

ECHOES OF MEDFORD

Written by

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Based on Historical People & Events

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**ACT I:**

OVER BLACK:

TEXT ON SCREEN:

Slavery, while present in Massachusetts from the 1630s, was legally sanctioned in 1641 when the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed its Body of Liberties, making it the first English colony in North America to formally recognize slavery as a legal institution.

FADE IN:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - DAWN - 1775

The first light of morning breaks across frost-covered fields.

A thin mist clings to the ground. Trees stand bare and brittle, like bones against a gray sky.

A sharp gust rustles dead leaves across packed dirt. The world is quiet. Not peaceful-restrained.

The camera drifts over the quiet land.

Smoke curls faintly from a distant chimney. A crow circles overhead, black against gray.

We hear the faint sound of metal-tools shifting, buckets knocking, chains clinking-muffled beneath the wind.

A frost-bitten cabbage lies half-pulled in the garden. A wooden toy wheel turns slowly in the mud, abandoned.

The world holds its breath.

Then-

Footsteps. Soft. Bare or wrapped in worn cloth.

Enslaved workers emerge from shadow and fog-men and women, young and old-moving in practiced silence. Buckets clatter. Ropes creak. Axes rest on shoulders. No words.

Among them is AMINA (20), small-framed but grounded. She moves with the group but apart from it-slightly behind, slightly slower, always watching.

She wears a faded scarf, tied tight. Her hands, red from cold, curl around a tin pail.

As she walks, she notices:

—A teenage girl wiping her nose with a torn sleeve

—An older man coughing, trying to hide it

—A toddler peeking from behind a cabin door, already awake

Amina sees it all.

A nearby OVERSEER 1 calls out—not in cruelty, just command.

OVERSEER 1 (O.S.)  
Keep it moving now.

The workers obey. No hesitation.

A boy about eight years old drops his bucket. A sharp clang on the stone path.

Everyone freezes—for a second.

The boy snatches it up, head bowed, and runs to catch up.

Amina pauses. She'd moved to help, but didn't need to. She exhales through her nose and continues walking.

She looks ahead.

BELINDA (58) is already far down the path, carrying a wrapped bundle. She doesn't see Amina—but Amina sees her. Just for a beat.

ANGLE ON:

A hawk circles overhead. Broad wings cut through the sky in slow, deliberate arcs.

Below, Amina glances up. Watches the hawk.

Then lowers her eyes.

And walks on.

The wind picks up. Dry leaves scrape across the dirt like whispers.

FADE TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - KITCHEN  
YARD - MORNING

A basin full of icy water. A bar of soap. Amina scrubs a blackened iron pot until the lye bites into her raw knuckles.

The morning is louder now—roosters, metal clinking, footsteps across gravel. The plantation is alive with routine, but no joy.

Nearby, chickens cluck near the steps of the big house.

ELIZABETH ROYALL PEPPERELL (27), dressed well above her station for a colonial woman, descends the back steps. She wears gloves despite the mild temperature and carries a stained apron at arm's length.

She stops just short of Amina.

ELIZABETH ROYALL PEPPERELL

(curt)

This needs boiling. You'll mind the embroidery this time.

She drops the apron into the dirt. Amina stands. Quietly picks it up.

Elizabeth turns away before Amina can respond—not that she would.

She walks off toward the stables, her heels clicking with purpose.

Amina brushes dirt from the apron and slips it over her arm.

INT. KITCHEN SLAVE QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Warm light filters through smoke-stained windows. The air smells of ash, stew bones, and damp cloth.

BELINDA (late 50s), her face worn but dignified, stirs a pot with methodical ease. She turns as Amina enters.

BELINDA

Your hands?

Amina holds them up. The skin at her knuckles is bright and broken.

Belinda sets down the ladle, climbs a stool, and retrieves a tin from the top shelf.

She opens it—salve the color of pine sap—and gestures for Amina to sit on the bench.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Sit still. You twist too much when  
you scrub. Been doing that since  
you were little.

Amina sits. Belinda kneels, taking one hand in hers.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
You were three and trying to wash  
rags twice your size. Kept soaking  
your sleeves through, every time.  
I'd scold you, and you'd just smile  
like it was worth it.

AMINA  
(barely above a whisper)  
I don't remember that.

BELINDA  
You weren't meant to. I did the  
remembering for both of us.

She resumes salving Amina's hands—gentle, practiced.

AMINA  
It burned this time.

BELINDA  
Pain don't mean you did it wrong.  
Just means the water was cold and  
the soap was strong. That's all.

They hold the moment.

Then—quietly, without instruction—Amina leans forward and  
wipes a bit of flour from Belinda's cheek with the edge of  
her own sleeve. A simple act, but tender. Mutual.

Belinda doesn't react. Just glances at Amina's face, then  
returns to stirring the stew.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Apron's by the door. If Elizabeth  
complains again, tell her you  
boiled the embroidery three times.

AMINA  
Wouldn't change her tone.

BELINDA

No. But it'll keep her from using  
yours.

A faint smile—almost shared between them.

They move together now—folding linens, kneading dough,  
checking the fire. Their rhythm is practiced. The care is  
quiet, never named, but it lives in every movement between  
them.

From outside, hoofbeats.

Low, murmured voices—one of them unmistakably ISAAC ROYALL JR  
(55), clipped and formal.

Amina glances toward the open window.

ISAAC ROYALL JR (O.S.)

I've never liked Boston's  
rabble—God knows I don't agree with  
their methods. But I can't say  
they're entirely wrong.

GENTLEMAN 1 (O.S.)

Yet you remain here. Loyal to the  
Crown, no?

ISAAC ROYALL JR (O.S.)

My money is.

Amina stiffens. She returns to kneading but listens now with  
purpose.

BELINDA

Not your business, girl.

AMINA

I wasn't—

BELINDA

You don't have to say it. I see  
your ears working.

Belinda pours boiling water into a basin with the apron.  
Steam curls up like smoke signals.

Amina goes to the window and stares—not directly at Isaac  
Royall Jr, but at the horse tied behind him. She watches the  
animal flick its tail. Then its hoof. She studies everything  
now. Different eyes.

BELINDA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
They've been arguing like this for  
months. It's all words.

AMINA  
They sound afraid.

Belinda doesn't answer.

The kitchen is quiet again, but not empty. The silence holds  
a new awareness.

CUT TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - STABLES - LATE MORNING

The sun hangs low. Shadows stretch across the yard. Horses  
drink noisily at the trough.

Amina kneels beside the water basin. She trails her fingers  
through the ripples, eyes distant. The world is louder  
today--yet harder to make sense of.

She wipes her hands and stares out the sooty window, the fog  
outside just visible.

AMINA  
(whispers)  
There's more than this... I just  
don't know it yet.

From inside the stable: low voices, hushed.

She moves closer, unnoticed, hugging the shadows near the  
doorway.

INT. STABLE - CONTINUOUS

Two ENSLAVED MEN - PLATO (30s) and ABRAHAM (40s) - sit on  
overturned crates, repairing harnesses. Their hands work  
fast; their mouths stay low.

PLATO  
Papers printed in Boston - treason  
to some, truth to others.

ABRAHAM  
Ain't just white men speakin' now.  
Some of ours are fightin'. Pickin'  
sides.

PLATO

Like that Crispus Attucks.  
Dockworker. Half-Black, half-  
native. He stood up. Took a bullet  
straight in the chest.

ABRAHAM

That was five years ago. Still  
dead. Still broke. His name don't  
buy food.

PLATO

His name won't be forgotten.

ABRAHAM

That name won't save the ones left  
behind.

They fall quiet for a moment. The air is heavy. Leather  
creaks beneath their grip.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

One side chains us. The other  
leaves us starving outside the  
gate.

(beat)

Different masters. Same hunger.

PLATO

Maybe it ain't about sides. Maybe  
it's about not goin' quiet.

ABRAHAM

If I raise my voice, who hears me  
but the whip?

PLATO

If we never speak, who remembers we  
were here?

Outside, Amina leans closer. Her brow tightens. Her breath  
shallows.

PLATO (CONT'D)

They say the British promise  
freedom to any slave who'll fight.  
That's why some gone north. Left in  
the night.

ABRAHAM

And what then? Die with no land, no  
name, no kin?



PLATO  
Still better than waitin' for a  
freedom that never comes.

A nearby pail CLANGS to the ground. Both men freeze.

Amina pulls back into the shadows—unseen.

PLATO and ABRAHAM resume quietly, slower now.

ABRAHAM  
You hear that?

PLATO  
Just wind.

ABRAHAM  
Mmm. Wind carries more than sound  
these days.

They return to their work, tension still thick.

EXT. STABLE EDGE - CONTINUOUS

Amina pulls back from the wall, heart still pounding. She  
steps softly around the corner—

—and nearly bumps into JOSEPH (17), tall and quiet, a sack of  
grain over his shoulder. His eyes are steady, older than his  
years.

AMINA  
You heard them?

He nods once.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
You think they're right? About  
running?

Joseph doesn't answer right away. Then:

JOSEPH  
Being quiet don't mean we don't  
feel. Some of us carry it so deep,  
it don't show until we break.

He shifts the sack, nods, and walks past her.

Amina watches him go.

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - STABLES - MOMENTS LATER

Amina walks back toward the trough. Her movements are slower, more intentional now. She pours water. Watches it settle.

Something is shifting in her.

Behind her, a hawk circles in the sky. She looks up.

CUT TO:

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - EARLY AFTERNOON

Steam rises from basins. Amina stands near two OLDER WOMEN folding linen.

WOMAN 1

(quietly)

Massachusetts might outlaw it. I heard it twice now—once from the boy at the print shop.

WOMAN 2

Outlaw what?

WOMAN 1

Slavery.

The second woman chuckles without humor. She folds sharply, precisely.

WOMAN 2

They'll just call it something else.

Amina pauses her folding.

Nearby, a CHILD 1 (7), squats in the dirt behind the washhouse. She traces a board game into the soil—three rows of three marks—and begins placing flat stones and shells in turn.

CHILD 1

(to herself)

Three in a row, I win again.

Amina crouches beside her.

AMINA

What do you call this?

CHILD 1  
Mama says it's Achi. Or Three  
Man's... something.

AMINA  
Who taught you?

CHILD 1  
My Nana. Before she was sold.

WOMAN 1 (O.S.)  
You ever hear about the Black man  
who beat the pox?

Amina looks up—back inside the washroom, the women continue folding.

WOMAN 2 (O.S.)  
The one from Africa?

WOMAN 1 (O.S.)  
Onesimus. That was his name.

Amina repeats it under her breath.

AMINA  
(soft)  
Onesimus...

She places a stone on the board.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
Your move.

Steam and silence rise between spaces. The linen folding continues.

The women's voices hush beneath the weight of what they've said. Amina listens from the side, unseen—or maybe not. The knowledge settles in her bones.

The hum of laundry fills the air. The weight of possibility does, too.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIDE PATH NEAR LAUNDRY - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun hangs low. Long shadows stretch from laundry lines and stone walls.

Amina lingers beside a storage crate, cloth still damp in her hands.

A little girl nearby mimics the movements of an older woman wringing cloth – twisting, slapping, folding with exaggerated care.

She hums to herself in rhythm. Concentrated. Proud.

The older woman doesn't stop her – just watches from the corner of her eye.

Amina observes it all – the child's earnestness, the repetition of movement, the silent teaching.

She turns away, thoughtful.

The cloth in her hand suddenly feels heavier. More significant.

She folds it – slowly, deliberately – and walks on.

EXT. PATH BEHIND LAUNDRY HOUSE – MOMENTS LATER

Amina walks slowly, a folded cloth in hand. The steady rhythm of paddles and low chatter fades behind her.

She stops near a row of shrubs. Something glints in the dirt—half-buried under a stone.

She kneels. Brushes the soil aside.

A carved wooden token. Smooth from age, worn by many hands. Etched into the back is an Adinkra symbol: EBAN.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
Obi nkyere akwadaa Nyame.  
(beat)  
No one shows a child the Supreme  
Being.

The wind lifts a line of linen nearby. It snaps sharply like a sail.

Amina turns the token in her palm, then tucks it into her sash.

Farther down the path, two YOUNG BOYS knot twine between sticks—pretending to sail toy boats. An elder woman watches them, nodding silently.

Amina watches them a moment.

Then walks on.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL PATH BEHIND THE QUARTERS - LATE AFTERNOON

Amina walks a narrow path with a woven basket. She's supposed to be gathering herbs.

Instead, she stops near a shed.

Inside, a boy—no more than ten—sits with a crumpled page in his lap. He's tracing letters with his finger. Sounding them out.

Amina watches from behind the door frame. The boy doesn't see her.

He whispers each word like a prayer.

BOY

"...that all men are... created..."

Footsteps.

The boy shoves the paper into his shirt and bolts upright. Amina steps back into the path, pretending not to see.

But she smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. AMINA'S SLEEPING AREA - NIGHT

Darkness folds around the quarters like a second skin.

Amina lies curled beneath a thin wool blanket, her back to the wall. The sounds of sleep fill the air—light snoring, shifting bodies, the soft creak of old floorboards.

A single candle flickers from across the room, then dims to nothing.

Silence.

Amina's eyes remain open. Unblinking. Awake.

She reaches beneath her pillow and pulls out a small, folded scrap of cloth—frayed at the edges, but carefully preserved. She runs her thumb along the seam, slow and steady, like she's tracing a memory.

Her breath slows.

Faint whispers echo in her mind, layered over one another:

ECHO 1  
"Still better than standing  
still..."

ECHO 2  
"...all men are... created..."

ECHO 3  
"They sound afraid..."

She squeezes the cloth tighter. Then—slowly—unfolds it.

It's small. Faded. Perhaps once bright in color, now dulled with age. It may have been her mother's. Or it may just be hers now. The truth is uncertain.

She holds it to her chest.

A floorboard creaks near the door. Amina doesn't move.

Outside the shuttered window, a cold wind whistles low and hollow.

Amina's gaze drifts toward it.

For a moment, the reflection of moonlight in the glass makes it seem like there's movement beyond the trees.

But it's just branches swaying.

She presses the cloth under her chin and closes her eyes.

She does not sleep.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MEDFORD TOWN CENTER - MIDDAY

Amina walks behind MARTHA (40s), another enslaved woman, each balancing cloth-wrapped bundles. The town moves around them—carts, children, the clang of the forge.

Amina scans it all. Quiet, absorbing.

MARTHA  
(low)  
Don't look too long. He'll charge  
double if you so much as breathe  
near his cotton.

Amina lowers her gaze.

A white boy tosses a stone. It hits Amina's shoe. He doesn't look back. She doesn't stop.

Up ahead, a free black man, MARCUS (50s), walks steadily. A CONSTABLE steps in.

CONSTABLE 1

Papers?

The man hands them over. The constable eyes him, then folds them roughly.

CONSTABLE 1 (CONT'D)

Curfew still stands. Don't let nine o'clock find you anywhere but your doorstep.

Another CONSTABLE joins.

CONSTABLE 2

That one—Marcus Dorsey. Used a different name last week.

CONSTABLE 1

These papers new?

MARCUS

No, sir. Dated three months. Signed in Salem.

CONSTABLE 1

Paper's valid, but your face ain't.

MARCUS

I've lived free twelve years. Work steady.

I've got a wife at home, sir.

CONSTABLE 2

Then best you remember—even the free ones don't walk too far past sunset.

CONSTABLE 1

You'd be wise to stay lit and low. This law don't blink.

MARCUS

Yes, sir.

They shove the papers back. Marcus nods and walks on.

Amina watches. Something tightens in her—not fear, but understanding.

A bell tolls.

Across the square, HARRIET (22) moves alone. Dark coat. Satchel in hand. Pages peek from the flap.

She walks like she belongs—but watches corners. Townsfolk part for her. No one speaks.

Their eyes never meet—but Amina sees her.

MARTHA  
(urgent whisper)  
Amina. Come now.

Amina lingers. Watches Harriet vanish down a lane.

They pass a PUBLIC NOTICE BOARD. A constable tacks up a parchment.

MARTHA (CONT'D)  
(soft)  
That one's old. But they still mean it.

CLOSE ON THE POSTER:

> *Proclamation - February 11th, 1745*

> "Any Negro found out after nightfall shall be returned to their master and whipped in the marketplace unless reason be given."

AMINA (V.O.)  
"Any Negro found out after  
nightfall shall be returned to  
their master and whipped in the  
marketplace unless reason be  
given."

Down the block, a BLACK WOMAN (30s) sweeps a storefront, humming an old hymn.

BLACK WOMAN 1  
(softly)  
♪ And He hears our cry in the lowly  
place... ♪

A white TAVERN OWNER steps out.



TAVERN OWNER  
Ain't Sunday.

The woman hushes. Keeps sweeping.

Amina hears it. Another note added to the symphony she's learning.

The wind lifts the edge of another notice nearby.

CLOSE ON THE WEATHERED PARCHMENT:

> *An Act to Prevent Disorders in the Night*

> "No Indian, Negro or Molatto Servant or Slave shall be abroad after Nine o'clock... unless upon Errand of their respective Masters..."

AMINA  
"No Indian, Negro or Molatto  
Servant or Slave shall be abroad  
after Nine o'clock... unless upon  
Errand of their respective  
Masters..."

Amina's expression remains neutral. But her eyes don't leave the notice.

FADE TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - MAIN COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Gray light falls over the yard like a thin blanket. A crowd has gathered.

Enslaved workers stand in a loose ring, silent, hands folded. Eyes low.

A YOUNG MAN—JOSIAH (20s)—kneels in the dirt, breathing hard. His shirt is torn at the shoulder.

Isaac Royall Jr stands a few feet away, calm but tense, arms folded. Beside him, a second GENTLEMAN, elegantly dressed and dispassionate, observes.

GENTLEMAN 2  
Your father would've hung him on  
sight.

ISAAC ROYALL JR  
My father didn't live in the shadow  
of rebellion.

GENTLEMAN 2

The Tufts family had two run off just last week. Brooks claims Pomp defied orders—refused to break a wall he built himself.

ISAAC ROYALL JR

(dry)

Even stone remembers its maker.

The gentleman chuckles, though uneasily.

ISAAC ROYALL JR (CONT'D)

And Fitch says they've stopped selling rum in Boston. Churchmen blame it on liberty.

He signals to the OVERSEER.

ISAAC ROYALL JR (CONT'D)

Fifteen lashes. No more.

OVERSEER 2

Yessir.

The whip cracks.

Amina stands at the edge of the crowd. Her arms are crossed, her eyes unblinking.

CRACK.

She flinches. Only slightly. But Belinda notices from across the yard.

CRACK.

Amina looks down—sees Josiah's blood in the dirt. It runs toward her feet.

Nearby, JOSEPH stiffens.

He doesn't look away—he balls his fists, then quickly hides them in his pockets.

His breath catches, chest rising once, sharply—then he turns his face, ashamed to be seen.

CRACK.

The third strike lands. Josiah groans.

Amina's jaw tightens. She does not move.

CRACK.

Then—movement. A child sobs nearby. A woman hushes him quickly.

Amina turns slightly, watching the boy's small face press into his mother's skirt.

She looks back toward Isaac Royall Jr and the gentleman.

They're already walking away. The punishment no longer interests them.

The whip falls again.

Amina's eyes stay on the blood in the dirt.

She whispers—half memory, half breath.

AMINA  
(whisper)  
They tried to burn our memory...

The wind catches the edge of her apron.

She doesn't finish the sentence. But she remembers.

FADE TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

Amina walks slowly, alone. The soft rustle of leaves beneath her steps is the only sound.

She stops where the cleared land of the plantation meets a thin tree line.

From beneath her apron, she draws the EBAN token. She studies its lines — rough, uneven, but deliberate.

She crouches and presses the token gently into the dirt, then lifts it again. A shallow imprint remains, quickly fading in the wind.

A nearby twig snaps — she stiffens — then exhales when no one appears.

She sits on a stump, holding the token in both hands.

AMINA  
(to herself)  
Safe house.

Far off, the Salem Street Burial Ground is just visible through the trees. She doesn't go there – not yet.

A young boy runs past in the distance, chasing a chicken. Laughter echoes faintly. A woman's voice calls after him in a language half-remembered, half-lost.

Amina watches. Her grip on the token tightens – not in fear, but thought.

She rises. Dusts off her skirt.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
(softly)  
Not just surviving.

She tucks the token away and walks on—not toward the burial ground, but toward the quarters.

CUT TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION – BACK PATH – EARLY EVENING

The sky burns orange behind the trees. Shadows stretch long across the ground.

Amina walks slowly, holding a basket of torn linens. Her steps are heavy, her hands raw.

She passes a row of stacked firewood near the smokehouse. An elderly woman crouches beside it, splitting kindling.

But her rhythm is... off.

Amina slows. Watches.

The woman intentionally stacks one log crooked-angled outward.

She turns the next log so the grain faces out. It looks insignificant.

But Amina realizes—it's a signal. A warning. A code. For who? She doesn't know.

The woman doesn't look up. Just hums softly and keeps splitting.

A rustle nearby—FOOTSTEPS.

Amina freezes.

A young boy rounds the corner, but doesn't notice her. He scratches his head, shrugs, and keeps walking.

Amina exhales slowly. Glances once more at the firewood.

Amina moves on.

EXT. WASH YARD - MOMENTS LATER

A boy around the age of 10, wiry and quiet, stands by the drying line. He slips a scrap of folded parchment into the seam of a garment. Hides it deep.

Amina watches from behind a post.

The boy looks around, then walks away.

She waits. Walks over.

Unfolds the scrap.

It's a piece of a printed flyer—ragged, water-damaged, but legible.

AMINA

“...shall henceforth be Free and  
Independent States...”

She reads the words again. Her brow furrows.

Behind her, a door creaks.

Amina quickly folds the paper and tucks it into her apron.

No one's there.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN SLAVE QUARTERS - LATER

Amina returns with the empty basket.

Belinda stirs a pot. The firelight dances across her face.

BELINDA

You're late.

AMINA

I stopped to wash the hem. Blood on  
it.

Belinda doesn't ask whose.

BELINDA

Wash it again. Let it take the  
stain this time.

Amina nods. Sets the basket down.

Belinda watches her for a moment.

Then—quietly—she turns and lifts a pot from the hearth.

Revealing beneath it a folded scrap of cloth, browned and  
pressed flat.

Amina notices. Says nothing.

Belinda replaces the pot. Turns back to her work.

A shared silence. Two women. One pot. Two truths.

CUT TO:

INT. AMINA'S SLEEPING AREA - NIGHT

The room is dim. Others sleep around her, curled under thin  
blankets.

Amina sits upright on her cot, her knees pulled close.

She reaches into her apron and unfolds the flyer—again.

She doesn't read it this time. Just stares.

The words are blurred now, smeared from damp cloth and her  
own hands. But still there.

She runs a finger across one line. Presses it flat.

Then folds it neatly.

She lifts her blanket, revealing a hidden crack between  
floorboards.

Slides the paper inside.

Covers it.

Listens to the wind pressing against the shutter.

She lies back. Eyes open.

The fire in the hearth flickers—nearly gone.

FADE TO:

INT. KITCHEN SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

The fire is low. Embers crackle in the hearth.

Amina and Belinda sit side by side at the long table, peeling root vegetables into a wooden bowl. The room is still—everyone else has gone. It is just them.

Belinda hums softly. An old, winding tune. Not English. Not from here.

Amina glances at her without turning her head.

The sound is familiar—soaked into memory. Amina has heard it since she was a child, but never questioned it.

Tonight, she does.

AMINA

Where does that come from?

Belinda doesn't stop humming. Not right away.

Then, she sets her knife down. The humming fades.

BELINDA

(slow)

From before.

AMINA

Before what?

Belinda looks at her. Not sharply—just with a stillness that quiets the room even more.

BELINDA

Before I was here.

AMINA

Do you remember it?

Belinda's eyes soften, but her mouth stays firm.

BELINDA

I remember everything.

She begins peeling again.

AMINA

You never told me.

BELINDA

Wasn't for you to carry yet.

Beat.

AMINA

And now?

Belinda pauses.

She looks down at the peel curled in her hand.

BELINDA

Now you're asking.

They sit in silence. The fire pops.

Belinda picks up the tune again—slower this time, almost a whisper.

Amina listens with her whole body.

Not just to the melody—but to the gap between each note.

Amina finishes peeling. She sets the knife down.

AMINA

(quietly)

The cloth you keep near the  
hearth...

Belinda doesn't respond at first. Just folds a peel in half.

BELINDA

What about it?

AMINA

Was it always yours?

Belinda pauses. Her hand hovers over the bowl.

BELINDA

No.

She reaches beneath the table and pulls out a small folded square—not the one given to Amina, but another.

She holds it between her fingers, worn soft with time.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

It belonged to the woman who taught  
me how to knead dough without  
bruising it. Who hummed when she  
was afraid. Who kept her name  
tucked under her tongue for twenty  
years.



Amina takes this in. Says nothing.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
I only keep it close so I don't  
forget how she moved.

A long beat.

Then—

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Maybe one day you'll carry  
something of mine that isn't just  
memory.

AMINA  
Maybe I already do.

They don't look at each other.

They don't have to.

They continue working in silence.

FADE TO:

EXT. SALEM STREET BURIAL GROUND - EARLY MORNING

A low fog rests between headstones.

Amina walks alone along the outer edge of the cemetery,  
moving slowly. Her scarf is tied tighter than usual.

She stops at the southwest corner of the grounds—bare earth.  
No headstones. Just grass and a few scattered stones too  
small to mark anything.

She kneels. Places a hand flat against the dirt.

No words.

A bell tolls once. Then silence.

The fog thins, revealing graves—marked and unmarked.

Amina closes her eyes.

FLASH MEMORY:

— A cloth-wrapped body lowered without words.

BACK TO SCENE

Amina opens her eyes.

She touches the hem of her skirt and presses it lightly into the dirt, as if trying to leave something of herself behind.

A crow lands nearby on a crooked post. It watches her. Head tilted.

AMINA  
(soft, unsure)  
I see you.

She's not sure who she's speaking to. But she means it.

She rises. Brushes her skirt.

One last glance at the unmarked corner.

She walks back toward the road.

The crow does not move.

FADE TO:

EXT. LAUNDRY YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun is low, casting long shadows across the gravel path.

A line of women wash, rinse, and hang linen between wooden poles. Steam rises from the boiling pots.

Amina scrubs at a dress collar, her eyes darting subtly to Belinda, who stands a few yards away, speaking with a young girl-SARAH (12), thin and quiet, her sleeves too long for her arms.

Belinda inspects the cloth in Sarah's hands.

BELINDA  
Who assigned you to this?

SARAH  
(over a whisper)  
Mr. Graves said I was late this morning. Gave me double rounds.

Belinda clicks her tongue. Looks at the girl's hands-red and shaking.

She glances toward the overseer across the yard, who's distracted with another worker.

BELINDA  
(softly)  
Go help Amina. And tell Ruth I'll  
take the north line today.

SARAH  
But—won't he—

BELINDA  
He won't notice if we don't tell  
him.

She gives the girl a quick nudge toward Amina.

SARAH hesitates—then obeys.

Amina continues scrubbing, pretending not to have overheard.

Sarah steps in beside her. Amina hands her a towel.

SARAH  
(quiet)  
She said you'd help me.

Amina gives the smallest nod.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
(softly, to a younger girl  
nearby)  
Start from the edge. It folds  
easier that way.

The younger girl nods, imitating her carefully.

Amina watches — something between pride and quiet  
recognition.

Belinda walks off toward the north line—basket in hand—like  
she's always been meant to go there.

The overseer looks up briefly. Sees nothing unusual. Turns  
back to his work.

Amina watches Belinda's back as she walks away.

Then looks down at Sarah—struggling to wring a wet shirt.

Amina reaches over. Shows her how to fold it tighter.

Not a word passes between them.

But the rhythm of care continues.

CUT TO:

INT. AMINA'S SLEEPING AREA - NIGHT

The fire has burned low.

Amina lies awake, curled beneath a worn blanket. The others around her sleep—soft breathing, the rustle of movement in dreams.

She stares at the ceiling. Her eyes do not blink.

From beneath her pillow, she pulls out the folded flyer again. The words now smeared but still readable.

AMINA  
"...be Free and Independent  
States..."

She runs her fingers over the line—but this time, does not hide it away.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN SLAVE QUARTERS - FLASH MEMORY

Amina watches Belinda humming. The pot boiling.

Belinda looks back at her—not stern, not soft. Just watching.

CUT TO:

EXT. BURIAL GROUND - FLASH MEMORY

Amina's hand pressed into the dirt. The weight of unmarked graves.

Her voice—barely audible.

AMINA (V.O.)  
I see you.

CUT TO:

EXT. WASH YARD - FLASH MEMORY

Sarah's trembling hands.

Belinda stepping into the north line.

The overseer never noticing.

CUT TO:

INT. AMINA'S SLEEPING AREA - BACK TO SCENE

Amina sits up.

Her breath is steady now.

She doesn't move quickly. Doesn't cry.

She simply sits—fully awake.

For the first time, her eyes don't just look.

They search.

She tucks the paper into her waistband—not to hide it, but to keep it close.

She lies back down.

                                AMINA (V.O.)  
                                 And so I kept their names. Not in  
                                 silence, but in story.

Eyes still open.

The fire flickers once.

Then goes quiet.

FADE TO BLACK.

**END OF ACT I.**

ACT II

INT. KITCHEN SLAVE QUARTERS - MORNING

Steam rises from a bubbling pot. Belinda stirs slowly, back turned.

Amina scrubs the same pot as before—but her motions are different now. Measured. Focused.

She glances around the room as she works. Studies everything. The sounds, the silences.

A door creaks open. RUTH (20s), steady and sharp-eyed, enters carrying a basket of dried herbs. She sets it near the hearth.

RUTH  
You're early today.

AMINA  
Didn't sleep.

RUTH  
(starting to sort herbs)  
That'll catch up to you.

Amina doesn't answer. She watches Ruth's hands move over the bundles—sorting by texture, not type.

BELINDA  
(from across the room)  
Check the ones with fray on the  
edges. They've been cut too close.

Amina notices it too, now. The torn stems. The bruised leaves. She didn't before.

RUTH  
(grinning)  
Didn't think you were watching that  
close.

BELINDA  
I always watch.

She looks directly at Amina.

A beat.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - SHORTLY AFTER

Amina stands alone, stacking jars. Behind her, faint voices bleed through the wall—Belinda and Ruth discussing inventory.

Amina runs her fingers along the labels—some handwritten, some scratched into the wood.

She reads the first one.

AMINA  
"Yarrow. For bleeding."

Her eyes move on to the next.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
"Root. For sleep."

She pauses on one marked only with an "X."

She opens it.

Inside: dried leaves. She doesn't know what they are. But she inhales the scent. Studies the shape.

Behind her, Belinda's voice grows louder.

BELINDA (O.S.)  
Don't leave it near the flour. You remember what happened last time.

RUTH (O.S.)  
I do. She's not likely to forget it either.

Laughter.

Amina sets the jar down.

She walks out of frame.

FADE TO:

EXT. DRYING YARD - LATE MORNING

Rows of linens flap on the line, crisp and white.

Amina carries a folded basket through the yard. Her pace is slow—but deliberate. She watches everything.

Near a corner of the fencing, an elder woman exchanges a bundle of dried lavender for a small carved token handed off by a boy.

No words.

Just a nod.

Amina slows. Watches the boy run off, hands clenched tight around the token.

She moves on.

EXT. SIDE PATH BEHIND TOOL SHED - CONTINUOUS

Amina rounds a corner and pauses.

On the wall of the shed, faint charcoal markings sketch the outline of the fields—crude, but measured. Nearby, THOMAS (40s) crouches, wiping his hands with burlap.

Amina glances from the drawing to Thomas.

AMINA

Did you make that?

THOMAS

(without looking up)

Fields don't memorize themselves.

He gives her a small smile, then walks off.

Amina studies the map.

She kneels. Picks up a twig from the ground.

Kneels beside the shed and traces the outline again in dirt—not to replicate, but to understand.

Her eyes follow the paths, the lines, the symbols.

Behind her, a breeze scatters dry leaves across the drawing.

She doesn't stop them.

She just watches.

EXT. KITCHEN YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth tends to a basket of herbs, checking bundles.

Nearby, two enslaved men pass—one drops a scrap of cloth on the ground.

The other picks it up but doesn't return it.



They part without speaking.

Amina frowns slightly. She bends down after they pass and examines the cloth.

Something is stitched into the hem—barely noticeable.

She can't read it, but she knows it means something.

RUTH

Not yours.

Amina looks up. Ruth is watching her.

AMINA

What's in it?

RUTH

(slight smile)

If it was meant for you, you'd know.

Beat.

AMINA

Do you ever wonder... if any of this changes?

RUTH

You mean, if it ends?

AMINA

(shrugs)

If the ground ever shifts.

Ruth tucks a stem of mint behind her ear.

RUTH

It's shifting all the time. You just never looked before.

They exchange a look.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK OF THE QUARTERS - LATER

A group of children play quietly, drawing symbols in the dirt with sticks. Amina watches.

One draws a crown. Another wipes it away and replaces it with a sun.

They giggle—but glance around, cautious.

Amina squats beside them, setting down her basket.

She doesn't speak.

She draws a circle in the dirt beside them.

The children pause.

A beat.

Then one child adds a line across the circle. Another adds a dot.

They keep playing.

Amina stands, basket in hand.

Her expression has changed.

She turns.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN SLAVE QUARTERS - EVENING

Belinda prepares the evening stew. Amina slices bread.

There's a pause between them.

AMINA

Why didn't you stop him? From  
switching the girl's chore.

BELINDA

(slow)

Because he didn't notice I had.

AMINA

But if he had—

BELINDA

Then I'd have switched it back.

Amina watches her.

Belinda wipes her hands on her apron.

BELINDA (CONT'D)

We survive best when no one knows  
we're trying to.

She hums the familiar tune again. Faint. Almost inaudible.

Amina listens.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. HILL BEHIND THE FIELDS - SUNSET

Amina climbs a small incline behind the lower fields. The sky glows orange, fading into violet.

From here, she can see most of the plantation: the house, the quarters, the burial ground. Smoke rises from chimneys. A bell tolls somewhere in the distance.

She kneels near a patch of wildflowers—yellow and low to the ground.

She plucks one.

Turns it in her fingers.

Behind her—

BELINDA (O.S.)  
You'll catch cold up here.

Amina turns.

Belinda approaches, carrying a wool shawl. She drapes it over Amina's shoulders without asking.

They sit together.

For a moment, neither speaks.

Then—

AMINA  
You knew her name, didn't you?

BELINDA  
Whose?

AMINA  
The girl. The one they buried last winter.

Belinda's face hardens—only for a second.

BELINDA  
They don't all get names.

AMINA  
But you knew it.

BELINDA  
(slowly)  
Names are a dangerous thing. You  
hold onto someone's name long  
enough... it becomes your burden  
when the world lets them go.

A beat.

Amina studies Belinda's profile—the lines in her face, the  
set of her jaw.

AMINA  
What was her name?

Belinda doesn't answer.

She looks out over the fields.

Hums the same tune from the kitchen—low, almost like a hum to  
herself.

The wind picks up.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
That song... it's from home, isn't  
it?

No response.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
Belinda?

BELINDA  
(quiet)  
I remember it... before I could  
speak the language of this land.

A long silence.

Then:

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Some truths were never meant to be  
spoken aloud.

She stands.

Gathers her shawl tighter around her shoulders.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Come down before the lamps are lit.

AMINA  
(quiet, unsure)  
If I let it all go... maybe it  
wouldn't hurt so much.

Belinda pauses. Her back still to Amina.

BELINDA  
That's not freedom. That's  
forgetting.

She walks off, her figure framed against the falling sun.

Amina watches her go.

She looks down at the flower still in her hand. Crushed  
slightly.

She tucks it into the fold of her apron.

And turns back toward the quarters.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERBEND CLEARING - DUSK

A shallow bend in the river, hidden from view. The reeds sway  
gently. Water laps against stone.

AMINA sits on a log near the water, alone. Her shawl wrapped  
tight. The world is quiet, but not still.

In her hands: the Adinkra token. EBAN.

She turns it slowly, running a thumb along its worn edge.

Nearby, a tree trunk bears faint scratch marks - someone once  
carved symbols here. Most are worn smooth by rain.

She traces one with her finger.

Then looks out over the water.

ECHOES of earlier voices drift in her mind:

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They tried to burn our memory with  
our bones...

PLATO (V.O.)  
If we never speak, who remembers we  
were here?

She exhales.

And for the first time...

She whispers.

AMINA  
I remember.

She exhales-slow and steady.

Her fingers trace the edge of the token like it's a name she  
doesn't want to forget.

AMINA (V.O.)  
I could run too. Walk past the  
trees, past the road, and never  
turn back.

She exhales again.

AMINA (V.O.)  
But then who would keep the  
stories?

She presses the token to her chest. Not as a relic-but as a  
promise.

The wind rises slightly, rippling the water.

Amina stands. Gathers her shawl. And walks back toward town.

FADE TO:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NOON

Sunlight slants through the wooden slats, striping the floor  
in gold.

Amina sits on a woven mat beside a YOUNG GIRL (8), who holds  
a large, dog-eared Bible. The book is too big for her hands.

The girl points at a word, uncertain.

YOUNG GIRL 1  
This one again.

AMINA  
 (softly)  
 In... the... beginning.

YOUNG GIRL 1  
 In the beginning...

Amina pulls something from her pocket.

The small Adinkra token—weathered, but still intact.

She sets it gently beside the girl's slate.

A symbol. A choice. A memory passed on.

Amina smiles faintly, then glances to the side—almost sensing Belinda's presence.

AMINA  
 Onesimus.

Just a whisper. A memory, passed on without fanfare.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
 God... created...

YOUNG GIRL 1  
 God... created...

A rhythm begins—quiet and holy. Amina reaches over and moves the girl's finger.

AMINA  
 Old Missus used to read this out  
 loud. Back when she still had  
 breath to shame folks into church.

The girl looks up.

YOUNG GIRL 1  
 Was it hers?

AMINA  
 Belonged to someone before her.  
 Maybe someone who saw more truth in  
 it than she ever could.

The girl returns to the page, whispering each word.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
 You keep reading. Even when no one  
 asks you to. Remember every word  
 you can.

The girl nods, determined.

From the doorway, Belinda watches, unseen.

YOUNG GIRL 1  
(repeating)  
In the beginning...

Amina leans back, eyes steady.

FADE TO:

EXT. MEDFORD TOWN CENTER - MIDDAY

A horse-drawn cart bumps through the narrow street, its wheels catching puddles from last night's rain. Children run barefoot between doorways. A bell tolls somewhere in the distance.

Amina walks beside a young enslaved BOY (10), who carries a length of rope coiled around his shoulder. She holds a small sack of flour. Her eyes are low—but her ears are open.

Nearby, two white men argue politics near a tavern stoop. One pounds his fist into his palm.

WHITE MAN 1  
This town'll turn redcoat before it  
ever turns free.

WHITE MAN 2  
Or blue and burn. Mark me.

Amina doesn't flinch.

She steps closer to the bakery, her nose briefly catching the smell of warm molasses bread.

The boy looks up.

BOY 1  
Can we stop?

Amina shakes her head.

She glances across the road.

A carriage pulls up outside a print shop.

From it steps Harriet, composed and striking in her quiet confidence. Her hat is modest, her bodice laced neat. She carries a bundle of paper and a satchel worn thin at the seams.



Amina's breath catches.

FLASH MEMORY -  
HARRIET

Smiling slightly weeks ago, passing by without speaking. Gone in a moment.

BACK TO PRESENT

Harriet steps onto the curb, steady and alert.

She nods slightly to an older white woman seated outside the tailor's. The woman nods back—a flicker of something shared. Or surveilled.

Harriet enters the PRINT SHOP.

Through the open door, Amina glimpses her speaking to the PRINTER (40s), a white man with ink-stained fingers and a soft limp. He hands her a small wrapped parcel. She accepts it with care, eyes scanning behind her.

WHITE ABOLITIONIST 1  
That fever sweeping through Boston  
again?

HARRIET  
Smallpox. Came back worse. Folk  
still trying to blame the poor and  
the Black. But we remember  
Onesimus. Some of us know better  
now.

Amina stands across the street, unnoticed. The name hits her like a shiver.

AMINA  
(whisper, to herself)  
Onesimus.

She doesn't move. But something inside her does. She remembers.

WHITE ABOLITIONIST 1  
(surprised)  
You believe in inoculation?

HARRIET  
I believe in memory. And medicine  
passed through scar and story. But  
I don't remember just to remember.  
I remember to resist.

Their eyes meet briefly – then Harriet nods and walks away.

Across the square, a town patrolman watches Harriet. His fingers toy with the strap of his baton.

Amina clocks it.

So does Harriet.

She doesn't react.

Instead, she steps from the shop and walks the street's edge, every movement careful—but proud.

Amina's grip tightens on the flour sack.

The boy beside her tugs her sleeve.

BOY 1

She free?

Amina glances down.

Then back at Harriet.

AMINA

Yes.

BOY 1

She don't look scared.

AMINA

She is.

(soft, to herself)

She just chooses it anyway.

The boy doesn't respond.

Harriet turns the corner.

Gone.

Amina watches the empty street for a beat longer.

AMINA (V.O.)

I could run too. But there's something she carries—and I need to know what it is.

BOY 1

We should go.

Amina nods.

She doesn't move.

FADE TO:

EXT. TOWN BACK ALLEY - LATE AFTERNOON

Shadows stretch long. The marketplace is thinning. A few carts rattle off down the dirt road.

Amina walks along the edge of a shop with a small bundle tucked beneath her arm—fabric, neatly wrapped.

A door opens ahead.

From a side entrance of the print shop steps HARRIET, her coat buttoned now, satchel slung tight. She pauses, checking the street before stepping fully into the alley.

They nearly collide.

HARRIET  
(surprised)  
Careful.

Amina freezes.

Harriet softens slightly, recognizing her.

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
You again.

AMINA  
I didn't mean to—

HARRIET  
You following me?

AMINA  
(shaking her head)  
No. Just... errands.

A tense pause.

Harriet looks her over. Notes the care in how Amina's hair is wrapped, the clean stitches on her apron.

Then—a patrolman turns onto the road at the far end of the alley.

Harriet sees him first.

HARRIET

(low)

You best not linger here.

She reaches forward—and adjusts the edge of Amina's bundle, covering the cloth's seam that had started to slip loose.

Harriet's fingers are quick, practiced.

She steps back.

AMINA

Thank you.

Harriet gives the smallest nod.

HARRIET

Next time... use the—

(beat)

The north alley. Fewer eyes that way.

She turns.

Walks away into the narrowing light.

Amina stays still.

Then slowly, she looks down at her bundle—now perfectly aligned. Protected.

She adjusts her scarf. Shoulders back.

Then exits the alley.

EXT. TOWN BACK ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Amina still stands.

The patrolman, at the alley's end, slows his steps. Looks once toward her. Then continues on.

Amina exhales. Only then does she move.

She untucks the edge of her bundle—peeking briefly beneath the fabric.

Inside: a sliver of rough linen with faint hand-stitched lettering.

She runs her fingers along it.

Then tucks it back. Tight.

She looks up.

The alley is empty now.

But something has changed.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDFORD - NIGHT

The town sleeps, but not peacefully.

Shutters are bolted. Chimneys smoke. A dog barks, then goes quiet. A lantern swings at the far end of the street.

FOOTSTEPS.

Harriet walks briskly, her silhouette barely visible under her hooded shawl. Her posture is practiced—confident, yet cautious. She knows how to move unseen.

She passes a brick post near the general store.

A torn, weathered notice is nailed to the wall.

In faded ink:

> "NO INDIAN, NEGRO, OR MULATTO SERVANT OR SLAVE SHALL BE ABROAD AFTER NINE O'CLOCK..."

HARRIET

"NO INDIAN, NEGRO, OR MULATTO  
SERVANT OR SLAVE SHALL BE ABROAD  
AFTER NINE O'CLOCK..."

Harriet slows.

She doesn't stop. Just touches the edge of the paper as she walks past.

Not to deface it. Not to fear it.

Just to remember.

INT. STORAGE SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Dust and broken crates. Harriet crouches just inside the shed, watching the glow of a patrolman's lantern through the slats.

The patrolman's humming grows louder. Then fades.

She waits five more breaths.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Harriet steps back into the street.

She walks cautiously between buildings.

A flicker of motion—

A young free black boy crouches beside a barrel, eyes wide.

Harriet spots him. She kneels to his level, whispers.

HARRIET

(low)

Count to fifty. Then go left. You  
know the way?

The boy nods. She touches his shoulder—firm but warm.

Then she rises. Continues on.

EXT. WINDOW ABOVE - CONTINUOUS

From the loft of a stable, a soft candle glows.

AMINA stands, just behind the glass.

She's been watching. Still as stone.

She sees Harriet pause near the corner of the old post  
office.

Harriet places a hand on the stone wall, her fingers splayed  
flat for just a moment.

Then she turns the corner and vanishes.

INT. STABLE LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Amina doesn't move.

Her eyes remain fixed on the spot where Harriet touched the  
wall.

She reaches for her candle—then stops.

Instead, she cups the flame with her hand.

Letting it burn a moment longer.

Then—she blows it out.

FADE TO:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

The fire is low. Shadows dance across the walls. Rain taps the roof softly.

Amina sits by the hearth, her eyes tired but alert. Across from her, Belinda mends a torn hem by the dim firelight.

A moment passes in silence.

Then—

BELINDA  
(quietly)  
I was not born to this.

Amina looks up.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
I was born near the river. The Volta. My mother called it the bone of the earth. We lived close enough to feel its mist on the warm mornings. There was always music. Always work. Always watching the trees.

As Belinda speaks, we begin to drift—

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VOLTA RIVER - GOLD COAST (GHANA) - DAY (FLASHBACK, C. 1712)

LUSH GREENERY surrounds the wide, flowing Volta River.

Women kneel by the water, scrubbing cloths against smooth stones, their laughter rising above the current.

A drumbeat pulses softly in the distance.

Villagers move in and out of communal spaces. Children run barefoot through sun-warmed paths. The scent of fish and smoked grain lingers in the air.

Among them—BABY BELINDA, cradled on her mother's back, swaddled in hand-dyed cloth.

A moment of serenity. Her mother hums a lullaby—half melody, half prayer.

ANGLE ON:

A group of elders sits under a wide acacia tree, speaking in low tones. Their expressions are grave.

Nearby, young men sharpen tools. Not idly—for defense.

One man scans the tree line toward the river. Watching. Always watching.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They say we didn't know. That we  
were taken from Eden, blind. But  
that is a lie.

A warrior, not much older than a boy, carves a mark into the base of a spear.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
We knew the white men came to the  
water. That they bought the fallen  
from rival tribes. That they turned  
us into coin.

A mother calls her child close—not with fear, but with urgency.

Young Belinda's father returns from the field. His eyes scan the treeline.

At the edge of the village, two scouts return with news.

The elders rise. Whispers spread.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
My people were not blind. We were  
alert.

A gust of wind shakes the trees.

Mothers tighten the wraps on their children.

The humming stops.



CLOSE ON:

Baby Belinda—dark eyes blinking, face calm in her mother's shawl.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DIRT ROAD - WEST AFRICA - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, C. 1724)

A lunar sliver cuts through the blackness.

Feet shuffling through dirt. Shackles CLINKING. Dozens of dark silhouettes move in a slow, broken procession.

The air is thick with dust and breath.

YOUNG BELINDA (12) walks barefoot, wrists bound in iron beside a man she doesn't know. Her shoulders are slumped. Her face is blank—but her eyes still burn with life.

Her lip is split. Her tunic hangs off one shoulder. She stumbles.

No one speaks.

Further up the line, a mother walks with one hand bound and the other clutching a child who can barely walk. The child wails quietly.

A guard on horseback calls out in Portuguese. The chain line halts. Several PRISONERS collapse into the dirt.

Belinda sways. Her lips are cracked. She looks down the line—faces from different tribes, languages, ages. All strangers. All captive.

A MAN beside her whispers.

STRANGER 1  
(low, hoarse)  
Don't fall. If you fall, they don't  
stop.

Young Belinda nods faintly. She grits her teeth and walks.

ANGLE ON:

Two guards toss a dead body from the end of the chain line into the bush. A boy. No older than 10.

No ceremony. Just disposal.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
 I learned to keep my eyes up. Not  
 to ask names. Not to pray for water  
 out loud. Not to cry unless the  
 moon was gone.

Morning light breaks faintly in the east.

They keep walking.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUSTY CLEARING - LATER

The caravan stops. PRISONERS collapse to their knees.

Young Belinda leans against the body of a sleeping woman.  
 She's too tired to ask if the woman is alive.

The SOUND OF WAVES faintly in the distance.

Young Belinda lifts her head—

A SHIP.

Far off—but visible through the trees.

Her eyes widen.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
 When I saw it, I thought it looked  
 like a house. Or maybe a cathedral.  
 But it was a cage. A floating  
 grave.

A guard shouts. The line begins to move again.

Young Belinda steadies herself. Then walks on.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SLAVE SHIP - HOLD - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, C. 1724)

BLACKNESS.

Then—creaking WOOD. Slow, labored BREATHING. A CHAIN dragging  
 over timber.

Dim firelight seeps in from the grate above—orange and  
 flickering, like hell licking the floorboards.

ANGLE WIDENS:

THE HOLD. A narrow, suffocating corridor of human bodies. Stacked in tiers. Arms shackled. Necks restrained.

Young Belinda lies wedged between two girls—one coughing blood, the other unmoving.

She's covered in sweat. Salt crusts her lips. Her chest rises and falls like it's lifting the weight of the ocean.

Above them, a rat scurries along a beam. Water drips steadily.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They called it "tight packing."  
Said it was more efficient. That if  
one died, there'd be two more to  
sell.

A low moan ripples down the row. Someone is praying in Ewe. Someone else has lost their voice.

SOUND CARRIES: waves pounding the hull, distant thunder, a SCREAM cut short.

A baby cries—but it's hoarse. Almost too weak to make sound.

CLOSE ON:

Young Belinda's wrists. Chafed. Infected. She flexes her fingers slowly, trying to keep the circulation.

A GUARD opens a hatch overhead. LIGHT floods in—blinding. The sound of the ocean SURGES.

Wrine and seawater run down from the deck. The light catches flies in the air.

GUARD 1 (O.S.)  
(Portuguese; subtitled)  
Still breathing, you bastards?

He slams the hatch shut.

BLACKNESS again.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
We stopped counting the days. I  
dreamed of trees, just to stay  
awake. If you slept too long, you  
didn't wake up.

A beat.

Then—The coughing girl beside her spasms. Her limbs go rigid, then limp.

Young Belinda stares. Doesn't cry. Just slowly pulls away so their arms aren't touching.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
I learned the weight of death  
before I knew the weight of my own  
name.

FADE TO:

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

The ship cuts through black water. Lanterns flicker on the mast. Storm clouds build.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They crossed the sea to sell us  
like barrels of sugar. They thought  
the ocean would take our memory.

It didn't.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ANTIGUA - SUGAR PLANTATION - DAY (FLASHBACK, C. 1725)

SUNLIGHT BEATS DOWN over rolling cane fields. Smoke stacks rise in the distance. A DENSE, HUMID HAZE clings to everything.

Young Belinda, barefoot and cautious, hauls a wooden bucket beside a row of sweating cane workers twice her size. Her movements are clumsy. Her hands tremble.

She watches a man with a twisted back chop cane with rhythmic skill. Nearby, a WOMAN shuffles forward with bloodied cloth tied around her feet. No one complains.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They brought me to Antigua when I  
was still a girl. I knew the shape  
of freedom—but not its weight.

She stumbles. A driver cracks a whip in the air—not at her, but the sound alone makes her flinch.

CUT TO:

INT. RUM DISTILLERY - LATER

Large wooden barrels line the walls. Men push carts of fermented molasses under low ceilings. The air stings with alcohol.

Belinda helps a woman push an iron drum. Her eyes drift toward ISAAC ISAAC ROYALL SR (53), in fine coat and breeches, overseeing a shipment.

He wears multiple silver rings. His gaze never lands on the workers.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They said his wealth came from  
sugar. But I only ever saw blood.

FADE TO:

EXT. PLANTATION YARD - NIGHT

The worker quarters are dim, but alive with sound. A drumbeat. Soft singing. Small firelight.

Young Belinda listens to the hum of voices around her. She holds a carved wooden bead in her palm—kept hidden beneath her shift.

A mother braids her child's hair. Two boys toss pebbles and laugh. For a moment, Belinda smiles.

Then—A scream in the distance.

It ends quickly. The drumming stops. The voices fade.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
Even then, we knew joy had to be  
quiet. Or it would be taken.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. ANTIGUA - PLANTATION COURTYARD - NIGHT (FLASHBACK, C. 1736)

Torches burn like funeral pyres. A crowd gathers in silence around seven men tied to stakes.

OLDER BELINDA (34), older now, her eyes sharper, stands at the edge of a shed's shadow.

A MAGISTRATE reads from a parchment—his voice cold, rehearsed.

MAGISTRATE  
—convicted of plotting rebellion,  
sedition, and murder. Sentenced to  
death by fire...

The crowd murmurs. Some white PLANTERS nod solemnly. Others  
avert their gaze.

Among the condemned is HECTOR—strong, proud, unmoved. Isaac  
Royall Jr's driver. A man Belinda once feared. A man who  
sometimes protected her.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They said Hector was a driver. That  
he knew. That he said nothing.  
Maybe he did. Maybe silence was his  
only weapon.

A torch touches the kindling. The fire takes instantly.

Older Belinda covers her mouth but does not look away. Her  
face is lit by flame.

Another man—QUACO—is pulled from the line.

GOVERNOR (O.S.)  
This man confessed. His life will  
be spared. He will be exiled.

Older Belinda watches as Quaco disappears into the crowd,  
shoulders hunched. No one greets him.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They spared him for a name. Some  
called him coward. Others...  
survivor.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE FIELDS - LATER

The fire has burned out. Smoke rises from charred earth. The  
stench lingers.

Older Belinda walks alone beneath a half-moon sky.

She kneels, presses her hand to the blackened soil.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They tried to burn our memory with  
our bones. But I never forgot. I  
carried them with me.

She lifts her hand. Ash clings to her fingers.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MASSACHUSETTS SHORE - MEDFORD - 1737 - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A small rowboat approaches the shore. Isaac Royall Sr stands aboard, dressed finely.

Among those rowing and unloading—Older Belinda. Her eyes are tired, but she doesn't stagger.

The New England cold bites her skin.

BELINDA (V.O.)

He brought us north. Said the soil  
here was easier. Said we'd thank  
him. But chains are chains—warm or  
cold.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHURCH - MEDFORD - DAY (FLASHBACK, 1768)

A faint draft moves through the cracks of the wooden shutters. Outside, wind rustles bare trees. Inside — stillness. Cold light filters through stained glass in soft beams of red and blue.

The sanctuary is sparsely filled. A few white townspeople sit scattered across pews. Their murmurs are low. Eyes flit toward the back, but no one stares long.

Belinda, wrapped in a plain Sunday dress, stands upright at the rear of the church. Her posture is proud, the product of decades of silent endurance. Her face is unreadable, but her fingers tremble slightly.

YOUNG JOSEPH (10), her son, stands in front of her, fidgeting with his sleeves.

YOUNG PRINE (8), smaller and gentle, rocks slightly on her heels. Her hands flutter at her sides. She watches the light moving across the wooden floor.

A WHITE CLERGYMAN (60s) in simple vestments stands at the front of the altar, reading from a worn Bible.

CLERGYMAN

(intoning)

Do you renounce the devil and all  
his works?

Young Joseph nods, too fast.

The clergyman turns to Young Prine. She does not speak. Her hands continue to move gently, in rhythm.

A pause. The clergyman looks to Belinda.

She gives a faint, assured nod.

He steps forward, dips his fingers into the water, and touches Joseph's forehead.

CLERGYMAN (CONT'D)  
I baptize thee, Joseph, in the name  
of the Father, the Son, and the  
Holy Ghost.

Joseph blinks but stands still.

The clergyman turns to Prine.

CLERGYMAN (CONT'D)  
Prine... child of God...

He touches water to her brow.

Young Prine looks toward the stained glass and smiles – wide, radiant.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
They said baptism would make them  
Christian. Said it would make them  
human.  
(beat)  
But only in heaven. Never in  
Medford.

INT. CHURCH – MOMENTS LATER

The ceremony is over.

Townspeople begin to file out. One white woman whispers to another behind a gloved hand. A second woman crosses herself.

Belinda takes Young Joseph's hand in one of hers and places the other gently on Young Prine's shoulder.

They walk the center aisle – slowly, solemnly, with dignity.

Near the front door, Young Prine pauses. She points at a patch of light on the floor – the shape of a dove.



YOUNG PRINE  
(softly)  
Bird.

Belinda kneels beside her. Her knees crack. She winces, but doesn't show it.

BELINDA  
Yes, baby. A bird.

YOUNG PRINE  
Flying.

Belinda smiles – just once.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
That day, I believed – for a moment  
– they saw her. Not as a burden. As  
a child.  
(beat)  
And that was enough.

EXT. CHURCH – CONTINUOUS

They step into the cold morning light.

A bell rings faintly in the distance.

Belinda looks back only once, then leads her children down the path.

She carries them in more ways than one.

FADE TO:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS – NIGHT – PRESENT

The fire crackles low. Shadows dance across the wooden walls.

Amina sits still, her back upright but tight – holding something too large to name.

Belinda, across from her, sews with quiet precision. The needle moves in and out. Her face calm. Not empty – cleared.

Amina's hands rest in her lap. Her eyes are wet, but she hasn't cried.

BELINDA  
I don't tell it for pity.  
(beat)  
I tell it so it won't die in me.

A long pause.

AMINA  
(softly)  
Why now?

BELINDA  
Because you're listening.  
(beat)  
And because you're ready to  
remember.

Silence.

Amina looks up – really looks at her.

Not as a caretaker. Not as the one who made her salve or  
corrected her apron.

But as a woman. A survivor.

Belinda stops sewing.

AMINA  
(barely audible)  
I didn't know.

BELINDA  
You weren't meant to.  
(beat)  
But you are now.

Belinda reaches into her apron and pulls out a worn piece of  
cloth – old, frayed, and folded carefully. She places it in  
Amina's hands.

Amina takes it.

Her fingers close around it.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
(gently)  
Keep it safe.

Belinda returns to stitching – slower now, each pass more  
deliberate.

The firelight flickers.

The silence between them is no longer empty.

FADE OUT.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

The fire has burned low. Amina sits on the floor near the hearth, her knees tucked to her chest.

The old cloth Belinda gave her – a frayed scrap from another life – rests in her lap.

She runs her fingers along the edges, slowly.

Belinda moves quietly around the room, tidying up with calm purpose. Her body is tired, but her hands are steady.

A long silence stretches between them.

AMINA

(quietly)

I didn't know... about any of it.

BELINDA

You weren't meant to.

AMINA

But it happened. It all happened.

BELINDA

(gently)

It did. And still – here we are.

Amina looks up. Her eyes are not tearful now, but focused. Alert.

AMINA

You remembered everything.

BELINDA

Not everything. Some things I  
buried so deep, I don't know where  
they live no more.

(beat)

But I kept what mattered.

Amina touches the cloth again – something clicking into place inside her.

AMINA

You carried it all this time.

BELINDA

It carried me.

Another beat.

AMINA  
I thought survival meant  
forgetting.

BELINDA  
No, baby.  
(soft)  
Survival means remembering – and  
not letting the remembering swallow  
you whole.

Amina studies Belinda. The lines in her face. The firelight  
in her eyes.

AMINA  
How did you know I was ready?

BELINDA  
(small smile)  
'Cause you stopped just surviving.  
(beat)  
You started watching.

Outside, a soft wind rattles the wooden shutters.

The room is warm, but something deeper now hums in the  
silence – legacy.

Belinda kneels and adds a log to the fire. It flares,  
briefly. Light flickers across Amina's face.

AMINA  
(low)  
I want to know more.

BELINDA  
Then ask.

They sit together – two women, two generations, in a room  
that holds more than just warmth.

Amina picks up the cloth again – carefully, reverently.

FADE OUT.

EXT. TOWN EDGE – EARLY MORNING

Mist clings low to the ground. A thin frost crackles  
underfoot. The sun is barely up.

Amina walks with purpose, her scarf drawn close against the  
chill. She clutches something in her hand – the cloth Belinda  
gave her.

She slows near a row of modest homes – where free Black residents live on the outskirts of town.

A few early risers sweep their stoops or feed chickens. No one looks her way.

Then – across the path – HARRIET emerges from a narrow alley, a stack of folded linens in her arms.

She doesn't notice Amina at first.

AMINA hesitates.

Then steps forward.

AMINA  
(soft)  
Harriet?

Harriet stops. Eyes sharp, guarded. A pause.

HARRIET  
Do I know you?

AMINA  
No. But I've seen you.  
(beat)  
In town. At the church. Once near  
the stable road.

Harriet studies her.

HARRIET  
You from the Isaac Royall Jr.  
place?

Amina nods, careful. She glances around – no one is close enough to hear.

AMINA  
I have something.

HARRIET  
Something?

Amina reaches into her apron and pulls out a small folded paper – old and worn, its ink faded. One of Belinda's memory scraps, rewritten in Amina's hand.

AMINA  
Just a piece. One story.

Harriet takes it – but doesn't open it. She watches Amina instead.

HARRIET  
Why give it to me?

AMINA  
Because you write.  
(beat)  
Because I don't want it forgotten.

A long moment.

Harriet finally unfolds the paper. Reads silently.

Her expression shifts – just slightly.

She folds it again. Slips it into her coat.

HARRIET  
(quiet)  
They killed Crispus Attucks five  
winters ago – shot him down in the  
street in Boston. Said he died a  
free man. But freedom don't mean  
much if we're not part of the  
future he bled for.  
(beat)  
We write because they won't.  
(beat)  
Meet me here. Same time. Two days.

Amina nods. She starts to turn.

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
Wait.

Amina stops.

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
Who wrote it?

AMINA  
Belinda.

That lands.

Harriet holds her gaze for a long beat.

HARRIET  
Then there's more where that came  
from.

AMINA  
There is.

They part without a smile – but with understanding.

Amina walks back toward the road. A crow caws overhead. Wind stirs the edge of her scarf.

She walks faster now.

Something has begun.

CUT TO:

EXT. BROOKS PLANTATION - GROVE STREET - DAY

The road is muddy from a recent frost. A cart wheel sinks deep as Amina and another ENSLAVED WOMAN (40s) carry a sack of grain between them. They approach the property of THOMAS BROOKS.

At the edge of the estate stands a striking stone wall – high, curved, decorative. A boundary between road and wealth.

Amina slows. Lets her fingers brush the stones.

ENSLAVED WOMAN 1  
(warning)  
Don't linger.

AMINA  
(softly)  
Someone built this.

ENSLAVED WOMAN 1  
Someone owned the hands that did.

The woman walks ahead.

Amina stays behind. Studies the stones. There's symmetry. Precision. Pride.

POMP (O.S.)  
You like the wall?

Amina turns sharply.

POMP (60s), lean and sharp-eyed, stands near the edge of the hedgerow. His shirt is worn, hands still calloused. There's a quiet fire behind his tired eyes.

POMP (CONT'D)  
It's mine.

AMINA  
You built it?

POMP

Every stone.

(beat)

Took near a year. Mr. Brooks wanted it curved. Said straight lines were too plain.

AMINA

Why didn't you tear it down – like they said?

POMP

Who said that?

AMINA

I heard talk. Said you refused.

POMP

(nods)

He wanted it moved once. Thought it would give better view from the house.

(shrugs)

I told him I'd die before I unstacked a single stone.

AMINA

And he let you?

POMP

He laughed first. Then he walked away.

(beat)

Sometimes agency is choosing where your body leaves its mark.

FADE TO:

FLASHBACK – EXT. GROVE STREET – DAY – 1765

YOUNG POMP, younger, stronger, drives a shovel into hard ground. Beside him, two other enslaved men place large, jagged stones into a rough line.

Their backs glisten with sweat. One of them hums a low, rhythmic tune. Another keeps time by knocking rock against rock – a pattern. A code.

Young Pomp steps back. Wipes his brow. Eyes the curve of the stones – adjusts one by just an inch.

He looks to the house in the distance – then back to the wall.



There is no joy on his face. But there is purpose.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Amina runs her hand again across the stone – slowly, like touching memory.

POMP

They'll say it was just decoration.

(beat)

But I made it with hands that had  
no say in where they woke – but  
knew how to shape what they  
touched.

AMINA

(quietly)

Do you regret it?

POMP

I remember it.

(beat)

That's enough.

He turns to go. Pauses.

POMP (CONT'D)

You're Royall's girl, ain't you?

AMINA

I was.

Pomp raises an eyebrow but doesn't ask more.

POMP

Then write it down.

AMINA

(startled)

What?

POMP

What I said. What you saw. All of  
it.

(beat)

If we don't tell our stories,  
they'll bury us under their walls.

AMINA

I don't write.

POMP

Then speak. Say it to someone who  
can. Say it till the wind carries  
it.

He starts to walk off, slow but upright.

Then stops again – this time softer.

POMP (CONT'D)

You've got that look-like the  
stories been waiting for you.

He disappears around the edge of the estate.

Amina watches the wall again.

The stones seem to breathe.

She presses a hand to one.

AMINA (V.O.)

He remembered. And now I will.

FADE TO:

EXT. TOWN EDGE - EARLY MORNING - TWO DAYS LATER

Frost glitters across the grass. A thin fog hangs like gauze  
over the field.

Amina stands beneath a crooked tree, arms folded, scarf  
pulled tight. She watches the path. No movement.

She shifts her weight. Clutches a cloth bundle close to her  
chest.

Cart wheels creak in the distance. A DOG BARKS faintly.

Then – FOOTSTEPS.

Harriet appears through the mist, dressed plainly, a satchel  
across her shoulder. She walks with purpose, but her eyes  
scan everything.

She sees Amina. Slows.

HARRIET

You came back.

AMINA

(soft)

You said two days.

HARRIET  
Lot can change in two days.

Amina steps forward and holds out the bundle.

AMINA  
I brought more.

Harriet doesn't take it right away. She glances around. No one nearby.

HARRIET  
This place ain't as empty as it looks.

AMINA  
I know.

HARRIET  
You still brought it.

AMINA  
They're not mine to keep.

A pause. Harriet takes the bundle. Opens it.

Inside – several worn pages. Different inks. Different hands.

Harriet runs her fingers across the top page – faint script from Belinda. A name. A place. A date.

HARRIET  
Some of these are barely legible.

AMINA  
That's why I need you.  
(beat)  
You can read them. Rewrite them.  
Save them.

HARRIET  
And if someone finds this?

AMINA  
They won't.

HARRIET  
(sharp)  
Don't be sure of that.

AMINA  
(quiet)  
I'm not. But we still have to do it.

Harriet tucks the pages back into the cloth.

HARRIET

Most folks don't ask us what we  
remember. Only what we can do.

AMINA

That's why we write it down.

Harriet kneels, pulls a thin book from her satchel – dog-eared, ink-stained. A pencil slips from inside.

She lays the cloth beside her, opens a page, and begins to copy.

Amina kneels slowly beside her.

HARRIET

You ever lose someone and forget  
their voice?

AMINA

(after a pause)

My mother. She died the day I was  
born. I don't know what her voice  
sounded like at all.

HARRIET

My uncle taught me to read. He hid  
pages under the floor. Said the  
words weren't for them – they were  
for us.

(beat)

He died with a broken back. And I  
couldn't remember the sound of his  
laugh a year later.

She looks at Amina.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

That's why I write.

Amina nods. No more words.

Harriet copies line after line. Her fingers quick. Careful.

Amina watches the marks appear. A new shape to old voices.

AMINA

You believe this will matter?

HARRIET

Not to them.

(beat)

(MORE)

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
But maybe to someone after.  
(Beat)  
Then we better start writing.

A slow breeze moves through the trees. The mist begins to lift.

They sit there together-on the earth, in silence, writing.

FADE TO:

EXT. WOODS EDGE - EARLY EVENING

A low golden light filters through the trees.

Amina and Harriet sit on a fallen log, a stack of notes between them. A nearby candle burns low in a tin cup.

HARRIET  
This one says he ran twice-first  
for his wife, then for himself.

You think they should be side by side?

AMINA  
(nods)  
It's the same story. One life. One  
freedom.

Harriet pauses. Looks out toward the trees.

HARRIET  
You talk about freedom like it's  
something we can hold.

AMINA  
Can't you?

HARRIET  
Freedom on paper isn't the same as  
freedom in a man's eyes.

I've seen free men flinch like they still got chains on.

AMINA  
And I've seen enslaved women walk  
like queens. What's that, if not  
freedom?

A beat.

HARRIET

Then maybe it's not about law or  
chains... maybe it's just memory.

AMINA

(quietly)

Or hope.

Harriet looks at her. Their differences hang in the silence –  
not in opposition, but in reflection.

The candle flickers low. A final note is added to the pile.

HARRIET

We remember so we survive. But what  
if remembering is all we ever get?

AMINA

Then it has to be enough. Until  
it's not.

They sit in stillness. Not angry. Just... different.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDFORD TOWN CENTER - NEXT DAY

A small crowd has gathered in the square.

At the center, a FREE BLACK MAN (30s) stands restrained  
beside a wooden post. His coat is torn. A worn \*\*freedom  
paper\*\* flutters from his pocket, crumpled but visible.

A WHITE CONSTABLE holds a baton. He's not yelling – just  
cold.

CONSTABLE 3

Paper don't matter after sundown.  
You were out. That's enough.

The man says nothing. He stands tall, eyes forward.

ONLOOKER 1 (WHITE)

Thought they could go where they  
pleased now...

ONLOOKER 2 (WHITE, SHRUGGING)

Not here.

From the edge of the square, Amina watches, hidden behind a  
cart of potatoes. Her face doesn't move – but her jaw  
tightens.

The constable raises the baton.

JUST A CUT TO:

A crumpled paper in the dirt.

Wind lifts it slightly – and it folds inward, unread.

FADE TO:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

A hush sits heavy in the room.

Amina enters slowly, cradling the Adinkra token in her hand. She pauses at the threshold – uncertain.

A small circle of women is already gathered. Older. Younger. A few with graying hair wrapped in faded cloth. The fire burns low.

Belinda sits at the far side, her sewing in her lap. PRINE is beside her, eyes wide and alert, rocking gently.

Harriet lingers near the wall. Observing. Listening.

WOMAN 1 shifts to make space.

WOMAN 3

Come in, child. Sit quiet. We don't  
speak loud here.

AMINA steps forward. She sits on the floor. Her back straight. Her eyes sharp.

A bowl of kola nut powder sits in the center. A scrap of striped kente cloth rests beside it. Simple, sacred offerings.

WOMAN 4 (60S)

First time always feels strange.  
Like remembering a thing you swere  
never told.

BELINDA

(softly)

But it's in you. Deeper than bone.  
You just need to sit still long  
enough to feel it.

The room stills.

WOMAN 5 (30S)

I heard a boy once – Prince Hall  
was his name. Said he'd join the  
fight if it meant we could breathe  
different. Said he was free, but  
still had to fight for his own  
people.

WOMAN 3

His son – Primus – just a boy now.  
But sharp. Gonna lead something  
someday.

WOMAN 6

And George Middleton – that one  
don't kneel to nobody. Carries  
himself like a man twice his age.  
Got a fire in his step.

WOMAN 7 (LATE 20S)

All of 'em born free. But still  
ain't safe. Papers don't mean  
protection. Just permission...  
until someone tears it up.

A beat.

WOMAN 4

We remember them here. Alongside  
the ones whose names never made  
paper.

She reaches into the bowl, pinches the powder, and tosses it  
gently into the fire.

SIZZLE.

The flame flares – then dims low again.

The room hums. A pulse of memory settling in.

A new voice – OLDER WOMAN (70s), accent thick, words  
deliberate.

OLDER WOMAN

Before the ships. Before the long  
dark. I was born under the sun near  
the Volta. My mother called me  
Adzo. My father wore gold around  
his wrist – not for wealth, but for  
heritage.



She holds out a tiny wooden doll – smooth from decades of touch.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

We were not kings and queens. We were people. We worked. We laughed. We fought with our neighbors. We planted yam. Ate stew of fish and maize. We walked barefoot and sang while we worked.

(beat)

And yes – we knew. That men came from the water with fire sticks and iron mouths.

WOMAN 6

(quietly)

Then why didn't we run?

OLDER WOMAN

Some did. Some sold. Some were stolen. Some believed they could trade one wrong for another mercy. But none of us – not one – was ignorant.

She turns her eyes toward Amina.

OLDER WOMAN (CONT'D)

You remember this. We were not docile. We were disrupted.

A silence falls.

Belinda takes a slow breath. Then she begins to hum – soft, low, like a lullaby dipped in smoke.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. WEST AFRICAN VILLAGE – SUNSET – FLASHBACK (C. 1700S)

A glow of golden sunlight dances across red earth. A cluster of earthen homes with thatched roofs form a semicircle. Cooking fires crackle. The smoke rises in lazy spirals.

Children gather around a carved AYO board, playing swiftly, laughing as seeds click into the hollows.

NEARBY-A WOMAN kneels over a stone bowl, rhythmically pounding cassava into dough.

Two men lean over hand-carved iron tools, sharpening with obsidian stones, their hands skilled and deliberate.

A group of young women practice Adowa, the ceremonial dance of storytelling. Their anklets jingle with each graceful movement. Their bodies speak of memory, rhythm, ancestry.

UNDER A BAOBAB TREE -

A teenager braids her younger sibling's hair with cowrie shells woven into the plaits.

A baba (father) lifts his giggling daughter onto his shoulders, spinning her once before settling her with care.

A mother grinds millet into fine flour, her voice humming - soft and melodic.

Her song is the one we've heard before from Belinda. Now we know where it came from.

                    OLDER WOMAN (V.O.)  
We raised our children with  
stories.

Every name had a meaning.

Every scar had a purpose.

                    CHILDREN (V.O.)  
                    (chanting)  
"Fire can burn the stick - but not  
the root."

EXT. VILLAGE CENTER - CONTINUOUS

A fire pit blazes in the center of the village. The Elders sit in a circle - passing down tales of migration, of the rivers, of ancestors who spoke with the wind.

Carvings of Adinkra symbols are painted on cloth. Each one has meaning.

CLOSE ON - EBAN: THE SYMBOL OF PROTECTION, HOME, AND SAFETY.

                    OLDER WOMAN (V.O.)  
We knew the danger. The sea brought  
change... not all of it welcome.

But we were not naive.

We sent warnings to other villages.

We watched the coast.

We chose watchmen, protectors, healers.

AT THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE -

Men stand guard - spears carved with markings. Women gather herbs, grinding them into medicine bundles wrapped in banana leaves.

A boy recites words from a bark scroll - oral tradition written in ink, passed from elder to youth.

A DRUMBEAT echoes in the distance.

TEEN GIRL (V.O.)  
I was born the season of yam  
harvest.

My mother said I came laughing.

That I would carry joy - even when it was taken.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. SHORELINE - NIGHT

Firelight flickers off water. Several people huddle near a tree line.

Shadows move on the beach. A figure peers into the darkness. The ocean is restless.

They know what may come.

Smoke drifts gently from cooking huts. The golden hue of dusk warms the red clay walls and thatched rooftops.

Women squat by a stream, washing cloth with soap made from shea and ash. The rhythmic slap of fabric echoes like a drumbeat.

Near the fire pits, iron pots simmer. A stew of okra, smoked fish, and yam wafts upward. Children gather calabash bowls, laughing.

A young girl, no older than ten, arranges polished cowrie shells around a shallow mound of sand - marking boundaries in a game.

ELDER WOMAN 3  
(soft, in Twi)  
So wo were fi na wosankofa a,  
yenkyi.

(MORE)

ELDER WOMAN 3 (CONT'D)  
 (If you forget and you go  
 back to reclaim it, it is  
 not wrong.)

Nearby, men sit in a circle,  
 weaving baskets, repairing tools.  
 Their hands are worn – but  
 purposeful.

A teen boy carves a figurine from a softwood branch. He hums  
 a rhythmic melody – the same heard during the Memory Circle.

ELDER WOMAN 4 (V.O.)  
 Our tools came from our land. Our  
 medicines from bark and root. We  
 needed no written book to tell us  
 how to heal.

A mother dips herbs into a boiling pot. Beside her, her  
 daughter gently dabs a wound on her brother's leg – the  
 family's knowledge passed hand to hand.

EXT. VILLAGE CENTER – MOMENTS LATER

A circle forms – elders seated, youth standing around. A  
 drummer begins a low beat.

ELDER MAN 1  
 The world speaks to us. The wind,  
 the trees, the stars – all memory.

A young woman rises. Her body adorned in dyed indigo wrap.  
 Gold thread catches light at the edge of her sleeve.

YOUNG WOMAN 2  
 The traders came first to trade.  
 But trade turned to blood.

The drums stop.

ELDER WOMAN 3  
 We knew the coast grew dangerous.  
 We stayed inland. Hid our children  
 when the sails came.

OLDER WOMAN (V.O.)  
 We did not go freely. We were  
 stolen. Torn from song and sky.

SLOW PAN – THE VILLAGE'S EDGE

A narrow path. Faint echoes of foreign shouting.

A mother clutches her baby, ducks into the forest brush. A BOY watches from behind woven fence panels.

FLASH IMAGES – quick, fractured:

Shackles dropped in a crate.

Gunpowder smoke.

The back of a man running – then falling.

OLDER WOMAN (V.O.)  
But even stolen – we remembered.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS – NIGHT – RETURN TO PRESENT

The flames pop.

Amina's eyes glisten. She clutches the token tighter.

AMINA  
I never saw it. I never knew.

OLDER WOMAN  
Now you do.

WOMAN 5  
When they chained us... they didn't  
just take land. Or breath.

They tried to take the stories.

WOMAN 6  
But they didn't know we were the  
stories.

The women nod slowly. A shared rhythm, a shared knowing.

Harriet finally speaks – her voice soft, but pointed.

HARRIET  
Sometimes I wonder... what if  
freedom ain't a destination?

All eyes turn to her.

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
What if it's a practice? A thing we  
pass... like a hymn or a name?

BELINDA  
Or a memory.

Amina glances around the circle. So many faces. So many secrets. She swallows hard.

AMINA  
I used to think... freedom would  
look like the road. A gate opening.

But now – I think it starts here. (beat) In the remembering.

BELINDA leans forward. Her tone is low, solemn.

BELINDA  
Then remember this.

She begins:

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
"A single tree cannot make a  
forest."

A few of the women echo softly in Twi.

VARIOUS WOMEN  
Baako nko gyina.

BELINDA  
My grandmother used to say that.

That we were always part of something bigger. Even when we felt small.

A pause.

WOMAN 6  
Then we pass the remembering  
forward.

One by one, each woman speaks a name.

WOMAN 3  
Afi. My mother. Killed for asking  
too many questions.

WOMAN 4  
Kwame. My husband. Died chained in  
the harbor.

WOMAN 5  
I don't know the name. But I  
remember her voice.

(MORE)

WOMAN 5 (CONT'D)  
She sang while she worked. Loud –  
like she didn't care who listened.

Amina looks to Prine, curled against Belinda's side. The child blinks slowly – but she is listening.

AMINA  
She'll remember too.

BELINDA offers a final nod.

BELINDA  
Then the circle is complete – for  
tonight.

Each woman takes a pinch of the kola nut powder and tosses it gently into the fire.

SIZZLE. POP. CRACKLE.

The flame glows.

They begin to rise, slow and reverent. Amina remains seated a beat longer, watching the fire.

AMINA  
(to herself)  
They'll know we were here.

FADE TO:

INT. HARRIET'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

A small, weather-worn cottage on the edge of Medford, just past the marshes. The kind of place that doesn't appear on maps – but has always been there.

Inside: modest and fiercely kept. The walls are uneven. The windows draft. But there's warmth in the space – a life carved carefully around silence.

The fire burns in the hearth. A pot simmers – the smell of lentils and herbs lingering in the air.

Harriet, coat off now, wears a long wool shift. Her hair unpinned, her hands calloused. She isn't at ease – but she is herself.

CAMERA MOVES SLOWLY THROUGH HER HOME:

– A bundle of dried lavender hangs from the rafter.

- A basin beside the fire. Used. Still warm.
- A narrow shelf with two books: a Bible, and a ledger half-filled with inked names.
- A carved wooden toy – a small horse – rests on the mantle, polished from touch.
- A stool tipped over near the window. She doesn't fix it.
- A child's cloak, carefully folded, sits under a stack of linens.

Harriet sits at her small table. A candle flickers beside her.

She unfolds a letter.

CLOSE ON: THE HANDWRITING IS HERS.

She reads silently – mouthing the words under her breath.

HARRIET (V.O.)  
"You would've been seven now. Tall.  
I think your laugh would've filled  
this whole room."

She folds the letter carefully. Presses it to her chest.  
Breath held. Then released.

She places it in a cloth pouch. Tucks it in a drawer under  
the floorboard. A sacred hiding place.

A beat.

She stands. Crosses to the hearth. Stirs the pot.

Then – she leans against the mantle. Lets the silence  
stretch.

She closes her eyes.

FLASH IMAGE – A candle-lit back room. A WHITE DOCTOR  
shouting. A midwife screaming. A child not breathing.

BACK TO PRESENT.

She opens her eyes.

She does not cry.

She moves to the window. Pulls the curtain back.

CUT TO:



EXT. HARRIET'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Across the field, distant lights flicker in white homes. The Isaac Royall Jr house looms in the far distance - barely visible through trees. A shadow, even in moonlight.

She whispers.

HARRIET  
Still watching.

She closes the curtain. Returns to her table.

On it: a cloth she's been embroidering. Small stars stitched in deep indigo thread. The cloth is worn - but the stars shimmer.

She continues the work.

KNOCK - Soft. Twice.

She doesn't startle. Just stills.

She crosses the room. Opens the door just a crack.

No one.

She closes it again. Bolts it.

Sits at the table. The cloth in hand.

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
(softly)  
Freedom ain't paper. It's memory...  
practiced.

She places the needle down. Folds the cloth.

Lights a second candle-and opens the ledger.

She writes:

"Amina. Witness. Writer."

Then she stares at the page.

Lingers there.

CUT TO:

EXT. SALEM STREET BURIAL GROUND - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun hovers low – casting long shadows across uneven stones. The wind picks up, dry and restless.

Amina walks along the perimeter of the burial ground. She carries a folded cloth satchel. HARRIET trails just behind, quieter than usual.

They stop at the far corner – where the markers thin out. Just earth. No names.

AMINA

They said this was the spot.

HARRIET

I counted fifty, last I was here.  
Maybe more.

AMINA

(soft)

No stones. No words. Just space.

Amina kneels. Brushes dirt from a patch of grass. Beneath her fingertips – a faint depression in the ground. A grave, long forgotten.

Harriet opens the satchel. Pulls out the notebook.

AMINA (CONT'D)

I remember two names from Belinda's list. The ones who died before I was born. Before even Belinda came north.

HARRIET

(writes)

Say them.

AMINA

Abena. She died in childbirth.

(beat)

Kojo. Beaten to death in winter.

Harriet writes.

HARRIET

Who told her?

AMINA

I think... everyone.

(beat)

Some memories aren't owned by one person.

A breeze rustles the grass. A piece of paper flutters from Harriet's lap. Amina catches it, presses it flat again.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
You think they knew we'd be  
standing here?

HARRIET  
(soft)  
Maybe they hoped.

Amina reaches into her satchel and pulls out a stone. Flat. Smooth. She places it on the patch of grass.

Then another.

Harriet watches, then does the same.

Amina lingers at one grave-shaped patch, her fingers still pressed to the earth.

AMINA  
Wait.

Harriet looks over.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
There's one more name. I never  
wrote it down. Don't know why.  
(beat)  
AMINA (CONT'D)  
Sika.

Harriet's pen stills.

HARRIET  
Who was she?

AMINA  
Just... someone who used to braid  
my hair when I was little. She sang  
songs I didn't understand then.  
(beat)  
She disappeared one winter. No one  
said where she went. No one  
remembered.

Harriet watches, saying nothing.

Amina places a stone gently at the base of the last patch.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
I remember now.

A beat of silence.

Harriet slowly reaches into the bag and hands Amina another stone.

Together, they press it into place.

HARRIET

Names don't have to be carved in marble.

AMINA

No. Just remembered.

They work silently – placing stones over five unmarked graves. Small altars of memory.

AMINA (CONT'D)

(whispering)

This isn't for them. They already know who they were.

(beat)

It's for us. So we don't forget.

Harriet places the final stone. Closes the notebook. She looks at Amina.

HARRIET

You ready to keep going?

A long pause.

AMINA

(softly)

Freedom ain't a law they give.

It's a memory we keep –

So it don't vanish when the paper burns.

Harriet looks at her, stilled.

They stand in silence – a silence filled with names, with witness, with purpose.

AMINA (CONT'D)

(without hesitation)

Yes.

They stand. Step back. The stones remain.

A field of memory reclaimed.

FADE TO:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

The room is dimly lit by a single flame. The fire has died down to embers.

Belinda sits at the table, mending a torn shawl by candlelight. Her hands are steady, her face unreadable.

Amina enters. She carries the notebook. She's muddy from the field. Her scarf is loose. Her face is flushed – not from exhaustion, but certainty.

BELINDA  
You walk like you've seen ghosts.

AMINA  
Maybe I have.

Amina sits across from her. The silence is heavy – but not tense. Just full.

She opens the notebook. Turns it toward Belinda.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
I've written them down. Names.  
Stories. What you told me. What  
I've seen.

BELINDA  
And?

AMINA  
(a breath)  
I know what I'm meant to do.  
(beat)  
I want to preserve it – all of it.  
Every scrap of memory. So they'll  
know we were here. And how we  
lived. Not just how we died.

Belinda doesn't speak. She places her sewing aside. Looks fully at Amina.

BELINDA  
That's a heavy thing to carry.

AMINA  
It's heavier not to.

BELINDA  
They'll call you a liar. Or worse.

AMINA  
Then I'll write louder. Like you  
said.

BELINDA  
(a long pause)  
I never said it had to be you.

AMINA  
You didn't have to.

She slides the notebook closer to Belinda – an offering.

Belinda touches the corner of the page. Her fingers tremble,  
just slightly.

BELINDA  
(softly)  
You'll need protection.

AMINA  
I have you.

They sit in stillness.

Then – a small gesture. Belinda pulls from her pocket a  
carved wooden piece – aged, worn smooth. A keepsake from  
before. From Africa.

She presses it into Amina's hand.

BELINDA  
It's time someone else remembered.  
(beat)  
Properly.  
(slower now)  
Me nana na ka kyere me saa asem  
yi...

Amina looks up. Belinda's voice is softer now, almost  
musical.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
"The path does not close for the  
one who knows where she's going."

Amina lets the words settle.

AMINA  
That was-

BELINDA  
Twi. From the river I was born  
near.

(MORE)

BELINDA (CONT'D)

(beat)

I forgot the taste of its water.  
But not the sound of its truth.

A moment of silence passes between them – reverent.

Amina closes her fingers around it.

AMINA

(quiet)

Thank you.

BELINDA

Don't thank me. You ain't done yet.

They sit by the dying fire, faces illuminated by a warm, flickering glow.

Amina places the carving beside the notebook.

She's not just observing anymore.

She is the witness now.

CUT TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR. PLANTATION – TWILIGHT – MONTAGE

– Amina walks past the cabins. A baby's cry echoes in the distance. A spoon scrapes softly in a pot. Smoke curls upward.

– An elderly woman weaves dried corn husks into tiny animal shapes. She glances around, then hides them beneath a floorboard.

– Two young boys crouch in the dirt, playing Achi with flat stones and chalk marks. One whispers the rules as if passing down a secret.

– A middle-aged man sharpens a hoe – slow, steady, intentional – before tucking it behind a barrel.

– A young girl slips a folded scrap of cloth behind the stable wall. Her fingers press it into place. Amina watches from a distance.

– From inside the cookhouse, faint laughter bubbles up – cut short by a shushing gesture. But the smile remains.

– Amina pauses by the well. Water reflects the fading light. She stares into it – as if trying to remember everything at once.

— A cloth hangs in a window — indigo with stitched stars. A signal. A story. A reminder.

BACK TO:

INT. AMINA'S CABIN - NIGHT

She kneels by the fire, unfolding one of Belinda's old scraps — the writing faded, but the shape of the letters familiar.

She whispers aloud what she remembers — slowly, clearly — committing it to memory.

                  AMINA  
                  (softly)  
                  I won't forget.  
                  (beat)  
                  I did not run. I remembered. I  
                  passed it on.

She folds the scrap. Tucks it under her scarf.

She sits taller now.

Still silent — but changed.

FADE TO BLACK.

**END OF ACT II.**



ACT III

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - MAIN HOUSE - EARLY MORNING  
- 1775

Dawn breaks, but the sky is murky - clouds threaten rain. A chill rides the wind.

The grand house looms, proud but restless. Shutters clatter in the breeze.

FROM A DISTANCE -

Amina crouches near the woodpile under the cover of a crooked willow. She gathers kindling - slowly - eyes fixed on the front steps of the Isaac Royall Jr. House.

She watches.

ANGLE - FRONT PORCH

ACROSS THE YARD - A GROUP OF DOMESTIC SERVANTS

Three enslaved women pause near the laundry line. A boy hauls firewood but slows. They pretend to work - but all eyes are on the porch.

One woman whispers, barely audible.

WOMAN 8  
They're runnin'.

BOY 2  
Where to?

WOMAN 8  
Don't matter. They ain't takin' us.

The wind flutters the laundry. Their faces remain unreadable - but alert.

A white messenger in a mud-splattered coat knocks twice. Isaac Royall Jr opens the door himself. His powdered wig is disheveled. He glances around, hurried.

The messenger hands him a sealed letter. Isaac breaks it open without ceremony, eyes darting over its contents.

Behind him, his two married daughters - MARY ROYALL ERVING (35) and Elizabeth Royall Pepperell (refined, anxious) - pace in the hallway, shawls draped, travel trunks nearby.

MARY ROYALL ERVING  
We should've left last week.  
Father, it's not safe.

ISAAC ROYALL JR  
Nova Scotia is safer than Boston.  
But it's England that holds peace.

ELIZABETH ROYALL PEPPERELL  
You said we'd wait. Now it's rushed  
— what changed?

ISAAC ROYALL JR.  
The crowd in Boston changed. The  
governor changed. The mood is  
fevered.  
(turns)  
You must be ready by dusk.

He shuts the door.

BACK TO: AMINA

She grips the kindling tighter, splinters digging into her  
skin. Her eyes narrow. A wave of unease ripples through her.

EXT. PATH TO THE WASHHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Amina hurries back toward the side buildings. As she passes  
the washhouse, MARTHA — one of the older laundresses — steps  
halfway out the doorway.

MARTHA  
(whispers)  
They're sending messages by candle.  
I saw 'em burn one before it could  
be read.

AMINA  
From who?

MARTHA  
Boston. Maybe Salem. I don't know.  
But it's fear I smelled on them,  
not smoke.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Amina slips inside carrying wood. The ROYALL FAMILY COOK  
(50s, enslaved, sharp-eyed) chops onions with precision. The  
air is heavy with spice and tension.

ROYALL FAMILY COOK  
(pulling Amina aside)  
They say the Sons of Liberty burned  
a Loyalist barn outside Cambridge.

AMINA  
Will they come here?

ROYALL FAMILY COOK  
(shakes head)  
They don't need to. Masta already  
packing like the devil himself is  
at his heels.

Amina sets the kindling beside the hearth. She notices a  
parcel of silver and ledgers tucked beneath the kitchen  
stairs.

AMINA  
(quiet)  
He's hiding what matters.

The Cook stops. Eyes the parcel. Then returns to chopping,  
but her hand trembles.

CUT TO:

EXT. STABLES - LATE MORNING

A carriage wheel lies broken in the mud. A BLACK STABLEHAND  
(40s) kneels beside it, grunting as he tries to fix the axle.

Amina approaches with a small rag of oats.

AMINA  
They leavin'?

STABLEHAND 1  
He sent for the wheelwright. Not  
for us.  
(pauses)  
Word is - Boston's about to boil  
over.

Amina glances to the woods beyond the fields.

STABLEHAND 1 (CONT'D)  
Folks vanishin'. Masta Royall and  
Masta Thomas - gone this morning.  
Said to help "prepare"-but they  
didn't say prepare for what.

CUT TO:

INT. AMINA'S CABIN - DUSK

Amina lights a small flame in the oil lamp. She unfurls one of Belinda's old memory scraps – now copied in her own hand.

She attempts to write and adds a new line:

"The Royalls are running. Their papers hide more than debts. Their eyes carry guilt."

She stops.

She hears something – outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD PERIMETER - NIGHT

Amina moves low through the grass. Hidden. She watches as two loyalist sympathizers, cloaked and hasty, hand Isaac Royall Jr a map near the old well.

The exchange is silent. Intentional. Urgent.

Behind them, the enslaved cabins flicker with candlelight – uninvited witnesses to history about to shift.

EXT. WOODLINE - CONTINUOUS

Amina backs away, retreating into the trees.

She stops at the edge of a clearing.

A SINGLE SHOT rings out in the far distance – faint but real.

Amina doesn't flinch. She steadies her breath.

NEARBY - A SMALL CABIN WINDOW

Two children peek through a gap in the shutter. Their breath fogs the glass.

CHILD 2

Why's Master meetin' outside?

CHILD 3

Mama said when they start  
whisperin' in the dark, somethin'  
bad's comin'.

The younger child holds a rag doll tight – eyes wide, unblinking.

AMINA (V.O.)  
Something is breaking. Not just in  
the world – in me.  
(beat)  
When the masters flee, do the  
chains fall? Or do they rust in  
silence?

She turns – walks back toward the cabins.

The camera lingers on the Isaac Royall Jr. House as a STORM  
begins to build.

FADE OUT.

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - LATE AFTERNOON

A biting wind curls around the trees. The sky is slate-gray.

Amina walks the path toward their usual meeting place – a  
small clearing behind a stone fence near the edge of the  
woods. She clutches her shawl tighter.

She waits.

She pulls her shawl tighter, fingers brushing the edges of a  
frayed seam – one Belinda repaired long ago.

Her eyes drift to the bare trees, their branches like raised  
arms.

She remembers her mother's voice:

AMINA (V.O.)  
She said the trees could speak – if  
you knew how to listen.  
(pause)  
I never learned her full name. But  
I remember the way she braided my  
hair – always left a curl free.  
Said it made me look brave.

Nothing.

She turns her head at the sound of boots in gravel. Harriet  
emerges from between two elms – but she does not cross the  
full distance.

She stays in the shadows. Her hood drawn low. Her breathing  
hurried.

Harriet glances over her shoulder – twice.

Beyond the stone fence, a town constable's silhouette lingers across the road, half-lit by the dying sun.

Harriet's jaw tightens.

HARRIET

(low)

He followed me all the way from the tailor's. Didn't even pretend not to stare.

She takes a breath – but it's clipped.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

I know what they do to Black folk they call agitators. My father died in a Boston alley for less.

(urgent whisper)

I can't stay. Not today. They followed me yesterday – white man on a gray horse. Same one who questioned Mr. Griggs. He knew my name.

Amina takes a step forward.

AMINA

You're in danger?

HARRIET

(nods)

They think I'm passing notes. Spreading ideas.

(beat)

They're not wrong. But now... it's different.

Harriet pulls something from her pocket – a folded scrap of paper, carefully sealed with twine.

She tosses it gently across the space between them.

Amina catches it.

Amina runs her thumb over the edge of the twine.

It reminds her of another knot – a thin cord her brother used to wear around his neck.

Gone now.

AMINA (SOFT)  
My brother once said it was better  
to speak and be punished than to  
swallow silence forever.  
(beat)  
They sent him south. I never saw  
him again.

HARRIET  
If they search my place, they won't  
find it. But you – you keep it  
safe.

A long pause. Harriet's voice softens.

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
Be careful. They're watching  
everything now. Even the ones they  
think are too quiet to notice.

Amina steps forward now, just slightly.

AMINA  
You ever get tired? Of trying to be  
brave... when it doesn't feel like  
enough?

Harriet's eyes glisten – but she doesn't look away.

HARRIET  
Every night.  
(beat)  
But every morning, I do it anyway.

She begins to back away into the trees. Then–

HARRIET (CONT'D)  
(over shoulder)  
If the paper burns... the memory  
must not.

And she's gone.

EXT. CLEARING – MOMENTS LATER

Amina kneels alone in the grass.

The wind has quieted, but the sky remains bruised. The faint  
drumbeat from town fades.

She unties the twine. Carefully unfolds the note.

INSERT - HARRIET'S HANDWRITING:

"They watch us like shadows. But even shadows leave marks when light comes."

Amina reads it once.

AMINA

"They watch us like shadows. But even shadows leave marks when light comes."

Then again - slower this time.

She places the paper against her chest. Her breath trembles.

She looks up at the tree line - no movement. Just the ghost of her own breath in the cold.

Nearby, a pair of crows rise from the brush, wings slicing the silence.

Amina lowers her gaze. Still no one.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - EXT. MEDFORD PLANTATION - NIGHT - YEARS EARLIER

A YOUNG AMINA (6) kneels in the dirt, her hands pressed to her ears.

Inside a cabin - muffled cries. A woman screams - once, then silence.

A MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

She's gone.

Amina looks up - her small face blank. The door creaks open. A shadowed figure steps outside - a midwife. Blood stains her apron.

The fire crackles. No one comes to comfort the child.

BACK TO:

EXT. CLEARING - PRESENT

Amina's hand tightens around the folded paper. She whispers:



AMINA

Mama never held me. My father... he  
left south when I still had baby  
teeth.

(beat)

I been here since memory began.

She lowers her hand.

HARRIET (V.O.)

(Soft, overlapping)

I remember.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. SMALL COTTAGE - DAY - YEARS EARLIER

A YOUNG HARRIET (8) traces letters in soot on the  
floorboards. Her MOTHER (Native/African descent) kneels  
beside her, correcting her with patience.

Nearby, her FATHER (dark-skinned, weathered hands) repairs a  
fishing net. A map of the Massachusetts coastline is pinned  
to the wall.

MOTHER

Your voice is your gift. But your  
memory - that's your anchor.

YOUNG HARRIET

Why memory?

MOTHER

Because memory is what they fear.  
It's what they can't un-teach.

CUT TO:

FLASH IMAGE - EXT. CEMETERY - 1772

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL COTTAGE - NIGHT - LATER

Harriet, now a few years older, sits alone beside a candle.  
She reads a page over and over - her mother's script.

Outside the window, thunder rumbles.

She doesn't flinch. She whispers the words to herself like a  
spell.

A funeral. Her mother's body is lowered.

Harriet clutches her father's hand, a paper tucked in her coat – her mother's handwriting.

BACK TO:

EXT. CLEARING - PRESENT

Harriet is gone – but her presence lingers in the silence.

Amina wipes her eyes. Her gaze lifts toward the path Harriet disappeared into.

AMINA (V.O.)  
She had books. I had breath. She  
knew freedom from the start – I  
knew chains that dressed themselves  
in days.

She stands slowly, note clutched in one hand.

She moves to a low tree stump, kneels, and carefully buries the note in a shallow crevice – pressed between two stones.

Amina stands. She wipes the dirt from her skirt.

She turns toward the forest edge where Harriet vanished. For a moment, it almost looks like she might follow – but she doesn't.

Instead, she walks back to the center of the clearing.

AMINA (V.O.)  
She remembers because she can read  
it. I remember... because I lived  
it.  
(beat)  
Both matter. Both survive.

WIDE SHOT - THE CLEARING

Wind rustles through the tall grass. A lone bird circles overhead.

Amina walks back down the path – but straighter now. More certain.

FADE TO:

EXT. EDGE OF TOWN - DUSK

A lone patrolman rides past the last fence line – musket slung, eyes alert. He pauses, scans the horizon.

But there's no one in sight.

Only wind in the trees. A bird's cry overhead.

Beneath the stillness – a lingering sense of movement.

Of stories shifting.

Of memory on the run.

Amina is gone – but not lost.

FADE TO:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Rain taps gently against the shutters. The fire is low, casting a quiet amber glow across the room.

Belinda sits at the table, mending a torn hem. Her fingers move with muscle memory – methodical, steady.

Amina leans beside the hearth, a folded scrap of cloth in her lap. She holds it tightly – one of her memory scraps. Ink faint. The edges smudged with wear.

A long silence.

Then:

BELINDA  
You're restless again.

AMINA  
They're leaving. Packing silver in the night. I heard a shot – far off. Like something already started.

BELINDA  
(nods slowly)  
Something's always starting. That don't mean it's your moment to move.

Amina shifts – uneasy.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Sometimes resistance means knowing  
when to hold still.

Even the river waits before it floods.

AMINA  
I want to write it down –  
everything. While I still can.  
Before it all disappears.

Belinda threads her needle through a stubborn corner. She  
exhales through her nose.

BELINDA  
There's a time for memory. And a  
time for silence.  
(beat)  
You think I ain't wanted to scream?  
To write it on their walls? I  
watched friends vanish. Watched  
masters change names on paper like  
it changed what they did.  
(soft, but sharp)  
You don't think I carry stories  
that would burn the house down?

Amina's eyes drop.

AMINA  
I do.

BELINDA  
Then trust when I say – Truth don't  
rot if you wait. It ferments. And  
when the time comes... it's strong  
enough to raise the dead.

CUT TO:

INSERT - FLASH IMAGE:

FLASHBACK - INT. SLAVE SHED - DAY (YEARS EARLIER)

Older Belinda kneels beside the covered body of a friend – a  
woman not much older than Amina is now.

Torn cloth at the throat. A dropped kerchief clutched in one  
hand.

Older Belinda doesn't cry. She removes the kerchief and tucks  
it into her apron – silent, trembling.

Then — the sound of white boots outside. She steels herself.  
A quiet breath.

Back to sewing.

CUT BACK TO  
PRESENT:

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT - 1775

Amina swallows. Her fingers trace the edge of the cloth scrap  
in her hand.

BELINDA  
Right now — it's about surviving.  
Holding it inside until you know  
the wind won't carry your words to  
the wrong ear.

She looks at Amina — steady, protective.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Not every witness gets to speak  
while the fire's still burning.

The rain picks up slightly — the sound like a whispering  
drumbeat.

AMINA  
So what do I do?

BELINDA  
You breathe. You watch. You  
remember.  
(beat)  
And when it's time — you speak so  
loud they can't bury it again.

Amina folds the scrap gently. Presses it to her chest. Her  
breath shudders — not from fear, but from restraint.

AMINA  
I'll wait.

BELINDA  
Good.  
(pauses, softly)  
That's the hardest part.

The fire snaps. A gust pushes against the windowpane. Shadows  
flicker like ghosts on the wall.

The two women sit in stillness – not broken, but bracing.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - EARLY MORNING

A thick fog hugs the ground. The dew glistens like sweat on the tall grass. Birds scatter suddenly, as if startled.

BOOM.

A distant cannon blast echoes like thunder through the valley. Then another.

ANGLE - AMINA

She jolts upright from behind the stables – a basket of kindling abandoned at her feet. Her breath clouds the air. Her eyes scan the horizon.

INT. MAIN HOUSE - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Mary Royall Erving clutches a family Bible to her chest. Elizabeth Royall Pepperell frantically opens and shuts drawers.

Isaac Royall Jr storms in, holding a crumpled letter.

ISAAC ROYALL JR  
Pack the silver. All of it. Tell  
them to load the trunks. Now.

ELIZABETH ROYALL PEPPERELL  
Was that gunfire?

ISAAC ROYALL JR  
That was Concord. Or Lexington.  
Maybe both.  
(beat)  
Either way, it's begun.

EXT. KITCHEN YARD - CONTINUOUS

A TOWN CRIER on horseback gallops past the front gates, shouting hoarse through the morning mist.

TOWN CRIER (O.S.)  
To arms! To arms! British troops  
fired upon at Lexington! The war  
has begun!

Enslaved workers freeze mid-task. A broom drops. A ladle clatters to the dirt.

THE Royall Family Cook exits the kitchen with flour still on her apron. She locks eyes with AMINA, who now stands stiff with alarm.

ROYALL FAMILY COOK  
(low, stunned)  
Did he say war?

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

A young boy (17) clutches a wooden toy. He turns to his mother.

BOY 3  
Mama... if there's war... does that  
mean we're free?

His mother pulls him close, but her eyes stare out the window, uncertain.

EXT. WAGON YARD - CONTINUOUS

Amina and two other women are handed canvas sacks by a white overseer.

OVERSEER 1  
You pack what you're told - and do  
it fast.

He gestures toward a row of trunks near the house.

OVERSEER 1 (CONT'D)  
Silver, ledgers, heirlooms -  
anything the family wants safe.

AMINA  
(quietly, to herself)  
Not the people though.

She grabs a sack and follows the others.

FLASH IMAGE - AMINA'S POV

Inside the open trunk:

A silver goblet, a child's porcelain doll, a ledger marked  
"Debts Paid in Flesh."

AMINA (CONT'D)  
 "Debts Paid in Flesh."

EXT. STAIRWELL CLOSET - INT. MAIN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Prine slips inside the dark of the stairwell. She carries a single folded page, edges soft with use.

She kneels beside a stack of packed trunks, lifts the false bottom of one, and hides the page beneath a bundle of linens.

She glances toward the hallway - the Royalls are shouting again.

PRINE (WHISPERS)  
 Let them forget. But I won't.

She closes the lid and slips away - unseen.

EXT. HILL OUTSIDE PLANTATION - SAME TIME

Smoke curls in the far distance. A faint glint of soldiers can be seen - redcoats, or militia, too far to know.

BACK TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR. GROUNDS - VARIOUS

- Harriet's linen shop is boarded shut.

- A preacher reads aloud the Declaration from the church steps, trembling.

- A freedman is dragged from a shop doorway by a Loyalist sympathizer.

- Someone screams. Glass shatters. A sign falls.

The town has ruptured.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD PERIMETER - LATER

Amina kneels beneath the same crooked willow from earlier scenes. She holds her sack of valuables - but her eyes are on the road beyond.

The wind carries distant voices - chaotic, frightened, rising.



Her voice returns as a whisper:

AMINA (V.O.)  
If the walls fall... what rises in  
their place?

A muffled explosion rumbles in the distance. This time,  
closer.

AMINA (V.O.)  
When war reaches the fields...  
where do the field hands run?

FADE TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - MAIN HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The sun filters through hazy clouds. The air feels thick -  
the kind that sticks to your skin before a storm.

A ladder creaks against the house as two men remove a gilded  
portrait of Isaac Royall Jr and his family. His painted gaze  
unblinking, self-important.

Below, Mary Royall Erving and Elizabeth Royall Pepperell, the  
Royall daughters and their husbands, direct chaos. Their hair  
is pinned but fraying. Gowns mud-splattered from pacing.

Isaac Royall Jr stands near the parlor window, barking  
orders.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Open trunks spill over with books, silver candlesticks, and  
delicate lace. A footman struggles to wrap an ornate clock in  
cloth.

ISAAC ROYALL JR  
No time to argue over the pewter.  
Take the portraits. The ledgers. My  
father's case journals from  
Antigua.

ELIZABETH ROYALL PEPPERELL  
What about the red marble chess  
set? Grandfather's?

MARY ROYALL ERVING  
(firm)  
We're not savages, Elizabeth. We  
take it all.

Behind them, a mirror reflects not just their frantic motion – but the absence of any enslaved person in their discussion.

CUT TO:

EXT. WAGON YARD - LATER

Amina, Prine, Joseph, and two other enslaved workers stand beside a loaded cart. They do not speak – they wait.

An OVERSEER walks by, checking lists. He doesn't make eye contact.

OVERSEER 1

You stay here. The master's orders.

PRINE

(whispers)

They're just leaving us?

The overseer says nothing. Keeps walking.

Belinda arrives, silent as stone. Her shawl pinned tight. She watches as a child's rocking horse is strapped onto a trunk.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - TWILIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Belinda sits on a small stool outside her cabin, carefully braiding Prine's hair. Each twist is tight, deliberate – a ritual of care.

Nearby, Amina stands quietly, holding a piece of cloth – watching.

Joseph leans against the cabin wall, sharpening a small whittling knife with slow strokes. Not out of need – out of control. The only control he still has.

In the background, a white cart creaks under the weight of paintings and silver.

AMINA'S POV:

A fine oil portrait loaded onto the cart... as Belinda gently tucks the final braid into place.

A CONTRAST:

One kind of legacy is boxed.

Another is passed hand to hand.

ANGLE - AMINA AND PRINE

AMINA  
(quietly, to Prine)  
They're leaving the house, not the  
memory.

PRINE  
Will we ever know what happens  
next?

Amina doesn't answer.

INT. MAIN HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mary Royall Erving clutches a Bible. Elizabeth Royall  
Pepperell hesitates before plucking a framed miniature of  
their late mother from the wall.

ELIZABETH ROYALL PEPPERELL  
She wouldn't have wanted it like  
this.

MARY ROYALL ERVING  
She's not here to want anything.

Isaac Royall Jr appears in the doorway.

ISAAC ROYALL JR  
We leave before first light. Be  
ready.

He exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR GROUNDS - SUNSET

The last of the trunks are sealed. Men secure wagons. Horses  
fidget against reins, sensing unrest.

In the distance - the fields lie golden, unmoved.

The enslaved workers stand as shadows among this wealth,  
excluded from every object deemed "precious."

BELINDA  
(speaking low)  
Silver travels faster than the  
truth.

Amina turns to her.

AMINA  
But truth don't tarnish.

ANGLE - THE HOUSE

A wide shot - its windows gleam, but its foundation trembles.  
The storm isn't coming. It's already here.

FADE OUT.

EXT. FREE BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD - MEDFORD - EARLY MORNING

Mist lingers low over cobbled paths and modest brick homes.  
The sun has not yet broken through - only pale gray light  
touches the shutters.

Amina walks briskly along the narrow road, her scarf drawn  
close. Her eyes search every doorway.

She stops at a small cottage - Harriet's home.

ANGLE - HARRIET'S DOOR

It's ajar. A faint creak in the wind. No smoke rises from the  
chimney. No voices. No movement.

INT. HARRIET'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Amina steps inside.

The space is neat. Empty. A folded quilt lies on a cot,  
perfectly made. A bowl still half-filled with water from last  
night's wash. A shelf of books - missing two volumes.

A small oil lamp sits cold.

Amina takes it all in - her breath shallow.

Then she sees it -

ON THE BACK WALL

A single page pinned with a sewing needle. Yellowed. Written  
in Harriet's bold, careful hand.

CLOSE ON - NOTE

"Keep writing. They'll try to silence even the past."

AMINA  
 "Keep writing. They'll try to  
 silence even the past."

Amina removes the page, her fingers trembling.

She presses it to her chest.

Then notices—

ANGLE - WRITING DESK

A scrap of dried sage and a lump of wax— protection charms  
 from her mother's people. Tucked in the drawer, a pressed  
 button from a militia coat. Evidence. Or memory.

She scans the room again. This time more slowly.

On the wall beside the bed: a faint outline where a portrait  
 once hung.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. SAME ROOM - A YEAR EARLIER

Harriet and her father sit by the fire. He recounts the  
 weather on the bay — high winds, stubborn sails. Harriet  
 listens while mending the hem of her coat.

Amina sits quietly on the floor, absorbing every word.

HARRIET'S FATHER (V.O.)  
 Some tides pull slow... but they're  
 the ones that reshape the coast.

BACK TO PRESENT:

Amina stands still in the now-empty room.

She folds the letter carefully, sliding it into the lining of  
 her scarf.

Then, she notices something else:

Carved into the wooden beam — near the doorframe, faint but  
 unmistakable:

"W.M.N.S." — We Must Not Silence.

AMINA  
 "W.M.N.S." — We Must Not Silence.

The 'W' curls like a wave. A Harriet flourish.

EXT. HARRIET'S DOORSTEP - MOMENTS LATER

Amina exits, the door creaking shut behind her.

She doesn't look back.

AMINA (V.O.)  
Some people vanish. Others echo.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD EDGE - SHORTLY AFTER

The town behind her. The house behind her. Amina walks with purpose now.

Behind her - barely visible in the shadows - an ELDERLY FREE BLACK WOMAN stands at her window. A candle flickers behind the glass.

She does not wave. She does not speak.

But her gaze follows Amina.

She nods - once.

Then disappears from view.

AMINA (V.O.)  
Some people vanish. Others echo.

FADE TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - EARLY MORNING

The fog hasn't lifted. It clings low over the fields, blanketing everything in a gray stillness.

No birds sing.

The path leading away from the house is lined with damp leaves and crushed grass - as if the land itself is bracing.

INT. FOYER - MAIN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A final trunk is snapped shut.

Mary Royall Erving stands by the door, fingers trembling as she clutches a silk handkerchief. Her eyes dart toward the staircase - one last glance at the only home she's known. She leans on her husband for emotional support.

Elizabeth Royall Pepperell fastens her gloves, her face tight with nerves. She avoids looking at the enslaved workers standing silently nearby. She looks between her husband and her father for further instruction.

Isaac Royall Jr appears in the hallway, coat tailored, but stiff. His powdered wig is damp from sweat.

He surveys the room – the portraits gone, the shelves emptied – and exhales as if the house has turned on him.

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR. PLANTATION – FRONT LAWN – MOMENTS LATER

Two carriages wait near the circular drive. Horses paw at the earth, uneasy.

Footmen load the final trunks with practiced urgency.

Nearby, Belinda, Amina, Prine, Joseph, and other enslaved people stand in a still line. Unaddressed. Unnamed. Unacknowledged.

WIDE SHOT – THE SCENE

A household in unraveling motion – wealth in retreat, silence in defiance.

Elizabeth Royall Pepperell climbs into the second carriage with her husband, glancing once toward the horizon.

Mary Royall Erving hesitates. Her hand brushes the banister.

MARY  
(whispers)  
We should've said something.

ISAAC ROYALL JR  
(to the driver)  
Go.

The carriages lurch forward.

EXT. FRONT STEPS – CONTINUOUS

The wheels crunch over gravel. No words. No final instructions. Just the sound of departure.

ANGLE – ENSLAVED GROUP

No one moves. Not even when the dust lifts.

Joseph shifts his weight, fists clenched. He opens his mouth – then says nothing.

Prine glances at him. Their eyes meet – a silent agreement, not of peace, but of pause.

CLOSE ON – AMINA

Her eyes follow the carriages until they vanish into the trees.

PRINE  
(low, near whisper)  
What now?

BELINDA  
(slowly)  
We wait. We breathe. We don't disappear.

JOSEPH  
(soft, but certain)  
You remembered when the rest of us  
were too tired to.

Amina turns, surprised by his voice.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)  
I kept my head down. Thought  
silence kept me safe.

He looks toward the house – now hollow.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)  
But it never kept me whole.

A beat. Then Joseph offers a small gesture – a nod, a glance – to Amina.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)  
Thank you... for remembering out  
loud.

Amina doesn't answer. But her eyes soften.

She nods back – not as a teacher, but as an equal.

Sarah approaches hesitantly, holding the edge of her apron.

Amina kneels slightly, pulls the Adinkra token from her sash, and places it in Sarah's hand – gentle, without ceremony.

AMINA  
Keep it safe. And keep telling.



Sarah nods, wide-eyed. Clutches it like something sacred.

WIDE SHOT - THE HOUSE

The great white mansion stands still - stripped and solemn. A monument to absence.

The wind stirs. A shutter claps open.

The house is watching them - but no longer holding them.

ANGLE - HOUSE WINDOW

A sheer curtain flutters from an open pane. A scrap of forgotten fabric—once a servant's apron—clings to the frame.

AMINA (V.O.)  
They left everything... except us.

The fabric slips loose and falls - slowly - to the earth below.

CUT TO:

EXT. EARLY MORNING - THE EDGE OF THE FIELD - LATER

Amina stands alone where the mist once clung. The same trees. The same silence. But she is different.

She kneels in the dirt and places the Adinkra token gently beside a child's slate, half-covered in soil.

She brushes her hand across the earth - slow, intentional.

AMINA (V.O.)  
The wind carried it. And I didn't  
let it die.

The wind picks up - just like in the beginning - but this time, it carries not silence, but memory.

FADE TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR. PLANTATION - MIDDAY

The dust from the departing carriages has settled. The wind has died.

Silence drapes the estate like a shroud.

A few chickens peck near the now-empty carriage path. A rope once used to tether luggage flaps uselessly against the fence.

ANGLE - ENSLAVED WORKERS

A group remains - Amina, Belinda, Prine, Joseph, and a dozen others. They stand near the wagonyard, uncertain.

No overseer. No orders. No direction.

They are not free. But they are no longer watched.

BELINDA steps forward, her shawl pinned like armor.

BELINDA  
(quiet, to no one and  
everyone)  
They left us behind - like we was  
part of the land.

PRINE  
So... are we free now?

A YOUNG WOMAN (20s) shakes her head, clutching a baby to her chest.

YOUNG WOMAN 3  
Nobody said so. Nobody told us  
anything.

JOSEPH  
They didn't have to. They left the  
food. The beds. The cabins.  
(beat)  
But not the silver.

A moment passes. Tense. Heavy.

Amina kneels by the edge of the path, picking up a small object - a dropped book clasp, its leather worn, the initials I.R. etched faintly.

She runs her thumb across it, then drops it in the dirt.

AMINA  
They're gone.

BELINDA  
(nods)  
The house is empty.  
(turns to the group)  
But we are not.

CLOSE ON - CABIN WINDOWS

Curtains sway. Candles flicker. Life stirs inside the structures that were once shadows.

SILENCE.

Then... soft footfalls.

An OLDER MAN (60s) steps forward. SIMON, eyes bleary, clothes too fine for field work.

SIMON  
(spoken slow)  
We still breathe. That's a start.

YOUNG BOY  
(whispers)  
Where do we go?

ANGLE - BELINDA

Her expression is unreadable - grief, calculation, memory, all at once.

BELINDA  
Where the wind carries truth. Or  
where we carve it in the road  
ourselves.

Amina turns slowly to face the main house.

AMINA (V.O.)  
The walls held our names in  
whispers. The floorboards drank our  
steps. But now... the air listens.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - LATER

They gather. Some sit. Some stand. Some still face the road.

A goat bleats in the distance. A cradle rocks gently with no one touching it.

A girl hums a tune once sung by her grandmother.

A sense of wanting. Not for orders. But for a sign.

FADE TO:

INSERT - VISUAL FLASH - THE HOUSE AS MEMORY

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR. MAIN HOUSE - NIGHTFALL - FLASH IMAGE

A FLASH OF IMAGERY:

- The Isaac Royall Jr. House framed in silhouette.
- Empty windows like hollow eyes.
- A withered bouquet left on the back steps.
- A charcoal mark on the bricks - once a child's drawing, now barely visible.
- Echoes of laughter - distant, residual. A moment of joy that never belonged to the enslaved.

CLOSE ON - DOORFRAME

A fingernail scratch - etched deep into the wood - a tally or name long erased.

ANGLE - FRONT DOOR

The wind pushes it open... slowly. A final groan from the house itself.

BACK TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - NIGHTFALL

A single lantern glows in the window of the slave quarters. The rest of the house remains dark.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
The house is empty.  
(beat)  
But we are not.

FADE TO:

EXT. ISAAC ROYALL JR PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Mist clings to the earth like breath not yet exhaled.

Belinda, Amina, Prine, Joseph, and others gather outside the cabins. Some carry small bundles. Others stand empty-handed - but heavy with questions.

Chickens rustle beneath the porch. A fire smolders low in a clay pit nearby. But no one cooks. No one speaks.

From the main house: nothing. No light. No sound. No return.

Then – the sound of hoofbeats.

All heads turn.

ANGLE – PATH FROM TOWN

DR. SIMON TUFTS (60s), dressed in a wool coat and muddied boots, rides up slow. His expression is conflicted – authority dulled by discomfort.

He dismounts. Clears his throat.

DR. SIMON TUFTS  
The Isaac Royall Jr.s have gone.  
England-bound.  
(beat)  
Some of you will be... relocated. A  
few are to be sold – papers drawn  
last week.

A sharp inhale ripples through the crowd. Prine grips her mother's shawl.

DR. SIMON TUFTS (CONT'D)  
The rest – you're to go to Boston.  
To the care of a friend of the  
family. That's all I know.

He doesn't wait for questions. He mounts again. And rides off – a man delivering a verdict but never justice.

ANGLE – AMINA

She stares at the tracks left by the horse. Her fists clench, but her voice remains steady.

AMINA  
They'd rather sell us for coin than  
leave us with choice.

BELINDA  
Not the first time. Won't be the  
last.

She glances to the others.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
But the rest – Boston's walkable.  
Long. Cold. But possible.

An OLDER WOMAN (50s) steps back instead of forward. Her arms folded.

OLDER WOMAN 9

I was born here. My babies are  
buried here.

(beat)

Boston don't know my name.

BELINDA

Then stay. But don't forget. That's  
the only thing that matters now.

The group begins to stir – uncertain but moving. Small steps.  
Slow motion. Some still hesitate.

JOSEPH

Do we even know where to go?

BELINDA

We go forward. That's enough for  
now.

EXT. FIELDS – MOMENTS LATER

The group passes the edge of the plantation. The fields once  
plowed by their hands now rustle wild in the breeze.

PRINE

(quietly)

Will we come back?

AMINA

They took the house. Not the  
memory.

(beat)

The roots stay. Even when the  
branches break.

A gust lifts a strip of cloth from Prine's hand – a memory  
scrap Amina gave her.

It flutters briefly in the air before Prine catches it,  
smiling softly.

The same wind that once carried linen now carries legacy.

They keep walking.

ANGLE – AMINA TURNS

One final glance back – the Isaac Royall Jr. House stands  
like a relic. Beautiful. Hollow.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. TREE LINE - SAME TIME

HARRIET watches from the woods.

Hidden. Still. Her scarf pulled low. A satchel at her side.

She fingers something small in her pocket – the faded thread of a memory scrap.

She steps forward, slow, deliberate.

AMINA (V.O.)  
Maybe freedom starts small – a  
step, not a destination.

Harriet steps onto the dirt road, falling in behind the group.

WIDE SHOT - THE WALK BEGINS

The line of figures moves like a whisper across the landscape.

The wind rises behind them – gentle, but certain – rustling the trees as if to mark their journey.

A bird lifts into the sky, circling once above the road.

EXT. FIELD PATH - CONTINUOUS

Amina slows her pace slightly. Reaches into her shawl.

From it, she withdraws the worn Adinkra token – Eban.

She kneels at the edge of the road, near a patch of wildflowers pushing up through the broken soil.

A small girl – Sarah – notices. Stops beside her.

AMINA  
(softly)  
For safekeeping.

Amina presses the token into Sarah's palm. Gently folds the girl's fingers around it.

SARAH  
(confused, quiet)  
But it's yours.

AMINA  
It was never just mine.

She smiles—not wide, but war—and rises.

Sarah stares at the token. Then tucks it into the fold of her apron.

The wind stirs again, lifting the corners of their skirts.

Together, they rejoin the others.

FADE OUT.

AMINA (V.O.)

And so I kept their names. Not in  
silence, but in story. I did not  
run. I remembered. I stayed. I kept  
their names, their songs, their  
breath—and made them echo.

**END OF ACT III.**



ACT IV

EXT. BOSTON COMMON - LATE AFTERNOON - 1781

The war is waning, but the scars remain.

A golden haze settles over the cobblestones. The air carries the scent of smoke, salt, and sweat – the trace of something just survived.

SLOW PAN –

Tattered flags ripple. A poster flutters on a tavern door:

"NEGRO SOLDIERS NEEDED – Continental Army to Grant Freedom for Service"

Below it, scribbled in faded ink:

"Some already paid. In blood."

FADE TO:

MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - 1776-1781

– A BLACK SOLDIER charges through smoke, musket raised, the stars and stripes tattered behind him.

– CANNONFIRE erupts near a field in Saratoga – dirt and fire explode around a company of troops, many Black men mixed among them.

– GEORGE MIDDLETON slams into a British line at Bunker Hill – sweat streaks his brow, fear and fury in equal measure.

– PRIMUS HALL digs trenches in a frozen camp at Valley Forge  
– his hands cracked, his face too young for this war.

– A young BLACK MAN falls – his uniform ripped, blood blooming beneath him. His hand clutches a letter home – unread.

– CAMPFIRE - NIGHT - dozens of Black soldiers warm their hands, silent. One hums a sorrow song. Others stare at the stars.

– A CONTINENTAL GENERAL nods toward a Black battalion. A token of respect – not yet of equality.

– A BLACK WOMAN reads a list of the fallen aloud – standing in the doorway of a Boston church.

— A child clutches a worn haversack — his father's — too large for his shoulders.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. BOSTON COMMON - LATE AFTERNOON - 1781

Below the poster:

"Some already paid. In blood."

FOOTSTEPS echo.

PRIMUS HALL (20, strong, solemn) and GEORGE MIDDLETON (22, lean, upright) walk side by side through the Common. Their uniforms are partial — coats frayed, boots worn, but posture proud.

George carries a musket over his shoulder. Primus holds a folded letter from the General's office.

They pass a row of homes.

AN ELDERLY BLACK WOMAN (70s) steps out from a doorway. Her back slightly bent, her eyes sharp.

She places a hand on Primus's shoulder — just for a moment.

ELDERLY WOMAN 4  
You came back standing.

Primus nods. Speechless.

Nearby, a young boy mimics their steps — his shoulders squared, his fingers curled like a soldier's grip. His MOTHER hushes him, but smiles.

They pass a small print shop.

IN THE WINDOW —

A broadside reads:

"Negroes Who Served With Honor — Names to Be Recorded"

Primus stops. Eyes it.

GEORGE  
(quiet)  
We fought for their liberty.

PRIMUS  
Now we fight for ours.

George gently adjusts the musket strap. They keep walking.

EXT. BOSTON STREETS - CONTINUOUS

The streets bustle with new tension — Loyalists in retreat, Patriots parading, and Black families on porches watching it all with wary hope.

ANGLE - A CHURCH STEEPLE

Bells toll slowly. The city marks the hour. A new day, perhaps — but not yet a different one.

George and Primus disappear down a side street. Their backs tall.

The boy watches them go — still imitating their march.

CLOSE ON - THE BOY'S FACE

Eyes full of fire.

FADE TO:

EXT. BELINDA'S COTTAGE - CAMBRIDGE - LATE AFTERNOON - 1781

The sun sinks low behind a grove of maple trees. The sky glows amber — not with heat, but with memory.

The cottage is modest — whitewashed wood, ivy creeping along the frame. A chicken scratches near the garden. A clothesline flutters.

INT. BELINDA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

The light inside is soft. A fire smolders gently. Dried herbs hang above the hearth. Everything is clean, ordered — lived in.

A satchel sits on the table — the same one from years before. Worn. Familiar. Still holding the scraps of a life not forgotten.

Belinda stands by the window. Her shawl draped neatly. Her spine straight. Her silence loud.

Amina, Harriet, and Prine sit nearby. A folded letter lies between them.

AMINA  
(softly)  
It's official.

She unfolds the parchment. Reads aloud – slowly, clearly.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
"...and to such persons formerly  
held in bondage... the estate  
shall, where permissible, extend  
the liberty thereof – as dictated  
by the instruction of ISAAC ISAAC  
ROYALL JR. JR Isaac Royall Jr.'s  
last will..."

She stops. Looks up.

AMINA (CONT'D)  
Your name was listed.

HARRIET  
It means... you're free.

PRINE  
Does this mean mama...

A long silence.

Belinda walks slowly toward the table. She sits. Her eyes  
never leave the page.

She doesn't cry.

BELINDA  
He left us like coin.  
(beat)  
But we are not his debt.

She looks at the satchel.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
I carried every piece of that house  
in my bones. In silence. In labor.

She rests her hand over the satchel.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
But this – this is mine now. The  
choice.

FADE TO:  
FLASHBACK – INT. ISAAC ROYALL JR. HOUSE – KITCHEN – 1760s

A younger Belinda slices yams at a wooden table. A GIRL'S CRY echoes from upstairs. She pauses. Her hand trembles, then steadies.

She does not look up – but her eyes glisten.

BACK TO PRESENT:

INT. BELINDA'S COTTAGE

Harriet pulls another document from her own satchel – a second letter. She places it beside the first.

HARRIET

It's real. His seal. His signature.

AMINA

You don't have to stay here.

BELINDA

I don't have to ask.

(beat)

That's what freedom means –  
sometimes.

She rises.

Goes to the window.

EXT. HER POV – OUTSIDE

A young Black child plays with a reed flute in the yard. He wears patched clothes, barefoot – but free. He laughs and spins in the grass.

BELINDA (V.O.)

I gave him the best of my years.  
But now I will give myself the  
rest.

INT. COTTAGE – CONTINUOUS

She turns back.

BELINDA

We are our own beginning.

CLOSE ON – THE LETTERS

The old world lies in ink and promises.

But this – this is the first page of something new.

FADE TO:

EXT. CAMBRIDGE ROADWAY – EARLY EVENING – 1781

The golden light lingers. BELINDA walks alone, shawl pulled close, the satchel slung over her shoulder.

Her feet trace a worn path – not hurried, but sure.

INTERCUT – SLOW MONTAGE:

– A black family repairs a porch. A young girl sweeps, pausing to wave.

– A black baker carries a tray of bread into a storefront.

– A former soldier with an amputated leg leans on a crutch outside a tavern, laughing with another veteran.

Belinda passes each without speaking. She watches. Absorbs.

At the edge of the South End, she pauses.

ANGLE – CHURCH STEPS

A small group gathers. PRINCE HALL stands speaking softly to a handful of free Black men and women. Harriet is among them, listening.

Belinda watches from across the street.

CLOSE ON – BELINDA'S FACE

Years in her eyes. But a new beginning in her breath.

BELINDA (V.O.)  
Some of us survived by remembering.  
Some by resisting.  
(beat)  
But now – we begin again. This  
time... by recording it.

She turns toward the light.

The sun dips below the rooftops.

FADE TO:

EXT. PRINCE HALL'S HOME - BOSTON - MORNING - 1783

The South End stirs gently. The morning sun warms the bricks of a modest, well-kept home tucked between a cobbler's shop and a tailor's window. A placard swings on iron hooks:

PRINCE HALL - FREEMASON, LEATHERWORK, LETTERS.

A boy sweeps the stoop, pausing to salute passing Black militiamen in faded coats. A bell tolls - not for battle, but a school lesson down the road.

Freedom has arrived. But equality has not.

INT. PRINCE HALL'S WORKROOM - CONTINUOUS

A wide wooden table dominates the space. Ink pots, parchment, and seals. On the far shelf, leather-bound Freemason ledgers. The windows are open, letting in the clean bite of spring.

PRINCE HALL (50s, stately, measured), sits at the head of the table, dressed with simple dignity. A Masonic pin catches the light on his coat.

Across from him, Belinda, sits tall. Her shawl is neatly wrapped. Her eyes unflinching.

To her left, Harriet and Amina sit alert, respectful. Prince (calm but rocking gently) fingers the corner of Belinda's satchel, then slowly removes a folded piece of cloth - a memory scrap of her own. She lays it next to the petition.

A flower is stitched into it. Her name, barely legible.

A scrivener (white man, mid-30s) dips a quill in ink.

PRINCE HALL  
Speak clearly. They must hear your  
voice through paper.

BELINDA  
(quietly, then louder)  
My name is Belinda. An African.

She folds her hands. Breathes. Begins.

The window shutters rattle in the wind. Outside, a carriage rolls by - its wheels splashing through mud. Inside, silence swells - sacred and loaded.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
Seventy years have passed since I  
was born along the Rio de Valta.  
(MORE)

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
My first memories – my parents'  
hands in mine, walking beneath  
trees heavy with fruit... then  
thunder. Then chains.

FLASH IMAGE:

The sacred grove. A child's scream. The chaos of capture.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
I was twelve. Taken. Sold. The sea  
was not my first god – but it  
became my longest prayer.

FLASH IMAGE – THE MIDDLE PASSAGE:

Cramped bodies. Open sores. Eyes blank. The groan of wood.  
The splash of bodies into water.

BACK TO:

INT. WORKROOM – CONTINUOUS

Prince Hall watches closely. The scrivener writes quickly.

BELINDA  
I served the Royall Family for  
fifty years. My hands built his  
comfort. My silence fed his power.

She reaches slowly into her satchel – pulls out a crumpled,  
age-worn copy of the Isaac Royall Jr. estate's final  
instructions.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
He left. He died. But his wealth  
lives. And so do I.

She places the paper on the table. Harriet places a steadying  
hand over hers.

BELINDA (CONT'D)  
I ask for allowance. Not charity.  
Not favor. Restitution.

PRINCE HALL  
(as he stands)  
You ask this court, this new  
Commonwealth, to remember.



BELINDA  
I ask them to reckon.

FLASHBACK:

3D INT. ISAAC ROYALL JR. KITCHEN - 1760s 3D

Young Belinda slices yams as thunder rattles windows.  
Upstairs – the distant cry of a girl. Belinda looks up,  
steady.

BACK TO:

INT. WORKROOM

Amina holds her own blank paper. Tentatively, she writes her  
name. For the first time – without help.

Prince Hall unrolls the final parchment.

PRINCE HALL  
Your words will be read aloud  
before the General Court.

BELINDA  
Then let them carry weight.

She dips her thumb in a dish of sealing wax.

Presses it against the paper.

A MARK. A WITNESS. A MEMORY UNERASED.

PRINCE HALL (V.O.)  
History will say a woman came  
forward – not as a slave, but as a  
witness.

A memory in flesh. A reckoning in motion.

FLASH IMAGE:

The signature. A child's flower pressed beside it. The seal.  
The silence after a storm.

FADE TO BLACK.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Belinda Sutton's 1783 petition for reparations was  
one of the earliest of its kind in American history.

She petitioned the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at least four times – in 1783, 1785, 1787, and 1793 – seeking compensation for her years of unpaid labor under the Isaac Royall Jr. family.

Records suggest she may have died shortly after 1793.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Slavery in Massachusetts was effectively abolished by a series of court rulings, culminating in 1783.

The 1780 Massachusetts Constitution declared that "all men are born free and equal," and enslaved people such as Quock Walker successfully sued for their freedom.

Yet the legacy of bondage lingered in law, in practice, and in memory.

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK:

ON SCREEN TEXT:

The Isaac Royall Jr. House and Slave Quarters in Medford, Massachusetts, remains one of the most significant surviving sites of slavery in New England.

It honors the memory of Belinda Sutton and the many Africans enslaved on the Isaac Royall Jr estate.

Elsewhere in Medford, "The Slave Wall" stands as a quiet monument to Pomp, an enslaved man who built it while owned by the Brooks family.

Nearby, the Salem Street Burial Ground holds unmarked graves – silent witnesses to the lives and losses of the enslaved.

This land remembers.

FADE OUT.

**THE END.**