

REDEMPTION SONG

Two men from different backgrounds seek reconciliation in  
the wake of the Baltimore riots.

A short film by

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EXT - SMALL BUSINESS IN BALTIMORE - DAY

We open with a montage of television news footage showing violence, rock throwing and looting during the Baltimore riots on April 27, 2015. Rioters break into then loot a store (convenience, liquor, other store) as we hear voiceovers from anchors and reporters describing the scene during a live broadcast.

FADE TO BLACK

While in black: SFX of glass crunching.

FADE UP FROM BLACK

Store owner, RON WILLIAMS is walking through his damaged shop. His daughter EMMA is there for moral support and to help clean up.

RON

Twenty Two years. Twenty Two years and I've never had anything like this. A few robberies. Some shoplifters sure. But nothing like this.

A dejected Ron leans up against a cooler, unsure of where to go from here.

RON (CONTINUED)

How am I going to rebuild? How can I carry on? After this?

EMMA

I don't know dad but we will. Somehow.

Emma grabs two brooms and hands one to Ron.

EMMA

Come on, help me sweep this glass up.

Ron takes the broom, shakes his head as he surveys the damage then starts sweeping.

TITLE CARD: 2 DAYS LATER

A Baltimore City POLICE OFFICER, Steven Thomas drives up just as Ron puts trash and debris from the damaged store into a portable dumpster.

OFFICER THOMAS

How's the clean up going?

RON

About as well as can be expected I guess.

OFFICER THOMAS

Gonna rebuild and keep going?

RON

I don't know. Don't know if it's even worth it.

OFFICER THOMAS

I know how you feel. But I came by to give you a little bit of good news. We caught the perp, a teenager. All of 15. Got him on the surveillance camera from across the street. Then he posted pictures of himself on Facebook. He thought he was so slick.

RON

Well how about that. Thanks. Now nail his little snot-nosed ass to the wall!

OFFICER THOMAS

Oh we will. Breaking and entering, malicious destruction, theft. He'll be going away for a while, til he's 21 at least. Here's the charging papers and the State's Attorney's info. She'll take it from here.

RON

Thanks. Maybe he'll learn some respect while he's in there. Insurance company will be here in an hour. I'll be sure to let them know.

As the Police Officer exits Ron exhibits a slight smile and goes back inside to continue cleaning up.

EXT STORE - LATER

The INSURANCE ADJUSTER, DAVID ARNOLD arrives to survey the damage. David enters the store.

RON  
(in a curt manner) We're  
closed right now, sorry.

INSURANCE ADJUSTER  
Hello, Mr. Williams? I'm David  
Arnold, the adjuster with Free  
State Insurance.

RON  
Oh sorry, come in. Thanks for  
coming. You can see what a number  
they did on the place. Let me show  
you the places they did the most  
damage.

As Ron shows David the damage Emma takes out a load of trash to the dumpster.

EXT - STORE - DAY

Emma sets the trashcan next to the dumpster and prepares to hoist the somewhat heavy can over the edge. Just then her cell phone rings.

EMMA  
Hello...oh hi Dana. I'm at my dad's  
store helping him clean up. I don't  
know, he's really depressed over  
it. He spent over 20 years building  
it up now this. It pretty much  
broke his spirit. I don't know if  
he'll keep the store or not.

INT STORE - DAY

David and Ron are wrapping up the damage assessment.

DAVID  
Yeah they really did a number on  
your place. Don't worry though,  
we'll get you back on your feet  
soon enough. You're covered for the  
riot damage and merchandise stolen  
plus lost revenue while you're  
rebuilding. You'll be back up and  
running before you know it.

(CONTINUED)

RON

Thanks but I don't know if I want to go through all of it again. I don't know if I should relocate or maybe get out all together.

DAVID

Well, don't worry Ron. You're covered either way.

RON

It's not that. It's the emotional toll. My whole life is wrapped up in this store.

DAVID

What will you do if you get out of it?

RON

I don't know. I don't know.

DAVID

Well let me know what you want to do.

RON

Yeah. Thanks David.

David and Ron shake hands and David exits as Ron goes back inside to clean up.

INT STORE - DAY - LATER

Later that afternoon Ron is busy cleaning up the mess, emptying a dustpan of broken glass, potato chips and other mess into the large trash can inside the store.

EMMMA

Dad you've been working so hard. Take a break and have something to eat. I brought some sandwiches from home.

RON

Yeah, maybe you're right.

Ron sits down to rest and eat a sandwich with Emma. He turns on an old small TV.

(CONTINUED)

RON

I'm surprised those hoodlums didn't take the TV too.

EMMA

(chucking) Probably because it's not high def.

As Ron and Emma eat their sandwiches the news is on and the reports provide updates on the aftermath of the riots. A REPORTER in the field is interviewing a neighborhood TEENAGER about the riots.

TEENAGER

The problem is there ain't no options for us. They took away our schools. They took away our rec centers. They cut social programs. There ain't no jobs around here. There ain't no future for us. What are we supposed to do? What do you do when they back you against wall and you ain't got no options?

The teenager's comments causes Ron to see things in a new light, looking at the issue from the perspective of the neighborhood residents, especially the young people.

Ron gets up from his chair and puts his coat on.

RON

I'll be back a in a bit.

EMMA

Where are you going?

RON

For a walk. I need some air...and some time to think.

EXT NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Ron walks through the neighborhood. Now it's all starting to sink in as he views the urban blight that beset the neighborhood long before the riots. Rotted wood, peeling paint, long boarded up rowhouses, cinderblocks where windows used to be, sidewalks with chunks of broken concrete and other signs of blight are now evident to Ron.

RON

(to himself) Damn. I've been so busy running the store that

(CONTINUED)

I never really noticed what is going on outside the store.

Ron pulls out his cell phone and calls the State's Attorney that is prosecuting his case.

RON  
Hello, Ms. Bradford? It's Ron Williams. I have an idea. I want to drop the charges against the kid. Yes, I said drop the charges but only on one condition...

EXT - RON'S STORE - NEXT DAY

Officer Thomas arrives bringing the accused teenage assailant, JAMEL to the store. Jamel is a bit nervous, not quite sure what to expect. Is he about to walk into the lion's den or meet his new best friend? Officer Thomas and Jamel walk into the store.

RON  
(extending his hand) So you're Jamel. Nice to meet you.

Jamel is not sure if he should shake hands or not. He finally accepts Ron's offer and they shake.

RON (CONTINUED)  
I'm Ron. So uh, you mind grabbing that tape measure for me?

A perplexed Jamel picks up the tape measure but is a little confused, expecting to be chewed out any minute now.

RON (CONTINUED)  
Do me a favor, measure that piece of plywood for me.

Jamel is motionless for a second, not sure what to expect.

JAMEL  
Uh...okay.

Jamel, looking more confused than ever obliges and measures the plywood, both the length and width.

RON  
What do you have?

(CONTINUED)

JAMEL

Two feet three and a quarter inches  
by one foot seven and a half  
inches.

RON

Sounds perfect. You know how to use  
a hammer?

JAMEL

Yeah.

RON

Good. Use that piece of plywood to  
cover the hole they made in the  
floor.

Jamel is thoroughly confused. He looks at Officer Thomas.  
Officer Thomas nods. Jamel places the plywood over the hole  
and nails it into place.

JAMEL

Can I ask why I'm doing this?

RON

You need something constructive to  
do and I need some help.

JAMEL

So...you ain't mad?

RON

I was. Truth is I wanted you to rot  
in jail for all the trouble you  
caused. Destroying my store,  
stealing my merchandise. Leaving me  
with this mess. But then I got to  
listening and thinking. People  
around your neighborhood say  
there's nothing good to do. No job  
opportunities, no way out. Hell,  
I've been working so hard to make  
my business a success that I didn't  
even take the time to notice. So I  
wanted to give you an opportunity.  
Help me fix my store. Get it back  
to where it used to be and I'll  
drop the charges. I'll even pay  
you, 12 bucks an hour.

JAMEL

Wait, you're gonna drop the  
charges...and pay me? This is a  
joke, right?

(CONTINUED)

RON

No I'm totally serious. But you have to work til it's done. No skipping out. No quitting before it's done and no cutting corners. I'll even teach you what I can along the way. If things work out maybe you can continue to work here after it's back up and running again. Deal?

Ron extends his hand to Jamel. Jamel is still skeptical but with his options limited Jamel accepts Ron's offer.

JAMEL

Um, o...okay yeah...yeah, deal.

Jamel shakes Ron's outstretched hand but he is unsure if he made the right decision. He knows he doesn't have much of a choice.

RON

Great. Now help take this trash can to the dumpster, it's heavy.

Ron and Jamel both pick up the heavy trash can and carry it outside to the dumpster.

EXT - RON'S STORE

RON

So why here? why my place?

JAMEL

I dunno. Maybe it's 'cause we're tired of being treated like we're disposable. Tired of the same bleak existence and seeing our bothers, sisters and fathers killed all the time. And after Freddie, we just couldn't take it anymore and our emotions boiled over.

RON

No respect.

JAMEL

Exactly. We didn't get treated like second class citizens. We got treated like third class citizens just because we live in the ghetto and don't have money to fight back.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMEL (cont'd)

The rich guy gets his new stadium and what do we get? Another greasy fried chicken joint.

RON

So where do you go to school?

JAMEL

Southwestern.

RON

How do you like it?

JAMEL

I don't. It's hard to learn there.

RON

What do you mean?

JAMEL

The computers are outdated. Half of them don't work anyway. Too many kids in a class. They play too much, always causing trouble. Half the class is over before they calm down. The class time we do have we struggle to keep up with what the teacher is telling us. That's why we're so far behind now.

RON

You think a tutor might help?

JAMEL

Man, my mom ain't got money for a tutor. In case you weren't listening I don't live in the ghetto by choice.

RON

What does your mom do?

JAMEL

She works at a nursing home out in the county. Takes two hours and three buses just to get there. She was full time til they cut her hours.

RON

Well maybe we can work something out. I know some people who can help.

(CONTINUED)

JAMEL  
You'd do that?

RON  
Well you seem like a good kid,  
despite all this. But like I said,  
I can't have you skipping out on  
these repairs.

JAMEL  
I think I can live with that. Yeah,  
yeah I know I can live with that.

INT - STORE - DAY

As they walk back inside their conversation continues.

RON  
You play any sports?

JAMEL  
I used to play basketball. Had  
dreams of making it big in the NBA  
til I fell and broke my kneecap.

RON  
Sorry to hear that.

JAMEL  
It's alright. Just means I have to  
find something else to do with my  
time. (pause) Let me ask you a  
question.

RON  
Yeah, what is it?

JAMEL  
Why do they put so many liquor  
stores, chicken joints and check  
cashing places in the poor  
neighborhoods? How come they don't  
put up an ice cream shop, a trade  
school, a health food store?  
Something like that.

RON  
Because...

Jamel's question has Ron stumped.

(CONTINUED)