

SAVING MLK

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. DARK FOREST - NIGHT

**BLUE RIDGE GEORGIA - 1955**

A black BOY (10) dressed in a suit and tie runs for his life alongside a younger GIRL (8) slicing through the deep forest thickets.

Bloodhounds pursue.

The girl trips and falls. The boy picks her back up and gets her to her feet, pulls branch twigs off of her white dress.

BOY  
We can't stop.

INT. SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

FBI Klan and Social Rights informant GARY THOMAS ROWE (40) sits flanked by his two attorneys before the Senate Select Committee.

His head is wrapped in a white, Klan-like, tied covering to protect his identity.

**UNITED STATES CAPITOL - DEC 2, 1975**

Congressman CHURCH (43) leads from the dais.

CONGRESSMAN CHURCH (CONT'D)  
Did you report back to the FBI the  
social life of known Klan members  
including their most intimate  
details?

GARY THOMAS ROWE  
My instruction was to sleep with as  
many wives as I could - as that was  
the best first-hand information I  
could deliver.

EXT. WASHINGTON CAPITOL STEPS - DAY

A dignified, well-dressed young black family, BYRON MIDDLETON (29), wife MARIE MIDDLETON (28) and daughter EMMA (7) discreetly make their way up the steps.

MARIE  
What if they come after us back  
home for testifying? Byron, we  
can't go through that again.

BYRON

Staying quiet is appeasing, Marie.  
They'll just take more. We'll tell  
them what happened. No more, no  
less.

The Middleton's are met by black staffer, assistant to senate  
select committee legal counsel JUDY KENSINGTON (27).

JUDY

I saw you coming up the steps. I'm  
Judy Kensington. I work for Mr.  
Schwarz.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - MINUTES LATER - DAY

Byron, Marie and Emma sit in unfamiliar, rich leather office  
chairs across from bipartisan select committee counsel, A.O.  
SCHWARZ (30's).

A.O. SCHWARZ

How do you feel?

BYRON

We're both just a little nervous  
about "payback" to be honest.

A.O. SCHWARZ

How this report reads, could lead  
to the reforms Dr. King was  
fighting for ever since you two  
were at Ebenezer. I'd like to start  
with what you did there, and work  
our way through to the morning of  
April 4th, 1968.

BYRON

Okay.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH STORAGE AREA - DAY

**EIGHT YEARS EARLIER - 1967**

A twenty-two year-old Byron carries a box of mail into a  
small storage. He sets it down in the dark.

BYRON (V.O.)

Initially, my job there was to go  
through the incoming mail.

Byron reaches up to a light string from the hanging bulb  
above. He pulls it.

BYRON (V.O.)  
Separate out the threats, box them  
up - put'em in storage.

A swath of low-density light bathes the concrete floor.

BYRON (V.O.)  
The Wallace election was a bit off  
but the threats were pouring in.  
Calls for lynching's, castrations,  
everything you could think of.

Byron picks up the box and sets it on the shelf next to  
dozens of others of hate mail.

A.O. SCHWARZ (V.O.)  
Segregation now, tomorrow and  
forever.

BYRON (V.O.)  
Yes, sir. Nonstop. I was approached  
by an FBI agent to work with them.  
Tell them what I knew. I told'em,  
"no way".

He pulls the string again. Darkness.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - DAY

(Back to scene)

Schwarz writes on his yellow pad.

BYRON  
We were expecting with Emma. We  
couldn't risk being firebombed or  
shot. So, it was time for me to  
step aside, step away from the  
trouble that was coming.

A.O. SCHWARZ  
You had a deep loyalty to the  
reverend?

BYRON  
He was like a second father to me.

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL - DAY

A black sedan pulls into the parking lot with official  
government plates.

BYRON (V.O.)  
His secretary, Miss Joyce, received  
a call from the Lorraine on April  
3rd confirming his room had been  
moved for some reason up to the  
second-floor, balcony.

TWO MEN (40's) one black, one white get out of the car.

A.O. SCHWARZ (V.O.)  
No one from his staff changed the  
reservation?

BYRON (V.O.)  
No.

INT. LORRAINE MOTEL - DAY

A BLACK MAN (40's), congenial, business-like, government  
official, enters the hotel, approaches the counter.

The man taps the desk bell and waits. The LORRAINE MANAGER  
(60'S), a black woman arrives from the other side.

LORRAINE MANAGER  
May I help you?

BLACK MAN  
I'm with Dr. King's lead team. We'd  
like to confirm his reservation -  
that his room is on the upstairs  
with the front balcony?

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - DAY

Schwarz leans in.

A.O. SCHWARZ  
You think the change was made by  
the FBI?

BYRON  
Somebody thought it was a good  
idea. Miss Joyce called me the next  
day, April 4th, 1968.

EXT. FREEWAY/ INT - CAR - DAY

**ATLANTA, GEORGIA - 1968**

Byron (22) is behind the wheel of an old rambler. He quickly  
maneuvers the car to get onto the freeway.

BYRON (V.O.)  
He'd given the speech the night  
before. I just got in my car and  
started driving.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - DAY

The room grows quiet.

A.O. SCHWARZ  
What were you going to do?

BYRON  
I had no idea.

INT. MASON TEMPLE - DAY

**SANITATION STRIKE - MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE - APRIL 3RD - 1968**

From behind we follow the purposeful, cut figure of MARTIN LUTHER KING (39) and a group of sanitation union leaders.

A magnetic MLK makes his way to a podium of Mason Temple Church - charismatic, charged with energy. (King's last speech).

MLK (V.O.)  
As I listened to Ralph Abernathy  
and his eloquent and generous  
introduction, and then thought  
about myself, I wondered who he was  
talking about?

EXT. BESSE BREWER'S ROOMINGHOUSE - PARKING LOT - DAY

A white 1967 Mustang pulls in and parks in the back of the parking lot.

A handsome, accused assassin, JAMES EARL RAY (40) wearing dark, loose pants, white t-shirt and a light coat steps out of the car.

MLK (V.O.)  
I'm delighted to see each of you  
here tonight, in spite of a storm  
warning.

Ray circles back to the trunk of the car with a nonthreatening ease.

He opens it up and looks inside.

He unfurls a green duffle bag and we see the long barrel of a big game hunting rifle.

MLK (V.O.)  
You reveal that you're determined  
to go on anyhow.

Ray sees a familiar man, RAUL (40) approaching from across  
the street.

He's a Latin man, about 5-foot-five with a shock of dark  
hair.

RAUL  
How was the trip from Birmingham?

JAMES EARL RAY  
Real easy. No trouble. Stopped in  
Tupelo. It's where Elvis was born.

INT. JIM'S GRILL - MINUTES LATER - DAY

MAFIA CAPO FRANK LIBERTO (50) opens the back door of the  
restaurant, enters and shuts it behind him.

MLK (V.O.)  
Something is happening in Memphis.

Waiting for Liberto, are four men; grill owner, LLOYD JOWERS  
(42), Memphis Police marksman, LIEUTENANT EARL CLARK (30),  
and two federal style military (CIA-NSA) OBSERVERS (30's).

MLK (V.O.)  
Something is happening in our  
world.

Liberto sets down a metal case on the stainless steel sink.  
He opens it up. We see \$100,000 in cash, small denominations.

A burning cigarette drips from the lips of Lloyd Jowers.

LOYD JOWERS  
Let's get some sandwiches. Then,  
the run-through.

INT. BESSE BREWER'S ROOMING HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

A man's dark figure approaches the room at the end of the  
hallway. He carries with him the green duffle bag from Ray's  
trunk.

An outreached hand opens the door with a room key.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

A man's hands unfurl a duffle bag to reveal the high-powered  
Bushmaster hunting rifle with a mounted Redfield scope.

MLK (V.O.)  
We are a determined people.

EXT. BESSE BREWER'S ROOMING HOUSE - DAY

From across the Lorraine Motel, a small upstairs window is slowly pushed open.

MLK (V.O.)  
Now, we're going to march and march  
again in order to put the issue  
where it needs to be.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - SECOND FLOOR - DAY

**5:55 PM** (Following Day).

From room 306, MLK steps outside from his door and on to the hotel balcony.

MLK (V.O.)  
And force them to see that 1300 of  
God's children here are suffering,  
sometimes going hungry...

We hear from the inside the room, local Memphis television news. "Cloudy and balmy weather this afternoon"...

MLK (V.O.)  
Going through dark and dreary  
nights wondering how this thing is  
going to come out?

MLK steps to the railing's edge - cars, friends, and associates below.

MLK (V.O.)  
We're not going to let any mace  
stop us, or dogs or water hoses!

EXT. BESSE BREWER'S ROOMING HOUSE - DAY

Through the small window, a barrel of a Remington Gamemaster 760, along with a mounted scope rests on the open window sill.

Through the crosshairs the rifle's aim lands on the face and neck of MLK.

A gloved finger rests just outside of the rifle's trigger guard - tapping, tapping.



MLK (V.O.)  
We are masters in our own  
nonviolent movement!!

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Byron's car barrels into the Lorraine parking lot screeching to a halt. He pushes open his driver's side door.

He leaps out of his car and flies towards the hotel stairwell, bounding four stairs at a time.

BYRON (V.O.)  
A glint caught my eye from the  
rifle out the window.

Giant strides carry Byron up the flight to the second floor.

BYRON (V.O.)  
I just ran towards him. It's all I  
thought I could do.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - SECOND FLOOR BALCONY - DAY

MLK looks out towards the sinking evening Memphis sun.

INT. BESSE BREWERS ROOMING HOUSE - DAY

The assassin's trigger-finger slides inside the guard.

MLK (V.O.)  
We'd just go on singing, "Over my  
head I see freedom in the air!"

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - SECOND FLOOR BALCONY - DAY

Byron reaches the second floor then leaps from his feet towards MLK.

A small puff of smoke. The shooter's rifle recoils. The shot rings out, April 4th, 1968.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - MINUTES LATER - DAY

Byron's expression grows cold.

BYRON  
I was the same age as Emmett Till  
when they found him in the river.

EXT. BLACK BAYOU BRIDGE - LEFORE COUNTY - NIGHT

**TALLAHATCHIE RIVER - MONEY, MISSISSIPPI - 1955**

Clear and serene tributary waters flow beneath us with graceful, moonlit ease.

Floating face-down in the gentle tributary below, a metal gin-fan weighs heavily about a black boy's head and shoulders - a very dead, EMMETT TILL (14).

Currents push the beaten and bludgeoned boy upright. Emmett's eyes frozen open in horror and terror.

INT. BYRON MIDDLELTON'S BEDROOM - BLUE RIDGE GEORGIA - DAY

A ten year-old BYRON (10) checks out his look in a full length mirror. He wears a well-fitted, tight shiny suit and tie.

Byron's got a million dollar smile, carries with him a sense of high-octane, performance energy.

He rehearses his dance steps as the youngest doo-wop member of "The Brothers Middleton".

BYRON

Step forward, turn, hands up, slow,  
bring them down, wait for my  
brothers, step back, quarter left.

A slow spin, hands opening wide - a real "Stylistics" member in the making.

Tucked up into the corner of the mirror is a picture of a young girl - a classmate crush - Marie Rosa.

He brings Marie's photo closer.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Woo-wee. You'll never be able to  
resist me, Marie Rosa. You're going  
to be mine!

A phone loudly rings.

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Patriarch HERB MIDDLETON (40) sits at the kitchen table wearing a suit and tie while he organizes a stack of flyers that read, "DOO-WOP SOUNDS OF THE BROTHERS MIDDLETON".

The phone rings again.

HERB

Hello? Oh, hey Louis.

In the other room, his boys rehears.

HERB (CONT'D)

No, I got a minute. We're just getting ready to step out - the boys are performing tonight. I'll get Adalia... what's that? Emmett took the train down to Mississippi from Chicago? Alone? What happened?

EXT. TALLAHATCHIE TRIBUTARY - DAY

Hound dogs bark riverside while a local Leflore County SHERIFF (35) tosses a rope over Emmett's body pulling him to the bank of the river.

SHERIFF

I don't recognize this one. You know who this boy is, Earl?

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

ADALIA MIDDLETONS (39), wife to Herb, enters.

ADALIA

Herb, we're going to be late. The boys are waiting to rehearse.

HERB (PHONE)

Ah, huh... How's Mamie holding up?  
I see.

Adalia is held frozen.

ADALIA

Mamie?

HERB

Alright... I'll have Adalia call her in a few days. Thanks, Louis.

EXT. TALLAHATCHIE TRIBUTARY - DAY

The sheriff pulls Emmet's body up on shore. Hound dogs nervously smell and howl.

SHERIFF

No tellin' how long he's been in there with his face battered like that. Call the morgue. Tell 'em we got an unknown, little, dead nigga' boy comin' in.

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Herb, devastated, hangs up the phone.

ADALIA

Herb?

HERB

They found Emmett whipped to death in the Tallahatchie River. Lets not mention it to the boys until after the veteran's show. We'll break it to 'em then. Louis suggested you call Mamie in a few days.

INT. MIDDLETON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Herb and Adalia enter.

HERB

Let's keep this quiet until the boys get through tonight. We'll let 'em know come Sunday services.

Byron skips down the stairs, looking sharp and crisp, making quite an entrance. He takes his rightful place next to his brothers.

Byron's brothers, matched in similar suits await. They are: RUSSEL (19), MILAN (17), LIONEL (14).

A stoic Herb awaits at his piano.

HERB (CONT'D)

C'mon, Byron. We're all waiting for you. You're late!

BYRON

Sorry, dad.

The boys snap to attention. Herb leads a rehearsal with his sons.

HERB

Remember, wait for my cue. Russel, after our introductions, look at me and I'll count it off - make sure you're paying attention, Lionel.

LIONEL

Got it.

HERB MIDDLEBROOK

And, Byron. No day-dreaming on stage like you did at the fair.

BYRON

Okay, dad.

INT. RURAL GEORGIA BARN - LATER - NIGHT

A dozen WHITE MEN - KKK (40's-60's) get themselves ready for their own, bloodthirsty performance.

MASON (30's), overweight and under-educated picks up a local Atlanta newspaper - it reads: **"BLACK VETERANS - WELCOME HOME!"**

KKK MASON

Soon, these nigga's are going to  
meet up with some real American,  
confederate pride.

The men blacken their faces with splashes of dark minstrel paint.

KKK MASON (CONT'D)

Okay boy's... Let's throw one down  
for "Big Daddy Pop..."

Jovial, sinister - they sing from their Jim Crow song book.

KKK MASON (CONT'D)

And, take it hard to the cotton  
eyed, Jimmy-Crows!

INT. FARM BUREAU HALL - NIGHT

We reveal a large multi-use room elegantly decorated. Decorations lie atop each of the round dinner tables - 25 in all.

Hanging banners read: **WELCOME HOME - OUR HEROES ARE BACK.**

RUSSEL

"Only you, and you alone."

The night is beautiful, people mingle, music is played by a small five-piece BAND. Russel sings...

Considering the news of Emmett Till , Herb and Adalia sit at their table bravely enough.

Russel leads Brothers Middleton in the Platters hit...

Revelers and invited guests mill about four returning black U.S. Army, Korean Military Veterans.

U.S. Army Soldiers, CORPORAL HUNTING, SERGEANT ROBINSON, CORPORAL LEWIS HAYNES and gunnery officer, JOHN WOOLSON (20's) shake hands, mingle and integrate back from their mission with their local townsfolk.

From the stage and across the floor, a cautious Byron lifts up his hesitant eyes to meet those of his crush, MARIE ROSA (8).

BYRON

Boy oh boy, she's pretty.

Marie stands amongst the adults all the way across the room with her parents.

MARIE

Boy, he's handsome.

EXT. RURAL DARK ROAD - NIGHT

A menacing caravan of speeding trucks approach. Uneven headlights punch through the night.

INT. FARM BUREAU HALL - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT

"Only You" comes to its conclusion. The gathering applauds the brothers who take a bow.

The gregarious Blue Ridge city mayor, a white man, WILLIAM TAYLOR (60's) steps up on stage and takes the microphone.

WILLIAM TAYLOR

Our own Blue Ridge, Brothers  
Middleton!! Let's hear it for them.

The room fills the rafters with applause.

EXT. FARM BUREAU HALL - NIGHT

A dozen trucks pull up to perimeter of the Farm Bureau Hall. Engines idle, headlights on. The men get out of their trucks.

Mason steps forward.

KKK MASON

Now boys... The blacks have come a long way now. Lets give'em plenty of credit. They fight, they live and die. No question. But we're here tonight to remind them of what they are and where they belong. Understand? Hail to Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam!!

Menacing white men in black face reach for their clubs while whistling the racist Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy Pops" melody.

KLAN MEN SING

"And, den I do to Orleans and feel  
so full of fight..." Come boys, get  
a lather on! We be'-do some hurtin'  
tonight!

INT. FARM BUREAU HALL - CONTINUED - NIGHT

The four soldiers stand proudly amidst a gathering of  
standing applause and recognition.

WILLIAM TAYLOR (CONT'D)

The United States of America right  
there. Fighting for liberty,  
fighting for freedom. Thank you,  
boys.

The veterans step off the stage and make their way through  
the tables.

WILLIAM TAYLOR (CONT'D)

But, but, but... before dinner is  
served, we do have another very  
special treat this evening. This  
young man, Byron Middleton, the  
youngest one of the Brothers  
Middleton, will be featured and I  
promise - it is something  
special... with, "In the Still of  
the Night!"

The Brothers take their positions on stage.

RUSSEL

On dad's cue, little man.

BYRON

I know.

The music begins. The brothers begin with their in-synch,  
choreographed moves.

Byron looks out to his father. Herb cues him forward.

Byron takes one-step forward out from his brothers as  
rehearsed. A soothing, crystal voice stills the room.

BYRON (CONT'D)

"In the still of the night."

EXT. FARM BUREAU HALL - MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

The grizzly mob lines up in unison. Thirty in the field wait  
for the order with clubs in hand.

INT. FARM BUREAU HALL - NIGHT

The room is spellbound by the Brothers Middleton. Marie, all but mesmerized.

Suddenly, a burning Molotov cocktail bursts through a nearby window landing just before the stage.

The music abruptly stops. Fire.

RUSSEL

Look out.

A second fiery bomb comes in from another window. The four military vets take up defensive positions.

SERGEANT ROBINSON

KLAN! Everybody turn their tables over!

EXT. FARM BUREAU PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rabid minstrel dancing men paint racial epitaphs on hoods and trunks - cackling in the delight.

Ropes and nooses are tossed over extending limbs of nearby trees - pure confederate TERROR.

KLAN MAN # 1

We're gonna' be making some mighty-righty postcards, tonight boys!  
Get'em high, get'em swingin'.

INT. FARM BUREAU HALL - NIGHT

In the chaos amidst the number of turned-over tables, Byron looks for Marie but can't find her.

BYRON

Marie? Marie?!

MORE - VARIOUS - CONTINUED

Herb Middleton and wife Adalia shudder behind the table. Russel huddles near them both.

HERB

Russel, get Byron out of here. They got your cousin Emmett today down in Mississippi. Now they're coming for us. Get him out - tell him to RUN!! Tell him to RUN HOME!!



Clubs pound the front door - a beautiful evening now overtaken over by the thunder of aggression.

ATTENDEE

They're going to kill us all!!

Black faced minstrel Klan racists pound their way through the front door, kicking it in, carrying inside their bats and clubs.

MASON

We're in now, boys!

Russel grabs Byron and pulls him away.

RUSSEL

Come on!!

Russel leads Byron to the back door through rear entryway. He pushes the door open wide - a dark, ominous forest awaits.

RUSSEL (CONT'D)

Run home, Byron. As fast as you can!

BYRON

Where's Marie?

RUSSEL

Her parents will look out for her.

Byron snaps his hand free from Russel's clutch and pushes past Russel and back towards the chaos inside.

BYRON

Marie!? Marie?!

Byron finds Marie hiding alone behind a table, grips her hand and pulls her out leading back to where Russel awaits.

MARIE

Where you taking me?

BYRON

We're getting out of here!

MARIE

My parents?

BYRON

COME ON, MARIE!!

Byron and Marie get to the back open door. Before the two young kids, a dark forest.

RUSSEL  
GO!! Go now. GO!

EXT. GEORGIA FOREST - NIGHT

Byron and Marie escape by running for their lives toward the dark thickets.

Broad, dense cover tears at skin and clothing. Bits and pieces of dress and sports coat shred in their escape.

MARIE  
Ahhh..

BYRON  
KEEP RUNNING!

Byron slows, Marie catches up.

Both slow then turn back and see the farm bureau burning - a macabre scene of white men in black face flailing their arms - dancing, singing, menacing in the Jim Crow South.

MARIE  
They're going to kill them all.

Lights of local sheriff's cars and firetrucks are then seen to be on their way.

BYRON  
No. Look.

Byron steps closer to the terrified girl.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
It's going to be all right.

MARIE  
How can you say that?

BYRON  
Because, I'll protect you. That's why. Today, tomorrow and forever, Marie. Follow me.

Byron takes her hand.

BYRON (V.O.)  
Meeting Dr. King felt predetermined. Knowing him put in place my destiny.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - 1975 - DAY

Byron gives Marie a look - smiles.

BYRON

Marie wanted Dr. King to marry us.  
I was trying to sing my way out of  
it of course, but Marie wasn't  
having any of it.

MARIE (V.O.)

Now don't be too shy, Byron!

EXT. BYRON'S RAMBLER - TWO LANE ROAD - MORNING - DAY

**ATLANTA GEORGIA - 1967**

Byron's car comes towards us.

12 years have passed since the Emmett Till death and the  
attack on the Farm Bureau.

MARIE (V.O.)

You always clam up when you meet  
someone new.

BYRON (V.O.)

Not "clamming" Marie, just  
"listening".

INT. CAR - MORNING - DAY

Now in their early-twenties, a handsome, reserved Byron  
Middleton (22) and his beautiful and spry fiancée, Marie  
Rosa (20) drive to Ebenezer Sunday services.

MARIE

I need to trust you're going to  
make a good impression on Dr.  
Martin Luther King Jr. Mrs. King  
said that part is important. He  
favors people who leave a good  
impression, Byron.

Marie nervously spins her engagement ring around and around  
her finger.

BYRON

You're finger's going to fall off  
if you keep doing that. We'll have  
to go to the emergency room, get it  
sewn back on.

MARIE

For us to make it, we need his  
blessing.

Another tact. He turns on the radio. Byron's fingers tap the wheel.

He reaches for Marie's hand, clasps his fingers between hers, and begins with a little Frankie Valli...

BYRON

"You're just too good to be true...  
Can't take my eyes off of you...  
You'd be like heaven to touch, I  
want to hold you so much..."

Marie rolls down the window to get some air - loosens up, shakes her head, melts, smiles.

MARIE

That's not fair... Oh, god...

EXT. EBENZER BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

The iconic blue sign above the Atlanta house of worship entrance reads: EBENEZER CHURCH.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - MLK'S OFFICE - DAY

MLK sits with both anxiety and conviction across his desk speaking with a NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER (30's).

MLK (CONT'D)

I know what I'm about to say, and  
how certain folks might just take  
it. I'm going to ask you to be  
careful as to how you write this.

REPORTER

And, what's that Dr. King?

MLK

That we believe in the south  
there's not the equal  
administration of justice,  
particularly with civil cases  
pursued by the FBI. Evidence to  
that fact can testify to it. Black  
folk die for this country, have  
built this country, and pay taxes  
in this country - all in hopes of  
simply living with this nation's  
promise.

REPORTER

Is there something you'd like to say to Director Hoover himself?

MLK

Equal justice, should be applied in equal measure... It's a simple request.

INT. EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Reverend King, a dramatic and powerful force of nature stands at the podium before his congregation.

Byron and Marie sit in the rear of the church.

BYRON

He scares me. It's like he looks right through you.

MARIE

Shhh.

MLK (O.C.)

Now those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament.

Byron's mind drifts miles away. Marie, again nervously spins her engagement ring around her wedding finger.

BYRON

Marie. People are starting to look at us. You gotta' quit acting so nervous.

MARIE

What if he says "no" and doesn't marry us?

MISS PARMAN (70), in Sunday best and wearing an oversized hat turns back with a hard look.

MISS PARMAN

I'll marry you myself if you two can be quiet. Now, shush!

INT. J. EDGAR HOOVER'S HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

FBI Director J. EDGAR HOOVER (72) lies in a sudsy, warm bathtub with his leg and foot pulled up towards his face and out of the water.

J. EDGAR HOOVER

Clyde? Get me that emery board will you, please? It's in the medicine cabinet.

CLYDE TOLSON (67), lifetime companion, subordinate and FBI Associate Director to Hoover comes into the bathroom wearing a terrycloth bathrobe lightly tied at the waist.

Clyde reaches into the medicine cabinet. Finds the emery board.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (CONT'D)

I think the hot water will soften up these calluses once and for all.

Clyde bends over the tub and hands the emery board to Hoover.

CLYDE TOLSON

Here. Don't drop it.

Hoover begins strafing down his inside heel callouses.

J. EDGAR HOOVER

Ah, that's it. The heals on my ox-toes are killing me. I'm not going to make it to my 75th if I keep wearing 'em.

CLYDE TOLSON

Maybe we take a weekend down to New York. Macy's. We can find something there that'd work.

J. EDGAR HOOVER

Test'em out in Central Park. See if I can actually walk anymore.

CLYDE TOLSON

Or, walk away from the Bureau? We could always do that too, J?

J. EDGAR HOOVER

In time. Only when we're sure America's neighborhoods won't turn on us. Why don't you get us some breakfast, Clyde?

EXT. MLK'S HOME - DAY

Friends and associates both enter and leave through MLK's front door. It's busy.

INT. MLK'S HOME OFFICE - AFTERNOON - DAY

Marie, tepid but determined, sits in the red hot-seat across from MLK.

MARIE (CONT'D)

You see, Dr. King, if we can get married, prior to school starting at Pellum College, I won't have to live on campus - married couples aren't allowed.

MLK

And, children? Have you thought about those responsibilities?

MARIE

Oh, not now. Byron needs to make a bit more money, and I'll need to get myself established.

INT. MLK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

CORRETA SCOTT KING (39) sets down trays of finger food for Byron as well as five other distinguished MEN (Ebenezer Contributors) who wait to see MLK.

BYRON

She's been in there for a while.

CORRETA

He looks at people for a long time.

BYRON

Oh.

INT. MLK'S HOME OFFICE - AFTERNOON - CONTINUED - DAY

Marie begins to fidget.

MARIE

He's got brothers and a tight-knit family. They had a doo-wop group like, The Platters.

MLK

The Platters, huh?

MARIE

Yes, and Byron sang. He still does. Especially when I get mad at him, he turns into Frankie Valli. He knows I can't stay too angry at him when he does.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

I try but I just can't. But, more importantly, a blessing from you Dr. King would mean the world. I love him. I just don't know how else to express it.

INT. MLK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Multi-tasking, Correta manages.

The King children, YOLANDA (12), BERNICE (5), DEXTER (7), they come and go as kids do, in and out - loud.

CORRETA

Yolanda, take your brother and sister and play outside. Your father has guests.

YOLANDA

Yes, ma'am. Bernice? Dexter? In the back, daddy's got visitors.

Byron, restless and nerves growing. The men reach for some appetizers. The phone continuously rings from the other room.

BYRON

Is it always busy like this? On a Sunday?

CORRETA

Nonstop. Be patient. Marie has you on the list for today. You'll get your chance.

BYRON

Swell.

MLK's office door slowly opens. Marie steps forward crossing the other men and sits next to Byron.

BYRON (CONT'D)

What'd he say?

MARIE

He said "living off campus wasn't a real reason to get married."

CORRETA

He said what? Well, maybe Mr. King sleeping on the couch will give him time to reconsider?

MLK steps out from his office and into the den.



MLK

Son?

Byron stands up, buttons his sport coat.

BYRON

Here I go.

MLK and Byron step inside. The den door closes. The Ebenezer man leans over to Marie.

EBENEZER MAN

Miss? You got your boy on the hot seat, now.

INT. MLK'S HOME OFFICE - MINUTES LATER - DAY

Byron sits in front the resolute desk of MLK. His foot taps. The Reverend takes in a long, hard look.

MLK

Have we met before?

BYRON

No, sir. We haven't.

MLK

You have a very determined fiancée out in the other room, young man.

BYRON

Yes, sir. I know it. I think if I don't come out of here with your blessing, she's going to drive me out to the countryside and leave me on the side of the road like an abandoned dog.

MLK burst out laughing.

MLK

If you understand that, you just might be more ready for marriage.

INT. MLK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Time crawls for Marie - pins and needles. Marie's foot also taps anxiously.

MARIE

I'm nervous, Miss King. Maybe I can get some of the Reverend's shirts ironed.

CORRETA

You just sit, child. Dr. King's shirts will take care of themselves.

INT. MLK'S HOME OFFICE - BACK TO SCENE - DAY

MLK leans back in his chair.

BYRON

Well, as you can tell, she basically runs the ship and I'm happy to let her be the Captain. I spend half my time trying to keep up with her but she's always two, three steps ahead. I just know how I feel when I'm near her and how much I think about her when I'm not.

MLK

What about when there's a disagreement?

BYRON

I sing to her. It gets me out of a lot of stuff.

MLK

Frankie Valli?

BYRON

She starts smiling even though she tries not to. My secret weapon. I start laughing. She starts laughing. She's always saying how much it would mean to have your blessing. She's confident it'll give us a chance in this world. I'd like it very much too, sir. If it's agreeable. I mean, if it's something you might consider?

INT. MLK'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Byron and MLK emerge. Marie and Correta on chair's edge.

MLK

Corrie? Looks like we're having a wedding!

Marie shrieks!

EXT. FBI OFFICE FIELD OFFICE - 4TH ST. NW - DAY

Clyde Tolson passes by a newspaper machine - sees the Washington Times.

NEWSPAPER READS: **MLK LAMBASTS HOOVER'S FBI.**

Tolson stops, places a quarter in the slot, opens the plastic canopy, tips back his fedora and glares at the article.

CLYDE TOLSON

Oh, Jesus.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - DAY

A handsome, dashing Byron Middleton stands with pride in a tailored, gallant, dark suit next to his impeccably beautiful bride who wears a borrowed, flowing gown.

Byron's parents sit alongside Marie's father, AUTHUR ROSA (40). Brothers Middleton stand next to their brother in witness of their youngest brother's vows.

Martin Luther King Jr. stands before them. He speaks not only to the young couple but to the full congregation.

The couple turns and gaze into the soul of the other.

MLK

Love, trust, loyalty...

EXT. FLORIDA STREET - NIGHT

James Earl Ray (38) strides up the street along with a scantily dressed woman - a PROSTITUTE (30's).

His eye catches the headline on the front page of a paper in a nearby newspaper machine. **"MLK LAMBASTS HOOVER'S FBI"**.

Ray pulls a smoke, brings it to his lips, touches the end of his Marlboro with a soft touch of the match stick flame.

JAMES EARL RAY

Lookie' there. Big mouth's taking  
on Hoover. He ain't gonna' last  
long doing that.

Ray looks up to see a dirty cinema marque that reads: Double Feature - CHINA GIRL ROCKS - BRICK DOLLHOUSE.

JAMES EARL RAY (CONT'D)

Lets get out of the sun, honey.

EXT. BACKYARD OF HERB MIDDLETON'S HOME - LATER - NIGHT

Wedding reception. A small FOUR-PIECE BAND gets the evening going with the hit's of 1967.

Guests take to a small wooden dance floor. A Champagne bottle pops open, spills out. Glasses are poured and filled.

A full wedding reception gets underway. Guests arrive and begin pouring into the backyard.

At the table of honor, Byron and Marie greet their friends and invite them in - the "thank-you's" for coming.

MORE - THE BANDSTAND

The band suddenly stops the music.

BAND LEADER

Ladies and gentlemen, all the way  
from the throwback years of the  
1950's, traveling through time  
itself. "The Brothers Middleton!!"

BYRON

What??

Having dusted off their flashy and shiny suits and pinstripe ties, Russel, Milan, and Lionel take up their positions on stage.

BAND LEADER

Hit it!

The band's guitarist begins a familiar riff - Sam and Dave's SOUL MAN".

RUSSEL

We all wanted to say something  
special to our youngest of  
brothers, "Little-man Byron" and  
esteemed, one-time family band  
member. Always outpacing us, and  
the most talented! Congratulations  
to both you and Marie. And, Marie,  
welcome to the family of the  
Brothers Middleton.

Marie holds up her glass.

MARIE

Thank you.

The Brothers Middleton begin with their well-rehearsed choreographed moves.

RUSSEL  
"Coming to you on a dusty road.  
Good loving, I got a truck load."

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER - NIGHT

The activity from all the day's events have now slowed.

Byron opens the door and places Marie down inside the room like a dream caught from clouds.

The door shuts behind them.

The room is decorated with wall to wall flowers and gifts - a Nat King Cole kind of evening.

MARIE  
It's like heaven.

BYRON  
Better than heaven.

Byron crosses to a bouquet of flowers. He sees a note.

MARIE  
Who's that from?

BYRON  
It's from Reverend King.

MARIE  
What's it say?

Byron reads.

BYRON  
It says, "By the other's side in  
honor and by the other's side in  
strife..."

He hands Marie the card.

MARIE  
"Take the hand of the other... hold  
it lightly, yet without waiver".

Byron reaches for his young wife's hand. She gives it to him. He leads her to the window - opens it wide.

Outside, the view of all of Atlanta, its vast beauty - its social uncertainty.

BYRON

It's a big world out there, Marie.  
Sometimes I'm get afraid of it.

The couple takes in a breath and views the life before them.

MARIE

"But, by your side in honor,  
Byron". Like Martin says.

Byron turns and leans in to his hopeful and eager bride.

EXT. DARK SKIES ABOVE - NINE YEARS LATER - DAY

**NINE YEARS LATER - PETRO TENNESSEE, 1977 - BRUSHY MOUNTAIN  
STATE PENITENTIARY.**

Thunder cracks menacingly above.

BYRON

"And, by yours, Marie... without  
waiver".

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Buses of prisoners come and go. Main gates open. Long-gun,  
holding armed-guards look down from tower turrets above.

MAGAZINE INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

So, you heard the news about Dr.  
King on the radio? You left that  
gas station at Second and Lyndon?  
What, about 6?

INT. PRISON CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Confessed gunman James Earl Ray (49), now grey at the  
temples, sits seemingly unaffected, handsome, articulate and  
collected.

JAMES EARL RAY

I couldn't really tell you the  
time. I was headed to New Orleans.

A MAGAZINE INTERVIEWER (46), peruses his notes across from  
Ray.

MAGAZINE INTERVIEWER

So, you heard all this confusion,  
you heard Dr. King had been shot.  
Did you think you'd been set up at  
that point?

JAMES EARL RAY  
I wasn't thinking anything other  
then how I was going to make some  
money off that rifle I bought in  
Birmingham.

EXT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - DAY

1967.

A Rambler Station Wagon pulls up into the driveway of Byron  
and Marie's new home.

BYRON  
We're here. 1378 105th Avenue. All  
ours!

Smiles slowly curl across the faces of the young married  
couple on their first night in their own home.

MARIE  
That house is ours!

BYRON  
Yes it is Miss Marie. Yes it is.

Marie leans across her seat and kisses Byron then leaps out  
of the car!

MARIE  
We're home. Our home!

Marie rushes to greet her new life, front yard, her own  
mailbox and porch.

MARIE (CONT'D)  
I want to paint these railings but  
a different color from the house,  
flowers of course on the porch,  
like we're living in Peach Tree  
Heights.

BYRON  
Peach Tree Heights?

Byron opens the trunk and gets out the luggage. Both,  
relaxed, happy, eager to get into their first house together.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Marie, we're the Blue Ridge  
Middletons not the New York  
Rockefellers.

Byron carries the luggage. Marie fumbles with the keys and opens up the front door.

MARIE  
I know but they have nothing on us.  
Look around. Who would want more  
than this?

BYRON  
Ah, probably the Rockefellers.

MARIE  
It's fun to dream a little bit,  
isn't it? Come on, c'mon!

INT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - DAY

Marie and Byron enter. They stand in the small living room -  
Byron puts down his luggage.

The home is filled with wedding gifts.

BYRON  
All yours, Marie!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

From above, we see the two drop and fall onto awaiting  
pillows below. Marie swells with the excitement for her new  
life.

MARIE  
So much to do. New sheets, spreads,  
dishes. I don't know where to  
start?

Marie leaps up, spins and straddles her knees over Byron.

MARIE (CONT'D)  
What if Reverend King had said,  
"No?"

BYRON  
I think he was too afraid to say  
"no".

She leans down and kisses Byron.

MARIE  
Well, then good! We're home, Byron.  
Just think of that!

Marie snaps up to her feet on top of the mattress towering  
over Byron. Playfully, she begins jumping up and down.



MARIE (CONT'D)  
Let's see the backyard.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Marie strides through the family with elegant ease, heading towards the back sliding glass door - Byron follows.

MARIE  
We can find a small couch here at the Sunday flea market at the Starlight Drive-in. The tv can be on that side!

Marie opens up the back sliding glass door.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Marie and Byron step out to the stoop. Their attention gazes skyward.

A sky-ballet of white pigeons whips by en-masse above, swooping down and back up again flowing skyward.

BYRON  
Where are they going?

MARIE  
And, where'd they come from?

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

**ALTON ILLINOIS - 1940 - HOME OF JAMES EARL RAY**

Two dozen white pigeons swoop down from the sky above landing on top of a homemade pigeon coop.

INT. PIGEON COOP - DAY

A young boy, James Earl Ray (12) meticulously cares for and feeds his pigeons using a syringe, feeding oats and vitamins.

JAMES EARL RAY  
That's it, Charlie boy. Eat it up.

Names for each, Ray's pigeons leap about from his hands, head and shoulders.

JAMES EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
Yeah, that's it. You're living the life, aren't ya'? Nice and safe. No cats or racoons in here, huh?

Smoke then begins to swirl about the coop - outside and in.  
The pigeons grow uneasy, look for their way out.

JAMES EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
Hey, Marjorie? What are you doing  
out there? You're scaring my birds.

MARJORIE (O.S.)  
Getting the incinerator ready to  
burn the garbage.

EXT. CHILDHOOD HOME OF JAMES EARL RAY - BACKYARD - DAY

MARJORIE RAY (8), sister to James Earl Ray stands in front of  
a backyard, burn-barrel incinerator.

MARJORIE  
Like mama said!

James Earl fans away the smoke.

JAMES EARL RAY (O.S.)  
Make sure to check it first.  
Sometimes daddy throws out his old  
rifle rounds and mama has to pick  
'em out.

Marjorie reaches for a small plastic bottle of lighter-fluid.

She opens the top of the plastic bottle and squeezes the  
accelerant over the top of the incinerator.

Wauuumph! FIRE, instantly ignites pushing Marjorie down onto  
a pile of dry, raked leaves.

She lands on the bottle of "Instant Ignite", which sprays  
over her face, hair and knit sweater.

Rifle rounds spill dangerously close to the spreading flames.  
The young girl is overtaken by clawing fire.

MARJORIE  
JAMES???!!

Marjory's legs snap, kicking the thrown-out ammunition closer  
to the incinerator.

She hideously jerks about pushing the fire away but to no  
avail - shrieking in agony!

MARJORIE (CONT'D)  
Help me!! HELP ME!!

INT. PIGEON COOP - DAY

A loud boom is heard and a rifle round tears through the pigeon coop next to the head of James Earl.

Birds scatter, Ray is covered in splinters.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Marjorie? NO!!!

EXT. ADJOINING FENCE - DAY

James Earl circles the adjoining fence to see his sister burning to death.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Marjorie, no...

A second round explodes outward from the strewn-about, burning garbage passing through the gate.

Ray rushes to his sister - but it's too late. More leaves catch fire and more fire licks upward.

A third round goes off penetrating Marjorie's chest sending her slumping backward - mercifully lifeless.

JAMES EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
Marjorie?!!

Ray pushes the bag of ammo away. The sibling's parents LUCILLE (35) and GEORGE (36) rush in from the side yard.

Groceries drop and splash from Lucille's arms.

GEORGE EARL RAY  
Marjorie??

The parents get to their daughter pushing the fiery leaves away.

GEORGE EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
Marjorie?? Marjorie??

A hysterical Lucille - inconsolable, rocks Marjorie's charred body back and forth.

LUCILLE  
Oh, god no... God, no...

Ray's father turns viciously back to James Earl.

GEORGE EARL RAY  
Come here you little son-of-a-bitch!

He slaps James Earl savagely across the face.

GEORGE EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
I leave you in charge for one thing!

LUCILLE  
Don't beat him too much, George.  
...not too, much.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Mama...! Stop him, please. Please,  
daddy stop! It wasn't my fault!

INT. RAY'S GRANDMOTHER'S LIVING ROOM - (1950) - DAY

James Earl Ray (22), withdrawn, now an adult, unemployed, and frustrated, sits with dark circles under his eyes, watching the "Honeymooners".

Ray pulls his imaginative handgun out of his imaginary holster and points his finger at the TV.

He pulls back the imaginary hammer. Ray squeezes his imaginary trigger.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Pew. Pew. Adios, Ralphie.

EXT. JOBSITE TRAILER - (1967) - DAY

Byron walks towards the jobsite work trailer. He takes his gloves off along with his construction hat.

BYRON (V.O.)  
I appreciate you making time for me, Mr. Reynolds.

INT. JOBSITE TRAILER OFFICE - DAY

Byron sits before his white boss, heavy-set, affable MR. REYNOLDS (50).

BYRON (CONT'D)  
You see, sir. Things have changed a bit now that I'm married.

A broad smile comes across Mr. Reynold's face.

MR. REYNOLDS

I know how that is. First it was moving my shirts to the far left in the closet then I couldn't wear my own shoes inside my own house.

BYRON

Yes, sir.

MR. REYNOLDS

What's on your mind, Byron?

BYRON

Mr. Reynolds, I've been thinking about my apprenticeship and the journeyman post that's opening up. My next step up - it'd be a little more money for Marie and I. I'd like to express my commitment to the company, sir. Share my priorities.

MR. REYNOLDS

I appreciate that, Byron. Everything gets a little more focused when you say, "I do" doesn't it?

BYRON

Isn't that the southern truth, sir?

INT. OUTSIDE BOSS'S OFFICE - DAY

Mr. Reynolds escorts Byron out the door. We see a white man, JIM (20's) who's also waiting to see the boss.

MR. REYNOLDS

Appreciate you coming in.

Byron and Jim share a look as Byron crosses.

JIM

Good luck, boy.

INT. COLLEGE LECTURE - DAY

Marie finishes up an exam. The bell rings.

She places down her pen and closes her test booklet - begins to feel nauseous - nearly gets sick at her desk.

EXT. BYRON'S WORK AREA - DAY

Byron bends down to see a number of electrical and gas lines which haven't been properly installed and grounded.

BYRON

Uh, oh.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

JUANITA (20), friend to Marie preens before the mirror. Marie steps inside the bathroom stall.

JUANITA (CONT'D)

So, he says, "Girl, when I look into your eyes, I forget all my troubles." Real suave-like. Like he's Richard Roundtree, or Sidney Poitier. He tries gettin' all up in it, smooth like he's Baryshnikov or something.

Juanita puts on some lipstick, smacks and dabs. Marie gets sick in the stall.

JUANITA (CONT'D)

You alright, girl?

Marie opens the door - looks physically stressed.

MARIE

Something's wrong. I think I should go see the campus nurse.

EXT. ATLANTA CONSTRUCTION JOBSITE - DAY

A jovial man approaches Byron's work station. He's got a clipboard. He's the Atlanta City ELECTRICAL INSPECTOR (50's).

INSPECTOR

How's the progress coming along?

Byron - unaware of who he's speaking to.

BYRON

Looks like these gas lines weren't grounded properly. Open lines could spark and burn.

The inspector bends at the knees to take a closer look.

INSPECTOR

Good catch. Have the other sections been sheet-rocked, yet?

BYRON  
Yeah... Looks like some have.

JOB FOREMAN (60's) arrives.

INSPECTOR  
Hey, Tom.

JOB FOREMAN  
Hey, Dan. Thought the inspection  
was scheduled for next week? Excuse  
us will you, Byron?

INT. INFIRMARY OFFICE - DAY

Marie comes out from the Doctor's office. Other college kids  
come and go. She appears ashen, shell-shocked.

JUANITA  
You look like a ghost.

MARIE  
A ghost that's in her sixth week,  
Juanita.

JUANITA  
Pregnant? Girl, you waste no time,  
little mama.

MARIE  
I don't think the whole freshman  
class heard you, Juanita?

JUANITA  
Oh, sorry. Was I loud?

Marie pulls her friend out of the flow of passing students.

MARIE  
This wasn't suppose to happen! We  
told Reverend King we weren't  
planning on any of this. He's going  
to think we lied to him!  
And, Byron. He's going to feel I  
pushed him into everything. And,  
his family? They're going to blame  
me!

EXT. JOBSITE PARKING LOT - DAY

At the end of the work day, a tired Byron strolls across  
empty parking spaces. He looks up to see the windshield of  
his Rambler.

Across the glass in white splashed paint it reads: **ONCE AN APPRENTICE, ALWAYS APPRENTICE, BOY!**

INT. FBI - HOOVER'S PRIVATE OFFICE - DAY

J. Edgar Hoover paces in front of Clyde Tolson like a caged animal.

King's headline and newspaper lies squarely on his own desk.

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
So, it looks like, "Mr. Southern-Baptist-Negro-King" wants to lambast my Bureau?

Headline reads.

CLYDE TOLSON  
"Equal justice applied in equal measure." In the south, he might not be too wrong.

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
Direct attack in a major goddamn newspaper - King's one bold Nigga' boy that's for damn sure.

CLYDE TOLSON  
And, getting bolder.

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
He's going to be the next black messiah isn't he, Clyde?

CLYDE TOLSON  
I'm sure not if you'll have something to say about it, John.

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
He'll consolidate every goddamn black faction out there and take down every, major metropolitan city as we know it.

CLYDE TOLSON  
What do you want to do?

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
I want to consolidate a little faction of our own - a little "roster of the willing."

CLYDE TOLSON  
What'd you have in mind?



J. EDGAR HOOVER  
Sit down, Clyde. Take notes.

EXT. MIDDLETON HOME - NIGHT

Byron's car pulls to a stop in front of the Middleton family home. Byron turns the off the ignition. Headlights out.

MARIE (V.O.)  
I was trying to be careful.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Byron and Marie sit quietly in their car - apprehensive, nervous.

MARIE (V.O.)  
I'm scared, Byron. Maybe everybody was right. We are young, too young maybe?

BYRON  
I have three brothers. My parents didn't wait. They'll worry about how we'll manage. School for you, my job for me.

Both cast their eyes to the Middleton home.

MARIE  
I've taken their little boy and made a father out of him.

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Herb stands in front of the television.

On it, we see a George Wallace campaign commercial for his presidential candidacy.

EXT. ROAD - (COMMERCIAL) - DAY

The back of a yellow school bus pulls away. A trusting, fatherly voice instructs.

CAMPAIGN COMMERCIAL (V.O.)  
Why are millions more of Americans turning to Governor Wallace? Follow us as your children are bussed across town.

INT. GEORGE WALLACE'S OFFICE (COMMERCIAL) - DAY

GEORGE WALLACE (52) sits behind a bland desk.

GEORGE WALLACE (T.V.)  
As president, and as within the  
law, I'll turn back the absolute  
control of the public school  
systems to the people of the United  
States.

CAMPAIGN COMMERCIAL (V.O.)  
Open a little business, and see  
what might happen.

EXT. STOREFRONT (COMMERCIAL) - DAY

A rock is thrown through the front window of a TV store. Fire  
ignites inside.

GEORGE WALLACE (V.O.)  
As president, I will stand up for  
local law and fire departments for  
protecting your safety and  
property.

(Back to Scene)

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Herb, fuming, hears enough - turns off the television.

Adalia enters the family room.

ADALIA  
Dinner's just about ready.

The doorbell rings.

HERB  
Okay. Lionel? Get the door. It's  
Byron and Marie.

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - DINING ROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Byron and Marie sit quietly, peck at their food.

Herb, Adalia and the brothers Middleton, Russel, Lionel and  
Milan are now ten years older since we've last seen them.

LIONEL (CONT'D)  
Muhammed Ali didn't enlist. He took  
a stance.

The dinner table is filled with chatter - except for Byron  
and Marie.

HERB

That stance disgraced him, too.  
Found guilty of "evasion" and  
stripped of his titles.

MILAN

Wasn't stripped of his self-  
respect, pop. He stood up - is  
still standing up.

Byron pulls the napkin from his lap and places it on the  
dinner table before him - not much to say.

ADALIA

Byron, you sick, or something? What  
is it? Marie? What's happened? You  
two fighting?

The dinner table gets quiet.

BYRON

No, mama. We're not fighting.

RUSSEL

What's up, little man?

BYRON

Ah, there's a development.

ADALIA

A development? Well, what's this?

HERB

You sick? Marie? He sick?

BYRON

No... Dad, I'm not sick.

RUSSEL

You get evicted?

BYRON

No. Marie and I...

MARIE

...are having a baby.

Forks and knives are placed down on the table unison.

HERB

What?

MARIE

That's what he's trying to say. I'm pregnant.

BYRON

That's our development.

Stunned silence.

LIONEL

Weewee, little man! That's what "The Ritz" will do to you. It's a damn "baby-making" palace.

HERB

Lionel!! Quiet!!

BYRON

Marie got the news at Pellman. Got sick in the bathroom - went and got checked out.

The table is both unsure and cautious.

MILAN

That's a good thing, right? It's not like you got fired? Or, you found out you got cancer or something.

MARIE

It's just catching us off guard with school, and Byron working his way up.

BYRON

Mother Nature got the best of us.

LIONEL

Nobody can stop her at the Ritz Carlton.

ADALIA

Lionel! Quiet! You two have family, brothers, parents. Children are born every day. When your father and I had Russel, we didn't have two pennies to rub together.

HERB

Even less than that. But, no matter! I like the sound of it. A new baby boy can take your place in the group in a few years...

The family enjoys Herb's part-in-parcel projections.

HERB (CONT'D)  
I'll have another suit specially  
made. Little arms, little legs.

ADALIA  
Herb! Marie... you just don't mind  
him. You just have a healthy child  
and focus on school. We're here for  
the both of you.

MARIE  
Thank you.

BYRON  
Thanks, mama.

Herb holds up a glass to toast. The family holds up their  
glasses.

HERB  
Okay, then. Hear, hear. To the  
growing Middleton family. And, to  
the next generation of the  
"Brothers Middleton!"

INT. JOBSITE - FOLLOWING DAYS - DAY

Byron works with his head down. Mr. Reynolds approaches -  
he's not happy.

MR. REYNOLDS  
Byron, you got a minute?

BYRON  
Sure. Yes, sir.

MR. REYNOLDS  
Why don't you walk with me over  
here.

BYRON  
Is there a problem?

Reynolds leads Byron away from the other men on the site.

MR. REYNOLDS  
We rely on our crews out here in  
the field to work well together.

BYRON  
Yes, sir.

MR. REYNOLDS

You pointed out a superior's electrical work in front of the city inspector. What'd you think that was going to do to our schedule?

BYRON

Mr. Reynolds, I had no idea who he was. He just came up from behind me. Those gas lines weren't grounded properly. They could've burned and taken down the whole site.

MR. REYNOLDS

And you felt it necessary to bring it to the inspector's attention?

BYRON

It wasn't like that.

MR. REYNOLDS

I'm going to need your site access badge. I'm sorry.

BYRON

I'm being fired? Mr. Reynolds, please? I need this job. I just got married with a baby on the way.

MR. REYNOLDS

You're a good kid but I need discretion. It's coming from the top.

Mr. Reynolds takes Byron's badge and tucks it in his pocket.

MR. REYNOLDS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

INT. HOOVER'S DINING ROOM - FOLLOWING WEEKS - NIGHT

Clyde pours John Edgar a glass of red wine. Candlelight and dinner between the two.

CLYDE TOLSON (CONT'D)

We heard from our friends out in Jefferson City this afternoon. Might have a key player for your "roster of the willing."

Hoover places down his fork.

J. EDGAR HOOVER

Oh?

CLYDE TOLSON

He could be your own - "Lee Harvey Oswald".

J. EDGAR HOOVER

Who is he?

INT. PRISON LIBRARY - DAY

James Earl Ray pushes a rolling bookshelf between the aisles. He places a book back on their shelf.

CLYDE TOLSON (V.O.)

James Earl Ray. Frustrated ex-G.I. with certain "political" proclivities. In and out of prison, prostitutes, drifter. Someone who's always been swinging for the fences but no talent to actually do it. But, a glitch.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (V.O.)

And, what's that?

INT. PRISON CHOW LINE - DAY

Wearing a hair net, Ray serves mashed potatoes to fellow prisoners.

CLYDE TOLSON (V.O.)

He's doing twenty years for armed robbery in the Missouri State prison.

INT. HOOVER'S DINING ROOM - FOLLOWING WEEKS - NIGHT

Hoover smiles, reaches for the gravy.

J. EDGAR HOOVER

Well then Clyde, why don't we see if we can give Mr. Ray something to good to swing at?

INT. MISSOURI STATE PEN VISITOR'S AREA - DAY

Behind the glass partition with a phone in his ear is James Earl Ray (40).

Across the glass partition is a nondescript, St. Louis man named ROBBIE WALKER (40).

Walker works for a whole class of people, including those at the FBI.

JAMES EARL RAY

We haven't met before, have we?

ROBBIE

No. Not up until now. Appreciate you seeing me.

JAMES EARL RAY

Do I have something that was yours, or you here to settle some score for someone?

ROBBIE

Let's just say we might be able to help each other. Maybe even help you get out?

JAMES EARL RAY

Must have something big-in-mind to say something along those lines.

ROBBIE

There's a man in the south and some very powerful people think he's gone too far. He's got a big mouth, grandiose style. Influential. Too influential. There's an informal bounty on his life.

JAMES EARL RAY

You mean MLK and the Missouri Klan bounty..? That's the prison pastime around here. You know, how someone would actually do it.

ROBBIE

That right?

JAMES EARL RAY

You know? "How to collect on it?"

ROBBIE

If my friends could get some help, someone might even be seen as a hero themselves. Kind of a "white hero". A real man among men in the parts that matter. Maybe more than a white hero, maybe even a "peacemaker" himself?



JAMES EARL RAY

For, "Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they shall be called sons of  
God. Therefore, since we have been  
justified by faith, we have peace  
through our Lord Jesus Christ".

BOBBIE

You quote scripture well.

JAMES EARL RAY

What do you want me to do?

INT. MLK'S BRICK HOME - DAY

Correta works at her desk archiving stories and articles.  
Young Dexter comes rushing in.

DEXTER

Mom? Mom?

CORRETA

What is it?

DEXTER

It's Marie! She's in the backyard,  
crying! It's really bad!

EXT. MLK'S BACKYARD - DAY

Correta rushes out through the backdoor. Marie, alone in the  
rain stands alone in the middle of the grass heaving in  
tears.

Correta approaches.

CORRETA

What is it, Marie? What happened?

Marie, inconsolable.

MARIE

We're not going to make it, Mrs.  
King.

CORRETA

Make what? Who's not going to make  
it?

MARIE

It's Byron. He's been fired.

CORRETA

Fired? For what?

MARIE

He pointed out some things on the site and it pushed back the finish date. They let him go because of it. And, now he's at home. We only have a little saved. And, I lied.

CORRETA

Lied? About what?

MARIE

To Dr. King. About starting a family right away. It just happened. We didn't plan it, it just happened?

CORRETA

You're with child... child?

MARIE

We didn't plan any of it, I swear.

Correta gets Marie turned back to the house. Dexter darts back inside through the door.

CORRETA

Okay. Let's calm down. Come inside. We'll talk all this over. Get those tears dry. Come on inside.

INT. MLK'S OFFICE - LATER - NIGHT

MLK sits at his desk going through correspondence. Correta pushes the door open. MLK looks up.

CORRETA

We got quite a problem good, Reverend.

EXT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - DAYS LATER - DAY

Dr. King parks his car in front of Byron's house. He gets out and makes his way up the walkway.

EXT. FRONT DOOR - DAY

Marie opens the door to see Martin Luther King Jr. on her doorstep.

MARIE

Oh, Reverend? This is a surprise. I know why you're here. I swear I didn't, we didn't mean to start...

MLK  
Marie, it's alright.

Martin smiles and winks.

MARIE  
You're not mad?

MLK  
No. Correta explained what's happened. I'd like to see Byron if I may? Can I come inside?

MARIE  
Oh, yes. Of course. Come in, come in.

EXT. BACKYARD - MINUTES LATER - DAY

MLK and Byron walk the back fence line. Marie looks out from the window.

MLK  
I'm traveling to Selma today so I'll have to get right to it.

BYRON  
Yes, sir.

MLK  
Correta told me you were let go from your job?

BYRON  
Yes, sir. I pointed out some faulty wiring to a city electrical inspector. I didn't know who he was. Gas line stuff - pushed the job back, months maybe.

MLK  
Your timing might be right.

BYRON  
Reverend?

MLK  
I may have something for you at Ebenezer if interested. Mrs. Washington in the office is helping her sister move out to California. She sorts the mail, runs the choir on occasion.

(MORE)

MLK (CONT'D)

It'd be temporary but maybe  
something in the meantime until  
things sort themselves out.

Byron looks over to Marie who's working over the kitchen sink  
through the window.

BYRON

I'm sure you know she's also  
pregnant.

MLK

Correta told me everything.

BYRON

It wasn't planned. I didn't want  
you to think I was fibbin' in your  
office when we spoke.

MLK

Let's just blame it on the Ritz.

BYRON

Can't argue that.

A slow smile grows across Byron's relieved face.

BYRON (CONT'D)

I would, Reverend. I would be  
interested. Thank you. This time, I  
won't let you down.

EXT. PETTUS BRIDGE - SELMA ALABAMA - FOLLOWING - DAY

A group of reporters stand surrounding MLK.

SELMA REPORTER

What's this day mark for you, Dr.  
King?

INT. HOOVER'S PRIVATE OFFICE - CONTINUED - DAY

Hoover sits watching King's Pettus Bridge speech on his  
office television.

MLK (T.V. CONT'D)

We recognize this sacred  
battleground is for a people whose  
right it is to live under the grace  
of all of America's promise - that  
all are free - against another kind  
of people, where for the bondage of  
man is not only acceptable - but  
preferable.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - ADMIN OFFICE - DAYS LATER - DAY

Byron stands before a file cabinet with a hand full of  
letters, i.e., Ebenezer utility bills, notes from  
parishioners.

MRS. JOYCE (O.S.)

Open those up, Byron and then file  
them under the headings on top of  
the folders.

BYRON

Okay.

MISS JOYCE (37) sits at a nearby office desk.

MISS JOYCE

The Reverend gets letters addressed  
to him personally as well. When  
they come in, just open them up and  
separate them out.

BYRON

Yes, Miss Joyce.

Byron opens the file cabinet and thumbs through the various  
files.

The file in the very back reads; "**THREATS - MLK**". Byron pulls  
it out - a number of envelopes fall out to the floor.

At Byron's feet, pictures of lynching's stamped with  
confederate threats lie about. Dr. King hanging from trees in  
effigy.

Byron shares a look with Miss Joyce.

MISS JOYCE

They're what you think they are.  
It's part of the territory for the  
Reverend.

BYRON

Does he know about these?

MISS JOYCE  
Even reads them every now and then.

BYRON  
Why?

MISS JOYCE  
Reminds him of what he's fighting  
for.

BYRON  
Yes, ma'am.

INT. STORAGE AREA - DAY

Byron pulls on a light bulb string.

The small room lights up dimly. Before him, boxes and boxes;  
letters of hate marked by the year - 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966.

Byron approaches the box that reads 1967; hesitant but opens  
it. He sees a lynching postcard, takes it, stares at it.

A black man hangs from his neck at a southern, Sunday white  
picnic.

Byron pulls the string and the small storage room falls dark  
once more.

From a distant place we hear.

MLK (V.O.)  
For what I have done and have  
failed to do.

INT. RIVERSIDE CHURCH, UPPER WEST SIDE OF NEW YORK - DAY

Martin Luther King stands at the podium before 3,000 people.

MLK (V.O. CONT'D)  
The actuality of these sentiments  
are truthful ones. To stay silent,  
is the failure to step forward when  
we are called to do so.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - WHITE HOUSE - DAY

**PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES - LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON**

**U.S. ATTORNEY GENERAL - WILLIAM RAMSEY CLARK**

CLARKE (40) sits across from the President of the United  
States, LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON (59).

WILLIAM RAMSEY CLARKE

J. Edgar thinks there could be communist subversive influences around King - that subversives are the basis of his antiwar speeches.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON

It's all bullshit, Bill. Pretense. Dr. Martin Luther King is no communist. He's a moralist. King criticized the Bureau for not prosecuting civil rights cases in the south. I think he's right. Hoover's never forgotten it.

WILLIAM RAMSEY CLARKE

Mr. President, if South Vietnam ultimately falls to the Viet Cong - and we simply sat by if King has communist influences, it'll all be on your watch, sir. We can't risk that.

INT. HOOVER'S PERSONAL OFFICE - DAY

Hoover and Tolson sit across from one another.

(MLK continues).

MLK (V.O.)

It's not an easy thing to confront the values of federal laws established by one's own country.

J. EDGAR HOOVER

I want the full counterintelligence program on King. Every ounce of it, Clyde.

INT. RIVERSIDE CHURCH UPPER WEST SIDE OF NEW YORK - DAY

Before 3,000 people, MLK stands at the podium.

(MLK continues).

MLK

The natural spirit of man is content with those common things, unagitated things.

INT. INTERVIEW OFFICE - DAY

Byron, professionally dressed, sits poised waiting to be seen for a job interview.

MLK (V.O.)

But there does come a time when we  
must welcome agitation. Purposeful  
agitation.

A SECRETARY (40's) sits between the boss's door and Byron. A  
white fellow worker exits the office door - all smiles.

SECRETARY

That's all Mr. Walters is seeing  
today. You can check back in next  
month if you like.

EXT. EBENEZER CHURCH - CONT'D - DAYS LATER - DAY

Two young black FEDERAL AGENTS #1 AND #2 (30's) dressed in  
their Ebenezer, Sunday best mingle with church-folk outside  
the steps of Ebenezer - listening, ingratiating, monitoring.

(MLK continues).

MLK (V.O.)

And in the case of the current  
Indochinese holocaust.

Marie and Byron mingle about.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (V.O.)

I want to know everything about  
Ebenezer. Those around him. Those  
who protect him - any and all who  
work for him.

MLK shakes hands with both the men and women in his  
congregation.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (V.O.)

Every asset we have. Blacks,  
whites, goddamned Navajo code  
talkers if need be.

Byron and Marie stand by. Byron takes notice of the two, new  
clean-cut men.

INT. RIVERSIDE CHURCH, UPPER WEST SIDE OF NEW YORK - DAY

Other men (FEDS) sit and monitor. (MLK continues).

MLK

Our moment has come and the  
country's moment has come to see  
this war for what it's become.



EXT. MLK'S MODEST BRICK HOME - NIGHT

Late. Two cars park at opposite ends of the street. Feds.

(MLK continues).

MLK (V.O.)  
The verity of this moment, cannot  
be denied.

INT. SMALL CONFEDERATE BASEMENT - NIGHT

A dozen MEN (40's) sit before the KLAN EMCEE. A Nationalist White Power flag drapes behind him.

Two FEDERAL AGENTS PLANTS #3 and #4 (40's) sit in the front row.

(MLK continues)

MLK (V.O.)  
And, the charge we choose to take  
up, is not without cost.

INT. MLK'S BRICK HOME - DAY

Marie strides down the hallway holding pressed shirts and slacks, while reading an open book at the same time.

MARIE  
Dexter? School bus is waiting  
outside.

INT. FBI HALLWAYS - DAY

Hoover and Tolson pace down the FBI hallway - Hoover double-checking his notes.

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
Make a list of who we have with our  
Dixie friends and the families in  
New York. Get in touch with Frankie  
Liberto.

INT. RIVERSIDE CHURCH, UPPER WEST SIDE OF NEW YORK - DAY

(MLK continues).

MLK  
Even with the frightening whispers  
of our own fears and trepidations.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Hoover and Tolson sit in a dark corner having a steak dinner.

CLYDE TOLSON  
We can talk to the Times and Post -  
criticize his public speeches.  
Undercut him.

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
Editorials. Front page stuff, no  
home and garden crap.

INT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - 2ND BEDROOM - DAY

Byron and Marie paint what will be their future child's room.  
A bassinette is covered by a drop cloth.

(MLK continues).

MLK (V.O.)  
Particularly when wars rage in  
proxy battles in our name.

INT. STORAGE AREA - DAY

Byron loads up another box of mail onto a shelf.

He pulls the light string throwing a small, dull glow about  
the room.

(MLK continues)

MLK (V.O.)  
We must be heard, we must be seen,  
and we must be focused.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAYS LATER - DAY

Miss Joyce, going home from work, walks down the sidewalk.  
Byron catches up to her.

BYRON  
Miss Joyce! Miss Joyce?

Miss Joyce turns to see Byron jogging to meet up to her.

MISS JOYCE  
What is it, Byron?

BYRON  
I was wondering if I could just  
speak with you for a second?

MISS JOYCE

Sure. Is there something I can help you with?

Byron produces a lynching postcard.

BYRON

The letters that come in. Should we have anything to worry about with Reverend King?

MISS JOYCE

Oh.

BYRON

Is he afraid something will happen?

MISS JOYCE

He gets afraid sometimes, yes. We're in the south. We know what that means.

BYRON

Yes, ma'am.

MISS JOYCE

You look worried.

BYRON

Caught me off-guard. I just didn't expect to see it here at Ebenezer.

MISS JOYCE

You should be aware of a few things, Byron. The election is coming up and you know who George Wallace is. And, the more the Reverend travels and speaks, the more threats that will be coming in. The more trips to the basement you'll be making. You understand?

BYRON

I'm beginning to.

MISS JOYCE

Dr. King, just doesn't ask anybody to work for him, or be close to personal correspondence around the church. He's a man who's been given the Nobel Peace Prize - and that man, thinks highly of you.

BYRON  
I appreciate that, ma'am.

MISS JOYCE  
No one would blame you if you  
decided to leave - but I do think  
you'll find the reason why you're  
here if you give it a chance.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - DAY

Byron stands before thirty or so, youthful and eager CHOIR  
MEMBERS (8 to 15) - eager eyes who look for direction.

A woman named MRS. JACKSON (35) stands in the back doorway  
looking on to her son, BENJAMIN JACKSON (9) who is barely  
seen in the back row among the older kids.

Byron turns and nods to the mother.

BYRON  
Let's see. Who is Benjamin Jackson?

The choir throws their attention to the small kid, who's  
hidden in the back row.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Benjamin?

We see a hand raised but can't see who it belongs to.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Come on down, Benjamin.

The kid works his way out from the older and bigger kids and  
approaches Byron.

Benjamin is dressed smartly, speaks when spoken to, more shy  
than not. Mrs. Jackson - the ever pensive parent.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Hey, Benjamin.

BENJAMIN  
Hello, Mr. Middleton.

BYRON  
Mr.? Just call me, Byron. The choir  
sheet says here, you have quite a  
voice. Is that right?

Benjamin shrugs.

BENJAMIN

I guess.

Byron turns to Mrs. Jackson and gives her a nod of assurance.

BYRON

Oh. Okay. Well, why don't you come  
on down and stand in the front,  
okay? This way I can see you.

Reluctantly Benjamin makes his way to the front of the group.  
He stops in front of Byron.

BENJAMIN

My mom wants me to be in the choir.  
It's why I'm here. Do I have to be  
in the front?

Byron bends down for a little one on one.

BYRON

No one would blame you if you  
decided to stay in the back - but I  
think if you give it a chance you  
might understand why your mom over  
there wants you to be up front.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Okay.

The other kids make room for him. Byron reaches for his  
baton.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Okay. Let's pull out your new sheet  
music. Graves into Gardens.

EXT. SHOOTING RANGE - U.S. MILITARY BASE - GERMANY - DAY

**U.S. MILITARY BASE - WEST GERMANY - 1946:**

James Earl Ray (18) lies on the ground with 50 other U.S.  
GI's in a long line.

In Ray's hands, an M1-Garand standard issue carbine.

GUNNERY SERGEANT (O.S.)

Eyes down field.

A BLACK GUNNERY SERGEANT (30's) walks the line - looks at  
targets.

GUNNERY SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Fire at will.

Ray fires repeatedly, expertly. All dead center hits.

INT. GERMAN BAR - NIGHT

Two MP's (30's) enter the bar. They approach the BARTENDER (60's) and James Earl.

Ray sits on a stool with his head lying on the bar. The MP's approach.

MP #1  
This the guy?

BARTENDER  
That's him. About twelve drinks so far. Harassing customers before he passed out like this.

An MP's nightstick pushes the drink away from Ray's face. The MP (30) nudges Ray with his stick.

MILITARY POLICE #1  
Get off the stool, soldier.

Ray opens a weary eye to see the Military Police.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Hey, boys.

He steps off the stool, wobbles, then takes a half-hearted swing at the MP.

MILITARY POLICE #2  
There it is.

MP # 1 simply pushes Ray backward with his nightstick and James Earl slumps to the floor in a drunken pile without a fight.

MILITARY POLICE # 1  
Let's get Wild Pete here back to the stockade.

INT. GRANDMA RAY'S KITCHEN - DAY

**ALTON, ILLINOIS - 1955**

Ray now (25) circles job possibilities, i.e., janitor, substitute teacher, driver, landscaper.

JAMES EARL RAY  
There's not one job in here worthy of my talents.

GRANDMA RAY (60's) places a plate of flapjacks in front of Ray.

GRANDMA RAY  
Sometimes things just take time.  
It's the way the world is, Jimmie-Ray. Maybe you just need to think bigger than you are.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Have to kill a man to get anyone to notice ya'.

INT. CAB - ALTON ILLINOIS - DAY

Ray holds a gun to a Cab Driver's head. He reaches in the man's pockets and take a hand full of cash.

JAMES EARL RAY  
That's for Ethel Rosenberg.

INT. LONDON AIRPORT - HOLDING AREA - CUSTOMS - DAY

**JUNE 8TH - 1968 - HEATHROW INTERNATIONAL**

Accused gunman, James Earl Ray (40) stands against the wall with his hands bound by handcuffs.

CUSTOMS OFFICIAL (45) and POLICE go through Ray's things lying on the table.

Before them a .38 Caliber pistol and two different Canadian passports.

CUSTOM OFFICIAL  
Ramon George Sneyd? Concealed loaded weapon and two Canadian passports? Why would you be traveling to Belgium?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

**BRUSHY MOUNTAIN STATE PRISON - PETRO TENNESSEE - MARCH 15, 1977**

CBS correspondent DAN RATHER (46) sits opposite James Earl Ray (49).

DAN RATHER (CONT'D)  
Let me stop and ask you. Are you willing to testify before the house committee?

JAMES EARL RAY

If I do testify, I wouldn't want to testify in any kind of executive session. Members of staff leak information like they did on the Church committee. Ray said this, Ray said that. I'd rather testify in public. That way, whoever's interested can hear all of it - not just bits and pieces.

EXT. EBENEZER PARKING LOT - DAY

**EBENEZER CHURCH - 1968**

After Sunday services.

Byron secures a banner sign which reads: VOTE AND BE COUNTED - VOTER REGISTRATION.

Voter registration tables line the parking lot. Church-goers mill about the enrollment tables.

Marie sits beneath an overhang taking names and registering parishioners.

MLK directs Byron who hangs a large banner.

MLK

Up just a bit more if possible.

BYRON

Okay. Like this? Is that even?

Byron stretches the Vote Banner even further above his head.

MLK

Good, yes. And, Byron?

BYRON

Yes, sir?

MLK

Don't let the older folks drift out without getting them to register. Sometimes their legs get tired so talk to them, keep'em occupied, give them some water if they need it.

BYRON

Yes, sir.



MLK  
You're doing fine, just fine.

MORE - VARIOUS

Byron and Marie hand out voter information, pencils, and water to those who gather in line.

MARIE  
Don't forget to register this morning.

BYRON  
Here you go... Make sure to fill out the voter cards completely. Any questions, just ask.

MLK is pleased.

He takes special note of Byron working well with Ebenezer's assembly. He's patient, informative, well-organized.

MLK  
If you don't vote, you don't count. Let them hear you. And, remember, next month is our mortgage assistance drive. You gotta' - "own to be known!"

MLK approaches Miss Joyce at a voter table. He turns back to look at Byron working well with the congregation members.

MLK (CONT'D)  
Joyce.

MISS JOYCE  
Yes, Reverend?

MLK  
Byron's got a nice feel doesn't he? With the parishioners?

MISS JOYCE  
I think he does. The kids in the choir really like him. Little Benjamin Jackson is coming out his shell.

MLK  
I'm going to need someone to travel with me for these up and coming speeches we've scheduled. I'd like for you to expose him to some official administration duties.  
(MORE)

MLK (CONT'D)

Get him familiar with itineraries,  
travel schedules. John Lewis will  
be in later today. Send Byron into  
my office and we'll have John take  
a look, too.

INT. MLK'S OFFICE - LATER - DAY

MLK and JOHN LEWIS (27) sit opposite each other reading  
various parts of Atlanta's Sunday Tribune.

MLK

If the Braves don't find another  
pitcher to help Cecil Upshaw,  
they're going flatline at a 50-50  
season.

JOHN LEWIS

I like Claude Raymond too, but  
they've got to get more help.

A light knock on the door.

MLK

John, I'm looking at this young man  
to possibly travel with me. He runs  
the youth choir, sorts the mail. I  
like him. I'd like your opinion.

JOHN LEWIS

Okay. I'll give him the once over.

MLK opens the door. Byron enters. He sees John Lewis sitting  
across from Reverend King.

BYRON

Excuse me, Reverend. Miss Joyce  
suggested I ask you about these  
files.

MLK

It's alright. Come in, come in.

John Lewis stands, reaches out his hand.

MLK (CONT'D)

Byron, this is John Lewis.

BYRON

Yes, sir. Of course, I know, Mr.  
Lewis. First saw you on TV on the  
Pettus Bridge.

JOHN LEWIS

My mama told me to wear a football helmet on that day but I didn't listen.

BYRON

Yes, sir.

MLK

Sit, Byron.

The group sits.

MLK (CONT'D)

John, maybe Byron here can settle this little argument of ours. Byron, Cecil Upshaw or Claude Raymond?

BYRON

Oh. For me, I think the Braves throw Upshaw too much. They don't make enough room for Raymond. They need more out of their farm system, but I don't think they're going to get it - at least this year anyway.

JOHN LEWIS

Kid knows his baseball.

MLK

Go ahead, Byron. Take the file down to storage.

BYRON

Yes, sir. Nice meeting you, Mr. Lewis.

JOHN LEWIS

Likewise, son.

Byron turns, leaves and shuts the door behind him.

MLK

What do you think, John?

JOHN LEWIS

Youth choirs are one thing, streets of America are another. I'd let him know what he's in for, Martin. You probably owe him that.

INT. FBI WAR ROOM OFFICE - DAY

An FBI Assistant pins photos to a suspect board. We see the targeted BIG SIX civil rights.

PHILLIP RANDOLPH FOUGHT (74), JAMES FARMER (48), JOHN LEWIS (27), MARTIN LUTHER KING (38), ROY WILKINS (67), WHITNEY YOUNG (48).

INT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - DAYS LATER - DAY

Marie studies at the kitchen table. Her pregnancy now shows just a bit. The phone rings. She picks up.

MARIE

Hello? Reverend King?

Byron enters the front door with an arm load of groceries and crosses to the kitchen.

MARIE (CONT'D)

He just walked in. Okay. Okay.

We'll see you then. I'll tell him.

Marie hangs up.

BYRON

Well, what?

MARIE

Reverend King is coming over. He wants to talk to you.

BYRON

What'd I do now?

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER - DAY

Picnic table. Byron sits with Reverend King.

BYRON (CONT'D)

We had a number of gas lines that weren't grounded properly. The inspector came by - I didn't know who he was. I guess I spoke up when I shouldn't have. All very expensive to redo.

MLK

And, they let you go.

BYRON

They did. Are you firing me from Ebenezer?

MLK

Oh, no, not that Byron. I've been watching you with the youth choir, how you handle yourself with the parishioners, voter registration, and working with Miss Joyce.

BYRON

Yes, sir.

MLK

In the months to come, I'm going to be speaking out on a number of topics. These speeches will be making even more folks uncomfortable with me. You see the kind of correspondence I receive.

BYRON

Yes, sir I do.

MLK

There'll be more of it. A lot more. With what I'm going to propose, you yourself may even be a target. You'll deal with threats, or even get threats or hear things. Or, a file might even be created on you by the authorities themselves.

BYRON

I'm not sure what you mean, Reverend King?

MLK

Have you ever had a direct experience with anything that resembles those letters in the basement? I'm asking for a reason.

BYRON

I have.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI WOODS - NIGHT

**TALAHATCHIE RIVER - 1955**

Tied to a tree with his open back exposed, two white men, ROY BRYANT (24) and J.W. MILAM (36) whip a young fourteen year-old black boy to death.

BYRON (V.O.)

I was a few years younger than Emmett Till .

EXT. TALLAHATCHIE RIVER - BRIDGE - 3 AM - NIGHT

Moonlit currents glisten. Till's beaten and contorted body floats lifelessly by.

INT. FARM BUREAU HALL - NIGHT

Byron and the Brothers Middleton dance beautifully with their choreographed moves. Byron looks out to see Marie.

BYRON (V.O.)  
We were performing for a "Welcome  
back", sit-down dinner for a few  
Korean War veterans.

Eight year-old Marie is smiling, smiling, smiling.

BYRON (V.O.)  
They found Emmett earlier that  
morning.

INT. GLENDORA MISSISSIPPI, GROCERY STORE - CONT'D - DAY

The young bright, unpretentious Byron Middleton as (EMMETT TILL) approaches the cashier.

Byron (Emmett Till), speaks as he walks past the store's aisle.

BYRON (V.O.)  
I remember thinking, when I heard,  
this could've been me.

Byron/Emmett approaches the counter, unassumingly gives CAROLYN BRYANT (32) a morning smile while placing down his milk and eggs.

BYRON / EMMET  
Morning.

CAROLYN BRYANT  
You ain't from around here are you  
little, nigga' boy?

We hear the menacing sounds of a long whip viciously snapping in the air.

BYRON/EMMET  
No ma'am. Chicago.

EXT. DARK FOREST - NIGHT

Teams of hounds bound through dark, forest thickets.

EXT. PITCH BLACK FOREST - NIGHT

Byron and Marie, frantically run side by side, chased by unleashed, distant howling hounds.

INT. CHICAGO CHURCH - DAY

Dressed in his Sunday suit, Byron approaches the open casket of Emmett Till. Tears break from swollen eyes.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONT'D - DAY

(Back to Scene)

Byron grows quiet.

BYRON

Emmett was my cousin. I've never said anything - didn't want the attention. You're asking me to step into the very thing I've spent my whole life trying to forget.

MLK

I understand, Byron. I didn't know. I'll look to find someone else.

MLK gets up from the picnic table.

BYRON

But, maybe it's time for me to get out of the forest. Try some remembering rather than working so hard to forget.

MLK

Every man runs, Byron. Not every man arrives.

MLK smiles and outstretches his hand.

BYRON

Okay, then.

INT. FBI WAR ROOM OFFICE - DAY

An FBI Assistant adds one more photo to a suspect board of the BIG SIX civil rights leaders - Byron Middleton.

FBI AGENT WILLIAM C. SULLIVAN (55) takes a view of the board.

AGENT SULLIVAN

Who's this guy?

FBI ASSISTANT  
King's new assistant.

AGENT SULLIVAN  
Go through his garbage. Let's find  
out if he's approachable.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - DAY

Byron stands with young Benjamin Jackson away from the choir.

BYRON  
You've been practicing. You're  
ready. I'll cue you in. Just keep  
your eyes on me, okay?

BENJAMIN  
Okay.

BYRON  
Go take your place.

Benjamin walks over to the choir. The elder members make room  
for him directly in front.

Byron takes his place. He reaches for his baton and lifts it  
up. The hymn begins.

The choir grows in a rousing manner. Byron locks eyes with  
young Benjamin.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Go, Benjamin.

Benjamin is cued in. The young boy steps forward and opens  
his mouth to sing - simply beautiful.

EXT. MISSOURI STATE PEN - DAY

A bread truck comes through the prison gates.

# **MISSOURI STATE PENITENTIARY**

INT. MISSOURI STATE PEN KITCHEN BAKERY - DAY

Ray reports to work in the kitchen bakery. Missouri State Pen  
(MSP) checks Ray in. (The guard assists in Ray's escape).

MSP GUARD  
Okay, today you'll be working  
loading the Renz Farm truck. Next?



EXT. ONE LANE EMPTY ROAD - 30 MINUTES LATER - DAY

The back of the truck bursts open and Ray hangs on the bumper.

He jumps off the truck into a field of tall grass tumbling to freedom.

INT. FBI AGENT SULLIVAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Agent Sullivan sits at his desk reviewing open files. Before him, James Earl Ray's file.

AGENT SULLIVAN  
U.S. Army dishonorably discharged,  
Joliet, Pontiac Prison,  
Leavenworth, Missouri State Pen  
escapee.

Agent Sullivan picks up the phone. He dials J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover picks up.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (PHONE)  
Yeah?

AGENT SULLIVAN  
He's out.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (V.O.)  
Go find him.

INT. UNIVERSITY AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

King stands before a bank of microphones. Byron, dressed professionally and holding a small brief case, stands by in the wings.

MLK  
Such disruptions in our inner  
cities are not fully baked without  
cause.

EXT. AUTO LOT - DAY

James Earl Ray walks with a used-car salesman over to a white, convertible 1966 Ford Mustang.

JAMES EARL RAY  
A man can see some country with  
this.

MLK(V.O.)

It chooses to regard America's  
promises for the many but not for  
the "all".

INT. CANADIAN BAR - WEEKS LATER - NIGHT

Ray sits at the bar alone.

He watches a Canadian news broadcast about the inner-city  
racial unrest in the states - blacks, whites, chaos and  
mayhem.

Ray sips a beer.

JAMES EARL RAY

Decline of western civilization  
right there.

A second man pulls a stool out from beneath the bar and sits.

(This is Raul from Besse Brewer's Rooming House - first  
actual introduction).

RAUL

I don't envy what's going on down  
there in the states, huh? Soon,  
they'll be busing every black that  
wants a free ticket into every  
white neighborhood that's willing  
to give it.

Ray turns.

JAMES EARL RAY

Segregation and forever.

RAUL

Cheers to that, my friend. Barkeep?  
A round of what he's having on me.  
Name's Raul.

JAMES EARL RAY

Ramon. Ramon Sneyd.

EXT. THE L.A. TIMES - DAY

TWO FEDERAL AGENTS (30's) walk through its front doors.

MLK(V.O.)

Why do America's powers turn its  
deaf ears to its own-made promises?

EXT. ALABAMA STREET - DAY

MLK and John Lewis quietly lead the way in a small demonstration.

Byron snaps photos of protesters and opposition gawkers.

Within those who watch, planted Federal Agents.

MLK(V.O.)  
The poor and the disenfranchised  
have grown even more bleak. Both  
the inner-city negroes and the  
Appalachian white man fight over  
the tossed-about scraps.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Byron sits with photos sprawled about his desk and bed. King speaks to Correta on the phone.

MLK(V.O.)  
With the growing middle-class in  
sprawling communities, we grow  
comfortable.

Byron puts photos together where he sees a number of the same people from different cities in them. (FBI).

He separates them out from the others.

MLK(V.O.)  
We paint serene pictures and tell  
ourselves the work is done.

EXT. IOWA STREET - DAYS LATER - DAY

Newspaper stands; papers read of maligned headlines of MLK.  
"KING MISSES MARK!". "KING UNDERMINES MOVEMENT!"

Byron approaches and pulls a paper out of a newspaper stand.

MLK(V.O.)  
And, the agitated feelings of those  
without now become threatening to  
those who have.

INT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - BEDROOM - 7:30PM - NIGHT

Marie steps on a small step-stool reaching for her books from Pellman. She sees above her head an unfamiliar box.

She takes it down, but its contents spill about on the ground around her.

MLK (V.O.)  
 And our Nation's discontents are  
 fed by the postponements of a  
 Nation's promises.

Marie steps off the stool and is suddenly held frozen by what she sees below her letters of hate, confederate letterhead, photos of lynching's, dead black men hanging from trees.

EXT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - 2AM - NIGHT

Byron is dropped off from one of his many trips. The car continues down the street.

He approaches the front door - quiet to open it.

INT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - NIGHT

Byron enters to see a small light coming from the dining room through the kitchen. He puts down his travel bag.

He pushes through the kitchen.

BYRON  
 Marie?

INT. DINING ROOM - 2 AM - NIGHT

Byron enters to see Marie's friend Juanita sitting, staring straight forward.

BYRON  
 Juanita? What're you doing here?

Before her & scattered about the table are the confederate letters, photos, and hate mail covering the entire table.

JUANITA  
 She found these in your closet.  
 She's out in the backyard.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Marie stands near the warming barbeque. In and around it are burnt cards and letters from the Ebenezer storage basement.

Martin approaches. Marie, nearly comatose, shivers from the shock.

Byron approaches and sees dozens of burnt hate postcards.

BYRON  
 I didn't want you to see those.

MARIE

I needed a book that was in the closet. I didn't recognize that other box. Where'd they come from?

BYRON

Ebenezer. Sent to Dr. King.

Marie turns to face him.

MARIE

Why are they here? In our house?

Marie reaches for a postcard of a lynching. A black man hangs from a tree while dozens of white folk enjoy their Sunday picnic.

Marie reads:

MARIE (CONT'D)

"Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., your efforts for those "nigs" in that zoo of yours is futile."

Byron shuts the top of the barbeque lid and puts his arms around his wife.

BYRON

Let's go inside.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Byron and Marie enter from the backyard. Marie double-locks the door behind them.

Both enter and approach the table where Juanita sits. Before the three of them, a table covered in letters of hate.

BYRON

He gets boxes of these sent to his house and Ebenezer. I read'em, sort 'em out, categorize them from threatening to worse.

MARIE

You never mentioned this to me.

BYRON

It scared me when I first saw them. I didn't want that for you.

MARIE

I want to feel safe, Byron. Finish school, have our baby, live.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

That world should be outside of our house, not in it.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Byron and Marie sleep. Through the bedroom drapes, we see small flickers of light bounce about from the outside.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

A MAN (30's - Fed Agent) dressed in dark clothes carefully, places the garbage cans lids quietly back over the cans.

EXT. WEST MONTGOMERY - MONTHS LATER - NIGHT

James Earl Ray cruises the Montgomery streets for prostitutes.

He sees a three or four ladies on a street corner. Ray slows to see TWO PROSTITUTES (30's) who openly solicit.

PROSTITUTE #1

You want to play wit' me, white boy?

JAMES EARL RAY

How about your friend, too?

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Ray, liquored up and with some cash to burn, undresses the two women and their night gets underway.

JAMES EARL RAY

Any of you ever been to Mexico?

EXT. MLK'S MODEST BRICK HOME - LATE - OTHER DAYS - NIGHT

A black sedan drives by slowly. (Feds).

INT. PELLMAN COLLEGE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Marie sits opposite a PELLMAN COUNSELOR (40).

MARIE

...everything I can do to finish up early.

PELLMAN COUNSELOR (CONT'D)

I understand, Marie but if there's a class to be repeated, it could hurt your overall efforts.

MARIE

I have to start working. It's gotten dangerous for Byron at Ebenezer. I'd just like to know, is there a way?

EXT. CAMPAIGN PLATFORM - DAY

Alabama Governor GEORGE WALLACE (44) stands at a platform at his Governors' inauguration as Alabama Governor.

**SCREEN READS - JANUARY 14, 1963**

GEORGE WALLACE

Today, I've stood once where Jefferson Davis stood. It's very appropriate from the cradle of this confederacy.

INT. ALABAMA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Cameras flash! Wallace takes questions from a pool of reporters. A REPORTER (30's) steps forward.

REPORTER

Sir, in light of the First Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, what needs to happen for the civil rights problems to end in Alabama?

GEORGE WALLACE

What we need son is a couple of first-class funerals.

EXT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - EARLY MORNING - DAY

Byron steps out from the front door, dressed and ready for travel. Marie sees him off. They kiss goodbye for now.

MARIE

Call me when you get there.

BYRON

As soon as we check in.

EXT. ALABAMA STREET - DAYS LATER - DAY

1968: Wallace's presidential campaign is in the air.

A WBRC NEWS INTERVIEWER (50's) gets the opinion on the streets.

It's humid - sticky, voters opine on George Wallace.

An Alabama WOMAN VOTER (40's) wears cat-eyed glasses, she has a terse expression, her mouth tight, her brow frowned.

WOMAN VOTER  
I really think George Wallace  
should be on the ballot.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Byron drives. MLK sits in the backseat going over touches on his next speech.

WOMAN VOTER (V.O.)  
He's the only man in the country  
not afraid to say what he thinks.

INT. ALABAMA COFFEE SHOP - CONT'D - DAY

WBRC Reporter sits with voters. A man of 70, an OLD MAN VOTER smokes.

OLD MAN VOTER  
And, he says what he'll do. That  
means a lot to the people of the  
United States that when he promises  
something, he does it.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - EVENING - NIGHT

Byron pulls King's car into a parking lot. Both tired men get out and make their way to the hotel check-in office.

OLD MAN VOTER (V.O.)  
Good fences make good neighbors.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Byron enters with a couple coffees in Styrofoam cups.

King and John Lewis sit across from one another. King reads the headline of the day. **"WALLACE JOINS PRESIDENTIAL BID!"**

MLK  
"Wallace appeals to white working  
and middle-class voters by  
positioning the oppressed and  
overlooked "redneck" as the new  
outsider, displaced by federal law  
and black activism."

JOHN LEWIS  
A page one grievance campaign.

MLK hands the newspaper to John Lewis.



MLK  
Pure Dixiecrat ushering back in Jim  
Crow.

INT. STORAGE AREA - WEEKS LATER - DAY

Byron pulls down the string on the lone single bulb. Sparse light lights the small room.

Boxes of hate continue to mount.

EXT. BEACHES OF PUERTO VALLARTA - DAY

Tourists lazily line the sun-drenched beaches.

INT. MEXICAN MOTEL - DAY

A cheap piece of art hangs over a king size hotel bed.

Two unclothed prostitutes from Montgomery make pornographic love to a third participant - male Latino (20's) ANDRES.

(Ray now goes by the name - ERIC STALVO GAULT).

JAMES EARL RAY (O.C.)  
That's it... good. Enrique, move  
closer to your right.

ANDRES  
Like this?

Ray directs a make-shift porno.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Yeah, that's it. Now more. More of  
that.

The trio grind their way through. Suddenly, a cheap hanging camera light drops down onto the actors.

JAMES EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
Look out.

The girls scream, and jump out of bed. The scene is blown.  
Enrique, enraged!

Enrique angrily pushes the light off the bed.

ANDRES  
We look like we're okay? We've been  
fucking for you all morning.

The two women get dressed, one lights a cigarette, one steps into the bathroom.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Where you going? We're not done.

PROSTITUTE #1  
And, Erico? Where's our money?

PROSTITUTE #2 (O.C.)  
Si, donde es el dinero, Ereek?

Enrique, full frontally nude approaches Ray - pushes him - slaps him in the face - hard!

Ray is knocked backwards off his feet.

JAMES EARL RAY  
Arrrgghhh...

Enrique reaches for a robe which hangs nearby.

ANDRES  
Fuck you, mamahuevo.

The face of a porn actor now turns into the face of a killer. The nude man grabs Ray by the throat.

ANDRES (CONT'D)  
Vã-stanse hermanas... Nos vamos de aqui. If you don't, I will fuck you up. Comprende? Get our money!!

INT. GROSSE POINTE HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - MICHIGAN - DAY

King stands at a podium. Byron is offstage and nearby with his briefcase.

MLK  
We're here today in concert with one another, speak aloud to one another, and listening to one another.

EXT. ATLANTA RESIDENTIAL HOME - DAY

Two FBI AGENTS (40's), MILESTONE and SANDERS knock on the door of 548 Collier Ridge. A black woman, MRS. JOHNSON (55) opens the door.

MRS. JOHNSON  
Yes, may I help you?

FBI AGENT MILESTONE  
Ma'am, we're agents Milestone and Sanders with the FBI.

(MORE)

FBI AGENT MILESTONE (CONT'D)  
 Are you the property owner of a  
 home on Dorsey Drive?

MRS. JOHNSON  
 Yes. Is there a problem?

INT. GROSSE POINTE HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - MICHIGAN - DAY

King stands at a podium. Byron overlooks schedule notes,  
 travel itinerary, confers with the school's administrators.

MLK  
 With so much activity, destructive  
 and otherwise, and the lower  
 classes which are fed into it...

EXT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - DAY

A pregnant Marie walks along the sidewalk to her home with an  
 arm load of groceries. She is trailed by a nondescript car.

A long camera lens jetties from the rear window. Photos begin  
 clicking like a Gatling gun.

MLK (V.O.)  
 One could merely throw a ball in  
 the air and it would land on any  
 one of them.

INT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - NIGHT

Juanita rests on the couch watching television. Marie studies  
 at the kitchen table.

MLK (V.O.)  
 But I'd like to speak today of a  
 separate nation, a nation divided  
 against itself.

INT. HOOVER'S PERSONAL OFFICE - DAY

J. Edgar Hoover sits with FBI Agent Bill Sullivan.

BILL SULLIVAN  
 If he's successful in putting  
 together an effective coalition,  
 Black Nationalist groups might be a  
 real "Mau Mau" rebellion of it.

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
 And King will be just the chocolate  
 Messiah to pull it off.

INT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - NIGHT

Phone rings. It's late. Byron's voice on the other end.

BYRON (V.O.)  
Hey, it's me.

MARIE  
When are you coming home?

BYRON (V.O.)  
In Atlanta around noon. Long haul  
on this one. You feeling okay?

MARIE  
Little tired. Doctor's visit went  
fine. Other than eating for two,  
good. How'd the speech go?

BYRON (V.O.)  
It's going to make some people real  
angry. Juanita over?

MARIA  
She gave me a ride and stayed for a  
while.

BYRON (V.O.)  
Good. Okay. We're getting on the  
bus now. I love you, Marie.

MARIE  
I love you, too.

EXT. MEXICAN FREEWAY - EARLY MORNING - DAY

As the sun rises, it's James Earl Ray (New alias - Eric  
Starvo Galt) heading north back to the United States in his  
white Mustang.

EXT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - DAY

Departing for Pellman College, Marie opens up the front door.

With books in hand, she steps on something awkward while  
locking the door. She looks down and sees "two nooses" laying  
on her doormat.

Marie lets out a blood-curdling, shrieking scream!!

EXT. ATLANTA BUS STATION - AFTERNOON - DAY

A Greyhound bus pulls into the station. Its door opens. Byron  
throws his bag over his shoulder as he exits.

EXT. MIDDLETON HOME - DAY

A taxi cab pulls over in front of the Middleton home. Bryon gets out.

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - DAY

Byron steps inside to the family room. His entire family is there waiting for him - it's unnervingly quiet.

BYRON  
Where's Marie?

Marie enters from the hallway bedroom.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
I checked in with Miss Joyce when I got in. They said you called Ebenezer. That the police were here. What happened?

Marie, nearly comatose, passes Byron and sits on the living room sofa.

HERB  
They left about an hour ago.

Herb refers to the kitchen table. Byron sees the two nooses lying on the middle of it. Next to them is an envelope.

MARIE  
I opened the door, and they were lying on our front porch.

Byron steps closer and sees the two hangman's nooses.

MARIE (CONT'D)  
I was leaving for Pellman this morning. I stepped out the door, and they were lying there.

Byron takes off his coat and covers the nooses. He turns to his family members.

BYRON  
They're meant for me because I'm working for Dr. King.

HERB  
You both just stay here for a while. We're not having anymore of this nonsense.

INT. MIDDLETON BEDROOM - NIGHT

3 AM. Marie lies in bed fast asleep. Byron sits at a small lighted desk going through photos.

Juggling the safety of his household and that of MLK, Byron compares his own photos from different cities to the same men (FBI Trails) who appear in the photos.

Marie stirs awake. She sees Byron at the small table with the light on. She edges up on her pillow.

MARIE

You have to tell him, Byron. As great as it is, we can't be living this way. I know how much Reverend King means to you, and to be close to him, but it's not your path. I'm your path. Your child is your path. We're going to get hurt if you keep following something that isn't yours.

INT. JOBSITE TRAILER OFFICE - DAY

Byron sits across from his old boss, Mr. Reynolds.

MR. REYNOLDS

Took me a while to find you. I appreciate you coming in.

BYRON

Yes, sir.

MR. REYNOLDS

It's been pointed out to me your observations a number of months back were more about ungrounded gas lines.

BYRON

I'm not sure...

MR. REYNOLDS

We've been experiencing a lot of on-site theft since you've been gone. Been happening for a while now actually. We now know it was the foreman who was selling our own electrical materials to our competitor - then building over the work to hide the losses.

BYRON  
I didn't help him steal anything,  
Mr. Reynolds.

MR. REYNOLDS  
I don't mean that. I'm a Christian  
man, Byron. Black or white, red or  
blue, we're all suppose to operate  
from the word of the good book. At  
least in theory, right?

BYRON  
I think so.

MR. REYNOLDS  
Thou shall not bear false witness.  
I owe you an apology. I'm sorry.  
I'd like to offer you your job back  
and promote you from apprentice to  
journeyman. If you'll consider it?

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - ADMIN OFFICE - DAY

Byron stands before Miss Joyce. She reads his letter of  
resignation.

MISS JOYCE  
You're leaving us Byron?

BYRON  
It's best for us now, Miss Joyce.  
He takes his walk in the park on  
Thursdays. I'll be there if he'd  
like to talk.

EXT. NORTH HIGHLAND AVE - LOS ANGELES - DAY

James Earl Ray arrives in Hollywood passing the Hollywood  
Bowl in his white convertible mustang.

RADIO (V.O.)  
Los Angeles weather this morning...

EXT. ATLANTA PARK - DAY

Byron sits on a bench - troubled, deflated. MLK approaches  
with Byron's resignation letter and sits alongside him.

MLK  
Miss Joyce said you might be out  
here.

BYRON  
Good morning, Reverend.

MLK sits alongside Byron. Byron pushes over to him a manila envelope.

MLK  
What's this?

BYRON  
Some pictures you should see. Our various stops.

MLK takes the envelope and opens it, thumbing through the pictures.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
You had inclinations the government was always watching you. These same men have been at every speech, every auditorium, college, and every church.

In each one, we see the same two to three men at the various locations.

MLK  
I see.

BYRON  
There's more. It's Marie.

MLK  
What is it?

BYRON  
The day we came back from Michigan, Marie opened the front door in the morning on her way to school. She almost tripped from what they left there for us.

Byron shows MLK the photos of the nooses. MLK takes a breath, knows all too well.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Brought her right back to Blue Ridge. I got back and she was with my parents - she was real quiet. The kind of quiet that says everything without saying anything.

MLK  
You've got to protect your family - above all things. That's what it means to be a husband, and a father.



BYRON

They offered my job back. For Marie's sake, I took it.

MLK

Looks like I've pulled you into "quite a complex unfolding" haven't I?

BYRON

No, Reverend. You've pulled me out of myself. My terrified self. My walking around, scared-stiff self. It's no way to live. I didn't realize how tired I was of carrying it with me. But I'm not afraid anymore, Dr. King. Just not. Focused like I should be. My father said something. He told me that working for you, I would have a "ringside seat to history itself." And, I have. I owe you that.

Byron, a bit lost can only stare forward, eyes staring far away.

BYRON (CONT'D)

Thanks for the ticket to see the world. Thanks for letting me see it with my own eyes.

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - 1535 N. SERRANO L.A. - NIGHT

Ray watches George Wallace interviews - politically aroused by them.

TV NEWS GEORGE WALLACE

This is a campaign about "Law and Order".

EXT. GEORGE WALLACE NORTH HOLLYWOOD FIELD OFFICE - DAY

Ray approaches a George Wallace field office. Wallace posters abound.

TV GEORGE WALLACE (V.O.)

The white forgotten "redneck" now has to fear for his jobs, schools, and neighborhoods.

INT. ARTHUR MURRAY DANCING SCHOOL - DAY

Ray glides across the floor in overstated, exaggerated fashion as if to be a handsome, famous, ballroom dancer.

EXT. NORTH HOLLYWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD - 1ST HOME - DAY

Ray canvases a neighborhood. He knocks on a door. A woman answers.

NEIGHBORHOOD WOMAN

Yes?

JAMES EARL RAY

Good morning ma'am. I'm with the George Wallace campaign. May I speak to you about the safety of your neighborhood?

INT. ARTHUR MURRY DANCE SCHOOL - DAY

With every step of exaggerated fantasy, Ray travels deeper and deeper into the illusory depths of self-grandiose-delusion.

He moves closer to the dance room mirror. He inspects his face, nose and cheekbones.

INT. PLASTIC SURGEON'S OFFICE - DAY

DR. RUSSEL HADLEY (43) examines Ray's nose for surgery.

DR. HADLEY

It can be done, Mr. Galt. But why?

JAMES EARL RAY

I'm beginning to get work doing commercials as an actor.

EXT. PAYPHONE - DAY

Ray speaks with Raul. He stands there in the booth with gauze across his nose.

RAUL (V.O.)

We can first do one rifle, make a little money. Others after.

INT. MEMPHIS MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

MEMPHIS MAYOR HENRY LOEB (48) sits behind his desk before a few city council members.

MAYOR HENRY LOEB

I'm telling you, gentlemen. Only the mayor possesses the power to recognize any union!

(MORE)

MAYOR HENRY LOEB (CONT'D)

I don't care if all of the Martin  
Luther King's in the world come to  
Memphis. This city is not going  
union!

EXT. HIGHWAY 10 - DAY

James Earl Ray drives on the open road east towards  
Birmingham Alabama.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - ATLANTA - DAY

Byron, back in his work clothes, sits on his lunch break at a  
table having lunch. A black man (FBI Counter Intelligence  
Agent) sits.

The two men stare at one another.

BYRON

I've seen you at Ebenezer. I know  
who you are.

BLACK FBI AGENT

I'm an agent with the FBI.

Byron remains quiet.

BYRON

What is it you want with Reverend  
King?

BLACK FBI AGENT

Not him. You.

BYRON

Me?

BLACK FBI AGENT

We'd like to ask if you'd consider  
working for us? You're close to  
him. He trusts you.

BYRON

Were you the one who left the  
nooses on my porch for my wife to  
find?

The agent doesn't answer but pushes forward an envelope  
filled with 100 bills.

BLACK FBI AGENT

We're just interested if he's  
funded by anyone in particular? If  
by any angel investors?

(MORE)

BLACK FBI AGENT (CONT'D)  
 If he's speaking to any other  
 groups like the Black Panthers.

BYRON  
 I'm afraid you're a bit late. I'm  
 out of the MLK business. But thanks  
 for stopping by.

Byron pushes the envelope of money back toward the agent. The  
 agent gets up - picks up the envelope.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
 Being black and working against Dr.  
 King doesn't bother you?

BLACK FBI AGENT  
 I'd rather be giving out the hits  
 with a badge, than taking'em  
 without one. It's good you got out  
 when you did.

The man turns and exits through the front door. The waitress  
 stops by the table and drops off the lunch tab.

BYRON  
 Thanks.

Byron stands up over his table. He reaches for his wallet,  
 picks up the check.

He puts a few dollars down and turns to exit. As he turns,  
 Byron bumps into a another man - a white man, a deferential  
 James Earl Ray.

JAMES EARL RAY  
 My fault. Pardon me.

INT. EBENEZER ADMIN - DAY

Reverend King enters the front office with a newspaper in his  
 hands. He drops it on the desk of Miss Joyce.

MLK  
 They leaked we were booked at the  
 Holiday Inn. Let's use the Lorraine  
 up there, Joyce. Black hotel. For  
 now, a little easier. Dr. Abernathy  
 and I can share a room.

MISS JOYCE  
 Byron won't be with you. And, the  
 driver?

MLK

Call Solomon Jones. Ask him if he'd like to make the trip?

INT. AREOMARINE GUN SHOP - BIRMINGHAM ALABAMA - DAY

Ray carries a rifle case into the store. (Alias - Harvey Lowemeyer). He approaches the counter.

GUNSHOP SALEMAN

Mr. Lowemeyer? Back so soon? You make up your mind?

JAMES EARL RAY

I think so. I'd like to look at that Bushmaster you were pitching me yesterday.

EXT. PAYPHONE - BIRMINGHAM - LATER - DAY

Ray stands inside a phone booth speaking to Raul.

RAUL (V.O.)

Get up to Memphis. Leave the rifle in the trunk. I'll have a room for you ready. Park in the back and leave the trunk slightly open.

INT. JIM'S CAFE - MEMPHIS - DAY

Owner of Jim's Café, a tight faced man LOYD JOWERS (42) sits with Mafia member FRANKI LIBERTO (50).

Others include, Memphis PD Officer MARRELL MCCOLLLOUGH (40's), MP Lieutenant EARL CLARKE, THIRD MP OFFICER (30's) and two non-descript men. (Probable FEDS - CIA, NSA).

FRANKE LIBERTO

I'll have the courier deliver 100,000. There'll be someone to pick up the rifle. He'll bring it here.

MERREL MCCOLOUGH

I've assigned eight men to King's security detail. It'll then be reduced to four, then two, then one at the Lorraine.

EXT. MEMPHIS GUN RANGE - DAY

Memphis PD Lieutenant Earl Clarke takes target practice at the range. Pow! Pow! Pow! All direct hits.

INT. BESSE BREWER'S ROOMING HOUSE PARKING LOT - DAY

Ray pulls into the parking lot. He gets out of his Mustang, approaches the rear of the car and slightly opens his trunk.

INT. BESSE BREWER'S ROOMING HOUSE - DAY

Ray walks in to the front desk. An attendant approaches.

JAMES EARL RAY (ALIAS)  
John Willard. Reservation for one.

EXT. BESSE BREWER'S ROOMING HOUSE PARKING LOT - DAY

Raul approaches the trunk of Ray's Mustang. He opens it and places the rifle in a duffle bag, closes the trunk and walks.

Last words of MLK.

MLK (V.O.)  
The earth is shaking in Memphis.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Ray walks the long hallway to the furthest room towards the back.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
It's public servants loyally serve  
but the good favor of it is not  
loyally returned.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

Ray enters, drops his bag and approaches the window. He looks out to see the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
Bull Connor has no hoses that can  
put out this kind of determined  
inferno.

EXT. BYRON AND MARIE'S HOME - DAY

Moving boxes stack high on the front porch. Byron and Marie carry them down the stairs towards the awaiting truck.

The dream of their own home for now is over.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
And we'd see his jailers and they'd  
see us, for the first time, up  
close, personal.

EXT. MASON TEMPLE CHURCH - DAY

King and company pull their two cars into the parking lot. His team consists of JESSEE JACKSON (27), HOSEA WILLIAMS (42), RALPH ABERNATHY (44) and ANDREW YOUNG (36).

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
Stirred by our stillness. Our quiet  
convictions.

The men get out. Martin Luther King leads the way towards his last and final speech.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.) (CONT'D)  
A physical and spiritual phenomenon  
which left them searching their own  
belief as jailers, containers of  
men.

INT. MASON TEMPLE CHURCH - DAY

King stands exhausted yet energize at the podium.

MLK (CONT'D)  
The inevitable crossroads between  
labor and management, efficiency  
and the toil that is tasked to  
produce that efficiency.

EXT. MIDDLETON BEDROOM - DAY

A very pregnant Marie sleeps. Byron enters and approaches.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
Before the hoses, before the dogs,  
before the men with clubs, before  
the authorities.

BYRON  
You okay?

MARIE  
Just tired. Going to sleep for a  
while.

INT. EBENEZER ADMIN - DAY

Miss Joyce takes a call. Lorraine Hotel manager on the other side.

MISS JOYCE  
First Baptist Ebenezer. Yes, this  
is Miss Joyce.

MANAGER VOICE (PHONE)  
Miss Joyce we just wanted to  
confirm the room change that was  
made earlier today for Mr. King to  
an upstairs balcony room?

INT. MIDDLETON HOUSE - DAY

The phone rings. Byron picks up.

MISS JOYCE (PHONE)  
Byron. Something's wrong. Someone  
changed Dr. King's room  
reservation.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - DAY

**CHURCH COMMITTEE SENATE COUNSEL - 1975**

Byron remains sitting across from A.O. Schwarz. He's  
exhausted, hesitant to finish the story - the worst part of  
it to come.

BYRON  
I could hear it in her voice.  
Something was wrong.

INT. MIDDLETON KITCHEN - DAY

(Back to scene April 4th - 1968)

Adalia washed the dishes over the sink.

BYRON  
Mama... I need you to keep an eye  
on Marie. I'm going to Memphis.

ADALIA  
Memphis? Dr. King's in Memphis.  
What is it, Byron?!

Byron turns quickly and leaves.

BYRON (V.O.)  
There was no time to explain  
anything.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Byron enters the freeway onramp at 12:00 PM.

BYRON (V.O.)  
384 miles, highway 22.



EXT. MASON TEMPLE CHURCH - DAY

Six policeman of the eight turn their backs and walk out through the exit doors leaving King two less men for protection.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
All the worry to my own safety, is  
of no longer a concern.

EXT. HIGHWAY 22 - DAY

Byron drives at top speeds - worried, fatigued.

INT. JIM'S GRILL - MEMPHIS - DAY

A Courier (40's) brings in a satchel through the back door. He approaches Lloyd Jowers - opens the satchel - 100,000 in cash.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

A pair of gloved hands pull the 30.06 Bushmaster out of it's duffel bag.

EXT. HIGHWAY 22 - WINFIELD - DAY

Byron passes the offramp to Winfield.

BYRON (V.O.)  
The Reverend flew out of Atlanta  
with Dr. Abernathy, Jesse Jackson  
and others.

INT. MIDDLETON HOME - DAY

Marie steps out her room and into the family room where Herb and Adalia watch TV.

MARIE  
My water broke.

Adalia snaps up to her feet.

ADALIA  
Get the car, Herb!

MARIE  
Where's Byron?

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

Gloved hands load a 30.06 Springfield cartridge inside the chamber of the rifle.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
Some said threats were lying in  
wait for me in Memphis.

INT. MASON TEMPLE - DAY

King approaches the podium.

INT. ATLANTA HOSPITAL - DAY

On a gurney, Marie is led with surrounding family down to the  
emergency room.

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL - DAY

Martin and team slowly walk up the second story steps to the  
Lorraine Hotel balcony.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
Well, I don't know what's going to  
happen to me now.

EXT. BLUES CITY THRIFT STORE - DAY

Byron throttles past the landmark. Memphis exit signs lie  
ahead.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
We've got some difficult days  
ahead.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Marie groans in pain. A surgical light is brought over the  
birthing mother.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

Gloved hands adjust the 4 x 7 Redfield scope.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
But it really doesn't matter with  
me now.

INT. LORRAINE HOTEL BATHROOM - DAY

MLK leans over the sink and washes cool water over his face.

He looks in the mirror - sees a tired man, an invigorated  
man.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
Because I've been to the mountain  
top. And, I don't mind.

EXT. FREEWAY OFFRAMP - DAY

Byron exits, gunning his way to the Lorraine.

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL BALCONY - 5:55 PM - DAY

MLK steps out from room 306.

MLK ( CONT'D V.O.)  
Like anybody, I would like to live  
a long life. Longevity has its  
place.

EXT. MEMPHIS - DAY

Byron races through the Memphis streets to get to the  
Lorraine Hotel.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
But I'm not concerned about that  
now.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - DAY

Gloved hands chamber a round into the 30.6 rifle.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
I just want to do God's will.

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

A white Memphis police officer sits inside his squad car  
getting instructions on his radio.

WHITE OFFICER  
Copy that.

The man puts the radio back in its holder and gets out of the  
car. He approaches the black officer.

WHITE OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Looks like they're sending you  
home.

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL BALCONY - DAY

King stands at the balcony and looks outward.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
And he's allowed me to go up to the  
mountain. And I've looked over. And  
I've seen the promised land!

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - 5:58 PM - DAY

A bathroom window is slightly pushed open with the rifle barrel.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
I may not get there with you.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - DAY

Byron throttles at top speeds!

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
But I want you to know tonight,  
that we, as a people.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - 5:59 PM - DAY

A Bushmaster rifle barrel rests on the sill.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
We will get to the promise land.

EXT. 450 MULBERRY ST. LORRAINE HOTEL - DAY

Road traffic is light. Byron furiously drives. The Lorraine Hotel comes into sight. Byron guns the pedal.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
I'm so happy, tonight.

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Byron cranks his wheel hard to get into the parking lot. He looks up to see MLK standing alone on the balcony above.

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
I'm not worried about anything!

Byron screeches to a stop. His car door flies open.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - DAY

# **CHURCH COMMITTEE SENATE COUNSEL - 1975**

Holding Marie's hand, Byron, gripped in memory - not a sound.

BYRON  
I saw the barrel out the window  
from the boarding house.

EXT. LORRAINE HOTEL PARKING LOT - CONT'D - DAY

(Back to scene - April 4th, 1968)

Byron jumps out of the car and runs towards the flight of ascending hotel stairs

MLK (CONT'D V.O.)  
I'm not fearing any man!

He leaps up the stairs, stretching at two to three at a time.

BYRON  
REVEREND?!

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - 6:04 PM - DAY

The shooter's finger rests inside the trigger assembly.

EXT. LORRAINE BALCONY - DAY

From resting on the railing, King leans up.

MLK (V.O.)  
Mine eyes have seen the glory of  
the coming of the Lord.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE ROOM - 6:07 PM - DAY

The shooter's finger squeezes.

We follow the bullet out of the rifle from the bathroom window as it travels outward toward the Lorraine.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Marie screams, her tight fists clinch.

EXT. LORRAINE MOTEL - DAY

Byron's long strides carry him across the pathway and body of Martin Luther King.

As the soft tip shell carries across Mulberry Avenue, Byron's body is in position to take the round.

The bullet hits, but it's Byron that goes down and not MLK.

He drops to the feet of the preacher. King points upwards and across the street to the rooming house.

Subsequent mayhem. Jesse Jackson, Hosea Williams, Ralph Abernathy all rush to Byron's felled body.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Marie's baby enters the world while Byron's life looks to be taken.

EXT. JIM'S GRILL - MEMPHIS - DAY

A nondescript man hurriedly hustles up the street beneath the Rooming House. He drops a bag in front of a small store.

EXT. HIGHWAY 22 - MEMPHIS - NIGHT

Ray's white Mustang is seen heading Memphis outbound. News and radio chatter fill the airwaves of the Memphis shooting.

INT. BAPTIST MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - WEEKS LATER - NIGHT

The rhythmic sounds of a medical ventilator fill the still hospital air.

We see Byron lying in bed in a deep coma. His left shoulder - heavily bandaged.

A hand then rests over his forehead. Byron's tired eyes open. He turns his head to the right to see Martin Luther King Jr.

Tears race down Byron's face. His voice is no more than a whisper.

MLK

Hello, Byron.

BYRON

Dr. King.

MLK

They tried. You stopped them.

BYRON

How long have I been here?

MLK

Two weeks.

BYRON

Marie?

MLK

She's doing fine. They're coming up. She's got something for you.

BYRON

I saw the barrel come out the window from across the street. I didn't think I had enough time.

MLK

Byron. It's over. Rest. There's some people who want to see you.

A nurse enters the room.

NURSE  
Your family is here, Byron.

Carrying their new child, Marie and the entire family  
Middleton fill the doorway - gradually make their way inside.

HERB  
Reverend King.

The men shake hands, King steps into the background.

MLK  
Your son saved not only me but a  
generation. Let me give you some  
room.

Seeing Byron wounded and lying in bed, Adalia steadies  
herself aside her husband's shoulder.

ADALIA  
There he is. Herb, our baby.

Russel, Milan, and Lionel surround their brother on either  
side of the Byron's bed.

RUSSEL  
Hey, little man.

Byron smiles.

MILAN  
Dad's telling us we're getting the  
group back together...

LIONEL  
We're going to need you to hurry up  
and heal. I can't hit those notes  
like you can.

BYRON  
Sure. Where's Marie?

Holding their new infant, Marie emerges from behind the  
brothers. She places her gentle hand on his cheek.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Hi.

MARIE  
Hi. Look who I have with me.

Marie lowers the child so Byron can see.

MARIE (CONT'D)

She wanted to meet her new father.  
Say, hello, baby girl. She's got  
your eyes, Byron.

BYRON

And she has your smile. Look at  
that.

The nurse steps in.

NURSE

We should probably let him get some  
rest.

The family steps back, but it's MLK who steps forward. He  
leans in and whispers.

MLK

"Every man runs."

MLK holds Byron's good, resting hand and squeezes and moves  
in closer.

BYRON

"But not every man arrives".

MLK

Welcome home, my loyal friend.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - MONTHS LATER - DAY

MLK stands at the podium.

Byron and his entire family all sit in the front row.

Marie and Byron sit on either side of their baby girl LEAN.(3  
months)

MLK (CONT'D)

From lesser hardships to his most  
profound trial, we have that  
special kind of hero in our  
congregation this morning.

INT. STORAGE AREA - DAY

The lightbulb string is pulled and a sparse light is thrown  
toward the stored boxes of hate, its mail and their threats.

MLK and Byron stand side by side facing all the epitaphs.

The feeling of threat, at least for now - fades.



EXT. BACK OF EBENEZER - DAY

Martin and Byron stand next to a small incinerator. Both men load the boxes of hate correspondence into the fire.

Fire engulfs the mail, the lynching postcards.

INT. EBENEZER CHURCH - ADMIN OFFICE - DAY

King puts on his coat getting ready to travel. Byron stands nearby - once more close to history in the making.

MLK  
I'm sorry Byron you won't be coming  
to Washington.

BYRON  
It's okay, Senator. Marie and I'll  
be watching all of it on the news.

Newspaper lies on Miss Joyce's desk.

ATLANTA TRIBUNE READS: **GEORGIA SENATOR MLK SECURES LANDMARK  
VICTORY!!**

BYRON (CONT'D)  
Congratulations.

INT. SENATE COUNSEL OFFICE - DAY

**CHURCH COMMITTEE SENATE COUNSEL - 1975**

The room is quiet. The story is over. A SENATE PAGE (14)  
knocks on the door lightly and steps forward.

SENATE PAGE  
Mr. Schwarz? They're ready for Mr.  
Middleton's testimony.

INT. SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Byron stands with Marie and Emma on one side and A.O. Schwarz  
on the other.

The senate conference doors open. Byron stands facing the  
entire committee members.

BYRON  
What do I tell them?

A.O. SCHWARZ  
Tell the truth. All of it, for both  
Emmett, Martin and yourself.

EXT. BURR OAK CEMETERY - ALSIP, ILLINOIS - DAY

Byron (29) stands alone in front of Emmett Till's grave.  
Headstone reads, "Emmett Louis Till - July 25, 1941 / August  
28th, 1955.

He lays down a bouquet of flowers.

BYRON

I'm sorry for what happened to you,  
Emmet.(Smiles) Named my daughter  
after you. Someday the world will  
know your name and your story. I'm  
going to see to it.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. WEST POTOMAC PARK - 54 YEARS LATER - DAY

**SCREEN READS: 54 YEARS LATER - APRIL 4TH, 2023.**

Now (77), Byron sits alone at the Martin Luther King Monument  
near next to the capitol's Tidal Basin.

Only a dry wind from the Potomac River fills the air.

He looks up to see the white granite wall and the granite  
image of his old friend, Martin Luther King Jr.

BYRON

My old friend...

Marie (75) strolls along with daughter Emma (54), Emma's  
daughter, CECILIA (34) and Cecilia's daughter, CHELSEA (5).  
(Byron's great-granddaughter).

Chelsea, with a fistful of balloons dances and skips her way  
over to Byron.

CHELSEA

Hi Papa...

BYRON

Hey, darlin'...

Chelsea points up to the MLK Monument.

CHELSEA

Who's that man out of the rock,  
Papa?

BYRON

He was a friend of mine.

CHELSEA

That man..?

BYRON  
Yes, that man.

In the distance, we see a small group of people who reenact a quiet protest making their way to the Lincoln Memorial.

Chelsea tries to read the words on the monument.

CHELSEA  
Out.. of.. the mountain of...  
despair, comes the rock of hope.

BYRON  
That's right, child. That's right.  
What's he doing up there?

Byron gets up and reaches his hand out to his great granddaughter. He looks over to Marie and the others.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
C'mon. I'll tell you about him.

CHELSEA  
How old were you when you knew him?

BYRON  
I was a young man.

CHELSEA  
That's a long time ago.

BYRON  
A long time ago.

The family meet up, turn and begin walking away.

BYRON (CONT'D)  
I first met him when your great-grandmother wanted to get married.

The Middletons begin to follow the other reenactors who are quietly walking together in a remembrance-protest of the MLK's speech at the Mall - April 23, 1963.

We begin to fade to black.

THE END