REDWOOD

MIKE 'SHORTY' REESE

AUDITION SIDES

Character Overview + Three Audition Scenes

SECTOR 7 FILMS

MIKE 'SHORTY' REESE

Late 30s | Head Chef, Redwood Grill

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Mike 'Shorty' Reese is a compact, highly skilled chef with a tough exterior and a softer side he does not give away easily. The script describes him as a late-30s African-American man, about 5'5, with piercing eyes, pride in his work, and the sense that there may be more beneath the surface than he lets people see.

Shorty did not come from comfort. His mother struggled with crack addiction and spent much of his childhood in and out of jail. His grandmother raised the family and taught everyone her way of cooking. That kitchen became Shorty's first school. After high school, he earned a scholarship to the Culinary Institute, finished near the top of his class, and eventually spent seven years as a top chef at XO in Las Vegas.

Cooking is not just a job to Shorty. It is pride, identity, survival and proof of how far he has come. He is comfortable around fire, knives, pressure and people who expect excellence. When Rod sees his ability, Shorty is moved directly into the head chef position at Redwood - Vanguard's flagship restaurant - and trusted with recipes that have been protected for generations.

The actor should not play Shorty as a stereotypical tough guy. The toughness is armor. Underneath it is discipline, talent, history and a man who knows exactly how hard he worked to get into this room. His humor is dry. His respect has to be earned. His loyalty matters. And when something feels wrong in his kitchen, he notices.

WHAT THE AUDITION SHOULD SHOW

- Skill and confidence - he belongs in a professional kitchen and knows it.
- Restraint - Shorty does not need to announce how tough he is.
- Pride - the food means something personal to him.
- Leadership - when the kitchen is moving, he is part of the machine and helps control its rhythm.
- Depth - his childhood story should reveal history without turning into self-pity.
- Observation - he can register suspicion quickly without overplaying it.

DO NOT PLAY THE HEIGHT. DO NOT PLAY THE TOUGH GUY. PLAY THE CHEF WHO EARNED EVERY INCH OF HIS POSITION.

SIDE 1 - THE TEST KITCHEN

SCENE: Rod Ashton and Brown approach Shorty in Vanguard's test kitchen after watching him work. Shorty is essentially being evaluated for a major position, but he does not behave like a man begging for approval.

ACTOR OBJECTIVE: Let them see the talent without selling yourself too hard. Shorty knows what he can do. The deeper objective is respect: he wants to know whether these men understand what they are looking at.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: The backstory about his mother and grandmother is important, but do not turn it into a speech about pain. It is simply where he came from. The pride is in what he built from it.

INT. VANGUARD TEST KITCHEN - DAY

A professional kitchen. Shorty works with precision as Rod and Brown approach.

ROD
You handle those knives like a man who knows his way around a kitchen.

Rod extends his hand.

ROD
Rod Ashton. CEO of Vanguard.

Shorty turns off the stove, gives Rod a quick once-over, then extends a balled fist instead of a handshake. Rod pounds him up.

SHORTY
Michael Reese. My friends call me Shorty for obvious reasons.

A slight chuckle. He gives away very little.

SHORTY
Been tearing up kitchens since I was twelve.

BROWN
I told you he was a beast.

ROD
So how'd you go from your mama's kitchen to the best culinary school in the country?

SHORTY
My mama never had a kitchen. She was a crackhead. Spent most of her time in and out of jail. My grandma took us in and raised us. She taught everybody in her house her way of cooking. And we learned.

SIDE 1 - THE TEST KITCHEN (CONTINUED)

SHORTY

After high school, I won a scholarship to the Culinary Institute. And that was it. That was my break. But I'm not gonna lie. You seem awfully young to be a CEO, my dude.

ROD

A lucky break. And I work my ass off. That's the secret. But head chef for seven years at XO ain't too shabby either, brother.

Shorty gives a crooked smile, slices the lamb, and plates a few pieces.

SHORTY

Tell me what you think.

Brown tastes first. Then Rod.

BROWN

Damn, champ. This right here is next level.

ROD

You got something here. It's a good start. But it's not over the top. Brown hired you to work as head chef of the Watershed at National Harbor. But I'm changing the plan. I want you to take over the kitchen at Redwood effective immediately. It's the highest grossing white-cloth asset in the company. I'll up your salary another twenty K a year.

ROD

Redwood needs the absolute best. We have recipes that we exclusively use only at Redwood. Rare recipes. Five generations of perfecting them. You'll have to sign a strict nondisclosure agreement. Not one recipe is allowed to leave the kitchen. Ever. You with me?

SHORTY

Yes, sir.

ROD

Good. We only want two things from you, big dog. Your absolute loyalty and your A-game when it comes to the food. Give us both and the sky is the limit.

(beat)

ROD

Welcome aboard!

SIDE 2 - THE KITCHEN

SCENE: Shorty is now running the Redwood Grill kitchen during a busy service. This side is short by design. It tests whether the actor can feel like a chef in command without turning the scene into shouting for the sake of shouting.

ACTOR OBJECTIVE: Keep the line moving. Protect the standard. Everyone in this kitchen has a job, and Shorty has to know where the entire room is without looking panicked.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: The pace is fast, but Shorty should not look lost. The pressure is familiar. This is where he is most at home.

INT. REDWOOD GRILL - KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is busy. Flames jump. Tickets print. Chefs move shoulder to shoulder. Shorty oversees the line.

SHORTY
Tamm, I need two crab cakes dropped! Behind that, three Monte Cristos.

TAMMY
Crab cakes down! Three Monte Cristos dropping.

The expeditor calls orders as servers move in and out.

EXPEDITOR
Table fourteen is up. Let's get this order out! Table six appetizers up. Let's go, let's go, people.

The expeditor turns toward Shorty.

EXPEDITOR
Still waiting on those two medium steaks, sir.

CLOSE ON the steaks sizzling on the grill.

SHORTY
Give me thirty seconds. I gotchu!

Shorty turns back into the rhythm of the kitchen.

PERFORMANCE BUTTON

Shorty does not need to dominate the room physically. His authority comes from competence. We should believe that if something goes wrong on this line, he will know before almost anyone else.

SIDE 3 - SOMETHING IS MISSING

SCENE: Les calls Shorty into his office because high-end steak inventory is missing. Shorty handled the count, so the discrepancy matters personally. He is not defensive - he wants to understand what happened.

ACTOR OBJECTIVE: Solve the problem. Shorty takes pride in his kitchen and his name. If somebody is stealing, they are violating both.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: Start practical. The suspicion should arrive only after Shorty sees the numbers do not make sense.

INT. LES'S OFFICE AT REDWOOD - NIGHT

Les sits behind his laptop. Shorty appears in the doorway in his kitchen smock, holding a spatula.

SHORTY
You wanted to see me, boss?

LES
Who handled inventory last week? Seafood and steak.

SHORTY
I did and uploaded it into the system.

Les finally looks up.

LES
We've got a problem. Take a look.

Shorty removes his gloves and moves behind Les to see the laptop.

LES
The ribeye and sirloin count is off. POS shows we sold ninety-seven last week. We purchased one hundred thirty. Should have thirty-three total on hand. I just recounted myself and can only find fifteen.

SHORTY
Yeah, I see it. You sure we ordered that many?

LES
One thirty.

Shorty walks toward the office door, thinking. He scratches his head.

SHORTY
Somebody's walking with them.

LES
Exactly. They messing with my profit. Keep your eye out.

SHORTY
Gotchu.

SIDE 3 - THE VIDEO

SCENE: Later, Les shows Shorty hidden-camera footage. They finally see what happened to the missing product.

ACTOR OBJECTIVE: Confirm what you are seeing, then decide what the right response should be. Shorty is disturbed not just by the theft, but because the person involved seemed trustworthy.

PERFORMANCE NOTE: Do not make this detective work. Keep it grounded. Shorty is a chef and leader watching someone violate the kitchen he is responsible for.

INT. LES'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Shorty is off work now, in plain clothes, leaned over Les as they watch surveillance video on the laptop.

LES
This video was at one-oh-two A.M. The camera's hidden. We're the only two who know about it.

SHORTY
Wait. Rewind it.

Les rewinds. They watch closely.

SHORTY
Looks like a female.

LES
Pretty sure it's Shana, the sous chef. And right there, she's stuffing them into her backpack.

SHORTY
Red-handed. And she came off so legit. So now what? Call the police?

LES
Not unless I can prove it's more than five hundred bucks. And I can't. The cameras are too new. I'll deal with her my way.

Shorty studies the screen. The problem is no longer inventory. It is trust.

PERFORMANCE BUTTON

Let Shorty's disappointment register before anger. He respects people who take their work seriously. Discovering that someone inside the kitchen has been stealing should feel like a personal violation of the standard he lives by.

AUDITION REMINDER

Across these three sides, we should see the same man in three different environments: the chef proving who he is, the leader controlling a high-pressure kitchen, and the professional realizing that someone inside his operation has betrayed the standard.

Shorty's toughness is not the performance. His COMPETENCE is.

He is a man who came from instability and built his life around precision. His grandmother gave him a foundation. Culinary school gave him an opportunity. His own talent carried him the rest of the way.

When he cooks, he should look at home. When he talks about his past, he should not ask for sympathy. When he is offered Redwood, we should feel that he understands the weight of that opportunity. And when something goes wrong inside his kitchen, we should feel how seriously he takes it.

DO NOT play Shorty as angry all the time.
DO NOT play his height as a joke.
DO NOT force the 'tough guy.'
DO NOT play the darker side before the story earns it.

PLAY THE PRIDE. PLAY THE DISCIPLINE. PLAY THE MAN WHO KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT HIS HANDS CAN DO.

That's Mike 'Shorty' Reese. Now show us your version of him.