hood Sherlock.
Instead of magnifying glass...
(thinks, then shrugs)
Brick of coke.

DARIUS
(tries to sneak it in
before Alfred stops
recording)
Darius is Watson.

RILEY
It seems like you may have come here for me to tell you not to go for broke.

Alfred shrugs.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Earn did this with Princeton.
He'll tell you I'm not the one.

EXT. HOT 107 RADIO STATION - EVENING

Dave is on air in the DJ booth. His recording voice

DAVE
I got your Future tickets at the top of the hour. Tweet me your request. I'm here on Atlanta's Hip-Hop-

Earn walks in.

DAVE (CONT'D)

My nigga, you came! You look weird.

EARN

I just had a moment of enlightenment. Or I just shared a sandwich with Satan.

DAVE

Lemme record this right quick.

EARN quickly places some folded money in DAVE's hand.

EARN

That's four hundred and thirty four dollars. Everything I have minus some bus money. Give it to KP.

DAVE

I'll see what-

EARN

Nah. You'll make it happen.

KP (40s) walks in.

KP

I'm brining Nas in right now about Birthday Bash. Say hi when you get a minute?

DAVE

(professional)
No problem, bro.

KP leaves.

DAVE (CONT'D)

(nigga)

Look, man. I'ma try my hardest but-

EARN

That money's not going to KP, is it? You're pocketing that and your gonna tell me next week KP isn't feelin the song. If you were serious about this, you would've introduced me to KP right then, but you didn't.

DAVE

Nigga, you just talking now.
(recording voice)

(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)
That was Migos, "YRN". I got your
Future tickets at the top of the
hour. Tweet me your-

KP and **NAS** poke their heads in.

DAVE (CONT'D)
(professional)
Hey man! So nice to meet you. Big
fan.

KP
They're doing an interview in the
conference room, so we'll be in the
studio.

DAVE
Cool, cool. I'll be right over.
Quick recording.

They leave and go next door.

EARN
That's twice.

DAVE
(nigga)
I got work to do.

EARN
You're fucking right you got
work to do. If that song
isn't on the air by next week
I'ma find you and kick your
fucking head in until four
hundred and thirty four
dollars falls out-

DAVE
(recording voice)
This is your boy Blowout, and
I got your Future tickets at
the top of the hour. Tweet
me your request. I'm taking
over for the Dirty Boyz
tonight right here on
Atlanta's Hip-Hop-- NIGGA!
CHILL!

Earn quietly shifts his eyes. Dave turns to the left and
sees Nas and KP staring back at him. They can hear him in
the studio. Earn's hand is on the switch. He flips it off.

EARN
(gesturing wildy)
Here's the deal. You're gonna do
exactly what I say.

DAVE
Why are you acting so weird?

EARN

Because I want them to think I'm upset about you calling me a nigga, when we both know I couldn't care less. I'm about money.

Dave is starting to realize he's been played a little.

EARN (CONT'D)

(still gesturing crazy)

You're gonna give KP that money. You're gonna introduce me to him when he comes in here, and you're gonna let me let you keep your job. You were right. Music is gross.

Dave is a little stunned. KP walks in.

KP

Can I talk to you for a second, Dave?

EARN

Actually, may I talk to you for a second Mr...?

KP

Parker.

Earn walks out with KP.

INT. MARTA BUS - EVENING

EARN is sitting in a seat on the bus with Lottie in his arms, asleep. He has earphones on. "Don't Disturb This Groove" by The System is all we can hear, as if we're Earn. Earn looks out the window solemnly while eating a Wendy's burger with his one free hand. Everyone on the bus looks dead. Just sad and dead. That look after you've worked so hard, all day, and you don't know why.

He looks at his daughter, then pulls out his phone. He begins to text Van. He puts "I love you. I was wrong. Can we talk tonight?"

He stares at "send".

The message disappears as his phone starts ringing. It's Alfred.

EARN

(on phone)

Hello?

Alfred's voice can be heard on the other side of the phone.

ALFRED (O.C.)
Yo. You hear that, my nigga?

EARN
Hear what?

CUT TO:

INT. ALFRED'S CAR - NIGHT

Alfred and Darius are in the car parked outside of a Chinese restaurant. Darius is eating Lo Mein out of a box. Both are bobbing their heads. "Paper Boy" is playing from the car radio.

ALFRED
(To Darius)
Yo turn that up.
(to EARN on phone)
"Paper Boy". They've been spinning
this shit for the last hour.

DARIUS
T.P.B. Bitch! Team Paper Boy for
life.
(then)
Tell em I sketched out them rat
phones.

He pulls out a sketch. He takes a picture.

ALFRED
Darius wants to send you a sketch
of the rat phone. Okay?

EARN
Uh...yeah. Whatever.

ALFRED
Sounds good on the radio. Thanks.

EARN
Trying to be a man of my word.

ALFRED
I feel you. Well maybe we can sit
down and talk. See if you got any
more ideas.

EARN
Like a manager?

ALFRED
Like a "calm the fuck down, we'll see".

Earn smiles. Alfred notices a GIRL off camera walk past the car.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
(to Girl)
Ey baby! That's me they playing on the radio.

GIRL (O.S.)
So what?

ALFRED
(angrily to girl)
Well fuck you then! Stank ass broad.

DARIUS
(to girl)
You ain't cute! Fake ass instagram model.

ALFRED
(to EARN on phone)
Yea man, what you doing tomorrow?

EARN
Shit. I gotta try to get my job back. I spent the last of everything I had today-

ALFRED
(to EARN)
Hold on. Something's happening. I'll hit to you later, cuh.

CUT TO:

INT. MARTA BUS - EVENING

EARN
Hello? Al?

Earnest gets a message on his phone. It's the rat phone diagram. Earn laughs, then notices it's actually really good. I mean, it's a stupid idea, but Darius obviously has some sort of knowledge in engineering and electronics. Earnest is shocked.

INT. EASTLAKE APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Earnest lies on a couch in the living room, looking sleepy. He hears a key in the door and perks up. Van walks in the door and sees Earn on the couch.

VAN

Hello. Don't tell me you waited up for me.

EARN

No. I'm not tripping. You're a grown woman. I'm not your keeper.

VAN flashes a faint smile at Earnest. She continues to get herself comfortable while she walks in the bedroom. Earnest follows her.

VAN

Where's my baby? I hope you fed her.

EARN

Of course. Lottie is asleep in her crib. I'm not as irresponsible as you like to believe.

VAN

Yea, let you tell it.

Earn sits on the bed while Van changes into her pajamas.

EARN

So...how was your day?

VAN

(smiling)
How was my date?

EARN

Not what I said.

VAN

You're such a hater.

Van gives Earnest a love tap to the head. He grabs her and kisses her hard. When he pulls away she looks at him as if he's brand new. She's struck.

EARN

I know he's a corny ass dude.
Cause he's not me.

Van's never really seen this. It's different. Kind of a turn on.

VAN

Maybe. But maybe I like corny dudes. The kind that have weird dreams all the time. How was your day?

EARN

Alright. A little long but it turned out okay I guess.

Van motions for Earn to get in bed next to her. Earn gets up off the bed and gets under the covers next to Van. She turns on the T.V. The news.

EARN (CONT'D)

Can you tell me how close I am?
 "Ey girl. I'm not trying to fuck, I just wanna listen to Talib and vibe with your energy. Don't mind the incense and neo-soul cd collection. CD's because downloading music is illegal." That right?

Van laughs. She begins to play with Earn's hair.

T.V.

A shooting on the eastside of Atlanta tonight outside of Dragonfly Chinese restaurant on Wesley Chapel. One man was shot and is in stable condition. Witnesses say a fight broke out after two men cat called a woman. One of the suspects, known as the rapper "Paper Boy," was arrested.

Earnest turns to the television. Fuck.

VAN (O.C.)

Oh yeah. You got that money for the rent?...Earn?

CUT TO BLACK.

END