

FADE IN:

INT. A HERCULEAN MANSION -- DAY

A black boy, seven years old, stands before two golden European stairways reaching up into a daunting indeterminate end.

Then a VOICE, like the shrill of many waters, speaks from above him.

THE VOICE

Remember, whichever you choose, I
will be with you. Now take seven
steps to your left.

He obeys and pauses at the bottom of the stairway on the left. He looks up and the stairway continues into an opulent light.

The boy continues in his ascension and hears a little girl's laughter. And then she speaks.

LITTLE GIRL

Daddy!

He continues to climb and then he hears a man weeping.

WEEPING MAN

Why? Just tell me why.

Then a woman responds:

WOMAN'S VOICE

Because it was him I always prayed
for.

The boy, suddenly heavy with sadness, descends the stairs. And as he backs away there is a loud gun shot! He crouches at the base of the stairs, weeping and shivering.

Then he finally returns back to the center, standing again between both stairways.

THE VOICE

Now take seven steps to your right.

So again he obeys and stops at the bottom of the stairway on the right. But unlike the other, this one is shrouded in darkness.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)

Do not be afraid.

Cautiously, the boy ascends.

THE BOY

I can't see.

But the voice is silent.

And as soon as he steps on the seventh stair, the mellifluous notes of a piano concerto descends from above. It's Beethoven's *Pathetique*. And then the tempo and volume increases as he ascends, until it becomes fiery! And then a loud applause follows.

But soon, the tempo subdues and then digresses into silence. Then a sadness overcomes the boy.

Then he continues his ascension and soon he hears the cry of a woman- a bellow of pure anguish! And then a man weeping. And again silence. Then the movement of the piano begins again, sad and tempered.

Then a woman speaks.

WOMAN

We'll get through this together. We always do.

And suddenly he begins to charge up the stairs, falling and rising as the music begins to grow louder, faster until the boy disappears, in a fit of hysteria, into a thick cloud of permanent darkness!

EXT. THE TAIGHA RESIDENCE -- NIGERIA -1970 -- NIGHT

A black Mercedes pulls up to the front gate of this exquisite work of architecture. In the back seat are a BEAUTIFUL WHITE ENGLISH WOMAN, mid-thirties and a BLACK MAN, at least ten years older, holding hands. They are MR AND MRS TAIGHA. And Mrs Taigha is six months pregnant.

The NIGERIAN DRIVER suddenly bolts out of the car and before the couple can make any sense of the strange exit, there are three semiautomatic guns pointing at them and a fourth masked man dragging Mr Taigha out of the car.

Mrs Taigha starts to scream and beg, but these masked men are clearly immune to such.

Mr Taigha takes off his watch and pulls out his wallet.

MR TAIGHA

Here. Take everything. I have more inside. But please spare our lives.

The masked man takes the expensive gold watch and tosses it by the side of the road.

MR TAIGHA (CONT'D)

It's...it's not money you want, is it?

The masked man shakes his head: No.

MRS TAIGHA

Please leave my husband alone.
Please.

MR TAIGHA

Then what? What is this about?
Business? Politics? Is it personal?
What!

MASKED MAN

Political business.

And the guns are emptied into his chest! While his wife screams and howls from the car.

The masked gunman now turns to Mrs Taigha who looks up defiantly.

INT. THE PARISH RESIDENCE -- DAY

MRS. KATHERINE PARISH, 40, WHITE, ENGLISH, walks into the kitchen where her 3 year-old son, NATHAN, plays and her nine-month pregnant Nigerian housemaid, CECILIA, prepares the lunch.

KATHERINE

I've told you a hundred times,
Cecilia, I'm not crippled. I can
handle things in here for a while.
You shouldn't be so busy at this
stage. That baby could pop out any
day now.

CECILIA

I know, madame. I just get too
restless, that's all.

KATHERINE

You sound just like my sister.
Speaking of whom, did she eat her
breakfast today?

CECILIA

Only very small, madame.

KATHERINE

Nathan! Don't put that in your mouth!

As she snatches a banana peel from the boy. Suddenly Cecilia grabs her stomach in pain.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

What is it? Is he fussing again
or...

CECILIA

I hope just fussing.

Cecilia sits down.

KATHERINE

Shall I get the tape?

Cecilia nods: Yes.

Katherine runs out of the kitchen for a moment and returns with a mini tape player and two tapes. She places the tape player on Cecilia's belly and hits play.

A piano piece plays. But Cecilia grabs her stomach and cries even louder!

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

Chopin. Sorry. Wrong tape.

As she grabs the tape player and replaces the tape with another. Then she places it back on her stomach and hits play again- *Pathetique*.

And with a sigh of relief

CECILIA

Beethoven.

As Cecilia rubs her stomach and smiles, there is a quick glare of jealousy in Katherine's eyes which she just as quickly admonishes.

She takes Nathan's hand and walks out the kitchen leaving the mother-to-be in her moment.

EXT. THE PARISH RESIDENCE -- AFTERNOON

Cecilia carries a tray of ice-water to her Nigerian husband, EMEKA, cutting the grass. Seeing her, he stops and takes the glass and downs the water in the sweltering heat.

Placing it back on the tray

EMEKA

Thank you.

Then he rubs her stomach.

EMEKA (CONT'D)

He is going to be the next Pelé.
And he will lead our Nigerian Eagles
to a world cup some day.

CECILIA

What if it's a girl?

He snaps his finger backwards over his head.

EMEKA

Ewo! It has never happened in my family. The first is--

CECILIA

--is always a male child in the Okafor family.

Cecilia waves him off as she walks away, while he proudly returns to his duty.

INT. BEDROOM- THE PARISH RESIDENCE -- LATER

Katherine lets herself in and finds her sister, the widowed Mrs. Taigha, lying in bed with an even heavier stomach.

Katherine sits by her and notices her untouched food.

KATHERINE

If not even for you, at least think about the child.

But her sister simply turns her head away, with fresh tears streaming down her eyes. So Katherine simply sits there, holding her sister's hand.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM- PARISH RESIDENCE -- NIGHT

Katherine climbs into bed next to her husband, JAMES PARISH, 45, white, who reads a bible.

JAMES

You know what would be funny, if they both actually deliver on the same day.

Katherine turns to him.

KATHERINE

That's not funny.

As James shuts his bible and puts it away

JAMES

Your sister screaming upstairs while Cecilia screams from their quarters.

Katherine turns off the night lamp and goes to sleep.

KATHERINE

God wouldn't be so cruel.

Suddenly there's a scream! Katherine turns on the night lamp and turns to her husband... it can't be.

INT. MRS TAIGHA'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Mrs Taigha is in labor. And while James helps with the delivery, there's another scream, and this time from the quarters downstairs.

Again they turn to each other...and James looks upwards.

JAMES
I was only kidding.

Katherine stands up to go, but

JAMES (CONT'D)
I'll go. Your sister needs you more.

KATHERINE
But I think I should be with Cecilia--

JAMES
Katherine!

And that does it. She turns her attention back to her sister.

KATHERINE
James. Please be careful.

And with that James leaves the room.

INT. THE QUARTERS -- CONTINUOUS

James enters the room and finds Emeka holding his wife's hand. But there is a lot of blood. Too much blood.

JAMES
Jesus help me.

EMEKA
Please help her. I don't want her
to die.

And he goes off on a rampage in his native tongue. James comes to his side.

JAMES
Emeka. Emeka. Emeka!

The third one grabs his attention.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I will help her. But I need you to
pull yourself together. Okay?

Emeka nods.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Good. Now get some towels and warm
water.

Emeka leaves. James turns and sees Nathan standing behind him watching in horror.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Get back upstairs. Now, Nathan!

He leaves the room but stands at the door watching as Cecilia screams as if in slaughter. And in Nathan's eyes, though still so young, awakes a contempt, as he looks on.

INT. MRS TAIGHA'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Mrs Taigha pushes with all life left within her and the baby begins to cry. And soon Katherine, holding the tiny bloody creature, walks up to her mother.

KATHERINE

Oh sister, you did good. It's a girl. A beautiful girl.

And she holds the baby towards her sister who turns aside from her child and balls up, crying.

INT. THE QUARTERS -- LATER

Emeka is crouched over his wife's still body. Bawling. While James holds the new-born in his hand.

JAMES

I'm sorry.

And Nathan, disappointed, walks away.

Now Katherine screams! And James runs out with the baby in hand only to find Mrs Taigha's body lying on the concrete floor outside her window.

She just jumped to her death.

James - in horror- looks at the body and up at the window, where his wife and the baby in hand, weep.

EXT. BEHIND THE HOUSE -- DAY

James, holding his bible, Katherine holding the baby girl, Emeka, holding his new son, and Nathan stand before two freshly covered graves.

Their silence speaks volumes.

INT. BEDROOM- THE PARISH RESIDENCE -- NIGHT

James and Katherine sit in their bed with their backs to one another.

JAMES

This is the devil's work.

KATHERINE

This had nothing to do with the devil.
It was an act of cowardice. No more.

And she stands up and walks away into another door.

INT. THE PARISH RESIDENCE -- DAY

Katherine opens the door to allow Emeka into the room. Behind her, a DOCTOR looks over his son with James by his side.

EMEKA

What's wrong with my son, madame?

KATHERINE

We will know for certain in a moment.

EMEKA

Doctor?

The doctor finally leans back up and turns to Emeka.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry. But your son is completely
blind.

Emeka stands there, stunned. James picks the boy up and carries him over to his father. And as he hands him over

JAMES

I'm sorry.

But Emeka retreats.

EMEKA

The boy is cursed.

KATHERINE

Oh for heaven's sake, he is your
son!

JAMES

There is no curse on your son. And
with prayer, I have no doubt that
God will deliver him.

DOCTOR

It will take a miracle. Don't give
the man false hope.

JAMES

I have seen bigger miracles happen.

Emeka backs out the door.

EMEKA

That is not my child.

And he is gone. Katherine tries to stop him, but

JAMES

Let him go. It's a big shock. He
will come to his senses by morning.

EXT. THE PARISH RESIDENCE -- DAWN

Emeka is at the main gate with a bundle of clothes wrapped in a blanket slung over his shoulder. He quietly unlocks it and spends one backwards glance only to meet the convicting eyes of Katherine at her window holding the boy.

She looks at the boy and back out at his father. She makes a decision: And pulls the curtain shut, exiling the son from the father.

Emeka, pauses, then opens the gate and walks out.

INT. THE PARISH RESIDENCE -- AFTERNOON

The boy and the girl have been placed naked on the bed next to one another.

While Katherine stands, watching them, and James stands behind her, watching them also, with his hand on her shoulders.

Nathan, as usual, is in a corner watching as well.

JAMES

Maybe we should name them after their--

KATHERINE

Not as long as I live. They both
had their chance. And they both
chose.

(a beat)

Their names will be Sara and Daniel
Parish.

And Katherine picks Daniel up and embraces him.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

Nathan. Come and meet your younger
brother and sister.

But Nathan simply stands there looking at Daniel with disdain. And by the time his mother turns around, he's gone.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

Nathan?

INT. THE PARISH RESIDENCE- BEDROOM -- NIGHT

James shuts his bible and removes his glasses as he prepares to sleep, while Katherine lies there appearing to be asleep.

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