

RASCAL ON THE RUN

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Based on the novel by Howard Tate Scott

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EXT. ATHENS, GEORGIA - EARLY MORNING 1988

Shades of gray dawn. Main Street is eerily deserted except for a man who runs past dark alleys and barren storefronts. He doesn't stop. Can't stop. This is his recurring nightmare.

CRITTER (V.O.)

My father was a legend in Athens, Georgia. A give-em-hell Southern lawyer. His name was August Stillwell, and so is mine, but folks called him Guy, and anyone who saw me in his shadow called me Critter.

AUGUST "CRITTER" STILLWELL runs like a 40-year-old lawyer, defensive and dodgy in his dark suit and dress shoes. He lugs his father's old-fashioned briefcase. It flops open. Papers flutter out. Critter tries to catch them on the fly.

He stumbles when he sees a sign in the window at Tony's Café: WHITES ONLY. That shouldn't be there. Not anymore. But it is.

Critter reaches the historic courthouse and bounds up the steps, past imposing columns, through the grand doorway.

Instead of the familiar marble hallway, he's inside the burned-out ruins of a juke joint. Wisps of smoke rise from the wooden floor along with the tinny echo of old music.

POPPY stands with her back to him: 20ish, biracial, wearing an impeccable peplum suit. Her right arm hangs at her side, her hand clenched around the handle of a heavy cast iron skillet. Critter is baffled but happy to see her.

CRITTER

Poppy...

Poppy turns, eyes blazing, and strides toward him.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

(seeing her rage)

Poppy, it's not my fault! I'm not-

She bashes him upside the head with a bell-ringing *tonk*.

EXT. CRITTER'S HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS

Critter jolts awake on the covered deck of his dilapidated houseboat. He swats at a yapping alarm clock, knocking over an empty whiskey bottle. He sits up, sweating even though he's been sleeping out on a porch sofa in his boxers.

A small electric fan whirs in harmony with the cicadas, the relentless song of oppressive summer heat.

A mobile phone toodles on the coffee table. Critter lifts the chunky handset from a charger the size of a lunch box.

CRITTER

Yeah. No. Did you try...okay.

(a weary sigh)

No, I got it. I'm on my way.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER

Critter is alone at the defense table. At the D.A.'s table, RED REDSTONE, 68, a bellicose prosecutor closing in on retirement, chats with A.D.A. CHASTAIN, 45ish, who gets a lot "you'd be so pretty if you smiled." She does not smile.

RED

Hey, Critter. Where's your daddy?

CRITTER

Indisposed.

RED

Lot of that going around lately.

BAILIFF

All rise. Court's in session. Judge Olympia Sterling presiding.

Critter snaps to attorney mode. OLYMPIA "POPPY" STERLING, 47, takes her place at the bench. Authority, gravitas, all that. But there's wry humor, too. And compassion.

RED

Good morning, Judge Sterling. My, don't you look lovely today.

CRITTER

Judge, if it please the court-

POPPY

It won't. I can already tell.

CRITTER

Requesting a two-week continuance.

RED

Oh! Say it ain't so, Joe.

CRITTER

May I approach?

Poppy waves him forward. Critter approaches with caution.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Poppy-

POPPY

In this room, you'll address me as Judge Sterling. Or Your Honor.

CRITTER

Your Honor. I apologize. Guy is-

POPPY

Mary-Louise already called with the usual BS excuses. I can't cut him any more slack. I have a duty to the court.

CRITTER

As do I! I have my own caseload.

POPPY

Get your head outa your ass! He's drinking himself to death, and at the rate you're going-

CRITTER

Respectfully, Your Honor, that's not your business.

Torn, Poppy drums dark red nails on the docket before her.

POPPY

Last one. Hear me? Don't even ask.

EXT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Critter's sister, tech-savvy private investigator TATUM STILLWELL, 30, blows a smoke ring, a round lens through which she eyes passersby. Critter comes out. Tate matches his stride down the steps, cig in the corner of her mouth.

TATE

Hey, big brother.

CRITTER

Hey, Tate. Tell me something good.

TATE

Mother hasn't seen him. I checked the girlfriend's apartment. Looks like she moved out a while ago.

CRITTER

Dang it. Where the hell is he?

Tate hands Critter a folded printout from her hip pocket.

TATE

I found that boat over in Savannah.  
It's owned by a shadow corporation  
out of the Cayman Islands.

Critter slows down to study the dot matrix printout, a grainy photo of a motor yacht with the name *Rascal* on the prow.

TATE (CONT'D)

What's your interest?

CRITTER

Guy took it as collateral on a  
pending criminal matter.

TATE

Who's the client?

CRITTER

That would be good information to  
know. Gee, if only I had a private  
investigator on the payroll.

TATE

Give me a minute! Jesus. All I know  
is GBI has them under surveillance.

CRITTER

GBI? What's *their* interest?

TATE

(shrugs)

You know Thunderbolt Marina. Dixie  
Mafia. Drugs. Chop shops. Hijinks.

CRITTER

Okay. Thanks, Tate.

TATE

You'll be invoiced.

She straddles a motorcycle parked by the curb.

TATE (CONT'D)

Maybe Daddy went somewhere to dry  
out. Maybe it'll work this time.

CRITTER

Sure. Maybe.

He touches her cheek tenderly. Tate smacks his hand away like it's a beach gnat. She jams her helmet on and rides away.

Critter gets into the driver's seat of his classic black Cadillac Brougham. He adjusts the rearview mirror and is troubled to see his father's old briefcase on the backseat.

Critter fiddles with the radio. Static. He sets both hands on the steering wheel, listening to the music in his memory.

CHUBBY CHECKER (ON RADIO)  
*Baby baby let's Birdland now!*

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. THE CADILLAC BROUGHAM - DAY 1963

Both hands on the wheel, YOUNG CRITTER pilots the Caddy down a winding road along the Little Oconee River. He's 15, an aspiring hep cat in a dark suit and skinny tie. The scenery whizzing by is lush green draped with gray Spanish moss.

TITLE: Athens, Georgia 1963

CRITTER (V.O.)  
Everything useful I know about practicing law, I learned from Guy and his partner, King Hodges.

GUY STILLWELL, 38, a handsome high mileage rogue, sits in the back with his law partner, KING HODGES, 48, a jovial Fezziwig with the ruddy complexion and distended abdomen of a late-stage alcoholic. They pass a silver flask as they banter.

CRITTER (V.O.)  
The summer I turned 15, they hooked me up a provisional license and took a 1963 Cadillac Brougham as collateral on a manslaughter case so I could drive them around.

GUY  
Best way to avoid a DUI. Grow yourself a chauffeur.

KING  
Like your new wheels, Speedracer?

Critter grins and cranks up the music. The Caddy crosses a covered bridge and turns down a gravel drive to a weathered structure. Flaking paint on the side, fading but fancy, says *Othella's Juke Joint - Music! Dancing! High Spirits!*

Law clerk POPPY STERLING hurries down the wooden stairs from an apartment above the juke joint. She's 22, biracial, eager and industrious in a stylish tailored suit and heels.

CRITTER (V.O.)

Nobody in Athens had a female law clerk - or a Black person either - until Stillwell & Hodges hired Poppy Sterling. Just to be shit-disturbers. Or so everyone assumed.

Critter opens the passenger door for Poppy.

INT. THE CADILLAC BROUGHAM - CONTINUOUS

As the Caddy jounces back onto the road, Poppy takes a file from her briefcase and bends over the seat to show Guy an 8x10 glossy. Guy and King lean forward to study it.

POPPY

I went over the crime scene photos again last night. Look. Right here. The blood spatter doesn't match what their witness is saying.

GUY

I'll be damned. Good eye, Poppy.

Pleased with herself, Poppy resettles in the passenger seat.

POPPY

I say that's grounds for dismissal.

GUY

We'll run it up the flagpole. You always try to solve a problem outside the courtroom if you can.

YOUNG CRITTER

What if the D.A. doesn't want it solved?

GUY

Then you go to court and kick his ass up to his shoulder blades.

EXT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Poppy comes out of the courthouse and holds the door for Guy, who carries a cardboard file box. King follows, weaving drunk, leaning heavily on Critter on the way to the Caddy.

GUY

To the victors go the spoils!  
 (to Poppy)  
 According to tradition, when  
 defense triumphs, he's awarded the  
 murder weapon as a trophy. And the  
 DA has to buy us a round at Tony's.

POPPY

(wide-eyed)  
 We're going to Tony's?

Critter and King exchange uncomfortable glances.

GUY

Another day. We gotta get this baby  
 home to the trophy case!

Critter opens the car door for Poppy. Crestfallen, she gets in. They drive through Athens. On Broad Street is a monument honoring Confederate dead. On Main, Woolworth's displays a sign of the times: COLORED ENTRANCE OUT BACK. They drive by Tony's Café. A placard in the window says WHITE ONLY.

The Caddy pulls up in front of the law office, a restored antebellum manse with a Civil War cannon on the front lawn.

INT. STILLWELL & HODGES LAW FIRM - MOMENTS LATER

Secretary MARY-LOUISE - big hair, big heart - answers a phone at the front desk. Critter enters, followed by Guy and Poppy.

MARY-LOUISE

Stillwell & Hodges. Hold, please.  
 Critter, honey, where's King?

YOUNG CRITTER

Asleep in the car. I'll drive him  
 home in a minute.

Critter bounds up the grand staircase to Guy's office.

INT. GUY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Guy takes a bottle of bourbon from his desk drawer. He pours a tumbler for himself and shots for Poppy and Critter.

GUY

Poppy, this is your victory. You do  
 the honors.

Poppy's pride and ambition are palpable. She takes a rusty torque wrench from the file box and places it in the massive trophy case with an array of lethal weapons: guns, knives, rat poison, power drill, piano wire, a clarinet...

CRITTER (V.O.)

Of course, it wouldn't do today, with DNA and all. But back in the day, Guy's trophy case was a monument to his legendary wiles.

INT. ALPS DRIVE-IN MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Critter sits in the backseat of the Caddy, his arm around the shoulder of a PRETTY GIRL. Gregory Peck is onscreen.

CRITTER (V.O.)

*To Kill a Mockingbird* played all summer long at the Alps Drive-In theater. I saw it seven times with seven different girls.

ATTICUS FINCH

Do you know what a compromise is?

SCOUT

Bending the law?

CRITTER (V.O.)

My father made a living defending people of low means, people of color, people who slipped through the cracks. So folks made obvious comparisons to Atticus Finch.

ATTICUS

No, an agreement reached by mutual consent. If you'll concede the necessity of going to school, we'll read every night, just as we always have. Is that a bargain?

Critter scoots closer to the girl, his hand on her knee.

CRITTER (V.O.)

Truth is, old Atticus didn't make enough money, drink enough bourbon, or sleep with enough women to keep up with Guy Stillwell.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CRITTER'S HOUSEBOAT - EVENING 1988

The sun sets on the quiet waterfront subdivision. Critter sits on his rooftop deck, sipping whiskey, studying Tate's printout and sorting documents from Guy's old briefcase.



CRITTER

There's other ways to do that.

TEDDI

We can't be in denial any longer. You're his law partner, not his child. Sadly, you never had much opportunity to be a child.

BOOTSY

Get over it, little brother. It's just paperwork.

CRITTER

Spoken like a serial divorcée.

Teddi kisses his cheek and puts the food basket in his arms.

TEDDI

Take this over to Poppy. Her mama took a nasty fall on Sunday.

EXT. OTHELLA'S FRONT PORCH - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

OTHELLA STERLING, an elderly corn husk doll version of the juke joint's dynamic owner, dozes in a wheel chair. Poppy stubs out a cigarette as Critter climbs the porch steps.

CRITTER

Hope you're hungry. Doralee made enough to feed the Foreign Legion.

POPPY

Y'all are too kind.

CRITTER

How are you, Miss Othella?

OTHELLA

Guy Stillwell! You rascal.

Othella grasps Critter's hand. He squats beside her chair.

CRITTER

No, Miss Othella, it's Critter.

OTHELLA

Critter Stillwell. Sit here with me. I'll tell you a story.

POPPY

Critter doesn't have time for stories, Mama.

OTHELLA  
Always on the run.

Critter smiles uncomfortably and withdraws his hand.

POPPY  
Someone's a towering oak all your  
life. It's hard to see them fall.

CRITTER  
Whose towering oak are we talking  
about? Yours or mine?

POPPY  
Take your pick.

Poppy lights another cigarette.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
He used to say, "You can't drink  
yourself sober, can't make water  
run uphill, and can't borrow  
yourself out of debt."

Critter laughs at her robust impression of his father.

CRITTER  
And yet, we keep trying.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - LATER

Critter approaches the venerable mahogany bar where RORY, 39,  
a no-BS bombshell bartender, works on a crossword puzzle.

CRITTER  
Wow. Hello there. Where's Rory?

RORY  
Retired to some tropical paradise  
called Detroit. I inherited the  
badge of courage.

She taps a brass RORY name tag on her white tuxedo shirt.

CRITTER  
It looks a whole lot better on you.

She gives him the single eyebrow raise. Unimpressed.

CRITTER (CONT'D)  
Johnny Walker neat. Please.

She sets up a cocktail napkin and two fingers of whiskey.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Thanks, um...

RORY

Let's stick with "Rory."

King saddles up on a barstool next to Critter. He's 73 now, hale and hearty, 25 years sober.

KING

Evening, Miss Rory. I see you've met my godson.

RORY

What - this is the houseboat guy?

CRITTER

I have a regular house. I'm renting it out right now.

KING

This fella squeezes a nickel flatter than a dime. Saving up his money to sail around the world.

RORY

Roast beef and Diet Coke, right?

KING

Hit me.

Rory fakes a left hook on her way to the kitchen.

CRITTER

King. What the hell? Don't tell the bartender my business.

KING

Plowing the road for ya, player. This woman has a masters degree in social anthropology and a pair of getaway sticks like-

CRITTER

Getaway sticks? Are you Humphrey Bogart now? I can plow my own road.

King reaches over the bar for the TV remote. Peering over his glasses, he clicks through *Wonder Years* and *Murphy Brown*, settling on an infomercial for Ginsu knives.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Have you heard from Guy?

KING

He's okay. Holed up at a nice little place down in Nassau.

CRITTER

*Nassau?! He has cases pending!*

KING

Don't get your giblets in a twist.

CRITTER

He just accepted a *yacht* as collateral for a sizable retainer!

KING

(still clicking)

You're the one who wants to sail around the world.

CRITTER

Not in a 30-year-old garbage scow!

KING

If you need a hand, I'll unretire for a while. Pipe down now. You need to see this.

The iconic *Unsolved Mysteries* tingle dissolves to scenes of Athens circa 1963. Rory returns with King's pot roast.

RORY

Oh, good. *Unsolved Mysteries*.

Rory pours King's Diet Coke. ROBERT STACK narrates a montage: crime scene photos, familiar places, ghosts of Athens past.

ROBERT STACK (ON TV)

Dateline: Athens, Georgia, 1963. Brinkman Pollard is found shot dead in a house of ill repute.

CRITTER

Whoa. Turn it up.

ROBERT STACK (ON TV)

Hit man Lucky Winfield confesses to the murder, claiming he was hired by Edward "Newt" Ballerini.

Lucky's mug shot dissolves to a clip of Guy and King on the courthouse steps with Poppy and Critter in the background.

KING

Look at us! Handsome devils.

RORY  
Nice haircut, houseboat.

CRITTER  
Yikes. I look like Barney  
Rubble.

GUY(ON TV)  
My client denies any  
involvement in this tragic  
affair.

KING  
Good God, we were large and  
in charge.

GUY (ON TV) (CONT'D)  
We look forward to our day in  
court.

ROBERT STACK (ON TV)  
Ballerini skips out on \$200,000  
bond, abandoning his wife to a  
lifetime of unanswered questions.

FERNANDA, 67, a siren with silver hair, sobs into a hanky.

FERNANDA (ON TV)  
All these years - not a word.  
I want to know *whyyyyy!*

KING  
Dog my cats! Fernanda's aged  
well, hasn't she?

The show cuts to the D.A.'s office. Stack is positioned  
between an American flag and a REDSTONE FOR CONGRESS poster.

ROBERT STACK (ON TV)  
A cash reward is offered for  
information leading to the arrest  
of Newt Ballerini.

Critter pulls the printout from his pocket, connecting the  
dots. He glares at King who offers a sympathetic shrug.

RED (ON TV)  
He can run, but he can't hide. The  
mills of the Lord's justice grind  
slow, but exceedingly fine.

ROBERT STACK (ON TV)  
According to witnesses, the murder  
stemmed from an altercation at the  
home of Athens socialites, Guy and  
Teddi Stillwell...

Critter stares at the TV version of his childhood home.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. STILLWELL HOME BACK YARD - EVENING 1963

Trees are hung with party lights. A swing band plays on the  
tennis court.

DORALEE is in her element, managing a bustling catering staff. TEDDI, 38, is a vivacious hostess in a mid mod cocktail dress and pearls.

CRITTER (V.O.)

My mother Theodora Marblesmith Stillwell came from old money, a progressive Catholic with that special audacity known only to Southern belles and serial killers.

TEDDI

Don't be shy, y'all! Ribs on the barbecue. Our signature cocktail is the Tequila Mockingbird.

TATUM, 5, a waif with a Wednesday Addams edge, darts down the porch steps past 15-year-old Critter. A bulky Brownie camera bounces on a strap around her neck.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

Critter, keep an eye on Tatum. I don't want her down by that creek.

BOOTSY, 17, a worldly debutante, more Brigitte than Gidget, grabs bottles of Coke from the porch fridge.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

Bootsy, I don't want to see you smoking with those beatniks from the poetry reading.

CRITTER (V.O.)

The summer of '63, she was keen on the cause of desegregation, and she knew how to catch flies with honey.

Teddi works the party, skillfully mixing and matching. She greets King and his wife, MIMI, a fashionably volatile equestrienne, exchanging air kisses.

TEDDI

Mimi, darling! King, liar's club is down by the fire pit. You'll have some catching up to do.

Teddi links Mimi's arm and steers her to the patio bar.

MIMI

King tells me this new law clerk was your big idea.

TEDDI

It's called progress, Mimi.

MIMI

It's unseemly is what it is.

TEDDI

Oh, look! The Ballerinis!

NEWT BALLERINI, 50ish, is impeccable in a shady way. His wife, FERNANDA, is a mid-mod Italian clotheshorse.

NEWT

Teddi! Ravishing, as usual.

TEDDI

Hello, Newt. Fernanda, honey, you are killin' me with those shoes.

FERNANDA

Bruno Magli. A dear friend.

TEDDI

I want you to meet A.D.A. Redstone. An old friend. He's running to replace D.A. Ruckels in November.

FERNANDA

(concerned)

Mr. Ruckels? He's retiring?

TEDDI

And not a moment too soon.

Teddi steers Fernanda over to Red's conversation knot, then goes for Poppy who lingers at the party perimeter.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

Poppy! What a perfect little dress. Is your mama with you?

POPPY

No, she had to be at work.

TEDDI

Come and meet the ghosts of law clerks past.

Teddi steers Poppy to the wraparound porch where young lawyers and hippie upstarts engage in lively debate. Sitting on the steps, Critter hastily stubs out a cigarette when he sees his mom. The group falls silent.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

Y'all, meet Miss Poppy Sterling. Stillwell & Hodges is blessed to have her as law clerk this year.

A PREPPY LAWYER says what everyone is thinking.

PREPPY

Law clerk? How's that gonna work?

POPPY

Same as it did for you. Except I'll pass the bar on my first try.

A ripple of "oooh snap" laughter rises from the porch.

PREPPY

Plea deals, negotiations - a lot happens over lunch at Tony's. So long as segregation is the law of the land-

POPPY

Laws change. If Tony wants to stay in business, he'll change too.

TEDDI

In Dr. King's letter from Birm-

PREPPY

I need another Tequila Mockingbird.

He brushes past Teddi on his way down the porch steps. Critter stands, but Teddi smiles and shakes her head.

TEDDI

Y'all don't be shy now. Ribs on the barbecue. Critter, honey, help me get another case of champagne.

Boisterous debate resumes. Critter walks with Teddi.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

I could have finished law school, you know. I got pregnant with Bootsy one semester shy of - oh, hell no. Tell me that is not Lucky Winfield over there.

She points to the glow of a cigarette in the shadows behind a Ballerini Distributors van.

LUCKY WINFIELD, a hangdog Klansman, ogles Bootsy and her friends, who dance, oblivious to his skeezy gaze.

YOUNG CRITTER

He delivered the booze from Newt's warehouse.

TEDDI

Go tell him to take a hike.

YOUNG CRITTER

No, ma'am! That fella's not right.

TEDDI

He won't do anything with me standing here. He wouldn't dare.

Reluctantly, Critter goes over to Lucky.

YOUNG CRITTER

Hey, Lucky. Thanks for the delivery and...Mrs. Stillwell would like for you to take off now.

LUCKY WINFIELD

Why? I'm not good enough for the shit-don't-stink crowd?

YOUNG CRITTER

No, but she's uncomfortable with-

LUCKY WINFIELD

And you gotta do like she says, dontcha? Faggoty little mama's boy.

Lucky flicks his cigarette onto Critter's shirt. Startled, Critter squawks and bats at it. Lucky laughs and walks away.

YOUNG CRITTER

Screw you!

Lucky turns. Critter runs like hell.

EXT. THE FIRE PIT BY THE CREEK - CONTINUOUS

Glancing over his shoulder, Critter reaches the good old boys group: petty tycoon BRINKMAN POLLARD and D.A. BORLEY RUCKELS, a larger-than-life blowhard, shoot the shit with King, Guy, and Red. Newt gives Critter a cigar and lights it.

NEWT

Here's the Stillwell scion! Join the gentlemen's club, Critter.

Puffing his cigar, Critter hears a giggle. Tatum is up in a tree pointing her camera at him.

YOUNG CRITTER

Tatum, you're not allowed down here.

TATUM

Buzz off.

YOUNG CRITTER

Don't make me haul you outa there.

TATUM

Try it! I'll kick your family  
jewels.

The men in the circle roar with laughter.

RED

That child's got a mouth on her.

GUY

She's precocious, like her daddy -  
with her mama's penchant for  
kickin' a man's family jewels.

Cigar between his teeth, Critter climbs up into the tree.

TATUM

I'm just listening to the stories.

YOUNG CRITTER

Ten minutes.

TATUM

Twenty.

YOUNG CRITTER

Fifteen.

TATUM

Done.

He ruffles her hair affectionately and climbs down. Around  
the fire, the mood of the conversation has gone tense.

POLLARD

Representing colored clientele is  
one thing. Taking on that nappy-  
headed gal as a law clerk-

GUY

She'll be a federal judge one day.  
Take it to the bank.

RUCKELS

First, they wanna be lawyers. Then  
it's the bench.

POLLARD

I don't give two cents for a white man's rights if we hand over the courts to women subject to the vagaries of menstruation, negroes out for revenge -

GUY

All of whom have the same constitutional rights as a revolving asshole like you!

POLLARD

Now we got Teddi Marblesmith talking integration like some uppity Northern slut.

Guy seizes Pollard by the front of his shirt.

GUY

*YOU WATCH YOUR MOUTH, POLLARD!*

KING

Hey! Hey! None of that!

Pollard breaks away and swings at Guy, but Newt gets between them and takes a hard punch in the face. Newt rebounds, hammering Pollard's head and shoulders with clenched fists. Pollard drops to one knee, covering his head with his arms. Teddi rushes down the hill, all bee charmer.

TEDDI

Boys! Boys! We're all friends here.

KING

Pollard! Put that damn thing away!

Pollard raises his arm, a gun in his hand - not aiming at anyone, just showing them all what's what. He shoots in the air. A small figure drops from the branches to the ground.

TEDDI

*TATUM!*

YOUNG CRITTER

(rushing to her)

Oh, Jesus! Tate! Tatum?

TATUM

(irritated but unhurt)

Dang it! I think my camera's broke.

Horrified, Critter picks up the camera. There's a bullet hole in it. Teddi scoops Tatum up, kissing and cradling her.

TEDDI  
Drunken idiots! Damn fools!

POLLARD  
(mortified, scared sober)  
Christ! Teddi, I - I didn't mean-

TEDDI  
Mr. Pollard. You are no longer  
welcome in this house.

INT. STILLWELL KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Perched on the edge of the table, Tatum smokes a candy  
cigarette while Doralee BandAids her skinned knees. Guy and  
Teddi can be heard raging at each other down the hall.

<p>GUY (O.S.) Madam, I am accustomed to the hoarfrost of your indifference. I don't give a good goddamn if you pack off to Paris and take up with the Bohemians!</p>	<p>TEDDI (O.S.) Maybe I should go back to law school instead of catering to you and your drunken cronies! Maybe then you'd spare me a shred of respect.</p>
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Critter comes downstairs in his Monday morning suit and tie.  
He cups his hands over Tatum's ears, but she swats him away.

CRITTER  
What's going on?

DORALEE  
Miss Bootsy ran off with the  
beatniks last night.

YOUNG CRITTER  
What?!

DORALEE  
She called from Western Union in  
Louisville asking for money to get  
to San Francisco.

Guy storms in, pours a cup of coffee, lays in a shot of  
bourbon, and washes down several aspirin. Critter wolfs  
scrambled eggs from a pan on the stove and follows Guy out.

INT. THE CADILLAC BROUGHAM - MOMENTS LATER

Critter glances uncomfortably at Guy in the rearview mirror.  
Bleak and hungover, Guy watches the town go by.

GUY

I'll go to the bungalow today.

YOUNG CRITTER

Yes, sir.

Critter rounds the corner and parks by The Tree That Owns Itself. Across the street on the front porch of a pleasant cottage, Guy's 20-something GIRLFRIEND reads a thick textbook, bare feet up on the rail. She smiles and waves.

GUY

Your mother's family always said she married beneath her. I had to believe I was good enough for her because I could not imagine a world in which I didn't have her.

Guy sighs deeply, pops a Sen-Sen, checks his breath, and gets out. Critter cranks up the radio and drives away.

EXT. THE CADILLAC BROUGHAM - LATER

Critter waits in the elm-lined driveway on King's 20-acre ranchette. Mimi follows King across the yard to the Caddy.

KING

It's not a social call! Miss Jeffie's business model is a taxation minefield.

MIMI

I know all about her business. I wasn't born yesterday!

KING

All right, lamb chop. If it's that important to you, I won't go.

King kisses Mimi warmly and gets into the Caddy.

YOUNG CRITTER

No Miss Jeffie's this week?

KING

Don't be ridiculous. Drive on.

Critter cruises down the long driveway. King checks over his shoulder; Mimi is behind them in a Mustang convertible.

KING (CONT'D)

Gun it, Fireball.

Critter guns it, spraying gravel, leaving Mimi behind.

EXT. MISS JEFFIE'S - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Critter and King approach the front porch of a once-grand mansion. MISS JEFFIE, a 50-fabulous drag queen, fans herself, surrounded by a buffet of familiar tropes and body types.

MISS JEFFIE

Hey, y'all! King, I'll meet you in my office. Critter, there's fresh cobbler in the kitchen.

King and Miss Jeffie go in, leaving Critter on the porch with the girls. TWYLA, 18 going on exhausted, pats a space on the swing next to her. Critter sits, summoning all his suave.

TWYLA

Critter Stillwell. Look at you driving a Cadillac.

YOUNG CRITTER

It gets me from point A to point B.

TWYLA

Bet I could get you to point B.

She plays with a lock of Critter's hair.

TWYLA (CONT'D)

Got twenty-five dollars to invest?

INT. A ROOM AT THE BROTHEL - MOMENTS LATER

Critter sits on the edge of a tatty brass bed in boxer shorts and socks, knee bouncing nervously. Twyla checks her watch.

TWYLA

Are we doing this?

YOUNG CRITTER

Sure. I mean...if you want to.

TWYLA

(like a pro)

Sure I do. You're so sweet. And handsome. Big-boned.

Twyla straddles his lap, hands roving. Critter buries his face in her cleavage and utters a strangled cry.

YOUNG CRITTER  
God dang it.

TWYLA  
Oops! That happens. Like popping  
the tab after you shake a can of  
root beer. It's okay. I'll show you  
some good moves. It ain't all about  
your pecker, you know.

INT. A ROOM AT THE BROTHEL - 43 MINUTES LATER

Twyla leaves Critter with a peck on the cheek.

TWYLA  
Open a window if you smoke.

She goes out. Critter gathers his clothes, pausing to posture  
in front of the mirror. Charles Atlas muscle-check.

YOUNG CRITTER  
You heard me, Lucky. Fuck off!

Chaos in the hallway. Screaming. Door-pounding.

TWYLA (O.S.)  
Cops! Cops are here! It's a raid!

YOUNG CRITTER  
Shit...shit...SHIT!

EXT. MISS JEFFIE'S - CONTINUOUS

Police swarm Miss Jeffie's yard, led by SHERIFF TOM HECK,  
50ish, spindly and officious. King is on the back porch with  
Miss Jeffie, who berates Heck in her gravely basso profundo.

MISS JEFFIE  
Shame on you! Fascist motherfucker!

SHERIFF HECK  
Into the wagon, ladies. Let's go.

Over Jeffie's shoulder, King sees Critter climbing out a  
gabled window. King drapes an arm around Heck's shoulders,  
steering him in the opposite direction.

KING  
Tom! Surely we can talk this over.

Critter dodges down the alley to the Caddy. Guy is standing  
next to it, arms folded, expression grim.

YOUNG CRITTER  
Guy...I wasn't...I - I just-

GUY  
Go get Poppy. Tell her to bring  
paperwork for the arraignments.  
We'll meet you at the courthouse.

Deputies wheel a gurney with a body bag down the porch steps.

SHERIFF HECK  
Careful now. Watch the curb.

YOUNG CRITTER  
What the hell... Who is that?

GUY  
Mr. Pollard. Go do as you're told.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER

Folks in the crowded gallery wave funeral home fans. An affable, middle-aged BAILIFF chats with Jeffie's girls. At the prosecution table, Ruckels yuks it up with Red. At the defense table, King dozes, chin to chest, while Critter helps Guy and Poppy sort paperwork.

POPPY  
Haven't seen folks turn out like  
this since Easter Sunday.

GUY  
A raid on Miss Jeffie's is good  
entertainment. Without the  
collection plate.

Teddi arrives with Tatum. Guy leans to kiss Teddi, but she turns an icy cheek. Tatum hands him a fancy red shoe box.

TATUM  
I got your lucky Ferragamos, Daddy!

GUY  
Thank you, chickpea.

Othella, a smartly-tailored businesswoman in her prime, pushes through the crowd.

OTHELLA  
Poppy! Do they have Cornelia?

POPPY  
Mama, please. You can't be here.

GUY

Don't you worry, Miss Othella.  
Cornelia's in good hands.

TATUM

Mama, can I sit upstairs with Miss  
Othella and Doralee?

TEDDI

Yes, go on. Mind your manners.

Othella takes Tatum to the balcony of the segregated  
courtroom. Teddi sits with Critter in the front row.

BAILIFF

All rise. Court's in session, Judge  
Eustace Talmadge presiding.

JUDGE TALMADGE, an ornery old windbag, bangs the gavel. King  
wakes with a snort. Poppy glares at him, embarrassed.

JUDGE TALMADGE

State versus Jeffie Pitcock. State  
your appearances for the record.

RED

A.D.A. Doolittle Redstone for the  
great State of Georgia.

GUY

Guy Stillwell and King Hodges of  
Stillwell & Hodges for the defense.

RED

Your Honor, surely we can dispatch  
this in a single proceeding.

GUY

Perhaps if this was a bubble gum  
machine and not a court of law!

JUDGE TALMADGE

Put a cork in it, Stillwell. You  
two got one hour to plead this  
thing out. Go on down to Tony's and  
get it done. Court's adjourned.

The crowd is loudly disappointed. The judge goes out. Guy  
steps across the aisle, offering his hand to Red.

GUY

C'mon, Red. Let's raise a glass to  
Pollard and clear this thing up so  
you can go be with the family.

Red nods curtly and walks out. Poppy collects the paperwork.

GUY (CONT'D)

Poppy, get King back to the office.  
Critter, meet me at Tony's.

POPPY

Your *law clerk* should be there!

GUY

Yes, you should, but today is not a  
good day to fight that fight.

POPPY

It's never a good day. That's why  
the fight still needs fighting!

GUY

Don't make it about yourself. Take  
a lesson from what went down here.

Poppy folds her arms, defiant but wanting to learn.

GUY (CONT'D)

Jeffie's got downtown dirt on some  
uptown people. Judge Talmadge  
doesn't want to get involved, but  
he can't look like he might have  
reason to recuse himself. Ruckels  
wants to make good with the judge,  
so he'll give Red marching orders  
to settle. That puts us in the  
catbird seat. All Miss Jeffie's  
girls go home tonight - including  
your aunt Cornelia.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - AFTERNOON

Critter wolfs down a burger while Guy and Red sip bourbon in  
a corner booth.

GUY

We'll plead no contest. Thirty  
days, suspended sentences. Jeffie  
pays same fine as last time.

RED

That crime scene remains sealed.  
Nobody leaves town. I want to  
question every one of those girls.

GUY

Understood.

Critter passes forms to Guy, Guy signs and passes to Red, Red signs and hands back to Critter. Justice via conveyor belt.

GUY (CONT'D)

I'm truly sorry for your loss, Red.  
I know you and Pollard go way back.

RED

It's a goddamn tragedy.

GUY

Who do you like for the murder?

RED

Between you and me, it looks like a professional hit.

GUY

Dixie Mafia?

RED

I'm not at liberty to say. But listen here. GBI's gonna find that hit man, and he's gonna need a lawyer.

GUY

Get me in the room. I'll get him to roll over on whoever hired him. We both walk away heroes in our own constituency.

Red nods, and they shake on it.

INT. STILLWELL KITCHEN - LATER

Critter slumps into a chair, overwhelmed by the eventful day. Teddi sets a plate of fried chicken in front of him and kisses the top of his head.

TEDDI

Beautiful boy. You need a haircut.

The phone rings on the wall. Teddi answers.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

Stillwell's. Hang on.

She cups her hand over the phone and calls down the hall.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

Guy, Red's on the phone. He's arrested Lucky Winfield for murder.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - EVENING

Lucky is handcuffed to the table in the interview room. Guy paces. Critter hangs back in the doorway.

LUCKY WINFIELD

I didn't do it! I swear to Christ!

GUY

Detective Hopper says otherwise.  
Says he's got witnesses.

LUCKY WINFIELD

Those SOBs down at the icehouse -  
they stand to collect a reward if I  
swing. It's a goddamn frame up!

D.A. Ruckels walks in with JULIAN TICK, a cypher of a man with a monkfish smile. Lucky's slingshot bravado evaporates.

LUCKY WINFIELD (CONT'D)

What's *he* doing here?

TICK

Mr. DiLippa authorized me to post  
bond on your behalf.

RUCKELS

Go on home, Guy. Mr. Tick will be  
representing the accused.

GUY

Red and I had an agreement.

RUCKELS

He's off the case due to his  
personal relationship with the  
victim. You understand.

GUY

Oh, yes. I understand. Lucky, do  
you want Mr. Tick to represent you?

Lucky shakes his head vehemently, eyes pleading.

GUY (CONT'D)

Sorry to have wasted your time,  
Tick. Mr. Winfield prefers to  
retain his own counsel.

RUCKELS

It's a done deal. Lucky's gonna testify how your pal, Newt Ballerini, paid him to put a bullet in Brinkman Pollard's head.

GUY

That is unpasteurized bullshit!

RUCKELS

We'll see what Judge Talmadge and twelve angry men have to say.

LUCKY WINFIELD

Mr. Ballerini...

Lucky points a trembling finger at Guy and then at Critter.

LUCKY WINFIELD (CONT'D)

You did this - and this silver-spoon motherfucker! I gave his sister a second glance and refused to kiss his candy ass. Now you're-

TICK

Mr. Winfield. Enough.

RUCKELS

You want Mr. Tick to be your lawyer, don't you, Lucky?

Lucky nods, looking at the floor, terrified, devoid of hope.

TICK

Pleasure seeing you, Mr. Stillwell. You and your boy.

EXT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

Critter trots to keep up with Guy on the way to the Caddy.

YOUNG CRITTER

What happened? You don't think Newt-

GUY

Leave it alone.

YOUNG CRITTER

What about-

GUY

(severely)

You are not involved. Understand?

YOUNG CRITTER

Yes, sir.

GUY

Drive King to Fort Valley tomorrow.  
Make sure he's in court at 9 AM.  
When you get back, if I'm not  
there, you give this to King. He'll  
know what to do.

He hands Critter a hastily scrawled note: THUNDERBOLT MARINA.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. THUNDERBOLT MARINA - DAY 1988

Seagulls congregate on a THUNDERBOLT MARINA sign. On the pier below, Critter sets his hand on *Rascal's* rust-stained hull.

CRITTER

Hello there.

NEWT leans over the rail, deeply tan, deeply weary, a dude who's survived a long series of iffy tropical adventures.

NEWT

Well, I'll be damned. Critter  
Stillwell! Where's Guy?

CRITTER

Indisposed. I'm handing your case.

NEWT

Is King still sober?

CRITTER

Twenty-five years and counting, but  
he's retired.

NEWT

Well...okay. Come aboard, son.

EXT. RASCAL FLY BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Critter lays out the paperwork. Newt pours the bourbon.

CRITTER

Tatum's onshore with a scanner.  
She'll signal if GBI heads our way.

NEWT

*Tatum?*

CRITTER

She's an exceptional PI. Way ahead of the curve on technology.

NEWT

Jesus. I have been gone a while.

Newt raises his glass to propose a toast.

NEWT (CONT'D)

No time like the present till the past catches up.

CRITTER

Why did you come back?

NEWT

Hoping to liquidate some well-hidden assets. Get-in-get-out kinda thing. Plan is to cruise *Rascal* over to Trinidad where this salvage outfit - Venezuelan pirates - they scuttle her. You collect the insurance. They raise her up and give her a whole new identity.

CRITTER

Whoa, whoa, as your attorney, I'm advising you: That is illegal. I can't be party to any of that.

NEWT

Well, I'm strapped for cash, so your half mil retainer-

CRITTER

I have a lien on the yacht. If you can't mobilize cash, I'll sell it.

A rusty mechanical moan emanates from below.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Or...maybe...keep her.

The engine purrs like a tabby.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Let's just focus on the case.

NEWT

I never hired Lucky to do any murder. I was framed.

CRITTER  
 Red's got some pretty damning  
 evidence. The gun. Lucky's  
 statement. Bank records-

A car horn sounds in the distance: two shorts and a long.

CRITTER (CONT'D)  
 That's the signal.

NEWT  
 Bond me out ASAP, understand?

CRITTER  
 Newt. That's not gonna happen.

NEWT  
 Get them to hold me at county then.  
 If I go to state prison, I'm a dead  
 man.

CRITTER  
 If there's something I should know-

NEWT  
 I told you! I'm innocent!

CRITTER  
 Then why did you run?

NEWT  
 I was the only son of a wealthy  
 family. You know how that is. I saw  
 an opportunity to bolt. I took it.

Newt looks out at the open water. Sirens wail, coming closer.

NEWT (CONT'D)  
 You'll get your chance one day,  
 Critter. You're a fool if you  
 hesitate.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY 1988

A bailiff brings Newt to the defense table where Critter  
 waits. Red struts in. Chastain follows, dressed to dominate.  
 She parks a file box on the defense table.

CHASTAIN  
 Weapon, motive, intent, opportunity  
 and celebrity witness Robert Stack,  
 if you're crazy enough to go to  
 trial. Enjoy!

Red leans down to snarl in Newt's face.

RED

Pollard was like a brother to me,  
godfather to my only son. We faced  
Hell side by side in Normandy.

CRITTER

Red, c'mon. Don't do this.

RED

I know what you are, you sick son  
of a bitch, and I'm gonna nail your  
nancy ass to the wall.

CRITTER

(getting between them)  
District Attorney Redstone, kindly  
address comments to counsel.

BAILIFF

All rise. Court's in session.  
Honorable Judge Olympia Sterling  
presiding.

Poppy takes her place at the bench and raps the gavel.

POPPY

Good morning. Georgia versus  
Ballerini. Counsel, state your  
appearances for the record.

RED

District Attorney Doolittle  
Redstone for the great State of  
Georgia. Judge Sterling, you look  
exceptionally lovely today.

Poppy shoots him a withering look. Red sits, oblivious.

CRITTER

August Stillwell, Stillwell &  
Hodges, for the defense.

POPPY

Mr. Ballerini, state your full name  
for the record, please.

NEWT

Edward Newton Ballerini: one  
hundred percent not guilty!

POPPY  
Keep your pants on. There's  
protocol.

Poppy puts on reading glasses and picks up the indictment.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
"Grand jury charges count one:  
murder in the first degree. Count  
two, conspiracy to commit murder."  
June 1963. Twenty-five years ago. I  
don't know about y'all, but that's  
a record for me. Mr. Stillwell,  
have you discussed the charges set  
forth with your client?

CRITTER  
Yes, Your Honor.

POPPY  
Does he wish to enter a plea?

NEWT  
One hundred percent-

Critter sets a hand on Newt's shoulder.

CRITTER  
He'll plead not guilty.

POPPY  
Plea is so entered. Any motions?

RED  
I've provided exculpatory evidence  
to defense. Once Critter's had a  
chance to look it over, I expect  
we'll engage in plea discussions.

CRITTER  
Defense has no such expectation.  
I've prepared a motion to dismiss.

Critter holds up the paperwork. Poppy waves him forward.

POPPY  
Let's see it.

CRITTER  
Twenty-five years hence, it's safe  
to say a speedy trial was not forth-  
coming.

(MORE)

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Rather than due diligence, the state allowed this matter to fester until shamed into action by a D-list actor outa *Caddyshack II*.

RED

Objection! Counsel is no position to impugn the diligence of the state. Further, I will not stand by as the career of Robert Stack is assailed. The man's a God dang American treasure!

POPPY

Enough with the Vaudeville. Both of you. Motion denied. Anything else?

CRITTER

This stone-cold case hinges on a statement made decades ago by a questionable witness who's now deceased. It's inadmissible.

RED

Statement was witnessed by the sitting D.A. and witness's counsel. Admissible as a rooster in a henhouse.

CRITTER

With no opportunity short of a Ouija board to cross examine, I move we toss the hearsay statement, dismiss charges, and enjoy what's left of a beautiful day.

RED

The accused took it on the lam and evaded capture for twenty-five years in an attempt to weasel out of these charges. Now defense wants to use the fact of this rascalion fleeing bond to throw out incontrovertible evidence.

Critter flips through evidence in the file box, pausing on an 8x10 photo of Lucky's statement.

RED (CONT'D)

Too long have we waited for this smoldering ember to ignite the mighty conflagration of justice!

CRITTER

Your Honor? Your Honor, I withdraw the motion to suppress.

POPPY

(bangs gavel)

Can it. The statement's out. Motion to dismiss is denied. A little something for everybody.

CRITTER

Your Honor, I withdrew the motion.

POPPY

Now you want the statement in?

Newt elbows Critter. Chastain whispers urgently to Red.

RED

Your Honor, move to suppress the statement.

POPPY

Move to suppress your own evidence?

RED

Hearsay. Inadmissible.

POPPY

Okay. I see where this is going.  
(raps the gavel, annoyed)  
The matter's bound over, the statement's in, and I'm putting you two on notice. For the sake of the vicim's family, we will not drag this thing out with fatuous motions, continuances, and Billy-Bob-BS oratory. Understood?

CRITTER AND RED

Yes, Your Honor.

POPPY

Regarding the flight risk of this defendant-

RED

(guffaws)

That ship has sailed, am I right?

CRITTER

Your Honor, I'm duty-bound to request bail be set-

POPPY

Denied. Go on home.

Newt grips Critter's wrist, eyes wide with panic.

CRITTER

Your Honor, request to have the  
defendant held here at county.  
Since we're trying to expedite.

POPPY

So ordered. We're adjourned.

Poppy goes to chambers. The bailiff comes to cuff Newt.

NEWT

Jesus balls, Critter. Why'd you let  
Lucky's statement back in?

CRITTER

So I can hang them with it.

Newt crows, confident, as the bailiff leads him away.

NEWT

Woot! There's Guy Stillwell's boy!

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - LATER

Critter walks in. Rory looks up from a crossword puzzle.

RORY

Hey, houseboat.

CRITTER

August. Friends call me Critter.

RORY

Well, don't take it personally.

Rory taps her crossword puzzle.

RORY (CONT'D)

I need a seven-letter word for  
"well endowed."

CRITTER

Critter?

RORY

(laughs)  
Oh, are we banter buddies already?

CRITTER

If you like.

Rory sets up Critter's bourbon. King saddles up at the bar.

RORY  
Hey, King. How's the bum hip?

KING  
Ready for a test drive if you are.

RORY  
You two better watch it. I'll feed you out back with the rest of the alley cats.

Rory goes through the kitchen door behind the bar.

KING  
I've grown fond of Rory the Subsequent.

CRITTER  
I'm kinda smitten myself. Any progress on Guy's caseload?

KING  
Some. His sudden departure left a few people royally pissed off.

CRITTER  
Yeah, I'm one of them.

KING  
If we have to refund a retainer or two, just dip into that "what if somebody croaks" fund.

CRITTER  
What if somebody does croak?

KING  
Somebody *will* croak. That's a given. How goes it with Newt?

CRITTER  
Red's case is airtight. Lucky's statement - something's off there, but I don't know how to prove it.

KING  
The man was a walking hangnail. Plenty capable of murder.

CRITTER  
That night at the jail, this odd little guy showed up with Ruckels.

KING

Julian Tick. Fixer for the Dixie Mafia.

CRITTER

Lucky was genuinely afraid of him.

KING

Old man DiLippa had a convenient way of disappearing inconvenient people. Tick would bond a fella out. They'd drop him into a dry well on some farm, toss in a stick of dynamite - problem solved.

CRITTER

So when Lucky demonstrated he couldn't keep his mouth shut-

KING

Good a reason as any.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. OTHELLA'S JUKE JOINT - NIGHT 1960

OTHELLA'S FATHER sets chairs on tables as Othella mops up. Hearing noises outside, he sends her to hide behind the bar.

KING (V.O.)

The DiLippa family ran a protection racket hand in glove with the Klan. I handled taxes and what not for Othella's daddy at the juke joint.

Lucky Winfield and two hooded Klansmen bash through the door and savagely beat Othella's father. Crouching out of sight, Othella scrambles to drag the phone down from the bar.

KING (V.O.)

She called me one night - "They're gonna kill Daddy!" Guy and I were drunk enough to go over there.

Guy and King charge in. Lucky and the Klansmen flee into the night leaving Othella's father unconscious on the floor.

KING (V.O.)

All we had to say was, "Tick's on the way." They scattered like cockroaches.

END FLASHBACK

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - CONTINUOUS

CRITTER

Jesus. Why would Ruckels facilitate a thing like that?

KING

Questions for the dead. Tick himself disappeared ten or twelve years ago. You reap what you sow.

CRITTER

Same could be said for Lucky.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. A CADILLAC ELDORADO - DAY 1963

Critter drives, anxious. He pulls Guy's note from his pocket and glances at King, who drinks, singing with the radio.

CRITTER (V.O.)

The day after Pollard was murdered, I drove King to Fort Valley for an aggravated assault trial. Two days later, our client was free, and King celebrated all the way back to Athens. I wasn't in the mood.

EXT. STILLWELL & HODGES LAW FIRM - CONTINUOUS

Teddi, Othella, and Poppy are on the front porch in Sunday dresses with hats and gloves when Critter and King roll up.

YOUNG CRITTER

Did Guy come back?

TEDDI

Yes. We're waiting for him to finish with Mr. Redstone.

Angry voices can be heard from an open window above.

GUY (O.S.)

Last I heard, Lucky was Tick's problem. Don't come to me now like there's something rotten in Denmark.

RED (O.S.)

Stop stonewalling like you know nothing about it! I'll have you as accessory after the fact!

OTHELLA

Where's King?

CRITTER  
I took him home. He's, um-

POPPY  
(disgusted)  
We know what he is.

Poppy turns away, shaking visibly, on the verge of tears.

CRITTER  
Poppy? Are you okay?

Critter squeezes her gloved hand. Poppy jerks it away and shoves it in her dress pocket.

POPPY  
Mind your business, fool!

The door flies open. Guy hurries over to Poppy. Red struts down the porch steps past a stunned Critter.

RED  
Close your mouth, boy. You'll catch flies.

GUY  
Poppy, call the warehouse. Tell them Red's on his way over with a warrant to search the place.

TEDDI  
Guy, darling, Othella and I need to see you in your office.

GUY  
Honey Pie, this is not the time.

TEDDI  
Yes. *Sugar*. It is.

INT. GUY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

GUY  
Whiskey, ladies?

OTHELLA  
Oh, hell, yes.

TEDDI  
Please.

Guy opens a globe bar and pours three stiff drinks. Othella sits on the sofa with a burlap bag the size of a pillow case. From it, she produces a thick envelope.

OTHELLA (CONT'D)

Five thousand dollars. Poppy tells me that's the price for a murder defense. On account of I killed Lucky Winfield last night.

YOUNG CRITTER

*FWAGH?!*

Guy silences him with a hard glance.

GUY

Go on, Miss Othella.

OTHELLA

Self-defense. A reasonable degree of force under threat of imminent death and/or egregious injury.

She recites the definition like a Bible verse. Guy looks at Poppy, who avoids his gaze, head held high.

GUY

Walk me through it.

Othella sets the burlap bag on the coffee table with a telltale *tonk*. Guy lays newspaper on the table and uses a handkerchief to draw out a cast-iron skillet.

OTHELLA

I was closing down the juke joint. Two AM. Lucky comes in and starts in on me like he's done before.

GUY

And then what happened?

OTHELLA

Then old Mr. Skillet happened! Right upside his head!

GUY

How do you know he's dead?

OTHELLA

Oh, he's *deeaanaad*.

GUY

Where? At the juke joint?

OTHELLA

There's a trapdoor from Prohibition days.

(MORE)

OTHELLA (CONT'D)

We use it to sweep up peanut shells and dirty water. Out he went with the rest of the peanut trash.

GUY

Did Poppy witness this altercation?

TEDDI

She was with me. Studying for the bar exam. Got so late, I said, "Poppy, honey, seeing as Bootsy's off with the beatniks-

GUY

She was at *our* house?

TEDDI

Well, you wouldn't know, as you never came home last night. But you have an airtight alibi, no doubt. And Critter was in Fort Valley with King. Tatum was sleeping like a precious baby, so...

GUY

That certainly covers it.

OTHELLA

The man needed killing.

GUY

Let's keep that sentiment to ourselves.

OTHELLA

Made us pay to keep the Klan off our necks. Beat my father near to death. He had a goat's appetite for humpin' anything he could climb on. The Sheriff wouldn't lift a finger. Ask Miss Jeffie. Those little gals were terrified to go with him. Well! They need not fear him now!

Guy throws back his whiskey, and prepares for action.

GUY

Poppy, Critter: with me. Teddi, wait here with Miss Othella while I assess the situation at the juke joint.

TEDDI

Give Poppy time to pack a bag  
before you call the sheriff. She'll  
stay with us until we get this all  
sorted out.

She tries for an encouraging smile.

GUY

I'll have Mary-Louise put that cash  
in the safe and fetch you ladies  
some lunch from Woolworths.

OTHELLA

Ooooooh! Never had lunch at  
*Woolworth's* before. Didn't know it  
would only cost me \$5,000.

EXT. JUKE JOINT - LATER

Critter lugs Poppy's suitcases out of the upstairs apartment.  
He pauses, curious and amused, to study two grinning lawn  
jockeys flanking the door, grotesque Black caricatures on  
stone pedestals etched with the name MARBLESMITH.

POPPY

Mama calls them Hokey and Pokey. My  
great-great-grandfather, John  
Taller, took them as a trophy at  
the end of the Civil War.

YOUNG CRITTER

They belonged to the Marblesmiths?

POPPY

So did John Taller.

GUY (O.S.)

Poppy, come on down here, please.

CRITTER

It'll be okay. Guy can fix it.

POPPY

Mama fixed it. The rest is just  
paperwork.

INT. JUKE JOINT - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy cringes by the door, a gloved finger pressed under her  
nose. Guy helps himself to whiskey as he talks on the phone.

GUY

Hey, Sheriff. Guy Stillwell. Fine, fine, and y'all? Listen, Tom, Lucky Winfield ran into some trouble down at the juke joint last night.

Critter edges close enough to look into the trap door. Lucky stares up from the water below, blue-faced and neck-broke.

GUY (CONT'D)

I don't want to step outside my area of expertise, but I'd say he is deceased. Right. Thanks, Tom.

Guy hangs up the phone and takes out a tape measure.

GUY (CONT'D)

We don't have much time. Poppy, walk me through it.

POPPY

Miss Teddi told you I wasn't here.

GUY

I know what I was told. I'm asking my law clerk to help me process our client's story in the context of the crime scene. To make sure there's no inconsistencies.

POPPY

She said...he assaulted her. She struck him. He fell in there.

GUY

Is that what happened? Or is that what you told her to tell me?

Poppy stands quietly, chin up, mouth tight.

GUY (CONT'D)

This floor's been mopped, but look here - blood. Down in the wood grain. You think they won't see it? Won't photograph it as evidence?

YOUNG CRITTER

That could be from an old bar fight. No way to say otherwise.

GUY

Oh, Ruckels will find a way to say otherwise, I guaran-goddam-tee.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

He'll have somebody swear up, down,  
and sideways, this is fresh blood  
right out of Lucky Winfield's head -  
evidence Othella tried to conceal  
after she dragged him over to that  
trapdoor - and we better have  
something better than "can't say  
otherwise" or her goose is well and  
truly cooked. There's a dozen ways  
she doesn't come out of this alive!

POPPY

You think I don't know that?!

GUY

Then you've got to trust me! We've  
got to have the truth, or we go  
into that courtroom, bare asses  
exposed and get blindsided. Poppy,  
you've got a brilliant career ahead  
of you. Think about your future.

POPPY

I'm thinking about Mama!

GUY

So am I, goddamnit!

Guy slams the trapdoor shut. Sirens wail in the distance.

GUY (CONT'D)

Get on up to the car. Both of you.

EXT. JUKE JOINT - MOMENTS LATER

Critter and Poppy scramble up an embankment to the Caddy  
parked on a landing above the riverbank. Poppy gets in, slams  
the door, and screams a long primal scream.

Critter moves a respectful distance from the car, watching  
police and coroner vehicles swarm the juke joint.

INT. STILLWELL DINING ROOM - EVENING

Poppy and the Stillwells sit in silence at the supper table.

TATUM

Why isn't anybody talking?

TEDDI

We're simply dumbstruck by  
Doralee's delicious fennel chicken.

TATUM

Bullshit.

TEDDI

Tatum! Leave this table. Come back when you can talk like a lady.

TATUM

Then I won't come back ever!

She storms off. Poppy folds her napkin next to her plate.

POPPY

I need to be excused, please.

TEDDI

Critter, take Poppy's bags up to Bootsy's room.

INT. BOOTSY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy sits rigidly on the edge of the bed. Critter stows her luggage in the corner.

POPPY

Thanks, bellhop.

He sits crosslegged on the floor at her feet.

YOUNG CRITTER

Tell me what to do. How can I help?

POPPY

No one can help.

YOUNG CRITTER

You're not giving us a chance. Guy can fix it. You know he can.

POPPY

(barely above a whisper)  
I thought the river would take him.

YOUNG CRITTER

So you were there.

POPPY

I can't talk about it.

Poppy slides down to sit on the floor next to Critter.

POPPY (CONT'D)

The day Pollard was murdered, my aunt Cornelia saw you at Jeffie's.

YOUNG CRITTER

*Augh!* Don't tell Mother. I'm begging you.

POPPY

That's not my circus, and you ain't my monkey. But now we both have a secret that needs keeping.

She looks him in the eye. Hard. Critter nods. It's a pact.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Best if we focus on Mama's defense.

YOUNG CRITTER

She'll need character witnesses.

POPPY

That won't happen.

YOUNG CRITTER

Why not?

POPPY

Cornelia was twelve the first time Lucky Winfield caught up with her. Mama was nineteen. She insisted they file a police report. They came and photographed Cornelia's bloody knees and bruised body. That night, Klansmen beat my grandfather almost to death. They meant to hang him, but Guy and King showed up. Next day, Lucky nailed a naked picture of Cornelia to the front door. Just to show he could do whatever to whomever. And he did.

Uncomfortable with the overshare, Poppy goes to the window.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Some people say he's my father.

YOUNG CRITTER

Jesus. Poppy...

Critter is too heartsick to finish the sentence.

POPPY

We can walk up and down that river  
till the water turns to stone. No  
one's gonna testify on Mama's  
behalf, because she won't have it.  
She says if anybody speaks up,  
she'll plead guilty. She'd die  
before she let anybody else suffer.

INT. STILLWELL HOME GUY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Critter creeps down the stairs outside Guy's office. Teddi  
and Guy are in there raging at each other again.

TEDDI

I made the best of a bad situation.

GUY

By pilfering the murder weapon?  
It's a goddamn felony! You're an  
accessory after the fact!

TEDDI

Don't you lecture law to me. I went  
to the same law school you did.

GUY

And now your brilliant plan hinges  
on me suborning perjury.

TEDDI

You've gotten plenty of practice  
lying to me.

GUY

Being a polecat doesn't get a man  
disbarred.

TEDDI

Ha! Good thing! Poppy would be the  
only lawyer South of Chicago!

Teddi wrenches the door open, startled to find herself face-  
to-face with wide-eyed Critter. She brushes past him and  
stomps up the stairs. Guy motions Critter in.

GUY

Are you about to tell me something  
I'd prefer not to hear?

YOUNG CRITTER

Isn't it better to have the facts?

GUY

Don't assume facts not in evidence.  
Assumptions are based on fear.  
Poppy and Othella - either one  
would lie to protect the other.

YOUNG CRITTER

What'll you do if Redstone  
subpoenas Mother?

GUY

Same thing I'm fixin' to do now -  
get good and drunk.

He takes a bottle from his desk drawer and pours a big glass.

YOUNG CRITTER

Poppy says the neighbors won't  
testify, but plenty of people knew  
Lucky was bad. Cops, Klan fellas -  
Ruckels charged him with murder.

GUY

(laughs)  
There's an idea! Let's call Ruckels  
to the stand!

YOUNG CRITTER

Is there a law against it?

GUY

No, but a jury sees you grasping at  
straws. They know the prosecution's  
got your dick in a wringer.

YOUNG CRITTER

Whatever evidence he had on Lucky-

GUY

He'll argue it's not exculpatory,  
and I don't anticipate Talmadge  
ruling in our favor. His Klan  
sympathies run deep.

YOUNG CRITTER

Folks say Lucky was Poppy's father.

GUY

That's an evil rumor born of  
jealousy. A beautiful girl with  
high aspirations - that's all they  
need to talk trash about her.

YOUNG CRITTER

But she's lighter than Othella. Her daddy could be a white man.

GUY

If so, miscegenation statutes being what they are, the best a man could do is provide financially. Pay for college. Which has been done. Moral of the story: *Use a goddamn rubber.* I know you think you're a man of the world now, but you're a freckle-faced tadpole, and the last thing you need is some girl settin' the hook because you couldn't keep August Stillwell the Fourth in your pants. Understand?

YOUNG CRITTER

Yes, sir.

GUY

Shut the door on your way out.

Critter turns to go.

GUY (CONT'D)

Critter.

YOUNG CRITTER

Sir?

GUY

You'll be a fine attorney someday. Don't let it chew you up.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LAW OFFICE - EVENING 1988

Critter lays out exculpatory evidence on Guy's desk: crime scene photos, witness statements, police and coroner reports. Tate spins idly in Guy's leather chair, taking it all in.

CRITTER

If Lucky didn't do the murder, Newt didn't hire him. We've gotta prove that statement is bullshit.

TATE

If Lucky didn't do it, who did?

CRITTER

Some dude.

TATE

"Some dude?"

CRITTER

The meat and potatoes of criminal defense. Create reasonable doubt by advancing an alternate scenario. "My client didn't steal that Rolex; he bought it from some dude."

TATE

(skeptical)

This is one damning pattern of facts, big brother.

CRITTER

Success rate of the "some dude" defense is not 100%. But sometimes, it's all you got.

Critter and Tate circle the desk, parsing items in evidence.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Sunday: Newt and Pollard duke it out at Mother's party. Wednesday: Pollard turns up dead at Jeffie's. Witnesses report Lucky talking about salacious crime scene details that have not been made public.

TATE

(peering at an 8x10)

The deceased appears to be wearing a lady's corset. And lipstick.

CRITTER

Detective Hopper goes to the icehouse. Lucky's still there shooting his mouth off. They haul him in. He calls Guy. But DiLippa sends Tick. He cuts a deal with Ruckels: ten years if Lucky testifies Newt paid him ten grand to do the murder.

TATE

He paid. Bank records back it up.

CRITTER

They search the warehouse and find a gun with both their fingerprints. Newt posts bond. And he runs.

TATE

Fast forward 25 years aaaaaand you're screwed.

CRITTER

At the start, all they had was hearsay from the icehouse. If he'd stuck with Guy-

TATE

But he makes the deal. Suddenly their case is tighter than a bug's ass. No wrong turns. No loose ends. It doesn't even feel like an investigation. It feels like...

CRITTER

Insurance.

Tate studies the crime scene photos.

TATE

I could turn this into a digital image. You'd be able to see a flea on your vic's johnson.

CRITTER

Don't go down some rabbit hole unless you're off the clock.

TATE

I should do your shit on my own time? I have other clients, you know, and they don't nickel and dime me to death on expenses.

CRITTER

Do they give you free office space?

TATE

In a store room behind the kitchen! I need a real office. And I do believe I have found one.

She pulls the chair up to Guy's desk, making herself at home.

CRITTER

Maybe when Guy comes back-

She shoots him a look of frustration mixed with pity.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

He's coming back! And when he does retire, this'll be my office.

TATE

So you can relive his life instead of getting your own?

CRITTER

That's crap, and you better tread lightly, sister. Guy's got no use for your tweaky-geeky bag of tricks. If it was up to him, you wouldn't be here at all.

TATE

(deeply hurt)

You think I don't know that? I've known it since I was five. Bootsy's the beautiful one who's got him wrapped around her finger. You're the golden son who can do no wrong. Then I come taggin' along like a lovingly tolerated household pet.

CRITTER

Oh, grow up.

TATE

Good luck with your case, brother.

She spins out of the chair and flips him off with both barrels on her way out the door.

CRITTER

Tate. Tatum! Don't be- God damn it.

Critter takes the bottle from Guy's desk drawer. Empty. He weighs it in his hand for a moment, then puts it away. He goes out, tucking the 1963 trial transcript under his arm.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - LATER

Critter sips bourbon at the bar, focused on the 1963 trial transcript. He's startled when Rory taps his empty glass.

RORY

Studying for a spelling test?

CRITTER

Trying to figure out how that 1963 case ties into a pending matter.

RORY

Not the *Unsolved Mysteries* case?

CRITTER

(eager to impress her)  
The very one.

RORY

Interesting! I'm surprised the D.A. didn't ask for a change of venue.

CRITTER

So am I. Newt's got kind of a D.B. Cooper folk hero following.

RORY

But you don't want groupies on your jury. They'll trigger conservatives who see nonconformity as sin. Paint him as a well-funded Jimmy Buffet.

CRITTER

That might resonate. Searching for a lost shaker of salt.

RORY

Voir dire was the focus of my master's thesis: "The BELL Curve: Dynamics of Personal Functionalism Applied to Jury Selection."

CRITTER

No kidding. How'd you land on that?

RORY

My dad was a court bailiff. I was in the courtroom every day after school from kindergarten up.

CRITTER

(smiles, feeling it)  
Sounds familiar.

RORY

Most lawyers cherry-pick a jury based on questions about the case. Getting prospective jurors to tell stories about themselves is ultimately more revealing. So...

(writing on a napkin)

(MORE)

RORY (CONT'D)  
 Belief, Education, Laughter,  
 Loyalty. BELL Curve.

CRITTER  
 Point of clarification: How does  
 one implement the BELL theory?

RORY  
 Ask questions that invite stories.  
 Personal but not intrusive.

CRITTER  
 Give me an example. Ask me  
 something to show how it works.

RORY  
 Okay... Have you ever been in love?

CRITTER  
 Yes.

RORY  
 And how'd that work out?

CRITTER  
 Not great so far, but I'm hoping  
 that if I feign interest in this  
 BELL thing-

Rory laughs and bounces an olive off his forehead.

RORY  
 Up yours! You're worse than King.

Critter gazes into her eyes, gobsmacked and infatuated.

RORY (CONT'D)  
 Seriously, though. Human  
 beings consistently respond  
 to basic tribal dynamics that  
 steer typical human  
 behaviors.

CRITTER (V.O.)  
 Guy dismissed this sort of  
 thing as "psychobabble and  
 parlor tricks." He'd have  
 paid a palm reader sooner  
 than a jury consultant.

CRITTER (V.O.)  
 But looking back, I could see it...

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - MORNING 1963

The courtroom is packed. Funeral home fans waft quietly.  
 Tatum is in the upper gallery on Miss Jeffie's lap.

Sitting beside Teddi and Poppy in the front row, Critter observes intently as Guy and Ruckels conduct voir dire.

CRITTER (V.O.)

Belief: *faith* in what's unseen.  
 Education: a desire to learn.  
 Laughter: fearless recognition of  
 the ridiculous. Loyalty: strength  
 to stand firm once one has been won  
 over.

Sunlight and shadow shift across the room in a time lapse. Jurors appear, disappear. The only constants is Othella, dignified and still at the defense table.

CRITTER (V.O.)

Not that it made much difference.

The initial jury pool: 17 white men, 2 Black men, 5 white women. At the end of the process, 12 white men remain.

JUDGE TALMADGE

D.A. Ruckels. Opening statement.

RUCKELS

Gentlemen of the jury. In the wee hours of June 2, 1963, the victim walks into a juke joint down by the covered bridge. A thirsty man at the end of a hard-workin' day. The accused offers him a bite to eat. "Come into my web," said the spider to the fly.

Redstone props up a watermelon on the prosecution table and hands Ruckels a large cast iron skillet.

GUY

Objection. Demonstration during opening statement.

RUCKELS

Minimal use of visual aids.

JUDGE TALMADGE

I'll allow it.

Guy leans over the rail, whispering to Poppy and Critter.

GUY

Watch this. He'll put on a show.  
 I'll object that it's prejudicial.  
 (MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

Talmadge will instruct the jury to disregard, but you can't unring the bell. It's a lowdown dirty trick.

POPPY

What were you planning to do?

GUY

Same thing.

RUCKELS

She takes a skillet identical to this one here. With malice and fury and unfeminine musculature typical of her heritage-

Ruckels swings the skillet, cracking the watermelon open, exposing red innards. He whacks it again. Gory chunks spray.

RUCKELS (CONT'D)

She bludgeoned him dead as a wedge!

GUY

Objection! Outrageous! It's a prejudicial dog and pony show!

JUDGE TALMADGE

Sustained. Jury will disregard.

Guy casts a jaded glance over his shoulder.

RUCKELS

Many of you know Guy Stillwell. Counsel for the defense. He is slicker than the whiskers on a harbor cat. He'll try to divert attention and vilify the victim, who was never convicted of any crime. The state of Georgia looks to you to weigh the evidence and return a proper verdict: guilty of murder in the first degree.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Defense. Opening statement.

GUY

I'll wait till they tidy up.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Then you'll forego your opening.

GUY

I will not! Miss Othella has a right to the most vigorous defense-

JUDGE TALMADGE

Get on with it then.

Guy stands with a measured huff of righteous indignation. He takes his time, organizing his thoughts.

GUY

Let's just cut to the chase. The man needed killing.

Teddy and Poppy exchange anxious glances.

GUY (CONT'D)

Fella shows up at the juke joint - two in the morning - he ain't sellin' encyclopedias. The deceased arrived with evil intent and got himself a taste of old Mr. Skillet. In a drunken stupor, he stumbled down a hole. Is that a homicide? Nobody's proven it to me beyond a reasonable doubt.

Guy scoops up a handful of watermelon brain and eats it.

GUY (CONT'D)

All I know is, Miss Othella acted to save her own life. Likely saved other lives as well. You see, the prosecution failed to mention that the deceased was a stone-cold murderer.

RUCKELS

Objection! Facts not in evidence.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Sustained.

GUY

The D.A. brought it up! Said the man was never convicted, even though, by Lucky's own admission shortly before his untimely demise, he blew a man's brains out at a local whorehouse.

RUCKELS

Objection! I object, God damn it!

<p>GUY</p> <p>He was never <i>convicted</i> of brutalizing business owners, assaulting women. By golly, that <i>is</i> some thirsty work!</p>	<p>RUCKELS (CONT'D)</p> <p>Defense counsel's yappin' on facts not in evidence in this case or any matter pending! This is grounds for mistrial!</p>
---	---

JUDGE TALMADGE  
 (banging the gavel)  
 The objection is sustained. Jury will disregard. Ruckels, if I declared a mistrial every time somebody stepped outa line, we'd still be litigating Cain versus Abel. Stillwell, wrap it up. And keep a civil tongue in your head.

Guy walks the box, making eye contact with each juror.

GUY

Gentlemen, "facts in evidence" are often tailored to the narrative of the ruthless. Those with the upper hand. Somebody recently said to me: "It's never a good day to fight. That's why the fight keeps needing to get fought." Well, Miss Othella decided it was a good day to fight. She rose up before a monster and  
*STRUCK - HIM - DOWN!*

As Guy thunders, the courtroom is transfixed. All eyes are on him - Poppy's filled with hungry hope, Critter's full of unabashed hero worship.

GUY (CONT'D)

So I am gonna fight for Miss Othella now. Fight like a pit bull! Every time the prosecution tries to make like she's anything less than innocent until proven guilty, every time he plays to unspoken bias that lurks in the hearts and minds of all men, I will call him out. I will call you out. Because I believe in your better angels. I believe you'll reach a just and wise verdict: not guilty.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - LATER

Tatum sleeps, her sweaty head against Doralee's chest. Ruckels questions officious coroner DR. COWELL.

RUCKELS

Dr. Cowell, you've been coroner in Athens-Clarke County for seventeen years. A board-certified forensic pathologist held in high esteem by-

GUY

Objection. Counsel's testifying.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Overruled. Ask a question, Ruckels.

RUCKELS

You personally did the autopsy on the savagely murdered victim?

GUY

Objection. Inflammatory.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Overruled.

CORONER

Cause of death was blunt force trauma to the right occipital region beneath the lambdoid suture.

RUCKELS

Now, Doc, for the benefit of an old Southern lawyer-

CORONER

She brained him but good.

Ruckels enjoys hearty laughter from the courtroom.

RUCKELS

Lucky's sitting there, minding his manners. She comes up behind him, quiet as little cat's feet-

GUY

Objection. Calls for speculation.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Calls for common sense. Overruled.

CORONER

A blow to the back of the head propels the victim forward. His face comes in contact with the table, breaking his nose and a couple front teeth.

RUCKELS

You suspect he was rendered  
unconscious at that point?

GUY

Objection. Speculation.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Overruled.

CORONER

I'd say he was unconscious or dead.

GUY

Objection!

JUDGE TALMADGE

Overruled.

GUY

Imagine my surprise!

JUDGE TALMADGE

Shut your yap, Stillwell.

RUCKELS

How do you suppose he ended up in  
the river bottom?

GUY

Your Honor! "I suspect"? "I'd say"?  
"Do you suppose"? It's speculation,  
plain as your Aunt Fanny!

JUDGE TALMADGE

Overruled. Take it up on cross.

CORONER

Wood splinters in his face indicate  
she dragged him to the trapdoor.

RUCKELS

Holy cats. Sounds like an  
unpleasant way to go.

CORONER

It was. Without a doubt.

RUCKELS

(to Guy)

Your witness.

Guy mulls for a moment, then stands to approach the witness.

GUY  
Unpleasant, you say.

CORONER  
Without a doubt.

GUY  
But a moment ago, you said he was  
unconscious. Maybe dead.

CORONER  
Correct, but-

GUY  
So he was dead, unconscious, in a  
state of agonized unpleasantness,  
or all or none of the above. Maybe  
you and the prosecution should get  
together over lunch at Tony's and  
agree upon which wild speculation  
you'd like the jury to embrace.

RUCKELS  
Objection! Badgering.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Sustained.

GUY  
Sworn statement of the accused says  
the deceased stumbled into the  
hole. Going over the edge, might he  
have grasped at the edge and ended  
up with a few splinters?

RUCKELS  
Objection. Calls for speculation.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Sustained.

GUY  
Fair enough. Truth is, you don't  
know. Isn't that right?

CORONER  
I can make an educated guess.

GUY  
No, sir, you may not! A woman's  
life hangs in the balance. This  
trial has not convened for the  
purpose of your guesswork.

RUCKELS  
Objection!

GUY  
State your grounds. I suspect it'll  
go well for you.

RUCKELS  
Badgering, testifying, and being a  
horse's ass!

The courtroom erupts in laughter and spattered applause.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Sustained.

GUY  
No more questions.

RUCKELS  
Prosecution calls Detective Hopper.

GUY  
If it please the court, that's a  
deep river to cross before supper.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
(bangs the gavel)  
Agreed. We'll reconvene tomorrow.

BAILIFF  
All rise.

King sits dozing until Poppy kicks his chair. He snorts, and  
struggles to his feet. Spectators stretch and kibitz.

Teddi and Poppy come forward to hug Othella.

TEDDI  
How ya holding up, Othella?

OTHELLA  
Though I walk through the valley of  
the shadow, I shall fear no evil.  
(to Poppy)  
Get home now, baby girl. You got a  
big day tomorrow.

POPPY  
I should be here. I could hold off  
on the bar exam. Take the next one.

OTHELLA AND TEDDI  
You'll do no such thing!

Doralee makes her way forward and passes a picnic basket to the bailiff, who searches it.

DORALEE

(to Othella)

Fried chicken, cornbread, and Waldorf salad. Plenty to share with the other ladies, like you asked.

OTHELLA

Doralee, you've made me the most popular gal on the cellblock.

TEDDI

(to the bailiff)

Those Tollhouse cookies are for you, Melvin. It means so much that we can depend on you to keep Othella safe from harm.

BAILIFF

Yes, ma'am, Mrs. Stillwell. We'll take her up the back way.

Guy waves Poppy and Critter into a brief huddle.

GUY

Hopper's gonna be a tough nut to crack. Critter, drive King home and hightail it back to the office.

POPPY

I should be second chair tomorrow. King's no good to us drunk.

GUY

Don't get distracted, Poppy. Go home and review your contracts and torts.

EXT. KING'S HOUSE - A LITTLE WHILE LATER

The Caddy pulls up next to a utility van - CASEY & SON INTERIOR/EXTERIOR MAINTENANCE - parked next to Mimi's Mustang. Paint and supplies are stacked in the driveway.

KING

Watch it there. Mimi's having the boudoir remodeled. She's been singing like a meadowlark every day since the fella started work.

YOUNG CRITTER  
Okay if I get a Coke?

KING  
Help yourself.

King heads into the house. Critter goes around to the back porch and takes a Coke from the fridge. He opens it, drinks a bit, and refills it with rum from a bottle on the shelf.

KING (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
What in fucking hell?!

MIMI (O.S.)  
(screaming)  
Stop it! Stop it, you crazy idiot!

Critter looks up at scuffling sounds on the porch roof overhead. BILLY ROY CASEY, a young Black man in capable handyman condition, drops from the eaves to the grass.

MIMI (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Run, Billy Roy, run! He has a gun!

Billy Roy dashes naked to the clothesline, snatches a white sheet, and wraps it around himself as he runs toward the van. A shot rings out. A front tire on the van goes flat.

YOUNG CRITTER  
FUCK! King! What the hell?!

Critter dashes out to the yard. Above the porch, King hangs out of a 2nd-floor window, waving a .38.

KING  
Git outa the way, Critter! I don't want you to get hurt.

Two more shots. Another tire, then the van's windshield explodes. Mimi pummels King with her fists, shrieking.

MIMI  
Stop it, you crazy-ass drunk!

Another shot. Billy Roy drops to the ground. A red bloodstain blossoms on the white sheet. Mimi screams, wrestles the gun away from King, and flings it into a flowerbed below.

YOUNG CRITTER  
(running to Billy Roy)  
FUCK! Oh, Jesus. Holy shit. Hey.  
Hey, man, are you okay?

BILLY ROY  
He shot me! Shot me in the ass!

Billy Roy struggles to his feet and limps toward the van.

YOUNG CRITTER  
Hang on. I'll call for help.

BILLY ROY  
Fuck you. I gotta get outa here.

Billy Roy gathers the bloody sheet around his body and limps down the driveway. Critter dashes inside.

INT. KING'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

King stumbles downstairs. He crumples on the bottom step, his head in his hands, rocking, shaking, sobbing.

KING  
Christ Jesus. Christ almighty.

Critter yanks the phone off the wall and dials.

INT. LAW OFFICE - SAME

Mary-Louise answers the phone as Guy walks in the front door.

MARY-LOUISE  
Stillwell and Hodges.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

YOUNG CRITTER  
Put Guy on. It's an emergency.

She hands Guy the phone.

GUY  
Critter?

YOUNG CRITTER  
King shot a man. Billy Roy Casey.  
He not dead, but he's bleeding  
something awful.

GUY  
Stay calm, son. You're doing fine.  
Drive Billy Roy to Saint Mary's.  
I'll call ahead and meet you there.

YOUNG CRITTER

Yes, sir.

END INTERCUT

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD NEAR KING'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy Roy limps along, the bloody sheet around his waist. The Caddy zooms up and screeches to a halt. Terrified, Billy Roy grabs a big stick and swings it at Critter.

BILLY ROY

Stay away from me, motherfucker!

YOUNG CRITTER

It's cool. It's cool. My dad's Guy Stillwell. Your dad's lawyer? He said to take you to the hospital.

Critter opens the back door of the Caddy. Billy Roy looks down the impossibly long road, shaking his head in despair.

BILLY ROY

*Fuck!* I might as well be dead.

EXT. STILLWELL HOME FRONT PORCH - LATER

In the driveway, Critter scrubs the bloody seat of the Caddy. King paces, shaking, distraught.

KING

(fighting tears)

This is rock bottom. It's over. I coulda killed that fella. Ended his young life. Destroyed my own. I'm gonna be disbarred. I'll be in jail with the DTs...

A taxi drops Guy off, and King rushes to meet him.

KING (CONT'D)

What's happening? Is he all right?

GUY

He's in good hands. I intercepted the police report. Worked it out with Mr. Casey. You'll pay four years college tuition for Billy Roy plus ten thousand cash to Mr. Casey for his inconvenience. Moral of the story: If you get shot in the ass, get shot in the ass by a lawyer.

KING

Oh, Jesus...

King crumples to the porch steps, weeping, head in his hands.

KING (CONT'D)

They tell you in AA to make a fearless moral inventory. I'm ready to do that. There's a place over in Savannah. I'm sorry to leave you in the middle of trial, but I gotta go dry out.

GUY

(grimly)

I understand.

KING

I owe you my life, partner.

Guy sets his hand on King's shoulder.

GUY

God damn a man who won't commit a felony for a friend.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

RUCKELS

State calls Detective Burl Hopper.

DETECTIVE HOPPER, 50ish, rumped but professional goes to the witness stand. Guy beckons Critter to the defense table.

GUY

Sit here till Poppy gets back from the bar exam. Doesn't look good to have Othella sitting alone while I cross.

BAILIFF

You swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

RUCKELS

Detective, says here in your report that the body was dumped, floor washed, and ten hours later, the sheriff was called not by the defendant but by her lawyer.

GUY

Objection. Leading by testifying.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Overruled.

GUY  
Leading by bloviating?

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Knock it off, Stillwell.

RUCKELS  
What do make of all this talk about  
the existing relationship between  
the victim and the accused?

GUY  
Objection! He's soliciting hearsay.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Overruled.

HOPPER  
There were rumors. Unsubstantiated.

RUCKELS  
They say the victim was the daddy  
of this woman's daughter.

GUY  
Objection! Lurid speculation! I  
want it stricken from the record.

RUCKELS  
Withdrawn. Your witness, defense.

Guy remains still long enough that spectators start to  
murmur. The notes in his hand rustle with a visible tremor.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Defense? Shake a tail feather.

GUY  
No questions.

RUCKELS  
All righty then! Prosecution rests.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Defense, call your first witness.

GUY  
Defense calls... District Attorney  
Borley Ruckels.

Pandemonium reigns despite the banging of the gavel.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. HOPPER'S CAMPSITE ON THE OCONEE - DAY 1988

Detective Hopper, on old man now, sits at the end of the dock, casting a lure, reeling it in, casting, reeling.

CRITTER  
Detective Hopper?

HOPPER  
Critter. What took you so long?

Critter joins Hopper at a picnic table on the dock. Hopper pours bourbon into paper cups.

HOPPER (CONT'D)  
People go, but they don't stay gone. They lie. But sooner or later, "the truth will out."

CRITTER  
Start with Pollard.

HOPPER  
Clean hit. No sign of struggle. Somebody opened that door and-

He points a two-finger gun and makes a hollow "POP" sound.

CRITTER  
Dixie mafia?

HOPPER  
DiLippa and Pollard had a history of conflicting interests.

CRITTER  
Do you think Lucky was the hitman?

HOPPER  
None of the ladies mentioned him. They knew him. Despised him. If he was there, I'd have heard about it.

CRITTER  
Did they mention anyone else? Anyone who seemed out of place?

HOPPER  
Just you.

CRITTER  
Gah! Jesus Christ.

HOPPER

(laughs)

It brought some levity to an otherwise dark day. They told the story for years, how the virgin Critter Stillwell jumped off the roof without his pants.

CRITTER

I had my pants.

HOPPER

Makes a better story if you don't.

Critter helps himself to another shot of bourbon.

HOPPER (CONT'D)

I had questions, and I was paid well not to ask. The shame ate at me. That's not who I am. But Ruckels was determined to hang it on Lucky, and I figured...

CRITTER

He had it coming?

Hopper shrugs, but the weight is evident in his shoulders.

HOPPER

For years, he'd skate on one thing after another. Ugly incidents. Violent. I did the legwork. The paperwork. I tried to put that twisted SOB in jail. Ruckels never charged him. Police reports got lost. Evidence went missing. It got to be too much for my conscience.

CRITTER

So you tipped Guy off.

HOPPER

(with a sly smile)

Funny. Some of that paperwork ended up in the trunk of your mama's car.

CRITTER

Okay. Thanks for your time.

Critter starts to go but turns back at the end of the dock.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

That day at Miss Jeffie's - who was Pollard there to see?

HOPPER  
His usual gal. Miss Cornelia.

EXT. OTHELLA'S PORCH - LATER

LIZZIE MAE, cheerful in pastel scrubs, waves to Critter.  
Othella slumps in her wheelchair, docile, vacant.

LIZZIE MAE  
Look, Miss Othella, it's Critter!

CRITTER  
Hey, Miss Othella. Good to see you.

LIZZIE MAE  
Do you mind sitting with her while  
I run to the post office? She's no  
trouble. You're no trouble, are  
you, Miss Othella? Poor thing is  
pretty much in a state of  
hypnagogia these days.

Lizzie Mae parks Othella's wheelchair by the porch swing,  
grabs her purse, and bustles down the sidewalk.

Critter kneels and passes one hand in front of Othella's  
blank stare.

CRITTER  
Miss Othella?

OTHELLA  
(cracking a smile)  
Hyp-no-GOTCHA!

Critter laughs. She claps her hands, delighted by her prank.

CRITTER  
Do you know why I'm here?

OTHELLA  
Poppy says Newt showed up out of  
the blue, and you're his lawyer.  
She says your daddy run off.

CRITTER  
He's...indisposed.

OTHELLA  
I know what he is. And I know what  
you are. Guy Stillwell's boy.

CRITTER

What was the story you wanted to tell me?

OTHELLA

You know the best way to poison a rat? Mix a little cornmeal with Ovaltine and baking soda. Rat can't resist the sweet chocolate. Eats it right up and dies from all that baking soda in his belly.

CRITTER

Walk me through it.

OTHELLA

Cornelia saw Pollard every week. That day, she walked in, ready to do business. There he was. She called me in a panic. Afraid she'd get blamed. Like *that-*

Othella snaps her gnarled fingers, delighting herself again.

OTHELLA (CONT'D)

Inspiration hit me! I had in mind some sweet chocolate for old Lucky.

CRITTER

The corset and lipstick.

OTHELLA

(laughing)

That was the special sauce. Took me and Cornelia some effort to get him out of his clothes and into it.

CRITTER

You put the corset on him?

OTHELLA

That night, Lucky came in to get the protection money, as per usual. Everybody was talking about the big murder that happened. I gave him all the down and dirty information.

CRITTER

Details only the killer would know.

OTHELLA

He couldn't wait to get up in that icehouse and impress the Klan fellas. I knew they'd turn on him faster than you can peel an onion.

CRITTER

So Hopper arrested him. But Tick bonded him out. And he came back.

Othella's glee fades.

OTHELLA

He was like a mad dog. Said he'd leave us dead or wishing we were.

CRITTER

Did he hurt Poppy? Did he rape her? Is that why you killed him?

POPPY

*Enough!*

Critter turns, startled. Poppy stands in the driveway, and she looks pissed.

INT. OTHELLA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy slams items out of the dishwasher into the cupboard.

CRITTER

Maybe you should just tell me.

POPPY

Maybe you should lay off the sauce, get your shit together, and prepare your client for trial.

CRITTER

That confession is bullshit, and you know it. Lucky was framed, which means Newt was framed, and I don't know how to keep you out of it, Poppy. You need to recuse yourself and retain counsel.

POPPY

On what grounds? There has to be financial gain or undue bias. Which one have you decided I'm guilty of?

CRITTER

I have a duty to provide a vigorous defense! If that means turning over a few old rocks - fine. I hope you know what's at stake.

POPPY

What's at *stake*?

The phone on the kitchen wall rings with an electronic trill.

POPPY (CONT'D)

In the history of this town, I am the only Black woman to sit on the superior court bench.

(the phone trills again)

In the history of my mother's family, I'm the first to get a post-graduate degree.

(the phone trills again)

I'm still waiting for a generation in which my family is not *owned*, to some extent, by yours, so do not presume to lecture me about *what's at stake*.

The phone trills again. Poppy yanks the receiver to her ear.

POPPY (CONT'D)

Judge Sterling. Oh. Miss Teddi.

Critter shakes his head and mouths "NO!" Poppy expression is pained. Sorrowful. Critter sees tears in her eyes and reluctantly takes the phone.

CRITTER

Mother? Where is he?

INT. GUY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Guy is intubated, eyes bloodshot and panicked. Teddi lies next to him, stroking his forehead, entertaining him with witty repartee while DR. HARINI, a compassionately cool professional, talks to Critter and Bootsy by the door.

TEDDI

Bootsy says every time she files for divorce, she gets three proposals of marriage. So, not to be outdone...

DR. HARINI

Advancing cirrhosis, primary liver cancer, alcoholic cardiomyopathy. He's had a massive stroke. Cascading TIAs. Brain function is severely compromised.

BOOTSY

What's the treatment plan?

DR. HARINI

Palliative care. This level of  
decompensation is irreversible.

TEDDI

First Peatus Vestipol, then  
Wade Epps, both confirmed  
bachelors, as they say.

DR. HARINI (CONT'D)

Statistically, he's at the  
upper end of life expectancy  
for an alcoholic.

DR. HARINI (CONT'D)

If you sign a DNR, the next cardiac  
event will likely be fatal.

TEDDI

Last but not least: Lindy Calvin  
invited me to run off to an island  
where Sapphic marriage has been *de  
rigueur* since Queen Isabella.

Guy gazes at Teddi, his eyes crinkled with amusement.  
Critter, stone-faced, signs the DNR. Teddi comes to put her  
arms around Bootsy, who weeps quietly.

TEDDI (CONT'D)

Bootsy, I need you to find Tatum.  
Critter, call King and Mary-Louise.  
I'll call Poppy.

CRITTER

Why Poppy?

TEDDI

Because your father asked me to.

INT. GUY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A heart monitor blips quietly. Critter keeps vigil in the  
corner, grinding through the 1963 trial transcript.

GUY (V.O.)

Defense calls District Attorney  
Borley Ruckels.

JUDGE TALMADGE

(shouting over the chaos)  
Order! I will clear this place out!

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY 1963

Pandemonium. Othella is the quiet eye of the storm. Mary-Louise pushes forward to pass a stack of files to Guy.

GUY

Your Honor, I need these entered into evidence.

RUCKELS

Objection! Disclosure! I've had no opportunity to review any so-called-

GUY

He's had all the opportunity in the world. The documents originated in his own office.

Guy hands copies to the bailiff, who hands them to the judge and prosecution. Ruckels flips through the pages.

RUCKELS

No. No. Hell, no! These documents compromise ongoing investigations.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Hang on, hang on.

Talmadge fumbles with his reading glasses, studying the file.

RUCKELS

I refuse to participate in this high-diving horse trick!

GUY

Move to declare a hostile witness. Let's see how you look in handcuffs.

A roar goes up from the gallery, a mix of glee and outrage.

JUDGE TALMADGE

Recess! In my chambers, counsel.

Guy, Red, and Ruckels follow the judge to chambers. Teddi and Poppy make their way forward through the chaotic courtroom. Othella embraces Poppy with pride and joy.

OTHELLA

Baby girl! How'd it go?

YOUNG CRITTER

Was it as hard as they say?

POPPY  
Later, later. What's happening?

YOUNG CRITTER  
Mary-Louise brought these.

He gives Poppy his seat next to Othella. Poppy studies the evidence file until Talmadge returns to the bench.

BAILIFF  
All rise. Court's in session.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
I have no choice but to order the D.A. to take the stand. Defense counsel, you're on a short leash.

RUCKELS  
(taking the stand)  
Ridiculous. Showboating bullshit.

TATUM  
Can I sit on your lap, Critter? Otherwise I can't see.

BAILIFF  
You swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Critter lifts her onto his lap.

GUY  
Mr. Ruckels, you are familiar with these reports submitted to your office by the sheriff's department?

RUCKELS  
Can't say as I recall.

GUY  
I'll refresh your memory.

Guy holds up the police reports one after another.

GUY (CONT'D)  
Assault with a deadly weapon. Rape. Sexual assault. Aggravated assault. And so on. In each and every case, the victim is a Black woman.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Ask a question or end it, counsel.

GUY  
What's the name here on each and every one of these complaints - where it says "Assailant"?

RUCKELS  
James Aloysius Winfield.

GUY  
When did they started calling him  
"Lucky"? I wonder. Was it when he  
climbed into your hip pocket?

RED  
Objection!

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Sustained.

GUY  
Did he get lucky when he became an  
informant, greasing the skids for  
you with GBI? Or was it lucky how  
he did the Klan's dirty work while  
you kept your hands clean?

RED  
Objection! Badgering!

JUDGE TALMADGE  
Sustained.

RUCKELS  
Counsel is mischaracterizing—

GUY  
Turning a blind eye to a string of  
violent crimes in order to keep  
this monstrous SOB out of jail. How  
should we characterize it?

RUCKELS  
A greater good was being served.

GUY  
That "personal relationship" you  
alluded to was, in fact, a well-  
documented series of felonious  
assaults, was it not?

RUCKELS  
(shrugs)  
He said, she said.

GUY  
Tell me about the greater good in  
this injury to my client and in her  
anguish at being slandered by you  
in this court!

RED  
 (on his feet)  
 Objection! Badgering the witness!

JUDGE TALMADGE  
 That's as far as you go, Stillwell.  
 Witness is excused. Jury will  
 disregard.

Critter leans forward and whispers to Poppy.

CRITTER  
 Like hell they will.

EXT. STILLWELL HOME FRONT PORCH - MORNING

Critter brings Tatum a bowl of cereal on the porch swing. Guy paces, yellow legal pad in one hand, bourbon in the other, muttering through his closing argument.

GUY  
 Great harm was done. You can't undo  
 it, but don't make it worse.

A VW microbus sputters into the driveway. Tatum shrieks, bolts over the porch rail, and runs to Bootsyt, who climbs out of the van, a fully blossomed flower child.

TATUM  
 Bootsyt! Bootsyt!

BOOTSYT  
 Tater-noggin!

Bootsyt swings Tatum up in her arms. Teddi rushes out, tearful with relief, gathering both her daughters in her arms.

TEDDI  
 Sweet girl! Oh, my girl! Thank God.

BOOTSYT  
 Mama, I had the most wonderful  
 summer. I worked in the garden and  
 read Mahatma Gandhi and-

TEDDI  
 Tell me while you take a bath. Your  
 daddy's due in court, and he needs  
 his good luck charm.

Bootsyt skips up the steps and throws her arms around Guy. Guy stands stiffly. Bootsyt takes the bourbon from him.

BOOTSY

You don't need this, Daddy. I'll make you breakfast like we had in California: toasted bread with avocado slices and an egg over easy right on top like a crown.

Choked up but trying to be gruff, he pulls her into his arms.

GUY

Beatrix Stillwell. Don't you ever terrify me like that again.

BOOTSY

Okay, Daddy. It's okay. I'm here...

END FLASHBACK

INT. GUY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING 1988

BOOTSY

I'm here, Daddy. It's okay.

Bootsy strokes Guy's hand, speaking quietly.

BOOTSY (CONT'D)

All that's left is love, Daddy. Just go with it now. Nothing else matters. Only love...

Critter stands by the window until he can't take it anymore.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ- A LITTLE WHILE LATER

Critter sits at the bar, writing on a yellow legal pad. Rory briefly sets her hand close to his but doesn't touch him.

RORY

I'm sorry to hear about your dad.

Critter taps his empty glass without looking up. Rory refills it and leaves the bottle. King sighs and sits next to him.

CRITTER

Please, don't share my personal business with the bartender.

KING

It was my personal business. My  
lifelong friend was at the  
precipice, and I failed to reel him  
in. That's the kind of thing a man  
can only confide in his bartender.

Frustrated, Critter tears away the page he's writing. He  
crumples it. His hands are shaking.

CRITTER

King...am I a good lawyer?

KING

(kidding)  
Nah, but I do see potential.

CRITTER

Am I an alcoholic?

KING

(not kidding)  
No. But I do see potential.

Rory brings King a club soda with lime. He raises the glass.

KING (CONT'D)

Guy Stillwell. A goddamn rascal.  
And I love him.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - LATER

Critter empties the bottle into his glass. He tears a sheet  
from the legal pad, and adds it to a pile of wadded paper.

RORY

(to the room)  
Last call, folks. Drink up.  
(to Critter)  
May I call you a cab?

CRITTER

I'm fine.

RORY

Critter, I don't mean to overstep-

CRITTER

Right. A cab. Of course. Thank you.

While Rory makes the call, Critter drains his glass, swishes  
water in his mouth, and tests his breath against his palm,  
watching the last die hards drift out the door.

RORY  
Cab'll be here in five.

CRITTER  
So. What are you doing after work?

RORY  
Wishing lawyers tipped better.

Critter offers a nervous laugh.

CRITTER  
I wonder if you'd like to go hear  
some music or...

RORY  
Critter, I know you probably don't  
want to be alone tonight, but  
let's, um, keep it professional.

CRITTER  
Is that what we've been doing? I  
don't mean to overstep either, but  
I like you. Very much. I find you  
very attractive, and I thought the  
feeling was mutual. If I'm wrong-

RORY  
You're not wrong.

CRITTER  
Great! Excellent. So...maybe start  
by telling me your name.

RORY  
Please, don't make me spell it out.

CRITTER  
What - you won't date a lawyer?

RORY  
I won't date a *drunk*. I wasted two  
years on a drunk and another year  
getting over it. Yes, I like you.  
Yes, I find you attractive. But if  
the drunk version of you is all  
that's available, I'll pass.

CRITTER  
I - you don't even -

Avoiding Critter's eyes, Rory gathers his crumpled pages into  
a trash can.

RORY

Hard thing is, a woman gets to be 40 and the talent pool for quality hookup is pretty shallow. It's a talent *puddle*. Most men my age are trying to knock boots with college girls, so if I meets a man who's intelligent, good-looking, potentially great in the sack – oh, Lord! It's tempting. I can almost convince myself he's a charming social drinker, not an asshole concealing a mean streak.

CRITTER

(trying to sound sober)  
I am not a drunk.

RORY

You're in here drinking every day.

CRITTER

I come in here to see you! Jesus. I didn't know you were sizing me up on your BELL Curve.

RORY

Ha! We both know what curves you're sizing me up on.

CRITTER

Wow. I don't even – the *hard thing*? When a man gets to be 40, the only women who don't crucify him for the sins of their old lovers are half his age. If I'm an asshole either way, I might as well wade right into the talent puddle and find myself a college girl because the woman I *really* want is–

He cuts himself off. Rory stands there, unflinching.

RORY

Your taxi's here.

CRITTER

You don't know shit about me, okay?  
(heading for the door)  
And you don't know shit about jury selection!

INT. GUY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

The sky outside the window is shades of gray dawn. Critter squeezes the back of his neck, spikes a Coke with bourbon, and takes half a dozen aspirin. He turns at the sound of Teddi's deep sigh. She kisses him tenderly on the cheek.

TEDDI

My beautiful boy. You need a haircut.

Teddi leaves. Critter slumps into a side chair and turns to the final pages of the 1963 transcript.

JUDGE TALMADGE (V.O.)

Defense. Closing argument.

GUY (V.O.)

Gentlemen of the jury, I thank you for your fortitude and vigilance. That is what troubled times require. Vigilance. Fortitude.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY 1963

Guy walks the box, delivering his closing argument. Critter sits in the front row of the silent courtroom.

GUY

Seen the big movie this summer? *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I'll be the contrarian. I didn't buy it. C'mon now. Compelling evidence exonerates a man who should have been presumed innocent, but the jury finds him guilty anyhow, because he's Black and they're white. And then he gets gunned down by law enforcement for no damn reason. That's a mighty cynical view of Southern justice. But then a case like this comes along, and it's impossible to deny. A case like this makes you think about Dr. King and the protesters down in Alabama. Makes you wonder how it took so long.

Guy sits on the table, speaking affably to the jury.

GUY (CONT'D)

There's a thirteenth juror in that room when you deliberate a verdict: *Zeitgeist*. The sum of who we are as a society. Sometimes it argues for vengeance. Sometimes it speaks for compassion. Sometimes it's shackled to antiquated notions, bigotry - but right now, at this moment in history, our *Zeitgeist* is urging us to evolve, to be a more egalitarian society.

Tatum fidgets until Bootsy pulls her onto her lap.

GUY (CONT'D)

I believe in Harper Lee's good intentions. I just wish she'd given old Atticus a better closing argument. He comes out mewling and pleading, "In the name of God, do your duty!" But they return that despicable, unjust guilty verdict because that's what Hollywood believes Southerners to be. We say *y'all* and *meemaw* and *fixin' to go to church*. Small of mind. Ignoble of spirit. The plight of the Negro in modern society - oh, that's on the crackers and the Dixiecrats - not on sophisticated Northern folks, heavens, no! This is what Yankees tell themselves so they can sleep at night. But someday, somehow, there will be a reckoning for wrongs that have been done from sea to shining sea, and every one of us will be called upon to examine our role in the history of it all.

Poppy grips Othella's hand. Othella strokes Poppy's arm.

GUY (CONT'D)

Funny thing about that trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Harper Lee based it on a true-life case down in Alabama. And the true-life jury returned a verdict of *not guilty*. That jury was not a Hollywood caricature. They were genuine Southern people with traditional Southern values: decency, literacy, common sense.

Guy is on his feet, incensed.

GUY (CONT'D)

Don't try to tell me, Mr. Hollywood  
Movie Man or Miss New York Book  
Editor that a Southern jury is  
incapable of such qualities, for I  
have seen them in this courtroom  
time and time again. I see them  
before me now. People of moral  
courage empaneled to perform a  
sacred duty. I refuse to believe  
that you'll deliver the cynical  
cracker verdict Hollywood wants to  
put in your mouth. I trust you to  
come back with a just and fair  
verdict: *not guilty*.

INT. COURTHOUSE INTERVIEW ROOM - LATER

Othella and Teddi halfheartedly play cards. Critter paws  
through food in the picnic basket. Guy and Poppy pace.

POPPY

Seventeen hours.

GUY

They're thinking about it. That's a  
good thing.

Guy opens his silver flask. His hand is shaking until Othella  
covers it with her own steady hand.

OTHELLA

I've run booze most of my life.  
There's those that enjoy it, those  
that need it, and those that use it  
as a crutch. Lately I wonder where  
you fit in.

GUY

That's not your worry.

OTHELLA

You made an effort to save my life.  
I'd feel wrong if I didn't return  
the favor.

A quick knock on the door. The bailiff leans in.

BAILIFF

Jury's back.

GUY  
 (to Critter)  
 Call Mary-Louise. Tell her I might  
 have to spend the night in jail.

The bailiff leads Othella out. Critter and Teddi hurry down  
 the hall. Poppy stops Guy at the door.

POPPY  
 If they come back with a guilty  
 verdict, I'll go to Mr. Ruckels and  
 tell him I did it.

GUY  
 Keep your lawyer hat on. If it  
 comes back guilty, we'll appeal.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Othella stands, flanked by Poppy and Guy.

JURY FOREMAN  
 In the case of Georgia versus  
 Othella Sterling, murder in the  
 first degree, we find the defendant  
 not guilty.

The courtroom erupts in a conflicted chorus of celebration  
 and dismay. Poppy and Othella embrace each other, weeping.

JUDGE TALMADGE  
 Gentlemen of the jury, thank you  
 for your service. Court is  
 adjourned. Defendant is free to go.

OTHELLA  
 Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!

GUY  
 (to Critter)  
 Didn't know Jesus had a law degree.

Teddi embraces Guy, caressing his face, kissing him.

TEDDI  
 Well done, my love! Well done!  
 Everyone come on home. Doralee's  
 fixing a celebration dinner.

OTHELLA  
 I appreciate you, Teddi, but if  
 Critter would be so kind as to  
 drive us, I'd like to go home now.

INT. THE CADILLAC BROUGHAM - DUSK

Critter drives out the scenic road along the Little Oconee. Othella extends one arm out the open window, catching the breeze. Poppy dozes in the back seat.

CRITTER

Poppy...

Poppy stirs. Her eyes widen at the ominous orange glow on the horizon. They round a bend to find the juke joint in flames. Tables and chairs prop up a burning cross. Firemen sit on lawn chairs, drinking beer, chatting jovially.

Critter stops on the landing above the road, and they stand there, watching - not in shock or even all that surprised, just heartbroken - as the juke joint is engulfed.

On the second floor, lace curtains billow and catch fire. Hokey and Pokey grin grotesque grins until the floor gives way and the roof collapses. The end of an era.

BOOTSY (V.O.)

Critter. Critter, wake up.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GUY'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT 1988

Critter jolts awake with Bootsy's hand on his arm.

BOOTSY

(choking back tears)

He's gone. It's over.

Critter blinks numbly. Bootsy hugs him, but he's wooden.

BOOTSY (CONT'D)

I'll call Mama.

Critter nods. Bootsy leaves. A NURSE disconnects the monitors and goes out, leaving Critter in the profound silence.

His face betrays a struggle between grief and stubborn pride. His composure crumbles. He clamps his hand over his mouth, trying to stifle wrenching sobs.

Tatum enters quietly and wraps her arms around her big brother. He grips her wrist, holding on for dear life.

EXT. STILLWELL BACK YARD - EVENING

The previous barbecue bash is outdone. Teddi and Bootsy hold up like steel magnolias, accepting condolences in a receiving line. All the familiar faces are among the throng.

Critter is surprised but pleased to see Rory.

CRITTER  
Hey. You're here.

RORY  
I drove King over. Hope it's okay.

CRITTER  
Of course. I'm glad to see you. I need to apologize.

RORY  
No worries. I get it. I lost my dad last year.

CRITTER  
I swear I'm not concealing a mean streak.

RORY  
(affectionately)  
I know. You're not that clever.

EXT. STILLWELL BACK YARD - LATER

The wake rages into the night. On the tennis court, Critter dances with Rory. Uptempo swing music segues to a slow dance.

CRITTER  
If this was a party instead of a funeral, could I have kissed you?

RORY  
Guess we'll never know.

He starts to go for it, but is derailed by the *PLIP PLIP* of a siren. A police unit rolls up flashing blue lights. Official DEPUTY DUVERNAY, thumbs in his gun belt, approaches Critter.

DUVERNAY  
Mr. Stillwell you need you to unplug the band. It's too loud.

CRITTER  
According to what ordinance?

DUVERNAY  
It's within my discretion.

CRITTER  
And you are?

DUVERNAY  
Deputy Duvernay.

CRITTER  
Okay, Deputy Duvernay. "Too loud,"  
you say...

College buddies, cousins, and court colleagues gather behind  
Crittter like spectators at a playground fight.

CRITTER (CONT'D)  
Exactly what is the metric for  
existent volume relative to legal  
parameters? An how recently was  
instrumentation calibrated?

BOOTSY  
Crittter, must you? Mother is on her  
last ragged nerve.

DUVERNAY  
It's too loud, sir, and now you're  
compounding the problem with  
obstruction and a shitty attitude.

CRITTER  
Write out a citation. I'll see you  
in court.

DUVERNAY  
How'd you like to share a cell with  
your client tonight?

CRITTER  
What do you know about my client?

DUVERNAY  
Only that he's a dead man walking.

CRITTER  
Excuse me?

DUVERNAY  
Hands behind your back.

KING  
Officer. C'mon. There's no need to  
get punitive about it.

CRITTER

See you at the arraignment, folks!  
Tell Mother I'll write her from the  
chain gang.

TATE

Be brave at the big house, brother!

Tatum throws her arms around his neck, pulling him down so she can speak quietly into his ear.

TATE (CONT'D)

Tell Newt you know about Bari.  
(she glances at Duvernay)  
Be careful around that one.

CRITTER

You're a good man, sister.

The crowd boos as Duvernay cuffs Critter and rousts him over to the cop car.

INT. JAILHOUSE - NIGHT

In the moonlit cell, Newt chuckles on the bunk below Critter.

NEWT

Your daddy always said, "It ain't a  
party 'til somebody gets arrested."  
Lord, I miss those old shindigs!

CRITTER

The last time we saw you was that  
night with Pollard.

Critter waits, but Newt doesn't answer.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

Don't make me be an archeologist,  
Newt. Whatever it is, we'll work  
with it, but I need the facts.

Newt sighs in annoyance but says nothing.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

I know about Bari.

NEWT

You've been talking to the FBI.

Critter's eyes open wide, but he keeps his tone easygoing.

CRITTER

Let's hear your side of it.

NEWT

I was a horny kid! I didn't know anything about any Dixie Mafia.

CRITTER

Walk me through it.

NEWT

That last few months of the war, anybody pro-Mussolini knew they were well and truly screwed. Some fellas took me up to Bari to meet Fernanda. DiLippa's daughter on the outside. He needed to get her out without his wife knowing. Wanted her to marry into money in Georgia. Brother, this girl had piston hips and Cadillac headlights. Before I knew what hit me, it was love, honor, and suck it up 'til death do us part. Man, you gotta understand-

Newt rolls out of his cot to stand in the half-light.

NEWT (CONT'D)

This woman has a fiendish temper. And she's a bona fide nymphomaniac. You'd get more sleep in a crate full of weasels. I couldn't stay drunk enough to stand it. I tried to leave her, but DiLippa made it clear: his daughter was gonna be a happy wife or a wealthy widow.

CRITTER

Are we closing in on the part where Lucky frames you for murder?

NEWT

(relishing his cleverness)  
Lucky didn't frame me. I did.

CRITTER

You framed...yourself?

NEWT

I knew DiLippa ordered the hit on Pollard. When they nailed Lucky, I saw a golden opportunity: he confesses to the murder, swears I paid him, I provide ample evidence-

CRITTER

The gun. The bank records.

NEWT

Case closed.

CRITTER

DiLippa's off the hook for the hit.  
And you're off the hook with his  
daughter. But Ruckels...

NEWT

They had an understanding, but  
somebody had to take the fall for  
this one. Pollard wasn't some trash  
you could sweep under the rug.

CRITTER

Like Lucky.

NEWT

That's not on me! We offered him an  
opportunity to jerk off in jail for  
ten years instead of disappearing  
down a dry well on some horse farm.  
That loony dipshit went and got  
himself killed.

CRITTER

And you sailed off into the sunset.

Newt returns to his bunk, feet up, hands behind his head.

NEWT

It's a good life aboard Rascal. The  
logistics are surprisingly doable.

CRITTER

Are they really?

NEWT

Give it a try! Avoid Trinidad.  
Those Venezuelan pirates seem to  
think they're owed some money.

EXT. CRITTER'S BOATHOUSE - EVENING

Critter dozes on the sofa. His funeral tie is crumpled on the  
coffee table with aspirin, Maalox, V8, and vodka - evidence  
of a level ten hangover.

A bag abruptly covers his head. Critter thrashes free. He manages to get hold of the vodka bottle and bashes his assailant upside the head. The GOON stumbles back.

A SECOND GOON comes from behind to garrote Critter with his own necktie. Critter fights, but he fights like a guy who had sisters. A swift gut punch coupled with a hard left hook drops him like a bag of wet cement.

INT. OPEN HOUSE CAFÉ - LATER

DiLippa's goons shove Critter into a booth across from Fernanda. On the wall behind her is a Confederate flag. On the table in front of her is a formidable stack of cash.

FERNANDA

August. Look at you. All grown up.

She hands him a napkin. He dabs his bloody nose and fat lip.

CRITTER

What can I do for you, Fernanda?

FERNANDA

Many things, I imagine. There's always work for a competent attorney in our organization. But first, the matter of my husband.

CRITTER

Ex-husband.

FERNANDA

Not in the eyes of God.

CRITTER

In the eyes of the law. And I'm not Tick. I don't kill my clients.

FERNANDA

Oh, Klansmen in general population at Baldwin will take care of that. All you have to do is go to court tomorrow and lose.

CRITTER

That's not happening. I mean - not on purpose.

FERNANDA

You won't change your mind?

CRITTER

No.

FERNANDA

Such a sweet boy. I'm sorry you've chosen the devil's path.

She signals the goons, and they roust him out.

FERNANDA (CONT'D)

Use the well on the Ebbot place.

CRITTER

Whoa, whoa, WHOA! Fernanda, don't do this! FERNANDA!

EXT. ABANDONED DRY WELL - LATER

Critter crashes into a pile of putrid debris at the bottom of a cistern twelve feet deep, eight feet across. A lighted stick of dynamite drops into the debris. Frantically, Critter thrashes to find it and pinch the fuse out.

CRITTER

Ha! Fuck you!

A flashlight beam finds him. The goons peer over the edge.

GOON

Couple days from now, lawyer, you'll wish you hadn't done that.

Critter absorbs that thought as the light fades and a vehicle roars off into the distance. Wait! He searches his coat pockets and comes up with the chunky mobile phone.

OPERATOR

9-1-1: What's your emergency?

CRITTER

I'm down in a dry well over on-

OPERATOR

Hello? Is someone there?

CRITTER

Hello? Hello? Can you hear me now?

OPERATOR

I hear you. What's your name, sir?

CRITTER

Stillwell. August Stillwell. I'm  
down in a well over at the Ebbot-

OPERATOR

Hello? Sir, are you there?

CRITTER

Fucking hell. Hello? Hello!

Critter pokes at the phone with increasing desperation. He paces the confined space, searching through the debris for any kind of tool, frustrated, raging.

CRITTER (V.O.)

I won't belabor the details, but  
there amongst the roaches, I began  
to have that *if I get out of this*  
*alive* conversation with myself.

Above the mouth of the well, a full moon moves into view. As it travels from one side of the aperture to the other, we see Critter's lonely journey from fading hope to abject terror.

CRITTER (V.O.)

If I didn't believe in rock bottom  
before, I believed in it now.

The moonlight wanes. Darkness settles. Critter stands with his back against the literal and figurative wall. Phone in one hand, dynamite in the other, forcing himself to breathe past the encroaching panic.

CRITTER (V.O.)

I took a fearless moral inventory.  
I vowed to myself and God, if I  
made it outa that hole, I'd never  
touch another drop of alcohol.

A flashlight beam slices the dark hole in half.

DUVERNAY

Mr. Stillwell?

CRITTER

Here! I'm down here! Who's there?

DUVERNAY

Deputy Duvernay. Ms. Fernanda sent  
me to check on you.

Critter drops his forehead against the cement wall.

DUVERNAY (CONT'D)  
Quite a predicament you're in.

CRITTER  
Yeah. Good thing I had my mobile phone. I was able to call 9-1-1.

DUVERNAY  
Say what now?

Critter holds his mobile phone up to the light.

DUVERNAY (CONT'D)  
(keying his radio)  
Hey, Enid, did you get a call that maybe somebody fell down a well?

An unintelligible response crackles from the radio.

DUVERNAY (CONT'D)  
No, I'll check it out. You don't need to send anybody else.

CRITTER  
(into the dead phone)  
Hey, King, guess who showed up. Deputy DuVernay! From the party. Right. So tell the FBI, *DuVernay* is here. I'm in good hands.

A collapsible ladder clatters into the well.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - LATER

Critter sits in a corner booth, disheveled, deeply shaken. Rory dabs at his abraded knuckles and chin with a bar towel.

CRITTER  
Then he says, "All in good fun, right? You won't be pressing charges."

RORY  
My god! How terrifying.

He takes her hands, in earnest, needing her to hear him.

CRITTER  
Every lawyer I know is trapped. Surrounded by a bunch of entitled people. Throwing money around, trying to look successful.  
(MORE)

## CRITTER (CONT'D)

Trips, cars, homes - I haven't done any of that. I just work and live close to the vest because my life - oh, I was gonna be different. I was gonna get myself a yacht and sail off into the sunset. But here I am. I live on a boat that doesn't go anywhere. And if I keep drinking, I'll die just like my father.

Rory takes Critter's face between her hands.

## RORY

You are a good man. A good lawyer. And you are not your father.

## DRUNK AT THE BAR

Hey, honey, I'll have what he's having.

## RORY

(over her shoulder)

Fall in a hole. In fact, get on outa here. All y'all! It's two A.M.. Don't you have homes? Jesus.

## CRITTER

I'm due in court six hours from now. I'm so screwed.

## RORY

You're okay. Okay? Listen to me. Use voir dire to buy some time and get your bearings. Run that clock. Invite stories. Don't ask what they know; ask *how* they know it.

## CRITTER

Not what they know. How they know.

## RORY

Here. Just to get you started.

She scribbles questions on a cocktail napkin. Critter observes her with newly sober eyes.

## CRITTER

May I ask you a question?

## RORY

You can ask.

CRITTER

Why are you tending bar instead of doing jury consultation?

RORY

Same reason you're living on a boat that doesn't go anywhere.

INT. ATHENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

The sun travels the courtroom. Prospective jurors appear and disappear, echoing the voir dire from Othella's trial. Chastain stands, sits, paces. Critter remains in his chair looking worse for wear with a black eye and split lip.

In the gallery, Teddi, Bootsy, and Tate look worried. King and Rory force encouraging smiles. At the back of the courtroom Fernanda sits flanked by Klan goons.

Newt's knee bobs nervously. He elbows Critter.

NEWT

Hey. Looky here.

Newt points to graffiti etched into the edge of the table: GUY STILLWELL WAS H- Critter laughs, but it's bittersweet.

CRITTER

All these years sitting at this table, I never noticed that.

NEWT

You never sat on this end with your fate dangling by a thread.

POPPY

Defense? Planning to participate?

Critter stands, clutching Rory's list. The ink has bled onto his sweaty palm, which is now imprinted with a backwards but legible question: "HOW DID YOU KNOW?"

Critter looks at Newt, sickened by sudden understanding.

CRITTER

Judge Sterling, I need a ten-minute recess to confer with my client.

CHASTAIN

Just so I can update my calendar, how long is defense gonna run the clock to cover for his shoddy trial preparation?

POPPY

Ask a question, defense. And stay to the scope of the trial.

Critter flips through the jury pool list.

CRITTER

Juror 10. You're a veterinarian?

JUROR #10

Semi-retired

CRITTER

In your professional opinion: Is it better to let sleeping dogs lie?

JUROR #10

Is that supposed to be a joke?

CRITTER

Not at all.

JUROR #10

Dogs need both sleep and activity.

POPPY

Counsel. *Scope. Of. The trial.*

CRITTER

Juror 11, as a janitor: If the D.A. was trying to sweep something under the rug-

CHASTAIN

Your Honor! Seriously? How is this guy not in contempt right now?

CRITTER

Red, you shouldn't have to go into the volcano for this bogus confession.

CHASTAIN

Whoa! Whoa! Move to strike!

POPPY

Sustained!

CRITTER

I know you're a good man. I know it was Ruckels.

RED

You don't know a goddamn thing!

CRITTER  
 I know he played fast and  
 loose with rules of evidence.  
 I know he dangled this job  
 over your head like a carrot  
 in front of a mule.

RED (CONT'D)  
 Not everyone was born with a  
 silver spoon in his mouth.  
 Some of us had to go along to  
 get along.

CHASTAIN  
 RED! *Stop. Talking.*

CRITTER  
 Poppy, for Christ sake! We all know  
 this is bullshit!

CHASTAIN  
 Objection! Badgering the - the -  
 what is happening?

POPPY  
 Approach! All y'all! Get up here!

Critter, Red, and Chastain approach the bench.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
 (to Critter)  
 Are you outside your mind?

CRITTER  
 Your Honor, If I may-

POPPY  
 You may not!

CHASTAIN  
 If this isn't grounds for mistrial,  
 you can just bikini wax the Statue  
 of Liberty right now!

CRITTER  
 Poppy, please! Give me a chance to  
 talk to Newt. I can end this.  
 You've got to trust me.

CHASTAIN  
 Obfuscation and horse crap!

Poppy silences them both with a raised hand.

POPPY  
 Mr. Redstone, tell me Ruckels did  
 not leave a trail of peanut shells  
 to that phony confession.  
 (MORE)

POPPY (CONT'D)

Tell me we did not just open the door to retry every case he ever had his grimy little fingers in.

RED

Throw the statement out! We got plenty of rubber on the road. And we'll have more after we test that old evidence for DNA.

Poppy thumbs her palm, a habit she can't break.

POPPY

Nobody say another word. Ten minute recess. Go on. Git!

Poppy bangs her gavel and goes to her chambers. Critter returns to the defense table.

NEWT

Jesus, Critter. Things went kinda buck wild there.

CRITTER

I quit drinking.

NEWT

Maybe you oughta rethink that.

Critter squats to make a paper and pencil rubbing of the etched letters: GUY STILLWELL WAS H

NEWT (CONT'D)

So...what happens now?

CRITTER

You'll end it by pleading guilty.

NEWT

Why would I do that?

CRITTER

How did you know, Newt? How'd you know DiLippa ordered the hit?

Newt leans back in his chair, sucking an unlit cigar.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

You killed Pollard. That was the price for the divorce, wasn't it?

NEWT

Once Pollard got sideways with DiLippa, he was a dead man. Better it was a friend. He didn't suffer.

CRITTER

That's how you live with it?

NEWT

Not really. Some nights I sit up on deck and say my Hail Marys. We'll see if she's watching out for me now that Fernanda knows where I am.

CRITTER

Roll over on DiLippa. I'll cut a deal with the FBI. Witness protection. White-collar prison. It's not the Ritz, but it's better than the bottom of a well.

Newt contemplates this for a moment, then nods.

CRITTER (V.O.)

That's how it went down. Newt went with the feds. And Rascal was mine.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Critter, Teddi, Bootsy, Tate, Poppy, King, and Mary-Louise are gathered around a conference table.

CRITTER (V.O.)

We gathered for the reading of my father's will. I expected to be executor, but Guy named Poppy.

POPPY

Most of the estate goes to Teddi. The horse farm to Bootsy. Critter, you have controlling interest in the law firm, but the building itself - he left it to you, Tatum.

Critter and Tate look at each other, stunned. But they get it. Paperwork is distributed. The family parts with hugs.

TATE

(to Critter)

You can still keep an office here, brother. The store room behind the kitchen just came available.

INT. LAW OFFICE - NIGHT

Guy's office is dark except for the light in the trophy case. Critter takes the empty bourbon bottle from his father's desk and places it on a shelf with the other murder weapons.

CRITTER (V.O.)

In the end, Guy left me the one thing he could never give me while he was living: my freedom.

Critter scans the lethal paraphernalia in the trophy case. He looks up to find Poppy standing in the doorway.

CRITTER

Back in 1963, DNA evidence would have sounded like science fiction.

He tears a sheet of clean paper from a legal pad and carefully removes Othella's skillet without touching it.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

I guess you're looking for this.

POPPY

I could find out for good and all if Lucky Winfield was my father.

CRITTER

Bullshit. Your father put you through law school. You must have known since you took charge of Othella's financial records.

Poppy nods, conceding the point. Critter is afraid to ask.

POPPY

Your parents were always like an aunt and uncle to me. Guy had only one friend who was like a brother.

CRITTER

*King.*

POPPY

He was the family lawyer. Back then, Mama genuinely loved him. So she never told a soul. He sent a check every month until I passed the bar.

CRITTER

So...he did the right thing.

POPPY  
 (laughs bitterly)  
 The right thing for whom?

CRITTER  
 Back then, with miscegenation laws-

POPPY  
*He was a lawyer!* Fuck King Hodges  
 and the alleged *right thing* that  
 allows him to sleep at night. He  
 crawled inside a bottle and left us  
 at the mercy of that *monster!*

Critter gently takes Poppy's hand and holds it next to the  
 skillet. The pattern on the handle is identical to a scar  
 bisecting her palm.

POPPY (CONT'D)  
 All that adrenaline, all that rage.  
 I didn't even feel it until...

CRITTER  
 Until he was dead.

POPPY  
 Doesn't even seem real. Like it was  
 somebody else.

CRITTER  
 It was a different world.

POPPY  
 (scoffs)  
 If you say so.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - LATER

Critter sets a UGA duffel bag on the bar with a telltale  
 metallic *tonk*.

RORY  
 Whatcha got there?

CRITTER  
 Moral dilemma.

RORY  
 Wanna talk about it?

CRITTER  
 Maybe later.

Rory sets chairs up on tables, prepping to close the bar.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

I'm still working out logistics,  
but it's surprisingly doable to  
live at sea like Newt did.

RORY

Don't tell me. You're about to sail  
off into the sunset.

CRITTER

If I can get the engine started.

RORY

Not gonna lie. I will miss you.

CRITTER

Sail off with me.

RORY

(laughs)  
Sure. Let's go.

CRITTER

I'm serious. You'd have your own  
stateroom. Private head. I'm not  
making any assumptions.

RORY

You don't even know my name.

CRITTER

I haven't had a drink since my  
dad's wake, and there won't be any  
booze on the boat. I know I'll have  
to earn your trust, but-

RORY

Okay, stop. That's - I - I can't  
just... I mean... what about...

She looks around the bar, searching for a reason to stay.

RORY (CONT'D)

You better not be jerking my chain.

CRITTER

Never. I promise.

Cautiously, Rory closes the distance between them.

CRITTER (CONT'D)

I feel obligated to mention, we may have Venezuelan pirates after us.

RORY

Well, that makes it a no-brainer.

She test-drives a kiss. It goes well. Careful not to cop a feel, Critter removes the RORY name tag from her breast pocket and sets it on the bar.

RORY (CONT'D)

My name is Vivienne. Friends call me Vivvy.

Critter takes her in his arms and kisses her.

CRITTER (V.O.)

Guy used to say about Mother: "I had to believe I was good enough for her. I could not imagine a world in which I didn't have her."

EXT. RASCAL FLY BRIDGE - EVENING

Out at sea, far from where they started, Critter and Rory sit with old Mr. Skillet on the table between them.

RORY

Wow. That is quite a story. Boy meets boat.

Rory gingerly takes the skillet in her hands, brow furrowed.

RORY (CONT'D)

When did you know?

CRITTER

I think I always suspected.

RORY

You withheld evidence.

CRITTER

(a la Guy)

"God damn a man who won't commit a felony for a friend."

RORY

But this wasn't that. I mean...you kept it.

CRITTER

I never held it over her head.

RORY

You don't have to. You both know it's there. You both know how things go in this world.

Critter goes to the front of the fly bridge, shading his eyes from the sun, studying the horizon.

CRITTER

My conscience is clear. I never *owned* anybody. I'm not a Klansman. I've dealt in good faith. I've been as truthful as I know how to be.

RORY

Yes, but...how truthful is that?

Rory hugs him firmly, kisses his cheek, and goes below. The sun sinks. Splendor takes over the sky. Critter takes it in.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY 1963

Critter and Poppy hover over Mary-Louise as she sorts the daily mail. She gasps and hands Poppy an official letter.

MARY-LOUISE

Here it is! It's here!

YOUNG CRITTER

Open it! C'mon! Did you pass?

Poppy tears it open. Exhales. Nods. Critter whoops for joy, sweeping her up, spinning her around.

POPPY

(laughing)  
Put me down, fool!

MARY-LOUISE

Oh, Poppy, honey! Congratulations!

Guy emerges from his office and comes down the stairs.

YOUNG CRITTER

She passed! She kicked its ass!

GUY

I expected no less.

Guy presents Poppy with a classic blue box.

GUY (CONT'D)

On behalf of the partnership.

MARY-LOUISE

It's from Tiffany's. In New York.

Poppy opens it and takes out a silver paperweight.

GUY

Teddi gave me one just like it when I passed the bar. Engraved with the words of Abraham Lincoln.

POPPY

"May the Almighty grant that the cause of truth, justice, and humanity shall in no wise suffer at my hands." It's beautiful. Thank you. For everything. I'm grateful.

GUY

God damn, I am proud of you, Poppy. King, too. All of us.

Poppy squares her shoulders, chin set high.

POPPY

In keeping with tradition, I will be taking you to lunch at Tony's. Since King's not available, Critter should come. It wouldn't look right if it's just the two of us.

There's a pregnant pause as they await Guy's response.

GUY

Mary-Louise, notify Teddi we may have to spend the night in jail.

INT. TONY'S CAFÉ - LATER

The café teems with the usual legal back and forth until Guy, Poppy, and Critter walk in. Uncomfortable silence settles.

GUY

(loudly, for the room)  
Good afternoon, everyone.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

Attorney Sterling here, having passed the bar on her first try - unlike many of y'all - is sponsoring the traditional partners' lunch. Tony! Let's have a round for the house.

A spatter of uncertain applause quickly fades. Poppy leads the way to a corner booth, followed by Guy and Critter. They sit. Poppy primly studies the menu.

The titular TONY sets a bourbon in front of Guy and stands over them, arms locked across his big belly.

TONY

Guy, c'mon. Understand, Miss, I'm not prejudiced! But customers expect a certain standard to be upheld. I go along to get along.

GUY

I'll have my usual rib eye and whiskey. How 'bout you, Poppy?

POPPY

Clam chowder, please.

TONY

We don't have any.

POPPY

Caesar salad.

TONY

Fresh out.

GUY

Attorney Sterling will have the chowder. How about you, Critter?

YOUNG CRITTER

Steak sandwich and fries, please.

TONY

I'm not gonna ask my hardworking Negro staff to wait on this uppity-

GUY

Tony. A word.

Guy steers Tony offside for a hushed conversation.

POPPY

(incensed)

I don't need your daddy to fight my battles. And I sure as hell don't need him to order my lunch.

YOUNG CRITTER

He's standing up for you.

POPPY

I can stand for myself. I'd be in a heap of trouble if I couldn't.

YOUNG CRITTER

You make trouble for yourself, Poppy. You go around like the whole world is against you.

POPPY

And you go around like the whole world is *for* you. Because it is!

Guy returns, followed by a visibly sullen Tony.

TONY

Oyster crackers or garlic toast with your chowder, Lawyer Sterling?

POPPY

*Crackers.*

Tony disappears into the kitchen.

YOUNG CRITTER

What did you say to him?

GUY

I offered to represent his wife in the divorce that's sure to be pending if I inform her of his standing appointment at Miss Jeffie's.

Critter laughs. Poppy doesn't.

GUY (CONT'D)

I know it's not the progress you'd like to see in the world, Poppy, but Rome wasn't built in a day.

POPPY

I'm not asking for Rome. All I want is Athens, same as y'all.

GUY

Let's enjoy our lunch before the  
cops get here.

POPPY

I won't be able to eat mine.  
They'll have spit in it. Or worse.

YOUNG CRITTER

I'll share mine. It's too much for  
one person.

Ambient noise resumes around them. Lunch is served. Poppy looks at hers with an arched brow. Critter pushes his plate to the center of the table, and she takes half his sandwich.

CRITTER (V.O.)

We didn't get arrested. The sky  
didn't fall down. Truth be told, it  
was rather anti-climactic.

Teddi and Othella arrive with Bootsy and Tatum.

TEDDI

Mary-Louise said there's a  
celebration going on. Tony, honey?  
We're gonna need champagne.

Teddi waves gaily to Tony, who looks displeased but resigned.

They crowd into the booth with more gifts for Poppy. Tatum tucks into Critter's fries. Othella grips Poppy's hand.

OTHELLA

Celebrate today. Tomorrow you got  
work to do.

A young Black waiter brings the champagne. His brass name tag says RORY.

INT. ALPS DRIVE-IN MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT 1963

The final scene of *TKAM* plays on the giant screen.

CRITTER (V.O.)

That night, I saw *To Kill a  
Mockingbird* for the seventh time.

SCOUT (O.S.)

The summer that had begun so long  
ago had ended. And another summer  
had taken its place...

In the backseat of the Caddy, Critter's date stares at the screen, eyes brimming with tears.

CRITTER (V.O.)

I didn't know why this movie made some people cry, and I was not curious to know. I was a warm-blooded American male, thinking of nothing but my own manly ambitions.

Emboldened by the eventful summer, Critter makes a smooth move on his date. They make out as the movie music swells. We drift beyond the black and white, into the starry night.

CRITTER (V.O.)

I didn't need Atticus Finch screwing everything up along with Poppy and Mother and Dr. King. All that talk about changing the world.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. RASCAL FLY BRIDGE - EVENING

CRITTER (V.O.)

I didn't want my world to change. Why would I?

The sky is every color but gray. Critter stands on the fly bridge looking out over the ocean, always changing, always the same. The ceaseless rhythm of the waves is woven with echoes from the past.

ATTICUS FINCH (V.O.)

The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience.

POPPY (V.O.)

"May the Almighty grant that the cause of truth, justice, and humanity shall in no wise suffer at my hands."

YOUNG CRITTER (V.O.)

It's too much for one person.

GUY (V.O.)

...someday, somehow, there will be a reckoning...

Critter hurls the old skillet as hard as he can. It arcs out over the waves and disappears into the blue water.

END