

A SMALL PRICE

Written by

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INT. THERESA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Brown stew chicken simmers on the stove. Plantains crackle in a pan.

Old-school R&B plays as THERESA, 45, finishes dinner.

Her son DRE, 16, sets the dining room table, singing along.

Theresa looks over.

THERESA

Boy, what you know about this?

DRE

Come on now, Ma. I know good music.

THERESA

You don't know nothing but the part TikTok taught you.

DRE

See, that's disrespectful.

Theresa laughs.

THERESA

Go get your brother. Food's ready.

Dre heads down the hall to get his younger brother.

Moments later, A KNOCK at the front door.

Theresa opens it.

REGGIE, 22, stands outside. Tired. A little thinner than she remembers.

Theresa freezes. Visibly surprised.

THERESA (CONT'D)

Reggie...

REGGIE

Hey, Ma.

She doesn't invite him in right away.

THERESA

What are you doing here?

REGGIE

It's been a while. I just wanted to see you.

Theresa studies him with skepticism.

THERESA
You should've called first. You
know the last time you were here—

REGGIE
I know, I know. I didn't come here
to start any trouble. I just needed
to see y'all.

A beat.

THERESA
Are you high?

Reggie's expression falls.

REGGIE
No, Ma.

She scans his face.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
I'm not. I promise.

Theresa still doesn't move.

She notices how worn down he looks.

THERESA
When's the last time you ate
something?

REGGIE
I had a bag of chips earlier. Ain't
had a home-cooked meal in a while
though.

Theresa sighs and steps aside.

THERESA
Come in.

Reggie enters.

The smell from the kitchen hits him.

REGGIE
Do I smell brown stew chicken?

Theresa nods and closes the door.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Please tell me you made plantains
too.

THERESA
I did.

A smile breaks through Reggie's exhaustion.

REGGIE
I knew you missed me.

THERESA
Don't push it.

Dre returns with CALEB, 13.

They both stop in their tracks when they see their older
brother.

Reggie smiles at them.

REGGIE
Wow, look at y'all.

He approaches Caleb.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
And when did you get so tall?

He pulls Caleb into a quick side hug.

Caleb hesitates before allowing it.

CALEB
Hey, Reggie.

Reggie releases him.

REGGIE
That's all I get?

Caleb cracks a small smile.

It's enough for Reggie.

He turns to Dre.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
What's up, lil' bro?

Dre doesn't respond.

Instead, he turns to Theresa.

DRE
What the hell is he doing here?

Theresa's eyes narrow.

THERESA
Excuse me?

Dre corrects himself.

DRE
Sorry. I mean, why is he here?

THERESA
He came by to see us, and I'm
letting him stay for dinner.

Her tone makes clear that's the end of it.

Dre looks at Reggie, then back at his mother.

He doesn't like it, but he knows better than to argue.

REGGIE
Chill, lil' bro. I come in peace.

DRE
You shouldn't have come at all.

THERESA
(sternly)
Dre.

REGGIE
It's okay, Ma.

Reggie looks back at Dre.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Like I told Ma, I'm not here to
start any trouble. Just wanted to
come and see my family.

Dre studies him.

THERESA
Everybody wash your hands. The food
is about ready.

Dre makes a face as if he's about to say something.

Theresa gives him a stern look.

He keeps quiet.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THERESA'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

The four eat around the table.

Reggie devours his food like it's the first real meal he's had in a while.

Caleb eats quietly. Dre barely touches his food.

Theresa watches her sons from the head of the table.

You could cut the tension with a knife.

Reggie finally sets down his fork.

REGGIE

All right. I can tell everybody's waiting for me to explain myself.

Dre looks at him.

DRE

You can start with why you're here.

Theresa glances at Dre but allows Reggie to respond.

REGGIE

The truth is, I've been going through some rough patches these last few months. And it forced me to think about everything and everyone that I care about.

Dre's eyes remain fixed on Reggie.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

I've been trying to get myself together. I know I've said that before. And after what happened last time, I don't blame anybody at this table for looking at me like I'm full of shit.

Theresa gives him a stern look.

Reggie catches himself.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Sorry. But I know that's what
everybody's thinking.

He continues.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
I'm ashamed of how bad I let things
get. I've been staying away from
drugs, barely drinking. I cut off a
lot of people I knew weren't good
for me. Been reading more, trying
to gain my sharpness back. I've
even been looking into getting my
GED.

That gets Theresa's attention.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
I'm not saying I got everything
figured out. I don't. But I'm
trying to do something different
with myself before I wake up one
day and realize I wasted my whole
damn—

Theresa looks at him.

Reggie stops himself.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
—my whole life.

Her expression softens.

THERESA
I'm glad you're thinking that way.
Especially about school. You know
I've been telling you for years
it's not too late to finish.

Reggie nods.

THERESA (CONT'D)
But you do know how hard it is to
trust you at this point, don't you?

REGGIE
I know. That's why I'm not asking
you to take my word for it. I want
to show you.

Theresa holds his gaze.

THERESA

I guess we'll just have to wait and see then.

Reggie nods.

Some of the tension leaves the table.

He looks toward Dre, who still hasn't said much.

REGGIE

So tell me, lil' bro, what you been up to?

Dre shrugs.

DRE

Working.

REGGIE

Working where?

DRE

I got a job at that tire shop on 27th.

Reggie nods, impressed.

REGGIE

Okay, I see you. A grown man job. You must be making some good money.

Dre gives him a look.

DRE

It's not much.

Caleb scoffs.

CALEB

Don't you have like fifteen hundred dollars already saved toward getting a car?

Dre immediately glares at him.

DRE

Why are you blurting out my business?

Caleb realizes too late that he shouldn't have said it.

A brief silence.

Reggie catches the implication but doesn't challenge it.

REGGIE

Nah, that's good, Dre. For real.
Fifteen hundred saved already at
sixteen? You doing a hell of a lot
better than I was at your age.

Theresa looks at him.

Reggie sighs.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

A lot better.

Dre remains guarded.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

I'm proud of you, lil' bro. Keep
saving. Get your car. Don't be like
me trying to figure everything out
after you already fucked—

Theresa's head snaps toward him.

He corrects himself mid-sentence.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Messed it all up.

Caleb smiles.

Even Dre almost does.

Almost.

Theresa looks at Reggie.

THERESA

It's getting late. If you need
somewhere to sleep, you can sleep
in your old room tonight.

Reggie looks at her, surprised.

REGGIE

You sure?

THERESA

Just for tonight. Tomorrow, we'll
figure out what comes next.

Reggie nods.

REGGIE
Thank you, Ma.

Theresa starts to clear the table.

THERESA
Just don't make me regret it.

REGGIE
I won't.

CUT TO:

INT. THERESA'S HOUSE - REGGIE'S OLD BEDROOM - LATER THAT
NIGHT

Dark.

Reggie lies awake.

Through the cracked door, he watches the hallway.

Waiting.

Dre's bedroom door opens.

Dre steps out with a change of clothes and heads into the
bathroom.

The bathroom door shuts.

A moment later-

The SHOWER starts.

Reggie listens.

Then gets out of bed.

INT. DRE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The faint sound of the SHOWER runs down the hall.

Reggie slips into Dre's room.

He listens.

The shower continues.

He moves quickly, opening a dresser drawer and searching
beneath the clothes.

Nothing.

Another drawer.

Still nothing.

He moves to the desk.

The shower continues running.

Reggie searches faster, confident he still has time.

A voice behind him—

DRE

What are you doing in here?

Reggie freezes.

He slowly turns.

Dre stands in the doorway.

REGGIE

I was just—

Dre raises an envelope.

DRE

Looking for this?

Reggie stares at it.

Dre shakes his head.

DRE (CONT'D)

See. I knew you were the same trifling motherfucker you always been. Feeding us that bullshit about how you changed, yet the first chance you get, you're right back to stealing from us.

REGGIE

It's not like that, Dre. I meant what I said at dinner. I'm trying to get my shit together, but I still owe people money, and that doesn't go away just because I'm trying to fix my life.

DRE
So instead of being honest and
asking your family for help, you
come in my room and try to steal
from us again?

Dre holds up the envelope.

DRE (CONT'D)
Do you know how hard I worked for
this? Every dollar in here, I
earned on my own. And you were
really about to take all of it like
it didn't mean shit.

Reggie opens his mouth to respond—

DRE (CONT'D)
Get out.

Reggie stops.

REGGIE
Dre—

DRE
I said get out.

Reggie hesitates.

Dre's anger gives way to something deeper.

DRE (CONT'D)
You clearly only care about
yourself. You don't love us. You
never have.

That hits Reggie.

REGGIE
That's not true.

DRE
Then why do you keep doing this to
us?

Reggie doesn't have an answer.

DRE (CONT'D)
Just go.

Reggie looks at him for a long moment.

Then nods.

He leaves.

Dre remains in the room, the envelope clenched in his hand.

The shower continues running.

He looks down at the money.

Something weighs on him.

INT. THERESA'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Reggie approaches with his bag over his shoulder.

He quietly unlocks the front door.

DRE (O.S.)

Hold up.

Reggie stops.

He turns.

Dre approaches with the envelope.

He holds it out.

Reggie eyes it.

REGGIE

Wait, you're giving me this?

DRE

Only if you promise me that this is
the last time you come back here.

Reggie wasn't expecting that.

REGGIE

What?

DRE

Every time you come back, it's the
same thing. You promise things are
gonna be different. You act like
you care about us, but the second
you need something, you go right
back to only caring about yourself
and your habits.

Dre glances toward the darkened house.

His voice lowers.

DRE (CONT'D)

And it breaks Ma's heart every time. She keeps believing you because she loves you, and I'm sick of watching you use that to manipulate her.

Reggie looks wounded.

REGGIE

You really think that's what I'm doing?

Dre doesn't back down.

DRE

I don't care what you're doing. I just need to know it won't happen anymore.

He extends the envelope farther.

DRE (CONT'D)

So take it. Pay whoever you owe. Buy whatever new drug that hits the street. Do whatever you need to do. But if you take this, you can't come back here.

Reggie stares at the envelope.

Then at Dre.

REGGIE

You want me gone that bad that you're willing to give up all the money you saved?

DRE

I want our mother to find peace.

A beat.

DRE (CONT'D)

And if this money is what it takes to keep you from putting her through this again... then that's a small price to pay.

Silence.

Reggie looks down at the envelope.

For a moment, the hurt is written all over his face.

Then he pushes it down.

He takes the money.

Dre watches the envelope leave his hand.

REGGIE
All right.

A beat.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
I won't come back.

Reggie pulls Dre into a hug.

Dre stiffens.

Doesn't return it.

Reggie holds him for a moment, then lets go.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Take care of yourself, lil' bro.

He looks back into the house.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Take care of Ma and Caleb too.

Reggie looks at Dre one last time.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
I guess you're the man of the house
now.

Dre says nothing.

Reggie opens the door and leaves with the envelope in hand.

Dre stands in the doorway and watches his older brother
disappear into the night.

Only then do his eyes begin to well.

A tear rolls down his cheek.

He wipes it away and closes the door.

CUT TO BLACK.