

PUSSY VALLEY

Pilot

"Perpetratin' "

Created and Written
By Katori Hall

Based on her play

EXT. APARTMENT - BALCONY - DUSK

A WOMAN (20s, black, "Flawless AF") looks out at the view--a dilapidated COMMERCIAL STRIP running on fumes. Wrapped in cashmere and sorrow, she fingers the rusty rails of the balcony with a peeling French manicure.

WOMAN

I'll take it.

OFF-SCREEN the JANGLE of KEYS.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Anywhere to get some groceries around here?

ATTENDANT (O.S.)

Naw. Gotta walk a bit down the road ways to get to a Kroger. Club 'cross the skreet got a mean buffet though.

The woman steps back in from the balcony, sliding the door behind her. But the sounds of REGGAETON and a COUPLE SCREAMING in SPANISH continue to make the walls vibrate.

WOMAN

Are they going to keep that up all night?

ATTENDANT

All day, too. We don't call this complex 'The Holler' for no reason.

She rolls her eyes, as the attendant SLAMS the door shut behind him.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The woman looks at the greige walls of her empty cocoon as the sun sets. She kneels in front of a SUITCASE and begins unpacking.

We hear the RUSTLE of TISSUE PAPER as she unwraps: A pencil skirt. Loubies. Pearls. Louis Vuitton purse. She gets to the bottom to reveal...

A WHITE SHIRT CAKED WITH BLOOD...

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

...the woman leaning over the sink, scrubbing in her panties and bra. It's hella hot, if the sweat skiing down her back is any indication. Breathless, she holds in the tears welling. She rinses and wrings the shirt out. Lifts it up for inspection. Beat. It's *purdee* white, now. All her sins washed away...

DJ STALLION (PRE-LAP)
Welcome to Sat'day Night at the
Pink Pony. The finest shake junt
right off Exit 2-9 in the Dirty
Delta as fur-tile as the Nile...

EXT. THE PINK PONY - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

We FLOAT past a line of PATRONS - a DOUGHBOY, a snaggle-toothed TRUCK DRIVER, a BI-CURIOUS BIKER GIRL CREW - before dipping into the shadows of the front door...

INT. THE PINK PONY - HALLWAY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

...Through a dark tunnel, we see the stage, which is too far and *out of focus*, but we can see the movement of TWIRLING BODIES, LIGHTS, and SMOKE making love in the circus beyond. A BOTTLE GIRL passes by.

A DRUNKEN MAN dips in and out of the camera's frame. Suddenly, we turn the corner and the bright kaleidoscopic colors de-saturate as we slide through a door with hanging beads into another world...

INT. THE PINK PONY - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

...SQUEAKY stall doors. DRIPPING faucets. The BUZZ of fluorescent lights. BUCKED-NAKED WOMEN are SLAMMING their lockers. FEBREEZING stripper floss. COUNTING tips. FILING talons...

MERCEDES (25, black, "The OG") is in a sustained yoga position hanging upside down against a warm-up pole. She is flexible as heyell. Her bestie GIT 'EM GIDGET (20, "The White Girl") is icing her thigh.

MERCEDES
And this niggah gone say, "Can I
get some change?" I was like, naw,
niggah, NAW! He acting like my g-
string a mufuckin' collection
plate.

GIDGET
(cackling)
Amen!

MERCEDES
And here I thought strippin' was a
recession proof industry. Bitch,
how that pole burn tho?

Mercedes goes to touch it.

GIDGET
(sucking in)
Stttsssss!

MERCEDES
Betta put some Neosporin on that
bitch.

GIDGET
Yet another scar on my pretty-ass
legs.

Gidget stands up to inspect her legs.

MERCEDES
Git 'em Gidget, wit them pretty-ass
legs!!

Gidget struts around in her g-string. Mercedes SMACKS her on
the ass. They LAUGH.

Suddenly, MISS MISSISSIPPI (20, black, "The Masterpiece")
bursts through the door past the hanging beads with a bloody
bar towel over her head.

GIDGET
Stttsssss!

MERCEDES
What the hell--

MISS MISSISSIPPI
Customer put his fuckin' beer on
the stage. I do a monkey drop and
it end up busting me in my fuckin'
head.

GIDGET
STTTSSSSSSSSSS!

MERCEDES
You gone need more than some
Neosporin for that, you gone need
some stitches.

MISS MISSISSIPPI
Mercedes, finish dancing my turn
for me.

MERCEDES
Unh, unh! My arms is tired. I'm
liable to fly right off the pole
and into the--

GIDGET
Mercedes, finish that girl turn.

MERCEDES
Hell, why don't you do it?

GIDGET
Cause I just went out--

MISS MISSISSIPPI
I'll give you a line.

Beat. SCREECH. Somebody just done grabbed the mic.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (O.S.)
Miss Mississippi, if you don't
bring yo' black ass back out here
on this staaage...

Miss Mississippi looks at her with those big doe eyes.

MERCEDES
Bitch, you owe me more than a line.

With that, Mercedes struts her good-goods past the hanging
beads. She opens the door, that DIRTY SOUTH TRAP MUSIC wafts
into the dressing room. The door closes. The MUSIC becomes
MUFFLED again. Miss Mississippi stares into the mirror
investigating the cut on her forehead. Gidget looks at her
with concern.

MISS MISSISSIPPI
First day back off maternity leave
and I get another fucking scar.

Gidget's gaze falls, landing on the hand prints snaking like
a necklace around her neck.

GIDGET
Hair can cover this one. Floss
can't cover that one.

Miss Mississippi looks down at her neck in the mirror. Beat.
Reaches for more makeup to hide the black and blue.

INT. THE PINK PONY - MAIN FLOOR - NIGHT

Mercedes takes to the floor. With each *BUMP, BUMP, BUMP*, of the beat, her buttocks BOUNCE...

Uninterested, the CUSTOMERS look like they're about to drown in they beers. Mercedes' head swivels, surveying the room. This shit ain't gone be easy...

EXT. THE PINK PONY - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a pair of those RED BOTTOMS CLICKING across the wet asphalt. PAN UP to see the woman, all decked out as a bougie wet dream, getting in line.

DIAMOND, (20s, black, Ex-Marine, salty) is patting down MOFOS hard at the door. He swipes the metal detector over CUSTOMER 1's head. BEEEEEEEEEP.

CUSTOMER 1
That's that bullet.

DIAMOND
(shaking his head)
Twanky dollars, niggah.

Customer 1 gives it. Diamond waves him on through. The woman is up next. Diamond doesn't even put her through the paces. She presents him with a twenty dollar bill.

DIAMOND (CONT'D)
Naw, that'll be 30, lil' mama.

WOMAN
But that gentleman just paid 20.

DIAMOND
That's how much it cost for a pretty bitch like you.

WOMAN
That's how you give compliments around these here parts?

DIAMOND
Especially for non-working pussy.

WOMAN
Excuse. Me?

DIAMOND
Thass the politickin' of the Pink Pony. Uncle Clifford rules.

He points to a sign that reads: "UNCLE CLIFFORD RULES"

MEN \$20/BITCHES \$30. NO CAMERA PHONES, NO FUNNY MONEY, NO BULLETS AND NO MUTHAFUCKING CHIPS!!!

WOMAN

No...chips?

Diamond does not move. The woman digs back into her wallet.

CLOSE ON a sole HAMILTON. The only thing she has left. She looks back up.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Look, just take this 20 and...my email.

DIAMOND

Yo' email? Wow. It's like that? Well...Take yo' Halle Berry lookin' ass on somewhere. You ain't even my type. Next!

Deflated, the woman starts walking away. However, her eyes land on another sign: TONIGHT! BOOTY BATTLE AMATEUR NIGHT. \$50 PRIZE & BUFFET PLATTER. She stops. Beat.

RACK FOCUS to a group of scantily-clad AMATEUR NIGHT HOPEFULS fluttering like moths under a street lamp at the side of the club.

INT. THE PINK PONY - PRIVATE BOOTH - NIGHT

We see Mercedes' buttocks rippling on the downbeat in the wet of a customer's eye. His hands start exploring...

MERCEDES

Unh, unh, hands where I can see 'em.

Mercedes bends over. And the man is over the moon. She continues to dance for him, but then he tries to place his hand between her crotch.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

Ay, what I say? Hands where I can see 'em.

CUSTOMER 2

Sorry, it slipped.

He pulls out another dollar bill. She begins to bend over in front of him again. Customer 2 looks at his CREW. Slips his finger deeper into her crotch.

Mercedes looks back to him.

CUSTOMER 2 (CONT'D)
(giggling)
Sorry, it slipped again.

Beat. Mercedes grabs his beer bottle. Breaks it on the table and pushes the broken bottle near his face.

CUSTOMER 2 (CONT'D)
Bitch, what the *heyell*...

A BOUNCER swoops in and yokes the customer up and out the door.

Smiling, Mercedes stomps off. PAN DOWN to her g-string where the man's WALLET dangles like a Christmas ornament.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. THE PINK PONY - FRONT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Customer 2 falling onto his ass on the wet asphalt.

CUSTOMER 2
Fuck you, faggot ass niggah! Pink
Pony ain't been hittin' on shit
nowadays no way.

A raspy VOICE shoots from the darkness--

UNCLE CLIFFORD (O.S.)
Jesse, you bets calm down 'fo I
tell yo' wife where you wuz
tonight.

CUSTOMER 2
I want my cover charge back!

UNCLE CLIFFORD (O.S.)
Do you want your cum back, too?

The customer is about to fire off again until WOOP! WOOP!
Customer 2 wobbles off into the night in a huff.

A SHERIFF DEPUTY CAR rolls up on the parking lot. It stops right in front of the entrance. SHERIFF TOMMY BAILEY steps out, (50s, white, "The Law") and walks right up to Diamond and...

UNCLE CLIFFORD (38, "The H.B.I.C"), finally emerging from the shadows. Milky Way skin, weaved out with nails as long as eagle claws and eyelashes that tickle the bellies of the stars, *She* is masculine and feminine in equal measure.

SHERIFF BAILEY

That fellah look a bit drunk.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Naw, Jesse just got a bad case of blue balls. Thass why he wobblin'.

SHERIFF BAILEY

Uncle Clifford...you bets not be serving no liquor...

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Sheriff Bailey, you know me. I abides by the county rules. As you know I got mine own.

SHERIFF BAILEY

Good. Liquor and pussy like a stick of dynamite. Blow up in your face every time.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

I wanna know what kinda liquor and pussy you sippin' on do all that.

SHERIFF BAILEY

You know this new "no tequila and titties" ordinance now. Ain't nobody got time to be writing summonses tonight--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Well, wanna take a look for yourself? Make sure we living right in this warehouse of sin?

Sheriff Bailey pokes his head through the door. He is drawn to the MUSIC. The smell. The possibility... Beat.

SHERIFF BAILEY

Naw...it's a Saturday night. Sunday morning's just a minute away.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Well, let me break you off a little some of these honey golds. For your trouble...

She hands over a STYROFOAM TO-GO BOX. The Sheriff opens it to reveal a STACK OF ONES.

SHERIFF BAILEY

'Night, Uncle Clifford.

The Sheriff jumps into his car and rides off. Uncle Clifford feels Diamond about to speak, interrupts him before his brain can even send the synapse to move his mouth--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Diamond, did anybody you ask for your opinion?

DIAMOND

Just saying...I'on trust no po-po to keep us on the squeaky.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

I don't trust him neither, that why I pay 'em.

DIAMOND

Better off letting 'im have some of these bitches pussy than some bank--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

I don't pimp these hoes. Hell, I'd let him have a taste of mine, but I ain't got one...yet.

Uncle Clifford POPS her pink fan and hustles back inside.

INT. THE PINK PONY - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The metallic back door SCREECHES open and the hopefuls flood in through the Pink Pony's pearly gates.

REVEAL the woman being swept up into the pulsing river that fills the already too-tight locker room to bursting. The OGS coolly eyefuck the fresh meat from their vanities.

HOPEUL 1 (ALIZÉ)

Can I borrow a tampon?

HOPEFUL 2 (PINK HAIR)

Ugh, you can have one.

RACK FOCUS to see Uncle Clifford burst through the beads with a flourish.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Alright, bitches! Booty Battle rules: DJ Stallion gone give each bitch two minutes to turn up. After that, you gone exit stage left. Those of y'all bitches don't know the difference 'tween yo' right and yo' left gone end up in a niggah lap.

(MORE)

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
Winner wins fifty duckets and a hot
plate. Any questions? Good, now
give a bitch yo' name...

Uncle Clifford whips out her clipboard.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
And you bet not say no Alizé cuz
last bitch came up here wit that
name...

HOPEFUL 1 (ALIZÉ)
Aw...Let me thank on that then.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
(popping tongue)
Next!

HOPEFUL 2 (PINK HAIR)
Skrawberry.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Skrawberry? Spell that for me.

HOPEFUL 2 (PINK HAIR)
S-T-R-A-W...berry?

HOPEFUL 3 (BRACES)
I'm Blue Cinnamon.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Where they do that at?

HOPEFUL 3 (BRACES)
Up Memphis.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Well, I think you need to change
yo' name to Bluetooth with them
teeth right there.

Uncle Clifford finally lands on the woman from the parking
lot. Looks her up and down.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
You ain't ready for this war, where
yuh floss at?

Mercedes eyes the woman with disgust (interest?).

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
Maite, can you get this bitch beat
for tonight?

MAITE

Don't worry, I got her, Uncle.

MAITE (40s, Latina, "The House Muva"), hustles the woman over to her stripper accoutrement store.

The woman surveys the stripper floss, tampons, Veet wax strips, Dramamine and chips for sale.

MAITE (CONT'D)

That one. It light up in the dark.

WOMAN

I'll take this one. How much?

MAITE

15, but for you...10

Maite sees her desperation but still needs to stack her coin. Grateful, the woman gives her that last Hamilton from her purse. Modest, she tries to put her stripper floss on *under* her clothes, as Hopeful 1 sneaks up on her.

HOPEFUL 1 (ALIZÉ)

That Louie real?

WOMAN

Ugh...Yeaaaa.

Mercedes decides to enter into the fray.

MERCEDES

I'on know why bitches wanna waste money on a real Louie when you can just get a fake one at the nail shop. Louie don't care nothin' 'bout no niggahs.

GIDGET

That was Tommy Hilfiger.

HOPEFUL 1 (ALIZÉ)

White girl you would know.

The woman quickly drops her dress and she stands in the day-glow floss in front of the mirror. Like Narcissus staring into the pond, she gets lost in her own reflection...

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Bitch, what's your name? I said, what's. Your. Name.

Woefully unprepared for this stripper ritual, the woman does a mental google search of her many masks for one fitting for this occasion...

WOMAN

Autumn...Autumn Night.

Uncle Clifford approves.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Soundin' all poetic and shiiiiit.

With that Uncle Clifford switches off with Maite in hot pursuit.

INT. THE PINK PONY - OFFICE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a CCTV. The girls are clomping around in their heels. Uncle Clifford and Maite walk through the BULLET-PROOF door to find BIG L (20s, mean teddybear lookin' ass) running SINGLES through a COUNTING MACHINE.

MAITE

Uncle Clifford, the boys was wondering if you could only take 30 dollars out their checks this time.

Maite hands Uncle Clifford a stack of CHECKS.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Who the fuck these border boys thank I is, Muva Mary?

MAITE

Rent due, mami. Every little bit count.

Sucking teeth and taking names, Uncle Clifford counts out money, complaining the whole damn time...

UNCLE CLIFFORD

These Mexican niggahs lucky I don't send they ass on down to them payday loan folks. They be taking 75 dollar out a niggah check and since when this turn into a negotiation, shiiit...

Uncle Clifford hands cash off to Maite then snatches it back.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

You bet not be taking a cut.

MAITE
(she is)
Never.

Through narrowed eyes, Uncle Clifford hands it off.

MAITE (CONT'D)
Thanks, mami.

There is a SPECIAL KNOCK at the door. We see Mercedes' face in the CCTV camera. Big L BUZZES her in. Maite exits just as Mercedes enters.

MAITE (CONT'D)
You still owe me 50 cents for last night's chips...

MERCEDES
Yeah, yeah, yeah...

MERCEDES' POV: she clocks Big L putting shrink-wrapped STACKS into a REFRIGERATOR SAFE.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)
'Sup Big L.

BIG L
'Sup Stout Junt.

Mercedes continues on to Uncle Clifford's desk and plops a FLYER down: *MERCEDES' LAST DANCE*.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
After seven years, huh? Took you long enough.

MERCEDES
Well, my 401K in need of spending.
'Sides, 25 retirement age for a stripper nowadays so... Awwwww, bitch, you crying?

UNCLE CLIFFORD
(she is)
Heifer, ain't nobody crying over yo' baby necks smelling ass...
What you gone do now?

MERCEDES
What an OG do. Count her money.

And with that Mercedes retires.

DJ STALLION (PRE-LAP)
It's time for the Pink Pony Booty
Battle!

EXT. THE PINK PONY - BACK LOT - CONTINUOUS

Maite counts out money to a group of waiting DAY LABORERS,
dusty from the day.

DJ STALLION (V.O.)
Is y'all ready for this war? I said
is y'all ready?

She pockets her cut, as the men stumble away into the night.

INT. THE PINK PONY - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Flickering fluorescent lights. QUICK CUTS of our hopefuls,
posing solo in Diane Arbus-esque portraits, though more
supershero than superfreak...

DJ STALLION (V.O.)
(all echo)
First up, we got Blue Cinnamon...
Skrawberry ... Get it, Alizé! Y'all
niggahs give it up for these
bitches. And bitches who here wit'
they niggahs, don't be J, give it
up for these bitches, too.

Finally AUTUMN NIGHT ("The Chameleon") stands before us, her
movements in SLOW MOTION, like sipping on syzurp.

DJ STALLION (V.O.)
And last but not least, soundin'
all poetic and shit...Autumn
Night!!!

We float towards those luscious lips as the fluorescent
lights flicker out and we--

SMASH TO BLACK:

ETHERLAND - FLASHBACK/FLASH-NOW

AUTUMN NIGHT'S POV: from the stage, lasers cut across the
dark smoky club, outlining the lonely. There is no music,
just memory. In the hot spotlight beyond, she sees...

...the silhouette of a man holding a gun...

We see FLASHES of the PAST spliced with PERFORMANCE.

Red bottoms shuffling over a mirrored floor.

...a hand over her mouth...

Her nipples hardened by their kiss with cold air.

...tears in her eyes...

Her body like laffy taffy around the pole.

...cold metal against her skull...

An ass like the ocean, wave after wave rising.

...blood spreading over the threshold of an open door...

Beaded up sweat on a strong back. Little black girl lost turning into...

...a flash of light...

INT. THE PINK PONY - BAR - NIGHT

We PAN across the bar -- Uncle Clifford, Git 'Em Gidget, Miss Mississippi, finally landing on Mercedes. We're thinking what she's thinking. *This a bitch that could take my spot.*

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE PINK PONY - LOCKER ROOM - DAWN

FIFTY ONES softly fluttering into the hands of Autumn Night. Most of the hopefuls and other girls are gone.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Don't spend it all at the nail
shop, now.

Uncle Clifford begins to switch away. Autumn Night clutches on to the money.

AUTUMN NIGHT

What does a girl gotta do to work
here?

Our "Trinity" stop and stare. Beat.

AUTUMN NIGHT (CONT'D)

I mean, do I need to fill out a job
application or...something...

MERCEDES

Bitch, this ain't no damn Wal-Mart.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

But there sho'll is a opening...

Uncle Clifford circles Autumn Night as if she's on the auction block.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

Nice ass. Got a nice jiggle to it. Titties look like two bee stings though, but you work hard, you can buy you some bigger ones. Nice teeth. This a weave?

AUTUMN NIGHT

I got Indian in my family--

MERCEDES

This bitch right here--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

You can start tomorrow if you wanna.

MERCEDES

I don't know why you steady stay trying to take on more bitches--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Mercedes, why you even over there yappin, ain't you finna retire?

Uncle Clifford throws Mercedes' flyer onto the bleachers. It lands in the room like a silent sob. Miss Mississippi picks it up.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

When was you gone let a bitch know?

MERCEDES

I was finna tell you, Keyshawn.

GIDGET

I know you been saying it for I'on know how long but...why? Why now?

Silence from Mercedes. *They all know why.* Autumn breaks up their stripper funeral.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Well, since you're leaving, perhaps I can...have your locker?

Mercedes looks to her locker--an OG's locker is always the biggest locker in the room. Pissy, Mercedes scoops up her platforms.

MERCEDES

Let's just see how long yo' ass
last under them lights.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. AUTUMN NIGHT'S APARTMENT - NEXT DAY

Autumn Night sits on the floor of her empty bedroom chomping down on the cold buffet platter she won the night before. The couple still screaming in Spanish are her only company. She stares up at last night's expensive clothes hanging above her—the only things in a barren closet.

CLOSE ON her phone's browser. She types in:

WWW.AUTUMNNIGHT.COM

An empty screen pops up. *This domain is for sale.* She goes into her wallet, her eyes lingering on a PICTURE of herself flanked by TWO BOYS, TWINS. Her throat jumps and she swallows. Pulls out several credit cards.

MACRO ON the names: *Sally Beale, Amelia Bontyn, LaKiesha Savage...* She picks one...starts entering billing info...

PRE-LAP: The DEAFENING ROAR of an unhinged GOSPEL CHOIR going orgasmic RISES...

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Mercedes stares straight ahead as Sunday morning takes flight around her. People clapping, dancing, folks falling out. The PIANO MAN starts playing the OFFERING SONG.

PASTOR WOODBINE (O.S.)

(singing)

*It don't matter if you a saint or a
ain't/God needs his 10 percent...*

Mercedes locks eyes with Customer 2 (AKA "Jesse") from last night. She winks. He bristles. She stands up to leave. Her ample apple bottom parting the folks dancing in the aisles. A SAINT smacks her AIN'T SON for ogling.

PASTOR PATRICE WOODBINE (late 40s, on that "Shirley Caesar" tip) looks down from her towering pulpit and shoots Mercedes a disapproving look. Mercedes feels her mother's eyes on her back. But we not in Gomorrah and this not Lot's wife and ain't nobody got time for looking back. Mercedes pulls a Benjamin from Jesse's wallet, places it into the collection plate and takes 50 cents in change.

INT. UNCLE CLIFFORD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Uncle Clifford stands naked in front of a full-length mirror. She binds her breasts down with DUCT TAPE. Pulls out her softened penis. Applies acetone and foil to remove the claws on her hands. She puts on a suit. Slicks her hair back under a Kool-Aid blue fedora.

Transformation complete with the "Uncle" part of her identity now on front street.

EXT. THE PINK PONY PARKING LOT - DAY

We see the Pink Pony under the harsh gaze of the high noon sun. No shadows to lurk behind, the cracking paint, and grimy velvet rope reveal a business in desperate need of repair.

In WIDE SHOT, we see rows and rows of FORECLOSURE signs or X's SPRAY-PAINTED on adjacent deteriorating buildings flanking the crumbling building. The COOK comes out of the back door to throw out trash.

A CAMERA'S POV--the Pink Pony framed by a CAR WINDOW. *CLICK! CLICK!* We settle on the STILL for a beat. The VIEWFINDER reanimates and we watch the COOK go back inside.

INT. BANK - LOBBY - DAY

A BANK OFFICER (40s, morbidly obese) escorts Uncle Clifford past ONLOOKERS, who look at her as if *she's* the circus freak. Despite the suit, Uncle Clifford still can't cover the effeminate gestures writ large by muscle memory. They walk inside a small glass en-cased office.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (PRE-LAP)
I know I'm behind, like, three months now, but this new mayor and his ordinances about to run my titty bar into the ground.

INT. BANK - OFFICE - DAY

BANK OFFICER
(who fucking cares)
Oh, bless your heart.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Here, take these checks for the rent.

Over the desk, Uncle Clifford hands the officer the CHECKS Maite gave her.

BANK OFFICER

I don't know why these Mexicans
keep on signing their checks over
to you.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Maybe, if y'all would let folks
open up accounts without a fucking
passport.

BANK OFFICER

Well, I was told by the branch
manager to not deposit these any
more. They've been bouncing.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

HoldupHoldupHoldupHOLD.UP. What the
hell you mean they been bouncing? I
paid good money for these checks.

BANK OFFICER

Sorry, Clifford, can't deposit 'em.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Well, what the hell I'm supposed to
do wit' 'em then?

BANK OFFICER

I heard your fine establishment's
been in need of some toilet paper.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Who told you that, yo husband?

The bank officer's face falls (it's true).

BANK OFFICER

Look, you're gonna have to pay your
rent by the end of the month--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

And if I don't?

BANK OFFICER

Then you and your hoochie-coochie
girls are just gonna have to post
up somewhere else.

UNCLE CLIFFORD'S POV: the BANK CUSTOMERS continue to stare,
as if she's an animal caged in the zoo.

PRE-LAP: MIGOS' "BAD AND BOUJEE" MONSTER REMIX

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Prepubescent TWEENS (ages 10-12, black) are schlepping through EIGHT COUNTS of G-rated twerk. Some are on the downbeat, others on the 1. One girl shouldn't be on the team AT ALL.

Mercedes stands on BLEACHERS surveying them, tapping her talons impatiently on a well-muscled arm. Finally, Mercedes pauses her PHONE. The MUSIC stops booming from the speaker. Beat. The general ain't happy...

MERCEDES

See, y'all ain't listen to nothin'
I told y'all ass. This shit y'all
doing right here ain't gone get
y'all no crown. I mean, how y'all
just gone let the Southaven Sizzlas
come steal yuh mu'fucking trophy. I
mean, how?

Silence.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

I asked y'all a question.

The girls break out into a CACOPHONY of excuses.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

SHUT UP! If y'all don't learn
nathan else from me, y'all learn
this. In this life, you always
gotta go full. out. Ain't no
marking this shit. Cause you never
know when this might be your last
battle, even if it is just for
practice. Now do it again. But
before that, give me 50 toe
touches.

Mercedes walks away from the crying girls who start throwing themselves into the sky like eagles.

ANGLE ON Pastor Woodbine, muva of Mercedes, watching from the stands.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Pastor Woodbine exhales from her ELECTRONIC PIPE.

PASTOR WOODBINE

Can't believe you got these girls
practicing out in this hot ass
heat. And on a Sunday, too...

MERCEDES

God don't mind it cause thou shalt
not lose to the Southaven Sizzlas.

Mercedes passes Pastor Woodbine off a plastic bag.

PASTOR WOODBINE

Feel light.

MERCEDES

Well gross been on the low-low at
the club. I'ma need you to add that
on to the rest. Thass gone make 20
stacks in all....

PASTOR WOODBINE

Can't believe I even let you hide
yo' booty money in the church
building fund.

MERCEDES

Only thang y'all president taught
me, why should I pay taxes if I
ain't got to? You sho'll wun't
complaining when the bank gave
y'all that loan *because* of that
booty money.

Mmmhmmmm. Silence from Pastor Woodbine.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

(softening)

Don't worry, Mama. It's all about
to come to a end. I'ma finally open
up that gym.

Mercedes hands her the Last Dance flyer. Pastor Woodbine
looks down at it.

PASTOR WOODBINE

Last dance, huh? I'll believe it
when I see it.

MERCEDES

Well, you should. See it. See me
dance for the first *and* last time.

Beat. Mercedes pleading with hopeful eyes.

PASTOR WOODBINE

I don't think I can see my little
girl up there like that.

MERCEDES

Well, you got your pulpit and I got mine.

INT. WAL-MART - GUN COUNTER - DAY

Autumn Night stands in front of wall of SHOTGUNS.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Let me try that one.

An ATTENDANT hands her a RIFLE. It's loooong AF. The CASHIER indicates her Louie.

CASHIER

Don't think it'll fit in that purse of yourn.

She hands it back.

AUTUMN NIGHT

What about that one?

A PINK PISTOL, small and deadly.

CASHIER

Expensive. We got a awesome layaway plan, though...

Autumn Night SLAMS down one of her CREDIT CARDS with a smile. The CASHIER begins to ring her up. A RISING argument can be heard floating from the next aisle. Autumn Night looks up to find Miss Mississippi talking all LOUD into her CELL PHONE. Autumn hides her face as Mississippi rushes out of the store.

PRE-LAP: TOKYO VANITY "THAT'S MY BEST FRIEND"

INT. NAIL SHOP - DAY

Mercedes and Gidget are leaned back in cracked leather chairs as NAIL TECH 2 & 3 finish up their pedicures. Sunday is "Slay Day" for the girls. Nails done, hair done, everything did. Mercedes climbs out of the pedi chair.

MERCEDES

...Amateur Night my ass. That bitch done flung her booty 'round a pole 'bout four, five hunned times.

GIDGET

She could get it though.

MERCEDES

Bitch, bye! You got mo' ass than
that bitch.

Mercedes passes a duo of CHURCH HATTED WOMEN giving her the
evil eye as she marches towards the manicure stations.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

Heeey, Deaconess. I didn't see you
at church today.

Mmmmmhmmmmmm. The DEACONESS minds her own damn business.
Mercedes plops down in an empty chair. The SHOP OWNER motions
at TECH 1 to take Mercedes. The workers fire back and forth
in vivid Vietnamese.

TECH 1

(Vietnamese w/ subtitles)
That one don't tip good.

SHOP OWNER

(Vietnamese w/ subtitles)
You take her then.

TECH 2

(Vietnamese w/ subtitles)
I don't know why I'm the one who
always has to service these dick-
sucking whores.

TECH 3

(Vietnamese w/ subtitles)
Well, I bet dancing beats *scrubbing*
the dick-sucking whores' feet,
which is what *we're* doing right
now....

Mercedes watches them, her stripper intuition antennae
tweaking on ten...

MERCEDES

(to TECH 2)
Just a polish change, thanks.
Can I put my flyers up in here?

TECH 1/TECH 2/TECH 3

(all smiles)
Yah. Yah. Sure. Sure.

Gidget joins Mercedes at the next station.

GIDGET

I thought Keyshawn was coming.

MERCEDES

(worried)

Her ass steady stay moving like molasses. She'll be here though.

GIDGET

It's getting worse.

MERCEDES

Awww, he ain't gone do nathan cause he don't want no smoke.

GIDGET

I got a bag packed for her at the club, just in case...

MERCEDES

Is yo' bags packed for New York? Yuh bwoy Duffy said he was gone ride you in his big rig up to the Yawk since you scurred of flying--

GIDGET

I ain't going.

MERCEDES

Bitch, what the hell you mean, you ain't going? Duffy told me you done sent in the registration fee for the US Pole Dancing Championship and e'erthang!

GIDGET

I just got this bad feeling when I was doing my visualization board that it was all just gonna be a calloso waste.

MERCEDES

Bitch, that Miss Trixy title is yours to claim. And I'ma be right there on the front row waving those stars and bars. Gidget 'bout to put Mississippi on the map--

GIDGET

Well, I guess you're just gonna have to coach me next couple of months since you retiring and all. That night fucked you up that bad, you gotta leave?

Mercedes, gets uncomfortable, starts checking her phone.

CLOSE ON a TEXT: Found the perfect property for you. But need to move on it now. Meet up morning?

Mercedes can't hide the sunshine in her eyes.

GIDGET (CONT'D)

What man got your snarl turned upside down?

MERCEDES

Keep on, you know I'm on a coochie strike.

(lying)

Folks just done shared my flyer 1,673 times on the Book of Faces.

Her joy is snatched when another TEXT from Uncle Clifford pops up: Emergency Meeting 30 minutes.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

Ugh, you get Uncle Clifford message?

GIDGET

She so woesome. Le' go...

Mercedes gingerly digs into her purse. Gives a BENJIE to Tech 3.

MERCEDES

(winking)

Keep the change.

The other Nail Techs' faces fall as Tech 3 adds it to her stash.

INT. THE PINK PONY - MAIN FLOOR - DAY

We TRACK the broad back of Uncle Clifford and Big L as they walk onto the main floor from the hallway.

BIG L

Tonight gone put us on full, but when Mercedes get gone, don't know how we gone stack up to make that transaction...

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Tell me something I don't know...

Uncle Clifford floats in to find the VARIOUS FACTIONS of the Pink Pony Club prepping for the night. The BOTTLE GIRLS cutting limes at the bar. The DJ prepping SOUND in the booth.

DANCERS warm up in a circle with Autumn Night off to the side.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
10 minutes 'til showtime. Everybody here? Where Miss Mississippi at?

GIDGET
She just text us.

MERCEDES
She comin'.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
Bitch, constantly be on CP time. Well, y'all let her know, I'm instituting some new rules for y'all hueax starting tonight. The new stripper math? Seven dollars off a lap dance and 15 percent off the private rooms for the house. Stage rent was always paid *before* dancing, but now that include tip-out, too.

MERCEDES
Awwwww, come on! You really gone have bitches hitting the floor negative a Benjie?

YOLI (20s, the raspy, busty barfly) chimes in.

YOLI
If bitches ain't skip out on tip-out at the end of the night maybe Uncle Clifford wouldn't have to make y'all to pay before. Me and my girls' pocketbooks getting fucked up over here.

MERCEDES
We'd all leave with more scrilla in our pockets if Yoli ain't serve them weak ass drinks.

YOLI
Mercedes, now you the main one. Always floggin' like you gone come up offa them duckets and at the end of the night yo' ass ain't nowhere to be seen't. DJ Stallion know.

DJ Stallion (16, yeah, 16) grunts agreement.

MERCEDES
Hell, if it was up to me we wouldn't have no DJs no way.
(MORE)

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

My majorettes' Ipods be poppin
harder than his shit be.

DJ STALLION

That "last dance" song might come
up missin on my Ipod, keep on.

MERCEDES

You wouldn't?

He would.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

Don't even worry about it! I'ma
have beacoup bank to throw down at
all y'all feet tonight. Cuz my last
dance guaranteed to bring in some
Hamiltons. Hell, maybe some
Tubmans, too.

Mercedes makes her ass wiggle as she walks. The girls are
CLAPPING. SMACKING her ass. The employee meeting is turning
into a going away party for the OG Twerk Queen.

OFF-SCREEN we hear the back door SQUAWK open. A GASP from the
girls. Uncle Clifford turns around to see...

Miss Mississippi standing there BLOODIED & BATTERED, cradling
her CRYING baby.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

I...fell...

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Don't tell me it's cornbread when I
can smell the biscuits burning.

Guilty, Autumn Night rushes to her side.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Are you alright?

MERCEDES

What you thank?

Silence. Most of the girls have seen this before, but Autumn
Night stands there frozen, *truly shook*...

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Like, I was sayin', some thangs
finna change 'round chere, and
y'all bitches betta like it...Gone
on back there and make them asses
pretty, nah.

The girls walk away in a huff. Uncle Clifford snaps at Gidget.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
And Gidget, come get this baby.

GIDGET
Unh, unh, I might break it--

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Girl, come on over here.

She hands the baby off to Gidget. The baby instantly stops crying. Beat.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
You'se a lie. Burp her good now!

Gidget clomps off with the baby. Uncle Clifford walks over to Mississippi to stroke her bruised face. Miss Mississippi looks down at the floor. Uncle Clifford walks to the counter and pulls out a fierce MAC brush set.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
Sit on down in this here chair.

She does. Uncle Clifford begins to paint over her pain.

MISS MISSISSIPPI
(wincing)
Sttssssss

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Sorry...sorry.

MISS MISSISSIPPI
I hit him first. Wha, you don't believe me?

UNCLE CLIFFORD
I ain't said nothing. Ain't said a word. How many you got by him?

MISS MISSISSIPPI
Three. The other two over my mama 'nem

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Mmmmm.

MISS MISSISSIPPI
He say he love me.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

I know that kind of love. Feel good only because it make you feel something. Let you know you livin' even though livin' ain't supposed to feel that bad.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

You don't understand.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

How come I don't? Hell, I had a niggah used to beat my ass.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

You?

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Sho'll did. That's 'til I poured a pot of hot grits all over his dang-a-lang. Yes, ma'am. I Al Greened his ass somethin' terrible. He ain't bother me no never more...

Again, Uncle Clifford presses a bit too hard.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

STTTTSSSSS!!

Uncle Clifford throws down the brush.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Honey, I'm over here trying to getchoo blendt for the gawds, but I don't think a ton of Dermablend can cover up all this ugly. Don't know why y'all heifers let these niggahs fuck witcha money like this--

MISS MISSISSIPPI

He ain't fuckin' wit my money. That why he wanna wild out. He tryin' to cut into my paper, sayin' I can't come up in here no more--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Girl, *this* yo money right 'chere.

Uncle Clifford grabs up her face a roughly. She winces.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

This ya *strength*. You let a niggah take this away, I don't know what you gone do.

Uncle Clifford, looks deeply into her eyes. Penetrating.
Finally, Uncle Clifford lets her go.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
Gone back there and get dressed.
It's opening time at the Pink Pony.

INT. THE PINK PONY - MAIN STAGE - NIGHT

QUICK CUTS of flesh and metal blending under hot neon lights.
DJ Stallion is turning up in the booth perched above the main stage.

DJ STALLION
It's yuh fav DJ Stallion on the
ones and twos. Who ready to get
crunk this Sunday night? I said
whoooo readdddyyyy?????

EXT. INTERSTATE - EXIT 29 - NIGHT

AERIAL VIEW of an off-ramp with red brake lights lit like the
blood pulsing through true Southern-fried arteries, clogged.
A distressed BILLBOARD advertising the PINK PONY towers over
the EXIT 29 sign.

DJ STALLION (V.O.)
It's getting' crunk up in the Pink
Pony. But it's still some room on
the wall and some skrimps on the
buffet.

EXT. THE PINK PONY - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A muddy puddle reflects the neon lights pulsing at the front
of the club. Bodies and cars dance in the reflection. Soon a
wheel SPLASHES through the puddle, making the Pink Pony
mirage dissolve.

We PAN up to see a high yellaH HUMMER squeezing into a too-
tight spot.

The DOOR opens and a cloud of KUSH blooms out. Emerging from
the haze is LIL' MURDER (18, "The Street Griot"). He is
cloaked in a rainbow bright mink jacket sans shirt. He. Just.
Sweating. He takes a swig from a purple Crown Royal bag as he
walks to the trunk to find WODDY (pronounced *WHOA-dee*)
stuffing a LOUIE DUFFEL with STACKS of ONES.

WODDY
Whoa, Lil' Murder, let me kill
that.

Woddy snatches the bottle and dumps all of the liquid onto a GREEN FLORAL BRICK.

LIL' MURDER

Woddy, what the fuck you wastin' my tea on, maine?

WODDY

(like, duh...)

A floral brick. You wet it down to keep yo' flowers from drying out in a arrangement.

LIL' MURDER

Faggot-ass niggah you got a hobby arranging flowers or some shit?

WODDY

Niggah, fuck you, I grew up in a funeral home. We used these in the floral sprays. Kept the carnations from wilting...

Woddy takes spome PLASTIC from the trunk and wraps the wet brick. He then buries it beneath the stacks floating on top. Hands the duffel to Lil' Murder. He feels the weight...

DJ STALLION (V.O.)

Hood legend Mercedes goes ham on the pole right after midnight...

EXT. THE PINK PONY - FRONT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Lil' Murder is walking through the crowded parking lot. A DIME walks by and Lil' Murder starts to serenade her with his poetry.

LIL' MURDER

Ay, girl. AY! "Look at you, lookin' like Lauren London / Oh my gwa, I think you is lookin' stunnin' / You a stunnah, a stunnah, stunnah / Ride wit' me gul in my hummah, hummah" Ooooo, weee! Somebody write that shit DOWN!

Woddy promptly pulls out a NOTE PAD. The girl rolls her eyes. Lil' Murder continues to lead his LIT AF CREW up to the front of the line.

LIL' MURDER (CONT'D)

Lil' Murder is in the builllllding!!!

They are about to cross the threshold until Diamond puts his finger into Lil' Murder's chest.

LIL' MURDER (CONT'D)
(coughing)
Damn, niggah, yo' fingah skrong.

DIAMOND
Get to the back of the line,
youngins'.

WODDY
This Lil' Murder, y'en know?

DIAMOND
I'on know nobody who ain't VIP.

Diamond indicates a line, full of BAWSE BITCHES, BALLERS & SHOTCALLERS. Woddy is about the pop off, but Lil' Murder calms him down with a wave of his hand.

LIL' MURDER
Thass aight.

Embarrassed, they all turn around.

CLOSE ON Lil' Murder's face simmering, as he leads his crew to the back of the line.

INT. THE PINK PONY - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

We TRACK a naked bootylicious DANCER from behind, past Mercedes' LAST DANCE poster to see all the girls getting lit and glittered for the Sunday night haul.

We stop on Gidget who is pensively gazing into the mirror...

GIDGET
When you talk to yourself in your
head, do you hear yourself?

MISS MISSISSIPPI
Bitch, whuuuu?

GIDGET
Like, do you hear your own voice
or, like, do you hear, like, a
heightened version of your self? Or
do you hear, like, your ancestors'
dreams, which is perhaps a version
of you--

MERCEDES

I need to be smokin' on what the
fuck you smokin' on cuz you high as
heyell righta 'bout now.

RACK FOCUS to Autumn Night trying to figure out how to join
in on the Trinity's convo. Mercedes shoots her with the stank-
face.

Autumn Night turns her head away to find Uncle Clifford
hustling in through the beads with Miss Mississippi's baby in
tow. She looks over her dancing diamonds, appreciating their
curves, their feminine funk.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Alright, bitches. Where these asses
at? *Noice, noice, noice!* Niggahs
ain't gone know what to do once
they see what Uncle Clifford got in
her stable. We got some Very
Important Penises out there. Take
care of them like a bad bitch wish
she could.

The girls start heading out towards the floor.

Uncle Clifford stops Mercedes.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

(pointing to Autumn)

I need you to break her in. Teach
her how to work the floor. Nothing
else...

MERCEDES

Now, how the fuck you gone make me
babysit on my last night?

UNCLE CLIFFORD

(indicating the baby)

Do you wanna trade? I ain't thank
so. Gone head, be a good booty
buddy, now...

Uncle Clifford leaves Mercedes and Autumn in a tête-à-tête.

MERCEDES

Come the fuck on.

Mercedes stalks off annoyed AF. Autumn Night titters after...

We hear that DIRTY SOUTH BOOM OVER THE FOLLOWING--

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

Pastor Woodbine stands in the middle of crumbling cubicles stacked like Jenga towers. Uprooted carpet. Moldy papers lay strewn about like confetti. She stares at the mess with tears in her eyes.

Pastor Woodbine hands the REAL ESTATE AGENT the *same plastic bag Mercedes gave to her*.

PASTOR WOODBINE

That's the last of it. 20 thousand
in all.

He peers into the bag, nods.

REAL ESTATE AGENT (O.S.)

So Breath of Life Full Gospel
Baptist Tabernacle, huh? You might
wanna shorten that name. Think
about Twitter.

He walks away, leaving Pastor Woodbine silently interior decorating her new church...

CUT TO:

INT. THE PINK PONY - MAIN FLOOR - NIGHT

Autumn Night tight on Mercedes' back.

MERCEDES

Damn, fall back, kinfolk. My booty
need some negative space to be
seen't up in this bitch.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Sorry, sorry.

Autumn Night falls back a bit. They pass a well-dressed man, we'll call him FERRAGAMOS (30, black), sitting at the bar.

FERRAGAMOS

Want a drank?

Autumn Night starts moving in his direction, but Mercedes grabs her by the wrist.

MERCEDES

Naw, bitch. He ain't popped his
tags yet.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Say that agai--

MERCEDES

Ain't popped his tags...Mean a niggah got a cute suit from Dillard's and gone take it right back for a refund before the week out. Ain't worth the dance.

Sure enough, Ferragamos pushes the exposed STORE TAG deeper into his jacket's sleeve.

AUTUMN NIGHT

How in the world did you see...

MERCEDES

Gotta always have them FBI eyes. Watch.

Mercedes walks off leaving Autumn Night at the edge of the bar.

AUTUMN'S POV: Mercedes floats around the room. Touching on a knee here, a shoulder there. There's a group of FLOSSY DOUGHBOYS and, let's call him, MR. SWEATPANTS. From behind the bar, Yoli leans over to Autumn.

YOLI

Ay, rookie, which one you'd pick?

AUTUMN NIGHT

Ugggghhh, well, those Space Jams were just released yesterday--

YOLI

(sucking teeth)

Yeah, thass 850 on they feet not in they pocket. Ordered some fucking midori sours. But big boss over there ordered that top-tier, five star. Plus look at the way he hold hisself...

Sure enough, Mr. Sweatpants, holds himself like a Kang.

DOUGHBOY

(to Mercedes)

Ay, lil' mama. Ay, shawty, you hear me talking to you!

Mercedes looks at what he's sippin' on, keeps on keepin' on, sits with Mr. Sweatpants instead. Runs her fingers through his thinning hair.

YOLI

Now, thass one bitch can smell
money. Can smell heartbreak, too...

Learning fast, Autumn watches as the man pulls out a fat
MONEY ROLL and leans in to Mercedes for some love and
tenderness.

Off Autumn's ADMIRING LOOK.

EXT. THE PINK PONY - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Miss Mississippi is in the "break room", an outside patio
stacked with rusty patio furniture, too-full ash trays and
dirty crates.

She stares off into space, breast-feeding. Diamond walks out
with his lunch box and sees her bare bosoms. Casts his eyes
down.

DIAMOND

Awww, I'm sorry.

He starts heading back inside.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

Diamond. Please.

She places the baby over her shoulder to burp. Diamond is
still awkward.

MISS MISSISSIPPI (CONT'D)

You gone eat your Vienna sausages
or naw?

DIAMOND

If you'en mind?

She scoots over to make room. He sits, staring straight
ahead. *Sweet silence.*

DIAMOND (CONT'D)

You know. I can take care of that.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

As many folks you kilt over there,
you'en need na'an 'nother body on
that conscience of yours.

DIAMOND

Better his than yours.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

No, thank you.

DIAMOND

Well, offer's out. If you--

Uncle Clifford opens the back door. The booming music of the club cutting the night.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

M'Ssippi, you on deck.

Diamond motions for Miss Mississippi to give him the baby.

MISS MISSISSIPPI

You sure?

He nods. She does. Miss Mississippi passes Uncle Clifford, swallowed by the darkness.

OFF Uncle Clifford watching Diamond rocking the baby into a deep slumber.

DJ STALLION (PRE-LAP)

Throw some ones up in the air for
Miss M-I-Crooked-Letter-Crooked-
Letter-I-Crooked-Letter-Crooked-
Letter-I-Humpback-Humpback-I!!!!

INT. THE PINK PONY - MAIN STAGE - NIGHT - INTERCUT

SLOW MOTION as Miss Mississippi rocks those hips that make ripples snake into tsunamis. The Yemaya of the South's got all that black and blue covered up. We'd never know what's going on below the surface of that silky skin...

INT. THE PINK PONY - HALLWAY ENTRANCE - INTERCUT

We TRACK Lil' Murder's scapula as he parts the waters for his crew. Finally, the boys are in the building and life is a rap video, at least for now. The world seems to go SILENT for a moment as Lil' Murder takes in the view. For the first time, our camera is doing the gazing of the main stage, instead of being gazed upon.

We CIRCLE around as he plunges his hand heavy with that ice into his duffel bag. He tears the rubber band off a stack of ones, heaving them into the air.

Lil Murder feels all eyez on him, as it all rains down like confetti.

The women in the club all get in formation like ants marching to sweet water, hoping to drown in his foolishness.

But from MISS MISSISSIPPI'S POV: the deep dark beyond looks like a snowfall. Peaceful.

She grabs the silver pole, heaving both legs into the air, a perfect PEPPERMINT WHIRL as she catches freedom twixt her toes and our world turns upside down...

CUT TO:

INT. THE PINK PONY - PRIVATE BOOTH - NIGHT

A trio of DANCERS are TWERKING for their dental bill, electric bill, and Marshall's lay-a-way respectively.

Mercedes passes Lil' Murder's PRIVATE BOOTH as she continues to work the floor. Lil' Murder is getting turnt up.

LIL' MURDER

Ay girl, Ay. Wanna partake of my
lil' part-tay.

MERCEDES

(coy)

Seems like you got yo' lap full
right 'bout now.

LIL' MURDER

Naw, my lap big enough to accompany
all that there.

MERCEDES

If I'ma twerk it, you gone have to
make this g-strang greener than I
done ever seen.

LIL' MURDER

Ooo, I like your consonance. Yo ass-
onance, too.

His crew laughs, but she starts to walk away.

LIL' MURDER (CONT'D)

Sit down witcho boy for minute. I
got a Louie duffel full of coochie
coupons.

Beat. She gazes down. Uses her super stripper x-ray vision to count what's inside.

MERCEDES

That duffel *could* hold 8 stacks,
but you ain't got nothin' but five.
With them floral arrangement bricks
up in there it's hard to tell.

WODDY

(caught)

Damn, how the *fuu--*

LIL' MURDER

Okay-okay-okay, so it's, like, uh,
five stacks.

MERCEDES

Four, you just wasted a G on these
heaux perpetratin'.

LIL' MURDER

Damn, bitch, you is a OG for real.

MERCEDES

What yo' name is, partnah?

LIL' MURDER

Lil' Murder, the hottest rapper out
in these skreets right 'bout now.

MERCEDES

Lil' Murder huh? Don't make a bitch
wanna dance for you wit Lil'
dangling in front of yo' name.

LIL' MURDER

Naw, maine. Bitches be like, "*his
dick is way too long/he need to cut
it*"

WODDY

He need to cut it!!

His entourage laughs. Mercedes laughs despite herself. Beat.
She SNAPS her fingers and the other ladies skiddadle.

MERCEDES

Is we spending four stacks on a lap
dance tonight, or you got something
else in mind?

LIL' MURDER

Somethin' else.

MERCEDES

Keep talkin'.

LIL' MURDER

(leaning in)

This champagne room business you
know what I'm sayin'.

MERCEDES

Mmmmmhmmm. You know this my last night, right?

LIL' MURDER

The better to go out with a bang, you know what I'm say--

WODDY

Whoa, whoa. Who that girl getting it right *there* though?

Lil' Murder turns his attention to Autumn Night on the main stage.

MERCEDES

Nobody.

LIL' MURDER

Nawwww, playa, that's like Beyonce cousin with that blue dress on.

WODDY

Ay, ay, that was a good metaphor.

LIL' MURDER

Write that shit down.

Woddy does and the crew's attention starts to shift.

MERCEDES

She just look light when them lights hit her right.

WODDY

And she looking right tonight, bwoy...

CLOSE ON Mercedes' face growing sour. Lil' Murder clocks it.

LIL' MURDER

I guess I'ma have to throw my stacks thataway then--

MERCEDES

Holdupholdupholdup. You say four stacks, huh? Let me see 'em.

Lil' Murder does.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

Tell you what, I pull her in for your boy over there, you give us *all* yo' coochie coupons.

LIL' MURDER
Double the trouble? Bet.

We FOLLOW Mercedes as she stalks off...

CUT TO:

INT. THE PINK PONY - SIDE STAGE - NIGHT

A man, let's call him BROWN FUBU T-SHIRT is leaning over Autumn Night as she lays prone on the stage, wobbling her legs. Mercedes pokes the man in his back.

MERCEDES
If you ain't laying down no ones,
that'll keep that electric on, you
best move along, Brown Fubu T-
shirt.

Brown FUBU T-shirt walks on. Mercedes leans over Autumn.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)
So I got a customer want you and me
in the VIP, you down?

AUTUMN NIGHT
I thought since this is my first
night I was just working the floor.
That's what Uncle Clifford said--

MERCEDES
The way you getting poetic on this
pole it look like you gone have to
come up offa these training wheels.
'Sides, I got a niggah willing to
pay 2 stacks. A G for me. And a G
for you.

AUTUMN NIGHT
(suspicious)
A G, huh?

MERCEDES
Girl, that's double what these
niggahs throwing down nowadays for
the champagne room. Sides, you need
to learn how to handle VIP. And who
betta to learn from than an OG like
me. You in or naw?

PRE-LAP: BEYONCE'S "SIX INCH HEELS"

INT. THE PINK PONY - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The lights kaleidoscopic. The music muffled and fast like the beating of fetus heart. We hear the heavy CLOMP, CLOMP, CLOMP of their heels. This is vampire's work. Lonely. Dark. Life-sucking. Mercedes and Autumn Night pass through beams of light. They reach the end of the tunnel, their figures swallowed by a hungry shadow.

INT. THE PINK PONY - CHAMPAGNE ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a CHAMPAGNE BOTTLE as the CORK POPS and the FOAM SPLASHES against the lacquered walls.

LIL' MURDER

It's getting creamy up in this
bitch, right here. It's getting
creamy!

Dancing cheek to cheek, Mercedes and Autumn Night are like ebony and ivory blending...

ENTOURAGE MEMBERS

Goddamn/Lawd, Jesus, save
me./Maine, maine, maine!!!

LIL' MURDER

Do what y'all do, boos. Do what
y'all do!

Another member of the posse, we'll call him DRUNK AF is clocking Autumn Night, especially.

DRUNK AF

*Redbone, Redbone look my way. Look
my way. I said, look my way!*

Drunk AF grabs Autumn Night's elbow all rough-like. Diamond swoops in from the shadows.

DIAMOND

Ay, don't make me have to wrap a
niggah balls 'round his neck. Don't
touch them, unless they touch you.

MERCEDES

It's all copacetic in the cut,
Diamond.

Diamond ice-grills them, then backs around the corner.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

(Lil' Murder)

Look, you gone have to calm down
Drunk As Fuck over thur.

LIL' MURDER

Niggah, you is doing the most right
now.

(to Autumn Night)

You straight?

MERCEDES

Yeah, she straight.

Mercedes gives Autumn a look. Autumn offers up a strained
smiled. The duo continue to dance for the crew. Mercedes
leans back on Lil' Murder's lap.

CLOSE ON Mercedes face, puzzled.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

(whispering)

I see why they call you *Lil'*
Murder.

LIL' MURDER

You ain't seen nothin' yet 'til I
take you to that next level, know
what I'm sayin'?

He nods to a SECRET DOOR outlined in BLUE NEON LED light.

MERCEDES

That's only for private *private*
parties.

LIL' MURDER

Well, if you want it all then this
something I'ma need to put on you.
In private.

Beat. She looks at the duffel. She looks to Autumn Night
trying hard to play being sexy and comfortable.

MERCEDES

Autumn, be right back. Y'all take
real good care of my sis, now...

Mercedes leads Lil' Murder through the secret door. Autumn
Night continues to dance for the entourage alone.

INT. THE PINK PONY - LEVEL 3 - NIGHT

Level three, black leather couches. We TRACK ACROSS Queen Mercedes from toe to tummy to titties, landing on a pair of BEATS BUDS slivering down her well-oiled body. Lil' Murder is pacing the floor. Beat.

MERCEDES

Naw, dawg, my booty can't bump to this.

LIL' MURDER

What you mean?

MERCEDES

Ain't got enough tremelo you axe me. And these lyrics though? I mean, is you rapping in cursive or what?

LIL' MURDER

This trap reggae soul!

MERCEDES

Niggah, look...I need to go out on a song that I can go ham on. Dance all these demons out. One. Last. Time. I deserve it, shawty.

LIL' MURDER

(all defensive like)
Fuck all my stacks then.

MERCEDES

Thass fine. Who needs yo' money when I got my artistic integrity. You ain't pinning that on my budonka donk.

Mercedes walks out.

OFF Lil' Murder pissed.

CUT TO:

INT. THE PINK PONY - CHAMPAGNE ROOM - NIGHT

Autumn Night is trying her best to be all sensual, but Drunk AF is just getting too damn touchy.

AUTUMN NIGHT'S POV: She looks towards the secret door. *Where the fuck is Mercedes?*

Her bare chest begins to heave up and down. She starts taking deep breaths to slow her beating heart down.

CLOSE ON Drunk AF's hand snaking up her thigh. Autumn Night playfully SWATS it away.

AUTUMN NIGHT

You're the bad plum of the bunch, I see.

DRUNK AF

Half-way rotten, mostly sweet though like this here neck of yourn.

Drunk AF tries to kiss her on the neck, but she pulls away.

DRUNK AF (CONT'D)

Damn shawty, stop being so uptight. Come on, drink some cham-pang-gunah with me.

AUTUMN NIGHT

(correcting)

Uhm, you mean *sparkling wine*.

The crew laugh. Drunk AF feels small.

DRUNK AF

What, Redbone. you think you bettah than us? Hunh?

He grabs her. His touch makes her tremble...

AUTUMN NIGHT

Hey-hey, I didn't say--

DRUNK AF

Look, thot don't go getting all siddity on a niggah.

CLOSE ON Autumn's throat tightening. It's almost like she's being choked from the inside.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Please le' go of--

Just then Mercedes and Lil' Murder re-enter the room to find Autumn Night beginning to have a full-blown PANIC ATTACK.

LIL' MURDER

Yo, my niggah, what the fuck!?!?

Autumn Night finally breaks free and takes her stilleto DIGGING it into Drunk AF's balls.

Just as she runs out of the room, Diamond comes in and commences to whooping asses. Mercedes stands in the midst of the chaos somewhat impressed.

MERCEDES

Well, that's one way to VIP.

But Lil' Murder, concerned, is fast on Autumn Night's tail.

INT. THE PINK PONY - HALLWAY - NIGHT

AUTUMN'S POV: the colors in the hallway begin to separate, like film burned by the sun. She's running through a tunnel that never seems to end. The break room door seems to slide further and further away from her until she finally pushes open, falling into...

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Cold blue waters. She is floating underwater in that crisp white shirt from before, her body illuminated by the glow of moonlight. Bullets WHIZ by her body. Someone is shooting into the water. Shooting AT HER. A bullet PIERCES her ARM, but she refuses to resurface...

CLOSE ON Autumn Night's terrified eyes, as oxygen drains from her lungs...

CUT TO:

INT. THE PINK PONY - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The MUSIC is PUMPING LOUD. The CROWD is WILING OUT. Patrons are passing through the too-tight tunnel. Lil' Murder is looking up and down the flooded hallway for Autumn Night. He decides to go right, running headfirst into Uncle Clifford.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

(yelling)

NIGGAH, WATCH WHERE YOU PUTTING THEM BOATS!

LIL' MURDER

My bad, niggah, I'm looking for that bitch--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

WHICH BITCH? WHICH ONE?

LIL' MURDER

The redbone one with the white tankini on. We ain't mean to offe--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

What? Niggah, WHAT?

LIL' MURDER

I said, WE AIN'T MEAN TO OFFEND HER.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Niggah is you speakin' in cursive or WHAT?

LIL' MURDER

I SAID, WE AIN'T MEAN TO OFFEN--

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Niggah, come on up in *here*.

Uncle Clifford KEYS in a CODE to yet another HIDDEN DOOR and suddenly we are in...

INT. THE PINK PONY - THE PARADISE ROOM - NIGHT

Cream leather couches and silence. Lil' Murder takes it in.

LIL' MURDER

Daaaayummm. This room on some Super Mario save the Princess type shit.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Now, niggah, what you know about saving the Princess? That was befo' yo' time.

LIL' MURDER

Well, I'm a old soul.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Mmmmmhmmmm. Now what was you saying?

LIL' MURDER

Shit got kinda hectic up in VIP and I wanted to 'pologize to lil' shawty.

Uncle Clifford just looking...Bored.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Well, she gone have to get used to it. Learn how to handle herself she wanna work for me.

LIL' MURDER

Aw, so you the manager 'round here? I done found me the maine I need to complain to.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Wo-maine. And what you got to be complainin 'bout? Pink Pony got e'erthang a maine need. We got white bitches, redbone bitches, high yellah bitches, midnight blue bitches, molly, percocets...hot wings...Tums for after the hot wings...

LIL' MURDER

Seem like the Pink Pony got e'erthang but the one thing I really need.

Lil' Murder rolls up on Uncle Clifford. Beat.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

This lil' niggah 'bout to make me blush.

Lil' Murder makes his pecs pulse. Uncle Clifford POPS her pink fan and starts fanning herself.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

Don't make me fall. The fuck. Out.

LIL' MURDER

Well, I lay muthafuckas out. Thass why they call me Lil' Murder.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Thass yo' guvment name?

LIL' MURDER

That my rap name.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

So you be doing lil' murders as opposed to big murders?

LIL' MURDER

I body 'em all, babay.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Well, I might have to get me bodied
tonight.

LIL' MURDER

Is that right? Well...I got
something that'll murder you.

He pulls out his BEATS BUDS and gingerly places them into
Uncle Clifford's ears...

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER CHURCH - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Pastor Woodbine is locking the front gate to her new church.
In the bg we a hear a CACOPHONY of cars BEEPING. She is
walking back to her car when she sees the Pink Pony from
across the street.

An oasis in the middle of this neon wasteland, cars fight to
squeeze onto the Pink Pony's overflowing parking lot. Beat.

Pastor Woodbine crosses the congested street with a
vengeance...

DJ STALLION (PRE-LAP)

Yuh, girl Mercedes 'bout to hit the
stage in ten. Bring those cell
phones out cause we breakin' all
the rules tonight.

INT. THE PINK PONY - HALLWAY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON BLOODY KNUCKLES.

Diamond is coming back to his post at the front door, when he
sees Pastor Woodbine preaching fire and brimstone to the
patrons in line.

PASTOR WOODBINE

(yelling)

Turn away 'lest you become a pillar
of salt! Cause my awesome God will
bring His wrath down upon this
place just like he did to New
Orleans...

DIAMOND

(into a walkie-talkie)

Tell Mercedes to come from out the
locker room. Now!

OFF Diamond's WTF face.

EXT. THE PINK PONY - BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

From SOMEONE'S POV: we see a woozy Autumn Night bent over trying to catch her breath. Autumn Night tries to steady herself when--

ANDRE (O.S.)
You alright?

AUTUMN NIGHT
Customers not allowed back here.

Beat. ANDRE WATKINS (35, "The Morehouse Man") steps from out of the shadows.

ANDRE
I'm not a customer.

AUTUMN NIGHT
Well, who the fuck are you then?

ANDRE
Look, you alright?

He walks to her slowly. Carefully. Wobbly, she looks for something to grab...Andre catches her.

ANDRE (CONT'D)
Gotcha.

She holds onto him for balance. Autumn Night notices the CAMERA at his side.

AUTUMN NIGHT
What's that?

ANDRE
Oh, that's just my camera.

AUTUMN NIGHT
What, you taking pictures of me?

ANDRE
Naw-naw, I do real estate. Stupid me, I didn't take all the pictures I needed to earlier so I had to come back. Grab the backside of these properties. Got an important meeting tomorrow.

AUTUMN NIGHT
Do you?

ANDRE

Yeah... Look, are you, alright?

AUTUMN NIGHT

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I just needed air.
It gets so stuffy in there.
Couldn't breathe.

ANDRE

The smoke?

AUTUMN NIGHT

Actually...do you got one?

ANDRE

Naw.

AUTUMN NIGHT

What's your vice then?

ANDRE

Don't got one.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Can't trust a man without a vice.
We all need to give in to
something.

ANDRE

True that. Andre. Andre Watkins.

She laughs.

ANDRE (CONT'D)

What? You don't like my name?

AUTUMN NIGHT

No. It's not that. It's just.
Names. I guess you wanna know mine,
now, huh?

ANDRE

Not if you don't wanna tell me.

AUTUMN NIGHT

They call me "Autumn Night."

ANDRE

"Autumn Night." Sound all...

ANDRE (CONT'D)
...poetic and shit.

AUTUMN NIGHT
...poetic and shit.

They LAUGH.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Sorry, I was so, uhm, *abrasive*
before. I got a little...shook.

ANDRE

I can only imagine what you gotta
shake off working up in there.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Are you gonna come into the club?

ANDRE

You trying to give me a vice?

AUTUMN NIGHT

No. Well..Yeah. Yeah, I'm trying to
make you give in to something.

Andre looks her up and down. Contemplating. This is more her
speed.

ANDRE

Naw, naw, NAW. I'ma head on back,
but pleasure meeting you...?

AUTUMN NIGHT

Hailey.

ANDRE

Hailey.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Yeah. That's my name.

Finally. The Truth.

ANDRE

Nice. Well...Goodnight. Hailey.

Andre walks off from whence he came. Autumn Night is about to
go back inside when she's stopped by voices riding on the
wind. She peeks over a slab of rotting wood, leaving against
a CHAIN LINK fence. In the distance, Autumn Night sees...

EXT. THE PINK PONY - SIDE LOT - NIGHT

...Mercedes standing in all of her glory going head to head
with Pastor Woodbine.

MERCEDES

These folks ain't come here to see
you. They came here to see me.

(MORE)

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

Now unless you here to see the show
I suggests you get to steppin'.

PASTOR WOODBINE

I'm not goin' up into that den of
sin and you ain't neither.

Pastor Woodbine starts dragging Mercedes away.

MERCEDES

You think I'm gone walk away from
all my fans? You trippin'.

PASTOR WOODBINE

These folks don't care nothin'
about you, don't care nothin' about
yo' soul.

MERCEDES

Lawd, here you go...

PASTOR WOODBINE

These folks paid money to see you
dance thru the gates of hell.

MERCEDES

Pink Pony ain't hell, Ma: it's a
job, as you well know I'm retiring
from. 'Fact, I need you to gone go
up in that church fund and give me
back what I let y'all hold. Real
estate man say there's a property
up for auction thass perfect for my
gym. I'ma put it all down soon as
the sun come up. All 20 stacks...

CLOSE ON Pastor Woodbine's somber face.

PASTOR WOODBINE

Well, you might have to wait--

MERCEDES

Naw, Ma, man said I need to move on
it first thing in the morning. It's
all finally coming into place for
me. Just like He said it would.

PASTOR WOODBINE

He'll make a way out of no way
won't He?

MERCEDES

Yes, He will.

PASTOR WOODBINE

He always answers prayers. Like I prayed for years you'd stop this madness and look at you. You done finally done it. God answers prayers, but I've been on the request line a lil' bit longer than you...

Mercedes starts walking back.

MERCEDES

Ma, I don't know what you yip-yappin' 'bout, Just meet me in the morning wit' my stacks--

PASTOR WOODBINE

Bank denied us that loan, Mercedes. But as you said, God will make a way out of no way. Oh, yes He will. I had to put yo' money down for the new church building.

Looooong ass beat.

MERCEDES

(breathless)

Fuck you mean? Them stacks was for my gym--

PASTOR WOODBINE

Do you know how many lives will be changed, how many souls saved because of your *gift*?

MERCEDES

But that was for my girls!

PASTOR WOODBINE

Well, dancing for the devil ain't gone bring them girls salvation.

MERCEDES

You know what, e'erybody don't find God in the church, Ma. Some folks find Him in they *own* damn self!

PASTOR WOODBINE

It was dirty money and I made it clean. I did this to save your blaspheming' soul.

MERCEDES

Naw you did it for yourn! You
always steady stay thinking 'bout
yourself. What you wanna do. Thass
how you always been. If yo'
congregation really knew who the
fuck you was...You pimped me when I
was a little girl and you been
pimping me ever since...

PASTOR WOODBINE

Christ forgave me for that, and you
gone have to forgive me for that,
too.

MERCEDES

All along the devil I been dancing
for is you...

PASTOR WOODBINE

Flesh of my flesh, blood of my
blood, I didn't make this world.
Was just born in it. Don't deprive
me of my humanity. My mistakes. My
God believe in second chances. I
took mine. Now, it's time for you
to take yours.

Pastor Woodbine raises her hands to an angry sky.

PASTOR WOODBINE (CONT'D)

The doors of Breath of Life Full
Gospel Baptist Tabernacle are now
open. Come daughter, come before
the rapture descends upon your
ratchet soul...

MERCEDES

Fuck salvation, Ma. I want my
money!!! That was my sweat. My
tears. My...self-muthafuckin'
respect I sacrificed on that--

*Pastor Woodbine brings down her hands and slaps Mercedes who
falls to her knees.*

PASTOR WOODBINE

(growling)

With all you put Gawd through. You
owe Him this. You. Owe. Me.

Pastor Woodbine stands over her daughter daring her to stand
up to this mountain of a woman.

This is the *one woman* that strikes fear into the heart of Mercedes. Beat. Mercedes kowtows.

MERCEDES

(small, quiet)

Well, when you sitting pretty top
your pulpit and them siddity ass
church-hat wearing bitches wanna
snicker and laugh at me, just
remember to tell them, "My daughter
Mercedes' booty built this bitch."

RACK FOCUS to Autumn Night watching as Mercedes totter back into the back door.

DJ STALLION (PRE-LAP)

This is what we been waiting fuh
all night.

INT. THE PINK PONY - DJ BOOTH - NIGHT

Uncle Clifford clomps up to the DJ booth looking over a HYPED UP crowd.

CLOSE ON her hands handing DJ Stallion a THUMB DRIVE.

DJ STALLION

E'erbody ready? I said. Are. You.
READDDDDYYYY????

UNCLE CLIFFORD

(leaning in)

Load this up quick fast, this
Mercedes' changed her last dance
song...

DJ Stallion narrows his eyes but pops it into his lap top anyway...

INT. THE PINK PONY - STAGE WINGS - NIGHT

Mercedes stands in the shadows, trying to gather the shards of her heart off of the floor. With only a few seconds to get into the zone, she bows her head in prayer...

DJ STALLION (V.O.)

It's ya girl , throwin' it at us
for the last time. We gone miss
this bitch. Been the Pink Pony
Twerk Twister for seven years
skraight. Rest in Power to
MERCEEEEEEEEEEEESSSSSS!!

She walks into...

INT. THE PINK PONY - MAIN STAGE - NIGHT

...the shafts of light, slicing across her brown skin, leaving temporary tattoos of illumination. In the silence, Mercedes' body cuts a wavy silhouette against the light. For a beat, she stands on that stage making a memory, a hundred hungry eyes crawling across her flesh.

Then the beat drops.

LIL' MURDER (V.O.)
*E'erbody E'erbody wanna sit in my
lap/ E'erbody, E'erbody wanna make
that ass clap...*

Mercedes stops for a second. And throws a century's worth of shade at the DJ booth. DJ Stallion widens his eyes. *WTF!* Frozen, she stands akimbo as Lil' Murder's song continues to play.

DJ STALLION
ReeeeewinnnnD!!!!

DJ Stallion brings that beat back. A HORN BLARES as another song begins to spin. An unmistakable raw FEMININE VOICE rides a hard trap beat...

CARDI B (V.O.)
Look, I don't dance now
I make money moves/
Say I don't gotta dance
I make money move/
If I see you n' I'on speak
That means I'on fuck with you/
I'm a boss, you a worker bitch
I make bloody moves

Mercedes starts BUCK-JUMPING around the stage hyping an already ham CROWD. This goddess of twerk reveals that God is indeed a woman and She is in the building. She scampers up the pole, like a squirrel, catching air twixt her toes. The CROWD erupts in applause. An OG got mad tricks under her floss. While holding the top of the pole, she does the splits on the ceiling. Like the world has turned upside down just for her. She matrixes her muscles and slowly moonwalks on air back down to be with us earthlings. This must be what freedom feel like.

The sweat builds on that brown skin. She's serving it up, leaving herself on that pulpit, that pedestal. She is going. *Full. Out.* Dancing for self more than salvation.

Lil' Murder scans the room, watching the illuminated CELL PHONES capturing Mercedes' final chapter for the record books.

Lil' Murder's eyes land on Uncle Clifford standing across the room. If looks could kill, she'd be 12 feet underground right now. But Uncle Clifford just winks at Lil' Murder from that safe distance and heads back to her bullet-proof cocoon.

Suddenly, the CEILING TRAP is released and GLITTER flutters in SLOW MOTION to the ground.

AERIAL VIEW as the iridescent flakes smash into Mercedes' body mixing with the sweat, making her glisten like a starry night sky.

The BOTTLE GIRLS raise SPARKLERS up to Mercedes, basking in the APPLAUSE, the MAGIC, the SPECTACLE of it all.

SMASH TO BLACK:

INT. THE PINK PONY - LOCKER ROOM - DAWN

From deep inside, we see Autumn Night opening Mercedes' locker. She looks at the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGS, moldy SHOWER SANDALS, and PHOTOBOOTH PICS of "THE TRINITY"-- Mercedes, Mississippi and Gidget in various compromising positions, and a stuffed...SQUIRREL -- artifacts from the era of Mercedes' reign. Autumn Night has taken the top spot. Before closing the locker door, she places her PINK PISTOL on the upper shelf...

INT. THE PINK PONY - MAIN FLOOR - DAWN

The work lights illuminate the trash as WORKERS sweep away the confetti and condom wrappers littering the floor. The magic is gone and now we see the show for what it is. Grit and glitter, shit and shine, remnants of the Dirty South pushed into salivating dust bins.

INT. THE PINK PONY - OFFICE - DAWN

Mercedes rakes through the two trash bags of cash she's just hauled in. Starts handing out money.

MERCEDES

See, what I say I was gone do?
That's 200 dollars for Yoli. 50
cents for Maite...60 for these
snagga-tooth-ass bottle girls. One-
fitty for the DJ--

Mercedes snatches the money back from DJ Stallion.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)

First time one of my sets been roofied. Lil' *Schmurda* musta broke you off something real nice to have you slip that shit in on a bitch.

DJ STALLION

Lil' *Murder* ain't give me nothing. You betta talk to yo' bawse 'bout that. That was a Uncle Clifford request.

DJ Stallion grabs his money and walks out the door. We CIRCLE Mercedes as Uncle Clifford walks in from behind.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Well, somebody left two stacks for y'all little "champagne room experience."

(to Mercedes)

That's a G for you.

(to Autumn Night)

And a G for you.

Mercedes narrows her eyes. Putting 2 and -3 together.

MERCEDES

He said it was more than that.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Well, it's always a lying niggah ain't it.

MERCEDES

Or a lying bitch.

Uncle Clifford gives her THE LOOK. Autumn steps in to give her cut of the night's haul.

AUTUMN NIGHT

Like you said, here's 15 percent off my cut of VIP. Plus 547 from the lap dances.

Uncle Clifford, impressed passes it over to Big L for counting.

UNCLE CLIFFORD

Look at that Mercedes. She beat you on the lap dance tip.

MERCEDES
(ice-grilling Autumn)
Why God made me talented and lazy I
don't know.

Autumn Night leaves the office.

MERCEDES (CONT'D)
She ain't even do nothing but lay
up there lookin' light.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
Well, thass what yella bitches do.

Mercedes, peeved, counts out her 15 percent and throws it on
the table. But Uncle Clifford refuses to take it.

MERCEDES
Ain't this what I owe you?

Instead Uncle Clifford places TWO STACKS on top of the cash.

UNCLE CLIFFORD
You can call that my severance
package. Add in on to what Lil'
Murder owe you.

Mercedes' eyes well.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
Now turn around.

Mercedes does, booty hanging like a goodie on a shelf, not
yet expired.

UNCLE CLIFFORD (CONT'D)
And that's how I wanna remember yo'
ass.

Mercedes nods. Sniffles. Marches out. Uncle Clifford hands
the girls' earnings to Big L to run through the machine. Big
L places the night's stacks in the refrigerator safe.

From deep inside the safe we that the money goes waaaaay on
back, along with several KILOS of COKE.

OFF Uncle Clifford's STOIC LOOK.

EXT. THE PINK PONY - BACK LOT - DAWN

The sun is staking her rightful place in the sky. Autumn
Night stands there smoking her vice. Her purse heavy with
beacoup bank. She could get used to this.

The door opens and our Mississippi misfits trickle out one by one. Autumn nods at everyone as they clomp off to their respective rides.

Mercedes, always the last one, stumbles out the back door CLANKING shut behind her.

The OG and The Chameleon stand there for a spell, drinking up the silence. Mercedes pulls out her CAR KEYS and is about to walk off when--

AUTUMN NIGHT

Any *parting* words of wisdom,
Mercedes?

MERCEDES

Yeah...make sure you know where all
the exits in this bitch are. Don't
know when you might have to turn a
closed door into a window.

AUTUMN NIGHT

(a threat)

Well, don't get cut climbing your
way back in.

With that, Autumn Night throws her cigarette into a puddle and switches off.

Something about that parting shot stings. *What does this bitch know?* A levee of worry breaks inside of Mercedes. Frozen, she stands there framed by the LOCKED DOOR.

CARDI B's BODAK YELLOW (the Latin version) rises up...

We ZOOM OUT from Mercedes' broken face to see her dwarfed by the Pink Pony. We float up towards the heavens like a mosquito caught up in a twister taking in the dying Delta.

From God's perch in the sky, we see this world pockmarked with unfinished subdivisions, abandoned gins, and cotton, cotton, cotton as far as the eye can see. Up here dreams seem possible...up here...

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT