

BLANK SCREEN

TITLE: The blues was built in man from the beginning. --
Willie Dixon

FADE IN:

EXT. CHICAGO SKYLINE -- DAY

Establishing.

EXT. MICHIGAN AVE -- DAY

HARRISON "FISH" FISCHER, (40), walks among a CROWD, hair unkempt, needs a shave. Ear buds blast Stevie Ray Vaughan's, *Tight Rope* from his iPod. Fish moves in step with the music.

LYRICS: *Afraid of my own shadow in the face of grace, heart full of darkness. Spotlight on my face...*

Fish passes TWO YOUNG WOMEN in the crowd who stop, turn and point. Their voices barely AUDIBLE under the LOUD music.

GIRL 1
Oh, my God. That's Fish!

They run, catch up to him, stop him, smiling sweetly. Girl 1 takes a sharpie from her purse.

Fish signs her bag.

LYRICS: *There was love all around me, but I was lookin' for revenge. Thank God it never found me. Would have been the end.*

EXT. CAFE RALPH LAUREN -- DAY

LINDA STONE (38) sips a cappuccino. She's curvy, athletic, a mixture of white, Asian, and black. Chanel suit, a big diamond gleaming in her perfect cleavage. This woman stops traffic.

Linda stands up as Fish arrives. An awkward hesitation, then a hug.

LINDA
Hello, Fish.

FISH
Linda, you look... great.

LINDA
Thanks. You look... the same.

They sit. An espresso waiting in front of Fish.

LINDA (CONT'D)
I ordered you a double. Figured you'd be hung over.

FISH
How thoughtful.

Fish downs the coffee like a shot of Tequila.

FISH (CONT'D)
So, decided to loan your impressionist
collection to The Art Institute? Is
that the occasion?

She takes a deep breath, waits for his eyes, serious.

LINDA
Willie wants to live with you.

He stares at his cup, nervous.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Tom says the judge will let him make
his own choices now.

FISH
(can't believe it)
Did he say why?

LINDA
He wants a year with his dad.

FISH
What'd you tell him?

LINDA
That Tom and I think he's ready to
learn the truth about his father.

He looks up now, a flash of anger that fades quickly.

FISH
Do you throw punches at Tom like you
did at me?

LINDA
Fuck you, Fish. There won't be any
cameras in the court room this time.
If we fight over it, I'll win again.

FISH
You just said it's up to Willie now.

LINDA
All I have to do is prove you have a
drug problem. How easy would that
be?

FISH
With Tommy's money, you could prove
I'm a black female and a member of
the Nazi party.

LINDA

I didn't come here to argue about it.

FISH

You wouldn't have agreed if you thought I was incoherent half the day. You know the truth about me.

LINDA

Do I? I'm not the same person they scraped off the floor of that stage, Fish. Are you? Have you evolved at all in twenty years? Look at you.

As she points her finger at him, mouth open, Linda FREEZES.

FISH'S VISION:

All street traffic STOPS. Falling leaves swirl in SLOW MOTION, never landing. TWO PEDESTRIANS approach Fish in NORMAL MOTION. PEDESTRIAN 1 points to the FROZEN Linda.

PEDESTRIAN 1

She's fuckin' gorgeous. What's she doing with you?

PEDESTRIAN 2

Are you...like, her brother or something?

PEDESTRIAN 1

Wait a minute. I know you. I've seen you somewhere.... Didn't you do tile work for me?

FISH

Hey, fuck you. Did you see those two chicks I just signed autographs for? I could have either one of them, or both at the same time.

PEDESTRIAN 2

(laughing)

Oh, right. Like you're still a rock star. You haven't written a note of music in almost twenty years.

PEDESTRIAN 1

You're a washed-up, has-been, nobody.

FISH

You know what, asshole? This is my halucination. I don't have to listen to you.

Both pedestrians now look exactly like Fish. He is talking to TWO COPIES OF HIMSELF.

PEDESTRIAN 2 AS FISH

Really?

PEDESTRIAN 1 AS FISH
You sure about that?

PEDESTRIAN 2 AS FISH
Maybe that's another one your problems.
You don't listen to yourself.

LINDA (V.O.)
Fish!

BACK TO SCENE:

Linda waves a stapled wad of papers in front of him.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Would you pay attention, please?

FISH
Oh, sorry. I just...I thought I knew
those guys.

LINDA
What this stipulation says is that
I'm paying the extra child support
directly to Willie. It's for him,
not you.

FISH
Is that legal?

LINDA
I get him every third weekend for
three days, and all summer.

FISH
He'll be eighteen by next summer.

LINDA
If I can't send Tom's jet, I'll e-
mail the air tickets.

Fish smiles at her, paying no attention to her words.

LINDA (CONT'D)
I'll send a limo for him three hours
before each flight.

FISH
It's really too bad you and me don't
make music anymore. You might have
actually earned the money for all
your limos and jet airplanes instead
of having to marry some overbearing
prick.

LINDA
I divorced the overbearing prick.

She pushes the wad of papers across the table, stands up.

LINDA (CONT'D)
 Show that to your asshole lawyer,
 then sign it.

As she walks away:

LINDA (CONT'D)
 You can still sign your name can't
 you?

Pedestrians and motorists gawk at Linda as she moves diagonally across Rush Street. Fish is now just another face in the throng admiring her perfect ass.

INT. ARAGON BALL ROOM -- NIGHT

TITLE: Eighteen years prior.

Linda's ass, now clad in patched, faded leather, shakes all over the stage as she sings into a wireless mic. She and Fish are younger, long, wild hair. Their BAND surrounds them: SAX, TRUMPET, TROMBONE, PIANO, DRUMS, BASS, AND TWO GUITAR PLAYERS. LIGHTS come UP and FADE in myriad COLORS.

A HUGE CROWD roars as the band hits the final notes of a BLUES TUNE and Fish watches Linda move off stage, the rest of the players following.

Fish, holding a guitar, waves to the crowd. His voice BOOMS, fills the hall.

FISH
 Thank you. Good night.

Pandemonium. Feet stomp in unison.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

Fish moves toward Linda. All motion SLOWS. The SMOKE and COLORFUL LIGHTS are SURREAL. *The Rolling Stones "Monkey Man"* PLAYS as waves of LIT LIGHTERS sway in the crowd,

LYRICS: *I'm a fleabit, peanut monkey. All my friends are junkies...*

Fish watches Linda inject her arm with a hypodermic needle.

A ROADIE hands Fish another needle. Other BAND MEMBERS snort and shoot drugs. Fish injects himself. He leans on Linda as it hits him, bliss for both of them.

LYRICS: *I am just a monkey man. I'm glad you are a monkey woman too.*

PHIL HARMON, (30) band manager, long hair, holds his hand up to the band, all fingers spread, then he points to his watch. He yells over the ROAR of the crowd, lips moving SLOWLY, easy to read:

PHIL

Five minutes.

The music STOPS. NORMAL MOTION returns.

PHIL (CONT'D)

Five minutes, and we're in the limo.
Let's go. The jet's waiting. C'mon,
give them an encore.

The band members huddle together, then they move back on stage, Linda and Fish last.

The crowd ROARS even LOUDER. Fish looks to the PIANO PLAYER. His vision BLURRY.

A rhythmic ostinato begins at the low end of the keyboard. The horns join in, playing the head to a big band arrangement of Willie Dixon's classic tune, *I'm Ready*.

Fish and Linda tap their feet and sway to the music, then Fish sings. His voice BOOMS.

FISH

(singing)

I'm ready, ready as anybody can be.
I'm ready, ready as anybody can be.
Now I'm ready for you...

Fish and Linda sing together, harmony.

FISH AND LINDA

(singing)

I hope you're ready for me.

The horn section blasts. Piano keys pounding. The crowd moving with the beat.

Suddenly the horns BLEND into a HIGH PITCHED RINGING.

A blank stare on Linda's face as she falls to the stage floor. Fish stares down at her, then crumbles next to her.

Band members, roadies, and Phil come to help, as the RINGING SOUND BLEEDS into the WAIL of an AMBULANCE SIREN.

EXT. RACINE AVE -- NIGHT

An ambulance speeds down the street. Lights flashing. Cars moving out of the way. The SIREN WAILING.

INT. AMBULANCE -- NIGHT

Spinning red LIGHTS from the roof bounce off shiny equipment. A BLINDING, WHITE HALO over all the BODIES in the tight space. Uniformed MEDICS push on Linda's chest, insert an IV.

Hands place an oxygen mask over Fish's mouth.

In the WHITE HAZE, a shinny, black face emerges: WILLIE DIXON, a big man in boxing trunks, gloved hands, sweat dripping.

Mr. Dixon shakes his head slowly. He leans close to Fish.

MR. DIXON

You're one fuckin' stupid, white boy.

Fish's hands pull the mask off his sweaty face.

FISH

Did you like my chart, Willie? All the horns? I knew you would. I knew it, man. I did it for you. For you, baby.

White hands restrain Fish, put the mask back on his face.

FISH'S POV

Mr. Dixon pulls back his gloved right hand and punches.

DARKNESS.

INT. FISH'S APARTMENT -- EVENING -- PRESENT DAY

Top floor. Gold Coast. High ceilings. Glass facing the lake. The decor is Hard Rock Cafe meets frat house. A baby grand piano. Framed gold record. Photos of Fish with Keith Richards, Bono, Eric Clapton, Greg Allman, Buddy Guy, Taj Mahal.

In the big open kitchen, Fish sits at a desk area fashioned from the countertop. He sorts mail, opens an envelope, pulls out a check, throws it on the counter, disappointed.

He types into a laptop initiating a SKYPE CALL. Phil APPEARS on the screen, now bald, books on shelves behind him in B.G.

PHIL

Hi, Fish. How are you?

FISH

Not as rich as the last time we talked. What's up with these royalty checks? They're shrinking as fast as the price of beer goes up.

PHIL

They been shrinking every quarter for eighteen years. You just noticed?

FISH

What the fuck? I thought you had some movie soundtrack lined up.

TOM

You get the money when they do post production.

(beat)

Fish, you guys made a gold record, but it's not *The White Album*. You can't live off it for the rest of your life. Maybe you need to downsize a bit.

FISH

Have you been downsizing, Phil? Or are you still making more money off me than I ever did?

TOM

Gimme a break. I'm just the middleman. I don't control what songs kids download these days. And if you need money, try writing some new music instead of living off what you did in another lifetime.

Fish hits a button on the laptop and the call ends.

FISH

Asshole.

INT. SPARE BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Everything but the bed and desk is packed in boxes stacked in the hall just outside the door. Fish picks up one of two remaining boxes, moves it into the hall.

He heads for the last box. It's open. He pulls a book from inside.

INSERT BOOK:

I Am The Blues. The Willie Dixon Story.

BACK TO SCENE:

Fish walks to the window holding the book, looks out at the lake. A LOW VOICE rings out behind him.

MR. DIXON

You named him after me.

Fish turns around to face Mr. Dixon who wears a white tuxedo and a wide brimmed hat. He holds a big, double bass.

MR. DIXON (CONT'D)

Can the boy play?

Mr. Dixon runs through a few chords on the bass.

FISH

I don't know.

MR. DIXON

So you ain't taught him the blues?

FISH

How could I?

MR. DIXON

You his daddy, ain't you? Or you goin' teach him to waste his life too?

FISH

You know why I don't play.

MR. DIXON

'Cause you a lazy sack-a-shit?

FISH

You want to talk about me or Willie?

Mr. Dixon rests his bass against a wall. He moves closer to Fish, stares hard, then moves to the window, staring out.

MR. DIXON

Why you think he's coming here? To see your pretty lake view? He wants to learn it from his daddy.

FISH

I don't know how to be his daddy. It'd be different if I'd been there from the start.

Mr. Dixon turns, stares hard at Fish.

MR. DIXON

You love your boy?

FISH

Of course I do.

MR. DIXON

Then teach him the blues. He got to hear it from you.

(emphasis)

You got to be the blues.

FISH

Oh, gimme a break. The kid's seventeen. It's on him. And this is the twenty first fucking century. He can be the blues even if his granddaddy wasn't a slave.

Fish now turns away, puts the book into the last box, closes it, picks up the box and heads out of the room. He turns back to Mr. Dixon who stares at him, arms crossed.

Fish let's out a deep breath.

FISH (CONT'D)

I'm scared.

MR. DIXON

Ain't much worth doing in this life
that don't scare you, boy.

INT. FISH'S APARTMENT -- LATER

Fish stacks the sealed boxes in a closet. The DOORBELL RINGS. Fish hesitates, moves to the door, puts his hand on the knob. He hesitates again, looks through the peephole. In the hallway WILLIE is surrounded by luggage.

Fish opens the door.

WILLIE

Hi, Dad.

An awkward pause, then a hug.

FISH

Jesus, I hardly recognize you.

Willie is over six feet, a linebacker, but with a relaxed, gentle demeanor. His auburn hair touches his shoulders and frames a square face, dimpled chin, brown eyes.

WILLIE

Yeah, I guess I kind of grew up a bit
since you last saw me.

FISH

Doesn't seem like it's been long enough
for that.

Together they ferry the cases into the foyer.

WILLIE

Over a year, Dad. Mom sent me to
Interlochen last summer, remember?

FISH

Oh, yeah. You know, I wanted to come
visit you there.

WILLIE

Yeah, well...a lot of people at that
camp know you, Dad. They didn't think
it was a good idea.

FISH

They don't know me. They knew me.

INT. WILLIE'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Fish and Willie put down the last of the luggage.

FISH

So, this is your room now. Let me know if there's something you need.

WILLIE

Looks great. I'll set up the keyboard there.

He points toward the window. Fish points out toward the living room.

FISH

You can use the piano whenever you want.

WILLIE

Oh, thanks. Ummm, I guess I need a key to the front door.

FISH

Yeah, right. Here, take mine. I'll get another one out of the safe.

Fish pulls a single key on a silver chain from around his neck. He puts it on Willie's neck. Willie takes the key in his hand, stares at it, smiles.

WILLIE

Thanks.

Willie pulls an big manilla envelope from the outside pocket of a suitcase.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

This is from the Galter School. Lot of stuff to sign. We have a meeting tomorrow with the guidance counselor.

FISH

What time?

WILLIE

Eight.

FISH

In the morning?