

STEAL AWAY

by

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based on true events

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Steal Away is an epic legend inspired by true events. The situations, timelines, and character arcs have been allegorized to sharpen the dramatic narrative and illuminate their deeper universal truths.

THE NIGHT SKY

The gently rippling image of the FULL MOON and DARK PASSING CLOUDS.

We widen to reveal TWO ANGELS hovering peacefully in the foreground.

Our eyes adjust; we realize we're underwater looking up - at a WOMAN and young GIRL submerged underwater. All is calm and still. Then suddenly --

HANDS PLUNGE IN, snatch them out, and hurl them onto the:

DIMLY-LIT RIVERBANK

Silhouetted FIGURES furiously SEIZE the woman and girl. The woman REVIVES and frantically BEATS THEM BACK.

WOMAN
NO! NO! LEAVE US ALONE!

The pandemonium builds until -- **BLAM!!** -- a GUNSHOT RINGS OUT. A man's voice shouts --

VOICE
GET AWAY FROM THEM!

PIT BULLS charge out of the darkness and ATTACK the Figures. They SHRIEK in torment as the hounds viciously drive them back.

A WHISTLE blows and the dogs return to their owners: a clergyman in a holy robe - "BISHOP" SHEOLGATE - and his young SON.

The woman desperately clutches the girl then cradles her tenderly, weeping in relief. Bishop squints to make them out.

BISHOP
Sarah?

Visibility is low, but we see that the woman, SARAH, and her girl are black. Bishop and his boy are white. Bishop looks at the girl and gasps.

BISHOP
Jesus, she's not breathing!

Sarah clutches the lifeless child and glares at him.

SARAH
You can't touch her now.

Bishop LUNGES for the girl. Sarah clutches her harder. They FIGHT over the body, POUNDING and KICKING each other.

He wrests the girl free, then flips her over and WHACKS her back, begging God to revive her. The girl CONVULSES and COUGHS UP WATER.

SARAH
NO! GOD NO!

The girl revives. Her wide eyes open, and we reveal the face of --

SAM! SARAH **ELLA!** BISHOP

-- SAMUELLA "ELLA" SHEPPARD, 3. Frightened, little Ella scans the scene as if in a nightmare, then sees Sarah --

ELLA
Momma!

-- and buries herself in her mother's bosom.

Bishop glares incredulously at Sarah. Vexed and confused, he paces about in a state, replaying in his head what just happened.

BISHOP
I'm down at the whipping post before service dealing with the *runaways*. Stain the robe, but before I can change hear shouts up at the river. Get here straightaway, looks like a woman, maybe a white woman, is being beaten or raped. *But I'll be goddamned if it ain't my house nigger fending off my field niggers!*

Thinning clouds slowly BRIGHTEN THE SCENE, revealing the Figures to be FIELD SLAVES. It's 1853. We're on Bishop's plantation, and he's seeing red.

BISHOP
What happened here, Sarah Sheppard?!

But Sarah is lost in furious thought; Ella's revival has set her mind racing. A distant CHURCH BELL rings.

BISHOP
ANSWER ME! I'M LATE TO PREACH!

His fists tighten. His son, MYRON, looks at her anxiously.

CLOSE ON SARAH - Her eyes fire with a VISION. We see that it's a heavy, heart-wrenching vision. Her eyes mist over; she looks at Ella, both shattered and relieved, then kisses her bittersweetly.

Then Sarah's face turns *fire*. She faces Bishop - fists clenched, eyes aflame.

SARAH

Brother Bo, good sister Hattie, their sweet boy Wallace...

BISHOP

The *runaways*; I got the boy here.

He points to the frightened slave boy cowering at his feet. This is little WALLACE.

SARAH

Samuella and me heard it all tonight - their flesh splitting, screams for mercy, throats choking with blood.

BISHOP

The sounds of *discipline*; you've heard it before.

SARAH

Many times. But tonight I notice Sam ain't troubled by it. I ask why not. She say, "*They's just getting they due.*" I feel a knot in my chest. "Child, who tell you that?" "*Bishop.*" Bishop?! Now it's a knife. "Baby, what else he be saying to you?" "*Just asking what the 'niggers' be up to, day in, day out.*" "Bo and Hattie planning to escape - you the one tell him 'bout that?" Sam start shaking. Tears of guilt fill her eyes. My heart stops; now I can't breathe; an eternity I want no part of goes by. She look away - "Yes'm." Oh God...

(turns to the slaves)

He been using Samuella to spy on us all, then raining down bloodshed. Forgive us!

STARK MOONLIGHT now reveals the HEINOUS SCARS racking the slaves' FACES and bodies, and the FRESH BLOOD drenching Bishop's holy robe. Strikingly, his son Myron's face - a sweet, shy face - is just as marred as the slaves'.

Bishop fondles Ella's hand.

BISHOP

Yes, my little helper is a godsend.

Sarah snatches it back.

SARAH

Was. My Sam will never again be party to your cruelty.

Bishop glares at her. The CHURCH BELL rings again.

SARAH
(contemptuous)
Better wash that robe, "Bishop".

Myron's eyes beg Sarah to *hush* - the boy clearly cares for her.

But Sarah is beyond fear. Bold and unflinching, she now speaks her vision... as Bishop angrily grasps what happened at the river.

SARAH
The voices were right...

BISHOP
So, full of woe, you brought Ella to
the river and *drowned* yourselves...

SARAH
I see it now; I didn't then...

BISHOP
The niggers *saved* you.

SARAH
My baby won't be raised a slave.

BISHOP
(points at Ella)
INSOLENT APE! THAT'S MY PROPERTY!

SARAH
By God's reckoning or your own?!

BISHOP
THEY ARE ONE AND THE SAME!

SARAH
We'll see about that.

BISHOP
WE WILL!
(tosses SASH to two slaves)
YOU TWO, BIND HER!

The slaves hesitate. Just then, Wallace's folks BO and HATTIE race onto the scene.

BO and HATTIE
WALLACE! SON!

BISHOP
(raises his SHOTGUN)
I SAID *BIND HER!*

WALLACE
MOMMA! DADDY!

BISHOP
(cocks it)
NOW, GODDAMMIT!!

SARAH
BO!! HATTIE!! GET BACK!!

THE CHURCH BELL RINGS. **BLAM BLAM!!** He SHOTS BO AND HATTIE DEAD then takes aim at the two slaves. Wallace SCREAMS. Everyone SCREAMS. Ella SHRIEKS as the slaves SEIZE Sarah and WRESTLE her to the ground, their eyes begging her forgiveness.

Though harrowed beyond words, as the slaves hog-tie Sarah, she locks defiant eyes with Ella.

SARAH
As I faced the river, you in my arms, I heard the *choir*, the voices on the wind. They said, "*Don't do it, Sarah; we have need of this child - far from here, far from you. Sing with us - 'Steal Away'.*" The voices were loud, but your tears were louder, and knowing that son of hell was making you his... This river's called out to me many times; tonight I was listening.
(looks at the river)
But God gave you back. The voices were right; *he's going to set you free.*

BISHOP
You're deluded!

SARAH
Free her or so help me this river will free us both.

BISHOP
I'll drown you myself first!

SARAH
(points to Myron)
And *pretend* to rear this boy when I'm gone, as if you had the first clue?! I've raised Myron as my own since missus' death, and he loves me as *his* own.

BISHOP
Let's remedy that.

Breathing fire, he hands Myron a SPIKED BULLWHIP.

BISHOP

Do her.

SARAH

Do it yourself! Myron's a good boy!

Myron bursts into tears. Bishop BASHES HIS FACE with the shotgun.

BISHOP

Craven!

Sarah SHRIEKS for Myron as the boy falls to the ground SCREAMING. Bracing for what's next, Sarah speaks to her baby girl as if for the last time.

SARAH

Go to the Seventh Street Church here in Nashville; ask anyone how to get there. Find old Mr. Dunley, the organist. He'll take you in.

(sweeping Ella's eyes)

Precious baby, you got a call on your life, God's word. Run your race, fast and far. Become everything your stupid mother wasn't. And don't ever turn back - *I won't let you.*

But Bishop shoves a rag into Sarah's mouth then seizes Ella's face and GLARES PIERCINGLY into her wide eyes.

BISHOP

Now you *hear* God's word, Ella Sheppard...

(gestures to the carnage)

That blood, those battered FACES - it's all your doing. You betrayed your people, bringing heaven's wrath on them; then betrayed me, damning your mother. Those FACES will haunt you the rest of your rotten days, and no matter how far or fast you run in your miserable life, you'll never escape the truth that you're worthless trash your mother *should have* drowned.

CLOSE ON ELLA - She gasps, her mouth violently agape as she silently SHRIEKS at his curse.

Bishop takes a stance over Sarah, winds back the bullwhip, then commands his bleeding son --

BISHOP

Take note.

Just then, we hear a sound overhead... the almost surreal sound of FLAPPING WINGS. They draw Ella's gaze up to --

THE NIGHT SKY

-- where a RAVEN circles expectantly above. It circles around and around almost hypnotically. Ella stares at the raven, terrified yet strangely transfixed.

As SARAH'S SCREAMS pierce the air, black clouds again engulf the moon, damning the scene, and Ella's wide eyes, to darkness.

EXT. PLANTATION GROUNDS - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sarah's shredded body writhes on the cold floor of a steel SWEATBOX guarded by pit bulls. Wailing hysterically, little Ella lunges to get at her mother, but Wallace protectively holds her back.

Meanwhile, MYSTIC WINDS gently grace the plantation as slaves everywhere sing a deeply expressive *spiritual* into the air:

SLAVES

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

Their voices resonate with breathtaking beauty and power, and fill the winds as if vaulting them with their very souls.

Steal Away ravishes us, but hearing it while seeing Sarah writhe in blood traumatizes Ella. She clenches her ears in torment, shutting the spiritual out.

EXT. PLANTATION - NEXT MORNING

The COCKING OF A SHOTGUN jolts Ella from sleep near the sweatbox. Young Myron is leveling a barrel at her head.

MYRON

Come near this property again and
I'll shoot you for a trespasser.

His bludgeoned face plastered with bandages, he looks to his father for approval. Bishop nods it.

Panicked, Ella looks to the PAIR OF EYES peering out at her from the sweatbox.

ELLA

Please Momma, don't send me away...

IN THE SWEATBOX, Sarah bitterly weeps, pleading under her breath --

SARAH
Go on, baby, go...

ELLA
I'm sorry, Momma, I won't do it again!

Ella runs for the sweatbox. **BLAM BLAM!!** Myron OPENS FIRE at her feet -- **BLAM BLAM BLAM!!** -- driving her back.

ELLA
AAAAUUUGGH!! I'M SORRY, MOMMA!!
I'M SORRY!!

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM!!

Sarah wails in anguish as bullets drive her baby girl off the plantation... far down the road... and forever out of her life.

As little Ella vanishes screaming into the distance, we

FADE TO BLACK...

THEN SHOCK CUT TO:

**SPIKED WHIPS. SPLITTING FLESH. TORTURED SCREAMING FACES.
"THIS IS YOUR DOING!" BLAM BLAM!! BO AND HATTIE'S DEAD
FACES. MOMMA'S FACE: "WORTHLESS TRASH!" BLUDGEONED BLOOD-
SPLATTERED FACES SINGING "STEAL AWAY." FACES FACES FACES.**

We hear a TEENAGE GIRL shriek from the NIGHTMARE, then CUT TO:

(SERIES OF SCENES)

VIOLENTLY SHAKING HANDS

Relentlessly editing and reediting hymnals. Feverishly hammering old organ pipes into pitch. Hauling pews around the sanctuary with manic intensity to achieve perfect acoustics. The hands are young, but black and blue and worn to shreds. It's all in preparation for:

SUNDAY SERVICE

Breathtaking music fills the sanctuary. We PAN past spellbound parishioners to the young magician at the organ. At just 14, Ella is already a musical master. But she looks worn beyond her young years, and tellingly, she performs not a spiritual but *Bach*.

Suddenly, news breaks out in the pews. As it spreads like wildfire, everyone runs outside, emptying the church. Ella plays the last chord, throws heaven a look, then follows the clamor out to the --

EUPHORIC STREETS

-- where THOUSANDS CHEER as NEWSBOYS shout:

NEWSBOYS
WAR ENDS! FOUR MILLION SLAVES FREED!

TRAVELING BACK

Ella rides in a cargo wagon with other travelers. The wagon swerves to dodge FREED SLAVES straggling out from plantations. But Ella is in her own world; she's giddily rehearsing seeing Sarah again.

BISHOP'S PLANTATION

After eleven years, Ella has returned to the plantation - but is in hysterics; the gates are tagged with an official notice: "PROPERTY CONFISCATED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT."

She frantically scours the vacant grounds shouting "MOMMA! MOMMA!"

Then her heart drops - she finds the slave quarters splattered with BULLETS and BLOODSTAINS, the aftermath of a grisly rampage.

Shattered, Ella stands at the river's edge facing her reflection with disgust. Our heart drops to realize she's listing forward as if being drawn towards the river's depths.

Just then, a brilliant SUNBEAM breaks through, making something on the ground shimmer in her eyes. She picks it up; it's an old memento box. She opens it, takes out a tightly folded sheet of paper, unfolds it and gasps. It's a child's drawing of:

A BEAUTIFUL HOME

Crude in style but overflowing with heart, this precious treasure is more than a picture; it's a child's prayer. Ella gazes at it with longing eyes.

STRAGGLING ON

Ella treks along a road with several other former slaves. They turn onto a highway and are engulfed in an onslaught of HUNDREDS MORE.

AMA RELIEF BUREAU, DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE

A stunning sight: Ella is among thousands of destitute former slaves pouring off the streets onto the grounds of the AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION, (the "AMA"), where they are warmly greeted and aided by teams of doctors, lawyers and relief workers at an array of booths.

But the streets are violent: SUPREMACIST MOBS swarm the bureau, chanting death to the freed slaves and "nigger-loving" missionaries.

Ella makes a beeline for the MISSING PERSONS BUREAU booth - as a TEENAGE BOY keenly watches her.

(END SERIES OF SCENES)

INT. AMA RELIEF BUREAU - DARKENED MAP ROOM - THAT NIGHT

As the mob's torches rage outside, Ella stands at a glass-encased MAP OF AMERICA showing the locations of hundreds of Missing Persons Bureaus across the nation. Incredibly, she's copying them all down.

Suddenly, we hear --

BOY (O.S.)
You're going out there.

She spins around. The teenage boy has entered.

BOY
You're not waiting for *this* Bureau to find Miss Sarah; you're going out to them all.

Her eyes light up.

ELLA
Wallace?

WALLACE (BOY)
Overheard you at the booth earlier.
Almost worked up the nerve to say *hi*.

He blushes bashfully. This is the boy whose folks Bishop brutally gunned down. But his face bears no bitterness; soft and shy with sparkling eyes and a hopeful smile, Wallace is a sweet, gentle boy.

ELLA
It's so good to see you!

She drowns him in a deep hug - then comes to herself and backs off, red-faced.

ELLA
I-I'm sorry... It's just that...
I think about you a lot.

WALLACE
I see you, talk to you every day.

They trade gazes. Their attraction takes Ella aback, so she pivots.

ELLA
 The plantation, the bullets and
 blood in the slave quarters...
 What happened? Where's Momma?

WALLACE
 Wish I knew.

ELLA
 But --

WALLACE
 I live *here*, at the orphanage.
 (takes a heavy breath)
 Soon after Bishop shot Mom and Pop,
 same day you left, he *drowned* me.
 Or thought he had; passerby found
 me tangled in riverweed, brought me
 here to the AMA. Been here eleven
 years now.

Heartbreak haunts his eyes. Tears well up, but he beats them back.

ELLA
 Oh Wallace, you can cry.

But he toughens up and changes the subject.

WALLACE
 I remember this.

He picks up something from the table... the drawing of the house.

WALLACE
 You drew this for your mother,
 called it "Momma's House." Living
 with her in your own home, on your
 own land, was all you dreamed of.

But Ella curses herself.

ELLA
Wake up, stupid.

WALLACE
 Stupid??

Her eyes go bleak.

ELLA
 Momma didn't make it off the
 plantation. Those bullets took her,
 and if they didn't the river surely
 did. I don't know what I'm doing here.

She breaks down. Alarmed for her, he looks back to the drawing.

WALLACE
I'll build it.

She looks at him, puzzled. He searches her eyes.

WALLACE
From my first hour at the orphanage,
I prayed someone, *anyone*, would come
for me, choose me, make me a son again.
Years went by, then last week, Mister
Moore came over to repair the roof. I
like Mister Moore, so when he comes by
to fix something I chase him around -
carrying his tools, steadying his
ladder. So last week we're on the roof
sweating rivers, and he asks me for the
water. I hand it to him and he just
stops, looks at me as if for the first
time. He lost *his* family awhile back,
so we get to talking... before long
we're laughing. Next I know he signed
the papers, *in ink*. Took a minute, but
I'm getting a new Dad.

(he lifts her chin)

Don't lose hope, Ella - you'll find her,
and you'll live in that house. Mister
Moore... *Pop*... he builds homes here in
Nashville; he's going to teach me
everything. Bring Miss Sarah back and
I'll build you the finest house in town.

His promise fires her heart. Then she looks back at the vast map.

ELLA
Freed slaves are scattering far and
wide. She could be anywhere.

Her heart races. Wallace's gentle eyes suddenly flare. Damning the
Fates, he RIPS DOWN the map case, SMASHES THE GLASS, then hands her
the map as if arming a knight.

WALLACE
Next Bureau's east, in Meridian.

CUT TO THE:

BLOODTHIRSTY STREETS - JUST AFTER

Raging mobs throng the streets. The city flickers like an inferno
in their hellish torchlight.

Wallace and Ella stand beyond the torches at an east-facing road.

WALLACE

You look tired. Sleep tonight.

ELLA

Sleep and I aren't exactly on the best of terms.

WALLACE

Then stay to the shadows.

She nods. Her eyes filled with hope, they sweep each other with their imaginations.

WALLACE

See you on the other side.

ELLA

See you on the other side.

We feel their hearts beating together. She takes a breath then looks down the dark road. As she turns to go, he clasps her hand.

WALLACE

Write to her. Keep her alive.

She takes that in and nods. He lets go, and as she vanishes into the distance, his eyes mist over as if he's just lost his heart.

As the mob rages, our story again moves forward. We PUSH IN to their furious torches. Fire ENGULFS THE SCREEN, and we track the embers upwards to reveal them hellishly EMBLAZING THE SKY.

The embers metamorphose into FIREWORKS and we tilt back down to the:

SAME STREETS, SIX YEARS LATER

Gone are the torches. We're now at a grand CIVIL RIGHTS PARADE with marching bands, military units and astonishingly, black congressmen orating to cheering mixed crowds. We marvel at Blacks and Whites freely intermingling as their kids play harmoniously in the streets.

This stunning new world is PRESENT-DAY NASHVILLE, 1871.

As we TRAVEL DOWN THE BOULEVARD taking it all in, we hear:

ELLA (V.O.)

Dear Momma, it's me. What are you up to this bright holiday? I'm picturing you in a peach-trim dress taking in the fireworks. Me? Thinking of you of course, and us, and this dawn of freedom breaking across the South.

Still traveling, we spot supremacists seething at the integration, but FEDERAL TROOPS lock down the streets, keeping their fury at bay.

ELLA (V.O.)

The world is praising Washington for this civil rights revolution, but what if I told you that long before Congress found its fickle spine, an army of abolitionists - champions of justice that have *long* fought and bled for our freedom - were leading the charge? That racial oppression has no fiercer enemy than the American Missionary Association?

We approach a ramshackle CAMPUS...

ELLA (V.O.)

Hang in there, I'm going somewhere... The AMA *battles* hate through its nationwide churches, newspapers, hospitals and orphanages. But its most explosive weapons against tyranny are its hundreds of *schools*.

...then enter the crumbling but bustling grounds of FISK UNIVERSITY.

ELLA (V.O.)

The crown jewel of these is a scrappy university with a fighting spirit, defiantly built on an old slave yard - FISK.

We sweep through packed classrooms where former slaves are being taught Latin and Philosophy, Calculus and Constitutional Law...

ELLA (V.O.)

Fisk is forging senators and justices, scholars and ministers, authors, artists and attorneys that will make this nation live out its creed that *all men are created equal*.

... pass through dilapidated dorms and dining halls.

ELLA (V.O.)

The AMA's vast ambitions keep glamor at bay, and that's just fine; we're building the Dream. That's right, Momma, "*We*." After all these wayfaring years, I'm back in Nashville, a Professor of Music at Fisk. I can't wait to show you around when...

(breaks down)

when you... visit...

As she chokes up, we arrive at an old SLAVE BARRACKS and enter...

ELLA'S ROOM

... the lair of a workaholic. We PAN past mountains of music scores and textbooks... past the Missing Persons Bureau map, with its countless locations meticulously checked off... and SETTLE on the:

DEATH CERTIFICATE OF SARAH SHEPPARD, "DECLARED DEAD IN ABSENTIA."

We take that in, then CUT TO a young woman staring at it, haunted. Now 19, our Ella is a reluctant beauty - slender yet shapely with a softly chiseled face, wide probing eyes, and a churning mind that could power a city. She wills herself to finish the letter.

ELLA (V.O.)

Oh Momma, the last I saw of you were
those eyes peering out at me from
darkness. In the long years since,
I've seen nothing else. I swear
we'll be together again: despite the
"official word," I've got every
Bureau looking for you and ads
running coast to coast. Now I wait;
Hercules himself couldn't pry me
from Nashville until you walk
through that door. That's all I
live for. Yours forever, Samuella.

She folds the letter into an envelope, writes "Sarah Sheppard" on it, then sighs and adds it to a TALL STACK OF UNSENT LETTERS.

We hear a GRUNT; she's not alone. We PAN to a fatherly Caucasian man at a facing desk. Tousled and unshaven with dreamer's eyes and an otherworldly gaze, this is the deeply endearing GEORGE WHITE, 50.

He's slogging through an impossible mountain of Fisk bills.

WHITE

Smoke and mirrors...

Ella grunts back in empathy. They break out grunting like apes - "OO-OO AA-AA EE-EE!" - then burst out laughing in stitches. We immediately like White; despite their color and age differences, he and Ella are the closest, most inseparable of friends.

Smiling at White, Ella then whips the letter back out:

ELLA (V.O.)

Then there's our little *choir*...

CUT TO:

EXT. FISK QUAD - STORM-CLOUDED DAY

A sensational CHOIR OF EIGHT BLACK STUDENTS perform outdoors for the bustling campus. They're really phenomenal --

CHOIR

*Gott fähret auf mit Jauchzen und
der Herr mit heller Posaunen!*

-- even if it is *Bach* they're singing. In German.

ELLA (V.O.)

We're an amateur group without a name.

CLOSE-UPS ON:

BENNIE HOLMES - brainy, politically savvy, but cripplingly insecure.

ELLA (V.O.)

There's Bennie, our aspiring orator.

AMERICA ROBINSON - mature, graceful, a woman of quiet strength.

ELLA (V.O.)

My bosom buddy America, "Merrie" to me.

FRED LOUDIN - a restless, disgruntled ladder-climber.

ELLA (V.O.)

**Loudin - a gifted musical prodigy...
and frustrated husband and father.
His ambitions to conquer the world
were shattered by a shotgun wedding.**

GEORGIA GORDON - a sassy, sexy, light-skinned belle.

ELLA (V.O.)

**Georgia. Unlike most of us, Georgia
never suffered under slavery. For
her own protection, she was hidden in
a convent and raised as white.**

MINNIE TATE - the baby of the choir; a sweet, trusting angel.

ELLA (V.O.)

**Our nightingale and newest member,
Minnie, all of fourteen. She too
never knew slavery.**

TOM RUTLING and IKE DICKERSON - shameless dandies and pranksters.
Identically styled and coiffed, they sway like crooners as they sing.

ELLA (V.O.)

Tom and Ike, aka *The Twins*. Rascals both.

MAGGIE PORTER - an ultra-gifted, ultra-high-maintenance diva with
extremely dark skin, and perhaps a troubled past: Despite her brassy
persona, she wears dense skin-lightening makeup as if to hide in
plain sight, and long opera gloves that fully conceal her arms.

ELLA (V.O.)

Her Royal Goddess Maggie. A diva's diva, Maggie's dream is to command the world stage as *prima donna*, and trust me, that last part won't be a stretch. Maggie never talks about her past, and despite her antics Mr. White treats her as if she were infinitely fragile

ELLA - a one-woman orchestra on piano. As her fingers ravish the keyboard, she critically hawk-eyes the choir

ELLA (V.O.)

Me, Assistant Choirmaster and arranger.

Directing this young black choir is the only white guy in sight, our beloved GEORGE WHITE. He directs the choir with surprising soul

ELLA (V.O.)

And our Visionary in Chief, Fisk's treasurer and our treasure, George White. A passionate but chastened dreamer, life has dealt Mr. White severe blows. Since the tragic death of his wife, we're his only family.

And this is our colorful kaleidoscope of characters.

They bring the song to a stirring close... then hang their heads. Their performance has drawn only passing gawks and jeers.

ELLA (V.O.)

We sing to lift spirits, which usually means our own.

Ever the idealist, White alone is unfazed.

WHITE

Our time will come.

On cue, a DOWNPOUR breaks out. The singers run for cover, but --

ELLA

WHOA WHOA WHOA!!

-- *perfection* summons them back. Groaning, the singers fearfully return to Ella, flinching as she unleashes a barrage of CORRECTIONS:

ELLA

Altos, you were flat at the *fermata* - watch pitch and bring out that third. Tenors, stay with me at the *piu mosso*.
(MORE)

ELLA (CONT'D)

Mr. Loudin, your elocution at *E* was sheer mud; get the marbles out of your mouth! Mr. Rutling, Mr. Dickerson, blend at the key change - and *garden of mercy*, kill the theatrics!

We know this will go on forever. Mercifully, White intervenes.

WHITE

Sam, it *is* raining.

Ella looks up - *so it is*.

ELLA (V.O.)

Being such a motley bunch often makes us more madhouse than choir...

Drenched and dejected, the singers sulk. White opens his arms.

WHITE

Hey... family first and always.

Who can resist White? As always, his smile kindles theirs. They melt into warm hugs, standing together against the cold rain.

ELLA (V.O.)

But in the end, we *are* family.

FADE OUT.

INT. "MOUNTAIN TOP CHURCH" - BASEMENT CHOIR ROOM - SUNDAY MORNING

Ella holds a GIRLS CHOIR on a high note, gesturing for them to raise their pitch - UP! UP! UP! The girls are blue in the face trying, but Ella is relentless. Mercifully --

THE CHURCH BELL RINGS

-- ending the rehearsal. Panting for dear life, the girls look to Ella - *How'd we do??*

ELLA

Love covers a multitude of sins.

She winks. The girls laugh. We feel their love.

ELLA

All right, ladies - *robes!*

As the girls don choir robes, four adorable CUTIE PIES - (we'll learn their names later) - pepper Ella with questions.

CUTIE PIE 1

Miss Ella, why don't you ever sing?

ELLA

Refusal to inflict cruelty; I never
had much of a voice.

CUTIE PIE 2

Did your mother sing?

ELLA

(wistfully)

Momma's singing was sheer silk. Her
lullabies sent me straight to sleep.

CUTIE PIE 3

Why didn't you ever have children?

CUTIE PIE 4

Silly, she's old, not dead! There's
still a modicum of hope - *if* she can
manage to scrounge a man.

CUTIE PIES

I wouldn't hold my breath!

They high-five. Ella blushes, then kisses their foreheads.

ELLA

Didn't anyone tell you? You little
pickles are my children, every one
of you.

The girls coo - they love their Ella.

SHOCK CUT TO:

A FIERY STAINED-GLASS CROSS

A hate-drenched emblem of race supremacy that curdles our blood,
it towers monstrosly above a church. Over it, we hear:

PREACHER (O.S.)

Four million *mules* plundered from
our possession! Yesterday, they're
dragging our plows, today they're
canonized as citizens! Venerated as
voters! Exalted as bankers and
congressmen! To complete their
glorification, this so-called "*Civil
Rights Bill*" would enshrine these dumb-
as-dirt beasts as our *full* equals!
And lest we object, the U.S. Army
invades *our* states, confiscates *our*
plantations, purges *us* from power, and
locks down *our* streets like a military
state "to keep *our* rage at bay"!

We hear HOWLS OF FURY, then CUT INSIDE to --

INT. CHURCH OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS

-- a furnace of supremacist rage. We PAN PAST pews of rabid faces to the Bishop's Chair. Enthroned on it is BISHOP SHEOLGATE, Ella's former master. Bishop hawk-eyes the pulpit, and we follow his glare over to the volcanic preacher. To our shock, it's none other than MYRON, Bishop's brutally battered son. Now 25, his boyish face is marred with abusive welts, and his blue eyes blister with hate.

MYRON (continuing)

Now we got these tar-loving missionaries soiling our land with their so-called "schools"! *Schools, for savages!* Friends, you educate a dog, you get an educated dog - even God-on-High can't make mongrels men! Yet these kennels are breeding them to *completely* take over our world! The Southern Cross is under siege, and the flower of her people defiled! Once virile and proud, we've been brought to our knees, stripped, and ravaged by a godless enemy!

(SLAMS the pulpit)

BUT OUR CROSS SHALL RISE! SAY RISE!

CONGREGATION

RISE!

MYRON

And it shall destroy God's enemies in the great winepress of heaven's wrath! For the Lord says, *"I am raising an army, O Babylon, a mighty and dreadful army, and I will strike you down for the wrong done my people! I will wipe you from the Earth!"*

(SLAMS the pulpit)

SONS OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS, WE ARE THE LORD'S ARMY, HIS BATTLE-AXE AND SWORD! FOR HE WARNS EVERY ONE OF US: *"CURSED IS HE WHO HOLDS BACK HIS SWORD FROM BLOODSHED!"* SOON AND VERY SOON, BY GOD'S RECKONING AND OUR OWN, THOSE DOGS WILL BE PUT DOWN! THE DAMNED FEAR THE APOCALYPSE; THE FAITHFUL BRING IT ON!

Thundering **AMENS!** Sweating, young Myron looks to his father for approval; Bishop nods it. As the pews ROAR, we --

CUT TO:

A CROSS OF HOPE (SAME TIME)

This emblem of peace towers above a nearby church. Its preacher addresses the thundering *AMENS* we hear coming from Bishop's church:

HIRAM (O.S.)

Listen... the thunder of a raging cross, its daggered beams bearing a bloodthirsty Christ. Him they preach, him they believe; thus the South swelters with the heat of injustice...

We hear KNOWING GROANS, then CUT INSIDE to --

INT. MOUNTAINTOP CHURCH

-- a very different church. Here, dynamic preacher HIRAM JACKSON, (African-American, 30s), electrifies his thoroughly integrated congregation - including congressmen, civil rights luminaries, and all of Fisk - with a very different call to arms.

HIRAM (continuing)

Yet here *others* gather. Same Lord's Day, same Holy Book. But we look to Calvary and behold *another* cross - beams of *Hope* bearing a Savior of Love with a Gospel of *Peace*. A Great Physician who shed his *own* blood to heal his enemies, whose outstretched arms forge from men of every tribe, tongue and nation one people, one family, one object of his blazing love! For throughout these Southern "United" States, there are *two* crosses, and they are at war!

Ella accompanies Hiram on organ as her girls stand ready to sing. In the pews, White and the choir sit rapt. Bennie, our aspiring orator, mimics Hiram's speech patterns. Loudin sits uneasily with his beautiful wife and sons as Georgia discreetly eyes him.

HIRAM

And as this war over the Civil Rights Bill plays out and Congress debates just *how* free this "Land of the Free" should be, our hope is alive! For in *our* cross we see the promises of a faithful God. We see Jubilee! Ahh, "What's Jubilee?" You ask good questions on a Sunday morning!

Laughs in the pews. Bennie plucks up his courage, stands to his feet and stammers out --

BENNIE

*L-Leviticus 25: "A-and the L-Lord
said, 'P-proclaim l-l-liberty
throughout the land, and it sh-*

The Twins shout him down --

TOM and IKE

"A-and it sh-shall b-be a J-jubilee!"

-- and impishly snicker. Confirmed: Bennie is a dreadful speaker; we cringe for him as he slumps, humiliated, back to his seat.

HIRAM

Amen, Bennie. Jubilee is the triumph of *Liberty* over the shackles of hate for all people everywhere! The conquest of *Justice* that breaks every chain! We are an army, but our battle cry is *Jubilee!* We're soldiers, but our swords are *giftings and callings* from the armory of the true Cross to storm the gates of hate and set hate's captives free! Cast down strongholds of bigotry! Hew stones of hope from the mountains of despair! THIS is our warfare! THIS is our call to arms!

(SLAMS the pulpit)

BROTHERS! SISTERS! WILL YOU ANSWER THE CALL? WILL YOU LIFT YOUR SWORDS AND PROVE THE GOD OF JUBILEE... OR LET THEM RUST AND PROVE HIM THE MERE PHANTOM OF OUR HOPES?!

Deafening *AMENS!* Ella her girls break triumphally singing *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.*

EXT. TWO CHURCHES - AFTER SERVICE

We see that the churches are directly across the street from each other. Their rooftop crosses tower high into the sky, facing off as if warring for the nation's destiny.

Hiram and Myron each greet their exiting parishioners.

AT HIRAM'S CHURCH

White and the choir ply Hiram with warm hugs; it's a lovefest.

HIRAM

How's my favorite choir? You know I've been dying to join. Wait --

He warbles a pathetic tune. The singers cringe.

MAGGIE
Preach, brother, don't screech!

HIRAM
(feigns being shot down)
Oww!

AMERICA
That was some call to arms, Hiram
Jackson. A veiled stump speech?

Hiram groans; he gets this a lot.

BENNIE
You're about the most listened-to voice
in the country. Take that sermon to
Congress and you'll push through the
Civil Rights Bill.

A brisk passerby - FREDERICK DOUGLASS - agrees.

DOUGLASS
He's right, preacher; take office and
get those weathervane Moderates off
the fence! I want news of a campaign.

Awestruck, Bennie chases after Douglass.

BENNIE
M-Mr. Douglass, my name's Bennie --

DOUGLASS
(winces)
I'd stick to singing, kid.

Douglass exits. *Ouch.* Bennie sulks, but White lifts his chin.

WHITE
Benjamin Holmes, you're a powerful,
passionate communicator. You'll find
your voice and the people will listen.

ANGLE ON LOUDIN, ACROSS THE CHURCHYARD

He's angrily chewing his wife and sons out about something. We PAN
to Georgia looking on. If we're not mistaken, she's grinning.

ANGLE ON ELLA

She exits the church and belatedly joins the choir. As she does --

MINNIE

Look.

-- Minnie points across the street.

ANGLE ON MYRON - He's huddled with an ominous clan of YOUNG WHITE MEN. They're glaring right at Hiram and the choir.

HIRAM (O.S.)

Sons of the Southern Cross, and their
Lord and Savior, Myron Sheolgate.

Myron locks eyes with Ella. They trade icy glares. He and his boys break out miming "*Momma! Momma!*", cruelly mocking her.

Just then, we hear SHOUTS. Everyone looks down the street --

A GANG OF BLACK THUGS IS CHARGING UP TO BISHOP'S CHURCH.

In a flash, they furiously ATTACK Myron and his boys. A MELEE breaks out - fists and weapons fly.

The black GANG LEADER lunges to get at Myron, but Myron's boys viciously beat him back.

Troops SWOOP IN and TACKLE the thugs. As they pin down the gang leader, Ella's heart races - she races towards him, but White snatches her back.

Ella and the gang leader lock eyes. Something like electricity passes between them. We recognize him, even though he's now tall and strapping, and his once-gentle eyes now furnace with hate.

A soldier asks his name. We PUSH IN as he answers --

GANG LEADER

Wallace Moore.

EXT. VACANT PARCEL OF LAND - LATER

A gorgeous riverside property. Ella strolls about the lot dreamily as if making a home there with someone special.

A sign tells us we're on COVENANT LANE. The realtor is COLT COLTON.

INT. "COLT'S REAL ESTATE AND CARPENTRY" - SHOWROOM - LATER

An eclectic showroom of home models, custom furniture - and militant black separatism: Angry wall posters shout:

*"JOIN THE EXODUS! LEAVE WHITE NASHVILLE
FOR BLACK COLONIES IN KANSAS!"*

At the rear counter is the movement's leader - old COLT COLTON, an indestructible cuss with a scar-racked body.

Ella is gazing at lovely HOME MODELS as Wallace and his gang enter.

WALLACE

Sorry we're late, Colt.

Damn he's fine, even with fresh scars. Ella fans herself pretending not to notice - then manically slaps on more rouge. Then --

ELLA

AAAAHHH!!

-- he sneaks up and gooses her.

ELLA

Garden of mercy! You are a rogue!

WALLACE

And you've got rouge on your teeth.

She checks her teeth and gasps. He roars with satisfaction and gets to work marking lumber. Coarse, crass and full of swagger, this isn't the sweet kid we met way back.

Ella turns in a snit, waits in vain for an apology, then hisses back:

ELLA

Jailbird.

WALLACE

Gonna waste that preacher and his daddy.

ELLA

Oh now *that's* enlightened.

WALLACE

(points to shattered windows)
Those crackers shot this place up last night. Don't worry, first I'll bleed out of them what happened to your mother.

Ella can't go there. She *harumphs*, then goes back to gazing at the home model, talking to herself only louder.

ELLA

Fifty-Three-B, I do believe you're the one; you'll be "the finest house in Nashville." Maybe just... extra bedrooms, for children?

She bats Wallace a look.

WALLACE

Why stop there? How about marble floors? Sapphire outhouses? One of those new "toilets" that's all the rage?

ELLA

I can dream.

WALLACE

Dream on.

Ouch, his scoffing hurts. Just then, she spots a YOUNG MAN approaching Colt from the back room and gasps.

ELLA

Mr. Turner! Not you!

Turner sees her and ducks out. Ella hits the roof.

ELLA

That's *another* of my students, Mr. Colton, not one of your separatist disciples! He hasn't been to school in weeks! *DON'T SELL OUT, MR. TURNER!*
(fumes)
He sold out.

WALLACE

He saw the light.

ELLA

Moths see the light. "The Great Black Exodus" is a dead-end.

WALLACE

Your delusions are the dead-end. Add all the "rooms" you want, Nashville is white-man's land; we got no future here.

ELLA

Ah, but a militant *realtor-slash-prophet* and his *carpenter-thugs* herding Negroes off to some Caucasian-free Nirvana in Kansas - sounds like a *real* future.

WALLACE

Just bought a thousand acres; we break ground in the fall.

ELLA

Well *Happy Pitchforks*.

WALLACE

You should see it - blue skies, green fields, freedom like the wind.

ELLA

Thanks, we get wind here. And, by the way, *freedom*. What don't you see?? It's a bright new day!

WALLACE

(beat, his eyes haunted)
Suns set.

ELLA

This one's not. We'll get the Civil Rights Bill. After that, we'll be --

WALLACE

"Living the Dream!"

ELLA

Our friends in Congress are seeing to it; the President has sworn his support. Meanwhile, the AMA --

WALLACE

Your white shining knights!

ELLA

Our *friends*. They're paving our way to the White House.

WALLACE

The White House...
(shakes his head)
Let me help you --

ELLA

Garden of Mercy.

WALLACE

Whites come in two stripes - devils and devils. Your problem is, you think there's a third.

ELLA

You're wrong. Our friends are true friends.

WALLACE

So they seem. But beneath his nods and smiles - *at his core of cores* - every white man fears black flesh. Black is the *color* of white fear, and what he fears he must put down.

ELLA

You're wrong as wrong gets!

WALLACE

He can't help it, it's primal -
supremacy and domination flow like
gangrene in his blood. His retinas
see *us* as threats to be taken out.

ELLA

Hence their orphanage that raised you.

WALLACE

Some suffer flare-ups of guilt, so to
douse their liberal conscience they
condescend from on high, take the form
of a bondservant and present themselves
as angels of light, casting benevolent
crumbs at our tribal feet. And long as
we remain downtrodden niggers looking
gratefully *up* at those white wings, all
is well. But rise up - *stand* to our
feet and look *across* space into those
retinas - they'll snap out of their
stupor and reclaim the throne. Then
we'll wake from ours and see the horns
we'd overlooked all along.

ELLA

(bristles)

You're the other side of Bishop's coin.
You hate as much as they do.

WALLACE

Well said.

ELLA

Then I fear for your soul.

WALLACE

Do.

ELLA

What happened to you?? Your father
builds here in Nashville, right?
What does he think of --

WALLACE

Leave Pop out of this!

ELLA

He's not going to Kansas, is he?
I've never even seen him in here!
What, after he "taught you everything"
you're abandoning him for Colt?!

WALLACE
LEAVE HIM OUT.

ELLA
 (shattered)
God, what am I doing here?

WALLACE
 O mystery of mysteries!

ELLA
 Come again?!

WALLACE
 Come on - you're here four times a week, every week, on my shift.

ELLA
 (turns bright red)
 To see the models!

WALLACE
 You know those models down to the glue!

ELLA
 Meaning?!

WALLACE
 You're full of sound and fury, but we both know --

ELLA
 What?! What?!

Her mouth agape, he INCINERATES HER WITH A KISS that would scorch a volcano. Her heart blazes; her head sizzles; she flails like a drunken boxer to beat him off but is too disoriented to connect.

He releases her with a wink.

WALLACE
 You'll be chasing me to Kansas.

Unbelievable! She stares at the villain, woozy and wobbly, commanding her brain to function. Desperate to regain control, she racks her head for a potent comeback but manages only --

ELLA
 Oh you know that, do you?

WALLACE
 (grins)
 Like water's wet and flies fly.

She SLAPS him, then SLAPS him again. *There!* It took a minute, but she's back on her game.

ELLA
Get used to flies. When Kansas goes bust you'll be back cleaning latrines.

WALLACE
Oh will I?

ELLA
Sewage Services, a *thug's* future.
Say Hi when you get to the "sapphire outhouse" on Covenant Lane.

He glares at her.

WALLACE
Covenant Lane??

Something just changed. He looks at her incredulously.

ELLA
Th-that's the parcel I hope to build Momma's house on.

His eyes go cold. Suddenly, she feels horribly alone.

ELLA
It sounds far-fetched I know, but I'm cobbling my pennies. Looks like the land's been vacant years. Maybe God --

SNAP!! The plank in his hands SNAPS IN TWO. She flinches as he SLAMS IT DOWN and exits.

INT. MAKESHIFT CHOIR ROOM - THAT NIGHT

A madcap BIRTHDAY PARTY for Ella. White and the motley choir surround her at the piano, guzzling cider like drunks and howling their way through stacks of wretched American songs:

ALL
*Let me spank him for his mother,
He is such a naughty boy!
He the baby tried to smother
And he's broken Fannie's toy!
Oh I'll spank him for his mother,
For he's such a tiresome braaaaat --*

GONG! They murder the foul song with a nasty PIANO CHORD. Uproarious laughs, merciless jeers.

Upping the mania, the Twins whoop it up like Baptist preachers to the "Congregation."

TOM

Thus mercifully endeth this edition of *"Sing That Tripe: the Sad, Soulless State of American Top 10 Music"* featuring instant classics such as *"Carve That Possum," "Goober Peas,"* and of course *"Let the Old Cat Die."*

CONGREGATION

BOOOOOOOOO!!

IKE

Which is why we stick with Bach, Beethoven, and of course Brother Buxtehude!

CONGREGATION

AMEN!!

IKE

We turn now to that dreaded lady of the hour, that merciless maven in our mist --

TOM

"Midst," fool.

IKE

-- that crashed this Earth exactly twenty years ago today to taunt and torture every poor unpitched singer!

CONGREGATION

HISSSSSS!!

TOM

Let us praise the Almighty that she be mere assistant to the Director!

CONGREGATION

PRAISE BE!!

IKE

For heaven help us - *heaven help humanity* - should she ever ascend to the throne!

CONGREGATION

NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!

(they break out chanting)

NEVER DIE MR. WHITE, NEVER DIE DIE DIE!

NEVER DIE MR. WHITE, NEVER NEVER NEVER DIE!

Ella playfully rolls her eyes.

TOM

Who'll toast that Despot of Diction,
Tyrant of Tempo, Pharaoh of the Fermata,
terror to the fool and faint heart?

White stands.

IKE

(Elizabethan accent)

Ah, that *noble signior* who, despite
his name, skin and birth certificate,
doth oft strike us as *more black than*
fair. Brother White.

Nobody knows Ella better. White and Ella trade warm gazes. He sweeps her with admiring eyes then recites what sounds like an ancient ode.

WHITE

*Beware this one, Ye Fates. For though
by appearance frail, she is a force of
nature - unstoppable, unsinkable,
incapable of compromise or surrender,
a Soldier of Steel and Warrior of Hope
that takes no prisoners and suffers no
fools. So beware.*

(raises his glass)

Happy Twentieth, Sam.

Misty-eyed, Ella and White embrace like ancient friends. The choir breaks into loud *HOOAHS* and deep hugs. We feel the love all around.

But something's not right; the *UNDERScore* ominously swells. The instant they clink glasses we hear --

EXPLOSIONS and SCREAMS from across campus.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. FISK CAMPUS - MOMENTS LATER

The campus is in chaos. Screaming students flee *EXPLOSIONS AND TOWERING BILLOWS OF SMOKE*. White, Ella and the choir race against the fray towards the quad. They arrive and gasp at a scene of:

PANDEMONIUM

Buildings are *ENGULFED IN FLAMES*. Soldiers evacuate hysterical students as windows *EXPLODE* and glass *CASCADES* all around them.

GEORGIA

Sweet Jesus.

EXT. FISK CAMPUS - NEXT DAY

A horrific devastation. Buildings smolder. Black effigies hang lynched from trees. Prophetic graffiti vows a coming apocalypse. We PAN ACROSS the ruins to the site of an old excavated --

AUCTION BLOCK

-- where mountains of chains and manacles have been unearthed.

An emergency meeting is taking place here. Fisk's shell-shocked students are gathered before an imposing executive - MILO CRAVATH (Caucasian, 60s) - an unsentimental war hawk with intensely sensitive eyes. Beside him is a sharply-dressed WOMAN.

CRAVATH

Milo Cravath, AMA Headquarters. My deputy and I are just in from New York. The faculty have been briefed on the purpose of this meeting.

The red-eyed faculty clasp hands. Just then, White, Ella and the choir truantly arrive, drawing scowls. Cravath growls and goes on.

CRAVATH

Army Ops confirms what we already know: last night was *arson*. They're doubtful, however, they'll ever ID the attackers.

A STUDENT shouts --

STUDENT

It was that church mob!

The students CLAMOR in agreement. The woman with Cravath speaks up.

SUSAN

That was no mere mob; it was a *militia*.

CRAVATH

My deputy, Susan Gilbert.

The crackerjack SUSAN GILBERT (Caucasian, 40s) is a bold, beautiful, badass operative sporting aggressive pinstripes.

WHITE

Militia?? What's this about?

SUSAN

Turning back the clock. The Southern Cross is more than a denomination, it's the raging emblem of a vast and savage empire that took its last bow;
(MORE)

SUSAN (CONT'D)

its churches cauldrons of hate over
the end of their terrorist
civilization, a barbaric land of
cavaliers and cottonfields that,
thank God, is gone with the wind.
Emancipation cost the Old South
power, pride, and four billion
dollars in human flesh. *They're
rising up to take it back.*

BENNIE

Take *what* back?

SUSAN

You. Across the South, sons of the
Southern Cross are mobilizing to take
the elections... and take back their
slaves.

The students CLAMOR - "*Slaves?!"*

AMERICA

That's impossible; the 13th Amendment
abolishes slavery --

SUSAN

"Except as punishment for crime." I make
you a criminal, I make you my slave.

MINNIE

Even if they take back power, how do
you criminalize a *race* of people?

SUSAN

I arrest you for standing on a sidewalk
if you're the wrong color, then condemn
you to life as *convict labor* in my
factories and mines. Under their laws,
black men and boys will be snatched
from streets, tortured in boiler rooms
and caves until their bodies break,
then fed to the furnaces and replaced.

GEORGIA

Death camps!

SUSAN

Slavery, reinvented.

ELLA

(getting the big picture)
To rule us they need *mules*, not thinking
minds. Not Fisk. Last night was an act
of war.

WHITE
So we rebuild. Now.

Cravath takes a bitter breath.

CRAVATH
We can't. Not *this*, not with the AMA's swelling debt and shrinking credit. I'm afraid they struck the jugular.

WHITE
Translate.

CRAVATH
Fisk is shutting down.

SHOCKWAVES - the students EXPLODE in an uproar. The faculty weep. White visibly freaks out. Cravath presses on with business.

CRAVATH
We'll sleep students at the shelter tonight. Return here at 7AM for final instructions. It is finished.

White goes ballistic, and we

CUT TO:

WHITE DOGGING CRAVATH ACROSS CAMPUS

WHITE
What the hell?!

CRAVATH
This is just the beginning; they're going to attack us on every front until every campus is in ruins! We're in survival mode!

WHITE
Don't take the bait! They attacked Fisk because it's the best; they know if Fisk falls it all falls! We've got to fight back!

CRAVATH
With what, *ash*?! Our dorms and classrooms are rubble!

WHITE
We use the old slave barracks!

CRAVATH
Impossible! It's condemned!

WHITE

But intact! We house students there,
move classes to the field!

CRAVATH

The open field, in this coming winter?!
What part of *impossible* don't you ever
get? We move on to move up!

WHITE

I never heard *defeat* so nobly defended!
What happened to the *fighter* that
founded Fisk out of his own pocket?
That made it a great university?!
Impossible is devil's talk! Don't
crumble! Don't crucify the Dream!

That's it! As they barge into a --

CONFERENCE ROOM

-- Cravath SLAMS White into a wall map of the UNDERGROUND RAILROAD.

CRAVATH

Don't lecture me on the Dream! I
was raised there, on the Underground
Railroad; our home was a safe house
for escaping slaves! My parents died
defending the Dream and I vowed to God
the same - I beg him every hour to
make me half of what they were! I
love Fisk, but if sacrificing it means
saving the Dream, I'll slaughter it
without blinking!

Ella and Susan rush in --

ELLA and SUSAN

Mr. Cravath!

-- snapping him out of his fury.

We shudder at Cravath's anger; he's a powderkeg of pent-up rage.
He unthrottles White and slumps into a chair, clutching his head as
if it were being jackhammered. Then he catches his breath... calms
his shaking hands... and looks ruefully out at the campus.

CRAVATH

These lowlands were the worst site for
a campus anyway; the vermin sickened
our students and rotted every building.
(then, back to business)
And shut down that choir.

ELLA

Excuse me??

CRAVATH

No *German requiems* as Fisk shutters.
Your little circus act has been the
bane of this faculty's existence.

Susan's eyes glint to realize --

SUSAN

You're George White?

White nods cluelessly. Her eyes sweep him as if beholding a myth.

ELLA

What do they say about the choir?

Cravath shoots Susan a *this one's on you* look.

ELLA

Miss Gilbert? Your reputation as
Mr. Cravath's "assassin" precedes
you. I'll expect your candor.

Susan looks flustered, but owning her job, she toughens up and spews
it out...

SUSAN

They say the choir is a disgrace and
an embarrassment to Fisk. That its
director is a dangerous visionary, a
blind stargazer, a huckster of lies
and false hope. That the choir is a
salve for his guilt over a lost love.
That you're a family of *misfits* -
damned by nightmares, driven by far-
off dreams - singing of distant lives
and lands to escape your own. That
it's all... *pathetic*.

... detesting every word. White and Ella trade staggered looks.

ELLA

Why didn't you shut us down before?

CRAVATH

Oh, I ordered the hit. Then the
darndest thing happened: My "assassin"
reviews White's personal file, and for
reasons that defy reason finds in
those tortured pages not a madman but
a misunderstood genius - a dangerous
visionary in the *best* sense.

(MORE)

CRAVATH (CONT'D)

At which point she becomes his fist-and-knuckles *defender* at headquarters and tenders her resignation effective the moment anyone lays a hand on his choir. This without having laid eyes on the man until twenty minutes ago.

SUSAN

(fights blushing)
Distant impressions...

CRAVATH

Because her loss to the AMA would be catastrophic, the answer to your question is... *blackmail*.

Susan and White trade gazes. Deep, probing gazes. And in their gaze we'd swear time stopped. We gaze at Susan, past the pinstripes and pumps, and discover soft, searching eyes. We like her... but White is breathing and sweating uneasily.

Suddenly, White's eyes spark. He snaps back to the map.

WHITE

What would it take to rebuild?

CRAVATH

This sinkhole? Thousands, might as well be millions.

White stares at the Underground Railroad, transfixed. Entranced, he runs a finger along its northward routes as if tracing a journey.

His eyes flare with a vision.

WHITE

Don't count Fisk out, Milo. The Dream, the struggle - we've got a part to play in it.

CRAVATH

Good grief, another prophecy.

WHITE

God speaks!

CRAVATH

To you more than Moses, only the Red Sea never actually parts for you, does it? You and your fantasias -- voices on the wind, singing temples, globetrotting crusades. *Poor Laura...* Careful, or you're headed for another breakdown. You wage war on reality.

ELLA and SUSAN
Great men wage war on reality.

Ella and Susan trade looks. Cravath shakes his head.

CRAVATH
Be *on time* for the closure tomorrow.

WHITE
For God's sake, Milo --

CRAVATH
It is finished.

INT. CHOIR ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Devastated at the news, the singers mill about the room grimly as if in a bomb shelter awaiting the end. Meanwhile, HEAVY WINDS batter the windows insistently as if to get their attention.

White and Ella are off to themselves playing a solemn violin-piano duet. He looks preoccupied, and her playing is too rigid for him.

WHITE
Let it breathe, Sam.

ELLA
She looked at you.

WHITE
Forget the metronome; *feel* the music.

ELLA
You traded looks. Yours said "Have we met?" Hers said "Do dreams count?"

WHITE
(breaks into a sweat)
Sam...

ELLA
Live again, Mr. White. The past is past; what happened with Laura --

The bow drops from his hand. He's hyperventilating.

ELLA
Mr. White!

She swings him onto the bench and helps him --

ELLA
Breathe... breathe...

As White catches his breath, something heavy hangs in the air.

ELLA
The map today, you saw --

WHITE
(deflecting)
Lines.

ELLA
They went north. Then east to New York?

He hesitates, then nods.

WHITE
Would the others come?

ELLA
In a heartbeat.

Then he looks to *her*.

ELLA
You know I've got to wait for her
here. Go.

WHITE
Not without you.

ELLA
It's the only hope.

WHITE
Then there *is* no hope.

Just then - *WHAP!* - a skylight blows open. The wind ushers a ravishing melody into the room.

WHITE
Listen.

It's the spiritual *Steal Away* being sung by distant voices. White is in raptures; bewitched, he drifts upstairs as if drawn by a siren. The others trade knowing looks and follow him up to the:

EXT. ROOFTOP - MINUTES LATER

A brilliant star-filled night. White, Ella and the choir stand on what feels like the top of the world.

The heavens are charged with song; *Steal Away* is being sung by what sounds like a great timeless choir of souls, filling the Earth with piercing beauty as if a benediction over humanity.

Steal Away soothes White's troubled soul; he hums it soulfully as if one with the great choir. But others squirm.

ELLA
Mr. White...

WHITE
I know, the spirituals aren't for "us."

TOM
They're not for anyone anymore; they're *history* thank God.

Not all agree.

GEORGIA
This doesn't sound like history; this is alive.

ELLA
The spirituals are *dead*, Georgia.

MINNIE
I think it's beautif--

ELLA
Dead!

WHITE
What if you're wrong, Sam? What if --

ELLA
We're not discussing this!

We're struck by Ella's hostility to the spirituals. She abruptly turns to leave --

WHITE
Sam!

ELLA
Go.

-- then exits.

White sighs. Then his eyes light up as *Steal Away* draws his gaze back to the heavens. He scans the skies in awe, beholding something majestic yet invisible, magnificent and towering but not yet there.

AMERICA
You see it.

He reluctantly nods. The singers gather around White and follow his gaze to the skies, straining to see the invisible.

INT. COLT'S SHOWROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

As Wallace works, he spots an anxious figure outside in the moonlight nervously watching him, hesitant to come in.

He takes a breath then lays down his tools.

OUTSIDE

Wallace approaches Ella. Her heart is heavy.

ELLA
I-I was out walking... thinking...
Maybe you heard, Fisk shuts down
in the morning.

He says nothing; his eyes are as tense as before.

ELLA
You're working. I-I'm sorry.

She curses herself for coming... starts to go... then turns back.

ELLA
When Poppa died, leaving Momma and me
alone with Bishop, Momma lost all hope
of happiness; I never saw her smile
again. Watching her die day by day, I
promised her that one day I'd sweep
her away into our *own* home and take
care of her forever. In my dreams, I
saw the land so vividly that when I
saw that parcel on Covenant Lane, I...
recognized it.

WALLACE
(pacing tensely)
So that land is God's gift to you?! He
just *set it aside* for Ella Sheppard?!

ELLA
It *is* for sale.

WALLACE
To Whites, for Whites, to get us out!

ELLA
I'm not *getting* out! Nashville is
everything I believe in and stand for!

WALLACE
These people, this system - they
destroy your family, *your life!* Why
put down roots *here?!*

ELLA
 (searching his eyes)
 Maybe a *promise*. Maybe a boy whose
 hope kindled my own. What happened
 to that boy?

WALLACE
 Boys grow up!

ELLA
 He had dreams!

WALLACE
 Boys wake up!

ELLA
 What happened to you?? You *got* your
 new father, your home, your new life -
 your prayers were answered. Why
 curse mine??

He clenches his fists. She clasps those fists and kisses him
 desperately. He resists... then yields... then seizes *her* wrists.

WALLACE
 Come on.

CUT TO:

INT. COLT'S WAREHOUSE - JUST AFTER

A massive, bustling workspace. Ella gasps at the workforce of young
 black men building ENORMOUS STACKS OF COFFINS.

WALLACE
 Every one built-to-order. Somewhere
 out there, one of us is being lynched,
 drowned, burned alive. You see Utopia
 down South, but coffins don't lie.

COLT (O.S.)
 This ain't but a trickle; the tide's
 coming in...

Old Colt has entered; the young men look upon him reverently. Rail
 thin but tough as steel, his flaring eyes seize Ella's.

COLT
 The Southern Cross bears strange
 fruit; when it resurrects, these
 stacks'll become mountains.

ELLA
 And cowards defect to the countryside.
 Men of courage *change* the world.

COLT
Men like..?

ELLA
Hiram Jackson, the authors of the
Civil Rights Bill.

COLT
(to his workers, then Ella)
Fourteen-o-seven! I respect your
Mr. Jackson's intent...

The workers bring over an ornate coffin. The engraving reads "HIRAM JACKSON, 1835 - _____", the year of death left blank.

COLT
This'll be my gift to his estate.
Like your Civil Rights Bill, Hiram
Jackson is as dead as they come.

SHOCK CUT TO:

**MINES. FURNACES. SCREAMING TORTURED FACES. "IF FISK FALLS
IT ALL FALLS!" HIRAM'S DEAD FACE. MOMMA'S ANGRY FACE. FACES
LYNCHED DROWNED BURNED. THOUSANDS OF FACES. FACES. FACES.**

A loud WHAP! jolts Ella out of the nightmare, choking. We're in:

ELLA'S ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

RAGING WINDS have just blown open a rotted window, filling the room
with a spiritual. Again it's *Steal Away*.

Clutching her ears, she goes to the window then looks out and sees --

A TORMENTED SOUL

-- pacing the grounds, bitterly berating himself.

The sight of White unnerves her. She looks to the clock - it's 4am,
three hours to Fisk's end. Fighting a war of emotions, she wrests
her eyes from White and shuts the window. An instant later --

WHAP! -- she jolts as another window BLOWS OPEN, bringing back
Steal Away. Her heart pounding, she goes over and shuts it.

WHAP! -- another BLOWS OPEN, then -- WHAP! WHAP! -- another and
another. She's clearly at war with the insistent winds.

Harrowed, she charges over and SLAMS the nearest window. It BREAKS
OFF ITS HINGES AND CRASHES TO THE FLOOR. The wind BLASTS IN like a
tornado and BLOWS her belongings onto the floor.

Ella groans, then looks down and gasps: Her TRAVEL LUGGAGE stands facing her upright. Encircling it in perfect array are her MUSIC PAPERS, TUNING FORK and PITCH PIPE. And it all seems *narrated* by the spiritual. This is no random mess; it's a call to a journey.

CLOSE ON ELLA - Astonished, she concedes defeat.

ELLA

All right, let's get them up.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Racing against time, White, Ella and the choir rush up to the door, find it locked, then --

LOUDIN

Stand back!

-- SMASH IT DOWN. Swinging into gear, they RIP DOWN the Underground Railroad map and spread it out on a table.

WHITE

We need road maps, business, train schedules! GO! GO! GO!

The singers fly into action.

WHITE

We need something spectacular, something American!

ELLA

Got it!

As she races out, White starts tracing a travel route.

GEORGIA

This isn't possible.

WHITE

(grins)
Not remotely.

CUT TO:

EXT. FISK CAMPUS - OLD AUCTION BLOCK SITE - 7AM MEETING

Hundreds of students and faculty - and a fire-breathing Cravath - stare at White, Ella and the choir like they've got two heads.

Facing them from atop a dumpster, White repeats the insane plan.

WHITE

Our choir will tour America to raise money. We'll start to north, singing in cities along the old Underground Railroad. The people there helped slaves, they'll support us. We'll save Fisk.

A FURUR ERUPTS - the crowd SHOUTS THEM DOWN as crackpots.

CRAVATH

Your carnival act, save Fisk?! Get down from there!

White buckles with self-doubt. Ella motions to the SLAVE CHAINS. White seizes the chains and lifts them high.

WHITE

It was you that ordered these chains kept in plain sight to declare what we'd never go back to, that vowed we'd never retreat *an inch* to terror!
(turns to the people)
This auction block murdered our enslaved mothers and fathers; if we back down now, it will rise from this pit and make slaves of our children!

CRAVATH

This is ludicrous! There's no way --

WHITE

God makes a way out of no way - that is what we preach?! We say we have faith, it's time we *put feet* to that faith!
(thrusts his fists high)
It's time to root, hog, or die!!

White holds his pose. The singers sweat bullets. The people trade looks then BREAK INTO APPLAUSE.

Cravath looks to Susan for backup but she's beaming in awe at White. Cravath growls, and we

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE - DAY

SUPER: "OCTOBER 6, 1871"

A grand send-off for an outrageous plan. Newsboys shout "*CHOIR TOURS TO SAVE SINKING SCHOOL!*" All of Nashville has turned out to gawk at the departing choir as the Southern Cross damns their quest from on high.

ANGLE ON ELLA

As the train prepares to leave, Ella introduces her four beloved Cutie Pies to the effervescent young JULIA HAYDEN.

ELLA

Ladies, you've struck gold. The eminent Miss Julia Hayden is not only a star professor but a musical genius. She'll be taking over my classes at Fisk and directing you *little pickles* while I'm away.

JULIA HAYDEN

(beams at the girls)

Full disclosure: *Someone's* been bragging on you so hard I begged for the honor.

The girls coo, as does everyone meeting the unforgettable Julia, (African-American, 30s), a ravishing soul with radiant eyes.

JULIA HAYDEN

And don't worry, Sweetie, I'll keep watch for Miss Sarah.

ELLA

Thank you, Julia.

They hug like sisters. The conductor calls "*ALL ABOARD!*"

ELLA

And with that, my darlings...

CUTIE PIES

Don't leave us! Don't leave us!

The girls weigh Ella down like monkeys. One of them filches something shiny from her pocket.

ELLA

That's my pitch pipe, Sweet Love!

CUTIE PIES

Pleeeeeease?? To remember you by?

ELLA

Watch out for these four, Julia; they're inseparable even in mischief!

Ella solemnly sweeps the girls' eyes.

ELLA

How about this - when I use it, *I'll* remember you.

CUTIE PIES

Promise?

ELLA

On my life.

Tearful hugs and farewells.

AT THE TRAIN, A FEW MINUTES LATER

The big moment: Supporters surround the choir as they line up to depart. We marvel at this family of misfits braving all odds for a miracle. Cravath addresses them.

CRAVATH

You've got six weeks to raise four thousand dollars or Fisk shutsters for good. What you're undertaking is reckless, ridiculous, and with those savages out there, deadly. The AMA officially disavows any affiliation with this tour. You're on your own.

The singers bristle, but Hiram counters with a prayer. He glares at the Southern Cross towering hellishly above.

HIRAM

Lord, Joshua's army sang down the walls of Jericho; use this army to sing down that cross!

Loud "AMENS!" As the singers board the train...

WHITE AND SUSAN HAVE A MOMENT

Her eyes glint with admiration, his with apprehension.

WHITE

So you're staying on in Nashville.

SUSAN

Six weeks, anyway.

WHITE

Guess I'll see you on the other side.

SUSAN

Prove me right.

NEARBY - ANGLE ON ELLA AND WALLACE

They trade aching gazes.

ELLA
So you'll be here in Nashville?

WALLACE
Six weeks, anyway.

ELLA
Well... see you on the other side.

WALLACE
Prove me wrong.

We feel their love, and the impossible gulf between them.

Wallace nods goodbye and backs off. Ella turns, then flinches to find herself facing --

CRAVATH

Her blood runs cold as he glares piercingly into her wide eyes.

CRAVATH
She expects great things of you, Ella.
Don't fail her.

Ella gasps. Shaken to the core, she backs away and boards the train.

ANGLE ON LOUDIN

He coldly brushes off his wife and sons as they kiss him goodbye. We PAN TO Georgia watching intently... and grinning.

AS THE TRAIN DEPARTS

Cravath and Susan look on. He growls --

CRAVATH
On what planet does this make sense?
White called *me* the devil; I don't
know which of *you* to throw into the
Lake of Fire.

-- but Susan can't hear him; she's gazing off in wonder at the flight of a dream.

As the train steals away into the perilous unknown, we hold our breath and

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. ANIMAL CARGO BAY - TRAVELING TRAIN - DAY

White holds the choir on the closing bar of a number --

CHOIR
... RULE O'ER LAND AND SEAAAAAAA!

-- then cuts them off. We hear approving OINKS and MOOS. Huddled amidst livestock and manure, they're rehearsing a grand, bombastic cantata called *Esther the Beautiful Queen*. It's obscenely garish.

AMERICA
Not exactly dripping with taste.

ELLA
"Give 'em what they want." It's American and all the rage.

Heads shake. White moves on.

WHITE
Transition to Scene Six: Mordecai and the Persian Queen. The music softens, the lighting dims...

MAGGIE
Except my spotlight.

ELLA
You're not onstage yet.

MAGGIE
It anticipates me.

The others snicker, but Maggie is dead serious. White indulges her.

WHITE
O-of course it does.
(moving on)
Mordecai declares his woe, Esther sings "Open Ye the Gates," the peasants exit --

MAGGIE
Whoa whoa whoa! The Beautiful Queen devastates the court with that aria and spellbound peasants just *walk off?!*

WHITE
O-of course not. They'd...

MAGGIE
(loftily flaps her arms)
They'd flap in reverence, of course, then kiss the threads of her robe. *Royal Persian protocol.*

TOM
 (stifling a laugh)
 And we know this *how*?

MAGGIE
 A queen knows.

BENNIE
 You're a *stage* queen.

MAGGIE
 It passes through. *And* stands to
 reason, for she is fair --
 (flashes the title page)
 -- and "Beautiful".

The choir bursts out laughing. The Twins mercilessly ape her --
 "Look at me, I'm Faaaaaaair and Beauuuuutiful!"

Maggie's smile withers; we realize she's crushed. Damage control:
 White commands the choir to --

WHITE
 Revere her *then* exit.

-- then shuts the score, bullet dodged. Until Ella reopens it.

ELLA
 Maggie, at the chorale, your
 sustained note isn't the high E;
 you're on the low A with Minnie.

Already wounded, Maggie cops attitude.

MAGGIE
 I sing what's written.

Uh-oh, everyone braces for fireworks. White eyes Ella to *Let it go*,
 but she whips out her pitch pipe.

ELLA
 Now how can that be --
 (tings an "A")
 -- when *that's* your A?

MAGGIE
 Pipe's flat.

ELLA
 A *fifth*??

MAGGIE
 (shrugs)
 Warped metal. It's been hot.

IKE
(quips)
Hell's not that hot.

Ella growls, then grabs her tuning fork and tings the same "A".

MAGGIE
Obviously flat.

ELLA
Due to..??

MAGGIE
Cheap metal.

ELLA
Garden of Mercy, Maggie - *sing the A, blend with Minnie!*

MAGGIE
I'm building up to my solo there!

ELLA
Your solo is forty bars later! Here, you're *texture!*

MAGGIE
Do I *look like* denim?! This ain't *Buxtehude* - the Beautiful Queen don't do "texture."

ELLA
The score says --

CRASH!! Maggie SHOVES A CRATE AT ELLA - then explodes into tears. Everybody gasps. White reaches to console her --

MAGGIE
AAAUGHH!! GET OFF ME!! DON'T TOUCH ME!!

-- but she SHRIEKS at his touch. We're stunned at Maggie's trauma; dark memories are clearly warring for her mind.

WHITE
Shhhhh... it's me... it's me...

Shaking violently, Maggie clutches White, whimpering like a child.

MAGGIE
That's *my* note... I feel *good* singing that note...

WHITE
Of course... of course... it's yours.

Maggie calms in White's fatherly embrace. Ella fumes at the concession. The others catch their breath.

After a tense silence, Tom breaks the ice.

TOM

Hey, maybe we'll make it to Broadway.

IKE

Dream on!

AMERICA

It's good to dream.

GEORGIA

(ogling Loudin)
It is.

MINNIE

This is a dream; never been on a train.

BENNIE

I've never left Nashville.

AMERICA

What do you dream about, Maggie?

White knows the answer.

WHITE

London. The great ballrooms of England.
Above all, singing for the Queen.

Maggie nods. A smile breaks through. White exhales.

WHITE

And we're blue skies again... Well,
kids, Cincinnati here we come!

BENNIE

It'll be good being up north, away
from the prejudice.

MINNIE

Wait till they see our costumes!

IKE

They won't know what hit 'em.

Tom scans an imaginary marquee.

TOM

I can see it now: "THE NASHVILLE
SINGERS"!

CUT TO:

TONIGHT AT THE MARIGOLD: THE BLACKFOOTS!

OPENING ACT: THE NASHVILLE NIGGERS!

The choir gasps facing the MARIGOLD THEATER marquee. A long line snakes down the block.

GEORGIA

Sweet Jesus.

CUT INSIDE TO:

INT. MARIGOLD THEATER, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The choir and the cigar-chomping female OWNER face off. They're all freaked out.

OWNER

Damn me! You cabled that you're a Negro troupe. Coons dance and do coon tunes!

MINNIE

You've got to change that marquee!

OWNER

You didn't give me a name! What's your act?

MINNIE

We're doing *Esther*.

She chokes on her cigar.

OWNER

As in Old Testament *Esther*?! *Mordecai slays the Agagites* and all that?! What the hell kind of niggers are you, pardon my French?! I got three hundred soon-to-be drunks out there, and I'm fairly certain *they're* fairly certain they didn't pay to get a Bible lesson by a bunch of opera-singing spades, pardon my French! I am damned! Do you dance?

ALL

No!

OWNER

Shimmy?

IKE

We're out of here!

OWNER

All right, all right - you got me by the sack. Gotta distract those hicks with *something*. I'm going to pay for this, but you're on in twenty.

Ella hands her a thick folder.

ELLA

Spotlight cues and gel changes. And the piano was tuned *late* today, per my cable?

The Owner looks at her diabolically then exits freaking out.

OWNER

Damn me to dust!

CUT TO:

INT. MARIGOLD THEATER, AUDITORIUM - LATER

A sleazy, rowdy dive. As White eggs Bennie on, he nervously faces the drunken crowd.

BENNIE

HELLOOOOOOOO C-CINCINNATI!!

(*crickets*)

W-we've g-got a gripping s-saga for you t-tonight, right from the p-pages of scripture! O-one request: O-out of r-reverence, p-please refrain from drinking, s-smoking, and curs--

SMASH! A hurled beer bottle EXPLODES beside him, drenching the choir in suds. That settles that.

FLASH FORWARD TO:

A FULL-SCALE RIOT

The performance: Decked out in gaudy thrift-store costumes, the choir slogs through the dreadful *Esther*. White directs with his usual flair. Ella flogs the toothless cadaver impersonating a piano. Maggie and Loudin sing out with their stunning voices --

MAGGIE (as Esther)

Alas, thou knowest to go unto the King unbidden is death! Death! Deaaaaaath!

LOUDIN (as Mordecai)

Go unto the king and make supplication for our people. Go! Go! Go!

-- but the house is a FULL-SCALE RIOT. Hating the act, drunks SMASH glasses and chairs, SWARM the stage imitating "coon" dancing, and cruelly HECKLE the dark-skinned Maggie.

DRUNK HECKLERS

Come on, jigaboos, shuffle them feet!
Bug those eyes! Scratch them dirtbugs!
(taunting Maggie)
Look at that powderburn! Crawl back to
your tar pit, you blackface spook!

Maggie cries violently, but White directs everyone to soldier on.

CUT TO:

BACKSTAGE - AFTER THE SHOW

As White and Ella are off arguing with the Owner, a quintet of smug black singers, THE BLACKFOOTS, strut up to the choir snickering.

BLACKFOOT 1

Ah, the *No-Name Hebrew-Persian Negroes*.

BLACKFOOT 2

Feedback - y'all had those hicks up a gum tree trying to figure you out.

IKE

The Blackfoots! You're headlining!

BLACKFOOT 3

Of course we are. *Feedback* - if you want to, you'd better get serious about who you are, what you represent.

LOUDIN

What's *your* act?

BLACKFOOT 4

The Blackfoots are about legacy, history, authenticity.

BLACKFOOT 5

(pumps a *Black Power* fist)
We sing black music about the black experience! We tell *our* stories --

BLACKFOOT 1

-- but keep it mainstream!

BLACKFOOT 2

Some are ashamed of our heritage; we shout it from the rooftops! We stay true to the roots and keep it real --

BLACKFOOT 3
 -- but mainstream. We find that sweet spot!

TOM
 And Whites pay to see it?

BLACKFOOT 4
 Is you serious?! Look at us --
 (shows off their bling)
 -- velvet lapels, muskrat pumps, pearl-handled picks. That's white money!
 That's the power of *crossover*!

CHOIR
 Wow!

BLACKFOOT 5
 Wow, right! Stay for the show, feast on the crumbs.

FLASH FORWARD TO:

AUDITORIUM - JUST BEFORE THE BLACKFOOTS' SHOW

As White, Ella and the choir excitedly await the Blackfoots' show, the lights dim. The curtain rises.

The Blackfoots bound onstage singing a spiritual --

BLACKFOOTS
*NORA, NORA LET ME COME IN,
 DE DO'S ALL FAST'NED AN' DE WINDERS PINNED
 DARKIE DANCE DE JUBA FOR IT, HA HA HA!
 SHUFFLE SCRATCH SLAP-'N-SKIP, HA HA HA!*

-- in blackface, dancing like buffoons. Sporting bulging eyes, buck teeth and slave chains as jewelry, they're full-on minstrels.

BLACKFOOTS
*FOR A SPADE TO CROON
 GIVE A TUNE TO THAT COON!
 KEEP YO' HAN' ON DAT PLOW, HO'D ON!*

The audience ROARS. The choir retches.

INT. FLEABAG MOTEL - GRIMY DINING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

The choir sits at a putrid table, scratching bug bites and picking at foul food. All are shattered but the unfazed White, who eats heartily, and Ella, who fastidiously perfects the score.

As Bennie flips through the paper, he gasps.

MINNIE

What is it??

He holds it up. It's a scathing review of their show, with a full-page CARTOON of them as a tribe of howling apes. America reads:

AMERICA

"The crooning pickaninnies resembled a pack of well-trained baboons striving in vain for lofty expression..."

The singers groan. Loudin bitterly scowls.

GEORGIA

Fred said *Esther* was a mistake, not that anyone was actually listening.

Loudin nods *Thank you* to Georgia; she nods *I got your back*.

But sated and satisfied, White stretches as if nothing were wrong.

WHITE

Well, let's get a move-on. We've got Dayton tonight, Springfield tomorrow.

IKE

Lovely towns to be run out of.

WHITE

God will prosper our cause.

LOUDIN

You still believe that?? We didn't make a cent last night and those reviews are going to dog us everywhere!

WHITE

When God says jump through a wall, it's ours to jump and his to put us through.
(dabs his lips)
The Lord will shelter us.

FADE OUT.

INT. SUSAN'S OFFICE AT FISK - SIX WEEKS LATER

As Susan works - BLAM! - the door blasts open. She flinches as an angry black man barges in.

WALLACE

Where is she? It's been six weeks!

They inspect each other warily - both are haggard; neither has slept. He slams down a stack of clippings.

WALLACE

Reviews of the tour, city by city.
Two weeks ago they drop off the grid.

SUSAN

(placing his face)
Wallace Moore. Mr. Cravath pointed you
out at the send-off. Susan Gilbert.

She extends her hand. He GROWLS. She snatches it back and tells herself to smile.

SUSAN

M-Mrs. Wynn, your orphanage mistress,
wrote us often about you; you were
the apple of her eye. We all
celebrated when you were adopted.
(then, gravely)
I-I'm so sorry about what --

WALLACE

(SLAMS his fist down)
Where are they?! It's the dead of
winter and dangerous as hell out there!

Her heart beats out of her chest. He loathes her kind and she's terrified of his.

SUSAN

I-I'm afraid the tour isn't AMA
business.

WALLACE

Of course not. *You people...*

Disgusted, he starts for the door - then hears SLAM! He turns back. Susan has slammed down an even taller stack of reviews.

SUSAN

I lost them in Cleveland. Looks like
we're both out of luck.

FADE OUT... then FADE UP TO:

EXT. DECREPIT ALLEYWAY, BEHIND A CLOSED TRAIN DEPOT - NIGHT

A blizzard rages. Sick, starving and stunned by their failure, the devastated choir shivers around a trash-barrel fire, eating the dregs from old cans. White is numb with disbelief. Ella stares blankly into the snow. Loudin is a powderkeg set to explode.

TOM

What did we miss?

MAGGIE

At least we'll be home tomorrow.

GEORGIA

Whatever *home* means now.

AMERICA

I don't know... doesn't feel right
blowing off our last show tomorrow.

WHITE

(clinging to hope)
Big city, big main act; there'll be
a lot of promoters.

BENNIE

We've got one-way fare and had to beg for
that; I'd rather be buried back home.

IKE

Whatever *home* means.

Again the wind ushers in the heavenly strains of a choir singing
Steal Away. Hearing it, White SLAMS A BARREL. Everyone knows why.

MINNIE

Why *don't* we sing the spirituals?

GEORGIA

They're heavenly... so comforting.

LOUDIN

You don't have a clue!

WHITE

He means about the *suffering* behind them.

LOUDIN

Something none of you would know about.

GEORGIA

You don't mean that, Fred!

LOUDIN

No?! I'll put it in context --
(points to Georgia, Minnie, White)
While you were being sheltered by
nuns, and you were soaking you diaper,
and you were off being white, we were
being lynched, hanged, butchered and
hacked, eyes and tongues carved from
our heads; skinned alive, burned
alive, bludgeoned and beheaded, beaten
and battered to paste! Heavenly??

ELLA

Loudin!

LOUDIN

Our men: blinded for pleasure, castrated for sport. Our women: raped, molested, mutilated. Comforting??

(points to Maggie)

God knows how Master and the boys had their way with *this one*; she can't bear a man's sudden touch or the sight of her own skin! She can't even face herself in the mirror!

ELLA

LOUDIN STOP!

LOUDIN

Want to know what happened to that sweet, innocent boy you once knew as Wallace after Mr. Moore adopted him?

He's talking to Ella. She braces herself.

LOUDIN

Wallace and I knew each other around the way. He loved his new dad more than life; you couldn't pull the two of apart. They built houses together, and they were good - "*too good for niggers.*" One night, masked men broke into their home with hatchets and hungry dogs. I won't say what they did to Mr. Moore, but they made Wallace watch as his father *vanished before his eyes.* They threatened worse for Wallace if he ever built another house in Nashville; he builds coffins now. Thank God they never ID'd the killers; who'd want to see a Bishop and his deacons in jail? That's right, Bishop's made Wallace an orphan *twice* now.

(marvels at Wallace)

In all that, Wallace never shed a tear or spoke a word of it after. But those hatchets killed him too. Wallace is dead; there *is* no more Wallace.

(SLAMS A BARREL)

Our people sang for their lives, not entertainment! This world has no right to their music!

Loudin's rant destroys everyone - Maggie bitterly weeps, Ella shudders in horror for Wallace. Yet --

WHITE

But what if...

-- something stirs in White's soul, something welling up to be said. He falters, unsure where to start, then goes back in time.

WHITE

I know a man, a poor blacksmith's son who fought at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, then after the horrors of war formed a Sunday school for the children of former slaves. And he sang with them and taught them to sing...

(his eyes widen)

And then they taught him to sing, and when the songs of their people passed into his soul, he knew their power to heal. One night as he faced the stars, voices on the wind, a great *choir* of voices, said to him, "*Our suffering was not in vain.*" Whether he was in or out of the body God knows, but they showed him --

(his eyes sweep the sky)

-- a great temple built of their songs. Its bricks were fired with blood and dust, and it towered over the nations bursting with songs of hope. They said "*God promised this world Jubilee; "Jubilee Hall" is a beacon to that promise. Take our songs to the world; let us sing to the Earth as we've sung to you. The people will lay those bricks.*"

MINNIE

What happened?

WHITE

Eyes on the stars and songs in hand, he set sail to distant lands with his love and heart, Laura. Laura was ill, but he'd convinced her the trip would cure her...

(painful beat)

It killed her.

(struggles to go on)

His head was a storm; dark thoughts warred for his mind, and life. Enough of stars, and love; he returned in ridicule to bury her, bury the delusions. He fled it all for a desk.

But his eyes spark with a vision.

WHITE

But what if their suffering *wasn't*
in vain, those that braved slavery's
curse? What if, as perfume is
pressed from precious roses, God *has*
lifted from their wounds *salves* that
heal, inspire, lift up? What if
those *anthems of hope* that brought
them through so much darkness could
light up the world?

IKE

(thunderstruck)

Y-you mean sing the spirituals for --

WHITE

Every soul, everywhere.

BENNIE

Some of those "souls" put us in chains.
Some want us dead. Some of them --

WHITE

What if there *is* no "them"? *Every* man
is slave to some darkness. Beneath our
fears *and* fury, pain *and* rage, don't we
all hunger for healing? What if these
songs are our *swords* to break the
chains of hate and set both captive and
captor free? Make hatemongers
peacemakers the world over?

The singers trade stunned looks.

LOUDIN

So the spirituals are gonna fix the
world, get everyone holding hands?!

IKE

Master heard them, didn't free us. They
sure as hell didn't "conquer the South."

GEORGIA

The Gospel didn't conquer Rome in a day.
Maybe they'll do their part if we do
ours.

Some are haunted by dark memories.

MAGGIE

I- I can't go back to those songs.

ELLA

They're songs of defeat!

WHITE
They're psalms of Jubilee!

ELLA
It's blood music!

WHITE
That's why I run to it! Those blood-soaked hymns bathe me in the faith and courage of your mothers and fathers!

LOUDIN
You *shed* their blood!

WHITE
And you *trample* it, leaving their legacy to the mockery of minstrels! Redeem their suffering! Get those songs out of blackface into the hearts of the people! Let's give America her *true* music... and the world what it's *really* hungering for!

The air is charged. Minds churn as White's vision sinks in. Then reality hits.

TOM
We've got one shot, tomorrow's concert.

AMERICA
No way we raise four thousand dollars.

All nod in agreement.

GEORGIA
We'd need songs, arranged and rehearsed overnight. Not a chance we pull it off.

More nods. They nervously search each other's eyes, then --

MINNIE
Where do we start?

White beams. Loudin gestures to the wind.

LOUDIN
This one, *Steal Away*.

ELLA
No.

All eyes turn to the lone holdout. *Steal Away*, which tormented Ella the night Sarah was beaten, is clearly still too painful; but does she mean she won't perform any spiritual?

As she wrestles her demons, Loudin jumps in --

LOUDIN
I'll arrange it.

-- but White waves him silent. Loudin seethes. At last, Ella takes out her pen and music paper.

ELLA
Swing Low" - F-sharp, six parts, altos
and basses divided...

Everyone exhales... then White blows our minds with a new decree.

WHITE
Forget everything you *think* you know
about music. This ain't Schubert and
to hell with Earl Grey. Let's put your
grits, collard greens and black-eyed
peas on that stage. Music starts now.

CUT TO:

INT. ODEON THEATRE AUDITORIUM - NEXT DAY - JUST BEFORE THE CONCERT

Hundreds of chattering PATRONS and PROMOTERS mill about, oblivious to the ragamuffin choir onstage. As the petrified singers quake in their rotted boots, White hammers home final words:

WHITE
Remember, many of these people lost
family in last week's fires. The
sorrow songs bind deep wounds. Aim
for their heart; fix their eyes on the
sweet shores *beyond* the stormy Jordan.

The singers fearfully nod. Now the moment of truth: Ella plays a ravishing piano introduction. White cues the choir...

CHOIR
*Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.*

... and it's sheer magic. They sing in gorgeous hushed tones, quietly thundering with breathtaking emotion.

CHOIR
*I looked over Jordan, what did I see?
Coming for to carry me home.
A band of angels coming after me.
Coming for to carry me home.*

Maggie's soaring soprano sweeps us to the heavens; Loudin's deep bass stirs our souls. Ella's playing is sublime. White directs with deep emotional passion; this music is clearly in *his* soul.

They crescendo with earth-shaking power...

CHOIR

*If you get there before I do,
Coming for to carry me home!
Tell all my friends I'm coming too.
Coming for to carry me home!*

... then melt into silence. Then we hear nothing. Except sniffles.

Lots of sniffles.

Facing the audience, the choir's eyes are wide with disbelief. They motion White to turn around. He does and gasps to see --

AN OCEAN OF FACES WEEPING UNCONTROLLABLY.

The house explodes in applause. This singers bow in amazement.

LOBBY - AFTER THE CONCERT

BLESSED PANDEMONIUM - Frenzied fans swamp the choir for autographs. Concert promoters bombard them with business cards.

As White and Ella are off settling accounts, a party of Old World Southerners stagger up to the choir. Bennie is dumbstruck to recognize their leader.

BENNIE

Mr. Stephens!

STEPHENS

Alex, please.

ALEXANDER STEPHENS, (Caucasian, 60), is an austere, craggy-faced scowler with daggered eyes and an executioner's scowl.

Yet he's in a wonder-filled stupor.

BENNIE

This is... uh... quite a surprise.

STEPHENS

Came for the main act, of course. But that music - *whoo mommy!* - I hardly knew what planet I was on. It was as if...

BENNIE

Sir?

STEPHENS

As if heaven herself, and all her
light, were shining on us.

Suddenly unnerved, Stephens trades uneasy looks with his men, then goes on.

STEPHENS

How many invitations to perform so far?

MINNIE

Sixteen and counting, in five states.

STEPHENS

That's *paint thinner*. Your calendar's
about to choke with ink.

IKE

(sullen, to the choir)
Time's up; Cravath's going to shut us
down.

STEPHENS

Milo Cravath - we've crossed swords
with that old dog. Trust me, he's
gonna choke on his spit when he hears
about this. Don't worry about him;
you get ready.

TOM

For what?

STEPHENS

Why, to take this country by storm.
(eyes and sniffs them)
You'll need clothes, baths, and a
damn sight more songs.
(pats Bennie's back)
Long live Fisk. Godspeed and God bless.

Suddenly stunned at his own benediction, Stephens shoots the choir a suspicious eye as if they've slipped him a mickey. Then he shrugs it off and glides away with his men whistling "*Swing Low*."

BENNIE

"Our Confederacy rests upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery is his natural and normal state." Words of the honorable Alexander H. Stephens - Senator from Georgia, Vice President of the Confederacy... and apparently our newest fan.

The singers are astonished. Suddenly Stephens turns back.

STEPHENS

And for Jezreel's sake, my *ass* has
got a name!

A light goes off in their heads, and we hear --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, LIVE ON
BROADWAY: THE FISK JUBILEE SINGERS!

-- and SMASH CUT TO:

THE JUBILEE SINGERS CONQUER AMERICA (MONTAGE WITH VIGNETTES)

JUBILEES

*THIS IS THE YEAR OF JUBILEE,
MY LORD HAS SET HIS PEOPLE FREE!
I INTEND TO SHOUT AND NEVER STOP,
UNTIL I REACH THE MOUNTAIN TOP!*

The Jubilees take America by storm, performing sensational shows to ravished audiences. Their rise to fame is meteoric: marquees blaze, media swarm, barbershops and beauty salons buzz with Jubilee news. Crowds weep and cheer as the spirituals pierce hearts of all races.

JUBILEES

*WHEN YOU SEE THE LIGHTNING FLASHIN'
WHEN YOU SEE THE THUNDER CRASHIN'
GOOD NEWS, CHARIOTS COMIN'!*

The spirituals slay the hardest of hearts. At --

LOVEJOY CONFEDERATE DINER

-- Ella, White and the choir defiantly dine under a NO COLOREDS sign amidst tables of CONFEDERATE CIVIL WAR REENACTORS. Suddenly the beefy MRS. LOVEJOY barrels in waving a furious MEAT CLEAVER at them.

MRS. LOVEJOY

OUT! OUT OF MY BISTRO! YOU TOO, WHITEY!
(to the Reenactors)

I am soooo sorry, it just hit me they's
real soots! I thought they was minstrels
on break!

Before the choir can react, bony MR. LOVEJOY charges into her face.

MR. LOVEJOY

Missus, let them be! They're the
Jubilees!

MRS. LOVEJOY

Don't Missus me! You put that sign up!

A white-looking reenactor jumps to his feet.

JESSIE

*They ain't goin' nowhere! Dammit,
I'm comin' out: I'm half-nigger!*

His white wife CHOKES on her food.

JESSIE

Me and the boys been to their show
and I ain't hidin' it no more: I'm
black, black, black! Grandmama's
black as pitch!

Inspired, his whole table of WHITE REENACTORS rise up in black pride.

WHITE REENACTORS

I'm black! Me too! So am I!

One of them is confused.

CONFUSED REENACTOR

Wait - Jessie, we ain't black.

ANOTHER REENACTOR

Looks like today we sure as hell are!

Outraged, a table of RACIST REENACTORS stand up.

RACIST REENACTOR

What are you, *activists* now?! I don't
care if you are the whole damn school
board - Mrs. Lovejoy says *NIGGERS AND
WIGGERS OUT!*

CIVIL WAR BREAKS OUT - fists and fake swords fly. The choir ducks as Mrs. Lovejoy CLEAVES at them like a madwoman. Emboldened, skinny Mr. Lovejoy rips down the sign, howls like a buckaroo then swings from a chandelier and tackles his rabid wife. We CUT from the madness to a:

PACKED PRESS CONFERENCE

Flanked by the Jubilees and rows of black schoolkids, the banged-up, broken-nosed *Black Pride* SCHOOL BOARD make a shocking announcement:

JESSIE

We, the Jersey City Board of Education,
chastened by the word of *Jubilee* and a
nobler vision for our nation, renounce
the discriminatory policies of our past
and declare our schools fully *integrated*.
Furthermore, we urge Congress to pass the
Civil Rights Bill without delay.

SHOCKWAVES hit the crowd. Flashbulbs EXPLODE. Onlookers FAINT.
A little snaggle-toothed SCHOOLGIRL tugs at Ella's dress.

ELLA
Hello, precious.

SCHOOLGIRL
Momma says you're doing great things,
only too bad we can't spread you
around the country like molasses!

Ella's eyes flash with an EPIPHANY.

JUBILEES
JOSHUA FOUGHT THE BATTLE OF JERICHO,
JERICHO, JERICHO,
AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN!

JUBILEE SONGBOOKS sweep the nation and start a revolution,
electrifying the masses in churches and concert halls everywhere.
Across the country, segregation signs are yanked from establishment
windows as breathtaking HEADLINES fill the screen:

"CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, HOTELS, RAILWAYS INTEGRATE!"
"CHOIR CONQUERS THE NATION!" "AMERICA SINGS JUBILEE!"

The Jubilees are unstoppable. Facing an affluent audience at --

PRINCETON

-- America slams their SEGREGATED SEATING SIGNS.

AMERICA
Thank you, Princeton, for this
invitation to perform, and that
rousing recital of your proud motto.
Now help me understand - how dare you
chant *"Under the Protection of God
She Flourishes"* while bastardizing
His children of color - whose skin He
so carefully painted, whose hair He
took pains to curl?

The crowd gasps in embarrassment. White can't control himself; he
STORMS CENTER-STAGE with apocalyptic fury.

WHITE
HOW DARE YOU INVOKE OUR HOLY GOD WHILE
INFLECTING THIS HELLISH BIGOTRY! BURN
THOSE SIGNS, PRINCETON, OR BURN IN THE
JUDGMENT OF GOD AND HISTORY!

Ella eyes White to *chill*. He clears his throat and backs away.

AMERICA
Now for our first selection...

BOSTON COLISEUM

Raising the stakes to a fever pitch, the Jubilees perform at the WORLD PEACE EXTRAVAGANZA to a GARGANTUAN CROWD, backed by a THOUSAND-PIECE ORCHESTRA and TEN THOUSAND BACKGROUND SINGERS:

JUBILEES
OH BABYLON'S FALLING, FALLING, FALLING!
BABYLON'S FALLING TO RISE NO MORE!

CANNONS THUNDER. HATS FILL THE SKY. THE CHEERS ARE DEAFENING.

BACK IN NASHVILLE

SUSAN tallies the Jubilees' tour ledger - they've raised \$25,890!

We DISSOLVE from Fisk's crumbling old campus being shuttered to the grand opening of its gorgeous NEW CAMPUS.

At Colt's, WALLACE opens an envelope and pulls out an invitation to a grand gala honoring the Jubilees - at the WHITE HOUSE.

END MONTAGE

CLOSE ON A NEWSPAPER REVIEW: "BLACKFOOT JOOBALLEES STEAL HEARTS"

The review features the buck-grinning, bulging-eyed minstrels we met earlier, only now they dress identically to the Jubilee Singers and call themselves THE BLACKFOOT JOOBALLEES.

We WIDEN to Ella - she shreds the review in disgust. We're in a:

TRAVELING TRAIN CABIN - EVENING

Ella yawns, exhausted. Her tired eyes drift around the cabin to the slumbering singers...

... then over to an ODD MAN, probably a fan, discreetly eyeing the choir - Ella smiles politely, but he awkwardly looks away...

... then settle on White. He's staring forlorn into space as if already nostalgic about the tour. Seeing Ella, he forces a smile.

WHITE
What just happened??

ELLA
I know, right? *Whoosh!*

WHITE
Well, after tonight, guess it's back to the old desk. Thank you, Sam, for following an old fool.

ELLA
(winks)
When Moses calls...

His eyes go misty at the affirmation. Then, reading his mind...

ELLA
Yes, she'd be proud. So proud.

He chokes up... then turns it back around.

WHITE
So will *she*. And of course *he'll* be there tonight.

ELLA
And so will *she*... and you will give her a chance.

White groans. Just then, FLASHING LANTERNS appear in the window. The Odd Man YANKS the emergency brake.

SCREEEECH! The train LURCHES TO A HALT, jolting the choir awake.

The doors BLAST OPEN. A HOODED MOB barges in, nods to the Odd Man, then brutally SEIZES the choir.

They FIGHT and SCREAM as the attackers HAUL them off the train.

CUT TO:

EXT. DARK CLEARING - JUST AFTER

A BONFIRE rages. A FLAMING SOUTHERN CROSS flickers savagely. The Jubilees have been dumped into an ASSEMBLY OF HOODED SUPREMACISTS, fronted by their SUPREME LEADER.

WHITE
Please! They're just kids! We're on our way to the --

SUPREME LEADER
White House, honorees of President Ulysses S. Grant. Only you had a little *setback* en route. Meaning you were *cremated* from these beams.

He means the enormous CROSSBEAMS suspended over the bonfire. He thrusts his bare hand into the flames and pulls out one of the Jubilee songbooks that fuel it.

SUPREME LEADER

"The Jubilees Conquer America." You think you staved off the apocalypse; you just fanned the flames.

(then, to the mob)

EZEKIEL 9:7 - *"Slaughter them as I've commanded. Fill the courtyards with their twisted bodies."*

The singers SCREAM as the mob starts LYNCHING their necks.

As the Supreme Leader hovers over Ella, she glimpses his eyes.

ELLA

I know you.

He rips off his hood.

MYRON

Hello, Ella.

It's Myron, Bishop's son. His cavernous eyes are sulfured with hate.

ELLA

So tonight's your rite of passage.

MYRON

Something like that.

ELLA

Don't cross over; you can't take this back!

MYRON

Take back?! I've waited for this my whole life.

ELLA

You're no murderer. You're angry, but not at us.

MYRON

Quiet!

ELLA

You were a kind boy until your fath--

MYRON

SHUT UP! It's *you people* I've always hated!

ELLA

Not true. You loved Momma and she
loved you, remember? *Remember??*

CLOSE ON MYRON - His face goes pale at mention of Sarah. Suddenly flustered, for the briefest moment hate fades from his eyes as his gaze travels back in time. We FLASH BACK to Sarah in the sweatbox looking incredulously at young Myron as he gunblasts Ella off the plantation, then CUT BACK to Myron recalling it now. Deeply shaken, as the harrowing memories return, so do a young boy's pained eyes.

MYRON

(his eyes transfixed)
Time and youth blur the mind, but
I'll never forget that day... the
look in Miss Sarah's eyes as I drove
you out of her life... the way she
looked at me from then on... she
never touched or held me again.
That day stole her from us both.

Deep longing haunts his eyes.

ELLA

What happened to her?

MYRON

Huh?

ELLA

Momma. Is she alive?

Her question snaps him back. His eyes reblaze.

MYRON

Hang them!

BOOSH!! The attackers intensify the bonfire. The choir SCREAMS as the mob starts hoisting them to the crossbeams. Just then --

A voice RINGS OUT:

MINNIE

Fix me Jesus, fix me...

It's Minnie, singing for all she's worth.

MINNIE

*Fix me for my home on high,
Fix me for the by and by.
Fix me Jesus, fix me...*

The wind lifts Minnie's voice. The strains of a distant choir seem to join her, filling the air with piercing, otherworldly power.

The attackers halt.

MYRON
I SAID HANG THEM!

But incredibly, as the singing intensifies, the men cover their faces... then one by one break into weeping.

Sensing a chance, the choir joins in.

JUBILEES
*Fix me for my starry crown,
Fix me for a higher ground,
Fix me Jesus, fix me...*

As a stunned Myron looks on, the attackers begin releasing the lynchings then back away from the clearing until only he is left.

CLOSE ON MYRON - Bathed in the spiritual, he glares incredulously at the choir, fists clenched as if fighting off an invasion, quaking as if some war were raging inside. Then at last, he too relents. He backs off... scans the wind... then disappears into the night.

Spared their lives, the Jubilees sing on, and we

MATCH CUT TO --

INT. WHITE HOUSE - EAST ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

-- the choir closing out a scorching performance for the President, congressional leaders, and ambassadors from around the world.

JUBILEES
Oh fix me Jesus, fix meeeeeee.

Rapturous applause, standing ovation!

AFTER - GALA RECEPTION

A high-powered global affair. Senators and foreign diplomats trip over themselves praising the Jubilees as heroes. Freshly scarred and shaken, the singers paste on smiles and press the flesh.

ANGLE ON ELLA AND WHITE

Ella introduces White to Julia Hayden and her four Cutie Pies.

ELLA
Mr. White, you've met Julia Hayden.

WHITE
Of course. How are you, Miss Hayden?

JULIA HAYDEN
 (looking around)
 Dazzled.

No, we're dazzled; Julia is just as radiant and ravishing as we remember her.

ELLA
 And my girls.

WHITE
 Your "little pickles." Let's see -
 Carole, Cynthia, Denise, Addie Mae.

And now we know their names. The girls' bright smiles capture our hearts all over again.

WHITE
 Any word on Ella's mother?

JULIA HAYDEN
 I'm afraid not.

Just then, a beaming Susan Gilbert enters.

SUSAN
 Mr. White, congrat--

WHITE
 Excuse me.

Something vexes White's eye. He steps aside and rebukes a nearby Diplomat taking Minnie's hand.

WHITE
 She's fourteen, got it? She doesn't
 dance with strangers.

Minnie sighs. The Diplomat awkwardly exits. White returns to Susan.

WHITE
Kids... Well, Miss Gilbert, I hope
 you enjoy the receipt--

Ella elbows White to *Stay Put*. He groans. PRESIDENT GRANT enters.

ALL
 Mr. President.

PRESIDENT GRANT
 I'm thinking I'll scrap this suit for
 a choir robe and get something done in
 this country!

Everyone laughs.

GRANT

Friends, your presence here is an honor to the White House and the nation. The Jubilee Singers have accomplished great things against terrible odds - you're warriors if I've known warriors. Miss Sheppard, I've been singing your praises to the Chinese delegation. May I?

He extends his arm to Ella. The Cutie Pies enviously coo.

PRESIDENT GRANT

Let's make it a party.

Grant escorts the ladies away, leaving White and Susan awkwardly alone. Susan breaks the ice.

SUSAN

And for his next miracle: waterfalls in the Sahara?

WHITE

Try *man pushing pencil*.

SUSAN

In a new office, on a brand new campus. Not bad for a "blind stargazer."

WHITE

(genuinely touched)
Thank you.

Breaking their gaze, Cravath walks past with a flock of senators.

SUSAN

You know, losing Fisk would have shattered Cravath.

WHITE

What? Old Genghis - *feelings*?

SUSAN

Hey! Are we suggesting my boss isn't the *Sugar-Plumb Fairy*?

They chuckle. Then she gets serious.

SUSAN

No, Milo Cravath is a do-or-die general in a just and dire war; he'd march you, or *himself*, into cannon fire if it would advance the cause.

WHITE

You're the Dark Lord's lieutenant;
you run his war room. Do you like
your job?

SUSAN

(hedges)
I believe in it very much.

WHITE

What's the hardest part?

Herr smile fades.

SUSAN

The *friendly fire*, the faces those
cannons can bury. Heaven help them.

WHITE

Heaven help those led by the weak.
Cravath can be brutal, but he's the
best friend the cause ever had. He's
a decent man.

SUSAN

And when war makes decent men monsters?

WHITE

Monsters cower from just wars.

SUSAN

So, follow command always. No exceptions,
no exemptions of conscience.

WHITE

Unless *losing the future* is an option.

She takes that in. The ice is melting. He gets spunky.

WHITE

So, what enthralls Susan Gilbert?
Quilting? Camel racing?

SUSAN

(marvels at his chutzpah)
You're a man of most curious contours.
You've been told that.

WHITE

Never so nicely. *Answer.*

SUSAN

No camels I'm afraid, but I'm not
without hope.

WHITE

Do tell.

SUSAN

I'm rumored to brew a fierce *café au lait*. Ever have a *true* *café au lait*?

WHITE

Uh, can't say that I --

SUSAN

Ah, *watch your back!* I may just barge in and brew you one!

They laugh. Then, fidgeting...

SUSAN

And I stay.

WHITE

Huh?

Wow, she can't believe she said that. Red-faced, she looks for the nearest staircase to hurl herself down... then steels herself and goes the distance.

SUSAN

I never leave or forsake you, doubt or disbelieve you. I'm *in* all the way.

White gazes at her, smitten.

WHITE

Remind me why you're not, you know...

SUSAN

Taken?

WHITE

At least *rented out*.

SUSAN

Maybe I am; *rental's* a low bar.

WHITE

Ah, some *café au lait* freak.

SUSAN

There ya go!

More laughs. Then her eyes sweep his.

SUSAN

You know, George Leonard White is more envied than he knows.

WHITE
Highly doubtful.

SUSAN
Not everyone knows exactly why she gets out of the bed in the morning. George White battles himself, yes, but the day is his sky, and his dreams his wings.

WHITE
Double-edged sword; wings can be a curse.

SUSAN
Some would die for that curse. George White's *real* problem? He's a very big man in a very small world.

WHITE
You believe that?

SUSAN
I always have.

Lost in each other's gaze, heaven and earth have melted away. These two are alone in their own universe.

NEARBY - ANGLE ON ELLA, GRANT, AND THE CHINESE DELEGATION

As they schmooze, an ABDUCTOR'S HANDS discreetly clasp Ella's waist from behind. Her face lights up. His voice whispers in her ear:

ABDUCTOR
"Excuse me, Mr. President."

ELLA
(obediently)
Excuse me, Mr. President.

Grant nods, mystified. As Ella's heart races, the hands spirit her across the room, out through an obscure doorway, and into the --

WHITE HOUSE INTERIORS

-- where before she can catch her breath, Wallace is sweeping her through a maze of ornate chambers and parlors, ducking staff and security on a forbidden whirlwind journey through the White House.

ELLA
We can't be doing this! We are so deported!

CUT BACK TO THE:

EAST ROOM

ANGLE ON CRAVATH - Sporting a fine suit and fat cigar, he swaggers about with dignitaries bragging about *his* amazing choir.

We PAN to Loudin and Georgia glaring at him. As they fume, we hear:

ENGLISHMAN (O.S.)
Look at him soak it up. You'd think he was the *author and finisher* of your tour.

They turn to find a sleekly attired black ENGLISHMAN beside them. Not sure what to make of him, Georgia takes his program to sign it.

GEORGIA
Name?

ENGLISHMAN
It's there.

He extends his card. Before she can take it --

ENGLISHMAN
If only the people knew the truth.

LOUDIN
The truth?

ENGLISHMAN
I hear Cravath made it a little rough for you out on the road, that when you were sick, starving and sleeping on sidewalks, he wouldn't toss you a nickel sideways.

LOUDIN
(seething)
You've got hungry ears.

ENGLISHMAN
Ravenous. It's my work.

GEORGIA
Which is?

He again extends his card.

ENGLISHMAN
It's all there... Now of course you're his "goodwill niggers."

LOUDIN
What the hell?? Look, I don't know what you *think* you know --

ENGLISHMAN

I know when you were dying out on those streets to save his sinking school, that two-faced fraud disowned you like syphilis until you *whored up* twenty-five grand, then took every penny without leaving you a cup to crap in. Which explains why he's sporting a new three-piece *Herriman*, you're bleeding through cheap burlap, and behind their nods and applause folk are saying Fred Loudin *took it up the cargo*.

Unbelievable! Loudin hauls off to destroy this guy --

ENGLISHMAN

You *could* turn that around.

-- but Georgia stops his fist. They look the Englishman over. Impeccably groomed and bejeweled, he is polish personified. His coarse, quarried face is set off by magnetic blue eyes.

GEORGIA

Go on.

ENGLISHMAN

The enemy has come to steal, kill and destroy; let no weapon formed against you prosper.

Georgia and Loudin trade weighty looks. The Englishman grins.

ENGLISHMAN

It's all right there.

His card hovers before them like a pendulum, and we

CUT TO:

A HIDDEN ROOM - SOMEWHERE, SOMEPLACE

Wallace and Ella breathlessly enter. Alone at last, they devour each other with ravenous eyes. The attraction is nuclear.

She quivers as he reaches for her, then quakes as his rugged hands make gentle contact. As his fingers brush and probe her throbbing flesh she silently screams, her body a crush of sensations.

His fingers stop on a wound. The wound angers him, but she shushes his lips and pulls him deeply into herself. Her mouth waiting, he penetrates her with a blistering kiss that melts time, space and them into one. Fused inseparably, they writhe and moan as if awakening to life.

After a breathless eternity she sweeps him with daydreaming eyes.

ELLA
Build us a home.

WALLACE
Done.

ELLA
(holds her breath)
Extra bedrooms?

WALLACE
Three?

ELLA
(smiles)
Three works.

WALLACE
Sapphire outhouse of course. Toilet.
Farm out back.

She steps back.

ELLA
Farm?? We're talking Nashville.

WALLACE
I'm talking Kansas. You know I'm
moving there to build settlements.

ELLA
That was *then*. Look where we are -
everything's changed!

WALLACE
(points to her wounds)
Yeah, it's getting worse. I heard
what that preacher did to you; I'm
going to put a bullet in his head!

ELLA
Brilliant, like his father did yours!

He winces. She curses her insensitivity.

ELLA
I-I'm sorry. I know he was your life.

WALLACE
(raging at the memories)
What they did to Pop... a bullet would
have been a courtesy.

ELLA

Don't let them drive you away - we'll stay and defy them! I know you're a great builder; we'll find you clients in Nashville! I'll teach! We'll save and start new lives on Covenant La--

WALLACE

(clenches his fists)

Covenant Lane!

ELLA

There's more to this. What aren't you telling me?!

WALLACE

(pacing furiously)

Nothing to tell!

ELLA

I don't believe it.

WALLACE

Believe it! I'm *through* going to black funerals, watching them chalk out black figures on concrete!

ELLA

Hate won't bring him back!

WALLACE

Hate's all I got - they took everything else! You want me and my boys out of Nashville! We stay, it burns!

ELLA

I can't believe that!

WALLACE

Believe it! I want them dead - ALL OF THEM!

ELLA

No... no... I won't --

WALLACE

BELIEVE IT! I WANT RIOTS! BULLETS!
NIGGERS IN WARPAINT CUTTING HEADS!
WHITE BLOOD SOAKING SIDEWALKS! I WANT
THIS HOUSE OF LIES TORCHED TO CINDER
WITH THOSE BLUE-EYED SNAKES IN IT!

He SHOVES OVER A TABLE. She shudders in horror. Seeing her cower, he checks his rage and starts over.

WALLACE

I want to *protect* you, make a safe home for our family. I can't do that in Nashville. Now with Bishop's *butchers* set to seize power --

ELLA

Take back?!

He looks at her incredulously.

WALLACE

The Amnesty Act. Your "friends" upstairs just restored voting power to the Sons of the Southern Cross. Our slavers have been cleared to retake government, *and us*.

ELLA

(staggered, but defiant)

Congress can pass whatever they want. The President's on our side --

WALLACE

Your boy *Judas* signed it into law. And those U.S. troops that're supposed to "protect" us down South? They're packing it in - lock, stock and barrel. Game over.

ELLA

(breaking down)

Y-you're wrong. We're winning this. It's a new day.

WALLACE

Oh right - "*Rise and Shine, it's that Great Getting Up Morning*." Wake up!

ELLA

Y-you haven't seen what we've seen, the change breaking out. Read the papers!

WALLACE

Read past your own headlines to the real news! America's washing its hands of us and handing us to our executioners - and while you crow "*Mission Accomplished*," they're gearing up for the kill! With nothing standing between us and that Southern Cross, Nashville's a bloodbath waiting to happen! It's dark midnight for our people; there'll be no sunrise for us, not in this life or the next!

ELLA
Please...

WALLACE
Wake up!

ELLA
DREAM WITH ME!

WALLACE
WAKE UP!

Shattered, she slumps to the floor. He SMASHES a glass cabinet.

GUARDS rush in. Wallace doesn't resist as they furiously BEAT HIM DOWN. As they haul him off, he SHOUTS back:

WALLACE
YOUR AMA "LIBERATORS" - ASK THEM
WHAT'S GOING ON! ASK *THEM!!*

CUT TO:

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - ROOFTOP TERRACE - SHORTLY AFTER

The Jubilees anxiously huddle with Hiram, Susan, and Cravath. The mood is dire. Ella is there but not there, her head still reeling.

Hiram points into the distance at an ABORTED CONSTRUCTION SITE.

BENNIE
The Washington Monument, abandoned by
Congress twenty years ago.

HIRAM
Ruins of a great promise.

WHITE
Translate.

HIRAM
The Southern Cross' race-baiting has
panicked Middle America, and Moderates
in Congress, into fearing us as
equals. We're losing Washington.

SUSAN
Which puts the Southern Cross within
striking distance of retaking the South.
If their party wins the upcoming
elections --

AMERICA
Goodbye tomorrow.

The Jubilees are staggered.

TOM
So what saves us?

MINNIE
(shrugs)
The Civil Rights Bill.

IKE
What saves *that* now?!

Susan and Cravath shoot Hiram a look. Bennie picks up on it.

BENNIE
Hiram Jackson. You're running!

This time, Hiram nods. Everyone is stoked.

WHITE
You'll win back enough of the moderate vote to lead our side to victory! Our voters alone would brave hell to tear down that Cross!

Hiram and Susan eye each other gravely.

HIRAM
They'll have to. The Southern Cross is forging armies of terror - The Knight of the Southern Cross, you met them tonight. They're vowing to drown our schools in blood to scare young voters from the polls.

WHITE
My God, with the Army pulling out, what protects our campuses?

CRAVATH
Protect? With our mounting debt and this looming *recession*, we can't keep most of them open. Fisk is secure, but we're moving to shut down --

ELLA
Not one.

All eyes turn to Ella. Her fists are clenched, eyes aflame.

ELLA
Our schools are the front lines of our future. It's our duty to defend them.

CRAVATH

How??

ELLA

By any means necessary!

SUSAN

But what pays for that? And how do we get our people to stare down the Knights and vote?

ELLA

We rally the people with *our* monument... a beacon to Freedom.

Her eyes blaze with a vision. The singers catch it and look to White.

MINNIE

Jubilee Hall. We'll tour again, to build Jubilee Hall.

SUSAN

(to White)

Your vision!

White beams. Everyone beams. Even Cravath can picture it.

CRAVATH

Yes, yes, a grand edifice to capture imaginations... *and* wallets. *I'm in*. How soon can you --

LOUDIN

A thousand.

CRAVATH

Come again?

GEORGIA

Dollars.

IKE

Each.

A faction lines up against Cravath.

CRAVATH

That's mercenary. May I remind you this is *ministry*?

IKE

May *I* remind you, you're our guests at the White House?

TOM

Ike, he's not the enemy.

IKE

No? Half my life it was beaten into me I wasn't worth what I couldn't fetch at the auction block. Seven years off the plantation and I'm damned if there ain't still a boot on my neck.

He glares at Cravath. Cravath doesn't flinch; he sizes up his opponents then coolly pulls out a cigar.

CRAVATH

You understand that bankrolling hundreds of schools while building our answer to the Washington Monument is a Herculean undertaking, to say nothing of touring costs and titanic paychecks. You'll bear the weight of it all.

The rebels trade smug looks.

LOUDIN

We're soldiers.

Cravath lights his cigar, stares at the flame, then snuffs it out.

CRAVATH

Then we're agreed - you'll tour for the AMA until Jubilee Hall is built.

LOUDIN

We want it in writing, iron-clad.

CRAVATH

Rest assured, Mr. Loudin, contracts will bind us *inseparably*.

These words ring with foreboding.

TOM

The question is, *where next?* Jubilee rip-off acts are flooding the circuit. One of them, a bunch of bulging-eyed minstrels, pimp themselves around as our "coon clones," aping our show in blackface.

CRAVATH

The Blackfoots. I'm well aware of those vile scum - where's a good hangman when you need one? We'll take the tour west, to --

MAGGIE

London.

All turn to Maggie. She fidgets like a child, her pleading eyes fixed on White.

CRAVATH

England?! Preposterous! The British have no connection to the spirituals.

HIRAM

But they *are* quite pro-Black - even *feverish* if you know what I mean. Fred Douglass tells me he was hardly black enough for the British taste.

The Jubilees trade excited looks. Cravath eyes Susan for backup, gets nothing, then growls in defeat.

CRAVATH

I can lean on associates there to stage one event. It'll be make-or-break: you'll either catch fire or crash and burn.

(then the bombshell)

But the English are extremely sensitive to matters of race; the spectacle of a white man playing master to a troupe of Negroes he calls his *kids* would doom the tour before it starts. You're out, White. Out of sight, anyway.

White goes pale.

ELLA

What does that make him, a mascot?!

CRAVATH

Merely *invisible*. And it makes you, Miss Sheppard, the new director of the Jubilee Singers.

Terror sweeps the singers' faces; their horrified eyes beg White to refuse. But his eyes are on Maggie.

WHITE

London.

CRAVATH

Then *it is finished*. Now hear this: Jubilee Hall is your new gospel; you will preach it to every pocket and purse in England, and bleed those billfolds dry.

HIRAM

Then it's set: We build Jubilee Hall,
save our schools --

JUBILEES

And sing at *your* inauguration.

Hiram and the Jubilees high-five, then exit downstairs.

But Cravath holds Ella back. He stares piercingly into her eyes.

CRAVATH

"By any means necessary"... Good
one, Miss Sheppard. Now deliver.
Botch this tour and you stagger home
an incalculable disgrace to her and
the world, taking up your miserable
existence, alone and unclaimed, where
you'll swear your birth was a scar on
this earth.

CLOSE ON ELLA - his words penetrate and haunt her. Shaken, she
exits without a word, leaving Cravath and Susan alone.

SUSAN

A bit Machiavellian, wasn't it?

CRAVATH

Notify our contract lawyers, and *pray*.
Across those waters waits an enemy
deadlier than the Knights.

SUSAN

But Britain *is* well past America's
bigotry; if the Jubilees catch fire,
they'll have the world at their feet.

Cravath take an ominous drag on his cigar...

CRAVATH

Exactly.

... then crushes it.

FADE TO BLACK.

INTERMISSION

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - BRILLIANT BLUE SKY

A picture-perfect day. As a STEAMER crosses the sea, we hear a bizarre English accent:

MAGGIE (O.S.)
Too relaxed! *Backs arched, elbows out, nostrils up! Good.*

CUT TO:

SHIP DECK

The voice is Maggie's. She's schooling the choir in English etiquette - or rather, her tragically misguided conception of it.

MAGGIE
You've entered a room of nobles; waft through their presence like mist, eyes darting about like swans. *Necks stiff, knees straight, no blinking!*

They contort themselves into stiff, awkward pretzels.

MAGGIE
Excellent. When a hand is extended to you, let it linger as if unseen; then *chauncing* to notice it, render a sullen smirk - *never show teeth!* - then clasp but the pulp of their fingertip and lithely wiggle.

Onlookers snicker.

LOUDIN
Who *says* this is English etiquette??

MAGGIE
Only *Charlotte, Emily, Jane* - now hush before I charge you for this! Now, when meeting *Victoria* --

TOM
Oh now it's the Queen!

MAGGIE
(gives him the hand)
You don't exist. Address her as "Your Majesty" then fall deathly silent. Remember, the Queen is not your friend - don't touch her, don't look her in the eyes, don't even breathe on her. Above all, *never ever* turn your back on the great monarch!

The singers fearfully nod.

INT. SHIP CABIN - SAME TIME

An intimate scene: Ella sits at a window writing a letter to Sarah. White and America sit nearby, gazing at a gorgeous RENDERING OF JUBILEE HALL... and yakking about a certain someone.

AMERICA

Someone keep me from fainting -
George White has a real *for-real* date!

WHITE

If things go well in London and she happens to pass through, we might connect for a little café au lait

AMERICA

A "fierce" little café au lait!
Watch out, ladies, Doctor Love is on the prowl!

They *whoop-whoop* and bump butts. Just then, we hear a horrific GASP. Ella JOLTS out of a waking nightmare, violently gasping for breath.

WHITE

SAM!

AMERICA

SWEETIE!

ELLA

I-I'm okay.

But she's not. Her shaking hands hover paralyzed over the letter as if unable to go on. Her heart pounding, she looks bleakly at the TALL STACK OF LETTERS she's written to Sarah.

Alarmed, White gestures to the letters to buoy her spirits.

WHITE

A lifetime of love letters. You know I'm jealous, Sam; those pages know you better than I do. When she reads them, it'll be like you were never apart.

But Ella's eyes flare with fear. We FLASH BACK to the BULLETS AND BLOODSTAINS on the plantation -- then to the RAVEN circling expectantly above -- then back to Ella's terrified eyes.

ELLA

Th-that's not going to happen.
(breaking down)
I'm sorry, Momma! I'm so sorry!

AMERICA

Sweetie, you were three! God knows what happened wasn't your fault!

WHITE

Don't you give up, Sam; I won't let you!

(then, an epiphany hits)

Curse the fates - *build it for her!*
Build the house on Covenant Lane!

ELLA

No.

AMERICA

If England goes well, you can pay for it!

ELLA

I can't live in an empty house.

WHITE

Sam --

ELLA

That house can't be empty!

WHITE

It won't be! You'll find your mother; Wallace will come to his senses.

ELLA

You see that?! You're telling me you see us together?!

Her tears beg him to promise it. White searches himself, then concedes...

WHITE

No, no I don't. But I see a fighter, a prayer warrior with *faith* that could stop a planet. And she's going to put feet to that faith.

Ella breaks down, clutching White and America as she takes that in. They enfold her deeply in their arms as we --

FADE OUT.

INT. ARGYLL MANSION - JUBILEE HALL FUNDRAISER - NIGHT

We're at a posh affair with nobles and aristocrats. And thanks to Maggie, it's a total disaster: the Jubilees are causing an uproar emulating her highly offensive *Englishisms*. As insulted guests leave in droves, Ella frantically works the room to put out fires.

Meanwhile, a dour prick named VETTER mocks the choir to White's face:

VETTER

Pretentious asses. And to think, you probably *prayed* a lot about this.

WHITE

What are you, an atheist??

VETTER

Freethinker, thank you.

WHITE

Methinks you're at the wrong party; we're just a bunch of backwards, *miracles-really-happen* bumpkins.

VETTER

Pre-enlightened Americans! You'll need an Act of God to get you out of this shipwreck. What are you, their driver?

WHITE

What's your beef, pal - did I piss on your leg?

VETTER

I'll season my words with grace: You missionary leeches are the excrement of the Earth. That your cesspool of Bible-Belt religion exists at all is scourge enough, but that like turds on the tide you should wash up on our shores to spread your sewage incites me to fury. *Oh my, was that indelicate?*

White slips a dollar into Vetter's pocket.

WHITE

Your eyes are browning; enema's on me.

VETTER

(outraged)

Do you know who I am?!

WHITE

No, but you'll smell better after the procedure.

As Vetter seethes, the DUKE OF ARGYLL storms up.

DUKE

White! We extend our guests to you, and your people send them home in outrage?! The Duchess demands an explanation!

NEARBY - The DUCHESS and PRIME MINISTER GLADSTONE chat.

GLADSTONE

Of course the nation continues to mourn
your mother's, and our great loss.
Does nothing console her?

DUCHESS

It's twelve years now since father's
passing; she still sets out his shaving
kit every morning.

The Duke enters and thrusts a flustered White before her.

WHITE

Your *Lady*ness, uh, *ship*, uh...

DUCHESS

George White, this is William Gladstone,
Prime Minister.

WHITE

(flustered)
Of..?

Ella SWOOPS IN and swats White.

ELLA

Another bad joke! Whatever are we
going to do with you? Ella Sheppard,
pleased to meet you.

She and Gladstone shake hands. White bristles at the rebuke.

DUCHESS

I don't know what civility looks like
in your backwoods, but our guests
didn't come here to be mocked.

ELLA

Forgive us; we're all a bit light-
headed. The altitude, surely.

GLADSTONE

We're at sea level.

ELLA

(red-faced)
I-it gets better. I promise.

Just then, a COMMOTION erupts nearby: Ike has knocked over a crystal
clock and juggles to catch it. Guests shriek as -- **SMASH!!** -- it
SHATTERS TO SMITHEREENS. The Duchess seethes. Ella swoons.

LATER - MAIN ROOM - IT GETS WORSE

Bennie's fundraising pitch. As White eggs him on from the sidelines, Bennie displays the majestic Jubilee Hall rendering to the seated guests. Jubilee Hall is truly breathtaking - unlike Bennie's bumbling pitch. Battered by stage fright and blinded by cascading sweat, he stammers out a catastrophically incomprehensible speech.

BENNIE

Wh-while the chain of s-slavery is long in the behind of B-B-Britain, A-America's cast only j-just got th-them off. Every *quaid* you g-g-give to build Jubilee Hall...

Our heart sinks for Bennie. Sitting with the Prime Minister, the prick Vetter mocks Bennie...

VETTER

Buffoon!

... but the Prime Minister is quietly impressed:

GLADSTONE

No, there's a fire there.

MEANWHILE, IN THE --

ADJACENT ROOM

-- the humiliated Jubilees wait in doom to make their entrance.

AMERICA

Let's get this funeral over with!

MINNIE

England would have been nice.

TOM

Do thank Emily and Jane for us, Maggie!

Maggie fumes. Suddenly, we hear the MAIN ROOM stir. Georgia peers in.

IKE

What's going on??

GEORGIA

I can't see. Everyone's standing.

We hear the Duchess' voice:

DUCHESS (O.S.)

It's ma-ma!

MAGGIE
 (rolls her neck)
 Oh no, we are not waiting on *somebody*
momma!

BACK TO THE MAIN ROOM

The front door flies open. In sweeps a cranky WOMAN with a royal entourage. She's dressed in *widow's black* and in a very foul mood.

WOMAN
 Blasted weather! *Louise, Edward!*

ADJACENT ROOM

The Jubilees hear the guests BREAK INTO APPLAUSE.

MINNIE
 We're on.

MAIN ROOM

DUKE
 (addressing the guests)
 Friends, fortune has blessed us with
 a most unexpected and distinguished
 guest. It's my honor to announce --

The Jubilees BARREL IN and nearly plow into --

MAGGIE
 (shrieks)
Victoria!!!

-- THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND. IT'S REALLY HER.

Maggie SCREAMS. Victoria stares at her, agape. Maggie loses it: squealing like a poodle, she charges the Queen, hurls herself at her bosom, kisses the royal breast, then falls dreamily at her knees.

MAGGIE
 I worship you.

Victoria gasps. The guests gasp. *Then Maggie gasps.* Recapturing her dignity, she sheepishly rises, dusts off her knees, turns her back on the Queen and rejoins the choir. White nearly passes out.

Red-faced, the Duchess addresses her mother.

DUCHESS
 We have guests, Mama. The Fisk
 Jubilee Singers.

The Queen's interest is immediately piqued.

VICTORIA
From Nashville, yes. They sing --

TOM
The spirituals.

The room breaks into an uproar...

DUKE
Sir! One does not address the Qu--

VICTORIA
My husband adored the spirituals.

... and is thus silenced.

TOM
The late Prince Albert, Ma'am.

VICTORIA
You know of Albert?

TOM
A true hero. He labored for the
extinction of slavery.

VICTORIA
(touched he would know this)
That was his heart.

DUCHESS
We've learned, Mama, that some of the
spirituals have hidden meanings.

VICTORIA
Albert said as much. They're *ciphers*.

TOM
Yes Ma'am, *freedom cries* in code; they
rallied those in bondage to break free.

VICTORIA
Albert cherished one in particular;
he'd sing it when he felt embattled
on all sides. It's a simple,
almost sad-sounding song he called
the powerhouse of them all.

The Jubilees shoot Ella nervous looks.

TOM
You mean *Steal Away*.

VICTORIA
That's it.

TOM

The Prince was right; the oppressor never knew *Steal Away* wielded such force. See, he heard a cry of defeat; we heard a call to action.

VICTORIA

(recalling the lyrics)

So... "*Steal away to Jesus. I ain't got long to stay here.*"

TOM

(translating)

"Spread the word; we're casting off these chains."

VICTORIA

Yes, yes...

TOM

(turning it back to her)

"*My Lord calls me by the thunder; the trumpet sounds within my soul.*"

VICTORIA

(catching on)

That's the call of God to Jubilee!

TOM

"*Green trees bending --*"

VICTORIA

"*-- poor sinners stand trembling.*"
The faithless cower in *storms*, but the brave bear on to victory.

TOM

Right on. The spirituals liberated thousands.

VICTORIA

May they liberate millions yet.

(then, wistfully)

May we hear it? May we hear *Steal Aw--*

ELLA

May we offer Her Majesty something else?

Everyone winces. Victoria's foul mood instantly returns.

Ella's mind races - *what to sing, what to sing??* Then her eyes light on Victoria's mourning clothes. She takes that in, then looks up and meets the Queen's gaze, peering directly, almost invasively into her eyes. Then she curtseys respectfully and signals the choir.

Sumptuous humming fills the room. Maggie excitedly takes a breath -- singing for the Queen is her dream -- but just as she opens her mouth, Ella lifts her own voice:

ELLA

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long way from home...*

Ella's voice isn't remarkable, but her raw emotional transparency is earth-shattering. We feel *Motherless Child's* deep impact on Ella and Victoria - both shut their eyes to take it in...

ELLA

*Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
A long way from home...*

Her breathtaking close stirs our soul...

ELLA

*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long way from hooooooooome.*

Ella's voice melts into profound silence. Maggie glares daggers at her, but the room is on pins and needles, all faces stoically frozen awaiting the Queen's verdict.

Victoria's eyes open. The guests GASP as a lone tear emerges. It hesitates, then journeys haltingly down her cheek. The instant it strikes her lap, the room EXPLODES IN A CATHARSIS OF TEARS.

The Duchess whispers to her mother. Victoria nods. Her eyes bearing a grateful sparkle, the Queen's next words stun all:

VICTORIA

The Jubilee Singers are a bright constellation in their nation's present darkness, a beacon to the brotherhood of man. If they'd permit me the honor, I should like to commission a *portrait* to commemorate this night...

(speaking directly to the choir)

... and what I pray becomes your legacy.
*The doors of Britain open wide to the
Jubilee Singers!*

WILD APPLAUSE - all cheer. All but Vetter, who breathes fire at the choir's triumph. Victoria instructs her Valet with a rascal's wink:

VICTORIA

Hire Havell. Tell him *Be good.*

The Valet knowingly winks back. The guests now swarm the Jubilees like flies, showering them with kisses, social invitations, and rich pledges for Jubilee Hall.

White excitedly approaches Ella.

WHITE

Well, Sam, what do you think?

ELLA

I think the altos sounded like sandpaper in bars eighteen and forty-six.

WHITE

Oh, they sounded just fine.

ELLA

We're not in Kansas anymore; we've come to the holy ground of *Messiah* and *MacBeth*. Critics will eat "just fine" alive. Starting tomorrow, we rehearse four times daily, more if they miss the mark. First rehearsal, five a.m.

WHITE

Sam...

Just then, a dashing VIOLINIST enters.

JOHN

Miss Sheppard, John Peyton. Would you share a drink with me?

Ella shoots White a look --

ELLA

See to the wakeup calls? And coffee.

-- then exits with John, leaving White in a state.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

The Duchess catches up with Vetter as he furiously exits.

DUCHESS

Boning out so soon, Mr. Vetter? What beckons - trafficking? Prostitution?

She chuckles. He shoots the choir a glare that could split steel.

We don't know who this Vetter is, but as he STORMS OUT INTO THE NIGHT, we have the unsettling feeling we'll meet him again.

DISSOLVE TO:

“MR. COLTON, WILL PURCHASE HOME MODEL 53B CONSTRUCTED ON COVENANT LANE PARCEL. SUSAN GILBERT TO TRANSACT IN MY ABSENCE. ELLA SHEPPARD.”

We WIDEN to reveal an anguished Wallace reading the telegram. He's sitting alone on the dirt at the:

COVENANT LANE PARCEL

Looking the property over with haunted eyes, he digs his hand into the earth and pulls up hardened ash, the remnant of a great fire.

SUSAN (O.S.)

This is where it happened.

Susan has quietly arrived.

SUSAN

Mr. Colton said you were here. I know why.

Wallace wants to shout *GET AWAY* to her and everyone like her... but his heavy spirit pleads for a shoulder. She sits beside him.

He fights saying anything, then gestures to the home that once was.

WALLACE

We were there in the den, Christmas Eve. I'd just given Pop the chess set I'd been carving all year - I wanted to make it just like he would've. I could tell he saw the flaws, but he just smiled and held me as if there were nothing more perfect in the world. I hated myself - *there were so many flaws* - but Dad's heartbeat always made everything all right. *That's when they broke in...*

(long, painful beat)

After the funeral, I came back and burned it down, which is kind of funny because all I ever wanted was a home.

He releases the ash from his hand.

WALLACE

I miss him so much.

Tears well up, but he curses his weakness and beats them back.

SUSAN

You can cry.

WALLACE
 (deflecting)
 I gave the land to Colt. Now he's
 asking me to build the house for her.

SUSAN
 You could tell her what happened here.
 If she knew, she'd give up Nashville.

WALLACE
 And kill *her* dreams? This is "God's
 gift" to her, and where he cursed *me*.

SUSAN
 You think it hurts now; let her go
 and you curse yourself.

WALLACE
 How do I make a home here?! How do
 I live in this hell?! Everything
 reminds me of that night!

She clasps his hand.

SUSAN
 Her dreams would be your cross to
 bear.

Ashamed of his emotion, he covers his face. Susan leans in, lays
 his head on her shoulder, and weeps for him.

FADE OUT.

INT. "HAVELL'S PORTRAIT STUDIO" - DAY

The Jubilees enter to find a curious peacock wrangling an enormous
 BACKDROP into place. The painter HAVELL is a short, snarky,
 strangely endearing character with a Dali moustache, bizarre foreign
 accent and mauve staining rag he literally slings from a holster.

He's painfully unimpressed with the choir.

HAVELL
 Look what the low tide swept in.

WHITE
 Mr. Hovel?

HAVELL
Havell.

WHITE
 The painter?

Havell spits at White's feet.

HAVELL
The tightrope walker. You're the
lint up my navel!

ELLA
Mr. Havell, Mr. White is one of us;
he'll be in the portrait.

HAVELL
The *helt* you say! Work order says
"nine Negroes".

ELLA
He's in or you're out of a job.

Havell's nostrils flare; he whips out his rag and SWATS HER.

HAVELL
I'll slap you back up the canal.

The singers trade stunned looks. Havell points to the backdrop.

HAVELL
POSITIONS!

FLASH FORWARD TO:

LATER - CLOSE ON HAVELL

We HOLD ON Havell's appalled face as an ugly SHOUTING MATCH rages before him - we hear the Jubilees fighting offscreen over portrait positions. Cursing his fate, he groans to his staining rag:

HAVELL
And you abandoned *landscapes*. Fool!
Rocks, cows - that's where it's at!

We hear SHOVING, SHRIEKS, CRASH! RIP! Then an ugly silence.

We PAN to the Jubilees. They're posed tensely against the backdrop, White claiming center position while Loudin's faction seethe at the sides. The backdrop is ripped; the air is poisoned with rage.

HAVELL
So, you call yourselves "Jubilees"?

Aghast at their look, Havell gets in their faces and inspects them like a drill sergeant, wincing as if he were inspecting dung.

He SNARLS at Tom's baggy clothes --

HAVELL
Come to show off our potato bags,
big boy?

GASPS at Bennie's wild afro --

HAVELL
So, the yak died.

SNEERS at America's fake jewelry --

HAVELL
May wildebeests trample your firstborn.

GAGS at Maggie's dense makeup --

HAVELL
Lend me a quid, dear?

MAGGIE
F-for what??

He SWATS HER with his rag.

HAVELL
The snowplow I need to get that face
off.

He contorts the slouching Minnie into a formal pose.

HAVELL
This hain't Nashville, honey; tuck
that tush.

MINNIE
(as he manhandles her)
This is so awkward.

HAVELL
Trust me, you don't *know* awkward, so
just stash the cash. We straight?

TOM
How long will the portrait take?

Havell SWATS HIM.

HAVELL
Don't cluck with me, rooster! I'm
the *shyte* and Queen What's-Her-Name
knows it! Havell submit nothing till
all is P-E-R-F-E-C-T!
(then, raging at the heavens)
Mighty Isis, they're hideous creatures!
I want to hurl them to the jackals!

ELLA
Mr. Havell, this is our best.

HAVELL
 Not best enough! ALL MUST DIE... AND
 BE REBORN!

JUBILEES
LORD, I KNOW I'VE BEEN CHANGED!
LORD, I KNOW I'VE BEEN CHANGED!
LORD, I KNOW I'VE BEEN CHANGED!
THE ANGELS IN HEAVEN DONE SIGNED MY NAME!

RAPID-FIRE MONTAGE

EXTREME MAKEOVER: An army of stylists, designers, beauticians and etiquette Nazis mercilessly attack the choir in an all-out fashion blitzkrieg. Havell oversees their transformation like a god:

HAVELL
 In the beginning, Havell!

Over splash cuts of BLAZING MARQUEES, BURSTING FLASHBULBS, BRILLIANT SPOTLIGHTS, and BLIZZARDS OF CASH raining down, we INTERCUT:

Susan overseeing the spectacular groundbreaking of Jubilee Hall

Wallace leading the construction of Ella's home

The choir luxuriating in London's high life -- theatre, opera, poetry, art, high tea, polo and fencing -- with aristocratic friends and suitors

Loudin and Georgia plunging into a torrid affair

Gladstone teaching Bennie oratory in the halls of Parliament

Meanwhile, the isolated, out-of-place White dines alone, reads to himself, and haunts the hotel corridors like a restless ghost.

JUBILEES
I COULDN'T HEAR NOBODY PRAY,
COULDN'T HEAR NOBODY PRAY.
WAY DOWN YONDER BY MYSELF,
I COULDN'T HEAR NOBODY PRAY!

HAVELL'S STUDIO: Months later, the Jubilees are still sitting for Havell. The portrait is complete except for their faces, but bad blood among the contentious choir poisons their expressions. At wit's end, Havell hurls down his palette and curses their frowns:

HAVELL
 Visage of death! *Beam! Radiate!*

As he scrapes off the paint to start over, we PAN TO the life-sized canvas and gasp at the image: The young former slaves in the portrait have undergone a stunning metamorphosis -- they now radiate posh Victorian splendor -- but are completely stripped of faces.

END MONTAGE.

INT. PACKED-OUT CONCERT HALL - JUBILEE HALL BENEFIT CONCERT

A THUNDERING OVATION as the Jubilees close a stunning show. Under Ella's dazzling direction, the choir has never looked or sounded better. Tom flashes the Jubilee Hall rendering. The crowd goes wild and throws OCEANS OF MONEY onto the stage, stomping and chanting:

CROWD
JUBILEE HALL NOW! JUBILEE HALL NOW!

White watches uselessly backstage, muttering unintelligibly to himself. We're shocked at how pale and gaunt he's become.

The Jubilees clasp joyful hands and bow like family. The curtain falls --

BACKSTAGE

-- and so does the façade. They detach hands, break into arguing, and charge through the wings as VALETS get them into disguises.

Stagehands clear a dreaded path as Ella barrels their way, praying to God she looks past them. First in her crosshairs - the kindly old CURTAINMASTER:

ELLA
Mr. Hurley, you were late on two cues and missed a third altogether.

HURLEY
Apologies, Miss Sheppard; perfection does take time.

ELLA
Time's finally up, sir. You're out.

The old man breaks down. As Ella barrels on, her haters and defenders weigh in.

LOUDIN
Another one bites the dust.

IKE
No one even noticed.

TOM
No one but God and Ella.

GEORGIA
You mean Ella and God.

The LAMP OPERATOR does an urgent Rosary as Ella approaches.

ELLA
Congo Blue during a warm ballad,
 Mr. Kendall?

KENDALL
 I- I was going for irony.

ELLA
 Irony is for conflicted poets. We
 looked like ghouls out there! As I
 warned your predecessor, stick to
 the script!

MAGGIE
It's dictatorship.

BENNIE
It's management.

VOICE FROM THE RAFTERS
 Tyranny! Tyranny is what it is!

Ella glowers at the rafters. As they reach the exit, she spots the cowering owner.

ELLA
 Mr. Drucker!!

DRUCKER
 (scampers over)
 M-Miss Sheppard.

ELLA
 The limelights sat unemployed all
 night.

DRUCKER
 I-I swapped them for gas lamps; I
 thought them sufficiently bright.

ELLA
 Your thought life is not my concern;
 the limelights punch up our flesh
 tones. We've been over this.

DRUCKER
 F-forgive me. Regulations require
 hiring a man for each unit. This
 recession is killing us --

ELLA

Bad call.

DRUCKER

I-I see that now.

ELLA

We fill this house twice daily...

DRUCKER

Oh God, i-it won't happen again.

ELLA

It won't. *Our patronage is withdrawn.*

Drucker falls to pieces. Now FULLY DISGUISED, the Jubilees exit the building into --

EXT. CONCERT HALL

-- *JUBILEEMANIA*. The streets are in hysterics as fans clamor to glimpse and touch their idols. Paparazzi swarm. Lovestruck men flash diamonds. Casanovas croon wedding proposals from treetops. Cat-clawing women draw blood fighting their way to the stage door.

As the singers press INCOGNITO through the chaos, NEWSBOYS shout:

NEWSBOYS

JUBILEE HALL A NO-SHOW AGAIN!
IS POSH CHOIR BILKING DONORS TO
BANKROLL LAVISH LIFESTYLES?

The allegations alarm us. Then suddenly --

CROWD

IT'S THEM!

-- fans recognize the choir and STAMPEDE. Panicked, they race for their lives to a FLEET OF LUXURY COACHES, where White shouts --

WHITE

GET IN! GET IN!

The fans CLOSE IN. Valets furiously shove the choir into the coaches. Just as the crowd reaches them, the coaches PEEL AWAY and BOLT INTO THE CLEAR.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - JUBILEE HALL FUNDRAISER - THAT NIGHT

A GLITTERING GRAND BALL with liquor, laughter and live Viennese waltzes. Banners everywhere depict Jubilee Hall. Aristocrats and royalty abound. The exquisitely mannered Jubilees, now darlings of high society, kiss and greet nobles in courtly Victorian fashion.

DUCHESS (O.S.)
Eight years ago, they were chattel;
now they own the world.

HAVELL (O.S.)
And belong to it. It's the stuff
of legend.

ANGLE ON THE DUCHESS, HAVELL, AND SUSAN

SUSAN
So they've captured England's hearts.

DUCHESS
And *pierced* them. Who knew this land
of stoic grief had *so many* unshed tears?

Tom glides in and takes the Duchess' arm.

TOM
Dance, Louise?

She coos as Tom sweeps her away.

HAVELL
So, fresh off the boat?

SUSAN
We've just arrived this hour. I hope
to surprise Mr. White.

HAVELL
Cunning vixen. There's our Moses,
losing his sheep to wolves.

He points across the room to:

THE NERVOUS WRECK WHITE (POV)

Unhinged by the decadence, he anxiously crisscrosses the ballroom tracking his scattered *kids*, manically clocking their every move. He's no mere bundle of nerves; he's a ticking time bomb.

SERVER
To drink, sir?

WHITE
How about non-alcoholic *water*, if
that's not a stretch?

SUSAN (O.S.)
He doesn't look well.

HAVELL (O.S.)
 Nothing tortures a soul like the sting
 of irrelevance.

NEARBY, ANGLE ON BENNIE

Prime Minister Gladstone and a circle of PARLIAMENTARIANS try to cheer up their dispirited friend.

GLADSTONE
 Ben, you're unfair to yourself. The Jubilees' speeches have electrified England; you've fired us up for the American cause.

BENNIE
 That would be the others, Bill; I don't even pitch Jubilee Hall anymore for fear of screwing it up.

PARLIAMENTARIAN 1
 Nonsense! You're an orator in the making. You've got the passion of thunder!

BENNIE
 In a thimble, maybe. All I've ever wanted was to inspire the people, make a real difference. Just today, I heard the American ambassador speak --

PARLIAMENTARIAN 2
Bah! One of your *songs* outpowers a thousand clanging orations!

PARLIAMENTARIAN 3
 He's right, Ben. The Jubilees are America's true ambassadors. *Yours* is the America the world awaits.

Bennie forces a smile; Gladstone clasps his shoulder.

GLADSTONE
 Patience, son. On this I stand with White: one day you'll rouse the living and raise the dead.

BACK TO THE FEVERISH WHITE

He rabidly hawk-eyes the dance floor, wincing as the singers waltz with long queues of lusty socialites.

Suddenly, his eyes flare. We WHIP PAN TO:

LOUDIN AND GEORGIA

They're dancing really intimately, nearly fornicating in motion.

White BREAKS IN and RIPS THEM APART.

WHITE

It's a dance floor, not a mattress.

They glower at White. He glowers back. Then his saber eyes snap to:

MINNIE

As she blissfully waltzes with a dashing young man, White BARGES IN and SHOVES HIM AWAY.

WHITE

We said five minutes per, no repeats!

Minnie sadly nods. White passes her off to the next guy in queue, a decorated young soldier in uniform, and gravely warns him:

WHITE

You can touch the arms, but maintain
an infinite chasm between torsos or
you hobble home - *capiche?*

The poor guy practically wets himself. He tries to flee, but Minnie snatches him back and whisks him off to the dance floor.

And now we CUT TO:

THE POV OF AN UNSEEN SOMEONE

The POV moves through the ballroom searching faces... then discovers Ella playing in the band. Wearing a scintillating blue dress and glistening jewels, she looks beyond beautiful. Beside her is the handsome violinist JOHN, a hot-blooded Romeo who brazenly loves her.

CLOSE ON ELLA AND JOHN (BETWEEN NUMBERS)

JOHN

You're radiant tonight, my dear.

ELLA

John...

JOHN

You know my weakness for bergamot.

He strokes her perfumed neck. Ella smiles but isn't really there; she's gazing wistfully into the crowd as if at a distant love.

JOHN

You see him everywhere - how do I compete with a ghost? I want this finger, Ella Sheppard, and the woman that comes with it.

He kisses her ring finger. From afar, these two look like lovers.

An USHER approaches with a collection tray.

USHER

For Jubilee Hall?

John sighs, then gives up his gold watch. He looks around at the ARMY OF USHERS taking up cash and jewelry from guests.

JOHN

Deep pockets have opened for Jubilee Hall. Some are suspicious about its *failures to appear*. There've been rumors --

ELLA

Tabloid lies. There were delays, but Jubilee Hall will soon be unveiled.

JOHN

Let's hope so. *Look*.

He points to PLAINCLOTHESMEN discreetly surveilling the scene.

JOHN

Those aren't guests; they're investigators.

ELLA

But we've given no cause!

JOHN

Except that tonight was to be a *celebration* of Jubilee Hall's much-belated completion, not yet another pitch for money. Watch out, the mere appearance of *fraud* puts you in the crosshairs of the Prosecutor.

ELLA

Prosecutor??

JOHN

A venomous prig whose sole joy is inflicting misery. He's hated but powerful, and never misses when he aims. It appears he's setting his cannons on you.

Suddenly, Ella gasps. She spots White freaking out about something. In a flash, she BOLTS from the stage, bumps into the Unseen Someone --

ELLA
Excuse me.

-- then dashes off without looking at him. We PAN to reveal the Unseen Someone:

IT'S WALLACE. HE'S THERE. IN PERSON.

ANGLE ON WHITE

He's breathing fire reading someone's lips. Just as he LUNGES to kill, Ella swoops in and SNATCHES HIM BACK.

ELLA
Breathe... remember where you are.

Too unglued to speak, he points to a FRENCHMAN chatting Ike up.

ELLA
That's Marcel Proviere, the great talent manager.

WHITE
Vulture!

He shakes Ella off and BARRELS OVER to Proviere.

PROVIERE
Ah, Mr. White. I've been impressed with young Mr. Dicker--

WHITE
Not that you haven't heard, but my boy *has* a gig. You can *shove* your solo offer!

IKE
But Mr. Proviere is --

WHITE
You're taken!
(to Proviere)
Go proselytize somewhere else!

PROVIERE
Last I checked, I'm a legend, you're their lackey, and Mr. Dickerson is of age. I intend to represent him with or without your consent.

WHITE
 (gets in Proviere's face)
 You pompous son of a --

SNATCH!! A HULKING WOMAN yanks White into her MONSTROUS BOSOM.

ELLA
 The Widow Fisher's had her eye on you.

The Widow grins through a minefield of mangled teeth. White SHRIEKS.

ELLA
East, Mrs. Fisher!

The widow SMACKS White's rump. He SCREAMS as she muscles him like a rag doll out to the dance floor.

Ella gets in Proviere's face.

PROVIERE
 You have no idea who I am.

ELLA
 To the contrary, I wouldn't be doing my job if I hadn't swept this town for landmines, Proviere - real name Pincock - (*let's not go there*) - promoter, poacher, man of secrets; one being that despite your exalted status you're a skid-row slumdweller thanks to litigious ex-wives, pregnant ex-mistresses, and costly genital treatments for that stubborn social disease you picked up in either Turkey or Uruguay, depending on the source. Which is why, given your mythically precarious house of cards, it stuns me to have to advise you that as Mr. Dickerson is legally exclusive to this tour, if he were to *cough* for you onstage my lawyers would very publicly expose your charade and take you for every scrap you've got left... minus that appalling toupée.

Proviere stares at her incredulously. After a stunned silence, he breaks into weeping, resets his toupée, and slinks off to the exit.

MEANWHILE, IN THE POWDER ROOM

America and her Parisian GIRLFRIENDS gab in SUBTITLED FRENCH:

GIRLFRIEND 1
 So what's holding up the portrait?

AMERICA

Us, apparently.

(spoofing Havell)

"I see no family, just ghosts! Hollow smiles, hollow hearts! No soul, no glow, no love! Flinking disaster!"

GIRLFRIEND 2

Can't Havell just paint smiles?

America SWATS her with a rag.

AMERICA

"Cretin! Havell paint souls, not smiles!"

As they laugh, the door flies open. Maggie breezes in and beams at her gorgeous self in the mirror. And she truly *is* beautiful; no longer wearing skin-lightening makeup, her dark complexion ravishes us. Oddly, she still wears full-length gloves. America marvels --

AMERICA

The Queen of London: twenty-three proposals and counting. She carries an umbrella to fend them off.

BACK TO THE DANCE FLOOR

Ella and John waltz on air. John's an amazing dancer and Ella looks radiant in his arms.

Wallace is dying watching them. Her face shimmers, her smile shines, her bright eyes sparkle with dreams. UP CLOSE, we see that those dreams are of someone far away, but Wallace sees lovers in love.

Fighting a war of emotions, he charges over to claim his woman - then stops at a mirror and looks himself over. Though dressed decently enough, here in Ella's opulent world he might as well be a bum. She's clearly in her element, and way out of his league.

Cursing himself, he backs off and staggers across the room to:

SUSAN

She reads his tortured eyes, then spots John kissing Ella and gasps.

SUSAN

No.

WALLACE

Didn't work out.

Beating back tears, he presses a precious ENVELOPE into her hand.

WALLACE

I wasn't here.

His misty eyes demand an oath. Crushed for him, she reluctantly nods it. They clutch each other, hugging deeply. Then he surrenders the envelope as if surrendering his heart.

And then he's gone.

NEARBY, ON THE BASKET CASE WHITE

Freed from *The Bosom*, his nerves are shot to pieces. Shaking and sweating, he frenetically scans the dance floor.

Suddenly his eyes flare - he spots Maggie dancing with a lecherous CRITIC whose hands and eyes freely wander. Already a powderkeg, his blood boils like mercury reading their lips:

ON MAGGIE AND THE CRITIC

CRITIC

"The sensation of the evening was Maggie Porter, whose aching rendition of 'Nobody Knows' stole our hearts."

MAGGIE

London Gazette, December 4th. That was a good night.

CRITIC

A felony understatement - you were "incandescence itself."

MAGGIE

(nods to him)

So wrote Europe's most powerful critic. They do call me *The Larynx*; I've sung Buxtehude.

CRITIC

You were born for La Scala. Your enslavement to that choir is a travesty.

WHITE

(spiralizing out of control)

Lice!

MAGGIE

The music does leave some of us cold.

CRITIC

Does it? You look convincing onstage.

MAGGIE

It's called *acting*. Just don't let it in.

CRITIC

Oh, let's let it in. Give me that larynx and I'll give you Europe.

(GROPES HER THIGH)

Free yourself.

THAT'S IT! WHITE EXPLODES. IN A STUNNING MELTDOWN, HE STORMS ABOUT IN A FURIOUS TIRADE, ROUNDING UP THE CHOIR LIKE CHILDREN.

WHITE

(as he spots them)

LOUDIN! GEORGIA! ALL OF YOU!
GET OVER HERE! WE'RE LEAVING!

SUSAN

Oh my God.

SHOCKWAVES. The guests gasp. The band aborts. Ella desperately tries to calm him --

ELLA

MR. WHITE! MR. WHITE! PLEASE!

-- but he's lost his mind. As he rages about, the mortified singers head in disgrace for the door. But traumatized by White's rant, Maggie clutches the Critic like a frightened child.

WHITE

MAGGIE! LET'S GO!

CRITIC

That baggage doesn't own you.

WHITE GOES BALLISTIC. Raging out of his mind, he charges over and PUNCHES the Critic, knocking him out. Maggie SCREAMS. White grabs her arm. She MENTALLY EXPLODES.

MAGGIE

AAAUGH!! GET OFF ME!! GET OFF!!

SHRIEKING HYSTERICALLY, she KICKS and FLAILS at White as if fighting off a rapist. Ella orders the men --

ELLA

GET HIM OFF!

Tom and Bennie LUNGE IN to pull them apart. Maggie SCREAMS TRAUMATICALLY at their touch, BASHING and THRASHING at them with furious blows. As stunned guests look on, the four of them roll violently across the floor, CRASHING INTO TABLES AND CHAIRS.

Finally, Tom and Bennie pull them apart. The men are slashed and bleeding, but it's Maggie that clutches her body as if violated.

Bursting into tears, she backs up a staircase, cursing them all.

MAGGIE

I don't need any of you! I'm going
to make it on my own! I hope you all
die!

WHITE

Maggie!

White starts after her, but Ella BLOCKS him.

ELLA

Let her go!

White tries to push past her.

ELLA

LET HER GO!

EXT. HOTEL TERRACE - SUNRISE - NEXT MORNING

A heated scene: As Ella paces in a state, Susan clashes with the volcanic White over last night.

SUSAN

You had an Olympian meltdown in
front of five hundred patrons!

WHITE

Spare me your third degree! I
should never have brought them
to this godless country --

SUSAN

Cravath's been cabling me all night.
Our patrons are outraged; they're
cabling *him* crying *abuse!*

WHITE

Rationalists, freethinkers, humanists.
Merrie danced with Darwin, for God's
sake!

SUSAN

And Miss Porter --

WHITE

Oh God... Maggie. He was probably
groping her the whole time.

Ella switches gears.

ELLA

We've got a situation; the Crown Prosecutor is weighing an investigation into Jubilee Hall.

SUSAN

What does he suspect??

ELLA

Fraud? Embezzlement? His men were there last night.

SUSAN

That's ridiculous! The recession is wreaking havoc on construction everywhere, but Jubilee Hall is back on track. An investigation would prove that.

ELLA

Or do us in. The very scandal of an inquest could destroy us.

SUSAN

Right. Okay, so how do we stave off --

WHITE

Dublin.

They look at White. He's become enthralled by a WALL MAP OF IRELAND.

SUSAN

Tour Ireland?? The AMA won't approve that.

WHITE

I didn't hear me asking. *Revival* is breaking out there; we're going to lead it.

ELLA

The choir's fan base is *here*.

WHITE

So are their tempters! *Chauffeurs, pedicures, sex like ivy.* My kids are missionaries, not highborn aristocrats!

SUSAN

But there's no money in Ireland; it's been ravaged by the recession, and the *plague*.

WHITE

Heaven forbid we soil our satin with their suffering! Ireland gets us back to our roots - and bulletproofs us against the Prosecutor. Think some desk jockey is gonna drop his donut and chase us across the Irish Sea when we're bringing hope to the people?

Susan's hands shake. Trembling, she pulls out a stack of Southern NEWSPAPERS bearing the Southern Cross insignia. The shocking headlines call for bombings and assassinations against AMA schools.

SUSAN

Grant is pardoning terrorists by the thousands; they're joining the Knights to annihilate our schools. The rise of terror is striking fear into our voters. The people need *vision*, *courage*. They need Jubilee Hall. To finish Jubilee Hall in this worsening recession, we need this tour to be even *more* profitable than it's been. That's not possible in Ireland.

WHITE

Thank you, Miss Gilbert, for that stirring lecture. Meanwhile, I'm losing my family to *Gomorrhah*. The Lord will provide; Maggie will catch up with us; revival will save us.

ELLA and SUSAN

That's just not reality!

WHITE

Right, only *great men* wage war on reality.

His look of betrayal stops their hearts. He stands to go.

SUSAN

M-Mr. White, there's something I --

WHITE

I hope you find London agreeable, Miss Gilbert.

He abruptly exits. Susan breaks down.

SUSAN

They said he'd become unstable; I refused to believe it. I couldn't change their minds. Oh, God...

ELLA
What are you saying, Susan?

SUSAN
Cravath wants him off the tour.
They've fired him.

ELLA
(flushes with horror)
God, no... that would kill him.

SUSAN
You hold the cards; they know the
tour can't go on without you.

Ella paces, processing it all. Then...

ELLA
Tell them it's Ireland. Mr. White
stays and never hears of this.

SUSAN
(relieved for White)
They'll have to go along. But the
revenue must never let up, and you'll
have to rein him in or they will.
Your friendship might not survive.

Ella takes that in, then nods. Susan's next words are grave.

SUSAN
You do understand that to meet the
AMA's bottom line in Ireland, the
choir will work relentlessly:
concerts, revivals, fundraisers,
receptions - day and night, it won't
let up. They've sacrificed, but
nothing like what's ahead.

CLOSE ON ELLA - Her eyes are haunted with foreboding, but she owns
that and nods.

SUSAN
(sighs)
Well, looks like I'm headed home.

ELLA
I'm so sorry, Susan.

Susan fidgets, then hands Ella the envelope from Wallace.

SUSAN
I brought this from Nashville.
Congratulations, it's beautiful.

Ella knows what's in it; the sight of the envelope sinks her heart.

SUSAN

Julia gave the Bureaus your mailing address here. They'll write you directly with any word on Miss Sarah. If it's any consolation, we've got everyone everywhere praying for you.

Ella nods a weary nod, then --

ELLA

Have you... have you seen...

SUSAN

I understand he's in Kansas.

Ella takes that in. Damned by her lie, Susan stands to go.

ELLA

This Prosecutor... he's a cutthroat, and apparently never loses.

SUSAN

Then remember the hour, Ella; the bright lights, blue skies... none of it's real. We're facing the birth of a terrorist nation and the future of Freedom lies with this choir. You're our only hope.

INT. INDUSTRIAL OFFICE - LATER THAT MORNING

A stale, musty workroom. Raging over last night, rebels Loudin, Ike, and Georgia try to turn a conflicted Bennie against the AMA.

LOUDIN

Ireland?! Just lynch us now! I'm scarred head-to-toe from Irish masters and cops!

BENNIE

Irish-American.

IKE

Irish is Irish! Those paddies have it in for us, and like dumb animals we have no say!

GEORGIA

We're finally living our dreams, and they want us back in cages! They've beaten us down since we got here!

BENNIE

Come on.

LOUDIN

Come on! That slave-driver working us day and night like dogs, and stealing Maggie's big moment with the Queen?! White dictating our every move and publicly flogging us last night?! And our portrait - forcing himself onto it front and center like massah! That devil --

BENNIE

That devil *saved* our music when we left it to die; the portrait's the only way he gets remembered.

(then, conceding)

Yeah, it's gotten rough; but we're partners in this. The AMA pays us.

LOUDIN

To *blind* us. Open your eyes! They rape and bleed this music out of our people then copyright and sell tickets to it?! They're stealing our treasure and the world is blind to the crime! Why? Because they've *bought* eight smiling Negroes as their frontmen! Jubilee Hall is *their* cause; the tour, the money - *that's* ours. We're taking it back.

BENNIE

Mutiny.

IKE

Recovery.

Bennie can't believe his ears.

BENNIE

So what, the AMA's going to just hand over the choir to you??

GEORGIA

That's where *The Liberator* comes in. Isn't that right, Mr. Stone?

We PAN to reveal the other party to this cabal - JONAS STONE, the black Englishman we met at the White House.

STONE

Quite.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LIBERATOR NEWSPAPER PRINT ROOM - JUST AFTER

A cavernous, echoey space. Oddly, the place is dead - no workers, the machinery idle. Still, Stone shows off the printing presses.

STONE

*How great a forest a little fire
kindles.*

BENNIE

And these "force the AMA's hand" how?

Stone hands Bennie the draft of an article. His eyes widen at the title:

"BIGOTRY, BRUTALITY, CRIMINAL ABUSE: THE AMA'S SHOCKING NEW SLAVERY"

It's a tell-all exposé. He reads the lead paragraph:

BENNIE

"Cash-strapped Missionaries prey on the lives of eight black students, including a fourteen year-old minor, their treasurer and music professor sending them cross-country into violence-plagued territory without provisions or protection from bloodthirsty vigilantes, subjecting them to sickness, starvation and near-slaughter on a deadly moneymaking mission the AMA director himself called reckless."

Thunderstruck, Bennie breaks off. Ike shrugs uneasily.

IKE

"Truth is a mist."

STONE

The cornerstone of journalism. This hits the stands, the fallout is fatal. Cravath, White, the Sheppard girl --

BENNIE

They're crucified.

IKE

We inherit the kingdom. The scandal forces them to surrender the choir.

Bennie is floored, disturbed yet torn. He paces, processing it all.

BENNIE

So why am *I* here?

STONE

The Prime Minister loves you as a son -
hell, he's all but adopted you. You
have his ear *and sword*; you cry foul,
his wrath puts us all behind bars.

IKE

Your endorsement bulletproofs us;
The Liberator can't run it without
you.

Pacing, thinking, Bennie looks around.

BENNIE

Where is everyone?

STONE

Church, if they know what's good for
them. We shut down for Holy Week.

Stone's eyes draw Bennie's gaze. Stone's face is coarse, but his
crystal blue eyes, rare for a black man, glisten like hypnotic
pools. Bennie wrests himself from their pull.

BENNIE

What's our fate to you?

GEORGIA

Bennie! *The Liberator* is a crusader
for justice!

STONE

(defending Bennie)

Now, now, we're to be *wise as serpents* --

BENNIE

-- *and harmless as doves*. You're a man
of Scripture.

STONE

Oh my father was a great preacher.
The Jubilees are the pride of our
people, but your oppression sets
back the race.

(holds up the exposé)

This is an axe, but it takes one to
break the chains of injustice. *The
Liberator* stands with you in the
struggle, to give you hope and a
future.

BENNIE

(chastened, his head swimming)

Right... sorry... I'm just trying to...

STONE

Figure it all out, I know. You have been all your life, wondering where you belong, how you fit in.

Bennie's eyes go misty; Stone's eyes sweep his soul.

STONE

I see you, son; your faith is frail, beaten down by empty prayers and promises. You bow the knee day and night crying, "*Use me, please use me!*" But heaven's silence mocks your tears. Truth is, you'd end the torture today if you could be sure you were worth the funeral. *Hope deferred makes the heart sick --*

BENNIE

But longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

STONE

Amen, Amen. The world worships a victim; expose their abuse and become a living martyr on the world stage, high and lifted up. *You think you're famous now...* Get off those knees! Take to the mountaintop and claim your Jubilee!

Stone's words stir Bennie. Everyone holds their breath as he wrestles his thoughts. But in the end...

BENNIE

We promised the world a monument to freedom; I won't rest until I touch those bricks.

He takes a breath, owns his decision, and exits. The others seethe.

STONE

(hands Loudin the exposé)
Not to worry, sweetness, he'll come around. When his cage gets too tight, this is the key. Cable me and I'll bring the world to your feet. Remember, *I am with you always.*

They shake on it. Then ominously...

LOUDIN

Meanwhile, if it's fireworks they want, let's start the show.

EXT. DEPARTING STEAMER - STORM-CLOUDED DAY

From the ship's stern, the Jubilees, sans Maggie, wave farewells to English friends and fans. Susan is among the crowd; she and White trade agonizing looks across the widening chasm.

Alone at the bow, Ella stares grimly at the content of the envelope: the DEED to her new, empty house. She sighs. Then steeling herself for what comes next, she looks out to the violent waters ahead.

We BOOM UP, high above Ella and the ship, into the TURBULENT STORM CLOUDS until we're lost in churning mists, then

TIME DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KANSAS CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Many months have passed. Wallace spiritlessly oversees the construction of new homes. Bearded and bedraggled, he works ruggedly but with lifeless eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. FOREMAN'S TENT - DAY

As Wallace polishes off a flask, a beautiful WOMAN enters. She sets a BOX OF DELIVERIES before him then kisses him. He lets her, while anxiously rummaging through the box.

He finds what he's looking for: an Irish newspaper. He braces himself, then flips through it and stops on a page. His eyes fire with anguish. He slams it down, and we PUSH IN to the headline:

"JUBILEE HOAX? EMBATTLED CHOIR UNDER CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION."

INT. CROWN INTERROGATION ROOM - IRELAND

A sweltering, underground chamber. A haggard, severely fatigued Ella is being savaged by the malicious Prosecutor. To our shock, he's none other than VETTER, the snarling prig we met at Argyll mansion. The tension between these two is blistering: Ella strains to endure Vetter's venom, but months of grueling work have worn her and her patience to shreds.

VETTER

Yet another postponement! Like your
truant Lord, that damned building
just doesn't want to appear!

ELLA

The news from headquarters this
morning was a blow to us all.

VETTER

Now the AMA is saying --

ELLA

December 1st, final word. Construction's hit --

VETTER

"-- a few more snags, thanks to this pesky recession."

ELLA

Depression now. Your own economists are calling it the downturn of the century. It's crippled construction everywhere.

VETTER

Rot! The economy is a smokescreen and your own records will prove it. Which is why I've summoned you: Your people are stonewalling; the documents I subpoenaed are but dribbling in.

ELLA

Mr. Vetter, you've demanded quite the laundry list: receipts, invoices --

VETTER

Ledgers, logs, bank statements, petty cash disbursements down to the penny! I want an encyclopedic tracking of every cent siphoned from British pockets!

ELLA

Sir... as you've been apprised, the tour revenues I remit to New York are first allocated to Jubilee Hall, then to the hundreds of campuses this tour also sustains, each of which generates its own litany of expenditures. That's tens of thousands of documents. I advise *patience*.

VETTER

Pathologically!

ELLA

(stands to go)
I've got somewhere to --

VETTER

Sit down!

She seethes... then bitterly obeys.

VETTER

I expected that imbecile White here;
my men tell me he hasn't been seen in
ages. Where is he?!

ELLA

Indisposed.

VETTER

Meaning?!

ELLA

"Unavailable," as it does.

VETTER

Watch it, I'm the face of the law!

ELLA

Really, the face?

Again, she stands.

VETTER

SIT DOWN!

ELLA

I have full power of attorney for the
group; I'm afraid you're stuck with *me*.

VETTER

No, you're stuck with me! The Jubilee
Singers are under investigation for
fraud, embezzlement and racketeering.

ELLA

We've committed no crime.

VETTER

Dung! You whip the *Congregation of
England* into raptures proclaiming the
"Great, Glorious Coming of Jubilee
Hall," plunder their purses, then when
you've got all eyes looking to the
clouds abscond to Ireland and hit
replay?! You silk-robed swindlers are
the crime! Oh you stage an impressive
show - tending our orphans, serving at
soup kitchens and prisons, packing out
stadiums "bringing revival to the
people"! You've got the world touching
the hem of your garment, but I'll prove
you're false as hell, you *and* your
fictitious "Monument to Freedom"!

ELLA
 (pulls out DOCUMENTS)
 We've sent you the permits...

VETTER
 You haven't barnstormed Britain
 prophesying *permits*.

ELLA
 Construction-site photos...

VETTER
 Impossible to authenticate. Nothing
 absolves you but a government-issued
 Certificate of Completion, and we both
 know *that ain't goan happen*.

ELLA
 Then arrest us.

VETTER
 Oh, I'd have *gallowed* you long ago
 if I had unfettered power. *But you*
understand fetters... The Prime
 Minister's unfortunate blessing on
 your tour following Her Majesty's
 misguided benediction have *set my*
hooves on eggshells. I'm forced to
 stalk you more gingerly than I'd like.

ELLA
 You can't touch us without hard
 evidence. Welcome to justice.

VETTER
 Justice is the firing squad you'll
 soon face. The Prime Minister is
 coming around.

ELLA
 You're confused. Mr. Gladstone is a
 friend, and *he* at least understands
 depressions.

VETTER
True that, which is why, (as I haunt
 his ear), he's losing sleep trying to
 rationalize - EXHIBIT A - how it is a
 bunch of beggarly missionaries from a
 cash-strapped charity could afford
 those lap-of-luxury lifestyles we all
 so publicly witnessed in London.

Ella squirms; the room feels suddenly hotter.

ELLA

W-we may have gotten carried away in London, but the choir's hands never touch the till. Our salaries are paid from New York.

VETTER

And a king's ransom I'll prove they are: EXHIBIT B - public donations *laundered* into exorbitant paychecks. Those documents will be the spikes in your coffin. The hunt is on.

CLOSE ON ELLA - Vetter's threat conjures something deep, something *ancient* within her. Her searing eyes seize his.

ELLA

Mr. Vetter, you've hunted me all my life. From my birth as your beast to this moment, there hasn't been an hour I haven't felt your breath on my neck. Only I swore long ago to keep you behind me. Sorry to *rain reality*, but on December 1st, those "clouds" will part, Jubilee Hall will appear, and you *will* believe.

VETTER

Feculent scum!

ELLA

(stands to go)
We're through.

VETTER

Decidedly. See, what shattered the old man's heart was this *silver bullet*, courtesy of Nashville public records --

(pulls out a document)

EXHIBIT C - a Certificate of Completion, not for Jubilee Hall of course, but a brand new custom home built on choice waterfront property by a young choir director who by all reckoning was near-penniless upon her arrival here. "How is it, sir," (I press), "that while Jubilee Hall languishes unbuilt, this lavish house - a literal stone's throw away - was miraculously *passed over* by this "downturn of the century" that's "crippled construction everywhere"?

Rattled, for the first time Ella is speechless.

VETTER

His reaction exactly. As it sank in that he, Her Majesty and the whole of Britain were playing the catamite to a company of cons, I saw the scales of faith fall from his eyes. Racked with agony, he assured me that should just one untidy document come to light or Jubilee Hall be delayed just once more, he'd *unchain* me - which I pray happens before you destroy each other, which *my men* prophesy will happen any day.

(gets in her face)

So run, Ella, as far and fast as you can. I AM the fire of your hell, the fury of your nightmares. I will catch you, and after making a bloody spectacle of your arrest and trial, I will damn you to the dungeons, where I swear you won't see daylight until your Lord returns.

INT. PACKED-OUT CONCERT HALL - JUBILEE HALL BENEFIT CONCERT

A MASSIVE REVIVAL. Tens of thousands of fans weep, cheer and *catch the spirit* as the Jubilees raise the roof. The Irish are ecstatic for their Jubilees.

But up close, we're shocked to see that the choir is crumbling. Battered by sickness and exhaustion, we barely recognize the run-down human beings before us. Ominously, Bennie is plagued with a grave cough. White is conspicuously absent.

Suddenly, DRAMA STRIKES. As Minnie sings a high-flying solo --

MINNIE

*Sometimes I am tossed and driven,
I don't know where to roam...*

-- Loudin brazenly HIJACKS IT. Upstaging Minnie, he strides out front, bows to the crowd, then breaks out in a flashy solo that SOARS TO THE HEIGHTS and careens through an insane tangle of keys:

LOUDIN

*I've hearrrrrrd of a cityyyyyy
called Heaaaaa-vennnnnn...*

The choir panics - they're lost amidst his wildly chromatic harmonies. The performance tailspins towards a crash landing.

Ella growls. She scrambles to the piano and launches a spectacular ANTI-BALLISTIC ATTACK, bombarding Loudin with a barrage of tonal chords to lock him into key. The crowd goes wild --

AUDIENCE
OOOOOOOOHHHH!

Loudin fires back, strafing Ella with a blitz of VOCAL MANEUVERS that force her to follow.

AUDIENCE
WOOOOOOOOWWW!!

Blow by breathtaking blow, they clash like gladiators in an epic musical dogfight. Finally, Ella torpedoes Loudin with an ATOMIC CHORD that blasts him into key. Ella cues the choir; they enter and close the song with sensational flair. THUNDERING OVATION.

BACKSTAGE

As they charge towards the exit. Minnie bursts into tears. Ella breathes fire at Loudin.

ELLA
That's another week's pay!

LOUDIN
Worth it!

ELLA
And you're *demoted* - second bass!

LOUDIN
We'll see about that!

ELLA
We will. Next up, washing windows!

Georgia clings to Loudin.

ELLA
Get off him!

GEORGIA
Piss off!

Ella RIPS THEM APART.

ELLA
This is a choir, not a harem! Your adultery is the talk of Ireland!

GEORGIA
What we do is our business!

ELLA
Not on my watch. For the last time, stay clear of him and his bed!

GEORGIA

Pity an iceberg like you will never know what a good bed is for! Even a volcano like Wallace couldn't thaw *that!*

ELLA

For the last time, it stops now!

GEORGIA

Or what?! What are you going to do, controlling bitc--

ELLA

Goodbye, Georgia.

The singers gasp. Georgia flushes with humiliation, but defiantly clutches Loudin.

GEORGIA

Let's go, babe. We said we don't need this.

But Loudin has no intention of leaving. He drops her hand.

ELLA

Surprise, surprise. Your ticket home will be waiting at the hotel.

Georgia turns pale, but before she can say anything --

MINNIE

BENNIE!!

Minnie SHRIEKS. Everyone looks to the floor. BENNIE HAS COLLAPSED.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - NEXT MORNING

Tension is thick as the choir awaits news. Bloodless and bone-weary, they look ghastly, none worse than the sickly, emaciated White. He wears a hospital robe, already admitted.

Despite her condition, Ella relentlessly works, slogging through mountains of TOUR MAIL at a makeshift desk.

They rush DR. FREARS as he enters.

WHITE

Can we see him?

DR. FREARS

I'm afraid we're still running tests. How many concerts yesterday?

IKE
 (glowers at Ella)
 Three. Plus speeches, receptions,
 travel, and of course rehearsals.

DR. FREARS
 Good God. About this tour --

Just then, an amiable telegram man enters.

CHOIR
 Hey, Sean.

SEAN
 Morning! Telegram for Miss Sheppard
 from New York.

White jealously snatches it. Awkward.

SEAN
 Godspeed Mr. Holmes' recovery. I
 say it all the time, but Ireland's
 thankful for you.

He exits. White reads the cable. The news is bad.

WHITE
 They need us to raise more money;
 they've booked us a litany of new
 tours. We leave tonight for Wales.
 After that, Switzerland, the
 Netherlands, then Scotland.

AMERICA
 What about our vacations?? Our
 vacations start tomorrow.

WHITE
Canceled. We work straight through to
 December.
 (his face turns pale)
 They're *doubling* the daily schedule.

The room erupts in panic.

DR. FREARS
 What do they want from you, *blood?*

ELLA
 Let's calm down...

DR. FREARS
 Calm down?! This hospital is *already*
 your second home!

ELLA

No one is forced to work when sick; I tell them not to.

WHITE

But they *do*, to keep up with you.

DR. FREARS

Miss Sheppard, do you have any idea how serious Ben's condition is?! If it's what we suspect --

ELLA

I didn't send myself that telegram!
I trust Bennie's in good hands. Now you'll do your job, Doctor, and leave me to do mine.

(to the choir)

We've got *Wicklów* in half an hour. We make our day then leave for Wales.

LOUDIN

Send us a postcard; we'll be tanning in Nice. Vacations are in our contracts!

ELLA

(whips out their contract)
So's cancellation. "*The AMA may suspend vacations as it deems necessary.*" Paragraph Six.

Loudin and Ike trade looks; apparently they'd forgotten that.

LOUDIN

Screw the fine print; we'll get this arbitrated.

ELLA

Paragraph Nine: "*The AMA shall arbitrate all disputes, and its decisions shall be permanently binding.*" You signed it, and per your demand it's "*ironclad.*"
Don't cross my lawyers.

IKE

You're full of it!

ELLA

Know where Maggie is? Singing in Nashville, for pigeons and stray dogs. She can't get work doing funerals.

LOUDIN

You killed her career.

ELLA
It was *suicide*; be kinder to your own.

Just then, we hear a COMMOTION in the hallway. NURSES chase the feeble Bennie into the room.

DR. FREARS
Bennie, you've got to lie down!

LOUDIN
(to Bennie)
Vacations canceled, workload doubled.
They're bleeding the life out of us!

Loudin's eyes demand his allegiance. Ella picks up on the cryptic exchange. Bennie is alarmed; he processes that... then defiantly buttons his coat.

BENNIE
Wicklow.

ELLA
LET'S MOVE!

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - JUST AFTER

As the choir hustles to the coach, White chases Ella down.

WHITE
What the hell?!

ELLA
Go back inside.

WHITE
I'm suspending this tour!

ELLA
I can't let that happen.

WHITE
Get off your high horse, Ella! I've missed a few shows but that doesn't make you God! *Those are my kids!*

ELLA
Our parents went through far worse.

WHITE
Geez, you sound like Cravath!

ELLA
I'm just navigating reality. *Reality!*

Now at the coach, the singers board. Ella searches White's eyes.

ELLA
Remember where we are. If we let up,
the Knights win. *Game over.*

WHITE
(his head swimming)
Right, right... we stop when Jubilee
Hall stands. The Knights, Jubilee
Hall... it seems like another world.

White breaks down. Something heavy is on his heart.

WHITE
I don't hear them anymore.

ELLA
The songs.

WHITE
I fight to hold on, but the *other side*
seems so far away.

CLOSE ON ELLA - her eyes confess the same.

WHITE
We've healed so many; what heals *us*?

His eyes flush with shame. He begs her --

WHITE
Please, Sam... don't write me off.

ELLA
You need rest.

WHITE
I'm not the enemy.

ELLA
NURSE!!
(then shrugs)
Wicklows.

White listlessly nods. They come *this close* to hugging but don't.

Ella boards the coach, leaving White at the curb. As the coach
races off, she weeps watching NURSES race over and seize White.

WE FADE OUT... HOLD ON BLACK...

THEN FADE UP TO A MARQUEE:

“TOMORROW: JUBILEE HALL GRAND OPENING GALA!”

Many grueling months have passed. We're facing the darkened --

SCOTLAND GRAND THEATRE

-- on a frigid December night. As the cold winds howl, we hear the death throes of a dying choir:

JUBILEES (O.S.)
This is the day of Jubilee, God's --

ELLA (O.S.)
No! No! Where's the chord?! Again!

JUBILEES (O.S.)
This is the day of J--

ELLA (O.S.)
F-Almost-Sharp is not a chord!

The ghastly voices aren't coming from the theatre but the SANATORIUM adjacent to it. We PUSH IN to the sanatorium, ENTER its --

BASEMENT WINDOW

-- and find ourselves in the building's catacombs, a mortuary for defunct equipment. A harrowing rehearsal is taking place here. We don't yet reveal the choir, but PAN TO the anguished face of the painter Havell. He's trying to break in as he watches the nail-biting scene before him.

HAVELL
Miss Sheppard, if I could just --

ELLA (O.S.)
Our closing show tomorrow is the talk of Europe, and we're not going out like screeching bats! I know you've got this in you, now give me the chord!

HAVELL
Please, it'll just take --

IKE (O.S.)
We gave it to you at six shows today!

ELLA (O.S.)
And sounded drugged at every one!

LOUDIN (O.S.)
Like we're not?! I thought *Master* knew how to flog a dead nigger!

HAVELL

(leaps to his feet)

Please, just ten minutes! I capture your faces then finish the portrait in London. Without faces, I can do nothing. It's now or never.

We CUT TO the choir and gasp: After a brutal eternity of punishing work, they're walking corpses, as cadaverous as the machines around them. Ella's hands shake with palsy, her ears plugged with bloodied gauze. Bennie has withered to bones. The decaying White is propped up on crutches. All wear patient robes as nurses stand watch.

LOUDIN

Havell's no joke; he damn sure gonna claim that royal commission before we croak!

HAVELL

In fact, I've declined payment from Her Majesty. This is... *for me.*

Havell's misty eyes tell us the choir have become dear to him. Ella growls, then grants him --

ELLA

Five minutes.

Springing into action, Havell herds everyone in front of his camera.

HAVELL

Places places, faces faces!
 (small talk as they scramble)
 Congratulations on Jubilee Hall; you got the best of that *tosser* Vetter!
 (then, looking around)
 Where are Miss Porter and Miss Gordon?

WHITE

Cleaning stables in Nashville.

White glowers at Ella. Havell groans, but his camera is set. The Jubilees paste on smiles, but smiling corpses aren't pretty.

HAVELL

Glow for Havell! One, two, three --

Just as the FLASH goes off, Loudin and Ike flip Havell the bird.

LOUDIN

Just remembered, posing *ain't* in our contract.

They head for the door --

IKE

Screw your portrait, screw your chord,
screw Jubilee Hall! After tomorrow,
we're *free at last, free at last!*

LOUDIN

Thank God Almighty!

-- and brashly exit.

INT. ELLA'S ROOM/MAKESHIFT OFFICE - LATER THAT NIGHT

A packing party is underway. Racing to wrap up tour business, Ella and allies Tom, Minnie and America slog through an impossible backlog of mail, direly ill but pushing themselves relentlessly.

MINNIE

We'll never get through this.

ELLA

Back to your rooms, guys! I mean it!

TOM

You sleep, we sleep.

Ella groans but marvels at their valor. Suddenly, America gasps.

AMERICA

Oh God... this is it.

She's holding an official envelope from Tennessee. She looks to Ella and nods *Are you ready?* Ella cautiously nods. America gingerly hands the envelope to her. Ella's eyes widen - it's from:

THE MISSING PERSONS BUREAU

Ella's heart races. She looks to the others. They nod *Open it, open it!* Her hands shaking, she catches her breath... clasps the envelope...

Just then, the door FLIES OPEN. A furious White barges in.

WHITE

Cravath and Susan just got here from
New York. *We're screwed!*

INT. WHITE HART INN - SHORTLY AFTER

Ella and White go nuclear over what Susan is telling them.

ELLA

I'm not hearing this!

SUSAN

We wrote you!

ELLA

We're drowning in mail; you should have cabled!!

SUSAN

And have Vetter's men intercept it?! You'd be in prison already!

WHITE

Unbelievable! As we speak, everyone from the Queen of Holland to the Emperor of Germany is trekking here to revel in a "spectacular celebration" of "last week's" grand opening of Jubilee Hall, an event you're now telling us - eight hours before curtain - never happened! We're dead!!

SUSAN

Let's not panic.

WHITE

It's not your head on the axe!!
We're facing *fourteen* investigations! We've sworn to the Crown *and the galaxy* that *today* we'd deliver proof positive Jubilee Hall isn't the conjuration of scam artists, proof you were supposed to bring! Vetter will be there with a legion of cops to haul us off the moment we welsh!

The WAITRESS enters and sets down their drinks.

WAITRESS

Two waters, another scotch.

ELLA

What's the delay now?!

SUSAN

Just finishing touches - windows, doors, paint. Three weeks, max.

ELLA

You knew today was do-or-die; what in your letter spared our heads?!

SUSAN

Hope, *hopefully*. One man can stop Vetter.

WHITE

The Prime Minister. He'll be there today with Vetter! Oh yeah, he was a friend once!

SUSAN

And may still be. Just three weeks ago, we received a warm but urgent letter from Gladstone asking for clarification on the delays. It was the plea of a friend seeking any means to exonerate us. We wrote back explaining our predicament and begging his forbearance.

ELLA

You sent *me* the letter to take to him.

WHITE

Which never happened. Brilliant, we dissed the Prime Minister!

SUSAN

I can still get to him before the show.

WHITE

Not a chance he bends now.

ELLA

It's all we've got. All right, I'll face the crowd and explain. Then assuming Gladstone believes us, we do the show, pause the tour to let the choir rest, then knock out the last three weeks.

SUSAN

That's not the plan.

WHITE and ELLA

(glaring at Susan)

Translate.

SUSAN

We wrote you. The South is under siege; the Knights have unleashed an all-out *reign of terror* against our voters. With the elections around the corner, we don't have a day to spare - we need fresh revenue to finish Jubilee Hall. We've booked the choir into concert halls across Europe; their Continental tour launches today.

WHITE

You're out of your mind!

SUSAN
You're seeing *faces*. Blot them out.

WHITE
They're barely alive! *Bennie's dying!*

SUSAN
Blot them out! Three weeks.

WHITE
Not possible!

SUSAN
Don't tell me what's possible! We're
here doing the impossible!

WHITE
There's no way!

SUSAN
Then *make* one! That *is* what you
preach?!

WHITE
And if I choose *decency*?!

SUSAN
Then *damn* you at a time like this!

WHITE
We're damned all right, you saw to
that! *Keep up* and we kill ourselves;
Let up and we detonate civilization!
And it's all moot anyway because
Vetter's about to guillotine us all!
Well-played, Miss Gilbert, we'll take
the blade! ELLA!

Ella doesn't move.

WHITE
You're not listening to this?!

Her head grinds, processing it all. White glowers at her --

WHITE
You betrayed your people once for
Master; thinking you might be back
in business?

-- then fires his glare at Susan --

WHITE
You... I never knew you.

-- then exits. They both want to die. Susan downs her scotch then signals for another. Ella wills herself to focus.

ELLA
So, where's Cravath?

SUSAN
Upstairs, with the others.

ELLA
Others??

Susan hides her shaking hands.

SUSAN
There was something else in the letter...

We CUT TO THE BAR.

The Waitress pours a scotch, then walks it across the room to Susan.

Ella is horrified.

ELLA
No.

SUSAN
It's the Final Solution, the only way forward. You've got to see that. Will the others go along?

ELLA
Go along?! They won't show up when I tell them.

SUSAN
Then don't. Just get them to the theatre.

ELLA
And when it goes down?! They'll walk on the spot.

SUSAN
Leave that to Cravath.

She sets out a stack of TRAVEL TICKETS.

SUSAN
Your ship leaves after the show.

ELLA
I'll get back with you.

Seething, she stands to go. Susan knocks back her drink.

SUSAN
Julia Hayden.

ELLA
What about Julia??

SUSAN
Assassinated by the Knights. In *your* classroom while teaching *your* students.

ELLA
Oh God, no.

Ella gasps, her shattered eyes processing the unimaginable. Our hearts sink; we remember Julia and her ravishing eyes.

SUSAN
It happened months back. The choir was already at the brink; we didn't want to destroy their morale... like it destroyed Cravath. Julia's murder tortures him day and night - he's gone half out of his mind tormented with guilt. He hasn't slept for months; I've never seen him like this.
(then, seizing Ella's eyes)
Julia knew the risk but fought to the end. Will you? This tour is our last stand against the Knights. Quit now and you render her sacrifice meaningless. Quit and the epitaph of hope forever bears your name. Just *three weeks* seals your legacy; make up your mind what side of destiny you want to stand on.

CUT TO:

**“... SARAH SHEPPARD HAS BEEN LOCATED
IN BELLEVUE, TENNESSEE...”**

Falling tears smear the ink. We WIDEN to the:

SANATORIUM ROOFTOP - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ella sits under the night sky, reading the letter. America enters.

AMERICA
Well, Mr. White and I broke the news.

ELLA
How did they take it?

AMERICA

Of course, Tom and Minnie are a go if you give the word. And despite his heat, Mr. White won't abandon the tour.

ELLA

Loudin and Ike?

AMERICA

Strange. Didn't say a word, just made a beeline for Bennie's room. A few minutes later, they went out somewhere.

ELLA

(suspicious)

Huh.

AMERICA

It's you I'm worried about. You've got a call to make.

Ella sighs, feeling the weight of those words.

ELLA

What would you do, Merrie?

AMERICA

What I always do... ask myself what Ella Sheppard would do.

Ella groans... more weight. Merrie's spots the letter.

AMERICA

So?

ELLA

She's a half-hour from Nashville.

AMERICA

(pumps her fists)

Yesss! And proud she'll be at her daughter's triumphal return!

ELLA

Merrie...

AMERICA

You know the people will be lining the streets. I can see Miss Sarah beaming as they hurl confetti at their conquering hero!

But Ella's face flush with dread. She takes a heavy breath then looks to the heavens. The stars flicker fitfully in her tired eyes.

ELLA

I feel old, Merrie. Old and spent.
Every breath I take feels borrowed.

AMERICA

Sweetie, that's because your *soul*
needs rest.

ELLA

My soul, Merrie?

America sits beside Ella and clasps her hands

AMERICA

There's a girl I pray for, a precious
princess with a smile as wide as a
barn. I call her "my girl." She
deserved all the joy of her innocence,
but was crushed with guilt as heavy as
the world then sent running to redeem
herself. She's something, my girl -
her trophies could fill a room - but
her hands are ever too empty. That
guilt has already stolen her youth; I
pray *Dear God* it doesn't take her
life. I want my girl freed.

Ella clutches her deeply. America kisses her forehead and gets up.

ELLA

Th-there's something else, Merrie,
something I'm not supposed to tell you --

AMERICA

Shhhhhh, then don't. I trust my girl
with my life. *Just free her.*

She exits. As Ella looks to the heavens, a warm breeze sweeps in,
bathing her in the strains of a spiritual. Clutching herself
protectively, she takes a breath... closes her eyes... and sings.

ELLA

S-ste-steal away, s-steal aw-wayy...

Or tries to. The NIGHTMARES immediately CRASH IN. Her eyes flare
with terror. Her face beads with sweat. Her lips quake as each word
becomes excruciating to utter. She tortures herself to sing on --

ELLA

S-steal a-away t-to J-Jesus

-- but breaks down, unable to go on. As she weeps violently into
her fists, we TILT UP to the fitful stars and

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. SCOTLAND GRAND THEATRE - GALA RED-CARPET EVENT - NEXT DAY

A star-studded media frenzy; celebrities and royalty enter the theatre as fans and reporters throng the streets.

Ella scans the scene from a stage door, then zeroes in on Gladstone - he's approaching the theatre with Vetter and a massive ARMY OF COPS.

Susan swoops in and intercepts him.

SUSAN

Mr. Gladstone. Susan Gilbert, AMA...

Ella crosses her fingers. Then her eyes snap to another man, an impeccably dressed black Englishman. Reporters are swarming him, clamoring to know what Bennie's surprise announcement will be and how *The Liberator* got the scoop. Ella growls.

CUT TO:

INT. SCOTLAND GRAND THEATRE - BACKSTAGE

Tension is thick as the choir awaits curtain in factions. White sweats bullets as he peers out at the packed house - he sees the cops taking up positions as Susan urgently chats up Gladstone.

Suddenly, the door BLASTS OPEN. Ella charges in and confronts Ike, Loudin, and a squirming Bennie.

ELLA

So it's war.

IKE

You taught us the art.

ELLA

Sabotage, conspiracy, defamation...
You'd better have expensive lawyers
and a penchant for small cells.

WHITE

What's this??

ELLA

A *coup*. Curtain rises, we take our bows, then they step forward with shocking news of the AMA's mortal sins, witnessed by Benjamin Holmes, which the public can read all about in *The Liberator*.

LOUDIN

(applauds)

Brava.

WHITE

(realizes)

The scandal takes us down, leaves them the choir, and paints them as victims in Vetter's eyes. Whatever you've got, it's dirt!

IKE

Mud, and the avalanche buries you.

The MANAGER enters.

MANAGER

All seated; the house is yours.

LOUDIN

(confident)

Let's do this.

ELLA

Hold it. You're in bed with a hustler. Jonas Stone is setting you up.

BENNIE

The Liberator is a crusader for justice.

ELLA

The Liberator doesn't exist, anymore.

BENNIE

We were there.

ELLA

And took the bait. Ever read an issue, or see one on a newsstand? When *The Liberator* did exist, it was a sleazy soft-porn *tabloid* so notoriously lawless that Vetter shut it down and locked Stone up for criminal libel, which is why the print room on Brick Lane is in cobwebs. After doing time, Stone grifted from Damascus to DC looking for money to restart the paper, but no one would fund a felon. Then lo...

(indicates them)

Paydirt. Wake up! Stone knows the AMA would unleash its lawyers to crush your conspiracy, making for the showdown of the century. And guess who's got the inside scoop? "*The Jubilee Singers Mutual Destruction*" is the exclusive that resurrects *The Liberator*. Stand down, Bennie. We're almost there; just three weeks and you're feeling those bricks.

Never a rebel at heart, Bennie sighs. The Manager reenters.

MANAGER
They're restless.

ELLA
(confident)
Let's do this.

CRAVATH (O.S.)
HOLD IT!

The door BLASTS OPEN. In blows Cravath with a QUINTET OF BLACK SINGERS in overcoats. No one can believe their eyes; it's --

MINNIE
The Blackfoots!

CRAVATH
Dressing rooms, hurry!

The Blackfoots exit. Everyone freaks out.

WHITE
You brought *them* here?!

CRAVATH
Straight from New York. Fresh blood, a stable full. They've got your songs down to the last note; they're joining this tour.

TOM
You grind us to dust then freshen up the act with *minstrels*?!

CRAVATH
This tour will never again be held hostage to sickness... or treason.

Suddenly, Cravath totters then catches himself. True to Susan's words, he looks sickly and unstable.

The Blackfoots return in costume looking like Jubilee clones, only fresh and perky. The sight sickens everyone.

CRAVATH
Splendid. Miss Sheppard?

Incredulous eyes turn to Ella.

MINNIE
Y-you knew about this?? You're taking them onstage?!

CLOSE ON ELLA - Her hands shake, her mortified face beads with sweat. We sense her sanity and strength cracking, but she pulls back from the brink and calls to the rafters.

ELLA

Mr. Dunham, we need two more keylights.
Fire up four and seven...

WHITE

Have you sold your soul?!

ELLA

(shutting out the voices)
Stipple lenses, pale amber frost...

Loyal until now, Tom LUNGES up to Cravath.

TOM

Three weeks my ass, Cravath! When does
this end?!

CRAVATH

Get on that stage.

TOM

I asked you a question!!

CRAVATH

You're not being paid to demand answers!
Gutless hypocrites! You call yourselves
soldiers then faint when the wind blows!

TOM

(GRABS HIM by the collar)
You bastard! We've been in these
trenches from Day One! We've fought,
fallen, then dredged ourselves from
gurneys to fight on! Bennie won't
see another birthday! When's enough
enough for you, when we're all laid
out at the morgue?!

CRAVATH

Not even then! This choir will outlive
every one of you!

TOM

(CLUTCHES his throat)
HEARTLESS PRICK! LAST CHANCE - WHEN
DOES THIS DAMNED TOUR END?

CRAVATH

(choking)
J-Jubilee H-hall is almost buil--

TOM
 (TIGHTENS his grip)
 LYING CROOK!

CRAVATH
 J-just w-windows, d-doors --

TOM
 FINISH THAT AND YOU DIE! WHEN WILL
 JUBILEE HALL BE DONE? WHEN?! WHEN?!

Tom CRUSHES his throat - fury makes him a powerhouse. The tension is nuclear. Cravath holds out until a moment from death, then --

CRAVATH
THERE IS NO JUBILEE HALL!

The news EXPLODES like a bombshell. Furious SHOUTS and ACCUSATIONS. White and the choir reel in disbelief. Ella slumps to the ground.

Once a trusting angel, Minnie EXPLODES with rage.

MINNIE
 You monster! You aborted construction!

CRAVATH
 We were building Jubilee Hall, delays and all. But Julia Hayden's murder changed everything; it was a grim wake-up call as to how vulnerable our people were. To keep our campuses from becoming killing fields - to defend them "by any means necessary" - we needed vastly more munitions, fortifications, patrols. The depression had bankrupted the AMA, so I did what I had to!

MINNIE
 I don't believe a word you say! Our Monument to Freedom, to inspire voters --

CRAVATH
 The dead don't vote!

MINNIE
Stop the scare tactics!

CRAVATH
 Scare tactics?! The South you left is a human slaughterhouse!

TOM
 You strung us along! You should have told us what was going on!

CRAVATH

So you could faint into your caviar,
or desert your post to go "tanning in
Nice"?! *You needed blinders!* The
AMA --

LOUDIN

To hell with the AMA! We've sacrificed
enough for you!

CRAVATH

For *me?! Look at my skin!* This is
the color of *freedom!* My people will
always, effortlessly be free - there's
no shadow of turning with a white
man's freedom! It's *your people* that
Southern Cross is set to annihilate!
We're here to stop a holocaust!

Bennie bites the bullet.

BENNIE

All right, I'll stick it out. Just a
few days rest.

CRAVATH

Not on your life.

BENNIE

(points to the Blackfoots)
You've got your "steeds"! We're rebels.

CRAVATH

I don't care if you're cancer itself.
They're filler; you're *purebreds* -
original Jubilees! It's your pedigree
the public pays for! Until I say "It is
finished," you're chained to this tour!

BENNIE

You bastard! I *am* taking this public;
I'm going to destroy the AMA!

CRAVATH

Wake up - you are the AMA! Your fat
paychecks authenticate everything we
do! Heaven forbid Vetter gets proof
your *let's-put-Marie-Antoinette-to-*
shame lifestyles were funded by
donations. How else could we afford
those ungodly salaries you extorted
from us?! Now get over your pity
party and take to that stage! And
clean up those sorry faces!

MINNIE

You want our smiles, you devil?!

CRAVATH

I WANT YOUR DENTURES!! God help me that curtain's about to rise, and I'll be damned if it reveals a band of sniveling weaklings!

MINNIE

And what will it reveal?!

CRAVATH

STAND DOWN, TATE!

MINNIE

Answer me!

CRAVATH

JUST WHAT I BOUGHT!

MINNIE

And what's that, you shit, you tyrant piece of shit! Just what did you "buy"?!

CRAVATH

A GLOWING, RADIANT CHOIR - VIBRANT AS SPRING, FRESH AS WINTER'S WIND! AND ON HER CUE, YOU WILL OPEN THOSE INFERNAL MOUTHS AND PRODUCE HEAVENLY SOUNDS - FACES SHIMMERING, EYES GLEAMING, YOUR WHOLE WRETCHED ESSENCE EXUDING JOY! HOW YOU *ACHIEVE* THAT EFFECT OR HOW *EXTRINSIC* IT IS TO YOUR NATURE OR CIRCUMSTANCES I COULDN'T CARE LESS! YOU WILL RAISE THAT ROOF, BRING DOWN THE HOUSE, THEN WHILE MISS GILBERT CHARMS THE STING OUT OF GLADSTONE MAKE A BEELINE FOR THE GREENROOM AND BLITZ THOSE REPORTERS WITH A BATTERY OF WINSOME INTERVIEWS IN WHICH EVERY WORD OUT OF THOSE CANTANKEROUS THROATS REVERBERATES WITH THE HARMONY OF EDEN AND A MENDELSSOHNIAN CHORUS OF PRAISE FOR THE AMA, AFTER WHICH YOU WILL DRAG THOSE WHINY BACKSIDES TO THE HOTEL, PACK, AND AT FOURTEEN HUNDRED HOURS BOARD THE *SS SCHWITZEN* FOR THE CONTINENT!

WHITE

You son of a bitch! I won't let you --

CRAVATH

(to SECURITY)

GET HIM OUT!

WHITE

What's the meaning of this?!

CRAVATH

You *have* no meaning - you've been out of a job all year! Ask Miss Sheppard!

WHITE

Ella??

Ella flushes with horror. White's eyes beg her to refute it, but she can't even look at him.

CRAVATH

NOW! I'M PAYING FOR THIS!

Ella SHRIEKS as guards SEIZE and HAUL White out to the curb. As the door SLAMS SHUT, he furiously POUNDS and SHOUTS --

WHITE (O.S.)

ELLA! ELLA! ELLA!!

Cravath's glare turns to Ella.

CRAVATH

Start this show, Miss Sheppard.

But Ella is dying. Destroyed inside and out, she clutches herself fetally on the floor, her mind and body gravely deteriorating.

Cravath circles his prey.

CRAVATH

Up, Ella! She expects great things of you; don't crawl back with empty hands!

ELLA

(CLUTCHING her head)

STOP!! STOP!!

CRAVATH

(points to the curtain)

All the world is out there! Conquer the world and even *she* can't deny your worth!

Swooning with vertigo, Ella CLUTCHES HER HEAD as if shrapnel were blasting through it.

AMERICA

LEAVE HER ALONE!

She runs to Ella, but Cravath grabs a STEEL PIPE and BEATS HER BACK.

CRAVATH

This is the endgame, Ella - the Knights are butchering thousands and chanting for Hiram's head! They're plotting an all-out apocalypse in Nashville! Only you can stop the bloodbath!

Blacking out, her mind spirals violently out of control.

CRAVATH

FAIL, AND THE BLOOD OF THOUSANDS IS ON YOUR HANDS! FAIL, AND THE DREAM DIES ON YOUR WATCH! FAIL, AND SHE SEES YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE! GET UP, ELLA!!

Her head EXPLODES in a HORRIFIC NIGHTMARE:

SLAUGHTER. SCREAMS. RIVERS OF BLOOD. TORTURED FACES SHOUTING "GET UP!" HIRAM'S AND JULIA'S BLOODIED FACES SHRIEKING "GET UP!" THOUSANDS OF FACES BEYOND THE CURTAIN THUNDERING "GET UP, ELLA, GET UP!"

Terror-struck, Ella hoists herself onto her brittle arms, but SWOONS and CRASHES DOWN. Cravath ERUPTS LIKE A VOLCANO; he BASHES THE FLOOR BESIDE HER with the PIPE -- **WHACK!!**

ELLA

AAAAAUUUUUGHHH!!!!

CRAVATH

SHE KNEW YOUR BIRTH WAS A BLIGHT ON THIS EARTH!! **WHACK!!** SHE DROWNED YOU ONCE!! **WHACK!!** BETRAY HER NOW AND SHE'LL DISOWN YOU FOREVER!!

WHACK WHACK!! She SCREAMS for him to stop, but he BLUDGEONS AWAY relentlessly -- **WHACK WHACK WHACK!!**

Cops rush backstage but Cravath rabidly BEATS THEM BACK.

SHRIEKING HYSTERICALLY, Ella deliriously tries to get back up --

ELLA

GET UP, ELLA! GET UP!

CRAVATH

REDEEM YOURSELF!! **WHACK WHACK!!** THE ONLY WAY BACK TO HER IS THROUGH THAT CURTAIN! GET THOSE BODIES ON THAT STAGE! **WHACK WHACK WHACK!!**

Her heart BLASTING OUT OF HER CHEST, she SCREAMS at her broken body to rise --

ELLA
DAMN YOU, ELLA!! STAND TO YOUR FEET!!

-- but again buckles. CRAVATH GOES BALLISTIC. RAGING OUT OF HIS MIND, HE BASHES EVERYTHING IN SIGHT -- **SMASH WHACK CRASH!!** -- DEMOLISHING THE THEATRE. LIGHTS EXPLODE, BREAKERS SMASH, GLASS AND STEEL CASCADE LIKE RAIN. **CRASH SMASH WHACK!!**

Heaving and convulsing, Ella curses herself like a dying horse --

ELLA
GET UP, GOD DAMN YOU!! YOU WORTHLESS TRASH, YOU GODDAMNED WORTHLESS TRASH!!

CRAVATH
DON'T GIVE OUT, YOU COWARD! START THIS SHOW OR I'LL DAMN YOUR LIVES TO OBLIVION! **CRASH SMASH WHACK!!**
THOSE CONTRACTS ARE MY TITLE DEED TO YOUR HIDES! THEY GRANT ME YOUR VOICES, YOUR BODIES, AND YOUR UNWAVERING OBEDIENCE!! **WHACK CRASH SMASH!!**
I BOUGHT YOU! I OWN YOU! YOU'RE MY GODDAMNED PROPERTY!

-- but unable able to bear the weight any longer, she collapses in a heap, destroyed. Cravath SPITS at the corpse.

CRAVATH
CRAVEN!

We hear an OCEAN OF GASPS. Cravath spins around. Tom has raised the curtain on his rampage; the audience has witnessed it all.

Gladstone and Vetter look on incredulously. Susan weeps uncontrollably. White still POUNDS and SHOUTS Ella's name from outside. The cops SEIZE Cravath and SLAM him to the floor.

But one man savors the carnage. Jonas Stone watches the debacle as if it were a feast. Pleased, he takes out his tablet, ponders just the right phrasing, then jots down the title of his new article:

"IT IS FINISHED."

As he underlines these words, we PULL BACK to a WIDE SHOT of the demolished stage... and the smoldering wreckage that had been the Jubilee Singers.

CUT TO BLACK... THEN SLOW FADE UP TO:

A WASTELAND OF STEEL BEAMS

... rising valiantly from the earth, then dying midair. Mountains of dead red bricks. A company of hobbled soldiers glare at the RAIN-FLOODED CONSTRUCTION PIT that should have been Jubilee Hall.

SUPER: "NASHVILLE, EVE OF THE ELECTION"

The noon sky is BLACK AS MIDNIGHT and ruled by RAVENS. Sinister winds haunt the air. Distant rumblings foretell some imminent doom.

The withered White is now in a wheelchair. White's and Ella's tortured eyes meet; looks of searing anguish pass between them. Susan looks on from afar, weeping in devastation but not daring to approach White.

EXT. ELLA'S NEW HOUSE - SHORTLY AFTER

A Coachman unloads Ella's luggage into her new house. The house is beautiful, a breathtaking masterpiece of design and construction, but Ella stands sullenly out on the street.

An ornate carriage pulls up beside her. Out leaps the last soul she wants to see --

ELLA

Mr. Moore.

-- Wallace. He's dressed to the nines, sporting a dapper suit and bright LILAC SHIRT. He nods to the house.

WALLACE

Handsome work; someone did you right.

ELLA

I don't understand; it's not what I bought. But it *is* lovely. Quite so.

Yet her voice sounds morose. Alarmed, he realizes --

WALLACE

You're not going in.

ELLA

What brings you here?

WALLACE

(shows off the carriage)
I'm your chauffeur; I rented this for the occasion.

ELLA

Occasion?

WALLACE

I-I heard the news. I've got room for three, plus her luggage. You are going --

ELLA

Nowhere.

WALLACE

You don't mean that.

ELLA

The Coachman's going to show me around the city.

WALLACE

Let me at least do that. Drove eight hundred miles.

ELLA

I'm sorry you came so far.

The Coachman opens his coach door for Ella. In a flash, Wallace SNATCHES the man's pistol, SHOOTS HIS WHEEL TO BITS, then tosses back the gun with his wallet.

WALLACE

Sorry, bruh.

Ella growls, and we

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. WALLACE'S CARRIAGE - RIDING THROUGH NASHVILLE

Ella gasps at the depression-ravaged slum that is now Nashville. Broken glass, rotting animal carcasses and tar-paper shanties litter the decrepit streets. The diseased homeless scavenge for food.

WALLACE

Welcome home.

Massive BILLOWS OF BLACK SMOKE rise from everywhere like volcanic ash, choking the sun and blackening the sky.

WALLACE

The plague kills seventy a day. They burn tar around the clock to purge it from the air.

As they turn onto the highway, they pass a throng of NEWSBOYS shouting "IT IS FINISHED! NIGGER CHOIR SELF DESTRUCTS!" They're hawking a sensational tabloid called *The New Liberator* depicting a Victorian monkey choir eating each other alive.

A PARADE forms around Ella. Jeering townspeople swarm the coach, mocking the Jubilees and pelting Ella with ROTTEN FOOD.

Ella is too spent to cry.

DOWNTOWN - HIRAM'S RALLY

They ride past a MAJOR CAMPAIGN EVENT taking place downtown. We spot Hiram orating from a hotel balcony to a CROWD OF THOUSANDS.

WALLACE

Hiram's voter rally. Everyone's there. The Knights threatened to attack, but the people wouldn't back down.

ELLA

My God, where are the children?

WALLACE

Safe at the church.

Suddenly Ella's blood runs cold. Bishop's church sweeps into view, its fiery STAINED-GLASS CROSS towering monstrosly over the city. The church marquee apocalyptically taunts:

WELCOME HOME, JUBILEES. EZEKIEL 9 : 7

WALLACE

Back at you, Bishop.

ELLA

You mean Myron, his son.

WALLACE

No one's seen Preacher Boy in ages.

ELLA

He leads the Knights; he must have led Julia's murder.

WALLACE

Wasn't him; that was Bishop's gang. Junior's no doubt cracking skulls in some other town.

But Wallace has something else in mind; eyeing Ella, he abruptly VEERS OFF the highway onto an out-of-town road. She knows why.

ELLA

No!

CUT TO:

INT. WALLACE'S CARRIAGE - CLEAR SKIES - DAY

A bumpy ride on a rural road. Ella is furious at being kidnapped.

ELLA
You have no right! It's *my* life!

WALLACE
She's your life.

ELLA
Don't do this to me. She'd know what happened over there; it's a miracle our lawyers got us home on bail.

Livid, she turns in a snit... but can't stop eyeing his shirt.

WALLACE
So, someone walks into the Bureau, tells them where to find her. Doesn't give a name, just mumbles "No more" and leaves.

ELLA
I know, sounds cryptic.

WALLACE
Sounds like a confession.

ELLA
And you know this, and the way there *how?*

WALLACE
Bureau records are public.

She festers with attitude... yet again eyes his shirt. The air is a powderkeg of emotion.

Wallace has something solemn on his heart. He takes a breath.

WALLACE
Ella...

ELLA
(snitty)
Miss Sheppard.

WALLACE
Miss Sheppard...

ELLA
(thaws just a little)
Ella.

He sighs; this is going to be hard.

WALLACE

I know things didn't pan out as you'd hoped...

ELLA

If you came to take a victory lap, you can swagger your six hundred miles back to Kansas.

WALLACE

Eight, and that's not why I --

ELLA

How *is* Haystack Haven?

WALLACE

That's what I'm getting at. It's a place of fresh starts.

She *harumphs*. He pushes back.

WALLACE

Granted, it's no Chelsea.

ELLA

Meaning??

WALLACE

No ballrooms, waltzes, *octopusses* named *John*.

ELLA

You read gossip?!

WALLACE

Some gossip ain't gossip. Maybe *I* should take up the fiddle!

ELLA

Let's set the record straight - *you* ditched *me*!

WALLACE

Fact check - *I* didn't cross the Atlantic for greener pastures!

ELLA

No, you crossed the Mississippi! At least *I* dress myself.

WALLACE

Huh??

ELLA
Don't change the subject. What's her name?

WALLACE
Whose??

ELLA
The little strumpet that dolled you up!
Don't coil your nose at me! A woman knows!

WALLACE
A woman *imagines!*

ELLA
Men don't wear lilac!

WALLACE
I *like* lilac! You've *seen me* in lilac!

ELLA
Not that shade! Come on: Tish? Latonda?

WALLACE
You're tripping!

ELLA
Kaneesha? Koolaidria?

BUMP!! The carriage LURCHES ON A POTHOLE, flinging Ella's dress clear over her head.

ELLA
(flailing in horror)
AAAUUUGGH!!

She snatches down her dress and SWATS HIM.

ELLA
You looked! I *know* you looked! Did you see anything?!

WALLACE
(biting his lips)
"Anything"??

ELLA
(SWATS him again)
Stop grinning! *Anything!! Anything!!*

WALLACE
Nothing Providence didn't want me to.

ELLA

If you did, Scripture abjures you to blot it out of your mind! Philippians 3:13!

WALLACE

"Forgetting that which is behind."
It doesn't say forgetting *your* behind!

He roars with laughter. She SWATS HIM HYSTERICALLY.

ELLA

Thug! You're no theologian! You did that deliberately!

WALLACE

And bust the carriage? Lose my deposit?

She turns in a huff and fights to stay mad. Getting serious again, he forces a straight face and picks up where he left off.

WALLACE

Look, I know I'm rough around the edges...

ELLA

Oh, at middle, too.

WALLACE

Probably, but...

ELLA

Waaaaay down to the core.

WALLACE

Doubtless.

He reaches for her hand...

WALLACE

This isn't the most traditional way of asking --

ELLA

What is it?!

... but it's all going over her head. He gives up.

WALLACE

No matter.

ELLA

I'm not going to beg.

She turns away in a snit. Wallace grins, then - **BUMP!!** - DRIVES OVER ANOTHER POTHOLE, sending her dress sky-high.

ELLA
AAAUUUGGH!!

EXT. RURAL MANOR - LATER

They've arrived. Ella SLAPS Wallace for his mischief, then checks her makeup and asks --

ELLA
How do I look?

FRONT DOOR

Ella quakes with dread; this is the moment she's poured out her life for. She knocks, then tells herself not to run away.

An eternity passes. We hear footsteps, then a pause. Then the narrow peephole opens, revealing EYES we last saw in a sweatbox.

ELLA
Momma!

SARAH
Sam!

And here they are, mother and daughter, together again after twenty years. Their eyes light up, and for the briefest moment they gaze at each other as if beholding dreams.

THEN THE DOOR OPENS

... revealing two women that couldn't be more different: one coarse and disheveled wearing field-stained rags; the other an elegant Victorian. Ella breaks into tears of joy, but as Sarah looks at her opulent daughter, we see a terrible self-consciousness set in.

ELLA
May I?

INSIDE

Sarah awkwardly shows Ella in. After a lifetime of longing, Ella can't control herself; she breaks out and clutches Sarah deeply, burying herself in her mother's bosom as if all were finally right with the world.

ELLA
Oh Momma, I've missed you! I've missed you so much!

But Sarah's countenance grows dark; for reasons Ella isn't grasping, the encounter is excruciating for her. And now Sarah realizes her dirty hands are soiling Ella's dress.

Sarah pulls back.

ELLA
What is it??

SARAH
I- I'm...

Sarah fidgets, avoiding eye contact. Ella's heart races.

ELLA
I've got so many questions, Momma.
I'm surprised you haven't gotten any
of the Bureau's letters; they've been
sending them out everywhere for
years, inquiring about you, telling
you how to find me. And look, you're
not an hour away.

Sarah is at a loss for words. Ella comes closer, but Sarah pulls further back, keeping her at bay. Ella panics; she nervously scans the room then spots a newspaper.

ELLA
You read the Chronicle, Momma?

SARAH
Try to.

ELLA
I've posted notices for you in it for
years. I-I've been easy to find...

Ella's heart sinks as the unthinkable dawns on her. Sarah's tortured eyes look away, then light on Ella's dress.

ELLA
(grasping at straws)
You like it? It's from London, can
you believe it? You'll never guess
why I was there. I- I'm with... was
with... a choir... and we...

Her words tapers off. She knows it's over.

ELLA
I'm sorry. I-I shouldn't have come.
I'll go away now... I'll go back...

Sarah's heart screams, but she holds it in. Just then --

MAN (O.S.)
Sarah, where the devil are you?!

SARAH
 Foyer, sir.
 (shoos Ella)
 Go!

MAN (O.S.)
Get your dirty hide back in that yard!

As Sarah pushes Ella to the door, the Man enters with a STRAP.

MAN
 I've told you about coming in this
 house with those filthy --

He and Ella lay eyes on each other. Ella gasps. It's BISHOP.

ELLA
 No...

BISHOP
 Well, I'll be. Welcome home, Ella!

ELLA
 Momma, you're free!

SARAH
 (ashamed)
 He pays me a little. Go!

ELLA
 I got us that house, Momma, just like
 I said I would. We can be together!

Sarah's eyes cascade with tears, but she clenches her fists and forces harrowing words from her mouth.

SARAH
 Get out, Sam. Get out and don't come
 back. I don't ever want to see you
 again.

ELLA
 No... please Jesus, no...

BISHOP
 (taunting)
 "Sometimes I feel like a motherless
 child!" Haw!

SARAH
 Stop it!

Bishop BASHES Sarah's face. Ella SCREAMS. She LUNGES at him, but Wallace BARGES IN and snatches her back.

Bishop levels a SHOTGUN at Ella's face.

SARAH
GET OUT!! GO!!

ELLA
 AAAAAUUUGGH!! I'M SORRY, MOMMA!!
 I'M SORRY!!

Wailing uncontrollably, Ella fights to get to Sarah; but Wallace wrests her out of the house. As the door slams shut, we hear --

ELLA (O.S.)
 I CAME BACK FOR YOU, MOMMA! I CAME
 BACK!

Sarah SHRIEKS in anguish, then staggers out back. We FOLLOW HER out of the house, across the backyard, and into her --

SHANTY

-- where she doubles over and collapses to her knees, wailing.

We PULL BACK to reveal the interior of Sarah's shanty. Every wall is covered with photos and clippings of Ella. The entire room is a proud shrine to her daughter. We SETTLE ON a TALL STACK OF LETTERS from the Missing Person's Bureau.

INT. WALLACE'S CARRIAGE - RIDING BACK - LATER

As they ride back, Ella stares soullessly, almost hypnotically, at the passing terrain, leaning precariously close to the open door. Wallace eyes her with alarm, his arm extended ready to grab her.

As they reach Nashville, the sky again turns ominously black.

Then suddenly --

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM!!

-- a BLAZE OF GUNFIRE erupts from behind. Wallace whips the carriage off the road.

LEGIONS OF HOODED KNIGHTS SWEEP PAST WITH THE FORCE OF A FREIGHT TRAIN.

WALLACE
 Knights! They're headed for the rally!

CUT TO:

MASSACRE AT HIRAM'S RALLY

Wallace and Ella ride into a scene of horrific mayhem. HIRAM'S RALLY IS UNDER SIEGE; RAMPAGING KNIGHTS SLAM INTO THE PANICKED MASSES LIKE BARBARIAN HORDES. BULLETS FLY; GRENADES EXPLODE; STAMPEDING HORSES CRUSH THE HELPLESS. IT'S A BLOODBATH OF APOCLYPTIC PROPORTIONS.

Wallace pulls up to a SECURE BUILDING.

WALLACE
Get inside!

ELLA
I'm not hiding!

WALLACE
INSIDE!

He shoots her a warning look, then charges off into the mayhem.

Before Ella can move, a careening wagon SLAMS INTO A YOUNG WHITE MAN near her, smashing him to the ground. She runs to the man, and so do two others - Maggie and Georgia. The three of them trade glares, then get over themselves and hoist the man into the building.

INTERIOR SECURE BUILDING

The young white man is bleeding badly. As Maggie looks down at him, we realize she's back to wearing dense camouflaging makeup as if to erase herself from the world. As the man's blond head rests on her lap, we see her conflicted emotions about tending to him.

Taking charge, she clasps her arms-length gloves, hesitates, then for the first time pulls them off, exposing what they've long hidden - the scars of slit wrists. She looks with humiliation at Ella and Georgia, ashamed of her secret, but they're awed by her courage.

Maggie stanches the man's bleeding with the gloves then orders Ella:

MAGGIE
Get antiseptic.

ELLA
(obediently)
Right.

Suddenly, the door BLASTS OPEN. In blows Cravath carrying two wounded black girls, followed by their panicked mother.

Cravath and Ella trade looks. She sees that his pants are soaked in blood, then spots a bullet hole in his thigh. He's been shot.

Ella exits. Cravath sets the girls down and reassures the mother:

CRAVATH
Keep them still; I'll be back with help.

THE FRENZIED STREETS

As HORRIFIC SCREAMS PIERCE THE AIR, we spot the singers charging through the chaos, dodging bullets and shrapnel to rescue victims.

Wallace and Loudin cross paths. They catch their breath, staggered by the blood drenching their hands. Then --

LOUDIN
Look!

He points to Ella exiting the building. A MAN IS RACING UP ON HER FROM BEHIND. We make him out - it's Myron, Bishop's son. Oddly, he's not robed like the attackers - but he's gaining on Ella.

Exploding with rage, Wallace grabs a PLANK and CHARGES at Myron.

WALLACE
ELLA! BEHIND YOU! WATCH OUT!

Ella ducks back. Myron sees Wallace coming at him. He raises his hands to say something, but before he can utter a word Wallace BLUDGEONS HIM SENSELESS. Just then, we hear --

WHITE (O.S.)
GET OUT OF THE WAY!!

-- and CUT TO the nearby:

WHITE

As rampaging horses CRUSH victims, the wheelchair-bound White is shouting to a wounded TEEN across the street - the young man is oblivious to the MASSIVE RIG BARRELING TOWARDS HIM.

WHITE
SOMEBODY HELP HIM!! HE DOESN'T SEE
THE TRUCK!!

Frenzied, White fights his way out of the wheelchair and hobbles towards the boy, dodging horses. Just as White reaches him --

A woman's hands SNATCH HIM BACK.

An instant later, the rig brutally MOWS THE BOY DOWN, missing White by inches. White SCREAMS, wishing it were him. Susan cradles White, weeping; she's just saved his life.

CUT DOWN THE BLOCK TO:

HIRAM'S CHURCH

Terrorists SWARM the building, PLANTING DYNAMITE beneath it while SPRAYING BULLETS everywhere around. Inside, trapped children and teachers helplessly SCREAM.

Minnie, Tom, Ike, America and other would-be RESCUERS gather across from the church, kept at bay by the ferocious GUNFIRE.

CUT BACK TO:

ELLA, RACING FROM SHOP TO SHOP

As she hunts for antiseptic, she spots Hiram on the balcony. He's with FOUR MEN, tracking the Knights' positions.

Suddenly a metallic glint catches her eye. She traces the glint to an adjacent rooftop. Sweat blurs her vision, but she squints and makes out --

A SNIPER TAKING AIM AT HIRAM.

ELLA

God no.

CHURCH

The Knights DRENCH THEIR DYNAMITE IN GASOLINE as the rescuers look helplessly on. A church ELDER races up to them.

ELDER

There's an overgrown service entrance between the parsonage and the church.

MINNIE

LET'S GO!

The rescuers break for the parsonage. Dodging bullets, we TRACK them as they circle around to the far side of the church grounds, break into the --

PARSONAGE

-- then race through the interior to a back door that faces the church. They SMASH DOWN THE DOOR and enter the --

OVERGROWN WALKWAY BETWEEN THE PARASONAGE AND THE CHURCH

As stray bullets SHATTER WINDOWS around them, they find the church entrance, BREAK DOWN THE DOOR, then race inside SHOUTING FOR EVERYONE TO EVACUATE.

THE SNIPER STEADIES HIS AIM

Eyeing him, Ella CHARGES furiously towards Hiram, SHOUTING --

ELLA
HIRAM!! HIRAM!! HIRAM!!

-- but he doesn't hear her.

CHURCH

As the Knights set DETONATORS out front, the rescuers frantically evacuate the children and teachers through the parsonage out onto the:

FIELD BEHIND THE PARSONAGE

As they vacate the church grounds, it looks like they're in the clear - until a panicked TEACHER counts heads.

TEACHER
I'M MISSING FOUR! FOUR GIRLS!

A traumatized CHILD remembers --

CHILD
Th-they were in the choir room. I-I'm
sorry, I-I thought they were with us.

IKE
Jesus.

CHURCH BASEMENT

As bullets SHATTER WINDOWS, we REVEAL four terrified young girls huddling in a corner. Our heart drops; they're:

CAROLE, CYNTHIA, DENISE AND ADDIE MAE, Ella's Cutie Pies.

ELLA CLOSES IN ON HIRAM

As the Sniper COCKS HIS TRIGGER, Ella runs furiously towards Hiram.

ELLA
HIRAM!! GET DOWN!! GET DOWN!!

She pushes herself FASTER, FASTER, FASTER towards him as if racing against inevitability itself.

Hiram spots her.

FIELD BEHIND THE PARSONAGE

As the Knights COUNT DOWN TO DETONATION, the rescuers race back towards the parsonage for the girls.

CLOSE ON HIRAM

He can't make out what Ella is shouting. Then oddly, he just smiles at her serenely. Ella knowingly SCREAMS. A split-second later --

A BULLET STRIKES HIM DOWN.

Ella SCREAMS. As Hiram lay mortally wounded on the balcony, the four men with him point in the direction of the assassin.

At that instant --

THE CHURCH EXPLODES IN A TITANIC FIREBALL

-- blasting the rescuers backwards.

THE BLACK SKY BLAZES LIKE HELLFIRE. THE SOUTHERN CROSS SHIMMERS GLORIOUSLY IN THE INFERNO.

Everyone SCREAMS and we CUT TO a:

BLACK SCREEN

After a morbid silence, we hear a disembodied VOICE singing --

VOICE

*Deep river,
My home is over Jordan.
Deep river, Lord,
I want to cross over into campground...*

-- and FADE UP to the:

AFTERMATH (SERIES OF SCENES)**DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE**

A devastation of cataclysmic proportions. Blood flows like rivers. Lamentation fills the streets. Survivors sweep up twisted metal and weep at the colossal ruins of hope.

Where a church once stood, Ella morosely sifts through a graveyard of rubble - an exploded pulpit, shattered pews, and the smoldering remains of Hiram's cross.

As if insufficiently damned, she unearths blood-splattered pages from Jubilee songbooks -- pages promising deliverance and freedom, peace and hope. Pages of *lies* bearing the words:

"ARRANGED BY ELLA SHEPPARD"

Her eyes go completely lifeless.

FUNERAL PREPARATIONS

A grave is dug. A headstone chiseled. "1874" is engraved as the year of death on a noble coffin. Wallace is the angry engraver.

MIRRORS

We DISSOLVE through grim CLOSE-UPS of White and the singers facing themselves in mirrors, dressing for a funeral they prayed never to attend.

As the singers bare their shoulders and backs, we see the deep scars of slavery that physically rack their bodies.

White's bleak, hollow eyes are windows to a dungeon; drained of life and will, Susan tenderly dresses him.

One face is missing...

ELLA'S HOUSE

We MOVE THROUGH the aching rooms of a lonely house, and discover a tired soul on a cold floor, writing a heartrending letter.

ELLA (V.O.)

Dear Momma, I'm sorry to trouble you again, it seems I'm always troubling you. I'm going away, and wanted to leave you the deed to your house. It really is yours.

FISK CHAPEL - HIRAM'S FUNERAL

A packed service on a BLACK, SUNLESS DAY. White, Susan, Cravath and the singers stare in agony at Hiram's coffin. The sense of despair is overwhelming.

ELLA (V.O.)

In case you ever get to wondering about me, want to know anything, I also leaving my letters. You'll see, everything I've done, every breath I've taken, has been for you. Or at least a *dream* of you...

But on the streets outside, something momentous is happening - MASSES OF PEOPLE are arriving in an endless cavalcade of vehicles.

ELLA (V.O.)

I've chased dreams all my life - dreams of us, dreams of home and country; I dreamed I'd make you proud one day, that you'd take me back. Dreams chasing dreams...

RAGING FLAMES

... consume Ella's songbooks and Bible. We PAN from the fireplace, to the deed and Ella's tall stack of letters neatly laid out on the floor, to Ella standing in the doorway.

ELLA (V.O.)

Dreams kept me alive, drove me on. But I'm tired now, so tired. I'm drowning in dreams and dreams of dreams. It's time I navigate reality...

She takes a last look at the house, marvels at its beauty, then heads out back.

JUBILEE HALL CONSTRUCTION PIT, AFTER HIRAM'S SERVICE

White and the singers stand at the rain-filled pit staring bleakly into the watery abyss, its depths as black as the heavens above.

ELLA (V.O.)

I've failed you, and so many. I don't know why it is the things I touch go so terribly wrong...

They don't hear the MASSES OF PEOPLE quietly filling the field around them.

RIVERBANK BEHIND ELLA'S HOUSE

Ella stands at the river's edge facing her reflection with disgust. The black heavens bathe her in merciless, unforgiving light. Strong for so long, she looks unnaturally old, as if a lifetime of borrowed strength were coming fatefully due.

ELLA (V.O.)

One dream *did* come true, in a way.
I dream a lot about heaven, and
for the briefest moment, when you
opened that door and I saw your
eyes, I'd swear you were smiling.
I thought I was in heaven.

A shadow sweeps by. Ella looks up, and we CUT TO:

A RAVEN CIRCLING EXPECTANTLY ABOVE.

ELLA (V.O.)

But I'm awake now. Wide awake...

We CUT BACK to the riverbank. Ella is gone, but AIR BUBBLES rise from the river's depths, breaking at the surface.

ELLA (V.O.)

Good night, Momma.

The last bubble breaks, leaving pure silence. We CUT TO the gently rippling image of --

A SUSPENDED ANGEL

-- hovering against black clouds. We're underwater, looking up. At long last, all is peaceful and still. Until --

HANDS PLUNGE INTO THE RIVER

They seize Ella. She revives. She flails furiously to stay down but the hands won't let go. She fights to die, but they grip her harder and raise her out of the river.

Wallace pulls Ella into himself. She pounds him with fists of self-loathing but he absorbs it all. Then --

WALLACE

Shhh.

We hear voices on the wind. They're humming a spiritual. Ella clenches her ears, but Wallace traces the sound across the wind to:

WALLACE

Fisk.

EXT. JUBILEE HALL CONSTRUCTION PIT - JUST AFTER

Wallace carries Ella kicking and screaming to the field, then freezes at an astonishing sight:

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE SURROUND WHITE AND THE CHOIR, humming a poignant spiritual. Seeing Ella, they break into applause.

Cravath is behind it. He steps forward and addresses the choir.

CRAVATH

These are just some of the lives
you've saved. They've come from
all over; there are many, many
more. You've rescued their future.

Then he locks eyes with Ella.

CRAVATH

This is *your* doing. The truth is,
Miss Sheppard, I've never known heroes
like you. I don't expect your
forgiveness, but... *forgive me.*

His eyes are seared with remorse.

Staggered and overwhelmed, Ella looks back to the crowd. As she gazes upon the sight, her breath is taken away by the countless --

FACES. YOUNG. OLD. BLACK. WHITE. YELLOW. BROWN. GENERATIONS OF FACES FACES.

In a spectacular show of honor, they come forward and bless their saviors. Ella breaks into weeping as soul after soul embraces and showers her with thanksgiving.

Then as if on a mission, the people lift their voices as a GREAT CHOIR, singing a *healing spiritual* as if to raise the dead:

GREAT CHOIR

*There is a balm in Gilead,
To make the wounded whole.
There is a balm in Gilead,
To heal the sin-sick soul...*

And it does. Now on the receiving end of a spiritual, the Jubilees are pierced by its power.

The dying Bennie weeps tears of peace, feeling the immense worth of his sacrifice. Maggie's cascades wash away layers of camouflage, soothing the deep scars of abuse. Tears purge Ella's damning guilt and White's blistering shame. Washed in the soaring voices, America, Minnie, Georgia, Ike, Loudin and Tom breathe in new life.

Rinsed of rage, the Jubilees embrace each other again, standing resurrected as one.

GREAT CHOIR

*Sometimes I feel discouraged,
And think my work's in vain.
But then the Holy Spirit
Revives my soul again...*

Wallace alone still festers with rage. *Then the unthinkable...*

A buzz breaks out on the field; the crowd parts as several YOUNG MEN come forward. We recognize them; they're the Knights that attacked the choir on the train. Out front is none other than Myron, still bruised from Wallace's thrashing.

The tension is thick: *What are they doing here?*

The young man are carrying their supremacist hoods and robes. As the crowd watches in disbelief, they hurl the garments of hate into the watery pit and watch them sink into the abyss.

Myron turns to Wallace and says simply:

MYRON

No more.

His heart is heavy with remorse; his eyes plead for their pardon. Wallace glares daggers at this white boy - he wants to kill him.

Then the singing intensifies:

GREAT CHOIR

*There is a balm in Gilead,
To make the wounded whole.
There is a balm in Gilead,
To heal the sin-sick soul...*

Wallace fights to hate, but something greater surges up from within. He glares incredulously at the choir, fists clenched as if fighting off an invasion, quaking as if some war were raging inside.

Then at long last the floodgates burst, unleashing a lifetime of unshed tears - tears of a tender boy's loss, of searing heartbreak and grief; a torrent of tears that douse the fires of hate.

Myron walks up to Wallace, stopping inches away. Wallace stares at his archenemy. Overcome, he looks him in the eyes...

And embraces him. Tightly. And in their embrace, we'd swear we were seeing brothers reunited. *Then the unbelievable...*

Myron throws Ella a look, disappears into the crowd, then brings back someone that's been anxiously hiding.

ELLA
 (gasps)
 Momma!

It *is* Sarah. She's mortified to be there.

SARAH
 M-Myron came for me.

MYRON
 More like kidnapped.

Sarah hugs Myron without a trace of spite. But flushing with shame, she can barely look at Ella.

SARAH
 Samuella, I-I just don't want to be
 in your way.

ELLA
 In my way? I *need* you!

Overwhelmed with emotion, they search each other's eyes, fumbling for words but barely able to breathe. In the end, it's just --

ELLA
 Oh Momma!

SARAH
 Precious baby!

They clutch each other deeply, desperately, as if never again to let go. Having prayed for them, the people break out in applause.

Then as the field stirs with excitement, a bold voice THUNDERS OUT:

BENNIE
 Friends, we came today to bury a great
 man, and a dream. The Knights will rise;
 hate will reign; our blood will flow. By
 any measure, this is the death of hope.
 (eyes White)
 But another great man taught us to reach
 past what is, to the beyond; to walk by
 faith and not by sight! Friends, this is
 no burial, but a *baptism* - a beginning!
 For we are hard-pressed but not crushed,
 struck down but not destroyed! Freedom
 was crucified, but we believe in the
 resurrection! The Dream is not in that
 casket, it lives on in us!

Loud *AMENS!* Bennie has found his voice, and it's powerful. Fervor sweeps the field as he transforms the funeral into a REVIVAL.

BENNIE

We may not greet the Dawn of Freedom,
but if we don't fight through the
night, neither will our children. We
are an army! But our weapons are not
bullets or bombs or the invective of
hate, lest in our righteous rage we
become the devil we decry! For
children of the God of Peace must
neither bow to tyranny nor take up her
mantle! Our swords are *giftings and*
callings, talents and abilities to
break the chains of hate and set
hate's captives free! Heal hearts of
pain and rage! Make hatemongers
peacemakers the world over until every
village and hamlet thunders with the
cry of *Jubilee!* And we cannot fail,
for we fight with light, and the light
shines in darkness, and the darkness
shall never extinguish it. *This* is
our combat! *This* is our warfare!

DEAFENING AMENS! The crowd is electrified. White beams for Bennie.

BENNIE

"But brother Ben, that dawn is a long
way off. What lights our path when
hope fades and we've lost our way?"
Well, last I checked there's supposed
to be a TEMPLE right around here! A
MONUMENT TO FREEDOM! A BEACON TO THE
BROTHERHOOD OF MAN!

(points to the pit)

AH, THERE IT IS! DO YOU SEE IT?! DO
YOU SEE IT?! I SAID DO YOU SEE IT?!

EARTH-SHATTERING CHEERS. The BLACK CLOUDS BREAK, bathing the field
in a blazing heavenly light that sets Jubilee Hall's steel beams
aglow as if bringing them to life. All eyes fire with a BRILLIANT
MAJESTIC VISION towering high above the pit.

Recharged and purpose-driven, the Jubilees trade winks.

LOUDIN

Looks like it's time to root, hog
or die.

INT. BISHOP'S CHURCH - SUNDAY SERVICE

As Bishop leads his choir in singing of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our
God," the ground begins to QUAKE. We hear the THUNDERING of an
approaching choir:

GREAT CHOIR (O.S.)
STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY,
STEAL AWAY TO JESUS,
STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY HOME!!
I AIN'T GOT LONG TO STAY HERE!!

OUTSIDE

Bishop and his parishioners rush out and do a double take. The Jubilees are leading an ARMY OF THOUSANDS up the boulevard, pounding the earth with almost supernatural force:

GREAT CHOIR
MY LORD, HE CALLS ME,
HE CALLS ME BY THE THUNDER!!
THE TRUMPET SOUNDS WITHIN MY SOUL,
I AIN'T GOT LONG TO STAY HERE!!

Ella and Sarah are singing out front, alongside Wallace, Susan, and the defiant White, his wheelchair nowhere in sight.

Townpeople cheer. Children run up and sing alongside the choir.

To Bishop's horror, not only is his son Myron marching with them, but several of his own parishioners, including robed choir members, trade looks then bolt from the church to join them.

GREAT CHOIR
GREEN TREES ARE BENDING,
POOR SINNER STAND A-TREMBLING!!
THE TRUMPET SOUNDS WITHIN MY SOUL.
I AIN'T GOT LONG TO STAY HERE!!

Ominously, a shard of stained glass falls on Bishop's head. He looks up and gasps: shaken by the marchers, the Southern Cross is convulsing violently. THOUSANDS OF CRACKS are rippling through the stained glass, defacing the racist emblem and unleashing a FURY OF SHARDS. Bishop cowers as the fractals of hate VIOLENTLY ENGULF HIM.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

A GRAND SEND-OFF for a new Jubilee tour. Reporters swarm.

REPORTER
 China, Japan, India, Europe. You
 don't aim low; you're taking the
 spirituals --

MAGGIE
 Everywhere.

REPORTER
 Comment on the Crown absolving you
 of wrongdoing?

MINNIE

They found Jubilee Hall to be the victim of terror, not fraud. *Now we deliver.*

REPORTER

And you're directing now, Mr. Loudin?

LOUDIN

Along with Miss Sheppard. Pray for a brother; she sets a high bar.

WHITE

(proudly manholds Loudin)
He'll kill it.

Loudin smiles at White's affirmation. We've never seen him smile.

NEARBY - The departing choir say emotional farewells to the fading Bennie, knowing they'll never see him again.

BENNIE

Hey, no pity parties - just sing those bricks up!

REPORTER

Calling it quits, Mr. Holmes?

WHITE

(swoops in)
If you call publishing *quits*. Frederick Douglass has named Bennie the latest writer for *The New National Era*.

Bennie beams. He and White hug.

NEARBY - Ella, Sarah and Wallace say goodbyes.

ELLA

Well, Momma, this is it.

SARAH

I'm so proud of you, Sam.

Ella gushes. Then, to Wallace --

ELLA

Momma loves the house.

SARAH

(corrects her)
I *like* it. Nice design, well-built...

WALLACE
 (faux-offended)
 Only it's missing...?

Sarah burps an imaginary baby. Ella turns bright red.

ELLA
 Momma!

SARAH
 Do I *look like* I'm getting younger??

She is dead serious. Who knew Sarah was such a card?

Fanning herself like a hummingbird, Ella doe-eyes Wallace.

ELLA
 So you're really staying in Nashville?

WALLACE
 I'm going to build homes here in my
 father's name. That's how I fight back.

ELLA
 And you'll really wait for me?

WALLACE
 I'll be right here.

That warms her all over. Risking it all, she coos:

ELLA
 I love you, Wallace Moore.

WALLACE
 (winks to Sarah)
 She always has.

ELLA
 Hey!!

WALLACE
Okay okay! I love you.

ELLA
 (pouts)
 You pity me.

SARAH
 (keeping it real)
 It appears he loves *and* pities you.

Wallace high-fives Sarah. Ella hauls off to swat him, but he intercepts her hand --

WALLACE
And I'm not taking another breath
without you.

-- and PUTS A RING ON HER FINGER.

ELLA
(swoons)
Oh my...

WALLACE
Or as a pretender to my throne said:
"I want this finger, Ella Sheppard,
and the woman that comes with it."

She nearly faints to realize --

ELLA
You were there.

-- then of course turns cocky.

ELLA
Of course you were; you can't do
without me.
(suddenly insecure)
Y-you know that, right?

SARAH
Child, the man just put a ring on
your finger!

Reporters call "PRESS PHOTOS!" Mustering her nerve, Ella leans into Wallace, kisses him tepidly, then shrinks back awaiting his reaction.

Wallace and Sarah trade pathetic looks. Wallace winks *Watch this*, then grabs Ella, incinerates her with a kiss that short-circuits her wiring, then nonchalantly releases her.

WALLACE
Don't miss your train.

ELLA
(SWATS him repeatedly)
Ooooooooooooo!

Brimming with attitude, she brushes him off, kisses Sarah goodbye, then strides off twisting her engagement ring.

ELLA
Ha! This was inevitable!

WALLACE
(shouts out)
One question. "Koolaidria"??

ELLA
Sounds like your type!

WALLACE
What does that say about you?

ELLA
That I pity the hopeless!

WALLACE
Oh so you know I'm hopeless!

ELLA
Like water's wet and flies fly.
Hahahaha!

She cackles at her wit. Then steam from a vent BLOWS HER DRESS SKY-HIGH.

ELLA
AAAUUGGH!!!

NEARBY - Tom and a chastened Cravath say farewells.

TOM
So, no prison blues for you. A royal
pardon.

CRAVATH
(haunted with shame)
I don't deserve it. Some credit to my
parents...

Just then, we hear --

JUBILEES (O.S.)
TOM! MR. WHITE! LAST PHOTOS! COME ON!

CRAVATH
Well, Mr. Rutling, the new century is
upon us; the road to Freedom is long.

TOM
Which is why Freedom's warriors never
sleep.

CRAVATH
You've proved that.

TOM
I mean you. You're a giant, Mr. Cravath;
you were in these trenches before we were
born. Your folks would be proud.

CRAVATH
Get over to those photos.

TOM
I said *you've done them proud.*

The old war hawk fights ocular moisture, but loses. He gratefully hugs Tom, as a boy would his father.

ANGLE ON WHITE AND SUSAN

White and Susan race across the platform to make the press photos. But FLASHBULBS start going off without him. White speeds up to make it... then stops and processes what he sees:

As cameras capture the moment, the original Jubilees embrace in a warm group hug, basking and glowing as family. They spot White --

JUBILEES
COME ON, MR. WHITE! HURRY UP!

-- but his eyes glint with an epiphany. He drops his luggage. They know what this means and rush over.

MAGGIE
No.

WHITE
It's time.

GEORGIA
We need you.

WHITE
You need each other.

ELLA
Always upsetting the cart. You sure about this?

White nods. Tears flowing, he and Ella share a moment; after all they've been through, these ancient friends struggle to say goodbye.

She sweeps him with admiring eyes.

ELLA
When people ask me about George White, I'll tell them there was once a brave blacksmith's son, a very dangerous visionary, who heard from God... and taught the world to sing.

White beams. The Jubilees bury him in a timeless embrace.

INSIDE THE TRAIN CABIN - JUST AFTER

Now aboard, the Jubilees buzz with excitement. Ella looks across the cabin at Loudin; he's laughing with his wife and sons; they're joining him this time out. She smiles for them, then gazes out at Sarah and Wallace, letting it sink in that she too now has a family.

OUTSIDE - WALLACE AND SUSAN SHARE A MOMENT

SUSAN

You're not going to tell her.

WALLACE

She's run a long race on a dark road.
I need that house to be light for her.

SUSAN

Living there will be a sacrifice; the
nightmares may never end.

WALLACE

If she's smiling, I'm good; I'll find
my blue skies in hers.

He chokes up.

SUSAN

What is it?

WALLACE

Dad would have loved her.

BACK TO ELLA ON THE TRAIN

As the train pulls off, she holds her pitch pipe and remembers a vow:

ELLA (V.O.)

That's my pitch pipe, Sweet Love!

CUTIE PIES (V.O.)

Pleeeeeease?? To remember you by?

ELLA (V.O.)

*How about this - when I use it, I'll
remember you.*

Ella kisses the pitch pipe, then clasps it as if it were her life.

ANGLE ON WHITE

As the choir journeys on, his eyes mist with pride and heartache.
He hands his card to one of the Press Photographers --

WHITE
I need prints.

-- then looks back at the train vanishing into the distance.

WHITE (V.O.)
History is a fickle thing, forging
then forgetting heroes...

MONTAGE:

A blaze of ATLASES, PASSPORT STAMPS and INTERNATIONAL HEADLINES splash across the screen.

WHITE (V.O.)
God knows whether the story of a choir
rising from the fetters of slavery to
the frontlines of freedom will be
remembered...

We FLASH FORWARD to the completed JUBILEE HALL. Bold and conquering, it seems to tower over the nations, its red bricks bursting with songs of hope, its soaring steeple claiming humanity's destiny.

WHITE (V.O.)
But their legacy will never fade. It
can't; this world, a realm ringing
with their music, *is* their legacy...

THE WORLD CHEERS THE JUBILEES. We DISSOLVE through the colorful cast of characters we've met on the choir's incredible journey; all toast headlines of their success. Even Vetter scowls in grudging awe.

WHITE (V.O.)
Dark midnight won't pass on their
watch, but their fire will kindle the
torches of tomorrow's warriors, who
will blaze the way to Freedom...

We FLASH BACK in time to Havell reading this letter from White.

WHITE (V.O.)
I have no children; they are *my*
teachers, *my* heroes. They are the
Jubilee Singers. So I trust, Mr.
Havell, that my request, and the
enclosed, will set things right.

Havell pulls a PHOTOGRAPH from White's envelope. Taken at the train station, it's of the Jubilees in a family hug, *beaming and radiating*.

HAVELL
(blubbering sentimentally)
Yes... yes...

We FLASH FORWARD again to Jubilee Hall's grand foyer, where a media-filled UNVEILING CEREMONY is taking place.

As thousands look on, the velvet curtain drops, revealing Havell's PORTRAIT OF HEROES. The stunning floor-to-ceiling painting P-E-R-F-E-C-T-L-Y captures the Jubilees we've come to know.

Only we realize someone is missing; White has had himself removed from the portrait, leaving only Ella and the choir.

WHITE (V.O.)
Yours for the cause, George Leonard
White.

The crowd and media go wild. As flashbulbs EXPLODE, we --

FREEZE FRAME ON THE PORTRAIT

-- and SUPER:

"Saved from extinction by the Jubilees, the AMA thrived for another 125 years. It founded 500 schools and supported 4,000 more."

"The spirituals went on to shape western music, giving rise to gospel, jazz, rock and roll, and rhythm and blues."

"Bennie lived see touch Jubilee Hall's bricks before inheriting his Bright Mansions. He was 28."

"Completed nine years before the Washington Monument, Jubilee Hall inspires to this day..."

"So do the Jubilee Singers, who continue to tour the world."

FLASH FORWARD TO:

SARAH'S HOUSE - CLOUD-DARKENED DAY

Ella and Sarah sip tea on the porch, *pinkies-up*. Three kids race past, and we FOLLOW THEM to the shed where Wallace works.

"Ella and Wallace married. They had three children and lived with Sarah in the house her dreams built."

Ella smiles. Wallace sees her smile. Then *WHOOSH!* A blue jay sweeps past, lifting his gaze to the sky, where passing clouds reveal glimpses of distant blue, and the coy sun dances in his misty eyes.

FINAL FADE TO BLACK.