

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

A LOOMING FIGURE limps through the Atlanta streets, face hidden by a dirty trench coat and even dirtier hoodie.

The Figure pushes a squeaky SHOPPING CART, and it is clear people try to avoid staring. Sometimes, they just go ahead cross to the other side of the street.

EXT. JUNK YARD - NIGHT

The Figure finally arrives at a junkyard with a chainlink fence. There's an impressive lock and chain around the entrance. The Figure casually crushes the deadbolt lock with its bare hands. For a brief moment, we see their hands are definitely not human.

EXT. JUNK YARD - LATER

Some time later, the Figure exits the junkyard with a huge heap of metal and electronic equipment. The shopping cart squeaks even louder under the weight of the all the stuff.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

The Figure walks past a shoddy apartment complex. Few of the windows are lit.

From the street looking into the windows, The Figure sees and hears commotion coming from a second-story unit. They look up to see MONICA (8), a black girl with unkempt afro buns and mismatched stained pajamas. Monica stares back at The Figure through the window of her bedroom.

In the next room of the apartment, a black man (30) shouts at a black woman (30), but he's not the only one. She's giving as good as she gets in this war of words. The arguing becomes more and more animated.

INT. APARTMENT KIDS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside Monica's unremarkable bedroom, her older sister SHANA (12) pulls her away from the window. They both jump as--

BLAM CRASH BOOM. Shit is going down in the next room.

Monica clings to Shana who gently peels her off and gestures for Monica to put something in her ears. Monica reluctantly nods her compliance and puts in some CHEAP HEADPHONES.

Shana rushes to a tiny closet and pulls out a baseball bat. She nervously exits the room.

Monica stares at the bedroom door for a while then looks out the window again where she locks eyes with The Figure who still stares up.

Monica can't believe her eyes and we push in on her astonished face.

MATCH TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

SUPER: 7 YEARS LATER

We push out to see a stoic, 15-year-old Monica. She has an otherworldly intensity that does not invite conversation.

She is in a classroom that is very much on the brink of chaos. Like that special kind of chaos that exists specifically for a substitute in those last few minutes of class.

At the front of the class, DANI RODRIGUEZ (40) is proverbially drowning. She's so scattered it's hard to tell what class she's even teaching. Based on the numbers on the whiteboard, maybe math or science? Nonetheless, she powers through a pathetic attempt to teach.

On Monica's CRACKED PHONE SCREEN, a new text message pops up from someone named Bitchassdria. Monica opens the text, which simply reads "Hallway. After class." followed by a middle finger emoji. Monica sighs then-

RING!

Monica stays in her seat nervously doodling on her notebook as the class stumbles out of the room.

Several girls pass by her, each smacking her on the back of the neck. One of the mean girls SLAPS MONICA'S NECK particularly hard.

Monica just takes it. Meanwhile--

DANI

(shouting)

Miss Thomas will be back on Monday so  
make sure you read...um--read...

She fumbles through her syllabus trying to find an end to her sentence as the echo of Monica's last NECK SMACK catches Dani's attention.

An UNAWARE STUDENT roughhousing with another student accidentally knocks DANI's BAG off its perch nearby. All the contents go spilling.

The classroom chaos joins the larger student storm in the hallway.

DANI (CONT'D)

... read my suicide note.

Dani starts to pick up her when she realizes Monica still hasn't left her spot.

DANI (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm sorry. That was just a bad joke...to myself. Did you have a question about something?

Monica gets up and helps Dani.

MONICA

Funny.

DANI

What?

MONICA

Your joke. Suicide note.

DANI

I shouldn't have joked about that.

Monica looks up at her and for once there's not a "fuck off" planted on her face.

MONICA

I disagree.

DANI

Well, do me a favor and don't tell any of your friends.

MONICA

You don't gotta worry about that.

Monica awkwardly turns her attention back to the task. Dani notices.

DANI

Ya know, I think I remember you.  
Maya...?

MONICA

Monica.

DANI

Right, Monica. I remember you reading  
your poem when I subbed for Lit a  
while back. Something about society  
and self-annihilation, right?

MONICA

Societal self-immolation.

DANI

Right, how could I forget that...30%  
of the population should just set  
themselves on fire to stop climate  
change if I remember correctly?

Monica shrugs.

DANI (CONT'D)

So suicide jokes are kinda a thing  
for you, huh?

MONICA

No.

Silence. They focus on cleaning up the contents.

Monica comes across an old, faded NASA SECURITY BADGE. Monica  
picks it up, awestruck.

MONICA (CONT'D)

This real?

Dani realizes what she has and quickly grabs it from her.

DANI

No. I mean, it was. A long time ago.

MONICA

What happened?

DANI

Too crazy for space, but just crazy  
enough for public school. Never mind.  
That was...another joke.

MONICA

I get it.

Monica goes to pick up a rather large tube of lip balm and studies it.

DANI  
Hey, careful with that.

Monica freezes.

DANI (CONT'D)  
It's okay. It's just not for your lips.

Dani takes off the cap and underneath it looks like the tip of a TINY TASER. She presses the bottom of the tube and it SPARKS.

DANI (CONT'D)  
Not quite normal taser strength, but it'll get somebody off you.

They finally finish picking up Dani's stuff, and Monica starts to leave but stops at the door. Dani notices.

DANI (CONT'D)  
You know, sometimes being the smartest person in the room means that everyone else is too dumb to know how valuable you are. All you can do is try not to get chapped lips.

Monica inquisitively looks at her, and Dani throws Monica the lip balm taser.

DANI (CONT'D)  
Good to see you again, Monica. Stay out of trouble.

Monica involuntarily flashes a sinister smile to Dani who actually wears a similar smirk.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Monica walks into the crowded hallway.

We see the group of mean girls clustered in the hallway obviously talking trash about Monica.

MEAN GIRL  
(seeing Monica enter)  
There she go right there, Bernardria.

BERNARDRIA (15), a very put-together girl, turns around with a clear chip on her shoulder. Monica continues to calmly walk past the mean girl gang.

BERNARDRIA

Yo bitch, run me my fuckin money  
back. I got a muhfuckin 85 on my last  
project and I pay yo dumbass for A's.  
Periodt. So I'ma need you to-

Monica casually SHOCKS Bernardria causing a domino effect--

Bernardria accidentally hits the other mean girls...making them each accidentally hit a bunch of kids passing through...making them accidentally hit someone else.

This isn't the school that takes kindly to such accidents so everybody takes it to a ten immediately.

SUPER FLY GIRL

My Jordans, nigga!!!

Everybody starts fighting, and Monica walks away unnoticed like an action hero walking away from an explosion.

INT. INK'S BASEMENT - EVENING

CLOSE UP on a television screen with an anime image of the planet Earth. This is ROBOTECH. Millions of alien ships begin bombarding Earth, reducing the planet to a crater-filled shell of itself. There's a montage of cities and people being blown apart.

SHANA (19) is completely fixated. She reacts to every explosion on tv as if this is the most tragic thing she's ever seen.

The anime characters onscreen are Rick Hunter and Minmay. They are both speaking in the classic overly dramatic anime style.

MINMAY

Do you think everyone is dead?

RICK HUNTER

Probably.

MINMAY

OH NO!

Shana holds her breath as if she's about to burst into tears, but instead she let's out a giant puff of smoke. Needless to say, she is very high.

SHANA

That nigga should have stayed his ass at the flying circus thing instead of tryin' to be a damn hero.

Shana takes another big puff off a massive bong.

SHANA (CONT'D)

Okay so this is gonna sound like some high logic--which is beside the point--My philosophy is unflappable. Unfuckin-flappable. Anyway, continue. Wait hold on.

She takes an even bigger hit of the bong.

SHANA (CONT'D)

This is some real shit. Like we're just robots flying around being controlled by these little people inside us trying to fight the wars and live our lives the only way we know how. And we got these robot arms and fingers, and they inside using joysticks trying to transform into jets and shoot missiles and shit, but we can't even use our robot hands to like open a coke can, or pet a dog. Like what's the point of having these massive robot bodies if you can't even feel the dog's fur that you're trying to pet? That's why when they try to get you to join their giant transforming robot pilot squad you should just stay the fuck home. Because you won't be able to pet a dog with your hands no more.

A room of guys just stare at Shana. They're gathered around a nice poker table that matches the offbeat elegance of the room.

And by offbeat elegance: this room is a perfect combination of a surprisingly well-curated museum of African art and a serial killer's idea of what a fancy house looks like.

DANTE (19), a dude with a lot of bark and a questionable amount of bite, yells at Shana from across the room.

DANTE

Bitch shut yo high ass up! I'm 'bout to take this nigga's money!

He is in a very intense game of Texas hold 'em with JORDAN (19), a preppy black boy who's the epitome of too cool for school.

Although he's wearing sunglasses, it's obvious he hasn't taken his eye off the game for a moment.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Shit or get off the pot, fool.

Everybody else has bust out of the game, but still watches intently. Jordan takes off his sunglasses and lays down his cards. The onlooking goons around the table chitter their enthusiasm.

JORDAN

You owe Shana an apology, nigga.

DANTE EXPLODES with anger. Half a second ago, he was on the other side of a poker table and now he's nose to nose with Jordan accusing him of cheating.

They trade impressively creative language that feels like will only end in physical violence.

INT. INK'S WORKOUT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A man does DOWNWARD FACING DOG as he listens to some lo-fi music. This is THEO MACALL (35). Everybody calls him INK, and he's a well-muscled man whose skin is a labyrinth of tattoos.

He moves to COBRA POSE. He has a joint in his mouth. He uses one hand to remove it and he forcibly exhales the smoke.

Although the door is closed, we can still hear the commotion from the poker game just destroying his whole vibe.

INT. INK'S BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Jordan and Dante are seconds from throwing hands, and the other goons instigate as Shana tries to keep them apart. From out of nowhere--

INK

What the fuck is yall niggas doin out here?!

Ink stomps toward them.



INK (CONT'D)

A nigga can't find his fuckin center with all this bullshit! Squash it or take y'all ass home!

DANTE

Yo Ink, he--

INK

(Mocking)

He he he--nigga YOU LOST! Take your shriveled dick home or shut the fuck up.

SHANA

Thank you, Ink. I was--

INK

You can shut the fuck up too, Shana.

Dante steps back as Shana slinks her way back to the couch, both talking trash under their breath.

Ink turns his attention to Jordan.

INK (CONT'D)

In fact, I'ma squash all this right now. It's been a minute, Jordan. You ready for a real game?

JORDAN

Oh you best believe.

INK

You sure? Y'all done fucked up my chakras now so this game ain't for shiggles. You win: you get the pot, and I'll throw in some powder for--

JORDAN

You know I don't fuck around with drugs like--

INK

--AND, rude lil nigga, I'll throw in that three-wheeler I saw you eyeing.

Jordan is interested.

JORDAN

And if you win?

INK

You come work with me.

Jordan contemplates.

JORDAN  
I dunno, Ink...

INK  
Time waits for no nigga. What's it  
gon' be?

DANTE  
He stallin' cuz he know he gon' get  
his ass beat in a fair game.

JORDAN  
Nigga, I don't cheat. You just fuckin  
suck.

DANTE  
Bitch--

The two boys start toward each other again. Ink grabs the  
back of Dante's neck like a puppy.

INK  
Chill 'fore I put you back on cuttin'  
duty!

Ink chuckles, seemingly to himself.

INK (CONT'D)  
Doody.

The others don't know if they can laugh or not. Ink he  
chuckles his fill then changes gear.

INK (CONT'D)  
Jordan, what's ya play, lil nigga?

SHANA  
Hold up, Jordan. No shade, but you  
always lose to Ink.

JORDAN  
Shana, shut the fuck-

SHANA  
No but for real. Listen--

INT. INK'S BASEMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

SHANA (V.O.)  
When y'all played last month for  
Easter...

Jordan slides all his chips into the pot. Ink smiles as he goes all in too.

They reveal.

Ink isn't ashamed to flaunt his win, and Jordan isn't afraid to bitch about his loss.

SHANA (V.O.)  
 ...You lost to his full house after  
 he called your bluff.

INT. GOLD ROOM ATLANTA - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

SHANA (V.O.)  
 Remember last year after you dropped  
 out of Morehouse and Ink threw you  
 that party at Gold Room...

It's 11:30 and the club is jump-ing, jump-ing. In the upper level above the sea of percolating people, we see a calm oasis of a poker game. Again, it has come down to just Ink and Jordan.

They share almost the exact same smug grin. They reveal.

Jordan pounds on the table while Ink records himself taking the pot.

SHANA (V.O.)  
 ...you folded on that pair of tens  
 when you shoulda held. He ain't have  
 shit 'cept a Queen.

INT. INK'S BASEMENT - NIGHT - PRESENT

SHANA  
 You keeping losing because every time  
 you got a good hand you--

JORDAN  
 SHUT THE FUCK UP, SHANA!

Jordan glares at Shana and she holds his look. Everyone else looks to Ink. Ink explodes into laughter.

INK  
 You always so high and talkin  
 bullshit, I forget you got that  
 ancestor sight.

SHANA

Nah man don't start with that, I was just--

INK

Nah for real for real, you need to listen to me. You got that so-called "photographic memory" from our ancestors. You just need to accept that shit!

JORDAN

Ink, let's get back to the matter--

SHANA

You really don't have to go into--

Ink SMACKS them both on the forehead.

INK

I oughta kick y'all triflin asses out. Coming in here interrupting my yoga flow and shit. Then y'all wanna disrespect the ancient wisdoms on top of that? If y'all niggas weren't my lil cousins, I swear...

Jordan and Shana are silent, trying to read him. Ink can be scary when he wants to be.

DANTE

That's right, triflin ass nie-gguhs...

Ink shoots a look at Dante.

DANTE (CONT'D)

My bad.

INK

Top left corner of the clink clink. Bring me the necklace.

Dante walks off into a nearby bedroom. Ink points to Shana.

INK (CONT'D)

Where you from?

SHANA

...Bankhead.

INK

Bruh...

Ink turns around and points to his back. On his back, there's a large TATTOO OF AFRICA that stands out from all the other tats.

INK (CONT'D)

The Motherland, Shana!

SHANA

Wow okay. We went all the way back.

INK

Everybody think I go by Ink 'cause of my tats. Nah, it's short for Inkanyamba.

Blank stares.

INK (CONT'D)

It's an ancient Zulu serpent and whenever it gets pissed the fuck off, it causes the stormy season.

SHANA

So the wisdom is... you named yourself after a snake?

INK

Nigga, I took a name that reflected the spirit and the power given to me-- to us--by our land. Our people. I'm cool 'til you fuck with me.

SHANA

So what? You want me to change my name to something like printer?

Ink menacingly steps closer to Shana.

INK

What do you want out of this life?

SHANA

Front row Beyonce tickets...

Ink gets even closer to Shana forcing her to step back.

SHANA (CONT'D)

Stop playing, Ink. I'm too high for this shit.

Ink steps closer.

INK

What do you want?

SHANA

I want Jordan to cut his losses so we can go.

Ink steps even closer.

INK

What do you want, Shana?

SHANA

I just wanna be some place where don't nobody need shit from me, aight?

Ink stops.

INK

You can't run away from who you are.  
(Yelling)

DANTE!

Dante is already standing there. He jumps.

DANTE

Yo, I'm right here!

INK

Why ain't you say nothing?

DANTE

I was trying not to be disrespectful.

Dante holds out an AFRICAN-STYLE NECKLACE. Ink's eyes lock onto it and he gingerly takes it from Dante.

INK

Shana, I could never put my finger on it before, but you have the spirit of Oba flowing through you.

SHANA

What's an Oba?

INK

*She* is the goddess of protection and restoration. You don't run. You overcome. Whether you like it or not-- that's why you got that ancestor sight. You pick up on shit that normal niggas can't.

Shana is confused along with everybody else.

SHANA

And this is...?

INK

Put it on. You'll see.

Shana just looks at it, unsure. Ink throws it around her neck.

INK (CONT'D)

Wear this shit, Shana! Granny used to say this had the spirit of our matriarchs flowing through it. See, that's some of their hair sewn right into it, going back generations.

Shana looks down at the necklace and there is most definitely HUMAN HAIR.

She tries to play it cool. She tries so hard.

INK (CONT'D)

What do you feel?

SHANA

I gotta take a shit.

Shana scurries into the nearby bedroom.

INK

Yeah, it's working.

JORDAN

So I don't mean to break up whatever the hell that was, but how 'bout the best of five hands?

INK

Dante, put on my ass whooping playlist.