

POSE

"A House Is Not A Home"

Written by

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POSE \ 'poz \

Verb: to affect an attitude or character to deceive or impress

Noun: the position in which someone stands, sits, lies down, etc.

To be gay or lesbian in the 1960's was to live a life of secrecy. On the heels of the sexual revolution, and in the face of legal repression and social ostracism, drag communities began to organize.

By the 1970's, referencing the fashion houses whose glamour and style they admired, African American and Latino drag queens formed 'Drag Houses,' or families. Headed by a Mother who provided moral and social support, Drag Houses operated as de facto orphanages for displaced gay and transgender youth, estranged from their biological families.

In the 1980's, out of the drag culture, materialized The House Ballroom Scene in New York City. Cornerstone fêtes, these monthly House Balls featured members from opposing Drag Houses challenging one another in a range of categories, including dance skills, and their ability to walk the runway like a model. It wasn't money or fame that they sought. Glory and an enduring legacy was the prize.

This is the story of those magnificent souls.

TEASER

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER, HARLEM - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: House of Dupree Ball, 1985.

OVER BLACK - WE HEAR the ROAR of the crowd --
"Yes, bitch!" "Work it, Momma!" "Sashay, Chanté!"

A pair of red stilettos CLICK into view.

WE FOLLOW the thin heels onto the jury-rigged --

DANCE HALL FLOOR

Bright lights! Glitter! PIZZAZZ!

Brown, black, and tan skinned MEN SHRIEK. THIS is delight!

Miss COCOA LABEIJJA, 32 -- as glamorous as the diva herself,
Miss Diana Ross -- struts down the makeshift cat walk in a
bejeweled evening gown. She's luminous. Ravishing.

DION (O.C.)

Representin' the House of LaBeiija.
The preeminent Cocoa LaBeijaaaaa!

The crowd goes ape shit! Cocoa gives face as she blows kisses
to her adoring fans.

On a tiny stage stands DION, 28, rotund yet light in his
step. Behind him a table of JUDGES watch with fervor.

DION (CONT'D)

The category is Runway Realness and
Miss Cocoa is givin' us all kinds'a
face.

(beat)

She's a legend, and don't you
bitches evah forget it! Walk that
runway, momma. Own it!

Cocoa throws a wink to Dion.

DION (CONT'D)

YAASS! Miss LaBeiija is wearing that
couture OUT! Walkin' like she's on
a runway in Milan. Let's see those
scores.

The judges places their placards high in the air. ALL 10's!!

DION (CONT'D)
 (snapping his fingers)
 That's how you do the damn thang!

Cocoa sprints to the back of the hall. Enters the --

LADIES BATHROOM

ASIA, 18, a half Black, half Asian, transgender beauty,
 unzips Cocoa's dress. And then we see it --

The padding, the tuck -- Cocoa's a drag queen!

House of LaBeija MEMBERS, in various states of undress, prep
 for their categories.

ASIA
 Where is he? You're gonna have to
 go back out.

Cocoa sweats profusely. Asia dabs her face with a napkin.

COCOA
 Don't worry about me. Get the next
 outfit.

ASIA
 Cocoa, you don't look good --

COCOA
 Help the others get dressed!

Asia sprints off. Cocoa takes a seat. She is surrounded by
 gleeful mania. Grief lingers in her vacant eyes.

DION (O.C.)
 Are ya'll heifers ready for the
 next category? I can't hear you!
 Are. Ya'll. Ready!? Cause the next
 category is --

CUT TO:

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER, HARLEM - NIGHT

A dark alley. Grimy dumpsters, trash littered everywhere.

Between the dingy brick walls, WE SEE a Lincoln Town Car.

DION (O.S.)
 Butch queen VOGUE femme!

WE HEAR hoots and hollers. Music THUMPS in the distance.

Two young MEN IN HEELS teeter past the car. They peer into the drivers side window, LAUGH as they stumble away.

ANGLE ON drivers side window: WE SEE a WHITE DUDE, 45 -- his eyes roll to the back of his head. There's a head in his lap.

INT. LINCOLN TOWN CAR - CONTINUOUS

White Dude leans back on the leather headrest. *MOANS*. Sounds of ecstasy fill the air.

Wait? Is that a knife shoved into White Dude's gut?

Shit -- those aren't sounds of ecstasy. That's pain!
THE MOTHERFUCKER'S BEEN STABBED!

Inhale --

White Dude clutches his stomach. His breathing is shallow, labored.

Exhale --

A GLOVED HAND wraps its fingers around the blade handle, slowly extracts it -- drags the bloody blade across White Dude's wrinkled white dress shirt.

Inhale -- Exhale --

White Dude's hand trembles, reaches for the wheel. Where the fuck are the keys?

Inhale -- Exhale -- Inhale -- Exhale --

WHITE DUDE'S POV: the keys lie on the passenger side floor.

White Dude slumps to his side, blood pouring from his belly.

Inhale -- Exhale -- In -----

The passenger side door is unlocked. The killer exits, disappears into the shadows.

SHOCK CUT TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE

ACT ONE**INT. SPECTRUM CLUB - NIGHT**

TITLE CARD: 2 Weeks Earlier.

WE SEE loose hips. Tight ass. Sweaty brow.

DAMON, 18, black and lean with a mature demeanor that belies his age, gyrates on a temporary dance floor with PITO, 20, Latin and macho. They are approached by DESTINY, 18, high yellow skin, androgynous. A club kid before clubs kids were a thing.

DESTINY

(to Damon)

Hold the phone. Someone is eyeing you, girl.

Damon scans the room. Past the Reebok Classics, Members Only jackets, and neon everything, his eyes land on White Dude. When he doesn't have a knife sticking out of his gut White Dude's not bad looking. Stocky, a bear.

White Dude catches Damon staring, nods.

DAMON

(flustered)

Shit. Is he still looking?

PITO

Mmhmm.

DESTINY

Bitch, loosen up the boojina. Y'don't gotta be so conservative all the time. You're the one always complainin' about not havin' cash.

DAMON

I'm not going to screw him for money.

DESTINY

So you'll fuck him for free?

DAMON

I'm not going to -- screw him at all.

DESTINY

It's your mistake to make. The white ones always got more cash.

Destiny tightens his hair scrunchie, flounces toward White Dude.

Several MEN eye the teens. Damon wipes his sweaty palms on his acid wash jeans.

PITO
I need a drink.

Damon follows Pito to the bar -- the lights dim. What was once a dance floor is now a stage. Men huddle together.

A sequined curtain -- gaudy, luminescent -- illuminates the dim club.

Dion emerges microphone in hand. The crowd CHEERS.

DION
Alright, calm down queens! Save it for the performer. Are ya'll ready for a night of entertainment?
(off the crowd's energy)
If that's all ya'll are givin' me we can just call it a night. I said, are ya'll bitches ready?

The crowd erupts in a contagious ROAR. Dion points at a PATRON with a flattop, wearing a dookie chain.

DION (CONT'D)
No one told me Big Daddy Kane was gonna be here!
(off the crowd's laughter)
Okay, ladies. I want you cheap-asses to wave your dollars in the air for the vocal stylings of Miss Cocoa LaBeiJaaaa!!

The curtains fling open. Cocoa emerges in a sparkling jumpsuit. Chaka Khan's 'I'm Every Woman' BLARES through the speakers.

Cocoa glides through the crowd lip-syncing, collecting singles -- showering attention on her adoring fans.

COCOA
"Anytime you feel danger or fear, then instantly I will appear!"

As the hook of the song hits --

COCOA (CONT'D)
"I'm every woman, it's all in me!"

-- Cocoa rips her jumpsuit off to REVEAL: A ROMPER! The gays are beside themselves. Damon is dazed by the pomp.

Cocoa is majestic, and she knows it. She dances her ass off, drifts past Damon, caresses his cheek. He flinches -- uneasy.

Pito flags TYLER, 21, the bartender. A caramel-complected dream in cutoffs and a tank, Tyler is the epitome of banjee boy realness.

PITO
Lemme get two beers.

TYLER
You got ID?

PITO
No --

TYLER
How old are you?

PITO
Old enough. 20.

TYLER
You gotta be 21 now. We could lose our license. Sorry, bro.

PITO
Mira hermano, dame una cerveza.

TYLER
I ain't ya brother.

Cocoa's performance ends. The club erupts in APPLAUSE. Damon joins Pito at the bar.

PITO
This asshole won't serve me.

Damon and Tyler's eyes meet -- neither looks away. A staring contest. Damon loses -- breaks the stare first.

Tyler waves to a BOUNCER -- massive, brawny. He grabs Pito, pushes him toward the exit.

PITO (CONT'D)
Yo, what the fuck! Lemme go!

Damon grabs a blue backpack from the COAT CHECK, watches as Pito spills out onto the --

EXT. NYC STREET - CONTINUOUS

PITO
Fuck you, muthafucka!

Damon slings the backpack over his shoulder, pulls Pito away.

DAMON
C'mon. Let's go.

Damon and Pito walk arm in arm down the street.

EXT. COLUMBUS CIRCLE - MORNING

Pigeons forage for food in an overfull trash bin.

Young, sleepy, bodies are littered about the grass. ORPHANS.
RUNAWAYS.

Beside a bench -- Damon, in the same clothes from the night before, sleeps on a ragged blanket next to Pito.

A HOMELESS MAN stumbles by, spots Damon's backpack. He grabs the bag -- Damon is shaken out of his slumber.

DAMON
Hey! Let go!

Damon tussles with the homeless man. He can't push him away. Pito rises -- the homeless man releases his grip, runs off.

PITO
I told you, you gotta sleep with
this on your back.

DAMON
I know. I -- forgot. Thanks.
(looking around)
Destiny isn't back.

PITO
He's makin' that loot.

Damon shoots Pito a look that says, "I couldn't."

PITO (CONT'D)
When push comes to shove, you do
who you gotta do to survive.

DAMON
I came here to dance.

PITO
Lemme know when that pipe dream
starts earnin' you some cash.

Pito curls up in the ragged blanket, returns to his slumber.

Water trickles out of a nearby open hydrant. Damon rinses his mouth, wipes the crust from his eyes -- heads out.

INT. ROY ROGERS - MORNING

The morning rush. Damon joins the line, searches the bottom of his bag for change.

He pulls out a dollar fifty.

CLOSE ON MENU -- Two Roy burgers, fries, and a coke. \$2.99

Damon steps out of line. He approaches the self-serve food bar.

WE SEE a large sign: All You Care To Eat!

Damon checks his surroundings, quickly shoves several burgers in his bag. He grabs a cup, fills it with soda.

A MANAGER spots him, rushes over. SHIT!

The manager grabs Damon's backpack. Damon rips the bag from his hand, tearing a strap.

Damon sprints out of the restaurant.

EXT. NYC STREET, 9TH AVENUE - DAY

Damon -- sweaty, worn -- rests on a street corner. He guzzles the soda, removes a burger from his bag. He is ravenous.

A BUSINESSMAN walks by, drops several coins into his empty cup.

LATER --

The cup is partially filled with coins, cash.

Damon walks a block, and then he sees it --

ALVIN AILEY'S AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

Several svelte DANCERS enter the theater.

Damon takes a confident breath, and follows them in.

INT. SPECTRUM CLUB - DAY

Drab. Seedy. In daylight, Spectrum's a hole! The magical luster? Nonexistent.

Asia sketches a gaudy ruby red evening gown in a spiral notebook. Cocoa studies Asia's design.

COCOA

There aren't enough jewels or sequins. It needs to shine.

ASIA

I based it on this dress I saw at Macy's --

COCOA

Do I look like I'm gonna wear something off the rack? Either you can make it or you can't.

ASIA

I was planning on adding jewels and feathers. Some tulle for volume --

COCOA

Just make it work.

Tyler stands at a cash register -- counts cash, fills out the bookkeeping ledger. He looks around the bar. Liquor bottles are half empty, glasses haven't been stocked.

MANUEL, 21, gaunt with deep set eyes that have stories to tell, wipes the sticky bar top.

TYLER

Manny, where are all the glasses?

MANUEL

I look like a bar-back?

TYLER

How about you drop the attitude. You work here, no?

Manuel throws the dirty rag across the bar. Tyler approaches.

TYLER (CONT'D)

You got something to say, just say it.

COCOA (O.S.)

Tyler! We're gonna get started.

MANUEL

Run along, your mother beckons.

TYLER

She can wait.

(beat)

Are you pissed I didn't visit you?

Tyler leans into Manuel -- kisses his neck. Manuel backs off.

MANUEL

Do I look like one of your tricks?
I'm not some one night delight.

TYLER

Why're you putting walls up? You
join a different house and all of a
sudden we have issues?

MANUEL

Not everything is about you.

Manuel pushes Tyler away, sneaks to the back of the bar.

Tyler composes himself -- joins Cocoa, Asia, and several
HOUSE OF LABELIJA MEMBERS.

Cocoa looks drained. Tyler spots the fatigue.

TYLER

You feeling okay?

COCOA

(nodding)

I'm fine. Let's get started, we've
got a lot to cover. Asia, update on
clothing?

ASIA

If you're in the swimsuit
competition talk to me about
scheduling a fitting.

COCOA

If you're planning on wearing your
own clothes it has to be approved.
We can't have ragamuffins walking.
Tyler, updates on choreography.

TYLER

I'm meeting with the runway walkers
this week for a final rehearsal.

(beat)

(MORE)

TYLER (CONT'D)

And we need a new dancer. Max is out.

ASIA

What do you mean he's out?

TYLER

He's heading to L.A. Gonna be in a music video.

COCOA

Why didn't you call me immediately?

TYLER

I didn't want to stress you out.

COCOA

Nine. That's the number of first trophies House of Loca snatched at the last ball. Do you remember how many we took?

ASIA

Five.

(to Tyler)

But it shouldn't be that hard to find a replacement, right?

The tone in Asia's voice implores Tyler to lie.

TYLER

I'll do what I can. This isn't life or death. It's just a ball.

Cocoa stands. Shit is about to hit the fan.

COCOA

It's just a ball?

TYLER

I mean... there'll be others.

ASIA

We're all overextended --

COCOA

When you first arrived in New York, did you have money or a place to rest your head?

(off Tyler's silence)

And who was it that took you in?

TYLER

Cocoa, I'm sorry --

COCOA

You don't have to care about the trophies. Eventually you'll leave this place and have a fancy life choreographing for some talentless pop tart. But for most of us this is probably the closest we'll get to the spotlight. And everyone here deserves a little bit of shine. To know that they matter, that their life counted for something. Think about that the next time you call it just a ball.

Cocoa waves Tyler off as she saunters away. Asia chases after her, while LaBeija members depart.

Tyler collects an armful of dirty glasses off a nearby table. His grip is loose --

SMASH!

A glass shatters to bits as it meets the floor.

TYLER

Goddammit.

Tyler drops the remaining glasses on the bar. He pours himself a shot of whiskey. Swallows. Takes another shot.

INT. ALVIN AILEY'S AMERICAN DANCE THEATER - MORNING

Damon walks down a wide corridor, photos of the repertory line the walls.

He enters the --

MAIN OFFICE

Behind a large desk sits WANDA GREEN, 49. Grizzled yet grandiose, she watches Damon as he slowly steps in.

WANDA

Can I help you.

DAMON

Hi. I wanted some information about the repertory. I'd like to join.

WANDA

How old are you?

DAMON

Eighteen.

WANDA

Do you have any dance experience?
And clubs don't count.

(off Damon's silence)

Sweetie, The repertory is a
professional ensemble. Members have
years of experience and are hand
selected to join.

Wanda hands Damon a packet --

DAMON'S POV: The Ailey School's Junior Division Application.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Lucky for you we're auditioning for
the school. Fill out the
application completely and bring it
back to me. You'll want to include
your current address so we can
contact you, a resume with all
dance training --

DAMON

And clubs don't count.

WANDA

You're as smart as you look.
Auditions will be held later this
week. You have a couple days to
meet the deadline. And don't forget
the hundred and fifty dollar
application fee.

DAMON

A hundred and fifty dollars.

The office door opens -- in walks a DANCER in tights, a
duffle slung over her shoulder. She eyes Damon -- they
clearly aren't in the same league.

Wanda offers a supportive smile as Damon sprints out.

EXT. NYC STREET - EVENING

Tyler struts down the crowded street in a Gucci sweatshirt
and shell top Adidas.

In the distance WE HEAR the resonant beat of club music. It's
coming from -- TRAXX NIGHT CLUB!

TWINKS spill out of the entrance, onto the streets. Messy. Crass. Tyler pushes past them, approaches BIG BOY, 25, a behemoth of a man -- the Traxx bouncer.

Big Boy and Tyler knock fists. Tyler glides past a long line of impatient gays into --

INT. TRAXX - CONTINUOUS

Traxx is a far cry from the more demure state of Spectrum. The dance floor is packed!

Tyler heads to the bar -- flags down JON, 25, the bartender. Jon greets Tyler with a kiss.

JON

Hey baby, haven't seen you in a while.

TYLER

I've been busy.

JON

How's Manny? Heard he's back from the hospital.

TYLER

It's drama. Lemme get a vodka and soda.

Jon grabs a glass, pours the drink. Tyler pulls cash from his pocket.

JON

Don't worry, it's on me.

Destiny squeezes past Tyler -- Tyler eyes Destiny.

DESTINY

(to Jon)

Shot of tequila --

(noticing Tyler staring)

Any interest in a nightcap?

Destiny leans over the bar, his ass cheeks spill out of the bottom of his short shorts.

TYLER

I'm chill. I'm drinkin' vodka tonight.

DESTINY
 (sucking his teeth)
 Whatevah --

Tyler downs the drink quickly, makes his way to the dance floor.

WE HEAR the TINKLING of a piano -- Janet Jackson's "When I Think of You" blares.

Through the CROWD Tyler spots a DANCER. The dancer's body is supple. Agile. He moves to the beat with ease. Precision.

The dancer turns to REVEAL -- it's Damon! His body grooves to the rhythm. All eyes are on Damon.

A DANCE CIRCLE is formed!

Tyler steps onto the dance floor, hovers through the crowd. He steps into the middle of the circle, challenging Damon.

The crowd ERUPTS into a FRENZY!

PITO
 Show 'em how it's done, *papa!*

Damon wipes his brow, his hips sway. Tyler's never seen moves like Damon's. Defeat is imminent, until --

Tyler POSES -- graceful, fluid movements. HE'S VOGUING!

The SCREAMS from the crowd are deafening!

Tyler begins a sensual dance, grinds on Damon. Faggotry on full display! It's hot -- sweaty -- sexy.

Damon and Tyler lock eyes -- a double take. And then it dawns on Tyler --

TYLER
 You were at Spectrum the other night. Where'd you learn how to dance?

DAMON
 I taught myself.

PITO
 (to Damon)
Vamos! Let's hit the next spot!

Face to face, their lips barely skim each other. Tyler leans in -- Damon backs off. Denied.

PITO

He has the brain of a bird and the
luck of the Irish. He'll be fine.
I'm goin' to Camelot -- you comin'?

Damon looks down the street where White Dude is smoking a
cigarette. Damon pulls his hand out of his pocket -- a measly
five dollars. Fuck it.

DAMON

I'll see you tomorrow.

PITO

Don't. I got'chu --

DAMON

I can take care of myself.

Pito watches Damon head toward White Dude.

PITO

Fuck.

Damon avoids eye contact with White Dude as he nervously
approaches.

Tyler exits Traxx, catches Damon reluctantly stepping into
White Dude's Lincoln Town Car --

Off Damon's nervous look as White Dude speeds down the dusty
street.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**INT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING**

Dark. Uninhabited.

Cartoon mice are on screen -- An American Tail.
'Somewhere Out There' wafts through the air.

Damon sits in the last row. White Dude leans back -- moans.
THIS is the sound of pleasure.

WHITE DUDE
Faster -- harder.

Damon strokes White Dude's cock with an "am I doing this right" look on his face. White Dude takes control --

WHITE DUDE (CONT'D)
(guiding Damon's hand)
Here, you gotta -- like that. Oh --
don't stop. Don't stop.

White Dude SHUDDERS as he climaxes. Damon wipes his hand on an empty seat.

White Dude leans in for a kiss. Damon backs away --
A hand job? Acceptable. A kiss? Too personal.

WHITE DUDE (CONT'D)
So what's your deal?
(off Damon's silence)
You have a name?

DAMON
(lying)
Calvin.

WHITE DUDE
You do this often, Calvin?

DAMON
Yeah -- you?

WHITE DUDE
Only when the ball and chain is
holding out --
(showing his ring finger)
I'm kidding.

White Dude massages the back of Damon's neck.

WHITE DUDE (CONT'D)
You're fucking beautiful. You know
that, right?

Damon relaxes --

WHITE DUDE (CONT'D)
So what're you doing with me?

DAMON
I don't have anywhere to be.

WHITE DUDE
There's got to be someone more fun
for you to do.

DAMON
Fun has to be lucrative or it isn't
worth it.

WHITE DUDE
So where're you from?

Damon looks at White Dude -- behind the fatigued gaze there's
kindness in his green eyes.

DAMON
South Carolina.

WHITE DUDE
This is the part where you tell me
you ran away from home because your
parents didn't want a cocksucker
for a son.

DAMON
My parents are dead. So what's your
deal?

WHITE DUDE
Been looking for a piece of
chocolate as sweet as you.

White Dude digs into his pocket -- places \$100 in Damon's
hand.

WHITE DUDE (CONT'D)
I promise I'll take care of you.

White Dude leans in again. Damon relents. The kiss is
delicate. Damon peers into White Dude's fatigued eyes -- no
kindness, all temptation.

INT. COCOA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

WE SEE sparkling dresses, wigs galore, and a fuck ton of shoes. This has to be Cocoa's living room!

Tyler flips through Vogue magazine, imitates the model's poses. He choreographs a number to the music in his head.

His body is sharp, the lines are precise. His concentration is broken by --

ASIA (O.S.)
Breakfast's ready!

Asia stands in the tiny kitchen, flips a burnt pancake -- adds it to the stack of nearly charred cakes.

Tyler sniffs the smoky air.

ASIA (CONT'D)
Don't say a damn thing. You can scrape the black parts off.

Tyler takes a couple pancakes -- drowns them in syrup.

TYLER
Cocoa's still sleeping?

ASIA
She's been really tired.

TYLER
Distracted -- she won't talk to me.

ASIA
There's a lot of pressure to win the next ball. You know the loss to Loca bruised her ego.
(with hesitation)
I'm probably makin' a whole lotta something outta nothing, but she keeps bringing up her legacy. Know what, forget I said anything. Just fix this, Tyler.

Tyler takes another bite, rises. He walks down a narrow hallway, lightly TAPS on --

COCOA'S BEDROOM DOOR

Cocoa is in bed, out of face. Shit -- the classy Cocoa LaBeija is a plain, dowdy, KYLE BROWN.

COCOA

What?

Cocoa reaches for a bottle of Tylenol -- pops two, no three, fuck it, four pills in her mouth. She swallows them, dry.

TYLER (O.S.)

It's me, can I come in?

COCOA

Gimme a minute.

Cocoa searches the disorganized room -- slovenly really. How the hell is THIS the bedroom of Cocoa LaBeija?

Cocoa grabs a sun hat -- a veil covers her bare face.

COCOA (CONT'D)

Come in.

Tyler enters, winces at the smell. The room is foul.

TYLER

Asia cooked --

COCOA

I'm not hungry.

Tyler picks up a pile of clothes, folds them.

TYLER

I think I've found a new dancer --

COCOA

We don't need new members. We'll make do.

Cocoa's quiet. Tyler can see she's preoccupied. He sits beside her.

TYLER

About the other day -- I'm sorry. You loved me when my own mother wouldn't. That ain't lost on me.

COCOA

Your words cut deep.

TYLER

It'll never happen again, I promise.

Cocoa grabs Tyler's hand. A small purple bruise, more like a lesion, resides near her thumb.

COCOA

Eventually this will all be yours.
If you want it. I need to know --
can I trust you?

TYLER

Of course you can trust me.

COCOA

Good. Tell Asia I want whatever
she's burning.

Tyler hugs a vulnerable Cocoa -- heads out to the --

HALLWAY

Tyler throws a jacket on.

TYLER

Hey, she wants to eat.

ASIA

Are you two good?

TYLER

Yeah. I'll be back.

EXT. NYC PARK - MORNING

Tyler sprints through the polluted park. Trash and debris
everywhere -- spots Pito folding a blanket.

TYLER

Hey, where's your friend?

PITO

I got a lot of friends.

TYLER

The dancer --

PITO

Why should I help you, *hermano*?

TYLER

What do you want?

PITO

Next time I'm at Spectrum, I want
service.

EXT. ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER - MORNING

Damon watches the company rehearse -- his face nearly pressed against the glass.

He digs into his backpack, removes the application and a pen.

DAMON'S POV: The pen hovers over the application, never touching the page. The empty application taunts him.

PERSONAL INFORMATION -- DANCE TRAINING -- EDUCATION HISTORY

Tyler approaches -- Damon's gaze is fixed on the application.

TYLER

You lookin' to join?

DAMON

(shrugging)

Maybe. I don't know if I'm the kind of dancer they're looking for.

TYLER

Won't know if you don't try.

DAMON

Are you a street-side therapist or something?

TYLER

Something. Look, I got an offer for you. I want you to dance as a member of the House of LaBeiJa.

DAMON

The House of LaBeiJa?

TYLER

It's what we call our chosen family, named after our adopted mother. Once a month, as a house, we compete at the drag balls in Harlem. I scoped your dance moves at Traxx. We need someone like you.

Damon watches the Ailey Dancers flitter about the studio --

DAMON

You want me to lip sync with a face caked in makeup? No, thank you.

TYLER

We'll leave the drag to the professional queens. We want you to dance.

Tyler's eyes are inviting. Damon considers the offer.

DAMON

And I can dance however I like?

TYLER

There are some rules to the competition. But we can cover that later. And I can put you up somewhere, get you off the streets.

DAMON

What?

TYLER

It's all good, we take in strays.

DAMON

What makes you think I need your help?

TYLER

Don't you wanna get off the streets, so you can stop hustling?

DAMON

I don't need saving.

TYLER

So you're not doing it for the money?

DAMON

Fuck off.

Damon bolts down the street, indignant.

INT. LINCOLN TOWN CAR - EVENING

ANGLE THROUGH passenger window: Damon sits nervously in the passenger seat -- DAMON'S POV: WE SEE a five-story walk up.

White Dude grabs Damon's fidgety thigh.

WHITE DUDE

Just head up to apartment 2P. He's waiting for you.

DAMON
You aren't coming?

White Dude leans in -- this kiss isn't nearly as sweet as the first.

WHITE DUDE
You're gonna be alright.

Damon steps out of the Town Car.

WHITE DUDE (CONT'D)
Calvin. A couple things -- don't use your name, no hard drugs, and make sure you get the money up front.

Damon nods, heads into --

INT. BRONX WALK UP - CONTINUOUS

WE SEE beautifully tiled floors, stone and marble walls -- A grand lobby that reeks of sophistication.

Damon heads up the stairway, arrives at 2P. The door ajar, he enters -- walks down a hallway of hardwood into a --

LAVISH LIVING ROOM

A leather sofa, a painting by Keith Haring -- there's even a VCR. This is upscale living!

SAM LOWE, 42 -- leaner, cuter, than White Dude -- stands in a tank top and boxers, a glass of whiskey in hand, wiggling his flat ass to 'Kiss' by Prince.

SAM
(feigning surprise)
Oh, hello --

Sam approaches Damon -- licks his neck, twirls him around.

Sam places the glass of whiskey to Damon's lips --

DAMON
No, I don't --

Damon is forced to drink -- fuck, already breaking rules.

The whiskey pours onto Damon's chin, down his neck. Sam uses his tongue to sop up the spill.

WE HEAR the jingle of Damon's frayed belt being loosened.

DAMON (CONT'D)

Slow down --

SAM

(turning down the music)
You want a drink?

DAMON

No, thank you.

SAM

You sure? I've got vodka, rum,
tequila -- you've already tried the
whiskey.

DAMON

I'm good. Let's start with the
payment --

Sam slams back the rest of his drink, grabs his wallet -- he
throws \$200 at Damon.

SAM

That cover it?

DAMON

Uh, yeah.

SAM

Then lets get started.

Sam undresses. Damon's shaky, he's never seen a man fully
nude before. Shit, is he going to want more than a hand job?

Sam grabs Damon, they crash onto the sofa. Sam rips Damon's
clothes off. Damon's uncomfortable, overpowered.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'm gonna fuck the shit out of you.

Damon's thin legs flap like a flag in the wind -- they land
on Sam's muscular shoulders.

DAMON

Wait --

SAM

Ssshhh --

Sam spits into his hand -- forces himself into Damon. On a
scale of unpleasant to painful this is fucking excruciating!

SAM (CONT'D)

Goddamn you're tight.

DAMON
You're hurting me.

SAM
It'll feel better in a minute --

DAMON
Stop, please.

Damon's slim arms aren't strong enough to push Sam away.

SAM
You like it rough?

Sam thrusts harder. Oblivious.

SAM (CONT'D)
Oh my God -- I'm about to cum.

DAMON
Stop! STOP!

Damon SLAPS Sam -- throws a second blow. On the third, Sam catches his wrist.

Fear radiates from Damon -- Sam can see it. He's a kid.

SAM
You should leave.

Damon rises, throws his clothes on -- rushes out of 2P.

EXT. BRONX WALK UP - EVENING

Damon steps onto the street. The brisk air hits his face. He resists the temptation to cry -- his eyes still water.

Damon surveys the unfamiliar neighborhood -- rushes toward a subway station.

INT. SPECTRUM CLUB - EVENING

A hectic Saturday night -- CARELESS BOYS twirl to the PULSE of the music -- thirsty PATRONS fight to get Tyler & Manuel's attention.

TYLER
What can I get you?

PATRON
Lemme get 4 shots of tequila!

Tyler heads to the opposite end of the bar -- Manuel grabs the last clean shot glass.

TYLER
Goddammit, Manny!

MANUEL
Make up your mind. Either I'm cleaning or I'm serving.

TYLER
For fuck's sake, you can't multi-task?

MANUEL
Jerking while working is your specialty.

TYLER
Blow me.

Tyler quickly rinses several glasses as --

Damon pushes through the sweaty crowd of nameless gays. Not a single recognizable face. He approaches the bar.

Tyler turns to find Damon's sullen eyes staring at him. Damon opens his mouth to speak as --

The MUSIC SWELLS -- the ROAR of the crowd is thunderous.

TYLER (CONT'D)
(leaning over bar)
What?

DAMON
I'll dance for you. For LaBeija.
Just this one time.

TYLER
What makes you think the offer still stands?

Off Damon's startled look.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**INT. COCOA'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM - MORNING**

A torrent of water plunges upon Damon's head. It's been a while since he's had a proper shower. He savors the moment.

INT. COCOA'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Light wriggles through bent venetian blinds, lands on Tyler. Curled under a blanket, he lies peacefully on the floor. Almost celestial.

Damon dries himself amongst the dresses and wigs, digs into his backpack -- throws on his clothes from the night before.

This living room is a far cry from Sam's. Damon approaches a bookshelf -- there are trophies galore, pictures.

CLOSE ON picture: House of LaBeija, 1984. Cocoa, Tyler, Asia and a slew of others.

Beside the picture, a stack of Vogue magazines -- Damon removes the address label, pockets it.

In the distance WE HEAR sobbing.

Damon tiptoes down the hallway. He enters --

COCOA'S BEDROOM

Cocoa, out of drag, sits on the floor -- weeping.

DAMON'S POV: an open medicine bottle -- pills are scattered about the floor.

DAMON

Are -- are you okay?

Cocoa looks up --

COCOA

Who the fuck are you? Get out!

DAMON

Let me help you.

COCOA

(pulling away)

Don't touch me! Get out! GET THE
FUCK OUT!

Damon backs away -- Cocoa SLAMS the door shut.

In the --

LIVING ROOM

Tyler rises --

TYLER

What is going on?

DAMON

I -- uh. I walked into the bedroom.
There were pills all over the
floor.

Tyler rushes toward the bedroom -- the door is locked.

TYLER

Cocoa? Let me in. Cocoa, open the
door. Don't shut me out.

Damon stands in the living room listening.

COCOA (O.S.)

Who the fuck was that?

TYLER (O.S.)

That's Damon. He's a dancer --

COCOA (O.S.)

No! I told you no new members.
Tell'em to leave.

TYLER (O.S.)

Cocoa, we need --

CLICK. The bedroom door opens. Tyler is taken aback. Cocoa looks like shit.

COCOA

You listen here -- I'm still the
house mother. I make the decisions
for LaBeija. I do! You won't push
me out. It's my house!

SLAM!

TYLER

I'm not trying to tell you how to
run LaBeija.

Tyler walks back to the living room -- Damon is gone.

INT. ALVIN AILEY'S AMERICAN DANCE THEATER - MORNING

Wanda chats on the phone -- she's agitated. She offers Damon a smile while he waits, patiently.

WANDA
 (into phone)
 Right. \$150. No, it can't be
 waived. \$150. That's the
 application fee. Correct, it can't
 be waived.

Damon removes the label from his pocket and scribbles Cocoa's address on his application. It's still missing information.

DAMON'S POV: on Wanda's desk -- applications, filled out. He copies the DANCE TRAINING information from an application onto his own.

WANDA (CONT'D)
 (hanging up)
 Have a nice day.
 (to Damon)
 You're back.

Wanda takes the application and the money.

WANDA (CONT'D)
 Is it all filled out?

DAMON
 Yes, ma'am.

WANDA
 (inspecting the
 application)
 Belly dancing. I wouldn't have
 guessed.

LATER --

Damon nervously sits in a long hallway. He watches as DANCERS walk by -- some smiling, most crying

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
 Damon?

LORI PETERS, 40, greets Damon with an icy glare.

LORI
 Welcome to Alvin Ailey. Come with
 me.

Damon follows Lori into the --

REHEARSAL ROOM

A standard dance studio -- mirrored wall, ballet pli  bar.
Lori joins her COLLEAGUE at a long table.

LORI (CONT'D)
You'll have a maximum of three
minutes to perform. We prefer to
see your best work.

Damon stands in the middle of the room. He takes a breath,
begins a modern dance. No music.

He spirals across the dance floor, attempts a stag leap --
his jeans are restrictive. Damon collapses. Lori checks her
watch.

Damon stands -- he takes his jeans off. He returns to the
middle of the room in briefs and a tank top and begins his
dance afresh. He glides across the room, soaring like a bird.
Weightless, unfettered --

LORI (CONT'D)
Thank you! That'll be all. We'll
notify you of our decision in
writing.

Damon's eyes plead with Lori. He struggles to hide his
disenchantment. Damon grabs his belongings, exits.

EXT. JOHNNY'S LAUNDROMAT - AFTERNOON

A gray sky -- cloudy, foggy -- a light rain falls. Destiny
and Pito walk by, laughing -- spot Damon.

They enter the --

LAUNDROMAT

PITO
Where the fuck were you last night?

DESTINY
Gettin' his back blown OUT! Bonin'
for bones.

Destiny chuckles at his own joke -- so clever. Damon is not
amused.

DESTINY (CONT'D)
You makin' that good MonTey?

DAMON
The money isn't that good --

DESTINY
Then you aren't doing it right,
hooker.

Destiny begins simulating a blow job. He's really into it.

DESTINY (CONT'D)
You gotta learn how to suck him off
so those toes curl and he's beggin'
fa'more!

PITO
(to Destiny)
Why you gotta be so nasty?

DESTINY
(to Damon)
It's spill the tea time.

DAMON
Hustling isn't for me.

PITO
Something happen last night?

DAMON
It doesn't matter --

DESTINY
What'chu gonna do for money?

DAMON
Work at Spectrum. Tyler offered me
a job.

PITO
That punk ass bartender?

DAMON
Yeah.

DESTINY
Oh -- he's too good for us now.

DAMON
I never said that.

PITO
Where'd you stay last night?

DAMON
With a friend.

DESTINY
I thought we was your friends.

DAMON
You are -- but don't you want to stop sleeping in parks, screwing guys for money?

DESTINY
You high sadiddy bitch. Don't knock the hustle. You think you're better than me?

DAMON
I didn't say that. But it's a job where I can make real money --

DESTINY
Real money? The method may be different, but the cash smell just the same. Don't get it twisted.

Destiny grabs his bag and marches off.

DESTINY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I knew he couldn't be trusted from the first motherfuckin' day. Didn't I say that shit?

DAMON
Pito, I --

PITO
At the end of the day, you gotta look out for one person. Just don't forget where you came from.

Pito walks off. Damon stands in the laundromat, embarrassed. All eyes on him.

INT. SPECTRUM CLUB - EVENING

The club is packed -- Damon squeezes through the crowd with an armful of glasses.

Destiny purposely bumps into Damon.

CRASH!

DESTINY
(bitchy)
Oops.

Glass shards glide across the bar floor -- Manuel shoots a "you're such a fuck up" look at Damon.

Damon rushes to the --

BACKROOM

He wipes his brow, grabs a broom -- Tyler follows him in.

TYLER
You okay?

DAMON
Fine.

TYLER
You ran off this morning --

DAMON
I had somewhere to be.

TYLER
What happened this morning had nothing to do with you. I want you in LaBeiija. I just need more time to convince --

DAMON
Just let it go. I don't want to join the House of LaBeiija.

Manuel appears at the backroom entrance.

MANUEL
Hey! Move your ass, we got customers.

TYLER
Give us a second.

MANUEL
One.

Manuel doesn't leave. Damon pushes past Tyler, heads to the --

BAR

As he sweeps -- Dion steps out from behind the bedazzled curtain.

DION

Hey queens -- are ya'll ready for a
night of pleasure?

(off of hoots and hollers)

Get'cha minds out tha gutter!

Dion points to a group of giggling TWINKS.

DION (CONT'D)

Whatchu' laughing at? You better
tell momma. I'm a big bitch and I
eat riblets like ya'll for dinner.
I'm just playing -- I eat ya'll for
lunch.

(off crowd's laughter)

Okay, get ready honey, cause
Spectrum's bout to go up in flames.
Prepare for the Latin heat of Miss
Aye K. Locaaaaaa!!

WE SEE FLASHING LIGHTS -- WE HEAR A BEATING DRUM --

Gloria Estefan's 'Conga' BLASTS throughout Spectrum.
From the curtains emerges AYE K. LOCA, 30, a Latina goddess!

SLINKY -- SEDUCTIVE -- STUNNING -- SUBLIME

MANUEL

WEPA! I see you, Loca!

One fierce kitty -- this prima donna won't be caged!
She shimmies across the stage serenading the crowd.

Her choreographed dance break causes a frenzy!

Loca sets the stage ablaze -- in heels no less!

MANUEL (CONT'D)

(to Damon)

Quite a difference from that
wannabe Cocoa, right?

Damon watches as Loca sizzles. He's stunned by her moves.

LATER

Manuel and Loca stand in a corner -- whispering, scheming.

Loca heads to the bar --

LOCA

(to Damon)

Can I get you something to drink?

DAMON
No, ma'am. Thank you.

LOCA
Ma'am? *Que precioso* -- so polite.
(offering a hand)
I'm Loca, mother of the House of
Loca.

DAMON
Damon -- I've heard of you.

LOCA
Course you have. You got family?
(off Damon's nod no)
Are you part of a house?

Damon's silence tells Loca all that she needs to know.

Manuel slides shots of tequila in front of Loca -- she hands one to Damon. He considers the offer -- takes the shot.

LOCA (CONT'D)
I hear you're a dancer. Are you
looking to walk in the next ball?

Tyler spots Loca and Damon's chat.

TYLER
Hey! You're talking to a LaBeija
member.

LOCA
(to Damon)
I thought you were a free agent. Am
I mistaken?

Cocoa, regal in face, approaches. Loca YELPS dramatically -- backs away in fear. Damon's caught between the dueling divas.

LOCA (CONT'D)
Jesús, ayúdame!
(making sign of cross)
You scared me -- all that paint on
your face. Thought'chu was a clown.

Loca smirks -- what a bitch -- reaches for Cocoa's chin --

LOCA (CONT'D)
You missed a spot.

Loca's nail scrapes Cocoa's chin -- oh, shit!

COCOA
 (sniffing the air)
 From what I can smell, all you're
 serving is trout --

LOCA
Mira pendeja, don't try to throw no
 shade.

COCOA
 And your illiterate ass shouldn't
 try to read. You seem to forget. I
 knew you back when your pimply ass
 was still running tricks and you
 ain't have a pot to piss in or a
 window to throw it out of.

LOCA
 And look at me now. Legendary
 status.

COCOA
 Resting on pretty doesn't make you
 a legend.

LOCA
 You're right. Winning more trophies
 at the ball does.

COCOA
 I lowered the bar so you could step
 over it. Consider that a favor.

Blood trickles down Cocoa's nose --

DAMON
 Your nose is bleeding.

Damon hands Cocoa a napkin. She backs away, wipes her nose.
 She stares at the bloody napkin -- exits. Tyler follows.

Loca offers Damon her lithe hand. Damon receives it.

LOCA
 A piece of advice, *mijo*. Her
 'house' is not a home.

Loca's calculating eyes bore into Damon.

EXT. SPECTRUM CLUB - EVENING

Damon runs into the street, watches as Tyler SHUTS the door
 on Cocoa's yellow taxi -- she cruises down the block.

WE HEAR a car horn HONK. Damon surveys the busy street --
White Dude stands by his Town Car, still running.

WHITE DUDE

Get in.

Tyler rushes toward Damon --

TYLER

Hey, I still need you here.

WHITE DUDE

Calvin, get in.

TYLER

(to Damon)

Who the fuck's Calvin?

WHITE DUDE

Mind your business.

TYLER

Don't tell me what to do.

WHITE DUDE

Isn't that what you're used to?

Tyler charges at White Dude -- he's gonna kick his ass. White Dude hops into the car, locks the door.

Damon pulls Tyler by the arm, pushes him away.

DAMON

Stop!

TYLER

I'm trying to look out for you.

DAMON

I don't need you to protect me!

Tyler backs off.

TYLER

Fuck it -- you're on your own.

Damon steps into the car -- speeds away.

DAMON'S POV: In the passenger side mirror Tyler stands in the middle of the street watching Damon drive away.

INT. TOWN CAR - LATER

White Dude speeds down a dark street. Damon looks around -- where the fuck are they? Never been to this part of the city.

WHITE DUDE

What's the bug up your boyfriends
ass?

DAMON

Tyler's not my boyfriend.

White Dude pulls into a deserted lot -- turns the car off.

WHITE DUDE

Then why the fuck is he so
concerned with what happens to you?

DAMON

I'm not sure --

WHITE DUDE

What happened with Sam? He says you
left.

DAMON

I was -- uncomfortable.

WHITE DUDE

Uncomfortable?

Outrage is brewing in White Dude's eyes --

DAMON

I wasn't expecting to --

WHITE DUDE

What? Fuck him? When you skip out
on a client I look like an asshole.

DAMON

I'm sorry.

WHITE DUDE

You should be. He paid.

Damon digs into his backpack, removes \$50.

DAMON

(handing cash over)

That's all I've got. I'll get you
the rest later --

WHITE DUDE
You're gonna go back.

DAMON
I don't want to sleep with guys for
money.

WHITE DUDE
You don't want to sleep with guys
for money. You don't want to sleep
with guys for money?

DAMON
I came here to dance. I have a job
now --

SLAP!

The palm that flies through the air landing on Damon's cheek
is an unwelcome surprise -- he grips his stinging face.

Damon grabs the door handle, pulls.

White Dude snags the back of Damon's neck, chokes him.

Damon's arms thrash in the air. His hands slap against the
windshield -- a print left behind.

Damon fights for freedom. He's overpowered -- doesn't even
see the knuckles that come barreling toward his face.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**INT. JACKSON HOME, SOUTH CAROLINA - DAY**

MAYA JACKSON (40) statuesque, a cross hanging from her neck, scrubs a dirty plate. She is determined, focused.

RING! The phone breaks her concentration.

MAYA
Hello, Jackson residence.
(silence)
Hello?

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Mother?

Who is it? The voice is muffled --

MAYA
Damon?
(silence)
Damon is that you?

CUT TO:

EXT. NYC STREET - CONTINUOUS

A filthy phone booth -- WE SEE a bruised eye, busted lip, swollen cheek -- Damon had the shit beat out of him.

DAMON
Mother -- can you hear me?

MAYA (O.S.)
Lawrence! Lawrence, Damon's on the phone!

DAMON
No. Don't --

MAYA (O.S.)
Damon, where are you? You sound so far away.

DAMON
I -- I want to come home.

MAYA (O.S.)
Where are you? We'll pick you up.

DAMON
New York.

MAYA (O.S.)
New York?

DAMON
Yes, ma'am.

MAYA (O.S.)
It's going to take us some time to
get there -- but we'll come.

DAMON
Will you come alone?

MAYA (O.S.)
Where are you, sweetie? Just tell
me where you are. We'll be right
there --

Maya's voice trails off. WE HEAR whispering. Damon pushes the
receiver closer to his ear -- who is she talking to?

DAMON
Mother?

MAYA (O.S.)
Damon --

CUT TO:

INT. JACKSON HOME, SOUTH CAROLINA - CONTINUOUS

MAYA
We'll leave tomorrow morning and be
there by sundown.

Lawrence stands beside Maya. His callous gaze could burn a
hole through steel. Maya's eyes plead with Lawrence -- don't
make me do this. Lawrence snatches the phone.

LAWRENCE
Damon, your mother wants you to
come home. I assume this phase has
run its course. But let me be
clear, you won't return and live in
sin. Not under my roof. We have
rules.

Maya grabs the phone.

MAYA

Damon, I've already spoken to the authorities. You won't be in any trouble. I just want you home. Tell me where you're at.

A long pause. Silence. Then --

CLICK! A dial tone --

MAYA (CONT'D)

Hello? Hello?

Maya's eyes fill with tears.

She slams the phone into Lawrence's chest, storms off.

CUT TO:

EXT. NYC STREET - CONTINUOUS

WE SEE the receiver back on the hook.

Damon's chest heaves at a rapid pace. For better or worse, he's made a life-changing decision.

INT. SPECTRUM CLUB, DRESSING ROOM - AFTERNOON

A makeup brush skims a high cheekbone -- leaves rouge behind.

Cocoa sits at a makeup table, large bulbs illuminate every crease on her face. She's pale, gaunt. This ghastly lighting isn't doing her any favors.

Before her, a makeup buffet -- milk of magnesia, foundation, concealer, blush, mascara, eyeliner, a multitude of lashes.

She drags a tube of red lipstick across her mouth -- wrong color. Red smears across Cocoa's face as she wipes her lips with the back of her hand.

Cocoa rises, enters the --

RESTROOM

She's startled by Damon -- they've got to stop meeting like this.

Cocoa looks past the tear stained cheeks, at the fat lip and swollen eye lid.

LATER --

Damon sits at Cocoa's makeup table. Cocoa dabs Damon's face with foundation. Damon winces.

COCOA

So you want to look like shit?

Damon studies Cocoa -- how she moves with grace, the way she squints her eyes when she's focused.

COCOA (CONT'D)

Does he have a name?

Cocoa stops, waits for a response.

DAMON

He's a white dude. Drives a Town Car. That's all I know.

COCOA

He did a number on your face.

DAMON

I told him I didn't want to... to fuck --

COCOA

Good for you. A girl's gotta stand her ground.

DAMON

-- for money.

Cocoa doesn't bat a lash. She's oddly stoic. Mute.

DAMON (CONT'D)

Where did you learn how to do this?

COCOA

I taught myself. I used to work at the Clinique counter at Macy's. Bastards accused me of stealing and I got fired.

DAMON

Did you do it?

COCOA

The only thing I stole were tips for concealing every imperfection, while brightening the eye and extending the lash.

(beat)

And a couple of compacts. Fuck 'em, they weren't payin' me enough.

Cocoa beats Damon's face with makeup. She's an expert.

DAMON

I wanted to perform. To dance. I thought it'd happen here.

COCOA

The reality is always a bit blurrier than the dream. You think you have what it takes?

DAMON

It's all I've ever wanted to do.

Damon looks at himself in the mirror. Still a bit swollen, but a hell of a lot better. Damon offers Cocoa a smile.

Cocoa looks into Damon's angelic face, sees insecurity and confusion. Sees herself. She returns the smile.

INT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - EVENING

THE HOUSE OF DUPREE BALL!!

GAY MEN file into the dance hall --

Damon, in a neon track suit, cap, and gold chains, stands backstage with Loca and Manuel. This isn't his style.

Loca addresses HOUSE OF LOCA MEMBERS.

LOCA

Listen up! *Esta noche* we takin' every category, *pa que sepa!* So go out there and walk ya asses off.

ACROSS THE HALL --

Cocoa addresses the HOUSE OF LABELIJA.

COCOA

Okay everyone, bring it in.

(beat)

I just wanna say that I'm -- I'm sorry. I haven't been myself lately.

Cocoa struggles to find the right words. She nods at Tyler.

Dressed like Michael Jackson -- loafers, single glove, high waters -- Tyler quietly steps away, exits.

COCOA (CONT'D)

Whatever the results, I want you to go out there and have fun. Shake those hips, strut down that runway, and let 'em know Miss Cocoa sent you. Cause we are the shade throwing, face serving, trophy snatching, House of LaBeija. And don't you ever forget it.

Off the House of LaBeija members' CHEERS we --

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

-- House of LaBeija members walk in the HIGH FASHION EVENING WEAR category

-- Judges score the walk with 8's and 9's

-- House of Loca members display EXECUTIVE REALNESS

-- Judges score the walk with 9's and 10's

-- House of LaBeija and Loca members present LUSCIOUS BODIES as they walk the runway

END MONTAGE

LATER --

This isn't going well. House of Loca is winning -- five first place trophies to LaBeija's four.

We'll see what happens shortly since --

DION

The next category is LEGENDARYYYY!

The crowd goes wild as Loca steps onto the floor in a gaudy evening gown.

Inhuman SHRIEKS at inaudible decibels are hit when the red stilettos that could only be worn by Miss LaBeija appear.

Cocoa soaks in the adoration.

LOCA

Get ready for another second place finish.

COCOA

This is my crowd.

The CROWD CHANTS: "LBEIJA! LBEIJA!"

Damon beams, claps. Manuel shoots him a death stare -- 'What in the fuck are you doing?'

Damon backs away, looks for Tyler amongst the group of LaBeija members. Odd, he isn't supporting Cocoa? Where is he?

EXT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - AT THE SAME TIME

Tyler steps out of the dance hall, checks that the coast is clear. He walks down the dark alley, he's alone.

SUDDENLY --

LIGHTS! Tyler's blinded. A car rolls down the alley, stops. Tyler hops into the --

INT. LINCOLN TOWN CAR - CONTINUOUS

White Dude throws the car in park, turns the lights off. The keys remain in the ignition.

Tyler unzips his red leather jacket. An awkward silence.

WHITE DUDE

So? You want your old job back?

White Dude reaches for Tyler's head. Tyler pushes him away.

WHITE DUDE (CONT'D)

C'mon, baby. Don't be so salty. You aren't that old. I could still get that ass sold for a pretty penny.

TYLER

I made that mistake already.

WHITE DUDE

Well what the fuck did you call me for? I got things to do.

TYLER

What happened with Damon?

WHITE DUDE

Who?

TYLER

Don't play dumb.

WHITE DUDE

Oh, your new boyfriend. He stepped out of line. Had to be put in his place. You couldn't have forgotten how things work that quickly.

TYLER

You beat the shit of out him.

WHITE DUDE

And he'll never talk back to me again. You have to instill the fear of God in these kids. Otherwise they think they run the fuckin' place.

WE HEAR the excited CRIES from the crowd inside. What is going on?

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS

Dion stands between Cocoa and Loca.

DION

These queens turned out tonight. I conferred with the judges and they decided -- IT'S A TIE!

PANDEMONIUM! House of Loca members approach LaBeija members.

COCOA

Get back! Don't touch anyone. You'll be disqualified!

Asia grabs a sweaty Cocoa by the hand and leads her to the ladies bathroom.

ASIA

I can't find Tyler! You have to change.

Dion TAPS the mic -- grabs the audiences' attention.

DION

Alright, let's settle down. Listen up!

(beat)

Are ya'll heifers ready for the next category? I can't hear you! Are. Ya'll. Ready!?

(MORE)

DION (CONT'D)
Cause the next category is butch
queen VOGUE femme!

The crowd is in an UPROAR!

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN CAR - CONTINUOUS

TYLER
Stay the fuck away from him, okay!
This is your only warning.

WHITE DUDE
Is that a threat?

TYLER
That's a promise.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS

Loca leads Damon to the edge of the stage.

LOCA
Don't fuck it up.

A sweaty Cocoa steps back out in a jumpsuit, Damon follows her to the middle of the dance hall floor.

DION
Give 'em some walking music!

The BASS kicks in -- Damon is frozen. He looks out into the crowd. Recognizes no one.

Cocoa begins to VOGUE -- her arms fly through the air in a dizzying array of movements.

LOCA
(to Damon)
Don't just stand there!
POSE!

Damon looks at Loca and back at Cocoa as we --

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**INT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - EVENING**

Disconcerted faces stare at an immobile Damon. He heads for the door.

The crowd BOOS!

DION

What's the T? You gotta do something boo-boo.

Cocoa stops voguing, approaches Damon.

COCOA

(whispering)

You can be yourself here. No one's gonna judge you -- we might judge you a little.

(beat)

Remember. At the ball, you can dance. However. You. Like.

And with that, Miss Cocoa grabs the audiences attention anew.

Damon joins in -- he sashays to the middle of the dance hall and unleashes a flurry of poses. The crowd is enthralled.

Damon's never felt freedom like this before.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN CAR - CONTINUOUS

Tyler swings the passenger door open.

WHITE DUDE

You seem to forget, I made you. You didn't have shit before you met me.

TYLER

Fuck you.

White Dude grabs Tyler by the arm.

Tyler struggles to break free of White Dude's grasp -- this fucker is strong!

TYLER (CONT'D)

Let go of me!

Tyler punches White Dude in the mouth -- he grabs the keys out of the ignition.

White Dude's heavy hand SLAPS Tyler's throat. His grip is firm -- he's choking him! The keys fall to the car mat.

Tyler fights for air -- he's about to die! White Dude is going to kill him!

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS

As the song comes to an end so does Damon and Cocoa's dance.

DION

Ooooo -- they was fierce tonight. I
KNOW ya'll are gagging.
 (off the crowd's cheers)
 Let's see those scores.

The judges throw their score cards in the air --

Cocoa -- all 9's! Damon -- all 10's!!

LOCA

WEPA! That's what I'm talking
 about!

CUT TO:

EXT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - EVENING

HONK! HONK! HONK!

WE SEE the Town Car rattle from side to side.

INT. TOWN CAR - CONTINUOUS

Tyler's hand POUNDS the car horn. He's getting desperate -- how the hell is he getting out of this one?

Tyler's legs thrash against the glove compartment -- knock it open. WE SEE a knife.

Tyler's still struggling to break free from White Dude's grasp. He throws a sharp elbow -- connects with White Dude's jaw.

White Dude's head bounces off of the driver side window.

Tyler stretches his arm, reaches for the knife --

He lunges toward White Dude!

HOLY FUCK! The knife glides into White Dude's gut!

Tyler sits back in shock. It isn't everyday that you stab someone, even if the fucker deserved it.

White Dude clutches his belly. Fear in his eyes.

WHITE DUDE

You -- you stabbed me.

White Dude leaps toward Tyler. Tyler jams the knife in further.

White Dude slumps back in his seat.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE HALL, MANHATTAN - CONTINUOUS

House of LaBeiJa members are seething as Dion confers with the judges.

Cocoa is sweating profusely -- Asia props her up.

DION

Hold on. Hold on! It seems we had a first time walker in an established category.

Dion looks suspiciously at Damon and Loca. The crowd begins to rumble --

DION (CONT'D)

That means that Loca has been chopped!

MAYHEM! The crowd is in a frenzy!

Damon looks around -- he's confused.

DAMON

I don't understand. What does chopped mean?

LOCA

You've been disqualified, *pendejo!*

DAMON

Did I do something wrong?

LOCA

You lost!

Loca is pissed -- she shoves Damon aside.

MANUEL

The House of Loca doesn't associate
with losers.

This is too much. Damon sprints past Cocoa, out of the dance
hall. Cocoa follows, just as --

Loca approaches an exasperated, but satisfied, Asia.

LOCA

That was a cheap win, and you know
it.

ASIA

A win's a win.

LOCA

Shut ya' mouth tranny. You took
that category on a technicality.

ASIA

A win's a win.

LOCA

This ain't over. You best believe
this is just the beginning.

Loca storms off, Manuel in tow -- Tyler passes them, white as
a ghost.

Asia and Tyler's eyes lock. She can see it -- the panic, the
revulsion. Fuck, what has he done?

EXT. NYC STREET - EVENING

Damon bolts out of the dance hall, down the darkened alley.
He spots White Dude's Town Car -- heads in the opposite
direction.

Sweat flows from Damon's forehead as he sprints down a
bustling street toward --

INT. GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL - CONTINUOUS

Damon runs through the deserted terminal --

Trains aren't running at this hour. He's going to be waiting for a while.

Damon's eyes well with tears -- there's nowhere to go. He sits on a bench, fights to catch his breath.

Cocoa approaches with a trophy in hand.

COCOA

Running away, again? You're gonna be waiting here for hours.

DAMON

Then I'll wait. I'm going --

COCOA

Where? Home?

DAMON

I don't belong here.

COCOA

Sorry to break your heart, baby. You're never gonna find that place where you're headed.

DAMON

How do you know?

COCOA

How d'ya think we all wound up here?

Cocoa hands Damon an envelope -- Alvin Ailey's Dance Theater.

COCOA (CONT'D)

It's only after you have everything taken away that you learn how to survive.

Cocoa sashays away.

Damon sidles past the yellow edge of the subway platform. The rusty tracks wind into a chasm of black. Cavernous. From this angle, there's no end. Not a train in sight.

Damon rips the envelope open. His eyes well with tears.

Dear Damon: CONGRATULATIONS! I am pleased to inform you...

He takes a step back, and then another, as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER, HARLEM - MORNING

WE HEAR the WHIR of a police siren -- SEE a BARRICADE.

Yellow crime scene tape surrounds White Dude's Town Car.

Detective RAY POLENDO, 37, is troubled. The weary look on his face masks distress.

A FORENSIC INVESTIGATOR removes fibers from the body.

Officer JASON NUNZIATO, 28, approaches --

NUNZIATO
Detective.

POLENDO
What've we got?

NUNZIATO
White male, 45. Knife wound to the stomach. We haven't recovered the murder weapon yet. Forensics found a hand print on the windshield.

That's Damon's print! Damn.

Nunziato grabs Polendo's arm.

NUNZIATO (CONT'D)
The victim -- he's one of our own.

Polendo frees himself -- takes a heavy step toward the Town Car. Every breath is a bit shallower than the last.

POLENDO'S POV: White Dude sits, his body drained, in the drivers seat.

Polendo releases a pained exhale, a quiet yelp.

NUNZIATO (CONT'D)
Anthony Hughes, Commanding Officer
of Patrol Services --

POLENDO
I know who it is.

A young OFFICER approaches --

OFFICER
Detective, you gotta see this.

The trunk is open -- inside a duffle bag. Stacks of cash -- a couple thousand, easy. Maybe more.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Looks like we found our motive.

Polendo places a latex glove on, rifles through the duffle.

Beneath the cash, a bundle of polaroids --

CLOSE ON polaroids: naked teens, all male.

Polendo is queasy as he flips through the pictures.

REVEAL: One of the pics is of Tyler. Shit, this isn't good.

POLENDO

(to forensics)

Dust the bag for prints.

(to Nunziato)

And I want you to find out who
every kid in these photos is.

Polendo heads to his police car -- his sirens blare as we --

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT