

Language

Lenguaje

Feature Drama / Crime / Music / Romance

Written for Derrick Vernon

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES - BLOCK PARTY - DAY

A summer block party breathes under a hard California sun. Kids chase each other through hydrant water. Car trunks rattle with bass. A plywood stage has been built in the street.

Nine-year-old JAVIOUS HILL, skinny, watchful, and too serious for his age, stands off to the side holding a cheap microphone that is too big for his hand.

His father, REGGIE HILL, early 30s, hustler charm with tired eyes, kneels in front of him.

REGGIE

You don't gotta be
loud to be heard.

JAVIOUS

What if my voice
crack?

REGGIE

Then let it crack.
A real voice ain't
scared to shake.

Toni Hill, late 20s, strong and beautiful, carrying the weight of tomorrow in her eyes, watches from nearby.

TONI

Baby, only sing if
you want to.

Reggie smiles.

REGGIE

He wants to. He
just don't know it
yet.

The neighborhood EMCEE waves Javious over.

EMCEE

Come on, little
man! Show us what
you got!

Javious freezes. The crowd blurs. Then he looks to his mother. Toni gives him the slightest nod.

Javious steps onto the stage.

He sings one trembling line -- then the street goes still.

His voice is pure, aching, unusual. Heads turn. Grown men stop talking. Women stare. The note blooms bigger than his body.

Reggie is stunned. Toni's hand rises over her mouth.

Across the street, a plainclothes COP in his 30s, ISAIAH MONROE, hears it and smiles without meaning to.

ISAIAH
(to himself)
Lord have mercy.

The crowd erupts.

Javious, startled by the applause, runs off stage embarrassed.

Reggie catches him, laughing.

REGGIE
Boy, you don't run
from a gift.

JAVIOUS
Everybody was
looking.

REGGIE
One day, they're
gonna pay to.

Reggie's smile fades as a BLACK SUV idles at the corner. A slick man in sunglasses watches from inside.

Toni notices.

TONI
Reggie. Who is that?

REGGIE
Nobody we need to
know.

But he keeps watching the SUV.

CUT TO:

INT. HILL APARTMENT - NIGHT

A cramped apartment. Bills stacked on the table. A packed
duffel bag in the corner.

Toni slams down an opened envelope.

TONI
Mexico?

REGGIE
Guadalajara. Sound
manager job. Real
money. Real start.

TONI
Or another one of
your shortcuts?

REGGIE
It ain't like that.

TONI
Every time you say
that, I end up
paying for it.

Javious listens from the hallway, hidden.

REGGIE
I got a chance to
build something.
Club money. Event
money. Legit.

TONI
Who is funding it?

Reggie hesitates too long.

TONI (CONT'D)
Who?

REGGIE
A businessman.

TONI
That's not a name.

REGGIE
Julio Sanchez.

Toni goes still.

TONI
I've heard that
name.

REGGIE
You've heard
rumors. That's all.

TONI
Reggie, rumors
don't make women go
quiet when a name
comes up.

REGGIE
I'm doing this for
us.

TONI
No. You're doing
this because being
ordinary scares you
more than being
dead.

That lands.

Reggie lowers his voice.

REGGIE

I got debts here.
Bad ones. Out there
I can clear the
board.

Toni looks toward the hallway. She knows Javious is listening.

TONI

If I take my son to
another country, it
better be for life,
not some man's ego.

Reggie steps closer.

REGGIE

Give me ten years.
I come back with
something ours.

Javious looks at the duffel bag, then at his small reflection in the dark TV screen.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. GUADALAJARA, MEXICO - NIGHT - MONTAGE

- City lights burning gold.
- The Hill family in a small apartment over a crowded street.
- Reggie working sound boards in a lavish nightclub called EL REY DE ORO.
- Javious, growing older, hearing music from behind curtains.
- Toni sewing late into the night.
- Julio Sanchez, 40s, elegant, unreadable, moving through the club like a king.
- Men kiss Julio's ring. Others avoid his eyes.
- Javious, now 14, singing softly to himself on a rooftop where nobody can hear.
- Reggie drinking more.
- Cash changing hands.
- Guns glimpsed under jackets.

SUPER: TEN YEARS LATER

INT. SMALL CHURCH IN GUADALAJARA - EVENING

Candles flicker around a funeral service for a local musician. Javious, 15, stands in the choir shadows. The priest asks if anyone has a final hymn.

No one moves.

Then Toni looks at her son.

TONI

Only if you want to.

Javious steps forward shaking.

He sings in Spanish, voice soft at first, then powerful enough to quiet the whole chapel.

Julio, seated in the back for appearances, slowly turns.

For the first time, he really sees the boy.

Afterward, outside the church, Julio approaches Reggie.

JULIO

You never told me
your son sings like
that.

REGGIE

It ain't for
business.

JULIO

Everything
miraculous is for
business eventually.

He looks at Javious.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Hide that voice if
you want. The world
still has ears.

Julio leaves.

Javious looks uneasy.

JAVIOUS
I don't like how he
looked at me.

TONI
Then remember that
feeling. Some men
don't admire gifts.
They price them.

INT. HILL APARTMENT - GUADALAJARA - LATE NIGHT

Reggie cleans a pistol at the table. Javious watches.

JAVIOUS
Are we rich?

REGGIE
No.

JAVIOUS
Then why everybody
act like you got
money?

REGGIE
Because debt
dresses like money
till the bill comes
home.

Javious sits.

JAVIOUS
Can we go back to
California?

Reggie stops cleaning.

REGGIE
One day.

JAVIOUS
You always say that.

REGGIE
Because I keep
trying to build the
day before it gets
here.

JAVIOUS
Mama says that's
your problem.

Reggie laughs despite himself.

REGGIE
Your mama says a
lot of true things
in rude ways.

He grows serious.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Listen to me. Men
like Julio don't
just keep money.
They keep secrets.
The second a man
like that thinks
you know too much,
he don't see your
age. He don't see
your heart. He only
sees risk.

JAVIOUS
Then why work for
him?

REGGIE
Because I thought I
could get close
enough to steal a
better life.

JAVIOUS
Did it work?

Reggie looks at him a long moment.

REGGIE
Ask me in ten years.

INT. EL REY DE ORO - BACK OFFICE - NIGHT

Javious, 19, handsome now, quiet, built lean from work, counts cash at a desk. He moves carefully, like the room belongs to danger.

Reggie paces.

REGGIE
The numbers don't
line up.

JAVIOUS
Then stop asking me
to touch them.

REGGIE
You think I want
you in this?

JAVIOUS
I think you already
put me in it.

The office door opens. Julio enters with two GOONS.
Everything changes temperature.

JULIO SANCHEZ
My favorite
Americans.

Reggie forces a grin.

REGGIE
Julio.

Julio glances at Javious.

JULIO
He got your eyes.

TONI (O.S.)

No. He got mine.

Toni stands in the doorway, having followed him. Julio smiles at her with false respect.

JULIO

Señora Hill. Still
the only honest
thing in this
family.

TONI

Then keep my family
out your mouth.

Julio enjoys her fire.

JULIO

I like her.

He turns to Reggie.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Federal men are
asking too many
questions. Routes.
books. accounts. I
need loyal men
right now.

REGGIE

You have them.

Julio sets a heavy hand on the ledger book.

JULIO

Do I?

Beat.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Because when the
government starts
sniffing, rats
start praying.
Don't become

religious on me,
Reggie.

Julio exits. His men linger one second too long, then follow.

Toni shuts the door.

TONI
Tell me what you
did.

REGGIE
Nothing yet.

JAVIOUS
Yet?

REGGIE
I can fix this.

TONI
That's what men say
right before women
bury them.

EXT. RIVERSIDE WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - NIGHT

Rain on corrugated roofs. Reggie pulls up in a truck, panicked. Javious sits beside him.

JAVIOUS
Why am I here?

REGGIE
Because if
something happens,
you don't forget
what I tell you.

He hands Javious a small CASSETTE TAPE and a KEY.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
You keep these
hidden.

JAVIOUS

What's on it?

REGGIE

Insurance.

JAVIOUS

Against who?

REGGIE

Everybody.

A second car approaches. Headlights flare.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Listen to me. If I
say run, you run
with your mama. You
don't be brave. You
be gone.

Julio steps out with two armed men.

JULIO

You stole from me
and made me meet
you in the rain.
That offends me
twice.

REGGIE

I got something
more valuable than
the money.

JULIO

There is nothing
more valuable than
my money.

Javious slips out and ducks behind stacked pallets as the men close in.

REGGIE

The ledger. Names.
cops. judges.
shipments. If
anything happens to

my family, it
leaves Mexico.

Julio studies him.

JULIO
You should've
stayed a sound man.

REGGIE
Let Toni and
Javious go.

JULIO
You used my
business to build
your escape. Now
you negotiate?

REGGIE
I ain't asking. I'm
trading.

Julio almost admires it.

JULIO
Where is it?

REGGIE
Somewhere you can't
reach tonight.

Julio's face hardens.

JULIO
Tonight?

A beat. Then -- GUNSHOTS.

Javious covers his mouth. Reggie drops to his knees, hit
twice.

JULIO (CONT'D)
The federales have
clipped my wings
for now. Consider

that your family's
miracle.

He kneels close to dying Reggie.

JULIO (CONT'D)

When I can travel
again, I will
collect what you
stole. Times one
hundred. I like
interest.

He shoots Reggie in the chest.

Javious shakes with silent grief.

One of Julio's men hears something. Moves toward the
pallets.

Suddenly, distant SIRENS.

JULIO

Move.

They leave.

Javious runs to his father.

REGGIE

(struggling)
Key... tape...
Monroe...

JAVIOUS

Dad, stay with me.

REGGIE

Your voice...

JAVIOUS

Don't talk.

REGGIE

Don't hide from it
like I hid from
everything else.

Reggie dies in his arms.

Javious lets out a broken sound that is almost a song and almost a scream.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE: JAVIOUS STORY

INT. BUS TERMINAL - PRE-DAWN

Toni and Javious sit with two small bags between them. Javious is numb, holding the tape and key in his fist.

Isaiah Monroe, older now, approaches in plain clothes. He hugs Toni like family.

ISAIAH
I got your message
too late.

TONI
You came.

ISAIAH
Reggie saved my
life once in
California before
he started chasing
fast money. I owed
him one.

He looks at blood on Javious's sleeve.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)
You see who did it?

Javious nods once.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)
Then hear me. You
tell nobody till it
can matter.

TONI
Can you protect us?

Isaiah hates his own answer.

ISAIAH
Across the border,
maybe. In Mexico?
Not from a man like
Julio.

JAVIOUS
He said he'd come
when he could
travel.

ISAIAH
Then we make sure
when he comes, you
ain't where he
expects.

He presses plane tickets into Toni's hand.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)
Los Angeles. New
address. New names
if you need 'em.

Toni starts crying for the first time.

TONI
I don't even got
enough grief left
to say thank you.

ISAIAH
Then stay alive
instead.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

A worn apartment complex in present day.

Javious, now 24, carries drywall up a stairwell with his best friend KAYDEN BROOKS, 24, funny, loyal, hustling filmmaker energy.

KAYDEN
I'm telling you,
bro, God don't give
somebody a voice
like yours so they
can die fixing
pipes in Koreatown.

JAVIOUS
I'm not dying.

KAYDEN
Your dreams are.

Javious smirks despite himself.

JAVIOUS
Can we finish
apartment 12 before
you resurrect my
purpose?

Kayden grins.

KAYDEN
Only if you come to
open mic tonight.

JAVIOUS
No.

KAYDEN
See? That's not an
answer from a
singer. That's an
answer from a
hostage.

From an upstairs balcony, Toni, now worn by years of survival but still fierce, watches her son and forces a smile.

TONI
Quit bothering him
and grab the other
bucket.

KAYDEN

Miss Toni, tell
your son hiding
ain't humility.

TONI

I've been telling
him that since his
baby teeth.

Javious looks up at her. Their bond is deep, protective,
almost too tight.

JAVIOUS

Medicine at six.

TONI

I know what time my
pills are.

He catches the small tremor in her hand.

INT. COMMUNITY CHOIR ROOM - DAY

Toni folds chairs after a church rehearsal. A few elderly
women gossip kindly nearby.

Javious enters with groceries.

ELDERLY WOMAN

That your boy still
singing in secret?

TONI

He gets that from
his daddy. Hides
what could save him.

JAVIOUS

I can hear y'all.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Good. Then hear
this too. God don't
bury oil in the

ground so it can
complain about
pressure.

Javious smiles politely.

Outside, Toni and Javious walk home.

TONI

You remember Mexico
every day?

JAVIOUS

Some days every
hour.

TONI

I used to pray God
would take the
pictures out my
head.

JAVIOUS

Did He?

TONI

No. He just stopped
letting them be
bigger than me.

Javious absorbs that.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET BASKETBALL COURT - DUSK

Calvin runs a neighborhood game before his rise fully takes
over. Kids worship him. He signs shoes, jokes, dunks,
performs effortless greatness.

Miranda arrives carrying takeout.

MIRANDA

You ate today?

CALVIN

Does a king eat
before battle?

MIRANDA

You played at three parks and posted all of it. I think battle's over.

He kisses her, distracted by admirers.

A YOUNG KID shoves a phone in Calvin's face.

KID

You going first round?

CALVIN

That's the plan.

Miranda watches how easily the world gets Calvin's full smile.

INT. KAYDEN'S CAR - NIGHT

Kayden drives Javious past lit clubs.

KAYDEN

Look at all these mediocre singers getting applause for vowels. Meanwhile you over here acting like greatness is a sin.

JAVIOUS

Greatness ain't free.

KAYDEN

Neither is regret.

JAVIOUS

You got a quote for every bad decision?

KAYDEN

Only the
potentially iconic
ones.

INT. SPORTS TRAINING FACILITY - DAY

CALVIN RHODES, 25, magnetic, beautiful, all power and confidence, explodes through a drill. Cameras follow him. He is the city's favorite son, headed for a pro contract.

MIRANDA WELLS, 24, poised, intelligent, warm, watches from the sidelines with a clipboard. She works event production and community arts outreach for her father's company, which is sponsoring a citywide talent showcase.

Calvin jogs over, drenched in sweat.

CALVIN
You timing me or
admiring me?

MIRANDA
You wish both
answers were yes.

He kisses her cheek. She barely leans in.

CALVIN
Dinner tonight.

MIRANDA
You said that
yesterday.

CALVIN
And I mean it today.

His AGENT calls him over. Calvin turns away mid-conversation. Miranda watches him go, already used to being second place to whatever sees Calvin shining.

INT. SMALL NEIGHBORHOOD BAR - NIGHT

An OPEN MIC NIGHT. Cheap lights. Cheap drinks.

Kayden drags Javious in.

KAYDEN

One song. If you
hate it, I will
personally fake
your death and tell
everybody you moved
to Alaska.

JAVIOUS

You don't know
nobody in Alaska.

KAYDEN

Exactly. Clean
break.

On stage, a bad singer crashes and burns. The crowd laughs.
Javious tenses.

JAVIOUS

I'm leaving.

Then every light in the room flickers.

Across the street through the window, a black SUV sits at
the curb.

Javious's smile vanishes. He goes cold.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

The front door hangs cracked. Javious runs inside.

INT. TONI'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Furniture overturned. Toni on the floor, lip split, cheek
bruised.

Three MEN in dark clothes stand over her. A fourth man
smokes by the window. Not Julio, but one of his trusted
lieutenants, CESAR.

CESAR

There he is.

Javious lunges. Two men pin him hard.

JAVIOUS
Get off my mother!

Cesar crouches in front of Toni.

CESAR
You are lucky we
are under
instruction tonight.

He looks at Javious with a smile that disgusts him.

CESAR (CONT'D)
Real lucky.

Toni spits blood at his shoes.

TONI
You tell Julio to
come himself.

CESAR
When the boss wants
to be seen,
everybody sees him.

He turns to Javious.

CESAR (CONT'D)
Your father stole
from Julio Sanchez.
Principal,
penalties,
disrespect tax --
times one hundred.

JAVIOUS
My father is dead.

CESAR
Debts survive
death. Families
too, if they are
smart.

He pulls a knife and places the flat of it against Javious's cheek.

CESAR (CONT'D)

What's your number
by Saturday?

Javious thinks fast, terrified.

JAVIOUS

Thirty thousand.

The men laugh.

CESAR

From where?

JAVIOUS

Talent contest at
the Avalon. First
prize. I can win it.

Cesar studies him.

CESAR

You sing?

JAVIOUS

Yes.

CESAR

Everybody sings
right before they
drown.

He looks to Toni.

CESAR (CONT'D)

We'll be in the
crowd. No police.
Julio owns uniforms
in two countries.

He leans close to Javious.

CESAR (CONT'D)

Thirty thousand
isn't even a
scratch. But it is
better than what
your father left
behind.

They leave as suddenly as they came.

Javious drops to Toni, holds her face gently.

JAVIOUS
Mama, look at me.
Look at me.

TONI
I told your father
them men would bury
us all.

Javious kisses her forehead, shaking.

JAVIOUS
I'm gonna fix this.

TONI
That's what he said.

That destroys him.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - DAY

Toni is stitched up. Javious sits beside her. Isaiah Monroe enters, now LAPD Homicide, older, weathered, still carrying quiet integrity.

TONI
How'd you know?

ISIAH
I keep checking on
y'all even when you
don't ask me to.

Javious stands.

JAVIOUS

He's here.

ISAIAH

Julio?

JAVIOUS

His men.

Isaiah shuts the door.

ISAIAH

The federal case in
Mexico fell apart
three months ago.
Witnesses recanted.
evidence vanished.
I been afraid this
day was coming.

TONI

Then arrest him.

ISAIAH

For what I know? I
need more than fear
and old ghosts.

JAVIOUS

I got no time for
your procedure.

ISAIAH

And I got no coffin
left for your
family. Listen to
me. If you start
making payments, he
owns your next
breath.

JAVIOUS

He's already taking
it.

Isaiah sees the boy from Mexico still inside him.

ISAIAH

What are you
planning?

Javious doesn't answer.

CUT TO:

INT. AVALON THEATER - REGISTRATION HALL - DAY

Hundreds of contestants line up for THE CITY SOUND TALENT
SHOWCASE.

Banners. stagehands. camera crews.

Miranda works the registration table with efficient grace.

Javious steps up, bruised knuckles, sleepless eyes.

MIRANDA

Name?

JAVIOUS

Javious Hill.

She looks up. Something about him is heavier than the room.

MIRANDA

Song choice?

JAVIOUS

Original.

MIRANDA

Do you have
accompaniment?

KAYDEN (O.S.)

He's got me and the
Lord.

Kayden appears carrying a keyboard case he definitely
borrowed.

Miranda laughs despite herself.

MIRANDA

Well, that's a wide
range.

Calvin enters through the side doors with press around him.
He is one of the celebrity presenters for the finals.
Miranda's smile fades on instinct.

CALVIN
You didn't answer
my calls.

MIRANDA
I've been working.

CALVIN
So have I.

He notices Javious.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
You in line for
autographs?

JAVIOUS
No.

KAYDEN
He's in line to win
your girlfriend's
contest.

Miranda shoots Kayden a look.

CALVIN
Good luck with that.

He leaves with the press. Miranda exhales.

MIRANDA
Ignore him. He's
only charming when
cameras are on.

Javious signs the form.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

You look like
you're here to
survive something,
not perform.

Javious meets her eyes.

JAVIOUS

Maybe both.

That lands. Miranda watches him go.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM - LATER

Miranda steps in as Javious quietly works through a melody.
Kayden records on his phone.

Javious's voice fills the empty room with haunted beauty.

Miranda stands still, genuinely moved.

MIRANDA

Why haven't I heard
of you?

JAVIOUS

Because I don't
sing where people
can hear me.

MIRANDA

That's not modest.
That's a crime.

He almost smiles.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

What is the song
about?

JAVIOUS

Trying to carry
love and fear in
the same throat.

MIRANDA

That's...
annoyingly good.

Kayden grins.

KAYDEN

See? I've been
saying this. He
been wasting
miracles.

Miranda steps closer.

MIRANDA

The bridge is
strong, but you're
backing away from
the high note.

JAVIOUS

I don't trust it.

MIRANDA

Then borrow my
trust till yours
shows up.

Something begins there.

MONTAGE - TALENT
CONTEST PREP

- Miranda coaching stage presence.
- Kayden hustling flyers with Javious's name.
- Calvin on sports radio hyping his upcoming pro workout.
- Cesar watching from a car.
- Toni hearing Javious practice through a cracked bedroom door and quietly crying.
- Javious holding the cassette tape from his father, but not yet playing it.

INT. AVALON THEATER - SIDE STAGE - LATER

Calvin corners Miranda after Javious's rehearsal.

CALVIN

You looked at him
like he already won.

MIRANDA
Maybe because he
came in hungry
instead of entitled.

CALVIN
You been waiting to
say that?

MIRANDA
No. I've been
waiting for you to
hear anything not
about you.

Calvin checks himself, but pride wins.

CALVIN
Don't embarrass me
for some mystery
dude with a sad
face and a demo.

MIRANDA
Embarrass you?
Calvin, you think
every woman in your
life is a mirror.
Some of us are
doors. You just
never walk through.

She leaves him there.

INT. AVALON THEATER - EMPTY BALCONY - NIGHT

Before finals, Javious stands alone above the stage,
staring at the seats.

Miranda joins him with two paper cups of tea.

MIRANDA

My grandmother
swore tea could
slow panic.

JAVIOUS

Did it?

MIRANDA

No. But it gave her
something elegant
to hold while
falling apart.

He laughs softly.

JAVIOUS

That sounds useful.

They sit.

MIRANDA

What happens if you
win?

JAVIOUS

Depends who asks.

MIRANDA

I'm asking.

JAVIOUS

Then... maybe my
mother sleeps one
full night.

Miranda hears the seriousness in that.

MIRANDA

You keep speaking
in corners.

JAVIOUS

Corners kept me
alive.

MIRANDA

And open space?

JAVIOUS

Open space gets
people noticed.

MIRANDA

Maybe getting
noticed is not the
same thing as
getting caught.

He looks at her. She holds the gaze.

Something intimate but unspoken passes between them.

INT. AVALON THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Finals night. The place is packed. Cameras. Lights. Judges.

Cesar and two of Julio's men watch from the crowd, arms
crossed.

Backstage, Javious breathes too fast.

MIRANDA

Look at me.

He does.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

What are you scared
of more? Failing?
Or being seen?

JAVIOUS

Both.

MIRANDA

Then tonight, let
both happen.

An STAGE MANAGER waves him up.

STAGE MANAGER

You're on.

Javious steps onto the stage.

The crowd noise blurs.

He sees Cesar. He sees Toni in the back row holding herself together. He sees Miranda in the wings. He sees, for a flash, his father in the dark.

The music starts.

JAVIOUS

(singing)

I was raised by a
runaway storm,

By a man with fire in his hands,
By a woman who stitched every wound
Till our house could stand...

The theater stills.

His voice rises -- raw, impossible, spiritual. By the second chorus, people are crying. By the bridge, Calvin has stopped scrolling his phone and is staring.

JAVIOUS (CONT'D)

(singing)

If my fear got a
name,

I'ma sing it into shame,
If the dark want my breath,
I'ma turn it into flame...

He hits the note he was afraid of.

The room explodes.

Miranda is in tears. Kayden is shouting. Toni collapses into sobs from pure relief.

Cesar's smile fades. Even he is rattled.

CUT TO:

INT. AVALON THEATER - WINNER'S CORRIDOR - LATER

Javious holds the oversized check: \$30,000.

Media crowds him.

REPORTER

Where have you been
hiding?

JAVIOUS

Trying to stay
alive.

Everyone laughs, thinking it's a joke.

Miranda hands him a bottle of water, still overwhelmed.

MIRANDA

You don't belong in
small rooms.

JAVIOUS

I never wanted big
ones.

MIRANDA

Too late.

From the end of the hall, Calvin watches the way Miranda looks at Javious.

EXT. PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

Javious hands Cesar a duffel bag.

CESAR

Thirty thousand.
Congratulations.
You bought your
mother another week.

JAVIOUS

Tell Julio I'm
getting the rest.

CESAR

No. You're feeding
the rest. There's a
difference.

He opens the bag, satisfied.

CESAR (CONT'D)

The boss says now
that you've found
your voice, use it.

He leans in.

CESAR (CONT'D)

And don't make us
come upstairs again.

They drive off.

Isaiah, from a distance, watches the exchange and knows exactly what it was.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

A sleek independent studio.

Music executive VERA COLLINS, 40s, sharp and polished, sits across from Javious and Kayden.

VERA

You were trending
before midnight. We
can get you
distribution, a
debut EP, festival
slots.

KAYDEN

What kinda deal we
talking?

VERA

The kind that
changes zip codes.

Javious barely hears her. He is calculating debt, not fame.

VERA (CONT'D)

Your pain reads as
truth. The audience
pays for that.

MIRANDA (entering with production papers)
He needs a lawyer before he needs a slogan.

Vera clocks Miranda immediately.

VERA
And you are?

MIRANDA
A person with trust
issues.

Kayden laughs.

JAVIOUS
She's right.

Vera smiles thinly.

VERA
Good. Smart artists
last longer.

Outside the glass booth, Calvin arrives to pick Miranda up.
He sees her with Javious. He does not like how natural it
looks.

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - DAY

Calvin slams his car door.

CALVIN
So this what we're
doing now?

MIRANDA
Working?

CALVIN
Don't play smart. I
know when
somebody's circling.

MIRANDA
Maybe the problem
is you think

everything belongs
to you.

CALVIN
I made room for you
in my life.

MIRANDA
Room isn't love,
Calvin. Priority is.

He softens for half a second.

CALVIN
I'm doing all this
for us.

MIRANDA
No. You're doing it
for applause and
hoping I clap loud
enough.

Beat.

CALVIN
You leaving me for
a singer with no
future?

MIRANDA
I'm leaving you
because when I
talk, you hear
competition.

She walks away. Calvin stands there wounded, angry,
ashamed.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

Javious's first interview. He sits before microphones
trying not to look trapped.

RADIO HOST

You came out of
nowhere. That real
or label mythology?

JAVIOUS

I've been
somewhere. Just not
somewhere people
were invited.

RADIO HOST

Ladies are already
calling you
heartbreak with
lungs.

Javious glances through the glass at Miranda, who rolls her eyes.

JAVIOUS

That's a crazy
thing to say before
noon.

The room laughs.

After the interview, Miranda and Javious walk to the elevator.

MIRANDA

You were good.

JAVIOUS

I lied less than
usual.

MIRANDA

Progress.

The elevator stalls briefly between floors. They are suddenly alone in a humming metal box.

JAVIOUS

You ever feel like
everything can
change in one bad
minute?

MIRANDA

Yes.

JAVIOUS

How you live with
that?

MIRANDA

By not wasting the
good ones.

The elevator jolts back to life. Neither moves away.

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - NIGHT

A stolen night. Miranda and Javious walk the pier in hoodies, half-recognized by teenagers.

They play a rigged basketball game. Miranda wins a cheap stuffed dolphin.

JAVIOUS

You cheated.

MIRANDA

No. I adapted with
confidence.

They share churros on a bench looking over black water.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

What would you do
if music wasn't
attached to
survival?

JAVIOUS

Sing slower.

MIRANDA

That's the saddest
answer I've ever
heard.

JAVIOUS

Okay. I would build
my mama a house
with no memories in
the walls.

MIRANDA
Better.

JAVIOUS
What about you?

MIRANDA
Open a place for
kids who got talent
but no access. No
gatekeepers. No
fake saviors. Just
rooms where gifts
can breathe.

JAVIOUS
I'd donate.

MIRANDA
From your first
honest million?

JAVIOUS
From my first not-
blood money dollar.

That honesty lands. She takes his hand.

MIRANDA
Whoever hurt you
taught you to joke
one inch before
truth.

JAVIOUS
Yeah.

MIRANDA
I'm patient. Not
blind.

INT. TONI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bills. medicine. the \$30,000 is gone.

Toni stares at Javious.

TONI

How much is enough
for them?

JAVIOUS

I don't know.

TONI

Then stop paying
men whose hunger
got no bottom.

JAVIOUS

If I stop, they
come through that
door.

TONI

And if you keep
going, they'll come
through your soul.

He sits beside her.

JAVIOUS

I can do this, Mama.

TONI

You sound like your
father when you say
that.

Javious goes still.

TONI (CONT'D)

That is why it
scares me.

She softens, touches his face.

TONI (CONT'D)

But you also got
something he didn't.

JAVIOUS

What?

TONI

A chance to tell
the truth.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Javious performs his second paid gig. The crowd is bigger.
Women scream his name.

Miranda watches from backstage. The chemistry between them
is undeniable.

After the set, sweat and adrenaline.

MIRANDA

You're different up
there.

JAVIOUS

I hate that you
might be right.

MIRANDA

Why?

JAVIOUS

Because up there, I
feel free. And
freedom's expensive
in my life.

Miranda studies him.

MIRANDA

Who are you running
from?

He wants to tell her. Can't.

JAVIOUS

Myself, mostly.

Miranda steps close.

MIRANDA
You don't look like
a man running from
himself. You look
like somebody
dragging a whole
cemetery.

That cracks him.

He kisses her.

It is sudden, real, overdue.

She kisses him back.

For one suspended moment, the world leaves them alone.

Then a camera flash pops from outside.

Kayden pokes his head in.

KAYDEN
I hate to interrupt
destiny, but y'all
got bloggers in the
alley and one dude
already called you
the Hood Sam Cooke.

Javious pulls back, embarrassed. Miranda laughs.

MIRANDA
That's a terrible
nickname.

KAYDEN
Internet don't care.

MONTAGE - RISE

-- Javious records late into the night.
-- Clips of his performances spread online.
-- Vera books showcases, interviews, bigger stages.

- Miranda becomes part of the team, not officially, but always there.
- Javious hands more cash to Cesar in parking lots, restaurants, alleyways.
- Julio watches video of Javious on TV from a luxury room, expression unreadable.
- Calvin suffers a brutal knee injury during a pro workout. Cameras catch him collapsing.
- Toni coughs blood into a sink when no one is looking.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Toni sits with Javious.

DOCTOR
Kidney function is
dropping faster
than we'd like. We
need aggressive
treatment.

Javious tightens.

JAVIOUS
Whatever it costs.

TONI
Don't say that like
money is made of
sky.

DOCTOR
Stress won't help
either.

Toni laughs bitterly.

TONI
Then I'm in trouble.

Outside the office, Javious leans against a wall, crushed.

Miranda arrives.

MIRANDA
How bad?

He cannot answer. He just folds into her and for the first time lets himself be held.

INT. PRIVATE PARTY MANSION - NIGHT

Julio has ordered entertainment for a room full of corrupt power brokers, athletes, and city men who pretend not to know one another.

Javious stands with a live band, furious at being here.

Cesar murmurs from the wings.

CESAR

Smile. Rich men tip
better when the
singer looks
grateful.

Javious sings anyway. The room is transfixed.

Julio watches from a mezzanine with cold amusement.

Among the guests is Detective Hernandez.

Javious notices.

Later, in a service hallway, Julio blocks his path.

JULIO

See? Your gift
travels beautifully.

JAVIOUS

You turned it into
a chain.

JULIO

No. I revealed what
it costs to keep
your mother
breathing.

JAVIOUS

I could expose half
this room.

JULIO
Then why don't you?

Javious can't answer.

JULIO (CONT'D)
Because the first
thing corruption
buys is your
imagination. You
start imagining who
dies if you tell
the truth. It is a
very efficient
purchase.

He adjusts Javious's collar like a father.

JULIO (CONT'D)
Back on stage.

INT. CALVIN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Calvin watches sports highlights of himself before the injury, then the replay of his knee snapping. He turns it off, disgusted.

His mother, DENISE RHODES, enters.

DENISE
You can't keep
watching the
funeral.

CALVIN
It wasn't supposed
to end like that.

DENISE
Nothing ends the
way proud men
script it.

He looks away.

CALVIN

Miranda used to
look at me like I
was enough.

DENISE
Maybe she got tired
of waiting for you
to look at her that
way.

That wounds him, because it is true.

INT. HOSPITAL INFUSION CENTER - DAY

Toni receives treatment. Javious sits with her working on lyrics. An older PATIENT listens.

PATIENT
You the singer?

JAVIOUS
Trying to be.

PATIENT
Then sing something
that ain't about
heartbreak.
Everybody got
enough of that in
here.

Toni smiles.

TONI
Told you. The
people want variety.

Javious sings a light, hopeful line. The room softens.

For a brief moment, his gift heals without being weaponized.

INT. JULIO'S LOS ANGELES SAFE HOUSE - NIGHT

Julio has arrived in the city.

A beautiful house with too many guards.

Javious is brought in by Cesar. Julio sits at the head of a dinner table like a king receiving tribute.

JULIO

The voice of
California.

JAVIOUS

You wanted to see
me.

JULIO

I wanted to hear if
the videos were
lying.

Julio gestures.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Sing.

Javious stares at him.

JULIO (CONT'D)

That was not a
request.

Javious sings one chilling line a cappella. It echoes through the room.

Julio smiles.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Your father died
with fear in his
mouth. You sing
like pain baptized
you. I respect the
difference.

JAVIOUS

What do you want?

JULIO

All of it.

He slides a paper across the table: a revised debt figure that is astronomical.

JULIO (CONT'D)

The money Reggie stole. Interest. the cost of making me travel. the insult of waiting ten years.

JAVIOUS

That's impossible.

JULIO

Then become more famous.

Julio suddenly leans forward.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Or give me the ledger.

JAVIOUS

I don't have it.

JULIO

Your father was a thief, not a fool. He hid my death sentence somewhere. If you find it first, bring it to me. Maybe I let your mother grow old.

Julio smiles again.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Maybe.

INT. ISAIAH'S CAR - NIGHT

Javious gets in, furious.

ISAIAH

You met him.

JAVIOUS

How you know?

ISAIAH

Because you've got
that same look
Reggie wore when he
started lying to
himself.

Javious punches the dashboard.

JAVIOUS

He's gonna kill her
anyway.

ISAIAH

Probably.

JAVIOUS

You ain't helping.

ISAIAH

I'm helping by not
feeding you
fantasy. We don't
buy men like Julio
off. We bury their
empire in evidence.

JAVIOUS

You keep saying
evidence like it's
sitting on a shelf.

Javious pulls out the tape and key.

JAVIOUS (CONT'D)

This is all I got
left from my father.

Isaiah looks at them, stunned.

ISAIAH

Why didn't you tell
me?

JAVIOUS
Because everything
he touched turned
dangerous.

ISAIAH
Sometimes danger is
the only witness
left.

INT. KAYDEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Old camera gear. music files. cheap ramen cups.

Kayden helps Javious play the cassette on an old recorder.

Reggie's voice fills the room -- shaky, urgent.

REGGIE (V.O.)
If you hearing
this, I'm either
dead or too ashamed
to face you. Julio
keeps two books.
The public one and
the kingdom one.
The real ledger
names cops, judges,
shipments, murders,
payoffs. I mailed a
copy north before
he caught on.

Javious leans in.

REGGIE (V.O.)
(CONT'D)
The key opens box
409 at Union
Pacific Storage on
Alameda, Los
Angeles. If you got
this, Monroe is the
only lawman I ever

trusted. Son... if
your gift survived
me, use it to
build, not hide.

Tape clicks off.

Kayden looks up slowly.

KAYDEN
Your daddy really
lived like every
bad decision had a
soundtrack.

Javious almost laughs, then breaks instead.

JAVIOUS
He got himself
killed.

KAYDEN
Yeah.

(beat)

KAYDEN (CONT'D)
But maybe he also
gave you the bullet
to end this.

INT. STORAGE FACILITY - DAY

Isaiah, Javious, and Kayden open box 409.

Inside: a battered sound mixer case, old paperwork,
passport copies -- and a FLASH DRIVE hidden inside a
hollowed microphone body.

Isaiah holds it like treasure.

ISAIAH
Come on, Reggie.
Please let one
smart thing you
ever did be today.

INT. POLICE DIGITAL LAB - LATER

On a screen: spreadsheets, names, bribe amounts, audio clips, photos, shipping manifests.

Julio with politicians. Julio with dirty cops. Julio with men later listed as dead.

Isaiah goes pale.

ISAIAH

This doesn't just
bury Julio. This
burns half a city.

LAB TECH

Some of these files
are corrupted, but
enough survived.

Isaiah sees a name that hits him -- DETECTIVE MARCO
HERNANDEZ, current LAPD, someone still active.

ISAIAH

Damn.

INT. VERA'S OFFICE - DAY

Vera pushes contracts toward Javious.

VERA

Festival in
Chicago. late-night
TV. A record
advance. If you
want crossover,
now's the window.

JAVIOUS

I need cash fast.

VERA

Then I need
commitment faster.

MIRANDA

Read the back end
before you sign
anything.

VERA

He can either
become an artist or
remain a local
tragedy. I'm
offering the first
option.

Javious signs.

Miranda is disappointed but understands why.

EXT. ROOFTOP RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Miranda and Javious finally breathe for a moment above the
city.

MIRANDA

Tell me something
true that has
nothing to do with
music.

JAVIOUS

When I was little,
I used to sing in
closets because I
thought walls made
voices safer.

MIRANDA

That's sad enough
to be adorable.

JAVIOUS

Your turn.

MIRANDA

I stayed with
Calvin too long
because everybody
said we looked
right together.

JAVIOUS
And did it feel
right?

MIRANDA
No. It felt
convenient.

He takes her hand.

JAVIOUS
What does this feel
like?

She leans in, kisses him softly.

MIRANDA
Complicated.

JAVIOUS
I can do
complicated.

MIRANDA
Can you do honest?

He hesitates.

That is answer enough.

INT. SMALL ARENA - NIGHT

Javious's first headline showcase. Bigger stage. Bigger crowd.

In the VIP section, Julio watches unseen.

Backstage, Calvin appears on crutches, not as a threat this time but as a humbled man.

CALVIN
Miranda around?

Javious stiffens.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Relax. I ain't here
to fight. I came to
say... you got it.

JAVIOUS

What?

CALVIN

Whatever that thing
is that makes
people forget
themselves for
three minutes.

Javious doesn't know what to do with the sincerity.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

And for what it's
worth, I wasn't
good to her.

JAVIOUS

You telling me or
yourself?

CALVIN

Both.

He nods toward the stage.

CALVIN (CONT'D)

Don't waste her
chasing rooms full
of strangers.

Javious clocks that.

INT. TOUR BUS - NIGHT

Weeks later.

Tour life. flashing lights. no sleep. too much attention.

Javious scrolls through messages: Cesar demanding another
payment. Miranda asking when he'll be back. hospital
reminders for Toni.

Vera sits across from him.

VERA
Stop reading the
people who need
pieces of you. Read
the people building
you.

JAVIOUS
Easy for you to say.

VERA
No, easy for me to
monetize.

He looks at her.

VERA (CONT'D)
Fame doesn't ruin
people. It reveals
what they were
willing to trade
before anyone was
watching.

That hits a nerve.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

A new song session turns into an argument.

VERA
The hook needs to
hit harder. We are
selling pain, not
poetry class.

JAVIOUS
Maybe I'm tired of
packaging my
suffering for
people with
playlists.

VERA

Then you should've
stayed anonymous.

Miranda watches from the booth, uncomfortable.

MIRANDA
Maybe let him write
the truth before
you market it.

VERA
Truth doesn't chart
by itself.

JAVIOUS
Maybe that's why
everybody famous
sounds hungry and
empty at the same
time.

He storms out.

EXT. STUDIO ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Miranda follows.

MIRANDA
You can't keep
swallowing poison
just because it
pays.

JAVIOUS
Every time I spit
it out, somebody I
love gets
threatened.

MIRANDA
Then let me stand
with you.

JAVIOUS
I don't know how to
do that.

MIRANDA

I know.

That hurts because it is tender, not cruel.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Kayden meets a nervous low-level accountant from Julio's network, MATEO.

MATEO

I got copies of transfers, but if they know I talked--

KAYDEN

Then don't think of it like talking. Think of it like finally snitching on Satan.

Mateo almost laughs, hands over a thumb drive.

MATEO

Julio pays cops through shell charities. One is tied to the Mercy House benefit sponsor list.

KAYDEN

Say less. Actually say more, but inside this camera.

Kayden records a hidden statement.

Unseen, a car across the garage photographs them.

INT. MIRANDA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Miranda studies a positive pregnancy test again like maybe it will become easier on the second look.

Her father, GERALD WELLS, 50s, gentle businessman, sees her shaken.

GERALD
Bad news or life
news?

MIRANDA
Both, maybe.

He sits.

GERALD
Is the father worth
the trouble?

Miranda thinks of Javious, then of his silences.

MIRANDA
Worth and ready are
not the same thing.

GERALD
No. But babies
arrive anyway.

He squeezes her hand.

GERALD (CONT'D)
Whatever this
becomes, you won't
carry it alone.

INT. MIRANDA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Miranda waits with dinner gone cold.

Javious finally arrives after midnight, exhausted, smelling like smoke and strangers.

MIRANDA
You missed your
mother's
appointment.

JAVIOUS
I sent money.

MIRANDA

She didn't need
money. She needed
you.

JAVIOUS

Everything needs me
right now.

MIRANDA

That's the problem.
You started saying
yes to everybody
except the people
who loved you
before the lights.

JAVIOUS

You think I want
this?

MIRANDA

I think part of you
does. And you're
ashamed to admit it.

Beat.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

I'm pregnant.

Silence.

The room changes shape.

JAVIOUS

What?

MIRANDA

I found out this
morning.

Javious is overwhelmed, scared, trapped between joy and
terror.

JAVIOUS

This is... right
now?

MIRANDA
Yeah. That's how
babies work.

He sits hard.

JAVIOUS
I can't even keep
my mother safe.

MIRANDA
I didn't tell you
to scare you. I
told you because I
won't build a life
on half-truths.

JAVIOUS
I need time.

Miranda's face falls.

MIRANDA
Wrong answer.

She walks away. Javious doesn't stop her. He hates himself
immediately.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MIRANDA'S BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Calvin, parked nearby after dropping off paperwork for a
youth clinic, sees Miranda crying in the lobby. He says
nothing, just gets out and offers her his jacket.

She takes it.

INT. ISAIAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A modest home. Framed commendations on the wall. Isaiah
sits alone at his kitchen table with the ledger files open
on a laptop.

His wife, LENA, enters in pajamas.

LENA

You're home and not
home again.

ISAIAH

If I push this
wrong, people die.

LENA

If you don't push
it, people still
die.

He rubs his eyes.

ISAIAH

Dirty cops.
prosecutors. Julio
bought a map
through the city.

LENA

Then stop carrying
it like it's yours
alone.

ISAIAH

I made Reggie a
promise.

LENA

You made God one
too when you took
that badge. Keep
the right promise.

He sits with that.

EXT. MEXICAN RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

Javious meets Mateo, hoping for more evidence. The lot is
crowded, ordinary.

Mateo steps out of his car scared.

MATEO

I can't do this no
more.

Before he can say another word, a motorcycle races by. Two suppressed shots.

Mateo drops dead.

The motorcycle vanishes.

Javious is splattered with blood in broad daylight, frozen.

From across the street, Julio's black SUV idles for one second, then disappears.

INT. THERAPY REHAB GYM - DAY

Calvin works through painful knee drills. The TV overhead plays Javious's performance clips.

A younger athlete mutters to a friend.

YOUNG ATHLETE

At least singing
don't got knees.

Calvin hears it, almost snaps, then stops himself.

CALVIN

Nah. Singing got
other ways to break
a man.

He pushes through another rep, finally understanding pain outside his own lane.

INT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - NIGHT

Kayden secretly films Cesar meeting Detective Hernandez and another dirty cop. Cash changes hands.

KAYDEN

(whispering to
camera)
There it is. There
it go. Dumb and
dirty.

A metal CLANG behind him.

Kayden turns.

Cesar's men.

Kayden runs.

A brutal chase through the warehouse maze.

He almost escapes through a side door -- then a shot rings out.

Kayden drops, clutching his stomach.

CESAR
Should've stayed a
fan.

They take his camera and leave him bleeding.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Javious arrives to find Isaiah outside trauma surgery.

ISAIAH
He was alive long
enough to say your
name.

Javious crumbles.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Kayden, pale, dying.

JAVIOUS
I'm here. I'm here.

KAYDEN
Bro... if heaven
got bad acoustics,
fix it when you get
there.

Javious is crying openly.

JAVIOUS

Don't do this.

KAYDEN

Tell the world I
discovered you so I
can sound important.

Javious grips his hand.

KAYDEN (CONT'D)

And don't... don't
let them make your
gift ugly.

Kayden dies.

Javious lets out a shattered howl.

INT. FUNERAL CHAPEL - DAY

Kayden's funeral.

Javious sits front row, empty. Toni beside him. Miranda in the back, unsure if she still has the right to be near him. Calvin stands quietly along the wall.

After the service, Isaiah approaches with controlled urgency.

ISAIAH

Kayden's camera
card is gone. But
before he died he
named Cesar and one
dirty cop. We move
now or they erase
the rest.

JAVIOUS

No more moving
careful.

ISAIAH

Careful is why
you're still
breathing.

JAVIOUS

Careful got my
father killed.
Careful got Kayden
killed.

Isaiah grabs him.

ISAIAH

No. Silence did.

That lands.

Isaiah lowers his voice.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)

We set Julio up.
Controlled buy.
live confession.
ledger as bait. I
can get federal
attention if I give
them enough heat.

JAVIOUS

And if your dirty
cops hear first?

ISAIAH

Then we make the
stage so public
they can't clean it
up.

INT. CALVIN'S YOUTH GYM - DAY

Calvin runs a clinic now, knee brace visible. Miranda
watches kids laugh around him.

CALVIN

Funny how losing
one dream makes you
notice you got

hands left for
other things.

Miranda smiles faintly.

MIRANDA
You changed.

CALVIN
Pain got expensive.
I started trying to
get my money's
worth.

She laughs for the first time in days.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
He still don't know
what to do with
fear, does he?

MIRANDA
No.

CALVIN
Then make him
choose. Men like
him think love will
wait in the lobby
while they go fight
devils.

Miranda looks down at her stomach.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
You tell him yet?

MIRANDA
He knows.

CALVIN
And?

MIRANDA
He's drowning.

Calvin nods.

CALVIN
Then don't let him
pull you under
while he figures
out if he wants air.

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL - NIGHT

After Kayden's death, Javious sits alone in a hospital chapel.

No music. No words. Just grief.

Calvin enters quietly, having learned what happened.

CALVIN
I can go.

JAVIOUS
Probably should.

Calvin stays anyway.

CALVIN
When my knee went,
everybody came
around with
speeches. Real loud
sympathy. Didn't
mean nothing.

JAVIOUS
Then don't give one.

CALVIN
I'm not. I'm
telling you grief
makes people
selfish before it
makes them wise. So
whatever stupid
thing you thinking
right now -- don't
do it alone.

Javious finally looks at him.

JAVIOUS
Why are you helping
me?

CALVIN
Because I know what
it is to lose the
version of yourself
you thought was
gonna save you.

Beat.

CALVIN (CONT'D)
And because Miranda
loves you. Which
means if you
disappear, you take
parts of her with
you.

That lands.

INT. MIRANDA'S APARTMENT - LATER NIGHT

Miranda listens to a voicemail from Javious he never sent.
Just breathing. No words. She deletes it, crying.

She opens a box and places the sonogram inside with a
concert wristband from his first show.

EXT. ROOFTOP OVERLOOKING LOS ANGELES - DAWN

Javious stands with Toni as the city brightens.

TONI
Your father used to
bring me to
rooftops whenever
he wanted to sound
honest.

JAVIOUS
Did it work?

TONI
Sometimes. Sky make
liars feel small.

He gives her a weak smile.

TONI (CONT'D)
You still love
Miranda?

JAVIOUS
Yeah.

TONI
Then say it before
violence becomes
the only language
in your life.

He nods.

INT. TONI'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Toni struggles to breathe. Javious helps her to bed.

TONI
How many people
gotta die before
you stop paying for
a sin you didn't
commit?

JAVIOUS
Until it ends.

TONI
Then end it right.

She grips his wrist.

TONI (CONT'D)
Your father loved
us. But he loved
shortcuts too. You
don't honor him by
repeating him.

JAVIOUS

What if I lose
everything?

TONI

Baby, you've been
losing everything a
little at a time.
That's why you
don't feel it all
at once.

He breaks. She pulls him close like he's nine again.

TONI (CONT'D)

Go tell the truth.
Even if your voice
shakes.

INT. POLICE SAFE OFFICE - DAY

Isaiah lays out the plan with federal agents and one
trusted AUSA.

On a board: JULIO. CESAR. DET. HERNANDEZ. BANK TRANSFERS.
LEDGER. CHARITY CONCERT.

ISAIAH

Javious is
headlining the
Mercy House benefit
at the Forum Annex.
Julio likes money
and symbolism. We
tell him final
payment plus ledger
exchange happens
backstage after the
second set.

AUSA

This is thin.

ISAIAH

It's thinner if you
wait. He's bleeding
witnesses.

FEDERAL AGENT

And if your
department leak is
real?

ISAIAH

Then we keep local
out until the last
possible minute.

Javious enters wearing a wire fitting kit, face like stone.

JAVIOUS

Tell me where to
stand.

INT. MIRANDA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Javious knocks. Miranda opens the door but doesn't let him
in right away.

JAVIOUS

I was a coward.

MIRANDA

That narrows it
down to half the
men I've dated.

He deserves that.

JAVIOUS

I'm done hiding
what my life is.

He tells her everything -- Mexico, Reggie, Julio, the debt,
the payments, Kayden, the plan.

Miranda absorbs it, devastated and furious.

MIRANDA

You let me fall in
love with you
inside a war zone
and never told me.

JAVIOUS
I thought distance
could protect you.

MIRANDA
Distance doesn't
protect. It just
abandons politely.

Beat.

JAVIOUS
I'm sorry.

Miranda touches her stomach.

MIRANDA
I don't need sorry.
I need living.

He sees her hand there. Finally understands the full weight
again.

JAVIOUS
I'll come back.

MIRANDA
Don't promise me
what men in your
family say when
they are scared.

He nods, tears in his eyes.

JAVIOUS
Then I'll fight to
deserve you if I do.

She lets him in. They hold each other in silence.

EXT. FORUM ANNEX - NIGHT

The charity concert. Massive crowd. flashing cameras.
Banners for Mercy House.

Javious's face on everything.

Inside the security perimeter, Isaiah quietly positions federal teams. Calvin, volunteering through his youth foundation, notices the tension.

CALVIN
Something wrong?

Isaiah studies him.

ISAIAH
Depends how much
you care about
Miranda Wells.

Calvin goes still.

INT. BACKSTAGE DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Javious suits up. Mic check. wire hidden.

Toni, weak but dressed elegant, enters.

TONI
You look like your
father when he
wanted the world to
believe he had it
under control.

JAVIOUS
That's not
comforting.

TONI
Good. I came to
tell you something
real.

She takes his face in her hands.

TONI (CONT'D)
You owe your father
love. You do not
owe his mistakes
your life.

She kisses his forehead.

TONI (CONT'D)

Go sing like a free
man, even if
freedom only lasts
three minutes.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Javious steps into roaring light.

The crowd loses its mind.

He sings with a new edge tonight -- less polished, more true. Every lyric sounds like testimony.

Miranda watches from side stage, one hand unconsciously at her belly.

Calvin spots two unfamiliar men moving toward the family corridor. One is Cesar.

CALVIN

(to security
volunteer)
Watch stage left.

INT. FAMILY CORRIDOR - SAME

Cesar's men grab Miranda, covering her mouth.

Calvin sees and sprints despite his bad knee.

A vicious hallway fight. Calvin takes a beating but manages to slam one thug into a catering cart.

Miranda bites Cesar's wrist and breaks free.

CESAR

Take her!

Calvin tackles another goon. Miranda runs toward stage security.

INT. BACKSTAGE LOADING AREA - NIGHT

After the second set, Javious walks toward the exchange point carrying a duffel bag and a fake ledger case.

Wire live.

Isaiah listens from a surveillance van.

ISAIAH

Steady. Keep him
talking.

Julio steps out of shadow, elegant as ever, two men behind him.

JULIO

I do enjoy a man
who pays on time.

JAVIOUS

Ledger's in the
case. Final payment
in the bag.

JULIO

Nothing is final
till I say final.

Javious sets the case down.

JAVIOUS

You killed my
father over this.

JULIO

I killed your
father because he
confused greed with
leverage.

In the van, agents lean in.

JAVIOUS

And Kayden?

Julio shrugs.

JULIO

A cameraman with
bad instincts.

JAVIOUS

You sent Cesar
after my mother.

JULIO

No. I sent a
reminder. Mercy
bores me.

There it is. Enough to open the door.

ISAIAH

Move, move, move.

But before the teams hit, Detective Hernandez and dirty
local cops burst in from the opposite side -- tipped off.

HERNANDEZ

Drop the wire,
Monroe. This is our
scene.

Gun chaos erupts.

Julio smiles, having expected betrayal from everyone.

JULIO

This is why I never
trusted uniforms.

Gunfire.

One federal agent goes down. Cesar shoots at Javious.
Javious dives behind road cases.

Isaiah returns fire.

Calvin appears from the side corridor, limping, dragging
Miranda behind cover.

CALVIN

Get down!

Cesar spots Miranda and aims.

Calvin takes the shot in the shoulder tackling her away.

MIRANDA

Calvin!

Javious sees red. He charges Cesar.

A brutal hand-to-hand fight among cables, steel cases, and shattered lights. Cesar is bigger, dirtier. Javious is fueled by grief.

Cesar slams him into a truss.

CESAR

Your daddy screamed
louder.

Javious headbutts him, grabs a broken mic stand, and drives Cesar backward. Isaiah fires -- Cesar drops.

Julio flees up the catwalk stairs toward the stage rigging.

JAVIOUS

Julio!

Isaiah shouts but Javious is already after him.

INT. CATWALK ABOVE STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Below them, the audience screams, unsure if this is part of the show.

Julio limps along the catwalk, gun in hand. Javious follows, bleeding.

JULIO

Your father died
begging for
bargains. At least
you came angry.

JAVIOUS

You took ten years
from us.

JULIO

No. Your father
gave them to me.

Julio fires. Javious ducks. metal sparks.

Down below, Miranda watches in horror. Toni grips Isaiah's
arm, unable to breathe.

Julio reaches the end platform. nowhere left.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Give me the real
ledger, and I let
your child grow up
with a father.

Javious freezes -- Julio knows.

JULIO (CONT'D)

You think I don't
study the people I
own?

JAVIOUS

You don't own me.

JULIO

Everybody belongs
to fear.

Julio aims at Miranda below.

JULIO (CONT'D)

Especially fathers.

Before he can shoot, Javious lunges. They crash into the
railing. The gun skitters.

Julio draws a knife. He slashes Javious across the ribs.

Julio drives him back toward open air.

JULIO (CONT'D)

A voice is just
breath. I end
breath.

From below -- BANG.

Isaiah has a clear shot. Julio jerks, hit once in the side but not down.

Julio snarls and comes again.

Javious, half-falling, grabs a hanging chain and swings the hook into Julio's chest. Julio loses balance.

For one long second, mob king and singer stare at each other.

JULIO

You are your
father's son.

JAVIOUS

No.

Javious shoves him.

Julio falls from the catwalk and crashes through lighting scaffolds onto the empty section of stage below.

Silence.

Then chaos.

Julio Sanchez is dead.

INT. BACKSTAGE MEDICAL AREA - LATER

Sirens. medics. cuffs. dirty cops led away.

Calvin sits with his shoulder bandaged.

CALVIN

Tell me that counts
as community
service.

Miranda laughs through tears and kisses his forehead.

MIRANDA

You saved me.

CALVIN

Yeah. Don't tell
teenage me I ended
up being useful
without a trophy.

Across the room, Isaiah speaks with federal agents.

FEDERAL AGENT

With Julio dead and
this ledger, we're
rolling up the
whole network.

ISIAIAH

Make sure dead
doesn't become
convenient. He
killed too many for
a clean report.

Javious, stitched and exhausted, sits beside Toni.

TONI

You still here?

JAVIOUS

For now.

TONI

Good. I ain't done
needing you.

He smiles, tears in his eyes.

MIRANDA approaches slowly.

JAVIOUS

You okay?

MIRANDA

Ask me again in
twenty years.

He nods.

JAVIOUS

I don't deserve
easy with you.

MIRANDA

No.

Beat.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

But maybe if you
stay honest, you
deserve a chance.

She takes his hand and places it gently on her stomach.

MIRANDA (CONT'D)

Start there.

He breaks down quietly, overwhelmed.

DISSOLVE TO:

SUPER: NINE MONTHS LATER

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

No entourage. No glitter. Just a piano, a microphone, and
Javious.

A new maturity in him. Fame remains, but now it fits
different.

On the wall is a platinum plaque. Beneath it, a framed
photo of Kayden. Another of Toni, healthier, smiling from a
treatment chair. Another of Miranda holding a newborn boy.

Isaiah watches through the glass with a small smile.

Vera speaks softly from the booth.

VERA

Whenever you're
ready.

Javious looks through the glass at Miranda, who bounces
their baby in her arms. Calvin sits nearby, coaching kids

through homework in the corner of the studio lounge,
shoulder scar visible. Unlikely peace.

Javious steps to the mic.

JAVIOUS

This one's called
"No More Hiding."
It's for the people
who survived what
should've swallowed
them.

He begins to sing.

His voice is richer now. Less afraid. Less desperate to
prove. More willing to tell the truth.

INTERCUT WITH:

- Federal arrests based on the ledger.
- Headlines exposing corruption tied to Julio's network.
- Isaiah testifying.
- Toni ringing the bell after a completed treatment cycle.
- Miranda and Javious arguing in one moment, laughing in
the next, trying to build something real instead of
perfect.
- Calvin mentoring boys on a cracked court.
- Kayden's mother receiving a foundation check in his name
for young artists.

BACK TO SCENE

JAVIOUS

(singing)

I carried ghosts
inside my chest,

Till love demanded room,
I thought a song could pay my debts,
But truth is what broke through...

Miranda cries. Toni closes her eyes and smiles.

Javious sings the final note not like a wounded boy --

but like a man who chose not to hand his life to fear.

FADE OUT.

THE END