

BEEF (PROMISE TOMORROW TODAY).[©]

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ACT I

Setting: After Christmas, 2002. The small living room of a one-bedroom apartment on Ave D., New York City. A dilapidated sofa, a crooked coffee table, and other furniture found curbside. A smashed record player with built-in, wooden-paneled speakers sits waist-high on one side of the couch. An aluminum baseball bat sits nearby. Stacks of cardboard boxes line one wall, and dim lighting conceals an apartment in need of renovation. Two bodies are asleep on the couch, a large quilt pulled over them. SPADE, a young girl (skinny, white 17), lays in the arms of SHORTY (broad chest, black, 25). A small, withered Christmas tree in one corner of the room twinkles multi-colored lights, with a spherical discard of brown needles below it. Snow can be seen falling outside a bare window on the other side of the room, and intermittently, the sounds of the 14D bus is heard from the street below. There are no presents under the tree. Two doors are in opposite directions of the room. One leads off to a bedroom, and the other outside the apartment. The entrance to the kitchen is in-between.

(The sound of keys jingling. DICKIE (short, white 25), keys into the apartment quietly. He's dressed in a flamboyant parka (hood up), baggy jeans, timberland boots covered in gray snow-sludge. He drops a backpack near the door and looks around the room, unsure of what he recognizes. He notices SHORTY and SPADE asleep on the couch, then the cardboard boxes against the wall. He bobs his head as if listening to something. He squats to one knee.)

DICKIE

(Whispering—calling an animal.) Yo, BiggiePac. Come out bitch. BiggiePac . . .

(He gives up and steps over to a small boom box and drops the hood of his parka. He's wearing headphones, and he pulls a portable CD player out of the parka's pocket, takes the CD out, and puts it into the stereo. He finds the stereo remote, moves silently to one side of the sofa, waits for a moment, points the remote . . . and then YELLS!)

DICKIE

WAKE UP NIGGAS!!!

(He plays the CD at a deafening volume, the song: Jay-Z's *Takeover* blasts! Immediately, both SPADE and SHORTY shoot up off the couch. SPADE runs into one of the bedrooms wearing only her underwear and a simple gold watch. SHORTY,

in a pair of boxers, sees DICKIE bouncing to the music, then runs over to the stereo and kicks it off. Both men stand and look at one another, DICKIE smiling, SHORTY fuming.)

(SPADE comes running back into the room dressed in a black Kimono. She grabs the aluminum bat and heads for DICKIE.)

SPADE

I'm gonna fuck you up asshole!

(SHORTY stops her.)

SHORTY

Spade . . .

SPADE

What? You know this douchebag! (To DICKIE.) Fuck you! You come anywhere near me *again* and I'll castrate your fuckin' ass! (She throws the bat, it skids into the Christmas tree.) Fuckwad!

(She picks up an asthma inhaler off the coffee table, inhales it twice, and exits into the bedroom, SLAMming the door.)

(DICKIE smiles devilishly at SHORTY. They break, and SHORTY moves to the couch and sits. He takes a sip of water from a glass on the coffee table.)

DICKIE

Yo, I think she like me, B.

SHORTY

How you get in?

DICKIE

Shit, lease in my fuckin' name, Shorty. Think I ain't got no spare set?

(He jingles the keys and tosses them on the coffee table. He looks to the bedroom door.)

SHORTY

Nobody call me that no more.

DICKIE

Yo, where you pick *her* up? The fuckin gym? Hoe's mad brolic, son.

SHORTY

Outside dry dock park.

DICKIE

Dry *dick* park . . . What's she called? *Spade*?

SHORTY

Yeah.

DICKIE

Like the cat?

SHORTY

Like the *card*. Caught her hustlin Follow the Bee. Bout to be juxed by this Gompers crew come across Houston. Yo—Why you here?

DICKIE

You in on the beef?

SHORTY

(Cautiously.) Who's beef?

DICKIE

Fuckin the Jay-Z vs. Nas beef, son! Where you been at?

SHORTY

Up all night . . . (He settles into the sofa.)

DICKIE

Yo you are aware that there is beef right? Tween Jay-Z and Nas? (SHORTY shrugs.)
Yo, you even bother pick up Blueprint or Stillmatic?

SHORTY

Ain't got round to it.

DICKIE

What! Ah that's fuckin wack, B! Both them cat's albums is sick! Talkin best of career shit goin down and you ain't even bother pick 'em up.

SHORTY

Been busy.

DICKIE

Doin what? Hot 97 broadcasting like ever twenty seconds updates and shit, talkin bout who be this next King of New York. Street's talkin like there's a freestyle s'pose to be blowin up in like half an hour. On the air! Live battle. Jay-Z vs. Nas. Where the hell you been, *nigga*?

SHORTY

Yo, paying the fuckin rent! Hard for me to be takin your ass serious when you owe me four G's.

(DICKIE takes out a cigarette from his pocket and lights it.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Drop that paper on the table and then maybe we can get to talkin on bout some beef that ain't be-tween the two of us. Other than that you can get the fuck out, cuz this is my fuckin digs 'gardless who's name on the fuckin lease, *bitch*. (Pause.) And there ain't no smoking in here no more.

(DICKIE takes a large, rubber-banded wad of cash out of the backpack. He drops it on the table.)

SHORTY

What's that?

DICKIE

That is four G's. Six hundred and sixty six dollars a month for six months. (Drops another wad of cash on the table.) And *that* is three hundred and twenty-nine dollars for utilities at what? Fifty-three dollars and eighty cents a month? (Drops a cellophane zip-lock bag on the table.) And *that* is a very large bag of proly the best 'dro in all of the five boroughs. What.

(DICKIE proudly strikes an old school, Run DMC battle-won pose, his arms crossed over his chest, his cigarette dangling from his lips.)

SHORTY

There's no smoking in here.

DICKIE

What? Like no *smoke* smoke? Or no like smoke smoke? (He puffs on the cigarette.)

SHORTY

Get that cig outta your grill for I shove it down your throat.

DICKIE

Damn, fine B . . .

(Takes a few last puffs and drops it to the floor and steps on it.)

SHORTY

Pick that up.

DICKIE

What?

SHORTY

Pick it up. That's my floor, this my crib. Ain't no bar. Pick it up.

(DICKIE picks it up, scattering the ashes away with his boot. He moves to the Christmas tree.)

DICKIE

Shit . . . Mad anal, son. Actin like this be the fucking Marriott . . . (Stops, looks at the tree.) Yo, where my R2D2 trashcan? Shorty?

(SHORTY yawns and points to the pile of boxes.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

Yo, I think your bush is dying, B. Joint's balder than Hair Club For Men. Time to throw that shit out.

SHORTY

Feel free to take it along with yo'self.

(DICKIE looks in the boxes.)

DICKIE

Gee, mighty nice of you be packing up all my shit, Shorty. Guess it was too much to ask of you to throw it out in the gutter, huh?

(SHORTY stands wearily and moves to a lamp, realizing this is going to be a conversation.)

SHORTY

Yo, I didn't know when you was comin back. I ain't found no *note*.

(SHORTY flicks on the lamp giving more light to the room. DICKIE notices the sludge on his boots and freaks.)

DICKIE

Ah shit! Shit! Shit!

SHORTY

(Alarmed.) What? What?

DICKIE

Get me some—some—some bounty! Some—.

SHORTY

What?

DICKIE

Some fuckin paper towel! A rag! A fuckin sweater! Anything!

(Neurotically, DICKIE begins sifting through the boxes looking for something, throwing things left and right.)

SHORTY

Are you kidding?

DICKIE

I gots all of New York on my fucking kicks! Hurry!

SHORTY

Dick, it's fucking snowin *sideways* outside. There sludge up to your knees! Course you gonna mess your Tims.

DICKIE

These shits be limited addition, B! Like fuckin ten pairs in all the city! Now get me somethin!

SHORTY

What are you lookin for then?

DICKIE

My kick brush!

(SHORTY shakes his head and exits into the bedroom. DICKIE finds a small boot brush. He moves to the couch and puts one of his dirty boots on the cushion. He wipes the sludge off with his hand. Not satisfied, he pulls a rag out from between the cushions and uses that, alternating between both boots.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

There we go . . . There we go . . . There we go . . . That's nice . . . That's nice . . .
Fuckin . . . Fuckin . . . Gangsta . . . Shit's gangsta, B . . .

(He uses the brush now, smoothing out the sides and toes. He raps compulsively to himself.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

That's what I'm talkin bout . . . Fuckin Lacryma Christi, son . . . rob dat grip like a fuckin hoodlum . . . Break down your door, spit in your face, take out the gat . . . Put in your place . . . Plop plop plop. What.

(He takes a pause, satisfied now. He pulls a joint out of the cellophane bag, twist the ends, lights it and smokes relaxingly on the couch. He notices the rag he found in the cushions. He investigates.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

What the shit?

(He unfolds the rag with both hands revealing it as a pair of SPADE's panties. SHORTY comes back into the room carrying a bottle of Windex and some paper towels. He's wearing a Starbuck's work shirt now. He shuts the door behind him. DICKIE stuffs the panties half into his pocket. SHORTY smells the weed immediately.)

SHORTY

Put that out!

DICKIE

Huh?

(SHORTY moves to take the joint out of DICKIE's hand.)

SHORTY

That! Put it out!

DICKIE

You said no smoking.

SHORTY

What the shit you think this is?

(SHORTY takes the joint, drops it and steps on it.)

DICKIE

Yo, son! You just squashed my fuckin tree! You getting ash all on your floor!

(DICKIE picks up the joint, SHORTY sprays the Windex around the room like air-freshner.)

SHORTY

Spade's got mad asthma, D! Bud smoke could kill her!

(DICKIE sits down on the couch and smoothes out the remainder of the joint.)

DICKIE

Bitch ain't asthmatic. I done seen asthmatics. Had a cousin that was azzzy. What he use to call himself? Some stupid shit?

SHORTY

Marly.

DICKIE

Marly Mar the Messenger!

SHORTY

And he's my cuz!

DICKIE

Now that fag was fuckin *azzzy*. Nose always runnin, eyes fuckin dartin everywhere like fiendin-ass nigga snorted a whole quarter by his self.

SHORTY

Marly ain't no fiend, yo.

DICKIE

Shit. Iceberg Slim pimp wannabe. Vietnam vet, stupid as shit. Gets what he gets. Plop!

(DICKIE lights the joint again, smokes, SHORTY's back to him.)

SHORTY

Man, Spade goes into fits, fuckin epileptic at the disco shit!

DICKIE

She ain't fittin. Hoe's huslin your dumb-ass.

SHORTY

She needs 'halers. Ain't no hustle there. Medicine's real, D. Doctor approved.

DICKIE

Well, you think that shit's helping?

(SHORTY looks at the Windex bottle, considers.
Then he notices DICKIE smoking again.)

SHORTY

What the fuck is wrong with you? Put that out!

DICKIE

Nah.

SHORTY

Put it out for I crack you in your fuckin dome!

(SHORTY reaches for the joint. DICKIE evades
him on the couch.)

DICKIE

Nah!

SHORTY

Yo, I ain't playin! She's in the next room, Dickie. She could fuckin die!

DICKIE

Fuck that, bitch ain't dyin! Shit ain't sneakin under the door. This ain't some fuckin
ninja weed.

(SHORTY grabs DICKIE with one hand and
threatens a fist with the other.)

SHORTY

Put that shit out for I smack you in the face.

DICKIE

What! What! Bring it you bitch-ass! Tryin to get fuckin aggro on me, son? You
wouldn't squash a grape in fruit fight! I done kicked that ass in the sixth grade, Shorty!
Either man-up! Or step down! (Pause.) Yo man up or step the fuck down, bro!

(SHORTY backs off towards the bedroom door.)

SHORTY

I heard some rumors bout you. I heard some *ignet* shit.

DICKIE

Ah rumors is exactly what they is. Rumors!

(There's a moment's pause. DICKIE smokes.
SHORTY watches.)

SHORTY

Tsss . . .Yo get your stuff and get out of here, man.

DICKIE

What? Where you going? Don't go in there, son!

(DICKIE picks up the paper towels and moves to
the door. SHORTY watches confused as DICKIE
lines the bottom of the door with the paper to keep
the smoke out.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

Smokey as hell in here! Don't wanna croak your shorty, B.

SHORTY

She ain't my girl.

DICKIE

Well, whatever hoe is maybe she is asthmatic. Who knows? Shit, I'm fuckin stoned now
anyhows. What the shit do I know? Come on, I'm puttin it out.

(DICKIE moves back to the couch and puts the
joint out. He picks up a Starbucks' employee hat
off the coffee table.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

I heard rumors bout you too. Look like that shit true.

SHORTY

What?

DICKIE

Shit, you got more rumors than Fleetwood Mac, man

SHORTY

What rumors?

(DICKIE tosses the hat aside.)

DICKIE

That you slinging coffee to yuppies at *Starfucks* and ballin some twelve year old white hoe.

SHORTY

She's fourteen.

DICKIE

Word?

SHORTY

And it ain't like that.

DICKIE

Shit, younger the better what I say, so long's there's grass on the playing field. But couple Old-schools clocked you two yesterday comin out the Unplanned Parenthood off Bleeker. So maybe it is like that.

(SHORTY moves quickly near the couch.)

SHORTY

You can shut your mouth right now if you know what's good for you.

DICKIE

Yeah? *Gracious . . .*

SHORTY

For real. Cuz you know nothin about it. I'm serious.

DICKIE

True?

SHORTY

True that. (Pause.) And boy, you ain't kick my ass in sixth grade.

DICKIE

Did too. Punked that ten year-old ass out. Your shit got learned!

SHORTY

Did not, son.

DICKIE

Nigga, did too! Brawled outside the gym. Owned that ass.

SHORTY

I was twice your size, still is. All we done was roll round and then Mrs. Mahooney pull us off. Never threw a punch.

DICKIE

Shit I was *pullin* punches, bitch. Kicked that ass cuz you was cryin like a pussy bout some video game shit.

SHORTY

It was Bionic Commando, and that shit was my favorite Nintendo game and you broke it.

DICKIE

Yeah, Chronic Commando! That joint was dope.

SHORTY

Got that for Christmas and you broke it on your bike.

DICKIE

Whatever Shorty, ain't never been no bike.

SHORTY

My name's Richard. Ain't no one call me that no more.

DICKIE

Richard? I ain't heard that shit.

SHORTY

Yes you have. It was my pop's name.

DICKIE

Shit, how is that old nigga? Still holdin down the block? Ny-Cha! King of Ave. D, mutha fuckas! Piss & Wald bitch!

SHORTY

Don't him call *that*.

DICKIE

Shit bitch, who you think I learned *that* word from? Every time I come round lookin for an IcyPop, it's little nigga this, that little craka Dickie that. That nigga hated my white ass. Loved my moms though . . .

SHORTY

He's dead.

DICKIE

Oh shit . . . (Pause.) Oh shit.

SHORTY

So give it a rest.

DICKIE

Yo, I'm sorry, B. How'd that—I mean how'd he . . . (Thinks.) Whoa . . . Wait. It wasn't from, he didn't during the . . . (Meaning September 11th.)

SHORTY

Tsss, why would he be over there? Nah. The bottle. Stomach complications. On Christmas day.

DICKIE

Word? That soon? Yo, I'm sorry Shorty.

SHORTY

Look, you need just get your shit and cut, man.

DICKIE

Cut? I'm home, Shorty? Come on man, I just been fuckin round with you.

SHORTY

Nah man, I been up all night. I'm fuckin exhausted. I'll hook up with you later.

DICKIE

I didn't come just to get my stuff. I'll chill for a bit. It's cold out.

SHORTY

Look, I appreciate the paper and shit, I ain't got no beef with you, I just really need—.

DICKIE

Just for like half an hour, B.

SHORTY

To be alone, aight? He just passed, man.

DICKIE

Come on. 'Tis the season and shit.

SHORTY

I don't think so.

DICKIE

Alright, let me chill with a jay and Hot97 on the speaker then, man. See how the beef play out, then I'm gone.

SHORTY

I'm sorry brother.

DICKIE

Come on Richard. I got nowhere's to go! It's chilly, yo.

SHORTY

Go to your mom's. She only couple blocks away.

DICKIE

You seen her?

SHORTY

Yeah I seen her. At the funeral.

DICKIE

Well how is she? She look aight?

SHORTY

She look fine—Why ain't you go stop by?

DICKIE

I would, honest. I would. But they lookin for me.

SHORTY

Oh then you definitely can't stay here!

DICKIE

Nah, not the pigs. Some other cats.

SHORTY

Don't matter. I'm sorry.

DICKIE

For reals?

SHORTY

For real.

DICKIE

Like that?

SHORTY

Like that.

DICKIE

(Pause.) Alright. *A'ight*. I get it.

SHORTY

I'm sorry.

(DICKIE stands up. Starts moving to the boxes.)

DICKIE

Ice cold. You ice cold, brother. (Pause.) Nah, I'm just kiddin you. *Syke*. Remember that *shit*? *Syyyyyke*. (SHORTY knods.) Okay. Alright. I'm out. Let me just get some my shit. This way too much stuff to carry, you know? Just a couple boxes. Give you guys the rest. Be my gift to you. You and Roxanne. I like her. Brolic.

(DICKIE starts sorting through the boxes, consolidating everything into one boxes.)

SHORTY

How you know her name was Roxanne?

DICKIE

Ah, I'm sorry. I mean Spade. You and Spade.

SHORTY

Yeah, but how you know it was *Roxanne*?

DICKIE

Huh, cuz you said it.

SHORTY

No I didn't.

DICKIE

Yeah you did. You said it when you ah . . . when you woke up.

SHORTY

No I didn't. I ain't said nothin.

DICKIE

You did, you called her Roxanne when she tried to smack me with that aluminum and—. Come on, Shorty, where's your head, man?

SHORTY

I called her *Spade*. And you asked about it. Like the *cat*?

DICKIE

But . . . Yo, if you ain't call her Roxanne, then how'd I know? See.

(SHORTY moves closer to him.)

SHORTY

That's what I wanna know.

DICKIE

Man, I don't . . . Come on. I'm fucking stoned outta my head right now. I don't know what's going on.

SHORTY

You called her Roxanne, is what's going on. You know her name. Ain't nobody know her name.

(SHORTY stands over the top of DICKIE, looking down on him. DICKIE drops his head.)

DICKIE

Shit man . . . You wanna know what happened?

SHORTY

For real.

DICKIE

Look. I ain't wanna talk like this. I'm—I'm fuckin—.

(SHORTY sees SPADE's panties hanging out of DICKIE's parka pocket. He grabs them, looks at them, then holds them out to DICKIE.)

SHORTY

What the fuck you doin with these?

DICKIE

That's . . . what I was gonna tell you, dude!

SHORTY

Don't call me *dude*. I asked you what you doin with these.

DICKIE

I used them to clean my Timbos.

SHORTY

You what?!

DICKIE

I was straight trippin, B. I ain't seen what I was grabbin. First shit I picked up, honest.

SHORTY

Yo, so you was gonna steal this shit?

DICKIE

Nah! Dry clean and shit. One of those mad dope Korean places. Get stains outta like nothin'. Fold it all crisp and shit.

SHORTY

Get the fuck outta here, Dickie.

(SHORTY starts to move towards the bedroom.)

DICKIE

These kicks where like six hundred bills, B! I didn't mean it. I ain't seen.

SHORTY

That still don't explain how you know her name!

DICKIE

It's written right there! Right on the 'lastic! (He shows it to SHORTY.) *Roxanne*. See that's how I know. Fuckin Sharpie and shit, nigga. I mean Shorty. I mean Richard. Fuck! Come on . . . (Sings ala' *The Police*, dances a little.) *Roxanne! You don't have to turn out the red . . .!*

SHORTY

Dick, just get out man!

(DICKIE collapses onto the couch.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

Okay Shorty, I'm fuckin sorry, man! I'm fucked up. I'm crackin up. All I wanted to do was come chill with my boy, know wha' I'm sayin? Listen to the beef play out on the radio. Nas vs. Jay-Z! Best of career shit! I mean what the fuck happen to you? Cuz you still my boy, right? We're still family, aight? I ain't never meant to leave you hangin. Honest. I just fuckin freaked. I just lost my shit and got frustrated. Like someone broke my crayons. Frustrated like a little kid, you know? You saw it, man. Whole crowd was against me. You saw the beatdown!

SHORTY

There mighta been a good reason for the beat.

DICKIE

I still got fuckin scars, Shorty!

(DICKIE pauses, thinks for second, changes direction and tone.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

Fuck it . . . I don't wanna get into it. Cuz I just missed you, Shorty. Richard. Some major shit went down last year. Know wha' I'm sayin? Like *buildings* and shit, B. Fuckin crazy.

(SHORTY moves away from the door and towards the couch.)

SHORTY

Where was you?

DICKIE

The Cage. Courtside. Nothin' but smoke and ash. Everyone walkin round like they got down syndrome. Where was you?

SHORTY

Here. Still shit on my window sills from it. Was gonna call you, but you ain't leave no number.

DICKIE

Yeah. I forgot the note.

(They stare at each other for a moment. DICKIE see's something amongst the cardboard boxes.)

SHORTY

Look, Dickie . . .

DICKIE

Yo. Is that my fuckin Cee-lo deck? Oh shit, it's my fuckin Cee-lo deck! We used to make mad loot off this shit. You still got some dice?

SHORTY

They're taped to the back.

(DICKIE sets the dice board down on the coffee table. He untapes the dice from the back. He throws a few rolls.)

DICKIE

Man, when we first moved into this joint we was throwin mad parties. Fuckin eighteen year olds whilin out! Had the keg . . . (Searches and points with his finger.) Over in that

corner. Had Kelly's kit over by your bush. (Points to the Christmas tree.) Fuckin dice right here. (He rolls the dice.) *Trips!*

SHORTY

Nah, that ain't true. Not when we first moved in. We had Kelly's kit pushed way back in the bedroom. Had Four-Five-Six on the floor in the corner. Fuck that keg shit. We had forties in the fridge. And . . . I ain't remember what was here.

DICKIE

What was here was fuckin cardboard on the floor—.

SHORTY

That's right!

DICKIE

And we did the freestyles—.

SHORTY

Right here on top when Kelly would break it out. Yeah, for real. They hated us downstairs.

(For the first time they make fists and “pound” and shake on the memory.)

DICKIE

Fuck yeah, that's where all this shit started. (He rolls the dice again.) Bam! Four Five Six! I'm fuckin hot!

SHORTY

Pass me the teeth, son.

DICKIE

Fuckin roll it, B.

(SHORTY takes the dice and practices a few rolls.)

SHORTY

Shake 'em up, shake 'em up, shake it! (He rolls.)

DICKIE

Fevers! Roll again.

SHORTY

Shake 'em up, shake 'em up, shake it! (He rolls.)

DICKIE

Four Five Six! Head crack! Brother's hot!

SHORTY

Yo, you still freestyle?

(They continue rolling dice through out.)

DICKIE

Shorty you wouldn't even know me lately. . . I'm on some next level status. Been training like Rocky. Blowin' up cyphers all over Spanish Harlem.

SHORTY

Really? In Spanish Harlem?

DICKIE

Different crowd, you know? Ain't no one know me. Different then this alphabet city shit. My raps be so sick they make blind men see, turn fags to dykes, then fire to ice, you know wha' I'm sayin'?

SHORTY

(He rolls.) *Aced out!*

DICKIE

Took me like a month to find the right cats, but now they givin me some props, you know? Started listening to my flow. Like they got this name for me now.

SHORTY

(Rolls.) Two four six . . .

DICKIE

Yo, Shorty. I hated it at first. Hated it cuz I thought it was like a diss. But now I sorta be diggin on it. I sort of 'dopted it as my own. And really it was only like this one little Rican fuck, little look-out shorty like three foot tall. Like a year away from comin a runner? Wants to like kick it in the cyphers, but everyone kicks him to the side. He started following me around, calling me it. *Lacryma Christi! Lacryma Christi!*

SHORTY

Trips!

DICKIE

He call me it so much it just sorta caught on, Shorty. Everyone call me it, now.

SHORTY

Lacryma Christi, huh? Shit sound like a girl's name.

DICKIE

Nah, nah, it means like god's tears or something. The tears of Christ.

SHORTY

Ah yo, that cuz your eyes still cryin'?

DICKIE

(Frustrated exhale.) Yeah . . . Shit's wack. Ever time I start gettin into my flow, start really blowin up, get my words slangin tight . . . it's the same shit. It's like I can feel all this warmth spreadin through my chest, comin in to my lungs, up my throat, and out from my breath. Like this great warmth, like some sorta drug or something? And right then it's the best, like my mouth is doin some biblical type shit, and my brain is flowin faster than my mouth goin, and it come out so perfect cats be thinkin I writin it all. Like I got some book somewhere with all my rhymes I spit. So I throw in some shit bout some guy's ugly face in front of me or like the color of the punk's shoes or what not beside me, and brain's start blowin up. Like "Wow, this nigga's off the hook." And right then, right when shit starts to flow golden . . . My eyes start to leak. And tears start coming down my cheeks. I start leakin out like a little bitch. Ever time. So yeah. Shit's wack, B.

SHORTY

Could be worse.

DICKIE

You tell me what worse than cryin in the middle of a battle. In front of everyone?

SHORTY

You could shit your drawers.

(They both laugh at this.)

DICKIE

Yeah well you still do your thing down at Port Authority?

SHORTY

Nah, I quit.

DICKIE

What? Bullshit . . .

SHORTY

Ain't my thing no more.

DICKIE

What? You act like you a *family* man now.

SHORTY

No. I'm a rent paying man now. And it seems in the last six months my rent doubled. So . . . What.

DICKIE

So . . . why don't I give you a chance to win a little something for your trouble? A little chedda interest.

(DICKIE takes out a few bills and places them on the dice board.)

SHORTY

Tsss, well, since you already done paid me back what you owe, and I already done got my finances worked straight . . . (He slides DICKIE's money back to him.) Why don't you try to offer me something I can use?

(DICKIE moves to the boxes and begins opening them.)

DICKIE

Alright, interesting! I see, nigga. I see you. So what you want? (He begins pulling things out of boxes.) You want my Scarface poster?

SHORTY

Nah . . .

DICKIE

A'ight, fuck that. You want my Samuel L. J. autographed canary yellow Kangol. Skeezer Pleezer!

SHORTY

You already done told me that shit fake.

DICKIE

I did? A'ight, it's cool. I got more shit.

(Sifts through more boxes. Pulls out an obnoxious orange North Face parka.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

Yo, how bout my Orange 550 Snorkel with fur? "*Riker's still bustin, what's the woord.*"

SHORTY

Nah, shit's flossed-out. Supa ugly.

DICKIE

Shit, you flossed-out. Can't hang with it. (Pulls out more.) Yo, what about purple suede Pumas with the fat laces. "Cuz it's either that or K-swiss."

SHORTY

Please. What are we? Back in the day?

DICKIE

I got head for the first time in the sneaks, *back in the day*. Shante. Big assed girl, fuckin sunk it like the Titanic one night on a bench outside Dry dick pool. No hands, whole lotta spit. (Looks some more.) Oh I got it, I got it. O.D.B.'s doo rag.

SHORTY

That's not O.D.B.'s doo rag.

DICKIE

Is too. This shit's real. I promise you. I met the nigga one night outside Pyramid. Said, "Dickie . . ." Then he threw this shit in my face. I was like, "Word!" It's dope. O.D.B.'s doo rag. Word is bond, son.

SHORTY

Listen, I've had all your shit for months now. Might as well have been mine. So why don't you offer me something that's worth betting?

DICKIE

Why don't you tell me what this thing is that you think is worth bettin, and that way I don't have to waste time guessin around what it is I think you want?

SHORTY

Okay. (Pause.) What I want is that we bet one time, and one time only. No re-betting, no re-rolling. Shit is what it is. Stands. Four Five Six is the highest roll. Trips is the second highest, the highest trips being Six Six Six. Point—

DICKIE

Yo, I know the rules. Wha' you wanna bet?

SHORTY

Point—I'm sayin 'em anyways cuz I don't want you renegin on no shit—*Point* passes control of the dice and a Six Six One is less than a One One Six. One Two Three, is lowest roll.

DICKIE

Yo, *gracious*, thank you teacher. Now what we betting?

SHORTY

First someone who rolls Four Five Six or highest roll, wins. Other someone loses. I'll even roll first to make it more excitin for you.

Yo, dig grandma, but what we bettin'?

DICKIE

If I'm the someone who wins . . .

SHORTY

What?

DICKIE

Nah, forget it.

SHORTY

Nah, what?

DICKIE

I change my mind.

SHORTY

Nah seriously, what? What is it?

DICKIE

Yo if I'm the someone who wins you can never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever use *that* word in your rhymes again.

SHORTY

(Pause.) What word?

DICKIE

Man, you know what word.

SHORTY

No I don't. Lots of words in my rhymes.

DICKIE

You know the word.

SHORTY

Why don't you tell me?

DICKIE

Cuz I don't even use that word much no more.

SHORTY

DICKIE

Then how do I know what word you talkin bout.

SHORTY

It's the word you got your ass kicked for using at the club last time I saw you? It's the word I told you not to use, and like a fuckin *idiot* you slung it anyways.

DICKIE

How do I know what word you talkin bout? You gotta be *pacific*. I use lotsa words in my freestyle. You could win and say it's any one of those words just to fuck with me. It could be the word *fuck*, and that would fuck with me.

SHORTY

Dickie . . . (He takes a breath.) The word is *Nigger*, yo.

DICKIE

What like *nigger*? Or *nigga*?

SHORTY

Both, all the above. If I win you can never fuckin say it, you can never fuckin rap it, you can't even fuckin think it. It dissolves from your memory.

DICKIE

Now how I'm gonna do that? Like we didn't grow up in the same fuckin hood? Like you don't know I been fuckin called that since I was shittin Pampers. Like it wasn't your dad's second name for me! Other than craka. And sometimes it was both. Crakity ass little— . . . I don't think the guy even knew my real name . . .

SHORTY

That don't matter, not the issue. It's the bet. It's what I want.

DICKIE

And yo, why you want that corny-ass shit anyhow? Who you tryin to be? *Oprah*?

SHORTY

It don't matter. Yeah, guess could be I'm feeling very enlightened and feel like cleaning things up. Could be I really care about you and ironically, that word is holdin *you* back. (Pause.) Or could be none of those two things. Could be I just really wanna fuck with you. (Pause.) But that don't matter. Only thing that matters is the bet. And it's what I want.

DICKIE

Let me just make one thing clear. I get it. I do. But when I use the word—*that* word, in my freestyle . . . I'm not using the word as myself.

SHORTY

Who the fuck's using it then?

DICKIE

A character.

SHORTY

Who?

DICKIE

Yo, a character. I'm telling stories up there. From the view point of a character.

SHORTY

Who's point of view?

DICKIE

A character's, man. Someone we knew, someone I don't know, someone I made up. Someone who's got a story to tell. How many friends we had we ain't got no more? Yo, you remember Mel Clark?

SHORTY

I remember Mel Clark.

DICKIE

You remember what happened to him?

SHORTY

Some fucked up shit, for real.

DICKIE

Some fucked up shit, for real. Now if I'm on the mic, know wha' I'm sayin, and I'm telling a story, and it happens to be Mel's story, and I'm telling Mel's story so that fucked up shit don't happen to no one else . . . I'm gonna tell it straight. I'm gonna tell it through Mel's voice. And I'm gonna use Mel's language. And Mel was black. So I'm gonna use Mel's words. And that's the character. I ain't makin apologies.

SHORTY

It's not about apologies, Dickie. It don't matter what you mean. It's just what I wanna bet. So you have to figure out what it is that you wanna bet that's worth that to you. Or we don't have a bet.

DICKIE

Okay. I know what I want.

SHORTY

That was quick.

DICKIE

I wanna ask your girlfriend out on a date.

SHORTY

You wanna ask Spade out? She's not my girlfriend.

DICKIE

Don't matter. I wanna ask her out tonight. To the movies.

SHORTY

Tonight's not a good night.

DICKIE

The bet's for tonight. And she can say what she wants when I ask. I ain't gonna force nobody.

SHORTY

Why you wanna ask Spade out?

DICKIE

Don't matter.

SHORTY

I wanna know.

DICKIE

Don't matter. Could be I think she likes me and I just like her. Could be it's the only thing I can think of that means anything to you right now, and so's the only thing worth bettin on. (Pause.) Or could be none of those things. Could be I think she's hustling your ass, and I wanna be alone with her for while to figure that out for myself. Could be that I care for you, cuz you like my brother, and maybe this the whole reason I come here in the first place. (Pause.) But that don't matter. Only thing that matters is the bet. So we on?

SHORTY

Now, just let *me* make one thing clear. We was up all night last night trying to decide what to do. And I don't know if we made our decision or not, but we was coming from the doctor . . . cuz Spade's pregnant.

DICKIE

She ain't pregnant.

SHORTY

For real, she is. Doctor told us.

DICKIE

Doctor tell you?

SHORTY

Doctor told her.

DICKIE

But not you.

SHORTY

Patient confidentiality. I'm not the husband. Doctor see her, I wait outside.

DICKIE

Then she comes and tells you she pregnant.

SHORTY

Yeah.

DICKIE

She's pregnant with your baby.

SHORTY

No, I've never slept with her. I'm just gonna help her.

DICKIE

Ha! By fuckin pushin lattes from Starfucks?

SHORTY

Yeah. They have Domestic Partner insurance.

DICKIE

Domestic what?

SHORTY

It's like for if you're gay and got a boyfriend who need insurance.

DICKIE

Domestic who?

SHORTY

Or if you got a girlfriend who's having a kid, but don't wanna get married. It's insurance for me and them.

DICKIE

I thought she wasn't your girlfriend.

SHORTY

She's not.

DICKIE

She don't look pregnant.

SHORTY

She don't eat much. I'm trying to help her with that.

DICKIE

Bitch is azzy and anorexic? Fuckin hustle! She ain't pregnant!

SHORTY

Yes she is, D.

DICKIE

Her name is *Spade*! Think about it. Why you think I come up here? Cuz I heard bout this chick! So many fuckin botched hotel abortions there's a shortage of coat hangers! Bitch has been hustlin cats since she was twelve, and you just another fuckin mark! You picked her up playin' Three Card? A set up! Easy! You even talk to that Gompers crew? Or was they just slingin in the distance minding their own biz? And she tell you what to think. (Pause.) A set up.

SHORTY

Well . . . Looks like we got a bet.

DICKIE

Fuck yeah. Let's do it!

(SHORTY pushes everything off the coffee table except for the dice board. DICKIE picks up the joint off the floor and puts it in his mouth. SHORTY picks up the dice.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

So two rolls, highest roll wins. We roll until—.

SHORTY

Fuck it.

(SHORTY rolls the dice. Both lean in close and look.)

DICKIE

Fuck! Fuck me! Fuck me . . .

SHORTY

Triple Six, yo. Only a Four Five Six can beat that. A head crack.

DICKIE

I fuckin know that, B . . .

SHORTY

Once you lose I want you outta here. You've already wasted too much my time. My life is different now. Nothin personal, but things ain't like they was. Things have changed!

(DICKIE picks up the dice. He shakes them.)

DICKIE

Fuck that. I ain't losin. I ain't leavin. Nothin changes! Four Five Six comin at ya'. Lacryma Christi bitch! You forget your history, *snitch!*

(DICKIE shakes the dice concentrating. Long pause.)

SHORTY

Roll.

DICKIE

Don't fuckin push me . . .

SHORTY

Roll.

DICKIE

I. Will.

SHORTY

Roll.

DICKIE

Not. LOSE!

SHORTY

ROLL!

(DICKIE rolls blindly, jumping away from the table, unable to look at the outcome. SHORTY leans in.)

DICKIE

Fuck!

(There's a long pause. SHORTY stays hunched over, frozen, studying the dice. DICKIE takes out a lighter and lights the joint. Then:)

DICKIE

Okay. What is it? Did I lose?

(SHORTY doesn't answer. He backs away from the dice board in a daze.)

SHORTY

I want you outta here.

DICKIE

Fuckin lost! I knew it. What I roll? Shorty?

(DICKIE moves to the board and looks.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

I fuckin won . . . I fuckin won! Four Five Fuckin Six! I fuckin won! Head Crack Mutha Fucka! Bam! Plop plop plop! (DICKIE squeezes his trigger finger at him.)

(SHORTY moves to the table and over turns the dice board.)

SHORTY

I want you outta here!

DICKIE

But I fuckin won?

SHORTY

Get your shit and get outta here!

DICKIE

But I fuckin . . . won?

(SHORTY moves to the bedroom door.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

Yo, son we had a bet. You can't be whilin out cuz you lost.

(SHORTY rushes back to DICKIE and grabs him by the parka nearly lifting him off the ground. His aggression is so sudden DICKIE is a little confused at first, unsure what to say.)

SHORTY

I don't give a fuck bout the bet! I don't give a fuck bout you! Get the fuck out my apartment!

(SHORTY releases him. DICKIE checks his jacket.)

DICKIE

Yo son, if you ripped this, man . . . You . . . (Pause.) We had a bet, man. You can't back out. You have to man up. Life is fuckin hard, know wha' I'm sayin? That's what your dad taught me! But you man up! And don't ever PUSH me like that!

(DICKIE pushes SHORTY from behind.)

SHORTY

Don't touch me, Dickie, for real. I'll kill you you talk ill about my pops.

(SHORTY pushes DICKIE.)

DICKIE

I said . . . Don't. Ever. *Push* me!

(DICKIE pushes SHORTY and it's on! SHORTY swings him to the ground and they wrestle. They both roll around on the floor, over the coffee table, on top the money, destroying anything in their path and practically everything in the room.)

SHORTY

I fuckin told you! There's no fuckin smokin in here!

DICKIE

Fuck you, bitch!

(They release for a second and both are on their feet facing each other ready to go again.)

DICKIE

Richard!

SHORTY

Dick!

(They charge into one another and wrestle again. Finally, SHORTY gets on top of him and delivers

the first real punch to DICKIE's face. DICKIE lets out a haunting cry and the two separate.)

SHORTY

That's right! That's some fuckin hard shit! That what you fuckin get!

(DICKIE is in disbelief.)

DICKIE

You hit me?

SHORTY

Get the fuck up so I can kick your cracka ass!

DICKIE

You actually hit me.

(SHORTY paces the room, possessed by the violence.)

SHORTY

I told you, don't fuck with me.

DICKIE

I can't believe you actually hit me.

SHORTY

You wouldn't listen. Well, you stupid fuck, look at you now!

(DICKIE winces, one hand over his eye.)

DICKIE

You fucking hit me!

SHORTY

(Waning.) That's right.

DICKIE

Shorty, you hit me!

SHORTY

(Now unsure.) Well—yeah—that's right. We're—we're fighting.

DICKIE

So you hit me?

Yeah, that's what you do in a fight?
SHORTY

So you fucking hit me?
DICKIE

Well I'm sorry—we were fightin. And—
SHORTY

(Disbelief.) ARE WE???
DICKIE

Yeah, I guess . . .
SHORTY

OUUCCCHHHH!
DICKIE

Are you all right?
SHORTY

You're twice my size, Shorty!
DICKIE

Are you okay?
SHORTY

No! No, I'm not okay. You hit me!
DICKIE

Hold o!. I'll get some ice.
SHORTY

(SHORTY practically runs into the kitchen.)

DICKIE
I can't believe we're fightin . . . this is so wack . . . this is . . .

(SHORTY comes back in with a package of bologna.)

SHORTY
Yo, I don't have any ice. But this is better. Here.

(He leans down to put the bologna over DICKIE's eye, but DICKIE moves quickly and punches

SHORTY hard in the stomach. SHORTY is absolutely speechless, his mouth hangs open; the wind has been knocked out of him. He slumps onto the ground and lies there not moving. DICKIE stands shakily.)

DICKIE

You gotta breathe dawg. I knocked the wind outta ya'. Sorry bout the sucka punch, but you twice my size. I gotta get mine, know wha' I'm sayin? Gotta get mine . . .

(SHORTY lets out a blast of life and begins breathing deeply. DICKIE takes off his parka, and from a pocket on the inside of the jacket he pulls out a snub-nosed revolver. He puts it behind his back in the elastic of his jeans and pulls his shirt over. SHORTY doesn't see.)

(DICKIE is near tears, but he fights them off and launches into a freestyle rap, his voice shaky and slow at first, but more and more personal, and more and more direct as he progresses.)

DICKIE

We used to be brothers, Shorty. Nothin but dreams right, schemes right . . .
 Brothers Shorty
 We used to be brothers
 Nothin but those dreams right, getting schemes right
 Avenue D Hope
 Yo we used to listenin Hip Hop ever night just to cope
 You fly by my crib when your pops broke
 I sneak out to yours, avoidin chores
 Barefoot and bloodied and it was there we wrote
 Our first lines ever rhymin smoke and dope
 We was corny little kids smilin big with hope
 And those were the days that I remember when we was close
 Throwin rocks at cars down FDR
 Chasin booty, little cuties at Dry Dock Park
 But hell man, they always too snooty and we always too broke
 Yo best Jordans I ever had got stoled
 And see you went out that night and you stoled them back
 And yo I remember it was the first time I ever wished I black
 Cuz we used to be brothers, Shorty. Nothin but dreams right, schemes right . . .
 Avenue D Hope
 And Yo you used to be my hero in a Starter Jacket
 Chasin back thugs with your dad's hammer
 Taught me how to spot the handshake drugs and glammer

How to stay low and avoid the snitch when the pigs ride thru it
 "Raise up your head little shorty"
 You say ain't nothin to it
 So screw it, I knew it, and I still blew it
 But fuck that shit, man
 I use to believe your dad was my pops, man
 In secret I used to wish it, and not understand
 Why he bring my mom candy on Christmas, roses on V-day
 Thinkin it less coincidence or e-zay
 That my name Dickie and your name Richard
 And I wanted to take a bat to his head when he hit ya
 Break my bones cross his face when he beat ya
 Wishin it was me when he switch ya
 Cuz you used to be my hero, Shorty.
 And see that's what fucks me up bout all this shit
 Cuz if it was you gettin jump that night
 Until my last breath I would fight
 But you just let me get beat . . .
 Your hands in your pocket . . .
 Your feet in retreat . . .
 And I ain't never come back . . .
 Cuz this ain't feel like my home no more . . .
 And you used to be my brother, Shorty.
 But now we just some thing other.

(DICKIE ends shakily, barely able to finish the last few sentences. SHORTY slowly picks up the bologna. He hands it to DICKIE, who places it over his eye. DICKIE bends down and calls for an animal again.)

DICKIE

Yo, BiggiePac? BiggiePac, come out bitch. We gots to go. BiggiePac!

(He looks under the couch.)

SHORTY

Dickie . . .

DICKIE

Yo Shorty, I'll—I'll hook up with you later. You seen my cat? (Claps.) BiggiePac! Come out bitch! You can have all my other shit or throw it away or whatever. I'll just get BiggiePac outta your way and scam outta here . . .

SHORTY

Yo . . .

DICKIE

BiggiePac!

SHORTY

Yo . . . yo, D. D? (Shakes his head.) For real. He didn't . . . Yo, he didn't make it, son. (Pause.) He was sittin out on the window sill. He licked somethin' or ate somethin' toxic. Paint chips or some stuff. He ain't make it. Died a month ago.

(DICKIE collapses on the couch and sobs. SPADE comes out of the bedroom door. She wears a wrinkled dress and trashy heels. She looks at the two men.)

SHORTY

Yo, Spade . . . I think he wants to ask you somethin. (Pause.) Yo, D. Ask it.

(DICKIE doesn't say anything. SPADE sees the money on the table.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Ask her.

SPADE

Ask me what?

DICKIE

Fuck it.

SHORTY

He wants to ask you out on a date. A movie.

SPADE

You want him to take me to the movies?

SHORTY

Yeah. What do you say?

SPADE

(Pause. To SHORTY.) What are we seeing?

(Quietly she begins to realize the situation.)

SPADE (CONT.)

I'll get my stuff.

(SPADE exits into the bedroom.)

SHORTY

Come on, for real. I know that ain't the first time you ever been hit.

DICKIE

By you.

SHORTY

Pops used to say, beat your kid once a day, even if you don't know what he done.

DICKIE

Why?

SHORTY

Cuz the kid knows.

DICKIE

Yeah, he never touch me.

(SPADE comes out of the bedroom with a small gym bag, on her way towards the door. She stops when she sees DICKIE. She hits him across the face.)

SPADE

What the fuck you been crying for, huh? I'm the one that's pregnant! I'm the one your premature ejaculating ass knocked up! I'm the one who's gotta find a new place to stay!

(SHORTY and DICKIE stare at her for a moment. Suddenly she realizes she's given away something SHORTY didn't know.)

SHORTY

Wait . . . Spade . . . What did you say?

DICKIE

Don't listen to her, she's still hustlin.

SPADE

What? I'm not . . . I'm pregnant. He's the father! (She points to DICKIE.)

DICKIE

Bullshit.

SPADE

It's true. We slept together before I you helped me. I didn't know you know each other.

DICKIE

She's hustlin.

SPADE

I'm ain't hustlin nobody! I am pregnant! I am! I—I—.

(SPADE starts to lose breath and goes into what looks like asthmatic shock. She leans against the couch.)

SHORTY

Spade?

DICKIE

She hustlin . . .

SHORTY

Spade where's your 'haler, honey?

(SPADE points to her gym bag. SHORTY rushes to it and opens it up. SPADE collapses onto the floor.)

SHORTY

Roxanne!

(DICKIE moves to SPADE and stand over her.)

DICKIE

(To SPADE.) Are you kidding?

SHORTY

Jesus Dickie, help me!

DICKIE

Bro, she's hustlin you!

SHORTY

No she ain't! She's fittin'!

DICKIE

That ain't no asthmatic fit. (To SPADE.) Yo, hoe the gig's up.

SHORTY

It's real Dickie! Help me.

DICKIE

She is hustling you!

(DICKIE pulls the revolver out of his pants and points it at SHORTY. SHORTY finds the asthma inhaler. He sees DICKIE's gun.)

SHORTY

Jesus Dickie! What the fuck!

DICKIE

This bitch is fuckin hustlin you and I'm gonna show you!

(SHORTY attempts to cross to SPADE with the inhaler. DICKIE steps between them, the gun trained on SHORTY.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

Stay there or I'll fuckin cap your ass!

SHORTY

She's gonna die!

DICKIE

She ain't gonna die cuz she ain't azzzy.

SHORTY

(Rising.) You ain't got the balls or the bullets to shoot me.

DICKIE

I'd rather put a five dollar bullet in your brain than have you hustled by a two dollar whore. You think ammo for this old forty-five's hard to find? What city you live in?

(SPADE's breath becomes more and more labored.)

SHORTY

She's gonna die!

DICKIE

She ain't gonna fuckin die cuz she ain't fuckin azzzy! And she ain't pregnant. Who you think this girl is, man?

SHORTY

Dickie . . .

DICKIE

Yo, I slept with her three months ago and what? She ain't showin'? I start hearin' bout all these other cat's she hustle by actin' all pregnant and shit when she need a place to stay! Then I cop from Marly she stayin' with some cat down in the Village.

SHORTY

Dickie—!

DICKIE

And guess who it is? My best friend! And I ain't gonna let you be played like that, man!

SHORTY

Marly was shot in the face two weeks 'go, Dickie!

(SPADE stops breathing. Silence. SHORTY stares at DICKIE.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

(Calmly.) Yo, that ain't my name no more. And that shit, it's a hustle.

(SHORTY stares at DICKIE. Finally, DICKIE takes the gun off of SHORTY. SHORTY rushes to SPADE. He sprays the inhaler in her mouth.)

SHORTY

Spade, Spade honey. Spade? Roxanne?

(SHORTY slowly backs away terrified.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

She's dead . . . she's dead.

DICKIE

She ain't dead. (Moves to look at SPADE.) She's just . . .

(DICKIE stares at SHORTY. Slowly he backs away from SPADE.)

DICKIE (CONT.)

I'm sorry . . . I thought . . . thought she . . .

(DICKIE and SHORTY stare at one another. DICKIE looks at the gun in his hand. SHORTY looks at the gun in his hand.)

(Suddenly, SPADE stands directly up, moves to her gym bag, zips it shut. She turns and looks at DICKIE and SHORTY. She takes off the gold watch and drops it on the floor. She exits out the front door. Both men stand motionless for a moment, everything sinking in.)

DICKIE

Wow. That was mad crazy, B. My head's reelin . . .

(DICKIE sets the revolver down on the coffee table. He realizes something. He moves to the radio and turns it on. Static through the speakers as he searches for the station. SHORTY moves to the coffee table and picks up the revolver. He looks at it in his hand. DICKIE finds the radio station. Nas' *Ether* plays over the boom box speakers mid-verse.)

DICKIE

Yo, I think we missed the whole beef. (He looks around on the ground.) Yo, where's the money at? (He looks up at SHORTY.) Shorty?

(Both look towards the door.)

END OF ACT 1

ACT II

Christmas Eve, 2001, about a month earlier. *Barry White's Mellow Mood (Part 1)* spins on the old record player, now undamaged. Things look nearly the same; the cardboard boxes are against the wall, the dilapidated sofa sags in the middle of the living room, the R2D2 trashcan is in the corner where the withered Christmas tree had been/will be. DICKIE's orange, North Face parka hangs from a hook on the back of the front door. A green duffle bag is on the floor near the couch. It's raining outside the small window.

(SPADE, sweating profusely, moves about the apartment, talking on a telephone. She's naked, wrapped in a bed sheet, which occasionally drifts south, revealing multiple bruises along her face and chest. Urgently she looks in boxes, under the coffee table, behind the sofa etc. for things to steal. What she finds she stuffs into the green duffle bag. The song ends:)

SPADE

Yeah, you should see my face. (She touches her bruised cheek.)

(There's a cigar box under the sofa, she pulls it out.)

SPADE

Listen to me daddy, I'm not frontin. I ain't even in New York no more. Nah, I'm not tryin to hear all that, I'm just done! You here me? Yo, I know you love me. I believe you, for real. But that don't change me bein done. (Pause.) Shit, you don't know where I is. How I know that? Cuz *I* ain't even know where I is!

(From inside the cigar box she finds the snub-nosed revolver from Act 1.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Whoa . . . (She stops. Listens.) Listen don't come here looking for me! I'm serious, and you don't know what block this is! And it's *big* down here! I could be anywhere, yo!

(She throws the phone.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Fucking fuck!

(Sudden, LOUD knocking at the front door. SPADE freezes. Knocking again. Then again.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Go away . . .

(And again. Louder. And louder.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Go away!

(More knocking. Frazzled, SPADE drops the cigar box, a single bullet falls out to floor. She picks it up and loads it into the gun. More knocking, louder still. She points the gun at the door, breathing heavy.)

SPADE (CONT.)

GO AWAY!!!

(The knocking stops. She moves to put the gun into her duffle bag. From that angle she notices the record player's a little crooked. Underneath, she discovers a rubber-banded wad of cash, similar in size to the one DICKIE has earlier.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Holy shit Roxanne . . .

(She holds the gun in one hand and the cash in the other, trying to decide which to take. She moves to put the cash back . . .)

SPADE (CONT.)

Fuck him, Spade . . . Fuck him!

(She puts both the cash and the gun into the duffle bag, and then takes the orange parka off the hook and puts it on. It swallows her. With the bed sheet wrapped around her legs, she moves to the door with the gym bag. She stops. She thinks. She searches for the cordless phone.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Where the hell is it . . .!

(She finds it, and dials a number from memory.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Listen to me—*Listen* to me. I can't come back. I can't daddy. I'm sorry, I love you too. I love you so much, but I can't! (Pause.) Cuz I'm pregnant. *Pregnant*, as in *with a mothafuckin baby yo!* (Pause.) Obviously I still can, daddy! And I'm keeping it this time, I ain't frontin. And look, I got this new daddy now and he gonna look after me and—who gives a shit what his name is? It's *Glock!* And he's got mad loot, he drives a Caddy—ain't no Buick! He's got a huge dick, and he say you come 'round here, he gonna mess you up! Do you hear me? I'm serious! Don't come down here! Do you hear—do you here me—do you—.

(She begins to hyperventilate, the beginnings of a panic attack, which closely resembles her asthmatic attack from ACT. 1. She drops the phone and lays down. Her breathing increases. She puts her hand over her mouth, her eyes roll back in her head. She stops breathing. Silence.)

(A blast of life! And she begins breathing again. She sits up, regaining consciousness.)

(The sound of keys jingling, and then locks turning. SPADE shakes out the attack, gets to her feet, and makes her way to the front door. SHORTY stops her on his way into the apartment. He has a small karaoke machine and a dry cleaning bag.)

SHORTY

Whoa, where you goin?

(She tries to squeeze out the door, SHORTY puts his arms on her.)

SPADE

Lemme go.

SHORTY

Yo, hold up.

SPADE

Lemme go! Don't touch me!

(SPADE struggles in SHORTY's arms to get free.)

SHORTY

Hold up! I got your—.

SPADE

Lemme go!

SHORTY

What's up with you?

SPADE

I said *let me go*, mothafucker!

SHORTY

Just tell me what's up first! Just tell me what up!

SPADE

Fuck you! Fuck you!

(SPADE swings wildly at SHORTY.)

SHORTY

Hold up! Hold—Goddam it!

(SHORTY picks her up off the floor and kicks the door shut.)

SPADE

No! No! Let—let go of me!

(She scratches him across the face, he drops her. She scurries across the floor to the duffle bag, she clutches it and stares off, paralyzed with fear.)

SHORTY

Goddamn, what the fuck, girl! What's wrong with you? I just wanna know where you goin, huh! You ain't got no fuckin pants on, yo! You realize that shit? You realize that fuckin shit?!

SPADE

Just get it over with.

SHORTY

Just get *what* over with?

SPADE

Reason why you holding me captured.

SHORTY

Captured? That couch got a permanent ass print from your shit being stuck to it for the last two days. You holdin my *couch* captured. (Pause. SHORTY takes off his jacket.)

Take that off. Ain't helpin your fever. Yo, you hear me? You had a fever for the last two days, you wearing a fuckin five-fifty. (Pause.) Come on, I got your clothes right here. Super cranks the heat in this joint like we live in the middle Siberia or some shit. Pipes so hot you could fry an egg had you a sideways skillet.

(He moves to unzip the parka. SPADE backs off.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Yo, just chill, homegirl. You gonna feel much better.

(Slowly he drops the parka's hood off her head. She bites his hand.)

SHORTY

Yo. You bitin my hand. It hurts.

(She releases. He tries to take her duffle bag.)

SPADE

Don't touch my stuff!

SHORTY

I ain't wanna touch your *stuff*. I want you to put some clothes on and take off that five-fifty, girl!

SPADE

Fuck you! I do what I want!

(SPADE takes off the parka and throws it on the ground near the boxes. SHORTY picks it up.)

SHORTY

Yo, ain't nobody ever tell you respect other peeps belongings and such?

SPADE

Nah.

SHORTY

I can tell. You ain't even respect yo'self.

SPADE

Ain't nobody ever tell you your face so ugly it's disrespecting *me*?

(SHORTY moves to the window and opens it. The sound of rain. He notices the cordless phone.)

Yo, who was you callin?
SHORTY (CONT.)

Your momma.
SPADE

One hell of a long distance call, girl. Where was you goin?
SHORTY

Guam.
SPADE

What? Is that upstate?
SHORTY

Yeah Magellan, right outside Rochester.
SPADE

You in some kinda hurry or somethin?
SHORTY

Where the fuck are my clothes, bitch!
SPADE

(He moves to the dry cleaning bag he dropped near the door. He takes a cheap T-shirt and sweatpants out and tosses them to her.)

Here.
SHORTY

(He hangs a suit on the door hook, and takes the rest of the laundry and exits into the bedroom. SPADE pulls on the clothes, grabs the duffle bag and heads for the front door. SHORTY comes out of the bedroom changing his shirt.)

Yo, hold up!
SHORTY

(She freezes. SHORTY holds something behind his back. SPADE's hand slips into the duffle bag and clutches the gun, pointed in his direction, hidden.)

I know your type, you know?
SHORTY (CONT.)

SPADE

You don't know shit.

SHORTY

You already wasted my two best days. You know that? Two busiest days the year and I'm stuck mopping up your filth. You know how much money I lost babysittin your feverin ass? Feedin you water like you a baby?

SPADE

You got your money worth.

SHORTY

Tsss . . . You just another brainwashed girl runnin.

SPADE

You ain't know me. (SHORTY moves closer.) And you better watch out. I bite.

SHORTY

I was stupid bringin you up here. Ain't know what I was thinkin.

(From behind his back, SHORTY throws the purple pumas down in front of SPADE's bare feet.)

SPADE

What are those?

SHORTY

What you need to get you up and runnin.

SPADE

Where are my shoes?

SHORTY

Ha! What shoes? When I found you you ain't had no kicks! You passed out and sweatin for two days then I leave for five minutes to get some air and pick up the cleanin? You up and runnin! So there you go. Up and run.

(SPADE weakly knells and struggles to pull the shoes on her feet, her hand still in the bag.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Yo? (Pause.) I said yo. You hear that? That's the 14D. Right across the street. Try not to get lost. (Pause. Then realizes.) Fuck . . .hold up, I'll spot you a few bills for the bus.

(SHORTY begins moving towards the record player.)

SPADE

No!

SHORTY

But you ain't got no money, girl!

SPADE

I don't need your money.

SHORTY

Fine, then take my card then. (She doesn't move.) Go on, I ain't like you girl. I don't bite.

(SHORTY steps to her and gives her the card.)

SPADE

Yeah, now you just dying to get rid of me. I should call the cops.

SHORTY

And tell them what? That you show up at my place dusted off your head, covered in piss and filth, passed out on my couch for two days? Then you wake up soon as I walk out the door, two hours 'til? I'm lucky you ain't rob me blind. Go on. Call the cops.

SPADE

(Beat.) Two hours 'til *what*?

SHORTY

Girl, are you screwin with me?

(She shakes her head "No." SHORTY takes the simple gold watch SPADE wore in Act 1. off the record player.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Jesus, you dusty alright. Yo, it's like two hours 'til Christmas.

SPADE

I didn't . . . How long was I out?

SHORTY

I been tellin you two days.

SPADE

Two days?

SHORTY

How long you think you was out?

(SPADE leans against the door and slides to the floor, terrified by the idea.)

SPADE

I can't remember. . .

SHORTY

Hey, you okay? Girl? Hey girl? Hey *white* girl.

(SHORTY moves towards her.)

SPADE

Don't fuckin touch me! Don't—.

SHORTY

(Backs off.) Yo it's chill. That's cool . . . Just chill for a second. You just *dusty*, that's all. Shit's all floatin around your head, creating like these forget pockets and shit. Give it a minute and just try to think. What do you remember?

SPADE

Nothin. I don't remember fuckin nothin.

SHORTY

Yo, don't get angry. Go on, think. You remember something. You know you do. What you remember?

SPADE

I don't know. . . I remember singing.

SHORTY

Okay cool. What kinda singing?

SPADE

I don't know, like . . . I don't know, like *nigger* singing?

SHORTY

Like—okay, like *black*—okay, like hip-hop? Like rap?

SPADE

No, like a singer. Like a voice singin.

SHORTY

A black voice singin? What, you remember bein in like *church* or some shit?

SPADE

I said I ain't fuckin remember!

SHORTY

Well, what it sound like?

SPADE

I don't know! A voice. Like you. It was a voice that sounded like you singin to me.

SHORTY

Like me? (Pause.) Ah you know what?

SPADE

What?

SHORTY

Yo for real, you remember somethin.

SPADE

What?

SHORTY

I was playin forty-fives.

SPADE

Forty what?

SHORTY

Yeah, for real. You prolly heard me playin records.

SPADE

Nah, it ain't no fuckin record. I wasn't at some disco! It was a voice, aight? A voice singing. It was like . . . I don't know. Pretty and shit.

(SHORTY takes a 45 record out below the player and places it on the turntable.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Hold up, I gotch you.

(He places the needle down on the record, mid-song, perhaps The Dramatics *In The Rain*.* The song play scratchily.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Broke out the forty-fives cuz I ain't listened to gramps in a while. Been stayin in these last couple days and it's been rainin so much. . . Wait for it. There! Hear that? Hear that voice? Yo, that the voice you heard?

SPADE

(Listens.) I don't know . . .

SHORTY

(Proudly.) Listen . . . listen . . . That's his voice. That's my granpops singin, for real. He was the sixth member of The Dynamos. Original and shit. Old school. Used to get down with all the famous cats. Opened up for Sam Cooke, once. Loved Sam Cooke, man! This the voice you heard?

SPADE

I don't think so.

SHORTY

Nah, I'm sure of it. He ain't have but much of a career, but this one song still bring in pretty tight residuals. It's been sampled couple times and all, I mean. Every now and then I get a check with my name on it. They ain't worth too much, but they got my name on it, so . . . Yo, try 'member somethin else. (SHORTY stops the needle.)

SPADE

I don't remember anything . . .

SHORTY

I can tell you how I found you. You was done up, that's for sure. Someone laid into you, for reals. Lit you up good. You was mad hallucinating and shit. All dusty, like you get *wet*. You smoke that angel dust, that PCP smoke? You fuck with that shit?

SPADE

(Shaky on her feet. A whisper.) No . . .

SHORTY

Yo, you 'member who gave you those knuckle tattoos? Who bruise you face?

SPADE

No . . .

SHORTY

Yo, why you get wet like that? Pimps use that stuff on young girls and then they sell 'em to brother's pay twenty a head run trains on 'em all night . . . It's nasty shit. That you?

SPADE

I need to go . . .

SHORTY

Girl, what you gonna do? I'm tryin to help you!

SPADE

Someone's looking for me.

SHORTY

What's that mean? I ain't tryin to hurt you. (Beat.) That someone lookin the same someone you called?

SPADE

(Losing breath.) Yeah . . . and I'm just . . .

SHORTY

You know if you got someone you need to call . . . You got somewheres to be?

SPADE

No . . . I just . . .

SHORTY

You don't have somewheres to be?

SPADE

I just um . . . I just . . . *Goddammit Roxanne* . . .

SHORTY

Hey, settle down. You can go, it's chill. You got your card, got your shoes—I just wanna make sure you got somewheres to be. (SHORTY unlocks the door.) Go on.

SPADE

I'm embarrassed, okay?

SHORTY

Aight. Okay. Sure. Whatever. (Beat.) This ain't nothin, for reals. Just givin you shit, girl. You just need be more careful, you know? Go on, get the fuck outta here.

SPADE

I should go . . .

SHORTY

Yeah, go. Get somewheres.

SPADE

(Quickly.) I pissed your couch. I remember that.

SHORTY

I know you did. Look, it ain't no thing, for real. Worse shit done happened to that couch. Flip the cushions, Febreeze the hell outta that thing . . . It was my cousin's. It's old. Used to have the plastic. But I hate that shit, you know what I'm sayin'? Every time you sit down you slide off. Couch like a slip and slide.

(She picks up her bag and turns to the door.)

SPADE

When I woke up . . . I was under the blanket.

SHORTY

Yeah . . . ?

SPADE

I wasn't wearing what I was wearing. Anything. I mean.

SHORTY

Yeah. I cleaned you. (Pause.) I ain't done nothin. I swear to that shit.

(SPADE opens the door. Directly outside of it sits a Christmas tree with multi-colored lights on a red stand. The lights twinkle. She freezes.)

SPADE

(Dreamily.) There's a . . . Christmas tree . . .

(SPADE's eyes roll back in her head. She drifts out of consciousness, and collapses. SHORTY almost catches her. He stands there, holding one of her arms, she's dead weight.)

SHORTY

. . . Fuck me.

(Light fades, the Christmas tree twinkles.)

(DICKIE steps into the middle of the living room. He dances like James Brown to *Funky Drummer** playing from a cheap boom box behind him. A baseball hat sits in front with a few nickels, dimes, and pennies.)

DICKIE

(To the audience.) YO YO, ALRIGHT CHECK IT OUT. I'M NOT HERE DANCING FOR YOU BECAUSE I'M BROKE OR HOMELESS. I'M NOT A DRUG ADDICT, AND I DON'T ROB MOTHAFUCKERS. I'M DANCING FOR YOU BECAUSE I WOULD LIKE TO BUY MYSELF A BAG OF WEED. IT'S ALMOST CHRISTMAS AND I WANNA GET MOTHAFUCKIN MERRY! PLEASE GIVE ME A FEW QUARTERS OR DIMES OR DOLLARS IF YOU BALLERS, WHATEVER YOU CAN SPARE SO I DON'T HAVE TO FOLLOW YOU HOME AND STEAL YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE. Give the drummer some!

(At the breakdown he kicks, twirls, and does the splits—he's a good dancer. He raps over the beat:)

DICKIE (CONT)

Quarters, dimes, nickels and cents
 I'm asking for change son so I can pay the rent
 Don't be stingy cuz I'm feelin needy
 You all work on wallstreet no need be greedy
 I ain't askin for bling or cars or your credit card
 Just want a couple bucks so I can forget tomorrow
 A few quarters for a chicken sandwich
 A handful of dimes for the fries,
 Can't you spare a fuckin nickel bitch
 Now you just telling me lies!
 I'll take you pennies or even your fuckin pesos
 Don't look at me like that nigga, you racists!

Where you goin?! Come on, son! For real, B! I'm mad hungry yo! I ain't got nowhere to go! It's fuckin cold out! You all know how fuckin cold out it is?! Shit be fuckin, brisk yo! Shit be like . . . Hey you! Hey you! Gimmie a fuckin quarter! Gimmie a fuckin quarter, please. You fuckin bitch! (Pause.) I need help . . . I really need help. I really need . . . Hey you! Hey, you seen, you seen a nappy headed mothafucker 'round here? Name Shorty? Bout this tall? Twitchy eye and shit? Sings Sam Cooke, looks like Emanuel Lewis? Nah? *Aight*. Yo, yo, how much for this stereo here, yo. How much? Come on, just say how much, B. Two dollars? Go fuck yourself with a fist in your ass! Wait, wait, hold up . . .

(DICKIE stops the music and hands over the boom box.)

DICKIE (CONT)

Just gimmie the two bucks. . .

(He exits with the two dollars.)

(*After Laughter (Comes Tears)* by Wendy Rene spins on the record player. Lights up on SHORTY

and SPADE on the couch. He feeds her cold cereal.
The Christmas tree twinkles. The song fades.)

SPADE

I was watching the tree, and everything went down a hole. And then that hole got dark.
And then that dark got light like snowflakes, and then the light was like stars spreading
over my eyes.

SHORTY

Your head got light is what happen. You pass out. You got the fever. You ain't ate
nothin but water for two days.

SPADE

I heard the voice again. I heard it. When the stars went into my eyes. It was singing
about the movies. Going to the movies.

SHORTY

Goin to the movies? Nah, that ain't my granpop's song.

SPADE

It sounded like your voice. Like it was somewhere else. You singing to me.

SHORTY

I think that song in your head . . .

SPADE

(Gently.) I like going the movies.

SHORTY

What kinda movies you like?

SPADE

I ain't care. I like 'em all. *Scary* movies. I like being scared sometime.

SHORTY

Yo, that's wack. Who like bein scared?

SPADE

Like roller coasters, you know? Make you feel scared and it remind you what it's like
not bein scared. You know?

SHORTY

Never been on a rolla coaster.

SPADE

And I like when you walk outside you gotta squint cuz the sun's always shining no matter.

SHORTY

You live in Florida or some place? Where the sun always shinin? Ain't New York.

SPADE

Nah, you leave a movie and you gotta squint your eyes, you know? Like that.

SHORTY

That cuz that shit's *dark* inside when you come out. Not the sun.

SPADE

Nah for me. It's the sun too. Always.

SHORTY

Tsss. . .Shit, yo I have to see that to believe it.

SPADE

You gotta have to go to the movies with me then.

(He looks at her. They both realize she doesn't mean it.)

SHORTY

Yeah. Sure.

SPADE

What kind you like?

SHORTY

I don't. I don't like movies.

SPADE

What?

SHORTY

Nah. I ain't even got a TV.

SPADE

How you ain't got a TV? You don't like watchin TV? You don't like Mash?

SHORTY

What? Nah.

SPADE

I like Mash. I like Nightcourt. I like Columbo. I like Matlock a *lot*.

SHORTY

Yo, those some old shits.

SPADE

Those the best though cuz . . . I don't know why.

SHORTY

I had a TV. It got stolen.

SPADE

Who stole it?

SHORTY

Nothin. No one.

SPADE

You steal that tree?

SHORTY

What? Come on. It just showed up. You saw.

SPADE

For real?

SHORTY

Yeah, like someone delivered it and shit.

SPADE

They got the wrong house.

SHORTY

Maybe . . . Yo, check it out. The lights got like batteries and shit. You don't even gotta plug it in or nothin. Thought that was crazy.

(SHORTY picks up the Christmas tree and puts it in the corner, moving the R2D2 trashcan near the empty boxes. He stands back and looks at it.)

SHORTY

There. Looks good there, right? (Beat.) Yo you want some like hot cocoa or somethin?

SPADE

What?

SHORTY

Like hot chocolate milk, you know? Used the last of the milk on your cereal, but I can make it with water. It'll be alright. You want some?

SPADE

Okay.

SHORTY

Alright then.

(SHORTY moves into the kitchen. SPADE looks to her duffle bag near the front door. She almost stands up to retrieve it, but changes her mind, and sits back into the couch. SHORTY comes into the living room.)

SHORTY

It'll be like a minute for the water to do it's thing. (Pause.) What?

SPADE

(Smiles.) I don't know. It's funny.

SHORTY

Why? What's funny?

SPADE

I don't know. *Hot cocoa?* I don't know.

SHORTY

She don't know . . . Aight. Well you got a real nice smile. You *know* that?

SPADE

(Covers mouth, withdraws.) No, I don't.

SHORTY

Nah, you do, for reals! You got a dope smile. I know, cuz I ain't seen it shine yet in two days, girl. And that shit blings!

SPADE

Don't make fun of me.

SHORTY

I ain't makin no fun. Just sayin you got a nice smile. That's a compliment.

SPADE

Just like . . . You know, like *fuck off*. You get me? Just fuck the fuck off.

SHORTY

Look. I ain't tryin to *get* you, I'm just sayin bout your smile. It's nice.

SPADE

I ain't stupid, you know? I ain't stupid.

SHORTY

People ain't always tryin to *get* you, girl.

SPADE

Lotsa people said lotsa things bout me, nice and all, compliments and all, and everyone one of them wanted a nice thing done for them later. None of them ever said I got a nice smile. Never.

SHORTY

Well, I think you do. For real.

SPADE

Never.

(The sound of a kettle whistling. SHORTY gets off the couch.)

SPADE (CONT.)

And people *are* trying to get me.

(He exits. SPADE looks after him. She hops off the couch and retrieves her gym bag. She takes out the money and the revolver, and puts them both back, the money under the turntable, the revolver into the cigar box. She takes her hair down and tries to comb through the tangles with her fingers. SHORTY comes back into the room carrying two mugs of hot chocolate. He sets them carefully down on the coffee table, along with a bag of marshmallows.)

SHORTY

Ya'll, be careful, these are hot. You want a marshmallow in yours?

SPADE

Okay.

SHORTY

How many you want?

SPADE

Ten.

SHORTY

Yo, how bout some hot cocoa with your marshmallows, girl?

(SHORTY puts marshmallows in each coffee mug.)

SPADE

You've got a nice smile too.

SHORTY

Shit, I got busted-ass teeth what I got. When I smile looks like my mouth throwin up gang signs. See? (He smiles.) Shit's stacked.

SPADE

Nah, they don't.

SHORTY

Nah, that's just a joke my old roommate used to say.

SPADE

Where he at?

SHORTY

Uh, he uh . . . he died. (Pause.) Syke! No, I'm just kidding. He ain't die.

SPADE

What happened to him?

SHORTY

Nothing, he . . . (Pause.) He became a famous rapper.

SPADE

What's his name?

SHORTY

I ain't gonna tell you cuz you ain't gonna believe me, so let's just leave like that.

SPADE

What's his name?

(SHORTY picks up his hot cocoa, blows on it.)

SHORTY

Nah, no way. He's huge. You wouldn't believe me in a million years. I swear it.

SPADE

I promise I'll believe you. No frontin.

SHORTY

(Enjoying the created suspense.) No frontin? Aight. Well . . . his name . . .

(He take a sip of his cocoa and burns his lip.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Holy shit, that's hot! Burned my lip!

SPADE

Let me see.

SHORTY

Yo, I got blistered?

(SHORTY leans in close and SPADE looks. She kisses his lip. He pulls back and they look at each other. She leans in and kisses him again. She climbs on top of him and things move quickly. Her hand slips into his pants and she begins to jerk him off. She starts to undo his belt. He stops her.)

SPADE

Let me.

SHORTY

Nah.

SPADE

Please. I want to.

SHORTY

Stop. I'm serious, yo. Stop!

(He pushes her off, maybe a little harder than necessary. She doesn't say anything. They both look away.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

They didn't have any the small marshmallows so I had to get the big ones. My pops used to always make hot cocoa with the milk and the small marshmallows on Christmas day.

(Sullen.) Why did you bring me here?
 SPADE
 Because you told me to take you home.
 SHORTY
 What did you do to me?
 SPADE
 I didn't do nothin. I gave you water and I changed you. (Pause.) What's wrong with you? I mean how old are you? What the hell's wrong with you?
 SHORTY
 Ain't nothin wrong with me . . .
 SPADE
 You just a girl. You just a little girl.
 SHORTY
 I ain't a girl!
 SPADE
 How old are you?
 SHORTY
 I'm seven—I'm seventeen.
 SPADE
 How old are you?!
 SHORTY
 . . . I'm fourteen! But if you let me . . . I'll show you . . . I'm all woman.
 (SPADE puts her hand on SHORTY's crotch. He slaps her. She spits in his face then rises off the couch, grabs her duffle bag, and goes for the door. SHORTY intercepts her and throws the bag across the room. She cries.)
 SHORTY
 Sit down! What's wrong with you? No wonder you end up just how you end up! You let peeps walk on you like you nothing better than a street! Ain't nothin' out there given a shit bout you but yo'self!
 SPADE

What bout you?

SHORTY

What I just said?! Ain't nothin out there promise tomorrow today! Streets is hungry for my ass! I'm doin everythin I can stay out of its throat! And it still don't make any difference even if I do give a shit bout you!

(SPADE goes to SHORTY again and tries to put her arms around him, he tries to hold her at bay. . .)

SPADE

Please . . . Please . . . Please . . .

(They end up in a sort of hug for a moment, until SPADE's hands again drift south towards SHORTY's crotch. She kisses his neck.)

SHORTY

Stop it!

(SPADE begins hitting SHORTY, crying, flailing, finally SHORTY overpowers her holding her arms to her side. He holds her there until her struggling stops. She cries into his shoulder.)

SHORTY (CONT)

Ain't nothin promise tomorrow today, girl . . .

(The apartment buzzer rings LOUD. SPADE jumps.)

SPADE

. . . Don't answer it.

SHORTY

What? Come on, forget it.

SPADE

Please don't answer it.

SHORTY

Come on, it's rainin outside.

SPADE

Just don't answer it.

SHORTY
How can I not answer it?

SPADE
I gotta bad feeling bout it.

SHORTY
This ain't some horror movie, girl. Even serial killers take off Christmas.

SPADE
He doesn't.

SHORTY
Who doesn't? (Pause.) The person you call? Who'd you call?

SPADE
Don't answer it.

SHORTY
Wait, you tell someone you here?

SPADE
No.

SHORTY
Then why you scared?

SPADE
Don't answer it. Stay in here with me. It's almost time, right? Isn't it almost time?

(SHORTY checks the gold watch.)

SHORTY
Yeah . . . it's almost—.

SPADE
Then stay here with me. So we don't miss it.

(The buzzer rings obnoxiously loud again. Both
SHORTY and SPADE jump this time.)

SHORTY (CONT.)
(To the door.) Goddamn, I'm coming! (To SPADE.) Who's out there?

SPADE
Don't answer it.

SHORTY
 Girl, I'm askin you a question. Who's out there?

SPADE
 He's no one. Okay?

SHORTY
 Girl, who are you?

SPADE
 I'm no one too. (Beat.) I can't stay here.

(SPADE moves back to the couch and picks up her gym bag.)

SHORTY
 Wait!

SPADE
 I can't stay. I gotta go!

SHORTY
 No you don't.

SPADE
 Don't answer it.

SHORTY
 I have to. I have to, the buzzer's broken. It's prolly a lost delivery boy.

SPADE
 On Christmas?

SHORTY
 Or a neighbor that's locked out—and you ain't gonna tell me who it is anyway! So I gotta go.

SPADE
 I can't stay here

SHORTY
 No. Look, I got you covered girl. I'm gonna go down stairs. And you go into that room. And you lock that door. And you don't come out. Not 'till Christmas. Not 'till you hear from me. And if you don't hear from me, there's a fire 'scape and you can run. Up and runnin.

SPADE

Please . . .

SHORTY

I'm gonna go downstairs and check that door, and on that door's a little window. And I'm gonna look out that window, and if I ain't seen somebody I know, I'm gonna leave 'em. I promise.

(SHORTY moves towards the buzzer. He presses and holds it.)

SHORTY

(Intercom.) Be right down.

(SHORTY takes off the gold watch and puts it on SPADE's wrist.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Here. Look, this was my father's watch. It'll keep time for you. So you won't miss it.

SPADE

Please . . .

SHORTY

Go get in that room. Lock that door.

(SHORTY opens the door. SPADE moves towards the bedroom.)

SPADE

Don't go.

(SHORTY exits. SPADE grabs the orange parka off the couch, and then takes the revolver out of cigar box, and puts the box back. She enters the bedroom. The sound of the bedroom door locking.)

(The sound of a door outside the apartment opening. Silence. A long pause.)

(MARLY, wet from rain, enters through the front door, followed closely by SHORTY. He's shorter than SHORTY, smaller all around, older, with poor posture and a wheezy voice. He carries a brown paper bag, and moves about the room taking it all

in. He also has an inhaler he takes out of a pocket and sucks on occasionally. He appears mildly intoxicated, and wears a green army jacket.)

MARLY

Damn Cuz, my bag bout broke through. (Sets bag on coffee table.)

SHORTY

Yo, what up Cuz, sorry bout that. It don't work too straight. Ain't hear nothin.

MARLY

Yo, I be hearin all types shit floatin around this toilet.

SHORTY

For real?

MARLY

Yo, for real. You know I'm a messenger, man. Marly the Messenger Man. Hype shit goin down. But damn, let me take a look at your place first, son. Step on back, man. (Looks around.) These some nice digs, nigga. What up?

SHORTY

You actin like you ain't seen me in a years, Cuz.

MARLY

Shit, man ain't been to your joint in years. Ain't seen your ass in like half a year. Not since that barbeque your pops got wild at.

SHORTY

Yo, don't remind me.

MARLY

Yo, I won't. I won't. What I don't understand, why am I even here, son? You know you got fam you can come hang along with. They the ones that done sent my ass out in this rain.

SHORTY

Nah, I know that . . .

MARLY

I ain't talkin bout my place neither, shit. You could, but you know how my old lady gets. But I was talkin bout Julie, you know?

SHORTY

Julie?

MARLY

Julie *Clark*, son. You know how she gets 'round holidays since Mel passed. Could use some your jokes. Seriously, why you holed up in here? They sent me out checkin on you.

SHORTY

I was gonna come by tomorrow, after church and all.

MARLY

You goin to church?

SHORTY

Nah, I mean after everyone get back. Get some that Mrs. Clark's cookin.

MARLY

Shit nigga, you can't be missin that. Shouldn't be missin church none neither. (Spots the suit hanging on the door.) Yo, hold up. What's this shit?

SHORTY

That's just my monkey suit, man.

(MARLY takes the suit out of the plastic bag. It's a wild, flamboyant zoot suit.)

MARLY

Nah shit man!

SHORTY

Come on Cuz, why you gotta be messin with that?

MARLY

Look you even got the long swinging chain and ever-thin.

SHORTY

Yo why you messin, man?

MARLY

You got the knob-toed shoes?

SHORTY

I got ever-thin.

MARLY

You got the congolene for your conk?

SHORTY

The what?

MARLY

Your *hair*, man. That straightner, daddy-o. Where's your vocab, son? That's some nineteen fifties shit for your nineteen fifty suit. Come one man, you know how to do the Watusi, don't you? The frug? The twist?

(MARLY dances with the suit in arms. SHORTY comes up and takes the suit away from him, and hangs it back on the hook.)

SHORTY

I don't know what you talkin bout, Cuz. You crazy.

MARLY

You know the doo-rag, right? That cuz your *conk* get fried up from the congolene, man. Ain't your daddy told you bout his daddy? This be his suit, ain't it?

SHORTY

One of 'em, I guess. It's what he used to sing in.

MARLY

Been meanin to swing by Port Authority to see you sing. Ain't heard your voice in a minute, not since you a kid with church, that gospel.

SHORTY

For real.

MARLY

What you singin this holiday?

SHORTY

What else? Holiday songs. Doo wop and sixties soul.

MARLY

Yeah? Why don't you sing me some that gospel? Turn on that Karaoke thingy.

SHORTY

Shit, for real, all anybody request is Stylistics and Sam Cooke. My voice fried-up been singin so much.

MARLY

And you make money doin that?

SHORTY

Change. Enough to save. But ain't much.

MARLY

You want in on a different racket?

SHORTY

Nah, I'm good. Granpop's checks help a little. Saving it all out separate.

MARLY

Double your dollars, I know some guys. Get you cookin.

SHORTY

You know I'm good. I got my own thing, man. Why don't you come tell me bout this news, Cuz.

(MARLY makes his way to the couch, but stops when he sees the Christmas tree.)

MARLY

Whoa. That's a nice stick, daddy-o. Where'd you get such a nice twig as that?

SHORTY

Yo, it's crazy but I think pops got it for me. I opened the door tonight and it was there.

MARLY

Nah, that ain't right. Come here, sit down. (MARLY sits down on the couch.) My man, you still got the couch! Still lookin fresh too. But where's the plastic, son?

SHORTY

Hate that shit . . .

MARLY

Boy, why you think I had that couch so long?

SHORTY

Cuz the plastic on it.

MARLY

Cuz I got the plastic on it, right. I ain't have the plastic on it that shit ain't last long 'nough for me to give it to you.

SHORTY

Yo, I know.

MARLY

That shit been around since the seventies.

SHORTY

I know.

(MARLY takes two beers out of the damp paper bag. He opens one and hands it to SHORTY.)

MARLY

You know, you know, then you the man. Well, then drink up, daddy-o. (They cheers.) Yo, this to Bronx, all blood in the cut, Christmas, blah blah blah.

SHORTY

For family.

MARLY

Yo for family, you right. Salud, nigga.

(They both drink.)

SHORTY

So, Marly what up, man. What's this news you hearin'?

MARLY

Well, first off . . . I got bad news and I got bad news. Which one you want first off?

SHORTY

First off I'll take bad news number one.

MARLY

First off bad news number one from Marly the Messenger. And yo, I'm sorry this shit be comin to you on Christmas, but some this shit be urgent.

SHORTY

What's the news?

MARLY

Well daddy-o, word on the street, is your boy Dickie stepped in some shit. Nearly drownin in it, I'd say. Word is he got busted slangin Yo to some plainclothes in an unmarked Cavalier. That one part, and so now word is he's turn snitch cuz of it, two part. And frankly, it don't matter if he is or he isn't, cuz all truth be told, it's believed he is. And that all that matter. Other part, say he in bout seven or eight G into some real unsavory niggas up from around hundred and forty-sixth and Bradhurst or somewhere? And so I'm guessin, he got busted handin from his pocket. Whole stash arrest . . .

SHORTY

That's why he out the eight G's.

MARLY
Workin consignment.

SHORTY
Stupid . . . He ain't Federal is he?

MARLY
Fuck if I know. Conspire to distribute, possess with intent—fucked either way. And all this come out from rumors he was down near Q.B. and stabbed somebody with a screw driver over a bag of weed.

SHORTY
Yo, that ain't right.

MARLY
Sounds pretty heinous.

SHORTY
No, I mean your info ain't right, Cuz. Dickie can't stab nobody.

MARLY
Marly the Messenger's word on the street is never wrong. May be a little different. May be a little too right. But not wrong, man. And 'sides, just what I heard anyway.

SHORTY
From who?

MARLY
Shit, man. You know how shit is. Corner's whisper things. Building's speak. Street's watch. Put an ear out you'll hear ever-thin. I hear just how you hear from me. Ain't no different. Only the mouth change. Last I heard he's somewhere in Spanish Harlem. Layin' low. But they'll find him.

SHORTY
Who?

MARLY
Five-O. Thugs. Whoever wanna look. Like a booger hangin out your nose—he don't exactly blend in. (Pause.) He's just your boy, and I know y'all raised together . . .

SHORTY
We lived in the same P.J., same floor. That's all. What am I gonna do? Roll up Q.B. hammers sparkin? I ain't even got a car, man.

MARLY
Yo, I got the Buick . . .

SHORTY

Shit man, I'm lucky if I get 'nough change to save a little after I pay off his side the rent. Granpop's check's ain't leavin me shit.

MARLY

Yo, you need some dough?

SHORTY

I don't need no money, Marly.

MARLY

You sure? Double you dollars.

SHORTY

Yo stop peddling your shit on me, aight? I mean really, what the fuck you 'spect me to do bout all this?

MARLY

Marly's just the—.

SHORTY

Yeah, the fuckin *messenger*. I know, for real.

MARLY

Yo don't shoot! . . . It's alright, man. I knew you'd wanna know, that's why I told you.

(SHORTY drinks the rest of his beer and slams it down.)

SHORTY

What's your next piece of bad fuckin news, *daddy-o*?

(MARLY looks at him, then takes a hit off his inhaler. SHORTY takes a breath, tries to relax.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Yo, I'm sorry, Cuz. How's that asthma?

MARLY

It flairs up sometimes, I get these fits, no reason.

SHORTY

You smoke to much that 'dro, man.

MARLY

It's all good, though. The shit helps.

(SHORTY puts an arm on MARLY's shoulder.)

SHORTY

Yo, what's Marly the Messenger's next piece of news, B?

MARLY

It's bout you pops, man.

SHORTY

I don't wanna hear it.

MARLY

You should really. You should listen to it.

SHORTY

I don't wanna hear it.

MARLY

Look Shorty, when I tell you to listen to something, you should listen to it.

SHORTY

I don't wanna hear it!

MARLY

He's in the E.R., man. Lenox Hill. He ain't doin well.

SHORTY

What did I just say?

MARLY

Julie found him half froze to death on her stoop. Couldn't find the keys.

SHORTY

He'll thaw out.

MARLY

I don't know. His stomach a mess, liver sputterin . . . he been drinkin Listerine for a month. Then last night tried downin a whole bottle furniture polish.

SHORTY

He's worse sober.

MARLY

Yo, what's the beef with you two?

SHORTY

Yo, I told you I don't wanna know! He wanna drink a black hole into his stomach, let him! Let the nigga get his! That's all he want! You know he come by here on the weekly bangin on my door, trying to get in? Steal my shit? His own son?

(SHORTY downs the beer.)

MARLY

Yo, why he go crazy at that barbaque? Call you a faggot like that?

SHORTY

Cuz he is crazy! That's why! He's not happy till he got the whole fuckin world sucked into that stomach of his! Why you think he calls me a faggot? He been callin me a faggot ever since granpop signed over that residual in my name, which is his name but checks for me. That shit eats at him, so he try drinkin the whole world into his stomach to keep from throwin it up. He's fuckin crazy! You get me?

MARLY

Yeah, but you know—.

SHORTY

Do you get me!

MARLY

I gotch you.

(SHORTY downs MARLY's beer. Beat.)

MARLY (CONT)

Yo, this girl's fuckin you up, man. You comin 'part at the seams. Bout to break loose and shit. You need to chill . . .

(From a cigarette pack MARLY pulls out a joint of marijuana. He twists the ends.)

SHORTY

What did you say?

MARLY

You got someone here right now?

SHORTY

Nah, man.

MARLY

You got some booty in there? Some pale honey? What you got two hot coffee's for? Yo'self? Shit still steamin, yo Come on. Marly the Messenger hearin all types of shit.

SHORTY

Nah, man. Just some girl from round the way.

MARLY

You want me to cut?

SHORTY

Nah, she's 'sleep, Cuz. It's late.

MARLY

You sure? I can jet.

SHORTY

Yeah, I'm sure.

(MARLY lights the joint with a match, takes a hit, then offers it to SHORTY.)

MARLY

You sure?

(SHORTY takes a moment to consider.)

SHORTY

What'd you hear?

(MARLY taps his ear and hits the joint.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Listen, Cuz . . . I sorta found this girl.

MARLY

You *found* a girl?

SHORTY

Yeah sorta. It was kinda late, you know, bout three nights ago. I was walkin home, cross the park, and then see this little boy playin three card on one of them Jordan boxes. Sittin like right in front of my stoop. From behind I see he's playin the old three card, right? But like no one's there? He's playin it by hisself? He's pretty good. And I can hardly spot the throw, for real. From front I don't know if I could keep eye on the spade. He's got quick hands. So I move in front of him, and he don't look up. So I say, 'Hey Kid, I

got a dollar. What you got?' And the kid looks up. Only it ain't a kid. It's a girl. And her face ain't a kid face. I mean it is, but it's been all lit up, and smacked 'round.

MARLY

No shit . . .

(MARLY offers the joint to SHORTY, and this time he takes it. He holds it, but doesn't smoke.)

SHORTY

And she sorta falls over, right? And she say's 'Don't let 'em get me.' And I look over, where she lookin, and there's this whole group of big mutha fuckers rollin deep bout two blocks down comin from Gompers. Cats I don't know. Sportin flags and shit. And she's bleedin, you know, for real? And she say 'Take me home. Please take me home.' (Pause.) So that's what I done.

MARLY

You took her home?

SHORTY

I took her home.

(SHORTY takes a hit off the joint. He coughs tremendously.)

MARLY

Have you lost your fuckin mind?

SHORTY

Yo, this shit's nasty . . . taste like fuckin drano . . .

(SHORTY hits the joint again.)

MARLY

You picked a white girl up off your stoop and brought her home?

SHORTY

There's the taste again . . . this shit smell funny, Cuz . . .

MARLY

Yo, you better keep smokin that shit, cuz you in a world of ass kicken when this girl runs to the pigs.

(SHORTY keeps smoking the joint.)

SHORTY

Goes to cops for what?

MARLY

How bout fuckin *rape*?

SHORTY

I didn't sleep with her.

MARLY

Oh yeah? Prove it.

SHORTY

Ah she was dusty as hell, man . . . She wouldn't do that.

MARLY

How do you know?

SHORTY

She likes horror movies.

MARLY

Yo, wake the fuck up! You don't know shit about her!

SHORTY

I know her name's Roxanne.

MARLY

Ah good for you.

(MARLY stands up.)

SHORTY

Hey, were you goin, Cuz?

MARLY

I gettin this fuckin girl outta here. Get this shit straight. Take her up to the Bronx, drive 'round in circles and drop her ass off on a fuckin curb. She know where she at?

SHORTY

Yo, Cuz, chill . . .

(SHORTY attempts to stand, somewhat groggily from the drugs. MARLY pushes him back down onto the couch.)

MARLY

No, you chill with that shit.

(SHORTY rubs his shoulder where MARLY pushed him, then seems to notice the joint again, and smokes the rest of it.)

MARLY (CONT.)

Let me tell you bout this *girl* you got. I don't even have to know her to know her. She come up from the Midwest, a white girl talkin black, hop off that bus at Port Authority, and within ten minutes . . . her dumb ass get robbed of everything she got. Which ain't much to begin with anyway, cuz she a fuckin runaway! And ain't got no brains no how. She catch a teary eye with the first hip-hop looking mothafucker in a Caddie who give her a nice wink, she think she saved in a rap video. He old enough to be her daddy, but she ain't care. That's the mothafucker who abused her in the first place and why she runaway. She practically looking for him.

SHORTY

(Drowsy.) Yo, Marly . . . my head . . .

MARLY

You listenin! Sure, why don't she come stay with him for a minute. Sure, he'll put her up. Conveniently, he shares the place with bout four other women, also known as his *hoes*. And he's got a room open just for her. And look, what this girl don't know is, Mr. Cadillac, it was his homeboys after a finger he pointed that went and robbed the bitch. She's trash, Richard.

(MARLY bends down and looks at SHORTY, whose eyes are nearly rolled back in his head, nearly passed-out.)

MARLY

Yo, you stoned?

SHORTY

Yall, man . . . For reals . . . think this shit, I think your shit got laced, dawg.

(SHORTY drops his head between his legs. MARLY takes a cigarette out of a pack in his pocket and lights it.)

MARLY

Just sleep it off. You'll be better tomorrow, Shorty. It's better this way.

SHORTY

(Eyes closed.) I'm fucked up ma . . . I can hear my heart beat. I'm really . . . I'm spinin, man. Think I feel sick.

MARLY

Just take a nap, Shorty. Just go to sleep.

SHORTY

Nah, I think I'm gonna be sick!

(SHORTY stumbles off the couch into the kitchen. The sounds of him throwing up can be heard. MARLY moves near the record player. He flips the record and puts the needle down mid-song.)

MARLY

(Calls to SHORTY.) Yo, alright, Shorty! I'll just meet up with you sometime tomorrow!

(MARLY moves to the front door, opens it . . .)

MARLY (CONT.)

Merry Christmas!

(. . . and slams it shut without leaving the apartment. Quietly he makes his way back against the wall, near the bedroom door. The record plays.)

(After a moment, the bedroom door unlocks, and then slowly opens. SPADE stands in the doorway wearing DICKIE's orange parka, zipped up, hood pulled over her head, and with her hands in the pockets.)

(The song on the record player ends. The needle plays static as the record continues to spin. SPADE steps slowly into the room, not seeing MARLY. MARLY moves up behind her. He hits his inhaler.)

MARLY

Hey baby. (She doesn't move.) What you been up to, ol' girl? You been tryin to hide from me? I told you I find you. I can't believe of all the places in this city you wandered in on my cousin. That's crazy. That's my blood. First I didn't know where you was. Spent bout two days lookin for my wallet for I realize you musta copped it. He a pretty good kid, though, huh? Yeah, I think so. Course, made it difficult for me. I didn't know what he knew and what he didn't know. Not that that would've changed much, I suppose, but I do got a family image to think bout. Look, I owe you an apology. I'm not too good at this game. Be honest, sometimes I don't really know what I'm doin. Just tryin to help everyone out, you know wha' I'm sayin? I don't even like callin myself a—I don't. I don't like thinkin I'm like those other guys. That's why I never lay a hand on

any the girls. It's cuz I got pulled into this shit the same as you. I swear it. Dig this. My first time. . . It was *my girl's* idea. Same with you. You the one brought it up. Both times it done broke my heart. (Pause.) When you called you coulda been anywhere. Then I thought of my wallet. I thought of all the family address and phone numbers I got in there so I don't forget 'em. Then when you called I couldn't figure how I knew that number. . . and then I realized, it was Richard's. Shit, you ain't know I got call waiting, girl? Damn, forgot to tell you that. Still, it's a pretty good hustle, I gotta admit. (Pause.) Let me see your face.

(MARLY has slowly made his way to SPADE. He drops her hood to see her face. He cringes.)

MARLY (CONT.)

Ah . . . I'm sorry, girl. I didn't know he was gonna do that to you, I promise. But look I got something for you.

(MARLY takes a handkerchief out of his pocket. He unfolds it. Inside is a severed white ear.)

MARLY (CONT.)

None so deaf as those who won't hear . . . (Laughs.) And this nigga? He ain't gonna hear shit. (Into the ear.) Hello? I can promise he looks worse than you, girl.

(MARLY folds the ear back into the handkerchief, and places it inside SPADE's parka at the neck.)

MARLY (CONT.)

For you. . .

(He leans in close to kiss SPADE. The sound of the revolver cocking inside the orange parka.)

MARLY

Girl . . . is that a gun you got pointed at my dick?

SPADE

Move that dick over to the door.

(MARLY slowly moves over to the front door. SPADE removes the revolver from the parka's pocket.)

MARLY

Girl, now I know you ain't gonna shoot your daddy. This stupid.

SPADE

Wouldn't raise a fist to a girl neither? Yo, the bitches still actually buy your shit, Marly?

MARLY

You bought it. You still buyin it. You my number one customer. (Beat.) Alright, look. You can't be hangin 'round Shorty like this. He's a good kid. I know you prolly heard me talkin bout him, sayin he's got his head on straight and all, and you prolly thought he could help you. But only people like us can help each other, Spade. And Richard ain't like us. I mean what you plannin on doin? Stay here with him?

SPADE

I don't know, Marly. I ain't thought much about it.

MARLY

I can tell you what's gonna happen, you bein here. You last about two weeks with this domestic shit. Then you gonna go crazy, all cooped up like a dog in a kennel. And bit by bit you gonna pull the street into this place. Into his life. You be headed to kill the kid.

SPADE

Nah . . .

MARLY

Yes! You somethin not good for him. What you think? You clean in any sense? You're dirty, girl! How you think you gonna keep him clean and yo'self dirty at the same time?

SPADE

I'm just at bottom, Marly.

(MARLY edges near Spade.)

MARLY

I know you is. I seen that coming. You been in this business of obliterating yo'self for a while now. You tired. All spent. You cashed in, used up. And all that's left is shame . . .

SPADE

Yeah . . .

MARLY

And weariness . . .

SPADE

Yeah.

MARLY

And disgust.

SPADE

Yeah.

MARLY

You disgusted with yo'self, ain't you? Comin here.

SPADE

I didn't know where to go.

(MARLY sits down on the couch near SPADE.)

MARLY

I know. I been there. Truth be told . . . I couldn't give you up even if I wanted to. You worth too much to me. Financially yeah, but I'm talkin emotionally. We too much alike for me to ever let you go. (He stands.) I need you too much, girl. I love you. I'm your daddy. I take care of you. So here's what we gonna do. On account that you at bottom and all, and I suffer when I see you sufferin . . . I'm takin you off.

SPADE

What?

MARLY

Yeah, I'm takin you off it. No more of it for you. No more runnin. I put you on some administrative shit. Organizational type stuff. Whatever it takes to keep you solid for a while. You want domestic, that's cool. Plunny domestic shit need be done. I love you, baby. Okay?

SPADE

Okay . . .

MARLY

You love me?

SPADE

I love you, Marly.

(MARLY picks up his coat and offers a hand to help SPADE stand.)

MARLY

Okay then. Good. You ready to go?

SPADE

(Tired.) I wish it still work for me, Marly. Place I'm at right now, it's the end of the line in this direction, I think. (Pause.) Yo, messed up thing is, no frontin, right? I ain't even realize I was heading to this place I'm at. I ain't seen any signs. It got for a while I feel

like . . . like an old bike tire, been rode over too many blocks with a slow leak. That there's my hope leakin out. So your talk ain't enough. It can't come to hope. (Beat.) Goddam Marly. . . I love you so much! Even if you trapped in a circle you could still talk your way out of a corner.

MARLY

I think I'm getting a little rusty.

SPADE

Nah, you still do alright.

(MARLY begins to sit down on the couch. SPADE shifts the gun back in his direction.)

SPADE

Don't sit. This won't take long. Way I see it, you got bout two things you can do. You take a walk out that door, you come back tomorrow, see how the shit go down.

MARLY

You best believe I'm comin back tomorrow. And the day after. As long until it takes.

SPADE

Don't be lookin at me violent, Marly. Don't be stupid.

MARLY

Well, what you expect? I love you. I ain't gonna stop.

(SPADE takes the needle off the record and stops it. She takes the rubber-banded wad of cash out from under the turntable and tosses it to MARLY.)

MARLY

What's this?

SPADE

That's bout how you gonna be smart. That's your other thing.

MARLY

How much is here?

SPADE

I don't know. Never counted it. Put it in your pocket, you tell me. Go on. See how it feels.

(MARLY puts the money in his pocket.)

MARLY

Wait, this Shorty's paper?

SPADE

What difference does it make?

MARLY

Yo, you askin me to steal from my own fam? You crazy girl.

SPADE

I'm askin, when you got money in one hand, and a loaded gun pointed at your dick . . . what difference does it make, Marly?

MARLY

Shorty's a relative. Ain't worth the trouble.

(MARLY puts his hand in his pocket to take the money out.)

SPADE

Leave it there.

MARLY

I got family I gotta be straight with. How you gonna do anything but snitch me out when he notice this gone?

SPADE

When it come down to it, who's he gonna believe? Me or you? It's up to me to figure something out, and I will.

MARLY

And if you don't? Then what?

SPADE

Then I'll be knockin back on your front door, won't I?

MARLY

Yo, that ain't good 'nough. I need some kinda promise if you gonna be buyin time with this. You gonna have a prolonged bout of self-awareness? Fine. But I need some 'surance.

SPADE

Don't worry. I got your 'surance. In here, Marly.

(SPADE passes her hand underneath the parka, over her stomach.)

MARLY

That could be anyones. Ain't mine.

SPADE

Don't matter, Marly. It's all I need. And 'sides, you don't wanna wait around to find out if it is or isn't yours. And I sure don't want you around waitin. I go back with you now, I spend nine months of nights keeping you from beating me in my sleep with another one of your free abortions. I stick here, maybe I got a chance, right?

MARLY

And what are you gonna tell Shorty?

SPADE

You don't think about it. Just walk out the door before I decide *you* pregnant and you need an abortion.

MARLY

Yo, you sure don't want a cut from this? It's a lot of paper.

SPADE

That's my buy-out, Marly. It's all you.

MARLY

You one cold bitch, Spade. You ever stop the hustle?

SPADE

What hustle? (She moves near him.) Open up.

MARLY

What?

SPADE

Open your mouth, daddy.

(He opens his mouth. SPADE takes the handkerchief out of the parka and puts it in his mouth.)

SPADE (CONT.)

Take that shit with you. Get outta here.

(MARLY begins to exit. SPADE lowers the revolver and pulls out the cigar box. SHORTY is suddenly standing in the doorway to the kitchen.)

SHORTY

(Shakily.) Marly. (He spits on the floor, then wipes his mouth.) I threw up.

(SPADE puts the revolver into the cigar box and slides it under the couch. MARLY puts the handkerchief into his pocket.)

MARLY

You smoke too much, son. Catch some Z's. I'll catch you later, Cuz.

SHORTY

Wait. Marly, I got somethin for you . . .

(SHORTY walks awkwardly to the couch, passing SPADE.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Hey Roxanne. Merry Christmas.

(SHORTY plops down on the couch, bends over, and pulls out the cigar box—all of it very intoxicated.)

MARLY

Hey, Cuz . . . it's getting late, I got enough. Think I gotta . . .

SHORTY

Hold up.

(SHORTY takes the revolver out from the cigar box and tremulously points it at MARLY.)

SHORTY (CONT.)

Here . . .

MARLY

Yo Cuz . . .

(SHORTY stands shakily and moves towards MARLY, then falls into him when he gets near. MARLY keeps SHORTY on his feet.)

SHORTY

(Laughs.) Ah man . . . I'm fucked. Your shit straight laced, dawg. I'm sorry, for real . . .

MARLY

That's okay, Shorty.

(SHORTY raises the revolver to MARLY's face. He cocks back the hammer. He pauses while MARLY squirms.)

MARLY (CONT.)

Shorty . . .

SHORTY

Yo. . . you don't wanna see the chrome?

MARLY

No . . .

SHORTY

No? You sure?

MARLY

(Whisper.) No.

SHORTY

Okay . . . okay. (Whispers.) Pop!

(SHORTY laughs, and slowly moves the gun away from MARLY's face.)

SHORTY

This my *pop* gun cuz it goes 'pop'.

MARLY

Goddamn Shorty . . .

SHORTY

It was my pop's gun. Get it? You want it?

(He offers the gun.)

MARLY

No.

SHORTY

No?

(SHORTY puts the gun barrel against his head.)

Cut it out . . .

MARLY

You want me to get it?

SHORTY

No.

MARLY

Try and dodge a slug?

SHORTY

(SPADE begins to have one of her panic attacks,
and starts to hyperventilate.)

No Cuz.

MARLY

I'm a bad guy, Marly . . .

SHORTY

No you ain't.

MARLY

How you know?

SHORTY

I know . . .

MARLY

(SHORTY smiles and pulls the trigger. It clicks.
This sends SPADE's attack into overdrive.
SHORTY lowers the gun, chuckles, and hands it
over to MARLY.)

SHORTY

You gotta do somethin for me. You gotta promise, man. Promise me.

MARLY

I promise.

SHORTY

Yo, you gotta find Dickie, man. You gotta give him this chrome, for real. You got me?

MARLY

I gotch you.

Promise me?
SHORTY

I promise, Shorty.
MARLY

You promise? You promise on blood? On fam?
SHORTY

I promise. (Looks to SPADE.) On family.
MARLY

(MARLY turns to exit.)

SHORTY
One more thing, daddy-o. (Pause.) You see my father . . . You tell him Merry Christmas.

(MARLY exits. SHORTY shuts the door. He looks at SPADE, who is collapsed on the couch hyperventilating.)

SHORTY
Roxanne, calm down. There's no bullets in the gun.

(SPADE's breathing increases. She gasps for breath. SHORTY leans heavily on the front door.)

SHORTY (CONT.)
Hey, relax girl. What's wrong with you? Come on friend, my head's fucked . . .

(SHORTY moves to the couch and knells next to SPADE. Her breathing grows worse.)

SHORTY (CONT.)
What's wrong with you? Why you doin this? Come on . . . don't do this. Don't do this, please. Please mamma . . . please. Don't leave me, mamma. He didn't mean it. Don't leave me, mamma . . .

(SHORTY sees MARLY's inhaler on the floor near the coffee table. He picks it up and sprays it into SPADE's mouth.)

SHORTY (CONT.)
Please don't leave me. Please.

(Slowly she begins to breath normal again.)

SHORTY

There you go. There you go. Just listen to your song. Just listen you that song you got in your head. Listen to your song . . .

(The sounds of the 14D stopping through the window. It begins to rain harder outside.)

(Lights up on DICKIE. He's extremely fucked-up. He holds his hat out for change.)

DICKIE

And party and bullshit . . . and party and bullshit . . . Ladies and Gentleman . . . I'm break dancing for you . . . so gimmie change . . . Quarters, you know dimes . . . nickels and cents, I'm asking for change son so I can pay . . . I'm askin for change so I can pay . . . I'm askin for change . . .

(SHORTY begins to sing softly to SPADE.)

SHORTY

It's been too hard livin
But I'm afraid to die
I don't know what's there beyond the sky
It's been a long time comin
But I know
A change gonna come

DICKIE

I'm askin for change . . .

SHORTY

I go to the movies
And I go downtown
Somebody keeps telling me
Don't hang 'round
It's been a long time comin
But I know
A change gonna come

END OF PLAY

Author's Notes:

- The Dramatic's song, *In The Rain* is only used as a suggestion for the possible feel of whatever song Shorty plays to represent his grandfather's voice. It's not meant to be implied that Shorty's grandfather was an actual member of the Dramatics.
- The song Shorty sings to Spade at the end is *A Change Is Gonna Come*, by Sam Cooke.