

THE STOOP

"Pilot"

Written by

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INT. HIPSTER RESTAURANT - NEW YORK CITY - DAY

Inside an austere interior, bustling chatter roars throughout the space. JACKIE (25, pretty but approachable) and VINH (24, Asian, boyish, mouthy) hunch close together.

JACKIE

And that's how I found out my boss
was having sex with thoroughbred
stallions.

VINH

Huh. You would've thought he'd use
tranquilizers on the horses.

JACKIE

Apparently, he liked the kicking.
Just wanted it to hurt less.

The two share a laugh. Vinh searches for an icebreaker as Jackie looks over the eclectic décor: a gold dipped rubber duck, an industrial wagon wheel, mulch.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

This place is... interesting--

VINH

Random thought- you have a
really pretty name.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

Sorry, you go.

VINH

I really like your name.

JACKIE

Oh that's sweet. Jackie's okay.
Doesn't really do it for me.

VINH

Why? It's great! Perfect blend of
gender-sexual-nonconformity. My
college roommate is a lesbian.

JACKIE

Did you just call me a lesbian?

VINH

No. I'm saying plausible
deniability is a good thing.

Jackie smirks and rolls her eyes.

JACKIE

Anyways- Still not convinced.
Lauren's kind of a cute.

VINH

Lauren? Lauren. What's next? Sarah?
Emily?
(scoffs)
Please.

A nearby WAITRESS (20s) wearing a hoodie materializes and coughs. She's wearing a vintage nametag: "Emily"

WAITRESS

Any more oak-aged barley ferment?

VINH

What? Oh, no. That was gro- no.

JACKIE

(knowing smile)
I'm okay for now. Thanks.

The waitress walks away annoyed. Jackie glows.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

What about your name?

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - CORRIDOR - SAME TIME

Sporting a denim top, NATE (27, Black, serious, uncle-like) sits in a waiting area surrounded by several suited men. Surprisingly, as corporate demographics go, all of them are also Black. He's quietly talking to himself, prepping.

A RECEPTIONIST (30s) enters holding an iPad.

RECEPTIONIST

Nathaniel Franklin?

Nate stands. She pauses.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Hmmm. Mister Tillman is ready for you.

INT. TILLMAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The receptionist opens the door and gestures Nate inside. HANK TILLMAN (late 50s) is organizing documents. He double-takes after looking up.

TILLMAN

Oh, hey!

NATE

Hi. Uh, I'm Nate. I'm here for the interview.

TILLMAN

(searching)

Nate. Nate. Nate.

(oh my god)

You're Nathaniel Franklin?

NATE

Yeah?

TILLMAN

Jesus.

NATE

Is that a problem...?

TILLMAN

No. No. N--

Tillman cups to shout.

TILLMAN (CONT'D)

Catherine! Catherine-- Forget it.

You're already here. Let's go ahead and start.

NATE

Okay.

Nate looks at Tillman warily.

INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

LOU (26, Black, goofy, unaware) sits across from a theatre director, MICHELLE TOWNEND (50, stiff, no-nonsense). Michelle slowly rises and levels eye-contact with Lou.

MICHELLE

Lou...

(shaking her head)

You're our guy. You're it. The leading man.

Lou exhales with relief. Michelle smiles.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Louis Swan, what a name. I can already tell you got that "it."

(sweeping gesture)

Louis Swan is Atticus Finch.

(MORE)

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Louis Swan is the Fiddler on the Roof! Louis Swan, thirty-eight, has tragically passed following a rectally-infused ketamine overdose.

LOU
I didn't like that last part.

MICHELLE
Don't worry.
(then)
Comes with the territory.

LOU
What?

INT. HIPSTER RESTAURANT - DAY

Vinh and Jackie continue as before.

JACKIE
Vinh Nguyen. Super cute!

VINH
Really? There's no way you mean that.

JACKIE
Yeah, I do! It's awesome.

VINH
Seriously. You don't have to do the "I'm on a first date so I'll be comically inoffensive" thing.
(laughs)
Vinh's not great.

JACKIE
What's wrong with it?

VINH
You're not setting someone up for success if you name them Vinh. If anything, you're openly inviting ambiguity. Like "entrepreneurship" or "ethical polygamy."

Jackie is confused.

JACKIE
It's unique!

VINH

Yeah, no thanks. I don't even
really feel like a Vinh. Maybe
Steve.

JACKIE

Steve?

VINH

Like I don't feel all that Asian to
begin with. I'm really okay with a
normal American name.

JACKIE

Normal? Come on, who gets to decide
what's normal.

VINH

Probably not you. Your name's
Jackie, not really the arbiter of
weird names.

JACKIE

Ok, well it's not weird. I'm sorry
you feel that way. Seems hard to
live with.

A beat.

VINH

Yeah.

(then)

So... consumer price index has been
pretty rocky, huh?

JACKIE

What- I'm a nurse. And don't you
work for Buzzfeed?

VINH

A Buzzfeed-like company. Actually,
after our last lawsuit, we can't
say that either.

JACKIE

Are you... okay?

VINH

Never better.

Vinh drifts into space. Jackie watches with mixed sympathy. A moment. Jackie reaches for her purse and rifles.

JACKIE
(pulling out phone)
Shit. I completely forgot, I gotta
go to this--

VINH
It's cool. You can go.

She stops rifling.

JACKIE
I'm really sorry.

Jackie grabs her coat and exits. Vinh fixes on the empty chair as the restaurant goes on. The waitress drifts over.

WAITRESS
Everything alright?

VINH
Excellent. Check, please?

The waitress starts away.

VINH (CONT'D)
Actually, some more oak-aged barley
ferment would be great.

INT. TILLMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Tillman sits on his desk and places a fatherly hand on Nate's shoulder. They've become fast friends.

NATE
...So I pull him out of the water
and tell him "You're supposed to be
the lifeguard?"

Tillman chuckles.

TILLMAN
You're a great kid.

NATE
Thanks, Mr. Tillman.

TILLMAN
Please, I'm Hank.

NATE
Okay.

TILLMAN

Alright, listen. Any other time, I'd totally hire you. I like you. Really. But we honestly have too many Black employees right now. Our office looks like if Boyz II Men and Martin had a concert at the Apollo. We need some white people in here ASAP.

NATE

What about the guys outside?

TILLMAN

It's diversity and inclusion week. Catherine only let you in because of your name.

NATE

What?

TILLMAN

(exhales)

Sorry to do this. You can let the others know on your way out.

Nate's speechless. Tillman pulls in close. Nate dazedly extends a palm to shake which Tillman fistbumps. Confused, Nate inspects his hand as he exits.

INT. MICHELLE'S OFFICE - DAY

Lou and Michelle are as before.

MICHELLE

When I saw your name on that audition sheet, whew, I knew you were special--

There's a BUZZING from the director's pocket. She takes out her phone and silences it.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I'm excited to see what you can--

The BUZZING persists. She takes out her phone, inspects, and walks towards her desktop.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

(reading e-mail)

Hm. I'm gonna level with you, Lou. Seems like the producers are asking for one last look.

LOU

Another look? I don't--

MICHELLE

Relax! Just have a small scene
prepped and you'll have this locked
up. Come on, this'll be easy.

(then)

I got around to watching one of
those reusable hemorrhoid towel
commercials. You're incredible.

LOU

Each one, just a single take.

(then)

So a scene.

MICHELLE

Yeah. Of a classic. I don't know,
Fences.

LOU

Fences.

MICHELLE

Yeah, read some lines from Fences
and you'll be good to go.

LOU

I love Denzel.

MICHELLE

No. The theatrical rendition.

LOU

Shit- he really was theatrical.

MICHELLE

Please don't make me regret this.

LOU

No. After this, you'll have no
regrets. Okay, maybe one: not
asking for your own Hemorr-towel.

Michelle squints, afraid to ask. Lou grins, reminiscing
fondly.

LOU (CONT'D)

I found this secret chapter in the
Kamasutra--

MICHELLE

Alright, get out of my office.

INT. VINH & LOU'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

In a dark living room, Vinh is slumped into a couch slovenly eating cereal and watching TV. He's pretty hammered. The front door opens and a shadowy hand flicks on the lights. Lou and Nate stumble inside laughing. They're also drunk.

VINH

You guys drinking?

LOU

We're celebrating. Well, I am.
Nate's sad drinking.

Nate quietly nods.

VINH

Why?

LOU

Cause I got the part! Well, kinda.
I still gotta read some lines, but--

VINH

No, him.

NATE

I tanked the interview.

(then)

It's bullshit. They were expecting
a white guy.

VINH

Yeah, I can see that.

NATE

What?

LOU

(agreeing)

Hmmmmmm.

VINH

Your name is "Nate Franklin." I bet
you whitefished them.

LOU

(pointing index finger)

Hmmmmmm!

NATE

Whitefished?

VINH

It's like catfishing, but you're...

NATE

Yeah, okay.

(then)

I have another interview this week.
What am I supposed to do?

LOU

Bro, this is perfect. Win-win for
everyone.

NATE

Explain.

LOU

So they're expecting a white guy,
right? But instead, they get a
Black guy with a white name who
acts white but fills that quota.

NATE

Ah, got it. Got it.

VINH

(chuckles)

There's not really a quota system
anymore, right?

Nate and Lou look at each other before staring at Vinh.

LOU

Why're you drunk?

(inspects him)

And hate-eating cereal? Didn't you
have that date? You take her to
that weird artsy jawn?

VINH

Yeah, it went well. I'm in the
middle of a fourteen hour sex
marathon with an emotionally
unavailable stranger as we speak.

LOU

Your ass needs God. And Pedialyte.
Go get them in that order.

NATE

How'd you fuck this up now, kid?

VINH
I didn't! She said she liked my
name and I--

LOU
Don't do that.

Lou tsks while Nate groans in disapproval.

VINH
What do you mean?

LOU
She should know better than give
you a compliment.

VINH
I'm not that insecure.

NATE
Bitch.

VINH
I know what's wrong. It's my name.

NATE
What? No.

VINH
It totally is! This name's been
holding me back. Fuck it. I'm doing
it. I'm changing it to Steve.

NATE
We're not doing this Steve shit
again.

VINH
I'm doing it this time! Just watch.

Nate edges over to the fridge, nabs a beer, ignores Vinh.

VINH (CONT'D)
You know we could've lived
together. Two bed, in the Heights.

Vinh looks over at Lou.

LOU
Not my fight. His ass too uppity
for us now.

NATE
Y'all act like y'all ain't broke
and dramatic as shit. I'm good.

Nate gestures a brew to the others. They decline. Lou quietly walks over to the couch. He picks up a bag of chips and starts snacking, also ignoring Vinh.

LOU
(reading label)
Damn, that's a lot of sodium.

He casually pops a chip into his mouth.

VINH
I've thought it through. Steve's a great, high utility name. He, she, we, Steve.

NATE
White. You mean white.

VINH
Well that's just the pot calling the kettle...

Nate stares daggers at Vinh. Lou obviously browses on his phone, eating chips.

NATE
If you change your name, I'm having you disowned.

LOU
You guys know salt doesn't have any calories?

Nate walks over.

NATE
What?

LOU
Look!

Lou waves his phone at Vinh and Nate.

VINH
Wow.

Lou is eye-level with a chip.

LOU
Incredible.

He pops it into his mouth.

LOU (CONT'D)

Alright, here's the game plan. Ima
read some Fences to lock up this
role.

(to Nate)

You're gonna finesse some white
folks for that job.

(to Vinh)

You're not doing shit with your
name. I'm not calling you Steve.

VINH

You didn't get the role? I just
covered our rent.

LOU

Bitch, I'm trying!

(then)

You change your name, I'm sending
in pops to whoop your ass.

NATE

You know his dad?

LOU

I know everyone's dad. Even the
ones that disappeared getting milk.

Lou puts a consoling hand on Nate's shoulder.

NATE

Alright, fuck you.

Vinh lets out a groan.

VINH

You guys might be right. Damn it,
yeah, you guys are right.

(then)

What was I thinking?

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Nate is nestled at a small table clacking away on his
computer. Lines of code flash across the screen. It's very
impressive.

NATE

Word.

His pocket vibrates and he takes out his phone to answer. A woman's voice blasts from the top speaker. Nate stares lifelessly into the ether.

NATE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

Hey- No, I'm okay... Yes, I'm sure.
No mom, I'm good.... I'm using the
game I developed. Yeah, the online
one. Not as good as scripture? It
has fourteen million downloads...
Of course I don't think I'm better
than you.... No I don't think I'm
the Michael Strahan of computers.
Yeah- I'm going this Sunday.
Alright love you. Bye.

Nate opens his computer and loads the aforementioned game.

NATE (CONT'D)

(extremely polite)

Hey. Howdy. How do you do?

A CONFUSED DUDE (30s) walks by.

CONFUSED DUDE

Hey.

Nate takes off his headphones.

NATE

What's up?

CONFUSED DUDE

Oh, I thought you were talking to
me.

NATE

Nah, uh, I was just playing this
game.

CONFUSED DUDE

A game?

NATE

Yeah. Never mind.

CONFUSED DUDE

Uh, okay dude.

The confused dude walks past Nate and steals a glimpse of the screen. On the upper left side is a logo: the words "You Know, Lingo" beside a bespectacled crow with a suit and bowtie that vaguely resembles a certain civil rights icon.

In the center, a question asks: "How do you reassure your white pro-gun boss?" A response is neatly typed into a box: "Well, it is a stand your ground state."

CONFUSED DUDE (CONT'D)
What the hell?

Nate hits the enter key. It dings.

NATE
Obviously, you're not one of the
fourteen million users.

The confused dude gives Nate a worried glance before leaving. Nate rolls his eyes and puts on his headphones.

NATE (CONT'D)
Officer, there are no narcotics in
this vehicle.

There's a muted ding.

INT. VINH & LOU'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lou lazes on the couch, scrolling on his phone. His thumb loops against the screen.

LOU
Fences. Fences. Fences.

His thumb freezes.

LOU (CONT'D)
Got it.

A printer in the corner roars to life. Lou approaches and snatches up the reams of paper. He pauses to scan.

LOU (CONT'D)
This isn't enough.

He returns to the couch and falls into the cushions.

LOU (CONT'D)
It's got to be more. A lot more.

He closes his eyes and meditates. After a beat, he snaps upright.

LOU (CONT'D)
Oh!

Lou pulls out his phone and starts typing manically. In the background, the printer drones melodically.

INT. DISTRICT COURT OFFICE - DAY

Vinh stands behind a counter and nervously checks over his shoulders. A CLERK (30s) walks up with several documents.

CLERK

Okay, to change your name you'll need to fill out a petition, name change order, a request for judicial intervention, an index application, and after several days, the court will likely approve your appeal.

VINH

Of course. Not arbitrary at all.

CLERK

There's also a filing fee.

VINH

How much?

CLERK

Two-hundred ten dollars.

VINH

Two-hundred ten dollars??

CLERK

Correct.

VINH

Do you know what I could buy with that money?

Vinh pulls up a listicle on his phone.

VINH (CONT'D)

(reading)

A roundtrip flight to Belize. A standing desk. A vegan-leather tote. A mini-theragun.

CLERK

What's going on here.

VINH

A mini-theragun. I could buy a
years worth of Pornhub Premium,
three times.

(then)

If I wanted to.

CLERK

...Do you want to?

Vinh raises an index.

VINH

That's not the point.

A nearby STRANGE MAN (40s) interrupts.

STRANGE MAN

Y'all paying for porn?

VINH

Not anymore.

CLERK

Hey! Would you like to proceed or--

VINH

Goddamn it, yeah. Hand me the
forms.

The clerk slides them over. As Vinh frantically scribbles,
the strange man inches over.

STRANGE MAN

You should never pay for porn.

VINH

I don't. I was just explaining--

STRANGE MAN

Just go to the park and wait 'til
people take their shoes off. Those
bare toes, they give me life.

Vinh and the clerk both stare at him.

CLERK

Sir, you're gonna have to leave.

INT. ANOTHER OFFICE BUILDING - CORRIDOR - DAY

Nate is once again idling in a waiting area, preparing. He's surrounded by white men clad in suits. ANOTHER RECEPTIONIST (30s) enters the room holding an iPad.

ANOTHER RECEPTIONIST
Mister Franklin?

Nate stands up.

ANOTHER RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)
Hmmm.
(then)
Mister Andrews is ready for you.

INT. MALIK ANDREWS'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The receptionist gestures Nate inside. He enters but stops dead in his tracks. A handsome Black guy wearing a bespoke suit, MALIK ANDREWS (40s), is organizing documents on his desk. He looks up.

MALIK
Nathaniel?

INT. THEATRE HALL - BACKSTAGE - DAY

Lou's face is tense.

LOU
It's not easy for me to admit that
I've been standing in the same
place for eighteen years!

Reveal that a STAGE HAND is inches from the shouting Lou.

STAGE HAND
Uh. They're ready for you.

Lou nods. He whips up a dazzling smile and walks onto the stage.

INT. DISTRICT COURT OFFICE - DAY

Vinh passes the completed forms to the clerk.

CLERK
Alright. It will take a little to
process, but your request is
officially submitted.

A stupidly wide grin is stamped on Vinh's face.

INT. MALIK ANDREWS'S OFFICE - DAY

Malik analyzes Nate's face, and flips out his resume to scan.

MALIK

You're Nate?

(then)

Huh. I was just expecting a--

NATE

Yeah, I know.

MALIK

Brother, your name is Nathaniel Franklin.

NATE

No, I get it.

Malik gestures for Nate to sit. Nate slips into a chair.

MALIK

Before we start, are you vaguely familiar with the recent scandal the company has been embroiled in?

NATE

I'm familiar.

INSERT:

SCANDALOUS HEADLINES OF THE COMPANY, DOODLE:

- A) Report: Tech-company Doodle under fire for unequal pay among POC employees
- B) Federal investigation launched against 'Doodle Bros' for race-related hazing
- C) Doodle CEO Jefferson Seahorse resigns after 'Puerto Rican Day Parade' Sex Tape

MALIK

Then you should know that Doodle is doing everything it can to remedy the situation and add new blood to the company.

NATE

New what?

MALIK
Fresh faces.

Nate spots a photo on Malik's desk. It's a Halloween party: several people are wearing white sheets over their heads and Malik is dressed as the Native American from Village People.

MALIK (CONT'D)
(off Nate's glance)
It's not what you think. They're
ghosts.

NATE
Yeah- yeah. I, uh, I see that.

INT. THEATRE HALL - DAY

Lou is on the stage. Dozens of people are peppered throughout. Michelle eagerly watches in the back with several people cloaked in Patagonia.

LOU
Hello. I'm Louis Swan and I'll be
performing scenes from Fences.
(then)
Among others by Denzel Washington.

The audience members whisper and look at one another.
Michelle turns to a producer.

MICHELLE
Did he just say Denzel Washington?

Michelle stares worriedly at Lou, who returns a confident thumbs up.

INT. NIMBUS'S OFFICE - DAY

Dozens of disinterested employees mill about their cubicles, Vinh among them. Nimbus executive editor, DAVIS (39, tired, bro-y), tries to get everyone's attention. Several executives perch behind him.

Glowing behind the men -- and one Latin woman for diversity -- a white upward arrow peaking above two clouds.

DAVIS
Hey everyone! Thank you for
attending Nimbus's quarterly check-
in.
(MORE)

DAVIS (CONT'D)

And despite our recent legal trouble with "unnamed media entity," I just wanted to say you guys are absolutely slaying it. Clicks are up, advertisers are happy, and engagement is holding.

The office applauds half-heartedly.

DAVIS (CONT'D)

Great stuff guys! Keep it up for another three months or until we sell.

(then)

I'm around if you have questions. Let's keep churning out that content!

Everyone murmurs and grumbles as they return to their uninspired labor. Davis walks over to Vinh's cubicle.

DAVIS (CONT'D)

Hey Vinh, I actually wanted to let you know that you led all content scribes in stickiness this month.

VINH

That's great but--

DAVIS

(raises eyebrows)

So we're giving you a shot at next month's cover story. *Gong! Top Chinatown restaurants to get your takeout fix.*

VINH

Wow. Uh, that's definitely a headline.

(then)

But I'm actually not that familiar with that area. Why don't you ask Elliot? He lives right near Columbus Park.

They look over at ELLIOT (28), the only other Asian person in the office. He stops working to wave at Vinh and Davis. They wave back.

DAVIS

Don't be silly. This is your chance to get a great story. And, c'mon you're obviously more tapped into the culture.

(MORE)

DAVIS (CONT'D)

We can't have Elliot Zhang on this,
we need Vinh. Vinh Nguyen.

VINH

Okay...

(then)

Oh- I've been needing to mention. I
recently changed my name, so I'm
going to need all my bylines
updated. Is that cool?

Davis freezes.

DAVIS

You did what?

VINH

I changed my--

DAVIS

Okay, you can't do that without
consulting us.

VINH

What?

DAVIS

Yeah. It's in your contract.

(sighs)

I am super disappointed. How about
you take some PTO, and we'll
revisit this when you're back in
two weeks.

VINH

Are you serious?

DAVIS

Super disappointed, bro.

Vinh holds for clarification. Nothing. Vinh starts to pack
and head out when he turns to look back. Davis is chatting up
an eager Elliot. Elliot gives Davis a hug.

ELLIOT

Wow, what a great opportunity!

INT. MALIK ANDREWS'S OFFICE - DAY

Malik is looking at Nate's resume, periodically glancing up
and making eye-contact with him.

MALIK

Your qualifications look great. And a large reason why you were selected was the game you developed.

NATE

Oh my God. I can explain--

MALIK

No need. It's a very useful tool.

Nate is relieved.

MALIK (CONT'D)

And we are looking to add more diversity as I stated previously...

NATE

Okay?

MALIK

But the partners are still a bit wary about excessive changes. Do you know what I mean?

NATE

Do you mind explaining?

MALIK

Yeah, we need someone who provides diverse perspectives and insight but in a manner that doesn't disturb our already sterling level of efficacy.

(then)

Just to make sure everyone's comfortable. Follow?

Malik gives a nod and knowing glance. Nate thinks, weighing what Malik just hinted. A beat.

NATE

I think I understand what you're asking and believe I could be a strong asset in helping Doodle gradually progress as needed.

MALIK

Great.

Malik gives Nate a quiet shaking thumbs-up.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

Vinh is waiting in the lobby of a crowded Chinese restaurant. A RUDE WAITER (50s) is shouting orders.

RUDE WAITER
Seo-Yun!

A middle-aged Korean man gets his order.

RUDE WAITER (CONT'D)
Yuna!

A young Japanese lady steps up and gets her order.

RUDE WAITER (CONT'D)
Steve.

Vinh steps out to get his order. Everything and everyone stops. The rude waiter pauses at Vinh.

RUDE WAITER (CONT'D)
Steve? Steve.

Vinh looks at the waiter. The waiter stares into Vinh's soul.

RUDE WAITER (CONT'D)
Steve.

Vinh panics and rushes over to get his food. He sprints out the door as the crowd watches him leave.

A white guy, WHITE STEVE (40s) approaches the rude waiter.

WHITE STEVE
So, that guy ran out with my food.

INT. THEATRE HALL - DAY

Lou paces animatedly.

LOU
Like you? I go outta here every morning, I bust my butt 'cause I like you? You're about the biggest fool I ever saw.

The audience listens closely.

LOU (CONT'D)
A man is supposed to take care of his family.
(MORE)

LOU (CONT'D)
You live in my house, feed your
belly with my food, put your behind
on my bed because you're my son.
It's my duty to take care of you, I
owe a responsibility to you, I
ain't got to like you!

Michelle gives a reluctant nod. Lou's crushing it.

INT. THEATRE HALL - LATER

Lou continues. He approaches someone in the front row and points in their face.

LOU
Awwww, you motherfuckers.

MICHELLE
What is he doing?

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Shhhhhh.

LOU
Okay. Alright. I'm putting cases on
all you bitches! Huh. You think you
can do this shit. You think you can
do this to me?! You motherfuckers
will be playing basketball in
Pelican Bay when I get finished
with you! SHU program, nigga.
Twenty-three hour lockdown! I'm the
man up in this piece! You'll never
see the light of... Who the fuck do
you think you're fucking with?

The director's face falls into massaging fingers.

INT. THEATRE HALL - LATER

Full attention. The audience is enraptured. Michelle rolls her eyes.

LOU
You listen and take a lesson from
the dead.

MICHELLE
(sotto)
Is that "Remember the Titans?"

Lou kneels on the stage and clenches a fist.

LOU

If we don't come together right now, on this hallowed ground, we too will be destroyed just like they were.I don't care if you don't like each other, but you will respect each other. I don't know, maybe we'll learn to play this game like men.

EXT. CHINATOWN PARK - DAY

Vinh strolls through. Asian people are living their best life. Playing basketball, hanging up banners, selling seafood on the sidewalk. Zero to no English is being spoken.

He spots an open bench and sits down to eat when he notices a lonely backpack beside him. He inspects the embroidery: "Shiyang Zhao." Suddenly, a BOY (9) walks up to him.

BOY

Excuse me.

VINH

Oh, sorry.

The boy grabs the backpack and rushes over to his nearby parents. The dad ruffles the boy's hair. The family warmly embraces and walks away. Vinh watches.

VINH (CONT'D)

Huh.

Vinh looks down and stares pensively at his meal.

INT. DISTRICT COURT OFFICE - LATER

Vinh waits impatiently at the counter. The court clerk is taking his sweet time organizing envelopes and documents.

CLERK

Back so soon?

VINH

Hi, yeah. I need to reverse that name change.

CLERK

You're kidding.

VINH

No! I had a whole minor breakthrough. It was really harrowing.

CLERK

I don't know if the judge could approve an appeal so soon.

VINH

Is he busy?

CLERK

She is tied up with several compulsory proceedings.

Vinh rolls his eyes.

VINH

Well, could you at least let her know about my epiphany?

CLERK

I'll try my best to relay that message.

VINH

You're not gonna tell her, huh?

CLERK

I'll try my best.

VINH

That means no.

CLERK

It means I'll try.

(then)

But no.

INT. MALIK ANDREWS'S OFFICE - DAY

Malik gets up and walks over to Nate, who stands reflexively.

MALIK

Nate, it looks like you're our man. Congratulations. We'll have the offer sent over shortly.

NATE

(relieved)

Awesome, sounds great.

Malik and Nate shake hands. Malik pulls close to Nate's ear and points at the Halloween photo.

MALIK
(whisper)
You'll be working in that team.

Nate's hand slips. It dangles. He's speechless.

INT. THEATRE HALL - DAY

Lou lays motionless on the empty stage.

LOU
Thank you for finally allowing me to rest. I'm so very tired, but I go now to my rest at peace. Knowing that I have done right with my time on this earth. I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I kept the faith.

He gets up, bows, and is greeted with uneven applause. He swaggers over to Michelle.

LOU (CONT'D)
Right?

MICHELLE
What- What the fuck was that?

Lou looks around to check if Michelle was talking to someone else. She fumes.

LOU
What was what?

MICHELLE
Why did you read eleven different Denzel Washington monologues?
(then)
I told you to read Fences.

LOU
See, that's what you said, but I can read between the lines.

Lou offers self-assuring nods. Michelle is stunned.

LOU (CONT'D)
You said "Fences" but I knew what you really wanted: that full Denzel experience.

Michelle shakes her head.

MICHELLE
August Wilson's Fences.

LOU
No, Denzel definitely directed it.

MICHELLE
The play.

LOU
The what?

Michelle rubs her temple. She collects herself with incredible self-restraint.

MICHELLE
Get out of my theater.

LOU
Michelle. You can't do this.

She ignores him.

MICHELLE
Javi! We're tapping you in.

LOU
Yo! I know I killed it. Seriously?

Lou gestures wildly towards people nearby. No one makes eye contact. Lou approaches and tugs on the collar of an enormously buff audience member, John (31).

LOU (CONT'D)
John, c'mon John. Not you too.
We're- we're scene partners.

John does not come on.

MICHELLE
John, please escort Mr. Swan out of this theatre.

John takes Lou by the shoulders and firmly guides him out.

MICHELLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Wait! Wait!

Lou turns around, his face hopeful.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Best Denzel movie.

LOU
Heart Condition. Easy.

Michelle shakes her head and twirls her finger.

LOU (CONT'D)
(panicked)
No- no- it's uh, Fallen. Fallen!

John forcibly ushers him out. The theatre continues as usual.

LOU (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Fallen!

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Vinh, Lou, and Nate sit on the stoop outside their apartment building. Lou and Nate sit dejected while Vinh seems to be on the lookout.

LOU
You good?

NATE
I work with Klansmen.

VINH
Is that- is that slang?

NATE
(shaking head)
I'm onboarding and one of them
asked me "It's okay if I say it in
a rap song, right?" Bruh.

VINH
...Is it?

Nate shoots a dirty look at him.

LOU
They're gonna make you watch
Candace Owens clips for training.

Nate flinches in horror.

LOU (CONT'D)
Tragic. The cooning is powerful.
(over to Vinh)
(MORE)

VINH (CONT'D)
Hey George, got anything for me
today?

MAILMAN
You've asked me that question every
day since Saturday.

VINH
And?

The mailman reluctantly hands over an official-looking
envelope.

MAILMAN
Here. You know asking me doesn't
make mail go faster? I'm not Clippy
for your tracking number.

The mailman walks inside. Vinh shouts after him.

VINH
You're doing God's work, George!

MAILMAN (O.S.)
Yeah, whatever.

Lou snatches the envelope from Vinh and passes it to Nate.

VINH
Hey!

LOU
You don't want this.

Vinh relents.

NATE
Blah, blah, blah.
(reading)
They left a memo: "The court
recognizes that this will be Mr.
Nguyen's final attempt at
negotiating any changes in
identification."

VINH
(rolling eyes)
Yeah, okay. So?

NATE
(smiling)
They changed it.

Vinh heads to the street and breaks into celebration. Behind him, Nate passes the letter to Lou. They start laughing.

LOU
Steven-ass, motherfucker.

Vinh doesn't face them.

VINH
What?

NATE
You heard him, Steve.

Vinh whips back with twitchy delirium and grabs the letter. His eyes scan to the bottom. Clear as day...

ON OFFICIAL COURT DOCUMENT:

The name in which I propose to assume in place and stead of my present name is: Steve-Vinh Nguyen.

Vinh's arms plunge from the weight. The document dances in the wind before being blown away as Lou and Nate chuckle hysterically.

END OF EPISODE