

THE LAST DAYS OF PTOLEMY GREY - PILOT

Written by

Walter Mosley

Based on the novel "The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey"
by Walter Mosley

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - TODAY

SIX MONTHS FROM NOW

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Ptolemy is sitting at a card table in the living room. On the table is a small portable tape recorder, a .38 Caliber pistol, a half pint bottle of bourbon, a disposable plastic cup, an 1841 Coronet Head Gold Quarter Eagle \$2.50 Piece, and a standup frame with the photo-portrait of Sensia smiling out at him. This is a very neat room with a TV/radio console that is off. A foldaway sofa-bed that his ward, Robyn, uses as her bed. There's a bookcase filled with hard and paperback volumes.

Ptolemy is wearing a pretty snazzy dark blue suit and a light blue shirt with a muted red tie. He studies the treasures, memories, and tools set before him and then turns his attention to the tape recorder. He turns on the recorder and says...

PTOLEMY

Two plus nine makes eleven.

He rewinds the tape and plays it back.

PTOLEMY'S VOICE

Two plus nine makes eleven.

He rewinds again. Turns on recorder again. He pauses a moment before speaking.

PTOLEMY

Robyn, I want you to know that everybody in my family is counting on you. They might not like you. They might be mad that I put you in charge of my affairs. But in the end they will be better off for your strength; that and Coydog's crime so many years ago.

Ptolemy turns off the recorder and ponders the words he must say next. After a beat or two he turns the recorder back on.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

You're off with Billy Freres on Catalina Island and I am here waitin' for the man with two names to come and tell me the truth.

(MORE)

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

Because even though I can remember all the way back for ninety-three years, I still don't know for a fact what happened and a man has to know the truth and act accordingly, that's only right. I never did what was right before. I should have saved my little friend from that fire. I should'a tried to stop what those white men did to Coy-

LOUD KNOCKING on the door stops Ptolemy. He looks up at the door, frightened and yet determined.

ALFRED GULLA (O.S.)

I know you're in there, old man.

Ptolemy waits a beat more.

More LOUD KNOCKING.

Ptolemy picks up the pistol and puts it in his jacket pocket. He notices that the recorder is still on.

PTOLEMY

I love you, Robyn.

He turns off the recorder and stands up. He takes a step toward the door.

CUT TO:

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY**CURRENT DAY**

It's the same space but this is the apartment of a hoarder. The living room has four or more times the furniture than it needs. Add to this stacks, heaps and piles of detritus and debris the room begins to seem... vertical. There are four dining tables stacked one on the other; most of the ensuant shelves are packed with junk. There are a dozen chairs of all types; most used to stack and pile things upon and shove things underneath. Also there are huge piles of newspapers, magazines and cardboard boxes overflowing with knickknacks, take-out menus, old-time mechanical and electrical devices and other less recognizable flotsam and jetsam, bits and bobs. One of the shelves that the stacked tables form is made up like a cot.

The imposition of so much debris has transformed a fair sized room into a literal maze.

There's a scarred up, blond-wood console housing a TV and radio/record-player. The console's flat top is crowded with dozens of old photographs in tiny frames. Some have little pieces of tape attached scrawled upon with the names of those depicted.

The TV is tuned to a brassy 24-hour news station while the radio is playing soothing classical music.

There's **SOMEONE** sitting on a broad-bottomed ribbon-laced green and cream colored chair set before the console. All we see is the back of his black bald head.

Our POV, after having traveled around Methuselah's Maze, settles on the face of the old man **PTOLEMY GREY** (male, black, confused, 93 years old). His chin has three days growth.

NEWSCASTER
...a bomb exploded in Kabul
today killing 14. Three
Americans were among...

RADIO ANNOUNCER
We just heard Johann
Sebastian Bach's Brandenburg
Concerto Number Two in F
Major and now we are going to
hear Viola Concerto in G
Major by Georg Philipp
Telemann.

PTOLEMY
Tell the man? Is that what you
said? Huh? Tell him what?

Ptolemy really seems to expect an answer.

COYDOG (O.S.)
Stop playin' 'round, Pity.

Ptolemy turns his head to see who it is that has spoken. This simple motion is a long journey for the old man; he travels through time and space taking us to...

INT. SHARECROPPER'S SHACK, CIRCA 1928 - NIGHT

We are mostly in the shack but in some places the ramshackle cottage shares its dimension with the hoarder's apartment.

Ptolemy comes face to face with **COYDOG McCANN** (black, 40s, small, wiry, sly).

PTOLEMY
Coydog?

COYDOG
What you doin'?

PTOLEMY

Uh, um... tell the man?

COYDOG

Boy, stop plain' around and do what you promised.

PTOLEMY

But I forgot. I mean, I don't know anymore.

SIRENS of fire engines begin their WHINE somewhere outside Ptolemy's apartment - faintly at first.

COYDOG

Forgot? I didn't give my life for you to forget.

PTOLEMY

But I did. Maybe, maybe if you reminded me some...

COYDOG

The treasure, Pity. You remember...

As the SIRENS increase in volume Coydog and his shanty begin to fade.

PTOLEMY

I'm sorry, Coydog, but I, but I...

COYDOG

No, Pity, don't go!

Coydog is yelling but we can hardly hear him as he and his world are drowned out by the sound of sirens.

Ptolemy turns away and our vision shifts from the sharecropper's shack to...

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where we find our protagonist distracted and pained by the SIRENS wailing outside. He struggles to his feet and begins pacing the lanes of his maze becoming more and more agitated as he goes.

Finally, reluctantly he looks to his right where he sees...

A CLOSET DOOR, slightly ajar but also partly blocked by an overstuffed bookcase.

This door brings despair to Ptolemy. And with that despair he is once again transported to...

EXT. BURDETTE, MISSISSIPPI CIRCA 1925 - NIGHT

Burdette is a small town, a village replete with dirt roads that are lined with rows of rude huts and houses.

There's a FIRE RAGING burning hot and high over a tarpaper shack. The fire engines in 2010 slowly morph into clanking fire bells. Black **WOMEN** and **MEN** are passing buckets down a long line and tossing the water at the flames. They might as well be trying to douse the inferno with water balloons.

A CHILD SCREAMS PITEOUSLY.

MRS. IONA GREY (black, mid-20s, zaftig) is holding back 5 year old **PTOLEMY** who is trying to run into the burning building.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The elder Ptolemy is bereft.

PTOLEMY

I should'a done it. I should'a.

EXT. BURDETTE, MISSISSIPPI CIRCA 1925 - CONTINUOUS

Volunteer firemen are hacking away at the places where they can maybe get in. This is a heroic and deadly occupation. Their axes make a KNOCKING sound that gets louder and louder.

REGGIE (PRELAP)

Papa Grey! Papa Grey, you in there!

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ptolemy the Elder hears the call but before he can respond the calls become a WOMAN'S HUMMING.

Ptolemy looks toward the HUMAN MUSIC. Then...

INT. YOUNG PTOLEMY'S RAMSHACKLE HOME, BURDETTE MISSISSIPPI - DAY

IONA GREY (black woman not yet 25), Ptolemy's mother, is standing over a cast-iron stove making grits in a battered old pot while humming to herself.

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Child-Ptolemy comes in through the front door unseen. He looks toward someone behind him and urges them forward.

PITY

Come on in. She don't bite.

Little **MAUDE PETIT** (very dark-skinned girl, five years old) comes in tentatively.

PITY (CONT'D)

Mama.

With all the clanking, stirring and humming Iona doesn't hear her son.

PITY (CONT'D)

Mama!... Mama!

Iona hears the calls and turns to see her beloved son.

IONA

Yeah, baby? Who's your little friend?

Urging Maude on Ptolemy says:

PITY

Go on. Tell her.

MAUDE

I'm, uh, I'm Maude.

Smiling, Iona says:

IONA

I know who you are. Lana Petit's little girl. *

PITY

Her mama been gone three days an' Maude don't have nuthin' t'eat.

Iona understands.

IONA

Come on in, baby. Take a chair at the table.

Nervously Maude moves toward the table.

REGGIE (PRELAP)

Papa Grey!
(knocking)
You okay!

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - PRESENT DAY

The KNOCKING at the door frightens and confuses the old man. He looks around again and finds himself in...

EXT. MISSISSIPPI COUNTRYSIDE - LATE NIGHT

Pity (Ptolemy as a child) sees a MAN, a HUMAN TORCH, running and screaming through the countryside setting dried foliage aflame wherever he passes.

The KNOCKING continues. As the BURNING MAN fades into the distance the scene slowly shifts again.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ptolemy has absorbed, literally, a lifetime of pain in these moments. Weakened he lowers back into the lawn chair. The TV console is still chattering and playing. The KNOCKING continues. Ptolemy is breathing hard.

REGGIE (O.S.)

Papa Grey! You okay in there?

Ptolemy looks up at the door wondering what indeed is reality.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Papa Grey!

The old man pushes himself up from the chair and moves to the door.

PTOLEMY

Who's that?

REGGIE (O.S.)

Who? It's me.

PTOLEMY

You that woman wanna rob me?

REGGIE (O.S.)

I'm a man, Papa Grey... Reggie.

PTOLEMY

Reggie?

REGGIE (O.S.)

Yeah, Uncle, it's me.

PTOLEMY
 (suspicious)
 How I know it's you?

REGGIE (O.S.)
 Don't you know my voice?

PTOLEMY
 I know a voice if I see the man.
 Sometime, you know, I ain't so
 sure...

REGGIE (O.S.)
 Well how can I prove it to ya that
 I'm me?

Ptolemy glances over at the pictures on the console. He gets a little lost.

REGGIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Huh, Uncle?

PTOLEMY
 What?

REGGIE (O.S.)
 How can I prove to you that I'm me?

PTOLEMY
 What did I always tell Reggie that
 he got to do?

REGGIE (O.S.)
 Ummm. Take care'a my kids, uh, see
 the doctor if I get fever. Put at
 least ten dollars in the bank
 whenever I get paid.

PTOLEMY
 Anybody know that. But what did I
 tell Reggie 'bout drinkin'?

REGGIE (O.S.)
 Not to do it because when I do I'm
 likely to get mad.

Ptolemy puzzles out that this is the right answer. He grins and then, with some coordination difficulty he throws the six multi-colored bolts on the door and pulls the portal open revealing his tall, hefty great grandnephew, **REGGIE LLOYD** (32 year old dark-skinned black man, big and friendly).

Ptolemy stands, blocking the doorway and smiling at his nephew. He loves Reggie and feels anchored by his monumental presence.

PTOLEMY
Sure is good to see you, boy.

*
*

REGGIE
You too, Uncle.

*
*

Papa Grey has forgotten that he needs to back away from the door in order to let Reggie in.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Lemme just try and get around you here.

Reggie gently moves the old man to the side employing a kind of dance between the two men.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Reggie has passed Ptolemy into the living room. As the younger man looks around Ptolemy starts to relock the door.

PTOLEMY
First the blue and then the green.
After the green come the yella and
then red and then orange.

REGGIE
That's right, Uncle you always
gotta lock that door. You don't
want that woman to come in and rob
you again.

PTOLEMY
Uh-uh. Not her. She slapped me
down. Stole my change can.

This memory bothers Ptolemy.

REGGIE
That's okay, Uncle. You got some
ice water I could drink?

PTOLEMY
Huh?

REGGIE
Ice water to drink.

PTOLEMY

Oh. Yeah. Uh-huh. Come on.

Ptolemy forges past Reggie; a man with a mission he can understand.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The kitchen is a close cousin to the living room. Cluttered with dirty dishes, rags, rusted cutlery and broken crockery. They are greeted by scuttling roaches and even a fluttering moth or two. We know it smells in there because Reggie's nose turns up.

There's one area that's pretty much clutter free. Here there's a cardboard carton that has nine cans of baked beans lined up on it, a shelf that is at full capacity with three empty cans, and a very simple electric can-opener. *

REGGIE

You see, Uncle? You had three cans'a beans for lunch and here I am.

PTOLEMY

Uh-huh. You get the pitcher outta the ice box and I'll get your special glass.

While Ptolemy searches the cluttered shelves Reggie opens the refrigerator. This is packed with things that belong there, that have gone bad there, and things that should be somewhere else - like the alarm clock on the shelf next to the plastic pitcher filled with water.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

I know that glass here somewhere. I kept it clean for when Reggie want his water. Yes I did.

Reggie takes the pitcher and the clock from the refrigerator.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

I know I put it up here the last time you was here two, no, no, no three cans ago.

REGGIE

Papa Grey, why you got the alarm clock in the ice box?

Ptolemy realizes that something is wrong with leaving a clock in the refrigerator and so he intensifies his search for the *special glass*.

PTOLEMY

I know I put it here somewhere
cause my favorite nephew needs a
good glass.

Reggie puts the pitcher down on a small table and then reaches up to a high shelf that Ptolemy could never reach. He takes a glass from up there and brings it down. He places the glass and the alarm clock down on the table too.

REGGIE

Keep this clock on your sleeping
table and wind it every morning
when you get up.

PTOLEMY

You put that glass up there, huh?
It wasn't me.

REGGIE

What about the clock?

PTOLEMY

Yeah. Sure. I'ont know how it got
in there in the first place. Let's
go in the living room and sit down
to drink.

Ptolemy leads the way out of the kitchen - leaving the alarm clock. Reggie shakes his head but smiles. He picks up the alarm clock and follows his ancient great granduncle.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - A WHILE LATER

Ptolemy is sitting in his lawn chair while Reggie has brought up a dark-wood dining room chair. The TV news-channel and classical radio station are still playing. Reggie is drinking from the tumbler of ice water.

PTOLEMY

...I had a visitor just before you
got here. I mean it was a long
time ago but then you showed up.

Reggie doesn't like the idea of someone in his demented uncle's home.

REGGIE

They came inside?

Absently, Ptolemy nods.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
Who was it?

PTOLEMY
Coy.

REGGIE
Who?

PTOLEMY
(insistent)
Coy. You know - Coydog.

REGGIE
Uh-uh, Uncle. He one'a them niggahs
hang out up on the corner?

PTOLEMY
Oh, yeah, that's right. He was, he
was prolly before your time.

REGGIE
Who was he?

Reggie takes the pitcher and refills the glass.

PTOLEMY
Coydog was this old man, good
friend who taught me my letters and
made me swear I'd do something,
something. But I cain't remembah
what it was.

Reggie leans over and brings the *good glass* to Ptolemy's
lips. It is only now that the old man realizes how thirsty he
is. He guzzles the water, stops, and then guzzles some more.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)
...and, and there was this fire
somewhere. I could hear the
cowbells clankin'.

REGGIE
There was a fire up on Crenshaw.
Maybe it was that.

PTOLEMY
Naw... I don't think it was that
one.

REGGIE
What about this Coy guy?

PTOLEMY

I don't know. I mean, I forgot what
I was supposed to do.

Reggie reaches out and touches Ptolemy's grizzled chin with
his fingers.

REGGIE

You need a shave 'fore you go out
in the world, Uncle.

Ptolemy likes this idea.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Ptolemy is sitting on a backless stool with a sheet wrapped
around him. Reggie is standing over his uncle using a barber-
grade electric razor to trim his chin stubble. Ptolemy is
enjoying the process but Reggie has to keep moving the old
wandering man's head to get the work done.

REGGIE

...like I was sayin', Uncle, Nina
ain't, um, so happy here and I been
thinkin' about takin' her and the
kids an' movin' down to San Diego.

PTOLEMY

Uh-huh, yeah.

REGGIE

So do you think it would be okay
for other people come by and see
about you?

PTOLEMY

Oh yeah, sure, sure. The more the
better. Ow! That hurt!

Reggie pulls back and looks at his job. He takes the sheet
from Ptolemy's shoulders.

REGGIE

Looks like we done. How do you like
it?

Ptolemy runs a palm across his cheek.

PTOLEMY

Smooth. What we doin' now?

REGGIE

Don't you remember what we doin'
today?

With yet another challenge to his redirected mind Ptolemy concentrates.

PTOLEMY

The Lumber yard? No. The ice
house? No, not no more. Zenobia's
place?

Ptolemy stops for a moment at the thought of the Mississippi
cathouse.

REGGIE

You want me to turn off the radio
and TV so you could think?

PTOLEMY

No! Don't turn it off. I might not
find my stations again.

REGGIE

I could just turn down the sound.

PTOLEMY

Then I won't be able to hear it.
An' if I cain't hear it then it
ain't worf it.

REGGIE

But you could turn it up again
after.

PTOLEMY

Anyway I know what you want. You
wanna go to the doctor even though
that burn is all healed up...
(holds up his right hand)
...Look I took the bandage off an'
everything.

REGGIE

After the doctor we could go to the
diner an' get fried chicken thighs
and french fries.

PTOLEMY

I love them chicken thighs. I
surely do.

EXT. PEOPLE'S CLINIC - EARLY AFTERNOON

This is one of those nondescript plaster-sided bungalows that infest the LA landscape. Through a large picture window we see all ages of people of color in the waiting room, there to see one of the doctors or paramedics.

Reggie and Ptolemy are among these.

INT. PEOPLE'S CLINIC - CONTINUOUS

Reggie's reading a sports magazine while Ptolemy is looking around at the various **PATIENTS** waiting to be seen.

There are maybe a dozen potential Patients with various visible and invisible ailments. **ONE WOMAN** has a large goiter on the side of her neck. She's sitting there uncomfortably waiting.

PTOLEMY

(too loudly)

What's wrong with that woman,
Reggie? That one there.

REGGIE

Ain't nuthin' wrong with her,
uncle. Now lower your voice.

PTOLEMY

But she got a big lump on her neck
like another head 'bout to come
out. What's wrong with her?

The Woman is all the more mortified.

REGGIE

Just be quiet, Papa Grey.

PTOLEMY

I will not be quiet. That woman got
a, got a I don't know what growin'
outta her neck and I wanna know
what it is.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

P-Tolemy Grey. P-Tolemy.

REGGIE

(relieved)

Yes, ma'am. Right here.

Taking Ptolemy, only a little roughly, by the arm Reggie gets them both up. Then Reggie begins to drag them toward the Receptionist's desk.

PTOLEMY
Lemme go. Stop pullin'.

REGGIE
We goin' to see the doctor, Uncle.
That's why we here.

Ptolemy isn't completely convinced but he let's his nephew pull him along until they get to...

INT. PEOPLE'S CLINIC, RECEPTIONIST'S DESK - CONTINUOUS

MRS. KAMAL (50's, black woman, professional as hell) looks up as Reggie brings Ptolemy in tow.

MRS. KAMAL
P-tolemy?

REGGIE
Ptolemy. It's Egyptian from the
time of Cleopatra.

PTOLEMY
That's right.

MRS. KAMAL
Dr. Riley will see you now.

With only the mildest of struggles Reggie and Ptolemy go toward the doctor's open door.

INT. DR. RILEY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

DR. RILEY (a kindly brown man of about 40) comes from the neighborhood. Smiling, the doctor stands to greet his visitors and ushers them toward his battered visitors chairs.

DR. RILEY
Reggie, Mr. Grey, come on in. Have
a seat.

Riley takes a chair next to Ptolemy.

DR. RILEY (CONT'D)
It's good to see you again, Mr.
Grey.

PTOLEMY

Uh-huh.

He takes the older man by the wrist and studies his hand.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

Why you got me in here when there's that woman out there with that big lump on her th'oat?

DR. RILEY

Esther? She's okay. We're just prepping her for a trip to the hospital.

PTOLEMY

Coydog used ta tell me that hospitals was where black folk went to die.

DR. RILEY

I think Esther will be fine.

PTOLEMY

My cousin Petey went to the hospital and so did, so did, um, that woman. She was like, um... I don't remember.

DR. RILEY

Do you remember when I was a kid that lived in your building about thirty years ago?

Ptolemy studies the doctor's face.

PTOLEMY

No.

REGGIE

How is he, Dr. Riley?

DR. RILEY

Hand is almost completely healed.

PTOLEMY

I told ya. I told ya I didn't need no doctor stickin' me with needles an' wrappin' up my hand like it was a ornery hog.

DR. RILEY

Most people your age, when they have burns as bad as yours was, take months to recover.

PTOLEMY

I always healed fast. Black man in the cotton fields ain't got time to play sick.

REGGIE

I told him that he can't make coffee no more, Doctor. I disconnected the gas to the stove.

PTOLEMY

...yeah, one time I could pick three hunnert pounds'a cotton on a summer's day. Other niggahs be droppin' in the dirt cause'a the heat but I'd work till the June moon rose in the sky. The June moon.

DR. RILEY

(to Reggie)

Physically, your uncle is the healthiest man of his age I've ever seen.

The doctor gets up to go sit behind his desk.

REGGIE

They tell me that when he left the Delta to go up to Chicago he was only twelve and he went by foot, barefoot.

PTOLEMY

I ran.

DR. RILEY

(settling behind desk)

His recuperative ability was the reason I suggested him for this process.

Ptolemy's attention wanders.

Dr. Riley reaches down under his desk, fumbles around a bit, then...

DR. RILEY (CONT'D)

Mr. Grey.

PTOLEMY

Yeah?

For maybe three seconds Riley holds up an orange in his left hand. Then he puts the orange away and holds up a coconut in the right hand.

DR. RILEY

You don't remember when I used to trick or treat at your apartment door? You'd give out apples.

PTOLEMY

Apples? Um, maybe.

DR. RILEY

What did I have in my left hand?

Riley holds up his left hand - now empty.

Ptolemy looks from one side to the other. Says nothing.

DR. RILEY (CONT'D)

Can you point to the side that I had the orange on?

Ptolemy concentrates but it's no use.

REGGIE

You remember, uncle.

PTOLEMY

Remember what?

This response is a sad revelation for Reggie.

DR. RILEY

Would you like a pop, Mr. Grey?

PTOLEMY

Coca-Cola?

Smiling Dr. Riley nods and hits a button on his phone.

MRS. KAMAL (O.S.)

Yes, Doctor?

DR. RILEY

Mrs. Kamal, can you bring Mr. Grey down to the snack room and give him a Coke?

MRS. KAMAL

Yes, Doctor.

Coming in Mrs. Kamal smiles at Ptolemy. He basks in this simple display of friendliness.

MRS. KAMAL (CONT'D)
Come with me now, honey, and we'll
get you a soda.

Ptolemy gets up, takes two steps with the kindly assistant and then turns to Reggie.

PTOLEMY
You comin'?

REGGIE
I'm going to talk to the doctor a
minute, Papa Grey.

PTOLEMY
Oh. He gonna tell ya you need to
lose some weight.

Ptolemy and Mrs. Kamal leave the room.

INT. DR. RILEY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The men allow the tragedy of the moment to settle a bit.

DR. RILEY
He's healthier than either one of
us.

REGGIE
He's bound to outlive me.

DR. RILEY
But his mind has slipped even in
the last few weeks.

Reggie knows this truth but the doctor's corroboration hits him hard.

Riley hands Reggie a slip of paper. Reggie reads it.

DR. RILEY (CONT'D)
Dr. Rubin. He's a specialist that
does research in Mumbai.

REGGIE
Where?

DR. RILEY
India.

REGGIE

What good is that to a old black man in LA?

DR. RILEY

Dr. Rubin will be in town for a few days in a week or so. He specializes in dementia and needs candidates like your uncle for examination and tests.

REGGIE

Tests like on a guinea pig?

DR. RILEY

I've made the appointment already. The address is on the back side. Rubin knows more about your uncle's condition than anyone I know. He'll make suggestions but it'll be up to you how far you go.

Off Reggie - thinking many things.

EXT. BUSY STREET OF SOUTH LA - AFTERNOON

Walking down the street Reggie is on point but Ptolemy is distracted by people and movements:

Ptolemy sees someone across the street. It looks like Coydog; maybe it is him - in Ptolemy's mind. Coydog gestures at Ptolemy to cross over to him.

PTOLEMY

Hey, Reggie. There he is. That's Coydog. Hey, Coy!

Ptolemy walks right out into the street causing a driver to hit his brakes and honk. Reggie rushes out and pulls the old man back up on the curb.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

Lemme go! That's Coydog.

The **DRIVER** (black male, 30s, medium build) jumps out of his car, furious.

DRIVER

What the fuck you think you doin'?

Driver angrily rushes up to the duo only realizing Reggie's size and power when he gets on them.

REGGIE

Yeah?

DRIVER

What the fuck is wrong with him? He retarded or sumpin'?

REGGIE

Whatever's wrong with my uncle ain't nuthin' compared to the hurt on you if you don't back it up.

Behind Reggie a **WINO** (black, 60's, teetering) walks up to Ptolemy.

Backing away, the Driver is trying to escape a beating while, at the same time, keeping some dignity.

DRIVER

You bettah put that old man on a leash.

REGGIE

What you say?

Reggie takes a step toward the Driver and the driver dives into his car.

EXT. BUSY STREET OF SOUTH LA - CONTINUOUS

Reggie turns around to see Ptolemy talking to the Wino. He goes up to them.

PTOLEMY

Reggie, this here's my friend, um, what's your name again?

WINO

Luther. Luther Jones.

PTOLEMY

Yeah, yeah. Luther need a dollar. Give him one'a mines.

Reggie steps into the space between Ptolemy and Luther. Luther puts up his hands and backs off a step because some of the anger at the Driver still hovers around Reggie's shoulders. Reggie realizes the fear he's instilled.

REGGIE

Hold up, brother, I ain't gonna hurt you.

As Reggie takes a dollar from his pocket two young **BLACK WOMEN** pass by and are noticed by Ptolemy.

PTOLEMY

Hello, ladies. You goin' down to
Madame Zenobia's?

The lovely young women are a little charmed by the man's unabashed appreciation.

YOUNG WOMAN #1

You a player, granddad?

PTOLEMY

I haven't been to Zenobia's in a
hunnert years.

YOUNG WOMAN #2

I bet she miss you too, huh?

PTOLEMY

I don't even know where she is no
more.

*
*

YOUNG WOMAN #1

Bet you could find her, if you
looked.

*

A **THIRD YOUNG WOMAN** walks up to her friends. Ptolemy looks at this newcomer and sees:

EXT. SAME STREET 40 YEARS EARLIER - DAY

The Third Young Woman turns into **SENSIA HOWARD** (black, 30, beautiful, with a devilish inner light).

PTOLEMY

Sensie.

Sensia doesn't say anything but there's a impish look in her eye.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

I miss you so bad.

Ptolemy reaches out to take her hand. The contact causes flutter between realities. Sensia turns back into Third Young Woman who pulls her hand away from him...

EXT. BUSY STREET OF SOUTH LA - CONTINUOUS

Third Black Woman pulling away from Ptolemy's hand.

THIRD BLACK WOMAN
Take your hand off me!

PTOLEMY
(confused)
Sensie?

Reggie is on his way to this new situation.

THIRD BLACK WOMAN
Say what?

Reggie puts himself between the young women and his great uncle.

REGGIE
Sorry if he did anything wrong,
miss. You know he's old and spends
a lot of time thinking about the
past.

YOUNG WOMAN #2
He's cute.

THIRD BLACK WOMAN
Let's get outta here.

As the women leave Ptolemy looks after them. He sees, superimposed upon the contemporary ladies, Sensia Howard turning and blowing him a kiss.

REGGIE
You okay, Papa Grey?

PTOLEMY
She's the most beautiful woman I
ever known. God's one true gift to
me.

Reggie looks at the three young women a little perplexed at what his elder is seeing.

EXT. NOLAN'S DINER - AFTERNOON

Nolan's looks like a train's caboose lifted up on giant cinder blocks.

INT. NOLAN'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

On the inside it's not a very large place; six tables and two booths next to the window.

Reggie is standing next to the Men's Room. The door opens and Ptolemy comes out. The old man has taken a big shit.

PTOLEMY

Whew. That was somethin' else.

REGGIE

We gotta get a plumber to fix your toilet.

PTOLEMY

I'm hungry.

They walk toward an empty booth by the window.

INT. NOLAN'S DINER - MINUTES LATER

SONIA LAVANDRELL (black woman, 40s, waspish and yet friendly) is taking their order.

SONIA

Now don't tell me. Chili size for you Reggie and Mr. Grey wants fried chicken, only thighs.

REGGIE

That's right, Sonia. How you doin', girl?

SONIA

Sent Mr. Pete packin'. I told the niggah that if he didn't have some kinda reg'lar job in six weeks he'd have to go.

REGGIE

Can't fault you there. You take him back if he finds work?

SONIA

Uh-uh, no. If a dog bite you once you better believe he'll do it again.

Reggie laughs. Ptolemy, who is a little lost in their conversation, tries to act like he's with it.

SONIA (CONT'D)

You look like you losin' weight, Mr. Grey.

Ptolemy knows the spotlight is on him but he doesn't know what to say.

REGGIE

He mostly only eats when I'm around.

SONIA

He needs to eat more.

TIME LAPSE

Sonia is serving big plates of food to Nephew and Uncle.

TIME LAPSE

The plates are empty. Sonia is picking them up and taking them off.

REGGIE

You like the chicken, Uncle?

PTOLEMY

It's like I can't remember nuthin'. Sometimes I sit there and remember little Maud Petit comin' to live wit' us but then I try to say what day it is and I ain't got no idea.

REGGIE

Dr. Riley says that there's a doctor for that. You want to go see him?

PTOLEMY

I'm hungry, Reggie. When we gonna eat?

REGGIE

Sonia, could you bring my uncle some more fried thighs?

INT. LARGE SUPERMARKET - AFTERNOON

Somewhere in the middle of the frozen confections aisle Reggie is studying the ice creams and Ptolemy is shivering from the cold. Reggie notices his uncle's condition.

REGGIE

You cold, Papa Grey?

PTOLEMY

Sh-sh-sh-sure I am. What you think?

Reggie takes off his big army jacket and wraps it around Ptolemy's shoulders. Feeling the heat immediately Ptolemy giggles.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

It's warm.

REGGIE

So you want me to take you to that special doctor?

While luxuriating in Reggie's warm jacket Ptolemy is trying to remember, to understand what his nephew is asking.

PTOLEMY

Maybe some angel's food cake?

Reggie loves his Uncle.

REGGIE

You remember when you would take me out to the stream they used to have out around Venice? We'd catch crawdads there and come home to eat 'em over white rice.

PTOLEMY

And Coydog would help us. And Sensia would cook 'em on the wood stove down at Zenobia's.

Reggie pats his uncle on the shoulder and they move on down the aisle.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Back at their chairs before the TV/radio/phonograph console, listening to the news and some other classical masterpiece, Reggie is concentrating on Ptolemy while Ptolemy is studying some abstract concept in space.

REGGIE

Papa Grey... Papa Grey.

PTOLEMY

Yeah?

REGGIE

Would you mind if other people came and took care of you now and then?

PTOLEMY

You mean if they came with you?

REGGIE

At first with me but other times
alone, maybe.

Ptolemy doesn't like the idea but he's hesitant to complain.

PTOLEMY

The woman on the TV, you know, the
pretty black one, said that there
was a accident on the freeway and
the traffic went for miles. Ain't
that sumpin?

REGGIE

Yeah, uh-huh...
(Making to rise)
...I gotta go home, Uncle.

PTOLEMY

Already? Why'ont you stay an' play
some dominoes with me? Or, or, or
maybe you could help me look for
Coydog's um, lost, um, lost thing.

REGGIE

I'll play next time after we go to
the bank. Tonight's Latisha's
birthday.

PTOLEMY

You gonna have a party?

REGGIE

Just some cake and a few presents.

Ptolemy reaches out and grabs onto Reggie's arm. It's as if
he's trying to cross a barrier that keeps them apart. After a
few beats of this heartfelt silence Reggie stands. This
movement causes Ptolemy to lose his grip on his nephew.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

Remember, Uncle. When the bean cans
fill up the shelf I'll be back the
next morning.

Ptolemy follows Reggie to the front door and reaches out to
touch him again as he crosses the threshold.

PTOLEMY

I'll be here.

REGGIE

Close the door now, Papa Grey.
Close it and do your colors.

Reggie pulls the door closed leaving Ptolemy to stare.

REGGIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Do your colors, Uncle.

Ptolemy goes through the ritual of locking the bolts; this time working from the bottom to the top (maybe muttering to himself).

REGGIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Good-bye, Uncle.

PTOLEMY
I'll be here.

Ptolemy waits for a while expecting he knows not what. Then he turns away and walks past the console and into the back part of his apartment.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

(**NOTE** In this section of the script we find Ptolemy alone and anxious, wandering through the house and missing his nephew. In order to deal with this angst he narrates his journey.

In this heightened state partially garbled VOICES come to him at differing volumes, but mostly pretty soft and whispery, like the murmuring background at a restaurant. These voices and their content will come from this episode and later ones. People speaking will be Coydog, Sensia, the Evil White Man who Coydog stole from, etc.)

Ptolemy goes to the partially open and yet blocked closet door. He stares at the portal expectantly. After a beat or two...

PTOLEMY
Coydog? Coydog you there?

A beat or two more. No answer.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)
I think I lost what you gave me...
I'm sorry.

Ptolemy turns away from the closet door and shuffles out of the scene.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ptolemy enters the kitchen and, after a little struggle finding the switch and remembering how it works, turns on the light.

When the light comes on ROACHES scuttle across the floor, the counter, and up and down the walls. Ptolemy pays them no mind.

He goes to the sink and taps the basin.

PTOLEMY

That's my sink where I do my number
one 'cause the toilet don't work.

He turns on the faucet.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

You got to turn the water on for a
minute to make sure it all goes
down the drain after.

He turns the faucet mostly off and then walks out of the kitchen, leaving the leaky spigot in his wake.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

The TV, radio, and murmuring voices vie for his attention but Ptolemy has a goal.

Ptolemy approaches a muslin cloth hanging on the wall behind the TV/radio console. He pulls back the shroud revealing another door. This one is padlocked. He checks the lock.

PTOLEMY

Sleep, my darling. Rest.

Sensia appears like a projection on a panel of the door.

SENSIA

You the one look tired, Pitypapa.
You the one.

She fades away leaving Ptolemy with a beatific look. The murmuring has stopped. His journey through the house has calmed him.

Pitypapa goes to his chair and sits again. The TV NEWSCASTER is talking about child suicide-bombers in Afghanistan while the classical radio station plays the refrain to Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - MORNING

There are six cans on and around the bean-can ledge. Ptolemy's chin has the fuzz of a week's growth on it. His shirt only has one button buttoned, and it is askew.

PTOLEMY

Is it this many mean Reggie?

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - EVENING

Eight cans. There's a cut on his hand.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON

TV, radio, SNORING PAPA GREY. He's sitting in his lawn chair; grizzled and a week and a half worth of disheveled.

KNOCKING.

HILLY (O.S.)

Papa Grey! Papa Grey, you in there?

Ptolemy is startled awake.

PTOLEMY

What? Huh?

HILLY (O.S.)

Papa Grey!

Hilly keeps CALLING and KNOCKING while Ptolemy tries to orient himself.

Finally the elder gets to his feet and staggers to the door.

PTOLEMY

Who is it? Reggie?

HILLY (O.S.)

No, Uncle, it's Hilly.

PTOLEMY

Who-ee?

HILLY (O.S.)

Hilly. Niece's son.

He might as well be speaking ancient Phoenician for all that Ptolemy understands.

PTOLEMY
Where Reggie at?

HILLY (O.S.)
He couldn't, um, be here and mama
send me to come get you.

PTOLEMY
Get me? Why you wanna get me?

HILLY (O.S.)
To bring you to Niece's house.

PTOLEMY
Knees-ee?

HILLY (O.S.)
Niece. Hilda Brown. Your sister
June's daughter.

PTOLEMY
June's dead. She died a long time
ago.

HILLY (O.S.)
There's a picture sittin' on your
TV box, Papa Grey...

Ptolemy looks at the collection of little standup frames.

PTOLEMY
How you know what's in my house?

HILLY (O.S.)
There's a picture there with a
piece'a tape on it says Hilliard.
That's who I am.

Ptolemy goes to the pictures but he's already forgotten why.

HILLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Papa Grey?

PTOLEMY
What you say I'm lookin' for?

HILLY (O.S.)
Hilliard. H-I-L-L-

PTOLEMY
That's enough. I got it.

Rummaging around Ptolemy finally comes up with a picture of a round young black man. There's a piece of masking tape attached that reads - *Hilliard*.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)
 June had Niecie and Niecie had
 Hilliard. Yeah. But they call him
 Hilly. Uh-huh, that's it.

HILLY (O.S.)
 Papa Grey?

PTOLEMY
 I'm comin'.

Ptolemy starts the process with the locks.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT BUILDING HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Hilliard Brown (black, male, 30, bulbous, brooding and taciturn) is standing at the door when it opens inward. Ptolemy looks up at him.

HILLY
 Hey, Uncle. I didn't think you was
 evah gonna open up.

COYDOG (O.S.)
 Sumpin wrong with this boy, Pity.

PTOLEMY
 I know, Coy. I got eyes.

HILLY
 What?

PTOLEMY
 Nuthin'. Come on in.

Two beats.

HILLY
 You gotta move back to let me in.

Ptolemy doesn't understand.

HILLY (CONT'D)
 Move.

Rather than gently like Reggie, Hilly pushes past the elder.

Making his way in he is assailed by the strong odors of the unkempt apartment.

HILLY (CONT'D)
Oh shit! What's that smell?

PTOLEMY
What smell? I don't smell nuthin.

HILLY
Is it your toilet?

PTOLEMY
Where Reggie at?

This question sobers Hilly somewhat.

HILLY
Is that what you wearin'?

Hilly blunders further into the house. The squalor and smell seems to assail the younger man almost physically.

PTOLEMY
Stop touchin' things, boy.

HILLY
Come on, Uncle. Let's find you some clean clothes. We got to go.

PTOLEMY
Where Reggie? He ain't been here and this is bank day.

Again Hilly's attention is pressed beyond his complaints.

HILLY
You got to go to the bank?

PTOLEMY
Yeah. With Reggie.

HILLY
He's at mama's place. I could take you to the bank and then we could go over there.

Hilly stumbles into a stack of old LOOK magazines toppling them into one of the maze-like aisles.

PTOLEMY
Oh my God. What you done boy? How am I, how can? Oh no.

Ptolemy's response is over the top. One might think that the young man had just destroyed his life's work.

HILLY

Uncle, we gotta go. I'll pick up
the damn magazines.

Hilly moves toward the fallen tower of LOOK. Ptolemy blocks
him holding up his hands.

PTOLEMY

No, no, no, no, no. Don't do no
more. Please. Just go outside. Go
on and I'll come in a minute.

Hilly is an angry, brooding sort. But he's on a mission and
so he swallows some of his ire.

HILLY

Okay. But at least put on a clean
shirt.

Hilly blunders out slamming the door behind him.

The sound of the slam frightens Ptolemy so much that he has a
vision:

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY IN THE PAST

A BLACK MAN is shouting. There's a loud SHOT and then a
WOMAN'S SCREAM.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ptolemy is breathing hard. He's recovering from current
trauma and the long ago one. He looks around the apartment
trying to reorient himself.

As Ptolemy talks to himself he moves around the living room
looking... for something.

PTOLEMY

I got to, got to go see Reggie and
he's at, he's at Niece's... that's
right, Niece. June's girl.

He stops at the table-shelf made up like a cot. Tapping the
thin mattress and looking around he's searching for a memory.
Finally he sees a small rectangular bench at the end of the
sleep-shelf. Upon it is a drinking glass, a lamp, and a box *
of tissues. He removes these items, takes the bench and
places it on the floor. Then he manages to step up on the
little stool facing a teddy bear wedged into the junk
crowding the table-shelf above.

The MURMURING starts up again. The voices and their garbled content distract Ptolemy somewhat. But, finally, he manages to overcome these psychic obstacles enough to pull the teddy out of its spot revealing...

A miniature ironing board with a full-sized iron on it. Beneath the iron are three envelopes with cellophane windows in them. These are retirement checks that he receives in the mail.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

One, two, three.

The next trial for Ptolemy is getting off his stool while carrying his checks. He finally succeeds.

EXT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT BUILDING PORCH - A WHILE LATER

Hilly is smoking a cigarette on the top stair (of three stairs). Ptolemy comes out wearing a clean shirt and clutching his envelopes.

HILLY

You got what you need, Uncle?

PTOLEMY

One, two, three.

MELINDA HOGARTH (O.S.)

Hold it right there, mothahfuckah!

Storming across the street we see **MELINDA HOGARTH** (black woman, hard-lived 40s, hefty, drug addict). She runs up on the porch reaching for Ptolemy. He ducks behind Hilly to avoid her grasp. She grabs for him again and Hilly pushes her so that she walks backward down the stairs.

Melinda looks up as if maybe she hadn't seen Hilly standing there.

MELINDA HOGARTH (CONT'D)

Fuck you push me for?

HILLY

Fuck you mess with my uncle for?

MELINDA HOGARTH

Your uncle? That mothahfuckah there owe me money. He told me he gonna give me money for my, uh, my, uh rent. He promised me. An' you know he got it.

(MORE)

MELINDA HOGARTH (CONT'D)
 Everybody know that he got a whole
 bag fulla money in that apartment.

PTOLEMY
 No, uh-uh.

HILLY
 He say no.

MELINDA HOGARTH
 I say yeah.

Melinda takes a step up.

HILLY
 Bitch, take one more step and I'ma
 slap you hard enough yo mama gonna
 feel it.

A frightened Ptolemy sniggers behind his other nephew.

MELINDA HOGARTH
 He owe me!

Hilly takes a step down. Melinda takes three steps back.
 This equation continues until the woman-bully is across the
 street - glowering.

Ptolemy is sticking close to Hilly now.

HILLY
 That's okay, Papa Grey. She ain't
 gonna mess wichu no mo'. What way
 is the bank?

Looking to see where Melinda is, Ptolemy points in the
 opposite direction.

EXT. AVALON BLVD - EARLY AFTERNOON

They're standing on the sidewalk. Ptolemy is looking all
 around but does not see what he's looking for.

HILLY
 What's the name of your bank again,
 Uncle?

PTOLEMY
 It's the bank. My bank.

HILLY

But we been up and down this street
ten times. If you have a name I
could call information.

PTOLEMY

Call 'em then. Call 'em.

HILLY

Here, Papa Grey gimme your wallet.

PTOLEMY

What for?

HILLY

Maybe there's a bank card in there.
Lemme look.

PTOLEMY

(hesitant)

Okay.

Ptolemy gives his assent but doesn't move to get the wallet
so Hilly reaches into the old man's back pocket and fishes
out the billfold.

While this process is going on a Police Cruiser passes down
the opposite side of the boulevard. The car starts to make
the U-turn.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

John Bull.

Hilly is looking for the wallet while the cops make their
turn.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

(louder)

John Bull.

Hilly finds something that might reveal the name and location
of the bank.

HILLY

Grollier's Bank. It ain't even on
this street.

The cruiser is pulling to the curb behind Hilly.

PTOLEMY

Goddammit, boy, I said John Bull.

HILLY

What?

LOUDSPEAKER
 Stop right there and turn around
 with your hands empty.

HILLY
 Shit.

While Hilly is standing there frozen the policemen climb out of the car, their guns out.

They come up on either side of Hilly. **POLICEMAN #1** (white male, brunette, 20s, in shape) removes the wallet from his hand.

HILLY (CONT'D)
 Hello, officers. My name is
 Hilliard Brown and this here is my
 Uncle, Mr. P-Tolemy Grey.

POLICEMAN #2
 (to Ptolemy)
 Are you okay, sir?

POLICEMAN #2 is a blond clone of #1.

Ptolemy doesn't seem to understand. He's the perfect victim.

POLICEMAN #1
 (to Hilly)
 Alright, down on your knees.

HILLY
 My knees? Man, these is new pants
 and he really is my uncle.

Policeman #1 pushes Hilly to hurry the process.

Seeing the danger Ptolemy makes a supreme intellectual effort.

PTOLEMY
 No, no, no, no, Mr. Bull. Uh-uh.
 No. This here is, um, um, Reggie...
 No, uh-uh, we goin' to see Reggie
 and this is Hilliard. He's my
 sister's daughter's son.

POLICEMAN #2
 (to Hilly)
 Show me some, ID.

Hilly is eager to comply.

PTOLEMY

He a bull in china store but he
ain't bad. We goin' to cash my
checks and, and, and see Reggie.

BYSTANDERS have stopped to watch. Some take out cellphones to
record the encounter. Hilly is frightened. Ptolemy is
anxious. The police check his ID.

POLICEMAN #1

Hilliard Brown?

HILLY

Yes, sir.

POLICEMAN #1

This is your uncle?

HILLY

My mother's uncle, my great uncle.

POLICEMAN #1

Why are you going through his
wallet?

HILLY

He got a account at Grollier's Bank
but he forgot the name so I was
looking for his card.

PTOLEMY

That's right, officers, what he
said.

The policemen don't like Hilly but there's not quite enough
here to bring the black man to his knees.

POLICEMAN #2

All right. Go on to the bank but
we're putting the word out on you.
We'll be watching.

HILLY

Don't need to watch me, Officer.
I'm just helpin' my uncle out.

As the police go back to their car...

PTOLEMY

I said John Bull.

INT. GROLLIER'S BANK - MID-AFTERNOON

Just another bungalow bank with linoleum floors, a row of tellers behind bulletproof glass, and a dozen or so customers. Opposite the wall of tellers, against a broad window is the high shelf where people fill out deposit slips, etc.

Hilly and Ptolemy are there. The nephew is getting his uncle to sign the backs of the three retirement checks. Standing a little way off from them is **SHIRLEY WRING** (black woman, 70s, sympathetic). She watching them surreptitiously.

HILLY

You get three checks every month?

PTOLEMY

One, two, three. My social security, my pension, and Sensia Howard's death benefit. One, two, three.

HILLY

Damn. You a lucky mothahfuckah. That what you is. If I had that money my life'd be made.

Ptolemy agonizes over his signature. He writes slowly, mouthing the letters as he goes. When he's finished he gives the checks to Hilly, who hurries off to a free window.

INT. GROLLIER'S BANK - CONTINUOUS

As soon as Hilly is gone Shirley approaches Ptolemy.

SHIRLEY WRING

Excuse me, sir.

PTOLEMY

Yeah?

SHIRLEY WRING

Hi. My name is Shirley, Shirley Wring.

She holds out a hand to shake. At first Ptolemy doesn't understand this simple greeting but Shirley reaches out for his hand and then shakes. After a moment he remembers the nicety.

PTOLEMY

Shirley Wring?

SHIRLEY WRING
W-R-I-N-G.

PTOLEMY
Hello, double-U, ara, eye, Enne,
gee.

They both grin like schoolkids.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)
My name is, um, um, Ptolemy.

SHIRLEY WRING
Um... You look like a good person,
Ptolemy.

PTOLEMY
Thank you.

Meanwhile, in the background Hilly has gotten into a discussion with the teller, **KORA BROOKS** (black woman, 30s, sharp as a tack). Hilly points at Ptolemy.

SHIRLEY WRING
This is embarrassing but I'm here to pay me and my daughter's phone bill but I'm short some money. I need forty dollars. I don't have it but I have this, this ring.

Shirley produces a six or seven carat fire opal ring. The setting is very old. She hands it to Ptolemy.

He takes the beautiful piece. Looking at it he is deeply impressed by the beauty.

PTOLEMY
This is a treasure. A treasure.

SHIRLEY WRING
I only need forty-eight dollars to pay the bill and all I ask is that you let me buy it back when I get my social security check.

Ptolemy isn't following all of what she's saying. He is, instead, thinking about his own words.

PTOLEMY
That's what Coydog was tryin' t'tell me. A treasure.

SHIRLEY WRING
So will you lend me the money?

Hilly and Kora approach the two. Kora comes right up to Ptolemy and proffers a hand. Ptolemy remembers to shake and seems to get some pleasure from the ability.

KORA BROOKS

Hello, Mr. Grey. Do you remember me? Kora Brooks.

PTOLEMY

(not really, but)
Uh-huh.

KORA BROOKS

Mr. Brown here says that you want him to cash your checks.

PTOLEMY

Yeah, uh-huh. Reggie's at his house and um, and um... Hilly is taking me there.

KORA BROOKS

So you know Mr. Brown?

PTOLEMY

He's my sister's daughter's child.

Like the cops before her Kora is leery of Hilly but Ptolemy is just lucid enough.

KORA BROOKS

(to Hilly)
Come with me, Mr. Brown.

They leave.

SHIRLEY WRING

So can you lend me the money, Ptolemy?

He looks at her, a little at sea.

SHIRLEY WRING (CONT'D)

For the ring, the treasure.

This reminds Ptolemy to look at the ring in his hand.

PTOLEMY

That's what Coydog meant. A treasure.

INT. GROLLIER'S BANK - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Here we have to see Hilly getting the money and pocketing half of it.

INT. GROLLIER'S BANK - CONTINUOUS

Shirley and Ptolemy are again grinning like schoolchildren. Hilly walks up to them.

HILLY

Let's go, Uncle. We already late.

PTOLEMY

This here is Shirley Wring. Double-U, ara, eye, Enne, gee.

Hilly gives her a curt nod.

HILLY

We got to go.

PTOLEMY

I need my money.

HILLY

I can hold it for you.

PTOLEMY

I need my money now.

Hilly hands his uncle an envelope with the money in it, at least the money he hasn't stolen. Ptolemy looks for more than just one envelope.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

Where's the other letters?

HILLY

They put all the money in one.

Ptolemy inspects the contents and then turns his attention to Shirley.

PTOLEMY

How much did you want, Shirley Wring?

SHIRLEY WRING

Forty-eight dollars.

PTOLEMY

Here, count out what you need.

She takes the envelope under scrutiny of Hilly. She counts out fifty dollars.

SHIRLEY WRING

I took an even fifty. Thank you so much, Mr. Grey, Ptolemy.

Ptolemy experiences great joy through Shirley's gratitude. He takes her hand and places the ring in her palm.

PTOLEMY

Thank you so much. This is my gift to you.

Shirley is beyond words. She turns to Hilly (who is confused by the whole interchange).

SHIRLEY WRING

Ptolemy says that you have his address.

HILLY

Yeah?

SHIRLEY WRING

Will you please write it down so I can return his kindness?

Off Hilly - whatever.

INT. CROSSTOWN BUS - LATER

Hilly and Ptolemy sit at the back of the bus in the two seats at the left side. The bus is only about a quarter filled. Ptolemy is sitting on the inside counting his money obsessively and shooting angry questioning stares at Hilly.

HILLY

Put your money away, man. Some thief liable to see an' knock you on the head.

Ptolemy looks around for said thief but no one fills the bill.

PTOLEMY

When Reggie take me to the bank I always get three hunnert dollars. One, two, three. This here's only one hunnert. One.

HILLY

You gave the rest of the money to
that beggar woman.

PTOLEMY

A even fifty.

HILLY

No, uh-uh. I saw her. She took
almost two hunnert. Almost two.

Hilly's comment is like an insoluble riddle that hurts
Ptolemy's mind. He turns back to his obsessive counting.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Ptolemy and Hilly are walking up a rather down-at-heel street
lined by small and medium sized houses. On the way Ptolemy
sees:

- Children riding their bikes down sidewalk and street.
- A big woman sitting and smoking a cigarette with an infant
on the ground between her feet.
- A woman giving a boy a haircut on the front porch. There's
a man and another boy waiting their turn.
- Two older women standing at the edge of their property
lines talking about the events of the day.

They come to a house where a dozen cars are parked; on the
sidewalk, on the front lawn, up in the driveway.

Ptolemy sees two dead rose bushes next to one that's barely
alive. This one living plant has a huge, beautiful yellow
and red flower. Next to it is a spigot that's leaking ever so
slightly.

HILLY

Here we are.

PTOLEMY

Is it a birthday party?

HILLY

Kinda.

Hilly leads to the open door of the house. Through the door
we can see dozens of people all seemingly talking at once.

Hilly and Ptolemy pass through the portal.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Two dozen or more **BLACK PEOPLE** are celebrating a repast/wake. They are mostly dressed nicely from conservative to sexy. They're eating, drinking, and talking but mostly being considerate.

Making their way through the crowd they are stopped by a man **CHARLES FONTANOT** (40s, dark-skinned, angry) and woman **MIMI FLOOD** (30s, light-skinned, intense).

CHARLES FONTANOT

Hey, Hilliard.

(to Ptolemy)

Mr. Grey, you don't know me. I'm Charles, Charles Fontanot and this is Mimi Flood. I just wanna tell you that if we find this man we will kill him. You hear me?

Ptolemy is a little afraid. The anger and the words make no sense to him. Hilly takes him by the elbow and leads him away to a short sofa that has only one inhabitant: **HILDA 'NIECIE' BROWN** (black woman, 50s, filled with life).

When she sees Ptolemy Niece bounces up from the sofa and rushes to embrace him.

NIECIE

Pitypapa! Baby, it's been too long.

The hug goes on a beat or two. Ptolemy likes being hugged. But when she let's go he's confused at who she might be.

NIECIE (CONT'D)

It's me, Pitypapa. Your favorite Niece. Niece.

Ptolemy struggles for the memory... and finally it comes to him.

PTOLEMY

June, um, June's girl.

NIECIE

That's right. You remember. You okay. And here you are at my house.

PTOLEMY

Where Reggie at? He ain't been to my house in eight cans.

Niece is both saddened and confused by her uncle. She looks around the faces of the wake finally seeing...

NIECIE

Robyn. Robyn, come here girl.

From the crowd emerges a young black woman/girl **ROBYN BARNET** (17, black, as lovely as she is hard). Robyn approaches her aunt.

NIECIE (CONT'D)

Pitypapa, I'd like you to meet my best friend Frida's little girl Robyn. Frida died and now Robyn live with me and Hilly. Robyn this is my mother's brother, Ptolemy Grey.

Robyn does her best to suppress a sneer.

ROBYN

Hi.

Ptolemy, on the other hand, is enchanted.

PTOLEMY

Robyn. First bird of spring.

NIECIE

She might be coming by to take care'a you sometime, Pitypapa. Ain't that right, girl?

ROBYN

I guess.

NIECIE

You know what young people like, Uncle. They just want hip-hop, rap and video games. But she's a good worker. You hungry?

PTOLEMY

I wanna see, um, Hilly, I mean Reggie. I wanna see Reggie.

NIECIE

Get sumpin in your stomach first. Get sumpin in your stomach and then Reggie.

(to Robyn)

Go take your uncle and fix him a plate.

ROBYN

Okay.

She takes the confused old man by the sleeve and pulls him along.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

Come on.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A taciturn Robyn is guiding Ptolemy through the crowded event. Robyn is focused on her duties while Ptolemy is distracted by every person in the room.

ROBYN

Come on, this way.

PTOLEMY

Where's Reggie at? The boy-thief told me he was here.

ROBYN

Reggie got into trouble because he stayed in town too long takin' care'a you.

PTOLEMY

Reggie's in trouble? Where at? We, we got to help him.

Robyn is a little taken aback by the vehemence of Ptolemy's response. She's still angry but now there's a real person she's mad at.

ROBYN

He ain't in trouble no mo'. That's over.

As Robyn guides Ptolemy through the crowded living room he sees images and personages of his long-ago life. Coydog is watching from a corner.

Coydog is then blocked out by Sensia, who is close-dancing with a woman; they kiss.

Finally, Robyn leads Ptolemy go through a door into the...

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Women are fixing the various foods being served from a buffet-like counter. Robyn brings eternally distracted Ptolemy to the counter. She hands him a stiff paper plate.

ROBYN
Collard greens?

PTOLEMY
Yes, ma'am.

She serves him.

ROBYN
Yams?

PTOLEMY
Please.

A yam or two are deposited.

ROBYN
Roast beef?

PTOLEMY
That's nasty.

ROBYN
Cole slaw?

Ptolemy studies the Pyrex bowl of the shredded salad.

PTOLEMY
I already got a portion of greens
on my plate.

ROBYN
What about fried chicken?

PTOLEMY
Oh yeah. Thighs please.

Enthusiastically, Ptolemy sticks out his paper plate for the chicken but he holds it at a slant and the food already there falls on Robyn and then the floor.

ROBYN
Godammit, old man! All over me and
the floor.

Ptolemy is so upset that that he drops the plate and covers his face with his hands.

PTOLEMY
I'm sorry. I dropped it.

Just then **BILLY FRERES** (black, early 30s, 5' 8", strong of build) comes up, the peacemaker. He immediately gives Robyn a rag to wipe herself off.

BILLY FRERES

Wipe yourself off at the sink, Lil
Sister.

Billy squats down to start cleaning the floor as Robyn goes to the sink. Ptolemy hovers a bit wanting to help but not being able to figure out how. It's not such a big job and Billy accomplishes it quickly.

Billy stands.

BILLY FRERES (CONT'D)

It ain't so bad, Mr. Grey. Robyn
ain't always like this, but you
know.

Billy Freres is a mystery to Ptolemy.

PTOLEMY

Do I know you, Mister?

BILLY FRERES

Billy Freres, sir.
(offers a hand)
Reggie been my best friend since we
were boys. Don't you remember? We
used to come to your house and
you'd let us look through your old
magazines; National Geographic and
Jet.

PTOLEMY

Lookin' for naked girls.

This memory is reflex. Billy smiles. Ptolemy likes the connection.

Robyn returns with a plastic bag. She takes the paper plate and dropped food from Billy. She's not near a rage anymore but merely taciturn.

ROBYN

Thank you, Billy.

BILLY FRERES

(nodding at Robyn)
You want some fried chicken, Mr.
Grey?

PTOLEMY

Thighs please.

Billy puts a couple of thighs on a paper plate and hands them to Ptolemy; who stands at the counter eating hungrily and sloppily. Leaving...

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Robyn and Billy.

ROBYN

Look at him. Just eatin' like a pig.

BILLY FRERES

He took care of Reggie when he needed a gentle hand. When we were kids he'd let us play for hours and never, not one time, said a hard word.

Robyn understands. She takes the few steps back to Ptolemy, who has just finished his chicken. She takes the plate and bones.

ROBYN

You need anything else?

PTOLEMY

I wanna see Reggie. I wanna see my nephew. Then after that I need to go to the baf'room.

Robyn's stern façade hides her secret pain.

ROBYN

Come on.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, LONG HALL - LATER

Robyn is leading Ptolemy down a long hallway that goes past back rooms.

Coming out of the hall is **ALFRED GULLA** (black man, 35, street). Gulla is a brutal man. He walks past Robyn but is stopped by Ptolemy who doesn't have good spatial awareness.

ALFRED GULLA

Move.

Ptolemy looks up at the rude brute trying to understand something. He sees a medallion of faux-gold the reads -PETER G.

PTOLEMY

Peter G.

ALFRED GULLA

What?

PTOLEMY

That's what your necklace say.
Peter G.

ALFRED GULLA

Mothahfuckah!

Alfred moves at Ptolemy but Robyn is quicker and gets between them.

ROBYN

Hold up, Alfred. This here's
Reggie's great uncle. He's almost a
hundred and don't know what he's
sayin'.

Gulla is a man filled with rage. The courage of the young woman stymies him somewhat and he bulls his way past the two, headed the opposite way down the hall.

PTOLEMY

He's mad, that Peter G.

ROBYN

His name is Alfred Gulla and he's
just a dog. He once had a friend
named Peter but he died in some
kinda fight.

PTOLEMY

Oh.

ROBYN

Come on.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, LONG HALL - CONTINUOUS

The long hall is like a trek, a journey of discovery for Ptolemy. Soon he hears a woman crying. They come to an open door with light spilling out. As they pass Ptolemy looks in and sees...

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

NINA LA FONTAINE-LLOYD (black, 27, exquisite) and her two children, **LATISHA** (4) and **ARTHUR** (6). Nina is languishing on a settee with her children sitting next to her.

Ptolemy stops to stare. Robyn looks and then comes in taking Ptolemy in tow.

NINA LA FONTAINE-LLOYD

Robyn.

Nina rises to her feet feeling real grief. She tries to embrace Robyn but the girl is halfhearted returning the hug.

ROBYN

This here's Reggie's great uncle.

NINA LA FONTAINE-LLOYD

Oh. Reggie told me so much about you.

Nina hugs Ptolemy who is always ready for an embrace.

PTOLEMY

Where Reggie at?

Nina starts crying again and returns to the settee.

Ptolemy is watching the poor sad children.

PTOLEMY (CONT'D)

They little kids like me and Maude Petit back in Burdette.

ROBYN

Come on.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, LONG HALL - CONTINUOUS

Walking down the hall again they come to a closed door.

ROBYN

You sure you wanna go in?

Ptolemy reaches for the doorknob and turns it.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, SMALL BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ptolemy comes in first. The chamber is so small that it only has room for the raised coffin it contains.

Ptolemy realizes the depth of this moment. He walks stiffly to the side of the coffin and looks down on...

REGGIE'S CORPSE. He's in a suit and there's a false smile formed on his lips by an inept undertaker. There's a light brown plaster plug in Reggie's dark brown forehead from where the bullet struck him.

Ptolemy feels the pain so acutely that he crumples on the coffin and Robyn has to hold him up to keep from falling to the floor.

Ptolemy breaks down into tears, something Robyn has been unable to do. Her hard life up until now has had no room for tears. But Ptolemy's exhibition of grief opens her heart and she cries with him.

PTOLEMY

Why you got him in here?

ROBYN

Somebody shot him. It was a drive-by.

PTOLEMY

Nobody told me. Nobody said.

ROBYN

Didn't nobody call?

PTOLEMY

No... I mean I don't remember. Maybe the news lady on the TV. There's too much talk.

Robyn understands instinctively that her blaming Ptolemy makes no sense and that this man has more love for Reggie than anyone else in the family.

ROBYN

You want me to get Hilly to take you home, Uncle Grey?

PTOLEMY

That sloppy boy? No. Uh-uh. He knocked down my magazines. He don't listen worf a damn an,' an', an' he stole my, my one, two, three.

Robyn understands.

ROBYN

Yeah. I got to hide my money in a sock and I keep this...

She pulls a black-bladed, cork-haft knife from somewhere and displays it her soon-to-be benefactor.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
 ...so he don't try to push up on me
 when I'm sleepin' on the sofa or
 when I'm in the bathroom.

Ptolemy is a little intimidated by the knife. She puts it away.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
 You got your door key?

Ptolemy is a little lost with this question. Robyn grabs hold of the doorknob and points at the skeleton-keyhole.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
 Door key.

Ptolemy takes a moment more and then pulls out his shirt collar, reaches in and comes out with a brass key on a necklace of twine. Robyn smiles.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
 Come on.

As they head down the hall Ptolemy reaches out to take Robyn's hand.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, LONG HALL - CONTINUOUS

Retracing their steps down the long hall Robyn and Ptolemy and pass the sitting room. They both peer in but see different sights.

- Ptolemy sees Nina and Reggie sitting side by side with the children playing on the floor before him.

- Robyn sees Alfred Gulla in a passionate yet brutal embrace.

INT. NIECIE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Robyn and Ptolemy return to find that most of the Guests have gone. Niece is bidding farewell to a **COUPLE** around her age while brooding Hilly stands to the side.

Robyn takes her newfound friend to Niece.

ROBYN
 I'ma take Papa Grey home.

HILLY
 (petulant)
 I'm s'posed to take him.

ROBYN
 Papa Grey don't like you. He say
 you messed up his stuff.

HILLY
 His house was already a mess when I
 got there.

ROBYN
 And you made it worse.

PTOLEMY
 Yeah. An' you, you stoled my, my
 one, two, three.

NIECIE
 (to Hilly)
 What's he talkin' about?

HILLY
 How the hell should I know? He
 crazy.

Niecie takes that extra moment to express, silently, that she
 knows there's more to Ptolemy's complaint.

NIECIE
 (to Hilly)
 Do you wanna go ovah Papa Grey's
 house three days a week an' take
 care'a him?

Hilly sulks.

NIECIE (CONT'D)
 Okay then. Let Robyn do it.

ROBYN
 Come on, Papa Grey. Let's go get
 the bus and take you to your house.

PTOLEMY
 Is Reggie gonna come on later?

ROBYN
 Uh-huh. Yeah. He'll be there on,
 um, Tuesday.

They go out the front door onto the twilight street.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

The house is empty. The TV and radio are tuned to their perpetual stations. Sounds of the key in the lock and then the door comes open. Holding Ptolemy's twine key-necklace Robyn enters, finds and flicks on the light. Roaches scuttle across the floor. Ptolemy comes in behind her.

Robyn's face reflects the bad smells and response to the clutter. She stomps on a roach or two.

ROBYN

Papa Grey! It stink in here. Look at all these roaches everywhere.

PTOLEMY

It's okay. You don't have to get knife-mad.

ROBYN

It's not okay. Look at all this. Where you even sleep in this mess?

Ptolemy reacts more to her anger than the words. He puts a hand on her shoulder but she shrugs him off and goes to the radio/TV.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

At least turn off the TV and radio. I can't hear myself think.

PTOLEMY

No! Don't!

Robyn stops and turns to the old man.

ROBYN

Why not?

PTOLEMY

I need my, my sound. If you do that I might lose it.

ROBYN

You could turn it back on in the morning.

PTOLEMY

No, I, it don't work like that.

Robyn understands. It's like talking to a man has fallen down a well.

ROBYN
Where's your bed?

PTOLEMY
Down here.

Ptolemy leads Robyn to a long table at the bottom of a three-high stack of tables. Therein is a thin mat under a blanket and a pillow.

ROBYN
You sleep here?

PTOLEMY
Where Reggie?

ROBYN
He comin' Tuesday, Uncle. I already told you that.

ROBYN (CONT'D)
I'ma go now, Papa Grey, and let you get ready for bed. Okay?

It isn't okay but Ptolemy won't ask her to stay. She feels the pull but she's already done all her work so...

ROBYN (CONT'D)
Okay, Uncle?

Robyn moves closer and takes Ptolemy by the hand. How long has it been since he's had this kind of intimacy with a human being? His visage is gratefulness.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

We see Robyn going out the front door.

Camera moves back to allow us to see Ptolemy looking out from behind a stack of chairs, watching Robyn go.

INT. PTOLEMY'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

A recorder sonata and a Wall Street stock report are playing. On top of the TV console Ptolemy's studies pictures of his family. There are pictures of Billy Freres and Reggie as adolescents and Niece as a lovely young woman. There's even a picture of a 40-something Ptolemy arm in arm with Sensia. They really seem to be in love.

Ptolemy whispers names of people he remembers and concentrates, trying to recall those he doesn't remember.

Then he walks toward the kitchen. On the way he passes the muslin cloth that conceals the door to what he thinks of as 'Sensia's bedroom'. He touches the cloth so very lightly.

SENSIA (O.S.)

I love you, Pitypapa. And I always
will. No matter what.

These words bring our demented hero to tears.

COYDOG (O.C.)

What you cryin' about now?

Turning Ptolemy sees the beloved apparition of his childhood mentor.

PTOLEMY

I don't remember.

COYDOG

You got to find what I give you and
do what I asked before it's too
late.

In this state Ptolemy is almost sane. There's a pathos to his melancholy over Coydog's request. His head hanging low he walks past (maybe even through) Coydog.

COYDOG (CONT'D)

Are you listenin' to me?

When he gets to his 'bed' Ptolemy uses a small wooden block to step up and sit on the table, his feet hanging down. It is then that he looks directly at his old friend.

PTOLEMY

I done tole you, Coy. I forget what
I did with it and I'm ascaed too.
I'm ascaed.

This admission is like shackles to Coydog. He's trapped by Ptolemy's cowardice. Slowly he fades into the detritus of the hoarder's room. He fades away almost completely but there's still a trace of him in the fabric of the ruins.