

Work Sample 3 – Hollywood (from “Historical Inaccuracies”), ZZ Claybourne

Dying had become pretty old for Len Turman by the time he turned forty-six. He'd played the voice of a robot, and the robot had died. He'd been the young black dude in a platoon of brave men, and he'd died. He'd played a sword-wielding immortal and felt good that in the film he was supposed to have lived over four thousand years...until an older, evil immortal deceived and decapitated him. He'd had things rammed into him, poured over him, sliced diagonally across him, shot through him, horribly-gone-wrong spliced into him, lemming-ed off a cliff, absorbed, bitten in half, exploded, knifed, poisoned, burned, and even—as the only black man in a film about the French revolution—guillotined. He'd performed every stunt imaginable and acted against a rainbow assortment of special effects screens. He had yet to have onscreen sex, which is why he got into acting in the first damn place, and today was his birthday. Birthdays were tailor-made for deciding when certain shit was about to stop.

Len Turman made calls. He wasn't a bad actor, so he made convincing calls. By the time he was done there were twelve black men of varying ages, incomes and acting abilities parked outside his home. Of the twelve, two were famous enough for paparazzi, and before you knew it Len Turman was in front of the TV cameras looking the world dead in the eye and telling Hollywood:

“We quit.

“No more will we die while lesser actors go on to numerous sequels. No more will we turn our backs on wounded villains or provide chewable ethnic flavor.”

“Well,” somebody said.

“We are not your surprise twist endings, your tragi-comic sidekicks, or your security officers. We are actors, dammit—”

“Well, well.”

“We are men!”

“Full grown.”

“We are not going to be the characters everybody knows not to invest too much interest in!”

“Bubba was my best good friend!”

“Oh, no! To quote our great acting brother, we are huge, we are monumental... King Kong ain't got shit on me!”

“Jungle boogie!”

“Effective immediately, if the subplot calls for somebody to die, it's gonna be from somebody a whole lot shades lighter than me.”

So a bunch of light-skinned brothers got work. But it wasn't the same, everybody knew it. Moviegoers knew it. The right expectation just wasn't there. The ‘Why A Brother Gotta Die?’ movement kept growing and growing, until eight months later Len was found buck naked and OD'd between two silicon mounds whose dark carpet most certainly did not match the highlights on her blonde head. Except he'd been married for eighteen years and was more than in love with his wife, he was friends with her.

Word filtered quicker than was likely that Len Turman was a known titty man. Jessica Kitaen's titties were fake, but they were the best fake money could buy. Fox News aired snotty hourly segments on the downfall of the so-called ‘Man with a

Mission,' and it didn't take long before light-skinned brothers returned to working as lawyers or shifty boyfriends. Darker brothers returned to work too: Hollywood memorialized Len Turman the only way it knew how. Made a bunch of movies about him.