

THANDI ' S LOVE

By
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Based on the novel "Thandi's Love" by Angel Strong

FADE IN:

EXT. HOLLIS CREEK - DAY

A vibrant oak and pine forest.

On its borders stands a 'NO TRESPASSING' sign.

SUPERIMPOSE: NEWPORT, SOUTH CAROLINA - 1823

Occasionally, a breeze RUSTLES through its green foliage.

A pristine CREEK TRICKLES through the centre of the forest.

Kneeling on the banks is THANDI BORAN (9), a pretty mulatto girl with dark beautiful hair pleated into pigtails.

She stares bug-eyed at her reflection in the water.

IN THE WATER

Tiny fish flit around until her fingers swipe through and sends ripples across.

When it clears, the reflection of a scrawny, baby-faced boy comes into view - TOM LEXINGTON JR. (13). He cocks up from behind with a silly grin. She returns a forewarning smirk, scoops up the water and SPLATS it onto his face!

He stumbles back, reeling in surprise.

She knows what's coming! She lifts her skirts, sprints away, revealing a knobby set of knees!

He recovers. Tears after her! Hurtles over vines and rocks with his eyes sharp on target. But she's light years away!

He struggles to keep up, labors through each second.

She stops at a clearing, waits for him to catch up.

THANDI
(victoriously)
So, thought you could beat me, Tom
Lexington?

TOM
Of course, I will, Thandi Boran! And
I warn you, this time I won't hold
back!

THANDI
You really shouldn't be so sure of
yourself.

He straightens up, determined.

TOM
Well then -

BLAM!

A GUNSHOT thunders through the forest.

Every living form scatter like bullets.

They ogle at each other, fearing the worst:

THANDI
Isaac!

They bolt to the source, RIPPING through low branches, CRASHING over dead leaves.

BLAM!

A flock of birds FLUTTER out of the trees.

THANDI (CONT'D)
It's coming from Old Man Hollis'
place!

They close in at another narrow clearing, revealing a magnificent WHITE MANSION towering over weeping willows.

ISAAC BORAN (13), a short, stubby, smooth-faced Mulatto boy STUMBLES out of the clearing.

BLAM! A bullet WHIZZES past missing him by inches!

ISAAC
Old Man Hollis has a gun!
Run-run-run!

They scamper away with what's left of them!

Unnoticed, a WHITCLIFFE KNIFE drops out of Isaac's pockets.

EXT. OLD MAN HOLLIS' MANSION - CONTINUOUS

OLD MAN HOLLIS (70's), graying, haggard and bat-crazy with an inborn grumpiness, hobbles out wielding a SHOTGUN.

OLD MAN HOLLIS
(loading another round)
Come back here, you scoundrel! I'll
hang you by your limbs!

BLAM!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LEXINGTON PLANTATIONS - DAY

A vast blanket of brilliant WHITE COTTON dances as a gust sweeps through.

We hear intense spiritual VOCALS.

FIELD HANDS loaded with baskets pick the crops.

Thandi, Tom and Isaac scuttle through, carefree, LAUGHING, SHOUTING.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Thandi bounds down a winding pathway to the mansion. From the distance, BELLOWS a warning.

TOM (O.S.)
Ready or not! Here I come!

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

SERIES OF SHOTS

Thandi sprints up the stairs.

She enters an attic-turned-bedroom.

She clambers into a bureau.

INT. THE BUREAU - CONTINUOUS

In semi-darkness, she sits huddled, waiting to be found.

A CARVING on the door catches her attention:

Etchings of three faceless people. Circles for their heads. Squiggly lines for their bodies, arms and legs. The figure in the middle has squiggly curls for the hair.

She gropes her pockets, finds it empty...

THANDI
(remembering)
The knife...

Just then:

Muffled VOICES. It gets louder. Angrier. She listens.

I/E. THE BUREAU - CONTINUOUS

She comes out, follows the commotion.

EXT. DOWNSTAIRS, THE PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

She descends the stairs.

Eavesdropping at the door is Tom and Isaac.

She joins them.

VOICES surge from within, followed by a woman's SOB.

They glue their ears to the door, peering at each other. The conversation is incomprehensible. Suddenly -

The door OPENS! A woman emerges in tears - MRS. VIVIAN LEXINGTON. Startled, she stops short and glowers at them. She grabs Tom, drags him away.

HAITI BORAN, a slave, follows. She is distressed.

HAITI
What are you doing here?

THANDI
(concerned)
Is everything alright, mother?

She is tongue-tied. Quickly, she leads them away.

Thandi glances over her shoulder at --

THOMAS LEXINGTON SR., watching them sadly from the door.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

A carriage pulls out from the porch.

INT. THE CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Tom sticks his face to the window, peering at the diminishing figures of Thandi and Isaac.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

The carriage grows smaller in the distance. Thandi and Isaac watch on, and before them, Mr. & Mrs. Lexington.

Vivian fires a scathing look at the siblings, stomps in.

Lexington Sr. has the same sad look.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - EVENING

Haiti loads luggage into a carriage. Thandi boards. Isaac follows. Haiti stops to look up at --

INT. THE PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Peering back from the window is Lexington Sr. He heaves as she turns around and boards. The carriage pulls out. He breaks down sobbing.

INT. AN OLD CABIN - DAY

Dilapidated, CREAKING and rotting at places...

A weather-beaten TABLE sits in the corner. An almost empty bottle of BOURBON on it.

Drunk, sweating and wearier, Lexington Sr., sits at the table. An upturned SHOTGUN rests in between his legs, its barrel at his face! He pulls the trigger --

CUT TO BLACK.

BLAM! The gun goes off!

FADE IN:

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

... White, elegant and glorious as ever. A luminous sun bathes its yards carpeted in rich, green lawns.

SUPERIMPOSE: 15 YEARS LATER

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

THE ENTRANCE

A splendid view of the PLANTATION and its explosive yield.

TOM LEXINGTON JR. (30's) enters the frame, pulling on his work gloves and feasting on this. He leans at the doorway, gaze set far, ready to take on the world.

IN THE DISTANCE

Field hands set off, equipped with tools and baskets.

MEMORY FLASH - INT. THE ATTIC - DAY

SHUFFLING FEET close in and pause outside a BUREAU. Snickering as a SCRATCHING noise emanates from within.

Two pairs of little hands YANK open its doors to reveal THANDI (9), crouching inside holding a Whitcliffe knife.

TOM (O.S.)
Gotcha!

ISAAC (O.S.)
Gotcha!

She SQUEALS!

BACK TO:

THE ENTRANCE

Tom snickers and shakes his head as he dwells on this.

EXT. THE GARDENS - CONTINUOUS

Intertwined over a wall of tall hedges are hundreds of, WHITE ROSES, swaying with the breeze.

I/E. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

The gust hits Tom. He savors its fragrance.

A heavy, MALE VOICE interrupts, that of BEN (30's), aka Big Ben, overseer to the Lexington Plantations.

BEN (O.S.)
Morning, boss!

From the WINDING PATHWAY beside the mansion, Ben, a giant and stocky Negro, closes in, a SWING BLADE and a few BURLAP BAGS over his arm.

TOM
Yes, it is, my friend.

BEN
(gaping at the fields)
We're sure gonna need that help you sent for.

TOM
Indeed.

BEN
(tipping his hat)
Well, see you out there, boss.

He begins to leave, when, the SOUND of hooves and wagons stop him mid stride.

THE OPEN VERANDAH

Tom steps out under the blinding sun, shielding his eyes.

IN THE DISTANCE

Two WAGONS appear, kicking up dust. Then, a third. And a fourth!

THE OPEN VERANDAH

Ben towers behind Tom, his gaze on the approaching wagons.

BEN (CONT'D)
Is that them, boss?

TOM
(excited)
I do believe so.

BEN
You want me to wait a bit, boss?

TOM
Yes, I'll need your help, Big Ben.

Ben flashes a big, white, toothy grin. From behind them -

ANNA (O.S.)
Your people here early?

Tom glances over his shoulder.

AT THE DOOR SCREEN

... is ANNA LEXINGTON, 30's. She steps out in full view, shielding her eyes from the blaring sun. She's the typical Southern belle. Gorgeous, red hair, steel gray eyes...

Tom turns to the wagons. He doesn't want to see her.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(fanning with her glove)
By God! Can't believe it's fall at
all!

Ben is uncomfortable at her presence.

BEN
(tips his hat)
Morning, Missus.

She fires a cold, dismissive glare, tosses her curls.

She joins Tom on the verandah, smiling coyly.

He returns a dismal stare and looks away.

THE OPEN GATES

The first wagon THUNDERS through.

Ben drops his tools, confronts the oncoming carriage.

BEN (CONT'D)
(throwing up a hand)
Hold!

The wagon slows, halts on the COBBLESTONE PATH.

Tom recognizes the passenger sitting alongside the driver.

TOM
Isaac!

ISAAC BORAN (late 20's), thick beard, tall, burly and light-skinned, peers back curiously, then smiles.

ISAAC
(jumping down)
Tom!

Tom hurries down the stairs, arms wide open.

They smack into a deep embrace, chuckling, patting each others backs. They pull back, take a good look at each other.

TOM
By God! It's been too long! You've
shot up like a bean stalk!

Isaac admires Tom's raw and handsome transformation.

ISAAC
No, look at you!

His deep and manly baritone surprises Tom and he bursts out LAUGHING.

The wagons, chock full of manpower pulls up. THE SLAVES disembark at Ben's instruction.

Isaac enjoys the disbelief on Tom's face.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
More than you expected, huh?

Tom shrugs, laughing.

THE SECOND WAGON

The coverings lift and ---

--- THANDI BORAN, late 20's, emerges. She's unusually beautiful, green-eyed, light skinned. Graceful and elegant.

Time and space stills as she draw closer.

THANDI

Tom.

Isaac feasts on Tom's reaction.

ISAAC

You remember Thandi, don't you?

Tom is speechless. Her transformation is incredible.

TOM

No way!

Laughing, they embrace each other.

Over his shoulder, she notices Anna glowering at them, clearly not liking it.

She releases him quickly.

Tom picks up on this, follows her gaze, finds Anna glaring.

Anna covers up with a phony smile, joins Tom with a stylish swag of her hips. She ignores his vicious stare, fully focuses on Thandi.

A few cold moments later, she withdraws her piercing eyes and glances around at the many, strange dark faces.

ANNA

My, oh, my! My husband said we'd get a few extra slaves, but I didn't expect a small...

(glowers at Thandi)

... nigger army!

TOM

Forgive my wife's severe lack of manners. She has a frightful sense of humor. Thandi...

He holds her closer, making sure that Anna sees it.

Anna doesn't take it well.

TOM (CONT'D)

Isaac... This is my wife Anna. Anna, these are my dear friends I told you of - Thandi and Isaac.

Thandi, bows in a respectful half-curtsy and smile.

Isaac: a courteous nod and a tilt of his straw hat.

ISAAC

Nice to meet you, Ma'am.

Anna gives nothing. She is cold to the whole lot.

An awkward silence prevails.

Ben studies the mounting tension, moves in closer.

BEN

Boss, you want me to show them to
their quarters now.

TOM

Yes, Ben. But not before I've
introduced you.

Daggers spit from Anna's eyes, making Ben uncomfortable.

TOM (CONT'D)

Ben. These are my friends, Isaac and
Thandi.

Ben and Isaac shake hands.

TOM (CONT'D)

Thandi, Isaac, this is my overseer
and right-hand man. Big Ben.

Ben extends a hand to Thandi, gets lost in her eyes.

BEN

Nice... nice to meet you Miss.

Thandi smiles, takes his hand, gives it a hearty shake.

THANDI

And you.

Ben holds on to her hand, awestruck, lost...

Thandi politely pulls away.

Tom snaps him out of his trance with a hand over his shoulder.

TOM

(to Ben)

These are the two I've talked so much
about.

(to the siblings)

You two will stay in the house. I
believe Esther's prepared your
rooms by now.

Anna boils at this.

ANNA

(sweetly)

Darling. We never discussed them
staying in the house.

Isaac and Thandi exchange troubled glances.

TOM
(coldly)
There was no need to discuss it.

She seethes, offended. More so when Tom reassures Thandi with a hand to her shoulder.

TOM (CONT'D)
(to Thandi)
Lead me to your luggage. I'll help
you two get settled in.

She hesitates, leads him to her wagon.

Ben and Isaac set off to attend to the rest of the slaves.

Anna is left seething, desperate for attention.

She gets none. Right now, to Tom, she didn't exist.

She swerves around, storms up the stairs...

INT. LIVING ROOM, THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

... and thunders past ESTHER, 50's, the house slave. She's short, plump and otherwise jolly. Esther goes to THE DOOR, peers out its screen.

On the porch are several wagons and many strange Negro men and women, unloading their bags and tools.

Obscured behind one of the marble columns is Tom. He pokes in and out of view, smiling at someone, bending over, down... Up again.

THE PORCH

Esther moves out. Stops at the stunning mulatto girl beside Tom - Thandi. Wanting to get a good look, she moves closer. CREAK! The floorboards GROAN, drawing their attention.

TOM
There you are!

He says something to Thandi and she smiles.

He picks up the bags, joins Esther.

Thandi tags along.

TOM (CONT'D)
Esther, this is Thandi. Thandi,
Esther. The true lady of this house.

Esther blushes.

THANDI
Nice to meet you.

ESTHER
You too!

They shake hands.

So many questions, Esther stares long into her eyes.

Isaac joins them, loaded with luggage.

Esther quickly dolls herself up.

Thandi smirks at Esther's school girl reaction.

TOM
Esther. This is Isaac. Thandi's
brother and my dear old friend.

ISAAC
Hello.

ESTHER
(blushing)
Nice to meet you. I've heard a lot
about you.

ISAAC
All good, I hope.

ESTHER
Yes. All good.

ISAAC
(adjusting the bags)
Where should I put this?

TOM
(to Esther)
Have you finished their rooms?

ESTHER
Yes, Sir. Since yesterday. Just have
to put in some clean towels, is all.

TOM
And that's why she's the operator
of this place.

INT. THE HALLWAY, THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Esther leads the way.

Tom and the siblings struggle far behind. Plump she may be, but nimble and agile.

They cross several PAINTINGS. Thandi gapes at them all, slowing down to get a better look.

Esther stops at the hall's end, moves in through a door.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi enters, scanning the quaint space:

Walls papered in a floral print. Polished, hardwood floors. A large four-poster bed. Tall windows. Floor-length drapes. Portraits of ancestors. A tapestry of the Lexington coat-of-arms above the fireplace.

ESTHER

This will be your room.

Thandi is driven to an unfamiliar DOOR. She turns to Esther for information, finds her staring, in a creepy sort of way, for possibly a really long time!

THANDI

What does that door lead to?

ESTHER

That's the bath.

Esther promptly walks over, opens the door.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

It's new. Master's father had this addition put on years ago.

Thandi checks it out.

THE BATHROOM

It has everything. A sizeable porcelain tub. Marble vanity. Wash basin. Plush towels. Shelving with various toiletries.

AT THE WINDOW

Esther draws the curtains apart, detonating the place with light. A breeze flutters in.

THANDI

(inhaling deep)

What is that delightful smell?

ESTHER

(steps aside)

That's the garden.

Thandi comes over to a breath-taking sight - rows of colorful flowers, intricately designed trees and plants.

IN THE DISTANCE

... is a WHITE GAZEBO and a short line of oaks followed by six or more ambiguous STRUCTURES.

THANDI

And that there, what is it?

ESTHER

That's the slaves' quarters. Master Lexington's father built it shortly after I came on. And even put a closet in my room in the attic.

THANDI

(recollecting)

This place has changed so much.

ESTHER

Master Lexington has told me lots about you and your brother.

THANDI

(chuckles)

We were such misfits back then.

(suddenly excited)

Do you know of Hollis Creek?

ESTHER

We ride by it all the time, Master and me. Or me and Ben.

Esther's staring at her once again.

Thandi knows. She smiles, used to it by now.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY - MUCH LATER

Thandi stands before the mirror and flicks through her wet, open tresses. With her hair, eyes and old servant gown, she's strange for her kind.

She searches her skirts for something. Finds it...

ON THE HEM

Initials, stitched in small, white letters - "H.B."

THANDI

(running a finger on it)

Haiti Boran.

ESTHER (O.S.)
Miss Thandi?

She quickly drops her skirts, straightens out.

THANDI
Come in.

Esther enters. Stops at the doorway.

ESTHER
Master Lexington wants you to know
that you'll be having breakfast with
him and your brother in the kitchen.
(pauses)
And, the Missus won't be joining you.
She's got a headache.

Thandi is not convinced.

THANDI
I need only to braid my hair.

ESTHER
I can help you with it.

Thandi almost declines, notes Esther's eagerness. Agrees.

IN THE MIRROR

Their eyes meet. Thandi smiles, passes the hair brush.

Esther single-braids Thandi's hair.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
You've sure got some pretty hair Miss
Thandi. And pretty eyes too.

THANDI
(smiles)
Thank you.

Beat. Esther clears her throat. Thandi knows what's coming.

ESTHER
You must have some white folk in you.

THANDI
I was fathered by a white laborer.

Their eyes meet again, the awkwardness pronounced. Esther wraps
a ribbon around the completed plait.

ESTHER
All done.

THANDI
(tossing her hair)
Thank you. It's perfect.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Thandi stops by a particular portrait.

IN THE PORTRAIT

.. is a regal-faced man, standing with an elbow on his chair. His expression is stoic. His eyes, green and stern. Underneath his left eye is a scar. His resemblance to Tom is striking. Embossed on a shining strip at the bottom of the frame is: THOMAS LEXINGTON SR.

Thandi reaches out, longing to touch the portrait, when:

TOM (O.S.)
Here you are.

She turns around, startled.

THANDI
I only wished to see this.

TOM
(drawing closer)
Do you remember it?

THANDI
Why, yes! Of course! It used to hang
in the parlor above that huge
fireplace.

He's impressed. He extends an arm.

TOM
Let's catch up over breakfast.

She takes it.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Thandi accompanies Tom to the table.

Isaac stands, pulls out a chair for her. She takes it.

Esther comes in with a STEAMING PLATTER.

THANDI
The food smells wonderful.

ESTHER
(blushing)
Thank you.

Thandi scans the space. It's bright and spacious with luminous yellow walls, a row of tall windows and furniture.

MYRA, late teens, dark, frail, enters with more breakfast.

Thandi catches her eye. Smiles.

She smirks, a little shy.

TOM
This is Myra, Esther's daughter.

MYRA
(nervous)
Hello.

Esther tugs at her sleeve, rolls her eyes to clear out. They quickly exit.

Isaac hastily loads his plate, SCARFS it down.

Seeing this, Thandi struggles to smother her giggles.

Tom looks up from his plate. He follows her gaze to Isaac's full-of-food face.

They HOWL with laughter.

Isaac looks up, blinking, gulps down some juice. When it hits him, he grins sheepishly, wipes his mouth.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - MUCH LATER

Tom takes Thandi and Isaac on a brief tour.

THE SECOND FLOOR

Anna can be seen in one of the rooms, sewing.

They don't stop there.

UPSTAIRS

Thandi slows, not wanting to go further. Tom gets it.

TOM
I don't think Esther and Myra will mind if I show you to your old rooms.

INT. ESTHER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

There's a full-sized bed, trunk, side tables, Esther's belongings and a closet. The walls are a hideous olive. But their attention is on the bureau.

ISAAC

May I?

TOM

Sure. Go ahead.

Isaac quickly gets to the bureau, opens its doors.

THE BUREAU

Esther's garments hang on a wooden bar.

Inside the door, is the same, crude old carving by Thandi.

THANDI

I never finished it!

TOM

We could soon rectify that.

Smiling slyly, he pulls out something from his pocket and FLICKS it open.

ISAAC

(stunned)

Is that the old knife?

THANDI

(taking it)

How did you find it?

TOM

I didn't. Old man Hollis returned it some years ago. He said he'd found it on his property and that it must have belonged to one of the Negro scoundrels we owned.

A cheeky smirk on Isaac's face. It says everything.

Thandi resumes carving, her ears on the conversation.

TOM (CONT'D)

However, I could tell by the way he looked at me that he'd known exactly how it'd got on his land.

Isaac chuckles.

Thandi finishes up with little eyes, noses and smiling mouths. The depiction is comical.

The boys snicker.

She finishes up, gets to her feet.

TOM (CONT'D)
Looks just like us.

ISAAC
Wait a minute.

He removes Esther's stuff from the closet's floor.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Have you forgotten Momma's hiding spot?

She remembers.

THE BUREAU

Isaac pulls off the floor plank to reveal a CHEST coated with dust. The wood is a deep cherry, still intact. The clasp is rusted. He lifts it out, tries to open it.

Tom kneels, wipes it. He passes the knife to Isaac.

TOM
Here. You may need this.

With the knife, Isaac pries it open.

THE BOX

Looking back at them are a spool of needles, a set of pretty combs, a hand mirror and a yellowing handkerchief.

Isaac picks it, strokes it across his cheek, misses his mother.

From amongst the combs and mirror, Thandi pulls out a BLACK, VELVET POUCH.

THANDI
What is this?

Isaac shrugs.

It's secured in a complicated knot. She attempts to open it, gives up, hands it over to Isaac.

ISAAC
(inspects it)
I'll have to cut it.

He cuts it open, empties it into his hand - an oval shaped GOLDEN LOCKET hanging from a short chain.

Thandi GASPS.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Mother never owned any jewelry.

Thandi takes the locket, examines it closely.

THANDI
Where could she have gotten the money
to buy something like this?

THE LOCKET

.... engravings of swirling vines front to back. A THIN CREASE
in its side.

She pries it open.

No picture. Only an INSCRIPTION etched in fine calligraphy.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(lifts it closer, reads)
Always...
(it strikes her)
The white laborer.

Isaac gives a raised brow.

THANDI (CONT'D)
My father, silly.

TOM
It's very beautiful. You should wear
it.

ISAAC
Go on, wear it.

THANDI
(mocks)
And just where would I wear it?

They give a defeated pout.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(amused)
I'll wear it. Sometimes.

Not really.

She drops it in the pouch, gives the combs to Isaac.

THANDI (CONT'D)
You should give these to Sarah. If
she has a baby girl, she can pass
them to her.

ISAAC
(delighted)
Sarah's gonna love them.

MONTAGE - GETTING SETTLED

EXT. GARDEN - AFTERNOON

Tom, Thandi and Isaac lunch together, talking, laughing...

EXT. THE PLANTATION - LATER

Tom shows Isaac around the fields and cotton gin.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Esther inducts Thandi.

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

The three chat over tea, then, a walk down the cobblestone path and past a magnitude of flowers and trees.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Tom dines with Anna. No conversations. No eye contact.

END MONTAGE.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Thandi and Isaac dine with the HOUSE SERVANTS.

They are being watched.

Knowing this, Thandi smothers a smirk.

FROM ACROSS THE TABLE

... Ben steals several glances at her.

ESTHER (O.S.)
How do you like my stew?

Thandi almost sings praises when she finds Esther's full attention on Isaac instead.

ISAAC
It's delicious. Reminds me of home.

She blushes, then, in a blink, turns serious.

ESTHER

About how long are y'all gonna stay?

She glances at Thandi, the query clearly for her.

ISAAC

Well. I'm thinking a few months or more.

Thandi watches him fiddle with his spoon. He looks worried.

TOM (O.S.)

How's it going in here?

THE DOORWAY

... leaning onto the frame is Tom. He walks across to the table, sits.

Everyone greet him. He acknowledges them all.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm stuffed. The stew was marvelous.

THANDI

Definitely.

ISAAC

Yes. It was excellent.

Esther beams.

Two of the maids glance at each other, frowning.

MAID #1

(to the other,
whispering)

Why's she taking all the praises?
We made it.

Tom watches Thandi intently, just in time for her to catch him staring. He covers up quickly.

TOM

(pointing at her dress)
Wasn't that your mother's?

THANDI

(looking down)
You recognize it?

TOM

Definitely.

ESTHER
It sure is pretty.

ISAAC
Our mother was quite the seamstress.
She made garbs even prettier than
that.

Esther hangs onto Isaac's every word. The bread in her hands,
untouched.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Had she lived, she'd probably have
her own store by now.

Thandi notes the puzzled look on Esther's face.

THANDI
Our mother earned wages for the
dresses she made for our Missus and
all of her friends. She hoped to save
enough money to move north and open
a store someday. Our Missus had
promised her freedom - and ours,
still.

Suddenly, she remembers something.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(abruptly, to Isaac)
I want you to take the locket.

He's taken aback for a moment. Then, he shrugs it off.

ISAAC
It's a locket, sister. I think it
best when a woman wears it.

Tom snickers.

THANDI
No sillies. I think it would serve
a better purpose if we were to sell
it. We'd have more money towards our
plans - Momma's plans. Maybe, we even
have enough now to at least find some
land.

Isaac is silent as her words slowly sink in.

ISAAC
Are you sure?

THANDI
I'm more than certain.

Tom admires the siblings.

TOM

Isaac. You couldn't ask for a better sister.

She grins, realizing that they were being watched.

ISAAC

Well, okay then. But I insist that we wear it until you go home.

Thandi is satisfied. Terms and conditions accepted.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Thandi drags herself into bed, pulls the covers over and turns down the lantern next to her.

FADE TO BLACK.

FROM BLACK

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - MUCH LATER

Muffled, angry VOICES.

She stirs, sits up and fumbles with the lantern.

It FADES IN, filling the place with light. The voices die down...

... and surges, LOUDER than before.

It's Tom. His words - unclear.

Thandi gets out of bed, keeps the door ajar and listens... Nothing can be made out. Quietly, she ventures out into...

THE HALL

At random spots, lanterns burn low. The brightest one being from underneath the KITCHEN DOOR.

Thandi follows Tom's voice to the far corner of the house. When she reaches the end, she stops stiff.

ACROSS THE PARLOR

The SILHOUETTE of a LARGE FIGURE looms in the darkness.

It turns and Thandi quickly pulls back into the shadows.

Silence.

She waits, barely breathing. Then -

ESTHER (O.S.)
(whispering)
Thandi!

Hesitating, she peeks out from the shadows, sees Esther.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Come here!

Thandi goes to her, not making a sound.

THANDI
(whispering)
What's going on?

ESTHER
(in a hushed tone)
They've been arguing for a while.
Master Tom and the Missus.

A door SLAMS somewhere.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
To the kitchen! Quick!

They scurry to -

INT. THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Thandi sits at the table.

THANDI
Why are they arguing?

Esther gestures to be quiet, sticks her ear to the door, listens for oncoming footsteps. Certain that the coast is clear, she turns to Thandi.

ESTHER
You won't say a word of this.

Thandi nods, agreed.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Well. Master Tom got down on the
Missus earlier about how she's
treated y'all. Then she got stirred
up, talking about how she doesn't
want niggers in her guest rooms.

This shocks Thandi.

Esther studies her for a moment.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
It'll do you good to stay out of her way. She can be as mean as a snake, especially when she doesn't like you.

Suddenly, Thandi regrets it: staying in the mansion.

THANDI
(bitter)
You have no worries of me spilling the beans. Besides, we won't be here for very long.

Just then: Tom THUNDERS in! He stops short, not expecting them, then, masks his scowl.

TOM
(awkward)
Thandi?

He sits across her, glancing at Esther before he does.

TOM (CONT'D)
I knew Esther would be up. She's a relentless night owl. But you?

Thandi looks to Esther for permission to question.

She gives a forbidding 'no'.

ESTHER
Can I get you anything, Master?

TOM
No, thank you, Esther.

He studies Thandi.

She's disturbed, fidgety...

She's heard our argument, he figures.

TOM (CONT'D)
Would you like something?

THANDI
No, I'm fine. Thank you.

He smiles at her obvious lie.

TOM
Well then, how about a late-night stroll through the gardens? That is, if you're up for it so late.

She ponders over his offer. Despite Esther's horrified expression:

THANDI

Sure. I could use the air.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

They walk down ...

THE COBBLESTONE PATH

... worry-free, relaxed...

The plantation's night avatar is mesmerizing with its star-speckled ceiling. Somewhere, crickets CHIRP.

Ahead, an array of lanterns lights up the winding pathway.

THANDI

I've never seen anything more lovely.

TOM

Sure, you have.
(takes her arm in his)
You need to look in a mirror.

Blushing, she looks away.

He peers at her, checking to see if she was blushing. Answer received, he grins.

THANDI

(serious)
Have I changed so much, Tom? Was I so horrid back then?

TOM

You're beautiful now. And you were beautiful then.

She eyes him suspiciously.

He looks at her again, studying her sun-kissed skin, her dark, fluttering lashes, bewitching eyes... down her neck to her bosom, when...

... she catches him staring!

He looks away, embarrassed, fidgety...

THANDI

If I was beautiful then, why did you taunt me so?

He's caught by surprise. He leads her to a bench.

TOM
Sit with me a while.

They sit.

Lights from nearby lanterns highlight his features.

She savors on it, infatuated, gushing over how handsome he is.

Suddenly, he chuckles.

She panics, fearing that he read her mind.

TOM (CONT'D)
I teased you because I was an
intolerable misfit then.

She relaxes. He didn't read her mind after all! Hopefully!

TOM (CONT'D)
And honestly, I had a certain
fondness for you, though I dared not
admit it then.

This is news to her.

TOM (CONT'D)
Young boys have a funny way of
expressing their feelings.

THANDI
(laughs)
A funny way indeed. You're still so
maddening!

They gaze at the night sky again. Suddenly:

TOM
But, in my defense, you did, in fact,
have the worst knobbly knees.

He throws a naughty grin.

Her jaw drops! She shoves at him.

THANDI
You're absolutely incorrigible!

TOM
No, seriously. Why else would I allow
you to win at every single game we
played? Especially racing? It was
no wonder you beat me each and every
time. Well, I do hope you've outgrown
them.

He rolls his eyes at her draped knees.

THANDI
(laughing)
Stop!

She delivers another punishing shove to his ribs.

Their LAUGHTER subsides. The CHIRPS of crickets take over.

He drowns in gloom once again.

TOM
You must forgive me for tonight.

THANDI
Why? What do you mean?

TOM
I suspect my spat with Anna might
have awakened you.

THANDI
You need not make any apologies to
me, Tom.

TOM
My marriage isn't the happiest.

She's taken aback.

THANDI
Really, Tom. We all have our
problems. You need not apologize for
being human. And besides, you're
lord of your own house. You could
scream and swing from the rafters
if you choose to.

He pictures the scene and breaks into a smile.

TOM
I should have taken into
consideration the late hour and I
certainly should have respected the
presence of my guest.

THANDI
(touched)
It's just me and Isaac.

A GUST throws a few strands of her hair over her face.

Not really thinking, he gently swipes it from her eyes and
tucks it behind her ear. She watches him, a bit surprised.

THANDI (CONT'D)
You have a very beautiful wife.

TOM

(a contemptuous smirk)
If only she were as beautiful on the
inside. Anna and I have a very
troubled marriage. But then, I guess
I didn't exactly marry for love.

She waits. There's more to his confession.

TOM (CONT'D)

Did you hear of the rumors
surrounding my father's death?

Yes, she nods.

TOM (CONT'D)

Well, what you may not have heard
is the real reason why he took his
own life.

She waits patiently as he puts himself together.

TOM (CONT'D)

Weeks after my father's funeral, I
learned that he'd taken out several
large loans against the mill and
plantation. Loans that were nearing
default. He'd invested everything
he had, including a good amount of
my mother's inheritance into an
up-and-coming ginnery in the
Midwest. Ultimately, his friend
bought all his debts.

THANDI

Well, your father had a wonderful
friend.

TOM

His charity did not come without a
devil's price.

THANDI

What do you mean?

TOM

Daniel Stafford, my father's
associate.

Putting in efforts, he opens up to her.

MONTAGE - TOM'S MEMORY

INT. TOM'S STUDY - THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

DANIEL STAFFORD (60's) fills the frame. He's overbearing, intimidatingly tall, uncomfortably elite. He sports a piercing stare, snow-white hair, beard, and a smugness that he's presumably born with.

At the desk, sits Lexington Sr., pondering over several documents before him.

Daniel sits across, explaining something.

The other listens, head low, considering every word.

TOM (V.O.)

He was far from a friend. In my opinion, he was partly responsible for my father's suicide. The poor investments he made were brought to his attention by Stafford - Anna's father.

Daniel succeeds in interesting him with a particular scroll. Lexington Sr. takes it and reads through, hope in his eyes.

Daniel looks victorious.

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Not only was he a friend, he was also his lawyer and advisor. It was at his advice that my father made the investments.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

A carriage pulls up. The coach driver assists Vivian and her FATHER to alight.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Vivian walks past Lexington Sr. without a glance.

Her father stops before him with a stern expression.

TOM (V.O.)

He'd been having financial troubles for some time, and I wasn't aware because my mother's family kept us afloat. None of them ever made mention of any troubles to me, financial or otherwise.

INT. THE PARLOR - NIGHT

Lexington Sr. sits before the fireplace, eyes drooping, bloodshot, face all red and sweaty. Several empty bottles of bourbon lie strewn over the table and floor. His hands, unsteady, pours another glass. He downs it with a vengeance, sputters, slams the glass back on the table.

TOM (V.O.)

Not long after he lost his fortune, he started drinking heavily and gambling - throwing good money after bad...

INT. AN ELITE CLUB - NIGHT

Lexington Sr. sits at a large table with several other men from high society. A CLOUD OF SMOKE engulfs them while they puff on expensive cigars and gamble over cards. Every now and then, they take a shot out of their glasses.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A handful mourns around a fresh grave.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

Tom stands at the door, devastated, his eyes on the dying plantation.

TOM (V.O.)

After my father's death, Stafford bought his debts and assumed ownership of both the cotton mill and plantation. My mother had moved back with her family in London. She didn't even bother herself with the shameful business of the funeral. Without my inheritance, I had very few prospects.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

Daniel takes a stroll with Tom, discussing important matters while Tom listens quietly.

TOM (V.O.)

But then Stafford made me a convincing offer. An offer that would allow me to save my father's legacy and part of my inheritance.

Tom turns to Daniel as he battles to make his choice.

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 In exchange for the deed to the mansion and a partnership in the mill, I was to marry his brat of a daughter, as well as make him an even richer man.

When Tom isn't looking, Daniel flashes a crafty smile.

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He has promised to sell it back, but he has also retained twenty acres of the land here...
 (contempt)
 A way to keep watch over my marriage.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. THE GARDENS - NIGHT (PRESENT TIME)

Catching Tom's attention, a light flickers and fades from a window upstairs. He sighs, relieved, and turns to Thandi.

She watches him sadly.

TOM
 Don't feel bad for me. I've the plantation back and part ownership of the mill. Marrying an ice queen was a small price to pay to preserve my father's legacy.

His tone declares closure of the topic- for now.

IN THE DISTANCE

A breeze stirs through a twin row of oaks lining the path to the SLAVES' QUARTERS.

THANDI
 I'm glad you saved it. This place has always been so beautiful.

The surroundings are magnificent with its wide array of flowers faintly glowing in the dark.

TOM
 Indeed.

For a while, he says nothing. Like Thandi, he marvels at the serenity of the place, as if for the very first time.

TOM (CONT'D)
 So, what of you? Surely there's some poor beau back home, pining away for you right now as we speak.

THANDI

(blushing)

No, not hardly. No one's there. Isaac wouldn't have it. And neither would your aunt for that matter.

A fragrant gust whips through, she takes a deep whiff.

Tom admires her.

When she opens her eyes, he quickly looks away. But not before she gets a glimpse of him staring.

Close by, a FLUTTER ensues. Thandi whips around, startled.

IN THE DISTANCE

Large oaks sway back and forth, its leafy tops rustle fiercely. More FLUTTERS.

TOM

It's the nightingales. We get a large array of different species of birds due to the flowers, and then, of course, all the trees.

... And more FLUTTERS. Several birds shoot back and forth.

THANDI

(elated)

Despite all of it, Tom, you've done really well. Your father would be so very proud of you.

He holds her gaze for a moment, making her go still.

TOM

And your mother would be so astounded to see how wonderful you've become. No more a tomboy. You've become nothing less than a lady, like your mother.

She blushes hard, then gets to her feet.

THANDI

(mischievously)

Still think you can beat me?

It takes him a moment, then, he understands.

TOM

(rising)

Of course, I can. But I warn you, this time I won't hold back.

Thandi returns a haughty look.

THANDI

(gathers her skirts)
You really shouldn't be so sure of
yourself.

(glances at the tree path
direction)

Well then. Shall we race from one
end to the other?

Challenge accepted! Tom straightens his clothes.

TOM

(smirks)
By all means.

She goes to the first lamp post at the path's entrance.

THANDI

We'll start at the lanterns.

She positions herself into a runner's stance.

TOM

This will hardly be fair.

(joining her)

Maybe I should give you a bit of a
head start, seeing as you're at a
disadvantage with the...

(glances at her skirts)

...skirts.

THANDI

That won't be necessary. I'm gonna
beat you, skirts and all, Tom
Lexington.

He snickers sarcastically. He gives her a final cautioning
glance - "take the head start offer."

She turns it down, readies herself.

THANDI (CONT'D)

On three.

Tom leans forward, ready to dash to the other end.

THANDI (CONT'D)

One... Two...

(gives him one last look)

THREE!

Tom bolts away, taking the lead.

Thandi closes in, skipping strides.

Tom gives it all, gritting his teeth at the effort.

She catapults even further, the wind licking her face, undoing her hair and raking through her strands at will.

He spots a flicker beside him. It's Thandi!

AHEAD

... The end closes in.

Suddenly, she TEARS past like lightning.

Tom slows down, accepting defeat!

AT THE FINISH

Thandi stands proud, accomplished, gloating at him. She clasps the lantern's pole, trying to catch her breath.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(gasping)
Like I said, Tom Lexington...
Skirts and all!

Tom doubles over, desperate for air.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(sarcastically)
Are you alright?

TOM
(straightening up)
Definitely.

THANDI
Good. So, then, shall I give you a
chance at a tie and race you back?

He gawks, no way!

TOM
How about we walk back together
instead?

Laughing, she accepts his submission.

EXT. GARDENS - LATER

Tom and Thandi return to the mansion, their conversations low, a hearty chuckle every now and then.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION , FOYER - CONTINUOUS

They linger around, unwilling to part.

TOM
Good night.

THANDI
Good night.

They part ways, glancing over every now and then for one more glimpse, till they blend in with the shadows.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Thandi sleeps blissfully till the sun bathes her. She sits up, recollecting the previous night's events, blushes.

LATER

She brushes her hair before a mirror.

A KNOCK on the door.

THANDI
Come in.

Esther enters, fresh towels in hand.

ESTHER
Morning.

THANDI
(extra pleasant)
Good morning.

ESTHER
Master Tom and your brother are in the dining room. They thought I should see if you were up.

Esther heads to the bath.

THANDI
I'll be there right away.

She wears her mother's necklace..

On her way out, Esther gives her a strange look.

Thandi notices this, not truly understanding.

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Thandi walks in to a well-set table.

Tom and Isaac are already present.

Isaac begins to rise.

Tom is quicker, he pulls out a chair for her.

TOM
(holding her gaze)
Good morning, Thandi.

ISAAC
Morning, sister.

THANDI
'Morning Tom, Isaac.

They settle down and help themselves.

ISAAC
So, I hear you beat the pants off
of Tom last night.

She laughs.

Tom gloats, quickly changes the subject.

TOM
Can you believe this wonderful
weather we're having?

ISAAC
It's a blessing.

When filling Thandi's glass, Esther notices the necklace.

ESTHER
That sure is pretty.

THANDI
It was my mother's.

SUDDENLY:

The door OPENS. Anna walks in. Stops in disbelief.

SILENCE.

Esther pretends to be busy.

ANNA
Now we have niggers at our table.

They stare at her, shocked.

Tom shoots up with a loud SCRAPE of his chair.

TOM
How dare you insult them!

Anna recoils, reeling at his outburst.

TOM (CONT'D)
Upstairs! Now!

He grabs her arm, dragging her along with brute force.

ANNA
Unhand me! Let go off me!

He tugs her out the door and down ---

THE CORRIDOR

She resists hard!

ANNA
I said let go off me!

INT. TOM'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He shoves her in, SLAMS the door shut.

TOM
You're truly testing my patience!

ANNA
You test mine if you think those
niggers are going to stay in my
household as guests.

TOM
Your household? The last I checked,
the deed to this house is solely in
my name. And I'll have whoever I damn
well want in it.

ANNA
And you have it by the grace of my
father! Or have you forgotten?

TOM
How could I? God knows you never let
me forget.

ANNA
If those niggers are to stay in my
house, I'll go to my father's.

TOM
Then I suggest you pack heavy, you
spoiled little girl.

She storms to her closet, gathers up her things.

ANNA
Have Ben ready the carriage.

She expects him to stop her. He does nothing.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - MEANWHILE

Thandi and Isaac sit in shocked SILENCE, their food untouched.

Isaac pushes his plate aside, rises.

ISAAC

I'm no longer hungry. If Tom asks,
tell him I'll be in the fields.

Thandi picks their dishes, notices Esther watching.

THANDI

(smiles)

I'll eat mine later. Meanwhile, I'll
help you in the kitchen.

INT. THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Thandi walks in and stops abruptly when --

-- The female house staff look up from their table. They've
heard everything.

She keeps low and takes the plates to a side table.

Esther follows with glasses and a pitcher.

ESTHER

I'll put your breakfast in the oven
'til you're ready for it.
(to the house staff)
You ladies about done?

MILLIE

Yes, but I heard all that yelling
and was afraid to move.

MYRA

Lord, have mercy. I think they might
kill each other one of these days.

ESTHER

Oh. Shush now. Master Tom is not the
violent sort, and Missus Anna is too
small to do any damage.

Esther doubts her own statement.

Suddenly, Anna storms in, startling all.

ANNA

Millie! Get your things. You'll be
going to my father's with me.

Thandi stays low but fails to hide from Anna.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You! You're the cause of all this!
You and that brother of yours. Who
do you think you are?

THANDI

(coldly)

Master Tom invited us. He needed our
help.

ANNA

How could you possibly help him?
You're an ignorant,
good-for-nothing little nigger
girl.

A shocked silence.

THANDI

(defiantly)

Shall we get to work on the chores,
Esther? I'm sure I can learn if you
show me what to do.

Esther takes a quick glance at Anna, then back to Thandi.

ESTHER

Uh huh.

Anna thunders out.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Thandi helps to prepare dinner.

Tom dines with Anna.

INT. THE KITCHEN - EVENING

The ladies sit around the table, supping, chatting...

MILLIE

My! Miss Thandi. Where did you get
that necklace?

THANDI

(holding it)

It belonged to my mother, given to
her by my father, I guess.

A round of "awws". Thandi blushes.

ISAAC
A beautiful necklace for my
beautiful sister.

TOM (O.S.)
That she is.

They turn to --

THE DOOR

... Leaning against the frame is Tom.

THANDI
Aren't you supposed to be supping
with your wife?

TOM
(straightening up)
My wife does not like dining with
me much, which is why we don't do
it so often anymore. But we did sit
together, and I'm happy to say she
has apologized for her actions.

ISAAC
Well, that's good of her.

Thandi isn't convinced.

TOM
I would like to officially apologize
to all of you on behalf of Anna. She
does not always do well to keep
things to herself, and sometimes she
says things she does not truly mean.
But we appreciate all of you and your
hard work.

Thandi studies Tom, the true author of this apology.

He gives a little bow and exits.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - LATER

Tom mulls over paperwork. He takes a swig from his flask.

A light RAP on the door.

TOM
Yes?

The door opens ajar, Anna pokes her head in.

ANNA
Come to bed, my love.

TOM
(fed up)
I thought I told you not to disturb
me in my study, Anna.

ANNA
I have my right. I'm your wife.

TOM
And I have mine - to privacy!

He shoots up and storms past, SLAMMING the door behind.

EXT. GARDEN, THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Tom strolls down the cobblestone path, glances up at --

THE BOUDOIR

The lights flicker off, a sign that Anna has retreated for the night.

EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Tom trudges to its entrance. A lamp's glow can be from beneath the door. He almost knocks, when he hears --

SINGING. From within. In a beautiful voice.

He peers in through the window.

INT. THE BARN - CONTINUOUS

Thandi sings "SLEEP WITH THE ANGELS" as she removes water from the stables. She looks divine... unusually beautiful.

A CREAK from behind. She stops singing, turns around.

TOM
(moving in)
Don't stop. You've such a lovely
voice.

Thandi returns to work, smiling. She resumes singing, when
-

-- Tom moves in and arrests her.

She gazes back at him, confused...

THANDI
(not resisting)
Tom?

He tests her with a beat, then, makes the first move. A gentle brush at first, then, deeper when she reciprocates.

IN A MOMENT

Locked in a steaming kiss, Tom pins her against the wall.

AND LATER

Her nails dig into his bare, sweaty back, clinging on for a moment, then, letting go.

Tom looks up from the crook of her neck, leans forward.

TOM
(whispers into her ear)
Now sleep with the angels.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - THE NEXT DAY

Supervised by Esther, Thandi dusts portraits.

Esther sees her trying so hard to get a glimpse of someone. She follows her gaze to --

THE WINDOW

Tom waits on the porch. Ben joins him shortly and they take off to the fields.

Back to Thandi - her eyes never leave Tom.

ESTHER (O.S.)
Aren't you finished dusting that
portrait yet, Miss Thandi?

Thandi snaps back to earth.

Esther has a hand on her hip and an eyebrow raised.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
You've been scrubbing at it for a
long time now.

Thandi realizes that her hand has a mind of its own, brushing the portrait at will. She quickly recoils.

THANDI
(embarrassed)
I'm sorry. I guess my mind just
wandered a little.

Esther gives her an '*And-I-know-why*' look.

ESTHER

Mm-hmm. Let's make breakfast for Missus Lexington. She's expecting guests at noon and wants to be ready to greet them.

Thandi is clearly uninterested, tags along, however.

INT. THE KITCHEN - LATER

Thandi invests extra care on Anna's tray, adding garnishes, a generous helping of cheese grits...

THE STAIRCASE

Thandi ascends, one step at a time, the contents of the tray trembling.

EXT. ANNA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi trudges to the door. She balances the load, RAPS on the door, and waits.

It opens and Anna presents herself, hair undone, white nightgown, a lazy yawn...

ANNA

(bored)

What do you want?

THANDI

(holds up the tray)

I made you breakfast. Esther told me you like cheese grits.

Anna glances at the food, then, back at Thandi.

ANNA

Did she now? She's so thoughtful. Well, come in and set it down, I guess.

She opens the door a little wider, lets her in.

The beautiful decor is spoiled by carelessly strewn dresses.

Anna collapses into her soft bed.

ANNA (CONT'D)

(pats the night stand)

Set that here.

Thandi does so, nervously, yet, wanting to create an impression. When done, she waits for her permission.

Anna glares up at her.

ANNA (CONT'D)

What are you still doing here? I do not require a watchdog, you stupid girl. Go and assist Esther, or find something else to keep you occupied, but leave me alone.

Hurt, Thandi bows in curtsy, turns to leave.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Oh, and before you go...

She pauses, turns...

Anna sits up, sips her tea.

ANNA (CONT'D)

If I ever see you sitting at the table with my Tom again, I'll see to it personally that you're sent back to where you came from - or worse. Is that clear?

A long beat.

Submissive against will, Thandi nods, then, flurries out, shutting the door behind.

SERIES OF SHOTS

On the brink of exploding, Thandi scuttles down the corridor.

She barrels down the stairs...

... And bustles out the front door.

... Keeps running, till she comes to a dead stop in the ---

EXT. THE GARDENS - CONTINUOUS

She heaves over a beautiful array of roses. A SOB escapes and she claps it shut.

A fragrant gust caresses her, comforts her. She dries up.

SHUFFLING FEET. She looks around, sees Tom approaching her.

TOM

Good morning, Thandi. I thought you were still in bed and was on my way to come have Esther wake you for breakfast. Would you like to dine with me?

A beat.

THANDI

Oh. Uh... Tom, I can't. There's much work in the house to be done. I only stepped outside for a short break. But I could make your breakfast for you, if you like?

TOM

Nonsense! You are my guest.

THANDI

I am a slave, Tom.

He's puzzled. When he understands, he folds his arms across his chest.

TOM

Has Anna said something?

She merely glances at him. Enough information for him!

TOM (CONT'D)

(whistles)

I suspected as much. Thandi, don't let her cow you. She's a hateful, spiteful woman, but she must listen to me. This is my home, and I say that you and Isaac are welcome to my table whenever you -

THANDI

(interrupting)

She said that she would see to it personally that I was sent home.

He chuckles.

It does nothing to ease her worries.

TOM

And you took that seriously.

THANDI

How else can I take it? She's your wife. She's a powerful person, or at least, her father is...

TOM

Alright, alright!

(holds her shoulders)

I know she irks you, but you should try not to let her get to you so...

THANDI

She hates me, Tom.

He lifts her chin, guides her eyes to his.

TOM

Now you listen to me, Thandi. No one on this Earth could possibly hate you. Everyone adores you. Though not half as much as I do.

She listens quietly, admiring him.

TOM (CONT'D)

Anna doesn't know you. She's simply jealous of you. I do understand your fears, but you must trust me when I say that you have nothing to worry about.

Impulsively, she pecks on his cheek, pulls back in instant regret.

THANDI

(embarrassed)

Forgive me.

He's impressed! He checks if the coast's clear.

TOM

We should be careful. Though, I wish we'd have the luxury of being as outwardly affectionate as I want to be with you.

It becomes too awkward for her and she rises.

THANDI

I think I really should be getting along to my work.

TOM

(holds her back)

I say you shall eat breakfast with me. There will be plenty of work for you to do later, if you so insist. But, for now, let's enjoy the morning together.

She wants to refuse, but:

THANDI

Should I fetch Isaac from the fields?

TOM

I've already convinced him. He's on his way.

He notices something missing.

TOM (CONT'D)
Where's your necklace?

Instinctively, she gropes around her neck, remembers...

TOM (CONT'D)
Please, put it on. And change into
one of your prettiest frocks. It
makes me so happy to see you wearing
your mother's gift.

THANDI
Okay.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Esther fills up a vase with fresh flowers.

Thandi tiptoes past. Esther doesn't see her.

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Thandi enters in a vibrant blue dress and the locket.

Tom and Isaac rise from their seats.

Tom pulls out a chair for her.

TOM
(holds her gaze)
You look stunning, as usual.

Thandi struggles being near him. She takes the chair, brushing
against him.

THANDI
(shy)
Oh. Don't make a fuss over me.

TOM
Nonsense. I've never seen a woman
so beautiful.

Thandi sits, nervously scanning the place for Anna.

Esther enters with their breakfast.

Myra follows.

THANDI
Thank you, Esther.

ESTHER
(gives a dismal look)
You're welcome, Miss Thandi.

She leads Myra out, making Thandi uneasy.

ISAAC
(loading his plate)
You're mighty kind to treat us this way, Tom. Your Aunt Lacy will be pleased to hear of it.

TOM
(takes a bite)
Oh, don't go boasting too much about me. I'm so grateful to have your help.
(winks at Thandi)
It's the least I can do.

She looks away, blushing.

Tom watches her closely. She's restless and unable to eat.

TOM (CONT'D)
Thandi...

She looks up.

TOM (CONT'D)
Eat. You're safe, I promise. Anna can complain all she wants, but she cannot control how I run my household. There's nothing immoral about a man treating his visiting guests - black or white - to a decent meal.

It doesn't convince her, but she helps herself anyway.

Just then, from down the HALL:

ANNA (O.S.)
Millie!

Out of the blue, Anna barges in, happy about something. It's quick to vanish at the sight of the siblings.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Tom. What are they doing here? I thought we discussed before...

TOM
(gets up, goes to her)
Anna, won't you please have a seat and eat some breakfast with us. You have not truly met my dear friends yet.

She glowers at him as though he were mad.

ANNA

I don't want to meet your dear friends. As it so happens, I have written to my father about them.

He pulls out the chair next to Thandi.

TOM

Please, sit. You really should try being more sociable.

Anna doesn't budge.

Tom settles back, not really giving a damn.

TOM (CONT'D)

Well, more breakfast for us, then.

He resumes eating, breaking the SILENCE with his cutlery.

Anna grows furious.

Thandi sits head down, pretending that all is well.

TOM (CONT'D)

(with a mouthful of food)

I've written to your father as well. I invited him to come and visit as soon as he can, because we've some business to discuss. I assumed that you'd write to him after that tantrum you'd the other night.

Anna holds on to the table, as if she might collapse.

ANNA

You have niggers dining at our tables, sleeping in our beds. My father is not going to stand for this. You're running a mad house. If you think you can board people like this, you'd better be careful, or he will -

TOM

(cuts her off)

You'd be wise to not give me your idle threats.

THANDI

(quietly)

Tom. Isaac and I can go.

TOM

No! It is Anna who can go!

She's shocked at his outburst and looks away.

Anna is now in tears.

TOM (CONT'D)

(shoots up)

If you cannot be civil towards our guests, you can pack up your things and return home with your father after he gets here. I promised to marry you, but I did not...

He stops himself, sits back, struggling to calm down.

Humiliated, Anna glowers around, spots Thandi's locket.

ANNA

(points at Thandi's chest)

This bitch doesn't know her station. You think you're a proper lady just because you grew up here? Do you think you're white? Well, you're not. You are a nigger, and no gold is going to change that. Tom is mine. This house is mine.

(retreats)

I'll go with my father, if he says for me to go. But I wouldn't be so sure of yourself if I were you. He has been disappointed by the yield the last few years, and he has his own ideas for his portion of the land. Maybe I'll convince him to sell it!

Anna STORMS out with a RUFFLE of her skirts.

Dead SILENCE.

Tom sits still, eyes down, fork in hand, food untouched.

THANDI

(struggling)

Tom. I do wish you'd not place us in this awkward position.

ISAAC

(to Thandi)

Maybe we just ought to go home. It would be nice to see my wife.

TOM

You shall do no such thing. This is an ongoing war between me and my wife, and I won't lose my friends in the process. That's why I asked for her to return home to her parents now. She's a hindrance to my work anyway.

THANDI
People will talk.

TOM
Let them talk.

Tom resumes breakfast, not really enjoying his food.

TOM (CONT'D)
As long as they're also talking about
how well I'm doing here, who cares
what they say about Anna and me? Who
cares if they talk about the truth?

EXT. THE PORCH - DAY

Eyes set far, Tom waits for someone. He looks anxious.

INT. ANNA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Anna mopes around.

Millie packs Anna's belonging into five large suitcases.

INT. THE HALL - LATER

Anna descends the stairs, stops as she spots someone.

AHEAD, NEAR THE PARLOR

On a chair, sits Thandi, focused on her needlework, the locket
still around her neck.

ANNA
You!

THANDI
(looks up, confused)
Yes, Madame?

ANNA
Oh, don't you 'yes Madame' me.
(moves closer)
You're probably happy to see me go.
I'm sure you've just been hoping for
it. It's probably why you came, to
try and steal my husband away from
me. Well, don't get too comfortable
-

Suddenly, interrupting them --

ESTHER (O.S.)
They're here!

Esther rushes in, stops dead on seeing the two together.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Your father's carriage is here, Mrs.
Lexington.

Anna quickly leaves.

EXT. THE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Thandi walks into a strong gust, holding down her skirts as she joins the others.

Tom pins down his hat. He glances at Thandi, smiles.

AT THE GATES

A carriage TROTS through, kicking up a dust storm.

EXT. THE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

The carriage pulls up. The driver opens the door.

Daniel alights, looking dapper in an expensive suit.

Tom greets him with a smile.

TOM
(shakes hands)
Daniel.

Daniel gives an annoyed, piercing stare.

DANIEL
Tom. I'd hoped that we'd never be
meeting like this, but here we are.

Thandi watches them, growing anxious, when --

ANNA (O.S.)
Pa!

Anna whips past Thandi and she jumps in surprise.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(crashes into a hug)
Oh, Pa, it's so good to see you!

Daniel smiles and it's weird to see him do so. Unusual.

DANIEL
My little Anna. How have you been
keeping yourself? You look a bit
pale, you could use a little sun.

ANNA

Oh Daddy. You know I've never been
fond of too much sun. It darkens the
skin.

They walk past Thandi and she notices a sarcastic grimace on
Tom's face. She smothers a laugh.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Tom, Anna and Daniel go to the kitchen.

Esther posts herself near the door, hoping to eavesdrop on
them.

ACROSS THE PARLOR

Thandi sits, resumes her work - a nice, monogrammed pillowcase
for Tom. She undoes the crooked stitching from the letters
'T.L.'.

ESTHER

(quietly)

I'm amazed. I thought for sure that
they'd be yelling at each other.
Master Tom and Mr. Stafford are
always yelling at each other about
something. They're worse than him
and Missus Anna.

Thandi shrugs.

Esther isn't pleased at her countenance, she wants her to be
cautious.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

You'd best be careful, Miss Thandi.
I don't think it's likely that Mr.
Stafford came all this way without
your name coming up.

THANDI

(quietly)

I will be careful.

She undoes the shaky 'T' on the pillowcase, attempts to redo
it. The needle pokes her and she YELPS.

ESTHER

If you're lucky, Mr. Stafford won't
take Anna too seriously. She is
always finding things to complain
about here.

The kitchen door opens, and Anna appears, looking sulky.

She walks past Thandi, slowing down to fire an evil smirk before disappearing up the stairs.

ANNA (O.S.)

Millie!

ESTHER (O.S.)

Lord, have mercy, she is gonna be the death of that poor girl.

Something about Anna's countenance disturbs Thandi.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I hate to see her go. I just know she's gonnabewaitingonMissus Anna hand and foot with Mr. Stafford always there, to make sure she is.

The kitchen door opens again, and Tom appears. He goes to Thandi. Gently, he pulls her aside, speaks in a low voice.

TOM

Daniel wants to speak with you. I didn't tell him about us, and, of course, you shouldn't either.

THANDI

(alarmed)

What does he want to speak with me about?

TOM

(wearily)

Anna's concerns.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Thandi enters.

At the head of the table sits Daniel, the threat in his gaze imminent. He checks her out from head to toe.

She shifts uncomfortably.

DANIEL

Sit.

She obeys, sits across him, her eyes down.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

What is this business I hear about you and Tom sitting at the family dining table together?

His explosive tone startles her.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

It's my understanding that you and your brother are slaves belonging to the Lexington family. You're not visiting guests. You're servants who may enter the dining room only when serving meals. Correct?

THANDI

(bows her head)

Yes, Sir.

DANIEL

My daughter Anna is Tom's wife. You'll respect that by not hanging about him any longer. He'll be focusing on his work. He's not some child friend of yours anymore. It makes me shudder to think that my dear old friend Tom Sr. would have allowed the three of you to play together at all!

She stays low, not daring to look at him.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

You are to stop this nonsense at once! Is that clear?

She looks up, startled. Tears spring to her eyes.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Anna is coming home with me to have a vacation from all this insanity and be with her mother for her upcoming birthday. But meanwhile, my associate, Mr. Richmond, will be along in a few days' time. He'll be here on business. And I'll see to it that he keeps an eye on you and Tom in the process. And if he catches you going after Tom -

THANDI

(in tears)

I never went after Tom!

DANIEL

I suggest that you see that it stays that way. And send Tom back in here.

INT. THE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Trembling, Thandi plops down to her chair, rips off the 'T.L', flings it aside, bursts into explosive tears.

INT. KITCHEN - MEANWHILE

Tom sits across Daniel, not looking at him, his attitude contemptuous. Daniel glowers at him.

DANIEL

I know you're lying when you say you haven't touched her. I could see right through that girl.

(smirks)

She is a pretty little thing. I certainly can see your dilemma.

Tom looks up, notes his lusty sneer.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

But make no bones about it. If this thing between you two persists, I will personally set about on a mission to make your life a living hell.

Tom snickers, nods his head. *As if it isn't!*

DANIEL (CONT'D)

If you were smart, you'd send her home immediately, before your cock gets you into more trouble than you can handle.

TOM

Your business with me does not include my personal life. And furthermore, I'll not send my friends home.

Daniel sneers more and rises.

DANIEL

(adjusts his suit)

My business is my daughter. And you'll do well to remember that.

INT. HALL - THAT EVENING

Thandi still sews.

OUTSIDE

Horses NEIGH. A steady TROT.

AT THE DOOR

She peeps out its screen.

Tom stands alone, gazing emptily into the distance.

She lingers for a moment, then, turns to leave, when:

TOM (O.S.)

Thandi.

She stops, sees Tom in the same spot with his back to her.

THANDI

Yes, Tom?

TOM

Please, join me.

EXT. THE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

She joins him.

TOM

Will you ever forgive me?

She looks at him, puzzled.

THANDI

This is as much my fault as it is yours, Tom.

TOM

(smiles)

Well. I am still sorry.

(looks at her)

Will you ever forgive me for all of this? I told Stafford that I've no intentions of sending you home. I guess I was so determined to be rid of Anna for a while that I did not think of how this could affect you.

Pondering, she moves closer, at the same time, keeps her distance.

THANDI

Well, look on the bright side of all this. You've gotten rid of Anna for some time. Just as you wished.

TOM

(smiles, nods)

Ever the optimist.

A strong attraction grows between them once again. Tom moves in.

TOM (CONT'D)

(in a hushed tone)

Meet me at the barn. Midnight.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Thandi is in bed struggling to sleep, staring at random things.

A quiet RAP on the door.

She cocks up her head, alarmed.

The KNOB slowly TURNS, the door opens, and, in slips Tom. He leans against the door with his back, presses it shut.

She sits up, stunned.

THANDI
(barely audible)
Tom-

TOM'S FEET

His pants drop. His legs withdraw.

Thandi blushes hard and looks away.

He clambers into bed, smashing his lips into hers, sucking it up in a deep kiss.

HER BACK

His hand gropes around, finds the lace, tugs it open.

HER SHOULDER

The garment slips down, he pushes it down further, while planting gentle pecks down her neck.

She cringes, gasps.

HER LEG

His hand skis up.

She throws her head back, gasping, sinking deeper into the bed.

The pillows fall to the floor.

Her hands clutch the sheets.

HIS BACK

Her nails dig deeper as he thrusts into her, then, relaxes.

He lifts his head, breathless, sweating, admiring her.

She caresses his face, staring into his eyes.

THANDI (CONT'D)
I love you, Tom.

A tear trickles down her face and he wipes it away.

TOM
I love you more.

EXT. THE GARDENS - DAY

Thandi works at a rose bush. A gust throws her hair around. She gathers it up, tosses it back. Suddenly, behind:

VICTOR (O.S.)
(European accent)
You should use a hair tie.

She whips around.

VICTOR RICHMOND (40's), handsome, elite, seductive, towers behind her. He's in ornate apparel, like crushed, black velvet...

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Forgive my intrusion. My name is Victor Richmond. I'm an associate of Tom's and Mr. Daniel Stafford. He sent me to oversee some ---
(glances at her from head to toe)
--- *business* while he's away. And you might be...?

She jumps to her feet.

She senses his eyes on her, shamelessly exploring every nook and corner of her body. She takes cover behind her hair.

THANDI
(quietly)
I'm Thandi.

He chuckles, checks her out even more.

VICTOR
(teasing)
Are you always this shy?

She grabs the spade, gets back to the bush.

THANDI
Are you looking for Tom?

VICTOR

As a matter of fact, I am. Where is he? Have you seen him?

She pats the soil around the roots, begins a new hole.

THANDI

He's been gone for most of the day now. But he's due back any minute. You're welcome to wait in the parlor for him, if you'd like.

He stares for long, grinning cheekily all the while...

Thandi sees this from the corner of her eyes, gets fidgety.

VICTOR

I guess I'll wait in the parlor then.

He proceeds to the mansion at leisure, taking several good glances over his shoulder before finally going in.

Thandi GASPS for air! She'd been holding her breath.

A carriage APPROACHES. She looks up. It's Tom.

He disembarks, hurries to her.

TOM

Shall we lunch in the garden? It's such a beautiful day.

THANDI

I don't think that it would be a good idea. Especially, since sometimes important people arrive unexpected while you're away.

He stares at her, confused. Then, he understands. Surprisingly, he doesn't detest.

TOM

Richmond? He's here? When did he get here?

THANDI

Just a few minutes ago, as far as I can tell. I told him to wait for you in the parlor.

TOM

Well, I suppose now is as good a time as any to greet him.

He takes Thandi's arm. They leave together.

A bit off from the entrance, she breaks off from him.

INT. THE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Victor strolls about, pausing to admire a painting.

Tom enters.

TOM

Richmond!

They shake hands.

TOM (CONT'D)

How long have you been waiting?

Thandi avoids Victor's gaze, gets past nimbly.

VICTOR

(staring at Thandi)

Not long.

TOM

Well, I hope you haven't been bored much.

VICTOR

One could not possibly be bored when one is in the company of such...

(winks at Esther)

...beautiful ladies.

Esther blushes, giggles.

Thandi pauses to glance at Tom, disappears around the corner.

ESTHER

May I help you with anything, Master Lexington?

TOM

No, I'll manage just fine. Thank you, Esther.

Thandi returns. This time, in a fitting but modest frock.

Esther eyes her, CLEARS her throat.

Thandi takes the signal, follows her into the kitchen.

INT. THE PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Tom leads Victor in. He pours himself a drink.

TOM

So, what has brought you here?
Business or otherwise?

(pauses over the second
glass)

Brandy?

VICTOR

No, none for me. Thank you.

He waits for Tom to settle down.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

A bit of both. I thought we could
talk shop as well as address Daniel's
suspicions of you and that very
fetching girl.

Tom eyes him suspiciously.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Not that any of it is my business.
But I think I can already see where
he might get his ideas.

TOM

And just what is it that you think
you may already see?

VICTOR

(smiles slowly)

Well, just from the parlor window,
I'd say I saw the faces of two lovers
when you arrived. Daniel also feels
that you're not entirely invested
in our partnership as I'd like to
believe. He thinks your heart is not
in it. Is that so?

Tom's expression darkens.

TOM

How could my heart not be in it? Just
as my heart is in every brick and
stone in this place - this plantation
and the mill are my birthright - your
associate has taken that from me.
He owns the controlling interest in
the mill, and he requires a hefty
percentage of the plantations'
yield each year. He is lording
himself over my plantation. My home.
If he had his way, I'd do nothing
but work for him, and be his
daughter's simpering little
husband.

VICTOR

Tom. I'd like to think of you as my friend. But Stafford is my friend as well. Now, you two had an agreement.

TOM

Agreeing to something under duress is not really an agreement.

Victor leans back eyeing Tom's drink.

VICTOR

I've changed my mind. I think I'll have some of that brandy.

Tom caters to him.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

I do wish there was something I could say or do to help you with your predicament.

He swirls his drink around in the glass a couple of times, then, takes a long sip.

TOM

There's something you could do. What you do best, business with me.

VICTOR

Business with you? What business?

Excited, Tom moves to the edge of his seat.

TOM

There is something that I've had my eye on for quite some time. The old Newport Mill - if you aim to sell it.

VICTOR

You must be kidding. I make an excellent profit from my shares at Lexington Mills. Why on earth would I jeopardize that by selling it to you and making you my competitor.

TOM

I've given that thought as well. If you don't want to sell it outright, you could enter into a partnership with me. Lexington Mills's profits would hardly be affected. The Old Mill is closer to Bridgeport and Fenton - two major farming cities.
(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

The farmers there currently take their business to Steinway simply because it's closer than Lexington. I'm certain that if we were to restore the Newport mill, they'd bring their business to us and other surrounding cities as well. Before the fire, the mill had thrived... I'm certain it could thrive again.

Victor thinks over his offer - slowly allows it to sink in.

TOM (CONT'D)

You don't even have to think about it right now. You're welcome to relax here for a while. Make yourself at home so that Stafford really thinks you're out here spying on me. I've saved a considerable sum of cash over the past few years, and with my proceeds from this year's yield, I'm certain that I can come up with an asking price. All I ask is that you'll consider it.

Victor smiles, accepting.

TOM (CONT'D)

You're the best businessman in Newport. If there's anything that I can do for you to help make the deal more appealing, please, do not hesitate to mention it.

Victor leans back, swirling his drink again, GULPS it down.

VICTOR

I can think of something. But I'll stay here a while longer and think of it some more.

MONTAGE - VICTOR FLIRTS WITH THANDI

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Thandi dusts a portrait. She senses eyes on her, turns to see Victor on the other end, watching her, smirking.

EXT. GARDENS - DAY

Thandi tends to a rose bush. Her hair flies around in the breeze. She straightens to brush them off when...

THE MANSION, AN UPSTAIRS WINDOW

... she sees Victor smirking and checking her out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Thandi serves cakes to Victor and Tom. She begins to leave, when Victor catches her eye and winks.

INT. PARLOR - AFTERNOON

Tom and Victor discuss matters over a drink.

The door opens and Thandi enters, announcing lunch.

Victor shoots an air kiss.

INT. LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

Victor stands in the doorway, watching Thandi close in. There's something mischievous going on in his mind.

She attempts to walk through the door.

He stands in the way, filling up the frame.

She ignores this and tries to get past. He stops her again.

She glowers at him. He gives a cheeky grin.

VICTOR

You don't like me. Do you, Thandi?

She reattempts to get past. He allows her to slip through, watching her back with a naughty smirk.

END MONTAGE.

INT. THE KITCHEN - EVENING

Thandi assists Esther with the chores.

ESTHER

You're as jumpy as a jackrabbit
whenever Mister Richmond is around.

Thandi glances at her briefly, turns away.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Master Tom trusts him, so there's
no reason to fear him.

THANDI

I don't fear him. I just don't like
the way he looks at me.

INT. THE PARLOR - EVENING

Alone, Tom reads a disturbing letter.

Thandi appears at the doorway. She lingers for a moment, studying him, then, realizes that he's distressed.

She moves in, touches his shoulder. He turns to see --

THANDI

Tom?

There are tears in his eyes.

THANDI (CONT'D)

What is it? What's wrong?

TOM

Aunt Lacy's sick. Dying.

She takes the letter and skims through.

He buries his head in his hands.

Overwhelmed and in tears, she hugs him.

THANDI

Oh Tom. I am so sorry.

He holds her while crying, then, shoots to his feet.

TOM

I've to see her before it's too late.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He hurries down the corridor.

Esther comes in from the other direction.

TOM

Please, pack my things. I must go
to my aunt at once.

ESTHER

(bewildered)

Yes, Sir.

Thandi joins her from Tom's direction, earning a glare.

INT. TOM'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi and Esther pack Tom's bags.

THANDI
(quietly)
Aunt Lacy is dying.

Esther gives a worried glance.

THANDI (CONT'D)
She has scarlet fever. The letter told him that it's too dangerous for anyone to be around her. But do you think that will stop him?

ESTHER
He'll have you and me to take care of him if he comes back sick. And if we get sick, well... that's not important.

EXT. THE PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Victor loads Tom's luggage into the carriage.

The driver LUTHER is fearful, clearly unwilling to go.

ESTHER
(following Tom)
Give her our love, you hear?

TOM
Thank you, Esther.

Thandi remembers something.

THANDI
Wait!

He stops, turns around.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Isaac's wife could be in danger.

He hesitates, then, hurries to --

THE FIELDS

Tom talks with Isaac. They hurry back, panic-stricken.

In a moment, Isaac returns with his luggage.

From over her shoulder:

VICTOR (O.S.)
Don't worry about a thing Tom.

She's startled but doesn't turn around.

He brushes past her and shakes hands with Tom.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I'll make sure this place stays
running properly.

Though startled at his presence, she doesn't turn around.

Tom shake hands with Victor, boards the carriage.

Isaac hugs Thandi, joins Tom.

LUTHER
Hiya!

Horses SNORT.

The carriage crunches over the cobblestone path.

INT. CARRIAGE (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Tom peers back at Thandi as she shrinks with distance.

CUT TO:

THANDI

... as she gazes at Tom, the pangs of separation high.

EXT. MADAME LACY'S PLACE - NIGHT

We see a porch with glowing lanterns on either side.

A carriage pulls up and Tom alights from it. He heads in.

Isaac, to Sarah.

Luther attends to the luggage.

INT. MADAME LACY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tom stops at the door.

AUNT LACY is asleep. Her face is speckled with lights streaming through the window.

He turns to leave, when --

AUNT LACY (O.S.)
(feebly)
Tom?

He rushes to her side, takes her hand, squeezes it.

TOM
Aunt Lacy, I came for you.
She peers at him, eyes barely opening.

AUNT LACY
You shouldn't have, Tom. You could
become ill too.

TOM
I couldn't let you be sick alone.
I'd never have forgiven myself.

AUNT LACY
You've always been so noble... like
your father.

Suddenly, she remembers something. Panicking, she clambers
to sit up only to collapse.

TOM
(patting her)
Lie still.

Her breaths are labored. Ragged...

His hand stays on her forehead. It's hot.

AUNT LACY
(in a hoarse whisper)
Tom. I have something important to
tell you... Something I should have
told you years ago.

TOM
(strokes her hand)
Save your strength. Whatever it is,
it doesn't matter now.

AUNT LACY
It does matter.

He realizes that she's crying, her gray skin glistens with
tears.

AUNT LACY (CONT'D)
Tom...
(grip tightening)
Your father did not kill himself
because of money or land...

TOM

I don't want to talk about this. I
don't want to discuss that rat
Stafford while you're -

AUNT LACY

(cuts him off)

He died because of love.

He pauses, confused, curious...

TOM

Because of my mother?

AUNT LACY

No. Your mother had given up on him
long before... He was in love with
Haiti.

A prolonged silence as it hits him.

TOM

Haiti?

AUNT LACY

It killed him when she died. He
couldn't live with himself knowing
he'd sent her and her children away.

He leans back, his world crumbling, collapsing...

AUNT LACY (CONT'D)

But it was the only thing he could
do after your mother had learned
about them. When he sent her to me,
the poor thing was devastated.

He goes limp, her hand slipping off his.

AUNT LACY (CONT'D)

Tom.

He takes her hand again, squeezes it gently.

She is much weaker.

AUNT LACY (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Thandi...

(struggling)

Thandi was his daughter.

Beat.

TOM

Whatever do you mean?

AUNT LACY
She's your sister.
(struggling)
You must see after her and Isaac.

She slips into a frightful sleep.

Tom reels, her hand still in his.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - EVENING

Thandi cries in bed.

A light KNOCK on the door.

She wipes her tears, pulls herself together.

THANDI
Come in.

It's Esther. At Thandi's tear-stricken face, she stops.

THANDI (CONT'D)
What is it, Esther?

She hesitates, then, unfolds a piece of paper.

ESTHER
I'm afraid I have bad news.

Thandi sits up, panicking.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Madame Lacy... She's passed on.

Thandi dissolves into a deep SOB.

Esther rushes to her side, wraps her in a motherly hug.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
It's going to be alright. Master Tom
and your brother will be back, as
soon as they can be.

She remains buried in Esther's arms.

THANDI
(crying)
I should have gone with them.

ESTHER
(rocking her)
I'm sure Ms. Lacy would not have
wanted you to go and put yourself
in danger. And I'm sure she knew you
loved her too.

THANDI

I did. I just wish none of this ever happened. I hate being here with Richmond. I want him to go.

ESTHER

Shush. Master Richmond is in charge while Master Lexington's away. You better not say such things, in case he hears you.

THANDI

I don't care. He shouldn't be here. He's Stafford's...
(stops herself)
I just don't like him.

Esther lets go, peers at her.

ESTHER

Do you hate being here with me?

THANDI

No, of course not.

ESTHER

And as far as Mr. Richmond, well, I can't see why you don't like him. He seems to like you just fine.

Thandi wipes her tears, frowning.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Well, I suppose you won't be moving back to Missus Lacy's.

It gets Thandi thinking. 'What now'?

ESTHER (CONT'D)

You'd do best to stay in good graces with Master Tom's associates and family, even if you don't like them. Especially, when you may just be here indefinitely now.

(rising)

Now, dry your eyes and come help me set the table for Master Richmond's dinner. If he says anything to you, just bow and don't let it get to you.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Thandi lays out a lavish table - a platter of roasted duck.

Victor sits at the head, watching her closely.

VICTOR
The food looks marvelous.

She returns a faint smile, just for the sake of it and fills up his goblet with wine.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Obviously, I cannot possibly eat all of this by myself.
(gesturing at the duck)
You simply must dine with me.

She ogles at him, as though he were mad, then looks away.

THANDI
I don't think that would be a good idea.

Suddenly ---

Victor breaks into a COUGHING fit.

He covers up with his napkin, desperately trying to stop.

She rushes over and hands him the wine, looking concerned.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Here, drink this.

He composes himself, clears his throat.

VICTOR
Forgive me. I've been a little under the weather as of late.

She gives a small nod, prepares to leave.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Wait.

THANDI
Yes, Sir?

VICTOR
Why?

THANDI
Why what, Sir?

VICTOR
Why wouldn't it be a good idea?

She stares blankly, then, looks away.

THANDI
It simply would not be appropriate, Sir.

He smiles coyly, adjusts the napkin on his lap.

VICTOR
I'm sure it wouldn't be the first
inappropriate thing to happen in the
house.

She fires a scathing look.

He proceeds to cut the duck, looking smug.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

Esther goes around with the daily chores, when the SOUND of galloping hooves grows closer. She rushes out.

EXT. THE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Ben is already there, and so is Thandi.

She waits at the carriage anxiously.

Tom emerges from within, looking solemn.

Their eyes meet briefly, then, he looks away.

Her smile disappears. Then, she understands. Aunt Lacy.

THANDI
(hugs him)
Tom...

He still doesn't look at her.

Ben approaches.

TOM
(smiles at him)
It's good to be home. There's still
another suitcase, Ben.

BEN
On it, Boss.

Tom walks past Thandi without another glance.

He is greeted by Victor at the door. They go in.

Watching this scene is Thandi. She's hurt and confused. She looks for Isaac, doesn't find him, turns frantic.

THANDI
(to Luther)
My brother. Where is he?

LUTHER
Isaac stayed on, Missus.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Thandi walks in.

Tom is already there, drinking water.

THANDI
(brightly)
You must be famished.

He glances at her briefly, places his glass in the sink.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Well, not an awful lot has happened while you were away, Tom. I hear the crops are far greater in number than the previous years. And it won't be much longer before the hands have cleared the fields. At least, that's what Ben says. The other day, he said they sowed about one hundred more stalks than last year's record.

Tom maintains his rigidity.

TOM
The weather is changing.

She studies him, not really understanding.

TOM (CONT'D)
I had faith that things would turn around. I always do...

He finally looks at her, wanting to say more. Instead, he looks away, before she can quiz him further.

TOM (CONT'D)
Where's Richmond?

THANDI
(withered)
In your study, working on something.

He leaves immediately.

THE FOYER

Thandi sits on the settee, looking disturbed, lost...

ESTHER (O.S.)
Your peanut soup must be scentless.

Thandi looks at her, clueless.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
There's no smell of it coming out
of the kitchen.

THANDI
(remembering)
Oh! I'm sorry. I'll start right away.
It's only... I wanted to greet him
as soon as he got home.

ESTHER
Mm-hmm. Well, he's got to eat.

THANDI
I know.

She rises, sets off to work.

EXT. TOM'S STUDY - LATER

Thandi almost knocks at the door when she hears VOICES from
within. She listens briefly, then, KNOCKS.

SILENCE follows. Then, from within:

TOM (O.S.)
Come in.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Thandi peeps in.

Victor grins at her, Tom looks away.

THANDI
Sorry to interrupt you, gentlemen,
but I've prepared some soup for you
if you would like to come down to
the dining room. Dinner will be ready
later on.

VICTOR
My, my. That is awfully nice of you
Thandi.

She gives him a small smile and notices Tom watching her
thoughtfully, unsmiling.

He quickly looks away.

His behavior upsets her.

TOM
(stiffly)
Yes, thank you, Thandi. We'll be
along in a few minutes.

She hangs around, as if wanting him to look at her. He doesn't.
Slowly, she leaves.

VICTOR
That girl is one of your best kept
secrets. I'm surprised you're able
to get any work done around here with
her in your home.

TOM
I do my work just fine.

VICTOR
But your wife doesn't like her. Her
presence here is obviously causing
rifts in your marriage.

Tom is uninterested in this conversation.

TOM
There is nothing between us.

VICTOR
So, why keep her here if it causes
your marriage trouble?

Tom pours himself another drink, considering the true answer
to his question.

TOM
You know how women can be. Anna is
just jealous of her. I've known
Thandi and her brother since we were
children. They are good friends. And
they've done nothing to offend her.
I shouldn't have to throw them into
the streets simply because my wife
wishes it.

VICTOR
(leaning back)
You know, I've been thinking more
on your proposal for that Mill.

TOM
(excited)
You have?

VICTOR
(swirling his drink)
Yes. However, I must say that I'm not entirely certain if another partnership would be wise for me. I'm already stretched thin as it is.

TOM
I can pay you for the building outright. Just tell me your terms.

VICTOR
(stops swirling)
It isn't an issue of profit for me, Tom. I don't need money. I already own practically half of Newport as it is. But there's something that you have that I don't... Something that I've not had for many years.

Tom stares back, not really getting it.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Thandi.

TOM
Thandi?

VICTOR
Give her to me and you'll have your mill.

He stiffens, shocked.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Is it a deal?

Victor downs his drink, sits his empty glass on the table.

Tom hesitates for a moment longer.

TOM
I would have to talk it over with Thandi and see if she agrees.

VICTOR
Very well.

A beautiful aroma floats in, and Victor looks at the door, sniffing the air.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
We should probably go and have some of that delightfully smelling soup.

He rises, prepares to leave, Tom follows.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(stopping at the door)
Oh, there's just one other thing.
I'd like to take Thandi out for a
ride tomorrow. That is, if you have
no objections, of course.

EXT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Thandi stays busy with her needlework. From within, dishes
CLATTER as the men talk.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi walks in, clears out the dishes.

She catches Tom look at her remorsefully.

THANDI
(smiling)
Dinner will be ready soon.

VICTOR
That won't be necessary for me. I
must be off today on a matter of
business.

Thandi is delighted. She gives him a slight curtsy.

THANDI
I shall be sorry to see you go, Sir.

Not really. And he knows.

VICTOR
Oh, I shall be back soon enough. I've
got Tom's permission to take you out
for a ride tomorrow.

She snaps to Tom, wanting an explanation.

He avoids her gaze.

Victor watches them closely.

She's on the verge of tears.

THANDI
(glaring at Tom)
Very well. I will be ready. Sirs.

She gives a final curtsy and stomps out.

EXT. GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Tears slip down her cheeks as she trudges towards ---

THE GAZEBO

She lies down on the bench.

An uplifting SONG rises from the distant fields.

Wearily, she drifts off to sleep.

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Tom searches for Thandi.

IN THE DISTANCE

He spots her in the gazebo, asleep...

INT. GAZEBO - CONTINUOUS

He sits across, watching her, the tear stains on her face troubling him.

She stirs and wakes. On seeing him, she sits up.

THANDI
(sarcastic)
May I help you, Sir?

TOM
I'd like to apologize for my behavior earlier. I've not quite been myself lately. There's just been so much craziness the past few weeks that I can hardly make sense of it all.

At the sight of his worry, her hate diminishes.

TOM (CONT'D)
Victor questioned the nature of our relationship. I told him that there was nothing between us, though, I doubt he believed me. I believe he's requested the ride with you to test me. To see how I'll react.

THANDI
A test?

TOM
But if it makes you uncomfortable...

THANDI

No. If it will convince him of that,
then I will go.

He admires her, touched by her selflessness.

TOM

You are truly remarkable.

THANDI

I've missed you so much.

He struggles to face her.

THANDI (CONT'D)

Tom, are you alright?

TOM

There's something that we must
discuss.

She grows tensed.

TOM (CONT'D)

I don't know an easy way to say this.

Suddenly, she remembers, becomes alarmed.

THANDI

Isaac. Is he ill?

TOM

No. He's fine.
(hesitating)
I'd like to discuss us.

She's panicking, yet, keeps calm.

TOM (CONT'D)

We can no longer see each other. At
least, not intimately.

Beat.

Tom looks to her for a response, finds her in shock and tears
instead.

THANDI

Have I done something wrong?

TOM

No, it's not you, Thandi. It's my
marriage. I was wrong to come to you,
to seduce you. I should've never
crossed the line. I'm not a happily
married man, but I'm married. All
the same.

He watches her, feeling terrible...

Through her tears, she forces a bleak smile.

THANDI
It's for the best.

EXT. GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Thandi trudges to the mansion, broken, all alone.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She curls into bed and cries.

Someone RAPS on the door. She sits up, wipes it off.

THANDI
Yes?

ESTHER (O.S.)
May I come in?

THANDI
(reluctantly)
Yes.

Esther enters.

ESTHER
You didn't snap those peas like I
told you...

She breaks off at the sight of Thandi's tear-stricken face.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
You alright?

THANDI
(looking away)
I'm... I'm okay.

ESTHER
Not to me, you don't. You want to
tell me what's ailing you?

THANDI
It's nothing.

ESTHER
It's something.

THANDI
I cannot say.

ESTHER
Is it about Master Tom?

It gets her to look up, a bit shocked, embarrassed.

THANDI
(looks away, lies)
No. Why?

ESTHER
You don't have to keep nothing from me, child. I already know about you and the master.

She dares not face Esther.

THANDI
(fidgeting)
Whatever do you mean?

ESTHER
Well, I heard you and Master Tom in here the night before he left.

Esther gives her a "there's-no-point-in-denying" look.

THANDI
(in tears)
That will never happen again.

ESTHER
(hesitating)
Master Tom is an honorable man. If he's ended things, you should be glad. Things would only get worse between him and the Missus, which would make things worse for you.

Thandi hides in her hands, crying.

THANDI
I am so ashamed of myself.

Esther places a hand on Thandi's arm.

ESTHER
You need not be ashamed, child. We cannot control how we love or whether our hearts will be broken. It's just how life is.
But I do know that Master Tom loves you... I knew it pretty early on.

Thandi looks up at her, shocked at this.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I could see it in the way he looked at you. I ain't never seen him look at the Missus that way. And I ain't never seen him smile as much as he has since you've been here.

It comforts her.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

You mustn't be angry either. He's just doing what's best for the both of you.

She hugs Esther, much consoled.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Tom is at the table picking at his food, pushing it around...

Esther notices.

ESTHER

Are you alright, Master?

He snaps out of his trance, immediately eats a little.

TOM

Yes. I just don't have much of an appetite this morning.

Thandi comes in and serves, her eyes never leaving him.

He takes a few bites, pushes his plate aside, leaves.

Very hurt, she watches him leave.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - LATER

Tom relaxes with a drink by the window, when someone outside interests him. He leans in to take a good look.

TOM

Thandi.

EXT. THE GARDENS - CONTINUOUS

She strolls around, her long locks swirling in the wind.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Tom continues to watch her, mesmerized.

VICTOR (O.S.)
Beautiful day out, isn't it?

He turns around, startled.

At the door is Victor. He casually strolls in.

TOM
I'm sorry, didn't hear the door.

He smirks, knowing exactly why.

TOM (CONT'D)
May I offer you something?

Tom finishes his drink, goes to the cabinet.

VICTOR
No, it's far too early for me. And
besides, I'll need all my wits for
today's ride.

It takes him a moment to remember.

TOM
Oh, I had nearly forgotten.

Victor adjusts his coat, clearly in a very good mood.

VICTOR
Well, we should probably be off now.

After he leaves, Tom sits back, brooding.

EXT. THE PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Victor paces up and down, glancing at the courtyard every now and then.

Finally, Thandi appears, trudging down the garden path.

He checks her out, paying extra attention to her drab servant gown.

THANDI
(bows)
Sir.

He returns a teasing smirk, clearly meant to irritate her.

Victor's SERVANT turns up with a shiny black mare.

VICTOR
(stroking the mare)
This here is Belle.

For the first time, Thandi shows interest, moving in to touch its long, sleek nose.

Belle sniffs her hand, snorts.

THANDI
She's beautiful.

VICTOR
She likes you.

Victor helps her up, mounts himself. He takes the reins, urges Belle into a gallop.

EXT. THE STREETS - CONTINUOUS

They TROT past meadows, woodlands...

Thandi enjoys the scenery. At a familiar crossing---

THANDI
Hollis Creek.

VICTOR
You know this land?

THANDI
Very well.

Outlining the property are a mile of tall OAKS and CONED trees. Its tops sway in a gust.

THANDI (CONT'D)
It must still be there.

VICTOR
What?

THANDI
The creek.

Suddenly, Victor veers Belle off the trail...

... And towards the trees.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

VICTOR
To see the creek you mentioned.

THANDI
You mustn't. This is private land.

Belle breaks into a GALLOP.

VICTOR
I don't think the owner will mind
if we took a brief look around.

They whip past a 'NO TRESPASSING' sign...

EXT. HOLLIS CREEK - CONTINUOUS

... and along a narrow path. The sound of RUSHING WATER grows louder and...

... The creek comes into view.

Thandi grows ecstatic.

Victor steers Belle to the water's edge and dismounts. He reaches up to help Thandi.

THANDI
As I told you, Sir, we mustn't be
here. This is -

VICTOR
(calmly)
I know, I know. Private land.

THANDI
Exactly!

He grins at her attitude, almost teasing her.

VICTOR
We will be just fine.

She retreats a bit, refusing.

THANDI
And how can you be certain of that?

VICTOR
(proudly)
Because I am the owner of this land.

He studies her stunned expression.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I bought it from the former
landholder.

He reaches out again, she obliges.

He brings her down, at leisure, holding her waist a moment longer, her body closer to his, their eyes locked, till her feet hits the ground...

She moves away from him and to the banks to see the water.

HER REFLECTION

.... Thandi (9) stares back at her.

THANDI
(mesmerized)
Sir, do you really own Hollis Creek?

VICTOR
Yes, I really do. And please call
me Victor.

IN THE WATER

She dips her hand, allowing the fish to play with her.

THANDI
You're very fortunate to own it.

VICTOR
Yes, I am.
(looking around)
It'll be a shame to cut it down.

She whips around, shocked.

THANDI
(rising)
You plan to destroy these woods?

VICTOR
Yes, and cultivate two hundred of
the three hundred acres.

THANDI
(getting angry)
How can you destroy something so
beautiful?

VICTOR
This land is prime for agriculture.
The soil is rich, the creek provides
a natural water source for
irrigation. I could either farm the
land myself or lease it in parcels
to farmers for good profit.

She's at the brink of exploding.

THANDI
I'll never understand man's greed.
Always in pursuit of more than you
need.

She stops herself.

He gives a teasing smile.

VICTOR

You should think of it differently.
There's nothing wrong with wanting
more for yourself.

THANDI

Yes, but at what cost? I fear that
one day, all of Carolina will look
like wasteland because of men like
you.

VICTOR

I somehow doubt that will ever
happen. You needn't worry. More
trees will be planted when men like
me are done with the land.

She recoils, feeling childish at the smirk he gives her.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

As I said, I plan to clear two of
the three hundred acres. The creek
and surrounding woods will remain
perfectly intact. You're welcome to
visit the land whenever you like.

The hostility leaves her.

THANDI

That's very gracious of you, Sir.

He raises an eyebrow.

THANDI (CONT'D)

Forgive me. Victor.

He smiles.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - LATER

Thandi and Victor returns to Daniel's carriage on the
cobblestone path. They dismount Belle.

Esther rushes to her, panicking.

THANDI

Is anything wrong?

Before she can respond ---

--- Daniel appears in THE DOORWAY.

DANIEL

Well, there you are.

He checks her out.

Thandi turns to Esther. Her expression grows darker.

Victor hands Belle over to the servant boy.

ESTHER
There's much work to be done, Miss
Thandi.

Esther tugs Thandi's up the stairs. She follows closely, head low, gaze to the floor.

AT THE DOORWAY

ESTHER (CONT'D)
(to Daniel)
Excuse me, Sir.

Daniel steps aside, allows Esther to pass. When it's Thandi's turn, he blocks the way.

She BUMPS into his chest, stumbles back.

THANDI
(quietly)
Forgive me, Sir.

He stares hard, making her fearful, then, lets her go.

INT. THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Esther leads Thandi in.

Myra is at the kitchen sink.

ESTHER
(to Myra)
You can see to something else. We
got the kitchen chores.

Myra obeys. Confident that she has left:

ESTHER (CONT'D)
(in a low voice)
Miss Thandi, I overheard a most
terrible thing.

THANDI
What is it?

ESTHER
I overheard Mr. Stafford talking to
Master Lexington. He says he's got
legal papers proving he's the owner
of you and your brother.

Thandi stares back, fear and confusion stirring...

ESTHER (CONT'D)

He was talking about taking you back with him!

THANDI

That can't be possible. You must have heard wrong, Esther.

ESTHER

No, Miss Thandi. I heard him just right. He said that when Master Tom's daddy died, he not only bought the plantation, but he gained ownership of the slaves too.

THANDI

(incredulous)

I'm certain you're wrong.

EXT. TOM'S STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

She stops at the closed door, hesitating, then, knocks.

TOM (O.S.)

Come in.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Thandi walks in, shuts the door behind her.

Tom stares back solemnly. Before him is a glass of bourbon and several papers.

TOM

Please sit.

She sits across.

TOM (CONT'D)

There's something that we must discuss.

(he gives her a beat)

Anna's father has made a very serious claim, that he's the rightful owner of my father's slaves. He has brought this sales agreement to prove his allegations.

THANDI

What does that mean?

TOM

As their owner, he'd also become owner of the slaves' offspring.

THANDI

And what exactly does that mean?

TOM

It means, that if these documents are, in fact, legal, then Daniel is the true and lawful owner of you, Isaac and all the others my father owned.

When it sinks in...

THANDI

(tearfully)

But Madame Lacy was our owner. She even promised my mother our freedom.

TOM

Yes. But Daniel questions the legality of the ownership. If my father gave your mother to my aunt without proper papers, then Daniel could possibly have a legal right to her offspring.

THANDI

(reaching out)

May I see them?

He hands over the papers, watches sadly as she looks through, drowning in despair.

THANDI (CONT'D)

How can this be?

A knock on the door.

TOM

Yes?

VICTOR (O.S.)

May I come in?

Thandi wipes her tears, prepares to leave.

TOM

We will finish this very soon.

Victor enters.

She walks past him, avoiding his gaze.

INT. THE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Thandi hurries down the hall, stops short as she spots --

-- Anna, waiting at the end of the stairwell with a triumphant sneer.

Thandi quickens up, almost walks past.

ANNA
Stop right there!

She halts, glares back defiantly, squarely in the eyes.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Come. Draw my bath.

Anna goes up the stairs.

INT. ANNA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi enters, finds Anna disrobing. She hurries past, pretending to not have seen her.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi walks in. The tub is full.

ANNA (O.S.)
Oh yes. I forgot.

INT. ANNA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The robes drop to Anna's feet.

ANNA
I had Millie draw me a bath already.

Defiant, Thandi stomps past to the exit.

ANNA (CONT'D)
I didn't give you permission to go.

THANDI
(stops, turns around)
Yes?

ANNA
It's 'yes Ma'am'.

As she begins to unlace her bodice, Thandi looks away.

ANNA (CONT'D)
I think I'll have you wash me.

She gingerly crosses over to the bath.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Anna waits in the tub.

Thandi enters with a will to leave.

ANNA
Get that sponge.
(pointing to a shelf)
And give me my drink.

Thandi gets the glass, hands it over. Anna takes a sip...

ANNA (CONT'D)
(making a sour face)
I can't see how my husband likes this
so much.

Thandi raises a brow.

Anna gathers her hair, leans forward, draws her knees to her chest.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Wash my back.

Thandi stands in silent refusal, protest...

ANNA (CONT'D)
Well, get on with it.

She wets the sponge, scrubs her down with slow, delicate strokes.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Are you dumb? Harder! I should have
had Millie bathe me!

Gritting, clenching the sponge, she applies more pressure.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(satisfied)
That's much better. Go lower.

Making a face, she does as instructed.

ANNA (CONT'D)
That's enough.

Anna stretches out and sinks in, heaving in relief.

ANNA (CONT'D)
You know, my mother always saying
a nigger ain't good for nothing, but
I, myself, agree with my daddy.
Without y'all, who else would pick
our cotton and wash our asses?

She giggles.

THANDI
(submissive)
Will that be all, Ma'am?

ANNA
Has my Tom told you the latest news?

THANDI
Yes.

ANNA
Then you understand that you are my
father's property.

Thandi stares at the floor.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(dipping into the water)
You are a stubborn little nigger.
My mama's gonna have herself quite
a time breaking you.
(swings a leg over the
edge)
She keeps a short leather whip for
our niggas back home. My daddy gave
it to her on her thirty-fifth
birthday. Can you imagine such a
gift?

Thandi looks up, no longer stoic.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(relishing on her fear)
It would do you good to change your
attitude. My mama especially hates
your kind. Niggers that look like
us. It's an abomination.

She takes another sip, dismisses her with a careless wave.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Well, be gone, then.

Thandi hurries away, SLAMMING the door on her way out.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Thandi bustles down the corridor, dabbing at her tears, when,
she spots --

-- Daniel, lurking about with a nasty sneer.

She doesn't stop.

DANIEL
Hold on there, girl.

She halts, not daring to meet his stare.

He encroaches uncomfortably close, towers over...

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Well, well. Here you are.

She keeps her eyes down.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
(loud)
Look at me girl, when I address you.

She looks up, startled.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Have you had a word with our Tom?

When she says nothing...

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I'm gonna have a really good time
with you.

He brushes her cheek with a thumb, lust in his eyes...

She shudders. Her eyes dart frantically in desperate search
of an exit.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I'm gonna fuck you.
(stroking her cheek)
I'm gonna fuck you so hard.

She takes a step back, terrified...

VICTOR (O.S.)
Daniel.

Thandi gasps, breathing fast.

Daniel glances over his shoulder.

HALLWAY

At the far end, stands Victor, watching them.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(approaching them)
I was just coming to find you. Tom
would like a word with you.

Daniel gives Thandi a sly smile, leaves with Victor.

She gasps, hurries off to --

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

AT THE BASIN

-- Furious SPLASHING as Thandi washes off Daniel's revolting touch from her skin.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Daniel sits across Tom.

TOM

I'd like to have the documents reviewed by an attorney.

DANIEL

(smiles coyly)

You forget that I'm an attorney, Tom. I can assure you that another attorney will not find anything different. You're only putting off the inevitable. But I've got time.

VICTOR

I've suggested to Tom one of my own attorneys.

DANIEL

(surprised)

Your attorney?

(waves carelessly)

It doesn't matter. The outcome will be the same. I've always known that I legally owned the slaves here, Tom. But seeing as how you've got my Anna, I saw fit to leave them here. You know, you should really be thanking me instead of brooding over this. As I've told you, I have no interest in the brother or the others. It's just Thandi that I want.

(pauses to study Tom's expression)

But if you insist upon making this a problem, then maybe I should just take the whole lot of them.

TOM

(annoyed)

That won't be necessary. But I see no harm in verifying the documents.

DANIEL

(smug)

No, no, Tom, there's no harm in it at all. However, doing so does imply that you don't entirely trust me.

Tom suffers in angry silence. Suddenly --

-- he shoots across, grabs Daniel, knocks his block off!

Heaving furiously, he hears Daniel, still talking, sitting across him, untouched...

DANIEL (CONT'D)

With the girl gone, maybe now you can focus back on what's important. Like keeping my Anna happy for starters.

Victor notes the temper flaring on Tom's face.

VICTOR

If you'd like, we can ride into town tomorrow morning. To consult with the attorney.

TOM

I would appreciate that.

DANIEL

Well, tomorrow, after you two are done verifying what we already know, I'll be by to collect the girl.

(rises)

Meantime, I think I'll stay in town for the night. There's a poker game that I simply must attend.

He starts towards the door, stops midway.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

(turning to Victor)

What's the name of your attorney? I may as well accompany the two of you, since I'll already be in town.

Victor hesitates.

VICTOR

George Peterson.

DANIEL

Oh yes, George. So, what time shall we meet?

Victor glances at Tom: BITTER, then back to Daniel: SMUG.

VICTOR
 Eleven would be good timing.

Daniel parts with an irritating smirk.

EXT. TOM'S STUDY - THAT NIGHT

Tom leads Thandi in.

A lamp flickers inside.

TOM
 (anxious)
 There is much to discuss...

He closes the door.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - THE NEXT DAY

Another day dawns...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Thandi sits at the table, breakfast hardly touched. She's pale, tired, quiet...

Millie and Myra watch closely. They exchange curious glances, begin to check in on her. Esther stops them.

EXT. PETERSON'S OFFICE - LATER

A carriage PULLS UP. Victor and Tom disembark, finds Daniel's already stationed.

INT. PETERSON'S OFFICE - LATER

At the desk is GEORGE PETERSON, 50's, scanning the documents.

Across is Tom, Victor and Daniel.

Tom is nervous.

Daniel - irritatingly smug, confident, cool...

PETERSON
 Everything is in perfect order.
 Without question, Mr. Stafford is
 the legal and rightful owner of Tom
 Lexington Senior's slaves. The
 slaves and their offspring were
 included in the sale of the
 plantation.

Silence as Tom ponders over a way out.

TOM

But if my father had given one of those slaves to another prior to the sale -

PETERSON

(cutting him off)

Yes. Daniel has explained the situation. If your father turned a slave over to another party without taking the proper legal channels, then those said slaves would rightfully be owned by Mr. Stafford.

DANIEL

(smirking)

And if I were a betting man, and I am, I'd bet that my dear friend did no such thing. He wasn't himself for some time.

He brushes a speck of lint from his expensive suit.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

In fact, he was a total mess towards the end.

Tom glowers at him, seething.

Victor watches closely, expecting an explosion.

VICTOR

Then it appears that you must inquire with your aunt's lawyers.

Beat.

TOM

Yes. I will leave for my aunt's tomorrow.

DANIEL

(rising)

Well, don't be too long. I am very anxious to collect what's due to me.

He conveniently ignores Tom's ICY GLARE, leaves.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - LATER

Tom disembarks from his carriage, hurries up the steps.

Esther OPENS the door.

TOM
I need to speak with Thandi.
(hands his coat and hat)
Please, send her to my study.

EXT. TOM'S STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Thandi arrives nimbly, finds the door wide open.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

AT THE DESK

... sits Tom, face buried in his hands, crumbling...

AT THE DOOR

She watches him, concerned.

THANDI
Tom?

He looks up.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(shutting the door)
Esther said that you wished to see
me.

Wanting to hide his worry, he goes to the window.

TOM
(gazing at the gardens)
I'm afraid that I must leave in the
morning. The attorney has advised
me to obtain the contract between
my father and aunt.

THANDI
So, then there *is* a contract.

He turns to give a faint smile.

TOM
Yes, possibly.

His tone states otherwise. She joins him.

THANDI
And if there isn't?

TOM
(faces her)
Well, we mustn't assume the worst.

THANDI

Please, let me go with you. I miss Isaac terribly, and I'd like to attend Madame Lacy's services.

He looks out again. Silent seconds pass.

TOM

You should be ready by dawn.

A crushing moment of relief.

THANDI

I will be ready.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Thandi hurries in, begins packing immediately.

A KNOCK on the door.

ESTHER (O.S.)

Miss Thandi.

THANDI

(still packing)

Come in.

The door opens, Esther pauses to watch her pack.

ESTHER

Master Tom said for me to see to your packing.

Thandi considers the offer and her baggage: a SADDLEBAG.

THANDI

Thank you, but I don't need any help.

ESTHER

Don't you worry, Miss Thandi. I knows everything gonna be alright.

THANDI

If I have to, I'll run. I couldn't imagine a more horrible thing than having that man as a master.

ESTHER

(gives a stricken look)

Now, don't you go talking like that! You'd be hunted if you run away!

(turning to leave)

If there's a contract, you best believe Master Tom gonna find it.

THANDI
But what if there isn't?

ESTHER
If there isn't, I'm sure Master Tom
will figure something out.

Esther exits, leaving Thandi to herself.

INT. HALL - DAWN

Thandi appears with her bags. She quietly ventures to --

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

-- where Tom waits. He smiles at her, takes her bags.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

A carriage loaded with Tom's bags wait.

As they get in, Esther comes with a LARGE BASKET of food.

ESTHER
(handing it to Thandi)
This should get you through.

The carriage begins to roll.

INT. CARRIAGE (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

They sit across each other. A long SILENCE, broken by GALLOPS and the coachman's occasional commands.

Thandi notes Tom looking lost and staring out the window.

THANDI
Are you okay, Tom?

TOM
I'm fine.

THANDI
Are you really?

TOM
I will be, when this is all behind
us.

It comforts her for a while.

THANDI
Tom?

TOM

Yes?

THANDI

If the worse should happen, promise me that you won't let him take me. I could remain home with Isaac and never return to the plantation again.

He rises, sits next to her, takes her hand.

TOM

I know that all of this is terribly hard, but please try not to worry. You have my promise that I'll do everything possible to keep you from him... No matter what I must do.

It calms her down.

TOM (CONT'D)

(pulling her to his lap)
Get some sleep.

She rests her head on his lap, drifts off to sleep.

He marvels as the rising sun blankets her, making her look beautiful, peaceful and angelic.

He reaches out to sweep the hair off her face, hesitates when his dark secret haunts him.

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'm truly sorry, Thandi, I wish I'd been there for you as I wanted. How alone and helpless you might have felt, how afraid.

He tucks the hair off her face.

TOM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But I promise, no matter what happens, no matter the cost, I will protect you.

EXT. CHURCH, FAIRVIEW - THE NEXT DAY

A carriage pulls up. Tom, Thandi and Isaac alight.

They move to the gates, where several SLAVES stand. There's immense sadness and silence in the air.

Tom takes Thandi and Isaac --

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

-- along the alley to the front row, earning offensive glares on their way.

INT. MADAME LACY'S MANSION, SITTING ROOM - DAY

.. Is crowded with Lacy's circle.

Ahead in the center is ATTORNEY DAVENPORT.

Tom waits with Thandi and Issac.

Two of Lacy's friends, LADY TOLBERT and MADAME RIGBY, mumble, casting glances at the Borans every now and then.

DAVENPORT
(clearing his throat)
Well, it appears that everyone is here.

The room falls silent.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
To my beloved nephew, Thomas Lexington Jr., I, Lacetta Marie Lexington, hereby leave my plantation, Fairview, and all of its furnishings, one hundred and thirty-two acres of land, sixty-four slaves and twenty thousand dollars. To my dear friend, Mrs. Annette T. Tolbert, I leave my prized silver flatware, china and crystal. To my dear friend, Mrs. Diane Rigby, I leave my dresses and pearl broach.

The two women stir, looking pleased.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
To my beloved church, North Creek Presbyterian, I hereby leave one thousand dollars to the church's benevolence fund. And to Thandi Boran --

Thandi stiffens as several eyes fall upon her.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
-- I leave my mother's ring, and I do, hereby upon my death, give her, her freedom, thus making her a free slave.
(MORE)

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 And to Isaac Boran, I leave two
 hundred dollars - his mother's
 savings - and I do, hereby upon my
 death, give him his freedom, thus
 making him a free slave.

Thandi glances at Isaac, smiling.

Tom, however, remains glum.

Davenport reads on.

Thandi studies Tom, his expression is unreadable.

When the reading wraps up, Tom goes to Davenport. They share
 hushed words and exit.

ISAAC
 Can you believe this, sister?

They hug each other, tearing up.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
 (pulling back)
 I've gotta tell Sarah!

He bolts for the door.

The two women walk past Thandi, muttering something.

The SNORT of horses distracts her. She goes to the --

WINDOW

Tom and Davenport stands by the carriage. They discuss
 something, shake hands. Davenport boards the carriage,
 departs.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Tom walks up the stairs.

THANDI
 (going down the stairs)
 I was just coming to find you.

He's still troubled. Her smile drops.

THANDI (CONT'D)
 Is there something wrong?

TOM
 I'm afraid so. I need to find Isaac.
 You should meet us in the sitting
 room.

INT. THE SITTING ROOM - LATER

A troubled SILENCE as Thandi and Isaac wait for Tom's answer.

ISAAC
What is it, Tom?

TOM
I spoke with Davenport. He said that he was never made aware of a contract between my father and aunt. It appears that there was no contract.

Thandi stares hard, confused, saddened...

THANDI
But we have our freedom now, Tom.

TOM
He explained that if there isn't a contract or written agreement to prove legal ownership of you two and your mother, then the will can be contested.

They fight tears as realization sinks in.

Tom grows uncomfortable...

TOM (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry. I intend to have a talk with Daniel. Somehow, someday, I'll fix this.

ISAAC
You bare no fault in this, Tom.

He places a hand on Tom's shoulder, leaves.

Tom looks at Thandi, finds her in tears.

TOM
Please, don't cry.
(hugging her)
I made you a promise and I fully intend to keep it.

He holds on for a moment longer, parts with a kiss to her forehead.

TOM (CONT'D)
I'll be leaving the day after tomorrow, and I want you to remain here with Isaac.

She nods.

TOM (CONT'D)
I'll be back as soon as I've cleared
the air with Stafford. There's much
business here that I must attend to.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

A carriage pulls up, Tom alights.

SUPERIMPOSE: DAYS LATER

DOORWAY

Anna appears with an angry scowl.

Tom shoulders past without a glance.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Esther shells a bowl of peas.

Tom enters.

ESTHER
Master!
(springs up, wipes up)
I didn't hear your wagon. Are you
hungry? You must be starved!

TOM
(pulling out a chair)
I am indeed. And tired as well.

ESTHER
I'll make you some sandwiches and
tea right away.

She sets the kettle, gets bread, meat and cheese.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Made the bread fresh this morning.

Anna walks in.

ANNA
(to Tom)
I'd like to have a word with you.

Esther pauses to study Anna's expression, resumes her work.

TOM
(ignoring her)
Not now.

ANNA
Where's the girl?

TOM
(facing her)
She's returned home like you wanted.
Maybe now you can be happy.

Their eyes war with each other.

Esther stays aloof, slices the cheese.

ANNA
Hardly. And I can assure you that
my father won't be happy, either.

TOM
(smirking)
She's gone, and yet, you still aren't
satisfied.

Esther sets the sandwiches and tea before him. He nods.

ANNA
Yes, but she isn't very far, now is
she?

TOM
She's at her home, where she should
be. And, in case you haven't noticed,
I've just returned home from my
aunt's funeral. I'm tired, hungry
and mourning. Have a little heart.

He digs into his lunch.

She stands there, spitting daggers, then, storms out.

TOM (CONT'D)
(eating)
Esther, will you have Myra draw me
a hot bath, please?

ESTHER
Yes, sir.

She leaves immediately.

INT. TOM'S ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Tom, still in his day clothing, lies in bed, asleep, until
-

LIGHTNING FLASHES, and a CLAP of THUNDER ensues.

He turns, finds Anna asleep in bed.

He slips out to --

INT. THE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He flutters along the dark corridors.

INT. TOM'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

FIREPLACE

A low flame burns, almost dying, until a LOG drops in.

Tom steps back, lights a lantern. He gets a glass of bourbon, returns to watch the flames grow.

ANNA (O.S.)

Tom?

He turns and sees her in the doorway, leaning onto the frame, looking sultry.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Are you hungry? You slept through dinner.

He stares at her, something stirring within him.

TOM

No... thank you.

ANNA

(shutting the door)

May I have one of those? It's hard to sleep with the thunder.

He hands over his drink, gets another from the cabinet and settles at his desk. Just as he downs it, Anna joins him with the decanter and refills his glass. He downs it again.

ANNA (CONT'D)

(sitting across)

You're drinking a lot more these days.

TOM

(gives a wry look)

No more than usual.

She takes a sip, makes a sour face.

At this, he smiles faintly.

ANNA

I had expected to accompany you to your aunt's funeral. But you left me behind without so much as a goodbye, and took her -

(chokes with emotion)

It's hurtful and embarrassing the way you treat me, Tom.

TOM

Why would I bring you along, knowing the way you feel about Thandi? You and I've been at odds from the moment she arrived.

ANNA

Exactly! She's made nothing but trouble for us, and you treat me like me an enemy, instead of your wife.

TOM

(amused)

You are truly unbelievable.

ANNA

Am I? Can you honestly tell me that you haven't touched her?

TOM

And what good would it do if I did? You will believe what you will, no matter what I say.

He refills his glass, goes to --

THE WINDOW

-- and sips on his drink, watching the sky light up.

ANNA

Then swear on your aunt's grave that you haven't been with her.

She regrets her words immediately.

He keeps his gaze out, smiles wryly.

TOM

I won't play these silly games with you.

ANNA

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have
mentioned your aunt in that way.
(going to him)
It's just that it's been so long
since you've touched me. How can I
not believe something's going on?

He flushes down his drink. The bourbon kicks in, intoxicating him. Unbuttoning his collar, he staggers to his chair, sits.

TOM

(slurring)
Our problems existed long before
Thandi ever came here.

ANNA

Yes, but there was nothing that we
didn't work out some way or another.

She glides around the desk to his side.

ANNA (CONT'D)

(teasing)
Don't you miss me?

Her hand slides up his thigh, gets closer to his crotch.

He blinks.

Beaming, she drops her robes, revealing a thin gown.

Tom is still, petrified... as she sinks from view.

We hear his belt UNBUCKLE, he sits unresisting, then:

Gasping, he clasps her head, stiffening all over.

She rises to straddle and ride him.

Surrendering, he clenches her waist, buries his face onto her shoulder, shudders and explodes.

TOM

Thandi!

She pulls back, glaring dumbstruck, then --

-- SMACK! She SLAPS him across the face.

ANNA

You bastard!

He blinks, not really understanding.

She grabs her robe, STORMS out, SLAMMING the door behind.

INT. BATHROOM - THE NEXT DAY

BASIN

Tom SPLASHES water over his face, straightens up to see --

MIRROR

-- His reflection: Pale. Fearful. Disturbed.

EXT. TOM'S ROOM - LATER

Reeling, he shuffles to the door, waits, before giving a cautious RAP.

TOM

Anna...

(waits, knocks again)

Anna...

From within the room --

ANNA (O.S.)

Leave me alone!

He hangs around for a moment, leaves defeated.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - LATER

Tom boards a waiting carriage.

INT. THE CARRIAGE (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Slumping and disturbed, he stares out the window.

EXT. STAFFORD'S MANSION - LATER

Tom RAPS on the door. It's answered by --

A tall, Negro BUTLER.

EXT. BACKSIDE LAWN, STAFFORD'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Daniel sits at a table, feasting on tea and scones.

The butler brings in Tom.

DANIEL

(looking up from his tea)

Why, Tom, what a great surprise!

Please, have a seat.

The butler stands by for orders.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Would you like a spot of tea?

TOM
No... no, thanks.

DANIEL
(smirking)
Maybe something a little stronger?

TOM
No, no, thanks.

Daniel dismisses the butler with a careless wave.

The butler leaves.

DANIEL
(reaches for the scones)
So, I take it you're here to discuss
our little situation.

TOM
Yes.

Daniel chews on his food, being annoyingly slow...

DANIEL
So, did you find a contract?

TOM
No.

DANIEL
I didn't think you would.

He takes another bite, relishes it at leisure.

Tom glares at him, growing irritated.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
So, then, when will I be able to
collect the girl?

TOM
Well, I'd hoped that we could further
discuss things.

Daniel gives a raised brow.

TOM (CONT'D)
I've returned Thandi to Fairview,
so there will be no more problems
with she and my wife.

DANIEL

(smirking)

You've returned her to a home that
you now undoubtedly own?

TOM

I've inherited my aunt's estate,
which brings me to another possible
remedy to our situation. I'd like
to make you an offer for both Isaac
and Thandi.

Daniel studies him curiously.

DANIEL

And just how much would that be?

TOM

Two thousand.

Daniel sips his tea loudly, delaying things further...

DANIEL

Well, I don't know, Tom. I've quite
been looking forward to having the
girl here. And I've already been more
than fair with letting you keep all
the others -

TOM

(cuts him off)

Five thousand.

He ogles back, impressed.

DANIEL

Well, that's certainly an
impressive offer. But I think I'll
take the day and think it over. I
can come as early as tomorrow with
my answer.

Daniel goes back to eating, leaving Tom to panic.

INT. SEWING ROOM, THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

Tom shuffles in.

Anna glowers up at him from her needlework.

TOM

I understand that you're angry. I
ask that you forgive me. I was drunk
and completely out of my head.

ANNA

If you were out of your head, then
your so-called friend was most
certainly in it.

She drops her work, stomps past him.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON PLANTATIONS - DAY

Tom joins his men, blade and sack in hand. They're pleased
to see him.

BEN

Hi there, Boss! We been missing ya
out here.

TOM

I brought you these.

He pulls out a pair of gloves, hands it to Ben.

BEN

(showing his hands)

Aww, Boss, you know me. I works
better without 'em.

Tom studies --

BEN'S HANDS

... covered in cuts, callouses and open blisters.

TOM

I insist that you wear them. We can't
have blood on our cotton. Now can
we?

EXT. THE LEXINGTON PLANTATIONS - LATER

Tom and his men lunch under a tree, away from the blaring sun.
A hot gale grazes them.

Ben joins Tom, taking the tree stump next to him.

BEN

Can you believe it? We're almost
done.

Tom looks up from his bowl at the harvested fields, when --

IN THE DISTANCE

A carriage enters the plantation trail.

BACK TO TOM

He's pale. Ben eyes the wagon, then, Tom.

BEN (CONT'D)
You need any help with anything,
Boss?

TOM
(eyes on the carriage)
No, Big Ben. Nothing short of God
himself can help me right now.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - IN MOMENTS

The carriage pulls up. Tom quickly goes to it. He opens the door.

INSIDE

... is Daniel and across him, Victor.

DANIEL
(grabbing his cane)
I hope we're in time for lunch.

VICTOR
Hello Tom.

His expression says it all - they know.

TOM
(a nervous smile)
Victor.
(helping Daniel down)
I'm sure there's plenty of food left
over --

DANIEL
(pulling back, disgusted)
My! What in God's name!

His white day gloves are now covered in dirt.

Tom checks out his own hands, finds dirt on them.

TOM
I'm sorry. I've been working in the
fields all morning.

DANIEL
(pulling off his gloves)
I'll never understand why you go out
into the fields at all! You have
niggers here, just for that purpose.

Tom follows him up the stairs.

INT. LIVING ROOM, THE LEXINGTON MANSION - CONTINUOUS

Esther is at the door, she takes their hats and jackets.

TOM
Esther, please prepare some lunch
for our guests.

ESTHER
Yes, Sir. Would you like something
as well?

TOM
(sheepish)
No, thank you.

Anna bustles in, right into Daniel's open arms.

ANNA
Papa!

DANIEL
(hugs her)
Pumpkin!

She pulls back, gazes at him with big, doe eyes.

ANNA
May I have a word with you, Papa.
Alone?

DANIEL
(curious)
But, of course.
(to Victor and Tom)
I'll see you two in the dining room
shortly.

VICTOR
Certainly.
(to Anna)
Good afternoon, Mrs. Lexington.

ANNA
Please forgive my manners. Good
morning, Mr. Richmond.

She glances at Tom, relishes the panic on his face, then, leads Daniel down the hall.

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tom sits at the head of the table.

VICTOR
I hope you don't mind my coming.
Daniel insisted that I come along.

TOM
No, of course, not.

He quickly slips into worry, when --

ESTHER (O.S.)
Master? Should I fetch Master
Stafford?

TOM
No. I imagine he'll be joining us
in a moment.

She nods in acknowledgement, leaves, closing the door.

VICTOR
So how have you been holding up?

TOM
(a fake smile)
I've been fine.

Victor studies Tom for long.

VICTOR
I had a talk with Daniel.
(waits for his reaction)
That was a considerable offer you
made. I think he'll very likely take
you up on it.

TOM
(brightening up)
Has he said something? Something to
make you think he will?

VICTOR
Well, no. But I could tell that he
was seriously considering it. And
I did urge him to do so, as well.

TOM
(leaning back, relieved)
Thank you.

The door BURSTS open and --

-- Daniel STORMS in, clearly aware of Tom's secret.

He glares at Tom, sits at the opposite end of the table.

The door CREAKS ajar, Esther pokes her head in.

ESTHER
Should I serve now, Master?

DANIEL
(glowering at Tom)
I doubt I'll have much now. I seem
to have lost my appetite.

Tom deflates, all hope dissipating.

An uncomfortable silence as Daniel's eyes war with Tom's.

Victor studies them.

VICTOR
(jestingly)
Well, I, for one, could eat a horse
right now.

DANIEL
(smiling dryly)
Well, I guess we should get to the
point of my being here.

Tom grows tense.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
As you know, my main concern is my
daughter and her happiness.

He pauses as Esther enters with soup bowls and sandwiches.

Myra follows with lemonade.

They quickly set the table. When they finally clear out --

DANIEL (CONT'D)
As I was saying, my daughter's
happiness is what's most important
to me.
(glares at Tom)
As it should be to you. After much
consideration, as generous as it is,
I've decided to reject your offer.

Tom's expression darkens.

TOM
I can assure you that your daughter's
happiness is not at risk.

DANIEL
Can you?

TOM

I can understand your concern, but
there's nothing for Anna to fear
other than her own active
imagination.

A long SILENCE, except for Victor STIRRING his soup.

DANIEL

So, was it my daughter's imagination
when you cried out the name of your
nigger friend?

Shame crushes Tom.

TOM

As I tried explaining to Anna, I'd
had far too much to drink-

Daniel throws up a hand, cutting him off.

DANIEL

Please, spare me your pathetic
explanation. As we all know, a drunk
tongue speaks a sober mind.

TOM

You have my word. There will be no
further problems.

DANIEL

Your word? I've no faith in your
words or your promises. You gave your
word to love and honor my daughter,
and yet we're sitting here, now,
having this conversation.

Tom tries to explain, Daniel gives no space.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

The fact that you're willing to go
through such lengths to keep the girl
lets me know all I need to know. It
also lets me know that the girl has
got to have...

(lustfully)

...quite a piece of tail on her.

TOM

(defensive)

I won't permit you to take her.

Sneering, Daniel stirs his soup.

DANIEL

And just what can you do to stop me?
If you don't bring her back
immediately and turn her over, then
I'll simply be forced to bring in
the law.

(blows at his soup)

Either way, I get the girl.

He noisily SIPS his soup.

Tom seethes, pushes his bowl away.

TOM

(dropping his napkin)

Then I guess there's nothing further
for us to discuss.

Victor watches them curiously.

DANIEL

Other than business, I think not.

Smug, Daniel drinks his soup, as if nothing happened.

Tom glowers helplessly, shoots to his feet, storms out.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Can you believe him?

VICTOR

(drinking his soup)

I have an alternate solution to your
troubles.

DANIEL

And just what that might be?

VICTOR

Sell the girl to me.

DANIEL

To you?

VICTOR

Yes. I could use some companionship,
and it would free you of your
problems with Tom.

Daniel SLURPS his soup. He's happy.

DANIEL

Well, this is turning into one hell
of an afternoon. I knew you favored
the girl, but not this much. Save
your money my friend, I promise to
share.

Victor grows serious.

VICTOR
(sipping his soup)
There is something that I haven't
shared with you. Something that I
haven't shared with anyone.

Daniels notes his grave expression. The smile drops.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I am very ill.

DANIEL
(very concerned)
What is it?

VICTOR
Cancer, I'm afraid.

DANIEL
How long have you known?

VICTOR
For almost a year, now.

DANIEL
Is there a cure?

VICTOR
None that have been known to work.
My doctor is currently treating me
with iodine and tonics, and he has
me on a special diet that I refuse
to follow.

DANIEL
(abandoning his soup)
I am sorry to hear this.

VICTOR
Don't look so grim. I'm too stubborn
to die, but I could use a companion
now.

DANIEL
Yes, certainly. Just how much did
you have in mind?

VICTOR
Five thousand. The same as Tom's.

DANIEL
But his offer was for both the girl
and her brother. You'd only need to
pay half as much.

VICTOR

Yes, but I think I'd like the brother as well. I could use a good hand when it comes time to clear the fields surrounding Hollis Creek.

DANIEL

So what are your plans for the land? Do you still intend to lease it?

VICTOR

Yes, but, because of my illness, I plan to lease the land annually.

Daniel stirs his soup, thinking something.

DANIEL

I think that we could be of help to each other. I'd like to lease that land myself. Lease it to me at a fair price, and I'll be more than happy to accept your offer for the girl and her brother.

VICTOR

(smiling ruefully)
You have a deal.

INT. TOM'S ROOM - MEANWHILE

ON THE BED

... sits several bags, stuffed with men's clothes.

Tom tears open the closet, blindly gathers some shirts.

A KNOCK on the door.

TOM

Who's there?

VICTOR (O.S.)

It's me, Victor.

He hesitates, drops the shirts, quickly opens the door and returns to pack.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(moving in)

May I have a word with you?

Victor pauses, eyeing the bag and clothes strewn about.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Are you leaving?

TOM
Yes, to Fairview.

He crams his shirts into a bag.

VICTOR
We need to talk.

TOM
(uninterested)
What is it?

VICTOR
I've had a talk with Daniel. I've asked him to allow me to purchase the girl.

Tom looks up from his packing, surprised.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
He has agreed to sell Thandi to me, and her brother as well, for the price that you offered.

He lets the new turn of events sink in.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I hope that you aren't upset with me, but I can assure you that it's the only way to stop Daniel from taking Thandi. Running away is certainly not an option.
(eyeing the bags)
I still intend to sell you the Old Mill, and, as for Thandi's brother, I have no intentions on taking him, I only did it as favor to you. After the deal is done, I'll have my lawyer draw up the necessary papers for change of ownership.

TOM
(sarcastic)
How good of you. I'll see to it that you're paid at the end.

VICTOR
I understand your anger, but I do hope that you'll get past it and see that this is truly for the best. This is the only reasonable option there is.

TOM
Reasonable for who?

VICTOR

For Thandi. I can give her a good life, Tom. A life worth having. Would you rather see her with a man such as Daniel?

Tom considers his suggestion.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You'd be welcome to visit anytime you like.

TOM

How long before you take her?

VICTOR

I'm not sure when Daniel and I will close the deal, but I imagine that it will be very soon. Perhaps, in two weeks. I can send for her then.

TOM

Very well, then.

EXT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - DAY

An elegant BLACK CARRIAGE waits. On its door, embossed in gold are the initials 'V.R.'

SUPERIMPOSE: DAYS LATER

Tom and HENRY, the coachman, loads her luggage.

THE COURTYARD

Esther and Isaac see Thandi off.

ESTHER

(hugging her)

Master Tom says you won't be far away. An hour's ride at best, so we'll be able to see you often.

ISAAC

If it's alright with Mr. Richmond, I'll come to visit you as soon as I'm freed.

THANDI

(pulling back)

Promise?

ISAAC

I promise.

He brushes off her tears, pulls her into his arms.

Thandi spots Tom, approaching them ruefully. She follows his gaze to --

AN UPSTAIRS WINDOW

-- where Anna looks down on them, sneering.

TOM (O.S.)

I will be visiting you very soon.

She blinks back tears, smiling weakly.

The urge to comfort her, hug her, is bad, he resists.

ESTHER (O.S.)

Wait!

She thrusts a BASKET of biscuits and strawberry preserves into Thandi's hands. She begins to refuse.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

You ain't barely ate a bite in days!

Henry offers to assist Thandi onto the carriage. Tom takes over instead.

ISAAC

You be good, you hear? And remember,
I'll see you soon.

INT. VICTOR'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Thandi gets in, pausing to take a last glance at everyone and Tom. They hold their gaze for long, unwilling to part.

He closes the door. The carriage MOVES.

She sticks her face to --

THE WINDOW

-- breaking... peering at their diminishing figures...

Out of sight, she sinks back, quiet sobs racking her body.

EXT. VICTOR'S ESTATE - DAY

The carriage pulls past --

A LAKE

... Huge, enchanting and overhung by weeping green willows.
 ... and stops before a large, elegant mansion.

INT. VICTOR'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Thandi is face down on the seat, asleep. As if from a dream,
 a voice calls out.

HENRY (O.S.)
 Madame... Madame!

Stirring, her eyes flutter open. Sees --

HENRY

-- standing at the door, hand held out.

She sits up with a start, straightens her dress.

THANDI
 Forgive me.

Taking his hand, she steps down to --

THE WALKWAY

She gazes around, stunned by the sights surrounding her.

VICTOR (O.S.)
 Well, here you are. I've been looking
 quite forward to your arrival.

He comes to a stop before her, takes a moment to study her
 reddened eyes and sullen face.

She returns a vicious glare.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
 Come on, I'll show you to your room.
 Henry will see to your bags.

He reaches for her hand.

Reluctantly, she takes it, earning a victorious smirk.

INT. VICTOR'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

He guides her through a grand --

FOYER

Everything spells class: Marbled floors. High ivory walls trimmed in gold. A winding marble staircase.

She slows down to take a good look.

Victor enjoys her reaction.

VICTOR

After you've settled in, I can show
you around. Maybe after dinner.

She realizes that she's gaping, quickly shuts her mouth.

He leads her up --

THE STAIRS

And down a long wall-papered --

HALLWAY

He stops at a door on the left, goes in.

She follows.

INT. THE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Even classier and stunning. She takes a good look.

THE WALLS

Bright ivory with gold molding.

Centering the west is a large, marble mantelpiece.

THE WINDOWS

Rich gold floor-length drapes in white piping.

THE BALCONY

Glass doubled doors. Sunlight streams through.

THE ROOM

A large four poster bed on the opposite end. A white canopy encircles it.

VICTOR (O.S.)

I took the liberty of having a bath
drawn for you. Thank you, Corin.

Thandi notices a young maid, CORIN, staring at her.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
This here is Corin.

CORIN
(curtsies)
Good afternoon, Madame.

THANDI
It's very nice to meet you.

VICTOR
If there's anything you need,
please, feel free to call on Corin.
She'll be your personal servant.

His last words trouble her, earning a long stare.

THANDI
I don't imagine I'll need much once
you've shown me around.

VICTOR
The private bath is just beyond that
door. And also, I've taken the
liberty to buy you a few garments.
I only hope that I guessed correctly
at your measurements.

He strides across to a double door closet, opens to reveal
a long row of dresses hanging neatly on wooden racks.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I particularly like this.
(pulling out a blue silk
dress)
I'll buy you shoes after you've been
fitted, but, for tonight, we must
manage.

She gives him a raised brow.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Dinner is served promptly at eight.
I'd like it if you wore this dress
tonight.

Draping the dress over a chair, he exits with Corin.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - EVENING

SERIES OF SHOTS

The mantelpiece clock, 06:15

She compares Victor's pick for the evening with the rest. It's the type highborn ladies wear.

She sinks into a steaming tub.

The mantelpiece clock, 07:30

MIRROR

She dries her hair.

Quickly dresses.

Fashions her hair into a bun.

Spins, does a quick check. The dress is remarkable, fits like a glove. Her cleavage reflects back, overexposed and plump. Her hand slides down, realizing why he picked it.

INT. THE FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

She peeks out, unsure of where to go. She crosses the floor, walks down the long --

HALLWAY

-- with several doors on either side.

On the left, from behind double doors, VOICES float out. She almost knocks, when the door is answered by Corin.

CORIN
(stepping aside)
I was just coming to announce dinner,
Madame.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Victor sits at an elaborate, luxurious table.

Corin guides Thandi to her chair.

VICTOR
(studying her)
You look amazingly stunning.

She checks him out. He's in a dapper brown suit... and handsome. She takes interest on a statue at the far corner.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(following her gaze)
That is Hygieia, the Greek goddess
of health.

She sticks on to it for a moment longer, turns back.

He observes her closely, smirking.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Do I make you nervous?

THANDI
(looking up at him)
Whatever do you mean, Sir?

VICTOR
I mean, that it seems you have a hard time looking at me. So, I imagine that I either make you nervous, or that I'm too hideous to look upon. And again, please call me Victor. Sir is far too formal between us now, don't you think?

TWO FEMALE SERVANTS enter with roasted quail, orange sauce, peppered potatoes, carrots and shallots.

Another enters with wine and bread.

When they leave ---

VICTOR (CONT'D)
So?

THANDI
No, I am not nervous.

VICTOR
So, then I am hideous.

A wee smile on her face.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You don't like me, do you, Thandi?

THANDI
I don't think it matters.

VICTOR
It matters to me. I don't want to release you from the pain and judgment you've suffered with the Lexington's only for you to be unhappy with a brute like me. So, tell me, why don't you like me? I mean, other than the fact that Daniel and I are partners.

She keeps her eyes down.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

If you give me a chance, I think you'll find that I'm quite opposite of my associate.

THANDI

(looks up)

You mean, your friend.

VICTOR

Well, I wouldn't exactly call Daniel my friend. We are more so business partners.

She prods her food, trying to eat.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You really shouldn't feel so down trodden about what's happened. It's fate that has brought you here.

THANDI

(coldly)

Fate? Forgive me, but I don't think fate has had anything to with my being here.

VICTOR

You make it sound as though I'm kidnapping you.

THANDI

Aren't you?

He laughs flirtatiously.

Her face darkens.

VICTOR

I'd like to think that what I've done is free you.

She ceases to mull her food.

THANDI

And just how have you freed me? As I was told, you purchased me at a hefty price. That makes me your property. Your slave.

VICTOR

What that makes you is lady of this manor. And what I freed you from was yourself. Tom is a fine, admirable fellow, Thandi, but he's also married.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

You two can deny it all you want,
but it's clear you have feelings for
each other.

I don't even doubt that he loves you,
but what happiness could he ever give
you? Why waste your precious youth,
pursuing what you can truly never
have?

He gives her a beat.

She gives him silence and resumes poking her food.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

This isn't exactly the worst place
to be. Especially, when you consider
your one other option.

She regrets her outburst, continues in a composed manner.

THANDI

Forgive me, I'm being ungracious.
I am, in fact, grateful for what you
have done.

VICTOR

Yes, but you aren't happy. I do hope
to change that.

THANDI

What are your expectations of me?

VICTOR

I expect you stop sulking,
eventually. And to embrace this new
life that you have.

(pauses)

And to, perhaps, someday embrace me
in your heart as you now do another.

Her eyes shoot up, protesting!

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Tell you what, I'll make you a deal.
Stay here a year with me. If you're
still not happy here by then, you
can leave. With your freedom.

She brightens up, hopeful.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

There is, however, one condition.
I'd expect you to act as my
companion, and not my enemy. I don't
expect that you'll fall in love with
me, but I do expect to have an
intimate relationship between us.

She turns pale.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
However, if you do happen to fall
in love with me and stay, that would
make me very happy.

She gives it a thought.

THANDI
You give me your word you'll let me
go?

VICTOR
Of course. I always honor my
promises.

INT. VICTOR'S MANSION - LATER

KITCHEN

Victor introduces Thandi to the staff - Five MAIDS, one BUTLER,
two DRIVERS and a GARDENER.

She goes on to explore the --

LEISURE ROOM

... set with a PIANO, a HARP, a TABLE with PLAYING CARDS, an
IVORY CHESS SET, expensive SCULPTURES, FURNISHINGS and
PAINTINGS.

VICTOR'S STUDY

She goes to a massive PORTRAIT.

IN THE PORTRAIT

.. Is ELENA, a beautiful, aristocratic brown WOMAN in a gold
gown. Her caramel eyes stare back, captivating Thandi.

From over her shoulder:

VICTOR (O.S.)
My wife, Elena.

It sinks in, stunning her.

THANDI
But... she is Negro.

VICTOR
Does that shock you?

THANDI

Yes. But how can that be?

VICTOR

(gazes into Elena's eyes)

Although, there could be no legal marriage between us, Elena and I had our own unofficial ceremony. It was very private. No family or friends. Just our staff.

(reflecting)

For all points and purposes, our marriage was as real as any. Even better.

She looks at him, as if for the very first time, then, turns back to the portrait, intrigued by how much she resembles Haiti.

THANDI

She is very beautiful.

VICTOR

Yes.

THANDI

(hesitant)

What happened to her? Is she alive?

He turns grim, telling her what she needs to know.

THANDI (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. That was nosy of me.

VICTOR

It's not. She died of smallpox fifteen years ago.

A comfortable silence falls between them.

THANDI

(searching his eyes)

Do I somehow remind you of her?

He ponders over it.

VICTOR

Yes, in a way, I suppose. The two of you share the same stubborn temperament.

THANDI

I can only imagine the scrutiny and scandal you two must have endured.

VICTOR

When you obtain enough wealth and power, men tend to turn a blind eye to things they otherwise wouldn't.

(adoring Elena)

But even so, nothing and no one could have prevented me from loving her.

Admiration grows, replacing the contempt she has for him.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Perhaps tomorrow I can show you the gardens. I imagine that you could use some rest tonight.

THANDI

Yes... yes, I could.

He offers his arm.

She hesitates before taking it.

He leads her out.

EXT. THANDI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They pause at the door. His intense gaze locks with hers.

VICTOR

You have the most incredible green eyes.

The temptation to kiss her is irresistible, but --

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Well, good night.

She's unable to tear away from his eyes.

THANDI

Good night, then.

VICTOR

Yes, good night.

He hangs around till she retreats and shuts the door.

He returns to his chambers at a snail's pace, a smile growing all the while.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Thandi lies in bed, asleep and soaking up the sun.

A KNOCK on the door.

EXT. THANDI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Corin waits at the door.

It opens and Thandi appears, looking groggy.

CORIN
Morning Madame.

THANDI
Good morning, Corin.

CORIN
Did you sleep well, Missus?

She turns to the clock - 10:40

THANDI
(letting her in)
Yes, very much so.

CORIN
Master Richmond instructed me not
to wake you. Is there anything I can
do for you?

She's touched at his thoughtfulness.

THANDI
No, you needn't make a fuss over me,
Corin. I'm quite used to doing for
myself.

CORIN
(shoots a curious look)
Yes Madame, but Master Richmond has
instructed me to see you as lady of
the manor.

THANDI
I'm no lady. I'm just a slave like
you, Corin.

CORIN
Forgive me, Madame, but I'm not a
slave.

Beat.

THANDI
What do you mean? You are free?

CORIN
We all are.

She's blown away.

THANDI

Were you freed by Victor?

CORIN

Yes, Madame. Master Richmond has given us all our papers. We work for pay, and our food and lodging is free. Master Richmond is a very gracious man.

It sinks in, instilling in her a new-found confidence.

THANDI

Thank you, Corin. But there's nothing I need. Perhaps you could draw my bath each day, and keep fresh water for the basin. That would be enough.

CORIN

Yes, Madame. When you're ready, Master Richmond would like you to join him for breakfast.

THANDI

Tell him I shall be there straightaway.

Corin leaves.

Thandi ponders over Victor. There's more to him than meets the eye.

INT. THE DINING ROOM - MUCH LATER

Thandi enters.

At the head of the table is Victor, reading his daily.

VICTOR

(looking up)

There you are. I wasn't sure if I should instruct the staff to prepare lunch.

THANDI

Forgive me. I haven't gotten much sleep as of late.

The SERVANTS hurry in with their breakfast.

VICTOR

(casts his paper aside)

You look stunning.

THANDI

(smiling)

Thank you.

(checking him out)

You look very handsome yourself.

VICTOR

I was thinking that perhaps today
we could do some shopping. Maybe buy
you a few more dresses and shoes.

She stares in disbelief.

THANDI

It'd be a waste of your time. No store
is going to cater to a mulatto.

VICTOR

Oh, they'll cater to you just fine.
I know the owners personally.
Besides, they'll probably mistake
you for a white woman.

She isn't that certain.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Trust me, you'll be just fine.

MONTAGE - THANDI'S OUTING WITH VICTOR

EXT. THE GARDENS - MORNING

Victor watches over as Thandi caresses a flower, one amongst
several acres. She's no longer gloomy.

AFTERNOON

They chat over lunch with a marvelous FOUNTAIN in the backdrop.
She studies him in a new light.

EXT. TOWN - LATER

Victor's carriage pulls up before an expensive --

BOUTIQUE STORE

He steps out from the carriage, helps Thandi down.

Three SNOOTY WHITE WOMEN watch them, whispering...

Ignoring them, he flaunts her all the way to ---

INT. BOUTIQUE STORE - CONTINUOUS

They're welcomed graciously and taken to their collection.

Victor selects dress after the other, holding it over her, comparing, much of it to her liking.

The owners pass a comment, making Victor fly high.

Thandi observes him dreamily.

He catches her staring, smiling... He's never seen it before. He smiles back. Something has shifted between them.

INT. VICTOR'S CARRIAGE - LATER

Thandi almost boards, stops.

Her seat is packed with their purchase.

Victor, anxious, waits to see if she'll sit next to him.

She does. Unwillingly.

He beams, triumphant.

The carriage MOVES.

THANDI

Thank you.

VICTOR

It was my pleasure.

She gazes out. Stores, cafes, restaurants, scroll past.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Are you hungry?

THANDI

A little.

He TAPS his SILVER CANE. The carriage stops.

HENRY (O.S.)

Yes, sir?

VICTOR

Take us to the Watercrest.

The carriage MOVES again.

EXT. TOWN - MOMENTS LATER

Victor's carriage appears on the horizon. It slows down.

INT. VICTOR'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Thandi peers out at ---

--- A strip of shops and taverns. One stands out. A sign on its awning reads: 'THE WATERCREST RESTAURANT'.

Remembering something, he goes for the bags.

VICTOR
Wait. Wear these.

He gives her the new pair of shoes.

She admires his pick: a peach suede matching her peach colored dress. She wears it.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Perfect.

INT. THE WATERCREST - CONTINUOUS

They stroll in.

The MAITRE D, elite, polished formals, meets them at the door. He ushers them to a table in the center.

The decor is attractive. But she doesn't admire it. There are several eyes on her, watching every move. Wanting to hide, she picks up the menu, browses it.

Victor notices her fidgeting.

VICTOR
(lays a napkin on his lap)
So, what would you like?

THANDI
I think I'll have the broiler chicken.

VICTOR
Good selection. I think I will have the salmon myself.

THANDI
But you haven't even looked at your menu.

A waiter stands by to take their orders.

WAITER
(bowing)
Good evening, Mr. Richmond.

Thandi is intrigued. Surely, he isn't a new face.

WAITER (CONT'D)
And for dessert, Sir?

VICTOR
(to Thandi)
Do you like chocolate mousse?

THANDI
(sarcastic)
I can't say that I've ever had it.

He's impressed with her comeback. Grins.

The waiter takes their order and leaves.

VICTOR
So, tell me, what are some of the things you like to do?

THANDI
(thinking)
Sewing. I picked up the hobby from my mother.

VICTOR
And? Surely there must be more.

THANDI
I adore music.

VICTOR
Ah! Now there's a hobby. What instrument do you play?

THANDI
None. I like listening to it. My former mistress played the piano often.

VICTOR
Perhaps-

The waiter returns with glasses and wine. After he leaves --

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Perhaps, I can play something for you tonight.

She tries to pay attention. It's hard.

OVER HIS SHOULDER

From a table in the corner, ogles a dark-haired woman, MADAME BUCKLEY. She's not the only one watching them.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You seem preoccupied.

THANDI
(quietly)
Forgive me. But people are staring.

He follows her gaze.

MR. & MRS. GILES MORTON and MR. ARCHER from the press wave at them.

Victor returns a courteous nod, turns back to her.

VICTOR
It's because you're the most
beautiful woman in the room.

She still isn't paying attention.

Victor turns around. This time, it's Madame Buckley staring at them. She musters a sheepish smile and looks away.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(turning back to Thandi)
Madame Buckley.
(reaching for his glass)
She's an old friend.

THANDI
An old, *intimate* friend?

Jealous? He's amused. And glad.

VICTOR
That was quite some time ago.

She struggles to meet his stare, avoids it.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You should drink your wine. It'll
help you relax.

THANDI
I don't see how you can be so at ease.
If one of these white folks stare
at me long enough, we will both be
thrown on out by the ears or worse.

VICTOR
(laughing)
I'm sure that won't happen.

THANDI
And just how can you be certain of
that?

VICTOR

Because...

(leaning back)

... The owner would not allow that to happen.

THANDI

Don't be so certain of yourself.

VICTOR

(confident)

But I can be. The Water Crest is my establishment.

He concludes with a sip of his wine and a wink of his eye.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - MUCH LATER

Thandi, Corin and SOPHIE stagger in with shopping bags.

THANDI

Thank you.

CORIN

Would you like for us to put these away now, Madame?

THANDI

Yes, please.

She pulls out that elegant silk gown that had her thrilled, holds it up to herself.

CORIN (O.S.)

Should I hang that in the closet, Madame? The armoire is full.

THANDI

(passing it to Corin)

Yes, thank you.

CORIN

Master Richmond has informed us that you two have eaten, but if you become hungry again, there's dinner ready.

THANDI

Oh no. I'm quite stuffed. I couldn't imagine eating another bite tonight.

CORIN

Would you like a bath drawn now?

THANDI

No, thank you. I'll rest a bit.

She glances at the clock: Seven-thirty.

The maids leave.

Thandi slips off her shoes, flumps onto the bed.

INT. CORRIDOR - LATER

A beautiful MELODY floats all the way to --

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- And stirs her awake from her sleep.

She sits up, listening. It's a piano. She slips on her shoes and follows the MUSIC to --

THE HALLWAY

It gets louder as it leads her to --

INT. THE MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sitting at a grand PIANO is Victor, playing.

She leans onto the door frame, admiring.

Noticing her, he stops.

VICTOR
Well, there you are.

Out of habit, she gives a small curtsy, then, enters.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(nodding in disapproval)
You really must stop doing that.

THANDI
(stops at the piano)
That was quite lovely. Please go on.

Encouraged, he resumes.

Thandi is entranced. She swallows a lump. Tears build in her eyes.

The MELODY is dark, beautiful, haunting. It boldly surges at places, then, sweetly fades away.

THANDI (CONT'D)
What were you playing?

VICTOR
A piece I wrote. I never gave it a
title. But perhaps, I should.

THANDI
(astonished)
You... wrote that?

VICTOR
(grinning)
Is that so surprising?

THANDI
Did you write it for Elena?

VICTOR
(growing solemn)
Yes, shortly after her death. Those
were hard times. Music helped me make
it through.

A short silence as he gazes into her eyes. Then, patting the
empty space next to him:

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Come. Come sit.

She doesn't want to. She obliges, however, very cautiously.

He moves closer. Their arms brush. It fires a jolt.

A whiff of his cologne hits her making her eyes flutter.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Would you like to learn a simple
scale?

THANDI
No, I'm quite impossible to teach.

VICTOR
Don't be silly. Anyone can learn.

He positions his hands on the keys.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Put your hands over mine.

Hesitating, nervous, she places her hands --

THE KEYBOARD

-- atop his.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(sliding closer to her)
Relax your fingers.

She stiffens at his touch.

He captures her reaction.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Relax. Don't press down. Just watch
the keys that I press.

His fingers ballet over the keys - slowly at first, then faster,
until it creates a MELODY.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Now, you try.

She copies him, quite flawlessly.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
That's it. Don't stop.

He joins in on the right. Combined, a sweet MELODY ensues.
Slowly, he withdraws, allowing her to take it from there.
Confident, she picks up the pace as Victor watches in awe.
When she wraps up perfectly ---

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(applauding)
And you said you couldn't learn!

She's gleeful.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I could teach you to play, if you
like.

THANDI
Yes, I'd like.

He pauses to capture the thrill in her eyes.

Conscious, she looks away.

VICTOR
So, have I proven myself to be the
monster that you imagined?

THANDI
No... not yet. But what I don't
understand is...

He waits, curiosity building.

VICTOR
What you don't understand is, what?

THANDI

... Why a man like you would want
a woman like me as a companion.

VICTOR

(understanding)
A woman like you.

THANDI

Yes, a Negro. A slave. Why on earth
would you want a slave, when you
could have someone far better suited
for you. Someone in the likes of
Madame Buckley.

VICTOR

(amused)
Do you mean someone *white*?

THANDI

Yes.

VICTOR

(rises, takes her hand)
Come with me.

He leads her out to --

INT. VICTOR'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She pauses to study the grandeur. Everything about it is like
him: Masculine. Elite. Distinguished. Dignified.

He takes a picture from the mantel, hands it to her.

VICTOR

These are my parents.

THANDI

(studying the picture)
You strongly resemble your father.
And your mother is quite lovely. Are
they still in London?

VICTOR

No, they both died years ago.

THANDI

(returns it)
I'm so sorry.

He flips it, removes the backing and pulls out a small photograph
from the frame.

VICTOR

This is my true mother.

Puzzled, she takes it.

IN THE PHOTOGRAPH

... is LILY, a gorgeous teenage girl with long dark hair, sad brown eyes...

He studies her reaction.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

That's Lily. A mulatto slave. She was owned by my father. She's my real mother.

THANDI

(shocked)

Your mother?

VICTOR

Yes. Before my father died, he confessed a secret to me. A secret that he'd promised my mother he'd never share with me or another.

MONTAGE:

1) INT. ROOM - DAY

MRS. RICHMOND sits hunched on a chair. She leans onto her husband's shoulder, crying quietly.

VICTOR (V.O.)

According to my father, my mother was unable to bare children. She desperately wanted a child and he himself, an heir. My mother wanted me so badly. So, she devised a plan that would give them the child they longed for.

2) I/E. AUCTION HOUSE - DAY

Victor's parents watch the action, their hopes on the brink of dying.

VICTOR (V.O.)

They moved to the states for a female slave. For a year, they attended endless auctions.

Mrs. Richmond exchanges an anticipatory glance with her husband. In the background, LILY (13), waits.

VICTOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It was my mother who chose Lily. She
was young. Fertile. The lightest
skinned mulatto girl they'd ever
seen.

3) INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lily, meek, lies in bed, horrified...

Victor's father, hovers over, caressing her in places.

A lamp burns on the night table. It casts their shadows on...

THE WALL

His shadow moves in, blending with hers, becoming one.

VICTOR (V.O.)
With my mother's blessing, my father
impregnated her.
(disgusted)
She was just thirteen. A child.

4) INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Happy times. BABY VICTOR cries in Mrs. Richmond's arms. She
hands him to Lily who feeds him.

VICTOR (V.O.)
After she delivered the baby, my
mother claimed the child as her own.
For two years, they kept Lily to
nurse me.

5) EXT. RICHMOND'S MANSION - DAY

A stranger takes Lily away.

With the baby in custody, Victor's parents bid her adieu.

Victor's father is sad, guilt-ridden.

VICTOR (V.O.)
When she was no longer needed, they
sold her off and moved back to
London. There, they presented me to
society as their very own.

6) EXT. RICHMOND'S HOME IN LONDON - DAY

Proud moments. Visitors flock in to see the baby.

7) INT. ROOM - YEARS LATER - EVENING

Victor sits by his ailing father's bed. He's weak, dying...

VICTOR (V.O.)

My father made me promise to never tell my mother that I knew. When I asked him about the reason for his confession, he said that he wanted to leave this world with a clear conscience and that he'd always wondered about the girl.

8) EXT. A MANSION - DAY

Another door shuts on Victor as he turns around, dejected.

VICTOR (V.O.)

His dying wish was to find Lily. To get her back, no matter the cost. He gave me the name of the man he sold her to, but, by the time I found him, she'd been sold again.

9) EXT. VICTOR'S MANSION - DAY

He strolls into the gardens, eyes set far, determined...

VICTOR (V.O.)

The bill of sale had been lost over the years. There was no way of finding her. In the end, I liquidated my father's assets and moved here in hopes that maybe someday, somehow, I'd see her.

END MONTAGE.

INT. VICTOR'S ROOM - PRESENT TIME

Victor dwells fondly in the past, picture in hand...

VICTOR

I imagine that's why my father had this picture taken. His conscience. It must have plagued him all those years.

He keeps it aside, more relieved than ever.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

So, as you can see, you and I have a lot more common than you thought.

THANDI
Does anyone know?

VICTOR
No. Until now, I've never uttered
a word of this to anyone. Not even
to Elena.

THANDI
How long have you kept this secret?

VICTOR
For more than twenty years.

It stabs her! She holds onto the picture, gazing for long.

VICTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Everyone has their secrets.

She looks up, stiffens as she finds his eyes on her breasts.

He takes the picture from her, keeps it aside.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(eyes on her chest)
I've been meaning to ask you...
(steps closer)
Where did you get this?

He sweeps up the locket from her bosom.

His skin brushes against hers, making her shudder.

THANDI
It was my mother's.

VICTOR
(admiring it)
It's quite beautiful.
(looks up)
As are you.

He caresses her cheek, then, leans in to kiss her.

She tears back!

THANDI
Don't!

A beat as he composes himself.

VICTOR
Forgive me. I didn't mean any harm.
I must have somehow gotten our
conversation confused yesterday.
I'd thought we had an agreement.

It sinks in, breaking through her defenses.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
If you'd give me a chance, I could
make you very happy. Even if it's
only for a year.

He leans in again, sealing her lips with a kiss.

INT. BATHROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Thandi soaks in a hot tub, her mind at war with itself.

MEMORY FLASH - INT. VICTOR'S ROOM - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

THE BED

Victor and Thandi make love with full consent.

BACK TO - INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

She blushes hard.

MEMORY FLASH - INT. THE BARN

CLOSE UP

Tom's parted lips nuzzle into her ear, his voice eerie.

TOM
Now sleep with the angels.

BACK TO - INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi, still in the tub, sinks under. The surface BUBBLES.

INT. LIBRARY - A MONTH LATER - DAY

Thandi stands at the window, eyes far, a smile on her face.

VICTOR (O.S.)
A penny for thoughts.

She turns, a little startled, sees --

-- Victor, standing in the doorway.

THANDI
Good afternoon.

He notes her unenthusiastic smile.

VICTOR
We have visitors. Your brother. And
Tom.

He waits for her reaction.

THANDI
(excited)
They're here?

VICTOR
Yes. And they're waiting for you in
the parlor.

She whips past. Victor follows.

INT. THE PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

She appears at THE DOOR, runs into Isaac's open arms.

THANDI
Isaac!

That's when she notices him on the corner settee.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(blushing)
Tom!

He rises. She wants to run to him but restrains herself.

THANDI (CONT'D)
I was beginning to think that the
two of you had forgotten me.

TOM
Never.

He's swept away by her new avatar: Form-fitting dress. Hair
in curls with interwoven ribbons. All in expensive,
emerald-green silk.

She realizes that he's checking her out.

THANDI
Do you intend on staying for the
night, or longer, perhaps?

VICTOR
(joining Thandi's side)
Yes, how long will you stay?

At this, Tom's smile falls. Victor and Thandi together - is
DISTURBING! Did he lose her?

TOM
Just for dinner, as we discussed.

THANDI

(to Victor, surprised)
You knew they were coming?

VICTOR

Yes. Tom and I discussed their coming
just last week. I thought that it
would be a nice surprise.

THANDI

It is. The best surprise ever.

VICTOR

(to Tom and Isaac)
Well, there is still time for dinner.
Perhaps, I can interest the two of
you in a brandy?

ISAAC

No, none for me, thank you.

VICTOR

Then you, Tom? Certainly, you won't
suffer a friend to drink alone.

Tom smiles thinly. He wants to decline, but...

TOM

Lead the way.

VICTOR

Good, then! Besides, we have
business to discuss.

Tom accompanies him down THE CORRIDOR.

TOM

(glances around)
This place is quite impressive.

VICTOR

Maybe someday I can give you an
official tour.

INT. VICTOR'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

They enter.

VICTOR

(gestures at the chairs)
Please, have a seat.

Tom sits.

Victor goes to the cabinet, returns with drinks.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(hands Tom a glass)
Here you are.

TOM
(takes a sip)
Thandi looks well.

VICTOR
(sits across)
Yes. She's quite well. However, she
misses the two of you very much.

Tom says nothing. He gives half a smile, gulps his drink.

TOM
So, what business do we have?

VICTOR
Did you forget?

He pulls out some documents from his desk drawer.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(handing it over)
The contract for the Old Mill.

TOM
(taking it)
Oh, yes, of course.

He pulls out an envelope from his pocket, slides it across.

Victor opens --

THE ENVELOPE

-- to see a CHECK for thirty thousand.

VICTOR
This is double my asking price.

TOM
Sell her back to me.

VICTOR
(a beat, chuckles)
You can't be serious.

TOM
I am. Thandi should have her freedom
as her brother does. And she should
be home with her family.

VICTOR
And with you?

He gives an amused smirk, gulps his drink, puts it down.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Look, Tom, there's no need for the whole horse and pony show. At least, not with me. You're in love with her, and it's obvious that she's in love with you. The two of you might as well admit as much.

TOM

(sinks back)

Even if that were true, I could never have her, not in that way.

VICTOR

So, then why would you wish to take her away? She's free to visit her brother and the others as often as she likes. She deserves a chance at true happiness.

TOM

And you think you can give that to her.

VICTOR

Yes. In time, I could.

TOM

But what of her freedom? Her happiness is what's most important to me. You can give her the world, but she would never be happy as your slave.

VICTOR

(gives him a smart look)

It's interesting that you say that, because Thandi and I have already discussed the subject.

Tom is surprised.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

She will have her freedom. In fact, she will have it in a year's time.

He picks up his empty glass, goes to the cabinet, returns with the decanter.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

If she chooses to leave when that time comes, I won't stop her.

(refills their glasses)

So, then, as you can see, there's no need for the extra money.

(returns the check)

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Here you are. I'm sure you'll need
this for renovations and
production.

Tom sits blank, not having expected this comeback.

EXT. THE LAKE - VICTOR'S MANSION - EVENING

Thandi strolls with Tom and Isaac. She's happy. Ecstatic.

INT. VICTOR'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Drink in hand, Victor watches them from his window. Tom and Thandi are enviably close.

He's not happy.

INT. LIBRARY - ONE EVENING

Victor shuffles in, stops at the doorway.

At the window is Thandi. She's in tears.

VICTOR
What is the matter?

THANDI
(wiping her tears)
I'm fine.

VICTOR
No, you're not. Perhaps, I should
stop Tom's visits.

THANDI
(glowering)
I'm sure that won't be necessary.

VICTOR
I suppose Tom has told you about
Anna.

She's startled that he knows. Ashamed, she looks away.

THANDI
(in a choked voice)
Yes. I'm actually very happy for him.

VICTOR
Somehow, I doubt that is true.

THANDI
How dare you presume to know my
feelings? You know nothing of me.

VICTOR

Oh, I know enough. I know that you are foolishly wasting your tears and hopes on a man that you could never have as your own. At the very best, you could be his mistress or his whore. However, I sometimes wonder if that may be enough for you.

More angry tears spill from her eyes.

THANDI

And just what am I to you, if not your whore? Bought and paid for. You speak as if what you're doing is any better: buying slaves for affection. But then, I suppose the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree, as they say. Maybe you're just like your father!

Silence.

He glowers at her, rage building, breaths short, labored...

She instantly regrets her words.

VICTOR

Maybe you're right.

He KICKS the chair out of his way, grabs her by the arms!

She resists. Futile!

He forces her over the chair.

She SCREAMS, pushes herself up.

He KNOCKS her back down!

THANDI

No! Don't!

He towers over, THROWS her skirts up!

She THRASHES desperately underneath!

He pins her down. RIPS off her garments.

His hands FUMBLE with his trousers' buttons.

The chair SCRAPES forward.

Her hands tighten in a DEATH GRIP over it, holds on.

THANDI (CONT'D)

(cries in agony)

No!!! Please!

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Thandi's CRIES float out.

Coming by is Corin. She stops to listen. Leaves.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

Messed up, destroyed, Thandi sits hunched, knees drawn to her chest, skirts over her legs...

Victor, fully clothed, is guilty.

VICTOR

I... I'm sorry.

She looks away, eyes spitting hate.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Perhaps, tomorrow we can talk things over.

She shoots a scathing scowl, looks away again.

Victor hangs around, shifting on his legs, then, reluctantly leaves.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Thandi stands before the mirror, disoriented, robes open. At several places are bruises - black and blue.

CORIN (O.S.)

Should I add the oils and salts, Madame?

She's quick to shut her robes.

In the mirror, Corin's REFLECTION stares back warily.

THANDI

Yes, plenty, please.

She disappears into the bathroom, emerges with a bundle of dirty linen.

CORIN

(smiles sweetly)

I shall be right back.

Corin exits.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE UP - THANDI'S FEET

She trudges in. Her robes DROP and she gets into the tub, the water SPLASHING around her ankles.

She leans back with a relieved SIGH, closes her eyes.

OFF SCREEN, a door OPENS, FOOTSTEPS.

THANDI'S POV

Her eyes open to see --

-- Victor standing over, arm stacked with towels.

She sits up quickly, withdrawing into herself.

She's hate-stricken and it troubles him.

VICTOR
Forgive me, I didn't mean to startle
you.

She shoots a murderous glare, loathing...

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I ran into Corin in the hall.
(shelves the towels)
I'd like to apologize again for last
night.

She tears her gaze away.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
My actions were inexcusable. I never
should have -

He spots the bruises he gave her, feels disgusted with himself.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
I hope that perhaps, somehow, you
can forgive me, but I'll fully
understand if you can't. I certainly
will never forgive myself.

She's stiff, eyes everywhere but him.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You have my promise that it will
never happen again.

He hangs around for a moment, then, leaves.

She's rigid, hardly breathing, until she hears the door SHUT.

She crumbles into the water, a profound sadness taking over.
Quiet SOBS rack through her body.

CUT TO:

INT. TOM'S STUDY - AT THE SAME TIME

Tom broods at the fireplace, a glass of bourbon in hand.

EXT. VICTOR'S MANSION - THE PREVIOUS DAY - FLASHBACK

Thandi sees Tom off at his carriage. He hangs around, shifting on his feet, as if pressed to share something.

TOM

Anna is pregnant.

Her smile wilts.

THANDI

(wears a smile)

This-this is excellent news, Tom!
You're... you're going to be a
father! I'm so happy for you!
Congratulations!

BACK TO:

INT. TOM'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

He's miserable. He downs the drink. It does no help.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM

Post-bath, Thandi comes out in a robe, hair towel-dried, undone... She notices something.

BESIDE TABLE

A large bouquet of red roses in a crystal vase.

A black velvet case with gold trim.

She picks it up, runs a finger over, opens it. She gasps.

INSIDE

A gorgeous and expensive emerald and diamond necklace.

She's not impressed! She snaps it shut, keeps it back.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Victor sits at his desk lost in thoughts. TROTting hooves draw his attention. He goes to the window, peers out.

OUTSIDE

Tom's carriage pulls up. Isaac and his pregnant wife, SARAH, alights. Tom is not with them.

Victor hurries out.

INT. THE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Victor finds Thandi flit from Isaac's embrace to Sarah's.

THANDI
(laughing, to Sarah)
You look like you're about to burst!

INT. THE GARDEN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi leads them in. They sit.

SARAH
(looking around)
I never thought I'd see a place
lovelier than Madame Lacy's.

THANDI
(uninterested)
Yes, this place is very beautiful.
(brightening up)
So, how much longer?

SARAH
(sadly)
Almost two months still!

THANDI
Well, that isn't much longer.
Perhaps, I can come and visit for
a while after the babe is born. And,
if possible, I could stay for a while
and help out until you're up and well
again.

SARAH
(excited)
Yes, of course!

THANDI
I'll just have to ask Victor.

ISAAC

It would be nice to have you.

The maids, Corin and TESS, bring their lunch: pastries, sandwiches and tea.

Thandi gives her an acknowledging smile.

THANDI

It looks delicious.

SARAH

(cradling her belly)

Here I go again. If you could just point me in the direction of the facilities.

THANDI

Certainly, Corin can take you.

Corin escorts Sarah. Tess leaves.

A moment of silence, then:

ISAAC

How have you been?

THANDI

(takes the sugar bowl)

I've been well.

Doesn't look like it. He smiles, knowing very well.

ISAAC

(reaches into his vest)

I have something for you.

(pulls out a small, red
ring box)

This is for you. It's Madame Lacy's ring.

THANDI

Oh yes!

She takes it, opens it. Inside: a pearl and diamond RING.

THANDI (CONT'D)

I still can't believe she left this to me.

ISAAC

I can. She loved you like family.

Thandi wears it. It fits perfectly. Then, she remembers: the locket. She unhooks it, gives it to Isaac.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Are you sure?

THANDI

I'm certain.

ISAAC

(takes it)

How are things with you and Victor?

She looks up, curious. She takes a moment to answer.

THANDI

Things are well between us.

He smiles flatly, he doesn't believe her.

ISAAC

He loves you.

She returns a questioning look.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Victor, I mean.

She's quiet for a moment. It becomes clear, Isaac knows about her and Tom. A little sheepish, she serves tea.

THANDI

(quietly)

Perhaps.

ISAAC

Tom has told me that you're to be freed in a year.

THANDI

Yes. At least, that is what Victor has promised.

ISAAC

So, will you return or will you remain here?

THANDI

If I am freed, I will most definitely return home.

ISAAC

Well, we'd all be happy to have you, but honestly, Sister, I don't see why you'd want to give this all up. What has happened for you doesn't happen for our kind.

She gives a dry smile. She's about to share with him about recent events when Sarah returns.

SARAH

I can't get over how beautiful this place is! Isaac, you've gotta see

SARAH (CONT'D)
the facilities. I felt like a queen
on a throne.

Thandi SPUTTERS on her tea, laughs.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Thandi stands at the window, staring out, when ---

VICTOR (O.S.)
Thandi?

She sees him walk in.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Forgive me, the door was open.

THANDI
You don't have to apologize. It's
your library.

She takes interest in a book on the table.

VICTOR
I'm going into town, and I'd very
much like for you to come with me.
Perhaps, we could have lunch at the
restaurant?

She flips through the book, taking her own sweet time.

THANDI
I'm not hungry.

VICTOR
Well, then I must insist that you
come. It'll do you good to get out
and get some fresh air.

THANDI
(glaring in hate)
Well, if I must.

VICTOR
Perfect, we will leave in an hour
or so. That should be plenty enough
time to change.

She stays buried in the book, till he leaves.

INT. THE PARLOR - LATER

Victor waits for her, all dressed.

She presents herself, dressed in a drab, gray frock.

VICTOR
(checking her out)
You look beautiful.

She casts a spiteful look, collects her coat from Corin.

INT. VICTOR'S CARRIAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Thandi chooses to feast on the sights outside the window.

Victor glances at her, smiling ruefully.

She spots that from the corner of her eyes.

INT. THE WATERCREST RESTAURANT - LATER

It's busy and packed, especially with fancy women.

VICTOR'S TABLE

Thandi is uncomfortable. She senses eyes on her and regrets the way she's dressed. She tucks her gown away from sight.

ACROSS

At a table in the far corner is Tom and Anna. Sensing Thandi's eyes on her, she turns around.

Their stares lock, warring, until Thandi looks away.

VICTOR (O.S.)
Are you okay?

THANDI
Yes.

He follows her gaze, finds Anna, staring hard.

Tom waves at Victor, goes over to meet them.

Anna accompanies him.

Thandi is fidgety.

VICTOR
(rises)
Well, what a nice surprise.

Tom looks at Thandi, then back to Victor.

TOM
Yes, it is.

Anna shifts closer to Tom.

VICTOR

Anna. As always you look positively radiant.

Thandi keeps her eyes on the menu.

ANNA

Well, I'm afraid I won't look so flattering in the next few months.

Thandi frowns, stays buried in her menu.

VICTOR

Oh, yes. The two of you must be so thrilled.

Tom smiles wryly. Not exactly.

ANNA

We are! We're having a small dinner party this weekend to celebrate. I was certain that we sent an invitation.

Thandi looks up at Victor.

VICTOR

No, no, I don't believe we have. Perhaps, the two of you would like to join us.

Thandi grows tensed. And so does Tom. Quickly:

TOM

No, we've actually just finished our lunch.

Thandi is relieved.

ANNA

Well, you must come to dinner this Sunday, at seven. And you're more than welcome to bring a guest.

She gloats at Thandi, turns back to Victor.

VICTOR

Well, we both shall see you then.

They disperse.

INT. DINING ROOM, VICTOR'S MANSION - EVENING

Thandi and Victor dine in silence.

Fondly, he watches her eat.

She fiddles with the fork, picking on her food.

He smiles at her antics, when a gloom takes over, a state of panic.

SUPERIMPOSE: DAYS LATER

INT. FOYER, VICTOR'S MANSION - EVENING

Victor adds finishing touches to his tuxedo.

Someone descends the stairs and he looks up.

It's Thandi, looking strikingly gorgeous.

He marvels at her beauty.

VICTOR
You look incredible.

She smiles, flattered.

He offers her his hand. She takes it. He leads her out like a queen.

INT. THE LEXINGTON MANSION - LATER

A carriage pulls up. From it, alights Victor and Thandi.

She glances around nervously.

It's packed with guest carriages. It's no small party.

INT. THE HALL - CONTINUOUS

When Victor flaunts Thandi in, heads turn.

She is jittery, avoids everyone's gaze when she can, and works up a smile when she can't.

Sensing her discomfort, he gives her hand a light squeeze.

She turns to him, finds him studying her with intense eyes.

VICTOR
You'll be fine, I promise.

Her fear begins to fade, when ---

TOM (O.S.)
Victor!

Tom and Anna approach them.

VICTOR
Well, there you are.

Thandi's eyes meets Tom's, stays for a moment.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Well, this is hardly a small party.

Thandi glances at Anna and looks away.

TOM
Dinner should be starting shortly.
We took the liberty of reserving
seats for you at the table.

The BELL sounds. Tom's gaze lingers on her for longer.

TOM (CONT'D)
Well, then, shall we go?

They follow him down the hall, when, Thandi spots Daniel with
his wife MARGARET and DR. Gordon.

THANDI
(quietly)
Dr. Gordon.

Victor leads her to them, embraces Daniel.

VICTOR
You must be elated, now that you are
to become a grandfather.

DANIEL
Why, we're downright ecstatic.
Margaret and I were just speaking
with your friend, the doctor, about
seeing after our Anna.

VICTOR
Well, Gordon is an excellent doctor,
I wouldn't trust anyone else with
her care.

MARGARET
Well, I myself am thinking of hiring
a full-time nurse to take care of
her. I don't trust these...
(gives Thandi a nasty
look)
... darkies to see to her properly.

A glass CLANKS from the other end of the table.

TOM
Quiet, please.

He waits for the room to hush.

TOM (CONT'D)
 First and foremost, I'd like to thank
 you all for coming. I'm honored to
 have you join us in the celebration
 of my wife's pregnancy.

Shocked, happy GASPS.

TOM (CONT'D)
 (raising his glass)
 To our child.

They begin to dine.

Thandi is uncomfortable. She fiddles with her food.

LADY DAVENPORT (O.S.)
 Madame Thandi.

Anna chokes on her cider.

LADY DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 I must say that your dress is unlike
 any I've seen around. The hue is just
 lovely.

ANNA
 (sarcastically)
 Yes, *Madame Thandi*, wherever did you
 find it?

THANDI
 I don't know, you'd have to ask
 Victor.

VICTOR
 Sanderson's. The new boutique in the
 square.

ANNA
 (slurping her soup)
 Well, the dress itself is very
 pretty, but the color is a bit too
 risque for my taste.

LADY DAVENPORT
 Well, I must visit the store soon.
 I'm looking for the perfect dress
 for my Ida's wedding.

Thandi leans back, looking sick.

VICTOR
 Are you okay?

THANDI
 I feel a bit nauseous.
 (swallowing hard)

THANDI (CONT'D)
I could use some fresh air.

VICTOR
Certainly.

Victor helps her up.

Lady Davenport watches them curiously.

LADY DAVENPORT
Are you alright?

Thandi's at the brink of throwing up. She leaves fast.

EXT. THE GARDENS - CONTINUOUS

Thandi bolts to a rose bush and throws up hard.

Victor rushes to her aide.

VICTOR
My, you are ill!

He strokes her back as she throws up more. When she recovers
--

THANDI
Thank you.

VICTOR
Was it the soup?

THANDI
I didn't eat any, but the smell was
rather strong.

VICTOR
A case of the nerves, perhaps.

TOM
(rushing to them)
Is everything well?

VICTOR
I do believe so.

Thandi grows uncomfortable at his presence.

THANDI
I'm fine.

TOM
Are you sure?

THANDI
Yes.

VICTOR
It would be best if we retired early.

TOM
Given the circumstances, I'm sure everyone will understand.

VICTOR
If you could just have Esther collect our coats.

TOM
Of course.

Tom hurries back to the mansion.

Victor studies her, concerned.

THANDI
I'm sorry for ruining your evening.

VICTOR
Nonsense. You're saving me from a night of boredom, and, possibly, bad soup.

Tom returns with their coats, hands it over.

THANDI
Please, do say goodbye for me to Esther and the others.

TOM
Certainly.

He watches them intently, a little let down, as they board the carriage, looking happy with each other.

INT. VICTOR'S CARRIAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Victor turns to Thandi.

She looks thoughtful.

VICTOR
Are you truly feeling better?

She turns to smile at him.

THANDI
Yes, much.

VICTOR
You should still try and eat something. When we get back, I'll have the kitchen prepare you something light.

She smiles, her gaze lingering on his before looking out the window.

INT. VICTOR'S STUDY - DAY

Victor works on some documents at his table.

Elated, Thandi comes in with an open letter in hand.

THANDI
May I visit my brother? He's become
a father.

A beat as he considers her request.

VICTOR
How long would you like to stay?

THANDI
A couple of weeks. A month, maybe.

VICTOR
Two weeks.

EXT. FAIRVIEW - DAY

Isaac moves out into the courtyard as a carriage pulls up.

Thandi alights from it, goes into his embrace.

THANDI
(pulling apart)
Sarah...

ISAAC
She's in mother's old room upstairs.

She hurries in.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Thandi barges through the open door, stops when --

-- she sees Tom at Sarah's bed, standing.

SARAH
Sister!

THANDI
Sarah!

She goes to Sarah, sits beside her.

TOM
Thandi. What a pleasant surprise.

THANDI

Hello, Tom.

(taking Sarah's hand)

How are you feeling, Sarah?

SARAH

Better. I really had a time of it.

THANDI

Well, I shall see after you while I'm here.

SARAH

And how long will that be?

THANDI

A couple of weeks, though I wish it could be longer. So, where is my little niece?

ALICE, the maid, enters with a WHITE BUNDLE in her arms.

Thandi quickly washes her hands at the basin, sits on the bed and takes the bundle - the BABY.

Isaac is at the door. He leans on to the frame.

THANDI (CONT'D)

Oh, she's so beautiful.

She glances at the parents, then at the baby, comparing them.

THANDI (CONT'D)

She looks like you both.

ISAAC

I think she has mama's eyes.

THANDI

Yes, she does. What is her name?

SARAH

Odessa. After my mother.

ODESSA starts crying.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I think it's time for a feeding.

Thandi returns her to Sarah.

TOM

Well, I think I'll take my leave.

He steals a peek at Thandi and exits.

Thandi grows restless.

THANDI

I think I shall as well.

She rises and walks out.

INT. THE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Tom hangs around, clearly waiting.

Thandi joins him from the other end.

TOM

I didn't know you were coming. I'd have had a room prepared for you.

THANDI

I just received the news and thought I should come straightaway.

He takes her arm.

She looks at him, startled at his touch.

TOM

Are you hungry? Alice just made lunch for us.

THANDI

Yes, thank you.

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

They settle down at the table. Just the two of them.

Thandi is uncomfortable being alone with him.

To her relief, Isaac joins them.

ISAAC

You look well. I heard you had taken ill.

THANDI

Yes. I think it was just a bad case of the nerves. There were so many people...

ISAAC

Well, has Tom told you about how the crops turned out?

She's relieved in the change of subject.

THANDI

No.

ISAAC

Well, it was seventy percent better
than last season.

He pauses to study her reaction.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

And that's just at Lexington. We saw
a fifty percent increase here.

TOM

Yes, business has been well.

THANDI

You must be very proud. That is far
more than you expected.

TOM

We've also started the
reconstruction of the Newport Mill.

Alice brings in the SHEPHERD'S PIE, sets it on the table.

THANDI

That looks wonderful. Alice, will
you please ask my companion Corin
if she'd like to join us?

ALICE

Of course.

Alice hurries out.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM, FAIRVIEW - LATER

Post-bath, Thandi walks in, her dark tresses open and freshly
toweled.

She stops to relish the familiar surroundings.

On the mantle, sits a DOLL.

THANDI

Addy!

She gets it down, examines its loose button eyes, stringy yarn
hair, tattered clothing.

Suddenly, she gets an idea and rummages around. When she doesn't
find what she's looking for, she --

INT. THE HALL - CONTINUOUS

-- Hurries down with the doll in her hand.

TOM (O.S.)

Thandi!

She stops and turns to him.

THANDI

Tom.

Looking amused, he joins her, eyeing the doll.

TOM

And... Addy.

Blushing, she tucks it behind her.

TOM (CONT'D)

Still playing with dolls?

THANDI

No. I plan to give the doll to Odessa.
I've mended it, but it still needs
cleaning.

TOM

I'm sure that Sarah will absolutely
love it. So, where are you off to?

THANDI

I thought I'd go to the kitchen and
visit the girls. Perhaps, I can give
them a hand with dinner.

TOM

Well, I was very much hoping that
I could speak with you alone this
evening, seeing as how I'll be
heading back to the estate tomorrow
morning.

A beat as she uncomfortably considers his request.

THANDI

Well, certainly. We could talk now
before dinner, if you like.

TOM

No rush. We can talk alone in the
study after. That is, if that's okay
with you.

THANDI

(hesitating)
Certainly.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

ANNIE and Alice prepare supper, their backs to the door.

Thandi enters quietly, eyeing them, grinning.

But Annie spots her.

ANNIE

Oh my!!!

Alice turns around.

The three embrace each other, laughing, overjoyed.

They pull back and Annie takes a good look at her.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Well, I don't know whether I should hug you or bow. I was wondering how long it would be before you came to visit.

ALICE

Oh my! Just look at you. You look like a real lady.

ANNIE

Yes, you do.

(checking her out)

You look just like a proper white woman.

THANDI

Well, aren't looks deceiving.

ANNIE

So, I hear that you now live in a mansion twice the size of this place and far grander.

Thandi laughs.

ALICE

And don't forget the lake.

ANNIE

Thandi, you must be so happy.

Thandi's smile falls.

THANDI

Yes, the mansion is very big.

ALICE

We also hear that your master is not only very rich, but very handsome, too.

THANDI
(growing uncomfortable)
Yes, I guess he is.
(takes a deep whiff)
Something smells good in here.

ALICE
That's roast beef and vegetables
you're smelling. And apple pie!

Annie is at the oven, checking the meat and veggies.

ANNIE
It's ready, just need to slice the
bread.

THANDI
Let me.

She pulls out a bread knife from the drawers, joins them.

EXT. THE STUDY - LATER

Thandi approaches the door nervously. It's ajar and an ORANGE
LIGHT streams from the gap.

INT. THE STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Thandi opens the door.

AT THE FIREPLACE

... is Tom, standing with his back to her, his hands shoved
down his pockets.

THANDI (O.S.)
Tom.

TOM
(turning around)
Thandi.

She shuts the door.

TOM (CONT'D)
Come, have a seat.

Hesitating, she takes one of the wing back chairs at the fire.

TOM (CONT'D)
Would you like something to drink?
Perhaps, some wine?

THANDI
Yes, wine would be nice.

He goes to the cabinet, pulls out a bottle and glass, pours himself some brandy.

TOM
Esther misses you very much.

THANDI
I miss her too. Very much so.

He hands her the wine.

TOM
Here you are.

She takes a long sip.

He draws up the matching wing back chair and sits.

TOM (CONT'D)
So, how have you been?

THANDI
Well.

TOM
And Victor. I imagine that he is treating you well.

A beat as she recollects past events.

THANDI
Yes, he treats me well.

She watches the fire, takes another gulp.

For a moment, they say nothing. Tom senses her discomfort.

TOM
Are you upset with me?

THANDI
(startled)
No. Why would I be?

Her tone says otherwise.

TOM
You are angry with me.

Confirming his doubts, she takes another sip and stares at the flames. She is upset indeed.

TOM (CONT'D)
You have every right to be.

She looks at him.

TOM (CONT'D)

I miss you Thandi. I miss the way that we were before all the craziness.

(beat)

I just wish that we could put everything behind us and find a way to be like we were before.

(beat)

Before I screwed up. I worry that I have ruined our friendship.

Tears brim in her eyes. She keeps them in, stays calm.

THANDI

We will always be friends.

TOM

If only the circumstances could have been different.

THANDI

It's fine. More than anything, I just want to see you happy.

Silence. Then, suddenly:

THANDI (CONT'D)

Are you happy?

He's taken by surprise.

TOM

I suppose I am. I have the mill now, and Fairview. Also, business has been better than ever.

THANDI

Then I am happy for you.

TOM

No matter what happens, I will always see to your care.

THANDI

I'll be fine. There's no need to worry about me.

TOM

But I do worry. And so does Esther. There isn't a week that goes by that she doesn't ask about you. She was very glad to see you at the party.

THANDI

I was happy to see her as well. I had hoped to spend some time with her, but then... well, you know.

TOM
(making a funny face)
When I think of that poor rose bush.

She studies his expression, laughs.

Tom joins in.

Their laughter fades. Their eyes meet. Silence.

TOM (CONT'D)
Perhaps, I could arrange a visit.

She gives a confused look.

TOM (CONT'D)
With Esther. I'm certain that Victor
wouldn't have a problem with her
coming to visit.

THANDI
I would like that very much.

TOM
I shall see to it.

Another silence falls between them.

The wine kicks in, making her giddy. She keeps the empty glass
on the table.

THANDI
I think that I should go lie down
now.

TOM
Are you okay?

THANDI
Yes.
(rising)
I think that the wine has started
to get to me.

TOM
(stands)
I'll walk you to your room.

THANDI
No. I'll be fine, but you mustn't
leave tomorrow morning without me
seeing you off.

He stands watching as she exits.

EXT. THE STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Thandi closes the door behind her, trudges unsteadily down the hall.

THANDI'S POV

Her vision blurs, threatening to black out.

Like from a dream, Corin's voice ECHOES from the distance.

CORIN

Ma'am?

(beat)

Ma'am!!

Corin's arms shoot out as she crumbles to the floor.

BLACK SCREEN.

EXT. THANDI'S ROOM - LATER

Isaac waits outside the closed door.

Tom paces up and down.

The door opens and DR. GRANGER steps out.

DR. GRANGER

She's fine.

TOM

(relieved)

So, it was the wine?

DR. GRANGER

Partly. The girl's in a delicate state right now and shouldn't be drinking wine or any other alcohol for that matter. She's pregnant.

Beat.

TOM

Are you sure?

DR. GRANGER

Yes, I'm certain. She's early on. Perhaps, a month or two at best. It's difficult to say for certain. The girl has been having abnormal monthly's she says.

ISAAC

May we see her now?

DR. GRANGER
Certainly.

Isaac goes in.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

When Tom enters, Thandi is alone and in tears.

TOM
(approaching the bed)
I spoke with the doctor.

THANDI
(crying)
I can't believe it.

He gently squeezes her hand.

TOM
(chuckles)
Well, at least, now I know you're
not dying.

THANDI
Dying would probably be better.

TOM
(hesitating)
Is... the child mine?

THANDI
I'm not sure. The child could be
Victor's.

Comprehension dawns, he looks away.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Are you angry with me?

TOM
No. None of what has happened is your
fault.

THANDI
(crying)
What will I do?

TOM
What will we do? No matter what
happens, I won't leave you to face
this alone.

THANDI
Victor...

TOM

Does he know about us?

THANDI

No, but he has his suspicions.

TOM

Everything will be fine, we will figure this out.

THANDI

And how can you know that?

A KNOCK on the door interrupts them.

He hesitates, glancing at Thandi before answering.

TOM

Come in.

The door opens. It's Sarah and Isaac.

Thandi sits up, drying herself up.

THANDI

You should be in bed.

SARAH

Nonsense. I've been in bed long enough. Besides, I've been looking for any excuse to break free of that jail.

ISAAC

Tom, may I have a word with you?

His face is dead serious.

Thandi's no longer smiling.

TOM

Of course.

THANDI

Tom!

He stops, turns around.

THANDI (CONT'D)

Will you still be leaving in the morning?

TOM

Yes. I've several business commitments that I must see to. But I'll visit you very soon.

THANDI

Remember, you must not leave without
me seeing you off.

Tom nods 'agreed'! He goes to her, kisses her on the forehead
and follows Isaac out.

EXT. FAIRVIEW - DAWN

A carriage waits.

INT. THE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Thandi hurries down the corridor when she spots Tom at --

THE CLOSET

He's already dressed and ready to leave.

THANDI

(approaching him slowly)
Good morning.

TOM

Good morning

THANDI

Have you already had breakfast?

TOM

No, I'm not hungry. Besides, we must
stop in town for supplies. I'll have
a bite while we're there.

THANDI

(searching for him)
And Isaac? Where is he?

TOM

He's probably still sleeping.

A STAFF BOY brings up Tom's bags.

Horses NEIGH outside.

Anxiety lurks in the air.

THANDI

Will you come visit soon?

Beat.

TOM
(moving closer)
I promise. I'll come and see you as
soon as possible.

He steps even closer, as if wanting to kiss her.

TOM (CONT'D)
Don't worry. We'll talk soon.

He cups her face, kisses her long on the forehead. He spins around and exits, leaving her once again.

INT. CARRIAGE (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Tom sits with eyes set out of the window, his head heavy.

INT. THE STUDY - DAY - MEMORY FLASH

Tom and Isaac sit at the fireplace. The air, tense.

ISAAC
I'd suggest keeping this affair a
secret. Allow Victor to raise the
baby as his own, even if he'd not
fathered him.

BACK TO:

INT. CARRIAGE (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Tom stirs, burdened, distressed...

AUNT LACY (V.O.)
Thandi... is your sister!

INT. THANDI'S ROOM, FAIRVIEW - EVENING

Thandi lies in bed, still in tears.

The doorknob SQUEAKS and turns.

She sits up, quickly drying herself.

The door opens, Isaac walks in.

ISAAC
Were you sleeping?

THANDI
No, just resting until dinner.

ISAAC
(shutting the door)
Well, I was hoping we could talk for
a minute.

THANDI
Certainly.

He sits on the chair beside her bed.

ISAAC
How are you feeling?

THANDI
Quite well.

ISAAC
I had a talk with Tom. I know that
the child could be his.

She stares back, horrified.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
I know that you love him, Sis. But
he isn't yours to love. Think about
it, Thandi. After everything you've
been through, do you honestly think
Anna and her father would leave you
in peace? And Tom will not leave her.
Not now that she's having his child.
Never could he openly acknowledge
you or your baby. At the very best,
you could be his mistress. Is that
what you want for yourself? Or more
importantly, is that what you want
for your child?

Her eyes water. She looks away.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
I know it's hard. But you must make
the best of your situation.

THANDI
Do you not think that I've considered
all those things? I just can't do
what you're asking. To deceive a man
into raising another man's child as
his own. It is wrong Isaac.

ISAAC
But you don't know that for certain.
The child could very well be
Victor's. What other real choice do
you have right now?

She says nothing for a while, then, breaks down weeping.

Isaac sits next to her on the bed, embraces her.

EXT. VICTOR'S ESTATE - DAY

Thandi climbs onto her MARE, BELLE.

THANDI
Giddy up, Belle!

Belle CANTERS away.

Thandi glances over her shoulder.

Following her on HORSEBACK is JONAH. He speeds up, sealing off the distance between them.

The wind WHIPS through her hair as she rides past oaks and lush, green foliage.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Go, Belle, go!

Belle GALLOPS, leaving Jonah and his horse far behind.

Thandi grins as Jonah's YELLS reach her ears.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Go Belle! Go!

THE FOREST

--- flashes by and Thandi rides like a free spirit.

Blocking their path is a FALLEN TREE. Belle stops abruptly, NEIGHING and throws Thandi off her back.

Thandi falls SMACK to the ground.

JONAH (O.S.)
Madame Thandi!!!

In seconds, he drops to the ground beside her.

JONAH (CONT'D)
Are you hurt!?

He helps her sit. She winces, touches where it hurts.

THANDI
My back, a little... and my arm.

Jonah glances at her arm. It's scraped and bruised.

JONAH
Can you stand up?

THANDI

I believe so.

He helps her up.

JONAH

Does anything feel broken?

THANDI

No.

Jonah hurries off to secure Belle, ties her to a tree.

He returns with his horse.

JONAH

I'll take you back on my horse. And
I'll come back for Belle soon.

EXT. VICTOR'S MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

With Jonah's help, Thandi limps to the door.

Victor and Corin race down the stairs, panicking.

VICTOR

What in God's name!

JONAH

Madame Thandi took a fall from her
horse.

THANDI

I'm quite fine. Bella experienced
more of a scare than me. There's a
large fallen tree on the trail. I
fell off the horse, but I'm fine,
just a little sore.

VICTOR

You hardly look fine. I think you
should still see a doctor.

THANDI

Nonsense. It's just a few minor
scrapes.

CORIN

But what about the baby?

Beat.

VICTOR

You're pregnant?

THANDI

Yes, I was going to tell you tomorrow at breakfast. But now that Corin has already imparted you with the news...

She gives Corin a wry smile.

VICTOR

How do you know? Are you certain?

THANDI

Yes. I saw a doctor at Fairview.

VICTOR

Well, that settles it, you're seeing Gordon.

JONAH

Should I fetch him now, Master?

VICTOR

Yes, right away.

THANDI

But, Belle...

JONAH

I'll send another hand to get her, Madame.

VICTOR

Well, let's get you cleaned up and in bed.

He helps her inside. Corin follows.

EXT. THANDI'S ROOM, VICTOR'S MANSION - LATER

Victor paces up and down.

Gordon steps out, shuts the door.

GORDON

She looks fine. No broken bones. Just external scrapes and bruises. And yes, she's pregnant.

VICTOR

How far along?

GORDON

She's very early. A month. Slightly more. I've cleaned and dressed her bruises. She should get some rest, and no more horseback riding.

VICTOR
Yes, of course.

GORDON
And you, how are you feeling?

VICTOR
I've been well. The tonic has been working perfectly.

GORDON
Well, then, I should be going. I've another patient I must see.

Victor leads him out.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

When Victor enters, Thandi is in tears. He sits beside her.

VICTOR
What's wrong?

THANDI
(sobbing)
I didn't expect this to happen.

VICTOR
I understand how you feel. Please, don't cry. I promise I'll give you a good life.
(caressing her belly)
Both of you.

MONTAGE - THANDI'S PREGNANCY

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - DAY

Victor brings food.

Thandi is up and about, looking sour.

He tucks her in to bed. She isn't happy.

EXT. THE LAKE, VICTOR'S ESTATE - DAY

Thandi stands at the banks with Victor.

He holds her hand. She doesn't resist.

INT. THE HALL - EVENING

A splendid CHRISTMAS TREE, several gifts at its feet.

Thandi is elated.

Victor urges her to open the gifts.

She does so, very carefully.

He interrupts, shows her the right way to do it - RIP it open carelessly, be excited, jump up and down.

She laughs.

He pulls out her gift - an exquisite FEATHERED HAT.

She copies him, opens the others: a luxurious FUR COAT, DRESSES, SHOES, HATS, PETTICOATS, GOLD COMBS and a pair of DIAMOND EARRINGS. She hugs him.

END MONTAGE.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - EVENING

Thandi sits at the vanity.

Corin fixes her hair with the gold combs Victor got her.

THANDI
Thank you Corin, my hair looks
wonderful.

CORIN
You look beautiful, Madame.

A KNOCK on the door.

THANDI
Come in.

Victor enters, clad in a white tuxedo and shoes.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(admiring him)
You look very handsome.

VICTOR
You don't look so bad yourself.

He draws closer, puts on a DIAMOND NECKLACE for her.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
(admiring her reflection)
I thought that this would complete
your look.

She gazes back, touching the necklace, awestruck.

THANDI
You shouldn't have.

VICTOR
I've spent nothing. It was Elena's.

THANDI
Only tonight.

Victor nods, agreed.

INT. HALL - LATER

Victor and his BUTLER welcome guests at the entrance.

Thandi tries to blend in with the crowd.

Ahead, she spots Tom with another gentleman.

Anna's with him. They're dressed in blue and white.

Victor comes in from nowhere, offers his hand.

VICTOR
Hiding from me?

No, she nods, and takes his hand.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You know, you'll have to get used
to this someday.

THANDI
(scanning the room)
I don't think that I ever could.

DANIEL (O.S.)
Victor!

They turn and see Daniel closing in.

THANDI
(uneasy)
Excuse me. I'm going to visit the
powder room.

VICTOR
(understanding)
Certainly.

She hurries away. When:

TOM (O.S.)
Thandi!

She turns around.

He approaches her.

TOM (CONT'D)
Can we talk somewhere?

THANDI
The library.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

It's dimly lit. Thandi makes sure that they're alone, leads him in.

THANDI
Dinner will be starting soon.

TOM
Yes, we won't be long. So, how have you been feeling?

She keeps her distance.

THANDI
Exhausted, mostly. And the morning sickness is horrible. But otherwise, I've been fine.

TOM
I've been giving us a great deal of thought. I plan to talk to Victor. He, of course, will be upset, but he's a very reasonable man. If the child is mine, he can return you back to me, whatever the price. You could live at Fairview until I've made other arrangements. Anna would never have to know that-

THANDI
Stop!

He stares hard, a little shocked.

THANDI (CONT'D)
The child is Victor's.

Beat.

TOM
How do you know?

THANDI
Victor's doctor examined me. Like the other doctor, he said that I'm very early. Even earlier than Dr. Granger suggested.

She gives him a beat, allowing it to sink in.

THANDI (CONT'D)
He believes that I'm no more than
just a month or so along.

It rocks him. When he looks back to her, he's remorseful.

TOM
So, Victor is pleased.

THANDI
Yes. Very much so.

A heavy silence falls between them.

THANDI (CONT'D)
We should be getting back now.

TOM
Should you need anything, you only
need ask.

THANDI
I know that.

She turns to leave.

He pulls her back, crashes his lips to hers.

He lets her go. Nothing is the same.

THANDI (CONT'D)
(distant)
We should go now. Separately.

He smiles wryly, not really willing.

She steps back, gazing at him for one last time, leaves.

INT. HALL - CONTINUOUS

Tom trudges in, looking lost.

The guests take their seats at the table.

ANNA
Tom! Where were you?

TOM
(avoiding her gaze)
I went for some air.

He steals a glimpse down the table.

AT THE OPPOSITE END

... is Thandi sitting next to Victor.

Farther is Daniel and his wife, LADY MARGARET, a hook-nosed woman with a vile attitude.

Anna notices Tom's plate, still full.

ANNA

Is there something wrong? You've hardly touched your food.

TOM

I don't have much of an appetite.

Anna squints at him, turns to chat with the neighboring guest.

Tom glances at Victor and Thandi again, grows envious.

Victor stands to make a toast.

VICTOR

To a very happy, healthy...
(turning to Thandi)
... and fruitful New Year.

He turns back to the crowd.

They APPLAUD and CHEER. Everyone but Tom.

RED-HAIRED GENTLEMAN

Victor, I must say you've truly outdone yourself this time.

MADAME PULFORD

Yes. The place always looks so beautiful.

Thandi cringes when she spots Daniel smirking at her.

MADAME PULFORD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

With a place so large, I imagine you spent a small fortune on decorations.

MARGARET

Speaking of a place this large, when will you ever marry a proper girl and fill it with the sound of little pattering feet?

Thandi looks at Victor, her face red.

VICTOR

Funny that you ask. As it appears my companion and I are expecting.

A BUZZ of surprise and joy.

Anna and her mother are equally surprised. And so is Tom.

MADAME PULFORD
Well, that is wonderful!

MARGARET
That simply isn't the same. I meant
that your house should be filled with
white children. *Proper heirs.*

GASPS and WHISPERS.

Thandi keeps her eyes down, burning in humiliation.

VICTOR
Well, while I do thank you for your
concern, Lady Margaret, I think that
I shall fill it with whatever color
children I like.

The hall goes SILENT.

Victor shoots up, his fury at the seams.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Daniel. If I can have a word.
(to Thandi)
If you'll excuse me.

Victor storms out with Daniel on his tail.

THANDI
(to the guests)
If you all will please excuse me,
too.

She hurries out.

Tom fidgets, desperate to take off after her, doesn't move.

INT. VICTOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

LIQUOR CABINET

Victor pours two glasses of bourbon, hands one to Daniel.

DANIEL
So, tell me you old dog. How's she?

Victor shoots a murderous glare.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
The girl. How's she in bed? I mean,
she must be a good piece of tail,
seeing as how you've already gotten
her knocked up.

VICTOR

How she's in bed is of no concern to you. And certainly, should no longer be of concern to your wife or daughter. I simply won't stand for any more attacks on her.

Daniel stares back, shocked at his reaction.

DANIEL

If I or my wife have offended you, then I do apologize. However, you can't expect people to treat the girl like a white woman.

VICTOR

No, I cannot. But I can expect you and the others to treat her with common decency and respect.

DANIEL

What is it about this girl that makes you and Tom so crazy?

VICTOR

Perhaps, you didn't hear what I said.

Daniel's face darkens.

DANIEL

You're putting this girl, this nigger girl, before our friendship?
(waits for an answer)
I can understand your wanting her. How could any man not? But you go too far with all of this. Dressing her in jewels and fancy clothes, presenting her on your arm. She's a beautiful piece of mulatto ass, my friend, and nothing more.

Victor SLAMS his glass down.

VICTOR

(boiling)
You should leave now.

DANIEL

So, you'd seriously risk our friendship over this girl?

VICTOR

Yes, but I won't have to, because, from now on, you and I are no longer friends.

A beat as it hits Daniel. He rises, glaring hard.

DANIEL

Well, then I guess I shall contact you if there is business.

He shuffles to the door, stops.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

You know, I didn't say anything about you selling the mill to Tom. But since you and I have been so candid with each other tonight, I think you should know my feelings on the matter. You knew that I wanted it, and yet you sold it to Tom. I do pray that you stay in good health, old friend. I worry about what would happen if you were gone.

He leaves, SLAMMING the door behind.

Something haunts Victor, growing in on him. Panicking, he strides out.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Victor looks for Thandi in the dining hall.

He looks for her in the room. It's empty.

He sees the balcony's doors open. He bolts to the balcony.

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Thandi is at the railings, gazing into the distance. Hearing him, she turns.

He's pale, sweaty...

THANDI

(sourly)

I won't jump. You need not worry.

VICTOR

Are you alright?

THANDI

No. How could you do that to me? You should not have told them about my pregnancy. I'm not one of you!

VICTOR

(drawing closer)

One of you? Think of what you're saying. You and I are no different.

THANDI

Oh, but we are.

VICTOR

This is your life now.

THANDI

This isn't my life. I'll never be one of those ladies downstairs. There will always be people like Anna and her mother to remind me of exactly who and what I am.

VICTOR

Who you are? It isn't the color of your skin that defines who you are. You're a beautiful woman. A woman that I'm proud to have as a companion. A woman that I'm proud to have as the mother of my child.

He draws even closer.

She stiffens.

THANDI

Your guests are waiting.

VICTOR

Let them wait.

He lifts her chin, seals her lips with a kiss.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

Victor, weaker and much frail, sits with Thandi.

Corin enters.

CORIN

Excuse me, Sir.
(hands an envelope)
There was a messenger.

VICTOR

(takes it)
Thank you.

She leaves.

He opens it, pulls out a letter. Reads.

Thandi studies him, growing anxious. His face says that it's bad news.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

My God.

THANDI
Is everything alright?

VICTOR
No, I'm afraid not. It's from Tom.
Anna has lost the child.

He leans back. Thandi takes the letter, reads, growing sad.
She goes on to rest her head on his shoulder.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - TWO WEEKS LATER

Thandi suffers through labor.

Victor clutches her hand. He's frantic!

The live-in MIDWIFE assists them.

VICTOR
(glancing at the door,
angry)
Where the hell is Gordon?

MIDWIFE
We won't need him. It won't be long
now.

Another HUGE wave of pain hits Thandi. She CRIES out.

MIDWIFE (CONT'D)
Push, Madame!

THANDI
(panting)
I can't! I can't!

VICTOR
It's almost over. You've got to push,
darling.

She leans forward, gives all what she's got.

MIDWIFE
You're almost there!

Then: a BABY'S CRY fills the room.

MIDWIFE (CONT'D)
It's a boy!

VICTOR
(kisses her hand)
You did it!

The swaddled baby is placed in her arms. He's beautiful, dark
hair and white!

THANDI

He has your straight, dark hair.

Victor leans in eagerly. Suddenly: his smile fades.

A beat later...

VICTOR

He has your eyes.

THANDI

What will we name him?

VICTOR

Caleb.

A KNOCK at the door.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Who is it?

GORDON (O.S.)

Gordon.

VICTOR

Come in.

Gordon enters.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(annoyed)

What took you so long?

GORDON

I was in the middle of delivering
Lady Thompson.

Gordon goes to the basin, washes his hands.

VICTOR

Thank you, I'll take it from here,
Clarissa.

The midwife exits.

GORDON

I didn't expect to be on call this
soon. Thandi's early.

VICTOR

Thank God we had Clarissa.

GORDON

Well, friend, I'm here now. And I'm
afraid, I'll have to ask you to give
me some time alone with my patients.

Thandi smirks at Victor's reaction. He didn't expect that.

He goes to her.

VICTOR
(kissing her forehead)
I'll be back soon.

He leaves.

INT. VICTOR'S MANSION - DAY

Visitors flock in. They congratulate the new parents.

INT. THANDI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tom, fascinated, carries the baby in his arms.

TOM
What is his name?

THANDI
Caleb Xavier Richmond.

He gives a puzzled look.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Victor has already given him his
freedom.

TOM
And you?

THANDI
No.

TOM
He's a fine boy. He has your eyes.

THANDI
Yes, everyone says that.

TOM
Was he early?

THANDI
Yes, by weeks. Dr Gordon believes
that it may have been the fall that
brought on the early labor.

TOM
You had an accident?

THANDI
Yes, a minor fall from my horse very
early on. I'm just grateful that
Caleb --

She stops when she realizes Tom's smile fading.

THANDI (CONT'D)
Please forgive me. That was very
thoughtless of me.

TOM
You need not apologize. You should
be grateful to have him.

MONTAGE - VICTOR'S LAST DAYS

SUPERIMPOSE: A YEAR LATER

INT. CORRIDOR, VICTOR'S MANSION - EVENING

Victor goes into a coughing fit, collapses, spitting blood.
Thandi sees this, rushes to his aid.

INT. VICTOR'S MANSION - LATER

Thandi learns about Victor's illness from Dr. Gordon. She's
devastated.

INT. VICTOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

Victor is bedridden and in agony.
Thandi is by his side, comforting him.
Dr. Gordon inspects him, his expression grave.

INT. VICTOR'S ROOM - ONE NIGHT

Victor directs Thandi to the side table where an envelope is
placed. She opens it.

INSIDE

... Are her FREEDOM PAPERS, marking the end of their journey.
Nodding in refusal, blinking back tears, she folds the papers,
goes on to replace it on the table.
He stops her mid-way, urging her to accept.
She isn't up for it.
He insists.

She turns it down and crumbles to his chest, lamenting.

THANDI

No. Don't go. I love you.

He beams with joy. He's at peace.

VICTOR

(embracing her)

I know. I love you too.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAYS LATER

It's pleasant, calm, green...

An elite crowd stands around Victor's fresh grave.

Close to it, stands Thandi, mourning.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Thandi is at the window, gaze afar.

Caleb sleeps in her arms.

The air of loneliness, of loss... is devastating.

INT. GEORGE PETERSON'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Thandi shuffles in, searches for Tom.

She spots him amidst several unfamiliar faces.

Up front and center is Daniel, proud, confident, smug... On seeing Thandi, he gets upset.

DANIEL

(to the attorneys)

What is this!?

PETERSON

She's in the will.

(points at the seat next
to Daniel)

Please, Miss Boran, have a seat.

DANIEL

(laughing)

You've got to be kidding me.

PETERSON

Well, it seems that everyone is here.
We'll now start the reading of the
will.

Silence.

PETERSON (CONT'D)
Let me first begin by saying that we thank you all for being here. I'm sure some of you may be wondering who these two other gentlemen are.

He introduces them to the audience.

PETERSON (CONT'D)
This here, is Attorney Carl Briggers, and this, is Attorney Richard Jameson. Both gentlemen also have last will and testaments from Victor. They shall each read them separately after I've concluded the first.

A wave of WHISPERS, then, SILENCE.

PETERSON (CONT'D)
(reads)
Known by all men by their presence, that I, Victor Xavier Richmond, of the county of Bulford and state of South Carolina, being of sound mind and full age, do make, publish, and hereby declare this to be my last will and testament in the manner following. First, I nominate and appoint Thomas R. Lexington as executor of my estate.

Daniel stiffens up.

PETERSON (CONT'D)
I hereby give and bequeath to him, Thomas R. Lexington, my estate, all real property, and land, other than one hundred and twenty-four acres known as Hollis Creek. I also bequeath to him, all debts owing to me with relation to my business, land, real property, and interest holdings. I also bequeath to him, all my shares in the Lexington Mill Company.

Daniel shoots up from his chair.

Peterson pauses to study him, returns to the document.

Thandi glances at Tom.

He is shocked!

PETERSON (CONT'D)
 And to Thandi Boran, a female slave,
 I give and bequeath to her, again,
 her freedom. I also bequeath to her,
 two point one million dollars -

An UPROAR ensues.

PETERSON (CONT'D)
 (louder)
 And all my personal belongings!

DANIEL
 This is outrageous!
 (to Tom)
 You won't see those shares.
 (to Thandi)
 And no court's going to give a nigger
 that kind of money.

PETERSON
 There are three wills.

DANIEL
 All three are the same, iron clad.

TOM
 (teasing)
 You're an attorney, Daniel, aren't
 you?

Silenced, Daniel storms out!

Tom settles down, hands Thandi a letter. She opens --

THE LETTER

... in beautiful cursive writing. She reads through...

VICTOR (V.O.)
 Dear Tom, I suppose you and many
 others are baffled by my last will
 and testament. You must be wondering
 why I left so much to you. It's
 because I know that you love Thandi.
 And because you love her, I know that
 I can trust you to see after her and
 Caleb once I'm gone. I leave you my
 fortune to ensure their happiness.
 Also, there's something that you
 should know. Although, it is my
 belief that you already suspect
 so... Caleb is your son.

Thandi glances at Tom, choked up. She continues to read.

VICTOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I knew it from the very first moment
 I set eyes on him. However, I wanted
 them so much, that it didn't matter.
 They've brought so much happiness.
 Only once before have I been so truly
 happy. Tom, it's my sincere hope that
 you'll now relieve yourself of your
 present situation, so that you too,
 can find the happiness you deserve.
 I wish you well and please, take care
 of yourself and family. Sincerely,
 Victor.

Touched, she folds the letter, leans onto Tom's shoulder.

MONTAGE:

SUPERIMPOSE: TWO YEARS LATER

EXT. COURT - DAY

Daniel THUNDERS into his carriage, leaves.

Tom emerges, carefree.

EXT. THE OLD NEWPORT MILL - DAY

... Busy with toiling laborers, tons of raw materials and
 finished goods.

EXT. MARKET - DAY

Thandi shops with Corin and Henry, stops when she spots an
 old Mulatto woman - LILY. She approaches her.

THANDI
 Excuse me, Miss. Please, forgive my
 intrusion, but would your name
 happen to be Lily?

LILY
 (curiously)
 Yes, Ma'am.

THANDI
 Are you familiar with a family by
 the name of Richmond?

It takes her breath away.

LILY
 Yes, yes, I am.

Thandi takes Lily's hand, says something. With each word, Lily trembles. She leads Thandi to her Missus.

EXT. GARDENS - DAY

We see Tom with Thandi and Lily.

EXT. HOLLIS CREEK - DAY

Tom and Thandi stroll along the banks. CALEB, (2), holds their hands, toddles along.

Thandi is pregnant with their second child.

FADE TO BLACK.

WHITE OVER BLACK:

In the end, Victor left Caleb a huge sum of money that would be available to him upon his twenty-fifth birthday or before, if he should marry and the whole of Hollis' Creek to Thandi.

FADE OUT.

THE END.