

CONCRETE COWBOYS

Shelter from the Noise

A New Rock Musical

By Tommy Braaten

[Based on a true story]

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

THE PARK RANGER (Narrator)

A shape-shifting guide who frames the band's story within the cultural shifts of late-'70s/early-'80s rock.

MAX WATTS ("The Kid")

Ambitious lead guitarist whose drive propels the band forward at the cost of personal connection.

TOMMY O'NEIL ("Dude")

The drummer and emotional lens, navigating identity, loyalty, and the true cost of ambition.

CHINO VALENTE ("The Songwriter")

A gifted bassist whose charm and instinct reveal the freedom—and fragility—of living in the moment.

KNUTE ("The Cowboy")

The band's hustling roadie, whose risky solutions keep them moving while courting disaster.

GHOST DEBBIE (also BARTENDER DEBBIE)

A sharp-tongued muse and conscience who appears only to Tommy, challenging illusion and denial.

JOHNNY DIRT (Played by RANGER/NARRATOR)

A larger-than-life club owner who embodies the raw proving ground of the Jersey rock scene.

MARK KAMINS - THE A&R AGENT

A deal-making insider who personifies the collision between artistic vision and industry reality.

SONGS BY SCENE/CHARACTER

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 – SHELTER FROM THE STORM	THE BAND
SCENE 2 – YOU’RE NO ROCK STAR	NARRATOR
SCENE 3 – THE TIDE IS TURNING	THE BAND
SCENE 4 – GET IT DONE	JOHNNY & DEBBIE
SCENE 5 – WHEN I CAN DREAM	TOMMY & DEBBIE
SCENE 6 – WE ARE THE ONES	THE BAND
SCENE 7 – SHAKE THAT SHADOW	THE BAND
SCENE 8 – EMPTY GLASSES – TOMMY	TOMMY
SCENE 9 – GET IT DONE – REPRISE	JOHNNY & MARK

ACT TWO

SCENE 10 – EMPTY GLASSES – MAX	MAX
SCENE 11 – FLICKER & GLOW	THE BAND
SCREEN AGE ANTHEM	COMPANY
SCENE 12 – LIGHTS WENT OUT	TOMMY
SCENE 13 – WE ARE THE ONES – REPRISE	COMPANY
SCENE 14 – WE WALKED THE WIRE	COMPANY

ACT ONE**SCENE 1 - BEFORE THE CITY**

(The stage floor is a dark, packed dirt or asphalt texture. The main set piece is a battered picnic table covered in a tattered, heavy-duty tarp, forming a crude shelter. Upstage left, a broken, derelict hot dog cart sits as a subtle visual. A slightly weathered PARK RANGER stands downstage right, holding a clipboard. A distant, faint crackle of radio static as the lights come up on the PARK RANGER.)

(Static. A radio clicks on.)

WDHA RADIO ANNOUNCER

Here's the WDHA News Brief.

August fourth — John Lennon and Yoko Ono started recording a new album called *Double Fantasy*.

On September thirteenth Elton John played a free concert in New York's Central Park. Four hundred thousand people showed up and he wore a Donald Duck costume for the encore.

(Music stinger. Static.)

(The PARK RANGER clicks the radio off.)

PARK RANGER

(To the audience.)

Good morning campers. Welcome to Spruce Run, New Jersey. Just outside New York City — close enough to hear the noise, far enough to pretend you're not part of it. Fall. The campsites are full and everybody thinks the big story is happening somewhere else.

New York City's right over there — loud, dangerous, electric. Before the neon took over, New York was a different kind of animal. In the late '70s, it wasn't a postcard—it was a battlefield. You had punk kids with safety pins for armor, disco queens with glitter grenades... and every basement in the five boroughs smelled like gunpowder and hope. Revolutions don't start with a bang. They start with a borrowed van and fifty-six dollars.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where our story truly begins. The air's still thick with the ashes of disco. You remember Disco Demolition Night? July '79. Comiskey Park. Thousands of records, up in smoke. It wasn't just about the music. It was about kicking out the old. Clearing the decks. Making room for... well, that's always the question, isn't it? What comes next? And who gets to decide?

(He gestures subtly towards the campsite.)

These kids didn't grow up here – they grew up under open skies. Montana. Big horizons, quiet towns. The kind of place where dreams feel heavy, and every choice echoes for miles. They had the van, they had the fifty-six dollars, and they had a dream too loud to ignore. And now... here they are, trying to turn small-town ambition into city-sized music.

(The stage lights on him dim slightly, as the light on the campsite brightens. MAX is already awake, meticulously polishing a well-worn electric guitar, his focus intense. TOMMY slowly emerges from under a picnic table, rubbing his temples, his hand instinctively going to his throbbing black eye.)

PARK RANGER

(Approaching the campsite he spots TOMMY's eye.)

Well, good morning, sleeping beauties. Looks like someone already had a fight with the sunrise. Or maybe just a stubborn pillow.

MAX

He was just being himself. Which, as usual, resulted in me being incredibly pissed off.

TOMMY

It wasn't my fault. You just... you just don't get it. I tripped. Walked right into it. The doorframe, you know? Just... didn't see it.

MAX

(Turns sharply to TOMMY)

(MAX)

You want to run that by me again, Dude? Maybe you want another souvenir for that face? You got a problem, you talk to me, not to the picnic table. You want to just sit here, licking your wounds in the dark, or do you want to write history? We need to be the next Beatles, man! Not some forgotten garage band playing to three drunks and a woodland creature.

TOMMY

The Beatles? You think we're the Beatles? You think we're going to write "Yesterday" and "Helter Skelter" in a tent next to a dumpster? We're barely keeping it together. Seems like you're aiming a little high for two guys who just fought over a loose tarp. Maybe we should aim for "getting through the day without a black eye" first.

(He rubs his eye.)

TOMMY

Max, I don't want a revolution staged on my behalf. I want to choose my own war.

MAX

There's no choosing, Dude. The dream chooses you."

RANGER

(To the audience.)

See, independence is tricky. Everybody wants it, nobody knows what it costs. These boys are still paying with borrowed change and borrowed dreams. Revolutions don't start with strategy. They start with rebellion. And these boys? Oh, they're close... They just don't know what they're rebelling against yet.

TOMMY

Just... forget it. I'm just... grumpy. And frankly, this whole "New York is better than LA" thing you keep pushing, Max... I still don't get it. Seems like a lot more grind for... well, what exactly?

PARK RANGER

(He turns his attention to MAX.)

Grumpy or bruised, either way, you owe me five dollars. Another day, another five bucks. Unless you want the monthly pass? Save us both some trouble. This daily grind ain't good for my vibe either. Paperwork, park budgets... you think you've got problems?

MAX

(Finally looks up from his guitar.)

Five dollars... right. Look, Ranger, can we talk about this? This daily grind is killing our vibe!

MAX

Tommy, we've been over this! New York is where it's happening. The grit, the real scene. It's got the history. It's got the raw energy. It's got... it's got everything we need. We're on the verge of something big here. We're gonna be... influential. We're gonna get a record deal. That's the goal. The real goal. Not just... camping.

PARK RANGER

A record deal. Right. The state doesn't run on vibes, son. And it certainly doesn't run on dreams of "influential." It runs on revenue. And right now, that revenue comes from your five dollars.

MAX WATTS

But don't you understand the bigger picture? This isn't just about money! It's about the music, man! It's about the message! We're saying something important. We're artists. We're creating! Like... like The Kinks! Or The Beatles! Real music! That's influence!

PARK RANGER

The Kinks. 1964. "You Really Got Me." Gritty, raw — real influence. That sound gave American rock its edge. If you don't know your history, you'll just repeat it... or fade out fast. You think you're fresh? In a few years you'll be old like Keith Richards — or worse, forgotten.

MAX

That's what I'm talking about! That kind of staying power! Not like this manufactured stuff, this bubblegum... like Blondie. Or The Police! That's just... pop. It's not real rock and roll.

PARK RANGER

Pop, huh? Before Blondie came punk – and chaos had a name: *The Sex Pistols*. Johnny Rotten spitting in the face of polite society. "God Save the Queen" tearing through the system. Their manager, Malcolm McLaren – part genius, part con man – proved that shock sells. That's influence too. Just a different kind.

MAX

That's just chaos. That's for the history books, for documentaries. We're about the future. We're about transforming it. About making something with substance! Something that lasts, like The Beatles. Their songwriting, Ranger. Pure genius. That's what we aspire to!

(CHINO VALENTE stirs from his sleeping bag.)

CHINO VALENTE

Morning, Ranger! Sounds like a serious discussion out here! Are we talking about The Beatles? Because if we are... Lennon and McCartney, truly touched by the gods. The lyrical complexity, the harmonies... unmatched. Am I right, Max?

MAX WATTS

You are absolutely right, Chino. Finally, someone who gets it. Pure, undeniable influence. That's the lineage.

CHINO VALENTE

(Picks up a brightly colored Rubik's Cube from a nearby crate, turning it idly in his hands.)

You know, Tommy, sometimes I feel like this Rubik's Cube. All these disparate parts. My melodies. Max's raw power. Your...

(He gestures vaguely at TOMMY)

(CHINO VALENTE)

...your rhythm. All jumbled. But there is a sequence. A perfect harmony of moves. We just gotta find it. Like a song.

TOMMY

(He rubs his black eye, mutters to himself.)

This isn't coffee. This is regret. I'd give up a platinum record for a decent cup right now.

MAX

Rolls his eyes. A platinum record, Tommy? Really? You'd trade the dream for a cup of lukewarm brown water?

TOMMY

If it's good lukewarm brown water. And for the record, the raccoon agreed. He prefers French press.

MAX

A critic raccoon, huh? Tommy, you're the only person who thinks our local wildlife is moonlighting for Rolling Stone.

TOMMY

Well, he certainly wasn't impressed with the catering.

MAX

Heard it. They just want to hear the music, Dude. They're our first fans. We'll get to the tarps. Priorities. This is rock and roll. It's not supposed to be easy. We rough it for the art. Remember that.

TOMMY

So... this record deal? How exactly does that happen, Max? We're out here in the woods, arguing about raccoons. Are we even getting closer? Or just getting hungrier?

MAX

We get closer by sticking to the plan. By being so undeniable, they have to notice. It takes patience, Tommy. It takes believing, even when you're eating stale bread and the Ranger's breathing down your neck. The record deal isn't just some handout. It's what you earn by bleeding for your art. It's what you earn by being ready when that door opens. And it will open.

(KNUTE enters from offstage left. He's dressed in worn Western gear—a fringed leather jacket, a cowboy hat, and dusty boots.)

KNUTE

(Excitedly almost bursting.)

Max! Boys! You are NOT gonna believe this! I just walked past those payphones down the road... made a few calls... and I scored us a gig! A real one! And it's our first New York City gig!

MAX

A gig? Where, Knute? Don't mess with me, man.

KNUTE

CBGB's! The legendary CBGB's! Birthplace of Blondie, first US gig for The Police, regular hangout for the Ramones! This isn't just a gig, Max. It's the gig! And it's for Tuesday!

MAX WATT

CBGB's... Tuesday? Alright, Knute! This is it! This is really it!

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

CBGB's. Sacred ground. Birthplace of legends — and graveyard of thousands of dreams. You see the light, the headlines. What you don't see is the grime and the gamble. This ain't some poem, and it ain't a wish. It's the noise — everything trying to swallow you whole. What's waiting in that city isn't fame. It's a choice: Are you gonna find shelter from the noise, or are you gonna drown in it?

SONG: SHELTER FROM THE NOISE**ALL**

HEY!
 WE SLEEP WHERE THE PINE TREES BLEED
 NO STAGE, JUST DIRT AND WEED
 IS THIS THE DREAM OR JUST A PLOY?
 WE'RE CHASING STATIC
 SHELTER FROM THE NOISE!
 (FROM THE NOISE)

TOMMY

WOKE UP SIDEWAYS UNDER PLASTIC TARP
 BLACK EYE THROBBIN' LIKE A FALSE ALARM
 SNARE HAND'S TWITCHIN', HEARTBEAT'S SLOW
 CITY'S CALLING I STILL DON'T KNOW—
 WHAT THE HELL I'M DOING HERE
 WHAT I LEFT, WHAT I FEAR, WHAT I WANTED,
 WHO I WAS, MAN, IT'S ALL JUST FUZZ

MAX

DON'T LOOK FOR ANSWERS IN A BUSTED VAN
 I MAKE THE MAP—I'M THE ONLY MAN
 THIS AIN'T SOME POEM, THIS AIN'T A WISH
 IT'S GEAR AND GRIME AND IT'S GIGS AND RISK

TOMMY

WHAT THE HELL I'M DOING HERE
 WHAT I LEFT, WHAT I FEAR, WHAT I WANTED,
 WHO I WAS
 I'M A TWIN WITH NO REFLECTION
 YOU NEED A RESURRECTION
 I FALL IN LOVE WITH WHAT I LOSE
 YOU'RE JUST SCARED TO CHOOSE
 WE WANT LIGHT!
 BUT WE BURN OUT FAST
 WE WANT TRUTH!
 BUT THE MOMENT WON'T LAST
 WE WANT MORE!
 THAN THIS BROKEN VOICE
 BUT ALL WE GET IS—

ALL

SHELTER FROM THE NOISE!
 (FROM THE NOISE)

MAX

GOT A GIG, BOYS—CBGBS TONIGHT
 PUT ON THE SHADES AND GET YOUR LIES RIGHT
 DON'T BLINK MAN, YOU'LL MISS YOUR TURN

IT'S A LONG WAY BACK ONCE YOU CRASH AND BURN

TOMMY

WHAT THE HELL I'M DOING HERE
 WHAT I LEFT, WHAT I FEAR, WHAT I WANTED,
 WHO I WAS
 MAN, IT'S ALL JUST FUZZ

TWO OF ME, BOTH OFF BEAT
 ONE WANTS HEAVEN, ONE WANTS SLEEP
 I WAS THE DRUMMER, NOW I DRIFT
 I'M THE DREAM THAT DON'T EXIST

WE WANT LIGHT!
 BUT IT FLICKERS AND FADES
 WE WANT SOUND!
 BUT IT ECHOES LIKE BLAME
 WE WANT MORE!
 THAN THIS RAGGED NOISE

ALL

WE WANT LIGHT!
 BUT IT FLICKERS AND FADES
 WE WANT SOUND!
 BUT IT ECHOES LIKE BLAME
 WE WANT MORE!
 THAN THIS RAGGED NOISE
 (GTR SOLO)
 WE WANT LIGHT!

(LIGHTS FADE to black.)

SCENE 2 - THREE CHORDS AND A PRAYER

(A simple set piece evokes the iconic exterior of CBGB - faded awning, covered in graffiti. Downstage right, the FOOD CART is set up. The PARK RANGER is behind the counter, wearing a stained apron over his uniform shirt, looking less formal, more street-worn. He is now the FOOD CART GUY. Sounds of distant city traffic.)

FOOD CART GUY

(Addressing the audience, as if beginning a court summation.)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury - Exhibit A: the Bowery, New York City. When disco's glitter faded, a new sound was born in a dim, beer-stained club called CBGB. The Lexington and Concord of punk. No muskets, just guitars badly tuned and violently optimistic. Every kid who walked through this door was declaring independence from whatever town they escaped. Back then, everybody thought they were the next big thing. You showed up with three chords and a prayer, and maybe somebody let you plug in...

But ambition's cheap. Strings and rent aren't. They thought New York would knight them as rock royalty. Instead, the city handed them a musket and said: 'Good luck, patriot.

New York wasn't one city. It was a collection of moods. And every night, the rules changed. Back in the day, Patti Smith took the mic, a poet turned rock priestess, bleeding words into music. "Because the Night" - proof that punk could think and feel. Then came Blondie - sharp, infectious, mixing punk's grit with pop's pulse. "Heart of Glass," and "Call Me." Even the Brits caught the fever - The Police blending reggae and rock into something new. From that tiny stage came a movement - chaotic, brilliant, impossible to ignore.

(TOMMY shuffles into the scene, rubbing his black eye.)

FOOD CART GUY

And here we have Exhibit B: The Drummer. Still clinging to yesterday's bruises, chasing today's breakfast. Some things never change, no matter the postcode.

TOMMY

Uh... what's good here, chief? Something that tastes like I didn't just wake up on a pile of concrete.

FOOD CART GUY

Concrete? Must be Tuesday. We got the Lamb Shish Kabob today. Best in the five boroughs. Or at least, the best on this block of the Bowery that won't make you question your life choices.

TOMMY

Yeah, okay. Lamb Shish Kabob then. Anything to forget the last 72 hours.

(**MAX WATTS** enters, looking slightly more alert than Tommy, carrying his guitar case. He spots Tommy and walks over, a forced cheerfulness.)

FOOD CART GUY

And the leader. Always ready for a new stage, even if it's just the sidewalk. The perpetual motion machine of ambition.

MAX

Tommy, my man! New York. You found the spot! This is it, Dude! Greenwich Village Supper Club! Tonight, we feast!

TOMMY

Yeah, feast on grease and regret. And it's Tuesday, Max. Not tonight.

MAX

Tonight *is* the night, Tommy! CBGB's! You act like you forgot! This is our shot, man! It doesn't matter if the stage is spit and wishes, or if the crowd is just three punks and a dog. We're here. We earned this. You gotta believe we can own it. You have to be ready to leave your mark. This ain't about pretty, man. This is about being heard. Just make the noise count.

TOMMY

I know, Max. I know. But what if we're not loud enough? What if the noise we make... isn't the right kind of noise?

MAX

Ooh, lamb! Excellent choice, Tommy. See? This is why we came to New York! Culinary adventures! Remember LA, everything's just... bland chain restaurants. Or bad fast food.

TOMMY

Yeah, but in LA, at least there were palm trees. And not sleeping under upturned picnic tables. And I still don't get it, Max. Everyone goes to LA for a record deal. Why New York? It just feels... harder. What are we missing?

MAX WATTS

Harder means better, Dude. It means real. Look, the scene here... it's authentic. And speaking of authentic... where's Chino? He wasn't at the campsite this morning. Did he finally figure out how to do his laundry without my help? Or did he just melt into the concrete?

TOMMY

Beats me. He's probably off somewhere contemplating the existential dread of a broken bass string. Or chasing a stray cat. He's weird, you know?

(**MAX** Grabs a piece of Tommy's lamb kabob.)

TOMMY

Hey!

(Max takes a bite, then winces.)

MAX

Hmm, a little gamey. My Indian place down the street is way better. Seriously, Dude, it'll change your life. Or at least your digestive system.

TOMMY

I'm sure. And Chino's probably found some mind-blowing Mexican joint, covered in glitter. He was talking about getting some street-style burritos last night.

(**CHINO** and **KNUTE** enter from stage left. Chino looks disheveled but strangely invigorated, a dreamy look in his eyes. He has a small, brightly colored Mexican food container. Knute looks far too cheerful, almost manic.)

FOOD CART GUY

(A wry glance towards the newcomers.)

And just when you think you've seen it all, they arrive. The dreamer, and his... facilitator. Always an interesting pair.

KNUTE

(Beaming, holding up a peace sign.)

Morning, boys! You won't BELIEVE the adventure Chino and I had! An experience, I tell ya!

MAX

There you are! Where in the hell were you? We thought you'd been abducted by performance artists.

CHINO

(Holds out his Mexican food container almost reverently)

Mexican. From a tiny place on 6th Avenue. They use fresh cilantro. It was... transcendent. Like playing at CBG'S. Or staying at the Chelsea.

TOMMY

The Chelsea? What are you talking about?

KNUTE

The Chelsea Hotel, boys! Chino and I spent the night! The very same room! You know, the one where... the incident happened!

FOOD CART GUY

(to the audience)

Exhibit C: The Chelsea Hotel – the city's haunted heart. Elvis Costello sang, "I don't want to go to Chelsea," but every artist did. Dylan, Joplin, Cohen, Patti Smith – they all passed through its doors, paying rent in art and chaos. And then came Sid and Nancy – love, violence, punk distilled to its ugliest truth. Their story was the price of rebellion: inspiration and destruction, sharing a room. That's the other side of the music. The part they don't put on the record sleeve.

CHINO

Sid and Nancy. Can you believe it? I felt... the vibrations. The raw, desperate energy. And the stains on the carpet... so authentic. So punk. It was... (he shivers with a strange mix of awe and disgust) ...inspiring. The absolute chaos. You know, Sid Vicious couldn't do his own laundry either. It's truly a testament to artistic purity, no time for such mundane concerns.

TOMMY

You... you stayed in that room? With a... with a hooker? Cowboy, what the hell?! And how did you even pay for that?! We're sleeping in a park, man!

KNUTE

Details, details, Dude. An investment in Chino's artistic development! He needed to feel the *real* New York grit! And besides, I told you, I'm good at making friends. And this city... it's got *opportunities*.

MAX

Wait a minute. Chelsea Hotel... Knute, where did you get the money for that? Because I distinctly remember having three hundred dollars tucked away in that copy of *Less Than Zero* in the truck. Three hundred dollars we got from that bookstore gig last week. And now... it's gone.

TOMMY

Gone? Three hundred dollars? Cowboy! Did you pay for the Chelsea with our money?!

KNUTE

Well, now, Dude... "our" money? I facilitated that gig, didn't I? Finder's fee! And it was for the band's artistic immersion! Chino needed to feel the real... you know... vibe! You can't put a price on inspiration!

CHINO

The vibrations were incredible, Max. Truly. You should have felt them. Like a thousand broken strings singing.

MAX

Three hundred dollars, Knute. That was supposed to pay for our permit. Our food. You took our operating cash for a... for a punk rock seance?!

KNUTE

Look, I gotta go get my own breakfast! And Chino needs some more fresh cilantro! We'll talk about this later, Max! Inspiration waits for no man!

(KNUTE quickly pulls CHINO by the arm and they make their exit, Chino still eating.)

FOOD CART GUY

And there they go, off to chase their... inspiration. Or maybe just a clean shirt.

TOMMY

Three hundred dollars. Gone. He just... took it. I told you he was slippery! And how did he even know about the money? We just put it there last night!

MAX

I don't know, Tommy. I just... I don't know. This is exactly what I was talking about. We can't even get out of the starting blocks if we can't trust each other with the basics.

TOMMY

So that's it, huh? Our big New York debut, over breakfast. So much for the Greenwich Village Supper Club.

(The Food Cart Guy steps forward, addressing the audience.)

FOOD CART GUY / NARRATOR

You see 'em? Two kids with stars in their eyes and lint in their pockets. CBGBs – the mecca. The myth. They think playing here makes 'em legends already. But the truth? Money talks. Dreams walk. And trust – trust always breaks first.

(He circles them)

A famous club doesn't make you a rock star. Not when the rent's due, your gear's pawned, and you're arguing over who ate the last donut. That first gig? It's just the *on-ramp* to a long, uneven road – potholes, broken strings, and the sound of your own hope echoing back at you.

The world's not cheering yet, boys.
No – right now, it's smirking.

SONG: YOU'RE NO ROCK STAR**FOOD CART GUY / NARRATOR**

YOU'RE NO ROCK STAR
YOU'RE JUST DREAMIN' THEY'RE NOT SCREAMIN FOR YOU
YOU'RE NO ROCK STAR
YOU'RE JUST PLAYIN' I'M JUST SAYIN' TO YOU
YOU DON'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES YOU DON'T KNOW HOW IT MAKES ME FEEL
WHEN I SEE YOU THINKIN' 'BOUT GOING FOR BROKE
HANGING 'ROUND THOSE CLUBS SO FILLED WITH SMOKE
WATCHING ALL THOSE GROUPIES DANCE
WISHING YOU WOULD TAKE THEM HOME
AND YOU GUYS END UP HERE ALONE

OH, YOU'RE NO ROCK STAR, HEAR ME LOUD AND CLEAR
JUST A FADING SHADOW, LOST RIGHT HERE
THE DREAM IS OVER
THE SHOW IS DONE YOU'RE CHASING
SOMETHING THAT'S NEVER BEGUN

REMEMBER WHEN YOU SAID YOU'D OWN THE STAGE
TURNING EVERY HEAD, TURNING A NEW PAGE
NOW IT'S JUST THE SAME OLD FRIDAY NIGHT
ANOTHER BROKEN STRING, NO SHINING LIGHT
YOU PRACTICED ALL THE DAY, YOUR FINGERS RAW
BUT THE INDUSTRY JUST LAUGHS AT EVERY FLAW
THE LIGHTS DIM DOWN, THE CROWD IS THIN
SAME OLD FACES, WHERE DO YOU BEGIN
WITH EMPTY GLASSES, AND BROKEN PROMISES
JUST A GHOST OF WHAT YOUR FANTASY IS

OH, YOU'RE NO ROCK STAR,
HEAR ME LOUD AND CLEAR
JUST A FADING SHADOW, LOST RIGHT HERE
THE DREAM IS OVER
THE SHOW IS DONE YOU'RE CHASING
SOMETHING THAT'S NEVER BEGUN.

I'VE SEEN THIS PLAY A THOUSAND TIMES BEFORE
WATCHED HEARTS BREAK BANGING ON THAT DOOR
THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN NEON LIGHTS AND CHEERS
IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP, CONFRONT YOUR FEARS.
(SOLO)

OH, YOU'RE NO ROCK STAR, HEAR ME LOUD AND CLEAR
JUST A FADING SHADOW, LOST RIGHT HERE
THE DREAM IS OVER, THE SHOW IS DONE YOU'RE CHASING
SOMETHING THAT'S NEVER BEGUN.

(LIGHTS FADE to black.)

SCENE 3 - NOT YET NOT HERE

(The CBGB awning is gone, replaced by a minimalist suggestion of THE MUDD CLUB in downtown Manhattan - perhaps a single, stark spotlight, a hint of brick. The FOOD CART remains downstage right, but the FOOD CART GUY (Narrator/Ranger) is no longer actively working it.)

NARRATOR

1964. A song slips like cool fog through London - "She's Not There." The Zombies. Haunting. Clean. Still echoing in jukebox neon. And on that track - Paul Atkinson playing guitar. Not loud. Not flashy. But precise - like a scalpel in a hurricane. The song refused to die. Vanilla Fudge stretched it slow - Santana set it on fire - same ghost, new skin.

And Atkinson? He crossed off the stage. Started signing the ones with lightning in their veins. ABBA. Springsteen. Hornsby. Mr. Mister. A sideman turned kingmaker.

(Spotlight on a doorway - entrance for PAUL ATKINSON.)

And tonight - he's here. He arrives with quiet confidence. He's not a singer - he's a listener. A man who judges silently, pen in pocket.

PAUL

Heard you lads have something to prove.
I'll be watching.

(He moves to a table. He listens.)

MAX

Holy hell... that's Paul Atkinson.
Paul Atkinson. The Zombies. *The Zombies*.

TOMMY

No way he actually came.
I only sent those subpoenas as a joke.

(Paul steps into earshot - dry smile.)

PAUL ATKINSON

Well, Mr. O'Neil... consider the joke delivered.

MAX

Sir — Max Watts. This is Tommy O'Neil. We're the band... from Roundup, Montana.

PAUL ATKINSON

(nods politely)

Lasoo, Montana, yes. Remarkable.

TOMMY

Roundup. Like the rodeo — you know, wrangling cattle.

PAUL ATKINSON

Of course. Wranglers from Lasoo. Very rustic.

TOMMY

Roundup. *ROUND-UP*. One word. You gather things. Bring 'em together. Like music, I guess.

PAUL ATKINSON

Fascinating imagery. I'll remember that — a band from Lasoo.

TOMMY

Roundup.

(Paul gently waves it off.)

MAX

But how did you even know we were playing here?
We didn't even think anyone important would see—

PAUL ATKINSON

(Producing a folded document like a legal brief)

Because *this* landed on my desk.

(He unfolds it, reads with authority.)

PAUL ATKINSON

"You are hereby subpoenaed to appear at the Mudd Club to witness the future of rock and roll."

A bold move. Legally questionable. Rather *punk*, actually.

(*He folds it again.*)

MAX

So... you came.

PAUL ATKINSON

Curiosity. And a good summons is hard to ignore.

PAUL ATKINSON

I'll stay for a set. Show me what *Lasoo* sounds like.

TOMMY

(desperate)

It's *Roundup*...

MAX

Okay. Okay. We can do this.

PAUL ATKINSON

Surprise me.

(LIGHTS SHIFT — **THE BAND PREPARES TO PLAY** - Paul watches. Takes notes, smirks, maybe winces.)

SONG: THIS TIDE IS TURNING

THE DISCO DUST JUST CHOKED THE AIR
A SILENT GASP, A HOLLOW STARE
BUT UNDERNEATH, A TREMOR GROANED
A SEED OF RAGE, ABRUPTLY SOWN
FROM ISLAND FOG, A PRIMAL YELL
A SAVAGE CHORD, BREAKING THE SPELL
IT CUT THE POLISH, STRUCK THE NERVE
A HARDER LINE, A WICKED CURVE

THIS RESTLESS SPIRIT, CAN'T BE TAMED
A GRINDING RHYTHM, FIERCELY CLAIMED
FROM SHIFTING GROUND TO ELECTRIC SKY
A NEW WAVE BREAKING, PIERCING HIGH
YEAH, THIS TIDE IS TURNING, CAN'T DENY
(YEAH, THIS TIDE IS TURNING, CAN'T DENY)

YEARS TURNED, THE ANGER STILL RAN HOT
A NEW OBSESSION, TIGHTLY CAUGHT
THAT SAME COLD SHORE, A BRIGHTER FLASH
A CURRENT HITTING LIKE SHATTERED GLASS
AN ELECTRIC HUM, A DANGEROUS GLEAM
IGNITING A STARK AND VITAL DREAM

THIS RESTLESS SPIRIT, CAN'T BE TAMED
A GRINDING RHYTHM, FIERCELY CLAIMED
FROM SHIFTING GROUND TO ELECTRIC SKY
A NEW WAVE BREAKING, PIERCING HIGH
YEAH, THIS TIDE IS TURNING, CAN'T DENY
(SOLO)
YEAH, THIS TIDE IS TURNING, CAN'T DENY

FOR POWER DOESN'T BREAK AND BEND
IT FINDS NEW WAYS, RIGHT TO THE END
A CONSTANT FIRE, FROM SURGE TO SURGE
THE ENDLESS, WILD, UNSTOPPABLE URGE

THIS RESTLESS SPIRIT, CAN'T BE TAMED
A GRINDING RHYTHM, FIERCELY CLAIMED
FROM SHIFTING GROUND TO ELECTRIC SKY
A NEW WAVE BREAKING, PIERCING HIGH
YEAH, THIS TIDE IS TURNING, CAN'T DENY

(The band sits down at the table with Paul
Atkinson)

MAX

So... you liked what you heard? We tried to really capture our *raw energy*. Our message.

PAUL ATKINSON

Your energy is certainly... present. And your message — raw, yes — has conviction. Hunger. Nerve. I admire that.

TOMMY

So... is it... enough? Do we have what it takes for... a deal?

(Paul stands, shakes Max's hand kindly)

PAUL ATKINSON

You've got heart. And chaos — the good kind. You're close... just not *there*. Right now, for where the industry is heading. No, I have to pass.

MAX

Pass? But... why?

PAUL ATKINSON

It's not *why*. It's *when*. Not yet. Perhaps not here. Keep playing. Keep writing. Hold metal in the rain long enough — lightning might strike.

(Starts to leave.)

TOMMY

We should've sent a *thank you card*, not a subpoena.

MAX

Not yet. Perhaps not here. What does that even mean?

TOMMY

Someday WDHA will spin our track, and the Mudd Club will be begging for us — you'll see.

MAX

Meat Loaf didn't whisper his way up. He *BELTED*. Epic, operatic, volcanic.

TOMMY

We're not James Bond, Max. Fireworks burn out. We're one busted snare head from going acoustic in the subway.

MAX

Then think bigger. Steinman big. Cathedrals of guitar. An army of choruses. Love exploding like dynamite! If New York won't listen — we'll find a place that will.

(FOOD CART GUY/NARRATOR steps into a spot.)

NARRATOR

They walked out of the Mudd Club bruised — not on the body, but where dreams live. New York can smell hope like blood. And that night... it took a bite. Not every room is a cathedral like The Bottom Line. Not every stage wears history like The Bitter End. The Mudd Club was art over ambition — where ideas whispered in neon corners.

But across the river, in Jersey, the Dirt Club waited. No velvet. No mercy. No promises — just volume.

The Mudd Club whispered dreams. The Dirt Club screamed them. And sometimes — a scream is the only prayer a band has left.

(Lights Change)

Somewhere else in that same decade, though — Jim Steinman was carving cathedrals out of guitars. Operas disguised as rock songs. Love stories with explosions in the chorus. He and Meat Loaf didn't *perform* — they wrestled the heavens until thunder fell at their feet.

And maybe — just maybe — our boys wanted a piece of that thunder. New York said *no*. So they crossed the river to a place where *no* means "play louder."

(SFX-THUNDER)

SCENE 4 - NO MEANS PLAY LOUDER

(The thunder fades into glasses clinking. The stage is now fully transformed into THE DIRT CLUB, a gothic structure with a partially demolished brick wall and torches instead of lights. The FOOD CART GUY has now fully transformed into "REVEREND" JOHNNY DIRT, becoming more boisterous and theatrical.)

JOHNNY DIRT

So they crossed the river. Not chasing Broadway. Not chasing velvet ropes. They crossed into New Jersey — where "no" just means turn it up again.

Welcome to The Dirt Club. Bloomfield, New Jersey. Where the floor sticks, the beer's cheap, and Thursday nights belong to bands with more nerve than money. This ain't where legends arrive polished. This is where they show up tired, broke, and just dumb enough to believe. Case in point.

(He gestures toward the bar. Lights come up on MAX, TOMMY, and CHINO at the bar. MAX is counting loose change.)

MAX

We're good. We're definitely good.

TOMMY

We are not good.

CHINO

We are *creatively* good.

(BARTENDER DEBBIE appears.)

BARTENDER DEBBIE

How much you got?

(Max slides a pile of coins forward.)

...Okay. Courtesy of The Dirt Club. Hope you boys like to share.

(She reaches under the bar. Places one shot glass down.)

MAX

Oh, we love to share, Debbie. It's an efficiency thing. Reduces overhead.

CHINO

Could have some straws?

BARTENDER DEBBIE

Straws?

CHINO

Yeah! You know the trick, right? You drink whiskey through the straw—it concentrates the alcohol on your palate. Hits you faster. Stronger. It's science.

TOMMY

It's poverty. That's the science. But yeah, we maximize the minimum.

MAX

Exactly. We don't drink for volume, we drink for *impact*. One shot, three men, twice the effect. That's how we're built.

(The three men lean in and share the single shot with three straws.)

MAX

(Toasting)

To grit. To glory. To second acts we haven't screwed up yet.

TOMMY

Half a shot of Jack to split three ways. Nothing says "rising stars" like poverty and paper straws.

CHINO

There's still enough to feel it. Especially if you believe, Tommy. Ladies say confidence is better than tequila.

MAX

(holding up the newspaper)

The Police. "Pop brilliance. Urgency. Inevitable." They're touring America. Swimming in record deals.

TOMMY

They're good. Tight band.

MAX

They're polite. We are not polite.

CHINO

Polite seems to pay.

MAX

We don't need polish. We need unforgettable.

TOMMY

Unforgettable like sleeping under picnic tables?

CHINO

Or naked.

MAX

That was vision.

TOMMY

That was a felony.

MAX

Either way? Memorable.

(Johnny Dirt watches. Still silent.)

BARTENDER DEBBIE

(Smiling, wiping glasses)

You boys look like the kind that leave a mark... or at least a stain. What's your story?

MAX

Two-week gig. Crowd hated us.

TOMMY

Owner says, "Tomorrow's your last night."

MAX

So I say -if they won't remember the music...they'll remember the moment.

CHINO

Final song. No clothes. Just guitars.

TOMMY

I prayed the straps wouldn't slip.

CHINO

It slipped.

MAX

Crowd went feral. Owner gives us week two - but naked every night.

BARTENDER DEBBIE

Geniuses... or idiots.

MAX

Yes.

CHINO

People always wanted to sit in with us. One night — middle of nowhere — a guy dressed like a 1950s cowboy asks to play bass. Only people there? His wife and her parents. So we say yes. He was phenomenal.

MAX

We judged the outfit.

CHINO

Turns out he was camping, got rained out, borrowed clothes from her dad.

BARTENDER DEBBIE

So the cowboy was a disguise.

(Johnny Dirt finally steps closer.)

JOHNNY DIRT

That's rock and roll. Truth hiding in bad outfits.

MAX

What if we lean into it? Hollywood cowboys. Big myths. Big sound. We need to go shopping.

TOMMY

George Washington didn't dress like the British.

MAX

He dressed like a revolution.

(Lights shift. The room focuses.)

JOHNNY DIRT

Alright. Now you're talkin' my language. Ladies and gentlemen – now I can properly welcome you. This is THE DIRT CLUB. Bloomfield, New Jersey's last great rock-and-roll circus.

We ain't Asbury Park. We ain't the Bowery. We're where bands come before anyone tells 'em who they're supposed to be. By day, I run the Dirt Empire – club, label, T-shirts hot off the press. By night? We throw open the doors. Thursdays belonged to The Smithereens. Before MTV. Before stadiums. Right here – on a stage the size of a pizza box. This place doesn't make stars. It reveals 'em.

And you boys? You're right on the edge of finding out who you are.

So let's get this straight – you've been naked, misunderstood, mistaken for locals, tourists, and livestock... And now you wanna play like it's the final act of a rock opera nobody asked for.

MAX

Nobody asks for thunder.

JOHNNIE DIRT

Exactly. There was a guy once – wrote songs like endings. No subtlety. Everything on ten.

BARTENDER DEBBIE

Big feelings. Bigger choruses.

JOHNNIE DIRT

This ain't a whisper room, boys. This is Jersey. If you're gonna dream...

Song: GET IT DONE**BARTENDER DEBBIE**

GET IT DONE
GET IT DONE

JOHNNY DIRT

MAYBE IT'S JUST A CASTLE WALL
THAT'S GOT ME STANDIN' SO TALL
BUT DON'T YOU KNOW THAT THIS OLD TRAIN
DOESN'T STOP AT THE BLOOMFIELD MALL
I BUILT A CLUB AND WE CAN PACK THE FLOOR
AND THEN THEY'RE SCREAMIN' FOR MORE
THE DIRT HAS IT ALL

THE BEER IS CHEAP AND THE NIGHTS ARE LONG
THE BANDS ARE PLAYING LOUD
IT'S FRIDAY NIGHT AND THE KIDS ARE HERE
ANOTHER ROWDY CROWD
I BUILT THE STAGE AND I CRANK THE SOUND
SO YOU CAN PLAY THE GUITAR
I CAN MAKE YOU A STAR

BARTENDER DEBBIE

BUT JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE SO GOOD
AND YOU THINK THAT YOU'RE HOT
THERE'S SO MANY BANDS THAT ARE GOOD
BUT THEN THERE'S SOME THAT ARE NOT
BUT IF YOU DO IT THE DIRT CLUB WAY
WE'LL HAVE THOSE OTHER BANDS ON THE RUN
YOU SHOULD BE WHAT YOU WANTED TO BE
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TRUST ME

BOTH

TOGETHER WE CAN GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT DONE, WE GOTTA GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT DONE

JOHNNY DIRT

JUST ASK THE GIRLS

BARTENDER DEBBIE

HE DON'T WANT TO MAKE YOU INTO SOMETHIN'
THAT YOU REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO BE (GET IT DONE)
HE DON'T WANT TO WASTE HIS TIME ON SOMETHIN'
THAT YOU REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO SEE (GET IT DONE)

JOHNNY DIRT

IF WE GET BUSY AND HAVE A LITTLE FUN WE CAN GIVE IT A RUN
WE CAN GET IT DONE

BARTENDER DEBBIE

BUT JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE SO COOL
AND YOU THINK THAT YOU'RE GREAT
THERE'S SO MANY BANDS AT THE GATE
SOME ARE EARLY SOME ARE LATE
BUT IF YOU DO IT THE DIRT CLUB WAY
WE'LL HAVE THOSE OTHER BANDS ON THE RUN
YOU SHOULD BE WHAT YOU WANTED TO BE
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TRUST ME

BOTH

TOGETHER WE CAN GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT DONE, WE GOTTA GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT GET IT DONE
WE GOTTA GET IT DONE

JOHNNY DIRT

JUST ASK THE CROWD

BARTENDER DEBBIE

HE DON'T WANT TO MAKE YOU INTO SOMETHIN'
THAT YOU REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO BE - GET IT DONE
HE DON'T WANT TO WASTE HIS TIME ON SOMETHIN'
THAT YOU REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO SEE - GET IT DONE

JOHNNY DIRT

TOGETHER WE CAN GET DONE!

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 5 - THE QUIET QUESTION

(TOMMY sits on an overturned bucket nursing a can of cheap beer. Static. A radio clicks on.)

WDHA RADIO ANNOUNCER

Here's the WDHA News Brief.

On September thirteenth Elton John played a free concert in New York's Central Park. Four hundred thousand people showed up and he wore a Donald Duck costume for the encore.

Gary Numan earns his third consecutive number 1 on the UK Albums Chart in less than fourteen months. And "Cars" is number 12 on the Billboard Hot 100.

(Music stinger. Static.)

(The PARK RANGER clicks the radio off.)

The Narrator, now in his PARK RANGER persona addresses both Tommy and the audience.)

PARK RANGER

The end of the '70s was one long hangover. Disco died, punk screamed, and pop took a long look in the mirror.

Rupert Holmes topped the charts with "*Escape (The Piña Colada Song)*" – a perfect pop fable about two bored lovers who almost miss each other. That was the number one song of 1979. Before that, he wrote the theme for *The Partridge Family*.

That's pop at its purest – designed, polished, irresistible. Guys like Don Kirshner mastered that craft long before MTV, turning hits into an industry with The Monkees and their factory-floor songwriters.

But every factory faces rebellion.

Blondie came out of CBGB's with grit, turned disco on its head with "*Heart of Glass*," and rewrote the rules again with "*Rapture*." Debbie Harry made danger sound divine. Clem Burke held it all together with clockwork precision. They blurred the line between punk and pop – a trick that takes nerve. And a choice.

(The Ranger steps fully into Tommy's circle of light.)

Look for yourself in that mix, Tommy. In between what's real... and what sells. Sometimes the music's a mirror – not showing you who you are, but quietly asking who you're willing to become.

TOMMY

It's just another night. Another gig. Least they got good beer.

(He gestures to the can.)

(TOMMY)

But those damn outfits... rhinestone cowboys. Max and his big ideas. Always something else, isn't it, Ranger? Something he wants. Something they want. Something I don't have. Something new. You get it and then... it's just another thing. Just another Tuesday. You keep chasing – but what are you actually running after? All that chasing. All that noise.

PARK RANGER

That's how you know you're in the right place. When the noise stops sounding like music. To find the answer, Tommy, you gotta stop running. You gotta just... be.

Every revolution's got a ghost. Maybe a conscience. Maybe a warning. For you – she shows up wearing eyeliner and brutal honesty.

(A subtle shift in light. GHOST DEBBIE appears – not supernatural, just inevitable. She's calm. Direct.)

GHOST DEBBIE

Look at you...pretending the noise feels like music. Tell me, Tommy – whose dream are you chasing tonight?

TOMMY

Debbie? Debbie Harry? Is that... is that really you? Here? God. You're– you're a ghost. I must really be losing it. This is a dream.

GHOST DEBBIE

Maybe. Or maybe it's just the quiet telling the truth for once. You're alone, Tommy. Out here. No amps, no crowd. No shouting over anyone else. And now you're thinking about the dream. That damn dream. It's supposed to be this shining thing, isn't it? The one we chase. The one that fixes everything.

TOMMY

You know...my mom used to say I played the kitchen like a drum kit. Pots, pans, spoons – drove her nuts. I didn't know what I was doing. I just knew it felt right.

(TOMMY)

That Christmas, I didn't expect much. My dad gives me this card – real corny. He writes down everything I wanted, one by one. "A horse?" Where would we keep it? "A drum set?" Boy, would that be loud. So I figure – that's it. No drums. Just a joke. Then at the bottom he writes: "Go look in the closet." And there it was. A real drum set. Nothing fancy. But it was mine. First time I wasn't borrowing noise. First time I wasn't playing on someone else's stuff. I was making my own.

GHOST DEBBIE

That's the moment. That's the spark people forget about. Revolutions don't start with crowds, Tommy. They start when one person says No more. Not this. Not for me. What are you ready to break away from?

TOMMY

Maybe... Maybe my freedom starts where Max's dream ends.

GHOST DEBBIE

But I hear a different song in your head, Tommy. A quieter one. It's got your rhythm – the one you found banging on kitchen pans. But the words...those are yours. It's not an anthem. It's not a conquest. It's a song about what you actually want. Max has the vision. The big dramatic album, the fireworks. But you've got the soul.

TOMMY

I don't know what you mean. We're a band. We're supposed to want the same thing. But most nights... I just feel like a passenger. Always reacting. Never driving.

GHOST DEBBIE

A band is a collaboration, not a dictatorship. He writes the anthem. But what's *your* song, Tommy? What's the truth you're not singing? What's the beat you're holding back?

TOMMY

I don't know. I just... feel lost. Like I'm riding shotgun in his truck, in his story. I don't want fireworks. I just want to play. To feel that pure beat again.

GHOST DEBBIE

And what happens when you catch it? Another chase. Another promise. Another Paul Atkinson with a polite smile and a quiet pass.

TOMMY

Yeah. We poured everything into that Mudd Club gig. That was it. The meeting. The moment. And all we got was "Not quite right for us." Guess our subpoena wasn't that clever. So now it's on to Max's next vision — rhinestone cowboys. Hollywood nonsense. And I'm supposed to play along like it's all part of the dream.

GHOST DEBBIE

Doesn't quite fit your aesthetic, does it? You're more... authentic. More... hot dog vendor.

TOMMY

(laughs, then stops)

A hot dog vendor. That's it. That's honest work. That's a living. No bullshit. No empty promises. I'd be good at that. I'd be happy. Instead I'm out here — naked gigs, borrowed dreams, chasing... what exactly?

GHOST DEBBIE

Or maybe there was another path. Before the bands. Before the drums took over. Your sister's record player. You spinning songs. Announcing the next hit. "Coming up next..." You even looked into radio school.

TOMMY

How do you know that? Yeah... I did. Hours alone with that turntable. It felt right. Radio school was a real option. Safe. Steady. A future.

GHOST DEBBIE

But you wanted more. You wanted to be a star. Not just the voice between songs. You wanted the spotlight – not the booth.

TOMMY

Yeah. I wanted to be the music. Not just introduce it.

(Ghost Debbie looks offstage.)

GHOST DEBBIE

And you remember the moment it changed, don't you? When Max found you in the mountains. Simple band, good band. Not this.

(A sharp light isolates MAX, holding a phone receiver.)

MAX

(into phone)

Tommy, listen to me – do you wanna live in the mountains playing hippie music forever... or do you wanna be a ROCK STAR?

TOMMY

I wanna be a star. And once I said it... everything else followed.

GHOST DEBBIE

That's how it works. One answer becomes a life if you don't question it. So question it now.

TOMMY

Maybe my freedom doesn't come from chasing anymore. Maybe it starts... when I stop. I wanna be a star!

(The light snaps out.)

TOMMY

I said it without thinking. Because it was something else. Something new. Something I didn't have yet. And when I got it – when we started chasing it – it turned into... just another thing. The chase never ends, does it?

GHOST DEBBIE

No. It doesn't. That record deal? It's a siren song. It promises the world – and charges interest. Sleepless nights. Lonely rooms. Pieces of yourself you don't get back. You keep looking for truth out there, Tommy. In the next gig. The next deal. The next costume. But it's never been out there. It's been in you the whole time. So what are you ready to stop chasing?

TOMMY

Maybe... my freedom starts where Max's dream ends.

Song: WHEN I CAN DREAM**TOMMY**

THERE WAS A TIME, WHEN I KNEW WHAT TO DO
BUT NOW I'M JUST LOST, I'M GONE, I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S TRUE

GHOST DEBBIE

AND NOW WHEN I DREAM, I DREAM THAT I'M STILL ON THE STAGE
CAN'T KEEP MY MIND FROM TURNING THE PAGE
I'M ALWAYS DREAMING OF FAME ALL OF THE TIME

TOMMY

I KNOW I SHOULDN'T BE RESTLESS, I'VE GOT LOTS TO SHOW

BOTH

BUT NOW I'M FEELING SO RESTLESS, I WONDER WHICH WAY I SHOULD GO
AND NOW, NOW THAT I'M LOST IN BETWEEN
CAUGHT IN A VISION, CAUGHT IN A DREAM
I STILL BELIEVE, BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN

TOMMY

WHEN I CAN DREAM

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN HEAR THE RHYTHM CALLING ME

TOMMY

I CAN HEAR THE RHYTHM CALLING ME

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN FEEL THE DRUM INSIDE OF ME

TOMMY

I CAN FEEL THE DRUM INSIDE OF ME

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN SEE THE STAR I WANT TO BE

TOMMY

I CAN SEE THE STAR I WANTED TO BE

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN BE THE DREAM THAT IS CALLING ME

BOTH

AND I'M HOME, WHERE I BELONG, SINGING A SONG

TOMMY

BECAUSE I CAN DREAM

(GTR SOLO)

TOMMY

THERE WAS A TIME, A TIME WHEN I KNEW WHAT TO SAY

BOTH

JUST KEEP MY MIND ON WHAT I CAN PLAY
AND I CAN DREAM...

TOMMY

...OF FINDING MY WAY
WHEN I CAN DREAM

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN HEAR THE RHYTHM CALLING ME

TOMMY

I CAN HEAR THE RHYTHM CALLING ME

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN FEEL THE DRUM INSIDE OF ME

TOMMY

I CAN FEEL THE DRUM INSIDE OF ME

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN SEE THE STAR I WANT TO BE

TOMMY

I CAN SEE THE STAR I WANTED TO BE

GHOST DEBBIE

WHEN I DREAM I CAN BE THE DREAM THAT IS CALLING ME

BOTH

AND I'M HOME, WHERE I BELONG, SINGING A SONG

TOMMY

BECAUSE I CAN DREAM

(GTR SOLO)

(PIANO END)

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 6 - THE PROVING GROUND

(The scene opens in the gritty, echoing backstage area of Hitsville, mostly empty, save for the band's beat-up equipment - TOMMY sits on an overturned road case. CHINO is nursing a lukewarm coffee. KNUTE is trying to look busy, fussing with cables that are already neat. THE RANGER (NARRATOR) stands to the side, a quiet, ever-present observer.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

New York, 1981 - a crucible of sound where legends sweat for a shot. You push long enough, you get a crowd. Not a big one - Revolutions are built on three-minute miracles.

Hitsville wasn't Motown; it was the proving ground. Black Flag, Joan Jett, Siouxsie and the Banshees - they all bled on this stage.

Tonight, Watts opens for X - the critics' darlings, pure punk soul out of L.A. Opening for them here means you're in the circle, even if no one knows your name yet.

They're waiting - for soundcheck, for the set, for their turn to matter. That's the price of the dream: five minutes of chaos between a thousand hours of waiting.

TOMMY

How long have we been here? Feels like a week already, and we haven't even touched a mic. Just sitting, watching our gear.

MAX

Relax, Tommy. This is how it works. You get here before anyone else, you stake your claim. You make sure everything's right. Besides, it's not just any gig. We're opening for X. It means something.

CHINO

Yeah, but X isn't even here yet. They probably rolled in an hour ago, got their soundcheck, and are already napping in their plush dressing room. We're still waiting for ours.

TOMMY

Remember that night we actually saw them? At the Peppermint Lounge? Man, that place was a sweatbox. But the energy...

MAX

Unreal. That was raw, man. Pure. And then...

CHINO

Ronnie Wood! From the Stones! Just walked right up and played with them! No fanfare, no bullshit. Just plugged in and played. We haven't been in the city for an hour and we see a Rolling Stone on a club stage.

TOMMY

That's it, right? That's the dream. Real rock stars. Just jamming, making magic. You saw him, Max, right there with X. That's not just cool, that's... that's what it means. It's what we want.

MAX

It is what we want. And we're gonna get there. This is just the first step. Being here at Hitsville, opening for them. It's a start. We just gotta get through this wait.

(A booming voice comes over the loudspeaker.)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE

Watts! You're on in five minutes! You've got your time, get on the stage! No soundcheck. Just play!

(Tommy starts scrambling around the stage, a frantic energy taking over.)

TOMMY

Five minutes! We're dead! We're opening for X, and we have no hi-hat! My special one! The one you fixed with the welding wire! Knute, you saw me coil the cable around it last night!

KNUTE

Yeah, I saw it, Dude. Right here on the floor. I didn't touch it. I was on watch... all night. I must have dozed off for a minute. Just a minute!

TOMMY

A minute is all it takes! We're dead! This place is a madhouse when it gets going!

MAX

(He spots a punk STAGEHAND casually leaning against a stack of equipment.)

Everyone stop! Don't panic. Knute, check the green room. Chino, help Tommy look under the cases. Move them.

(Max taps the stagehand on the shoulder.)

MAX

You. You seen a hi-hat stand? It's beat-up, looks like hell.

(The stagehand shrugs, a sneer on his face. Max digs his hand into the tight space behind the stagehand and pulls out a battered, generic hi-hat stand.)

MAX

Found it. The guy was just "borrowing" it. Now set up.

TOMMY

(Inspects the stand, his face falling.)

It's not mine. This one's completely different. It's too short. And the clutch is missing!

(Max's eyes narrow. He pushes the stagehand against the wall, pinning him with a forearm to the throat. He reaches into the stagehand's pocket and pulls out a small metal object. It's Tommy's custom hi-hat clutch. Max shoves the stagehand to the floor and grabs the clutch, triumphantly. He tosses it to Tommy.)

MAX

See? Knute's doing his job, and I'm doing mine. Nothing to worry about. We're opening for X.

CHINO

(Trying to lighten the mood.)

Think they'll let us into their dressing room for a beer after our set? Just for a quick toast? You know, the headliners and the openers, celebrating a good night?

MAX

Nah, probably not. They're busy. They got their own thing going on. We're... we're new here. We gotta earn that. No free rides, right? We're the warm-up act. Still waiting for our turn.

(The low hum of the vehicle swells, and the set begins to transform. Hitsville fades and the lights reveal the beat-up WONDER BREAD TRUCK, painted crudely in DESERT CAMOUFLAGE. Mounted precariously on the front fenders are two brightly colored PLASTIC UZI WATER PISTOLS.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Music was changing — the raw grit of punk giving way to a new sound, sleek and shimmering. The synthesizer took over, reshaping melodies, birthing the New Wave frontier. One song told the story best: "Tainted Love." Once a forgotten soul tune, reborn by Soft Cell into a pulsing, electronic gospel.

But before these guys hit New York, they detoured through Wyoming — oil fields, dynamite, and rattlesnakes. Knute got them on a jug crew, chasing paychecks and stories. They weren't roughnecks, just kids playing tough, living on whiskey and luck. But Jack Daniels and cocaine for breakfast doesn't make you tough — it makes you unemployed.

(Flashback: the truck rattles.)

CHINO

Man, this is breakfast of champions!

TOMMY

Yeah, and by lunch we're gonna need a medic.

MAX

Drink up. We got helicopters waiting, and they don't wait for hangovers.

KNUTE

Told you boys — jugging's the real deal. Rattlesnake on the fire last night? That's frontier protein.

CHINO

Tasted just like chicken.

TOMMY

It tasted like snake wearing a chicken costume.

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

They limped east in that Wonder Bread truck — through Philadelphia breakdowns, police stops, and the sweet dreamscape of Hershey. From chocolate towns to Gettysburg fields, they saw what happens when ambition meets consequence.

TOMMY

Is the radio working? We gotta get WDHA. When we hit Jersey boys we gotta dial in the Jersey Giant— that's *church*."

CHINO

I thought CBGB was church.

TOMMY

CBGB is the Bible. WDHA is the preacher.

(The van hits a bump or the scene shifts.)

MAX

What the hell?! Something's wrong with the trailer!

TOMMY

That doesn't sound right.

CHINO

The trailer. It's... smoking.

KNUTE

Lost a bearing.

MAX

A bearing?! Are you kidding me?! We're in Philadelphia! The City of Bridges! This could stop everything! We can't stop here! New York is right there!

TOMMY

We're stuck, Max. Completely stuck.

(THE RANGER steps forward slightly, shifting his posture and adopting a gruffer tone. He becomes the WHEEL BEARING GUY from the U-Haul counter.)

MAX

Look, sir, we need a new wheel bearing for this trailer. It blew out. We're on our way to New York for a... a very important meeting. This could stop everything.

THE RANGER (AS WHEEL BEARING GUY)

Can't help ya. It's a U-HAUL. Can't sell parts to private individuals. Company policy.

MAX

But it's your trailer! We're just trying to get it rolling again! What are we supposed to do, abandon it in Philadelphia? Our whole trip... it's riding on this!

THE RANGER (AS WHEEL BEARING GUY)

Not my problem. Policy. Next customer.

(THE RANGER shifts back into Narrator stance.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Bureaucracy. The true monster of the open road. It threatened to stop their bold expedition cold. But they found a way, didn't they? A borrowed tool, a little ingenuity. They always did. Because the road to a dream is rarely paved.

(The lighting shifts again, now flashing with red and blue. Sirens wail briefly. THE RANGER becomes the POLICE OFFICER.)

TOMMY

What's the problem officer? We weren't speeding or anything. How'd you even spot us in all this traffic?

THE RANGER (AS POLICE OFFICER)

Problem, son? It was those machine guns on the fender. We've had some calls. We're gonna have to confiscate those.

MAX

They're water pistols! They're plastic! It's an artistic statement! You're serious?!

THE RANGER (AS POLICE OFFICER)

Plastic or not, they look real enough to cause a public disturbance. Hand 'em over.

(To the audience as **NARRATOR**.)

A minor setback, indeed. They lost their 'badass' ornaments, but not their spirit. Not yet.

TOMMY

And Gettysburg. You stand there, on that ground, and you realize... some moments, some decisions, they change everything. Not just for a few people, but for a whole country. All those miles. All those... experiences. Max, you really think this is it? This dream of ours? Is it going to be one of those moments?

MAX

(Joining him, eyes on the horizon)

This is it, Tommy! This is what we chose! We're almost there!
This is our moment! This is where the dream becomes reality!
Now, let's go get it!

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

(Stepping forward)

Funny thing about standing on famous battlefields... most of the people who fought there weren't heroes when they arrived. They were just kids, trying to figure out who they were.

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Sound familiar? They weren't looking for a "Synth-driven anthem" that night. They were looking for a reason to keep driving.

SONG: "WE ARE THE ONES"

WE ARE THE ONES
WE HAVE NO PLANS FOR THE FUTURE
WE ARE THE CZARS OF FATE
WE ARE THE ONES
WE HAVE NO FANTASIES TO NUTURE
YOU BLEW YOUR CHANCE, IT'S TOO LATE
WITH ONE FOOT IN THE FUTURE AND ONE IN THE PAST
NO PLAN FOR TOMORROW CAN LAST

WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE ABSTRACT IMAGINATION
WE ARE VIDEO
ONE FOOT IN THE FUTURE, ONE IN THE PAST
WE DON'T ASK NO QUESTIONS 'CAUSE THERE'S NO ONE TO ASK

WE ARE THE ONES REACHING FOR TOMORROW, IT'S OURS
WE ARE THE ONES CARESSING THE FUTURE IN HAND

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)

SCENE 7 - FAVORS AND FALLOUT

(The band sits in a half-lit room backstage with a warm, low reggae pulse in the background.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Reggae didn't arrive like a revolution. It drifted in. Off-beat guitar. Bass you could lean on. A rhythm that said: *slow down – you're still alive*. "Red Red Wine." Neil Diamond wrote it as a whisper. UB40 turned it into a working-class anthem – British voices, Jamaican rhythm, a borrowed beat made honest.

That groove crept into everything. The Police sharpened it. Blondie bent it. Not imitation – translation. Reggae wasn't about escape. It was about survival. Music that didn't fight the weight of the world – it carried it.

(A laid-back ROAD MANAGER enters, holding a sleek Sony Walkman.)

ROAD MANAGER

Hey – good set out there. Crowd's feeling it. We're having a few beers in our room before we go on. Nothing fancy. Just hanging. You boys are welcome.

(Max, Chino, and Knute head toward the open door. Tommy follows – until Knute gently stops him. Knute opens a small piece of foil.)

KNUTE

Just a little something. Take the edge off. Makes everything feel... easier.

(Tommy hesitates. Ghost Debbie appears.)

GHOST DEBBIE

This isn't ease, Tommy. It's a shortcut. And shortcuts don't take you where you think they do.

(Tommy pulls his hand back.)

TOMMY

Nah. I'm good. Just want a beer.

(Knut pockets the foil and exits.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

That invitation mattered. Not because they were famous – but because they were kind. UB40 didn't preach. Didn't posture. They shared space. In a business built on gates and passes, that door stayed open. That's reggae, too. Not the beat – the spirit.

(Lights shift to a sickly yellow glow. A distant industrial hum.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

On the drive out, the road went quiet when they passed Three Mile Island. America's almost-disaster.

No smoke. No fire. Just the hum of something that *almost* went wrong. Silence louder than any amplifier.

(The band is at the edge of the stage, looking out into the house. The lights are a sickly, glowing yellow.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

On the drive out, the road went quiet when they passed Three Mile Island. America's almost-disaster. No smoke. No fire. Just the hum of something that almost went wrong.

TOMMY

You feel that? Like the air's holding its breath.

CHINO

It's... wrong. Like the ground remembers something we don't.

MAX

Let's keep moving. Nothing good comes from staring at ghosts.

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

(Stepping toward them as the lights shift to a warm, expensive amber)

Some dreams burn bright. Others melt down. But the fallout? That follows you all the way to Manhattan.

(The sound of a champagne cork popping—Loud. Lights snap up suddenly on a small Italian bistro upstage right. MAX, TOMMY, and CHINO sit crowded around a tiny table. Wine glasses raised. Laughter spilling over.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Welcome to the Bistro. Where the "New Wave Expedition" met the old-world muscle. Success tasted like champagne, but the bubbles were a lie.

MAX

(Raising a glass)

To the set! Mark says the labels are circling. This is the room, boys!

CHINO

I could get used to the "Upper Crust," Max. No more oil fields!

(Suddenly, two sharp CRACKS—gunshots—echo from the back of the house. Sound of glass shattering. Screams. High-pitched sirens begin to wail in the distance.)

TOMMY

Was that a hit? Tell me that wasn't a hit!

MAX

It's just "logistics," Tommy. Keep your head down and don't look at the Lincoln parked outside.

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

(Over the chaos)

In New York, sirens don't mean help. They just mean the rhythm changed. The "almost-disaster" of the reactor was nothing compared to the sound of a door being kicked in.

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

In this town, sirens don't mean stop. They mean someone else already paid. By the time the echoes fade, the paperwork's done, the favors are logged, and the night moves on. That's how it works at places like Hitsville. You don't walk in – you're allowed in.

(Lights rise on the HITSVILLE BACKSTAGE. Equipment cases. A **MAN IN A DARK SUIT** lingers in the shadows – never moving.)

TOMMY

You heard that, right? You *felt* that?

MAX

It was a week ago, Tommy.

TOMMY

It doesn't leave after a week, Max.

MAX

It wasn't our business.

TOMMY

That's the problem – I think it was. That demo money. Three hundred bucks. Where did it come from?

MAX

Knute said he handled it.

TOMMY

Yeah — *when*? Right after he quit the bookstore. Right after the Chelsea. Right before the demo suddenly... existed.

(MAX doesn't answer.)

TOMMY

And these gigs — X, UB40, Hitsville. You think those calls just *happen*?

MAX

Does it matter?

TOMMY

It does to me.

MAX

We needed it. The demo got us in the door.

TOMMY

And now someone else owns the hinges.

CHINO

Maybe we just... play. That's what we do.

TOMMY

You don't hear it, do you? Every beat feels like it's counting something *else* now.

MAX

This city runs on favors, Tommy. You want out — fine. You want to sell hot dogs — great. But I didn't come here to stall. We took the money.

(The **MAN IN A DARK SUIT** adjusts his cuff. That's all. **THE RANGER** steps forward.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Then came The Stray Cats. Pomade. Leather. Upright bass like a weapon. They took American rockabilly to England, lit it on fire, and brought it back dangerous again.

They proved the past could still sell -if you played it loud enough. For Max, opening for them wasn't nostalgia. It was prophecy. For Tommy...it felt like dancing faster so you wouldn't feel the floor shaking.

(Lights snap to performance mode.)

SONG: SHAKE THAT SHADOW

(The band explodes into the number. The **MAN IN A DARK SUIT** watches.)

WELL I SLIPPED OUT THE BACK WITH A MATCH IN MY TEETH
 GOT A SWITCHBLADE SMILE AND TROUBLE BENEATH
 I DON'T WALK STRAIGHT, BABY, I SLINK
 I DON'T NEED YOUR LOVE - JUST GIMME A DRINK

SHAKE THAT SHADOW, SWING THAT TAIL
 WE'RE RAISIN' SOME HELL ON A NO-MOON TRAIL
 LIGHTS GO DOWN AND THE STARS SHOW UP
 I'M A WILDCAT BOY WITH A HALF-FULL CUP
 SHAKE THAT SHADOW - DON'T THINK TWICE
 WE'RE BURNIN' THIS NIGHT LIKE A BLOCK OF ICE

WELL I DON'T WRITE LETTERS, I DON'T SEND SIGNS
 BUT I'LL LEAVE MY MARK IN SCRATCHED-UP LINES
 IF YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR LOVE, YOU'RE LOOKIN' TOO LATE
 BUT IF YOU'RE LOOKIN' FOR TROUBLE - HONEY, I'M FATE

SHAKE THAT SHADOW, SWING THAT TAIL
 WE'RE RAISIN' SOME HELL ON A NO-MOON TRAIL
 LIGHTS GO DOWN AND THE STARS SHOW UP
 I'M A WILDCAT BOY WITH A HALF-FULL CUP
 SHAKE THAT SHADOW - HIT THAT BREAK
 WE'RE RUNNIN' THIS NIGHT LIKE A MIDNIGHT SHAKE

I AIN'T HERE FOR REDEMPTION
 I AIN'T HERE FOR THE FAME
 I JUST WANNA HEAR THAT ENGINE
 CALLIN' OUT MY NAME

SHAKE THAT SHADOW, SWING THAT TAIL
WE'RE RAISIN' SOME HELL AND LEAVIN' NO TRAIL
LIGHTS GO DOWN AND THE CROWD SHOWS UP
WE'RE WILDCAT KINGS WITH A BOTTOMS-UP
SHAKE THAT SHADOW — RIDE OR RUN
WE AIN'T SLOWIN' DOWN FOR ANYONE

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

(Alone in the spotlight)

Sometimes the loudest song is the one you play so you don't hear
the truth catching up.

(The lights fade on the Ranger and remain on the
Man in the Dark Suit just a little bit longer
before fading to black)

SCENE 8 - THE BILL COMES DUE

(The stage lights up on the campground set at evening. MAX is by the fire, meticulously cleaning his guitar. TOMMY is fussing with a sleeping bag, looking rumpled and weary, and subtly rubs a spot near his eye, where a faint, but distinct bruise is still visible. Static. A radio clicks on.)

WDHA RADIO ANNOUNCER

Here's the WDHA News Brief.
December 5 - Duran Duran signs with EMI after finalizing its lineup and touring as a support act for Hazel O'Connor.

(Music stinger. Static.)

(The PARK RANGER enters, clicks the radio off.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Evening boys. Just checking the books - and collecting dues. Always something to pay, even for dreamers in tents.

MAX

Ranger! Perfect timing. We were just about to grab some shut eye. You know, rest the rock and roll engine.

TOMMY

Yeah, more sleep. The "rock and roll engine" is running on fumes right now.

RANGER

Sleep is OK. Fees would be better. Twenty-five bucks.

MAX

(Nodding, reaching into his pocket for a coin.)

Right. The usual, then. Heads or tails, Tommy? Our destiny for the week.

TOMMY

(He touches his bruised eye.)

Heads. Always heads with you, isn't it, Max? You're the reason I'm still seeing double. If it's tails, we go get real jobs.

(Max flips the coin high and reveals it. It's HEADS.)

TOMMY

Heads... guess fate wants us to keep running this rock and roll engine.

MAX

Looks like destiny wants us to keep rocking, buddy!

(He pulls out a crumpled bill and hands it over.)

Pleasure doing business, Ranger.

RANGER (NARRATOR)

(Takes the bill, nods, and jots in his ledger.)

Always a pleasure, Max. You boys keep making that music. Might need it to fight off the cold. Or other things. Especially that monthly fee. That one is relentless.

(The Ranger now addressing the audience.)

America runs on stories. Some get whispered in bars. Some get blasted through cheap speakers. By the early '80s, rock had learned how to dress itself up. Danger sells better when it wears a tuxedo.

(CHINO enters carrying a crumpled newspaper.)

CHINO

Hey, boys. Anyone seen this? Big news! The new Bond movie, 'For Your Eyes Only,' it's out! Finally! I've been waiting for this one.

TOMMY

No way! Already? Did you see the theme song? Is it good? Please tell me it's good. Last one was... well, okay.

CHINO

Yeah, they're saying it's a classic! And guess who did it? None other than Sheena Easton! Can you believe it? She sings it right there on screen, too! My sister told me.

MAX

Sheena Easton? Really? Won't be like Paul McCartney. Man, 'Live and Let Die' was a killer. That was a song. Still stuck in my head. He just gets it. The Bond sound.

CHINO

Nah, not like McCartney this time. But Easton's no slouch! They're saying it's a big, dramatic ballad. Perfect for Bond. Real classy. You know, that orchestra, those soaring strings... it's iconic. Every Bond song has to be. It's the sound of espionage!

MAX

Sheena Easton? Nah. A Bond song should be a power anthem. You know, with, like, a choir of ten thousand people and me on lead guitar. It needs to be about winning. Maybe we should pitch our record to them.

TOMMY

Sheena Easton... huh. I bet it's all dramatic and slick. Like a tuxedo. Every Bond song has to be grand, right? Makes you feel like you're part of something... bigger than yourself. Something with stakes. But you know, what about the classic instrumental ones? Like John Barry? The ones that just are the sound of Bond? No words, just pure atmosphere and cool.

MAX

Yeah. Big, powerful. Like an anthem. That's what we need. Something that screams 'we're here!' But you're right, Tommy. Barry's stuff... that's the backbone. That's the grit. You need the elegance, but you need the raw power too.

CHINO

Okay, okay, you two. You're going to write a whole Bond musical out here. But it's true, every one of them is huge. Like the stakes are always impossibly high.

TOMMY

(He touches his bruised eye again, faintly.)

High stakes. Yeah. That's what it feels like sometimes. Like... like when you stand on some old battlefield. You know, like Gettysburg. You can almost feel the ghosts, the weight of everything that happened there. The choices. The sacrifice. All that history, right under your feet. It changes you, that feeling. Makes you remember what fighting for something *really* means.

MAX

Yeah, well, we're not fighting a civil war out here, Tommy. Just trying to make it in rock and roll. But it still feels like a battle sometimes, doesn't it? Just keeping the dream alive. Trying to make something out of nothing.

(THE NARRATOR steps into focus.)

NARRATOR

Morristown, New Jersey — quiet now. But the ground remembers battle. Washington's troops froze here, fought here, built something out of nothing but belief and hunger.

That's the lesson history keeps teaching. Every dream is a campaign. Every anthem, a risk. This isn't wonder anymore. This is reckoning.

New York eats talent first. Rent second. Dreams last. And hiding in plain sight? One of the best voices in the city.

Cyndi Lauper wasn't famous yet. Neither were most of the voices worth hearing. Hitsville tested them all. Most didn't survive the heat.

(MAX and Chino exit, the RANGER faeds into the background and TOMMY sits alone by the fire.)

GHOST DEBBIE steps from shadow – almost unseen at first.)

GHOST DEBBIE

(singing softly, almost spoken)

When I can dream...

I don't borrow the sky...

(A thin underscore begins – no full band.)

When I can dream...

I don't have to ask why...

TOMMY

A record deal, Debbie. That's the dream, right? But it feels... wrong. Too fast. Too clean. Suddenly Knute "knows a guy." Just like that demo money.

GHOST DEBBIE

Money always shows up when the dream gets impatient. That's when it's most dangerous.

TOMMY

That three hundred bucks – it didn't fall out of the sky. Knute quits his job. Chelsea Hotel blows up. Next thing you know, we're cutting demos and opening doors we didn't knock on. Was it from the Scampi Bar? Was it *their* money? Because if it was... then this deal isn't just music. It's a hook.

GHOST DEBBIE

Everything worth chasing comes with strings, Tommy. The question isn't *who tied them* – it's how tight you let them pull.

TOMMY

Max doesn't feel it. He just sees momentum. He thinks this deal makes us untouchable. But what if it makes us owned?

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

(Stepping forward)

Trouble in the ranks now. Happens in every rebellion – fear, fatigue... a few deserters. And sometimes the bravest act isn't staying. It's finally leaving.

GHOST DEBBIE

Every revolution has deserters, Tommy. But some deserters are the ones who survive.

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Even revolutions fracture. Someone wants glory. Someone wants peace. Someone just wants the bleeding to stop.

GHOST DEBBIE

You keep saying "we." But you mean Max. You're disappearing under someone else's noise. Say your own name before it's too late.

TOMMY

I don't know when it happened. I used to hear the beat before anyone else spoke.

GHOST DEBBIE

You think the universe whispers lies for fun? This isn't going to end the way Max promised you. Start listening.

(Ghost Debbie fades.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

That's the moment. When the noise drops out. When the question isn't Can we make it? But what will it cost if we do?

SONG: "EMPTY GLASSES"**TOMMY**

ANOTHER DUSTY STAGE,
SAME OLD FACES FLIPPING TO A NEW PAGE
WE PLAY OUR HEARTS OUT
BUT THE CROWD IS THIN
JUST EMPTY GLASSES
WHERE DO WE BEGIN

OH, EMPTY GLASSES,
CLINKING IN THE DARK WE'RE SCREAMING STORIES,
LEAVING OUR MARK
THE DREAM'S ALIVE
IT'S BURNING BRIGHT AND HOT
IGNORING ALL THE DOUBTS
AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT

THE JUKEBOX HUMS A SONG I USED TO KNOW ABOUT A DREAM THAT DIED
A LONG, LONG TIME AGO BUT I STILL BELIEVE
WITH EVERY BEAT I PLAY THAT TOMORROW'S COMING
AND GONNA BREAK THIS DAY

OH, EMPTY GLASSES, CLINKING IN THE DARK WE'RE SCREAMING STORIES,
LEAVING OUR MARK! THE DREAM'S ALIVE,
IT'S BURNING BRIGHT AND HOT
IGNORING ALL THE DOUBTS,
AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT

(SOLO)

OH, EMPTY GLASSES, DRINKING IN THE DARK WE'RE SCREAMING STORIES,
LEAVING OUR MARK! THE DREAM'S ALIVE
IT'S BURNING BRIGHT AND HOT
IGNORING ALL THE DOUBTS
AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT

(GTR SOLO)

OH, EMPTY GLASSES, DRINKING IN THE DARK WE'RE SCREAMING STORIES,
LEAVING OUR MARK! THE DREAM'S ALIVE
IT'S BURNING BRIGHT AND HOT
IGNORING ALL THE DOUBTS
AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT

OH EMPTY GLASSES STILL WE STAND

EMPTY GLASSES IN THIS PROMISED LAND
OH, EMPTY GLASSES, STILL WE'RE STANDING HERE
CHASING SHADOWS
DROWNING IN OUR FEAR
THE DREAM IS DYING
THE STAGE IS COLD AND BARE
ANOTHER PROMISE LOST
HANGING IN THE AIR.

(Lights widen. MAX has been listening.)

TOMMY

Well... there it is. A lullaby for tired drunks.

MAX

No — it's honest. Feels like walking home after last call,
replaying everything you didn't say.

TOMMY

Yeah. Sometimes the machine doesn't make you angry. Sometimes it
just makes you tired.

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Some men make noise. Some make meaning. The trouble isn't
choosing one — it's knowing which one you are before the bill
comes due.

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)

SCENE 9 - THE DIRTY DEAL

(The stage has returned to the gothic gloom of THE DIRT CLUB)

JOHNNY DIRT (NARRATOR)

This ain't Manhattan, folks. No velvet ropes. No piña coladas. Only time you hear Rupert Holmes in here is if he's lost... or slummin'. He's not. So drink the beer. Don't ask questions.

I've seen this look before. Band plays a little tighter. Crowd stays a little longer. Everybody thinks tonight means something. Sometimes it does. Most times it just means you're tired.

The Smithereens stood right where these guys are standing. Pressed their own record. Sold it out of a trunk. Did it their way. Worked for them. Doesn't mean it works for everyone.

Crossroads don't come with signs. You just wake up one day and realize you've been standing in the middle of one.

(TOMMY, MAX, and CHINO head directly to the BAR. BARTENDER DEBBIE approaches them with a tray of three drinks. She offers a small, kind smile.)

TOMMY

(Pulling out a few crumpled bills.)

Well, look at that. We actually got paid tonight.

CHINO

Paid? In money? Not just "exposure"? Somebody pinch me.

MAX

I say we celebrate. Three shots of Jack. One each.

BARTENDER DEBBIE

Now that's progress. Coming right up.

(She lines up three shot glasses and pours, handing them each a straw.)

TOMMY

Last time, we were splitting one shot with three straws.

MAX

Yeah, survival mode.

CHINO

This time? Celebration mode.

BARTENDER DEBBIE

Wouldn't want you boys to lose the tradition.

(They laugh. Each dips his straw into his own glass. The ritual is both ridiculous and strangely moving.)

MAX

To better nights.

TOMMY

To the Dirt.

CHINO

To keeping the echoes alive.

(They sip, each through their own straw.)

JOHNNY DIRT (NARRATOR)

See? Last time it was one shot, three straws. Tonight, it's three shots, three straws. Step by step, sip by sip, they were building something bigger. Around here, that's how legends are made. Just like the Smithereens. They get their deal. Proof that sometimes the independent path leads right into the mainstream.

And here, emerging from the shadows of promise, was Mark Kamins: the all-important agent. The kind of man who could open doors... or close them forever.

(Enter MARK KAMINS. Smiling like a shark.)

KAMINS

Big night, boys. Big stage. Big decisions. You want the record? You want the deal? Or do you just want to keep playing dirt bars for dirt pay? Because I don't waste time. I don't wait for magic. I make it.

TOMMY

We'd settle for getting through tonight without tripping over my hi-hat stand.

MAX

What kind of deal are we talking about, Mark?

KAMINS

The kind that takes you off this plywood floor and puts you on vinyl. The kind where people don't just hear you in Bloomfield—they hear you in Berlin. You think the dirty deal is the contract? No, the dirty deal is waiting. It's hoping. It's praying for a lucky break that never comes. I don't waste time on hope. I'm offering a spark that guarantees you'll be seen. The only real risk is if you don't trust the fire. I can make you a star, Max. I can take your music, twist it, turn it, make it burn so bright it blinds them. But you have to let me.

CHINO

Berlin sounds good. Do they have laundry service there?

(Kamins leans in.)

KAMINS

But nothing comes free. There's always a price. Remember that.

JOHNNY DIRT (NARRATOR)

The Smithereens did it themselves. Pressed their own record. Sold it out of the trunk of a car. And it worked.

MAX

Why not us?

CHINO

Creative freedom. Total control.

TOMMY

Or total disaster. Pressing vinyl ain't free. And if nobody buys it? We're just broke with boxes of wax.

KAMINS

Exactly. That's why you need someone like me. You want to play legends? Or you want to play losers? Because that independent fire you're talking about? It burns out fast without someone to stoke the flames. Someone who knows how the game is played.

MAX

We want to play music. Our way.

KAMINS

Oh, Max... "our way" is how garage bands die. Trust me. The Smithereens? Lucky. A fluke. Lightning in a beer bottle. Don't mistake one spark for a system. I don't want to make you something you didn't want to be, but I damn sure don't want to waste my time on something that won't catch fire.

CHINO

Maybe flukes are all we've got.

TOMMY

Or maybe flukes are how you end up back at the bar splitting one shot three ways.

KAMINS

Funny thing about gambles—sometimes you have to walk away from the sure thing to find the real thing.

MAX

Walk away? What do you mean? You talk like you're one of us...
always chasing the next thing.

KAMINS

Wouldn't have happened if I'd stayed chained to Island Records. I quit. Walked away.

MAX

You *quit* Island? You mean... you're not with them anymore?

KAMINS

Too slow. Too many suits counting beans instead of feeling beats. I saw a different beat. That's why I started went to Danceteria. A place where anything could happen. Where the next big sound, the next big star, was just t waiting for the right moment. That's the real gamble. Finding that moment.

TOMMY

You quit a major label... to spin records in a nightclub?

KAMINS

Not just spin. Build. Shape. Create a scene. At Island, I was a cog. Here, I'm fire. And fire catches. Madonna, the Smithereens—they prove it. The suits don't make legends. Clubs do. Bands do. You do... if you've got the guts.

CHINO

That's what I've been saying! No waiting around for some A&R guy to polish us down. We press our own record. Do it ourselves. Like the Smithereens.

TOMMY

Or we sink ourselves. Boxes of vinyl in the van, gathering dust.

KAMINS

(Leans in, directly challenging Tommy.)

Or you sink anyway, waiting for permission. At least this way, you go down fighting for your sound. He's right about the fire, boys. The kind that lights up the night. But who holds the match? The independent fire is yours. The dirty deal is his. You own the sound, or the sound owns you.

MAX

No waiting. No begging. We make our own record.

CHINO

Yes! Ours. Start to finish.

TOMMY

Yeah... screw it. We do it. Independent. Just like the Smithereens.

(He tosses the straw down onto the bar, a sharp punctuation. Kamins then melts back into the crowd, observing.)

RANGER (NARRATOR)

For every thunder god like Jim Steinman, there was a songwriter like Rupert Holmes – quiet, clever, sharp enough to cut you softly. Steinman gave you lightning. Holmes gave you a wink.

Our boys? They were somewhere between thunder and a bar tab. Because thunder makes promises. Bar tabs make payments.

Some folks chase the big river – bright lights, higher tides. Others find a quiet corner. Maybe a hot-dog cart.

But here's the trick, kids... Who's really calling it?

TOMMY

(Muttering, defensive, almost to himself,)

A hot dog cart?

(KNUTE re-enters the scene, holding his own crumpled piece of paper.)

KNUTE

Hey guys. Check this out! I was just talking to a guy over by the supply shed. There's a Battle of the Bands coming up at the Meadowbrook Ballroom next month! Biggest one yet. The winner gets to headline a show. On a Saturday night! And record label scouts are gonna be there for sure.

CHINO

The Meadowbrook Ballroom?! That place is legendary!

MAX

The Meadowbrook. Perfect. A battle. We haven't played a proper battle yet.

TOMMY

The Meadowbrook...

(The stage lights shift dramatically as MARK KAMINS re-emerges.)

KAMINS

Funny thing about freedom... it gets loud when nobody's in charge.

GET IT DONE-REPRISE**JOHNNY DIRT**

MAYBE IT'S JUST A CITY STREET WHERE THE WALLS ALL START TO BLEED
BUT DON'T YOU KNOW THIS KIND OF HEAT IS JUST THE FUEL WE NEED
I BUILT A STAGE AND WE MAKE SOME NOISE
WE'RE SHAKIN' THE WALL AND BREAKIN' THE CREED

MARK KAMINS

I'VE HAD SOME DREAMS THAT BURNED TOO FAST SO I HAD TO LET 'EM GO
I'M THE GUY THAT TURNED THE GAS, JUST TO WATCH IT BLOW
AND NOW WE'RE HERE AND WE PLAY IT LOUD
YEAH, WE'RE LIGHTING THE NIGHT
AND STEALIN' THE SHOW

BOTH

BUT JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE SO HIGH
AND THINK YOU'RE GONNA LAST
THERE'S A THOUSAND BANDS IN THE NIGHT
AND THEY'RE COMIN' UP FAST
BUT IF YOU STRIKE LIKE A LIGHTNING BOLT
YOU'LL PUT THOSE OTHER BANDS ON THE RUN

MARK KAMINS

YOU SHOULD BE WHAT I KNOW YOU CAN BE
ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS TRUST ME
TOGETHER WE CAN GET IT DONE

(He spreads his arms wide, like a prophet at the pulpit)
JUST ASK THE CROWD

MARK KAMINS

WE DON'T WANNA BREAK YOU DOWN TO SOMETHIN' YOU DIDN'T WANNA BE
YOU DON'T WANNA WASTE YOUR TIME ON SOMETHIN' YOU DON'T WANNA SEE

JOHNNY DIRT

YOU SHOULD BE WHAT I KNOW YOU CAN BE — ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS TRUST
ME —

MARK KAMINS

TOGETHER WE CAN GET IT DONE — WE CAN GET IT DONE
TOGETHER WE CAN GET IT DONE

JOHNNY DIRT

TOGETHER WE CAN GET IT DONE

(LIGHTS FADE to black.)

RANGER (NARRATOR)

Labels don't sign bands. They sign fantasies. Jim Steinman
thunder. Bond swagger. Paradise by the dashboard light. Our boys
had truth instead. Turns out... truth sells slower. Success never
comes charging through the door. It sneaks in — one gig, one
song, one night no one forgets.

And when you get close? Close enough to smell it —
you're close enough to choke on it too.

And that's when the real battle starts.

(Blackout)

End Act One.

ACT TWO**SCENE 10 - WHEN THE SONG CHANGED**

(The stage immediately explodes with light and sound. MAX is center stage, leading the band.)

SONG: MAX'S EMPTY GLASSES

ANOTHER DUSTY STAGE
SAME OLD FACES, FLIPPING TO A NEW PAGE
WE PLAY OUR HEARTS OUT BUT THE CROWD IS THIN
JUST EMPTY GLASSES, WHERE DO WE BEGIN

OH, EMPTY GLASSES, CLINKING IN THE DARK
WE'RE SCREAMING STORIES, LEAVING OUR MARK
THE DREAM'S ALIVE, IT'S BURNING BRIGHT AND HOT
IGNORING ALL THE DOUBTS, AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT

I USED TO KNOW ABOUT A DREAM THAT DIED
A LONG, LONG TIME AGO
BUT I STILL BELIEVE, WITH EVERY BEAT I PLAY
THAT TOMORROW'S COMING, GONNA BREAK THIS DAY

OH, EMPTY GLASSES, CLINKING IN THE DARK
WE'RE SCREAMING STORIES, LEAVING OUR MARK
THE DREAM'S ALIVE, IT'S BURNING BRIGHT AND HOT
IGNORING ALL THE DOUBTS, AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT

THE JUKEBOX HUMS A SONG I USED TO KNOW ABOUT A DREAM THAT DIED
A LONG, LONG TIME AGO
BUT I STILL BELIEVE WITH EVERY BEAT I PLAY
THAT TOMORROW'S COMING, GONNA BREAK THIS DAY

OH, EMPTY GLASSES, CLINKING IN THE DARK
WE'RE SCREAMING STORIES, LEAVING OUR MARK
THE DREAM'S ALIVE, IT'S BURNING BRIGHT AND HOT
IGNORING ALL THE DOUBTS, AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT
AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T GOT

WHEN THE GHOSTS OF LEGENDS WHISPER
EMPTY GLASSES IN THIS PROMISED LAND
OH, EMPTY GLASSES, STILL WE'RE STANDING HERE
CHASING SHADOWS DROWNING IN OUR FEAR
THE DREAM IS DYING, THE STAGE IS COLD AND BARE
ANOTHER PROMISE LOST
HANGING IN THE AIR

MAX

Okay, so I took your little "rain on a tin roof" number...and I gave it some thunder. A hurricane. Same song. Just has a pulse now.

TOMMY

What did you do to it? It's... unrecognizable.

MAX

It's making them move. It's radio gold. It's the sound of a thousand people screaming along. That's the only currency that matters, Tommy. Make the noise count.

TOMMY

Yeah — screaming "*what the hell happened to that pretty song?*"

MAX

We're not selling quiet reflection. We're selling a good time. Big. Loud. Unforgettable.

TOMMY

And the soul? You're trading honesty for volume, Max. We'll lose ourselves before we even start.

MAX

And you liked it. Admit it.

TOMMY

...Yeah. I liked it. Doesn't mean I forgive you.

(A spotlight finds THE RANGER slightly off to the side.)

NARRATOR

Two strong voices. One song. That's not harmony — that's pressure. Rock 'n' roll's always been a tug-of-war — soul versus spectacle. Meaning versus momentum. And momentum usually wins... at least at first.

(He looks toward the club door.)

The Jersey Shore didn't care about polish. Didn't care about futures. Blue-collar rooms. Cheap beer. If you meant it, you stayed. If you didn't, the room told you fast.

Asbury Park didn't launch bands. It tested them.

(Lights rise on the alley behind the club. TOMMY, MAX, and CHINO spill out, with muffled music following them.)

MAX

You hear that?

CHINO

Yeah. That's not a bar band.

TOMMY

That's... different.

(The song swells – big, emotional, unapologetic. Then fades under.)

CHINO

That room was alive. Ellen Foley fans don't play around.

MAX

They listened. That's the job.
You open. You hold. You get out alive.

TOMMY

Alive costs money. We're almost out.

MAX

I know. We're close. Just a few more days for the final mix.
Then we press 'em – and it's real.

CHINO

And then we hit the pavement. Selling 'em out of the trunk. Just like the Smithereens. No suits. No labels. Just records and miles.

TOMMY

"Real" would be knowing where that bookstore money went. Still don't know who walked off with that cash.

MAX

Let it go, Tommy. Old news. Besides — Cowboy saved your ass with that duct-tape drumhead at Hitsville, remember?

TOMMY

Yeah. Cowboy. Always there with the quick fix.

(They drift toward a weathered poster: ELLEN FOLEY / MICK JONES. Tommy studies it longer than the others.)

NARRATOR

Ellen Foley didn't just sing songs. She survived them. She stood in rooms like this — loud, broke, electric — long before the money showed up. Long before the mythology.

That's the lie every young band believes. But the truth is simpler. The bill always comes first. And it never asks how pure the music was. Some people make it through that fire. Some people disappear inside it. Our boys were about to find out which kind they were.

Jim Steinman wrote music like weather reports from the apocalypse. *Paradise* wasn't subtle — it was myth cranked until something snapped. And when that wasn't dramatic enough? She falls for Mick Jones. Yes, that Mick Jones. The Clash. The only band that could look malnourished and still start a revolution.

CHINO

(Squinting at the poster)

He looks... really skinny. And kinda... pale. Is that what punk does to you? Makes you forget to eat? Max, Tommy, look at his pants. Could you even *get into* those? You'd have to lose twenty pounds first. Look at him—skinny as a guitar string.

TOMMY

(Straightening his jacket instinctively)

That's what *cool* looks like, Chino. They're legends. The Clash, man. This is a big deal, even seeing them, let alone meeting them.

NARRATOR (RANGER)

Skinny? Sure. Pale? Absolutely. Pants like dental floss. But that was the point. Punk wasn't about eating. It was about burning. Calories were optional. Conviction wasn't.

They say "*Should I Stay or Should I Go*" came out of those nights. Love and ego and guitars loud enough to drown both out.

See, that's how it works in this business. You don't just date the storm — you stand in it and hope you don't get struck. Some people make it through that fire. Some disappear inside it.

Our boys? They were still arguing about pants sizes. And about to learn what it really costs to look legendary.

MAX

(Gestures vaguely at Tommy's in his leather jacket.)

You know, we look a bit like... fat Americans next to them. Well, you mostly, in that jacket.

TOMMY

Is that what this is about, Max? You want to look like you just crawled out of some London gutter, skinny and miserable? I'm not trading a cheeseburger for a photo op.

MAX

It was a joke, Tommy. A jab. I'm just saying... we need to look the part.

TOMMY

Yeah. And I'm just the guy who doesn't fit the suit. I'm a drummer, Max. You're trying to turn our songs into a magazine cover.

CHINO

Yeah, that's our album cover. "The Fat Americans!" Pass the Cheeseburgers. Instant gold.

NARRATOR

That's how it happens sometimes. You don't meet the ghost. You just feel the temperature drop.

MAX

You hear that, though? That's the line. Strummer. Steinman. Different ends of the same wire.

TOMMY

No. One's a lightning strike. The other's a voice in the dark saying, *stay awake*.

MAX

Ellen Foley caught fire because she went big. Steinman wrote thunder and she held on. We could do that.

TOMMY

Maybe. But we're not built for exploding heavens. We're built for bleeding through real life.

CHINO

I'd settle for bleeding with decent monitors.

NARRATOR

Every story breaks in half. This was the crack — thunder versus truth, volume versus nerve.

MAX

We don't get another shot at Meadowbrook. That's the room that decides.

TOMMY

No. That's the room that reveals. And we won. We're headlining.

CHINO

That's right. Saturday night. Our name on top.

MAX

Then we go big.

NARRATOR

Should they stay... or should they go? That question follows every band with duct tape and empty pockets. Because some songs are written to be heard. And some are written to survive.

This one's about to find out.

(Blackout)

SCENE 11 - THE SCREEN AGE

(The band is in the alley. A loud CLAP from a film slate. WHITE WORK LIGHTS SNAP ON and the alley look is exposed as a set. Stagehands in black flood in with light stands reflector boards and dragging cables. The band freezes mid-exit.)

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT (offstage)

Places! Camera test! Who's the band?

Another voice

Where's wardrobe? Who approved the hats?

(The boys are repositioned physically by crew. Tommy resists. Max adjusts hat proudly. Chino smiles into lens.)

DIRECTOR/NARRATOR

(Putting on a cap)

Alright. Gather up. So — why are we here?

MAX

We met some guys.

TOMMY

Always starts like that.

MAX

No, listen. Uptown bar. They said they're building something new. A cable channel. Just music. All day.

CHINO

No radio. Just videos.

TOMMY

That's insane.

NARRATOR/DIRECTOR

A music *television* channel? Cable? You bought that line?

MAX

They promised us a slot.

TOMMY

They promised us history.

NARRATOR/DIRECTOR

History. Right. The first garage band to embarrass themselves in front of the entire tri-state area. But I'm a director. And a director never says no to a story this good.

(He hoists his camera onto his shoulder.)

NARRATOR/DIRECTOR

Fine. You need a video. So tell me — how do you want to look?

(MAX slaps the cowboy hat on his head, proud.
CHINO tries his backward.)

TOMMY

(Visibly uncomfortable.)

This feels ridiculous. I feel like a clown. A cheap cowboy.

MAX

It's not cheap, it's a look. Tough. American.
We're not New Romantics — we're New Cowboys.

TOMMY

Frontier? We're in New Jersey. We'll look like Roy Rogers' roadies.

CHINO

I like the hat.

TOMMY

You look like a pizza guy lost at a rodeo.

MAX

Mick Jones changed. Brought in reggae, funk – evolved.

TOMMY

Joe Strummer didn't. He kept the heart. The Clash was about the message, not the costume.

DIRECTOR

Gentlemen – you're all right. Cowboys are kitsch. Cowboys are cinema. On a stage, kitsch is a joke. On tape – it's myth.

(He adjusts the band members quickly.)

Tommy – give me something real. Don't smile.

(Lights shift. A simple countdown appears on the screen.)

NARRATOR

They didn't know who would survive this new world. They just knew it had arrived –uninvited, unstoppable, glowing in the dark.

DIRECTOR

Alright. We don't have time. Tape's rolling.

TOMMY

This still feels stupid.

NARRATOR/DIRECTOR

Everything important feels stupid right before it changes everything. This wasn't Hollywood. This wasn't Times Square. This was a Jersey club with sticky floors and a borrowed signal. A New York cable channel – public access, barely legal – about to flip a switch no one knew how to turn off.

(The large screen on stage now takes over completely, powerfully displaying the iconic, full-screen image of MTV's launch.)

VOICE (DISTORTED, LIVE)

Ladies and gentlemen...rock and roll.

(The MTV logo hits.)

NARRATOR/DIRECTOR

It didn't ask permission. Didn't knock. Didn't care how good your song was. It just showed up twenty-four hours a day, and changed the rules while everyone was tuning their guitars.

(The light shifts.)

SONG: FLICKER AND GLOW

THE COLOR BLEEDS, THE SCREEN ALIVE
A THOUSAND FACES, QUICK AND BRIGHT
YOUR LIVING ROOM, A NEW DISGUISE
REFLECTING ALL THE ELECTRIC LIES
A FLASH, A CUT, A SUDDEN SHOCK
IT'S FIFTEEN MINUTES ON THE CLOCK

THE VOLUME RISES, CAN'T LOOK AWAY THE WORLD IS WATCHING
NIGHT AND DAY FROM COAST TO COAST
THE SIGNAL FLIES A NEW RELIGION IN THEIR EYES
YOUR IMAGE BURNS, A PIXEL DREAM CAUGHT IN THE VISUAL
A SILENT SCREAM

OH, FLICKER AND GLOW,
THE CHANNEL'S HIGH A MILLION EYES BENEATH THE SKY
THE FASHION FIRES, THE HAIR SO TALL
YOU'RE EVERYWHERE, YOU'RE ON THE WALL
NO NEED FOR RADIO
JUST PLASTIC SOUND THE NEWEST KING ON HOLLYWOOD GROUND
THEY'RE DANCING NOW, IN EVERY TOWN TO WHAT THEY SEE
NOT WHAT THEY'VE FOUND A STAR IS BORN IN LIGHTNING STROKE
THE SILENT SHADOWS, SMOKE AND JOKE
FLICKER AND GLOW,
THE SCREEN'S REFLECTED YOUR WHOLE WIDE WORLD, NOW INTERSECTED
FLICKER AND GLOW, THE FUTURE'S HERE NO TURNING BACK
THE MESSAGE'S CLEAR

OH, FLICKER AND GLOW,
 THE CHANNEL'S HIGH A MILLION EYES BENEATH THE SKY
 THE FASHION FIRES, THE HAIR SO TALL
 YOU'RE EVERYWHERE, YOU'RE ON THE WALL
 NO NEED FOR RADIO
 JUST PLASTIC SOUND THE NEWEST KING ON HOLLYWOOD GROUND
 THEY'RE DANCING NOW, IN EVERY TOWN TO WHAT THEY SEE
 NOT WHAT THEY'VE FOUND A STAR IS BORN IN LIGHTNING STROKE
 THE SILENT SHADOWS, SMOKE AND JOKE

FLICKER AND GLOW, THE SCREEN'S REFLECTED
 YOUR WHOLE WIDE WORLD, NOW INTERSECTED
 FLICKER - THE FUTURE'S HERE NO TURNING BACK
 THE MESSAGE'S CLEAR.

TOMMY

So that's it. Radio's done.

NARRATOR/DIRECTOR

That's what everyone thought.

(He steps forward slightly.)

NARRATOR/DIRECTOR

There was a guy behind this thing - not a rocker, not a poet. A radio kid. He didn't care what you wore. Didn't care where you were from. He cared about one thing... attention.

Bob Pittman. At the time, just another hustler with a transmitter and a theory - that if you could hold someone's ear, you could hold their future. He wasn't killing radio. He was *teaching it to survive*.

TOMMY

It's not about songs anymore. It's about the signal.

MAX

Then we get in the signal. That's the whole point.

TOMMY

No...It's about who controls it.

NARRATOR

Some people hear noise. Some hear music. And some — hear where it's all headed. Years from now, that same instinct would reshape radio itself. Less romance. More reach. A voice, everywhere at once. Tommy didn't know it yet, but something in him recognized the shape of that power. MTV didn't kill rock and roll. It just asked a harder question:

Could you survive being seen as loudly as you were heard?

(Ensemble floods the stage from all sides)

SONG: SCREEN AGE ANTHEM

THE COLOR EXPLODES, A THOUSAND WATTS ALIGHT
YOUR LIVING ROOM'S A STAGE, CONQUERING THE NIGHT
NO RADIO SIGNAL JUST A FLASHING WILD DESIRE
WE'RE BURNIN' UP THE SCREENS, PUSHIN' HIGHER AND HIGHER
A MILLION EYEBALLS GLUED FROM COAST TO SHINING SHORE
THE VISUAL ASSAULT YOU'RE BEGGING US FOR MORE

THE OLD GUARD'S SHAKING, THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO
WE'RE CRASHING THROUGH THE AIRWAVES, THE REBELS BREAKING THROUGH
THE FASHION'S LOUD, THE HAIR'S A DEFIANT SIGN
THIS DIGITAL INSURRECTION, WATCH THE OLD WAYS DIE
NO TURNING BACK THE CLOCK, NO PLACE LEFT TO HIDE
WE'RE IN YOUR HEADS AND HOMES RIDING THE NEW TIDE

SCREEN AGE ANTHEM, BLAZING EVER SO BRIGHT
WE'RE THE FLICKERING FURY, STEALING ALL THE LIGHT
FROM THE UNDERGROUND UP TO THE MASSIVE MAINSTREAM FLOW
IT'S THE SOUND AND THE PICTURE
THE ONLY WAY TO GO

NO MORE WAITING, NO MORE WHISPERING OUR NAME
WE'RE ON EVERY SINGLE CHANNEL, FUELING THE NEW FLAME

THE OLD GUARD'S SHAKING, THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO
WE'RE CRASHING THROUGH THE AIRWAVES, THE REBELS BREAKING
THROUGH! THE FASHION'S LOUD, THE HAIR'S A DEFIANT SIGN
THIS DIGITAL INSURRECTION, WATCH THE OLD WAYS DIE
NO TURNING BACK THE CLOCK NO PLACE LEFT TO HIDE
WE'RE IN YOUR HEADS AND HOMES
RIDING THE NEW TIDE

SCREEN AGE ANTHEM BLAZING EVER SO BRIGHT
WE'RE THE FLICKERING FURY STEALING ALL THE LIGHT
FROM THE UNDERGROUND UP TO THE MASSIVE MAINSTREAM FLOW
IT'S THE SOUND AND THE PICTURE
THE ONLY WAY TO GO

NO MORE WAITING, NO MORE WHISPERING OUR NAME
WE'RE ON EVERY SINGLE CHANNEL, FUELING THE NEW FLAME
THEY CALLED US DREAMERS SAID WE'D NEVER BREAK THE CHAINS
BUT NOW WE'RE BROADCASTING LIVE, WASHING OUT THE STAINS
A REBEL WITH A CAMERA
A VISION SO BOLD A STORY UNFOLDING WAITING TO BE TOLD

SCREEN AGE ANTHEM, BLAZING EVER SO BRIGHT
WE'RE THE FLICKERING FURY, STEALING ALL THE LIGHT
FROM THE UNDERGROUND UP TO THE MASSIVE MAINSTREAM FLOW
IT'S THE SOUND AND THE PICTURE
THE ONLY WAY TO GO
SCREEN AGE SEE IT BURN
SCREEN AGE NO RETURN
SCREEN AGE THE FUTURE'S HERE
SCREEN AGE LOUD AND CLEAR

(BLACKOUT)

SCENE 12 - THE GILDED CAGE

(The stage is dim, a cramped, disused backstage area of Studio 54. TOMMY, MAX, and CHINO are unwinding after their set.)

NARRATOR

Sometimes, a flash of something pure cuts through the grime. Just a few months ago, on September 19, 1981, a half million souls gathered at the Great Lawn for Simon & Garfunkel. They sang "The Sound of Silence," a brief whisper of unity in a city always ready to tear itself apart. But even that couldn't erase the ledger. This city, you see, always collects its debts.

CHINO

(Wiping sweat from his brow, grinning)

Man, that was something! A private party at *Studio 54*? Even if it's "closed," it's still Studio freakin' 54! The velvet ropes, the lights, the... well, the echo of the decadence. Did you see those people? Even the old ones still had glitter in their hair.

MAX

It was a gig, Chino. A good one. They paid. And being able to say we played Studio 54, even post-mortem, that's worth something for the resume. Not quite the same as when it opened. A real den of excess then. But still.

TOMMY

Yeah, well, it still feels like a gilded cage to me. All that flash, all that money... for what? A hollow space with a beat. I keep thinking about what Knute said back at Hitsville. All this commercialism. It's just a different kind of trap.

NARRATOR

"A gilded cage." Tommy understood the trap. Studio 54 was built on light and exclusivity. And when the lights went out — nothing underneath was strong enough to hold it up.

MAX

Alright, let's get out of here. Cowboy's probably waiting with the van. My back's killing me from lugging all this gear.

TOMMY

Wait. My jacket. Where's my jacket? I had it backstage, right here.

CHINO

(Looking around the messy space)

Huh? You mean your leather one? You were wearing it when we came in. Did you hang it up?

TOMMY

(Frantically searching)

No, I just... I left it on that chair. I swear. It's not here! Someone must have taken it. Damn it! Everything's just... going wrong.

NARRATOR

That jacket. More than just leather and denim. It was a shield. A second skin. And in a city that collects its debts, sometimes, the smallest loss can feel like the heaviest burden. For Tommy, already reeling from the new, glossy superficiality of the MTV world, this missing piece felt like another chip out of his soul.

(The stage lights begin to shift, indicating a transition. The backstage elements are struck quickly, revealing a city sidewalk. A low, haunting reggae rhythm, created through layered vocalizations or subtle percussion, begins to seep into the space.)

TOMMY

(Looking lost, still fixated on his missing jacket.)

It's just... gone. Everything feels like it's slipping away.

MAX

We'll get you another one, man. Better than that beat-up thing. Come on. Fresh air.

NARRATOR

But even in this city of debt and loss, there were whispers of other rhythms. The city kept changing its rhythm. New beats, borrowed beats – music learning how to survive without asking permission.

(CHINO and MAX move to the edge of the stage, looking out as if onto a street. TOMMY, however, is drawn by the soft, vocalized reggae sound to a corner of the stage. He approaches an unseen group, perhaps just a single, silhouetted figure.)

CHINO

(Calling to Tommy)

Come on, man! It's freezing out here! What are you doing?

MAX

(Squinting up the street)

What's all that commotion up there? A protest? Or just... New York being New York? Looks like a vigil.

CHINO

Yeah, a lot of people just standing there. Kinda creepy. Hey, isn't it... December 8th?

TOMMY

December 8th. Oh man. It's been a year.

MAX

Ah, the anniversary. Yeah.

NARRATOR

Then, just months after Studio 54's final gasp, a darkness descended. On December 8, 1980, at The Dakota, John Lennon, the dreamer, was shot.

(The stage lights dim further, focusing tightly on Tommy.)

[FLASHBACK: WDHA RADIO REPORT - ONE YEAR AGO]

WDHA ANCHOR VOICE

Here's the WDHA News Brief.

"We're breaking into programming with unconfirmed reports coming out of New York City. Sources indicate that former Beatle, John Lennon, has been shot outside his apartment building, The Dakota, on Central Park West. Details are still scarce, but we are attempting to confirm this devastating news. Stay tuned to WDHA for immediate updates as this story develops. Again, John Lennon reportedly shot outside The Dakota in New York City..."

NARRATOR

The music died that night, and the world held its breath. A year later, the city remembered. They later built Strawberry Fields in the park, a circular mosaic with a single word: "Imagine." But the scar remained, a testament to the fragile line between light and shadow.

TOMMY

No... not... Not Lennon again. It still... it still feels like it just happened.

(The sound of distant, mournful sirens begins to wail. KNUTE, appears at the edge of the stage, holding a small, nondescript package. He approaches Tommy.)

KNUTE

Rough night, huh, kid? This city just keeps taking. Look around. Dreams die quick out here. Especially the biggest ones. But some things... some things can make the edges dull. Just for a little while. Take the sting out. Like that money that got you guys this far, eh? It always comes with a price, doesn't it?

(Knutte subtly extends the package towards Tommy. Tommy's hand hovers over the package. The sirens wail louder. MAX and CHINO slowly turn to see Knute and Tommy.)

NARRATOR

History told them legends never die.
But the candles on that sidewalk said otherwise.

(Lights shift. Studio 54 drains away. Candlelight emerges. Soft, broken voices singing "Imagine." Not a concert – a murmur.)

History doesn't always shout. Sometimes... it just stops.

(Tommy stands outside the circle. He does not move.)

GHOST DEBBIE

(quiet, close)

He didn't stop, Tommy.

(A candle goes out. The song falters.)

NARRATOR

That's the thing about light...You never know it's fading until you're standing in the dark.

(Tommy steps forward.)

SONG: LIGHTS WENT OUT (BROADWAY)

THE LIGHTS WENT OUT
A RADIO'S WHISPER, A SHATTERING CRACK
A NAME IN THE STATIC, NO TURNING BACK
HE WALKED THROUGH THAT DOOR, A LEGEND SO BRIGHT
THEN DARKNESS DESCENDED AND SWALLOWED THE LIGHT
THE CITY STOOD SILENT, THE PROPHETS ALL CRIED
A PIECE OF THE FUTURE, JUST WITHERED AND DIED

THE GLITTER IS DUST, THE VELVET IS BLACK
NO TURNING FORWARD, NO WAY TO GO BACK
THE SHEILD THAT I WORE WAS JUST STRIPPED AWAY
ANOTHER PIECE LOST IN THIS ENDLESS DECAY

I STAND ON THIS STREET WHERE THE DREAM MET ITS END
A LIE IN THE SPOTLIGHT MY ONLY FRIEND

A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT NO SONG LEFT TO SING
JUST BROKEN REFLECTIONS ON EVERY BRIGHT THING
WAS THIS THE PROMISE, THE FAME AND THE PAIN
TO WATCH ALL YOUR IDOLS GO DOWN IN THE RAIN
THE SOUND OF THE SILENCE, IT CUTS LIKE A KNIFE
WHEN ALL YOU BELIEVED IN JUST DIES IN THIS NIGHT
WHAT'S LEFT TO CHASE NOW, WHEN HEROES JUST FALL
THE PRICE OF THIS FAME, IT'S TAKING US ALL

WAS IT ALL FOR NOTHING? THIS CLIMB TO THE HEIGHT
EVEN THE BRIGHTEST, FADE INTO THE NIGHT
THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD, A HAND ON MY THROAT
JUST A HOLLOW WHISPER, A SINKING SMALL BOAT

A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT, NO SONG LEFT TO SING
JUST BROKEN REFLECTIONS ON EVERY BRIGHT THING
WAS THIS THE PROMISE, THE FAME AND THE PAIN
TO WATCH ALL YOUR IDOLS GO DOWN IN THE RAIN
THE SOUND OF THE SILENCE, IT CUTS LIKE A KNIFE
WHEN ALL YOU BELIEVED IN JUST DIES IN THIS NIGHT
WHAT'S LEFT TO CHASE NOW, WHEN HEROES JUST FALL
THE PRICE OF THIS FAME, IT'S TAKING US ALL

(LIGHTS FADE to black.)

SCENE 13 - ONE FOOT IN THE FUTURE

(The stage is a chaotic, buzzing hive of fluorescent-lit energy. Signs for the "NEW MUSIC SEMINAR" are scattered. The space is a jumble of booths, banquet tables overflowing with discarded flyers, coffee cups, and half-eaten pastries. People in a mix of rock-and-roll chic and business casual jostle for space. TOMMY stands slightly apart, looking weary, but with a flicker of resolve. MAX and CHINO are more actively in the thick of it, trying to hand out their newly pressed independent records.)

(A lone spotlight finds the Narrator)

NARRATOR

The early '80s were grief and rebirth sharing a stage. Lennon was gone — but music didn't stop. It reorganized. "Authenticity" became a costume. Shock became currency. And control of the signal? That became everything.

The New Music Seminar wasn't about music. It was about who held the doors — and who learned how they opened. Some people walked in looking for deals. Some walked in looking for exits. And some learned just enough to survive the next room.

(Max rushes up to Tommy, a handful of business cards in his hand.)

MAX

Tommy! Quit loitering, man! This isn't some dusty corner of a club. This is the New Music Seminar at the New Yorker Hotel! This is the Mecca! Everyone who's anyone, or wants to be anyone, is here. And look!

(He thrusts a record into Tommy's hand.)

Your artwork, man. On our actual record. People are picking these up. We actually did it. This is what we worked for!

(Max runs off leaving Tommy holding the record. Chino bounds over to Tommy.)

CHINO

I just saw a guy in a suit with a clipboard. He said our records were "very authentic." You know what that means, right? It means they're going to pay us so much money that we can finally get real clothes!

(MAX reappears, tugging his arm with renewed urgency.)

MAX

Come on, Tommy! Less brooding, more schmoozing! Epic Records has a hospitality suite. Free beer, hot food, and I just saw... I swear I saw Clem Burke from Blondie in there! Blondie, man! Their drummer! We gotta go. You gotta meet him.

CHINO

Clem Burke! No way! Man, his beats are so sick! He's a legend!

TOMMY

Alright. Let's crash it.

(Tommy, Max, and Chino move towards an implied "Epic Records Hospitality Suite" area of the stage. The lights shift, becoming a bit warmer, less harsh. CLEM BURKE is seen nursing a beer and looking genuinely at ease.)

MAX

Mr. Burke? Max. This is Tommy, our drummer. Huge fans.

CLEM BURKE

(Nodding, a friendly, genuine smile)

Studio 54, huh? Nice. Still got some ghosts in that old place, I bet. And a drummer, eh? Good to meet ya, Tommy. Grab a beer. It's on Epic, so it must be good, right?

TOMMY

Your work... with Blondie. It's... it's really something. Especially how you guys integrated... you know... that sound. It was... it was brave.

(Chino and Max step away, leaving Tommy and Clem alone for a moment.)

CLEM BURKE

"That sound," yeah. People forget, punk wasn't just three chords and a sneer. Sometimes the most authentic thing you can do is let something unexpected in. It's about being true to the beat, no matter where it comes from. Just playing the damn drums.

(As Clem speaks, GHOST DEBBIE slowly steps forward.)

GHOST DEBBIE

You hear it now. The difference between noise and signal. Between chasing the room and choosing the moment. Doesn't mean you're done. It just means you're not blind anymore.

TOMMY

(A deep, liberating breath.)

Yeah. Yeah, it opens up everything.

CLEM BURKE

(Raises his beer in a toast)

To new beginnings, then. To finding your own beat.

CHINO

(Returning, with a plate of half-eaten pastries.)

Hey, Tommy, you want to get one of these? I think this one's a day old. They've been here since the morning, I think. Still free, though.

NARRATOR

Knowing how the world works doesn't save you. It just tells you what you're risking when you step back onstage.

SONG: WE ARE THE ONES (REPRISE)

WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES

WE ARE THE ONES, NO FEAR IN OUR EYES
WE ARE THE ONES, AND WE CUT THROUGH THE LIES
ONE FOOT IN THE FUTURE, AND ONE IN THE PAST
NO PLAN FOR TOMORROW CAN LAST

WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES, NO CHAINS ON THE BEAT
WE ARE THE ONES
THE HEART OF THE DRUM IS OUR VICTORY SWEET
NO PLAN FOR TOMORROW, WE'RE LIVING IT LOUD
WE ARE THE SOUND THAT CAN RISE FROM THE CROWD

WE ARE THE ONES — REACHING FOR TOMORROW, IT'S OURS
WE ARE THE ONES — CARESSING THE FUTURE IN HAND
WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES

WE ARE THE ONES WE WON'T BE DENIED
WE ARE THE ONES
THE FUTURE IS HERE AND IT'S BEATING INSIDE
ONE FOOT IN THE FUTURE, AND ONE IN THE PAST
WE DON'T ASK NO QUESTIONS 'CAUSE THERE'S NO ONE TO ASK

CHORUS

WE ARE THE ONES — REACHING FOR TOMORROW, IT'S OURS
WE ARE THE ONES — CARESSING THE FUTURE IN HAND
WE ARE THE ONES — REACHING FOR TOMORROW, IT'S OURS
WE ARE THE ONES — CARESSING THE FUTURE IN HAND

WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES
WE ARE THE ONES

(LIGHTS FADE to black)

SCENE 14 - BREAK EVERY CHAIN

(MEADOWBROOK BALLROOM backstage. There's a cooler overflowing with tubs of cold beer, sparkling water, and several prominent bowls of white powder on a table. Max is buzzing, pacing. Chino is excitedly trying to fix his hair. Tommy, in stark contrast to his earlier weariness, is now quietly focused, a calm intensity about him.)

(Static. A radio clicks on.)

WDHA RADIO ANNOUNCER

Here's the WDHA News Brief.

August first — a new cable channel called MTV goes on the air, promising music... on television, twenty-four hours a day. Bruce Springsteen continues his *River* tour, selling out arenas across the country. And tonight, here in New Jersey, another sold-out room waits to see who's next.

(Music stinger. Static.)

The PARK RANGER steps in and clicks the radio off.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

Every journey has its end, or at least, its summit. And for Tommy and the boys, it's right here: The Meadowbrook Ballroom. Years of grinding, always wondering if that light at the end of the tunnel was a breakthrough or just an oncoming train. It all led to this room, this moment.

The truth is, music never wraps itself up with a neat little bow; it just keeps spinning, changing costumes, trying on new shoes. Take "Because the Night." You had Patti Smith's raw, aching cry, then Bruce's stadium singalong, 10,000 Maniacs' stripped-bare confessional, and finally, Cascada's EDM rush. Same soul, just different skin. That's endurance.

Or look at the James Bond theme. Always dramatic, always larger than life. Duran Duran turned *A View to a Kill* into a neon spy fantasy in '85. Bulletproof songs, you see, they survive everything. Even when Guns N' Roses rearmed Paul McCartney's *Live and Let Die* with hard-rock fury, the core remained.

Then there's Celine Dion's "It's All Coming Back to Me Now." A true detonation of a song. Its very first life was on that Jim Steinman album, *Original Sin*, first sung by Ellen Foley—the same face that hung on your club wall, daring the skinny-jean dreamers to measure up. The history is personal, darling.

And "Call Me"? Blondie nailed it, but in 2012, *In This Moment* dragged it through metal's fire and somehow it landed. Proof that a great hook survives any storm you throw at it.

And this old barn, the Meadowbrook, was built for that kind of magic. In 1934 it used redwood beams to drink the sound. The Big Band kings all swung under these rafters—Kenton, Goodman, Miller. It was a dance hall, then a roller disco, and now? New Wave and neon. Big Band to punk-pop, same heartbeat.

Tonight, it's not history repeating; it's history reborn. The headline moment that makes every fight, every empty diner coffee, worth it. The music keeps spinning. And the show, as they say, must go on.

(Lights come up on the band)

MAX

(Grabbing a beer)

Can you believe this, guys? Meadowbrook! The whole damn place sold out! Headlining! I saw the marquee out front—our name! Look at this room compared to where we were twelve months ago! Remember those first gigs? The Bowery dives with three drunks and a dog? We clawed our way here! Every damn show, every opening slot at Hitsville, every rejection letter... it was all leading to this!

CHINO

I still can't believe it. I keep thinking they're gonna tell us it was a mistake. Like we're gonna wake up back in the van, freezing, out of gas. Remember the Dirt Club? I miss that place. The realness.

MAX

The Dirt Club was honest. It didn't pretend to be anything it wasn't. Just raw noise, Max. Raw noise that got us noticed! And

now... this! They're really pulling out all the stops, huh? This is the high life, boys!

CHINO

(He spots the white powder pile on a nearby surface, gesturing toward it.)

(CHINO)

Oh man, is this... powdered sugar? For the doughnuts? I was just about to ask. I've been waiting all night! (He sniffs cautiously at it, but stops, clearly confused but innocent. He looks at Max.) Yeah... high. Really high. Is that what we're supposed to be feeling now?

TOMMY

(Waving a piece of paper)

Can you believe it, guys? The crowd! They're already wild! Look at this offer! This is it! Right here! They just slipped it to me! This is the deal! This is what we dreamed of! Right now, before we even hit the stage! They're gonna be talking about this signing for years!

MAX

(Watching the crowd through the curtain, ignoring the paper)

Tommy... look at me. This is it. The dream's come true. But... what's next? What's the deal really going to look like? We'll get a big record label, a huge advance... and they'll want to own everything, won't they? The masters. Creative control. They'll tell us to change our image, to "refine" the sound. They'll want us to be U2 meets Duran Duran. That's how it works, isn't it?

TOMMY

(Waving the paper impatiently)

Max, this is it! We talk terms later! This is our chance! We've got to take the advance! Now!

MAX

No. This is our chance. It's about to happen out there. On our terms. With our songs. And if they want that, then they take that. Not some diluted, polished-up version they think will sell. We're not selling our souls for a contract.

TOMMY

(He stares at the paper, then at the roaring stage door and crumples the paper slightly.)

He's right. The raw noise. The honest noise. That's the deal. Take it or leave it. We've got our own records to sell.

CHINO

I guess... we didn't sell out.

TOMMY

No. We didn't. We just... played our own tune.

(KNUTE walks over, placing a hand on Max's shoulder and Tommy's shoulder.)

KNUTE

We always did make it work, didn't we? One way or another.

(Tommy looks at the crumpled paper one last time, throws it down, and nods to Max.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

He'd seen the gilded cages, heard the siren song of commercialism, felt the sting of loss. And through it all, Tommy had found something else. Something within. The noise of the world, the whispers of doubt, the shadow of addiction - they still called. But his inner compass, once spinning wildly, was now steady. He wasn't just observing anymore; he was deciding.

(Tommy walks over to the table with the bowls of cocaine. Max and Chino watch him, tense. Tommy looks at the white powder, then slowly, deliberately, reaches out - not for the cocaine, but to push the bowls away, further from the edge

of the table, almost out of sight. He then picks up a bottle of water instead of a beer.)

TOMMY

Let's just play. I'm not saying no to the free food, though.

(A flustered STAGE MANAGER rushes into the dressing room, clutching a drum head that is visibly ripped, with a large, ugly tear.)

STAGE MANAGER

Guys! Guys, we've got a problem! Major problem! The main snare drum head! It just... it just tore! Right before you go on! We don't have a spare!

MAX

No! You're kidding me! Right now?! We're on in five!

CHINO

We can't play with that! It'll sound like... like static!

TOMMY

(Calmly taking the damaged drum head from the Stage Manager.)

It's a big tear. A new head would be ideal.

(KNUTE appears in the doorway clutching a roll of DUCT TAPE. He sees the panic, then Tommy's calm. He doesn't say anything, just offers the tape.)

KNUTE

(He tosses the duct tape to Tommy)

Patch it. You know how. Make it hold. This ain't about perfect, kid. It's about getting the job done. That's how we always did it, remember? Just... make it work.

(Catching the duct tape, he quickly and efficiently applies it to the snare drum head. He looks up, his gaze steady, directly at MAX.)

TOMMY

Yeah. That's how we always did it. Not about perfect. Not even about loud anymore. It's about being real. About surviving. Just make the noise count.

(The stage lights hold on Tommy, a moment of quiet triumph and resolve.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

That was the final challenge – the moment that tests what survival truly means. Tommy faced a major gear failure, and through grit, improvisation, and an unexpected ally, he pulled off the show. He finished the job. Not as a flawless musician, but as a survivor. Sometimes that's the whole lesson. Just make the noise count.

TOMMY

No. I am not a rock star. I'm a lightweight.

(A quick, dreamlike transition. The club sounds fade completely. The stage is now bathed in the soft, natural glow of a CAMPGROUND. The PARK RANGER is visible in the background, tending to a now restored hot-dog cart. TOMMY is sitting on a foldable chair, his returned leather jacket now draped over his shoulders. GHOST DEBBIE sits beside him.)

TOMMY

And then, after everything... after the show... I just felt... unnoticed. Like I was back where I started. But then I came here, to the quiet. And it made me think of it all. Knute, showing up with this.

(He gestures to the jacket.)

Said he found it back at the Dirt Club. Max had doubled back. Kept it safe.

(He pulls the COIN from a jacket pocket, the one from the very first scene. He looks at it, then at Debbie.)

TOMMY

And then Max. He told me. He confessed. The coin. The flip. New York or LA. He always made sure it landed on heads. He always made sure we came here. He just... knew. Said it was where I had to be.

GHOST DEBBIE

He always believed in you, Tommy. That's true love, isn't it? The kind that sees you, even when you can't see yourself. It was never about fate, was it? Or a rigged coin. It was always about the choices you made, the people you fought for, and the strength you found inside yourself. You were never unnoticed. You just had to learn to hear your own beat.

TOMMY

(Looks at the coin, then, with a definitive gesture, flips it high into the air and catches it cleanly then slips it into his own pocket.)

No. It was always us. All of it.

(The Park Ranger slowly walks into the immediate foreground, observing Tommy and Debbie with a quiet, knowing gaze.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

And there it was—the culmination, the payoff. No more shadows, no more cages. Just raw power—shaped by the grind, tempered by loss, unleashed at last.

Funny thing about temporary places... some people outgrow 'em. Guess I don't gotta chase you boys for rent anymore.

This wasn't just a band playing music; it was defiance made electric. A triumph built from every broken string, every missed note, every doubt they refused to believe. They found their voice. Their beat. Their moment.

(Tommy rises slowly, crosses to the hot dog cart, lays a hand on it for a moment, then—without fanfare—pushes it off the stage. Debbie watches, smiling—because she finally sees him exactly as he is.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

And maybe now you get why I've been telling it this way. It was never just about the gigs, the clubs, or the songs. It was about the guy in the middle of it all—stumbling forward, learning who he was while the world kept changing its tune.

And years later, if you spin the dial just right, you might hear a voice that sounds...familiar. Steady, weathered, carrying the music forward. Maybe you've been hearing it all along.

(As the Park Ranger finishes, the campground setting begins to shimmer and fade. The stage lights shift dramatically, building in intensity and color. The faint sound of a massive crowd returning, growing louder, mixed with the anticipation of powerful rock music.)

THE RANGER (NARRATOR)

(His voice echoes one last time.)

And that, my friends, is the sound that truly lasts.

(The Ranger exits. The stage explodes with light and sound.)

SONG: "WE WALKED THE WIRE"**TOMMY**

THE LIGHTS ARE HOT, AND THE AIR IS THIN
I SEE THE GHOSTS OF WHERE WE'VE BEEN
DIRT-CLUB NIGHTS AND JERSEY RAIN
CARRIED EVERY DREAM THROUGH JOY AND PAIN
EVERY BROKEN STRING, EVERY WASTED MILE
JUST TO FEEL ALIVE FOR A LITTLE WHILE

GHOST DEBBIE

THEY SAID WE'D FAIL, THEY SAID WE'D BREAK

COMPANY

OHHH-OHHH

GHOST DEBBIE

BUT LOOK HOW FAR WE'VE COME TO TAKE

BOTH

ONE MORE SHOT - ONE MORE NIGHT
WE BURNED OUR NAMES ACROSS THE LIGHT

COMPANY

WE WALKED THE WIRE - WE PLAYED THE GAME
WE LIT A FIRE - WE SCREAMED OUR NAME
FROM DIRTY FLOORS TO THE VELVET ROPES
WE TURNED THE SILENCE INTO SOUND AND HOPE
THIS IS FOR THE SWEAT, THE DIRT, THE RAIN
WE TAKE TOMORROW - WE'LL BREAK EVERY CHAIN

GHOST DEBBIE

I SAW THE GLITTER, I FELT THE PULL
BUT SHINY DREAMS CAN COME BACK DULL

MAX

WE FOUND OUR SONG IN THE MIDNIGHT HAZE
STUMBLING HEARTS IN ELECTRIC DAYS

GHOST DEBBIE

THEY SOLD US FUTURES DRESSED IN LIES
BUT SOUL DON'T BEND AND TRUTH DON'T DIE

TOMOMY

YOU CAN'T FAKE HEART

BOTH

YOU CAN'T REWIND

CHINO

WE'RE MOVING FORWARD - LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND

GHOST DEBBIE

A NEW SOUND RISING

COMPANY

FROM UNDERGROUND
 OHHH-OHHH — RISING FROM THE UNDERGROUND
 OHHH-OHHH — RISING FROM THE UNDERGROUND
 NO MORE SHADOWS NO MORE GHOSTS
 WHAT WE KEEP IS WHAT WE CHOSE

GHOST DEBBIE

THIS IS FOR LENNON

TOMMY

THIS IS FOR US.

GHOST DEBBIE

THIS IS FOR EVERYONE WHO LEARNED TO TRUST

COMPANY

WE WALKED THE WIRE — WE PLAYED THE GAME
 WE LIT A FIRE — WE CLAIMED OUR NAME
 FROM CHEAP HOTEL TO THE OPEN SKY
 WE LEARNED TO STAND, WE LEARNED TO FLY
 THIS IS FOR THE DIRT THE STREETS THE PAIN
 THIS IS THE MOMENT WE BREAK EVERY CHAIN
 BREAK EVERY CHAIN BREAK EVERY CHAIN
 BREAK—EVERY—CHAIN

TOMMY

THE BATTLE IS WON. I'M FINALLY FREE

GHOST DEBBIE

THIS STAGE WAS MY CAGE, BUT THIS VOICE IS ME.

(BLACKOUT)