

COLD JUSTICE

by

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Inspired by the actual cases of
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from
The Innocence Project

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FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSTON THIRD WARD MUSIC STORE - NIGHT

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Early evening. SHADRACK DOMINGUEZ, barely 19, mixed race, a steamy, sexy guy with a welterweight's build, pulls a rolling grille down at a music store.

He juggles a stack of posters that read "Jackson for Mayor". Drops a few. Sets the rest down. Lights a joint.

A flashy silver-sand Cadillac Escalade SUV trolls past the store. Inside it are the BOYS, a rag-tag,

mixed race gang. MUSIC BLARES from it, bass thumping.

It slows at the end of the block and goes silent. Its menace stains the street. It stops.

TWO PRE-TEEN GIRLS outside the store primp to their reflections in its front window, unaware of the SUV.

One is JONQUIL, loving an audience, even if it's herself. Her FRIEND, a devious instigator, pushes her toward Shad, but she doesn't need convincing.

JONQUIL

Hey. Time you do what you promised.

SHADRACK

Ain't promised you nothing, girl.

JONQUIL

You said if I gonna make it as a singer,
I need a coach. Said I needed to learn
how to show up.

SHADRACK

Yeah, you wanna just fade away if
nobody's paying attention. I never said
the coach you need is me.

JONQUIL

Huh. I got ways of showing up...

She turns away, adjusts her clothing so her budding breasts swell over her top. Spins back to show Shad.

JONQUIL (CONT'D)

Classic, ain't they? Unless you be too
wasted to care.

Shad glances at Jonquil. She's juicy, but he's not taking the bait.

SHADRACK

You pretty enough. Get on home now.

The lurking SUV troubles him, and his eyes flick a warning, signaling her. She sees but does not understand.

A funeral procession passes in front of the SUV, blocking the street in front of it.

Jonquil strikes a sexier pose. Strokes Shad's arm.

JONQUIL

Look, you hot, and you want what I got.

WHIP CARVER exits the SUV, plods back toward Shad and the girls. Whip is 23, black and heavy with too much muscle, much of it between his ears. Shad scrapes Jonquil off.

SHADRACK

You wanna be Britney Spears, get a dog collar. Now split.

The girl's furious in an instant.

JONQUIL

Bite me, bitch! You gonna be sorry.

She and her friend give Shad the finger, stomp away.

Shad goes to meet Whip, hands him a joint. Whip lights up, points to the funeral procession.

WHIP

That's Maurice Joiner. They taking him to his last party.

SHADRACK

Not much of a party, when it's your wake.

WHIP

Yeah. Some said we was kin.

SHADRACK

He's kin, and you don't even go the viewing? That's cold, man.

WHIP

You hear who killed him?

Shad won't admit he's not that much in the loop.

SHADRACK

He did me a wrong, while back. Fuck him.

WHIP

You cold, too, Shad.

Shad stifles a smile, satisfied with Whip's impression.

Whip takes a long drag on his joint, lets it hit.

WHIP (CONT'D)

Mmmmm. Mo was all right. Always saying he was 'high on God.' Sang like -- what you call them Eye-talians, sound like somebody cut off they balls? One of them. Guess he got on a permanent buzz now.

Shad staggers, "shocked" that Whip knows about *castratos*.

SHADRACK

He sang falsetto. Means faking it, bro. See, Mo stood me up and lost us a gig.

WHIP

Huh. What I say? Turning the other cheek, that ain't you. Listen, you seen that girl Jonquil? Melton been lookin' for her. I get a reward, I bring her to him.

SHADRACK

What kind of reward?

WHIP

You seen her?

SHADRACK

What's he doing scoping her out?

WHIP

Band need a back-up singer tonight.

Shad pinches his joint out. Whip's killing his buzz.

SHADRACK

Your brother may think she's fine, but hell, Whip, she's like twelve. Melton's already got that ZsaZsa. Ain't she pushin' to sing with the boys?

WHIP

ZsaZsa pushes, he push back. She crazy.

SHADRACK

You used to go with her. Dumped you, huh?

Whip glowers at Shad, who doesn't notice his anger.

WHIP

She got the asthma. All that gasping turned me off. Melton, he bet on the Rockets and lost to Jonquil's agent, so we have to let her sing. That O.K. with you?

Shad picks up the posters, uneasy but letting it pass.

SHADRACK

Sure. Agent gonna look after her, huh?

WHIP

Sure.

SHADRACK

'Cause I'm too busy with Pop to baby-sit.

Surprise crosses Whip's face. He pouts with jealousy.

WHIP

Pop's getting you gigs?

SHADRACK

Tonight he's got me doing favors for Darcy Jackson.

WHIP

Melton say you better off with us. We be a pussy magnet, what's wrong with you?

The SUV suddenly speeds backwards, stops. ANTOINE FOSTER, 20, black and no alpha male, drives. MELTON CARVER, 22, black, thin, boyish, waves Shad and Whip over to the car.

Melton is Whip minus a hundred pounds. He resembles Shad, too, but his eyes leak a cunning intelligence. A white mouse sits on his shoulder. He strokes it. It submits.

SHADRACK

Hey. That your ride?

MELTON

(always in a whispery rasp)
It is now. "No fear," you know? Get in, Whip. Antoine say we in business.

Whip obeys. Melton waves to Antoine to drive on. Antoine checks his reflection in the rear view mirror first, touches up his hair. Finally he lets the SUV roll away.

Shad shrugs off the encounter. WHISTLES, walks on.

EXT. PROJECT ROW HOUSES - NIGHT

Shad and his father, POP DOMINGUEZ, 40, mixed race and aspiring to middle-class, sit on the front porch of one of 22 renovated shotgun shacks used by local artists.

Shad PLAYS a lick of Nuevo Tango on his saxophone. Pop joins in, ACCOMPANIES him on his squeeze box. The song ends in laughter at Pop's last improvisation.

SHADRACK

You hear? They gonna spruce up the El Dorado. We shoulda got in on that.

POP DOMINQUEZ

Yeah? Been falling down ten years. Glad it ain't my cross to bear. Got enough on my plate right now. You keep your eyes peeled and your head down, you hear?

SHADRACK

Like, for what?

POP DOMINQUEZ

Maybe the boys. What they up to?

SHADRACK

Them three-block thugs don't worry me.

POP DOMINQUEZ

You watch yourself. You just like your grand-dad. You trust everyone. Go along, got music on your mind, don't see trouble coming your way. See what's inside.

Shad shrugs it off.

SHADRACK

When it re-opens, we could hire on. Find somebody on skins can keep the beat--

POP DOMINQUEZ

You don't know who's who 'round here any more. All these foreigners movin' in. And the developers, they want to put as little as possible into Third Ward, take as much out as fast as they can.

SHADRACK

You always saying we got to control our own destiny. So, what, will they do it?

POP DOMINQUEZ

I'd like somebody to open it again, sure.
When I see Darcy, I'll ask him who's
behind it. See if he thinks anybody'd pay
to listen to you.

Pop's teasing, but when he begins a SONG, it's the blues.

INT. SOUTH CENTRAL POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Late that night. SHANEISHA TUCKER, 7, is black, beautiful, and terrified. Her mouth is always open, and she seems a little slow as she takes everything in. She looks at an array of black-and-white photos of the faces of six black men. Uniformed POLICE OFFICERS go in and out all around the room.

A white detective, JOE BONE, conducts the questioning. He's 48, arrogant and ruthlessly efficient. MIKE BUCKNER, 30, black, anxious to please but squeamish, looks on.

POLICE CHIEF DARCY JACKSON, 51, his dark face as lean as Dick Tracy's, monitors events from the rear of the room.

BONE

You don't recognize anyone? Tell me again, slowly. Everything you remember.

SHANEISHA

Gettin' dark. Guy tells LaToya we goin' to the movies. But we go to this room. They do make-up. Keep poppin' big lights in my eyes. This man come in, he tellin' 'em how to make me stand. Took my clothes. Then he, he...hurt me. I never saw his, his...he on top of me so fast. He big. After, he send me out, take LaToya. I hear her sassin' him good. They's hollerin', knockin' things over. Then the men's all grabbin' they camera and stuff, runnin'. I look in the other room, LaToya, she bleedin'. Bad. I hold her hand 'til she go to sleep.

Bone puts another six photos in front of her.

BONE

Any of those the ones?

Shaneisha shakes her head no.

BONE (CONT'D)

You gonna cooperate or not?

SHANEISHA

I want my momma.

Bone snaps six more photos in front of her, taps one.

BONE

She's coming. But we need to get these guys off the street. How about this guy?

SHANEISHA

Big guy was skinny. He not skinny.

Shaneisha dares to be emphatic, shaking her head no. Bone snatches up the photos, leaves. Buckner hands her a Coke.

INT. POLICE STATION INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Time passes. Shaneisha's alone. She twists in her chair, crossing her legs so she doesn't pee. She examines the stains on her legs, the bruises on her arms and wrists. Runs her tongue over lips rimmed with lipstick.

Buckner and Bone come back in. Frustrated, Bone flips open a photo spread again, points to one color picture.

BONE

Now you see the man?

SHANEISHA

No. Done tol' you all I can.

BUCKNER

Help us catch him, we'll keep you safe.

Shaneisha forces herself to study the faces again.

SHANEISHA

What I say he look like?

Buckner puts his finger on the color photo of Shad.

BUCKNER

Skinny, you said. Like this.

EXT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

The next morning. JAYMAR, 9, myopic but neat, gazes at the instruments. He drags a beat-up saxophone case and holds a reed between his lips. Shad arrives to open up.

SHADRACK

You're early, boy.

JAYMAR

You promised to be here at ten. You late.

SHADRACK

Did you put it in writing, make me sign?

JAYMAR

No.

SHADRACK

Well, then. I'm here now, so shut the fuck up.

Jaymar gazes at Shad, hero worship in his eyes.

INT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

They go to the back of the store. Shad watches Jaymar put his sax together, insert the reed, EEK a few notes out.

SHADRACK

Look, your reed's geriatric. You not winnin' any talent show with that.

Shad removes the reed, takes out a reed knife and shaves a little off. Nicks his hand. Wipes it on his shirt, sets the knife aside. Refits the reed.

Jaymar's TONE improves. Shad nods encouragement. Jaymar manages a JAZZ RIFF.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Ooo, that's cool, man. You got it now. You been practicin', I can tell. Play it again, only feel it more.

The boy PLAYS, getting into it. Stops, beaming.

JAYMAR

My mom, she says if we making payments on my ax, I got to play it good.

SHADRACK

You want hear how I'd do it?

The boy nods yes. Shad picks up his sax. Inside its case is a postcard of a beach.

JAYMAR

What's that?

SHADRACK

Where I'm taking my folks on vacation.

JAYMAR

Like after you famous? Like the Bird?

SHADRACK

You got it. A year from now, that's me.

Shad PLAYS a run like a virtuoso. Slips to the counter, steals a pack of new reeds, passes them to Jaymar. Winks.

Suddenly POLICEMEN pour into the store.

Jaymar's stunned.

Bone grabs Shad. Another cop seizes the reed knife.

BONE

You're under arrest for the rape and murder of LaToya Winthrop.

Buckner cuffs Shad. Drags him out in front of the kid, his glasses half off his face.

SHADRACK

I don't know no LaToya. This is all wrong! You call my pop. Jaymar, keep practicin'. I see you later.

INT. PRISON EXERCISE YARD, POLUNSKY UNIT - DAY

DECEMBER, PRESENT DAY

General population area, Level 1. Radios play RAP and SALSA MUSIC. INMATES group to hold their turf. Melton, now 34, slides over to WILLIE POTTS, 27. He's new, and he's freezing with cold and nerves.

MELTON

You need protection? I got connections.

Melton pulls Willie along to a quieter place.

WILLIE

I can't live like this.

MELTON

You be all right. Steal cars, beat up a dooper, nobody gives a shit. They's four hundred guys sittin' on Death Row right over there--

Melton points across the yard to 12 Building.

MELTON (CONT'D)

--but they still taking care of them
dudes, right up 'til they haul 'em to
Huntsville and put the needle in.

WILLIE

Somebody sold me out.

MELTON

Sure, it happens. That's what my cousin
say, too, but today he gone to
Huntsville, ain't he. See, it comes back
that you a kiddy-diddler or some Al Qaeda
freak, you can kiss your ass goodbye.

WILLIE

How would that get out?

Melton shrugs. A mouse peeks out of his shirt.

MELTON

Walls got ears, baby.

INT. DEATH ROW CELL - POLUNSKY UNIT - DAY

Four prison GUARDS pull Shad, in shackles, out of a 6' x
9' cell. He wears a white jumpsuit with the letters "DR"
on the back, in black. Gives a glance to the room that
holds his estate: a cot sits next to a stainless steel
sink and toilet. Above the cot is a shelf with books and
a radio on it.

He also leaves behind a history of scandal. Taped on the
walls are yellowed pages from the *Houston Chronicle* with
these headlines:

**June 5, 2002: Rape Kits; HPD strives to end
"embarrassment" of untested DNA.**

**June 25, 2003: HPD ignored warnings, ex-lab man says;
Retired official says he cited 'train wreck.'**

**November 5, 2003: DNA evidence destroyed; pardons called
possible.**

**June 5, 2005: Bitter pills; HPD analysts faked drug
evidence in four cases. How much more fraud has gone
undetected?**

**December 18, 2005: HPD's lab's troubles predate DNA
testing; Experts' review finds a pattern of problems in
1980s studies of blood samples.**

January 5, 2006: HPD Lab Probe Details More Lapses; Revelations show 2 divisions' problems amount to 'near-total breakdown.'

June 17, 2007: 'Troubling' Cases Surface in Report on HPD Crime Lab; 1991 conviction for rape, murder has drawn the most concern.

January 26, 2008: HPD again shuts down crime lab's DNA unit; Move follows resignation of division's leader in cheating probe.

July 19, 2010: District attorney calls for emergency DNA lab; Houston's backlog of cases keeps growing.

August 10, 2011: Crime lab finds another 3000-plus untested rape kits; Inventory shows more than 7000 now.

As he pauses, shame paints Shad's face at his fear, submission, and failure to get anything changed.

INT. DEATH CHAMBER ANNEX - HUNTSVILLE - DAY

WARDEN ROSANKY, 55, dates the form next to the signatures of two waiting prosecutors inside The Walls Unit.

CROWD NOISE seeps in from outside in the streets.

ALICE-MAE ISRAEL, 24, is slender, tense, bright but overworked, and alarmed.

Her boss AUSTIN JAMES, 46, broad in the beam, is killing time until early retirement and mostly indifferent to the ambience.

Rosanky motions for TWO GUARDS to let the lawyers enter the holding cell.

INT. HOLDING CELL - HUNTSVILLE - DAY

PREACHER MICHAELS, 70, holds a Bible between his hands.

Shad, now 31 and built like a tank, watches the clock on the wall. He no longer has to pretend he's tough.

SHADRACK

(education in his voice now)

Where's my lawyer?

Austin shrugs. Alice-Mae hugs herself, cold with fear.

Desperation fights with dignity in Shad's eyes. It's 11:25. Shad points to the clock, but everyone's already watching his time run out.

SHADRACK(CONT'D)

It's going to come too late. Cops are all going to have a big laugh about it.

AUSTIN

For some people, the law's the law.

SHADRACK

And science is science! You tell my story, Preacher. Get this shit changed!

ALICE-MAE

The results are from an independent lab. They can't be questioning them again!

All of them look at the clock again.

PREACHER MICHAELS

Best comfort your soul, Brother Shadrack.

SHADRACK

The Lord's not wanting me in Heaven.

PREACHER MICHAELS

Why not, son?

SHADRACK

Heaven's supposed to be happy, music all the time. You think I'm gonna care about music? I'll shout for eternity that Texas killed another innocent man.

NOISE breaks out down the hall (O.S.). As it grows, it's clear that it's CHEERING.

PREACHER MICHAELS

Hallelujah! Shad, the stay, that's the stay coming through!

Shad jumps up as the door opens to let in the good news.

EXT. THE WALLS UNIT, HUNTSVILLE - NIGHT

The CROWD OF PROTESTERS holding candles and signs that say "Free Shadrack!" gets the news. CHEERS, WHOOPS! Jaymar, now 22, weeps with relief, jumps with joy on the hood of the waiting hearse. The protesters SING,

PROTESTERS

Marching 'round the chamber like Jericho,
Jericho, Jericho. Marchin' round the
chamber like Jericho, and The Walls are
tumblin' down.

INT. PRISON CELL, POLUNSKY UNIT - NIGHT

Melton awakes, reaches under his pillow. Checks for any
witnesses, sneaks out a cell phone.

MELTON

(into phone)

What?

The message is shocking. Melton hangs up, considers it.

EXT. THIRD WARD CORNER - NIGHT

Antoine, now 33 and half-lit, watches drug deals go down
as cars stop and go. He's listening to music through
earbuds connected to his iPhone when his PHONE RINGS.

Antoine sees the caller is Melton, wrinkles his nose.
Answers anyway, forcing friendliness.

ANTOINE

(into phone continuously)

What up? Hey, I hear you ain't got but
two more weeks, keep you shit straight.

The news is a definite buzzkill.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Fuck, Melton! Well, sure, I get
vibrations, you know, but not always. How
soon they be letting him go?

The next item on Melton's agenda is worse.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

I don't know, man, she ain't never said
nothing to me 'bout that night.

Antoine paces, skittish.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Look, I already put your picture out on
the TV, like you said. No, I said you was
family. Like you said. She remembered,
she woulda said so. I told her what you
said, you borrowed a car, is all. Yeah.

Antoine sobers up as Melton talks.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Okay, yeah. I'll tell her you coming to visit. No, nothing else. You tell her how long you planning to stay. And I'll get us married, like next week.

INT. DISTRICT COURT - DAY

A few days later. Alice-Mae and Austin stand at the bench in front of JUDGE HENDRIX, 45, smart when he's sober.

JUDGE HENDRIX

State waives a new trial?

AUSTIN

Yes, your honor.

Shad, dressed in a new suit, stands next to his lawyer, camera-happy RED BOSTICK, to complete the circle. A COURT REPORTER taking notes hovers at the edge.

A group of YOUNG LAWYERS and INTERNS for the Innocence Project watch from the spectators' area, excited and pleased.

JUDGE HENDRIX

Want to put anything on the record?

Austin waves to Alice-Mae to hand him a document. She hands a lab report to Judge Hendrix.

ALICE-MAE

May it please the court. Oh, wait.

She finds the affidavit that goes with it and hands it over, too. Austin nudges her out of the way, takes over.

AUSTIN

State's motion to dismiss. This case was remanded after appeal, but we no longer wish to proceed. We have another suspect.

JUDGE HENDRIX

Really? In custody?

AUSTIN

No, from a CODIS catalog of DNA samples. We have a partial match. But that'll likely preclude conviction in this case.

Shad's excitement lifts him onto his toes, like a boxer.

SHADRACK

You discovered who did it? Did you put him away yet? Who is he?

JUDGE HENDRIX

Mister Dominguez, I know it's a big day for you, but you need to let the attorneys speak unless someone asks you a question. Anything else? Good. State's motion's granted. Order, anyone?

Both Austin and Bostick thrust proposed orders onto the bench for Hendrix to sign. Shad tries to be patient, but he's so close....

JUDGE HENDRIX (CONT'D)

All right. Mister Dominguez, the count of murder in the first degree and two counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child under fourteen are dismissed.

Judge Hendrix signs one of the orders, time-stamps it and puts it in his file. He time-stamps the copies and gives them back to the lawyers. Leans over toward Shad.

JUDGE HENDRIX (CONT'D)

Mister Dominguez, on behalf of the State of Texas, you have my deepest regrets. You're free to go.

Judge Hendrix reaches down and shakes hands with Shad, then bangs his gavel to APPLAUSE from the spectators. He glares at them but with a twinkle, and leaves the bench.

Bostick shakes Shad's hand, runs off to his groupies. Waves for Shad to join his entourage, goes out to talk to the CLAMORING press. Alice-Mae stops Shad from following.

ALICE-MAE

Don't say anything about another suspect. You're innocent, that's the main thing.

SHADRACK

People been believing something else for a long, long time. Until you arrest the right guy, who's going to accept the truth?

The media's NOISE (O.S.) interrupts Alice-Mae.

ALICE-MAE

You may think you want to talk to the press, until they start in on you. You don't. And you don't have to.

SHADRACK

I get it. Somewhere there's a stone-cold rapist and killer. And you know who it is, but you've got yet another problem.

Alice-Mae shakes Shad's hand.

ALICE-MAE

It's not your problem. Good luck.

INT. TAXI CAB - HOUSTON THIRD WARD - DAY

Later that day. The cab stops in front of a small shabby house with barred windows, a tiny Christmas tree visible inside. A blue FEMA tarp hides the roof. Shad stares with sad uncertainty at it.

The CABBIE's 68, black, with a distinguished bearing.

CABBIE

Anything else I can do for you?

SHADRACK

I remembered it different.

CABBIE

Been, what, ten years now?

SHADRACK

Twelve years, two months, eighteen days, nine hours. About that.

CABBIE

Well, see, been hard for your mother to keep the place up, her with no man. Hurricane three years ago 'bout wiped her out. You tell Miriam, Sam Parsons asked about her.

Shad tries to pay from a wallet with two tens left in it. Sam pushes his money back.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Shad carries a grocery sack. He tests a broken board. Dirt-dobber nests cling to the eaves, paint peels.

An old yellow cat jumps onto the porch. Shad smiles and pets it when it head-butts his leg.

SHADRACK

Look at you, Percy. You still alive, too.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

MIRIAM DOMINGUEZ, black, 60 and bent with a spinal deformity, pours herself a drink from a bottle of tequila. She's tough as a corncob when she's composed.

She hears the door RATTLE again. It frightens her.

MIRIAM

Who's there? What you want?

SHADRACK (O.S.)

It's me, Momma. Your prodigal son.

MIRIAM

Who? I ain't got no son. Ain't yo momma.

SHADRACK (O.S.)

Momma, it's Shadrack. They let me out.

MIRIAM

You crazy. That boy on Death Row.

The door RATTLES again, harder.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Go 'way! You go way and leave me alone!

Miriam eyes the shotgun in the living room, across from the kitchen. She fumbles on the table for something.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

SHADRACK

(quieter)

Momma, I've got no place else to go.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Miriam's finds her glasses on her head, takes a big swig of her drink, and after a while locates her cane. She heads for the door in her own good time. One hip is high, and she limps. She stops to look at the shotgun.

SHADRACK (O.S.)

Come on, Momma! Maybe you want to claim you never got my letters, but I know you saw all that stuff about me on TV.

MIRIAM

Hold yo water. I'm comin'.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Shad waits. The cat attacks the leg of his suit. He LAUGHS, picks it up to pet it. The door opens a crack.

Part of Miriam's face is exposed. Wariness changes to tentative hope. She takes in Shad's visible changes.

A smile she can't control touches her lips. The crack widens until she's let her son inside. She holds him in her arms as tears brim her eyes. She whispers a prayer.

Shad rocks his mother gently in his arms.

Her gaze takes in everything in her tiny world. She wonders what he wants.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The next afternoon. The radio plays big band MUSIC. Miriam sits in a recliner, piecing together a quilt by hand. Now and then she stares at Shad in disbelief.

As she stitches the squares, Percy lies by her side, plays with her thread.

Shad's perched on the sofa. He moves very slowly, deliberately, from years of caution in prison. His muscles ripple and bunch, but he's like a monk, unaware of his sex appeal. He wears clothes he left behind.

He sorts his belongings from prison, pulling them from the paper sack. First, worn jeans and a blood-stained T-shirt with holes cut in it; a ring of keys; an empty cigarette pack; a radio; his few books. A pocket Bible.

MIRIAM

That's not much to start over with.

SHADRACK

Almost starting over in the negative.
Never thought my life would go this way.

Fighting frustration, Shad goes to an arrangement of framed pictures on the wall: his graduation photo, one of a young Miriam, three happy people sitting on the porch.

MIRIAM

Pop was sure proud of you back then.
Proud we had a good life, we was moving up. Sorry I had to give you lima beans fo supper. I know you never liked 'em. I did cook 'em with a little bit of salt pork.

SHADRACK

Momma, I told you it was fine.

MIRIAM

I like gettin' my supper over 'bout four o'clock. Kinda early for young folks.

SHADRACK

It was fine. No way to even describe how your lima beans taste. I just wish Pop had been here to enjoy them today. And I wish they'd call.

Shad takes a stance like a pillar near the telephone, willing it to ring.

MIRIAM

You want to hear from the police?

SHADRACK

Not the cops, the District Attorney. I'm waiting for them to tell me the truth.

MIRIAM

They ain't puttin' you back on Death Row, though, right? You sure 'bout that?

Miriam keeps her eyes on her needlework, ambivalent.

SHADRACK

They can't do that now. They found out it wasn't me after all. And I damn sure want to know who it was.

MIRIAM

That's what I tol' em, it wasn't you, but do you think they'd listen to me? No way.

Shad's resigned to the fact that Miriam never spoke up for him. He heads for the kitchen.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

I'm just some ol' widow woman, some fool black woman. But it was wrong!

SHADRACK

You want some coffee?

His thoughtfulness sweetens the moment. Miriam reaches up and grabs Shad's hand as he passes her.

MIRIAM

Oh, honey. They was wrong, and they put you away. And I couldn't stop 'em.

She fights back tears, but a few get past her resolve. Shad's bitterness fades for a moment, aching for her. He hands her a Kleenex from the lamp table by her chair.

SHADRACK

Momma. Shhhh. Don't.

Miriam's tough exterior reappears once she's calm.

MIRIAM

How come they let you out anyway, send you home? They think it's up to me to take care of you?

SHADRACK

It was my choice to come back here.

MIRIAM

Humph. You ain't no kid no more.

SHADRACK

You want me to leave?

Miriam doesn't expect him to be that direct. She won't be, with him. They eye each other, both uncertain.

MIRIAM

I ain't afraid.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Unit 14 opens off a narrow second-floor balcony. The THEME from a TV game show rattles the windows.

Antoine paces on the balcony, passes the open door. He stops to stare in at Shaneisha, now 19 and more beautiful than ever. She's wearing short shorts, slowly folding clothes.

SHANEISHA (O.S.)

You so damn psychic, why you think I be wanting to marry you? You think I want to be yo permanent maid? You better see yo-sef doing you own damn laundry if my way, my unwifely way, don't suit you.

He's desperate, not knowing what to do, and forbidden to tell her anything.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Miriam reads her Bible. Shad's going stir-crazy. Miriam puts down her book and watches him a moment.

MIRIAM

You like this lady gonna call?

SHADRACK

Got nothing to do with it. It's a matter of science.

MIRIAM

I don't suppose your mother's smart enough for you to explain anything. Like what's different about the science now from before, when I went to school. I did go to school, you know.

She picks up her book and pretends to become absorbed.

SHADRACK

Listen, Momma, you watch C.S.I., don't you? Or C.S.I. New York, Miami, N.C.S.I.? Everybody watches them, right?

MIRIAM

They broke in six months ago, stole my TV.

Shad looks down at the floor, ready to quit. Miriam folds at once, to keep him talking.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

I used to watch 'em sometimes. I ain't crazy about all that blood and them showing those corpses.

SHADRACK

But you know about DNA? How they can tell whose body it is, they test their DNA?

MIRIAM

But if you didn't kill anybody, baby, the only body concerned was that child. They knew who she was. It all hurt me so bad.

For Miriam, all the sympathy shouldn't go one way.

SHADRACK

They don't need a body now, they get it from hair. Or from spit. From your fingernails. Lots of ways without a body.

MIRIAM

They got the body, why they do that?

Shad wants to be exasperated. Manages a bitter smile.

SHADRACK

They didn't have my body until Shaneisha said it was me. Remember? Maybe you know where she's staying now.

MIRIAM

Thirteen years is a long time, honey. Might not want to remember everything.

SHADRACK

There's some things you don't forget. I can't forget there's a killer still loose out there. And the D.A. knows who.

MIRIAM

It was a bad time, a real bad time when they took you. Yo daddy tried to get up a pot from his poker buddies for a good lawyer, but he never could hardly make the house payment, and them the same. Couldn't pay no Johnny Cochran, no sir. Bad time.

She looks around for her needlework, dropping the subject to avoid the controversy it's bound to create.

SHADRACK

Yeah. Bad time.

EXT. THIRD WARD CORNER - DAY

The weather's blustery. Antoine hurries up to Whip, who's leaning against a glass storefront in the rain, checking out the traffic, too indifferent to move to shelter.

Now 35, Whip's already lost most of the important battles in his life but can't admit it.

ANTOINE

Bad time coming, bro.

He nudges Whip around the corner, under an entry way.

WHIP

I ain't heard nothin'.

ANTOINE

Well, I have. Sometimes it's like seeing a ghost. People who go to Death Row may not stay on Death Row.

WHIP

Yeah, Melton's coming home. But he ain't capped no cop, nothing like that.

ANTOINE

I don't mean your brother. Look, all's I'm saying, you may want to go fishing, you know what I mean?

WHIP

Think I'll wait and see what Melton decides to do once he's home.

Antoine shakes his head. It's no use.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The day is fading into early evening. Shad picks up the phone. Starts to dial. Changes his mind. Puts it down.

SHADRACK

Funny. All I did in prison was wait. You'd think I'd be better at it.

MIRIAM

Well, while you at it, I been waiting a long time for someone to fix that front door. How 'bout it?

Shad goes into the kitchen for tools, returns with them.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Never did understand why you didn't testify, tell 'em if you weren't there. Made things easier on yo family.

A conflict from a decade ago arises in Shad's eyes. He calms himself before he answers.

SHADRACK

I trusted my idiot public defender. He said my alibi wasn't strong enough. If you'd come to my trial--

Miriam shies away from Shad's criticism, aware she deserves it.

MIRIAM

Let me go see if I got some money for paint. Be good to paint the porch.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

It's too late for Shad to get the call, and he's furious. He hammers away at the frame around the screen door, carelessly tacking up Christmas lights, until Miriam comes out in alarm.

MIRIAM

Land-sake! You trying to wake the dead? I done called you for supper an hour ago.

Shad forces himself to put his tools away.

SHADRACK

That door knob's tighter anyway. Me and Pop used to sit out here, nights, and play. He knew everybody 'round here. Everything that was going on.

MIRIAM

He thought he did. Turned out...

She goes inside. Shad takes a long look around the neighborhood, then follows her.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Miriam picks up her quilt project.

SHADRACK

I admitted I was only a couple of blocks away from where it happened. But I told them I wasn't there, to talk to Whip and the boys. They were running around that night, might have seen something. But the cops weren't interested, and my lawyer never did talk to them, either. He said fighting it might make it worse.

MIRIAM

What's worse than having them say it was you got them two babies raped?

SHADRACK

I got to talk to Shaneisha.

Miriam pricks a finger with her needle. YELPS! The cat jumps down.

MIRIAM

You see where my needle went?

Shad finds it on the chair. He holds it up to check: there's a fraction of blood on the tip.

SHADRACK

See here. You left some DNA. It's yours and nobody else's. I got some of it in me, not the same, but mighty like.

He shows her.

MIRIAM

Looks just like blood.

SHADRACK

It is blood, but DNA's inside it. It proves the blood found on me was mine.

MIRIAM

You sure you didn't leave any blood on Shaneisha, nor nothin' else?

SHADRACK

I wasn't there. But somebody else was.

He puts the needle in Miriam's pin cushion. Finds the screwdriver, works on the rickety doorknob.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Remember, Darcy Jackson's election was coming up, and I was all over the Ward with those posters. Maybe Shaneisha did see me that night. I've got to find her, find out who else she saw.

Miriam's alarmed by Shad's obsessive talk about the girl.

MIRIAM

You ain't goin' lookin' for trouble, right? You need to be lookin' for work. I can't carry any bigger a load.

SHADRACK

And who's going to hire me?

MIRIAM

But if you didn't do it...

SHADRACK

You think it's that cut and dried? Like I told the lady D.A., if they know who it is, they should damn well arrest him.

(MORE)

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

They need to tell me, too. Tell everyone.
Get this stink off me.

Miriam's flustered by the news.

MIRIAM

What? What? They know who it was?

SHADRACK

They're close to knowing. This close.

She ponders the tiny gap between Shad's finger and thumb.

Then,

MIRIAM

Won't do you no good to be nosin' around.
Let sleepin' dogs lie. Find you a job.

Shad gives her a look of pure rage. Instantly grabs the
the needle and flicks it past her nose into the wall, so
fast she doesn't see it go.

But she sees it sticking there next to her ear, vibrating
and shockingly lethal. She folds her quilt up with care,
gets to her feet, gathers all her authority.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Get that and give it to me.

Slowly, Shad retrieves the needle. Offers it to her.

Miriam takes the needle back, sticks into the pin
cushion, moves it out of Shad's reach.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

You listen to me, now. "Vengeance is
mine," saith the Lord. You do something
crazy, Lord'll smite you up side the
head! I just got you back. You gotta
forgive and forget if you livin' with me.

Shad SNORTS at this.

SHADRACK

There's a way to find out. Got to be.

MIRIAM

After you call the wrath of God onto the
murderin' son of a bitch, what else?

Shad paces, restless. Miriam sits to watch him. He stops.
He's not been truly there with her. Kneels at her feet.

SHADRACK

You want me to get you out of here? Take a vacation? Blue skies and blue water...

MIRIAM

Go fishing! Yeah, we could take a bus to Rockport next Sunday, it's not too cold.

SHADRACK

Sure...but an arrest might come soon. I need to hang around for a little while. I want to look the killer in the eye.

MIRIAM

Baby, you ain't no scientist.

SHADRACK

The science is all done. Something else's holding things up.

MIRIAM

Thought they had them experts.

Shad's put a lid on his frustration so long, his response sounds detached and as livid as frost, all at once.

SHADRACK

Yeah, they're all the rage. Lucky it's painless for them if they're wrong. But unless he's wearing a shroud by now, there's a killer roaming the streets.

MIRIAM

Now, who would that be, I wonder.

SHADRACK

Momma, I laid on my bunk hour after hour thinking about that. About my time running out. And the only thing I could control was inside me. Oh, I could have been thinking about anything. You and Daddy, places we used to go. Things I used to like to eat... Not your lima beans, but your fried chicken. Songs. Bet I know ten thousand songs, I could have been singing them in my head. But no, I was thinking about what that fucker had in his mind, wherever he was. Whether he even knew I was doing his time. I was thinking why that child said what she said against me.

MIRIAM

I don't know either. But you go lookin' for Shaneisha with a face like that, she be plenty scared of you now.

SHADRACK

Every minute I was in there, it killed me inside. How could she hate me that much? She didn't even know me.

MIRIAM

So now you free, but you stayin' here waitin' on the police, 'cause you an expert on hating? You think you better at it than they are? I hope not, honey. I hope not.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

That night. Shad walks up to the store, deep in thought.

An HPD patrol car passes, slows. The driver is a policewoman, MARGARET PROKOFIEV, 22, attractive and sturdy. She looks Shad over.

He spots the car and freezes with visceral fear. She gives him a casual wave. After a moment, he waves back.

As her car disappears, a shiny-new blue Range Rover SUV SCREECHES to a stop after passing him. Backs up, swerves in front of Shad into the parking lot. He recognizes the driver. Wants to retreat, but he can't.

SHADRACK

Shit.

Antoine and Whip get out and swagger over. Tonight Whip is huge and hallucinatory in vivid pants and a warped mental state. Antoine's high, all his moves aggressive.

ANTOINE

Never thought I'd see you again.

SHADRACK

Guess you thought wrong.

WHIP

How'd you work that out?

SHADRACK

Like I said all along, it wasn't me.

Antoine's skepticism contorts his face.

ANTOINE

Jury said it was.

SHADRACK

Jury was wrong. Witness was wrong.

ANTOINE

You saying Shaneisha fucked you up? You can't blame her, she was just a kid.

SHADRACK

Shay hangin' with you? The D.A. wants her to testify against the right guy.

ANTOINE

Last I heard, Shay ain't into none of that court stuff. Hell, it's like a dozen years. You know what you was doing a dozen years ago?

SHADRACK

Yeah, I do. You know where she is?

ANTOINE

Maybe yes, maybe no. I ain't saying.

SHADRACK

Oh, yeah?

Antoine's weak, but on this, he's not backing down.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Well, she needs to talk to that lady D.A. And I want to talk to her, too. Now, I need a deck of squares.

Shad's leaving. Whip catches on and corners him, for fun.

WHIP

Still smoking? I guess they gonna fry your ass, what the hell.

SHADRACK

They're not frying nothing on me. I'm a free man. More than I can say for some.

ANTOINE

You mean Melton? He's getting out next week. Says he stole his last car.

SHADRACK

Out of where?

ANTOINE

Polunsky. That's a hard place.

Shad's stoic. Normal time in Polunsky is not Death Row.

SHADRACK

You see your brother much?

WHIP

Yeah. Well, not so much. It's not like it's all that far, Livingston...but you know, time go by fast. Melton's your cousin. You ever write?

SHADRACK

Never was close. How long's his stretch?

ANTOINE

He copped and took eight years, but they letting him go after three for good behavior.

Whip begins to slap his hands on his legs to an inner rhythm. Antoine's nervous. Whip's losing it.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

You ain't got a lot of friends left here, bro. Might's well chill. I notice you not tellin' me to give Shaneisha your best.

Shad bristles, flexes his fists.

SHADRACK

You see her, you tell her I'm back and I'm coming to talk to her. Just talk.

Antoine tries to stare him down a second time, realizes how foolish that is. Shrugs, tries a high-five.

Shad's not into it. He watches Antoine herd the pathetic Whip back into the SUV. Some things never change.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Miriam leans on her cane as Shad storms through the door. She raps the floor with it in her excitement.

MIRIAM

They called! Let's see, it's almost ten-thirty, they called 'bout nine o'clock.

Shad's pissed that he missed it.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

They didn't say all that much, really. I wrote it down.

She locates a scrawled note. Sits, hands it over.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Alice-Mae something, I never got her last name. Jerusalem? No, Israel.

SHADRACK

I know who she is.

Miriam relies on her memory.

MIRIAM

O.K., she said she was sorry. That was the first thing, she was real sorry. Called you Mister Dominguez, too. But she say they can't find Shaneisha. And anyway Miz Israel already argued with her when she got that DNA back. Nothing's changed.

Shad's hopes wither. Then he tries to regroup.

SHADRACK

What exactly did Shaneisha argue about?

MIRIAM

Why she won't testify. Best let it be.

SHADRACK

She say why? Did you write that down?

MIRIAM

What do you take your mother for? There's part of it. It says DNA right there.

She points to letters printed in a scrawl on the note.

SHADRACK

No news there. We talked about that.

MIRIAM

Well, Shaneisha can't swear to it. To say who's the real guy who left it, now they sayin' it wasn't you. You know? That child hardly never went to school, she can't do that C.S.I.

SHADRACK

I understand, Momma. When you're right, you're right.

Shad's shoulders sag. He goes into the kitchen as Miriam talks, returns with two glasses and a tequila bottle.

MIRIAM

See, I wrote it like she said. "They gonna say she lyin' now or she lyin' then." They gonna make her look at yo picture, and they say, "That's the guy who raped you thirteen years ago, that's what you said, right?" Then she got to look at the new guy face. Then they say, "You can't tell, can you? Long time ago."

They sit. Miriam pours two drinks. They don't touch them.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

'Cause the other side's gonna say, "You already swore it was Shad, looking at his picture, when you was just raped. Yo memory better now, that's what you claimin'?" And they say, "When the last time you seen this guy?" Point to him, say she seen him around all the time, he lives next door, like. But she never said nothin' against him. Could be like that.

SHADRACK

Yeah. So much for eye witness testimony.

MIRIAM

I see somebody done you a terrible wrong, son. Broke my heart.

Shad would like to believe her, but he's not so sure.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

The next morning. Shad walks past the mailboxes, reading names. Wanders, looking around.

Children SHOUT in a rubble play zone. A strip of vacant units deteriorate around the back. From the occupied apartments, TV's BLARE inside (O.S.).

Whip steps out of one with a baseball glove, sober now. He's leery of Shad.

WHIP

Hey. How 'bout them Astros?

SHADRACK

Hey. Listen, where's Antoine staying?

WHIP

Oh, here and there. I don't know.

SHADRACK

Of course you know, Whip. How 'bout you show me before you go to the game?

Whip's eyes narrow inside his fleshy face. Reaches back inside, emerges with a baseball bat.

WHIP

You move on. You trying to find Shaneisha, but we ain't letting you get close to that girl. You done enough.

Shad recoils at the realization that he's still suspect.

SHADRACK

For the record, Whip, I never did anything to that child. Never laid eyes on her, never touched her or her friend. Why do you think they let me go?

WHIP

Made you do a stretch, didn't they? Man don't come out of that like he went in.

The path ahead for Shad becomes as clear as new ice.

SHADRACK

I'm going to find her, and she's gonna tell me the truth. Then I'll find the man who stole half my life. You watch me.

EXT. SOUTH CENTRAL POLICE STATION - DAY

That afternoon. The station has tacky decorations up for the holiday season. Shad waits for the DUTY SERGEANT to finish other business. SERGEANT PAGE, with the puffy eyes and irritability of the chronic drinker, wears his suspicion like his rumpled uniform.

SHADRACK

I'm trying to locate an officer who used to work this part of town.

SERGEANT PAGE

What for?

Page notices Shad giving the eye to the female junior officer. It's Margaret, who spotted him on patrol.

She eavesdrops on the conversation. She exudes a keen intelligence and a Zen-like calm when she speaks. Her voice is soft but clear.

MARGARET

This officer working a case for you?

SHADRACK

His name is Joe Bone. Detective Joe Bone.

SERGEANT PAGE

Never heard of him. Sorry.

He can't be bothered. But Shad has learned patience.

SHADRACK

He worked murder cases in ninety-nine.
Big cases that made the headlines.

SERGEANT PAGE

Don't have time to read the paper.

MARGARET

Wasn't he the one arrested that guy...?
Hey, you're the guy, right?

As sudden fame puts a spotlight on Shad, his nerves make him too shy to talk to her.

SERGEANT PAGE

What guy?

MARGARET

He did twelve years on a capital conviction, then the crime lab finally analyzed the DNA from the scene like he'd been asking. Stopped the execution just in time. You're Mister Dominguez, right?

She comes over to shake Shad's hand.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

My God, what you've been through. And no one would believe you.

The two of them have a moment, Shad staring first at her hand -- her soft, *female* hand, in his -- then at her face.

SHADRACK

Miss...Miss Israel in the D.A.'s Office said the DNA may tell them who the killer is. But even if they catch him, that's not going to be enough.

(MORE)

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

I need somebody from my case to explain how I was identified by mistake. I can't find the eye witness. Her name's Shaneisha Tucker.

SERGEANT PAGE

Nobody here now from that long ago.

MARGARET

I'm sorry, but Bone won't be able to tell you anything.

SHADRACK

Why, is he dead?

MARGARET

No, but he's living in an institution. His memory's gone.

SHADRACK

Completely?

MARGARET

I guess it's a matter of degree.

SHADRACK

Can you tell me where? Which one?

Margaret waits for Sergeant Page to give her permission. He shrugs.

In her desk she finds a tattered Christmas card with a calendar inside from 2006.

MARGARET

He sent us this the first year after he retired. From Maplewood Adult Living Center. But I wouldn't go out there. His wife says he's pretty frail. You'd frighten him.

Shad's courage grows. He won't give up.

SHADRACK

What if you went with me?

MARGARET

Me?

SHADRACK

If he saw me with a police officer in uniform, maybe he'd talk to me.

Margaret's eyes show the inner debate she's having. Then,

MARGARET

I'll go with you, but you better not stir that old man up. I've heard he can get violent.

SHADRACK

I've been around violent men before. O.K. if I ride with you?

INT. MAPLEWOOD ADULT LIVING CENTER - DAY

Late afternoon. Shad's in his suit and tie. Margaret, in uniform, peeks into a patient's room. It's half hospital, half den. Fresh flowers are in a vase. They enter.

MARGARET

Mister Bone? Detective Bone?

In the bed, a thin body stirs. Bone, now 61, enjoys the superiority of his suspicious mind, puffed up with pride. He can tap into his memories in short hostile bursts.

BONE

Who wants to know? Oh, hey. What are you, Patrol?

MARGARET

Out of South Central, sir.

Shad moves out of the shadows.

BONE

You a detective already? I used to be... Which district did you say?

MARGARET

Tenth. Third Ward, sir. Your old beat.

BONE

Never walked a beat. I walk, I want something to show for it. Used to hunt deer, had a lease out near Junction. Who'd you say you are?

SHADRACK

We thought you might remember a case--

BONE

Mind like a steel trap.

He lapses into silence.

SHADRACK

A case involving two little girls. Rape--

BONE

I hate kids. 'Specially nappy-haired black kids. Girls, boys, all the same. Wrap their sticky hands around your legs, want to see your gun. I'll show 'em my gun all right.

SHADRACK

And a murder. You did the photo line-up.

Bone CACKLES.

BONE

Closed more cases that way. Old Darcy used to give me Rockets tickets. Or maybe that was 'cause I caught him doing the nasty with a deputy in his car. You think you're hung like a horse, boy? Ha! That damn lease, was it near Junction? Utopia?

SHADRACK

Where did you get all the photographs?

BONE

Got 'em in my wallet. Three grandchildren, you want to see?

It's hopeless. Then Bone goes on the attack against Shad.

BONE (CONT'D)

Pho-to-graphs. Bet you got you a degree, huh. A fancy mail-order diploma, gets you a job. Wear a suit instead of stripes. In my day, you people stayed in your place.

The mild-mannered Margaret bares her teeth at this.

MARGARET

In your day? The Civil War was over a long time ago. Your side lost, in case you don't remember. Get over it.

Bone throws a bedpan at her. As they leave Shad murmurs,

SHADRACK

Not so frail after all, huh.

INT. PATROL CAR - NIGHT

Margaret drives slowly through River Oaks, where there's no traffic at all between the set-back mansions with their impeccable acres of lawn. Elegant wreaths hang on the doors.

MARGARET

Even if he didn't have dementia, it might be hard to remember what happened on one case. He probably worked extra jobs too.

SHADRACK

They gave the Innocence Project lawyers the incident report and Detective Bone's whole file. There's nothing in it about showing Shaneisha pictures that night.

MARGARET

Somebody should have signed off on the photo array. But they didn't have any written policy about how to do one back then. Still don't.

Shad's incensed. This is preposterous.

SHADRACK

How the hell do you do it now?

Margaret stops the car. Rolls down the windows.

MARGARET

It's amazing how it smells like flowers here, no matter what season. Must cost them an arm and a leg just to water the yard. The scent of flowers makes me calm.

Shad takes a deep breath to get himself under control.

SHADRACK

Would you please explain the process?

MARGARET

Come on. I'm subbing for a buddy on this job. The "neighborhood police presence."

SHADRACK

You're working two jobs. I can't get one.

MARGARET

There was this guy, he prayed and prayed to win the Lotto. He begged God to let him win, until one day God gets tired of it.

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Next time He hears the guy praying, He sends a bolt of lightning, the clouds open up, and God says, "Look, Howard, I'm trying. How 'bout you buy a ticket?"

Shad LAUGHS, but he gets the point. She closes the window, they get out.

EXT. RIVER OAKS - NIGHT

They stroll along the sidewalk. Shad's in awe at the wealth of the neighborhood and size of the homes.

SHADRACK

We're a long way from Third Ward.

MARGARET

Does a body good to consider. If I had that kind of money, I wouldn't buy a house like that. What would you do?

SHADRACK

Buy a time machine. So, the cops decide themselves how they'll do a photo spread?

MARGARET

There's two ways. One, a computer pulls up five similar faces. If we've handled the suspect before, it automatically compares his mug shot to everybody else's in our database. Finds points to match up, eyes, nose, chin and cheekbones, and it looks for the same basic shape.

Shad pulls a face, shows her his 'mask'. She LAUGHS, then grows quiet as he looks serious again.

SHADRACK

What if the guy's never been arrested? Like me in ninety-nine?

MARGARET

Then we use photos from driver's licenses. We kind of eyeball it, find faces that are close. I don't know what Bone did without a database back then.

SHADRACK

Miss Israel at the D.A.'s office told me that even then, they had to show Shaneisha at least five pictures besides mine. How she could have picked me out, I don't know. I can't understand it.

MARGARET

Maybe Miss Israel knows more than she said. Why don't you talk to her again?

A sprinkler suddenly SPRITZES near their feet. Shad jumps a mile at the sound.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What? It's okay.

SHADRACK

Sounds like a gas chamber. I saw one on TV, waiting for my trial. Somebody who forgot about Hitler thought poison was more humane.

His bitterness has returned.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

That evening. A SPRITZ comes out of a bottle of fizzy lemonade as Shad breaks the cap's seal. He pours tequila into two glasses, then the mixer, and stirs with his finger. He hands one to Miriam. She's tipsy and furious.

MIRIAM

All those years, you up in the pen, the real killer be thinking, "Better him than me. Ha ha."

SHADRACK

That's about right.

MIRIAM

You not mad? Makes me madder'n hell.

SHADRACK

Oh, my bile's still stirred up. I prayed, and I knew you were praying, even when you never came to see me. But I've lived on Death Row half my life, for nothing.

Shad gives in. He SCREAMS. Smashes a fist into the wall.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

For nothing!

Miriam jumps away from his violence. Falls, CRYING OUT as her drink splashes on the floor. Tries to get up.

MIRIAM

I'm all right, I'm all right. You just 'bout give me a heart attack.

SHADRACK

Oh, Momma, I'm so sorry. Come on.

He helps her up, tears welling. Wipes his eyes, gives her his drink and holds the glass as she sips it.

She licks her lips, shakily picks up an old House Beautiful magazine. Speaks, with her eyes on its pages.

MIRIAM

I reckon you got plenty of reason to be mad, honey. But yo daddy tried to be his own policeman, and look where it got him.

SHADRACK

What do you mean? How did he do that?

Miriam just shakes her head, unwilling or unable to talk about it. A moment later, she takes a new tack.

MIRIAM

I wonder, ain't the state s'posed to pay you for violating your civil rights?

Shad jumps to his feet, leaves her side.

SHADRACK

I don't want their money.

MIRIAM

All that time inside make you soft in the head?

SHADRACK

The state didn't do anything wrong. They had an eye witness.

MIRIAM

That's s'posed to make it a done deal? I know plenty of folks would tell you a crow's a cabbage without their specs. You don't want their money, I'll take it.

SHADRACK

Shaneisha picked me out of a photo spread. The only one wrong was that child, and she was scared to death.

The TELEPHONE RINGS.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Maybe she changed her mind!

Miriam's irritated by his obsession. He answers.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

(into phone)

It's Shad Dominguez. You've got the wrong number. Well, you remembered it wrong.

He hangs up.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Memory's a funny thing. I hope someday I forget a few things myself. I've got to go out for a while, or I'll explode.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - NIGHT

Shad looks in the window at electronic equipment, musical instruments, jewelry, guns, and junk. Simmers. Smokes.

A white van rolls silently up behind him. A darkened window comes down a few inches. A gun barrel gleams in the streetlight.

Shad catches movement out the corner of his eye. Dives!

GUNSHOTS blast holes in the shop windows above his head. The van's tires SCREECH. It disappears around the corner.

Shad watches it in disbelief as he lies on the sidewalk.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

The next day. Shad waits in Alice-Mae's office. Family photos sit on her credenza. Shad goes around her desk to look. Austin sees Shad and steps in, his attitude cool.

AUSTIN

Miss Israel may not be back for lunch.

SHADRACK

Do you have any news for me? Maybe somebody found Shaneisha?

Austin can't fight a natural sympathy for Shad, but he's cautious with what he'll reveal.

AUSTIN

I'm sorry, man. Alice-Mae should have explained it. So long as the girl refuses to testify, we can't try anybody.

SHADRACK

You mean even if I find her, the judge can't make her talk?

AUSTIN

Nobody can really make her. Oh, they can hold her in contempt, even put her jail.

SHADRACK

Jail? Oh, my God, no.

AUSTIN

Oh, they won't do it. But we'll never know what really happened. She was a child. She was traumatized. She doesn't want to remember, and no judge is going to blame her for that.

Austin shrugs. Shad's crushed.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Night turns to early morning. At the front window Miriam holds the shotgun ready, supporting herself with her knees on the wall, her body twisted. Ignores her pain.

She twitches the curtain back to see who's in the police car that's pulled up in front of her house. Whispers,

MIRIAM

Don't you mess with me, now. You killed my man and you screwed my boy up to a fare-thee-well, you not messin' with me.

EXT. HOUSE - POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Dawn. Margaret waits in her patrol car. Notices the curtain moving. Waves. Shad wearily walks back toward the house, tosses a cigarette away. Surprised, he stops to talk to Margaret.

SHADRACK

You got something for me?

MARGARET

I found some articles about your trial.

SHADRACK

Thanks for trying to help me, but it's hopeless. I've got to find Shaneisha.

MARGARET

More than one way to skin a cat. I'll buy you a cup of coffee.

Shad gets in.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Miriam's shocked and frightened to see them drive off.

EXT. HOUSE - STREET - DAY

A white van with darkened windows follows the patrol car.

INT. THE BREAKFAST KLUB - DAY

Shad and Margaret get their coffee, find a table.

MARGARET

What were you doing just before you were arrested? Did you already have a job?

SHADRACK

Sure. A bunch of us musicians, we needed a place to play. The Ballroom was closed, area around it was filthy. But man, the guys who played there. B.B. King, Count Basie, Lightning Hopkins. Ray Charles.

MARGARET

Ray Charles. I remember him. One of my mom's boyfriends liked to listen to him.

SHADRACK

Yeah? Well, then these people started buying up everything, tearing the crack houses down. This rich guy bought the El Dorado, promised he'd open it again if it wouldn't get robbed every night. My folks thought Chief Jackson walked on water, 'cause at first he wanted to help.

MARGARET

"At first"?

SHADRACK

Yeah, he was all over the Ward then, saying that once he was mayor, he was going to clean it up for us. Though some people claimed, for enough money, he'd let them tear the old 'hood apart. He talked a good game, though.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

FLASHBACK TO SEPTEMBER 1999

In a crowded room, Pop sits reading the *Forward Times*. Shad, 19, leans against the back wall, listens to Chief Jackson argue with ROBERT HAWTHORNE, 55, a white bank president.

CHIEF JACKSON

Who you think is going to buy all these condominiums you want to build? You gonna run every minority family out of here.

HAWTHORNE

We can build it for an ethnic mix, keep some of the locals around.

CHIEF JACKSON

How are they supposed to pay for them? Folks here work minimum wage. They don't know anything about credit, about getting a home loan, even if they had the money to make the payments.

JACOB FINKEL, 75, reeking of oil money, has an agenda.

FINKEL

What we really need, Chief, is a bigger police presence.

The SPECTATORS comment, "Amen," "That's right," etc.

FINKEL (CONT'D)

I've owned property up and down Dowling for years, but I can't develop it. You'll start getting investment money for re-opening businesses there when the owners know their employees will be safe.

CHIEF JACKSON

Chicken and egg, Jacob. As mayor --

Pop tosses his newspaper down and confronts Finkel.

POP DOMINQUEZ

What about the customers? Don't you want them to be safe, too?

FINKEL

The area's overrun with no-goodniks.

POP DOMINQUEZ

My family happens to stay over that way. How 'bout you stop callin' folks names.

FINKEL

You got drive-by's, drugs. Blight, that's what I call it.

POP DOMINQUEZ

Look, you saddled Jackson here with too big a job and too little money to do it, just like the last chief. You may not like us organizin' our own patrols, but we are. We need a mayor backin' a budget that puts money into policing this neighborhood, not just River Oaks. That's where you live, right?

CHEERS and JEERS from the spectators greet this remark.

HAWTHORNE

We are going to build them. You and your kind will just have to adjust. If you're smart, you'll take what's offered.

Pop's stunned at Hawthorne's blatant racism. The room falls silent. Spectators begin to leave, GRUMBLING.

EXT. THIRD WARD - DAY

PRESENT DAY

Shad and Margaret ride past "Not Jus' Donuts Bakery."

SHADRACK

They bulldozed the shotgun houses, the beauty parlors, barbecue joints... My dad used to walk over here when it was Drexler's, bring us home a bag of ribs.

He falls silent.

MARGARET

Where is he now?

A shadow of old pain darkens Shadrack's eyes.

SHADRACK

Pop was shot while I was in Polunsky. Didn't even get to go to his funeral.

MARGARET

What happened?

He's reluctant to tell her, but--

SHADRACK

Cop said he caught him breaking into a car. Said he pulled a pistol, wouldn't put it down. I never believed it.

MARGARET

Did anyone see it happen?

SHADRACK

My mother's sister lived right next door. It was like a year after I got sent up. Instead of...

MARGARET

What?

SHADRACK

Instead of the guy who really did it. We thought maybe Chief Jackson would solve both cases, but he never did.

He puts on dark glasses, unwilling to share his bitter disappointment.

MARGARET

Chief Jackson was forced to drop out of his campaign. He lost his support, left the department the next year, I think.

SHADRACK

Wonder where is he now.

MARGARET

He spends a lot of time on his boat, last I heard. Likes to party with astronauts.

SHADRACK

I can pay for your gas. Part, anyway.

His offer's troubling. She touches his arm, gets his attention.

MARGARET

You keep chasing this, it could cost you a lot more than four dollars a gallon.

SHADRACK

Maybe it's just a cold case for you, but I don't have any choice.

Margaret decides to roll the dice.

MARGARET

My shift ends at five. I'll pick you up.

EXT. CLEAR LAKE - MARINA - DAY

Not long before sunset, Shad and Margaret approach a Sportcruiser 440 houseboat named "Bacon Rack."

On the lower deck, Chief Jackson, now 63 and a little paunchy, grinds a hatchet blade with a Dremel. His eyes are still watchful and bright, his jawline tight.

CHIEF JACKSON

Help you?

SHADRACK

Hey, Chief. I'm Shad Dominguez, and this is --

CHIEF JACKSON

I know who she is. Hey, Margie, how's tricks?

MARGARET

Good, Chief. You remember Shad?

Jackson does an exaggerated double-take.

CHIEF JACKSON

Good God. Well, come aboard, son.

They step onto the boat. Chief puts down the hatchet with care not to damage the teak deck. Shakes Shad's hand with vigor.

SHADRACK

I'd send my daddy's respects, but...

CHIEF JACKSON

Your mother all right? Your family was good to me, back in the day.

SHADRACK

I'm taking care of my mother now.

They go into the spacious salon.

INT. HOUSEBOAT - DAY

MARGARET

How many does this sleep?

CHIEF JACKSON

Ten, if it's the grand-kids. Hot tub on the upper deck holds six.

SHADRACK

Wow. Come a long way from Third Ward.

Jackson wears his courtesy toward two uninvited guests like a veneer. He invites them to sit on the two couches.

CHIEF JACKSON

Not what it once was. Though not for want of trying. Your dad was a mainstay on Dowling Street. That man had heart.

SHADRACK

And soul.

CHIEF JACKSON

He did, that. Tickled those ivories. I remember, he lined up the guy who saved the El Dorado from the wrecking ball. Been a while since I rode over that way.

MARGARET

A light rail line's going through there now. Money people are buying the shotgun shacks. Building apartments and condo's.

CHIEF JACKSON

I know a banker who's probably sorry he walked away, just 'cause he didn't get everything he demanded.

He rubs his fingers together. Money's what that means. It's vaguely offensive to Shad.

SHADRACK

Pop used to say, anybody willing to take a banker's money to leave there, went.

MARGARET

Guess that's what they wanted all the time. A way out.

CHIEF JACKSON

Nobody can get what they want all the time. That's what drives the criminal element, who can't tolerate frustration in order to learn what sells. Your people never moved?

SHADRACK

We had a mortgage. Plus, they were going to re-open the El Dorado. We thought it was the Second Coming. They'd get the shows going again, hire a new house band.

CHIEF JACKSON

Pop used to brag about you to high heaven. Wish I'd 'a had a son like that.

SHADRACK

Talk about "the day the music died"...

Jackson's starting to have to work to keep up the polite chitchat. Margaret takes the initiative.

MARGARET

You probably have a scrapbook somewhere about the cases you worked. Am I right?

Jackson goes straight to a bench, pulls out a scrapbook, takes it to the dining table. He waves Shad over, opens it. He points to a small headline from a newspaper's inside page. Pushes the scrapbook over. Margaret joins them to see what the Chief saved.

CHIEF JACKSON

Here's the clipping from your case.

Shad reads. Margaret reads over his shoulder.

SHADRACK

Two little girls are victims like that, and it's only worth a paragraph.

CHIEF JACKSON

Detective Bone and a guy named Buckner solved the case.

SHADRACK

If you want to call it that.

MARGARET

Buckner?

CHIEF JACKSON

He was a lightweight, a push-over. He got fired, and no loss. Guess you know that as well as anyone, though, huh. Sorry.

Shad becomes a stone as he hears the perfunctory apology. Shakes it off. He'll tolerate this to get information.

SHADRACK

So where he is now?

Chief Jackson shrugs. He stands, inviting them to leave.

MARGARET

Thanks for your time, Chief.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - DAY

As Shad and Margaret reach the dock, Jackson picks up his hatchet and rotary tool.

SHADRACK

You find much use for that?

CHIEF JACKSON

Chopping wood for the barbecue grill.

SHADRACK

Ah. Well, thanks again.

Shad and Margaret walk away. He sees that she's uneasy.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

You see a grill back there anywhere?

MARGARET

No. You?

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

The next morning. Alice-Mae dumps a pile of file folders on her desk, making it even more of a fortress to work behind. PHONES RING sporadically. She takes the top folder off as she sits down.

Austin drops by, his coat over his shoulder. Sets his briefcase on a chair.

AUSTIN

Boss wants a decision by tomorrow, Alice-Mae. You know what it's got to be.

Alice-Mae drags a hand over her weary face.

ALICE-MAE

I'm close.

AUSTIN

Close won't cut it.

ALICE-MAE

Shit, Austin! Maybe if we gave the investigators one more week...

AUSTIN

It wouldn't matter. Shaneisha told you a month ago, she's not going to cooperate.

Alice-Mae shouts,

ALICE-MAE

She's afraid! That's all.

AUSTIN

Think of it from her point of view. She knows the defense will trip her up with what she said at the last trial.

ALICE-MAE

That bastard's going to walk.

Austin's the calm voice of reason and taxpayer budgets.

AUSTIN

'Cause you've got nothing. No witness, no arresting officer. Where's your detective -- what was his name, Gone? Bone? Retired. Might be dead for all you know.

Alice-Mae shoots him a look of reproof.

ALICE-MAE

Shaneisha's alive. If I could just talk to her again...

AUSTIN

She wants to be left alone.

ALICE-MAE

She was raped! Her best friend died! Don't you want him to pay?

AUSTIN

I do. You do. Her, maybe not. Not now.

ALICE-MAE

That's no justice at all.

AUSTIN

For who? Look, She knows she was wrong the first time. Let it go.

Alice-Mae doesn't let anything go.

ALICE-MAE

If we don't make this case, another girl--

AUSTIN

You got a partial DNA match to another con. A ticket to a fishing expedition.

She thrusts the lab report at him.

ALICE-MAE

But it's gotta be related. We could get the right guy this time!

Austin grabs his briefcase. The realities in it are exhausting.

AUSTIN

You got two hundred other felony cases to force a plea or try. We gotta move on.

EXT. PROJECT ROW HOUSES - DAY

That afternoon. The row houses now form a group of studios and exhibit space, with new duplexes in the rear.

Shad strolls through, hears live DRUMMING coming from one house (O.S.). KNOCKS, goes in when he finds it unlocked.

INT. PROJECT ROW HOUSES - DAY

The DRUMMING (O.S.) grows louder. The interior is exhibit space for children's art.

SHADRACK

Hey! Anybody home?

Jaymar enters, recognizes Shad.

JAYMAR

Holy shit! It's you!

He happily shakes Shad's hand, claps him on the back.

JAYMAR (CONT'D)

Man, it's great to see you. Can't even imagine...

Shad's embarrassed.

SHADRACK

What's going on? You still playing?

JAYMAR

Sax, piano, horns, drums, anything I can find. Getting ready to play at a wedding. Come on, let me show you. (to the drummer) Hey, shut it down!

The DRUMMING stops. Shad spots a cluster of musical instruments in a corner. Goes over to open a case, admire the gleaming contents.

JAYMAR (CONT'D)

Go on, try it.

SHADRACK

Haven't picked up a horn in a long time.

He's awkward as he PLAYS, settles into some happy JAZZ.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Man, it's a beauty. Is this one yours?

JAYMAR

Belongs to a kid who stays behind us. His mom grew up here, didn't want to move.

A group of Afro-Brazilian DANCERS bubble in, CHATTING about rehearsals. One is Jonquil, now 24. She stops their leader, LaFONDA TUCKER, 34, and points to Shad. LaFonda's shocked.

LAFONDA

You? What the hell you doing here?
Everybody, get out!

Puzzled and alarmed, the other dancers leave.

JAYMAR

LaFonda, this is--

LAFONDA

I know who the hell it is. You crazy, Jaymar, you let that bastard in this place, around these kids.

JAYMAR

Look, he didn't--

LaFonda gets in Shad's face.

LAFONDA

All these years, you never said you was sorry, you never shed one tear for what you done to Shaneisha. State shoulda give you the needle and let you rot in hell, 'stead of lettin' you out on a technicality. And you come back here?

SHADRACK

You don't know what happened. I don't know what happened. I didn't do it, I wasn't there. But if you've got a lawyer who never even talks to the witnesses who could --

LAFONDA

Lawyer? You messed with my baby! You, you cut LaToya, and you--! My baby was never right in the head again! Now you back, what other shit you trying to pull? I better not see or hear that you came around Shaneisha, you listenin' to me?

She stomps out. Shad's furious, frustrated, mortified.

JAYMAR

Listen, Shad, I'm sorry. She--

SHADRACK

She's not the only one.

JAYMAR

It's not fair.

SHADRACK

'Til they put the real killer away, this is what I have to live with. Might as well be O.J.

JAYMAR

She ain't so lily-white herself. She ought to know better. She's supposed to be a Christian woman.

SHADRACK

What she thinks I did, it's hard to forgive. I thought since I was innocent, I'd be O.K.

His fingers stroke the keys of the sax as he remembers...

JAYMAR

Forget her, Shad. You got your freedom back, you could even get your music back.

SHADRACK

Maybe. Hey, who's getting married?

JAYMAR

Shaneisha Tucker. How'd you like LaFonda for a mother-in-law?

Shad's stunned.

SHADRACK

You know where she is? Who she's marrying?

JAYMAR

Yeah. Guy's way older than her, and he's no catch, you ask me. But that's the future she wants, I guess. Have you thought about what future you want for yourself, Shad? You know it's up to you.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Shad talks to Antoine on the doorstep of one of the run-down units, not his own. Shad fumbles with something in his pocket, finds a pack of cigs. He's pissed off but pushes it down again, to get information.

SHADRACK

Whip could have told me you were staying right here the other day.

ANTOINE

He got his own way of thinking.

SHADRACK

Or not. Look, what I want to know is, how come Shaneisha can't remember how she got so mixed up?

ANTOINE

You think she knew it was some other guy? She told me she never remembered nothing. How come you saying so?

SHADRACK

Maybe I'm wrong. But I think she did.

He leaves the statement there, smokes. Waits.

ANTOINE

She ain't the brightest bulb, yo.

SHADRACK

Call her out here. I'll ask her.

Antoine goes upstairs and into his apartment where POP MUSIC plays (O.S.) and a baby CRIES, then shushes.

Shaneisha comes out on the balcony toting a baby on her hip. She's skittish around Shad. Antoine follows her.

SHANEISHA

That Shad? You out of jail?

SHADRACK

Yeah, they finally admitted it wasn't me
did that killing...and, you know.

SHANEISHA

Antoine's step-brother, he still in jail.
You know Melton?

SHADRACK

What about Melton, Shay?

SHANEISHA

Got a picture of him sittin' on our TV.
He coming to the weddin'. Guess you ain't
gonna be invited, after where you been.

SHADRACK

I didn't do anything to you, Shaneisha.

SHANEISHA

Never said you did.

She plays with the baby. Shad's totally shocked. Antoine
can't believe his ears.

She doesn't remember - or can't understand - what
happened because of her statements.

ANTOINE

Shad here says it was some other guy, you
know, besides the ones picked you and
LaToya up. You knew that? You never said.

Antoine watches Shad, expecting him to explode. He sidles
up to Shaneisha, takes the baby. Makes a goofy face to
entertain her, edges toward the door.

SHANEISHA

Police called. I said, go 'way. Don't
want nothing to do with the police. Man,
you been working out, huh.

Shaneisha admires Shad's look. Antoine's itchy now and
almost inside their apartment.

SHADRACK

Shaneisha, why'd you say it was me? What
did the police do to you?

SHANEISHA

Told 'em it wasn't you, twicet. I looked
at they pictures, and I told him you was
too fat. You was fatter back then.

SHADRACK

How old did you think the real guy was?

SHANEISHA

Like, old. And skinny. You was what?

Saddened and sick at Shaneisha's question, he whispers

SHADRACK

Nineteen.

ANTOINE (O.S.)

Where's that box of diapers, Shay?

Shaneisha lowers her voice, imitating Antoine perfectly.

SHANEISHA

Where's that box of diapers, Shay?

She gives Shad a coy smile.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)

I gotta go.

Shaneisha starts inside, then stops.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)

I hope you ain't mad. I done told 'em you was too fat, first time they showed me yo picture. Later they showed me a picture of some skinny guy and says, "That's him, now, ain't that him?". I was so tired, I didn't know any more. So I says, "That's him." You ain't skinny now, neither. You looking good.

Antoine hollers at her,

ANTOINE (O.S.)

Shay, get in here and tend to yo kid.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN

Miriam sits at an ironing board, pressing quilt squares.

Shad looks out the window. Many emotions cross his face. He fiddles with something in his pocket.

MIRIAM

You not smokin' in my house.

Shad shrugs. Women! He takes a harmonica out, one from the pawn shop window. BLOWS a blues tune. Stops.

SHADRACK

It doesn't make sense, Momma. All this time, I thought she said it was me. She testified, said my name, but she was on TV across the hall. She wasn't even in the same courtroom where I was.

He paces, thumps his hand with the harmonica.

MIRIAM

There was something funny going on with that, I'm telling you straight.

Shad pauses, full of confusion.

SHADRACK

Listen, Momma, what you said about Pop. I should have asked what happened, the day I got back. You want to tell me now?

Miriam rests the iron on a square until it's scorched.

MIRIAM

What do you want to know? Oh!

She sets down the iron with a THUD, as if exasperated at herself, to cover her sudden pang of grief.

SHADRACK

Take a rest.

Shad unplugs the iron. Brings Miriam a glass of tea. She buries her nose in it. Wipes her eyes, her sweaty neck.

MIRIAM

It wasn't even a year after you was gone. We knew houses was gettin' broken in.

SHADRACK

They say he was found with a gun.

MIRIAM

Half o' Third Ward bought 'em a gun. Yo daddy didn't want to, but Pearline said somebody kept comin' into her house and stealin' her money. She said she was scared and I should be, too. Not hardly.

Shad's distaste for his aunt comes through in sarcasm.

SHADRACK

Aunt Pearline's nerves always were shot.

But Miriam's certain of her point of view.

MIRIAM

Darcy Jackson, he wasn't Chief any more, and the new one just didn't have enough cops to patrol over here. Oh, we saw them ridin' by, sure. But ever time something happened, we'd call and call for help, but they never came.

SHADRACK

They were Johnny-on-the-spot the day they came for me.

MIRIAM

I always did think that was odd. Anyway, yo daddy took to walkin' back and forth, up and down the block, late in the night, between her house and ours. Didn't want to burn gas in the car. Gas cost money.

SHADRACK

He did it by himself?

MIRIAM

Oh, no, two or three did it. Took turns, had shifts, like, all around the Ward.

SHADRACK

So Aunt Pearline called here for help the night he got shot --

MIRIAM

Somebody called, I didn't hear who it was. All I know, yo daddy answers, he slams down the phone, he goes out the door. He's yellin' something about, "We gonna catch the bastard this time." Last words he ever spoke to me.

The memory still devastates her.

SHADRACK

What about Melton?

MIRIAM

What about him? Skinny li'l kid, he weren't gonna be any use.

SHADRACK

He was older than I was. Old enough to steal a car. More than one, that I know.

MIRIAM

Oh, he was jus' joy-ridin'. That's what his momma say. She always took up for that kid.

SHADRACK

No shit.

He's still simmering that Miriam never took up for him.

MIRIAM

Don't matter now. I don't hardly talk to Pearline no more. Melton, I never see him around. No loss, you know what I mean?

SHADRACK

You got a problem with your sister?

MIRIAM

After yo daddy died, she make out like Pop was the one sneakin' into her house, takin' money from her cornmeal canister, breakin' in all hours of the night. She crazy, and she know it. Nerves, my ass.

Shad has to LAUGH at her plain talk. Then he re-focuses.

SHADRACK

She saw what happened?

MIRIAM

She said she heard glass breakin'. Looked out and saw yo daddy wavin' a gun.

SHADRACK

At who?

MIRIAM

You got that right.

SHADRACK

And suddenly the police show up?

MIRIAM

Yeah, this policeman, this off-duty policeman, she says he tells Pop to drop the gun. But Pearline, she say he kept it in his hand 'til he's shot up and dyin'. It weren't true. He was a good man.

The tears come despite her best efforts. Shad tries to comfort his mother.

INT. THE BREAKFAST KLUB - DAY

The next morning. Shad studies a criminal law book, but he has trouble concentrating. Margaret comes in, spots him. She waves to a few customers, comes to his table. Slides into a seat.

SHADRACK

You know, you're about the prettiest, easiest-going cop I've ever seen.

MARGARET

Maybe that's 'cause you've never seen me in action.

She intends the double meaning.

SHADRACK

Maybe I will someday.

He grins.

MARGARET

So, O.K., you talked to Shaneisha?

SHADRACK

Yes, but she can't remember anything.

MARGARET

Oh. Nothing? Are you sure?

SHADRACK

Says she never identified me.

Margaret's confusion brings a frown to her face.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

I know. I don't understand it, either. What about you?

MARGARET

I tracked Buckner down.

SHADRACK

You did? He's not like Bone, is he?

MARGARET

Worse. But I learned when I was a kid, sometimes you have to lick your wounds and go on.

Shad's curious about her "wounds" but won't ask.

SHADRACK

What's worse than losing your mind?

MARGARET

Acting like you're a straight-arrow when you know you're full of shit.

SHADRACK

Oh.

Customers fill the tables, too close for conversation.

MARGARET

Let's take a ride.

EXT. RIVER OAKS - DAY

Shad and Margaret stroll past elaborate holiday decorations. A patrol car passes them. The cop waves at her but she's pre-occupied.

MARGARET

Buckner's agreed to meet with you.

SHADRACK

What?

MARGARET

He's serving papers for a constable now. After Jackson left, he was never going any higher at HPD. Lost his stroke.

SHADRACK

What's his story?

MARGARET

He's in AA. Says he's willing to talk, to make amends. He's tired of secrets.

Her voice has a peculiar tone.

SHADRACK

Really. When?

MARGARET

If you want, tomorrow after church.

Shad's trying to become a gentler man for her.

SHADRACK

Please. I never smelled flowers so sweet.

Margaret tucks her hand inside his. He pulls her to him, kisses her with exquisite gentleness.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Shaneisha kisses the baby. Antoine picks up clothes and crap. Around the playpen everything is pink and clean.

ANTOINE

You not going to aggravate him, you hear?

SHANEISHA

What for?

ANTOINE

I mean, you don't need to be talkin' about Shad comin' here looking for you.

SHANEISHA

What's it to Melton? You tellin' me he such a bad-ass, he take care of himself.

Antoine opens a package of decorations, dumps them out. Shaneisha picks up a string of glittery letters.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)

You puttin' this up? It ain't his birthday, is it? I didn't get no cake.

ANTOINE

That don't say Happy Birthday.

He takes them from her, tapes the letter banner to a cabinet. The banner says, "WELCOME HOME."

INT. SUV - DAY

Whip drives Melton, in a white shirt and slacks, toward Houston on I-45 in the white van with darkened windows. Melton's on his cell phone, a new pet mouse on his knee.

MELTON

(into phone)

S'up, Antoine? How soon you having that wedding we discussed?

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

ANTOINE

(into phone)

Shay say it'll have to be after this weekend.

(MORE)

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Say her momma be all over her 'bout not talking to Shad. She don't want to ask her 'bout no wedding right now.

INTERCUT with Melton in SUV.

MELTON

You got your marriage license yet?

ANTOINE

Thought any preacher was good enough.

MELTON

Shit no. I got to tell you everything? You look it up.

ANTOINE

Can't see what difference it makes to you. Step-brother once removed, you my best man anyway, right?

MELTON

Man, you could fuck up a wet dream. Shay hardly never seen me before they sent me up. She knows me as part of the family, she ain't gonna want to testify.

ANTOINE

She already don't.

MELTON

You keep assumin', you gonna assume room temperature before long.

INT. SUV - DAY

Melton disconnects. In a sudden fit of anger, he pinches the mouse's head. It scratches him, tries to bite him.

MELTON

You little fuck!

He twists its head viciously. Blood spurts on his shirt. He throws the dead mouse out the window.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Antoine rips down the "WELCOME HOME" banner.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Later. Melton arrives with Whip. Takes a look around like he's king of the 'hood. Slides into Antoine's unit.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shaneisha reluctantly comes forward when Antoine summons her to greet Melton. She has no memory of him.

SHANEISHA

Hey. Guess you stayin' with us, huh.

MELTON

Looks like it. That bother you?

SHANEISHA

Not me payin' the rent. I got no say.

Melton finds her capitulation too easy.

MELTON

But you don't like it, do you? See, I don't want to be wakin' up tomorrow morning, you standin' over me with a knife in your hand. That be no kind of welcome, would it, Shaneisha?

SHANEISHA

That ain't my style. Never had no beef.

Now Melton's up for a fight.

MELTON

You remember my style? What you thinkin' about, Shay?

Antoine tries to cool Melton's mood.

ANTOINE

Come on, bro, get yourself something to eat. Beer in the fridge. Forget that bitch, she got a kid to tend to.

Melton grabs Shaneisha's face, squeezes her cheeks hard.

MELTON

Don't you fuck with me. My crew got eyes and ears everywhere. You start talkin'--

SHANEISHA

Don't matter. Nobody listens to me any more. They say I turned addle-brained when, when... I don't remember.

Melton stares into her blank eyes, lets her go. Saunters off to get a beer. Hands one to Whip, lounges on the kitchen counter as he opens his.

MELTON

So I got me this job, gonna set me up pretty. Big money coming, man.

He sizes Antoine up. Antoine's reaction to this attention is to reach for his comb, check his do.

MELTON (CONT'D)

You want to do more than drive?

Antoine's nervous, but he can't hide his interest.

ANTOINE

I could use a piece of some action. What you got?

MELTON

You let me worry about that. I got connections. I know what they want.

He wanders over to the baby's playpen, jiggles her hand.

SHANEISHA

You don't want to be touchin' her. She got the croup.

Melton jerks away. Whip hides a grin.

MELTON

She better not give it to me.

SHANEISHA

Like it would be her idea?

MELTON

You got a smart mouth, you know that? You best not be talkin' greasy to me.

Shaneisha grabs the baby up and slips outside.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Shaneisha's aware that danger lurks around Antoine's unit. She keeps an eye peeled for trouble, especially coming from the empty apartments at the rear.

She spots Shad hiding. She's scared, then she recognizes him. Keeping her voice low, she calls to him,

SHANEISHA

Hey, you watching over me now?

Shad comes forward, staying out of view of anyone in Antoine's place.

SHADRACK

Watching my cousin come home.

SHANEISHA

Why don't you go in and see him?

Shad SNORTS at this, his face hard with contempt.

SHADRACK

Got no use for that asshole.

SHANEISHA

Me, neither. Kinda slimy. Don't want him messin' with Danielle.

Shaneisha moves toward Shad to talk.

SHADRACK

You think he'd hurt her?

SHANEISHA

Probably hurt everything comes his way. I tol' Antoine, leave him be, but no. Say, "Antoine, you got a family now. Leavin' us ain't lovin' us, you end up dead."

Her elemental wisdom rings true. It applies to Shad, too.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)

You like my baby girl? You want to take care of us when Antoine gone?

Shad's startled again by Shaneisha's naivete.

SHADRACK

I...I don't know. Why're you worried about Antoine?

SHANEISHA

They cookin' up trouble. Ever time
Antoine talk about big money, he closer
to going to jail, just like Melton did.
Now they's talkin' 'bout runnin' people
off, folks I know. How's I s'posed to be
plannin' a wedding, nobody come?

Antoine steps out of the apartment, looking for her.

Shad disappears.

ANTOINE

Who you talkin' to?

SHANEISHA

The stars. See, that one's for Danielle.
Bright as the moon. Wish you was.

She points one out to her would-be husband, goes inside.

EXT. ST. MARTIN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH - DAY

The next morning. Margaret, nicely dressed, HUMS a song
as she exits the church looking for Shad. He's on the
corner watching the upper-crust white CHURCHGOERS leave.
He joins her.

MARGARET

I saw him inside. Passed him a note to
meet us at Treebeard's for lunch.

SHADRACK

You buying?

MARGARET

You thinking about getting a job?

SHADRACK

I've been turning down offers all week.

MARGARET

Give it time. I've seen people come out
of prison and go to work for their
lawyer. You read lots of cases, I bet.

SHADRACK

My lawyer went back to New York. Said he
was going to write a book.

MARGARET

If it's about you, you should get paid.

SHADRACK

I used to think I wanted someone to tell my story. Now I see no one would believe it. 'Specially if a lawyer wrote it.

Margaret smiles. Then A CHURCH LADY, 55, in a leopard-print coat spots Shad. Grabs her husband, points.

Shad's cringing inside. They come over to him.

CHURCH LADY

Hello. I'm so happy to see you here.

SHADRACK

You are?

CHURCH LADY

I want to tell you how sorry I am, well, we all are, for what happened to you.

She pulls her husband forward. He studies Shad's face.

CHURCH MAN

You're Mister Dominguez, right? My wife recognized you.

He calls to other members of the congregation.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

Listen up! Father, come over here!

Churchgoers approach them. The PRIEST does, too.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

This man, this good man, is the victim of a terrible injustice. Twelve years ago -- it was more than twelve, wasn't it?

Shad nods. He's not sure where this is going.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

He was convicted of a diabolical crime. A jury sat in judgment of Shad Dominguez and sent him to Death Row.

Some of the church members GASP with shock and step back.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

A prosecutor stood in the courtroom downtown, pointed at this man, and made a false accusation of rape and murder.

The crowd MURMURS. Faces scowl at Shad.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

Now, he had a lawyer, but that lawyer failed him. There was scientific evidence that should have cleared his name, but the scientists didn't do their jobs.

A few people nod. Others WHISPER, and the words "crime lab" and "scandal" and "shame" can be heard.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

For twelve long years, Mister Dominguez was on Death Row, thanks to our corrupt and worthless crime lab and "the killingest D.A. in America". Whom we elected again and again, so we'd be safe. Let me tell you, we're not safe.

His eyes sweep the crowd, accusing them all.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

Oh, sure, Mister Dominguez appealed. He begged them to analyze the DNA evidence found at the scene. And years went by.

Margaret takes Shad's hand, offering support.

CHURCH MAN (CONT'D)

Finally, finally, DNA showed he wasn't the man who raped those children.

The church man's wife steps in front of him to speak.

CHURCH LADY

This innocent man was going to be put to death, just like our Lord. At the last possible minute, he was saved. But for years this man was wronged by a legal system that's completely off the tracks.

Though it's a lily-white crowd, some folks mutter AMEN.

CHURCH MAN

Can you imagine being sentenced to die for something you didn't do? Well, until we get that crime lab cleaned up, none of us is really safe. Not any man here.

Shad looks at the ground, unable to figure out how to react to this public affirmation.

The priest comes forward and shakes his hand.

PRIEST

My son, you're a miracle. Are you a man of faith?

Shad isn't sure any more, but he nods that he is.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Then you must join with us in prayer.

The crowd gathers more closely, joining hands. The church lady takes Shad's, smiles at Margaret on his other side.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Heavenly Father, we thank you for saving this good man, and for giving him strength and fortitude to bear this awful injustice. Touch his heart with your grace that he will forgive those who wronged him, and ours that we will not rest until the system is changed.

He begins to sing the Battle Hymn of the Republic. The congregation joins in.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on!

The sound grows in volume until it overcomes Shad, who wipes tears from his face.

The second verse begins. Those who know it SING, those who don't HUM along. Then the churchgoers form a line and pass by to shake Shad's dark hand.

EXT. STREET CORNER BY CHURCH - DAY

Mike Buckner, now 42, stands on the corner and watches. His face is a portrait of guilt. Shifty-eyed, he takes off down the sidewalk away from the church crowd as people move toward Shad. He glances back.

Margaret is pointing at him, disgust on her face.

EXT. ST. MARTIN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH - DAY

MARGARET

There he goes, that's Buckner.

SHADRACK

Oh, yeah. I remember him from my trial.

They trot toward him, nearly catch up. Buckner catches sight of them. Starts across the street.

The white van lurches around the corner. It strikes Buckner with a BANG! His body flies, rolls, lies still.

Churchgoers SCREAM! The van disappears before witnesses can grasp what they've seen.

MARGARET

Oh my God!

She runs toward Buckner.

SHADRACK

What the hell!

Margaret reaches Buckner first. He's in agony.

BUCKNER

Baby, I know I ruined everything. Didn't mean...Oh, I hurt! Bone...it wasn't him. I was the one. Weak...took his filthy money to keep quiet. We were flipping...

Shad stares down at Buckner. He dies.

Then it hits Shad.

SHADRACK

"Baby?"

Margaret's face turns stony.

MARGARET

I can explain. It's not pretty.

SHADRACK

Yeah? Who all knew we were meeting him?

Margaret hears the suspicion in Shad's voice. Grows defensive and sharp.

MARGARET

Maybe they hit the wrong person.

Shad's expression grows equally cold with shattered trust. He walks away from Margaret, leaves her to summon help for Buckner, but it's too late.

She lets Shad go.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Late that afternoon. Miriam studies her Bible. Shad sits on the couch with his head in his hands.

SHADRACK

I can't. I can't forget, and I sure as hell can't forgive. It's too much.

MIRIAM

No, you never gonna forget. Sometimes we just have to endure.

SHADRACK

But why? Why us? Why Pop? Why me?

Miriam's Bible offers no answer. Shad snaps his head up.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Come on, Momma.

MIRIAM

What? Where we goin'?

SHADRACK

To see Aunt Pearline.

INT. PEARLINE'S HOUSE - DAY

PEARLINE CARVER, 52, black and lacking any sensitivity, plops two cans of Coke and a plate of brownies on the table in front of Miriam. Takes two brownies and backs her bulk into an easy chair that's seen years of abuse.

Shad's itchy. Everything about her grates on his nerves.

He stands to examine a wall of family photographs, none of which show Pearline with her husband. A lighter spot on the weathered wallpaper shows where at least one picture was removed some time ago.

PEARLINE

We been over this, Miriam.

MIRIAM

Yeah, but not since my son come home. He missed his daddy's funeral, at least he ought to hear how the shootin' went down.

Pearline SIGHS. Points to a window that faces the street.

PEARLINE

Melton or Whip one parked my car out there, jus' like always. Thought we was in for the night, then they all ups and says the boys got a gig. Took off.

SHADRACK

A gig? Where did they play that night?

PEARLINE

Over the El Dorado. Back-up, you know.

SHADRACK

Back-up for who?

PEARLINE

I don't know. Oh, yeah... Kinny Abair.

Pearline pushes brownies toward Miriam, who ignores them.

PEARLINE (CONT'D)

So it was maybe eleven o'clock, I'se just gone to bed. I'm watching the TV, heard glass breakin'. Melton, he tol' me if I ever heard anything not to get near the windows. Jus' in case, you know.

EXT. PEARLINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

FLASHBACK TO 2000

A younger Pearline waves good night out the back door. A CRASH and a TINKLE of glass (O.S.) as it closes.

At the front window, she looks out to see the dark figure of a heavy-set man reaching into an old Buick's broken window. He unlocks the car door.

MIRIAM (V.O.)

So who was it called Pop?

PEARLINE (V.O.)

I don't know. Then I hear gunshots.

GUNFIRE near the Buick.

PEARLINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Two or three shots, real close.

Pearline continues to watch from her window. A younger Melton approaches the car, slaps the heavy-set man. It's Whip. Melton takes a gun away from him.

MELTON

You s'posed to be watching him!

From down the block, Pop Dominguez runs toward them, SHOUTING. Melton and Whip run. Melton turns, FIRES at Pop. Pop fumbles for his gun as he reaches the Buick.

Chief Jackson runs from the back of Pearline's house, FIRES at Pop. Melton FIRES again. Pop falls.

PEARLINE (V.O.)

I was too scared to look.

Pearline disappears from the curtain. Moments pass. She opens her front door, tiptoes outside. Nothing's moving.

SHADRACK (V.O.)

Did Pop have a gun in his hand?

PEARLINE (V.O.)

Gun was on the ground, little bit away from he was layin'.

Pearline ignores Pop. She opens the car door, reaches in, opens the glove box. Pulls out a baggie of dope.

She squirrels it away inside her robe, goes back inside fast.

SHADRACK (V.O.)

What about the car? Was anything missing?

PEARLINE (V.O.)

Not that I know of. In a while this policeman comes to the door, says will I look at a man's body. I 'bout had a heart attack. Then I called yo house.

SHADRACK (V.O.)

You never heard of a throw-down piece?

PEARLINE (V.O.)

Wasn't up to me to say what went down!

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

PRESENT DAY

Shad throws his key on the sofa, furious.

SHADRACK

Well, that damn sure ain't what happened.

Miriam leans on her cane to help her as she slowly sits. Her hands are shaking.

MIRIAM

Don't surprise me none. Why you say so?

SHADRACK

Melton lied, for one thing. They didn't re-open the El Dorado 'til three years later, May Two Thousand Three. One of the guards up at Polunsky told me. He went to see one of the first shows.

MIRIAM

When Chief Jackson came by later --

SHADRACK

Was he still police chief?

MIRIAM

No, and he weren't no mayor. He holds my hand and says to me, he don't understand why Pop would do it, but he did. Just to add insult to injury. Yo daddy was honest as the day was long.

Shad tries to put it together, shakes his head. He pulls out paper and pen. Jots notes for himself.

SHADRACK

Jackson was chief about six years. After he pulled out of the campaign and let Lee Brown get re-elected mayor, he was replaced. You remember that?

MIRIAM

Sure. Pop was mad as whiz. Spent all that time helpin' him, raisin' money for him.

Shad ponders this bit of history.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

When you was convicted, yo daddy blamed himself for gettin' so caught up in that, he never saw what you was doin', where you went astray.

Shad's sadness and frustration almost overwhelm him.

SHADRACK

I didn't, Momma. Something happened that fall. Jackson was in a scandal, remember?

Miriam shakes her head in mock amazement.

MIRIAM

I remember it had to do with some woman.
Darcy was a handsome devil in his day.
Some said he had a wanderin' eye.

SHADRACK

You're kidding! He's got ten grand-kids.

MIRIAM

Honey, you just like your grand-pa. Pop kept diggin' into things, but yo granddaddy, he never look under the surface. Then when somethin' up and bit him, like a snake rearin' outta the weeds, he blame ever'one else.

SHADRACK

Same thing with Bone.

MIRIAM

Who?

SHADRACK

The detective who arrested me. Once Shaneisha said it was me, he never once looked past that to see who I was. Never once considered she might be wrong.

MIRIAM

That, or he knew she was wrong, and he was runnin' his own agenda. But Darcy Jackson coulda stepped in, if he'd a-wanted to. He knew us! I know he couldn't let you off, but -- Lord, it did hurt.

Shad's finally seeing it from Miriam's point of view.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

He knew what kind of a kid you were, what kind of family you came from. Ask me, I think he was scared.

SHADRACK

Scared? Of what?

Miriam shrugs.

MIRIAM

I seen peoples with fear in they eyes. I know it when I seen it.

SHADRACK

Momma, I'm going to find out what happened to us, if it kills me.

Miriam's face is a map of continuing tragedy.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Shad, in a suit, takes a seat in Alice-Mae's office.
PHONES RING. No one pays any attention to him.

Alice-Mae bustles in. Surprised at first, she shakes hands with Shad.

ALICE-MAE

Mister Dominguez. What can I do for you?

SHADRACK

It's about that evidence. That DNA evidence.

She pours two cups of coffee from a near-empty pot, pushes one across to him.

ALICE-MAE

I'm sorry, I already --

SHADRACK

Oh, I know. I'm not asking whose it is, 'cause you made it clear you won't tell me. I'm asking what it is you found.

Alice-Mae clears her chair of files and sits. Sips, makes a face. Pushes her cup away.

ALICE-MAE

Well, in every human cell, there's DNA present that comes from both parents. Their DNA, in turn --

SHADRACK

Ma'am, I do understand the science, actually. But when I think back to the Offense Report, the only biological material they collected at the crime scene was semen. And it wasn't mine.

ALICE-MAE

The crime lab --

SHADRACK

Is a train wreck, yes. But the State knew it wasn't mine, eventually. So it's someone else's. And that's not enough.

ALICE-MAE

Ah.

She debates with herself. Finally,

ALICE-MAE (CONT'D)

I guess there's no reason not to tell you. Everything collected should have been listed. But then we had that first problem with the crime lab, remember?

Shad nods yes. Then thinks to ask,

SHADRACK

You mean the one in Two Thousand Two?

ALICE-MAE

Yes. They suspended all DNA testing until they could do an inventory.

SHADRACK

Like time didn't matter.

Alice-Mae gives him a sympathetic glance, points to the files on her desk with weary frustration.

ALICE-MAE

Tell me about it. Anyway, they found samples all over the place. Some were mislabeled, some misfiled. And one of them was from your case, fortunately. It had never been put in the evidence box. It was a cotton sheet.

SHADRACK

They found more semen on it?

ALICE-MAE

No. They found a pubic hair.

SHADRACK

And they still had that hair last year? Almost twelve years later?

Alice-Mae cringes at the reminder.

ALICE-MAE

They did. After the second time they shut the lab down, in Two Thousand Eight, somebody realized it never was tested.

SHADRACK

Christ. So what are you not telling me?

She leaves her chair, goes to the door and closes it. Turns back to speak to Shad very quietly.

ALICE-MAE

There were indications that the chain of custody paperwork might have been forged.

Silence, as this soaks in.

SHADRACK

Who would have a reason to do that?

ALICE-MAE

People trying to sabotage each other. Or trying to keep their jobs.

SHADRACK

Or their secrets. But with hair, why would there only be a partial match?

Alice-Mae registers not only surprise but suspicion.

ALICE-MAE

Where'd you hear that?

SHADRACK

That's why you said at the hearing.

She studies his face, now aware of his insight.

ALICE-MAE

What did it mean to you?

SHADRACK

Nothing, at the time. Now I've done a little studying. That, and some other things, make me wonder just how close the real killer was to me. Or is.

ALICE-MAE

Ah. You think you're in danger?

Shad shrugs, but his voice becomes equally quiet.

SHADRACK

If you'd had a mixed sample, for instance semen from two men, you'd get a partial match, right?

ALICE-MAE

Yes.

SHADRACK

But you didn't. A hair can't be mixed.

ALICE-MAE

No. It's why we need Shaneisha's testimony, besides to establish time and place.

SHADRACK

You're never going to get it, from what I hear. Catch-twenty two. Or something.

Alice-Mae takes her seat again behind her fortress of file folders.

Shad moves a stack out of the way, so that they find themselves face-to-face, Shad's dilemma between them.

It embarrasses her and saddens her as a professional and a human being, too. She picks up Shad's file from a stack labeled CLOSED CASES and opens it. With resignation,

ALICE-MAE

Probably. Okay. Some segments of the DNA from the hair matched the DNA from our original specimen, but it wasn't a perfect match.

She hurries to offer rationales, keeping things vague.

ALICE-MAE (CONT'D)

We're not positive what it means. Maybe the sample was too old and degraded. Or it could be from someone in the same family, like a brother, father, cousin...

She's trying to tell him without spelling it out.

SHADRACK

So partial DNA could implicate a relative, then. Some guy's whole family could be suspects? No shit.

ALICE-MAE

No shit.

Shad stares at Alice-Mae as this news sinks in.

Her PHONE RINGS.

ALICE-MAE (CONT'D)

Look, I've got to go.

She closes his file, places it prominently on her desk.

ALICE-MAE (CONT'D)

But you don't have to hurry off. Finish your coffee, such as it is.

She shakes hands with Shad. Hurries off, not letting the door close behind her, but blocking the view of those outside her office.

Shad's cautious. He waits. Checks to see if anyone's watching, but nobody's paying attention.

He hurriedly flips through the most recent entries in his case file. Finds the lab report. Reads it. Carefully tucks the file back in place, his face turned to stone.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The radio plays BLUES. Shad sits staring into space.

A KNOCK (O.S.) at the front door startles him. He looks out the front window. Goes to the door reluctantly. Opens it to see Margaret standing there in the twilight.

SHADRACK

What?

Margaret holds up a bag of something greasy.

MARGARET

I know they're not like Drexler's, but they're pretty good.

He lets her in. She pulls out napkins, puts the bag on the table. Removes a package wrapped in aluminum foil.

SHADRACK

Ribs aren't much of an explanation.

She gestures to ask if she can sit down. He nods. She does, unwraps the meat.

MARGARET

First, I never told anyone we were planning to meet Buckner. I don't know what he repeated, or to whom, but he'd damn sure have had no reason to talk.

Shad's surprised by her vicious tone.

SHADRACK

Thought he was going around making amends.

MARGARET

He wanted to. To you.

Clearly she's got her own grudge. But Shad presses on.

SHADRACK

So what did he do to me?

She hands him a rib on a napkin. He ignores it.

MARGARET

He used to be different. A sad case.

SHADRACK

I'm not shedding any tears.

MARGARET

Me neither. My mother did, though. She worked as a court reporter when I was a kid.

She's not happy with the memory. She bites savagely into a rib.

SHADRACK

So you knew him?

MARGARET

Oh, yes. And he 'knew' me. Far too well, if you get my drift.

This is a Margaret Shad's never seen, full of venom, hurrying to spit it out.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Oh, she thought he was such an upstanding guy. Good thing they didn't have Viagra back then, he'd have been 'standing up' even more.

The implication stuns him. Her hurt sinks in.

SHADRACK

Oh, my God. Did you tell her?

MARGARET

Come on, he was a cop! What good would that have done, even if she'd believed me? Anyway, that's probably why she still had this.

Margaret tries to re-establish her calm, professional demeanor. She wipes her fingers, removes a small note pad from a pocket. She flips to a page inside.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

You know what this is, right?

Shad goes along with her wish to get back to business.

SHADRACK

It's Buckner's?

Margaret pulls a second one out, shows it to Shad.

MARGARET

I carry one, too. Most cops do.

She replaces hers. Reads from the first one.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(reading aloud)

"Made a scene at Ten Forty-Five p.m. after receiving a call from Lieutenant Bone. Upstairs apartment on Live Oak at McGowen. One homicide by stabbing (female black child), one victim-witness, sexual assault, same. Chief on scene."

SHADRACK

Wait. You're saying Chief Jackson was already there?

MARGARET

By the time Buckner arrived, yes.

SHADRACK

He came to the scene? Isn't that unusual?

Shad stares at Margaret, trying to understand this news.

MARGARET

Yeah, but that's what it says. Here's some more. "Took witness to South Central for statement, photo ID. Called CPS."

SHADRACK

So what? We already knew that.

MARGARET

No, listen. "Sent to Thirty-One Eighty-Nine Saint Charles Street to collect photograph of possible suspect."

SHADRACK

That's my Aunt Pearlina's house!

It's Margaret's turn to be surprised. Shad turns his attention to the food she brought, giving her space.

They nibble at the ribs, consider the new information.

MARGARET

It does make you wonder, hmmm?

SHADRACK

Damn straight. "Sent to..." And who would have sent him?

It's a rhetorical question.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

His boss, sure. I thought that was Bone, the son of a bitch.

MARGARET

That's one way to look at it.

SHADRACK

Oh. Darcy Jackson was his boss, too. But how would he know where to send Buckner?

MARGARET

There's a lot of things this doesn't explain. But it certainly makes you wonder, doesn't it.

SHADRACK

You already said that. Assuming you're the wondering type.

They look at each other, trying to put it all together.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

"Other people's secrets"... Is there anything else?

MARGARET

"Resident volunteered that she and her sons were present for dinner. Boys left for a party, due home by midnight."

SHADRACK

Melton and Whip never had a curfew in their whole lives.

MARGARET

That's about all, except for one more thing: "Resident surrendered photo."

SHADRACK

Photo, singular? I don't understand.

MARGARET

I don't either, Shad. But all and all,
lots of tricky things were going down.

She's agitated. Notices Miriam's quilt, goes to it and strokes it until she can find a better thought. Finally,

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Double wedding ring. My grandmother made
a quilt like that. I still have it.

The radio on her duty belt goes off with a SQUAWK. The DISPATCHER recites an indecipherable address and a brief offense code. She translates the call for him.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Some taggers just hit one of the Project
Row Houses.

SHADRACK

You sure painting graffiti's still a
crime over there?

MARGARET

They can say it's Urban Art if they want
to, but if somebody thinks it's serious
enough to call, I've got to check it out.

SHADRACK

I shouldn't have doubted you. Shouldn't
judge a tree by its bark. Baby, I --

He stops, realizing what that must mean to her. He goes to her, enfolds her in his arms.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, so sorry.

She absorbs his loving care, resting there, two broken people needing each other. She pulls herself together.

MARGARET

Clarence Darrow once said, "Doubt is the
beginning of wisdom."

He grabs her hand as she adjusts her utility belt, turns to go.

SHADRACK

I'm sorry. Please...

MARGARET

I forgive you. You do the same for me,
O.K.? I've got to go.

She wipes his lips with a napkin, kisses him.

Holding onto the frame of the bedroom door, Miriam watches. Frowns.

EXT. DOWLING STREET - NIGHT

Later. Margaret's in her patrol car. Traffic's very light.

A blue SUV runs a stop sign right in front of her. She switches on her bubble lights, goes after it. The SUV stops, and she stops behind it.

INT. PATROL CAR - NIGHT

Margaret checks the license plate on her in-car computer. Makes a note on her own note pad. Exits the car.

EXT. DOWLING STREET - NIGHT

Margaret approaches the SUV, motions to the driver to roll down the window. Whip gets out, and from the passenger side, Melton gets out, too. He has a new white mouse on his shoulder.

MARGARET

Sir, get back in the car. You, too.

Melton continues to approach her. She draws her service weapon, pulls out her radio, speaks into it.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Officer needs assistance, Dowling and Elgin.

WHIP

You don't need any help. I'm doing what you wanted, see?

MARGARET

You, back in the car.

She points to Melton. He stops but doesn't get back in.

MELTON

Nice lady shouldn't be out here alone.

MARGARET

Whatever you have in mind, forget it.

MELTON

Don't need to be afraid of me. I just like to watch.

MARGARET

You want to watch me shoot your ass? I said, get back in the car before I arrest you both. Now!

Whip waits for a cue, shoulders bunched, ready to tackle her. After a long moment, Melton shrugs. Turns around.

Margaret's attention follows him. Whip takes three steps forward and grabs her. GUNFIRE as she gets off a wild shot. Whip knocks her gun away.

Margaret struggles. Whip's huge arms enfold her. Margaret continues to fight.

Whip pounds her head with a solid blow, knocking her out.

MELTON

Come on, put her inside.

They pick her crumpled body up and stuff her into the SUV's back seat. Melton climbs in beside her.

INT. PATROL CAR - NIGHT

In the passenger seat, Melton dials his cell phone.

MELTON

(into phone)

We got her.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A while later. The apartment unit, around the corner of the complex from Antoine's, holds only a ratty bed and a couple of chairs.

Melton watches Whip roll the unconscious Margaret over on the bed and pull her trousers off. Her radio SQUAWKS. The filthy sheets muffle an urgent voice.

WHIP

She ain't no spring chicken. She ain't cherry, like the ones you like to watch.

MELTON

Then you better be quick before she croaks on you, 'less you like 'em cold.

Melton pats his shirt, then his pants, searches his pockets. The mouse rides on his shoulder.

MELTON (CONT'D)

Fuck. I left my cell in yo crib.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alone in Antoine's apartment, Shaneisha spots Melton's cell phone. Slips it into her pocket. Opens the grocery sack with Melton's things inside.

Antoine enter, discovers her snooping.

ANTOINE

What you doing, woman?

Shaneisha tries to look nonchalant.

SHANEISHA

Lookin' for grocery money. He livin' here, soakin' up soda pop like a sponge.

ANTOINE

That ain't your problem.

SHANEISHA

It is when I want one and it's all gone.

Melton charges in, excited until he sees Shaneisha with his sack of belongings.

MELTON

What the hell?

SHANEISHA

Where's yo wallet? Whip done brought you home, I know you got money already.

MELTON

Antoine, you gonna put up with this shit? You better be keepin' your woman in line.

The mouse runs down his arm. Shaneisha sees it, SCREAMS.

SHANEISHA

You got a rat on you! Get it out of here!

ANTOINE

That's just his little pet mousy.

SHANEISHA

I ain't havin' any such mess around
Danielle! Take it away! You get out!

She turns on Antoine.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)

And you! You lettin' him bring that shit
near my baby?

She grabs Danielle up, heads for the door. Turns back and
grabs the baby's diaper bag.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)

You out of yo mind, think I'm living with
that. I put up with yo shit long enough.

She's gone before the men can stop her. Melton shrugs,
looks for his cell. Antoine's too surprised to chase her.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Miriam limps to the RINGING PHONE, sees the caller I.D.

MIRIAM

(into phone)

Hey, Darcy, what you want? It's late.

INT. RIVER OAKS MANSION - NIGHT

Chief Jackson, in an opulent den, speaks in an agitated
voice. He's watching the late night NEWS on TV.

CHIEF JACKSON

(into phone continuously)

Miriam, where's Shad?

INTERCUT with Miriam in her house.

MIRIAM

(into phone)

He's right here, where he belong.

Jackson changes channels rapidly, lands on one covering
the discovery of Margaret's empty patrol car.

CHIEF JACKSON

Y'all watchin' TV?

MIRIAM

(into phone)

Don't have no TV. Thieves took it.

CHIEF JACKSON

Put him on.

Miriam calls to Shad.

MIRIAM

Shad! You want to talk to Darcy?

Shad rushes in, takes the telephone.

SHADRACK

(into phone continuously)

What's going on?

CHIEF JACKSON

Margaret Prokofiev's missing. They found her patrol car abandoned on Dowling. She'd called in a traffic stop. When was the last time you saw her?

SHADRACK

Couple of hours ago she was here. What, now you think I did something to her?

Shad's both enraged and worried sick.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

I never did! That's crazy.

MIRIAM

You been here all night! You tell him. Give me that phone, I'll tell him.

Shad ignores this.

CHIEF JACKSON

You seen Melton and his boys?

SHADRACK

I've haven't seen them all day. What about Melton?

Miriam's alarmed by the mention of his name.

MIRIAM

What's he wanting with Melton?

CHIEF JACKSON

You and Margaret were nosing around, asking questions. Melton's got spies everywhere. You can believe he found out.

SHADRACK

So what?

His suspicions grow, but the chief knows how to be cagey.

CHIEF JACKSON

Your appeal, you got your case sent back for retrial because your lawyer never talked to him and his boys, right? It's possible Margaret tried to talk to him tonight. He wouldn't like that.

SHADRACK

Shit. Listen, you call us back if you hear anything.

He hangs up. Starts for the door.

MIRIAM

Where you going?

SHADRACK

I'm going to Aunt Pearline's.

MIRIAM

Then I'm going, too.

Shad starts to object, but

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Don't give me any lip, boy. I said I'm going. Come on.

INT. PEARLINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As soon as Pearline opens it, Shad comes through the front door like a battering ram, pushing her back.

SHADRACK

You heard from Melton and Whip?

PEARLINE

I beg your pardon? What the hell you doin', bustin' in here this time of night?

She sees Miriam behind him.

PEARLINE (CONT'D)

Sister, you don't just come into my house like this. What you want?

Shad leaves the room, searching and BANGING (O.S.).

MIRIAM

Something funny goin' on, and you know it. That lady cop been helpin' Shad, somebody took her away.

PEARLINE

Got nothing to do with me.

MIRIAM

Too many people close to us gettin' the shaft, Pearline. I should say, close to yo son.

PEARLINE

Whip, he ain't got the sense God gave a goose. Don't you go accusin'.

MIRIAM

I ain't talkin' 'bout Whip, I'm talkin' 'bout Melton. He's trouble, and you know it. Been nothin' but trouble. Never hit a lick at a snake his whole life.

PEARLINE

Melton's a good boy. Brings me -- presents. Helps me keep up the house since my man been gone.

MIRIAM

You mean, since Tyrone caught you messin' around with everything wears pants.

Pearline takes this in stride.

PEARLINE

Tyrone weren't the kind of man I thought he'd be. My sons may have their faults, but they take good care of their momma.

Miriam SNORTS at this.

PEARLINE (CONT'D)

More'n I can say for yours, sittin' on Death Row.

MIRIAM

Watch your mouth! Shad was innocent all the time. That child was pressured. Confused. They tricked her, and then they took my boy away!

PEARLINE

Yeah? She never said nothing like that.

MIRIAM

Why would Shaneisha Tucker be talkin' to you? You ain't her mother. You ain't much of a mother to anybody, come to that.

Now Pearline's mad. She rushes Miriam, fists flying. Miriam raises her cane, strikes Pearline on her shoulders and head. SCREAMS, CURSES, and BANGS result.

Shad runs back in, gets between them.

SHADRACK

Stop it! Both of you, right now!

Miriam stops, but she holds her cane at the ready.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Aunt Pearline! Where's Melton now?

PEARLINE

I got no idea, just like I tol' Darcy.

SHADRACK

You talked to Darcy? What'd he say?

PEARLINE

Wanted to know when I last seen his boys. Madder than a meat axe.

She realizes she's made a slip.

SHADRACK

His boys? Darcy been gettin' some on the side from you all this time? Shit!

Miriam's flabbergasted.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Come on, Momma. One of us needs to be at home, in case he calls again.

Shad drags his mother out, her mouth still agape. Pearline goes to her phone.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A light rain falls. Antoine yells at Shaneisha,

ANTOINE

Hey! You come back here with that baby!

Shaneisha doesn't look back. Takes the upstairs walkway past the vacant apartments.

Antoine's cell PHONE RINGS. He checks the caller I.D.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Awwww, man! Shit!

Antoine debates whether to answer or stop Shay. Lets it RING. Whip steps out into Shaneisha's path.

WHIP

Where you goin', bitch?

Inside, Margaret MOANS (O.S.).

SHANEISHA

Who you got in there?

Margaret begins to yell,

MARGARET (O.S.)

Help! Somebody help me.

Shaneisha peers past Whip. Whip turns, clearing her path. Antoine calls to him,

ANTOINE

Grab her!

SHANEISHA

You ain't catchin' me.

She slips away, still holding Danielle and her bag. Runs.

Antoine rushes up to Whip.

ANTOINE

You done fuckin' the fuzz?

WHIP

Not hardly. She kicked me in the nuts.
I'm gonna be peeing blood for a month.

ANTOINE

Let me at her. Shaneisha got me so mad, I
could piss glue.

His cell PHONE RINGS again. Antoine gives up, answers.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

What? Damn it, you think I'm your
blackbird? You think you still the Man,
you get one of your boys to do it. Whip's
right here.

The response sobers him.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Shit, they'll be back there in next to no time and they house is all barred up. O.K., but you a real cockblocker, you know that?

He hangs up.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Whip, you and Melton, hang onto that ho. I got to go take care of Shad.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Antoine checks his gun. Unlocks the white van, climbs in.

EXT. THIRD WARD STREETS - NIGHT

Shad walks in the rain without a destination, searching for Margaret without hope.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Antoine BANGS on the door at Miriam's with the pearlized pistol grip. Percy's hunkered down on the edge of the porch, watching with a territorial glare.

Miriam's hiding in the shadows, shotgun in hand. She spies Antoine on her porch from around the corner.

ANTOINE

Open up! Come on, bitch, talk to me. What, Shad carryin' such a load, he in the bathroom calling Earl on the big white phone?

He kicks at the door. RATTLES the knob. Peers in the windows.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Fuck. Stupid beezy.

He kicks the front door. Wood splinters and tears.

EXT. THIRD WARD CORNER - NIGHT

Chief Jackson pulls up next to Shad in a high-end gull-wing Mercedes. Rolls down the window, calls to him as he opens the passenger door.

CHIEF JACKSON

Get in. You'll never find her that way.

SHADRACK

I'll never forgive myself if she's hurt because of me.

EXT. EMANCIPATION PARK - NIGHT

Two LABORERS trudge by. They approach to look at Jackson's fancy car. He waves, then watches Shad get in.

Jackson drives a few blocks to where Margaret's patrol car is parked. Flashing lights on other police units blink on the wet street. TV trucks block the street, their cameras rolling.

INT. JACKSON'S MERCEDES - NIGHT

CHIEF JACKSON

I spoke with the Chief. Gave him Melton's cell phone number. They're going to try to locate him that way.

SHADRACK

You mean your son Melton, right?

CHIEF JACKSON

You've been talking to Pearline.

SHADRACK

You think Margaret stopped him and he took her. Just like he took LaToya and Shaneisha, years ago. Only that wasn't the end of the story, right?

Shad's trying to back Jackson into a corner.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

You know something. Something that could have changed things thirteen years ago. You know more than you've been telling.

CHIEF JACKSON

Boy can't tell right from wrong.

SHADRACK

What utter bullshit. Melton Carver has a finely developed understanding of right and wrong. He doesn't care, is all.

CHIEF JACKSON

It's a mental illness. He can't help it.

SHADRACK

If you believed it, why didn't you get him off the street? Keep him from hurting other people? And then there's Whip.

CHIEF JACKSON

Whip fried his brain a long time ago. He's as harmless as a pecker on a pope.

Shad's response drips derision.

SHADRACK

There's a fine legacy for you.

CHIEF JACKSON

I tried to put him away, damn it!

Jackson pulls the car over, turns to Shad.

CHIEF JACKSON (CONT'D)

Those idiots in the crime lab! It's their fault, don't you see?

Shad's confused.

SHADRACK

What are you talking about?

CHIEF JACKSON

The hair! The hair on the sheet.

SHADRACK

I don't get it.

CHIEF JACKSON

I put it there. They hired me as a consultant about the crime lab problem. When I got a chance, I opened the evidence box and slipped it inside.

SHADRACK

Melton's hair? You knew he killed LaToya?

CHIEF JACKSON

No, and I still don't. But I knew he was trouble, and I wanted him off the street.

SHADRACK

You framed your son for something you don't know he did? Man, that's cold.

Jackson LAUGHS bitterly.

CHIEF JACKSON

Oh, he did plenty. I found a stack of kiddie porn at Pearline's.

SHADRACK

Why didn't you take him in?

CHIEF JACKSON

I had to come up with a plausible reason for finding it. It was gone when I came back with a warrant.

SHADRACK

He always did like to watch. Whip told me as much.

CHIEF JACKSON

Yeah, well, who could have guessed they'd take ten more years to analyze that hair.

Shad digests this for a moment.

SHADRACK

In other words, that sample that had nothing to do with the crime. This is so fucked.

CHIEF JACKSON

You might as well give up, Shad. It's not your job to figure it out. I know you can't forget, but you have to put it all in the past and get on with your life.

Ahead, Shaneisha scurries across the street with Danielle. Shad jumps from the car, runs toward her.

EXT. THIRD WARD - DOWLING STREET - NIGHT

SHADRACK

Shay! Hey, Shaneisha, wait up!

She stops in the doorway of a pawn shop, pulls her jacket around Danielle against the rain. In her pocket, Melton's cell phone RINGS.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

What's going on, Shay? You look like you've seen a ghost.

SHANEISHA

I saw...I saw a rat.

SHADRACK

There's a hoard of rats in the Ward.

SHANEISHA

No, I mean, on him. It was on him!

Sensing her distress, Danielle begins to fuss and cry.

Chief Jackson drives up to them. Yells from the car,

CHIEF JACKSON

Come on, get in my car and I'll take you somewhere safe, out of the rain.

At the sight of Jackson, Shaneisha runs, ducks down an alley. Jackson speeds up to follow her. Loses her.

Shad stands, indecisive. Cries to the sky,

SHADRACK

Oh God! Margaret!

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Margaret struggles to overcome the haze in her head from a huge knot over one eye. Rolls from the bed behind Whip's back, careful not to land with a thud.

She lands on a stack of pornography. It spills. Children are featured on all of it. In one old picture is Jonquil.

Margaret spots Whip's feet and legs outside the door. Finds her trousers, pulls them on. Her duty belt's tossed aside, minus its radio, Taser and service weapon.

WHIP (O.S.)

You might as well chill.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melton emerges from Antoine's place. Slugs down a beer in irritation. Walks to the apartment where Margaret's being held. He strokes the mouse compulsively with his thumb.

He peeks into the room behind Whip.

MELTON
Where's she gone?

Whip whirls around to look.

WHIP
She in there, has to be.

He shuffles in, looking in all directions.

Margaret has created a mound in the bed by bunching up part of the sheet. She's crawled under the bed and pulled the tail of the sheet off to hide behind.

WHIP (CONT'D)
Hey, cop.

Whip becomes agitated when she doesn't answer. He pounds the sheet, panics when he flattens it.

WHIP (CONT'D)
Melton, I just saw her. Half-naked.

He doesn't realize he'd find her if he just lowered his bulk to look. He glances back at Melton, helpless.

MELTON (O.S.)
Are you really that stupid? Go find her.
And he's going to want her awake.

INT. JACKSON'S MERCEDES - NIGHT

Jackson spots the blue SUV parked behind a bush. He douses his headlights, rolls the Mercedes up behind it and stops.

He reaches into the storage space behind the passenger seat and pulls out the hatchet.

EXT. BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

Shaneisha peeks out around a support column, sees Shad standing with his face to the sky, his hands clenched, eyes closed in agony.

She checks to see if anyone else is around, then makes herself approach him.

SHANEISHA
You all right, Shad. It never was you,
was it.

Shad's stunned to see her again.

SHADRACK

What? What you talking about, Shay?

SHANEISHA

I remember it now. I saw that rat on him,
and it all came back to me.

Shad grabs her by the shoulders and pulls her into a doorway.

SHADRACK

What came back? You mean that night?

SHANEISHA

Yeah. You wasn't there. But I know who
was.

SHADRACK

You mean Melton?

SHANEISHA

Yeah, and Whip. Antoine, too, but he
didn't stay. Melton, he had that thing on
his shoulder the whole time. When the big
man come, he kept stroking it...saying,
"Yeah, Daddy, give it to her, give it to
her good."

SHADRACK

What? What you saying, Shay? Are you
sure?

SHANEISHA

I wish I wasn't. I wish it never come
back, but tonight...

Shad can't believe it. Then he re-sets his world view.

SHADRACK

You know where Margaret is? The lady cop?

SHANEISHA

They got her. Just like they had me and
LaToya. The big guy comin', too.

The cell in her bag RINGS again.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)

Wait. It's Antoine.

She answers in Melton's whispery voice.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)
 (into phone continuously)
 Hey, asshole. Where are you?

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

ANTOINE
 (into phone continuously)
 I can't get into Shad's crib. But they's
 somebody inside.

INTERCUT with Shaneisha on the street.

SHANEISHA
 You missin' something good here. You
 comin' back?

ANTOINE
 Fuck!

SHANEISHA
 You know what you s'posed to do?

ANTOINE
 Yeah. Man said waste 'em both.

SHANEISHA
 Got to do what you got to do, bro.

She hangs up. Holds out the phone, shaking.

SHADRACK
 Take me to her, Shay.

Shaneisha's terrified.

SHANEISHA
 That was Antoine...he, he at your house.
 Say he gonna do you. Do yo momma.

Shad LAUGHS, a sound as bitter as gall.

SHANEISHA (CONT'D)
 What you gonna do?

He paces, he thinks. Finally,

SHADRACK
 My momma's tough as a jail break. Take me
 to Margaret. You don't have to go in.
 Come on, just point me to the place.

She steps out into the rain and points to the apartment house only fifty yards away. Dense foliage blocks Shad's sight-line of the driveway.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

That's where you live, honey.

SHANEISHA

It's around back. Upstairs.

Shad gently pushes her back out of the rain. Takes off at a sprint, sleek and silent as a panther.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jackson pauses on the stairs to look down at the driveway and the two cars in it.

Looking up, he spots Melton on the upstairs walkway.

Shad hides behind the Mercedes. When Jackson ascends the last of the stairs, Shad moves to the bottom of them and stops again. He looks around, finds a broken board.

CHIEF JACKSON

If you had one more brain cell, it would die of loneliness. Fool!

MELTON

What?

CHIEF JACKSON

You snatched her and left her patrol car for the whole world to find! They probably got it all on video, too.

MELTON

Come on, it's nothing you can't fix. Listen, I'm not going back inside. I just got out.

Jackson storms up to the apartment door.

CHIEF JACKSON

You see what I got in my hand? You want me to, I can fix you for good.

He lifts the hatchet, but Melton dodges.

MELTON

Daddy, don't! I'm sorry, I'm sorry!

CHIEF JACKSON
Why the hell did you bring her here? My
name's on the fucking deed.

From inside the apartment, Whip yells,

WHIP (O.S.)
Mel, she's gone!

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Under the bed, Margaret loops the sheet around Whip's ankle while he's facing the door.

She gives it a jerk with all her strength. Whip tries to catch himself as he falls with a THUD. It's too late.

The instant he's down, she's on him with her baton. She smashes him in the head!

She gets three good shots with it to Whip's temple. His eyes roll, and he's out.

Melton runs toward her. She crouches and backs away, fire in her eyes, daring him to take her.

Jackson enters the apartment, hatchet firmly in his grip.

Melton falls back, fearful but excited. Jackson's calm and controlled when he speaks to Margaret.

CHIEF JACKSON
You weren't satisfied, huh. Had to keep
poking into my business.

MARGARET
I saw your magazines, too. Nice.

Disgust drips from her voice.

Melton tries to get behind Margaret. She keeps him at bay, dodging, but it's a losing game, and she knows it.

Whip rouses, staggers to his feet.

EXT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shad's made it to the upper walkway.

CHIEF JACKSON (O.S.)
Melton, step away. Go get some plastic
bags. Big ones. Like garbage bags.

Melton hurries out, not paying attention to anything but the errand he's been given. Turns away from where Shad stands flush against the wall, heads back to Antoine's.

Shad lets him go.

EXT. THIRD WARD CORNER - NIGHT

Shaneisha dials from memory.

SHANEISHA

(into phone)

Hey, South Central? Mister Page, you better get over here quick. We's on Tuam across from the park.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Antoine smooths his hair to get himself ready. BANGS on the door at Miriam's with the pearlized pistol grip.

Percy's hunkered down on the edge of the porch, watching with a territorial glare.

ANTOINE

Open up! Come on, bitch, talk to me.
What, Shad carryin' such a load a shit,
he in the bathroom calling Earl on the
big white phone?

Miriam hides in the shadows, shotgun in hand.

Antoine peers into her window. Kicks at the front door.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Fuck. Stupid beezy.

He kicks harder at the door. Wood splinters and tears.

MIRIAM

Hey, you! You get away from my house!

She steps into his view, shotgun at the ready.

Antoine whirls toward her, gun in hand.

She FIRES! Most of the pellets hit the porch ceiling, but a few spat into Antoine's face.

ANTOINE

Bitch!

He takes aim at Miriam.

Percy GROWLS, leaps onto Antoine's back! His claws dig in deep.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Shit! Owwww, get him off!

Antoine drops the pistol. Bats at the cat as it climbs his head, hissing.

MIRIAM

You get him, Percy!

Percy takes Antoine's face apart.

Miriam runs forward, picks up the pistol. RAPID-FIRES it into the ground until it's empty.

She holds the shotgun ready, at close range.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Shad explodes into the room!

Jackson turns, throws the hatchet at him with expert aim.

CHIEF JACKSON

I got you now!

Shad blocks it with the broken board, but the blade slams through it. The board shatters.

Jackson reaches for a pistol strapped to his ankle.

Whip and Shad fight for the hatchet.

WHIP

Drop it, sucker! Shoot him, Daddy! Shoot!

Jackson has a clear shot. Just as he FIRES, Shad spins.

Whip's hit! Mortally wounded, he falls.

Shad picks up the hatchet, but Jackson FIRES again, point-blank. Misses as Shad ducks.

Whip gurgles a death rattle. It distracts Jackson for an instant. Shad attacks, fury driving him straight at Jackson, the hatchet over his head.

CHIEF JACKSON

Stop, Shad! You don't want to do this.

Oh yes, he does.

POLICEMAN

Hold it! Put it down or you're dead!

Shad freezes, the hatchet a second from splitting Jackson's head open.

Police pour into the room. Margaret tries to stand.

CHIEF JACKSON

Arrest him!

Two cops wrestle Shad to his knees, seize the hatchet, cuff him.

SHADRACK

He did it! He's the one.

Jackson spots Margaret's duty belt and equipment. Seizes the Taser, pops her with it!

Margaret collapses, unable to move or speak.

POLICEMAN

Are you O.K., sir?

CHIEF JACKSON

I think so. Do you know who I am?

POLICEMAN

Yes, sir.

He tells the other cop,

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

This is Darcy Jackson. Remember him? Man, this place is a mess. What the hell did you get yourself into, Chief?

Margaret MOANS.

CHIEF JACKSON

Arrest her, too. She's gone rogue.

Margaret's cuffed. Melton comes in, spots Whip's body, goes to him.

MELTON

Aw shit, Daddy. Oh bro, you turnin' cold.

He cradles his brother's massive head, rocks with pain.

The mouse jumps off, skitters over Whip and runs under the bed.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Shad sits alone at an empty table, still cuffed.

SERGEANT PAGE (O.S.)

Sorry, Miss Israel. He says you're the only person he'll talk to.

Alice-Mae comes in, weariness in her every move. Page follows her.

ALICE-MAE

God, Shad. What've you done now?

Shad's rage threatens to drown him in silence.

SERGEANT PAGE

I told him if he wants his own lawyer, he's got to hire one. Obviously, it can't be you.

She opens the door, waves him out.

ALICE-MAE

I'll take it from here. Go on.

She sits. They study each other a moment.

SHADRACK

How's Margaret?

ALICE-MAE

Officer Prokofiev is doing well.

SHADRACK

Somebody's watching us, huh. And listening in.

ALICE-MAE

That's the usual procedure.

SHADRACK

You got a piece of paper I can write on?

Alice-Mae pulls out a notebook, passes a page over. Gives Shad a pen. He writes: "Darcy Jackson is a murderer. Melton and Whip are his sons. They helped." Passes it back to her.

Alice-Mae reads it impassively. Shad pulls it back.

He writes: "He told them to get Margaret." Thinks a moment, adds: "Planted evidence in '03."

Alice-Mae reads, writes one word: "Why?"

Shad writes, "Look for his DNA on Shaneisha's clothes." He shows it to her. Before she can pull the paper away, he crumples it and chews it up.

ALICE-MAE

Wait here.

SHADRACK

Oh, I'm good at that, ma'am. Had lots of practice.

She leaves.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

POLICEMEN escort Miriam in. She spots Shad inside the interrogation room. Bangs on the window with her cane.

MIRIAM

Shad! Hang on, son. I'll get you out of there.

POLICEMAN

Not unless you got about a million dollars in the bank, 'cause that's how much his bail's gonna be.

MIRIAM

You let me worry about that. I want to talk to him.

The policeman turns to Sergeant Page for a decision. Page shrugs.

SERGEANT PAGE

Let her in. Tape's running.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

SHADRACK

Momma! You all right?

Miriam waves off his concern, with angry impatience.

MIRIAM

That police woman done set you up!

SHADRACK

It wasn't like that. She's a good person.

Miriam's vigorous head-shake denies what Shad's saying.

MIRIAM

You playin' the fool.

Shad grins, gives her a hug.

SHADRACK

Wouldn't be the first time, Momma. But you don't know her like I do. So what happened at home last night?

MIRIAM

Well, you know how Percy is. That boy tried to break in, he must have smelled like a nickel steak, the way that cat chewed him up. Told that policeman out there, best check the ER at Ben Taub, 'cause that boy be needing some stitches.

Shad LAUGHS, his laughter like music. Then he sobers.

SHADRACK

You want to know what happened to Pop?

Miriam reaches for a chair and sits, shocked.

MIRIAM

What's Pop got to do with this?

SHADRACK

Long story. But I think I'm right.

Alice-Mae returns, along with Sergeant Page.

ALICE-MAE

Release him. I'm not filing charges.

SERGEANT PAGE

You gotta be kidding!

ALICE-MAE

Officer Prokofiev's statement exonerates him. We've still got evidence to process, but the picture's getting clearer.

Page removes Shad's handcuffs reluctantly.

ALICE-MAE (CONT'D)

(to Shad)

Go home, and don't go anywhere else.

(MORE)

ALICE-MAE (CONT'D)

We're going to need to talk to you tomorrow.

SHADRACK

You should talk to Shaneisha, too. Her memory's back.

ALICE-MAE

Really. How do you know she's not making something up? Maybe she has a guilty conscience where you're concerned.

SHADRACK

The one thing she doesn't need to be is guilty. You think you can find her now?

Alice-Mae opens the door, points down the hall. There sits Shaneisha with Danielle. She gives Shad a shaky smile and waves.

Shad takes Miriam's arm and helps out her.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shad and Miriam are eating pie.

SHADRACK

It took me a while to put it together. Let me show you something.

He goes into the living room, returns with the framed photograph of himself as a teenager.

MIRIAM

That's from your high school graduation.

SHADRACK

Right. As I remember, you also gave one to Aunt Pearline.

Miriam lets herself enjoy a sly smile.

MIRIAM

Rubbin' it in, I guess. Those worthless boys of hers never got past tenth grade.

SHADRACK

You notice my shirt collar's hanging loose on my neck?

MIRIAM

That's right. You was a scarecrow, got the flu bad, spring of that year.

SHADRACK

You know what happened to her picture?

MIRIAM

She said a policeman took it. Said they needed one from when you was younger.

SHADRACK

Do you remember when?

MIRIAM

Back then. The bad time.

SHADRACK

Darcy sent this cop Buckner to pull a picture off Pearline's wall. He meant one of Melton, so Shaneisha would ID him as one of the boys who picked her up. But Pearline gave him one of me.

MIRIAM

You can bet that weren't no mistake.

SHADRACK

Yeah. You'll never get her to admit it, though. But Shaneisha? I'm not mad at her. It wasn't her fault.

MIRIAM

You know why the Chief wanted to drop Melton in the grease?

SHADRACK

Yeah.

Miriam absorbs this, then wants to know the rest.

MIRIAM

What about Pop?

SHADRACK

After I got sent up, Darcy still wanted to implicate Melton any way he could, get him out of his hair. Where do you think Melton and Whip get their cash?

MIRIAM

Always figured Pearline give it to them.

SHADRACK

Maybe. But she didn't have all that much to give. Even if Melton stole her egg money, it wouldn't be that much. But suppose Jackson took it instead?

MIRIAM

He didn't need no egg money. He's rich!

SHADRACK

Yeah, from flipping real estate all over our 'hood. No, he wanted a war in the camp. Get Pearline to throw them out, to give Darcy free reign.

MIRIAM

Darcy was giving them that money?

SHADRACK

They acted all innocent when Pearline accused them of taking her stash of cash because they were innocent. He had 'em in a squeeze. You know he was making plenty off that trash he was selling, but I don't see Darcy as one to share.

MIRIAM

So he thought Pop was on to him...

SHADRACK

Or to Buckner. Pop was a sharp cookie. We'll never know for sure, but I'd make a blind bet the cop who turned up that night was Buckner.

MIRIAM

When Darcy didn't take his badge right then for setting Pop up, it meant Buckner had something on the Chief. So then Darcy had to pay him off, too.

SHADRACK

For a long time. If Pearline gave Buckner the wrong picture, he had no need to make amends to me. But I think he was in the Chief's operation up to his eyeballs. "Filthy money," he said, and it doesn't get any filthier than that. Buckner owed us, and in the end he wanted to do right.

MIRIAM

Not a good man.

SHADRACK

No, but trying to be better. And that's all any of us can do.

EXT. FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - DAY

FOUR MONTHS LATER

Shad and Miriam push through a crowd of REPORTERS who YELL questions at Shad about his future plans.

Shad beams, Miriam wipes tears away. Shad's new lawyer FENTIS BROGAN, 50, shakes hands with everyone in sight, pleased as Punch with his own performance. But as the photographers close in, he raises Shad's hand like a prize fighter, gives Shad his day in the sun.

As Shad poses for photographs, Brogan spots Miriam.

FENTIS

Missus Dominguez, my car's over here.

He points her to a black Cadillac by the curb.

Shad waves off the reporters, catches up with Brogan and his mother. He shakes hands with Brogan again. They're two happy men.

Ignoring the black Caddy, Shad takes his mother's arm, escorts her to a horse-drawn carriage. Helps her in.

SHADRACK

Time to smell the roses.

Miriam unfolds a blanket on the seat.

Alice-Mae breaks from the crowd, comes to speak to Shad.

ALICE-MAE

We're still negotiating with Jackson.
It'll be a race for one of them to plead
out and turn on the other. If I can ever
help you in any way, let me know, okay?

Shad's so happy, he kisses her on the cheek.

SHADRACK

Darcy Jackson's getting the needle. I can
feel it in my bones.

Alice-Mae shrugs at first, then winks.

No longer in a police officer's uniform, Margaret joins Shad. He kisses her, too, a kiss long and sweet. He helps her up into the carriage next to Miriam.

MIRIAM
 (to Margaret)
 He's really gonna get all that money?

MARGARET
 Yes, he is. It should be over a million
 dollars, maybe close to two.

MIRIAM
 Good thing you knew him when he was still
 poor. He don't have to wonder 'bout you
 being no gold-digger.

Margaret LAUGHS.

SHADRACK
 I'm going to open a store and sell music.
 Records, instruments, everything. But
 I've got to take care of something first.

He leans over to Alice-Mae and speaks in her ear.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)
 I bet you know people up at Polunsky,
 don't you? Not the warden, I mean.

Alice-Mae nods.

MIRIAM
 I'm waiting, honey. Come on!

Shad waves her off, turns serious and quiet.

SHADRACK
 (to Alice-Mae)
 Nobody know whose DNA you found at the
 crime scene in ninety-nine, right?

ALICE-MAE
 All we've ever said is it wasn't yours.

Shad understands what she's not saying.

SHADRACK
 If I know Melton, he's going to pull
 every string he can. With only a partial
 match to his DNA, you may not be able to
 stop him. He'll plead to a lesser charge,
 right?

ALICE-MAE
 You know the ropes.

SHADRACK

I do. Which will put him back in Polunsky. So after he arrives, maybe you could have a nice long talk with one of your snitches.

ALICE-MAE

You think I have ears inside Polunsky?

SHADRACK

Ears and eyes, and mouths, too. Suppose your snitch puts the word out around Polunsky about Melton being at the scene where LaToya was raped in ninety-nine?

Alice-Mae stifles a smile as she realizes what Shad has in mind for Melton.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

Those boys up there aren't going to know the difference between partial DNA and dynamite. I mean, familial DNA is still a fairly new thing. Or am I wrong?

The prosecutor has a twinkle in her eye.

ALICE-MAE

No, I think you're right.

Smiles cement their understanding. Alice-Mae backs away from the carriage and waves.

SHADRACK

Happy New Year!

Shad climbs up into the carriage next to Miriam.

MIRIAM

You sure you ain't mad at Shaneisha?

SHADRACK

Momma, I'm just doing what you suggested. I can't forget, but I can forgive. "Let it be, let it be."

MARGARET

I hear the state may change the rules on how police do a photo spread. In Dallas the detective working the case can't show any photographs to the victims or eye witnesses, in case his body language gives something away. In fact, the officer who does the photo ID can't even know the facts of the case.

SHADRACK

If they asked me, I might be willing to put in a word about that.

Margaret gives his arm a squeeze.

SHADRACK (CONT'D)

It could eventually spread to every county in every state. Even here in Houston, the home of "the killingest District Attorney in America."

MARGARET

Thank God, that's history.

SHADRACK

Well, that's one thing I'm not going to be. I'm not going to freeze to death! You give me some of that blanket!

Miriam LAUGHS.

Shad tucks it around her on one side and pulls it across his lap, then reaches over to tuck Margaret in on the other side. He waves to the carriage driver that they're ready. The horse walks on, then breaks into a trot.

As they round the corner, Sam the cabbie approaches them in his taxi cab.

He spots them, slows and waves. He tips his hat to Miriam, who spots him and excitedly waves back.

The carriage pulls away under a dazzling blue Texas sky.

FADE TO WHITE.