

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
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CHEZ MORT: A SCREENPLAY

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A thesis
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ABSTRACT

Chez Mort is a drama about a death row exoneree, Karl Fox, who seeks to regain his mental freedom. Taking place in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana, the story follows Karl's journey of attaining the settlement money that will allow him to start over after spending twenty five years of his life in prison. While trying to fight against a corrupt criminal justice system, Karl has an uneasy relationship with his lawyer, Li, who has been by his side since the very beginning. Upon Karl's release, the New Orleans district attorney has gone missing, creating problems for his settlement case. A young documentarian named Lucie seeks to chronicle Karl's story and uncover the darkest secrets hidden within the local bayous. Desperate for a quick escape, Karl must work for the local funeral home, *Chez Mort*, whose practices are less than ethical. This pilot is only the first installment in a mini-series on the complexity of freedom.

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Chez Mort

By

Abby Jackson

EXT. BAYOUS - NIGHT

Over the Louisiana swamp, the full moon's reflection glistens... We move in towards the water. The reflection fades to a dark oval...

The water ripples... we see the figure of an alligator rising from the water...

As he rises, his scales shine in the moonlight... He opens his mouth and appears to "eat the moon"...

The gator drifts back into the water when a large shipping boat is revealed to have blocked our view of the glowing moon.

Suddenly, we hear three LOUD POPS! The sound of gunshots.

A bloody rag falls into the water...

A voice speaks as we slowly pull away...

MALE V.O.

\$24.39. \$24.39. Say it with me now.

A FEMALE VOICE laughs uncomfortably.

MALE V.O.

\$24.39...

FEMALE V.O.

\$24.39.

MALE V.O.

Again.

FEMALE V.O.

\$24.39

MALE V.O.

Mhm?

FEMALE V.O.

\$24.39

MALE V.O.

Is exactly how much I am worth to you.

Suddenly we have a wide view of the Louisiana Bayou. A GROUP OF 100 PEOPLE wear rags and hold lanterns. They are clearly inhabitants of the bayous.

The male voice belongs to SAL, 60s, who stands before the group, holding a much larger lantern. He's rugged, fit, and has eyes of elderly wisdom.

The female voice belongs to LUCIE, mid to late 20s, who operates a large videocamera.

Lucie points the camera back in Sal's face.

ON CAMERA:

Sal looks straight into the camera.

SAL
A spectre is haunting Louisiana...

Sal crinkles his nose... barely concealing his anger.

LUCIE (V.O.)
Of what kind?

SAL
Fraud.

A dramatic pause.

SAL (CONT'D)
Of ideals, intentions, and results.

The crowd agrees with "mhm"...

SAL (CONT'D)
And it all starts at Angola which
can no longer hold our fellow
brother captive...

EXT. LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY (ANGOLA) - DAY

We see an aerial view of the prison surrounded by a barren field. We are clearly in the middle of nowhere...

Large white buildings shaped like X's... MEN IN PRISON GARB march along the fence. They are followed by a hawk-like CORRECTIONS OFFICER on horseback.

At the front entrance, we see a man carrying a manila envelope march past the security checkout. His name is KARL FOX (40s). By his side is his slick-talking lawyer, LI (Late 40s).

Reporters swarm the area.

REPORTER (V.O.)
 You are watching a man taking his
 first steps out of prison in twenty
 five years.

Karl shakes hands with a CORRECTIONS OFFICER.

REPORTER (V.O.)
 In his hands, is a state issued
 debit card containing twenty
 dollars and the fifteen cents left
 on his inmate account.

LI pushes past reporters to get to a black Mercedes-Benz. he
 opens the driver's side, but looks on at the commotion.

One FEMALE REPORTER sticks a microphone in Karl's face.

KARL
 Oh, I'm tryna see my mother. We
 lost touch a bit.

FEMALE REPORTER
 When was the last time you talked
 to her?

Li scowls and shuts the door. He gestures for the reporter
 to stop.

The female reporter glances at him, but then listens into
 the wire (bluetooth) on her ears.

FEMALE REPORTER
 (into wire)
 Yeah, uh-huh.

She squints. Li walks back to Karl.

Karl observes the bluetooth. He's clearly never seen this
 before.

KARL
 (to Li)
 Everyone's in the FBI now?

LI
 The times have changed you know.

FEMALE REPORTER
 (into wire)
 You're sure this is a good time?
 Uh-huh. Yeah, Bob. I get it. Don't
 be an ass.

Li puts a hand on Karl's shoulder, almost forcefully pushing him towards the car.

Karl resists. He still wants to do the interview. He nods his head towards the reporter.

LI
Leave them be.

KARL
I wanna talk!

Li comes into Karl's face.

LI
They'll turn on you in an instant.

KARL
I already lost half my life man.
You called ma already? I hope she
ain't too mad.

Li gazes at the female reporter with distrust.

FEMALE REPORTER
Bob, he has a right to know.

The BUFF CAMERAMAN becomes impatient. His shoulders twiddle.

BUFF CAMERAMAN
We're still live, you know.

The female reporter waves him down. The Buff Cameraman GROANS. She prepares her mic and gestures at Karl.

FEMALE REPORTER
(into wire)
Don't forget who went to
Northwestern.

The reporter clicks a button on the bluetooth and sticks the mic back into Karl's face.

The buff cameraman pushes Li out of the way.

FEMALE REPORTER
Mr. Fox, we're just getting word on
something very important that you
need to know.

The female reporter looks directly into the camera for a moment. Karl smiles nervously.

Li fiddles with his own bluetooth.

FEMALE REPORTER
 We've just gotten word that your
 mother had passed during Katrina.

Karl GASPS. He is a bit confused. Li is shocked.

KARL
 Who's that?

Li tries to intervene.

LI
 Shut it down.

The buff cameraman blocks Li.

FEMALE REPORTER
 Hurricane Katrina. 2004. Her home
 was completely flooded.

Karl is silent. He furrows his brows. The female reporter stands still, waiting for an answer. He turns to Li, still blocked by the Cameraman.

KARL
 (to Li)
 What year is it?

Karl makes eye contact with Li over the shoulder of the cameraman.

BUFF CAMERMAN
 2015, sir-ee.

Karl storms towards the black car. The reporter follows... the cameraman close behind. He hops into the passenger's seat shuts the door in their faces.

Li pushes the reporter and the cameraman away from the car.

FEMALE REPORTER
 Mr. Zhang, why wasn't Mr. Fox
 notified of his mother's death?

LI
 Has Rick Milano ever admitted to
 his role in the cover up?

The buff cameraman shoves the camera in Li's face. He pushes it away, nearly knocking him over.

The corrections officer approaches the commotion... Li runs to the driver's side and turn on the car.

INT/EXT. LI'S CAR - DAY

Karl peeks at the fuel gage. The red indicator is slightly above "Empty."

Li is too busy changing the gear to notice.

Karl looks back out the window at the reporter and the cameraman. They set down their equipment, still retaining eye contact...

They fade into the distance.

EXT. LOUISIANA INTERSTATE 10 - DAY

The black Mercedes Benz cruises down the barren highway. A white pickup truck speeds up close behind.

The Benz slows down unexpectedly. The white pickup truck overtakes it. The Benz BLOWS ITS HORN.

The HICK driving the pickup sticks his middle finger out of the window.

The Benz slows down unexpectedly.

LI (V.O.)

Shit!

A HIGHWAY EXIT SIGN READS: GAS STATION 5 MILES. The Benz creeps down the road.

INT/EXT. LI'S CAR - DAY

The speedometer reads 10 miles an hour. Karl sits silently.

Li digs his hands into his hair, SIGHING. His phone RINGS.

LI

(into Bluetooth)

WHAT?!?!

Karl wipes a tear from his eyes.

LI

(into Bluetooth)

I'm with a client right now!

The car swerves into a gas station. The car comes to a screeching halt.

Li digs into his pocket and throws his wallet into Karl's lap.

Karl looks back at Li, confused.

LI
 (to Karl)
 I got you out. Time for real world
 transactions!

Li mouths "Cash" and steps out of the car towards the
 convenience store.

Karl opens the wallet. No cash. He pokes his head out of the
 window. Li walks into the store.

A LANKY GAS ATTENDANT approaches the window. He wears a name
 tag that reads - "RUDY"

RUDY
 (in a Southern Accent)
 Is there a problem over heeere?

KARL
 He ain't got no cash.

Rudy rolls his neck with a bit of sass.

RUDY
 You're the only 'he' I see.

Karl gestures towards the convenience store. Li stands at
 the checkout counter, still engaged in conversation.

Rudy looks down into the car. He sees the outline of cuff
 rings around Karl's wrists.

RUDY (CONT'D)
 Your friend ain't coming back?
 Drivin' a E350 in these parts...

Karl looks down at the manila envelope. He hesitates, then
 picks it up.

RUDY (CONT'D)
 You from Angola?

Karl doesn't respond. He removes a crisp debit card from the
 envelope and hands it to Rudy.

KARL
 Fill it up.

RUDY
 This ain't Jersey.

KARL

Twenty five years. Hard time.

Rudy smirks and removes the pump. Li comes out of the store. He waves at Karl. Karl skins up his nose. Rudy nods at Li. Li gives him the side eye.

EXT. LOUISIANA INTERSTATE 10 -SUNSET

The sun is beginning to set. The Benz approaches a sign that reads: I-10 NEW ORLEANS.

We see the New Orleans skyline... the Superdome, tall buildings, water glistens below the highway...

INT/EXT. LI'S CAR - SUNSET

Karl is struck by the city skyline. He glances at Li for a moment, but looks straight forward.

Li glances at Karl. He turns down the windows.

Karl breathes in the fresh air. He looks like he is stuck in a trance until... he breaks the silence.

KARL

Why didn't you tell me, man?

Li doesn't immediately respond.

KARL (CONT'D)

I been rotting away in there. Don't say I ain't grateful, cuz I am. But you know...

He snivels a bit.

KARL (CONT'D)

You know, your kind can be cruel.

LI

We needed you to keep fighting.

Karl wipes his eye.

KARL

Fighting what, man? I ain't a fool. 'System's broken.

LI

We couldn't let it happen.

KARL
It already did, man. I already lost
half my life.

LI
We don't think so.

KARL
Who's "we", man? I don't got
nobody. My sister done stop calling
as soon as she knew I was heading
for the chamber. Y'all can't even
give me the courtesy--

Li slams his hands onto the steering wheel.

LI
You wanna drive, man (mockingly)?

Karl bites his lip.

LI (CONT'D)
We've been at this for years. This
is for you. It has always been for
you. We've been fighting for the
settlement.

KARL
Why ain't you let me grieve ten
years ago?

Li's phone RINGS. Karl frowns at him, expecting him to take
the call. Li ignores it.

LI
You wouldn't be here and you know
it.

Karl stares at him intensely. There's a glimmer in his eyes.
There are remnants of tears on his eyeballs.

KARL
So where we eatin'?

CUT TO:

INT. WHOLE FOODS - NIGHT

Karl holds an empty container in his hands, staring at the
array of options:

A salad bar, a pasta bar, Chinese, Indian...

Li swiftly moves around the salad train. This A drop of lettuce. A drop of tomatoes. Organic slaw...

Karl leans against the organic cereal, awkwardly... Li notices.

LI
It's your day, buddy!

Li gestures for Karl to come over. Karl remains still.

KARL
Man, I ain't used to having a choice.

LI
Well, what is it that you want?

CUT TO:

INT. MCDONALD'S - NIGHT

Karl gawks at the colorful menu. The neon lights highlight his eyes which drift towards the Big Mac. PRICE: 4.99.

He digs his hand into his right pocket. COINS SHUFFLE. Two quarters and a penny. He makes a fist.

LI engages in an INTENSE INAUDIBLE CONVERSATION on his bluetooth. He stands by the napkin area and carries a boxed salad.

ON BOX: Whole Foods - Fresh is Best.

Karl glances back at Li momentarily. He fumbles through his left pocket. A dime.

The CASHIER, 20's, CHEWS GUM LOUDLY. Her fingers TAP the computer impatiently.

No one else is in line. Karl SIGHS and dawdles towards the counter.

CASHIER
Yesss...

She drags out her "'s"

KARL
Hello Miss, uh...

He takes another long look at the menu.

KARL (CONT'D)

Wow...

So many choices... So many lights...

Karl shakes the coins in his fist. He looks back up at the Big Mac.

KARL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to ask, but have y'all got a special on them Big Macs?

The cashier squints.

CASHIER

(coarsely)

What?

KARL

The B-b-big Mac, ma'am.

CASHIER

Big Mac's are 4.99.

Karl counts the coins in hand. The Cashier snarls and preeminently enters Karl's order.

CASHIER (CONT'D)

Will you be paying in coins today, sir?

KARL

You sure y'all ain't got a special?

CASHIER

Credit?

KARL

It's just that I ain't had one of those in a real long time.

The cashier continues TAPPING.

KARL

Oh, man... What've you got for fifty cents?

The cashier smirks.

CASHIER

Half an apple pie.

KARL
I want a sandwich.

CASHIER
You'll need a dollar.

Karl scratches his head, slightly offended by the jab. The cuff marks on his wrist are still visible. In his hand: 60 cents.

Defeated, he makes his way towards the door until...

Li finally looks up at Karl. He puts down his salad and scurries towards the counter. He drops a twenty.

LI
Get him everything he wants.
(to Karl))
The cruelty of it all.
(to Cashier))
Do you know what he's been through?

The cashier shrugs. Karl squirms.

KARL
I just... No, man. You don't have to.

LI
I will. Take it.

The cashier pauses.

LI
Take it. Take it!

The cashier slides the twenty dollar bill over the counter.

LI
You are not spending your first day of freedom eating goddamn apple pie.

Karl stands behind Li, looking apologetically at the cashier.

KARL
Imma have to call home about this.

The cashier hands over the change.

ANOTHER EMPLOYEE gives Karl a Big Mac container. He smiles, a bit sadly.

KARL
I ain't getting no settlement money
and you know it.

He opens the container.

EXT.CHATEAU HOTEL - NIGHT

The gorgeous colonial-style building glistens.

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Karl lays down in the comfy bed. The television BLARES...

ON SCREEN: PETER FALK AS COLUMBO hesitates before leaving a room.

COLUMBO
Just one more thing...

Karl LAUGHS. Li stuffs clothes into a suitcase by the wide window.

KARL
Never gets old, man...

His eyes drift towards Li

KARL (CONT'D)
So what we doing tomorrow?

Li ZIPS UP THE SUITCASE.

LI
You remember how to file taxes?
Employment?

Karl chuckles.

KARL
What taxes? I ain't go no income.

LI
No settlement... for the time
being. You've got to hustle.

Li removes an manila envelope from his briefcase. He hands it to Karl.

KARL
What's this?

Li removes a small white card from his pocket and hands it to him.

LI
Room key.

Karl takes it. Li moves towards the door.

KARL
Wait, where you going?

LI
Work.

Karl sits up.

LI (CONT'D)
I have other clients.

KARL
Oh.

LI
You're free.

KARL
I know.

LI
If you get lonely...

Li points towards a box by the bed. The box reads: ROBO-DOG:
a 21st CENTURY COMPANION. There is a picture of a robotic
dog.

Li tosses him a smartphone.

LI
Call me.

Karl furrows his brow. Li's phone RINGS.

LI
(into Bluetooth)
On my way Catherine.

Karl dangles the smartphone in front of him, unsure of what
to do.

LI (CONT'D)
(to Karl)
'On' button's at the side.

The screen emits a glow onto Karl's face. He's taken aback.
Li opens the door.

KARL
Is this the future or something?

LI
You're living it.

The door SLAMS SHUT. The smartphone makes a BING.

SMARTPHONE - FEMALE (V.O.)
Welcome back, Karl.

ON SCREEN: A picture of Karl, Li, a TEAM OF LAWYERS, and an older woman assumed to be Karl's mother.

Karl holds back the tears.

We hear LOUD JAZZ MUSIC in the distance... Karl goes to the window and sees a JAZZ BAND wearing colorful clothing playing on the rooftop of the building across the street.

One MAN IN A WHITE SUIT appears still. His trumpet hangs between his lips. The other members of the band wear black.

A SMALL AUDIENCE surrounds the group.

EXT. CHEZ MORT ROOFTOP - NIGHT

In the background, a statuesque woman wears a giant pair of sunglasses. Her tight black dress gives her the elegance of a vampire.

A cross between Grace Jones and Naomi Campbell, she must've been a supermodel in her heyday. Her name is JOSETTE BOUCHER.

The song finishes. The audience CLAPS. The band members in black CHEER. The man in white remains still.

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Karl eyes the man in white. Josette emerges in front of the audience. She sends a chill up his spine.

EXT. CHEZ MORT ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Josette removes her sunglasses. She spots Karl lingering by his window. He ducks down a bit.

JOSETTE
Terrence is--

She crackles.

JOSETTE (CONT'D)
Was. Pardon. A fantastic
individual. Human being.

The audience APPLAUDS in agreement.

JOSETTE (CONT'D)
Terrence, he-- He, did all he
could, with the time he had left.

Behind the crowd, RICK MILANO (CREOLE) makes eye contact
with Josette. He nods at her.

JOSETTE (CONT'D)
He inspired us all.

Her tone is one of pandering enthusiasm.

Rick nods at her again, a bit more urgently.

JOSETTE (CONT'D)
Anyone have a few words?

An old lady in a pink dress and a large blue hat nods in the
front row. Her name is MISS MADDIE. Josette hands Miss
Maddie the microphone.

She glances back up at Karl's window then walks towards
Milano. They converse in the rooftop shadow.

JOSETTE
What is it, Rick?

MILANO
He's missing.

JOSETTE
Vague pronouns, Rick.

MILANO
Something's rising in the swamps.

JOSETTE
No one's ever questioned whether
shellfish are scavengers.

The two step deeper into the shadow.

Over black:

We hear OBNOXIOUS BARKING... a man GROANS

FADE IN:

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Karl's eyes jolt open. The sun beams on his face. Robo-dog BARKS on his night stand.

The TV NEWS PLAYS QUIETLY in the background.

He hits Robo-dog. It continues barking. He hits it again. Robo-dog MOANS. The black screens of his eyes present a single blue tear drop.

Karl feels kinda bad. He picks the dog up and rests it beside him.

TV ANCHOR (V.O.)

New Orleans district attorney,
Bruno Test, was reported missing
last night.

Robo-Dog barks. Karl's attention goes towards the tv. He recognizes the name.

TV ANCHOR

News of the controversial
prosecutor's disappearance comes on
the heels of the release of Karl
Fox.

Karl immediately picks up the remote and turns up the volume.

TV ANCHOR

Fox's twenty-five year stint on
death row for the murder of local
restauranteur, Michel Arnaud.

Robo-Dog barks again. Karl blasts up the volume.

TV ANCHOR

The conviction was thrown out when
attorneys found the sole witness in
the 1989 trial to be unreliable...

The newscast cuts to a grainy interview with a bald man. A mic is stuck in his face. He's identified as BRUNO TEST.

BRUNO

Mistakes? Is there any such thing?
Listen, if we are going to keep our
society safe, we've got to lock up
the scum. Keep 'em away for good.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
Define scum.

BRUNO
All scum.

Karl's grip tightens on the remote.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
Can you be more specific?

BRUNO
Potential scum. Scum who don't know that they're not scum yet. Scum who've been scum since before they were born. Scum that think they're not scum anymore. Still scum. It's like that saying about lipstick and pigs.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)
But these are people we're talking about.

BRUNO
What people?

Karl shuts off the television and throws the remote onto the floor, causing the batteries to fall out.

RING! RING! RING!

The room phone at Karl's bedside sounds like a school bell. Robo-Dog barks at Karl to answer it. Karl's hesitant.

The phone keeps ringing. Karl picks up the phone.

SCRAMBLED VOICE (V.O.)
Is this Karl Fox?

Robo-Dog barks happily in the background.

Karl shushes him. He doesn't answer the question. We hear his SLOW DEEP BREATHS against the receiver.

The SCRAMBLED VOICE takes that as a yes.

SCRAMBLED VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You really think there's a million dollar pay day coming?

There's a long awkward pause. Karl stands up and looks out the wide window.

There's a rustle in the bushes across the street.

KARL
(into phone)
Who's this?

SCRAMBLED VOICE (V.O.)
The truth.

Karl spots the lens of a black camera. He watches for a moment, holding the phone to his ear.

SCRAMBLED VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You got our letters?

A lightbulb goes off in Karl's head. He immediately shuts the curtains and puts the phone back on the receiver.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Karl crouches on floor of the luxurious bathroom. A small bundle of open envelopes surround him.

He picks up a letter and reads to himself...

ON NOTE: Dear Mr. Fox, We have info you seek. Interview?
Reach out soon. -BAYOU

Karl scratches his head and turns on the tap water. He picks up the smartphone and dials. He's shaking a little bit.

KARL
(into phone)
When's the hearing?

LI (V.O.)
What's the rush?

KARL
'Member that map I showed you? I
meant it.

LI (V.O.)
When you get your money, you'll be
free to go.

KARL
Them fools won't let me walk free.
Never done. Angola'll shoot you
dead even after you drown.

Karl stares at his reflection in the mirror. He's a broken man... he's spacing... reflecting... thinking...

EXT. NEW ORLEANS PORT - NIGHT

TITLE: NEW ORLEANS 1989

Two fishing boats send a giant net into the water. On the red boat is an OLD FISHERMAN with a peculiar snake draped around his neck. He drops a huge net into the water.

A few feet away on the blue boat the other is a FISHERWOMAN. She holds a lantern.

EXT. UNDERWATER - NIGHT

We get a view of the gorgeous waters by the port. POV of the lobsters.

A DAD LOBSTER with a group of BABY LOBSTERS looks up at the approaching net... It barely misses.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS PORT - NIGHT

The fisherwoman throws a giant net into the water. She shines the lantern onto the red boat.

That white beard of his is familiar...

FISHERMAN

This is my post!

FISHERWOMAN

I got here first!

EXT. UNDERWATER - NIGHT

Once more, the net SWISHES through the water, barely missing the baby lobsters.

The two nets entangle.

The Dad Lobster guides the baby lobsters away from the chaos with his two big claws.

The nets untangle behind The Dad Lobster. One net approaches him from behind...

In comes the other net approaching the lobster.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS PORT - NIGHT

The fisherman shines his lantern onto the fisherman, nearly blinding her.

The fisherwoman will not concede. She tugs at her net.

Off in the distance we hear JAZZ MUSIC playing.

EXT. UNDERWATER - NIGHT

The Dad Lobster gently pushes the the baby lobsters even farther away until....

SWOOP! the net falls over his head. The baby lobsters dwaddle away.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS PORT - NIGHT

The SNAKE HISSES at the fisherwoman. The fisherman drops his lantern.

The fisherwoman SCREAMS.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

This is 1980s New Orleans bustling with energy. A GROUP OF BRASS MUSICIANS PLAY JAZZ MUSIC by the waterfront.

Flashing Neon lights flood the streets. We get a nice view of old colonial style houses...

...TOWNIES wear bright, eccentric clothing...

It looks like a jazz painting.

We pan down the street to see...

WELL-DRESSED CUSTOMERS eat fancy seafood on the patio of one particular establishment...

A marquee: Cafe Arnaud (5 STARS)

EXT. CAFE ARNAUD - NIGHT

Underneath the shining marquee, A BUSBOY (20s) wipes an empty table.

A WOMAN IN BLACK dangles an empty lobster tail in the air. She WHISTLES in his direction.

The Busboy hurries towards her and drops it in a bin...At another table, A WELL-DRESSED LITTLE BOY SNAPS...

His table is littered with crawfish shells. The busboy slides a few shells into the bin... A few fall to the floor.

The busboy hesitates...

His SUPERVISOR (40s) snarls in the corner.

The same fisherman from docks wearing his dirty fishing gear storms past the elite looking customers.

A few turns heads. A WOMAN drops her pearl necklace.

INT. CAFE ARNAUD DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The fisherman pushes past the hostess, knocking over the dishes that the bus boy is holding.

The DISHES BREAK LOUDLY. Cutlery spills everywhere.

He storms through double doors into the kitchen...

INT. CAFE ARNAUD KITCHEN - NIGHT

... where CHEFS CHOP CRAWFISH, SCALLOPS...a hand pries open a clam shell.

We hear the SIZZLING OF PANS.

We see various shellfish in crates, on tables, in pots...

The fisherman traverses through the chaos... KNOCKS OVER PANS... bumps into chefs...

...storms through plastic room dividers into an office space in which a MIDDLE-AGED MAN in a suit talks on the phone, twirling a cigar.

INT. CAFE ARNAUD OFFICE SPACE - NIGHT

The man is MICHEL ARNAUD, bourgeois. A look of terror comes across his face.

He DROPS THE PHONE onto the receiver.

INT. CAFE ARNAUD KITCHEN - NIGHT

The busboy carries a box broken dishes into the kitchen through the back door, but he stops before the office door.

He hears LOUD VOICES engaged in an inaudible argument.

He looks back through the through the double doors - the chefs continue chop up seafood nonchalantly. They are clearly playing deaf and dumb.

The bus boy hesitates before the office door. Michel and the fisherman glance at him momentarily.

Behind the busboy, a CHEF gives gives him a stern "mind yo business" look.

EXT. CAFE ARNAUD DUMPSTER- NIGHT

The busboy disposes of the broken dishes in the dumpster.

Around the corner, Michel and the fisherman come out of the backdoor, still arguing.

A shadowy figure approaches in the distance, appearing to watch the jazz band in the distance.

The busboy looks away... hurries through the back door.

We hear FIVE GUNSHOTS... A SCREAM...

INT. CAFE ARNAUD KITCHEN - NIGHT

The busboy hurries towards the dining room door, carrying mops out to the dining room.

A MALE CHEF eyes the busboy and SLAMS HIS KNIFE on the cutting board. He abandons his post.

INT. CAFE ARNAUD DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The busboy fervently mops the floor, periodically glancing back at the kitchen door.

The customers stir. A LITTLE GIRL CRIES. A SOPHISTICATED LADY fans herself.

A FAT MAN IN A BLUE SUIT shakes a wine glass, worrisome.

FAT MAN

ARNAUD!

EXT. CAFE ARNAUD DUMPSTER - NIGHT

The male chef GASPS.

The bodies of Michel and the fisherman lay in a pool of blood in the street.

The snake crawls from underneath the fisherman and HISSES at the chef back inside the restaurant.

The busboy looks on through the crack in the back door.

The snake swivels towards him. The busboy kneels quietly.

They are face to face. The snake's tongue is just inches from his nose.

The chef glances back at the sight.

We hear SIRENS approach in the distance...

EXT. NEW ORLEANS PORT - NIGHT

A CRAZED OLD MAN wearing rags SINGS A HORRID RENDITION OF "GO DOWN MOSES."

He flicks a piece of shrimp into his mouth... smiles at the fishing boat parading around the port...

EXT. BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

BACK TO PRESENT DAY:

Karl walks past the lively areas. Robo-Dog teeters by his side.

He passes an outdoor Crawfish market and stops. Them crawfish are nice buttery red. No hungry person would keep walking.

An elderly woman, GLORIA, smiles behind the display. Her smile could rival sharks.

GLORIA
How much ya like, dear?

Karl pauses.

KARL
The Bernard's still selling to everybody?

GLORIA
Oh, no deary.

Suddenly, Gloria's voice turns to a whisper.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Bernard's got competition. One of Arnaud's grandchildren's been corning the market.

Gloria lips tighten around her teeth.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Every cajun place in town goes through them. Not like Michel didn't have enemies before.

Karl takes the information with caution.

KARL
I ain't allowed to talk about the
case.

Gloria answers with a "hm".

GLORIA
Are they gonna repay you for your
time?

Karl shrugs.

GLORIA
If I were in your shoes, I'd get
out.

Gloria gestures to the sky.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Don't matter if you gave me one
thousand or one million. This
place'll pull you back in and keep
there.

She calms down.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Angola got you once, they'll get
you again.

Karl nods, understanding the importance of her speech.

KARL
How much'll make me full?

GLORIA
I guesstimate about two pounds.

Karl takes a bill from his pocket.

LATER -

Karl carries a big crate back to the Chateau Hotel. Robo-Dog follows behind him.

He sets down the crate before he reaches the entrance.

On the rooftop of the building across the street, we see the silhouette of a tall statuesque woman.

Karl looks behind him and sees her. He looks at her inquisitively.

EXT. BURGER KING - DAY

Karl walks into the store, wearing a hoodie that disguises his face. He carries a manila envelope.

INT. BURGER KING - DAY

Karl removes a piece of paper from the envelope. He hands it to a A MIDDLE-AGED MANAGER who restocks straws.

MANAGER

Leave it on the counter.

KARL

When will I find out?

The manager shrugs. He opens a box of lids.

Karl bites his lip.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - DAY

Karl walks along the street with Robo-Dog paddling along by his side. He passes an abandoned establishment with caution tape all over.

A crooked sign reads: CAFE ARNAUD.

Karl pauses. Robo-Dog barks excitedly as if reading his mind.

Karl keeps walking, unwilling to look back. Robo-Dog follows obediently, struggling to keep up.

INT. APPLE STORE - DAY

We're almost blinded by the white walls and bright lights... TECHIES assist CUSTOMERS...

Karl walks around observing the computers... Wow. Technology sure has changed.

He stops by a row of iPads and puts down the envelope. He presses a button.

FEMALE V.O.

What would you like today?.

Karl raises his eyebrows. He presses a button.

FEMALE V.O.

No results found.

He presses another button.

FEMALE V.O.

Please make a new selection.

Karl scratches his head. A QUIRKY EMPLOYEE with green hair approaches him.

QUIRKY EMPLOYEE

What can I help you with?

KARL

I was hearin' that the Apple was the best place to work at. That true?

The quirky employee smiles widely.

QUIRKY EMPLOYEE

I don't think that I'm obliged to say otherwise.

KARL

That so?

He takes another long look at all the crazy technology.

KARL (CONT'D)

You hirin'?

The quirky employee chuckles.

Karl tilts his head.

KARL (CONT'D)

That a yes?

The quirky employee scans Karl judgmentally. Robo-Dog loyally stands by his side.

QUIRKY EMPLOYEE

What's your experience?

KARL

Twenty five years of hard labor.

The quirky employee unsure of whether to laugh creaks the sides of her mouth... But Karl gets the message and it sure ain't funny.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

A large yellow construction vehicle honks as it lowers a giant piece of wood.

A few feet away, A man in a plaid outfit and hard hat directs the vehicle while talking to Karl. The man's name is JOE.

The place is noisy, so, they must scream.

KARL

You needin' more people?

HONK. HONK. HONK.

Joe points to where the vehicle should drop the wood.

JOE

Already payin' five men off the books.

Joe, half-listening, waves his arms at the vehicle putting the wood in the wrong place.

KARL

I need the money, sir.

Joe is taken aback by the sincerity in Karl's voice. He turns around.

JOE

What's your experience son?

Karl freezes. He sure as hell doesn't have any.

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QUIRKY EMPLOYEE
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KARL
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The quirky employee unsure of whether to laugh creaks the sides of her mouth... But Karl gets the message and it sure ain't funny.

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL - DAY

Karl sits in his bed, frustrated. He opens up a world map. One city across the globe is circled. He sighs.

Robo-Dog is perched next to him. He looks at Karl then at the map then back at Karl as if he's reading his mind...

Karl removes a couple sheets of paper from his envelope. One paper reads - DRIVER'S PERMIT - \$32.25. DRIVER'S LICENSE - 32.25.

Another - PASSPORT: \$110.

Robo-Dog barks sympathetically.

Karl is visibly distressed by the prices. He picks up the smartphone and checks the side for the "On" button. He presses it.

The screen lights up. An unsteady finger swipes the screen to unlock it... Now confusion. Where's the contact book?

Karl presses the green phone symbol and luckily enough Li's number shows up. RING...RING...RING...

It looks like Li is never going to pick up until we hear an out of breath voice...

LI (V.O.)

I'm with a client right now. What is it?

KARL

Hey Li, uh, I've been looking at some... opportunities and I uh...

Karl looks at the daunting costs of the passport and license.

LI (V.O.)

What is it, buddy?

Li's impatience is barely masked by the pleasant demeanor. Karl doesn't answer immediately.

LI (V.O.)

Yeah?

KARL

It's just that...

Karl takes a deep breath.

KARL (CONT'D)

I ain't got no skills for most of these folks. They keep askin' "What's your experience?" Like I'm supposed to know everything.

LI (V.O.)

When the settlement is said and done, people will be offering up their experience whether you ask them to or not.

KARL

Why you so sure?

LI (V.O.)

How long have we been in this together?

KARL

You ain't from here, man. People don't do easy.

LI (V.O.)

You worried about money? I'll wire some over.

KARL

Oh, no...

LI (V.O.)

How much? \$500? It's cheap to live there. That should carry you over. Alright? See Y---

KARL

Where do I get my social security number? And my passport? And my license? And my---

Li pauses and sighs... Unfortunate news.

LI (V.O.)

I believe your mother had it. Or I can send you to a guy--

KARL

Where're you wirin' the money?

EXT. WESTERN UNION - DAY

Karl counts out five hundred dollar bills before stuffing them into his pocket. Robo-Dog hobbles by his side.

A taxi pulls up to the sidewalk. Karl steps inside with Robo-Dog.

EXT. BAYOUS - DAY

The taxi passes the glitzy ritziness of NOLA's French Quarter into swampy territory. The car stops before the road ends.

Karl hands the driver a hundred dollar bill. Definitely overpaying.

He and Robo-Dog hop out of the car while the taxi immediately speeds away.

In front of them is a magnificent swampland.

The sun sets over the water creating shadows of the mystical looking trees. Karl and Robo-Dog walk towards a ramshackle house in the swampy area.

There's a sign in front of the property: CONDEMNED.

Karl walks past the sign. Robo-Dog barks with concern.

Karl approaches the front door which is an unfortunate looking slab of wood and pushes it open.

INT. HOUSE - DAY/EVENING - CONTINUOUS

The house is a fucking mess, but a small smile creeps across Karl's face. He's home.

Robo-Dog trots inside behind him and picks up a bare chicken bone lying on the uneven floor.

Karl takes in his surroundings for a moment... His eyes turn to an open drawer. The wood is completely rotten but he pulls it open.

In the drawer are childhood trinkets - a whistle, a map, and a set of keys.

Karl takes the keys and massages them in his hand.

He turns towards a small closet and turns the key. He opens the door. A small kayak rests against the wall. Karl removes it.

EXT. BAYOUS - EVENING

Karl and Robo-Dog float in the kayak on the bayou while the sun sets. They're in the shadowy area by the trees.

Karl breathes in the fresh air. The boat treads farther away from the home deeper in the depths of the bayou.

He leans back and closes his eyes. Robo-Dog does the same... Karl falls asleep...

An alligator swims near by...

LATER:

A bright light shines in Karl's face. His eyes bolt open.

The light shifts to another area of the water.

Karl shakes, knocking the boat over, Robo-Dog falling into the water.

Robo-Dog barks frantically.

The alligator approaches.

Karl gasps and tries to turn the boat back over... until BOOM!

There's a gunshot.

Karl freezes. The alligator doesn't.

Robo-Dog floats back up to the surface, doggy paddling. He barks at Karl.

Karl shushes Robo-Dog, keeping his eyes on the menacing gator.

Karl turns the kayak over and motions for Robo-Dog to come back.

Robo-Dog keeps paddling in place.

Karl submerges himself underneath the kayak, barely keeping his head above the water.

He guides the boat away from the scene.

The gator circles the action...

Another gunshot!

It lands next to Robo-Dog! The gator swirls around in the water, retreating.

Robo-Dog looks panicked.

ROBO-DOG
Owner! Owner!

Karl stops and listens.

ROBO-DOG
Owner!

Karl peaks up from the kayak. He makes eye contact with Robo-Dog.

ROBO-DOG
Owner!

He finally gets it. Robo-Dog never knew his name.

KARL
Karl.

ROBO-DOG
Kaaaerrrrrl.

KARL
Owner. Karl.

Karl comes back for Robo-Dog and lifts the boat above his head... His eyes are wide with memory... He dips his head back into the water.

The television blares in the background.

The empty barrel sits by the door. The table by the window is littered with crawfish shells. Karl eats the last bit of meat and then wipes his mouth.

He takes his eyes off the television and glances out the window at the rooftop of Chez Mort.

His smartphone lights up. INCOMING CALL- UNKNOWN.

Karl hesitates. His head turns towards the window. Nothing. The phone still rings.

Karl wipes his fingers and picks up the phone.

KARL
Hello?

He hears a KNOCK at the door. He whips around.

FEMALE VOICE

You see me?

Back to the window:

KARL

Who's this?

FEMALE VOICE

Look out your window.

Karl stands up by the window. He looks around. Nobody's out there... Just a haze.

FEMALE VOICE (CONT'D)

I can see you.

Karl drops the phone to his side. He's a bit freaked out. He takes a moment to collect himself and then raises the phone back to his ear.

KARL

You the one's been sending me letters?

FEMALE VOICE

You want to get your driver's license, right?

KARL

Yeah.

FEMALE VOICE

You need a job, right?

Karl nods.

FEMALE VOICE (CONT'D)

Well, I can take care of both.

A light turns on at Chez Mort and a hand waves, the person completely out of view.

Karl doesn't wave back instead he asks:

KARL

Who is this?

FEMALE VOICE

Josette. Come over tomorrow.

The name makes a light bulb go off. Karl steps away from the window.

STOCK FOOTAGE:

We're watching a grainy old news clip showing the mugshot of a young man, 16, staring blankly into the camera... The frame cuts to a crazy looking woman talking to a REPORTER.

FEMALE (V.O.)

I know what I saw. Just look at him. What do you expect?

REPORTER

Did you see what you expected?

FEMALE

Oh, I have very good instincts. My husband will tell you that.

REPORTER

Condemned to the electric chair.

FEMALE

A young man like that deserves a shock.

The picture suddenly cuts out. We pull back to reveal:

INT. LUCIE'S WORK ROOM - NIGHT

Papers scatter a bare office space.

Pictures of Karl are pinned to the gray walls... His mugshot. His childhood picture... The bayous...

Lucie takes a sip of coffee as she jets down a note - FIND HIM.

EXT. CHEZ MORT - DAY

Josette is even more stunning in person. She opens the grand wooden door to the building that resembles a rehab center in Malibu.

She embraces Karl, a wide smile on her face. Almost superficial.

Karl doesn't return the enthusiasm.

JOSETTE

Well, this is home.

Karl's eyes take in the lush green...the bronze statues of French revolutionaries...

His eyes stay on Voltaire's which reads: "The comfort of the rich depends on the abundance of the poor."

Josette notices his gaze... Karl eyes the luxurious-looking building once more.... and then Josette's designer shoes...

Josette leads him away from the door towards the open garden surrounded by a paved circle.

On the circle sits a black Rolls-Royce hearse.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Josette leads Karl past a glass door that shows a room full of luxury coffins...

Her heels CLACK against the tile floors.

Way down the hall is a steel door, noticeably different (in style) from everything else.

Karl gets a quick glance at it until Josette whips around the corner...

INT. JOSETTE'S OFFICE - DAY

A painting of an African landscape hangs behind Josette's leather office chair. She picks up a blue gummy worm from a tiny red bowl on her desk.

Karl is seated across from her in a hard rolling chair, he fiddles with his pants.

JOSETTE

So...

She pops the gummy worm into her mouth.

Karl watches her chew. It takes a while.

When she's finished:

JOSETTE (CONT'D)

How are you?

Karl nods... "good."

JOSETTE (CONT'D)

What does freedom feel like after all this time?

KARL
I don't know.

Karl peers over his shoulder at the bizarre decorations that litter the office...

A lion's head... A tusk... A spear... a French flag... A photo of a runway...

He's suddenly a bit curious.

Back to Josette:

KARL (CONT'D)
What's it like out there?

Josette traps a gummy worm between her middle and index finger, holding it like a cigarette.

JOSETTE
Depends on the size of your wallet.

She bites off half of the gummy worm. Karl frowns.

KARL (CONT'D)
You know, my lawyer's telling me to sit tight.

JOSETTE
In this town?

Josette snorts in disbelief.

KARL
He's the New York kind.

Josette finishes the other half.

JOSETTE
Admirable.

KARL
I won't be touching no dead bodies, right?

Josette shrugs.

JOSETTE
You get used to it when you the checks come in.

Karl sits up straight.

KARL
How much?

JOSETTE
Enough.

Karl GROANS and digs in his pockets for the crumpled map.

KARL
Twisted shit's been happening since
I been out.

He unfolds the map on Josette's mahogany desk. Josette glimpses at it.

There's an X marked on a land across the ocean.

JOSETTE
I don't know if we can make up for
the settlement, dear.

KARL
I ain't waiting if it fails.

Karl points to the spot again in case she didn't understand the first time.

JOSETTE
Well, I think we've come to an
agreement. And here's the gist:
Stay away from reporters. Media.
Leeches. Crooks. New Orleans hasn't
changed much since you've been
away.

EXT. CHATEAU HOTEL - NIGHT

Lucie walks towards the entrance holding a black camera bag.

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

Lucie stands at the reception desk embroiled in a conversation with the RECEPTIONIST.

LUCIE
Fox. F-O-X. You know the guy they
just took off of death row?

RECEPTIONIST
I'm sorry, I can't provide you with
any information.

LUCIE

I know, I've seen him. He's staying here!

The receptionist shrugs and starts typing on her computer. Lucie turns around and groans, completely frustrated.

The receptionist thinks that she's given up...

Lucie puts her camera bag on the floor defiantly.

The receptionist looks up.

LUCIE

There's something rotten around here. It goes beyond Karl Fox. You've been watching the news, right? Bruno Test disappearing out of thin air. That's not troubling to you?

RECEPTIONIST

I didn't know him personally.

LUCIE

A lot of people do. And from what I heard, he's crooked.

RECEPTIONIST

So are a lot of people.

LUCIE

Listen...

Lucie looks for the receptionist's name tag "Jane."

LUCIE (CONT'D)

...Jane, I need to find this guy. Just to ask him what he's seen.

In the darkened staircase off to the side of the lobby, we see the outline of Karl listening in on the conversation.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm not at liberty to tell you who is staying at this hotel. You will leave or else I'll need to make a phone call.

Lucie digs her hand through her hair with frustration. She picks up her camera bag and heads towards the door until she hears:

KARL (O.S.)

Wait!

Lucie turns around.

Karl emerges down the staircase wearing his pajamas.

Lucie lights up.

LUCIE

Karl Fox? It's such a--

KARL

Were you the one sending me
letters?

A smile creeps upon Lucie's face.

EXT. CHATEAU HOTEL OUTDOOR POOL - NIGHT

Spotlights shine on the majestic blue waters of the outdoor pool.

Karl sits in one of the beach chairs as Lucie puts down her camera bag. Lucie unzips it and takes out an expensive videocamera. She tilts the lens towards Karl's face.

KARL

What's that?

Karl shields his face.

KARL (CONT'D)

Put that down!

Lucie does not listen. She fiddles with the battery compartment.

LUCIE

I just have to record our
conversation. For personal use--

Karl waves her down.

KARL

Nope! I got a settlement hearin'
coming up.

LUCIE

So this will help?

She slides the power switch from OFF to ON.

KARL
Li said not to make any public
appearances.

Lucie bolts up. She removes a tiny notepad and pen from her
back pocket.

LUCIE
Who's Li?

Karl shakes his head.

KARL
I ain't talkin' unless you turn
that off.

LUCIE
Okay.

Lucie sighs and puts the camera back into the bag.

KARL
And... no notes.

LUCIE
Sure.

Lucie closes the notepad and tucks it back into her pocket.

KARL
What do you want?

LUCIE
Just your opinion on Brun--

KARL
Why was you writin' me?

Lucie crosses her arms and rests her back against the fence.

LUCIE
You know Karl, I'm sorry that they
did this to you.

Karl squints his nose -"I know, I know."

KARL
What's your info?

LUCIE
Your daughter.

Woah. Karl freezes.

KARL
What daughter?

LUCIE
I've heard she's in New York.

KARL
Oh, no. That ain't possible. Sure
of it.

LUCIE
I don't think she told you...
Sandra.

KARL
Man, I ain't seen Sandra in years.

LUCIE
She must've thought they were going
to kill you.

Karl chuckles painfully. He's fighting tears.

KARL
Man, I shouldn't be talkin' to you.

Taking advantage of his vulnerability:

LUCIE
You need your money. Your family.
Job... I can provide that.

Karl looks straight ahead to avoid eye contact.

KARL
How?

LUCIE
I'm a truth teller, Mr. Fox.

Lucie picks up her camera. Karl, visibly angry waves for
her to put it down.

Lucie points the lens at his face.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
This will set you free.

Karl stares into the lens... the endless black tunnel...

LUCIE (CONT'D)
My documentary will help people see
the injustice you've faced. I'm
(MORE)

LUCIE (CONT'D) (cont'd)
exposing all of the people who've
done you wrong. Bruno Test
included. And people will be angry.
Very angry. Once the evidence can't
be refuted, you won't even need the
courts.

This last line softens Karl's gaze. It sounds inviting.
However, he catches himself and snaps back to reality.

KARL
No. No digging.

LUCIE
You're willing to take another
gamble on the legal system that has
failed you before?

Karl doesn't answer.

LUCIE
You need this, Karl. I'm gonna get
your story out there. People need
to see it.

KARL
Ain't nobody wants to see what I
went through.

LUCIE
People watch. Dateline. 48 Hours.

KARL
This ain't finished yet!

LUCIE
If this gets out before your
settlement, they'll have no choice
but to reward you. The people will
be up in arms!

Karl shakes his head. He gets up and heads towards the door
back inside the building.

INT. CHEZ MORT DRESSING ROOM - DAY

It's Karl's first day on the job. He wears an uncomfortable
purple dress shirt that has "Chez Mort" embellished on the
back.

A cadaver of an old female lays on the table. Josette
thickens her eyebrows with eyeliner pencil.

Off to the side of the table is tray of every color eyeshadow known to man. Josette gestures at it.

Karl reaches for it, about to hand it to her...

Josette puts a hand in his face.

JOSETTE

I'm not an octopus.

Point taken. Karl holds the eyeshadow tray as Josette waves her brush in the air, deciding which color to pick. His arms are stiff. He tries his best not to look at the dead body.

Josette's found her colors. She paints over the brown face until it looks alive again. She takes a step back and admires her work.

She smiles at Karl. Karl looks disturbed.

JOSETTE

I know, I know. Blush. She looks sooo dead right now.

Josette laughs at her own joke and waves a hand in the air for him to do her bidding.

Karl digs through the tray on the table. He's passed about five different containers of blush. He's clearly ignorant.

Josette frowns a bit. She's losing patience.

JOSETTE

Circular Container.

KARL

Huh?

Karl picks up several circular containers plus a few square-shaped.

Josette hisses her teeth.

Karl juggles the containers in his hand, unsure which one is blush.

JOSETTE

What were you doing in the twenty years in the civilian world?

Josette snatches a blue container of blush from his arms and proceeds to pad the old woman's face.

Karl drops the containers, causing Josette's hand to slide a streak of red across the old woman's cheek.

Josette pauses, seething.

Karl scrambles for the containers.

INT. PREPARATION ROOM - DAY

Josette rolls the plastic off of a cadaver to reveal a bald man who must've been smiling during his last moments.

Karl gasps. He knows that face. Bruno Test. He backs away from the table.

 JOSETTE
 You didn't know?

Karl tilts his head at her. Josette chuckles.

 JOSETTE (CONT'D)
 Hasn't gotten out yet, I suppose.
 You signed a confidentiality
 agreement.

Karl's eyes are wide. He's frozen while Josette is taking the situation in strides.

 KARL
 What's he doing here?

Josette rolls up the plastic and tosses it into Karl's hands.

 JOSETTE
 Dispose of it.

Karl remains still.

 KARL
 This man's out missing.

 JOSETTE
 I thought you'd be glad. Almost
 sent you to your death on bogus
 charges.

Josette points to the light wooden coffin at the side of the room and smiles.

Karl loosens his grip on the plastic covering.

INT. CREMATORIUM - DAY

Karl's face reflects the warm colors of flames. A wooden coffin lays on the rack... It's destination?

The flaming hot furnace before them.

Sweat pours down Karl's face.

Josette places a hand on his shoulder.

JOSETTE

This is a twenty billion-dollar industry, you know that?

Karl stares into the heart of the furnace. His hands are on the handle to push the coffin inside. His fingers tap the handle bars.

KARL

How do you do this shit?

JOSETTE

I need you to push it inside.

Karl grips the handle. But he doesn't push. He blinks and wipes another bead of sweat off of his face.

JOSETTE (CONT'D)

Set yourself free, Karl. Push.

Karl doesn't push yet.

JOSETTE (CONT'D)

Push.

Karl takes a deep breath... Josette places his hand over his hands. She makes him push.

The coffin goes off into the furnace. Slowly.

Karl watches uneasily as the flames devour every last bit of the former human inside. In his eyes: trauma.

Josette places a hand on his shoulder.

JOSETTE

You'll get used to it.

Karl shakes his head. His eyes are still on the furnace.

KARL
I ain't doing this.

JOSETTE
You're already in it, darling. I'm
your only way out.

We pull away from the scene... Karl's gaze is lost in the depths of the furnace... It all turns to ash...He knows that she's right.

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Karl sits on his bed, picking at his burger while the television blares in the background. He's not even watching. His eyes are drifted towards the wide window.

Robo-Dog sits at his side barking happily on occasion.

Karl holds Lucie's business card in his hands. LUCIE MÉNARD
- DOCUMENTARIAN.

A SHERIFF character on the television is heard saying:

SHERIFF
The truth hurts!

Karl takes his smartphone from under his leg. He begins to dial Lucie's number until he hears a KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!

Robo-Dog squeals.

Karl puts down his burger and heads for the door. He hesitates. He looks through the peephole...

Li stands in the hallway with briefcase in hand.

Karl sighs with relief.

LATER:

Karl sips on his milkshake and glances at the tv as Li hurriedly removes paperwork from the briefcase.

LI
I had to get down here as soon as I could. A buddy of mine was able to get the hearing rolling. And we've got to roll. A missing DA. Can't have any delays.

Karl looks at Li. The trauma of Chez Mort fresh in his head.

KARL

Missing?

Li turns through another file.

LI

His wife thought he was on vacation. 3 weeks. No answer. He didn't even ring up at any of the airports.

Karl puts down his milkshake.

KARL

They know what happened?

LI

If he turns up. We'll see.

Karl nods, but he's staring into space. Li pulls a paper out of the folder and lays it on the table.

LI (CONT'D)

There. We've got you your first hearing tomorrow. You'll have your money in no time.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

A JUDGE, 60s, bangs the gavel on her podium. Karl and Li stand before her.

JUDGE

I'm calling for a delay in the proceedings.

Li flails his arms, pissed.

LI

Your honor, my client--

JUDGE

In light of the missing district attorney, the case would best be served by... waiting out the storm.

Karl's heart sinks. Li glares... not just at the judge but at Karl.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Li walks hurriedly in front of Karl. Karl's trying to keep up from behind.

LI
This should've gone through. I didn't fly here on the whim. What kind of ruling is ride out the storm? God!

Li throws his cup of Starbucks coffee at the nearby garbage can. He misses. The coffee spills on the floor. He doesn't bother picking it up.

Karl looks at the mess. He bends down to pick it up...

LI (CONT'D)
Have you been talking to any journalists?

Karl jolts up.

LI (CONT'D)
You have?

KARL
No, no...

He sighs.

KARL (CONT'D)
I mean there was this--

LI
What did I tell you about staying away from the press? They'll turn on you in an instance.

Karl stands, taking the harsh talking-to. Li's coffee cup is in his hands.

LI (CONT'D)
And it's not just you. It's us. I represent you. We are in this together. You are not fucking this up. Not again--

Karl's grip on the cup tightens so much that the insides burst open. The hot liquid spills onto his hands, but he holds back the pain. Teeth tightened.

KARL
--Do I got a daughter, Li?

Li falls silent. His black Mercedes awaits at the sidewalk. He opens the driver's side.

KARL (CONT'D)
This lady claims that Sandra was pregnant before I went away.

LI
I don't know anything about that.

KARL
Don't mess with me again.

Karl is firm, serious. Even intimidating for the first time in years.

Li lingers by the door.

KARL (CONT'D)
What else is you hidin'?

Li leans against the door, a bit smug.

LI
There are a lot of stories going around about you. A person in your situation should be careful about what they choose to believe.

Karl drops the coffee cup and bolts towards Li, grabbing his collar violently. They are face to face. Karl heaves with anger.

KARL
Don't forget where I been.

Li laughs nervously, but returns Karl's intense gaze.

LI
I've been putting up with corporate cases just to have enough money to defend your ass for free.

Karl tightens his grip.

LI (CONT'D)
And you know what? The fees probably amount to whatever puny fortune they think you deserve.

Karl slams Li against the car. He shakes him.

KARL
Leave me alone.

Li, frightened, nods to calm him down.

LI
Okay... I'll go.

KARL
Stop it!

LI
Okay, I'll stop.

KARL
Stop it!

Li raises his arms above his head.

KARL (CONT'D)
Stop it!

He's crazed. He continues to shake Li, repeating "Stop it!"
He let's go of Li and screams at the clouds.

KARL (CONT'D)
Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!

His eyes are wide and maniacal, he bangs his fist on his
head, screaming.

And Li watches him lose it. A SMALL CROWD has gathered
around the scene. Among them is Lucie holding a videocamera.

Karl spots the lens and falls to his knees and weeps in the
middle of the street.

Lucie gets the best view.

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Karl and Li sit across from each other at the small wooden
round table by the wide window. They eat dinner in silence:
fried seafood.

Li finishes and wipes his mouth. He takes a big sip of water
and sighs. He's about to deliver some news.

LI
You know, corporate law is boring
work. Lots of money, but kills the
soul.

Karl looks down, focused on his fried crawfish.

LI (CONT'D)
 My daughter thinks I'm a hero.
 Defending the defenseless. A
 do-gooder. Right reasons. I have to
 see the best in people in my line
 of work. Ignore the details. The
coincidences.

The emphasis on coincidences sends a chill up Karl's spine.
 More like an accusation.

LI (CONT'D)
 No matter how coincidental they may
 be. But you know?

Karl realizes that Li's prompting him to respond. He looks
 annoyed.

KARL
 What?

LI
 Sometimes there are enablers that
 prevent a person from seeing their
 true potential.

Karl stops eating. Something's coming.

LI (CONT'D)
 Potential ruined by constraints.

Yup, it's coming. Karl chugs down the glass of water,
 keeping eye contact with Li. It's an awkward few seconds.
 When he finishes:

KARL
 I'mma be on my way.

Karl gets up from his chair and grabs the empty takeout
 containers...

Li is taken aback.

LI
 Hold on--

Karl does not answer. He throws the containers into the
 trash.

LI (CONT'D)
 Why didn't you tell me you got a
 job?

Karl heads to the bathroom, removing his things. Seconds later he reemerges with a towel, toothbrush, toothpaste, and body wash cradled in his hands.

Karl dumps all of his belongings into a large plastic shopping bag.

Li gets up and rushes over to stop him.

Karl brushes him off a bit violently.

Li steps away, regretting his word choice.

Karl bolts and LOUDLY PULLS OUT EVERY SINGLE DOOR... picks up a packet of white shirts... two pairs of jeans... his purple Chez Mort uniform.

Li stands there, shocked.

He stuffs those items into the large shopping bag. He peers around the room for his map and Robo-Dog perched on the nightstand.

He lifts the shopping bag onto his shoulders, hurriedly stuffs the rolled up map under his elbow and holds Robo-Dog tightly in his other arm.

He heads for the door... takes one last look at Li. He's determined...

But Li looks so doubtful, he's on the verge of rolling his eyes. Where can Karl possibly go?

KARL

You sittin' here, thinkin' I'm a killer.

LI

I didn't say that.

KARL

You lettin' them screw me over? Man, you almost made me plea. And you know what?

Karl flares his nose.

KARL (CONT'D)

I ain't doing this. Waitin' 'round for you. It's killin' me, man. I'm getting my ticket out.

Karl turns around and places his hand on the knob.

Li stands by the window, calm.

We see that a manilla envelope labelled with the words
PASSPORT AND VISA lies on the floor.

LI

You have enough money?

Karl's too prideful to say no... or to even check. He turns
the knob and rushes out the door.

INT. CHATEAU HOTEL OUTSIDE THE ROOM - NIGHT

Karl slams the door shut behind him. He throws the map to
the floor and digs through his pocket for his wallet.

In his wallet: \$20.

Karl sighs and walks down the hallway.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

Karl walks around aimlessly... His face is disguised by
sunglasses. and a large hat.

Robo-Dog trots by his side.

He walks fast and far... so far that the colors of Bourbon
Street fade out to a much darker part of town...

EXT. ALLEY WAY - NIGHT

Karl hears FOOTSTEPS behind him. He doesn't turn around
until the FOOTSTEPS GROW LOUDER AND FASTER...

The VOICES OF YOUNG MEN WHISPER INAUDIBLY...

Robo-Dog barks perkily.

Karl can only see the shadows of TWO LARGE MEN. One of them
appears to be holding a crow bar. They walk towards him.

Karl turns back around, look for a way out... Dead-end.

The men are approaching. They take their time, knowing he
has no other place to go.

Karl scoops up Robo-Dog into his arms and tip toes farther
down the street into total darkness... He stands still. We
can hear him breathing... heavily... deeply...

The men come farther down the dark street end.

Karl waits.

One of the men drags the crow bar against the pavement as he advances.

Karl stands still patiently. The men disappear into the darkness.

At the open end of the street, Karl spots a tiny green light.

We hear the SHARPY WINDY NOISE of the crowbar swinging in the air. BAM! It hits a brick.

FOOTSTEPS SHUFFLE. Karl dashes for the light. The large men come after him...

Karl runs so fast that items spill out of the large shopping bag.

As we move with Karl, it's revealed that the green light belongs to Lucie's videocamera... which she whips around the corner.

Lucie quickly pulls Karl into the adjacent building. She LOCKS THE DOOR with a quick turn of a knob.

INT. LUCIE'S WORK ROOM - NIGHT

Lucie pieces together images of the Louisiana bayou on her wall.

The faces of sad poor kids in rags stare back at her. She walks through her notes once more.

BRUNO TEST - DA.

LI ZHANG - DEFENSE.

KARL FOX - DEFENDANT.

MICHEL ARNAUD.

ANONYMOUS WITNESS - BAYOU ORIGIN.

She stares at the photographs of the brightly lit New Orleans streets...

Lucie goes back to the pictures of the bayou... fishing boats...crawfish... She draws a big circle around the crawfish and taps her pen against the wall to make a point:

LUCIE
It all starts in the bayous.

We pull out to reveal Karl standing (still frazzled) behind Lucie in awe of the work that she's compiled.

Lucie turns around.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
I've watching, waiting, looking...
So much of this doesn't make much
sense.

KARL
People out to kill me?

LUCIE
Not just you. Before you got out,
there were so many disappearances,
people thought that going away
without telling anybody was the new
fad.

Lucie picks up some photographs from her desk and flips through them for Karl.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
Every single one. Gone without a
trace.

KARL
Can I see that?

Lucie hands him the photos.

Karl flips through them himself, taking a closer look at the names and faces.

His eyes light up. He recognizes some of them.

KARL (CONT'D)
Some of these people're in
crawfish, law...

He comes across a photo of Bruno Test. Karl pauses and looks at it.

LUCIE
It's odd that they haven't found
Arnaud's killer after all this
time, isn't it?

Karl doesn't say anything. He continues to stare at the picture.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
 And then there's the witness?
 Somebody knows what happened. I
 know you know that you're not
 getting out of here until we found
 out. Regardless of the settlement.

Karl finally looks up.

KARL
 I got a job.

LUCIE
 So?

KARL
 It ain't necessary. I'll make
 enough to get out. Might take a
 little longer but--

LUCIE
 Nope.

Lucie plucks the selected photos off the wall.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
 Not with Test still missing. You've
 got to find this person. It's for
 your own good or else you're--

KARL
 Back to Angola?

Karl paces around the tight space.

KARL (CONT'D)
 I'll be gone before then. Someone
 probably killed the fool.

LUCIE
 Which is why you must know for
 sure.

Lucie points at the bayou.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
 Someone out there has been letting
 you rot away.

KARL
 You ain't wanna be digging 'round
 there.

LUCIE

I have to know everything about you. Where you lived, worked, slept, ate. Even now...

Karl's eyes drift towards the camera that is mounted on a tripod in the back of the room. The green "RECORD" light shines in the dimly lit space.

He backs away.

KARL

You don't wanna know what's out there.

LUCIE

You're gonna have to walk me through it.

Karl shakes his head.

LUCIE (CONT'D)

Karl, some men out there tried to kill you. The courts aren't going to give you any money until Test shows up. Your settlement depends on this--

Karl keeps shaking his head... Realizing how bad his situation is.

KARL

No, no... You ain't understandin' me. Test ain't coming back.

Shocked, Lucie suddenly gets into interviewer mode.

LUCIE

Why do you say that?

Karl gestures towards the camera.

KARL

Not speaking.

Lucie reluctantly shuts off the power, but stands attentively.

KARL (CONT'D)

He's completely gone. Dust. Don't exist no more.

Lucie pauses, shocked by this revelation. She opens her mouth to respond, but Karl waves her off.

LUCIE
Why were you walking around like
that?

Lucie gestures at the large shopping bag at the side of the
room.

Karl tightens up.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
You don't need to explain.

Karl sighs with relief.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
But you need to bring me with you.

KARL
Can't do that. I'm making my money
and getting out.

LUCIE
Really? Just how long is it gonna
take you? Months? Years? Decades?

KARL
She's paying me well.

Lucie laughs and pulls out a stalker photograph of Karl
outside Chez Mort.

LUCIE
A funeral home? Of all places...

KARL
It's the only place that would take
me.

LUCIE
What, you needed a PhD to work at
Burger King?

KARL
She's getting me out of here.

LUCIE
Sleep on the couch.

Lucie turns on her computer.

LUCIE
Do you know who Josette Boucher is?

CUT TO:

STOCK FOOTAGE - 1995 PARIS FASHION WEEK.

Le Carrousel du Louevre

Josette, dressed in high heels and a form-fitting black gown beats a well-dressed man in the head with an umbrella.

A crowd forms around her. She doesn't stop..

LUCIE

We have to dig. I need you to walk
me through that entire area.

Where is Karl going now? We pull away from the scene as Karl contemplates his dismal future.

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ACADEMIC VITA

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The Pennsylvania State University
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Work Experience

January 2016- Present
Creative Development Intern
Collaborated in the research, storyboarding, and development of short film
Palinka Pictures – State College, PA

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Invited Presenter
Presented honors thesis, a script critical of the prison industrial complex
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Film Sales Intern
Wrote film and script coverage, festival preparation, industry tracking
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Assisted in the inner-workings of film premieres, red carpets, and Q&A sessions
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Theater Operations & Technical Intern
Assisted the technical director in the logging and editing of footage from the festival
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Dean's List

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Directed & adapted Silver Linings Playbook for stage at No Refund Theatre

Portrayed Beneatha in a production of A Raisin in the Sun at No Refund Theatre

Visiting Student in Dramatic Writing at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts