

HARD CUT FROM BLACK:

INT. REC ROOM

CLOSE UP ON a young gangbanger, not a day over 20. He addresses someone just off camera.

GANGBANGER

I bought a brick and started sellin' shit. Pullin' two, three bills a day, ya know? Two weeks later, some five-o muthafucka tagged my ass.

CUT TO:

Another youth. They're all much the same as the first, surprisingly young and vulnerable despite a tough exterior.

GANGBANGER 2

I wanted a job, right? But there ain't no McDonalds in my neighborhood.  
(laughter)  
Know what I'm sayin'?

CUT TO:

GANGBANGER 3

I wuz a lookout since, fuck. . .  
Twelve? Thirteen? By fifteen I had to deal jus' to feed my own shit.  
It got sick, I was like a fiend, yo.

CUT TO:

GANGBANGER 4 (MAURICE)

Moms don't even speak to me. Gonna have to stay in a shelter or move in with some bitch, right? Cause only friends I got are usin' or dealin'.

CUT TO:

DOM

Yo, I wuz high everyday before I got yoked. Since I wuz a shorty. Been stoned most of my fucked up life.

The others murmur in recognition.

DOM (CONT'D)

Be straight?  
(it's daunting)  
I know some niggas done it. Hard muthafuckas, too.

COUNSELOR (O.S.)

How are you gonna do it?

DOM

Day by day, like you said. And I'm gonna get real with my Pops and my girl. I gotta do that shit. Gotta. Only ever seen my boy through glass.

CUT TO:

INT. REC ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The young men sit in a circle with a COUNSELOR. There are eleven of them in all, dressed in prison orange.

COUNSELOR

That's good advice for all of you, even you Maurice. Reconnect. You all got friends and family that want to see you win. Let them help.

The counselor checks his watch.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

Alright, we've run long so pack up quick. When you get out get some breakfast, get cleaned up and then get your butt to your parole officer. He'll help you get housing, food, jobs, whatever.

GANGBANGER 2

Bitches?

The fellas snigger a little.

MAURICE

Try puttin a bag over your head.

MAJOR REACTIONS. Lots of "oh, damn" type ad libs.

GANGBANGER 2

Shut up--

COUNSELOR

(over the noise)

Alright, alright! You gotta chill people.

(they settle)

You've all done well here, but it's the outside that's the real test. Take a look around. Look hard. Five of you will be in prison again within 10 months. Don't be one of those five.

CUT TO:

Begin opening credits.

CLOSE UP ON PHOTO OF AN INFANT

It's a candid and awkward photo, still he could be a poster boy for Gerber's-- smiling, happy, and about four months old.

INT. PRISON CELL -- CONTINUOUS

Dom smiles at the photo. A Prisoner pounds on the bars as he passes.

PRISONER

I'd be walkin' if I was you, Shine.

DOM

It's Dom, brah.

Dom drops the photo onto the bed and pulls off his prison shirt. We glide down to the photo. Next to it are two others --

--A HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION photo of LINA, an eighteen year old beauty. She's got a smile like the sun.

--A FADED FAMILY PHOTO. A middle aged couple stands behind Dom (age 12) and a girl (ANNA, age 6). The woman smiles warmly, the man (POP) has a stern proud bearing.

INT. STORAGE ROOM

Dom is dressed in a t-shirt and jeans. He stands in line at the CLERK'S WINDOW.

DOM

(to clerk)

Dom Williams.

The clerk searches and then hands Dom a legal sized envelope. Dom sits on a bench against the wall and opens it.

INSIDE THE ENVELOPE are keys, wallet and pager. He opens his wallet. It's empty except for slip of paper. He checks it over several more times.

DOM (CONT'D)

(quiet)

Fuck. Why give it back.

Dom puts the PHOTOS into the wallet and pulls out --

THE SLIP OF PAPER: A single phone number is scrawled on each side. Dom flips it over several times, staring intently at each and then shoves it into the wallet. He turns on the pager. The time appears --

5:57 A.M.

End credits. Title over black screen.

2/17

EXT. PRISON -- 6:00AM

The guys walk from the prison to the bus. Their breath can be seen in the air. The COUNSELOR wishes the men luck at the door of the bus.

COUNSELOR

What's your boy's name?

DOM

Tony. Don't take this wrong, but I hope I never see you again.

COUNSELOR

Me too.

They shake hands and DOM jumps aboard.

INT. BUS -- CONTINUOUS

The interior is barely lit by the prison lights, but you can see there are more people here than were in the rehab group. Dom spots Maurice and takes the seat behind him. Beat.

DOM

(leans forward)

Hey, dog.

Maurice turns.

DOM (CONT'D)

(quiet)

I've been thinkin', I know you got no place to stay and all -- I was thinkin' that you could stay with me and my girl until you get set up.

MAURICE

Nah man, I gotta place.

DOM

But you said--

MAURICE

Fool, I jus' told that nigga what he wanted to hear.

Maurice turns forward. Dom slumps back against his seat and stares out the window.

INT. BUS -- 6:14 AM

Dom watches the 'hood fly by.

OUTSIDE, broken glass sparkles on the streets as people duck into doors and alleyways in front of the approaching bus. The homes that aren't boarded up are past due for demolition.

Ahead, a dealer sells crack beside a MASSIVE MURAL. Steps away, a hooker is already on the pipe. Crouched on the stoop of an abandoned building, her face is lit by the sickly orange flame of her lighter.

Dom drags his eyes away. This isn't going to be easy.

EXT. PARKING LOT -- 6:33 AM

The men straggle off the bus and rush to their loved ones. Dom steps into the cold morning air, shivering.

At the edge of the lot is POP, he's a few years older than his photo, but just as stern. He's a blue collar working man with the hands and shoulders to show for it -- and little else.

Dom stops about six feet away. He doesn't seem welcome any closer. Pop tosses him a jacket.

POP

Here.

DOM

Thanks, Pop. Where's my girl?

POP

Your sister doesn't need to see you like this.

DOM

I meant Lina.

POP

I don't keep track of your mistakes. If you're mother could see you--

DOM

She can't.

Pop turns toward the parked cars. Dom follows, silently.

INT. POP'S CAR -- 6:39 AM

The car was hip years before Pop bought it -- and that was ten years ago. He keeps it in good shape like someone who knows the value of a penny earned with blood and sweat.

The ride is arctic.

RADIO (V.O.)

Operation Sunrise is credited with netting fifty-two arrests and over eighteen pounds of narcotics over the past two days --

Pop turns the radio down and slides a brown paper bag across the seat at Dom.

POP

Here.

DOM

Aw, I didn't get you anything.

POP

Don't be smart.

Dom opens the bag.

INSIDE is a videotape and sandwich. He pulls the tape out, a twenty dollar bill sticks out of the jacket.

DOM

What's this?

POP

(stoic)

It's the Vargas fight and breakfast.

Dom knows better than to say anything. This isn't a loan or a gift -- as far as Pop is concerned, it never happened.

DOM

Cool.

Silence.

EXT. DOM'S APT BUILDING -- 6:51 A.M.

The sun is just rising.

GRAFFITI covers the three story building like a spreading disease. The house on right leans heavily against it, while the one on the left appears to be an active crack house. People stumble from it's doorless entryway.

POP's car pulls up.

INT. POP'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Pop stares straight ahead.

DOM

Pop, I wanna --

POP  
I gotta get to work.

DOM  
Things are gonna be different.

POP  
Show me.

Dom nods and steps out of the car.

POP (CONT'D)  
An another thing, you got enough  
problems on your own. You'd be best  
to leave that girl alone.

DOM  
Her name's Lina. She's the mother  
of your grandson, the least you could--

POP  
Don't lecture me about family and  
responsibility. You don't have the  
credentials.

Right.

DOM  
Thanks for the fight, Pop. Tell  
Anna I said "hey."

Pop nods curtly, still staring ahead. Dom shuts the door.

EXT. DOM'S APT BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

Dom watches his dad pull away. A SKINNY ADDICT stumbles out  
of the building next door.

SKINNY  
Shine? Whassup--

DOM  
Go home, dog.

INT. DOM'S APT BUILDING -- MOMENTS LATER

GRAFFITI SNAKES down the hall praising drugs, sex and  
violence. Dom jogs up the last few steps and hurries to his  
apartment door. He reaches for the doorknob and stops.

"GHETTO GOD, KING OF KRACK" is spray-painted on the door in  
large jagged letters.

INT. DOM'S APARTMENT -- 6:55 AM

It's a small studio apartment, and it's filthy.

Dom plows a mountain of mail into the corner as he opens the door. He goes straight to searching the kitchen cabinets.

HALL -- 6:58 AM

Dom shakes a can of spray paint and then covers over the scrawled slogan.

DOM

See ya.

In a moment his door is simply black.

DOM'S APARTMENT -- 7:01 AM

Dom pulls a KEY from a drawer and places it on the table.

DOM'S APARTMENT -- 7:02 AM

Dom scoops up the mail. It's a rainbow of OVERDUE NOTICES. He grabs Publisher's Clearing House envelope and tosses the rest on the table.

Dom puts the video tape into the VCR, turns on the TV and dives into an old recliner. He opens the sweepstakes offer and chows on the sandwich while the TV warms up. IT DOESN'T.

DOM

C'mon--

He slaps the side of the TV. Nothing. He checks it over, it's plugged into the wall. He wiggles the cord, then slaps the TV a couple more times. Nothing. He flips the light switch back and forth -- nothing happens.

DOM (CONT'D)

Shit.

His eyes stop on a blank piece of wall above his bathroom door. It looks unremarkable in every way.

DOM'S APARTMENT -- 7:04 AM

Dom sorts through the bills and pulls all that are marked FINAL NOTICE. There's plenty. HE CHECKS THE TIME on his pager.

His eyes flick over to the bathroom door again. He seems transfixed.

DOM'S APARTMENT -- 7:11

Dom gags as he empties the fridge into the garbage. The garbage also now contains several of his dishes, which are impossibly choked with mold.

DOM'S APARTMENT -- 7:17 AM

Dom checks the time. He opens the window and peers out.

THE STREET looks worse by daylight. A few people make their way to work, others are just making it home. Either way it's bleak and destitute.

Doms shuts the window. His eyes are drawn to that blank spot above the door again. He fidgets uncomfortably.

SOMEONE KNOCKS. Dom jumps, startled from his thoughts.

DOM

Hold up.

Dom runs into the bathroom and smoothes his hair into place. ANOTHER KNOCK.

DOM (CONT'D)

I'm coming, baby.

Dom rushes to the door and unlocks it.

FIVE MEN rush in and tackle him to the ground. They're all around Dom's age.

DOM (CONT'D)

The fuck --?

TYRIQ

(pinning Dom)

Baby? Who you callin' baby?

DD

Someone turn you out?

BEE

Musta. Nigga we know would'a called by now.

JAY

Why you gotta make us find your punk ass?

The four are practically interchangeable. The fifth however, JOJO, looks like a mountain - 5'8" and 340lbs. He pulls Dom to his feet.

JOJO

You know that's bullshit--

(beat, then a big hug)

Welcome home, muthafucka. Why didn'chu call or somethin'? We'd picked'chu up.

SWISS (O.S.)

Brother's spent 11 months in prison,  
you think he wants some fat ass nigga  
slobberin' on him?

SWISS (late 20's) surveys the scene from just inside the  
door. He's got the hypnotic grace and intensity of a cobra.

SWISS (CONT'D)

Whassup, Shine.

DOM

Dom.

JOJO

Why you always rippin' on me?

SWISS

Cause you fat. What'chu mean "Dom"?

DOM

It's my name.

JOJO

I'm jus' big boned.

SWISS

You fat, shut up.

(to Dom)

Since when?

DOM

Now.

JOJO

Nah, nah -- my whole family's big  
boned, dog.

SWISS

Please. Your momma so fat her license  
plate says Free Willy.

The fellas bursts in to laughter.

SWISS (CONT'D)

(to Dom)

You seen her. They slapped the plate  
on her ass and ride the bitch around.  
Nephew calls her Auntie Escalady.

JOJO

Aw, don't be a hater --

SWISS

When the bitch backs up she go, beep,  
beep, beep --

The fellas laugh uproariously. Ad libs galore.

JOJO

Alright, so she big --

SWISS

She big? Nigga, you put on a red suit on an every muthafucka in the 'hood be askin you for Koolaid, so sit the fuck down an' shut up.

TYRIQ

He right, dog. You need some of that Cherry Hill boot camp shit, thin you out.

Jojo pounds Tyriq on the shoulder.

JOJO

The fuck you talkin to?

SWISS

(icy)

I said shut it.

Swiss gets instant respect. Tyriq holds in shoulder in pain. A smile slowly returns to Swiss's face.

SWISS (CONT'D)

Shine, Dom -- Whatever. Either way I'm glad to see you out, brotha. How you doin'?

DOM

Alright.

SWISS

Mutha's jus' done eleven months in the first strike club and he "alright." Shit. I'm "alright" too. Thanks for askin'.

DOM

I'm sorry, dog -- I didn't--

SWISS

S'alright, you got shit on your mind. What time you get out?

DOM

'Bout six.

SWISS

We jus' finished up. Why don'chu grub with us. Got some shit to talk about.

DOM  
Can't, my girl's coming round.

SWISS  
I respect that. You need anything?

DOM  
I'm cool.

SWISS  
Alright, alright. Roll out, fellas.  
Our boy needs some room to get his  
freak on.

The crew files out the door. Swiss drops a roll of bills on the table.

SWISS (CONT'D)  
Tap that ass good and when you ready  
for business, page me.

DOM  
You don't gotta do that --

SWISS  
(Eyeing Dom)  
I know.

Swiss gives Dom a pound and a half hug.

SWISS (CONT'D)  
Talk to you later, "Dom".

Swiss slams the door behind him. Dom flips through the roll --  
It's at least FOUR HUNDRED DOLLARS.

BATHROOM -- 7:23 AM

Dom pulls back the shower curtain. The tub looks like someone may have died in it.

DOM  
Aw, fuck.

He checks the time on his pager -- 7:24 A.M.

BATHROOM -- 7:35 AM

Dom is on his hands and knees vigorously scrubbing the tub. Sweat beads up on his forehead. He stops and looks at the tub.

It still looks like someone died in it. He checks the time on his pager.

DOM  
C'mon, baby. . .

BATHROOM -- 7:41

Dom wears his sneakers in the shower. Water streams over his face and shoulders. On his chest is a large GANG TATTOO.

A KNOCK is faintly heard. Dom shuts off the water and listens. A SECOND KNOCK.

DOM  
Hold up! I'm comin!

He throws a towel around his waist and runs to the front door. He opens the door to reveal--

LINA, 19, is as pretty as her picture. Instant relief floods over Dom. He reaches for her --

DOM (CONT'D)  
Jesus, I was trippin.

But she PULLS AWAY.

DOM (CONT'D)  
What's the matter?

LINA  
Nuthin.

Bullshit.

DOM  
Where's Tony?

LINA  
I left him with Mary.

She's totally closed off. He's totally confused.

DOM  
Don't I get a hug or somethin'?

LINA  
Look, we gotta talk.

DOM  
(under his breath)  
Shit.

LINA  
I'm not down with this no more. I'm workin' three jobs, takin' care of Tony and barely making it through --

DOM

I know.

LINA

You don't.

DOM

What'chu mean "I don't"?

LINA

I mean this, between us, I can't do this. 'Cause nuthin's casual anymore. I gotta think of my boy.

DOM

Whoa, whoa -- Who do you think I've been thinking about? I've done my ten to twelve, now I'm gettin a nine to five.

LINA

Yeah? Where?

DOM

Where? I just -- I ain't even finished takin a shower yet. Ya gotta give a brotha a chance, right?

If it's working, she isn't showing it.

DOM (CONT'D)

Serious. You've made up your mind that I'm up to no good and I've been out, like, an hour. You gotta trust me.

She buries her head in her hands.

LINA

I'm sorry.

DOM

I'm gonna do right by you. I promise. Jus' don't wig on me like that.

He pulls her into his arms.

LINA

I'm sorry, Tone been up all night cryin'. I ain't slept, and now I gotta go to work an --

DOM

It's cool. You jus' freaked me.

He kisses the top of her head. She doesn't look up.

DOM (CONT'D)  
Tone kept you up, huh?

LINA  
Kept everybody up.

DOM  
That's my boy. Got lungs.

LINA  
It's not cute. A couple more nights like that and I'm gonna have to find a new place to stay. Been sleepin' on their couch six weeks already.

DOM  
I'm sorry. You scared me when you weren't there this mornin'

LINA  
What was I supposed to do? I had to get Tone ready and your Pops doesn't want nothing to do with us. I don't know what his problem is.

DOM  
Count yourself lucky. Only reason he picked me up was to show me what a disappointment I was.  
(beat)  
He'll come around.

Lina looks skeptical.

DOM (CONT'D)  
I love you.

Lina clenches her jaw against her tears. Dom holds her close.

LINA  
You gonna be straight?

DOM  
I won't even deal cards. Swear.

They kiss, then again more passionately. Dom pulls her in.

DOM (CONT'D)  
C'mere, I'm freezin.

LINA  
I can't --

DOM  
Bet a hot number like you'd warm me up in no time.

LINA  
(giggles)  
Shut up. I gotta --  
(She freezes)  
What is that?

Dom looks back into the filthy apartment.

DOM  
Aw, I'm sorry about the place. I  
was gonna do some Mr. Clean action --

LINA  
Fuck you.

LINA SLAPS HIM HARD and takes off.

DOM  
What the fuck?

He looks around, bewildered. Then he sees it -- FOUR HUNDRED  
DOLLARS rolled up on the table.

WANNA KNOW WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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