

OFFICER X

"PILOT"

Written by

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Inspired By A True Story

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OFFICER X

"JUSTICE BY NIGHTSTICK"

TEASER

EXT. BEACH LANDING ZONE - DAY

HOWLS and SCREAMS of wounded and dying MEN rise above the THUNDEROUS ROAR of BATTLE.

SUPER: "HOLLANDIA ISLAND - NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN, 1944"

An Amphibious Landing Craft lists on its side. Oil and smoke spews from its WHINING ENGINE. Wooden crates of supplies fill the cargo hold.

SERGEANT ISAAC WOODARD JR., 24, African American, tall, lean, and battle-hardened, rushes across the beach.

Machine gun fire kicks up sand all around Isaac. He darts between the bodies floating in the water.

A RECRUIT, horror-struck, paces aimlessly in the tide. Isaac takes him by the arm.

ISAAC  
(shouts)  
Come with me.

The Recruit stares past Isaac.

RECRUIT  
I can't... can't find my helmet.

Isaac leans down. Takes one of the many helmets tumbling in the surf. He puts it on the Recruit's head. Seawater pours over the Recruit's face.

ISAAC  
Come on.

Isaac drags the Recruit aboard the damaged Landing Craft.

Isaac grabs a rope handle on one of the crates. The Recruit grabs another. Both men drag their crates off the craft and across the sand.

A shell hits the landing craft. Jagged metal flies skyward.

The Recruit stares in disbelief. Starts to speak --

MACHINE GUN FIRE tears through him. Blood and bone splatter over Isaac.

Without hesitation, Isaac grabs the handles on both crates. Struggles to drag them out of the line of fire.

BOOM. Another shell explodes. The BLAST blows Isaac back.

Black smoke from the explosion billows up the beachhead.

Isaac tries to peer through the inky waves of darkness that surrounds him.

EXT. FOXHOLE - EVENING

Isaac sits in his foxhole. Stares off into the distance. His face covered in sand, oil, and the Recruit's remains.

WILKES, 33, black, war-weary, squats down next to Isaac.

WILKES

Sarge.

ISAAC

Wilkes.

Wilkes gestures to his face.

WILKES

You got...

Isaac runs a hand over his face. Looks at dirt in his palm.

ISAAC

Poor bastard.

Isaac grabs his canteen.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

He couldn't find his helmet.

The two men exchange a look -- Isaac pours the canteen over his head. Washes his face.

EXT. SMALL HILL - DAY

Isaac, Wilkes, and THREE BLACK SOLDIERS load supplies onto a transport truck.

The truck pulls away and Wilkes notices--

The bodies of four Japanese soldiers, charred beyond recognition, their remains melded into each other.

WILKES

We don't stand a chance.

ISAAC

What's that?

WILKES

If they're willing to burn for this shithole, what are we gonna be up against when we invade their homeland?

ISAAC

We just take one island at a time.

A BLACK PRIVATE shakes his head.

BLACK PRIVATE

He's right, Sarge.

ISAAC

Every man on this island is scared. And for the rest of our lives, we're all gonna wake up screaming over the shit we do and see over here.

The Soldiers huddle around Isaac.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

But that's living. And that's what I intend to do. No matter how many of them I gotta kill.

He makes eye contact with his Men. Wills them to believe.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

We're all gonna keep ourselves alive. That's the job.

One by one, the four Soldiers nod in agreement.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Alright.

Another Transport truck pulls up the ridge.

Isaac breaks up the huddle -- and loads a box onto the truck.

**END TEASER**

ACT ONE

INT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

SUPER: "GEORGIA. FEBRUARY 12, 1946. TWO YEARS LATER"

Isaac, 26, handsome in his dress uniform, shares a bench with PRIVATE JENNINGS STROUD, 25, white, cherub-faced, sprawled out and fast asleep.

Isaac plays a harmonica.

A YOUNG MOTHER, 24, white, sits across from Isaac. She rocks her sleeping BABY to Isaac's music.

YOUNG MOTHER  
That's nice. She never sleeps.

Isaac grins. Nods to Stroud.

ISAAC  
It works on this sad sack, too.

Young Mother LAUGHS. Her Baby COOS. Squirms.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Uh-oh.

Isaac resumes playing. A kindness in his eyes.

YOUNG MOTHER  
Thank you.

The Baby settles.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

A bus pulls up.

White bus driver ALTON BLACKWELL, 36, stocky, friendly, pops out of the bus. Stretches his legs and back.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

PASSENGERS stand. Collect their luggage. Isaac shakes Stroud.

ISAAC  
Rise and shine, Stroud.

Stroud wakes slowly. Looks around. Wipes sleep from his eyes.

STROUD

It's a wonder I could sleep with  
all that racket you were making.

Elated, both men grab their duffle bags and head outside.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - DAY

Alton takes the Passengers' bags. Stows them in the baggage hold under the bus.

ISAAC

Hope this 'Hound's fast. I been  
dreaming 'bout my wife for three  
years. I'm gonna walk in that house  
and look at her until I believe  
she's for real.

Stroud, happy-go-lucky, takes out a well-worn photograph of a YOUNG WOMAN. Petite, pretty.

STROUD

Look? Shit, I've been lookin' since  
boot camp.

Alton takes Stroud's bag. Packs it with a grin.

Isaac eases up next to Alton. Holds out his bag.

Alton's grin fades. He side-eyes Isaac. Notes the four medals on Isaac's uniform. Gestures to the baggage hold.

ALTON

Toss it in yourself.

Isaac hesitates. Alton ignores him. Wanders off.

Isaac stows his bag. Follows Stroud to the bus door.

Alton blocks their path.

ALTON (CONT'D)

I 'spect there'll be more room for  
ya in the back.

Isaac flashes a winning smile at Alton.

ISAAC

Whatever gets me home.

Alton steps aside. Isaac and Stroud climb on board.

EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD - DAY

The bus tears down a stretch of road.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

Isaac plays an upbeat, sing-along folk tune on his harmonica. Stroud claps and sings.

Passengers sing along.

The song ends. Passengers erupt in laughter and applause.

ISAAC

Thank you, thank you.

Stroud swigs a fifth of whiskey. Offers it to Isaac.

Isaac waves it away. Slips the harmonica into his shirt pocket. Closes his eyes.

Alton adjusts his rearview mirror. Eyes the soldiers.

EXT. GREYHOUND GAS STATION - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

The bus pulls up to a pump.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Isaac shifts in his seat. Bounces his leg.

Alton turns to the Passengers.

ALTON

We're only here to refuel, so  
everyone please stay seated.

Alton steps outside.

Isaac grabs his crotch. Scurries down the aisle.

INT. GREYHOUND GAS STATION - NIGHT

The ATTENDANT, 20, white, pumps gas.

Alton spots Isaac leaving the bus.

ALTON

Back on the bus, please.

Isaac grabs his crotch again. Squeezes hard.

ISAAC  
Sir, if I could, I sure need to use  
the latrine.

ALTON  
Boy, stop grabbing your pecker and  
get your black ass back on the bus.

ISAAC  
Why are you talking to me like  
that? I'm a grown man fixin' to  
piss hisself.

Alton spits on the ground.

ALTON  
Don't think I won't leave your ass.

Isaac trots off. Alton watches him go.

ALTON (CONT'D)  
(to Attendant)  
Got a phone?

The Attendant points toward his office.

INT. ORSON WELLES'S HOME - SWANKY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A star-powered cocktail party filled with the best of  
Hollywood, all jubilant and tipsy. The men are in tuxes, the  
ladies in gowns. It's high-society, high-glitz and highballs  
all around.

RITA HAYWORTH, 28, flits about the room, chats with GUESTS.  
Her famous red hair curls around her pin-up-girl face.

ACROSS THE ROOM

ORSON WELLES, 31, handsome, intelligent, with an oversized  
personality and ambition, hands a cigar to--

SAM SPIEGEL, 45, pompous, entitled. He takes in the room.

SAM  
Orson, I hope you didn't do all of  
this just for me.

Orson lights Sam's cigar. Sizes up the party.



ORSON

All what?

CLAUDETTE COLBERT, 43, an exquisite, flirtatious redhead, cozies up between Sam and Orson.

CLAUDETTE

Talk about two boys up to no good.

ORSON

Just admiring you from afar,  
Claudette.

CLAUDETTE

I prefer being admired up close.

Rita eases between Orson and Claudette.

SAM

Rita, everything is perfect.

RITA

Thank you, Sam.

Orson kisses Rita on the cheek.

SAM

Well now.

Sam drifts over to a bookcase -- observes an Oscar statuette. Takes it from the shelf.

CLOSE ON OSCAR INSCRIPTION: "ORSON WELLES FOR WRITING ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY OF CITIZEN KANE."

Claudette takes the Oscar from Sam.

CLAUDETTE

I saw it in his trailer on the set.

Rita draws away from Orson. It's subtle. But Orson notices.

SAM

You deserved Best Director.

ORSON

I deserved Best Picture.

SAM

No reason we can't win both with  
The Stranger.

Claudette puts the Oscar back on the shelf.

SAM (CONT'D)

Of course we'll need to discuss the changes you requested.

ORSON

Think of them as improvements.

RITA

(to Orson and Sam)  
It's official, I'm bored.

Rita takes Claudette's glass.

RITA (CONT'D)

Let's freshen that up.

The two redheads sashay to--

THE BAR

Rita and Claudette reach for new martinis.

RITA

How was he?

CLAUDETTE

Pardon?

RITA

Please. I know you fucked him.

CLAUDETTE

Rita... you're serious? I'd never.

RITA

Why else would he carry that stupid Oscar from set to set.

Rita scrutinizes Claudette. Knocks back her drink.

RITA (CONT'D)

It's gotten him more pussy than work, I'll give him that.

Claudette wiggles her index and middle fingers.

CLAUDETTE

Darling, if I wanted to screw someone with an Oscar, I'd simply put my fingers to work.

She saunters off.

RITA  
(to BARTENDER)  
Numb me.

Rita slams her glass on the bar.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Sam and Orson huddle in a haze of cigar smoke.

SAM  
Regarding The Stranger, I'm seeing  
Robinson in the lead.

ORSON  
Edward's a sonuvabitch.

SAM  
He's bankable. You need that.

ORSON  
You assured me that I could expect  
some control.

SAM  
Some control.

Sam puts a hand on Orson's shoulder.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Only the great Orson Welles would  
want to use footage of the  
concentration camps.

ORSON  
The entire film centers around the  
search for a Nazi war criminal.  
Logic dictates we show the crime.

SAM  
Actual footage!

ORSON  
I need it, Sam. It's a deal  
breaker.

SAM  
Orson, you're not going to walk  
away from this film. Hell, you're  
more apt to get fired.

ORSON  
Just give me the camp footage.

Sam looks skeptical.

SAM  
Keep it tasteful.

ORSON  
They're death camps, Sam.

SAM  
Don't make me regret this.

Sam raises his glass and drifts off.

Orson gazes over his party. Spots Rita by the bar. They lock eyes and exchange half-hearted smiles.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Passengers sleep. Air brakes sneeze. The bus slows.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

SUPER: "BATESBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA."

The bus eases into the lot. Two cop cars wait. Flashing bubble tops cast a blood-red glow.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Isaac stirs. Looks out the window at the cop cars.

Alton opens the door.

CHIEF LYNWOOD SHULL, 40, cocky, arrogant, burly, gray hair cropped short, steps inside.

Alton points to Isaac.

Chief Shull marches down the aisle. Shines his flashlight into Isaac's eyes.

CHIEF SHULL  
Get up.

ISAAC  
Excuse me?

CHIEF SHULL  
Get off the bus.

Chief Shull lowers his flashlight. Stares Isaac down.

INT. ORSON WELLES'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rita, in a silk nightgown and heels, brushes her hair at a vanity.

IN THE VANITY MIRROR

Rita sees Orson behind her. He leans in for a kiss.

Rita flips her hair into Orson's face.

ORSON  
What's wrong?

RITA  
Feeling guilty?

ORSON  
I'm feeling tired. Too tired for  
this, anyway.

Orson heads to the bed. Plops down.

ORSON (CONT'D)  
Did you see Sam ambush me tonight?

RITA  
He's asked you to direct, write,  
and star in his next movie. He's  
entitled to ambush you.

ORSON  
That's the problem, it's his movie.

Rita glides over.

RITA  
(baby talk)  
You're just upset that Sam doesn't  
realize you're a genius.

ORSON  
I'm upset that he doesn't care.

She slips out of her heels and into bed.

RITA  
Make Sam happy. Then he'll let you  
direct me.

ORSON  
I can't afford you.

RITA  
Probably not.

Rita turns out the light.

Orson laughs. He can't help it. He fucking loves her.

EXT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - DAY

SUPER: "AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA. TWO WEEKS LATER"

INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - DOCTOR MEADE'S OFFICE - DAY

WALTER FRANCIS WHITE, 52, a light-skinned African American with blue eyes, blonde hair, and an air of composure and intelligence looks out the window of a small office.

DOCTOR MEADE, 30, white, all business, hustles in.

WALTER  
Doctor Meade, I'm Walter Francis  
from the National Association for  
the Advancement of Colored People.

Dr. Meade eyes Walter with surprise.

DR. MEADE  
Mr. Francis?

Walter extends his hand. The men shake.

WALTER  
Thank you for contacting us.

DR. MEADE  
Honestly, I didn't know who else to  
call.

Walter grabs his briefcase as Doctor Meade takes off down--

THE HALLWAY

Walter follows Doctor Meade.

WALTER  
How is he?

DR. MEADE  
Bad. His eyes were gouged.

Walter stops in his tracks.

WALTER  
Gouged... out?

DR. MEADE  
For all intents and purposes.  
Officers told the admissions nurse  
he resisted arrest.

WALTER  
About that.

Walter pulls a form out of his briefcase.

WALTER (CONT'D)  
There's no name on Mr. Woodard's  
admission form. No arresting  
officer. No identification of the  
officer or officers who dropped him  
off. Even the police report is  
unsigned.

DR. MEADE  
He's hardly the first negro to be  
dropped off anonymously.

WALTER  
He's a decorated soldier.

DR. MEADE  
A negro with medals. That bullseye  
just got a lot bigger.

Dr. Meade softens.

DR. MEADE (CONT'D)  
Look, he's had a rough go. I'm just  
relieved they sent you instead  
of...

Walter looks at him quizzically.

DR. MEADE (CONT'D)  
Instead of another negro. Last  
thing we need is the blind leading  
the blind.

Walter doesn't bat an eye.

Doctor Meade points to a door down the hall.

DR. MEADE (CONT'D)  
He's just down there. Last bed on  
the right.

Doctor Meade heads back down the hall. Walter hurries into

INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - AFRICAN AMERICAN WARD - CONTINUOUS

Beds line both sides of the room.

BLACK PATIENTS mingle about, some on crutches or in wheelchairs.

Isaac lies in bed. His forehead and eyes covered in bandages.

Walter approaches Isaac's bedside.

WALTER

Mr. Woodard, I'm Walter Francis. We spoke on the phone.

Isaac holds out his hand. Walter shakes it.

ISAAC

Did you reach my wife?

WALTER

She'll be here soon.

Isaac works a finger under the bandages. Scratches his cheek.

ISAAC

I want these off before she sees me.

WALTER

That's up to your doctor.

ISAAC

Ain't no doctors here, you ask me.

WALTER

That's why we want to move you into the VA Hospital in New York.

ISAAC

Whoa. Whoa.

WALTER

Your parents live there, correct?

ISAAC

My home is in South Carolina. My wife is in South Carolina.



WALTER

I understand, but you need a hospital specifically for the blind.

ISAAC

These doctors don't know if I'm blind. And you for damn sure don't know.

WALTER

We just want to get you the proper care.

ISAAC

And I'm just suppose to sit here wrapped up and shut up.

WALTER

Far from it. I'm here to personally take a sworn affidavit for any trial--

ISAAC

--Already tried my ass. Judge didn't listen to me then, and you ain't listening to me now.

Isaac swings his legs over the side of the bed. Stands.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Just leave me be.

Isaac feels around his bedside table. Grabs a white plastic urinal jar. Fumbles with the lid.

He turns his back to Walter. Pisses.

**END ACT ONE**

ACT TWO

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

A shapely African American leg dangles down.

The leg jerks. A high-heeled shoe falls off.

A bra strap slides down a sweaty shoulder.

The moon shines on a yellow dress lying on the grass.

A ripped shirt exposes a muscular black man's chest.

CREAK. A tree limb bends.

Black hands tied behind a back. Twist. Pull.

A SMILING WHITE MAN focuses his camera -- CLICK.

The flashbulb POPS.

CLOSE ON A NEWSPAPER.

The front page photograph: Two AFRICAN AMERICAN COUPLES hang from tree limbs.

EXT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - LAWN - DAY

Walter sags forward on a wooden bench. Reads the newspaper aloud.

WALTER

Georgia Governor Talmadge justified  
the double lynching.

Isaac soaks up the sun next to Walter, his bandaged face lifted to the sky.

WALTER (CONT'D)

The two black couples were dragged  
from a car, tied--

ISAAC

Any more word from my wife--

WALTER

--and then shot...

Walter glances up from the paper.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Sorry?

ISAAC

My wife.

WALTER

We have a driver standing by.

ISAAC

It's been two days.

WALTER

She wants to make sure her mother  
is cared for while she's gone.

Isaac shakes his head furiously.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Have you put any more thought into  
what we discussed? Your testimony.  
Clearing up any discrepancies.

ISAAC

Discrepancies?

WALTER

The police report states that you  
plead guilty to being drunk and  
disorderly.

ISAAC

Why are you worryin' me with this?

WALTER

Because I'm tired of writing  
obituaries.

Walter leaps to his feet. SLAPS the paper against his leg.

WALTER (CONT'D)

And I'm tired of feeling powerless.  
I have a chance to help someone. To  
do some good. And you won't even  
talk to me.

ISAAC

Talk. Man, I begged. I was on my  
knees. They still beat me blind. If  
begging didn't help me, what's  
talking gonna do?

Walter runs a hand through his hair. Checks his watch.

WALTER

Come on. There's something I want  
you to hear.

Isaac stands. Walter guides him up the path.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - STUDIO - LOS ANGELES - DAY

A red neon sign reads: "ON THE AIR."

Orson towers over a microphone.

ORSON

(into mic)

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Orson  
Welles Commentaries. I'd like to  
read today from a letter sent by  
one Mrs. Edna Frasier.

Orson opens the letter.

ORSON (CONT'D)

(into mic)

Composed in response to my belief  
that a black man and a white woman  
should be free to marry if they so  
choose.

Orson pulls out a cigar from his jacket pocket.

ORSON (CONT'D)

(into mic)

Edna writes, "My Dear Mr. Welles. I  
can't believe you're advocating  
interracial marriage between whites  
and Negroes."

Orson lights the cigar. Shakes out the match.

ORSON (CONT'D)

(into mic)

"I do not expect you to understand  
the humiliation young women endure  
by the black man."

Orson folds the letter over.

INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - AFRICAN AMERICAN WARD - DAY

Isaac, Walter, and a group of other PATIENTS gather around a  
radio, glued to Orson's broadcast.

ORSON (V.O.)

"But if you are truly in support of such a degenerate belief, I'll ask the almighty to forgive me for ever listening to your repulsive ideas."

Isaac fixates on Orson's voice.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - STUDIO - DAY

Orson holds his cigar to the letter. The letter catches fire. Its corners curl.

ORSON

(into mic)

I remind Edna Frasier that, just as one can wake up on the wrong side of the bed, so too can one wake up on the wrong side of history.

Orson drops the burning paper into an ashtray.

INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - AFRICAN AMERICAN WARD - DAY

A black hand turns up the volume on the radio.

ORSON (V.O.)

Courageous black men are fighting and dying for the same freedoms abroad that they are refused here at home. My dear Edna, surely you can see, that's the sin God should forgive.

ISAAC

(to Walter)

That man's gonna talk hisself out of a job.

WALTER

Possibly. But he's a powerful ally to have in your corner. And he's in your corner, Isaac.

ORSON (V.O.)

And now a message from our sponsor, Lear Radio.

ISAAC

I wanted them to stop beating me.

Isaac hesitates.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

That was the only way... I couldn't see a doctor until I plead guilty.

Walter fumbles with his briefcase. Takes out a notebook.

WALTER

I would have done the same thing.

Isaac gestures toward the radio.

ISAAC

Let's give him my story. Before they fire his crazy ass.

Walter opens the notebook. Isaac leans forward. Determined.

EXT. DEE-DEE'S DINER - DAY

SUPER: "BATESBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA."

Chief Shull pulls up in his police car.

INT. DEE-DEE'S DINER - DAY

Chief Shull hangs his hat on a rack.

LUCAS BOONE, 35, a heavy-set farmer in overalls, sips his coffee.

Chief Shull bellies up to the counter.

CHIEF SHULL

Lucas.

(to a waitress)

Dee.

DEE, 40, friendly as all get out, grabs a fresh pot.

DEE

Chief.

Dee pours Chief Shull a cup of coffee.

CHIEF SHULL

I'll take an order of biscuits with a dollop of gravy.

DEE

Sheryl would have a conniption if she saw you eating that.

CHIEF SHULL  
Put a little fruit on the side if  
it makes you feel any better.

Dee walks off laughing. Chief Shull turns to Lucas.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
Heard you had another run in with  
that Monroe boy.

Lucas nods.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
The boy's all of thirteen.

LUCAS  
I done told him not to come around.

CHIEF SHULL  
You think maybe Becky told him  
otherwise?

LUCAS  
Now hold on.

CHIEF SHULL  
They're kids, Lucas. I can't arrest  
the boy for pining after your  
Becky.

Lucas grunts his disapproval.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
My advice, let this thing run its  
course -- which it will. Until  
then, hell, put him to work.

Dee sits a plate of biscuits on the counter.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
You're a saint, Dee.

GARLAND LEWIS, 63, the embodiment of Southern charm in a  
seersucker suit, strolls up to Chief Shull.

GARLAND  
Lynwood.

Garland grabs the seat next to Chief Shull.

CHIEF SHULL  
Garland.  
(gestures to Lucas)  
You know Lucas Boone.

Garland and Lucas exchange nods.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
We were just talking about young  
love.

GARLAND  
No better kind.

LUCAS  
Young love. Christ almighty.

Garland gestures to Chief Shull's plate.

GARLAND  
I know Sheryl doesn't want you  
eating that.

CHIEF SHULL  
That woman's gonna kill me by  
trying to keep me alive.

GARLAND  
Well if she succeeds, I'll get her  
off on self-defense.

Garland and Lucas laugh.

Chief Shull pops a biscuit into his mouth.

EXT. MOVIE STUDIO BACKLOT - DAY

WORKERS on metal scaffolding construct a soaring clock tower  
that casts a shadow over--

EDWARD G. ROBINSON, 53, short and chubby, reads his script.

Orson ambles up to Edward.

ORSON  
Edward! I can't tell you how  
excited I am to have you onboard.

He shakes Edward's hand vigorously.

ORSON (CONT'D)  
I told Sam, no Robinson, no movie.

EDWARD  
Fuck you, Orson.



ORSON

Save that scenery chewing for the camera, old boy. It'll help hide your usual lack of preparation.

Orson strides off. Inspects the work on the clock tower.

LORETTA YOUNG, 34, struts across the set.

LORETTA

Orson. It's been ages.

ORSON

Loretta.

Orson kisses the raven-haired beauty on the cheek.

ORSON (CONT'D)

Since we're playing husband and wife, I thought we should read through the script together.

Orson discreetly whisks Loretta to his trailer.

LORETTA

What a wonderful idea.

Orson opens the door for Loretta and follows her inside.

ORSON

Have I ever shown you my Oscar?

The door closes behind him.

INT. ROSA WOODARD'S HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "WINNSBORO, SOUTH CAROLINA"

ROSA WOODARD, 20, African American, thin, overwhelmed, drops a suitcase on the floor. Her soft features crunched into a frown.

MOMMA, 37, African American, proud, stern, fans herself, stares out an open window at a--

DIRT DRIVEWAY

CHARLES, 22, African American, cleans his car's windshield.

ROSA

Momma, he's gonna see you.

MOMMA

Man's in my yard. Let him see me.

Rosa stomps up next to Momma. Closes the window.

MOMMA (CONT'D)

Uh-uh, too hot for that.

Momma throws the window back open.

MOMMA (CONT'D)

Ain't right.

ROSA

Don't start.

MOMMA

Ain't right getting in a car with some young buck.

ROSA

Momma, Mr. Francis sent him.

MOMMA

Well Mr. Francis should have sent bus fare. Or put you on a train.

Momma turns from the window.

MOMMA (CONT'D)

Bet Isaac wouldn't like it none, either.

ROSA

You're too much.

MOMMA

Why you even going?

ROSA

You know why.

MOMMA

To sit around waiting for Isaac to get sent home. Shoot. You can do that from here.

ROSA

He's my husband.

Rosa opens the front door. Struggles with her suitcase.

Charles rushes over. Grabs Rosa's bag.

CHARLES

Let me get that for you.

ROSA

Thank you.

(to Momma)

See. He's nice.

MOMMA

Nice don't fool me.

ROSA

We'll be back in a few days.

Rosa hugs Momma -- heads to the car.

Momma stands on the porch shaking her head.

**END ACT TWO**

ACT THREE

EXT. PHYLLIS SHULL'S HOUSE - BACKYARD PATIO - DAY

PHYLLIS SHULL, 70, confined to a wheelchair, looks out at her well-kept yard. Eyes wide. Vacant.

MILDRED BLUE, 50, African-American with a beaming smile and kind features, cuts fresh flowers. Arranges them in a vase.

MILDRED  
These will brighten up your room.

CHIEF SHULL (O.S.)  
Hello!

MILDRED  
We're out back.

Chief Shull strolls out of the house. Removes a pair of reflective sunglasses.

MILDRED (CONT'D)  
Morning, Mr. Lynwood.

Chief Shull puts a kind hand on the small of Mildred's back.

CHIEF SHULL  
Mildred.

Chief Shull leans down to Phyllis.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
How's my favorite girl?

Chief Shull kisses Phyllis on the forehead. Admires the flower arrangement.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
Aren't these pretty?

Phyllis stares straight ahead.

Chief Shull and Mildred exchange a knowing look.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
How's Lee?

Mildred glows.

MILDRED

The foreman's taken him on full time.

CHIEF SHULL

That's good. Tell him I was asking after him.

(turns to Phyllis)

Mother, I've gotta get to the office. I'll stop back tonight on my way home.

Chief Shull slips his sunglasses on. Disappears into the house.

INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Rosa, suitcase at her feet, picks at her nails in the empty waiting room.

Walter strolls inside the room. Approaches Rosa. Smiles.

WALTER

Mrs. Woodard?

Rosa forces a smile.

WALTER (CONT'D)

I'm Walter Francis. It's a pleasure to finally meet you.

Walter eases into the seat next to Rosa.

ROSA

Thank you.

WALTER

I thought I'd answer any questions you might have.

ROSA

What kind of questions?

WALTER

Regarding Isaac's eyesight or the hospital in New York.

Rosa's bottom lip trembles.

ROSA

New York?

Walter takes her hand. Squeezes it.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - ORSON'S OFFICE - DAY

SHIRLEY, 24, Orson's pretty blonde assistant, searches through a stack of letters and newspaper clippings.

ORSON  
Crap. Crap. Crap.

Orson tosses each item into the trash.

ORSON (CONT'D)  
This may finally be the day Orson Welles has nothing to comment on.

SHIRLEY  
You say that every Sunday morning.

Shirley opens a manila envelope. Scans its contents.

ORSON  
Radio belongs to the public.

SHIRLEY  
Orson.

ORSON  
The listeners should sue this network for mishandling public property. I've a good mind to contact my own lawyers on the public's behalf.

SHIRLEY  
Orson!

Shirley fights back tears -- hands Orson the manila envelope.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - STUDIO - NIGHT

Orson clutches Isaac's affidavit.

ORSON  
(into mic)  
Before me is what amounts to a sworn testimony that states, "I, Isaac Woodard Jr., am twenty-seven years old and a Veteran of the United States Army."

Orson pulls the mic closer.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Air brakes SNEEZE. The bus crawls to a stop.

SUPER: "FOUR WEEKS EARLIER."

ORSON (V.O.)

"Five hours after being honorably discharged on February 12, 1946, my bus home made a stop in the town of Aiken, South Carolina."

Chief Shull struts toward the bus.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Isaac stirs. Eyes the cop cars through the window.

Chief Shull shines his flashlight into Isaac's eyes.

ORSON (V.O.)

"Upon arrival a policeman climbed on the bus and led me out."

CHIEF SHULL

Get up.

Chief Shull lowers his flashlight.

Passengers MURMUR. Stroud watches with concern.

Chief Shull escorts Isaac off the bus.

Alton breaks into a shit-eating grin.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Isaac steps off the bus. Chief Shull pushes him forward.

ORSON (V.O.)

Once off the bus, it appears that Mr. Woodard was immediately surrounded by three police officers.

Chief Shull twirls his nightstick by its leather strap.

ORSON (V.O.)

Three men sworn to uphold the law.

ISAAC

Is everything all right?

A BEEFY COP, 35, grabs Isaac, pulls him close.

BEEFY COP  
Did we tell you to speak, boy?

Isaac raises his hands in surrender.

A YOUNG DEPUTY, 24, smirks. Bounces in place. Taunts Isaac.

YOUNG ROOKIE  
Whoo-wee, he stinks of it.

ORSON (V.O.)  
Accused of being drunk and  
disorderly, Isaac Woodard denied  
those charges.

CHIEF SHULL  
You been drinking, boy?

ISAAC  
No.

WHAP! The Beefy Cop's nightstick hits Isaac on the back of his leg.

Isaac falls on one knee. YELPS in pain. Grips his leg.

Chief Shull slides the tip of his nightstick under Isaac's chin. Lifts Isaac's head.

CHIEF SHULL  
No, what?

ISAAC  
Beg pardon. No sir!

Beefy Cop hauls Isaac back up to his feet.

INT. BUS - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Stroud rushes down the aisle.

The Young Mother holds her Baby tight. Grasps Stroud's arm. Looks at him with tears in her eyes.

YOUNG MOTHER  
(voice cracks)  
Wanna get home? Stay on this bus.

Stroud holds her gaze. Nods. They stare out the window as--



EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Chief Shull steps up to Isaac.

CHIEF SHULL  
We know you threatened the driver.

ISAAC  
That's a lie. I only asked to use  
the latrine--

A nightstick SLAMS into Isaac's head. He drops. Hard.

Isaac's harmonica falls out of his shirt pocket. It gleams in the headlights.

CHIEF SHULL  
He's got a razor!

Beefy Cop puts Isaac in a chokehold with his nightstick. He pulls back hard. The stick digs into Isaac's windpipe.

ORSON WELLES (V.O.)  
It seems that the only crime Mr.  
Woodard was guilty of was being a  
black man in Aiken, South Carolina.

Chief Shull stoops down. Picks up the harmonica.

CHIEF SHULL  
(chuckles)  
Goddamn. It's just a jew harp,  
fellas -- play us something, boy.

Chief Shull forces the harmonica between Isaac's lips.

Isaac blows a feeble NOTE.

Chief Shull tosses the harmonica aside. Beefy Cop releases Isaac.

Isaac gasps for air -- struggles to speak.

Chief Shull swings his nightstick at Isaac.

Isaac grabs the nightstick -- holds it tight.

The Beefy Cop and Young Deputy unleash a flurry of strikes with their nightsticks.

Isaac covers his head. His body jerks with each savage blow.

ORSON (V.O.)  
 And being black is a crime that  
 comes with a high price.

Chief Shull wipes specks of blood from his face.

ORSON (V.O.)  
 A price Isaac Woodard paid in full.

Alton, in wide-eyed shock, scrambles back into the--

BUS

Stroud storms up to Alton -- cocks his arm back--

STROUD  
 You stupid hick.

Chief Shull climbs in -- Stroud freezes.

CHIEF SHULL  
 Ladies and Gentlemen, I apologize  
 for this inconvenience.

STROUD  
 Officer, I don't know what this man  
 told you--

CHIEF SHULL  
 I appreciate you trying to cover  
 for a fellow soldier, son. But that  
 man's behavior was threatening.

Chief Shull eyes Stroud.

CHIEF SHULL (CONT'D)  
 Now, go and take your seat so you  
 good folks can be on your way.

Stroud's courage wanes. He slinks back to his seat.

ORSON (V.O.)  
 Mr. Woodard was taken into custody,  
 beaten and bloodied, and yet for  
 one particular officer, the attack  
 was far from over.

INT. BATESBURG POLICE STATION - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The Young Deputy drags Isaac toward a cell.

Isaac chokes on his own blood. Spits out a crimson wad.

ORSON (V.O.)  
 And Mr. Woodard would awake with  
 his eyes dead in their sockets.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - STUDIO - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Orson slides the affidavit behind a stack of papers.

ORSON  
 (into mic)  
 Now, if you noticed, it seems that  
 the officer who blinded the young  
 man has not been named. Mr. Woodard  
 saw him, of course, while he could  
 still see, but for now this  
 policeman hides in plain sight.  
 Safe and smug behind his badge.

Orson lowers his voice to a whisper.

ORSON (CONT'D)  
 (into mic)  
 But know this, we have an  
 appointment, you and I. An  
 appointment your badge can't stop.  
 Until next week, this is Orson  
 Welles, obediently yours.

The "ON THE AIR" sign goes dark.

APPLAUSE fills the studio. Orson turns to--

THE ENGINEER'S BOOTH

Proud CO-WORKERS cheer Orson on with handclaps.

BACK TO THE STUDIO

Orson, always the star, bows.

The studio door opens.

ABC RADIO PRESIDENT, ADRIAN SAMISH, 37, an unabashed company  
 man, breezes in.

ORSON  
 Adrian. What brings you down from  
 the ivory tower?

ADRIAN  
Orson. That was extraordinary.

Adrian reviews Isaac's affidavit.

ORSON  
Rough stuff.

ADRIAN  
I'm proud of you.

Adrian points to the co-workers in the engineer's booth.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)  
We all are.

Orson takes Isaac's affidavit from Adrian.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)  
This Officer X. Nail the bastard.

Orson nods. Smiles approvingly.

INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - AFRICAN AMERICAN WARD - NIGHT

The lights are low. Isaac sleeps.

Rosa stands at Isaac's bedside. Anxious.

ROSA  
(whispers)  
Isaac.

Isaac stirs.

ROSA (CONT'D)  
Isaac.

ISAAC  
Rosa.

ROSA  
Hey, baby.

She kisses Isaac on his cheek.

ISAAC  
I thought they were gonna kill me.

Tears stream from under Isaac's bandages.

ROSA  
You're safe now.

ISAAC

I want to go home.

She wipes his tears. Kisses his lips.

ROSA

I know.

Rosa brushes her own tears away.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Just not sure you can.

ISAAC

Don't say that.

ROSA

Mr. Francis was telling me about  
that school for the blind.

ISAAC

He ought not have done that. Ain't  
nobody sure if I'm blind.

ROSA

The doctor's said--

ISAAC

They don't know.

She cups his face with her hands.

ROSA

You're the only one who don't know.

ISAAC

Damn it. Only one way to find out.

Isaac claws at his bandages.

ROSA

Don't.

Isaac unspools the gauze to reveal--

His left eye swollen shut. The right clouded by a milky film.

Isaac attempts to open his left eye. A thick yellow fluid  
oozes out under the lid.

Isaac lifts his hands to his face. Panics.

ISAAC

This can't be. Give me a light.

ROSA  
Isaac--

ISAAC  
Shine a light.

Rosa takes a small lamp from Isaac's bedside table. Guides his hand. He switches on the light.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Please.

ROSA  
The light is on.

ISAAC  
I'll get better.

ROSA  
There's no getting better.

Isaac hurls the lamp across the room. Rosa ducks.

The lamp CLATTERS to the floor in pieces.

Rosa folds into herself -- stares at Isaac in fear.

**END ACT THREE**

ACT FOUR

INT. ORSON WELLES'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Rita hands a crystal ashtray to--

CONRAD HALL, 40 , a straight-shooting private investigator, lights up a cigarette.

RITA

I'm not sure if you listen to Orson's broadcasts, but the attack on this poor man was just ghastly.

Conrad nods. Flicks ash into the ashtray.

CONRAD

I assume I'll be heading to South Carolina.

RITA

You have my condolences.

The sound of a DOOR OPENING grabs Rita's attention.

RITA (CONT'D)

(calls out)

We're in here, darling.

Orson waltzes into the room beaming. Conrad rises.

ORSON

We have company.

Conrad extends his hand.

Orson studies Conrads face. His good cheer fades away.

Conrad notes the shift. Puts his hand in his pocket.

Orson SNAPS his fingers three times to jog his memory.

ORSON (CONT'D)

Hall! Conrad Hall.

Orson locks eyes with Rita.

ORSON (CONT'D)

What are you accusing me of now, dear?

She waves her hand in the air.

RITA  
Let's not wallow in ancient  
history. You said you needed a  
private investigator.

ORSON  
Not this one.

RITA  
Nonsense. Mr. Hall is highly  
efficient, as you well know. If he  
can track down the occasional  
pregnant ballerina--

ORSON  
We've been over this--

Orson turns to storm out.

Rita leaps to her feet. Snatches Orson's arm.

RITA  
I'm sure he's more than capable of  
sniffing out a crooked police  
officer or two.

Orson stops. Glares at Conrad.

ORSON  
Is that true?

CONRAD  
It wouldn't be my first dirty cop.

RITA  
That settles it.

Rita kisses Orson on the cheek.

RITA (CONT'D)  
(whispers to Orson)  
Play nice.  
(to Conrad)  
Mr. Conrad.

Rita floats out of the room.

CONRAD  
Feisty.

ORSON  
It's the hair.

Orson, full of disdain, gestures for Conrad to sit.



INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - AFRICAN AMERICAN WARD - LATER

Isaac and Rosa huddle in quiet desperation.

Rosa's suitcase sits on the floor next to the bed.

Isaac runs his fingers over fresh bandages.

ROSA

Baby, what'd you do to those police  
to make 'em hurt you so bad?

ISAAC

Since when a black man gotta do  
anything to get a whoopin'?

ROSA

Momma wondered is all.

ISAAC

I was more scared of them than I  
ever was of the Japanese.

Rosa moves to a wooden chair next to the bed.

ROSA

Isaac, let these people help you.

ISAAC

When I first got here they said I  
couldn't remember a thing. My  
memory came back. Same could happen  
with my eyes.

ROSA

Go to this school Mr. Francis talks  
about.

ISAAC

I'm going home.

ROSA

What are you gonna do back there?

Isaac scoots up in bed.

ISAAC

I'll learn.

ROSA

Learn what? How to walk with a  
stick?

Rosa kneels on the floor. Opens her suitcase.

ISAAC  
Then we'll go to New York.

ROSA  
And live with your parents.  
Surrounded by more blind folk.

ISAAC  
We'll be together.

Rosa takes out a small stack of Isaac's clothes. Places them in a chair. Closes her suitcase quietly. Stands.

ROSA  
I don't know how to help you.

Rosa leans over. Kisses Isaac on the forehead.

ROSA (CONT'D)  
This ain't your fault.

Rosa hoists her suitcase off the floor.

ISAAC  
We'll talk to Mr. Francis. Build a  
new life. You'll see.

Isaac cocks his head.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Rosa?

Rosa tiptoes out of the room into--

THE HALLWAY

A NURSE watches Rosa stride past the nurses station.

ISAAC (O.S.)  
Rosa!

Rosa looks straight ahead and disappears down the hall.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Set up like a war room with notes taped on the wall and paper spread out on a desk and two beds.

Walter and two African Americans, DWIGHT, 30, and SALLY, 21, eat sandwiches and work.

SALLY

If he agrees to New York, then it makes perfect sense to hold the concert there.

WALTER

Getting him to New York is the issue.

Dwight talks with his mouth full.

DWIGHT

It's going to be hard to fly everyone to... where is it?

SALLY

Winnsboro--

DWIGHT

Winnsboro. Can you see Billie playing Winnsboro for nothing.

WALTER

It's not for nothing.

SALLY

That's right. It's for justice.

DWIGHT

The trial's for justice.

WALTER

No concert. No trial.

SALLY

No New York. No concert.

The room falls silent.

Walter moves his paper plate aside.

WALTER

Orson will keep the pressure on. We all will. But eventually, this has to reach Truman's desk.

Sally and Dwight blow raspberries and wave dismissive hands.

WALTER (CONT'D)

I know. I know. But Truman can be an ally.

DWIGHT

When it's convenient.

WALTER  
That's how our allies work.

THE DOOR

Flies open. Charles hurls himself into the room.

CHARLES  
Mrs. Woodard's gone.

WALTER  
Gone.

SALLY  
Where could she go?

CHARLES  
She left the hospital in the middle  
of the night.

SALLY  
She wouldn't -- I mean, did you  
check her room?

CHARLES  
She's gone.

WALTER  
Okay.

Walter grabs his jacket.

WALTER (CONT'D)  
I've gotta get to Isaac.  
(to Charles)  
Check the bus station.

Charles darts off without a word.

Walter hesitates at the door. Turns to Sally.

WALTER (CONT'D)  
New York just started looking a  
whole lot better.

Walter rushes out of the room.

Dwight and Sally exchange glances.

DWIGHT  
You heard the man, we're going to  
New York.

Dwight and Sally dive back into their sandwiches.

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Charles rushes into the station.

A FAMILY sleeps on a wooden bench.

Charles steps up to the ticket counter.

LOUISE, 60, white, sits reading a magazine.

CHARLES  
Excuse me, Ma'am.

Louise never looks up.

LOUISE  
Where ya headin'?

CHARLES  
Nowhere. I was wondering when the  
last bus to Winnsboro lit out.

Louise eyes a schedule taped to the counter.

LOUISE  
Had a bus headed that way at five  
this morning.

Charles looks around crestfallen.

CHARLES  
You wouldn't happen to remember if  
a young woman--

Louise shuts him down with a shake of her head.

LOUISE  
Don't get paid to remember.

Louise goes back to her magazine.

INT. BAPTIST HOSPITAL - AFRICAN AMERICAN WARD - DAY

Doctor Meade shines a light into Isaac's eyes.

DR. MEADE  
The infection's gone. Swellings  
down. Feel any pain?

ISAAC  
You said the bandages would protect  
whatever eyesight that remained.

DR. MEADE

Yes. Unfortunately, the trauma was just too extensive. We couldn't slow down the hemorrhaging.

Dr. Meade turns the light off.

DR. MEADE (CONT'D)

You've got the rest of your life, Isaac.

ISAAC

Yes. Unfortunately.

DR. MEADE

I'll keep you in my prayers.

ISAAC

You do that.

Dr. Meade treks out of the room. Walter stands in the door.

WALTER

Thank you for everything you've done.

DR. MEADE

It wasn't enough.

Dr. Meade and Walter shake hands.

Walter makes his way to Isaac's bed.

WALTER

Isaac.

ISAAC

She gone?

WALTER

We think she's on her way home. We'll send Charles back--

ISAAC

No. She don't wanna be with me.

WALTER

These things take time.

ISAAC

You've won, Mr. Francis. You're all I got. Just please stop talking.

Isaac crumples onto the bed.

INT. MOVIE STUDIO BACKLOT - FILM SET - DAY

Edward and Loretta are in the middle of a scene.

Orson squats next to the camera -- watches -- jumps up.

ORSON

Cut.

Orson strolls onto the set. Ignores Edward.

ORSON (CONT'D)

Loretta that was perfect. Let's go again.

Shirley rushes up to Orson. Whispers into his ear.

Orson's face drops.

ORSON (CONT'D)

What?

Shirley nods.

ORSON (CONT'D)

(to the room)

Everybody take ten.

Edward throws up his arms in frustration.

EXT. AIKEN CITY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Aiken MAYOR ODELL WEEKS, 40, well-groomed, verbose, stands on the steps of the courthouse in front of reporters.

MAYOR WEEKS

Last Sunday, Orson Welles dedicated an entire episode of his weekly radio broadcast on an incident involving a Negro soldier that he claims took place right here in Aiken, South Carolina.

Mayor Weeks gestures to the courthouse behind him.

MAYOR WEEKS (CONT'D)

Today I am happy to report that no such event took place in Aiken -- or involved any Aiken City police officers.

A snide smile snakes across his face.

MAYOR WEEKS (CONT'D)

If this is the emphasis Mr. Welles puts on the truth, it's clear that he still prefers to broadcast fiction as fact.

REPORTERS shout questions at the smiling Mayor.

INT. ADRIAN SAMISH'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Orson writes furiously on the back of an envelope.

A STERN RECEPTIONIST sits behind a desk.

A radio speaker mounted on the wall plays ABC NEWS.

REPORTER

(from the speaker)

The mayor of Aiken went on to compare the story to the infamous 1938 War of the Worlds broadcast that first brought Mr. Welles to national attention.

Orson shoots the radio speaker a deadly glare.

A phone BUZZES.

STERN RECEPTIONIST

(into phone)

Yes sir.

(to Orson)

You can go in.

Orson opens the door and strides inside

ADRIAN SAMISH'S OFFICE

Adrian greets Orson at the door.

Orson waves the envelope in the air.

ORSON

Adrian, I've prepared my rebuttal--

ADRIAN

One city official called the Isaac Woodard blinding, and I quote, "The latest hoax from the Barnum and Bailey of broadcasting."



ORSON  
The alliteration's not half bad.

ADRIAN  
Did you get the story wrong?

ORSON  
The NAACP has never let me down.

ADRIAN  
Maybe Woodard scammed them as well.

Orson hesitates. Considers the thought.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)  
Damn it, Orson, if you're going to  
make the news at least have the  
decency to get it right.

Adrian opens his office door wider. Moves out of the doorway.

Orson ambles past.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)  
Fix this.

Adrian slams his office door.

Orson lifts his head. Marches past the Stern Receptionist.

**END ACT FOUR**

ACT FIVE

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - PENN STATION - DAY

A wave of PEOPLE moving to and fro. Sounds and movement flood over--

ISAAC

Stands on the sidewalk, walking stick in hand. Head moving from sound to sound.

Walter carries two suitcases.

WALTER  
Welcome to New York.

An AFRICAN AMERICAN COUPLE rushes up to Isaac.

Isaac's Mother, SARAH WOODARD, 54, proud and strong, tears streaming, flings herself at Isaac.

SARAH  
Oh, my baby.

Isaac recoils from her touch.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
Thank you, Lord, for bringing my  
baby back home.

CLANCY WOODARD, 59, Isaac's father, nods to Walter.

WALTER  
Mr. Woodard, I'm Walter Francis.

Clancy steps back. Suspicious.

CLANCY  
From the NAACP?

Walter nods.

CLANCY (CONT'D)  
I just assumed--

WALTER  
It's fine. I'm used to it.

Clancy joins Sarah and Isaac.

CLANCY  
Welcome home, son.

The Woodards stand in a loving embrace.

Clancy keeps his eyes peeled on Walter.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - BRONX - DAY

Sarah walks arm in arm with Isaac. Clancy and Walter trail behind.

GENE DIXON, 8, African American, bounces a baseball-sized rubber ball off the side of the brownstone. KA-CHUNK. KA-CHUNK. KA-CHUNK.

The ball goes high. Gene leaps. Catches it. Bumps Isaac.

SARAH  
(to Gene)  
Ain't you got somewhere to be?

Gene stares at Isaac and his dark glasses.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
Gene! You hearing me? Run on home.

Gene darts into the brownstone apartment building.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
That boy's always under foot. Okay baby, we're gonna be taking five steps up.

Sarah assists Isaac up the stoop.

INT. BROWNSTONE - JULIA DIXON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gene watches Isaac from the living room window.

JULIA DIXON, 29, impeccably dressed, high cheekbones and casually stunning, joins Gene at the window.

GENE  
What's wrong with him, Momma?

JULIA  
He's blind.

GENE  
From the war?

JULIA  
No. Not the war.

Gene stares. Julia turns away from the window.

EXT. MOVIE STUDIO BACKLOT - FILM SET - DAY

Orson looks through the camera.

Sam Spiegel saunters onto the set. Mingles with the CREW.

Orson pulls away from the camera. Jogs over.

ORSON  
Sam. Come to see how I'm spending  
your money?

SAM  
Just stretching my legs.

Sam gazes up at the clock tower.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Hell of a set.

ORSON  
And under budget.

SAM  
How much do you hate my being here?

ORSON  
I don't have the words.

SAM  
Oh I doubt that.

Sam and Orson laugh.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Walk with me.

Sam makes a beeline toward a golf cart parked across the set.

Orson follows lockstep.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Know what I hate seeing most in  
this town? A man shooting himself  
in the foot.

Orson turns. Not understanding. Cocks an eyebrow.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Your radio mess needs to go away.

ORSON  
I'm working on that.

Sam gestures to the set.

SAM  
There are more important things for  
you to work on.

Sam climbs aboard the golf cart.

A FEMALE DRIVER, 18, starts the cart.

SAM (CONT'D)  
We're making a good movie here. I  
want people to go see it.

Sam signals the Driver.

The cart backs up.

SAM (CONT'D)  
Even in South Carolina.

Sam waves as the cart speeds off.

INT. BROWNSTONE - WOODARD APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Isaac, Sarah, Clancy, and Walter gather around the table.

WALTER  
I want to talk about the benefit  
show we're planning.

Isaac fidgets with his cup of coffee.

ISAAC  
Benefit?

WALTER  
There's a long list of celebrities  
signing on. Joe Louis. Woody  
Guthrie. Billie Holiday.

SARAH  
Billie Holiday. That's something.

WALTER  
This will go a long way in raising  
attention.

ISAAC

And money.

WALTER

And that's a good thing.

Isaac lifts his coffee cup.

ISAAC

How about I take this cup and go begging on the street.

SARAH

It's not like that, baby.

ISAAC

This money going to the NAACP?

WALTER

And to your trial.

Isaac slams the cup back down on the table.

ISAAC

Nobody asked me if I wanted a benefit -- much less a trial.

WALTER

We've talked about that.

SARAH

Mr. Francis thinks it's the right thing to do.

CLANCY

If I looked like him, I would too.

Sarah, shocked, glowers at Clancy.

SARAH

Hush.

ISAAC

What's he mean?

CLANCY

(to Walter)

Want me to tell him?

SARAH

It's not your place.

ISAAC

Tell me what? Walter?

CLANCY  
He's white.

WALTER  
My grandmother was a slave.

CLANCY  
Nigger's passing.

Sarah SLAPS Clancy across the face.

SARAH  
That's enough.

Clancy's nostrils flare.

WALTER  
I look white.  
(to Clancy)  
And I have passed for white.

Clancy bores holes into Walter.

WALTER (CONT'D)  
When I first joined the NAACP a  
group of five white men in  
Mississippi strung up an eleven-  
year-old boy. The Police did  
nothing, so I went down there.

Sarah clutches the cross that hangs from her neck.

WALTER (CONT'D)  
Took a week of buying drinks and a  
haircut before three of those  
bastards bragged about it. All my  
life I'd felt betrayed by my own  
skin, but here I was, with my blond  
hair and blue eyes, getting justice  
for a fellow Negro. After that, I  
passed from one lynch mob to the  
next.

SARAH  
Doing the Lord's work.

Isaac scrambles to his feet. Holds on to his chair.

WALTER  
I may not look as black as you want  
me to, but if I did, there'd be a  
lot more guilty white men walking  
around free.

Walter stands.

WALTER (CONT'D)  
Isaac, I should have told you  
sooner.

SARAH  
(to Isaac)  
Baby, this don't change a thing.

ISAAC  
Yeah, it does.

Isaac steps away from the table.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Don't matter how much African blood  
he got, if we go to trial, they'll  
only see one Negro in that  
courtroom.

Isaac removes his glasses.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
And this is what they do to Negroes  
in South Carolina.

SARAH  
Isaac--

ISAAC  
(to Sarah)  
And your Lord didn't do me any  
favours. I'm not even a man anymore.  
Haven't you heard? I'm just a  
cause.

Isaac grazes his hands across the wall. Finds the doorway.  
Feels his way out of the kitchen.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - ORSON'S OFFICE - DAY

A muffled phone RINGS.

Orson opens a desk drawer. Grabs the phone inside. Answers.

ORSON  
(into phone)  
What've you got for me?



INT. PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Conrad gazes out of the glass booth.

CONRAD  
(into phone)  
I've got a friend in the Bureau.  
Seems your broadcast ruffled some  
feathers.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

ORSON  
So we're making waves.

CONRAD  
More like making enemies.

ORSON  
Tell me we have a name.

CONRAD  
Not yet. But we've got the town.

Orson listens. Beams proudly.

ORSON  
Good man.

Orson hangs up.

Conrad steps out of the phone booth.

Eyes a building across the street.

The window reads: "BATESBURG SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT"

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - STUDIO - DAY

Shirley hovers next to the MIC when Orson barges in.

ENGINEER (V.O.)  
Ten seconds.

Shirley hands Orson a glass of water. He gulps it down.  
Returns the glass.

ENGINEER (V.O.)  
Five. Four.

Orson scours through a stack of papers on a metal stand. He  
flings them in the air. Points to the door.

ORSON  
 (to Shirley)  
 Out!

ENGINEER (V.O.)  
 Three. Two.

Shirley scurries out of the room.

ENGINEER (V.O.)  
 One.

Orson watches the "On The Air" sign light up.

ORSON  
 (into mic)  
 The town is Batesburg, South  
 Carolina! Not Aiken. The mistake  
 was both geographical and  
 understandable. Isaac Woodard,  
 after being beaten blind and  
 senseless, found himself in an  
 Aiken city hospital room.

Orson moves in place -- finds his rhythm.

INT. MAYOR ODELL HOME - PORCH - DAY

Mayor Odell rocks back and forth on a swing. Orson's  
 broadcast drifts from inside the house.

ORSON (V.O.)  
 Just last week, Aiken's honorable  
 mayor Odell Weeks asked me to kill  
 the story. It appears as if he'll  
 have to settle for a correction.  
 For while the location may have  
 been in question, the attack itself  
 was very real indeed. So too is the  
 man who led the attack. A police  
 officer who has chosen to remain  
 nameless.

Mayor Odell stops swinging. Wipes sweat from his forehead.

INT. PHYLLIS SHULL'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

Mildred cleans. Orson's broadcast plays in the background.

ORSON (V.O.)  
 This week, I've hired private  
 investigators in an effort to  
 identify this so-called protector  
 of the peace. But for now we will  
 call him Officer X.

Mildred wipes dust from the radio.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - STUDIO - DAY

Orson punches the air with his fist -- eyes wild.

ORSON  
 (into mic)  
 Officer X is clearly to blame for  
 this crime, but he's hardly alone.  
 Blame falls like the volley of  
 clubs upon Mr. Woodard's head.

Orson revels in his fury.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

Alton listens to Orson's broadcast.

ORSON (V.O.)  
 The blame and shame of a white bus  
 driver who set this whole chain of  
 events into motion simply because a  
 black man had the gall to ask to  
 use the bathroom.

Alton hocks up a loogie, spits it out the window.

EXT. BATESBURG COUNTY LINE - DAY

Welcome sign: "NIGGERS LEAVE TOWN BEFORE THE SUN GOES DOWN."

ORSON (V.O.)  
 The blame and shame of a city that  
 warns Negroes to leave town before  
 sundown.

The Greyhound bus rolls past.

INT. THE WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE - DAY

PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN, 62, wears a shirt and boxers.

ORSON (V.O.)

The blame and shame of the United States Armed Forces, which refused to aid Sergeant Woodard on the grounds that the brave soldier had already been honorably discharged.

Truman takes his pressed pants from a hanger.

INT. BATESBURG POLICE STATION - DAY

Chief Shull scowls at the radio.

ORSON (V.O.)

Well, Officer X, before you get too comfortable, Mr. Woodard has at least one fighter in his corner. A fighter hellbent on uncovering your name. And make no mistake Officer X. Once I have your name, Isaac Woodard will have justice.

Chief Shull SNAPS the radio off.

INT. WOODARD APARTMENT - ISAAC'S ROOM - DAY

Isaac feels his way around the small room.

He stumbles over his suitcase into the wall.

His glasses fall from his face.

Isaac howls like a caged animal.

SLAMS his fists into the wall. One after another.

INT. ABC RADIO STATION - STUDIO - DAY

Orson steps away from the microphone. The studio goes dark.

ORSON

(to himself)

And so it begins.

Orson strikes a match. Lights the tip of his cigar.

The flame casts a red glow over Orson's face.

**THE END**