

GODFATHER OF HARLEM

Episode 101

"By Whatever Means Necessary"

Written

by

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ABC SIGNATURE
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FIRST DRAFT
OCTOBER 16, 2017

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FADE IN:

A CONCRETE CORRIDOR

We hear FOOTSTEPS echoing, *tap tap tap*. Now two girlish PINK SHOES come into frame, topped with bowties.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Revealing now MARGARET JOHNSON, 11, African-American, walking with great purpose in her white dress and a Chatty Cathy doll (white) nestled under her arm.

WIDER, we see MAYME JOHNSON, African-American, 40's, a mature, fashionable beauty with an oversize Saks Fifth Avenue purse.

They reach massive iron bar doors. A klaxon sounds and the doors slide open. They enter.

A sign informs us this is... ALCATRAZ.

INT. ALCATRAZ - VISITOR'S AREA -- DAY

Two GUARDS (white) usher Mayme and Margaret into the visitation room, which features tables and chairs bolted to the floor. Prisoners in striped uniforms share brief moments with their wives and children. All are white except for the man seated in contemplation.

This is ELLSWORTH "BUMPY" JOHNSON (Forest Whitaker).

He's a published poet, master chess player, and brutal gangster: sensitivity, strategy, and explosive violence are the contradictory impulses that drive him.

He looks up. Something lights in his eyes. He's caught sight of Margaret, white dress, Chatty Cathy tucked under her arm. His greatest love and greatest weakness.

NEW ANGLE

The Guards carefully search through Mayme's large purse, examining lipstick, compact, hair brush.

MAYME

I know the contraband list.

The Guard looks over to Bumpy, sees that he's focused on Margaret. He turns to the little girl.

GUARD

Lemme see that.

MAYME

That's her favorite doll.

The Guard tugs the Chatty Cathy away, ripping off a BUTTON from the doll. He breaks the doll's head off at the neck. Digs his finger in to search the innards. Margaret cries.

That's when the tsunami hits.

Bumpy comes out of nowhere, blasting the guard with two lethal punches. One breaks his nose in a spray of blood, the second crushes his jaw and knocks him out.

It's only seconds before a slew of Guards pummel Bumpy with batons. Mayme screams. They beat him senseless.

CLOSE - ON MARGARET

Tears streaming now, dress splattered with blood, clutching her headless doll.

CUT TO:

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: THE BUTTON FROM THE DOLL.

BUMPY (V.O.)

Where you at, baby?

INT. ALCATRAZ - THE HOLE

LOW ANGLE CAMERA, the room is pitch black. We HEAR someone crawling around the cell. We catch glimpses of crawling bugs. Finally, a hand enters FRAME to grasp the button.

BUMPY

Gotcha.

Bumpy sits into a thin shaft of light with the button clenched in his hand. He recites a poem.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

If we must die, let it not be like
hogs, hunted and penned in an
inglorious spot...

He tosses the button into a dark corner and begins to search the cell again. From the dark recesses.

BUMPY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

While round us bark the mad and hungry
dogs, making their mock at our
accursed lot.

On hands and knees, he methodically covers every square inch of the cell. Roaches scurry away. The wall's carved with 67 chalk marks to indicate his days.

BUMPY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 If we must die, oh let us nobly die,
 so that our precious blood may not
 be spilt in vain...

He finds the button. For a moment, he's still, satisfied. This is his method of keeping sane.

BUMPY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Then even the monsters we defy,
 shall be constrained to honor us
 though dead.

Suddenly, anger and claustrophobia flood over him. He holds his body tight against the tremors. He hurls the button and begins the search again.

BUMPY (CONT'D)
 If we must die, let it not be like
 hogs, hunted and penned in an
 inglorious spot...

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO BAY - DAY

WIDE SHOT, a TUGBOAT churns through the rough waters of the Bay, leaving the forbidding island of Alcatraz.

On the boat, Bumpy takes a last look at his home for eleven years, nodding at the Rock respectfully, like a competitor he's defeated.

CUT TO:

EXTREME C.U. - MRS. BRANTLEY

About seventy something, an old irrepressible black woman.

MRS. BRANTLEY
 I had this dream about a dolphin,
 dream book says number for dolphin
 is 147.

INT. SOMEWHERE - NIGHT

Could be a confessional, we're not sure.

MRS. BRANTLEY

Sure enough, there's a horse named Blue Dolphin running at Yonkers in the seventh. Put half the money on the race, half on 147, ended up flat busted broke. Now the landlord says he's gonna evict me.

REVERSING, to find Bumpy Johnson. Tastefully-dressed in expensive suit and custom shoes. We are--

INT. BISCHOFF'S ICE CREAM PARLOR - NIGHT

A classic Harlem joint, with red leather booths and clean sparkling white formica tables. The Ronette's "Be My Baby" plays on the jukebox. Twenty family and friends celebrate Bumpy's homecoming.

BUMPY

You bet on "Blue Dolphin?"

MRS. BRANTLEY

Yessuh.

BUMPY

Baby, I could get up from this table and outrun that nag right now. She ain't placed higher than sixth her last five outings.

Scolded, she chuckles, but Bumpy reads her thoughts.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

Rent's due, huh? You still over there at The Holland?

MRS. BRANTLEY

Yes, Bumpy.

BUMPY

Kleinberg owns that building. I'll take care of it.

MRS. BRANTLEY

Bless you.

He moves on to shake the hands of half a dozen other friends and family. HARRY CHISHOLM, 40's, a tough as nails old black gangster, escorts a flamboyantly-dressed man named SPANISH RAY.

CHISHOLM

Look what the motherfuckin' cat
dragged in.

BUMPY

Spanish Ray.

SPANISH RAY

Buen verte, hermano. Only man I
know looks *better* after he comes out
of the joint.

BUMPY

Thanks for getting an envelope to
Mayme every month.

SPANISH RAY

Somos bandidos.

They share a hug. Bumpy spots a WAITER putting the finishing
touches on a banana split. He intercepts the split and
carries it next to Mayme and Margaret. Mayme taps her glass
with her fork to get everyone's attention.

MAYME

Parole Board said Bumpy hadda pay
the government nine hundred dollars
in bogus court fees `fore he could
get out. He was set to stay in jail
rather than pay the damn government.
It's a matter of principle, he said.
I said pay that damn fee and get
your butt home or I'm gonna make
Alcatraz seem like an island getaway.

(everyone laughs)

I missed my man almost as much as he
missed his banana splits.

They hoot and holler. Bumpy addresses the crowd.

BUMPY

First I want to walk the streets and
hear the voices, laughter, the sirens,
the music. Oh man, do I want to
hear some music playing. Then I'm
gonna satiate. I'm gonna get all the
rice and gravy than they have on all
of Lennox Ave. I'm gonna have ice
cream everyday.

The crowd cheers. Bumpy turns it serious.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

I want to stay free and be with my family. I want to be with my daughter.

The guests applaud, but Margaret is distinctly cold. Guests start receiving their ice cream sundaes from waiters. Much merriment.

ON BUMPY, MAYME AND MARGARET

Bumpy takes a scoop of the split, careful to get every ingredient on one spoon. But rather than feed himself, he offers the spoon to Margaret.

MARGARET

I don't like splits.

Margaret slips out of her seat and heads to the bathroom. The rejection plays on Bumpy's face, it's palpable.

BUMPY

What kid don't like ice cream?

MAYME

Give her time. You scared her. She needs to get used to having you around. And so do I.

He's stung by this, but his response is cut off by the arrival of NAT PETTIGREW, 30's, pretty and cool, a modern "hep" brother with colorful threads and sunglasses.

PETTIGREW

Problem up on 46th.

BUMPY

Can it wait?

Pettigrew shakes his head no. Bumpy looks apologetically to Mayme. This is his eternal dilemma.

EXT. 146TH STREET - HARLEM - NIGHT

Bumpy, Chisholm and Pettigrew cross the rubble-strewn street, sidestepping cabs and cars. They pass storefronts, chicken and waffles, clothes shops, and finally Joy's Hair Salon.

INT. JOY'S HAIR SALON - NIGHT

Bumpy and crew walk into a shattered mess. Female workers and customers crying, hair dryers smashed, weaves and wigs and extensions all over the floor.

A DIGNIFIED WOMAN, 50's, ushers them toward the back.

INT. JOY'S BACK ROOM - NIGHT

An office with many sacks of pink numbers slips. Also a cheap lock box, now empty, that's been shot open.

DIGNIFIED WOMAN

They knee-capped Dexter.

In the corner is eighteen year old DEXTER, sweating, in shock, attended to by three black GRANNIES. His leg's sunk above the knee in a bucket of ice, which is blood red.

BUMPY

This gonna hurt, boy.

He carefully lifts Dexter's leg above the water line and the sight makes everyone cringe but Bumpy. Dexter's kneecap has been shot off, leaving only blood and bone.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

Call an ambulance?

DIGNIFIED WOMAN

...We... wanted to wait till you got here...

BUMPY

Call Saint Mary's. Ask for Sister Helen. Tell her it's me.

The Dignified Woman hurries off to make the call. Bumpy grabs a cloth from a Granny, wipes Dexter's forehead.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

Who did it?

DEXTER

(out of it)

The guinea with the crazy eyes.
Took the cash, all of it.

BUMPY

I know this is tough, but now you got a story to tell. Girls are gonna love how you stood up to them guinea bullets. Ain't gotta worry bout your love life.

Somehow these words draw a smile from Dexter. Bumpy peels off some bills, hands them to a granny.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

See he gets anything he needs. We'll get a crew to clean this place up.

EXT. JOY'S HAIR SALON - NIGHT

Bumpy steps out with Chisholm and Pettigrew. He's rubbing something between his two fingers.

CHISHOLM

They hit 27th last week. Damn near killed Herm Robertson.

PETTIGREW

We've had four-five spots whole time you gone, guineas never did shit.

BUMPY

They know I'm back.

We see what Bumpy's rubbing. The doll's button.

EXT. LENNOX AVENUE - NIGHT

A shiny Lincoln Mark IV cruises down Lennox.

INT. LINCOLN MARK IV - NIGHT (DRIVING)

ON BUMPY, gazing at the passing streets, a technicolor bazaar of storefronts, juke joints and jazz clubs. James Brown at the Apollo. Wilson Pickett at Small's. In the words of Langston Hughes, Harlem is a "melting pot of honey and chocolate, rum and vinegar."

BUMPY

Guineas afraid I'm gonna try to expand. It was a message.

Chisholm drives, always grumpy, toothpick in mouth.

CHISHOLM

They don't take kindly to niggas on
Pleasant Avenue.

Bumpy's attention is drawn by a marquee at the stately Hotel Theresa. "THE FUTURE OF RESISTANCE. A discussion with Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and Minister Malcolm X."

BUMPY

Knew that cat `fore he changed his
name to Malcolm.

HIS P.O.V. - A huge CROWD waiting to get into the Hotel. Regular church-going folk, but also dozens of NATION OF ISLAM SOLDIERS in their classic black suits and bow-ties.

BUMPY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

We got history, him and me.

Just what that history is remains to be seen, but the collision of Bumpy and Malcolm will shortly and forever more change the history of Harlem.

CHISHOLM

Niggas marchin', all for what?

PETTIGREW

For our rights, fool.

CHISHOLM

Got my rights right here.

He taps the barrel of his .38 Long.

POWELL (V.O.)

Nonviolence demands that the means
we use must be as pure as the ends
we seek...

INT. HOTEL THERESA - SKYLINE BALLROOM - NIGHT

A hotel ballroom packed with an upscale African-American crowd. On stage is CONGRESSMAN ADAM CLAYTON POWELL, also a noted preacher, so light-skinned he could pass for white.

POWELL

Jesus said love your enemies. Bless
them that curse you. Be good to
them who respect you...

INT. LINCOLN MARK IV - NIGHT (DRIVING)

Bumpy stares at the streets of Italian East Harlem, which are clean, well-lit, every pedestrian is white.

POWELL (V.O.)

And pray for them that don't...

Kids play stickball, old Italian women sip espresso in the cafes. A traffic sign says: PLEASANT AVENUE.

EXT. PLEASANT AVENUE - NIGHT

The Lincoln pulls to a stop beside double-parked Cadillacs in front of a row of neatly-kept stores.

POWELL (V.O.)

We must oppose any attempt to gain our freedom by the methods of malice, hate, and violence that have characterized our oppressors.

INT. LINCOLN MARK IV - NIGHT

A moment as Bumpy studies a quaint butcher shop. Outside their are a half dozen Italian toughs.

POWELL (V.O.)

Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. It is the sword that heals.

BUMPY

Get me the shotgun.

INT. SKYLINE BALL ROOM - HOTEL THERESA - NIGHT

Rousing applause to Powell's words.

MODERATOR

Minister Malcolm, how do you respond?

Meet MALCOLM X SHABAZZ, former pimp, now magnetic chief lieutenant and spokesman for the Nation of Islam.

MALCOLM X

We who have accepted the religion of Islam have never bombed any churches, have never murdered any little girls as was done in Birmingham, have never lynched anybody.

(MORE)

MALCOLM X (CONT'D)

We are taught by the Honorable Elijah Mohammed to obey the law, to respect those who respect us.

EXT. PLEASANT AVENUE - NIGHT

The Lincoln's trunk swings open. Inside are shotguns and pistols. Chisholm hands out weapons.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

To accuse us of violence is like accusing the man who is being lynched simply because he struggles vigorously against his lyncher.

Quick shots. The shotgun dangles from the crook of Bumpy's arm. Pettigrew adjusts his shades. Chisholm spits out his toothpick. They stride toward the butcher shop.

PETTIGREW

Keep your motherfuckin' hands in the air! Get `em up!

As the Italians raise their hands, Bumpy cradles his shotgun and enters the butcher shop alone.

INT. SKYLINE BALL ROOM - HOTEL THERESA - NIGHT

The crowd is restive, Malcolm's words are alarming.

MALCOLM X

I say that if anyone seeks to inflict violence upon us, we reserve the right to defend ourselves.

INT. BUTCHER SHOP - NIGHT

The shop is bare and empty. Eerie. Bumpy creeps through the shop toward the meat locker in the back. He swings open the door to the meat locker.

INT. MEAT LOCKER - NIGHT

Bumpy levels his shotgun at JIMMY "EYES" ZAMBRANO, 30's, soulless blue eyes, a human pit bull, standing by half a dozen beef carcasses hanging from metal hooks.

BUMPY

I should kill you for knee-capping that kid. He ain't gonna walk again.

ZAMBRANO

Boo hoo.

CHIN

Easy with the gun, Bumpy.

From between the beef carcasses comes a man in a smock stained with blood. He carries a butcher knife. This is VINCENT "THE CHIN" GIGANTE, 50, a former boxer whose mashed nose and droopy eyelids hide a lethal craftiness. He and Bumpy have a long history in Harlem.

BUMPY

Nothing goes down from 110th to 160th without my say-so. No dope, no women, no numbers. Way it's always been.

CHIN

Zambrano's the man in Harlem now.

ZAMBRANO

Times have changed.

Bumpy removes a STRAIGHT RAZOR from a handkerchief and slices open a carcass of beef. It's stuffed with heroin.

BUMPY

I haven't.

Bumpy cocks the shotgun and BLASTS a hole in the carcass, sending an EXPLOSION OF DOPE directly at CAMERA.

UP WITH TITLES:

"GODFATHER OF HARLEM"

Gordon Parks black and white photos (archival) depict the intersection of gangsterism, politics and social upheaval. Church ladies in feathered hats. A Nation of Islam recruiting center, with men in suits and women in hijabs. Numbers runners selling their policy slips on 135th. A pimp with his ladies outside Small's Paradise. Black high society on Striver's Row and Sugar Hill. Heartbreaking poverty on 146th. Guns, dope, protest signs, a melting pot about to boil over.

END TITLES:

FADE UP ON:

INT. BUMPY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A spacious apartment in a building that's one of the best in Harlem. The living room is decorated in a sleek modern style, lots of metal and clean lines.

Bumpy enters.

Mayme emerges from the bedroom in a robe. Hair down, ready for bed. The sight of him gives her a visible sense of relief. She comes to help him take off his coat. Sniffs. She lifts his hands to smell them.

MAYME

You fired a gun tonight.

BUMPY

Not *at* nobody.

Mayme seems to take this as a logical explanation.

MAYME

Want some tea?

He nods. She heads for the kitchen. He follows. As she makes the tea--

MAYME (CONT'D)

What's wrong, baby?

BUMPY

Them fuckin' guineas.

MAYME

You used to be able to work with them.

BUMPY

"Times have changed." Tonight I saw those Muslims outside the Hotel Theresa, making noise. So I made some noise myself.

MAYME

You're gonna go against the guineas?

BUMPY

No... but a little noise gets you a seat at the table.

MAYME

Margaret needs a father.

BUMPY

I messed up once, I ain't messin' up
with her.

To whom he's referring, we don't know. Mayme steps up to
deliver his tea.

MAYME

I need a husband.

BUMPY

Gettin' tired of your boyfriend?

He clasps her by the ass and pulls her close. She bats his
hands away, giggling.

MAYME

You're the worst.

EXT. WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL - NEXT DAY

Early morning sunshine. A Cadillac pulls to the curb of
this luxury hotel adorned with colorful flags. Chin and
Zambrano get out.

INT. PENTHOUSE SUIT - WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL - DAY

Chin and Zambrano are ushered into a gorgeous penthouse suite
by a MANSERVANT. They stand awkward amid exquisite art.

VINNIE

Where's Costello?

COSTELLO (O.S.)

Right here, relax.

From an ornate atrium balcony, FRANK COSTELLO, the best-
looking 65 year old you've ever seen, enters wearing a dirt-
smudged smock. He's an elder statesman with a nasty scar on
his left temple where no hair will ever grow.

COSTELLO (CONT'D)

Come inside. Herman will get you
something to drink.

He gestures to the manservant.

INT. ATRIUM GREENHOUSE - DAY

An outdoor atrium covered over with greenhouse glass, home
to colorful species of jungle flowers.

CHIN
Ninety thousand dollars, Frank. He
cost us ninety K.

COSTELLO
(amused)
And shot a cow? Sounds like Bumpy,
alright.

CHIN
I'm gonna kill him.

Costello turns from pruning a flower to study Chin. Though
he always speaks softly, there's menace underneath.

COSTELLO
Johnson's tight with all the old
pezzonoventes. He's goes all the
way back to Lucky Luciano.

CHIN
I can't kill a nigger who *fires* a
shotgun in my place of business?

COSTELLO
This isn't about him. Snitches,
congressional hearings, your boss
Vito's locked up in Atlanta for the
rest of his life. We can't afford
any disruption in Harlem.

CHIN
I want my money.

COSTELLO
Johnson did eleven years in Alcatraz
without snitching us out. The
families won't sanction any move
against him.

CHIN
What about my money?

COSTELLO
I hear you attacked his numbers spots.

CHIN
Frank, you're growing fucking orchids
in the Waldorf and telling me how to
run my business?

Costello lays down his pruning clippers.

COSTELLO

Know why I like orchids? So delicate, so soft, but they been around a hundred million years. They survive in the jungle because they live on air rather than soil. They stay above their natural enemies.

CHIN

What the fuck?

COSTELLO

Bumpy's an orchid.

INT. WALDORF ASTORIA - ELEVATOR - DAY

Chin and Zambrano ride the elevator down.

CHIN

The "Prime Minister" thinks he speaks for the families. Fuckin' faggot in a flower patch.

ZAMBRANO

I got this coon in Spanish Harlem could hit Johnson with no blow back to us.

CHIN

Can't risk it right now. But I know Johnson a long time. That prideful nigger will make another move, and this time we'll be ready.

EXT. 22 WEST RESTAURANT - DAY

Far uptown, 122th Street to be exact.

PETTIGREW (V.O.)

Guineas gonna come at us.

INT. 22 WEST RESTAURANT - DAY

Bumpy, Chisholm and Pettigrew have breakfast in a joint that caters to Harlem's elite - political, business, or criminal. The Chiffons' "He's So Fine" blasts from the juke.

BUMPY

Expect so.

PETTIGREW

Bumpy, all due respect, they got a couple hundred soldiers. What are we gonna do?

BUMPY

Enjoy breakfast.

Pettigrew isn't satisfied with this answer. Chisholm throws Bumpy a look. Explain yourself.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

I been through it with these motherfuckers for over thirty years. It's a chess game. Stay calm, look for your next move.

Bumpy goes back to his rice and gravy.

NEW ANGLE - ANOTHER TABLE

The power table, where we find Congressman/Reverend Adam Clayton Powell huddled with his always-calculating campaign aide LIVINGSTON WINGATE, 30's, bow-tie, glasses.

WINGATE

Raymond Jones is betting that the people are looking for someone with a more progressive stance.

POWELL

I'm the Congressman who passed the first major legislation for colored people, and this sonofabitch says I'm not "progressive" enough?

WINGATE

Tammany Hall has the power to keep you off the ballot no matter how long you been in Congress.

There's a loud commotion at another table.

THEIR P.O.V.

A group of older Harlemites are shaking hands and hugging Bumpy, their prodigal son returned.

POWELL

A popular fellow.

WINGATE

It's easy for a gangster to be popular. They can do things we can't. Like kill people.

POWELL

We can only wish them dead.

Powell muses, eyes on Bumpy.

POWELL (CONT'D)

That man's a geechee, through and through.

WINGATE

Should I know what that is?

POWELL

South Carolina geechees grew rice on the coast, get a straight razor the minute they're in britches to cut that rice and sometimes cut each other. White overseers couldn't take the mosquitoes and malaria, so these negros worked for decades without overseers.

WINGATE

Slaves with no masters.

POWELL

Which may explain why Mr. Johnson has never taken kindly to authority.

WINGATE

Rumor has it he's very tight with Frank Costello.

POWELL

Costello? That mobster with connections at Tammany Hall?

Wingate looks at Powell. An epiphany here.

EXT. 22 WEST - DAY

Chisholm and Pettigrew emerge into the morning sunshine, followed by Bumpy. Their senses go on alert.

CHISHOLM

What the fuck is this?

THEIR P.O.V. - A SQUAD OF MEN, in military formation, wearing immaculate suits and bow ties. They're alert, heads on a swivel. Imposing, dangerous, ready for anything.

Chisholm and Pettigrew move their hands to their weapons. The men notice, slowing, a possible confrontation... until the man in the center of the formation is revealed.

BUMPY

Detroit Red?

The man turns. It's Malcolm X. The two men exchange a warm handshake - street compatriots many years ago.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

If you told me the red-conked hustler I knew back at Small's would end up on the cover of Time Magazine, I woulda said you was crazy.

MALCOLM X

Elijah Mohammed opened my eyes. Maybe he can do the same for you.

BUMPY

Aw brother, I ain't fallin' for this new hustle. I know you going in there for a plate of pork chops.

MALCOLM X

Pork is unclean, just like your mind. We'll get you on the prayer mat before too long.

They laugh and hug.

MALCOLM X (CONT'D)

I heard you got out. How you been?

BUMPY

Young brother, I done this before.

Malcolm ponders this statement. An idea forming.

MALCOLM X

Yes, you have. You were the first to recognize my deficiencies as a hustler. I credit you with pushing me toward the path of Islam.

BUMPY

First time anyone's accused me of pushing them toward religion.

MALCOLM X

I believe in providence, and maybe that's why I ran into you today.

EXT. RANDOLPH HOUSES - 114TH STREET - DAY

TILTING DOWN, as a once majestic building has now sunk into utter and abject poverty and disrepair. Heroin is sold from baby carriages, from shopping bags, from junked cars, in alleys, tenements, and stairwells.

MALCOLM X (O.S.)

Back when I was hustlin', the only people into dope were musicians, artists, and hep cats. Now it's everywhere.

Addicts sleep on sidewalks or nod out against tenement walls. Many of the dealers and junkies are teenagers.

BUMPY

It used to be the numbers, now the money's in junk.

Malcolm and Bumpy, flanked by Nation of Islam soldiers, watch the drug activity from across the street.

MALCOLM X

More heroin comes out of these four project towers than any other place in Harlem. If you're growing up here, it's a nightmare.

BUMPY

This is a Genovese spot. I don't run my shit this way. I catch anyone selling to kids it's his ass.

MALCOLM X

I may disagree with the way you make money, but you're a powerful voice on these streets, my man. So how is it you're telling me you have no influence over the flow of drugs to our children?

BUMPY

The guineas will sell to anybody, so
will their Uncle Toms.

MALCOLM X

I was under the impression that you
had their ear.

BUMPY

I do, but I can't tell them how to
run their business any more than
they can tell me how to run mine.
Shutting down drug corners is what
the Nation does, not me.

MALCOLM X

I want to shut this one down. But
there are too many guns.

They watch a drug buy go down. Bumpy ponders - an idea
forming. *He sees his next move.*

BUMPY

Well, I got guns. And you got
soldiers.

As we BLAST into an ENERGETIC MONTAGE, set to The
Temptations' "Get Ready Here I Come"...

INT./EXT. RANDOLPH HOUSES - NIGHT (MONTAGE)

A battalion of NATION OF ISLAM SOLDIERS sweep into the
blighted courtyard, which is ringed on each corner by a
project tower. A ramrod straight, bow-tied army of former
gangsters, now converts to Islam. Various shots--

Nation of Islam soldiers beat down two DRUG DEALERS in a
hallway, ripping bags of heroin from their hands.

A fire roars in a trashcan. The Soldiers exit the building
and toss the heroin into the fire.

A DEALER flees his post as more soldiers arrive.

Bumpy receives a report by telephone.

Two JUNKIES head for a tower. They stop short at the sight
of a dozen Nation of Islam blocking the door.

More raids, more scuffles. Dope bags tossed into the fire,
dealers running away, junkies scurrying.

INT. RANDOLPH HOUSE TOWER - NIGHT

Inside a tower, five DEALERS break two kilos into small bags. The door CRASHES open. Chisholm and Pettigrew enter, shotguns in hand. One of the Dealers pulls a weapon, catches a load of buckshot in the chest. Pettigrew grabs a wrapped kilo and heads for the window.

Outside, the fourth floor window slides open. Pettigrew appears, ripping open the kilo.

EXT. RANDOLPH HOUSE TOWER - NIGHT

The heroin floats into the wind like snow in July.

INT. RANDOLPH HOUSE TOWER - NIGHT

Pettigrew and Chisholm stuff the remaining dope and money into a large duffel. For them, this is a robbery, not a drug protest.

CHISHOLM

Nigga, why the fuck you throw that
shit out the window?

PETTIGREW

Sorry, I got caught up in it.

They exit.

INT. PLEASANT AVENUE BUTCHER SHOP - NIGHT (MONTAGE)

Zambrano gets off the phone, whispers to Chin. Bad news.

EXT. PLEASANT AVENUE - NIGHT (MONTAGE)

On the street, Chin and Zambrano lead an army of Mafiosi into three Cadillacs. Loaded with high powered guns, they're ready for war.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

The white man wants you to be high
and drunk.

EXT. RANDOLPH HOUSES - NIGHT

Malcolm, flanked by Nation of Islam soldiers, exhorts a large crowd of Harlemites in the courtyard.

MALCOLM X

He wants you to be high and drunk
the way some men try to get a woman
under the influence if they want to
sleep with her. Brothers and sisters,
the struggle against this drug is
the struggle for liberation from
white oppression.

The gunning of a CAR ENGINE causes the crowd to swivel, and
Malcolm to stop his address--

NEW ANGLE - THREE CADILLACS

Rolling like a tank brigade, nudging the crowd aside as they
come to a stop at the curb. From each car come four ITALIAN
MEN, including Chin and Zambrano. They are strapped with
bats, clubs and guns.

MALCOLM X (CONT'D)

It appears we have visitors.

Some of the crowd disperses in fear, but many watch from a
safe distance away. Chin and Zambrano stroll to face Malcolm
below his dais.

CHIN

Pull the fuck away from my spots or
you moolenyans are gonna get shot.

The two dozen, bow-tied NATION OF ISLAM MEMBERS (all former
gangsters themselves) have surged to the front to stand off
against the Italians.

The street's deadly quiet, a standoff.

MALCOLM

Everyone of these men will die for
what they believe. Your men willing
to do the same?

The Mob versus the Muslims. The Italians begin to curse and
razz their stone-faced Muslim opponents. Neither army willing
to give quarter. A HONKING HORN causes everyone to turn--

NEW ANGLE - LINCOLN MARK IV

Pulling up beside the Italians. Pettigrew drives. Chisholm
leans out the window with a shotgun cradled in his arm.
Bumpy rolls down the back-seat window, smiles at Chin.

BUMPY

Don't you know this is a dangerous neighborhood?

He calmly steps out of the car, allowing his gaze to direct Chin and Zambrano to the roof above. Six rifle barrels poke over the parapet of a rooftop.

CHIN

Kiss my ass, Johnson.

BUMPY

(to Malcolm)

See how Chin's nose all mashed up? He used to be a pretty good boxer back in the forties till this negro kid I managed busted him up. Since then, Chin ain't had much nice to say to me.

CHIN

You coloreds used to know your place.

Zambrano's been watching with quiet fury.

ZAMBRANO

Ain't that the fuckin' truth. Coons marching in the streets? What the fuck is this world coming to?

MALCOLM X

It's not what it's coming to, it's where it's going.

Bumpy and Chin are toe-to-toe. It's as though all sounds and colors fade away, leaving only the two adversaries.

BUMPY

Lay off my shit or I'll have the Nation shuttin' down your spots every fuckin' day.

Malcolm clocks this. Chin glances at the Nation soldiers, the snipers on rooftops. He's been outplayed and he knows it. With a withering stare at Bumpy that says "this ain't over," Chin motions Zambrano.

CHIN

Let's go.

Bumpy and Malcolm watch them go. For now, a victory.

EXT. LENNOX TERRACE - BUMPY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bumpy gets out of his car. Weary.

INT. LENNOX TERRACE - BUMPY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Bumpy steps inside to find Mayme. He's exhausted.

MAYME

Hey darlin', there's someone here
who needs to talk to you.

BUMPY

Who?

A habit, she picks the lint off his jacket.

MAYME

My friend Delia, remember her? She
was a hostess with me down at Small's.
Her son's in some kind of trouble.

BUMPY

Mayme, I ain't got time for this
right now.

MAYME

You ain't got time? I raised a
daughter who ain't my own for ten
years, and you ain't got time?

That Margaret isn't Mayme's daughter is news to us. Bumpy's
sufficiently chastened.

BUMPY

Alright, alright. Where is she?

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bumpy and Mayme sit with DELIA, 40's, a recent Harlemitite
with a distinct geechee twang.

DELIA

His name's Joe. My boy always had a
way with music. Even when he was
little, anytime he played that guitar,
everyone would stop whatever they
doing and listen.

BUMPY

Boy must have skills to play with
Mary Bullock.

DELIA
Yeah, but he got a disease... an affliction...

BUMPY
(sympathetic)
A lot of musicians get high.

DELIA
He don't touch dope. It's an addiction to white women.

Bumpy shares a covert look with Mayme - are you serious?

DELIA (CONT'D)
They demons. This devil white woman has taken my son's soul. You've got to help me, Mr. Johnson.

MAYME
Delia, since I know him, Bumpy has his door open to help anyone in this community who needs help. He was that way before he went away...

She shifts a pointed gaze to Bumpy.

MAYME (CONT'D)
And I'm sure he feels the same way since he came back.

Off Bumpy, resigned...

INT. MINTON'S PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

A smoky blues club packed with dancing patrons, mostly black but with a sprinkling of white. On stage is MARY BULLOCK and an R&B band funkng out on "Whatever Makes You Happy."

Bumpy sips a ginger ale, grooving to the rhythm and blues. He hasn't heard this shit live in eleven years. Passersby shake his hand and wave hello. A legend.

Chisholm approaches.

CHISHOLM
Manager said Joey ain't played the last four nights.

BUMPY
I'll talk at Mary when she's done.

He gets back into the music.

BUMPY (CONT'D)
Man, my girl can sing.

INT. BACK STAGE AREA - HALLWAY - LATER

Mary sweeps the drapes aside.

MARY
Bumpy! You handsome, geechee
motherfucker. I heard you was out,
how come you ain't come hear me sing?

BUMPY
I'm here now, ain't I? Woman, you
got the voice of angels.

MARY
Come in, come in.

Bumpy enters.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

They exchange a warm hug. Tacked to the dressing room wall
are items clipping supporting Malcolm X.

MARY
You still married? If you ain't I'd
like to have you for breakfast.

He gently removes her hand from his shoulder.

BUMPY
Be a good girl now. I'm lookin' for
Joe Wilson, your guitar player.

MARY
Joey's in the wind, baby.

BUMPY
Any idea where?

MARY
Nope.

BUMPY
(sensing something)
C'mon, girl. He in some kinda
trouble?

Mary takes a breath... relents--

MARY
The guineas lookin' for him.

BUMPY
What guineas? Why?

MARY
Joe had a whole mess of that good
yellow duji.

BUMPY
(surprised)
He uses?

MARY
Nah, Joe was peddlin'.

BUMPY
How's a bluesman have connections
for the yellow shit? Yellow's
straight off the boat.

MARY
I dunno.

But it's clear to Bumpy she does.

BUMPY
Baby, Joe's mama's worried sick.

MARY
Maybe he got it from the white girl
he been seein'. She Italian.

BUMPY
Know her name?

MARY
Please Bumpy, don't tell no one I
told ya.

BUMPY
Go on.

MARY
Stella Gigante.

You could knock Bumpy over with a feather. Over this--

CHISHOLM (V.O.)
Chin's daughter up with a nigga?!

EXT. MINTON'S PLAYHOUSE - NIGHT

Bumpy strides down the hall with Chisholm.

CHISHOLM
Oh man, the Almighty has himself a
sense of humor.

BUMPY
They could be anywhere. Put out the
word. I need to get some rest.

CHISHOLM
You got it.

BUMPY
I'm bettin' he stole dope from Chin,
otherwise how would Joe have the
yellow?

CHISHOLM
Fuckin' the Chin's daughter and
stealing his dope? That's what I
call a two piece special - dark meat,
white meat, and a biscuit.

They both can't help but laugh.

CUT TO:

TWO BODIES. Making love. Vigorously.

STELLA
Joe...

INT. FLEABAG MOTEL - NIGHT

Two twenty-somethings, thrashing in ecstasy. The woman is
STELLA GIGANTE, Chin's beautiful daughter, deeply engaged
with the emerging "beatnik" movement. The other is JOE
WILSON, a black man with movie star looks.

Before completion, Joe pulls away. Preoccupied.

STELLA
What's wrong?

JOE

What's wrong? Your fuckin' daddy's gonna kill me.

The brick of heroin sits in an open guitar case on the floor.

STELLA

It was a good plan. Sell the kilo, make a profit, replace it before he found out.

JOE

Well it fell through. And he found out. You need to call him.

STELLA

There's nothing I can say to him till we get the money back.

JOE

Fuck the money. He'll kill me anyway.

STELLA

My father loves me. I love you. He wouldn't lay a hand on you.

Joe kisses Stella's hand. They're deeply in love.

JOE

Baby, what planet you on?

EXT. 116TH STREET - DAY

Blasting from a record store in SPANISH HARLEM, know as "El Barrio," a colorful mecca with numerous taquerías and tamale vendors, bars and clothing stores.

A CADILLAC pulls in front of a fire hydrant. Zambrano gets out, the only white man in a sea of Puerto Ricans. People instinctively move out of his path as Zambrano heads toward EL CONGO REAL, a dingy bar.

INT. EL CONGO REAL - DAY

Zambrano walks down a flight of stairs into a juke joint thick with the smell of stale beer and cigarettes. There are several early morning drinkers arrayed at the bar.

The bartender is EL MUGRE ("The Dirt"), a black-as-night Cuban with lethal looks, cocks his head.

ZAMBRANO
 (in Spanish)
 I have a job for you.

El Mugre smiles as he polishes the bar.

EXT. MIDWAY AIRPORT - CHICAGO - DAY

A plane lands.

EXT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - CHICAGO - DAY

Malcolm is greeted by two solemn NATION OF ISLAM HIGHER-UPS.
 He gets into a car and they drive away.

INT. NATION HEAD QUARTERS - CHICAGO - DAY

In a room with subtle opulence, book shelves lining the walls
 and a fireplace burning, Malcolm sits across from the
 HONORABLE ELIJAH Mohammed, 60s, whose gentle sing-song voice
 reveals why he's known as the lamb of Allah.

MALCOLM
 When I was on a dark path, Bumpy
 Johnson was able to see I was destined
 for something better. He advised me
 to leave Harlem, which put me on the
 path to Islam.

ELIJAH
 Sometimes the devil can point us in
 the right direction.

Malcolm accepts a cup of tea from Elijah.

MALCOLM
 The Nation's built on men like him.
 Men driven to criminality by lack of
 opportunity. And he truly cares
 about Harlem. He pays rents, hospital
 bills, buys food for families.

ELIJAH
 Ah, a generous criminal.

Elijah gestures to a dog-eared copy of LIFE MAGAZINE, May
 1963, which features Malcolm on the cover.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)
 You're representing our religion on
 a world stage and associating with a
 known gangster.

MALCOLM X

We shut down the biggest drug operation in Harlem.

ELIJAH

Do you understand he used you?

MALCOLM X

And I used him.

ELIJAH

You served his purposes more than ours. It was extremely foolish.

MALCOLM X

No one is without flaws, but I see in this man a greatness perhaps he doesn't even see himself.

ELIJAH

(chuckling)

Is your intention to convert him?

MALCOLM X

Not convert, educate.

Elijah grimaces as he sips his tea.

MALCOLM X (CONT'D)

Is our mission to convert or fight the battle for our people? If it's to fight, then Bumpy's vital.

ELIJAH

You're not hearing what I'm saying. You have committed a sin against our Nation. It's an astounding lack of humility. As a consequence, you are to refrain from pronouncements at our Mosques.

MALCOLM X

You're censuring me?

ELIJAH

Speak on the street corners where you started. It builds humility.

Off Malcolm, staggered.

EXT. 135TH STREET - NEXT DAY

Bumpy has his shoes shined by CECIL, 80, a fixture on the block for six decades. The stand has two chairs.

CECIL

James Brown just a buncha noise to me. Fool up there gyratin' like he got a cockroach up his ass.

BUMPY

(chuckling)

Kid's music. Can't compare to Billie or Lena Horne.

CECIL

Damn skippy, Bumpy. I got some bee wax for them Oster's of yours. Give them a deep shine.

A large DARK SEDAN pulls right to the curb, causing Chisholm and Pettigrew to tense. Adam Clayton Powell emerges. He climbs into the seat next to Bumpy.

BUMPY

I'm expecting Minister Malcolm here any minute.

POWELL

Well, I'm just warming his chair.

Powell makes a show of unfolding a newspaper and studying its contents, but he speaks to Bumpy quietly.

POWELL (CONT'D)

Been a long time, Johnson. Welcome back. I could use your assistance with a political matter.

BUMPY

I'm a convicted felon, Congressman. My vote don't mean a fuckin' thing.

POWELL

Yes, but--

BUMPY

--And don't bother askin' me about Frank Costello.

Powell's charming smile never fades.

POWELL

Listen, you low country gullah rice picker, don't pull that shit on me. Your friend can get me on the ballot. It would work very much in your favor if I was elected.

BUMPY

Listen, you high yalla motherfucka, just cause you come from Sugar Hill, don't think you can play me. When I got sent up, you said a monster was off the streets.

POWELL

I think you know the difference between public pronouncements and reality. I have influence with Federal Law Enforcement agencies.

BUMPY

I don't have any Federal beefs.

POWELL

Yet.

Cecil finishes polishing Bumpy's shoes.

CECIL

Ready, Reverend Powell.

POWELL

Next time, Cecil.

(to Bumpy)

Just consider. That's all I'm asking.

He's almost to his car when Malcolm approaches, flanked by several Nation soldiers.

POWELL (CONT'D)

Brother Malcolm, your pretty, slick-suited brothers are poaching from my flock, handing out flyers outside my church.

MALCOLM X

You see them as your flock. That might just be the problem.

Powell angrily climbs into the back of his car. It screeches away from the curb. Bumpy hands Cecil a twenty.

EXT. LENNOX AVENUE - DAY

Bumpy and Malcolm, on the move, tailed at a discreet distance by Chisholm, Pettigrew and Nation of Islam soldiers.

MALCOLM X

I knew we were making a devil's bargain, but I didn't realize you had another game going with Gigante. You used the Nation as a threat.

BUMPY

We both got what we wanted.

MALCOLM X

No, you did. You smacked down the Italians, but I've been censured by Elijah. He's forbidden me to speak in the Mosques.

BUMPY

Why?

MALCOLM X

Because I worked with you.

BUMPY

So you can recruit gangsters and criminals to be in the Nation, but you can't work with them?

MALCOLM X

Those men have renounced sin.

BUMPY

Sin ain't going away and I'll be damned if the guineas are gonna take all the money out of the neighborhood.

Malcolm stops and spins on Bumpy, furious.

MALCOLM X

Look at you - your spit-shined shoes and Fifth Avenue suit. You just like that integrationist nigga fighting to sit at the white man's lunch counter, but it's with those mobsters.

BUMPY

I spent my whole life fighting for that fuckin' seat.

MALCOLM X

Think they see you as an equal? Or
you just House Nigga to the Mob?

BUMPY

Malcolm, don't make me slap your
ass.

MALCOLM X

You want real respect? Separate.
Don't integrate.

He walks away, leaving Bumpy speechless.

INT. BUMPY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Bumpy enters, still slammed by Malcolm's words. The presence
of Mayme and Margaret at the kitchen table forces a radical
shift in his demeanor.

BUMPY

Ice cream, anyone?

MARGARET

Yes!

MAYME

Let me call down for a taxi.

BUMPY

Nah, let's walk. I could use the
fresh air.

He offers his arm to Margaret.

EXT. LENNOX AVENUE - DAY

Bumpy, Mayme and Margaret walk up the busy street.

BUMPY

(to Margaret)

How you doing with the nuns at Saint
Mary's? School alright?

MARGARET

They got us reading poetry.

Said as if it's a curse word.

BUMPY

If we must die, oh let us nobly die,
so that our precious--

MARGARET

Daddy, it's boring.

BUMPY

When you're a jailbird, got plenty of time to read poetry. So if you hate poetry, little girl, you best stay outta jail.

Margaret giggles. Up ahead is Sylvia's Restaurant. Bumpy intuitively glances over his shoulder. Someone's trailing them at a distance.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

(lightly)

Take Margaret into Sylvia's, huh?
I'll join y'all in a minute.

Mayme senses his concern, and quickly steers Margaret toward the corner soda shop.

MAYME

C'mon, honey. Let's get a sundae.

Bumpy continues ambling down the avenue, but his hand reaches into his pocket. The minute they're inside, he wheels and stalks back toward the follower. His STRAIGHT RAZOR flicks open, ready to cut, as he reaches--

THE FOLLOWER. Not a thug, but a ONCE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, now a shell of a human, a wretched junkie.

JUNKIE WOMAN

I need money.

BUMPY

Not if it's gonna go in your arm.

JUNKIE WOMAN

Please!

Bumpy has deep pity for this human tragedy. He pulls bills from his wallet and crams fifty dollars into her hand.

INT. SYLVIA'S RESTAURANT - SUNSET

Bumpy shares a banana split with Mayme and Margaret. This is an upscale soul food establishment.

MARGARET

You always buy the banana split to share and then eat it yourself.

BUMPY

You try going eleven years without
ice cream.

He pushes the sundae over to her.

MARGARET

Daddy, what was that poem?

BUMPY

If We Must Die," by Claude McKay.

MAYME

Bumpy, let's not get all caught up
in poetry. We finally got some family
time together.

BUMPY

Settle down, woman, she asked a
question.

(to Margaret)

The message of that poem is to keep
fighting back, even if the chances
of winning are small.

The conversation is interrupted when the MAITRE D' approaches
and whispers in Bumpy's ear.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

Baby, `scuse me, I got to handle this.

He rises, then pauses.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

Don't finish that split without me.

EXT. SYLVIA'S - CONTINUOUS

Bumpy emerges slowly from the restaurant, hand perched in
his jacket. Almost immediately GUNSHOTS EXPLODE. A window
next to Bumpy shatters. Bumpy rips out his gun and returns
fire across the street towards...

EL MUGRE, who shoots at Bumpy with a .45

INT. SYLVIA'S - SUNSET

Mayme and the other customers are aghast. BAM-BAM-BAM.

EXT. SYLVIA'S - CONTINUOUS

Bumpy fires off another couple rounds as El Mugre dives into his Chevrolet and speeds away. Bumpy adjusts his clothes and re-enters the restaurant.

INT. SYLVIA'S - CONTINUOUS

Absolute frozen silence. Bumpy walks past table after table of open-mouthed patrons. He takes his seat across from a stunned Mayme and Margaret.

MAYME

What happened?

Bumpy shrugs, resumes eating the sundae.

BUMPY

We both missed.

EXT. FLEABAG MOTEL - NIGHT

A cheap flophouse in Brooklyn.

INT. FLEABAG MOTEL - NIGHT

Joe tosses in fitful sleep. It's been several days and the room is littered with fast food cartons. Stella sits over Joe's sleeping form. She makes a decision.

She grabs the phone and moves it as far away from Joe as the cord will allow. She dials.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MULBERRY STREET SOCIAL CLUB - NIGHT

A MOB SOLDIER brings a telephone to Chin, who sits at a booth with Zambrano and other made men.

MOB SOLDIER

For you.

Chin's irritated at the disruption until...

MOB SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Stella.

He takes the phone. His voice, in this moment, is one of the concerned, relieved parent.

CHIN
Stella, honey.

Stella immediately bursts into tears.

STELLA
I'm sorry, Pop.

CHIN
Hey, it's okay.

STELLA
It was very dumb. I know. I know.
Please, please, forgive me.

CHIN
What are you crying about?

STELLA
I want to come home.

CHIN
Sure you can come home.

STELLA
Thank you, thank you.

CHIN
And that boyfriend of yours, he can
come home. I got coffins for both
of you.

He slams the phone into the receiver. Seething.

CUT TO:

A 1963 OLDSMOBILE, tricked out...

SPANISH RAY (O.S.)
When Bumpy calls, I'm there.

We're--

EXT. 112TH STREET - NIGHT

It's hours after the attempted shooting. The Olds cruises
up 112th in Spanish Harlem. The vibe is Latin, colorful,
lots of street traffic.

PETTIGREW (O.S.)
Got a line on this shooter?

INT. OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT (DRIVING)

Spanish Ray, seen earlier at Bumpy's party, is the numbers king of Spanish Harlem, flamboyant hustler and a dear friend of Bumpy's. He drives. Pettigrew is in the front, Chisholm in the back.

SPANISH RAY

This cat goes by the handle "El Mugre," used to be a hitter for Genovese in Havana before Castro. Now he works for them up here.

CHISHOLM

Bumpy said the motherfucker was black as coal.

SPANISH RAY

Not every spic is sweet caramel like me, m'ijo. We got niggas too.

INT. CLUB EL CONGO REAL - NIGHT

El Mugre tends bar. It's afterhours, the club is jumping and loud. He returns some change to a customer. Momentarily alone, he pours cocaine from a bag onto the back of his hand. Snorts hard.

HIS P.O.V. - THE CROWD

There's a ripple of commotion. Spanish Ray leads Pettigrew and Chisholm through the dancing crowd.

REVERSING, ON EL MUGRE. Sensing danger. He vaults OVER THE BAR and dashes into the crowd.

CHISHOLM

Get him!

El Mugre uses the patrons as interference, bowling over revelers on his way to the stairs. Over Martha and the Vandellas' "Nowhere to Run Nowhere to Hide"...

EXT. CLUB EL CONGO REAL - NIGHT

El Mugre bursts from the club. Chisholm and Pettigrew emerge moments later. They give chase.

VARIOUS ANGLES - THE CHASE (OVER MUSIC)

High speed. Impressionistic. El Mugre sprints past bodegas, knocking pedestrians out of the way.

Pettigrew and Chisholm gain ground. Guns in hand.

El Mugre ducks into an alley. Chisholm and Pettigrew stop, their communication wordless and practiced by years of this shit. Chisholm runs off to places unknown.

NEW ANGLE - EL MUGRE

Pistol in hand. He fires a fusillade at Pettigrew, who ducks behind a dumpster. An exchange of GUNFIRE. El Mugre grabs hold of a fire escape, climbs up the side of a building. He fires down on Pettigrew while he climbs.

ANGLE - EL MUGRE CLIMBING

Higher and higher. Just above is the roof parapet. He vaults himself over onto the roof.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

El Mugre rises, pleased, dusts himself off. That's when Chisholm's .38 Long appears in his face.

CHISHOLM

You done fucked up.

CUT TO:

EL MUGRE - AFTERNOON

Face drenched with sweat.

SPANISH RAY (O.S.)

(in Spanish)

Who hired you? We won't kill ya if you give us the name.

We're--

INT. NONDESCRIPT APARTMENT - DAY

El Mugre is tied over the back of a dirt-stained couch in this spare, dingy apartment. His back features BLOODY WELTS from the lash of Chisholm's belt. Chisholm, Spanish Ray and Bumpy are in attendance.

EL MUGRE

(in Spanish)

I ain't sayin' shit.

Chisholm unleashes another series of lashes, until Spanish Ray raises a hand to stop him. He steps up to El Mugre.

SPANISH RAY

(in Spanish)

You know, parsero, I don't care if them Italians got you out of Havana. You're a nigga to them, even though you're Cubano.

EL MUGRE

(in Spanish)

Fuck you.

He spits on the floor. Everyone looks to Bumpy. He hates to do this, but--

BUMPY

Call Big Dick Buster.

CUT TO:

BIG DICK BUSTER, six foot eight and three hundred fifty pounds, ambles toward El Mugre. El Mugre strains against his bindings at this vision from hell. Buster tears El Mugre's pants down to the ankles.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

(to Buster)

He's all yours.

They exit. Buster steps into the foreground. With his back to camera, Big Dick Buster drops his pants and begins jerking off. From El Mugre's look of fear, it's clear Buster's nickname is well-earned.

INT. NEXT ROOM - LATER

Spanish Ray smokes. Chisholm checks a watch. Bumpy leans against the wall, eyes closed. The window is level with the train tracks and a TRAIN SHRIEKS past the window like a bullet. As it subsides, it's replaced by a WEEPING SHRIEK from the next room.

PUERTO RICAN (O.S.)

ZAMBRANO! IT WAS ZAMBRANO!!!

Then just wracking SOBS.

SPANISH RAY

I thought it would take longer than that.

CHISHOLM

Pay up.

Spanish Ray hands Chisholm a twenty dollar bill.

INT. SMALL'S PARADISE - NIGHT

Bumpy storms into the nightclub. Sam Cooke is singing "Twistin' the Night Away." The club is filled with white and black patrons. The OWNER (a suave black man in a tux) sees the look in Bumpy's eyes and cuts him off.

OWNER

Bumpy, I have a great table--

Bumpy blasts past him. The Owner follows.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Please Bumpy, you know this is a special place. A place that welcomes people from uptown *and* downtown--

We see Bumpy's target: a table across the way with Chin, Zambrano and several CHORUS-GIRL TYPES.

BUMPY (CAMERA TRACKING)

Moves through the club toward Chin's table. They spot his approach and laughter and chatter stops.

CHIN

We've already ordered.

BUMPY

Excuse me, ladies.

(to Chin)

I was with my family. My kid.

Patrons nearby sense this could get ugly. They move away.

CHIN

I don't know what you're talking about. If someone's fucking with you, it's someone else.

BUMPY

Bullshit.

Zambrano vaults up into Bumpy's face.

ZAMBRANO

Nigger, take a drum down to the dance floor and beat it.

The White Girl snickers, spits some champagne. Bumpy grabs Zambrano's tie and YANKS him forward. His straight razor is pressed against Zambrano's neck. The Owner hovers in the background, freaked out--

OWNER

Bumpy, please. Not here.

The girls are terrified. Chin thinks this is the funniest thing he's ever seen.

CHIN

What are you gonna do? Cut him?

Zambrano seethes, but stays still.

CHIN (CONT'D)

Go on. Go ahead, Bumpy. Cut his fuckin' throat. Kill a made man and see what happens.

CLOSE - ON BUMPY

He knows Chin is right. He lowers the razor. But his look to Zambrano suggests this hasn't been resolved.

EXT. WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL - NIGHT

Bumpy gets out of the Mark IV, heads for the entrance. He's intercepted by a DOORMAN.

BUMPY

Frank Costello.

INT. LIVING ROOM - COSTELLO'S SUITE - WALDORF ASTORIA - NIGHT

Bumpy and Frank sit over an ornate chessboard. They are old friends with great mutual respect.

COSTELLO

That was very foolish, what you did.

BUMPY

What if that asshole's bullet had gone through the window and hit my daughter?

COSTELLO

You went after Zambrano in a public place.

BUMPY

I should have cut him. Don't know why I didn't. Check.

Costello moves his King out of check.

COSTELLO

Because if you kill a made man, you're dead. That's why. There's no coming back from that. It's how this whole thing works, you know as well as me.

BUMPY

Why you take Chin's side? He damn near put a bullet in your head.

Frank absently touches the scar on his temple.

COSTELLO

Reason I'm still here is because I learned to let things go.

BUMPY

Check.

COSTELLO

(studying the board)

What the fuck did you expect when you teamed up with the Nation of goddamn Islam? You're supposed to keep your business private and you're running a dope blockade with a guy on the cover of Life.

Costello realizes Bumpy has him checkmated.

COSTELLO (CONT'D)

Just once. Just once will I ever fucking beat you?

BUMPY

No.

COSTELLO

Bumpy, as your friend, accept what happened as part of business and keep silent. No one likes a colored guy getting loud and boisterous. It fits a stereotype of your people you don't want them to have.

EXT. PARK AVENUE - NIGHT

The Lincoln cruises up Park Avenue.

INT. LINCOLN - NIGHT

Chisholm and Pettigrew in the front. Bumpy stares out the window in silence.

HIS P.O.V. - PARK AVENUE

The stately apartment buildings, the well-to-do white pedestrians, the cops on every corner. And now, as the car passes 100th Street heading uptown, things change.

A dope fiend searches through a garbage can. Skinny kids fight in the street. Winos stumble out of a speakeasy. The Lincoln pulls to a corner populated by prostitutes.

CLOSE - ON BUMPY

Staring out the window. Something catches his eye.

HIS P.O.V. - THE JUNKIE WOMAN

The one seen earlier. Jutting her bony hips at the car in front. She slides into the passenger seat next to the John. The light turns green. The car pulls away.

WIDER

Bumpy rubs the doll's button between his fingers. It's in this moment, as he stares at the wreckage that is this particular block of Harlem, that Bumpy has his epiphany.

Pettigrew turns from the front seat.

PETTIGREW

What we gonna do, Bump?

BUMPY

Get loud and boisterous.

Chisholm and Pettigrew eye him strangely.

EXT. MOSQUE #7 - LENNOX AVE - DAY

Bumpy approaches the entrance. Numerous Nation of Islam members block his entry.

BUMPY

I'd like a word with Minister Malcolm.

INT. MOSQUE #7 - DETOX ROOM - DAY

Bumpy steps into an immaculately-clean room with a dozen beds. YOUNG BLACK MEN are chained to the bedposts, in the throes of agonizing detox from heroin. Malcolm notes Bumpy's entrance without surprise.

MALCOLM X

When I was doing my detox in solitary at Charleston, they called me "Satan" cause I was so full of hate.

He gestures to a bed where a sweat-soaked young man spews curses at his Nation of Islam counselor.

MALCOLM X (CONT'D)

That was my lowest point, where that boy is right there.

BUMPY

We need to talk.

MALCOLM X

I've done enough talking.

Bumpy will not be denied.

BUMPY

You were right. I been an integrationist nigga. But that don't mean I can't change. I just sat with a guinea I respect, and he told me I couldn't defend myself against the motherfuckers who tried to shoot me in front of my family.

MALCOLM X

(concerned)

Is everyone alright?

BUMPY

Yeah, but now I understand what you were sayin'. They'll never see me as they see themselves. I don't want scraps off their table any more. It's time to separate.

MALCOLM X

This another hustle, Bumpy?

BUMPY

You got censured for working with me. I'm sorry for that. People need to hear your message and I can help you get it out there.

MALCOLM X

What's in it for you?

BUMPY

I want Zambrano out of Harlem. You always sayin' our problem is we're too busy fightin' each other instead of the common enemy. I think I know who the enemy is.

Off Malcolm, struck by these words...

EXT./INT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - NIGHT

A search begins. Muslims go into a fleabag motel with a flashing neon light. They muscle their way behind the desk and check the register. Two other Muslims step into a nightclub, searching the patrons and checking the band. Different streets. Different motels. An army of Muslims on the search. Chisholm and Pettigrew drive with Bumpy in the back seat. They're in Brooklyn.

EXT. FLEABAG MOTEL - NIGHT

The Lincoln pulls up to the front. Bumpy, Pettigrew and Chisholm get out.

NATION OF ISLAM

They in here.

A couple Muslims usher them inside.

INT. FLEABAG MOTEL - NIGHT

They lead Bumpy past various rooms. Working girls are here, they wave hello to Bumpy. Pettigrew reaches a door at the end of the hall.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Bumpy stares. Joe sits beside Stella, who is bound and gagged with her own stockings.

BUMPY

What you go and do that for?

NATION OF ISLAM

She bit me.

Bumpy moves to her and she recoils in fear, pressing up against the wall. She's trembling.

BUMPY

I ain't gonna hurt you.

He pulls the gag from her mouth and cuts her binds. She clutches at the crucifix around her neck.

STELLA

Dear God in Heaven, please watch over us--

BUMPY

I said I ain't gonna hurt you.

STELLA

Do you know who my father is? I promise, he'll kill you.

BUMPY

Of that I have no doubt. What do you think he'll do with your boyfriend?

This freezes Stella. She looks at Joe.

BUMPY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna have to disappear him for awhile till things cool down. It's the least I can do for his mama.

JOE

Ain't going nowhere without Stella.

BUMPY

Stella's got other plans.

All are surprised at this. Stella whispers, terrified.

STELLA

What are you going to do?

Bumpy reaches out and gently clasps Stella's crucifix in his hand. He yanks it off her neck.

INT. HOTEL THERESA - BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Adam Clayton Powell sits at a booth with a full view of the room. He's in the company of his aide Wingate, and a several very PRETTY YOUNG WOMEN. A Waiter delivers drinks.

WAITER

Cutty Sark with milk, Congressman.

POWELL

Thank you.

The Waiter nods, moves off.

PRETTY WOMAN

Milk with your whiskey, Reverend?
Is that cuz you a tomcat?

POWELL

It was a habit I picked up during
the Prohibition, my dear, when the
whiskey tasted like solvent.

He looks up at Bumpy's approach.

BUMPY

That drink fits you, man. Milky
white, goes down easy.

WINGATE

(to the ladies)
Ladies, can you excuse the Reverend?

He ushers them away, leaving Bumpy and Powell alone.

POWELL

What do you want, Johnson?

BUMPY

I'll talk to Costello. He'll get
you on that ballot. But there's
something you gotta do for me.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AERIAL VIEW - HARLEM - DAY

From Mount Morris Park, overlooking the slope into early
morning, sun-dappled Harlem. MUSIC OVER as we--

EXT. EIGHTH AVENUE - DAY

Sunday, the streets placid and litter-strewn after another crazy Saturday night.

INT. LENNOX TERRACE - BUMPY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Bumpy puts on a fresh suit and tie. Checks himself in the mirror. All good. He folds his straight-razor inside a crisp white handkerchief and puts it in his pocket.

INT. BUMPY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Bumpy inspects Mayme and Margaret. They look pretty.

BUMPY
My beautiful ladies.

EXT. ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Towering, majestic. Already CONGREGANTS arrive in droves, beautiful automobiles, a chance to show off the latest fashions. These are the black elites, luminaries from sports and entertainment and politics.

There are television news vans, newspaper photographers and even a small band of anti-Muslim protestors.

A CAR pulls to the front. Malcolm gets out. He removes his sunglasses. He enters the church.

EXT. LENNOX AVENUE - DAY

Bumpy walks arm-in-arm with Mayme and Margaret. There's a renewed bounce in his step. They reach the church. He gestures them inside.

MAYME
What about Malcolm? Don't you want to hear him speak?

BUMPY
Already got the message.

INT. ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - OFFICE - DAY

Malcolm and Powell pose for photographs with plastered smiles.

POWELL
You can thank Bumpy Johnson for this. I trust you'll keep it within the bounds of propriety.

MALCOLM X

There's nothing I'm going to say
your parishioners can't handle.

INT. PETTIGREW CAR - DAY (DRIVING)

Bumpy and Pettigrew drive in silence. The shattered streets
of Harlem give way to the leafy comfort of Pleasant Avenue.

INT. ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The crowd buzzes with anticipation. Powell and Malcolm each
cross to the pulpit from opposite sides of the stage.

POWELL

Our congregation must open our hearts
and minds to people of all faiths,
knowing we are all one people of one
God. Today, may I present the
Honorable Malcolm X Shabazz.

MALCOLM X

Thank you, Reverend Powell. A friend
of mine recently reminded me of the
importance of coming together as a
people to face a common enemy.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

Chisholm pulls to a stop. Joe Wilson gets out with his bag
to a bus with the final destination "South Carolina." He
hands his ticket to the BUS DRIVER.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

There can be no black-white unity
until there is first black unity.

BUS DRIVER

(to Joe)
Back of the bus.

INT. ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The crowd is rapt. Malcolm continues.

MALCOLM X

Whether Christian or Muslim, we must
forget our differences to fight a
system of oppression.

EXT. PLEASANT AVENUE - FANCY APARTMENT - DAY

Bumpy enters the building.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

Tactics based on morality can only
succeed when you are dealing with a
system that is moral.

INT. PLEASANT AVENUE - FANCY APARTMENT - DAY

Bumpy climbs the stairs. The smells of homecooking, an
Italian woman sweeping a hallway.

MALCOLM X

If a dog is biting a black man,
whether a police dog, a hound dog or
any other type of dog, the black man
should kill that dog... or any two-
legged dog that sics the dog on him.

INT. ABYSSINIAN BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Malcolm drives it home.

MALCOLM X

In those areas where the government
is unwilling to protect the lives of
our people, our people are within
our rights to protect themselves by
whatever means necessary.

Mayme and Margaret are swept away by Malcolm's words.

INT. PLEASANT AVENUE - FANCY APARTMENT - DAY

Bumpy reaches the door of an apartment.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

I repeat, because to me this is the
most important thing...

He takes a handkerchief from his pocket, KICKS IN THE DOOR--

INT. FANCY APARTMENT - DAY

Bumpy steps inside.

MALCOLM X (V.O.)

Our people are within their rights
to protect themselves by *whatever*
means necessary.

An Italian man is on the bed with a HOOKER. The man turns to the sound and we see it's--

ZAMBRANO

What the fuck?

He sees it's Bumpy. And he sees the straight razor.

ZAMBRANO (CONT'D)

Don't!

Bumpy steps up and cuts his throat. A geyser of blood sprays across the bedsheets. Zambrano topples back. Bumpy steers the Hooker away from the sight, hands her cash.

BUMPY

Thanks, baby. Now get along.

The Hooker exits. Bumpy casually uses his razor to slit open the KILO he brought. He pours it over Zambrano's body. The yellow dope coats his body.

EXT. FANCY APARTMENT - DAY

Bumpy emerges from the apartment. He appreciates the fresh air. He's got something in his hand.

CLOSE - IT'S STELLA'S CRUCIFIX.

PULLING BACK TO REVEAL:

STELLA'S CRUCIFIX. In a white man's hand.

CHIN (O.S.)

I think we give Johnson 110th to 160th, try to work with him.

INT. WALDORF ASTORIA HOTEL - NIGHT

CAMERA DRIFTS below the table, where we see Chin clutching something between sweaty fingers: Stella's crucifix, given to him by Bumpy as "proof of life."

COSTELLO

Why the change of heart?

CHIN

Turns out I didn't have to worry about Johnson. Zambrano stole a kilo of my H. I had to take him out.

COSTELLO

Dope trade makes everyone greedy.

CHIN

These niggers today, standing up,
sittin' down, they're all animals.
Let Johnson keep `em in line.

Costello is surprised. This isn't like Chin.

EXT. HARLEM STREET - NIGHT

Chin pulls onto a desolate street in his Cadillac. He gets out and searches the block.

BUMPY stands beside his Lincoln. Chin approaches.

CHIN

Did what you wanted. Told Costello
I killed Zambrano.

BUMPY

And here's your kid.

Bumpy opens the back door. Stella gets out. She runs to her father. He examines her at arms length.

CHIN

Anyone touch you?

STELLA

No.

A moment, then Chin pulls her into deep embrace, and in this moment, he's simply a father. Bumpy watches the reunion, something sad playing over his face.

CHIN

Go on. Car's over there.

Stella heads off, leaving Bumpy and Chin alone.

CHIN (CONT'D)

You're pretty smart for a nigger.
But you forgot one thing.

BUMPY

What's that?

CHIN

I'm coming for you.

BUMPY
Of course you are.

A frozen moment. Chin heads for his car. Bumpy watches it drive away, Stella and her father framed in the window.

EXT. 146TH STREET - JUNKIE ALLEY - NIGHT

It's many hours later. CAMERA PANS across a fire escape upon which hangs drying laundry. This alley is strewn with used syringes, dope wrappers, scurrying rats.

A HALF DOZEN JUNKIES are on the nod amid the garbage. Tilting heads. Eyes rolled back. Men and women in the blissful moments before the craving starts again.

A SHADOW falls over the alley.

CLOSE - ON BUMPY

He sidesteps the needles, makes his way through the human detritus. He finds what he's looking for, a WOMAN in a ratty overcoat propped against the brick, nodding out.

For moments he simply regards her. He kneels beside her. Gently shakes the woman out of her stupor. This is the Junkie Woman seen earlier.

JUNKIE WOMAN
Why you here? Is Margaret okay?

BUMPY
Your daughter's fine. I'm here to help you, Elise.

ELISE
I'm high, Daddy. Leave me alone.

She turns back into her overcoat. She is Bumpy's real daughter, and Margaret is *her* child. Bumpy watches her with infinite sadness. He knows what he must do.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

DOORS CRASH OPEN open to admit Bumpy, carrying Elise in his arms, she's light as a feather. He turns a corner--

INT. MOSQUE #7 - DETOX ROOM - NIGHT

A sparkling clean room with nurses and six beds. There are five women detoxing, one bed is empty. Malcolm stands next to the empty bed.

58.

Bumpy enters the room with Elise and gently lays her down.
The nurses tend to her. Bumpy meets eyes with Malcolm, gives
a nod of gratitude. Two men united.

FADE OUT.

(TO BE CONTINUED)