

flowered concrete productions presents: a

"use your brain" short film

in association with drawing realm studios

Darwin "D.C." Charles & Jarvis "Prince" McKay star

in

"pReSSuREd": another hood story

also starring:

Jacob "J-LAX" latimore

Ken "Supreme" McKay

With Brandon "Boog" Roberts

& Austin "Fuego" Rivera

"the conclusion" (I)

“Set up”

“You ready?” said the tallest of the bunch with his .22 caliber intact.

“Yeah, I’m ready,” said the guy right next to him.

“How about you Germ? Is your shit loaded?”

“You know my shit stay tight my nigga,” responded Germ three paces behind the first two gunmen.

It was obvious that Germ was nervous, as he fiddled with his gun. He was a young boy of around sixteen and it was the first time that he had ever been a part of his older brother Rex’s plans.

“Where’s Ace?” asked the second guy.

“That nigga outside somewhere waiting for Riv,” said Rex as he aimed his gun at the basement door with intense focus.

“I can’t believe these niggas haven’t heard us,” said the second masked gunman.

“C’mon Mook, you really think them niggas gon’ hear us with all that loud music and PS3 shit they got goin’ on?”

“Word up,” said Germ as he continued to show his nervousness.

The three young men were dressed up in all black. They wore all black Reebok sneakers, jeans, sweatshirts, gloves and ski masks that casually rested upon their heads, but had yet to cover their faces.

“Yo Rex, be honest playa. Do you really think we can trust that Fuego cat?” asked Mook as he wiped the beady sweat off of his forehead.

It just so happened to be a sweltering hot evening and the all black dress code that the young men were abiding by wasn’t helping.

"We ain't got a choice Mook, our scratch is in there. That loot belongs to us, so these niggas about to learn what happens when you take our shit," replied Rex.

"Yeah, I feel you. Let's do this," said Mook in agreement.

"But if Señor Estrella double-crosses us, I won't have no hard feelings when it comes to murking him," said Rex coldly.

"Damn, what's taking them niggas so long though?" asked Mook.

"Germ, go see if Ace is still out there," ordered Rex.

Just as Rex had given the order, Ace and Fuego arrived with .48 revolvers in hand and dressed in similar attire as the three young men before them.

"You're late," said Rex with a sneer as he stared at Fuego hard in the eye.

"I was making sure everything was intact," he said as he dusted off lint that was sitting upon his left shoulder.

"It really doesn't matter. We're all here now. Let's turn it up right quick so we can break out. I got a ripper to zeez with tonight and this bitch'll do anything for me to bust a nut my nicca," said Ace as he steadied his gaze upon the basement door.

"Aight fellas, I hope y'all shit loaded. Let's get active," said Rex as he pulled his ski-mask down upon his face.

The other young men proceeded to follow suit as they prepared to unleash a wrath of destruction against a group of young men that were essentially of their own kind.

And so, it was then that shots were fired and ripped into the night as all of the lives within the basement's parameters changed forever...

Director's Note: This is a story that just so happens to occur every day and affects many impoverished minorities living within low-income communities throughout the ghettos of America. As much as it may appear to have ceased in national coverage, this terrible cycle of violence still endures in inner cities throughout the country such as Philadelphia, Detroit, Baltimore and most notably Chicago. The disturbing and menacing calamities regarding misguided youth, specifically, those of minority backgrounds still occur within the present year of 2014. Therefore, with this story, I have made it my job to show you the resulting misfortunes of such a lifestyle. And so, welcome to an often overlooked and unexplored territory within today's current cycle of violence. My setting for this piece is Oakland. West Oakland to be exact. You are now officially west bound. This is what happens when African-American teens and/or young adults, dealing with substandard economic as well as sociopolitical conditions are pressured..

"fRiDaY" (II)

"The plan"

It was 3:30pm on Friday, June 1st, when the entire school population made their way out of McClymonds high school. It wasn't long when two teenagers, in particular, on the verge of manhood, exited the building as they each carried schoolbags strapped over their right shoulders. The barely turned eighteen year-old boys that had just made their way out of McClymonds high, were none other than Jarvis McKay, also known as Prince, and Darwin Charles, who often went by D.C. for short.

Darwin was a kid with a placid personality but a very sharp intellect. He had big brown eyes, neatly cut hair and possessed the most innocent looking baby face imaginable. Under his chiseled chin, he had six stubs of facial hair and also a few that rested upon his upper lip. Due to his youthful features, people were often taken aback when he told them that he was in fact, eighteen. His life-long dream was to become a screenwriter and as he wrapped up his senior year of high school, he hoped that he would one day write big budget movies that portrayed daily experiences of those living harsh and bitter realities within the ghetto slums of America. That year he received a damn near perfect score on his SAT's and had many different colleges recruiting him with hopes that he'd join their film programs. However, Darwin had turned down most of their offers in order to stay home in California, where he felt that he would have the best chance to launch his career. Of all the schools that had once been on his radar, he had shrunken down the amount of schools as potential destinations to one or possibly two.

Prince, on the other hand, was a young rebel and mouth flapper whose mouth constantly got him into trouble. He had a hard face that expressed bitter longing. Unlike Darwin, many often mistook him for being older than he actually was. It was without question that the environment and pressures of West Oakland shaped his physical appearance as well as his mental persona. Although he had no interests in furthering his education or any plans for that matter, Prince, like Darwin,

possessed a keen intellect and shrewd amount of wit as he was the leader of the Physics club at McClymonds. He also possessed a great knack for the physical sciences as he had scored a damn near perfect score twice on the SAT subjects exam but thought of it as unfortunate good luck that he would never look into.

The boys had just finished their last day of classes for the week and were headed home. They were seniors in high school as well as very intelligent. They were also eager and overjoyed about moving on with their lives and getting out of the nationwide public school educational system.

"I just want this shit to be over," said Prince as he rubbed both temples across his forehead.

The two boys had just crossed Myrtle Street where their school suddenly stood in tow. They then merged onto 26th Street and took that path straight until they hit Adeline Street. From there, they walked four blocks until they reached 18th Street.

"We ain't done nothin' yet," said Darwin as he checked his watch. "College is right around the corner," he added.

"How many times do I gotta tell you? I ain't going to no goddamn college. What is college gon' do for a nigga like me? You know, if this really was the land of opportunity, you think nigga's like us or people in general, would be payin' for higher education, living on welfare, enlisting in the armed forces and paying proprietor tax deductions??!! Well, no sir. Not this nigga. You see, I ain't the one. But they gon' learn, oh yes they will."

Darwin kept his mouth shut as Prince continued his "fuck-the-system" rant.

"They ain't never gon' give us nothin', so if the government ain't worried about me, what the fuck makes you think I'm gon' worry about them?"

"I hear you Prince, but we're all worth somethin,' I just know it. Although I can't explain it to you now, I just know

I'll be able to someday," said Darwin with the upmost amount of optimism in his voice.

"Yeah, please do, I mean...once you figure it all out and shit. Let's just hope that I'm alive to hear it," said Prince as they inched closer to 18th street, also known as "the block".

"What are you going to do once you hit the crib my nilla?" asked Darwin.

"I dunno, I've got some Physics homework to tackle but I'll probably bust that down Sunday night. As for now, Supreme hit me up earlier and dropped a line about getting some good Rodrigo from B-town, so we probably gon' be higher than a muthafucka tonight," said Prince ardently.

"Y'all can never stay off of that shit huh?" asked Darwin as he shook his head.

"Naw, but it's good for the soul, you should really try it man," he said.

"You know I don't smoke Prince," said Darwin as he continued to glance at the gold watch his father had gotten him for Christmas the year before.

"You really need to though, since you gon' be a big time screenwriter, filming movies up in Hollywood and shit. You need something that'd take a load off," urged Prince with a smirk.

"Naw, I'm good. Look at these fools," said Darwin as they had now reached the front porch of Prince's house and were welcomed by a smattering of chatter and laughter.

Prince's household was always occupied by the same young men that currently sat in its space.

"What up little niggas? What y'all learned in that thing called school today?" asked Boog as he picked his afro with a comb and a smirk upon his face.

Boog was a playful and plump guy who had a big afro, a vice for smoking and also an overlapping belly that concealed his waist. He had tiny beady little eyes that were Asian-esque. When

looking at him close enough, many said that he happened to share a resemblance with Steele from the Ernest Dickerson, 1992 African-American classic film, "Juice". At that present point in time, he was seated upon a rocking chair that cried with every attempted rock.

"A lot. Maybe you should try it sometime," said Darwin as he dapped all of the guys on the porch while Prince went inside to drop off his schoolbag.

"No, no, no, school ain't for me cuz. Do you know how hard it was for me to make it past the 7th grade, let alone the 8th?" he asked rhetorically as he took a sip from a grape juice can that had been sitting in between his legs.

"My nigga, you barely made it past the 5th!" said Supreme as they all burst into laughter.

Supreme was the calmly aggressive one within the crew. Although he wasn't the head in charge, he definitely had the respect of everyone involved due to his cutthroat attitude and his tough nature. He had a thin face and a frilly wild afro that was as tall as the sun. He was the uncle of Prince by two years and always made sure that his nephew was in good spirits. He truly cared about him, as well as his friends. Despite the hardness within his character that he possessed, he was also a playful and interactive individual.

"Where'd Prince run off to?" asked another dude who was known in the crew as J-LAX.

J-LAX had a demeanor about him that hinted he wasn't meant to be fucked with. He had a harmless face, charming smile and flat-twisted dreads that sat firmly upon his head. As harmless as he looked in appearance, the actuality of his life-story said everything that needed to be known about him. He grew up on the south side of Chicago, moved to L.A. at the age of ten and finally migrated to West Oakland at the age of fifteen. He also spent time in Long Beach and Compton while living in Southern California. There was no doubt that he had a great influence upon every single member of the crew. Gangbanging had been the core foundation surrounding his entire childhood and with that credibility, they certainly respected him.

"I don't know nigga, he probably talking to his momma," said Supreme as he rocked back and forth upon his chair.

"I ain't gon' front though. Your sister fine as fuck Preme. When you gon' let me hit that?" asked Boog as he finished his grape juice.

"Nigga, you try to fuck my sister and I'mma shoot the shit out your heavy-set ass," said Supreme as they all erupted in laughter again.

Just at that moment, Prince re-emerged as he was now wearing a white tank-top and basketball shorts. Summer happened to be right around the corner and Oakland was rapidly starting to heat up as spring began to tumble away.

"You washed your pussy good my nigga? It felt like you was in there for ages," said Boog as the other guys snickered.

"Yeah, I was gettin' it trimmed from your momma," said Prince as Boog got up off the porch as fast as his fat feet would let him and chased Prince around the front lawn.

They all watched the playful chase as Prince ducked and dodged Boog's clutches.

"Aight, quit it you two, we gotta talk some business," said Supreme as he beckoned for them to return upon the porch.

"Ok LAX, the floor is yours, tell them what you told me," said Supreme.

J-LAX waited until he saw that all eyes were completely focused upon him before speaking.

"So, over the past week, I've been camping out by Seventh Street near that grocery store. And it seems as if the shit is accessible. We can pull a lick," he finished.

Darwin didn't think twice as he immediately dismissed the idea.

"I ain't with it," he said as he shook his head with vigor.

"Would you just shut the fuck up and let the man speak. He didn't even discuss the shit yet," said Supreme as he glared at Darwin.

"There ain't nothing to discuss," he replied.

"D.C., let him finish bro," said Prince as he stretched out his hand to diffuse the tension.

"I'm telling you, one of these nights we're headed for trouble, I just know it," he affirmed.

"Well it ain't gonna be tonight my nilla," assured Supreme.

He then continued, "As you were J-LAX."

"Like I was saying, Mandela Foods Cooperative is lookin' pretty vacant at night. That old man Garcia is the only one behind the register during that time. We could just pull the lick and break out. I'm talking quick, fast, and act as if nothin' happened. It's easy money."

"Cool," said Prince.

"Word," said Supreme.

"I can fuck with it," said Boog as he took a puff from the spliff in his hand.

"Not on my porch nigga!" said Supreme. He then raised his voice, "This little nigga's mother gon' be hot and all in my ear if she smell that shit!"

"Aight, I'll put it out," said Boog as he threw the blunt upon the grass and peeled it with his foot.

"You up for it?" asked J-LAX as he surveyed Darwin up and down like a sports coach deciding upon his last cut.

"Whatever, let's just be quick," said Darwin as he checked his watch again.

"Atta boy! My muhtafuckin' man D.C.! This nigga got a future in writing and he pullin' licks in the hood. Now, that's cold!" said Supreme as he punched Darwin on the shoulder.

"Everyone is to be back by dusk. The store closes up at eight but Garcia usually leaves around nine," said J-LAX.

"You sure, he ain't gon' take off earlier?" asked Supreme.

"I'm sure my nilla, I've been studyin' his shit for the past two weeks," assured J-LAX.

"Aight, everyone be here for eight thirty. D.C. don't bail on the homies, and Boog, make sure your titanic ass is here by eight because you know your heart fails with every step you take," said Supreme with a grin and to another chorus of laughter.

"I live two blocks away my nilla, what you mean?" asked Boog as he appeared hurt by the joke.

"Pay him no mind, you know he just fuckin with you," said J-LAX as he tried to comfort Boog while suppressing the smirk across his face.

"I'll catch up with y'all later," said Darwin as he made his way off of the porch.

"Don't bail on us D.C.," said Supreme in a firm tone.

As Darwin walked across the street and entered his house, he once again checked his watch. The moment he poured himself a glass of water and placed his schoolbag upon the floor, the telephone began to ring. As quickly as he could, he rushed to pick it up.

"Hello?" he said as he grabbed the receiver.

"Hey Dar," said a man with a deep voice on the opposing line.

"Oh, uh, hey Dad," replied Darwin uncomfortably.

"Hey, son," his father responded.

"How are things?" asked Darwin.

"Good. How are things on your end?" his father asked.

"Fine," responded Darwin nonchalantly.

"How's the writing coming along?"

"Good, no complaints over here...about anything..."

"You know Dar; the UCLA offer is still on the table if you want it. You'd be going to school close enough to me and the changing of scenery would offer you various opportunities, especially for film," said his father.

"I dunno, I gotta think about it," he said as he scratched his head.

"Have you heard from them as of yet?" asked his father.

"No, but U.C. Berkeley has accepted me. I'm just waiting for my financial aid package to be approved.

"But why put yourself through that when I can secure you a full ride at UCLA?"

"I dunno Dad. I think mom's calling. Gotta go," said Darwin.

"You just think about it. I'll be sure to make some calls," said his father.

"Ummm, okay, I will," replied Darwin as he rushed to get him off the phone.

"Hey, son, I love you."

"Yeah, okay. Bye, Dad," said Darwin as he hung up the phone in abrupt fashion.

Later that night, Darwin finished putting the final touches upon his screening script for the U.C. Berkeley college application before heading into the shower. He then changed into some gear of all black clothing and made his way across the street to Supreme and Prince's porch. It was time for the lick..

"The lick"

When Darwin arrived upon Prince and Supreme's porch, the two had already been present and were waiting for the rest of the crew's arrival. It was twenty after the hour and the two were in frantic conversation about what was about to happen.

"My brother, D.C.! Always early when it's time for a lick. The ultimate professional," said Supreme as he playfully nudged Darwin on the shoulder before sitting in silence.

"Y'all ready?" asked Darwin in one short breathe.

"Yeah bruh, you already know what time it is. Shit, here comes LAX now," said Prince as J-LAX parked his car on the opposite side of the street, just two houses away from Darwin's.

The three of them then parted ways with the porch simultaneously, as they went to go meet J-LAX.

The automobile driven by J-LAX was an old 1992 Toyota Avalon, as it was a dark and gritty gray of a color.

The car's age was apparent as the paint upon the body's exterior seemed chipped in every place imaginable. Without warning, the muffler of the Toyota's engine then roared as it exhaled all of the particles from the main engine's intake.

"Get in. Let's ride out," said J-LAX as he unlocked the car doors.

"We can't," said Prince with a screwed face.

"Why, not?" asked J-LAX.

"We waitin' on that fat piece of tissue," said Supreme as he looked up at what had suddenly become a dark and glistening sky.

The stars were few and far in between but shined nonetheless.

It was then fifteen minutes to nine and the sun was long gone. After taking a quick glance at his watch, Supreme honestly wondered if there would be enough time to complete the lick.

"Damn, just get in, if he ain't here in five, we'll just swerve by his crib," said J-LAX as they all got into the cramped Toyota.

"He lives on 23rd right?" asked J-LAX as he put the car in drive.

"Yup, 23rd, just off of West Grand," said Supreme.

"Aight, cool," said J-LAX after shifting gears and placing the stick in drive.

Just as the Toyota was about to pull off, they heard a heavy panting coming from the sidewalk curb.

"WAIT!" yelled a voice out of breathe from behind.

Boog had just turned the corner and was running as fast as his fat feet could carry him.

"Come the fuck on, we been waitin' on your bubbly ass," yelled Supreme from out of the passenger window.

Boog, in amazement, somehow managed to squeeze himself within the tiny Toyota. And as they pulled off, the car made an unmistakable lurch which was probably attributed to Boog's frightening weight.

"My ride is in distress because of your M&M fun size ass," said J-LAX as he made a left turn upon reaching a green traffic light.

"Yeah, what took you so long husky?" asked Prince as he played with his ski mask.

"I dunno, just lost track of time, I guess," he said as he shoved an inhaler into one of his pockets with a deep thrust.

"You still think we got time to do this?" asked Darwin as he checked his watch. "It's five to nine."

"Yeah, we'll make it my nigga," said Supreme.

"Don't worry, we'll have you in bed before your acceptance letters arrive," said J-LAX as the other guys snickered.

Darwin remained mum as he thought about what would soon occur. Little did J-LAX or the crew know that one of his acceptance letters *did* actually arrive..

The car slowly came to a halt on the corner of 7th as they observed the grocery store across the street. One light remained luminous as Garcia made his way to the back of the establishment. The boys quickly got out of the car as J-LAX popped open his trunk.

"Any of y'all need thumpers?" he asked.

"Nah, I'm good," said Supreme.

"Me too," said Prince as he carefully displayed the .45 tucked underneath his belt.

"I'm straight," added Boog as he too flashed a steely black pistol.

Here you go D.C.," said J-LAX as he offered him a 357 magnum.

"D.C., that shit is loaded, so be careful with it my nilla," said Supreme as Darwin reluctantly grabbed the 357.

"Aight, here's the plan. When Garcia goes back to the register, I'll be demanding him for the money. Boog, Prince, I need y'all two to stand guard and patrol the exteriors of the premises just in case the elroy's roll through. D.C., Preme, y'all coming inside with me as I need y'all to aim at him from opposite angles just in case he tries to get smart, got it?" ordered J-LAX with ease.

"Yeah," replied everyone, confirming that they understood their roles and what was expected of them.

"Aight fellas, masks on, it's time to get active."

The five young men placed their ski-masks upon their faces and withdrew guns before crossing the street in complete

silence. It was now completely dark and soundless except for the chirping of beetles in the distance.

Boog and Prince then posted up outside of the store as J-LAX, Supreme, and Darwin quietly entered the establishment. The store's bell chime signaled their entrance while Garcia, who kept his back turned to the register, took care of business.

"I'm sorry, we're closed," he said as he returned some fallen items back onto their rightful shelves.

The gang didn't budge as they waited for Garcia to turn around and face them.

"Are you deaf? I said we're clo—"

"No, you're open! You're as open as you'll be if you don't do what the fuck I say!" said a muffled voice from under the ski-mask which happened to be J-LAX as he brandished his gun at the store owner.

"Please man, please don't shoot. I have a wife, mother, and two kids," said Garcia in trembling fear.

"Just shut the fuck up and do what he says Flip! Facil, facil, you'll see la familia if you follow our rules!" said Supreme. His voice was calm and steady...

"Okay, okay, just please," said the middle-aged man in between sobs.

"You're not listening," exclaimed J-LAX as he now unlocked the safety to his 9 millimeter and placed it upon Garcia's heart.

"Okay, okay, okay," he said as he swiftly extracted the money from the cash register.

It was then that sirens were heard from a distance.

"Hurry the FUCK UP!" yelled Supreme with his gun pointed at Garcia as he signaled for Darwin to go outside.

"Here, here, here, this is all of it," he said as he threw it all upon the counter.

J-LAX quickly pulled out a little black bag and used his gun to slide all of the cash within its receptacle.

"C'mon y'all, let's go, the popo sound like they're browsin'!" screamed Prince as he held the door.

As Supreme and J-LAX headed for the exit, Garcia, who was sobbing hysterically, quickly pulled out a jet-black rifle and shot at the crew. The gang all ducked and ran for the car as hastily as they could.

"Move, move, move, let's go!" yelled J-LAX as he opened the car doors for all of them to get in.

Garcia then ran into the street until he felt he was close enough before letting off another blast into the night.

That time, the boys weren't as lucky, as he managed to knock off the visor mirror on the passenger side of the car.

The Toyota then began to grumble before pulling off from the curb, leaving the mirror in its wake as it did.

"Shit, el vato loco," exclaimed Boog as he peered out of the back window.

As he stared at the fading image of Garcia, he watched him in the distance as he transformed into a small glint within the night.

"How much did we make out with?" asked J-LAX as the car growled past Wood Street and turned on 18th near Raimondi Park.

Supreme, who had been counting the money during Garcia's shooting, responded to J-LAX.

"Two stacks."

"Shit, we payed tonight my nillas," said Boog as he lit a blunt in victory.

"Okay, so we're all gettin' four hundred," said J-LAX.

"One of y'all could take mine, I don't want nothin'," said Darwin as he peered out of his window uneasily.

"C'mon D.C., stop being a lil' bitch ass nigga. Take your loot, you worked for it," said J-LAX.

"But that's the whole point. I didn't do any—"

Within that moment, a siren wailed from behind as they saw a cop car tailing them in the distance.

"Shit, what we gon' do now?" asked Prince as he made a gesture to conceal his gun.

"Chill out, be cool, don't look suspect and put that fucking weed out Boog," said Supreme.

Boog then did as he was told by squashing his blunt with both hands.

The cops precipitously came to a halt behind them when yet another car with five young black males, suddenly ran the light at top speed.

Without hesitation, the police car pulled out from behind them and also ran the light as they sped forward chasing the potential suspects.

From there, J-LAX quickly brought the crew home before they were bound to run into any more potential misfortunes.

As Darwin opened his front door twenty minutes later, a voice from within said, "Darwin, is that you baby?"

"Yeah ma, it's me," he responded.

"I've been calling your cell since 8:30," she said.

"Yeah, well, I was doing a project at a friend's house," he yelled as he took off his sneakers and ran into his room.

It then struck Darwin that he had forgotten to give back the 357 magnum to J-LAX. He really hated even the thought of a gun concealed within the sanctuary that was his home. He hastily went under his bed and pulled out a shoe box that he once used

to pile his money into as a kid and stuffed the gun within it. Once he was sure that the box was closed shut, he then kicked it back to where it had come from and then climbed onto his bed. Before heading to sleep, he laid his head upon his pillow and thought about how close he had been to being killed or incarcerated. Somewhere deep within Darwin's brain, a voice told him that what he had just experienced was only the beginning to his concerns and that the real shit had yet to surface.

"SATuRdaY" (III)

“staying in”

After Friday night's lick that nearly resulted in jail time for Darwin and the crew, he decided to stay in the following day in hopes of avoiding any further types of trouble.

Darwin decided to spend his entire Saturday by browsing the web on his laptop and comparing benefits of attending U.C. Berkeley's School of Film as opposed to UCLA's.

It then struck Darwin that going to UCLA would probably turn out to be a great decision for him in the end. For one thing, the prestige of UCLA was amazing and also, the connections he would possibly make as an up and coming screenwriter within the film industry would play to his advantage. Lastly, although it was a subconscious thought, the most important reason as to why Darwin wanted to go there happened to be because of his Dad. Darwin desperately wanted to rekindle his relationship with his father and thought that moving to Los Angeles would be a great way to do it. Darwin didn't have a lot of memories with him and for the little that he did, they were all few and far in between...

“Darwin, Darwin!”

“Darwin, honey!” yelled his mother from the bottom of the staircase.

“Yes, mam,” he replied as he snapped out of his day dream.

“I'm headed to work now baby, I'll be back around ten.”

As Darwin turned his head to face his dresser, he noticed that the digital clock read 1:20p.m. His mother worked a 2-9pm shift on Saturdays at the local fast food burger shack called Beefy Hut for extra income.

“Are you working on your college apps?” she asked.

“Yeah, just pondering upon the different benefits between UCLA and U.C. Berkeley,” he shouted to her.

"Well alright, baby. You know mama needs you to go to a great school now. I need you to be better than me sweetheart."

"Yes mam, I know," he responded.

"Okay then, I'll see you later than sweetie. I'm just so proud of you as an individual and everything you've managed to achieve thus far," she said.

"Sure thing mom," he yelled back just in time before hearing a loud swishing thud of the door that signaled her departure.

After a few more hours of staring at the computer, Darwin finally grew tired as his eyes began to close.

It was then around 6p.m. when he awoke to the faint distant ringing of his doorbell. As quickly as he could, Darwin dashed to the front door and saw a smiling Prince staring back at him the moment he had opened it.

"Put on the uniform. All black everything. We're out tonight my nilla," said Prince as he tried his hardest to contain his excitement.

"Another lick already?" asked Darwin sleepily as he stifled a huge yawn.

"Nope. A home invasion. But get your shit though. We'll explain everything to you in the car," he said.

"nleking @ niTe" (invasion)

Fifteen minutes later and what was less than twenty four hours since the robbing of Mandela Food Cooperatives, Darwin once again found himself within the backseat of J-LAX's car. The whole crew stared at him as he did his best to shrug off his drowsiness.

"You look like you've had a long day," said Boog who was riding shotgun that evening as he turned around to look at Darwin who was in the rear passenger's seat.

"No, not really. I guess I'm still a little worn out from that lick we pulled last night," he replied.

"What? That was light work my nigga," said Supreme as he peered outside the window from where he sat behind J-LAX.

"Wait, what's going on?" demanded Darwin.

"We're headed up to Piedmont as we speak," said J-LAX as he made a right turn on West Grand Avenue and continued to drive forward.

"Piedmont Ave?" asked Darwin.

"Nah nigga. The community. We finna take a nice little ride to the house of a man named Wieler," said Supreme.

"Wieler, Wieler, you mean Joe Wieler? Oh hell no! What are y'all thinking?! Have you guys finally lost it?"

"Nope, we're as sane as can be," said Prince.

"Nigga, Joe Wieler is the Vice Mayor of Piedmont. Please don't tell me--"

"Yep, we're nicking his crib tonight," said J-LAX as he made a turn onto Oakland Avenue while keeping his right hand firmly behind the wheel.

"J-LAX has a connect named Antonio that doesn't live too far from where he lives and he says that Weiler goes out to stupid Gala's on every second Saturday of the month with his wife," said Supreme as he played with a .9 millimeter pistol in his right hand.

"Yeah, so, you know what that means..." said Prince.

"What?" asked Darwin as he was now fully awake.

"Tonight, we're robbing his shit?" said Boog rhetorically as he exhaled smoke and flicked sparks from the blunt he had been inhaling out of the window.

They all burst out in laughter as Darwin contemplated upon what would soon unfold.

After another half hour of driving down Oakland Avenue, the car abruptly made a right turn onto Highland Avenue and eventually came to a halt in a suburban community.

"Here we are boys, Piedmont. Home to some of the richest upper-class citizens of Alameda County," said J-LAX as he turned off the engine to his Toyota.

"Where's our intended target?" asked Supreme as he scanned the quiet residential area.

"Over there," pointed J-LAX to a large white house that had a picketed fence, cobble-stoned driveway and a neatly kept green lawn.

"Damn, this is real presidential status," said Prince as he surveyed the entire street of houses within the block's radius.

"Let's rob the whole damn community," he then said, as he pumped his fist in excitement.

"Nah, we're starting off light tonight. Just Weiler's place my nilla. That's it," said J-LAX.

"Yo, Preme, what time is it?" he asked.

"Ten after seven," replied Supreme.

"The lights are on. There's still somebody in the crib," said Boog.

"Shit, that nigga Antonio told me Weiler would be gone no later than seven," said J-LAX in an irritated tone.

"Yeah, but there's a car sitting in the driveway," said Supreme.

"Damn, that's a clean ride too," said Darwin.

As he said this, all of their eyes fell upon the mauve M5 BMW that complimented the driveway of the gorgeous white minted house for the first time.

"Look, there he is," said Boog.

They all watched as a portly old man in a tailored gray suit walked out into the driveway with his wife in tow. His hair was balding and receding as what was left of it sat upon his plump shaped head. He also wore round spectacles that appeared as clear as glass. Weiler's wife, who wasn't that far behind wore a stunning burgundy dress that was two shades away from matching the BMW. She was a fairly thin woman that seemed as if her daily diet consisted of carrots and brussel sprouts and had long blonde hair that flowed and rested upon her thin frail shoulders.

"The typical politics troll-of-a-wife," said Supreme as the head lights to the BMW flashed before it exited the stunning driveway.

"Alright, fellas, it's time. When we get in there, make sure you snatch the illest shit that you can find and be as quick as you can. You can never tell who's watching in these private communities. I hear these Brady bunch ass of bitches peep through their windows at any scent of a nigger approaching their property from a mile away," said J-LAX in his best upper-class socio-economic accent.

Everyone, including Darwin, laughed hysterically as they exited the car.

The thought of committing a rapid burglary in a neighborhood just on the outskirts of Oakland didn't sound too ruthless to Darwin.

"This wouldn't be so bad", he thought.

Besides, he decided that whatever he agreed upon taking would be left for the rest of the crew or better yet, exchanged for money to pay for college applications and fees.

As they made their way onto the oak front steps, they marveled at the house and were astonished by its beauty.

Although dusk had fallen, they were still able to absorb with their eyes the crisp white coat of paint that engulfed the entire house.

Darwin watched J-LAX pull out a steel crowbar from out a leather bag when Supreme said, "Naw, there's probably a back or side window open somewhere. Don't do that."

"Aight, go see if you can find one then," said J-LAX.

"Prince, come with me," said Supreme as they disappeared into the backyard.

A few minutes later, the oak front door swung open as Boog, J-LAX, and Darwin entered within the Weiler residence. The house was a lush wonder as the entire ground floor was made out of marble glass. Before Darwin knew it, the whole crew vanished before his eyes.

"I got the living room," yelled Supreme.

"I got the basement," said Prince.

"I got the bedroom," said J-LAX.

"I got the kitchen," yelled Boog.

"Well, of course your fat ass would," said Supreme, before departing with a chuckle.

"I'll go check out the bedroom as well," said Darwin after it seemed as if the crew ransacked the entire house and claimed a territory.

As he made his way up a long-spiraled staircase, he found J-LAX placing beads, jewelry, necklaces, and anything in between into his brown leather bag. J-LAX then briefly stopped what he was doing to look up at him.

"Everyone claimed something huh?" he asked.

Darwin simply nodded his head.

"Well, help me stuff some of this shit into the bag D.C. Don't just stand there as if you're out posted up on a corner my nilla!"

Darwin responded by following J-LAX's instructions and after ten minutes of providing assistance, they heard what sounded like the rumbling of a car backing up into the driveway.

Immediately they froze as they listened to the voices outside of the window.

"Joe, Joe, whatever you do, please baby don't go in there! They could all be armed. I mean, who knows what they have?!" said a woman in a petrified voice.

"How dare they?! Seriously, how dare they?! A bunch of dirty black niggers!!! And in MY HOUSE!!" he bellowed.

"Joe, Joe, calm down," said Mrs. Weiler as she tried to cool him off. "Just call the police, but whatever you do, DO NOT go in there!" she added.

"Don't you think I did already??" he said in an outraged tone.

"Damn Piedmont police, I know there's nothing but one goddamn square mile to this town, but they need to do something about the lack of a police force presence. I mean, what if there's an actual gang or something in there?"

In that instant, J-LAX decided that he had heard enough as he swiftly clutched his bag, grabbed Darwin by the collar of his shirt and bolted down the stairs.

"Code red my nillas! We've been detected, let's break out!" he shouted upon reaching the first level of the Weiler residence.

In that precise moment, everyone reconvened in the kitchen.

"Y'all all got something??!!" asked Supreme.

"Yeah," said everyone in unison.

"Aight, c'mon. Me and Prince will lead y'all through the back window."

As they all made it out of the house, they made a dash for the car when they heard Mrs. Weiler shout, "Honey, there they are!! My God, they're big! Teenagers probably, and they really are *black!!*"

"Shit!" he then replied in turn as they rapidly got into the car and pulled off.

J-LAX drove as fast as he could down Highland Avenue before turning back onto Oakland. As he did, they all heard the wail of sirens and cop cars in the distance. Luckily for them, they had just crossed the borderline between the two cities and left Piedmont in the dust as they re-entered West Oakland.

"Another close one my nillas," said Supreme as he let out a sigh of relief.

"Word, I think it's 'bout time we start calling ourselves *the real close-call crew*," said Boog as the Toyota Avalon zipped down Adeline Street before turning onto West Grand.

"What did everybody get?" asked Prince enthusiastically.

"Let's all head back to my crib and sort all of this shit out," said J-LAX.

"Yeah, and then we'll head to a pawn shop later in the week and cash in for some scratch," said Supreme.

"No doubt, no doubt," replied J-LAX.

As Darwin sat back in his seat mum and quiet, he reflected upon the first break-in that he had just been a part of. Although, he loved the crew, he didn't want the strong possibility of failure to ultimately catch up with him. As much as he hated to admit it, his actions led him to believe that he was now farther away from college than he had ever been. And yet, he still had hopes of finding his voice in time before it was all too late. The crew had just been through a bizarre span of twenty-four hours that there was no telling what waited for them around the corner...

"sUnDaY (IV)

"A fueGo reTuRn"

The next day Darwin had finished writing up a personal essay for acceptance at U.C. Berkeley when he heard a slight tap upon his bedroom window. As he peered out of the blinds, he saw that Prince had been throwing tiny pebbles off of the curb in order to get his attention.

"Negro, what?" asked Darwin as he pulled up the blinds and cracked open his window.

"Well, that's not very nice," said Prince as he dusted the dirt from the pebbles off of his fingers while looking at Darwin.

"What?" said Darwin yet again in insistent fashion, as he looked down below to where Prince stood upon the curb.

"Why so hostile all of a sudden?" asked Prince with a grin.

"Nigga, I'm doing work right now, something you should be doing as well," said Darwin as he poked his head out of the window to survey the neighborhood.

"Fuck that man. Look, come over tonight. Uncle Preme has something very important that he wants to discuss."

"What is it?" Darwin asked skeptically.

"Just come tonight. See you later."

And without another word, Darwin saw Prince retreat as he made his way back across the street and enter his driveway.

As Darwin withdrew from the window and closed his blinds, he honestly thought about leaving West Oakland permanently for the first time in his existence. He then became certain that he didn't want to continue living the life he had lived for eighteen years any longer.

Later that night, Darwin made his way across the street and knocked upon Supreme and Prince's front door. Within a matter of seconds, Prince's mom answered and told Darwin that the crew was located within the basement. As Darwin listened to the words she spoke slip off of her tongue, he couldn't help but notice how beautiful Prince's mom was. She was a young woman in her early thirties but appeared as if she was still in her twenties. Her hair, a sleek black, flowed down to her shoulders. She could have possibly passed for a teenage girl if it hadn't been for the slight wrinkles that sternly sat upon her forehead. As Darwin made his way around the corner of the house, he was amazed at how young and close in age Prince and his uncle Supreme was. But as he contemplated upon it, he realized that this was a reality often seen in the hood. The way Supreme and Prince interacted, anyone could have mistaken them for brothers. It was funny to him that he thought of it now just when he was about to finish high school and prepare for life in college.

When Darwin finally reached the basement door, he knocked upon it twice before Boog opened it to let him in.

"Is that D.C.? Damn, he done grew up!" said a boy who sat by the television set.

The young man who stared back at Darwin was a Hispanic dude who was once a part of the crew. His name was Austin Rivera, but to the crew, he went by the name of Fuego. He had a thin sallow face to go along with a wiry frame, and his hair was neatly kempt due to his Hispanic roots. His eyes were a dark black and expressed a hint of coldness that had not been there when the crew had last seen him. Darwin looked on, and also noticed that he had deep bags under his eyes that expressed he had been sleeping sporadically. There seemed to be a lot of pent-up energy bottled up deep within him.

"Fuego?" asked Darwin? "When did you get out?"

"Today," he replied with a smug look about him. "Man, you and Prince have grown, huh?" he continued.

"After you committed grand theft, we were sure that they had you bound," cut-in Boog.

"Shit, I just did my time and now I'm here," he said.

"Damn, we ain't think we'd ever see you again," said Supreme as he rolled up a spliff.

"Yeah, well, it was my first offense; therefore, they let me off easy. But anyway, I'm back and I've got something for us to do," he replied.

"Sorry bruh, J-LAX calls the licks now," said Supreme as he took a puff from his blunt and exhaled a ring of smoke.

"But this ain't a lick. I'm talking about Summit Bank here," he said with a voice that was sleek and solid.

"Woah, woah, woah, you want us to pull off a heist?" asked Prince in amazement.

"I don't know about that," said Boog.

It was the first time the crew noticed that Boog didn't appear enthused at the thought of trouble.

"I don't know, I think Boog is actually right for a change. It sounds extremely risky," said Prince.

Fuego might have realized that the thought of doubt trickled upon every individual within the room due to Boog and Prince's uncertainty of the idea. In fear that he might lose them all, he quickly added:

"C'mon guys, I got the whole shit planned out. Broadway is not a place that's usually swarmed with cops. We can do it."

"We gotta discuss it. Run it through LAX first," said Supreme as he had finished smoking his blunt and dropped it into an ash-trey that was nearby.

Fuego's face rapidly soured as if an elephant had sat upon it without warning.

"Whatever, yo, just let me know what y'all think by Wednesday, the latest. This lick, I mean heist, needs to be done

by this Thursday night," he said as he picked his bag up off the floor.

"Aight, we'll let you know, then," responded Supreme.

"Nice seeing you D.C." said Fuego as he shook his hand on the way out.

Darwin wasn't sure what it was but there was something in the handshake as well as the look that Fuego gave him that explicitly said he was not to be trusted. Something about it seemed malicious and violent in nature. Darwin couldn't put his finger on it, but he knew that Fuego wasn't happy to see him or any of the crew for that matter. Although he sporadically saw his father, if there was one thing his father had taught him during the rare times they shared one another's presence was when he once said, *"when peering into another man's eyes, you'll know all that you need to know about him if you can just hold his gaze. For a man's eyes are the windows to his soul."* He wanted more than anything to figure out exactly what Fuego was thinking...

Somehow, Darwin couldn't come to terms with how he had gotten himself into such a turbulent mess. He knew that he had better things in life to worry about and to look forward to. But for some reason, he couldn't separate himself completely from the people who cared for him most. *The crew.*

"Monday" (V)

"Let us heist @ the summit"

For some reason, the boys held off in telling J-LAX about the prospective robbery at Summit Bank that Sunday night. Secretly, they weren't sure how to feel about it and if they could trust Fuego at all. They all knew how money hungry and reckless Fuego was, but the majority of them didn't think he would go out of his way to manifest a diabolical plan that would hurt as well as sabotage them. And so, a special meeting had been scheduled for Monday night at J-LAX's house. The meeting was scheduled to commence at six due to Darwin's participation in a writing workshop at Mclymonds' and Prince's involvement with the school's Physics club.

As the two of them made their way into LAX's house on the intersection of San Pablo Avenue and Market Street, they found his basement door already ajar as they let themselves in.

J-LAX's basement was a shabby little place that needed a makeover. The walls were as bland as they possibly could be with a strong need for new plaster. The bathroom hid in a dingy little corner by the kitchen window where dishes upon dishes were sitting piled up filthily within a sink. In the heart of the basement, was a Sony Plasma Television set as well as a dusty but functional PS3. The clutter of material and devices that surrounded the below average set-up insinuated that they had just got there and hadn't been amongst their current location that long. The other members of the crew were in deep conversation when both Darwin and Prince walked in.

"No, no, no, hell naw! Ain't no way we're doin' that. Is he crazy?" asked J-LAX in disbelief.

"That's what we were saying folk. That's why we told him we'd think about it so that we could possibly decide against it the closer the date came," said Supreme as he scratched his chin.

"I would have said no, anyway," said J-LAX as he grabbed a dusty glass from his kitchen cabinet and went to the sink to pour himself a cup of water.

"I mean, the shit's too risky," said Boog who was sitting on the chair with his back turned to them as he played Call of Duty.

"Obviously," said Supreme.

"So is that a no?" asked Prince as he broke his silence.

"When did you get here nephew?" asked Supreme as he turned to face Darwin and Prince.

"We just came in about a minute ago," he replied.

"Wassup D.C.? You aight lil' homie?" asked Supreme curiously as he surveyed him up and down like a fax scanner.

"Yeah, I'm good," replied Darwin.

Internally, he wasn't good. Darwin felt as if all of their violent as well as felonious tendencies were swiftly catching up to them. However, he couldn't find it within himself to tell the others how he truly felt. The summer prior to his senior year, he remembered taking a free intro-to-screenplay writing course at Samuel Merritt University for college credit. It was there where his screenplay professor once said to his class, "When developing a story, whether it's a screenplay, teleplay, short-story, Shakespearean tragedy, novella, or novel, it is best to remember that every heinous act or terrible deed pays a price, and before that price is paid, there will be signs that there is major peril to come. Class, you can all take this and apply this to your everyday lives. If something doesn't feel right, and you know that it isn't right, chances are, it isn't *right!*"

"The only way we should consider this is if the vato is going to abide by my rules. If not, him and I can both run the

lick. But he sure ain't gonna do it by himself. Not on my watch," said J-LAX as he drained the glass of water in his hand.

"Homie barely has been out a week and he already wanna do a lick? Shit is wild I tell you," said Boog as he had just put down the controller.

"I just have my feelings about him. I heard he was trying to pitch the same heist to the Los Santos crew out in Francisco," said J-LAX.

"You talkin' about Rex and Mook's crew?" asked Supreme.

"Yeah, those guys," he replied.

"Those are some shady dudes bro. I grew up with them clowns for a bit back in San Francisco until I came here and dropped out of junior high. Ever since we were little kids, they've always had bad intentions...Maybe we shouldn't do this," said Boog as he surveyed all of the crew with his beady little eyes.

"Aight, here's what it is! I'll meet up with Fuego in the morning and hear out his plans myself. If the shit sounds legit, let's go for it. I mean, twenty-five chalupas?! Why not?! That's more money than we've ever had in a lifetime. Shit, my mom doesn't even make that much in a single year, and y'all see how hard she grinds. She barely gets by. The only reason why we're maintaining is because I contribute to her income. She knows the money that helps her ain't clean money, but what can she say? It's helping us *get by*," said J-LAX candidly.

The rest of the crew remained tight-lipped on the couch as they let every word which came out of J-LAX's mouth trickle down their spines. It was obvious by the look of their dubious faces that the potential amount of money involved was what kept them intrigued. It was money that none of them had ever seen in a lifetime; either individually or collectively.

"Sounds like a plan, so let us know by Wednesday, the latest, if we're doin' this shit or not," said Supreme.

"Looks like we got this shit kinda-sorta figured out. Well, if y'all will excuse me, I'mma holla at you guys later. My momma

is cooking," said Prince as he made movements to head for the door.

"Word? Damn, my sister doesn't tell me shit," said Supreme as he followed suit with a look of hunger upon his face.

"Yeah, I'm hungry too," added Boog as he ran as fast as his fat feet could carry him.

"One plate my nigga, my mom's is gettin' tired of feeding your tubby ass," said Prince as their voices began to subside.

"I can't help it, I got a condition," said Boog.

"Yeah, your condition is that you outta condition my nigga," retorted Supreme as they all cackled in the distance.

"What's on your mind D.C.?" asked J-LAX as he surveyed Darwin from top to bottom.

"I just wanted to return this," he said.

In that precise moment, he pulled out the 357 handgun that was given to him by J-LAX himself, in which J-LAX refused to accept.

"Nope, that's yours, now."

"I just don't see—"

"Listen, if we actually go through with all of this shit, there's a chance that you might need it. Look...let's make a deal. Once Thursday has come and gone I'll take it back from you, understand? We've noticed that your future is brighter than all of this D.C. and I don't think it would be fair at all if we hinder you from it. Shit, I think we all know that by now..."

Darwin couldn't find the right words to explain how he felt, but he was amazed to know that the crew wouldn't let their personal as well as collective desires conflict with his future, and for that and that reason alone, he felt as if he owed it to his brothers...just one heist and he was done for good.

"tHuRsDaY" (VI)

"sHowdOwn"

"Woouooooo! Fuck yeah, that's what I'm talkin' bout!" yelled Boog as he rolled up a blunt from inside J-LAX's speeding Toyota.

"We pulled it off my niggas, we did that shit. The world ain't ready for us! Do y'all fucking hear me?? THE WORLD AIN'T READY FOR US!! What's next?!?! I'm ready. I said I'm fucking ready for what's next!!" yelled Supreme as he cranked up the radio inside J-LAX's car.

"Aww, hell yeah. This is my shit!" screamed Prince as he leaned into the front seat and hit the equalizer button on the car stereo until the vehicle was soon thumping to a very abrasive bass.

As he did this, Kendrick Lamar's "Backseat Freestyle" was now knocking in every direction of the car's speakers.

"All my life I want money and power/
respect my mind or die from lead shower/
I pray my dick get big as the Eiffel Tower/
so I can fuck the world for seventy-two hours/
Goddamn I feel amazing, damn I feel amazing/
My mind is living on cloud nine/
and this 9 is never on vacation/
start up the Maserati and vroom-vroom, I'm racing/
Popping pills in the lobby and
I pray they don't find her naked/
And I pray you niggas is hating,
shooters go after Judas/

Jesus Christ if I live life on my knees
ain't no need to do this."

"That nigga, Kendrick, cold cuz," said Boog who was now
blazed in the back seat in between Prince and Darwin.

"Yeah, that nigga really put the west coast back on the
map. Now if only some of these young Oakland niggas out here can
start makin' some noise," said J-LAX as he made a left turn at a
red traffic light.

"That good kid, m.A.A.d city album K. Dot put out was a
classic though. He really understands the shit we go through in
the hood. Also, I fucks with this track, this shit's a
standout," declared Supreme as he nodded his head to the beat.

Darwin sat in silence as he pondered upon the song's true
meaning. He listened to a lot of hip-hop and Kendrick Lamar was
definitely one of his favorite artists at that current point in
time. What he liked about Kendrick was that he depicted life as
he saw it. Not to harm, but to articulate the ills and troubles
that he thought society passively, but purposely, inflicted upon
African-American communities with on a daily basis. He knew that
was what precisely separated Kendrick from the other mainstream
so-called "artists". And so, within that moment, Darwin couldn't
help thinking that his friends had gotten it all wrong. Kendrick
wasn't rapping from a glorifying perspective. Instead, he was
rapping from the mentality of an adolescent navigating himself
through the choices that he made and thought were good for him,
such as the mindset that his friends were in now...

"You got the scratch Prince?" asked J-LAX.

"Yeah, it's right here," he said enthusiastically as he
patted the bag down firmly which contained the stacks of
currency.

"Where's Fuego gonna meet us at to get his cut?" asked
Supreme.

"I told him to be at my crib by nine," said J-LAX as their latest turn found them within the familiarity of their neighborhood.

"Why didn't he come with us?" asked Darwin.

"He said that he had to go meet a few niggas," said J-LAX as he took a blunt that was passed down to him from Boog.

The car abruptly came to a complete halt as they made their way excitedly into the house. Darwin, in particular, was extremely thrilled because for one, he didn't think he'd make it through the night's events alive and two, only a week remained until he and Prince graduated. That night became a time for celebration, as he decided that he would ultimately wait until later on in the week when he'd announce his departure from the crew for good.

"Everybody go into the bathroom and change up your gear, and when you're done, put them in that big plastic bag that's sitting under the bed," directed J-LAX.

And so, over the course of the next hour, the crew then took turns in the shower before changing their clothes.

It was around 9:15 and apparently the party had just begun. The crew all took turns on the Playstation while smoking blunts. Even Darwin who hadn't burned a day in his life took a hit.

"Oh shit, that nigga D.C. is *actually* doin' it son!" said Prince as he coughed out a big billow of smoke.

"My nilla, it's that peer pressure, I tell you," said Boog as he too rolled an L that was the size of his fat thumb.

"Just make sure you ain't lit when you leave here my nigga. I don't want your mom to be like, "what are you guys doing to my son?" said Supreme in an impersonation of Darwin's mother.

J-LAX had just gotten up when he made his way over to the radio and tuned into the 106 KEML Hip-Hop frequency. At once, Tyga's "Dope" record came on as all of the crew began reciting his lyrics.

"Damn, I'm hungry," said Boog as he rubbed his belly.

"We're all hungry, huh?" asked Supreme.

"Okay, well, just go to the corner store and buy us all sandwiches," said Prince as he gave Boog a twenty.

Boog had gotten up to make his way to the basement door when a large red vase suddenly crashed onto the floor with a loud thud.

Without warning, bullets from gunfire began to penetrate the interior of J-LAX's basement.

"EVERYBODY DOWN, NOW!" bellowed J-LAX as all of the men crouched low and swiftly made their way to the nearest exit.

Upon reaching the staircase, they all crawled out of a broken window which led them out of the lower level of the house.

Five masked gun men had then emerged into the street and started shooting at everyone in sight.

"Duck, behind the car, quick!" screamed Supreme.

"Everybody grab their piece!" screamed Prince.

"And shoot, my niggas, SHOOT!" yelled J-LAX.

They all obeyed orders and immediately brandished their guns as they began to shoot back at their unknown targets.

As Darwin got up on one occasion and took aim, he managed to strike one of them in the leg. Upon the intended target stumbling upon the ground and clutching his leg in pain, he suddenly realized that he had shot at someone and actually used a gun for the first time in his life.

"Damn, we need more ammo," said Supreme as he crouched behind the car and rummaged through his pockets.

"I've got some two blocks away at a mailbox on Hoover-Foster," screamed J-LAX from behind the trunk.

"I'll go get it," said Prince.

"Me too, just to make sure he's straight," added Boog.

"Aight, y'all, we'll cover for you. Just be careful on your way back in," said Supreme.

"My shit is in a blood red mailbox, you can't miss it. That's my boy's crib, be quick," added J-LAX as he squeezed off two more shots towards the men attempting to kill them.

"D.C. help me cover them!" screamed Supreme as he got up to better his aim.

"Go!" he then shouted as the two young men ran down the block and disappeared out of sight.

The group that had broken into J-LAX's basement had suddenly begun running.

"Let's go," said J-LAX as they got up to chase them.

Their unexpected visitors who had shot at them speedily ran to a parked car on 27th street and pulled off.

"Shit, Prince and Boog! They're going after them!" yelled Supreme.

"Let's go," said J-LAX.

"Why can't we take your car bruh?" asked Supreme as they all ran the two blocks to Hoover.

"My nigga, ain't you seen what they done did to my ride?" asked J-LAX in disbelief.

It was then that an engine roared to life and a car screeched and turned a corner from the right end of the street.

"Prince, Boog, run!" screamed Darwin as he, Supreme, and J-LAX attempted to catch up to them.

As quickly as they could, the boys dropped their sacks and ran as fast as they could towards the others.

Then instantly, and without warning, two of the gunmen poked their torsos out from the backseat of an old red Cadillac and pulled out assault rifles...

The last image that Darwin would ever see of his friends was one of desperation as they attempted to escape the inevitable as fast as they could. He knew that there was always a possibility that this day would come, but never did he think it would happen in such an abrupt fashion.

But when Prince and Boog couldn't run any further, they slowly met the pavement in increments. The first thing to go was their legs as they totally succumbed to the pressures of the impact, then it was their torsos..and finally it was their heads as everything reunited upon reaching the ground.

And as for Darwin and his remaining friends, they watched it all like a cinematic taping...but as they witnessed, they fully came to the realization that there weren't any camera men or directors around to call for 'cut' or a re-shoot. This was what really happened in the underprivileged neighborhoods of America. Everything was live and direct as two young men who were products of an American plight forever ceased to exist...

As fast as it all occurred, a red liquid wasted no time in spilling and seeping onto the pavement. Not a single one of them had doubts as to who had set up the tragedy, while the Cadillac, in its dark red frame, sped into the opposite direction and out of sight into the starless night...

"No! My NEPHEW!!" screamed Supreme as he, Darwin and J-LAX went to the aid of their wounded friends.

Boog was breathing heavily as he held a red stained hand over his heart and looked on in horror.

"Just keep breathing my nigga, we got you," said J-LAX as he held his hands.

"C'mon Jarvis, just hold on kid!" yelled Supreme as he hugged his nephew with tenderness and care.

A bullet had pierced him in the left lung as he struggled to breathe with every gaping breath.

It was then that Darwin picked him up and held him like a newborn.

"Fue, Fue, Fue--" he struggled.

"What?! What?! What is it?! Man, tell me!!"

"Fue...go," he managed to say before his eyes shut.

And with a final exhale, Prince looked at Darwin with a hard desperate longing. One that told him there was more to the world than the daily pressures experienced in West Oakland. Prince, badly wanted to tell Darwin something, but due to the given circumstances, he couldn't.

Slowly, his eyes began to reverse as they went behind his skull, and what came in its place were scleras, also known as the white of the eyes.

"Jarvis, JARVIS DANIEL MCKAY!!! Don't do this shit to me baby! Please, I need you. The world needs you, your intelligence, your talent, this isn't the end, it just can't be!!" cried Supreme in hysteric fashion as he repetitively shook his lifeless nephew.

As Darwin observed the blood that had smeared his hands, he then looked over at Boog. He was dead too. These were his childhood friends...the people he grew up with...he couldn't come to terms with this feeling...the feeling of hurt...he suddenly had the yearning for vindication...someone had to suffer...someone had to pay...they *all* had to pay...*he* had to pay..

"Fuego," he said in a voice of sheer menace as Supreme continued to sob beside him.

"We're going to San Francisco," said J-LAX in a composed manner as he rose up off the ground and wiped his right eye clean from what seemed to be a tiny unmistakable tear.

"friDaY" (VII)

"IS IT WORTH IT?"

An hour later around midnight, Darwin found himself alongside J-LAX and Supreme in a stolen jeep headed across Dwight D. Eisenhower highway.

"I don't care if we gotta drive around Francisco the whole damn night into the morning, we gon' find these niggas," assured J-LAX as he scoured the streets for a dark red Cadillac while keeping his foot on the gas.

As Darwin heard nothing but the sound of the car's growl mixed with Supreme's overbearing sobs, he came to the notion that he suddenly didn't care about what tomorrow held. He didn't care about his dreams of being a screenwriter. He didn't care about getting out of his impoverished neighborhood. He didn't care about what was real or not. He no longer cared whether he lived or died. All he cared about was getting back at the masked gunmen that had killed two of his best friends...

"There they go, right there! They bout' to pay toll to cross the bridge," said J-LAX.

"Let me out of this fuckin' car," said Supreme as he wrestled with his locked passenger door.

"Hold up for just a sec, my nigga. Let's see where they're headed. You'll get your chance," said J-LAX with smooth tonality to his voice.

Twenty minutes later, they followed the murderers into a gas station when the driver, who they recognized to be the Los Santos gang leader Rex, exited the vehicle in order to pump gas.

Lock and load y'all," said J-LAX as he passed around bullets to both Supreme and Darwin.

"On my count," he said. "One...two..."

J-LAX speedily pulled up beside the Cadillac. He and Supreme then ejected bullets from their guns as if the inevitability of tomorrow had always been a myth.

All was quiet except for the loud thoughts of the young men who had pulled the triggers. They had committed their first murders and subconsciously, the thought of foreseeing restlessness forever haunted them...

The opposing set of young men, that were just as confused, just as lost and just as naive, no longer existed and were now all dead within a red Cadillac...Well, almost all of them...

Fuego somehow managed to crawl out of the rear window and began to slither upon the ground like a snake, leaving a bloody heap behind him as he did.

As the crew exited the car and inched closer toward him, they noticed patches scattered throughout his clothing. He had been shot in multiple places.

Darwin turned him over and looked him dead in the eye. He wasn't sure who, he, as a person, was anymore...at least, he thought he didn't...

The look that manifested upon Fuego's face was one of fright and terror.

"Please man, show me mercy. Don't kill me. I'm sorry it went down this way. I had no choice because I want to live. And so, they made me go through with it."

Darwin couldn't hear him. He cocked his gun and pointed it at Fuego's heart. All that he had to do was pull the trigger and it would have all been over. However, halfway into pulling the trigger, something flooded his inner conscience like a typhoon headed for the shore.

Was it really worth it? he thought. Taking another person's life for those that could not be returned? If he killed Fuego, could he possibly make it out of West Oakland alive? As the thoughts came in and out of his brain in what seemed like a vortex, he wasn't prepared for what then happened next. Without warning, Supreme suddenly snatched the 357 magnum from Darwin's

grasp and coolly plugged Fuego five times in the head. After doing so, he dropped the weapon upon the ground and said,

"Let's go."

With no other reason to stick around, they quickly clamored into the jeep and made their way back onto the highway. They were halfway home when Supreme suddenly came to a realization.

"There were five of them," he said. "One of them was missing."

And as the car roared into the darkness and dissolved into the heavy San Francisco morning traffic, it did so with uncertainty as they rode back to Oakland in silence.

END

"the beginning"

(VIII)

"tell yOur sToRy"

It was two weeks after graduation when Darwin had received word that J-LAX was being hospitalized at Alameda County Medical Center with multiple gun wounds to the chest. Supreme, on the other hand, had been murdered. Amazingly enough, Darwin wasn't surprised at all. As he looked on towards the approaching sunset, Darwin threw his 357 magnum into the deep waters of Oakland's Outer Harbor and followed the act by enjoying a nice long walk home. He wasn't sure of what his future held, but he knew that it didn't involve the pressures and ills of West Oakland.

The moment he reached home, his mother from within the depths of their basement informed him that a college admissions representative had called asking for him. After running up the stairs and listening to the voicemail, Darwin redialed the number immediately which picked up after two rings.

"Hello?" said the nasally voice of a woman.

"Hi, this is Darwin Charles. I think you may have called my house earlier."

"Yes, I did. Hello, Darwin, how are you?" she asked in a jubilant manner.

"I'm fine," he replied pleasantly.

"Glad to hear that," she said. "Well, I called because I'm an admissions counselor from UCLA. My name is Colleen Crawford and we were blown away by your high school transcript and personal college essay. Therefore, if it isn't too late, we'd love to have you enrolled in our screenwriting program at the university starting this fall."

"I'm very sorry, but I'm leaning more so to U.C. Berkeley at this point in time. I'm going to send them my admissions deposit soon," he said in a regretful tone.

"We certainly understand, but if you don't mind me asking, how will you be accommodated in terms of books and such by UCB?" she asked.

"I received some financial aid. And so, I guess I'm just going to look for a job, and take out a few loans once I get there," he said matter-of-factly.

"Well, here's an offer for you Darwin. We here at the university are so thrilled about your talents and extremely high on your potential, that we are willing to offer you a full ride if you commit to us," she said in an airy cool voice.

"Seriously?" he asked in amazement while trying to contain his excitement.

"Once again, Darwin, your grades are more than exceptional and your father is well known among the campus community. In addition to what has already been said, he also vouched for you."

"Well, that sounds, great!" he said heartily.

"The only thing we ask of you since this is very short notice and due to our failure of screening you is a twenty page screenplay script of a real life experience relating to how you grew up or what you may currently be going through in a third person narrative perspective," said Ms. Crawford.

"When do you want it by?" he asked her immediately.

"Let's say within a week, because we're really running out of time," she told him with a sense of urgency.

"I'll get right to it then," he assured.

"Great, well, congratulations and welcome to UCLA-School of Film, Theater & Television, Darwin. We look forward to seeing you on campus this fall."

"Likewise, thanks again," he responded.

Darwin finally hung up the phone and let out a long, exasperated, but yet, relieved whistle. Not only would he be leaving West Oakland in a few months time, but also, he would be leaving a life that stagnated him from what was really out there. For the first time in his existence, he was receiving a full-blown opportunity with the hopes of eventually becoming everything that he wanted to be.

And so, as he found a pen lying upon his computer desk, he quickly rummaged through a battered, weary, drawer to find a notepad that would enable him to embark upon his forthcoming journey. After carefully using a few hours to devise some concepts, Darwin's pen finally hit the pad as he then proceeded to write...

- Ext. The outside of a high school named McClymonds. It is hot, sunny and students are rapidly spilling onto the sidewalk from all angles.

Not long after, two teenagers in particular on the verge of manhood, exit the building as they each carry schoolbags strapped over their right shoulders. The barely turned eighteen year-old boys that make their way out of McClymonds high are none other than Jarvis McKay, also known as Prince, and Darwin Charles, who goes by the initials of D.C. for short. The boys have finished their last day of classes for the week and in the midst of the moment, are thrilled to be headed home...

