

MEADOWLANDZ

by

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Sundance Feature Film Program

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Emerging Narratives

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INT. THE PALACE NIGHTCLUB - NEW JERSEY - NIGHT

A skinny, small-framed black kid, MARKEES (20) stands at the bar holding a beer. Lights FLASH and WHIRL around him. He walks a little ways toward the dance floor, bopping to the BLARING, THUMPING HIP-HOP music.

A young, black CLUB THUG (23) approaches, trying to make his way to the bar, squeezing through the crowd

CLUB THUG
Yo, let me pass!

MARKEES
What?

CLUB THUG
I SAID, "LET ME PASS!"

MARKEES
Oh, I ain't hear you.

Club Thug jumps in Markees's face, nudging him in the head with "gun fingers." Some PEOPLE IN THE CROWD notice.

CLUB THUG
YO, NEXT TIME I SAY "LET ME PASS,"
YOU BETTER FUCKIN' LET ME PASS!

MARKEES
Look, I ain't hear you, a'ight.

Markees turns to walk away. Club Thug nudges Markees hard in the back of the head with the "gun fingers."

CLUB THUG
DON'T WALK AWAY FROM ME!

Markees stops. Turns around. A SMALL CROWD forms a circle around them, watching. Club Thug gets right in Markees's face, staring hard and spit-spraying him with every word...

CLUB THUG (CONT'D)
YOU DON'T WALK AWAY FROM ME UNTIL I
TELL YOU CAN WALK AWAY!

Markees stands his ground, only moving his head and averting his face to avoid the concussive breath in Club Thug's words.

MARKEES
(shaking his head)
Yo, you know what...?

CLUB THUG
(nudging Markees again)
WHAT?! WHAT YOU GOT TO SAY?!

Markees moves his head again, but no matter how much he evades, Club Thug's face is there, an inch from his own.

Markees frowns and grinds his jaw visibly, skillfully faking as if bottling anger. A show for the crowd.

MARKEES
 (shaking his head)
 ...naw, naw, I ain't even gon' go
 there wit'chu, man.

CLUB THUG
 OH...YOU AIN'T GON' GO THERE WIT'
 ME, HUH...?!
 (laughing at Markees)
 YOU AIN'T GON' GO THERE WIT' ME?!

Suddenly, something behind Club Thug catches Markees's eye. Markees looks up. Nods to someone behind Club Thug.

MARKEES
 (calling to someone O.S.)
 Yo, Jay. This yuh boy, right? Come
 git yuh boy, man.

CLUB THUG
 MATTER OF FACT, DON'T EVEN TALK
 UNLESS I SAY YOU CAN TALK!

MARKEES
 Yo, Jay, come git yuh boy.

CLUB THUG
 ASK MAH PERMISSION TO TALK, NIGGA!

MARKEES
 (lilt of warning)
 Jay, come git yuh boy!

CLUB THUG
 ASK MAH PERMISSION!!!

MARKEES
 YO, JAY--!

Suddenly, a tall, dark-skinned kid, BLACK (22), steps between Markees and Club Thug, pushing them away from one another.

BLACK
 A'ight...a'ight...

CLUB THUG
 WHAT'CHU MEAN, A'IGHT? WHO DA FUCK
 IS YOU?!?!

BLACK

I'm the nigga puttin' a stop to this bullshit before botha y'all git this whole shit shut down and ruin it for eh-hh-verybody. Cuz botha y'all know how they do when a fight jump off in this piece.

Markees and Club Thug stare past Black at one another.

CLUB THUG

One day I'm gon' catch you out here wit' out yuh bodyguard and it's gon' me and you, nigga.

MARKEES

Whatever, yo.

CLUB THUG

YEAH, WHATEVER!

SWACK! Club Thug smacks Markees's cup up into his face, drenching his head and shirt with beer.

SMALL CROWD

(various voices)

DAAAMN!/OOOH SHIT!/HA-HAAA!!!

CLUB THUG

Bitch-ass nigga.

Club Thug walks away. The small crowd stands scrutinizing Markees with disdain. Soon they, too, begin to disperse...

SMALL CROWD

(various voices)

If that was me, booooy!/Yo, that nigga a punk!/I woulda punched that nigga in his face!/Bitch-ass!

Black moves Markees over to the bar. A towel is thrown to Markees from an off screen BARTENDER. Markees wipes his face.

BLACK

You good?

MARKEES

(smells towel, frowns)

Yeah, I'm good...

(pats shirts with towel)

Know what? No. Fuck this. I'm out.

BLACK

So what, you just gon' go home?

MARKEES

Yeah. At least to get this shit off me. Change my shirt. You comin' or you gettin' another ride?

BLACK

Can we hit that Spanish party in Union City?

MARKEES

Auw, man! You know how far Union City is from here?

BLACK

Come on, son! You know I got you on gas. And there's gon' be mad Dominican shorties there.

MARKEES

A'ight, fine. I just need to go back to my house to change.

BLACK

Cool. Lemme get Third's dumb ass.

INT. HALLWAY TO THE RESTROOMS - THE PALACE NIGHTCLUB

A Puerto Rican kid, THIRD (20), stands in a line of young CLUB GUYS leaning against a wall, watching and cat-calling CLUB GIRLS as they walk by. TWO BLACK CLUB GIRLS strut past.

THIRD

Yo, Mami. Can I talk to you? Mami!
(they ignore him)
Oh, what, y'all can't be civil?

A BLACK AND LATINA CLUB GIRL DUO walks by, the LATINA TEXTING on her cell phone.

THIRD (CONT'D)

Yo, sweetheart...how you textin' me when you ain't got my number yet?
(she ignores him)
Aaah, see? You smiled! You smiled!

THREE LATINA CLUB GIRLS walk by. This time Third just grabs a handful of the BIG-BOOTIED LATIN GIRL's ass cheek.

In a whirlwind, she spins around and slaps the living shit out of him. SWACK!!! The Club Guys against the wall jump, startled at the loudness of it.

CLUB GUYS ON THE WALL

(laugh-shouting in unison)
OOH SHIT!!!

Third, totally caught off guard, stumbles, almost falling. He gains his feet and immediately launches at the girl with his fist in the air, feigning a punch so as to make her flinch.

THIRD
 (shouting in her face)
 WHAT? WHAT?
 (but she does not flinch)
 That's what I thought!

Big-Bootied Latin Club Girl raises her fist, feigning a punch at Third, who actually does flinch.

BIG-BOOTIED LATIN CLUB GIRL
 Yeah, that's what I thought!

She walks away smiling at Third mockingly. Third turns to look at the Club Guys on the Wall and they BURST OUT LAUGHING at him, doubling over and pointing at him for effect.

CLUB GUYS ON THE WALL
 (various voices)
 AAAHHH!/YOU GOT CLOWNED, NIGGA!/YOU
 A IDIOT, YO!/DUMB-ASS!

Black appears and pulls Third aside.

BLACK
 Yo, me and Markees is out, son.

THIRD
 What? We just got here, yo.

BLACK
 I think we gon' hit up that Spanish party in Union City.

THIRD
 Oh, word? There gon' be a lotta honeys there?

BLACK
 Fuh sho.

THIRD
 Hellz yeah. This club is whack anyway, yo.

Suddenly, the crowd BUZZES. People scurry, jump and point, trying to see something over the heads of the others. On tip-toes, Black and Markees crane their necks up to see...

ACROSS THE ROOM

Where a LARGE CIRCLE OF ONLOOKERS widens to give ample room to a tight huddle of JAMAICAN THUGS. Arms flailing and bodies jerking, they punch and kick someone they have surrounded.

THIRD
Oh shit, is that a fight?

BLACK
Looks like it.

Third begins pushing toward the scuffle. Black follows. Both of them jump and strain, trying to get a better view...

ACROSS THE ROOM

As FOUR CLUB BOUNCERS rush into the fray, pushing and pulling ten or so Jamaican Thugs off of whoever is getting their ass whooped in the middle. Two of the Club Bouncers then each scoop TWO LIMP BODIES from the floor.

THIRD
Damn, them niggas they scooped
don't even look conscious, yo!
(straining to see)
Wait! Ain't that yuh boy?

BLACK
What? Who?

THIRD
That nigga that just got danced on.
The one on the left -- ain't that
yuh boy Adrian?

Black hops and weaves, peering over people's heads at...

The Two Club Bouncers dragging the Two Limp Bodies away, but they are too far to see clearly, disappearing into darkness.

BLACK
(still bobbing, squinting)
I can't tell. It's too dark.

POP! POP! POP! Huge lights in the ceiling strike--

Flooding the club in a bright, white blaze. The crowd MOANS AND GROANS, shrouding their eyes.

THIRD
(squeezing his eyes tight)
Oop! Here we go! Shut down!

On tiptoes, Black again squints over the crowd to look...

ACROSS THE ROOM

But only a sea of RANDOM HIP HOP HEADS remain at the fight sight, they too squinting and shrouding their eyes in pain.

EXT. THE PALACE NIGHTCLUB - LATER

Markees, Black and Third walk down a street amongst a crowd of DISGRUNTLED CLUB GOERS.

THIRD
Damn, it took forever to git out
that club, yo!

BLACK
And I ain't barely see shit, so
that fight wasn't even worth it.

THIRD
Yo, next time, I'm leaving the club
when the fight starts! Fuh real!

Markees opens the door of an Oldsmobile and gets into the driver's seat as Black gets into the passenger seat and Third into the back. Markees reaches out to turn the ignition when--

A HARD DOUBLE KNOCK ON A WINDOW. Black and Markees jump with a startled: "OH!" Third lets loose a HIGH PITCHED SQUEAL.

At the passenger's side window, is the bruised face of a large, black, thug, ADRIAN (24). Black rolls down the window.

ADRIAN
Yo, Black, what up, man?

THIRD
Yo, man, you scared the shit outta
us.

ADRIAN
Obviously.

BLACK
Yeah yo, you can't be creepin' up
on the car like that, son.

ADRIAN
Sorry. I got them ninja skills,
know what I'm sayin'?

BLACK
Yo, you know Markees and Third,
right?

ADRIAN
(nods to Third)
Yeah, I know this fool back here.
(nods to Markees)
Yeah, and I know you from back in
the day, right? Ain't seen you in
minute. Whus good?

MARKEES

Whus up?

ADRIAN

So look, y'all leaving? Can I ride wit' y'all?

THIRD

Was that you back there in that fight with them Jamaicans?

ADRIAN

Yeah. You saw that?

BLACK

Yeah. What was up wit' that shit?

ADRIAN

I'll tell you later. Can a nigga get a ride or what?

BLACK

Where you headed, though?

ADRIAN

It don't even matter, yo. Just the hell up outta here.

BLACK

Well, first we gon hit Markees's spot then we gon' hit this Spanish party out in Union City.

ADRIAN

Can y'all drop me in Newark. It's on the way. I got you on gas.

BLACK

(to Markees)
Markees?

MARKEES

Cool. Whatever, yo. Get in.

Adrian gets in the back, scooting Third over to sit behind Markees. Markees reaches up to ignition, then balks.

MARKEES

(to rearview mirror)
Third, man, what was that a second ago?

THIRD

What was what?

MARKEES

That noise you made -- what was that?

THIRD

What?

MARKEES

You screamed like a bitch.

THIRD

Fuck you. I don't know what you talkin' about. You need to go 'head and drive this broke ride you got.

MARKEES

(starts the car)

Sounded like a cat in a blender.

THIRD

Oh! Oh, you got jokes now, huh? You got jokes? Got us out here at the club in a goddamn Oldsmobile. More like Old-ASS-mobile...and got the nerve to talk some shit.

Markees begins the four point turn needed to get his yacht-like car out of the tight place between two others.

BLACK

Yo, Adrian, what happened to yuh ride, son?

ADRIAN

Oh, uh...it's in the shop.

They drive off.

INT. OUTER HALLWAY - TENEMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A door. Outside it, the LAUGHING and TALKING of a group of YOUNG MEN approaches. The door CREAKS open and in comes Markees, who stops in his tracks, staring at something on the floor.

Black and Third squeeze in behind him, followed by Adrian. They follow Markees's gaze, all of them finally staring at...

A portly, dishevelled African man, VAL (52), lying passed out and barefoot in the middle of the floor, spotlighted by the ceiling light.

THIRD

(ghetto falsetto)

Look at this mu'fucka...!

ADRIAN
Damn, this nigga is TO' UP!

THIRD
Yo...and where my nigga shoes at,
yo! Damn!

ADRIAN
That's fucked up, you so drunk you
lose yuh shoes.

THIRD
Crackhead prolly stole them shits.

BLACK
Nobody stole his shit, son. He
still got his wallet.

ADRIAN
How you know?

BLACK
That bulge in front his pocket.

THIRD
Or he just happy to see you. Head
all nappy, too? Twigs and shit all
up in his wig.

ADRIAN
Look like he been crawlin' through
the dirt, right?

THIRD
(correction)
My man look like a runaway slave.

ADRIAN
(mock shout of pride)
AF-REE-KUH!

THIRD
(mocking & laughing)
AF-REE-KUHHH!!!

BLACK
Yo, why don't y'all shuddup, man.
That's Markees' father, man.

Adrian and Third LAUGH that aggressive, ghetto-loud guffaw
meant to humiliate Markees and egg-on a retort.

But Markees doesn't respond.

And Black doesn't laugh with them. Instead, he stares at
Adrian and Third, not even cracking a smile.

Looking into Black's mirthless eyes, Adrian and Third's attack-laughter dies down, leaving Adrian solemn-faced and Third wearing an awkward grin.

BLACK
That's his father, son.

THIRD
(trying to hold the grin)
Shuddup, nigga...

Third's grin finally, reluctantly drops. He looks over at--
Markees, who stares down at the Val.

MARKEES
(not looking back at him)
Yo, Black, man. Help me get this
nigga up, man.

FADE OUT.

INT./EXT. TENEMENT COURTYARD - NIGHT

Caught in the front door jam, Markees and Black struggle to hold Val up, one arm draped over each of their shoulders. Dead weight, he hangs limply between them, head lolling on his shoulders. Finally they drag him out to...

THE STOOP

And toward the stairs to the sidewalk. As they struggle down one stair, then stumble down another, Val slides further down between them.

Markees's ankle twists under the weight and--

He falls down the last stair, taking Val and Black with him. They all hit the sidewalk and grass below.

BLACK
(grabbing his knee)
OUW! FUCK! Yo, fuck this! That's
it! I ain't draggin' this big ass
nigga no more!

MARKEES
Come on, man! You know I can't
carry this nigga mahself!

BLACK
Nope. Nope. I'm done. I'm done.

MARKEES

(to Black)

Look, a'ight, jus' help me get him into a Fireman's Carry so I can get him down the path to the car.

THIRD

Fireman's Carry? What the fuck is that?

MARKEES

It's like when you throw somebody over yuh shoulder.

THIRD

Yo, man, this a big ass nigga, though. You sure you can do that shit?

MARKEES

In a Fireman's Carry, yeah.

ADRIAN

You done Fireman's Carry before?

MARKEES

Yeah!

ADRIAN

Who you done Fireman's Carry on?

MARKEES

My girl.

ADRIAN

YUH GIRL!

This time Adrian, Third and Black laugh.

THIRD

Yo, son, yuh girl weigh like a buck-an'-a-quarter, soakin' wet wit' boots on! This nigga's straight Goliath, yo!

ADRIAN

There ain't no way you gettin' this nigga up off the ground.
AIN'T...NO...WAY!

MARKEES

It'll work.

THIRD

Pssssh! A'ight! Don't git no hernia! That's I got to say.

MARKEES

Come on, man! Why you buggin'?

BLACK

Tell me why! Why we gotta go movin' this nigga when we could just leave his ass right here. Why?

THIRD

For real, yo. Just leave this nigga out here.

MARKEES

Naw, fuck that! People gotta come through this way.

ADRIAN

So?

MARKEES

"So!" What'chu mean, "so?" I don't want people seein' this shit--

ADRIAN

Fuck people.

MARKEES

People that live in this building? People that know me? Naw! Uh-uh!

THIRD

(nodding toward the path)
Oop. Too late. Here come somebody right now.

BLACK

Oh shit, son, das yuh momz!

The boys stand rigid, watching OPADELLA BAILEY (43), walk up the path toward them in a maid's uniform, carrying a bag of groceries in one hand Markees's little sister, EBONY (4), in the other. Opal has a tired look, old beyond her years. Ebony has pink blotches (burn scars) on her face and neck.

OPADELLA

Markees, what is goin'--?

She sees Val on the cement path behind them.

OPADELLA

Oh, my God! That's it! That's it!
I'm callin' the police! I'm tired
of this! I'm tired!

She tries to walk past Markees, but he blocks her way.

MARKEES

Mah, we got this--!

OPADELLA

No! No! No--!

MARKEES

Mah! Mah! We got this!

OPADELLA

What you got? You ain't got shit!
 Know what I got, though: I got a
 restrainin' order on this fool, and
 I'm calling the police! Let them do
 they job! Let them take care of it!

FADE TO:

WHITE FRAME. The WHINE and CRACKLE of badly transmitted
 voices BLEATS and BELCHES.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

WHITE FRAME. VAL'S POV of a flashlight shining in his eyes
 (the FRAME). The light is pulled away to reveal two police
 officers, FAT COP and SKINNY COP, standing against the starry
 night sky. Walkie-talkies BURP whining, crackling, VOICES.

The flashlight is shined into Val's eyes (the FRAME) again.

FAT COP

...if he didn't violate the
 restraining order, why is his stuff
 in there?

MARKEES (O.S.)

Well, when that dude across the
 hall--Johnny--kicked him out, all
 his stuff was outside in the front,
 so I jus' brought it in the house
 for him until he found him a place.

SKINNY COP

(nudging Val with foot)
 Mr. Mudge? Mr. Mudge...?

FAT COP

So he didn't violate the
 restraining order?

MARKEES (O.S.)

No.

SKINNY COP

Mr. Mudge? Mr. Mudge, wake up!

Another flashlight beam shines into Val's eyes (the FRAME).

FAT COP
Mr. Mudge? Can you stand up?

Val GRUNTS off screen.

FAT COP
Can you stand up?

In the background, Opadella stands in the doorway to her apartment still wearing her maid's uniform. Markees's little sister, Ebony, stands next to her, holding her hand.

OPADELLA
Can you take him somewhere?

FAT COP
Well, we can't take him to detox unless he can sign the papers. He can't even stand up, so I doubt he can sign the papers.

SKINNY COP
Mr. Mudge? Can you sign your name?

FAT COP
Can you sign your name, Mr. Mudge?

SKINNY COP
He's completely incoherent. He can't go to detox.

FAT COP
Is there someplace he can go -- someplace you can take him? A friend's house maybe?

MARKEES
Yeah. Ukachi' house.

FAT COP
Ukachi?

Markees looks down at...

Val lying on the floor.

MARKEES
His cousin.

Val's unseeing eyes peer through slits up at...

The ceiling light and Fat Cop silhouetted above him.

BEGIN FADE OUT.

FAT COP
 Can you call him up and see if they
 can take him?

FADE OUT.

BLACK FRAME.

MARKEES (O.S.)
 I don't know his number.

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - LATER

NO SOUND. Val stands at the open passenger-side door of a car, both hands clutching the car for dear life.

POLICE LIGHTS WHIRL, bouncing and reflecting off everything.

The African stands there, wobbly, dumbfounded. With much effort, he turns, looking at everyone flatly, confused.

FAT COP
 (muffled as from far away)
 You are going to get into the car
 now, Mr. Mudge.

Fat Cop places his hand on Val's head, trying to push him down into the car.

SOUND FADE IN:

FAT COP (CONT'D)
 Get into the car, Mr. Mudge!

Val finally yields and stumbles into the passenger's seat. Fat Cop shuts the car door.

INT. MARKEES'S CAR

Bleary eyed, Val turns to look at...

Markees's stomach, Markees still stands in the open driver's side car door, leaning over the car's hood.

FAT COP (O.S.)
 So you guys are going to take him
 to this Ukachi-guy's house?

MARKEES (O.S.)
 Yeah. See if he home.

Val turns back around to look at...

Fat Cop's blue-shirted potbelly through the passenger-side window. We PAN to FOCUS on his walkie-talkie.

FAT COP (O.S.)
 What are you going to do if this
 guy's not home or if he doesn't
 want to take him?

We PAN to FOCUS on his badge. Then on his holstered gun.

MARKEES (O.S.)
 I don't know, I'll figure it out
 when I get there.

Val turns to face forward, drunkenly squinting out through...

The front windshield. Beyond a blurry, dark street. Street lamps like globes of light. Flickering tenements like stars.

Val's eyes flutter closed...

BEGIN FADE OUT.

FAT COP (O.S.)
 Well just don't leave him in some
 fuckin' ditch, okay.

FADE OUT.

BLACK FRAME.

MARKEES (O.S.)
 Oh no...I ain't gon' leave him in
 no fuckin' ditch.

FADE IN:

INT. MARKEES'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Val's eyes flutter half open and gaze unfocused through--

The windshield at the oncoming city street.

Val's head turns slightly and his eyes shift to see...

Markees driving the car.

Black does a double-take into the back window at...

A PLUSHY TOY ANIMAL staring at him, an army of multi-colored PLUSHY TOYS lined up behind it.

BLACK

Yo, Markees, what up wit' this
shit, man?

MARKEES

What up wit' what?

BLACK

What up wit' this?

Markees looks into the rearview mirror at--

Black gesturing to the plushy toys in the back window well.

BLACK

What up wit' yuh momz and these
puppets up in the window and shit,
man?

MARKEES

They my sister's, a'ight

BLACK

Yeah, but why she gotta have 'em
all up in the window, man?

Black reaches into the back window well, rifling through an
arrangement of brightly colored stuffed animals.

BLACK (cont'd)

Damn! Look at this shit! She got
all kinds of shit up here --
Kermits and Barneys and shit!

MARKEES

Yo, man, why don't you leave my
sister's shit alone, man? She got
a handicap.

BLACK

What her having a handicap gotta do
with these shits bein' all up in
the window?

THIRD

For real? Why they gotta be all up
in the window?

MARKEES

'Cause that's where she like 'em,
a'ight They make her feel good --
YO, MAN, LEAVE THEM SHITS ALONE! I
JUST TOLD YOU SHE GOT A HANDICAP!
DAMN, WHERE'S YUH COMPASSION, MAN?

THIRD

No passion.

MARKEES
COM-PASSION.

THIRD
No passion.

MARKEES
 Look...jus'...look...jus' leave
 them shits alone, A'ight

BLACK
 She ain't here!

MARKEES
 So? Why you forever gotta go and
 fuck wit' shit? You can't just
 never leave well enough alone!

BLACK
 Yo, man, get these shits outta here
 while we up in here, man!

MARKEES
 They ain't hurtin' nobody. They
 ain't hurtin' you.

BLACK
 THE SHITS LOOK RETARDED, A'IGHT?!

Markees continues driving. Black gets frustrated, and in a huff, begins pulling the plushy toys out of the window.

MARKEES
 Yo, what'chu doin'? Puttin' 'em on
 the floor?!?!

BLACK
 Ain't no place else to put 'em!

MARKEES
 LEAVE 'EM IN THE GODDAMN WINDOW!

BLACK
 Yo, I don't care what you say,
 these stupid mu'fuckas is comin'
 out this window!

MARKEES
 Put 'em in the trunk then, man!

BLACK
 Stop the car then!

EXT. CITY STREET

The car SCREECHES to a halt. Black gets out with an armful of plushy toys and walks around to the trunk. The hazard lights begin to flash.

BLACK
 (to Markees inside car)
 Yo, pop the coochie already, man!

The trunk POPS unlocked. Black lifts the hood and begins unloading the toys into the trunk.

BACK IN THE CAR

Black returns to the open backseat door, leans in, and scoops the last of the plushy toys out of the rear window.

BLACK (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 (grumbling to himself)
 Got the whole Bronx-fuckin'-Zoo up
 in this muthafucka!

Arms full, he storms off toward the trunk again.

BACK OUTSIDE AT THE TRUNK

Black finishes unloading the last of toys into the trunk. SHOOMP! He slams the trunk closed.

BACK INSIDE THE CAR

Val's eyes shift, looking into his side mirror at...

Black coming back to the open car door. He gets in, closing it. The car pulls off, the street moving behind.

Val's eyes close...

FADE OUT.

INT. MARKEES'S CAR

The young men sit in silence. HIP-HOP MUSIC blares. Val shifts in his seat MUMBLING in some liquor-sodden dream.

ADRIAN
 What's that gibberish that nigga
 talkin'? African?

MARKEES
 Russian.

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