

STRANGE FRUIT  
BY  
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SUPER: "Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop."

--Billie Holiday

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - DAY

SUPER: 160 YEARS AGO

An INVISIBLE FORCE hovers and rushes toward a plantation mansion in its prime.

Oak trees are opposite each other along a well-groomed lane.

The mansion projects the majesty of an antebellum age enjoyed by the landed gentry: roman columns and a balcony.

A giant oak tree stands like a sentry to the left.

A wind rustles through the branches to give the illusion of the oak moving of its own volition.

A large knothole stares in solemn witness.

By the oak are two lines of enslaved people: a front line for those in the house and a back line for those in the field.

MARCUS CLAY (50), their white master, stands before them.

WHITE MAN #1 tugs on the noose around PARIS MOZINGO'S (41) neck and marches him to the step ladder under a tree branch.

Paris' family tremble to Marcus' left: VENUS (34), HANY (16), and MERIDAY (12).

Venus, with a knife behind her back, steps closer to Marcus who brandishes a whip.

VENUS

Please, Master Clay! Spare my  
husband! Don't split up my family!  
They's all I got.

He won't even look at her and instead speaks to his staff.

He motions for Paris to be forced to climb the step ladder.

White Man #1 forces him.

WHITE MAN #2 climbs a taller ladder and ties the rope around the tree branch.

VENUS (CONT'D)

No! Please, no!

Venus cries and tries to get close enough to Marcus to give him a stab, but he cracks his whip.

She falls back where her children shrink in fear and sadness.

MARCUS

Let this be a lesson to all of you!

She tries again to get close to him.

Marcus lashes his whip which opens a cut along her cheek.

He nods.

White Man #1 kicks the ladder from under Paris.

Venus cries out in extreme anguish.

VENUS

We go together, my love!

(to her kids)

Forgive me, my darlings.

She whips the knife out from behind her back and SLITS MERIDAY'S AND HANY'S THROATS.

She gives one last cry, a ULULATION that pierces the morning air and drowns out everything else from a mile around.

She STABS HERSELF IN THE HEART.

EXT. DALLAS HOME - DAY

SUPER: PRESENT DAY

A home with brown and white brickwork and a round window.

INT. ALDRICH DALLAS HOME - OFFICE - DAY

A cluttered room with stacks of overdue bills on the desk.

At his desk, ROGER ALDRICH (46), physically fit but looks tired these days, clutches a note: "Eviction Notice."

He shakes his head--defeated and needing a Hail Mary.

He picks up his landline phone and dials a number.

MOMENTS LATER

Roger is talking on the phone.

ANDREW ALDRICH (12) peeks through a crack in the door.

He always has a faraway look in his eyes as if he secretly evaluates the world around him.

JERRY (O.S.)

I'd be happy to have you as my  
neighbor. How're your kids?

ROGER

Okay. They'd be happy to see you  
again.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - DAY

It's the same oak-lined property from the opening, but the white paint's faded and cracked.

JERRY FULLMOUTH (46), Roger's African-American high school friend, examines the giant oak beside the mansion.

JERRY

Sorry to hear about you losing your  
job. A lot of folks have, I guess,  
since the pandemic.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

Roger's hand, still clasping the eviction notice, trembles with an anger that's the opposite of his tone.

ROGER

Kind of funny how you haven't lost  
yours.

JERRY

Funny?

ROGER

It's a joke. How's the place  
looking?

Jerry sees how a branch almost touches a second floor window.  
The tree's roots extend to and run beneath the house.

JERRY  
I won't lie. The place needs some  
tender, loving care.

Roger wads up the eviction notice.

ROGER  
I don't doubt it, my friend. I  
haven't been there since we were  
kids. I think my father was  
handling some contractual details.

Jerry gets closer to the giant oak and peers at the large  
knothole which a swarm of insects circle.

His movement forward gets rebuffed, as if by a forcefield.

He feels for bites along his neck, but there are none.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
You still there?

Jerry steps back to focus on the tire swing that hangs from  
the large branch which stretches up to a second story window.

JERRY  
Yeah. You know that big-ass oak  
right beside the mansion?

ROGER  
Sure. Wasn't there a tire swing we  
practically wore out?

JERRY  
Yeah, and then your great grand-  
pops was threatening to wear out  
our hides if we didn't stop. I  
don't think he liked me, in  
particular.

There's a photo album on Roger's desk opened to a page with a  
picture of a 110-year-old man.

He looks haunted standing by the giant oak tree from earlier.

ROGER  
We never went back for some reason.  
Funny, now that I think about it,  
Dad didn't talk much about his side  
of the family.  
(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

He'd grow uncomfortable if anyone brought it up.

JERRY

By the way, that old tree's roots are intruding upon the foundation.

Andrew jots notes in a pocket-sized notebook.

ROGER

Better get that taken care of.  
Jerry, I don't know how to say this...

Jerry sighs.

JERRY

You feel guilty about taking over a plantation property. Did you think that by having me handle the paperwork, that makes it okay?

Jerry breaks the moment of tension with a laugh.

ROGER

Shit, Jerry! You almost had me!

JERRY

I did have you.

ROGER

Hey, I appreciate your dotting the i's and crossing the t's.

JERRY

You bet. Have a safe trip.

Andrew takes out his journal from his back pocket, writes in it, and returns it.

He braces himself as Roger marches for the door.

Andrew shuts the door in time to remain unnoticed.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew dashes around the corner as Roger emerges.

Andrew sees Roger glance his way in suspicion but then turn and head in the opposite direction.

With the coast clear, Andrew tiptoes back to his father's office and goes inside.

OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew goes to Roger's desk and flattens the paper his father looked at with grave concern earlier: the eviction notice.

Andrew sighs.

EXT. SALVATION, ALABAMA - CLAY PLANTATION - DAY

The buzzing around the oak's knothole grows louder.

The swarm of insects make it unbearable for THREE TREE SERVICE WORKERS who climb into their truck.

The truck speeds down the dirt road and kicks up dust as it weaves in between rows of oak trees.

INT./EXT. TREE SERVICE TRUCK - DAY

JOSE sits on the passenger side with his ringing phone upraised as he looks back on the plantation.

The giant ancient oak tree sways from a slight breeze. Its leaves brush the second story window of the white mansion.

JERRY (O.S.)

Jose? Did you uproot the tree?

JOSE

No, señor. And we're not going back.

JERRY (O.S.)

What do you mean? You can't leave before the job's done.

JOSE

We're leaving before that árbol monstruoso harms one of my men.

JERRY (O.S.)

What happened?

JOSE

I tell you what happen. That árbol monstruoso almost broke Javier's leg. A root, how you say, wrapped around him. Thank Jesus he got his leg out. Lo siento, señor. I believe the stories now.

Jose looks like a haunted man.

JOSE (CONT'D)  
Please, señor, no one should live  
here. Tell the familia, no bueno.

INT. ALDRICH DALLAS HOME - PRIMARY BEDROOM - DAY

PRISCILLA ALDRICH (40) puts on pearl earrings, posing in  
front of a full-length mirror.

Roger thunders in, a man on a mission.

ROGER  
Hon, we need to talk. There's  
something I should tell--

PRISCILLA  
Zip me up.

Roger slinks over and zips up the back of her dress.

She wrinkles her nose.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)  
Are you suckling the bottle again?  
Real smart: drown in what got us  
into this mess in the first place!

ROGER  
That's not... I was fired because  
of DEI.

PRISCILLA  
The ladies are whispering all about  
you--which means us...

A tear rolls down her cheek.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)  
The other day I was at a restaurant  
luncheon, and all three of my  
credit cards were declined. All  
three, Roger! Deborah Mason had to  
bail me out. Can you imagine the  
humiliation of having one of our  
newest members--such a pretty  
little thing--do that?

He sighs and proceeds with his sales pitch.

ROGER  
I was thinking--what we all need is  
to get away from here.



She takes a beat and remembers something.

PRISCILLA  
We're not going to the Alamo again.

ROGER  
I was thinking more along the lines  
of... Alabama.

She turns around to fully regard him: *is he joking?*

PRISCILLA  
For vacation? A reunion?

ROGER  
Do you remember me talking about my  
Great Grandad's place?

PRISCILLA  
You mean that ratty, old  
plantation?

ROGER  
That's the point! And on top of  
that, my Great Granddad's place is  
haunted.

He grins like he's the best salesman ever, but her reaction  
is like he stepped in dog doo-doo.

PRISCILLA  
Then that definitely settles it.  
We're staying here, and I'm going  
to show that little Deborah  
Mason... Acting all high and mighty  
with her inner city youth  
initiative. I'll show her I care  
more than her about kids of color  
if I have to hold a million more  
galas for them!

ROGER  
Allegedly it's haunted--allegedly.  
You know people, especially kids,  
love a haunted house. And you know  
what that means!

He makes a gesture meaning lots of money.

PRISCILLA  
But all my Daughters for the  
Southern Cause would miss me.

ROGER

Okay, okay--forget the haunted mansion part... You will be the envy of them all--the queen of the plantation.

She spins back toward the mirror, her feather boa striking Roger in the nose--making him sneeze.

She admires her reflection.

PRISCILLA

I would be, wouldn't I? But, honestly, I don't think my ladies could go on without me. After two decades of service, you just don't throw out the old to make way for the new--after all, traditions are sacred.

He stares in frustration at the image of his wife: a high society lady who needs her social life.

SUSIE'S ROOM - DAY

SUSIE ALDRICH (16) prepares to go to her boyfriend's house.

She uses this opportunity to do an influencer Tik Tok.

She has her smart phone on a tripod sitting on her dresser; the mirror at the back has lights all around.

Roger enters as she finishes her video.

SUSIE

And that's why I swear by this lipstick. It just makes me oh so more kissable! Bye bye, lovely followers!

She does a kiss to either side of the camera as if she's kissing the viewers' cheeks.

She realizes her father's there and grunts in frustration.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

Thanks, Dad, for ruining a perfect take!

ROGER

Suse, can we talk?

She makes a puppy-dog face to mirror her father's.

SUSIE

Dad, I hate to see you like this...  
OMG, when're you going to pull  
yourself together?

ROGER

I was thinking... What we all need  
is to get away from here.

SUSIE

Cut to the chase. I kept telling  
you, altcoin is what you should've  
invested in.

ROGER

What happened to those Bitcoins?

She rolls her eyes.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Remember our old friend, Jerry?

SUSIE

You mean yours?

ROGER

We all had a blast going to those  
water parks. Jerry used to call you  
the princess--

SUSIE

I'm not into that scene anymore.

ROGER

Honey, did you know your Great  
Grandad has a plantation with a  
mansion? Imagine that: you, with  
your influencer's eye, transforming  
the place back to its historical  
beauty.

SUSIE

That's a hard no from me.  
Especially when Chad and I are  
getting serious.

He strolls over to where she sits before her mirror.

ROGER

Just for the summer.

SUSIE

But this is the summer. It's so  
important for me.

He rests his hands on her shoulders and looks at what she sees of herself.

ROGER  
You have blossomed into such a beautiful young lady.

SUSIE  
Then you understand what this means to me.

ROGER  
When you said you're getting serious with this Chad guy, how serious do you mean?

She bolts up and steps away from him.

SUSIE  
Ew... As if!

ROGER  
I didn't mean to suggest...

SUSIE  
This conversation is over! Chad's waiting for me.

She brushes past her father who seems to have shrunk.

ANDREW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew sits on his bed, scribbling away in his journal.

A very drunk Roger stumbles inside.

Andrew doesn't look at his father.

ANDREW  
I know all about Great Grandad's property. You've already given your sales pitch to Mom and Susie, and it's a no from me.

ROGER  
Little pitchers have big ears.

Andrew still refuses to look at his father.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Andrew?

Roger staggers a few steps closer to Andrew's bed.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Andrew?

Roger draws close enough with his alcohol-fueled breath it makes Andrew recoil.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Andrew, I'm... I hate to say it,  
but I'm dis, disappointed in you.

ANDREW

You should go sleep it off.

ROGER

I just want you to be a man... An  
Aldrich man!

ANDREW

I know about the eviction notice.

ROGER

Damn you, son! I should ship you  
off to the CIA to be a spy.

Roger teeters and almost falls over.

Andrew gently guides Roger so he lies in his bed.

Andrew continues to scribble away, but Roger shoots a hand  
out and tugs at Andrew to join him.

After a couple of unsuccessful tugs, Roger finally gets  
Andrew to lie back with him.

They stare at the solar system poster on Andrew's ceiling.

ROGER (CONT'D)

This world will steamroll you if  
you let it. Look at what happened  
to me: we have to seize what is  
ours.

ANDREW

But it's not ours... I've been  
reading about the history of the  
place and--

ROGER

There you go--it's our family  
history that I'm talking about.  
It's in our blood.

ANDREW

I'm saying we should be sensitive  
about who was here before.

ROGER

You, sometimes, let's be honest,  
keep your nose in books too much,  
and you speak up about other  
people's rights, but what about our  
people?

Roger tires himself out and falls asleep.

Andrew gets up with his journal, shakes his head at the sight  
of his slumbering father, and puts the covers over him.

INT. BRASS TACKS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The high-end steak restaurant has wood-paneled walls, a high  
ceiling, and dim lighting.

Waiters and waitresses weave in and out between the tables.

A banner on the back wall proclaims, "Dallas Youth Gala."

Priscilla holds court beneath it.

DEBORAH MASON (late 20s), a confident and no-nonsense African-  
American woman, steps in Priscilla's space.

Priscilla's tea-time smile evaporates.

Priscilla attempts to gain regain her cheerfulness as she air  
kisses both sides of Deborah's cheeks.

Deborah isn't falling for it.

PRISCILLA

How lovely to see you, Deborah!

DEBORAH

No cap, Priscilla. And we are going  
to miss you. For reals!

Priscilla grows scarlet--her whole cheery demeanor strangled.

She gets closer to Deborah to whisper in her ear.

PRISCILLA

But I paid the dues. Didn't I?

DEBORAH

Vibe check: it's about more than  
that.

Deborah hands Priscilla the fake-diamond-studded microphone  
and gives her a half-hearted pat on the back.

Priscilla takes a deep breath and gets her bearing.

PRISCILLA

It's been my privilege to be of  
service to our inner city youth.

At a nearby table, LADY #1 whispers to LADY #2 in a way that  
doesn't prevent others from hearing.

LADY #1

Her husband's been laid off. Poor  
woman--your heart just pours out  
for her.

This catches Priscilla off-guard, yet she continues.

PRISCILLA

What we do is so important.

Lady #2 has an evil grin as she whisper-shouts to Lady #1.

LADY #2

I hear she's going to lose that big  
house of hers.

LADY #1

She might need charity, herself.

Priscilla trembles, in between rage and grief.

A group of FOUR AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN come and hand her a  
bouquet of flowers and speak as if in a spoken word choir.

FOUR AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN

We thank you and love you, Miss  
Priscilla.

Priscilla sheds vulnerable tears as everyone applauds; it's  
as if they're doing so in SLOW MOTION.

She sees Lady #1 and Lady #2 pointing at her and laughing.

She squints her eyes at CHILD #1 and thinks she hears...

CHILD #1

Dumb white bitch thinks we love  
her.

Priscilla grabs Child #1's elbow.

PRISCILLA  
What did you say to me?

Child #1 shakes her head in confusion and appears hurt.

CHILD #1  
Miss Priscilla, I just said thank  
you so much. We love you.

Deborah watches all this with a disgusted look on her face.

Priscilla regains her composure and gives a prim nod and smile before finally releasing the child's elbow.

INT. CHAD'S ROOM - NIGHT

The spacious bedroom has a chandelier suspended from the oak-paneled ceiling; along the oak-paneled walls are sports memorabilia with signed jerseys, baseballs, etc.

Susie sits on the edge of the four-poster bed.

CHAD (18) lies there, a tall and muscular guy with wavy blond hair, broad shoulders and deep, penetrating blue eyes.

He props himself up on his elbows.

CHAD  
Come on, honey. We've been waiting  
for this moment.

She won't look at him.

SUSIE  
I thought you were taking me to  
that party.

He scoots next to her and caresses her arm.

CHAD  
The party can wait.

She finally turns to him, and his chiseled, handsome features and sparkling eyes work on her.

SUSIE  
But what if I have to move? You  
won't forget me?

He grins and pulls her into the bed with him.



CHAD  
No chance of that.

He disrobes her.

INT. ALDRICH DALLAS HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The high ceiling and walls are all painted white.

Pictures of each family member hang on the wall above the couch; conspicuously, there are none of them together.

Priscilla enters and yells like some call to dinner.

PRISCILLA  
Family meeting! Now!

Susie seems to float in as she comes through the front door. Her blissful look makes it appear like she's high.

Andrew pokes his head in, and Roger drags himself forward.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)  
We're 'Bama bound!

Andrew scratches his head.

ANDREW  
My vote is still no.

Susie comes out of her stupor.

SUSIE  
And mine is, a hell to the no!

The whole exchange sobers Roger and wakes him up.

ROGER  
Parents' rule.

SUSIE  
You really do want to ruin my life!

ANDREW  
I thought we were a democracy.

PRISCILLA  
Not even close. Not in this household.

EXT. SALVATION, ALABAMA/CLAY PLANTATION - DAY

SUPER: ONE WEEK AND 700 MILES LATER...

Roger drives the rental truck down the road between rows of oak trees on a windless summer day.

He pulls up in front of the mansion.

He gets out and brims over with new-found energy.

ROGER  
What do you think?

Andrew and Susie climb down from the passenger side to stand next to their father who admires their new home.

Susie's as cranky as a love-starved teenaged girl can be.

SUSIE  
It looks old.

ROGER  
Exactly. Those are Roman columns.  
Roman columns! This is antebellum  
architecture at its finest.

SUSIE  
So I'll be sleeping in a museum?

ANDREW  
You never know--we might actually  
learn something here.

Roger nods.

A BMW drives up and parks behind the rental truck.

ROGER  
There's your mother.

Priscilla gets out and joins her family by the mansion.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Isn't this amazing, hon?

She stares at the building's front, planning its remodel.

Andrew stands near the oak tree next to the mansion

He squints as a breeze blows as if caused by someone or something rushing past.

ANDREW  
Is there someone over there?

ROGER  
Over where?

The tree trunk seems to absorb something, or there's a distortion of air around it.

ANDREW  
I thought I saw someone standing by that tree.

Roger examines the area around the tree and the dirt road that leads to the place.

ROGER  
Maybe it was Jerry. He's supposed to be meeting us here with the keys and mortgage papers, but I don't see...

A Subaru pulls up by the BMW. Jerry emerges with a briefcase.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
There he is!

Jerry smiles, and the two embrace as brothers.

Andrew swings on the tire swing. He observes Roger and Jerry.

JERRY  
Hey, Andrew!

Andrew waves at him.

Susie stands next to her father.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
Hey, Susie! How's the princess of the biggest, baddest water slides doing?

SUSIE  
Okay, I guess.

ROGER  
That's not her scene now.

Roger wipes sweat from his brow and swats at insects that buzz around, some which bite him.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Ow!

JERRY  
Let's get inside.

Jerry motions as a COUPLE OF YOUNG GUYS exit his car.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
(to the young guys)  
Go ahead and start moving  
everything.

ROGER  
Just leave it all in the front  
room.

JERRY  
The foyer.

Roger nods.

Jerry opens the front door, and all step inside except for Andrew who hovers near the giant oak.

INT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION/FOYER - DAY

The inside is like a sepia-toned photo--a hint of historical majesty, but the current version is dusty, worn, and quaint.

The foyer has paintings with such a heavy coat of dirt or dust, it's difficult to make out what's in them.

Priscilla marvels at the images of antebellum society that lurk beneath layers of grime.

She glides a few steps up the curving staircase on the left and runs her hand along the railing.

She takes in the aura of the place's former majesty.

JERRY  
It's a bit of a fixer upper.

ROGER  
I guess it'll give us something to  
do as a family.

Roger gives a teasing smile to Susie and Andrew.

Everyone fans themselves.

JERRY  
It gets real hot here in 'Bama.  
Even at night. Let me turn on the  
fan.

ROGER

What happened to the air  
conditioner?

JERRY

It stopped working yesterday. I can  
help you get someone out here to  
fix it. For a reduced price.

Roger appears annoyed.

Jerry sees something in Roger's eyes he doesn't like.

JERRY (CONT'D)

You okay, Rog?

Roger flashes a grin and pats Jerry on the shoulder.

ROGER

I'll be fine. It's weird, though--  
those insects must've really gotten  
under my skin.

Roger feels his neck, and there's already a rash.

SUSIE

Ew, don't scratch it, Dad!

Jerry flips a switch on the wall to turn on the ceiling fan  
and unlatches and opens the windows.

JERRY

Would you like me to show you  
around?

ROGER

You gonna charge an admission fee?

Jerry laughs and shakes his head.

PRISCILLA

Where's Andrew?

SUSIE

I think he's, like, throwing shade  
at us, you know, outside hugging  
that tree.

ROGER

Do you mean the tree is? That's  
what trees do: provide shade.

SUSIE

Whatever. I'll get him.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - DAY

From a few feet away, Susie sees Andrew who sits in front of the tree by the house.

He's engrossed in the yellowed pages of a journal.

SUSIE

Hey, dweeb! Stop acting psycho and come inside.

He doesn't respond.

She steps closer to find out what's got his attention.

She peers at a drawing of an African-American family that mirrors, in age and number, the Aldriches: father, mother, brother, and sister.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

That's kind of dope. Did you draw that? They look real and, OMG, I think I wanna say, alive.

ANDREW

I found it in the knothole.

She frowns and starts to say something sarcastic but grows transfixed by the tree knothole.

She strains to hear... SOFT PIANO MUSIC as a BOY SINGS.

SUSIE

Is that music? Sounds like a piano.

ANDREW

I hear a boy singing. It's Meriday.

SUSIE

Meriday?

He flips a page in the journal and points to an entry.

She reads aloud.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

My name is Meriday Mzingo. I am twelve years old, and my master is Marcus Clay. I'm afraid for my family these days...

INT. CLAY PLANTATION - PRIMARY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Across from the entrance, a canopied bed with an oak frame sits next to a window that overlooks the giant oak tree.

A small table with a lantern and a couple of chairs lies on the opposite side of the room next to the other window

A horse-and-carriage chandelier hangs from the ceiling.

Jerry leads Roger and Priscilla into the room.

JERRY

This is the primary bedroom.

ROGER

Don't you mean, master bedroom?

Jerry frowns in irritation.

Roger chuckles.

PRISCILLA

It's actually quite charming.

ROGER

See, honey, I knew you'd like it.

PRISCILLA

With a modern woman's touch and a little dusting off...

She wanders over to the bed and fans herself.

Jerry opens the window, and a breeze blows into the room.

She glances out at Susie and Andrew by the tree.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

That breeze feels wonderful.

She hugs herself and yawns and feels the softness of the bed.

JERRY

Feels comfortable, doesn't it? Some efforts have been made to make the place cozy and up-to-date. All the old feather mattresses have been replaced with memory foam cushions.

ROGER

You look tired, honey.

His comment makes her yawn.

PRISCILLA  
I think I'll just lie down and take  
a nap.

Jerry leads Roger into the living room.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - NIGHT

Susie hears the BUZZ OF INSECTS grow louder.

ANDREW  
What's wrong?

SUSIE  
Don't you hear that?

Susie gets the chills and throws the journal in Andrew's lap.

SUSIE (CONT'D)  
It's another one of your nerd  
traps. You can stay out here, but  
I'm going inside to claim my  
bedroom.

ANDREW  
What just happened to you?

She runs back inside.

He opens the journal and finds the page Susie read earlier.

Using his phone's flashlight, he takes a picture by accident.

When he clicks on the photo to erase it, he sees, like a  
hidden watermark, the name "Isaac" along with a curved line.

A moment later he follows her inside.

EXT./INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew stops in front of the living room door as he hears  
Roger and Jerry talking. He cracks the door open to listen.

The large space allows for a couch and two plush-cushioned  
chairs on either side on the left.

A piano and painter easels are on the right.

A crystal chandelier hangs from the center of the ceiling.

Roger stands beside Jerry who has a concerned expression.



ROGER  
What is it?

JERRY  
After I first talked to you, I nosed around and talked to people familiar with the place. I want you to know the, shall I say, recent history of it before we get to signing papers.

Roger puts a hand on Jerry's shoulder but winces for a moment as, with his other, he swats away an insect from his neck.

ROGER  
Jerry, buddy, this is all just a formality to tie up loose ends.

JERRY  
I need to tell you something. I wouldn't feel right, otherwise.

Roger shrugs and humors Jerry.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
The last couple that rented here, some twenty years ago, didn't stay long. The husband committed her to an insane asylum.

ROGER  
Are you going to tell me the ghosts here rattled their chains and drove some woman crazy? Are you afraid that might happen to me?

JERRY  
That's exactly what I'm afraid of. And they won't be as patient as I am about racial insensitivities.

Jerry's dead serious expression is belied by Roger who appears ready to burst into laughter.

ROGER  
You almost got me again!

The tension cracks as Jerry finally joins Roger in laughter.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The dining room features a long, oak wood table in this room void of people, above which hangs a chandelier with candles.

The lemon-colored curtains offset the walls' darker yellow.

A painting on the wall at the end looms, as if at the head of the table, of Rosamond Clay.

She has an unsettling smile, ample bosom, and all-knowing eyes that peek out from layers of dust and oil.

SUSIE (O.S.)

Hey, Dad?

Susie leans in and takes a few steps as the lights turn off.

In the darkness, she feels her way until...

SHE SCREAMS at GHOSTLY IMAGES of Roger, Priscilla, Andrew, and Susie all at the table with their THROATS SLASHED.

The lights flicker on to reveal a distraught Susie huddled against the wall.

EXT. LIVING ROOM DOOR - NIGHT

Priscilla comes upon Andrew who still listens at the door.

PRISCILLA

Why're you sneaking around?

Andrew puts a finger to his mouth.

ANDREW

It's Dad and Jerry.

Priscilla scoots Andrew out of her way and puts her ear to the crack in the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Roger and Jerry stroll over by the couch.

ROGER

I appreciate your telling me all this, Jerry. We'll be fine, but will you be?

There's a moment of tension.

JERRY

Of course, of course. I was joking earlier.

Jerry and Roger sit on the couch.

Roger motions and Jerry slides a stack of papers on the coffee table for Roger.

Roger rises as Jerry stands, and they shake hands.

EXT. LIVING ROOM DOOR - NIGHT

Priscilla turns to Andrew.

PRISCILLA  
Stop spying on people.

She heads toward the primary bedroom but whips back around.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)  
But give me a full report.

Andrew salutes her.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - NIGHT

Andrew edges closer to the oak tree.

He stares at a BLOTCH near the knothole.

KNOTHOLE VOICE  
Set my family free.

Shapes that resemble HUMAN FACES form inside the knothole.

ANDREW  
Meriday?

Roger and Jerry exit the front door.

Roger pats Jerry on the back.

Roger sweats profusely.

JERRY  
I'll be in touch.

Jerry marches a few paces toward his car and turns around.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
Let me know if you need anything.

ROGER  
You worry too much.

Jerry climbs into his Subaru.

Roger smiles and waves as Jerry drives away.

ANDREW

Why're you sweating so much? Are you sick?

ROGER

I'm not sick, and I told you about sticking your nose in other people's stuff.

Andrew seems full of melancholy.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Hey, what's wrong?

ANDREW

I don't think we should be here. It's not our place.

Roger narrows his eyes and looks upon Andrew with irritation.

ROGER

We've already had this discussion and sounds like you heard Jerry talking to me.

ANDREW

Sorry for... snooping around again. But I'm not a little kid anymore.

ROGER

You're right. I just try my best, your mother and I both do, to keep you sheltered from the real world. Lord knows I tried for as long as I could with your sister. Guess I should've listened to her about Bitcoins.

ANDREW

Bitcoin. Dad, you're doing your best.

ROGER

That's what worries me.

Andrew squeezes his father's arm and recoils.

ANDREW

You're warm.

Roger explodes with no warning.

ROGER  
Everybody's worried about me. Just  
stay away, all right!

At a safe distance, Andrew sees Roger's expression soften.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Sorry. Don't know what came over  
me.

Roger heads back inside while Andrew faces the tree knothole.

INT. SUSIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susie has staked out the room above the primary bedroom. Its pink walls could stand a fresh coat of paint.

She peers out the window beside her bed at the tree whose branches rub against the glass.

Andrew's below with his ear pressed to the knothole.

She shakes her head and holds her phone at different angles.

SUSIE  
Stupid wi-fi! Hey, Dad, the wi-fi  
here sucks!

She finally gets a signal and...

SUSIE (CONT'D)  
Oh, shit! Tesla's dropped 50%?

She sees a reminder: "Call Chad," and clicks on her phone app which shows "RECENTS" with 10 "Chad" listings.

She takes a deep breath and tries again as his outgoing voicemail message plays.

She lies on her stomach in her four-poster bed.

CHAD (V.O.)  
Yo, this is Chad. I'm off somewhere  
being sexy. Leave your digits, and  
I'll hook you up. Stay sexy.

She puts her phone face down and rolls over to gaze upward.

She continues to throw the sharp end of her nail file at the wooden canopy above.

She always misses and has to move so she's not hit by it.

Finally, she sticks it in the wood.

Andrew appears beside her and gives her a scare.

In the process, she shakes the bed, and the nail file comes back down and hits the top of her head as she yells in pain.

SUSIE

Creep! What're you doing? You nearly gave me a heart attack, you know. That's TNC.

He shows her a drawing in the journal from the knothole.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

That's me. Who gave you permission to draw that? Why're you drawing...?

He points to how the figure in the drawing holds her head, and there's a nail file beside her on the bed.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

But that just happened. How could you draw that fast?

ANDREW

I didn't draw it. Meriday did.

SUSIE

Just stop it, okay! I get it: you're trying to get me back.

ANDREW

It's not like that. Look, I know I haven't been the best little brother...

SUSIE

Yeah, duh. My friends still bring up the time when you set cockroaches loose during our sleepover.

ANDREW

I was doing an experiment. I wanted to study their movements in different-sized jars. Some of them got out--Sorry.

SUSIE

Sorry? A friend still has nightmares from that.

ANDREW  
I'm also sorry about Chad. Did  
he...?

She shushes him and nods and stifles her tears.

Andrew gives her a moment and leans in with sincerity.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
I think Meriday's trying to tell me  
something. Check this out.

He shows her pictures on his phone of pages from the journal.

In all of them, like a watermark, the name "Isaac" shows up  
along with some line drawn along the edges of the pages.

SUSIE  
Who's Isaac? I thought the kid's  
name was Meriday.

ANDREW  
I don't know, but I think we're  
meant to find out.

She takes Andrew's journal and examines the picture of her  
from earlier, and it's as if there's been a great thaw.

SUSIE  
I don't think we should pursue  
this.

ANDREW  
Why not?

SUSIE  
Earlier, I saw all of us--our  
ghosts, you know--sitting at the  
dining room table with our...  
throats cut.

Andrew notices how Susie shivers and extends his hand. After  
a beat, she takes it.

ANDREW  
You know what this means? They  
reached out to you, too.

SUSIE  
They didn't reach out or any such  
shit. I'm saying we're a little too  
vulnerable to the haunted house  
history of this place.

ANDREW

You don't believe that. It sounds logical and sane, but you know it's not true.

SUSIE

So what does that mean if it's real?

ANDREW

It means we have to find out-- especially since it's passed down from Dad's side of the family. It's, well, in our blood.

This strikes Susie to her core.

SUSIE

Huh... Our people...

INT. PRIMARY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Priscilla lies under covers as Roger enters their room.

He tiptoes as he removes his pajamas from the chest of drawers to the left of the bed.

He slips into bed beside her.

THUNDER RUMBLES and LIGHTNING FLASHES.

ROGER

We'll have a big storm tonight.

He glances over at the curtain-less windows.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I'll have to see about getting curtains. You expect those to come with a mansion.

He rolls over to face the other direction, but she taps him on the shoulder.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Oh, right. Good night, honey lamb.

He moves to kiss her, but she evades him.

PRISCILLA

I heard you talking to Jerry earlier.



ROGER  
How much did you hear?

PRISCILLA  
Enough to know this place really is  
haunted.

Rain pelts the window, and the wind howls.

ROGER  
You know people like their ghost  
stories. We're fine. The place is  
fine.

PRISCILLA  
I don't know, mister. Haunted or  
not, it's creepy here, and being  
uprooted from our life in Dallas...

ROGER  
I thought you were handling this  
well.

PRISCILLA  
It's just a brave face for the  
kids.

They alternate in tossing and turning.

He gets up to peer out the window.

LIGHTNING SILHOUETTES HIM and gives a sense of dread.

TREE BRANCHES SLAP the wall as if a WHIPPING is going on.

He turns to her, and she considers something.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)  
Fine. If I'm being exiled here,  
I'll do it in style. I see a  
shopping spree in my future.

She tosses his pillow on the floor and scowls at him.

ROGER  
Fine. I'll sleep next door.

He grabs the pillow.

They have a tug-of-war with the top bedsheet before she  
releases it, and he falls on his butt.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Real mature.

He wheels around to the door and whips back to face her.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Sleep on it. It was a long trip.  
It's just nerves. Don't worry.  
You'll adjust. And it's only  
temporary.

She pulls her covers up and turns away from him.

He glances at the storm that rages outside and leaves.

She swats at an insect and removes her finger to find blood.

INT. SUSIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Susie's still fast asleep. Her contorted body hugs the twisted bedspread like it's a life preserver.

Priscilla sticks her head in the doorway.

PRISCILLA  
Get up, my dear.

She comes all the way in.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)  
Wake up, wake up, wake up!

Susie pops up and snarls at her mother.

SUSIE  
What the hell, Mom?

PRISCILLA  
We've got some shopping to do.

Susie yawns, stretches, and stumbles over to the window.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)  
Excellent. You're awake. Come on.  
This place won't remodel itself.  
Where's your brother?

SUSIE  
He's down there hugging the... He's  
by the tree.

Andrew has Meriday's journal open to sketch the tree.

PRISCILLA  
Forget him. Let's go.

SUSIE

Why're you so extra? Did you, like,  
actually catch some z's last night?

PRISCILLA

Are you for reals? Of course not.

Susie rolls her eyes at her mother trying to act current.

Priscilla sighs, her zest for shopping not deflated.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

I'll see you downstairs. We'll grab  
a bite to eat.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

The china plates, silver utensils, and food are all laid out.

Priscilla looks to Susie with questioning eyes.

PRISCILLA

Did you do this? I thought you were  
asleep the whole time.

SUSIE

Since when do I know how to cook,  
Mom?

PRISCILLA

It's definitely not the work of  
your father. His lazy butt's still--

ROGER

I'm up.

Roger yawns from the foyer entrance.

ROGER (CONT'D)

It must've been Andrew, but I  
thought he was outside by that tree  
all night.

Roger comes all the way in and takes a seat.

Andrew enters with a package of store-bought muffins.

PRISCILLA

Andrew, where'd you learn to cook  
like this?

ANDREW

I didn't.

ROGER

Where'd you get all the food? We only bought a few items from the store on the way over here, and I know we forgot to get eggs.

Andrew enters and sits as his mother and sister follow suit.

Andrew offers Roger a muffin.

Roger sniffs it, as if mistrusting the provenance of the muffin more than the ghost food.

PRISCILLA

Heaven's to Betsy, Andrew! Fess up: who brought in the food?

Andrew points to a picture in Meriday's journal.

Roger leans over and squints at it.

ROGER

Why're you drawing pictures of us eating at the table?

ANDREW

I didn't draw it.

SUSIE

I don't think he's lying.

She looks uncomfortable with taking her brother's side.

Each one takes a muffin and eats it to be on the safe side.

Roger peers at her in disbelief.

ROGER

You're defending your brother?

PRISCILLA

It's as plain as toenail polish: these two are in cahoots. Anyway, Susie and I are going into town to shop, and stuck with her mother for a while, she'll spill the beans.

ROGER

Are you getting curtains?

Priscilla gives Susie a meaningful look.

PRISCILLA

Among other things.

Priscilla eyes the painting of a Southern belle.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

I think I could restore the paintings in this place and post pictures of them on... Instagram. What do you think, Susie?

SUSIE

You've never done anything like that.

PRISCILLA

I know pictures. I'm sure I could do it.

ROGER

Great idea, hon!

PRISCILLA

The sooner we can open this place to visitors, the better. Maybe we can get "Garden & Gun" here: I'd love to see the look on Deborah's face when she sees me in a slick magazine spread.

Roger shoots Andrew an annoyed glance for having his journal out still and turns to Priscilla.

ROGER

See? I knew you'd warm to this place.

PRISCILLA

Speaking of warm, doesn't it seem excessively hot? Even considering the AC's out...

She fans herself as beads of sweat trickle down her forehead.

Andrew sketches in his journal as Roger snatches it away.

ROGER

Where'd you get this, anyway?

ANDREW

From the tree.

ROGER

From the tree? Andrew, since we got here, you've spent more time with that tree than your own family.

Roger opens it to a random place and sees Andrew's sketch of the tree with menacing eyes that watch the mansion.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
See? Look at this.

He shows the picture to his wife and daughter and throws the journal down on the table.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
I don't have time for this. I'm going to get some tools so I can uproot that tree and see if Jerry can find someone to fix the AC.

He strides over to the foyer entrance.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Want to come along?

ANDREW  
I'm surprised you're not getting Jerry to find you a tree service.

Roger wipes sweat from his face.

ROGER  
Tried that. The locals are superstitious about that tree.

ANDREW  
Maybe they have a point. I don't think you should touch it.

ROGER  
You, too?

ANDREW  
Dad, there's usually an underlying explanation for what happens to us. I think you're sick, and it's not a stretch to say maybe the insects from the tree have passed something on to you.

SUSIE  
Andrew might have a point. Why not go see a doctor while you're in town?

ROGER  
As soon as we get the AC fixed and that tree taken down, we'll all be fine.

Roger mops his brow and pats Andrew's shoulder.

PRISCILLA

It's the heat. But, strangely, it doesn't seem to have bothered you two that much.

Andrew and Susie regard each other in their shared concern for their parents.

Roger tries to be good old Roger with a put-on grin.

ROGER

Ah, youth! To be young again. You ladies coming?

Roger lumbers out.

Priscilla and Susie get up to follow him.

PRISCILLA

Clear off this food. Wash the dishes. The detergent and some rags are in a box in the foyer.

Susie urges Andrew to conspire with her off to the side.

SUSIE

I'll work on getting Mom to see what's happening.

EXT./INT. BMW - COUNTRY ROAD AND THEN CLAY MANSION - DAY

The BMW Sunday-drives down the ribboning, country road-- nothing but trees on either side.

The car is packed with the booty of their shopping spree.

Roger is asleep in the backseat, wedged between packages.

As she drives, Priscilla hums a cheerful tune and smacks the steering wheel for percussion.

Susie's sour expression says it all.

She reaches for the radio power button but stops and gives her mother a serious look.

SUSIE

Mom?

Priscilla continues to hum, oblivious to her daughter.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

Mom?

PRISCILLA

What is it, my dear one?

SUSIE

We need to talk about the weird  
vibes of this place.

PRISCILLA

Oh, for goodness sake! You're  
trying to scare your father and I  
so we'll go back to Dallas for the  
summer.

SUSIE

The past is all around us. Can you  
feel it?

PRISCILLA

Oh, fiddlesticks! I think you have  
something against anything or  
anybody being old. You'll get there  
some day--maybe sooner than you  
should.

SUSIE

It's not about me. Andrew's journal  
seems to predict what's going to  
happen--it drew a picture of me  
doing something before I did it.

PRISCILLA

Do you hear yourself?

SUSIE

I saw our ghosts with our throats  
slit--there at the dining room  
table.

PRISCILLA

Our ghosts? Honey, we're still  
alive. How can we have ghosts?

SUSIE

This place is trying to show us  
something. It's reaching out to me  
and Andrew, and if you and Dad  
don't see it...

Roger wakes up as they pull up outside the mansion.

The three of them exit the vehicle.



AT THE TREE - MOMENTS LATER

Roger carries a bag of tools over to the tree where Andrew sits cross-legged as he stares up at the knothole.

Priscilla and Susie pass by with their arms loaded with bags. They head toward the front door.

PRISCILLA

I thought some shopping would cheer you up, but you, young lady... You've been watching too many horror movies.

SUSIE

I know it sounds weird, but I'm being upfront, Mom.

PRISCILLA

For reals?

Susie winces and shakes her head.

Priscilla stiffens, takes her daughter off to the side, and hands her a pregnancy test kit.

Susie is horrified.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

And, it seems, you're ignoring those videos they make you watch in health class.

SUSIE

But how...? How could you...?

PRISCILLA

A mother knows because she used to be young, beautiful, and stupid, too.

Andrew sits near the tree in his own world but raises his head to give Susie a conspiratorial look.

But Susie bursts into tears and dashes into the mansion.

Priscilla sighs and follows her inside.

ROGER

What the hell, Andrew. Get up. Help me get started with this tree.

Andrew stands and shows Roger a page in the journal. He shows him a picture of a brighter and cleaner-looking mansion.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Looks like it did in its glory  
days... Is that after our  
renovation?

ANDREW  
Yes. I don't think we should do it.

ROGER  
You mean fix it up? Nonsense.

Andrew points to the tree in the picture. Roots run beneath  
and branches and limbs intertwine with the building.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
That's why we're uprooting the tree--  
-so that doesn't happen.

ANDREW  
That's just it, Dad. I think this  
is a prediction. This drawing is  
from a section in the back of the  
journal.

ROGER  
So what? Like I said, we're doing  
this so--

ANDREW  
See the blood?

Andrew points to BLOOD dripping from the KNOTHOLE.

ROGER  
I guess you're going to tell me you  
didn't draw this, and it wasn't in  
the journal before.

Roger pauses but gets no reaction from Andrew.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Some day we need to get you to a  
psychiatrist. Come on, let's get  
started before it grows dark.

Roger pulls out various tools such as a couple of axes, a  
couple of spades, a root saw, and a stump grinder.

He grabs a spade and hands one to Andrew.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Let's begin by digging around the  
trunk.

(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

Dig to see where the roots are so  
we know what we're dealing with.

Andrew just stands there and watches his father attempt to  
break through the ground.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Wow, this ground is hard like  
cement. What're you waiting for?

ANDREW

I don't think this is a good idea.

Roger struggles to dig but gets nowhere. In a huff, he throws  
his spade down and grabs an axe.

ROGER

I'll start with this fucking branch  
that kept scraping the window last  
night. Get the ladder out of the  
car.

Andrew doesn't want to move.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I said get the ladder.

Andrew relents, goes to the trunk, pulls out the ladder and  
brings it to where Roger stands by the window.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Come on. Set it up. Let's go. Right  
here.

Andrew does as he's told.

ANDREW

I don't want you to get hurt.

Roger scoffs and climbs the ladder with the axe in his hand.

Priscilla, on the other side of the window, hangs a curtain  
with Susie's help.

Roger waves, and Priscilla sticks her tongue out at him.

ROGER

See. Things are already improving  
around here. We'll all sleep better  
now.

Roger hacks at the branch but does no damage.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Fucking tree! You think you're  
going to keep us up all night  
again?

Roger pulls the axe back and delivers a mighty wack, and  
large chunks of the sharp blade chip off.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
What the fuck!

ANDREW  
Dad, are you okay?

Roger climbs down and appears defeated.

ROGER  
That's no tree. No tree could do  
that.

ANDREW  
Let's just go inside and have  
dinner.

Roger gathers all his tools back and puts them in the bag,  
and he and Andrew head to the porch.

Roger turns around and glares at the tree.

ROGER  
That's okay. Round one to you. At  
least with curtains up, you won't  
keep us awake again.

INT. PRIMARY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Priscilla dashes out to get Roger and brings him back into  
the room to show him their curtains are on the floor.

Outside, the wind blows the tree branches that scrape against  
the window and wall.

On the step ladder, he hoists the curtains back into place.

He takes five steps and gets summoned by Priscilla.

The curtains lie on the floor again.

He shrugs, yawns, and heads back out to the sitting room.

SITTING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

This game of switching sleeping locations continues.

Roger snores on the couch as Priscilla creeps in the room.

She taps him on the shoulder.

He pops up like he's been shocked with electricity.

He sighs and allows her to take his place while he heads back to the primary bedroom.

SUSIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susie lies in a fetal position on her bed.

She clutches something Andrew can't see as he tiptoes inside.

ANDREW

Susie?

She springs up ready to attack anything and anyone.

SUSIE

Creep!

He hangs his head.

ANDREW

So, we're back to name-calling?

He softens when he sees the tears on her cheeks.

He glances at the foot of the bed to see Susie's pregnancy kit: it has one red strip.

She sees what he does and snatches it up.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Does it mean... you're pregnant?

SUSIE

No, you dweeb... No, Andrew... It means I'm not.

She dissolves into tears.

He approaches with caution.

ANDREW

You want to get...?

SUSIE

No! I mean, yes. I mean, look...

She shows him her phone with all the texts and calls to Chad that have gone unanswered.

ANDREW

So, good riddance?

She considers his face: should she throw her phone at him?

SUSIE

You don't understand because you're... You're Andrew--my sheltered little brother. Love sucks!

ANDREW

I'm sorry.

SUSIE

He made me feel special and then...  
threw me away like a used tampon.

He wrinkles his nose.

ANDREW

That's kinda gross, sis.

(beat)

But I would never do that to you.  
We're family.

SUSIE

Look at you--I never thought you  
could be sweet.

He moves in for a hug, but she shakes her head with a smile.

He nods and leaves her be, shuffling out of the room.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION - DAY

Jerry stands by the tree with Andrew.

Susie sits in the tree's tire swing.

Jerry gives the tire swing a shove as Susie smiles.

WHITE WORKER and LATINO WORKER crouch by the air conditioner.

Roger approaches Jerry and the workers.

JERRY  
I've got good news.

ROGER  
I hope so.

Pale and sweaty, Roger yawns and stumbles closer.

JERRY  
You okay? You don't look so good.

ROGER  
I haven't slept much since I moved here. What did you find?

JERRY  
Roots were blocking the AC's outside unit.

ROGER  
You took care of them?

Jerry nods, and Roger looks back at the oak tree.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Did those roots come all the way from that tree?

JERRY  
Seems impossible and yet likely at the same time.

ROGER  
You're speaking in riddles, Jerry. Listen, that tree keeps me up all night with its branches thrashing about. Can you help me out?

JERRY  
Okay. Let me ask the men to see what they can do--at least trim the branches.

Jerry talks to the workers. Latino Worker shakes his head and pleads in fear while White Worker listens.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
You were able to cut the branches from that AC unit.

LATINO WORKER  
Si, señor, because it's far from the trunk.

WHITE WORKER  
Sir, I'll do it. I'm not  
superstitious about some stupid  
tree.

Roger joins Jerry off to the side.

ROGER  
This is what you get for practicing  
DEI!

JERRY  
You've got it backwards, my friend.  
It's not easy to find white guys to  
do this kind of work.

ROGER  
My guy, my people...

Roger pats Jerry on the back like they're having a laugh.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Will show you how it's done.

The Latino Worker sets up the ladder for the White Worker.

JERRY  
Whatever, Roger! Now if you don't  
mind, let's go inside the house to  
check the...

There's a THUMP, and the Latino Worker screams.

Roger and Jerry rush over and find White Worker on the ground  
with his head turned a complete 180 degrees.

His face looks out from his backside with his tongue out,  
clamped between his teeth.

The Latino Worker sobs non-stop.

Jerry puts his arm around him and escorts him to his car.

Roger continually shifts his gaze from between the man with a  
broken neck to the tree.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION - DAY

A police car and ambulance pull up, lights and sirens going.

Priscilla and Susie come out as Roger speaks to the police.

Andrew is nowhere to be found.



INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Varying degrees of defeat, Priscilla, Roger, and Susie enter.

Andrew enters from the living room.

PRISCILLA

What a day! Don't expect much for  
dinner. I feel so tired, and Roger,  
I don't know how long...

They see an impressive spread of food on the table with some dishes that were popular before the Civil War.

The variety of meat is unusual: a ham at the head and a large roast turkey at the foot.

In between stands a boiled turkey stuffed with oysters.

In the middle are celery in tall cut-glass stands.

On the sides are cranberries in molds and various pickles.

Roger gawks at Andrew who shrugs.

Andrew goes to Susie, and they stand there, creeped-out by the ghost food, knowing what it is.

Andrew reaches a hand out, and Susie gives him a look.

ANDREW

Let's check the kitchen.

She gulps and takes his hand.

Hand-in-hand, they step carefully through the kitchen door.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The stove is bare--no sign of recent cooking.

Andrew opens the refrigerator to see only what they bought.

Susie opens the cabinets and finds nothing unusual.

They come back together and shrug.

SUSIE

What do you think Meriday is up to?

ANDREW

I don't know, but I've been  
thinking about the myths  
surrounding the "food of the gods."  
In Greek mythology, ambrosia is  
supposed to give you immortality.

SUSIE

But this food comes from ghosts who  
are not immortal...

ANDREW

They're stuck in their deaths. So  
any food of theirs we eat...

They look at each other in alarm and rush to the dining room.

DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Andrew and Susie gawk as Roger cuts himself a slice of ham.

Roger shakes his head at their alarmist reaction.

ROGER

I don't care where this delicious  
food came from, I'm eating it.

PRISCILLA

It'd be a sin to let it go to  
waste.

Priscilla proffers her plate, and Roger cuts her a slice.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

Sit down, my dears.

Susie and Andrew sit opposite each other but just push the  
food around on their plates.

Susie and Andrew stare in horror as GHOSTLY SLITS appear on  
their parents' necks.

Roger grows irritated, not knowing why they're staring.

ROGER

I'm sorry, okay? How could I have  
known...? That poor guy--I can't  
get that out of my head the way  
he...

PRISCILLA

What is it about that tree?

ANDREW

When anyone other than Dad messes  
with it, they end up hurt or dead.

ROGER

I guess it likes me.

SUSIE

It didn't like your axe.

ANDREW

It's saving you for something else.

ROGER

Is that some kind of threat?

ANDREW

Not from me. We need to leave this  
place.

SUSIE

He's right.

PRISCILLA

Siding with your brother again?  
What kind of deal did you make? You  
wanna go back with your boyfriend  
after...?

Susie's so hurt she can't speak.

ROGER

We are not leaving. Okay? Let's  
make the best of the situation.  
When we get our affairs back in  
order, we can go back to Dallas and  
rent this place out or get someone  
to manage it and collect fees from  
tourists.

PRISCILLA

I can't believe I'm saying this,  
but I agree with your father. We're  
going to bring the glory back to  
this place.

Roger and Priscilla raise their glasses in a toast.

PRISCILLA (CONT'D)

And I'm going to be the queen of  
the plantation!

Roger grins and nods.

Priscilla does some queenly, high society waves to imaginary people who adore her as they should.

Andrew and Susie glance at each other in defeat.

INT. SUSIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susie tosses and turns in her bed as THUNDER BOOMS and LIGHTNING FLASHES. Her curtains lie on the floor.

Susie turns again, sees a SHADOWY FIGURE, and screams.

Andrew stands beside her bed with a guarded look.

She gathers her blanket about her.

SUSIE

GD, Andrew! You almost made me piss myself!

ANDREW

Sorry.

He holds up his hands with something in them.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I brought you a sandwich.

She smiles as she accepts the food from him.

SUSIE

You sure this wasn't prepared by our friendly ghosts?

He laughs.

ANDREW

Not even the unfriendly ones.

Awkward, he looks on as she eats.

She pats the bed beside her, and he takes a seat.

SUSIE

Can't forget how that worker's head was...

ANDREW

What're we gonna do?

SUSIE

About our insane-in-the-membrane parents? I think for now we have to just play along.

ANDREW

Play along?

SUSIE

You know we're going to be volunteered to help with the renovation. I'm thinking, as we remodel, we can find out more about this place.

He takes a shine to that idea.

ANDREW

I'm glad you're on my side again.

She glances at him in bemusement.

SUSIE

Again? Let's get real--or reals, as Mom would put it. We haven't been on each other's sides for a long time.

She pinches his cheek, and he glares in mock fury.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

Sorry for calling you retard. And nerd. And creep. And--

ANDREW

Okay, okay. Sorry the cockroaches got out and scared you and your friends.

She gives him a hug.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Are Mom and Dad going to be okay?

Her face darkens for a moment, but when she observes his sad expression, she recalls something.

SUSIE

Mom's brilliant idea gave me one. She and Dad may be good at making renovations, but you and I can help with advertising on social media.

ANDREW

You mean, you want people to know  
about us, about this place?

SUSIE

It might just save us.

ANDREW

Sort of like sending up an S.O.S.?

She nods.

THUNDER BOOMS and LIGHTNING FLASHES.

SUSIE

Don't leave me tonight, 'kay?

ANDREW

We haven't slept in the same bed  
since we were little kids.

SUSIE

Stay way on your side. Hug the  
edge, or I'll kick you in the nuts.

He grins and shakes his head as he gets under the covers.

Now that he's hidden, she's forlorn as she stares at the  
storm out the window.

BEGIN MONTAGE

-- In the morning on the front porch, Priscilla meets with  
TWO WORKERS to review the blueprint for remodeling. Susie and  
Roger stand off to the side as Andrew carries in SUPPLIES.

-- In the sitting room, Priscilla supervises a WORKER as he  
gives the walls a fresh coat of paint.

-- Susie does the same as Priscilla in the dining room.

-- Andrew preps the living room for painting as he lays down  
a DROP CLOTH and applies PAINTERS TAPE. He notices an uneven  
place in the baseboard. He snaps it back and continues to  
apply painters tape.

-- Roger does the same as Andrew to prep the kitchen.

-- There's a time-lapse from day to night as the four rooms  
receive a fresh coat of paint, touch-ups to woodwork, the  
polishing of floors, and other finishing touches such as the  
washing of windows.

END MONTAGE

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: End of Week 1

Roger and Priscilla sit on opposite ends of the dining table with the side chairs conspicuously empty.

In the middle are dishes heaped with Southern style food.

Roger glares at Priscilla who shrugs.

ROGER  
(full-throated yell)  
Andrew? Susie? Get your asses to  
the dinner table--now--pronto--we  
got some celebrating to do!

Something dawns on her.

PRISCILLA  
I did see Andrew out front where  
that tacky, overgrown bush was. I  
told him to remove it, but that was  
a while ago.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION - NIGHT

Susie comes upon Andrew who is crouched over a wild-growing bush off to the side of the front lawn.

He removes a garden spade from a bucket that also has a pair of hedge sheers with the sharp points pointing up.

SUSIE  
Andrew, Dad's calling us to dinner.

Andrew swings the garden spade which snaps a root and rises with the bush in his hands to reveal a metal box.

It's just long and wide enough to fit a human body.

SUSIE (CONT'D)  
What is that?

Andrew bends to retrieve Meriday's journal by the metal box.

A breeze blows the pages to a picture of the same metal box.

Susie strikes a high, startled note.

Words imprint upon the blank page.

In a trance, Andrew picks the journal up and reads, but the voice of Meriday tells his family's story.

FLASHBACK - INT. SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

SUPER: 160 YEARS AGO

Meriday and his sister, Hany, leave their mother sleeping.

MERIDAY (V.O.)

I felt like I had left my body, I was so upset when I heard about my father, and I was just floating. I followed the tug of my sister's hand.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION - NIGHT

Meriday and Hany run under a full moon, hands linked tight.

Meriday pulls up and urges Hany to duck behind a shrub.

HANY

What're you doing?

MERIDAY

Are we sure about...?

HANY

Sure about our father being innocent?

MERIDAY

Why would Mrs. Clay lie about something like that?

She wants to squeeze him.

HANY

'Day, you an innocent babe. You's blind not to see that white queen eyeing our father like he's a side of beef.

He gapes at her.

MERIDAY (V.O.)

It was like I'd been struck by lightning.

(MORE)



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

I had goose bumps of anger as I took in what she was saying. I realized she'd looked at me that way too--me, a twelve-year-old boy. And then I also felt a flush of shame that I had considered maybe my father did what he was accused of doing.

Hany rubs his arms and gives him a knowing look.

MERIDAY

We have to get him out of that box.

HANY

But there's two guys.

TWO GUYS sit on the lid of the metal box about 20 feet away.

Midway, there's a haystack.

MERIDAY (V.O.)

I wanted to get closer to hear what they were joking about. After the lightning bolt from Hany, I wasn't thinking anymore--just reacting like I had to.

Meriday bolts, and Hany pursues him in her frustration.

Guy #1 appears like he sees them as they remain frozen in no-man's-land between the shrub and the haystack.

GUY #1, a man with mutton chops and a glass eye, laughs with his partner. MOONLIGHT GLINTS off his GLASS EYE.

GUY #2, a thick-headed fellow with a cheek scar, continues with his comedy routine.

Hany and Meriday run to duck behind the haystack.

GUY #2

Tell me again, why does Mrs. Clay want us out here?

GUY #1

A show of force.

GUY #2

It's a show alright. She wants her husband to see the slaves as dangerous, but I tell you, she's the one. Guess it's a good thing Mrs. Clay likes dark meat.

GUY #1

She's not a bad-looking woman, but  
if she liked either one of us, we  
could be the ones hanging tomorrow.

GUY #2

Why do we always get these jobs?

GUY #1

Guess it's fitting since we stood  
guard for her.

GUY #2

She was going after him so hard she  
couldn't hear either one of us try  
to warn her.

Hany and Meriday turn to each other and clasp hands tight.

MERIDAY

I'll take the mutton chops guy--

HANY

I know another way.

MERIDAY

But we have to get our father out.

HANY

Those are men and too big for us.  
We have to think about how to keep  
our family together.

MERIDAY (V.O.)

If my sister hadn't been there to  
hold me back, I would've jumped on  
both of those guys by myself. Hany,  
though, said she knew a voodoo  
priestess and told me to bring my  
journal and a bottle of the  
master's best wine.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION - NIGHT

The writing in Meriday's journal stops.

SUSIE

So then what happens?

ANDREW

I'm thinking we need to find  
wherever they kept the wine.

SUSIE

A wine cellar!

Roger, transformed, bursts out the door.

Susie and Andrew turn to each other as if to wonder who has  
replaced their father.

ROGER

What're you doing out here...?  
Andrew?

Roger sees the metal box.

ROGER (CONT'D)

What in Sam Hill is that?

ANDREW

It's where slaves used to be  
punished. Look.

ROGER

You and that goddamned journal!

As Andrew searches in Meriday's journal, Roger grabs his arm  
too roughly which makes him wince in pain.

SUSIE

Let go! You're hurting him!

Roger releases Andrew's arm and looks upon Susie in disgust.

ROGER

You're the oldest. You used to be  
able to smack some sense out of  
him.

Roger takes a threatening step toward Susie.

A FIERCE WIND BLOWS that causes him to trip.

Andrew gives him a push so that he lands just to the right of  
the sharp hedge shears.

Susie gasps as she sees HANY'S GHOST, her VENGEFUL EYES  
bright in a SMOKY CLOUD before she ZIPS away.

Roger stands, brushes himself off, and glares at Andrew.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
You trying to kill your old man?  
(to Susie)  
Is that what the two of you had  
planned?

SUSIE  
Honest, we didn't...

ANDREW  
I tried to keep you from--

ROGER  
Get all these tools put away before  
you come inside to eat your cold  
food.

Roger gives them a scornful look and stomps back inside.

Andrew and Susie shrug at each other.

INT. SUSIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Andrew lies on his side of the bed as Susie sits up on hers.

SUSIE  
That wasn't our father.

ANDREW  
I know. What's happening to him?

SUSIE  
And Mom. When Dad almost lost an  
eye--

ANDREW  
Or worse.

SUSIE  
Or worse... I saw Hany.

He sits up and faces his sister in grim acknowledgement.

ANDREW  
There was a sudden wind...

The two shudder.

SUSIE  
We have to find that wine cellar. I  
just hope...

She grabs her cell phone and peers at it in her anxiousness.

ANDREW

Yes. But not tonight. I just don't  
think I could after...

She nods.

She puts her cell phone back on the night stand and makes  
sure the cover is over both her and her brother.

INT. PRIMARY BEDROOM - DAY

Roger snores.

Priscilla awakes: someone's knocking on their front door.

She nudges him.

PRISCILLA

Roger! Wake up!

She gives him a harder shove.

ROGER

What the hell, woman?

PRISCILLA

Someone's knocking at our door.

Roger sits up. He hears it, too.

ROGER

I didn't ask Jerry to come by.

Priscilla gets up, pries part of the curtain from some  
staples holding it to the wall, and peers out the window.

She sees TEN PEOPLE outside, none older than twenty-five.

ROGER (CONT'D)

What is it? What do you see?

PRISCILLA

A line of people.

ROGER

What the...

He shoves his wife out of the way and sees one person in the  
crowd waves at him.

Roger rushes over to the foyer.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Roger runs up the stairs all while he yells.

ROGER

Susie! Susie, what have you done?

He dashes to the second floor and into Susie's bedroom.

INT. SUSIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Andrew and Susie sit up from their sides of the bed to face their father, a rumpled mess.

ROGER

There's a line of people at our door. What did you post, and just how many people saw it?

She grins and applauds herself as she gets out of bed, with Andrew getting up as well.

SUSIE

We're going viral. For some reason, the wi-fi's back and faster than ever. I posted pictures of our mansion, actually did some research about the history of this place--my history teacher would be proud--and made a page promoting it.

Andrew whispers in her ear.

ANDREW

Are you sure about this?

She whispers back.

SUSIE

Trust me.

Roger stands in the doorway, the color drained from his face.

Priscilla calls out to Roger from the first floor.

PRISCILLA (O.S.)

Hey Roger, where'd you find this beautiful dress?

He exits Susie's room.

Andrew looks again with uncertainty at his sister.

ANDREW

Did you do this so you can get back  
to Chad more quickly?

SUSIE

He and I are finished. From now on,  
we have to stick together, and you  
have to believe in me--and believe  
that I'm your big sister again who  
has your back.

He smiles and nods.

STAIRS THEN FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

From the top step, Roger observes Priscilla at the bottom.

She's dressed in a pink, ruffle-filled dress with three  
layers to the skirt.

She is in heaven: the queen of the plantation is ready for  
her photo shoot.

Roger runs down the stairs as the KNOCKING continues.

ROGER

Just what in the hell is going on  
here?

She's excited and happy while her husband is clueless.

PRISCILLA

There's more.

ROGER

More?

She grabs his hand and leads him into the dining room.

DINING ROOM - DAY

Priscilla points to the fully restored painting on the wall  
at the end of the dining table.

It's a portrait of a Southern belle in Priscilla's dress.

ROGER

But how... You have the same...

She grins like this is all a fun game and takes his hand to  
drag him to their bedroom.

PRIMARY BEDROOM - DAY

Priscilla opens the armoire to reveal Civil War era clothes for Roger, Andrew, and a dress like Priscilla's for Susie.

Roger's a man totally at sea while Priscilla's in her element and ready to rally the troops.

PRISCILLA

Hey kids! Come get dressed for our guests.

FOYER - DAY

Andrew is in brown dress pants and brown vest with a white shirt underneath and a black tie in a Windsor knot.

He opens the front door as Roger stands a safe distance off to the side.

TEENAGED GIRL #1 in a Confederate flag t-shirt enters.

TEENAGED GIRL #1

How much is the fee?

Roger steps closer, in his own Southern gentleman's attire.

ROGER

Fee?

Teenaged Girl #1 takes out money from her pocket.

TEENAGED GIRL #1

How does twenty sound?

ROGER

Sounds like I won't have to get a part-time job.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - PORCH - DAY

SUPER: A FEW HOURS LATER...

Andrew collects people's money with the journal in his lap.

Susie gives them tickets from a printer attached to a computer set on a table.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Priscilla takes a family of four through the dining room.



She points to the restored portrait of the Southern belle and gathers them around the table.

PRISCILLA

Food magically appears on our table  
with Southern dishes not prepared  
since the Civil War ended.

The visitors smile.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

Priscilla shows a couple around in the sitting room. She comments on the furniture and paintings.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Roger escorts THREE MIDDLE-AGED LADIES into the living room.

He gives a short speech about the furniture and items in the room and stands before the piano.

ROGER

And this is where Master Marcus  
Clay taught the slave boy Meriday  
how to play piano. Master Marcus  
Clay looked on in delight while  
Meriday played, his sixteen-year-  
old sister Hany danced and his  
mother, Venus, sang. Meanwhile, his  
father, Paris, entered and was  
jealous.

The Three Middle-aged Ladies glance at each other and nod.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - PORCH - EVENING

Roger guides a group onto the porch while Andrew and Susie pick up the table with the computer and printer.

TEENAGED GIRL #2

What an awesome tree!

Mention of the tree animates Roger as Andrew motions to Susie to put the table down.

ROGER

It's a helluva good tree for a  
lynching!

The girls gasp in horror but shift into awkward giggles.

Andrew tries to get his father's attention but is ignored.

Roger gets beside the tree.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
That savage attacked my wife.

TEENAGED GIRL #1  
You mean, Master Clay's.

TEENAGED GIRL #2  
He's playing the part.

Roger crouches low and looks his audience in the eye. He seethes with anger.

Andrew is pale and shattered by what he witnesses.

ROGER  
And Venus, his wife, stood there clutching her hands and pleading, "They's all I got, mister! That's when I gave the signal, and the step ladder beneath Paris was kicked away, and he hung there with his eyes bulging. Looked like a strung-up animal!"

His audience, which has grown by four, stands in silence.

Jerry appears and scowls in dismay.

The group leaves except for Jerry.

Andrew and Susie carry the table inside.

Roger scrutinizes Jerry.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Good to see you, Jerry. What's that uptight look doing on your face?

JERRY  
You're charging entrance fees?

ROGER  
You've dotted the i's and crossed all the t's--this is my property now as it should've been all along.

JERRY  
Your property? Whose blood, sweat, and tears built this place?

The two size each other up as Andrew and Susie watch from inside the screen door.

JERRY (CONT'D)

My friend, who knows better about this stuff than me, says there are laws on the books about using properties as public parks for hate speech and such. He told me to tell you, hope y'all got the proper licenses for your theatrical presentation.

ROGER

Who is this friend of yours? Sounds like my enemy. And what about our friendship?

JERRY

That's just it--as your friend, I'm trying to help you. These people at the NAACP don't mess around.

ROGER

I don't have to prove anything to the NAACP or to you. But you tell your buddy he better stay the hell away from me before he finds his neck in a noose.

The effect of that last statement is like a gun's been fired.

Roger gets in Jerry's face until their noses almost touch.

Jerry trembles--not afraid of Roger but afraid for him: there's something in his eyes and manner that's different.

JERRY

They'll be watching you, Roger. I just worry about you and your family...

ROGER

You just worry about yourself. You've changed. Where's the buddy I knew from high school?

Jerry sighs and leaves.

Roger bolts inside.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Roger grabs Andrew's arm as he attempts to flee.

ROGER  
Did you rat out your old man?

Susie stands by looking helpless.

SUSIE  
Don't hurt him, Dad!

ROGER  
Or maybe it was you, Susie Q!

Priscilla drifts into the dining room with a wary look directed at her husband.

Roger lets go of Andrew to reveal an ugly bruise.

PRISCILLA  
What's the meaning of this?

ROGER  
I was just about to assure our boy  
that we did quite well tonight.

PRISCILLA  
That was fun, wasn't it? How much  
did we make?

Roger turns to Andrew.

ROGER  
How did we do, son? Where's the  
money?

PRISCILLA  
I saw him put it in the tree.

Roger turns red in fury.

ROGER  
The tree? Are you fucking kidding  
me?

Roger marches out as everyone follows him.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Roger reaches a tentative hand into the knothole but jerks it back out and acts like something just bit him.

ROGER

Ow! It got me! The monster tree bit  
off my hand!

He makes a dramatic turn to show off his maimed hand, but  
nothing's wrong with it.

He waves and, with a showman's flair, puts it inside the  
knothole and removes a wad of cash.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Yessir, we cleaned up! What did I  
tell you about this place?

ANDREW

You don't see it?

ROGER

See what?

ANDREW

That money's soaked in blood.

Andrew's POV: BLOOD drips from the STACK OF CASH as Roger  
sorts through it in his count.

PRISCILLA

Andrew, save your melodrama for the  
tourists. And stop putting the  
money in the tree.

SUPER: AS THE ALDRICHES CONTINUE WITH THE RENOVATION, THE  
PEOPLE CONTINUE TO COME FROM FAR AND WIDE.

BEGIN MONTAGE

-- A line of people wait to go inside.

-- Andrew glowers as he takes people's money on the porch.

-- In her Southern madame's dress, Priscilla fully plays the  
part. She waves a fan as she sits on the sitting room couch.

-- Susie curtsies in the dining room and twirls about.

-- In the living room, Roger mimes playing the piano and gets  
up to show how people would dance at parties.

-- On the porch, Roger gives Andrew a stern look, and Andrew  
hands over the cash, which Roger counts with glee.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - PORCH - DAY

SUPER: END OF WEEK 2

A line of people gather in a circle about the porch to listen to Andrew give a speech.

His face is paler than normal. He appears to be in a trance.

ANDREW

My name's Meriday. I'm the son of Paris and Venus Mozingo. You know the story of my family. That's why you've come, but I warn you: our tragedy is not for your amusement. There are forces here that will be unshackled if this doesn't stop. Turn away now.

Stunned by the commanding performance, a smattering of hands applaud, followed by an enthusiastic response.

Back in line, people proceed to pay and enter as before.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Roger, Andrew, Priscilla, and Susie gather around the table loaded with fine, Southern food.

Andrew and Susie look at each other: they both see the ghoulish blue tint on the food.

Jerry is already seated.

Roger, who appears to suffer a bout of indigestion, turns to Andrew and Susie.

ROGER

What the fuck's he doing here?

Priscilla gives a mischievous grin.

PRISCILLA

I invited him. I thought it'd be appropriate for your friend and the one who straightened all the paperwork out to be here.

Roger eyes Jerry like some dog wanting to mark its territory.

Jerry gives a polite nod.

Priscilla tugs on Roger's sleeve.

Roger gives in and sits.

Susie's next to Andrew with Jerry by himself on one side.

Jerry appears ill-at-ease--definitely not happy to be here.

Roger raises his wine glass along with Priscilla.

Andrew and Susie see the label on the bottle, "Clay Plantation," and stare at each other like all is lost.

ANDREW

Dad, I don't think you should be drinking--

ROGER

Enough, Andrew! Where're your manners?

(beat)

A toast: to the incredible success of the Aldrich Plantation Tour!

Jerry sets his glass full of wine down.

JERRY

Don't you mean the Clay Plantation Tour?

Roger ignores Jerry's distemper.

ROGER

And Andrew, wow, you surprised us with that last bit. Keep it up. Do that every time. I didn't know you took drama classes.

JERRY

Yes, he was terrific. I have to say, old friend, I didn't expect this--not after our chat. We certainly didn't anticipate it when you signed the papers.

PRISCILLA

What're you getting at?

JERRY

You never said you wanted the rights to exploit the history of the property. Not to mention the right to exploit my people.

PRISCILLA

I don't like your tone, Jerry. I'll have you know we've remodeled this place. I restored all the paintings.

Roger nods his approval at Priscilla and sneers at Jerry.

ANDREW

You don't have the right to do any of this.

Priscilla glares at Andrew whose expression looks nothing like his own.

ROGER

Whoah now, your acting, we said, is top shelf, but take it down a notch, method actor.

JERRY

Roger, I think we can discuss this amicably. I can help you with the license you'll need if you, first of all, chill out on the white supremacist bullshit, and then cut me in for 25% with my proceeds going to the NAACP.

ROGER

25%? Are you crazy?

Roger chokes as he drinks wine and spits some out.

JERRY

Think about how your actions can benefit or hurt Andrew and Susie.

Roger grabs a glass from the overhead cupboard, and when he turns the faucet on, out come BLOODIED LEAVES AND BARK.

ROGER

For fuck's sake! Jerry, you never got rid of that tree like I told you to.

Roger takes a BLOODIED BRANCH out and studies it.

ROGER (CONT'D)

This is your fault!

He flings the BLOODIED BRANCH on the table before Jerry.



Andrew sings a hymn as the argument escalates. He repeats the refrain as they talk.

ANDREW

"Steal away to Jesus./Steal away,  
steal away home!/I ain't got long  
to stay here."

Andrew's out-of-character singing creeps Susie out.

Jerry gets up to confront Roger.

JERRY

You know what your problem is,  
Roger?

ROGER

Let me guess: you're gonna fucking  
tell me.

The two men are in each other's faces.

JERRY

Your problem is you don't  
appreciate others like me who try  
to help you.

Roger wipes the sweat from his brow and down to his neck.

The rash has spread to almost completely cover it.

His voice shifts from here on out to sound like Marcus Clay.

ROGER

You're just the help! Don't you  
see?

Andrew still sings. Susie hits his arm, and Andrew slaps her.

Shocked and hurt, she puts a hand to her face.

Andrew, who doesn't miss a beat, sings on in the background.  
He repeats the refrain as the scene goes on.

ANDREW

"My Lord calls me! He calls me by  
the thunder!/The trumpet sound it  
in my soul!/I ain't got long to  
stay here."

JERRY

Why, you ungrateful son of a bitch!

Jerry grapples with Roger.

THUNDER BOOMS from outside.

Roger, bigger, easily subdues Jerry, and hovers over him.

Roger punches Jerry in the face.

THUNDER BOOMS again as Andrew continues to sing.

Jerry kicks Roger in the knee and Roger collapses.

ROGER

Ow, you fucking cock-sucking  
asshole of a motherfucker!

THUNDER BOOMS again as Andrew sings.

PRISCILLA

Get out of my house, Jerry! Get out  
now before I call the police.

Jerry wipes his bloodied hands, stands, and collects himself.

ANDREW

"He calls me by the lightning!/The  
trumpet sound it in my soul!/I  
ain't got long to stay here!"

JERRY

I finally see you for who you are,  
Roger.

Jerry bolts for the door but swings back around.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Look at what's happening to your  
kids! Forget about my offer. The  
last advice I'll give to you is get  
the hell out.

From the floor, Roger makes a pathetic lunge as he pulls  
himself up with the help of a chair.

Jerry shakes his head and strolls out the door.

Roger hobbles, chair by chair, over to where Andrew sits and  
continues to sing.

THUNDER BOOMS.

Roger reaches for the journal on the table before Andrew.

After a brief tug-of-war game, Roger wrenches it away.

Andrew sings, unimpeded, as Roger exits the dining room and lurches toward the sitting room.

The others follow as Andrew sings on.

INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Roger hurls the journal into the blazing fireplace.

He rushes over to Andrew with his hand raised.

Andrew grows mute as the flames consume the journal.

Roger stops his hand before it strikes Andrew.

THUNDER BOOMS.

Priscilla sees how pale and sickly her son appears.

She puts a hand on his forehead and caresses his cheek.

PRISCILLA

You've got a fever. How're you  
feeling?

ANDREW

Like myself again.

INT. PRIMARY BEDROOM - NIGHT

The storm rages outside. The wind blows the tree branches against the house.

VOICES SCREAM with each STRIKE OF A WHIP.

In bed, Priscilla holds Roger like he's a life preserver.

He pretends to sleep and stubbornly faces the other way to ignore his wife.

PRISCILLA

Do you hear that?

ROGER

Hear what?

PRISCILLA

You can't tell me you don't hear  
that.

He finally turns to face her.

There's a RIPPING SOUND as the curtains, as if with one good yank, are cast to the floor.

Priscilla screams.

ROGER  
I'll just sleep in the sitting  
room.

He starts to get up, but she tugs on his arm.

PRISCILLA  
Oh no you don't! That's where I'm  
sleeping.

She takes the blanket with her into the sitting room.

He shakes his head and moves over to the curtain-less window.

He glares at the tree and gives it the middle finger.

Behind him a SHADOW appears: a ROPE PLACED AROUND HIS NECK.

INT. SUSIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susie gets out of her bed and opens her door a crack.

SUSIE  
Andrew? Are you there?

She waits a moment and gets back under covers.

She tosses and turns in her bed.

THUNDER BOOMS and LIGHTNING FLASHES.

Her curtains also lie on the floor.

Susie turns and, with a start, sees Andrew as she gathers her blanket about her and sits up.

SUSIE (CONT'D)  
Why did you do that? You're not  
back to your old self, are you,  
with your experimental cockroaches?

He shakes his head and cracks a smile.

ANDREW  
It's just me. Not the old or the...

SUSIE

What the fuck was going on with you earlier?

His eyes sunken, he draws closer.

ANDREW

I felt another presence crawling around inside me.

SUSIE

Meriday.

ANDREW

Was I singing?

She laughs.

SUSIE

Pretty good, no cap. That did not sound like you.

He laughs.

ANDREW

I can't sing for shit.

Her laughter turns to crying.

He grabs a couple of tissues from a box on her night stand and hands them to her.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I keep thinking about Meriday's story and how it's...

SUSIE

Unfinished. Me, too. Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?

ANDREW

We have to find that wine cellar.

SUSIE

But even if we did, Dad threw Meriday's journal into the fire.

Andrew holds up his own journal.

ANDREW

After tonight, we both know there's an undeniable connection between us.

SUSIE

I'm not sure if that's smart, TBH.

He takes her hand.

ANDREW

It's the only way.

She nods.

SUSIE

But, after all the remodeling we've been doing, we still haven't found it.

ANDREW

I might have an idea.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Susie flips on the lights.

Andrew guides her to the northeast corner where he gets on his knees to feel around the baseboard.

ANDREW

When we painted this room, I noticed the baseboard was sticking out right around... Here!

He tugs on it, but it only budges enough to show a crack.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

The seam is sealed. We'll have to get some tools.

SUPER: SEVERAL MINUTES LATER...

Susie and Andrew chip away with hammer and chisel at the thin layer of wallpaper, and together, they pry open a door.

They see steps that lead to a dark place.

Turning to each other, they sense it's supercharged with a mysterious energy that must be explored, though it's scary.

Susie grabs a flashlight from a drawer, and they head down.

INT. HIDDEN WINE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

In the dusty, six feet by six feet room, Andrew and Susie gawk at the rows of wine bottles in the cellar.

Andrew holds his journal up, and Susie nods.

The journal almost flies open, as if by its own volition, and INKS a BLANK PAGE.

FLASHBACK EXT./INT. WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

Hany and Meriday descend the steps.

He stares in wonder at all the bottles of wine.

MERIDAY  
How will them white people ever  
drink all those?

HANY  
They sit around so much, they got  
time for that.

She looks around.

MERIDAY  
How do you know which bottle she  
wants?

She shrugs.

HANY  
All that matters is that we have  
something.

She reaches for a random bottle of red wine.

When she pulls it out, the wine rack budes.

MERIDAY  
I thought that was gonna fall on  
our heads.

HANY  
Let's get outta here.

EXT./INT. SWAMPY WOODS SHACK - NIGHT

The shack looks like something out of a twisted fairy tale.  
It blends in with the trees and swampy water and its fauna.

Vines twist about the shabby wooden structure like it's been  
claimed by the swamp.

Meriday scans the area with his lantern raised, Hany by his  
side. They squint until they find the shack.

They stumble toward it as their feet sink in the soggy earth, and the roots and vines almost trip them up.

MERIDAY (V.O.)

I wondered how this voodoo priestess would know we were there, but Hany told me our lantern would draw the old woman of the swamp out.

Meriday wields his lantern up like a cross and keeps something else behind his back.

He steps into the shack and glances around and over his shoulder as Hany follows him.

INT. VODOO SHACK - NIGHT

The pelts of various animals hang on the wooden walls.

Lit candles occupy much of the space.

Different-sized clay jugs hang from ropes.

Vials of fluids and bottles of ingredients of dubious origin surround a human skull on a central table.

CHICKENS CLUCK from somewhere behind the table.

The VODOO PRIESTESS is a woman with dreadlocks and a brown canvas dress decorated with skulls.

She beams a welcoming smile and beckons with her waving hand.

VOODOO PRIESTESS

So, child, it has come to pass.  
Sorry it is so. I see you brought your brother.

The Voodoo Priestess holds out her hand for payment.

From behind his back, Meriday pulls out the bottle of wine they stole from their master and gives it to her.

VOODOO PRIESTESS (CONT'D)

And did you bring an object of sentimental attachment?

MERIDAY (V.O.)

There was so much I was unaware of, but clearly, my older sister knew what would happen before it did.



HANY

I had my brother bring his journal.  
He puts his soul into that book.

Meriday relinquishes his journal to the Voodoo Priestess.

VOODOO PRIESTESS

This should work. Now children, put  
out your palms.

The Voodoo Priestess grasps a butcher's blade.

With one motion, she sweeps it behind her and twists back  
around with a chicken held by the neck.

She flashes an unsettling smile to reveal a few golden teeth  
and screeches as she slashes the chicken's head off.

She draws close to Hany and Meriday with the chicken head in  
one hand and the blood-stained blade in the other.

Meriday backs up.

Hany grabs his hand and urges him to present his open palm.

The Voodoo Priestess slices Hany's and Meriday's palms.

She allows blood from the chicken head to mix with theirs.

The Voodoo Priestess reaches around, takes Meriday's journal  
from the table, and opens it.

She soaks the pages with blood from the chicken along with  
that of Hany's and Meriday's intertwined palms.

MERIDAY (V.O.)

The Voodoo Priestess then chanted,  
"For those who wish--"

END FLASHBACK

INT. HIDDEN WINE CELLAR - NIGHT

A RUMBLING SOUND issues from everywhere in the tight space.

MERIDAY (O.S.)

Run! Get outta here!

An INVISIBLE FORCE, like a wind with unintelligible form,  
zooms about the tiny room.

The wine racks all around shake.

Andrew grabs Susie's hand.

They rush up the wooden steps as the wine racks collapse.

The GHOST OF MARCUS CLAY stands at the bottom of the steps with a look of fury and disappointment.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Susie secures the secret door and sighs.

SUSIE

That was close. I don't think Meriday wanted you to finish reading that.

ANDREW

That tells you something about the power of the curse.

SUSIE

We're getting closer to figuring all this out.

ANDREW

Let me show you something on my phone. I took pictures of all the pages in Meriday's journal.

SUSIE

Do all of them have the name Isaac on them?

ANDREW

Yeah, and look at what happened when I pieced together all the pages.

She gazes in awe at the image formed when all the watermark lines at the edges of the pages come together.

SUSIE

It's like a puzzle. This is someone's face.

ANDREW

Isaac's. I had a hunch, knowing this property has ties to our family, and this was what I found in my research.

She's gobsmacked as she stares at his cell phone.

It's the face drawn in the journal, and it's in an article about mixed heritage between enslaved folk and their masters.

SUSIE

Isaac Aldridge? He resembles Dad's great grandfather--like they're related. The plantation was passed down to him from his mother. But she was a Clay. Rosamond Clay. Aldridge is close to Aldrich.

ANDREW

I heard how immigrants changed their last names a lot. But I'm thinking this time, it was changed--

SUSIE

Out of shame due to the history. Okay, why was she a Clay, but her child was an Aldridge and not a Mozingo?

Some realization dawns on her.

ANDREW

Rosamond gave up her child, born from raping an enslaved person, to another family for adoption. Then, later in life out of guilt, she passed the property down to her son she'd put up for adoption.

SUSIE

How do you know?

He shows her a picture drawn in the journal that depicts a scene suggesting a white woman jumped on her slave.

This is followed by a newborn being handed off to someone.

She grasps her brother tighter.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

Holy shit! That would mean Dad's--

ANDREW

Descended from a slave. He's got black blood in him.

SUSIE

We've got black blood in us.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A chipped-up wooden table, a relic from the time of slavery, is pushed against the wall.

Old-style pots and pans hang from the wall to the side.

The electric lights are off, the only light coming from an antique lantern.

Roger drinks straight from a bottle of wine at the table.

The label, "Clay Plantation," looks yellowed and worn and has a sheen of dust.

Already drunk, he mumbles to himself.

ROGER

You don't appreciate people like me  
who try to help you. Well, help  
yourself Jerry to a big fuck you!

He takes another big swig and sees the SHADOW OF A WOMAN cast on the wall. He rubs his eyes.

He stands up and shadow boxes with the SHADOW.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I'm better than you, and you better  
know your place!

He hears the SHARPENING OF A BLADE from behind him.

He feels the nick of a knife, yells, and whips around.

There floats VENUS MOZINGO: a SHIMMERING SILHOUETTE darker than the darkness.

She points a BLADE SHAPE at him and makes a motion as if to cut his throat.

He raises the lantern to better see her, and she vanishes with a WHOOSH of cold air.

He shivers and feels a drop of blood from his neck.

Shocked to see a knife in his hands, he lays it on the table.

In the light of the lantern, complete terror fills his eyes.

INT. SITTING ROOM - MORNING

Roger's in a fetal position by the couch against the wall.

Priscilla looms over him.

PRISCILLA  
Get up, Roger!

ROGER  
I'm going back to sleep.

PRISCILLA  
We've got people outside waiting  
for us. Customers. Waiting for you.

He hears a KNOCK as people call to be let in.

ROGER  
We can't keep doing this. I can't.

He stumbles in the direction of the primary bedroom.

She runs to block his way.

PRISCILLA  
We're not going to stop making  
lemonade from lemons. And I still  
don't have my magazine spread.

He lets that sink in and shrugs.

ROGER  
They want a show? I'll give them a  
show.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Roger leads different groups around.

With each mimed display, he grows more and more erratic--all  
from a GHOST'S POV as we time-lapse from morning to night.

-- Outside by the oak tree, Roger mimes how Andrew took the  
journal from the knothole.

-- Roger mimes how the Caucasian Worker's head got twisted  
around when he tried to saw off a branch.

-- In the primary bedroom, Roger points to the curtains on  
the floor and how they fell and how the trees smacked the  
window and wall to create a sound like there was a whipping.

-- In the living room, Roger dramatizes how he's seen ghostly  
dancing figures while a ghostly boy plays piano.

END MONTAGE

INT. JERRY'S HOME - OFFICE - DAY

Jerry's office is a cozy place with pictures of him and his wife everywhere--it stands out how they don't have kids.

At his desk, Jerry flips through pictures on his phone from four years ago when Roger and his family visited.

Susie, at 12 years old, appears so innocent--just a sweet, happy kid in front of the water slide park sign.

Andrew, eight, brims over with joy as he gazes at the older sister he clearly loves.

Jerry sighs, comes to a decision, and makes a call.

JERRY

Mr. Helms, it's me--Jerry  
Fullmouth.

DRAYMOND (O.S.)

Mr. Fullmouth, nice timing. I am  
about to head out to Clay  
Plantation.

JERRY

Don't go. Just let the authorities  
do their job.

DRAYMOND (O.S.)

Mr. Fullmouth, I wish to proceed  
with the paperwork as soon as  
practicable. The authorities are  
only needed as a backup to put some  
teeth into the injunction, as they  
say.

JERRY

Put some teeth into it, huh... Mr.  
Helms, I've known Roger for a long  
time.

DRAYMOND (O.S.)

You've regaled me with stories of  
your high school years together.

JERRY

And I did that to remind myself as  
much as tell you of who Roger  
Aldrich is versus what he has  
become.

DRAYMOND (O.S.)  
Are you buying into the local  
superstitions, Mr. Fullmouth?

JERRY  
All I can say is, the last time I  
saw Roger, he was not himself. I  
could see it in his eyes.

There's silence on the other end of the phone call and then  
an exhaled breath.

DRAYMOND (O.S.)  
It may be hard to do, but perhaps  
you should realize you never knew  
the man. You didn't know what he  
was capable of, but I think the  
evidence was there all along.

JERRY  
Mr. Helms, I'm telling you--

DRAYMOND (O.S.)  
Goodbye, Mr. Fullmouth.

The call ends, leaving Jerry staring as if at ghosts.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roger mimes drinking from a bottle of wine.

He sees the shadow and boxes it.

He witnesses a dark form with a shadowy blade.

ROGER  
And then I felt a drop of blood  
coming from my neck, and the figure  
vanished with a rush of cold air.

Roger's full of sweat, and his eyes blink back their sting.

His hair's a wild tangle, and he can't stop shaking.

The CROWD OF FIVE applaud, which angers Roger.

ROGER (CONT'D)  
Get the fuck out of my house! Get  
out now before I throw you all out  
one by one!

The crowd's applause grows louder, with even a few whistles.

They all file out.

Roger heads to the kitchen, but Priscilla grabs his arm.

She whispers in his ear in a different, sexy voice.

PRISCILLA

You did well, honey. Nothing's  
going to stop us from making Clay  
Plantation immortal.

They stare at each other like they're about to screw.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roger and Priscilla prepare to take trays of food into the  
dining room as DRAYMOND HELMS marches into the kitchen.

Draymond is a well-dressed and steely-eyed African-American.

Roger gives him the stink-eye and stomps up to him.

ROGER

We're not hiring a butler.

DRAYMOND

I'm not here seeking--

ROGER

I know who you are. My so-called  
friend said you're from the NAACP.  
Well, I'm from the U.S. of A.

Draymond gives him a tight smile and shakes his head.

ROGER (CONT'D)

I've already had this discussion  
with Jerry about your illegal  
licenses.

DRAYMOND

You should've listened to your  
friend's legal advice. I've  
contacted law enforcement.

Roger looks like a drowning man who gulps for oxygen.

Unseen, Priscilla lurks from behind the doorway.

ROGER

After all I did for that son of a  
bitch... Jerry thinks he's gonna  
take me down.



Roger hardens his facial features as Priscilla creeps up behind Draymond with something behind her back.

DRAYMOND

You brought yourself down to the  
scummy level of your ancestors!

A SHADOW hovers above Roger and takes over his form as he shivers in discomfort followed by pleasure.

ROGER

I am my ancestor, you black fuck!  
The name's Marcus Clay.

A similar SHADOW hovers and overtakes Priscilla as she leaps on Draymond's back.

She straddles him, her legs wrapped around him.

Draymond struggles and tries to back her up against the wall.

But she slashes his neck with her butcher's blade.

Draymond falls back, his eyes glazed with surprise and the BLOODY WOUND on his neck a GRIM SMILE.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

At the doorway to the kitchen, Susie and Andrew look to each other in uncomprehending horror.

SUSIE

We have to get out of here!

She turns to run, but he grabs her arm.

ANDREW

Let's get where they can't hear us.

He leads her to the foyer.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Susie trembles like she's lost all control of her body.

Andrew, by comparison, is calmer.

SUSIE

What're we waiting for? Let's run!

ANDREW

To where? I say we call the police,  
but before they get here, we have  
to pretend like we don't know.

SUSIE

Like everything's normal?

He nods and calls the police.

ANDREW

Come to Clay Plantation as quickly  
as you can. There's been a murder.

(beat)

She used to be my mother.

He stifles his tears, tucks his journal into the back of his  
pants, and heads up the stairs.

SUSIE

Where're you going?

ANDREW

To get something of Dad's.  
Something we might need.

His aggressive, almost violent look startles her as he whips  
around and dashes up the rest of the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Roger stares in awe at Priscilla.

PRISCILLA

Don't say a word. Just grab his  
feet and help me move him into the  
pantry closet.

He does so, and they carry the body there.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Andrew and Susie act as normal and calm as possible sitting  
across from each other at the table.

It's filled with enough food to make a fine feast.

Priscilla grins like she's hosting a dinner party.

An overly cheerful Roger presides at the head.

ROGER

What a magnificent spread, if I do  
say so myself. A fine feast is  
called for on this special  
occasion.

Priscilla nods with regality.

SUSIE

Why're you acting like that, Dad?

Andrew gives her a look to stop it.

Roger's creepy smile portends something evil is afoot.

Susie can't contain herself.

SUSIE (CONT'D)

Are you drunk or just plain cray  
cray?

ANDREW

Susie, don't!

Roger rises and gives his daughter a menacing look.

PRISCILLA

My, my, what spicy children we  
have!

ROGER

Darling, eat your chicken 'n  
dumplings. They're mighty good!

THUNDER BOOMS as another storm starts up.

SUSIE

I'm not hungry.

ROGER

Daddy worked hard preparing this  
meal.

Roger puts a hand on Susie's shoulder to shove her back down  
in her seat.

SUSIE

Stop, Daddy!

ROGER

Stop, Daddy? You will learn your  
manners and your place, young lady.

PRISCILLA

Why, yes, indeed! You're due for a grand Debutante ball. The grandest of them all!

THUNDER RATTLES the walls.

A CREAKING and CRUNCHING can be heard as the oak tree's roots get a firmer grip of the house.

Priscilla sets the BUTCHER'S BLADE from earlier at the corner of the table with evil in her eyes.

Susie sees this as Priscilla narrows her eyes in a taunt.

ANDREW

Debutante ball? Mom, what're you talking about? Wake up! You're not like this. You don't do things like...

ROGER

Like what? I think both of you've been sneaking around spying on us. Did you see what your mother did?

Susie eyes the butcher's blade as does Priscilla.

Susie makes a quick move to snatch it up.

Priscilla is quicker.

She wields as if awaiting all her life for this moment.

Andrew pulls out Roger's gun.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Oh ho! Tricky, sneaky Andrew! You going to shoot your father?

Roger takes a few steps toward Andrew.

Andrew waves the gun like he's about to shoot.

Roger stops moving.

ANDREW

Just listen, Dad. I know you're still in there. We've been ignoring our black ancestry.

Andrew nods at Roger.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
Yes, our black ancestry.

Roger appears stunned but bursts into laughter.

SUSIE  
It's true, Dad. We've got black  
blood in us.

ANDREW  
Your great grandfather's related  
somehow to Isaac who was the  
product of rape: Rosamond Clay's  
rape of Paris Mozingo.

ROGER  
Don't talk to me in that way, boy,  
and not about that.

PRISCILLA  
That slave looked at me like he was  
a child in a candy store.

Priscilla takes a swipe with her blade and nearly misses  
Susie who ducks under and gets on her other side.

Andrew moves into position as he aims his gun so Susie can  
get behind him.

After he gestures for her to, she does so.

Roger and Priscilla, side by side, advance toward Andrew and  
Susie and push them into the foyer.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Andrew fires the gun.

The BULLET RICOCHETS off the ceiling--far from its target.

Roger laughs.

The GHOST OF VENUS MOZINGO appears as a SILKY BLACK  
SILHOUETTE at the front door.

She repeats the motion of opening the door to welcome guests.

The door opens and shuts to let in the cold breeze and rain.

The ghost distracts Andrew.

Roger rushes up to him and grabs the gun.

At the same time, as Susie's distracted, Priscilla slashes at Susie and SLICES OPEN HER RIGHT ARM as she cries out in pain.

Susie runs out the front door. Priscilla pursues her.

Roger chases Andrew into the sitting room.

INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

The GHOST OF HANY swirls around and shows how she offers white guests a TRAY WITH CHOCOLATES.

A WHITE GUEST smiles at her, but she doesn't respond.

Her MASTER WHIPS HER.

ANDREW

Dad, it's me! Remember when we used  
to go to those water parks?

For a moment, Roger seems to remember.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - NIGHT

Susie faces her mother who waves the blade around.

SUSIE

Mom, hello? Wake up! I'm Susie.

PRISCILLA

I couldn't help it. They walk  
around like sin on two legs. They  
awaken our darkest desires--our  
savage desires.

INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Roger fires his gun and just misses Andrew's shoulder.

Andrew flees into the living room as his father hunts him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The GHOST OF MERIDAY plays the piano.

The GHOST OF VENUS SCATS A MELODY.

ROGER

I acted too kindly to my slaves,  
and look at what I got in return.  
(MORE)

ROGER (CONT'D)

After I gave them jobs on top of  
room and board!

ANDREW

It was your wife. She seduced Paris  
and then got caught.

This affects Roger at first, but he shrugs it off.

The GHOST OF PARIS appears before Roger and pleads with him.

The GHOST MOUTHS that it's true and lunges for him.

Roger shoots downward at the Ghost.

The bullet zips right through him--

THUNK! It hits Andrew in the leg. He screams out in pain.

Andrew limps near the door to the foyer and by the piano.

The GHOST OF MERIDAY looks straight at Andrew and nods as if  
to say Andrew knows what must be done.

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION - NIGHT

A strong wind blows as rain falls in a steady flow as POLICE  
SIRENS draw near.

Susie makes a run for it but trips over a TREE LIMB that lies  
on the ground.

Priscilla advances with her blade held high.

SUSIE

Mom, it's this place. We need to  
leave.

Her daughter's words have struck a nerve as Priscilla squints  
at the blade in her hand.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Andrew stands before the front door that the GHOST OF VENUS  
continually opens and closes.

LIGHTNING FLASHES behind him as RAIN and TREE LEAVES and  
TWIGS get inside.

Andrew retrieves his journal from the back of his pants.

He flips through the pages frantically as Roger bursts through the door from the living room.

Roger holds up his gun and aims it when Andrew throws a stick at Roger and hits him in the eye.

Andrew has now found the page he needs.

ANDREW

For those who wish to harm  
Mozingos,/They will reap all that  
this sows,/The deep and tangled web  
of roots,/Will strangle those who  
try forsooth...

EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - NIGHT

The rain pours harder as Priscilla and Susie get soaked.

With her mother distracted and more like herself, Susie heaves a tree limb at Priscilla.

Priscilla falls and cries out as Susie scrambles for the blade that drops to the ground.

Priscilla reaches for the blade but lets Susie grab it first.

With blade in hand, Susie looks down on her pathetic mother.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Roger twitches in pain as BLOOD POURS from his WOUNDED EYE.

ANDREW

To separate them from their  
bond,/Those foolish souls will soon  
be gone.

THUNDER ECHOES, and the whole house shakes as a horrible CREAKING SOUND comes from everywhere.

Roger regroups and gets ready to pounce as a SCREAM from outside throws him off guard and alerts Andrew.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Susie?

Andrew limps through the front door as it opens again.



EXT. CLAY PLANTATION MANSION - NIGHT

Andrew watches his sister stand over his mother with a BLADE.

Susie hesitates to strike down with it.

Susie and Andrew face each other and shriek in horror.

The TRANSFORMED OAK TREE picks up their mother with its BRANCHES like she's a rag doll.

She gapes at her children.

PRISCILLA

For reals?

It feeds her through the KNOTHOLE which has become a LARGE, HIDEOUS MOUTH with JAGGED TEETH.

THUNDER GROANS and LIGHTNING IGNITES as again the house SHAKES and CREEKS as if a hand tightens its grip.

Paralysis seizes Susie and Andrew in their fear and sorrow.

Roger stands outside the front door, his gun on Andrew.

SUSIE

Daddy, stop this now! Wake up. It's us, your family.

ROGER

You speak about family but want to throw away tradition. Your roots are deep, young lady--they are inescapable!

THUNDER HOWLS and LIGHTNING SIZZLES.

There are horrible CREAKING SOUNDS.

The whole building's the plaything of a giant invisible hand.

SIRENS approach from a distance.

The OAK TREE has been transformed into a LIVING MONSTER.

BLOOD OZZES from its KNOTHOLE which has widened into the terrifying GRIMACE of a JAGGED-TOOTHED CREATURE.

Its bark contains the LASH MARKS of a slave master's whip.

High up, TWO WORN GROOVES open to reveal FIERY EYES.

What makes Andrew scream, though, is the FACIAL IMPRESSION of his MOTHER in the trunk's belly.

It's pressed against the semi-pliant wood in a desperate plea to get out.

THUNDER BELLOWS and LIGHTNING ILLUMINATES the face of Roger.

He staggers closer to Andrew with his gun.

His damaged eye impedes his vision.

He has an awful grin as the rain continues to fall in sheets.

Susie still wields the blade she got after her mother fell.

She points it toward her father.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Look at you two--sticking up for each other.

Roger starts to squeeze his gun's trigger.

Susie slashes his gun-holding arm.

The gun flies a few feet and lands before the tree.

ROGER (CONT'D)

You two are full of surprises. I'm proud of you. You, Andrew, with your tall tale about us having black roots.

ANDREW

Dad, if you think about it, we're all related in one way or another.

Roger laughs like that's the funniest joke he's ever heard.

He grabs the gun and stands before the monstrous oak tree.

At first scared and ready to run, he grimaces at the tree.

ROGER

What're you waiting for, you fucking tree? There are two classes in this world. Masters and their--

The tree extends the branch with the tire swing and flings the rope so it wraps around Roger's neck as he hangs.

His feet kick as he fights for his life.

The tree lashes a branch around Roger's waist and reels him in with slow, delighted deliberation.

Roger's eyes and mouth open in a terrified, silent scream.

The tree reveals its awful mouth, with WORMS and MAGGOTS that crawl and fly all about, and takes Roger's body inside it.

The tree chomps with relish.

Andrew and Susie close their eyes in anticipation.

There's a HUGE RUMBLING SOUND as the GROUND TREMBLES.

An AWFUL CRACKING SOUND issues.

The mansion falls into a sinkhole.

They open their eyes to see a hole where the mansion stood.

The oak tree transforms back to a regular tree with only a hint of blood and malice.

There's a RED TINGE throughout and many MARKS, like scars, on its limbs.

Police cars pull up, their sirens turned off while their lights still flash.

POLICEMAN #1 surveys the scene in disbelief.

POLICEMAN #1  
What in blazes happened here?

He speaks into his walkie-talkie.

POLICEMAN #1 (CONT'D)  
We need an ambulance out at Clay  
Plantation.

POLICEMAN #2 approaches Andrew and Susie.

He bends down to talk to them.

POLICEMAN #2  
Are you okay, kids? Can you hear  
me?

Andrew and Susie gawk as, from the top of the oak tree, they see FOUR SWIRLING FIGURES.

They are so intermingled as to almost seem like a distortion of the air or an illusion for the eye.

They ascend up in the sky.

Andrew waves and addresses someone who's not there.

ANDREW  
Goodbye, Meriday.

The policemen turn to each other in confusion and concern.

Jerry comes onto the scene and stands off to the side.

Policeman #2 gently taps Andrew's shoulder.

POLICEMAN #2  
Where are your parents? Were they  
in the house?

ANDREW  
My parents? They were long gone  
before that. Before I met Meriday.

Andrew's own words sink in, and he's devastated.

Susie takes his hand, and he gives her a crushing embrace  
that makes her melt.

She spots Jerry who is a welcome sight for their sad eyes.

SUSIE  
Jerry?

Jerry moves closer to Andrew and Susie.

JERRY  
I came as soon as I could.

Jerry, stunned, takes in the view of the hole where the  
mansion once stood.

He looks with compassion upon Andrew and Susie.

JERRY (CONT'D)  
I'm so sorry.

ANDREW  
How can we ever forget...?

JERRY  
Forget the horrors, but remember  
the sins that led your parents  
here. There is evil lying at the  
root of every human heart.

SUSIE

So, you're saying this place didn't  
make them do what they did?

JERRY

There's no telling what we're  
capable of--racism is a disease  
that may lie dormant, but give it a  
little water and it'll blossom into  
a tree most foul.

Andrew stares at the giant hole they briefly called home.

ANDREW

Where're Susie and I going to go?

Jerry gets an idea that lights up his face.

JERRY

How about you come stay with Uncle  
Jerry?

ANDREW

But am I... foul to you?

JERRY

I only see the best of your parents  
in both of you.

Andrew smiles, and Jerry puts an arm around him.

Jerry looks to Susie who seems paralyzed.

JERRY (CONT'D)

How does that sound to you, Susie?  
You think you could live with Uncle  
Jerry?

She smiles and gets on Jerry's other side.

SUSIE

That wouldn't suck.

Emotions overtake her as she hugs Jerry with abandon.

The AMBULANCE'S SIREN approaches as the rain stops.

The sky clears to reveal a FULL MOON behind the giant oak  
tree that stands by the hole where Clay Mansion once stood.

FADE TO BLACK.

**THE END.**