

FOR THE GOOD TIMES

"Let's Do The Time Warp Again, & Again, & Again"

S01E01

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. USED RECORD STORE - DAY

The hands of a Black man run along the bins filled with used albums.

A placard reads: SOUL/R&B

He pauses at one, flips through the records until he stops at a Stevie Wonder album. He picks it out, turns it over, sees a B&W group photo of the musicians in Studio A at Mowtown.

WE FOCUS ON a young Black man behind the drumkit.

His face is turned away from the camera, as if he doesn't want to be photographed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, WAITING ROOM - DAY

CLOSE-UPS of the nurse's station, the frosted window, clipboard with medical information forms, coffee mug of pens, TV hung in the corner with a daytime infomercial, chairs around the perimeter of the wall.

WE SETTLE on a pair of legs clad in slate slacks, hands clasped on a weathered, leather briefcase on the lap, skinny tie over white shirt under slate jacket.

SHIRLEY (O.S.)

She's running a bit late, Shouldn't be long now.

Wrist turns, slate jacket sleeve pulls back, smart-watch is checked.

INT. KING ARTHUR'S MOTOR COURT, ROOM 23 - MORNING

The aftermath from an evening of debauchery worthy of frat pledge Caligula. Liquor bottles and clothing are strewn across the motel room. On a table lies a mirror, lines of cocaine rise like mountain ranges across the Def Leppard logo screen-printed underneath.

An empty champagne bottle rests next to an ice bucket, the handset of the room's telephone submerged in the melted ice.

A slate suit, skinny tie, white dress shirt, draped neatly over the back of a chair, black leather shoes on the floor next to them.

DR. REBECCA RABIN (30s) lies naked underneath the twisted sheets of the queen-sized bed. A Black man lies next to her submerged in the sheets, his legs stick out one end, his head covered.

Someone begins KNOCKING on the door. Neither of the occupants stir. The KNOCKING becomes more insistent.

Dr. Rabin rolls over, blinded by a morning light ray through a slit in the curtains. More KNOCKING assaults her ears.

DR. RABIN
Yeah, yeah, YEAH!

She slides off the bed and gathers the sheet around her, leaves her companion exposed. He GRUMBLES, face down in the pillow. Rabin stops to vacuum one of the Alps up her nose.

She opens the door a crack, enough to see the MOTEL MANAGER (60s) peak in, stained t-shirt with the motel's logo, tucked into tight slacks. Rabin attempts to speak, manages a hacking cough.

MOTEL MANAGER
Your wake-up call, ma'am.

DR. RABIN
What?

MOTEL MANAGER
Your wake-up call, for 7AM. Your phone seems to be out of order.

The manager tries to look into the room. Rabin closes the door slightly.

DR. RABIN
I wanted it on Monday morning.

MOTEL MANAGER
It *is* Monday morning, ma'am.

Rabin looks back over her shoulder at the mess.

DR. RABIN
You sure? Feels like a Sunday.

MOTEL MANAGER
I can assure you, ma'am, it *is* Monday.

Another hacking cough spills out of Rabin.

DR. RABIN
Ok... uh... thanks.

MOTEL MANAGER
If there's damage to the room,
you're going to have to-

Rabin closes the door.

MOTEL MANAGER (CONT'D)
(through the door)
Check-out is 10AM!

Dr. Rabin examines her ravaged face in the mirror, lights a cigarette.

DR. RABIN
Left you some booger sugar.

Another GRUMBLE from her companion.

Rabin holds out her hand.

DR. RABIN (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Ready steady go.

Rabin gathers her clothes, slides into her heels, zips up her mini-dress, brushes her hair, each achievement rewarded with a snort of cocaine.

DR. RABIN (CONT'D)
Listen, I know we just met and all,
and I guess I spilled my life story
to you, including a number of
embarrassing incidents, but let's
call this a lost weekend, yeah? Two
ships fucking in the night and all
that. The room's paid for 'til ten,
take your time. I'd like to say I
never do this kind of thing but I
do this kind of thing a lot, so,
nice knowing you. Don't call me,
I'll call you, adios, and may your
god go with you.

She grabs her briefcase and jacket, exits the room.

CU ON the cocaine dust on the mirror. After a moment, a CLICK and FLASH from a camera, then the familiar sound of a Polaroid being spit out.

CU ON the empty liquor bottles, another CLICK/FLASH.

Used condoms in the wastebasket, CLICK/FLASH!

The companion's hand grabs a wallet from under the bed, opens it on the table, flips to Rabin's driver's license, CLICK/FLASH!

Arms slide into the suit jacket.

Finally, his hand grabs the door knob, turns it left and right, back-and-forth in a specific pattern before opening it.

We get a quick, inexplicable glimpse of a doctor's office waiting room before he slips through to the other side.

INT. DR. RABIN'S MERCEDES - DRIVING

The morning sun flashes in the rearview before it's adjusted, Dr. Rabin's bloodshot eyes are reflected.

The Merc rolls with the traffic, passes a road sign: DETROIT, DOWNTOWN ACCESS, EXIT 2-A

Rabin speaks with nurse's assistant SHIRLEY (40s) on her car's speakerphone while she applies lipstick.

DR. RABIN

I'll be in shortly, traffic is ridiculous.

SHIRLEY

(speakerphone)

Take your time, only one guy here and he's new, filling out paperwork.

DR. RABIN

Is my extra coat there?

SHIRLEY

I think so. I'll get Shawna to put it in your office.

DR. RABIN

And my wake-up kit?

SHIRLEY

You'll need it. Your husband has been leaving messages all morning.

Rabin's lipstick strays to her cheek at the mention of her hubby.

DR. RABIN

Shit!

SHIRLEY

He didn't sound happy.

DR. RABIN

The, uh, doctor's conference ran long. Did that sound convincing?
I'll be in soon.

Dr. Rabin hangs up, throws the lipstick into the glove compartment and slams it closed.

INT. DR. RABIN'S OFFICE, WAITING ROOM - FOLLOWING

Rabin steps into the waiting room, a Muzak version of "My Guy" plays.

A Black man slumps in a corner chair, stares at the TV showing an infomercial for a Motown Greatest Hits box set. He wears a slate '60s style suit, thin black tie, fedora, a well-worn briefcase on his lap.

Rabin ignores him, Shirley buzzes her in.

OFFICE HALLWAY

Dr. Rabin peeks into the nurse's station. Shirley sits at the reception window, MYRTLE (60s) stuffs files into a cabinet, SHAWNA (30s) checks her phone.

DR. RABIN

Good morning, my lovelies.

NURSES

(unison)

Good morning, Dr. Rabin.

They all give Rabin the "you nasty" look, rub under their nostrils.

Rabin passes examinations rooms on the way to her office at the end of the hall. A fresh blouse awaits inside, as does a silver case on her desk. She closes the door and opens the case, retrieves a syringe, jabs it into a vial marked "B12".

She strips down to her underwear and administers the shot into her right butt cheek.

She taps out a line of cocaine from a small vial and snorts it, returns the case to a locked filing cabinet before donning the freshly pressed blouse. The coat she slips on is as sparkling white as the crystals she wipes from around her nostrils.

WAITING ROOM

Shawna slides the reception window open, nods to the man.

SHAWNA
Mr. Watkins?

The door to the hallway unlocks with a BUZZ. The man makes his way through the door and follows Shawna.

EXAMINATION ROOM

He sets his briefcase and hat on the counter, strips off his jacket and shirt.

The nurse performs standard tests: blood pressure, weight, temperature.

SHAWNA
The doctor will see you shortly.

She departs, he sits quietly at the edge of the examination table, waits, plays a paradiddle rudiment with his fingers on top of a column of neatly placed horizontal scars.

Finally, Dr. Rabin walks in with a manilla folder, doesn't look at the patient. She immediately washes her hands and opens the folder on the counter.

DR. RABIN
So, Mr. Watkins? It says you need some shots. What are you in the market for?

REGGIE WATKINS
I have a list.

DR. RABIN
Ooooo-kay. How 'bout we do a physical and-

REGGIE WATKINS
There really is no need.

DR. RABIN
It's kind of what we do here.

REGGIE WATKINS

No doubt, doctor. But I am not in need of a physical examination.

DR. RABIN

Then why are you here?

REGGIE WATKINS

I need something, doctor. Something very specific.

DR. RABIN

Lemme guess, a very thorough prostate exam. Did Dr. Blume put you up to this?

REGGIE WATKINS

I assure you, what I need is very real.

Reggie reaches for his briefcase and places it on his thighs. He engages the combination locks, lifts the lid, spins it around toward Rabin.

She finally turns toward him, her eyes go wide.

DR. RABIN

The fuck?

She stares down at the briefcase's contents: it's filled with polaroids, the photos taken at the motel room, a list on old velum paper clearly made with a manual typewriter, and Rabin's wallet.

REGGIE WATKINS (CONT'D)

It's all there.

DR. RABIN

How did you get here before me? Is that my wallet?

REGGIE WATKINS

Please, Doctor, time is precious.

DR. RABIN

This is...

She stares at the polaroids.

He takes the document from the briefcase, hands it to Rabin.

She reads, it appears to be a simple list of vaccinations.

DR. RABIN
You don't need to blackmail me for
vaccinations.

REGGIE WATKINS
I'm buying your discretion, not the
shots.

DR. RABIN
This is fucked. I'm gong to call-

REGGIE WATKINS
Please, doctor. What's done is
done. My aim is not to threaten
you. Only secure your cooperation.

Rabin looks at the incriminating photos, relents with a heavy
SIGH.

DR. RABIN
Where are you traveling?

REGGIE WATKINS
Abroad.

DR. RABIN
I figured, but where? You might not
need all of these. Are you
backpacking? Staying at a 5-star
resort?

REGGIE WATKINS
I'd prefer not to say.

DR. RABIN
Some of these, Jesus, I don't know
if I can get a hold of-

Reggie closes the briefcase, goes to put on his clothes.

REGGIE WATKINS
That's a shame, doctor. Careers
come and go, I guess.

DR. RABIN
I don't know what the fuck is going
on, but it's not about that, it's
just-

REGGIE WATKINS
The motel manager was very
forthcoming with your credit card
information.

(MORE)

REGGIE WATKINS (CONT'D)
The sign-in sheet was also easy to
procure. You used your real name.

Rabin blanches at the mention.

Nurse Shirley sticks her head in the room.

SHIRLEY
You-know-who, ETA, five minutes.

DR. RABIN
Fuck.

She looks at the paper, then at Reggie.

DR. RABIN
This one's for MCI. I prescribe
this in cases of early Alzheimers.

REGGIE WATKINS
It all serves a purpose.

DR. RABIN
Who the fuck are you?

REGGIE WATKINS
A traveller, Dr. Rabin, nothing
more.

DR. RABIN
You could have just said you're
going on a trip, I'd have hooked
you up. You bought the blow, I owe
you. Why all this?

REGGIE WATKINS
That deception would not explain
exactly where I'm traveling. A
vaccination against polio, for
instance.

DR. RABIN
Polio? Where are you going? 1954?
You should have already had one.

She manages a smirk, he remains serious.

REGGIE WATKINS
I have not.

Reggie slides off the examination table, begins dressing with
a heavy sigh.

REGGIE WATKINS
Good day, doctor.

DR. RABIN
Wait. I-

REGGIE WATKINS
Yes?

DR. RABIN
I'll do it. At least I *think* I can
do it. Wait here.

Rabin departs. Reggie returns to the edge of the examination table and quietly waits, taps out a beat on his legs.

INT. NURSING HOME, COMMON ROOM - DAY

Inhabitants doze in their wheelchairs, play checkers, mill about with canes and walkers. Nurses mingle, check on the elderly.

Parked in the center is WILMA ETIENNE, a 90-year-old Black woman, blanket over her legs. She looks out the large bay windows, her ten-thousand yard stare passes through the patients/tenants slowly walking around the patio, relatives visit at tables.

BETTY (O.S.)
Ms. Etienne? Wilma?

The old woman focuses, turns to see NURSE BETTY (40s), a tall, solidly-built woman fit for a deadlift challenge against Russian steroid abusers.

BETTY
Lunchtime. Your daughter left this
at the front desk.

Wilma looks around for her daughter.

BETTY
She didn't stay, I'm sorry.

She goes to push Wilma to a table but is brushed off as the old woman propels herself.

Betty sets the lunch bag in front of her, takes plasticware and a napkin from her pocket and sets it to the side.

Wilma wipes the plasticware off the table and onto the floor.

BETTY

Wilma. What have I said about that?

The nurse lays down a piece of note paper and pencil, the nursing home's letterhead across the top of the paper with "Another Essential TERORDYNE HOLISTIC STRATEGIES Endeavor" underneath.

BETTY

Lucky numbers tonight. You won last week, didn't you?

Wilma ignores it.

BETTY

I'll just take it away, then.

Nurse goes to grab the paper and pencil, Wilma gets to the pencil first, jots down 12-22-63.

The old woman takes out a set of silverware from the bag, along with a cloth napkin.

BETTY

Well, you enjoy.

WILMA

Where's my soda?

BETTY

Your blood sugar levels have been elevated lately.

WILMA

You stole my soda?

NURSE

It's for your own good. How 'bout some ice tea?

WILMA

Sweet tea?

Nurse shakes her head.

WILMA

Just go away.

Betty sets a bottle of water on the table, departs.

Wilma lifts a sandwich wrapped in wax paper from the bag, followed by Tupperware which she cracks open, closes her eyes and smiles as she breathes in the scent of homemade collards.

The sense-memory seems to take her back. Motown soul fades in with full stereo as if she's having a revelatory fantasy.

And then, the music turns tinny from the crap speakers on the cheap flat-screen hung nearby.

The reverie is ruined when she looks up at the TV and sees an infomercial for a CD collection of Motown's Greatest Hits.

A young Black woman acts as PRESENTER (20s), waves her hands over the CDs like a gameshow presenter. Set out on the presentation table are the cases opened to show the CDs inside and looks to be very comprehensive.

Wilma glances over to the table next to her, the TV remote is within arms reach. The person at the table is asleep, it's an easy snag.

She digs-in to her collard greens with the fork in one hand, opens the wax paper with the other to reveal an egg salad sandwich.

She increases the volume a bit as a guest is introduced to the infomercial.

Wilma's eyes go wide as a handsome young Black man in thick-framed glasses walks onto the set, stands next to the presenter. (He looks like the man from the doctor's office, but in modern clothes.)

REGGIE WATKINS

Thank you, Mary. I had a lot of fun curating this wonderful collection of Motown's greatest hits. A contribution to music that will never be matched.

PRESENTER

This is, indeed, a once in a lifetime opportunity to own a piece of history in just twelve monthly payments.

Wilma's bottom lip quivers, her eyes water.

WILMA

No.

REGGIE WATKINS

In fact, I reserved my own picks for the last CD in the collection. These are, in my opinion, the very best Motown produced.

PRESENTER

Let's check one out, shall we?

Stevie Wonder's "Uptight (Everything Is Alright)" spills from the TV. Something's different about it, the drums?

The presenter holds up a large booklet with text and photos.

PRESENTER

It's packaged with this beautiful picture book showcasing never-before-seen photos and stories from the stars of Motown. Hold on, do I recognize someone?

The camera cuts to a close-up of the booklet, focuses on a B&W photo of a young man behind a drum kit. It looks exactly like the guest.

His hands show a slight tremor before he stuffs them into his pant's pockets.

REGGIE WATKINS

That's my father, Reggie Watkins, Senior. A member of the legendary Wrecking Crew, some of the greatest musicians of all time.

PRESENTER

You have your father's good looks, how about his musical talent?

REGGIE WATKINS

Unfortunately, I'm an appreciator of music, not a practitioner.

The presenter and guest share a laugh as the song increases in volume.

REGGIE WATKINS

I wrote the forward and did much of the research for the booklet.

WILMA

No.

Something about the infomercial seems to agitate her. The hand she holds the sandwich in balls up into a fist, egg salad leaks from between her fingers onto the table.

WILMA

No.

She sweeps her lunch off the table.

WILMA
That's wasn't yours.

Nurses react, try to calm her down, grab her arms but she still flails.

WILMA
No. NO!

Wilma is sent into hysterics when the young black man on the TV looks directly into the camera with a smile.

The nurse injects her with a sedative. She gets one last word out as she slips unconscious.

WILMA
Mo... ther... fu...

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, DETROIT - DAY

A modest efficiency apartment, metal framed bed, Mid-century furniture, 1963 Ford Motor Company wall calendar ("You're ahead in a FORD all the way") opened to December indicates we are in the Detroit past, the 22nd is circled in red marker.

REGGIE WATKINS (20s), spitting-image of the guest from the infomercial/doctor's office, sits in boxers at the edge of his twin bed, uses drum sticks to play a rhythm on his bare legs.

A watch strap around his wrist, the watch face underneath, out of sight.

A metronome BEEPS from somewhere.

With each hit, the angry red marks become more vibrant as the rhythm intensifies.

On his nightstand is a dogeared copy of "Trapped Between The Lash And The Gun" by Arvella Whitmore. Next to it is a notepad with the phrase "A musical insurrection against racism and injustice" written in pencil.

A modern SUDOKU puzzle book lies under a hardcover about memory-loss titled "The Phantom Brain". A scrap of paper with "Terordyne Inc." letterhead sticks out of the pages like a bookmark, written on it is a code: R-L-R-R-L-R-L-L

Sweat pours off him as the bookmark's rudiment pattern becomes a blur, his face a grimace of pain.

A digital ALARM interrupts the metronome. He pauses to flip his wrist up to look at his smart watch. Sees an alert: "NO CONNECTION."

CUT TO:

Reggie stands in front of a full-length mirror hung on the apartment's door, checks himself out, smooths his slate suit.

He straightens his tie, runs a brush over his close-cropped hair.

Reggie taps out the rudiment from the bookmark.

He stares into his reflection, tries a smile, the same one we saw in the infomercial.

REGGIE WATKINS
Visualize. Remember.

He opens a pill bottle, sees one left, swallows it with a gulp from a glass of water.

He's about to exit when he turns, sweeps the stuff on his nightstand into a drawer, drops the watch on top of a 1964 Detroit Phone Book, slams the drawer shut.

EXT. HITSVILLE U.S.A. - DAY

An unassuming, two-story home sits off a suburban street under an overcast sky. A sign on the front says "Hitsville U.S.A." This is the house Motown built, the heart of Detroit soul. Christmas decorations line the windows.

A few cars parked on the street in front, a shining 1963 Cadillac Coupe DeVille, convertible 1964 Ford Mustang and more from that era. A few residents walk past in their Sunday best, their breath expelled as clouds in the waning Winter cold.

INT. HITSVILLE U.S.A., BERRY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Reggie sits, hands in his lap, waits for the impresario of Motown BERRY GORDY (30s) to look through his resume.

Berry, comfortable in a bespoke three-piece suit, glances up at Reggie, then back down at the resume.

Reggie fidgets with his thin tie, pats down his suit jacket, plays a soft drum rhythm on his legs.

BERRY GORDY

Looks like you have some education.
BA in English from Morehouse
College. A year interning at
Broadside Press. Impressive. You
must have learned a lot working for
Dudley.

REGGIE WATKINS WATKINS

I did. Learned how to not take no
for an answer when reviewers didn't
want to read his books.

BERRY GORDY

And you want to be the guy that
collects the garbage here?

REGGIE WATKINS

I want to be the guy who collects
the garbage at *Motown*.

BERRY GORDY

Some pretty fancy garbage here,
huh?

REGGIE WATKINS

What you're doing is revolutionary.

BERRY GORDY

What I'm doing is making people
dance and giving them moments of
joy two-and-a-half minutes at a
time.

REGGIE WATKINS

It's more than that.

Berry sits back, considers what Reggie has said.

BERRY GORDY

What do you think we do here, Mr.
Watkins?

REGGIE WATKINS

This...

He looks around the office, extends his arms to indicate he's
speaking about all of Motown.

REGGIE WATKINS

This is where it will start, where
it *has* started. The genesis of
awareness. A musical insurrection
against racism and injustice.

BERRY GORDY

You really putting that English degree to work. Brother, you sound like Marvin. You been hanging out in his basement, smoking the funny stuff? You think the T.A.M.I. show was a political rally? I have voices that sing, beautiful Black voices that make Black folks smile ear-to-ear, and a helluva lot of the white ones, too, whether they admit it or not.

REGGIE WATKINS

Marvin's voice, especially. But there are others.

BERRY GORDY

You're not some crazy fan looking to sniff Ms. Wells' underwear or something.

REGGIE WATKINS

Not at all. I just love the music. It might... it *will* change things someday.

Berry slides the resume into a drawer.

BERRY GORDY

Listen, brother. I need someone who can keep this place cleaned up. It's a fulltime job. Musicians are strange creatures and messy as hell. Think you can handle a mop, a broom, dustpan, trashcan? My car needs a good wash every other day. Smokey's, too.

REGGIE WATKINS

I can do the job.

BERRY GORDY

Well, let's see if you can. Start tomorrow, seven a.m. My office manager Gwendolyn will set you up.

REGGIE WATKINS

Thank you, Mr. Gordy.

BERRY GORDY

Don't thank me yet. You haven't seen the ashtray situation. Lemme give you the ten-cent tour.

MOTOWN HALLWAY

Berry leads Reggie through Hitsville, stops at studio doors, the break-room, offices.

Christmas decorations are strung along the wall.

BERRY GORDY

Studio-A, where the magic happens.
Lots of talent and rampant egos
reside within. Also, mountains of
cigarette butts Sir Edmund Hillary
wouldn't touch with a ten foot
sherpa. Break-room. We keep it
stocked with soda, coffee, hot
chocolate with those little
marshmallows for Li'l Stevie.
Accounting offices.

They peek into a room with several white men in grey suits, all hunched around an adding machine. They look up, nod at Berry, then return to their calculations.

BERRY GORDY

Those of the Hebrew persuasion make
the best bean counters. Never let
it be said, I wasn't an equal
opportunity bossman.

They walk by GWENDOLYN AYERS (20s) as she hangs more decorations, smiles when she sees Berry.

GWENDOLYN

Good morning, Mr. Gordy.

BERRY GORDY

Good morning, Gwendolyn.

Reggie glances back at her.

BERRY GORDY

Equal opportunities abound here,
Mr. Watkins.

The tour ends at a utility closet filled with mops, buckets, cleaning supplies, overalls hang from a hook.

BERRY GORDY

Here's your office. Not much of a
view, but it's got everything you
need. I don't have to explain the
job to you do I?

REGGIE WATKINS
No sir, think I got it.

BERRY GORDY
I knew you were smart. See you
tomorrow.

REGGIE WATKINS
Seven sharp. Thank you.

BERRY GORDY
Welcome to Motown. You're part of
the family now.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, DETROIT - NIGHT

Reggie sits on a chair facing his couch, a pair of drumsticks
poised over the cushions in the cramped apartment.

Eyes closed, he begins to play a beat, his foot stomps the
floor with each imaginary bass drum hit.

WE HEAR the drums that he imagines in his head. The big beat
becomes more insistent, increases in tempo ever-so slightly
as it hits the chorus.

Another bass drum inserts itself into his fantasy, its off-
time beat ruins the moment.

Reggie stops playing and hears the POUNDING of a broomstick
on his floor from the apartment below.

NEIGHBOR (O.S.)
Shut the fuck up motherfucker!
Ain't no one got time for that
Buddy Rich shit!

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, DETROIT - NIGHT

In bed, eyes open, earbuds in, his hands tap out a drum beat
on his chest.

He turns over and looks at his watch on the nightstand.

Four A.M.

There's no way he's going to be able to sleep.

He rolls to his back, returns to the drum beat on his chest,
his foot hits the imaginary bass drum.

He closes his eyes, a smile broadens as the REAL DRUM KIT fades in. It reaches a crescendo before...

INT. SUPERETTE MARKET - DAY

Reggie walks into the cramped bodega, looks around for something that'll serve as breakfast.

No bagels or items he's used to finding, just a crusty coffee machine and paper cups.

He approaches the cashier. A couple of old heads play chess nearby.

REGGIE WATKINS
No breakfast burrito?

BODEGA OWNER
What the fuck is that?

REGGIE WATKINS
Bagels?

BODEGA OWNER
Where you think you are, Dexter?
None of that shit here. If you want
breakfast, try Lionel's down the
block.

Reggie looks up at the TV bolted to the wall inside a chickenwire cage behind the cashier. The black & white image of an ad for a boxing match plays: SONNY LISTON vs. CASSIUS CLAY at the Convention Hall in Miami, Florida, February 25, 1964.

REGGIE WATKINS
I'd put money on Ali.

BODEGA OWNER
Who? Speak english, Dexter.

REGGIE WATKINS
Cassius Clay.

The bodega denizens give Reggie a "WTF?" look.

BODEGA OWNER
You're crazy. No way in hell he
wins. Sonny's gonna beat the shit
out of him. Clay's an 8-to-1
underdog. Liston's prison tough.
The entire Nation of Islam ain't no
help to Clay in the ring.

REGGIE WATKINS

Liston barely fights, his
shoulder's messed up, not to
mention he's in his forties.

BODEGA OWNER

Huh? He's 32, man. What the hell
are you smokin'? Did you see what
he did to Patterson, *twice*?

REGGIE WATKINS

I don't know about that. Where can
I get in on that action?

BODEGA OWNER

Mustafa Goldberg, works out of the
diner. If you a cop, he'll smell it
on you and, well...

REGGIE WATKINS

Do I look like a cop?

BODEGA OWNER

You put money on Clay, he's gonna
think something's up.

Reggie grabs a Clark Bar and a box of Lemonheads candy.

BODEGA OWNER

Sweet tooth, huh?

Reggie leaves to derisive laughter from the bodega denizens.

INT. HITSVILLE U.S.A., JANITOR'S CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Reggies slips off his jacket, slacks, steps into the
overalls.

Before he zips up, WE SEE several welts on his arm just below
his shoulder.

His hands tremble before he regains control.

BREAKROOM

Reggie swirls a mop over a coffee spill. The mop has done its
job, but Reggie continues to move it around.

His attention is not on the spill, but on WILMA ETIENNE
(20s), at a small table. He watches her empty a sack lunch,
carefully lay out each item: an egg salad sandwich in wax
paper, Tupperware of greens, silverware, cloth napkin.

Reggie quickly looks down at the spill when she gets up to grab a bottle of cola from the fridge.

BERRY GORDY (O.S.)
I think you got it, brother.

Reggie turns to see his boss in a tailored suit.

REGGIE WATKINS
Mr. Gordy. Just cleaning up this spill. Coffee, I guess.

BERRY GORDY
Don't need its life story. When you're done here, the ashtrays are overflowing in the studio. Can't have the talent ashin' on my floor.

REGGIE WATKINS
Right away, Mr. Gordy.

Berry nods to the young woman on his way out.

BERRY GORDY
Wilma.

She nods back, takes a big bite out of her sandwich.

Her chewing slows down when she realizes Reggie is staring.

WILMA
(mouth full)
You want a bite?

Reggie blinks out of his trance.

REGGIE WATKINS
Huh?

WILMA
My sandwich. You seem to be staring at it.

REGGIE WATKINS
Oh no, not the sandw-

Her eyebrow raises.

REGGIE WATKINS
It's just that, I skipped breakfast and... ya know, I think I have some ashtrays to attend to.

WILMA

Ms. Wells is tracking today. You'll need a bigger wastebasket for hers.

REGGIE WATKINS

That's right, Mary was known to smoke a lot.

WILMA

Oh, you're on a first name basis with Ms. Wells? You writing her memoirs?

REGGIE WATKINS

No, I...

She smiles.

WILMA

Just messin' with you. Now go on, shoo, before Mr. Gordy sees you're lallygagging.

REGGIE WATKINS

Right. It was nice talking to you, Wilma.

WILMA

You too, uh...

REGGIE WATKINS

Reginald.

WILMA

Oh lord, do the musicians know that's your name?

REGGIE WATKINS

To be honest, I don't think anyone here knows my name.

WILMA

From now on, you're Reggie.

REGGIE WATKINS

Sure. I can live with that.

WILMA

It's either that, or merciless ridicule for the rest of your life.

REGGIE WATKINS

Reggie it is.

Gwendolyn sits down with Wilma.

GWENDOLYN

You will not believe the night I
had. If anyone asks you to a party
in Marvin's basement, tell them you
have to straighten your hair.

Gwendolyn notices Reggie hasn't left yet.

GWENDOLYN

(to Reggie)

I'm sure you have something better
to do than eavesdrop. Garbage
doesn't take itself out.

WILMA

Gwen.

GWENDOLYN

Well?

Reggie drags his mop bucket away.

INT. HITSVILLE U.S.A., STUDIO A

Eyes closed, Reggie stands outside the studio tracking room
as the band runs through "My Guy".

He smiles, nods his head to the beat.

They finish, Reggie walks in.

The musicians ignore him as he empties the overflowing
ashtrays at each band station.

One ashtray in particular has already flooded onto the top of
a piano, standing next to it is Motown superstar MARY WELLS
(20s).

Reggie reaches for it when she takes a long drag on a
cigarette and rests the butt on top of the ash mountain.

MARY WELLS

Might as well take a seat, I'll
have it full in no time.

REGGIE WATKINS

Full?

The band CHUCKLES.

Reggie stands next to the piano, waits for... something.

The band relaxes with their cigarettes, a few take a sip from flasks.

In the lull, Reggie musters the courage to speak to Mary.

REGGIE WATKINS
You sound great.

MARY WELLS
Sounds like cold shit.

REGGIE WATKINS
Just needs a bridge transition.

Reggie thought he'd said it quiet enough, but the band has stopped to look at him.

Mary looks back to the band.

MARY WELLS
He says it just needs a, what was it, a bridge transition? Why didn't any of you worthless assholes tell me it just needs a bridge transition? Better yet, tell Smokey.

REGGIE WATKINS
(sotto)
The Funk Brothers.

MARY WELLS
You seem to have a thing for stating the obvious.

More chuckles from the band.

Reggie looks through the glass into the control room. Next to engineer LAWRENCE HORN (30s) is WILLIAM "SMOKEY" ROBINSON (20s), arms folded.

The band breaks out in LAUGHTER.

MARY WELLS
All Smokey does is think about bridges, and choruses, and verses. Do you know who he is?

REGGIE WATKINS
Of course I know-

MARY WELLS
He is Smokey Joe, the purveyor, the hitmaker.

(MORE)

MARY WELLS (CONT'D)

If this song needs a bridge
transition, you can bet your ass
he'll write one. Hold up, did he
put you up to this? I'll put bleach
in that high-pitch bitch's relaxer.

She turns to the control room, Smokey has sheet music in his hands.

MARY WELLS

Smokey, does this song need a
bridge transition?

Smokey uses the control room microphone to respond.

SMOKEY

Well, we were just discussing,
maybe after the second chorus you
could-

MARY WELLS

(to Reggie)

See what you did? You made him
doubt his own genius.

REGGIE WATKINS

I'm sorry. I'll go.

Not thinking, he empties her ashtray.

Reggie sees the wide-eyed faces, knows he fucked up.

MARY WELLS

Did I not just tell you-

REGGIE WATKINS

I, uh, Mr. Gordy told me to-

MARY WELLS

Well shit, Mr. Gordy told you.

She looks back to the control room where Berry Gordy has just arrived.

MARY WELLS

(sarcastic)

Thanks, Berry.

She gives him the middle-finger salute. Berry shrugs.

MARY WELLS

(to Reggie)

Write this down.

(MORE)

MARY WELLS (CONT'D)

My ashtray does *not* get emptied
until the session is complete. It's
a thing. It's *my* thing.

She waits to see if it has sunk in.

MARY WELLS

If you need a pencil, I have one
you can use.

Reggie shakes his head.

She stares at the empty ashtray.

MARY WELLS

I can't look at that and produce
greatness.

Reggie suddenly has a great idea.

He grabs the ashtray, digs into the garbage bag, and uses it
to scoop up a pile of ashes.

He carefully sets it on top of the piano.

Mary slowly scans the room.

MARY WELLS

Do you believe this motherfucker?

The tense moment is released by an uproar of LAUGHTER.

Mary glances at the piano player and they begin to improvise
a song.

One-by-one the band joins her until it becomes a full
performance.

MARY WELLS

Motherfucker, tryin' my one last
nerve / Brother thinks he's the
clean-up man / Doesn't know how
close he is / To feeling the back
of my hand / Oh, he's the clean-up
brother / And he just loves his
trash / He got it in his bag / He
got all my ash / He's the clean-up
brother / There ain't no other

They end together and fall silent.

Reggie is frozen by the moment.

MARY WELLS
You can go ruin someone else's
genius.

Berry Gordy speaks to Reggie over the studio P.A.

BERRY GORDY
Empty the ashtray.

Mary stares daggers at Reggie.

MARY WELLS
Walk away, brother.

BERRY GORDY
Son.

Reggie slowly reaches for the ashtray.

Mary takes a threatening step toward Reggie.

He retracts his arm.

REGGIE WATKINS
You should think about quitting.

Mary's eyes go wide, Reggie fast-walks out of the studio.

MARY WELLS
If you send that kid in here again,
I'll walk out of Motown and never
return. You hear me, Berry?

Berry smiles, shakes his head.

MOTOWN HALLWAY

Reggie closes the studio door behind him, hears the eruption
of LAUGHTER die down before the band begins another take of
the song.

Wilma walks up.

WILMA
I don't suppose you told a great
joke.

He shakes his head.

WILMA
They think they're God's gift. Some
of them are. Problem is, they *all*
think it. What did you do?

REGGIE WATKINS
I emptied Mary's ashtray.

WILMA
Oh damn. Damn, Reggie. Well, now
you know.

REGGIE WATKINS
Now I know.

WILMA
Berry would've fired you if he was
going to. I think he likes messing
with her for some reason. She's
going to be a huge star and he
hates not being in control. I guess
you're safe, for now.

She smiles, his eyes light up.

REGGIE WATKINS
Wilma, do you think you might want
to-

He's cut off by the control room door opening, Berry Gordy
walks out in a heated discussion with the engineer.

ENGINEER
The drummer is hitting way too many
cymbals. He's eating up sonic real
estate like Fats Domino at a pie
factory.

BERRY GORDY
I know, I know. Can't you do
something about it, dial it down,
use some tricks?

ENGINEER
Or, he could stop playing the damn
cymbals.

BERRY GORDY
He's all we got 'til Papa and
Pistol come back.

The engineer retreats back to the booth, Berry walks between
Wilma and Reggie, ignores them both.

When he's out of earshot, Reggie tries to ask Wilma again.

REGGIE WATKINS
I was saying, do you think you'd be-

BERRY GORDY (O.S.)
Janitor!

WILMA
Duty calls. See you tomorrow.

REGGIE WATKINS
Right.

He watches her walk away.

BERRY GORDY (O.S.)
Janitor!

DISSOLVE TO:

JANITOR'S CLOSET

Reggie returns his mop and bucket, strips off his overalls, hangs them on a peg.

MOTOWN HALLWAY

It's dead quiet, almost everyone has gone home for the night.
He stops at the door to the studio, listens.

STUDIO A

Reggie walks into the empty, darkened studio, goes right to the drum kit.

He runs his hands over the cymbals, unscrews the wingnuts, takes them off their stands, stacks them against the wall. Only the hi-hats remain.

Reggie sits down behind the drums, begins to play a driving beat worthy of a T-Rex stomper.

He's good, the beat is masterful in its simplicity. It could easily be played under the song from before and work better than what was played in the session.

BOOM BAP BUH-BOOM BAP! Classic fills interspersed for effect. Similar to the original beat, but expansive, powerful, modern.

He gets lost in the loop, closes his eyes as the drums ring out in the room, ends with a flourish across the drums.

He keeps his eyes closed until the reverberation fades.

And then, he hears someone SLOW CLAP.

He opens his eyes to see Berry Gordy in the doorway.

Reggie jumps up from the drums, starts to return the cymbals back to their stands. Wipes them down with a cloth as if he was just cleaning them.

REGGIE WATKINS
Sorry, Mr. Gordy.

BERRY GORDY
Hold on, son. What exactly were you doing?

REGGIE WATKINS
Nothing. Just fooling around. I didn't know anyone was still here.

BERRY GORDY
I never leave. This might as well be my home.

Reggie finishes arranging the drums.

REGGIE WATKINS
I guess I'll go. See you tomor-

BERRY GORDY
Now wait a minute. Lemme hear that again.

REGGIE WATKINS
The drums?

BERRY GORDY
Unless you also play the trumpet.

He goes to sit behind the kit.

BERRY GORDY
Like you had them before. None of them big cymbals.

As before, Reggie takes the cymbals down, stacks them against the wall.

BERRY GORDY
Good. Now, gimme that same beat.

Reggie begins, the drums sound thunderous in the room.

Berry nods along with it, then waves his hands for Reggie to stop.

BERRY GORDY
I take it, that's the verse?

Reggie nods.

BERRY GORDY
What about the chorus? Gotta switch
it up somehow. How you gonna do
that without cymbals?

Reggie takes a second to think, then launches into a similar beat, except this time, he adds a double hit to the snare upbeat.

Berry nods along, waves his arms again.

BERRY GORDY
Play me that outro, the end part.

Reggie plays another variation, ends with the flourish.

BERRY GORDY
Gotdam, no cymbals works. Tomorrow
you report right here.

REGGIE WATKINS
After my chores?

BERRY GORDY
Fuck that. I can find a dozen kids
who'd empty ashtrays for a chance
to eye-fuck The Supremes. Your
talents are needed elsewhere.

REGGIE WATKINS
You want me to play on the record?

BERRY GORDY
You're a little slow on the uptake,
but damn if you don't have
something with those drums. Nine ay-
em sharp. Don't be late.

REGGIE WATKINS
Yes, Mr. Gordy.

Berry leaves, Reggie sits behind the kit a moment longer,
rubs his thighs.

INT. LIONEL'S DINER - NIGHT

Reggie walks in, grabs a stool at the counter.

Waitress (30s) with the nametag "ROSA" flips a coffee mug over, pours steaming coffee.

ROSA

Menu?

Reggie scans the specials on the board.

REGGIE WATKINS

I'll try the sweet potato pie.
Slice with the burnt marshmallows.
Side of fries, to go.

ROSA

A burnt marshmallow man. You might
have to fight me for it.

She turns, slides the order into the revolving ticket holder in the pass-through to the kitchen.

Reggie glances around, sees an enormous man sort little scraps of paper into piles all over his corner booth. A gold Star of David hangs from a delicate chain over his black turtleneck.

He jots down calculations on a legal pad with a mechanical pencil.

ROSA

You here to make a bet?

Rosa has returned with silverware wrapped in a napkin.

REGGIE WATKINS

Nah, I mean, probably not.

ROSA

Four legs or two legs?

REGGIE WATKINS

What?

ROSA

Horses or humans?

REGGIE WATKINS

Well, I have a feeling.

ROSA

We all have those once in a while.

REGGIE WATKINS

This is a good feeling, like, a
sure thing feeling.

ROSA

My uncle George had one of those.
Lost everything, got his head
liquified courtesy of a shotgun
when he tried to rob an armored
car. Now he doesn't feel anything.

She leaves Reggie with that image.

A few more glances toward the bookie and Reggie heads over.

REGGIE WATKINS

You Mustafa Goldberg?

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

(British East End accent)

You a cop?

REGGIE WATKINS

No. Do I look like a cop?

He finally looks up at Reggie.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

You one'a them Motown nerds?

REGGIE WATKINS

How did you know?

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

Cigarette ashes on your shoes, and
that stink of Brill Creme. I figure
you ain't no astronaut, so...

REGGIE WATKINS

I want to place a bet. You're a
bookie, right?

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

"Accountant" is my preferred
nomenclature.

REGGIE WATKINS

My bad.

Mustafa shoots him a "what does that mean?" look.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

Well, step into my office.

Reggie sits down, Mustafa flips the legal pad to a clean
page.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

You lose, you got a day to settle.
Ajax is two off the top. And no
weep 'n' wail about your mum
needing an operation.

REGGIE WATKINS

And if you lose?

Mustafa stares at him.

Reggie counts out fifty dollars in ten dollar bills.

Mustafa watches him, a crease of disbelief across his
forehead.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

You want me to spread that around?
Pistons, Celtics, and Knicks are
all in action.

REGGIE WATKINS

I want it all on Ali- I mean, Clay.

Mustafa looks at him, bemused.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

Something happen to your lump of
lead? Why don't I just put that in
my pocket and we'll call it a day,
'cause Clay ain't got a chance in
Jahannam.

REGGIE WATKINS

Apparently there are two
certainties in life. I look like a
cop, and Cassius Clay doesn't have
a chance against Sonny Liston.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

What's the Boston strangle?

ROSA (O.S.)

Food's up.

REGGIE WATKINS

Pardon?

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

The angle.

REGGIE WATKINS

No angle, just a feeling.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

Hey, who am I to suggest you don't know what the fuck you're talking about. Half-a-buck on Clay.

He shakes his head, jots down the bet on his pad.

REGGIE WATKINS

Thanks.

MUSTAFA GOLDBERG

No, thank you. I wish I had more clients ready to part with their money so willingly. I'd throw you a Friar Tuck, but it won't matter.

Reggie slides out of the booth, steps to the diner.

REGGIE WATKINS

(to Rosa)

Thanks.

Reggie slaps a few dollars on the counter.

He notices one of the dollars is a modern version with the holo-stripe, quickly grabs it back.

ROSA

Was that my tip?

Reggie digs in his pocket, lays down two older bills.

REGGIE WATKINS

That was my lucky dollar.

ROSA

Mm-hm. My kids try to use Monopoly money to buy shit, too.

On his way out, he passes the bodega owner who makes a beeline to Mustafa's booth.

Through the window, Reggie watches the almost giddy bodega owner hold out a five dollar bill, says something that causes Mustafa to mad-dog Reggie as he walks down the street out of view.

INT. REGGIE'S APARTMENT, DETROIT - NIGHT

Crumbs in the to-go box are mute testimony to the destruction wrought upon the sweet potato pie and fries.

Reggie can't sleep, sits on the end of his bed, practices the drum part.

This time, he ignores the banging from downstairs and gets lost in the music he imagines as the drums explode in his head.

INT. HITSVILLE U.S.A., STUDIO A - NEXT MORNING

The musicians tune-up, straighten sheet music, prepare for that day's recording session.

Smokey stands with Mary, looks over the sheet music spread on the piano.

Drummer WILLIS EVANS (30s) shakes his head when he sees the cymbals stacked in the corner.

WILLIS
Who touched my shit?

He sets the cymbals back, takes a seat behind the kit, tunes the drums.

Reggie walks in.

Mary covers her ashtray with her hands.

MARY WELLS
Look out, it's the ash bandit.

Reggie looks to the drums, sees Willis behind the kit, doesn't know what to do.

Berry speaks over the P.A. from the control booth.

BERRY GORDY
Willis, I'm gonna need you to sit aside. Grab some coffee. Reggie will be playing the drums this session.

WILLIS EVANS
The fuck? Are you serious?

BERRY GORDY
I am, Willis.

WILLIS EVANS
Why am I even here?

BERRY GORDY
In case the janitor messes up.

Willis gets up, shoots Reggie a dirty look, exits the studio.
Reggie sits down at the kit, musicians share a look.

BERRY GORDY

Reggie?

The kid looks back, Berry nods at the drum kit.

REGGIE WATKINS

Oh, right.

He gets up, takes the cymbals off their stands, all except the hi-hats.

The band looks at him like he's crazy.

MARY WELLS

I guess it makes it easier if
there's less things to hit.

A shared CHUCKLE from the band.

Reggie takes his seat, adjusts the drums, then nods at Smokey.

ENGINEER

My Guy, take one. Rolling.

Smokey acts as band leader, counts them in.

Reggie goes to hit the beat and a stick flies out of his hand, almost hits the bass player in the face.

The band shake their heads as the bassist hands Reggie the stick.

The engineer stares at Berry with the "are you fucking serious?" look.

Mary gives Berry a middle finger salute.

ENGINEER

Still rolling on take one.

Smokey counts them in.

Reggie begins the beat, this time, nails it.

The band kicks in, shocked by how good it sounds.

They're killing it, propelled by the new, improved beat. They forget that the janitor is behind the drums and completely lose themselves in the performance, reacting to the urgency and power.

MOTOWN HALLWAY

Willis stands outside the studio door listening, coffee in his hand. With a dismissive look on his face, he can't help but tap along with his foot.

WILLIS
(sotto)
I coulda' done that.

BREAKROOM

Willa and Gwendolyn sit with their coffees.

GWENDOLYN
Willis been taking drum lessons?

WILLA
That's not Willis.

She smiles.

STUDIO A

The band blazes through the song, finally reach the outro, Reggie ends with a flourish and the room freezes until the reverb fades.

ENGINEER
Got it.

Berry bursts into the tracking room.

He looks to the engineer.

BERRY GORDY
No cymbals. Gotdam, it worked. One more for safety. Let's see if it was a fluke.

He exits, returns to the control booth.

ENGINEER
My Guy, take two.

Smokey counts them in, Reggie hits the drums.

INT. HITSVILLE U.S.A., BREAKROOM - LATER

Reggie pours himself some coffee, suit jacket off, sleeves rolled up, drum sticks in his back pocket.

WILMA (O.S.)
Don't spill it.

He almost loses his grip on the mug, but saves it.

WILMA
I heard you were great today.

REGGIE WATKINS
That's what I hear.

WILMA
Don't let it go to your head,
Reginald. It's possible to be a
genius and a not have an ego the
size of Berry's head.

REGGIE WATKINS
I don't know. I was *really* great.

WILMA
That was one session. Berry'll
squeeze every ounce of ability you
have, then ask for more. Nothing
will ever be good enough. That's
how he keeps the talent at their
best. Manufactured competition.
Learned it workin' the assembly
line at Lincoln-Mercury. Conceived
this whole operation there.

REGGIE WATKINS
A talent factory.

WILMA
You could say that.

REGGIE WATKINS
I'm ready for it.

WILMA
No, you're not. But you'll learn.
And maybe make it through your
second session. A third? Hmmm,
being a janitor's not the worst
thing. Gives you plenty of time for
that puzzle book. Crossword?

Reggie pats the folded Sudoku booklet under his arm.

REGGIE WATKINS
Something like that.

Wilma's holds out her mug, Reggie fills it with coffee.

WILMA
I heard Willis threw a fit in
Berry's office. Making enemies
already?

REGGIE WATKINS
I was just doing what Mr. Gordy
wanted me to.

WILMA
Be sure to say that when Willis
sticks a switchblade between your
ribs. See, there's that
manufactured competition I was
talking about.

Reggie stares with a mix of disbelief and genuine concern.

WILMA
It won't come to that. Probably.

REGGIE WATKINS
It's just drums.

WILMA
You don't mean that. I heard more
than "just drums" coming from the
session. I heard real passion.
Don't belittle your gift.

REGGIE WATKINS
I thought emptying ashtrays was my
gift.

WILMA
You can have more than one. Plan B.
Something to fall back on. But your
Plan A seems to be working out.

REGGIE WATKINS
Every revolution needs a tempo to
fight to.

Wilma's eyebrow goes up.

WILMA
Revolution, eh? Your crusade has
just started. Get some sleep. See
you tomorrow.

REGGIE WATKINS

Will do.

He turns back to the coffee pot, then realizes something.

REGGIE WATKINS

Hey, you want to go on a-

She's gone.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HITSVILLE U.S.A., HALLWAY - LATER

Once again, Motown has settled-in for the night.

A typewriter CLACKS somewhere in the building. Producers at a piano, work on a new song in one of the offices.

Reggie walks by Studio A, hears someone play a thoughtful jazz ballad version of "Uptight (Everything Is Alright)" on the piano.

After listening for a moment, he peeks his head in and sees a teenager at the piano, barely visible in the shadow.

Reggie listens. He leans on the doorjamb, it CREEKS, the music stops.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

Who's there?

Reggie hesitates, should he just slip away or answer the kid?

REGGIE WATKINS

It's me.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

Me who?

REGGIE WATKINS

Reginal- uh, Reggie.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

The janitor who ceased to be a janitor.

REGGIE WATKINS

You could say that.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

The no-cymbals cat.

REGGIE WATKINS

That's me.

The teen turns around on the bench.

He wears dark sunglasses, his head tilts back, searching.
It's LITTLE STEVIE WONDER (13).

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

Well, good luck tomorrow. You'll be
on another one of Smokey's tunes.
He's a perfectionist. He hears
everything.

REGGIE WATKINS

They haven't said what song.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

They want to see how you react.
Smokey'll have his eyes on you.

REGGIE WATKINS

No pressure.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

Like the bottom of the ocean.

Stevie turns back to the piano, plays a few chords.

REGGIE WATKINS

Uptight?

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

Not usually? I'm pretty cool under
pressure.

REGGIE WATKINS

Right, I mean, you haven't-

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

Good name for a song, though. Mind
if I use it?

REGGIE WATKINS

Of course not. It would be an
honor.

Stevie starts to play the tune, then stops to think.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER

Maybe more like this.

Stevie speeds it up until it sounds closer to the recorded
version.

Reggie taps along, provides the beat.

Stevie talks over the soft pedal chords.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER
Mr. Gordy's been on my back to
finish it. Gonna get Sylvia and
Henry to help out. It's time I
started working on my own music.
Maybe you'll play on my session, as
long as you bring that fire you
brought today. Where'd you learn to
play like that? Taking off the
cymbals, man, I thought we drummers
liked to hit things, not not hit
things.

REGGIE WATKINS
I'm sure it's something I picked up
listening to the band.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER
Lots of spills to mop right outside
the studio door?

REGGIE WATKINS
Something like that.

Stevie laughs.

LITTLE STEVIE WONDER
You're funny, drummer who use to be
a janitor. Good luck tomorrow.

Stevie releases the soft pedal, finds the perfect tempo and
arrangement, fills the room with music.

MOTOWN HALLWAY

Reggie stops, back against the wall.

He can't believe it's happening.

He smiles, a nervous CHUCKLE spills out.

Reggie calms himself as a pair of accountants walk past.

BERRY GORDY'S OFFICE

Reggie checks if the coast is clear, slips in, closes and
locks the door.

He takes out the Terordyne Inc. notepaper, dials the number at the top.

REGGIE WATKINS
May I speak with Dr. Island? I'll hold.

A few clicks on the line before it picks up.

DR. ISLAND
Lab.

REGGIE WATKINS
Doctor Island?

DR. ISLAND
Speaking.

REGGIE WATKINS
I wonder if we could meet sometime.

DR. ISLAND
Who is this?

REGGIE WATKINS
My apologies. My name is Reginald Watkins. I am a fellow traveler. I believe you are working on a project called Mercury.

A moment of nervous silence.

INT. BIODYNAMICS, MERCURY LAB

Doctor NANCY ISLAND (30s) stands among desks laden with tools for scientific experimentation. Research documents fight for the available space.

She cups the handset to her chest, looks around, she's alone.

DR. ISLAND
Are you from the government? One of H.P.'s guys?

REGGIE WATKINS
Not exactly. I'm a product of your efforts.

DR. ISLAND
A produ- Hold on, how do I know this is for real? Did Doctor Bryant put you up to this?

REGGIE WATKINS
I'd tell you who's going to win the
next Super Bowl, but...

DR. ISLAND
How's your memory?

A pause on the line.

REGGIE WATKINS
Not good.

DR. ISLAND
Tremors?

REGGIE WATKINS
Yes.

DR. ISLAND
Oh my god. I knew it. You're from
the future. It worked.

REGGIE WATKINS
Please, doctor, let's not get ahead
of ourselves. I suggest we meet, in
secret. No use attracting undo
attention at this stage. I have
some questions, specifically about
the side effects of your project.

DR. ISLAND
There are more?

REGGIE WATKINS
Shifts in bone density. Elevated
heart rate.

DR. ISLAND
We're not even at the animal
testing phase. There's no telling
at this time.

BERRY GORDY'S OFFICE

Reggie shakes his head.

REGGIE WATKINS
(sotto)
I'm too early.

DR. ISLAND
What's that?

REGGIE WATKINS
When do you expect to begin the trials?

MERCURY LAB

Dr. Island consults a timetable.

DR. ISLAND
Two months, maybe three.

REGGIE WATKINS
You can't move that up?

DR. ISLAND
Absolutely not. We're waiting on...
Jesus, what am I doing. I have no
idea who you are. Pretty good
American accent for a Russkie.

BERRY GORDY'S OFFICE

Reggie opens the door a crack, checks to see the if anyone is listening.

REGGIE WATKINS
I assure you, I'm not a communist
spy. In fact, it's why I want to
meet. To prove who I am so you'll
help me.

DR. ISLAND
Very well. I'll have a guest pass
waiting at the front desk-

REGGIE WATKINS
No way. Too many eyes. You know a
diner called Lionel's?

DR. ISLAND
No.

REGGIE WATKINS
West Grand and Seward. Tomorrow
night. Seven a.m.?

DR. ISLAND
Ok. How will I know it's you?

REGGIE WATKINS
You'll know.

MOTOWN LOBBY

Reggie slips out of Berry's office, makes his way to the lobby.

He goes to leave the building, grabs the doorknob, begins to turn it left and right in some sort of OCD ritual.

REGGIE WATKINS

(sotto)

Right, right. Left. Right. Left...

He can't remember the it, shuts his eyes.

REGGIE WATKINS (CONT'D)

(sotto)

Shit.

Tries again, no go.

He consults the letter combination on the scrap of note paper, finishes the ritual, opens the door and steps through the doorway when...

WILMA (O.S.)

Reggie?

He turns, sees Wilma in the lobby.

WILMA (CONT'D)

I thought we could-

Daylight from outside leaks through the doorway, a car passes by, LOUD MUFFLED HIP HOP MUSIC THUMPS.

WILMA (CONT'D)

Reggie?

Wilma steps forward, Reggie disappears through the closing door as it shuts.

She opens the door onto nighttime, the street lined with old cars, a cold breeze through the trees, the moon high in the heavens.

No sign of Reggie.

INT. NURSING HOME, WILMA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Old Wilma sits propped-up in bed, phone handset to her ear.

WILMA

Yes, I want to speak with Reggie Watkins ... The guest you had on today ... What do you mean he's not available ... No, I don't want to return anything. I want to speak with that time-traveling high-toned son-of-a-

An AUDIBLE CLICK, the line goes dead.

WILMA (CONT'D)

Well ain't that a bitch.

She dials another number.

WILMA (CONT'D)

Shawna? It's your mother. I need to see you ... Yes, I got my lunch, this is something different, important ... What if I said it's about your inheritance ... I thought that would get your attention. Come before five, it's brisket night and I don't want you disturbing me.

She hangs up.

WILMA (CONT'D)

Gonna get you, Reggie. Gonna get you good.

INT. SHAWNA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Wilma's daughter SHAWNA (30s), the nurse from Rabin's office, hangs up, turns to her wife OCTAVIA (30s).

SHAWNA

Gotta swing by the home tomorrow.

OCTAVIA

What's wrong now?

SHAWNA

Who the hell knows. Maybe there was too much relish in the egg salad.

OCTAVIA

I bet they confiscated the soda again. I told you it's a waste of time putting it in her lunch.

SHAWNA

She complains either way. You don't have to go. I'll drop by after my shift.

OCTAVIA

I'll have a bubble bath and a shot of bourbon waiting for you.

Shawna smiles, hugs her wife.

OCTAVIA (CONT'D)

I got you.

SHAWNA

You got me.

EXT. HITSVILLE U.S.A. - NIGHT

The outside of the house looks different, more like the museum it has become in the present.

Reggie, in his bespoke suit, walks from the front door to the curb. Instead of cars from the 1960s, modern vehicles line the street.

He pulls out keys, hits the alarm/lock control, gets into a Volkswagen Jetta.

He rolls the windows down, grabs an iPhone from the glove compartment, connects it to the car stereo, dials in Wonder's "Uptight (Everything Is Alright)", drives away.

INT. DR. RABIN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rabin sits at her desk, snorts a line.

She covers it up when there's a KNOCK at her door.

DR. RABIN

Come.

Myrtle pokes her head in.

MYRTLE

Another light day tomorrow.

DR. RABIN

Thank god for small mercies.

MYRTLE

Dr. Moore called, said he can get those vaccinations you want. He seemed eager to know why you need them.

DR. RABIN

That's for me to know, and no one to find out.

MYRTLE

Copy that. This was left at the front desk.

She tosses a manilla envelop, Rabin catches it.

MYRTLE (CONT'D)

Good night.

DR. RABIN

Night.

Myrtle closes the door.

Rabin opens the envelope, tips it up and a single Polaroid drops onto the desk, sends up coke dust in a small cloud.

It's a shot of the wastepaper basket from the motel with several used condoms at the bottom, one hangs over the edge.

DR. RABIN (CONT'D)

Asshole.

She makes a call.

DR. RABIN (CONT'D)

Tony? I need you to look at something for me ... I know *I'm* the doctor, this is a *who* not a *what* ... Don't know his name, but I got him on the security cam ... I don't know, run that racial recognition stuff ... facial, whatever. You owe me. Or do you want your wife finding about that little problem you had after the bachelor party?

She uses a pen to tip the polaroid up to the light, turns it until a faint thumbprint appears.

DR. RABIN (CONT'D)

Some fingerprints, too.

EXT. HITSVILLE U.S.A., - NIGHT

Reggie pulls away from the curb, smacks his steering wheel as he plays along with the drums on "Uptight".

His smart-watch reconnects, messages begin to DING-IN, including a reminder message: BOOSTER SHOTS TOMORROW!

INT. NURSING HOME, WILMA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Wilma retrieves a suitcase from her closet, lifts it onto her bed.

She opens it to find clothing from a bygone era.

A nurse pokes her head in the door.

NURSE

Wilma. Almost bedtime. What have I said about moving around without your wheelchair?

WILMA

I don't need the damned thing.

NURSE

We don't want another fall.

Wilma waves her away, nurse departs.

CUT TO:

Wilma, now dressed in clothes fit for the '60s, pushes back the sleeves on her blouse, runs a finger along a fading tattoo of letters in a flowery script: R-L-R-R-L-R-L-L

She grabs the door knob.

WILMA

Here I come, ready or not.

She begins to turn the knob this way and that.

INT. BIODYNAMICS, MERCURY LAB - PRESENT DAY

A door opens on a high-tech lab outfitted in equipment that looks sci-fi. Clean white walls and benches, computers with holographic monitors, strange pulse weapons.

A LAB ASSISTANT walks through, approaches a woman in a lab coat at a desk, her back to the assistant.

LAB ASSISTANT

Doctor? I have the results from the
quasar collapse tests. Looks good.

The doctor turns around to reveal Doctor Nancy Island, hair a bit different, but she looks just as young as she did in the '60s.

DR. ISLAND

Set them over there, I'll take a
look later.

The assistant leaves the documents, exits.

Dr. Island peers into an electron microscope, raises her right hand to adjust a dial.

We see that at least one thing has changed. Her hand is withered, black fingertips, the skin covered in burn scars.

The hand moves to her phone, hits PLAY, "Uptight (Everything's Alright)" leaks from her earbuds.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE ONE.