

Antebellum

Written by

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LIONSGATE
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WHITE LETTERS ON A BLACK BACKGROUND

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."

~William Faulkner

FADE IN — SUPER: LOUISIANA

EXT: PLANTATION — EARLY EVENING

The gloaming drapes a lonely plantation in burnt oranges and yellows. The Great House sits atop acres of endless, perfectly manicured cotton fields, guarded by giant hundred-year-old moss trees — replete with cows roaming at pasture, a few scarce chickens and a brood of quarter horses. It is late Summer, the heat is stifling, omnipresent; unrelenting.

We follow a little BLONDE GIRL who can be seen skipping past the endless rolling greens, dragonflies buzzing about in her wake. We spot her rosy cheek, from the faint profile — she appears to be just shy of ten years old, at the most — her long ponytail whipping in the wind, donned in a floor-length linsey-woolsey dress, buttoned all the way to her throat. Without a care in the world, she grips a tiny fistful of wildflowers.

Blindingly white sheets can be seen rolling like ocean waves in the Southern Summer breeze. A few young black women slaves are busy pinning sheets carefully to the clothesline. They're dressed in ecru-colored, lace Chantilly dresses, which button up all the way to the neck. A trio of grinning Confederate soldiers pass proudly in their army-issued grays and tip their hats toward the women slaves, which the girls acknowledge with odd, forced, plastic smiles; their eyes dead, with a hint of terror, under perspiring brows — a sinister current shadows the cordial exchange. Once the Confederates have safely passed, the women slaves' seemingly friendly expressions are immediately replaced with a look of absolute horror.

As we continue our exploration of the plantation, we see an old wooden pole, about 12 feet high with a singed, tattered Confederate flag billowing in the breeze. We pass behind a REGAL WOMAN in a peach-colored, formal dress, with long, strawberry-blond hair, she is standing just at the edge of The Great House. We catch the profile of her face as she stares toward a forest in the distance. The little blonde girl has now joined her, and hands her the freshly picked wild flowers before gently clasping her mother's white laced-gloved hand.

Emerging from the forest, nestled just at the bottom of the plantation's property, we see a freshly recaptured female slave hoisted over the backside of a beautiful, silk, black horse — she is being lead by a CONFEDERATE CORPORAL. Her face obscured; we only see the drip trail left behind by her bloody mouth — her body bouncing up and down in rhythm with the horse's trot;

all the while a commanding, shadowy figure follows closely behind.

In the distance, located on the clay dirt road, just adjacent to the Great House — we notice a row of a half-dozen or so cabins, all identical — save for a rusted-out shed, with a stumped chimney, we see a gaggle of Confederates struggling to separate two recaptured runaway slaves (one male, one female).

Super-tight shot of the female runaway; slinked over the back of the horse. EDEN — a rail thin, youngish, beautiful black slave, maybe mid-thirties — lies limp, bobbing up and down on the backside of the horse, her face resting on the saddle bag. Her mouth is dripping blood, when her eyes suddenly widen, clearly surprised by whatever she has discovered in the saddle bag. They continue their march across the plantation. Eden doesn't blink again until the horse begins to slowdown, before arriving in front of cabin #4 — we now clearly hear the disturbance, as it has grown louder; more urgent.

When the beautiful, silky, black, quarter horse comes to a complete stop, Eden moves her tongue over her lip, trying to locate the source of the gash, when suddenly, without warning, she is dragged feet first down from the saddle — her head smashing on the soggy Louisiana soil. We see only the boot of a Confederate as he warns her to not move an inch, before heading toward the other soldiers — who are still trying to regain control of the recaptured escapees in the distance.

Cabin #4 sits lonely and unkempt, evidenced by the overgrown brush and horse post in front, where grass and wild weeds have replaced fading hoof prints. The dirty curtains, which cover the only two windows, billow intermittently from an errant breeze. We notice Eden's gaze is trained on the saddle bag, before the horse is lead away, leaving only the corporal's boots as her view — her eyes then follow him as he runs toward the commotion.

Super-tight shot of a STRIKING YOUNG SLAVE WOMAN, skin like black porcelain, with razor-sharp cheekbones, her face decorated with a septum ring that reads she may have only been recently stolen from the Gold Coast of Africa. She is being pulled away by a gimpish Confederate, while refusing to break her stare with ELI, a healthy young buck; with a wisdom in his eyes that cheat his years.

Eli has a draconian collar around his neck; he's shirtless, skin glistening with sweat and what appears to be whipping scars

creeping up the back of his left shoulder. Breathless from the failed escape, he is being carried off in the opposite direction by a couple of Confederates. Tears are welling in his eyes as he tries desperately to maintain eye contact with the woman slave, who shoots him an earnest, apologetic stare.

SLAVE WOMAN

(low whisper, almost mouthing
the words in a thick, Ghanaian accent)
I'm sorry.

She wipes her tears away before kissing a small crucifix fastened at the end of her delicate gold necklace. She then breaks away from her soldier and makes a run through the cotton fields toward the nothingness, with the kind of speed that could only be powered by the sheer will to escape the nightmare of slavery; one way or the other...

JASPER, the head overseer – a young, ginger-bearded white man, with a deceptively polite manner, tips his hat with an amputated ring finger; he sits atop his horse at the edge of the field, while calmly watching the escape play out as if solely for his entertainment. A perimeter guard shoots off a warning shot and glances toward him. A commanding Jasper raises his hand – he has this.

JASPER

(to his horse)
Get!

Jasper and his right-hand give chase as if for sport. The corporal and his palomino sidle up beside the runaway slave as a lasso pulls the back of her neck, snapping her violently back to earth. Eden and the other slaves look on in disbelief of the suicide run and the ease and brutality of the capture. Jasper can be seen in the distance dismounting his horse as the corporal looks on. Jasper kneels down, studying her face, quizzically. The rough rope has rubbed the slave girl's neck raw, she is crying but says nothing at first and then...

SLAVE WOMAN

Kill me... Just kill me, you bastard!

Jasper doesn't break his stare for a full 10 seconds.

JASPER

Oh – don't worry girl. I will accommodate you.

This is your second attempt.
It WILL be your last.

Jasper then tightens the noose and slowly walks back to his horse - deliberately prolonging the torture. He ties the rope to the other end of his saddle as the runaway begins crawling; scooping handfuls of earth, as Jasper follows behind, one slow boot at a time — savoring every moment.

We slowly zoom in on the little blonde girl's face, who is still holding hands with her mother, we notice her smirk grow into a devious smile.

The two horses now appear more like a painting than real life as Jasper pulls out his shotgun and without hesitation shoots the crawling runaway point blank in the back. Eden watches in horror.

Eli screams, using his full lung capacity, veins protruding from under his neck collar — he begins punching and kicking the two corporals who are barely able to contain him, as he tries desperately to free himself, extending his shackled arms toward the murdered runaway.

ELI
(screaming)
NO!!!

Eli almost breaks free, when one of the corporals reverses his rifle and strikes him across the head with brute force, knocking him unconscious.

The corporal then reappears beside Eden, who has just witnessed this horrific event. Without hesitating, he drags her feet first toward cabin #4. As she claws away at the earth toward an imaginary freedom she sees the murdered slave woman's body being dragged into the burn shed, just adjacent to cabin row. Eden's eyes begin to well up with tears as we turn toward a close-up of the flag waving in the wind.

Black slaves urgently collect linen baskets and clothespins at the line, before scurrying for cover as if taking shelter from a fast approaching thunderstorm.

We finally see the shadowy figure who was following so closely behind Eden. HIM stands at the end of the clay dirt road, surveying the estate, as the Confederate soldier exits cabin #4 and salutes.

HIM is in silhouette — a substantial, intimidating white man, exiting his middle-age years, with brown, thinning hair; donning his Confederate army-issued grays. Judging by the stripes, he is a man of great authority in the Confederacy. We don't get a clear enough look at HIM's face to survey the wrinkles and weather — he appears to move like a ghost in shadow. His gait determined, as he makes his way into the cabin, where upon almost immediately we hear blood-curdling screams from a terrified Eden.

INT: INSIDE CABIN #4

Eden is perched on her tiptoes in the corner. As she moves from her frozen position, we hear a heavy rusted chain that leads to her raw and bleeding cuffed ankle.

As HIM approaches, we hear the loud creaks from the bending of rotting wood. Eden struggles to cover herself before HIM swats her across the torso repeatedly, with the buckle-end of his belt. HIM puts his entire body into each lash — his generous back outlining the sweat-soaked, Confederate-issued pea coat, as he administers each swing. Eden begs for mercy from a God that doesn't answer and the General who coldly ignores her pleas.

HIM
(drenched in a sandpapered
Southern drawl)
God says...
you have no right to your freedom.
I am responsible for you now;
and I will tame your savage ways —
THIS is your home now.
(pauses for a moment to get his breath)
It brings me no joy to do this
work, but it is ordained and you will
obey me as your earthly master as
intended by our forebearers. (pause)
You will speak only when I instruct
you to speak. Do you understand me?

She nods her head yes, trembling uncontrollably... hoping to prevent further assault.

HIM
Now. What's your name?
Say it girl! What's your name?

WOMAN

Please! Stop!

HIM slaps her with his bare hand, opening her lip and right eye.

HIM

What's your name, girl? Say it!

(whap!)

I'm losing patience with you – say it!

WOMAN

Eden? My name is Eden?

HIM nods in the affirmative.

EDEM (CONT)

It's Eden! My name is Eden!

HIM

(satisfied)

Good, Eden. That's real good.

Everything will be alright.

You can stop that crying.

There is a long pause between them – Eden is clearly jolted by the sudden change in tone from HIM. For a moment they both bathe in uncomfortable silence but Eden's reprieve is short lived.

HIM (CONT)

Now... Please stand up for me.

With just the strength of her now compromised legs, Eden raises herself cautiously to stay balanced, flinching at even his slightest move. HIM takes Eden gently by the chain tie and leads her to a small, unremarkable dinette table, just across from the now raging furnace.

HIM (CONT)

You've given me no choice. Now bend over.

(gives her a moment)

Go on... Do it.

(places his index finger over her lips)

Now trembling in pure terror, tears streaming down her bruised cheeks. Eden reluctantly bends over. HIM takes Eden in full view before tacking her arms over a peg located underneath the leaf end of the kitchen table. There is complete silence as HIM walks away toward the fire to remove a branding iron. Eden squirms

trying to locate her tormentor but it's no use. HIM lands the branding iron just at the small of her back — the skin sizzles as Eden's guttural scream pierces the air. Eden; defiant, unsuccessfully tries to hold back tears, while concentrating on a specific space on the wall (adjacent to the bed) as HIM attempts to reduce her will to ashes.

HIM (CONT)

(deadpan)

...your nigger friends are dead because of you. You know that, right?

Try it again and...

I'll drag you to the burn shed myself.

Eden's lifeless legs flailing like a corpse, soul emptied, body resigned. HIM covers her mouth with his enormous hand, suffocating Eden under the weight of his big body, while she squirms and screams from the searing burn. For good measure, HIM concludes his violent attack with clinical precision; adding an inaudible sinister whisper of instruction in the ear, before finally releasing his grip. Eden then slinks back down to the floor, into fetal position.

HIM (CONT)

(casually lighting up a cigar)

Now be my good girl and clean up this mess.

(in between puffs of cigar smoke)

Eden tries to control her wheezing from the smoke wafting directly in her face.

HIM (CONT)

Maybe I can get away for supper tonight.

Would you like that?

You can make us a chicken.

Him exits the cabin door, signaled by the hinges screaming out a long, exaggerated squeal — leaving Eden shocked, limp and lifeless on the floor. Once Eden hears the door close she finally takes in a gasp of breath and begins to shake and cry uncontrollably. Her screaming is so low, almost inaudible.

Eden makes her way to the window where she sees HIM untie the beautiful black quarter horse from the post out front — once again, she trains her gaze on Daphne's saddle bag.

HIM acknowledges Eli, instructing him to retrieve Eden a chicken for supper.

HIM
Get, DAPHNE! Get!!

As HIM and his horse disappear into the now setting sun — past the cotton fields, beyond the nothingness — we see a soldier lower the Confederate flag from the pole, announcing the General's departure. Eden stares out at the flag pole before making her way to the bed, where she crawls in and begins to weep in guttural screams.

CUT TO BLACK

"ANTEBELLUM"

EXT: PLANTATION COTTON FIELDS — SIX WEEKS LATER

About a dozen or so slaves pepper the cotton fields of the plantation in absolute silence.

We find Eden among the other slaves, fingers bloodied from liberating cotton from stalk. Cannons and gunfire from a battle can be heard in the distance. A thunderous sound rolls across the sky as the slaves, entranced, all follow something overhead in unison that has stolen their attention.

Jasper is on his horse a few yards way.

JASPER
Y'all seem easily distracted.
Let's break up this monotony
and get you focused... Sing us something!
...Perhaps one of those ole' negro tunes.

He and his fellow overseers laugh heartily as the slaves look to one another. Eli leads with a faint, eerily familiar whistle before the other slaves join in with a collective humming. Their impromptu performance is interrupted by intermittent gun and cannon fire, which leaves Jasper and his men unfazed.

JASPER
(motioning to Eden to approach)
Girl!
Your Master will be back this evening.
I would suggest you get yourself together.
He'll be expecting a good supper...

Eden is silent.

JASPER

You have my permission to speak, girl?
Do you understand me?

EDEN

(in a whisper)
Yes.

JASPER

Yes, what?

EDEN

(hesitates)
Yes, Sir.

JASPER

Now that's better. After you
finish here, get yourself cleaned up.
I'll send ole Eli up there directly.

Eden continues liberating cotton from stalk, her bale brimming with cotton — her fellow slaves never look up from their duties, perhaps in a silent acknowledgement of the exchange, except for one woman slave we spy in profile, whispering to the slave beside her.

We only see the hooves of Jasper's chestnut horse in a leisurely trot, as we pan up to reveal him removing a long handle rifle from the saddle holster. Jasper then flips the rifle to the wooden handle effortlessly, with one hand, before windmilling it like a polo mallet — landing a devastating blow to the back of the whispering slave woman's head — she collapses like a sack of potatoes.

JASPER

(Jasper calmly places his index finger over his lips and tilts his head to one side)
Shhhhhhh.
(beat)
Next time I won't be so generous.

Cannon fire can still be heard in the distance and remnants of musket smoke now waft in the air.

JASPER (CONT)

Back to work! All of you!
Let the sound of Confederate
victory bring joy to your labor.

The slaves pick up their pace, as ordered, barely glancing at one another. As the disruption settles, the cruel monotony of cotton picking is only amplified by Louisiana's Indian Summer — the heat stifling, stubborn; the sun wicked in its unrelenting scorching. From the clear blue sky, a sound like thunder rolls across the fields as the slaves look up in unison, yet again.

INT: CABIN — LATE AFTERNOON

Eden is methodical in her preparation of the cabin. Setting the table just so... the bed made up to military standard. Eden then moves over to the door, vigorously slathering butter all over the door's hinges. Once finished, she gets up, catching her reflection in the non-glass mirror and caresses the small of her back. There is a knock at the door.

Eden opens the door to reveal Eli standing there. She slowly shuts the door in his face, before re-opening. The door squeaks. Eli looks at the door hinges and shoots Eden a concerned look.

EDEN

(without missing a beat)

We'll be fine.

(hands him the bucket and ax)

Milk. Chicken.

Eden abruptly closes the door, as if she's just spotted something or someone — we then see Jasper in the distance spying on their exchange.

EXT: CABIN ROW — DAY

Eden is hanging freshly cleaned linens on the clothesline in front of the cabin. In the distance, a buggy with a new batch of human chattel — a half dozen or so — approaches the Great House. Their clothes tattered... faces bruised, tender; chapped by the blistering sun.

From a distance, we see the same strawberry blonde woman and her young daughter weighing and measuring the new slaves, before they are hosed down and reloaded into the buggy. Jasper and a handful of his subordinates — who sit on horseback at a safe distance, appear to take in the indoctrination of the new slaves with a visible curiosity, if not complete fascination.

JASPER

(yelling toward cabin row)

Eden! Get down here girl –
Hurry up, we don't have all damn day!

Eden makes her way down to Jasper and the buggy of unfortunates at a brisk but cautious pace. She finds Jasper dismounting from his horse to allow closer inspection.

The buggy of slaves, all mid-20's to early 30's at most, range from high-yella to black satin. They appear shell-shocked but also strangely bewildered by the nightmare of slavery.

JASPER
(loudly and proudly)
Welcome home, one and all!

Jasper takes a particular interest in the youngest – JULIA, a beautiful, doe-eyed nymph in her early 20's, with tight curls and amber eyes that read defiant. As Julia disembarks from the buggy she loses her balance and falls down to all fours, digging her fingers into the earth, trying desperately to regain herself, but her emotions seemingly get the better of her as dry heaves give way to vomiting. We notice a marking on her lower right ankle, perhaps a birthmark.

Disgusted, Jasper turns away and then comes right back to Julia who is now recovering.

JASPER
What's your name, girl?

JULIA
My name is...
(she hesitates and looks around at the other slaves as if asking for permission).

JASPER
(impatient)
Girl...

JULIA
(barely audible)
My name is Julia.

JASPER
Oh... I think you forgot something, girl.

Julia looks around at the other slaves, confused and searching their eyes for the correct answer before Jasper grabs her by the face, squeezing her jaw with his dirty gloved hand.

JASPER (CONT)

I don't know where you came from or how you addressed white folk before, but here you will always address me and any white man as "Sir". Do I make myself clear?

JULIA

(still confused but keeping it together)
Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

JASPER

That's better. Now listen up!
All of you. This here is a reformer plantation- commandeered by the 9th infantry of the Confederate army of the 13 States. Wherever you were before - whatever small freedoms you may have enjoyed, I'm here to tell you - that's over.
I don't tolerate any back talk whatsoever, in fact; the rules on this plantation are that you only speak when given permission to do so. That means absolutely no speaking among yourselves unless one of the white folk on property gives you permission to do so. If you do - we WILL know about it.
(looks across the whole group)
And none of you, under any circumstance, are to be out after sundown.
(pauses to ensure that resonates)
Now... right up this hill you will find your cabins, you'll also be given instructions by one of the overseers as to your daily duties - which are to be followed obediently and with a smile. Here we whistle while we work. Ain't that right, Eli?

Eli acknowledges the question with a nod as Jasper continues.

JASPER

That's right! So... Are we clear?

None of the new arrivals speak, still stunned, appearing to look at each other for some semblance of solace that never comes...

JASPER

You have permission to speak.
Now let's try this again.
(annunciates absurdly)
Do I make myself clear?

They all answer in the affirmative in unison.

JASPER

That's good.

The slaves all exit the buggy as Jasper reunites with his horse and motions over to one of the young Confederates.

JASPER (CONT)

(with pride)
Raise the flag.
The General returns this evening.

As the soldier begins to raise the Confederate flag, we see Eden leading some of the girls up the hill, with the youngest; Julia, following close behind...

JULIA

(to Eden)
Psst... what is...

Eden grabs her forcefully by the arm before Julia can even finish her question.

EDEN

(yelled whisper)
Quiet!

The terror in Eden's eyes was enough for Julia and all of the newly arrived slaves within ear shot — they follow Eden's lead in both silence and pace leading up to the row of modest cabins. We notice through a gap in one of the cabin doors, a slave woman working a cotton loom.

INT: EDEN'S CABIN — NIGHT

Eden can be seen in her tattered, soiled dress, hair pressed back, skin clean — she is preparing the cabin for HIM's imminent arrival. She tends to the chicken, making sure the meal

has been prepared just so. The small dinette table is set, illuminated by the two kerosene lamps that serve as the cabin's only light.

Daphne's bated breath and dignified trot signal Him's arrival.

HIM

Whoa... Daphne. That's my girl.

Eden makes her way to the corner of the cabin to await Him's entry. We only see his size 12 Confederate army boots as he enters the cabin.

HIM (CONT)

Eden... How I've missed you, girl.
Come over here and let me see you.

Eden gingerly makes her way over and catches a glance from Eli before the door closes.

HIM (CONT)

No need to be afraid.

Eden says nothing but obediently follows the instruction; moving in, allowing herself to be enveloped by Him's big body.

HIM (CONT)

You may speak, girl. You miss me?

EDEN

Yes... Yes sir.

HIM

I know. Missed you too... Terribly.
Ooh! You feel so goddamn good!

Him starts licking Eden's neck while sticking his dirty hands under her reeking and tattered dress.

HIM (CONT)

Among my concubine, you are my
greatest prize.
(stares at her)
The Northern aggressors will never
take you away from me.
(as he runs his fingers across the
branding he administered...
still licking while talking)

You know that, don't you?

EDEN

Yes, Sir.

A sustained thunderous sound from above echoes through the cabin to which both Eden and HIM react.

HIM

(wiping sweat from brow)
Sounds like a storm's coming... maybe
it'll break this God forsaken heat -
It's October for crying out loud..
(looks out window)
Remember... we got some brave boys of
the Confederacy headed this way..
(pause)
I'll expect you and the girls will
show them some real Southern hospitality..
(looking down at her)
...you should get a bath.

EDEN

Yes, Sir.

HIM

Alright, good. First, let's eat.

As HIM & Eden fall out of frame, we slowly pan out from cabin window. Once we are a few yards away, and time passes the cabin suddenly goes silent as the camera continues the slow pan out revealing the entirety of the cabin, a restless Daphne, and the black vastness of their surroundings. The kerosene lamp is then extinguished, rendering the two cabin windows pitch black..

DREAM SEQUENCE

A little girl is laying on top of Eden — they're hiding from someone under what appears to be a burlap blanket, Eden is covering the little girl's mouth trying desperately to keep her quiet.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT. CABIN #4 — DAYTIME

We only see a stark white sheet ripping the air — from outside the cabin window — it's one of the young slave women pinning

sheets to the clothesline. We find Eden staring out the window before taking a seat on the floor beside the bed. Her hand outstretched, resting on the wall – she seems to be slowly scraping a groove into one of the wooden wall planks with her thumb and index fingers when she is startled by a rap at the door. Eden wipes her tears before standing up to gather herself and moving to answer the door. As she did before, she closes the door and then re-opens. The squeak is no more.

ELI

(slaughtered chicken in tow, he looks Eden directly in the eye – in a hard whisper)
WHEN??

EDEN

(returns his stare)
If they raise the flag..
(pause)
...We go tonight.

Eli nods in recognition before turning back as Eden closes the door.

Eden begins to tiptoe across the wood planks back toward the grooves at the edge of the bed as we hear yet another rap at the door. At the same time, the plank she is standing on lets out a loud squeak. Eden turns around, clearly frustrated and swings the door open quickly.

EDEN

(without even really looking)
I told you...

She cuts herself off as she realizes it is not Eli. It's Julia. She only stares at Eden, clearly distraught.

EDEN

(looking in both directions to be sure none of the overseers are on guard before acknowledging Julia.)
Get in here, girl!

Eden takes Julia's hand and leads her to the dinette to sit. They stare at each other in silence for a moment before Julia begins to speak. Julia is out of focus, her words muted until...

JULIA

(quizzically)

Have we met before?

Eden says not a word and continues to stare straight ahead, vacant of emotion.

JULIA (CONT)

(barely moving her mouth)
I'm from North Carolina.
(Pauses, remembering for a moment)
Seems like forever ago...
(snaps back to her new reality).

Julia sits in the uncomfortable silence waiting for Eden to say anything in futility – Eden remains standing. Julia pulls on a few strands of her hair and begins nervously wrapping a long piece around her index finger. She repeats the nervous tic — twisting and then unraveling the same section of hair. Eden's expression changes, as if ruminating on a thought she is unable to keep secret — indicated by just a hint of warmth that creeps over her face. Eden leans toward Julia, perhaps to calm Julia's nervous tick, but at the last second thinks better of it, instead resuming her cold, stoic posture.

JULIA (CONT)

I was married.
(pause)
I mean... I AM married.

Eden closes her eyes and exhales; unaffected. Julia can't wait any longer for a response from Eden that doesn't feel like it is coming any time soon.

JULIA (CONT)

I HAVE to get back to my husband!
(pauses staring at Eden, calmer tone)
I need your help...
I know you and Eli are friendly...
He won't say a word to me. Nothing.
You must have SOME kind of plan. Right?!

Eden only stares at her, contemplating what she will share.

JULIA (CONT)

(Desperate, crying uncontrollably)
I can't do it. I just can't do it.

EDEN

(calmly and in a quieter tone)

Listen to me.
You need to forget wherever you came
from before here...
Bury it; if you have any hope of surviving.
(looks down at the table)
Your mind has to be strong –
that's how you cope. You have to stay...

JULIA

(in a harsh tone)
No. No, no no. That's not possible for me.
(looks at Eden, inspecting as if
she might be able to see the answer
in her eyes before saying earnestly)
What are we doing? What is the plan?

Eden looks down at the table.

EDEN

(puts both her hands on the table)
You think we haven't tried?
There WAS a rebellion...
five people... slaughtered.
(pauses, remembering...
looks directly at Julia)
Listen to me carefully –
here... on this plantation,
your second chance IS YOUR LAST.

Eden flips up her waistcoat revealing the brand on her back.
She then takes Julia by the elbow, ushering her toward the door.

EDEN (CONT)

We must choose our moment wisely.
But for now, we keep our heads down
and our mouths shut.

Eden, relieved to now have Julia outside of her cabin, slowly
begins shutting the door, satisfied she's convinced Julia to her
way of thinking... Julia suddenly shoves her foot between she and
the door.

JULIA

You HAVE to help me...
(staring directly into Eden's
eyes – very close, almost nose-to-nose)
I'm pregnant.

Eden is jolted and although she tries to temper her reaction, her facial expression gives away her surprise at hearing Julia's news.

EDEN

Listen to me – you must keep quiet...
(looking around)
...they will kill you...

JULIA

(cuts her off in a loud whisper)
You think being quiet is being strong?
You think that's gonna get us outta
here, alive?

Julia locks eyes with Eden for what seems like an eternity.

JULIA (CONT)

It turns out, you ain't special...

Eden pushes her out of the door once again but Julia is having none of it and forces the door back open.

JULIA (CONT)

You ain't special at all! You just a coward
nigga slave with a brand and no backbone!

Eden manages to slam the door successfully this time, leaving Julia standing alone and exposed on the front porch.

Eden contemplates for just a moment; clearly fighting the urge to comfort Julia, she instead softly rubs her hand against the surface of the door. Confident Julia has finally retreated, Eden calmly moves back toward the dinette set and takes a seat, returning to her trademark, seemingly emotionless state.

Eden stands back up expressionless; placing her hands on her face in thought, inhaling, exhaling. Then suddenly, with one violent motion, she swats away all the tin plates, candles and cups from the table, clearly frustrated, she pounds her forehead with the palms of her hands.

Eden then retreats to the corner of the room where she quickly regains her composure. She calmly sits on the end of the bed before standing back up and then returning to a seated position; she repeats this odd dance several times before extending her legs over across specific swaths of the floor, as if playing a

bizarre game of invisible hop-scotch – we hear a loud creak from the floor as Eden moves across.

EXT. PLANTATION – NIGHTFALL

As a soldier raises the Confederate flag, an impressive caravan of tall, thin torches lights up the night sky. It is the Confederates' triumphant return from the battlefield. The sound of boots marching, in concert with the collective baritone chant "Blood and Soil" provide an eerie, menacing soundtrack to the otherwise quiet plantation.

The slaves stand with vacant stares, the women all dressed in long, stark white cotton dresses, while the male slaves are in ecru, tattered shirts, buttoned to the neck — they all stand perfectly rowed as the Confederates make their way up to the mess hall. The young soldiers' bare faces begin to come into focus, only illuminated by torchlight. There is unified anger, and defiance read in their expressions.

INT. MESS HALL – DINNER TIME

A dozen or so Confederate soldiers, none over 30, are seated at a communal table in the plantation's packed mess hall, bayonets by their side. The slaves serve them, with faint, seemingly forced smiles and not so much of a whisper — as instructed... Julia and Eden among them. The boy soldiers; all eating from tin plates, with only kerosene lamps to illuminate the hall, giving a grim, sinister quality to their baby faces.

The soldiers appear to be in good spirits, celebrating their victory and bragging about the successful defeat of the "Yanks" at Williamsport. They eat ravenously, mouths open — lacking even a modicum of decorum. The celebration is interrupted by the clanking of a chalice at the front. It is HIM. A hush falls over the hall.

HIM

First I want to congratulate you
all on your victory at Williamsport.
...And now with our defeat of the
Yanks at Gettysburg it seems we've
got those blue-bellied bastards on their
heels. ...Washington in our sights!

The mess hall erupts in applause while we see two of the slaves sharing a long, strained stare.

HIM (CONT)

But we must never relent!

Jasper gestures and mess hall goes quiet.

HIM (CONT)

We are descendants of the Gods and will fight with the same immeasurable courage and vigor. We will sacrifice our blood that will stain this soil of our homeland. This is the only hope we have of retaining our heritage, our way of life!

All of the young Confederates cheer in adulation. We see one of the few young white women in the mess hall — a sandy-haired, petite belle — as she makes her way over to one of the corporals. She puts her hands on his shoulders and begins massaging him, to his clear delight — as they continue to listen to HIM's speech. A young soldier whispers in HIM's ear.

HIM

I've just been informed we received a new batch of recaptured escapees that require some behavioral correction... and that reminded me.

(takes a moment)

We are of rightful inheritance to this land and rest assured our National Estate will not be stolen from us by these traitors to America. You all are the future, the brave men of the Confederacy, who will lead us to ultimate victory. For tonight, let us put away our troubles; drink and be merry! You've earned it... all of you. Enjoy yourselves. And by the way, these sapphires are here to serve your needs... Whatever they may be...

The whole room laughs in unison before erupting in applause. Jasper walks up next to HIM and raises his hand. We now see that the strawberry blonde woman was standing slightly behind, HIM (who appears to be her father) for the entirety of his speech. The woman's daughter runs up the aisle to give her mother a goodnight kiss before returning to what appears to be her mammy (a slave).

JASPER

(pounds the table)

Faith. Family. Folk.

THE WHOLE ROOM
(pounding the tables)
Faith! Family! Folk!

Julia stares across the room at Eden, who stands expressionless.

COMMUNAL TABLE OF YOUNG CONFEDERATES

PURCELL, a young corporal, handsome, clean-shaven, whistles toward Julia while cheered on by his comrades. Next to him, is DANIEL, a less handsome, Confederate – skinny, scruffy, with a slightly effeminate disposition. He is not as boisterous and does not cheer – he keeps his head down toward his food.

PURCELL
Angel. Yeah, you... come here. I don't bite.

DANIEL
(meekly shaking his head contrarily)
Man...

Eden looks over from across the room concerned for Julia. Julia cautiously makes her way to the group of rowdy Confederates.

PURCELL
(Toward Julia)
What's your name? Mine's Purcell.

Jasper, irritated, takes a sip from his chalice while standing behind the group.

JASPER
Her name's Julia...
...corporal.

Red-faced, the young Confederate soldier acknowledges Jasper respectfully before motioning for Julia to come closer.

PURCELL
Well hello, *Julia*.
Pleased to make your acquaintance...

JULIA
Hello.

PURCELL

You sure are pretty. Have a face
like an angel. How bout I call you
angel? Would that be okay with you?

Hesitant but compliant, Julia nods.

PURCELL (CONT)

My compadre here was just telling
me that he thinks you're real pretty.

DANIEL

(blushing, not making eye contact)
Nah, man, no.

PURCELL

What? You don't think she's pretty?

DANIEL

No, I mean, yes... of course I do.

PURCELL

Well then... She ain't gonna say no!
(motions toward Julia)
Talk to her.
(under his breath to #2)
You're in charge here.

Julia stands there, waiting for this scene to come to some sort
of conclusion so she can get on with it.

DANIEL

(politely & hesitantly)
...Julia... ugh... well I...

JASPER

(exhausted by this pitiful exchange)
For fuck sake.
(to Julia)
He will meet you back at your cabin
immediately following dinner service.
You are dismissed as of this moment.
(looks Julia dead in the eye)
Go prepare for your Corporal.

Julia nods toward Jasper and Daniel.

JASPER
(angrily)
What's that, girl?

JULIA
(in a whisper)
Yes, sir.

JASPER
That's more like it! Now, go!

PURCELL
(To Corporal #2)
Enjoy. I'm headed round back
to the whipping post.
Lashing the backs of uppity niggers
is much more satisfying anyway.

As Julia makes her way back to the kitchen, the table of inebriated young men bursts out in laughter. Eden looks on emotionless, careful not to reveal her dismay before Julia is escorted out to her cabin.

INT. JULIA'S CABIN

Daniel stands just inside the door to Julia's cabin. It is shut behind him, but he stands there. Frozen. In awe of Julia, and the situation.

We see Julia across the room, seated at the edge of the bed staring at him, her face illuminated by the kerosene lamp.

JULIA
If I may, I didn't get your
name earlier.

DANIEL
(caught off guard)
Daniel.
(the first "Daniel" had a little
crackle. He affirms...)
It's Daniel.

JULIA
(feeling slightly more at
ease from his shyness)
Well, Daniel.
I appreciate the compliment.

Daniel looks confused.

JULIA (CONT)

...From earlier... You said I was pretty.

DANIEL

Oh. Well, yes. I mean, of course you are. Anyone can see.

Julia smiles as she slowly stands up. She walks toward the young soldier with a deliberate pace, maintaining his attention.

JULIA

Well, thank you again... Sir.

DANIEL

No... no need for the "Sir".

JULIA

(her confidence building)
Well, it's been such a long time since any man was nice to me. I appreciate the compliment is all.
(looks him in the eye)
How'd you get to be so sweet?
(still walking toward the soldier).

Daniel simply looks down, unsure of how to answer the question He then looks back to Julia to help move the conversation.

JULIA (CONT)

I mean... you're so young. How old are you? You even twenty?

DANIEL

(looking down)
Twenty-one. How old are you?

JULIA

(looks a little confused herself)
Twenty-three... Maybe twenty-four.

He looks at Julia in a loving way, as if he understands her plight. He puts his hand on her arm. She reaches up to touch his cheek tenderly.

JULIA (CONT)
(whispers into his ear in a skeptical
but understanding tone)
You know... you don't have to do this.
(pause)
I can tell you're special.

The soldier stares at Julia.

JULIA (CONT)
(still in a whisper)
Please. help me get out of here.
(pause)
You have no idea...
(she pulls back slightly to stare
at him, he could be her chance...)
You're not like the others, those monsters.

The soldier looks intently at Julia.

DANIEL
(returns her gesture in kind,
resting his hand upon her cheek –
we notice what looks like a class ring)
Why did you speak to me?

JULIA
(confused)
You mean when your friend called me over?

DANIEL
(deliberately louder and more directly)
NO. ...Why did you speak to me when
I entered the room just now?

JULIA
(slightly uncomfortable, but still
thinking she can handle him, smiles)
Well, I, just thought we should be
properly introduced...

They slowly move together toward the center of the room, Daniel
moving forward and Julia stepping backward.

DANIEL
(dry)
You have a short memory then.
You heard Commander Jasper.

You speak only when given
permission to do so.
(his hand slides down from her
cheek toward her neck)
Is that not right?

JULIA
Yes... Sir... I mean Daniel...

DANIEL
No. It's SIR.

Suddenly, the young corporal backhands Julia across the face, her lip busting wide open from the class ring, she just misses the bed post and crashes to the floor. The corporal's shoulder bag hits the ground with a thud. Daniel puts his boot next to Julia's face gesturing toward her.

DANIEL (CONT)
You don't know shit. I'm as much a
man as any Confederate here. Just cuz I
don't want to sleep with a filthy mongrel
instead of my own kind doesn't make me...
(hesitates - stammers)
I'm a patriot. You understand me?!

JULIA
Yes, sir, sorry... I didn't mean...

DANIEL
Just shut the fuck up! You're lucky
I don't tell Jasper. You best make him
believe I had my way with you if
you know what's good for you!

JULIA
Yes sir...

Julia reaches for the young corporal's boot hoping to diffuse an increasingly unpredictable situation. Daniel attempts to kick her hand away from his boot but accidentally lands his foot directly in her gut.

DANIEL (CONT)
(short breath out, remorseful)
Ugh, sor---

Frustrated; he moves toward the door.

EXT. OUTSIDE JULIA'S CABIN

Cloaked in darkness, Eli walks one of the corporal's horses down cabin row. It is quiet – with only the sound of crickets and the occasional hoot of a lone owl in the background.

We hear brisk footsteps approaching Eli from behind..

EDEN
(in a whisper)
Pssst!

Eli; startled, turns around quickly to see Eden approaching, mid-stride, crouching low to the ground. By this time we are only about 20 or so yards from Julia's cabin.

ELI
(to Eden)
What are you doing out here!?
You'll get us both killed!
You have to get back before they see you.

Eden is now crouching just behind Eli, using the horse for cover.

EDEN
We need to... We have to hold off..
We can't tonight..

ELI
(surprised and clearly beyond frustrated)
What?! No, tonight – we go tonight.

EDEN
No..
It's Julia..
We have to take her with us..
...She's pregn.....

Eli has no time to respond, they spot the young corporal now standing in Julia's cabin doorway. Agitated – he interrupts..

DANIEL
(to Eli)
What you looking at, nigger?
Don't just stand there –
bring me my fucking horse.

Eden walks alongside the horse, hidden from view as Eli approaches... Eli deliberately leads the corporal's horse just past the corner of Julia's cabin, giving Eden just enough space and cover to slide from behind the other side and conceal herself from view of the corporal (or an overseer).

As we pull out, we see Daniel mount his horse and make his way toward the cotton fields, beyond the nothingness — as Eden moves in shadow back toward her cabin.

EXT. COTTON FIELDS — SUNRISE, NEXT DAY

The cavalry of boy soldiers make their way past the cotton fields where the slaves are already fast at work liberating cotton from stalk. The stoic band of overseers, lead by Jasper's eagle eye, stand guard. Eli walks among the rows collecting baskets — he looks to Eden for any sign, any update, but nothing. They both silently wonder about young Julia, who finally makes her way down to the fields — her eye is slightly black and blue and her lip is cut.

JASPER

(tipping his hat with a smug smile)
I trust you had a good night? You're excused for your tardiness... this time. Don't make it a habit or the stocks will be waiting for you.

Julia nods her head and makes her way to join the other slaves in the fields. She settles in next to Eden. Eli is maybe 20 yards away... Jasper on mounted horse behind him.

EDEN

(to Julia — motioning to her lip)
You ok?

Julia looks up toward Eden — her eye and lip clearly visible — she stares at Eden a long while before..

JULIA

Please.

EDEN

I know. Be patient.

A tear streams down Julia's cheek — her muffled cry now on the verge of eruption. She puts her hands up to cover her face.

Eden looks over toward Jasper who is occupied with his favorite pastime of harassing Eli. She reaches toward Julia putting her hand on her back and pulling Julia's hands away from her face, before wiping her cheeks clean.

EDEN

Just keep going. Keep going.

We move past Eden and we slowly push in on Julia who is doing her best with the cotton. Suddenly she reaches for her stomach and looks down. We see a blood stain expanding on her dress and dripping onto the dirt below. A tear slowly makes its way down her cheek.

JULIA

(increasing volume with each "no")
No no no no no no no no!

Eden immediately turns to her putting her hand over her own mouth... Eden doesn't see the blood. Julia then slowly turns toward Eden, revealing her dress. By this time Jasper's attention has been diverted from Eli to Julia. Eli looks on toward Eden as if to say "what is going on?" Eden shoots him a look we have not seen from her before and Eli knows exactly what to do.

As Jasper is headed away from Eli on his horse Eli sings out, just loud enough so Jasper can hear...

ELI

CRAC-KA!

Jasper immediately whips back around.

JASPER

What the fuck you say, boy?

Once Jasper is distracted Eden huddles over Julia, doing her best to sooth her in the moment.

JULIA

Why? I just don't understand.

EDEN

Shhh. It's ok, it's ok.

JULIA

It's not ok!

(louder now)
It's NEVER gonna be ok!

Jasper now hears the disruption and turns back toward Julia.

JASPER
(to Eli)
I'll be right back for you.

Jasper approaches Eden and Julia.

EDEN
(to Jasper)
She is sick... sir.

JASPER
What. The fuck. Is the issue?

He then sees the blood and thinks he understands the problem.

JASPER (CONT)
Ugh, go get cleaned up – Now!

EDEN
May I go with her... sir??

JASPER
She can handle herself. Get back to work.

Julia tries to stand and falls. She gets right back up and takes a step and falls again, her face right in the dirt.

JASPER (CONT)
(disgusted)
Clean her up and get back here.

Eden rushes to Julia's side and holds her up as they walk back toward cabin row. Jasper then makes his way back toward Eli, coming up behind him on his horse and kicking him in the middle of his back.

JASPER (CONT)
Now what were you saying?

Eli says nothing.

JASPER (CONT)
You know what?

(now louder, for all to hear)
The shed needs cleaning..
Too many foolish negroes with
rebellious hearts.

Jasper laughs and looks to the other soldiers who join in the
cackling chorus.

JASPER (CONT)
Go get that cleaned up, boy. That should
keep you from flapping those gums.

None of the slaves are looking, but all are listening. We can
see the dread on each of their faces as they all contemplate
this horrific task. Sadness overwhelms as they keep working.

JASPER (CONT)
Get!

ELI
Sir - yes sir.
(under his breath)
Cracka ass cracka.

Eli walks over toward the burn shed as Jasper turns his
attention back to the other slaves, scolding one of them with a
whip to the face for not working fast enough.

INT: BURN SHED - MINUTES LATER - SILENCE

A creaking of the door follows a loud thud as daylight floods
the shed. Eli's feet take a couple steps inside - he enters as
if walking on broken glass. The burn shed is empty. Scanning
the floor inside we see pieces of charred wood.. evidence of
desecrated bodies. Upon further inspection we notice what
appears to be some sort of gold jewelry. Eli fishes through the
dirt and ash to retrieve a delicate gold necklace. He cleans it
off and loops it over a couple of his fingers - that's when we
recognize the small crucifix fastened at the end (from the young
woman's suicide run). We see Eli's face - clearly thinking
about its owner - her horrible end. He kisses the crucifix and
then carefully lifts the necklace over his head and places it
around his own neck.

Eli takes in a moment of silence as the spirits of the departed
wash over him. He has clearly performed this macabre task
before, but the psychological torture proves too much to bear.

He suddenly begins to tear the shirt from his body, his mouth agape, screaming with no sound before collapsing to the ground. Eli lays on the floor of the shed as we slowly pull out from the door, across the field, past cabin row.

EXT. PLANTATION - NIGHT

We move in on a corporal slowly raising the flag.

INT. EDEN'S CABIN - SAME NIGHT

We find Eden sitting at the edge of the bed, arms outstretched, as she continues slowly caressing the same spot on the wall, her left foot tapping nervously. Eden then crawls over to the furthest side of the bed, where she extends her right leg back toward the floor, careful to avoid hitting the mattress with her knee, before stepping down and gingerly navigating the creaky wood planks.

Eden appears to be repeating the same strange, hopscotch we observed earlier, with the same resulting squeaks on the wood floor. She then returns to the wall and presses her hand against the etching while squeezing her eyes closed.

We notice the cabin is prepared just so, the table is set, pots piping on the fire stove in back. Eden stands, releases her hands from the wall and walks toward the window. We see a torch flickering in the distance. It is Him. Eden retreats to the corner of the cabin — as is customary when greeting HIM — staring at the floor, head down, both hands clasped and resting on her dress; when we hear a restless Daphne out front...

HIM

Whoa girl, settle down. Settle down.
You're my favorite girl, aren't you?

HIM dismounts Daphne, dragon saber dangling, torch in hand.

HIM (CONT)

(louder, yelling to Eden)
Eden! Get on out here and
get Daphne settled!

Eden immediately moves to exit the cabin. As she opens the door, it lets out a creak. Eden looks toward it in frustration before moving quickly toward Daphne.

HIM (CONT)
(pushes past Eden to enter the cabin)
And how's my second favorite girl?

Eden gives HIM a nod as she exits the cabin. She approaches Daphne and caresses her beautiful coat, before their foreheads instinctively meet for a loving nuzzle – which immediately calms the horse. While their connection is apparent, Eden's eyes appear mesmerized by Daphne's saddle bag.

She is suddenly summoned back to reality by HIM.

HIM (CONT)
(yelling)
Hurry up and get back in here, girl!

Eden quickly secures Daphne before making her way back to the cabin as instructed.

EDEN
Yes sir!

HIM
You hear me? How is my second favorite girl?

EDEN
I'm doing real fine, sir. Real fine.

HIM
What I like to hear. What's for supper?

EDEN
Lamb stew. Eli finished the slaughtering...
...just this morning.

HIM
A full belly and a good sleep is
just what I need.

Him secures his saddle bag tightly – extending his arm just enough so we can see his watch. They enter the cabin. HIM closes the door.

TIME PASSES, MAYBE AN HOUR

INT. CABIN IN BED. SAME NIGHT

We see Eden's face on HIM's side shoulder — expressionless; vacant of emotion. They both lay silent for a moment.

HIM
(as if to his wife of 20 years...)
Sweet dreams, Eden.
Sleep tight.

EDEN
(holds back a physical dry heave)
Good night, sir.

The cabin is still, save for the rustling of Daphne outside. The kerosene lamp burning the last of its oil in the corner serves as the only light. Him is in a deep slumber while Eden lays awake staring at the ceiling. Her expression sad, hopeless as we see her eyes begin to fill with water. She succumbs to exhaustion, closing her eyes and pushing out a lonely tear.

Eden and HIM are now both fast asleep. It is pitch dark — deadly silent. An iPhone rings.

CUT TO:

INT.

The same iPhone ring continues.

In the pitch dark — eyes; startled, shoot open, before taking a dramatic, deep gasp of air — clearly awakened from a nightmare; now summoned back to reality by the familiar ring of her cell phone.

Camera pulls out.

INT: MODERN BEDROOM - MORNING

The iPhone rings once more as a manicured hand extends out from luxurious, pristine white sheets and fumbles to find the phone on the adjacent night stand.

EDEN
(groggy)
Morning...

WOMAN ON PHONE
Morning VERONICA. Just making
sure you are on time getting

ready for your flight. The car
will be there at 9.

The electric blinds, which cover the giant floor-to-ceiling
glass windows, slowly begin raising in perfect unison – barely
make a sound – allowing morning sun to flood the sizable,
minimalist designed, ultra-modern bedroom.

VERONICA

Thank you, Steph.

Veronica (clearly the same woman as Eden, but with remnants of
make-up and looking quite a bit more polished) ends the call and
places the phone back on the night stand. As she does, a man's
hand gently pulls a few strands of hair away from her face.
Veronica rolls over to rest her head on his generous chest,
revealing the hand belongs to a strikingly handsome African
American man in his mid-to-late thirties, with a slight beard,
kind eyes and just a hint of salt at the temples.

MAN

(softly)
The phone startle you?

VERONICA

Oh, yeah – no, I'm good..
Just... just a god awful dream..
...I can't even remember it now.
(looks around, foggy)
Ugh... I have to be out of here by 9..
Can you do me a favor?

NICK

Anything...

VERONICA

Can you get Ken all dressed for me?

NICK

Of course... my board meeting was
pushed back to 11 anyway.

VERONICA

I'm gonna barely have enough
time to get ready for this flight.

NICK

I gotchu.

(lightly running his hand up her leg
over the white sheet)
But would it be the worst thing in
the world if you missed it?
(looks up at her)

VERONICA

(returns his gesture with a little,
playful tap on his butt and smiling)
You'd like that, wouldn't you?
(turns head)
Not today!

They sink back into bed for a moment and Veronica seems to let
her mind drift.

Veronica smiles and shifts her weight toward the edge of the
bed, before getting on her feet — she is wearing a maroon
Spelman sweatshirt and royal blue Columbia University boxers.

As Veronica rises she immediately grabs the small of her back,
as if she's felt a sharp, sudden pain.

As Veronica makes her way toward the bathroom we hear tiny feet
running on the floor; it's KENNEDI (about 4 years old with tight
curls and amber eyes — she could be a miniature version of
Julia). She bursts into the room jumping right on top of Nick.

VERONICA

(half yelling from the bathroom)
Hey Ken Ken — Daddy is going to
get you dressed and ready for
school — no dilly dallying!

KENNEDI

(looks at Nick with all the
seriousness in the world)
I know exactly what I want to wear!
(dragging Nick)
Let's go, Daddy!

The door to the bathroom is slightly ajar. A dresser to the
left of the door is covered in framed family photos — some of a
teenage equestrian — a young Veronica. Before Veronica closes
the door to the bathroom we hear the shower turn on. As she
steps into the shower we see her back has no tattoo or branding
of any sort — the shower door creaks.

She takes a moment, under the water with her eyes closed to enjoy the quiet and the warmth. She lathers.

INT: KITCHEN — ABOUT 15 MINUTES LATER

Nick is under the stovetop looking for a pan while Kennedy is seated at the counter. Veronica walks by the entryway to the kitchen, popping her head in for a moment. Nick peeks out from under the stovetop.

NICK

Hey V — check the TV.

Nick smiles and points to the refrigerator after finding the pancake griddle.

NICK (CONT)

...paused it for you.

Veronica looks toward the refrigerator door and touches the screen to play. It's a split screen CNN segment with Veronica and a talking head — a Hoover Institute Fellow — he's white, appearing to be in his early 60's, with a head full of white hair. We catch him mid-sentence, animated, finishing his point.

The chyron reads: Timothy Paul, Hoover Institute @TPHoover)

TALKING HEAD

(raising his voice and gesturing with his hands)

Listen, I come from three generations of Harvard Grads — my father and my father's father attended and came to this country with only the shirts on their backs.

(satisfied with that statement)

We all sympathize with the plight of Black America... to a point... but

(wrapping up)

Political correctness has taken the place of bootstrapping. It's hard work that should be rewarded, not the preferential treatment we see with affirmative action.

HOST

Veronica, I only have 15 seconds left in this segment... Your response?

The chyron reads: Veronica Henley, Sociologist & NYT Best-Selling Author of "The Coping Persona" - @VHenley81)

VERONICA

(calmly and concisely)

I would say this...

My version of a meritocracy wouldn't include granting admission to top-tier schools simply because your father can write a 3-million-dollar check.

(pause)

Perhaps providing a gifted black or brown student — who doesn't necessarily have the financial means or familial connections — an equal opportunity — would solve the stubborn problem of mediocrity masquerading as excellence.

HOST

Well... unfortunately we are out of time..

Veronica turns the screen off and smiles to herself. Nick extends his fist toward Veronica from across the breakfast counter...

NICK

Boom!

KENNEDI

(repeating her dad)

Boom!

Veronica strokes Kennedy on the head just as she is about to leave the kitchen...

KENNEDI

Mommy, why was that man so mad?

VERONICA

(grins)

Baby girl... I'm still trying to figure that out myself.

Veronica walks toward the door of the kitchen.

VERONICA

Gotta take a quick Skype session — be right back and then we will do "good-byes", ok?

Kennedi begins nervously twisting her hair around her index finger and only manages a nod. Veronica stops abruptly and changes course, and moves into the kitchen quickly, where she sidles up next to Kennedy.

VERONICA
You good, baby?

Concerned, she releases Kennedy's finger from her hair in a way that appears routine. Kennedy nods her head "yes". Veronica kisses Kennedy on the forehead before making her way out of the kitchen, back toward her office.

INT. VERONICA'S HOME OFFICE — MINUTES LATER

Just as she sits down, her phone lights up from a text.

STEPHANIE // 8:26AM
Hey Veronica --
5-minute warning for your 8:30AM --
I already notified her that you have a hard stop at 8:55.

Veronica picks up her phone and quickly replies with a simple "Thx" text.

Veronica pulls out her laptop from her bag and places it on her desk next to a TED Talk folder, with her name at the top:

VERONICA HENLEY PHD
LICENSED PSYCHOTHERAPIST
Author "The Coping Persona"
Sociologist & CNN Contributor

Before going any further, she checks herself in a compact mirror and turns on an additional light. The shelves in the background are filled with family photos and a mix of Veronica's equestrian trophies.

Nick pops his head around the doorway and stares at Veronica for a moment with a loving smile on his face. He clears his throat.

NICK
Vegan pancake?

VERONICA
On a Tuesday? What's the occasion?

NICK

I was informed, it's pancakes or nothing.
...gotta pick our battles.

VERONICA

Emm-hmmm. Got it.
Nah, I'll grab something at
the airport.
(sincerely)
Thank you babe.

NICK

Team work makes the dream work.

Nick taps the doorframe twice before turning back toward the kitchen.

VERONICA

Babe!

Nick pops his head back in.

VERONICA (CONT)

Second thought...
I'll take one pancake,
please, thank you.

NICK

I got you.

Nick pulls the knob but the door doesn't close all the way.

Veronica re-settles in her chair, opens Skype and dials in. On the screen appears a strikingly attractive young white woman, early 30's with bone straight, strawberry-blonde hair; with more of a smirk than a smile, with vacant crystal blue eyes. She is clearly the same woman from the opening scene.

She is polished, with a conservative, professional appearance, appearing to take the call from the driver's seat of her car.

VERONICA

Hi... Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH

(a cheerful Southern accent but obviously well-educated, placing a little

attitude on the title "Dr.")
Yes, Dr. Henley?
Good morning -- So nice to meet you.
That lipstick looks great on you,
complements your skin!
...I could never pull that off.

VERONICA

Thank you? (clearly off put)
Good to meet you as well...
And please, it's Veronica.
I apologize for our call being truncated
this morning.
I'm traveling so it couldn't be helped..
I know you've been trying to get
on the schedule for a while, so I hope
this is okay.

ELIZABETH

Absolutely... Veronica. You're a busy girl.
I appreciate you squeezing me in.

VERONICA

Of course --
So, how did you hear about me?

ELIZABETH

Oh, I saw you on one of those
legacy media networks.
(pause)
It was a roundtable discussion on
lack of "inclusion".
(pause)
Anyway, I found your position quite
interesting, but it was more how you
carried yourself that caught my attention.
(surprised)
You were just so articulate.
So... in control of yourself.
It was clear to anyone watching
that your opponent didn't stand
a chance.
That silly man was putty in your hands.

Veronica's expression is growing increasingly impatient.

ELIZABETH (CONT)

I was impressed.
Must have been a ratings bonanza.

VERONICA

(trying to be agreeable)
Well, yes.
That segment garnered the network
quite a bit of "spirited" mail.

Awkward pause.

VERONICA (CONT)

But... may I ask, how did that
segment pique your interest
and inspire you to contact me?

ELIZABETH

I think you mentioned your book.
(pause)
Well, you definitely mentioned your
book actually.
(looking away at something out of view,
clearly distracted)
I remember because it seemed odd to
be peddling your wares in that particular
moment; the high tension of it and all.
(pause)
But... we all have to make a living, right?!
(awkward grin)

Veronica grows squirmy and uncomfortable.

VERONICA

I must politely disagree.
Perhaps you were distracted and didn't
see the entirety of the segment.
My work focuses on the intersectionality
of race, class and gender.
(pause)
...and as a result I've been targeted with
some pretty disgusting online abuse —
not to mention constant attempts at
gaslighting on social media...
(pauses briefly, organizing her thoughts)
I wrote "The Coping Persona" as a
supportive tool for historically
marginalized people.

(becoming confused and irritated
as to why she has to explain herself)
I'm sorry which publication did you say
you were with again?

ELIZABETH

I didn't.
But... full disclosure...
I'm really more of a talent scout..

VERONICA

(feigning interest at this point)
Really? So you're a headhunter.

ELIZABETH

Yes!
(begins giggling bizarrely)
I'm a headhunter. Exactly...
(looks past Veronica and points)
Is that Kennedi?!

Shocked, Veronica looks behind her and sees that Kennedi has propped herself up on the couch – a notebook in one hand and a crayon in the other – obviously wanting to be a part of her mom's work, looking like she is taking notes. Veronica immediately moves the laptop to push Kennedi out of frame.

ELIZABETH (CONT)

(as if looking at an animal in the zoo)
She is just SO cute. She would be a
great lil companion for my daughter...
I see a play date in our future!

VERONICA

Ok. I'm sorry but at this point..

A loud double car beep sound can be heard outside the house. A fraction of a second later, the same beep can be heard on the Skype audio.

VERONICA (CONT)

(tilts head, almost recognizing the
double beep, but distracted)
I have to go.

ELIZABETH

No Problem. Didn't mean to trigger you.
Good luck at the summit. Be safe.

(waves while still grinning)

Veronica, quickly disconnects from Skype and closes her computer, completely baffled by the strange woman. She shakes it off before re-packing her laptop, scooping up Kennedy, and exiting the office.

On her way to the kitchen she opens the front door. The black car, on her tree-lined street, is a little early and waiting for her. She waves to the driver, Kennedy on her hip and puts up five fingers to signal she will be ready in five minutes.

Veronica and Kennedy re-enter the kitchen with Nick.

VERONICA

(to Nick)

Well... that was bizarre.

NICK

Oh yeah? What happened?

VERONICA

(pressed for time)

Oh... I mean nothing... that woman was just so off.

(ugh)

...the car is outside.

VERONICA (CONT)

(shakes it off looking toward Kennedy)

You guys be good while I'm gone!

Kennedi suddenly begins to cry uncontrollably, screaming, appearing inconsolable...

KENNEDI

Mommy – do you HAVE to go????

I don't want you to go!

Stay home with me! Please!

(wiping her tears on her face
with her little fists)

Nick looks over to Veronica with an expression that reads this behavior is unusual.

VERONICA

Oh baby girl – Mommy is going
to be right back. I promise.

In fact, I'll be back before
the weekend so I can take you to
Catie's birthday party.

KENNEDI
(Barely audible)
But WHY can't I come with you?

VERONICA
I will be so busy, baby, you
would be bored.
(looks to Nick)
Plus, who's going to take care
of Daddy while I'm gone?!
(Nick looks at Kennedy as though
he is helpless).

They share a long pause. Kennedy is mulling it over. Still not
convinced.

VERONICA
You know what? In a couple days, when
you look up in the sky and see the big
airplane, you'll know that's mommy
flying home to you!

KENNEDI
Ok Mommy!
(getting over her tantrum she
takes another handful of granola)

Confident that Kennedy is recovering, she caresses her cheek.

VERONICA
(to Kennedy)
Who's the strongest girl in all the land?

KENNEDI
(flexes both her biceps)
Me!!!

VERONICA
And what's her name?

KENNEDI
(smiling)
KENNEDI HENLEEEEEEEY!!

VERONICA
That's right!!

Now fully recovered from her meltdown, Veronica continues to keep her upbeat...

VERONICA
(to Kennedi)
You know who I'm going to see??

KENNEDI
(now excited)
WHO?!

VERONICA
Auntie Dawn!

KENNEDI
Auntie Dawn!

VERONICA
Want me to tell her you say
"I love you, Auntie?!"

Kennedi smiles and aggressively nods her head up and down.

Intuitively, Nick grabs a tissue and hands it to Veronica with one hand and runs his hand over her head with the other. Veronica then wipes Kennedi's cheeks and nose.

NICK
Ahh, the notorious Auntie D.
I can't imagine what y'all are
gonna get into.
(hums Notorious BIG's "Big Poppa")

VERONICA
Re-live our undergrad years
in one night, obviously.

A second car beep echoes from outside.

VERONICA
Ugh — I am off!
I'll text you when I get in...
...shouldn't be too late.
I love you both the MOST!

Veronica hugs Nick and plants a big kiss on his lips to which Kennedy sneers. Veronica then goes to release the hug while Nick keeps on holding her, wanting the hug to go on just a little longer. Veronica smiles before pulling her face back, looks at Nick in the eye and gives him another short peck on the lips before they break their embrace.

Veronica then moves over to Kennedy giving her a dozen kisses all over her face before walking toward the door.

NICK
(points to Veronica as she
heads out the door)
Love you, babe.

As seems to be their routine, she points back at him, before turning to head out the door.

Kennedi suddenly makes a beeline for her mom before she can get out the door – she has a mauve-colored piece of construction paper in her hand; waving it around as she sprints toward Veronica.

KENNEDI
Mommy, wait!
I almost forgot...! This is for you.

Kennedi hands her mom the picture she was drawing back in Veronica's office. It is a beautiful stick figure drawing of Nick and Kennedi and a plane overhead with "Mommy" on top.

VERONICA
Thank you baby! I need this!
I'm putting it with all my
important papers...
(puts it inside her briefcase bag)
And will hang it on the wall in my room!

Kennedi is very happy with this reception. Veronica gives her one more kiss on the forehead before walking out the door.

INT: AIRPORT – DAY

Veronica makes her way through the airport. We can now fully see her perfectly tailored suit and appreciate her commanding presence juxtaposed with her effortless beauty.

Pulling her small Rimowa roller luggage behind her, she is making her way to the gate. She passes by a Hudson Booksellers

where there is a stand right out front. Veronica lets out a small grin and after she passes by we can see why. Her book is prominently on display – her face on the cover. “The Coping Persona” Veronica Henley, PhD.

Veronica steps onto the people mover just as she receives a text. She continues her confident stride and reads the text.

DAWN // 11:47AM
When do you get in... bitch?!

Veronica smiles and quickly replies:

VERONICA // 11:49AM
Late tonight.

She steps off the people mover and moves to her gate just as they are calling for first class passengers as she quickly adds:

VERONICA // 11:50AM
...bitch (with a smile emoji)

Veronica files into the first-class line to board. Just as she does, a man taps her on the shoulder from behind. Startled, Veronica spins around instantly to find a WHITE MAN in his early 50's with salt and pepper hair that looks to be more on the salty side. He leans in and whispers...

MAN
(plainly without emotion)
Excuse me.
This line is for first-class.

Veronica breathes out, releasing a knowing smile while her eyes dig into his for just a moment before...

COUNTER AGENT
(to Veronica)
Ticket please.

Veronica swipes her iPhone in a slightly exaggerated way in front of the man and places it above the scanner.

The light turns green.

COUNTER AGENT (CONT)
(to Veronica)
Have a nice flight, Ms. Henley.

Veronica brushes off that episode quickly, makes her way down the jet bridge and onto the plane. She stows her carry-on and quickly, but thoroughly, wipes down the armrests, headrest and tray table with a sanitary wipe before settling into her seat.

As the flight attendant offers her a glass of champagne, we see a woman several rows back in coach – is it Elizabeth from the Skype session?

The strawberry-blond woman is staring up at Veronica in first class.

Just as the woman leans over and peeks her head into the aisle to get a better look at Veronica, a large man and his wife stop in front obstructing our view while they stow their luggage.

Veronica relaxes in first-class. She reaches into her purse for her Chanel lipstick and applies before checking her phone one last time. She fully extends her arm, holding the camera as far away as possible and slightly overhead and presses the big red circle on the bottom of the screen to record and we see a “live” icon pop up at the top. Veronica is in the foreground and the first row of coach in the background.

VERONICA

Why hello you lovely people...
Can't wait to see all your faces
at the Ted X...
(turns the camera out the window
and then back on herself)
...On my way!

Veronica pulls the phone back, closing Instagram as a new message from “Bae” pops up. It's a selfie of Nick, suited up for work, he is at the wheel, parked in what appears to be a school parking lot. We see Kennedy peering over from her car seat in the back, both make identical kissy faces into the camera.

Veronica replies with a heart emoji before placing her phone on airplane mode and putting the sleep mask over her eyes.

CUT TO BLACK

INT: WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE ARE, BUT IT IS HOT

Extreme close-up of Eden or Veronica's bare face, she hangs upside down, beads of sweat gathering on her forehead; she

appears to wince in pain, eyes closed, she is concentrating intently on something internally. Her eyes shoot open with the same direct, emotionless, and penetrating stare from the opening scene.

As we pan out just a bit further we notice her upper body is shaking. Is she being punished? Are we back in the nightmare of cabin row with Eden?

MAN

Ok, release. The yoga practice makes us as light as a feather on our feet. Slowly dismount and lower yourself and let's lay on our backs for final rest for just a moment — as we gather our thoughts on the day ahead, bringing positivity to each and every situation you may face today. Visualize addressing any challenge with unrelenting focus and emerging successful and victorious on the other side.

Veronica and the private yoga instructor have their mats laid out in the living room of Veronica's luxurious hotel suite. The curtains are drawn, the room is calm and light spa music plays in the background.

As we pan the hotel suite we can see the picture Kennedy painted for Veronica pinned just above her bed. Veronica looks up.

INSTRUCTOR

Namaste.

VERONICA

Namaste.

A loud knock at the door is followed by an exaggerated "Veeeeee!"

WOMAN OUTSIDE DOOR

"V"! I cannot hold this tea any longer!
It is about to spill!

Veronica cracks a smile.

VERONICA

(to Instructor, grins)
Positivity and light, right?
(loud enough so the woman outside

can hear)
Good morning, Dawn!

Veronica opens the door. A healthy, full-bodied black woman (of butterscotch complexion) with an impossibly infectious smile moves through the door, into the room and leans up against the desk facing Veronica, all in one fluid motion.

The yoga instructor is gathering her mat and towel as Dawn gives her the look of death as if to say, "get out of here, I have something to say".

VERONICA
(gathering up her energy)
How is the #1 relationship therapist
in the land this morning?

DAWN
Fantastic as per yoosh.
(looking around perplexed)
It is sweltering in here!

VERONICA
Oh, sorry – was creating my own
version of Bikram...

DAWN
(nods – gets it)
Ok, first...
(overly dramatic pause)
How is my favorite little
human -- Miss Ken Ken?

VERONICA
(big smile comes across her face)
My little miracle? Ugh, just amazing.
She told me tell her Auntie Dawn she
loves you...

DAWN
Oh Miss Ken Ken...
Or as the world will have to address
her in a few decades...
"Madam President".
(smiles)
Emmmph. Love that girl. LOVE. HER.

Veronica smiles before Dawn quickly moves to her next thought...

DAWN (CONT)
So... You know Camille...
(waiting for confirmation)

VERONICA
Yes, but no -- I can't.
I simply cannot indulge in your
perennially hot tea at the moment.
I must get ready!
I love you... But you know that.
(pushing her out the door)
I will see you down there!

Veronica shuts the door.

About 5 seconds later, just as she is walking away from the door, there is a loud knock. Veronica spins back around and opens the door in one fluid motion...

VERONICA
Girl! I have to ---

It's not Dawn. Instead, a tall, slender, strange looking white MAN; maybe forty, stands in front of her, staring strangely back at Veronica. He bears a striking resemblance to Jasper's right hand.

STRANGE MAN
Ms. Henley?

The man extends his arms.

VERONICA
(said almost as a question...)
Yes?

The man is holding a beautiful bouquet of wild flowers, identical to the flowers that the little blonde girl gave to her mother.

STRANGE MAN
Delivery.

VERONICA
Oh, oh, thank you so much.
(puzzled)
Front desk didn't call.

...do I need to sign anyth---

The delivery man cuts her off, gruffly handing Veronica the flowers and abruptly turning away and walking down the hall. Creeped out by his whole vibe, Veronica closes the door and places the flowers on the table. She reaches for the card.

The card simply reads, "Look forward to your homecoming. X"

Veronica tilts her head and grins, now recovered from the weird interaction.

INT: HOTEL LOBBY – AFTERNOON

High-heels click loudly on the marble floors of the hotel lobby as Veronica makes her way through. Veronica navigates a measured balance of restrained femininity and polished, self-assured dominance, only amplified by her Louboutin heels and Celine bag. Her quiet confidence and determined strut tells the world that she is not to be toyed with. This is her world.

As Veronica makes her way through the lobby, she clearly feels the weight of someone's stare from the corner of her eye back by the elevators. Shrugging it off, she joins the short line at the concierge desk when she is tapped aggressively on the shoulder – she belts out a scream and whips around with a quickness.

Veronica, clearly startled, looks up and a wide smile slowly replaces her look of concern. We see SARAH, a beautiful woman with dirty blonde hair – impeccably dressed in a decidedly professorial way. She is joyful, positive and happy -- and obviously has much love and affection for Veronica, who she also warmly calls "Vee".

SARAH

(arms open wide)

Veeeeee! I'm sorry!

Didn't mean to give you a scare.

VERONICA

Sarah Beee!

No! Not at all!

Travel has me jumpy, I guess.

Veronica and Sarah embrace and then, as if rehearsed, give each other two playful air kisses, obviously poking fun at women who air kiss.

SARAH

You. Look. Gorgeous.
What the hell are you doing...
other than making us all look
less-than?

VERONICA

My dear, no one's making you look
ANYTHING less than exquisite.
Trust.

SARAH

(points toward Veronica)
Believe.
(pause)
Pssssh. Sooo... will I see you at my
"Harnessing Your Past Lives" panel.

VERONICA

(in a serious tone)
The past is never dead...
(slight pause)
...it's not even past.

SARAH

Faulkner... exactly.

VERONICA

My grandmother used to say, sometimes
the ancestors haunt your dreams to
seed themselves forward.

SARAH

Oooh... your grandmother was a wise soul —
the unresolved past can certainly
wreak havoc on the present.
She succinctly covered my entire panel
discussion in 10 words or less.
Welp... suppose I can cancel it now.

VERONICA

Absolutely not — Nana's superstitious
heirlooms are no match for your years
of research.
(pause)
Ugh, I hate that I am going to miss it...
I have a walk-through with Camille.
(looks at watch)

About two minutes ago.
I will see you both there... right?

SARAH
Come on. You know it!

VERONICA
Perfect – and I will eat up this panel
tomorrow morning online and share it with
the world!
Hopefully the plane's wifi will cooperate.

SARAH
By the way... Dawn has NOT stopped
talking about our dinner tonight.
I'm looking forward to it ALMOST as
much as she is.
Fair warning – our girl is ON THE PROWL.
(makes a playful clawing gesture)

The two smile and air kiss goodbye as Sarah makes her way back
across the lobby. Veronica, now next in line at the concierge
desk, looks back toward the elevator where she felt the weight
of someone's stare before her reunion with Sarah – but now only
finds a couple of tweens on iPads.

CONCIERGE
How may I help you this morning?

The concierge appears to be the same sandy-haired young woman
who was massaging the shoulders of the soldier in the mess hall.

VERONICA
Oh, right, yes. Can I make a
reservation for three tonight?
7:30 at Stephano's.
I'm in room 713.

CONCIERGE
Absolutely, right way.

VERONICA
Thank you so much!
(remembering)
Ohh... and isn't this a non-smoking hotel?

CONCIERGE
Yes, Ms. Henley it is.

VERONICA

Well, someone didn't get the memo.
Last night there was the most pungent
smell of cigar smoke coming from either
an adjacent room or the hallway, I'm not
really sure where it originated from
but I'm allergic and...

CONCIERGE

(puts her hand up to stop her)
Ms. Henley, say no more —
I will look into this right away.

Veronica, satisfied, turns to walk away — we hold on the
concierge's hands for just a moment before slowly pushing in.
The concierge simultaneously picks up the desk phone, while
managing to type something on her iPhone. We hear the sound
effect of a text message being sent.

INT: HOTEL HALLWAY

A different pair of strappy Alexander Wang high-heels click
loudly on the marble floor of the hotel hallway; skin pale
white, showing off perfectly manicured red toes. Matching red
fingernails hold a phone that just received an incoming text
that we can't see. The woman passes by several rooms. We scan
up briefly, just enough to notice the woman has stopped and is
standing in front of a door marked "713".

The woman exhales quickly, feigning frustration. As we pan
right (still only legs and feet) another woman is standing next
to her with a cart of folded bath towels and bed sheets. She is
wearing all white sneakers and white stockings, transparent
enough for us to see her varicose veins. We can tell she is a
housekeeper.

WOMAN IN STRAPPY HEELS

(turns around to the housekeeper
we only see torso...
in a slight Southern accent)
Excuse me... puddin...

The housekeeper's feet turn around.

WOMAN (CONT)

Ugh... I am SO silly...
(flustered)

I must have left my key in the room...
Is there any way you could let me in
quickly?

We scan up enough to see the housekeeper's hand's looking at her clipboard.

HOUSEKEEPER
(flat American accent)
713... Ms. Henley?

INT. A BATHROOM?

Tight shot of the same strappy high-heels and perfectly manicured red toes from the hallway, are now resting on a tile floor. As we gradually pull out slightly from the strappy heels, we find that a woman is on the commode (never seeing her face). A faint trickle of water can be heard as she gleefully taps her foot. She finishes, closes the lid, but does not flush the toilet.

We know this is the same woman from the hallway with the housekeeper. She walks over to the vanity in the oversized luxurious bathroom, and washes her hands (extreme close-up) before collecting a tube of Chanel lipstick (from a make-up bag sitting on the counter) and applying it very carefully to her lips (extreme close-up). She puts the cap back on and places the tube in her purse. Once finished, she takes a beautiful glass perfume bottle and sprays on her wrists (extreme close-up) before rubbing them together. Smelling herself, she is clearly pleased with the scent. From behind, without revealing her face, we see her adjust her hair in the mirror before exiting the bathroom.

The room is immaculate. Clothes are neatly folded, papers are perfectly ordered on the desk — in an almost obsessive compulsive way. The woman looks at the neatly piled clothes and papers and lightly knocks a sweater off the top of the pile and moves the papers out of order.

The woman makes her way to the hallway door and exits. As the door closes slowly behind her, the camera remains stationary for just a moment, before the focus slowly shifts from mid-room, to the wall behind the giant king bed — where we notice Kennedy's stick figure drawing she gifted her mommy, hanging just above the headboard.

INT: HOTEL BALLROOM — DAYTIME

The audience is applauding as Veronica concludes her final words. Behind her is a large screen spotlighting her credentials along with a photo and the familiar TED Talk logo.

*Veronica Henley PhD
Sociologist & Best Selling Author*

VERONICA

(we enter mid-sentence)

...I've been courted by controversy for saying African Americans are descendants of kings and queens as much as we are of slaves – that dichotomy affords us a unique perspective in both experience and observation. For example, as a black woman, in American academia — by necessity, I became expert at navigating spaces that were traditionally designated for white men. I would temporarily compartmentalize those parts of myself that could potentially be perceived as threatening, or god forbid "angry", to the patriarchy.

Veronica takes an extended pause. We see faces in the audience nodding and wide-eyed. Veronica looks back out at the audience as she concludes...

VERONICA (CONT)

But eventually, I learned that by embracing my true self, not only would I survive – I would thrive.
(clasps her hands and pauses)
I hope that by sharing my own "Coping Persona" story, people of all stripes will lean into the full potential of what is possible when we are courageous enough to remain grounded to our most authentic selves — even within environments, which by design, demand our total and complete assimilation.

Rousing applause from the audience turns into a standing ovation. We see the stage from the audience's perspective. Veronica looks like a star – strong, accomplished, beautiful.

The summit host, CAMILLE, is looking out at the room as she interrupts the clapping...

CAMILLE

I want to thank Dr. Veronica Henley so much for being here. We couldn't ask for more. (looks toward Veronica while clapping herself and mouths "thank you") (to audience)
It is truly an honor for you to have been a part of this discussion. I can say for myself, that learning more about the "Coping Persona" has me thinking on how I can apply that in my own life - and how I may already have.

The audience once again applauds as both Veronica and Camille exit the stage.

INT. BACK STAGE - MINUTES LATER

The back-stage is really just a make-shift set-up area, a part of the overall ballroom. Veronica is speaking to a PA who is handing her back her purse and briefcase. Camille is speaking to someone else but sees Veronica, putting her finger up indicating she needs a quick moment before sidling up next to Veronica.

CAMILLE

The way you capture the nuance and...

Dawn comes out of nowhere and abruptly interrupts...

DAWN

That was just fantastic!
I enjoyed my own session but there was no way I was leaving before this!
(now directly to Camille)
Just fantastic. Really.
Now, I don't mean to be abrupt,
but I must steal Vee - important business.
(gives a playful wink)

CAMILLE

Oh... no worries - I have to finish up some work and then get right back to San Fran...

Dawn ushers Veronica out of there as if a bomb was reported in the building. As soon as they are at a safe distance from the crowd, now in a far corner of the hotel lobby...

DAWN

You are welcome!
Real talk -- she was angling
to join us for dinner this evening
and I just couldn't have it.
Girl, bye.
We deserve a little recess from
academia. Besides - I only get my
Vee time a few times a year and I need
to be able to be "All Dawn" - no filter.

VERONICA

(playfully)
There's a filter?
(slight pause)
So is Sarah locked in a closet
somewhere as well?

DAWN

Pssssh...
(thinks on it for a moment though)
Of course not! No! Sarah's my girl too.
(seriously)
The dinner reservation is for 3 and we
should respect the restaurant protocol,
don't you think?
(smiles, completely aware of her
own ridiculousness).
And... so for after dinner I was
thinking that...

VERONICA

(Was only half-listening, but interrupts)
After dinner? After dinner I have a date
with my king bed. I cannot watch you
two as you are on the prowl...
Me and that king bed - it's a thing.

DAWN

(disappointed but not surprised)
Ok then, I get it, I get it.
Gotta get that me time when you can.

VERONICA

Plus, I have a 6am flight.

DAWN

No, no, no, no, no –
Do not worry -- I get it.
We will keep you fully apprised
via text of every detail.

VERONICA

Of this I have no doubt. Now let me
head up to this room and get ready.

DAWN

Ok, meet you down here at 7:00 –
we'll Uber together.

VERONICA

See you at 7.
(presses elevator button)

DAWN

Ooh... what you wearin'?
Wear somethin' sexy – we want
all eyes on our table.

VERONICA

(reveals smile)
Girl. I'm on it.

The elevator doors open and Veronica walks in and presses her floor. We notice the same rosy-checked little blonde girl from the opening scene lurking in the corner, wearing a floor length, ecru and baby blue-colored linsey-woolsey dress. She is a miniaturized southern belle from *Gone with the Wind* – save for the bright, pink, Nike high-tops peeking out from under the lace trimming.

Veronica moves to press floor "7" but it is already illuminated.

VERONICA

You're on the 7th floor too,
sweetie?

The little blonde girl places her index finger over her lips shushing Veronica.

LITTLE BLONDE GIRL
(stares at Veronica tilting her head
to one side, reminiscent of Jasper)
Shhhh!
(beat)
You'll get in trouble for talking!

Veronica playing along replies...

VERONICA
(loud whisper)
Okay!

While disembarking, the strange little girl doesn't break stare with Veronica – she simply begins skipping down the hallway without a care in the world. We now notice she is holding a black baby doll by the leg, letting it's head drag along the hallway floor. The stark contrast of the hotel's ultra-modern setting makes her appear more ghost than real.

VERONICA
(under her breath)
Well allllright then...

Veronica exits the elevator making her way to her door and lets herself in. As soon as Veronica moves to enter her room, the little girl is revealed behind her in the distance, slightly out of focus staring back in that direction a couple doors down.

CUT TO BLACK FOR TWO FULL SECONDS

Elevator doors open with a "ding"!

While Veronica is always a vision, she is now a full-blown knockout in a knee-length emerald dress, tall black strappy shoes, with a delicate black suede jacket draped over her shoulders. In stark contrast to her earlier outfit – now showing just a little cleavage. Not too much – just enough. As she walks out of the elevator we hear a gasp which we are pretty sure is Dawn, who is, of course, already seated in the lobby waiting on her girls to arrive.

DAWN
(quickly and simply)
Oh, okay... okay...

Dawn throws her hand up and begins to walk away, obviously happy with how Veronica looks.

Veronica grins as they begin to walk together.

DAWN (CONT)
(playfully to Veronica)
Can we kick it?

Sarah enters next to Veronica...

VERONICA & SARAH
(collectively)
Yes we can!

INT: BLACK SUV EN ROUTE TO RESTAURANT

In the car, Veronica is seated by the door, Dawn in the middle and Sarah on the other side. Veronica has herself positioned so that she has some privacy while texting. Dawn and Sarah are talking about where they are going later while Veronica texts.

Incoming text:
Bae // 7:17PM
[PHOTO OF KENNEDI IN EQUESTRIAN HELMET]
Destined to be a champion just like her mother!

Veronica text:
[HEART EMOJI]

Bae text:
You in them streets?

Veronica text:
Yup.

Bae text:
(texting bubbles as he writes)
You looking sexy?

Veronica text:
Yup.

Bae text:
(texting bubbles as he writes)
You got the titties out?

Veronica gives a little laugh which shifts Dawn's attention.

DAWN

What? Who is that?

SARAH

You know it's Nick.

Before Veronica engages with Dawn she types a simple "Yup" with a kiss emoji. While typing, Dawn is peeping her screen and lets out a little shriek.

DAWN

See? You see?!
THIS is what I am talking about.
THIS is how it's supposed to be!
No jealousy, no fear –
On each other's team.
A case study, you two...
Ugh, sickening... Just sickening.
Where are all the Nicks!!!
Why do they escape me???
(drawn out)
Why do you hiiiide??

VERONICA

Oh stop.

SARAH

Excuse me... What is happening???

Before Veronica can click her phone off, Dawn grabs it playfully to show to Sarah.

SARAH

Oh! And here I thought
marital bliss was an oxymoron.

She laughs as we see the SUV slow down and can see the entry to the restaurant outside the window. Veronica has her phone back and is texting...

Veronica text:

I almost forgot

TY for the [flowers emoji] babe. [heart]

Nick is texting back as indicated by the animated bubbles. The Uber driver comes around to open the door. As Veronica is getting out of the car, Nick responds:

Bae text:
Huh? Would love to take credit...
Must be from one of your many admirers...

Veronica has a look of confusion on her face and is just about to text a reply, when Dawn rests her hand on Veronica's shoulder as they approach the restaurant's entrance.

DAWN
(playfully, but for real...)
Let's live in the present, girl.

Veronica, while still confused, complies and puts her phone away as the girls enter the restaurant.

INT. RESTAURANT – NIGHT

The hostess greets them with a plastered smile at the podium.

VERONICA
Henley for three, please.

HOSTESS
(her name tag reads "Rebecca")
Yes... we have your table, follow me.

The hostess leads the trio through the half-filled restaurant to the other side, near the back. She stops at the last table, directly next to the bathroom entrance.

HOSTESS (CONT)
Have a lovely dinner.

DAWN
(puts her hand up)
No. I um... No.

SARAH
What my friend is trying to say...

DAWN
Oh no – I got this.
Excuse me, Becky...
This is simply unacceptable.
But I think you already know that.
I'm not going to get into a back
and forth as to why you think this
is ok – but we are taking that table

right over there.

HOSTESS

I - Um...

DAWN

Thank you so much, sweetie.
(pats her on the shoulder as they
make their way toward the prime
table in the center of the restaurant.)

The women settle into their table as the waiter immediately
comes by to introduce himself.

WAITER

Good evening - my name is Sam.
May I start you ladies off with
a cocktail this evening?

Dawn pipes up right away without consulting the table.

DAWN

We'll take a bottle of champagne
please - we're celebrating.

WAITER

Lovely.
(tilts head)
How about a nice bottle of prosecco?

Veronica snaps the wine list shut with a purposeful clap.

VERONICA

(without looking at the waiter)
We'll take a bottle of the
2003 Krug. Thank you.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

The restaurant is dimly lit, with one small light in the center
of each table. There is a sexy vibe in the space, and most
patrons match the vibe. Veronica, Dawn & Sarah are now seated at
a prime table in the middle of the room. We enter mid-
conversation...

SARAH

(looks to Dawn)
Any app prospects for the evening?

DAWN

(exaggeratedly points to Sarah)
I am GLAD you asked.
As a matter of fact, I have been
setting up a time to meet a
man named Justin.
He is dark chocolate. ...of course.
(serious)
About 72% Cacao I would say.
(animated, sings it)
And... he has a friiiiieend...
(looks to Sarah)

SARAH

And by friend you mean...

VERONICA

Awful. Probably awful.

SARAH

Exactly. Horrible.

DAWN

No, no, no, no, no...
I'm sure he is just as fine.

SARAH

Waaaait.
"I'm sure"???
So, you mean you haven't even seen him?
Nope. This is not a thing that is going
to happen. I am too grown.

DAWN

Okay, okay...
(to Sarah)
I don't have to meet up with
him tonight.
Let's just go have some FUN!

VERONICA

(leans in toward the women... in a
worried whisper)
Girls... did you notice that guy at
the bar? ...he won't stop looking at us.

The waiter arrives at the table.

SERVER

Before I take your order, I just wanted to let you know that the gentleman over there sent this drink specifically for you.
(places drink in front of Dawn)

The women turn their attention toward Dawn's now familiar ADMIRER who is looking at their table from under the bar's mounted television. On the screen we notice a politician (who looks eerily similar to HIM) being interviewed on CNN. The chyron reads: "Senator Dunn Proposes Bill to Preserve Confederate Monuments on Federal Lands."

The admirer makes his way over to the table as the server leaves to let him have his moment. The stranger is tall, white, svelte, clean-cut and quite handsome, with a full head of luxurious black hair and piercing blue eyes.

ADMIRER

(to Dawn)
I've had my eye on you.
(awkward pause, clears throat)
I just had to come by to tell you that I think you are quite stunning.

DAWN

Oh, well thank you very much.
(fans herself)
Might I say that you are quite fine yourself.
(looks at the drink – becomes serious)
HOWEVER -- I think I would be doing you a disservice if I did not help you to critique your game...

Veronica and Sarah become visibly awkward, shifting in their chairs, unable to look directly at the situation, but we can tell that this has happened before.

DAWN (CONT)

First, thank you for the drink.
Second, you are fine as hell and because of that, you are forgiven.
HOWEVER... I think you could see from across the room that we are drinking champagne.
I am a champagne lady.
We are champagne women.

While the gesture is very much welcomed,
a vodka cranberry shows a lack of
appreciation of the situation.

ADMIERER looks around uncomfortably. The other women are equally
as uncomfortable.

Veronica glances a few tables over and spots a WOMAN facing the
opposite direction ordering from the waiter. We notice her long
strawberry-blonde hair distracting Veronica from the interaction
happening at her own table.

We enter back into Dawn's conversation.

DAWN (CONT)

Further. You see I am here with
these lovely ladies. Did you
intend to have them feel left out?
(let's the pause linger)
Here is what should have happened..
Ask our server what type of champagne
we are drinking.
Send us another bottle of that.
Make eye contact with me from across
the room.
Hell... maybe even a little eye fuck.
(demonstrates)
Then... then... make your way over and
introduce yourself.

The admirer is growing increasingly deflated and uncomfortable.

DAWN (CONT)

I say all of that to say this..
(pause)
Here is my card.
(hands him her card which she had ready)
Thank you for the drink - I like you.
You are quite fine. This CAN happen.
But not tonight -- Text me.

Slightly confused, but happy, the admirer slowly makes his way
back to the table as all the women watch.

Veronica shifts her focus back to the woman a few tables away.
The woman turns her head as she laughs with her tablemate,
inadvertently making eye contact with Veronica. It is not

Elizabeth. Veronica breathes a sigh of relief and brings her attention back to her own table.

Veronica and Sarah share a look with each other, and then back toward Dawn.

DAWN

What?! He needed to know.

SARAH

Can we all just take a moment to acknowledge that he was supernaturally FINE??

Veronica and Sarah once again share a look.

DAWN

What?
(gets what they are thinking)
No.
(shaking head)
Emmm Emmmm
Racial [clap] Bias [clap]
Don't do it!

Still not fully buying it, Veronica & Sarah acquiesce.

SARAH

Ok, ok...

VERONICA

No, you're right. You're right.

Dawn basks in her own righteousness for a moment...

DAWN

...he couldn't resist all this...
(wiggles in her chair)
I mean you don't know... we could have shared several lifetimes together and he just felt that connection.
I do leave quite an impression you know...

SARAH

Well... not to put my academia hat on too tightly, but... humans experience time as linear, but in actuality, the past, present and future are all taking place simultaneously...

DAWN

Oh, I see... so what you're saying is
that boo and I are together RIGHT NOW...

HARD CUT / TIME PASSES

DAWN

(mid-sentence)
...and you know I don't discriminate.
JDate, Christian Mingle, Black Planet...
...all accounts are fully active.

Veronica and Sara smirk before the busser comes by to clear some
final plates from the table and Dawn takes the last sip from her
champagne glass.

VERONICA

(giving up, she pushes her seat out)
Well, I very much look forward
to keeping up with this saga on a
group chat from my bed.
(beat)
Although everything has just been so off
with this hotel – housekeeping didn't
even clean my room today!
Not holding my breath for turn down service.

SARAH

Ugh, that's weird – everything has
been so great with my room.

Veronica gives an almost inaudible “humph” to herself as she
rises from the table and collects her purse.

DAWN

Um... excuse me...
I know we are all beautiful as
Hell, but I think that we
might still have to pay..
Good looks notwithstanding.

VERONICA

Taken care of... Let's go.

DAWN

OOHHH... See... Do you see that??
Thank you my classy lady.

SARAH

Vee – you didn't have to do that.
Thank you so much for dinner.
(pause)
Are you SURE you can't keep this going?

VERONICA

(tilts head)
Anything for my favorites.
...except proceeding to the next venue.
(presses button on her phone)
My uber is en route.

All the women get up from the table. We see Sarah ordering an Uber for herself and Dawn. The woman from a few tables away is now headed straight for Veronica.

WOMAN

(apologetic gesture)
I am so sorry to do this, but
I just had to tell you that your
book changed my life –
my whole perspective.
(beat)
I apologize if I was staring at you
earlier. I just – I just had
to come up and say thank you.

VERONICA

Oh, no apology necessary at all!
Thank you so much, I really
appreciate that.
I'm so happy to hear that it had
such a positive influence for you.

WOMAN

Ugh, it really did.
(putting her hand out apologetically
realizing she didn't introduce herself
properly)
I just had to meet you.
I'll let you get back to your night.

VERONICA

It's so nice to meet you.
Thank you again.

Veronica returns to Dawn & Sarah who apparently are used to this as they don't react. As they all walk out, Dawn makes sure to make eye-contact with the man from earlier... giving him a little air kiss as she exits. Next to the gentleman from earlier, we briefly notice another man at the bar who strongly resembles one of the corporals from the mess hall.

The women crowd under the small awning as it has begun to rain.

DAWN
OOH – almost forgot!
(scrambles for phone)
Let's get a cute little
selfie real quick.

Veronica rifles through her purse and mumbles under her breath "where's my lipstick"? Frustrated; she gives up.

The three women bring their faces together and Dawn extends her arm. After several snaps they immediately look at the screen.

DAWN
One-take wonders.
All of us. ...I'll tag everybody.

The women both give their sign of approval on the photo as a large black SUV pulls up to the curb and the window cracks open.

We hear the driver call "Veronica"...

VERONICA
(raises her hand to let the
driver know she heard her as
she says goodbye to Dawn and Sarah)
Okay my beauties... 'til next time...!

Even crowded under the awning they perform their departure ritual of over-emphasized air kisses before Veronica sprints to the car, gives a little wave and quickly shuts the door.

INT. VERONICA'S UBER

VERONICA
(to the driver)
The Four Seasons, please. ...I put it in.
(Depeche Mode is playing at a clearly
inappropriate level.)
Also, can you turn that down a tick?

Veronica opens her texts and replies to Nick's last message.

VERONICA'S TEXT

*Dinner was fantastic. Girls say hey.
Text you in the AM from the airport.*

As soon as the text goes through a new text pops up from Sarah in their group chat. The music has not been turned down.

SARAH TEXT

*She is already flirting with the driver...
of course. Thank you again for dinner.*

INT: DAWN & SARAH'S UBER

Sarah is finishing her text while we enter mid-conversation between Dawn and the driver.

DAWN

...so you know ahead of time...
We are five star'ers.
And it looks like you might just
be as well...
(gives a little wink)
...but we'll see...
(interrupts herself)
Ohh! Turn that up! Turn. That. Up.

Maxwell's "Ascension" is playing low in the background before the volume increases sharply. Sarah immediately puts her phone down and the two women begin harmonizing.

INT: VERONICA'S UBER

VERONICA TEXT

Love you both. I'll...

Just then her phone starts to ring with an incoming 415 number, interrupting her text message. Veronica presses "accept". The volume is still at an inappropriately high level as she answers the phone and it's hard to hear.

VERONICA

Yes.

CALLER

Veronica?

VERONICA

Hello.
Yes, who is this?

INT. DAWN & SAHRA'S UBER

The two women are fully enjoying themselves and just about to get to the chorus of the song...

DAWN
(to the driver)
Danny... this your part right here!
THIS YOUR PART!

The trio begin singing in unison.

SARAH
For real – this my shit right here.

Dawn puts her hand up to let Sarah know that this is a full-on performance – no commentary. She gets it and joins back in as we...

INT. VERONICA'S UBER

Music still blaring.

VERONICA
(to person on phone)
Sorry, I'm having difficulty hearing.
(to driver)
Can you PLEASE turn that down?
(back to person on phone)
Who is this?

CALLER
This is Chet ...your Uber driver.
I'm outside the restaurant
whenever you're ready.

VERONICA
(confused)
No, no, I think there is a mistake.
I'm in my Uber now...
(looks to the driver)
Ma'am!

Music still blaring, the driver does not turn around or acknowledge Veronica at all.

INT. DAWN & SARAH'S UBER

The song continues as Dawn & Sarah are swaying in unison – the driver peeks back at them in the rear-view and begins to sway with them.

INT. VERONICA'S UBER

VERONICA

(to driver)
Excuse me... Ma'am...
I think there was a mix-up.
(beat)
Can you turn that down?

The driver ignores her.

VERONICA (CONT)

(now agitated)
Hello?!

The woman in the driver's seat moves her head to look back at Veronica in the rear-view mirror, pushing her long, strawberry-blond hair out of her face and applying Veronica's tangerine Chanel lipstick – it is Elizabeth.

DRIVER

Mmmm. Turns out this color *does*
look good on me.

Just as we make this connection we see a hand emerge from the pitch black of the third-row seat behind Veronica. The man violently pulls back Veronica's head. We immediately notice his hand is missing a ring finger -- it is Jasper.

Veronica screams through Jasper's hand. It moves just enough for us to hear her above the raging music...

VERONICA (CONT)

(muffled scream through his hands)
Wha... mmmmmmmmm – hmmmmmmmmph

EXT. VERONICA'S UBER

Veronica's black Uber SUV is barreling down the two-lane street. She is desperately slapping her hands against the rear passenger window, fighting for dear life to get someone; anyone's attention. Just then, a second, almost identical SUV pulls up

alongside Veronica's Uber, and slowly passes – it's Dawn & Sarah. Their windows are down, we hear the music blaring as they continue singing at the top of their lungs, passing Veronica's SUV, completely clueless. Veronica can see Dawn and Sarah as their windows are down, but they cannot see her through her SUV tints.

INT. VERONICA'S SUV

We see a smug expression come across Elizabeth's face via the rear-view mirror. Veronica is in a full panic, with her arms and legs flailing and kicking, trying to break free of Jasper's grip. She smashes her high heel into the front seat with every bit of her strength, losing her shoe in the struggle, nearly kicking Elizabeth in the jaw, but misses.

It is no use. Jasper tries unsuccessfully to force a cloth over Veronica's mouth as she continues to fight him off with every ounce of her strength.

ELIZABETH

We don't have time for this,
stop being such a god damn
snowflake and handle her!

Jasper takes Elizabeth's instruction and suddenly grabs the side of Veronica's head and slams it against the side door with such force, blood splatters from her mouth and nose before her eyes go white. Veronica is knocked out cold and slinks into a horizontal position across the back seat. Her phone falls from the seat onto the floor. It lights up as we see a text from Sarah.

NICK TEXT

*[photo of Kennedi smiling in her bedroom
giving her mom a kissy face.
Her pajama top reads a sparkly
"Black Girl Magic"]*

As we pan back up we see Elizabeth's eyes, mesmerized, taking it all in from the rear-view, she gives Jasper an approving smirk.

Screen abruptly cuts to black.

CUT TO:

INT. VERONICA'S CABIN – LATE NIGHT

The same iPhone continues to ring.

Veronica's eyes shoot open in the pitch dark.

Startled and without a stitch of clothing, HIM jumps up from the bed and races outside to the source of the man-made chirping. Veronica waits for just a moment before making her way to the window, quietly, so as to go undetected.

HIM has managed to harvest the device from Daphne's saddle bag.

HIM

What the hell? It's 3AM.

There is silence as HIM is intensely listening to what the caller is saying on the other end – we cannot hear them.

HIM (CONT)

Emm-hmm.

Well... what did you say?

(silence, deep sigh)

It's under control...

(silence, he is listening)

I SAID, I will handle it –
she is gone.

We see Veronica, still at the window, listening to the one-sided conversation.

HIM (CONT)

(frustrated)

...If I see her pathetic husband
on the news one more time...

(convincingly)

Yes... understood. It's handled.

Him hangs up the phone abruptly and pauses; looking up toward the night sky before heading back in. Veronica quickly shakes herself out of the daze from what she just heard and runs as fast she can back to bed.

Him re-enters the cabin. The floor creaking with every step.

HIM (CONT)
(whispers loudly)
Eden?

Veronica does not respond.

HIM (CONT)
(again, slightly louder)
EDEN?!

Nothing. Him then softly caresses Eden's head.

HIM (CONT)
(in a whisper)
I've so enjoyed our time together.

Tight on Eden's face, we see her doing the best she can to contain the terror and convincingly feign sleep.

HIM; satisfied, moves to the far side of the room. As he does, Veronica peeks her eyes open for only a moment. HIM sits in the chair – it creaks and moans as he leans back and lights a cigar.

The smoke makes its way over to Veronica's face. She does her best, struggling to stifle a cough.

She can feel his eyes on her – boring into her. She will not sleep the rest of the night.

INT. CABIN -- THE NEXT MORNING

Veronica struggles to keep her balance as she dozes off in a corner, standing; listless and terrified — awaiting further instruction from Him. The kettle squeals, whistling Veronica to attention. Him's raspy voice echoes out from the shadows.

HIM
Not too hot, girl - and no cream.
My flask is right, sittin' on the table.
...give me just a shot in the cup.

Veronica grips the kettle handle as if it were a weapon, watching the pot scream, as the scalding steam gushes from the spout. But she thinks better of it, shaking off any fantasy she may have in the moment and instead spikes Him's tea as instructed.

HIM (CONT)

I'm heading out.
Got some business to handle.
Politics never sleeps.
But don't worry, I'll be
right back here tonight.
(pauses, touching her face)
Let's make it a special evening..

Trembling in fear, Veronica lifts up the cup of tea, handing it to Him without a word. HIM takes a generous portion of Veronica's backside, sullyng her already soiled dress with his soot-covered hands.

Veronica moves quickly to stand in the entryway of the cabin as HIM collects his things from inside.

Looking over to Veronica, while preparing Daphne's saddle..

HIM

See you tonight.
(pause)
...get a bath.

A chill runs down Veronica's spine. HIM then collects his dragon saber and mounts Daphne. Veronica watches HIM turn into a small dot, as he makes his way past the cotton fields, into the nothingness. She re-enters the cabin and sits on the edge of the bed. Clearly anxious, she stares out the tiny cabin window; contemplative – mind racing – tonight Veronica knows that she will escape, or die trying.

Then, suddenly a loud rap at the door; Veronica almost jumps out of her skin.

It's just Eli.

ELI

(loud whisper from other side of door)
Gon be late for this bullshit, you ready?

Veronica, ordinarily sedate, rushes to the door and begins her walk down to the fields with Eli. Just as she is about to utter the news, she notices Eli is walking with a limp and appears to wince in pain with each step. We notice a rip in the back of Eli's shirt revealing what appears to be a "Q Dog" fraternity brand on his left shoulder.

VERONICA
We leave tonight.

ELI
What?!

VERONICA (CONT)
(takes a beat)
We go tonight.

ELI
Tonight?
(emphasizes his limp)
I can't...

They continue down cabin row, when Veronica is just about to share the news of HIM's disturbing late night phone conversation. The opportunity is lost when suddenly an overseer appears within earshot; gun pointed directly at their backs.

EXT. PLANTATION – DAY

A frost is already on the ground from the first cold snap. Eli and Veronica settle into the field and begin their work alongside the rest of the "slaves". Veronica cups her freezing hands over her mouth, trying to ward off the bitter cold.

JASPER
(stern)
What I say?

Veronica, Eli and the others look up toward Jasper – not knowing quite how to respond.

Jasper tilts his head – waiting.

JASPER
What the FUCK did I say? Julia.
I told that girl YESTERDAY she
got one pass.
Now she thinks she can come
to the fields whenever she
damn well pleases.
She will learn her lesson today.
(looks toward Veronica)
Go fetch her.

Veronica is frozen for a moment.

ELI
I can head up there, sir.

Jasper spits a wad of snuff collecting in his jaw down at the ground next to Eli's foot.

JASPER
Who gave you permission to
speak, boy?

Jasper looks around toward the other Confederates on horseback as they all shake their heads... Veronica locks eyes with Eli as if begging him to stay quiet.

ELI
(under his breath, to himself)
I gave MYSELF permission to speak.

JASPER
(turning his attention back to Eden)
Right now, girl! Get.

Veronica nods and begins to make her way before Jasper yells...

JASPER (CONT)
With some pep in your step, girl!

Veronica begins a jog straight toward cabin row, somewhat visible from their position in the field.

JASPER (CONT)
No fucking sense of urgency
round here.
All of ya. Back to work.
(looks to a male slave)
You boy – fetch me that basket
over there.
(motions toward the cotton
basket maybe 20 yards way)

We wait and watch as the male slave complies and retrieves the basket, dropping it then at Jasper's feet.

MALE SLAVE
Here you are.....
(sarcastically)
Sir.

(stares back at Jasper as if he could murder him with his bare hands – tears of hatred welling in his eyes)

Jasper gives it one hard kick from the saddle, knocking over the entire basket. Atop his palomino, he grins down at the male slave.

JASPER
Pick that shit up.
(turns away, still grinning)

The male slave then turns back toward Jasper taking an aggressive stance, ready to throw him off his horse and beat the shit out of him.

The tip of a rifle suddenly appears at the slave's back. The other overseer is directly behind him.

OVERSEER
Don't even think about it, boy.

EXT. CABIN ROW, MOMENTS LATER

Veronica continues her run toward the cabin – sweat and worry on her face.

She begins to slow down as she approaches cabin row. Julia's cabin is just ahead. When she reaches cabin #2, the door is ajar and Veronica gives it a soft knock.

VERONICA
Julia. You in there?
(knocks harder)
Julia?

Veronica presses the door gently just above the knob and it gradually swings open. Veronica's face is overcome with horror and repulsion.

Julia's legs sway in mid-air, spinning slowly. Her exposed ankle reveals not a birthmark, but a small heart symbol tattoo. As we tilt upward, we see her neck is broken, head sideways, eyes open. The blank stare indicates her spirit only recently vacated her now-lifeless body.

Veronica slaps her own mouth closed, as the sound of the roped bed sheet stressing the wood becomes too much to bear and for

the first time Veronica is unable to stave off a visible display of emotion.

Veronica rushes over to Julia, in a desperate attempt to prop her up in futility.

Veronica collapses to her knees.

As Veronica holds Julia's body, in the distance we hear a whip cracking the air, and the unmistakable sound of the cat o' nine tails slashing skin to the bone. The look of despair on Veronica's face is replaced with a mix of terror and seething anger.

FADE TO WHITE

DREAM SEQUENCE (CONT FROM FIRST DREAM SEQUENCE)

Kennedi's long, loose curls fall onto Veronica's shoulders as she holds her super tight; covering her tiny mouth to keep her from giving away their location. Suddenly the blanket is ripped away revealing they were never hiding from anything sinister, but instead Nick, who is playing hide and seek, and finds them before giving chase to Kennedy. Veronica falls behind, and we notice a look of awe as she stares toward her beautiful, innocent, little girl.

FADE TO WHITE

EXT. COTTON FIELDS — LATER THAT AFTERNOON

We pull out on Veronica's stoic face, we can see the pores on her skin and the beads of sweat gathering on the crevice of her lip. She is staring into the nothingness. Behind her, smoke billows from the burn shed in the background as we see the guards on patrol along the perimeter. Some don rifles, while others brandish semi-automatic weapons.

The slaves continue to cultivate the frozen soil by hand — for the sole purpose of stage craft — when once again they train their sights on the thunderous sound overhead. We finally learn the source of their fascination is a passing commercial jet. All the slaves stare — except for Veronica. She knows what it is. She doesn't need to see it again— her eyes are locked on the burn shed.

The airliner flying above feels like an insult at this point. In the distance, Elizabeth, fitted in a southern belle dress,

tracks the plane as it races across the sky, before taking a deep breath, as she surveys the entire plantation with a sense of pride — holding her daughter's hand.

Jasper reprimands them back to "picking cotton" before he and a gaggle of his men head out to patrol the parameter. We can hear rumblings of that "great battle" in the distance as Eli comes back to join them, limping and wincing in pain.

Jasper mounted on his horse slowly trots toward Veronica.

JASPER
(breaks a hard silence)
Eden. You're not looking your best.

Veronica looks at him puzzled as if thinking "of course I don't look my fucking best you fucking simpleton" but says nothing.

JASPER (CONT)
I suspect The General will want you a bit more presentable this evening.
(gives her a wink)
Finish this row and get your sorry ass to the cabin.

Veronica doesn't mouth a word but nods her head in recognition of the instruction from Jasper.

Jasper moves on, leaving Veronica and Eli alone. Veronica takes full survey of the land as she digs in the hard earth with her hands. She appears to be studying the wooded area that is the break between the cotton fields and the nothingness — where she so often hears the sound of cannons and gunfire.

VERONICA
(Looking straight ahead without so much as a glance Eli's way...)
Tonight.

This gets Eli's attention.

VERONICA (CONT)
(restrained defiance, in a loud whisper, barely covers the alarm and urgency in Veronica's voice — she now looks directly at Eli)
We go tonight!

Eli swiftly turns to Veronica, whose terrified eyes are trained on him with a long, defiant stare, adding further weight to her declaration. Eli now senses they are in IMMINENT danger – Veronica then turns her head away from Eli, pretending to work.

As Veronica walks away, we hear Eli's signature whistle –
GAME ON.

INT. VERONICA'S CABIN - GLOAMING

Veronica takes the orange jar of "Murray's pomade" and looks at the cover with the famous afro'd couple on the lid. She takes a generous portion in her hands to lay down her edges, just so. She catches her reflection in the looking glass and closes her eyes for just a moment.

Veronica makes her way to the front window of the cabin. The Confederate flag flies above as caravans of tiki torches in the distance signaling the Confederates are making their way to the plantation for the night.

Veronica runs to check herself in the looking glass knowing that Him will be among the cavalry. She then returns to practicing the now familiar invisible hopscotch dance before making her way to the door. The floor still creaks slightly – she hasn't perfected her route.

INT. VERONICA'S CABIN - LATER

We only see the bottom of Him's size 12 boots, sitting next to his Confederate-issued dragon saber. Veronica is laying at the foot of the bed, on top of Him's bare feet like a cat, as instructed.

The cabin is cold and the furnace serves as both the cabin's only light source and heat.

HIM

What did you do while I was gone?

Veronica says nothing but instead adjusts her body in acknowledgement of the question.

HIM

That's good, Eden.

Nice and quiet.

HIM gets up from the bed, it is pitch dark, save for the moonlight cascading through the window. The red coal from the end of a cigar is the only indication of where he is located in the room.

HIM torments Veronica with a long drag from his cigar and lets it swirl for a moment before continuing.

HIM (CONT)

I was the antidote, Eden —
I broke the fever. When I found you,
stricken by that poison, flailing all
around on television; I knew I had to
stop you, I had to head off the spread..

HIM, shadowed in silhouette, puts out his cigar and gets back into bed, pulling Veronica up to his big body.

Veronica rolls over to her side, anxious; eyes wide open. Him situates himself as Veronica waits patiently for his eyes to close for the night, signaled by his heavy, labored breathing.

HIM is asleep.

Veronica puts her hand on his face — nothing. She gives him a nudge in his side, but no, nothing, Him is dead asleep.

It is time.

Veronica begins the process of carefully climbing over his big body to reach the floor on the other side of the bed. First her leg, then her arm, then her other leg, contorting her body, not unlike moves we saw in her yoga practice. She is just about over HIM, to the other side of the bed, slowly lowering her feet onto the ground, light as a feather, when HIM suddenly lets out a loud snore, startling Veronica, causing her to lose her balance and fall to the floor.

Completely still, she remains on the floor, waiting to hear his voice — but nothing, only a small subsequent snore.

Veronica looks up toward the spot on the wall, next to the bed where she had been rubbing her fingers previously; almost like a touchstone.

As we pull out, we can now see that it is a carving etched into the wall, exactly like that of the picture Kennedi drew before Veronica left that fateful day.

Veronica reaches up once more, rubbing her finger against the smallest stick figure, squeezing her eyes closed before taking one final look – steeling herself for the difficult mission ahead.

VERONICA
(in a whisper)
Ken-Ken.

By saying Kennedy's name and through her defiant expression, we realize Veronica's coping persona has been shed.

When she re-opens her eyes, Veronica steals one last look at the carving, looks around the room and takes an ever-so-quiet deep breath, before slowly rising to her feet.

We can see HIM sleeping – unbothered by her fall.

Wearing an oversized stained night shirt, Veronica slowly presses her feet against the selected wood planks, as practiced – making her way toward the front door, masterfully avoiding the creaky floor planks that are burned into her memory. Her movements are slow, meticulous and patient. She considers for a moment, veering off course to collect HIM's dragon savor leaned close to his side, but decides against it. Her caution pays off as she finally makes it to the door which opens without a sound – courtesy of her makeshift butter lubricant.

The rude cold immediately gives her a shiver and a few flakes of snow fall into the room. She quickly and quietly closes the door so the cold does not disturb Him's slumber.

Greeting Veronica outside, only the sound of crickets and other nighttime creatures – shadowed by the full moon, illuminating the fields like a giant flashlight – but no Eli.

Veronica looks both directions; panicked and terrified — with only Daphne's breath, dissolving like smoke plumes to give her comfort.

She walks over to the side of the cabin and looks around the corner, but only the perimeter guards in the distance at the edge of the woods are within view – no Eli.

The odd falling snow creates an otherworldly silence over the entire plantation. Veronica stares at Daphne for a moment, as if she is magic.

She turns back to the cabin door knowing that she cannot risk being outside of the cabin much longer without risking Him waking up.

[MUSIC BEGINS TO BUILD]

Suddenly, out from the darkness, very faint, very low, we hear Eli's trademark whistle. While soft, it now goes on long enough for us to easily identify it as Kanye West's "Power".

We now recognize that Eli has been whistling "Power" this whole time. Eli steps out from the dark, ax in hand.

Veronica and Eli share a stare. We collectively sigh.

Veronica smiles... for the first time.

ELI
(loud whisper)
You ready?

VERONICA
mmm-hmm.

ELI
Let's go home.

VERONICA
WAIT!
(Veronica opens Daphne's saddle bag.)

Eli leans his ax on the side of the cabin as Veronica rifles through the saddle bag, half expecting it not to be in there, until she feels it in her hand and a grin comes across her face. She pulls the phone out and holds it in her hand, almost in disbelief. After all this time, it looks both familiar and alien. Eli looks on - stunned.

ELI
(whispered in disbelief)
I'll be damned.

Veronica presses her finger to the screen to wake the sleeping phone. The phone automatically attempts to sign in using Veronica's face.

IPHONE SCREEN
Face Not Detected
Enter PIN

The screen gives the option to put in the physical password, or press "Emergency" or "Cancel".

Eli nudges her and she presses "Emergency" which populates a screen with a keypad. Veronica presses "9", then just before she can press the following two digits...

Suddenly there is a distant laughing followed by faint reflections of torches on the side of the cabin. It is the two young corporals from the mess hall and Julia's cabin - Daniel and Purcell, obviously intoxicated, making their way back to the main house.

Startled, Veronica and Eli stumble to find a place to hide on the side of the cabin. As they move, the phone drops out of Veronica's hand. There is no time, they have to get out of view of the corporals. The phone lays next on the ground about 10 feet from Daphne as the corporals walk straight toward it as they make their way past the cabin.

As they approach, Daniel trips and falls. His face lands not even a foot from HIM's phone.

PURCELL
(to the other, laughing)
Dumb ass!

As Purcell reaches his hand down to help the other up, the phone is in plain view, they are going to spot it.

Just then, Daphne lets out a snort and a nicker and taps her back hoof against the ground as if she is annoyed by this whole interruption. This noise spooks both young men who raise their heads to look at Daphne, as they get up, missing the phone lying on the ground right next to them.

As they move forward, Purcell inadvertently kicks the phone with his foot. It has been discovered.

PURCELL
Dude, what the hell?
(looks down)
Is this yours?
(picks up the device and shows Daniel)

DANIEL
PURCELL!
No! You know the rules...
NO CELLPHONES.
(repeats the rule under his breath
as he struggles to keep his balance)

No cellphones.

PURCELL
Fucking cuck...

Purcell throws his beer bottle at Daniel which smashes at his feet.

PURCELL (CONT)
Don't say my fucking name out here... DANIEL!
You know that rule too.
(snatches phone)
I'll give it to one of the
"Overseers" at the house.
(places the cellphone in his
jacket pocket)

The two corporals stumble on, right past Veronica and Eli who are hiding in the shadows.

Eli waits for a moment and then motions for Veronica to follow. There is only one chance and it is too late to turn back now.

They begin tracking the young corporals through the cotton fields, careful to remain in shadow. We can now see light illuminating from the great house in the distance.

Veronica's bare foot lands on the tip of a broken beer bottle; she winces in pain and lets out a faint cry, almost falling to the ground. Although she rebounds quickly, the corporals have heard something.

Veronica and Eli lay flat on the ground, faces in the dirt, deadly still. The corporals turn back toward Veronica and Eli to investigate.

DANIEL
What was that?

PURCELL
Came from that direction.

Purcell pushes in front to get a better look. They both stand in silence, eyes combing the brush. It is pitch dark. Veronica and Eli are unable to make out how close the Confederates are to their hiding spot.

The standoff goes on for what seems like an eternity. Then, suddenly from the dead of night, we see a bright fluorescent blue light illuminate from the end of a Juul – as Daniel takes a long, exaggerated drag.

Veronica and Eli's faces are covered in earth and sweat. Veronica's expression is a mix of determination and terror. Eli's body language demonstrates that he is about to make a move. Veronica squeezes Eli's hand and whispers "hold tight".

Purcell comes back around the side of Daniel and stealthily rips the e-cigarette from him.

DANIEL

Fuck! Scared the shit out of me!

PURCELL

Aww, what is it...
The spooks got you spooked?
It's nothing man. No one out here but us this time of night.
(looks around taking in the silence of the night).

DANIEL

I'm about to piss myself.
Can't stain this new uniform.
Gonna take a leak.

PURCELL

Fuck that! I ain't waitin,
the night is still young.
Just meet me at the house.

DANIEL

Fine...
(laughs)
...traitor!
(mumbles inaudibly to himself)

Purcell begins to make his way north to the house while Daniel walks a few paces further into the cotton field, close to the edge of the woods.

Leaning his bayonet against an old pine tree, he unfastens his Confederate uniform trousers to relieve himself.

We hear a rustling a few feet away from behind DANIEL.

DANIEL
Purcell, stop fucking around.
I'll be up in a sec.

MAN'S VOICE
(loud whisper from behind Daniel)
Daniel!

Daniel immediately turns around to find Eli starring directly at him like a rabid dog.

Eli wastes no time and slashes him across the neck with the corporal's own bayonet. Blood spews everywhere as the young corporal collapses – completely stunned.

He is dead.

ELI
Get the damn phone!

VERONICA
(rustling in Purcell's pocket
as Eli keeps a lookout)
Got it!

There is now no time to waste. Veronica touches the screen and the glow illuminates both their faces. She dials 9 – 1 – 1...

Nothing. No bars. There is no signal.

ELI
(in the loudest whisper possible)
FUUCCCK!!

VERONICA
I know there is service at the cabin!
(thinking on it...)
But... let's just go!
(grabs Eli's hand)

ELI
(sternly)
NO.
We have to go to the cabin, first.
We HAVE to.
(looks Veronica directly in the eye)
IF we don't make it...

The world HAS to find out about this place.
It has to end, tonight!

Veronica nods in agreement as they begin to make their way back toward the cabin. The night is deadly silent and snow begins to fall.

They arrive back at the cabin, give each other a quick glance before Veronica immediately dials 9-1-1 via the emergency option... there is only one bar, going in and out on the screen.

A scratchy ring is audible. Then another... then another... before...

OPERATOR

9-1-1.
(interference/static)
What's your emergency?"

Veronica is unable to muster the words and sits in silence. Eli bumps her shoulder.

The operator asks again. Again the operator's words are static-y and muffled – reception is bad.

OPERATOR

9-1-1. What's your emergency?"

VERONICA

(in a barely audible whisper)
My name is... Veronica Henley.

OPERATOR

9-1-1.
(static)
What is your emergency?

VERONICA

(desperate)
My name is...
Veronica Henley.
I have been kidnapped!
Send help – there are others!

The call drops.

VERONICA

(desperate, to Eli)
We have to unlock the phone...
We need to send our location...

They both know what this means. They need HIM's face. Knowing they have no time to spare, Veronica and Eli move toward the door of the cabin. Eli slowly picks up the ax he left leaned on the side of the cabin. Veronica slowly turns the knob and presses the door, slowly taking a step inside.

Almost immediately, Veronica is kicked so hard she falls back off her feet. It is HIM and he is madder than ten snakes! HIM strikes Eli with the dragon saber.

Eli is down on the ground. Incapacitated.

Him climbs on top of Eli. They share a stare.

Him has his hands around Eli's neck, slowly choking the life out of him. We see Eli grasp for anything. The ax is just out of his reach as he stretches and contorts himself to grab for it. But it is no use. Him has Eli. Eli begins to fade in Him's hands.

Just then Him screams out in pain. Veronica has a hold of the ax and is on her knees with just enough leverage to chop at Him's shins.

Him, turns around and throws his whole body on top of Veronica who is unprepared and unable to get out of his way. She is completely smothered by him. Her hands frantically swatting at his face to no avail.

Him's right arm swings upward having all the momentum necessary to knock the life out of Veronica.

Before he can take his swing, Eli's hand grab's Him's wrist, holding him back – giving Veronica just enough time to regain her breath.

Him immediately grabs the ax with his left hand laying next to Veronica and comes at Eli from the opposite direction landing the ax square in his stomach.

Eli looks down at his stomach as Him, unsatisfied with this blow, pulls the ax out of Eli's stomach as blood pours out and before Veronica can get to them, Him lands another blow. This time to Eli's chest.

In an instant, Eli is no more.

Him pushes the ax in further and jerks it around before pulling it back out – making sure Eli is dead. We see the necklace dangling around Eli's neck – the one from the burn shed – as he stares straight ahead and takes his final gasp.

Him then swings his arm by Veronica's leg, knocking her to the floor once again. She scrambles to get out of the cabin, falling and stumbling. She makes it out – her face landing in the dusting of snow on the front porch. She attempts to get back up but falls back down from the slick snow.

HIM is back and with a sudden movement, and on top of Veronica. With his bare hands (all the while making primal mumbling and grunting sounds) he begins to choke the life out of Veronica, her veins protruding from her forehead. She swats and slaps desperately, trying to get out from under his grip. But it is no use. HIM has control. Eli is dead. No one is coming for her. This is the end.

HIM releases his hold from Veronica's neck as the picture fades in and out of a fuzzy vignette. HIM's back now faces Veronica as he then steps over toward Eli. We only see flashes – in and out. When we come back in we see Veronica being dragged across the floor toward the door by HIM.

HIM
(mumbling)
I told you...
Next time I would take you
to the burn shed myself..

Veronica is dragged a few more feet before we hear a loud, strained gasp for air. Veronica swings her foot upward with all her body weight behind it, landing her knee just between HIM's thighs, relegating him to the ground once again.

Veronica wastes no time jumping on top of HIM. She straddles his chest, reaching down toward his face and violently begins to gouge his eyes with her fingernails, appearing to almost pull HIM's eyeballs out of the sockets. HIM is wailing in agonizing pain as he struggles to get her off, getting to his knees and then on his feet. Veronica wraps herself around HIM's entire big body, squeezing his torso like a boa constrictor, as HIM violently swings to and fro. HIM finally manages to slam Veronica's back several times against the wall, knocking her head so hard she releases her hold and slinks to the ground. HIM then tries to regain control, but it's too late, Veronica has

made her way out of the doorway, in front of the cabin, and is headed in Daphne's direction.

HIM
(yelling)
No fucking loyalty!
(now breathless)
Should've killed you a long time ago.

Him hobbles on one leg behind Veronica, ax in hand.

HIM (CONT)
Where do you think you're going?
Ain't nothing for miles.

Him raises the ax as he makes his way toward her.

HIM (CONT)
You're not going anywhere!
You hear me, Eden!?

Just then, as he approaches the corner of the cabin toward Daphne's direction, Him's own dragon saber comes from around the corner and is driven straight through his stomach.

VERONICA
(without raising her voice as much
as an octave, almost in a whisper...)
My name is Veronica.
...you sick bastard.

HIM falls to the ground, as Veronica lands on top of him from the momentum. She pulls the saber out from his stomach and begins slicing his body, over and over, unable to stop but careful not to touch his face. She quickly reaches for the rope next to Daphne and hog ties HIM.

She is possessed and shoves HIM down into the dirt — completely exhausted. Drenched in blood and trembling — the sky is slowly getting brighter, as morning gradually approaches.

Veronica then looks to her right and sees Eli lying in the doorway and rushes over.

Tears stream down her face, now mixing with blood.

VERONICA
Sean! Sean!
Get up!

Tears well up in her eyes as she realizes that Sean (Eli) is dead. She holds his face in her hands. A tear from her eye falls on Sean's face.

But she will have to mourn another day - time is of the essence.

Veronica gets up. Retrieving the phone which lays on the ground next to Eli's face she rushes back outside next to Him who is now barely even able to cough up any more blood. Practically dead.

HIM is slowly moving his body like a slug on the ground. Veronica steps on his chest, bends down and grabs his hair, pulling his head against the ground and yanks the handkerchief out of his pocket and begins cleaning the blood from Him's face with a patient hand.

VERONICA

Look at the screen, motherfucker!

HIM barely flinches. Veronica, losing patience, slaps HIM across the face with the full weight of her body.

VERONICA (CONT)

Look at it!

Open your fucking eyes!

Veronica, enraged, once again slaps HIM across the face. HIM finally opens his eyes, ever so slowly; with a look of absolute disdain. Veronica holds the phone to his face. HIM'S eyes blink and the screen is unlocked.

Veronica begins to walk away, but pauses, turns back, walks up to HIM and elbows him across the face so hard he loses a tooth.

She turns her attention to the phone, quickly dialing before pressing it against her ear.

This time we hear Nick on the other end.

NICK

Hello?

VERONICA

Nick!?

(static)

NICK

V? V??

VERONICA

Yes...
I can't... I can't talk.
I am alive. I am...

NICK

WHERE ARE YOU?!
V! Tell me exactly where you are!

VERONICA

I - I don't know. I am getting out.

NICK

V - stay with me - Oh my god.
Everyone has been searching for you!
Where -

VERONICA

(interrupts)
I have to go RIGHT NOW.
I'm sending you a pin...
Send the police!
I... - I have to go NOW.

NICK

V! V! Oh my god!

VERONICA

I love you. I love Kennedy.

NICK

V! V!

We now hear Kennedy screaming "MOMMY" at the top of her lungs in the background.

The call drops.

VERONICA

No!

Veronica looks at the phone and sends a text with her location - she waits for what seems like forever for the text to go through. The text holds at 90%... it doesn't go through. The phone battery is red at 2%.

She sends it again. The text holds at 90%... After an agonizing wait... success! It goes through.

She stands there, snow falling on her, covered in blood – Eli dead, Him hanging on by a thread. She looks up toward the sky and then off toward the end of cabin row, the shed and then the nothingness.

Daphne lets out a huff and a stomp.

Without enough time to fully express her frustration, she quickly secures the phone back into Daphne's saddle bag before heading back over toward Him.

With all her might, she begins to drag him down the small hill, slowly – he is heavy and it is difficult, but the layer of slick snow and all her adrenaline aid in the mission.

We pull out from above to reveal the cabin, and Veronica's slow journey with Him. She gets further and further from the cabin we can see the trail of blood through the snow.

The path she is taking puts her in view of the perimeter guard for about 10 feet. She looks around the corner before proceeding. She lowers herself closer to the ground as she drags him, holding in any sound as she uses all her strength.

Finally, she is out of view of the perimeter guard, not stopping for even a moment before bumping up against a door.

It is the burn shed.

Unable to drag him anymore, she kicks and rolls him into the shed and props him up against the interior wall.

HIM coughs up blood through a strained, almost inaudible voice.

HIM

Naïve Eden. Don't you know?

(beat)

Your emancipation is a complete fabrication.

Veronica stands expressionless starring at him.

HIM (CONT)

You think this ends... with me?

This crusade?

(coughing up blood, struggling
to speak)
We are nowhere and... everywhere.

VERONICA

Having trouble getting your air...
(sarcastically)
Senator?
(beat)
I think it's your turn to be quiet...
(looking around)
...this abomination ends, NOW.

HIM

You just don't get it, do you?
(struggling)
You'll destroy this country, if given
the chance... but... after the Great War,
we will return to the natural order –
the National Estate WILL restore the
white homeland.

VERONICA

You're a psychopath.
(tilts head sideways)
Black is not a weapon... you sick fuck.
(pause)
If it was... Trust.
You would have been dead the moment
you laid your filthy hands on me.
(pause)
But you know what?
Your hate WILL NOT infect me.
As you take your last breath... just know...
the country you claim as yours will
only remember you as a perverted mistake.

Now trembling from the cold, but satisfied in the moment,
Veronica moves in and forcefully strips HIM's Confederate coat
from his body and tucks it under her arm.

She stands, looks at HIM who is slumped over, oozing blood from
his mouth. She surveys the space before exiting the shed
running, following the blood trail all the way back to the
cabin, careful not to alert the guards.

Upon arriving back at the cabin she finds everything as it was.
Sean is on the floor dead, lying in the cabin doorway. Daphne

stands tall, looking directly at Veronica. Her black coat shining beside the entryway torch.

Veronica walks up to Daphne; putting her hand on that beautiful quarter horse's forehead, closing her eyes for just a moment, before throwing HIM's jacket over the saddle.

VERONICA
I'll be right back.

She then grabs the torch from beside the front door and darts back toward the burn shed. As she approaches the short distance where the guard could spot her she stops. She stops right in the middle – right in plain view – glowing torch in hand.

She starts walking, then running toward the perimeter guard, the most immediate threat to her escape.

VERONICA (CONT)
Help! Come quick! Help!

Just then she runs directly into Jasper as the other perimeter guard continues to run toward them.

JASPER
What the fuck are you doing
out here... You're----

A look of terror comes across Veronica's face as she drops to her knees. She quickly regains her composure and..

VERONICA
It's the General!
He's hurt. Real bad!
(breathing heavily)
Come quick!

Veronica gets up and begins running with them toward the burn shed. They outpace her and get there before she does and they enter the shed. Him is propped up right where Veronica left him, barely alive.

PERIMETER GUARD
[We recognize him as the flower
delivery man]
Senator! Senator!

Him slowly raises his head.

JASPER
(searching him for the wound)
General... what happened..

Jasper takes his coat off, attempting to stop the bleeding. HIM looks just past Jasper and the guard as they tend to his injuries.

HIM slowly and painfully raises his arm, pointing to Veronica who is standing in the doorway. He tries to alert Jasper but is too late – the guard turns his head to see Veronica standing just outside the shed.

Veronica slams the door shut and secures the door block to lock it in place. Immediately we hear the guard pounding on the door – screaming bloody murder.

A satisfied grin comes over Veronica's face before she slowly moves toward the back of the shed, torch in hand.

Veronica opens the lower latch under the shed and lights the ignitor before walking around the perimeter and lighting all four corners, for good measure, before finally tossing the torch up onto the roof.

GUARD AND JASPER
Jesus! No!
Open the fucking door!
(incessant pounding on door)
Help, help!
Open the fucking door!
Oh my god!
(screaming increases –
becoming inaudible)

VERONICA
(low, almost to herself)
You don't give the orders anymore.

The screams grow louder and louder; as they continue their unrelenting pounding for mercy that goes unanswered. This is precisely what the shed was built for.

Smoke billows into the pre-dawn sky, as the agonizing screams go from louder – now to softer – to silence... only the sound of timber and human flesh burning.

The devil and his minion are no more.

Veronica turns to walk away slowly, bathing in satisfaction as the burning shed is now fully engulfed in flames. Veronica, outside the burn shed, as the still burning-hot embers cascade over her silhouette; paints a surreal picture. She knows she must make haste, anyone could have heard the screams, and the smoke is now fully visible from anywhere across the plantation. She has to get out of there. Now.

In the distance, we hear muffled voices as Veronica runs back to the cabin. She finds the bloody ax laying on the ground next to the front porch and grabs it before making her way to the beautiful quarter horse, Daphne.

We can hear the sound of cannon and gunfire in the far distance as Veronica runs her hand over Daphne's head, calming her before attempting to mount.

The muffled voices are getting closer... we can now hear the horse's hooves on the ground.

Without hesitation, Veronica snatches HIM's Confederate coat, draping it over her shivering torso.

She then attempts to mount Daphne and falls off again and again; her blood-soaked, exhausted body and Daphne's silky coat prove impossible... until...

Veronica finally secures her foot into the saddle strap and manages to mount, this time successfully, onto that beautiful quarter horse.

Veronica pats her twice on the neck before giving the command that she so often heard instructed by Him.

VERONICA
Daphne! Get Girl!
Get!

The snow falls across the wooded terrain as they leave the now engulfed burn shed behind. Veronica and that beautiful quarter horse sprint through the woods, that seem to go on forever.

Daphne's galloping hits the ground with such force we can hear her hooves pound the earth. We then notice other horses joining in the chorus... they're fast approaching and almost upon Veronica and Daphne.

We hear rapid gunfire. It is not a distant gunshot from battle – nor is it the sound of a Civil War era gun – it is a modern AR-15. No one is pretending any longer.

The other perimeter guard is on horseback, maybe 10 lengths behind Veronica and gaining speed — with another rider, maybe 50 yards behind him, moving at a pace just a hair slower.

As soon as Veronica and Daphne enter the forest one bullet grazes Daphne's ear, setting them off balance and possibly on a crash course. Veronica soothes Daphne, rubs her neck – their bond now solidified, indicated by Daphne's unrelenting march toward freedom.

Veronica looks back quickly toward the guard on horseback. The expansive battlefield slowly begins to come into the far distant view, but still quite a few miles out, as cannon smoke and snowfall share the horizon. There is plenty of time for them to catch up.

A clearer path to the field, and a brushy, thicker path lie ahead. In an instant, Veronica chooses the latter – the guard follows behind Veronica as well as the other rider, now picking up the pace.

Veronica navigates the brush with ease. The guard is struggling but manages to keep up.

As both the guard and Veronica wind through the thick brush and trees that seem to go on forever, he lets off several quickly repeating shots toward Veronica – one of them clipping the side of her arm.

Veronica doesn't even flinch.

Veronica and Daphne keep a determined, almost super-natural pace through the trees. She winds through the expansive forest impressively, ducking and weaving; her years of championship equestrian training now evident. Just ahead is a protruding low branch that extends almost 20 feet out and about 4 feet high – there is no way around it.

Veronica and Daphne jump the branch, beautifully – clearing it by only an inch.

The guard is relentless in his pursuit and has trained his sights on Veronica as he aims his AR-15 again. He does not notice the branch until the last second when his horse abruptly stops – its back legs rising off the ground, letting out a loud

neigh while throwing the guard violently forward into the air. He is clotheslined by a tree-trunk sized branch, before crashing to the ground, incapacitated, if not dead.

Veronica looks back for just a moment, satisfied he is no longer a threat, but her reprieve would be short-lived – she is interrupted by a gunshot coming at her from the other rider. We cut away from Veronica as we slowly see the other horse coming into view.

Emerging from the thick forest and falling snow; we see Elizabeth on horseback and realize she was the other rider. Elizabeth's long flowing strawberry-blonde hair is disheveled and flying wildly in the wind along with her black laced cape and southern belle style dress.

Once again an eerie hush drapes the forest. Only the distant sound of cannon and musket fire can be heard.

Elizabeth lets out several gunshots into the air.

ELIZABETH

(yelling)
Where the fuck are you, you
fucking cunt?
(gathers herself, now calmly)
You killed my family!
(waiving gun)
There is no way you are getting
out of here alive...

Silence.

ELIZABETH (CONT)

(growing frustrated)
I watched you...
And I know what you think.
(soft)
You think you're better than me.
(now screaming)
You think you're better than me?!?!
Eden... Eden! Where are you?!

We only see hooves as they make an impression in the collecting snow.

An exasperated Elizabeth, appearing to hold a conversation with herself for Veronica's benefit.

ELIZABETH (CONT)

The lot of you – hand-picked by me,
with one exception!
I warned my father – “too risky a conquest,”
I said, but he insisted; “Elizabeth,
she’s spreading this filth!”
He just couldn’t resist —
the movement be damned!
He HAD To have you.
(sigh)
And now... as always, the woman is
left to clean up the mess of the man!

Elizabeth is now just a short distance from Veronica – making her way through the trees and brush. We are watching her. Veronica is watching her – stalking her. We see a knife attached to Elizabeth’s waistband. She is shooting in all directions, unsure of Veronica’s location. She attempts another shot, but only a click. She is out of bullets.

ELIZABETH (CONT)

Eden!
Come ouuuutt!!
(losing her temper)
Fuck you, you fucking
black bitch! EDEN!!
Get the fuck ba---

Before Elizabeth can get another word out of her mouth, Veronica comes from behind, out of the brush and snaps back Elizabeth’s neck with a rope tie from atop Daphne. Veronica drags her, Elizabeth’s feet violently kicking the earth, but it’s no use, Veronica is cutting off all oxygen, as Elizabeth’s face goes from bright red to purple. Daphne stops and Veronica dismounts, keeping Elizabeth restrained with the rope tie.

Elizabeth’s legs are flailing and her arms are reaching for Veronica’s face. Veronica successfully dodges her attempts until Elizabeth grabs a hold of Veronica’s hair with one hand and pulls her head toward her. As she does, she grasps on to her head with her other hand as well. Now with a firm grip, but losing air, Elizabeth gives Veronica one hard pull, knocking her off her feet. Elizabeth then reaches for her knife on her waistband and quickly cuts herself loose of the rope. Elizabeth takes a deep breath before Veronica comes back at her, landing one good, closed-fist hit across Elizabeth’s face, blood splatters from her jaw and the knife falls from her hand into

the dirt. Elizabeth turns back quickly getting her hands around Veronica's neck as Veronica squirms and kicks to get away.

Veronica's hands search the ground for anything, in a desperate attempt to get away, but there is nothing. Elizabeth is laser-focused, squeezing her neck with her arms fully extended. Veronica is losing air, and dying slowly... Elizabeth has overpowered her.

Veronica desperately tries to push Elizabeth off to no avail, swatting at her body... She feels around the ground and just in time, identifies the knife, grabs it, and slides it into Elizabeth's thigh in one fluid motion, as the two women share an intense eye-to-eye stare. Elizabeth then releases her iron grip on Veronica's neck.

VERONICA

What... is wrong with you??
(smashing Elizabeth's head into the ground)
What kind of woman are you?

Enraged, Veronica continues her assault – we hear Elizabeth's head hit violently against a stump, knocking her out – she may be dead. Veronica keeps ahold of her neck for another few seconds, for good measure.

Veronica looks at Elizabeth with the same bewildered expression she had during that fateful Skype conference. Veronica then stands up and takes a long, deep breath, while looking down at Elizabeth's vacant stare – satisfied she is no longer an immediate threat... the rope-tie still loose around Elizabeth's neck.

Veronica hears the overseers getting closer and re-mounts Daphne, and is just about to cut Elizabeth loose, when we hear a single gun shot echo through the nothingness. This spooks Daphne, who takes off violently, almost throwing Veronica from her saddle.

Elizabeth is dragged across the forest floor, as they continue their journey toward a clearing in the distance. Elizabeth is coming to, desperately grabbing at the rope and begins to wail in agonizing, breathless screams. Veronica unsuccessfully tries once again to cut the tether but it's no use, Daphne is moving at far too fast a clip.

Jasper and Elizabeth's horses ghost ride, running close behind Veronica and Daphne, almost appearing to join in the escape.

Elizabeth's screams grow louder, more urgent as Veronica continues her desperate attempts to cut the dead weight — just as Veronica finally cuts through the last of the twine; untethering Elizabeth — Elizabeth simultaneously slams head first into what appears to be a giant stone. The impact violently snaps her neck, leaving Elizabeth's now lifeless body wedged between two objects we can't quite make out.

Veronica and Daphne, now frozen in their tracks, look back to see Elizabeth's broken body. As we pan out, we reveal that she and Daphne are mirroring a giant monument of Robert E. Lee on horseback, maybe 20 feet tall, sword in the air — his ghost guarding the haunted forest beside a Caterpillar fork lift. Veronica pulls up Daphne's reins for just a moment as she slowly cuts Elizabeth loose.

Veronica's face reads a look of total shock as she and Daphne are shaded by the shadow of Robert E. Lee. But there is no time for contemplation, we hear fast approaching gunshots. Veronica snaps back to reality and bolts towards the battlefield with a quickness— now that she and Daphne are no longer weighed down by Elizabeth.

The overseers clear the final obstacle of trees — they are just about at the border of the battlefield — determined; relentless. Veronica looks back fleetingly, to see the posted placards with an image of a circled cell phone with a line through it.

Looking like a woman possessed, an other-worldly goddess, with her blood-drenched legs squeezing Daphne with the last of her strength, commanding that beautiful quarter horse to keep pace. Veronica is swinging Sean's ax in the air, she is enveloped by the eerie, soft falling snow; screaming in absolute disbelief that her hard-fought liberation is within reach — as she enters the "active" battlefield where Union soldiers intersect with The Sons of the South.

The remaining overseers on horseback make it to the edge of the woods after Veronica has already entered the battlefield. They stop abruptly right at the forest line — not entering the battlefield behind her.

VERONICA

Get!

(lifts her head up to take in the full battle scene as she raises her ax while she rides and screams out.)

Get! Good girl! Get!

Veronica and Daphne ride straight through the field of cannons, bayonets, and "soldiers" — the smoke from the cannons drape the morning sky, shadowed by the snow.

Veronica's bloody body and bare feet make her feel freer than she has ever been. She looks back at the Confederate and Union soldiers, waiting for a gunshot to materialize as she works her way through the center of combat — but it never comes — only shock and dismay on the faces of the soldiers.

Veronica doesn't stop — pushing forward as familiar plumes of smoke float upward in the distance behind her. She and Daphne ride all the way past the horizon.

Gun smoke gives way to flashing lights from a sea of approaching police cars, as a helicopter zips by overhead. Stunned spectators in modern civilian clothing record the moment with their cellphones — as Veronica and Daphne pass the entryway of the park, we see a metal sign that reads...

*"Antebellum
Louisiana's Premier Civil War Reenactment Park.
All major credit cards and Apple Pay accepted.
Private Property — No Trespassing."*

The camera winds back through the battlefield, weaving between the reenactors and cannon smoke, until we return to the edge of the forest and spot the little blonde girl emerging from the shadows. She stops just at the edge of the battlefield, with a sinister look on her face, unfazed by the pandemonium now engulfing the property.

CUT TO BLACK

SLOW FADE IN FROM BLACK

The battlefield entrance is visible (for just a beat) before a bulldozer enters the frame demolishing the Antebellum sign, as we slowly pull out to a full aerial view of the entirety of the property (which appears to be comprised of tens of thousands of acres of land) — both the public re-enactment park and the private plantation. At least fifty or so federal authorities, donning yellow-lettered FBI blue windbreakers, can be seen scouring the cotton fields, the Great House and cabin row.

NEWS CLIP AUDIO OVER VISUAL (VOICE OF WOLF BLITZER)

CNN Breaking News Alert — Louisiana Senator Blake Dunn, now

infamously known as 'HIM' — whose family has been one of the state's largest land owners for generations, shocked the country with his involvement in the Antebellum nightmare.

The Civil War re-enactment park owned by the Senator was a front for a secret "house of horrors" he operated with impunity; nestled deep within the outskirts of the expansive property, the public had no idea of its existence.

Investigators say Elizabeth Dunn-Harrington, heiress to the DUNN Oil fortune — was one of the masterminds, her husband Jasper Harrington ran day-to-day operations at Antebellum — he was also head of the ultra-far-right Super Pac *The National Estate* — they, along with Dunn, were all killed during Veronica Henley's harrowing escape. A minor child, believed to be the Herrington's daughter, was located on the property — she is the sole, living heir to the Dunn Oil and land fortune.

A private memorial ceremony is scheduled for the Dunn family this Saturday.

In other news — 19 are now confirmed dead in the mass shooting that took place last night in...

(audio tapers off)

ANTEBELLUM

END