

AMERICAN FICTION

Written for the Screen by

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Based upon the novel 'Erasure' by Percival Everett

OVER BLACK

MONK
OK. Let's begin.

INT. USC CLASSROOM - DAY

We open on **THELONIOUS "MONK" ELLISON** (black, 50s, neurotic, tired) standing before a classroom of college students, most of them white.

MONK
Who wants to start?

BRITTANY (white, 19) raises her hand.

MONK (CONT'D)
Yes, Brittany. Kick it off.

BRITTANY
I don't have a thought on the reading, I just think that that word on the board is wrong.

The camera moves now so we can see the whiteboard behind Monk, on which is written: "Flannery O'Connor" and "The Artificial Nigger." Monk turns to look.

MONK
No, it still had two Gs last I checked.

Some of the students laugh, but not Brittany.

BRITTANY
It's not funny. We shouldn't have to stare at the n-word all day.

MONK
Listen. This is a class on the literature of the American South. You're going to encounter some archaic thoughts, coarse language, but we're all adults here, and I think we can understand it in the context in which it's used.

BRITTANY
Well, I just find that word really offensive.

MONK

With all due respect, Brittany, I got over it. I'm pretty sure you can, too.

BRITTANY

Well, I don't see why.

Monk, who has been affable up until now, casts an icy stare at Brittany.

INT. USC HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Brittany storms out of the classroom carrying all her things, tears streaming down her bright red cheeks. We can hear Monk's voice trailing after her.

MONK (O.S.)

(shouting)

Now, does anyone else have thoughts on the reading?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Monk is sitting before a tribunal of sorts. At a long table in front of him are three other professors: **GILDA** (white, 50s), **MANDEL** (white, 60s), and **LEO** (white, 50s), the chair of the English department.

LEO

Well, it made some of your students uncomfortable, Monk.

MONK

When did they all become so goddamn delicate?

MANDEL

This wasn't an isolated incident.

MONK

What?

GILDA

Last month you asked a student if his family had been Nazis.

MONK

Yeah, I did. He's German. We were reading "The Plot Against America." And trust me, from the way he was squirming, they were.

LEO
 Monk, you are a very talented
 writer. We're fortunate to have you
 here --

MANDEL
 (interrupting)
 What? He hasn't published in years.
 (off Monk's look)
 I've written three novels since the
 last time you published.

MONK
 This is true. And the speed with
 which you write only proves that
 good things take time.

MANDEL
 Oh, go to hell, Monk!

LEO
 (intervening)
 Enough. Enough! Relax, Mandy.

MONK
 Yeah, relax, Mandy. And anyway, my
 new book is in with Ecco and my
 agent says they're very excited
 about it.

LEO
 That's great to hear. What's it
 about?

GILDA
 Can we stop stalling, Leo.

Monk looks to Leo, puzzled.

LEO
 Uh, listen, Monk, we'd like to give
 you a break.

MONK
 A break?

LEO
 Just some time off.

MANDEL
Mandatory time off.

LEO

It's just, you're already going to Boston for the festival, right? Why don't you just stay there for a couple weeks?

MONK

Because I hate Boston. My family's there.

LEO

Well, you need some time to relax. You're on edge, man.

MONK

And you're under the impression that time spent with my family will take the edge off. I'm fine.

MANDEL

You're not fine. I saw you crying in your car last week.

(to Leo)

He punched the steering wheel.

Monk stands and walks toward Mandy.

MONK

You know, if you spent less time spying on me you could probably write a dozen more novels that people buy in airports, with their neck pillows, and Cheez-Its.

MANDEL

Oh, here we go! You want to get dirty, doggy?! Okay, well, enjoy Boston! You can get my book at the airport! Oh, and good luck with Ecco!

But Monk already is out the door.

TITLE SEQUENCE TRANSITIONING US FROM LA TO BOSTON

EXT. HOTEL - LATE AFTERNOON

Monk is exiting a hotel with a Dunkin' Donuts iced coffee. After a few steps, his phone buzzes in his pocket. It's his agent, ARTHUR (50s, gregarious).

MONK

Hello?

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Arthur's office is clean, but there are stacks of bound books and printed manuscripts. He chats using wired headphones.

ARTHUR

Welcome back. How's it feel to be home?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

MONK

Great. I've already had a man in a Bruins jersey ask me if I think I'm better than him.

ARTHUR

That's good luck here. That's Boston's version of a ladybug landing on you.

MONK

Any news?

ARTHUR

Patrick at Ecco is passing.
(then, quickly)
But who fucking cares -- he's an old alcoholic.

MONK

What is that? Nine now?

ARTHUR

He said...
(reading from computer)
"This book is finely crafted, with fully developed characters and rich language, but one is lost to understand what this reworking of Aeschlyus' *The Persians* has to do with the African-American experience."

MONK

And there it is.

ARTHUR

They want a black book.

MONK

They have one. I'm black and it's my book.

ARTHUR

You know what I mean.

MONK

You mean they want me to write about a cop killing some teenager, or a single mom in Dorchester raising five kids.

ARTHUR

Dorchester's pretty white now. But yes.

MONK

Jesus Christ.

(then)

Do you know that I don't even really believe in race?

Monk raises his hand to hail a cab, and we stay with him instead of going back to Arthur.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Yeah. The problem is that everyone else does.

A cab pulls up to Monk and then blows right past him to pick up a **WHITE MAN** several feet away.

ARTHUR (V.O.)

Anyway, have fun at the book festival. And just don't insult anyone important. Please.

INT. HOTEL EVENT ROOM - DAY

Monk is at the front with **TWO OTHER AUTHORS** and a **MODERATOR**. A placard on an easel next to them reads, "REVITALIZING ANCIENT LITERATURE FOR THE MODERN AUDIENCE." One of the other authors is finishing a thought.

AUTHOR

...and writing from a historical perspective doesn't mean you can't make work that doesn't resonate with today's audiences. I think of things like *Game of Thrones* as proof that nerds like us can still find great success.

A few people clap, and we now reveal a mostly empty room.

MODERATOR

Unfortunately we're going to have to end it there. Thank you to our authors and thanks to all of you for attending.

The audience claps and begins to disperse as the panelists graciously wave. Monk leans toward the moderator.

MONK

Is it just me, or was this small, even for a book festival?

MODERATOR

Yeah, it's because we're up against Sintara.

MONK

Who?

MODERATOR

Sintara Golden. You haven't read her?

MONK

No. What's her book called?

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL EVENT ROOM - DAY

INSERT -

We're extremely close on a book poster. The book's title -- "We's Lives in Da Ghetto" -- is written in big font and accompanied by a stereotypical illustration.

BACK TO SCENE.

The camera moves from the poster to reveal the event room, which is packed. Monk nudges past some onlookers to get a better view. Onstage, author **SINTARA GOLDEN** (black, 32, polished) sits with a **MODERATOR** (white, 40s).

MODERATOR

Raves everywhere: the Post, Bookforum, the Times. The London Review of Books said, "'We's Lives in Da Ghetto' is a heartbreaking and visceral debut." Plus, a little birdie told me that perhaps there's a TV adaptation in the works?

Sintara gives a coy look to the moderator.

SINTARA

No comment.

The audience offers some excited giggles.

MODERATOR

OK. It was worth a shot. Tell us:
What was your life like before you
were an author?

SINTARA

I did undergrad at Oberlin and
moved to New York the day after
graduation. And, a couple months
later, I was an assistant at a
publisher.

MODERATOR

And did that assistant experience
shape your writing?

SINTARA

Absolutely. I was a "first reader,"
meaning I would read all the
manuscripts in the slush pile and
send them up the ladder if they
were any good. Some of them were
great, most were not.

The audience laughs.

SINTARA (CONT'D)

But the feeling I couldn't shake
was that, no matter how good the
books were, most every submission
was from some white dude from New
York going through a divorce. Too
few of them were about my people.
And so I'd think, Where are our
stories? Where is our
representation? And it was from
that lack that my book was born.

MODERATOR

Would you give us the pleasure of
reading an excerpt?

Sintara nods and the moderator hands her a book.

SINTARA

Thank you.

(reading)

(MORE)

SINTARA (CONT'D)

"Yo, Sharonda, where you be goin' in a hurry likes dat?" D'onna ax me when she seed me comin' out da house. "Ain't none yo biznis, but iffan you gots to know, I'se goin to the pharmacy." I looks back at the do' to see if Mama comin' out. "The pharmacy? What fo?" she ax. "You know," I says. "Naw," she say. "Hell, naw. Girl, you be pregnant again?" "Mights be," I tells her. "And if I is, Ray Ray's gon' be a real father this time around."

Sintara closes the book as the audience and the moderator explode in gushing applause, with some even giving a standing ovation. Sintara smiles and waves to her fans.

SINTARA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Monk scans the room, slightly confused by what he's just witnessed.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A drunken Monk finishes a martini and motions for another.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - MORNING

Daylight breaks through the curtains onto a ruffled, empty bed. A hungover Monk is sitting on the floor of the shower, letting the water run over him.

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD SECURITY CHECK - AFTERNOON

Monk enters the clinic. A **SECURITY GUARD** wands him down and lets him pass.

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Monk approaches a desk where a **RECEPTIONIST** sits.

MONK

Hi, I'm here to see Lisa Ellison.

RECEPTIONIST

Do you have an appointment? We're about to close.

MONK

No, I'm her brother.

We hear the sound of a door opening and **LISA** (late 50s, put together) emerges from the back.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, there she is.

She approaches her brother and stops a few feet away from him.

LISA

Hello, Monk.

MONK

Hi, Lisa.

They stand and look at each other for a moment, neither of them closing the distance between them.

I/E. LISA'S CAR - SUNSET

Lisa drives as Monk rides shotgun. A few beats of silence.

LISA

OK, you're in a boat, the motor cuts out, but you're in shallow water, but you're wearing six-hundred-dollar shoes, but your ride to the airport is just pulling away from the beach. Why, oh why, is this a legal issue?

MONK

I don't know.

LISA

It's a matter of row versus wade.

MONK

Oh my god.

The ice breaker works and Monk smiles.

LISA

I think that's one of my best.

Monk and Lisa both laugh now. Lisa pulls out a cigarette and lights it.

MONK

When did you start smoking again?

LISA
Right after the divorce.

MONK
I always hated Larry.

LISA
Oh, I know. You told me right when we started dating. Do you remember how mad I got?

MONK
(Lisa impression)
"It's not your business who I fuck!
Who I fellate!"

LISA
I definitely did not say fellate.

MONK
I thought you did. That's how I heard it, anyway.

LISA
It's good to see you.

MONK
Yeah. It's good to see you, too.
How's work?

LISA
It's not very glamorous. I go through a metal detector every day.

MONK
What you do is important. Meanwhile all I do is invent little people in my head and then make them have imaginary conversations with each other.

LISA
Books change people's lives.

MONK
Has something I've written ever changed your life?

LISA
Absolutely. Absolutely! My dining room table was wobbly as hell before your last book came out.

Lisa smiles wryly at Monk.

MONK

Oh my god.

LISA

It was, like, perfect. I'm telling you--

MONK

Take me back to Logan please.

LISA

Logan cannot help you, Monk.

They laugh again.

EXT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DUSK

Lisa pulls her car into the driveway out front.

LISA (V.O.)

Welcome home, baby!

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Monk and Lisa enter the home, a worn but still elegant house in Cambridge.

LISA

Hello? Hello?

The live-in housekeeper, **LORRAINE** (black, late 60s, the barest Southern lilt), enters from the kitchen wearing her omnipresent yellow apron.

LORRAINE

Mr. Monk!

MONK

Lorraine...

Lorraine and Monk embrace for a few moments.

MONK (CONT'D)

Oh, you know how that makes me feel. It's just Monk.

LORRAINE

Oh, don't do that to me. You know I'm too old to learn new names.

(then)

How're you doing, Ms. Lisa?

LISA

I'm good.

LORRAINE

You look good, Mr. Monk.

MONK

I look fat.

LORRAINE

That's the California talking. If I took you back to Arkansas, you'd be a beauty queen.

MONK

That's frightening.

AGNES (70s, black, graceful), Monk and Lisa's mother, comes slowly down the stairs.

AGNES

Is that my Monkey?

Monk smiles when he sees her.

MONK

Hi, Mother.

They hug.

AGNES

You look fat.

MONK

I know.

LORRAINE

You ready to go to dinner, Mrs. Ellison?

AGNES

I just need my purse, and my black cardigan.

LORRAINE

Alright. I'll get it.

Monk and Agnes walk to the dining room as Lorraine goes upstairs to fetch the things.

AGNES

Are you alright? You overeat when you're depressed.

MONK

I'm not depressed. I've just been not sleeping well lately and so fell off my exercise routine.

AGNES

So you're not depressed, you just bears all the hallmarks of depression?

Monk helps Agnes into her chair.

MONK

I missed you.

Monk sits down across from Agnes as Lisa appears in the doorway.

AGNES

Is Larry coming?

LISA

No, Mother. Larry and I separated, remember?

AGNES

Of course I remember.

She didn't, so she rushes to recover.

AGNES (CONT'D)

I just thought he might be join us -
- to see your brother.

LISA

OK.

Monk and Lisa steal a glance at each other.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Monk and Lisa are at a table in a bustling Cambridge restaurant. Their mother's chair is empty, and they're trying to speak quickly and quietly before she returns.

MONK

I mean, is it really such a big deal? Everyone forgets things. That doesn't mean she's sick, necessarily.

LISA

People forget dentist appointments.
She forgets I'm not married
anymore. That's weird.

MONK

What do you suggest we do?

LISA

Why do I have to decide?

MONK

Because you're a doctor.

LISA

So are you.

MONK

I'm not that kind.

LISA

Okay, my point is you are an
intelligent adult, and I'm tired of
being the only person that takes
care of her.

MONK

Well, I don't recall anyone
assigning you that responsibility.

LISA

No, you and Cliff just fled west as
soon as you could and made me
caretaker by default.

MONK

My work's there. Apologies that it
keeps me from keeping up with the
family melodrama.

LISA

If you lived up the block you
wouldn't know what was going on.
I'm stuck here taking care of that
old house and finding love letters
from dad's affairs.

MONK

His what?

LISA

His affairs. You didn't know he was
having affairs?

MONK

Uh, no. How did you?

LISA

Well he was an OB/GYN who was traveling constantly but his patients were in Boston.

MONK

He said he was going to conferences.

LISA

He was making house calls. Do you know that I saw him kiss a white woman in the park in high school?

MONK

How white?

LISA

What do you mean how white?

MONK

Like *Brahmin* white, or *Southie* white?

LISA

I don't know. She had thin lips. Looked like a bad kisser.

MONK

Did you tell Mother?

LISA

No. I wasn't going to blow up our lives.

(recognizing)

She's coming back. Mom. Mom.

Monk stands to help Agnes into her chair.

LISA (CONT'D)

(to Agnes)

Hi. How ya doin'?

AGNES

Our waitress isn't wearing a bra.

LISA

OK.

MONK

I didn't notice.

Monk sits back down.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Monk lays atop his hotel bed wearing only his underwear. He's watching *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (2005) on the hotel TV, specifically the scene in which **MAJESTIC** (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje) explains the "house rules" of crack dealing to some neighborhood drug dealers.

MAJESTIC (ON TV)

See this shit? This gonna take us out of the ghetto. But there are rules to the house. Rule number one: Never leave this product in the house. Rule number two: Get your own crew. Number three: Gotta have discipline in your crew...four: Don't praise a n*gga too much... otherwise he gonna think you soft. Rule number five: Don't show no love. Love will get you killed. See this? It's like a bitch. You fuck a bitch, don't let a bitch fuck you. You a man? You don't need nothing or no one to get you through. This bitch... This bitch will take your soul...

Monk's initial amusement turns to disgust, and he turns the the TV off.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MORNING

Monk looks for a book in "Mythology" section, but what he wants isn't there. He stops an **EMPLOYEE** (20s, unenthusiastic).

MONK

Excuse me...

(looking at name tag)

Ned. Do you have any books by the writer Thelonious Ellison?

Ned lifts the iPad he's carrying and types in some letters.

NED

Yeah, this way.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MOMENTS LATER

Ned has walked Monk to a section called "African-American Studies."

NED
Here you go.

Ned goes to leave, but Monk stops him.

MONK
Wait a minute. Why're these books here?

NED
I'm not sure. I would imagine that this author, Ellison, is black.

MONK
That's me. Ellison. He is me. And he and I are black.

NED
Oh, bingo.

MONK
No bingo, Ned. These books have nothing to do with African-American studies. They're just literature.
(pointing again)
The blackest thing about this one is the ink.

NED
I don't decide what sections the books go in. Nobody here does. That's how chain stores work.

MONK
Right. Ned. You don't make the rules.

Monk stares at Ned angrily for a moment.

INT. BOOKSTORE - MOMENTS LATER

Monk, his arms full of his books, is walking the aisles to the appropriate section. Ned is a few paces behind him.

NED
I'm just going to put them back after you leave.

MONK

Don't you dare, Ned. Do not you dare.

Monk arrives at "Contemporary Fiction" and begins to put his books on the shelf. He looks to his right for a brief moment and catches a glimpse of a display for "We's Lives in Da Ghetto." This book is haunting him. After a short beat, Lisa steps out from behind a corner.

LISA

Monk? What are you doing?

Monk turns to her, his fists still gripping a couple books.

EXT. BAR - BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Lisa and Monk are seated at a small café table. Other **PATRONS** dot the area. Lisa has a cocktail while Monk sips a glass of wine.

LISA

Mom's only going to get worse.

LISA (CONT'D)

They say mental exercise is good. That's why I got her that gardening book.

MONK

Does growing cucumbers count as mental exercise?

LISA

I hate when you do that.

MONK

What?

LISA

You share your condescending opinion as a question to try and disguise the condescension. Why don't you just say you think the gardening is idiotic?

MONK

Um, because that's not what I was doing.

LISA

Bullshit. Bullshit.

MONK

Maybe we can hire a nurse a few times a week.

LISA

Who's gonna pay for that?

MONK

You can't afford it?

LISA

Not after the divorce. I cannot.

MONK

It'll hurt, but we'll probably have to sell the beach house.

Lisa pulls out a cigarette and lights it.

LISA

Yeah, we definitely need to sell the beach house, but that money is going to go to pay back the reverse mortgage that our mother took out on the other house.

The reverse mortgage is news to Monk.

MONK

I can send some money home, but it won't be much. Can't Cliff chip in?

LISA

Cliff's not in a good place, OK?

MONK

Who is?

LISA

Monk, Becca took everything, and the kids are getting teased in school.

MONK

I didn't know.

LISA

Well, maybe you should call him.

They're quiet for a beat.

MONK

I'm sorry I've always been so distant.

LISA

You couldn't help it. You were always Dad's favorite. And then that made Cliff and I bond, and you resented us for having that bond, and then...I don't know, you just became self-sufficient.

MONK

We've never talked about this.

LISA

We've never talked about anything. Is that surprising? Look at our parents.

(scoffs)

The only emotions I can remember Dad expressing were boredom and rage.

MONK

Is boredom an emotion?

LISA

Great. It's Detective Dictionary.

MONK

(laughing)

You haven't called me that in forever.

Just then, Lisa lurches forward and grabs her chest, clearly hurting.

LISA

Oh god.

MONK

What?

But Lisa doesn't respond. She's in too much pain.

LISA

Oh god.

MONK

Oh, c'mon.

We get close on Monk's face. At first he's smiling, still laughing at her teasing. But soon it's a look of concern, and then terror. He stands to help her.

MONK (CONT'D)

(to Lisa)

Hey --

(calling out to anyone)

Hey, help! Help! Help me! Help me!

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Monk watches through a window as a **MEDICAL TEAM** works on Lisa. The window is narrow, allowing him a limited view of his sister. After a while, he sees the doctors and nurses start to recognize that their efforts aren't working -- Lisa and her stopped heart remain unresponsive. Seeing their exertions dwindle, Monk realizes what's happening and he turns away, silent, placid. And then, without saying a word, he walks down the hallway toward the exit.

EXT. BEACH - MORNING

We're now a couple weeks out from Lisa's death, which we'll understand in a few moments. The camera pans over the mourners: Monk, Agnes, Lorraine, and a new character, **CLIFF** (early 50s, in much better shape than Monk). The group is gathered on the beach behind their home.

A breeze comes in from the ocean as water laps the sand. Cliff holds an urn and Monk holds a folded sheet of paper. He opens the document and begins to read.

MONK

(reading)

If you are reading this, it's because I, Lisa Madrigal Ellison, have died. Obviously this is not ideal, but I guess it had to happen at some point. Hopefully I expired under...

Monk stops for a moment and then begins again.

MONK (CONT'D)

(reading)

Hopefully I expired under the heaving thrusts of a sweaty Idris Elba, or perhaps in a less dignified manner, under the heaving thrusts of a sweaty Russell Crowe.

Cliff smirks as Lorraine crosses herself and Agnes shakes her head.

MONK (CONT'D)

(reading)

Irrespective of how I went, I ask that those closest to me not mourn all that much. I lived a life that made me proud. I was loved, and I loved in return. I found work that aroused my passions. I believe I gave more than I took, and I did my damndest to help people in need. And on top of all that, many a friend wrongly accused me of having botox because of how tight my skin stayed well into my 50s. What more could someone ask of a life? I love you all. Thank you for being here today. Goodbye.

Agnes and Lorraine are crying now. Monk folds the paper and pockets it as he turns to his brother.

MONK (CONT'D)

Cliff...

He reaches out and takes the urn from Cliff, then makes his way toward the water. Monk removes the lid and lets Lisa's ashes mix with the sand on the beach. A **BYSTANDER** ambles by.

BYSTANDER

Are those human remains? Do you guys have a permit for that?

CLIFF

Shut the fuck up, Phillip.

BYSTANDER

Cliff, you don't talk to me like that.

CLIFF

Fuck you. I just did.

BYSTANDER

What?

CLIFF

You want me to beat your ass?

BYSTANDER

(backing away)

I'm just--

Cliff starts after him.

CLIFF

Get the fuck outta here. I will eat your sweater vest for dinner.

BYSTANDER

No--

CLIFF

Bitch, go!

MONK

(from afar)

Get the fuck outta here, Phillip!

CLIFF

One, two, three--

Cliff follows after Phillip as Monk spreads the remaining ashes.

MONK

Always been a fuckin' douche.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Monk comes inside to find Cliff sitting alone and having a glass of wine, the bottle open on the coffee table.

MONK

Where is everybody?

CLIFF

They're exhausted. I gave Lorraine something to help her sleep. Mother's taking a bath and then I'll dose her, too.

MONK

You think maybe I could get some of that later tonight?

CLIFF

Yeah. You're not sleeping well?

MONK

Normally I sleep fine. But just...lately.

(then)

Does seeing a dead body ever become normal?

CLIFF

I don't know. I haven't seen many.

MONK

Really?

CLIFF

I'm a plastic surgeon. If I'm looking at a corpse, then something went very awry.

MONK

Right.

Monk picks up a wine glass and pours some from the bottle.

MONK (CONT'D)

Yeah, it made me feel for Mother. I can't imagine what she went through finding Dad...like that.

CLIFF

Yeah. So much death.

MONK

When's the last time we were here together?

CLIFF

Uh, maybe ten years. The kids were still little.

MONK

How is your family, by the way?

CLIFF

You actually care?

MONK

Of course. Why would I ask? Why would you ask me that?

CLIFF

I don't know, Monk. You never really call.

MONK

I get busy.

CLIFF

Everybody gets busy. You drift away.

(shaking his head)

You want to know how my family is? My wife left me because she caught me in bed with a man. She took the house, half my practice.

(MORE)

CLIFF (CONT'D)

My kids fucking hate me. And I still live in fucking Tucson.

MONK

What's wrong with Tucson?

CLIFF

Oh my god. There's one gay bar and it's full of college kids. One of them asked me if I was Tyler Perry.

MONK

That's terrible. I mean, Tyler Perry lives in Atlanta, right?

CLIFF

Pfft. Fuck you, man. Shut up.

MONK

That's nowhere near Tucson.

They both laugh.

MONK (CONT'D)

Did you know dad had affairs?

CLIFF

Oh, for sure.

MONK

How?

CLIFF

You could just tell. Lisa told me she saw him kissing a white woman once.

MONK

Why did I have no idea? Why am I the last to know?

CLIFF

'cause you loved him too much. Enemies see each other better than friends.

An earth-rattling snort comes from the adjacent living room. Monk goes to look and sees Lorraine sleeping in an almost yogic pose while snoring. Monk turns back to Cliff.

MONK

What the hell did you give her?

CLIFF
Oxycodone. Puts 'em right out.

MONK
You gave her opioids to sleep?

CLIFF
Yeah. You ever seen a heroin addict? Those guys take naps standing up.

MONK
It's dangerous.

CLIFF
Look, I'm keeping an eye on her.
I'm a doctor.

MONK
So am I.

CLIFF
Right. Maybe if we need to revive a sentence.

MONK
Um, well, uh -- why do you have synthetic smack anyway?

Cliff doesn't answer and instead looks to the ceiling behind Monk.

CLIFF
What is that?

Monk and Cliff stand and see that a small trickle of water is dripping from the ceiling.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
Ah, shit.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - SECOND FLOOR BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

There's water coming from under the bathroom door. Monk knocks but nobody answers.

MONK
Mother?

He knocks again.

MONK (CONT'D)
Mother?

Still no answer. Monk finally forces his way in. The bathtub is overflowing and drenching the entire floor as Agnes sits on a stool in her underwear, staring into nothingness.

MONK (CONT'D)

Hey. Hey!

Monk shuts off the water and tries to rouse Agnes to lucidity, but she remains unresponsive.

MONK (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Hey!

(then, softer)

Mother, hey. Come on. Come on.

Monk wraps Agnes in a towel. This act finally breaks her reverie.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Monk paces in front of the house as he chats on the phone. We do not see who's on the end of the line.

MONK

I'm not sure, to be honest with you. It's going to depend on what the doctors say...Yeah, I'll touch base when I know more...Thanks so much for being understanding.

An old station wagon pulls into a driveway across the street and out of it steps **CORALINE WILSON** (early 40s, black, dreadlocks). She begins to unpack groceries from her car.

MONK (CONT'D)

Uh, hey, Leo, one more thing...I was wondering if, uh, maybe we could treat this as a sabbatical as opposed to a leave-of-absence. Whatever happens with my mom, it's going to cost some money.

There's a pause as Monk listens to Leo's response. As he does this, Coraline accidentally drops a grocery bag, spilling produce all over the street.

MONK (CONT'D)

No, I understand...No, it's not your fault. I'll figure something out. Yeah. Thanks for your help...OK, bye-bye.

Monk hangs up and he runs across the street to help Coraline.

CORALINE
You don't have to do that.

MONK
Oh, no. I do. It's tomato season.
Can't let them go to waste. It's a
crime around here.

They bag up all the errant groceries and stand.

CORALINE
Thank you.

MONK
That's what neighbors are for,
right?

Monk turns to leave.

CORALINE
Welcome to the neighborhood. I
thought that place was vacant.

MONK
Uh, it has been for a while. We
just got here last night.

CORALINE
I figured the place was haunted.
They say some old man blew his
brains out there a while back.

MONK
Oh...yeah.

Coraline immediately realizes what she's done.

CORALINE
Oh my god. I'm a fucking idiot.
Please forgive me.

EXT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - EVENING

The house is aglow with light from inside.

CORALINE (PRE-LAP)
I'm very sorry to hear that.

INT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Coraline and Monk are having some wine as Coraline puts away
the groceries.

CORALINE

What did she do for a living?

MONK

She was a doctor. My whole family is doctors basically. I'm the outcast.

(then)

What do you do for work?

CORALINE

I'm a lawyer. Public defense. Quincy.

MONK

That's very honorable.

CORALINE

Yeah. It's very hard. But it can be rewarding.

MONK

May I ask you something that I'm sure a lot of people ask you?

CORALINE

How do I feel defending guilty people?

MONK

Yeah.

CORALINE

I love it.

MONK

Why?

CORALINE

You have to. And...they're all guilty.

MONK

Really?

CORALINE

Yes. But that's OK. People are more than their worst deed.

MONK

I guess I agree with that.

CORALINE

I'm sure you do. You're a writer.

MONK

I don't follow.

CORALINE

Well, writers have to be nonjudgmental. You can't write interesting characters if you're critical of every bad decision they make, right?

MONK

Maybe you should be the writer. I don't feel like much of one lately.

CORALINE

You blocked?

MONK

It's just--I don't think anybody wants to buy what I write.

CORALINE

That's not true. I--I didn't want to say anything, but, uh, I actually read one of your books.

MONK

Huh. Which?

CORALINE

"The Frogs."

MONK

Oh, so you're the one.

They laugh. The energy is becoming casually flirty.

CORALINE

I liked it. You're talented.

From outside, the sound of a car engine chugs into earshot.

MONK

Are you expecting company?

CORALINE

Yeah.

When Coraline doesn't make to explain who it is, Monk gets the message.

MONK

Oh.

JELANI (late 40s, black) enters.

JELANI
Hello.

MONK
Hi.

CORALINE
Jelani, this is Monk. He and his family own the house across the street.

JELANI
Nice to meet you.

MONK
It's a pleasure.

JELANI
Are you staying for dinner?

MONK
Uh, no. I need to go check in on my mother.

JELANI
Cool.

MONK
Thank you, um--

Monk gulps down the rest of his wine.

MONK (CONT'D)
For the wine. And, uh, good night.

CORALINE
Goodnight, Monk.

EXT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - DUSK

As Monk makes his way down Coraline's front steps, we can hear Jelani's laughter coming from the house.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - MORNING

Monk and Cliff are packing up the car -- Lisa's old car -- as they prepare to head back to the city.

MONK
What time's your flight?

CLIFF

Eleven.

MONK

Do you think you could change it?
It'd be useful to have you at
Mother's doctor's appointment
today.

CLIFF

I can't. I've got to get home.

MONK

Fine. But can you chip in for her
care once we find out what's what?
It's probably going to be
expensive.

CLIFF

Things are tight right now, so --
(then)
Have you thought about firing
Lorraine?

MONK

Lorraine is family.

CLIFF

(shrugging)
Well, shit, Monk. I don't know what
to tell you, alright.

MONK

So you can't do anything?

CLIFF

I will check with my accountant
when I get back, alright?

Cliff pulls a vodka bottle out of his pocket and takes a
swig.

MONK

It's eight in the morning.

CLIFF

I'm not flying the fucking plane,
Monk.

MONK

Well, do you think you could be so
kind as to go inside and see if
Mother is ready to head out?

CLIFF

Ugh, fine.
(then)
Mother!

MONK

Don't yell, man. Be civilized.

CLIFF

You're just like our Dad, man.
'till you do right by me, Monk. I
swear to fucking God.

MONK

(under his breath)
Clown.

CLIFF (O.S.)

Wanna see civilized? Mother!!

As soon as Cliff goes inside, Coraline, in a robe and pajama pants, walks up. Jelani's car is still in front of her house.

CORALINE

Good morning.

MONK

Oh, hey. Good morning.

CORALINE

Listen, about last night...

MONK

Oh, it's okay. You don't have to
explain. I had a good time.

CORALINE

No I -- Jelani, he's, uh, my ex.
Or, he's going to be. We're in the
middle of breaking up and it's
hard.

MONK

I get it.

CORALINE

I'd like to see you again. Do you
think you'll be around town the
next couple of days? Want to grab a
drink?

MONK

Yeah. I'd like that.

CORALINE
Yeah, me too. Drive safe.

MONK
Thanks.

Monk watches her for a few beats as she walks away.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Monk is sitting in a chair reading a copy of *The Atlantic*. **He finishes an article and flips to the next page, where he finds a picture of...**Sintara Golden. The article is a rave review of her book. We can tell it's a rave via closeups of words like IMPORTANT and NECESSARY. After a short while, a **NURSE** enters.

NURSE
Mr. Ellison? We're ready.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Monk sits across from **DR. BULGER** (50s). The office is tidy. Through glass, we can see Agnes sitting outside the office.

DR. BULGER
Her MRI shows early signs of neurodegeneration. There's a slight decrease in the size of the temporal lobe, which suggests Alzheimer's.

Dr. Bulger gives Monk a moment to process this news.

DR. BULGER (CONT'D)
I'm very sorry, Mr. Ellison. But at some point, she'll probably require round-the-clock care, for her own safety.

Monk peers out at Agnes, who looks sweet and a little lonely.

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - STUDY - NIGHT

Monk sits at his father's old desk in front of his laptop, on which there's a blank Word document. Next to Monk is his copy of *The Atlantic*, folded open to the Sintara Golden review. The cursor on the empty page blinks mockingly at Monk. After a few beats, he begins to type, and big, bold letters appear atop the page:

MY PAFOLGY

by Stagg R. Leigh.

Monk hits return a couple times and starts to type again. The camera moves behind the laptop now, so we can see Monk as he types, determined, a glint of mischief in his eyes, a smirk growing across his face.

The camera goes wide to show that there are now two men standing in front of Monk's desk. These are two of the characters he's conjuring in his novel: **VAN GO JENKINS** (played by Michael B. Jordan) and **WILLY THE WONKER** (Samuel L. Jackson). Willy is a junkie, visibly drunk. And Van Go is a jittery young man with a gun in his waistband. Van Go has his back to Willy.

WILLY
Hey, young nigga!

Van pulls out his gun and turns to the source of the voice.

WILLY (CONT'D)
(re: gun)
Whoa! Whoa! Don't shoot me,
pardner, come on.

Willy's swaying and slurring his words, but a hint of recognition comes over him at the sight of Van Go.

WILLY (CONT'D)
Van Go? That you?

VAN
Yeah, it me, nigga. Shit, whatchu
drunk mufucka?

WILLY
Where you runnin' to?

VAN
Just leave me alone, man.

WILLY
How yo' mama?

VAN
Whatchu say?

WILLY
I say, how yo' mama?

Van Go grows increasingly enraged as Willy goes on.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Oh, shit. They ain't tell you?

VAN

Whatchu talkin' 'bout, punk? Hey!
Watchu talkin' 'bout?

WILLY

Think 'bout it, Van Go. Lookit my
face. face. Lookit my midnight
black complex-- no, that's not
right.

Willy turns to Monk, breaking the fourth wall.

WILLY (CONT'D)

What did you want to say? You can
say it better than that, right?
Come on. What you want?

Monk revises the document. As he types, Willy gets back into
character.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Think 'bout it, Van Go. Lookit my
face. Lookit my coal black skin and
then look at y'own. Look at my
black eyes and then look at y'own.
Look at my big black lips and look
at y'own.

(then)

I's your daddy whether you likes it
or not.

VAN

Shut up! Shut up, man. You lyin'!

WILLY

Nah, nah. That's the truth, nigga.

VAN

Then where you been? Huh? Where you
been?

WILLY

I been where I always be --
survivin'. You ain't worth a piss.
Yo' mama ain't worth a piss. So,
here I am.

Van's distraught, filled with rage. He stares angrily at the
man in front of him. But after a few beats, he turns to Monk.

VAN

What do I say now?

MONK

I think now will come some sort of, you know, like, some sort of dumb, melodramatic sob story to highlight your broken interiority. Something like, uh, I dunno...

Monk goes back to typing. As he does, Van turns back to focus on Willy. As Monk types, Van breaks into his soliloquy.

VAN

I hates this man. I hates my mama. And I hates myself. I'm seein' my face in his. I see the ape that all them stupid girls were afraid of, yeah. I see my long arms hangin' down. And I see eyes that don't care what happens tomorrow. I see myself rockin' back on my heels, just like this baby, just waitin', and waitin', and waitin', and waitin' for sumpin that I'm not even gonna recognize when it come. Death is my only cure. I heard that before. I been hearin' it. And I'm hearin' it now. I see...I see my Mama cryin', I see her screamin' in my dreams. I see my babies. I see my-- I see my daddy. I see myself.

Out of nowhere, he shoots Willy in the gut. Willy doubles over and looks up at Van, clenching his wound as blood darkens his clothing.

WILLY

What tha fuck? Whatchu do that fo'?! the fuck was that fo'?!

Van, tears streaming down his face, stands over Willy.

VAN

Cause you ain't shit, nigga! And you made me! So 'cause you ain't shit, I ain't shit. 'Cause you ain't shit, I ain't shit.

Van hears the distant sound of police sirens.

VAN (CONT'D)

I gots to bounce.
 (then, to Monk)
 Peace, mufucka.

MONK

Peace.

Van sprints out of the room as Willy writhes on the floor.

WILLY

(to Monk)
 What the fuck was that fo'!?

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

Monk watches TV in bed. The channel announces an upcoming "Black Stories Month." It shows clips of the movies being honored: gang violence in *Baby Boy*, slaves lined up in *Antebellum*, a teen mother in *Precious*, police brutality in *Straight Outta Compton*, Chris Rock's character smoking crack in *New Jack City*, Morris Chestnut shot in the back in *Boyz n' The Hood*. Monk's cellphone buzzes. He looks and smiles when he sees who's calling.

MONK

Hello?

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - DAY

ARTHUR

(reading from the printed
 manuscript)

"I be standin' outside in the night. A police chopper go by and shine some lights in some backyards and I think, shine that light on me mufucka. Shine me some fuckin' light so I can see where the fuck I be at."

Monk laughs.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Are you serious?

MONK

You'll notice I didn't put my name to it.

ARTHUR

Yes, "Stagg R. Leigh." I did notice that. Well done. But I still can't send this out.

MONK

You said you wanted black stuff. What's blacker than that? It's got deadbeat dads, rappers, crack -- and he's killed by the cops in the end. I mean, that's black, right?

ARTHUR

I see what you're doing.

MONK

Good, because it's not subtle. I mean, how's that book so different from some of the other garbage they put there?

ARTHUR

That's not the point.

MONK

Well, it's my point. Look at what they publish. Look at what they expect us to write. I'm sick of it. And this is an expression of how sick I am.

ARTHUR

Monk, I'm trying to sell books. Not be a part of some crusade. Who do you expect to publish this?

MONK

No one. I just want to rub their noses in the horse shit they solicit.

ARTHUR

OK. What do you want me to do?

MONK

I want you to send it out.

ARTHUR

Can I say it's performance art?

MONK

No, send it straight. If they can't take the joke, then fuck them.

ARTHUR

Alright, but I'm only sending it to a couple places. This thing scares me.

MONK

Scares you? Why?

ARTHUR

Because white people think they want the truth, but they don't. They just want to feel absolved.

MONK

Well, fortunately that's not my problem. Bye.

EXT. ICE CREAM SHOP - AFTERNOON

Monk and Coraline are eating ice cream cones as they walk down a path cutting through some tall grass.

MONK

I'm surprised you reached out. I thought you were just being nice.

CORALINE

I'm never just being nice. I'm too old for that. I liked you so much, in fact, that I went out and got another one of your books.

MONK

Really? Which one?

CORALINE

"The Haas Conundrum."

MONK

What'd you think?

CORALINE

I liked it! Susan has really great dialogue. And I loved the aunt. You write women well.

MONK

You think so?

CORALINE

Yeah, they aren't hothouse flowers.

MONK

Thank you. I appreciate that.

CORALINE

I could have done with fewer footnotes, though.

They laugh.

INT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SUNSET

The sun is setting outside the window as Monk puts his clothes back on in Coraline's bedroom. Coraline enters, wearing only a robe, from an adjoining bathroom.

MONK

I've got to run.

CORALINE

How's your mom?

MONK

In and out. I'm afraid to be away for too long, but, uh, I'll call you.

CORALINE

Hold on a minute.

Coraline retrieves her copy of "The Haas Conundrum" and a pen from her dresser.

CORALINE (CONT'D)

Sign my book.

Monk opens the book to sign it.

MONK

What's your name again?

They both laugh. She and Monk kiss before Monk heads toward the door.

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

The home is completely dark when Monk walks in the door. He flicks a light switch, but nothing happens.

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Mr. Monk?

Monk turns on his smartphone flashlight and uses it to guide himself forward as Lorraine steps out of the kitchen holding a camping lantern.

MONK

What's going on with the lights?

LORRAINE

Ms. Lisa used to pay the bills.

(then)

Did you?

INT. CLIFF'S HOME - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Cliff is in trousers and an unbuttoned shirt eating fast food. Lines of cocaine are in front of him on a small mirror. A French pop song from the 1980s is blasting in the background. Cliff does a line.

CLIFF

How much?

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - FORMAL LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Monk, lit by candlelight, is on the telephone. His laptop is open in front of him and a glass of scotch is nearby.

MONK

Well, I can handle the electric bills, but these care facilities are expensive.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

MONK (CONT'D)

The best one nearby is \$5,600 a month. And that's for a shared room. It goes up to \$6,900 a month for a private room.

CLIFF

Why are you looking at the best one? She wasn't the best mother.

MONK

I'm not calling to re-litigate our childhoods.

CLIFF

Of course not. 'Cause yours was great.

MONK

Goddamnit. Are you going to help me, or not?

CLIFF

Won't Medicaid cover it or something?

MONK

That's not how it works. You don't know this?

A man, **CLAUDE** (Latino, 30s, also shirtless), enters the frame.

CLIFF

(to Claude)

Oh, hello.

Claude and Cliff kiss before Claude snorts a line of coke.

MONK

Who's that? What are you doing?

CLIFF

I've taken a lover.

MONK

You've "taken a lover"?

CLIFF

Yeah. Do you have a problem with that, homophobe?

MONK

Listen, I'm not offended that you've taken a lover, Cliff. I'm offended, Cliff, that you call it taking a lover.

CLIFF

You can eat shit, Nigga.

Cliff hangs up and follows after Claude.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

I'll take my lover right now.

(calling after Claude)

Hey, where you goin'?

Back on Monk, who sets down his phone calmly and then slams his laptop shut.

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - DAY

Arthur is pacing around in silence when Monk walks in.

ARTHUR
There you are.

MONK
Traffic was insane. What's up?

ARTHUR
Sit down.

Monk sits, but Arthur stays standing.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
We sold your book.

MONK
Holy shit. I thought it was DOA.

ARTHUR
Not "The Persians."

Monk looks confused at first and then...

MONK
No.
(off Arthur's nod)
Get out.

ARTHUR
Paula Baderman, from Thompson-Watt.

MONK
She always passes.

ARTHUR
Not this time. They want to pre-empt for \$750,000.

Monk's eyes go wide.

MONK
No one's ever offered that much to me.

ARTHUR
This is you.

MONK
No it's not, Arthur.

ARTHUR
You wrote it.

MONK
As a joke.

ARTHUR
Well, now it's the most lucrative
joke you've ever told.

MONK
And I'm not selling.

ARTHUR
Why not?

MONK
Because it's trash, Arthur. You
didn't even want to send it out the
other day. But look who's suddenly
overcome his fears.

ARTHUR
I know. I broke the first rule of
sales: Never underestimate how
stupid everyone is.

MONK
Well, I'm not participating in
making them any stupider.

ARTHUR
Well, you haven't...thus far, which
is admirable. But you also haven't
made any money.
(then)
Doesn't your mom need help these
days?

Monk considers this.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Check this out.

Arthur goes to a bar car in the corner of his office.

MONK
I don't care how drunk we get, I'm
not selling it.

ARTHUR
That's not what I'm doing.

Arthur picks out three bottles, which he then brings back to his desk, where he begins arranging them with his back to Monk. The bottles set how he wants them, Arthur turns and shows us what he's put together: three types of Johnnie Walker -- Red, Black, and Blue -- aligned in that order.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Johnnie Walker Red, twenty-four bucks. Johnnie Walker Black, fifty bucks. Johnnie Walker Blue, one-hundred-and-sixty dollars. You see the metaphor?

MONK

No.

ARTHUR

These are all made by the same company. The Red is shit, the Black is less shit, and the Blue is good. But fewer people buy the Blue, because it's expensive, and at the end of the day, most people just want to get drunk. For most of your career, your books have been Blue -- they're good, they're complex, but they're not popular, because most people want something easy. Now, for the first time ever, you've written a Red book. It's simple, prurient. It's not great literature, but it satisfies an urge, and that's valuable.

(off Monk's face)

What I'm trying to illustrate is that just because you do Red doesn't mean you can't also do Blue. You can do it all, like Johnnie Walker. In fact, you've got Johnnie Walker beat, because you don't even have to put your real name on it.

Monk mulls over Arthur's point for a moment.

MONK

(shaking his head)

Jesus. Do we drink now?

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Monk and Arthur clink their glasses and drink. A bottle of Johnnie Walker Red sits between them. They're both looking at

Arthur's office phone, which is ringing on speaker as they try to contact **PAULA BADERMAN** (white, 50s).

PAULA
Hello?

ARTHUR
Hello, Paula.

INT. THOMPSON-WATT - PAULA BADERMAN'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Paula's office is crowded with books and manuscripts. Slight hints to her leftist leanings dot the space: a "Resist" poster, a framed picture of RBG in a crown, etc. Paula is the kind of nice, white neoliberal who will gladly vote for Bernie but then balk at the idea of low-income housing on her block.

PAULA
Arthur! So wonderful to hear from you. I hope you're with the man of the hour.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

ARTHUR
I am indeed. He's right here next to me.

PAULA
Mr. Leigh?

MONK
This is he.

PAULA
(surprised))
Oh...really?

Arthur signals for Monk to enhance his response, so Monk begrudgingly puts some bass in his voice.

MONK
Yeah, goddamnit. Motherfucker!

Arthur gives a thumbs up. Paula is immediately more at ease.

PAULA
(phew)
Oh, OK. I was a little confused at first, but--

ARTHUR

We're both very excited to discuss Thompson-Watt's offer.

PAULA

Yes. Well, first, let me say that all of us here at Thompson-Watt are thrilled with "My Pafology." It is about as perfect a book as I've seen in a long, long while -- just raw, and real. Mr. Leigh, is this based on your actual life?

MONK

Yeah. You think some bitch-ass college boy can come up with this shit?

PAULA

No, no, I don't. You know, that kind of visceral energy cannot be taught, right? Stagg, may I call you -- now is Stagg a pseudonym?

ARTHUR

(grasping for a lie)

Yes, uh, it is. Mr. Leigh can't use his real name because he's a...well, he's a wanted fugitive.

PAULA

Oh my god. Wow.

ARTHUR

That's why this couldn't be a video conference.

Monk's eyes go wide toward Arthur, who gives him a wink. Monk mutes the phone.

MONK

Are you crazy? What if they fact check this?

ARTHUR

Fact check? There's barely money to pay editors anymore. Just go with it.

Arthur unmutes the phone.

MONK

Uh, yeah, I did a, uh...a twelve year bid, but no goin' back. Nah mean?

PAULA

Yeah. Yeah. You know, um, I've been reading a lot about the prison abolition movement--

MONK

(under his breath, as
Paula trails on)
Oh god...

ARTHUR

(interrupting)
I'm sorry to rush, Paula, but can we talk business? Mr. Leigh values his time outside of a cell.

PAULA

Of course. I'm sure you're both busy, so I'll get right to it. You'll notice that our offer is unusually large. And that is because we think Mr. Leigh has written a best-seller. We think this is going to be the read of the summer.

MONK

Yeah, I'm sure white people on the Hamptons will delight in it.

PAULA

Yes, we will.
(then, clearly confused)
Th--they--we?...it's gonna be huge.
Huge. I love it.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Monk's unpacking the car by himself when a security guard pulls up in one of those quasi-cop cars. This security guard is **MAYNARD** (black, late 60s).

MAYNARD

Is that little Thelonious Ellison?

Monk turns to look.

MONK
My god. Maynard.

Maynard steps out of his car and he and Monk shake hands.

MAYNARD
Everyone still call you Monk?

MONK
Well, everyone but you.

MAYNARD
Thelonious is a beautiful name.
Seems sinful to not say it whole.

MONK
Well, I'm happy somebody
appreciates it.

MAYNARD
I heard about your sister. My
condolences.

MONK
Thank you.

MAYNARD
I don't think I've seen you since
before your father passed.

MONK
Yeah, it's been a while. I live in
LA now.

MAYNARD
Hollywood! Hey, do you write for
that NCIS?

MONK
Just books.

MAYNARD
Well you should try to write for
NCIS. It's popular.

MONK
Well, maybe I will.
(then)
So, how you been?

MAYNARD
Oh, I'm good. And you?

LORRAINE (O.S.)

Mr. Monk!

Lorraine comes out of the house already mid-sentence.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

What would you like for dinner?

Lorraine stops when she sees Maynard, who smiles when he sees her.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

Maynard.

MAYNARD

Hi, Lorraine. It's been a dog's age.

The two look at each other as if Monk's not even there. There's clearly a current of electricity between them.

LORRAINE

Well, I guess it has. You look well.

MAYNARD

You too.

(then)

Well, I best be getting back. Good to see you, Thelonious.

MONK

You too.

MAYNARD

(to Lorraine)

Lorraine.

Maynard gets back in his car and drives off. As Lorraine heads back inside, she notices Monk smiling at her.

LORRAINE

Ain't nothing to smile at.

He laughs.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - AFTERNOON

It's golden hour. There's a knock on the door.

MONK

(from the living room)

There she is. Behave yourself.

Monk swings open the front door to find Coraline there with a bottle of wine and some flowers.

Behind him, Lorraine sets the table for an early meal.

CORALINE

Hi.

Monk and Coraline share a quick kiss.

CORALINE (CONT'D)

(re: wine)

Got this for you.

MONK

Thank you.

(then, to Lorraine)

Lorraine, this is Coraline.

LORRAINE

Welcome.

CORALINE

Hello.

When they hear footsteps coming down the stairs, they turn to see Agnes.

MONK

Oh, mother. Perfect timing. This is Coraline.

AGNES

Hello, dear. I'm Agnes.

CORALINE

Such a pleasure to meet you. I brought you these.

She hands Agnes the flowers.

AGNES

Dahlias are my favorite. There's a whole world inside them.

Agnes puts her arm around Coraline and kisses her on the cheek with a warmth that Monk was not expecting.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Lorraine.

Agnes hands the flowers to Lorraine.

MONK
 Mother, you sit here...

Monk helps Agnes into her seat.

MONK (CONT'D)
 Alright. And Coraline, why don't
 you sit across from mother?

Coraline and Monk take their seats.

AGNES
 (to Coraline)
 I'm happy you're not white.

CORALINE
 Me too.

INT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Monk and Coraline sip nightcaps on the sofa as the sun sets.

MONK
 ...yeah, it was pretty funny. I
 think you remind her of my sister.

CORALINE
 Hmm. Well, do you think we look
 alike?

MONK
 No, but you're both self-assured,
 and funny, and you're
 both...fantastic kissers.

They laugh and then begin to kiss, gently at first, and then more deeply. The calm evening is interrupted when they hear Lorraine calling for help. Monk and Coraline both stand and rush to investigate.

EXT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Monk and Coraline exit to find Lorraine in a frenzy as Maynard tries to calm her down.

MONK
 What's wrong?

LORRAINE
 I'd just stepped out for a moment
 to have a cup of coffee with
 Maynard. I was right in front.

MONK
Where's Mother?

LORRAINE
I don't know. The back door was open. She's gone.

MONK
What?

MAYNARD
We should split up.
(then, handing Monk the flashlight from his belt)
Here. I've got more in the car.

Monk takes the flashlight and bolts away.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Monk runs down the beach with his flashlight looking for Agnes.

MONK
Mother! Mother!

After some frantic searching, Monk sees something in the distance: Agnes, in her robe and slippers, walking dangerously close to the water, oblivious to the chaos. Monk sprints after her.

MONK (CONT'D)
Mother! Hey! Mother!

But Agnes doesn't respond, doesn't even look in Monk's direction.

MONK (CONT'D)
Hey! Hey! Stop! Hey!

Monk finally catches up to her, but she resists his efforts to intervene.

MONK (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

AGNES
Lisa's out there! Roughhousing with the cousins. Somebody's going to get hurt.

MONK
Stop! I will go tell her, OK?

AGNES
Yeah, but they--

Monk wraps his arm around Agnes and leads her back toward the house.

MONK
I will take you back to the house,
and then I will go tell her.

AGNES
But they're out there!

MONK
I know. I know.

AGNES
OK. You sure?

MONK
I will tell her.

AGNES
(finally starting to calm
down)
OK.

MONK
C'mon. It's too cold out there.

AGNES
Lisa doesn't swim very well.

MONK
I know. OK. Almost there. Alright.

Coraline, Maynard, and Lorraine rush to Agnes with a blanket.

MONK (CONT'D)
Okay, Monkey.

INT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - LIBRARY - DAY

Monk and Agnes walk with **LUZ BORQUEZ** (40s, Latina, pantsuit), who's showing them the facilities. It's cozy and dignified, not clinical or sparse like some retirement homes. A couple **RETIREEES** read in chairs dotting the space.

LUZ
And this is our library. It's full
of all the classics, and we try to
get some new releases, too.
(MORE)

LUZ (CONT'D)

(to Agnes)

Do you like to read, Mrs. Ellison?

AGNES

No.

MONK

That's not true. She loves to read.
She taught me to love reading.

LUZ

(to Agnes)

Perhaps we can get some of your
son's books in here and you can
lead a book club?

Agnes ignores her and wanders away into the hall.

MONK

I'm sorry.

LUZ

It's fine. It's hard for a lot of
the residents at first, but she'll
settle in.

MONK

Right. I appreciate all your help.
But, uh, how soon do you think we
get her in?

LUZ

In about a month. You can start the
paperwork today if you'd like.

MONK

Great. I'd like that.

Monk looks around for Agnes. At the same time, his phone
starts to ring.

LUZ

I'll go check in on mom.

EXT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - DAY

Monk sits down on an empty bench to take his call.

MONK

Hello?

INT. CARL BRUNT'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

It's a small office laden with books of all shapes and sizes.
CARL BRUNT (60s, white, patrician) is professorially stuffy.

CARL

Hello, Thelonious. My name is Carl Brunt. I'm the director of the New England Book Association.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

MONK

Hi, Carl. I know who you are.

CARL

Oh, good. Then perhaps you also know that each year my organization bestows the somewhat pretentiously named Literary Award.

MONK

Every writer knows the Literary Award, Carl. Especially those of us who haven't won it.

Carl laughs a little.

CARL

Well, that's related to why I'm calling. Like many American institutions, mine was recently rattled by the notion that our lack of diversity has led to a blindspot in our work. So we're kind of trying to remedy that and, to that end, I was wondering how you might feel about being a judge for this year's award.

Monk pauses his browsing for a moment.

MONK

Um, let me say first say, Carl, that I'm honored you'd choose me out of all the black writers you could go to for fear of being called racist.

CARL

(oblivious)
Yeah, you're very welcome.

MONK

But I think this sounds like a lot of work.

CARL

Yeah, I can't deny that. I mean, you're going to have to read dozens of books. We could offer you a modest stipend.

MONK

Even so, I'm not sure.

CARL

OK. One other crass perk I reference when people are on the fence is that this will allow you the opportunity to literally judge other writers for once, rather than just figuratively.

Monk considers this for a moment.

MONK

Alright. I'm in.

CARL

Fantastic. OK. Great. So you're going to be one of five judges. The only one we have confirmed so far is Sintara Golden. Are you familiar her work?

MONK

Vaguely.

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - FORMAL LIVING ROOM - DAY

Monk is lying on the couch reading when Lorraine enters, carrying a tray of food and a beverage.

LORRAINE

I brought you lunch, Mr. Monk.

Monk sits up, surprised.

MONK

Wow. To what do I owe the pleasure?

LORRAINE

Well, I have a favor to ask.

Lorraine hesitates for a beat. She's nervous to ask.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

I was wondering if I might be able to take the afternoon off. Maynard just came in from the beach and we thought it might be nice to visit a museum.

MONK

Yes, of course. I'm free today, so I can look after Mother.

Lorraine smiles, clearly grateful. She turns to leave, but Monk calls after her.

MONK (CONT'D)

Lorraine. You really like him, huh?

LORRAINE

He's a fine man.

Lorraine exits and Monk starts to eat his lunch. After a bite, his phone buzzes. Monk answers.

MONK

Yeah?

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - DAY

Monk and Agnes enter Arthur's office, where Arthur sits with an assistant, **LAYNE** (20s).

ARTHUR

The guests of honor!
(to Agnes)
Hello, Mrs. Ellison. Looking beautiful as ever.

Arthur hugs Agnes and kisses her on the cheek.

AGNES

Hello, Arthur.

ARTHUR

(to assistant)
Layne, would you take Mrs. Ellison to the kitchen and set her up with some tea?

LAYNE

Right this way, ma'am.

MONK

Mother, I won't be long.

AGNES
Take your time.

Layne ushers Agnes out.

ARTHUR
(calling)
Not the pods! The good tea -- for
guests!

Arthur closes the door and immediately dives in.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(re: Monk's clothes)
What is this? I told you to dress
street.

MONK
I did.

ARTHUR
Fuckin' Sesame Street.

MONK
What's this guy's name? Willy?

ARTHUR
Wiley. Wiley Valdespino. He
specializes in Oscar-baity
(air quotes)
"issue" movies. He did the Middle
Passage one last year.

MONK
Somehow I didn't see that.

ARTHUR
Of course not; you're not
lobotomized. But if he adapts your
book, you stand to make a lot of
money.

MONK
Why can't we just do a phone call?

ARTHUR
Well, he said if he's going to cut
a check this large then he needs to
meet in person.

MONK
Alright, what do I need to do?

ARTHUR

Just make him like you. When I talked to him, he seemed thrilled that you're a fugitive. Just, you know, play that up.

MONK

What if he recognizes me?

ARTHUR

You?

MONK

Yeah. The real me.

ARTHUR

Monk, you're not that famous. And nobody in Hollywood reads. They get their assistants to read things and then summarize them. The whole town runs on book reports.

MONK

Are you sure you can look after my mother?

ARTHUR

She won't leave my sight. You'll just be across the street anyway.
(looking at watch)
You should go. You'll be late. He's waiting for you.

MONK

Well...

After thinking for a beat, Monk takes a seat.

MONK (CONT'D)

If he wants a stereotype, maybe it's better I'm late.

INT. SOUTH END RESTAURANT - DAY

Monk gets into character as he enters the restaurant. He approaches a booth in a corner of the main room, where **WILEY** (white, 50s, bro-ey) sits. Wiley stands to greet Monk.

WILEY

Stagg, I presume.

MONK

That's me.

Wiley and Monk shake.

WILEY

Hey. I'm Wiley. Nice to meet you,
brother.

Monk and Wiley sit.

WILEY (CONT'D)

Sorry about the bourgie restaurant.
My assistant picked it. We can go
somewhere else if you're
uncomfortable.

MONK

This is fine.

A **SERVER** approaches.

WILEY

What're you drinking?

MONK

I'll have a chenin blanc.

MONK (CONT'D)

Your driest.

The server departs.

WILEY

Ha.

MONK

What's funny?

WILEY

Just a strange order for a guy like
you.

MONK

Why's that?

WILEY

Just don't see too many convicts
drinking white wine.

MONK

You know many convicts?

WILEY

You'd be surprised. I spent a month
in the joint myself. It was some
interstate commerce shit.

(MORE)

WILEY (CONT'D)

It was a short stay, but I'll tell you what: That experience grounded me. The people I met in there allowed me to see a whole new world of underrepresented stories from underrepresented storytellers.

(then)

Can I ask what you were in for?

MONK

I don't like to talk about that. You feel me?

WILEY

Was it murder?

MONK

You said that, not me.

Wiley stiffens in his seat.

WILEY

You know, I gotta tell you. Before you showed up, I was a little worried you might be a phony. A lot of fakes in Hollywood.

MONK

Well, I'm not from Hollywood.

As Wiley speaks, Monk notices the sound of sirens. Not too strange in a city, but they seem to be getting closer.

WILEY

Yeah, no. That's obvious. Clearly you're cut from a different cloth than your average screenwriter.

(then)

Let me ask you. I know they sent you some of my stuff. Did you have a chance to see any of my movies?

Wiley stops talking and Monk realizes he has no idea what he's said.

MONK

Sorry, sorry. What did you say?

WILEY

Have you seen any of my movies?

MONK

Uh, nah.

WILEY

OK. Well, look. I like to pair genre with real-world pathos, which sort of elevates things. You might be interested in this new one we're about to shoot, actually. It's about this white couple. They get married on an old plantation in Louisiana and all the slave ghosts come back, and they murder everyone.

MONK

Dear god.

WILEY

I know. It's great, right? It's called "Plantation Annihilation." Ryan Reynolds gets decapitated with an Afro pick in the opening scene.
(then)
He's a friend.

An ambulance pulls up to the building across the street, its siren roaring. An **EMT** leaps from the vehicle and rushes inside. Now Monk's really worried.

MONK

I've got to go.

Monk stands and quickly runs from the table.

INT. BUILDING STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Monk is sprinting up the flights of stairs to Arthur's office, on the seventh floor.

MONK

Mother! Mother!

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

When Monk finally reaches the office, everyone turns to look at the commotion, including Arthur and Agnes, who are sitting in Arthur's office and chatting politely. Monk feels ridiculous.

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Monk is peeing when Arthur enters.

ARTHUR

Some ad exec on the third floor had an aneurysm.

MONK

Awful.

ARTHUR

I know. Imagine exploding your brain trying to think up a toilet paper commercial.

MONK

I assume Wiley's not interested. I sprinted out of there like a complete maniac.

ARTHUR

Actually, he's offering \$4,000,000 for the rights.

MONK

What?

ARTHUR

(nodding)

Yeah, man! He called you "the real deal." Said that you took off the moment you heard police sirens.

Monk stares at Arthur's elated face in disbelief for a beat.

MONK

The dumber I behave, the richer I get.

ARTHUR

Now you know why my parents moved here from Puerto Rico.

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - STUDY - DAY

Monk sits in front of his laptop with a cup of coffee. He's on a Zoom call with the other NBA judges: **WILSON HARNET** (white, 60s), **AILENE HOOVER** (white, 50s), **DANIEL SIGMARSEN** (white, 50s, grumpy cowboy), and Sintara Golden.

INT. WILSON'S OFFICE - DAY

WILSON

I mean, we can't be expected to read every novel all the way through, right?

INT. AILENE'S OFFICE - DAY

AILENE

What? No. People have worked hard on these books. We have to respect that.

WILSON

Hard work doesn't demand respect. You know, people worked hard on the Third Reich.

AILENE

Well, I feel that we owe it to them to read every page.

INT. DANIEL'S DEN - DAY

DANIEL

That is such horse shit. I mean, most of it's going to be that Knausgård autofiction crap anyhow. I'll tell you right now -- I'm not reading 600 pages about some pretentious jackwagon discovering masturbation. Sorry.

INT. SINTARA'S OFFICE - DAY

SINTARA

OK. Look, I think we're all experienced enough to assess the general quality of something within 100 pages. If you want to read beyond that, that's your prerogative.

AILENE

Well how do you feel, Monk?

MONK

Uh, I agree with Sintara, actually. I think 100 pages is sufficient.

DANIEL

You know, this is all a crock, anyway. I mean, pitting art against other art for awards -- like it's not subjective -- it's absurd.

AILENE

Then why did you agree to be a judge if you feel that way?

DANIEL

Well, because it's either me or some other Brooklyn hack who doesn't think there's a world beyond the Hudson River, Ailene.

AILENE

It's the East River, if you're in Brooklyn, Daniel.

SINTARA

You know what? Art is subjective, but I think this is an opportunity to highlight books that might otherwise be undervalued. Book sales are plummeting right now, so perhaps this award can give someone a real chance at a career in this industry.

MONK

(begrudgingly)
Hear, hear.

INT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - AGNES' ROOM - DAY

Monk, Coraline, and Lorraine are helping Agnes settle in to her room at the home. Coraline is going through boxes as Monk hangs a landscape painting. Lorraine and Agnes are seated at the room's small dining table.

MONK

Where do you want this, Mother? I thought it might look nice here, with this the natural light.

AGNES

I don't care. I never liked that painting, anyway.

MONK

OK, well, I'll bring some more things from home next week.

(MORE)

MONK (CONT'D)

And you just tell me the pieces you like, and I'll bring them.

An **ORDERLY** comes in with lunch: a sandwich on wheat bread and some sides.

ORDERLY

We've got your lunch ready for you, Mrs. Ellison.

He sets the food on a dining tray next to Agnes.

CORALINE

(trying to be cheery)
This looks great. What is it?

ORDERLY

It's roasted turkey and havarti on twelve grain.

CORALINE

Sounds delicious.

Lorraine stands to assess the lunch for herself, and she doesn't like what she sees.

LORRAINE

Mrs. Ellison prefers white bread. And she doesn't like the crust. As much as this place costs, y'all should get the sandwiches right.

ORDERLY

I'll make sure we take care of that from now on, okay?
(then)
Enjoy your lunch, Mrs. Ellison.

Lorraine and Agnes share a knowing look as the orderly departs.

I/E. CAR - DAY

Monk and Coraline are in the front seat of Lisa's car. Lorraine rides in the back. They're driving along in silence, a little somber after leaving Agnes. And then...

LORRAINE

I'm getting married.

CORALINE

Shut up!

MONK

What?!

LORRAINE

I didn't say nothing earlier. It was just so sad. But Maynard asked me yesterday.

CORALINE

Lorraine! That's amazing! Let's celebrate!

LORRAINE

It's too much excitement. I don't like being the center of attention.

MONK

Well, you deserve it, Lorraine. And Maynard is a lucky man.

LORRAINE

Do you think you'd be willing to walk me down the aisle, Mr. Monk?

MONK

I'd be honored.
(then, smiling)
Wow.

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Monk and Arthur are gathered at Arthur's phone, where they're listening to Paula on speaker.

PAULA (ON SPEAKERPHONE)

We are wildly excited to help you get "My Pafology" out. The marketing team has all kinds of great ideas to help sell it.

ARTHUR

Great. We're excited to hear.

INT. THOMPSON-WATT - PAULA BADERMAN'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Paula's office is the same, but now she's sitting with **JOHN BOSCO** (white, 30s, gay).

PAULA

John Bosco is the head of the department. I'll let him tell you more.

JOHN

Hi, Stagg.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

MONK

Hello.

JOHN

Nice to finally meet you, my man. Listen, I love the book, and we are going to sell many, many copies. There's already so much buzz because of the movie deal, and we just want to keep that momentum going.

ARTHUR

I spoke to Wiley yesterday. He says Michael B. Jordan is circling.

PAULA

We heard. We think he would be absolutely perfect. You know, this book is awards bait with a capital B.

JOHN

And we're thinking that if Michael does sign on, we want to put him on the cover, in one of those, um...scarves, I guess you would call them, tied around his head.

MONK

A do-rag?

JOHN

Do-rag! That's it. Do-rag and a tank top. With those muscles showing.

PAULA

Whoo. Somebody call the fire department.

JOHN

Yummy.

John and Paula laugh as Monk cringes. Arthur mimes shooting himself, but then he recalls something and covers the phone.

ARTHUR

(whispering)

Shit, sorry, your dad. Sorry.

JOHN

So listen, for a release date, we're thinking of rushing it so that we can get it out in time for for Juneteenth.

PAULA

Yeah.

MONK

Juneteenth?

JOHN

We're thinking of making a big holiday push. Black people will be celebrating, white people will be feeling -- let's be honest -- a little conscience-stricken. We think it's gonna be a huge moment for your book.

Monk closes his eyes and drops his head into his hands.

JOHN (CONT'D)

So Stagg, are you so, so happy?

ARTHUR

We think it's great, John. Really. Amazing.

Monk lifts his head, revealing a smirk on his face. Arthur motions for Monk to say something.

MONK

Yeah, it's, uh -- it's great.

(then)

And, you know, I've got an idea I want to share with you two.

PAULA

Oh, well, I mean, we always love to hear great ideas...

JOHN

Yeah! Cool.

MONK

I want to change the title.

JOHN

(uncertain)

OK. Um, well, just to be clear, we love "My Pafology."

PAULA

Love it.

JOHN

It's got that Irvine Welsh,
proletariat vernacular thang.

Arthur looks confusedly to Monk. He wasn't expecting him to call an audible like this.

MONK

That's why I think you'll like the
new title even more.

PAULA

Well, OK. You know what? We are
always happy to hear new ideas.
What did you have in mind?

MONK

"Fuck."

There's a lengthy pause.

PAULA

Uh, I'm sorry. Pardon me?

MONK

"Fuck." I want to call it "Fuck."

Arthur laughs a fake, panicked laugh and rushes to mute the phone as Paula and John chatter.

ARTHUR

(angry whispering)
What are you doing?

MONK

(angry whispering)
Screw these idiots.

ARTHUR

(angry whispering)
Stop it.

MONK

(angry whispering)
No.

Monk tries to take the phone from Arthur.

PAULA

So Stagg, what about, uh, like
"Damn" -- "Damn" -- or "Hell"?

Arthur shakes his head and unmutes the phone. And now we return to intercutting with Paula and John in their office.

MONK

Nah. "Fuck."

JOHN

OK. That's cool. But maybe we could maybe do that with a P-H instead? Because that would be more palatable to our sellers.

MONK

I don't care about all that. And if you don't change the title, the deal is off.

JOHN

Whoa, whoa, whoa.

PAULA

Yeah, no, there's no need to be hasty. You know what? Why don't we-- just give us a second, and, um, a moment, and we will get right back to you. OK?

Once muted, Monk and Arthur get into it.

ARTHUR

What are you doing?

MONK

What are you doing? This is ridiculous.

ARTHUR

It's too much money we're talking about.

MONK

I don't care. I'm shutting it down.

ARTHUR

Shutting wha--

MONK

(interrupting)
Shutting it down.

Paula returns with a decision.

PAULA

Are you there?

ARTHUR

We're here.

PAULA
Let's do it!

What?

ARTHUR

What?

MONK

PAULA
Yeah, we discussed it, and we think it is very in your face in the best way possible.

JOHN
It's very, uh --

MONK
Black?

JOHN
That's it! Yes, that's it. I'm happy you said it and not me.

Paula and John laugh as Arthur, still in shock, looks to Monk, who just shakes his head in disgust.

PAULA
Ah, fuck!

JOHN
It's fucking great, Stagg.

PAULA
You know, it's so brave, actually.

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

Monk and Coraline have just gotten home. They make their way to the kitchen.

CORALINE
I'm exhausted.

MONK
Yeah, me too. But I've got to stay up a few hours reading these these books for --

Monk notices some commotion in the backyard. He looks out the window and sees that someone is swimming in the pool.

EXT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Monk and Coraline step through the back gate to find a person furiously swimming laps.

MONK
Hey! Hey! Hey!

CLIFF
Ah, shit.

The swimmer stands up out of the water and we finally see...it's Cliff. He's drunk and he's got a black eye.

MONK
What are you doing here?

CLIFF
What am I doing here? What are you doing here?

MONK
What do you mean what am I doin--
Why are you in town?

MONK (CONT'D)
I came to see our mother. Isn't that what you've been calling me about for weeks now.

MONK (CONT'D)
What happened to your eye?

CLIFF
I got in a fight.

MONK
Well, get out of the pool.

Monk looks around at the mess Cliff has made.

MONK (CONT'D)
You're making a mess of it.

CLIFF
I don't want to get out of the pool. I'm a grown ass man.
(then)
Is this your girlfriend?

MONK
Yeah. You scared the shit out of her.

CORALINE
I'm Coraline.

Monk picks up the skimmer net and begins to clean out the detritus Cliff has tracked in.

CLIFF
Hi, Coraline.
(to Monk)
At least she's not white again.

MONK
Your wife was white.

CLIFF
My wife was a beard. Beards don't count.

MONK
Well, get out. Fuckin' menace.
You'll wake the neighbors.

CLIFF
Fuck your neighbors. And fuck your clean pool. It's all just a part of your superiority complex anyway.

Cliff dips underwater, grabs the net and yanks it hard, throwing Monk off balance and sending him splashing into the pool. Monk comes up drenched.

MONK
You are a goddamn child!

Cliff is giggling, followed by Coraline.

CLIFF
It's probably a bad time to tell you but I did piss down there.

Coraline and Cliff laugh harder now.

MONK
Oh, this is funny, huh?

CORALINE
I'm sorry, Monk.

CLIFF
Don't get mad.

Monk tries to wrestle Cliff to try to get back at him, but Cliff can't stop laughing.

EXT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BOCCE COURT - LATER

Coraline and Cliff toss bocce balls and drink wine as Monk watches at the edge. Monk's in a bathrobe, Cliff in basketball shorts and nothing else. Coraline's in her clothes from before.

CLIFF

So I'm lying in bed with him, buck ass naked, and in walks Claude carrying the frozen yogurt.

CORALINE

No!

CLIFF

Yeah, I forgot that I'd shown him where I keep the spare key. So he just throws the yogurt at us and then he wallops me, right in the eye.

CORALINE

What's the other guy do?

CLIFF

He couldn't stop laughing. He said that's what he does when he gets nervous.

MONK

You're really going for it these days.

CLIFF

I've only been gay for like five minutes. I gotta make up for lost time.

CORALINE

Good for you. The whole world's falling apart, you might as well have some fun.

CLIFF

I appreciate that.
(then)
You know, you're quite beautiful.

CORALINE

(bashful)
Thank you.

CLIFF

Can I --
 (then)
 What do you see in my brother?

CORALINE

He's funny.

CLIFF

Hmm. He's not funny.

CORALINE

No, not "ha ha" funny. Like sad-funny.

CLIFF

OK.

CORALINE

Like a three-legged dog.

CLIFF

I see it now. Like somebody dying on the toilet.

CORALINE

Exactly.

MONK

(stumbling)
 Invariably, you, you -- you go too far.

CLIFF

You think? I don't think I go far enough.

MONK

It's becoming hurtful.

CORALINE

Awww.

CLIFF

Awww.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(mocking Monk)
 "Invariably, you, you, you go too far..."

Coraline gives Monk a kiss. Cliff laughs.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

You got a kiss, man! Look at you! Just by being pathetic.

Coraline laughs now, followed by Monk.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
Pathetic like a three-legged dog.

They all laugh again.

EXT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - COURTYARD - DAY

Monk, Coraline, and Cliff are walking through the courtyard carrying some banker's boxes. They're filled with things for Agnes, including a stereo and some vinyl records. Cliff looks admiringly at the grounds.

CLIFF
This is nice.

MONK
Yeah, it's not bad.

CLIFF
What do they got there? A pergola?

MONK
That's a gazebo.

CLIFF
Same difference.

INT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Cliff, Monk, and Coraline continue their trek with the boxes.

CLIFF
Hey, Monk? How the hell can you afford this place?

Monk is annoyed by Cliff's question. Coraline tries to pretend like she's not interested in the answer, but she is.

MONK
I, uh, there was some money Lisa left for Mother.

CLIFF
I thought her divorce cleaned her out.

MONK
I'm not familiar with what her finances were like.

(MORE)

MONK (CONT'D)

But if you're so interested in the bills, perhaps I can start sending them to you.

Cliff rolls his eyes at this.

CLIFF

Uh, that's fine. Where are we going?

MONK

Right here. 44.

INT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - AGNES' ROOM - AFTERNOON

Cliff, Coraline, and Monk enter Agnes' room carrying the banker's boxes. Agnes is sitting in a chair, staring blankly across the room. An **ORDERLY** is giving her water.

MONK

Surprise.

Agnes is unresponsive.

ORDERLY

We've had a difficult morning.

INT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Cliff assembles a CD player and speakers for Agnes as Monk talks with a **DOCTOR** in hushed tones at Agnes' door.

DOCTOR

We had to sedate her after she tried to strike a nurse.

MONK

Has she done that before?

As the doctor speaks, some jazz music starts to drift from Agnes' room.

DOCTOR

No. She has a different demeanor every day. Sometimes every hour. Maybe she'll feel better tomorrow.

(then)

I'm sorry. I need to go.

MONK

Yes, of course. Thank you.

The doctor leaves just as Coraline returns with a small bunch of flowers.

CORALINE

The gardener cut these right off
the bush for your mom. Sweet,
right?

MONK

Yeah, that's great.

Coraline is mum for a couple beats, but then she can't help herself.

CORALINE

How can you afford it here?
(then, joking)
You're not a drug dealer or
something, are you?

Monk does not receive the kidding well.

MONK

No, I'm a writer. And you're my
girlfriend, not my bookkeeper.

CORALINE

(to herself)

OK.

Monk and Coraline turn to see Cliff dancing with Agnes. Though Agnes is still not incredibly lucid, she's able to dance well, albeit slowly. Coraline and Monk watch in silence. Agnes rests her head on Cliff's chest and Cliff smiles -- it's the sweetest moment he's had with his mother in years. After a few more beats, Agnes speaks.

AGNES

I always knew you weren't a queer.

Cliff's face registers injury. He stops dancing and pulls away.

MONK

She doesn't know what she's saying.

CLIFF

I'm going to wait outside.

Cliff exits. Agnes is completely oblivious. She returns to the chair and stares out the window.

EXT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - PORCH - AFTERNOON

Monk, Coraline, and Cliff are sitting on the front porch in total silence. Cliff, who's clutching a suitcase, is standoffish now, different from the unguarded man we saw briefly in the previous scenes. An Uber pulls up and the trio stands solemnly.

MONK

Are you sure you don't want to stay
for Lorraine's wedding?

CLIFF

It's better if I go.

Cliff starts walking to the Uber.

CORALINE

It was nice to meet you, Cliff.

Cliff turns back to look at Coraline and Monk. He thinks for a beat before responding.

CLIFF

This family'll break your heart.

With that, Cliff turns and walks away.

CLOSE ON VIDEO SCREEN

We're watching *The Kenya Dunston Show*, a daytime talk program. **KENYA DUNSTON** (black, 40s) is in the style of Wendy Williams -- high skirt, low neckline, studiously unrefined.

Kenya sits next to a small coffee table. There's a book in her lap. A monitor above her right shoulder bears the show's logo.

KENYA

Welcome back. I'm Kenya Dunston and today we're going to discuss a new novel that just debuted at number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It is just a remarkable, special book. And it's called -- cover your kids' eyes and ears -- (bleep).

Kenya holds up "Fuck" by Stagg R. Leigh -- "Fuck" is blurred out but not the name of its author. Kenya props the book open on the table.

KENYA (CONT'D)

We're lucky enough to have the author with us today. And for those of you who are just joining us, please know that Mr. Stagg R. Leigh is coming to us from an undisclosed location, as he is still on the run from authorities.

The audience erupts in applause.

"Stagg's" silhouette appears on the monitor next to Kenya before taking over the whole screen -- at the bottom of the silhouette a chyron appears: "STAGG R. LEIGH, AUTHOR/FUGITIVE."

KENYA (CONT'D)

Ah, Stagg. Tell us: is this novel a true story?

MONK

(voice modulated)

Not factually, but it is the true story of what it's like to be black in America, like me. And it ain't pretty.

KENYA

Amen to that.

MONK

(voice modulated)

During my time in prison, I learned that words belong to everybody. So this book is my contribution to this wonderful country of ours. Where a black convict can become rich simply by telling the story of his unfortunate people.

KENYA

Mmm. Yes! Yes...

The audience applauds again, but they're soon overshadowed, literally, by a phone call notification from Arthur. We PULL BACK to reveal...

I/E. UBER - DAY

Monk is riding in the back of the car and watching the clip on his phone, his face contorted into a sour grimace. He answers the call.

MONK

Yeah.

INT. ARTHUR'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

ARTHUR

Get this: The FBI called Thompson-Watt today to try to get Stagg R. Leigh's identity.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

MONK

What?

ARTHUR

Don't worry. They're not gonna give him up.

MONK

Give who up? It's me. And I haven't done anything.

ARTHUR

They don't know that.

MONK

Look, this has gone too far.

ARTHUR

Relax. The fugitive stuff's getting us mountains of free press. Plus, as you said, you haven't done anything. It's not like they can arrest you.

MONK

I wish I could go back to not selling books.

ARTHUR

I don't. Bye.

INT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Monk and Coraline are having pasta for dinner. Monk is clearly aggravated, eating in silence.

CORALINE

Is everything alright?

MONK

Yeah. I'm just a little stressed out. This Book Award stuff is a bit more work than I expected.

Monk drops his fork onto the floor.

MONK (CONT'D)

Shit.

CORALINE

It's no biggie. Got more forks in the kitchen.

Monk goes into the kitchen to get a new fork. As he's doing this, he clocks a copy of "Fuck" on the counter, poking out from underneath Coraline's bag. He grabs it.

MONK

What's this?

CORALINE

Oh, my friend got it for me. Have you read it?

MONK

Of course not. Have you?

Coraline is taken aback by Monk's tone.

CORALINE

Yeah.

MONK

What'd you think of it?

CORALINE

I liked it.

MONK

What did you like about it?

CORALINE

Um, I--

MONK

(interrupting)
It didn't offend you?

CORALINE

You just said you didn't read it. What's your problem?

MONK

Why don't you answer my question?

CORALINE

You answer mine.

MONK

My problem is that books like this aren't real. They flatten our lives.

CORALINE

What do you mean?

MONK

I mean that my life is a disaster, but not in the way you'd think reading this shit. Books like this reduce us, and they do it over and over again, because too many white people -- and people, apparently, like you-- devour this slop like pigs at a dumpster to stay current at fucking cocktail parties or whatever.

CORALINE

You've got a lot of opinions for someone who hasn't published anything for years.

MONK

And you've published what exactly?

CORALINE

Okay, what is wrong with you? Why are you acting like this?

MONK

I'm not acting like anything.

CORALINE

You've been acting like a weirdo for weeks. You're obfuscating and sneaking around. You're fucking unknowable. And maybe you think being an enigma is chic and artsy, but I think it just makes you an asshole.

Monk pours himself another glass of red wine.

MONK

Well, um, you don't understand my life, and you can't, so just leave it at that.

CORALINE

One day maybe you'll learn that not being able to relate to other people isn't a badge of honor.

(then)

I think you should leave.

MONK

Well you know what I think?

CORALINE

You should leave, Monk.

The tone in her voice is clear and direct. Monk gulps down the rest of his wine and puts the glass down on the table. He gathers his things to leave, pointing at the copy of "Fuck" that's place on the same table.

MONK

(re: book)

Nonsense...

He exits.

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - FOYER - DAY

Monk helps Lorraine, Maynard, and Maynard's sons, **BURT** and **JEFF** (both black and in their 40s), move the last of Lorraine's things into a moving truck out front. Lorraine enters from the kitchen carrying a SodaStream.

MONK

You guys need any help with that?

BURT

Nah, we're good.

MONK

Thought you could use a little brawn.

JEFF

We got it.

LORRAINE

Mr. Monk, you mind if I keep the soda maker? You don't like bubbly water anyhow, right?

MONK
It's all yours.

LORRAINE
Thank you.

Monk notices Lorraine's signature yellow apron hanging on a chair.

MONK
Hey, what about this?

LORRAINE
No. I always hated that color. It's just the one your father bought.

Maynard enters from outside carrying a small FedEx package.

MAYNARD
Thelonious, this just came for you, Monk.

MONK
OK, thanks.

Monk grabs the package as Lorraine hands over the SodStream to Maynard.

LORRAINE
(to Maynard)
This is the last of it.

Lorraine now turns to Monk.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)
Goodbye, Mr. Monk.

MONK
Goodbye, Lorraine.

They hug. When they pull away, Monk extends his hand to Maynard, who shakes it.

MONK (CONT'D)
Drive safe. Guess I'll see you at the wedding.

MAYNARD
Alright.

After Maynard and Lorraine exit, Monk opens the package and out slides a copy of "Fuck" with a note on Thompson-Watt letterhead: "We're delighted to submit this book for consideration in the Book Awards." Monk looks horrified.

INT. MONK'S CHILDHOOD HOME - STUDY - LATER

Monk is on another Zoom call with the Book Award judges.

INT. WILSON'S OFFICE - DAY

WILSON

Thompson-Watt apparently raced to publish it.

INT. AILENE'S OFFICE - DAY

AILENE

Yeah, I heard that they ran 300,000 copies already. And they're reprinting more soon. I mean, it's going like gangbusters.

INT. DANIEL'S DEN - DAY

DANIEL

Christ on a crutch. It better be good.

WILSON

I heard the writer's a fugitive.

DANIEL

That would explain the title. He didn't go to charm school.

AILENE

I think that background is a plus. I am thrilled to read a BIPOC man hurt by our carceral state.

DANIEL

Wait -- are you one of those "defund the cops" nuts?

AILENE

Yes. And I wouldn't expect you to understand.

DANIEL

Well, I hope someone you love doesn't ever get raped or murdered.

INT. SINTARA'S OFFICE - DAY

SINTARA

Can we not have this conversation
now, please?

Daniel and Ailene calm down.

MONK

Look, criminal or not, I don't
think we should add it. We're
already weeks into the process, and
I don't know about any of you, but
I've got more than a dozen books
that haven't even opened yet.

AILENE

It was published within the
submission window. I think we have
to accept it.

WILSON

It's just one more. And from the
looks of it, it should be a quick
read.

DANIEL

A quick "Fuck," huh? I've had some
of those.

Wilson and Daniel laugh at the dumb joke as Monk looks ill.

AILENE

Bye, guys. Bye.

INT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - AGNES' BEDROOM - DAY

Monk, who's wearing a suit and tie, enters to find Agnes
applying the finishing touches to her makeup. Monk beams a
genuine smile when he sees her.

AGNES

Hi, Monkey.

MONK

You look beautiful.

She really does.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - DAY

Monk and Agnes arrive at the beach house and unpack their car.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Monk and Agnes enter to find two strange men: **KENNY** (20s, white, very in shape, only in a speedo) and **ALVIN** (40s, black, also very in shape). Kenny is chopping up some fruit as Alvin stirs eggs for omelettes in large bowl. There are poppers and White Claw cans littering the kitchen table.

KENNY

Oh, hello!

AGNES

(to Monk, unsure)

Monkey, do we know these men?

MONK

No, mother. This isn't the Alzheimer's. These are actual strangers.

(then, to Kenny and Alvin)

Who are you people?

KENNY

We're Cliff's friends.

MONK

Of course you are.

KENNY

We met him a few days ago. I'm Kenny. This is Alvin.

ALVIN

Are you Monk?

MONK

I am. How did you know?

ALVIN

Well Cliff said Monk is a real tight-ass.

MONK

Oh, did he? Delightful.

(then, re: chair)

Mother, you sit here.

(then)

Lorraine?

The camera moves now to catch Cliff come into view in the living room, where he locks eyes with Monk in the kitchen.

CLIFF

What the hell are you doing here?

MONK

You first.

Monk makes his way toward Cliff while Agnes stays with Kenny and Alvin.

INT. BEACH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Monk and Cliff are now face to face.

CLIFF

Shit. The wedding.

MONK

Yeah.

CLIFF

Oh, fuck. I didn't go to the airport that day. I needed some time to myself.

Cliff rushes to gather the cans and drug detritus.

MONK

Time to oneself implies -- by definition -- time alone.

CLIFF

Christ, here we go. Detective Dictionary.

Maynard and Lorraine now enter the dining room just behind Monk.

LORRAINE

Oh, Mr. Cliff...

MONK

(to Maynard and Lorraine)
I'm sorry, guys. I'll handle it.
(to Cliff)
You need to leave. Don't bother to clean up. Just go.

MAYNARD

No, it's alright.
(to Cliff)

(MORE)

MAYNARD (CONT'D)

Please, stay. It's a celebration.
It's good to see you, Cliff.

CLIFF

It's good to see you, too, Maynard.
But I don't want to impose.

LORRAINE

You can't impose. You're family.

Lorraine hugs Cliff. It's clear this kindness means a lot to Cliff.

CLIFF

OK. Let me clean up a bit.
Congratulations.

Kenny pokes his head out from the kitchen.

KENNY

Can we make y'all some breakfast? I
can whip up a killer smoothie and
Alvin used to work the omelette
station on a cruise ship.

LORRAINE

That sounds lovely. Thank you.

Lorraine begins to help Kenny and Alvin with breakfast,
leaving Monk and Maynard alone to chat.

MONK

(to Maynard)

It's very kind of you to let them
stay.

MAYNARD

It's easier to deal with other
people's families than your own.

MONK

I regret to inform you that in a
couple hours, this will be your
family.

They share a laugh.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Monk, Agnes, Cliff, Burt, Jeff, Kenny, and Alvin are gathered
behind the house with a small coterie of **OTHERS** as Lorraine
and Maynard are married by a **PASTOR** beneath a small arbor
decorated with flowers.

Most everyone is in formal clothes, but Cliff and his friends have to make do, with Kenny still in his Speedo and a Hawaiian shirt. Cliff is weeping. He catches the bouquet.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - BACK PORCH - DUSK

Everyone is dancing. The motley crew has grown to enjoy each other's company. Monk takes in the joyful scene, but it's clear his head is elsewhere.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Monk steps away from the party and gazes across the road toward Coraline's dark, empty home.

CLIFF (O.S.)
Did you piss her off?

Monk turns to see Cliff.

MONK
Yeah.

CLIFF
Did you shut her out?

MONK
Yeah.

CLIFF
Dad shut everyone out, too. And lied all the time. Look how that turned out.

MONK
I find myself getting very angry these days, like dad.

CLIFF
These days?

Monk smirks, recognizing the truth there.

CLIFF (CONT'D)
I've been thinking lately about how dad died not knowing I'm gay.

MONK
I think he suspected it.

CLIFF

He may have. But he didn't know for sure. He never knew the entirety of me. And now he never will. That makes me real sad.

MONK

Well, what if he had known and rejected you?

CLIFF

At least he'd be rejecting the real me. I know that sounds crazy, but there'd be some relief in that.

MONK

It doesn't sound so crazy.

CLIFF

People want to love you, Monk. I personally don't know what they see in you, but they want to love you.

Monk laughs a little at this.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

You should let them love all of you.

Cliff kisses Monk on the forehead and heads back to the party.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Monk and the NBA judges discuss their choices for the Book Award finalists. A list of titles are up on a white board, ranked from 10 to 4. The top three spots are empty.

DANIEL

It was dog shit. I mean, some mollycoddled chump faffing on and on about his dead mom. Who cares?

WILSON

OK, so that means that "Bury Me Standing" is fourth. Let's talk about "Fuck."

MONK

Could we not?

AILENE

Personally, I adored it. It was like gazing into an open wound.

WILSON

I agree. I think it's the strongest African American novel I've read in a long time -- since yours, of course, Sintara.

DANIEL

I actually liked it much more than I was expecting. I mean, this is a gutsy piece of work. And necessary for the times.

AILENE

What did you think, Sintara?

SINTARA

I found it to be pretty pandering, actually.

Monk turns to her, slightly surprised.

MONK

You did?

SINTARA

Yes. Did you not?

MONK

I very much did. I thought it was simplistic and meaningless.

DANIEL

Of course it's simplistic -- it's the language of the gutter. Not some prissy graduate thesis.

MONK

Language of the gutter? Jesus Christ.

There's a lull as people run out of steam.

WILSON

I think our blood sugar's low. How about we take a break for lunch?

SINTARA

Fine by me.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

Monk enters carrying a salad in a plastic clamshell container. He's surprised to find Sintara eating sushi by herself and reading.

MONK

I'm sorry.

SINTARA

Oh, no, you're fine.

MONK

I'm not interrupting?

SINTARA

No.

She goes back to her book as Monk sits and begins to eat. He looks to Sintara and hesitates before speaking.

MONK

Do you mind if I ask you something?

SINTARA

Sure.

MONK

Um...what about "Fuck" did you find pandering?

SINTARA

Oh. I can't really put my finger on it, but...it's not different from some of what's out there, but it just felt..."soulless" is the word that I'm gonna use? You said you agreed, right?

MONK

I do. I think it seems written to satisfy the tastes of guilt-ridden white people.

SINTARA

Yeah, the kind of book critics will call "important" and "necessary" but not "well-written."

Monk laughs.

MONK

Exactly.
(then)
(MORE)

MONK (CONT'D)

Okay, so -- and please don't take offense at this -- but how is "Fuck" so very different from your book?

SINTARA

Is that what this is about? You think my book's trash.

MONK

No. To be honest, I haven't read your book. I've read excerpts, and it didn't seem so dissimilar.

SINTARA

I did a lot of research for my book. Some of it was actually taken from real interviews. Maybe you've been up in your ivory tower of academia for so long you've forgotten that some people's lives are hard.

MONK

Your life? You went to an exclusive, bohemian college. You had a job at a fancy publishing house in New York.

SINTARA

So what? I don't need to write about my life. I write about what interests people.

MONK

You write what interests white publishers fiending black trauma porn.

SINTARA

They're the ones buying the manuscripts. Is it bad to cater to their tastes?

MONK

If you're OK feeding people's base desires for profit...

SINTARA

I'm OK with giving the market what it wants.

MONK

That's how drug dealers excuse themselves.

SINTARA

And I think drugs should be legal.

MONK

But you-- you're not fed up with it? Black people in poverty, black people rapping, black people as slaves, black people murdered by the police, whole soaring narratives about black folks in dire circumstances who still manage to maintain their dignity before they die-- I mean, I'm not saying these things aren't real, but we're also more than this. And it's like so many writers like you can't envision us without some white boot on our necks.

SINTARA

Do you get angry at Bret Easton Ellis or Charles Bukowski for writing about the downtrodden? Or is your ire strictly reserved for black women?

MONK

Nobody reads Bukowski thinking his is the definitive white experience. But people -- *white* people -- read your book and confine us to *it*. They think that we're all like that.

SINTARA

Then it sounds like your issue is with white people, Monk, not me.

MONK

That may be, but I also think that I see the unrealized potential of black people in this country.

SINTARA

Potential is what people see when they think what's in front of them isn't good enough.

As Monk considers this, the door swings open. Ailene enters and takes a seat.

AILENE

So, what are we talking about?

Sintara returns to her book and Monk returns to his salad.

EXT. HOTEL STAIRWELL - DAY

Monk is sitting on the top step. After a few beats of contemplation, he pulls out his phone and goes to his text thread with Coraline. He composes a message: "I'm sorry. I'd like to tell you some things. Would you be my date to the book awards in a couple weeks?" He sends it. A few seconds later, he sees the text bubbles signifying that Coraline is typing something. But after several moments, they disappear. Monk looks dejected. A moment later, Ailene sticks her head out the door.

AILENE

We're starting again.

MONK

I'll be right there.

Monk scans through his phone and presses a button. We do not intercut the call.

MONK (CONT'D)

Yeah, can I speak to Arthur? Yeah, it's Monk.

(then)

Hey, I'm fine. Listen, you think you can set up another meeting with Wiley? I've got a new idea for him. For a different kind of movie.

As he descends the steps, he pauses for a moment to look at the photograph hanging on the wall -- Gordon Parks, 'Untitled, Harlem, New York,' 1947.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The judges have moved around from their initial positions. Monk is now next to Sintara and the other three are grouped together at the other side of the table. On the board, the rankings are all filled out, save for number one.

AILENE

I think it's "Fuck" for me.

DANIEL

Me too.

WILSON

I agree.

SINTARA

I disagree. I'm sorry.

MONK

I think it would be a mistake to award this book anything at all.

DANIEL

Well, it's two versus three, so "Fuck" is the winner.

Ailene writes "Fuck" next to the number one on the board.

AILENE

(as she writes)

"Fuck" is the winner.

(then)

You know, it's not just that it's so affecting. I just think it's essential to listen to black voices right now.

In a wide shot, we see the division of the room: the three white judges on one side, the overruled black judges on the other.

EXT. SUNRISE ELDER CARE HOME - AGNES' ROOM - DAY

Monk sits at Agnes' bedside as Agnes stares off into the distance. They're both silent for a few beats.

MONK

Mother.

Agnes turns to look at Monk.

MONK (CONT'D)

Did you know dad was cheating on you?

AGNES

He was bad at keeping secrets.

MONK

Why didn't you leave him?

AGNES

He would have been even more lonely without me.

MONK

You thought he was lonely?

AGNES

Your father was a genius. Geniuses are lonely, because they can't connect with the rest of us.

(then)

You're a genius, son.

MONK

I certainly don't feel like one half the time.

AGNES

That's because you've always been so hard on yourself, Cliffy.

INT. BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Monk, his fellow judges, and **DOZENS OF GUESTS** in black tie are gathered at the awards gala. It's not incredibly glamorous -- this is a book award, after all. Monk, dateless, sits at a circular table of **OLD WHITE PEOPLE** picking at salads. Onstage, Carl Brunt, carrying a trophy, steps to a lectern and clears his throat into the microphone. The audience quiets down.

CARL

And now, the final award of the evening. I promise to leave you alone and let you eat after this.

Some people laugh.

CARL (CONT'D)

But, before I announce the winner, I would like to acknowledge our group of judges -- our incredibly diverse group of judges -- who've sacrificed valuable time so we can all celebrate here tonight. So if you could your hands together -- they did a fantastic job.

The audience claps.

CARL (CONT'D)

OK, without further ado: this year's Literary Award goes to -- oh, I knew it: By Stagg R. Leigh, "Fuck"!

Wild applause. People stand to get a glimpse of the mysterious author.

CARL (CONT'D)

I'm not sure if Mr. Leigh is going to grace us with his presence tonight. He's famously cagy about attention.

INT. BANQUET HALL - MONK'S TABLE - SAME TIME

Monk thinks for a beat, then stands, and buttons his tuxedo jacket.

INT. BANQUET HALL - STAGE - SAME TIME

Carl squints and looks out over the ballroom.

CARL

Hold on, OK, I see some-- someone's coming.

INT. BANQUET HALL - AUDIENCE - SAME TIME

Monk calmly maneuvers through the tables to the stage.

INT. BANQUET HALL - STAGE - SAME TIME

Carl turns to look at Monk, who's now making his way up the stage stairs.

CARL

(in mic, to audience)
Oh, uh, Thelonious Ellison one of our judges...weirdly walking toward the stage...no idea why.
(covering mic, to Monk)
Hey, what's going on?

MONK

Excuse me.

Monk takes the award, shunts Carl to the side, and approaches the mic. As he does, he spots Coraline staring at him from the back of the room. He locks eyes with her.

The camera moves behind Monk, so we can only see his silhouette beneath the bright lights. Carl and the audience stare at Monk, confused.

MONK (CONT'D)

I have a confession to make.

Before Monk can speak again, we

SMASH TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK

WILEY (PRE-LAP)

Wait, wait, wait. Smash to black?
No fucking way, dude.

INT. "PLANTATION ANNIHILATION SET" - DAY

The filmmaking detritus and garish branding on the backs of some directors' chairs let us know we're on the set of Wiley Valdespino's latest film. Wiley is reading Monk's script as Monk sits beside him.

MONK

What's wrong with that?

WILEY

(re: script)

There's no resolution here. What's he gonna say?

MONK

I don't know. I think that's what's interesting about it.

WILEY (O.S.)

He should say something. What did you say?

MONK

Nothing. I walked out of the ceremony and the next day I called you to say I wanted to write this movie.

WILEY (O.S.)

Well, Monk the character should say something.

MONK

I don't want him to do some grandiose speech spoon-feeding everyone the moral of the story. There is no moral. That's the idea. I like the ambiguity.

WILEY

OK, look. You're a good writer, and this is almost there. But novels aren't movies, OK? Nuance doesn't put asses into theater seats. We need a big finish.

An **ASSISTANT** approaches Wiley with a can of seltzer.

WILEY (CONT'D)

(re: can)

What is this?

ASSISTANT

It's the seltzer you asked for.

WILEY

Why's it all wet?

ASSISTANT

Condensation?

WILEY

Condensation? You a fucking weatherman now?

(then, to Monk)

You want anything?

MONK

No, I'm fine. Thank you.

WILEY

(to assistant)

This is Monk. We're gonna make a movie with him if he can get the ending right.

ASSISTANT

(to Monk)

Nice meeting you.

MONK

You as well.

WILEY

(to assistant)

Get me a flat white.

(handing back the can)

And hey: Never again.

The assistant takes the wet can and departs.

WILEY (CONT'D)

Alright, what other endings you got
in that big brain of yours?

Monk takes a deep breath and exhales, thinking on the fly.

MONK

How about if --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL - STAGE - NIGHT

Carl repeats his line.

CARL

This year's Literary Award goes to -
- Stagg R. Leigh, "Fuck"!

Wild applause. People stand to get a glimpse of the
mysterious author.

INT. BANQUET HALL - MONK'S TABLE - SAME TIME

The people at Monk's table stand to applaud. Monk smirks,
stands, and buttons his tuxedo jacket. As the audience looks
around for a glimpse at Stagg, Monk makes his way to the
exit. He doesn't look back at the ecstatic crowd as the door
swings shut behind him.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Monk walks down the sidewalk, passing drunken revelers and
buskers and beggars. He's clearly headed somewhere specific.
He stops at a crosswalk and hails a cab. Without noticing, he
runs past a giant "Fuck" ad on the side of a building.
Someone has tagged a giant "YOU" next to the book's title.

EXT. CORALINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

And now we see where Monk's been headed. There's a yellow
glow in the window. Monk walks toward the house as the cab
drives away. Monk can see Coraline reading a magazine by
lamplight. She looks up and meets his gaze. A few moments
later, Coraline opens the door. She says nothing, just
stares. After a couple beats, Monk speaks...

MONK

I'd like to apologize. I haven't
been myself lately.

We get a glimpse of the lovers looking at each other. Before Coraline can respond, we

SMASH TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK

MONK (PRE-LAP)
What about that?

INT. "PLANTATION ANNIHILATION" SET - DAY

We're back with Monk and Wiley, who is mulling over what we've just seen.

WILEY
Will she forgive him?

MONK
Dunno. The real Coraline won't return my calls. Maybe the movie Coraline is more forgiving.

Wiley shakes his head.

WILEY
No, it's too pat. Makes the whole thing feel like a rom-com. We don't wanna make a rom-com. We wanna make something real. Give me something real.

Monk is quiet for a few beats, already regretting what he's about to say.

MONK
I mean, we could just --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL - STAGE - NIGHT

Monk is back onstage with Carl, who repeats his line.

CARL
(covering mic, to Monk)
Hey, what's going on?

MONK
Excuse me.

Monk takes the award and shunts Carl to the side.

MONK (CONT'D)

Beat it.

As he approaches the mic, he spots Coraline staring at him from the back of the room. He locks eyes with her and then begins

MONK (CONT'D)

I have a confession to make.

Just as Monk is about to continue, the doors to the banquet hall burst open and five **COPS** flood in. A **DETECTIVE** (white, 40s) in a kevlar vest rushes the stage, his gun drawn.

DETECTIVE

Stagg Leigh! On the ground! Now!

MONK

What?! No! I'm not Stagg R. Leigh!
He doesn't exist. I'm Monk!
Thelonious Ellison!

DETECTIVE

You're a fugitive! On the ground
now!

MONK

No, that was all a marketing
gimmick! It was all lies!

Monk raises his hands, one of which is holding the award. A **UNIFORMED COP** points.

UNIFORMED COP

He's got a gun!

The police start to unload their weapons on Monk, who collapses backward in SLO-MO. As orchestral music swells, we get a bird's-eye view of Monk, dead, blood pooling around his body. Cops surround him as the camera zooms out and we

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. "PLANTATION ANNIHILATION" SET - DAY

Wiley is grinning ear to ear as Monk looks aghast.

WILEY

He's dead? They smoke him? It's
perfect. Yes! That is perfect. Time
to pick out your tux, my brother.

(MORE)

WILEY (CONT'D)

We're going to the big show.
 (then, to his assistant)
 Hey, come transcribe this. We got
 it.

MONK

(under his breath)
 Fuck.

EXT. STUDIO BACKLOT

Monk, a bit defeated, steps out of a building onto the backlot of some nameless studio, carrying his script. It's a beautiful day in L.A. and **PEOPLE** run to and fro. But Monk is only looking for one person: Cliff, who's waiting for him in a vintage convertible. Monk gets in the passenger's seat.

CLIFF

So, are they gonna make your movie
 or what?

MONK

Unfortunately yes.

CLIFF

Ay! You know what? Good luck
 finding someone handsome enough to
 play me.

MONK

I think they have.

CLIFF

Who they got?

MONK

Tyler Perry.

The brothers laugh. As Cliff starts the car, Monk turns to his right and sees a **SLAVE EXTRA** from "Plantation Annihilation" resting between takes. Monk locks eyes with the extra, a younger man wearing Airpods; he throws Monk a peace sign, the universal symbol of solidarity. Monk nods at the man as the car takes off into the sunny day.

THE END