

ONE NIGHT IN MIAMI...

Screenplay by

Kemp Powers

Based on his original stage play

A black screen. A TITLE CARD appears:

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS...

We hear the roaring of a crowd, pierced every few seconds by a loud THWACK that sounds like a wet-gloved punch landing on an unguarded head. Every thud elicits a collective groan from hundreds of voices.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The rain has stopped. The excitement has really grown among this forty thousand strong Wembley crowd. It's safe to say that every single one of them is on Henry Cooper's side...

FADE IN:

INT. WEMBLEY STADIUM BOXING RING - NIGHT

CHYRON: 1963, WEMBLEY STADIUM, LONDON

A sweat-soaked CASSIUS CLAY, 21, dances around a flailing HENRY "THE HAMMER" COOPER, 28, delivering punches to Cooper's face at will.

ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

And Cooper's eye is opening wider! It's a shocking cut above his left eye! He knows he's got to get this fight over with really quickly. Clay is mocking Cooper!

Cooper takes several more desperate swings at Cassius. Finally the sound of an end-of-round BELL sparks a muted, collective APPLAUSE.

ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

Clay raises his hands as he goes back to his corner, the crowd jeering him all the way. My goodness, Cooper...

Cassius struts back to his corner, where he's flanked by ANGELO DUNDEE, 42, and DREW "BUNDINI" BROWN, 35. Bundini removes his mouthguard, and Cassius immediately flashes a megawatt smile. Angelo is irate, shouting.

ANGELO

Is this a joke to you, kid?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

What I do?

ANGELO

Nothing! That's the problem! We had a fight plan...

CASSIUS

Plan?! Angie, look at him!

From Cassius' POV, we see the opposite corner of the ring, where Cooper sits on his stool, wheezing like he's about to have a heart attack. His trainers struggle to stop the blood pouring from his forehead and eyelids. Back to Cassius.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

I'm beatin' the shit outta that tomato can!

BUNDINI

Damn right, he is! Rumble, young man, rumble!

Right on cue, Cassius and Bundini lock eyes and, mouths equally agape, let out an arrogant shout.

CASSIUS AND BUNDINI

Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhh!

Angelo isn't amused.

ANGELO

If you're not gonna put your guard up, could you at least finish him off?!

CASSIUS

I don't want get too close to him! If I get any more a' his blood on my trunks, my momma ain't never gonna be able to wash it out.

ANGELO

Nobody gives a damn about blood on some boxing trunks!

CASSIUS

These is my lucky trunks!

BUNDINI

Your momma still doin' your laundry?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

Shut up!

ANGELO

Would you both shut the fuck up?!

CUT TO ringside, where two English ANNOUNCERS are discussing the one-sided action.

ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

(sighs)

Three rounds in, and it's not looking good for Henry the Hammer.

ANNOUNCER #2 (V.O.)

No it is not.

ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

This Wembley Park crowd was expecting a better showing from local lad Cooper against American upstart Cassius Clay.

ANNOUNCER #1 (V.O.)

They've been saying the Louisville Lip's theatrics overshadow his actual skills in the ring.

ANNOUNCER #2

I doubt Cooper agrees with that assessment tonight...

ANNOUNCER #1

Let's just hope Clay can put this bloke out of his misery soon.

ANNOUNCER #2

I think we may have all underestimated Cassius Clay. Perhaps he is as good as he says he is.

Back on Cassius' corner as the BELL rings. The REFEREE motions to Cassius, who saunters from his corner.

ANGELO

Remember... finish him off!

CASSIUS

(defiantly)

I'll finish him when I'm good and ready to!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Angelo throws up his hands in exasperation as Cassius skips to the center of the ring, where Cooper is waiting. Before Cooper can even get his hands up, Cassius unleashes a lightning-fast punch right into his face, to the collective groans of the crowd.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

You ain't got nowhere to be, do
you, Henry?

Each punch sends a combination of sweat and blood flying off Cooper's head as he stumbles back towards the ropes. As Cooper struggles to recover, Clay dances around, prolonging the punishment.

ANGELO

(walla)

Let's go now, Cassius, let's go...
There ya are... Move... There it
is... None of that... Hands up!
(to Bundini)
What's he doin'?

BUNDINI

I don't know, playin' around...

Cassius glances out over the audience, a sea of ANGRY FACES. Something catches his eye, and he does a double-take.

CASSIUS

That Elizabeth Taylor?

ANGELO

Keep your eyes in the ring! Get
those hands up!

Without warning, Cooper comes from below with a jackhammer of a LEFT HOOK that nails Cassius square in his jaw. He slams down onto the canvas hard, ass-first.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Clay took one chance too many, and
he still doesn't where he is!

Angelo shouts words of encouragement, but Cassius doesn't hear them. Legs akimbo and arms tangled in the ropes, his eyes are open, but Cassius is effectively OUT COLD.

From Cassius' POV, even the bright LIGHTS above the ring are blurry. As the referee's hand slowly counts him out...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VOICE (PRE-LAP)

I want you to imagine a man who for twenty-five years of his life arrived to work every morning at nine o'clock. You could set your watch by him...

CUT TO:

INT. COPACABANA NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Comedian MYRON COHEN is on the stage, performing his bit to a capacity crowd of onlookers, all white and mostly middle-aged or older. Everyone is smiling widely. They love this guy.

MYRON

...Then suddenly, one morning, after twenty-five years of punctual nine in the morning appearances, not only is he late, but he doesn't look like himself. He has a big lump on his head, two black eyes. Bloody nose. Lip torn. Clothes ripped and disheveled. His boss says, "What in the world happened to you?" He says, "Ooooh. Fell down a whole flight of stairs, almost got killed." The boss says, "So this took you an hour?"

The entire crowd roars with laughter at the punchline as Cohen stands there, deadpan, drinking it in. Backstage, SAM COOKE, 32, watches with a sour look on his face. By his side stands his younger brother, L.C. COOKE.

Sam's watching Cohen, but listening closely to the conversation happening five feet away as JESS RAND, his publicist, pleads with JULES PODELL, an intimidating hulk of a man. Cohen's jokes (and the crowd's laughter) can be heard in the background throughout.

JESS

Jules, work with us.

JULES

The Copa has rules. Band members sit in the band-stand! Cliff's not dressed. You don't even have a chair for him! If your guy's a real singer...

SAM

Real singer?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JULES
 (smirking)
 ...then he don't need no guitar
 player on the floor with him.

JESS
 My "guy's" first single was number
 one in America.

JULES
 He ain't had any hits in here.
 (scoffs)
 I never shoulda booked him. We
 coulda had Mark Wilson in this
 slot.

L.C. suddenly looks excited.

JESS
 Who?

L.C.
 The magician from "the Magical Land
 of Alakazam"? I love that show,
 man!

JULES
 See? Even that guy knows, and he
 looks like an idiot.

L.C.
 Fuck you, man!

VOICE (O.S.)
 Give it up again for Myron Cohen,
 ladies and gentlemen! Myron Cohen!

We hear the roar of the crowd.

JULES
 So, should I tell Myron to do an
 encore? He's the one these people
 paid to see...

Jess turns to Sam.

JESS
 Sam...

There's a look of withering anger on Sam's face.

SAM
 All right, fine. Fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JESS
(to Jules)
Fine.

SAM
They better not fuck up my
arrangements.

We CUT back to the stage, where RONNIE the announcer stands at the microphone in front of the crowd.

RONNIE
Next up, we have a young man coming to the Copacabana stage for the very first time. You all know him from his hit song, *You Send Me*. Ladies and gents, let's give a warm Copacabana welcome to... Saaaaaam Cooke!

The band plays cheesy entrance music as Sam walks quickly onto the stage, a big toothy grin now plastered onto his face. He looks down and notices no fewer than half a dozen couples abruptly rise from their tables and begin making their way to the exits. Sam fights to keep the smile on his face as he arrives at the microphone.

SAM
It's great to be at The Copacabana!
How's everybody feelin' tonight?

A smattering of applause. All of the enthusiasm that greeted Myron Cohen seems to have left with him.

SAM (CONT'D)
Um, I want to tell you that ever since I started singing... Before I knew I even wanted to be a singer... Playing The Copa has been a dream of mine. So thank you for being here on the night that dream comes true.

Another smattering of applause, only slightly more enthusiastic. A few people cough.

SAM (CONT'D)
I thought I'd start off this evening, uh... with something that you all might recognize.
(turns to the band)
Boys?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sam gestures to the orchestra, which begins playing a poorly-arranged intro to the song "Tammy."

SAM (CONT'D)

(singing)

*I hear the cottonwoods whispering
above, Tammy, Tammy, Tammy's my
love...*

A well-dressed WOMAN in the front row leans over to her HUSBAND and whispers in his ear.

WOMAN

(whispering)

I liked this song so much more when
Debbie Reynolds sang it!

Her husband nods in approval as Sam continues. A couple more people try to discreetly make their way to the exits.

SAM

(singing)

*The old hootie owl hootie-hoos to
the dove, Tammy, Tammy, Tammy's my
love...*

Sam looks offstage and locks eyes with L.C. and CLIFF, both shaking their heads in disapproval. Jess, meanwhile, gives a sheepish two thumbs up.

CUT TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sam sits in front of his dressing room mirror, seething. L.C. and Cliff sit on a small sofa behind him, quiet as mice.

The door swings open and Jess enters.

JESS

Boy, did really you bomb tonight,
Sam.

In a flash, Sam leaps from his chair and is nose-to-nose with the shocked Jess.

SAM

Motherfucker, have you ever made a
quarter million dollars singing?

JESS

Sam... no.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Well I have. So until you do, keep
your fucking mouth shut!

Sam pushes Jess backwards out the door and slams it in his face. He returns to sit in his chair. The room is once again silent, until...

L.C.

He ain't wrong, though. You did
kinda stink the place up tonight.

Sam chuckles.

SAM

Yeah, I did.

L.C.

(chuckling, to Cliff)
I told him not to sing that song.
He got all them hits and chose that
one...

Sam goes silent. He looks at himself in the mirror and takes a swig from his glass of whiskey.

CUT TO:

INT. 1960S CADILLAC - MOVING - DAY

A scarred HAND with a large GOLD RING on the ring finger rests on a steering wheel. A PULL OUT reveals the driver is JIM BROWN, 27. He's maneuvering the car down an unpaved road, past the distinct willows and oaks that make it recognizable as the American South. He slows the car as he approaches a large, remote HOUSE, pulling to a stop in front of the porch and stepping out.

EXT. ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA - DAY

CHYRON: ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA

Jim steps onto the porch, swings open the SCREEN DOOR, and knocks. He lets the screen door swing closed as he waits. After several seconds, the inner door opens, revealing EMILY CARLTON, 20s, a young white girl in a sundress, on the other side. She surveys Jim with her eyes, suspiciously.

EMILY

Yes? May I help you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Yes, ma'am. I'm here to see Mr. Carlton.

A look of recognition comes over her face, and she suddenly lights up with excitement.

JIM (CONT'D)

Would you tell him that Jim Brown is...

EMILY

Jim Brown?! Oh God, from the NFL!

JIM

(smiling)
Yes, ma'am.

EMILY

Grandpa! Jim Brown from the NFL is here! And he wants to see you!

She excitedly shakes Jim's hand.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Well I never...

Jim chuckles to himself. He's accustomed to this kind of thing happening. A BEAT, then MR. CARLTON, 60s-70s, steps onto the porch, smiling.

MR. CARLTON

Would you look at who's on my porch! James Nathaniel Brown.

JIM

Hello there, Mr. Carlton.

MR. CARLTON

Don't you "hello" me! Put her there, son.

Mr. Carlton extends his hand. Jim is charmed and reaches out, shaking his hand, firmly.

MR. CARLTON (CONT'D)

Come now, have a seat with me!

Mr. Carlton and Jim walk over to the edge of the porch, where they sit down on a pair of matching patio chairs.

MR. CARLTON (CONT'D)

Can I get you something to drink?
Lemonade, maybe?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

That's all right. Thank you,
though.

MR. CARLTON

Welp, suit yourself. I'm certainly
having me some.

(shouting towards the
house)

Fetch us a couple glasses of that
lemonade, would you, sweetie?

(smiling at Jim)

Just in case you change your
mind...

Jim smiles and nods.

MR. CARLTON (CONT'D)

How long you been back on the
island?

JIM

I just got in last night.

MR. CARLTON

And you came by to say hello. How
thoughtful of you, Jimmy.

JIM

My aunt said you were anxious to
see me. I'm an early riser, so I
thought I'd come right over.

MR. CARLTON

The early bird does catch the worm.
But you already know that. Caught a
hell of a lotta worms this year!

JIM

(smiling)

I guess you could say that.

MR. CARLTON

No man who's run one thousand eight
hundred and sixty yards in a season
needs to be so humble.

JIM

Actually, it was one thousand eight
hundred and sixty three.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. CARLTON

(laughs)

That's more like it! That record is going to stand the test of time.

JIM

You know, I'd happily give the record back for a win over the Packers in that last game.

MR. CARLTON

That Packers win is gonna be forgotten by anyone who doesn't live in Goose Bay by tomorrow. Your record is going to be remembered forever.

JIM

I don't see any reason why I can't get the record and the win next time.

MR. CARLTON

Right you are, son. Right you are.

A beat. Both men look out from the porch.

MR. CARLTON (CONT'D)

Jimmy, I just wanted to let you know if there's ever anything I can do for you, you should never hesitate to reach out.

JIM

That's mighty kind of you, sir.

MR. CARLTON

Our families go way back. Been looking out for one another since the first folks settled on this island. I wanted to make sure that I told you face-to-face that as long as I'm still here, that ain't ever gonna change.

JIM

Well, my aunt will be very happy to hear such a kind sentiment from you, Mr. Carlton. Not everyone else on the island has been so supportive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. CARLTON

Crabs in a barrel, I say. To hell with 'em all! I for one think that you are a credit not only to this community, but to the entire state of Georgia. I've never been prouder to say that I live on St. Simon's Island than I am now. And I always make the point of adding "the place where the great Jim Brown is from."

Jim smiles warmly and shakes Mr. Carlton's hand again. Just then, Emily emerges from behind the screen door carrying a TRAY with two glasses of lemonade.

EMILY

Here you boys go. Two lemonades!

MR. CARLTON

Thank you, darlin'.

JIM

Thank you.

She sets the tray down and each takes a glass.

EMILY

Sorry to bother you while you're entertaining, grandpa, but if you could come move that bureau when you have a moment?

MR. CARLTON

Sorry, I almost forgot...

Mr. Carlton rises from his chair. Jim follows suit. They head for the front door. Emily dashes back inside.

JIM

You moving some furniture? You should let me help you with that.

MR. CARLTON

That's so considerate of you, Jimmy...

Mr. Carlton steps inside. Jim, smiling, is about to do the same, when Mr. Carlton stops him.

MR. CARLTON (CONT'D)

...but you know we don't allow niggers in the house. So it's quite all right.

Jim is stunned into silence. His mouth hangs open. Mr. Carlton doesn't think twice about what he's just said, and smiles as he turns to Jim one last time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. CARLTON (CONT'D)

It really is wonderful to see you,
son. Keep up the good work. You do
us all proud.

As Mr. Carlton walks away, Jim continues to stand there,
silently, on the other side of the door. We also hear a
VOICE, like something one might hear on the radio.

VOICE (V.O.)

While city officials, state
agencies, white liberals and sober-
minded Negroes stand idly by...

CUT TO:

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY

We now see the voice speaking is that of MIKE WALLACE, a
television news anchor, who stands in an empty newsroom
speaking directly to the screen. This is the news documentary
THE HATE THAT HATE PRODUCED ---

WALLACE

...a group of Negro dissenters is
taking to street corner
stepladders, church pulpits, sports
arenas and ballroom platforms
across the United States to preach
a gospel of hate that would set off
a federal investigation if it were
preached by Southern whites.

INT. HOUSE - QUEENS, NEW YORK CITY - EVENING

CLOSE UP of a black and white TELEVISION SCREEN, where the
Mike Wallace special continues playing. PULL OUT to reveal
the television sits in the humble LIVING ROOM of a suburban-
looking house.

WALLACE

For some time between now and 1970,
Elijah Muhammad, founder and
spiritual leader of the group, has
intimated that he will give the
call for the destruction of the
white man.

BETTY "X" SHABAZZ, 29, sits on a sofa, watching the screen as
the program continues to play.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WALLACE (CONT'D)

Here you will hear Elijah Muhammad introduced by minister Malcolm X, the Muslim's New York leader and ambassador at large for the movement.

A massive Nation of Islam rally is on the television. MALCOLM X, 38, walks over to a podium and begins addressing a crowd, as ELIJAH MUHAMMAD sits in a row behind him, flanked by a row of sunglass-clad BODYGUARDS.

MALCOLM

In the church, we used to sing the song, "good news, the chariot is comin'." Is that right or wrong?

The crowd shouts its affirmation.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

But what we must bear in mind is that what's good news to you might be bad news to another. And while you sit here today knowing that you have come to hear good news, you must realize in advance that what's good news for the sheep... well that might be bad news for the wolf!

The crowd cheers.

BACK TO:

Inside the house. The lock on the front door clicks, and Betty rises from the couch just as it opens and Malcolm X enters. He looks exhausted.

BETTY

I expected you back hours ago!

MALCOLM

I know. I know. I got back as fast as I could.

BETTY

Thank goodness you're safe.

MALCOLM

Where are the girls?

BETTY

I put them to bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

(disappointed)

I promised I'd be here in time to
tuck them in.

(pause)

I'm really sorry.

BETTY

You can put them to bed tomorrow
night.

MALCOLM

Right. Tomorrow...

This remark gives Betty pause. She places her hand on
Malcolm's face.

BETTY

Did you speak to him?

MALCOLM

Yes.

BETTY

And?

MALCOLM

Louis X said that if I decide to
leave the Nation of Islam, I will
be doing so... on my own.

BETTY

Damn him!!

MALCOLM

Betty, please. Don't wake up the
girls.

BETTY

He wouldn't even be in the Nation
if not for you! Let along running
the Boston temple?

MALCOLM

He remains thankful for my
mentorship.

BETTY

You told him about the Messenger's
indiscretions? All of the
secretaries? All of the children?
And that didn't sway him at all?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad...

BETTY

Don't say "honorable"...

MALCOLM

(sighs)

...was his lure to the Nation. Just like he was for me and so many others. Imagine convincing someone to convert to Christianity, then telling that same person to leave the church because Christ wasn't who you said he was.

BETTY

Louis could stroll right over to any of the seedy apartments Elijah Muhammad has those poor young girls holed up in and see the proof of his deeds with his own eyes!

MALCOLM

Perhaps Louis X just isn't ready to see that truth. Maybe none of them are.

BETTY

(suddenly horrified)

What are we going to do now? The Nation owns this house. The car. Everything we have. The second they learn about your plan...

MALCOLM

I'm hoping our friendship will keep brother Louis from sharing our plans with anyone else.

BETTY

You can't count on that!

MALCOLM

I have to. I have to until I can make other arrangements.

BETTY

What else can be done? You... we are all alone if we go through with this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

For the moment. But I have one more potential ace up my sleeve.

BETTY

What?

Malcolm doesn't say anything, and simply smiles at Betty.

SMASH CUT TO:

TITLE CARD:

"One Night in Miami..."

INT. POOL -DAY

Cassius, clad only in his white boxing trunks, stands in his fighting stance underwater, perfectly still. A sudden SPLASH as a camera-toting DIVER plunges into the pool and quickly sinks to the bottom.

CHYRON: Miami, Florida February 25, 1964

As the froth and bubbles clear, the photographer begins taking photos. Cassius is the picture of grace as he throws seemingly slow-motion punches underwater.

CUT TO:

EXT. POOLSIDE

POOLSIDE, where Bundini, Angelo, and FERDIE PACHECO stare down into the pool.

BUNDINI

He can't even swim! That boy gonna mess around and drown.

Cassius and the photographer emerge from the pool. Cassius is laughing.

BUNDINI (CONT'D)

You need to get on outta there before you get yourself killed!

ANGELO

He's right, kid. You need to get your head into this fight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

My head is into the fight, Angie.

Cassius pulls himself out of the pool and towels off.

ANGELO

You sat in on any more of Liston's training sessions like I asked?

CASSIUS

No need. Watching Sonny Liston train is like bein' at the circus. He looks like one a' them big, ugly bears they have riding around on tiny little bikes. All he needs is an itty bitty hat on his head. He ain't no boxer. He's an animal.

ANGELO

He's an animal that can tear you apart if you don't focus. You make the same mistakes with him that you did with Cooper, you won't be walkin' away from it.

CASSIUS

I won that Cooper fight, didn't I?

FERDIE

You got saved by the bell! And he woulda finished the job if they didn't stop the fight from all the bleeding.

CASSIUS

Woulda, coulda, shoulda, didn't. A win is a win, Ferdie.

Cassius throws on his SHORT ROBE and FLIP-FLOPS.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

I'll be back in a bit.

ANGELO

And where on Earth are you going?

CASSIUS

To check on Malcolm.

ANGELO

Oh, good grief...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

You got something else on your mind, Angie?

ANGELO

Do I have to remind you how unhappy the Louisville group is about him being here?

CASSIUS

What they got to be mad about? I been training hard as hell for this fight!

ANGELO

Well, they're the ones paying for all of the training. They're paying for all of us. I'm just letting you know, they've been giving me a lot of grief.

CASSIUS

What business is Malcolm of theirs?

ANGELO

You don't understand why a bunch of white businessmen might be a little stung by a guy who says they're all natural born demons?

BUNDINI

Mmm-hmm. That'll do it...

CASSIUS

(chuckling)
He said devils.

Angelo isn't amused.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Malcolm's never been anything but kind to you, Angelo.

ANGELO

I know, but the investors only know what they see on T.V. And that ain't good, kid.

CASSIUS

They pay for my training. They don't get to choose my friends for me...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGELO

Well, training's what they want
their money going towards, not some
white man-hating demagogue's
airfare.

Cassius is silent, trying to hold back the anger he's feeling
over Angelo's comments.

CASSIUS

What did the investors say when
they gave me my money?

ANGELO

(sighs)
That it was yours to do...

CASSIUS

(cutting him off)
...to do with as I pleased, Angie!
And if it pleases me to bring my
friend down to give me the
spiritual support I need to win
this fight, then that's what I'm
gonna do. They want their money
back?! I'll pay it back to all of
'em with interest, after the fight!

Angelo is silent, unsure of what to say.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Now, if you all will excuse me.
I'll see you back here in an hour.

Cassius walks off.

BUNDINI

He'll be all right. You gotta have
faith in him. You gotta have a
little bit of faith...

CUT TO:

INT. FONTAINEBLEAU HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Sam sits on his bed, strumming a GUITAR. The door to the
bathroom is open, and we can see BARBARA COOKE in the
bathroom, applying her makeup.

SAM

(singing softly)
*Don't make it rougher and don't
make me suffer just...*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM AND BARBARA
 (singing in unison)
...put me down eeeeeeeasaay...

BARBARA
 That sounds nice!

SAM
 It does, doesn't it?

SAM (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*If you found somebody new, there is
 nothing I can do, but ask you
 toooooooooo...*
 (pauses)
*Go...easy on me baby doll, do me
 this service break my fall...ahhh,
 shit!*

BARBARA
 What? That sounds great!

SAM
 If I was singin' it, maybe. But not
 for L.C. That don't sound like
 nothin' he'd ever say.

BARBARA
 You got that right. He's more
 like...
 (impersonating L.C.)
*Get over here girl and let me smell
 them panties!*

Sam bursts into laughter.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
 Your brother is so country.

SAM
 (laughing)
 Look who's talkin'!

BARBARA
 I'm sophisticated!

SAM
 (slyly)
 I don't know why I went through all
 the trouble of gettin' this nice
 hotel room for an old country gal
 like you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARBARA

(chuckles)

I didn't ask to stay at the Fontainebleau! I'd have been perfectly happy over at the Sir John with Cassius or the Hampton House with Malcolm and the rest of the Black folks like us.

Sam suddenly stiffens. And awkward silence. Barbara clocks this.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

But I do like it here. It's nice.

Sam says nothing.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

And... I'm glad I decided to come down here for this, Sam. With you. You haven't sung to me in a long time.

Sam looks down at his guitar and continues to lightly strum, avoiding eye contact.

SAM

Yeah, I know it...

Barbara is about to say something else when the TELEPHONE rings. Sam is quick to answer it.

SAM (CONT'D)

Hello?

CUT TO:

INT. MALCOLM'S ROOM

Malcolm smiles as he speaks into a receiver.

MALCOLM

Brother Sam.

BACK TO SCENE.

SAM

Mallllllcolm!

INTERCUT BETWEEN SAM AND MALCOLM.

Sam points to the phone with an "I've got to take this" gesture. Barbara, obviously disappointed, returns to the bathroom.

A wide shot reveals Malcolm is sitting in his hotel room at the Hampton House.

MALCOLM

Is brother Cassius there with you?

SAM

Naw. He's probably doing some last-minute prep for the fight. Why?

MALCOLM

Oh, I thought he might come by before heading to the convention center so that we might have a word or two.

SAM

Have you tried Jim?

MALCOLM

Yes. Jimmy hasn't seen him either.

SAM

Well, if he calls, I'll let him know you're looking for him.

MALCOLM

I appreciate that, brother Sam.

SAM

I'll see you at the convention center.

MALCOLM

Yeah, I wouldn't miss it.

Malcolm and Sam both hang up. Malcolm sighs, then looks out his window.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE MOTEL

Cassius saunters through a parking lot and under a large SIGN welcoming guests to the HAMPTON HOUSE HOTEL.

INT. MALCOLM'S HOTEL ROOM

There is a KNOCK at the door.

MALCOLM

Come in.

The door swings open, and brother KAREEM X stands in the doorway.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Yes, brother Kareem?

KAREEM

You have a visitor, brother Malcolm.

Cassius struts into the room. Malcolm smiles.

MALCOLM

Brother Cassius.

Malcolm and Cassius hug as Kareem closes the door, giving them privacy.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

I thought you might not be able to make it.

CASSIUS

Hey man, ain't no way I'm goin' into that ring without my insurance policy.

Malcolm walks over to the corner and pulls out a pair of PRAYER RUGS. He unrolls them onto the floor. The two men kneel together on the small rug and lower their heads in unison. They begin to silently pray in Arabic.

During the prayer, Malcolm opens one eye and notices Cassius is holding his hands incorrectly. He reaches out, and kindly corrects his hand position.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

(embarrassed)

Thank you.

Malcolm nods and they continue their prayer...

EXT. HOTEL BALCONY, POOLSIDE

At the same time outside the room, Kareem and the other Jamaal silently, simultaneously conduct the same prayer while standing.

INT. MALCOLM'S ROOM

Inside the room, Malcolm and Cassius also stand, their prayer completed. Malcolm smiles as he pats Cassius on the back, then rolls up his rug.

MALCOLM

You ready for tonight?

CASSIUS

I been training three years for this fight. I'm as ready as a person can be.

MALCOLM

Still, it might not hurt to just tone down the rhetoric until after the fight.

CASSIUS

Why would I do that?

MALCOLM

It may be easier for you to focus, Cash, if for once the only person gunning for your head is the guy in the ring, and not the entire arena.

Cassius ponders this for a minute.

CASSIUS

You watch wrasslin'?

MALCOLM

Wrestling? I can't say it's part of my daily viewing.

CASSIUS

I figured not. Well, my favorite wrassler is Gorgeous George.

MALCOLM

Good-lookin' fellow, I take it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

In the European way, sure. Head full of blond hair, teased up into a nice 'do.

MALCOLM

(sarcastically)

The crowds must love him.

CASSIUS

Naw. He preens and prances around like a peacock, talkin' all kinda a' smack. They boo him. They scream at him. And the more they scream, the more he eggs 'em all on.

MALCOLM

So, he's the villain?

CASSIUS

Well, sorta. Wrasslin's kinda complicated.

MALCOLM

Why would you model yourself after a person everyone hates?

CASSIUS

Because everyone in that arena pays a hundred dollars to see George lose. The way I figure it, win or lose the fight, George has already won the war.

MALCOLM

(chuckles)

Well, maybe you fellas just like going around with targets on your backs.

CASSIUS

(slyly)

We learned from the best, brother minister.

MALCOLM

Touché.

CASSIUS

I got you a ticket in the second row, right next to Sam.

MALCOLM

And Jimmy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

He's doing commentary ringside. But don't worry. I already told all of 'em after the fight we're all coming back here for the champ's victory party.

MALCOLM

And did you tell them anything else?

CASSIUS

Oh, um. I didn't get around to it. I mean, I plan on...

MALCOLM

No, no. It's all right, my brother. This journey is different for each of us.

CASSIUS

Thank you, Malcolm.

Malcolm smiles.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

I've gotta get back to my team. The fight time is at ten. Don't be late.

MALCOLM

I won't. Peace be unto you, young brother. Peace be unto you...

CUT TO:

INT. MIAMI CONVENTION CENTER - FIGHT NIGHT

INT. BOXING RING

CLOSE UP on the face of SONNY LISTON, covered in sweat and eyes swelling. A GLOVED FIST comes into frame and lands squarely on his nose.

VOICE (O.S.)

Come on, sucka!

His heads snaps back, also snapping us into real time as we pull out to reveal that Cassius has delivered the blow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

Come on, boy! You gonna get that whoopin'...

Cassius unloads a rapid-fire flurry of punches, one after the other, each landing with a thud, thud, THUD on Liston's head as he backpedals to escape. He cannot, as Cassius plows forward, throwing punches the entire way.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Damn, Sonny, you gettin' uglier?

Cassius shoves Liston backwards, delivering a quick jab as he does.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Take that with you!

Liston sidesteps, stumbling. He looks out into the crowd, begging for help with his eyes. In the crowd, his wife, GERALDINE, shouts up to him.

GERALDINE

Come on, baby! Give him that Liston punch!

But Sonny can't hear her. He's lost. The REFEREE tries to control the chaos in the ring. Cassius' eyes go from Liston and begin to scan the crowd in the jam-packed arena. In a series of quick cuts around the arena, we see:

--JIM, sitting ringside behind a microphone among a group of ANNOUNCERS, with a smirk on his face.

--SAM, his mouth agape as he sits next to Barbara, who is also cheering.

--MALCOLM, in the seat right behind Sam, with a CAMERA held up to his face, snapping a picture of this glorious moment. While everyone around him is on their feet, Malcolm lowers his camera and sits down, looking completely satisfied.

Cassius approaches the hobbled Liston, who has the look of a wounded animal in his eyes. Even with his mouthguard in, Cassius smiles wide.

The BELL rings, and Cassius winks at Liston before walking confidently to his corner. Angelo, Bundini and Ferdie are waiting. Cassius calmly sits on his chair.

ANGELO

He's right where you want him!
Finish him off and take that belt home!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUNDINI

Stay on him.

Across the ring, Liston looks downright desperate.

BUNDINI (CONT'D)

He lookin' bad over there. You got him.

CASSIUS

I told you he was ugly. You should see him up close. Oh man, he's ugly...

The BELL rings and Cassius stands.

ANGELO

Let's go. Let's go home...

Angelo, Bundini and Ferdie exit the ring, leaving Cassius, bouncing with excitement as he prepares to charge Liston again. He glares at Liston, who still hasn't risen from his seat.

CASSIUS

(muttering)

Go on and quit, Sonny... You ready to quit... Then go on and quit... That's it, boy... That's it, Sonny...

Sonny spits out his mouthguard and shakes his head. Cassius knows what that means.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

That's it... Go on and quit, then! Go on and quit, then!!

Cassius raises his arms in victory as his ENTOURAGE and TRAINERS rush the ring and embrace him. The dejected Liston sits in his corner with his head down.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

I'm the king of the world! I'm the king of the world! I'm pretty! I'm a bad, bad man! Hahahaha!

Cassius runs around the ring, pointing at the men in the press box, taunting them. He then shifts his attention and points down at Jim at the end of the press box.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

You see that, Jimmy?! Hahahaha! Woooohooooo!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From Cassius' POV, we see Jim is now standing proudly and applauding for his friend, a huge smile on his otherwise restrained face, while the white ANNOUNCERS around him stay seated with looks of shock and dismay on their faces.

The ANNOUNCER and fights through the crowd in the ring and makes his way up to Cassius.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)
That's Sam Cooke! That's the
world's greatest rock and roll
singer. That's Sam Cooke, he's too
pretty! We're both pretty!

Sam is ushered through the crowd and embraces Cassius.

SAM
You're beautiful! You're beautiful!

Sam leans in and whispers in Clay's ear.

SAM (CONT'D)
See you at the Hampton House!

Still standing at his seat outside the ring, Malcolm smiles widely and nods in approval. He snaps several more photos of Cassius, surrounded by the crowd. Cassius looks over at him, and Malcolm simply puts his hand over his heart. Cassius repeats the gesture with his gloved hand.

CASSIUS
Malcolm! Ahhhh! I told 'em! I told
'em!
(to the reporters)
Eat your words! Eat your words! I
remember you, you picked him!

23

CUT TO: 23

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE MOTEL PARKING LOT - LATER THAT NIGHT

SAM tears into the motel parking lot in his car, screeching to a stop. Sam leaps out of his car, carrying his GUITAR CASE. KAREEM is in the parking lot to greet him. He frowns in disapproval as Sam steps out of his car.

SAM
Is this where the party's at?

KAREEM
Mr. Cooke. I'm Brother Kareem. The
brother minister instructed us to
let you in if you arrived early.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM
I'm the first one here?

KAREEM
That's correct.

SAM
Me and my fast-ass cars. Heh heh.
(a beat)
So?

KAREEM
This way, please.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE MOTEL - POOLSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Sam and Kareem breeze past the hotel pool and up the stairs, where they are met at the front door of the room by JAMAAL, another identically-dressed Nation of Islam guard. The much younger Jamaal smiles wide, somewhat star struck.

INT. MALCOLM'S ROOM

Kareem opens the door for Sam. The room is empty. Sam surveys the environment, pretty unimpressed. The smile leaves his face. He examines Malcolm's belongings as he wanders around the room. Just then, he looks up as we hear the jet ROAR of an AIRPLANE passing overhead. It's loud, causing the entire room to rumble and the lights on the lamps to flicker.

SAM
(mumbling)
It's a damn dump.

Sam abruptly drops his guitar case down on the floor, hard. He steadies the case, suddenly a bit worried that in his aggravation he was too rough with it. That's when the inspiration suddenly hit him. He quickly grabs a PAD and PENCIL from his pocket and begins writing.

SAM (CONT'D)
(softly singing to the
tune "Put Me Down Easy")
*If you found somebody new, there is
nothing I can do, but ask you
tooo...Do it to me just the same...*

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)
 (singing)
*...as PILOTS do big
 AEROPLANES...yeah...put me down
 eeeeeeeasy... put me down easy
 baby... Don't make it rougher and
 don't make me suffer just, put me
 down easy...*

Sam smiles as he continues to sing. The camera backs away from him and out the window to Kareem and Jamaal, standing at attention outside the room. Kareem is reading a BOOK. Jamaal, is leaning towards the door, listening to the singing inside. After several quiet seconds...

JAMAAL
 You gotta admit, that brother sure
 can sing.

KAREEM
 If you're into that sort of thing.

JAMAAL
 Right, right.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE PARKING LOT

A large, LINCOLN pulls into the Hampton House parking lot. The engine turns off and the lights dim. Kareem exits the hotel and approaches the car. All four doors of the car open simultaneously, and out from each pokes a well-appointed LEG and SHOE before the figures behind each steps out of:

From the PASSENGER DOOR steps a smirking Malcolm.

From the REAR RIGHT DOOR steps a smiling Jim.

From the REAR LEFT DOOR steps a Jubilant Cassius.

From the DRIVER'S DOOR steps BROTHER JEROME 7X, another sharply-dressed NOI guard.

Malcolm and Kareem share a brotherly embrace. Kareem then leads the smack-talking men up the stairs. Cassius and Jim are particularly loud and jovial.

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE MOTEL

Once inside, they head up the stairs towards Malcolm's room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KAREEM

Your... friend has already arrived.

MALCOLM

I'd assumed. His car is hard to miss.

KAREEM

Yes. Well, we let him into your room, as you instructed.

MALCOLM

That's much appreciated.

The group arrives at the door to Malcolm's room. A starstruck Jamaal quickly opens the door.

KAREEM

Is there anything else you need?

MALCOLM

No, brother. We'll be fine from here.

KAREEM

God is great.

MALCOLM

(As he ponders the phrase)
He really is, isn't he?

Kareem is somewhat taken aback by Malcolm's less-than-formal response. Nonetheless, he opens the room door and Malcolm, Cassius and Jim stroll in. Jerome exits.

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE MOTEL - MALCOLM'S ROOM

SAM

What the hell took y'all so long?!

JIM

We didn't run every damn red light between the Convention Center and Overtown.

CASSIUS

We told you to ride with us!

SAM

And leave my car at the arena parking lot? Fuck that. Besides, I had to drop off Barbara.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Was you sad, Sam? Sittin' in here
all by your lonesome?

SAM

I don't need y'all around to
entertain myself.

CASSIUS

We figured you'd have rounded up
some girls before we even got here,
boy! Where they at?

SAM

Shit, ain't you too tired?

CASSIUS

Tired?! Boy, I'm energized! Was
before I even threw the first
punch!

Just then, a new idea hits him.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Can you believe they had the nerve
to trot Willie Pastrano into the
ring before the fight?

JIM

(Slapping Sam on the arm
playfully)
They say he boxes just like you,
Cash...

CASSIUS

Like me? Are you insane?!

SAM

(Also slyly, playing
along)
Willie Pastrano, that's the
"dancing master," ain't he?

CASSIUS

Sheeit. If he's the dancing
master, than I must be the
motherfuckin' inventor of dance.
Just ask Sonny!

JIM

(laughing)
You goddamn right...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

I am two hundred ten and a half pounds of trouble, boys. And what they didn't know when they weighed me in...was that a half pound of it wasn't even me.

JIM

What was it, Cash?

In an instant, Cassius jumps onto Malcolm's BED and points to the sky. Malcolm says nothing, but his face reads "aw, c'mon man, not my bed!"

CASSIUS

It was a half pound of divine skill bestowed upon me from God up on high!

JIM

This motherfucker...

CASSIUS

They had Joe Louis on one side of the ring, Rocky Marciano on the other. Halfway through the 6th, out the corner of my eye, I saw them lookin' at each other, like they was asking themselves "why couldn't we do that when we was young?"

All three burst into laughter. Even Malcolm can't help but chuckle.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

I'm serious! If tonight don't prove God was with me, then nuthin' does.

JIM

He sure as shit wasn't with Sonny.

CASSIUS

You know Sonny a damn heathen. And what do they always say, Malcolm? The penalty one pays for avoiding the path of righteousness is walking whatever other path they choose...alone.

Malcolm beams as he nods his head in agreement.

MALCOLM

Yes, yes!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sam rolls his eyes.

SAM

Whatever.

CASSIUS

Cassius Marcellus Clay is the new
heavyweight champion of the world,
boys!

Cassius throws his hands up in victory and begins to spin in a circle, Sam and Jim embracing him in a huge group hug.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

And I don't even have a scratch on
my face...

From Cassius' POV, he suddenly freezes as he catches his reflection in a MIRROR and is shocked by what he sees.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

...Oh my Goodness!!

SAM AND JIM

What?! What is it, Cash?

Cassius turns and faces them, silent for a beat and completely serious looking before he finally speaks.

CASSIUS

(Deadpan, sincerely)
Why... Am I... so pretty?

Sam, Jim and even Malcolm erupt in cheers.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

And I'm only twenty two years old!
There is no way I'm supposed to be
this great.

SAM

There he goes...

CASSIUS

Look, Alexander the Great conquered
the whole world at the age of
thirty. And I conquered the world
of boxing at twenty two, without
sustaining so much as a scratch.
You do the math.

SAM

All right! Where and when is this
party going down?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

That's a good question. What's on the agenda, Malcolm?

MALCOLM

Well, I thought this would be a wonderful chance for us to reflect on what's happened tonight. Like our young brother said, there's no denying that greater forces were at work.

JIM

You mean...no one else is coming?

MALCOLM

Rest assured, my brother, you're not missing anything.

JIM

But... I wanted some pussy tonight.

MALCOLM

It'll be all right, Jimmy. I think you'll live.

Malcolm pats Jim on the back as Sam shakes his head.

SAM

Malcolm, I did not give up a chance to stay at the Fontainebleau for this shit!

Malcolm scoffs.

MALCOLM

The Fontainebleau? Miami Beach?

SAM

Yeah. What?

MALCOLM

So you just walked right up to the counter and booked yourself a room, brother Sam?

JIM

Malcolm, relax...

SAM

Allen booked the room! Allen booked the room...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

Allen Klein. The white man.

SAM

That's his job.

MALCOLM

Oh, that's his job? To tell the other crackers that you're one of the "good ones?"

SAM

To do what I ask him to do!

CASSIUS

Could you two quit the philosophical debate for five seconds? Ain't you just heard Jim say he's gettin' blue balls?

Both Sam and Malcolm chuckle at this remark. It breaks the tension.

SAM

All right. Do we at least have something to eat while we "reflect?"

MALCOLM

As a matter of fact, we do, brother Sam!

Malcolm rushes over to the fridge. As he passes Sam...

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

(smirking)

Just because I'm militant doesn't mean I don't know how to have a good time...

Malcolm open the fridge, ducking down out of sight as he looks inside. Sam and Jim immediately cut a simultaneous, evil glare at Cassius.

CASSIUS

(whispering)

What I do?

Malcolm rises from the fridge, holding two tubs of VANILLA ICE CREAM.

MALCOLM

Ice cream!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM
(sarcastically)
Yay.

MALCOLM
(smirking)
Just because I'm militant doesn't
mean I don't know how to have a
good time.

SAM
I don't suppose you have any beer
in there?

Malcolm looks down into the fridge, self-consciously. He
hadn't thought of that.

SAM (CONT'D)
Stupid question. Some chips then?
Chips?

MALCOLM
Um...I'm sure I can send one of the
brothers to get some.

JIM
Well, what flavor is it?

MALCOLM
Well, we have vanilla, Jimmy,
and...

Malcolm looks back into the fridge.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)
...vanilla.

JIM
Shit.

SAM
(chuckles)
How is that for some irony?

MALCOLM
Last time I checked, vanilla was
your flavor of choice.

JIM AND CASSIUS
(mocking)
Ooooooooooooooooooh....

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sam respects this witty retort, as he turns to Jim and Cassius, who both have an expression that says, simply: "Damn." Malcolm and Sam both laugh as Sam holds out his hand for some "dap."

MALCOLM

That's right, jack...

Malcolm slides Sam some "skin," an older dap that signifies the generational difference. Sam just stares at his hand as the pleased Malcolm laughs to himself as he returns to the fridge to put one tub of ice cream back, before closing it.

SAM

Fellas, I'm just saying, why don't we at least go someplace hoppin'? Fellas, the entire city of Miami is celebrating Cassius' win!

CASSIUS

They was all expectin' to be partyin' with Sonny Liston tonight.

SAM

And it seem to me it's not a great idea your first night as world champ starting it off by throwing away all that good will?

MALCOLM

Good will? Good will from whom? Good will from the press that threw their support behind that thug, hoping that he'd put our young brother in his place? Naw, you're out of your mind, Sam. And besides, part of the reason we're here is to celebrate Cassius' official transition.

CASSIUS

Malc...

Cassius is shocked. He wasn't expecting this to come out this way.

JIM

Transition? To what?

MALCOLM

Shall we give them the news, Cassius?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

Well, I suppose... If you wanna
tell them, Malcolm...

Jim and Sam look confused.

SAM

Now wait a second. You ain't about
to say what I think you're gonna
say?

CASSIUS

I've been thinking long and hard
about it, boys...and
I'm officially joining the Nation
of Islam.

Malcolm laughs and claps. Jim and Sam are in shock.

SAM

Cassius. Are you sure that's such a
good idea?

CASSIUS

Why not?

SAM

I thought this Muslim jive was
somethin' to rile up white folks.

MALCOLM

It's no jive, Sam.

SAM

The cameras are off, Malcolm.

MALCOLM

He became champion on his own
terms, naysayers be damned!

SAM

We can't all just go out and
declare the white man the devil!

MALCOLM

Oh? Why not? Huh? We're entering a
new time. Where no one can hold us
back from voicing our honest
opinions! Jimmy hasn't bitten his
tongue for one day of his career...

JIM

Well, you ain't lyin'.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Oh, so you agree with him?

JIM

Look man, I'm always in the hot seat. But as long as I keep winning, ain't one fuckin' thing any racist poot-butt can do about it.

MALCOLM

That's right.

SAM

Well, if it's such a great idea, why don't you become a Muslim too?

JIM

Sheeeit. Have you tasted my grandmother's pork chops?

Cassius erupts in laughter. Malcolm smiles as well.

JIM (CONT'D)

And I like white women, too. Fuck that.

MALCOLM

Oh, you'll see the light soon enough, Jimmy.

JIM

Don't need to, hanging around you. Ain't you ever heard of "guilt by association"?

MALCOLM

Well, you already do have plenty of nice suits. You given any thought to switching from straight to bow ties?

JIM

Malcolm, you ain't never gonna catch me dressed up as one of your "soldiers of Allah."

MALCOLM

I've already seen it, Jimmy! Those pictures I took of you going to practice, looking sharp as a razor? The spittin' image, Cash, of a powerful, black Muslim warrior!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

I know it...

MALCOLM

A photo never lies, Jimmy. A photo never lies. It alw...hmmm...

He suddenly stops talking, mid-sentence.

CASSIUS

What's wrong, Malcolm?

MALCOLM

I just remembered, I left my new camera in the car. I'd better go get it.

CASSIUS

Now?

MALCOLM

Yeah, I just got that camera.

Annoyed, Malcolm heads for the door.

CASSIUS

Don't sweat it, man. The bodyguards have this whole place locked down. They'd see anybody messin' with your car...

Malcolm quickly exits the room.

EXT. OUTSIDE HOTEL ROOM DOOR

Kareem and Jamaal greet Malcolm as he exits the room.

KAREEM

Is everything all right, brother Malcolm?

MALCOLM

Yes, brother. I just need to get something from the car.

KAREEM

I'll accompany you.
(to Jamaal)
Watch the door.

JAMAAL

Yes, brother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Just then, Sam runs over to door, opens it, and shouts out to Malcolm.

SAM

What's wrong, brother? Ain't your
shit safe here in the black
community?

Jamaal stays at his post at the door, smiling at Sam. Sam closes the curtain so no one can see inside. Kareem and Malcolm walk towards the stairs.

KAREEM

Your friend is quite the truculent
one.

MALCOLM

Entertaining white people in the
south will bring the truculence out
of any black man.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

Jim is comfortably laying back on Malcolm's bed, trying to ignore Cassius, who is jumping up and down on it. Sam sits in a chair, looking around.

JIM

What are you, a giant fuckin' baby?

CASSIUS

Man, I can't help it! I'm full of
energy!

JIM

Well, this party's off to a hoppin'
start.

SAM

I just know we are not fittin' to
sit in this little-ass room all
night?

JIM

It's not like anyone else was
planning a victory party tonight.

SAM

The diner downstairs is open all
night.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

We could throw the shindig there,
if Malcolm would lighten the hell
up.

CASSIUS

He's just lookin' out for me, Sam.

SAM

He's a big boy, Cash.

CASSIUS

Still, you ain't gotta antagonize
him...

SAM

He should be able to handle being
called out on his shit, especially
since he's made such a name for
himself calling everyone else out
on theirs.

CASSIUS

Why you gotta push back so hard on
everything, Sam?

SAM

'Cause I'm a pushy motherfucker.
And I ain't changin'.

CASSIUS

Oh, grow up!

JIM

You two...

Cassius comes down from the bed and goes to the REFRIGERATOR,
where he pulls out the tub of VANILLA ICE CREAM.

CASSIUS

You want some ice cream?

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE - PARKING LOT

Malcolm and Kareem approach the car. Jerome 7X steps out of
it.

JEROME

Everything okay, brother?

MALCOLM

Yes, brother...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Malcolm reaches into the car and removes a beautiful ROLLEIFLEX CAMERA. He admires it, then looks up and sees a TELEPHONE BOOTH at the edge of the parking lot.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

I should make a call while I'm down here.

KAREEM

Is the phone in your room not working?

MALCOLM

I prefer privacy when I speak to my wife, and I'd rather not send all of the fellas out.

Jerome and Kareem look at one another. Malcolm walks off.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

I'll be right back...

The men stay in position at the car.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

Jim holds a small BOWL of ICE CREAM.

JIM

Know one thing that would make this a little bit better?

CASSIUS

What?

JIM

Sam's stash.

SAM

Fuck y'all!

JIM

Come on, man. Where is it?

SAM

Naw, no way..

JIM

(to Cassius)

Hey. Check his guitar case.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Sam is surprised.

CASSIUS
For what?

JIM
Just look, fool!

Cassius walks over to Sam's guitar case and opens it.

SAM
You ain't gonna find it.

JIM
I'll bet you that cheap, purple
suit he will.

Cassius smiles, then pulls out a small FLASK from the case.
Sam rolls his eyes.

SAM
Don't drink all my shit.

Cassius tosses the flask to Jim, who opens it and take a
nice, long swig.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE - TELEPHONE BOOTH

Malcolm holds the telephone receiver up to his ear.

MALCOLM
Attalah?

ATTALAH (O.S.)
Hi, daddy.

MALCOLM
Hey, sweetheart. What are you doing
up so late?

INT. MALCOLM'S HOUSE - QUEENS - NIGHT

ATTALAH SHABAZZ, 6, Malcolm's young daughter, is on the
phone.

ATTALAH
You woke me up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM (O.S.)

Ohhh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you up. But I'm glad you answered. Because I've got something for you. Do you want it now?

ATTALAH

(giggling)

Okay.

INTERCUT BETWEEN ATTALAH AND MALCOLM.

MALCOLM

All right, well I need you to get down from the stool.

Attalah does as she's told.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

I want you to take three big jumps forward.

Attalah obliges, taking three big jumps forward, stretching the telephone cord to its limit. To her left is a small BOOKSHELF.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Now look to your left. Now what's in front of you?

ATTALAH

Books.

MALCOLM

Books! That's right. Now I want you to take one of those books.

ATTALAH

Which one?

MALCOLM

It's your favorite number.

Attalah thinks for a moment. Then points at the book furthest to the left and begins to count out loud as she moves down the row.

ATTALAH

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

She stops on the sixth BOOK and pulls it from the shelf. She examines the book, then notices something dog-eared is protruding from a corner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

There you go. Now open it up and
take a look inside. You see it?

She opens the book at that places to reveal a NOTE. A CLOSE
UP reveals the note says "FOR ATTALAH" on it. She beams.

ATTALAH

(whispering)
Thank you, daddy.

MALCOLM

You be a good girl and you read
that to your sisters. Okay?

ATTALAH

Okay.

A bleary-eyed Betty enters the room.

BETTY

Attalah? It's time to go to bed.

ATTALAH

It's daddy.

BETTY

I understand sweetheart, but it's
time to go to bed.

ATTALAH

Can I talk to him for a few more
minutes? Please?

BETTY

(sighs)
Okay...

Attalah turns her attention back to the call.

ATTALAH

Where are you?

CUT TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

Betty takes the receiver from her.

BETTY

Get to bed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ATTALAH

But he gave me a note to read to everyone.

BETTY

You can read it to your sisters tomorrow.

Attalah exits, her letter in her hands.

Jim hands the flask to Cassius. Cassius considers it for a moment. There's a KNOCK at the door. Cassius suddenly stops and puts the flask out of sight.

CASSIUS

Who is it?!

The door opens and Jamaal's head and torso sheepishly lean into the room.

JAMAAL

Can I get anything for you brothers?

CASSIUS

Naw, man. We're all good in here!

JAMAAL

Good, good...

After an awkward beat, Jamaal leans further into the room.

JAMAAL (CONT'D)

Say, champ. You don't supposed you could see your way to signing an autograph for me?

CASSIUS

Uh, yeah. Of course, man! Come on in!

He slowly enters the room, looking back to make sure Kareem is away. He doesn't notice Sam sitting in the corner.

JIM

Gotta make sure your superior officer don't catch you?

As Jamaal hands Cassius a small NOTEPAD and PEN...

JAMAAL

Oh yeah, brother Kareem can run a pretty tight ship, but he's committed to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMAAL (CONT'D)
teaching the young brothers
discipline.

JIM
Well, I ain't never been a fan of
no tight ships!

The smile leaves Jamaal's face. Jim immediately chuckles.

CASSIUS
Quit messin' with the young brother
Jim! Here, give him an autograph!

Cassius hands the notepad to the smirking Jim.

JAMAAL
That'd be great! And actually,
champ, I'm a coupla years older
than you...

CASSIUS
Oh! See, I'm such an overachiever,
sometimes I forget.

Jim gets ready to sign his autograph.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)
You know Jim Brown here is the
strongest man in the whole world?

JAMAAL
Oh yeah! See, I'm from Toledo. We
been watching Mr. Brown's games for
years now! Actually, I almost got
to go to one.

JIM
Oh yeah?

JAMAAL
Yeah!
(pauses, thinking)
Naw, I ain't have no money...

Somewhat charmed by Jamal's innocence, Jim signs his autograph as Sam flicks his LIGHTER, alerting Jamaal to his presence in the corner. Seeing him, Jamaal quickly snatches the paper from Jim's still-writing hands.

JAMAAL (CONT'D)
Mr. Cooke! Um...if you wouldn't
mind?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Oh, sure thing, brother.

Sam smirks as he signs it. Off Sam's arrogance...

CASSIUS

Hey man... Jamaal!

JAMAAL

Yeah?

CASSIUS

Mind if I ask you a question?

JAMAAL

Sure!

CASSIUS

You like being a Muslim?

JAMAAL

It beats being a purse thief in Toledo!

CASSIUS

Yeah, I know that's right. I mean, but, was it hard? You know, giving up stuff?

JAMAAL

I reckon so. I used to love me a nice Champale every now and then. Certainly miss my grandmamma's pork chops...

JIM

See?!

JAMAAL

...and it can be difficult, you know? Like, the schedule...

CASSIUS

Yeah...

JAMAAL

I mean, none of that's gonna apply to you anyway!

CASSIUS

What you mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMAAL

I'm just sayin', I don't think you're gonna be spending any time handing out pamphlets, is all...

CASSIUS

Yeah, I suppose you right.

JIM

Say man, do you have any regrets?

JAMAAL

Regrets?

JIM

You know. With hitchin' your cart to the Muslim train.

JAMAAL

Yeah. Yes, um, I think you could say I do.

Cassius looks surprised.

CASSIUS

Really?

JAMAAL

I regret that I didn't join up when I was even younger.

CASSIUS AND JIM

Oh...

JAMAAL

This kid named Rollo used to chase me home from school every damn day. He's the reason I stopped goin'. Now I reckon if I woulda gotten with the brothers sooner, we coulda' nipped it in the bud, and put a foot in Rollo's ass. Know what I'm sayin'?

Sam's heard enough and begins heading for the door.

JIM

Yeah, you don't need religion for that, kid. You could've just joined a gang.

JAMAAL

What's the damn difference?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jim and Cassius are surprised by this answer. Sam stops in his tracks, turns to the others, and gives a satisfied smirk at this revealing response. Sam exits through the front door, taking a long drag on his CIGARETTE as he steps into the night air.

JAMAAL (CONT'D)
 Anyway, I better get going before
 brother Kareem gets back.
 We're all proud of you, champ.

CASSIUS
 Thanks, brother.

Jamaal exits as well. Jim, laughing at Cassius, takes another swig of the whiskey.

JIM
 Drink up while you can.

He hands the flask to Cassius again, who takes a swig without hesitation this time. It's strong.

CASSIUS
 (coughing from the
 whiskey)
 Damn!

CUT TO:

INT. TELEPHONE BOOTH

Malcolm is still on the phone, smiling wide.

MALCOLM
 Betty?

INTERCUT BETWEEN BETTY AND MALCOLM.

BETTY
 Malcolm?

MALCOLM
 He did it.

BETTY
 I heard! Praise allah!

They both begin to laugh. Betty weeps tears of joy.

MALCOLM
 Honey, are you crying?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETTY

I'm just... happy.

MALCOLM

So am I. So am I.

BETTY

And is he going to...

MALCOLM

He'll be announcing tomorrow morning that he's a Muslim.

BETTY

Do you think he'll go along with your...plan?

MALCOLM

It's too soon to tell. But... I feel good about it.

BETTY

Oh, Malcolm. You were the only one who believed in him. It's only fitting that you and Cassius be blessed in this way. That you do this thing together.

MALCOLM

I really do believe in him, Betty.

BETTY

He believes in you, too. As well as he should.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

Cassius is once again standing in front of the mirror, preening as he admires himself. He takes another swig of whiskey from the flask, then holds his arms up in a victory pose. Jim looks around to make sure the coast is clear.

JIM

Hey, Cash. Can I tell you something?

CASSIUS

Of course, man. Anything.

JIM

I did a movie...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

You produced a movie?

JIM

Naw, man. I starred in one!

CASSIUS

Well, that's great, Jim! But, you're not an actor...

JIM

That's what I told the cat who wanted to cast me! But he put me in his western anyway!

CASSIUS

Western, huh? Okay, so who do you play?

JIM

I play a Buffalo Soldier! I'm part of this special unit, and we're tracking this Confederate general. He's being protected by these Apaches.

CASSIUS

Damn, that sounds pretty good! So, you're the hero?

JIM

One of 'em. But my character gets killed about halfway through, so...

Cassius bursts into laughter.

JIM (CONT'D)

What?

CASSIUS

No, nuthin' man. I shoulda known as soon as you said "black action hero," the next part of that sentence was gonna be "who gets killed."

JIM

It went well, man. I think there might be a future for me in this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

Bein' the sacrificial Negro in some western ain't the same as the NFL, man! But how much you gettin' paid to be in this movie?

JIM

(proudly)
Thirty-seven thousand dollars!

CASSIUS

Damn. That's pretty good!

JIM

And it's a lot easier on my knees, too...

CASSIUS

Yeah, but...
(new idea)
...the only reason they want you in that movie is because people know you from football. You need the game, just like I need boxing.

JIM

We're all just gladiators, Cash, with our ruler sittin' up there, in his box, givin' us the thumbs up or the thumbs down. Well I don't want no damn ruler. Shit, there's only so much running one man can do, anyway.

CASSIUS

Speak for yourself. I plan to run, dance and fight well into my old age.

CUT TO:

EXT. TELEPHONE BOOTH

As Kareem watches on, Malcolm continues to have his conversation with Betty.

MALCOLM

Is everything okay at the house?
The girls behaving themselves?

INTERCUT BETWEEN MALCOLM AND BETTY

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETTY

As best as they can.

Malcolm smiles. He looks up and from his POV, we see two WHITE MEN in dress shirts standing across the street. They're talking to one another, but every few seconds, one looks over at Malcolm.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Malcolm?

MALCOLM

Yes...

BETTY

Is everything okay?

MALCOLM

Yes. Yes, everything is... fine.

EXT. HAMPTON HOTEL - PARKING LOT/TELEPHONE BOOTH

Sam watches Sam as he finishes his cigarette. A smiling WOMAN passes him.

SAM

Good evenin'.

WOMAN

(giggling)

Hi, Sam Cooke.

The woman rushes off and Sam approaches Malcolm, who is wrapping his call with Betty. Malcolm steps out of the booth.

SAM

Hey. I was wondering what was taking you so long to find a camera.

MALCOLM

I had to check in with Betty.

Sam playfully makes a cracking whip sound.

SAM

(laughing)

Wha-pssssshhhhhh!

Malcolm chuckles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

Shouldn't you be checking in with Barbara at the hotel?

SAM

Nah, she's on her way back to Los Angeles.

MALCOLM

(awkwardly)

I... hope I haven't unnecessarily kept you away from her.

SAM

No...

Malcolm turns and looks out across the street again. Sam notices.

SAM (CONT'D)

What you lookin' at?

MALCOLM

Let's make our way back to the hotel, shall we?

Puzzled, Sam looks across the street and sees the two white guys as well.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

The sound of VOICES can be heard outside, which Jim immediately notices.

JIM

Aw, here they come.

CASSIUS

My goodness, you must have super hearing. For real.

JIM

I'm Jim motherfuckin' Brown...

JIM (CONT'D)

Hey. Remember, man. Just don't say anything about the movie shit.

CASSIUS

Why you embarrassed about it? It's not a big deal...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Just don't say a goddamn thing!

CASSIUS

Mum's the word.

Malcolm re-enters the room, followed closely by Kareem. Sam re-enters right behind them. Malcolm is holding a CAMERA, but he looks nervous, turning around to look out the window.

KAREEM

Brother Malcolm. Is there anything I can help you with?

MALCOLM

No, Brother. We're doing just fine.

KAREEM

Well, you know where I am if you need me. God is great.

MALCOLM

Yes he is.

Kareem exits. As soon as the door closes, Malcolm walks over to the window and slightly pulls back the curtain.

From his POV, we now have a bird's-eye view across the street at the two white men, who seem to be laughing to one another as they finally begin to walk off.

JIM

What's with him?

Malcolm ignores them, continuing to look out the window.

SAM

He thinks someone's following him.

MALCOLM

You didn't see those two white guys across the street? I know when I'm being watched.

SAM

How you know they wasn't watchin' me? Shit, I'm famous!

CASSIUS

They ain't all after you, Malcolm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

Hoover's lackeys have been following me around so long they know where I'm gonna be before I do.

CASSIUS

This is what happens when you don't get enough exercise. Your mind goes haywire.

Malcolm begins to examine his lamp, under his telephone visually scan the room as he speaks.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Yeah. As a matter of fact, maybe exercise is just what we all need. What say we stretch our legs, boys?

SAM

Are you serious?

CASSIUS

As a heart attack.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

A DOOR onto the roof opens, and Cassius, Malcolm, Sam and Jim all step onto the roof. Kareem and Jamaal wait at the door.

MALCOLM

I know when I'm being watched, Sam...

SAM

Your paranoia is really crampin' my style, Malcolm.

CASSIUS

Come on. Just cause you can't see bugs don't mean they ain't in the house, Sam.

SAM

Up on this dirty-ass roof...

JIM

Why can't you be like Bing Crosby about that shit, man? And accentuate the muthafuckin' positive! Look at this view...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

From their POV, we see the sparkling city lights of Miami in the distance. The sky in the distance is lit up by FIREWORKS.

CASSIUS

I bey they doin' 'em for me!

Malcolm sits down on the edge of the roof, his legs dangling over the side.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

It's nice, ain't it Malcolm?

MALCOLM

It's most definitely soothing. The air up here is...

(taking a deep breath, his eyes closed)

...cooler.

SAM

Far away from the prying eyes of your G-Men...

MALCOLM

Joke all you want, Sam. I'm telling you, it's gotten worse since the tension between me and Mr. Muhammad. I met with a writer in New York a few weeks back, and there were two guys following us through the airport. I'd swear it was the same two!

SAM

I thought you didn't trust writers.

MALCOLM

This one was a brother, and this meeting was important. I figure I'd better start getting my life story documented, in my own words, while I can.

JIM

What are you talking about, man?

MALCOLM

There's been this feeling permeating the air as of late.

JIM

Anger?

SAM

Anxiety?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS
(jokingly)
Humidity?

They collectively chuckle. Malcolm noticeably does not.

MALCOLM
More like menace. Foreboding.
Death.

Malcolm removes his glasses and rubs his eyes. There is a long, uncomfortable silence.

CASSIUS
Well...Um...Jim is quitting
football to become a movie star,
y'all!

JIM
Cassius! What the fuck?!

<p>CASSIUS Sorry, man! I had to do somethin' to lighten the mood!</p>	<p>SAM Holy shit, you are?</p>
---	------------------------------------

JIM
Hey man, I'm not quitting football,
okay? I'm just exploring other
options for after it ends.

SAM
I think it's a great idea! You get
that career goin', Jim! LA's the
land of milk and honey, baby! We
can do whatever we want to out
there!

MALCOLM
You can't live in Beverly Hills...

SAM
Don't need to! Got our own, black
Beverly Hills! And we got the
better view!

CASSIUS
Baldwin Hills, baby!

SAM
Top of the hill, looks out over the
whole city, mountains in the
distance. Nicer than Harlem! Hell
of a lot nicer than Overtown.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

No tenements, no slum lords. Just sunshine, pools and beaches. Don't need no Green Book tellin' you where you can and can't go. The only color that matters out in Cali is that green...

Sam gives Cassius some skin. Jim is amused as well. Malcolm lightens up as well.

MALCOLM

(smirks)

You sound like you might be gettin' a bit seduced out there, brother.

SAM

You know I'm the one doin' all the seducin'!

MALCOLM

(playfully)

You watch out for this one, Jimmy. He'll lead you down the primrose path.

SAM

Shit. The only disasters out in Hollywood are up there on that movie screen. Trust me, Jimmy, there's a real future in it.

CASSIUS

Well I should be in movies too, then! Damn, I'm too pretty not to be up on screen. And you too, Malcolm!

MALCOLM

Yeah?

CASSIUS

You could be our director! Come on, show us the camera.

SAM

Come on, man. Show us the camera...

Malcolm stands up and displays his prized CAMERA.

MALCOLM

Well, it's a pretty fantastic camera. Betty got it for me. It's a Rolleiflex...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Malcolm holds the camera out as he explains. Cassius snatches it out of his hand immediately.

CASSIUS

Bee sting!

Cassius begins to make off with the camera, Malcolm moving to pursue, but Cassius cleverly hands the camera off to Jim, who tosses it behind his back to Cassius, who catches it like a wide receiver just before it flies off the rooftop. Malcolm's smile turns to sudden shock at this toss, and he transformatively "breaks character" as he shouts at Jim.

MALCOLM

Jimmy! What, you blew your wig?!?!?!?

The trio freezes, silently taking in what Malcolm just said as they look at each other. Malcolm snatches back his camera.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Give me the damn camera! You lost your mind? You know how much this thing cost?

SAM

I think we done hit a nerve! Malcolm done dropped the affected speech and everything!

They burst into laughter. Malcolm smiles.

MALCOLM

Yeah, that's right. I've got more rep than all three of you clowns put together.

SAM

Come on, man. Rep don't carry over from decade to decade! That tired-ass 1940's slang you usin'.

JIM

(chuckling)
Definitely not "hep," daddy-o.

SAM

Talkin' about "blew your wig." Just show us the camera, Negro!

MALCOLM

Fine. Just stop joking for a second.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The gents stand a little more upright.

JIM
Okay...

SAM AND JIM
(mocking Malcolm)
Blew your wiiiig!

Malcolm composes himself. He begins focusing the camera.

CASSIUS
Oh, he's takin' a picture!

The trio instantly strike suave poses.

MALCOLM
It's a Rolleiflex 3.5. A German twin lens reflex camera. A fine piece of engineering, here. You see, there's this pop-out viewfinder.

JIM
It looks bulky.

MALCOLM
No, Jimmy. It's a work of art. Besides, I've always got my Nikon handy for taking photos on the move.

CASSIUS
(laughs)
Like when you're running from the feds?

MALCOLM
Or riding on a camel.

JIM
Hmmm. Where to?

MALCOLM
Mecca.

SAM
You're going to Saudi Arabia?

MALCOLM
All Muslims are supposed to do it at least once in their lives.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

And since I'm not doing any speaking right now, this feels like as good a time as any. Maybe I'll take a few detours while I'm out there. It would be quite amazing to see the Great Pyramids.

CASSIUS

That sounds fantastic!

MALCOLM

It will be! If your schedule permits, you should join me.

CASSIUS

Count me in!

MALCOLM

Yeah?

CASSIUS

Count me in! I mean, fine African sistas? Come on Jim, I know you're down with that.

JIM

With the ladies, most definitely. But I'm up for another part. Between that and camp, I won't have time for a trip to Africa.

MALCOLM

You should consider coming as well, Sam. Leaving this country in the rear view for a while is a great way to get some perspective.

SAM

I'm busy too.

MALCOLM

One can never be too busy for some added perspective.

SAM

I'm swamped, man. And I've got to prep to go back to The Copa.

CASSIUS, JIM AND MALCOLM

(in unison)

Awwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

Man, you need to go on and forget about the Copa.

SAM

It was not that bad.

Cassius and Jim look at each other, wide-eyed. Their faces say "is this guy serious?"

SAM (CONT'D)

All right, fine. Maybe it was that bad...

MALCOLM

You don't shuck and jive enough for those O'fay tastes.

SAM

I may not dance around the stage like Jackie or James Brown, but that's not what I'm sellin'. I'm selling my voice, my words, my image - my message.

MALCOLM

The problem is, at The Copa, you have to sell that message to a bunch of white folks.

SAM

That don't matter! They got souls, don't they? And every living thing with a soul can have that soul tapped into. I thought you'd know that...

MALCOLM

You think, just maybe, your energy is misdirected trying to tap into white people's souls?

SAM

No, I don't! If I win them over, playing our music, I'm knockin' down doors for everybody! You watch and see. It's not gonna always be the pop charts over here and the black music charts over there. One day it's gonna be one chart, with one music, for all people...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

But what kind of message are you sending, doing one show for white folks, and a completely different show for black folks? Or performing in places where the only blacks not on stage are the ones serving the food?

SAM

Don't you think I know that? I can't tell you how many times I wanted to just reach out and punch somebody.

MALCOLM

Then strike with the weapon that you have, man! Your voice! Black people... we're standing up, we're speaking out. You have possibly one of the most effective outlets of us all, and you're not using it to help the cause.

SAM

The hell I'm not! I got the masters to my songs. I started a label. I'm producing tons of black artists. Don't you think my determining my creative and business destiny is every bit as inspiring to people as you standing up on a podium and trying to piss them off? Oh, wait a minute, I forgot...that's all you do!

MALCOLM

I do plenty.

SAM

Do you? Let's see, you suck at sports.

MALCOLM

Well, I was never much into football...

SAM

You can't sing. You damn sure can't make shit outta no peanut...

MALCOLM

Is there a point to this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

My point is that sometimes I feel like you're just like all the rest of those people out there. Obsessed with the stars.

CASSIUS

Whoah, now.

MALCOLM

No, let him finish!

SAM

Look around. Which one of us don't belong?

MALCOLM

The only person here that white people seem to like. That would be you.

JIM

Y'all need to cool it.

SAM

You know, you've always managed to just be around for shit, haven't you? Maybe your daddy shoulda beaten you better.

MALCOLM

That's it, Jack!

Malcolm lunges right at Sam in a rage. Jim And Cassius hold him back.

SAM

You can let him go! Let him go!

Just then, the door to the roof bursts open and Brothers Kareem and Jamaal come rushing out. Kareem in the front, Jamaal right behind him.

KAREEM

(Alarmed)

Everything all right, brother Malcolm?!?!

SAM

What do you want?!

Kareem stops Sam cold with an unexpected STRIKE or SLAP that sends him stumbling backwards.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

Get your motherfuckin' hands off
me!

In an instant, Jim is standing between him and Sam. He stares Kareem down.

JIM

Oh, I don't think so.

KAREEM

Our job here is to protect the
brother minister.

MALCOLM

(dismissively)

I don't need your protection,
brother.

JIM

Well... Now that that's settled,
away you go.

KAREEM

Negro, I will leave when I...

JIM

You'd best think long and hard
before you wag that tongue at ME.

Kareem looks at the edge of the roof, considers this, looks at Malcolm, then looks back at Jim. He smiles.

KAREEM

(with poison dripping from
his tongue)

God is great.

MALCOLM

Greater than any of us.

Kareem and Jamaal back out the door and exit.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE - OUTER CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

The foursome are walking back to Malcolm's room, trailing far behind Kareem.

JIM

Your security people are assholes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

I don't choose them.

CASSIUS

What's wrong with you, Sam?! You're supposed to be smooth.

SAM

(mumbling)

It ain't easy bein' smooth with this sandpaper nigga around...

They reach Malcolm's room, where Kareem and Jamaal wait. Without saying a word, Jamaal opens the door and they enter, closing the door behind them immediately.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

All of the men except Malcolm remove their jackets.

JIM

You two done fighting?

SAM

I wasn't trying to fight nobody. That's Malcolm. Always pissed off.

MALCOLM

Pissed off? What's going on around us should make everyone angry! And you bourgeois Negroes are too happy with your scraps to really understand what's really at stake here! You think Cash being the world champ will protect him from the devils that harassed him from the first day that he got here?

CASSIUS

I'd like to see them try.

MALCOLM

And Jimmy. Jimmy is the best football player in the world. But he's also giving money to black-owned businesses. You don't think that threatens a lot of white people? You don't think the FBI is probably starting to follow him around, too?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Oh, man, now you're gonna fuckin' jinx me.

MALCOLM

That is why, brother Sam, this movement that we are in is called a STRUGGLE! Because we are fighting for our lives. And what words are we hearing from you, brother?

Malcolm walks over to a RECORD PLAYER and pulls out an LP.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

(sarcastically)

Mmmm. Mr. Soul.

He puts the needle on the record for a few seconds, playing the first bar of Sam's song, "YOU SEND ME."

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Or maybe this one...

He lifts the needle again and drops it back down. We now hear the first bar of Sam's cover of the song "SENTIMENTAL REASONS."

Malcolm lifts the needle and turns the record player off.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Wow, Sam...your music is deep.

CASSIUS

Hey man, I love them songs!

SAM

You back never facin' the door, bean pie-eatin', self-righteous motherfucker.

MALCOLM

And, to boot, most of them are versions of the church songs that nurtured you. You twisted them and you perverted them to feed a white crowd.

SAM

That is bullshit. Most of the artists I work with are gospel singers. Do you have any idea what I've given back to the church?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

How many times do I have to hear that? That has got to be the greatest fault of you so-called "successful Negroes." You'll do something detrimental to your own people with the promise that, after you get rich, then you'll make it back up to them. With a handout. Some gesture of patronage. You've made it, Sam, but for all the others...the majority of people...who had their own self-destructive dreams and didn't make it, all they've left behind is a legacy of negativity. But that's okay, because "they all meant well."

JIM

Malcolm. Would you please have some damn ice cream?!

MALCOLM

And what you don't get is that you'll never be loved by the people you're trying so hard to win over. You're just a wind-up toy in a music box, or a monkey. You're a monkey dancing for an organ grinder to them.

A long pause as his biting words shock everyone in the room into silence. Jim's eyes go wide.

JIM

(off the word "monkey")
Wheeew.

He begins to exit the room.

JIM (CONT'D)

Y'all pulled out the knives. And if I get cut, I'm fittin' to hurt somebody.

Jim exits. Malcolm turns to Cassius.

MALCOLM

Cassius, who were those English boys you were hanging out with a couple of days ago?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

The Beatles?

MALCOLM

Yes, The Bea-A-tles.

(Back to Sam)

All that time you spent on the road, Sam, entertaining the children of bigots, and at the end of the day white folks'd still rather import their popular music.

CASSIUS

Just hold on one second. The Beatles. They're funny, but they ain't no Sam Cooke. They're more of a fad.

MALCOLM

Well, if not them, then someone else. The bottom line, this is too important a time to be wasting a brilliant creative mind on pandering.

SAM

And it's too damn hot in here to be wearing that blazer. So what's your point?

As Malcolm continues to speak, CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM

Jim washes his hands as he listens.

MALCOLM (O.S.)

My point is that I am just one voice in this struggle. Cassius is another, who pushes us forward with his fists and with his words. Jimmy pushes us forward with his relentlessness. His fearlessness.

Jim looks down at his battered hands in the sink, then up at his own face.

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

But you, brother, could be the loudest voice of us all!

B42 BACK TO SCENE - INT. MOTEL ROOM

B42

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad
says...

SAM

Hold on. I ain't ask what the
Honorable Elijah Muhammad thought,
I asked what you thought! There you
go with the Honorable Elijah
Muhammad says this and the
Honorable Elijah Muhammad says
that. But when the Honorable Elijah
Muhammad tells you to shut the fuck
up, you damn sure do that, too.

Jim re-enters the room.

MALCOLM

What's going on between the Nation
and me is way more complicated than
that.

Jim clocks this, perplexed.

SAM

But you still obey them when they
tell you to come out here and
recruit Cassius to become a member
of something you don't even seem to
believe in.

MALCOLM

I'm not making Cassius do anything.
He came to me for insight. He had
questions. His passion for Islam
comes from a pure place.

CASSIUS

Well, passion is kind of a strong
word...

Malcolm is positively shocked by this comment. Sam points at
Cassius to Malcolm, as though to say, "see?"

MALCOLM

You... couldn't stop talking about
how excited you were to come out
with your faith to the world.

CASSIUS

True. True. I was. I am. It's just
that...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

What is it?

CASSIUS

If we're being completely honest
and all, I guess being Muslim
sounded like a much better idea
before tonight.

Jim chuckles to himself.

MALCOLM

(nervous)

How could you have any second
thoughts, Cash? You're on top of
the world... I don't understand.

JIM

He didn't actually think he was
going to win tonight, Malcolm!

MALCOLM

Cash...

CASSIUS

(Uncertain of himself.

Nervous.)

Of course I knew! I'm the best
there...I'm the greatest there ever
will be...I'm...I'm just saying...

SAM

Easy, Cash. It's okay...

CASSIUS

No, I'm good. I'm just a little
nervous, that's all. That's
natural! Ain't it?

Malcolm just looks on, silent and a bit forlorn.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Malcolm!

SAM

It takes a hustler to see a hustle.

Malcolm is silent for several seconds. Cassius wanders off to
the corner and looks out the window. Sam is visibly disgusted
by this state of affairs. He turns to Malcolm.

SAM (CONT'D)

Let me ask you something, Mr. know-
it-all.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

How is it helpful for black people to run their businesses different than everyone else's? Dumber than everyone else's?

MALCOLM

No one's accused you of making bad business decisions.

SAM

You might as well have! You think I don't know about the British invasion? I invested in it. I have these proteges, The Valentinos. The five Womack brothers. The youngest one, Bobby, wrote this song. "It's All Over Now." Great tune. The band records it, and it's fantastic. All over the R&B charts. It even went to number 94 on Billboard's Hot 100. Then I get a call from England. One of these British bands wants to record a cover version.

Cassius turns around and perks up a bit.

CASSIUS

The Beatles?

SAM

No, Cash. They call themselves The Rolling Stones.

CASSIUS

Like the Muddy Waters song?

SAM

Exactly. So, Bobby's like, "no damn way, man. That's our song!" But I get the final say, and I'm looking at the big picture. And I give the Rolling Stones permission to record it.

CASSIUS

You did?!

SAM

I did. And the Rolling Stones' version of the song goes all the way to number one. Not on the R&B charts, but the pop charts!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

But, of course, once this version of the song gets big, Bobby's version just disappears. Falls off the R&B charts...it's just gone. So of course, Bobby's crushed.

MALCOLM

Yes. As well he should be, Sam...

SAM

Let me finish! He's crushed...for about six months. Because six months later, that first royalty check comes in. Because Bobby's the writer, and my company owns the rights to the song, that means every time some white girl goes and buys a copy of that single, she's putting money into my pockets. Our pockets. Those white boys are out there touring around, they don't even know they're working for us. Next thing you know, Bobby's like "the Rolling Stones wanna cover any more versions of my songs?"

Jim chuckles and slow claps, snaps, or nods in agreement.

SAM (CONT'D)

You know who gets paid more than the writer of a song that hits number 94 on the Billboard Hot 100? The writer of a song that hits number one! I already knew that. Now Bobby knows it, too. Tell me how it's not empowerment... Everybody talks about they want a piece of the pie. Well, I don't. I want the goddamn recipe.

MALCOLM

I congratulate you on being so shrewd, brother.

SAM

You just don't get how everything's not so black and white like you make it out to be. In your mind, President Kennedy getting assassinated is just another one of those white devils getting what they deserved.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

Well, I liked JFK, man. And my
momma cried when he died.

CASSIUS

Mine did, too...

SAM

How do you think it made me feel to
have her see my friend on TV
talking about "good riddance"?

MALCOLM

I didn't say "good riddance."

SAM

You said it was "chickens coming
home to roost."

MALCOLM

I was trying to make a point,
brother...

JIM

You were paraphrasing...

SAM

I'll tell you somethin' else. My
whole family lives on the South
Side of Chicago. Not up in
Harlem where you are. The Black
Muslims...

MALCOLM

The Nation of Islam...

SAM

The NATION OF ISLAM is huge in
Chicago. I know where Elijah
Muhammad's house is. It's the
biggest one for miles around. Looks
like the mayor's residence.

MALCOLM

Oh yeah, I've been there for
dinner.

SAM

So you see how he lives like a
Pharaoh? Never says nuthin' about
the crooked black aldermen runnin'
numbers. Pushin' drugs.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (CONT'D)

Doing all those things to hurt the community while at the same time condemning those "devils." Come off it, Malcolm.

Malcolm just stands there, silently. He looks over at Jim and Cassius, who don't know what to say. Back to Sam, he smiles and waves his finger, "tsk, tsk, well played."

MALCOLM

I've got somethin' for YOUR ass.

He walks over to his CLOSET and opens it. He pulls out a SQUARE, FLAT PAPER BAG.

SAM

(Mimicking the "Dragnet" theme)

Dum, da-dum dum!

(to Malcolm, sarcastically)

Is that the clue that's gonna solve the crime, officer?

MALCOLM

You could say that.

Malcolm opens the paper bag and pulls out an LP. He heads over to the record player.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

I was thinking about this song I'd heard on the radio the other day. A song that made me think of you. Turns out it's pretty popular.

Malcolm places the LP on the player. He drops the needle, then walks over to the corner and sits down, his back to the others.

The song playing is Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind." Malcolm taps his feet to it as he listens to the lyrics, smiling. He even closes his eyes every now and then and grooves to it like he's really into it.

Cassius and Jim look at each other, confused. After the song plays for a while, Malcolm turns it off.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

I just love those lyrics. Especially in the beginning.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

"How many roads must a man walk down, before you can call him a man." It's as though he's asking, how much do the oppressed have to do before they can be recognized as human beings? Really gets you thinking, don't it?

SAM

I already know "Blowin' in the Wind," Malcolm. I heard it when it first came out.

MALCOLM

And it didn't make you angry?

SAM

Why would it?

MALCOLM

Well, isn't this Bob Dylan fella a white boy from Minnesota?

SAM

So what?

MALCOLM

This is a white boy... from Minnesota. Who has nothing to gain from writing a song that speaks more to the struggles of our people, more to the movement, than anything that you have ever penned in your life. Now, I know I'm not the shrewd businessperson you are, my brother, but since you say being vocally in the struggle is bad for business, why has this song gone higher on the pop charts than anything you've got out?

Sam says nothing.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Why. Has this song. Gone higher on the pop charts than anything you've got out?

Sam looks long and hard at Malcolm, seething for several seconds before abruptly storming out of the room.

CASSIUS

Sam! Come back here, man!

JIM

Sam!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

That wasn't necessary!

MALCOLM

Yes, that was absolutely was necessary!

CASSIUS

We're supposed to be friends...

MALCOLM

I AM his friend, Cassius! That's why I'm trying to give him a wake-up call. There is no more room for anyone, not you, not me, not Jimmy, not Sam, no one, to be standing on the fence anymore. Our people are quite literally dying out there on the streets every day! And a line has got to be drawn in the sand. A line that says, either you stand on this side with us, or you stand on that side against us. And I believe in that brother's potential too much to let him stay over on the other side!

CASSIUS

I'd better go get him before he drives off.

Cassius quickly runs out the door in pursuit of Sam. Malcolm stands there for several seconds, pensive. He obviously feels kind of bad about hurting Sam's feelings. After a few seconds, Jim closes the door and slowly turns to Malcolm.

JIM

You know, I always find it kinda funny how you light-skinned cats end up being so damn militant.

MALCOLM

Huh?! What do you mean?

JIM

Well... You ARE yella as the sun. And when I think about who the most outspoken, consequences-be-damned brothers are out there, it's always you light-skinned boys. You. W.E.B. Dubois. Adam Clayton Powell...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

I'd never really paid much attention to complexions, because we are all black people.

JIM

Don't suddenly talk to me like I'm stupid. You know we are far from all the same. When white folks ain't around, you see all the light-skinned girls gather in one corner of the room. All the dark-skinned girls gather in the other. And you know, comin' up, light-skinned cats get it harder from other black people sometimes than they do from white people.

MALCOLM

What are you trying to say?

JIM

I just wonder if all the pushing and all the "hard line" this and "hard line" that is about trying to prove something to white people Malcolm...or is it about trying to prove something to black people?

MALCOLM

That's... a very interesting way of looking at things.

JIM

Just something I noticed, that's all. I just don't think you should begrudge Sam for being about his business. He's got to be. If the goal is for us to be free. To really be free...

MALCOLM

You know it is.

JIM

Then the key is economic freedom. And no one's more economically free than Sam. Shit, technically he's the only one of us not waiting on a paycheck from a white man.

MALCOLM

I'M not waiting on no paycheck from a white man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM
YOU don't have a job, Negro!

Malcolm is surprised by this comment.

JIM (CONT'D)
Shit. Well, in the literal sense.

MALCOLM
I know what you meant.

JIM
The one thing white folks are masters at is tapping into our passion to the point that we forget about the important stuff.

MALCOLM
I thought you loved being the hero of the NFL.

JIM
Hero? I ain't no damn hero to them. No. You see, some white folks cannot wait to pat themselves on the back for not being cruel to us. Like we should be singing hosannas because they found the kindness in their hearts to almost treat us like real human beings. Do you expect a dog to give you a medal for not kicking it that day? I hate those motherfuckers more than the rednecks who just put it all out there. And I'll be damned if I'm ever going to forget what they really think of me.

MALCOLM
I've no doubt that you won't.

JIM
And the thing that I love about Sam is that he doesn't forget either. And he does not deserve you implying otherwise.

MALCOLM
I'm not implying... Jimmy, brothers like him, you and Cassius. You all are our greatest weapons.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

Champ. I could get used to that...

SAM

Malcolm'll have them calling you
Champ X like a damn fool.

CASSIUS

Malcolm's had it rough these past
few months.

SAM

Oh, Malcolm's had it rough?!

CASSIUS

He's getting worn down.

Cassius quickly enters the car to avoid further argument. Sam
throws up his hands, exasperated.

SAM

(angrily)

Oh for the love of...

Sam stops himself. He takes a deep breath and exhales the
anger. He throws his head back and closes his eyes.

SAM (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Jeeeesus, wash away my troubles,
while I'm travelin' here below...*

A calm washes over Sam. He takes a deep breath, enters the
car.

INT. SAM'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

A quiet beat.

SAM

So, Muslim, eh?

CASSIUS

It won't change my friendship with
you and Jim.

SAM

You don't know that.

CASSIUS

The hell I don't. We have to be
there for each other.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Why?

CASSIUS

Because cain't nobody else
understand what it's like bein' one
of us. C'ept us.

SAM

(chuckling)

One of us?

CASSIUS

You know. Young. Black. Righteous.
Famous. Unapologetic.

Sam silently ponders what Cassius has said.

SAM

The target's gonna be on your back.

CASSIUS

It was gonna be there anyway.

Sam is silent.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

This ain't about civil rights.
Those activists ain't do squat
about them four little girls that
got bombed in Alabama. That's why
they preachin' to a deaf
congregation. Cause they ain't
giving black people what they
really want.

SAM

Which is?

CASSIUS

What you have, but take for
granted.

Sam stares at Cassius, puzzled. He doesn't know what he means.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Power.

SAM

Black. Power. I like the sound of
that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

So do I. And so do they.

Sam looks out to see the kids exiting the Liquor Store, each with a handful of goodies. They're both holding their heads high, looking confident.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Power just means a world where we're safe to be ourselves. To look like we want. Think like we want. Without having to answer to anybody for it. After all we put in, don't black folks deserve that much?

The kids wave. Sam and Cassius wave back.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

We can do whatever we want now, brother. So tell me, what do you want to do?

SAM

I want...
(thinking, then smirking)
...I want to damn party.

Cassius smiles and rolls his eyes.

SAM (CONT'D)

I mean... Don't you?

CASSIUS

Yeah.

SAM

So let's go...

Sam fires up his engine, and his car speeds out of the parking lot and into the Miami night, Cassius shouting out the window the entire way.

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

The door opens and Cassius re-enters with Sam.

CASSIUS

Hey, hey, the gang's all here.

JIM

Good. You caught him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

I wasn't running nowhere. I am ready to take care of the hosting duties, though.

He pulls a large bottle of WHISKEY from a BAG.

MALCOLM

Really?

SAM

Malcolm, you've had the floor long enough. It's time to take this party to the Fontainebleau!
(singing)
We're havin' a paaaarty...

Sam laughs, but Jim and Cassius don't move.

MALCOLM

You've obviously forgotten that brother Cassius no longer drinks.

SAM

And YOU obviously haven't smelled his breath in the last hour.

Malcolm looks to the now shocked Cassius, who breathes into his hand and backs away, mortified. Malcolm looks over to Jim, who shrugs.

JIM

Hey, let it go, man.

A look of disappointment on his face, he turns back to Sam. He decides to use a different tactic.

MALCOLM

(with compassion)
Sam, what is this problem between us?

SAM

I DON'T got a problem with you. I got a problem with... this guy.

He gestures at Malcolm, up and down.

SAM (CONT'D)

You used to be such a fun cat! Now you're acting in private like you are on camera.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

I was always that person.

SAM

Maybe, but you were also always so much... more.

(to Jim and Cassius)

Fellas? Y'all ready?

Jim and Cassius don't move.

MALCOLM

You remember the first time we met, Sam?

SAM

I'm tired of your questions, man.

MALCOLM

Is that a no?

SAM

Of course I do. Up in Harlem. You didn't even know who I was.

MALCOLM

I might've said that at the time, but I knew who you were. A lot of the brothers had been requesting shifts outside the Apollo that week.

SAM

Is that a fact?

MALCOLM

That's a fact. And I understood, because I'd caught one of your shows in Chicago.

SAM

You've been to one of my shows?

MALCOLM

No. I've been to five of them. Including the one in Boston.

SAM

Shit. Boston? Really?

MALCOLM

Really.

A long silence as Sam takes this in, smiling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

Well, what happened in Boston?!

Malcolm chuckles.

MALCOLM

Mind if I recount the story, Sam?

A BEAT.

SAM

Naw, go ahead.

MALCOLM

Yeah?

SAM

Yeah.

Malcolm smiles as he begins to tell the story.

MALCOLM

Well, at this show, Sam was playing with Jackie Wilson...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BOSTON BALLROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

JACKIE WILSON is on stage, singing "Lonely Teardrops" to a capacity crowd, entirely black. He's dancing wildly.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Now, I was there to see Sam, of course. But Jackie was the opener. He was doing his usual routine, shuckin' and jivin' like those types do. Not really my cup of tea.

Jackie does an acrobatic series of spins as his number comes wraps. The crowd would disagree with Malcolm's assessment.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

But thankfully, it came to an end and Sam was getting ready to come on stage. I knew he was about to class this joint up.

Jackie exits the stage to cheers. He passes Sam backstage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JACKIE

(slyly)

Warmed 'em up for you, brother.
Don't fuck up, now.

Sam says nothing, fixing his collar as the MC announces him, to the even louder cheers of the crowd.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Sam comes strolling out onto the stage, and the crowd goes wild! Sam steps up to the microphone and wraps his hand around it.

CLOSE UP of Sam's hand as his fingers work their way around the MICROPHONE.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

You know how Sam does. He caresses it, like one might caress a delicate piece of crystal.

CASSIUS (V.O.)

Or a pretty little fox!

JIM (V.O.)

Or an NFL championship trophy!

MALCOLM (V.O.)

You want me to finish this story, Jimmy?

JIM

Aw, go ahead.

Jim, Cassius and Malcolm chuckle.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Like I was saying. He caresses the mic. Pulls it close to his lips, opens his mouth...

The loud sound of feedback, followed by a crackling pop, fills the arena as the sound goes out.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

The sound went out!

CASSIUS AND JIM (V.O.)

What?!

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Mmm-hmmm! How's that for some bad luck?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM (V.O.)
Bad luck, my ass!

We see a smiling Jackie Wilson dap the ENGINEER as he hands him a crisp TWENTY DOLLAR BILL for a job well done.

SAM (V.O.)
Jackie was always the king of sabotage.

MALCOLM (V.O.)
Regardless, Sam was now stuck on stage, with no sound, and a worked up Boston crowd.

A lone MAN in the crowd begins to boo. Soon, others join in. In the back of the room, we see MALCOLM standing with his arms crossed, two NOI GUARDS at his side.

MALCOLM (V.O.)
Things escalated quickly.

Various MEN and WOMEN in the crowd start shouting.

SAM (V.O.)
My band was outta there like some runaway slaves!

Malcolm watches as Sam's entire BACKING BAND gathers their instruments and flees the stage.

SAM
(to his band)
Where the fuck y'all goin'?

BASSIST
We musicians, not bodyguards! Good luck!

Malcolm's guards, though stone-faced, seem concerned.

The band exits, but Sam continues to stand there, taking in the crowd's collective jeers.

MALCOLM (V.O.)
But Sam, he just stood there on that stage, and I remember thinkin' to myself "this young brother is fittin' to get himself killed!"

CLOSE UP on Malcom in Boston, as he glances over at one of his guards.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

This young brother is fittin' to
get himself killed.

CASSIUS (V.O.)

Then what happened?

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Something... something, amazing.

The roar of the crowd grows deafening. A BOTTLE hits the ground and shatters just a few feet in front of Malcolm. He looks to one of his guards and nods. It's time to go.

The guard opens the rear door and Malcolm is about to exit when he suddenly stops. The entire room has gone SILENT. Malcolm turns back to see what silenced everyone.

He squints as he stares at the stage. He can see Sam gesturing and swaying, but he cannot discern what he's doing or saying. He steps forward with his guards, into the crowd.

Suddenly, a deep GROAN reverberates from the front of the room. It's difficult to tell what the sound is, so Malcolm steps more into the crowd. The sound gets louder and louder as he gets closer to it (or, it closer to him?). His eyes go wide, like he's staring at an oncoming freight train.

Just like that, the wave of SOUND hits him. If he had long hair, it would've been blown back by it. It's the collective chanting of the CROWD.

CROWD

Ooh, Ah! Ooh, ah! Ooh, ah! Ooh, Ah!
Ooh, Ah!

Malcolm smiles as he turns to his guards and sees that they're chanting, too. He starts to chant himself.

CLOSE IN on Sam, who is obviously singing the words to his song, though the only thing audible is the chanting of the crowd.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

I saw him up there, covered in
sweat, and singing to them. But in
the back, you couldn't hear
anything except that chant. And you
know what?

BACK TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - MALCOLM'S ROOM

MALCOLM

That was good enough. Yes, that was one hell of a show, Sam...

CASSIUS

That sounds like somethin'.

MALCOLM

It really was, Cash. It really was.
(to Sam)

Brother, you could move mountains without lifting a finger. Listen, if I give you a hard time, it's only because I think so highly of you. You brothers are our bright, shining future. I never lose sight of that.

CASSIUS

Well, you're part of that future too, Malcolm.

MALCOLM

(apprehensively)
I'm flattered, really, but...

SAM

Taking the world on your shoulders is bad for your health.

CASSIUS

He won't have to carry it by himself much longer. Cause we're gonna be in the Nation together!

Jim suddenly cuts Malcolm a knowing, concerned glance.

JIM

Malcolm...

MALCOLM

I know, I know.

CASSIUS

What is it?

Cassius and Sam both look confused.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Malcolm?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A long silence, as Malcolm inexplicably struggles to find the right words to express himself.

MALCOLM

Like I said, my relationship with the Nation has gotten... complicated. And I don't know how much longer I'll be in it.

SAM

You're leaving the Nation of Islam? I thought once you went in, you were in it for life?

MALCOLM

I guess I'll be putting that theory to the test.

CASSIUS

Why would you want to leave? All of the things you've told me. Things you showed me that the Nation does.

MALCOLM

There's lots of good, righteous brothers and sisters in the Nation, Cassius. It's the leadership that has shown that it's not up to the task.

CASSIUS

Wait...so you're gonna help me cross over to being a Muslim, then quit being a Muslim?

MALCOLM

No Cassius. I'll always be Muslim. In fact, I guess you could say I'm becoming more Muslim than ever.

CASSIUS

I'm not understanding.

MALCOLM

Well, I'm not leaving just to be out alone in the world. I'm leaving to start a new organization. One that adheres more closely to the honest, righteous tenets of Islam.

CASSIUS

Who's going to be in this new organization?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MALCOLM

I think lots of people will follow me over, Cash. Especially... if you come with me.

A long pause, as Cassius lets this sink in. Cassius looks away, then looks back at Malcolm.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)

Say something, Cassius.

Cassius suddenly lunges at Malcolm.

CASSIUS

You motherfucker!!

Sam and Jim are horrified and quickly step in to hold him back.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

You've been using me?!

Malcolm looks Cassius in the eyes. Cassius' expression goes from rage to regret. Malcolm slowly rises, dusts himself off, then picks up his glasses and puts them back on.

MALCOLM

No, no, brother. I'm trying to save you.

Cassius lowers his hands.

CASSIUS

You're the only one that needs saving!

MALCOLM

If you don't believe in your heart that I've been an honest friend to you, then you shouldn't join me. If there's any part of you believes our time together has been motivated in any way by opportunism or selfishness on my part, then brother, I encourage you... alk away from me with a clear mind and conscious knowing it's the right thing... the only thing you can do.

There's a long pause. Cassius looks like he's about to say something when suddenly a bunch of FLASHES erupt outside the window, followed quickly by a series of KNOCKS on the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMAAL (O.S.)

Brother Malcolm! We got a bunch of reporters out here!

JIM

There they are...

CASSIUS

Someone... must have saw me and Sam downstairs.

MALCOLM

(a little shaken)

Well, you can't blame them for wanting a word from the new world champion.

CASSIUS

Yeah. Yeah. I guess I'd better go talk to them, help them sell a few papers.

MALCOLM

Absolutely.

CASSIUS

You coming?

A look of shock on Malcolm's face.

MALCOLM

I... I don't have any comments to make right now. Besides, they're here to see you, brother.

CASSIUS

I want you standing with me.

Malcolm smiles. He looks relieved to get this affirmation from Cassius.

MALCOLM

Very well. If you brothers will excuse us.

Cassius puts his hand on the doorknob. He looks down for a moment, as though quietly putting on his "game face," before suddenly swinging the door open to the blinding series of FLASHES and the gaggles of REPORTERS QUESTIONS being hurled at him. He's instantly in character and defiant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS
I TOLD YOU SUCKAS I WAS THE
GREATEST! (Pause) ALL OF YOU MUST
BOW!!

Cassius continues to hurl his over-the-top vitriol at the crowd as he and Malcolm quickly exit the room into the flashes. Cassius' braggadocio-laced invective and the questions die out as the door closes behind them.

Jim and Sam head over to the window and peek outside. The flickering lights from the flashbulbs shine through the window like lightning. Sam notices this and softly begins to hum to himself before abruptly turning to Jim.

JIM
This is one strange fuckin' night.

SAM
Yeah. You know, I know what's going
on out there, right?

JIM
Yeah, Cassius... he's out there
talking to the press.

SAM
Not out there, outside our room.
Out THERE.

Jim is obviously puzzled.

SAM (CONT'D)
I mean, just because I haven't
released any records about the
movement doesn't mean I haven't
written any songs about the
movement.

JIM
Come on, man. You know Malcolm is
all fire and brimstone about
everything.

SAM
But when I first heard that Dylan
song, I WAS mad!

JIM
Why?

SAM
Because it's fuckin' good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JIM

Good! You should feel competitive.

SAM

No, it's not just because it's good. But... I felt like I should have written that song. I'm calling myself "Mr. Soul" and I haven't written anything like that.

JIM

Why don't you start?

SAM

I started working on something. I started writing it the first day I heard that song...

JIM

Really?

SAM

Yeah. But it's just so...different. I haven't even played it for a crowd yet.

JIM

How does it go?

Sam stares at Jim, his eyes quietly asking "are you serious?"

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMPTON HOUSE HOTEL - POOL

A throng of REPORTERS surrounds Cassius and Malcolm. A growing group of black onlookers has also gathered, emerging from their rooms and the hotel diner.

CASSIUS

All these so-called experts were all wrong. Next time, don't ask no bookies who's gonna win. You come to me! I'll tell ya who's gonna win...

REPORTER 1

Cassius, is it fair to assume that since Malcolm X is standing here with you, that you're seriously considering becoming a Muslim?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASSIUS

I'm not considering anything. I am a Muslim. And from this day forward I no longer want to be called by the name Cassius Clay. That is a slave name.

REPORTER 1

What are we supposed to call you?

CASSIUS

You will refer to me as Cassius X.

Rumbling laughter amongst the crowd.

Jim and Sam emerge from the room and join the crowd taking in this spectacle. They beam with pride at their friend.

REPORTER 1

Malcolm, have you been giving Clay advice on his religious beliefs?

MALCOLM

He's my brother and my friend. I express what I know and understand, but he has a mind of his own... an understanding of his own.

Cassius turns and smiles at Malcolm, who returns the gesture. Jim looks at Sam, who also smiles, knowing this is the right thing for Cassius to do.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMPTON HOUSE - DINER - LATER

The diner at the base of the hotel is overrun with people. Most of the entirely black crowd are jostling to get as close as they can to the DINING COUNTER, where Clay, now decked out in a SUIT and BOWTIE like a Muslim, smiles wide for Malcolm, who is on the other side of the counter taking his photo with his Nikon, also smiling. We hear Sam Cooke's song "GOOD TIMES" roaring as Malcolm takes one photo after another.

CASSIUS

(shouting)

Man, I'm so fast! I'm so fast that after the fight, Miami vice tried giving me a speeding ticket! You take Sonny Liston, Joe Louis and Rocky Marciano... I'll whoop 'em all in the same night! You know I'm the greatest! Who's the greatest?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROWD
YOU ARE!!!

PULL OUT to reveal Jim and Sam blending in among the crowd, sharing drinks. Sam sits off to the side, smoking a cigarette and laughing.

CASSIUS
That's right! Put that thing down and come over here. Somebody get a picture of us! I was in Rome! They had a man they said could beat me... I whooped him too!

Malcolm continues to snap photos. He looks up at the window, and from his POV, we see that just outside the diner, brother Jerome 7X is meeting with the two white guys he saw earlier and handing them NOTES. The smile leaves Malcolm's face as he looks back at Cassius and locks eyes with him as we FADE OUT, the music still going, until...

FADE IN:

INT. THE TONIGHT SHOW - NIGHT - WEEKS LATER

Sam sings the last few stanzas of the song "GOOD TIMES" for the rapt Tonight Show audience. He finishes the song with a flourish. Loud APPLAUSE from the audience as Sam strolls over to the sofa and takes a seat next to ED MCMAHON. A smiling JOHNNY CARSON claps enthusiastically.

JOHNNY
He sings well, doesn't he, Ed?

ED
Incredibly well, Johnny.

SAM
(smiling)
Thank you, Johnny.

JOHNNY
Sam, tell us. How do you come up with so many great songs?

SAM
Well, Johnny, I just observe the things going on around me.

JOHNNY
What do you mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM

Well, if you try to see what's going on and try to figure out how people are thinking and determine the times of your day, I think you can always write something the people will understand.

JOHNNY

Would you mind singing us one more song? Would you like that, folks?

The audience CHEERS in approval.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Whaddaya say, Sam? Got anything the people will understand?

SAM

I do have something that I've been working on. Something new. I haven't really shared with anyone yet. Anyone except...

(pause)

...some friends of mine.

JOHNNY

That sounds great. We'd love to hear it!

SAM

All right, then, let's do it.

JOHNNY

Ladies and gentlemen. Once again, Mr. Sam Cooke!

The crowd CHEERS again as Sam walks back over to the microphone. He looks out over the faces in the audience. He slowly begins to sing.

SAM

(singing)

I was...born by the river. In a little old tent. And just like the river, I've been runnin'. Ever since. It's been a loooong, a long time comin', but I know a change is gonna come. Oh yes it will...

The band cautiously joins in as we CUT TO:

INT. NATION OF ISLAM MOSQUE - DAY

Elijah Muhammad welcomes Cassius to a podium in front of a huge crowd of NATION OF ISLAM onlookers. Cassius, now wearing the trademark SUIT and BOWTIE of the Nation, smiles and waves to the crowd.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD

The world champion, will no longer
be known as Cassius Clay. He will
be known as, Muhammad Ali!

SAM (V.O.)

(singing)

*It's been too hard livin', but I'm
afraid to die. Cause I don't know
what's up there, beyond the sky.
It's been a long, long time comin',
but I know a change is gonna come.
Oh yes, it will.*

The large assemblage CHEERS for Muhammad Ali, who smiles and waves at the crowd. CLOSE UP of his face as the smile slowly vanishes as his thoughts turn to Malcolm. He looks back at the SEAT where Malcolm likely would have been sitting, then turns back to the crowd and continues waving, now solemnly.

CUT TO:

EXT. MALCOLM'S HOUSE - QUEENS

A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL flies through the air and crashes into walls. PULL OUT to reveal it is the wooden walls of a house as it is being firebombed. As the flames rapidly spread, the FRONT DOOR swings open and Betty, Malcolm and their young daughters come running out into the street. Malcolm is in his robe and holding a RIFLE. They get to the front lawn. Betty and the girls are in tears. All they can do is watch it burn.

SAM (V.O.)

(singing)

*I go to the movies and I go
downtown. Somebody keep tellin' me
don't hang around. It's been a
long, a long time coming, but I
know a change gonna come. Oh yes it
will.*

CUT TO:

EXT. DIRTY DOZEN SET - DAY

Jim sits at a DESK in front of a crowd of REPORTERS.

JIM

Because my filming schedule conflicts with Cleveland Browns training camp, and since the Browns have said there is no option for me to return to camp late without incurring hefty fines, effective immediately, I am retiring from the NFL to pursue my movie career full-time. Now if y'all will excuse me, I have to get back to work.

Hands shoot up to ask Jim questions. Jim smiles as he confidently walks off. Sam's voice is more confident now, the band's accompaniment gets even more robust.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Betty and Malcolm's daughters laying in a single large bed. The girls are asleep. Malcolm sits nearby at a desk, a sleeping Attalah on his lap. He's in deep thought.

SAM (V.O.)

(singing)

*Then I go to my brother. And I say
brother, help me please.*

Betty rises from the bed. She smiles at him. He kisses Attalah on the head, then returns the smile.

SAM (V.O.)

*And he winds up knockin me, back
down on my knees, wellllllllll.*

Malcolm then looks over at a thick MANUSCRIPT sitting on his desk. A CLOSE UP of the manuscript reveals the title: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X, AS TOLD TO ALEX HALEY. He taps the cover of the manuscript and sighs in relief, knowing his legacy will go on regardless of what happens to him.

CUT TO:

BACK TO SCENE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SLOW ZOOM in on a CLOSE UP of Sam's face as he sings the last refrain, tears now streaming down his cheeks.

SAM

(singing)

*There's been times that I thought,
I wouldn't last for long. But now I
think I'm able to carry on. It's
been a long, long time comin', but
I know a change is gonna come. Oh
yes it will...*

MATCH CUT TO:

A TELEVISION SCREEN, as Sam discreetly wipes a tear from his eye and bows for the silent audience.

PULL OUT to reveal Malcolm watching the television from his chair in his hotel room. He takes a deep, satisfied breath, then closes his eyes.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK SCREEN.

SUPER:

"It is a time for martyrs now, and if I am to be one, it will be for the cause of brotherhood. That's the only thing that can save this country."

Malcolm X, February 19, 1965

He was murdered two days later.

END.