

Treatment: Defining Moments

By Ben Burgess Jr.

Logline:

Two attorneys, one Black man and one white man, look back over their lives and navigate racial tension and stereotypes as they compete for the same partnership position at their prestigious law firm, which has just nabbed the two biggest cases in the firm's history.

Main Characters

Ben Turner: Ben is an African American man competing with rival Bill O'Neil for the same partnership position at their prestigious law firm. He faces racial stereotypes from his high-profile Black client, who is accused of four heinous murders who insists Ben is nothing but a preppie Oreo who isn't Black enough to be his attorney on this case while experiencing brazen and blatant racist behavior from his white girlfriend's father. Ben looks back over his privileged life as he fights for his client and for his interracial relationship.

Becky Preston: Becky is a successful columnist for Cosmopolitan magazine, who recently completed her novel on the trial and tribulations of being in an interracial relationship. She struggles to find a publisher without her wealthy and influential father's help.

Bill O'Neil: Bill is a talented attorney at a prestigious law firm. He is a white man who grew up poor in the Queensbridge Housing projects where he met his current girlfriend, a Black woman named Ebony Williams, a Sergeant in the New York police department. Bill looks back over his impoverished upbringing, including witnessing his best friend's murder at the hands of police officers and his mother's chronic illness, and uses both as fuel to be a successful and respectable lawyer.

Ebony Williams: Ebony is an African American female who worked her way up to Sergeant in the police force after witnessing her twin brother's death at the hands of a white, racist police officer years previously. She is currently studying for her Lieutenant's exam.

Opening Scene

The dark opening scene sets the film's tone in the immediate aftermath of the brutal rape of an exotic dancer, Sophia Winters, at J's Gentlemen's Club. Simultaneously, Sergeant Ebony and her partner, Rashida, respond to a shots fired call and arrive at a tense murder scene that soon has two more victims, their colleagues, police officers Gomez and Roberts, who have been riddled with bullets in their squad car.

Act One

In Act One, we witness the immediate aftermath of two brutal acts of violence: the rape of exotic dancer Sophia Winters and the murder of police officers Ricardo Gomez and Kenneth Roberts, as well as two gay club-goers outside a club across town. We meet Bill, a white man, and Ben Turner, a Black man, who are both successful attorneys at the law firm of Wayne, Rothstein, and Lincoln as they are both roused from sleep in the middle of the night and summoned to the law firm by the firm's partners, as the firm has just picked up the highest-profile clients in its history. NBA star Johnny Alfieri, a white man, accused of raping Sophia in the gentlemen's club, and Reginald Brown, aka famous rapper CoKayne, a Black man, who has been arrested for the four murders in the club across town. Ben and Bill are given first chair, Reginald's murder case, and Alfieri's rape case, respectively, and are promised consideration for partnership in the firm if they can pull out a win on these difficult-at-best cases.

Act Two

In Act Two, Ben and Bill meet their clients and realize for the first time how difficult their cases will be to win. Ben's client, Reginald Brown, aka rapper Co-Kayne, dismisses Ben as a corny Wayne Brady type of Black man and insists Ben is not what he wants for an attorney for this case that is life and death for him. Bill finds his client, Johnny Alfieri, a pompous, brazen predator showboat, and immediately begins to question if he is indeed guilty of raping the Sophia Winters. We also get a look inside both men's personal lives. Both men are in interracial relationships, a fact that those closest to them have trouble accepting. Bill's relationship with Ebony starts to fray at the edges when he begins spending too much time at the office preparing to defend a man he can't even stand. To make matters worse, one of Ebony's coworkers, Morgan St. Clair, has his eye on her and uses his knowledge of her lack of experience with dating to make Ebony question if it's possible to be for the betterment of black people and date outside your race and wonder if she did herself a disservice by only dating Bill exclusively at such a young age without experiencing what else the world had to offer. When Ben's girlfriend Becky is finally signed to a publishing deal, she surprises him at his office only to discover none of his coworkers know she exists. Bill's relationship with Ebony hits a solid brick wall when Bill reveals to her that he knows Alfieri is guilty and that Alfieri admitted to Bill that he raped Sophia Winters. Ben proposes marriage to Becky, but her father threatens to disown her if she says yes. Hearing this, Ben realizes he must let Becky go in order for her to have the life she deserves.

Act Three

In Act Three, Alfieri menacingly threatens to rape Ebony in the same manner he had Sophia. Bill lashes out and attacks Alfieri physically. He is promptly removed from the case and fired from the law firm. With Bill gone, Ben is a shoo-in for the partnership position. As Bill angrily walks out of the building, leaving with a box full of his office things, Ben invites him to lunch, where they discovered they were more alike than they initially thought. Ben pulls out a miracle and finds evidence that absolves Reginald of guilt in his case. Reginald is acquitted and set free; however, the partners inform Ben that, despite his historic win in the Co-Kayne case, the position will be given to a much less qualified colleague.

The Wrap Up

After both men are denied the partnership at the firm, they realize they decide to put their petty differences aside to form a firm together. Together at their new firm, they can select the cases they want to work on, making them proud to be attorneys again. They also begin to repair the damage inflicted on their personal relationships throughout the drama of the trial and racial tensions.

Black and White - Episode 1

By
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Based on the novel
Defining Moments by Ben Burgess Jr.

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EPISODE ONE

OVER BLACK --

The sound of MULTIPLE GUNSHOTS ring out.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. NYC STREET - NIGHT

A DARK FIGURE is wielding a gun. Empty shell casings fall from the gun, CLING-CLANGING on the pavement. Heavy FOOTSTEPS retreat.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
All units, be advised. We're
getting reports of gunshots on the
corner of Fourteenth Street and
Tenth Avenue.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Sergeant EBONY WILLIAM rides in the passenger's seat of a patrol car. RASHIDA HARRELL, Ebony's partner, is driving.

EBONY
You hear that?

RASHIDA
Yup, sounded like shots.

EBONY
Hit the lights!
(into the radio)
Show me responding. I'm two blocks
away.

EXT. NYC STREET - NIGHT [MOMENTS LATER]

Ebony and Rashida exit their squad car to see Officers MENDEZ and MAHONEY holding popular black rapper, REGINALD BROWN, aka CO-KAYNE, late '20s, at gunpoint.

Reginald's hands and clothing are covered in blood. Behind him, two DECEASED MEN are lying on the ground. SPECTATORS begin to gather.

MENDEZ
 (calling out)
 Drop your weapon and get on the
 ground!

REGINALD
 (pleading)
 This is fucked-up. I found them
 like that.

MENDEZ
 I'm not going to tell you again.
 Drop the gun and get on the ground,
 now!

Reginald drops the gun but resists arrest. Mahoney wrestles
 him face down as they struggle to cuff him.

REGINALD
 Fuck you, pigs! I didn't kill
 anybody. I want a fucking lawyer.

Ebony rushes toward a patrol car riddled with bullets. Police
 Officer RICARDO GOMEZ is slumped against the driver's side
 door, his eyes open and vacant.

Officer KENNETH ROBERTS is in the passenger's seat, shaking,
 holding his throat. Panic floods his eyes as tears roll down
 his cheeks.

Ebony's mouth drops open, eyes horrified.

EBONY
 Fuck!

RASHIDA
 (gesturing to the dead
 men)
 Boss, they're dead.

EBONY
 Gomez and Roberts are hurt.

RASHIDA
 Boss...Gomez is --

EBONY
 -- I know! But we have to try. We
 can't let them both die out here.
 (keys the radio)
 Central, rush buses to this
 location. Four confirmed shot. Two
 unidentified males and two officers
 are severely wounded.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
10-4, Sergeant. I have ambulances
on the way.

Panic is on Robert's face as he kicks his legs frantically fighting to live. Ebony tries to console him.

EBONY
You're going to be okay. Don't give
up on me, Roberts. Stay with me.

POLICE SIRENS in the distance. Ebony makes a judgment call.

EBONY (CONT'D)
(to Rashida)
The ambulance will never make it in
time. Fuck it, let's go. Grab
Gomez!

They frantically put both wounded officers in their squad car and speed off, LIGHTS ON and SIRENS blaring. Ebony turns around in the passenger's seat to see Robert's movements are gradually slowing. Gomez's lifeless eyes are staring back at her.

EBONY (CONT'D)
Stay with me! Okay, Roberts? We're
almost there.

Ebony keys the radio.

EBONY (CONT'D)
Central, contact Bellevue and
advise them that I'm bringing the
two injured officers in myself.

DISPATCHER
10-4, Sergeant. I'm putting in the
notification now.

Ebony and Rashida pull up to the emergency room doors and are immediately met by HOSPITAL STAFF who rush to treat Gomez and Roberts.

Ebony's cellphone BUZZES.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS
Williams, where are you?

EBONY
Bellevue. Gomez and Roberts were in
too bad of shape to wait for the
bus.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

Jesus, I'm on my way. Are you all right?

EBONY

I'm good. I just hope the paramedics can save them. Once everything is stable here, I'll head back and take care of everything at the scene.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

Don't worry about the scene, Captain Wallace is there. I want you to take care of yourself. You saw a lot tonight and you can't help anyone else if your head isn't right.

EBONY

Honestly, I'm good.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

Keep me posted on Roberts and Gomez's conditions if anything changes before I get there.

EBONY

Yes, sir.

Ebony hangs up.

An ER DOCTOR looks at Ebony and shakes his head. White sheets are pulled up over both Gomez and Roberts's bodies.

Ebony drops to her knees crying as Rashida consoles her.

CUT TO BLACK:

OVER BLACK --

SUPER: Episode One

FADE IN:

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

BEN TURNER, early '30s, is asleep in bed with his girlfriend, BECKY PRESTON, early 30s, a curvy, white, blond-haired girl.

Cable box reads 2:43 A.M. A cell phone BUZZES. Ben startles awake and feels blindly for phone.

BEN

Hello?

TIM (V.O.)

Sorry to wake you, buddy. I can't get into the particulars, but I need you to come into the firm ASAP. We just snagged a huge case and it could define your career if you pull out a win. We'll fill you in when you get here.

BEN

Yes, sir, I'm on my way.

Ben ends the call and rushes to his closet.

BECKY

What time is it?

BEN

Almost three.

BECKY

Ugh! It's too early. What do they want now?

BEN

I gotta go. Big case. I'll call you when I know more.

Becky sulks. Ben gives her a quick kiss, and rushes out of the room.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Driving, Ben turns the radio to 1010 WINS.

WINS NEWS REPORTER (RADIO)

Top news, Rapper Co-Kayne was arrested this morning for murder. He is accused of killing two men that he had argued with earlier inside of a nightclub, as well as two police officers responding to the scene. Co-Kayne was found holding the murder weapon and standing over the bodies of the two men when backup arrived. Authorities say Co-Kayne fled and resisted arrest once apprehended.

(MORE)

WINS NEWS REPORTER (RADIO) (CONT'D)

In other news, basketball star Johnny Alfieri will turn himself in to authorities this morning after an exotic dancer made claims that he raped her inside of J's Gentlemen's Quarters in the Bronx. We'll have more information on the case as it unfolds...

INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Ben's BMW SCREECHES into the garage, followed by a Range Rover driven by BILL, Ben's rival, early 30's, Caucasian.

They park side by side and walk together into the law firm of WAYNE, ROTHSTEIN, and LINCOLN.

BEN

You're here early.

BILL

Yeah, Francis said he and the other partners needed me ASAP.

They step into...

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

BEN

Me too. But Tim called me. I wonder why they need both of us?

Bill's phone BUZZES, and he answers it.

BILL

Hey, babe...At the firm, what's up?

(eyes widen)

Oh my God. Are you okay? Fuck it, where are you? I'll come to you...

I'll tell them I have a family emergency. Babe . . . You say you're ok, but I can hear it in your voice you're not...Alright...ok, yeah. I'll call you soon. Love you, babe.

Bill hangs up.

BEN

Everything all right?

BILL

My girl is an NYPD sergeant. She said that rapper Co-Kayne went crazy and killed two of her cops and two other guys at a club downtown.

BEN

Damn. Sorry about your girl.

BILL

Thanks. I hope that's not the case we're here for.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Bill enter. Seated at the head of a long conference table are the three partners; FRANCIS, TIM, and RICHARD, all Caucasian, 60's.

RICHARD

All right gentlemen, have a seat. I'm going to be talking quickly. We're pressed for time.

Ben and Bill sit and take out their legal pads.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

We picked up two nightmare cases. Rapper Co-Kayne was arrested for allegedly killing two cops and a gay couple, and an NBA player who allegedly raped a stripper at a gentlemen's club.

BEN

If you don't mind, I'd like to take the --

RICHARD

-- Ben, you'll handle the rapper case.

(slides case file to him)

Look over the file then get over to the sixth precinct to get more info from our client.

Ben takes the file begrudgingly.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Ben, you'll be first chair. Tim, second.

FRANCIS

Co-Kayne only wanted a "Brotha" to represent him, so you're perfect for this case.

BEN

Excuse me for asking, but am I perfect because you think I'm capable of winning or because I'm the firm's only black associate?

FRANCIS

(chuckling)

Both.

TIM

We get the best of both worlds with you, Ben.

RICHARD

You appeal to our minority clients, but you don't act all 'ghetto', so you're a good asset to have. We have nothing but confidence in you.

The partners laugh. Ben does not. Richard slides another file over to Bill.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(to Bill)

You'll handle the ball player. The DA's office sent us video from the night in question. It's pretty clear and doesn't look good for our client. We'll discuss that later.

(to Bill and Ben)

We know it's a lot to ask to win both cases. So, as an added incentive, whoever gets the best results will be strongly considered for a partnership with this firm.

Bill and Ben perk up.

BILL

Partnership?

RICHARD

(nodding)

We know you both have aspirations to become a partner someday. Well, now's your chance.

Richard shares a smile with Francis and Tim. Their eyes are focused on Bill while he's studying his file. Ben notices.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Okay, Ben. Rush down to the sixth precinct and keep Tim posted on everything.

Ben nods and stands with the file, giving one last look at the table before he leaves. The partners are smiling and laughing with Bill.

BEN (V.O.)

I know they have me written off and have Bill pegged as the next partner, but that partnership is mine. I'm going to win this case.

INT. ELEVATOR FOYER - EARLY MORNING

Ben waves to MRS. WILSON, the only black woman working in the firm.

MRS. WILSON

Good morning, Mr. Turner. You're here early.

BEN

Yeah, the partners wanted to meet me and Bill about some important cases.

Mrs. Wilson is talking to Ben but it's inaudible. He's distracted thinking about his rivalry with Bill.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. LAW FIRM RECEPTION AREA - MORNING

BEN (V.O.)

Every morning, Bill greets and hugs Mrs. Wilson.

QUICK CUTS of different days of Bill greeting Mrs. Wilson.

-- Bill brings her a birthday cake for her birthday.

-- Bill brings her a present for Christmas.

-- Bill brings her flowers and candy for Valentines Day.

BEN (V.O.)
He's a poser. If you close your
eyes and hear him speak, he even
sounds "black."

INT. LAW FIRM BREAK ROOM - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Bill sits laughing and joking with minorities that work for
the firm.

BEN (V.O.)
But I know his type, it's all for
show. He's just another bigot that
hides it well.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

The elevator stops on the ground floor, and Ben exits.

BEN
I don't mean to be rude but I'm in
a rush. Talk to you later, Mrs.
Wilson.

MRS. WILSON
Take care!

Ben rushes to his car.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Bill and the partners are watching the video from the strip
club on a large projection screen.

RICHARD
(whistling)
Ben's going to have his hands full
with that case.

FRANCIS
Yours is no walk in the park
either, but be thankful that thug
wanted a "Brotha" for a lawyer.

The partners laugh. Bill displays a faux grin. Francis taps a
few keys on a laptop.

RICHARD
We're lucky. The surveillance video
had audio.
(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

The NYPD raided the strip club two years ago, and the owner, Jerrod, had HD cameras installed as an attempt to run a legit business without prostitution. He's willing to testify on our client's behalf.

BILL

What's the name of the club?

RICHARD

J's Gentlemen's Quarters.

INSERT: SURVEILLANCE FOOTAGE

JOHNNY ALFIERI, (20's), pulls out a wad of money and waves it at SOPHIA WINTERS, late 20's. She saunters over to him, straddling his lap.

ALFIERI

Damn, ma. How much?

SOPHIA

It depends on what you're looking for.

ALFIERI

You know what I want.

SOPHIA

We don't do that here anymore. You a cop?

ALFIERI

You don't know who I am?

SOPHIA

Should I?

ALFIERI

Fuck, yeah. I'm Johnny Alfieri, the best white boy playin' in the NBA.

SOPHIA

Sorry, I don't watch sports. Look, I can give you a private lap dance, but that's about it.

ALFIERI

I don't want a dance, I'm tryna fuck.

Sophia stands and turns to walk away. Alfieri stand and grabs her arm.

ALFIERI (CONT'D)

You really gonna turn down all this money?

(Sophia pulls her arm away)

Come on. Name your price. I'm sure none of the other women here would turn down this much money.

SOPHIA

All right, get a VIP room, and we'll fuck in there.

(lowering voice)

No anal and no leaving marks.

ALFIERI

(smiling)

That's what I'm talking about.

Alfieri slaps her on the ass as she walks away.

Francis hits more keys.

INSERT: VIP ROOM FOOTAGE

Alfieri enters while Sophia is taking off her lingerie. Alfieri immediately starts fondling her breasts.

SOPHIA

(uncomfortable)

Wait.

She pushes away and gathers her clothes.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

I changed my mind. I don't want to do this.

ALFIERI

Bitch, I already told you I'm not a cop, and I'm about to pay you good money.

SOPHIA

You can keep your money.

Alfieri SLAMS her against the wall and places his hands flat against the wall on both sides of her.

ALFIERI

You're gonna give me what I want. I
always get what I want.

Alfieri THROWS HER DOWN on the couch by her neck and unzips
his pants.

Holding her head down, he forces his dick into her mouth
until she coughs and gags. She sucks him woefully, tears
streaming down her face.

ALFIERI (CONT'D)

Don't act like you don't like this
shit. I know you want this money.

He stops her, stands up, and maneuvers her until she is bent
over. Sophia tries to get away but he forces his dick into
her without protection.

ALFIERI (CONT'D)

There we go! Tell me you like it.

SOPHIA

(complying begrudgingly,
crying)

I like it, daddy.

ALFIERI

Tell me you want this dick!

SOPHIA

You know I want it, daddy. Give it
to me.

Her grunts and moans make him quicken his pace excitedly. He
smacks her ass.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

(begging)

Come for me daddy. I want you to
come.

Alfieri moans and releases himself inside her.

ALFIERI

See, I knew you'd like it.

Alfieri backs away, leaving Sophia naked and trembling on the
black leather couch. The video ends.

BACK TO SCENE

RICHARD

Now, you see our dilemma.

BILL

What is he saying? Does he think he raped her?

RICHARD

He's a dumb jock who can barely spell his name. He swears that he didn't but you heard her, she wanted him to come inside her. She's a whore, and we need to convey that messaged to the jury if this goes to trial.

BILL

What's the woman's name?

FRANCIS

Sophia Winters, but her stripper name is Sapphire.

The Partners chuckle.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

She's just some dumb stripper that's disappointed that her rich client didn't whisk her away and give her a happily-ever-after-fantasy life like Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman.

BILL

(To Richard)

You said "if" this goes to trial. What do you mean?

RICHARD

We had an anonymous friend of the firm reach out to her and set up a meeting later today after Johnny turns himself in and goes through the arraignment.

BILL

Who's the friend?

FRANCIS

That's irrelevant.

BILL

How did you manage to set up a meeting with her?

RICHARD

Our 'friend' told her that there had to be some kind of mutual agreement we could arrive at regarding this misunderstanding.

BILL

She bought that?

RICHARD

She said she'd hear us out.

FRANCIS

Take her somewhere low-key, talk to her, and let's settle this bullshit out of court.

BILL

With all due respect, sir, talking to her after Alfieri turns himself in is tampering with a witness. I could get disbarred for that. The firm could get prosecuted for it too.

FRANCIS

That's why no one needs to know about it.

Bill looks like he's in deep thought.

BILL

If I convince her to take the money, is the partnership mine?

RICHARD

We'd all highly consider it. Get this done for us, Bill.

BILL

I got this. I won't let you down.

RICHARD

I know you won't. Look, Alfieri is on his way here. Talk with him a bit and then go with him to the precinct to turn himself in. We'll make some calls to get him through Central Booking quickly and into arraignment. Most likely, he'll get bail, and then you can meet up with the whore and wrap this all up.

BILL
I'm on it.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Becky grabs her laptop from the kitchen counter when her PHONE RINGS. She looks at the caller ID and rolls her eyes, then answers.

BECKY
(on phone)
Hello, Mother.

INT. CAR - MORNING [SIMULTANEOUS]

MRS. PRESTON sits behind the wheel of a late-model luxury car.

MRS. PRESTON (V.O.)
I'm driving to the gym but I made
this a three-way call. You're
Father is on the line too.

INT. BECKY'S PARENT'S MANSION - MR. PRESTON'S OFFICE -
MORNING [SIMULTANEOUS]

MR. PRESTON (V.O.)
Hey Becky Bear!

INTERCUT: BECKY/MRS. PRESTON/MR. PRESTON

BECKY
Hey Dad!

Becky sits on the couch in the living room and multitasks between talking to her parents and tinkering with her novel on her laptop.

MRS. PRESTON
We're calling to see if you and Ben
are still coming here for dinner
tonight.

BECKY
We should be but Ben stormed out
early for an important case, so it
may just be me.

Mrs. Preston sighs.

MRS. PRESTON

Anyway, how have you been? Unless we call you or set up these dinner plans, we never hear from you.

BECKY

I've been busy working on my book.

MRS. PRESTON

When are you going to choose a serious career and stop with this writing foolishness?

BECKY

Maybe I should just marry wealthy like you did so I don't have to worry about it.

Mr. Preston laughs.

MRS. PRESTON

That's a shitty thing to say, Rebecca. Anyway, it won't happen for you. You insist on dating your black guy, and even if you smartened up and broke up with him, you're not thin enough to marry well.

BECKY

There's the mother I know and love.

MRS. PRESTON

You're so cynical. No wonder you couldn't find a nice white man to date you.

MR. PRESTON

Seriously, Rebecca, when is this bullshit relationship going to end? You both know it isn't going anywhere.

BECKY

Dad, we live together. We've been in a relationship for eight years. Why is it so hard to see that our love is real?

MRS. PRESTON

While I'd love to continue this wonderful conversation with you, Rebecca, I'm pulling up to the gym.
(MORE)

MRS. PRESTON (CONT'D)

Steven, there's no point trying to reason with her. She's too stubborn. Rebecca, I'll see you at dinner. I love you both, bye.

CLICK -- Mrs. Preston leaves the call.

BECKY

Daddy, seriously, what's so bad about my relationship with Ben?

MR. PRESTON

Besides him being Black? Nothing.

BECKY

So, you just don't like him because he's Black? Don't you think that's an immature reason?

MR. PRESTON

That's the only reason I need, Rebecca. Blacks are mostly uneducated, poor, filthy and diseased. They're thieves who live in crime-riddled neighborhoods and, if you don't watch them, they'll steal everything you own right out from under your nose.

BECKY

And you're basing this off of...?

MR. PRESTON

Facts. Every race needs to stick with their own.

BECKY

Daddy!

MR. PRESTON

What?

BECKY

Ben is none of those thing and you know that.

MR. PRESTON

Becky Bear, remember this and remember it well: You can polish a turd, but it's still a piece of shit. Ben might have a little education and a decent career but that doesn't change the fact that he's Black.

BECKY

You're downplaying everything Ben has done. He graduated from an Ivy league school, and he's on his way to becoming a partner at one of the most prestigious law firms in the country. That's way more than merely having a little education and a decent career. He's a great guy and he treats me like a queen. What does it matter what race he is? Don't you want your only child to be happy?

MR. PRESTON

You can be happy with someone white. Eventually, Rebecca, you're going to have to make the decision to drop him.

BECKY

I love him, Dad.

MR. PRESTON

Yeah, well, after this discussion, I need to unwind. I'm going to the country club.

BECKY

I'll see you tonight, Dad.

MR. PRESTON

Remember this, Becky bear. No man is worth your family.

BECKY

Bye, Daddy.

MR. PRESTON

Bye, Becky Bear.

CLICK -- Mr. Preston hangs up.

Becky leans her head back on the couch, clearly annoyed.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - MORNING [LATER]

The car is packed. Becky is standing by the door wearing business attire that is form fitting and clingy around her curvy body.

A BLACK COUPLE are sitting on the train and the Man is eyeing Becky. The Man's Girlfriend realizes this and gets angrier by the second.

Innocently, Becky and the Man make eye contact. Becky smiles awkwardly and rolls her eyes when she realizes that he's checking her out.

INT. SIXTH PRECINCT - INTERROGATION ROOM - MORNING

Reginald is sitting at a small table slouched in a metal chair. Ben enters.

BEN
(tries to shake hands)
Hi, I'm Ben Turner. I'm going to be representing you.

REGINALD
(snubs handshake, to Officer)
Who the fuck is this guy?

OFFICER
It's your lawyer, jerk-off.

The OFFICER leaves, slamming the door behind him.

REGINALD
(bats Ben's hand away)
Nah, I told my manager I wanted a brotha, and he gets me some prep school Oreos?

BEN
Reginald --

REGINALD
-- Nigga, don't call me by my government name.

BEN
Okay then...can I call you Reggie?

REGINALD
Yeah, whatever.

BEN
I'm from Wayne, Rothstein, and Lincoln, the best criminal defense firm in New York.

REGGIE

I don't care where you came from. I want a black man as my lawyer. You're not what I'm looking for.

BEN

Well, I'm the best chance you have of not doing life in prison, so either accept me as your lawyer or rot in a cell for the rest of your life. Your choice.

REGGIE

See! You walk around with your Ivy League education and your nice suits, and you see me as some poor, stupid, street nigga. You wanna know how I know you're a sellout?

BEN

Enlighten me.

REGGIE

Because I can tell you're the type that doesn't live around other blacks. Am I wrong?

BEN

You don't know anything about me.

REGGIE

And you don't know shit about me, either, but I bet as soon as you walked through that door, you already believed you knew all you needed to know about me. You're not a real black man. I told your firm I wanted a real nigga.

BEN

You're right, I'm nobody's 'nigga', and to degrade me because I don't meet your standard of blackness is sad and ignorant. Now, are we going to go over your case or not?

REGGIE

I didn't kill those people, but you think I did it, don't you?

BEN

(sits)

Honestly, I don't know what to believe.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

You have a lot of evidence against you and an extensive rap sheet of violent assaults dating back to when you were a juvenile, which shows a history of violence. Before the murders, you argued with the victims which shows a motive and places you at the scene. On top of all that, you were found with the couple's blood on your clothing and you were holding the murder weapon when the cops arrested you.

REGGIE

How're you gonna convince a jury I'm innocent if you don't even believe it?

BEN

Explain it to me then. As your attorney, I'm taking your word, and I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt, but I need the absolute truth and I need you to help it make sense to me. Now, what happened that night?

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. LE BAIN NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Two MEN approach Reggie in the club, they obviously are aware of who he is.

One of the Men smiles and nods at Reggie as the other touches his arm.

REGGIE (V.O.)

I was in the club when these two dudes came up to me and told me they recognized me. They told me I was cute and wanted to take me home with them. People were watching us. I couldn't have that shit leaking out to the media that faggots were hitting on me. My fans would think I'm about that life, and that's bad for business, so I flipped out on them.

Reggie pulls his arm away and begins cussing them out. They begin arguing before one of the Men pulls the other away.

BEN (V.O.)

According to witnesses, you said
you'd kill their faggot asses.

REGGIE (V.O.)

Whatever. Anyway between the
Paparazzi and my security team
always following me around like my
fucking shadow, I snuck out of the
club to clear my head and smoke a
cigarette.

Reggie smokes at the corner when GUNFIRE erupts behind him.
He ducks down.

As he cautiously straightens and turns, a MAN wearing dark
clothing collides with him. They fall. A GUN lands on the
ground. The man balls up his fist. Reggie grabs the gun and
points it at the man. Blood from the man is now all over
Reggie. The man runs off.

Reggie looks to the right and sees TWO BODIES on the ground.
He walks up to them. Recognizes them as the two Men he argued
with earlier.

The COPS arrive on scene. With a horrified look at the gun in
his hand, Reggie runs off.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

Two POLICE OFFICERS walk in.

OFFICER 1

Sorry to cut this short, but we're
transporting him to central booking
now.

BEN

(to Reggie)

Don't say anything to anyone.

REGGIE

Yeah, yeah. This isn't my first
time being locked up.

BEN

I'll see you at the arraignment.

INT. BEN'S CAR - MORNING [LATER]

Ben gets in his car and looks at himself in the rearview mirror.

BEN (V.O.)
Reggie's words brought back old feelings I thought I'd buried. My thoughts drifted back to my childhood...

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. SCHOOL YARD OF PS 112 - DAY

YOUNG BEN and YOUNG SIMONE are handing out turkeys and food to the community with MR. and MRS. TURNER. Two Officers, WATSON and BUCKLEY, are helping them.

BEN (V.O.)
Every year around Thanksgiving, my dad took my cousin Simone and me to his old neighborhood, the Edenwald Houses, in the Bronx.

WATSON
This is a good thing you're doing, Curtis.

BUCKLEY
Yeah, if no one else says it today, thanks for this.

MR. TURNER
I used to live here. I know what it's like to think this is all life has to offer. If I can inspire even one person today, give hope to just one person, I did my job and hopefully it'll spark a change.

JOAN, Mr. Turner's half-sister, approaches. Her clothes are dirty and she is noticeably pregnant.

JOAN
Can I have one?

MR. TURNER
Joan?

Mr. Turner tries to hug her but she brushes it off.

JOAN
Yeah, it's me.

MR. TURNER
Simone, come say hi to your mom.

SIMONE
Nah, I don't want to.

JOAN
Fuck you, then. I don't want to
talk to your stupid ass either.
(to Mr. Turner)
Can I just get my food now?

MR. TURNER
(gesturing to her belly)
Who's the father of this one?

JOAN
Same as the last one; Silky.

MR. TURNER
Silky...what's his real name?

JOAN
Why? You gonna get your cop friends
to look him up? I'm not tellin' you
shit.

MR. TURNER
If you want this food, you will.

JOAN
You ain't shit, Curtis.
(after a small stand off)
Fine. His name is Sammy Miller. You
happy now? Gimme my shit so I can
go on with my business.

MR. TURNER
From the looks of it, you're about
to have this baby any day now. You
still using?

JOAN
That's none of your business. All I
want is my fucking turkey, come on.
(off Simone's scowl)
Stop staring at me, you little
bitch. I should've swallowed you.

MRS. TURNER
Joan!

JOAN
I don't like her lookin' at me like
I'm a piece of shit.

MR. TURNER
(to Ben)
Take Simone and go play basketball
while I talk to your aunt for a
bit.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - CONTINUOUS [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Simone and Ben walk to the basketball court.

SIMONE
I hate her.

BEN
She's not bad. She's just on that
stuff. Dad said once she's clean,
she'll be good.

SIMONE
Uncle Curtis always sees the good
in people but she's an evil witch.
I never want to be like her.

JJ, a boy Ben's age who is with a gang of neighborhood BOYS,
appears and pushes Ben from behind. Ben hits the ground hard.

JJ
What are you doing on our courts,
punk?

Simone helps Ben up as JJ and the other Boys laugh.

BEN
First off, I'm not a punk. Second,
my family is handing out food for
Thanksgiving, like they do every
year. I'm just shooting around with
my cousin.

JJ gets in his face and shoves him.

JJ
Yeah, your punk-ass father is
trying to win brownie points in the
hood by handing out scraps again.

BEN

You and everyone else are taking them too, so what does that say about you?

JJ

Yeah, we take your dad's free shit, but he still gets no love here. You and your family think you're saints for coming around here once a year and treating us like charity cases. Everyone knows your family uses this shit as a tax write-off. Your pops is an Uncle Tom. He doesn't care about us, and we don't give a shit about him.

SIMONE

Shut up, you ugly, black monkey, before I tell Uncle Curtis not to give your bum-ass family any food.

JJ

(laughing)

Listen to you talkin' all proper and shit. You sound like a white girl. Mind your business before I pay your momma five dollars to suck my dick.

The Boys laugh. Simone hangs her head in shame and runs off to Mrs. Turner. Mrs. Turner storms over to Mr. Turner and is visibly pointing and yelling.

Meanwhile, Ben shoves JJ. More BOYS come to see what's going on. JJ steps closer to Ben and grabs him by his collar. Mr. Turner runs over and separates them.

MR. TURNER

Boys, that's enough.

JJ's father, JAMEL appears.

JAMEL

What's the matter, Curtis? Your boy too soft to fight his own battles?

MR. TURNER

I see you haven't changed, Jamel. Still the same old bully you were when we were kids, and you're teaching your son to follow in your footsteps.

JAMEL

Whatever, nigga. I can't help that your boy is soft.

MR. TURNER

He's tough. I just don't want him to beat your kid's ass in front of all his friends.

Buckley and Watson rush over.

JAMEL

Get the fuck outta here with that bullshit.

(to the Officers)

What do ya say, Officers? Can y'all let the boys fight a fair one?

Mr. Turner nods in agreement.

BUCKLEY

You sure, Curtis?

MR. TURNER

Absolutely.

BUCKLEY

(considering)

Officer Watson and I will finish packing up the truck. When we get back, whatever business that needs to be taken care of needs to be over with. Got it?

MR. TURNER

That's all the time we need.

BEN

(terrified)

Are you crazy, Dad? I'm not fighting him.

MR. TURNER

(pulling him away)

Look, son, you've been training to box for two years now. I got you into boxing so you'd know how to defend yourself if the time ever came. Well, the time is here, son. People like JJ will keep picking on you unless you stand up for yourself. You can take this kid. Win or lose, you have to stand up for yourself.

JAMEL

Curtis, you done coaxing that pussy
into fighting?

MR. TURNER

You ready for him to whoop your
son's ass?

JAMEL

(to the crowd)

Now, don't anyone get involved in
their fight, or you'll answer to
me, y'all hear?

CROWD

(in unison)

Yeah!

Jamel pushes JJ towards Ben. JJ balls up his fists. Ben
raises his fists hesitantly. They circle each other.

The crowd is cheering on JJ. JJ swings and Ben dodges but
doesn't fight back. The cheers for JJ increase.

PERSON 1

Kick this Oreo's ass, JJ!

Spurred by this, Ben hits JJ with four good hooks to his
ribs. JJ gasps. Both JJ and Ben begin throwing punches at
each other fast and hard.

Ben dodges JJ's haymaker and sweeps his foot. JJ stumbles
onto the concrete, scraping his face. Ben turns him over,
mounts him and rains down blows.

BUCKLEY

All right, show's over.

Mr. Turner pulls Ben off JJ. Buckley and Watson disperse the
crowd, their faces clearly showing their disappointment.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

Ben sits in his car looking in the rearview mirror.

BEN (V.O.)

Reggie reminded me of the kids back
then that used to heckle me. He
showed me that the internal battle
I struggled with every day is real.

(MORE)

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

To him, and most people I've met, I was an Oreo. An Uncle Tom. A disgrace to my race.

Ben sighs and starts his car.

INT. BILL'S OFFICE - DAY

Bill sits at his desk studying the file. On the desk, there is a framed photograph of Ebony and him.

BILL (V.O.)

The partners mentioned a while back that Ben grew up well off with both of his parents, who were successful judges. I didn't have that luxury then, and I damn sure didn't have it now. I grew up with just my mom and me in the projects. Life was hard for us because, to this day, my mom's still battling multiple sclerosis and deteriorating daily from it.

Bill opens his desk drawer, takes out a small ring box, and pulls out an engagement ring from it. He looks at Ebony's photograph.

BILL (V.O.)

I make decent money, but becoming a partner would give me a big enough salary to easily cover my bills, the financial ability to put my mom in a comfortable, assisted-living place, and enough money to give Ebony the wedding she deserves.

A KNOCK at the door.

Bill puts the ring back in the drawer and closes it.

BILL

Come in.

Alfieri enters hurriedly followed by Paul and Greg. Bill stands and shakes their hands.

BILL (CONT'D)

I'm Bill O'Neil. I'm going to be representing you, Mr. Alfieri.

ALFIERI

Yeah, yeah, just make sure you
clear me of this shit, yo!

PAUL

Please excuse his rudeness. Hi, I'm
Alfieri's agent, Paul Marshall, and
this is his publicist, Greg
Goldman.

BILL

(gesturing to chairs)
Please, have a seat.

ALFIERI

Yo, your boss, Richard, said
somethin' about payin' this bitch
off and sweepin' this shit under
the rug. How quickly can we do that
shit, yo? We gonna talk to this
chick or what?

BILL

Under the law, an attorney can't
attempt to alter or prevent the
testimony of a witness in a
criminal or civil proceeding. The
firm is going to do everything in
its power to relay the message to
her that we want this resolved out
of court.

ALFIERI

Fuck that, yo. I'll go back to the
club and talk to the bitch myself.

BILL

Under no circumstances should you
speak to Ms. Winters or go back to
that club. We'll handle it.

(off his grumble)

Now, can you please explain to me
exactly what happened that night?

ALFIERI

Didn't you see the video?

BILL

I did, but I want to hear your side
of the story.

ALFIERI

I'll be straight wit' you, homie. I wanted a pretty piece of ass, and I heard that club was known for their strippers fucking the clientele. I offered to pay her to fuck me in the VIP room, and she said yes. At first, she was feisty, but I calmed her down, and it was cool. We handled our business, then I paid her and went on my way.

BILL

Did she at any time give you any indication that she didn't want to have sex with you?

ALFIERI

Nah, She wanted it. She was begging me to fuck her. Now, she's actin' like a fucking victim.

BILL

So, you're certain you didn't rape Sophia Winters?

ALFIERI

Whatever the bitch's name is, I swear on my life I didn't rape her.

BILL

All right. Once you turn yourself in, they'll bring you to central booking. We pulled some strings to expedite the process to get you seen by the judge as soon as possible. Any questions?

ALFIERI

(stands)

Let's do this shit.

Paul shakes his head and looks at Bill.

BILL

I'll meet you down there.

INT. MANHATTAN COURT ROOM - DAY

Reggie is standing before the JUDGE. Ben looks uncomfortable as Reggie addresses the Judge.

JUDGE
How does the defendant plead?

REGINALD
What do you think? Not guilty. How
many times do I need to tell y'all.
I didn't do this shit.

The PEOPLE in the courtroom laugh.

JUDGE
(slamming gavel)
Order!
(and then)
Due to the severity of these
heinous charges, the defendant will
be remanded to await prosecution!

Judge SLAMS THE GAVEL again and Reggie is pulled away by a
BAILIFF.

INT. BRONX COURT ROOM - DAY

Another Judge, JUDGE #2, SLAMS THE GAVEL. Alfieri stands.
Bill sits near him.

JUDGE #2
The court will set bail for Mr.
Alfieri at ten thousand dollars.

Bill stands up and nods.

BILL
Thank you, Your Honor.

ALFIERI
So, you're gonna talk to this bitch
now?

BILL
(hissing)
Lower your voice. I told you I
can't speak to her, but it'll be
taken care of it.

EXT. BRONX COURT - DAY

There is a MEDIA CIRCUS and a mob of Alfieri's FANS in front
of the court. Alfieri exits and rushes to his Limo. His
Publicist and Bill stop to answer a few questions.

INT. COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Becky is sitting in her cubicle typing on her laptop working on her book. BROOKE, white, Becky's friend and co-worker, is reading over her shoulder.

BROOKE
(reading)
"Black and White."
(to Becky)
So, is it true? You know, about
their cocks?

BECKY
(startled, sighing)
Really? Is that the only question
you have?

Brooke waits for an answer.

BECKY (CONT'D)
(sighing)
From my experience, it's true, but
Ben's the only black guy I've been
with so I can't speak for all black
men.

BROOKE
Nice. So how big we talking? *Sore-
for-a-couple-of-days* big, or, oh my
God, *you're-being-ripped-in-half*
big?

BECKY
Brooke, I'm not discussing my man's
dick with you. It's funny, all
these years we've been friends, and
you've never asked me questions
about being in an interracial
relationship.

BROOKE
(reading screen)
I never read a sex scene so
descriptive before. Is your book
going to have lots of interracial
sex scenes?

BECKY
Yes, but it's not all about sex.
This book is about the trials and
tribulations of being in an
interracial relationship.

(MORE)

BECKY (CONT'D)

I want people to fall in love with my characters and root for them... Wait, why do you care? You'd never sleep with a black guy anyway.

BROOKE

True, I could never be as adventurous as you, but I am curious about them. Wait a minute. This book is fiction, right? You're not going to off yourself and have the book published as a sort of suicide note, are you?

BECKY

Of course not.

BROOKE

Let me read some more of it. What are you doing anyway?

Becky hands over the manuscript and leans back in her chair and thumbs through a pile of rejection letters.

BECKY (V.O.)

I knew my book was good, but something was missing. I kept getting rejected by publishers. Every time I got rejected, I retooled my story to find that missing link, but I kept falling short.

Brooke looks up, notices the rejection letters.

BROOKE

Damn! All those are rejection letters? That sucks. Doesn't your rich and powerful daddy have all sorts of connections though? Just ask him to help you get it published.

BECKY

Nah, I'm not asking my dad for any favors. He doesn't take my writing or my relationship with Ben seriously. I need to do this on my own. My parents, Ben's parents, Ben's annoying best friend, Gabby, and the rest of the world think I'm a helpless, incompetent bimbo. I'm determined to prove them all wrong.

BROOKE

Well, I think your writing is amazing. I don't know how a publisher hasn't picked this up yet.

BECKY

Not to toot my own horn, but me neither. I just hope the publisher I'm meeting today feels the same way.

BROOKE

You'll prove them wrong when the book is published, and you're a bestseller. Any-hoo, I'm going to sit right here next to you and read more of this juicy story.

Brooke gets comfortable and goes back to reading the manuscript. Becky looks at a picture of her and Ben on her desk.

BECKY (V.O.)

My parents expect me to fail. They expect me to come running to them with my tail between my legs, begging for help, but I won't give them that satisfaction.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. BECKY'S CHILDHOOD ROOM - DAY

YOUNG BECKY is sitting in front of a mirror while her Mother brushes her hair.

BECKY (V.O.)

Growing up, I never felt good enough for them.

INT. BECKY'S CHILDHOOD KITCHEN - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Young Becky is being scolded by her Mother as she sits at the kitchen table doing homework.

BECKY (V.O.)

I was never pretty, smart, or thin enough for them.

INT. BECKY'S CHILDHOOD ROOM - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Young Becky is in a ballerina tutu that is too tight and is being scolded by her Mother about her weight.

BECKY (V.O.)
So I spent most of my life
rebellious.

INT. BECKY'S CHILDHOOD ROOM - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Young Becky THROWS A SHOE at the door as her Mother leaves.

BECKY (V.O.)
When they wanted me to be a
ballerina...

INT. DANCE STUDIO - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Mr. & Mrs. Preston are at Becky's Ballet recital. Mrs. Preston is pleased watching young Becky performing

BECKY (V.O.)
...I quit and became a gymnast.

INT. GYMNASTICS GYM - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Mr. & Mrs. Preston are at Becky's Gymnastic meet. Mrs. Preston sulks as Young Becky performs.

BECKY (V.O.)
When they wanted me to stay home
and study...

INT. LIBRARY - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

TEENAGE BECKY is sitting in the library looking miserable as she tries to study.

BECKY (V.O.)
...I went out and partied.

INT. RANDOM HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Teenage Becky is hanging out with FRIENDS, smoking and drinking.

BECKY (V.O.)
They wanted me to be their perfect
little angel.

INT. CHURCH - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Teenage Becky looks annoyed and is slouching at her confirmation. Mrs. Preston is visibly mad, and whispers something in Becky's ear which makes her straighten up.

BECKY (V.O.)
But since they were constant
destroyers of my confidence, I was
the neighborhood slut who slept
with any guy who told me I was
pretty.

EXT. BECKY'S CHILDHOOD HOME'S STREET - MORNING [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

A red sports car drops off a very tipsy Teenage Becky holding her shoes in her hand, doing the walk of shame to her house.

Mr. & Mrs. Preston are standing in the doorway, angry and shaking their heads when Becky approaches. She steps in the house and passes out.

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Mrs. Preston is neatly dressed, organizing things for a debutante ball at the country club.

BECKY (V.O.)
My mom, always the prim and proper
woman, was too busy doing events
with other well-kept women at the
country club.

INT. BECKY'S CHILDHOOD ROOM - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

A Hispanic NANNY is tucking in a Young Becky to bed and reading her a bedtime story.

BECKY (V.O.)
She was fine having my nannies
handle the responsibilities of
raising me.

INT. BECKY'S THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Becky is on a therapist's couch talking about her problems.

BECKY (V.O.)
And hiring the finest therapists in
New York to talk to me rather than
listen to any of my problems.

INT. BEN'S PLACE - EVENING [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Becky are cuddled up on the couch. Ben smiles at
Becky and kisses her.

BECKY (V.O.)
Every action I did growing up was
my big "fuck you" to them for
always making me feel like a
disappointment. And even though I
knew they believed my relationship
with Ben was a continuation of that
behavior, it wasn't.

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben pulls the chair out for Becky to sit at the restaurant
and stares at her lovingly as she looks at her menu.

BECKY (V.O.)
I was sure my parent's believed my
relationship with Ben was due to
some liberal guilt, or he was with
me as a trophy for his success. But
they were wrong. What Ben and I had
was real and beautiful.

INT. BECKY'S CHILDHOOD HOME - EVENING [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Mrs. Preston looks annoyed and disappointed when Becky
introduces Ben to her for the first time.

BECKY (V.O.)
At the beginning of our
relationship, my parent's hatred
toward Ben didn't surprise me. They
never accepted me for who I was, so
I didn't expect them to approve of
any guy I brought home - let alone
a black one.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GOTHAM PUBLISHING H.Q. - RECEPTION - DAY

Becky is sitting nervously in the waiting area.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Simonetti will see you now, Ms.
Preston.

Becky nods and the receptionists walks her to Mr. Simonetti's office where he greets her at the door.

MR. SIMONETTI

I'm glad you could make it. We have
a lot to discuss. Come in. Have a
seat.

INT. MR. SIMONETTI'S OFFICE - DAY [CONTINUOUS]

Becky smiles as Mr. Simonetti directs her to sit down in a chair in front of his desk.

MR. SIMONETTI

I'll cut right to the chase. Your
story is witty, sexy and well-
written, but it's a bit dark, and I
don't know if I can sell an
interracial story. I'm sure with
your fan base from your articles at
Cosmo, my company would break even,
but I don't know if we'd see much
of a profit the way the story is
now.

BECKY

What do you feel is missing to make
it marketable?

MR. SIMONETTI

Do yourself a favor. Take the
interracial element out. Keep it a
love story between two white
people, and that would definitely
increase the book's profitability.

Mr. Simonetti pauses and notices that Becky looks discouraged. He sighs and goes on with his critique.

MR. SIMONETTI (CONT'D)

I've seen you at events, and I know
your boyfriend is black.

(MORE)

MR. SIMONETTI (CONT'D)

I'm sure you probably wanted to use this story to profess your love to the world, but interracial books between a black man and a white woman just don't sell.

BECKY

The book is called "Black and White." The basis is to show the trials and tribulations of being in a relationship that society shuns. Without the interracial part, the book wouldn't make sense.

MR. SIMONETTI

White people don't have trials and tribulations in their relationships? Don't some Italians and Irish people believe they should stick with their own? We can spin this in a million ways to make it more marketable.

Becky looks discouraged and saddened by the conversation.

MR. SIMONETTI (CONT'D)

Realize this: Fifty shades of Grey started out as Twilight fan fiction. E. L. James wasn't making money with her story until she took out the vampire element. If you change the black-and-white relationship, we have a deal. If you can't do that, I'm sorry. I can't help you.

Becky stands up and is so visibly upset she can't look Mr. Simonetti in the eyes.

BECKY

I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me in person, but I put my heart and soul into this book. While it might be a simple fix to you to change the interracial part, I couldn't live with myself, no matter how popular the book would be, if I didn't publish it the way I want it.

Mr. Simonetti shakes his head, feeling like she's being foolish and making a big mistake by not agreeing to make the changes.

MR. SIMONETTI

I'm sorry to hear that. Look, I know your father. He's a powerful man and I know he has a ton of connections. I'm sure he can pull some strings with a bigger publisher that could put your book out the way you intend it to be. For me, book sales have been on the decline lately and I can't make that type of risky business move. I'm sorry.

Becky nods and shakes his hand.

BECKY

I understand. Thanks for taking the time to meet with me.

MR. SIMONETTI

It's no problem. Look, here's my card.

Mr. Simonetti hands her a thick business card.

MR. SIMONETTI (CONT'D)

If you decide to change that little part of your book, I'll publish it with no problem. Take some time and consider it.

Becky smiles.

BECKY

Thank you so much.

Becky hangs her head.

INT. STARBUCKS - AFTERNOON

The coffee shop is crowded. Ben is at a table on his phone talking to his Mother.

INTERCUT: BEN/MRS. TURNER

BEN

...Alright, mom. I gotta go. Gabby and Terrence will be here any minute.

MRS. TURNER

Let Gabby know I love her. I so wish you would just be with her already instead of the weak white woman you're with.

BEN

Momma...

MRS. TURNER

(interrupting)

Don't momma me. Let me speak. When parents are raising their children, they envision their kids will find mates that resemble them but both you and Simone are dating white people and it just feels like rejection. Like your father and I weren't good enough, strong enough, or smart enough for either of you so it caused you to look outside your race.

BEN

Mom, you're the strongest woman I know. I love and admire you more than anyone.

MRS. TURNER

Then why are you with Rebecca when you have a strong black woman in Gabby? How can you pass up on having a strong partner for a weak one?

BEN

Gabby is more successful than Becky, but Becky has a lot more similarities with you.

MRS. TURNER

I highly doubt I have anything in common with that...that woman.

BEN

You're both determined to prove everyone wrong, even when the world is against you.

(off her chuckle)

You're both confident that when you apply yourself, you can achieve anything.

MRS. TURNER

What else?

BEN

Behind all of your strengths,
you're both sensitive, loving and
nurturing. I see how you take care
of dad and Becky is the same way
towards me. You gotta give her a
chance, mom. I know you love Gabby.
She'll always be my friend, but
that's where it ends. I love Becky
and I need you to give her the same
love and respect that you give
Gabby.

MRS. TURNER

I'll try, Ben, but it does bother
me that she's white.

BEN

Momma.

MRS. TURNER

I promise I'll be nicer. Anyway,
tell Gabby I love her and kiss
Becky for me.

BEN

I will. Tell dad I said, hi.

Ben hangs up and dials Becky.

INTERCUT: BEN/BECKY

BEN (CONT'D)

Hey babe! Long day. I got assigned
the case for that rapper that
killed those cops and that couple.

BECKY

Ugh! I don't envy you.

BEN

If I pull off a win, the firm will
make me a partner.

BECKY

Well at least there's a positive
there.

BEN

I'll be home soon. I'm just getting coffee at Starbucks with Gabby and Terrence. I won't be long.

BECKY

Cool, where?

BEN

Starbucks on Astor Place.

BECKY

I'm actually close by. Just met with another publisher.

BEN

How'd that go?

BECKY

Rejected. Again.

BEN

Ouch. Sorry, babe.

BECKY

You mind if I crash your coffee date with Gabby?

BEN

It's not a date and it's fine as long as you two can play nice.

BECKY

I'll try, but I'm not the bitch that starts shit. I honestly hate her but this is good. With me being there, I can cut your date short since we have dinner plans with my parents tonight anyway.

BEN

(sarcastically)

I can't wait for that.

BECKY

(laughing)

See you soon, babe.

Ben ends the call as he spots GABRIELLE "GABBY" THOMAS weaving her way through the crowd.

BEN

(standing, hugging her)

Hey! What's up?

GABBY
Nothing much, Big Head.

BEN
(smiling)
Terrence is on the way and Becky is
stopping by too.

GABBY
Why did you invite those two?

BEN
Becky was in the neighborhood and I
wanted to share the news about my
case with you and Terrence.

TERRANCE enters and walks up to them.

TERRENCE
Yo, yo, what's up, Ben?

Terrence and Ben share a brotherly hug.

TERRENCE (CONT'D)
(to Gabby)
I see you're still suffering from
resting bitch-face.

GABBY
(jokingly punches him in
the arm)
Shut up, punk!

INT. STARBUCKS - LATER

The three are gathered around a table.

BEN (V.O.)
I brought Terrence and Gabby up to
speed with my case.

GABBY
Wow, do you think you can win?

BEN
It's gonna be hard as hell but I'll
find an angle.

TERRENCE
I don't want to be that guy, but
your firm is playing you. They know
damn well you can't win that case.

GABBY

Rarely do I agree with this one, but he's right. The partners are rooting for you to fail so they can give the partnership to the white boy.

TERRENCE

You should drop that firm anyway and start one with me.

GABBY

Why would Ben want to work with your broke ass?

TERRENCE

Baby Girl, I'm far from broke. My life is like a sandwich. No matter which way I flip it, my bread comes first. And with Ben and me working together, we'd be unstoppable.

An interracial COUPLE walks by them.

GABBY

(glaring)

Ugh, you're not the only sell out here.

Ben gives her an annoyed look.

TERRENCE

Your mouth is reckless.

GABBY

It's not enough that white people run the world? They have to take all the successful black men too?

BEN

Gabby, Don't start with that today, especially when Becky gets here.

GABBY

It's a fucking epidemic.

BEN

I see brothers hitting on you all the time, and you always make an excuse for why they aren't good enough.

GABBY

I'm saving myself for you.

BEN

It's a little too late for that,
don't you think?

GABBY

Nope. Eventually, you'll come to
your senses, see the truth about
your snowflake, and drop her. You
want your usual coffee order?

BEN

Yeah.

GABBY

Terrence, come with me, punk.

Terrence looks at her like she's crazy, but goes with her.
Gabby goes to the counter to place their order.

BEN (V.O.)

No doubt, Gabby loves me. But
before I dated Becky, Gabby only
viewed me as a friend. There was a
time when I was in love with her
and wanted more than a friendship.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. BEN'S PARENT'S HOUSE - LATE MORNING

YOUNG BEN is playing basketball with YOUNG TERRANCE.

BEN (V.O.)

I went to private school all of my
adolescent life. My parents
adamantly pushed me to befriend
other minority kids. But besides
Terrence, there weren't that many
of us. Which didn't leave me a lot
of options when it came to finding
girls my parents approved of. That
changed when I met Gabby.

They stop playing when they see a young African American
girl, YOUNG GABBY, hop out of a moving truck across the
street.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Young Ben passes a note to Young Terrence who gives it to
Young Gabby.

Gabby reads the note, scribbles something down on it, and passes it back. Ben opens the note excitedly -- his face falls.

INSERT: BEN'S NOTE. His grammar mistakes have been corrected by Gabby.

BEN (V.O.)
I had eyes for Gabrielle Thomas
since sixth grade. Back then, she
was the smartest and prettiest girl
I'd ever seen.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT [FLASHBACK]

Ben and Gabby's parents are laughing and having a good time playing cards.

BEN (V.O.)
Gabby's mom was a professor at
Columbia, and her dad was an
orthopedic surgeon for Winthrop
Hospital. Our parents hit it off
and became good friends. I was
happy about that because Gabby was
always around my house and I was
determined to get her to like me.

Ben and Gabby look at each other shyly.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MOM'S OFFICE - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Mrs. Turner showing a young Gabby her law degrees and law books.

BEN (V.O.)
Gabby idolized my mom, and once,
she expressed interest in becoming
a lawyer, my mom took Gabby under
her wing and mentored her.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY - AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Gabby is tongue kissing her BOYFRIEND at the table while Ben watches, stewing in anger.

BEN (V.O.)
My infatuation grew the older I
got. She had boyfriends growing
up...

Ben gets up and rushes out.

EXT. A MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

TEENAGE BEN is making out with GIRL #1 in the last row of a movie theater.

BEN
And I had my fair share of
girlfriends...

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

A teenage house party. Teenage Ben is holding the hand of GIRL #2 who is guiding him up the stairs.

BEN (V.O.)
But I didn't take them seriously. I
viewed them as practice for when I
finally convinced Gabby that we
were meant to be together.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben is slumped on the couch in a tuxedo. His parents are sitting with him.

BEN (V.O.)
Our senior year, Gabby promised to
be my date to the prom, but reneged
and took some other guy she met
online that she nicknamed "Freaky
Ty."

MRS. TURNER
Baby, she'll come around. She's
going through a selfish phase right
now.

MR. TURNER
(scoffing)
Selfish phase or not, it's time to
let her go, son. Her breaking her
promise is blatantly disrespectful.
Move on.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MORNING [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben is having breakfast with his parents.

BEN (V.O.)

When it was time for college, my parents wanted me to follow in their footsteps and go to a historically black college, preferably Howard University. But, I didn't want to risk losing out on dating Gabby who was accepted to Columbia.

Mr. Turner places a stack of papers in front of him.

INSERT: A Howard University Application.

BEN

Dad, I know you and mom want me to go to an HBCU but I applied to Columbia and got accepted.

MR. TURNER

I hope you're not going there to chase after that girl. Son, let her go. You'll meet plenty of beautiful, smart sistas at Howard.

MRS. TURNER

Oh, Curtis, leave him be. I think it's romantic.

(facing Ben)

If you really love her and you think going to Columbia will help you get her, do it!

Mr. Turner shakes his head and walks away.

INT. COLUMBIA GYM BUILDING - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Gabby are working out and discussing something inaudibly. Terrence comes to the gym and joins them.

BEN (V.O)

We studied, worked out, and hung out together all the time. I was around her more than Tyshaun, her loser boyfriend.

INT. COLUMBIA COLLEGE LIBRARY - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Gabby are studying. Gabby receives a text message:

"TYSHAUN: Can't make it, baby. Sry."

Ben stares at Gabby who is visibly upset.

BEN (V.O.)
When Tyshaun broke her heart, I
thought I had a shot. I was wrong.

INT. BEN'S COLLEGE APARTMENT - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Terence are in sportswear. Ben's cell phone RINGS.

BEN
Hold up. It's Gabby.

TERRENCE
Don't answer it. We got plans. I
know she's going to fuck everything
up.

BEN
I'll be quick.

TERRENCE
How are you so pussy whipped and
didn't even get the pussy yet?

Ben laughs, gives him the finger and answers the phone.

BEN
(on phone)
What's up, Gabby? Slow down. What
happened? Damn, I'm sorry. Hold on,
okay?

Ben puts the call on mute and turns to Terrence.

TERRENCE
C'mon, man, she always does this
shit, and you go running every
single time.

BEN
It's not like that. Ty broke up
with her.

TERRENCE
So? Tell her she needs to use this
time to reflect on what she did to
fuck her relationship up. We got
plans.

BEN
She needs me.

TERRENCE

(scoffing)

No, she doesn't but go take care of your girl. I hope she doesn't give you DSB.

BEN

DSB?

TERRENCE

Deadly Sperm Build-up, bro. Tell her if she's going to ruin your plans with your boy, she can at least let you fuck, so you don't suffer from blue balls.

BEN

You got jokes.

TERRENCE

Yup! Later!

INT. BEN'S COLLEGE APARTMENT - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Gabby enter. Ben lays on the sofa and stares at the ceiling.

BEN (V.O.)

I wined and dined Gabby to show her my intentions were for us to become more than friends finally, but as the night went on, our date felt more like she was only with me out of familiarity and comfort rather than attraction and love.

Gabby walks to...

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

...Ben's bedroom, digs in his closet and pulls out his rumpled Columbia University sweatshirt.

GABBY

(pouting)

I'm cold, Big Head. What's wrong? Why are you pouting.

BEN

You wouldn't understand.

GABBY

I do understand. I get it, Ben. I know you like me.

BEN

So, give me a chance.

GABBY

(putting a finger over
his lip)

Maybe one day. Look, I'm going to shower. When I come back, I expect you to have nothing on.

Gabby walks to the bathroom.

BEN

Wait..what? Are you serious?

GABBY (O.S.)

(from bathroom)

With the kind of day I had, I need a good fuck. Can you give me that, or do I have to find someone else?

BEN

No, no. I can handle it.

BEN (V.O.)

I'd waited for this opportunity for so long. I wanted everything to be perfect. I needed Gabby to realize I was the perfect guy for her.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - LATER [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben is lighting candles in the room. Popping breath mints. The bathroom door opens. Gabby comes out, slips off the towel and gets into the bed with Ben.

They kiss while Ben rolls on a condom. Gabby breathes heavily as Ben slides his cock into her.

GABBY

Oh Shit. Don't stop, Ty.

BEN

What?

GABBY

Sorry! Oh shit, Don't stop, Ben.

BEN (V.O.)

The sex wasn't how I envisioned our first time together would be. It felt forced and meaningless...like she was doing me a favor instead of sharing an emotional experience with me. We went through the motions in different positions, but seeing her stare down at her fingernails and drift off with a blank stare proved to me her heart wasn't in it.

Post-sex, Ben puts his arm around Gabby's shoulders but she shrugs it off. The silence is deafening.

BEN

This meant something to me, Gabby.
This wasn't just a fuck.

Gabby gets up and gathers her clothes, visibly bothered, and hurriedly gets dressed.

GABBY

I'm sorry, Ben. This was a mistake.

BEN

What?

GABBY

I can't do this. You're a great guy and you know I care about you, but I don't love you and I don't think I'll ever see you like that. Sorry.

She leaves without another word. Ben grabs the clock on his nightstand and whips it across the room.

INT. COLUMBIA COLLEGE LIBRARY - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben is at a table studying.

BEN (V.O.)

I had nothing but time on my hands since my life had mostly revolved around Gabby. I was sitting at one of the tables studying when I met Becky for the first time.

Becky approaches.

BECKY

You mind if I sit here?

Ben looks around. The library is nearly empty but Becky waits for an answer.

BEN
Nah, go ahead.

Ben continues reading but he can't help but check her out. They make shy eye contact with each other as they work.

Becky suddenly breaks into tears. The few PEOPLE who are in the library are whispering, pointing, and snickering at her.

BEN (CONT'D)
Excuse me, are you okay?

BECKY
I'm such a loser.

Ben stands and puts a hand on her shoulder.

BEN
You're not a loser. You're probably just stressed because of midterms.

BECKY
It's not just that.

Ben pulls out the chair next to Becky and sits down. She presses her face into Ben's chest and sobs quietly. Ben awkwardly pats her back.

BEN
It's okay. What's wrong?

BECKY
Where do I start? My parents think I'm a useless, helpless, talentless moron. My boyfriend broke up with me and told me I'm a decent fuck and good eye candy, but I'm too dumb to be marriage material. Maybe he and my parents are right. I mean, I'm doing terrible in all of my classes.

BEN
Don't think about yourself like that. The first step in being successful is confidence. Use your ex's negative words and your feelings toward your parents as motivation to prove them wrong.

BECKY
Thanks. I feel a little better.

BEN
Glad I could help.

Ben starts to head back to his original chair.

BECKY
Wait, what's your name?

BEN
I'm Ben. Ben Turner.

BECKY
Rebecca Preston, but you can call
me Becky.

BEN (V.O)
Becky and I started hanging out
together.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Becky are attending a hip-hop concert.

BEN (V.O)
I took her to hip-hop concerts with
me.

INT. MET-LIFE STADIUM - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Becky are attending a rock concert.

BEN (V.O)
And she took me to rock concerts
with her.

INT. BEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Terrence and Ben are in the kitchen overlooking the living
room. The Knicks game is playing on the TV.

BEN (V.O)
I introduced her to Terrence, and
after getting his approval, I knew
she was someone special. Becky knew
nothing about sports, but what I
liked about her was she was willing
to learn so we could bond over it.

Becky drops the remote and bends over to pick it up.

TERRENCE
(nudging Ben)
Damn, Ben, I didn't know your
snowflake had a body like that!

BEN
Yup, she's nice in all the right
places.

TERRENCE
She's thicker than a bowl of
oatmeal, bro. She got a sister? A
friend? Anyone that looks like her
that she could hook me up with?

BEN
I'll ask, but I doubt it.

TERRENCE
In all seriousness, though, I'm
glad you stopped chasing Gabby.

Terrence bites his bottom lip, shakes his head, and takes a
sip of his beer.

TERRENCE (CONT'D)
You did good, brother. You lose
points for her not being a sister,
but at least she's built like one.

BEN (V.O)
It was the little things Becky did
regularly that made me fall for
her. She never emasculated me and
was always uplifting and
supportive, qualities I never felt
with Gabby.

EXT. LONG ISLAND SKYDIVE CENTER - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Becky is pulling a hesitant Ben toward the door of the center
of an airplane, both of them are about to skydive.

BEN (V.O)
We balanced each other out. Becky
is spontaneous and adventurous..

EXT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben is helping Becky study.

BEN (V.O)
...while I was always calculated
and cautious. She helped me live in
the moment, and I kept her grounded
and responsible.

EXT. BECKY'S PARENT'S MANSION - EVENING [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Becky is searching for something in her purse. She's visibly nervous.

BEN (V.O.)
Things between us were getting
better, but we didn't make things
official until after facing the
true test of our relationship;
meeting her parents.

BECKY
I can't find my damn keys.

BEN
Why do you look so nervous? I'm the
one meeting your parents.

BECKY
Yeah, but my parents can be
snobbish assholes, and I don't want
them tainting your thoughts about
me.

BEN
(squeezing her hand,
winking)
Never!

Ben rings the DOORBELL. BERNARD the butler, 60's, opens the door.

BEN (CONT'D)
Is this your dad? It's good to meet
you, Mister...

BECKY
That's our butler, Bernard.

BEN
(leaning in, whispering)
Your parents have white servants?
Now I know they're loaded.

Becky playfully nudges him. Becky's mother, Mrs. Preston, appears.

MRS. PRESTON
Thank you, Bernard. I'll take it
from here. There's my favorite
daughter.

Mrs. Preston opens her arms to hug Becky. Becky gives her an
unenthusiastic hug back.

BECKY
I'm your only daughter.

MRS. PRESTON
I see you're still as cynical as
ever.

BECKY
Hello, mom.

Mrs. Preston scrunches up her nose and looks at Ben.

MRS. PRESTON
And who is this young man?

BECKY
This is my boyfriend, Ben.

Ben is taken aback by her choice of words and extends his
hand to Mrs. Preston. She frowns and gives Ben a weak
handshake.

BEN
It's nice to meet you Mrs. Preston.

MRS. PRESTON
I'm sure. Call me Susan.
(at Becky)
Come, Rebecca. Your father is
already in the dining room.

INT. BECKY'S PARENT'S MANSION - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS
[FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben, Becky and Mrs. Preston enter the dining room. Mr.
Preston stands up from the dinner table.

MR. PRESTON
Becky Bear!

Becky runs up and hugs her father.

BECKY
Hi, Daddy!

MR. PRESTON
(at Ben)
And who is this gentleman?

MRS. PRESTON
This is Rebecca's friend, Ben.

Mr. Preston gives him a firm handshake.

MR. PRESTON
It's nice to meet you, Ben.

LATER: [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

BEN (V.O)
At dinner, Becky tried to talk me up to her parents, telling them how I was the top of my law school class. But I got to see how her Dad really was once he brought up politics.

MR. PRESTON
What's your stance on politics, Ben?

BEN
(laughing)
Well, sir, my parents told me there's two things you should never discuss; religion and politics.

MR. PRESTON
That's true, but we're all friends here, right? I'll tell you this: I can't believe we have that disgrace of a President, Barack Obama, in office. Did you support McCain?

BEN
I wasn't a fan of him.

MR. PRESTON
Don't tell me you supported that monkey, Obama. Well, what should I expect?

BECKY
Daddy!

MRS. PRESTON
Steven!

Ben stews but stays silent.

MR. PRESTON

(waving them off)

Obama is going to be the worst president this country has ever had, and you people look at him like he's some type of fucking hero. He's nothing. He's less than nothing.

BEN

How many white role models would you say you've had in your lifetime?

MR. PRESTON

A few, but why does that matter? Obama isn't a role model. He's a Muslim Socialist.

BEN

I'm sure you had your father, and numerous presidents, and so forth. I'm not the spokesman for black people, but to me, Obama is a role model and he gives me hope. Him being elected transcends politics. He shows a generation of black children and adults that we're not limited to being just athletes and musicians. Obama shows the world that black people are smart, family-oriented, and selfless.

Mr. Preston begins a slow obnoxious clap.

BECKY

(to Ben)

Don't worry. I'll defend you. You're worth fighting for.

Mr. Preston's eyes bore into Ben.

MR. PRESTON

It's all bullshit.

(To Becky)

Anyway, do you have anyone special in your life?

BECKY

Isn't it obvious? Yes, Ben's my boyfriend.

MR. PRESTON

The hell he is. No daughter of mine is going to date some black boy. Unbelievable. First we have a darky in the White House and now my only child is fucking one. God wanted us to stick with our own race. You don't see lions mating with panthers.

BECKY

Your logic is false and outdated. Life isn't in Black and White. Life is in color, and you need to open your narrow-minded way of thinking to understand that.

MR. PRESTON

Ben, let's talk in my study like civilized men.

BECKY

(to Ben)

You don't have to if you don't want to. We can leave right now if you want to go home.

BEN

It's okay. I'll hear him out.

Ben follows Mr. Preston out of the dining room.

STUDY: [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Mr. Preston enter.

MR. PRESTON

Have a seat, Ben. In this room, we leave all the politically correct bullshit at the door. We're unfiltered and open in here.

BEN

I understand, sir.

MR. PRESTON

Good. Bottom line, I don't want you dating my daughter.

(laughing)

Rebecca has always been rebellious. If I try to stop her from being with you, it'll only drive her to want you more.

(MORE)

MR. PRESTON (CONT'D)

For now, I'll play the game and tolerate this sham of a relationship. I'm sure she's only in it for sexual gratification. But once that novelty wears off, she'll come to her senses and drop you.

BEN

What if we were soul mates?

MR. PRESTON

Ben, I'd never let my daughter marry a nigger or have nigger children. Is that clear enough for you? If it does go that far, I guarantee I'll put an end to it.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

INT. STARBUCK - AFTERNOON [PRESENT]

Becky walks in and looks around for Ben.

BEN (V.O.)

After that day, it's been Becky and me against the world. Things weren't easy but we always had each other.

She spots Ben and walks over. She touches his arm and breaks him out of his daydream.

BECKY

Hey, babe.

BEN

(hugging her)

Hey!

Terrence and Gabby come back to the table with the coffees. Gabby gives Becky the stink eye and doesn't acknowledge her.

TERRENCE

Hey, Becky! Bring it in, girl. Show me some love.

Becky laughs and hugs him. Gabby sips her coffee and pays them no mind. Ben stares at Gabby and clears his throat.

GABBY
(to Ben)
What?!

BEN
Did you forget something?

GABBY
Nope!

BEN
You're being rude.

TERRENCE
She's always rude.

GABBY
Hi Rebecca. What's wrong? Writing
in your little column isn't cutting
it, so you're going to apply here
to be a barista?

TERRENCE
You're foul, Gabby.

BECKY
What's your problem? Are you that
insecure and intimidated by me that
you have to put me down to boost
yourself up every chance you get?

BEN
(To Gabby)
You need to stop!
(turns to Becky)
Baby! Just let it go. Both of you
please, let's try to have a nice,
peaceful day. Okay?

BECKY
She obviously has a problem with us
being together, and I want to know
what's so wrong with us being
together?

GABBY
Insecure? Hardly. Intimidated by
you? Never. Listen to him, Becky.
You don't have the wits to have a
debate like that with me.

BECKY
Oh yeah? Try me!

BEN

Baby, please. Don't do this.

BECKY

No, I can handle myself. I'm not afraid of her, and I'm tired of backing down every time she acts like a bitch. Not today. I got this.

Ben sighs, closes his eyes and rubs the bridge of his nose.

GABBY

May I start with my opening argument?

BEN

Neither of you listen to me anyway, so proceed.

GABBY

Gladly!

(turns to Becky)

Becky, honestly, interracial dating disgusts me, especially when most white women only date black men as a novelty - not because they love them and truly understand what black men face in this country on a daily basis. Before I school you, answer me this: how many African American friends do you have? Real friends, not Ben's cousin, Simone, or co-workers you're friendly with. How many *real* black friends do you have?

BECKY

(stammering)

I don't keep a tally of the number of friends of different races I have. For me, people are people. I'm sorry you believe that I see Ben as a novelty, but I've never looked at him like that. I genuinely love him, and you'd see that if you weren't so busy being racist towards me. But since we're on the topic, how many white friends do you have?

GABBY

To answer your question, Becky, I don't have any white friends.

(MORE)

GABBY (CONT'D)

I have a few associates, but none that I'd consider close friends. There are some Caucasians that I'm cordial with, but that's where it ends. Second, black people can't be racist. Racism is a problem and concept that operates on both an individual and institutional level, where a dominant race benefits from the oppression of another. To be racist, I'd have to have the power and influence to take my prejudices and exercise them with immunity under the law. African Americans in this country have never had that type of authority or influence. Therefore, we could never be racist.

BECKY

Racism, by definition, means to view another race as being inferior, and isn't that how you view me? You look at me as if I'm less than nothing. You don't like or respect me. You think I'm some stupid, spoiled, little white bitch who is beneath you.

Gabby clasps her hands together and places them on the table.

GABBY

I can't help that I see you for who you are.

Terrence chokes on his drink.

BEN

Gabby!

GABBY

(smiling at Ben)

Sorry. It slipped.

(to Becky)

You're interchanging racism and prejudice. They aren't the same thing. How I treat you is just a taste of what Ben and I go through on a daily basis. We live in a challenging time for black people. Women like you won't help him through these struggles.

(MORE)

GABBY (CONT'D)

When he gets pulled over for driving while being black, followed, and harassed in stores because of the color of his skin, or passed up on getting this partnership, when everyone knows he busts his ass and is probably more qualified and deserving than the white guy he's in competition with, who is going to console him - you?

BEN

All right, let's stop this now.

TERRENCE

I second that. Gabby, you had your fun but you need to stop.

BECKY

No, I'm a big girl, guys, I got this. I can take anything she dishes out.

BEN

Baby, I have all the confidence in the world that you're strong, but you don't have to prove anything to Gabby or me.

GABBY

No, Ben, she needs to hear this. Too many times I've seen white women like her date black men just to piss off their fathers, or because they want to have exotic looking babies, or just to escape the label of being racist. Do you know how many white girls I know who will date, marry, or have babies with black men but don't associate with any other black people or African American culture whatsoever?

BECKY

I care about African American culture, and I have black friends.

GABBY

Hanging out with Simone and watching Save the Last Dance doesn't mean you have black friends or care about African American culture.

(MORE)

GABBY (CONT'D)

Look at you with your fake tan,
wearing your big hoop earrings,
stealing our cultural styles. It's
funny how y'all hate us but want to
be us so much. Is that all supposed
to make you appear more 'down for
the cause'?

BECKY

(seething)

Now you're attacking my appearance
and fashion choices? I don't see
you wearing a dashiki. All the
designers you're wearing are
European. Doesn't that makeup you
have on make your skin appear
lighter than it is? Who is really
stealing whose style?

GABBY

So, you think all African Americans
should wear dashikis, huh? Maybe we
should live in mud huts too and be
primitive like your people believe
is in our nature, right? I wear
clothing and makeup because they're
tools to help me succeed in this
country that is controlled by your
kind. What's your excuse?

Becky taps her finger on the table and her legs fidget under
the table.

GABBY (CONT'D)

Oh, am I striking a nerve? Help me
understand. Why do you want to be
with a black man? Since you're not
a twig and have some hips and ass,
were you rejected by your precious
white men and gravitated to
brothers as a default because they
showed you attention? Oh, I get it.
It's a sex thing. You just love you
some black dick, huh? Knowing that
sistas have been enjoying something
so good that you never did must've
driven your cracker-ass to want it
full-time, huh?

BECKY

Fuck you, you stupid, black bitch!

Becky slaps her hands over her mouth.

GABBY

You see that, Ben? All it took was a little prying and irritation, but her true colors showed. She doesn't give a shit about you or black people. She's just another spoiled bougie white bitch that doesn't know the struggle and is trying to convince herself she isn't racist.

Becky tears up and gets up to run out.

BEN

Gabby, you're my best friend and I care about you a lot, but you have to stop this shit.

GABBY

She's an adult, Ben. The bitch doesn't need her big black man to save her all the time.

BEN

I love you, Gabby, but if you do that shit again, we're done!

After a brief stare down, Ben gets up and follows Becky.

TERRENCE

(to Gabby)

Yo, you can be real foul. If you really love him like you say you do, you need to stop with that shit or you're not even gonna have him as a friend.

GABBY

Shut-up.

INT. BEN'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Ben and Becky drive home in silence.

INT. BEN'S PLACE - EVENING

Becky storms into the house.

BEN

Baby, wait.

BECKY

She's a vapid bitch, and I fucking hate her.

BEN

I know you do. Look, I'm going to talk to her and my parents. This can't keep going on.

BECKY

Will anyone ever think I'm good enough for you?

BEN

I could ask you the same thing. You think I have it easy with your family?

Becky doesn't answer, she's still fuming.

BEN (CONT'D)

Look, it's hard for both of us, but we knew this when we started dating. The only opinion that matters is our own. As long as we love each other, we can handle it.

BECKY

What if I can't handle it anymore? What if I told you that you had to choose between Gabby or me? Who would you choose, huh?

Ben looks taken aback by Becky's question.

BECKY (CONT'D)

You know what? Don't say it. I know the answer.

Ben folds his arms and looks at her.

BECKY (V.O.)

I didn't want Ben to answer because, deep down, I was scared he might answer truthfully. I hated gabby because, overall, I felt she was better than me.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. BEN'S PLACE - EVENING

Becky is sitting next to Ben and Terrence on the couch when Gabby walks in wearing something form-fitting and revealing. Becky notice Ben and Terrence staring.

BECKY (V.O.)

Gabby is graceful and sexy with serious curves that made men, and some women, turn their heads. She was strong, confident, and articulate, and I was intimidated by her. I knew if I saw all those things, it was obvious Ben saw them too.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BEN'S PLACE - AFTERNOON

Becky plops down on the couch. Ben sits next to her.

BEN

Baby, don't be mad, ok?

BECKY

I'm not.

BEN

You sure?

BECKY

Yup.

BEN

All right, you did this to yourself.

Ben tickles Becky into submission and she can't help but laugh.

BEN (CONT'D)

I love you, baby.

BECKY

I love you too...Let me show you how much.

A smile grows on Ben's face. They both frantically take off their clothes. They have a sweaty, vigorous sex session. Images of Gabby keep popping into Becky's head. Becky climbs on top.

BECKY (V.O.)

I needed reassurance that I could please my man. I wanted to fuck him so good that he'd forget about ever being intimate with Gabby or any other woman that came before me.

BEN

Damn, baby.

BECKY (V.O.)

I needed to see him lose control, to know that I made him reach nirvana like this. I needed to feel and believe that Ben wanted me, and only me.

BEN

Oh, shit, Becky.

Becky's own orgasm creeps up on her and they hold each other as they come intensely together.

BECKY (V.O.)

I knew what we had was real, but deep down I was afraid Ben would come to his senses one day and choose Gabby over me.

Ben spoons against Becky and nuzzles his face into her neck. Becky is in bliss.

BEN

I love you, Becky.

BECKY

I love you too.

Ben runs his fingertips along the contours of her body.

INT. BRONX ZOO - AFTERNOON

Bill appears to be looking for someone in the crowd. His phone CHIMES -- a message from Francis.

"FRANCIS: Keep it brief, get her to sign, and get the fuck out of there"

Bill sighs and pockets his phone before taking a seat on a bench near the reptile exhibit.

A moment later, Sophia walks near him. Bill doesn't notice her at first.

SOPHIA
(to Bill)
Excuse me, you waiting here for
Sophia?

BILL
Yes, Sophia?
(off her nod)
It's nice to meet you, Ms. Winters.
(motions to the bench)
Please.

She sits.

SOPHIA
I always thought lawyers like you
were slimy. How fitting that we're
meeting in front of the reptile
exhibit.

Bill laughs. Sophia doesn't.

SOPHIA (CONT'D)
Smooth, not telling me who you are.
Let's cut the bullshit. What do you
want? Jerrod, said I should hear
you out, so I'm here.

BILL
All right. Mr. Alfieri believes
this is all a big misunderstanding.
I asked you here to see if we can
work something out that'll be
beneficial to all of us.

SOPHIA
By beneficial, you mean money. How
much is he offering?

BILL
Two million.

SOPHIA
(laughing, shaking her
head)
That should show you he's guilty.

BILL
Sophia, you should consider this
deal. A long, drawn-out trial might
not paint you in the best of
lights.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

It's terrible what you're saying he did, but you know what can easily help you forget about the incident? Money. We can negotiate more money and make you a very rich woman.

SOPHIA

(still laughing)

Sure, taking his money would make me rich, but it would only give him the green light to rape more black women.

BILL

Would you like time to think --

SOPHIA

-- You can let that douchebag know I'll see his ass in court. Tell him, don't drop the soap when he goes to prison. I don't need his money.

BILL

If you do change your mind, let Jerrod know and he'll contact me. I hope you'll reconsider and put more thought into it.

SOPHIA

There's nothing to think about. I want justice.

Sophia stands, Bill nods, and she leaves. Bill grabs his phone and dials.

RICHARD (O.S.)

Talk to me! Please, tell me you got the stripper to take the money.

BILL

We have a problem. She wants to go to trial and she said she doesn't want Alfieri's money, she just wants justice.

RICHARD (O.S.)

I was hoping she'd be smart enough to take the money, but now we'll show her no mercy. All over the news, I see clips of her using this incident to make her famous. By the end of this trial, I want her to be infamous.

(MORE)

RICHARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Billy, I need the world to see her
for the whore she is. Dig up every
nasty detail you can find about her
past.

Bill looks pained by what he's asked to do.

BILL
Understood, sir.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Good! Handle it and keep Francis
and me posted.

CLICK - Richard ends the call.

BILL (V.O.)
I realized this was going to be an
ugly battle, and it was already
turning me ugly. I needed to
remember who I was.

Bill stands and walks off into the crowd.

END OF EPISODE ONE

Black and White - Episode 2

By
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Based on the novel
Defining Moments by Ben Burgess Jr.

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EPISODE TWO

INT. 6TH PRECINCT LOUNGE AREA - AFTERNOON

Ebony flops down on a worn couch, visibly shaken. Dried blood is on her hands and clothing.

QUICK FLASHBACK:

Gomez's lifeless eyes staring at her

BACK TO SCENE

Ebony shakes it off, takes out her notes and attempts to study for her upcoming lieutenants test.

QUICK FLASHBACK:

A sheet is pulled up over Gomez's and Richard's bodies.

BACK TO SCENE

Ebony slams down her notebook and cradles her head. She stands quickly and turns on the TV to drown out the images in her mind.

ON SCREEN: The POLICE COMMISSIONER is speaking at a press conference.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

At approximately two fifteen this morning, officers responded to the corner of Gansevoort and Washington and found the perpetrator, Mr. Reginald Brown also known as the Rapper Co-Kayne standing over the bodies of two of the victims, brandishing a gun. Two officers were also killed during the incident when they attempted to exit their vehicle. When the second group of officers approached, Mr. Brown fled and resisted arrest before being apprehended. As of now, Mr. Brown is being held without bail at Rikers Island, and has denied killing any of the victims.

A deep pain is etched on Ebony's face. Her hands are trembling. She attempts to read her study material but she's too flustered.

RASHIDA enters.

RASHIDA
You all right, Boss?

EBONY
Hanging in there.

RASHIDA
I'm gonna head home. Maybe you
should too.

EBONY
Yeah, I think I will. I'm trying to
take my mind off everything by
studying but I can't stop seeing
Gomez and Roberts...

RASHIDA
I feel you. I'm all-around drained
by it too.
(beat)
Some of us are going to the
Delancey around six tonight for
drinks. After everything we've all
been through, why don't you put the
studying off for one night and come
with us.

EBONY
Who's all gonna be there?

RASHIDA
So far, Mahoney, Mendez, and
Morgan. I told Morgan I'd ask you
and once he heard that, he was in.
Can you please at least make an
appearance? Whenever I hanging out
with all of them, they get drunk,
forget that I'm gay, and hit on me
all night. If you at least make a
brief appearance, I can use you as
an excuse to leave early.

EBONY
(laughing)
I'm not promising anything, but
I'll try. Let's see how I feel
after I get some sleep.

RASHIDA
I'll take that as a yes!

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Ebony tosses and turns as she sleeps in bed.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

GUNSHOTS SOUND. An ambulance SIREN WAILS.

YOUNG EBONY, teen, looks through her apartment blinds, eyes wide. Blue and red lights are reflected on her face as she runs from the room, amidst inaudible commotion.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT [DREAM CONT'D]

Young Ebony, MRS. WILLIAMS, and MRS. WILSON run out of the building towards a CROWD. Young Ebony shoves her way through them, breath panicky.

She spots YOUNG BILL, sitting on the ground next to Mrs. Wilson's oldest son, JALEN. Their T-Shirts are stained with blood. Young Ebony rushes over.

YOUNG EBONY
 Billy, where's Akeem? Where's my
 brother?
 (shaking him)
 Where is he?

Young Bill points to an ambulance. PARAMEDICS are using a defibrillator on AKEEM. Young Ebony and Mrs. Williams run-up to the ambulance but a Paramedics extends his arm to block their paths.

PARAMEDIC 1
 Ma'am, you can't come in here.

MRS. WILLIAMS
 That's my son.

The Paramedics are working frantically on Akeem. His eyes are shut and his arm is dangling off the sides of the stretcher.

While one of the Paramedics is arguing with Young Ebony, Mrs. Williams rushes onto the ambulance and tries to pick up Akeem's lifeless body.

The COPS take her off so the paramedics could continue working with no distractions. The Cops and EMS workers try to console her and Ebony.

MRS. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
(struggling with the
cops)
Get off me. You murdered my son.

Young Ebony looks down. Blood on her hands. Her brother's bullet-ridden body intermix with the dead cops from earlier in the day.

PRE-LAP: A BUZZING SOUND

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. BEDROOM - EVENING [PRESENT]

Ebony's cell phone buzzes, jolting her from her nightmare. She grabs the phone and answers.

EBONY
(groggily)
Hey, honey.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE PROJECTS - LATE AFTERNOON

Bill locks his car while he's talking on his cellphone. He starts walking towards his mom's building.

BILL
Hey, baby. Did I wake you up?

INTERCUT: BILL/EBONY

EBONY
Yeah, but it's ok. Where are you?

Bill waves at some PEOPLE sitting on a bench outside the apartment building. He holds the phone to his ear as he uses his key to get inside the building.

BILL
I stopped by our old neighborhood to see my mom. You all right? You sounded real shook up when I talked to you this morning.

EBONY
I'm already having nightmares thinking about Roberts and Gomez. I still can't believe they're gone.

BILL

I'm sorry, baby. I know that's hard on you.

EBONY

This wasn't the case your firm called you in for, was it?

BILL

Nah, Ben got that one. I got the rape case with that NBA player.

EBONY

Damn, that's shitty. Do you think he did it?

Bill shakes his head at the elevator that is out of order and makes his way up the stairs.

BILL

I don't know. He swears on his life he didn't but she wants no part of the money he's offering to shut her up. She's made it known she just wants justice. Here's the kicker, if I pull out a win, the firm said they'll make me a partner.

EBONY

Wow, babe! I know that's something you always wanted but watch that. She might be telling the truth and I know you're not trying to represent a guilty asshole rapist.

BILL

Yeah. Sorry, baby. I didn't mean to turn this conversation into talking about me. I know you had a way more important and stressful day than me.

EBONY

It's okay. You're just excited about your opportunity. I know you'll be there for me when I vent later.

BILL

Absolutely! Baby, I'm about to walk into my mom's apartment. I won't be long. I'll keep it short, so I can come home, cook you dinner, and hear more about your day.

EBONY

Don't cut your visit with your
momma short because of me. Rashida
and some of my other coworkers
asked me to go to the Delancey for
some drinks. We all need to de-
stress, and I should be there for
my cops.

BILL

I get it. Hang out with your
people. I'll wait up for you.

EBONY

All right, babe. I'll see you
tonight. Love you.

BILL

Love you too.

BILL (V.O.)

Working at the firm. I had no
choice but to listen and smile at
the bullshit comments and racist
jokes the partners made. I didn't
belong in their narrow-minded
world. Here, in this neighborhood,
these were my people. I grew up
here, found love here. But most
importantly, I could be myself
here. Whenever I needed to humble
myself and remember why I became a
lawyer, the memories from this
neighborhood always guided me.

INT. BILL'S MOM'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Bill opens the door and nudges it shut behind him. MRS.
WILLIAMS, Ebony's mom, 60s, is in the living-room watching
television.

BILL

Hey, Mrs. Williams. How's mom
doing?

MRS. WILLIAMS

She's holding up. She's in her room
napping, but go on in there and see
her.

(off his nod)

Are you taking care of my baby
girl?

BILL

Always!

MRS. WILLIAMS

Tell her I said I know she's out there trying to save the world, but she needs to visit her mother from time to time.

BILL

(winking)

You know I will.

Bill smiles and walks to down the hall.

INT. MS. O'NEIL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bill slowly opens the door. Ms. O'Neil's bedside lamp is on, and Bill sees her grimacing in pain against her headboard.

BILL

Hey, Mom. How are you feeling?

MRS. O'NEIL

(grimacing)

I'm all right.

BILL (V.O.)

She was getting worse. All I could picture was her slowly deteriorating and one day dying alone. My mom had been through too much with her M.S. already. I needed to make partner to make sure that didn't happen.

BILL

I talked to the powers that be at my firm today, and if I win this big case, they're going to make me a partner.

MRS. O'NEIL

That's great, Billy.

BILL

If I get the partnership, I can afford to move you out of here to someplace more comfortable...where they can take care of you.

MRS. O'NEIL

Don't worry about me. Use that extra money you'll be making to pay for a nice wedding for you and Ebony. I'm not going anywhere. This is my home. All of my positive memories are here. I've been blessed with friends that take care of me. Don't waste your money on me. I don't have much time left.

BILL

Don't talk like that, Mom. You're the only family I have.

MRS. O'NEIL

That's why you should stop worrying about me and focus on marrying Ebony so I can at least try to be alive to see my grandkids. We can't stop the inevitable with me.

BILL

Can we drop the negative talk?

BILL (V.O.)

I told my mom about the case and sent Mrs. Williams home for the night. I took care of her until she went to bed and thought about growing up and why I became a lawyer.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - MORNING

A noisy classroom full of African-American STUDENTS.

BILL (V.O.)

After my mom lost her housekeeping job, we got evicted from our house and had to move to the only place we could afford; a small two-bedroom apartment in the Queensbridge housing projects.

The teacher, MRS. FOY, enters.

MRS. FOY

Now, class, I want you all to welcome our newest student, William O'Neil.

YOUNG BILL stands timidly in front of the class.

YOUNG BILL
Excuse me, Mrs. Foy, Can you call
me Billy or Bill?

JALEN
(mocking)
Can you call me Billy or Bill?

MRS. FOY
(to Jalen)
Knock it off, Jalen. Keep it up,
and I'll make another call home to
your mother.

The Students laugh at Jalen's expense.

Young Bill is fidgeting. He looks around for a friendly face,
but no one reciprocates. A student, DRAPER, raises his voice.

DRAPER
He your son or something? There
ain't no white kids around this
neighborhood.

MRS. FOY
No, Draper. Billy, and I are not
related.
(to Young Bill)
You can take the empty desk next to
Ebony in the third row, okay?

Young Bill nods and walks to the desk next to YOUNG EBONY. He
can't take his eyes off her.

BILL (V.O.)
The first time I saw Ebony, I
thought she was the most beautiful
girl I had ever seen. More than
anything else, her smile is the
prettiest smile I had ever seen.

YOUNG BILL
(to Young Ebony)
Hi.

EBONY
Hey.

AKEEM, Ebony's brother, stares Young Bill down.

AKEEM
Stay away from my twin, white boy.

YOUNG BILL
Huh? I was just saying hi.

AKEEM
I saw you gawking at my sister.
That shit ends now.

EBONY
Chill out, Akeem. He's just being
nice.

AKEEM
(to Young Bill)
You heard what I said. Keep looking
at her, and Imma fuck you up.

Mrs. Foy slams her palms on her table.

MRS. FOY
Akeem, I'm not going to have you
using that language and threatening
kids in my classroom! Go to the
principal's office, now.

Akeem stands and leans over Young Bill's desk.

AKEEM
(pushes Young Bill's
forehead)
This ain't over, chump.

MRS. FOY
Akeem!

Akeem leaves the classroom, staring Bill down.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE HOUSING PROJECTS - AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK
CONT'D]

Young Bill is being chased by Akeem, Jalen, Draper, and the
rest of Akeem's boys.

BILL (V.O.)
Fighting my way home after school
became a daily routine. What made
it even worse was Akeem and his
best friend Jalen lived in my
building.

AKEEM
(shouting)
Stop running like a bitch, white
boy!

Young Bill gets cut off by Jalen. He turns to run, but Draper is behind him. Eight African-American BOYS surround him.

AKEEM (CONT'D)
(shouting)
Fuck him up!

Jalen sucker-punches Young Bill while Draper yanks him to the ground. All of them stomp and kick Young Bill while he tries his best to protect his face and head.

SIRENS. A cruiser screeches to halt, LIGHTS FLASHING.

AKEEM (CONT'D)
Shit, that's O'Sullivan. Fall back.
Let's bounce.

The kids run away. Young Bill is laying on the sidewalk, bloodied and beaten.

Officer O'SULLIVAN, a muscular white cop, 30's, gets out of his patrol car and rushes over to Young Bill.

O'SULLIVAN
(yelling to the kids)
Run. Scatter like fucking roaches,
you bunch of savages!
(helping Bill up)
You'll be alright, kid. Stop
crying. Be tough. What's your name?

YOUNG BILL
Billy O'Neil.

O'SULLIVAN
Ah, an Irish boy, huh? What are you
doing around here?

YOUNG BILL
I live here.

O'SULLIVAN
You live in this neighborhood with
the niggers? What does your dad do?

YOUNG BILL
I never met him.

O'SULLIVAN
Your mom?

YOUNG BILL
She's sick...she has Multiple
Sclerosis.

O'SULLIVAN
 Jesus. Come on, I'll take you to
 your apartment.

INT. BILL'S MOM'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Mrs. O'Neil looks weak and is grimacing in pain, bent over in
 the kitchen. Young Bill enters with O'Sullivan.

YOUNG BILL
 Are you alright, mom?

MRS. O'NEIL
 (seeing the blood and
 bruises)
 God! What happened, Bill? Are those
 boys still beating on you?

She runs to the bathroom and returns with a damp towel to
 cleans Bill's face.

O'SULLIVAN
 I'm Officer O'Sullivan, ma'am. I
 stopped those niggers from
 attacking your son. Don't worry,
 Ms. O'Neil. Billy told me his
 father wasn't around, so I'll make
 sure to keep an eye on him and keep
 him out of trouble. Have a good
 day, ma'am.

O'Sullivan leaves. Young Bill helps his mom to the couch.
 Mrs. O'Neil motions for him to sit with her.

MRS. O'NEIL
 Sit down, Billy.
 (he sits)
 Billy, I know you're hurting. I
 know it's hard not to be angry.
 It'd be easy to just hate all black
 people for what they're doing to
 you, but don't become a bigot like
 Officer O'Sullivan.

YOUNG BILL
 Mom, they're beating me up every
 day because I'm white.

MRS. O'NEIL
 I know, and it's terrible. I'm
 going to talk to their mothers, but
 in the meantime, I need you to
 endure until they get to know you.
 (MORE)

MRS. O'NEIL (CONT'D)

Things will be better. They'll see that you're not their enemy and vice versa.

YOUNG BILL

(rolling eyes)

I'll try, mom.

MRS. O'NEIL

There was a time when I hated minorities and thought I was better than them, but life has a way of humbling us all.

YOUNG BILL

What happened?

MRS. O'NEIL

Back then, I was a housekeeper at the Hilton, and I used to bad-mouth and wouldn't acknowledge or talk to any race that wasn't white. Before your dad left us, he lost his job and couldn't find a new one, which forced me to work double shifts at mine. I struggled to take care of us, and there were times when I had to choose between paying the rent or buying food. We went to bed hungry often. Our church, our neighborhood, our people knew we were struggling, and they did nothing to help us. When I couldn't pay tithes every month, our church excommunicated us. Our so-called friends, relatives, and community stuck up their noses and called us white trash. Do you know who helped us when we were at our lowest?

YOUNG BILL

Who?

MRS. O'NEIL

The black women that I worked side by side with every day, the same people I used to bad-mouth and wouldn't talk to, put together a collection and gave us money to help with our rent, food, and clothes to survive.

YOUNG BILL
(nodding)
I understand.

MRS. O'NEIL
(smiling slightly)
I realized I was wrong and needed
to change. In time, those boys will
see they need to change too.

YOUNG BILL
I hope they figure it out soon
before they kill me.

MRS. O'NEIL
I'm sure they will.

Mrs. O'Neil hugs Young Bill and kisses his forehead.

BILL(V.O.)
As promised, Mom talked to Akeem's
mother about my daily ass
whoppings, but they didn't stop.
She was determined to befriend
Jalen's and Akeem's mothers and
stop the bullying once she had a
better relationship with them.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE APARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING [FLASHBACK
CONT'D]

Mrs. William and Mrs. Wilson are smoking cigarettes during a
friendly and funny conversation. Mrs. O'Neil walks up to
them.

MRS. O'NEIL
Hi...

Mrs. William and Mrs. Wilson ignore her. They move a few feet
away without looking at her.

BILL (V.O.)
The first month, every day,
whenever Mom saw them smoking their
cigarettes and talking in front of
our building, she went up to them
and tried to befriend them, and
every day, they ignored her.

INT. QUEENSBRIDGE APARTMENT - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Young Bill exits hauling trash to the chute. Akeem sprints up the stairs at full speed.

AKEEM
(panicking)
O'Sullivan gonna kill me.

Sounds of HEAVY FOOTSTEPS are heard coming up the stairwell. Akeem tugs on the janitor's closet door and hides inside.

O'SULLIVAN
(appearing)
Where is he? Where'd that fucking
pickaninny go?

YOUNG BILL
He ran upstairs.

O'SULLIVAN
You better not be lying to me. He's
not your friend. He and his
homeboys beat your ass every day. I
hope you're not stupid enough to
protect him.

YOUNG BILL
(shaking head)
I'm not lying.

O'Sullivan checks the elevator, but it's broken. Then he notices the janitor's closet and runs towards it.

MRS. O'NEIL
(opening the door)
What's going on here, Officer?

O'SULLIVAN
(stopping)
I was just asking your son if he's
seen Akeem.

MRS. O'NEIL
I've been listening to you this
entire time. My son answered your
questions. Why are you chasing
after a child, anyway?

O'SULLIVAN
I'm sorry, ma'am. Those little
hoodlums threw eggs at my car, and
I wanted to teach them a lesson.
(MORE)

O'SULLIVAN (CONT'D)

I didn't mean to take my
frustration out on Billy.

MRS. O'NEIL

Well, my son answered you. If you
don't mind ending this
interrogation, Bill has homework to
finish.

O'SULLIVAN

No, no, I don't mind. I'm sure I
lost Akeem by now anyway, so I'm
heading out. You have a good day,
Ms. O'Neil.

O'Sullivan disappears down the stairs. Mrs. O'Neil goes
inside her apartment. Akeem comes out and rushes up the
stairs.

AKEEM

(calling over his
shoulder)

Yo! Thanks, man. I owe you one!

BILL(V.O.)

Mom was right...everything changed
once they got to know me.

EXT. BASKET BALL COURT - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Akeem, Draper, and Jalen are playing basketball with other
BOYS from the neighborhood.

Young Bill passes by them and tries to avoid eye contact but
can't help but notice that everyone except Akeem is staring
him down.

AKEEM

(shouting)

Hey, white boy, you wanna play with
us?

Young Bill nods and enters the court.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-- Young Bill handles the ball well

-- Young Bill makes a fancy assist to Akeem

-- Young Bill hits an open shot...

-- Then another...

-- And another

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Akeem and Young Bill win. Jalen, Draper, and the other Boys are winded and exhausted with their hands on their knees sulking on the sidelines.

Akeem high-fives Young Bill and starts talking to him while Jalen and the others stay off to the side.

AKEEM (CONT'D)

I didn't know you had game like that! You should play ball with us from now.

YOUNG BILL

Thanks, I will.

AKEEM

Good looking out for not diming me out to O'Sullivan.

YOUNG BILL

No doubt.

AKEEM

Nah, that's a big deal to me. I already gave the word for everyone around here to stop beating on you.

YOUNG BILL

Thanks for that.

AKEEM

Yo, where your pops at?

YOUNG BILL

Never met him. He left when I was younger.

AKEEM

I thought all white people had both parents in their lives.

YOUNG BILL

Not in my family.

AKEEM

(laughing)

Between you being good at ball and your pops not being around, I swear, I'm starting to think your secretly black.

(MORE)

AKEEM (CONT'D)

(suddenly serious)

My pops took off when me and my sister were babies. The coward left us to fend for ourselves. It's all right, though. I don't need him. One day, I'm gonna be paid and my mom and Ebony will never have to worry about money again.

YOUNG BILL

I want to do the same for my mom and me.

A beat of understanding and acceptance between them.

AKEEM

Cool.

Akeem motions Jalen over, but not Draper. Draper is noticeably irked.

AKEEM (CONT'D)

Bring it in, J.

(to Bill)

J's my right hand. Now that you're down with us, we'll get this money together. The boys fist bump.

BILL (V.O.)

After that day, Akeem, Jalen and I became best friends. Akeem and Jalen got respect and street credibility. My mom being cool with Akeem's and Jalen's moms was a plus too. A lot of people around the neighborhood still weren't fond of white people, but my mom and me were the exceptions. Things were good for a while until one summer day that changed our lives forever.

EXT. BILL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - AFTERNOON [FLASHBACK, CONT'D]

Young Bill, Akeem, and Draper are sitting on a bench in front of the building when an Escalade with huge rims and a loud sound system pulls up to the curb and parks at the hydrant on the corner.

The window descends and DRASTIC, African-American, long scar down the side of his face, mid 20's, points at Akeem.

DRASTIC

Yo, Akeem, lemme holla at'cha real quick.

Akeem walks over. The other Boys are within earshot.

YOUNG BILL

(whispering to Jalen)

Who's that?

DRAPER

That's Drastic. Right-hand man to Boogie Brown. He's got crazy loot. He pays us good money if we drop off packages for him.

JALEN

I hope he asks me to do a drop off. I need money bad. The boys step closer to hear Akeem and Drastic's conversation.

DRASTIC

(to Akeem)

Yo, you and your boy Jalen wanna work for me again?

AKEEM

I don't know. My moms would kill me if she found out. Me and J can't get picked up by the cops again or we're going to Spofford for sure this time.

DRASTIC

Don't worry about that. It won't be like last time. I don't want y'all boostin' shit for me no more. I want y'all to sell on the block for me and make serious money.

Akeem looks unsure.

DRASTIC (CONT'D)

Look, I'm a busy man. I need an answer now. You're my first choice but if you can't handle it, I'm moving on.

AKEEM

Nah, I can handle it. I'm in.

DRASTIC

Call your boy over here.

AKEEM

Yo, J, Draper, Bill, come here.

DRASTIC

Chill, kid. Draper and the white boy can't be down with us. They're bad for business. Draper got a big fucking mouth and the last time he did a drop for me, the block was hot with cops for weeks. Putting him and the white boy on would draw too much attention. In this game, you don't want or need that.

Akeem looks disappointed but nods and calls for Jalen.

AKEEM

Alright. Yo, J come here.

BILL (V.O.)

Once Akeem and Jalen agreed to sell for Drastic, that changed everything. Draper became extremely jealous, stopped hanging out with us altogether and started selling dope for a rival dealer.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Draper is doing a hand to hand with a friend while an OLDER MAN nods and watches.

BILL (V.O.)

High School came around. Akeem and Jalen stopped playing ball and eventually stopped going to school in general to sell full time for Drastic. Akeem's reputation was growing because of all the dirty work Drastic had him doing.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Akeem is beating up a rival DRUG DEALER that is on his block while Jalen watches his back. Drastic and BOOGIE BROWN watch in approval.

BILL (V.O.)

Scholastically, Ebony and I were doing well and were in all the same honors classes.

(MORE)

BILL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We were officially dating and Akeem was cool about it because he knew I always liked her, would treat her right, and didn't want her dating a guy in the street like him.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Bill has his arm around Ebony and Akeem and Jalen are sitting on the bench with them laughing.

BILL (V.O.)

Time passed and Mayor Giuliani had the cops cracking down hard on dealers. Eventually, Drastic got caught by the cops and with the amount of drugs he had on him, his priors, and a gun the cops found that was linked to a few homicides, Drastic was sentenced to life in prison. With Drastic gone, Akeem was number one in the streets.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Drastic is shoved into the back of a police car. Akeem is standing in front of a group of tough looking MEN. He's in charge now.

BILL (V.O.)

With Akeem's new power came a lot of enemies. O'Sullivan was always trying to bust him and he and Draper were always at war over territory now that Draper also gained power when Drastic's rival, Neville retired from the drug game. Tension between Draper and Akeem was at an all-time high.

Bill, Akeem, and Jalen are hanging out near the basketball courts when Draper and two of his GOONS walk past and point in Akeem's direction.

AKEEM

What the hell is your bum ass looking at?

DRAPER

What'd you say, Motherfucker?

Draper and Akeem rush each other. O'Sullivan and his partner MCIVOR appear of nowhere and break it up. They rough them up as they frisk them. They find nothing and leave.

DRAPER (CONT'D)

This ain't over...

BILL (V.O.)

Two weeks passed and word on the street was Draper was going around the neighborhood telling everyone he had enough of Akeem punking him and was going to shoot him if Akeem got in his face again. Wanting to make an example out of him, Akeem went searching for him and it changed my life forever.

INT. MRS. O'NEIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Bill is reading a book. Sound of THREE GUNSHOTS are heard. Bill runs to the window and looks out --

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Akeem sprints past building with his gun in his hand while Draper FIRES continuously at him. A beat. Sound of POLICE SIRENS are heard. Both Akeem and Draper stops for a second.

O'Sullivan's police car stop in front of them and O'Sullivan and McIvor rush out, guns raised. Draper runs in the opposite direction and Akeem runs around the car headed to his building.

O'SULLIVAN

Drop your weapon!

Akeem turns around quickly with his gun in his hand. O'Sullivan and McIvor fire, riddling Akeem with bullets.

BILL

NOOOOOOO!

MRS. O'NEIL

Billy get away from the window!

Bill quickly puts on shoes and heads out the door.

MRS. O'NEIL (CONT'D)

Billy!!

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Bill runs down the stairs. He sees Jalen.

BILL

The cops just shot Akeem! You gotta tell Ms. Williams and Ebony. Hurry up.

Jalen runs up the stairs and Bill runs out the building to Akeem.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Akeem is slumped on the side of the fence leading to the building. Blood is gushing out of him and he's is gasping for air.

BILL

Help! Call an ambulance! O'Sullivan keys his radio.

O'SULLIVAN

(into radio)

Central, shots fired. The perp was hit. We're gonna need a bus at this location.

BILL

He's not a perp, and he doesn't need a bus. He needs a damn ambulance.

O'SULLIVAN

Relax, kid. A bus is cop jargon for an ambulance.

BILL

You knew him. He was terrified of you. He wouldn't have shot you, and you know it.

O'SULLIVAN

Look, when someone turns around with a gun pointed, you don't have time to assume they're not going to shoot at you. You said it yourself: he was terrified of me. Wouldn't you want to kill the boogeyman that you're afraid of? Wake up. They're all the same.

(MORE)

O'SULLIVAN (CONT'D)

They're all killers, and savages
and I took this one out before he
killed me.

INT. EBONY'S BEDROOM - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

BILL (V.O.)

After Akeem's funeral, me and Ebony
were in her bedroom having a heart
to heart discussion.

Ebony is looking out the window. Bill is sitting on her bed.

EBONY

What do you want to be after high
school?

BILL

(shrugging)

I don't know. I was thinking maybe
a lawyer. I like arguing with
people and I want to fight for good
people that the world is fucking
with. What do you want to be?

EBONY

(quietly)

I want to be a cop.

BILL

A cop?

EBONY

I should hate them after they
killed my brother, but I learned
something from all of this. My
brother was far from a saint, but
he didn't deserve to die. The cops
in this neighborhood prey on
minorities and think we're all
savages. To change things, I have
to be a part of it. I'm going to
become a cop and rise so high in
the ranks that I'll have the power
to make changes to police
procedures and the way cops
interact with minority communities.

BILL (V.O.)

After High School, Ebony and I went
to John Jay College.

(MORE)

BILL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She majored in criminal justice,
and I studied law. Both of us used
Akeem's death as motivation in
life.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

INT. MRS. O'NEIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT [PRESENT]

Bill pulls the blanket up on his mother and kisses her
forehead. He turns off her light and closes her bedroom door.

INT. THE DELANCEY - EVENING

Ebony walks in but immediately tries to walk out when she is
spotted by Rashida.

RASHIDA
Hey! You made it!
(mouthing)
Thank you!

Ebony and Rashida laugh together.

RASHIDA (CONT'D)
We're all sitting over here. Don't
worry, I already ordered you a
beer.

EBONY
Thanks, but I'm not staying long.

RASHIDA
Me neither. I'm leaving when you
are.

Mendez, Mahoney, and St. Clair are sitting in a booth, raise
their beers and salute Ebony.

The news is on one of the televisions and the REPORTER is
talking about the murder of their two co-workers.

The WAITER drops off drinks for them and they make a toast to
Richards and Gomez. They're drinking, laughing. Morgan St.
Clair smoothly puts his arm around Ebony. She lets it linger
for awhile but comes to her senses and moves it.

EBONY
All right, guys. I'm outta here.

RASHIDA
I'm right behind you, boss.

MAHONEY
Can I take you home, Rashida?

RASHIDA
Nope, unless you have a pussy,
you're not touching me.

They all laugh.

MORGAN
(to Ebony)
You leaving so soon?

EBONY
Yeah, I haven't seen my man all day
and I want to spend some time with
him before he goes back to work.

MORGAN
All right, beautiful. Are we still
studying for the Lieutenant's test
together this week?

EBONY
Yup!

MORGAN
Good! I'll see you later.

EBONY (V.O.)
Morgan was another sergeant at my
precinct, and I couldn't lie. I was
attracted to him. We often joked
that we were each other's work
spouses, but neither of us could
deny there was an attraction
between us. Despite our flirty
exchanges, he knew I'd never cheat
on Billy but I had to admit a
previous conversation we had while
studying was fucking with my head.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. POLICE ACADEMY LIBRARY - NIGHT

EBONY (V.O)

We were studying in the library at the police academy talking about life, work, and our families when Morgan started talking about Billy.

MORGAN

So, I gotta ask, how are you so Pro-Black and Afrocentric and dating a white boy?

EBONY

(laughing)

I love Billy. He's my soulmate. He's smart, loyal, loving, attentive...everything I want in a man. And the last time I checked, those characteristics weren't attached to a specific race.

MORGAN

I hear that.

EBONY

Honestly, when I see Billy, I don't see his race. He grew up with me in Queensbridge, so he isn't your typical white guy.

MORGAN

He might be conscious of black plights but he's still white. Plus, I know he's not holding it down like a brother.

Ebony blushes and shifts a little.

EBONY

I'm very satisfied. Billy holds it down in the bedroom. I have no complaints in that department.

MORGAN

So, you're telling me he pleases you better than all the brothers you dated in the past?

EBONY

I wouldn't know. I never dated a brother. Billy's my first everything.

MORGAN
You gotta be kidding me.

EBONY
(off his look)
Don't look at me like that.

MORGAN
Like what?

EBONY
Like 'oh, you're the type that
talks pro-black but doesn't live
that life. I see that look everyday
on people's faces when I'm out with
Billy.

MORGAN
No judgement. I don't see you like
that. I just think it's kind of sad
but good in a way. Ignorance is
bliss. You don't know any better or
see what your missing because
you've never had anything else.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

INT. THE DELANCEY - EVENING [PRESENT]

Ebony and Rashida walk out.

EBONY (V.O.)
I know it shouldn't but his words
crept into my subconscious and have
been fucking with me ever since. It
made me question if when people saw
me with Bill, did they see me as a
hypocrite? Another question that I
was ashamed of myself for thinking
was, by settling down with Billy so
young, did I do myself a disservice
by not experiencing the dating
scene and seeing what else was out
there? I shook those thoughts away,
said my goodbyes to my co-workers,
and went home to be with my man.

INT. BEN'S CAR - EVENING

Becky sulks while Ben parks in her parents driveway.

BEN

Baby, please, can you let that
silly spat with Gabby go?

BECKY

Nope. She's a vapid bitch, and I
fucking hate her. Will anyone ever
think I'm good enough for you?

BEN

I know you and Gabby aren't fond of
each other but do you think I have
it easy with your family?

BECKY

Let's put this convo on pause. I
don't want to fight in front of my
parents.

Ben nods and they exit the car.

INT. BECKY'S PARENT'S MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

Bernard escorts them to the dining room.

BECKY

Hey, Dad. Hey, Mom.

Becky hugs both her parents. Ben shakes their hands.

MR. PRESTON

Glad to see you could make it, Ben.

BEN

I'm happy I could be here tonight.
Mr. Preston, can I talk to you
about something later?

MR. PRESTON

(skeptically)

Sure thing.

BECKY

(leaning in, whispering)

What do you have to talk to him
about?

BEN

Just man stuff.

BECKY

You're up to something.

She smiles and gives him a quick peck. Becky clears her throat when she sees her father's disgusted expression.

BECKY (CONT'D)

Ben has been working hard on that case that's all over the news.

MRS. PRESTON

What case is that, dear?

BECKY

The one with that rapper that killed all those people. He's even being considered for partner.

MRS. PRESTON

That's wonderful!

Mr. Preston grunts and turns to Ben.

MR. PRESTON

Anyone else up for consideration?

BEN

Bill, another lawyer who has been winning a lot of cases for the firm too.

MR. PRESTON

Let me guess: Bill is white.

BEN

Not that it matters, but yes.

MR. PRESTON

Of course, you wouldn't think it matters. Are any of the partners Black in your firm?

BEN

No, but --

MR. PRESTON

-- I'm sure it doesn't matter how hard Bill works, you'll end up getting the position over him. That's how things work nowadays. You'll automatically get it because you're black, and the white guy will probably never move up in your firm.

Becky squeezes Ben's hand under the table.

MR. PRESTON (CONT'D)

The media is always talking about white privilege, but the only privilege I see is with you people.

BEN (V.O.)

Every day I busted my ass to show people like him that black people weren't just thugs, criminals and drug addicts. I wanted to prove to him, and other small-minded individuals, that my people were sophisticated, intelligent, and just as good as his were.

MR. PRESTON

You know what you minorities will , never understand?

BEN

What would that be, sir?

MRS. PRESTON

Steven...

MR. PRESTON

(To Mrs. Preston)

No, society coddles minorities too much. He needs to hear this, Susan.

(To Ben)

You people always want more and think things should be equal. When does it end? I'm not dumb or blind. I know right now, white people hold the majority of power in this country, but why should we give it up? We built this country --

BEN

(interrupting)

-- Off the backs of those minorities you're talking about.

MR. PRESTON

Regardless of that, it was white men who built this country and if minorities had it their way, they'd push white people out of power and make us the minority. While that's good for you and your people, what about mine? Why would I want to see a shitty world like that?

BEN

It wouldn't be a bad world. It would be how races should be treated in this world; equal. You wouldn't feel good doing what's right?

MR. PRESTON

Please, don't talk to me about morals. You're getting paid well to represent a murderer, and I'm sure as an attorney, you've manipulated the law plenty of times to benefit your firm when you knew it wasn't morally right. The same rules apply to me. I'm not worried about your race or any other minority. Frankly, as a white man, I don't give a shit about minorities killing each other. It's one less mouth on welfare mooching off of my tax dollars.

BEN

(sighing)

Let's just agree to disagree.

MR. PRESTON

Ben, that's the smartest thing you've said all night.

LATER:

Mrs. Preston and Becky are laughing and talking.

MR. PRESTON

Ben, while the women gossip, let's go to my study so we can talk, man to man.

Ben nods and follows him out.

POV: Ben closes the door and seals the men behind it.

EXT. BECKY'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Becky and Mrs. Preston are sitting at the dinner table in silence, sipping wine.

STUDY:

Mr. Preston enters the study and Ben follows him in.

MR. PRESTON

We can drop the bullshit now. You know my daughter can't hear us in here. Now, tell me what you want?

Ben sits down in the chair across from Mr. Preston's desk.

BEN

I won't beat around the bush. I love Rebecca, and I wanted to ask you for your blessing when I ask her to marry me.

MR. PRESTON

(scoffing)

Absolutely not. I've entertained this phase she's going through and put up with your sham of a relationship for years because I love my daughter. But there's no way in hell I'd allow you to ever marry her. No matter what you do, you'll never be good enough for my daughter.

BEN

Why is that? I'm no slouch. I've worked hard all my life, and I've always done well --

MR. PRESTON

-- You people are all the same. You might be wrapped in a nicer package, but when it comes down to it, you're no different from the other blacks I've met.

BEN

What's that supposed to mean?

MR. PRESTON

I thought you were smarter than that but I guess I'll dumb it down for you. You've gone to prestigious schools, so you're not completely stupid. You have a decent job, drive a nice car and have a beautiful town house but nothing will change the fact that you're black.

(MORE)

MR. PRESTON (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter how many fancy degrees you have or how much money you make. You can never change that flaw and if my daughter were to marry you it would be a downgrade.

BEN

Downgrade? I work just as hard, if not harder, than you.

MR. PRESTON

But you're still Black.

BEN

And?

MR. PRESTON

And any children you would have with my daughter would be black and I don't want your race contaminating my gene pool. I'd rather my daughter be a lesbian than marry a nigger.

Ben stands suddenly about to storm out. At the last second and his hand on the doorknob he turns back.

BEN

With your blessing or not, I love Becky, and nothing you say or do will stop me from asking her to marry me.

MR. PRESTON

I'll never let it happen.

BEN

We'll just have to see, won't we.

Ben slams the door behind him.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ebony comes home to a dark apartment. The only light in the house comes from the bedroom off the muted TV that Bill left on.

Ebony walks to the bedroom and sees Bill asleep in just his underwear with the remote in one hand and a case file in the other.

EBONY (V.O.)

I know he was probably waiting up
for me to hear about my day, let me
vent and maybe sneak in a quickie.

She smiles at him, takes both the remote and the file and
rests them on the dresser.

EBONY (V.O.)

As exhausted as I was, I missed
him. I wanted to talk to him even
if only for a few minutes.

SHOWER:

Ebony takes a quick shower.

An image of Morgan working out in the precinct gym pops up in
her mind but she quickly dismisses it and dries off.

BEDROOM:

She goes back to the bed wearing only her towel and gently
nudges Bill. His hand glides against her naked skin and that
wakes him up and gains his attention.

EBONY

Hey, baby.

BILL

Oh, Miss Officer are you trying to
seduce me?

Ebony laughs and they engage in an intense love-making
session. When it's over, Bill is holding her and a look of
guilt is on her face.

EBONY (V.O.)

Even though I love Billy so much,
and I know he loves me
unconditionally, a part of me feels
like maybe Morgan is right. Maybe
I'm missing out on more in life
because I didn't know anything but
life with Billy. I'm mad that I
can't shake this feeling.

Ebony sighs lightly, kisses Bill and they sleep together
peacefully.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK - AFTERNOON

It's pouring. Ebony and Rashida are soaked working at a protest inside the park.

EBONY (V.O.)

I was tired and cranky from spending hours being cursed out by angry protestors. Their outrage came about because a cop in North Carolina shot and killed an unarmed fifteen-year-old black boy.

QUICK FLASH:

A black BOY is shooting alone on a basketball court when he's approached by POLICE OFFICERS. He hands them ID. Nervous, the boy jumps when his phone vibrates in his pants pocket.

The boy reaches in his pants, pulls out his phone and is SHOT when the Officers mistake his phone for a gun.

BACK TO SCENE

EBONY (V.O.)

People all over the country were protesting, and I don't blame them, but they weren't mad at just the cops involved in the incident - they were mad at the system and law enforcement, in general.

PROTESTORS are standing behind the barrier, close to Ebony and yelling in her face.

EBONY (V.O.)

The crowd seemed to heckle me more because I was a black cop and stood inches from my face yelling.

PROTESTOR 1

You should be ashamed of yourself, sista!

PROTESTOR 2

Look at you, taking orders from your new-age slave master. Don't you know they're just using you?

PROTESTOR 3

You're lost. You need to stop disrespecting yourself.

PROTESTOR 4

Does it feel good oppressing your own people to suck the white man's dick? How do you sleep at night?

EBONY (V.O.)

I looked at all these angry faces, and they didn't see me, a woman that fought and worked her ass off for the community - they just saw the uniform. My skin was as black as most of theirs, but they only saw me as blue. It's hard to not develop the *us-versus-them* mentality when you feel like the world hates you because of your profession.

PROTESTOR 4

What's wrong with you, sista?

EBONY

How do you know that I'm not as pained by this as you are? Why do you assume that I don't care about this young man's life?

PROTESTOR 4

Because we know you don't. You're under the blue wall of silence. Once you took that job, you stopped giving a shit about your own people because you think you're safe and one of them. You ain't shit either, and as soon as you take off that uniform, they'll treat your ass just like the rest of us.

EBONY (V.O.)

I fought day in and day out when I was a kid against racist cops like O'Sullivan and manipulative drug dealers that corrupt young boys the way Drastic corrupted my brother growing up. She didn't know that the purpose of me being a cop was to help make a change for the better in our communities. To her, I was just a sellout with a badge.

EBONY

(in the woman's face)

You don't know me or what I'm about.

(MORE)

EBONY (CONT'D)

You're judging me the same way you
say the cops judge the community.

RASHIDA

(pulling Ebony back)

Boss, chill.

PROTESTOR 4

Oh , please. Once you put on that
uniform, you're just as fucked-up
and corrupt as the rest of them.

Before Ebony engages further, Morgan touches her shoulder.

MORGAN

Take a minute to cool off. Sit in
the car for a while and study your
flashcards for the lieutenant's
test. I'll hold it down until you
get back.

Ebony nods.

INT. EBONY'S PATROL CAR - SAME

She gets in and takes a deep breath and looks over her cards.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK - SAME, LATER

Ebony returns goes back to her post. Morgan wraps his arms
around her and kisses her cheek.

MORGAN

You good now, Williams?

EBONY

(deep breath)

Yeah, I'm cool.

MORGAN

As sexy as you look when you're
mad, I didn't want you to lose your
temper on these protestors.

EBONY

I appreciate it.

MORGAN

I got to look out for my girl. Let
me know if you need another break.

Morgan walks away. Ebony checks him out as he leaves.

RASHIDA

Boss, you need to be careful. It's obvious he's feeling you, and it looks like you're feeling him too. Players recognize players and I'm telling you, he wants to fuck you.

EBONY

I won't become a statistic. Trust me.

INT. GABBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gabby is sitting on her bed listening to Drake's "Too Good" playing on her cellphone. Her laptop illuminates her face as she scrolls through profiles on eHarmony. She frowns.

GABBY (V.O.)

Although there were lots of men I could be compatible with, most of them wanted to be fucking white girls.

BEGIN MONTAGE: *Dating*

We cycle through a series of dates Gabby has been on.

GABBY (V.O.)

Lately, I was having terrible luck with men. They were either ugly as hell...

-- A PLAIN-LOOKING GUY walks up to Gabby in a bar. She gives him one look and walks away.

GABBY (V.O.)

Or gay...

-- Gabby is smiling and talking to a GOOD-LOOKING MAN in a bar. She turns to get her drink and catches him looking lustily at ANOTHER MAN across the bar.

GABBY (V.O.)

Or looking only for white women.

-- Another GOOD-LOOKING MAN waves at Gabby from across the bar and starts to approach her. Gabby smiles and waves back. He passes right by her to the white WOMAN behind her. Gabby slams her drink down and walks out.

GABBY (V.O.)
It was beginning to dawn on me that
I may never feel the same
connection that I felt with Ben
with anyone else.

PRE-LAP: The CHORUS of Drake's "TOO GOOD" PLAYS

INT. BEN'S PLACE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

GABBY (V.O.)
The lyrics about taking his love
for granted were too fitting and
reminded me that I'd created this
big, life-altering mess that
brought Ben and Becky together.

Gabby is sitting on the couch next to Terrance, glaring at
Ben and Becky sitting across from them, kissing.

GABBY (V.O.)
My relationship with Ben was like a
scab that I kept picking at. My
actions were what kept it from
healing. The conversations I had
with him, our inside jokes, our
history together - I've never had
that type of connection with anyone
else past or present. Our
connection was real and extremely
hard to find, which was why I
refused to stop picking at it.

INT. FRAMES BOWLING LOUNGE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Ben and Gabby are at the register at the bowling lounge. Ben
is paying for everything and getting shoes for them when
Gabby spots Ty and a white girl a couple lanes away smiling
and laughing.

GABBY (V.O.)
When Ben took me out on that date
to Frames Bowling Lounge, what he
didn't know was that I spotted Ty
there with a white girl.

She's visibly heartbroken but acts like everything is alright
when Ben faces her with their shoes.

INT. BEN'S PLACE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

We see Ben and Gabby being intimate. Ben is passionately making love to her but Gabby's mind seems elsewhere.

GABBY VO

I had a great time with Ben, and the sex was good, but my mind and my heart were on Ty. I questioned why he left me for that white girl and wondered what she had that I didn't.

After their intimate session, Gabby rushes out of bed to get dress, leaving Ben feeling hurt and confused on what he did wrong.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Gabby is running in the park when it finally hits her that Ben is the right man for her.

GABBY (V.O.)

When I left Ben's place that night, I did a lot of self-inventory. It finally dawned on me that I'd never find another guy who loved me unconditionally the way Ben did.

INT. BEN'S PLACE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Gabby rushes into Ben's apartment and see's Becky for the first time.

GABBY (V.O.)

I went to his apartment to patch things up and work on a relationship with him, but I was too late. Playing too hard to get made him turn to Becky, and she didn't deserve him. Seeing Ben with a white girl after spotting Ty with one pissed me the fuck off!

INT. KNICKS GAME - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Becky, Ben, Gabby and Terrance are sitting at the game. Ben and Becky are having a great time while Gabby is watching them, envious.

GABBY (V.O.)

To add insult to injury, I had a front row seat watching Ben and Becky's relationship blossom in front of my face. Seeing him not jump up to please me whenever I called and showing her so much love and attention made me realize that she had replaced my spot in his heart.

END OF FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

INT. GABBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT [PRESENT]

Gabby is still scrolling through the profiles on the dating site.

GABBY (V.O.)

I wasn't going to lose my best friend - and, in my heart, future husband - to Becky, so I'd been patient. I'd stayed close to him because I needed him in my life. Ben, understood me, he listened to me, and unlike most men he wanted to do more than just fuck me.

Gabby comes across Terrence's profile on the dating site, reaches for her cellphone and calls him.

INTERCUT: GABBY/TERRENCE

TERRENCE

Bitch face? Is that you?

GABBY

Shut up, punk. Why do you have a profile on eHarmony?

TERRENCE

You wouldn't know that unless you had one too. The question is, why do you have one?

GABBY

I'm keeping an open mind. What are you doing?

TERRENCE
Nothing. Why? You want some
company?

GABBY
Come through.

INT. GABBY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT [LATER]

The DOORBELL RINGS.

Gabby answers the door wearing only her robe. Terrence is wearing a dark blue suit, standing in Gabby's doorway smiling. Gabby looks at him lustfully.

GABBY (V.O.)
The truth was, Terrence and I had
been fucking recreationally for the
past four years. Shit, I needed
some dick, and he was an excellent
maintenance man.

QUICK FLASH:

INT. GABBY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gabby and Terrence are drinking together in her living room. One thing leads to another and they end up having an intense sex session.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. GABBY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT [PRESENT]

Gabby admires Terrence's suit. She touches the Fabric.

GABBY
Nice suit, but where's your tie?

TERRENCE
I'm too fly to wear a tie. I don't
let nothing tie me down!

GABBY
Oh my God.

Terrence steps inside and closes the door behind him. He slides his arm around Gabby, scoops her up and brings her to the bedroom. They undress and have a hardcore intimate session.

INT. GABBY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT [LATER]

Both Gabby and Terrence high-five each other and have looks of satisfaction on their faces. Gabby springs up from bed and Terrence admires the view.

INT. GABBY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Showered and dressed, Gabby is in the kitchen cooking. Terrence walks into the kitchen.

TERRENCE

What are you making?

GABBY

I'm making Ben his favorite, macaroni and cheese. I'm going to surprise him with it in a few minutes and apologize for fighting with Becky.

Terrence looks jealous.

TERRENCE

How come you never cook for me?

GABBY

Oh, shut up. I cook for you all the time.

TERRENCE

You just use me for my body and don't even have the decency to make me a meal.

GABBY

Whatever, punk. We use each other.

TERRENCE

It's funny. Ben used to chase you. Now you're chasing him.

GABBY

I chase him because he's worth it. Why do you care? You've been getting a no-strings-attached piece of ass for the past four years. Just enjoy it and mind your business.

TERRENCE

Ben's not the only successful black man out there. He loves his girl. You need to move on.

GABBY

Don't worry about what I need to do. Take care of yourself.

TERRENCE

Gabby, I know you love Ben, but eventually, even you have to see that Becky's here to stay.

GABBY

You don't know him like I do. When I look in his eyes, I know there's something still there. He knows it too. That's why we talk every day.

Terrence puts on his suit jacket.

TERRENCE

Touching. Well, I'm out. Call me when you want company again.

Terrence walks to the door. Gabby stops him in the door way. He turns around and faces her.

GABBY

Uh, you're lucky you're cute.

TERRENCE

I know. Bye, bitch face.

They kiss. Terrence breaks away first.

GABBY

Bye, punk.

She closes the door and goes back to cooking.

INT. BEN'S PLACE - NIGHT

Ben opens his door surprised to see Gabby.

GABBY

Can I come in?

BEN

What are you doing here?

GABBY

Don't be like that, Big head. I made you baked macaroni.

BEN

Uh-huh.

GABBY

I'm serious. This is a bona-fide peace offering here.

Ben steps aside to let Gabby in. Ben puts the macaroni in the kitchen while Gabby walks into the living room and sees case files on the coffee table.

GABBY (CONT'D)

I see you're still reading up on your case.

BEN

Yeah, it's the hardest one I've ever had.

GABBY

I believe it. Is Becky here?

BEN

No, she's out with Simone. I don't know when she'll be back.

GABBY

I wanted to say I'm sorry to you - to both of you. I'm always going to feel a certain way because I love you, but I have to respect that you're with Becky. And even if I don't like her, I can try to be more cordial. You're my best friend. I won't risk losing your friendship because I can't be nice to your girlfriend.

Ben smiles and brings her in for a hug. Gabby smiles smugly.

GABBY (V.O.)

I just had to be patient. In time, I'd get what I wanted.

INT. BEN'S PARENT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Ben walks into his parent's house. His father, MR. TURNER, is sitting in a brown leather recliner watching the show, *The First 48*.

BEN

Hey, Dad.

MR. TURNER

What's up, son? What brings you around here today?

BEN

I just needed to clear my head. This new case is driving me crazy and balancing my home life with Becky isn't helping. Is mom home?

MR. TURNER

No. She's out somewhere hanging out with Gabby.

Ben sits on a sofa across from his dad.

BEN

Dad, I gotta ask, how come you aren't as mad about me being with Becky as mom is?

Mr. Turner takes a long breath and exhales.

MR. TURNER

Son, I've dealt with my fair share of racism, but not like your mother. I lived in New York all my life, where racism wasn't as prevalent as it was in the south. Your momma grew up in Tennessee during the segregation era. If you know your history, Pulaski, Tennessee, was where the Ku Klux Klan originated.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. STREET IN PULASKI TENNESSEE - DAY

A YOUNG MRS. TURNER is holding her mother's hand as a large group of men in full Ku Klux Klan garb march in the yearly Klan parade.

MR. TURNER (V.O.)

As a kid, your momma witnessed family and friends get beaten and killed by white people.

(MORE)

MR. TURNER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I was blessed with not having the same negative experiences with white folks as she has, so my views are somewhat different, but no matter how much time has changed and race relations have slightly improved, those memories will always be ingrained in the back of her mind.

Young Mrs. Turner glares at the Klan as they march past.

BACK TO SCENE

Ben nods as his father continues

BEN

I get that, Dad, but how does that help me show mom that Becky is different?

MR. TURNER

It doesn't. That's not up to you to show her. Your momma has to change on her own. She knows you love Becky, and even though she isn't fond of your relationship, she'll come around. And Becky has to do her part by continuing to show her love and support for you, and trust me, it'll soften your mom's heart.

BEN

How is that fair to Becky or me?

MR. TURNER

Fair? Son, there's nothing written in stone that anything in this life has to be fair. Black people in this country have endured troubling times for generations. All our lives, your momma and I had to prove to the world that not all black people are the same, that we aren't all uneducated, lazy losers.

BEN

But --

Mr. Turner raises a hand, cutting Ben off.

MR. TURNER

-- Let me finish. Through hard work and our actions, we show people every day that we're different. With some people, we've changed their perspective on us. With some, we haven't. It feels like an never-ending battle, but that's life. Becky is going to have to endure that same fight with you. If it's too hard for her, she can take the easy way out and leave you, but if she loves you like you say she does, she'll be able to handle it.

Ben sighs and reluctantly nods again.

BEN

You gave me a lot to think about, Dad.

MR. TURNER

That's what I'm here for. Now, how's everything going with your case?

BEN

I'm struggling but I'll fight with whatever I have.

MR. TURNER

That's what I like to hear.

BEN

I'm gonna get going. I need to swing by the firm and look at some more video for this case.

MR. TURNER

Ugh, I don't miss those days. Handle your business, son. I believe in you.

BEN

Thanks, dad.

Ben and his Dad stand and hug.

INT. BILL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Bill sits prepping Alfieri for the upcoming trial.

BILL
Nope, not like that. Try it again.

ALFIERI
I'm tired of prepping for this
shit, yo. I'm ready to go.

Alfieri picks up a framed photograph of Bill and Ebony off
the credenza.

ALFIERI (CONT'D)
So, this is your lady, huh?

BILL
Uh, yeah, that's my girl.

ALFIERI
Yo, I knew you and I were cut from
the same cloth.

Bill gives him the side-eye.

ALFIERI (CONT'D)
I love fucking black bitches.

BILL (V.O.)
I tried to keep my face
expressionless. Everything about
him pissed me off. He wasn't from
the street, but he pretended to be.
I also didn't appreciate him
referring to my woman as a "Black
Bitch" or thinking he and I were
anything alike. I thought about
what winning this case would do for
my mom and Ebony, which helped calm
me.

ALFIERI
C'mon, stop frontin' like you don't
gotta black-girl fetish too.

BILL
Let's focus on our trial prep. You
gotta answer the questions exactly
how we rehearsed, and you seriously
need to stop smiling when you
answer them too. You don't want the
jury to think you're some pompous
asshole. Now, did you rape Sophia?

ALFIERI
(laughing)
Nope.

BILL

Be serious.

ALFIERI

How you want me to answer it? Like this: "No, sir, I did not forcefully have sexual relations with that woman."

BILL

If you say it like that, they'll know you're being condescending.

ALFIERI

Well, I wouldn't call it rape. At least, I paid the bitch.

BILL

(stops pacing)

You can't say that on the witness stand. What do you mean by that, anyway?

ALFIERI

Well, I did rough her up a bit to convince her to let me fuck, but it's not like she didn't get paid. Look, between you and me, blacks are beneath us anyway, so fucking them only feels right.

BILL (V.O.)

I was insulted. This asshole believed our views were the same, and he wouldn't stop talking.

ALFIERI

Black bitches will do any nasty thing you want when you got money. They'll let you fuck them any kind of way, and even if they don't want it - fuck it, no one will believe them anyway.

BILL

(seething)

Wait, what did you just say?

ALFIERI

No one in their right mind would take some black stripper bitch's word over a white dude. We can do whatever we want to them.

BILL

You're making it sound like you raped her.

ALFIERI

Well, I paid her, but I knew she definitely didn't want it. I took what I wanted, and I'm sure she spent the good money I gave her on drugs or some other bullshit.

Bill charges at Alfieri and SLAMS him against the office door.

BILL

You son of a bitch. You swore to me that you didn't rape that girl! Now, you're telling me you did.

ALFIERI

Get your fucking hands off me. Are you crazy?

Bill releases him and straightens his own clothes.

ALFIERI (CONT'D)

You wanna hear me say it, fine. I fucking raped her, and I'm not sorry about it either.

BILL (V.O.)

There it was - the truth- and I wasn't ready for it. When I was in law school I knew there'd be times that I'd have to represent guilty clients as a criminal defense lawyer, but I figured I'd deal with it when the time came. The time was here, and I didn't want to handle it. Under attorney-client privilege, I still had to defend him despite now knowing he was guilty.

ALFIERI

That bitch has been fucking for money for years. I wasn't gonna let her turn me down. I see I'm gonna have to treat you like I did that bitch. She got me off sexually, and you're gonna get me off legally. Fuck this. I'm out.

Alfieri walks out and SLAMS the door behind him.

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - DAY [LATER]

Bill enters. Francis is on the phone and holds up his index finger to stop Bill from interrupting his conversation.

FRANCIS

It's not a problem. I'll talk to him. This won't happen again. I promise you that. Goodbye, sir.

(slamming phone down)

What just happened in your office with Alfieri?

BILL

He told me he's guilty.

FRANCIS

So what? A good criminal defense lawyer doesn't ask, what did my client do? He asks, what can the prosecutors prove he did? You shouldn't care about what he admitted. He's not legally guilty until the prosecutor has enough evidence to convince the jury to convict him.

(slams palms on the desk)

Come on, Billy, this is basic stuff. You're better than that. Tactically, for trial, your arguments should be focused on the prosecution's failure to prove Johnny raped the stripper. You need to get your shit together if you're going to win this case. Get out of my sight.

Bill walks out with his head down.

INT. BEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Ben is re-watching the surveillance videos from the fight with Reggie and the couple inside the club.

BEN

Shit!

There's a KNOCK on his door. MARK CRUZ, Hispanic, 30's, enters.

MARK

What's up, Ben? You got a minute?

BEN

Yup.

MARK

Richard wants you to focus solely on your murder case. He assigned all your other cases to me. I need your case files.

Ben nods and hands him two big boxes full of files and paperwork. Mark tosses a manila envelope on Ben's desk.

MARK (CONT'D)

It's the forensic test for your murder case. No offense, but I'm glad I got all your other cases and not this clusterfuck.

BEN

Gee, thanks.

Mark walks to the door with the box and turns back.

MARK

On the bright side, you did all the legwork for these cases I'm taking over, so they should all be easy wins for me and improve my case record.

BEN

(faking smile)

Glad I could help.

MARK

(laughing)

Later.

Mark closes the door behind him and Ben looks at the file in front of him.

INT. RIKER'S ISLAND - VARIOUS - DAY

Ben navigates a series of hallways and security doors on his way to meet with Reggie.

BEN (V.O.)

The forensic test came back showing that the gun in Reggie's hand was the same gun that killed the cops and the couple.

(MORE)

BEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The test also confirmed that Reggie's DNA was on the trigger and the blood on his clothes were from the couple. The odd thing about the test was that another set of fingerprints found on the magazine for the gun belonged to Kuwuan Mitchell, who had tons of priors for selling illegal guns. The cops had no idea where he was currently and didn't even look at him as a suspect despite him having the same build and height as Reggie.

MEETING ROOM:

Ben enters the room and sits across the desk from Reggie.

BEN (V.O.)

I decided I needed to find out if Reggie knew who he was.

REGGIE

What's up, Oreos?

BEN

(death stare)

How are things going in here?

REGGIE

Shitty. But I'm mentally preparing myself to spend the rest of my life in here, so I'm adjusting.

BEN

Don't say things like that. It's bad for your psyche. I'm trying my best to make sure that doesn't happen, but I need you to help me understand this case, Reggie. All signs are pointing to you. Give me something. What am I missing or not seeing? I need you to help me.

REGGIE

(chuckling)

Are your folks still together?

Ben rubs his hand down his face.

BEN

Reggie, I'm not here to discuss my parents. We're fighting for your life.

REGGIE

My dad wasn't around growing up. He was running the streets. My mom tried the best she could to raise me and my three brothers on her own.

Ben calms down and puts his notepad down.

BEN

Your mom must be a strong woman. That's hard to ask of anyone, to raise four kids alone.

REGGIE

Yeah, she was strong but all that stress caused her to have a stroke and killed her when I was fourteen. Since I was the oldest, I had to hustle in the streets to help me and my brothers survive. I didn't have the luxury of living a Cosby Show life like you did growing up.

BEN

(irritated)

Now that you finished giving me your family history, do you think we can get back to discussing your case?

REGGIE

In a few. I like you, Ben. You're not as big of an asshole that I thought you were. But I know you still don't see that you and I are the same.

BEN

We're the same, huh?

REGGIE

Yup. The only difference between us is our environments and circumstances. If the roles were reversed and we traded pasts, you'd be where I'm at, and I'd be sitting in your seat.

BEN

(nods thoughtfully)

Reggie, I don't doubt that we have similarities, but what overrules your environment and circumstances argument is choice. Yeah, you had a tough family life and a rough environment but you could've chosen not to sell drugs. That choice led to you going to prison. You could've not fought people after prison, which would've not given you a history of violent assaults. Your choices were what led to why we're here now.

REGGIE

True Dat. Some of my choices could've been avoided, but that doesn't change the fact that you and I are the same.

BEN

Can we get back to discussing your case? Your record label is spending a lot of money on your defense. You're important to them, so let's not waste any more time.

REGGIE

(sucking his teeth)

I'm important to them now because I fill their pockets. I watch the news in here. I know this drama is making all of my albums fly off the shelves, and they're making a shit ton of money right now. But if I'm found guilty and convicted, best believe they'll drop my black ass like a bad habit. Same goes for you. Your bosses use you as their golden boy and make tons of money off the cases you win, but don't get it twisted - they don't think you're anything special. Lose a couple of cases in a row, and they'll look at you the same way the record executives look at me once they stop making money off me - as just another nigga.

Ben nods. Reggie laughs.

BEN

Can we please focus on your case now? Who is Kuwuan Mitchell to you?

REGGIE

I don't know any Kuwuan Mitchell.

BEN

What did the guy that night look like?

REGGIE

I dunno. Dark-skinned guy, around my height. He had a red and black Chicago Bulls hat on and matching Air Jordans.

BEN

And you don't know him? You never saw him before?

REGGIE

Did I stutter?

(off Ben's look)

You look worried. You all right?

BEN

I'm fine. I'm not going to lose this case.

REGGIE

So, you believe me?

BEN

Your story is consistent and never changed.

REGGIE

Because I didn't do it. You know, you're different from all the other lawyers I've had. You got this corny Wayne Brady demeanor going for you.

BEN

What does that mean?

REGGIE

White people love sellout brothas like you. I think it'll help convince the jury that I didn't do it.

Ben frowns, gathers his stuff and leaves without saying anything. Reggie laughs.

INT. BEN'S BMW - LATE AFTERNOON [LATER]

Ben calls Becky as he drives.

BECKY
(on phone)
Hey, babe.

BEN
(on phone)
Hey. I have a lot of shit I need to do for this case. I'm gonna have to stay out late tonight studying at the Columbia Law Library with Gabby.

BECKY
Aw. Why? And why with her?

BEN
She's a strong lawyer and I need to look at this case from different legal perspectives if I'm going to win this. I promise, I won't stay out too long.

BECKY
I get it. Handle your business, babe. I'll see you when you get home. Love you.

BEN
Love you, too.

He ends call and glances in his rearview mirror -- a POLICE CAR pulls up behind him and hits his LIGHTS and SIREN.

Ben pulls to a stop under a street lamp. The patrol car pulls up closely behind him. Exasperated, Ben gets his documents in order as the OFFICER approaches the window and unsnaps his gun holster. Ben rolls down his window.

BEN (CONT'D)
Is there a problem, Officer?

OFFICER
A lot of these BMW's have been getting stolen lately in this area. Is this your car?

BEN

Yes, sir, it is. I have all the proper documents and paperwork if you would like to see them.

OFFICER

(examining him)

You don't speak like you're black. What do you do for work?

BEN

(sighing)

I'm a lawyer.

OFFICER

Well, that explains it. Have a good day, sir.

The Officer walks away.

REGGIE (V.O.)

You got this corny Wayne Brady demeanor going for you. White people love sellout brothas like you.

BEN (V.O.)

I got out of the stop without a problem, but Reggie's comment was still in the back of my mind after hearing the cop tell me I didn't speak like I was black. I hated feeling like a sellout.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Becky is typing away at her laptop. She checks the clock on it, and then glances at a photo of her and Ben. Brooke is channel surfing.

BROOKE

Still working on your book?

BECKY

Yup. I know it's good, but it still hasn't gotten picked up by a publisher. Something's missing and I'm retooling it to add that missing piece.

BROOKE
(nodding)
So, where's your big dick
boyfriend?

That gets a laugh out of Becky but she turns serious and stops typing.

BECKY
He's with Gabby at the law library
working on his case.

BROOKE
You trust him with her?

BECKY
Of course. Ben would never do
anything to hurt me.

BROOKE
That dick must really have you
sprung if you trust another woman
around your man like that. I mean
it's nice that you trust him, but
do you trust her?

BECKY
It doesn't matter what Gabby tries
to pull. Ben would never cheat on
me.

BROOKE
If you say so.

BECKY (V.O.)
Brooke's comments had me emotional,
paranoid, and fucked up my flow
when it came to working on my book.
I loved the life I built with Ben
but Brooke was right. Gabby was in
my fucking way of total happiness.
She'd love to have me out of the
way so she could have him for
herself and that scared me.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. BEN'S COLLEGE APARTMENT - MORNING

A KNOCK. Ben gets up to answer the door while Becky sits on the couch watching TV in only panties and an oversized jersey. Gabby is at the door.

BEN

This is a surprise. I've haven't heard from or seen you in weeks.

GABBY

Yeah, I've been busy.

BEN

Yeah? Well, I'm busy right now too. Later, Gabby.

Ben goes to shut the door.

GABBY

(stopping him)

Aren't you going to invite me in? It's early and I want to get a quick run in. It's nice outside and I wanted you to keep me company.

BEN

Like I said, I'm busy. I have company right now.

GABBY

So? It's not like I haven't hung out with you and your boys before. Who's here, Terrence?

BEN

No. I'm sort of continuing a date.

GABBY

(taken aback)

She must be ugly if you're not trying to be seen with her outside.

Gabby pushes through the door and sees Becky for the first time. Becky smiles warmly and extends her hand to Gabby.

BECKY

Hi! I'm Becky. Ben has told me so much about you.

Gabby dismisses her gesture and turns to Ben.

GABBY

(furiously)

Who is this? What? I shoot you down after our one-time fuck, and you swear off of Black women?

BEN

I haven't seen you in weeks and you made it very clear that our night together meant nothing. Don't come to my place disrespecting my...friend and talking to me like I'm a piece of shit.

GABBY

It did mean something. I was going through shit.

He gestures to the open door.

BEN

Like I said, I'm busy. Bye, Gabby.

GABBY

You're kicking me out? Fine, but whatever this shit is you have with her it won't last.

BECKY (V.O)

I thought after that day, I saw the last of her but she wouldn't go away.

INT. BEN'S PARENTS HOUSE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Becky and Ben are at the dinner table with Ben's parents.

BECKY (V.O.)

I remember meeting Ben's parents for the first time. His dad seemed cool but his mom had already expressed her displeasure about Simone dating a white guy and she looked just as pissed whenever she looked at me. I told his parents about myself and tried desperately to get them to like me but I couldn't wipe that look off their faces. Then Gabby came by and had to ruin the day.

The DOORBELL RINGS and Mrs. Turner gets up to answer it. A moment later she returns with Gabby in tow. The two women are laughing.

GABBY

(to Ben)

Hey, Big head.

(MORE)

GABBY (CONT'D)
 (to Becky)
 Becky.

BEN
 What are you doing here?

GABBY
 I always hang out with your momma
 on Sundays. I never turn down a
 free meal.

Ben's parents fall over themselves to pay attention to Gabby,
 ignoring Becky.

BECKY (V.O.)
 She and Mrs. Turner laughed and I
 was invisible to his parents from
 that moment forward.

EXT. BEN'S PARENTS' BACKYARD - EVENING [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

A typical backyard barbecue with Ben, Becky, his parents and
 a smattering of his parents' FRIENDS and UNCLE GEORGE, AUNT
 VALERIE.

BECKY (V.O.)
 The next time I hung out with his
 family wasn't any better. His
 parents had a big Fourth of July
 party and they and their friends
 made me feel like I was
 insignificant. They barely talked
 to me and didn't seem the least bit
 interested in getting to know me.
 The only positive was that I met
 Simone who kept me company and
 helped me to relax.

SIMONE
 Don't mind them. They act all rude
 and militant, but they aren't that
 bad. They do the same thing when I
 bring white guys home. Hi, I'm
 Simone, Ben's cousin.

Becky and Simone smile and shake hands.

BECKY
 Ben has told me so much about you.
 It's nice to meet you finally.

SIMONE

He's told me a lot about you too.
He thinks you're the one.

BECKY

Did he say that?

SIMONE

Yup!

Ben looks at Simone and Becky laughing, having girl talk and smiles.

Gabby arrives.

GABBY

The party can start now, y'all. I'm here!

BECKY (V.O.)

Once Gabby showed up, all eyes were on her and I felt like I could never compare to her.

GABBY

Hey, mama Turner!

Ben's mother hugs and kisses Gabby. Gabby smirks at Becky.

GABBY (CONT'D)

Papa, don't lose too much weight now. I like seeing you fill out your suits.

MR. TURNER

I won't.

GABBY

Uncle George, now you know that plate has too much on it. You have to watch your sugar.

UNCLE GEORGE

I know, I know, I need you around to keep me in check.

GABBY

That's right. Aunt Valerie, save my spot at the spades table. Nobody is taking us down tonight.

AUNT VALERIE

I know that's right, Chile.

BECKY (V.O.)

Once Gabby got settled with the guests, It was like I didn't exist. Ben and Simone kept me company but I knew that Gabby would always be in the way.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON [PRESENT]

Becky blinks out of her daydream and turns to Brooke.

BECKY

Well, I'm creatively spent. I need to unwind. Let's hang out with Simone tonight.

BROOKE

(sulking)

Just because she's your man's cousin, it doesn't mean you're obligated to hang out with her all the time. You know I don't like her.

BECKY

(smiling)

Why? Jealous of her huge ass?

BROOKE

Whatever. Call her. I guess she can come, but I want to go clubbing tonight.

BECKY

Great!

Becky grabs her phone.

INT. CLUB - EVENING [LATER]

Becky sips a beer while Brooke flirts with a GUY. Simone is talking with a cute WHITE GUY.

BROOKE

I just don't get why every guy here is all over her.

BECKY

Guys have been hitting on you all night too. Relax.

BROOKE

Yeah, the ugly ones. It's not fair.

BECKY

What's not fair?

BROOKE

How easy she has it because she's black.

BECKY

Trust me, her life is far from easy.

BROOKE

She's an unemployed college dropout that's babied by her rich aunt and uncle. Sounds pretty easy to me. Sure, you and I have trust funds, and our parents do a lot for us, but we also work and make our own money. You're even working on publishing a book - what is she doing with her life? It's just not fair that the pretty black girl gets all the attention while pretty white girls like me, who deserve to be with these white men, get shafted.

BECKY

I think your drinks are speaking for you tonight.

BROOKE

(taking a long drink)

Maybe. Or maybe I'm just tired of her getting fucked by these guys when they could be my potential husband.

SIMONE

(approaching)

Hey, Trevor is here. I've been waiting for this text all day. I gotta go, guys.

BECKY

Is this the new guy you've been telling me about?

SIMONE

Yup! Do I look sexy?

BROOKE

Your butt looks huge. Maybe you should focus more on a career and less on guys.

SIMONE

Trevor can't keep his hands off my butt and everyone doesn't need a career, Brooke. If I'm right about Trevor, he's going to be my Prince Charming. I'll marry him, have his babies, and be a stay-at-home mom.

Simone's phone rings.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

(answering)

Hey, handsome. Are you outside?
Okay, I'm coming out now.

EXT. BROOME STREET - MANHATTAN - EARLY MORNING

Simone is walking woeful on the sidewalk trying to hail a cab. Her clothes and hair are disheveled. She's wearing high heels, a short black dress, and is being catcalled by every drunk man around.

SIMONE (V.O.)

I feel hurt, abandoned, lonely and emotionally drained by yet another man who just used me to cross "fucking a black chick" off his bucket list.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. TREVOR'S CONDO - NIGHT

Shirtless Trevor is kicking Simone who is half-dressed out of his condo.

SIMONE (V.O.)

Part of it was my fault for using my pretty face, tits, hips, and ass to entice these shallow guys, but sex was all I ever felt I was good at.

INT. RANDOM CLUB 1 - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Simone is flirting and drink with a group of white MEN. A HANDSOME MAN hands her a drink and kisses on her neck.

INT. HANDSOME MAN 1'S BEDROOM - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Handsome man 1 is in bed with Simone. He has a look of satisfaction on his face while she has a look of regret.

INT. RANDOM CLUB 2 - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Simone is flirting and dancing with ANOTHER HANDSOME MAN.

INT. HANDSOME MAN 2'S BEDROOM- NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Again, ANOTHER HANDSOME MAN is in bed with Simone with a look of satisfaction on his face while she looks hurt and disappointed.

SIMONE (V.O.)
I'd been so desperate to find true
love that I'd mistaken cheap pickup
lines from jerks for actual
interest in me.

INT. RANDOM CLUB 3 - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Simone is sitting at the bar when Trevor approaches her. He's comes off aggressive and touchy. Simone is talking but Trevor is only looking her up and down, observing her body. It's obvious he's not interested in a word she's saying and he is just lusting after her.

SIMONE (V.O.)
I'd always longed to be loved, but
I was constantly getting my ass
kicked by it.

EXT. RANDOM SIDEWALK 1 - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Simone is holding her shoes in hand, woefully doing the walk of shame to her home.

EXT. RANDOM SIDEWALK 2 - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Simone is crying, walking on a sidewalk.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. BROOME STREET - MANHATTAN - NIGHT [PRESENT]

Simone sighs and continues walking while she uses her phone to schedule an Uber to pick her up.

SIMONE (V.O.)
I was aware that I had serious,
deep-rooted abandonment issues that
dated back to my childhood.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. SIMONE'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY

A young Simone looks on in horror as her mother is nodding out from being strung out on heroine. The apartment is a mess.

SIMONE (V.O.)
But I wanted to feel that
unconditional love that Ben and
Becky have.

INT. BEN'S PLACE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Simone is watching Ben feed Becky strawberries as they cuddle on the couch. Simone is sitting off to the side envious that she doesn't have some one to love her like that.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. BROOME STREET - MANHATTAN - EARLY MORNING [PRESENT]

Simone leans against a building, waiting for her Uber to come while being catcalled by a HOMELESS WHITE MAN.

SIMONE V.O.
Instead, I was here on the corner
or Broome street being offered "the
dick" by a drunk homeless man.

HOMELESS MAN

Hey, pretty lady. I know just what you need to take that sad look off your face.

SIMONE

Oh yeah? What's that?

HOMELESS MAN

This dick!

The Man bursts out laughing. Simone leans against the wall and ignores him. Her Uber arrives and she rushes to the car.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MORNING

The DOORBELL RINGS. Ben walks to the door adjusting his tie. Simone is standing outside looking depressed.

BEN

Hey, what's up?

Simone walks in and plops down next to Becky on the couch.

BEN (CONT'D)

You look nice. Where are you coming from so early?

Instead of responding, Simone tears up.

BEN (CONT'D)

You okay?

SIMONE

No, I'm not. As always I got fucked over.

BECKY

Let's talk, what happened?

SIMONE

Like I said, I got fucked over again. What should I expect being the seed of a pimp and a junkie prostitute?

Ben shakes his head and hugs her.

BEN

Simone, Don't let some loser get you down. Aunt Joan doesn't define who you are.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

My parents didn't raise you as their own just because the court gave them custody. You're family. You're an extension of them and your my sister.

SIMONE

(smiling slightly)

Uncle Curtis keeps stressing me to find my sister. He thinks if I find that piece of my life that's missing, everything will turn around. He had his friends do some investigating and found out my sister lives in the Bronx and has a successful photography business.

BEN

I don't know. Maybe he's right. I gotta go. If you need me, call me.

Ben hugs her and kisses Becky. He mouths to her to take care of his cousin. Becky nods, and rubs Simone's back.

BECKY

What happened?

SIMONE

I always find the fucking losers. Why does this keep happening to me?

BECKY

Please, don't take this the wrong way but maybe you should take a break from white guys or maybe dating in general until your mentally ready.

SIMONE

I know what you mean. I don't know what's wrong with me. I know all black men aren't evil. I have my uncle and cousin who are great examples of that, but do you want to know the truth? I don't date black guys because I try to shield myself from anybody and anyone that reminds me of my parents.

BECKY

Don't let your past control your future.

SIMONE

You're right. I'm gonna take a break from dating and follow Uncle Curtis's advice. I'll look for my sister. I wonder if she's as wounded as I am.

EXT. CROWDED CITY STREET - DAY

Rashida is hauling ass down the sidewalk after FAIZON JACKSON, 15, who is carrying a stolen purse. Ebony is close behind, carefully maneuvering through the crowded street.

EBONY

Stop it right there!

The boy gets stuck at the corner and Rashida grabs him by his arm. The boy throws a wild punch at her face. Rashida ducks, sweeps him to the ground and cuffs him. Ebony catches up, winded.

RASHIDA

This little punk took a swing at me.

FAIZON

Yo, get off me.

PEDESTRIAN

I saw the whole thing. That kid didn't do shit. The pigs grabbed him for no reason.

PEDESTRIAN 2

I swear, man. The black cops be worse than the white ones.

Ebony looks at the boy and he looks very similar to Akeem.

EBONY (V.O.)

At first glance, the boy favors my deceased twin brother. He has the same height, complexion, and eyes that Akeem had at that age.

CLOSE ON: FAIZON'S FACE

QUICK FLASH:

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The scene of the paramedics working frantically on Akeem. His eyes are shut and his arm is dangling off the sides of the stretcher.

BACK TO SCENE

EBONY
(to Faizon)
What's your name, kid?

FAIZON
Fuck you!

EBONY
Let's try this again. What's your name? You can tell me or sit in a cell all day and night until you do, it's up to you.

FAIZON
Faizon Jackson.

EBONY
How old are you, Faizon?

FAIZON
Fifteen.

RASHIDA
Why'd you rob that old woman?

FAIZON
I was hungry, and she was an easy target.

Ebony and Rashida exchange looks.

EXT. PRECINCT - DAY

Rashida and Ebony pull up in a squad car and escort Faizon into the building.

INT. JUVENILE ROOM - DAY [LATER]

Rashida is sitting at a desk filling out paperwork.

RASHIDA
Faizon, what's your mom's name and phone number?

FAIZON
I don't have a mom.

RASHIDA
Okay, what's your dad's, then?

FAIZON
I don't have a pops neither.

RASHIDA
Who do you stay with?

FAIZON
For now, I stay with my foster mom,
Janelle Richards.

RASHIDA
All right, what's her information?

Rashida dials as Faizon slumps in his chair and tells her the information.

INT. JUVENILE ROOM - DAY [LATER]

Ebony is sitting with the victim, GINA HARRIS, an old woman, and stares at Faizon.

RASHIDA
(to Faizon)
Mrs. Richards told me you've been
getting picked up by the cops a
lot. Why?

FAIZON
Mrs. Richards is nice and all, but
she's broke. She barely has money
to feed the two of us, so I gotta
do what I need to, to survive.
Anyway, what are y'all charging me
with? Y'all taking me to juvie or
what?

EBONY
(approaching him)
We're trying to help you.

FAIZON
Y'all don't care about me. Nobody
does. Even Mrs. Richards is full of
shit. She only took me in so she
could get money from the state to
help her with bills.
(MORE)

FAIZON (CONT'D)

Y'all are gonna talk shit and load me up with charges just like all the other cops do.

EBONY

That's not true. I want to help you. I'm not letting you off completely, but I'm not going to add that you tried to assault Officer Harrell.

FAIZON

Whoopie!

Ebony walks back to Gina.

GINA HARRIS

What would make that boy attack me like that?

Ebony leans in and tells Gina something inaudible. Gina looks at Faizon, and her face becomes sympathetic. Gina walks over to Rashida and leans in, whispering to her.

RASHIDA

(sighing)

Ma'am, you pointed him out earlier and said he punched you numerous times in your face and snatched your purse.

GINA HARRIS

I know, but now I'm telling you he didn't. I put my bag down, and he grabbed it and ran.

RASHIDA

Are you sure that's what you want in the report? I see the bruises on your face.

GINA HARRIS

I'm fine. That's what happened.

Shaking her head, Rashida begins new paperwork.

EBONY (V.O.)

I could've easily had Rashida stick with Mrs. Harris's original story, but I understood that Gina didn't want to see another black kid's record ruined.

(MORE)

EBONY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Since the new report changed the crime from a robbery to only a petty larceny and possession of stolen property, we could release him to his foster mother and his record would be sealed at eighteen.

Gina Harris exits. COPS around the precinct mumble and shake their head at Ebony. MRS. RICHARDS enters.

MRS. RICHARDS

I'm sorry, Officer. I try my best to raise him right, but I can't control him. Thank you.

RASHIDA

Don't thank me. Thank the complainant. She's giving him a second chance. He beat up and robbed an old woman. The Sergeant is trying to help him, but you need to figure something out quick. The next cops that arrest him might not be as nice as we are.

MRS. RICHARDS

Yes, Officer. Thank you both.
(to Faizon)
Say thank you, Faizon.

He doesn't. He just smirks. They leave.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Becky is sitting on the couch holding a letter, sulking. Brooke and Simone notice.

SIMONE

What's got you acting all pissy?

BECKY

I got another rejection letter. I'm getting them daily at this point.

SIMONE

What do those pretentious dickheads know anyway? People love your column in Cosmo. Just ask your dad to pull some strings with his contacts and get you published already.

BROOKE

Leave her be. I told her the same thing. She's too stubborn.

Becky crumples the letter and throws it at a garbage can.

BECKY (V.O.)

I wanted to prove to everyone that I could do this on my own. Most importantly, I needed to prove it to myself.

Becky opens her laptop and starts typing. Brooke's nose is scrunched up while she plays with Simone's hair.

BROOKE

It's so thick...how can anyone manage this?

BECKY

Stop playing with her hair.

SIMONE

It's all right. Look, I don't want to see you stressed out all night. Ben's gonna come home and be lost in his annoying case all night. Why don't the three of us go clubbing? We can dance and get shitfaced!

BROOKE

That's your answer to everything.

BECKY

I hate going clubbing with you two. You guys always end up abandoning me to go home with guys you met at the end of the night.

BROOKE

Thanks for making us sound like hoes.

SIMONE

Come on. It'll be fun.

Becky looks to Simone, then Brooke. She sighs and closes her laptop.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - EVENING

Becky, Simone, and Brooke enter the club.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-- A NERDY GUY hits on Brooke. She ignores him.

-- A GOOD-LOOKING GUY hits on Simone. She turns him down.

-- ANOTHER GOOD-LOOKING GUY hits on Simone. She shakes her head.

-- A THIRD GUY hits on Simone. She smiles and follows him to the bar.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Brooke gives Simone a dirty look as she walks away.

BECKY

Can you stop looking at Simone like that? Geez, If looks could kill, you would've murdered her twice.

BROOKE

I'm tired of getting the consolation prizes while the quality guys look at her as some easy hoe they can fuck...just like her mother.

BECKY

What's wrong with you?

BROOKE

It doesn't make you mad that we work hard, yet this unemployed bum has a better wardrobe than us?

BECKY

No. We shop together at the same stores. Nothing is stopping us from buying the same clothes she has.

BROOKE

Why do you always defend her?

BECKY

Because she's our friend, and you sound really fucking racist right now.

BROOKE

And what if I am. Just because you're fucking one, don't act all high and mighty.

BECKY

Wow, Brooke. The truth finally comes out.

Simone returns and sees them bickering.

SIMONE

What are you guys arguing about over here?

BECKY

Nothing of importance.

BROOKE

We're fine. Why don't you go back over there with your future fuck buddy?

The FUCK BOY winks at Simone.

FUCK BOY

Hey, Beautiful, come back over here and keep me company.

SIMONE

Nah, I'm gonna keep my friend company. But my girl Brooke would love to talk to you.

BROOKE

(pissed off)

I don't want your fucking sloppy seconds. I can find a man on my own.

Fuck Boy tosses up his hands and walks away.

SIMONE

Ouch. What's wrong with you?

BROOKE

You're what's wrong with me. Why can't you just stick with your own kind?

SIMONE

I didn't know who I dated bothered you.

BROOKE

I'm just tired of you acting like you're white.

SIMONE

(wounded)

I know I'm not white. How would you like me to act, Brooke? Should I talk loudly and only speak in slang? Should I drink grape soda and eat fried chicken and watermelon every day?

(off their uncomfortable looks)

I know you hate me. I figured in time, after getting to know me, you would accept me, but you don't even respect me. All you seem is my skin color.

Simone storms off.

BECKY

Wait for me!

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT [MOMENTS LATER]

Simone and Becky stand in front of the club. Simone is holding herself and crying.

SIMONE

People have been telling me I talk and act white since I was a little girl. I fucking hate hearing that. What am I supposed to sound like?

BECKY

People are ignorant. Don't let it bother you.

SIMONE

It shouldn't, but it does. I used to close my eyes and pretend others didn't see my skin color and racial problems didn't exist, but Brooke's outburst proved that people only see me as a black girl trying to be white.

BECKY

I'm sorry.

SIMONE

It's not your fault.

Brooke exits the club.

BECKY
(to Brooke)
Seriously, you need to apologize.

BROOKE
(to Simone)
Sorry.

SIMONE
Whatever. I thought I was more than
your token black friend. You think
I don't hear the shit you say?
Whenever we converse, you talk
through me, not to me. I usually
don't speak up because I don't want
to come across as the angry black
girl causing problems, but I'm
tired of it.

BROOKE
I've been a real bitch lately, and
I've taken it out on you. Let's
drop it and get over it.

SIMONE
It must be nice to be white and
have the luxury to tell me to just
get over it. What's up with all the
shit you said?

BROOKE
I didn't mean it. I was just acting
stupid because I'm afraid I'll
never get married. When I see all
these guys crowded around you, I
get jealous. Can we pretend this
didn't happen?

SIMONE
I can't. I forgive you, but I can't
forget that. It's better this way,
because at least I know where I
stand with you.
(beat)
Come on. Let's go back inside.

INT. PRECINCT - MORNING

Ebony enters and Morgan is behind the desk.

MORGAN
You might want to take a look in
the juvenile room.

EBONY

Why?

MORGAN

You'll see. You're not going to be happy about it.

INT. JUVENILE ROOM - MORNING [MOMENTS LATER]

Ebony enters and sees Faizon is locked up again.

FAIZON

What's up, Sergeant Williams?

EBONY

What are you doing here again?

FAIZON

They caught me having fun.

INT. PRECINCT - MORNING

Ebony approaches the desk.

MORGAN

Told you, you wouldn't be happy about it.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. STREET CORNER - EARLY EVENING

Faizon walks up to his nineteen-year-old friend, DEVON and slaps him five.

MORGAN (V.O.)

After he left the precinct yesterday, he ditched his foster mother and met up with his nineteen-year-old friend, Devon.

The two boys block the path of an ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL and drag her to a vacant house.

MORGAN (V.O.)

They found an eleven-year-old girl coming from her after-school program, took her to a vacant house that was being remodeled, and raped her repeatedly.

INT. VACANT HOUSE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Two PATROL COPS walk around in a pitch black vacant house with their flashlights out and their guns drawn.

CRYING is heard in the distance. The Patrol Cops walk in on Faizon and Devon raping the girl off camera.

MORGAN (V.O.)

The people who lived next door to the house heard screaming and yelling. We sent a patrol car to the building. They saw the locks were broken, searched inside, and caught them in the act.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE VACANT HOUSE - NIGHT [FLASHBACK CONT'D]

Faizon and Devon are shown in handcuffs being walked to the patrol car.

MORGAN (V.O.)

The officers arrested Faizon and his friends on the spot.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

INT. PRECINCT - MORNING [PRESENT]

Ebony snatches the arrest sheet off the front desk to read. Rashida appears, already dressed for patrol, and hugs Ebony.

Another nearby Officer, BATEMAN, approaches.

OFFICER BATEMAN

Don't hug her. If she didn't give the little shit a free pass, he wouldn't have raped that girl.

RASHIDA

Fuck you, Bateman.

OFFICER BATEMAN

Don't be mad at me. If she wants to hold people's hands, be a social worker. We're cops. Our job is to keep these scumbags off the streets.

MORGAN

Guess who's going to stand on a foot post all day and guard the location?

OFFICER BATEMAN

Oh, come on, Sarge...

MORGAN

Nope. You want to disrespect a supervisor, you get what you get. Oh, and it doesn't look like you'll be taking a lunch today either.

OFFICER BATEMAN

This is bullshit.

MORGAN

Next time, come correct, and maybe you won't be hit with this cloud of bad luck coming to you.

Ebony struggles to gain composure.

RASHIDA

Boss, maybe you should sit in your car for a minute. You need to calm your nerves.

EBONY

(wiping her eyes)
I'm good.

MORGAN

You sure?
(Ebony nods)
Good, cause the CO wants to see you right away.

Ebony sighs and hits the "UP" button beside the elevators.

INT. INSPECTOR PHILLIP'S OFFICE - MORNING [MOMENTS LATER]

Ebony enters, and Phillips gestures to the chair across from his desk.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

Have a seat, Williams.

Ebony takes a look around. His office is decorated with dozens of PHOTOS from notable society and political figures. A Friedrich Nietzsche quote catches Ebony's eye:

"Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster...for when you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."

EBONY

That's a deep quote you have up there.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

It is. I read it every day. It has helped to center me my entire career in law enforcement.

He stares at her silently and she fidgets in her seat.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

You know what I like about you, Williams? Your compassion. You see people and still feel empathy, while a lot of cops become cynical and desensitized further on in their career. You don't get pressured or take shit from anyone. You're a fighter. You weren't made that way, it's who you are. Don't lose that. Keep being who you are.

EBONY

Thank you, sir.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

Now, for the criticism. Williams, I heard about the kid in the juvenile room. I know that after you talked to the victim, she decided to switch up her story. As one of my best sergeants, especially one that's studying to go up in the ranks, you know you're not supposed to do that.

EBONY

But --

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

-- You've gone through a lot these last few months. If this were any other time, I wouldn't hesitate to give you a command discipline. Instead, I'm going to give you a warning.

EBONY

I appreciate it, sir.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

I understand, your heart was in the right place. But you need to understand that we save people by educating them about the law, not lessening the crimes they commit.

EBONY

Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

You've been staying strong after Roberts' and Gomez's murder. But with this incident with the kid, it's been a lot lately, and it's taking a toll on you. Maybe you should take a few days off to recharge.

EBONY

I think that's a good idea.

INSPECTOR PHILLIPS

Good. You're one of my best supervisors and I want to see you back in full form. Head home. Take the rest of the week off, and if anyone asks who authorized it, tell them it came directly from me.

EBONY

Thank you, sir.

Ebony stands and makes her way out.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Becky's cell phone BUZZES and she answers.

SIMONE (V.O.)

What's up, Bestie?

BECKY

We got home late. How are you so chipper right now?

SIMONE (V.O.)

It's the power of positive thinking. Anyway, I need to take my fat ass to the gym, and I don't want to go alone. Can you come with me?

BECKY

Ugh, I wasn't trying to go out today.

SIMONE (V.O.)

Come on, please...I'll be your best friend. You know you can't say no to your best friend.

BECKY

Oh yeah? Watch me.

SIMONE (V.O.)

Come on, Bestie. I promise we won't stay long. We'll go hard on the weights, do a little cardio, and then be out the door.

BECKY

Ugh. Alright.

SIMONE (V.O.)

Cool! Can you pick me up? My car is in the shop.

BECKY

So, the real reason for the invite is you needed a ride.

SIMONE (V.O.)

Nope. That's not the real reason. Just hurry up.

BECKY

I'm on my way.

INT. CAR - MORNING [LATER]

Becky pulls up to Simone's and sees Gabby's car in the driveway.

BECKY

(to herself)

Gabby's car? Seriously?

Becky grabs her phone and sends a text. A second later her phone BUZZES:

"SIMONE: Come inside!"

Becky sighs.

EXT. HOUSE - MORNING [MOMENTS LATER]

Becky RINGS THE DOORBELL. Simone answers. She's not in workout clothes.

BECKY
You're working out in that?

SIMONE
Nope.

Simone grabs Becky by the arm and pulls her into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING [CONTINUATION]

Gabby and Mrs. Turner are watching TV. Simone pulls Becky directly in front of the T.V.

GABBY
You two mind moving?

SIMONE
(switching off T.V.)
Nope. This is an intervention.

GABBY
Oh my God.

MRS. TURNER
Girl, what the hell are you talking about?

BECKY
(whispering to Simone)
Yeah, what the hell are you talking about?

SIMONE
You helped me get my feelings off my chest with Brooke yesterday. I want you to get everything off your chest with them.
(off her nod)
We all need to talk. It's blatantly obvious that neither of you is fond of Becky and vice versa.
(to Mrs. Turner)
Aunt Mable, you and Uncle Curtis are always telling me that people need closure to move on in life. Well, things won't improve between any of you unless you get everything off your chest.

Mrs. Turner leans back on the sofa, folds her arms.

MRS. TURNER

Okay, but the truth hurts.

BECKY

(to Simone)

I don't know if I'm up for a conversation like this right now.

Simone pulls her to sit on the couch opposite the other women, who look at Becky, laugh and whisper to each other.

BECKY (CONT'D)

What's that about?

GABBY

Nothing, just an inside joke.

BECKY

You know what? I'm ready to have this conversation. I'll start with you Mrs. Turner. Why do you hate me?

MRS. TURNER

I don't hate you, Rebecca. I just don't feel like you're the right woman for my son. Honestly, I think you're weak.

Becky tears up and stands up to leave.

MRS. TURNER (CONT'D)

You see? The first sign of adversity, you run. How do you expect me to respect that?

BECKY

(sitting back down)

You're right. I need to stop running. Mrs. Turner, I'm not the spoiled, rich girl that you think I am, but you'd never know because instead of getting to know me, you've pushed me away.

GABBY

Oh, stop. You're not the victim, although you're really good at playing that role.

BECKY

I didn't get to you yet, but since you had to add your two cents, I'll say this: Stay away from my man. I love him, and he loves me. You had your chance, and you didn't appreciate him. Period.

Mrs. Turner gives Becky a respectful look.

GABBY

Am I supposed to cower because a white woman is demanding something? Please. Life has been so easy for you being rich and white --

BECKY

-- That's what this is really about? Me being white?

GABBY

Too often, in movies and media, black women are portrayed as loud, hostile, and inferior to you white women. I'd never openly admit it to Ben, but he's a great example of a good black man, and women like you take them. Black men put you on a pedestal, while women like me who are deserving of a man like him, are left with nothing.

BECKY

All you ever talk about is black and white. I'm not just a color or a race. I'm a person.

MRS. TURNER

We're all people, but you don't care about, understand, or even try understanding the difficulties blacks experience in this world.

GABBY

(to Mrs. Turner)

She doesn't get what we mean when we talk about white privilege. Her little feelings get hurt, and she catches an attitude.

(to Becky)

When we say you're privileged, we're not just talking about financially.

(MORE)

GABBY (CONT'D)

It means you see bad things happening, but it doesn't matter to you because it doesn't affect your race or you personally.

BECKY

How do you, any of you, know what I care about or what I understand? Neither of you has ever taken the time to get to know me. I don't know what it's like to be black, but that doesn't mean I'm not trying to understand what my man has to deal with. Yeah, I'm white but that doesn't mean I don't care or see that things aren't always fair.

(beat)

What do you want me to say? What do you expect me to do? I'm sorry, but I refuse to apologize for being white. I haven't done anything to either of you. I haven't owned slaves or downplayed how black people are treated in society. Stop blaming me and holding me responsible for everything wrong that has been done to black people. You're taking that anger out on me.

GABBY

Why shouldn't we? Most white people assume we're all the same. Why shouldn't we return the favor?

BECKY

Because nothing changes if nothing changes. If neither of us is willing to be different, everything stays the same.

GABBY

It's easy for you to say that when the world is so perfect for you.

BECKY

You think it's easy for me? You think I don't get dirty looks from other white people who think I'm only with Ben for sexual reasons, or fight with my family that thinks I'm just trying to be difficult and rebellious?

(MORE)

BECKY (CONT'D)

I fight for my love for Ben every day. It's not easy for me.

Mrs. Turner's continues to observe the conversation.

BECKY (CONT'D)

Believe what you want to believe. The only thing you need to know is it doesn't matter how much hell you put me through. I love Ben, and I'm going to marry him one day. I don't have to justify or prove my love to anyone. I'm leaving, and I'm not running away. I don't want to waste my time and energy on this anymore.

Becky stands up and heads for the door with Simone on her heels.

EXT. HOUSE - MORNING [MOMENTS LATER]

Simone gets in the passenger seat of Becky's car. Becky is getting in her car when Mrs. Turner approaches.

MRS. TURNER

Rebecca.

(Becky stops and faces her)

I've been looking for this type of fight in you for years. I know you love my son, but I'll admit I wasn't always the nicest. I promise I'll make more of a conscious effort to get to know you better.

Mrs. Turner extends her hand but Becky pulls her into an awkward hug. Mrs. Turner walks back to the house and Becky's cell phone RINGS.

INT. CAR - MORNING

Becky answers the phone as she starts the engine and puts it on speakerphone.

BECKY

Hello?

MAUREEN

May I speak with Rebecca Preston, please?

BECKY

This is she.

MAUREEN

This is Maureen Hofer from Legacy Books Publishing. We're very interested in your book and would like to speak with you about it.

Becky and Simone celebrate silently together.

MAUREEN (CONT'D)

Do you have time to meet with me on Monday?

BECKY

Yes, Monday is perfect!

INT. LEGACY BOOKS - DAY

Becky and MAUREEN are discussing Becky's book.

MAUREEN

I have to be honest, I never bring authors in to personally discuss publishing their books but after reading yours I had to do this meeting in person.

BECKY

That means so much to me. I put my heart and soul into that book.

MAUREEN

It shows. I love the raw honesty of your story. You didn't hold back. Your characters felt authentic, and I feel that's missing in a lot of books these days.

BECKY

Thank You.

MAUREEN

With your following from Cosmo and our marketing strategy, I believe this book will be a major success. I already faxed it to your lawyer and we're just waiting for him to finish looking it over so you can sign.

INT. BEN'S LAW FIRM - RECEPTION - DAY

Becky exits the elevator and is talking on her phone.

BECKY

I did it, mom. Legacy Books signed me to a three-book deal. Yes! I'm excited too. I got to go. I'm surprising Ben at work to tell him the good news. Don't forget to tell dad. Love you! Bye.

Becky ends the call and approaches the reception desk. MRS. WILSON is behind the desk.

BECKY (CONT'D)

Hi, I'm Rebecca Preston. I was around the area, and I wanted to surprise my boyfriend, Ben Turner.

MRS. WILSON

I didn't know he had a girlfriend. Well, it's nice to meet you, Ms. Preston. If he's not expecting you, I have to page him on the intercom and tell him you're here.

Becky nods as she pages Ben, her face crestfallen.

MRS. WILSON (CONT'D)

Mr. Turner said you could head back to his office. Third door on the right.

BECKY

Thanks!

HALLWAY:

Becky walks down the hallway. Bill's office is unoccupied and open. Becky walks in and sees Bill's office is loaded with pictures of him and his Black girlfriend.

BEN

Becky! She jumps, turns and rushes to hug him.

BECKY

Hey, honey.

Ben gives her a quick peck on the lips and steers her out the door.

INT. BEN'S OFFICE - MORNING [MOMENTS LATER]

Ben's office is dull and has no pictures of them anywhere.

BECKY

(gesturing around)

Your office is bare compared to the lawyer next door.

BEN

(fidgeting)

Yeah, I like to keep my private life, private. I don't want my co-workers in my business.

BECKY

Are you ashamed of me, Ben?

BEN

Of course not, babe.

BECKY

Why do you care what these people think? Maybe if they saw you had a family side, they wouldn't overwork you so much.

BEN

I don't want to argue, babe. I'm under a lot of pressure with this case. I'm crazy busy working on this trial strategy. What's up?

BECKY

It feels like you're trying to rush me out of here.

BEN

I'm not, but I have to meet Tim in five minutes.

BECKY

You don't have to brush me off.

BEN

Babe, I'm not, but I'm not trying to come off as unprofessional in front of the partners either.

BECKY

All you care about lately is the partners and this fucking case. I'll leave, since it's obvious you don't want me here.

BEN

Baby, please. It has nothing to do with you, honest. Things will get better after this case, I promise.

Becky storms out.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - EVENING [LATER]

Ben enters and sees Becky lying on the bed crying. He spoons with her.

BEN

Baby?

BECKY

What? You finally noticed me? I'm amazed you left your fucking office to talk to me.

BEN

I love you. This case just has me stressing, but everything I do, I do for us. Once this is over, things will be better.

BECKY

I hope so.

BEN

I promise. I feel like I'm missing something but I just can't put my finger on it. I don't know when it got to this point, but this case has me feeling like I'm drowning.

BECKY

Just don't lose yourself trying to save your client.

Ben kisses Becky and gets up to leave. He stops suddenly and turns back to her.

BEN

C'mon.

BECKY

Where we going?

BEN

Out. Just you and me.

BECKY
What about your case?

BEN
Case? What case?

Ben winks. Becky smiles as he pulls her into a hug.

INT. BILL AND EBONY'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

EBONY enters. She looks exhausted and stressed.

BILL
Hey. Everything okay?

EBONY
No!

Bill pulls Ebony into a hug.

BILL
Tell me, baby.

Bill leads Ebony to the couch and sits next to her. She starts to tell him about her day...

LATER:

BILL
I'm sorry about your day. How about
I make it up to you?

EBONY
How you going to do that?

BILL
When's the last time we had a real
date? You know, dinner, movie, and
you for my dessert...

EBONY
(laughing)
We're way past due.

BILL
Let's forget about your job, my mom
being sick, and my fucking case and
let's go out tonight.

EBONY
Let's do it.

END OF EPISODE TWO

Black and White - Episode 3

By
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Based on the novel
Defining Moments by Ben Burgess Jr.

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EPISODE THREE

EXT. STREET CORNER - EVENING

Bill and Ebony are walking hand in hand dressed to kill. The traffic light is green and Ebony and Bill are stuck at the traffic light getting heckled by RANDOM MEN on the corner.

RANDOM MAN

(catcalling)

Whoa-wee! Goddamn, baby. I know
that white boy can't handle all
that ass.

RANDOM MAN 2

All I need is one night with her.
I'd make her love brothas again.

Bill's eyes tighten. Ebony squeezes his hand, signaling to let it go and not get involved in a pointless argument.

Bill wraps his arms around Ebony and pulled her closer to him. Ebony looks at Bill lovingly and kisses him.

RANDOM MAN

Oh, I get it. You think you're too
good for brothas, huh?

EBONY

I love brothas, but I'm *in love*
with this man right here.

Bill smiles and they walk into a movie theater.

INT. MOVIE THEATER CONCESSION STAND - EVENING

Bill and Ebony are standing on the concession line. Ebony spots Morgan there holding hands with a black woman with a shapely figure. Morgan sees Ebony and winks. Ebony winks back but feels guilty for flirting back.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING

The theater is packed. As Bill and Ebony make their way to their seats, Bill nods at Ben who is holding Becky's hand a few rows away.

BECKY

(to Ben)

Who's that?

BEN
That's Bill, my competition at
work.

EBONY
You know him?

BILL
Yeah, that's Ben, the guy I've been
telling you about at work.

Bill looks at Ben with disgust.

BILL (CONT'D)
You saw how he strutted in here,
holding his girl's hand. He
probably only sees her as a
"trophy." Guys like Ben enjoy
showing off their success with a
pretty girl on their arm.

EBONY
You don't think he views you the
same way?

BILL
What? No, why would he? He doesn't
know me.

EBONY
And you don't know him, but you're
assuming without actually knowing
him. Sorry, but that annoys me,
because I feel people judge me like
that for being a cop and when I'm
out with you too. Maybe Ben loves
her just as much as you love me.

Bill glances over at Ben.

BILL
Maybe.

INT. MOVIE THEATER BATHROOMS - EVENING

After the movie ends, Morgan walks past Bill and Ebony with
his date and smiles. Ebony looks noticeable uncomfortable.
Bill looks taken aback but shrugs it off.

BILL
I'm gonna go to the bathroom before
we head out.

EBONY

Okay, I'll be right here.

Ebony is standing across from the bathrooms, staring down at her phone, texting her mom when she feels hands slowly wrap around her waist. She turns and sees it's Morgan.

EBONY (CONT'D)

Hey.

MORGAN

Hey, yourself.

EBONY

Where's your date?

MORGAN

She's in the bathroom. Where's your white boy?

EBONY

He's in the bathroom too. How's your date going?

MORGAN

She's fine and all, but she's lame.

EBONY

Why is she lame?

MORGAN

She just doesn't have ambition.

Morgan holds her hand, lifts it and kisses it.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

At least not like you.

Billy clears his throat and it causes Ebony to jump. Morgan is still holding Ebony's hand, she quickly realizes it and drops it. Bill is staring Morgan down and sizing him up.

BILL

Baby, who is this?

EBONY

This is Morgan St. Clair, my study partner for the lieutenants test. We work together as Sergeants at my precinct. I've told you about him.

Morgan extends his hand.

MORGAN

Nice to meet you, Billy.

Bill shakes his hand but continues to stare him down.

BILL

It looks like you're trying to do more than just study for a test with Ebony.

Ebony's eyes widen in shock.

EBONY

Billy!

Morgan waves off the comment and laughs it off.

MORGAN

I'm sorry if things looked inappropriate, but I'm not trying to push up on your lady. My lady is coming out of the bathroom too.

Morgan's date walks out of the bathroom and kisses him.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

See? Jasmine, this is my co-worker, Ebony and her man, Bill.

JASMINE

It's nice to meet you guys.

They all exchange pleasantries. Bill looks at Morgan.

BILL

Sorry.

MORGAN

Not a problem. Ebony, see you tomorrow?

EBONY

I'll see you at tomorrow.

They all say their goodbyes and go their separate ways.

INT. BILL AND EBONY'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Bill and Ebony walk into their apartment and Bill is visibly mad.

EBONY

C'mon, Billy, I got enough going on. Are you going to be salty with me the rest of the night?

BILL

Nope.

They walk to their bedroom.

EBONY

Does this mean you're not going to have me for dessert?

Bill smirks.

They engage in an intense sex session and Bill seems determined to make sure he pleases Ebony. Ebony is loving every moment of it but images of Morgan keep creeping into her head.

INT. BILL AND EBONY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Bill and Ebony are watching TV, post-coital. A segment about Johnny comes on. Bill stews at the footage of his reality show. Johnny is acting like a role model.

EBONY

...Billy, are you even listening to me?

BILL

I'm sorry, baby. Thinking about this case got me stressing.

EBONY

I knew something had to be on your mind. You worried that guy Ben is going to win his case?

BILL

Nah, I'm sure I can win but I don't know if I should. Seeing this dickhead acting like a role model is fucking with me.

EBONY

Huh, why wouldn't you want to win?

BILL

During prep for trial, Johnny slipped and admitted to me he raped the stripper. I can win, but I hate knowing that he's guilty.

EBONY

(disgusted)

What? Are you telling me you know he did it?

(off his silence)

WOW! You not saying anything, speaks volumes, Billy.

(off his stammering)

I know making partner is a dream of yours, but is it worth your soul? Here's some food for thought. If he rapes her and gets away with it, do you think he'll stop or keep doing it?

(off his look)

If he gets away with this, he'll rape more black women, and every time he does, he'll come back to you to help get him off. That girl might not be smart, she might've picked the wrong profession, but she's still a black woman.

(beat)

That could've easily been me in her predicament. What would you say if someone violated me and had a lawyer like you that set him free?

BILL

(reaching for her)

Baby-

(off her recoil)

Come on, baby. I'm having a hard time dealing with this as it is. I just need you to understand and give me a little support.

EBONY

Well, you're not going to get any support from me. From what you told me about Ben, I expected this from him, but not you. Do you know why this hurts me so much?

(off his silence)

It hurts because you know better. You've seen first hand how white men with power abuse it and prey on black people.

(MORE)

EBONY (CONT'D)

You saw my brother lose his life because of a racist monster. You swore you'd be a lawyer to fight against guys like that, but now you're defending one. This whole situation makes me see you in an entirely new light.

BILL

Look, I'm doing this for us. I'm trying to get my mom into a home that can take care of her full-time, so she's not a burden on your mom and Mrs. Wilson. I'm trying to put money together so I can marry you can give you the wedding you deserve.

EBONY

You ever heard the verse Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial? You should apply that to your life.

BILL

What's that from?

EBONY

The Bible. First Corinthians ten twenty-three, you heathen. You need to keep it in mind when you try to justify your stance on defending that asshole. You know damn well your momma wouldn't want to go to a cushy place knowing what you'd have to do to pay for it, and if it means ruining another black woman's life to get my dream wedding, I don't want that either. I'd rather go to city hall and marry you there, but I don't know if I could do that now that I see you're selling soul to the devil.

BILL

I'm still gathering all the facts. For all I know, she might've had this shit planned too.

EBONY

Stop trying to justify it, Billy. You know.

(MORE)

EBONY (CONT'D)

Even if you try to convince
yourself otherwise, your conscience
is telling you that you're wrong.

BILL

Yes, I know he's guilty. Yes, I
know morally it's wrong to defend
him, but this is my job, and
winning this case can open a lot of
doors for us when I make partner.

He reaches for her again, and she recoils, again.

EBONY

Don't touch me.

She gets up and starts packing a bag.

BILL

Where are you going?

EBONY

You need some time to get yourself
together, and I need to figure out
if I can live with myself being
with you after you crucify that
poor black woman. Some food for
thought for you. Is this case and
your career worth losing me? I know
how I am, and if you win, you might
fool the world, but I'd always
know, and I'd blame you like it was
your fault. I'd eventually grow to
hate you because of it. Would you
be ok with that?

(off his head shake)

I didn't think so. You call me when
you get your head right.

Ebony storms out. He watches her exit the house from the
window.

INT. EBONY'S CAR - LATE NIGHT

Ebony is speeding. She dials Morgan's phone but there's no
answer. She hangs up and dials again.

INT. INTERCUT EBONY/MORGAN. - LATE NIGHT

EBONY

Hey...Sorry to call you so
late...or early.

Morgan yawns.

MORGAN
It's cool. What's up?

EBONY
I had a fight with Billy and I need
someone to talk with that'll help
me make a logical decision. Can we
meet up somewhere and talk?

MORGAN
Yeah. Stop by my place.

EBONY
...I just want to talk.

MORGAN
I know.

INT. MORGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Morgan answers the door wearing basketball shorts with no
shirt on and escorts Ebony to his couch.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Morgan sits listening to Ebony as she talks.
- Morgan moves in closer, Ebony eyes him but keeps talking.
- Ebony sits with her head in her hands. Morgan starts to
rub her back.
- Morgan leans in and kisses her neck.

END SERIES OF SHOTS.

EBONY
(pulling away)
What are you doing?

He grabs her hand and puts it on top of his hard-on.

MORGAN
You see what you do to me. I want
you. I know you want me too so
let's stop playing games.

EBONY
I can't.

MORGAN

You can't, or you won't?

EBONY

Both. I love Billy...I shouldn't be here right now. I'm too emotional.

MORGAN

Spend the night with me.

EBONY

I'm still with Bill. I'm starting to think all you want to do is fuck me.

MORGAN

(frustrated)

Why are you here this early in the morning if you're not trying to fuck?

EBONY

I told you from the jump that I need someone to talk --

MORGAN

-- Do I look like one of your fucking girlfriends? You come here at this time and think I just want to talk? You're staying faithful to a fucking white boy who defends men who rape black women?

(beat)

You know what? Get the fuck out. I wasted enough time on you, you fucking tease.

EXT. MORGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ebony rushes to her car and pulls out of the driveway.

INT. EBONY'S MOM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT [LATER]

Mrs. Williams answers the door and Ebony walks in.

MRS. WILLIAMS

We'll, isn't this a surprise.

Ebony gives her mother a kiss on the cheek

EBONY

Hey, mom.

MRS. WILLIAMS

What brings you here today? I haven't seen you in a least a month. You barely even sent me a text after you were involved in that arrest with that crazy rapper that killed all those people. You only stop by unexpected like this when something is wrong. So, what's wrong.

EBONY

That's not true, and please don't ask, ma.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Oh, this has to do with you and Billy. What's going on? Y'all had a fight?

EBONY

Something like that. I just need a place to cool off.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Well, you know I'm not gonna stop until you talk about it.

Ebony looks at her.

EBONY (V.O.)

I knew I shouldn't have come here but, she was right. She wouldn't stop asking me what was wrong until I gave in and told her, and it was also true...I usually stopped by unexpectedly like this when I had a problem and wanted advice without actually asking for it.

Ebony sighs and shakes her head.

EBONY

Be honest. Do you sometimes wish Billy were Black?

MRS. WILLIAMS

I won't lie. Sometimes, but I love him. What's got you asking that question?

EBONY (V.O.)

I broke down and told her about my stress with Morgan, and Billy's case. She nodded and took in every word.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Baby girl, listen and listen good. Billy loves you. He treats you like a queen, and you've both been bringing out the best in each other since you were kids. When I see the way he looks at you, I think back, and I've never had a man look at me with the same passion I see in his eyes for you.

Ebony smiles and nods.

MRS. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

When I was young, I turned down a lot of good men who were going places for your father. Don't get me wrong. The best thing to come out of that relationship was you and your brother, may he rest in peace, but I put off those good men because I was excited and curious about being with a bad boy.

Ebony is listening intently to her mother's words.

MRS. WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

The only thing that curiosity got me was him deserting us. Don't let go of something good to chase something uncertain.

EBONY

I get it, ma, but what about Billy representing that rapist?

MRS. WILLIAMS

I can't defend that, but you have to put the shoe on the other foot. With your job, haven't there been times when you were ordered to do things you didn't totally agree with?

EBONY (V.O.)

I mostly fought against things I didn't believe in, whether it be in work or life in general, but I'll admit there were some times earlier in my career when I questioned some of the things I was ordered to do.

Ebony sighs.

EBONY

I guess...

MRS. WILLIAMS

You might not have wanted to do what you were ordered to do but it was your job, right?

EBONY

Yeah, but I never did anything that could ruin someone's life. I have integrity. That woman could've been you or me. Her life is forever changed because of that guy Billy's representing and now, he's going to get the guy off?

Ebony is emotional and Mrs. Williams looks at her with sad eyes and hugs her daughter.

EBONY (CONT'D)

Say I stay with him, and he wins this case. My thoughts would always take me back to that woman. I know how I am. I'd end up hating Billy for it. Mama, I love him, but this is a deal breaker for me.

MRS. WILLIAMS

What do you plan on doing?

EBONY

I wanted to stay with you at least until the trial is over so I can think.

MRS. WILLIAMS

And then what?

EBONY

If he loses, I think we can work it out, but if he wins...Hopefully, I'm strong enough to end things quickly.

MRS. WILLIAMS

You know this is always home for you, but I hope you and Billy can get through this.

EBONY

Me too, mama. Me, too.

INT. BILL AND EBONY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Bill is tossing and turning. He opens his eyes and sees Ebony packing more clothes.

BILL

What are you doing?

EBONY

I'm staying with my mom until I figure out where our relationship is going.

BILL

Ebony --

EBONY

-- No, Billy. I can't stay here and sleep next to you every night knowing that you're working hard to defend a rapist.

BILL

Are you leaving me?

EBONY

I don't know. I have too much shit going on right now. Once your case is over, we'll talk.

Ebony leaves.

INT. JERROD'S OFFICE - DAY

Francis and Bill are sitting opposite Jerrod's desk. Francis clasps his hands together.

BILL

You said you had something to show us?

JERROD

Yeah. Check this shit out.

Jerrod turns his computer monitor to face them. The cameras for all the club are on the screen.

Jerrod clicks a button and the footage plays: It shows Sophia having sex with a man in the VIP room.

JERROD (CONT'D)

Look at the date. She's running tricks. Don't get me wrong. I love the money she's drawing to my business, but I don't need her skanky ass bringing the heat back on my business.

FRANCIS

You're doing the right thing!

(to Bill)

With this video, we got this case in the bag!

Bill's cell phone buzzes. He glances at it.

BILL

Sorry, I'll be quick.

(into phone)

Mrs. Williams, I'm a little busy right now. I gotta call you --

MRS. WILLIAMS

-- Billy, your momma's gone.

BILL

What?

MRS. WILLIAMS

I'm sorry, baby. She just passed a few minutes ago.

Bill drops the phone.

BEGIN MONTAGE: *Loss*

A) INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Bill is with Mrs. Williams arranging everything for his mom's funeral.

B) INT. POLICE PRECINCT - DAY

Ebony is back to work. She looks at the screensaver on her phone showing a picture of her and Bill. She sees Morgan who rolls his eyes at her. She gives him the finger.

C) INT. BILL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Bill is sitting in his living room, watching "The Dark Knight" on TV and looking over his case file.

HARVEY DENT (ON SCREEN)
You either die a hero or live long
enough to see yourself become the
villain.

That line hits Bill like a truck. He looks up, realization in his eyes.

D) INT. POLICE PRECINCT - DAY

Ebony is in a room taking her Lieutenant's test. She looks at the screensaver of her and Bill on her phone again and gets started with her test.

E) EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Bill is at the funeral. Ebony stands next to him and holds his hand. Bill breaks down and weeps. Ebony consoles him, but once he calms down, she lets his hand go, kisses him on the cheek and leaves. He is left standing alone.

END MONTAGE

INT. BRONX COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom is packed with MEDIA MEMBERS and their cameras. Richard sitting in the audience.

JUDGE NORRIS enters.

BAILIFF
All rise.

JUDGE NORRIS
Please introduce yourselves to the
court.

BRONX DA
Bronx county District Attorney,
Anthony Rodriguez, and Assistant
District Attorney Kenneth Ellis for
the City of New York.

BILL
(standing)
William O'Neil and Francis Lincoln
of Wayne, Rothstein, and Lincoln.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-- Bill looks noticeably irritated by all the cameras in the courtroom.

-- One by one, the DA has dancers testifying. Bill checks the jury.

-- Johnny is slumped in a chair unmoved by their testimonies and shows a nonchalant attitude.

-- Sophia takes the stand.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Sophia sits after taking the stand.

BRONX DA

Ms. Winters, I know it's uncomfortable, but can you please tell us what happened during your encounter with Mr. Alfieri?

SOPHIA

Yes. I was working late that night...

As Sophia begins to speak, her voice trails off into complete silence.

SLOW MOTION:

As Sophia's mouth moves, Bill scans the courtroom, assessing the effect of Sophia's testimony on the jury.

As Bill brings his eyes back to the defense table, He sees Johnny subtly rubbing the inside of his pant leg underneath the defense table, and he's clearly aroused.

Bill looks around the courtroom. Nobody else can see what Alfieri is doing. Bill is fighting his rage, clearing his throat. Johnny quickly returns his hands to the table. Bill looks away in disgust.

END SLOW MOTION

Sophia finishes her testimony, many of the JURORS are in tears.

BRONX DA

I have no further questions, Your Honor.

Bill stands and approaches Sophia, handing her a tissue.

SOPHIA
(dabbing her eyes)
Thank you.

BILL
It's no problem.
(and then)
Ms. Winters, you work at J's
Gentlemen's Quarters, is that
correct?

SOPHIA
Yes.

BILL
What kind of business is that?

SOPHIA
It's a gentlemen's club.

BILL
Is it safe to say another name for
a gentlemen's club would be a strip
club.

SOPHIA
Uh, I guess some people would call
it that.

BILL
What's your occupation there?

SOPHIA
I'm a dancer.

BILL
When you're dancing, are you
usually naked?

SOPHIA
...Yes.

BILL
Is it safe to say, you're an erotic
dancer.

SOPHIA
...Yes.

BILL
Ms. Winters, answer this question
truthfully, and remember, you're
under oath.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

Have you engaged in sexual activity with customers at the strip club after your allegations against my client?

(off her nod)

The answer is not clear.

SOPHIA

(quietly)

Yes.

A collective WHISPER comes from those in the jury.

BILL

Ms. Winters, do you enjoy sex?

SOPHIA

Wh-what?

BILL

Do you enjoy having sex with a charming, handsome man?

DA

(standing)

Objection! Irrelevant, Your Honor.

BILL

Your Honor, the question goes to motive.

JUDGE

Overruled. Ms. Winters, please answer the question.

SOPHIA

Yeah, I enjoy sex.

BILL

Did you enjoy the intimacy with Mr. Alfieri?

SOPHIA

No, I didn't.

BILL

Mr. Alfieri paid you for your time with him in the VIP room, did he not?

SOPHIA

He did.

BILL
What did you do with the money he
left you with?

SOPHIA
I kept it.

BILL
Can you repeat that, please?

SOPHIA
(looking down)
I said I kept the money.

BILL
Isn't it true that you didn't agree
to go to the VIP room with him
until after he informed you of his
profession?

SOPHIA
(tearing up)
Yes, but --

BILL
-- Ms. Winters, have you ever been
arrested?

SOPHIA
(shaking)
Yes, I've been arrested.

BILL
What charges have you been arrested
for in the past?

Sophia looks down but doesn't answer.

JUDGE
Will the witness please answer the
question?

SOPHIA
Prostitution and soliciting
prostitution.

BILL
(clearing throat)
How many times have you been
arrested for those charges?

SOPHIA
Four times.

The jury and the crowd TALK AMONG THEMSELVES.

Sophia starts sobbing.

JUDGE

We'll take a fifteen-minute recess.

Alfieri and Richard share a happy smile. Richard goes to Bill. He taps Bill's shoulder and points at Sophia who is being consoled by her lawyer while she sobs. Bill storms out.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Bill crashes through the door and throws cold water on his face, then stares at his reflection. The door opens. Francis enters and uses the urinal.

FRANCIS

(laughing)

You had that girl on the ropes.

He finishes and washes his hands.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

I loved how you played on her last arrest. It left her speechless! I think the jury sees now that she's just a money-grubbing whore that's just looking for her ten seconds of fame.

Bill continues to look at his reflection.

BILL

He's guilty. I know he's guilty. He told me he raped her and he doesn't give a shit about it.

(off his unconcerned
reaction)

This isn't like other cases where my clients were just using a loop hole in the system, or I had an idea they might be guilty but didn't know for sure. I know he raped that woman.

FRANCIS

Calm down. You're getting yourself worked up over nothing. So what if he's guilty? You're a lawyer. It's never been about if our clients are right or wrong, lying or telling the truth.

(MORE)

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

The truth is not as important as what you can persuade the jury to believe, and the secret to disguising a lie to the jury is to mirror it with the truth.

BILL

How can I defend that man knowing the truth?

FRANCIS

Are you fucking kidding me right now? Are you really asking that question? This is your fucking job - that's how.

BILL

I went into law to do the right thing and defend those who really need it.

FRANCIS

Spare me the bullshit. You want to be some fucking hero? Quit the firm and go back to being a public defender. Go ahead and help all the little niggers and spics with their legal problems and make crumbs for a living. You're not sounding like partnership material right now, and the way you're acting under pressure, you're making me question if you're competent enough to continue working at this firm. Get your shit together, put a smile on your fucking face, march in that courtroom, and do your fucking job. The firm is expecting you to pull off a win.

Bill storms out.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY [LATER]

Bill stands.

BILL

The defense would like to call Mr. Jerrod Jefferson to the stand.

Jerrod walks to the stand and is sworn in.

BILL (CONT'D)

Mr. Jefferson, were you working on the night in question?

JERROD

Yeah, I was there.

BILL

Do you remember seeing Ms. Winters that night?

JERROD

Yeah, she was working.

BILL

After the incident, how was Ms. Winter's behavior?

JERROD

She wasn't happy, but most women aren't after fucking guys for money.

Many in the courtroom laugh. The Judge BANGS HIS GAVEL.

JUDGE

Order! Mr. Jefferson, refrain from using that language in my courtroom or you'll be placed in contempt.

JERROD

Sorry. She wasn't happy.

BILL

Did she seem sad or distraught?

JERROD

If she was, she got over it quickly, because she was giving lap dances later that night.

BILL

Why did you decide to put cameras all around your business?

JERROD

To try to stop these bit-girls from sleeping with the customers.

BILL

Other than the night in question, do you know if Ms. Winters slept with customers after her allegations against my client?

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Objection, Your Honor.

BILL
Your Honor, again, this shows
motive.

JUDGE
Overruled.

JERROD
Yup, she slept with close to ten
guys afterward. I'm not trying to
get in trouble for her
bull...actions, so I made sure to
document it and report it.

BILL
If the Judge will allow, I'd like
to show the jury a video of Ms.
Winters in one of the VIP rooms
after she made claims that my
client raped her.

JUDGE
You may show the jury the video.

The projector screen illuminates on the faces of the jurors
as they watch Sophia riding a white man in a suit.

CLOSE ON: The JUROR'S FACES as moans are heard coming from
the video and what sounds like naked flesh slapping against
each other.

The DA squirms in his seat. Sophia is sobbing with her head
in her hands.

PRE-LAP: The SOUND of a champagne bottle POPPING OPEN.

INT. LAW FIRM - EVENING

Francis, Johnny, Paul, and Greg hold their glasses up. Bill
is off by himself at a window looking out over the city.

FRANCIS
Tomorrow, we'll put Johnny on the
stand, and that'll put the nail in
the coffin, for Sapphire Bill
crushed her today.

Johnny, Greg and Paul laugh. Bill turns.

BILL

I don't think we should put him on the stand.

A face-off ensues.

JOHNNY

(to Francis)

I don't like the way your boy looks at me.

FRANCIS

Don't mind him. He just has his game face on. Let's hear him out. Why not, Bill?

BILL

His cockiness is going to be his downfall. Just looking at the jury's faces whenever they see him at the defense table, I already know they're not feeling him. All it takes is for Johnny to slip up and say one bad thing, and it'll undo everything we did today. We did everything we needed to do. We gave the jury enough to get the verdict.

FRANCIS

You worry too much. Once we tell the jury about all of Johnny's community service and charity work, they'll be eating out of his hand.

Francis goes back to laughing with Johnny's people while Johnny walks up to Bill, grabs him by the forearm, and leans in.

JOHNNY

(whispering)

After I beat this case, maybe I'll pay your girl a visit. I'll give her the same treatment I gave this bitch!

Bill punches Johnny.

BILL

Fuck you!

Francis's eyes grow wide. He rushes toward Bill and jabs his index finger in his chest.

FRANCIS

Are you fucking crazy? What the hell is the matter with you? You never assault a client.

(turns to Alfieri)

Are you all right, Mr. Alfieri? I apologize for this.

Francis turned to Johnny who was still holding his jaw

ALFIERI

He's fucking done. I want him gone. There's no way he's representing me anymore.

FRANCIS

That's no problem, sir. We'll find you another attorney right away.

(turns to Bill)

Clear out your fucking office. You're fired. You better hope and pray you didn't ruin everything and I can convince him to stick with our firm.

(to Johnny)

Again, I'm so sorry about this. Do you want to press charges?

JOHNNY

Nah, fuck him. I don't need this shit leaking out that he sucker punched me. It'll hurt my rep.

FRANCIS

You're lucky he's not asking to have you fucking arrested. He ought to sue your ass for assault. Get out of my fucking sight.

Bill opens the door and Francis immediately slams it behind him.

INT. BEN'S OFFICE - EVENING

MARK opens Ben's Office door and walks in without knocking.

MARK

Did you hear your boy Bill had a meltdown?

BEN

What?

MARK

Bill punched his client in the face
in front of his agent and Francis.

BEN

You gotta be kidding me.

MARK

Nope, Francis fired him on the
spot. Bill is in clearing his
office now. I just got assigned the
Alfieri case. I've been following
it. He had this case in the bag.
Between me winning all the cases I
got from you and inheriting this
gem from Bill, you guys are making
me look like a superstar.

(laughs)

Look, do me a favor. Your case
sounds like a dead end. Don't go
punching your client in the face
now. I have a good winning streak
going on, and I don't want to ruin
it.

Mark leaves without closing Ben's office door. Ben stands to
close it but see's Mrs. Wilson, tearing up and releasing Bill
from a hug. Bill walks past Ben.

BILL

Good luck to you.

INT. FRONT DESK - EVENING

Ben approaches Mrs. Wilson who is dabbing her eyes with a
tissue.

BEN

What's going on?

MRS. WILSON

Francis just fired Bill. That
ballplayer he was representing said
something sick about doing the same
thing he did to that stripper to
Bill's girlfriend and Bill punched
him.

BEN

I'm sorry to hear that.

Mrs. Wilson nods and dabs her eyes with a tissue.

BEN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Wilson?

MRS. WILSON

Yes, Mr. Turner.

BEN

If you don't mind me asking, why are you so close with Bill? I see you two chatting every morning and you're emotional about him being fired. What's that about?

MRS. WILSON

I've known him since he was a little boy. Billy is like a son to me. He grew up in my neighborhood and went to school with my oldest son. They're still best friends to this day.

BEN

Bill lived in Queensbridge?

MRS. WILSON

Yes. His mom still lived there. He visited almost everyday. I know you probably thought he was some privileged racist white man but Billy's a good guy. I watched him grow up and he's never changed. Once he finished law school and had a decent case record, I convinced the partners to give him a job.

BEN

You got him his job here?

MRS. WILSON

Yes. I've been here for years, and let's just say...the partners owed me one. Bill's tough though. I know he'll land on his feet.

BEN

Thank you, Mrs. Wilson.

MRS. WILSON

For what, Mr. Turner?

BEN

For helping me see how close-minded I was towards Bill. Well, I'm going to see if he wants to grab a bite.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

We should talk like this more often.

MRS. WILSON

(smiling)

I'd like that.

Ben jogs towards the elevators.

INT. ELEVATOR - EVENING [MOMENTS LATER]

Bill waits for the elevator holding a box. The elevator door opens. Bill enters. Just as the door closes, Ben gets on.

BILL

Look, if you came to gloat, save it.

BEN

I'm not here to heckle you. I wanted to let you know I'm sorry you got let go.

BILL

Thanks.

BEN

I need a break. You want to get a bite to eat? It's on me.

BILL

Why are you acting nice all of a sudden? We've worked together for years, and we've rarely ever talked.

BEN

Between this case, things going in my life, and talking to Mrs. Wilson today, I realized I need to stop judging people before I get to know them. I thought you were an elitist who acted like he cared for minorities. I was wrong, and I apologize.

BILL

It's cool. I thought you were a boujie douchebag.

Both of them laugh.

BILL (CONT'D)
I'll take you up on that offer.

INT. DINER - EVENING [LATER]

Ben and Bill sit at table talking over their food.

BILL
I heard the fucked up jokes the partners used to say about you not being black enough. I used to get it too. They used to say I tried to act black. A lot of people think like that, but I'm just being me.

BEN
I see that now. This murder case is showing me a lot of things.

BILL
Mine did too and I seriously wish I never got it. I lost my mom, my job, and my woman while handling this case.

BEN
Again, sorry about your mom. I know how you feel though. I'm always fighting with Becky because she feels like I'm neglecting her.

BILL
I'd rather Ebony feel like I'm neglecting her than to think I'm a secret racist. She felt betrayed because I was defending Alfieri when I knew for a fact he raped that woman. I didn't want to defend that asshole but I was trying to make a better life for her and my mom. I hope I didn't completely lose her.

BEN
I'm sure she knows that.
(and then)
What do you love about Ebony?

BILL
Since day one, I always felt like we were a team. We've been together since we were kids.
(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

(Bill leans in, lowering
his voice)

She's the only woman I've ever been
with and she the only one I want.
She's smart, determined, and when
she puts her mind to something, she
can do anything. She makes me step
my game up. What about you?

BEN

With Becky and me, it's always been
us against the world. Her parents
hate me and mine aren't too fond of
her but truthfully, she balances me
out. She still surprises me
everyday and I couldn't picture my
life without her.

Both men nod.

INT. MRS. WILLIAM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mrs. Williams opens the door to let Bill in.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Hey, Billy. How are you, baby?

BILL

I'm good. Is Ebony here?

MRS. WILLIAMS

No. She said she was going out for
some fresh air. She's been really
depressed lately, and I don't know
where she goes when she gets like
that.

BILL

I think I know where she is. I'll
find her.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I hope you two work everything out.

BILL

Me too.

EXT. QUEENSBRIDGE PARK - EVENING

Bill finds Ebony sitting on a park bench.

BILL

Hey.

EBONY

How did you know I'd be here?

BILL

You and Akeem would always come here when you needed to think.

(off her silence)

I'm sorry about everything.

EBONY

I'm sorry too. I had a lot of things going on. Between studying for my test and shit going on at work, your situation amplified everything that was pissing me off and stressing me out.

BILL

I know that feeling. Did you pass your test?

EBONY

Yeah. I'm going to be a Lieutenant.

BILL

See, I knew you would.

EBONY

What about you? Did you get him off?

BILL

I got removed from the case. I could've won, but I lost it when he whispered in my ear that he wanted to do the same thing to you that he did to that girl. I punched his ass and realized I couldn't live with myself if I helped him get away with raping that girl.

EBONY

(smiling)

That's my man! I'm proud of you for sticking to your morals.

BILL

I got fired today, Ebony.

EBONY

Why? What about everything you wanted?

BILL

If I stayed there, I'd be right back to handling cases I didn't agree with, and that isn't why I got into law. Most importantly, working there would've pushed you further away from me. You're my world, and I couldn't risk losing you.

Ebony hugs and kisses him.

EBONY

I'm sorry. I know how hard you worked to rise in that firm. What are you going to do about everything?

BILL

I honestly don't know. I'm sure I can find another firm, but before I do anything, I need to ask you a question.

EBONY

What's the question?

Bill gets down on one knee and opens the black ring box.

BILL

Ebony, will you marry me?

Ebony excitedly nods her head.

EBONY

Yes!

He places the ring on her finger and the kiss and hug.

BILL (V.O.)

I wasn't sure what the future held for us, but I knew I could face anything as long as I had Ebony in my life.

INT. BECKY'S PARENT'S MANSION - EVENING

Ben and Becky are her parents' annual party.

MRS. PRESTON

(to a guest)

My incredibly talented daughter was recently offered a lucrative publishing deal for one of her novels. It should be in bookstores all around the country by...

(to Becky)

I'm sorry, when dear?

BECKY

In two weeks, on Valentine's day.

WOMAN 1

What is your book about, Rebecca?

BECKY

It's a fictional story about the trials and tribulations of being in a relationship.

WOMAN 2

(gesturing to Ben)

And who is this handsome young man?

MRS. PRESTON

This is...Rebecca's, uh...boyfriend, Ben. He graduated from Columbia University with Rebecca, and he's been a lawyer with Wayne, Rothstein, and Lincoln for the past nine years. He's being considered for a partnership with the firm and he's handling that big case with that rapper that murdered the four people.

The guests nod and smile. Ben picks up a wine goblet and taps a fork with it. Everyone stops and looks at him.

BEN

Everyone, I have something I need to do, and I'd like everyone's attention.

BECKY

Babe, what are you doing?

Ben gets on one knee and pulls a velvet ring box out of his pants pocket.

Becky covers her mouth and immediately starts nodding.

BEN

Rebecca, you've been supportive, loyal, and honest with me since we started dating. We've faced a lot of obstacles, but like you told me when we first made things official, 'I love you, and you're worth fighting for.' Will you continue to fight with me for our love forever? Will you marry me, baby?

BECKY

Yes!

She cups his face and kisses him. The people at the party are all CHEERING for them but Mr. Preston is seething.

MR. PRESTON

Enough! You've embarrassed this family enough by turning my daughter into a damn nigger lover, and I won't let this go any further. I already told you there'd be no way in fucking hell I'd let my daughter marry you.

BECKY

Daddy!

MR. PRESTON

Rebecca, your mother and I love you, but this shit ends tonight. You have to chose right now. If you marry him, you'll be dead to your mother and me. You'll never see another dime from us. If you leave him now, I promise we'll always take care of you, but you have to make a choice now.

BECKY

Dad, this isn't funny. You can't be serious.

MR. PRESTON

I'm not kidding. If you say yes to him, your trust fund will be cut off first thing tomorrow morning. That I promise you.

BECKY

That's not fair. I love him. If you force me to make that decision, you know I'll choose Ben.

MRS. PRESTON

Can you take this conversation to the study? I think we've embarrassed our family enough in front of our company.

MR. PRESTON

My study. Now!

There's a chorus of GASPS and MURMURS from the guests as Becky and Ben follow Mr. Preston out of the room.

INT. STUDY - SAME

Mr. Preston SLAMS THE DOOR behind them.

MR. PRESTON

I'm so sick of your people trying to take everything. I will not allow you to take my daughter. You will never be a part of my family.

Becky wedges herself between Ben and Mr. Preston.

BEN

Becky, I think it would be best if we broke up.

Becky freezes at that statement. She holds Ben's hand.

BECKY

What? Baby, you don't mean that.

BEN

I do. I never wanted to put you in a position where you'd have to choose between your family and me. They're important to you, and I won't be the cause of you losing your family and trust fund. I love you and I know you love me, but I have to make this decision for you. We can't be together anymore, Becky. I'm sorry.

Ben lets go of her hand and Becky bursts into tears. Ben hesitates at this, but walks toward the door.

BEN (CONT'D)

I'm going home.

MR. PRESTON

I think that would be for the best.

Becky calls Ben's name over and over as he leaves.

INT. BECKY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Becky is crying hysterically looking out the window.

MR. PRESTON

Oh, let him go, Rebecca. You're better off without him. What's done is done. Give me your cell phone and take off that damn ring.

Becky flings the phone at him and places her ring on her dresser.

MR. PRESTON (CONT'D)

You don't need these anymore. Tomorrow, I'll go with some movers to his place to get your things and give him back this ring.

BECKY

Are you happy now? Do you feel good about yourself now that you finally drove him away?

MR. PRESTON

Honey! I don't like seeing you in pain, but I did this for your own good.

Mr. Preston closes the door and Becky lays down, crying.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Becky is balled up on the floor surrounded by empty liquor bottles, eating ice cream out of the carton, watching TV.

MRS. PRESTON

(disgusted)

Jesus, Rebecca, you look ghastly. Stop being so dramatically pathetic and pull yourself together.

Becky sticks out her ice-cream-covered tongue at her.

MRS. PRESTON (CONT'D)

I'm off to my tennis lesson. Enjoy wallowing in your sorrow.

As Mrs. Preston is leaving the living room, an extra-chipper Mr. Preston kisses her goodbye.

MR. PRESTON

I had the movers take all your things from his place, so you'll never have to go there again.

BECKY

Was he there when you got them?

MR. PRESTON

Nope!

BECKY

Where's my ring?

MR. PRESTON

I left it on the counter with your keys. Rebecca, stop worrying about that stupid ring. That nightmare of a relationship with Ben is over. Do yourself a favor and move on.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-- Ben comes home to see all of Becky's things gone and her keys on the counter next to the ring he just gave her. He looks pained by the sight.

-- Becky is sitting at her cubicle at work, staring at her blank monitor.

-- Ben is in his office looking at the screensaver on his cellphone of him and Becky. He forces himself to focus and goes back to working on his case.

-- Becky is sitting in her room crying while staring at pictures on her phone of her and Ben together.

-- Ben is running outside to clear his head he passes by a bookstore and see's a banner for Becky's book.

-- Becky is in the living room crying while her parents shake their heads.

-- Ben is in bed staring at the ceiling unable to sleep.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ben is running a highlighter on some documents when his DOORBELL RINGS. He answer the door-- it's Gabby.

GABBY
Hey, Big head.

BEN
Hey.

They hug and walk to the living room.

GABBY
You're at this nonstop, huh?

BEN
I need this win.

GABBY
I feel you, but give it a break for now.

Ben flips through the channels and turns on a basketball game.

GABBY (CONT'D)
Stop looking so sad. Ugh, I'm sick of you harping over Becky. Get over it.

Ben looks at her and shakes his head, keeping his comments to himself.

GABBY (CONT'D)
You need to drop this whole woe-is-me bullshit. I'm here. You don't need to be thinking about another woman. Think back in the day when it used to be just you and me. We used to hang out alone like this all the time. Remember when we were kids and you used to write me love letters?

BEN
(laughing)
Yup. You used to correct the grammar in them and hand them back to me.

They laugh.

GABBY
You ever wonder how things would've turned out if we gave us a try back in college?

BEN

Time has changed us. We're not the same people we were back then. It's not healthy wondering about the what if's with us. Besides, we would've fought all the time in a relationship.

GABBY

That's a shitty thing to say.

BEN

That sounded worse than I meant it to, but it's true. Your tongue can be real sharp and hurtful sometimes.

GABBY

Sorry, but I'm not Willy Wonka. I don't sugarcoat shit. I'm not the coddling type. I don't cry at weddings or sappy movies, and I damn sure don't tell people they're good when they suck. With me, at least you know I'm always straight with you. Wouldn't you want a woman that is going to be honest with you?

BEN

You can be honest without being brutal.

GABBY

I don't have time to stroke egos. If a man is too weak to handle me being real, that's on him.

BEN

And that's your fucking problem, Gabby. I'm not asking you to be fake or baby a man, but you should have some tact. You're not uplifting, and if you want to have a lasting relationship, you need to work on that.

GABBY

Who says I have a problem or need to work on anything?

BEN

Your dating history does. No one is ever good enough for you.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

You find faults in everything. You block yourself from being happy. I'm going to tell you something not to be mean, but as your best friend who cares. I'm not telling you to lower your standards, but if you don't get it through your head that no guy is ever going to meet every expectation you have, you're going to end up a lonely, bitter old woman.

Gabby scowls and opens her mouth to say something, but doesn't. She nods, kissing him on the cheek.

GABBY

Thank you. I needed to hear that.

(beat)

I had a long day. Make me a drink, Big head.

BEN

I think I got some Captain Morgan in the kitchen. You want a rum and Coke?

Gabby nods. Ben goes to the kitchen to make her drink. When he comes back a trail of clothing is sprawled out on the floor. Ben follows the trail of clothes to his...

BEDROOM:

He sees Gabby naked on his bed. Ben gulps down her drink. Gabby laughs.

GABBY

Why don't you come over here and let me relieve some of that stress you have?

BEN

Gabby, I can't. It's too soon.

GABBY

(angrily)

What? I know you're not gonna pass this up, pining over some silly white girl.

(off his silence)

Becky is gone.

(MORE)

GABBY (CONT'D)

She made her choice, and like I've always told you, when it came time for her to choose between you and her cushy life, she wanted her life.

BEN

She didn't choose. I made the choice for her.

GABBY

You did, but where is she, Ben? You told me yourself, she left her key and engagement ring on the counter, right? I don't get it, Ben. What does she have that I don't? I'm practically throwing myself at you, and you're dismissing me like I'm not shit.

BEN

Gabby, I'm very attracted to you. You're gorgeous, sexy, and smart, everything I want in a woman, but I'm still dealing with my breakup. My feelings for her have nothing to do with race. I don't think she's better than you, but while I love you and always will, I'm in love with Becky. If we're ever intimate again, I want it to mean something special, not just a rebound thing, like our first time was for you. Until my feelings for her fade, it wouldn't be right for me to fuck you if my heart isn't fully in it. You mean more to me than that, and you know this already.

Gabby quickly starts to dress.

BEN (CONT'D)

You going to be okay?

GABBY

Of course, why wouldn't I be?

Gabby puts on her shades, hikes her purse on her shoulders, and storms out.

BEN

Wait!

GABBY

No. I'm not going to play myself
and accept being treated like I'm
second best anymore.

Ben watches as Gabby adjusts her clothes and walks to her car.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - SAME

Becky watches Gabby leave the house, adjusting her clothes.

INT. BILL AND EBONY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Bill and Ebony are in their living room watching Johnny's case on TV.

ON SCREEN:

Johnny is on the stand.

JOHNNY

This bitch --

BRONX DA

-- Objection, Your Honor!

JUDGE

Mr. Alfieri, I advise you to
refrain from calling Ms. Winters
derogatory names. If you do it
again, I'll hold you in contempt.

JOHNNY

I gotcha. Anyway, she wanted me. I
had to push her around a bit at
first...

BRONX DA

I'm sorry, did you say you pushed
her around?

JOHNNY

Yeah, she was trying to pull away
at first, but I wanted her to hear
me out. After we handled our
business, I paid her. If I'm guilty
of anything, it's getting a
prostitute but I didn't rape her.

The jury MURMURS.

BRONX DA

So, Ms. Winters was trying to leave, and you wouldn't let her go until she heard you out and complied with what you wanted?

JOHNNY

You know how black people can be. They're stubborn.

The jury and audience COLLECTIVELY GASP.

ON SCREEN [LATER]:

The LEAD JUROR stands.

LEAD JUROR

We find the defendant, Johnny Alfieri, guilty of all charges.

JOHNNY

You can't do this to me!

FRANCIS

It's okay, Johnny. We'll appeal. Just keep quiet.

The COURT OFFICERS are trying to talk Johnny into complying, but he isn't having it. Sophia is crying and Johnny breaks out of the Court Officers grasps and rushes toward her.

JOHNNY

Come here, bitch. You wanna ruin people's lives? I got something for you.

The Judge continuously BANGS HIS GAVEL.

JUDGE

Get him out of here now!

JOHNNY

Fuck this. I'm Johnny Alfieri. Y'all can't convict me because of this nigger bitch's lies. Back in the day, guys like me used to take the pussy for free. At least I paid the bitch!

Johnny is dragged away kicking and screaming. Ebony and Bill laugh and turn the channel.

INT. COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Becky is at her desk and suddenly breaks down crying.

BROOKE

(consoling)

I know you love him, but the best way to get over a broken heart is to find someone new.

BECKY

I don't want anyone else. I want Ben.

BROOKE

Was he that good?

BECKY

What do you mean?

BROOKE

In the sack.

BECKY

This has nothing to do with sex. Is that the only reason you think I'm with him?

BROOKE

Well, why are you so hung up on him? It's not like Gabby or Simone are around. You can be honest. He's Black. Besides him fucking you silly, I can't see why you couldn't easily find a quality white guy to be serious with.

BECKY

Fuck you! You can't find a decent guy because you're not even a decent person. People are more than just their race.

BROOKE

Oh, don't start saying shit you don't mean.

BECKY

I mean it. You're an ugly, shallow person inside.

BROOKE

And you're a pathetic person inside and out.

(MORE)

BROOKE (CONT'D)

I don't need your white-guilt having ass in my life. Do you want to know why your book wasn't getting picked up? Because no one wants to read about a stupid white woman struggling with her nappy-headed nigger. Your book is going to flop and you won't have me to be your shoulder to cry on anymore. Enjoy your life.

Brooke storms off.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

Ben and Tim are at the defense table with Reggie while Francis and Richard are seated with the public directly behind the defense table.

FRANCIS

You're up, kid. We need you to pull off a miracle. After that Alfieri disaster, we don't need another big negative blow to our firm.

BEN

(waves off)

No pressure.

TIM

Today's the first day of the trial. Things might not look pretty, but don't get discouraged.

REGGIE

I'm cool.

(leans over to Ben)

I'm alone here. None of the executives from my record label are here, not even my manager and my agent. I haven't heard from anyone from the label in two months. I guess they figure I'm finished.

BEN

I'm here with you, and I'm going to do my best to make sure you're acquitted.

BAILIFF

All rise for the Honorable Judge Brewer.

The Judge stepped up to bench and looks over the courtroom.

JUDGE

Please be seated.

Ben stays standing.

BEN

Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, during this case, I want you to think. It's easy to just look at the world in black and white, but life isn't that simple. Life is in color, and sometimes things aren't what they seem at first. Right now, I want you to imagine you're driving and another car is zig zagging through traffic. The driver cuts you off, and you have words with them. Now imagine you and that same car, later on, get into an accident. Now, despite being in that dispute, did you want to be in an accident? Did you want to hurt yourself or that other driver? I'm sure pretty much all of you are saying no. My point is, in that situation you had no intent to harm anyone; you were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

(deep breath)

My client Reginald Brown did argue with two of the victims, but murder them, he did not. He was at the wrong place at the wrong time, and during this trial, I will prove to you that the wrong man was arrested. The killer is still out there, and once I prove that to this jury, I hope everyone does the right thing and acquits Mr. Brown. Thank you.

Ben sits down. DA TORRES stands up from the prosecution table and winks at Ben.

DA TORRES

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the evidence clearly shows the defendant holding the murder weapon with the victim's blood on him. The evidence also shows the defendant's DNA on the trigger, the slide and the grip on the murder weapon.

(MORE)

DA TORRES (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, this case is open and shut. This isn't the movie The Fugitive. There is no one-armed man that committed these grisly murders.

(points at Reggie)

It was that man, Reginald Brown, who did these crimes. The evidence shows that when the first set of police arrived at the crime scene, they were ambushed by the defendant before they could even exit their patrol vehicle.

DA Torres walks over to the evidence table and grabs a gun in a plastic baggie. He walks it to the jury box and continues.

DA TORRES (CONT'D)

The defendant used this weapon to end the lives of two police officers and a happy couple. If convicted of these heinous crimes, we are asking that Mr. Brown receive a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

BEN (V.O.)

The first day was disastrous. The 911 operator, medical examiner, crime scene unit, cops and witnesses were all set to testify. First, the DA called up the emergency operator, who played the chilling 911 calls on the night of the murders. Next, the medical examiner explained how the victims suffered when they died. When the crime scene unit testified, photos from the crime scene of Reggie holding the gun, photos of the slain officers and the couple's bullet-riddled bodies were displayed.

Ben stands up and cross-examines CSI DETECTIVE HARBOR.

BEN

Detective Harbor, were my client's fingerprints found on the murder weapon?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

The gun is ridged, so that makes it extremely difficult to get a fingerprint off it, so to answer your question, no his fingerprints weren't on it.

BEN

Can you please explain to the court the process with which you examined the gun?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

We examined the gun for DNA, and we found Mr. Brown's DNA on the grip and trigger. We used another technique called fuming on the magazine, because sometimes we can find a fingerprint on the magazine.

BEN

And were my client's fingerprints or any other person's fingerprints or DNA found on the weapon?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

Mr. Brown's fingerprints weren't found on the magazine, but his DNA was on the trigger and grip. Another man named Kuwuan Mitchell's fingerprints were found on the magazine, and his DNA was also found on the trigger and grip.

A murmur falls over the crowd.

JUDGE

(slamming gavel)

Order!

BEN

Do we have a description of Kuwuan Mitchell?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

He's a dark-skinned Black male. Approximately six feet and two hundred pounds.

BEN

So, it's safe to say that Kuwuan's description is identical to my client's?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

Your client was at the scene with blood on him, holding the smoking gun. Kuwuan Mitchell has never been arrested for killing people. He's a small-time gun dealer from Harlem.

BEN

That's not what I asked you, Detective Harbor. Now please stop tiptoeing around the question.

DETECTIVE HARBOR

Yes, they look similar.

BEN

Do we know Mr. Kuwuan Mitchell's whereabouts on the night of the murders?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

No.

BEN

Has he been labeled a suspect or questioned about the incident?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

No. No one has seen him around lately.

BEN

So, we have someone who was potentially involved, seeing that his fingerprints and DNA were found on the weapon, yet he hasn't been labeled a suspect, questioned or searched for?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

Correct.

BEN

Could it be that my client's statement is true, and he didn't kill those people, but you and your colleagues want him to take the fall for these murders because it's easier to handle?

DA TORRES

Objection, Your Honor!

JUDGE

Sustained.

BEN

I'll rephrase. Could it be that my client's statement is true about being at the wrong place at the wrong time?

DETECTIVE HARBOR

I highly doubt it.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY [LATER]

JUDGE

This looks like a good place to stop for today. We will reconvene bright and early tomorrow morning at nine. Court is adjourned.

FRANCIS

Ben, relax. We knew the first day would be brutal. Being a successful lawyer is like being a great chess player. You have to study your opponent and use the right strategy. Ben, I have nothing but faith in you to make us all proud and pull out a win for this case.

INT. MANHATTAN COURT ROOM - DAY

BEN (V.O.)

The second day of trial was just as bad as the first. Officer Mendez, the first police officer on the scene that night, was up first on the witness stand, followed by his partner, Officer Mahoney. Bill's girl, Sergeant Ebony Williams, took the stand and told the jury the gruesome details about discovering the victims, and the items on the scene that were vouchered. When she was done, I had no questions to ask her. It just didn't seem right. I could've fired off questions to try to trip her up and make her and the officers seem incompetent, but I couldn't bring myself to do that.

Ebony exits the witness stand and cuts her eyes at Ben.

BEN (V.O.)

When the DA put on the videos from the incident, I knew I had to start being aggressive. I asked the witnesses question after question to trip them up and contradict themselves.

MS. TAYLOR, a party girl, takes the stand.

BEN

(to Taylor)

Ms. Taylor. Are you certain the man you saw that night is my client?

MS. TAYLOR

Absolutely.

BEN

How far would you say you were from Mr. Brown when you witnessed what he allegedly did?

MS. TAYLOR

He was about a block away from me.

BEN

After watching the videos from the incident a few minutes ago, what was the perpetrator wearing?

DA TORRES

Objection, Your Honor.

JUDGE

Overruled.

MS. TAYLOR

All black, I think.

BEN

Did you noticed anything specific the defendant was wearing?

MS. TAYLOR

Nope.

BEN

Was the killer wearing boots or sneakers?

MS. TAYLOR

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

BEN

Was he wearing a hat or not?

MS. TAYLOR

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

BEN

You just watched numerous videos showing the incident a few minutes ago. You can't remember if he wore a hat or what type of shoes he was wearing?

MS. TAYLOR

Nope.

The courtroom falls silent.

Ben walks over to the projector and played the grainy video again. He pauses it on the clip that showed the killer had on a hat and sneakers.

BEN

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can clearly see from the video, the killer was wearing a black and red Chicago Bulls hat with matching sneakers.

Ben walks over to a clear picture of Reggie holding the murder weapon and faces the jury.

BEN (CONT'D)

In this picture, it's clear that my client doesn't have a hat on and he was wearing all black Timberland boots. How is it possible that in a matter of seconds Mr. Brown was able to change his shoes and ditch his hat?

(to Taylor)

I'll ask you again, Ms. Taylor. We watched the video again and you just looked at the picture. Are you certain the man you saw that night was my client?

MS. TAYLOR

(stammering)

I...I don't know.

BEN

No further questions.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY [LATER]

REGGIE

(looking over jury)

Man, these people think I did it. I swear on my life I didn't kill anybody.

BEN

I know you didn't, Reggie, but we need to prove that to the jury.

REGGIE

So, what are you waiting for?

BEN

I'm going to talk to you in a few minutes.

REGGIE

(uncertainty)

A'ight.

Reggie sulks as the Court Officer takes him out of the courtroom.

INT. LAWYER ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ben enters. He sits down across from Reggie and smooths out the stress lines on his forehead.

REGGIE

What's wrong? You don't look like your usual corny self.

BEN

Listen, is there anything else you can tell me about that night? I'm trying to attack this case from every angle but I'm running out of ammunition.

REGGIE

What? What are you saying?

BEN

I'm saying if we don't come up with something big to help prove your innocence, it doesn't look good for us.

REGGIE

Us? They're gonna lock my black ass up for life. You really had me buggin', believing I had a legit shot to be free of this shit. I should've never let you put those bullshit thoughts in my head. It's over for me.

BEN

That's not true, Reggie. I'm trying to help you.

REGGIE

Nah, you don't give a shit about me. You just want to prolong this shit to get paid. I get it. Just let the hood nigga rot in prison for the rest of his life while the oreo lives the high life, huh? You made me think I could have a normal life when this was all over, and I'm the real sucker because I believed you. I've dealt with a lot of hustlers in the street, and none of them got me to buy the shit they were selling like you. You're the smoothest hustler I've ever met.

BEN

Reggie, it's not like that. I'm trying to help you.

REGGIE

Cut the bullshit. From now on, don't talk to me. I got nothing to say to you. I'll sit there in court and wait to hear my guilty verdict.

Reggie stands up fast, letting his chair fall behind him.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Guard!

The guard walks him out. Reggie gives Ben the middle finger with both hands.

INT. BEN'S DAD'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Ben enters and finds his dad sitting playing chess with himself.

BEN

Hey, dad.

MR. TURNER

How was the trial today, son?

BEN

Terrible. Where's mom?

MR. TURNER

Out shopping with Simone. I told them both that I did some investigating on your Aunt Joan and found out that Simone's sister lives in the Bronx and has a successful photography business. They went to the mall to think on whether Simone should go to the business and meet her. I say yes. It's always good to meet your family. But anyway, why was your trial so terrible?

BEN

Reggie thinks I'm not putting my all into defending him, and I'm going to let him rot in prison for life. He believes I'm some boujie Oreo that only dates white women and doesn't care about our people.

MR. TURNER

Son, no one ever said this trial was going to be easy. You're going to have to weather the storm and stay strong.

BEN

Why is it that every black person I meet seems to think the same thing. All my life, I've been either too black for white people or not black enough for our people.

MR. TURNER

Do you feel you're that way? Not black enough?

BEN

No.

MR. TURNER

Son, James Brown once said, A man can't get himself together until he knows who he is, and can be proud of what and who he is and where he comes from. I watched you struggle for years, trying to figure out if you're black enough and hoping to be accepted. Until you love yourself for who you are and what you're about, you'll never find peace.

(off his nod)

You can never forget black history, because it's a part of who you are, and the world will always remind you that you're a black man. But if you make a conscious effort to improve the world and the lives of our people, if you understand the plight that less fortunate people in our race face on a regular basis and seek positive change, then you know in your heart you're black enough. You won't ever have to worry about proving it to another brotha or sista again.

A look of clarity from Ben. He hugs his father.

BEN

Thanks, Dad. You don't know how badly I needed to hear this today.

MR. TURNER

Anytime, son.

INT. CAFE - AFTERNOON

Ben is sitting at a table sipping a cup of coffee.

BEN (V.O.)

I had looked through all of the various video of the outside cameras, briefs, and witness testimonies, but I couldn't find anything that would prove that Reggie was innocent. As a last resort, I went back to the crime scene. After I failed to find anything new, I sat inside this diner.

He packs his things and goes to the CASHIER. While paying his bill, he sees a TV screen with all the surveillance cameras on it. One of the cameras shows an angle that was a blind spot on the other videos he's seen. A flash of thought.

BEN
Excuse me? Are these cameras behind
the register new?

CASHIER
(looks at cameras)
No, we've always had them.

Ben pulls out his cell and leaves in a hurry.

TIM (PHONE)
What's up, Ben?

BEN
I think I found what's missing to
win this case.

INT. BEN'S OFFICE - EVENING

TIM
Right there. Freeze that frame.

ON SCREEN: Frozen on the screen is the image of an unidentified, dark-skinned, black MAN wearing similar clothes as Reggie - but with a red and black hat and matching sneakers.

BEN (O.S)
Continue.

ON SCREEN: The video continues and shows the Man murdering the gay couple and then rushing toward the cop car and killing the policemen. A moment later, Reggie walks out of the club and collides with the killer.

BACK TO SCENE

TIM
Oh my God, I can't believe you're
really going to pull this off. You
did it, Ben!

Ben quickly makes a clip and reaches out to the District Attorney.

INT. MANHATTAN COURT ROOM - DAY

The surveillance video from the diner plays on a large LCD screen. MURMURS in the room.

BEN
Please pause it here.

Ben turns to the Judge.

JUDGE
(slams gavel)
Order in the court! Will the
defendant please rise?

Reggie stands up behind the defendant's table. A smile of relief appears on Reggie's face. The District Attorney comes forward.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Your Honor, due to the newly found evidence that has been presented to us, our office declines to prosecute further and moves to dismiss all charges against the defendant.

JUDGE
It's the court's decision to grant the prosecution's motion to dismiss. All charges against the defendant Reginald Brown are hereby dismissed with prejudice. You're free to go, Mr. Brown.

The audience in the courtroom CHEERS.

EXT. COURT ROOM - DAY [MOMENTS LATER]

Ben and Reggie exit and are immediately swarmed by MEDIA and Reggie's FANS. Uncountable numbers of microphones and cameras are around him.

REPORTER 1
Co-Kayne, how does it feel to be proven innocent?

REGGIE
Yo, I just want to say thank you to my lawyer, Ben Turner. He had my back from day one and never gave up on me.

(MORE)

REGGIE (CONT'D)

When everyone thought I was guilty, Ben was the only person that believed me when I said I didn't do it. I figured I was finished. I thought my life was over, but Ben wouldn't stop trying to show the world that I was innocent. He saved my life, and I can't thank him enough.

Reggie pushes through the microphones and cameras and hugs Ben.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Thank you, man. Thank you for not giving up on me when I had already given up on myself.

INT. BECKY'S PARENT'S MANSION - DINING ROOM - DAY

Becky, Mr and Mrs. Preston are eating breakfast. The news is playing in the background on TV. Becky is poking her eggs with her fork.

MRS. PRESTON

You know, your father and I are used to seeing you quit everything you do. It's good to see you stuck with your writing. I always thought it was a silly hobby but your novel being number two on the New York Times bestsellers list proves it isn't. We're proud of you, Rebecca.

BECKY

Thanks.

Mr. Preston raises the volume to the TV when the breaking news segment comes on.

ON SCREEN:

Ben is standing next to Reggie holding a press conference. The headline reads:

"Charges against Rapper Dismissed after New Evidence Found."

MR. PRESTON

(laughing)

Ha. It looks like your loser-ex pulled it off.

Becky puts her hand over her heart.

BECKY (V.O.)

Seeing Ben on TV only confirmed that I needed to talk to him. My book's success, my parents - nothing mattered if I didn't have him in my life.

Becky pushes her plate from her and stands up from the table.

BECKY

I have to seem him.

MR. PRESTON

Rebecca, leave him be. You're doing fine without him. This is all for the best.

BECKY

It's not fine, daddy. I love him.

MR. PRESTON

You made your choice, and he made his. You know what's at stake if you marry him.

BECKY

I don't care about the money, dad. You can't control me with that anymore. I make my own money.

MR. PRESTON

So, you're willing to give up your family to chase some nigger? Fine. Let him take care of you. Pack two bags with as much as you can carry. Whatever you leave here with are the last things you'll ever get from your mother and me. Oh, and while you're at it, hand over your house and car keys.

BECKY

You would really disown me?

MR. PRESTON

Without hesitation.

BECKY

(to her mom)

Mom, you're going to let this happen?

(off her silence)

Fine. I'll start packing.

MR. PRESTON

I'll have Bernard get the car ready so he can drop you off at your nigger's place. Once you step out these doors and go to him, you're dead to us. You better hope your jungle bunny takes you back.

Tears stream down her face as she rushes the stairs.

LATER:

Becky comes down the steps with a bag and Mrs. Preston is standing by the front door next to Bernard. They both look extremely bothered by the situation.

MRS. PRESTON

Becky, please don't do this. Just go upstairs and let's pretend this never happened.

(Becky shakes her head)

Rebecca, can you stop fighting me and listen for once? Life doesn't have to be so hard. You're making this situation harder than it needs to be. Forget about Ben.

BECKY

Mom, I'm not like you. I'm not prim and proper, and I'm not going to stop fighting for something I love because daddy wants to control me. I'm going to live my life and be happy. He's kicking me out of his life, but both of you will always have a place in mine.

Mrs. Preston hugs her one last time before wiping her eyes and walking upstairs.

BERNARD

Are you ready, Ms. Rebecca?

BECKY

As ready as I'll ever be.

INT. CAR - DAY

Becky is crying. Bernard looks at her through the rearview mirror.

BERNARD

For what it's worth, Ms. Rebecca, I think what you're doing is noble and brave. You're a strong, young woman and I wish you nothing but the best.

BECKY

Thank you.

BERNARD

I'm sure your father will see to it that I dispose of your things. When you patch things up with your fiancé I will have everything stored for you so you can pick them up when you're ready.

Becky smiles. The car comes to a stop in front of Ben's Brownstone. Becky and Bernard exit the car.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

BERNARD

Well, goodbye, Ms. Rebecca...

BECKY

Goodbye, Bernard, and thank you for everything.

Becky hugs him. Bernard smiles, gets back in the car and waves before pulling off. Becky sits on the steps of the Townhouse. It starts to drizzle.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Richard, Francis, Tim and Ben are sitting at the conference table. Mrs. Wilson places champagne glasses on the table.

RICHARD

How do you feel?

BEN

I feel good. I'm just happy this is all over, and I'm excited to embrace my lifelong goal of becoming a partner.

Richard, Tim and Francis exchange looks.

TIM

(uncomfortably)

About that...well, it might be awhile before you become a partner, buddy.

BEN

What do you mean, Tim? I sat with the three of you, right here in this conference room, and all of you assured me that if I did the impossible and pulled out a victory for this case, I'd make partner.

FRANCIS

(clearing throat)

Now, Ben, we never promised you that you'd be a partner. We said you'd be considered, and we did consider you, but we decided to go another route.

BEN

(visibly angry)

What? May I ask who the worthy one was that beat me out of the partnership?

RICHARD

We went with Mark Cruz.

BEN

And you felt he contributed to this firm more than I have in his short time here? I've been with this firm for nine years. He's been here for two.

Ben leans back in his chair, trying to compose himself.

FRANCIS

Now, Ben, there's no doubt you work hard for this firm. You're a strong, competent lawyer and everyone in this room likes you. We've trusted you with a lot of high-profile cases, and today you pulled off a miracle, but there's always room for growth. We gave you the incentive to grow with our consideration, and look how well you did. In time, if you keep working hard for us, you'll make partner someday.

BEN

Sir, if not now, when? Mark is a decent lawyer, but I put my heart and soul into working for that position. Dangling the possibility of one day making partner in my face feels like I'm being strung along and used.

(beat)

You haven't given Mark half the responsibilities or difficult cases that I've been given. He took over the Alfieri case and lost. I've given this firm nine years of devotion, time away from my fiancé, my family, and my friends, because that's how much making partner meant to me, and to see it go to someone who hasn't been here as long as I have or who has put in as much work as I do, isn't right.

RICHARD

Now, don't get cocky, Ben. You've risen relatively quickly in this firm. You aren't too big where we couldn't put you right back to handling all of the grunt work - don't forget that. My, and the rest of the partner's, decision on the matter is final. We don't have to explain our reasoning. You're lucky we're even having this discussion with you. We're grateful for what you bring to this firm, but don't let it go to your head. There are thousands of lawyers out there that would kill to be in your shoes and could easily take your place. You're good, but you're not irreplaceable. Remember that.

FRANCIS

Look at it like this, Ben: We motivated you.

BEN

Motivate me? Why couldn't you use that motivation to help Mark win?

FRANCIS

You need to watch your tone, Ben,
If you don't end this conversation
right now, we'll no longer have a
place for you in this firm.

BEN

After everything I've done for this
firm, that's what you're telling
me?

RICHARD

That's exactly what we're telling
you.

BEN

(Standing)

None of you have respect or
appreciation for me or what I do
here, so expect my letter of
resignation within the hour.

TIM

Ben, please don't --

RICHARD

-- Let him go. He's nothing
special. He's a dime a dozen.

REGGIE (V.O.)

But don't get it twisted - they
don't think you're anything
special. Trust me, lose a couple
cases in a row, and I'm sure
they'll look at you as just another
nigga.

BEN

That's where you're wrong. I just
won a major case. My client
publicly told the world my name.
I'm sure I'll have plenty of calls
from other firms. Maybe I'll even
start my own.

FRANCIS

Good Luck. Hurry up and clear out
your office.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY [LATER]

Ben exits the elevator with boxes and heads for his car.

EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - EVENING

Becky is sitting on the steps when he pulls up.

Ben slowly walks up to the steps. Becky stands, and they look at each other in silence. They smile and rush to embrace.

BEN

Baby, what are you doing here?

BECKY

I left my family and gave up everything. I told you from day one, I love you, and your worth fighting for.

INT. STARBUCKS - DAY

GABBY (V.O.)

After our argument, leaving Ben's place, I needed time away from him. Two weeks later, I called Terrence and asked him to get coffee with me. I ended up venting and telling him everything that went down with Ben, and he surprised me.

Gabby and Terrence are sitting at a table.

TERRENCE

Why don't we give us a try?

GABBY

What?

TERRENCE

You and me. We have chemistry. We've known each other forever, we're friends, and we have a lot in common. Why don't we give it a try?

GABBY

(nodding)

Let's start off slow and see where we go from there.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-- Gabby and Terrance at a movie theatre. Terrance sneaks his arm around Gabby. She rolls her eyes and smiles.

-- Gabby and Terrance eating dinner together at Terrance's place.

-- Gabby comes out of the shower wrapped in a towel. She drops the towel and climbs into bed with Terrance.

-- Gabby and Terrance walking through the park holding hands.

-- Terrance surprises Gabby with some flowers at work.

GABBY (V.O.)

After that day, Terrence and I went on real dates, and I felt my heart opening up to him. Since we were both so used to being single for so long, it took some getting used to, but we enjoyed each other's company, and our bond was growing by the day. Before we made things official, we told Ben about us dating at one of our usual coffee dates.

INT. STARBUCKS - DAY

Ben looks at the two of them suspiciously and laughs.

BEN

I'm very happy for you both.
Besides myself, I can't think of a better guy for you, Gabby.
(to Terrance)
I look at you like a brother, but if you hurt her, I'll kick your ass!

They all laugh and hug.

GABBY (V.O.)

I was happy that I was finally dating a man who loved me. I didn't get the man I wanted, but life gave me the man I needed.

INT. BRIDAL SHOP - DAY

Rashida is sitting in a lounge chair outside a dressing room. Ebony walks out modeling a wedding gown.

RASHIDA

Oh, that looks good on you, boss lady!

Ebony twists side to side admiring the fit of the wedding dress.

EBONY

I think this is the one!

RASHIDA

It suits you.

EBONY

It's expensive.

RASHIDA

You'll be able to afford it now.
You're getting promoted in a few
months!

EBONY (V.O.)

The past months showed me that I
didn't need to sleep with another
man to know that I was happy. Bill
is and always will be my soulmate.
It didn't matter what people
thought of me being with someone
white. I couldn't let their opinion
affect my goals of making a
difference and uplifting my people.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Bill pulls up to the building and parks his car.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Ben and Terrence are unpacking boxes.

BILL (V.O.)

After the Alfieri case, my old law
firm blacklisted me. Luckily for
me, Ben called me up out of the
blue and asked me if I wanted to
become a partner with him in a new
firm. I'd never been the type for
idleness, and with being unemployed
for over two months, I jumped at
his offer.

INSERT: Bill's name on his office door.

BILL (V.O.)

After dealing with the Alfieri
case, I was done practicing
criminal defense law.

(MORE)

BILL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

As a partner in our new firm, I decided to focus on civil, commercial, and environmental litigation.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Bill, Ben, and Terrence are standing in front of their new office building, proud of their new firm.

BILL (V.O.)

I missed my mom every day. I hoped she could see me now. Life for me had never been easy, but everything worked out for the best.

INT. BEN'S PARENTS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben with his Dad and Terrence. Gabby, Simone, Becky, and Mrs. Turner are in the kitchen, cooking.

BEN (V.O.)

Becky and I were still going strong. Her book, Black and White, reached number one on the New York and LA Times' Best Seller's list. Her book was being considered for a movie adaption, and she was working on her next novel, Wounded.

INT. BOOK STORE - DAY

Becky autographing her books for a line of FANS. Ben is beside her.

BEN (V.O.)

Becky's parents kept their promise and disowned her. She reached out to them on numerous occasions, but they wanted nothing to do with her.

INT. BECKY'S PARENTS' MANSION - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mrs. Preston, teary eyed, sees Becky's number on the caller ID and Mr. Preston shaking his head.

BEN (V.O.)

It took awhile, but after giving up her family for me, my parents were extra loving toward her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Becky is typing on her laptop and Mr. and Mrs. Turner lovingly embrace her.

BEN (V.O.)

Becky continued to surprise me. She planned a trip for us to go to Washington, D.C., and see the National Museum of African American History and Culture. It made me happy to see that she wanted to, and was willing to, learn more about my culture.

EXT. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE - DAY

Ben and Becky are hand in hand walking inside of the museum.

INT. BEN'S PARENTS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Becky is standing next to Gabby in the kitchen. Gabby is instructing her on cooking.

BEN (V.O.)

Now that Gabby was dating Terrence, Becky didn't look at her as a threat anymore. I knew they'd never be friendly or hang out together, but it was nice to see Gabby, Simone, Becky, and my mom in the kitchen together.

INT. BEN'S PARENTS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben enters, kisses his mother on the cheek, and wraps his arms around the ladies.

BEN

Look at the most important women in my life working hard in the kitchen.

BECKY

Gabby is showing me how to make macaroni and cheese, and your mom is teaching me how to make the chocolate chip cookies you like.

BEN

That's what I'm talking about!

DINING ROOM [LATER]:

Becky puts a box of cookies in front of Ben. Ben opens the box, and there's a note in it.

BEN

What's the note say?

GABBY

Read it and find out, Big head.

Ben opens the note. It reads:

"Eat all the cookies. I don't want to be the only one with a huge belly: Love, all of us."

It takes Ben a second to catch on, but his eyes grow wide and excited.

BEN

Really?

Becky nods, and Ben hugs and kisses her. Terrence and Mr. Turner pat Ben on the back while Mrs. Turner and Simone dab their eyes with tissues.

GABBY

Congratulations!

BEN (V.O.)

Gabby genuinely smiled as if she were happy for me.

Ben nods at her, smiling.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

BEN (V.O.)

Simon decided she'd be more open-minded, and dated men of every race instead of limiting herself to just white ones.

A handsome black MAN is seen opening a door for her.

BEN (V.O.)

Simone wanted to improve her life and felt the next step to doing that was to meet her sister.

INT. S&S STUDIOS - DAY

A BELL CHIMES as Simone and Ben walk in, but no one is at the counter.

SAMANTHA
(calling out)
Give me a second. I'll be right
out!

SAMANTHA steps out and looks almost identical to Simone. She seems taken aback.

SAMANTHA (CONT'D)
Can I help you?

SIMONE
I-I-I'm Simone Miller. Are you
Samantha?

SAMANTHA
I am. Why?

SIMONE
I'm not trying to cause any
trouble, but I'm your sister.

SAMANTHA
Excuse me? I think you have the
wrong person. I'm an only child.

SIMONE
Was your mother named Joan?

SAMANTHA
Who are you? Who is this guy with
you? I don't know what shit you two
are trying to pull, but it needs to
stop.

SIMONE
No. Please, I'm not trying to get
anything from you. This is my...our
cousin, Ben. He's here for support
because I wanted to finally meet
you.

Samantha balls up her fist. She looks furious like she's going to lose her temper any moment.

SIMONE (CONT'D)
(continues quickly)
Your father's name was Sam Miller.
Our mother's name was Joan.
(MORE)

SIMONE (CONT'D)

She had me seven years before you were born, but her half-brother, Curtis, took me in because she couldn't stop using.

SAMANTHA

(softening)

What do y'all want from me?

SIMONE

Nothing. I just wanted to get to know you.

BEN (V.O.)

Their relationship wasn't built overnight, but over time, Simone and Samantha became close.

INT. S&S. STUDIOS - LATER

BEN (V.O.)

Samantha even gave Simone a management job at the studio.

Samantha is standing next to Simone at the counter while Simone is instructs employees.

EXT. SCHOOL-YARD OF PS 112 - DAY

Ben, a very-pregnant Becky, Simone, Samantha, and Mr. Turner are handing out food to the community.

BEN (V.O.)

Every year, Simone, Samantha, Becky, and I went with my dad to the old neighborhood and helped him hand out food to the community. I finally understood the reasoning and purpose of why we did it. My case with Reggie helped me gain a strong sense of who I was. I was just me. Regardless of whether people thought I acted white, I didn't let idiotic statements by some people faze me anymore. I was secure with being the strong black man I was, and I didn't need anyone's validation.

FADE TO BLACK:

END OF EPISODE THREE