

MIDNIGHTS

by

Mark Tenn & Alvaro Donado

INT. FRIED CHICKEN JOINT (HIGH ANGLE CCTV POV) - NIGHT

SILENCE. Grainy images of florescent-bathed chrome seating and dingy floor tile. TWO GIRLS (15) eating at a table.

A MAN (black, 20's) in a bobble hat sauntering in. Placing order at the counter... Flirting with the girls....

The girls not interested, leaving... Bobble Hat fawning after them out the door and frame....

...Re-entering alone... craning over the counter, hollering at whoever's back there... Then typing on his phone, his back is to the open front door from where

TWO HOODED FIGURES STEP IN.

One TALL, one SHORT. They stop behind Bobble Hat. WE PUSH IN.

Short Hood slides a MACHETE out from under his hooded top. He holds it limp by his side. Wavering... unsure....

Bobble Hat, texting. Oblivious to what is about to happen. OUR PUSHING IN SLIDES HIM OUT OF FRAME as--

Tall Hood, impatient, grabs the dirty blade from Short. He wields its heft and advances on Bobble Hat offscreen LEAVING SHORT ALONE IN THE SHOT -- frozen to the spot.

Blood splatters the floor tile. Long beat.

Tall Hood calmly backs into frame and out the open door.

Short Hood still rooted to the spot.

Suddenly, Tall rushes in and yanks Short out the door.

The silence. The blurry blood splatter....

PULSATING REGGAETON blasts in over:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RESERVATION - EVENING

A lone female runner, VERONICA DURAN (Latina, 30's), coasting down a forest trail. A gazelle in high-end Asics, pro running gear and AirPods, she hurdles a downed tree, sprints up an incline and over a ridge onto--

EXT. NARROW TRAIL - EVENING

Up ahead, a PAIR OF JOGGERS clog the way. Duran hooks off-trail, slices into trees--

EXT. HILLTOP CLEARING - EVENING

--and out into low sun all by herself. A sprawling urban skyline crests from below. She shifts up a gear and runs downhill towards it.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREETS - EVENING

Duran spills out onto tarmac. Crowded housing, chain link fencing, weeded sidewalks. Kicks it up a notch more--

EXT. OLD INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT - EVENING

--sprinting past derelict silk mills -- overgrown railway tracks -- faster, faster.

TIGHT ON DURAN'S FACE screwed tight. This is more than mere exercise. It's an habitual purge, her daily bread.

She powers head on towards us. A side glance, then sudden panic. She tries to pull up, but--

A SPEEDING CYCLIST careens in from a side street and cuts her off. She veers to avoid colliding only to crash land hard into trash bags piled curbside.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL STREET - EVENING

Duran untangles herself from the bags and lands prone on the curb. She removes her AirPods, killing the reggaeton. She leans back and her hand goes to her belly, spent, as she catches her breath. She looks off.

The oblivious cyclist disappears down the street.

Duran's gaze falls on a makeshift R.I.P. memorial huddling a sidewalk lamp post. Wilted flowers, burnt candles, empty liquor bottles and a photo of a black youth. Downturned paper cups bear handwritten messages. Cavalier odes of brotherhood, vengeance, honor, violence.

Duran stiffly rises. She removes the inscribed paper cups and gently jogs off. Passing a dumpster, she tosses the cups in.

INT. STORE SHELF - EVENING

INCONTINENCE PADS. EPSOM SALTS. BOX OF ADVIL.

INT. BODEGA, AISLE - EVENING

Duran, still sweaty, inhales a Gatorade as she browses a magazine. Sudden angry commotion from the front.

INT. BODEGA, REGISTER - EVENING

Blocking the door, a stout, venerable old woman, MS. EVA (60's), is cursing and wildly swinging a baseball bat at a MIXED RACE KID (17) trying to exit.

MS. EVA

(thick Dominican accent)

Think I'm some piece of shit old woman, huh? My eyes still see you good you son of a bitch.

KID

Best stand aside cube! 'Fore I step up on yo prune ass!

MS. EVA

Soy Dominicana, you punk! You steal from me, I smash your face.

She swings again. The kid lurches back into a shelf, inches from a temple crushing. Not so tough now. Ms. Eva arches the bat for a home run when Veronica steps square onto the plate.

DURAN

(in Spanish)

Okay, okay. Easy there now.

Duran calmly takes the bat from Ms. Eva.

MS. EVA

(in Spanish)

Not this time, Veronica. They think they can keep stealing from me?

DURAN

(in Spanish)

Okay. Just let me see, okay?

Duran turns to the kid, who's shaken up. His baggy sweater and sweats are some sizes too big. More hand me down than cool.

DURAN

What's your name?

KID

Step off, lady. This ain't yo' biz.

Duran raises a brow, unimpressed.

KID

Albert, ah-ight. Albert. Damn.

DURAN

Albert. Okay, Albert. Did she see you take something?

MS. EVA

"Did she see you"? You don't believe me you gotta ask him? Like vaboom! -- he just gonna confess?

ALBERT

Old woman, I ain't got nothin'! You seein' things in yo' mind!

MS. EVA

My mind? What you say?

Bored, Duran hands the bat to Ms. Eva.

ALBERT

Whoa - hold up, hold up. Jus' chill, lady, chill.

Duran eyes him up -- *well?*

Busted, Albert empties his pockets onto the counter: Advil, Epsom salts, incontinence pads, and a Snickers.

Duran lets up. It's not what she expected. Albert is mortified.

Duran tosses up a couple magazines (FAMILY CIRCLE and GOOD HOUSEKEEPING) and her empty Gatorade bottle onto the pile.

MS. EVA

(in Spanish)

That's it? Veronica...

Duran gives her the eyes. Thoroughly aggrieved, Ms. Eva rings up the pile cursing in Spanish under her breath.

DURAN

Y'know, you're lucky Ms. Eva here likes baseball. Raul across the street keeps a twelve-gauge back there. So does Yusuf down the block. Peña's over on Dale too.

Duran pays cash, bags Albert's "shopping". She hands it to Albert, but before she lets go, she holds up a BUSINESS CARD.

DURAN

If you or your mom or sister or
aunt...

(need whatever)

She drops the card into the bag. Albert, chastened, takes it and splits.

Duran tosses the empty Gatorade bottle into a bin behind the counter. She grabs her magazines, salutes Ms. Eva and exits.

CUT TO:

CU: DARK CHOCOLATE SYRUP

oozing down a scoop of CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM. Thick and slow....

EXT. ICE CREAM PARLOR / PARKING LOT - EVENING

A short guy, BYRON (black, 20's), leaves the order window holding a couple chocolate cones. He saunters past a line of families waiting to order and across the parking lot.

Byron hands the cone to a large, toad of a man, CLARENCE (black, 30's), brimming a wheelchair.

Behind Clarence stands a tall, beefy goon, CHILI DOG (black, 20's). He's glaring at the 190lb of street-nurtured, African American brawn standing before them: MALIK BROWN (30's).

Clarence slurps on his cone.

CLARENCE

Mmmm. Thank you Byron.

Byron sneers at Malik. Malik glances at Clarence's wheelchair.

CLARENCE

Can hook you up if you want. You know. Return the favor.

Clarence licks his cone as he cold stares Malik. Malik eyes Chili Dog and Byron. No-one bats an eyelid. Sound of laughter and playful screams from across the way.

CLARENCE

Malik Brown. My, my. Long time. You look... rehabilitated.

(beat)

You got somethin' comin' back round here.

MALIK

I ain't one to bitch an'
reminisce. Was what it was. Move
on.

Chili Dog bristles.

CLARENCE

Move on. Like we born-again
brothers. Like that night you
never left me behind. Like that
pig never shot me five times. Like
I can walk.

MALIK

Somethin' like that.

CLARENCE

Well, hallelujah. How 'bout that.
But you know, I'm gonna need a
miracle first--
(re his crippled legs)
--Cause my faith ain't that blind.

MALIK

Business ain't like it was.

CLARENCE

No it ain't. It be a whole lot
bigger.

MALIK

True. That's what it be.

CLARENCE

So, what you want?

MALIK

The East side.

Chili Dog and Byron chuckle mockingly. Clarence grins wide.

CLARENCE

You gotta be deep on the street.
Gotta have brothers you can trust.
How a muthafucka like you gonna
prosper on yo' own?

We hear gunshots, measured -- POW... POW... POW and--

INT. WOMEN'S RESTROOM - EVENING

Duran rustles her damp hair under a wall-mounted hand dryer. She's wearing a pristine white T-shirt and navy slacks. A silver cross pendant dangles her neck.

More measured shots -- POW... POW... RAPID RELOAD and--

INT. INDOOR FIRING RANGE - EVENING

Duran, tactical glasses and ear muffs, firmly poised with a Glock .45 trained on her target. POW.

INTERCUT: WOMEN'S PUBLIC RESTROOM / FIRING RANGE:

- Duran suiting up in police patrol blues. Badge, gun, radio, cellphone, name tag: "V. DURAN".
- Firing off two more rounds. Relaxed, focused, fluid.
- Lacing up boots. An open DUFFEL BAG: cuffs, tactical knife, toolkit, cereal bars, 5-hour energy bottles, Tylenol....
- Emptying her clip -- rapid reload -- aim. Stand down.
- Suited up, Officer Veronica Duran exits the restroom with her duffel bag into--

INT. POLICE PRECINCT CORRIDOR - EVENING

--and straight into THREE MALE COPS brooding over a LETTER. The sight of Duran instantly kills the conversation.

DURAN
Excuse me, fellas.

But they don't. She squeezes past. Their gazes laser her back as she heads upstream past cops on shift change. Every one a man. ONE COP bumps her shoulder as he passes. Duran registers the slight, but keeps on walking.

EXT. PRECINCT CAR LOT - EVENING

Duran exits the precinct with a sturdy, affable cop, CURTIS NELSON (black, 30's) with his own duffel bag of gear. Duran is reading a letter as they go. Their voices are low, covert.

NELSON
Martinez, Dudek, Bruno....

DURAN
Hayes?

NELSON

Hayes is gone. Phillips is gone.
Lombardo's gone. Hundred and
twenty. Just like they promised.

DURAN

(re letter, confused)

You're not supposed to be on the
list.

She hands the letter back to Nelson who shoves it into his bag.

NELSON

Last five academy classes mostly.
Ours included. None of the older
guys.

DURAN

Big fucking surprise.

NELSON

You're not on it either.

Duran feels the judgment.

DURAN

I'm sorry, Curtis. I'll talk to
him, okay.

Nelson smirks - *uh-huh*. They turn down a lane of cruisers.

DURAN

They should've let us vote.
Reductions, salary deferrals,
overtime caps, rolling furloughs.
All of it. If there was a better
deal, we should've had a say.

NELSON

Lieutenant know you're out here
tonight?

DURAN

Don't start.

NELSON

Well does he?

DURAN

What's he gonna do?

Nelson smirks some more, looks around for his cruiser.

DURAN
Is there a written directive
saying I can't report?

NELSON
No.

DURAN
Then it's still my shift.
Technically.

NELSON
I tell ya, if I tried to come in
on my day off?--

DURAN
--It's not a day off. It's bad
enough they took our overtime. Now
they wanna short change us. I need
the money and not all of us got
sugar-mamas.

NELSON
Yeah, well, Sonya, man. She'd nail
my dick to the wall. Technically.

DURAN
Surely that thing must be shredded
by now.

Nelson laughs. Duran looks ahead. Her face falls.

DURAN
Don't suppose he's on the list is
he?

Up ahead, a brawny cop, MANZANO (40's), bundles a BURLY
GANGBANGER towards us. Judging by the blood and bruises, it
must've been one helluva scrap to get the cuffs on this guy.

Manzano gloats at Duran with a sneer as he passes.

NELSON
(re gangbanger)
Beating up on your girlfriend
again, Manzano?

MANZANO
(re Duran)
Snakin' with yer snitch bitch
again, Nelson?

As Manzano hustles by, he bumps the gangbanger against Nelson,
almost knocking him over.

NELSON
Oh, you wanna go, huh? Sit your
bitch down, let's go. All day
motherfucker.

Manzano keeps stride ignoring him.

NELSON
Degenerate asshole....

Nelson turns to Duran who's pissed. At him.

NELSON
What?

She shakes her head and walks on. Nelson follows.

NELSON
Three years you been taking shit
cause of him.

DURAN
Jesus Nelson....

NELSON
Just watch me smack that oily grin
off his sphincter next time.

DURAN
You can't keep doing that.

NELSON
Doing what?

DURAN
Feeding the apes. Making things
worse.

NELSON
I'm making things worse?

DURAN
How you think it looks when you
stick up for me like that?

They arrive at--

DURAN'S CRUISER

--and stop, glaring at it.

NELSON
Those fuckin' jerk-offs, man.

A One Way traffic sign is pinned under her windshield wiper.

NELSON
 They need to just--
 (yelling back to Manzano)
 --back the fuck up!
 (back to Duran, hands up)
 Sorry Vee, but bullshit's outta
 hand.

She slides the One Way sign out. Considers it.

DURAN
 "Sit-your-bitch-down-let's-go-all-
 day-motherfucker" huh?

NELSON
 All day.
 (they fist bump)
 Watch yourself.

Nelson continues onto his pool car down the lane.

Duran tosses the One Way sign into the trunk. She does a walk around, kicking tires. Gets down on all fours scanning the underside. The old Crown Vic is scarred with dents, scrapes and corrosion.

I/E. DURAN'S CRUISER / PRECINCT PARKING LOT - DAY

Duran lands in the driver's seat and starts the engine. Checks the driver visor - unfiled police reports.

DURAN
 Damned lazy....

She stashes them in her bag on the passenger seat. Logs into the onboard computer and checks her dash gauges:

FUEL: Half full
 ODOMETER: a whopping 147,739 miles
 CLOCK: **5:57PM**

She keys the radio mic.

DURAN
 Two-Nineteen, Center.

RADIO (CENTER)
 Center, Two-Nineteen. Go ahead.

Duran suddenly gags and covers her nose, revolted.

DURAN
Ten-eight. Rolling out.

RADIO (CENTER)
Roger, Two-Nineteen. Ten-eight.

Duran's flashlight scans the interior. The beam settles on the source of offense: a lumpy pool of feces cementing the plastic back seat bench.

DURAN
Hijo de puta.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DAY

Small storefront signs blur by on repeat: Cash for Gold! -- Travel Agency -- Colombian -- Halal -- Liquor -- Income Tax: FAST! -- Western Union -- Phone Cards. It's the view from

DURAN'S CRUISER on patrol. Despite the Autumnal chill, her window's down. Only way to soak up the Friday hustle and air out the stink. Back seat is now clean.

RADIO (CENTER)
Center, Two-Nineteen.

DURAN (INTO RADIO)
Two-Nineteen receiving.

RADIO (CENTER)
Seven Thirty-Five burglary in progress at fifteen thirty-eight Putnam Avenue.

DURAN (INTO RADIO)
Copy that. Two-Nineteen en route.

Duran ignites the siren and lights. Makes a turn.

RADIO (CENTER)
Be advised--

I/E. DURAN'S CRUISER / RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Duran, lights off, silently eases to a stop.

RADIO (CENTER) (V.O.)
--suspect may still be in the vicinity. Proceed with caution.

She reads the street then eyes a two-family house a block away.