

CHOOSE TO BECOME

Written by

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BLACK SCREEN:

SUPER:

NOVEMBER 24, 2014. ST. LOUIS COUNTY GRAND JURY DECLINES TO INDICT FERGUSON POLICE OFFICER DARREN WILSON IN FATAL SHOOTING OF 18-YEAR-OLD MICHAEL BROWN. PROTESTS OCCUR THROUGHOUT AMERICA.

FADE TO:

EST. SHOT EXT. LEXINGTON SECTION OF BALTIMORE - NIGHT

The sodium street lamps light up the city. Baltimore is buzzing, the night is tense, restless. This is the home of the infamous "corner," the intersection of North Monroe and West Fayette.

SUPER: BALTIMORE

INT. BALTIMORE PD POLICE CRUISER - SAME TIME

Corporal BILL GRACE and P.O. MIKE LLEWELYN are on patrol. The radio is crackling with calls. BILL is 38, Black, built like a linebacker, and a veteran cop. His presence carries the threat of sudden violence. MIKE is 28, a college-educated, idealistic and stubborn young white officer: lean, handsome and fit. Missionary over achiever who believes he'll be commissioner one day. BILL is his third FTO and this is his last round of Field Training. BILL is driving.

As they drive, they get cold stares. Occasionally someone flips them off. Graffiti that says "fuck the police" is fresh on a wall.

MIKE

This shit. Of course it comes back down to this shit.

BILL

What do you expect? Always been like this.

MIKE

I don't think I believe that. Not always.

A bottle breaks in front of the car.

BILL
Assholes. Roll up your window a
little.

Mike rolls his window up, shaking his head sadly.

MIKE
Can't blame 'em.

BILL
What?

MIKE
Wilson should've been indicted. He
shot a kid. People are outraged -
Hell, I'm outraged, aren't --

BILL
Hold up. That kid was six-four, two-
ten and robbed a convenience store.

MIKE
He was unarmed. Even if that's true
the penalty for robbery isn't
death.

Bill looks over at him incredulously.

BILL
Unarmed? You fucking with me?

MIKE
Why would I be fucking with you? He
didn't have a gun.

BILL
That motherfucker went for Wilson's
gun. Any time you show up on a
scene, there's already a gun:
yours. Someone tries to take it
from you, you better have your head
straight.

Bill pauses to glare out the window at someone. He turns back
to Mike. He softens a bit.

MIKE
Didn't have to escalate. Kid wasn't
carrying. Wilson had other options
on the approach.

BILL

So did the kid who robbed a store
and then went for his gun. How
about those options?

MIKE

Maybe he felt like those were his
only options.

BILL

I just hope you don't get your ass
lit up when you're out on your own.
I hope you learned something these
past weeks.

MIKE

I did. I just think there's a
better way.

Bill just stares straight ahead. They keep driving.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)

2-David-14, Domestic assault
reported at 863 West Lexington. See
the woman in the courtyard West
Lexington and Poppleton Place.

Mike picks up the radio and answers.

MIKE

10-4, responding.

Bill accelerates a bit, makes a hard turn. More debris flies
at the car.

BILL

Poe Homes domestic. Bet I know who
it is, too.

MIKE

What makes you say that?

BILL

Always the same ones.

MIKE

Cycle of poverty continues.

BILL

Cycle of stupidity continues.

MIKE

Do you always assume the worst in people? You know you illicit behavior from people based on the expectations you have of them?

BILL

What?

MIKE (SLIGHTLY IRRITATED)

Yea, people actually fulfill the thoughts you project on them. So you actually have power from the start, before the scene, when you're in the locker room, at home. You don't want people to be shitheads all the time, try believing that they aren't.

BILL

Try believing that this isn't one of your books or some shit you seen on TV.

MIKE

Treat them the way you want them to behave and watch the world change.

BILL

People been killing each other since caveman days. How you gonna change that?

MIKE

Elevate man, there's more to the game if you want to actually inspire people and give them hope. If they have that when they see you, that you'll give them a fair shot, they're a little less hopeless. And no, it doesn't work most of the time but those are the assumptions we need to police with. You think there's no solution? There is.

BILL

You think this is simple?

MIKE

Damn right I do. Thinking it's so complex is what's fucking us all.

(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

We're just humans all the same.
Lesser men have won bigger battles.

BILL

All the same, huh? What lesser men?

Mike thinks for a minute.

MIKE

How about MLK? How about Gandhi?
Hmmm...civil rights movement and
independence for a billion people?

BILL

Do I look like fuckin' Gandhi? You
married right?

MIKE

Just had our second anniversary.

BILL

Well, if you want to see a third,
then fuck Gandhi.

MIKE

Look, people think we shouldn't be
accountable for how things have
turned out. This shit is a result.
We created it and putting the blame
on 'them' is a cop-out.

BILL

Hold up. 'We?' Who the fuck is
'we?' I grew up with these
assholes. They selling dope,
killing each other.

MIKE

See that, that's what I'm talking
about. You've gotta leave that
behind you. "I am not what happened
to me. I am what I choose to
become." Transcend the shit.

BILL

Who the fuck said that? Buddha?

EXT. POE HOMES HOUSING PROJECT - CONTINUOUS

They pull up, park, get out of the car, and start walking
towards TWO WOMEN sitting on the corner. One of them is
comforting the other who is holding her face and crying. A
CHILD sits with them.

BILL

Bullshit. They know exactly what they do. You assume anything else and you'll get played.

CUT TO:

EXT. POE HOMES COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Bill and Mike approach the TWO WOMEN and CHILD. JANELLE is holding her face. She is in her 20s, Black, and tired-looking. Her lip is cut and her eye is bruised shut. She is shaking and smoking a cigarette. CHANDRA is her teenage cousin who sits with her arm around her. LIL RONE is JANELLE'S 6-year-old son. He's quiet, playing with a toy.

A group of YOUNG BLACK MEN are sitting on a nearby picnic table drinking and smoking. They don't move when Bill and Mike show up, but start talking loudly. Some acknowledge Bill with a nod, which Bill returns, if officially. There are some BASKETBALL PLAYERS hanging back. They stop playing when they see the cops.

Mike pulls out a notebook and pen.

BILL

Janelle, Rone do this?

CHANDRA

Yea.

JANELLE

He been drinking ever since he got out. Smoking some too.

MIKE

(to Chandra) Did you see any of this? Were you together?

BILL

Put that away. (Quietly) You want us to lock him up?

JANELLE

I just want him to stop coming over here. I'm trying to make a life for me and Lil Rone.

MIKE

What does 'make a life' mean to you?

BILL
Shut up. Where's he at now?

CHANDRA
I don't know, ask his homies.

BILL
Imma talk to them right quick.

Bill reaches into his pocket and pulls out a crumpled 20 which he hands to Chandra.

BILL (CONT'D)
Go get you something to eat.
Especially him.

He looks down at LIL RONE.

BILL (CONT'D)
Give me a high-five, Lil Rone.

Lil Rone enthusiastically gives him a high five.

BILL (CONT'D)
I can see it in you Lil Rone,
you're gon' be twice as good. Just
gotta choose the right things.

LIL RONE
Ok, Big Bill.

Bill motions to Mike and begins walking into the projects towards the picnic table full of smack-talkers. The basketball players have stopped. They're leaning against the fence, watching.

MIKE
Shouldn't we take a report?

BILL
On what? She doesn't want to lock
him up. I ain't trying to roll
paper on this bullshit.

MIKE
So, what, we're just gonna let it
go?

BILL
No. We're gonna counsel this
motherfucker.

They walk up to the table. They're met with disdainful looks by the teens.

The youths are led by EGYPT: tall, muscular, and heavily tattooed, with a gold grill. He is flanked by WAYNE, similarly built with an afro and LIL MANE, younger and trying hard to impress his older peers.

BILL (CONT'D)
Egypt. Where's Rone at?

EGYPT
Sup Bill.

LIL MANE
Fuck the police.

MIKE
What? Why?

LIL MAN
Getting away with shooting another nigga.

EGYPT
Nigga shut up, you probably would have lit him up too if you was police!

LIL MAN
Ha yea probably hahaha

EGYPT
'Bout you, Big Bill? You shoot anybody lately?

BILL
Not tonight. Where's Rone?

The three begin sizing up Mike incredulously. Some of the basketball players begin walking towards them.

MIKE
Look, we just want to talk to him.

EGYPT
Who's this boot? You training? You look new. All clean and shit.

LIL MANE
(To Mike) Where you from, homie?
(looks at Mike's name tag) The fuck kind of name is Ll...Ell...

WAYNE
You stupid, nigga. Llewelyn. That's Welsh, right?

(MORE)

WAYNE (CONT'D)

I used to bang this bitch said she was half-Welsh and Mexican...

LIL MANE

You from Welsh?

BILL

You don't need to know where he's from. Where the fuck is Rone?

The BASKETBALL PLAYERS are now there as well. There's now a small crowd forming around the two cops. Lil Mane is emboldened by this.

MIKE

Guys, do me a favor and hang back a little...

LIL MANE

What the fuck you gon' do, cuz, shoot...

Bill thrusts his hand into Lil Man's throat, knocking him to the ground. The BASKETBALL PLAYERS start talking smack.

BILL

I ain't yo' cuz, you punk-ass bitch. (To Egypt) You better teach this little motherfucker. Don't come with that squabble, boy.

He looks at the rest of them, hard. Lil Man starts to get up, but Bill stops him with a stare.

BILL (CONT'D)

Stay the fuck on the ground. (To the others) You know I don't come here to play games.

EGYPT

Chill, Big Bill. Rone up in Janelle's crib.

Bill begins walking towards the projects. Mike follows. The group stares at the two cops with powerless rage, dusting off the embarrassed Lil Man.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY PROJECTS - CONTINUOUS

Bill and Mike are walking down an interior hallway. Janelle's door in a depressing interior hallway.

The look is decidedly institutional with empty 40 ounce bottles and other trash strewn in the corners.

MIKE

That - that back there - is exactly what I'm talking about. You're perpetuating the cycle.

BILL

Just shut the fuck up. Please.

MIKE

In that situation when he was cursing at us, you could have given him one chance and shown some dignity before you had to get hard. That's the difference in success or failure in the long run. Instead you took his dignity from him first. Show respect and they'll think about you differently when we leave for next time.

BILL

I just showed you how you earn respect out here. Fear.

MIKE

And you wonder...

BILL

I wonder why the fuck you took this job.

Bill pounds on the door.

BILL (CONT'D)

Tyrone. Open this fucking door.

TYRONE (O.S.)

Who's that?

BILL

Big Bill. We need to talk real quick.

The door opens. TYRONE is standing in the doorway, a hulk of a man, far bigger than Bill, rippling with prison muscle. He wears an tank top with "221 MOB" tattooed down one of his forearms. His eyes are red. He's smoking a blunt.

TYRONE

So talk then.

BILL
You gonna let us in?

Tyrone stands aside with fake magnanimity. The two men obviously know each other. There's a level of respect beneath the mutual hostility. Mike and Bill enter. Tyrone plops down in a chair and continues smoking.

TYRONE
Well?

BILL
I told you, you can't be hitting Janelle. Especially in front of your son.

TYRONE
Wasn't in front of nobody. I'm trying to see my son. She with some other motherfucker now, won't let me.

BILL
Mm. You working?

TYRONE
Yeah, man, I'm a VP at the bank now. The fuck you think, Big? I'm slingin. Nobody trying to hire me.

BILL
That's a you problem, old son.

MIKE glares at his partner, irritated with his return to insensitivity.

TYRONE
Yo man, fuck you.

BILL
Get your shit. You need to leave.

Tyrone leans forward menacingly, blowing smoke at them and putting his blunt out in a dirty plate.

TYRONE
Or what? This my house. This is MY fucking HOUSE. You trying to tell me what to do in my fucking house, Big?

Mike falls back into a defensive bladed stance, tense. He puts his hands up and attempts to de-escalate.

MIKE

Hey, relax. It's just for tonight
so you guys can cool down.

Tyrone stands up and looks at Mike angrily.

TYRONE

Who are you telling me shit?

Tyrone gets angrier.

TYRONE (CONT'D)

Get the fuck out my house.

BILL

Not playing with you. You ain't
staying here tonight.

Bill grabs his arm. Tyrone pulls away, roughly. Mike glares
at Bill at the sudden shift to physical force.

TYRONE

The fuck off me, man.

Bill is pissed. Mike is tense, ready to step in.

BILL

You want to go to jail? I will
violate your ass right back to the
box. Now GET YOUR SHIT.

MIKE

Look, let's talk about this
downstairs.

Mike reaches for Tyrone's arm. Tyrone pushes Mike who sprawls
to the floor, knocking over a lamp. Bill rushes in to attempt
to subdue Tyrone and the two begin wrestling, with Bill
attempting to retain his pistol. Mike gets up and hesitates,
unsure of what to do.

BILL

Help me cuff this motherfucker!

Mike draws his weapon as the two men continue knocking things
over in the living room. Bill frees his weapon from the
holster, but loses it, sending it spinning across the floor.
Tyrone manages to hit Bill hard and breaks free. Mike looks
horrified and points his weapon at Tyrone. Tyrone stands and
we see the butt of a pistol in his waistband.

BILL (CONT'D)

GUN! WAISTBAND!

TYRONE
Not reaching! Not reaching!

MIKE
ON YOUR KNEES!

TYRONE
I'm not reaching man! Chill!

Tyrone throws his hands up and out to his sides. Mike nervously cocks his pistol, hands shaking.

MIKE
I SAID GET ON YOUR KNEES!

Tyrone cocks his head.

TYRONE
You gonna do something? Huh?

MIKE
Get the fuck down! I will shoot you!

Tyrone shakes his head and takes a step towards Mike as Bill keeps struggling with his stuck sidearm.

TYRONE
Go on. Do it then, you punk-ass motherfucker. I see you shaking. DO IT!

MIKE
I SAID, GET THE FUCK --

Suddenly the door swings open wide and Lil Rone walks in, carrying a Happy Meal, just as Mike squeezes the trigger.

CLICK.

Tyrone and Mike both go pale and the room is suddenly thick with silence. All three men are frozen as the women walk in. Bill immediately holsters his weapon, a look of shame and fear on his face.

Lil Rone spots Bill first.

LIL RONE
Uncle Bill! Are you gonna stay?

BILL
Hey partner... no... We were just...

Lil Rone turns and sees Tyrone.

LIL RONE

Daddy!

Tyrone's countenance softens and he drops down to his knees, hugging his son tight.

LIL RONE (CONT'D)

I missed you.

TYRONE

Missed you too, homie.

Tyrone stands up, holding his kid. As he does, the pistol falls to the floor. It's a toy gun, the barrel clearly painted orange.

We see Bill and Mike's expression.

FADE TO:

INT. POLICE LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Bill and Mike are alone, changing back into civilian clothes, not speaking.

Mike drops the mag from his pistol and clears the chamber. He looks at his gun, the slide locked back.

MIKE

I almost... I mean. I can't believe I wasn't.

BILL

Shut the fuck up about it. Tonight did not happen, you understand me? And don't you EVER go back out on the street without knowing your state of load again.

MIKE

I thought it was hot. I swear I racked before I holstered.

BILL

You thought, you swear...Just don't fuck up again. Tomorrow you're on your own, so like I said, tonight didn't happen.

MIKE

But what if it did?

Bill turns, slamming his fist against a locker door.

BILL

Then what? WHAT? Then you put his ass in a box and you keep a straight face and you thank God you shot first and you get your ass up and you do it again if you have to! And you keep doing it! Every! Day!

MIKE

Doing it? What, shooting people? What the fuck does that mean? It was a fucking toy, man!

BILL

There was no way to know that! You can't ever fucking assume that shit! Not even one time! Ain't no toys out there!

MIKE

Tonight there was! How do you know?

BILL

You didn't know. You don't ever know, but you still squeezed that trigger! The only thing you need to know is "gun." That's it.

MIKE

Do you not realize that we could have killed that guy in front of his kid? That kid called you "uncle Bill," man. How could you live with that?

BILL

Easy. By making sure that I live. That MY kids have their daddy come back home every night.

MIKE

That's surviving, not living.

BILL

It's both. And if you stay smart, you get to do both too. Tomorrow, you're on your own. You want to be safe, you got to be dangerous.

Mike finishes buttoning his shirt in silence. The two men don't even look at each other. Mike closes his locker. He turns to Bill one last time.

MIKE

How about if you want to serve justice, you've got to be just? I know, I know... I'll shut the fuck up. You can choose to become something else, man. That door is always open.

BILL

Whatever, boot. Go home.

Mike walks out.

Bill pulls off his body armor and hangs it. He wears a tank top. He reaches into the back of his locker and pulls out a large faded photograph that has been taped there. We see that Bill has a tattoo on his forearm that says "221 MOB."

Bill sits down. He looks at the photo. We see that it is a much younger Bill and Tyrone sitting at the picnic table at Poe Homes. He flips it over. There's writing on the back.

TYRONE (V.O.)

Big bill. This to remind you of where you from now that you on the other side. I read this when I was in lockup and I always think of it. "I am not what happened to me. I am what I choose to become." That's deep right? Real shit. Tyrone.

Bill sits for a moment, staring at the photograph, and then puts his face in his hands and begins to cry silently.

FADE TO BLACK.

END.