

ALL OF US

An original screenplay

by David W. Grant

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FADE IN:

EXT. CALIFORNIA STATE PARK - DAY

A picnic of mothers and children. Early autumn. The chaparral foothills of California's central coast. Signs posted: "Fire danger: Extreme!"

LITTLE ANTHONY, 9, small for his age, very dark African-American, plays catch.

He's the only one with a mitt, a top-of-the-line. Despite that, he misses often. The other children make allowances, sending soft, easy-to-catch pitches his way.

Anthony whines, shrugs nonchalance, hogs the ball.

One by one, the mothers depart with their children. ANTHONY'S MOTHER, 35, stylishly corn-rowed, waves goodbye to the last of them.

She plops herself down on top of a picnic table, lights a smoke and shakes her head at her son. Dismay.

ANTHONY'S MOTHER

They were trying to be kind.

Anthony, testy, flings his mitt into the bushes and stomps away. When his mother goes to retrieve it, she accidentally drops her cigarette.

The duff catches fire. She tries to smother the flames with the mitt. Too late. A blaze.

She tosses the mitt, picks up Anthony, and guns her car out of the tinderbox forest.

EXT. CALIFORNIA INTERSTATE - DAY

Still breathless but calming, she instructs her son.

ANTHONY'S MOTHER

You were playing with matches. You hear?

EXT. LITTLE ANTHONY'S HOME - DAY

Police arrive to the extravagant structure cantilevered over a canyon. They hand Anthony's mother the baseball mitt. Its address label is scorched but the mitt is intact.

Chiding Anthony, his mother shakes the mitt at her son.
ANTHONY'S FATHER, 35, mumbles before the police.

ANTHONY'S FATHER
Little A's not to blame. He has
a... a disability.

The boy snatches the mitt from his mother and shouts at the police.

LITTLE ANTHONY
You got it dirty! You got it dirty!

EXT. CALIFORNIA STATE PARK - DAY

The fire escapes the park.

INT. LITTLE ANTHONY'S HOME - NIGHT

On their wall-size screen his parents and a couple dozen of their Highbrow friends -- SMILING, STOCKY and BLUSTERY -- view Robert Bresson's classic life story of a donkey, "*Au Hasard, Balthasar*".

As the film rolls, they analyze dispassionately.

INSERT - CIRCUS SCENE OF THE MOVIE

In response to the ringmaster's arithmetical questions, the donkey answers by pawing the ground, counting.

SMILING Highbrow (O.S.)
Exquisite irony.

STOCKY Highbrow (O.S.)
An ordinary donkey.

BLUSTERY Highbrow (O.S.)
Like all of us.

SMILING Highbrow (O.S.)
Heretic!

STOCKY Highbrow (O.S.)
The fittest rule.

BACK TO SCENE

BLUSTERY Highbrow

Au Hasard, Balthasar. Why isn't the title translated?

SMILING Highbrow

In French, *hasard* means random. Or chance. In English, danger.

STOCKY Highbrow

Enough! Wait until we get to the part where the old rich guy gets the poor starving girl.

BLUSTERY Highbrow

Ordinary, as I said. What we are.

Unnoticed, Anthony creeps unsteadily around the room, eventually stationing himself behind a WHISPERING MAN and WOMAN, eavesdropping upon their prattle.

WHISPERING WOMAN

Poor little Anthony.

WHISPERING MAN

Hobbled.

WHISPERING WOMAN

The disease.

WHISPERING MAN

Tragic.

WHISPERING WOMAN

The way his parents cover it...

WHISPERING MAN

Only clumsy. Growing pains.

WHISPERING WOMAN

Degenerative.

WHISPERING MAN

How fast?

WHISPERING WOMAN

In a few years, a wheelchair. Then...?

Little Anthony jumps out from behind, surprising them. They are embarrassed. Little Anthony sneers.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE STATE PARK - DAY

In the chaparral the fire rages. Houses consumed. An elderly couple escapes into their swimming pool. Holding each other dearly, they die there.

SUPER: "Four Decades Later"

EXT. BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS OF NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

Hills are splashed with blooming rhododendrons and verdant springtime green. Adults stream into a country schoolhouse.

INT. CLASSROOM, BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS, NC - DAY

JOSEPHINE, 28, Euro-American, squirms in a school desk chair. The room is full of people similarly squirming, all bent over paper, pencils in hand.

A proctor paces officiously in front of a blackboard with the chalked message: "Qualification For the Selection Pool".

Josephine labors to answer the multiple choice test, but the letters squiggle. To her, the last question looks like: "Nawe tmo rights in Declaratiou of Imbegembemce". The choices: "lite," "liderty" and "qursuit of groqerty".

Time is running out. She's tired. At a loss, she circles "lite" and "liderty".

INT. AUTOMOBILE - DAY

After the test, she gets a ride home with a NEIGHBOR. Both speak with a Blue Ridge twang, but Josephine's much lighter.

NEIGHBOR

Audacious child! What give you the idea? You ain't got no chance.

JOSEPHINE

Everybody's got a chance! It's a new day. Ever'body's in. That's what they say.

NEIGHBOR

Who they?

JOSEPHINE

News, every where.

NEIGHBOR

Blue sky dreamin'. If you got
picked, you'd jes make foolish.

JOSEPHINE

Guess you better not read the
papers then.

NEIGHBOR

Yes'iree. Nothing but lies, them
papers.

JOSEPHINE

Good for nothing, hunh?

Neighbor considers.

NEIGHBOR

(blushing)

Well... maybe for somethin'.

JOSEPHINE

Still got no plumbing up the
holler, hey?

INT. GREASY SPOON RESTAURANT - DAY

A few weeks later Josephine clocks out of waitressing and
drags herself out the door, paying no attention to clusters
of ruby red wild columbines.

EXT./INT. JOSEPHINE'S TRAILER HOME - DAY

She pulls the day's mail from the box, opens her front door,
and recoils from the stink that assaults her.

She takes three steps to the bathroom door and opens it. The
commode has overflowed, clogged with the weekly advertiser.
She looks in the cabinet under the sink. Empty.

JOSEPHINE'S SON, 11, comes up behind her.

JOSEPHINE'S SON

Sorry, mama, I...

She hugs him.

JOSEPHINE

Sorry myself, honey. I should have
bought an extra roll.

He blushes at the mess but immediately lends a hand as they clean it up together.

JOSEPHINE'S SON

Possum got a hen.
(proudly)
I plugged that sucker.

JOSEPHINE

Your father would have been proud.

Josephine smiles at her son, finishes the clean-up, and leads him to the kitchen. She picks up the mail, opens one. And turns jubilant.

JOSEPHINE (CONT'D)

Let's turn that possum into stew.

She gives him another hug, harder.

EXT. NORTHERN COAST OF CALIFORNIA - DAY

A wood fire blazes under a hot tub on the rim of a cliff overlooking the Pacific.

ANTHONY, now 49, rolls his wheelchair up to the tub and lifts himself into the stew of his naked, multi-hued, male BUDDIES -
- SALLOW, ROSE and BRONZE.

ANTHONY

(petulant)
Couldn't wait for me, could you?
Just had to jump in first.

BRONZE BUDDY

Lighten up, man.

ANTHONY

(sings in dialect)
I hear dem gentle voices callin',
Ole... Black... Joe.

He shoulder-shuffles and drops his voice an octave.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Ole darkie crip... jes natchally be
de las'.

ROSY BUDDY

(sarcastic)
Man, you gonna do bang up. In the
Citizen... hot-damn... Senate.
(to the others, joshing)
(MORE)

ROSY BUDDY (CONT'D)
 Man afraid to hobnob with the *hoi poloi*.

ANTHONY
 (drops dialect)
 Oh yeah? Justice! Prosperity!
 Tolerance!

SALLOW BUDDY
 Cooperation! Peace...

ANTHONY
 Liberty. The core.

Sallow Buddy backslaps Anthony.

SALLOW BUDDY
 We gonna be freedom fighters!

BRONZE BUDDY
 The irony. Us... Fighters...

ANTHONY
 Nothing new. History's full of
 it... Irony.
 (singing)
 I hear the gentle voices singing...

EXT./INT. RESIDENCE IN BETHESDA, MARYLAND - DAY

On a crisp autumn morning, clad in a frumpy dress and unsteady on high heels, Josephine stumbles across the threshold to be greeted by HOST WIFE, 45, pushing ten years younger.

HOST WIFE
 (ebullient)
 Can we call you Jo? I've got a
 great aunt Josephine. We always
 called her Jo.

JOSEPHINE
 I, unh... I've always answered to
 Josephine.

HOST WIFE
 Not a regular Jo? How about a jolly
 one?

JOSEPHINE
 I'll be going back home some
 weekends. Mama's got my son.

HOST WIFE

Let me show you the house.

They traipse through rooms of mementos from international travel. Entering one of the bathrooms, Josephine slips.

HOST WIFE (CONT'D)

Foot-binders, ugh...

Josephine smiles and removes her shoes.

HOST WIFE (CONT'D)

...but if I have to, I wear them.

(severely)

You'd better learn to, too!

They enter a bedroom. Host wife grandly points to a big hand-lettered sign in Hebrew script: "*Baruch haba!*"

HOST WIFE (CONT'D)

Welcome! Awesome to have you with us, Jo. We've been all over the world. Humanitarian aid.

JOSEPHINE

Six bathrooms, did you say?

HOST WIFE

Traveling days are over. The kids need stability. So we write grants.

Josephine smiles politely.

HOST WIFE (CONT'D)

The quiet type? You'll have to learn to talk. A legislator! What a wonder.

HOST DAUGHTER, 12, flounces in.

HOST DAUGHTER

Is she the hillbilly, mom?

HOST WIFE

Daughter! Who taught you that word?

HOST DAUGHTER

She was on TV, they said. A hillbilly, they said. At school.

INT. HOST'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Host Wife and HOST HUSBAND lie in bed.

HOST WIFE
Whatever were we thinking?

HOST HUSBAND
She's good with the kids.

HOST WIFE
They say only one-third of the
populace can name the three
branches of government.

HOST HUSBAND
That test is no more difficult than
the one for a driver's license.

HOST WIFE
She's the perfect, famous...
ordinary citizen.

HOST HUSBAND
They get weeks of orientation.

HOST WIFE
We'll school her in UBI.

HOST HUSBAND
Or Mini-Maxi.

He drowns.

HOST WIFE
We'll teach.

HOST HUSBAND
She'll learn.

HOST WIFE
She'll...

HOST HUSBAND
They'll...

Sleep.

EXT. THE CAPITOL, WASHINGTON, DC - DAY

Some tromping through snow and others entering from the
underground parking garage, the recently sworn Citizen
Senators settle in.

As a group they match the nation's demography. Half-and-half
male-female, mostly middle-class and ethnically diverse.

INT. CITIZEN SENATE CHAMBER, THE CAPITOL - DAY

With the chamber half full, Josephine sits at her desk in a back corner. Listening.

Anthony holds forth -- blasting, blistering, bloviating.

ANTHONY

Unshackle science! It was the Law of Large Numbers... statistics... that undergirded the argument to use sortition...

(sarcastically)

Random selection, you may recall.

He spreads his arms wide, dramatically magnanimous.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

Now that everybody's in, science must be freed. For a better us!

A couple of REPRESENTATIVES -- INDIGNANT and POMPUS -- make the effort to engage him. One holds up a book, "Passing of the Great Race by Madison Grant".

INDIGNANT REP

At Nuremberg the Nazis entered this book as a defense. Written in 1916 by an American. It promotes eugenics and racial cleansing. Hitler called it his Bible.

ANTHONY

(dismissive)

In the 1920's even black leaders said that only their Talented Tenth should breed.

POMPOUS REP

The U.S. paved the way for the Holocaust?

INDIGNANT REP

Scientific racism, so-called.

Indignant Rep shakes another a sheaf of paper.

INDIGNANT REP (CONT'D)

I have here an entry from the blog of a group calling itself Lobak. L-O-B-A-K. Loosely-Organized-Bunch-Against-Kollectivism. That's with a K.

(jeering)

(MORE)

INDIGNANT REP (CONT'D)
Sophomoric. Get this.
(she reads)
"Plato thought a guardian class
should be bred through selective
mating. A positive form of
eugenics."

She tosses the sheaf onto the floor.

POMPOUS REP
So who are they?

INDIGNANT REP
In this paper, they identify
themselves only by number. Lobak
One, Lobak Two... Ideological
extremists. They won't carry much
weight.

ANTHONY
Don't kid yourselves...
Predictability happens.