

THE COOKOUT

Written by

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FADE IN:

The CRACKLING of flames rising. A faint POP.

Grey smoke drifts from above, curling unnaturally. Embers glow, falling downward. Flames swell the same direction, violent, licking at the darkness.

Distant, MUFFLED SOUNDS – maybe screams. Maybe just the wind. Each paragraph of the following appears...

SUPERIMPOSED:

"After the U.S. Civil War, many Southern states, still poisoned by white supremacy, enacted racial segregation laws...JIM CROW."

"When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, it followed suit."

"Greenwood, a thriving Black district in Tulsa, OK, flourished—wealthy, educated, independent. So prosperous, it earned a name: 'NEGRO WALL STREET.'"

The fire burns hot.

"On May 31 – June 1, 1921, white mobs—some deputized, some armed by city officials—descended on Greenwood."

"More than 35 blocks reduced to ash. Thousands displaced. Hundreds murdered."

"Survivors scattered. Stories silenced. But history doesn't burn so easily..."

Reds, oranges, yellows, whites and blues from flame consume all.

INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT

The roaring flames invert – revealing a gas fireplace burning hot. Distant screams morph, melting into breathy MOANS.

Moonlight spills through the window, washing over tangled sheets – two bodies moving in rhythm beneath them.

TRINITY WASHINGTON-WHITE (23, Biracial-but *easily* passes for white) lies beneath THEODORE "THEO" MOSS (25, Caucasian). Her thin face glows with sweat, freckles stark against flushed skin, green eyes heavy-lidded with pleasure. Her platinum blonde hair fans against the pillow.

Theo – tall, lanky, Zuckerberg-adjacent hairstyle – presses into her, eyes dark with hunger.

A sharp GASP. A deep, primal shudder.

Trinity's nails rake Theo's back, drawing blood.

He exhales, quivering through his final thrust. Collapses. Their bodies slick, trembling. A breath. Then another.

Foreheads press together, their breaths syncing, slow and heavy.

THEO
(satisfied)
You're my boo.

TRINITY
You're my boo.

They nuzzle, lost in the warmth.

The fire crackles.

EXT. AIRBNB HOUSE - MORNING

An AirBNB sticker on the door. In the distance, R&B-infused hip-hop BOOMS from an SUV.

EXT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

A manicured hand—glamorous, glittering with mini-jewel polish — shoves the corner of a cocaine brick beneath a pair of Marc Jacobs boots inside a suitcase within the trunk of a luxury SUV.

SHAMYKA FISCHER (26, Caucasian), hourglass curves, dressed like she's front row at a Cardi B concert—sleek black braids, fresh-from-the-salon hair, and a gold "\$HAMYKA" necklace nestled against her chest—casually adjusts her suitcase.

She barely notices CHAD WHITE (27, Caucasian) creeping up behind her—dapper, cute, skinny jeans sharp, oversized pristine white headphones dangling from his neck matching his pristine white sneakers. Without a word, he clamps a hand over her mouth.

Shamyka thrashes—heel BARELY missing its target of said pristine sneakers.

CHAD
What the fuck-?!

Chad leaps back like he touched a live wire.

Shamyka zips up her suitcase, eyeing him hard.

SHAMYKA
Muhfukah, wha'chu doin'?!

CHAD
(aghast)
These are Nike White Saturns!

Shamyka shrugs, unimpressed.

CHAD (CONT'D)
They're limited edition.

She side eyes, hops onto the bumper with folded arms. She wags her finger at Chad.

SHAMYKA
I ain't ask you to wear no limited edition shoes an' creep up on me like Freddy Krueger invading my wet dreams. Bet you could feed a small country with what you paid for those.

Chad grins, playfully SNAPS his teeth at her finger.

CHAD
Or what? You gonna be my final girl? You gonna finish me off?

Shamyka's posture softens. She curls her lips.

SHAMYKA
(leaning in, teasing)
You'd like that, wouldn't you?
Freaky ass.

CHAD
At least I admit-I'm a fucked-up person, living in a fucked-up world...with a fucked-up girl who I wanna fuck so bad right now.

SHAMYKA
Mmm...I like when you spit game, baby.

A passionate peck shared between the two.

CHAD
(murmurs against her lips)
Let that sustain you while you chauffeur us to Naw'lins.

SHAMYKA
(kisses teeth)
I aint'cho chauffeur. I'm a tour
guide.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

From the window, Theo watches with disapproving eyes.

Trinity enters, handing him a cup of steaming coffee.

THEO
(taking a sip)
Where did he even meet her?

TRINITY
(shrugs, sips)
One of his parties. Seattle, I
think.

They observe Shamyka twerking onto Chad, now sitting on the
bumper of the SUV, loving every second.

THEO
Not even a month. Your brother
works fast.

The duo witness the front door swing open, introducing TONY
PETERS (25, Caucasian), bearded, eyeliner sharp, guitar case
slung over one shoulder. He also joins in on the fun.

Theo and Trinity soaks in the moment.

THEO (CONT'D)
She certainly tries hard enough,
doesn't she?

He exits, sipping coffee.

Trinity lingers, watching. Contemplating.

INT. SUV - MOVING - DAY

The spacious SUV ZOOMS past a road sign: "WELCOME TO
MISSISSIPPI".

Shamyka drives, head bopping to TRAP-LIKE MUMBLE RAP. In the
passenger seat, Chad puffs on a marijuana vape, oversized
headphones swallowing his head as he nods to a beat.

Seated behind them, Theo and Trinity scroll through her
phone.

In the back, Tony casually picks dirt out from under his nails with a pocket knife, his guitar laying on the floor, snug. A whiny murmur draws Tony's attention.

JAX WILLIAMS (24, Caucasian)-cute in oversized glasses and stunning red hair highlights with socialite vibes, sits beside Tony. In her lap, a tiny Pomchi squirms inside a bougie pet carrier.

TONY

Hey, Denzel! It's okay, buddy...

Jax smiles as DENZEL, the cute pup licks Tony's fingers frantically.

TONY (CONT'D)

He must know I didn't sleep great last night.

JAX

Let's spill it...that AirBNB was subpar.

SHAMYKA

What? That place was cute.

JAX

(pointed)

Sub. Par.

Shamyka rolls her eyes. Chad hands Tony his headphones. Tony listens intently, humming along.

TRINITY

This house Theo rented is stunning.
You'll sleep for a week.

Jax eyes vapor from Chad's lips escape through the cracked window.

JAX

(to Chad)

Apologies for invading your space.

CHAD

Jax, the window's open, it's vapor,
and you're literally-back there.

TRINITY

(staring at phone)

Don't start, bro-gimme some peace
to figure out this itinerary for
us.

CHAD

"Itinerary," Trin? Moritz has you
and Jax with her lack of
understanding when it comes to
ganja living a bullet-point life.

JAX

(insulted)

I do not have a lack of
understanding of weed.

CHAD

Ever blazed up? Tried an edible?

JAX

(after a beat)

No.

CHAD

Then respectfully—your case is
dismissed.

Tony hands back the headphones, eyes wide.

TONY

Yo, that slaps.

CHAD

Right? Think you could lay some
melodies on it at my boy's studio
in the Big Easy?

TRINITY

(annoyed)

...And I don't live a bullet-point
life.

Theo smirks, about to quip—

TRINITY (CONT'D)

(dryly)

Try it.

Theo grins, playfully head-butts her.

SHAMYKA

(to Trinity)

Girl, long as I can freak to SZA,
Juss don't kill my vibe.

JAX

(stroking Denzel)

...My dad used to smoke. A lot.

CHAD

You won't even try CBD drops for Denzel's yippin' ass.

SHAMYKA

Oh, you gotta do them drops. I put some in Lulu's water when she actin' like she in heat, and she be on some Half-Baked shit. Tryna feed horses and everything.

CHAD

Bet.

(to Trinity)

This week is about bass, vibes, and relaxing, sis. So relax, sis!

TRINITY

How many political posts have you made on Bluesky today?

CHAD

(smug)

Fuck you. Six.

Trinity playfully taps his forehead with two fingers. Chad swats her away with a smirk, taking another vape hit.

CHAD (CONT'D)

We've let micro-aggressions fester for generations, now we're drowning in global apathy. We gotta resist.

TONY

(annoyed)

Dude, it's too early for politics.

CHAD

(spins to back)

Tell the NAZIS kicking down your door at 2 AM it's "too early for politics".

Theo pulls out his phone.

THEO

Speaking of...

TRINITY

(groaning)

Oh my God, Chad, you don't even know—

CHAD

Know what?

Theo hands Chad his phone, puffing on his vape.

THEO

Remember those racist texts after
Trump won?

CHAD

(skeptical)

Yes...

ON PHONE:

A TikTok Video-

INT. MOSS FOODS CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The ground floor of a large-scale, typical corporate building, steel and glass everywhere. Despite the sunlight spilling in from all directions, the place stinks of sterilization.

A BLACK ASSISTANT (Early 30s) in a crisp suit squares up against a WHITE JANITOR (60s) in a contractor uniform. The janitor, cocky, despite being half the Assistant's size, gets in his face.

BACK TO SUV

Chad watches, stunned.

THEO

My buddy's wife got one of those
texts. Their 13-year-old saw it
first.

TRINITY

Thirteen...

SHAMYKA

She don' need that trauma.

THEO

So dude loses it. He's in the
middle of meeting fucking Petersen-

CHAD

(in thought)

Petersen. Petersen...

THEO
His wife's the ex-Maxim model.
Finnish chick.

CHAD
OH. Yeah. *She can still get it.*

Shamyka side-eyes him.

JAX
Gross. She's like, 45.

TONY
Girl, you're gross. Demi Moore is
over 50 and fione.

SHAMYKA
Wait...she wasn't *playing* a 50-year-
old in *The Substance*?

CHAD
So what happened with your buddy?

TRINITY
(casually correcting)
More like his boss's assistant.

THEO
We had some cocktails at happy
hour. But, this janitor—this dude's
got the balls to mutter, under his
breath but in his loudest bigot
inside voice, "next year there'll
be real trucks."

SHAMYKA
Real trucks?

TONY
(realizing)
...Oh shit.

JAX
I don't get it.

CHAD
(puffing)
Are you even listening?

JAX
Oh wait...He's saying next year
they'll bring—

ALL
REAL FUCKING TRUCKS.

THEO
Dude SNAPS. Gets in the janitor's face. I hear "say that again," and I rush out. You see it—he's a fucking linebacker—all hooded out—

CHAD
Hooded out?

THEO
You know, stance locked, ready to throw bows.

TRINITY
(amused)
You play too much.

THEO
Dude points at me: "Film this." I knew shit was 'bout to go down.

SHAMYKA
I ain't built to process this.

CHAD
(shocked)
...Why are they arresting the black guy?

THEO
Disorderly conduct. Told you shit got weird.

SHAMYKA
Nah uh. That's outta pocket.

THEO
I'm filming, internally screaming
"This is madness!"

Theo's tinny voice CUTS from the phone:

THEO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
POWER TO THE PEOPLE. YEAH. YEAH.

TONY
Damn, you got animated.

THEO
Had to. It was wrong. I threw up the fist. He knew.

"WADE IN THE WATER" - yes *that* Negro Spiritual - is whistled by the Janitor to the Assistant, clearly in mockery. The significance of the song seems to be ignored by all, except Trinity who side-eyes the tune with quiet disappointment.

CHAD
(impressed)
900k views in three hours...

THEO
Tracking to be my second most viral post this month. Who knew?

CHAD
(scrolling)
Unsurprisingly, some of these comments are trash.

TRINITY
(snaps into thought)
Wait. Who *did* called the cops?

Theo shrugs.

CHAD
(passing phone back)
And the janitor?

THEO
Didn't see him again. Figure he got canned.

SHAMYKA
Hope so.
(sharp exhale)
Fucking white people.

WOOOOP-WOOOOP!

The unmistakable sound of a POLICE SIREN blares. Red and blue lights flash through the rear windshield.

Collective groans. Jax slumps in her seat.

JAX
Please tell me that's an ambulance.

SHAMYKA
(sighing)
You gotta be fucking kidding me.

Shamyka grips the steering wheel, something Chad notices from the corner of his eye.

CHAD
(under breath, to Shamyka)
You okay?

Another WOOOOP! The siren pulses again—short, direct. The cruiser stays locked behind them.

Shamyka reluctantly flips the turn signal and eases toward the curb.

EXT. LONELY HIGHWAY STREET - CONTINUOUS

A two-lane backroad that also doubles as a highway to small town Deep South. The police cruiser slows behind the SUV, lights reflecting off the car's body.

BACK TO THE SUV

Only the rhythmic pulse of the siren and the flash of red and blue permeate the atmosphere.

Shamyka, white-knuckled, types furiously on her phone—immediately pockets it.

JAX (O.S.)
(legit concern)
...Fuck man, I can't go to jail I
have a 3.9 GPA!

BUZZ. Chad yanks out his phone.

ON SCREEN:

"ACT CALM. YAYO IN SUITCASE. \$10K GIG."

Chad's jaw tightens. He glares daggers at Shamyka. She won't meet his eyes.

Trinity SNAPS her fingers at Chad, who blinks.

TRINITY
Hey, put your fucking vape away.

He does so. Trinity watches him, uneasy.

TRINITY (CONT'D)
You good?

Through the side mirror, a BLACK POLICE OFFICER (30's) steps out. Tall. Broad. Built like a pro wrestling champion.

SHAMYKA
(low, impressed)
Oh my god.

She fixes herself up, Chad squinting her direction.

TRINITY
(to Chad)
Bro!

The Police Officer strides closer.

CHAD
(at Shamyka)
Oh, no doubt. We're all upstanding
citizens here.

The Police Officer arrives, taps the window.

Shamyka lowers it – cleavage forward.

SHAMYKA
(overly friendly)
Afternoon, Officer---

POLICE OFFICER
(flat, Southern)
License, registration and
insurance.

She hands them over. He studies them, and her.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
Where y'all headed?

SHAMYKA
Naw'lins, sir. Music festival. You
get down to SZA right?

POLICE OFFICER
(cold)
Should I?

Shamyka wilts.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
This a rental?

SHAMYKA
Yes, sir.

The Police Officer leans in. Eyes scan. Silence coils tight.
He eyes Tony's guitar.

POLICE OFFICER
(to Tony)
Whaddya play?

TONY
A little bit of everything but
mostly blues, sir.

POLICE OFFICER
Blues. Mm.

His eyes shift to Theo. Holds.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
...You look familiar.

Theo's jaw tightens. Lowers eyes.

THEO
Just a music lover, sir.

The Police Officer doesn't blink. Moves to Jax, her brows
furrowed.

Denzel licks his fingers. The officer smirks.

POLICE OFFICER
Friendly boy.

JAX
Denzel must really like you.

That smirk fades. Denzel relents as if instinctual, pouting.

POLICE OFFICER
Your dog's name is Denzel?

A charged silence.

The Police Officer scoffs, shaking his head. Looks back at
Shamyka.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
Road gets bad up ahead. Fog bank.
I'd take the detour. You'll see the
orange signs.

SHAMYKA
We will be extra careful.

The officer leans in, noticing Shamyka's glistening forehead.

POLICE OFFICER
Y'all seem...tense.

A beat.

CHAD
I have Anxiety. And ADHD.

THEO
Bipolar 1.

JAX
PTSD?

TONY
Daddy issues.

The Officer sighs.

POLICE OFFICER
(to Shamyka)
Pop your trunk, ma'am.

SHAMYKA
(flirty)
Is that a request or an order?

JAX
(blurts)
Do you have a warrant?

POLICE OFFICER
(side eye)
We gotta law student o'rr here.

JAX
Yes. Literally.
(points at Trinity)
Her too. So, yeah, we know our
rights.

POLICE OFFICER
(smirks)
I bet y'all privileged enough to
know. Smelled your boy's vape.
Probable cause.

A beat.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
(to Shamyka)
Open the trunk. That's an order.

Shamyka and Chad lock eyes. She presses the trunk button.
CLICK.

The Police Officer moves to the rear.

JAX
(low, immediately to Chad)
I told you about that fucking vape.

Trinity notices Chad and Shamyka's stare-off.

TONY
No way he smelled that. I've pulled
on it...It's odorless.

TRINITY
(whispers)
Chad. You good?

ZIP. A suitcase opens.

CHAD
(flat)
Everything is YAYO-kay.

Suitcase is searched. Suitcase slammed shut. ZIP.

JAX
Who does he think he is? "Probable
cause"...Do we look that desperate?
Does he *actually* know who Theo is?

ZIP. Shamyka slightly jumps in her seat. Theo glances in her
direction.

TRINITY
Jax, just let it go. We're good.

ZIP. Chad stares out.

TRINITY (CONT'D)
(to Chad)
Right?

A SLAM. The Police Officer returns with documents, expression
unreadable.

POLICE OFFICER
Y'all gotta lot of nice stuff.

SHAMYKA
Do we get style points?

POLICE OFFICER
(hands documents, flat)
Just take the detour.

One last lingering glance from the Police Officer.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
(to Trinity, smiling)
You have a nice day.

He side-eyes the rest. Strides back to his cruiser.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
(low, muttering)
...she really named her dog Denzel,
got-damn.

Shamyka exhales once he is out of view.

CHAD
(quick, angry)
Should you tell them or should I?

TRINITY
What?

SHAMYKA
Let me get off this fucking road
first, yo, shit...

Shamyka keeping her eyes on the rear-view, pulls the SUV back
onto the road.

CHAD
We got a fucking mule over here. Go
on, tell them *how much coke is in*
the trunk!

GASPS.

TRINITY
The fuck?

SHAMYKA
Ten G's worth. G'on, judge a bitch
for making rent.

TONY
We could've all gone to prison!

SHAMYKA
But we didn't!

Silence. The blasting rap music now feels wrong.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
I met someone on Facebook
marketplace...

CHAD
(facepalm)
Motherfucker...

SHAMYKA
...already got \$2,500. The rest I
get in New Orleans.

JAX
Great. Now we're all accomplices.
Thanks, Chad. Thanks, Dollarama
Iggy Azalea.

TRINITY
(to Chad)
You studying crime or recruiting
for it, bro?

SHAMYKA
(offended)
I don't have to take this shit.

CHAD
Then I guess you're cool if we
chuck your blow---

SHAMYKA
(quick)
Please. Don't. *I need this*. And
they're expecting me. If I don't
show...?

A beat.

THEO
Pull over.

Shamyka rolls her eyes, yanks the SUV to the side again.

TRINITY
Let's think this through.

CHAD
(to Shamyka)
After this drop, you're done,
right?

SHAMYKA
Yes.

THEO
Fine. Drop it off, take the cash.
But you're not coming back with us.

SHAMYKA

What?

Shamyka snaps to Chad. He shrugs. Everyone stares – silent verdict.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)

Y'all foul.

She throws open the door and storms out. Seat swap. Now Theo drives, Trinity shotgun, Chad and Shamyka in the back.

TRINITY

Babe, that detour the cop mentioned? Adds 90 minutes.

JAX

After this shit? Can we just get to the VRBO so I can feed Denzel...

(pointed glance at
Shamyka)

Since we're generously giving all dogs scraps today.

Trinity raises her eyebrows at Theo.

THEO

Nah, fuck that-I can handle a little fog.

The SUV rumbles forward.

EXT. LONELY ROAD - LATER

The SUV barrels down the desolate road. Grey storm clouds churn.

INT. SUV - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Trinity scrolls her phone. Theo grips the wheel, eyes ahead.

A wall of fog looms – thick, swallowing the road beyond.

CHAD

(peeking out with vape)
Gnarly.

Theo and Trinity exchange a look.

TRINITY

Babe, GPS still says straight.

Theo nods. The SUV plunges into the fog.

EXT. FOGGY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Visibility drops to feet. Headlights barely pierce the void.

BACK TO SUV

Theo stiffens. The fog swallows them whole.

The SUV drifts into a crawl. The air pressurizes. Everyone stares out, silent.

Chad, curious, begins to lower his window.

SHAMYKA

What are you—

CHAD

Shhh.

SHAMYKA

Don't shush—

CHAD

SHHHH.

The window lowers all the way.

Nothing. No wind. No birds. No insects. No road noise. Just vacuum silence.

Everyone exchanges looks.

CHAD (CONT'D)

Dude...we're moving, right?

THEO

Yeah.

CHAD

...I can't even hear the tires.

JAX

(soothing Denzel)

Y'all, this is fucked up.

Trinity glances at her phone. The screen glitches.

TRINITY

What's happening to my phone?

Instantly, everyone (except Theo) whip out their phones.
Screens flicker. Panic sets in.

CHAD
If 12-foot bugs jump out, you're on
your own.

TONY
(reassuring)
It's just fog, guys...

Chad's eyes flick outside.

BACK TO FOGGY ROAD

Barely visible through the fog, too brief to truly notice:

A pike...Impaling a burnt, aged skull. An old blood-soaked,
half-torched Ku Klux Klan hood dangles.

BACK TO SUV

Chad's face drains.

CHAD
The fuck was that?

THEO
Tony's right, we're overreacting--

BANG.

BACK TO FOGGY ROAD

The front driver's side tire of the SUV EXPLODES.

It jerks hard, spinning.

BACK TO SUV

Chaos.

Theo wrestles for control. Denzel yelps. Passengers lurch
violently. Tires SCREECH.

BACK TO FOGGY ROAD

The SUV spins once. Stops. Hazard lights PULSE weakly.

BACK TO SUV

Silence. Deep, suffocating.

Theo reaches for Trinity.

THEO
You okay, babe?

She nods.

Tony clutches his chest. Denzel trembles. Jax hugs him.

JAX
It's okay, baby...

Shamyka, crossed arms, huffs.

SHAMYKA
I'm fine too, Chad.

CHAD
(annoyed)
...Seriously?

Theo sighs, exits.

TRINITY
Babe, be careful...

BACK TO FOGGY ROAD

Theo crouches at the tire, shredded-tilting the SUV unevenly.

JAX (O.S.)
The fuck is this day?!

Trinity exits and arrives on the scene.

TRINITY
How bad?

THEO
We're gonna need to grab a spare
from under all that luggage.

BACK TO SUV

Jax holds Denzel. The dog suddenly HOWLS.

Everyone leaps in shock.

JAX
 (comforting)
 Oh baby! It's okay...!

Trinity reviews her phone. Still fried and glitching.

BACK TO FOGGY ROAD

Chad joins Trinity and Theo.

CHAD
 Put it in neutral, we can push it
 off the road?

Theo nods.

Without warning, a low-pitched SNARL. Like a rattlesnake's hiss mixed with...a wolf or bear growl? But wet. Primal. Slicing through the fog.

SHAMYKA
 What. The fuck. Was that?

TONY (O.S.)
 I swear to God, I will use my
 guitar like it's WWE.

TRINITY
 (to Theo, concerned)
 Can you drive on a flat?

THEO
 Fuck yeah, I can.

Chad eyes ahead.

CHAD
 What's that up there?

Theo and Trinity turn toward Chad's direction.

Barely visible in the distance—a WATER TOWER.

BACK TO SUV

Jax squints, suspicious

JAX
 ...Was that there before?

All climb back into the vehicle.

THEO
If it's a town, we can get this
fixed.

CHAD
A small town in Mississippi? That's
how Texas Chainsaw starts.

TRINITY
(confused)
Except. We're in Mississippi.

CHAD
Rather be eaten than lynched.

SHAMYKA
You don't have anything to worry
about.

CHAD
Except your COCAÍNA in the--

THAT SOUND. AGAIN.

SHAMYKA
(no time for games)
Nah uh. Nope.

TRINITY
I'm pissed at you, but I agree.

Theo throws it in gear.

The SUV lurches forward into the fog.

BACK TO FOGGY ROAD

The SUV, blown out front tire and all, reverses from the
shoulder, makes a 3-point turn and drives towards the
direction of the barely visible, silhouetted water tower.

EXT. SUNNY ROAD - DAY

The SUV drifts out of the thick fog, rolling into an almost
eerily perfect small town, sun-kissed road. The sky is
cloudless. The sun gleams. Birds chirp in unison, as if
rehearsed.

INT. SUV - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Everyone exhales - relieved, but wary.

CHAD

So...we are gonna ignore how that
was some straight-up Stephen King
shit?

EXT. SUNNY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The SUV rumbles. To one side, soybean crops stretch
endlessly. To the other—sheep.

Dozens. No, maybe at least 200. They graze, motionless.
Staring.

BACK TO SUV

Trinity rolls down her window as they slow at a weathered yet
oddly pristine road sign.

The typography screams 1960s—bold, atomic-age optimism. A
crude rocket ship spirals toward a massive moon, its smoky
trail forming the words:

"WELCOME TO APOLLO NOIR...

SHOOTING FOR THE MOON SINCE 1925!"

In the center, an all-American family: a smiling mother,
father, son, daughter, and even a panting, smiling
bloodhound, sitting around a dinner table, a picture-perfect
vision of Americana straight out of a Norman Rockwell
painting.

...Except they are all African-American.

Everyone stares.

CHAD

That's something you don't see
every day.

TRINITY

(scolding)

Chad!

CHAD

...We're all thinking it.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - ROUNDABOUT ENTRANCE - DAY

The SUV slows as it approaches a roundabout — placed
deliberately, almost as if marking an invisible border.

At its center, towering 20 feet high, stands a gleaming silver statue:

A Black Man and Woman, dressed in working-class 1930s attire—their expressions proud, defiant. Fists clenched and high above their heads, holding a thick chain snapped in half.

The SUV idles.

Theo steps out first, the others following.

At the statue's base, a bronze plaque reads:

"DEDICATED TO THE STRENGTH AND MEMORY OF
TYWIN HAMILTON AND FRANCIE JONES,
WHO MADE THE ULTIMATE CHOICE & SACRIFICE
TO EMANCIPATE OUR TOWN IN ITS DARKEST HOUR."

The group eyes up and down the triumphant work of art.

CHAD
(puffs vape)
Gnarly.

Trinity, entranced, steps closer.

A WHISPER curls into her ear – indistinct, layered, rushing through like a train in a tunnel.

Her breath catches. The world around her DARKENS.

That ROAR. The wet, rattling growl.

She whips around...And it's gone. The town is bright again. The birds are still singing. The statue gleams.

Theo's voice FADES back in.

THEO
(muffled)
...Trin... Babe...

She blinks, shaking off the fog in her brain.

TRINITY
(gritted smile)
I'm good. Just...a little hangry.
Anxious.

TONY
Please, put something in my belly
today!

On the roadside, Jax holds Denzel as the little pup WHIMPERS, peering around nervously.

INT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

From inside a dim farmhouse, behind laced crochet curtains, an UNSEEN FIGURE watches the group.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Denzel is relieving himself on the side of the road.

Jax peers ahead.

A lone DONKEY, tied close to a barn looks eyes with her, almost like it is peering into her soul. Her chest rises and falls.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - DAY

The SUV rolls deeper into town, slipping into light traffic.

The bright blue water tower glistens in its perfection:

"APOLLO NOIR"

Written in bold, block black letters, introducing newcomers.

Inside, the passengers gawk at their surroundings:

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - FARMER'S MARKET - CONTINUOUS

A farmer's market bustles with smiling faces. People chat, barter, and exchange freshly baked goods, homemade soaps, street art and other items like something out of a vintage Coca-Cola ad—but real.

Vendors and customers chuckle at unheard jokes.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - MAIN STRIP DISTRICT - CONTINUOUS

CHILDREN zip down the sidewalk on bikes, playing tag, their LAUGHTER syrupy sweet.

Along the main plaza, businesses thrive: cafés, boutiques, record stores, high-end restaurants, bookstores and more. Every storefront shines like a postcard of the American Dream.

Libraries. Schools. Pristine. A utopia.

And the RESIDENTS? All Black. All youthful.

Even the ELDERLY move with an energy that feels...unnatural.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - HOUSE WITH A PORCH - CONTINUOUS

An OLD BLACK COUPLE (mid-70s) sit on their wraparound porch. The HUSBAND exhales a slow, contented puff from a joint before passing it to his WIFE, accepting with a grin.

INT. SUV - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Rolling past, The Old Wife lifts the joint in a cheers motion at the incredulous Outsiders.

SHAMYKA

(stunned)

Did Nana just hit us with a "what up" while taking a hit?

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - STREET - CONTINUOUS

The streets gleam too perfect. It appears the sidewalks have never seen a gum stain or cigarette butt. So flawless they could be CGI.

Old MOTOWN and STAX soul music drift from hidden street speakers, perfectly timed to the gentle breeze.

By a crosswalk, a female African-American OFFICER (40s) in crisp uniform-smile wide-chuckles with a SCHOOL CROSSING GUARD (60s). They exchange a nod of deep understanding-like old friends in a secret society.

BACK TO THE SUV

Inside the SUV, stunned silence.

SHAMYKA

(slow nod)

This...is kinda awesome, y'all.

Chad leans forward, squinting hard.

CHAD
(skeptical)
This *is* Mississippi, right?

TRINITY
We weren't even ten minutes into
the state before that cop stopped
us.

JAX
(raised eyebrows)
This is some twisted tea.

TONY
(offended)
You don't think a thriving Black
town can exist in this country?

JAX
(cutting a look)
Open your eyes, Tony, we're the
minority class in a *fucking Jordan*
Peele movie.

As if the town heard them, the SUV rolls past...

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - GATED BASKETBALL COURT - CONTINUOUS

A heated game in full swing. Sneakers patter. Trash talk.

The ENTIRE COURT: PLAYERS and SPECTATORS alike, all FREEZE -
turning in unison, locking eyes on the limping, out-of-place
SUV.

Silence. Even the basketball stops bouncing.

BACK TO THE SUV

Chad lowers his eyes.

CHAD
(under breath)
Jax, if there's ever a day to dial
down the privilege decibel...

TONY
(forced optimism)
Well, I think this is the *perfect*
time to show that we're allies and
we support this.

THEO

The only support we need is right
now for this shredded-ass tire.

Trinity glances at her phone - still glitching.

TRINITY

I assume everyone's phone is still
fucked up.

Everyone checks...yep.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - GAS STATION - DAY

The SUV sputters onto the lot of a full-service gas station,
straight off a 1960s postcard-pristine and untouched by time.

A small convenience store, garage bays, and an automatic car
wash stand as part of the architecture, blending retro charm
with an eerie modern gloss. Too clean.

CUSTOMERS linger. ATTENDANTS methodically wipe down spotless
vintage, and luxury vehicles. Everything looks fresh off the
lot. Mechanics work at their expertise. All Black.

INT. SUV - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

The Outsiders stare out.

TRINITY

This is kinda cute.

They roll to a stop behind a sleek black-and-gold motorcycle.

BACK TO GAS STATION

The RIDER, clad in black leather, doesn't move. His dark
helmet visor hides his face, but the 9mm pistol holstered at
his hip is in full view.

His bike THUMPS aggressive Hip-Hop, rippling the air.

DING as the SUV approaches its destination.

The Rider stiffens, his helmet tilting just slightly toward
the SUV.

BACK TO SUV

A KNOCK ON THE WINDOW makes everyone jump.

Theo exhales, rolls down the window.

RUFUS (mid-60s, suspiciously youthful, too friendly of a smile) grins down at them, decked in a spotless old-school service white uniform, cap and all.

The group isn't sure what to make of him.

RUFUS
(too happy)
Well now, lookie here!

THEO
(slowly)
Uh-hello, sir...

RUFUS
Yes, sir! Yes sir! What can I do to help--

JAX
(sharp)
You could start by getting that creeper to stop staring at us.

Rufus' grin doesn't budge as he glances over his shoulder.

The mysterious Rider stands with arms folded like a statue. No one is able to penetrate into the midnight-dark visor of his helmet.

Rufus turns back to them, smile even wider.

RUFUS
Oh, that's just J'von. That boy all bark.

Jax shrinks in her seat, pulling her dog closer as more CUSTOMERS start peering into the SUV.

JAX
(low)
Why is everyone staring at us?

SHAMYKA
(confident, waving)
Hey, I like the attention!

CHAD
(flat)
We see that.

Shamyka deflates, folding her arms.

RUFUS
(spots the flat)
Well, that tire's blown to hell.
Where y'all headin'?

THEO
New Orleans.

More passing CUSTOMERS whisper among themselves, eyes darting toward the Outsiders.

RUFUS
(grinning)
N'awlins! I had family down there.
Lifetimes ago!

TRINITY
Phones are fried, too. Can you
direct us outta here?

A twinkle in his eye.

RUFUS
(ominous)
...Went through the fog, did'ja?

THEO
It was pretty thick.

RUFUS
(smirking)
Did Sheriff Kwame warn ya?

THEO
Yeah, and we didn't listen. We're
dumb.

RUFUS
(low)
Or just privileged enough to think
nothin' bad can happen to you.

Silence.

TONY
(tensing)
Pardon?

RUFUS
(laughs, waving it off)
Oh, nothin'! Not a thing. We just
don't get much company no mo'!
Ain't that right, folks?

No responses from customers—just cold observation as they go about their day.

TRINITY

(curious)

Are there...animals in that fog? We heard something.

RUFUS

(matter of fact)

We get some bears up this way sometimes.

TRINITY

...Didn't sound like a bear.

VROOOOM. The motorcycle revs. The group jolts, except for Rufus, still grinning.

J'VON straddles the bike, head turned to reveal a gold Black Power Fist gleaming on the back of his helmet.

He ROARS off. A thick black smoke trail.

RUFUS

We got a service station. Get y'all fixed right up.

THEO

Appreciate it, Rufus. How long?

RUFUS

Got a few ahead of ya. Maybe a couple hours?

Theo turns to the group. They shrug, reluctant.

TRINITY

If we listened to that cop, we'd be on the same timeline anyway.

RUFUS

(perking up)

Gives y'all time to check out our lil' town of sunshine.

TONY

(grinning)

So far, this place is to die for.

RUFUS

(overly excited)

Y'all came on a special day!

(MORE)

RUFUS (CONT'D)

We turn 100 years old! Big
cookout...Y'all more than welcome!

TONY

(cheery)

Oh wow, centennial! That's amazing!

RUFUS

(waving it off)

Towns turn 100 every day. Ain't no
achievement.

TONY

(brow furrowing)

But...this town especially.

The group tenses.

RUFUS

(still smiling)

Yes? Why..."this town"?

TONY

Well...seems we're the
only...uh...what's that old word?

(beat)

Crackers.

A thick silence.

Rufus ERUPTS in laughter, loud and booming, drawing
everyone's attention.

RUFUS

Did y'all hear this? This boy
called himself an' his friends a
buncha crackas!

A well-dressed BLACK HOUSEWIFE (30s, with a 1960s housewife
aesthetic) at a gas pump lowers her white oval sunglasses,
peering into the SUV.

HOUSEWIFE

(dry)

They don't look salty to me.

RUFUS

(clapping Theo's
shoulder)

Imma get y'all a tow.

THEO

Thanks, Rufus.

RUFUS
 (grinning at Trinity)
 Gon' fix ya right up.

As Rufus strolls off, Shamyka steps out of the SUV and stretches. She throws a playful wave at the Housewife finishing up at the pump.

SHAMYKA
 Hey girl, I got all the seasonings
 if y'all lookin' for some real soul
 food.

The Housewife's expression twists in disgust.

HOUSEWIFE
 Ugh. Learn to love yourself.

Shamyka stiffens.

SHAMYKA
 (defensive)
 Oh, I love myself, girl. Do you?

The Housewife yawns and slides into her car.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
 (muttering)
 Rude.

CHAD
 (smug)
 Karma.

SCREECH.

The car peeling off frightens Denzel, who leaps from Jax's lap, dashing out the open SUV door, through Shamyka's legs—his leash dangling out like a serpent.

JAX
 (yelling)
 DENZEL! NO!

SHAMYKA
 (delayed reaction)
 Shit—!

Denzel scurries past onlookers and into the depths of the town.

Jax bolts after him, followed by the group. She angrily spins to Shamyka

JAX
Were you not paying attention?

SHAMYKA
Sorry! He was fast!

JAX
(furious)
You've been sorry this entire trip!

CHAD
(calm)
Jax. We'll find him.

Off in the distance, Tony is oddly grinning.

STEFAN
(to himself)
...never been invited to a cookout
before!

INT. RUFUS' GARAGE OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Through the glass doors, a tow truck hauls the SUV into the garage bay. Inside the dimly lit, cluttered office, decals and posters for oil changes, tires, and brakes cover the walls. The air hums with generators, air compressors, and rattling engines.

At the cramped L-shaped counter, Theo and Trinity wait. Nearby, Jax slumps in a chair, distraught, as Chad rubs her shoulder. Tony sits beside her, guitar in hand. Shamyka examines her nails.

Trinity glances at her phone, which looks like it is back to normal again. She exhales, taps on Theo's shoulder.

TRINITY
Babe, it looks like our phones
aren't glitching anymore.

Jax immediately sits up and pulls out her phone.

JAX
Thank God...I can pull up a pic of
Denzel...

Jax squints at her phone, still glitching. So is everyone else's.

JAX (CONT'D)
We're in a Venus Flytrap with
street signs.

TRINITY

Hold on, I know I have a pic...

As Trinity scrolls through her phone, Rufus arrives through the garage door with paperwork.

RUFUS

Okay...so to get that tire repaired with labor...let's go with thirty bucks even.

THEO

(nodding)

Bet. We can do that!

RUFUS

Yeah. Bet. Estimated wait time is gonna be around two and a half hours.

THEO

(at Jax)

We're gonna need the time anyway.

TRINITY

(holding out phone)

I got a pic!

CHAD

It would make sense to split up, but if Trin is the only one with a pic...

RUFUS

You need copies of that picture?

TRINITY

Oh my God, could you help?

RUFUS

(chuckling)

This ain't the 1930s.

INT. RUFUS' GARAGE OFFICE - LATER

The Outsiders each hold photocopied flyers with pics of Denzel.

THEO

(studying flyer)

Okay, so Jax and Tony, Chad and Shamyka and myself and Trin. We'll hit as many places as we can.

(MORE)

THEO (CONT'D)

If anything, we will meet back here
at around 3:30?

They nod, all on the same page.

TRINITY

(to Jax)

You know I got you, sis.

Jax, eyes to the ground, weakly affirms.

RUFUS

I'm sure he couldn't have gone far.
Wouldn't be surprised if someone
already snatched him up.

CHAD

Cool, let's find this dog, kick
back, and call it a day. Aight?

TRINITY

(smirking)

...Aight.

Chad taps Trinity's forehead with two fingers, playful. She
nods, returning the gesture with equal amusement.

CHAD

(grinning)

Yeah, yeah...I'll see you later
too...

(mockingly)

...Sis.

The Outsiders exit the office. Rufus, still grinning, picks
up the landline phone from the counter.

INT. TREBLE & BASS RECORD STORE - AFTERNOON

A sprawling, bustling record store straight out of the mid-
90s, vibing to classic R&B. Walls lined with vinyl, DVDs, Blu-
rays—pure nostalgia. Every staff member and customer is
Black.

The DOOR JINGLES.

The music plays, but the energy shifts.

Conversations die. Customers pause. Eyes dart toward the
entrance:

Chad and Shamyka stand, awkward, clutching a wad of "Missing
Dog" flyers like lost missionaries.

A couple of customers whisper to each other, barely disguising their side-eye.

A FEMALE VOICE from behind them slices through the silence.

VOICE (O.S.)
May we help you?

Chad inhales deeply, already bracing himself, turns...

RAINELLE (26, dark-skinned, built like a gymnast, a crown of natural curls, gum-popping with surgical precision) stands behind them, arms crossed, expression unreadable.

She is a staple of beauty that freezes Chad in his tracks. Shamyka side-eyes. He tries too hard to act natural.

CHAD
...Uh...Hey! So, my friend's dog
kinda...took off. We're just
posting these around.

SHAMYKA
(grinning, pointing)
Girl, your hair is--

RAINELLE
(like Shamyka isn't there)
Uh-huh. Just passing through, I
assume?

Beat.

CHAD
Yeah, heading to New Orleans. Your
store is awesome, by the way. Mind
if we---

RAINELLE
(already over it)
You're already here. You're gonna
do what you want, right?

CHAD
That's a level of unnatural consent
I'm not used to.

RAINELLE
Wha? If you need-Just holler. Or...
whatever.

As if she can't be bothered any longer, she exits. Chad and Shamyka exchange a glance.

A few customers keep staring. Shamyka curls her lips.

SHAMYKA
She your type?

CHAD
(off guard)
What?

SHAMYKA
Mmmm. Yeah.

Shamyka observes the customers inside the store.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
(low, whispering)
It's like err'body here think they
Taraji P.

Chad sighs.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - DOG PARK - AFTERNOON

Theo and Trinity stroll through a very lush, bustling and engaged dog park, where several residents walk and congregate with all different breeds of canine, all very friendly.

The duo hand flyers to residents, with equal shades of quiet acceptance and suspicion.

THEO
The vibe here...

TRINITY
Is cool...but it is a little
creepy.

THEO
Think of everyone, you would be
most on board with this.

Trinity stops dead in her tracks with fire in her eyes.
Instant regret melts into Theo's.

THEO (CONT'D)
That's--That's not...

TRINITY
Sometimes you can't help for that
that family business to just bubble
to the surface.

THEO

That's really unfair, Trin. You know that's not me.

TRINITY

And that whole "put up a fist" thing. That's cool for a few thousand "likes", but...

(low)

Your net worth can probably buy this town a thousand times over and you dunno if a racist janitor got fired?

Theo pauses. He notices some regulars and dog walkers sharing cold glances.

THEO

(trying to diffuse)

What the hell is going on right now?

Trinity exhales, raising hands to her eyes.

TRINITY

(through cupped hands)

I'm sorry, babe. This has been a trying day.

Theo pulls Trinity in close and embraces her.

THEO

Hey. Hey. It's okay.

As Theo gently kisses Trinity's forehead, she silently observes her surroundings. Unspoken unease in her eyes.

TRINITY

Think it's weird we haven't run into even one church in a town like this yet?

THEO

(amused)

Now who's tapping into stereotypes?

TRINITY

No, seriously. I don't think I've even seen a cemetery.

THEO

(wide eyed, teasing)

Maybe they're all vampires!

TRINITY
(annoyed)
Don't even start.

THEO
Ohhhh, we need to watch *Blacula*
again for a bad movie night.

TRINITY
Fuck you for even considering
Blacula a bad movie. William
Marshall is a goddamn gift.

Theo kisses Trinity on the cheek.

THEO
There she is.

Trinity huffs.

TRINITY
Bro, I hate you so much.

THEO
But you're still my boo?

Trinity rolls her eyes.

TRINITY
You're still my boo. Idiot.

THEO
And after we find Denzel, once we
hit that VRBO, you can be my
Equalizer. Nine seconds is all I
need.

TRINITY
(chuckles)
You're wrong.

Trinity playfully SQUEALS as onlookers watch the lovebirds.

INT. UNITY BOUTIQUE - DAY

Soft jazz hums from the speakers. The boutique is warm,
curated - every item meticulously placed. Bold, vibrant
colors - not only classic and modern boutique clothing and
accessories of all sorts, but Afrocentric-inspired patterns,
Caftans, headwraps, Dashikis - all symbolic of black pride.

Through the security mirror, Tony and Jax enter.

TONY
(under breath)
So cute! Maybe I can find something
for my sister's birthday.

JAX
Please do so after we find my
puppy, please?

Jax heads toward the counter at the rear, while Tony drifts near a display of scarves.

At the register, the OWNER (40s, African-American, poised, charmingly intrusive) looks up from a book. Her eyes widen slightly when she sees Tony but quickly transitions into a broad, too-pleased smile.

OWNER
Oh shit! Hello there, young lady!

JAX
(startled)
Uh...hi.

OWNER
Ya'll just made my day walkin' in
here.
(gesturing around)
What you think? Cute, right?

TONY (O.S.)
Girl!

OWNER
I knew ya'll had taste.

Her smile lingers just a second too long. Jax attempts, fails to match her energy.

Behind, Tony drifts between racks, fingers lightly brushing fabrics. A few feet away, a UNITY EMPLOYEE (30s, Black, expression unreadable) watches.

Jax slides a flyer across the counter.

JAX
We're just passing through, but my
dog got lost and we need to find
him before we get back on the road.

OWNER
Oh no! That poor thing.

She holds onto the flyer.

OWNER (CONT'D)

(barely glances)

He's adorable. You happen to hear about our Cookout? Biggest event of the year. Great food, great people. Especially this year. You should stick around.

TONY

We'd love to. Sounds like a special event.

JAX

Yes, we'd love to...but we probably won't have time after we find my dog.

The Owner's smile never wavers - with a weight behind it - too welcoming.

OWNER

Too bad. Your friend is right. It is. A special event.

A beat.

Jax glances back at Tony...who is now being shadowed.

The Unity Employee stands just a few feet away, folding and refolding the same scarf, eyes flicking toward Tony every time he moves.

Tony notices. A small smirk plays on his lips. He picks up a belt. Turns it over in his hands.

The employee shifts closer.

UNITY EMPLOYEE

Can I help you with something?

TONY

(smooth, polite)

No, I'm good. Just looking.

UNITY EMPLOYEE

Uh-huh. There's just a guitar in that case, right?

Tony tenses, eyes darting between Jax and the employee.

TONY

I'd hope so.

The Owner, still beaming, speaks too casually.

OWNER

Oh, don't mind him. We just like to make sure everything stays in place, you know?

JAX

(suspicious)

Sure.

OWNER

(smiling wider)

Of course. Small business, you understand.

Tony replaces the belt. The Unity Employee relaxes – slightly.

The tension thickens. Tony chuckles nervously as he moves towards Jax.

TONY

So do you sometimes have street performers at the farmer's market?

OWNER

Oh yes! Always a good time.

TONY

(leaning in, eager)

Y'know...My guitar teacher was Black.

The warmth in the Owner's eyes cools. The charm stays, but there's a recalculation behind it.

OWNER

That so?

TONY

(nods, genuine)

My inspiration for everything.

OWNER

(flat)

Sounds like a great man.

Jax swallows. Turns to Tony, his smile thinning.

JAX

Find anything for your sister?

TONY

Unfortunately nothing here fits her style.

UNITY EMPLOYEE
Such a shame. But not surprising.

OWNER
(slightly too quick)
Oh that's not true! I'm sure
you'll find something more
accustomed to your taste.

Her words are honeyed, but the air is too charged.

Tony and Stefan exchange a glance. They both feel it.

TONY
Maybe next time.

They head for the door. The Owner and the Unity Employee
never take their eyes off Jax and Tony.

UNITY EMPLOYEE
(cooly)
Hope to see y'all at the cookout.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - STREET OUTSIDE UNITY - CONTINUOUS

As Tony and Jax step outside, the jazz fades. For a moment,
neither speaks.

Tony releases a sharp, hollow, deadly nervous laugh.

JAX
You were just profiled! Not cool.
If you were black--

The hum from the warm breeze interrupts her thoughts.

Across the street, a massive banner that reads:

"APOLLO NOIR CENTENNIAL COOKOUT"

flutters overhead. A few town residents stand near it,
watching. Their eyes linger.

Jax and Tony slowly flee the scene as casually as they can.
Behind them - the boutique door slowly, ominously closes.

INT. TREBLE & BASS MUSIC SHOP - DAY

Chad casually flips through vinyl albums. Shamyka pretends to
browse - but her eyes flick to the whispers, side-eyes, and
blatant glares from customers.

CHAD
(eyes widening)
Holy shit!

Shamyka jumps. Chad snatches a record: solid black, no label.

CHAD (CONT'D)
(to Rainelle, eager)
Uh-Rainelle, right? Sorry to bother-

RAINELLE
(pops gum, flat)
Yeah.

He holds up the mystery record flashing a big grin.

CHAD
How much for this?

Rainelle eyes it. The gum chewing stops. She rolls her eyes, snatches it with the cold efficiency of TSA confiscating lotion.

RAINELLE
(calling to the counter)
Hey, Dee...

Chad slowly turns to Shamyka. Their eyes are wide.

Customers return to browsing—but the outsiders feel the whispers. The side-eyes.

Chad keeps flipping through records, surveying.

Shamyka fidgets, eyes darting to the open-carry pistols strapped to a few customers' hips.

CHAD
(muttering)
Y'know...I woulda helped you.

SHAMYKA
(not looking up)
What?

CHAD
(under breath)
I'm a DJ...You think I haven't
smuggled a lil'...

SHAMYKA
It's just the money, yo.

CHAD

Mika. You see who I roll with?

Shamyka purses her lips.

SHAMYKA

(under breath)

I just wish they'd stop---

RAINELLE

(sharp)

You wish we'd stop what?

Chad and Shamyka jolt.

Rainelle leans against a rack, head tilted, chewing slow, waiting.

No one speaks.

She finally holds out the record like it's a biohazard.

RAINELLE (CONT'D)

Twenty bucks.

CHAD

(baffled)

Even?

RAINELLE

(already over it)

Yeah.

CHAD

(scoffs, pulls out \$20)

For *this*?

Rainelle blinks at him. Chad quickly hands over the \$20.

She takes it, the only thing that impresses her. Her eyes land on Shamyka's chain.

RAINELLE

(pointed, smirking)

Your momma must hate you givin' you that name. Ain't like it will ever really belong to you.

Shamyka's brow furrows. She moves to step forward...

CHAD

(grinning)

I guess you can let us know if our dog happens to waltz in--

RAINELLE
Does it look like we allow dogs in here?

CHAD
Not unless they're hunting ones, I suppose.

A beat.

RAINELLE
'Scuse me?

CHAD
(trying to recover)
A lotta folks strapped in here.

RAINELLE
(smirks, chewing loud)
Boy, wha'chu know 'bout bein' "strapped"? You hear that on a Tupac record?

SHAMYKA
Nah, don't be rude---

RAINELLE
Like your name? Bet folks see it on paper and sure get confused when they see...*this*.

Chad grins, steering Shamyka toward the door.

CHAD
Thanks for your help! If by some miracle you see our friend, please don't shoot him.

Silence. All eyes lock onto them.

Chad shuts his eyes immediately.

CHAD (CONT'D)
(muttering, defeated)
Ah, fuck.

A LARGE MAN (50s) steps forward. Rifle strapped to his back. Intimidating. He completely eclipses them.

LARGE MAN
(deep, booming)
That a joke to you?

Chad and Shamyka press against the door. Hard stare from the Man.

LARGE MAN (CONT'D)
You think all we do is shoot each other?

CHAD
(fast, nervous)
No.

LARGE MAN
(leaning in)
You think we shoot dogs?

CHAD
(dry swallow)
No, sir.

LARGE MAN
I. Love my dog.

SHAMYKA
(hopeful)
I'm sure you do.

LARGE MAN
(closer, dead serious)
A. Lot.

Chad and Shamyka glance at each other, unsure if they're about to die.

The Large Man snatches a flyer from Chad's hand. He reads.

LARGE MAN (CONT'D)
The dog's name is Denzel?

SHAMYKA
We didn't name him.

The Large Man studies her. Then, her necklace. Chad notices.

CHAD
(quick, light-hearted)
And I didn't name her.

SHAMYKA
(at Rainelle)
And I apologize on behalf of my parents!

Rainelle rolls her eyes, waving them off.

The Large Man studies the flyer again.

LARGE MAN
If I see him, Imma holla at Rufus.
Buddy.

CHAD
Thank you!

SHAMYKA
(searching for doorknob)
Okay! Gotta dog to find.

RAINELLE (O.S.)
Well, find him, then. Shit.

Chad and Shamyka weakly smile, retreating. The doorbell
CHIMES as they exit.

EXT. TREBLE & BASS RECORD STORE - CONTINUOUS

Chad and Shamyka stumble out, rattled from their experience
inside.

SHAMYKA
(still fuming)
...My momma love my name.

CHAD
I've been through some shit...I
still see a therapist over that
time I was dangled over the
Atlantic...but that?

Shamyka's nostrils flare. A thought.

SHAMYKA
Ever since that fog, yo...
(sighing)
Today is not a good day, Ice Cube.

Chad holds up his album with a victorious grin.

CHAD
You sure? 'Cause this...is "*The
Black Album!*"

SHAMYKA
Forreal? All that over Metallica?

CHAD
(offended)
Metallica?
(MORE)

CHAD (CONT'D)

Baby, this is Prince's "*Black Album*." Scrapped in '87 'cause he thought it was 'too evil.' These go for triple digits on eBay. And I just got it for twenty bucks!

Chad spins, admiring his prize-

AND WALKS DIRECTLY INTO A BLACK WALL OF MUSCLE.

J'Von. Helmet still on. Hulking. Towering.

Slowly, he removes it, revealing dreadlocks, a thick beard, and a hard, knowing smirk.

J'VON

Y'all lost?

Chad immediately raises his hands in surrender.

CHAD

We don't want trouble.

J'VON

(chuckling, no warmth)

But here you are.

His eyes drop to Chad's gleaming white sneakers.

J'VON (CONT'D)

Damn. White Saturns? What that run you? Couple stacks?

(mock whistle)

Must be nice.

J'Von slowly, torturously-presses his muddy boot down, grinding dirt into Chad's pristine sneaker.

J'VON (CONT'D)

Guess you can afford another pair.

Chad stiffens.

Shamyka immediately throws out an arm, blocking him.

They glance around. Residents have stopped. Cars have slowed. Eyes are watching.

J'Von grins wider.

J'VON (CONT'D)

We ain't in your world anymore.

Shamyka grabs Chad's arm, pulling him away.

J'VON (CONT'D)
 (mocking, calling after
 them)
 I thought y'all were lookin' for a
 dog? But I found her right here!

Chad spins back, jaw clenched.

CHAD
 Excuse me?

J'VON
 (eyes flashing, inviting
 confrontation)
 YEAH. Give me a reason, bruh. I
 need a new dance partner.

Shamyka yanks Chad harder, whispering sharply as they leave.

J'VON (CONT'D)
 I'll be seeing you.

CHAD (O.S.)
 (from a distance)
 ...God, I hope not....

J'Von observes, devilish smirk never fading.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - MAIN PARK - DAY

The park is massive, buzzing with early cookout prep. Smoke curls from grills, long tables stretch under string lights, and the air is thick with spice, charcoal, and something mouthwateringly rich.

Theo, and Trinity walk along a path, taking it all in with flyers in hand.

Jax and Tony arrive from the opposite direction. Her eyes sink.

TRINITY
 Ugh. No luck, huh?

TONY
 Unfortunately, no.

JAX
 Just "unfortunately"? Tony got
 reverse profiled like a common
 criminal out the hood.

Tony squints.

TONY

And how is one "reverse profiled"?

JAX

Don't be dense—you know what I'm saying.

A slow descent as Trinity becomes distant. Her pace slows. The familiar whispers curl around her ears—hushed, rhythmic, unsettling.

JAX (CONT'D)

It's like this place is actively trying to keep us here.

Trinity winces, rubbing her temple.

THEO

Jax, I get that you're distressed about Denzel, but—

JAX

Don't play me. I'm telling you—something is off about this place.

Jax's eyes dart, before dropping her voice.

JAX (CONT'D)

(low)

You guys should be uncomfortable too. If you haven't noticed, **these people** are watching us. If the roles were reversed, and we were in some all-white town with people acting weird like this? We could post about it, turn it into a whole fucking cause.

Theo raises an eyebrow.

TONY

Yeah, that'd be cool...except for the hundreds of years of oppression the opposite direction.

JAX

(rolls eyes)

Here we go.

THEO

He's just saying, "we're being watched" doesn't hit the same when you're not statistically more likely to get arrested, harassed, or, you know—murdered?

JAX

(conceding)

Fine. But if I end up in a cauldron or pit, just know I felt it first.

Trinity stays quiet, eyes flicking around. The park hums with activity, but something about it seems...orchestrated. Like the town isn't just watching them—it's waiting.

Suddenly - a familiar yip.

JAX (CONT'D)

(snapping back)

Wait...

A sleek, black-and-tan Pomchi rockets toward them.

JAX (CONT'D)

DENZEL?!

Jax drops to her knees, scooping up the dog as he licks her face furiously.

A deep, smooth-as-whiskey voice follows.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Little man was fast, but I got 'im.

The Voice belongs to HAKEEM beaming before them. Late 20s. Tall. Skin like dark satin cocoa. Built like a Greek tragedy. A jawline that could split atoms. Perfectly lined up. Perfect waves.

A smirk, his golden-hazel eyes locks onto Jax with intense, deliberate amusement.

Jax, probably for the first time in her life, short-circuits.

JAX

Oh, uh...cool. Thanks.

Hakeem grins wider, clocking her reaction immediately.

HAKEEM

No problem. Figured he was yours. He's got your energy.

JAX
(offended)
Excuse me?

HAKEEM
(playful)
Cute. Chaotic.

Theo and Tony stifle laughs. Jax glares, clutching Denzel like a prized purse.

JAX
He's. Spirited.

HAKEEM
(smirking)
That what we calling it? Aight,
Red.

Trinity watches the tension crackle between them.

Hakeem nods toward the cookout.

HAKEEM (CONT'D)
Y'all stickin' around? Food's about
to hit the grill, music's coming
in...finna be good vibes only.

THEO
Appreciate that, man-but we're on a
schedule. Soon as our tire's fixed,
we gotta hit New Orleans-

JAX
(blurts out)
I mean...do we, though?

All whip their heads toward her.

JAX (CONT'D)
I'm just saying. We've been through
it today. And the festival doesn't
start till tomorrow. Maybe we
deserve, like...A plate?

Trinity squints at her.

THEO
A plate?

JAX
(defensive)
What? I'm just being open to new
cultural experiences.
(MORE)

JAX (CONT'D)

I've never been to a cookout
before. Would like to attend one
before I die.

Hakeem chuckles.

HAKEEM

Well, if that's what you're after,
you're in the right place.

His eyes linger on Jax – slow-burning, teasing, intentional.

Jax tries not to combust on sight.

HAKEEM (CONT'D)

I'll make sure to save y'all a
spot.

Hakeem takes his leave into the park. As Jax watches. And
watches.

All glare at Jax.

JAX

(scoffs)

It's just food. Relax.

TONY

I think we're relaxed. Just didn't
know you were so suddenly down for
the cause.

JAX

(cradling Denzel)

Shut up.

TRINITY

...We should stay.

They turn to her.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

(justifying)

Don't wanna be rude.

Theo eyes her carefully, but Jax is already sold.

JAX

(too quickly)

Right, sis?! This is why we're
besties!

Theo sighs.

THEO

Fine. Once we find everyone else-
one plate. Then we go.

Trinity doesn't respond-she just glances at the welcoming cookout. The warm lights. The perfect setup.

And in the distance, a line of town residents...already watching. Their smiles never waver.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - MAIN PARK - LATER

The park is alive. The scent of smoked meats, fried chicken, collard greens, sweet potatoes, spices, and cornbread fills the air. Soulful R&B and funk booms from speakers. Children weave through crowds, aunties gossip with plates stacked high, uncles slap dominoes on fold-out tables with theatrical aggression.

Black culture at its most vibrant, unfiltered, and unapologetic.

At one of the dozens of wooden picnic tables, Theo, Trinity, Jax and Hakeem sit with Rufus, sipping from a red cup. The table is piled high with collard greens, ribs, mac and cheese and more succulent soul food.

A little ways off at a nearby table, Tony strums an old blues riff on his guitar, really feeling himself. A few residents are mildly impressed, tapping their toes and subtly nodding.

Rufus kicks back with Theo.

RUFUS

So, once y'all are ready, we'll
take you back to the shop and send
you on your way.

THEO

Thank you so much, Rufus.

RUFUS

(wide smile)
My pleasure! My pleasure.

Rufus eyes Trinity, rubbing her temples. Whispers curl around her.

APOLLO NOIR (V.O.)

Home...you could be home...

RUFUS
(to Trinity)
Baby girl, you feeling good?

Trinity, fighting the sensation, nods.

TRINITY
Yeah. Yeah!

Her focus is pulled towards the familiar voices of Chad and Shamyka, just arriving. A slow blink and exhale of relief from Trinity.

SHAMYKA
(clapping hands)
Okay, why didn't y'all tell me it
was lit out here?! This a whole-ass
HBCU homecoming!

Chad, already nervous, gives her a look.

CHAD
Lower your voice.

SHAMYKA
Boy, if you don't relax...

Shamyka immediately gets in line for a plate, immediately integrating herself into the atmosphere. She observes the delightful, seemingly endless buffet of soul food.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
Ayyyee, y'all put they whole foot in
this mac. Who made it? 'Cause I
need to shake they hand.

Some of the Apollo Noir residents exchange silent, knowing glances. Trinity watches uneasily.

J'von, at a tree where he has a view of the entire cookout, unblinking, leans against his parked black motorcycle, a whiskey flask in hand, subtly observing the group while his BIKER CREW crack jokes beside him.

Jax, legs crossed is absolutely inhaling a plate of ribs, sitting with Hakeem, who watches with amusement.

JAX
(mouth full)
Jesus. This is insane.

HAKEEM
(grinning)
Told you.

She wipes her mouth, motions at his perfect physique.

JAX
Okay, but where do you put it?

HAKEEM
(leaning in)
Wouldn't you like to know?

Jax chokes on a sip of sweet tea. Denzel yips beside her.
Hakeem leans against the table.

Denzel sits at his feet, completely at ease.

JAX
(fumbling)
So...thanks again for, um...
finding him.

HAKEEM
Least I could do.

Jax nods. Too much. Takes a sip – too fast. She steals a quick glance at him. Then away. Then back.

Of course Hakeem notices. He licks a bit of rib sauce off his thumb.

Jax looks away so hard she might sprain something.

JAX
You been in Apollo Noir long?

HAKEEM
(chuckles)
Born and raised.

JAX
(nodding, eager)
Right. Right. That makes sense. You
seem...Like you know your way
around.

HAKEEM
I do alright.

Jax forces a laugh. Tries to play it cool. Fails.

HAKEEM (CONT'D)
(genuine curiosity)
You alright, Red?

She swallows.

JAX
Yeah! Totally. Just, uh...not used
to this. The town. The...
(gesturing vaguely)
Vibe.

Trinity facepalms. Groans.

Hakeem nods, considering.

HAKEEM
I figured.

Trinity abruptly rises from her seat.

TRINITY
Hey, Jax...I'm getting seconds.

JAX
(no hesitation)
I'm good.

Trinity's wide eyes motion at Jax. Something of importance.
Jax's delayed reaction is obvious.

JAX (CONT'D)
Oh. OH! Yeah, sis - let's!

Jax stands.

JAX (CONT'D)
(to Hakeem)
Please watch my baby.

HAKEEM
He won't be safer anywhere else.

Trinity yanks Jax towards the buffet.

TRINITY
(under breath, gesturing)
Who is this person? Cause I dunno
her.

JAX
(innocent)
What?

TRINITY
For as long as I've known you,
you've NEVER considered even
looking a black man's way.

JAX
 Right, sis?!
 (concern)
 This place...gets a hold of you,
 doesn't it?

Beat. The two observe the events ahead of them. It all seems so innocent in its celebratory spirit.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - MAIN PARK - EVENING

Rufus, Theo and Tony with red cups leaning back with other residents and ELDERS all engaged in what seems to be a very serious discussion.

RUFUS
 (gesturing with a rib)
 ...Black success in America...we
 can get that. No, the issue is
 America detests and is threatened
 by the concept of Black Ownership.

TONY
 I've heard stories about banks side-
 eyeing so many loan applications.

The Elders all give side-glances at Tony.

RUFUS
 You think this is about the ability
 to get a measly hundred thousand
 dollar loan?

Rufus shakes his head.

RUFUS (CONT'D)
 What does that matter when someone
 who has five generations worth of
 wealth can waltz in at any time and
 just purchase policy to just take
 what they want?

Rufus leans in close to Theo, knowing.

RUFUS (CONT'D)
 I'm sure you can appreciate this,
 Theo. Shouting down the concept of
 white supremacy as something simply
 with genocidal ends is too broad,
 too vague and too impersonal and
 that's why it doesn't resonate
 nowadays-even towards other people
 of color.

(MORE)

RUFUS (CONT'D)

Cause the narrative shifted to something so broad that we are somehow okay with accepting Kanye West as a Neo Nazi? This is more than wool over our eyes.

Theo shifts in his seat.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

The supremacy that has always existed - is rooted in the basic nature of conquest and expanding one's empire. So here's the hypothetical: 80% of this country doesn't look like you and enjoys a certain level of privilege - a level that a good number don't even have self-awareness of. A chunk of those wish you don't even exist. Doesn't matter if your "ideas" or "values" align with theirs. You don't share their precious bloodline. So, if you're a black person, if you're a Latino, or Asian, or Jewish, or Muslim, or Native American or Sikh, or Buddhist or a woman, or homosexual, or athiest...should you be surprised when those who decide they want to eradicate you, decide that ONLY their land is going to be enough? At some point for those people, it won't be. Whose land do you think those supremacists are gonna go after first? Not their own, I'll tell you that much. Nah - they'll go after the Toms, the self-professed "anti-wokes", the ones who were simply nothing more than pawns and numbers to add to a vote total against their own interests.

THEO

(quiet realization)
Leopards eating faces.

RUFUS

You catch on, Youngblood.

THEO

But how do we-
(catches himself)
(MORE)

THEO (CONT'D)

You combat five generations of
generational wealth that is
hellbent on erasing your existence.
Or even worse, minimizing the
experience that gave us this system
in the first place?

RUFUS

(knowingly)

Some folks play the game.

(nods at Elders)

Others change the rules.

Theo takes a slow sip of beer. Rufus meets his gaze with
pointed intensity.

A BOOMING FEMALE VOICE enters the conversation.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT (V.O.)

...But you have to know the history
of the game before you can change
those rules.

Rufus looks up. His eyes brighten as he stands.

RUFUS

Hey! What's up, Mayor Cartwright?

MAYOR HARRIET CARTWRIGHT (female mid-60s, full of vitality -
a beacon of quiet authority) tower over the seated guests.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

One of our esteemed leaders...

Theo rises, shakes her hand.

THEO

(introductions)

Theo, Tony....everyone else is
scattered. You have an amazing
town, ma'am.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT

Thank you, Theo.

TONY

So, Apollo Noir... what's the
story? How'd it all start?

The Elders exchange glances.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT
(smiling)
Same as any town, son. A lot of
blood, sweat and tears.

THEO
I can't imagine.

RUFUS
(ominously)
No. You can't.

Theo pauses. Sips his drink as he notices Trinity floating around the cookout from a distance in a slight daze.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT
We gotta keep the festivities
going, but it was great meeting
you.

TONY
Likewise!

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT
You are welcome here. Enjoy
yourselves for as long as you'd
like.

RUFUS
They gotta be moving along
themselves, though.

THEO
Yes! Yes, we do.

Jax returns to Hakeem. She kneels down and cuddles Denzel.

HAKEEM
Y'all not sticking around?

JAX
Why? You tryna sacrifice us?

HAKEEM
I wouldn't dare throw you to the
wolves like that.

Jax glares. Hakeem grins wider.

A few locals watch them from a distance, whispering.

Trinity - in a haze, floats through the crowd, feeling the weight of something unseen.

An ELDERLY WOMAN brushes past her, smiling warmly – but her whisper is ice.

ELDERLY WOMAN
(soft, cryptic)
Blood always calls home.

Trinity freezes.

She observes the cookout – alive with joy, history, and something unknowable. The Residents smile too warmly.

A large bonfire is being started in the distance.

Shamyka dives in, hyping up a group of WOMEN mid-line dance – clapping, pointing, bouncing on her toes.

SHAMYKA
(amped up)
Ayee! Y'all snappin'! We finna jump
in an' see what y'all 'bout!

The Women exchange side-eyes and smirks, but keep dancing.

Shamyka jumps in, hitting the beat – and she's good. But trying a little too hard.

Rufus carefully watches, sipping from a red cup.

Shamyka drops it low. Too low. Nearly wipes out, catches herself just in time.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
Y'all wasn't ready! I stays on go!

The Women laugh along, but it's a knowing laugh.

Shamyka hears-pretends she doesn't. She flips her braids, grabs her drink, and struts off, playing it cool.

Trinity observes a MAN AT THE GRILL flipping ribs. The flames cast his face in harsh shadow, but his eyes gleam too bright. His nails...were they claws just now?

Trinity blinks. They're normal again.

A LITTLE GIRL, holding a stuffed plush wolf, giggles at her.

LITTLE GIRL
(innocent, eerie)
You look different in the
firelight.

Trinity's breath shudders.

A low, inhuman GROWL echoes somewhere beyond the fire.

No one reacts.

Trinity arrives to a quiet Chad, sipping a drink with an empty plate in front of him-observing Shamyka now shamelessly flirting with a group of FINE LOOKING BROTHERS playing dominoes.

Trinity hovers over her brother, not noticing her near-catatonic state.

CHAD
I fucking hate Seattle.

Chad glances at Trinity.

CHAD (CONT'D)
Yo. Wakey wakey!

Chad smacks Trinity's thigh. Hard.

TRINITY
Ow! The fuck!

CHAD
(smirking)
You walking around like you got
that good food fatigue too. Facts,
that fried chicken's the best I'd
ever have.

TRINITY
(uneasy)
Mm.

The two observe the festive scene. A brief moment of tranquility and reflection.

CHAD
Mom would've loved this.

Trinity nods, eyes staring out. Chad looks up at his sister.

CHAD (CONT'D)
Your dad, too.

A sharp inhale from Trinity.

TRINITY
We really should leave soon.

Nearby, Rainelle glances at Chad with a playful smile. Chad's eyes dart left and right, confused.

CHAD

Yeah. Gather everyone. Gives me
time to devour another plate.

Trinity pokes two fingers at her brother's head, who snaps
back.

TRINITY

Hurry up, then.

CHAD

You won't even notice I'm gone.

Trinity sighs, exits - walking right past Rainelle
approaching Chad at the the table. She sits beside him. Chad
stiffens, despite Rainelle's softened demeanor.

CHAD (CONT'D)

...Hello?

RAINELLE

Sup.

Chad, suspicious, eyes her way. Rainelle sighs.

RAINELLE (CONT'D)

I don't do this a lot - but I was
rude to you and...

Rainelle looks off towards Shamyka, who is enjoying her
dominoes time.

RAINELLE (CONT'D)

...your friend, there. When all you
were trying to do was do good. I
feel that.

Chad is taken aback.

CHAD

Uh. Thanks. Honestly-this place is
awesome...I think-

RAINELLE

I know. Towns like this are few and
far between.

CHAD

This is the closest thing to
Wakanda.

Rainelle's eyes soften as the DJ switches to a SLOW JAM. She
tilts her head toward the makeshift dance floor.

RAINELLE

You just gonna sit there looking pretty, or you tryna move?

Chad's eyes twinkle.

CHAD

Me? I'm a limited-edition collector's item – ain't built for all that wear and tear.

RAINELLE

Bet you move just fine when you want to.

Chad glances at Shamyka...too into the joy of sitting on one of the domino player's laps to notice – then shrugs.

CHAD

Can't hurt to see if I still got it.

Cups in hand, Chad follows Rainelle onto the makeshift dance floor. She moves close, sultry but teasing, swaying against him. Chad, nervous but intrigued, does his best to match her flow.

Chad and Rainelle share a chuckle.

Rainelle dances too close to Chad – the kind of close that makes it clear who's in control. Chad follows her lead, but she's testing him, teasing him.

From a distance, with narrow eyes and his flask stands J'von, studying the flirtation between Chad and Rainelle.

Rainelle's fingers lightly graze Chad's collar, nails scraping gently against his neck before she leans into his ear.

RAINELLE

(seductive)

Wanna get outta here?

She eyes toward the nearby woods. A challenge. Chad, drunken lust in his eyes hesitates just long enough to make it clear he should know better.

CHAD

You're playing, right? A couple hours ago it seemed like you wanted to murder me.

RAINELLE

You will find out very quickly. I don't play games.

Chad pauses with a suspicious smirk.

RAINELLE (CONT'D)

C'mon...I gotta little drank, you gotta little drank - you don't strike me as someone who plays it safe.

She's right. Chad bites his lip.

CHAD

Sure you can handle it?

RAINELLE

Can you?

Chad looks down at his drink.

CHAD

(after a chug)

Fuck it.

Theo - searching for Trinity - catches a glimpse of Rainelle leading Chad into the woods. He sighs.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - WOODS - CONTINUOUS

The sounds of the cookout fade as the trees close in.

Chad follows Rainelle through the trees, her movements almost hypnotic. She laughs, looking over her shoulder as if inviting him to chase her.

CHAD

So...is this, like, a nature walk or a setup? Cuz if someone pops out in a hockey mask, I swear to God---

RAINELLE

Shh...you talk too much.

Rainelle pulls him in for a slow, drunken kiss, then suddenly grins and darts away into the trees.

CHAD

...I thought you said you don't play games?

He jogs after her, but she keeps slipping just out of reach, her laughter echoing. The deeper they go, the more the woods swallow the sound. Soon, there's only silence.

Chad stops, drunk, slightly winded.

CHAD (CONT'D)
 Alright, you got me. You win.
 What's my prize?

Nothing. Just stillness.

A faint rattling sound drifts from the trees.

An uneasy chuckle escapes Chad's lips.

BACK TO THE PARK

Trinity, with slightly blurred vision stumbles around, scanning the area.

APOLLO NOIR (V.O.)
...Do you know...who you are?

Theo catches up with her.

THEO
 Hey. Hey. Trin.

Trinity blinks hard. Takes a DEEP breath.

THEO (CONT'D)
 You okay?

Trinity nods. Something ominous.

TRINITY
 Think we can get ready to head out?

THEO
 You read my mind.

As the outsiders are all engaged in the life and joy of the cookout atmosphere, Trinity makes an observation:

TRINITY
 (to Theo)
 You seen Chad?

THEO
 (annoyed)
 You don't even wanna know.
 (MORE)

THEO (CONT'D)

But once your brother is done
manwhoring, we'll get back on the
road.

TRINITY

(rolling eyes)
Jesus, Chad...

BACK TO WOODS

Chad turns in a slow circle, breath steady but shallow. The
cookout is a distant memory-silenced behind the thick woods.

CHAD

Aight, this where I call 'game
over.'

A single sound. RATTLE. ROAR. Too familiar. Too horrific.

Chad's grin falters. His fingers twitch as he takes a slow
step back. His pristine white sneakers sink into mud, the
filth creeping up like an omen.

From behind-a rustle. Chad spins...

Appearing like a specter of doom is J'Von, wide-eyed with a
slow moving, knowing, grin.

Startled, Chad takes a step back. The two share a moment.
Tension so thick the only sound is Chad's labored breathing.

J'VON

(leans in, malicious)
Power. To the people.

Something unseen immediately SNATCHES Chad by his ankles.

He crashes face-first to the ground, headphones SHATTERING
against a rock. His scream muffled by the impact.

He is DRAGGED. Fast. Violent. J'von's stands victorious, his
stature shrinking as Chad is pulled deeper into the woods -
his body bouncing over roots and twigs SNAPPING and TEARING
against his skin.

Chad CLAWS at the dirt, but he's pulled deeper, deeper. He's
YANKED onto a tree, his skull CRACKING against the bark.

Blood dribbles from his lips as he groans, his breath coming
in short, shallow gasps. His fingers twitch. His vision
swims.

That RATTLE again. Closer. Louder.

Chad's head lulls to the side, his eyes flicking to the side.

A shadow moves...

A SWIPE. Brutal. Fast.

The top of Chad's skull SPLITS OPEN, a grotesque EXPLOSION of blood, bone, and brain matter.

Chad's fading eyes try – just for a second – to look up at the carnage.

CHAD
(weakly)
...gnarly...

His body slumps, lifeless. The sounds of nature envelope – except for the grotesque sound of something feeding.

BACK TO THE PARK

The Outsiders, minus Chad and Shamyka sit together at a picnic table as Shamyka, winded approaches.

SHAMYKA
Lord. Child. My feets be burning.

Shamyka plops herself down. No one is impressed.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
(looks around)
Where Chad at?

Rufus approaches. Theo stands.

THEO
Hey, we're just about ready...We're waiting for Trinity's bro to return from...
(to Trinity)
What is he doing?

TRINITY
(annoyed)
Being Chad.

Shamyka is piecing together what may be happening. She leans back, slight jealousy in her eyes.

SHAMYKA
Oh. Forreal?

RUFUS
 (to group)
 Lemme holla at'chu.
 (discreetly)
 So, look - personally, I don't care
 what y'all do in the outside world.
 That's...

The group awaits with baited breath.

RUFUS (CONT'D)
 (sighing)
 I don't care whose brick of cocaine
 is in your trunk...

The entire group sinks.

TONY
 Oh, God...

THEO
 (quick, at Shamyka)
 I assure you, if it was up to the
 majority of us, this would not even
 be an issue.

RUFUS
 Unfortunately...Look, you see us.
 We don't try to invite
 any...hinderances to our community.

THEO
 I get it. We will be out of your
 hair.
 (to Shamyka)
 Right, Shamyka?

Shamyka, sweat beads forming inhales.

SHAMYKA
 ...I dunno what y'all talking
 'bout.

The group erupts.

TRINITY
 Are you fucking kidding me?

SHAMYKA
 I'm not in the business of pushing
 drugs in the black community.

TONY
(incredulously)
This bitch.

THEO
(to Trinity)
Let's just grab your brother so we
can drop off this dead weight.

Shamyka kisses her teeth.

SHAMYKA
Whatever. Imma pop off till you
find him.

She abruptly exits, rejoining the celebration like she is
part of that world more than the group she arrived with.

The sky has darkened – imperceptibly, eerily.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR – MAIN PARK – LATER

A bonfire crackles, illuminating the faces of the gathered
townspeople.

The Outsiders, minus Shamyka are split up, searching for
Chad, asking random locals if they recognize him.

APOLLO NOIR RESIDENT (O.S.)
They lose dogs, now they lose whole
people? Lord, help...

As this proceeds, a stage is set up in the center, with Mayor
Cartwright gripping the microphone.

Behind her, two framed portraits:

TYWIN HAMILTON – Staring straight ahead, jaw set with
defiance.

FRANCIE JONES – Eyes like fire, unbreakable.

Their 1930s-era clothes—old, tattered but dignified—suggest a
past forged in tragedy and survival. Faint burn marks along
the edges of the portraits seem intentional.

The Residents hush in anticipation. The outsiders remain
oblivious, engaged in their search (except for Shamyka, who
is swaying to the music with a FINE BLACK GENTLEMAN.)

Trinity rubs her arms, a cold chill settling in. A faint,
ghostly WHISPER brushes past her ear, too soft to understand.

The Mayor steps forward.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT
(powerful, reverent)
A hundred years ago, two souls
arrived here with nothing but their
backs and their will. Tywin
Hamilton. Francie Jones. They came
from fire. From a place that wanted
to erase them.

A murmur of acknowledgment ripples through the crowd.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT (CONT'D)
But they were not erased.

The bonfire swells, licking higher into the sky.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT (CONT'D)
They carried the memory of those
lost. They carried the promise of
those who would never see freedom.
And they built something untouched.
Something untouchable.

Trinity shifts uncomfortably.

A woman near her whispers something too low to hear. She
turns – but the woman is already looking away.

Jax-nestling Denzel-squints at the stage. Something about the
Mayor's tone has changed.

Residents lift their heads, sniffing the air, almost in sync.
The bonfire casts long, shifting shadows. Dozens gather
around the bonfire.

They begin moving. Powerful, tribal.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT (CONT'D)
While our people were being pushed
out, burned out, chased from their
homes – we did not run. We stood.
We fought. And most importantly...
(she pauses, scanning the
Outsiders)
We remembered who we are.

The bonfire erupts, flames surging unnaturally. The residents
move with it, their bodies stretching toward the sky,
silhouetted in frenzied sync with the rising fire. Clothes
slip away amid their feverish, primal motions.

JAX
 (to Trinity)
 We seeing the same thing, right?

The Elders' eyes gleam...a little too reflective. Gold.

A man in the crowd GROANS. His breathing turns ragged.

A woman clutches the edge of a picnic table, her fingers visibly lengthening.

The Fine Black Gentleman Shamyka is dancing with removes his shirt, revealing a buff, tattooed, pristine black body.

SHAMYKA
 (oblivious)
 Heyyyyyy! Aight, come get it!

Mayor Cartwright straightens herself-tall, bold and powerful.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT
 (absolute)
 ...And we will never forget.

A ripple runs through the townsfolk. BONES CRACK. A low, unnatural GROWL rolls through the crowd. Someone inhales deeply, like they've just caught a scent. A golden glow emerge from the residents' eyes.

The Outsiders tense.

Shamyka lets out a strained chuckle.

SHAMYKA
 (trying too hard to be casual)
 This some next-level Juneteenth shit...

The music DISTORTS. Slows. The needle on the record warps.

More charged ROARS. More stretching limbs. The residents of Apollo Noir begin to change in the silhouette of the high bonfire.

The Fine Black Gentleman dancing with Shamyka unleashes a ROAR of his own, causing her to fall on her ass. Golden fire emerge from his eyes.

CHAOS AND SCREAMS from the Outsiders. All are too focused on the shifting bodies to notice Mayor Cartwright hasn't moved.

She remains a statue. Not at the crowd. Not at the chaos unfolding. Just at Trinity.

As her breath shortens, their eyes lock - piercing, knowing.

The WHISPERS return, curling around Trinity's ears, pressing into her skull.

APOLLO NOIR (V.O.)
...Blood calls to blood...

Trinity shakes her head, gripping her arms.

In the silhouette of the bonfire, the townsfolk fully transform.

TONY
WHAT THE FUCK???

SNAPPING JAWS. Clawed hands. Fur overtaking skin. Golden eyes burning with something ancient and primal.

The Outsiders panic as Mayor Cartwright steps forward. Still unchanged and eerily calm.

The bonfire cast shadows of dozens upon dozens of completely transformed werewolves, each at least 7 feet-all with golden eyes glowing. Dripping fangs.

MAYOR CARTWRIGHT
The history of bigotry never
repeats in Apollo Noir.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

MULTIPLE SCREAMS ECHO THROUGH THE NIGHT AIR.

Shamyka runs for her life, tripping over roots, her breath ragged.

Behind her - SNAPPING JAWS. BARE FEET SLAPPING THE EARTH.

The wolves aren't chasing her. They're herding her.

Through the trees, Jax, Denzel cradled close to her chest, stumbles alongside Tony.

Trinity and Theo, holding hands, dart ahead-Trinity glancing back periodically, as if something still pulls at her.

Shamyka finds herself surrounded by a pack of impossibly large, SNARLING wolves circling her.

SHAMYKA
(desperate, breathless)
Wait! WAIT! Y'ALL! I didn't bring
them drugs, I swear!

SNARL. Shamyka's breath quickens.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
...Okay-maybe I did, but y'all get
it, dont'cha? I gotta eat, I gotta
pay rent...

DRIPPING FANGS.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
Y'all don't you see? I'm one of
you! I'm---!

SNAP.

From behind, A DARK SHAPE lunges from the shadows. Jagged
teeth CLAMP into Shamyka's shoulder.

She SHRIEKS, writhing. The beast yanks her back like a
ragdoll. Blood SPLATTERS against tree bark.

Ahead, the remaining Outsiders hear Shamyka's horrific CRIES
of unbearable pain cut through the dark forest.

SHAMYKA (CONT'D)
(gurgling on blood)
...I swear...I...love y'all! I--

Her words die as claws plunge into her gut.

The wolves don't just kill her. They rip her apart, TEARING
HER TORSO IN TWO. Blood erupts.

DEEPER INTO THE WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Trinity and Theo are chased by the GNASHING sounds of wolves
within the dark trees, moonlight cascading.

Theo slips on an unseen puddle - a mix of gelling blood and
mud, falling backwards, dragging him and Trinity down to the
muddy ground. Their discovery horrifies them:

The brutalized, shredded, nearly fully eaten remains of Chad,
skull ripped open.

Trinity SCREAMS with the weight of sheer hopelessness.

TRINITY

CHAD! NO!

Theo eyes lower, then dart ahead, grabbing her hand. As the guttural, primal rattles from the wolves cut through the trees, the duo share a knowing look of defiance.

EXT. CLEARING - SECONDS LATER

Jax and Tony burst through the brush.

A wolf LEAPS at Tony, who twists mid-run, pocket knife in hand. Slash! BLOOD SPLATTERS HIS FACE.

The wolf YELPS, stumbles back.

The force pushes Jax and Denzel back into an unseen shallow pit. She SCREAMS in panic, hitting the ground below HARD.

Denzel lands on Jax's chest with a YELP.

Tony spins around, looking down at Jax, who groans in pain.

TONY

Oh, God...

Jax, dazed, struggles to discover her surroundings.

The moonlight slices through the trees, illuminating the area.

Jax eyes down. Bones.

Tony hears the sound of wolves assessing their prey from behind. He freezes in horror as he also witnesses what awaits Jax in the pit below:

Skeletal remains. Of close to a hundred or so bodies draped in ancient, scorched, muddy Ku Klux Klan hoods and robes.

Jax, experiencing a level of hell she cannot comprehend, releases a blood-curdling SCREAM as Tony reach his arms out to her.

TONY (CONT'D)

Jax...!

The wolves SNARLS pull in closer.

Jax, in absolute terror, steps back shaking her head as if trying to wake from a nightmare.

Denzel BARKS aggressively.

TONY (CONT'D)
JAX! GRAB ON!

Ominous growls emerge from behind.

JAX
(paralyzed)
I...I can't...

A pack of wolves. Massive. Gold eyes burning, sniffing the air around Tony, frozen in fear.

Jax shudders. There is no way out.

JAX (CONT'D)
(hysterical, points at
Tony)
...HE'S ANTI-D.E.I.! KILL HIM!

Tony narrows his eyes.

TONY
The fuck, Jax?!

From behind Jax, a shadow lands without sound in the pit.

Tony, a sweaty and muddy mess, observes the wolves that prey ahead. He grips and raises his guitar.

Wolves from all directions POUNCE on Tony, who at first tries to resiliently fight back swinging his guitar, but he is overpowered, and piled upon by several large wolves.

Jax cowers in fear as she hears the painful SCREAMS, BONES CRUNCHING, TEETH GNASHING, and muscle being TORN and FEASTED UPON from above.

Denzel pouts and cowers.

Jax, in hysterics, backs into something. She spins.

A naked Hakeem, eyes with a golden glow, slowly approaches. Jax gulps. Her eyes sink.

JAX
Hakeem...

No response. No movement. Shadow. A resentment and fire grows in Jax's eyes. She is at the end of her rope.

JAX (CONT'D)
YOU NIGG-

IMMEDIATELY, Jax's jaw is grotesquely REMOVED from her face with the ease of ripping a piece of paper. Blood SPRAYS on an emotionless Hakeem as her body falls limp in the pit.

He coldly holds the jaw he removed in his hand.

A beat. YIP.

Denzel scurries to Hakeem's foot, aggressively, yet lovingly sniffs and licks it, POUTING.

Hakeem lowers his eyes at the pup.

DEEPER INTO THE WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Branches whip past as Theo and Trinity tear through the undergrowth, lungs burning, feet slamming into the damp earth. Their breath is ragged, erratic.

Behind them—rustling. Footsteps. Laughter.

It echoes. Bounces. Surrounds them.

Theo skids to a halt, eyes darting wildly. The night is alive, shifting shadows between the trees, flickers of golden eyes everywhere.

A SNAP of a branch—behind them. They turn. A shadow streaks past.

Another CRACK—to the left. They whirl. Nothing.

Then—a whisper. Soft. Beckoning. Deep inside Trinity's skull.

APOLLO NOIR (V.O.)
*What are you, really? What do you
belong to?*

Trinity flinches. A tremor runs through her. The voice lingers in her marrow.

APOLLO NOIR (V.O.)
*You are not one of them. You are
not one of us.*

The shadows close in. A flash of fur. A growl.

Theo grips Trinity's arm and yanks her forward. They run.

The woods warp around them, branches twisting like hands reaching. The wolves herd them, guiding them like prey.

Up ahead — a clearing.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Theo and Trinity break through the trees with urgency, finding themselves back on the main streets of Apollo Noir, now with a eeriness about it as the entire town is shut down. No businesses open. All house lights off. The entire town is either at the cookout or on the hunt.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Theo and Trinity arrive at the gas station where their car was left. All lights are off. Everything is locked.

THEO
(banging)
FUCK!

Growls in the distance. Paws on concrete approaching.

Theo and Trinity frantically, desperately work together in attempts to kick or shoulder the door open. Their efforts are fruitless.

ROAR.

Theo and Trinity stop dead. Their chests heave. Their eyes widen. They know they are fucked. The couple share a glance, take hands and slowly turn, awaiting their fate.

Before them, towering like sentinels in the night - two massive wolves standing between 7 and 8 feet in height. One black as an abyss. The other a sickly, glowing gold. Both majestic in their otherworldly terror.

Theo trembles with a grip on Trinity, who cocks her head curiously, something in her expression cracking.

The wolves begin to shift-a reverse transformation.

Theo and Trinity back away, not able to comprehend what they are witnessing:

Muscle SHRINKING. Bone TWISTING inward. SNAPPING and GRINDING of cartilage in reverse. Claws receding into fingers. Fur melting into smooth skin.

Their faces - elongated, SNARLING - collapse inward, mouths unhinging and reforming into something human.

Standing before the cowering duo are TYWIN HAMILTON and FRANCIE JONES, who should be well over 100 years old but look and have the vitality of a pair perpetually in their early 30s. Bare-skinned. Unshaken. Their bodies are lean, powerful, untouched by time. Their golden eyes burn.

Tywin steps forward. His voice is low. Steady. Absolute.

TYWIN

Much like a slave trying to escape
a plantation, your attempts are
fruitless.

Francie tilts her head at Trinity, eyes narrowing.

FRANCIE

And you...are not whole.

Theo LUNGES, but Tywin moves too fast.

Tywin's hand CLAMPS Theo's throat.

Theo CHOKES and GASPS, feet lifting off the ground as Tywin holds him with terrifying ease.

Trinity's attempts to escape are thwarted as Francie grabs her wrist with an iron grip like iron.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

No more running, child.

Theo thrashes, gasping, weak in Tywin's grip.

Trinity trembles, eyes darting.

From the shadows...THE WEREWOLVES EMERGE. A silent army of golden eyes, stepping forward, their features unreadable in the dark.

Theo and Trinity are outnumbered and overwhelmed.

Tywin, with wise, burning eyes shares a look at Theo with an understanding of who wields power. Tywin drops Theo who crumples to his knees, gasping for air.

Francie releases Trinity, who immediately rushes to Theo, embracing him.

The town watches. Waiting.

TRINITY

(defeated)

...why?

Francie leans in close to Trinity.

FRANCIE
(low, ominous)
You, of all people. Already know
the answer.

Theo and Trinity observe the entire town enshrouded in shadow-golden eyes glowing, watching.

EXT. APOLLO NOIR - TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Rufus drives an all-black pickup truck slowly down the deserted street.

Theo and Trinity, with ropes tied around their throats and wrists, are bound to the back of the truck-paraded around like a pre-lynching party.

THE ENTIRE TOWN BACK IN HUMAN FORM, naked, shrouded in shadow and silhouette, their gold eyes glimmering.

Hakeem stands out, as he holds Denzel in his arms, lovingly stroking the pup, who WHIMPERS and licks dried blood from his fingers.

As if telepathically calling to her, the whispers return, soft, creeping within Trinity's head:

APOLLO NOIR (V.O.)
Not one of them. Not one of us.

Trinity shudders, eyes lowered, almost numb.

Rufus parks the pickup in the center of the road for the entire town, on sidewalks, on rooftops, behind trees, all observe with glowing, ominous golden eyes.

Rufus forces Theo and Trinity on their knees as Tywin and Francie approach as if prepared for a most righteous sermon.

FRANCIE
(preaching at town)
Apollo Noir was built for our
survival. And every 25 years, we
ensure it.

She gestures to the silver statue of her and Tywin, glowing in the moonlight.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

(to Trinity)

You think this town thrives by accident? We survive because we are willing to make the hard choices.

TRINITY

I am sorry for the pain you experienced...but you have no right to decide who lives and dies just because...

Tywin steps forward in anticipation. Trinity begins to break down.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

(sobbing)

My brother...he didn't deserve-

Theo grits his teeth.

THEO

(furious, broken)

This is hypocrisy...You talk about survival...like EVERYONE who doesn't look like you deserves a death sentence.

Tywin smirks. Approaches Theo.

TYWIN

(dangerous, smooth)

My dear boy. How wrong you have it. Let's talk the survival of your family's plantation money. Turned into a lil' rice empire, didn't it?

Theo's jaw tightens.

TYWIN (CONT'D)

C'mon. Don't think we don't know who you are, Theodore Moss. Think the heir to one of the biggest food distributors in the world could just slip by us?

Tywin kneels down to Theo's level.

TYWIN (CONT'D)

Black folk shed blood in those fields while your family got fat. Y'all took that stolen wealth, cleaned it up real nice, and slapped a goddamn cartoon on it.

(MORE)

TYWIN (CONT'D)

(venomous)

"Moss Minute Rice. We Feed
America." Y'all hear that. WE FEED
AMERICA.

The town laughs. Sharp. Cruel.

Theo shakes. He can't deny it. He raises his eyes, defiant.

THEO

(soft, raw)

I am not my family.

Tywin's smirk fades as Theo lifts his head, his voice steady.

THEO (CONT'D)

I'd burn every dollar if I could.
Undo every sin. If you think I
stand with them, you're wrong.
(unwavering, eyes Trinity)
I stand with her.

Tywin's head tilts.

TYWIN

(amused)

Awww, standin' with her, huh? What
an ally!

FRANCIE

(mocking, to Trinity)

And what are you, girl? Tell him.
"Say it loud...!"

Trinity's breath catches as Francie awaits for her to finish
that particular song lyric. She slumps in disappointment.

Francie circles behind her. Lowering her head. Close.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

That's always been a problem, ain't
it? Can't pick a side.

Trinity's fists clench.

Francie twirls a lock of her blonde hair.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

Growing up knowing what this world
thinks of you.

(whispers close)

Got a Black daddy, but did you ever
feel Black enough?

Theo stiffens. Trinity's eyes flash.

FRANCIE (CONT'D)

No matter what you do. Bleach your hair, change your eyes, wear lighter makeup, filter yourself in pics...

(leans against Trinity)

...you will never escape-that one drop.

Trinity's breathing shallows. She is over this day.

TRINITY

You're right. I live on the line.

Francie demeanor shifts, intrigued, as Trinity defiantly raises her head.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

You think I don't feel the weight of history? That I don't hear my father's voice reminding me where I come from?

Her voice shakes – but not with fear.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

But, I also hear my mother's voice. And she wasn't a plantation owner. *She was a history teacher.* I know about both sides of the whip.

(bitter)

What's been done to us. What's been done by us. And-none of it makes me feel whole.

Francie's eyes narrow. Tywin's smirk thins.

TRINITY (CONT'D)

I live with White Guilt and Black Trauma every second. I don't get the luxury of choosing one or the other.

Francie's lips curl. Just slightly.

FRANCIE

Woke enough to admit it, but not strong enough to do something about it.

Trinity's eyes flicker in the moonlight.

TRINITY
 (vicious, immediate)
 You don't get to call me weak. YOU
 MURDERED MY BROTHER!

FRANCIE
 WE PROTECT OUR OWN. Bigots want to
 kill us! Do you GET IT? We
 understand that if white
 supremacists caught on to what we
 have they would use it to destroy
 us-so we hold onto it *to defend*
ourselves from that very scenario.

Theo's glassy eyes lower. His breath shallows.

TYWIN
 This is the ritual we must perform
 for our self-preservation. We will
 never be another Tulsa. Not here.

Trinity steps closer, hands trembling from anguish and anger.
 Tywin's eyes sharpen.

Because for the first time...He notices it. The smallest
 shift in Trinity's frame. Not enough for anyone else to see.

But Tywin sees.

Trinity's breath...deeper. Her posture adjusts. A faint,
 barely-there shift in the shadows under her skin.

Trinity and Theo doesn't realize it. Francie doesn't either.
 But Tywin does. His golden eyes narrow.

Trinity's jaw sets. She rises - the rope around her neck her
 only restraint.

TRINITY
 I've been fighting my entire
 fucking life for the right to
 exist. Some second-guess my
 Blackness. Others second-guess my
 allegiance to the black experience.
 (razor-sharp)
 My very existence is defiance
 against everyone who hate me. *So*
don't you ever tell me I haven't
fought.

A slow smile emerges from Francie's lips.

FRANCIE
 (low, an inviting snarl)
 Then. Fight now.

Trinity glances at Theo. Theo, bloodied but unwavering, exhales shakily.

Trinity's hands shake. Her chest rises and falls. Fast. Ragged. Her fingers curl. Her spine lengthens—just slightly.

The town awaits her next move.

Theo quickly kneels before Trinity. A long, heavy silence. His breath slows as his blood drips onto the earth.

He looks up at Trinity. And he sees her—*really sees her*. A knowing nod.

THEO
 (genuine, to Tywin)
 If it's *my* blood you need—take it.

Tywin and Francie exchange a glance. Trinity's eyes widen.

FRANCIE
 (low, victorious)
 There it is.

Trinity stares down at Theo, breath shaky. Unsteady. She grabs his face, desperately searching his eyes.

TRINITY
 (whispering, broken)
 No, no no...You don't have to do this...

Theo softly smiles, even through the pain. His thumb grazes her wrist—a light, tender touch. A squint of realization.

THEO
 (chuckles under pain)
 This is a really cool town.
 (heavy, true)
 And they have a right to exist.

Trinity shakes her head, eyes burning. She is trembling, desperate.

TRINITY
 ...So do you.

Trinity sinks to her knees at Theo, tightening her hands around his, eyes welling with tears. Theo, bloodied but unwavering, exhales shakily.

Softly, painfully - they press their foreheads together.

THEO
(gentle, certain)
You're my boo.

TRINITY
(whimpering, broken)
You're my boo.

Theo breathes out, voice barely there. But he smiles.

Francie steps closer and places a hand on Trinity's shoulder. They share an exchange.

The town leans in, waiting. Trinity's heart pounds. Was that a flicker of gold in her eye?

INT. MOSS FOODS CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Empty halls. Cold and pristine. Sterile walls. The hum of fluorescent lights buzz.

A janitor enters. Familiar. Too familiar. HIM...

...The bigoted janitor from the TikTok video. Not fired. Not punished. Just back at work, like nothing ever happened.

He moves casually, unbothered, unfazed, slipping on his corporate-issued jumpsuit and casually clipping his name badge back on.

A WHISTLE.

"WADE IN THE WATER."

Slow. Drawn-out. Echoing down the halls.

He wipes down a desk. Methodical. Routine.

He continues his whistle...Richer, like he enjoys it - like he knows *exactly* what it means.

The story concludes here. Unblinking. Merciless.

Because this is the real world.

No fangs. No golden eyes.

Just a monster in plain sight. Whistling while he works.

CUT TO BLACK.