

COTTON GIRL

Written by  
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FADE IN:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A grueling summer heat bakes a small one room classroom.

SUPER: BIRMINGHAM ALABAMA 1840

The schoolhouse TEACHER stands before her chalkboard. She translates words from Latin to English and writes "bombicis puella" on the board.

TEACHER  
Cotton girl.

A teenage boy, ELIJAH BENNET, gazing out the window turns to the teacher at the sound of the words.

TEACHER (CONT'D)  
Bombicis puella. It translates as  
Cotton girl in English. Say it with  
me.

The class repeats in unison.

CLASS  
Bombicis puella

ELIJAH  
(whispering to self)  
Pepper.

Elijah turns back to the window outside.

Across the deserted schoolyard, is a major cotton field.

African worker slaves migrate from the field to take shelter under big trees which line the fenced property.

A Caucasian WOMAN in her 40s rides horseback. Behind her, two slaves carry a whiskey barrel. The woman supervises with a stern face as slaves pass out canteens of water to the workers.

Elijah is surprised by the woman's generosity. He studies the act of kindness when suddenly his desk is whipped by a wooden ruler.

TEACHER  
Mr. Bennet, is there something more  
important than your lessons?

ELIJAH

No ma'am.

TEACHER

Then pay attention or I shall have  
to contact your father.

Elijah looks out the window one last time before he picks up his writing pencil.

INT. GOLDMAN'S SHOP - DAY

Elijah pushes through the door of an overstuffed, pathetic thrift store. Every wall covered with everything from horse saddles to candlesticks. It would take any man years to discover it all.

Elijah gazes over the piles of junk. He inspects the tag of a broken chair. The tag reads "\$5." He cringes at the outrageous price.

He moves to a glass case which held what could be passed off as "valuable." He surveys the many jewelry pieces until his eyes fall upon a small pearl bracelet. He smiles.

An old man, MR. GOLDMAN, staggers to the glass case. He chews hard on his gums.

MR. GOLDMAN

You gonna buy somethin', boy?

Elijah nods and points at the bracelet.

MR. GOLDMAN (CONT'D)

Three dollars.

Elijah frowns.

ELIJAH

I don't have that much, sir.

Mr. Goldman snorts.

MR. GOLDMAN

No money. No sale.

A younger man comes from behind Goldman. It's his son GARY,  
30.

GARY

What my pa means, is that he'll  
take whatever you got.

MR. GOLDMAN  
Gary, stay out my business!

GARY  
Don't mind my pa. He's the only one  
round here thinks this junk is  
worth anythin'. So what's it gonna  
be?

Elijah digs in his pockets. He presents fifty cents.

ELIJAH  
It's my whole allowance, sir. It's  
all I have.

GARY  
We'll take it.

Gary takes the money and gives Elijah the bracelet.

EXT. BENNET'S PLANTATION - DAY

Elijah walks a long path to a massive two-story plantation house painted bright white with ocean blue trimming and shutters.

African slaves of every age walk about the land. The majority of slaves work the cotton field. More handsome slaves tend to the cleanliness of the home. The elders of the slaves pull trash from wagon loads of cotton.

On the grand porch of the home stands a Caucasian woman dressed in the best fashion, a floral petticoat with her shoulders bare.

She is MRS. BENNET, 40, a woman of great pride and isn't afraid to show it. She sports her thick dress despite her drenched skin, a Japanese fan whip wildly in her hand to keep her cool.

She smiles at Elijah as he comes to her.

MRS. BENNET  
My dear boy. How was your lesson?

ELIJAH  
Very well mother, we learned more  
Latin.

Mrs. Bennet's joy turns sour.

MRS. BENNET

I can't understand why they  
continue to teach a dying language.  
English is the only language that  
matters in this country.

ELIJAH

Mother, may I read by the river  
today?

MRS. BENNET

What about your assignments?

ELIJAH

Just some reading is all. May I?

MRS. BENNET

I suppose you can. Be home in time  
for supper, please.

ELIJAH

Yes, ma'am.

Elijah bolts from the steps and whips the corner around the house.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY

Elijah strolls along the edge of a massive cotton field.

He spots his father, an overweight MR. BENNET, late 40s, on horseback. He treads between rows of cotton. His shirt soaked with sweat. He sports a hateful snarl on his face.

At the other end of the field, Mr. Bennet's right-hand man JOHN, 30, a young trouble-thirsty lad, trots about the field in desperate search for any misconduct from the slaves.

Elijah hides out of sight. He peeps above the cotton in search of a face. At last, he finds her...

A teenage African slave with rusty wild brown hair and skin dark from the sun's exposure picks tirelessly at the cotton. The slave is PEPPER.

Elijah gaze at her as if it were his first time seeing her. A dreamy look flows across his face. He grips the fence which separates the field from the rest of the plantation.

Elijah flashbacks.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. BENNET'S HOME - DAY (1833)

Elijah is about six-year-old. He is bound to his mother's dress.

Before him, stand a frightened six year old KIYATA. Her light brown cat eyes noticeable even in dim light. Her skin a caramel color and her hair braided to her scalp.

MRS. BENNET  
It's okay Elijah. She's yours to  
own. Come here Kiyata.

Elijah looks up at his mother then back at Kiyata.

ELIJAH  
Is that her name?

MRS. BENNET  
It was.

ELIJAH  
Can I name her?

MRS. BENNET  
Yes you can. What will you name  
her?

Elijah breaks from his mother's dress. He approaches the trembling slave.

Elijah leans forward to whisper.

ELIJAH  
Don't be afraid.

Kiyata stares. She doesn't understand him.

Elijah grins at her then turn to his mother.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Her name is Pepper.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - EVENING

The slaves retire for the evening. They limp to their quarters to rest.

Elijah hides. As Pepper approach, he catches her eye and signals her to follow him.

EXT. RIVER - EVENING

The sun is close to setting. Pepper sits on the ground. She stares at the calm river.

Elijah, sitting next to Pepper, reads a book aloud. He closes the book mid-sentence.

ELIJAH  
Pepper? Do you like me?

Pepper stares at Elijah. She nods.

Elijah takes Pepper's hand in his. Pepper is alert but doesn't snatch away.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
When I get older, I will go the  
university in the North and become  
a businessman. Will you wait for  
me?

Pepper nods again.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
When I come back I want us to get  
married and live up North. Will you  
come with me?

Pepper frowns. She looks in the direction of the other slaves.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Oh, don't worry Pepper. I will free  
them too. All of them.

Pepper smiles but says nothing.

Elijah pulls the pearl bracelet, from Goldman's, out of his pocket. He slips the bracelet onto Pepper's wrist.

Pepper beam at the bracelet. She spins it around on her wrist fascinated.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
It isn't a real pearl bracelet, but  
I promise one day I'll buy you a  
real one. Do you like it?

Pepper nods.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
We are engaged, Pepper. We have to  
kiss now.

Pepper looks around nervous.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Don't be afraid.

Elijah leans into Pepper. She hesitates at first but then slowly lean into Elijah. The two give a peck on each other's lips.

Elijah beams at the kiss. He holds her hand, love struck.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Mrs. Bennet sits down to breakfast.

SUPER: FIVE YEARS LATER

Mrs. Bennet sighs annoyed. ELEANOR, 48, a slave, enters the dining area.

MRS. BENNET  
Where is he?

ELEANOR  
In his room ma'am. Do ya want me to  
get him?

MRS. BENNET  
No, it's fine.

Heavy steps pound the stairs. Moments later a very handsome grown up Elijah enters the dining area.

ELIJAH  
Good morning, mama.

MRS. BENNET  
Good morning, Elijah. You've been  
late for breakfast and supper  
lately.

He plops down in his seat and helps himself to a couple of stacks of hot cakes and sausage links.

A teasing smile come to Mrs. Bennet's lips.



MRS. BENNET (CONT'D)  
You have a letter, Elijah. From  
Grace.

Elijah stops chewing at the sound of the name.

ELIJAH  
What does she want?

MRS. BENNET  
Probably the same thing she wanted  
from the other letters she's  
written to you without response. Do  
you not like her?

ELIJAH  
She's alright, I suppose.

MRS. BENNET  
She's also Farmer Gideon's  
daughter. You be on your best  
behavior with her if you plan on  
keeping your job. Unless... there  
is someone else you're interested  
in.

Elijah's face floods with fear. He gazes at his plate to hide  
his nervous look.

ELIJAH  
No ma'am. No one.

MRS. BENNET  
Well, whoever you choose will be a  
very lucky woman. Your father runs  
one of the most successful  
plantations in all of Alabama. A  
reputation like that is hard to  
come by. But with you next in line  
to run the plantation, I'm sure  
that your father's legacy will live  
on long after he is gone.

Elijah set down his fork, his appetite lost.

ELIJAH  
Excuse me, mother.

MRS. BENNET  
Are you alright?

ELIJAH  
I'm fine. I'm late for work.

EXT. BENNET'S PLANTATION - DAY

Elijah walks with a long face along the fence of the cotton field.

He taps his fingers along the fence as he browses through the field. He stops when he sees her.

Pepper, now of age, has blossomed into a beautiful young woman with the same light brown cat eyes, and longer yet wild brownish hair.

Elijah leans into the fence. He stares at her with loving eyes.

Pepper is busy at work. She plucks cotton pods when she catches him staring. She gives him a quick smile. He smiles back.

Pepper turns away as John trots up to her on his horse. John sneers down at Pepper. He runs his fingers through her hair.

Elijah hardens at the sight of Pepper being harassed.

John moves to caress Pepper's neck. She tries to ignore his touch. He suddenly grabs her neck hard. She chokes

Elijah roars.

ELIJAH

John!

John grunts at Elijah before he turns away from Pepper. He darts off back through the field barking at the other slaves.

Pepper grants Elijah a thankful smile.

Elijah nods respectfully with a smile until Pepper turns back to her work. His smile fades to a depressing frown.

EXT. GIDEON'S FARM - DAY

Elijah trudges through dried dirt behind two horses and a plow. In the distance, a tall farmhouse stands with a huge red barn about twenty feet away from it. Trees filled with large fruits stand planted in rows that stretch in the horizon.

EXT. THE WELL - LATER

Elijah takes a break. He drinks water and cleans his face.

A pretty dark-haired GRACE, 18, tip toes across the dirt to the well. An ELDERLY SLAVE follows her with a pitcher of ice cold lemonade.

GRACE  
Good afternoon Elijah.

Elijah jumps. He straightens himself.

Grace beams in her white sunflower gown. A large brimmed white hat barely attached to her head.

ELIJAH  
Good afternoon Grace.

GRACE  
I brought you lemonade.

Elijah looks at the slave who looks to be in his sixties dressed in a full black and white tux and gloves. His face and neck run with sweat from the brutal heat. He struggles to hold the large pitcher.

Elijah reaches out to take the pitcher.

ELIJAH  
Please, let me...

Grace grabs Elijah's hands mid-transfer and the pitcher falls to the ground. Grace explodes.

GRACE  
You stupid old black bastard! Look at what you done. Pick it up and go back in the kitchen and fix our guest a fresh pitcher or so help me God, I'll hang you with your own tie!

The frightened old man quickly picks the pitcher up off the ground and scurries back to the farm house.

Elijah is stunned at Grace's unladylike attitude.

Grace turns to Elijah with a sweet smile.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
I am sorry Elijah. My slave can be quite clumsy sometimes. It'll just be a few moments more for a fresh pitcher.

ELIJAH

It's all right Grace. I don't think that will be necessary. I must go anyway.

Grace grabs Elijah's arm. Elijah resists snatching it away.

GRACE

Oh please don't go Elijah. I wanted to talk for just a moment. You haven't been answering my letters.

ELIJAH

I've been busy.

GRACE

Running your pa's plantation?

ELIJAH

No. I've been preparing to go North to become a businessman at one of the universities.

Grace is surprised yet confused.

GRACE

You don't want to run the plantation?

ELIJAH

No.

GRACE

Why?

Elijah looks around as if to tell a forbidden secret.

ELIJAH

Have you ever felt like maybe slavery is wrong? That we're not supposed to treat God's people like animals?

Grace laughs.

GRACE

But they are animals, silly. They're filthy beasts who God put on this Earth to do labor for us. They aren't smart enough to do anything else.

Elijah nods with a false smirk.

ELIJAH  
Have a good day Grace.

GRACE  
Will you not stay?

ELIJAH  
No. My pa needs me to help him.  
Good evening.

The old slaves stagger from the house with the pitcher.

Elijah walks away. He listens as Grace screams at the man ordering him back into the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mrs. Bennet sits at a small table picking through jewelry with Eleanor.

Eleanor picks up an emerald pair of earrings.

ELEANOR  
What about these Miss?

MRS. BENNET  
Oh dear yes, get rid of those things. Paula at the church gave me those last Easter. That woman couldn't pick good jewelry if God himself told her exactly what to pick.

The two laugh at her joke.

Elijah enters with a rush. He's covered in sweat and dirt.

MRS. BENNET (CONT'D)  
Dear God Elijah, you're a mess.

ELIJAH  
Hello, mother. What are you doing?

MRS. BENNET  
Just cleaning out all this useless jewelry.

Elijah eyes a pearl bracelet. The bracelet consists of decorative metal plates with half cut pearls attached to them. The pearls shimmer brightly even in the darkening room.

ELIJAH  
Mother, are these pearls real?

MRS. BENNET  
Of course, they're real. What woman  
would wear them any other way?

ELIJAH  
Do you want it?

MRS. BENNET  
Why?

Elijah thinks quickly.

ELIJAH  
I was thinking of giving it as a  
gift.

Mrs. Bennet's eyes stretch with excited curiosity.

MRS. BENNET  
Grace?

ELIJAH  
Maybe.

Mrs. Bennet squeals.

MRS. BENNET  
Of course you can have it.

ELIJAH  
Thanks, mama.

EXT. RIVERBANK - EVENING

Elijah and Pepper sit close. Pepper reads mentally, her  
finger move under each word. She stops at a word she can't  
read. Her face twists in confusion.

ELIJAH  
Catapult.

Pepper looks at Elijah.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
(nods)  
Cat-ta-pult.

Pepper nods, her way of repeating.

Elijah smiles. He kisses her forehead. He looks down at her  
wrist where the old pearl bracelet sits. The pearly paint is  
chipped off almost completely from the worn bracelet.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
You need a new one.

Pepper touch the worn bracelet. She shrugs.

Elijah pulls the bracelet out of his pocket. The pearls appear to glow from the sun's final light.

Pepper gasps.

Elijah removes the old bracelet from her wrist and slides the new on. Pepper's eyes swell at the beauty of the bracelet.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Do you like it?

Pepper nods. She caresses each pearl.

Elijah saddens.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Pepper. I'm going to ask you a question and I want the truth.

She gives her attention.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Has John ever hurt you?

She shakes her head.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Has he had his way with you?

She shakes her head hard.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Has he tried to?

She hesitates.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Pepper? Answer me.

Pepper nods slowly.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Many times?

She bites her lower lip frightened. She nods, her eyes fill.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Don't worry Pepper. I'll take care of it.

Elijah places both hands on her dark cheeks.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
I won't let anyone hurt you. I  
promise. You believe me, don't you?

Pepper nods.

Elijah kisses her before he pulls her into his arms.

Pepper rests her head on his chest. She looks at Elijah's hand resting on one of her hands. She hesitates at first then lie her free hand on top of his.

Elijah smiles at Pepper's brave gesture.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
You are my life, Pepper.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Bennets sit down for supper.

Mrs. Bennet catches Elijah smiling to himself.

MRS. BENNET  
Elijah, why are you smiling?

Elijah flush.

ELIJAH  
No reason mother.

MRS. BENNET  
Oh, I doubt there's no reason.  
(to Mr. Bennet)  
I believe our son here has a girl  
on his mind my dear. My guess is  
Grace Gideon.

MR. BENNET  
Farmer Gideon's daughter?

Mrs. Bennet beams with a nod.

MRS. BENNET  
How did she like the gift?

MR. BENNET  
What gift?



MRS. BENNET

(back to Mr. Bennet)

Elijah wanted one of my old pearl bracelets I were throwing away to give as a gift. Did she like it, Elijah?

ELIJAH

I haven't given it to her yet.

MRS. BENNET

You've been gone all evening. I thought you were spending time at the farm with her.

ELIJAH

No. I was reading at the riverbank. Very interesting book on businessmen in the North.

Mr. Bennet huffs. He stabs his meat with the fork and cuts at it as if to saw wood.

MR. BENNET

You don't need to be bothered with that northern nonsense. You have a future here on the plantation.

ELIJAH

Father, businesses up north are booming. There's a lot of money in it and a good living.

MR. BENNET

There's good money in plantation too. Look at you, you're wearing the best clothes money can buy, the food's always on the table, you need for nothing.

ELIJAH

But father--

MR. BENNET

Who will run the plantation when I'm gone? You have no brothers and sisters. There's no one else.

ELIJAH

I'm sorry father, but I don't want to run the plantation. I want to be a businessman.

Mr. Bennet slams his hand on the table. Everyone jumps including Eleanor standing off to the side waiting to serve.

MR. BENNET

Don't tell me what you want to do or don't want to do. I didn't bust my back my whole life for you to ruin what I've started. I've got the best plantation in all of Alabama and that's the way it'll stay. You gonna run this plantation and that's all to it. You understand me, boy?

ELIJAH

Yes, pa.

The room falls silent. Mrs. Bennet looks at Mr. Bennet pigging his food while Elijah simply stares at his.

MRS. BENNET

Husband, Mr. Thompson came earlier today asking for you. He said you two spoke about some new venture in the slave market. He wanted to meet with you as soon as possible. What is this new venture?

Elijah slowly eats food again at the change of topic.

MR. BENNET

He found out that he saves money by breeding his slaves rather than buying them from the auction. He lost a lot of slaves last year to sickness on ships. He breeds the healthy one to make stronger slaves to keep or sell as he will.

MRS. BENNET

We don't have many that are young and healthy enough to breed.

MR. BENNET

We got Pepper.

Elijah jumps.

ELIJAH

No! Not Pepper.

MR. BENNET

Why not?

ELIJAH

She's my slave. I don't want to breed her.

MR. BENNET

I paid for Pepper. She's my slave. I'll do as I see fit.

ELIJAH

You gave her to me. You have more than plenty enough slaves to breed.

Mr. Bennet points his fork at Elijah.

MR. BENNET

I'm not gonna argue with you, Elijah. My slave. My property.

Elijah tries to think fast.

ELIJAH

If you breed her father, it'll be bad for business.

MR. BENNET

How so?

ELIJAH

Breeding slaves mean they'll need time to care for their child. That will be time loss from working in the field. You can't work the slaves while they carry. The stress of the labor will cause them to lose the child. That's a waste. Please, father, breeding your slaves will only hurt your plantation rather than help. Buy your slaves already grown up and in condition. In the end, you'll have the advantage.

Mr. Bennet stares at his son for a moment.

Elijah grips his fork tight.

MR. BENNET

You know what Elijah, I think you just may be on to something. I think I will pass. I'll let ole man Thompson go ahead in the venture, and when he has no one to pick his cotton, I'll make more money for it. Good work son.

Mr. Bennet laughs aloud. Mrs. Bennet joins him. Elijah moves from the table.

ELIJAH  
Excuse me. I'm going to bed early  
tonight. I'm tired.

MRS. BENNET  
Good night my dear Elijah.

ELIJAH  
Good night.

Elijah rush from the dining room.

INT. ELIJAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elijah bursts into his room shutting the door behind him. He leans against the door clutching his chest. He hyperventilates for a moment.

He pulls at his short hair as he glides down the door to the floor. He's on the edge of a breakdown but he fights through.

ELIJAH  
Oh Pepper...

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Pepper sits in her private corner playing with her new gift. She beams at the shiny pearls.

A female slave, MIONI, 40, comes over to Pepper, a hungry, jealous look on her face.

MIONI  
You gon get yourself killed over  
that there.

Pepper's smile fade.

MIONI (CONT'D)  
Give it back, or the master gonna  
hang you.

Pepper stare in defense.

Mioni suddenly grabs for the bracelet.

MIONI (CONT'D)  
Give it to me!

PEPPER

No!

Pepper pulls her arm to her body. She shields it from Mioni.

The room goes quiet. Everyone looks at Pepper, surprised by her speech.

Pepper is humiliated and runs out of the quarters.

EXT. PLANTATION - NIGHT

Pepper toy with her bracelet when she hears a whisper.

VOICE

Pepper...

Pepper looks around. Out of the shadow of the field, John steps out with a lantern.

Pepper hides her wrist.

JOHN

What are you doing out here all alone?

Pepper backs away from John.

John grins hungrily at Pepper.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Come here Pepper. I just want to talk.

Pepper turns and runs. John drops the lantern and chases her.

He catches up to Pepper and toss her to the ground. He tears at her clothes ripping them in half.

Pepper screams.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Shut up nigger!

John slaps Pepper. She screams again.

EXT. HOUSE PORCH - NIGHT

Elijah rests in a rocking chair when he hears the scream.

ELIJAH

Pepper?

Elijah grabs a shotgun from the corner of the porch and lunge for the field.

John forces Pepper's legs apart.

Suddenly the sound of someone COCKING a shotgun is heard. The barrel of the gun is pointed at John's skull. It's Elijah.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Get up you filthy animal or I swear  
I'll kill you where you lie.

John holds up his hands in surrender. He stands to his feet.

Pepper scrambles up off the ground. She hides behind Elijah.

Elijah points the gun dead center of John's face only mere centimeters apart.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
You ever come near Pepper again, I  
swear as God as my witness tonight,  
I'll kill you. Ya hear?

John nods. He notices the bracelet on Pepper's wrist but doesn't stir.

JOHN  
I hear you. Loud and clear.

ELIJAH  
Now get on.

John turns slowly and walks off. A smile comes to his face but isn't seen by Elijah and Pepper.

Elijah turns to Pepper. He places a hand on her face.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Are you okay?

Pepper nods frightened.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Good. Come. I'll take you back.

Elijah takes her hand.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Elijah plants a quick kiss on Pepper's cheek.

ELIJAH  
You're safe now.

Pepper smiles and grabs Elijah's head and gently kiss his forehead. Pepper retreats to her quarter.

EXT. PLANTATION - DAY

John talks to Mr. Bennet. He gestures to his wrist. Their words can't be heard.

EXT. GIDEON'S FARM - DAY

Elijah stacks huge bundles of hay. He stops suddenly. He shields his eyes from the blazing sun.

He looks down the road outside the farm. Something feels off. He eventually shrugs it off and returns to the hay.

INTERCUT - BETWEEN ELIJAH AND PEPPER

A. John drags Pepper by her hair. He throws her down in front of Mr. Bennet. Mr. Bennet grabs Pepper's wrist where the bracelet lies. Pepper simply stare in fear.

B. Elijah feeds chickens. He looks at the road again uneasy.

C. Pepper's face is beaten bad and covered in blood. John stands over her with bloody knuckles.

D. Elijah places a pony into it's stable. The nameplate on the door reads "Pepper." He smiles.

E. Pepper's wrists are tied from nearby trees. John whips her back without breaking stride. She screams in agony.

F. A SLAVE BOY runs like a cheetah down a dirt road.

G. Pepper, weak and covered in blood, fights against her arm being held down by John. Mr. Bennet pulls back an ax high above his head.

H. Elijah comes out of the barn to find the slave boy running up the road in his direction. The boy talks to Elijah. Elijah's face fills with horror and they both run home.

F. Slaves look in horror at Pepper's dead body dangling from a tree. The older slave Mioni takes the pearl bracelet from Pepper's amputated hand and shoves it in her pocket.

EXT. PLANTATION - DAY

Elijah bolts past the home toward the crowd of slaves.

He halts at the horrendous sight of Pepper's blood-covered body.

His eyes flood with tears. His legs weaken and he drops the ground.

ELIJAH

No! No! No!

He covers his head with his arms.

Mrs. Bennet comes outside. She jumps at the sight of Pepper. She covers her eyes with her Japanese fan.

Elijah looks up at Pepper, his eyes red and face drenched.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

(croaks)

Pepper...

Elijah lies back in his lap covering his head.

The other slaves move to pull the body down.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Mrs. Bennet FANS herself in her rocking chair. Her face is long.

Mioni walks up the steps. She holds her hand out to give Mrs. Bennet Pepper's bracelet.

Mrs. Bennet recognizes the bracelet as her own. She GASPS realizing the truth.

INT. ELIJAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mrs. Bennet enters.

Elijah looks out of his window at the plantation.

He turns to find his mother holding out the bracelet to him. He takes it from her.

MRS. BENNET

She must have taken it. That's why your father punished her.



Elijah shakes his head. His eyes filling again as he runs his fingers over the blood-covered pearl bracelet.

ELIJAH

She didn't take it. I gave it to her.

Mrs. Bennet looks at him in shock.

MRS. BENNET

Why Elijah?

Elijah looks at his mother, heartbroken.

ELIJAH

Because I loved her. I always have.

Mrs. Bennet turns from Elijah. She closes and locks the bedroom door. She goes to his bed and sits. Her facial expression stiff.

MRS. BENNET

You will never... ever speak of your love for a negro again in this house. Do you understand me?

Elijah turns to her.

MRS. BENNET (CONT'D)

If your father hears you say such things he would have both our heads. I live a good life here and I will not let you mess this up for me.

Elijah blinks surprised by his mother's attitude.

ELIJAH

It's not right. To treat them like animals. It isn't right.

MRS. BENNET

Hush your mouth. They are our property and to be treated as such. They are not to be loved and educated. They work from the sun up to sun down. They are the bread and butter of this house and this country. They are the reason we live in such a fine home and wear fine clothing. Elijah Bennet, you will never need for anything as long as there are slaves to work in those fields.

ELIJAH  
But mother--

Mrs. Bennet jumps from the bed.

MRS. BENNET  
Now you stop this ridiculous talk  
of love for niggers. She was a  
slave who did wrong to this family  
and was punished for it. And I am  
glad of it.

Elijah is hurt.

A sign of hurt and weakness accidentally leaks through Mrs.  
Bennet's coldness. She stiffens again.

MRS. BENNET (CONT'D)  
Good night.

Mrs. Bennet doesn't wait for a reply before she unlocks the  
door and closes it behind her. She stands in the

HALLWAY

Where she muffles a quick silent cry. After a moment, she  
takes a deep breath, straightens herself and moves down the  
stairs.

INT. ELIJAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Elijah stares out the window. He watches as the slaves  
perform a vigil ceremony for her.

He walks over to his desk, grabs his textbook on business and  
tosses it in the trash.

He looks at Pepper's blood-stained bracelet in his hand.

The pain on his face replaced with anger.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Elijah emerges from the house with a final suitcase to add to  
the waiting carriage.

SUPER: SIX MONTHS LATER

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet come out to greet Elijah.

Mrs. Bennet opens her arms to him.

MRS. BENNET  
My beautiful son off to be a man of  
the law. How wonderful?

Elijah smiles. He hugs his mother tight.

Mr. Bennet shakes Elijah's hand.

MR. BENNET  
What happened to you wanting to be  
a businessman?

Elijah smirks at his father to mask his tightened jaw and  
burning eyes.

ELIJAH  
Things changed.

MR. BENNET  
Well then, make me proud, son.

ELIJAH  
I will.

Elijah looks over at another man much older than he and just  
as handsome. He is THOMAS.

Elijah shakes his hand.

THOMAS  
Good luck cousin.

ELIJAH  
Good luck to you too cousin. Take  
care of this plantation and all of  
the people on it.

THOMAS  
I'll do my best. I swear it.

ELIJAH  
Thank you.

Elijah looks over the plantation one more time. His eyes fall  
to the slave quarters.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
If it's all right, I'd like to take  
a final walk around the place  
before I go.

The others nod approval.

MR. BENNET  
 (Pats Thomas' back)  
 Come Thomas, let me show you around  
 the house.

Mrs. Bennet follows them inside.

EXT. PLANTATION - DAY

Elijah stands over a dirt grave with a rocky tombstone at the head of it with "Pepper" etched into its surface.

Elijah is frozen a moment, unable to speak.

ELIJAH  
 Goodbye Pepper, for now anyway.  
 (clears throat)  
 When I come back, I'll be a true  
 man of the law and I'll do as I  
 promised. I'll free them. I'll free  
 them all. For you...  
 (beat)  
 Kiyata.

He pulls the bracelet from his pocket. He kisses it before  
 shoving it back into place.

He turns from the grave toward his waiting carriage.

FADE OUT.

THE END