



written by
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*Inspired by the poem
"Cross"
by Langston Hughes*

EXT. TOUCHSTONE PLANTATION - 1861 - DUSK

A rural, sprawling cotton plantation that extends for miles, forever, into the desolate wilderness as far as we can see.

The late summer wind whips through the crops.

EXT. TOUCHSTONE PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - DUSK

We PUSH IN on an oil LANTERN hanging outside of a small wooden cabin, the walls slightly VIBRATE from impact.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

ON LEVI TOUCHSTONE

Late-50s, a European-imported plantation owner, having rough sex with ANNABELLE LEE - a slave, light-skinned, early-40s.

As Levi pumps and pants and sweats, Annabelle stares up at him, her soft face drained of emotion.

EXT. TOUCHSTONE PLANTATION - COTTON FIELDS - DAY

We DRIFT along rows of FEMALE SLAVES working diligently beneath the scorching sun until the CAMERA finds

ANNABELLE,

working just as hard as everyone else.

Suddenly, she feels light-headed; her eyes flutter, her knees slightly buckle.

Without warning, droplets of BLOOD begin dripping from between her legs and onto her bale of cotton.

EXT. TOUCHSTONE MANOR - DAY

Sitting on the porch, overlooking his estate, Levi rocks rhythmically in his rocking chair.

Annabelle is escorted by WHITE OVERSEERS; she asks for permission to approach, which Levi cautiously grants.

She whispers something in his ear.

Levi looks up at her with cold, unforgiving eyes.

INT. TOUCHSTONE MANOR - FOYER - DUSK

A family room transformed into a primitive delivery room.

Annabelle is propped up on a small expensive-looking sofa. Levi stands over her.

Annabelle clutches her MIDWIFE's hand; moans in pain.

WHIP PAN to REVEAL, from across the room, MAGGIE TOUCHSTONE - early-50s, Levi's wife - watching with disgust, guzzling a cocktail, pouring another.

Eventually, two WET NURSES deliver a healthy BABY BOY, light brown-skinned - looking more Latino than Mulatto.

This is MAX.

As Levi cradles the crying newborn with fatherly compassion:

MAX (V.O.)
My old man's a white old man...

With her legs still propped, Annabelle falls back into the sofa, exhausted.

MAX (V.O.)
And my old mother's black.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Baby Max screams and cries before bedtime. Annabelle hovers over his makeshift crib, silently singing lullabies.

INT./EXT. PLANTATION HOUSE - DAY - SERIES OF SHOTS

Max growing up: Annabelle helps Baby Max walk through the cotton fields; Levi teaches YOUNG MAX how to read; TEENAGE MAX gets caught stealing food; Levi fiercely reprimands him.

Young WHITE CHILDREN point at Max and laugh. Max lowers his head, humiliated.

MAX (V.O.)
*If ever I cursed my white old
man...*

EXT. TOUCHSTONE PLANTATION - COTTON FIELDS - DUSK

A wide shot. Levi and Max stand together, contemplating the sky. Levi reluctantly throws his arm around Max's shoulders.

MAX (V.O.)
... I take my curses back.

INT. TOUCHSTONE MANOR - STUDY - NIGHT

CLOSE ON a leather-bound copy of John Webster's "The White Devil".

Levi reads aloud expressively, doing the voice, over-exaggerating, entertaining Max and some other CHILDREN.

Max looks over at a few GIRLS his age; smiles sheepishly.

EXT. COTTON FIELDS - DAY

Thunderclaps BOOM in the distance, the sky turns black.

Max and other CHILDREN laugh and dance in the light rain.

Max gets teased by OLDER BLACK CHILDREN because of his hair - which is parted and coiffed.

The Older Black Children hold their forearms against Max's, compare skin color, bully Max for being lighter.

Max wrestles with a few of the Older Kids.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DUSK

Max and Annabelle argue feverishly.

MAX (V.O.)
*If ever I cursed my black old
 mother...*

LATER

Max, alone, uses a lantern for illumination, attempts to SCRATCH off his own skin - desperately tries to peel away his pigmentation.

MAX (V.O.)
... And wished she were in hell...

EXT. COTTON FIELDS - NIGHT

CLOSE ON the dancing flames of a sizzling bonfire.

SLAVES stand around the heat, struggling to stay warm.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - SAME

Over his narrow cot, Max prays, eye closed tightly.

MAX
 (whispering)
 -- my mom. Please Lord please just
 kill her, Lord. Please just kill
 her, Lord, please--

We intrusively PUSH IN on a small picture of the VIRGIN MARY posted above Max's bed.

MAX (V.O.)
I'm sorry for that evil wish...

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MORNING

Max and Annabelle embrace on the porch, overlooking the plantation. The sunset.

MAX (V.O.)
... And now I wish her well.

INT. PLANTATION HOUSE - DAY

We FOLLOW a DOCTOR as he moves down a lavish corridor, making his way into the

MASTER BEDROOM,

where Levi lays in bed, slowly dying.

Levi dies surrounded by MAGGIE, OVERSEERS, and CHILDREN.

MAX (V.O.)
*My old man died in a fine big
 house...*

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DUSK

We PUSH IN on the wooden barracks.

CLOSE ON an army of MOTHS fluttering around the lantern.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Annabelle lays in the shed, dying, with only Max at her side.

He clutches her hand emotionally.

MAX (V.O.)
My ma died in a shack.

Max pushes away a tear. Makes the Sign of the Cross.

MAX (V.O.)
I wonder where I'm going to die...

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

As Max exits the wooden cabin, a swarm of BIRDS scatter into the sky at the exact same moment.

MAX (V.O.)
Being neither white nor black?

We DRIFT across the plantation, across the cotton fields, dancing in the air, giving way to the wind and the sky.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END