

A PARTY FOR JOEY

written by

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INT. HALLWAY - THE PROJECTS - DAY

A battered apartment door painted with graffiti with TWO BULLET HOLES shot through the center.

A couple of PARAMEDICS load a bloodied and wounded black teen SHAUN LEWIS (16), simple t shirt, sweats, onto a stretcher and roll him from the scene.

Watching them leave are plain clothes officers JOE CULLEN (30s), short, all muscle, thin hair and MIKE PERRY (30s), tall, thin, drugged out eyes.

An aging POLICE CAPTAIN steps out from inside the apartment, stares at the bullet ridden door.

POLICE CAPTAIN

Tell me about him. The kid. What was he doing here?

Inside, a cuffed black man JIMMY POUNCEY (20s), sits in a chair as a UNIFORM COP records his statement.

JOE

His name's Shaun Lewis. A special project of mine and Mike's. Good kid. A few wrong turns. Earlier tonight, we caught him slinging rock at a bus stop off of third avenue. We've been watching him real close. He's been moving a lot of product. More than usual.

MIKE

Yeah, so what happened was me and Joey heard Shaun here was moving up in the world so we...

POLICE CAPTAIN

I don't remember asking you a fuckin thing!

Mike and Joe share a quick glance. Joe signals him to back off. Mike is out of it, eyes wide, can't stand still, jacked up on something.

The Captain turns to Joe.

POLICE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Go on.

JOE

Well, sir, like Perry was saying, we figured Shaun found himself a new meal ticket. So we run him down, catch him with over ten rocks. Takes him less than a minute to flip on our guy inside.

The three of them stare at the bullet ridden door.

POLICE CAPTAIN

Well, judging from those holes in the door, somebody knew you were coming.

JOE

Yes, sir. Looks like Pouncey's got more feet on the pavement than we thought. From the point we picked up Lewis to Pouncey's front door, we're talking less than twenty minutes.

POLICE CAPTAIN

That kid couldn't be more than fifteen.

JOE

Sixteen, sir.

POLICE CAPTAIN

Alright, you two. I'll give it to you straight. You coming here, off the clock, in plain clothes and without a warrant isn't doing you any favors.

Mike paces the filth ridden hallway, a nervous wreck.

POLICE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

You're only other witness to all this has two bullets in him. That leaves two scumbags inside claiming that not only did you break into his apartment to take his money and product, you're the one who put those bullets in the door.

MIKE

Fuckin nigger bullshit!

Joe stares down the hall. Two young black WOMEN outside their apartment watch the action. The Captain jumps in Mike's face, steaming hot.

POLICE CAPTAIN

(to Mike)

Shut your mouth! Don't open it again until I tell you! You got that?!

Mike throws his hands up in defeat. The Captain turns to the two women in the hall.

POLICE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Police business. Get back in your house, please.

The two women step back inside, shut the door. The Captain turns to his guys.

POLICE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I'm telling you, for your sake. You better hope this Lewis kid knows where his bread's buttered. Because if he doesn't corroborate your version of what happened, the two of you are looking at some serious shit.

Joe and Mike share another look.

CUT TO:

INT. IRISH PUB - BACKROOM - DAY

Several empty beer mugs and scads of court documents cover a modest table. Amongst the papers are some scary faces with numbers in front of their chests.

LOGAN (O.S.)

Let me get this straight. You want three of my guys against your one case.

We reveal TWO MEN at the table. The first is LOGAN (30s), a tired slug, sport coat off, sleeves rolled up.

Across from him is CHRIS CULLEN (20s), sharp suit and tie. About ten years Logan's junior and full of vigor.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Are you looking for defender of the year or something?

CHRIS

I'm not looking for anything. It's personal.

Logan picks up a rap sheet with a young black face posted near the top.

LOGAN
You know this animal?

Chris stalls.

CHRIS
I know the type.

Logan scoffs.

LOGAN
Here's a little wake up call,
buddy. You're not gonna love every
case dropped in your lap.

CHRIS
I know that.

A waitress picks up their empties. Drops four more in front of them.

LOGAN
That's why you still have
that grin on your face. Sure, you
had some luck so far. Plea
bargained a few poor bastards that
never had a chance in life. Makes
you feel good. Like you did
something right. I get it. But
you haven't had to face any real
monsters like this guy.

Chris takes a huge swig of his beer, avoids eye contact with Logan.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
You've been passing off cases like
this left and right. And not just
to me. You afraid of getting your
hands dirty?

CHRIS
No. It's more than that.

LOGAN
I know. You think he's wrong.
Hell, he probably is wrong. Most
of them are.

CHRIS
(angry)
What the hell's that supposed to mean?

Logan sits back, shocked, confused.

LOGAN
Nothing. Forget it.

Logan checks his watch.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
Hey, listen, I'm gonna be late for court. You headed home for the holidays?

CHRIS
I take it you heard the bad news.

LOGAN
Take my advice. He's going through a hard time. Last thing he needs to hear right now is some lawyer's two bit opinion. He's already got a lawyer. Be his brother for once and give him a hug for God sakes.

Chris smiles and nods.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
In the end, all we'll have left is family. Remember that.

Logan pats him on the shoulder and heads out.

CUT TO:

INT. KEVON'S CAR - DAY

Behind the wheel is KEVON HARRIS (20s), black, expensive sweater, wire rim glasses, very studious.

Kevon fights the urge to stare in the backseat where a young woman changes her clothes. This is --

MARNIE CULLEN (21), bleach blonde, blue eyes, Chris's sister. Marnie smiles, stares back at Kevon as she throws her panties into the front seat.

KEVON
What the hell are you doing?

MARNIE

What's it look like? Can't wear a full back with yoga pants.

Marnie grabs a duffel bag and unzips, pulls out a thong and twirls it on her finger, smiles back at Kevon.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

I knew I had a pair in here somewhere.

Kevon sighs out loud as he stares out the window. Tries to focus on the road.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Oh, stop acting like I'm naked. I'm wearing a skirt.

KEVON

Keep your eyes on the road. Eyes on the road.

Marnie laughs as she pulls on her yoga pants.

KEVON (CONT'D)

You know we'd both be a lot safer if I just started texting.

MARNIE

I thought you said you could handle just being friends.

KEVON

I can. There's just being friends and then there's stop being a man. Just because we're not together doesn't make me one of your girlfriends. I can see we're gonna have to lay down some ground rules.

Marnie winks at him seductively.

MARNIE

You're very take charge. I like that.

KEVON

One, you don't change in front of me. Two, you don't chew my ear off about your latest sexual exploits.

Marnie crawls back into the front seat.

MARNIE

But that's what friends do. They talk about their sex life. Who else am I supposed to tell? My parents? Sorry you're not getting any. But that's not my fault.

Kevon shoots her a nasty stare.

KEVON

Who says I'm not getting any? Maybe I have too much respect for you to go on and on about my sex life.

MARNIE

Bullshit. Just admit it. I was the last girl you were with. Otherwise you'd be with her right now instead of me.

KEVON

Oh, yeah? Why's that?

MARNIE

Because you're clingy. You're a very clingy person. I thought we already had this discussion two months ago.

KEVON

Yes. You made it crystal clear you wanted nothing more to do with me. I get it.

MARNIE

If that were true, you wouldn't be here right now. I like you. I like being with you. Your problem is, you don't know how to be alone. To not have someone constantly there to stroke your fragile little ego.

KEVON

That's not true.

MARNIE

It is true. Since I've known you, you've always had a girlfriend. That's ten years. At two girlfriends a year, that's twenty failed relationships.

KEVON

What you call a failed relationship, I call a young man in his prime having the time of his life.

MARNIE

Oh, yeah, right. That's why they all dumped you. Face it. You were always all about you. And if they didn't cater to your every need, you got clingy.

Kevon refuses to listen and plays with the rearview mirror.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

You have a lot of very attractive traits, Kev. But that definitely isn't one of them.

KEVON

Okay, so if I'm this terrible guy you can't ever see having a real relationship with...Why'd you invite me out here to meet your family?

Marnie loses her cool smile, stares straight ahead.

MARNIE

Let's just say going home these days is kind of stressful.

KEVON

Oh, so I'm just a distraction for you. I get it. You wanna talk about it?

MARNIE

Not really.

KEVON

Hey. Sorry I changed the subject. Since I'm all about me I figured you'd wanna turn the spotlight on you for awhile.

MARNIE

Look. I didn't bring you along to make things harder. So squash it, okay?

Kevon reads her closely as she folds her arms, kicks up her feet on the dash.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CULLEN HOME - DAY

Raking piles of leaves in the front sprawling lawn of this quaint, out of the way home is Joe.

His mother JANET CULLEN (50s), grayish blonde, an aging beauty, brings him a tall hot coffee.

JANET

You've been out here almost an hour. I thought you came for a visit.

Joe sips the coffee.

JOE

Just making myself useful. That's all. All this sitting around drives me nuts.

JANET

You could've come up to see me two weeks ago if that were the case.

JOE

Two weeks ago I was passing out on the couch with a bottle in my hand.

Janet stares up the hill and through a rear kitchen window at BECKY "BECKS" MCNEELY (20s), short hair, tough but pretty. Becks stares down at boyfriend Joe with great concern.

JANET

Yeah, I heard. She's worried about you.

Joe stares back at Becks.

JOE

She should be. It's gonna be hard supporting both of us on a cop's salary. That is if she sticks around.

JANET

Oh, please. If you really think that little of her you wouldn't be with her. So let's stop with the pity party.

Joe hangs his head low, embarrassed.

JANET (CONT'D)

You know how many leaves I watched your father rake in thirty years of marriage? You have the same problem he did. You bring the job home with you. He let all that hate build up inside until it eventually burnt a hole in his stomach. Around your age I might add.

JOE

Is there a point to this?

JANET

Getting out now with a partial pension might not be the worst thing for you.

JOE

Can we not do this? Not this year. I'm a cop. It's what you married. It's what you gave birth too. Sooner or later, you're gonna have to come to grips with that.

JANET

And what happens next month when they take your badge away? Or maybe they don't and you end up taking a bullet anyways. If you don't end up with an ulcer or dead, you're stuck in a wheelchair or on crutches for the rest of your life.

Joe laughs, shakes his head.

JOE

Great talk, Mom. It's getting cold out here. I'm heading inside.

Joe heads for the porch door. Becks ducks away from the kitchen window.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Joe opens a screen door, steps inside as Becks spreads icing on a carrot cake. Some news about Christmas traffic plays on a small television.

BECKS

You look pissed. Should I even ask?

JOE

No. You shouldn't.

Joe sips his coffee, leans against a chair at a small breakfast table.

BECKS

Okay, so I won't. By the way, Chris called. He hit traffic but should be here by Five at the latest.

JOE

Gee. I wonder what he'll wanna talk about at dinner.

BECKS

Don't start anything. Alright?

JOE

I never do. He's the one that starts that shit. If you ask him, the whole department's dirty.

Joe reaches his dirty finger into the icing bowl as Becks shoos him away.

JOE (CONT'D)

He's been with the defender's office, what? Eight months and he thinks he's got us all figured out.

BECKS

So he's stubborn. He's your father's son. Just like you. So maybe he hasn't been a lawyer for that long. He's got twenty eight years of hearing your father's war stories. The good and the bad. Remember that.

JOE

That's right. There's good and bad.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

Those that obey the law and those that break it. You rob and steal, shoot at cops, I got no sympathy for what happens to you after the fact.

BECKS

That's your partner talking. If your father were here, he'd tell you the same thing.

JOE

Yeah, well. He's not here, is he?

Becks just nods and goes back to icing the cake. Joe instantly regrets his words, kisses her on the neck.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go wash up.

Joe heads down a thin hallway. Becks stares out the kitchen window and down at Janet still in the front lawn. She is distant. Withdrawn.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Chris parks just outside a mini mall salon, steps out and spots a cute redhead at the register. The two catch eyes as the redhead offers a lukewarm smile.

INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Chris enters, holds the door for an older WOMAN with her hair freshly curled.

CHRIS

You look ravishing.

WOMAN

Why thank you.

CHRIS

You're welcome.

The redhead cracks a grin and rolls her eyes as she preps her station. This is ANDREA (20s), cute, too much makeup, sexy but somewhat slutty outfit.

Chris cracks a shit eating grin as he struts his way to Andrea's station.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I take it since my phone hasn't rang all day and you're still working that you decided against joining me for the weekend.

ANDREA

Why do you constantly do that?

CHRIS

What?

ANDREA

Compliment every single person you pass on the sidewalk. It was kinda cute at first but the Dudley Do Right act is getting old.

CHRIS

You're right. I should be so much less sensitive to people's feelings. Tell you what. I'll run back out there, bring her back and tell her how terrible she looks. Maybe if I really tear into her, she'll ask for her money back.

ANDREA

Never mind. Forget I said anything.

Andrea sweeps some hair into a corner as Chris studies her overall demeanor.

CHRIS

You're in a mood.

ANDREA

I'm sorry, I'm just...

CHRIS

Tired? Ready for the weekend?

ANDREA

Yes. I mean no. I mean...yes I'm tired. No I'm not ready for the weekend.

CHRIS

Why not? You said your family's not coming in this year. You're gonna be all alone and needed some company the last I heard. Don't tell me you got a better offer.

Andrea's co workers all turn and stare at them. Chris offers them a dumb smile.

ANDREA

Look. Can we talk about this outside?

EXT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Andrea ducks out, pops a smoke in her mouth. Chris quickly snags it from her lip, tosses it in a nearby trash bin.

CHRIS

Come on. You just quit last week. What are you doing?

ANDREA

No, actually. You quit for me. Kind of what I wanna talk to you about.

CHRIS

Okay, I'm lost.

ANDREA

I appreciate everything you've done for me. With my P.O. For getting me back on my feet. For helping me land this job. Everything. But it's been three months. I feel like I'm this special project you can't let go of.

CHRIS

What're you talking about?

ANDREA

I'm talking about the only time I ever see you is when you've just lost a case or you're feeling sorry for yourself. I feel like the only reason you come see me is for validation.

Chris throws his hands in his pockets, shimmies his feet on the sidewalk and avoids Andrea.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Like you need this constant pat on the back. Okay, fine. You're a terrific lawyer. A great person. You help a lot of people.

(MORE)

ANDREA (CONT'D)

But you have to face the fact that there are some people you just can't help. No matter how bad you try.

CHRIS

Where is this coming from?

ANDREA

Come on. Are you telling me I'm the girl of your dreams you've been waiting to bring home to Mommy for Christmas? A recovering addict charged with three counts of check fraud?

Chris plays lost.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

Don't play me for a fool, Chris. I know what you're trying to do with me and it's not cool. I'm not your trophy.

CHRIS

Okay, I'm still lost.

ANDREA

For whatever reason, in that big hard head of yours, you look at yourself like a failure. And you wanna bring me home to your family as some kind of validation of a job well done. Well I'm not interested.

Chris slumps down on a bench, defeated. Andrea parks right next to him.

CHRIS

A simple no would've sufficed.

ANDREA

Look. We had a couple of good nights. Okay, we had several good nights. But the last thing I need right now is any complications. I worked hard to stay clean for the last three months. I just don't think I can handle anymore outside distractions right now.

Chris nods half-heartedly.

CHRIS
Is it okay I check in on you from
time to time?

ANDREA
No.

Chris is sad by this but nods with understanding.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
I'm a big girl. Stop trying to
save me. You looking to save
someone, try looking in the mirror
sometime.

Chris stares at the ground. A smug grin as he nods.

Andrea kisses his cheek.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas. Enjoy your
weekend.

Andrea heads back to work. Chris watches her with a sincere
sadness about him.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - BASEMENT - DAY

Joe stumbles down the steep basement steps and into a very
busy game room. Air hockey, pool table and ping pong.

Hanging on a wall is a very large flatscreen tv. Joe checks
to see if he's alone, grabs the remote from a corner pocket
on the pool table, turns on the news.

A random traffic report plays out as Joe checks the DVR
recordings. Five CHANNEL 9 NEWS REPORTS are on the most
recent list. He plays one:

ON TV:

A young black student SHAUN LEWIS (16) wheels his way out the
emergency room doors in a wheelchair as he's hounded by
reporters and tv cameras. A NURSE behind the chair and his
father JAMES LEWIS (50s), suit and tie, by his side.

REPORTER #1
Mister Lewis, would you care to
comment on Officer Cullen's recent
suspension and pending dismissal
from the police force?

JAMES

At this time, I am filled with so many different emotions. Some of them very bad. Some very angry to say the least. But most of all grateful. Grateful that my son is alive and still with us. Grateful that our country has been awakened to this...very sad but very real prejudice that exists. I could easily let my anger and resentment take control of me. But right now, I'm very very happy.

JOE

Yeah, I bet you are.

Becks slowly walks up behind him. Joe turns, stares back at her.

JOE (CONT'D)

Look at this clown. You can practically see the dollar signs in his eyes.

BECKS

Or maybe he's just happy his kid's not dead. And so should you be.

JOE

Now I remember what I hated about growing up here. Thin walls.

BECKS

I'm very sorry I interrupted your fun. But your sister just pulled up. Or should I just leave you a bottle and lock the basement door?

Joe paces the floor and shakes his head with disgust.

JOE

Did you know she's got over three hours of news DVR'd? Not upstairs where we can see it but down here. Like she's hiding something.

BECKS

Maybe she just likes the news.

JOE

Even Mom knows I'm fucked. That's why she looks like she hasn't had a wink of sleep in weeks. Because she hasn't.

BECKS

None of us have. We're worried sick. Who isn't?

JOE

You know what she's doing? She's watching these reports over and over again. Like she's trying to convince herself that her biggest fear about her son isn't coming true right in front of her eyes.

BECKS

Nobody thinks you're a racist. So stop it. Now if you're done, your sister's waiting upstairs. Get it together.

Becks heads upstairs. Joe throws his hands on his hips in protest. Pretends to stand his ground but follows Becks with his tail between his legs.

JOE

Yeah. Let the festivities begin. I know I'm pumped.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - DAY

Joe, arms folded, throws the thousand yard stare to Kevon from across the room. Kevon also stares down Joe.

Janet strokes Marnie's new hair as the girls discuss girl talk and try hard not to notice the awkward standoff.

Becks walks in with a couple beers in hand. Gives one to Joe and then to Kevon.

JANET

I don't hate it. It's just different. But what I think doesn't matter. All that matters is that you like it.

MARNIE

I hate it when you say that. It's like, when you say that I know that you really hate it.

JANET

Well. I thought it would be rude to tell you I hated your hair in front of company.

Becks watches the awkward exchange between Joe and Kevon and intervenes.

BECKS

Well I like it. It's different. Every once in awhile, you gotta just go for it. You never know until you try.

(to Joe)

Right, Joe?

JOE

Sure. If there's one thing about my little sister I always appreciated, it's the element of surprise. After all, nobody likes to ruffle feathers more than me.

(to Marnie)

But I gotta say, sis. You've outdone yourself this time.

KEVON

Funny. I was just thinking the same thing.

MARNIE

Thanks, Joe. Since you're feet are obviously stuck to the carpet, I'll make the first move.

Marnie, arms wide open, walks to Joe and bear hugs him. Gives him a smooch on the cheek. Joe never breaks eye contact with Kevon.

JOE

Don't be so rude, Marnie. Aren't you gonna introduce your new boyfriend?

MARNIE

Well. Actually, he's not my boyfriend...

Kevon shifts his angry stare to Marnie who avoids eye contact with him.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

At least not at the moment. He is, however, my best friend in the whole world and would make a great boyfriend.

Marnie wraps her arms around his waist, kisses his cheek as this really gets to Joe.

JANET

Oh. And did you two meet at school?

KEVON

No. Actually
(beat)
Well. Yes and no.

Janet laughs. Checks with both Becks and Joe who are still busy being angry.

JANET

I'm confused.

JOE

No need to be so nervous, Kev.
We're all family here.

Becks rubs her tired eyes. Janet takes notice of her obvious embarrassment.

KEVON

We actually grew up together. Had a lot of the same classes back in the day. I've actually been to your house twice as a matter of fact.

JANET

Really?

KEVON

Marnie's ninth and tenth birthday parties. I guess you could say I sort of invited myself.

Marnie squeezes Kevon closer.

MARNIE

He had a hardcore crush on me. For years. It was truly pathetic. Really.

KEVON

Don't feel bad if you don't remember. I'm not so sure Marnie even knew I was there to tell you the truth.

JOE

I'm sure Dad would've remembered.

They all turn and stare at Joe in a most uncomfortable silence.

JOE (CONT'D)

You know. Since he was so great at remembering faces and all.

BECKS

Joe, why don't you help me carve the bird. I'm sure Kevon and Marnie have been dreaming of a real meal for weeks.

Janet shoots Joe a dirty look but smiles nicely at Becks.

JANET

Yes, I think that's a wonderful idea. Thank you, Becky.

Becks grabs Joe by the arm and drags him toward the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Joe uses an electric knife to carve down a giant turkey. Becks removes the foil from several casserole dishes.

JOE

She's really outdone herself this time.

BECKS

Hold it together. I just watched your mother's face turn three shades of red before my eyes. I've never seen anything like it.

JOE

She's trying to push my buttons.
She gets off on this. I'm telling
you.

BECKS

Or maybe this kid had nothing going
on for the holidays and she felt
sorry for him. Not everything has
to do with you, Joe.

Becks places large spoons in all of the prepared dishes as
Joe carves some more meat.

JOE

Okay. Go ask our new friend Kevon
what he thinks about it. You think
he would've signed up for a wild
weekend with George Zimmerman if he
had a say in it?

BECKS

Probably not.

Becks thinks it over.

BECKS (CONT'D)

Unless...

JOE

Unless what?

BECKS

Unless he wanted to meet you face
to face. He could very well be
understandably curious.

JOE

So he can stick his dick in my
sister on a clear conscience? Is
that what you're saying?

BECKS

No. You heard Marnie. They're
just friends so calm the hell
down. And would it really bother
you if it were more than that?

JOE

No comment.

Joe keeps his eyes on the turkey and carves away.

BECKS

Yeah. That's a great idea, Joe.
Keep your comments to yourself.

JOE

You heard him. He's been here twice. If he knew the family he had to have heard what happened. Unless he's locked himself in his dorm with the tv off for the last few weeks, he knows.

BECKS

Okay, so he knows. Maybe he just doesn't give a shit and cares about your sister.

Joe laughs at the thought.

JOE

They all give a shit. They stick together no matter what. No matter what the evidence says. This kid could've shot me in the back and they'd be marching in the streets screaming self defense.

Becks pops a handful of aspirins, chases it down with a swig of beer.

BECKS

Get a hold of yourself, Joe. Get a hold of yourself or I swear to God I'll get up right in the middle of dinner and go home. I don't give a shit.

Joe huffs in protest as he carves the last of the turkey.

BECKS (CONT'D)

I'll go home, jerk off and eat a peanut butter and jelly. Call it a day.

Becks carries a couple dishes into the dining room.

JOE

That was a very disturbing image.
Thank you.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - REAR PORCH - DAY

Janet hugs and kisses Chris as he hangs his winter coat on a hand carved rack.

CHRIS
Sorry I'm late. What did I miss?

Kevon and Marnie relax on a two seat swing. Chris catches eyes with Kevon and can't help but look stunned.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Hello there.

Kevon cracks a fake smile and half-heartedly stands as Chris walks their direction. The two shake as Marnie watches the awkward exchange.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Chris Cullen. Marnie's brother.

KEVON
Yes, sir, I know. We met about eleven years ago.

CHRIS
(smiles)
Of course we did. How could I forget?

Chris shoots Marnie a concerned stare. She quickly intervenes and stands between them.

MARNIE
So, anyways, Kevon and I were just chatting about you.

CHRIS
All good I hope.

KEVON
She was just saying how happy you were with your new job and all. Congrats, by the way.

CHRIS
Yeah, thanks. You know, just like any job, it has its up and downs. In this line of work, you're not always dealt a winning hand. You gotta take the good with the bad. But it's mostly good.

KEVON

Yeah, I bet. But, man, listen. In all honesty, I just wanted to say with all that's going on today, it takes a special person to see both sides. To deal with what you gotta deal with. Much respect. Really.

Chris nods and smiles.

CHRIS

Thanks. I appreciate it.

Janet smiles with pride and respect.

JANET

That's Chris. Ever since he was a kid he had a soft spot for people. A real kind heart. He got that from his father.

Joe scoffs out loud. Everyone turns and stares.

JOE

Is this the same man you called the most cynical sonofabitch you ever knew?

Janet looks down in embarrassment. Chris and Marnie shoot him an ugly stare.

JOE (CONT'D)

Kind of a stretch from the man with a heart of gold, don't you think?

Janet stares dead at Joe. A serious look.

JANET

(to Joe)

What Joe is trying to say...

Janet smiles for the others.

JANET (CONT'D)

...is that his father wasn't perfect. And sometimes he cared too much. And when you care too much, you tend to hold things inside instead of letting them go.

Janet wraps her arm around Chris.

JANET (CONT'D)

I'm talking to you, Chris. You've been with the defender's office for seven lousy months and you already look stressed.

CHRIS

I'm fine, Mom. Just a little overworked.

Joe slumps down in a rocking chair, beer in hand.

JOE

Can't say as I have that problem little brother.

Chris turns to him. A mix of pity and real concern.

CHRIS

Yeah.

Becks watches the two brothers. Nervous.

BECKS

On that note, dinner is ready if anyone's hungry. Which I believe everyone is if I'm not mistaken.

Joe claps his hands together. Excited. He quickly stands and heads for the dining room.

JOE

I know I'm starved. Let's eat.

Janet shuts her eyes from sheer embarrassment. Chris gives her a quick hug and heads inside.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Joe sits at one end of the long table with Janet at the other. Kevon and Marnie on one side, Chris and Becks across from them.

JANET

So how did you two get reacquainted anyway?

MARNIE

Well. It was nowhere near campus believe it or not.

(MORE)

MARNIE (CONT'D)

We ran into each other at this really cool dueling pianos bar a good twenty minutes outside of town.

She nods at Chris.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Chris knows the place.

CHRIS

Lefty's.

MARNIE

Yep. So I go up to order round two for the girls and there he was. Waiting on his tab.

KEVON

Yeah, for twenty five minutes I might add.

MARNIE

So he's staring right at me, acting all cool like we don't know each other.

Marnie smiles at Kevon who cracks a grin.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

I finally make a move since Kevon's obviously too big of a wussy.

BECKS

Ouch.

MARNIE

And before I can open my mouth, here comes the bartender with his ticket.

KEVON

Thirty minutes later.

MARNIE

A half hour later. Think about it. If he would've been ten seconds sooner with that tab, we would've never talked.

Marnie and Kevon stare into each other's eyes.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

It could've been another ten whole years since we saw each other again.

Janet, hand under chin, hangs on every word with a giant grin on her face.

JANET

It's like it was fate.

Joe rolls his eyes as Becks notices.

KEVON

So to make a long story longer, we met at Lefty's every Friday night for the next four weeks straight.

Marnie points to Kevon.

MARNIE

His idea.

KEVON

What can I say? I'm a hopeless romantic.

Marnie smooches him on the cheek and checks to see if Joe's watching. Kevon notices.

JOE

Marnie ever tell you she had an alcohol problem?

Janet drops her fork as it crashes to the china.

JANET

Joe, what the hell.

KEVON

No, Joe. I guess the subject never came up.

JOE

She got started real young. Even younger than me. Chris was the smart one. Never touched the stuff. Yep. Somehow he steered clear of the family bug. Unlike me and Marnie.

Chris cracks an awkward smile for Kevon.

JOE (CONT'D)

Marnie was a handful. By age twelve she was raiding the liquor cabinet with her friends. By thirteen she was climbing out the window and sneaking home just before sun up. Loaded out of her mind. If it weren't for Dad pulling so many strings, she would've spent her whole middle school years in juvie. It's true.

CHRIS

Joe, I don't think this is the time for memory lane.

Joe laughs out loud as the memories hit him all at once.

JOE

I mean, she was a real partier. She'd do anything to get a reaction. It drove Dad nuts. Hell, some of us even blame her for Dad's first heart attack. Including Dad.

Marnie's eyes well with tears. Kevon notices.

JANET

What's the matter with you? Nobody blames her for your father.
(to Marnie)
Nobody blames you, sweetie.

Marnie isn't so sure as she stares her mother down with hate in her eyes.

JOE

Until finally he said enough of this. Held her down and beat her so hard she was black and blue for weeks. Mom doesn't wanna admit in front of company and all but she's grateful he knocked some sense into her before he kicked.

CHRIS

Fuck, Joe.

JOE

But if you ask me, I still see that rebellious little girl when I look in those eyes.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

I see an angry, spoiled brat who'll do anything to get back at her mother for turning her back all those years ago.

Janet watches Marnie closely as rage consumes her bright red face.

JANET

Is there a point to any of this, Joseph?

JOE

Sorry. I didn't mean to go off track like that. I guess what I'm trying to say is...

(to Kevon)

We don't condone Marnie's drinking. And we sure as hell don't like the idea of any young man who would take advantage of her obvious problems with alcohol as the quickest route into her pants.

Kevon can hardly believe it as he holds back a nervous laugh and shakes his head.

MARNIE

Point taken.

JOE

Good. Then we're clear on the subject.

(to Kevon)

Aren't we, Kevon?

KEVON

Yes, sir.

CHRIS

You'll have to forgive my brother. He's going through a hard time right now.

Joe gives Chris a nasty stare.

JOE

Thanks, Chris. I think he knows that. I think everyone is well aware of that.

(to Marnie)

That's why you brought him here, isn't it?

Marnie drops her fork and folds her arms in protest. Kevon watches her closely.

JOE (CONT'D)

I mean, your timing is perfect.

Joe cracks a fake smile for Kevon.

JOE (CONT'D)

You see, somewhere down the line, some psyche professor at this fancy ass school of hers convinced her that all cops were fascist, right wing nut jobs who shoot black people for target practice. And she's so arrogant and has such low respect for you, she thinks she needs to be your voice. Just like every other radical leftist liberal.

BECKS

Come on, Joe. That's not fair and you know it.

JOE

Okay, you're right. I'm placing all the blame on Marnie.

(to Kevon)

The truth is nobody drug you here, Kevon. You made that decision all by yourself. Which I find kind of fascinating. Given present circumstances and all.

KEVON

And what circumstances are those?

JOE

Since you and Marnie are good friends and all. Did she ever tell you what happened to our old man?

JANET

Joe, this is very inappropriate. Games are over. Enough.

JOE

He was shot in the back three times by a young black kid around your age. A couple years younger.

Kevon checks with Janet who tears up at the thought. She offers Kevon a warm smile.

KEVON

I didn't know that. I'm very sorry to hear.

JOE

You didn't know that. Okay. You didn't know that. But you did know about my current circumstance. Did you not?

Kevon nervously plays with his linen napkin.

JOE (CONT'D)

You see, my whole family thinks I was channeling Dad's spirit when I shot that kid. That somehow I knew he didn't have a gun and shot him anyways. All because I've never been able to let go what happened to Pop. I already know what they think.

(beat)

What do you think about it, Kev? I mean, you must've known the subject would come up.

KEVON

Guess I never gave it that much thought, Joe.

Joe scoffs at him. He checks with Becks and Chris who are both visibly uncomfortable.

JOE

Don't do that. Don't you sit there, at the table my father built with his bare fuckin hands and lie to my face, and to my mother's face like that.

MARNIE

What the fuck's the matter with you?

JOE

You've been looking forward to today. To sitting there with that smug smile while your hand's up my sister's skirt. So just admit it. Admit that you're loving every minute of this.

KEVON

I can't say that I am, Joe.

JOE
Yeah, I bet.

Marnie shoots Joe a smartass grin.

JOE (CONT'D)
(to Marnie)
Yeah. Look at you. Let's not pretend you're not enjoying the hell out of this. This is exactly what you wanted.

Kevon stands to leave.

KEVON
On that note, I think it's time I got going. I sincerely apologize if my presence here has offended anyone.

Kevon heads for the door. Janet jumps to her feet, sincere.

JANET
Don't. Please. You're a guest in my home. And I'm asking you to stay. Please.

Kevon checks with Joe.

JOE
No. Let him leave. Because I'll tell you something, Kevon. In case you haven't figured it out yet.

He points to Marnie

JOE (CONT'D)
She's using you. She wants me to get so hopping mad I jump across the table and choke you out. She's counting on it. I do that...she can prove once and for all time that I'm nothing but the racist, violent pig our father was.
(to Marnie)
Just tell him.

Marnie stays strangely quiet, stares at the table.

JANET
Not one more word. If you care anything about your father's memory or this home you'll stay quiet.

KEVON

If that's true, I'm very sorry to hear that, Joe. Sounds to me like you all have some serious talking to do. I won't get in the middle of that. Excuse me.

Kevon heads for the door. Marnie kicks her chair backward as it crashes to the floor. She storms after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CULLEN HOME - DUSK

Kevon is almost to his car at the curb when Marnie storms out the front door.

MARNIE

If you leave me here like this, you're not the friend I thought you were.

KEVON

You're right. Maybe we're not friends. Last I checked, friends don't set other friends up to be ambushed by their bigoted older brother.

MARNIE

Okay, so I've got a lot of explaining to do. Come back inside and we can talk about it. Just the two of us.

KEVON

Tell you what. I'm gonna need a minute to think about it.

MARNIE

Fair enough. Anyways. I hope to see you back inside. And I'm sorry. Really.

Marnie ducks back in. Chris holds the door open, steps outside. He feels the cool crisp air as he rubs his hands together.

KEVON

Don't know if you noticed, but it's cold out here.

CHRIS

Yeah, and it's a little too hot in there.

KEVON

You know, your brother's a pretty angry guy.

CHRIS

Don't take it personally. If you weren't here, he'd be yelling at me. You just happened to catch him at a pretty bad time.

Kevon smiles.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's go downstairs and shoot some stick. I think I left some beer down there from last year's festivities.

Kevon stares back at his car, unsure. Chris reads his reluctance.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I changed my mind. It's cold out here. Come on.

Kevon slowly shuffles his way back to the door. Chris ducks back in.

INT. MARNIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marnie flips through an old photo album which feature her and her father, Joseph Cullen, Senior. She is in her younger years. After a few pages, the photos show Marnie in her later teens and no Joseph.

Becks knocks and enters. Marnie is caught by surprise, faces her still at the door.

MARNIE

Is he gone?

BECKS

Who? Your boyfriend? No, he's downstairs with Chris. Shooting a game.

MARNIE

He's not my boyfriend. I told you that already.

Becks walks further into the room, looks down at Marnie's photo album.

BECKS

Yeah, you keep saying that. Does he know that?

MARNIE

What do you mean?

Becks snags the album from Marnie's lap, flips through a few pages.

BECKS

You brought him home for Christmas. Kind of a big deal. Even for serious boyfriends.

MARNIE

I don't know. I guess I haven't decided on where we stand.

BECKS

You haven't decided yet so you brought him home on Christmas holiday to get your mother's and Joe's approval? No. You brought him here to push their buttons.

MARNIE

He's my best friend, Becky.

BECKS

Good for you and him. But you should've left him at school.

Becks drops the photo album on Marnie's bed. Marnie shoots Becks a dismayed look.

BECKS (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like that. This isn't about me. You know what Joe's going through. And this is the only day all year long your mother can have all of us for dinner. Us. Her family. Not some black face Joe has to stare at from across the table.

MARNIE

God, Becks. After the shit he pulled, you're actually taking his side?

Marnie opens a desk drawer, grabs a hairbrush, goes to an armoire where old photos of her and her two brothers in happier times hang from the corners of a mirror.

Marnie brushes her hair out and stares back at Becks who hovers behind her.

BECKS

I'm not taking anyone's side. Not you or Joe. I'm on your mother's side. Today's about her. I hope, for the rest of the day, you and Joe can respect that. Your friend too.

Marnie stops brushing, glances at Becks in the mirror.

MARNIE

What do you mean?

BECKS

What do I mean? I saw the way he was staring at Joe when you guys walked in. Everyone saw it.

Marnie stops, turns to Becks, angry.

MARNIE

Are you kidding? He didn't say anything.

BECKS

He didn't have to, Marnie. I think Joe got the message loud and clear.

MARNIE

Oh, so now it's Kevon's fault Joe lost his shit at the table.

BECKS

Look. You can re-write this any way you want, Marnie. But he shouldn't be here. You know it and I know it. Most importantly, your friend knows it. But he came anyway. Honestly, I find that a little disrespectful.

Marnie stares at herself in the mirror, unsure about everything. Lost.

MARNIE

We never really...talked about it.
About what happened with Joe. He
never asked and I never told.

BECKS

Come on, Marnie. It's been all
over the news for almost two months
now. You didn't have to say
anything. He knew.

Marnie slowly stares back at Becks.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CULLEN HOME - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Joe paces near an old wooden picnic bench and outdoor
barbecue area. A pack of smokes in one hand and cell
in the other.

JOE

(into phone)

I'm losing it here, man. I don't
know how much longer I can keep
this up.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MIKE PERRY'S HOUSE - MIKE'S DEN - NIGHT

Mike stares back at his family playing monopoly at the dining
table. His wife ANGELA (30s), blonde, gorgeous, keeps a
watchful eye on him.

MIKE

(softly)

You've been drinking. Just like I
said not to. You know what happens
if those tv assholes catch you with
a bottle?

JOE (O.S.)

What's wrong, Mikey? Afraid I
might slip up and tell the truth?

Mike fidgets with his hair in a nervous fit, checks to see if
Angela is watching. She mouths "hang up" as Mike turns his
back on her.

MIKE

You already told the truth. We both did. Anything you say now is gonna come off as a desperate attempt to save your own ass. All that's gonna do is land us both in a heap of shit. Stick-to-the plan.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. THE CULLEN HOME - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Joe moves further into the sprawling lawn as Janet quietly sneaks out a rear door, watches from a safe distance.

JOE

What version of this plan have you shared with your wife, Mikey?

MIKE (O.S.)

You think she'd turn her back on you? Take Uncle Joey from her kids? Listen to yourself. You're losing it.

JOE

Am I? Can't help but notice Becks and I haven't been invited for dinner these past few weeks.

Joe turns, spots Janet coming his way.

MIKE (O.S.)

Look. Just cause things are a bit hot right now don't mean you're not welcome in our home. It's just with the kids here and everything. With the baby coming. And the press the way they've been all over you. It's just stress she doesn't need right now.

JOE

Yeah. Well. I appreciate your support. Partner.

Joe hangs up.

JANET

You call Mikey to wish him a Merry Christmas?

JOE
Something like that.

JANET
That's the fourth call you've made today. Sounds like you two have some unfinished business.

Joe smiles, laughs.

JOE
You are a cop's wife, aren't you, Mom?

JANET
It doesn't take a cop's wife to know you got something eating away at you. And it isn't your sister. She just happened to be the most convenient target.

Joe peels the plastic off a pack of smokes. Janet quickly snatches them from his hand.

JANET (CONT'D)
Wanna talk about it?

JOE
Do I have a choice?

JANET
Of course not.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Janet and Joe stroll a sidewalk in their quiet suburban neighborhood.

JOE
I just keep wondering what my life would be like with another partner. If I wasn't cruising the old neighborhood next to a kid I grew up with. It's like every bad trait either of us ever had times ten. Except now we got guns.

A passing car slows to an almost halt.

DRIVER
Keep your chin up, Joey!

The car speeds off as Joe waves and cracks a slight grin.

JOE

Neither one of us willing to call the other out when we know we're doing the wrong thing. It's like we know we got each other's backs. No matter what. That scares the shit out of certain people. It scares the shit out of me.

JANET

Mikey ever talk you into something you didn't wanna do?

Joe sighs out loud, shakes his head. Janet stares into his eyes, reads him.

JANET (CONT'D)

You can't just keep everything balled up inside. It'll kill you. Look what just happened with your sister. You're holding onto things and it's not healthy. If there's things you need to get off your chest, then do it. No one's gonna judge you.

JOE

You wanna tell that to our guest?

JANET

Is that what's making you so upset? You're afraid of what Kevon thinks of you?

JOE

I could give a shit what Kevon thinks of me.

JANET

Then why so angry when I mention his name?

Joe and Janet approach a small children's playground as Joe heads for --

THE SWINGS

and takes a seat.

JOE

Everybody's looking at me and Mike like we're wrong. Like we went looking to hurt those kids.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

They're using what happened to Dad as ammunition.

JANET

You knew as soon as that kid got shot that would happen. So why are you acting so surprised?

JOE

You see the way she looks at me? Marnie? She thinks I'm him, you know.

JANET

That's not such a bad thing, Joe. No matter what anyone says, your father was a great man. Marnie only remembers the bad but that's something she has to come to grips with. It's got nothing to do with you.

JOE

Look, Mom. I know he was great. You don't have to keep trying to convince me. I grew up with the man. But you know what I'm talking about. He wasn't exactly spending his weekends marching with the ACLU. Because of Dad I thought the word nigger was a conjunction until I was fifteen years old.

Janet winces at the thought. She takes a seat in the swing next to Joe.

JANET

You're afraid she might be right. That you're just like him.

JOE

I don't know. Maybe.

Joe stares at the ground, lost, empty.

JANET

You never did tell me what you and Mikey were doing in that apartment building.

Joe looks up quick. Angry.

JOE

Yes. I did. I told you a hundred times. We were following up on a lead.

JANET

Chris said that kid who was shot was never booked in at county. That you and Mikey never arrested him.

JOE

That's because we didn't. We let him go in exchange he gave us his supplier.

JANET

So you went there without a warrant on a tip from a guy you didn't bust? I'm sorry but I guess I don't understand.

Joe avoids Janet's eyes, stands, his cold hands now in his coat pockets.

JOE

Police work isn't always so cut and dry, Mom. Not everything is by the book. If Dad were here, he'd tell you the same thing.

JANET

I'm sure if you're Dad were here, and if he had to do it all over again, he'd do a lot different.

Joe ponders this. A sincere look in his eyes. Janet stands, joins Joe as they walk the playground.

JANET (CONT'D)

He had a lot of regrets. About being a cop. About his family. I don't want this job to destroy you like it did him. Look at what it's doing to you now.

Joe nods with understanding. He stares at the playground around him. Monkey bars, slides, merry go round.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Kevon and Chris in a round of pool. Chris stares at the table and ponders his next move. Kevon exhausted by the day as he leans on his cue.

CHRIS

So, I hear you wanna be a principal.

KEVON

That's right.

CHRIS

You're a bigger man than me, Kevon. I'll give you that.

KEVON

How's that?

CHRIS

These kids today. If they're not fighting or killing each other, they're going after the teachers. Makes me a bit worried about Marnie going into the school system, to be honest. Tell me. Why would either of you wanna sign up for that? With all the shit that's going on anymore.

KEVON

I guess the same reasons you became a public defender.

Chris scoffs at the thought.

CHRIS

Trust me. I'd rather make partner at a big name firm and drive an AMG than deal with some of the maggots and bottom feeders I gotta deal with on a daily basis.

Kevon squints, visibly offended. Chris notices.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

After awhile it gets to you, ya know? Don't get me wrong, Kevon. It's not all about race or color. Some of my white guys are the worst of the lot.

Kevon cracks a fake smile, nods politely.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

It's about the choices people make. It's real easy to point a finger and blame all of society's problems on race or class warfare. But nobody made you rob that register. Or put that gun in your hand.

Kevon seems affected by Chris's words.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

You might think my brother and I are opposite ends of the spectrum but we're not. We're the same. The only difference is, I wear a suit to work and don't get shot at. Not yet, at least.

Chris shoots and misses. Kevon walks the table, ponders his next shot.

KEVON

You know, you don't always have to agree with your brother on everything. Or feel guilty about being down here with me. You two are clearly different. Everyone can see that. And I don't even know you two.

Kevon shoots and scores. He sets up his next shot as Chris watches him closely.

CHRIS

Oh yeah? How so?

KEVON

How many other defense lawyers are there in the family? Other than you?

Chris smiles, nods in agreement.

KEVON (CONT'D)

I thought so. You could've become a cop just like Joe. Just like your father.

Kevon stares at all the family portraits and dress blue photos of various cops on the wall.

KEVON (CONT'D)

And I'm guessing his father before him from what I'm seeing in all these pictures.

Chris stares at the photos with regret.

KEVON (CONT'D)

But not only did you not become a cop, you made a career of putting criminals back on the street.

CHRIS

I don't really look at it that way, Kevon. But yeah.

Kevon sinks another one as Chris grimaces.

KEVON

So when your father found out you wanted to be a lawyer and lost his shit, what did you tell him?

CHRIS

For years, my Dad would come home from work and go on and on about the same shit. Some junky or dealer he just busted for the tenth time working the same block. It's like the county jail had this revolving door that never stopped. Before the ink was dry on the paperwork, these perps were right back on the street committing the same crimes. Nothing he ever did amounted to shit. At least not in the long run.

KEVON

Must've been hard on him. Feeling like you're not doing any good.

CHRIS

I was always taught that the police helped people. Kept people safe. Kept the streets safe for everyone. The older I got, the more I started seeing things the way they really were.

KEVON

How were they?

CHRIS

My father was miserable. You don't drink yourself into a coma four nights a week because the world is so peachy and terrific. The truth was, he wasn't changing shit. What can I say? I didn't want that to be my life. Crazy, huh?

KEVON

So why become a lawyer? When you're dealing with repeat criminals, isn't that kind of worse than being a cop?

CHRIS

I figured it's still law enforcement. Just a different kind. Maybe I could at least help people who felt they had no one else to turn to.

KEVON

In a way you were helping those same people your father could never reach?

CHRIS

Yeah, sort of. I guess so.

KEVON

How's that working out for you?

CHRIS

What can I say? I should've joined the police force.

Kevon laughs.

KEVON

So tell me, man. How come you don't have an old lady?

JOE

Chris is married to the job.

Kevon and Chris both turn and stare at Joe, perched on the steps. He smiles, heads down the remaining stairs, joins the fun and games.

JOE (CONT'D)

At least that's what he keeps telling Mom to keep her off his back.

Joe snags the cue out of Chris's hands.

JOE (CONT'D)

So who's winning?

CHRIS

Kevon is. But I'm just getting warmed up.

JOE

So, Chris, you never did tell us what happened to that young thing you were supposed to bring to dinner. What was her name again?

Chris sighs with a real tiredness. Kevon smiles.

JOE (CONT'D)

Andrea. Yeah, that's right.

(to Kevon)

Chris tell you how they met?

CHRIS

Haven't really gotten that far yet, Joe.

JOE

See, Andrea is this cute young piece I busted on a shoplifting beef last year. A client of Chris's I threw his way. Let me tell you. She wasn't going in easy. Not without putting up a fight. I heard every excuse in the book from this broad.

(mimics)

Oh, that? I forgot about that. That four hundred dollar watch must've fell in my bag.

Joe laughs as Chris grows more uncomfortable.

JOE (CONT'D)

I mean, she had a small fortune tucked away in every crack and crevice of that tight little outfit of hers. She's looking at sixty days in the can. Easily.

CHRIS

Okay. Story time is over. Good one, Joe.

JOE

So we're out by my car and she offers me a blowjob. I say no can do, sweetheart. You'd think she'd learn her lesson by now. Not her.

Kevon chuckles and Chris isn't amused.

JOE (CONT'D)

So she says if I let her go, I can stick it wherever I want. So now not only do I got her for shoplifting but I got her for attempting to bribe a police officer and prostitution.

Joe points at a shameful Chris.

JOE (CONT'D)

Now guess who gets stuck defending this Andrea? Of all people.

Kevon and Chris catch eyes. Chris looks tired and defeated.

KEVON

Chris.

JOE

You know what this bitch does? Tells the judge I solicited sexual favors from her. And she was the one who refused. Of course the judge isn't buying a word of this crap and tosses her inside for the full sixty.

Joe stares dead at Chris.

JOE (CONT'D)

Chris here must've been feeling seriously guilty about poor old Andrea and her pig of an older brother because he went straight to the judge and got her off with probation and time served.

CHRIS

(to Kevon)

It was a situation. To put it mildly.

JOE

What I'm wondering is...what exactly did old Andrea promise Chris to get such a slap on the wrist like that? Probation and time served. Well. It must've been life changing because last I heard down at the station, Chris and Andrea were practically a pair.

CHRIS

You come down here to shoot some stick or shoot off your mouth?

JOE

Sorry little brother. But someone had to ask. I couldn't help but notice she couldn't make it today.

Chris heads for the fridge and cracks a beer. He grabs a second and walks it to Kevon.

JOE (CONT'D)

You know what I think? I think Chris started believing the stories. That I stuck my big old pecker in old Andrea and he couldn't handle the thought of bringing her to the dinner table.

CHRIS

That's enough, Joe. Why don't you squash it.

Joe throws his hands in the air in a defensive manner.

JOE

Hey. At least I'm leaving Kevon alone. Can't let him feel like the only one with a target on his back. Not with all these other juicy stories goin' around. What fun is that?

CHRIS

Why don't we try just having a conversation. Maybe act like a family. For just a few hours.

JOE

Conversation. Okay.

(to Kevon)

So. Kevon. How long you been fuckin our sister?

CHRIS

What the fuck's the matter with you?

JOE

It's a fair question. And we're all adults down here. The last I checked.

KEVON

Does it really matter that much to you?

JOE

Just humor me for a second. How long?

KEVON

A couple of months.

JOE

Okay.

(to Chris)

You see that? That wasn't so hard. I asked a question and he answered it. Great. A couple months.

(to Kevon)

And you guys said you met at Lefty's bar?

KEVON

That's right.

JOE

Crazy. You haven't seen each other in ten years and there you were. Within a few feet of each other at some random bar nowhere near school.

CHRIS

Is there a point to this, Joe?

JOE

Sorry, counselor. Was I being argumentative? My apologies to the court. But I'm not through with this witness.

CHRIS

I didn't know anyone was on trial here.

JOE

Just reminded you that this isn't a courtroom. And Kevon isn't your client. So let the man answer for himself.

(to Kevon)

When you say two months, was it really two months, or just shy of two months?

ON THE STAIRS

Marnie quietly ducks down, listens in on their heated conversation.

KEVON (O.S.)

A little over a month and a half.

BASEMENT

JOE

A month and a half. That's a little bit under two months if my math serves me.

KEVON

Yes, sir, it is.

JOE

You two must've had a lot to talk about, huh?

KEVON

Yes, I suppose we did.

JOE

I suppose you two talked a great deal about my case then?

Kevon slowly cracks a smug grin.

KEVON

Can't say that it ever came up, Joe.

JOE

(to Chris)

Never came up.

Chris watches Kevon closely.

JOE (CONT'D)

Let me ask you another question, Kevon. Who did you go to Lefty's with that night?

CHRIS

What the hell is this, Joe?

JOE

I'm not through questioning this witness!

(to Kevon)

You and Marnie stayed another couple hours. Closed the place down. So what happened to your crew? The guys you came with?

KEVON

I didn't come with anyone else. I was there alone.

JOE

Twenty five minutes outside of town? And you came alone? All by yourself?

CHRIS

Objection. The witness has already answered the question.

KEVON

That's right.

JOE

Had to be plenty of places to get a quick beer closer to school. What I don't get is...why go all the way out to Lefty's if it's just you?

Marnie quietly walks down the last few steps, shoes her face to the room. Kevon peeks over his shoulder at her.

KEVON

I don't know, Joe. Maybe I just really like that bar.

Marnie stares at Kevon with accusatory eyes.

JOE

That's funny. Marnie's in there every weekend with her girlfriends. Closing the place down.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

And, this, being your favorite bar around, you two never once ran into each other before that night.

MARNIE

What's he talking about, Kevon?

CHRIS

Nothing. He doesn't know what he's saying. He's drunk.

Kevon slow claps. His eyes unflinching, emotionless.

KEVON

Nice work, Detective. You figured me out. Now let's talk about you.

JOE

I'm an open book, Kev. Give it your best shot.

KEVON

That's what you want, isn't it? Get me all worked up. Maybe even work up the nerve to throw a punch. You get to knock a black boy on his ass and be the big hero in your mother's house.

CHRIS

That's right, Kevon. So don't play his game. Be smart.

JOE

(to Chris)

No. Kevon here can't play it cool.

(to Kevon)

Because Kevon's got something to say. And he's been waiting almost two months to say it to my face.

MARNIE

(to Kevon)

Is that true?

Kevon turns to her, strangely quiet.

CHRIS

(to Marnie)

Hey. Don't you start too. He's playing both of you.

(to all)

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Now, all of you need to knock it off. We're not doing this again.

Joe heads to the fridge, grabs a beer, cracks and takes a generous swig.

JOE

Come on, Chris. Things were just getting interesting. Don't kill the party yet. Come on. In a couple weeks I won't be a cop anymore. Let me enjoy this.

CHRIS

Enjoy what exactly? What are you trying to prove here, Joe? That Kevon came here to start trouble? That he's the aggressor and not you? Well I don't think that's gonna work out for you.

JOE

Tell you what. If I can't get him to tell us the truth, I'll get it from his girlfriend.

Kevon checks with Marnie.

MARNIE

(angry)

Just shut up, Joe!

JOE

Maybe Kevon is the victim in all of this. Sorry, Kev.

(to Marnie)

Why'd you bring him here?

Becks races down the steps, angry as hell.

BECKS

You don't have to answer that.

JOE

Look who dropped in. Thought you'd be halfway home by now.

BECKS

Yeah, well, I left my keys down here. And I'm taking you with me. Let's go.

JOE

Go where, Becks? I got nowhere else to go. Look around.

Becks and the others all share a look.

JOE (CONT'D)

My whole life is in this room. Right here, right now. The answer to all of it. And you wanna go home and have a turkey sandwich.

Becks walks off the steps, heads over to Joe.

BECKS

The answer to all of what, Joey? You're not making sense.

JOE

All of it.

Joe stares down Marnie.

JOE (CONT'D)

The answer to why my sister stopped talking to Mom since Pop died.

Joe struts over to Chris still by the pool table.

JOE (CONT'D)

Why my own brother thinks I robbed a dealer and shot that kid in cold blood.

(to Becks)

Why my fiancé can barely look me in the eye let alone touch me.

Becks turns her back, now in tears.

JOE (CONT'D)

(to all)

I mean, these are pressing issues to say the least. I mean, we can keep dodging them if that's how you wanna play it. Or we can stop all the bullshit and lay it all out on the table.

KEVON

What really happened that day? At that dealer's apartment? Is it true what they say? That you tried to rob him?

JOE

Thank you for starting things off,
Kevon. The answer is none of your
fuckin business.

Chris scoffs at him.

CHRIS

That's great. Really great. So
much for putting it all on the
table.

JOE

Hey. At least I was honest with
the kid.

MARNIE

Were you? Were you really being
honest?

JOE

Yes. I was. It's what I'm
thinking. Which is more than I can
say for you.

Joe points at Kevon.

JOE (CONT'D)

That's why you brought Superfly to
dinner. You were hoping he'd say
fuck you so you didn't have to.

BECKS

Watch your mouth, Joe.

MARNIE

His name's Kevon.

JOE

Yeah, well. Kevon is a piece of
shit. Because he used you to get
to me. He's been waiting for the
opportunity to get us all together
like this so he can give me a piece
of his mind.

Joe points at Marnie.

JOE (CONT'D)

And you knew it. You knew it this
whole time. Since he "bumped into
you" at Lefty's, and you didn't say
shit.

Kevon checks with Marnie. Both have guilt written on their faces.

JOE (CONT'D)

You see, that's the difference between you and me. I got the balls to call him an asshole to his face.

Joe smiles at the lot of them.

JOE (CONT'D)

But you all conveniently keep your feelings all balled up inside like some kind of secret. And somehow that makes you better than me.

CHRIS

No one said they were better than you, Joe.

JOE

Spoken by the only man in three generations of this family who never wore the uniform. Righteous indignation incarnate.

CHRIS

You're out of line.

JOE

You hate me, don't you, Chris? You see Dad every time you look at my face. I look like him and sound like him...

(to all)

...and you all hate me for it. You knew the day I shot some nigger boy in the back was coming. And all of you were waiting for it.

Kevon huffs his chest with anger. Marnie holds him back.

JOE (CONT'D)

You know what's funny? Somehow my problems have made all of your lives difficult. Like this is all about you and your standing in the community. Well, excuse the shit out of me. The last I checked...

Joe tears up. Wipes his eyes.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm the one that sees that kid's face every fucking time I shut my eyes.

(to Marnie)

Not you.

(to Chris)

Or you.

(to Kevon)

Or you, Kevon.

CHRIS

I always wished you the best, Joe. Everyone did. And that's more than I ever got from you. Or Mom.

Kevon, Marnie, Becks all watch Chris with a sincere sadness about them.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Because why? I chose to defend some of those niggers and spics and poor white trash. Just like that kid you've been crying your eyes out about for the last two months. They all have names believe it or not.

He points to Marnie

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I could stand here and yell at Marnie for bringing Kevon here today but the truth is she's the only one who gets it.

Kevon grabs Marnie's hand. A warm smile.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

She sees you coming apart at the seams. She knew it took bringing Kevon here today to pull the truth out of you. She knows you just like she knew Dad. All you ever saw from Dad was the good. She saw the bad.

Joe chugs his beer, turns his back on them. Chris follows behind, doesn't let up.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

She saw what the job did to him. The guilt over all the dirty shit he pulled.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Every project kid he ever kicked
the hell out of or planted evidence
on. She saw it even when Mom
couldn't.

JOE

Okay, so what do you want? An
apology?

Joe turns to Marnie.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Marnie. Okay? You
happy?
(to all)
Everyone happy?

Chris shuts his eyes, rubs his sore nose. Becks with full
tears in her eyes.

BECKS

You're so angry, Joe. You gotta
let it go.

JOE

Let it go, huh? Just let it go.

Joe smiles at Kevon.

JOE (CONT'D)

What do you think, Kevon? Should I
let it go?

Marnie wraps her arms around his, keeps him calm.

MARNIE

Just stay quiet.

JOE

Take it easy little sister. I'm
just asking him a question.
(to Kevon)
I'm about to lose my job.
Everything I ever worked towards
and I'm supposed to just...let it
go.

Joe stares at Becks and Chris with disgust.

JOE (CONT'D)

(to Kevon)
You see, nobody really wants to
talk about what happened to Shaun
Lewis because you're in the room.

KEVON
I'd actually like to hear their
opinion.

Joe, surprised, turns to Becks who isn't exactly enthused by the idea.

JOE
Great. Let's start with Becks.

BECKS
Don't do this.

JOE
You think I went there to rob that
dealer, Becks?

Becks checks with Chris, who shakes his head "no".

BECKS
I think you'll go anywhere Mikey
tells you to go.

Joe slams his beer bottle down with a hard crash. This startles Becks.

JOE
Tell me the truth! Do you think I
went there to rob that dealer? Yes
or no?

Becks stalls.

BECKS
Yes. Did you?

Joe holds her in suspense. And then, a slight grin.

JOE
Sure. Been doing it for months
now. Are you happy?

Becks is fuming mad, red with anger.

JOE (CONT'D)
(to Kevon)
Did I give you what you came here
to hear?

Kevon smiles. Marnie stares at Joe with pure contempt and utter disappointment.

KEVON
Yes. Thank you.

CHRIS

Guess that explains all the drinking. You've been stealing. Taking bribes too?

JOE

I never took a bribe in my life.

KEVON

No, you just take what doesn't belong to you. That's so much better.

JOE

I guess that makes Shaun Lewis better than me. That he just happened to be behind that door and caught a couple stray shots.

Joe turns to Becks.

JOE (CONT'D)

It was an accident! You think I could see through that door like fuckin Superman?

CHRIS

If I were you, Joe, I'd stop talking.

JOE

Let me tell you something. Something very important. Shaun Lewis never accidentally slung crack to middle schoolers. I wonder if he wasn't stuck in that wheelchair just how many lives he would've taken in his day. I'd love to do a little compare and contrast twenty years from now.

Kevon looks down in shame. His face full of tension and mixed anger.

JOE (CONT'D)

But nobody wants to talk about that. That's old news. Dirty cops. Now, they're all the rage. Just ask anyone.

(to all)

Isn't that the new politically correct answer?

KEVON

Now where would anyone get that idea, Joe?

MARNIE

(whispers)

Don't push him.

JOE

That's why nobody blinked an eye when you walked through the door, Kevon. They wouldn't dare wanna be mixed in with the other racists.

(mimics)

Pull up a chair and let us fix you a plate, young man. Wow. Aren't they a lovely couple.

(to Kevon)

Trust me. No one was thinking that.

KEVON

I'm sure they weren't.

Marnie shoots Kevon a dirty look.

CHRIS

You're right, Joe. Marnie should've left him at school and you're drunk. So let's call it on the count of rain, okay?

Joe just shoots Kevon a smug grin but slowly backs off as he heads to the fridge for a new beer.

Kevon's face twitches with sheer anger.

KEVON

(to Joe)

You're right. About everything. I wanted to meet you. Or I should say...meet again.

Joe squints in confusion as do the others.

KEVON (CONT'D)

That's right. You forgot. Just like I expected you would.

BECKS

(to Marnie)

What's he talking about, Marn?

MARNIE

I don't know.

KEVON

You see, this isn't my first go around at The Cullen household. I was here about ten years ago. Marnie's birthday. Her big brother was passing through. Helping out in the kitchen. Scooping out ice cream, cake and so forth. Until he stared down at this black face that come up behind him. He says "sorry kid. "If I knew you were coming, we would've got some fried chicken and watermelon".

Joe cracks an embarrassed laugh, turns his back on the onlooking crowd. Becks rolls her eyes, takes a big swill of beer.

KEVON (CONT'D)

Now, that might sound like just another day in the Cullen house but for a young impressionable black kid, that kind of shit stays with a person.

Janet walks down the steps.

JANET

I'm sorry.

Kevon turns to her.

JANET (CONT'D)

But not as sorry as Joe. I'm sure. He grew up around that kind of talk.

Joe takes a seat on the couch, huffs in protest. A smartass laugh.

JANET (CONT'D)

Not his fault, really. And just like his father never understood. Words can cut just as deep as a bullet. You can only carry that much hate around inside before one of two things happen. You drop dead of a heart attack or you live long enough that someone else catches the brunt of your anger.

Joe refuses to face his mother as he incessantly taps his feet on the floor, chugs his beer.

JANET (CONT'D)

Well, Joe Senior had not one but two heart attacks and lived through both of them. It seems every night he'd come home and spill all his hate out on me and the kids. Nigger this. Nigger that. It used to drive me nuts. Then, after he was killed by a man of color, that kind of talk only got worse around here.

Chris looks down in shame. Kevon notices.

JANET (CONT'D)

Do you know what scares me the most, Kevon?

KEVON

No, mam.

JANET

That talk no longer bothered me.

Joe looks up, surprised. So are the others.

JANET (CONT'D)

That man had a choice and he chose to kill my husband. To take the father from my children. I want you to take that into consideration before you pass judgement on my son.

Joe stands, joins the others.

KEVON

I will.

They all stand in uncomfortable silence. Chris checks his watch.

CHRIS

Gee. Look at the time, Marnie. Maybe Kevon would like to turn in for the night.

Chris shoots a quick look at Becks who cracks a fake smile for the others.

BECKS

Yeah. Maybe we should give Marnie and Kevon some time alone down here. Go upstairs and get something to eat.

(to Joe)

Whatta you say, Joe. You wanna sandwich?

Joe and Kevon stare each other down.

BECKS (CONT'D)

Joe.

Joe laughs, shakes his head.

JOE

Yeah, sure.

He heads for the stairs. Becks smiles politely at Janet, throws her arm around her necks as the two ladies also head up the steps.

Chris walks toward Kevon with careful respect. A shameful look about him.

CHRIS

Sorry you had to hear all that.

KEVON

Yeah, I'm sorry too.

CHRIS

Well. I guess you two have a lot to talk about. I'll leave you to it.

Chris heads up the stairs. Marnie shoots Kevon an unsure look.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Becks helps Janet make some turkey sandwiches at a center counter.

BECKS

That took some guts telling Kevon how you felt like that.

JANET

Yeah, well. It took some guts for him to even come here. I figure we owed him that much.

Becks squints, confused.

BECKS

What do you mean?

JANET

Think about it. I can't imagine putting myself in the middle of something like that. Someone else's home. A bunch of angry faces staring back at you. All that opposition.

Becks stares at the basement door, a bit disgusted.

BECKS

I still find it a little disrespectful considering the circumstances and all.

JANET

What are we supposed to do? Ask him to leave? Make everything they're saying about Joe a reality? It's not just him they're trying to crucify. It's his whole family. It's you. Everyone in his life.

Becks ponders this. In deep thought as she spreads mayo on the bread.

JANET (CONT'D)

Everyone thinks because of what happened to his father, we raised him to be this hateful bigot. What scares me is...that may not be so much of a stretch.

BECKS

You don't really believe that. If you didn't respect Kevon, you would've stayed quiet. But you were at least honest enough with him to tell him how you were feeling.

JANET

That doesn't change the past,
Becky. It doesn't change the
things I should've done with Joey.
Before it was too late. Now look
at him. He's ruined his life and I
was in the position to stop it.

BECKS

Come on, Janet. You sound like
Joey shot this kid in cold blood.
You heard him. It was an
accident. He could've just as well
stuck with his story and kept
quiet. At least he trusted us
enough to tell the truth. Even
with Kevon.

Janet finishes building the sandwiches, uses a butcher knife
to cut them all in half. She watches Becks with concern.

JANET

What's gonna happen with the two of
you? When this is all over?

Becks huffs out loud as she finishes spreading mayo on her
sandwich.

JANET (CONT'D)

There's a good chance coming in on
the new year he won't be a cop
anymore. And he continues to slip
further and further into this hole
he's dug. And you come walking
through the door every night in
your dress blues while he shakes
his head in disgust. Are you gonna
stay by his side?

Becks stays strangely quiet. Takes a bite of her sandwich.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Marnie flips through her mother's old record collection from
her younger days.

MARNIE

God, I never knew my Mom was into
so much R and B back in the day.

(MORE)

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Sly and the Family Stone, Stevie Wonder, Earth Wind and Fire. Shalamar.

KEVON

You know what, stop it already.

Marnie pulls out an LP for a closer look.

MARNIE

Stop what?

KEVON

Trying hard to convince me your family doesn't hate black people. I get it.

Marnie stuffs the record back in the milk crate.

MARNIE

Maybe you're not the one who needs convincing.

Kevon watches her closely as she lazily flips through the records with little effort.

KEVON

You didn't invite me here to piss off your brother. You did it to piss off your mother.

Marnie shoots him a sharp but nasty stare.

KEVON (CONT'D)

That's what this whole thing was about for you. You're still mad at her. For turning her back on you. For what your old man did to you back in the day.

MARNIE

Don't talk about my father, okay?

KEVON

Not that it's any of my business or anything. But you sound like you went through a real wild stage there for awhile. Whatever he did, it couldn't be all that bad. You turned out pretty okay.

MARNIE

You're right. It's none of your business.

KEVON

Sorry.

Marnie swiftly changes the subject.

MARNIE

Is there any beer left?

Kevon walks to the fridge, opens. No more beers.

KEVON

No, not really.

MARNIE

Not really. Does that mean there's one left or none left?

KEVON

None. As in zero.

Marnie leaps to her feet.

MARNIE

Are you hungry?

KEVON

I guess I should be.

MARNIE

Yeah, me either. Hold tight.

Marnie heads for the stairs.

MARNIE (CONT'D)

Beer is on the way.

Kevon grabs the remote and turns on the tv. A frozen image on the screen. Kevon unpauses it.

NEWS REPORT:

A field reporter stands in front of a run down government housing project.

FIELD REPORTER

More witnesses are now coming forward claiming that Officers Joe Cullen and Michael Perry were, in fact, inside the apartment at the time Shaun Lewis was gunned down. Which contradicts both Officer's statements that they were in the hallway, with Lewis as he was being shot through the door.

Kevon leans forward, listens intently to the report.

FIELD REPORTER (CONT'D)

Both tenants of apartment Four B, James Pouncey and Jarvis Brown, have already testified that Officer Cullen was the one responsible for firing Pouncey's thirty two revolver into the door and, oddly enough, striking Lewis with both shots.

Kevon still full of hate.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CULLEN HOME - FRONT STEPS - NIGHT

Joe sits on the top steps of the Cullen home. A smoke in hand as he watches an old Dodge Challenger cruise by in a slow crawl.

A young black face stares back at him. Another black kid in the back seat peeks out a cracked window.

Joe stares them down with suspicion. Chris cracks open the screen door, stares down at Joe.

CHRIS

What're you doing out here? Mom's looking for you.

JOE

That's the third time that fuckin car's passed the house in the last five minutes.

Chris stares down the street, both ways.

CHRIS

What car?

JOE

There's a whole car full of them.

CHRIS

Full of who?

Joe takes one last drag of his smoke, stomps it, heads to his car parked in the driveway.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

What're you doing now?

Joe opens his door, ducks his head in as Chris watches.

Joe steps back out, forty five in hand. He checks the clip for bullets.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I don't know what you're doing but I'll give you fifty reasons why you shouldn't.

JOE

Tell our new friend Kevon to get his ass out here.

CHRIS

What for?

Joe stuffs the gun in the back of his jeans.

JOE

We're going for a ride.

CHRIS

Fuck you. You're going inside and drinking some black coffee, asshole.

Joe rushes to the door, shoves Chris out of the way.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Don't do this, Joe!

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Joe's Camaro speeds down the street in hot pursuit. Joe behind the wheel and Kevon shotgun.

INT. JOE'S CAR - NIGHT

Kevon stares over at a red hot Joe.

KEVON

Okay. You gonna tell me where we're going?

JOE

Who are they?

KEVON

Who's who?

JOE

The punks in the Challenger. The two black kids who keep passing my mother's house and staring at me like they're looking for trouble.

KEVON

How the fuck am I supposed to know?

JOE

Okay. You say you care about my baby sister. Now's your chance to prove it.

Joe nods to the glove box.

JOE (CONT'D)

Open the box.

Kevon opens it up. A shiny THREE EIGHTY P stares back at him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Take it.

KEVON

You must be kidding me?

JOE

No, I am not. Pick it up!

Kevon grabs the gun, hides on his lap as he stares out all the windows with paranoia.

JOE (CONT'D)

Take out the magazine.

Kevon watches him. Unsure.

JOE (CONT'D)

Trust me.

KEVON

Oh, yeah. Trust you?

JOE

We're gonna put a little scare into these assholes.

Kevon drops the clip of shells. Tosses them back in the glove box and shuts it.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

The black Challenger cruises to a STOP SIGN as Joe's Camaro screeches to a halt directly in front of them.

Out runs Joe, gun gripped in both hands as he charges the driver's side.

JOE
Put the window down!

Kevon charges the passenger door, gun hidden as he presses it against his pants.

JOE (CONT'D)
(to Kevon)
Hurry up! Cover their ass!

The young WHITE DRIVER puts his hands on the wheel. His BLACK FRIEND rides shotgun.

Kevon aims his gun into the other window and spots a young teen BLACK GIRL in the back seat next to her WHITE FRIEND.

KEVON
Shhhhit!
(to Joe)
Are you happy?

JOE
Shut up!
(to Driver)
What were you doing back there at my mother's house like you're pulling a fuckin drive by?!

DRIVER
Shit, man! Nothing!

Joe presses his gun against his nose.

JOE
Try again!

DRIVER
Take it easy, man! We were just wondering if Marnie was home, bro!

Joe squints, confused, stares back at Kevon who rolls his eyes.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
She is, isn't she?

JOE
Fuck you want with my sister?!

DRIVER
Nothing, man! We just thought she might wanna hang with us! That's all!

The BLACK FRIEND stares up at Kevon.

BLACK FRIEND
Black man. Whachu doin' with this dude?

KEVON
Shut up!

JOE
Who? Kevon? That's Marnie's new boyfriend. He's cute, isn't he?

Kevon is surprised, wide eyed as he stares back at Joe who cracks a smug grin.

DRIVER
Can we go now?

JOE
That depends. Where you guys headed?

DRIVER
Skating rink.

Joe stares at the driver's gloves. He checks the others hands. They are all gloved up, ski caps.

JOE
Get the hell outta here.

Joe pockets his gun.

DRIVER
Yes, sir.

They quickly bolt off. Kevon shoots Joe a truly nasty look as Joe returns with a stupid grin.

JOE
Come on. You know that was fun.

Joe heads back to the car. Kevon stares down at the gun in his hand. He stares up at several people on their lawns as they stare down at his gun.

KEVON

Shit!

CUT TO:

INT. THE CULLEN HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Joe chomps down on a turkey sandwich and some chips as Becks paces the floor like a nervous wreck.

Janet is so upset, she holds a hand over her face and leans against the counter in silence.

BECKS

That was fucking great, Joe! If they didn't have an airtight case against you and Mikey, they sure do now!

JOE

Oh, please. I'm done, Becks. You think anything's gonna stop that now?

Chris steps in, checks on Janet who still hides her tearful face behind her hand.

BECKS

You're suspended, Joe! You pulled a gun on a car load of teenagers! I'll be shocked if the cops aren't already on their way here! But I guess you want me to clean this one up! Just like the rest of your messes!

KEVON

(to Becks)

These guys made like four passes by the house.

Joe smiles, winks at Kevon.

BECKS

Three. They made three passes. And this isn't any of your business.

Kevon folds his arms, looks away in defeat.

MARNIE

Becks. What the hell. He's not saying what Joe did was right. He's saying he was scared.

BECKS

Look. You brought Kevon here. You both had your fun. You made Joe look like an asshole. Congratulations. Just leave it at that. Because unlike you, I actually care what happens to your brother.

Becks turns her back on Marnie which infuriates her more.

MARNIE

Fuck you, Becky.

Becks turns to her, gets in her face.

BECKS

No. Fuck you, Marnie!

JANET

That's enough! All of you!

Everyone is surprised by Janet's outburst.

JANET (CONT'D)

You're screaming at each other when you should be screaming at him!

Janet walks to Joe, stares down at him with contempt.

JANET (CONT'D)

Why'd you do it, Joe? Why? We're giving you every chance to make this all right again. And what do you do? You betray that trust at every possible moment.

JOE

Oh, yeah. You guys have been great. Bang up job all around.

Joe claps his hands for his family.

JANET

Don't do that. I never turned my back on you. Never. And you know it. And you bring this shit down on this house? What's the matter with you?

Joe just smiles and looks away. Janet knocks his plate to the floor as it shatters into a hundred pieces.

JANET (CONT'D)

What the hell's the matter with you?

Becks grabs Janet's arm, drags her away. Chris leans against the wall and watches in silence.

JOE

Enjoying the show, little brother?

CHRIS

No. I'm not, Big Brother.

JOE

So tell me, Chris. How should I have handled that situation? Since my own brother won't back me up in protecting his own family.

CHRIS

They were kids, Joe.

JOE

They're all kids! Dad took three in the back from a kid! You look at me with that smug look in your eye! Like they're always the victims! Does that make you feel better about yourself! Defending thugs and rapists! Thieves and killers! Does that somehow make it all right again? I would love to share a story about you with our new friend Kevon!

JANET

What're you talking about now?

BECKS

Whatever it is, we're not interested right now, Joe.

JOE

I don't think that's for you to decide, Becks. Kevon's come a long way to see me. He deserves to hear the truth.

CHRIS

That was a long time ago. And I've changed, Joe. More than I can say for you.

JOE

You see, when Chris and I were still kids, he had the hots for this chick Cindy. Cindy Cornell. He wanted her so bad he could barely be in the same room with her. Only he never had the nuts to go for it being she was more in what you'd call the popular crowd in those days.

BECKS

Why don't you quit while you're ahead.

JOE

Blonde, blue eyes. A body like Marilyn Monroe only better. And then one day, Chris finally works up the nerve to ask her out. Follows her out to the senior lot and finds old Cindy there in the backseat bouncing on this black guy's cock and screaming like a banchee.

Janet shuts her eyes in horror as she excuses herself from the room. Kevon stares back at Chris who avoids eye contact.

JOE (CONT'D)

Not just any black guy. David Morris. Chris here's biggest rival back in the day. Took his spot at short stop, Captain of the football team, and now he took his girl.

Chris is so mad his hands shake. He presses his palms together, calms himself.

JOE (CONT'D)

Man. He'd come home and tell Dad all about how Dave showed him up at school that day. Made him look bad. Our old man used to tell him "Forget the bitch, son. Any girl trashy enough to swap spit with a nigger would spread for anybody".

Chris stares up at Kevon. An apologetic look in his eyes.

JOE (CONT'D)

Chris didn't wanna hear that. He got so fuckin red hot mad, he didn't know what to do with himself.

Chris grabs a cold beer from the kitchen table, pops the cap and takes a big chug. Becks, Marnie and Kevon all watch him crumble before their eyes.

JOE (CONT'D)

So he comes to me. Says "big brother, I need your help. I wanna hurt someone. But he's bigger than me and I don't think I can take him on my own". But you could see this thing with Dave Morris was eating him up inside. Hurting him at school. I felt sorry for him.

Chris takes another huge belt of beer. Janet watches him from the comfort of the living room.

JOE (CONT'D)

So I said, I got an idea. So we waited for him. Out in the parking lot after football practice. Waited until no one was around. And I mean we kicked the shit out of this kid. You should've seen Chris. He was like a caged animal finally set free.

Marnie stares at Chris with disappointment.

JOE (CONT'D)

He didn't just hurt him. He broke him. Busted his throwing arm. Out for the rest of the season. Good thing Chris here was there to lick Cindy's sweet tears when she was down.

(to Chris)

Huh, little brother.

MARNIE

You've been living with this for ten years?

CHRIS

Explains a lot, doesn't it?

Chris takes a seat at the table.

THE LIVING ROOM

The RED and BLUE lights of a police car shoot through the front window.

JANET

Guess who's here?

Janet heads back to

THE KITCHEN

Becks stares down at Joe with tears down her face.

BECKS

Don't everybody move all at once.
I'll take care of it.

Becks heads for the door. Joe looks sincerely sorry.

CUT TO:

THE LIVING ROOM

Joe stares through the window at Becks and Kevon in the front lawn conversing with a UNIFORM COP. The cop stares back at Joe who quickly ducks away.

Joe shuffles his feet on the carpet, worried. Becks and Kevon walk back inside.

BECKS

Well. You can thank Kevon for getting you out of this one. He told the cops he thought he saw a gun in one of those kids hands and came running inside to tell you about it.

JOE

They bought that?

BECKS

Probably not. But they also know that if this ends up in court, you're as good as toast.

Joe rubs his sore nose, paces the carpet. Kevon scoffs at him.

KEVON

So a white cop pulls a gun on two black teenagers and walks away, scott free with no explanation. There goes what was left of my faith in law enforcement.

JOE

Hey, excuse me, Mister Sharpton. You know how many death threats my mother's gotten in the last two months?

Kevon and Janet catch eyes.

JOE (CONT'D)

I could tell you if we hadn't lost count. You wanna take a guess on how many of them were white?

KEVON

Point taken. Let's just drop it.

JOE

No, I don't think you get it, Kevon. I still don't think it's sunk in.

MARNIE

How far are you gonna take this, Joe. We've had enough.

JOE

It's easy for you and my sister to sit back and judge me from the comfort of your little coffee house couch or wherever the hell it is you kids hang out these days. You think police work is just like any other job in this bullshit, politically correct universe you live in. You go to work, smile, treat everybody with kindness, then pat each other on the ass for being such patriotic Americans. It doesn't work that way. The second you start taking people at face value is the day you get yours blown off.

KEVON

You mean like those kids in that car back there?

JOE

I didn't ask them if they like me
and I don't give a damn. My job
isn't about making friends. This
isn't hands across America.

Kevon smirks at him and walks off. Joe gets in his face.

JOE (CONT'D)

Look at me. I've performed more
CPR, talked more punks down and
saved more of your little homeboys
asses than you'll ever know. So
you're not gonna be fuckin shaking
your head at me!

Janet refuses to watch anymore and stares out the window.
Marnie rubs her back with comfort. She stares back at Kevon
with a pleading look.

KEVON

Are you done?

JOE

Yeah, I'm done. Haven't you heard?
I'm history.

Joe gives Kevon his space and steps back.

KEVON

You wanna remind everyone what were
you doing there that day?

Marnie shoots Kevon a nasty look.

JOE

Excuse me?

KEVON

You heard me. You weren't doing
any charity work or saving anyone's
life. You were filling your
pockets.

JOE

Yeah, well, I figured if I'm gonna
be labeled a racist and a dirty cop
for doing my job, I might as well
take myself a reward. You're damn
right I took that money.

Kevon smiles, folds his arms as if he's got the upper hand.

JOE (CONT'D)

You know what I was gonna do with it? Help fix up my mother's house and get a diamond ring for my fiance.

Becks is surprised by this. Joe smiles down at her on the couch.

JOE (CONT'D)

That's the difference between me and your homeboys, Kevon. You're all in it for yourself. You'd fuck your own mother's if the price were right.

KEVON

You don't know shit about me.

JOE

I know more about you than you, Kevon. Even black cops want nothing to do with these hood rats. But I'll tell you something. Black, red, green or yellow. I'd take a bullet for all of them. Because they have something you'll never understand. That's loyalty.

Becks watches him closely. She stares up at Janet and Marnie who also watch him.

JOE (CONT'D)

If there's one thing they understand in this God forsaken, shitty world is that you never, EVER rat your partners!

Joe turns his back on all of them. The others turn and stare at each other.

BECKS

Is there something you'd like to tell us, Joe?

Chris walks in, cracks a new beer, takes a swig. Joe and him catch eyes.

JOE

Fuck!

Joe tosses his hands in the air, walks to the window and stares into the street.

Janet walks up behind him.

JANET
Joseph, Becky asked you a question.

JOE
I can hear her, Mom.

BECKS
Okay. You don't wanna talk to me.
Maybe Mikey will.

Becks pulls her cell phone out. Joe turns to her, concerned.

BECKS (CONT'D)
Want me to call him? I swear to
God, Joe, I'll go beat down his
door if I have to.

JOE
What the hell are you talking
about?

BECKS
I'm talking about you're hiding
something. And everyone can see
it. Tell me what's really
bothering you.

Joe stares back at everyone. They're waiting. Joe breaks
out in tears.

JOE
(to Marnie)
He was a good cop, Marnie. You
never saw that. And I'm sorry.

Marnie also breaks down. Kevon holds her close.

CHRIS
We know that, Joe.

JANET
You don't have to apologize for
your father. That's not your job.
What's going on with you has
nothing to do with him. So don't
hide behind your badge because you
think it's the right thing to do.

Joe wipes his tears, gathers himself.

JOE
(to Kevon)
Kevon, this is a family matter.
Could you give us a few minutes?

Kevon check with Marnie. Then back to Joe.

KEVON
Sure thing. I'll be downstairs.

Kevon heads for the basement steps. Marnie follows behind.

JOE
You need to hear this too.

Marnie stops.

JOE (CONT'D)
This thing you think I did.

MARNIE
Yeah?

JOE
What if I didn't do it?

Marnie checks with Chris who is equally confused.

CHRIS
You were there, Joe. They saw you
do it.

JOE
They didn't see shit.

BECKS
Hell are you talking about?

JOE
When we...broke in to Pouncey's
apartment. I took down Jimmy.
Mikey took the other guy. I pulled
a thirty two from my guy's pants.
Before I knew what was happening,
Mikey took the gun out of my hands
and put two in the door.

JANET
For what reason?

JOE

We didn't have a warrant. Mikey puts two through the door so it looks like they took a pop at us from inside the apartment. Meanwhile, this kid Shaun Lewis was on the other side. His ear to the door. Listening in on us. He never knew what hit him.

Becks smirks at Joe with disgust but still tears up at the tragedy of it all.

JOE (CONT'D)

Mikey told the first on the scene that Lewis was our snitch. He took us there to make a buy. And when he knocked on the door, Pouncey panics, pulls his gun and takes him out.

JANET

Why have you been keeping this a secret?

Joe checks with Becks who awaits his answer.

JOE

Because Mikey was loaded the whole time.

BECKS

Stupid sonofabitch.

JOE

Tell me about it.

BECKS

I'm not talking about Mikey! I'm talking about you!

JOE

He just finished a three month suspension and his second stint in rehab. They find out he shot a kid, he's looking at prison time.

BECKS

What do you think they're gonna do to you, idiot?!

Becks charges his direction but Janet holds him back.

BECKS (CONT'D)

Isn't that why you spilled your guts to Kevon downstairs? Ever since he shot that kid, you've been trying like hell to justify it. Searching for some kind of reason not to turn him in.

JOE

He's my partner.

BECKS

Yeah, I get it, Joe. And you think that somehow makes you better than these guys because you were a badge and a uniform.

Joe shoots Chris an ugly stare. Still resentful. Chris looks down, unwilling to fuel the fire.

BECKS (CONT'D)

Even I bought into your shit for awhile, Joe, but that doesn't make what he did okay. I think you know that.

JOE

Okay. Let's say I come forward. No one's gonna believe me anyway so what the hell's the point?

BECKS

Oh, they will. Because I'm not letting up until Mikey tells me the truth. I don't care what it takes. If I gotta bring him here to stare your mother in the eye, I will.

JOE

What would Dad think?

JANET

Remember when I said if he had to do it all over again, he'd do things different?

JOE

Yeah.

JANET

Your father's gone because he stayed loyal to the force even when it was tearing his family apart.

(MORE)

JANET (CONT'D)

That young man didn't kill your father. His own stubbornness did. You have a chance to change your life, Joe. I won't let you throw it away like he did. I won't do it.

MARNIE

If not for Mom, do it for me.

CHRIS

And me.

Joe stares at all three of them. They offer him warm smiles and hope. He cracks a small grin and nods in agreement.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CULLEN HOME - MORNING

Marnie gives the last of her hugs to Becks as she and Kevon are about to head off.

Janet and Chris shake Kevon's hand as Joe watches from the top of the steps.

KEVON

Thanks for having me. It's been...educational.

CHRIS

Yeah. Something like that.

JANET

You're welcome any time.

BECKS

How about it, Marn. Will we be seeing Kevon again anytime soon?

Marnie stares up at him.

MARNIE

I don't know. We'll see.

BECKS

She's just messing with you. She wouldn't if she didn't like you.

Kevon stares up at Joe still by the door.

KEVON
 (to all)
 Excuse me for a second.

Kevon heads up the steps, greets Joe halfway. They exchange a hand shake.

KEVON (CONT'D)
 Officer Cullen. Take care of yourself.

Joe is a bit ashamed as he has trouble looking Kevon in the eye. He slowly comes around.

JOE
 So, listen. I didn't mean half that shit I said...

KEVON
 Sure you did. Just like I meant everything I said. So let's just agree that there's some things we both need to work on.

Joe nods in agreement.

JOE
 Fair enough. Do me a favor and keep an eye on Marnie for me. There's some real creeps out there.

Joe and Kevon share a smile.

KEVON
 Yes, sir.

He heads back down the steps.

JOE
 So let me ask you something, Kevon.

Kevon stops, looks up at Joe.

JOE (CONT'D)
 Was this the White Christmas you always dreamed of or what?

Kevin laughs, heads for his car. Joe smiles, sips his coffee and watches as Kevon and Marnie crawl in their car and drive off.

He chuckles to himself, sips his coffee and ducks back inside. The door shuts behind him.

FADE OUT.

THE END