

ROGUE RHYTHM.

EP. I - RUNAWAY

CIARA CRUDER.

INT. KIKO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A bedroom door bursts opens and **KIKO** rushes into the kitchen carrying a large backpack. She hoists it onto a table and rushes over behind the counter. She yanks open a drawer and shifts through its contents. She pulls out a flashlight and cracks it open to check for batteries.

KIKO  
(hisses)

**AMARI!** Are you ready?

Amari enters the kitchen. She is walking slow and somber. She leans against the wall and stares at the floor.

KIKO  
Do you have your knife?

Amari slowly nods her head, still staring at the floor.

KIKO  
I packed the essentials.  
They'll last you a week.

Silence. Kiko studies Amari's blank face. She sets the flashlight on the counter then walks over to her and grabs her shoulders.

KIKO  
Baby, look at me. Look.  
I know you're scared. I'm  
scared too, baby.

AMARI  
This was my idea. I don't  
understand why I'm so-

KIKO  
(cutting her off)  
Cold feet, baby. Cold feet.

Kiko turns and grabs the backpack and hands it to Amari. She watches her reluctantly put it on her back.

KIKO  
Please be safe. I wouldn't

be able to live with myself  
if something happened to you.  
Watch your back. Stay alive.

Amari nods somberly. She finally looks up into Kiko's eyes and sighs deeply.

AMARI

I'll miss you.

KIKO

I'll miss you too, baby.

Amari turns and slowly walks towards the doorway.

KIKO

Amari?

AMARI

Yes, mom?

KIKO

Thank you.

Silence. Amari back tracks and stands in front of Kiko. She holds up two fingers, kisses her fingertips, and touches Kiko's forehead. Kiko does the same to Amari.

AMARI

Dwayne will be checking on  
you.

KIKO

(surprised)

He knows?

AMARI

Of course. He didn't take it  
too well at first, but he'll  
be cool. He wants to help.

KIKO

Help with what?

Kiko already knows the answer, but looks innocent enough. Amari gives her a look. She's not buying it.

KIKO  
 (slightly offended)  
 I'm a grown woman, Amari.

AMARI  
 He's not a babysitter, mom.  
 Just a friend.

Amari glances over at a large clock on the wall and pulls her hood over her head.

AMARI  
 I have to go now.

Amari lovingly grabs Kiko's hand and looks into her eyes.

AMARI  
 Give me a week to find a  
 way to send you a message  
 that I'm safe in The Valley,  
 ok? Once I get the money, I  
 will do whatever it takes to  
 come back home. While I'm gone,  
 I need you to do whatever it  
 takes to stay sober.

Kiko's eyes tear up and she looks away from Amari's hard look. Amari squeezes Kiko's hand and leaves the kitchen. From the other room, the sound of a door opens then closes.

Kiko holds back tears as she paces back and forth in the kitchen. She grabs the flashlight and stuffs it back in the drawer. She hunches over the counter and looks up at the bottle of rum on top of the refrigerator. She cries.

\*\*CUE SONG "WANNA LIVE" BY MARK BATTLES\*\*

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD, THE HILLS - NIGHT

It's a still night. Amari swiftly sneaks from street to street, hiding in the shadows of buildings and cars and avoiding all streetlights. She stops every few feet to look around. When she feels safe, she keeps moving.

EXT. LOCKWELL STREET, THE HILLS - NIGHT

Amari's foot kicks a rock and it skips along the sidewalk and dings against a metal pole. She freezes. Her head whips around at the sound of faint voices behind her.

A group of men appear around a corner. They are talking loudly and laughing as they walk in Amari's direction. She ducks into a nearby alley and presses up against the wall. The heavy backpack arches her back uncomfortably. Her breathing is heavy. One of her hands slides to her back pocket to grip her knife. She waits in the dark.

GUY 1

Who tryna get some Backwoods?  
I'll pay you back, swear.

GUY 2

Pay us back with what? You  
ain't got no type of money,  
bruh.

GUY 3

He spends it all on his girl!  
You need to start takin' her  
to McDonald's. Ain't nothin'  
wrong with that dollar menu.

They walk past the alley laughing.

Amari lets out a sign of relief. False alarm. She peeks around the corner and hurries down the street.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE HILLS - NIGHT

Amari stops at the end of the sidewalk. She looks behind her at the lights up in the Hills. They look so small in the distance. She shifts her backpack and walks forward onto a dirt path. She struggles to maneuver around tall weeds and shrubs. A bush snags the bottom of her pants and as she yanks it free, a piece of her pants tears off. Amari frowns and touches the frayed end of her pants. Great.

She continues walking and gazes up at the full moon.

AMARI (V.O.)

What a beautiful night to die.  
It seems like the closer I get,  
the less scared I am of death.

Weird.

(Pause)

If I do die though, I can only blame myself. This was my crazy idea. My stupid death wish. Can't even point fingers when shit hits the fan, either. They told me I would fail. But they also told me a bunch of other bullshit too.

Amari looks over her shoulder again at the faint lights in the Hills. She tugs at a dog tag hanging from her neck.

AMARI (V.O.)

I should've known better when they told me time would heal my pain. It's been 6 years and the pain just keeps getting stronger. Time will never heal me. Because time can't bring him back.

\*\*CUE SONG: "SYMPHONY FOR SILENCE" BY DEVALOOP\*\*

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. KIKO'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (6 YEARS AGO)

Amari is sitting on the floor in front of a television. On the screen, a woman news reporter is speaking:

"Breaking news in East Territory today. A man was found dead early this morning on North Freeman Ave. around 3 AM. He was shot 5 times, with two of those shots in the head. There were no reported witnesses to this shooting and first responders said that his body was laying in the street for hours before they arrived..."

CUT TO:

A male news reporter speaks on the screen:

"The victim of the deadly shooting has been identified as **OSCAR MARTIN**, a local artist that was well known throughout the Territory. Those that knew him say he was a loving father..."

CUT TO:

A different female reporter speaks:

"New information on the murder of Oscar Martin has been released today when a chain of emails were leaked from E.T.U.'s database. The emails were a conversation between Officer Brian Yates, a 5-year veteran, and Lieutenant Cameron Marshall, and one of those emails reveals officer Yates admitting that he was the one that shot Oscar Martin because he thought he looked suspicious..."

CUT TO:

A different male reporter speaks:

"Tensions are at an all time high with E.T.U. under fire for the murder of an innocent man..."

CUT TO:

A different female reporter speaks:

"The saddest part of all of this chaos is that this young girl, Amari Martin, will now have to grow up without her father..."

BACK TO PRESENT

Amari pulls her hood off her head.

AMARI (V.O.)

This whole thing isn't about me.  
It never was. It's about her.  
I'm doing this shit for her. She  
knows we need this. And she knows  
she needs to stay sober. She  
doesn't get to just drink her  
pain away. Not when she knows I  
need her.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. KIKO'S HOUSE - NIGHT (3 YEARS AGO)

Kiko is wildly kicking her mailbox while tightly holding a bottle of rum.

KIKO  
 (drunkenly yelling)  
 Who told this thing to eat my  
 mail? HUH?! What the HELL is  
 its problem, HUH?!

One of her kicks misses the mailbox, and she stumbles around. She takes a sip from the bottle and resumes kicking. Amari runs from the house and grabs Kiko's arm.

AMARI  
 Mom, come inside.

KIKO  
 I d-don't wanna go in there!!  
 (yanks arm away) You can't  
 make me! I don't wanna-

AMARI  
 (pleading)  
 Mom, please! (grabs Kiko's arm)  
 You're drunk, you need to come  
 inside right now.

Kiko takes a dramatic swig from the bottle.

KIKO  
 I'm f-fine, baby. I say, you  
 see, I-I'm fine! Like, like  
 a...like...shit, I don't know.

AMARI  
 Mom, please. Just come inside  
 so you can lay down.

Amari pulls on Kiko's arm leading her towards the house.

KIKO  
 I d-don't have a p-problem.  
 (screams) I'M FINE! I love-

Kiko suddenly passes out, pulling Amari down to the ground. Amari crawls to Kiko and frantically shakes her.

AMARI

Mom! Mom! MOM! Wake up!  
(shakes more aggressively)  
Mom! Can you hear me? Mom?  
(begins to cry) Mom!  
(desperately looks around)  
Help! Somebody help us!  
Please! You can't leave me  
too! Please! Please!

BACK TO PRESENT

Amari adjusts the backpack. The weight is starting to slow her down.

AMARI (V.O.)

The world can be so cruel.  
Day after day it beats you  
down and has the nerve to  
tell you to get back up to  
take another beating. And  
with every punch, you're  
supposed to keep smiling.  
To act like you're not  
losing teeth and gushing  
blood. Because it will all  
work out in the end. Bull-  
shit. I'm sick of getting  
my ass beat. I'm sick of not  
being in control. This world  
will take everything away  
from me 'til I'm nothing. So  
I need to protect the little  
I have left.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE VALLEY - CRACK OF DAWN

Amari stops in front of a rusted chain-linked fence. She looks left and right. It stretches far on both ends. She takes off her backpack and grunts as she heaves it over the fence. She climbs up to the top and drops down on the other side. She picks up her backpack and looks around. All clear. She pulls her hood back over her head and continues up the path. Birds are chirping.

EXT. SUNSET STREET, THE VALLEY - CRACK OF DAWN

The sky is starting to lighten as sunrise begins. Amari slowly walks down the street. She's nervous and constantly looks over her shoulder. Something is off, but she can't put her finger on it.

Amari stops in front of a building. It's a small store. The signs says: "RIOT RECORDS". She's curious. She steps closer to the window. Vinyl records and CD cases sit in stacks on top of wooden shelves. She grins.

She jolts back to high alert when a nearby streetlight suddenly shuts off. She continues walking with caution, staying close to the buildings. Her hand brushes against every wall, window, and pole she walks by. She stops at a corner and looks around. The streets are still silent, but for how much longer?

A small dog is digging through a trash bag on the sidewalk. It looks up at Amari, then goes back to digging. Amari takes a few steps closer and squats down. The dog looks at her again, then goes back to digging. Amari carefully holds out her hand near the dog's face. The dog sniffs and licks it. She pets the dog's head and it wags its tail.

AMARI

Aw, you poor thing. Out here digging in the trash.

Amari grabs the dog's collar and searches for a tag but can't find one.

AMARI

Well, someone loves you enough to put a collar on you, so I won't take you. Can't afford you anyways.

Amari rubs the dog's back and it rolls over. She rubs its stomach and scratches it's ear. Then suddenly, the dog jolts to its feet and runs away.

AMARI

(calls after it)  
Hey, where are you going?

**SOME GUY**

I should be asking you the

same thing.

Amari stands up and whips around. Some Guy walks up and stands in right front of her. Amari flinches as he yanks her hood off her head. He eyes her suspiciously through his dreadlocks. He raises his shirt and shows a gun tucked in the waistband of his boxers. He cocks his head to the side and leans forward.

SOME GUY

Now you know what's up. So let's try again. What are you doing here?

Amari opens her mouth, but no words. She stares at the gun.

SOME GUY

What's the matter? You scared?

AMARI

(softly)

Is the g-gun really necessary?

SOME GUY

It's always necessary, girl. And you not lookin' too familiar right now.

AMARI

I-I don't get out much.

SOME GUY

You know you breakin' curfew right now?

Curfew?

AMARI

I-I know, it's just that-

SOME GUY

What's that big ass bag for?

AMARI

My, uh, my mom. She, uh, kicked me out. Said I was actin' too grown. Thought

she would teach me a lesson.

SOME GUY  
(thinks)  
Where ya mama stay?

AMARI  
Uh, um, on C-Crenshaw Dr.

Some Guy skeptically looks Amari up and down. With his free hand, he points at the left side of her body.

SOME GUY  
Let me see ya Black Star mark.

Shit. She didn't want it to come to this. Amari takes a deep breath. She slowly gathers the bottom of her shirt in her one hand while reaching for her back pocket with the other. As she slowly starts to lift her shirt, she tightly grips her knife.

The small dog returns and puts its front paws on the back of Some Guy's leg. It barks and wags its tail, oblivious to the danger.

SOME GUY  
What the hell? Get off me!  
(jerks his leg away)

The dog barks again and sits in between Amari and Some Guy.

SOME GUY  
(yells at the dog)  
Get out of here!

The dog remains and wags its tail.

SOME GUY  
Alright, fine. You can die.

Some Guy takes out his gun and points it at the dog's face.

AMARI  
No! Please, don't!

Amari quickly scoops up the small dog and shields its face. She's desperate. She won't be handle to seeing a dog die.

SOME GUY

Is this your dog or somethin'?

AMARI

No, but that doesn't mean  
it should die. Come on,  
it deserves to live just  
like you and me.

Some Guy points the gun at Amari, who stands defiantly still. He then lowers his gun and pushes his dreadlocks away from his face.

SOME GUY

What's ya name again?

AMARI

(hesitates)

Amari-

SOME GUY

And where did you say ya  
mama stay?

AMARI

Uh, Crenshaw Dr.

Some Guy thinks for a second, then puts his gun back in his pants.

\*\*CUE SONG: "UNDER CONTROL" BY THE INTERNET\*\*

SOME GUY

I'll be watching you, Amari.  
Don't let me catch you out  
breakin' curfew again. Or  
that ass is mine.

Some Guy shoves his shoulder against Amari's as he walks past her. He vanishes behind a corner.

Amari briefly closes her eyes. She's alive. She bends over and sets the dog on the ground. It runs over to the same trash bag and continues its previous digging.

Still shaken up, Amari watches the dog dig through the trash. She suddenly picks up a tattered newspaper ad. It's covered with apartment listings. One listing is circled: "CHEAP ROOM FOR RENT. BATHROOM INCLUDED. CRENSHAW DR." Amari looks up from the ad. Cars are passing by on the street and people are out walking. Amari glances at her wristwatch. 7 AM. The curfew must be over.

Amari adjusts her backpack and picks up the dog. Still clutching the ad, she starts walking down the street.

AMARI

(to the dog)

You saved my life, you know  
that? If that guy would've  
seen that my mark wasn't  
Black Star...  
I am in debt to you.

The dog licks her face, as if he knows. Amari smiles.

AMARI

(to the dog)

You know, my dad used to take  
me on Crenshaw Dr. a lot  
before the split. And before  
he died. (sighs) It seems like  
time won't let me forget the  
past no matter what I do.

Amari continues to walk down the street. The sun begins to rise.

FADE OUT.