

Heart of the City

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Adapted from: Undun by the Roots

EXT. CROWN HEIGHTS STREETS - NIGHT

The expansive darkness of the night sky is lost in the haze of lights and tall buildings on the busy new york streets. The street lights give off a distinct orange glow that makes it all seem surreal.

The silhouette of a man standing on the corner is visible. A bright neon sign rests above him, it reads, "Food & Liquor".

A minivan pulls up to the corner, the silhouette is now fully visible as he steps into the street light. He dips his head to the level of the car window.

Three shots ring out from the driver's side of the car. the shots give off a sharp echo that travels through the streets.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The car screeches away.

The man's body drops to the cold, hard concrete. He lays there motionless.

INT. RONNY'S ROOM - DAY

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Ronny smacks the top of his alarm clock. He shifts his head from his pillow so he can look at the time. The clock reads Seven Twenty AM.

The walls of Ronny's room are covered with rap posters, music quotes and family pictures. The bottom of his window is blocked by the huge pile of papers on his desk.

A copy of the Great Gatsby tops the stack of books, mostly autobiographies. A television set lyes in the corner of the room, covered in dirty clothes and jackets.

A picture of Malcolm X hangs on the back of his door.

RONNY

Fuck!

Ronny hops out of bed and runs to the bathroom to shower.

He comes back into his room and gets dressed for school. He

shoves the book and the papers on his desk into his bag in no particular order.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ronny runs through the kitchen, dodging the bodies of his two younger brothers and his younger sister.

His mother, DIANE, mid-thirties, puts her hand on Ronny's shoulder, stopping him before he goes.

Her hair is messy and out of place. It looks as if she hasn't slept in weeks. Her voice is shaky.

MOM

Am I gonna get another call from the school about you today?

RONNY

You won't Ma.

MOM

Did you get a job? The bills are stacking up..

She gestures over to the bills covering the kitchen table.

He begins to inch towards the door. His mother's eyes widen as if she is about to speak again but Ronny manages to slip out of the door.

RONNY

I'm in a rush, I'll see you later.

EXT. CROWN HEIGHTS STREETS - DAY

BUG, a chubby, smart, lighthearted 16 year old wait eagerly for Ronny in front of his building. He checks his watch every few seconds, nervous.

Bug's glasses cover up half of his face, but his bright red starter jacket attracts your attention away from his big glasses.

Ronny emerges from the buildings doors, Bugs face lights up.

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BUG

It's about time, I've been out here for like ten minutes.

RONNY

My alarm was late. We'll be good though, stop worrying.

They start the walk to school.

BUG

What's wrong man? You look upset.

RONNY

Nothing's wrong, Bug. I'm just tired.

BUG

Alright man.

A second passes.

BUG

So what'd you do last night?

RONNY

I watched the kids, my mom was out. Then I was up late studying for this History exam I got. You?

BUG

I was with Shawna.

Ronny turns to Bug, excited.

RONNY

Oh man! You guys are getting serious, huh?

Ronny gives Bug a playful shove.

Bug shrugs his shoulders then adjusts his glasses. He attempts to hide his smile.

BUG

Yeah, she's great. She really likes me, man.

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INT. CROWN HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

The bright red school bell ring's through the packed halls of the state-funded Crown Heights High School.

The vastness of the hallways is lost by the sheer number of students who roam those halls.

Bug and Ronny step into classroom number 14, their English class.

INT. CLASSROOM 14 - DAY

Most of the students scurry to the back desks, but Ronny and Bug sit in the front.

Ronny begins to stare out of the classroom window. Through it, the bright neon sign on the building next to the school is visible. It reads "Food & Liquor". His mind begins to wander...

The bell rings once more, snapping Ronny out of his daydream.

He zips up his backpack and heads out of the classroom.

INT. CROWN HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Ronny and Bug walk through the packed halls once again. Bug's bright red starter jacket makes him stand out in the crowd.

Bug stops off at his locker. They dap each other up and part ways.

RONNY

Peace!

Ronny continues on his way and heads towards the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

The walls and floor of the bathroom are a cream color due to the wear and tear over time, but some of the original white tile is still visible.

The walls are tagged in graffiti and the windows are barred, making it seem inhumane. The bathroom is empty, except for LAMAR standing in the corner. Lamar is tall and handsome, with his signature flat top hair style. Lamar has a full

goatee, and a grown man's body.

He stands by the window smoking a cigarette.

RONNY

Yo Lamar, I wanna get "in the
business".

Ronny makes air quotations with his fingers.

LAMAR

What are you talking about, boy?

Ronny steps closer to Lamar, so he doesn't have to shout
across the room.

RONNY

I need the cash, let me deal
something for you.

LAMAR

You're not cut out for it.

Ronny and Lamar share a long look as Ronny searches for the
right words. Lamar sizes up Ronny with his eyes.

LAMAR

I was good friends with your older
brother. I'm not gonna let what
happened to him happen to you.

Ronny's eyes bulge, he takes a few steps closer to Lamar.
They are now face to face.

RONNY

You don't know what you're talking
about. My brother knew the risks of
what he was doing, everyone does.

LAMAR

Ronny, come on.

Lamar takes a step back, creating some distance between them.

LAMAR

You're a smart kid. I promised your
brother I'd make sure you didn't get
into 'the game'.

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RONNY

Listen, bills are stacking up and we're really strapped for cash. I'm asking for some help, as a friend.

LAMAR

Alright. But listen, if you get in any kind of trouble, you don't know me. I'm already in enough trouble with the pigs, I don't need you making it any worse.

RONNY

I'm no snitch.

They share another long look. Ronny extends his hand, reaching for a handshake.

Lamar stands idle. He looks at Ronny's hand, then back at Ronny, then back at the hand.

Ronny keeps his hand extended.

LAMAR

Go to the alley behind the liquor store on the corner of Crown St. and Kingston Ave. after school. Find the green door on the right side of the ally and knock three times. I'll fix you up then.

Lamar finally shakes Ronny's hand. Lamar tosses his cigarette out of the window, and before they can share any more words he out.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Ronny approaches the alley behind the liquor store on the corner of Crown St. and Kingston Ave.

Fire escapes, trash cans, dumpsters, and electrical wires crowd the narrow, brick alleyway.

Ronny spots the big green door. He walks over to the door. he looks both ways, anxiously, then knocks three times.

The door swings open.

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INT. LAMAR'S OFFICE - DAY

Ronny enters, unable to really see whats in the room. The lights are dim and the room is filled with a smoky haze.

The door slams shut behind him.

An tall, obese black man dressed in all-black leather, TY, grabs Ronny and throws him against the wall. A man approaches Ronny, due to the haze in the room, only his silhouette is visible.

LAMAR

Good. You made it.

Ty pats down Ronny, checking every inch of him. The fear is visible in Ronny's eyes, he begins to breathe heavy.

Ty throws Ronny's backpack down to the ground and begins searching it. He tosses papers with no regard.

RONNY

Hey! Come on!

LAMAR

Alright Ty, that's enough.

Ty lets Ronny go, then proceeds to the table in the back corner of the room. The table is covered in stacks of cash. He puts each stack into a bill counting machine, and marks down the amount.

LAMAR

You ready to talk business?

Ronny nods.

LAMAR

Let's start with prices. Each rock is worth about ten dollars. It's one-hundred dollars per gram. A slice is one-hundred and twenty dollars. An eight-ball is two-hundred and forty dollars. An ounce is seven-hundred and a key is twenty thousand. Don't worry about the heavy weight just yet though.

Lamar then grabs a large zip-lock bag, filled to capacity with little white rocks and powder. He tosses it to Ronny.

Lamar then leads Ronny over to the desk in the middle of the room. He picks up a Mac-Ten with an extended clip. He begins to stroke the gun, twisting and turning it, examining it.

LAMAR

This is for you. Use it wisely, keep
it on you only when you feel unsafe
or if you're pushing heavy weight.

Ronny's mouth is open in awe. He quickly snaps out of it, though. He grabs the gun and tucks it in his waste band.

LAMAR

Before you go, two ground rules.
Never sell on credit and never get
high on your own supply. This time
it's free, but after that you work
for me.

EXT. CROWN HEIGHTS STREETS - DAY

Months pass.

Ronny has begun to gain clout in the streets.

He walks down the street in his new, squeaky clean Jordan Five's. He daps up the various dope fiends that pass him as he continues on his way.

He has a bandana around his neck. Two gold chains lay on his chest.

He approaches a Seven-Eleven. He stays outside and waits, counting the number of people inside, waiting for them all to leave.

Before he enters, he pulls the bandana on his neck over his nose and mouth.

The automatic doors open.

INT. SEVEN ELEVEN - DAY

He storms into the store, it appears empty except for the cashier, a mustached Indian man.

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CASHIER

Welcome to Seven Eleven.

He pulls the Mac-Ten out from his waste band, and points it at the man behind the counter.

RONNY

PUT YOUR HANDS UP!

He points to the register with the gun, and tosses the cashier a bag. The cashier begins emptying the cash register

RONNY

EMPTY THE REGISTER INTO THIS BAG.
NOW!

While still pointing the gun at the man behind the counter he begins to look aisle to aisle, double checking for any witnesses.

RONNY

HURRY UP! LETS GO!

A voice emerges from the back of the store.

BUG

RONNY?! Is that you?

He recognized Ronny's voice.

It is Bug, wearing his signature red starter jacket, standing in the back aisle.

Ronny turns, unsure of who's in the back of the store yelling at him.

He closes his eyes and pulls the trigger.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

All three shots hit Bug square in the chest. His drops the the ground.

He opens his eyes.

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RONNY

Bug?

Ronny's never killed anyone before. His eyes widen, then begin to tear. He double-takes a couple times, unable to process what he's just done.

He looks back at the cashier. They link eyes.

CASHIER

No, no, no, n-

Ronny releases the rest of the clip on him. He grabs the bag of cash and runs out of the store.

INT. RONNY'S ROOM

Ronny bursts into his room in a cold sweat.

He slams the door shut and locks it. He leans against the wall next to the door. He puts his face in his hands and slides into a sitting position.

RONNY

(to himself)

Fuck! Fuck! FUCK! WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT!?

He slaps himself on the side of the head. He is now visibly upset. Ronny has never killed anyone before.

He grabs his phone out of his front pocket and dials Bug's number and calls it. No answer. He calls it again, still no answer.

He calls Lamar. No answer.

Ronny throws his phone against the wall in frustration, it smashes into a bunch of little pieces.

He crawls over to the television set in the corner of his room and turns it on. He changes the channel to the local news. He sits idle, waiting eagerly for a report.

INT. TELEVISION SET - DAY

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ANCHORMAN

Good Afternoon, I am Ron Johnston here with you live on Channel Nine News. This just in, At the liquor store on the corner of New York Ave. and President St., two lay dead after an apparent armed robbery went wrong. The two victims were, Josediah Vadekkadam and local high school sophomore, Kenny "Bug" Sims. Further details are unavailable at this time.

INT. CLASSROOM 14 - DAY

Ronny enters the classroom, alone. There was an aura of grey around him. It was a mist that wouldn't rise.

He sits in the front, next to an empty chair, the same chair Bug used to sit in. His eyes were puffy from crying because he couldn't stop crying for the whole night.

The Principal's secretary's voice comes through the PA system.

SECRETARY

Excuse me, can you please send Ronny Banks to the principals office. Thank you.

The teacher motions for Ronny to go.

Ronny's heart begins to throb, unsure of what the principal could possibly want.

His thoughts begin to race, not knowing if the principal knows he is responsible, or if someone found out and told the principal.

He packs up his backpack and heads out of the classroom.

INT. MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Ronny waits eagerly in the main office. The principal's office is in the back of the room. The door to his office has "Principal Leonard A. Greatway" in bold written on it.

Ronny's fingers fidget, and his leg is shaking. His eyes shift between the principals door and the clock on the wall.

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The clock ticks slowly.

He sits across from the principal's secretary. She sends him glaring looks. Every time they make eye contact Ronny looks straight down.

After waiting for over ten minutes, the principal finally lets him in.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Ronny enters the office. The walls are dark brown, stained wood, with maroon carpet.

Principal Greatway is sitting at his desk in the middle of the room. The desk is empty except for his computer, a pen, and a stack of detention slips.

PRINCIPAL GREATWAY

Ronny, do you know why I called you here today?

Ronny is now in a cold sweat. He shakes his head, signaling that he doesn't know. He then clears his throat.

PRINCIPAL GREATWAY

Well, I don't know the best way to say this... You're friend Kenny, "Bug", was killed yesterday. I called you here to make sure you were doing alright. I know how tough death can be, especially to someone you're so close with.

RONNY

How did you know me and "Bug" were close?

PRINCIPAL GREATWAY

Kenny was quite fond of you. I got close with him over the last few months, as he was one of our top students. He always spoke so highly of you.

Ronny's eyes begin to water. Each word stabs him in the heart.

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Principal Greatway slides a couple tissues over to Ronny.

PRINCIPAL GREATWAY

Listen, if you need some time away...
You can take the rest of the week off
from school, I've already talked to
your teachers for you.

Head in hands, tears begin to fall from his eyes.

RONNY

Thank you Principal Greatway. I
really appreciate that. I just can't
believe he's gone... He was like a
brother to me.

Ronny breaks down.

INT. CROWN HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Ronny leaves the main office, sniffing and wiping his eyes
and nose. He continues on his way, walking down the hall.

INT. LAMAR'S OFFICE - DAY

Tensions are high, Lamar and Ronny are arguing inside Lamar's
office.

Ty sits in the corner counting cash and weighing out drugs.

RONNY

I did just like you told me, no
witnesses! I NEED THE CASH, YOU CANT
JUST DUMP ME ON THE STREETS!

LAMAR

Listen man, I can't take this kind of
heat. YOU'RE OUT!

Lamar motions towards the door.

RONNY

DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I EARN?

(CONTINUED)

LAMAR

You're a good pusher, BUT YOU'RE A MURDERER NOW. I GOT ENOUGH SHIT TO DEAL WITH FROM THE PIGS MYSELF!

Lamar punches the desk.

RONNY

If you don't want me I'll find another supplier. I CAN HANDLE MY OWN!

Ronny beats on his chest.

LAMAR

GET THE FUCK OUT! AND I BETTER NOT SEE YOU AROUND MY TERRITORY!

Ronny storms out. Slamming the door loudly behind him.

Lamar stands, leaning on the desk, contemplating what had just transpired.

EXT. CROWN HEIGHTS STREETS - NIGHT

The expansive darkness of the night sky is lost in the haze of lights and tall buildings on the busy New York streets. The street lights give off a distinct orange glow that makes it all seem surreal.

INT. MINIVAN - NIGHT

Lamar rides shotgun in a car with his young cousin, Little Mike, driving. Lamar is wearing a bullet proof vest over his tank top. He is holding a pistol.

The car they drive is a tinted out, grey minivan. All the windows in the car are tinted. The walls on the inside are reinforced, and the glass is bullet proof. Duffle bags filled with guns sit in the back seats.

LAMAR

It's on the corner.

Lamar points up and to the left, instructing Little Mike on which direction to go.

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EXT. CROWN HEIGHTS STREETS - NIGHT

Ronny standing on the corner is visible. A bright neon sign rests above him, it reads, "Food & Liquor".

He stands and waits. People walk by, some stop, others just keep walking.

Some give him money for the drugs he holds in his jacket.

INT. MINIVAN - NIGHT

LAMAR

That's him over there!

Lamar points to the silhouette under the "Food & Liquor" sign.

LAMAR

You ready? IT'S GO TIME!

LITTLE MIKE

No fear!

LAMAR

NO FEAR!

Little Mike stares ahead, he looks idle. His eyes show his fear, even though his words say the opposite.

The minivan pulls up to the corner, Ronny is now fully visible as he steps into the street light.

Ronny dips his head into the car window.

EXT. CROWN HEIGHTS STREETS - NIGHT

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The car screeches away.

Ronny's body drops to the cold, hard concrete. He lays there motionless.

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