

A FAMILY REUNION

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IN THE BEGINNING.

Ancient drawings appear on yellow, wrinkled parchment.

ANCESTORS, locked in chains, float across the Atlantic Ocean.

YOUNG CHILD'S VOICE

In the not-so-distant past, our  
ancestors found themselves chained  
and subjugated, brought to a new  
land against their will.

MAAFA, a deific goddess, watches from the shoreline as the  
ancestors fill the land. At night, inside their homes, they  
pray.

YOUNG CHILD'S VOICE (CONT'D)

They prayed for deliverance,  
freedom, and vengeance. Maafa heard  
their cries and shared their pain.

DEITIES surround Maafa. They place a hand over her mouth.  
Grab her hands. Obscure her eyes.

YOUNG CHILD'S VOICE (CONT'D)

The gods tasked their sibling with  
watching over those stolen, but  
forbade her from interfering in  
man's choices.

Fire. Blood. Smoke. The clashing of weapons. Maafa watches as  
plantations burn to the ground.

YOUNG CHILD'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Maafa refused to abide, and gave  
blessings to those who fought.

The deities plunge their beings into Maafa's heart, mouth,  
and hands. They confiscate each from the body.

YOUNG CHILD'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Enraged by this interference, the  
gods stripped Maafa of immortality,  
power, and divine speech.

Maafa marches from the heavens in despair.

YOUNG CHILD'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Shunned by the gods and eternally  
bereft from conversation with her  
kin, Maafa became disillusioned  
with her duty.

(MORE)

## YOUNG CHILD'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Now those who cry out for salvation  
from their oppressor, must come  
with "compensation."

Maafa weeps on the shoreline, then, descends into the chaotic world of the humans she loves and despises.

EXT. A PRAYER FOR FREEDOM. NIGHT.

CHYRON: MISSISSIPPI. 1770.

NADEA (13), a dark-skinned child with a warrior spirit, prostrates herself to the gods in the depths of the forest.

NADEA

My family. My people. My body.

Nadea reveals a trace of water in one palm... blood in the other. She pours it, then crunches her fingers into the dirt. At that moment, HOOVES COLLIDE. DOGS SNARL. Torches illuminate the area. WHITE OVERSEERS edge towards their prey.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANATION. MOMENTS LATER.

Nadea's thrown at the feet of WILLIAM EDGEFIELD (60s), her slave-master, and EZEKIEL (40s), a light-skinned house slave.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING.

SLAVES shiver, overseers hold torches.

WILLIAM

This is a warning to every single  
one'a y'all.

William throws Nadea to the dirt. Ivory white crosses stand before her. ABIGAIL (30s), her mother, CHARLES (30s), her father, and NATHANIEL (16), her brother, are strapped to each. Barely conscious. A final cross beckons for its victim.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

You bring the devil to my doorstep!

William focuses his glare at PATRICIA (12), his lily-white blonde daughter, standing next to Ezekiel.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Taint the innocence of my progeny  
with your decadence. Your--  
witchcraft. This is a House of God  
and I aim to keep it that way.

William gestures to the white overseers. *Do it.* They throw torches on the kindle. The flames lick the ivory away.

NADEA

NO!

Nadea scrambles towards her family, but William grabs her by the wrist. Ezekiel moves forward. William opens a greasy palm, and Ezekiel drops a dagger into it.

WILLIAM

Save the talk for the other side.

William thrusts the dagger into Nadea's proper right side.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

String'er up!

They hoist Nadea up.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Let this be your one and only lesson.

He ignites Nadea's cross. She lets out a blood curdling SCREAM to the heavens. Then, Maafa -- dressed in the moonlight -- stands before her.

MAAFA

Are you ready to serve?

They touch. A BOND IS FORGED. Nadea stands before everyone taller, older, and stronger. A DIVINE SYMBOL etched into the nape of her neck.



She flicks her wrist. William, Patricia, Ezekiel, and the overseers burst into white flames. The ground turns pitch black. Nathaniel, still burning, reaches out. Before the siblings touch, we--

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. UFC GYM. NIGHT.

CHYRON: LOS ANGELES. PRESENT DAY.

OCTAGON. EMMANUEL ADEDEJI (14), dark-skinned, circles THE OPPONENT (15), white. Jab. Deflected. Hook. Dodged.

A swivel then straight punch. Emmanuel reels back. Blood oozes from his lip. He evades the next punch and delivers a jab straight to the face. The opponent falls. Emmanuel pounds his chest, and turns to see three empty seats in the crowd.

EMMANUEL'S COACH

What are you doing?! Turn around!

The opponent tackles Emmanuel to the ground. He scrambles upwards and tucks Emmanuel's arm into a full wrist lock. THE REFEREE slides to the mat, looking for the tap out. Emmanuel writhes in pain as the opponent wraps him up tighter.

OUTSIDE THE OCTAGON. CORNELL ADEDEJI (40s), a mountain of a man, MICHIEL ADEDEJI (40s), and SHERECE (11), decked out in thick-rimmed glasses, rush to their seats. Michiel sees her son's situation and rushes to his coach.

BACK INSIDE. The opponent pulls down Emmanuel's arm.

EMMANUEL

Go on! Break it! Break it then!

REFEREE

That's it! Fight's over!

The referee rips the opponent off Emmanuel. The arm throbs, purple and swollen. Emmanuel fights the urge to whimper even in the slightest UNTIL--

INSIDE A SECRET CHAMBER.

A hand dips into an ORNATE, CEREMONIAL JAR. White soot and ash dangles from the fingertips. The fingertips slide the soot and ash across-- THE DIVINE SYMBOL ON THEIR NECK.

BACK IN THE OCTAGON.

A passive ocean washes over Emmanuel. He finds himself OUT OF REALITY AND INTO--

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING. NIGHT.

Four crosses burn. Nadea, visibly in her sixties but brimming with vitality, stands before Emmanuel.

NADEA

Get up and fight.

She touches the nape of Emmanuel's neck. Black and white soot crinkles on his skin. The divine symbol appears. An insidious voice invades the space.

WILLIAM (O.S.)  
He's weak.

William stands a few feet away with a toothy grin.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)  
Aren't you, nigger?

Enraged, Emmanuel pounces on William, beating him to a pulp as we flow BACK TO REALITY TO--

INT. UFC GYM. NIGHT.

Emmanuel's on top of his opponent, beating him into the ground. The referee grabs at him, but Emmanuel thrashes out of his grasp and swings on him instead. Michiel grabs her son from behind. She throws him to the ground, locking him in place. Emmanuel struggles against her. As he thrashes, the divine symbol burns and festers on his skin as we--

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. DAY.

Nadea stares out across the acres of land before her. She reaches out. Ezekiel hands over her cane. She heads inside the mansion's MAIN FOYER. Paintings, sculptures, and tapestries -- dedicated to the black body -- pepper the walls. WHITE SERVANTS bow their head. Nadea heads into the KITCHEN. She tastes from a steaming pot on the stove.

NADEA  
Add a lil more salt.

We follow as Nadea makes her way into a BEDROOM. She fluffs a pillow in front of a servant.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
Four pillows per bed. Go into town if we need more.

Nadea walks within a BOTANICAL GARDEN encased in thick glass. Flowers bloom within it despite the cold weather. She informs a servant.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
Don't let the kids run through here. Understand.

Nadea finally lands in THE MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI -- where family pictures, paintings, awards, art, and sculptures adorn every crevice of the space.

Nadea hobbles past the ORNATE, CEREMONIAL JAR and up to a LARGE PAINTING -- one that eerily resembles Emmanuel, Michiel, Cornell, and Sherece. Nadea violently coughs. Ezekiel, at attention near the museum's doors, steps forward. Nadea waves him off.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
I'll be seeing you again soon,  
Nathaniel.

FOCUS ON: THE YOUNG BOY IN THE PAINTING AS WE--

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. THE FAMILY SUV. DAY.

Emmanuel staring out the window. A sign reading WELCOME TO COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI fades into the distance. He turns his attention to the front passenger seat. Cornell reads his iPad. HEADLINE: BLACK-OWNED MENTAL HEALTH APP CRASHES & BURNS.

ZAP! Emmanuel reels. Sherece holds up wires connected to a mouse-sized defibrillator.

EMMANUEL  
What the hell, Sherece!?

MICHIEL  
Language.

EMMANUEL  
What about her?

CORNELL  
Stop using your brother as a guinea pig, please.

SHERECE  
My invention is for endothermic vertebrates of the class Aves or small mammals of the genus Mus.  
(off everyone's silence)  
It's for birds and mice, not guinea pigs.

EMMANUEL  
Can it fly?

SHERECE  
Of course it can't fly, you dolt.

EMMANUEL

Dope.

Emmanuel snatches the device and attempts to roll down the window. Michiel immediately presses the CHILD LOCK BUTTON.

SHERECE

Give it back!

CORNELL

Emmanuel!

EMMANUEL

What?

MICHIEL

Stop messing with your sister!

Sherece digs into Emmanuel's pocket and pulls out a FOLDED TOURNAMENT INVITE. Sherece holds it up, ready to tear.

SHERECE

Return my property, or else!

EMMANUEL

You're not that stupid.

Sherece tears at the edge. Emmanuel tries to snatch it away.

MICHIEL

HAND THEM OVER, NOW!

Cornell holds out his hand. The kids hand one another their possessions. Cornell shakes his head.

CORNELL

Nope. Give'm here.

Begrudgingly, Sherece hands over her mini-defibrillator. Emmanuel stares at the tourney invite with disappointment.

THE 6TH ANNUAL MMA YOUTH STATE CHAMPIONSHIP. YOU'RE INVITED.

EMMANUEL

Why'd this dumb reunion have to happen on the same weekend?

He passes the tourney invite to Cornell.

CORNELL

We're here one or two days tops. You'll get your chance to go full caveman on Sunday when we're back.

SHERECE

Why do you even get to go when you  
lost?

EMMANUEL

Top two always go, dummy.

MICHIEL

No name-calling!

Sherece sticks out her tongue. The SUV hits a pothole.  
Sherece yelps and grabs Emmanuel.

EMMANUEL

Lil scaredy-cat.

SHERECE

Am not!

CORNELL

Leave your sister be.

(then)

Honestly, I'm shocked they didn't  
ban you.

EMMANUEL

For what? Standing my ground?

MICHIEL

Don't start.

EMMANUEL

I just want to know why you came  
after me instead of homie.

CORNELL

No one heard him say...

(hesitantly)

...the "N" word.

EMMANUEL

That's 'cause he didn't say the "N"  
word, he said nigger--

MICHIEL

You're pushing your luck.

EMMANUEL

Maybe both of you would've caught  
it if y'all had actually showed up  
on time, Michiel.

EXT. SHITTY RURAL GAS STATION. DAY.

The SUV pulls into the station. BACK INSIDE THE SUV.

MICHIEL

Is this what you really want today?

EMMANUEL

...sorry.

He throws open the door--

CORNELL

Just wait.

--and jumps right the hell out. Sherece scrambles out, too. Cornell sighs. *These kids.* Cornell thinks, then--

CORNELL (CONT'D)

What day is the talent show again?  
I still gotta pick up a mouse for  
Sherece.

MICHIEL

Check the invite. I'll ask Ezekiel  
to get us one, though.

CORNELL

Thanks. You know, 'cause God forbid  
we don't participate in a mandatory  
talent show... at a family reunion.  
Sounds completely normal to me.

MICHIEL

It's not mandatory. The kids in our  
family are talented. Really  
talented. The show's about  
embracing their individual gifts  
and teaching them not to be shy or  
embarrassed about showcasing them.

Cornell grabs an envelope from the door panel. The invitation  
inside reads: THE ADEDEJI FAMILY REUNION - 250 YEARS STRONG.

CORNELL

I still think it's strange your  
family gets together every fifty  
years. That's a pretty long gap.

MICHIEL

You and your folks don't even have  
reunions, so...

Cornell opens his mouth to respond, then closes it. A BURLY WHITE man pumps gas. He spits out tobacco as he watches them. Cornell pulls his Glock 19 from the glove compartment.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)  
Really? You barely know how to use that thing.

CORNELL  
This is the deep, DEEP south.

MICHIEL  
It's home.

CORNELL  
It's your home. It ain't mine. I just might have to get lethal in this bitch.

Michiel disarms Cornell, releases all the bullets, and pops out the one in the chamber. Silence, then--

CORNELL (CONT'D)  
You want me to pump the gas?

MICHIEL  
I WANT your head in the game. We cannot let those two run all over us -- not this weekend. We're coming here asking for a big handout.  
(re: iPad)  
Because of what you did. So we have to play by Granny Nadea's rules. All of us.

Dejected, Cornell nods in agreement. Sensing this, Michiel pecks him on the cheek.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)  
Now, please go pump the gas.

INT. SHITTY RURAL GAS STATION. DAY.

Emmanuel browses the store. THE SHOPKEEPER (70s), rural white, follows Emmanuel across the station with his eyes. Emmanuel notices, but keeps it moving. Cornell walks up to the register.

CORNELL  
Thirty on three, sir.

Sherece decides between a Snickers or a Butterfinger.

EMMANUEL  
 Michiel said no candy.

SHERECE  
 (dismissively)  
 MiChIEl SaID nO cAnDY.

Emmanuel rolls his eyes. He grabs a drink from a cooler when he notices-- SOLOMON (15), a boy with unblinking eyes, staring him down. The boy crumples white and black soot between his fingers. Cornell finishes his transaction--

CORNELL  
 Aye you two! Let's go.

Sherece exits. Emmanuel approaches Solomon.

EMMANUEL  
 We got a problem?  
 (off Solomon's silence)  
 What's your deal?

Solomon grabs Emmanuel by his hand.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
 Hey!

Frightened, Emmanuel turns to the shopkeeper, who's witnessing everything. Fear fills the old man's expression.

SOLOMON  
 It's all real. Everything you saw.

Solomon rubs his fingers across the nape of Emmanuel's neck. Right where the divine symbol first appeared. The soot between their palms burns.

Emmanuel snatches his hand away. Studies it. No burns. He brings his attention back to-- the boy's gone. Emmanuel twists and turns around the store. Cornell pokes his head back in.

CORNELL  
 Yo!

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. THE FAMILY SUV. MOMENTS LATER.

Emmanuel examines his hand. No burn marks. He pulls out his phone and clicks on a video.

THE VIDEO: Emmanuel stands in front of a mirror in the UFC gym's changing room. He touches the writhing divine symbol.

The video ends. Emmanuel touches his neck. Nothing.

Cornell pumps the gas. Sherece, hand inside her pocket, ninjas the Snickers out of its wrapper.

MICHIEL  
What do you have?

SHERECE  
Nothing.

MICHIEL  
Hand it over.

SHERECE  
It's impossible to hand over  
nothingness.

MICHIEL  
Hand. It. Over.

Sherece bristles, but hands it over. Michiel pops her head out the window while holding up the candy.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)  
(to Cornell)  
What did we say about this?

CORNELL  
I didn't buy that. Who had it?

Michiel cocks her head. Cornell realizes what's happened.

CORNELL (CONT'D)  
Emmanuel. Get on the pump. Sherece,  
come here.

Downcast, Sherece hops out.

INT. SHITTY RURAL GAS STATION. DAY.

Cornell marches up to the shopkeeper with Sherece in tow.

CORNELL  
Hi, sir. I'm terribly sorry, but I  
think there was a small incident  
that happened.

Cornell glances at Sherece, whose head is bowed and hands are firmly buried inside both of her pockets.

CORNELL (CONT'D)  
 My daughter took a candy bar from  
 your store without letting me know.  
 I just want to make sure that I  
 give you the money for that, with  
 mine and her sincerest apologies.

Terror grows on the shopkeeper's face with each passing word.

CORNELL (CONT'D)  
 (to Sherece)  
 What do you have to say?

SHERECE  
 Sorry.

Cornell pulls out his wallet and withdraws some cash.

SHOPKEEPER  
 I don't want any trouble.

CORNELL  
 Excuse me?

The shopkeeper opens the register.

EXT. THE FAMILY SUV. MOMENTS LATER.

Sherece strolls up, happy as a clam. Cornell has a look of pure confusion across his face.

MICHIEL  
 What happened?

Cornell holds up three ten dollar bills.

CORNELL  
 He gave us our money back.

MICHIEL  
 Can we just go?

Emmanuel looks back to see the shopkeeper watching through the window.

EXT. THE TOWN OF COLUMBUS. DAY.

INSIDE THE SUV. FROM EMMANUEL'S POV:

BLACK RESIDENTS eat and converse in and outside a CAFE. WHITE BARISTAS serve them mocha lattes and freshly brewed coffee.

BLACK CHILDREN dart between carnivalesque game booths run exclusively by WHITE WORKERS.

BLACK WOMEN *oooh* and *aaah* over the latest fashions in a BOUTIQUE SHOP as the WHITE EMPLOYEE stands to the side.

WHITE GROCERS grab and bag vegetables and fruits from their OPEN-AIR BOOTHS as BLACK SHOPPERS point to what they desire.

THROUGH THE WINDOWS OF A BANK, a black child incessantly cries beside his MOTHER. A BLACK POLICE OFFICER walks over to comfort the child.

Michiel makes a left onto *MAGNOLIA AVE*.

EXT. THE MAGANOLIA PLANTATION. AFTERNOON.

Inside the SUV. Emmanuel and Sherece sleep.

MICHIEL

Wake up. We're here.

Emmanuel peers out. *CLINK!* Servants open the gates. One of them glances up for a brief moment. Emmanuel realizes it's William Edgefield, the slave-master from his vision.

Servants cast Christmas lights on low-hanging willow trees. Others build a nativity scene featuring a black Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Another paints the divine symbol onto the side of a tree. It's ornate and elegant.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

(re: the plantation)

What do y'all think?

SHERECE

Appropriately ominous.

EMMANUEL

Just feels... familiar.

MICHIEL

Remember, I need you both on your best behavior. The more y'all act up...

(to Emmanuel)

...the longer we stay. Understood?

The kids nod. Michiel parks in front of--

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. DRIVEWAY.

Behind a fleet of cars. Ezekiel greets them as they exit.

EZEKIEL  
It's been far too long.

MICHIEL  
Ain't that the truth. Think you can  
get me a mouse?

EZEKIEL  
(completely unfazed)  
Consider it done.

They hug. Servants grab luggage. Cornell's put off by this.  
He blocks their way.

CORNELL  
It's all good. I got it.

EZEKIEL  
Please, we insist.

Ezekiel gestures for the servants to continue.

CORNELL  
(to Michiel)  
Pinch me.

MICHIEL  
Why?

CORNELL  
I used to have dreams about white  
folks picking up after me. I just  
need to make sure this is real.

Michiel smirks as Sherece stuffs a mountain of luggage in the  
hands of a servant. Another reaches for Emmanuel's bags.

EMMANUEL  
Back off.

Cornell wraps an arm around Emmanuel's shoulder.

CORNELL  
Stand down, Jet Li. Let the white  
folks work.

EZEKIEL  
This way, please.

They climb the ivory steps.

MICHIEL

How soon can we see Grandma Nadea?

EZEKIEL

One thing at a time. She's feeling quite under the weather at the moment.

CORNELL

It's just important that we speak with her.

EZEKIEL

I'm well aware of the circumstance surrounding your visit. As is Nadea.

MICHIEL

Before we go in...  
 (to Emmanuel and Sherece)  
 There's gonna be a lot of aunts and uncles who ain't seen y'all in a minute. They're gonna be all over you.  
 (to Emmanuel)  
 Can you handle that?

EMMANUEL

Does that get us back home quicker?

MICHIEL

Without a doubt.

EMMANUEL

Then I got it.

Michiel kisses them both on the forehead.

EZEKIEL

Ready?

Michiel nods.

INT. THE ENTRANCE TO THE MANSION. CONTINUOUS.

Ezekiel swings open the doors. The servants carrying luggage skitter up the obsidian staircase.

EZEKIEL

The stragglers have arrived!

They walk into a FOYER FULL OF BLACK FACES -- YOUNG and OLD, MAN and WOMAN, BROTHER and DAUGHTER, AUNTIE, UNCLE, and COUSIN.

Immediately, a chorus of *HEY Y'ALL! WHAT'S GOOD! AYE! MERRY CHRISTMAS! WHAT'S HAPPENING! WHAT TOOK Y'ALL SO LONG?!* fills the room.

CUT TO:

UNCLE CHICKEN (70s), decked out in formal Navy attire, pokes and prods at Emmanuel and Sherece. AUNT ORISA (60s), the single auntie who gives you money, and AUNT KIM (60s), the aunt who tells you how to raise your kids, do the same.

UNCLE CHICKEN  
Boy, y'all done got big!

AUNT KIM  
Big? Please, these two are basically skin and bone.

MICHIEL  
They're eating just fine, Aunt Kim.

AUNT KIM  
Uh huh. Take a lil off ya man's plate and give it to them!

Cornell touches his stomach. *He isn't THAT fat.* Aunt Orisa pulls out two \$5 bills.

AUNT ORISA  
Y'all stop by the store tomorrow and get yaself a snack.

EMMANUEL  
We don't need snacks.

SHERECE  
Incorrect. You don't need snacks.

Sherece snatches both bills out of her auntie's hand.

CUT TO:

AUNT CORINE (50s), the family Erykah Badu, burns sage around Emmanuel.

AUNT CORINE  
Yes. Yes. I can feel the spirit of a warrior in this one. A fighter without equal. But there's inner conflict. An insatiable darkness.



UNCLE CHICKEN

This bad boy's been with me for  
damn near forty years. Seen a lil  
combat too.

EMMANUEL

...okay.

UNCLE CHICKEN

I just want you to know that in  
case you ever wanna try me like you  
did that lil white boy.

The two laugh, then-- Emmanuel fake lunges at his Uncle.

UNCLE CHICKEN (CONT'D)

Oh you a funny one!

EMMANUEL

A lil.

UNCLE CHICKEN

Uh huh, I see I'mma have to use  
this on ya one day, young-blood.

CUT TO:

Uncle Chicken cajoles Emmanuel to punch him in the gut. Aunt  
Orisa licks a napkin then wipes Emmanuel's face.

Emmanuel watches from a distance as an Aunt Kim threatens  
Trey with a whooping.

Emmanuel, Sherece, and their cousins are forced to *FLOSS*,  
*MILLY ROCK*, *SHOOT*, and do any other dance the adults request.

CUT TO:

INT. A HIDING PLACE. MOMENTS LATER.

Emmanuel dips into a sideroom. *CLICK!* He looks up to see  
Cornell placing his cell phone beside him. Cornell opens an  
app called "A *QUIET SPACE*," then hands Emmanuel headphones.

EMMANUEL

That thing don't work on me.

CORNELL

Humor me.



Emmanuel tilts his head back against the wall until-- he notices a figure in the shadows. Eyes pierce through the pitch black corner. Hands reach out from the darkness, holding an ORNATE CEREMONIAL JAR.

The figure sets it down and digs inside, pulling out white soot. Emmanuel approaches, then--

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
You're that kid from before.

Solomon beckons him, a soot-filled hand outstretched. Emmanuel takes it. The soot burns. He recoils-- but then rests his hands back onto the soot. Solomon clamps down. The soot pops and sizzles between their palms.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
Fuck! That hurts!

He rips himself away. Solomon blows the soot into his face. Emmanuel staggers backwards. He opens his eyes to see--

A CONGREGATION OF BLACK MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN in white ceremonial garb. The congregation advances. Emmanuel sprints to the door, but it's locked. He bangs and screams for help, repeatedly slamming into the door with his shoulder.

A fleet of black hands grabs his body. Emmanuel digs deep, and with all of his might, SLAMS INTO THE DOOR ONE LAST TIME. It opens, and he stumbles into--

INT. THE MAIN FOYER. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel hits the ground. He scrambles backwards until he crashes into--

CORNELL  
E-man?

EMMANUEL  
I... I saw something in there.  
There was all these people and this jar and this kid blew dirt in my face.

Michiel peers inside. It's empty.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
I'm not lying. He poured dirt or something in my hands and it burned 'em... Look!

Emmanuel shows them his palms. They're completely unharmed.  
Cornell pulls out his phone.

CORNELL  
Maybe you should give the app  
another try.

IN THE BACKGROUND. The family gathers around Ezekiel.

EZEKIEL  
Alright everyone, let's get  
started!

MICHIEL  
(to Cornell)  
Take Sherece on the tour. We'll  
catch up later.

Cornell nods, walking off.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)  
(to Emmanuel)  
Let's go over our routine.

EMMANUEL  
Right now?

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLATATION. MOMENTS LATER.

Mother and son spar in a clearing. Emmanuel hits the ground  
with a thud.

MICHIEL  
You're sloppy.

EMMANUEL  
I'm trying.

Right cross. Shoulder grab. Throw. Emmanuel eats dirt.

MICHIEL  
Where's your focus, Emmanuel? I  
expect better.

EMMANUEL  
I know what I saw in that room.

MICHIEL  
Which was?

EMMANUEL  
Okay, I don't know. But I didn't  
make it up. Something happened.  
(MORE)

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

(then)

Have I been here before?

MICHIEL

You've never been here.

(then)

Look, we messed up with your tournament. And we're sorry. But that's life, Emmanuel. You have to make the best out of an impossible situation sometimes.

Emmanuel stands up. Michiel sends a kick straight to his head. Emmanuel blocks, grabs her leg, and, very inelegantly, flings them both the ground. The two laugh together.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

You can't dodge. So take the hit. Grab, bring'm to the ground. Smart.

EMMANUEL

You went off script.

MICHIEL

And you adapted.

(then)

Someone's got you at knifepoint... they want everything you've got. You can take them, but there's a chance you could die if you engage. What's the best choice?

EMMANUEL

Fifty-fifty, never all or nothing. Give them what they want and run. You may lose your belongings, but you keep your life.

MICHIEL

Exactly. I need you at your best this weekend. This is very important to your father and I.

EMMANUEL

Why? It's just a family reunion.

MICHIEL

Can I count on you or not?

Emmanuel nods.

EMMANUEL

Do you really think we'll make it back for the tournament?

(MORE)

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

That's our thing. Sherece got it all. I just want something.

MICHIEL

I promise we'll get back in time. No matter what.

Michiel checks her phone.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

Let's catch up with everyone.

EMMANUEL

We don't gotta clean up?

MICHIEL

Nope. We'll miss the best part.

Michiel and Emmanuel head--

INT. THE MAIN FOYER. LATER.

EZEKIEL (V.O.)

The Adedeji Estate, formerly known as The Edgefield Magnolia Plantation, was built in the late sixteenth century at the behest of Norman Edgefield, the great grandfather of the last slave master of the plantation, William Edgefield. When your ancestors revolted, they not only took over the plantation permanently, but chose to leave their mark throughout this entire town and its history.

THROUGH THE KITCHEN. CONTINUOUS.

EZEKIEL (V.O.)

The now freed slaves of the Magnolia Plantation adopted a new name, *THE ADEDEJI*, meaning *the crown has become two*, signifying their ascension to a status equal to -- and some would say above -- their captors.

THROUGH THE HALLWAY TO THE BEDROOMS. CONTINUOUS.

EZEKIEL (V.O.)

The Adedeji didn't stop with their own freedom. They freed any and all slaves beholden to the oppressive chains of our town and welcomed them into the familial fold.

INTO THE BOTANICAL GARDEN. CONTINUOUS.

EZEKIEL (V.O.)

The impact of the Adedeji isn't bound to accomplishments in the distant past. All of you embody so much more...

THEN INSIDE THE MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel passes by his ancestors' numerous accomplishments.

EZEKIEL

The Adedeji have not only contributed to the development of this town, you've been an avid patron of the arts, science, technology, and infrastructure throughout the world. From this activity, you've built a chasm of generational wealth still being used today to impact the African diaspora.

He stops at-- THE ORNATE, CEREMONIAL JAR from Solomon's ritual. Emmanuel attempts to lay hands on it.

EZEKIEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Look but don't touch, young sir.

EMMANUEL

What's in it?

EZEKIEL

A mixture of soot and ash dating back to the time of your enslavement.

EMMANUEL

I was never enslaved. Why even keep something like that?

EZEKIEL

When you are cut off from your family and home, spanning centuries and an ocean... you might find yourself enamored with the idea of keeping relics to serve as reminders of your heritage.

Ezekiel turns and addresses everyone.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

To finish, please bring your attention here, everyone.

Ezekiel brings Emmanuel towards a large painting -- the same one bearing a striking resemblance to Emmanuel's family.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

You are looking at a commissioned piece recreating the family who incited the uprising that led to everything around you.

CORNELL

(re: the painting)  
That's a sexy ass man.

Michiel rolls her eyes.

CORNELL (CONT'D)

And that's a sexy ass woman beside him.

SHERECE

And that's a s--

CORNELL/MICHIEL

No.

EZEKIEL

Their names are lost to history, but you honor them with the continued excellence in all fields your family partakes.

(to Emmanuel)

From an MMA prodigy.

(to Sherece)

To a STEM wunderkind.

(to Michiel)

To a renowned combat specialist for women.

(to Cornell)

(MORE)

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

And even an app technician on the cusp of revolutionizing safe spaces for those who live *on the spectrum*.

EMMANUEL

So how do you fit in?

MICHIEL

Emmanuel!

EMMANUEL

What?

EZEKIEL

(to Michiel and Emmanuel)

It's fine. I, and those who serve on the staff, have been tasked with making sure your families' sacrifices are never forgotten. I am permanently of service.

AUNT KIM

What's on the spectrum?

CORNELL

(to Aunt Kim)

It's how we refer to those diagnosed with, or having the characteristic of, an autistic spectrum disorder.

UNCLE CHICKEN

You mean retarded?

Aunt Orisa smacks Uncle Chicken upside the head.

CORNELL

We prefer to use less derogatory terms. Retarded is highly offensive.

Aunt Orisa gives Uncle Chicken severe side-eye.

UNCLE CHICKEN

(to Aunt Orisa)

What?

CORNELL

I developed the app specifically to cater to anxiety stemming from social interactions.

(to Ezekiel)

Is it okay if I--

EZEKIEL

Please do.

Cornell pulls out his phone and opens up the app.

CORNELL

If all of you could pull out your  
phones for one moment.

Everyone pulls out their smartphones. Uncle Chicken whips out his flip phone. They crowd around Cornell as he demonstrates.

Emmanuel walks away to check out--

INT. THE BOTANICAL GARDEN. CONTINUOUS.

YEMI (13), dark-skinned with long, elegant locs, sits on a bench in the garden, singing.

YEMI

*Is it the strength of your devotion  
/ Overthrowing all of the pain /  
You'll see new sights to envision /  
And maybe one day, I pray you break  
all of our chains / And in your  
wake, ripple your sweet fate.*

Emmanuel steps up to her.

EMMANUEL

Who are you?

YEMI

Yemi. Also, family.

Yemi takes his hand.

YEMI (CONT'D)

I know you've seen them. So have I.

EMMANUEL

Who?

Yemi rubs her hands together then blows, a la Solomon.

YEMI

The Akinmade.  
(then)  
There's something even worse here.

EMMANUEL

Show me.

INT. THE HALLWAY LEADING TO AN IVORY DOOR. EVENING.

Yemi points to their destination.

YEMI

Scared?

EMMANUEL

Of a door? C'mon.

FROM AN UNKNOWN POV: Someone watches Emmanuel and Yemi pacing forward.

They reach the ivory door. Emmanuel notices the divine symbol etched into its woodwork. He takes a picture with his phone, then turns the door handle. It doesn't open. He tries again-- and again. Then--

AN OLD, WITHERED HAND grabs him from behind the door. Emmanuel screams. He falls back into the hands of-- PATRICIA, the same young girl clutching Ezekiel from the beginning.

PATRICIA

You can never go in there!

EMMANUEL

What was that? Where's Yemi?

PATRICIA

Come! Come! We must go now!

They go into--

INT. EMMANUEL AND SHERECE'S ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Cornell and Michiel help Sherece unpack.

CORNELL

Yo, where have you been?

EMMANUEL

I was just... uh--

PATRICIA

Excuse my impertinence, Master Cornell, but the young sir saw me struggling with luggage and intervened.

MICHIEL

(to Emmanuel)

Oh, well that's nice of you, but no more running off on your own.

(MORE)



EMMANUEL

Why didn't you tell Cornell and Michiel?

SHERECE

I did. But it was gone by the time I said anything. They thought I was lying.

EMMANUEL

This thing's been outside, on the doors, and on us. That ain't no coincidence.

SHERECE

Should we tell them?

EMMANUEL

Nope. I'mma figure it out myself.

SHERECE

False. We are going to figure it out together.

EMMANUEL

Sherece, you're afraid of your own shadow.

SHERECE

So? Shadows are scary. And that's THE ONLY thing I'm scared of.

Emmanuel turns off the light. Sherece shouts.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

TURN IT BACK ON!

Emmanuel throws it back on. Sherece's frown transforms into puppy dog eyes. Emmanuel relents. *Fine.*

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. DUSK.

STEPS OF THE MANSION. The entire family preps for a photo. Emmanuel tugs at his tucked shirt.

LOCAL DIGNITARIES FROM THE TOWN head down the steps with Ezekiel, who carries a vintage medium format camera. Emmanuel notices a few from the family.

Uncle Chicken, decked out in an all white suit with his sword, stands beside Aunt Orisa, in full police uniform, and Aunt Kim, holding a flag that reads COLUMBUS UNIVERSITY.

EZEKIEL

Before we take our family photo,  
I'd like to give a special thank  
you to all of our officials for  
taking time out of their day to be  
with us. Our humble town has made  
it our prerogative to champion  
ethnic empowerment in all areas of  
our community. We house one of the  
only black female college  
presidents in our state.

Aunt Kim excitedly waves her flag.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

Support the longest serving black  
police commissioner in the county.

Aunt Orisa calmly nods in acknowledgement.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

And uplift the longest-serving  
mayor, black or other, west of the  
Mississippi River.

Uncle Chicken bows to the audience with flare and pomp.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

The town of Columbus exudes  
excellence, whether past or  
present.

Ezekiel claps. The rest of the group follows suit.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

(re: the photo)

And now, without further ado--

A servant brings a tripod. Uncle Chicken, Aunt Orisa, and  
Aunt Kim take their places at the front.

CORNELL

Your family's basically the mafia.

MICHIEL

You scared?

CORNELL

Very. But if everything don't work  
out with Nadea, you think you could  
get me a job under ya uncle?

Emmanuel looks down a few steps to see--

PRIMA (14), tomboy, rough around the edges with knuckle bruises that all have stories, playfully jostling Yemi.

OSANYIN (17), small stature, earthy, touches their shoulders with an authoritative glance. *Stop.*

EZEKIEL

Alright, everyone. On three. ONE.  
TWO. THREE--

*FLASH!*

EXT. THE FRONT OF THE MANSION NEAR THE STEPS. NIGHT.

A large stereo blasts old school music. Adults and children dance, while servants clean.

EXT. SIDE OF THE MANSION. CONTINUOUS.

Osanyin, Yemi, and Prima blaze up. Emmanuel approaches.

EMMANUEL

(to Yemi)

Yo, why'd you leave me like that?

PRIMA

(to Yemi)

Look at you being a lil wimp.

YEMI

Shut up, Prima!

OSANYIN

(to Prima)

Lay off.

(to Emmanuel, re: herself)

Osanyin.

She offers the blunt to Emmanuel.

EMMANUEL

Stuff's bad for you.

OSANYIN

(rolling her eyes)

Square.

EMMANUEL

(to Yemi)

Why you left me, though?

YEMI

Don't pretend like you didn't feel it, too.

EMMANUEL

Feel what?

PRIMA

(sarcastically)  
The monster.

Yemi punches Prima in the shoulder.

EMMANUEL

What monster? Can y'all be serious for a second?

OSANYIN

Why should we?

Emmanuel grabs the blunt and takes a toke. He immediately starts coughing.

OSANYIN (CONT'D)

Did you see anything when you got close?

EMMANUEL

Nah, the door was locked. I mean, something touched me... but, I know it was just that little white girl.

Prima spits on the ground.

PRIMA

Patricia.

YEMI

You saw what you saw. Don't deny it.

EMMANUEL

I been seeing A LOT since I got here.

SHERECE (O.S.)

EMMANUEL?!

Emmanuel turns to see Sherece running up to him.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

Mom and Dad are searching for your current location.

Back to the group.

EMMANUEL

Ya'll playin', if ya'll don't wanna talk then kick rocks.

PRIMA

He's scared.

EMMANUEL

I ain't scared of nothing. Ya'll ain't tellin' me nothin, so, I'm out.

OSANYIN

Wait.

(then)

Okay. Let's go see the monster.

INT. EMMANUEL AND SHERECE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Emmanuel slips out of bed. He heads for the door when--

SHERECE

This is a lamentable conception.

EMMANUEL

Talk normal, please.

SHERECE

This is a bad idea.

EMMANUEL

I thought you wanted to figure this out with me.

SHERECE

They said there's a monster.

EMMANUEL

No shadows, though.

SHERECE

Monsters have shadows, and they live in the dark. Can we just tell Mom and Dad?

EMMANUEL

Nope. I don't need Michiel or Cornell's help.

SHERECE

Then don't go for me! Trepidation currently invades every orifice of my being.

Emmanuel frowns.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

I'm scared, okay?!

EMMANUEL

Remember when you got lost in the woods?

SHERECE

I sprained my ankle quite detrimentally.

EMMANUEL

Who came back to get you?

SHERECE

You should've never left me.

EMMANUEL

That's beside the point. What did I promise?

SHERECE

You'd never leave me behind again.

EMMANUEL

Mhm. Look, nothing about this house feels new. And I just wanna know why. I ain't gonna leave you -- but I'm not staying in here.

Emmanuel holds his sister's hand, trying his best to be a good big bro.

INT. THE HALLWAY TO THE BEDROOMS. MOMENTS LATER.

Emmanuel and Sherece sneak up to a door. He gives the handle a nudge. It opens.

EMMANUEL

(to Sherece)

Stay here and look out.

Sherece shakes her head, still frightened. Emmanuel puts out his pinky finger.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
Two minutes or less.

SHERECE  
No matter what, okay?

Emmanuel nods.

INT. EZEKIEL'S ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel crawls inside, then gestures to Sherece to close the door. Emmanuel surveys his surroundings. Moonlight, and a solitary lantern, illuminate the room. He lifts himself up, searching. He spots a small, mahogany nightstand on the opposite end of the room. He crawls underneath Ezekiel's bed. EZEKIEL'S EYES ARE WIDE OPEN. Emmanuel pops up from underneath the bed. He peers over at Ezekiel, whose eyes are now back closed.

Emmanuel prepares to open up the drawer when-- *SQUEEEEEAK!* Emmanuel drops to the ground. As his head pops back up, we see that THE DOOR IS SLIGHTLY AJAR. Sherece stands on the threshold, holding up *TWO FINGERS*. Emmanuel waves her off and points to the nightstand. Sherece nods. Emmanuel quietly rummages through the drawer, then pulls out a *KEY WITH THE DIVINE SYMBOL ENGRAVED UPON IT*.

*PLOP!* A hand slams down on the nightstand. Emmanuel's face turns white. He stares at Ezekiel. *BUT FROM EMMANUEL'S POV:* Ezekiel's still asleep. Just a late night spasm. Emmanuel exits back to--

INT. THE HALLWAY TO THE BEDROOMS. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel holds up the key for a visibly anxious Sherece.

YEMI (O.S.)  
Did you get it?

The pair scream as they swivel around to see Yemi. Ezekiel's door flies open. Ezekiel peers up and down the corridor. Nothing. A little way down the hall, one door is slightly ajar.

INT. A VAGUELY FAMILIAR ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Each child, hands to mouths, waits for the coast to clear. Emmanuel peers out the door. Ezekiel heads back into his room. Emmanuel gestures to Yemi and Sherece. *Let's go.*

Yemi signals for them to follow her out. She exits. Sherece goes next, but before Emmanuel leaves, he notices-- a LARGE FRAMED PHOTO of an elderly black woman and a grumpy child. Before he can inspect further, Sherece tugs at him.

INT. THE HALLWAY. LATER.

Osanyin and Prima watch as the trio heads towards them.

INT. THE DOOR TO NADEA'S DOMAIN. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel unlocks the door with the divine-symboled key. He turns to everyone with a finger pressed to his lips. He takes Sherece's hand and they all enter.

INT. NADEA'S DOMAIN. CONTINUOUS.

West African art peppers the walls. As they dive deeper into the lair, two muffled voices converse. One, old and decrepit. The other, soft and divine.

DECREPIT VOICE

I could end it all now. It would be nice to rest.

DIVINE VOICE

No. We want what is owed.

DECREPIT VOICE

How much more do you plan to take?

DIVINE VOICE

Take? We have only given.

The group approaches the inner sanctum.

DECREPIT VOICE

But you've given them such a steep price.

DIVINE VOICE

I have? No, beloved. We are conjoined in complicity.

(then)

There is nothing we can hide from one another. You falter all because of a boy.

DECREPIT VOICE

He is family.

DIVINE VOICE  
We are all family.

DECREPIT VOICE  
You know what I mean.

DIVINE VOICE  
I know what you believe.

DECREPIT VOICE  
Are you saying that it is not true?

Emmanuel peers from around the corner to SEE: A SOLITARY WOMAN. REGAL. OLD. YET RIPE WITH VITALITY. WHITE LOCS REACHING TO THE ARCH OF HER BACK. DRESSED IN WHITE AND ROYAL GOLD. THIS IS NADEA.

NADEA  
We must eat.

Nadea walks over to a rustic closet. She opens it. Sherece screams bloody murder. Inside the closet, in ornate see-through coffins, lie THREE CHARRED, STILL BURNING CORPSES.

Emmanuel turns back to the rest of the group to find that everyone -- except for Sherece -- is gone. He grabs Sherece.

INT. THE HALLWAY. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel and Sherece run for their lives when-- POW! They crash into Ezekiel.

EZEKIEL  
What are you two doing?

EMMANUEL  
We just got lost for a minute.

SHERECE  
THERE'S A MONSTER IN THAT ROOM AND WE SAW IT AND IT WAS EATING THREE PEOPLE!

Ezekiel comes down to their level.

EZEKIEL  
Monster?  
(then)  
Do you really want to see what's in there?

INT. NADEA'S DOMAIN. MOMENTS LATER.

Ezekiel leads them inside. He stops a few steps before the inner sanctum and raps on the wall. *KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!*

NADEA (O.S.)  
Bring them in.

Ezekiel leads them to a bed with a sheer white shawl around it. He pushes it back to reveal-- NADEA. Old, crippled, and on her death bed. A far cry from the deific being they saw.

SHERECE  
(to Emmanuel)  
What about the bodies? Tell him about the bodies... the bodies in the closet.

EMMANUEL  
Be quiet.

Ezekiel opens the closet. Nothing. Clothes... a few blankets. But no bodies. Ezekiel grabs a blanket for Nadea.

NADEA  
Thank you.

EZEKIEL  
Of course.

She reaches for Emmanuel. He takes her hand.

NADEA  
You done grown up on me something special.  
(to Sherece)  
And you. I swear on my life it's like looking in a mirror.

Nadea pulls out a tin dish from a drawer. Inside, a wide array of candy.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
Both of y'all take a lil sumthin.

Before they can move, Nadea violently coughs. Candy splatters onto the floor. Ezekiel brings a glass of water and pills.

INT. EMMANUEL AND SHERECE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Ezekiel guides them inside.

SHERECE  
We're unbelievably sorry for tonight's actions.

EMMANUEL  
Yea. That's on us.

Ezekiel raises both of his pinkies.

EZEKIEL

No more sneaking around the house  
and this stays between us?

SHERECE

Affirmative.

EMMANUEL

Bet.

They pinky promise. Ezekiel closes the door.

YEMI (O.S.)

Is he gone?

Yemi, Prima, and Osanyin hide behind the bed.

EMMANUEL

How the fuck y'all gonna leave us  
like that?

PRIMA

Ain't no need to be hostile.

YEMI

We didn't mean to.

EMMANUEL

And this is your second damn time!

OSANYIN

You really need to chill.

PRIMA

Yea. You saw what you was supposed  
to see anyway.

EMMANUEL

Get the fuck out.

OSANYIN

You're just a sheep -- like the  
rest of them.

The girls exit. Emmanuel slams the door shut.

SHERECE

Was that real? It felt real.

(then)

Can we please tell Mom and Dad?

EMMANUEL

They won't believe us.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Emmanuel looks at Sherece. Wait. He lays his ear to the door.

CORNELL (O.S.)

Babe, so what's the game plan here?  
How much ass does Nadea have for me  
to kiss?

MICHIEL (O.S.)

Please stop talking.

Emmanuel turns to Sherece.

EMMANUEL

Just follow my lead on this. Let me  
do all the talking and we'll be--

Sherece brushes past him and swings the door open, spilling  
into--

INT. MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel enters behind Sherece.

SHERECE

Dad, we saw monsters! We went to  
Mr. Ezekiel's room and stole a key,  
then we went to this room that was  
locked and unlocked it, and inside  
there were two of them. One of them  
opened the closet door and there  
were bodies in it.

(then)

Can we leave?

CORNELL

No, we can't. What's going on?

SHERECE

Tell them, Emmanuel.

EMMANUEL

Everything she's saying is true.

MICHIEL

(to Sherece)

Honey. There's no monsters here. I  
know it's a big place, and it's  
really old. But it's perfectly  
safe.

SHERECE

But Mom...

MICHIEL

No buts, okay? Time for bed.

Sherece frowns. She turns to Emmanuel, frustrated.

EMMANUEL

(to Sherece)

Told you.

Sherece exits. Emmanuel attempts to follow her out.

MICHIEL

Emmanuel.

Emmanuel turns to look at Michiel.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

Explain.

EMMANUEL

Explain what? It's like Sherece said. We went into Grandma Nadea's room and...

MICHIEL

You what?!

CORNELL

E-Man.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

Why would you even think about doing something like that?

EMMANUEL

Osanyin, Yemi, and Prima said that they've seen strange things around here, too. Just like I told you.

CORNELL

Who?

EMMANUEL

(slowly)

Osanyin, Yemi, and Prima.

Michiel gets down to Emmanuel's level.

MICHIEL

Emmanuel, I told you that we needed your help this weekend. This is absolutely the opposite of what I asked from you.

EMMANUEL

Michiel, there's something going on here...

MICHIEL

Enough! You're skating on thin ice. You pull anything like this again, you can kiss that tournament -- and your freedom while we're here -- goodbye. You got me?

INT. EMMANUEL AND SHERECE'S ROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

Sherece is under the covers. The moment Emmanuel walks inside, he turns off the light.

SHERECE

EMMANUEL!

EMMANUEL

Sorry.

There's a small click. A nightlight comes on. Emmanuel slinks into bed. Slowly, he gives in to exhaustion. As he sleeps, a disembodied hand makes its way up the covers. It clasps onto his neck. The divine symbol festers to life. A LOUD BANG on the door LEADS US INTO--

A VISION.

A SMALL CABIN ON THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION AT NIGHT.

Fists violently bang on the front door.

WHITE OVERSEER (O.S.)

OPEN UP NOW!

Emmanuel rises from his bed. He squints. It's hard to see inside the dimly-lit backroom. He turns to see Nadea, now a young child, waking up due to the clamor in the front.

EMMANUEL

Sherece?

*CRASH!* The kids hear a door in the front room break down.

CHARLES (O.S.)

Get the kids!

The backroom door swings open. A white overseer tackles Abigail to the ground.

ABIGAIL  
 RUN! RUN RIGHT NOW!

Emmanuel and Nadea dash to the window. Nadea can't reach. Emmanuel bends down and pushes her out. He attempts to follow. An overseer grabs him and Emmanuel struggles to shake him off. The overseer pulls Emmanuel back inside. A piece of broken glass slices his chest, creating a large gash. The overseer throws him to the ground. William Edgefield enters.

WILLIAM  
 Tie'm up. Find the witch.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING. NIGHT. VISION.

Emmanuel's dragged by rope to a field with four crosses.

EMMANUEL  
 No! No! I didn't do anything!

The overseers pin a struggling Emmanuel down. Tie'm up to a cross and lift.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
 Please don't do this. Stop! Stop!

Torch to kindle. The flames lick his feet. Emmanuel screams, but his cries are mute... unheard. He looks down to see William with Nadea in his grasp. Then-- A BLINDING WHITE LIGHT. Through the flames, he sees an incarnation of Nadea.

NADEA  
 Nathaniel. Do not be afraid. We will see each other again. I promise.

Emmanuel reaches out. His restraints rot away. Nadea's fingers extend to meet his, then--

THE VISION ENDS.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING NOW CHARRED. NIGHT. PRESENT DAY.

Emmanuel's eyes open. He feels the burning soot underneath him.

NADEA (O.S.)  
 Fire nor furnace keeps the soot underneath us aflame.

Nadea, holding the ornate, ceremonial jar, digs through the soot. She sprinkles black soot into the jar.

This is not the old woman who gave him candy -- this is the regal matriarch he first saw with three charred corpses.

EMMANUEL

Nadea?

NADEA

I much prefer Grandma.

EMMANUEL

But you look--

NADEA

Now you know better than to comment on a woman's appearances. Don't ya?

EMMANUEL

(re: the jar)

What are you doing?

NADEA

Keeping our family in check. But that's a story for another day. Come here. There's something else I'd like to show you.

Emmanuel doesn't budge.

NADEA (CONT'D)

I ain't gonna bite lil boy.

Nadea sets the jar aside and sifts through the soot.

NADEA (CONT'D)

The earth still reels from our previous encounter, a lasting reminder of our family's sacrifice.

EMMANUEL

Ain't no way it's suppose to stay hot like this.

NADEA

You'll know why soon enough.

EMMANUEL

Why cant y'all grownups just spit it out? Why's it always gotta be a riddle or you'll get it later or just do what I say and stop talking?

NADEA

You mean your parents?

EMMANUEL  
 (lying)  
 ...nah.

NADEA  
 Do you hate them?

Emmanuel thinks.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
 I asked if you hate them.

EMMANUEL  
 It just feels like they make it  
 harder than it has to be sometimes.

Nadea uncovers the corpse of a small bird in the soot. She scoops it up.

NADEA  
 The answer to your problem is  
 surprisingly simple. You don't  
 belong with them.

EMMANUEL  
 What do you mean?

NADEA  
 How did you get out here?

EMMANUEL  
 I... I don't know. I was in this  
 cabin with Sherece, and-- I must've  
 been dreaming.

She tugs at Emmanuel's shirt to reveal the scar on his chest.

NADEA  
 Do dreams give you scars?

EMMANUEL  
 This didn't come from the dream.  
 I've had this for as...

NADEA  
 ...long as you can remember.

Nadea places Emmanuel's hands over hers.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
 Nothing truly dies. The energy of  
 the soul is transferred to the  
 other side.

(MORE)

NADEA (CONT'D)

It waits for its new vessel to return, so that it can make its way back. Sometimes, a very special person can prevent that crossing altogether. But some folk don't like that. They say it's unnatural.

Nadea opens up their hands. The bird is no longer a smoldering corpse, but a fresh being given new life. Mystified, Emmanuel watches it fly off.

YOUNG NADEA (O.S.)

You feel this way about your parents because you don't belong with them, Emmanuel. You never have. You belong with me.

Emmanuel's gaze returns to Nadea. She's no longer an elderly woman, BUT A YOUNG GIRL THE SPLITTING IMAGE OF SHERECE.

EMMANUEL

(confused)

I saw you in my dream. You look just like my sister.

YOUNG NADEA

I don't look like your sister, Emmanuel. She looks like me.

(then)

You should go now. They're looking for you.

EMMANUEL

Shit.

He darts towards the lights of the mansion.

NADEA

Nathaniel.

Emmanuel stops. *Did she just call me Nathaniel?*

NADEA (CONT'D)

Any choice you make from here on out is yours and yours alone.

Frowning, Emmanuel runs into the forest. Nadea smiles.

NADEA (CONT'D)

Just as I remember you.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. LATER.

Emmanuel nears the plantation grounds. Cornell and Michiel can be seen in the distance.

MICHIEL  
EMMANUEL!

They sprint over to their son. The family follows.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)  
WHERE WERE YOU?

EMMANUEL  
I don't know! I was in a forest and there were no trees, and there was ash everywhere.

MICHIEL  
You can't just go out there on your own, Emmanuel!

EMMANUEL  
I didn't! I was just... I don't know how I got out there.

CORNELL  
Let's just go inside.

EMMANUEL  
Neither of y'all believe me. I don't know how I got out there. Why would I go out into the woods in the middle of the night?

MICHIEL  
You're lying.

CORNELL  
Michiel--

MICHIEL  
(to Cornell)  
No!  
(then, to Emmanuel)  
I told you not to pull something like this again. You're grounded. For the rest of our time here. And you can say goodbye to the tournament.

EMMANUEL  
You promised. This is OUR THING.

CORNELL

E-man--

Cornell glances at Michiel, who is resolute. He places a hand on Emmanuel's shoulder.

CORNELL (CONT'D)

There will be other tournaments,  
okay?

Emmanuel pushes his father's hand away. He heads towards the mansion entrance, a bevy of judgmental eyes following him.

INT. EMMANUEL AND SHERECE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Emmanuel tears the tourney invite in half and throws it in the trash. He slinks under the covers.

SHERECE

Emmanuel?

EMMANUEL

Yea?

SHERECE

Why did you depart the room in such  
a hurried fashion?

EMMANUEL

I don't remember leaving the room.

SHERECE

I have irrefutable evidence.

Sherece pulls out her phone.

ON THE PHONE: Emmanuel throws off his covers and heads for the door.

SHERECE (ON THE RECORDING) (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

Emmanuel looks back at her. His eyes are vacant.

SHERECE (ON THE RECORDING) (CONT'D)

Emmanuel?

He swings the door open and exits.

Sherece turns off the recording.

EMMANUEL  
(flabbergasted)  
I don't remember even getting up.  
(then)  
Why didn't you stop me?

SHERECE  
Calculating the full scope of  
everything that's been happening, I  
opted against such a decision.

EMMANUEL  
I had this dream. You, me, Michiel,  
and Cornell were in it. We were all  
burning up in this weird place, but  
then you... you saved me.

SHERECE  
I saved you? How?

EMMANUEL  
I sound crazy, don't I?

SHERECE  
An iota.

EMMANUEL  
If I'm stuck here, I gotta figure  
out what's happening before I go  
crazy.

SHERECE  
And I'm gonna save you by being  
super brave from now on! Watch  
this.

Sherece turns off her night light and scrambles under the covers.

SHERECE (CONT'D)  
See! I'm only fifty percent  
terrified of the dark now.

EMMANUEL  
(smiling)  
You're such a dork. But I love you  
though.

SHERECE  
Love you too, dunderhead.

Emmanuel nods off into a deep slumber when-- a pair of hands gently tucks him in.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. DAWN.

A servant hammers an extra slat of wood underneath a STAGE that's being built on the front lawn.

INT. EMMANUEL AND SHERECE'S ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

The drum of the hammer brings Emmanuel out of his slumber to find-- PATRICIA, inside his room, crying. He looks over to Sherece. She's gone. When he brings his gaze back to Patricia, he sees A SMALL DEAD DOG on the floor. A pool of blood leaks from its stomach. Patricia whimpers over its body. Then-- the blood flows back into it. The dead dog comes back life.

Emmanuel stares in disbelief. The dog rises, and dies again, and again, and again. Emmanuel steps in front of Patricia.

EMMANUEL

Don't look.

Patricia nods. Emmanuel glances back. The dog has vanished.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

What the heck is going on? Do you know?

(off her blank expression)

There's this boy. I've seen him around here. He's about my height. Dark-skinned. Seems like he never blinks.

Patricia shakes her head.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

What? You know him. Can you take me to him?

She continues to shake her head, no.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

Please. Just take to me to where he is... that's it.

INT. THE MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI. MOMENTS LATER.

Patricia leads Emmanuel to the ornate, ceremonial jar. He touches the intricate designs of the outer shell.

EMMANUEL

I don't understand. Where's the boy?

Emmanuel turns to Patricia for answers, only to find her at the entrance. She closes the door with a snap. *PLUCK!* Emmanuel whips around. Solomon holds the jar. He pulls clumps of white and black soot from it, slathering it across his face and eyes. The soot sizzles on his skin. Then-- he smashes it to the ground.

A HAND GRABS EMMANUEL. A torrent of ancestors, their faces disfigured, stand before him. Their ceremonial white garbs are burnt and tattered. Emmanuel screams and tries to run but finds himself accosted by more ancestors. They grab and pull at him. Ripping himself away, he sprints to the side entrance and pushes on it. Locked. He slams into it. No movement.

The ancestors pin Emmanuel against the door, slowly suffocating him, until--

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI. CONTINUOUS.

The doors burst open. Emmanuel spills out. Solomon and the ancestors look down upon him. One by one, the ancestors head down toward him. But once they touch dirt, an unknown power returns them to the museum steps. They repeat to no avail-- always returning back to the steps. Finally, Solomon steps down... and isn't sent back.

SOLOMON

Witness.

Solomon grabs Emmanuel's hand. Emmanuel's eyes roll back into his head as we fall into--

VISIONS.

SOLOMON (V.O.)

We are slaves to man or god no more.

- A knife slits a throat. Nadea grabs her bleeding neck. Crosses burn in the background.
- Solomon, ornately dressed with white paint adorning his face, holds up the blood-tinged knife, triumphant.
- A congregation of faces surround Nadea, cheering her death.
- Nadea, at her brink, divests from Maafa. Before us stand a feeble old woman and a fierce deity enraged by betrayal.
- Maafa holds her hand out. Those cheering burst into white flames. Soon, pale white ash falls to the ground.

- Maafa scoops black soot from underneath the crosses. Mixes it with white ash in her hands. She grabs Solomon and wipes it across his eyes. The young boys screams, then--

- Finds himself inside the MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI. Nadea pours black soot and white ash into the jar.

- Nadea exits the museum. Solomon runs after her, knife still in hand. She throws soot and ash in his eyes.

- He shuts his eyes then opens them to find himself back on the steps of the museum.

VISIONS ENDS.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI. DAY.

The information piling into Emmanuel leaves him frothing.

SOLOMON

I am Solomon.

THE AKINMADE speak in unison with him.

SOLOMON/AKINMADE

And we are the AKINMADE. Named for our noble disobedience. Made prisoners by our family. Seen only by those who witness the soot of freedom and the ash of our enslavement by hand and eye. Neither living nor dead, eternally clasped to this wretched place thanks to the demon living amongst you.

Solomon releases Emmanuel, who faints. Solomon blinks. He's back on the steps as the Akinmade close the entrance.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI. LATER.

Emmanuel wakes up. Prima, Yemi, and Osanyin hover over him.

OSANYIN

Morning sunshine.

YEMI

How are you feeling? Drowsy? A little groggy?

Emmanuel leans over and vomits.

PRIMA  
Sick. Got it.

EMMANUEL  
(still groggy)  
Where am I?

OSANYIN  
Right outside the mansion.

PRIMA  
I know folks talk about taking a dirt nap, but I ain't never seen someone literally do it.

EMMANUEL  
Solomon. All those people inside. They're... trapped because of Nadea?

Mhm. OSANYIN Quite. YEMI

PRIMA  
Duh.

EMMANUEL  
But I saw Solomon stab her. I saw everyone cheering it on. They had to deserve it.

OSANYIN  
More to it than that.

YEMI  
So much more.

Emmanuel gets to his feet.

EMMANUEL  
THEN WHY WON'T SOMEONE JUST TELL ME  
WHAT IS GOING ON? HOW DID SHE NOT  
DIE?

YEMI  
(shaking head)  
Nadea... is inevitable.

PRIMA  
Lil boys just don't blink and disappear for no reason.

OSANYIN  
If you fight back, family or not,  
you'll be punished.

EMMANUEL  
Punished? Wait... so Solomon really  
is our family?

Osanyin grimly nods.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
Who else knows about this? Uncle  
Chicken? Aunt Kim? Ezekiel?

The three girls stare at each other.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
We gotta tell them.

INT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. MOMENTS LATER.

Emmanuel searches the mansion for an adult. The girls follow.

YEMI  
Emmanuel. Emmanuel, slow down.

EMMANUEL  
Where is everyone?  
(then)  
Wait...

Emmanuel pulls his cell phone from out of his pocket.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
Shit... it's Sunday.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. DAY.

Parked cars stretch from the driveway to the front gates.  
BLACK RESIDENTS along with town officials find their seats  
around the stage. On stage, cousin Skeeter plays the piano.  
On the side of the stage, Cornell psyches Sherece up.

CORNELL  
Alright, you ready?

SHERECE  
This is juvenile.

CORNELL  
But you know you love it!

Sherece smirks as the two sing--

<p>CORNELL (CONT'D)</p> <p>One, three, six, nine, who's the best at science time! SHE- RECE! GO! GO! SHE-RECE! ONE MORE TIME! Two, Four, Six, Eight, who's got a brain that's super great! SHE-RECE! GO! GO! SHE-RECE!</p>	<p>SHERECE</p> <p>One, three, six, nine, who's the best at science time! SHE- RECE! GO! GO! SHE-RECE! ONE MORE TIME! Two, Four, Six, Eight, who's got a brain that's super great! SHE-RECE! GO! GO! SHE-RECE!</p>
--	---

Right beside the stage, Emmanuel approaches his mother.

EMMANUEL

So y'all got her ready, but forgot  
about me?

MICHIEL

We didn't forget about you,  
Emmanuel. We just let you sleep.

EMMANUEL

Were you gonna let me sleep through  
all this?

MICHIEL

Emmanuel-- you're grounded. There  
is no talent show for you.

Sherece runs up to Emmanuel.

SHERECE

One, three, six, nine, who's the  
best at science time! SHE-

Emmanuel walks away, ignoring her. Sherece deflates. On  
stage, Ezekiel introduces Sherece.

EZEKIEL

Alright everyone, put your hands  
together for our next talent!

Sherece walks up to the microphone.

SHERECE

Hi! My name is Sherece Adedeji. And  
today, I'll be showing you my  
latest invention.

IN THE AUDIENCE.

CORNELL

(to Emmanuel)

You could've at least wished her good luck.

ON STAGE. Sherece pulls a mouse out of a cage and places it in a new, open enclosure. She pulls out her mini-defibrillator.

SHERECE

A defibrillator is a device that delivers a dose of electric current to the heart to treat cardiac dysrhythmias. Simply put, you have a heart attack, this will save you. Now, imagine a world where a device like this was so small, it could fit in your pocket.

She pulls out a taser. Holds it up so everyone can see.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

My invention is the world's smallest defibrillator. While it isn't powerful enough to use on us, I aim to one day make it a possibility. Now, to demonstrate.

ZAP! The mouse keels over. The audience gasps.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

Don't worry. With just one TRIPLE-A battery, we can bring her back.

Sherece plugs a AAA battery into the mini-defibrillator, then-- ZAP! She hits the mouse with a shock... nothing happens.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

Apologies. Just a minor delay.

She tries again. Nothing.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

This is unprecedented. My invention has a ninety-nine point nine percent success rate.

Sherece keeps trying.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

C'mon. C'mon. C'mon.

ZAP! ZAP! ZAP! Sherece is flustered, on the verge of a breakdown until-- Cornell hops on stage.

CORNELL  
Hey. Hey. Babygirl. It's all good.

SHERECE  
This... this is inconceivable. I never make a mistake. My work is perpetually immaculate.

CORNELL  
And it still is. You had a little hiccup. Don't let it get to you.

Cornell takes the mini-defibrillator from her. Humiliated, Sherece runs off the stage. Cornell follows.

INT. NADEA'S DOMAIN./EXT. PLANTATION. CONTINUOUS.

Nadea watches from her window. She releases the tension from her tightly-clenched fist. On stage, the mouse returns to life. Ezekiel stares into Nadea's window. In the audience we see Emmanuel glancing behind him to where Cornell continues to console Sherece. Guilt ringing over him, Emmanuel jumps out of his seat.

MICHIEL  
Where are you going?

EMMANUEL  
I just wanna talk to her.

MICHIEL  
No, you've done enough.

EZEKIEL (O.S.)  
Next up.

Ezekiel stares at Michiel from on stage.

MICHIEL  
No, umm. We're not going on.

EZEKIEL  
Yes, you are.  
(then)  
Nadea insists.

MOMENTS LATER, Michiel and Emmanuel are on stage. The two taps fists, then-- begin. Michiel throws jabs and kicks. Emmanuel dodges with skill and grace. The crowd *oohs* and *aahs* over their synchronized dance.

Emmanuel goes on the offensive. He gives a quick jab that Michiel ducks, giving him a queer eye. Emmanuel charges. He throws a straight punch, jab, then an elbow.

Michiel jerkily counters each. Emmanuel's obviously going off script. Left hook. Kick. Push. He grabs her arm, flicks his foot, and slams her down. He prepares a "final blow," then--

APPLAUSE. Mother and son emerge from their trance to see the family cheering. They bow for the crowd and head offstage.

MICHIEL

What was that? You went off script.

EMMANUEL

I put on a show.

MICHIEL

By trying to give me a concussion?

EMMANUEL

You should have adapted.

MICHIEL

What is your problem, Emmanuel?

EMMANUEL

You want me to start from the top?  
I just lost my chance to fight at state after you promised we'd make it back. I'm grounded for something that I can't even remember doing. I'm seeing crazy things all over the place, which nobody believes. And now I'm out here at some stupid talent show dancing around like a lil circus monkey.

MICHIEL

You need to be quiet.

EMMANUEL

No, maybe you need to listen.

*POP!* Michiel pops Emmanuel across the face. Emmanuel touches the spot before storming off. Michiel follows for a moment, then... lets it go.

Emmanuel spots Sherece sitting by herself and heads over.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

(to Sherece)

Walk with me. I found some new info on what's happening here.

Sherece doesn't even look his way.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
C'mon Sherece.

SHERECE  
I don't care. Leave me alone.

EMMANUEL  
Look, my bad on the song stuff.

SHERECE  
YOU HATE EVERYTHING! YOU RUIN  
EVERYTHING! YOUR HEART'S A  
PERPETUAL BLACK HOLE!

EMMANUEL  
Sherece. Chill.

Sherece throws the mini-defibrillator on the ground.

SHERECE  
I wish you were never my brother.

Before Emmanuel can say anything else, a hand falls on his shoulder. He looks up to see Cornell.

CORNELL  
Leave it.

EMMANUEL  
I was tryna apologize.

CORNELL  
I know. Here.

Cornell hands him his phone with the app open. Emmanuel fights back tears. He grabs a drink from the table and marches away.

He takes a big gulp and crumples the cup. A drowsy haze overtakes him. Walking becomes a challenge. The townspeople rise from their seats. They change into ceremonial white garb. Others slick paint across their faces.

Emmanuel glances back to Cornell and Sherece. Both slump in their chairs. He attempts to move toward them, but collapses midway.

EMMANUEL  
Sherece. Cornell.

Emmanuel pushes himself up with all his might to catch a glimpse of-- Nadea, standing over him, before he passes out.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING NOW CHARRED. DUSK.

Emmanuel's vision is foggy, unclear.

SHERECE

Emmanuel! Wake up! Please.

He feels something... wet. His vision clears up. He's in a makeshift baptism pool. Dark, sultry soot surrounds it.

In front of him, all of his cousins, from the youngest to the oldest, are immersed in the water. Family, townspeople, and officials are painted and dressed in ceremonial garb. Some are calm. Others weep. The weak are subdued by those around them. They scrape and fight to get near the pool.

EMMANUEL

What's-- what's going on?

SHERECE

I don't know.

Emmanuel pulls himself out of the pool, but Uncle Chicken pushes him back in with his sword's scabbard.

EMMANUEL

Yo! What is this?

UNCLE CHICKEN

Stay as you are. It'll begin soon.

EMMANUEL

(to Sherece)

Where's Cornell and Michiel?

Sherece points. Behind them, Michiel holds Cornell up. He's limp and weak from whatever was in the juice. Emmanuel glances at the masked family members surrounding the pool, then--

Bodies appear from the outskirts of the forest, all dressed in white. They follow Nadea. The soot lightly singes her bare feet, but she pays it no mind. At the edge of the pool, Nadea extends her hand. William Edgefield pulls out the dagger he used on her years ago.

NADEA

All of you will have a powerful impact on our community.

Nadea takes it from him and cuts her wrist.

NADEA (CONT'D)

But one of you will be a savior.

The blood falls into the pool and... expands. It envelops the water, turning it deep blood red. Nadea steps into the pool. Emmanuel touches his neck-- THE DIVINE SYMBOL HAS RETURNED.

NADEA (CONT'D)

Who will go first?

No child comes forward.

NADEA (CONT'D)

Please. Don't make this hard.

Emmanuel steps forward.

NADEA (CONT'D)

I expected no less.

EMMANUEL

What are you going to do?

Nadea grabs him by his face and chest. She dunks him into the crimson liquid as WE CUT TO--

A VISION.

- Abigail, in ceremonial garb, dances IN THE FOREST as her family (Nadea, Nathaniel, and Charles) watch.

- A soft green glow emanates from Abigail's and Nadea's hands. A mouse creeps back to life. Nadea enthusiastically shows it to Nathaniel. He beams with approval.

- Nadea uses her powers to heal a SMALL PUPPY inside PATRICIA'S ROOM. Patricia is ecstatic.

- IN THE FIELDS, Nadea raises her head. She sees William holding up the puppy. Patricia, teary-eyed, points to Nadea.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING. NIGHT. VISION.

Once again, Emmanuel finds himself on the burning cross... but he feels no pain. Everyone from the first sacrifice stands before them, reliving the moment. However, this time the children from the reunion are faces within the crowd. The fire enveloping the cross dissipates. Emmanuel's bonds loosen. He gently falls to the ground.

Sherece stands underneath Nadea's cloak. One by one, the children give themselves to her-- locking hands. Nadea beckons for Emmanuel to take her hand. He does, completing the circle. The divine symbol burns with impunity.

THE VISION ENDS.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING NOW CHARRED. NIGHT.

Emmanuel bursts out from underneath the water. Sherece, and the rest of their cousins, do the same.

NADEA

On this night, in the wee hours of 1770, this family made a pact with one the oceans call MAAFA. She became one with my very being and one with the continued prosperity of the Adedeji. In exchange, every fifty years when we gather together, we repay her with sacrifice.

(to the kids)

One of you will honor this family with sacrifice, but only if you so choose.

Emmanuel pulls himself from the pool.

EMMANUEL

What if... what if we all refuse?

Nadea gestures to William, Patricia, Ezekiel, and every servant in the vicinity. She takes Patricia by the throat and cuts her open. Every individual who stepped forward slashes their throat. Blood sprays across the ground. The children scream.

Patricia hits the ground, dead. However, before this reality has a chance to sink in, all of the victims miraculously stand back up. The scars across their necks nowhere to be found.

NADEA

Every single man, woman, and child in this family becomes just like them. Neither living, nor dead. Forever bound to this plantation as my eternal servant.

Off Emmanuel's and Sherece's terrified expression--

CUT TO:

INT. MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Cornell hurriedly packs. The kids sit on the bed with vacant expressions. Michiel stands by the door.

MICHIEL

I really think we're overreacting.

CORNELL

Overreacting? Did you see what the hell I just saw? They had our kids in a pool of blood talking 'bout sacrificing them. We're leaving.

MICHIEL

And going where? We rescheduled our flight to Monday.

CORNELL

I don't give a damn. We'll sleep in the terminal.

MICHIEL

Let me just talk to Nadea.

CORNELL

Talk?! Baby, the only thing we need to say to her is bye.

Michiel crosses her arms. Emmanuel and Sherece's eyes bounce between their parents. For once, Cornell doesn't back down.

MICHIEL

What about the money?

CORNELL

The money?! Go talk to her if you want. But your family will not be here when you come back.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS/EXT. OUTSIDE THE MANSION. CONTINUOUS.

The entire family hauls ass down the long, winding steps and bursts out of the main entrance. Aunt Corine, Skeeter, and Trey pack their vehicle. Emmanuel throws his bag in the trunk. Sherece checks her pocket.

SHERECE

I forgot my defibrillator!

EMMANUEL

We can't go back for that.

SHERECE

Please!

CORNELL

Your brother's right. Now get in.

MICHIEL

Cornell!

CORNELL

Nope. We are not going back.

EMMANUEL

I promise to help you make another  
one the minute we're back home.

SHERECE

No lie?

Emmanuel pinky promises with her.

EMMANUEL

No lie.

They hop inside.

INT. THE FAMILY SUV. CONTINUOUS.

Cornell starts the SUV, and it bolts down the dirt road  
leading off of the plantation.

CORNELL

Y'all two don't worry. We're  
getting out of here and never  
coming back.

EMMANUEL

What about everyone else?

Aunt Corine's car zooms past them.

CORNELL

Awe hell nah.

Cornell steps on the accelerator.

MICHIEL

Cornell, you need to slow down.

SHERECE

Dad, I'm scared.

CORNELL

Everything's going to be alright,  
babygirl.

MICHIEL

Cornell, slow down.

CORNELL

No. No. No. I ain't stopping till  
we are out this fucking backwater,  
evil ass--

EMMANUEL

DAD, LOOKOUT!

Cornell hits the brakes. Dirt and rubble kick into the air.  
Nadea and her followers block their path.

EXT. THE FAMILY SUV. CONTINUOUS.

Cornell steps out.

CORNELL

Get outta the way.

No one moves.

CORNELL (CONT'D)

Get outta the way or I'm running  
all of you over.

NADEA

You know you won't do that.

Cornell looks back into the SUV, holding out his hand.

CORNELL

(to Michiel)  
Give me the gun.

MICHIEL

Excuse me?

CORNELL

Give me the gun, now.

MICHIEL

What are you going to do with it?  
(off Cornell's expression)  
Look at your kids.

They're huddled together scared.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

What we're not going to do is wave  
a gun in front of an angry mob and  
make this worse. We'll figure  
something out, but this ain't it.

CORNELL

If we don't leave now, we're never getting out of here.

MICHIEL

You don't know that.

CORNELL

And how are you so sure? How do you know we're not going back in there to get slaughtered?

MICHIEL

This is still my family.

CORNELL

Who are outside our car ready to drag us back. What the hell do you think is going to happen?

MICHIEL

Why won't you just listen to me?

CORNELL

Because I'm tryna get us out of here in one piece.

Emmanuel flings the door open and runs out.

CORNELL (CONT'D)

Emmanuel! Emmanuel, what are you doing?

MICHIEL

Emmanuel, get back in this car right now!

Emmanuel rushes to the middle of the road.

EMMANUEL

What do you want from us? Huh! Tell me! What do you want?!

Cornell scoops Emmanuel up, but he fights back. Before they can do anything else, Nadea's upon them. Father and son freeze. Nadea's expression changes from dominance to concern.

NADEA

Come.

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

The entire family sits in the most awkward family dinner ever. Nadea is front and center.

NADEA  
(to Sherece)  
Is the meal to your liking, baby?

Sherece nods.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
(to Michiel)  
How about you?

MICHIEL  
It's good, Grandma.

NADEA  
Emmanuel, you haven't eaten  
anything.

EMMANUEL  
I'm not hungry.

NADEA  
You gotta eat something. I know all  
this commotion has left you under  
the weather.

Cornell slams his hands on the table.

CORNELL  
This is some bullshit!

NADEA  
Speak your piece.

CORNELL  
You're not going to sacrifice one  
of our kids to some imaginary god  
for money. It's fucking crazy.

NADEA  
There's nothing imaginary about the  
one we serve. And it's not just  
money. It's your continued  
prosperity. Think about it. The  
luck you acquire in all that you  
do. The accomplishments you achieve  
in record time. Even the talents  
your children miraculously display  
with no effort. Where do you think  
it all comes from?

CORNELL  
Where? Maafa? This is ridiculous.

EMMANUEL

No. She's real. I saw her. Maafa.  
Nadea. Everything that happened all  
those years ago. We all saw it.

NADEA

We cleansed this plantation of its  
despicable tenants and turned this  
town into a utopia for our people.

EMMANUEL

What about Solomon? The Akinmade?

NADEA

What about them?

EMMANUEL

You cursed them.

NADEA

I spared their existence.

Nadea moves her hair to REVEAL: A long gash across her neck.

NADEA (CONT'D)

A gift from them. Maafa desired a  
feast for their treachery. I gave  
them respite.

EMMANUEL

You chained them here for eternity.

NADEA

Do you find our methods cruel?

CORNELL

More like barbaric.

NADEA

Michiel, when you wanted to  
franchise your gym, who did you  
come to?

MICHIEL

Grandma, don't do this.

NADEA

Answer.

MICHIEL

You.

NADEA

(to Cornell)

When you needed startup funds for your app, who did you reach out to?

(off Cornell's silence)

And when the money ran out and you put a lien on your house without telling anyone... who did you come crawling to this weekend for help?

EMMANUEL

Wait. What?!

Emmanuel turns to his father. Cornell looks away.

CORNELL

You weren't supposed to know about that.

EMMANUEL

That's why we're here?

SHERECE

(to Michiel)

We're gonna be homeless?

CORNELL

(to Emmanuel)

I'm sorry.

Emmanuel pushes his chair back so he can leave.

NADEA

Just wait. One moment. Please.

(then)

There is an out. If every single member of the Adedeji family renounces us... forever. You'll lose everything, but you will be free. No punishment, no damnation.

CORNELL

I want out.

EMMANUEL

So do I.

SHERECE

Affirmative.

Cornell look at his wife.

CORNELL

Michiel?

Michiel turns away. Cornell slumps into his chair.

NADEA  
 (smiling)  
 Now.  
 (to Emmanuel)  
 I would like to show you something.

INT. A VAGUELY FAMILIAR ROOM. LATER.

Nadea rummages through a bookshelf. The portrait of a woman and boy looms over them.

NADEA  
 Don't be too angry with your  
 father. He's a simple man.

EMMANUEL  
 What about Michiel?

Nadea pulls down a thick, dense book.

NADEA  
 She's trying.

She opens the book to REVEAL: A FAMILY ALBUM, littered with photos of Nadea and the young boy. Emmanuel turns the pages. Picnics. Birthdays. Vacations. First steps. Crying. Giggling.

EMMANUEL  
 You look really happy.

NADEA  
 At the time, I truly was.

EMMANUEL  
 Then what happened?

NADEA  
 What's the earliest thing you can  
 remember?

EMMANUEL  
 Not much. But... I remember packing  
 up everything I could in a bag and  
 I started walking. Cornell and  
 Michiel found me on the side of the  
 road. I was about to get in some  
 man's car who pulled over.

NADEA  
 Cornell and Michiel. Not Mom and  
 Dad?

(MORE)

NADEA (CONT'D)  
 (off Emmanuel's silence)  
 How old were you?

EMMANUEL  
 I don't know. Maybe like six or seven.

NADEA  
 Why do you think you did it?

EMMANUEL  
 Back then, I just knew I wasn't home. I wasn't where I was supposed to be. I kept on telling them I just wanna go home but they just said I was being silly.

NADEA  
 But you weren't home, right? You never were.

Nadea turns the album to the front page. In colorful letters it reads-- EMMANUEL ADEDEJI AGE 1-5. Emmanuel jumps to his feet and moves away from Nadea.

NADEA (CONT'D)  
 There's so much I need to tell you. About Nathaniel. Our family. Our heritage. What we've been entrusted to carry on... but for now know this. I've lost you twice. I will never lose you again.

Emmanuel quickly EXITS THE ROOM. PACES THROUGH THE HALLWAY. DOWN THE STAIRS INTO--

THE DINING ROOM. HE PICKS UP A PLATE AND HEADS INTO--

THE MAIN FOYER. Where the grownups argue. Emmanuel spots his parents. He HURLS the plate straight at their heads. They dodge. The plate smashes into the wall.

INT. MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

Emmanuel drops the family albums on the bed.

EMMANUEL  
 You lied.

MICHIEL  
 No. No, we didn't.

EMMANUEL

Then explain all these pics. If this is my first time here, why does Nadea have all this?

MICHIEL

You were young.

CORNELL

We didn't think you were ready to know everything.

EMMANUEL

Everything? What is everything?

CORNELL

Let's just take a minute to calm down.

Cornell pulls out his phone. Emmanuel grabs it and slings it across the room.

EMMANUEL

I don't need meditation. I want to know why I'm in all these photos!

CORNELL

When me and your momma had you, we were still in college. We were babies ourselves. We... we--

MICHIEL

We didn't want to put everything on hold just cause we had a child. So... Nadea made us an offer. She'd cover everything if we just... gave you to her.

EMMANUEL

YOU SOLD ME?!

CORNELL

That's not it. I mean, I know it sounds like it. But that's not it.

MICHIEL

We made a mistake. And we knew it. So we came back and got you.

EMMANUEL

When?

(off their silence)

When did you come back and get me?

MICHIEL  
When you were six.

EMMANUEL  
Why can't I remember any of this?

MICHIEL  
You were so messed up over leaving here. You'd try every which way to get out the house and come... here.

CORNELL  
We tried everything. Family therapy, meditation, even... pills. Nothing made you give up trying to come back here. Then we heard about hypnotherapy.

EMMANUEL  
You made me forget?

MICHIEL  
It was just until we could get you under control.

Michiel steps forward, but Emmanuel backs away.

EMMANUEL  
Don't touch me. Just... stay away from me.

He exits.

INT. A HALLWAY IN THE MANSION. NIGHT.

Emmanuel, head in his lap, bangs on the mansion's walls.

INT. A SIDEROOM IN THE MANSION. MOMENTS LATER.

The children have been sectioned off to this room. Emmanuel enters. Voices speak in hushed tones.

FRIGHTENED VOICE  
Why should it be me?

ACCUSING VOICE  
You're the oldest out of all of us!

FRIGHTENED VOICE  
Why don't they just sacrifice one of the babies?

APPALLED VOICE

What the hell is wrong with you?

ANNOYED VOICE

A baby can't say yes. It's gotta be one of us.

FEARFUL VOICE

I don't want to die.

INSIGHTFUL VOICE

We're all dead if no one volunteers...

Emmanuel approaches Sherece.

SHERECE

Are you scared?

Emmanuel shakes his head. *Of course not.*

SHERECE (CONT'D)

Why can't I be brave, like you?

Emmanuel holds her hand. It's a small comfort. Everything weighs heavy on Emmanuel's mind. This pressure leads him to--

INT. THE BOTANICAL GARDEN. MOMENTS LATER.

Where he sits alone. Every emotion he's experienced tumbles out. Yemi appears next to him. Osanyin and Prima are nearby, planting roses.

EMMANUEL

We're all about to die and y'all are out here planting flowers.

YEMI

There's always a volunteer.

EMMANUEL

No one should have to make that kind'a sacrifice.

PRIMA

You have no idea how much we agree.

EMMANUEL

You were the first ones to warn me about Nadea. The first ones to tell me about the Akinmade, and the only ones here who knew about Solomon.

(MORE)

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

(then)  
Who are y'all?

OSANYIN  
We're family.

EMMANUEL  
You're more than that. I know it.

*Beat.*

OSANYIN  
Nadea is inevitable... but so is  
our truth. Emmanuel, do you want to  
see our truth? It might not change  
anything, but it's all we have.

Emmanuel wipes his bloodshot, teary eyes, and nods.

INT. THE MUSEUM OF THE ADEDEJI/INNER SANCTUM. LATER.

Emmanuel and the girls head to the back of the museum. Osanyin digs her fingers into a small crevice between the chalk white wall, and pulls. Prima and Yemi do the same from the other side. Slowly, the INNER SANCTUM is revealed. Emmanuel enters. In front of him are four objects obscured by white cloth. Four paintings are obscured in the same manner.

OSANYIN  
Don't get scared now.

Emmanuel snatches the blanket off the unknown object to REVEAL: A TRANSPARENT COFFIN. Inside-- one of the smoldering corpses. Emmanuel steps back in shock. Osanyin rips the cover from the portrait above the coffin to reveal a portrait of herself. Yemi and Prima rip the sheets from the other two. A portrait of their visage hangs above their corpses.

EMMANUEL  
No.

PRIMA  
Born in 1806. Dead by 1820. I  
sacrificed myself to Nadea in  
exchange for bringing my father out  
of his coma.

OSANYIN  
Born 1853. Sacrificed on a cold  
night in 1870. I offered myself to  
our god and she cured my sister's  
illness.

YEMI

Born in the year 1907. I died by the hands of this family in 1920. I gave my soul to Nadea so my father could never hurt my mother again.

EMMANUEL

How are you still alive?

PRIMA

We're remnants. That last vestiges of our corporeal beings un-devoured by the beast.

EMMANUEL

That doesn't make any sense. How can I see you and talk to you if you're ghosts? Sherece, and my parents, too.

OSANYIN

No, not adults. Our energy is connected to potential sacrifices. Nothing ever truly dies, Emmanuel.

YEMI

We were trapped. Smoldering in a state of non-life inside our prisons until--

The girls gaze towards the final monument. Solomon now stands beside them. Emmanuel snatches the covers off, to REVEAL: A TORN PAINTING OF SOLOMON AND AN EMPTY COFFIN.

SOLOMON

Solomon. Born 1954. Bound to eternal subjugation in 1970. I rebelled against an unjust system. Stole sustenance from our god. Rallied like-minded followers in an attempt to rebel. We failed -- and now suffer her wrath. We are now known as the Akinmade. The warriors who attempted to take the crown.

NADEA (O.S.)

A name far too kind for traitors.

Nadea enters the inner sanctum. The girls vanish.

NADEA (CONT'D)

We suffer still from his betrayal. Yes, they were punished -- but they were not the only ones.

(MORE)

NADEA (CONT'D)

I was unwilling to bring more pain to our family. So there was no sacrifice. And now I am at the doorstep of the afterlife because of the actions of petulant children. Now, they aim to fully destroy me, through you.

EMMANUEL

How?

NADEA

Because you are my brother. And they know I would never harm you.

EMMANUEL

I'm not your dead brother. Solomon saw through all of this.

NADEA

Solomon put his own selfish desires over the future of our people.

SOLOMON

I wanted a world where no child must choose to die in exchange for a hollow paradise.

NADEA

And look where it left you.

EMMANUEL

He didn't want to die. No one would.

NADEA

I told you before. Nothing truly dies. What he did was strip them all of their blessing.

EMMANUEL

THIS IS NOT A BLESSING!

NADEA

Will you conspire with him?

EMMANUEL

I'll volunteer.

NADEA

You will not.

EMMANUEL

How can you stop me? Isn't this  
what you want?

NADEA

My will is absolute. A sacrifice  
will be made. But it won't be you.

Nadea exits. Emmanuel turns to Solomon, an idea bubbling.

EMMANUEL

There's someone I need to bring  
back here. Don't blink.

Solomon nods.

INT. MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. A LITTLE WHILE LATER.

Michiel and Cornell speak in hushed tones. Sherece tinkers  
with her mini-defibrillator.

CORNELL

What do we say to him after that?

MICHIEL

He's a child. The first mistake we  
made was explaining ourselves.

CORNELL

Telling him to shut up and trust us  
after that isn't gonna fly.

MICHIEL

We were gonna be kids raising a  
kid. We did what we had to do.

CORNELL

You did what you had to do.  
Remember?

MICHIEL

Wow. Tell me. Do you enjoy the  
glass house you live in?

*CLICK!* They whip around to find Emmanuel at the door.

CORNELL

Hey, what's good, E-man?

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

What's up, baby boy?

EMMANUEL

Stop being weird.

CORNELL

Cool. Cool. We're not weird. We're not weird at all.

MICHIEL

What your Dad said.

EMMANUEL

Just. Please, listen. I need y'all to meet some-- one. I think he... they can help us stop this.

CORNELL

Okay, where are they?

EMMANUEL

I don't know. But when I call, they'll come. Y'all just have to trust me.

MICHIEL

No. We shouldn't be running around everywhere right now. We should all stay here and...

SHERECE

...I'll go with you!

MICHIEL

None of you are going anywhere!

SHERECE

BUT I HAVE THE CAPACITY TO FACILITATE BRAVERY JUST LIKE EMMANUEL.

EMMANUEL

(to Sherece)

This is on me, okay?

(then, to his parents)

I can do this with or without y'all. Choose. 'Cause no one's stopping me.

CORNELL

I'll go.

(to Michiel)

You and Sherece stay here.

MICHIEL

This is ridiculous.

CORNELL

We owe it to him.

Sherece tugs at Emmanuel's shirt.

SHERECE

I have the ability to aid you.

Emmanuel hugs his little sister.

EMMANUEL

Do that by staying right here.

MICHIEL

(to Emmanuel)

If this helps you believe in us.  
Fine. Just be careful. I love you.

Michiel hugs Emmanuel with all her might. He won't admit it, but this is nice. Emmanuel and Cornell exit. A BEAT. THEN--  
*KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!* Michiel opens the door to find Nadea standing outside.

NADEA

I'd like to speak with both of you.

MICHIEL

(to Sherece)

Go outside.

SHERECE

But she said both of us!

MICHIEL

Outside. Now.

Sherece pouts her way to the door. Michiel closes it.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

Tell me this is all a bad joke so I  
can laugh, please.

(then)

This is insane. I always knew our  
family had secrets, but-- I've been  
defending you and I need you to  
tell me that this is some stupid,  
lil prank we always do.

NADEA

(calmly)

Listen...

MICHIEL

...You're not sacrificing either of  
my children.

NADEA  
It's their choice.

MICHIEL  
It's not!

Nadea takes a seat.

NADEA  
Do you know why I've always liked  
you?

MICHIEL  
Honestly, Grandma, that doesn't  
really matter--

Nadea holds up her hand. *Silence.*

NADEA  
You're not weak or shortsighted.  
Not like your husband. You know  
your circumstances and act  
accordingly. You saved Emmanuel  
from a childhood of struggle.

MICHIEL  
Every time I look in his eyes all I  
see is resentment. Giving him up is  
my greatest regret.

NADEA  
It doesn't matter how you feel now.  
You made the right decision then.

MICHIEL  
Have you asked the rest of them for  
a child?

NADEA  
I've spoken with everyone. They ask  
why I dote on the ones who never  
visit. They say you take, but never  
give.

MICHIEL  
I don't give a fuck what they think  
of me or my family. I've been  
through enough! No one is taking  
Emmanuel or...

SHERECE (O.S.)  
...I'll do it!

Michiel turns to see Sherece standing in the doorway. Michiel rushes over to her daughter.

MICHIEL  
I TOLD YOU TO STAY OUTSIDE!

SHERECE  
But, Mom!

NADEA  
Let her speak.

MICHIEL  
(to Nadea)  
She doesn't understand what she's saying!

SHERECE  
But I do! I do...

MICHIEL  
...You will die.

SHERECE  
And I'll save you, Daddy, and Emmanuel.  
(to Nadea)  
I request immediate immunity for my immediate family from any harm... please.

MAAFA  
So it shall be done.

Michiel interrupts one last time. Whispers to her daughter.

MICHIEL  
I will kill every single person in this house. You know I can do it. No one can make you choose this.

Sherece hugs Michiel.

SHERECE  
You don't have to 'cause I'm a hero.

She turns to Nadea. Nadea bends down and pricks Sherece's palms. Sherece winces. Nadea holds her hand out in a balled fist. Sherece does the same. Nadea flips her hand and opens it. Water. Sherece does the same. Blood.

NADEA

There is no turning back. No one  
will volunteer to take your place.  
Are you ready to serve?

Sherece meets her matriarch eye to eye. The divine symbol  
writhes on her neck.

INT. THE MUSESUM OF THE ADEDEJI. NIGHT.

Cornell and Emmanuel head inside.

CORNELL

E-man, I really feel like I owe you  
a better explanation of everything  
that's happening back home.

EMMANUEL

Yeah, but not right now.

CORNELL

I just want you to understand, we--  
I came out here to fix it. I really  
messed up with this whole app  
thing, but-- I'm not going to let  
us lose the house.

EMMANUEL

Dad, you made a mistake. Stop  
beating yourself up about it.

CORNELL

Did you just call me--

EMMANUEL

Don't ruin it.

Cornell zips his lips. Emmanuel searches around the museum.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

Solomon. I'm back. And... I need  
your help.

Solomon steps out from the shadows. He focuses on Cornell.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

(re: Cornell)

He's here to help, too.

Assured, Solomon joins them. Emmanuel scoops soot and ash  
from the broken jar on the museum floor.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
 (to Cornell)  
 Bend down. Trust me.

CORNELL  
 Alright, E-man.

EMMANUEL  
 Put your hands out. And don't freak  
 out on me, okay?

CORNELL  
 Ain't nothing you can do that's  
 gonna trip me out at this point.

EMMANUEL  
 This will burn. Don't let go.

Emmanuel clasps his father's hands. The dirt sizzles and  
 burns. Cornell fights as long as he can until--

CORNELL  
 Ahhh! Shit!

He pulls away. Emmanuel blows the soot into his face. Cornell  
 coughs and wipes his eyes.

CORNELL (CONT'D)  
 Dammit, Emmanuel.

EMMANUEL  
 Open your eyes.

Cornell squints one eye open. THE AKINMADE APPEAR.

CORNELL  
 HOLY SWEET PEACHES!! WHAT THE HELL!

EMMANUEL  
 Cornell! Cornell! You gotta chill.

CORNELL  
 But... but...

EMMANUEL  
 I know. Really. But stop.

SOLOMON  
 Does he believe now?

EMMANUEL  
 Ain't no way he doesn't. Now, I  
 need you to show both of us what  
 you showed me last time.

Solomon extends his hands. Emmanuel takes it.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)  
 (to Cornell)  
 You, too.

CORNELL  
 Uh. Nah, I'm good.

EMMANUEL  
 I can't do this without you.

Reluctantly, Cornell grabs Solomon's and Emmanuel's hands. Solomon closes his eyes.

A VISION.

ONE OF MURDER AND REVENGE.

Nadea wheezes through her slit throat. Maafa, still radiant, yet herself woozy from the wound inflicted upon Nadea, holds Solomon in the air. Her eyes only speak punishment. Solomon's gaze never averts itself from the wound on Maafa's neck.

THE VISION ENDS.

BACK TO REALITY.

Solomon lets go. Emmanuel and Cornell gasp for air.

EMMANUEL  
 You tried to kill Nadea.

SOLOMON  
 The Akinmade miscalculated. We didn't realize her true nature and paid the price.

EMMANUEL  
 But Maafa still bled. She bleeds just like us. What if your mistake was trying to kill the vessel, instead of the god? What if we went after Maafa, instead of Nadea?

For the first time in our story, Solomon's eyes light up.

SOLOMON  
 We could end this nightmare.

CORNELL  
 What if it doesn't work?

SOLOMON

Then you will be doomed to  
subservience for eternity.

CORNELL

I'm not sure I like you.

EMMANUEL

When would we ever have that  
chance?

SOLOMON

At the climax of the sacrifice.

INT. BOTANICAL GARDEN. NIGHT.

Father and son emerge from the museum.

CORNELL

So that's the plan, right?

EMMANUEL

Unless we figure out something  
better. Is Michiel gonna be down  
for this?

CORNELL

Of course. She'll be on the same  
page once we explain everything.

In front of them, servants light torches across the garden.  
They sway in jubilation, sprinkling soot and white ash across  
the floor. Emmanuel stops one of them.

EMMANUEL

Has it already started?

SERVANT

One has come forward.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING NOW CHARRED. NIGHT.

Nadea watches her servants struggle to erect the crosses.  
Their bodies writhe in pain, controlled by Nadea's power.  
William falls to his knees, exhausted. He stares Nadea down.

NADEA

Speak freely.

WILLIAM

I only made one mistake that night.  
I should'a made no spectacle.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)  
Should'a took y'all outside and  
shot ya in the head like the  
worthless rats you--

A finger sways. The tip of his forehead hits the dirt.  
William bends to her will. Nadea smirks.

INT. THE MAIN FOYER. NIGHT.

Emmanuel and Cornell open the doors leading to the main foyer  
to REVEAL: A PROCESSION. Family members drink and celebrate.

In the middle of this great ritual we find-- SHERECE. White  
and gold trimming adorn her face. Long, shimmering ceremonial  
garb clings to her small frame. The divine symbol upon her  
is a bright, pulsating red.

CORNELL  
No.

EMMANUEL  
Sherece? Sherece!

The two slam through the crowd. Their paths are blocked by  
elders in white robes. Michiel approaches them.

CORNELL  
What is happening?! Please tell me  
this is not what I think it is!

MICHIEL  
She... she volunteered.

Emmanuel charges an elder to get near his sister.

EMMANUEL  
Sherece!

SHERECE  
I'm brave, Emmanuel. I'll save you,  
Mom, and Dad. Like I did in your  
dream.

EMMANUEL  
No... no, this is not the way!

The elder pushes Emmanuel to the ground. Cornell slams into  
another one so he can reach his son.

CORNELL  
GET OFF OF HIM!

The entire family closes in on them, forcing them both to the floor. They continue to violently struggle.

MICHIEL  
DON'T HURT THEM!

SHERECE  
DADDY!

Nadea enters.

NADEA  
ENOUGH!

Everyone freezes. Nadea makes a quick gesture. Uncle Chicken ties their hands behind their back. Elders pull them up and drag them towards the stairs. Michiel watches in shock.

CORNELL  
(to Michiel)  
THIS IS YOUR FAULT. THIS IS YOUR  
FAULT!

Nadea walks over to the remaining family members and Sherece.

NADEA  
Continue with the preparations. We  
start soon.

Michiel stands frozen to the wall. Terror creeps into her face as they prepare to take Sherece away.

MICHIEL  
Stop! This is not right.

Michiel moves toward Sherece. Nadea blocks her path. She places a hand on Michiel's chest, and pushes her against the wall. Michiel fights back tears.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)  
She's my baby.

NADEA  
You all die if you interfere.  
Remember why this is an honor. Now,  
go convince the others.

Nadea releases Michiel and leaves.

INT. MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. MOMENTS LATER.

Michiel walks in. Husband and son are tied to their seats.

CORNELL

What the hell happened?

MICHIEL

Nadea stopped by and asked if she could talk to me and Sherece.

CORNELL

And you let her?

MICHIEL

I sent Sherece away! I didn't know she'd come back in and do this!

EMMANUEL

Michiel...

MICHIEL

I am your mother! Not Michiel! Your mother. Call me what I am.

EMMANUEL

Mother. We know how to stop Nadea. No one has to die. But we need your help. Please, Mom. We need you.

MICHIEL

Nadea's had her grip on me since the day I was born. I used to always be over here, at her beck and call. Your grandma and granddad went to the grave always telling me to heed her will. And she used to try and teach me these... rituals. Telling me my previous life would emerge and... I moved two thousand miles to get away from her, and now I'm right back here like she always wanted. There's no real choice. I'll do what's necessary to save the family I still can.

Michiel hugs her little delinquent son.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

I should've never given you up. It's the mistake I can never run from. Every time I see you, I want to scream and beat my past self to a bloody pulp. I will never be able to make up for what I put you through, but you'll be fine. She assured me of that. We'll be fine.

(MORE)

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

You've always said I put you  
second, right? Well, that ends  
tonight.

Michiel heads to the exit.

CORNELL

Michiel. Don't do this. Please.  
Please don't to this.

EMMAUNEL

Mom! Mom!

CORNELL

MICHIEL, YOU HAVE TO STOP THIS.  
DAMMIT. PLEASE STOP THIS.

Michiel closes the door on them.

INT. THE MAIN FOYER. CONTINUOUS.

Nadea fixes a smudge on Sherece's face-paint.

NADEA

Done.

Sherece glances at where they dragged her family away.

SHERECE

You promised.

NADEA

They'll be safe and sound. Don't  
worry. I just need you to be brave.

SHERECE

Will it hurt?

NADEA

Only for a moment. Then you'll be  
one with me and there will be no  
more pain.

Nadea pulls Sherece off her pedestal. A congregation of  
bodies draped in white linen, blood, and masks wait by the  
mansion entrance. Michiel makes a beeline to her daughter.

MICHIEL

You're my brave little girl. You  
know that?

SHERECE

Affirmative. Are Dad and Emmanuel okay?

MICHIEL

Of course. I'm going to stay here and take care of them. You don't need to worry about a thing.

SHERECE

Will I see you before... it happens?

MICHIEL

I'll be there. Promise.

Michiel embraces her daughter. Nadea extends her hand.

NADEA

Come.

(to Michiel)

Your sacrifice brings prosperity. One passes, or we all pass. The men never make this choice.

MICHIEL

Just leave. Please.

Nadea abides by her wishes and exits.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. NIGHT.

THE PROCESSION BEGINS. Servants walk with torches in hand. Drums bang. Trumpets and maracas intertwine in harmony. Gatherers hum. Dancers sway in the dark, southern humidity. AT THE BACK OF THE PROCESSION is Sherece. A multitude of followers patiently guide the throne she's seated upon forward.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PROCESSION, Aunt Corine, Skeeter, and Trey cautiously move forward.

AT THE FRONT OF THE PROCESSION is NADEA. All smiles. Kissing anyone who comes near.

INT. MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Michiel downs a bottle of water. A kitchen knife sits beside her. She approaches Emmanuel.

MICHIEL

Open up.

Emmanuel sneers.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

It's gonna be a long night, you  
better open up.

Emmanuel relents. She waterfalls a gulp for him.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

You spit that back at me it's gonna  
be a problem.

EMMANUEL

You knew all along, didn't you?  
(off Michiel's silence)  
They didn't hold you down when they  
drugged everybody, you stopped Dad  
from plowing them over, you didn't  
want me to leave the room, and the  
moment we do leave, Nadea's got  
Sherece's whole ear.

CORNELL

You prolly already knew all the way  
back when Nadea first came to us.

MICHIEL

I knew our family had a secret. I  
didn't know it was this.

EMMANUEL

You're a bad liar.

MICHIEL

You think I'd choose this? For your  
dad? For you? For Sherece? I'm  
playing the cards we were dealt.

CORNELL

You convinced me to take your last  
name. Adedeji. The name holds  
weight... remember? You knew. But  
to sacrifice your own daughter.

MICHIEL

Then who? Who should it be? What if  
no child says yes? Then we all die?  
Someone had to make a real decision  
to save this family and I stepped  
up to the plate.

CORNELL

All we had to do was renounce her.

MICHIEL

And you think all of the Adedeji would have done that? Uncle Chicken, Aunt Orisha, Aunt Kim? You think they're just going to give up that power?

EMMANUEL

Stop making yourself out to be the hero. You aren't out there marching to your death. You're a coward!

MICHIEL

Don't you dare talk to me like that.

CORNELL

No one asked you to do this.

MICHIEL

EVERYONE ASKED ME! As a mother, as a wife, and as a black woman, this was my burden to take on!

From the corner of his eye Emmanuel sees-- YEMI. Hand up to her mouth. *Shhhhhh.*

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

We were broke college students in debt when you knocked me up. The only reason we survived is 'cause I made the decision you couldn't.

CORNELL

Abandoning our son?

MICHIEL

No! Giving him a stable life while we got our shit together. You were too chickenshit to make a hard choice, so I did it for us. And look where we are now. We've built an entire life from that. When Nadea came to me, she said I'm the only one who's ever been strong enough to carry this family. Just like her. I made an impossible choice. And I did it for us.

CORNELL

Sacrificing Sherece ain't for us.

MICHIEL

I made sure, no matter what, one of our children would come out of this alive. Both of you want everything or nothing. That's not how the world works. Do you really think you and your little plan to try and kill a god is going to--

Ezekiel sneaks Michiel into a sleeper hold. She flops backwards, sending them to the ground. She reaches for the knife. Too far away. Ezekiel tightens his grip, then-- she stops moving. Ezekiel rushes over to untie them.

CORNELL

Did-- did you...

EZEKIEL

No. But she'll be out for a while.

CORNELL

I thought you were Nadea's people?

EZEKIEL

I am a loyal and undying servant who's paid for his crimes tenfold. Now, I want peace.

EMMANUEL

What did you do?

EZEKIEL

I sided with our slave-masters.

Ezekiel frees them. Cornell lays Michiel on the bed. Ezekiel ties her up.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

Tell me about your plan.

The trio leave the room. When they're gone, Michiel opens her eyes. She looks to the kitchen knife.

INT. HALLWAY/STAIRS. CONTINUOUS.

The trio move quickly.

EMMANUEL

Do you think it can work?

EZEKIEL

There's no guarantee.

CORNELL  
But you've seen this  
transformation?

EZEKIEL  
Every single time.

EMMANUEL  
Give us something. Anything.

Just before THE STAIRS, Ezekiel stops.

EZEKIEL  
Nadea's refusal to break the pact  
and take another child after  
Solomon's betrayal weakened our  
god. Your matriarch's benevolence  
could be the path to her undoing--

Ezekiel's eyes bulge. He coughs up blood before collapsing,  
knife jutting from his back. Behind him-- MICHIEL.

CORNELL  
Shit.

Michiel grabs Cornell and bashes him in the head. Pivot.  
Throw. He tumbles down the stairs. Michiel turns to--  
EMMANUEL. She pulls the knife out of Ezekiel's back.

MICHIEL  
You can't win this one.

*She's right.* Emmanuel sprints back up the HALLWAY. Then down  
the corridor. Finally stumbling into--

INT. EZEKIEL'S ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

MICHIEL (O.S.)  
Someone's got you at knifepoint.  
They want everything you've got.

Emmanuel searches for anything that can help him.

MICHIEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
You can take them, but there's a  
chance you could die if you engage.  
What's your best choice?

*Click!* Doors continue to open. She's close. Then-- Emmanuel  
sees the vintage lantern atop Ezekiel's desk.

INT. HALLWAY. CONTINUOUS.

*Crash!* Michiel hears something shatter a few doors down. She rushes over and flings open the door to reveal A BLAZING FIRE. Emmanuel slams into her, sending both to the floor. He twists her arm. The knife drops. Michiel thrusts her palm into Emmanuel's nose, dazing him. She kicks him into--

INT. MICHIEL AND CORNELL'S ROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Emmanuel feels something on the ground. It's the mini-defibrillator. Michiel ambles forward.

MICHIEL

I save one of you or lose both of you. Those are my choices.

Emmanuel crawls away.

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

When you were born, I held you up and put my finger out. And you grabbed it with your little grip. You were so strong, and so weak all at once. Right then, I knew you were the most precious thing God ever gave me. And that ain't ever changed, even when your sister came along. I've been protecting you since the day I laid eyes on you. And I'll keep doing that till the day I die.

Michiel extends her arm. Reluctantly, he extends his, then-- jabs the mini-defibrillator into her arm. The shock sends her reeling backwards. Emmanuel bolts back to the--

INT. HALLWAY. CONTINUOUS.

He hits the ground as Michiel grabs hold of his leg. She grabs the knife she dropped before. Emmanuel rips himself away.

MICHIEL

I abandoned you once. I won't do it again. Just give up.

Emmanuel thinks. It's time for a gamble. He charges Michiel. She pivots to throw him down when-- Emmanuel plunges his hand into the knife.

It juts through his palm. He screams. Michiel's rattled. For once, unfocused. Emmanuel pushes her off him. He rips the knife from his hand and plunges it into Michiel's gut. Then-- Emmanuel realizes what he's done.

MICHEL (CONT'D)

Lunge. Sacrifice your own body.  
Catch me off guard. And kill. Fifty-  
fifty. Smart.

Michiel coughs up blood. Frantic, Emmanuel wipes it away.

EMMANUEL

I'm... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to--

MICHEL

Just... say the words. Say the  
words I want to hear.

EMMANUEL

I love you, Mom.

MICHEL

They say you're not supposed to  
have a favorite. But I do.

Michiel resigns herself to her fate. Flames around her. Blood trickling from her body. Emmanuel looks down the hall to see-- Cornell, limping towards him, despair on his face.

INT./EXT. THE FAMILY SUV. NIGHT.

Cornell lays Michiel on the backseat. Pulls out the emergency kit. Dresses her wound. He pours antiseptic on Emmanuel's puncture wound, then starts wrapping it.

CORNELL

She was just doing what she thought  
was right.

EMMANUEL

Yea.

CORNELL

This ain't even your fault, E-man.  
If I didn't fuck up so bad... we  
wouldn't even be here. Sherece  
wouldn't be out there with them  
folks. And you... you wouldn't have  
needed to... I'm sorry, Emmanuel.  
This... all of this. Everything's  
on me and I know you hate me right  
now, but--

A QUIET SPACE  
Are you feeling overwhelmed?

Cornell looks up to see his son holding the app open.

CORNELL  
Yes.

A QUIET SPACE  
Is there anything you'd like to hear?

CORNELL  
September twenty-third. Five P.M.  
Second clip.

*SEARCHING. SEARCHING. SEARCHING.* A video of Michiel and Cornell play-fighting appears. We don't see it, but we hear the laughter, the kisses, and the soft "I love you's." Cornell embraces his son. Emmanuel does the same.

EMMANUEL  
Sherece.

CORNELL  
I know, E-man. Let's do it.

Cornell pulls the gun from the glove compartment. Emmanuel pockets the mini-defibrillator and picks up his mother's knife.

EXT. A PLACE OF BURNING. MOMENTS LATER.

The procession waits on the perimeter of the ceremonial pool. Nadea immerses herself. She sinks into the depths, then--

Two women emerge. First, the frail and old NADEA. The elders hand her a cane. Second, a radiant and young MAAFA. All bow their heads. Maafa gestures for the crowd to bring Sherece forward.

MAAFA  
Your bravery will never be forgotten, my child.

Maafa takes Sherece's hand. She leads her towards the final, un-erected cross, when--

CORNELL (O.S.)  
STEP AWAY FROM HER!

NADEA  
Cornell, you need to accept this.

CORNELL

I don't have to accept nothing! Get away from my child!

Maafa steps towards him. He closes his eyes and shoots. Cornell opens them to find an unfazed Maafa right in front of him. She places the bullet in his hand. Cornell drops the gun out of shock. Emmanuel steps out from the shadows.

EMMANUEL

I volunteer.

NADEA

What? No! Absolutely not!

MAAFA

We have our chosen.

EMMANUEL

She doesn't understand what she's said yes to.

SHERECE

I'm not stupid. I know I'll die.

EMMANUEL

That's it! You know you'll die. But it won't be over. You're giving her everything. An eternal life of servitude. Nothing ever dies, right, Grandma?

The news unnerves Sherece. Maafa notices.

MAAFA

You waiver?

SHERECE

No. I just--

EMMANUEL

I'm your sacrifice. I only have one condition.

NADEA

There will be none of this! You will not take him! Do you hear me?!

MAAFA

(to Emmanuel)  
Speak.

EMMANUEL

My mom, dad, and sister are no longer bound to you.

NADEA

We are one. What you decide, I decide. What we manifest is an effort wrought from our being. Do you hear me? This boy will not be chosen.

MAAFA

Sentimentality clouds your judgement. As it did with Solomon's ilk.

Uncle Chicken blocks Nadea's path to Maafa. Maafa brings Emmanuel close. She pricks him on the palms. Holds up a balled fist. Emmanuel does the same. They open. Water. The other. Blood.

MAAFA (CONT'D)

No one will save you. Do you accept your fate?

Emmanuel nods.

MAAFA (CONT'D)

Then pour.

Blood and water drops to the ground.

MAAFA (CONT'D)

And seed.

Emmanuel follows her moves. They thrust their hands into the ground where the water and blood landed. Sherece's divine symbol fades to a fleshy red. Emmanuel's deeply pulsates.

Nadea fights to get near them, but Uncle Chicken and Aunt Kim hold her back.

MAAFA (CONT'D)

Then we begin.

Maafa pulls out the ceremonial dagger. The family bows. Cornell and Nadea are forced to their knees.

MAAFA (CONT'D)

Tonight, we give thanks to a boy far stronger than any of you. With his sacrifice, you all will know continued prosperity under my watch. GIVE THANKS.

THE WORSHIPPERS  
GIVE THANKS!

MAAFA  
GIVE THANKS!

THE WORSHIPPERS  
GIVE THANKS! GIVE THANKS! GIVE  
THANKS! GIVE THANKS--

They continue chanting. Maafa pulls up Emmanuel's shirt. She closes her eyes. Raises the dagger, then-- Emmanuel pulls out the knife and swings around for the killing blow... only to have his hand caught mid-thrust.

MAAFA  
Do you think me a fool, boy?

She tightens her grip. The knife falls out of his hands.

MAAFA (CONT'D)  
Too simple-minded to notice your  
bloodlust? You conspire to take my  
life and expect me to stand here  
oblivious.  
(then)  
I am not Nadea. And I will have  
what's owe--

Maafa stops mid-sentence. She drops Emmanuel. Checks herself. The knife juts from her side. A few feet away, Sherece crawls backwards with a defiant scowl.

MAAFA (CONT'D)  
You!

Emmanuel rips the knife from Maafa's body and pushes it against her neck. Still, she doesn't panic.

MAAFA (CONT'D)  
Make the right choice.

Emmanuel thrusts the knife through her neck, then pulls it away. Maafa drops to the ground, dead. Sherece wipes the snot away from her nose.

SHERECE  
I'm braver than you.

EMMANUEL  
(still in disbelief)  
Yea. Yea, I know.

AUNT ORISA  
GRAB HIM! NOW!

Elders rush Emmanuel, but he keeps them at bay with the knife. He pushes Sherece behind him.

EMMANUEL  
Stay back! She's dead! She's  
fucking dead! She can't do anything  
to us anymore. It's over.

The crowd edges towards them, until-- Maafa stands up. Completely unscathed. She rushes Emmanuel, snatches the knife, and tosses it aside.

SHERECE  
Leave him alone!

Maafa waves her hand. Sherece hits the ground with a thud, as if an invisible weight holds her down.

MAAFA  
Betrayal after betrayal. I have  
brought you security. I have  
brought you safety. I've brought  
this entire wretched town to its  
knees. I've allowed this family to  
know dominion and riches unknown to  
our people since we were in chains.

Maafa clenches her fist. Emmanuel grabs his chest. The color from his face fades. White flames simmer across his skin. Everyone, excluding Nadea, collapses to the ground on fire.

Cornell reaches out for his children, but he can't reach. His outstretched fingers start to disintegrate.

SHERECE  
Emmanuel...

Emmanuel crawls to Sherece. Fear captures them both. Emmanuel peers from his soon-to-be dirt grave at-- NADEA. The only one unaffected by Maafa's rage.

MAAFA  
If you won't offer me one, then I  
will take you all.

A white light consumes Emmanuel. They lost, but at least they kept fighting. Our young warrior accepts his fate...

...A SINGULAR WAIL PIERCES THE SKY. The knife falls to the grass. Emmanuel opens his eyes. Looking upwards-- NADEA. A deep gash across her neck. She's slit her own throat.

ACROSS FROM THEM, Maafa gasps. Trying to stop the bleeding. She concentrates. The wound heals, then spills back open. Nadea crumples to the ground. Tears from her long, sordid life well up into one, final revelation.

NADEA

I just wanted my brother and my family back. I wanted to end our suffering -- I wanted freedom.

Nadea's eyes go blank. Maafa lets out a final scream. Her ethereal presence vanishes with each drop of blood. Thus, matriarch and goddess die. Cornell rushes over to his children. He bear hugs them.

CORNELL

Tell me you're okay! Say something to me. Anything!

SHERECE

You're crushing me.

EMMANUEL

Same.

CORNELL

Deal with it 'cause I'm never letting either of y'all go again!

UNCLE CHICKEN

Don't let them get away! Maafa tests us! If we forsake her now, she'll take everything away!

The crowd shifts from despair to retribution. Cornell grabs the gun and looks over to his son. Emmanuel nods. Cornell grabs Sherece and throws her over his shoulder.

Father and son dash into the forest. The congregation gives chase. Unbeknownst to any of them-- MAAFA'S BODY IS GONE.

EXT. THE FOREST/FRONT OF MANSION. NIGHT.

The family makes a dash to the mansion. A legion of enraged worshippers follow. Cornell takes a shot in the dark. The mob scatters, but in no way relents. The trio bursts through the forest... to the front of the BURNING PLANTATION HOUSE, where the SUV awaits.

EMMANUEL

The keys! The keys!

Cornell pulls out the keys-- and drops them.

CORNELL

Shit!

SHERECE

Daddy, they're coming!

Emmanuel grabs the keys. A worshipper leaps onto Emmanuel. *Pop!* The assailant screams in agony. They hop inside the SUV.

CORNELL

We're getting the fuck outta here  
right--

*POW!* Another car rams them. Cornell flops out of the SUV, still disoriented. The mob pins him down and pulls out the children, while leaving Michiel inside.

INT/EXT. THE FAMILY SUV. NIGHT.

Michiel awakens inside the wreckage. She touches her head. Looks at her hand. Blood. Her ears are ringing. Everything's muffled. She looks out the opened SUV door. The mob throws the kids to the ground. Cornell screams--

CORNELL

Just take me! Leave them alone!

Uncle Chicken, Aunt Orisa, and Aunt Kim stand over the soon-to-be executed. Uncle Chicken unsheathes his sword. Emmanuel makes his final plea.

EMMANUEL

Why?! She's dead. Your god is gone.  
You're killing us for nothing.

UNCLE CHICKEN

She only needs one of you.

Michiel spills out of the back passengers seat and onto the gravel.

MICHIEL

Emmanuel...

EMMANUEL

Mom.

They share a moment. Emmanuel's expression contorts into horror. Michiel looks down. BLOOD SPILLS OUT FROM HER WOUND. She's quickly bleeding out.

Then she sees-- MAAFA. Prostrating herself before her with one hand holding water. Michiel looks at her hand. It's covered in her own blood. Then--

UNCLE CHICKEN HOISTS UP HIS SWORD AND STABS EMMANUEL IN THE HEART, KILLING HIM. (We do not see it, but we hear steel slide through flesh) Cornell gasps and huffs. Sherece can barely manage an expression.

They unhand them both. Cornell slumps to the ground. Unable to process his grief. Sherece crawls over to her brother's body. She whimpers--

SHERECE

Emmanuel. Wake up. Please. Please.

The sound of ocean waves overtake the senses. Michiel, bright and deific, the mortal wound inflicted by Emmanuel still visible, appears next to her children.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

Mom?

CORNELL

Michiel?

Michiel gently places her hand on Emmanuel's chest. Nothing happens. She addresses Sherece.

MICHIEL

You must save him.

SHERECE

How?

Michiel takes her hand and gently places it over his heart.

MICHIEL

Look into your past life. Find her dying wish.

(then)

Tell me what you see.

Sherece closes her eyes. Concentrating.

SHERECE

I see... fire and flesh. A girl unaware of her gifts. A sister watching her brother burn.

Sherece's hands radiate with a greenish glow.

SHERECE (CONT'D)

And... a mother to many. Unbound  
from a wicked fate, cast into  
matriarchy for our sake, and... a  
child yearning to give us the  
warmth robbed from her soul.

The glow radiates across Emmanuel's body. He takes in a deep  
breath.

EMMANUEL

Sherece.

Sherece hugs her brother with all of her might.

SHERECE

I thought you were... irrefutably  
deceased...

Sherece passes out in his arms. Cornell picks her up.  
Emmanuel turns his attention to-- Michiel. This is not his  
mother anymore. She's a being far beyond his grasp. Michiel  
touches the nape of both Emmanuel and Sherece's neck. The  
divine symbol fades away. The doors to the burning mansion  
burst open.

The Akinmade spill out. Their feet touch the ground without  
being transported away. Emmanuel sees-- PATRICIA leave. She  
nods in thanks, then vanishes into the darkness of the night.

The Akinmade head toward the forest. Solomon is the last to  
exit. He spots Emmanuel, grins, then disappears.

MICHIEL

We begin anew.

She looks to Emmanuel. They share this moment. One for a  
lifetime, then--

MICHIEL (CONT'D)

You are bound no more. Leave --  
never come back.

Michiel heads towards the burning mansion. The mob follows.  
In the distance, William drags a cross towards them.

INT. THE FAMILY SUV. NIGHT.

Cornell drives. Sherece is still asleep. Emmanuel places  
Sherece's mini-defibrillator in her hand. Firefighter trucks  
speed past them. The blaze still dances in the night sky.  
Emmanuel looks back at the blazing mansion.

Behind him, Osanyin, Yemi, and Prima fight for room in the trunk... but they're all smiles.

OSANYIN

Thank you.

Emmanuel fist-bumps his compatriots. Cornell sees this in the rearview mirror, but doesn't say anything. *No one would believe him anyway.*

CORNELL

You know... we can probably still make your tournament.

Emmanuel shrugs.

EMMANUEL

Nah. I'm good.

A BEAT.

EMMANUEL (CONT'D)

Dad...

CORNELL

Yea, E-man?

EMMANUEL

No more family reunions.

Father and son share one last, traumatized laugh.

EXT. THE FAMILY SUV. CONTINUOUS.

They zoom past a sign: WELCOME TO COLUMBUS, MISSISSIPPI.

EXT. THE MAGNOLIA PLANTATION MANSION. CLOSE TO DAWN.

The townspeople disperse as the new day arises. A charred corpse hangs from the cross. The ceremony has been completed, though we'll never know the blessed victim.

Ezekiel scoops up a handful of soot and places it in Michiel's hand. She crunches it between her fingers, then-- heads inside the decrepit, fuming plantation house.

CUT TO BLACK.

**END.**