

"ALWAYS PLAY SOME BLUES"

Original Screenplay by

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EXT. GLENOAKS, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Smog rises from suburban sprawl - rows of stucco homes, identical but for their diverse geometric garage door trims.

SUPER: Glenoaks, California - August, 1966

A view of picture-perfect, single story Glenoaks High School.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

Well, here's my story - I graduated Glenoaks High in 1967, the Summer of Love. Sounds cool, right? Well, I didn't smoke pot or drop acid and I didn't like psychedelic music. I was a nerd and a half. I did my homework in the school library before I went home. The librarians were very helpful.

Just beyond is the town landmark: a rock cliff, embossed with the town insignia - a white letter "G" inside a white circle.

At the top of the cliff is a grassy field. Behind scattered trees is a dirt parking lot and an old water tower.

Carved on a tree trunk just above eye level reads:  
K.K.K. L.A. 1957 A.T.R.

INT. NICHOLLS HOUSE - DAY

A teenage boy's bedroom, with low-budget furnishings and a single bed. A turntable plays an instrumental SURF SONG.

DENNIS NICHOLLS, 17, plays along on his unamplified electric guitar.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

I wanted to be a guitarist, but not like The Beatles or The Rolling Stones. I wanted to be a surf guitarist, like Dick Dale and The Surfaris.

Dennis puts his guitar down as the song ends. He picks up one of the two windbreakers from his bed. He cuts the lining with scissors to make interior pockets.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

My clean cut facade concealed my juvenile pranks. Actually, I was the mastermind behind them.

EXT. NELSON'S DRUG STORE ALLEYWAY - DAY

VINCE ROMAN, 17, owns his masculinity, smoking hot in a tight T-shirt and clean, new jeans.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

There was Vince, the muscle, who had the coolest haircut and tightest arms at Glenoaks High. Vince thought I was a genius when I kept correcting our science teacher and made him look like a fool. Vince excelled at fist-fighting and was the sharpest dresser in school.

Vince shadow-boxes the air.

BOBBY JORDAN, 18, wears ripped jeans, stained T-shirt and tattered old sneakers. He smokes and spits nearby.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

And Bobby, the slob. Vince hated Bobby as much as he liked me. But with Bobby, that was easy.

VINCE

There's that Bobby stink, again. You shower weekly or monthly these days?

BOBBY

You want me to shower every day?

VINCE

One hour a day, with heavy duty detergent and a scrub brush.

Bobby blows his nose on his T-shirt.

VINCE

Uck, even pigs don't do that!

BOBBY

Pigs don't wear T-shirts.

VINCE

You do!

Dennis approaches, wearing a windbreaker and carrying another. He tosses it to Vince, who puts it on and examines the inner pocket.

VINCE

Nice! A toaster can fit in here.

DENNIS  
Don't need one.

All three stare down the alley as Dennis' kid brother MIKEY NICHOLLS, 11 - approaches. Dennis looks at Vince's watch.

DENNIS  
Thanks for being late again, Mikey.

MIKEY  
That's okay!

Dennis rolls his eyes.

DENNIS  
C'mere.

Mikey comes close. Dennis pulls a small plastic bag filled with pennies, dimes and nickels out of his windbreaker and holds it up.

DENNIS  
Hey Vince, check this out.

Dennis empties the bag into Mikey's pockets.

DENNIS  
Mikey, when the cashier asks you for money, empty your left pocket first. Now remember -

MIKEY  
Can I get a Snicker Bar?

DENNIS  
If I see you looking at us, you're not gonna get anything! Vince and I go in first, then Bobby. When the door closes, you count to twenty. One-Mississippi, two-Mississippi -

Mikey nods.

DENNIS  
Then come in and go to the cashier.

INT. NELSON'S DRUG STORE - DAY

The CASHIER, a middle-aged woman behind the counter smoking a cigarette, sees Mikey come in and looks up from the tabloid magazine she's reading.

Bobby flips through a comic book rack nearby.

In the back of the store, Dennis and Vince stuff candy bars, golf ball packs and other items into their windbreakers.

A bell above the door RINGS. Mikey strides in. He goes to the counter and hands the cashier a note. She studies it.

MIKEY

My mom said to get two packs.

CASHIER

You tell your mother this is the last time! From now on she has to come in herself. Fifty cents.

Mikey empties his pockets onto the counter. Coins and junk spill everywhere. The cashier angrily sorts the change.

Dennis and Vince signal Bobby with a look.

BOBBY

Excuse me, ma'am? Can you tell me when the...uh...the new issue of Fantastic Floor is...uh, out yet?

With the cigarette still in her mouth -

CASHIER

If it's not on the rack, we don't have it!

Dennis and Vince sneak toward the exit. The cashier starts to turn their way when -

BOBBY

Wait! It's supposed to be out today. Are you sure?

The Cashier turns to Bobby.

CASHIER

Whad'ya mean "Am I sure?" Of course I'm sure! I work here, don't I?

The bell above the door RINGS as Dennis and Vince make their escape, unseen.

EXT. NELSON'S DRUG STORE ALLEYWAY - DAY

Mikey tags along behind the older boys.

MIKEY

Can I have my Snicker Bar now?

BOBBY

We didn't get any Snicker Bars.

MIKEY

That's not fair! You said -

BOBBY

Gimme those smokes.

Mikey obediently hands over two packs of cigarettes.

MIKEY

I didn't look at you guys one time!

BOBBY

Check it out you guys, a  
flamethrower!

Bobby flicks a Zippo lighter in front of a can of hair spray. A bluish flame spits out from the nozzle, singeing the back of Mikey's hair. He SCREECHES, causing a dog to BARK in a distant yard. Mikey rubs his head and starts to cry.

DENNIS

C'mon, don't be such a baby.

MIKEY

But he burned my hair!

BOBBY

Now you don't need a haircut.

Mikey timidly gives Bobby the middle finger. Bobby stops dead in his tracks and stares sternly.

BOBBY

Uh-Oh! Now you did it! That's the most insulting thing you can do to a person. Now I have to burn your wiener off. That's the law! Grab him, men!

Vince and Dennis grab Mikey's arms and legs as he squirms. Bobby moves in, aiming the spray can torch at Mikey's crotch.

BOBBY

Don't worry, kid, this is gonna hurt you a lot more than it's gonna hurt me, I promise.

Bobby ignites the torch, Mikey SCREECHES again. Dennis and Vince drop Mikey on his rear-end. He jumps up and bolts away, blubbering.

MIKEY

I'm tellin' Mom! I am!

The older boys catch up to him. Bobby teasingly rubs Mikey's head and he flinches.

DENNIS

Give him his damn Snicker bar. He earned it.

Vince hands him the candy bar. Mikey looks up at Dennis.

MIKEY

I didn't look at you guys one time!

DENNIS

You did good, Mikey.

EXT. BOBBY'S BACKYARD - DAY

A transistor radio plays a muffled song. Dennis sits on an old car seat, fingering his unamplified electric guitar, mimicking the song.

The backyard is filled with rusted appliances, auto parts and overgrown weeds.

Bobby tosses a golf ball in the air and swings at it with a baseball bat - THWACK! A pop fly disappears behind a tree a few houses away.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S BACKYARD - CONT.

The golf ball THUDS on the grass and bounces into an old dog's water dish. Chin resting on its paws, it lifts its head, SNIFFS, and then lays its head back down.

EXT. BOBBY'S BACKYARD - CONT.

BOBBY

Why do you always have that dumb guitar with you? You look like one of those hippy dippy freaks.

DENNIS

Check this out, I wrote a protest song!

(sings and plays)

*"Life used to be fun,  
And now we ain't got none.*

DENNIS (CONT'D)

*Go to school, get a job,  
Work 'til you retire,  
Watch TV, drink some beer,  
Then get sick and die!  
That'll be your future,  
When you go to Glenoaks High!"*

BOBBY

(sports announcer voice)  
Ladies and gentlemen, Killebrew  
steps up to the plate!

Bobby tosses up another golf ball and connects with a WHACK!

BOBBY

A way back! And this ball is  
fuckin' outta here! Another  
towering home run by Harmon  
Killebrew, ladies and gentlemen!  
(fakes audience cheering)  
Hey Dennis, you wanna hit a few?

DENNIS

Nah. I'd rather do something  
stupendulous.

BOBBY

What the hell does that mean?

Bobby CRACKS a line drive that RIPS through the branches of a  
tree and disappears. In the distance, a window SHATTERS.

Dennis looks up to see Bobby's older sister ROXIE, 19,  
trashy-cute, coming out the back door. Dennis puts down his  
guitar and hops on a rusty old washing machine. He awkwardly  
brushes the hair off his forehead and takes off his glasses.

Roxie sashays by in tight shorts, make-up, teased hair, and a  
revealing top.

DENNIS

Hi, Roxie.

Roxie strolls past, ignoring him.

ROXIE

Did you steal my cigarettes, Bobby?  
I had a pack sitting on -

BOBBY

They're in my pocket.

ROXIE

Well, let me have 'em.

Bobby ignores her.

ROXIE  
Gimme my cigarettes!

She reaches for the cigarette pack in Bobby's shirt pocket and he pushes her hand away.

BOBBY  
Keep your hands off me, Rah-bur-ta.

ROXIE  
Well, give'em here!

Bobby throws Roxie the pack. It bounces off her and falls on the ground. Dennis eyes her as she bends over to retrieve it.

ROXIE  
Why don't you grow up and quit being such an asshole, Bobby?

BOBBY  
(loud)  
I'm an asshole and I'm proud!

Vince enters through the backyard gate.

VINCE  
You should be, you're good at it.

Roxie passes Vince.

VINCE  
Someone smells nice.

She gives Vince a half smile. Vince strides over. Dennis hops off the washing machine.

VINCE  
Hey, did you guys hear what happened to Phil Gleason, man?

DENNIS  
Who's Phil Gleason?

BOBBY  
No, what happened?

VINCE  
Some niggers jumped him over in Booger Town and beat the crap out of him. Todd Duncan told me.

DENNIS

Does he live by the park?

BOBBY

Who cares where he lives? He got jumped! We oughta do something.

VINCE

My brother says if you let them get away with that shit, they'll take over. Then the neighborhood's ruined. Drugs and crime everywhere.

BOBBY

How about if we -

VINCE

Leave that to Dennis, he's the brains.

BOBBY

If he's the brains, and you're the muscle, what am I?

Bobby blows his nose on his T-shirt.

VINCE

I don't know, human snot-rag?

DENNIS

What if I draw a dopey Negro face on the school auditorium?

VINCE

No way, man. You're a good drawer, but this is for real. We gotta open a can o' kick-ass.

DENNIS

You think Tony would loan us that old Dodge?

VINCE

I know he don't like niggers.

BOBBY

I heard there's gonna be one at our school this year.

DENNIS

Nah, not in our school.

VINCE  
 If there is, I'm gonna Rocky  
 Marciano his Joe Louis ass.

Vince shadow boxes the air.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (DRIVING) - NIGHT

The old Dodge cruises along the streets of downtown BAUERTON, a neighboring town with a mostly black population and a mix of dilapidated old shops and two-story apartment buildings.

Dennis drives. Vince rides shotgun. TODD DUNCAN, 17, white, blond and hefty, sits in back with Bobby. Tense silence, juxtaposed with a cheerful JINGLE on the car radio.

SERIES OF SHOTS - DOWNTOWN BAUERTON - SAME

A YOUNG BLACK MOTHER pushes a baby carriage accompanied by a YOUNG BLACK FATHER holding a CHILD's hand.

TWO ELDERLY BLACK MEN sit in front of a boarded up SHOE REPAIR SHOP.

A CLOSED SIGN in the window of a BARBER SHOP.

FOUR YOUNG BLACK MEN drink sodas at a HAMBURGER STAND.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (DRIVING) - CONT.

TODD  
 What about those guys?

Todd gestures to the four young black men.

VINCE  
 It's a fair fight, four on four.

BOBBY  
 No way! Same odds Bill Gleason got.  
 Four against one!

VINCE  
 Who told you that!? And it's Phil,  
 not Bill.

Vince looks out the passenger window and targets a LONE BLACK MAN with a conk hairstyle.

VINCE  
 Slow down. There's a good one.

The Dodge slowly creeps towards the lone black man.

VINCE

Pull over. When the car stops,  
Bobby, Todd and me out, do him  
quick and get back in the car.

Dennis pulls over. The boys jump out and chase the lone black man, who runs for his life with the boys close behind.

Dennis' attention is drawn to a golden GUITAR in the display window of a closed MUSIC SHOP up the street and he slowly pulls up to it.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (PARKED) - NIGHT

As Dennis gazes at the music shop window, he hears FOOTSTEPS from behind the Dodge. Dennis turns to see the lone black man running up to the car, imploring him for help. Dennis shakes his head "no". The lone man runs off. Dennis watches him disappear around a corner.

Vince, Bobby and Todd run up to the car and pile in.

VINCE

Where did he go?! Did you see him?

DENNIS

No.

VINCE

Let's get out of here!

Dennis starts the engine and drives off.

BOBBY

I think I got one hit in.

VINCE

Bullshit! Non of us got even close.  
He must be a running back.

BOBBY

I thought I did.

VINCE

Well you didn't--God-damn, you piss  
me off.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE - (DRIVING) - LATER

Dennis turns on the radio and a POP SONG comes on. A red light flashes in the rear view mirror.

DENNIS

Damn! The cops.

Dennis turns off the radio and pulls over.

VINCE

Everybody stay cool!

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (PARKED) - CONT.

FOOTSTEPS. OFFICER TERRY, mid 40's, an upright, no-nonsense black policeman, approaches.

OFFICER TERRY

What are you boys up to tonight?

BOBBY (O.S.)

Did we do something wrong, Officer?

Officer Terry shines his flashlight into the back seat.

OFFICER TERRY

I don't know. What were you doing?

DENNIS

We're just out driving, sir.

OFFICER TERRY

Let's see your license.

Dennis gets out his wallet and offers his learner's permit.

OFFICER TERRY

That isn't a driver's license. Any body else have a license?

Nobody responds.

OFFICER TERRY

Step out with the registration.

Vince hands Dennis the registration from the glove box and Dennis gets out. Blinded by the headlights from the cop car, Dennis hands Officer Terry the registration.

OFFICER TERRY

You know you need to have a licensed driver in the car, right?

DENNIS  
I forgot, sir.

OFFICER TERRY  
You're facing trouble here, son.

Officer Terry studies the young man carefully.

OFFICER TERRY  
What's that in your pocket?

DENNIS  
Guitar strings sir.

OFFICER TERRY  
May I see them?

Dennis hands them over.

DENNIS  
I play a little surf guitar.

OFFICER TERRY  
Oh, like The Beach Boys.

DENNIS  
No, uh, like Dick Dale and The  
Surfaris.

OFFICER TERRY  
You attend Glenoaks High?

DENNIS  
Yes, sir. We start back next week.

OFFICER TERRY  
Some of those Glenoaks kids like to  
come to Bauerton to buy reefer.

DENNIS  
No sir, not us. We're not hippies.

Officer Terry appraises Dennis, who stands at attention.

OFFICER TERRY  
Is it going to be a problem if we  
get your parents involved?

DENNIS  
My Dad would be disappointed in me.

Officer Terry thinks for a moment, then hands Dennis his  
registration and permit.

OFFICER TERRY

I want you to take this car right back where it belongs and park it. No sight-seein', no stoppin' for sodas, no nothin'. Is that clear?

Dennis relaxes his posture.

DENNIS

Yes, sir. Perfectly clear.

OFFICER TERRY

Next time I stop you without a licensed driver, you're gonna have a world of sorry to deal with.

DENNIS

Thank you, sir, but that's not going to happen.

Dennis gets back in the Dodge.

INT. OLD DODGE (DRIVING) - LATER

Dennis focuses on the road, both hands on the wheel.

BOBBY

Dumb ass nigger cop! What's with all that sir, yes sir shit?

DENNIS

All those yes sirs is the reason we're not on our way to jail.

VINCE

Dennis, remember that dopey-looking Negro face you were talking about? Could you do a drawing for me?

DENNIS

Yeah, I guess I could.

EXT. BAUERTON STREET CORNER - NIGHT

Officer Terry, leaning against his patrol car, takes notes in his police log as the agitated Lone Black Man with a conk tells his story.

EXT. TERRY HOUSE - DAY

The TERRY FAMILY - Officer Terry, his wife and teenage daughter - carry boxes from a Glenoaks moving van into their new suburban home.

EXT. BOBBY'S BACKYARD - DAY

A radio plays muffled ROCK-N-ROLL. Vince lays on a weight bench pumping a dumbbell with one arm. Bobby, smoking a cigarette, counts Vince's reps.

BOBBY

Twenty, twenty one -

Bobby stops counting to blow his nose on his T-shirt. Vince drops the weight on the ground with a THUD.

BOBBY

I can't help it. I got a cold!

VINCE

You know what? From now on you stay three feet away from me at all times. When you get too close, my clothes stink the rest of the day.

Dennis enters with a drawing of a black minstrel's face.

DENNIS

What do you think of this?

Vince takes the drawing from Dennis and studies it. They all snicker at the racial stereotype.

BOBBY

Yeah, that's exactly how they look.

VINCE

I'm gonna show this to Tony. He might want it painted on the cliff for everyone in Glenoaks to see.

INT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/HALLWAY - DAY

White STUDENTS chatter on their first day back to class.

BRENDA TERRY, 17, the first and only black student at Glenoaks High - pretty, vivacious and well-dressed - walks among them confidently with good posture, holding a book.

Dennis rounds a hallway corner, shouting over his shoulder -

DENNIS

Yeah, my summer was a blast!

Dennis bumps into Brenda, knocking the book out of her hand.

BRENDA

Sorry.

He picks up her book and hands it to her, momentarily taken aback.

DENNIS

Oh, it was my fault.

With a snooty tone -

BRENDA

Maybe you should watch where you're going then, don't you think?

Scowling, Brenda turns to leave. A few steps down the hall, she looks at Dennis over her shoulder, her scowl turning into a warm smile. She waves goodbye with a wink. Dennis' eyes follow her down the hall.

A bell RINGS. Sprightly MUZAK on the P.A. system signals classes are changing. Bobby approaches.

BOBBY

Have you seen her?!

DENNIS

I just bumped into her.

BOBBY

See? I told ya one was coming!

DENNIS

I never thought it would be a girl.

INT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/CAFETERIA - DAY

Dennis sits at a table, watching Brenda at nearby table. Brenda sits across from LINDA, JEANIE and MARGARET, three high school seniors with teased hair, who ignore her.

LINDA

I have Mr. Wagner for Social Studies. Who do you have Jeanie?

JEANIE

Mr. Seibert. He's such a creep.

MARGARET  
I'm taking drama with Mr.  
Premerini.

Brenda smiles at Margaret, attempting to break the ice.

BRENDA  
Me too!

Margaret smiles back. The other girls give Margaret a look.

BRENDA  
(to Margaret)  
That's a very pretty ring.

Linda leans behind Jeanie's back and whispers to Margaret.

LINDA  
What did she say?

MARGARET  
She likes my ring.

JEANIE  
You better keep it on your finger!

MARGARET  
Where else would I keep it?!

Dennis watches as Brenda picks up her lunch tray and leaves.

EXT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Two rows of MALE STUDENTS in blue gym shorts and white T-shirts do jumping-jacks, led by their COACH. Dennis is a row in front of Bobby and Vince.

COACH  
Six - two - three - four...  
Seven - two - three - four...

BOBBY  
(loud whisper)  
PSSST! Your hangers!

Dennis looks down to see his boxer shorts exposed below his gym shorts. He quickly stuffs them in, out of view.

COACH  
Ten - two - three - four...

They stop jumping.

COACH

Okay, shake it out! Nicholls!

Dennis looks up at the coach.

COACH

Didn't we have this problem last year? No - boxers - in - class!

DENNIS

Sorry Coach, I forgot to bring my jockey shorts.

COACH

How about this? Take you and your sorry boxers over to the track and give me five laps.

EXT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/RUNNING TRACK - CONT.

Dennis casually jogs his first lap.

The center of the track is filled with FEMALE STUDENTS wearing red gym uniforms, engaged in athletic activities.

Brenda, sets up hurdles off by herself. As Dennis approaches her, she waves. He jumps over a hurdle.

BRENDA

Nice form, Dennis!

DENNIS

How do you know my name?

BRENDA

I probably shouldn't be telling you this but... we can read minds. It's an African thing.

Dennis looks confused.

DENNIS

Oh...

Brenda touches her temples.

BRENDA

For instance, right now you're thinking, "Hey, wait a minute!"

DENNIS

Actually, it was, "No they can't!"

They laugh.

BASKETBALL COURT - SAME

Vince and Bobby glare at Dennis and Brenda laughing.  
Vince is anxious.

RUNNING TRACK - CONT.

BRENDA

I think you made a good impression  
on my father.

DENNIS

Your father?

BRENDA

Officer Ralph Terry.

DENNIS

Really? Well, I guess he made a  
good impression on me too.

BRENDA

He said I should invite you to our  
house for dinner.

DENNIS

He did?

BRENDA

He's concerned about me making  
friends. You know how parents are.  
My daddy's a great guitar player.  
He told me you play, too.

DENNIS

Really? He mentioned that?

BRENDA

He wants to show you his guitar. My  
locker is number 329. Just drop a  
note with your phone number in it  
if you want to come for a visit.

(beat)

You don't have to feel bad if you'd  
rather not. Really, I understand.

She turns to leave, then turns back to say -

BRENDA

My friends call me Brenda.

Brenda confidently walks away while a few of the girls stare and gossip. Dennis watches her leave.

DENNIS  
(to himself)  
Nice to meet you, Brenda.

INT. NICHOLLS HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

MRS. NICHOLLS, mid-40's, in a simple dress and apron, clears the table. Mikey helps. MR. NICHOLLS, in his maintenance work outfit, sits with his coffee and cigarette, reading a paper.

Dennis hangs up the kitchen wall phone.

DENNIS  
Dad? I'm invited for dinner Friday to someone's house. If you give me a ride over, they said they'll give me a ride back. They live over by the golf course.

MR. NICHOLLS  
Whose house for dinner?

DENNIS  
Just this girl from school.

MRS. NICHOLLS  
What's her name? Tell us about her.

Dennis, wanting to avoid their questioning, lets out a sigh.

DENNIS  
Her name's Brenda.

MR. NICHOLLS  
She good lookin'?

MRS. NICHOLLS  
Carl!  
(to Dennis)  
So what's she like? She's a nice girl?

DENNIS  
It doesn't matter!

Dennis gives an anguished look to his perplexed family.

MRS. NICHOLLS  
Well tell us a little about her.

DENNIS  
(exasperated)  
She's colored, okay?

MR. NICHOLLS  
You mean she's a Negro?

MRS. NICHOLLS  
I heard the school has a Negro  
student this year.

DENNIS  
So can you give me a ride or not?

MR. NICHOLLS  
I don't think it's a good idea to  
get too friendly with them.

EXT. TERRY HOUSE - NIGHT

Officer Terry is cleaning some graffiti off the side of his house with rags. He watches as Dennis parks at the curb. Dennis gets out of the car. Mr. Nicholls slides to the driver's seat, watching warily as Officer Terry approaches.

OFFICER TERRY  
Just cleaning up after some poorly  
educated neighbors. Hi, Dennis.

DENNIS  
Hi, Mr. Terry.

Mr. Nicholls gets out of the car. Officer Terry offers his handshake.

OFFICER TERRY  
Ralph Terry.

MR. NICHOLLS  
Carl Nicholls.

MR. NICHOLLS  
Dennis tells me you're a police  
officer.

OFFICER TERRY  
For fifteen years.

MR. NICHOLLS  
I was an M.P. for a year in Korea.

OFFICER TERRY  
What branch?

MR. NICHOLLS

Army. Uh, my wife's making dinner so I better be going.

OFFICER TERRY

Did you ever play pool, Mr. Nicholls?

MR. NICHOLLS

Sure. We had a pool table at the U.S.O. in Seoul.

OFFICER TERRY

I have a new table. Why don't you stop by for a game of pool sometime?

MR. NICHOLLS

That sounds good. I think I will!

Mr. Nicholls gets back in his car and drives off.

INT. TERRY HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A KNOCK at the door. MRS. TERRY, mid-40's, a gracious black woman in a stylish dress and hairdo, opens it.

MRS. TERRY

You must be Dennis. On time, too!

Dennis and Officer Terry enter.

Dennis looks around the room as he enters, surprised by the well furnished mid-century modern home.

MRS. TERRY

Brenda's helpin' me in the kitchen.

OFFICER TERRY

Dennis, how'd you like to shoot a game of pool?

DENNIS

Sure!

INT. TERRY HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

Dennis makes a particularly nice shot. He gives Officer Terry a sly smile. He's having a good time.

OFFICER TERRY  
Dennis, were you surprised I asked  
you to come over tonight?

DENNIS  
A little.

OFFICER TERRY  
Go ahead and take your shot.

Dennis looks around the pool table.

OFFICER TERRY  
That night after I let you go, a  
Bauerton man told me he was chased  
by four white boys in an old Dodge.

Dennis misses the shot.

OFFICER TERRY  
We know who those boys were, right?

Dennis gives Officer Terry a nervous look.

DENNIS  
I, uh -

OFFICER TERRY  
You'd be smart to keep your  
mouth shut for a minute and listen.

Dennis is stunned by Officer Terry's quick change in tone.

OFFICER TERRY  
If I had stopped you later, you  
guys would still be in jail. How'd  
you like that?

Officer Terry calmly sinks an impossible shot.

DENNIS  
But I -

OFFICER TERRY  
Don't deny it. He gave me your  
plate number. I thought you were a  
decent kid when you said you didn't  
want to disappoint your father.

BRENDA (O.S.)  
Dinner's ready!

OFFICER TERRY  
We're comin', Sugar!

DENNIS

Mr. Terry, I -

OFFICER TERRY

I don't wanna hear it. You and your friends just watch your step, cause I'll be watching you. Now let's go eat. You like friend chicken don't you?

INT. TERRY HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - LATER

Dennis and the Terry family sit after dinner, conversing over coffee and dessert.

MRS. TERRY

Dennis, have any college plans?

DENNIS

I'm not sure yet. I'm thinking about it.

OFFICER TERRY

When I was your age I wanted to be a police officer, just like my Dad. You know, he once arrested Huddie Ledbetter.

DENNIS

Huddie Ledbetter? Who's that?

OFFICER TERRY

Leadbelly! You haven't heard of him? He's a Blues legend!

Officer Terry gets up off the sofa.

OFFICER TERRY

I'll play you one of his records.

BRENDA

No, Daddy, sing him a song.

Officer Terry goes to the stereo and flips through records.

OFFICER TERRY

I don't wanna introduce him to Huddie with my caterwaulin'.

BRENDA

Caterwaulin'? What are you talking about? Mom, make him sing!

Brenda jumps up from the sofa and rushes down the hallway.

MRS. TERRY

Oh, go ahead and sing, Ralph.

OFFICER TERRY

I ain't singin' by myself.

Officer Terry sits in his chair. Brenda returns with a guitar and hands it to her Dad. She joins her mom back on the sofa.

BRENDA

Let's do "Rock Island Line".

Officer Terry does a quick tuning.

DENNIS

Wow, that's a nice guitar.

OFFICER TERRY

After Leadbelly got famous, he gave this guitar to my father.

Officer Terry plays the intro, while his wife and daughter get ready to join in.

OFFICER TERRY

(sings and plays)

*"Oh, the Rock Island Line,  
It's a mighty good road,  
Oh, the Rock Island Line,  
It's the road to ride.  
If you want to ride,  
You got to ride it like you  
find it,  
Get your ticket at the station,  
On the Rock Island Line..."*

MRS. TERRY/BRENDA

(joining in)

*"Jesus died to save our sins..."*

MR. TERRY (IN BASS VOICE)

*"Glory to Glory gonna meet him  
again..."*

The Terry family finish the song, holding the final chord in harmony. Dennis applauds enthusiastically.

DENNIS

Wow, that was great.

OFFICER TERRY

You mentioned you play guitar.

DENNIS

I used to, in a surf band. We played house parties. No pay, but we got free chips and sodas.

MRS. TERRY

Brenda's in the Drama Club and pursuing a career in Theater Arts.

DENNIS

You should enter the Glenoaks talent show.

BRENDA

I heard about it, but I wouldn't want to do it by myself.

MRS. TERRY

Maybe Dennis could be your partner.

Officer Terry clears his throat.

OFFICER TERRY

I don't think Dennis -

DENNIS

I could come up with a few ideas. My dad says you can do anything with planning, preparation and perseverance. We could do this.

BRENDA

That would be really groovy!

Brenda raises her glass in a toast. On the wall behind her is a framed photo of Martin Luther King, Jr.

BRENDA

To paraphrase Dr. King, "we have a dream"!

Brenda hands Dennis his glass, and they all clink. Everyone is in a celebratory mood except Officer Terry.

EXT. NICHOLLS HOUSE - NIGHT

A Cadillac pulls up to the curb. Dennis jogs out of his house and gets in the back seat.