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.

Mandell
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 rumpled, 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 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 PAFOLOGY

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! Whatchu talkin’ 'bout?

WILLY
Think 'bout it, Van Go. Lookit my 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 see'n' 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)

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 RETIREES 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.
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.

Dear god.


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.

I’ve got to go.

Monk stands and quickly runs from the table.

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

Mother! Mother!

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.

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 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
MONK
Shut up! 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.
INTERCUIT 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    Yeah! Cool.
love to hear great ideas...

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!

ARTHUR MONK
What? What?

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 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, studiedly 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.

(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!
Theonious 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