

OSCAR

Written by

Abigail Burdess

Based on research by Professor Binna Kandola and Kulraj Bains

INTERIOR, WAREHOUSE, EARLY MORNING.

Stepladders, rolled up red carpet, tools... a warehouse shelf with a row of Oscar statuettes. Work overalls flash past. An Oscar statuette begins to wobble, to totter, then it falls, into the next. One by one, the Oscars fall like dominoes into...

A vast can of whitewash. A hand lifts the Oscar, its gold turned white.

CARETAKER (OFF SCREEN)

How's this happened?!?

INT, THE INVESTIGATOR'S KITCHEN, MORNING.

February 2016. An untouched cup of coffee cools on the kitchen counter. Andy, 40, the investigator, watches - reflected in his spectacles - the TV screen. On it, action hero Will Smith is smiling charmingly.

INTERVIEWER

Jada's said she's boycotting. So will you be attending the Oscar ceremony this year?

On screen, Will smiles ruefully.

WILL SMITH

No. My wife's not going. It would be awkward to show up with Charlize...

Andy's wife, Elaine (23) beautiful, enters, carrying laundry.

ELAINE

Honey, could you remember to pick up the...

Andy turns to her. She is silenced by the look on his face.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

What is it?

Andy gestures to the TV.

ANDY

Will. He's boycotting the Oscars. Along with Jada Pinkett-Smith and Spike Lee.

The laundry falls from Elaine's hand.

ELAINE

What? But why?

ANDY

Every single nominee this year was white.

Elaine is shell-shocked.

ELAINE

I don't believe you.

Andy hands Elaine a copy of the LA Times. A picture of Cheryl Boone-Isaacs, African American, 69, stunning. The headline reads: 'Academy President "heart-broken and frustrated" by lack of diversity.'

ELAINE (CONT'D)

But why? Why are the Oscars so white?

On screen, Will is explaining...

WILL SMITH V/O

...the nominations reflect the Academy. The Academy reflects the industry, and then the industry reflects America.

ANDY

I don't know. I don't know. But I'm going to find out...

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR'S OFFICE DAY.

A chaotic office. Sam, 48, Andy's boss, graying, rumpled, has his feet on a large desk strewn with papers. Andy plucks nervously at the copy of the LA Times.

SAM

Ask all you like but I'm telling you, they'll never give you those ethnicity stats! The Academy's a secret club of 6,000 industry professionals - they would never publicly disclose their membership!

ANDY

Well, I know that now.

Sam sees a copy of the LA Times in Andy's hand.

SAM

Wait a minute...Didn't the LA Times blow this whole thing wide open back in 2012? I've got a copy in here somewhere...

Sam indicates a massive pile of old newspapers.

ANDY

I've got a better idea.

Andy takes out his laptop.

CUT TO:

INT. ANDY'S HOME, NIGHT.

Andy's bespectacled profile is outlined in the glow of his computer screen - Andy scans the LA TIMES data: Black filmmakers 2% - Latino filmmakers - 1%. Academy 94% white. Andy's mouth falls open.

ANDY

(under breath)

Oh my God.

Andy yawns. Elaine appears at the doorway in a nightgown.

ELAINE

You coming to bed?

ANDY

In a minute...

Elaine disappears. Andy checks his watch. His eyelids are heavy. He puts his head down on the desk.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ACADEMY.

Andy's face presses against an ancient door. It creaks open. Before him a vast hall - everything is strange and shadowy, for this is Andy's DREAM.

As Andy peers into the gloom, light spears through arched windows to reveal...

Old people. Closest to him - four men, then one woman, behind another four men and one woman then another, and another - rank upon rank, a vast phalanx of old people. 6,028 Academy members - an ancient army in Ted Baker shirts. Amongst these just 61 are black, 120 are Latino. On the front row one East Asian man suddenly catches Andy's eye, and nods. Yes. As Andy stares the members step forward as one and push the door shut in Andy's face.

Andy looks up. A sign above the door reads 'The Academy'.

Andy wakes with a start.

ANDY

I've got to tell Sam...

INT. INVESTIGATOR'S OFFICE, NIGHT

The office is even messier. Andy is pacing. A board behind him is covered with statistics.

ANDY

... and nearly four out of five Academy members are men: old men - only fourteen percent are under fifty. The average age is sixty-two.

SAM

Sixty-two, huh?

ANDY

Those figures are from 2012. By 2013 the average had gone up to sixty-three. The average Academy member looks like this.

Andy indicates a picture on the board of Ed Harris.

SAM

That's Ed Harris.

ANDY

It is.

Sam runs a hand through his hair.

SAM

What the hell are the Academy doing about this?

ANDY

They've announced a diversity initiative - invited almost seven hundred new members, over forty percent people of colour.

Andy indicates photos of Idris Elba, Daniel Dae Kim and Freida Pinto, all wearing very little.

SAM

Why are they wearing so little?

ANDY

Old movie trick. If you're trying to convey a lot of information, you make good-looking actors take their clothes off so the audience don't get bored.

SAM

Clever. So the Academy think that'll stave off an Oscars boycott?
That's gotta change the demographic?

ANDY

Not really. Academy members serve for life, so change is glacial, even if all the invitees accept, the make-up of the Academy'll only change by a tiny margin. But Boone-Isaacs says she's reviewing the recruitment process to become a member.

SAM

What is the recruitment process?

ANDY

Let me show you a movie called 'How to join the Academy'.
Andy pulls up a flat screen.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Let's start with the credits.

Andy points the remote. The credits roll.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Writers, producers and directors need a minimum of two credits, actors; three, and an 'unusually high level of distinction' in their fields, but you can bypass all that if you've got two friends to sponsor you...

Andy plays a clip: Oscar nominee Stand By Me. Two young white boys smoke cigarettes in a tree-house. On the floor is a trap door. A knock at it.

GORDIE (FROM STAND BY ME)

That's not the secret knock!

VERN (FROM STAND BY ME)

Forget the secret knock let me in!

GORDIE/CHRIS

Vern!

The white boys let the third white kid in.

ANDY

But only...

Andy clicks his remote to cue up the next movie...

ANDY (CONT'D)

If the board approves.

Andy presses play. The Shawshank Redemption. Four old white guys and an old white woman sit in judgement as our hero, Oscar nominee Morgan Freeman, walks towards them. His footsteps echo.

ANDY (CONT'D)

But the surest way to become a Member of the Academy - the way you are automatically considered for membership - is to get nominated.

SAM

But there were no non-white nominees! The snake is biting its tail!
How do you get nominated?

ANDY

I don't know.

SAM

Go see Hutchinson. Old friend of mine. He might be able to help us.

CUT TO:

AN UNDERGROUND CAR PARK, NIGHT.

Andy meets Hutchinson, 65. Andy checks they are alone.

ANDY

Hutchinson?

Hutchinson nods.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Not very talkative are you?

Hutchinson shrugs.

ANDY (CONT'D)

You know how to get nominated?

Hutchinson hands over a heavy brown envelope. Andy takes out pages and pages of data.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Throw me a bone here. I'm just trying to find out why the Oscars are so white.

Hutchinson stubs out a cigarette.

HUTCHINSON

In that case... Get in.

Hutchinson indicates his battered Prius. Andy and Hutchinson swing into it. Hutchinson engages the engine and speeds off.

HUTCHINSON (CONT'D)

It works like this.

CUT TO:

INT. LEONARDO DI CAPRIO'S MANSION

LEONARDO DI CAPRIO (Leo) drinks tea in his posing pouch.

HUTCHINSON V/O

Members vote on potential nominees for standard awards in up to 25 categories...

Leo's PA, brings Leo a letter with tastefully embossed writing.

HUTCHINSON

...yet members from each field may only put forward nominees in their respective field - actors vote for actors etc.

Out of the envelope falls... The ballot sheet. It says 'Please rank in order of preference 1,2,3,4,5'. Next to number one, Leo writes 'Leonardo di Caprio'.

HUTCHINSON V/O

The Academy instructs voters to "follow their hearts".

Leo writes 'Leonardo Di Caprio' in all four of the other slots.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR, NIGHT.

Andy waves the brown envelope.

ANDY

What if their hearts are full of unconscious bias?

Hutchinson screeches round a corner.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE: THE JOURNEY OF THE CARD.

The nomination card is put in another envelope. Into a handbag... a collection box... a mail bag... a mail van and up the stairs into offices marked 'Price Waterhouse Cooper'. Onto a desk. A manicured hand takes out the card. And places it on a pile marked 'Leonardo do Caprio'.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEONARDO DI CAPRIO'S MANSION, MORNING INTERCUT/
THE BALLOT STATION/THE CAR PARK

Leo, in swimming trunks, stretches in the sunshine.

HUTCHINSON V/O

Price Waterhouse Coopers are looking for the 'magic number', the number of votes that turns a name on the ballot into an official nominee. Let's say there are most first choice votes for Leonardo di Caprio.

In the ballot station, a hand holds up Leo's card/Leo stands on tiptoes at the edge of the pool. And dives into lane one.

Hutchinson's Prius screeches round a corner.

HUTCHINSON

...the ballots that named him as a first choice are set aside...

On the ballot desk, a pile of cards for Matt Damon.

HUTCHINSON V/O

There are now four spots left.

In Leo's pool, in lane two, Matt Damon dives in.

HUTCHINSON V/O

The actor with the fewest first-place votes is automatically knocked out, and those ballots are redistributed based on the voters' second place choices...

In lane three, Michael Fassbender dives in. Michael sees Matt, crawling fast, and begins to race.

HUTCHINSON V/O (CONT'D)

And so on.

In lane four Bryan Cranston dives.

HUTCHINSON V/O (CONT'D)
Until we have our five nominees...

Eddie Redmayne dives into lane five. All race. Down into the water, the darkness of the pool, of the tarmac.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR PARK.

Hutchinson pulls into exactly the same parking spot he was in before.

ANDY
Isn't this where we started?

HUTCHINSON
Well, to be in the race...

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR'S OFFICE, NIGHT.

Andy is reporting to Sam. Hutchinson's and Andy's voices merge together.

HUTCHINSON/ANDY
... you got to be on the ballot.

SAM
So it's a catch 22 - without more diverse film-makers the Academy is unlikely to nominate more diverse film-makers?

ANDY
There is another possibility.

SAM
What's that?

Andy shrugs.

ANDY
Maybe there was no one to nominate this year...

SAM
What are you saying? You can't mean...

ANDY

Yes! It's just a hunch but maybe it's not just the Academy which is prejudiced but the whole film industry. Just look at this screenplay!
(MORE)

ANDY (CONT'D)

Why is my character called 'Andy' when in real life I'm called Kulraj? Why are you called Sam when you are based on Professor Kandola? Why is Elaine, my wife, seventeen years younger than me, beautiful and almost mute? We deal in stereotypes and call them archetypes. What did Will Smith say?

SAM

"The nominations reflect the Academy. The Academy reflects the industry, and then the industry reflects America."

ANDY

Let's hope that all the discussion around diversity might make the Academy more aware of their own prejudices in 2017...

SAM

I'll believe it when I see it.

CUT TO:

THE OSCAR CEREMONY 2017

Warren Beatty double-checks the envelope.

WARREN BEATTY

And the Academy Award for Best Picture...

FAYE DUNAWAY

La La Land.

CUT TO:

INT. INVESTIGATOR'S KITCHEN, EVENING.

Sam, Andy and Elaine are watching the Oscars. Andy sighs.

JORDAN HOROWITZ

I'm sorry! No! There a mistake. Moonlight! You guys won best picture!

Sam and Andy look at each other. Andy begins to grin.

THE END.