

TROMDITA: The Romanticization of Mankind by Dita (The Daemon named Ita)
Part I and II

By Kevin Woghiren
kevwog@me.com

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ACT I: JOSEPHINE

SISTER FLEUR
(French with English subtitles)
Josephine? Josephine... wake up...

FADE IN:

INT. NATIONAL COLONIAL INSTITUTE- DORMITORY- EARLY MORNING-
1801 – PARIS, FRANCE

Josephine, a 13-year-old girl of African descent is sleeping comfortably in bed. She hears the calls from Sister Fleur, the older black woman and nun hovering over her, but she only grumbles and turns away in response.

Sister Fleur smiles briefly. Her smile is warm, but tired. The heavy bags around her eyes betray her own lack of sleep. She places her hand on Josephine's shoulder and shakes her awake slightly.

SISTER FLEUR
Sleeping all night wasn't enough for you?
Come now, Josephine. We need your help!

Josephine buries her head into her pillow, hiding away from Sister Fleur and groaning in protest.

JOSEPHINE
(Muffled, inaudible)
Mnm-mnmn mnmnmn mnmnmnm, mnmnmnm
nmnmn mnm-

Sister Fleur leans in closer to Josephine.

SISTER FLEUR
I can't hear you...

Josephine finally pops out from under her pillow.

JOSEPHINE
(French, with English subtitles)
I didn't sleep all night! The little ones kept
waking up with nightmares. I hardly slept at all!

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Sister Fleur's face softens at Josephine's complaints. Josephine was always doing far too much for the children. Such a selfless child.

SISTER FLEUR

I'm sorry to hear that, Josephine, but we need you. The Minister of the Navy and Colonies is going to arrive any moment and we need to round up some of the kids in the main hall.

Josephine scrunches her brow in confusion and becomes alert.

JOSEPHINE

The minister of... what's such an official doing here...? And why not all the kids...?

SISTER FLEUR

I don't know. But it's definitely a big deal. Now, quick! Help me get the other children ready.

Though clearly reluctant, Josephine finally gets up off her bed. She quickly makes her own bed as Sister Fleur moves to wake some of the other children up. She joins Sister Fleur a little later.

Josephine notices that only the black children were being awakened and joins Sister Fleur without much thought as to why. They wake the rest of the children scattered throughout the various dormitories together; knocking on doors, shaking those who are reluctant, and urging them to quickly gather in the main hall.

EXT. NATIONAL COLONIAL INSTITUTE- COURTYARD- MORNING

It is a dreary, grey autumn morning. A few specks of snow drift in the wind outside as the children, all of them dark-skinned or mixed-race, gather together in the courtyard, looking up at a lone man standing above them: Minister Denis Decres.

A stone-faced man clad in thick wool, Decres clearly doesn't have the patience to be here. A few workers of the National Institute are gathered beside him. One of them is Marcel a middle-aged Caucasian man, with a scraggly beard and a warm demeanour to him.

MINISTER DECRES

(French, with English subtitles)

Is that all of them?

MARCEL

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Almost sir, there seems to be a few missing...there they are!

Marcel quickly notices Sister Fleur and Josephine in the back of the crowd, steering a group of rowdy young children to join the gathered group.

Sister Fleur faintly feels a pair of eyes on her. She gazes towards the worker, and they share a quick stare across the distance. Subtly, they smile at each other.

Unaware, and uncaring, the minister nods curtly. He loudly clears his throat to announce his intention to speak. A series of shushes cascade through the crowd of children, bringing them to complete silence.

MINISTER DECRES

Under the direction of Emperor Napoleon, I come to announce that this integration experiment has come to an end. The French Government will no longer pay for your education and living here. The National Institute will, from this day forward, be whites only.

An absolute bombshell. The workers of the Institute, Sister Fleur amongst them, are completely shocked. Worried frowns quickly spread amongst their ranks. The children, young and carefree, only appear vaguely confused.

Sister Fleur makes eye contact with Marcel who is standing beside the Minister. He subtly nods to her, sad and equally shocked.

MINISTER DECRES (CONT)

No black or mixed-race person is allowed to mix with a white person outside of a private setting. While I know this may be a shock to you lot, rest assured that this is the best path for all. (pause) I understand that many of your families live abroad and work in the colonies...we have also given them notice in addition to the new location where you will continue your studies. My government advisers and your teachers will assist you with this transition, but your fate is now yours alone to determine! Our government has already done enough to help the likes of *you*. Good luck.

And, with that, the Minister turns his back on the cold, helpless children and walks away.

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The children break out into a buzzing murmur, discussing the “big news”. Josephine stands off to the side, frowning heavily. Very clearly upset, and concerned for her fate. She looks over the crowd of mildly panicking children, and her frown only deepens. Unlike many of the children who have parents abroad and, in the colonies, she is an orphan.

Josephine quickly scans the crowd for Sister Fleur, but she doesn’t see her amongst the bustle. The crowd’s distressed, cacophonous noise overwhelms her.

The whispers. The conversations. The distant cries and the sound of feet marching away... it’s all too much for her!

Panic starts to set in. Josephine starts hyperventilating. She is consumed by fear for her dark, uncertain future. She feels alone, isolated and vulnerable, even within the busy crowd.

A hand gently lands on Josephine’s shoulder, but in her panicked state she jumps back from it. She looks up.

Framed by a beam of natural sunlight, Sister Fleur smiles down mercifully at Josephine.

JOSEPHINE

Sister Fleur! What’s going to happen to us?
Who will look after all of the children now? Will
their parents come back? What about me?

Sister Fleur smothers Josephine in a big, warm hug.

SISTER FLEUR

It’s okay sweetheart, it’s okay. The government
made arrangements for us all. I would never let
you be on your own, Josephine.

Josephine pulls away from Sister Fleur and gazes at her hopefully.

SISTER FLEUR

I promise. I’ll be with you every step of the way.

Sister Fleur strokes Josephine’s back as they embrace, calming the near-hysterical teenage girl.

SISTER FLEUR

Look around you, Josephine. All these children
will need a lot of help packing for their new
home. Do you think you can help them?

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Sister Fleur pulls away from Josephine. Josephine wipes the tears off her face, finally managing a weak smile.

JOSEPHINE

Okay.

They enter the crowd and start issuing orders to pack. The children quickly organize themselves around the two strong women while the government advisers watch as spectators to the chaos.

EXT. NATIONAL COLONIAL INSTITUTE- MORNING

An hour or so has passed, allowing the sun to break through the oppressive cloud cover and melt some of the snow away.

A series of wagons and carriages are parked outside the National Colonial Institute, packed to the brim with luggage and children.

Sister Fleur loads on the last load of luggage with the help of Marcel.

SISTER FLEUR

Thank you, Marcel.

Marcel smiles kindly at Sister Fleur.

MARCEL

Anything for you, my lady.

Sister Fleur blushes slightly. She tries to hide her face away. Marcel grins.

Sister Fleur notices Josephine approaching and she quickly puts on a stern look to reflect the seriousness of the situation.

Sister Fleur steps away from Marcel and helps Josephine with the last of her luggage. Josephine's eyes dance from her to Marcel and finally back at the National Institute, the concrete slab she'd always call home.

Josephine boards one of those carriages gives one last glance at the flamboyantly gold-coloured flag pole flying the French flag.

But a distant howl distracts her. She stares out towards the pristine countryside in the distance contemplatively. A frigid wind howls violently from afar.

CUT TO BLACK.

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In the blackness, we hear a high-pitched, whining, grovelling noise. Like the whimper a wounded animal makes when it gets hurt unjustly. Clearly in pain. This whimpering carries on...

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS/RIVERISDE- DAY

POV: a pair of eyes snaps open, but light floods in so harshly they snap shut as quickly. We hear the gasp of a young, surprised child: the owner of the eyes we are seeing through.

The sound of flowing water slowly fades in, along with the buzzing of insects, and the flowing of wind. All muffled by a layer of snow.

The child's eyes open again, slowly this time. We can vaguely make out the blurry shapes of tree branches contrasted against a blinding white sky through the child's eyelashes. The image quickly comes into focus.

The child sits up, and looks around, as if exploring the world for the first time. We now see that he is in a forest clearing, with a river to the side a dozen or so metres away. The forest isn't too dense, and there is evidence that civilization is close by, as a few of the trees have been cut down.

Looking down, the child discovers his own arms, wrapped in pale, Caucasian skin, roughly the size of a pre-teen. They crawl forward a little bit, and they find a slowly flowing river.

Looking down at the river's water, the child discovers a young boy looking back up at him with a face full of curiosity.

He stares at his own eyes for a long time, and a vague recollection starts to assemble itself in his mind. He is aware of himself but he is in an unfamiliar world.

ITA

I.. Ita.

He slowly reaches out towards his reflection. His finger connects with the water. Gentle waves ripple across the flowing current. He is absolutely fascinated by this simple act.

A pitiful, yelping bark and low growl breaks Ita's focus. He looks around. Ita frowns and looks around, concerned.

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He quickly stands up, but he wobbles on his feet for a little bit before he manages to catch his balance. We now discover that Ita is completely naked. Not one scrap of cloth covers his pale, scrawny body from the chilly air, and bits of snow are stuck to various parts of his torso, but he doesn't seem to be bothered by or notice the cold at all.

He quickly rushes off towards the animal in distress.

Ita wanders through the woods a little. Although he is bare-skinned, he still doesn't seem to notice or particularly mind the cold. His eyes dart around frantically in search of the distressed animal as he wanders. But they widen in shock as he stumbles onto:

An old wolf dangling from the tree by a length of rope securely wrapped around one of its paws. The animal is clearly distressed and whimpers fearfully.

Ita's shock quickly fades. It is replaced with curiosity, and a vague sense of horror. He cautiously approaches the wolf until he is standing underneath it. He watches the animal attentively, as it whimpers and whines, his face contorts to show empathy.

Ita looks at the mechanics of the trap and the rope tied to the wolf, and his eyes closely follow it and discover that the rope leads to a nearby tree. He walks over to the tree to assist the helpless animal.

With a grunt, he finally pulls at the rope just right. The knot untangles itself, the rope slackens, and the wolf falls to the ground behind him with one more pained yelp. Ita winces.

Guiltily, Ita turns to look at the animal.

Ita takes a step carefully towards it, as if to assess the damage but the wolf growls menacingly at Ita.

Ita is slightly disappointed at the threat and slowly retreats from the violent animal. He curiously looks around, unsure of what to do next.

But he's startled by a low, menacing growl that suddenly sounds out from just behind him. An instinctual fear washes over Ita.

He slowly turns around and he sees ...

The lone wolf, snarling and inching slowly towards him as if they had unfinished business.

Ita freezes, terrified. The wolf circles him hungrily. His heart beats violently against his chest. He stares down the wolf.

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From the corner of his vision, Ita notices a low-hanging branch. Sneakily, his eye darts towards the branch.

But the wolf takes the opportunity and lunges straight for him, managing to scratch Ita on his face, sure to leave a sizable scar.

Ita dashes straight towards the low-hanging branch. He runs with all his might, but the wolf follows closely behind.

Ita swings on the branch. At the apex of his swing, he kicks his legs out and jumps towards a hill slightly to his left.

The wolf, watching him eagerly, quickly gives chase but the ground is wet and icy.

Ita frantically dashes away as the wolf struggles to chase after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY-ROAD- DAY

A lone horse carriage trudges down a narrow country road, slightly covered in snow. The sun is out though, so it's a bright, idyllic winter day. We hear the vague, intelligible chatter of children talking and playing. The chatter gradually escalates in volume and intensity- a sure sign of an argument.

INT. HORSE CARRIAGE- DAY

Josephine is sitting in the rearmost carriage, absent-mindedly staring out at the pristine countryside rolling by. The children gradually grow rowdier and rowdier, but Josephine pays them no mind.

From behind the tree-line, a quick blur passes by. Josephine notices. She looks closer, but she can't see anything. A faint, distant howl vaguely echoes in from the woods. Josephine shivers in fear.

SISTER FLEUR

Josephine!

Josephine's mind is pulled back into the horse carriage. The children are talking loudly, some of them crying, and they're packed tightly together.

SISTER FLEUR

The children are rowdy.

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JOSEPHINE

They must be bored. And scared. Most of us have never been out of the Institute before.

Sister Fleur nods her head sympathetically.

SISTER FLEUR

Yes! That's why I was thinking it would be great if you could help us all pass a little time...

Sister Fleur eyes Josephine suggestively through fluttering eyebrows.

Josephine looks at her like she's acting weird. Some confusion. Then! Her eyes widen in horror as she realizes...

JOSEPHINE

You mean you want me to... no! Not happening.

SISTER FLEUR

Please, Josephine. They could really do with a little distracting

JOSEPHINE

No way! Besides, even if I wanted to, I packed in a rush, and I'm not sure I brought it with us.

Sister Fleur unleashes a devious, calculated smile. As she speaks, she digs through her satchel. Josephine looks on curiously.

SISTER FLEUR

I thought you'd forgot something in the rush, so I went back... and look what I found!

Sister Fleur pulls out a wooden flute from her satchel with the most delighted, beaming grin on her face. Josephine groans in defeat.

SISTER FLEUR

So, will you, do it?

She snatches the wooden flute from Sister Fleur's hands.

Sister Fleur nearly leaps up in excitement.

SISTER FLEUR

Yay!

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JOSEPHINE

But! Only after we pass the river ahead. I need a moment to practice.

Sister Fleur nods obediently, then she immediately turns towards the gathered carriage of children.

SISTER FLEUR

Okay, my sweethearts! If you keep quiet, sister Josephine is going to play a little song!

The children exchange excited glances. A low, buzzing excitement spreads through them as Josephine fiddles with some notes

EXT. HORSE CARRIAGE- DRIVERS SEAT- DAY

Two men, heavily clad in winter coats, sit side-by-side at the front of the carriage, steering the horses down the narrow path. Although no snow falls anymore, the path is still ankle-deep in the white stuff, and the men have to urge their horses on.

MAN #1

Damned minister. Who decides to move children in the winter anyway?

The second man, Marcel, frowns slightly in dissatisfaction and quips.

MARCEL

Careful. If he heard you, you might be hung for treason.

The driver smiles and spits a fat wad of black phlegm out the side of the carriage, mumbling bitterly under his breath.

DRIVER

What a world. A man can't even speak the truth without being beheaded.

Marcel is just about to say something again, but a wolf howl echoes out from nearby. A serious, grim frown is suddenly drawn onto both men's faces.

They look around themselves and scan through the distant trees carefully, fearful of the worst.

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MARCEL

Is that...

DRIVER

Wolves. They're common in these parts.
Wolves, druids, and alchemists...we must
avoid them at all costs.

He reaches down beneath his seat to pull something out.

The driver pulls out a double-barrelled shotgun; an antique...rarely used.

MARCEL

Heavens! You're not going to need that are-

DRIVER

Quiet!

The trees just ahead of them suddenly shake. The driver pulls the horses to a halt. He aims his shotgun grimly at the treeline.

The treeline stares back at the driver. The wind blows. Birds in the distance chirp. But the woods stay still, and silent. Eerily silent.

Marcel shifts uncomfortably in his seat. A tense moment passes.

The trees suddenly shake again, much closer this time, and the driver quickly pivots his aim.

He cocks the shotgun back. He looks down the sights. His entire body stands on its very last nerve as the shaking of the trees draws nearer and nearer on the carriage.

The driver's heart beats in his chest. His finger rests on the trigger, ready to squeeze it. Just as he can't stand the tension any longer, a small figure suddenly bursts out of the bushes.

Without thinking, the driver tracks the small figure and his finger gently squeezes on the trigger.

MARCEL

Wait!

Marcel leaps at the driver, pushing his arm away at the very last moment. The shotgun releases a great loud

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“BANG!”

INT. HORSE CARRIAGE- DAY

The children scream in fear as the thunderous bang echoes into the carriage.

EXT. HORSE CARRIAGE- DRIVERS SEAT- DAY

A spray of pellets explodes out the double-barrel and lodge themselves into a tree ahead of the carriage, just above:

The absolutely petrified Ita, who’s covering his head with his hands, stares blankly at the horse carriage. He is still completely naked.

The driver and Marcel stare back at Ita, equally as shocked as he is.

The driver and Marcel give each other a sideways glance.

DRIVER

Uh... You see this child, right?

MARCEL

Yes.

A beat.

DRIVER

Why’s he naked?

Visible confusion is etched on Marcel’s face.

MARCEL

No clue. He must be freezing!

Marcel turns towards the naked child, Ita, and he prepares to say something.

DRIVER

Wait! A naked child in the middle of the forest?
This could be something... spooky. I warned
you about the alchemists around these parts!
It’s a witch child! The cold doesn’t even bother
him!

The driver glances at Ita once more. His pale skin against the snow gives him a peculiar, vague halo of some kind. Something about him just feels strange. Especially since he only stares back blankly at the horse carriage.

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MARCEL

Spooky...

DRIVER

Yes! Or a demon... there's plenty of those around.

Marcel scoffs.

MARCEL

Don't be ridiculous! That is clearly just a lost child! He's in shock!

Marcel turns to Ita.

MARCEL

You there! Young boy. Who are you, and why are you naked?

Ita stares back blankly at Marcel, not understanding a word.

MARCEL

Can you hear me? Your clothes. Where are your clothes? No? What about your parents?

The driver fidgets nervously, his eyes darting through the forest.

DRIVER

Sir. I really think we should get going. These parts aren't safe.

MARCEL

What about the boy? We can't just leave him here.

DRIVER

Well, he doesn't seem like he needs much helping to me.

The two men glance back at Ita. Ita looks at them nonchalantly. He completely ignores Marcel's repeated questions. He keeps casting backwards glances towards the trees he came from, inching away like he wants nothing to do with these men.

Marcel shrugs nonchalantly, finally giving up. The driver urges the horses to move. The carriage takes off.

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The horse carriage passes Ita, who looks on at the kids inside with curiosity.

INT. HORSE CARRIAGE- DAY

As the carriage passes by Ita, the children have a chance to get a good look at the strange boy. Some of the children giggle at Ita's nakedness, but Josephine is absolutely horrified.

Naked, alone, and in the wild, the image of Ita outside their carriage pulls at all of Josephine's worst fears. She exhales a deep gasp of shock.

JOSEPHINE

Sister... why is that boy...

Sister Fleur, seating beside Josephine, is equally mortified by the boy standing alone in the snow.

SISTER FLEUR

I don't know sweetheart. Wait here.

Sister Fleur shuffles through the crowd of children. She reaches a spot behind the drivers, just within earshot of them.

SISTER FLEUR

Excuse me, good sirs.

Marcel turns back to face her, a warm smile on his face. The driver, on the other hand, simply nods in her direction, keeps directing the horses onwards.

MARCEL

Oh, Sister Fleur!
How can we be of service?

SISTER FLEUR

Marcel. You think this is the right kind of weather for a child to be alone and naked in?

The smile on the adviser's face drops. He's embarrassed.

Sister Fleur can't believe it.

SISTER FLEUR

How can you possibly leave him like that? At the very least you could have given him a blanket.

DRIVER

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Sorry lady. No time. These roads are dangerous.

Sister Fleur loses it.

SISTER FLEUR

If these roads are dangerous for big, strong men like you, imagine how dangerous they must be for that little boy! We have to help him. Turn back!

DRIVER

No way, Sister. This carriage only takes orders from the government. Not the likes of you.

Sister Fleur is deeply insulted. She looks at the driver in disbelief. A rage quickly builds up in her, threatening to explode.

MARCEL

Come on, now. That was uncalled for-

DRIVER

Wait!

The driver whips his left arm against Marcel's chest, a clear signal for silence. His eyes are wide open and alert, and his entire body seems coiled up and tense.

DRIVER

Do you hear that?

Marcel listens carefully, but he can only hear the natural sounds of the outdoors.

MARCEL

I don't think I hear-

He shuts up and his eyes widen fearfully. A low, menacing growl spreads through the trees behind him. He looks back.

Frightfully, a wolf sneaks out from the forest. It approaches Ita calmly. He looks around but there's no way out this time.

The trio of adults (Sister Fleur, the driver, Marcel) are stunned.

SISTER FLEUR

`You have to do something!

DRIVER

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Damn right, I do. We have to get out of here!

The driver furiously whips the horses forward.

MARCEL

Wait a minute, we can't just-

DRIVER

If anymore wolves come here then the horses will either run off or be eaten, then we risk the entire carriage!

Marcel is torn. He looks at Sister Fleur, pleading and desperate. He looks at the driver, determined and fierce. He glances out towards the boy. As the wolf approaches him, he backs up into the tree, cornering himself in a blind panic. Yet still, Marcel cannot make a decision.

A loud knock sounds from the back of the carriage. The children cheer loudly.

MARCEL

What was that?

A little girl, no older than five or so years old, pokes her head out to Sister Fleur and points in the direction of Josephine running towards Ita.

LITTLE GIRL

Sister Fleur, Josephine!

Sister Fleur blanches. Marcel blanches. Even the cold-hearted, pragmatic driver frowns sourly. This is not good.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE- DAY

The wolf snarls menacingly at Ita, backed up defenceless against a tree.

JOSEPHINE

Hey!

A snowball sails through the air and lands squarely on the wolf's body. Clearly surprised, the wolf, and Ita, turn to look at the snowball attacker and they see:

Josephine running bravely towards them with a pair of snowballs in her hands. She frowns combatively at the old, injured wolf, not willing to back down.

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The children are gathered in the carriage, watching her with awe in the background.

The wolf, clearly growing impatient, turns to face Josephine, and runs toward her. It snarls and growls, aggressively.

Josephine gets scared and takes a few steps backward. She clearly hasn't thought this through enough. Unfortunately, she trips over the snow and she falls on her back with a frightened yell.

She looks up and sees the wolf approaching her, snarling aggressively with its teeth bared. A truly frightful image. Petrified panic. She realizes it's only a few metres away! It seems she is destined to meet her end at the paws of this hungry, savage wolf.

"Bang!" "Bang!"

The snow immediately in front of the wolf explodes. The wolf panickily retreats into the trees. Josephine is absolutely stunned.

SISTER FLEUR

Josephine! Get back here! Now!

Josephine glances back towards the carriage. Marcel is standing to the side of it. He has a shotgun split in half, borrowed from the driver. Quickly reloading it with a grim expression on his face. Sister Fleur stands right beside him, urging Josephine to get back to the carriage.

Josephine shakily stands up on her feet. She takes one step towards the carriage, but she stops.

MARCEL

What are you waiting for, little girl? Get on here, now!

Josephine turns back towards the naked Ita.

JOSEPHINE

Come with us!

She extends an arm toward him. Ita stares blankly at her.

DRIVER

He doesn't understand what you're saying, kid. Leave him. Let's go!

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The driver nervously glances around the surrounding, cursing. Although the wolf has retreated, he can make out a shadow darting about in the forest, and the horses whine nervously. The situation is still very tense.

Josephine glances at the naked Ita. She realizes he can't understand her, so she runs over to him.

Ita eyes Josephine cautiously as she approaches, but also with curiosity. As she gets close, she smiles at him.

JOSEPHINE

Hello.

Ita has never before seen a person smile. He is transfixed in the gesture of a smile even amidst the great danger he's in.

Before he knows it, Josephine is an arm's length away from him. She reaches out her hand and holds his. He looks down at their intertwined hands, confused. What is this?

JOSEPHINE

Just hold on to me, alright?

Not giving him a chance to respond, Josephine dashes away, yanking Ita along by the hand.

Together, they trudge through the snow and board the carriage under Sister Fleur and Marcel's watchful eyes.

The two adults only climb back on once the two children are safely on board. The carriage gets moving. It swiftly charges through the snow, leaving the lone wolf far off in the distance.

INT. HORSE CARRIAGE- DAY

The horse carriage moves through the countryside at a swifter speed, despite the snow. The children are all gathered in a half circle, gazing curiously at Ita.

Ita gazes curiously back at them. He has none of the embarrassment that should be present on his face. He looks a little like an alien wordlessly observing a strange, savage people.

LITTLE GIRL

Sister Fleur...

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A little girl, much younger than Josephine, pulls at Sister Fleur's sleeve, who digs through a packed bag for something.

SISTER FLEUR

Yes, Daphne?

DAPHNE

Why doesn't he have any clothes on?

SISTER FLEUR

Well, maybe he doesn't have any?

Realization dawns on the little girl. Sister Fleur pulls out a blanket from the luggage.

SISTER FLEUR

Which is why we're going to help him!

Sister Fleur wraps the thick, warm blanket around Ita, who interprets the gesture as one of comfort and conformity with the other dressed people on the carriage.

RANDOM CHILD

Maybe he's never worn clothes or seen a blanket before?

A round of giggles makes its way through the children.

JOSEPHINE

Don't make fun of him!

Ita looks around, seeing all the children staring at him curiously, he curls his lips into a strange, toothy smile.

LITTLE GIRL

He smiled!

The children break out into a happy chatter once more.

As the carriage keeps riding on down the narrow country road, the children slowly fall into silence. Only the gentle, rhythmic clop-clop of the horses' hooves against the snow sounds throughout the carriage.

Josephine absent-mindedly stares out of the carriage, towards the rolling countryside. She occasionally glances at Ita, now covered in a blanket, who stares out at the other children curiously. He is the only white child in the carriage filled with black and mixed-race children, and the other children maintain a distance from him.

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Josephine frowns as she notices his isolation. Then, she suddenly remembers something.

She reaches into her bag and she pulls out her flute. Sister Fleur's bored eyes light up as she realizes.

While nobody else is paying her much attention, Josephine starts playing a song on her flute. A low, cheerful, nostalgic song that really tugs at the heart-strings. Think Handel's Water Music, but played by a flute.

The children in the carriage look on at Josephine. One by one, they hum along with her flute playing.

Ita's eyes widen as he hears music for the first time. He looks on at Josephine, purely enraptured by her playing. He watches her every move, closely observing the movement of her fingers on the flute's body. Subconsciously, his own fingers mimic hers.

As her song draws to an end, he reaches his hands out towards her flute.

Josephine eyes him questioningly.

JOSEPHINE

You know how to play?

Ita looks back dumbly at her. She rolls her eyes.

JOSEPHINE

(mumbling)

Why do I even try?

Josephine hands the flute to Ita.

RANDOM CHILD

Wow, he can play the flute?

RANDOM CHILD #2

As if! He can't even speak.

Ita slowly brings the flute to his lips.

Uncomfortable at first, he begins playing an exact replica of Josephine's music. He quickly falls into the groove within moments.

The other children, Josephine included, look on. They're absolutely fascinated with Ita's playing.

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Ita's playing quickly improves. Within moments, his playing is almost exactly like Josephine's.

EXT. LA PITIE ORPHANAGE

The song keeps playing as the carriage rides into a new village setting. The horse carriage approaches a new building: La Pitie Orphanage.

The carriage slows to a stop. Led by Sister Fleur, all the children gingerly climb out, squinting at the run-down building.

SISTER FLEUR

Well, children, welcome to your new home!

One by one, the children walk into the orphanage. Ita stands back and watches them, Josephine by his side. He looks at the orphanage a long time, then slowly, painfully, he squeezes out a word.

ITA

Ho-ho-home.

Josephine smiles warmly at Ita. He blushes. Unbeknownst to everyone, Ita's language skills are developing exponentially fast, real-time, as he adapts into his new world.

JOSEPHINE

Home is where you will always be safe.

She slips her hand around his again. He looks up at her. Nervous, excited, confused. His heart is a mess.

JOSEPHINE

This will be your home now.

She squeezes his hand. He nods.

JOSEPHINE

Let's go see what it's like!

The two of them venture off into the orphanage.

CUT TO:

A WEEK LATER

INT. LA PITIE ORPHANAGE- SISTER FLEUR'S ROOM- MORNING

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Children, formally dressed in pretty dresses and serious clothes, are bustling around the orphanage. Sister Fleur is in a room, combing through Josephine's hair- a large, voluminous afro.

Josephine frowns unhappily, occasionally yipping from pain as Sister Fleur tugs at her unruly hair.

JOSEPHINE

Ow! That hurts.

SISTER FLEUR

Sorry dear. But pretty hurts.

Josephine frowns, unsatisfied.

SISTER FLEUR

This is a special day for Ita. His baptism! Since no one has claimed him as missing, he is now a part of our family.

Josephine sulks even more.

SISTER FLEUR

The church is one of our biggest supporters. We must remain faithful! Without them, most of us wouldn't have a place to sleep anymore. And... there! All done.

Sister Fleur whisks Josephine to a mirror. Josephine's hair is laid down into a neat, manageable style.

Josephine is still not happy.

A knock at the door.

MARCEL

Pardon the interruption

SISTER FLEUR

No, no. We were already done.

She gently waves Josephine away. Josephine scurries off, still sulking.

Marcel closes the door after Josephine.

MARCEL

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Ready?

Sister Fleur takes a moment to neaten her dress up.

SISTER FLEUR

Just about... Awfully kind of you to continuously check in on us, Marcel. We would be hopeless without your kind heart. Thanks again for being our chauffeur on this special day.

Marcel blushes, but he clears his throat to cover it up. He slowly approaches Sister Fleur.

MARCEL

Of course! The wellbeing of the children, physical and spiritual, is most important!

Sister Fleur rolls her eyes, but a smile is on her face. Marcel laughs dryly.

A moment passes. Marcel shifts uncomfortably.

MARCEL

How's the boy doing? Is he... is he coming along too?

Sister Fleur frowns.

SISTER FLEUR

You mean Ita? Of course. It's his baptism!

MARCEL

Careful the church doesn't burn down. What a strange fellow! No one has claimed him. We've put the word out and not a word back!

Sister Fleur giggles.

SISTER FLEUR

You speak of him as if he's a demon, he's just a lost child we found in the forest.

MARCEL

Naked. Alone. Without any ability to speak, yet in a week he's become a modern-day Cicero!

SISTER FLEUR

Who?

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MARCEL

Sister! You have to brush up on your Roman history (sarcasm). He's a strange boy, is what I'm really saying.

SISTER FLEUR

Strange or mundane, he's still under my care. And I'd like for you to keep his being here between us and our community.

They both depart the room to round up the children and depart.

INT. LA PITIE ORPHANAGE- MORNING

Josephine wanders around the orphanage. She passes by groups of other children, and she examines them closely, looking for someone. She turns away when she doesn't find him.

Her ears perk up.

In the distance, soft and vague, Josephine hears the music of a sweet flute. She pivots her head slightly, trying to find where the music is coming from. She looks up. Above her. She dashes off and up the stairs.

EXT. LA PITIE ORPHANAGE- ROOFTOP- MORNING

Up on the rooftop, overlooking a beautiful sunrise over a sleepy town, Ita sits lazily, dangling his feet off the edge, a flute on his lips, music drifting into the wind. He's dressed nicely in a formal suit, like the other children, but his top buttons are undone.

Josephine walks up to him and sits beside him. She enjoys the music, and the view.

Ita's playing comes to a slow stop.

A small, sad smile plays on Ita's lips. Josephine notices.

JOSEPHINE

Why are you up here? Aren't you excited for your baptism?

ITA

I am not like you...any of you. It's all starting to make sense now...the wolf, my presence here.

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It's hard to explain, but you can think of me as a background process, like your religion. Except that I am in physical form. Unlike your religion, you can't touch it but you expect it to work as a background process in your lives. I am a little similar in that sense.

Josephine rolls her eyes, stifling a giggle.

JOSEPHINE

You talk very funny. Like an old teacher.

Ita glances at her. Her barely suppressed giggles are released. Ita joins her. They laugh together. Josephine waits until the laughter dies out.

JOSEPHINE

Are the other children still being mean to you?

Ita ignores her question and dramatically continues.

ITA

I'm really not like the rest of you.

JOSEPHINE

I don't think so. Sure, you came from nowhere, but most of us did! Maybe you just need more-

ITA

That's not what I mean.

The sharpness in his voice stings Josephine's heart. She looks over to him, curious.

Quickly, impatiently, Ita reaches over to Josephine and grabs her hand. Her dark skin contrasts strongly against Ita's bright, white complexion.

ITA

See!

Josephine blushes heavily and continues talking

JOSEPHINE

Everyone's different. Sister Fleur is different too, and everybody loves her--

Josephine's words trail off as she realizes, to her absolute shock, that Ita's skin complexion on his hand briefly changes to match her skin tone. From the pale,

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white colour that it was, his hand quickly transforms to a rich, dark complexion before returning back to its original state.

Ita looks at Josephine carefully, vulnerably. Josephine is in a state of shock but trying not to alarm Ita and scare him off.

JOSEPHINE

When did.... How did... what is this?

Ita releases Josephine's hand and hides his away.

ITA

Please keep this between us. Only you can know about this! We are forever connected.

A moment of silence. Shocked silence.

Down below, Sister Fleur exits the main building, accompanied by Marcel. She quickly corrals all the children together and calls Ita and Josephine down for departure.

SISTER FLEUR

Come on children, let's get going!

Josephine and Ita stand up and move to join the group.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH BUILDING- DAY

The sun shines beautifully over a pristine, but generic, church. A horse carriage, driven by Marcel itself, pulls up to this church.

The children disembark, one-by-one, and Ita soon exits as well. He looks at the church building and its Latin inscription with wide, amazed eyes, reminiscing of a past

SISTER FLEUR

Come along, children. In you all go!

INT. CHURCH- DAY

The children walk into the church, all single file, sombre, and serious. The organ is playing a beautiful, uplifting hymn that has the children humming along.

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The children find their seats and sit down. The service starts. The preacher preaches. All this happens in the background of Ita's mind.

The service goes on, Ita is distracted, in his own world. He barely notices. The choir starts singing another song, but this song is in Latin. The song transfixes Ita. He is rooted to the spot. He starts mouthing off a string of words, as if speaking to someone.

The children around Ita look at him curiously. The song ends, all the people gathered in the church take their seats, but Ita remains standing.

Josephine, sitting right behind Ita, crouches up to him.

JOSEPHINE

Ita, Ita are you okay?

ITA

(Mumbling in Latin, barely audible)

Ego ad angelum, ad terram's facere domino
pro labore daemonium.

A startled frown crosses Josephine's face. The entire church is now looking at Ita, including the preacher.

JOSEPHINE

Ita?

ITA

Ego ad angelum, ad terram's facere domino
pro labore daemonium.!

The whole church eyes Ita fearfully. The children closest to him do their best to distance themselves from him. The preacher's brow creases into a tight, suspicious frown. The children step back from Ita cautiously.

Ita keeps mumbling, repeating the same phrase over and over again.

PREACHER

That boy is not right.

Unbeknownst to all, there is a Druid sympathizer present as part of the church pew, who is fascinated by what is happening, especially by the fact that Ita stands out among the group of children. Sister Fleur watches on in abject horror and embarrassment. She looks around the room, and she discovers many of the adults levelling unfriendly glares at the young, innocent Ita. She promptly stands up to make physical contact with Ita and wake him from his trance.

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More chattering, more gossip. A few big, strong men menacingly approach Ita.

RANDOM MAN #1

He's possessed! We have to capture him
before he curses all of us!

Sister Fleur scoops up Ita protectively in her arms and tries to exit the church

At that moment, an incredibly psychic force floods Sister fleur's mind. She hears music- beautiful, choir music that shakes her soul... and she collapses onto the floor. Writhing as if suffering a seizure.

MARCEL

Sister Fleur!

Marcel races to Sister Fleur. Holds her close to his body

Ita stands there blankly, not sure what just happened. He runs away while the congregation tends to her.

Marcel, clutching onto Sister Fleur, looks up at a running Ita with a wild, fierce frown filled with rage and accusation.

MARCEL

You set a spell on her, demon! Demon child!

Josephine runs after Ita, as if she's the only who understands him and can protect him.

JOSEPHINE

He did no such thing!

Ita, still slightly dazed and confused, looks back at Josephine pursuing behind him.

The image overlays with his memory of being pursued by a wolf. Terrified, he continues to run, getting further and further away from Josephine!

Josephine desperately tries to catch up but Ita's speed outmatches hers. She cries as she watches him run off.

JOSEPHINE

Come back, Ita! I need you!

Ita disappears into the distance as if running back into the wilderness that birthed him.

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ACT II: DESANGE

100 YEARS LATER

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- NIGHT – ~1901 – DAHOMEY, AFRICA

The orphanage is a modest-sized, old, brick building. Silhouetted by the bright full moon, it stands on its own with very few nearby buildings and structures. Over this image, we hear a woman unleashing a fierce scolding.

DESANGE
(In English)

I cannot believe you two would do something so horrible! Have we not taught you better in this orphanage? Have we not tried our hardest to provide you with everything you need?

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- NIGHT

A few candles are burning. Their warm, orange glow is comforting in the small, cosy old room.

But for the two identical young boys (pre-teens) being scolded, this room is the most uncomfortable place on Earth. They squirm and shuffle about with guilty looks on their faces as their scolding continues. One of the boys looks guiltier than the other while the other one seems genuinely repentant.

DESANGE
You both know how hard everyone in this community works for everything they have. Why would you go and steal food from Farmer Aufrey at the market?

A young woman (mid 20s) stands over the twins menacingly with a fierce, accusatory scowl on her face. She's dressed plainly, with cheap fabric, and her young face is wrinkled with stress. A few tears threaten to fall from her face as her scolding reaches an emotional hot spot.

DESANGE

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After everything my grandmother did, to build this place from nothing. To raise respectful children who could be respected by their community... why would you two boys go and throw that away? By stealing! And lying to me!

Her voice cracks. She looks away from the morose twins.

One of the twins, the repentant one, breaks down into tears. The other twin, the guilty one, looks helplessly between his brother and Desange.

TWIN #1

We're sorry Aunty Desange. We were just a little hungry. Please don't be mad.

Desange turns to face the twins again. Her face softens.

DESANGE

I know guys, come here.

The crying twin fearfully approaches Desange.

TWIN #2

We're sorry, Aunty Desange.

Desange regards both of the children gently, like a mother.

DESANGE

Stealing and lying are very bad things, my dears. Do you, boys, know the legend of Ita?

The twins shake their heads.

DESANGE

My grandmother used to tell it to me and others when I was younger. It's the story of a demon...this world is full of demons. They come in all shapes and sizes, but they all want the same thing.

Twin #2 has stopped crying. He looks at Desange curiously.

TWIN #2

What's that?

DESANGE

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To manipulate us and corrupt our hearts and make us do terrible, evil things to each other.

TWIN #1

Like stealing?

DESANGE

Exactly! And lying and being bad boys! Do you know what happens to boys who lie and steal in the story?

The twins shake their heads again. Desange puts on a mysterious, horror story persona as she continues telling the twins the legend of Ita.

DESANGE

There was...is...a demon named Ita, a shapeshifter. He manipulates young people to do bad things until you are corrupt enough for his liking. You see, as a shapeshifter, he needs to assume new forms and bodies regularly...and the more corrupt the body, the better.

The twins are absolutely horrified.

DESANGE

And then, one day, when you have been marinated by your own sins long enough, Ita will come for you. He will jump out from the shadows, and he will TAKE YOUR BODY!

She jumps onto the twins and they jump back in fright, but she only unleashes a furious flurry of tickles on them. They roll about on the floor, laughing and giggling like a happy family again.

A few moments later, Desange gets up off the floor. She affectionately tussles their hair.

One of the twins, tidies up his hair, slightly annoyed at Desange.

DESANGE

So, to reverse your bad deeds, you must do good deeds. Unless you volunteer to help farmer Aufrey with his chores, you will be prime targets for Ita. But it has to come from the heart, otherwise he will know you're just being insincere.

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TWIN #1
I volunteer to help the farmer!

TWIN #2
I volunteer too!

A warm smile saturates Desange's face as she looks at the twins.

DESANGE
Okay. I'll take you there first thing in the morning. Now go to bed! It's long past your sleep time.

The twins scurry off to their room. As soon as they walk out, Desange heaves a heavy sigh and flops onto the nearest seat.

Desange directs a thoughtful glance towards the large painting hanging on the wall behind it.

A familiar looking old woman kindly smiles down at Desange, her eyes knowing well the struggle she's facing.

A knock on the door sounds out. Desange turns to see who it is.

An older woman and orphanage worker, shuffles in slowly, carrying a pot of tea and two mugs.

AUNTY BERTHE
Some tea, dear. To soothe your mood after all that trouble.

Desange chuckles at the offer.

DESANGE
Thank you, Aunty. They were just being naughty boys, testing the limits as always. I'm sure they learnt their lesson.

Aunty Berthe pours Desange tea and hands it to her as they speak.

AUNTY BERTHE
Oh?

DESANGE
Yes, they have to volunteer at the farm they stole from.

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A sour expression crosses Aunty Berthe's face, like she just swallowed a lemon whole.

AUNTY BERTHE

Didn't they steal from Ogiso farm? I don't like you being near that Aufrey.

Desange nods.

DESANGE

Yes, but I know how to handle Aufrey. They'll be fine. It's this place I'm worried about.

Desange gestures to the interior of the orphanage.

AUNTY BERTHE

It will be okay, dear. Your grandmother, Josephine, built this place from nothing in even harder conditions than now. You will find a way to keep it going, I'm sure of it.

DESANGE

I hope so, Aunty Berthe. I hope so.

Aunty Berthe and Desange proudly gaze at the portrait hanging on the wall together of an elderly Josephine

FADE TO:

The following morning.

EXT. ROAD TO OGISO FARM- MORNING

Desange and the twins depart from the orphanage. A banner besides the building boldly states "DeeDee's Home for Children".

They embark on the journey to Ogiso Farm. A few neighbours pass them and they politely greet each other. Everyone knows everyone in the tight knit community and gossip spreads fast.

A while later.

The twins are tired and they have these really obnoxious, whiny expressions on their face that children get when they feel cheated.

TWIN #1

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The farm is too far, why couldn't we just help out at the market-

Twin #1 is interrupted by an approaching Caucasian man that they bump into. The man nearly drops the small bouquet of flowers he is holding.

STRANGER

Why, sorry there, kid.

DESANGE

No, no! It's our fault. He should really watch where he's going...

The stranger, a middle-aged Caucasian man of average build, looks up at Desange and they lock eyes. His face has a small scar, indicative of the injury that Ita sustained as a youth.

An exhilarating feeling washes over her. A strange sense of familiarity. In an odd way, she vaguely feels like this man, this stranger she has never met before, reminds her of her favourite music. A moment passes where Desange feels as if the whole world has been reduced to herself and this stranger.

He smiles again.

STRANGER

I cannot accept your blame, kind madam. It is I who stepped in his way. In fact, I approached you because you seem knowledgeable about this area, and I was wondering if you could help me.

The stranger's electric voice sounds like a sweet melody in Desange's ear.

The twins pick up on the strange atmosphere between the two adults, and they shoot each other questioning glances.

DESANGE

Oh, and how might my humble self be able to help you, good sir?

STRANGER

I am lost, and I was wondering if you could help me find my way to the old cemetery?

DESANGE

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Uh, yes. Not too far from here, if I remember correctly. You just go down that way, and turn right towards the town. The cemetery is just outside, near the church.

STRANGER

Thank you. For your troubles.

The stranger hands one of his flowers over to Desange, who accepts it absent-mindedly.

Desange gazes at him longingly as he disappears down the road, and the twins finally can't contain their excitement any longer.

TWIN #2

Do you know that man, Aunty Desange?

Desange blushes.

DESANGE

No. I don't think so. He just felt... familiar.
Anyway, let's go. We don't want to be late to farmer Aufrey's!

And so, off they go on their way again. Without a clue that the stranger they just passed was the "demon" of their legend, Ita.

EXT. OGISO FARM- DAY

Resting at the foot of a small hill, nestled in the bosom of an endless expanse of greenery, Ogiso Farm is a thing of beauty, with spectacular views, indicative of the relative wealth of the farm.

Farmer Aufrey, mid 50s, athletic build, is busy shovelling animal waste when the trio arrive.

Aufrey's eyes light up at the sight of Desange. A passionate, wanting fire burns in his eyes. He quickly tosses his tools away, and excitedly approaches her, wiping his hands on the hem of his shirt.

AUFREY

Desange!

Desange smiles and Aufrey boldly embraces her in a tight bear hug. In his excitement, he even lifts her off the floor!

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DESANGE

Hello Sir Aufrey.

Desange pulls away from Aufrey, turning away from two enthused kisses on her cheek.

DESANGE

I just came by to drop off these two trouble makers. In fact, they have something to say to you.

The boys step forward and glance up at Aufrey solemnly.

TWINS (IN UNISON)

We're sorry for stealing from you, Farmer Aufrey.

Aufrey notices the kids for the first time. He absently nods at their apology. What's two or three apples and some roasted corn for a man like him, anyway? He regards the twins carefully, analysing their features.

They're small, young, and their hands look soft. A very subtle burst of irritation and contempt flash through Aufrey's face, but he quickly hides it with a flattering smile.

AUFREY

Ah, so my helpers are here! We'll make good farm hands out of you boys in no time.

The twins nod enthusiastically, relieved that their apology was so easily accepted.

AUFREY

Now, why don't you boys go get started with shovelling the manure while your Aunty and I have a little talk?

TWINS (IN UNISON)

Okay!

The twins run off to meet the other farm workers, leaving Desange alone with Aufrey. As soon as they're gone, Aufrey no longer bothers to hide the lust in him as his eyes freely roam over Desange's body.

AUFREY

You know Desange, if you would just accept my proposal all your children at the orphanage

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could eat as much as they want. They wouldn't have to resort to stealing.

Desange squirms uncomfortably.

DESANGE

That is very kind of you, Mr Aufrey. But I am afraid I cannot-

AUFREY

But--

DESANGE

If you'll excuse me, sir. I have some business I must attend to in town. I'll be back for the twins in several hours.

Desange politely courtesies the farmer, and walks away.

Aufrey frowns as he watches Desange walk away from him. But is mesmerized by the sight of Desange, walking away.

AUFREY

(mumbling)

I'll excuse you for now, miss. But some day... you will be mine.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD CEMETERY- DAY

Ita arrives at the old cemetery. He gives the space a glance, then he walks in.

He clumsily stumbles through some of the newer graves, like he's not quite sure where he should be going, but he quickly arrives at the section for older graves.

The graves in this section are painfully neglected. Cracked, dusty, and overgrown with weeds and moss. The names on most of the tombstones are too faded to read here, but Ita deftly navigates the area, a sure location in mind.

Within moments, he arrives at a particular grave. Nothing special or unique about it, but he knows that's exactly where he needs to be.

Swimming in melancholy, Ita crouches down, over the grave, and gently sets down the flowers above it. A warm, nostalgic smile crosses his lips. He reaches

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out and his fingers gently caress the name engraved on the stone. Although faded, it's still present enough to just barely read: "Josephine".

Ita reaches into his coat and he pulls out a tiny old flute from the inner pocket. He brings the flute to his lips and, very tenderly, he plays a beautiful tune, the same tune during their first meet. Filled with longing and desperation, the tune plays on.

But Ita's hand suddenly shakes violently, and the flute drops. He grabs his hand in his other one, and we watch, in horror, as the hand transforms uncontrollably.

Festering boils sprout on the hand and it swells disproportionately, with some fingers growing larger than others. But the attack only lasts a moment, and Ita's hand is soon back to normal.

He sighs deeply.

ITA

Well. I guess I can't put it off any longer.

He collects his flute and stands up. He gives one, final glance at Josephine's tomb, then he walks away.

Ita walks around the cemetery a little longer, and he soon comes across a gated area. The area has signs all around it, clearly marking it as a restricted, burial ground.

Ita approaches the front gate, but he's stopped by a guard, a member of the Voodoo Men.

GUARD #1

Sorry. You are not allowed here.

Ita frowns.

ITA

Surely you joke!

GUARD #1

This is an ancient burial ground. No one is allowed in here, even the French Legionnaires respect this. I won't tell you again sir.

ITA

But my grand aunt is in there! Please, just let me go in and-

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GUARD #1

Only sacred members of our society are buried here. Please be on your way.

Ita's hand starts shaking again, and he quickly tucks it into his pocket. He stares behind the guard at a looming large African oak tree, his target, surrounded by religious and Voodoo symbols and grave markers.

ITA

Alright.

He turns away without any further debate and walks away. Once he's out of the guard's line of sight, he doubles back to the gated area, this time approaching from the side. He keeps a careful eye on the guard as he investigates the fence, and he soon finds a gap where the bars are a little farther apart.

Carefully, he approaches the gap and manages to squeeze through.

He sighs in relief, but a rash of boils quickly bubbles up across his face. These boils, unlike the ones on his hands, burn him. Unable to cry out lest he alerts the guard, he grits his teeth in pain.

An iron-like determination rises on his face, and he sneaks away, deeper into the sacred burial ground, approaching the oak tree.

CUT TO:

EXT.- RIVERSIDE- DAY

Desange approaches a tree, rooted along a peaceful, idyllic riverside with a small waterfall in the distance. She shelters from the morning sun under the tree's shade, heaving a great breath of relaxation. Deep down, she is relieved to finally have some time to herself.

She looks out over the natural landscape, soaking in the beauty of nature.

DESANGE

(In broken French, with some difficulty)

Cet endroit ces magnifique.

She frowns, uncertain of whether her phrasing is correct or not. She repeats the phrase a few times as she digs into a satchel and, a moment later, she pulls out a small book.

She quickly flips through the book, and she smiles in delight.

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Written in black and white, right there in her book, “This place is beautiful” “Cet endroit est magnifique”. She was right!

She frowns slightly, concocting another phrase.

She practices more phrases in both English and French, relaxing under the shade of the tree.

CUT TO:

EXT. SACRED BURIAL GROUND- DAY

At a relatively discrete corner of the burial ground, Ita digs a hole near the tree. His clothes are messy. He’s panting heavily, sweating profusely, and, to make matters worse, his skin is covered in festering boils. A truly horrific sight.

Regardless, Ita keeps digging through the dirt. Eventually, his shovel hits something hard and immovable, a sacred root. Ita smiles victoriously, though it looks grotesque.

A solemn, reverent look rises on his face as he slowly kneels towards the hole he just dug, offering a prayer in that strange, ancient language.

ITA

Pectus mihim conferus munduna iterumia
plura oriri a ruina mortiso. Liceatus mihi, et in
aeternaeum vitae resurrectione
suscitabitur facultas mea sacrum officium.
Quaeso, o di immortales terra det vitam
novam humili vasa pretiosa!

As Ita repeats his strange, chanting prayer, his body starts to renew as if to hold the shape that he has been holding for far too long.

His voice raspy and harsh, he fervently carries on with his prayer. Slowly, life begins to flow again into his body, a borrowed corpse seeking replenishment

GUARD #2

You there! What are you doing in the sacred
burial grounds?

A different short, chubby, angry-looking guard swiftly approaches Ita.

Shock expresses itself on Ita’s face as the guard nears him.

ITA

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Stop! Don't come any closer.

But the guard doesn't listen. He steps closer to Ita, brandishing his beating cane from his belt buckle.

GUARD #2

Are you a grave robber? We've caught you now-

The guard takes a step closer to Ita, grabbing him and immediately yelps out in horrific pain. He drops the cane and quickly shrinks back. He looks a little closer at Ita and realizes he is slightly deformed. The guard, via his touching Ita, begins his own transformation and begins to grow sharpened teeth. Panic washes over him and he yells out in fear, alerting the other guard

GUARD #2

Witchcraft! This man is practicing witchcraft!

A group of Voodoo Men and their affiliates join the commotion the sacred burial grounds.

The first guard arrives to Ita's position, while seeing a half man, half wolf figure run off in the distance, transforming right before his eyes. Guard #2 will never be heard from again.

Having had his corporal ceremony interrupted, Ita is slightly deformed and begins to run away, in hopes of his full recovery later.

The gathering of people chases after him scowling fiercely and brandishing all sorts of canes and pitchforks.

They furiously chase after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERSIDE- DAY

Desange is resting peacefully in the shade, her French book closed on her lap. The wind gently blows over her.

She smiles warmly, grateful for the afternoon away from the orphanage. A calm, relaxed sigh escapes her lips, as she shifts into a more comfortable position.

A distant ruckus- a mob of outraged, shouting people, drifts into her ear, carried by the wind. She frowns as she hears the shouts and yells.

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Desange tries to ignore the villagers, but the sound of their furious shouts, yells and accusations only grows louder.

A series of gunshots suddenly bang into her ear drums, and she's unable to ignore the noise anymore. Her eyes flutter open and she looks out at the shocking scene.

A bit of a distance away from her, over on the bridge, she sees a man running for his life from the group of villagers and some patrolling French Legionnaires, leftovers from the 1st and 2nd Franco-Dahomean Wars, that have joined in on the chase. Desange notices the man's clothes as the stranger she ran into on the way to Ogiso Farm.

The intense pursuit of a "witch" is the only thing the rag-tag mob has in common, and they're all directed at Ita.

Desange tries to intervene from afar. Infuriated, she quickly stands up, heading towards the commotion.

DESANGE

Hey, leave that poor man alone, stop shooting!
You animals!

Desange's powerful voice is overpowered by the large mob's booming shouts.

But at the front of the mob, a young, dark-skinned man, a French Legionnaire, hears her. He recognizes her voice, and he slows down to look for her.

RANDOM MAN

Is that... Miss Desange?

With the distraction, Ita takes a gap and plunges into the river. He has escaped the mob.

The mob watches helplessly as Ita disappears beneath the waters. They look on for a few moments.

MOB MEMBER

Do you think he survived that?

MOB MEMBER #2

I don't know. The river is not too deep. If the fall didn't kill him, he'll definitely drown to death.

The mob dissipates slowly. As they leave, Desange and the dark-skinned French Legionnaire approach each other.

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DESANGE

Antoine! What's all this nonsense about?

Antoine smiles wryly, hiding a bit of embarrassment away from Desange.

ANTOINE

Aunty Desange, what are you doing out here all alone? That man was accused of witchcraft. They say he turned a Voodoo Man to stone and the man has gone missing.

Desange frowns, clearly displeased.

DESANGE

How could you believe such nonsense? If only my grandma could hear such things.

Antoine shrugs, unmoved.

ANTOINE

With all those fairy tales she used to tell us about demons, it's no wonder I believe in witchcraft.

Desange laughs heartily.

ANTOINE

Do you still remember her favourite one? About that demon named Ida, or Idie or something.

DESANGE

Ita!

Desange yells out, and she suddenly remembers something about two troublesome boys...

ANTOINE

Yes, that's the one. She used to tell us about him all the...hey, where are you going?

Desange rushes to gather her book and all the other things she's left beneath the shade of the tree.

DESANGE

I have to fetch the twins from Ogiso farm.

Antoine frowns in concern.

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ANTOINE

Ogiso... isn't that the farm that creepy old man who's been trying to marry you owns?

Desange nods, grimacing in disgust.

ANTOINE

What are the twins doing there?

DESANGE

They stole from him, so they're volunteering there for a month as punishment. Anyway, I really must get going!

Desange finally has all her stuff gathered neatly in her satchel, and she rushes off from Antoine, towards Ogiso farm.

ANTOINE

Wait! I'll come with you.

He rushes to catch up with her, but his long legs easily match her stride and they walk side by side.

They keep conversing as they walk towards Ogiso Farm, their conversation gradually fading out.

ANTOINE

So how is old Berthe doing?

DESANGE

That's Auntie old Berthe to you, still. But she's as sweet as ever. Did you know one of her nephews recently got a job with the government?

ANTOINE

No, that's wonderful, she must be so proud.

DESANGE

And I heard you got engaged!
Congratulations...

EXT. OGISO FARM- LATE AFTERNOON

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Back at the farm, the twins are working faithfully. Their clothes are a little dirty, but their faces carry fiercely determined scowls, clearly absorbed in their tedious work.

INT. OGISO FARM- KITCHEN- LATE AFTERNOON

A table is set up with some pork, veggies and other dinner foods. Really decadent stuff for the time period. A cook bustles around, fixing things up here and there, while Aufrey sits at a seat near a window, overlooking his farm. He seems sulky.

COOK

She will be here, sir. She wouldn't just abandon the boys.

AUFREY

I know that. But what's taking her so long? She was meant to be back at least an hour ago.

The cook heads over to a pot and prods it gently with a wooden spoon.

COOK

Well, at least this gives us time to let the garbure set.

Aufrey grunts. Impatient, he stands up and heads outside, towards the twins.

EXT. OGISO FARM- LATE AFTERNOON

As Aufrey nears the twins, he notices Desange approaching from around the corner,

AUFREY

Alright boys, looks like your sweet Aunty Desange's back.

A vaguely confused, suspicious frown draws over twins' faces as they notice the way Aufrey glares at Desange.

TWIN #1

Why do you look at Aunty Desange like that?

As Desange nears the farm, her companion, Antoine comes into view. Aufrey scowls sourly.

AUFREY

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Shut up. Who is that man she's walking with?

The twins both look at Antoine. They screw their faces up trying to remember the man.

TWINS

It's Antoine!

The twins put down their tools and rush towards Antoine, but Aufrey reaches out and grabs one of the twins, who's just a little slower than the other, by the shoulder.

Aufrey's eyes bore into his eyes with a shallowly hidden, seething jealousy that frightens the young boy.

AUFREY

Hold on. Who is this Antoine man?

TWIN #2

He's Desange's husband!

Stunned. Aufrey is just stunned. Devastated, in fact.

The twin uses the moment to slip from the stunned farmer's grip. He too runs towards Desange and Antoine, who are now just a few metres away.

ANTOINE

And look at how big you've grown!

Antoine reaches down and scoops up the excited Eugene into his arms.

DESANGE

Well, these two seem to have enjoyed themselves.

AUFREY

Yes! They are definitely learning their lesson.

He levels a frigid glance at Antoine.

AUFREY

And it's nice to meet your husband.

He extends his hand out towards Antoine.

Antoine and Desange share a glance with each other, then they burst out into laughter.

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Aufrey is not amused.

AUFREY

What's so funny?

DESANGE

Aufrey, Antoine isn't my husband. Where did you get such a silly idea?

A mix of relief and embarrassment makes its way onto Aufrey's face.

AUFREY

Well, the twins said...

Too embarrassed to finish the sentence, Aufrey splutters into silence.

Understanding dawns on Desange's face

DESANGE

Oh! Well, when we were younger, Antoine here was the only child my age at the orphanage. So, naturally, we used to play together all the time. The whole "Husband" thing came from the kids teasing us about that. And now he's helping the French take over our country.

Antoine feels the sting of Desange's jab at him and smiles.

That clears away Aufrey's last doubts. Relief floods through his body. His whole demeanour changes, and he suddenly looks at Antoine much kindlier.

AUFREY

Oh, well nice to meet you, sir!

ANTOINE

And you.

Antoine politely smiles and nods at Aufrey.

But Aufrey's little social faux pas still embarrasses him greatly.

AUFREY

But, yes! The twins were great today! It will be my pleasure to have them here for the rest of the month.

DESANGE

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That's lovely to hear.

Aufrey shuffles awkwardly on his feet, clearly itching to say something.

DESANGE

Well, if that's all then, we'll be on our way.

AUFREY

Actually, uh... The cook has prepared a lovely lunch, why don't you join me, Desange?

Desange knew this would happen, but she's prepared. She politely, kindly even smiles at the old farmer.

DESANGE

Thank you, but no. I really would not feel well eating without the other children at the orphanage.

Aufrey is dissatisfied, and clearly not willing to take "no" for an answer.

AUFREY

We can also send the kids some food on a wagon, join me.

Desange, a little uncomfortable, carefully chooses her next words.

DESANGE

That's very kind of you, sir. But, no. If I leave old Aunty Berthe alone with the children too long, I fear they might drive her to a heart attack! See you next time.

She turns away from Aufrey, and he panics. He reaches out and grabs her arm.

Antoine, looking over the situation, frowns and sets the twins down.

AUFREY

I'm sure she'll be fine for just an hour longer. Just stay, please.

Hints of anger dance in Desange's eye as she looks at Aufrey's offensive hand.

ANTOINE

The lady said no, sir.

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Antoine, a whole head taller than Aufrey, steps forward and stands intimidatingly over him.

A brief stalemate, but Aufrey realizes he won't get his way today. He releases Desange, and he storms off in a huff.

AUFREY
(mumbling)
Some people just have no gratitude.

Desange, Antoine and the twins leave Ogiso Farm in a strange, tense silence.

ANTOINE
That man gives me the creeps. What do you think about letting me bring the twins over for the rest of the month?

Desange is visibly relieved.

DESANGE
That would be wonderful. Are you sure it won't burden you?

Antoine smiles teasingly.

ANTOINE
Of course not. Patrolling these lands for insurgent behaviour is pointless. It's my pleasure to give back.

CUT TO:

INT. OGISO FARM- KITCHEN- LATE AFTERNOON

Aufrey walks into his kitchen in a rage, slamming the door behind him.

The cook, quite used to his temper tantrums and wildly swinging moods, only gives him a casual glance in response.

COOK
She turned down your invitation, sir?

Aufrey frowns, irritated by the clear schadenfreude in the cook's voice.

AUFREY
Yes. Now, go away! I need some time to myself, and I'm hungry!

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The cook obediently puts their cutlery down, and walks out of the room.

COOK

As you'll have it, sir.

Alone in the kitchen, Aufrey stewes in his own anger a little bit. More than anything, he just feels disappointed to be rejected again.

While he's stewing, he hears the door creak open. His anger uncontrollably rushes to his throat.

AUFREY

I thought I told you I need to be... Oh. It's you.

He swallows his anger. Although he's still frustrated, he knows he must not let that show to the man at the door. A slight tint of fear falls over him as the man enters.

A member of the Voodoo Men enters Aufrey's presence.

VOODOO MAN

That woman helped a witch escape, today. A witch that desecrated our sacred burial grounds. We need you to help teach her a lesson. Deal with her for us and the gods will continue to bless you abundantly.

The Voodoo Man gestures towards the room insinuating that Aufrey is an active believer and benefactor of the Voodoo Men.

Aufrey scoffs at the man.

AUFREY

After all these years, you think I'd hurt someone I love? What do you mean she helped a witch escape?

The man frowns disappointedly at Aufrey. But his frown lacks seriousness, as if he's humouring a child.

VOODOO MAN

She is a witch sympathizer. Teach her a lesson for us. She knows you and trusts you. We won't curse a caretaker of our children but she must learn her place. Teach the non-believer not to interfere with us again.

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Aufrey shuffles uncomfortably in his seat. He wants to say something, but all he manages is an exasperated sigh.

AUFREY

Alright. And what of this witch? Is that going to be a problem for us?

VOODOO MAN

Let us worry about that.

They continue their discussion into the night.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- EARLY EVENING

Desange, the twins, and Antoine arrive at the orphanage with the setting sun on their backs.

The twins are absolutely spent. Both Antoine and Desange arrive with a twin on their backs.

The front door bursts open and Aunty Berthe shuffles through, surrounded by a constellation of small children. Some older than the twins, some younger.

But one thing they all have in common is their old, ill-fitting clothes- a sure sign of hand-me-downs- as well as very simple, coarse hair and ashy ankles.

Antoine winces slightly as he sees the poor children.

But poor as they may look, they are rich in spirit, and they immediately rush to Antoine and Desange, shouting and yelling excitedly in a cacophonous mess!

CHILD #1

Look! It's Antoine!

CHILD #2

Who's Antoine?

CHILD #3

Who cares?! Can he give us a piggyback also?

Desange warmly smiles at the children, patiently dealing with them.

DESANGE

It's a long walk, they're tired.

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CHILD #3

If I go volunteer at Ogiso farm, can I get a piggyback ride too?

Desange laughs heartily.

DESANGE

Sorry, I'm afraid the ride is full!

All the noise rouses the twins from their slumber. Sleepy and sheepish as two newly born babies, they groggily slide off from their backs.

Although slightly overwhelmed, Antoine's heart warms at the children's liveliness. He glances at Desange, who's smiling back warmly at the young children. A smile breaks out on his own face. They may be poor, but this is a good home.

AUNTY BERTHE

My, oh my. If it isn't Antoine himself! I was beginning to think you'd forgotten about us.

Aunty Berthe gives Antoine a great big hug, and Antoine complies like a baby.

ANTOINE

Never! DeeDee's is forever my home.

AUNTY BERTHE

Well, if it's your home, surely you can stay for dinner, can't you?

Antoine looks out at the darkening sky. It will soon be night and I need to check in with my squad and wife. He hesitates.

DESANGE

Come on, some of these children don't even know who you are!

Antoine hesitates for a moment longer, his mind at heart playing tug-o'-war. His eyes dart between Desange, Aunty Berthe and the children of the orphanage, happily playing with the twins.

His heart wins.

ANTOINE

Well, okay. Margaret will just have to understand.

AUNTY BERTHE

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Who's Margaret?

DESANGE

His fiancé!

Surprised, and clearly curious for more, Aunty Berthe enters the building with Antoine, Desange, and all the kids.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- DINING HALL- NIGHT

Aunty Berthe dishes up a hearty meal of vegetable stew, and a single lump of dry, almost stale, bread into an old, chipped bowl.

Although the meal is modest, Antoine enthusiastically accepts it.

ANTOINE

Ah, your famous vegetable stew! How I have missed this.

Aunty Berthe serves the rest of the children while speaking with Antoine.

AUNTY BERTHE

Oh, you flatter me. I'm sure Margaret makes wonderful and fancier meals for you.

ANTOINE

Yes, but yours will always have a special place in my heart.

DESANGE

Don't listen to him, Aunty Berthe. He's just trying to get away with not visiting for so long.

Finally done dishing for the children, Aunty Berthe laughs dismissively as she takes her own seat.

AUNTY BERTHE

Oh, all children grow and go on to live their own lives. I'm just glad we helped make it a good one... Josephine would have been proud.

A solemn, warm nostalgia passes between the adults. The children, having no clue who Josephine is, blankly stare at each other.

AUNTY BERTHE

But, enough about that...

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The sombre moment amongst the adults passes, and they dig into their meal.

AUNTY BERTHE

So, you never did tell me why you were so late? Surely the trip to Ogiso Farm wasn't so long?

Desange and Antoine share a glance. Some left-over anger is still on Desange's face, while embarrassment is clearly on Antoine's.

DESANGE

Well, why don't you tell her?

Aunty Berthe looks expectantly at Antoine, whose embarrassment only grows thicker.

ANTOINE

Well, it's kind of a funny story when I think about repeating it, but uh earlier in the day, there was this event that-

DESANGE

He was chasing a man accused of "witchcraft".

Surprise and disbelief flashes across Berthe's eyes.

BERTHE

Really!

She glances around, making sure the children aren't listening too carefully, then she whispers.

AUNTY BERTHE

I thought you knew better.

Desange breaks up laughing off to the side.

DESANGE

I told him it's because he loved Granny's stories too much!

ANTOINE

Now, Aunty Berthe. I know it sounds a little ridiculous.

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AUNTY BERTHE

Antoine... It's the beginning of a new century! I hope those Voodoo Men haven't corrupted you during your countryside patrols.

ANTOINE

I know, but if you had seen this man accused of witchcraft, you would have joined the chase too!

The dinner and discussions continue into the evening.

FADE TO:

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- OFFICE- LATE AFTERNOON

A few weeks later.

The office is small, cramped almost. And it's modestly furnished. Desange sits behind the sole desk in the room. Thick worry lines sprawl all over her forehead. Clearly, she's stressed.

DESANGE

Oh my god... how will we get out of this?

A knock on the door, Aunty Berthe pops her head in.

AUNTY BERTHE

Sorry to disturb you, but there are men at the door.

Desange sighs.

DESANGE

Probably more debt collectors.

She dreads meeting with the men, yet she drags herself out of her seat and makes her way out of the office.

INT./EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- FRONT DOOR- DAY

The front door swings open to reveal:

A government official, dressed in a plain, but neat work suit. The man has the type of face you couldn't remember if you tried, but he has a barely hidden, excited smile on his face. Next to him is a familiar man. He resembles the man

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that Desange previously ran into and the individual chased by Antoine and the mob. However, his skin tone is different...he is of a mixed-race complexion and in a finely stitched suit. He gazes out curiously at the many cracks and chips to the orphanage's structure.

Desange is immediately fascinated by this man. Although she cannot tell what, something about him is vaguely familiar. Attractive. So fascinated by this man she is, that she barely hears Mr Martin calling out to her.

MR MARTIN

Ah, Desange. How good it is to see you again!

She snaps out of her short trance, and places her mind back on Mr Martin. An old friend of the orphanage, Desange is only too happy to see him. They embrace politely.

DESANGE

Mr Martin! To what do we owe this pleasure?
I'm sorry, but your guest looks very familiar.

MR MARTIN

You must excuse my rudeness, good lady, but time is short, and I have many matters to attend.

He steps aside, gesturing towards the patient guest. The man finally looks at Desange. His gaze is intense. Longing. It takes her breath away

MR MARTIN

This is Dita. He is from a family that does lots of charity work on the continent, and he has taken an interest in DeeDee's.

Desange, surprised, impressed and grateful, rushes to greet Dita. She does not suspect that he is the same individual that she came across previously on 2 different occasions.

DESANGE

Why, good day to you sir.

Desange offers Dita her hand to shake. He softly pulls it to his lips and offers a gentle kiss over the back, the entire time maintaining eye contact with Desange.

DITA

Good day, indeed.

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Noticing the strange, electric atmosphere between the two, Mr Martin coughs uncomfortably.

MR MARTIN

Dita's foundation, and his family, has been very generous to the provisional government, and he has personally requested to oversee the complete renewal of DeeDee's orphanage.

Desange is shocked by these new developments.

MR MARTIN

In addition, with the ongoing conflicts between the French and the splinter groups, having a man might deter any hooligans from unsavoury designs on your orphanage. Anyway, I must get going now. I trust you and Dita will get along famously.

Mr Martin tips his hat at Desange and Dita, then he walks away without another word.

Left alone with Dita so suddenly, Desange is at a loss on what to do.

DITA

Well. Won't you at least invite me in?

Desange giggles at her own silliness.

DESANGE

Of course. In fact, I'll give you a tour!

Desange steps aside, allowing Dita into the orphanage. He walks in as if in familiar territory.

Desange approaches the man inside. She follows his gaze, and they find a portrait of Grandma Josephine hanging on the wall at the end of the passage.

Josephine, in the portrait, is old with greying hair and a wrinkled face, but there is no denying it is her. His eyes carry on a reminiscing glance.

DESANGE

That's my grandmother, Josephine.

Desange draws closer to Dita. Standing side-by-side, they admire the portrait.

DESANGE

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She founded this whole place for children who had nowhere to go. She was an orphan as well in France but after coming of age she relocated back to her deceased parents' country, here. Her path is very similar to many of the children's here. She's my hero.

Dita stares at the portrait, melancholy and nostalgia battling on his face.

DITA

People like her... they make me believe this world still has a few kind people.

Desange nods in agreement. She shares a moment with Dita, just admiring the portrait.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- DAY

Desange takes Dita through into the orphanage.

DESANGE

But I must say, trying to fix the orphanage? I'm really not sure you're prepared for what you're getting yourself into.

Dita smiles smugly, his face full of confidence.

DITA

Try me.

Desange gives Dita a tour of the whole orphanage, ticking off areas that need replacing as she goes.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- KITCHEN- DAY

Desange opens a cupboard, revealing an old, rusty pipe- leaking horribly into a protective dish, much to Dita's surprised concern.

DESANGE

That pipe needs fixing.

Dita nods in agreement.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- CHILDREN'S DORM- BOYS- DAY

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Desange knocks opens one of the wardrobe's drawers, but instead she lifts it clean off its hinges.

DESANGE

So does this wardrobe. And most of the furniture.

Dita nods thoughtfully.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- ATTIC- DAY

Pieces of insulation dangle from the roof and some fall out. Dust swirls around. Dita coughs lightly.

DITA

I don't imagine this to be perfectly safe.

DESANGE

Well, we've been petitioning the government for money to fix all of this for a while, but they haven't sent any and here we are!

Dita walks around the attic, casting his gaze everywhere. He approaches a window and he looks out contemplatively. From here, he has an oblique view of the entire orphanage.

Desange tentatively approaches him.

DESANGE

So, while I appreciate your concern, Mr Dita, I worry you may underestimate the amount of effort this little old orphanage needs.

Dita sharply gazes back at her, an intense, burning fire in his gaze. Framed against the light pouring in through the window, Dita's powerful silhouette gives off a heroic image.

DITA

No matter the effort, I am committed to taking care of this orphanage. The children deserve this much at least... and so do you.

Desange's breath catches in her throat. Butterflies swirl in her stomach. For a moment, she doesn't quite know what to say.

But then.

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A window breaks somewhere nearby, interrupting their moment. Almost immediately, a child starts crying, shocking and worrying Desange almost to death.

She turns away from Dita and quickly dashes off without another word. Dita wordlessly follows.

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- BACK YARD- DAY

Outside the sun shines brightly. A radius of young children forms around a young girl, roughly eight years old, with a bleeding thumb, bawling her eyes out.

CHILD #!
We have to tell Aunty Desange!

A disturbance pushes the gathered children apart.

DESANGE
What's going on here?

Desange comes through. She sees the child on the floor, bleeding through her thumb. She looks around. Quickly analysing what's happened.

There's a hole in one of the windows, and a ball close by. The ball has a slight bit of blood on it. She looks around the children, and instantly spot a few of them with dusty, muddy or ashy feet.

Anger, reprimand, sympathy... a variety of emotions flash by Desange's face. Her words catch in her throat.

Dita, in the background, looks on. Curious on how Desange will respond.

She finally settles on kindness. She lightly sighs.

DESANGE
What happened?

Two nearby boys tense up. Guilt spelled out on their faces as broad as day.

DESANGE
Go fetch the first aid kit.

Relief softens their bodies, they nod obediently.

BOYS
Yes, Aunty Desange!

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They quickly dash towards their house, but as they pass close by Desange, she yells at them.

DESANGE

We will talk about your role in this later!

Their eyes bulge, but they dare not stop now. They quickly run into the house, panicking and fearful, but also apologetic and guilty.

Meanwhile, Desange tenderly approaches the young girl. She kneels down next to the girl, only an arm's reach away.

DESANGE

Oh, my darling. What happened?

The little girl sniffles, but she frantically responds.

LITTLE GIRL

The boys and I were playing kickball but then I kicked it too hard and it broke the window so I went to fetch it. They told me not to do it because I'm a girl, but then I told him girls can do anything boys can and then I reached in. I grabbed the ball but when I tried to pull it out, I cut myself.

Desange gently cuddles the young, panicked little girl.

DESANGE

It's okay, my baby. It's okay.

The boys return and hand Desange the first aid kit. She starts by taking out a tiny, delicate pair of tongs.

DESANGE

Show me where you were cut.

The young girl's eyes widen in horror at the site of the scissors. She starts panicking, trying to wiggle away from the scissors.

LITTLE GIRL

I'm sorry for breaking the window, auntie Desange!

Dita comes over and tries to console the girl but she becomes defensive to his surprise.

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DESANGE

Her name is Stephanie. She was left here last year after her abusive dad killed her mom and ran away. It's nothing personal to you.

Desange's face softens greatly.

DESANGE

It's okay, sweetheart. We're not going to hurt you. Calm down.

But the little girl remains defensive.

Softly, Dita begins playing a gentle tune in the background.

The little girl slowly calms down, Dita approaches. He crouches down near the girl and looks her in the eyes.

Without speaking, he whistles a short little tune. He repeats the tune twice. The third time he whistles it, he stops halfway through and looks expectantly at Stephanie.

Stephanie, although slightly confused, hesitantly whistles the second half to complete the tune.

Dita smiles. Positively delighted. He whistles the tune again, and he gestures to Stephanie as he does: join me, he suggests.

Stephan smiles right back, and she whistles along with him. Now, both of them are whistling this wonderful, warm tune.

As they do, Dita motions to Desange.

Desange is astounded. Absolutely gobsmacked. So, this was how to calm down a child having a panic attack!? She cannot believe it, but she snaps out of her stupor quickly. Stephanie is still hurt, after all.

She swiftly (but also cautiously) approaches Stephanie with the tiny tongs.

DESANGE

I'm just going to use these to remove the glass so I can bandage you, okay?

Still whistling along, Stephanie nods her head, and holds out her hand to Desange.

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Desange proceeds to remove the big piece of glass sticking out of Stephanie's arm. She washes it down with soap and water, and wraps it in a bandage.

Dita, standing slightly back, looks at Desange with a deep admiration and respect.

As she's wrapping, she looks back at Dita.

DESANGE

Well. Children are very brave. Sometimes too brave for their own good. Too many times, maybe. But I care for them and let them do what makes them happy, even if they break things and do wrong sometimes. How else can a child learn, but from their mistakes?

Dita nods, impressed with Desange's magnanimous view on raising children.

DITA

You definitely seem to have your hands full here. I'm glad to have come in time to lend a helping hand.

Desange looks up at him, working hard to suppress a bubbling joy and happiness on her face.

DITA

I mean it. I truly want to help...in no time we'll have this place cleaned up and provide you with the resources you need.

A fire burns in Dita's eye. A fire so bright and so warm it comfortably wraps Desange in its flame.

Sparkles twinkle in her eyes. A vibrant chemistry flow between the two. Nobody can deny it.

STEPHANIE

Are you both going to kiss now?

The kids around them laugh, teasingly.

Desange turns to Stephanie sharply, embarrassment spilling all over her face. Dita coughs dryly and walks away, whistling a small tune.

DESANGE

Why would you say something like that!

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The children all laugh together. The sun shines generously over the old orphanage, carrying the light promise of a bright new day.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE- DAY

On the road, a grumpy farmer Aufrey drives two, troublesome twins towards DeeDee's, in a carriage, which appears in the distance a little way away.

As Aufrey approaches the orphanage, he sees the vague figure of a man working outside.

AUFREY

Boys. Is there an adult man like me living with you all?

The boys mull the question over.

TWIN #1

Yes, over there! That's Dita. He has been helping fix some things. He very much likes Aunty Desange.

Aufrey grinds his teeth in frustration.

The words feel like sandpaper in his throat, but he spits them out anyway.

The boys shake their head.

Aufrey begins contemplating. His eye fixed on the orphanage, he wonders who that man is.

Silently, sulkily, the trio approach DeeDee's orphanage.

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- DAY

The sun hangs high in the sky- its midday. Dita is outside the orphanage, hammering in a new window in.

Desange sits with a small group of children under the shade of a tree. A few of them read from a variety of books, a few more chase each other, laughing and giggling. Just general good times.

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Desange, on the other hand, stares out distractedly towards the distance. Absolutely enraptured, longing and desire wrestle on her face. Clearly, the woman is daydreaming.

A little girl, no older than 13, looks at Desange. Curious, she follows her stare and she finds...

Under the bright, sharp midday light, Dita's dark skin reflects a subtle sheen of sweat, highlighting his muscles as he swings his hammer against the window frame.

Looking back at Desange, the little girl finds an absolutely enraptured look on her face. The little girl giggles lightly to herself.

AUFREY

Desange!

An ugly, harsh shout shocks Desange out of her daydream. In fact, the shout brings the whole orphanage to a standstill.

The children stop playing.

Dita puts his hammer down. Concerned, he regards the approaching Farmer Aufrey.

Farmer Aufrey huffs and puffs his way up to the orphanage. He approaches Dita and jabs out an accusatory finger at him.

AUFREY

Who is this man?

Desange's caught off-guard. Confused even.

DESANGE

Aufrey-

A flash of irritation crosses her face, but she catches a glimpse of the twins by Aufrey's side, as well as all the other, watching children. She forces herself to calm down.

DESANGE

This man is Dita. Our benefactor, and a great friend.

Dita's face melts into a subtle smile. Aufrey pulls Desange aside.

AUFREY

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You must be careful who you befriend. There are talks of witches and demons amongst us and you being a sympathizer...and out of nowhere, this benefactor appears.

Desange scoffs. She doesn't buy it.

Aufrey can tell, and he grows desperate to convince her.

AUFREY

Believe me, Miss Desange! You must be careful and know Ogiso Farm will always be there for you.

Aufrey reaches out to Desange and he grabs her by her delicate arm, much to her surprise.

Desange writhes under his grip, but Aufrey refuses to let go of her.

DESANGE

You're hurting me Aufrey. Let go!

Aufrey's ears are deaf to her pleas.

His grip tightens on Desange.

A vague horror surfaces on Desange's face, but a large shadow suddenly falls over the struggling duo.

Aufrey looks up and he finds Dita staring down at him. Aufrey stops in his tracks, still holding on tightly to Desange.

DITA

See here, sir. I know not what problems you have with me, but I advise you allow the lady her freedom.

Desange's eyes widen in admiration.

Aufrey notices from the corner of his eye. Jealousy and rage quickly build into a frightful sneer.

Without warning, he swings a fist viciously at Dita.

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Dita ducks backwards, allowing Aufrey's fist to sail harmlessly in front of him. The motion is effortless, and when he looks at Aufrey, he gives off an intense, dangerous energy.

Aufrey, suddenly struck by fear, takes a step backwards.

DITA
Release the lady.

Aufrey instinctively follows his orders. He steps back a few more steps, sweating under the pressure. He slowly turns around, clearly meaning to run away, but he can't help giving one last jab to Desange.

AUFREY
You will live to regret this, I guarantee it.

He turns and walks away. Defeated but still proud and righteous.

Dita watches him depart for a few more minutes, then he tosses his attention towards Desange.

Seeing the bruise Aufrey left on her fair skin, he frowns.

Desange stares back at Dita, hopelessly lost in the romance of his eyes. He says something, but she barely registers the words.

DITA
Desange, did he hurt you?

She shakes her head lightly out of her reverie.

DESANGE
Hmh? No. It's not that bad.

They both look down at Desange's bruised arm. No bleeding, but a distant discoloration.

DITA
Still, better we get some ointment on it.

He gazes around.

DITA
Who are the most reliable children here?

Desange thinks for a moment, then she points at three children- two girls and a boy.

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DESANGE

Adele, Eloise, Francois, come here.

The three pointed out children shuffle out of the crowd.

CHILDREN

Yes, Aunty Desange?

DESANGE

I need you to listen to Mr Dita here.

The children glance at Dita, and he smiles warmly, genuinely. They instantly relax.

DITA

Aunty Desange needs some help, get me some ointment and some water.

INT. ORPHANAGE- DESANGE'S OFFICE- DAY

A few minutes later, Desange and Dita are sitting in her office.

Dita quickly, deftly mixes together a variety of green, leafy herbs into the water, and a solution soon forms.

DITA

This should help with your bruises.

Desange watches Dita as he tends to her bruise. A fawning expression on her face. Something about Dita just feels so familiar, so comfortable to her.

She exhales warmly.

Dita looks at her weirdly. A little awkward.

DITA

What is it?

Desange shakes her head, a little coquettish, mostly shy.

DESANGE

Can I ask you something, Mr Dita?

DITA

Sure.

DESANGE

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Out of all the orphanages in this country you could've supported, why ours?

Dita pauses to think for a moment, as if that question has never before crossed his mind.

DITA

I don't know. But I do know, now, that there's just something special about this place.

Desange nods sympathetically, disarmed by Dita's sudden vulnerability.

DITA

And, believe it or not, I know what it's like not to have a home. Nowhere to go and no-one to take care of you.

Nostalgia blends with melancholy on his face as he looks faraway, into the distant past. Memories of snow. Of hunger. Of loneliness.

Desange can hardly believe Dita. She looks at him with eyes equally in awe and in pity.

Dita suddenly turns his head. He's face to face with Desange. A ruler's length away.

DITA

The why is not important. You've been neglected for too long and I'm here to fix that wrong.

Dita finished applying ointment on her bruises a long time ago, yet they still hold on to each other's arms.

Their eyes search each other passionately. Slowly, without a word. They lean in to each other.

Just as their lips are about to meet, though, Dita pulls back slightly.

Desange looks up, Dita quickly glances at her lips, but his eyes return to hers, silently asking for permission.

Desange nods and, finally, they kiss. A long, passionate kiss in the privacy of Desange's office, under the watchful eye of Granny Josephine, who hangs over the wall.

CUT TO:

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EXT. OGISO FARM- EVENING

Aufrey, mad as a bull, charges his way into his own farm. Stomping and kicking up dust, he makes his way to the front door.

INT. OGISO FARM- KITCHEN- EVENING

The cook is busy with his pots again. He's delicately pouring in spice, but he nearly jumps out of his boots when Aufrey kicks the door in. Clearly in a bad mood.

Noticing the tense situation is out of hand, the cook rolls his eyes, tired of dealing with Aufrey's temper tantrums. He calmly turns to face farmer Aufrey.

COOK

Not a great day, sir?

AUFREY

Shut up. Get out!

The cook nods obediently and walks out the door, mumbling under his breath

But Aufrey doesn't hear him.

The sun sets over Ogiso farm.

CUT TO:

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- DESANGE'S ROOM- MORNING

The rooster sings its morning song in the background.

Desange, snuggled comfortably in her own bed, smiles warmly.

Besides Desange, the bed crinkles, and a soft, musical snort awakens her.

She rolls around to face the source of the disturbance.

DESANGE

Why, good morning there.

Dita, sleeping right besides Desange, mumbles incoherently. Absent-minded, he lifts his arm to cover her body.

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Desange smiles warmly. She's in love. She closes her eyes, drifting back into a peaceful sleep in the arms of her lover.

Outside, the children slowly wake up. They run around the orphanage, shouting as children do early in the morning- glad to be alive.

Within a few moments, a knock at the door interrupts Desange's peaceful sleep.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

TWIN #1

Aunty Desange, are we still going to Ogiso Farm, today?

TWIN #2

Yeah, Farmer Aufrey said that today he'd show us how to ride a horse, to reward us for how good we've been!

Desange groans in displeasure.

DESANGE

That Aufrey! Of all the farms these brats could've stolen from, why him?

Dita laughs softly besides her.

DITA

If he's such a hassle, I can go to his farm on your behalf?

DESANGE

Just so he can accuse you of being an evil spirit again, and fight you?

The couple laughs warmly, ridiculing Aufrey.

DESANGE

No. I can take care of Aufrey. Can you help Aunty Berthe with watching the children?

DITA

Sure. But here, take this...

Dita reaches out to the bedside and takes out some money from his wallet.

DITA

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This should cover whatever they stole. After today, there will be no need to return to that farm. Pay him off.

Desange's heart melts. She accepts the money gratefully and laughingly

DESANGE

Okay. But I don't think money is an issue with Aufrey, but I'll try to buy him off.

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- MORNING

Dark, gloomy morning. A few clouds hang ominously over the farm.

Dita stands at the exit of the orphanage with Aunty Berthe, waving goodbye at Desange as she walks away from the orphanage with the troublesome twins in tow.

As Desange disappears into the distance, Dita turns to the friendly old Aunty.

DITA

So, how can I help you, today?

Aunty Berthe sways on her feet. The world blurs in front of her.

DITA

Aunty Berthe?

Concerned, Dita nears Aunty Berthe.

Her eyes roll back and she collapses, breathing in hard, ragged breaths.

Dita races to catch her. He puts two fingers on her neck. Worry deepens on his forehead.

CUT TO:

EXT. OGISO FARM- LATE MORNING

Desange and the twins arrive at Ogiso Farm. The farm is eerily empty.

The clouds deepen in darkness, and the wind beats furiously. Flickers of lightning meander within the distant clouds.

The twins look around, chills slither up their spines.

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TWIN #1
Where is everyone?

Desange looks around, frowning.

DESANGE
I don't know honey. Let's go look for Mr.
Aufrey.

They approach the main house of the farm. The door swings open. The cook stands at the boundary.

COOK
Welcome to Ogiso Farm, unfortunately we
don't have any chores for the children to do
right now.

TWINS
But the horses!

The cook smiles in response.

COOK
If you're so eager to learn to ride a horse, I can
give you a quick lesson. Miss Desange, there's
a small breakfast for you to enjoy while you
wait.

The cook gestures for Desange to enter. She hesitates.

DESANGE
Is Mr Aufrey around? I have something to give
him.

COOK
He's out, at the market at present. But if you're
willing to wait a little, I'm sure he'll return.

Desange nods, then she heads inside.

The cook passes her, closing the door as he steps through.

INT. OGISO FARM- KITCHEN- MORNING

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Desange shivers. Not cold, exactly, more creeped out. She takes a few, cautious steps into the kitchen. She finds a fine banquet of food laid out for her on the table. She sits at the table, but she eats nothing. Choosing to wait patiently.

Some wood creaks, as if from a heavy step.

AUFREY

What's wrong, dear? Are you not going to eat?

Desange whips around sharply. Finds Aufrey stepping in. She shivers, and rushes to stand.

DESANGE

Farmer Aufrey! What a surprise, your cook said you're at the market.

Aufrey nods absently.

AUFREY

Yes, well, plans change.

Aufrey walks around the room. At the door, he pulls out a key and locks the door with it.

Desange swallows heavily. Obviously, she's beyond creeped out.

DESANGE

Is that really necessary?

AUFREY

I believe it is time you and I had a little talk, Desange.

Aufrey takes a few steps forward. Desange backs away.

DESANGE

If this is about the twins, I am here to settle that matter today.

Quickly, she squirrels into her bag and pulls out the money Dita gave her. Shaking, but trying to hide it, she hands the money to Aufrey.

DESANGE

This should cover the value of whatever the twins stole and your time. Once again, I'm sorry for their behaviour, we will never allow anything like that to happen again.

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Aufrey stares blankly at the money Desange offers him.

AUFREY

You insult me, Desange. Did you get that money from that Dita?

Rage flickers in his eye.

Confusion reflects in Desange's.

DESANGE

Wha- what does that have to do with anything?

AUFREY

Everything! He's using you Desange, don't you see it? I don't trust him.

DESANGE

Not this again.

She rolls her eyes, places the money on the table, then she moves to walk away.

DESANGE

I did not come all this way just to listen to your fairy tales. If you'll excuse me.

Aufrey reaches out and grabs Desange. A maniacal look swirling in his eye. He's excited. Angry. Aroused.

AUFREY

He has you in a spell, Desange. I have to help you out of it.

DESANGE

What are you on about, let me go, Aufrey! Let me go!

Desange struggles against Aufrey, but the short, stout farmer pulls her towards himself. Against her protests, his hands roam all over her body. He thrusts his groin against hers like a dog in heat, panting and grovelling pathetically.

AUFREY

It's a spell, Desange. You'll see when I'm done.

Aufrey tries to strip Desange's dress off. Desange pushes him off, but he's stronger than she is.

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DESANGE

Aufrey, stop, stop!

Desange slaps him furiously.

Aufrey grins deviously. He strips away at her clothes; she fights harder against him.

DESANGE

Stop Aufrey! Aufrey, stop! Stop!

EXT. OGISO FARM- LATE MORNING

Desange's screams echo out through Ogiso farm, but nobody can hear her.

CUT TO:

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- MORNING

Inside the orphanage, in some, random, nondescript room, Aunty Berthe lies on a bed. Breathing heavily. Dita is kneeled next to her with a bucket of water. He soaks a towel in the water and rubs her forehead tenderly.

Aunty Berthe's eyes crack open. She looks around and finds the worried face of Dita.

For a moment, she silently watches him apply the towel to her face.

AUNTY BERTHE

It's a bad sickness. It won't be long now.

Dita nods, as if already expecting this.

DITA

Does she know?

Aunty Berthe shakes her head.

AUNTY BERTHE

I couldn't... I couldn't tell her. She'd be all alone without me.

Dita nods again. As if expecting this too.

Aunty Berthe, tired beyond belief, rests her head back.

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AUNTY BERTHE

I've lived long. And I've lived well. I don't think I can complain.

DITA

DeeDee's is in good hands...we will carry on Josephine's and your legacy.

Dita then smiles at her and bids her farewell in Aunty Berthe's native language as she passes away.

Aunty Berthe looks to Dita in shock and passes away.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- EVENING

Desange walks into DeeDee's with the twins. She's down, depressed.

Dita breaks the negative news to her and she breaks down crying.

She shuffles through the orphanage, barely hearing the screaming children all around her. She makes her way to her room. She looks around. She collapses into her bed. Looking out at the bright evening through the window, tears fall from her eye as the sun sets.

CUT TO:

THREE MONTHS LATER

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- NIGHT

A knock on the door. A moment passes.

DITA

Who is it?

DESANGE

It's me...I have some news my dear.

A pause.

Desange rubs her stomach, suggestively, and looks at Dita.

Dita smiles broadly, not sure of what Desange is indicating.

DITA

Desange...I don't understand.

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DESANGE

I think I'm pregnant.

Dita looks closer, observing a little weight gain on Desange and arrives at the same conclusion.

Dita is shocked. Absolutely shocked.

DITA

How, how can this be?

DESANGE

Well, this is generally what happens when two people do what we did-

DITA

Are you saying this is my child?

Dita stares Desange directly in her eye. Accusation, hostility, betrayal, they all swirl endlessly on his face.

Desange hesitates for a moment before she answers.

DESANGE

Yes.

The word hangs in the air like an executioner's blade. Dita, unsure of how to react, hugs Desange tightly.

They lay down together in bed to digest the news and tears stream down Desange's face. As she falls asleep in Dita's arms, Dita remains awake contemplating his next steps.

He turns over to Desange and rubs her stomach. He begins mumbling under his breath as if to pray over her pregnancy. In fact, he is placing a curse on her pregnancy. When finished, he whispers in her ear, as she sleeps.

DITA

Until we meet again, my love.

Desange rolls over to one side of the bed and Dita kisses her gently as he departs the bed.

Dita exits the orphanage and walks out into the night, abandoning Desange and the children and all that they built together. He is not heard from again.

FADE TO BLACK.

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INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- NURSERY- NIGHT

SEVERAL YEARS LATER

The wind howls furiously outside, while a baby cries vehemently within the orphanage's walls.

Thrashing and bawling in the crib, is the tiniest little albino toddler- a little girl named Estrellita- fighting for her life against a horrifying nightmare.

Desange, sleepless and panicked, runs into the baby's nursery, with only her night dress on. The years have been heavy on her. She's put on some weight, a couple wrinkles. She beelines straight for the crying baby.

In a single, fluid motion, Desange grabs the baby out of her cot and cradles her lovingly in her arms. Her face radiating the natural, loving glow of a mother.

DESANGE

Estrellita, my darling little star! It's okay.
Mommy's here for you.

Estrellita's crying slows down a little, though she doesn't wake up.

Desange carefully holds her in her arms, and she gently traces a little star over the toddler's heart.

DESANGE

Mommy will always be here for you, my
beautiful little star. It's okay, you're safe. It's
only a bad dream.

Desange keeps drawing the star on Estrellita as she consoles her, and the toddler soon calms down.

Estrellita's hand tentatively reaches out to her mother's finger. She grabs hold of the (relatively) massive finger as Desange keeps tracing the star around her heart.

Estrellita stops crying altogether and, a few moments later, she laughs joyfully.

Desange, exhausted but relieved, closes her eyes. She falls asleep cradling her daughter, and Estrellita falls asleep on her mother's bosom.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- MORNING

Desange is sleeping peacefully with her eyes closed, somewhere far off in deep slumber.

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Estrellita, beside her, looks up at her mother- eyes filled with curiosity.

A series of short, sharp knocks against the door shakes Desange's sleep up a little, but she does not awaken.

Estrellita, ever the helpful child, moves to Desange and tries to jiggle her away.

Tired, and not really interested, Desange turns away from Estrellita.

DESANGE

(Sleepy, mumbling)

Just five more minutes, Aunty Berthe... Just five more minutes.

Estrellita giggles at her mother, but the knock comes again. Harder, more urgent this time. The government official, Mr. Martin, who introduced Dita to the orphanage, is at the door.

MR MARTIN

Miss Desange!

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!

MR MARTIN

MISS DESANGE! It's really quite urgent.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!

That finally does it. Desange slowly peels her eyes open. She sits up slowly, looking out groggily at the worn-down building around her.

DESANGE

Com- COMING!

Tired and groggy, Desange pulls herself up and shuffles through the orphanage.

As she goes, we get a chance to see the orphanage and, well... time has not been kind.

Paint is peeling off. Many doors are broken, the ceiling has large, worrisome cracks spreading through it like a spider's net.

And the children, the few who remain, are dressed in even older, more tattered clothes. The entire orphanage gives off a very sad, morose feeling.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!

MR MARTIN

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Miss Desange, we really must- oh.

Desange, tired and overworked, opens the door.

Sympathy softens Mr Martin's face.

MR MARTIN

Oh, you poor woman.

Mr Martin steps forward, as if to hug Desange, but she steps backwards defensively.

DESANGE

Mr Martin, what brings you by?

Martin scrutinizes Desange carefully, more than a little worry shining through his eye.

MR MARTIN

Well, I wanted to check on you. I know things have been awfully difficult ever since old Berthe's passing and Dita's departure.

Desange nods absently.

DESANGE

We're maintaining sir.

The sounds of a piano, vague and unrefined, gently make themselves heard in the background.

MR MARTIN

And the little one? How is she?

DESANGE

Estrllima is doing well. She's taken on well with music and the arts. She's a genius, I tell you. It's just... the nightmares. They won't stop. Most nights I have to sleep with her.

Mr Martin levels a worried look at Desange.

MR MARTIN

You mean Estrellita.

DESANGE

Excuse me.

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MR MARTIN

Just now, you called her Estrllima.

Desange gets a little confused, a little panicked, but she quickly brushes it off.

DESANGE

Oh... Sorry. I must have too much on my mind.
It's a little overwhelming taking care of all this,
all alone.

She gestures to the orphanage around her.

Martin nods sympathetically.

MR MARTIN

I understand, Desange. It can't have been easy
for you to adjust to so many changes, so soon.
And that despicable Dita! Running away from
his responsibility like that. He's no man, but a
coward dressed in a man's skin!

Intense pain shoots through Desange's heart at the mention of Dita. She looks
away, as if hiding from some unfaceable horror.

Martin notices her discomfort. A little embarrassed, he tries to steer the
conversation onto firmer ground.

MR MARTIN

But, on to business. The French liaison
government has agreed to help close this place
down by the end of the year. Of course, that
includes finding a place for all these lovely
children to live.

Desange only grows more downcast.

DESANGE

Are you sure we can't do anything to preserve
my grandmother's legacy?

MR MARTIN

I'm sorry it has come to this, Desange. But the
government is consolidating social services in
the city centre.

DESANGE

Yes, I know. It just all seems... too sudden.

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Desange looks out at the orphanage. Old and falling apart, she is still saddened by the thought of losing it all.

MR MARTIN

But don't worry about you and Estrellita. The government will ensure you receive the best help available to you!

With that, Mr Martin hands Desange a medical pamphlet.

Slightly confused, Desange takes the pamphlet from him. Reading it over, she discovers it to be about "Alzheimer's". A new mental disease she's never heard of before.

She looks at Mr Martin sharply.

DESANGE

Are you suggesting I'm mentally ill, Mr Martin?

Mr Martin shifts uncomfortably.

MR MARTIN

Well, memory and speech loss are a sort of mental illness. And some might say the chronic nightmares Estrellita suffers are too. But I promise, I'm only trying to help.

Desange holds Mr Martin's gaze a moment longer.

Ever so subtly, she nods, folds the pamphlet, and hides it in the hem of her clothes.

DESANGE

What about the children, Mr Martin?

Mr Martin's face brightens slightly.

MR MARTIN

Since most of the children still here are under twelve, it was simple to find homes for them across Europe. A variety of powerful groups and families have expressed interest in helping

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find new homes for displaced children of the War. From France, Austria, even England!

Desange doesn't quite share in Mr Martin's excitement. She nods dully.

MR MARTIN

They will have access to the best education, the best resources, that Europe has to offer. The children will be fine.

Desange smiles weakly.

DESANGE

I'm sure Estrellita will enjoy that greatly.

Mr Martin shakes his head awkwardly.

MR MARTIN

Why, yes. I'm sure we'll have you in a government office in the city in no time! That will surely allow you to provide everything she needs.

Desange levels a hurt, betrayed look at Mr Martin.

DESANGE

What do you mean? My Estrellita won't enjoy the same treatment as other children? Is this because of her nightmares, her skin? Her-

MR MARTIN

Heavens, no!

Mr Martin is horrified at the accusations.

MR MARTIN

Estrellita has the blessing of still having a parent alive, unlike the other children.

Desange calms down.

DESANGE

Oh.

The awkward moment extends into awkward silence. Mr Martin clears his throat.

MR MARTIN

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Well, there will be other government officials soon. They'll handle the logistics of getting all the children moved.

Mr Martin stands to walk away.

MR MARTIN

Things will work out great for you, and for the children. I promise.

Mr Martin reaches out for a hug, but Desange recoils in a mild panic.

Mr Martin hesitates for a moment. Then he walks away, shaking his head sadly with each step.

Desange is left alone in the darkness.

DESANGE

Children!

She yells into the emptiness. Her own voice echoes back at her.

DESANGE

Children! Come here.

The remaining few children in the orphanage, most of them tiny little young ones of no older than 12, slowly gather in front of her.

Desange's own daughter, Estrellita, hides within the throng of the crowd. Watching out at her mother curiously.

DESANGE

Well, children. I have some news for you. All of you are about to get a permanent home!

The children look at each other, confused and uncertain.

DESANGE

It's going to be a great home with a great family...a beautiful home where you will be free to pursue all your dreams! And if you ever need an escape, you can always use hjkjhgiuviu(gibberish).

Her eyebrows scrunch together in confusion. The children start giggling.

DESANGE

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Sorry, children, I'm not sure what has jhsacdu
jkbcdsain ksjabksaj (more gibberish)!

The children burst into bubbling giggles. Some of them imitate Desange's gibberish speech.

DESANGE
Kdckh, kbasdb, jhavcdsv!

Desange, terrified and distraught, rushes out into her own room.

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- DESANGE'S ROOM- DAY

Desange storms into her room, distraught and overwhelmed. She shuts the door behind her.

She looks up at the painting of Josephine, tears in her eyes. Frustrated and defeated, she scribbles together a letter. She folds the letter into an envelope and puts it away. Then, she bawls silently in the corner of the room. All alone.

EXT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- NIGHT

The moon is absent but the stars are free. Under this beautiful tapestry, Desange sneaks out of the orphanage. She gives the building one final, sorrow-filled glance, then she walks away- disappearing into the night.

FADE TO:

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- MORNING

The following morning, the orphanage is a mess. The children riot all over the place. Estrellita cries uncontrollably.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!

MR MARTIN
Desange! Desange! I'm here with a few
officials, please open up!

Estrellita wobbles over to the door, brushing tears off her face as she does. She curiously cracks it open.

Mr Martin is appalled.

MR MARTIN

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Estrellita! Where's your mommy?

Mr Martin scoops Estrellita in his arms. She cries at the mention of "mommy".
Martin's eyes crease into a frown.

He walks around the building, the other official in tow.

MR MARTIN
Desange! Desange!

A bunch of children gather around him.

MR MARTIN
Where is Auntie Desange, do any of you know?

The children shake their heads.

RANDOM CHILD
We're hungry.

Mr Martin frowns, deeply concerned.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
Are there no adults here? What's going on?

MR MARTIN
Desange, this place's official administrator,
seems to have disappeared. Something terrible
must have happened, she even left her
daughter!

Estrellita blankly stares out at the government official over Mr Martin's shoulder.
The official smiles at her, and the toddler smiles back.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
So, what are we going to do?

MR MARTIN
We have to hasten our plans; all these children
need to find homes as soon as possible!

Mr Martin pulls up a chair, makes himself comfortable.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
What are you doing, sir?

MR MARTIN

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Well, we can't very well leave these children unsupervised. We must get started on processing these children sooner than we planned.

We see a TIMELAPSE of the orphanage. Children get packed. Some leave. One by one, it grows emptier.

CUT TO:

A FEW WEEKS LATER

INT. DEEDEE'S ORPHANAGE- DAY

The orphanage is now completely empty. All the children are gone, only Estrellita remains, playing by herself in the corner.

MR MARTIN

Well, now that she's the only one, we best find her a new home personally.

Mr Martin packs all his stuff up, preparing to leave.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL

Will she end up in another place like this?

The government official looks around her, at the frayed, decayed building.

DITA

Not if I can help it.

Surprised, Mr Martin looks up to find a nonchalant Dita strolling towards them. Anger quickly builds up on his face.

MR MARTIN

You, you! How dare you show your face here after all these years? After Desange has left, taken away by the madness?

Dita is nonplussed, he slowly moves towards Estrellita.

Estrellita, ever the curious innocent, looks up at Dita.

DITA

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What happened in the past is not that simple,
and it doesn't matter as much as what will
happen next.

Dita hands Mr Martin a piece of paper as he passes. An official court document,
declaring Dita as the rightful parent and caretaker of Estrellita.

DITA

Besides, I am the closest thing she has to
family.

He crouches down, looking into Estrellita's eyes with a warm familiarity.

Estrellita, as childish as ever, pokes a finger out into his cheek.

Dita smiles.

Mr Martin watches hopelessly from the background as Dita scoops Estrellita in
his arms. She doesn't protest, feeling oddly comfortable with him.

He glances around the orphanage one final time, soaking in nostalgia. Then, he
walks away.

END OF PART ONE

EXT. DITA'S HOME - MORNING - VIENNA -1913

Sweet, classical piano music. The sun shines bright and birds sing happily
outside a pristine, upmarket, Parisian-style home. Dita's home.

INT. DITA'S HOME- DINING ROOM- MORNING

Inside the house, we find a collection of antique musical instruments- the finest
quality, of course- sitting in eye-catching positions.

Dita (mid 50s, refined gentleman) sits at his table with a cup of coffee, reading a
newspaper. The headline on the newspaper reads "Strange Illness spreads
through Europe, doctors baffled!"

The piano music trips up- a wrong note knocks the player off-tempo. She curses.

Dita glances over his newspaper towards a young girl- no older than fourteen-
who sits at the piano, frowning in frustration. The young albino girl, Estrellita,
takes a moment to compose herself. Her fingers glide over the piano's keys as if
stroking an old friend.

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She starts playing again; tapping deftly, articulately at each of the keys. The music is beautiful.

Dita smiles. He goes back to reading his newspaper.

A moment later, the bell to the door rings.

DITA

Don't worry, my little star. I'll get it.

Estrellita trips up again. She looks up at Dita, frowning discontentedly. But his back is turned to her, so he doesn't notice and he just walks to the door.

INT/EXT DITA'S HOME- FRONT DOOR- MORNING

The front door swings open, revealing two grim-faced medical types standing outside.

DR. AUGUSTINE

Good morning, dear say. I'm Doctor Augustine and this is my assistant, Nurse Joy.

Dr. Augustine extends a hand towards dita, Dita shakes it strongly.

DITA

Good day, sir.

DR. AUGUSTINE

We've been trying to track the spread of aphasia across Europe.

DITA

Aphasia?

Visible confusion on Dita's face, impatience on Dr. Augustine's.

DR. AUGUSTINE

Yes. It's a severe illness that affects the brain, I'm afraid. People afflicted with this horrible disease generally lose all their speech abilities in months, even weeks in some cases. Have you seen or heard of anyone encountering this behaviour, lately?

Dita, seemingly scared halfway to death, vigorously shakes his head.

DITA

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A few of the older children at my daughter's school have reported those symptoms, but nobody I know personally. I took it upon myself to home-school her amid all the craziness going on.

A slightly panicked, worried frown creases over Augustine's brow.

DR. AUGUSTINE

Heavens, and your daughter, has she shown any symptoms?

In the background, Estrellita trips over another note. She curses loudly.

Dita is slightly embarrassed.

DITA

No, but sometimes I think it would be better if she had. I'm joking. She's trying to learn a new piece of music I thought her by Manuel Ponce...the song shares the same name with her, coincidentally!

The young nurse, Joy, giggles.

Augustine, stone faced and impassive, reaches into his pocket, pulls out a business card.

DR. AUGUSTINE

Well, if anything happens, send a telegram to this address.

DITA

Sure!

Dita examines the business card: "Dr. Augustine, Specialist on viral infections". The card also includes Augustine's telegram and mailing address.

Augustine, clearly in a hurry, waves Dita away.

Dita watches Augustine and Nurse Joy leave, a bemused twinkle in his eye. When he's sure they're out of sight, he tosses the card carelessly to the side with a slight grunt.

INT. DITA'S HOME- DINING ROOM- MORNING

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Dita walks into the dining room, that same, amused grin still plastered on his face.

Estrellita is still playing the piano, or at least attempting to. She plays beautifully for a little while, all the notes in the right order. She continues practicing Manuel Ponce's "Estrellita" until she gives up and switches to a different tune.

Dita can vaguely recognize the song she's playing. He knits his brows in thought, trying to recall the song's origin.

DITA

Now, where have I heard-

But, too soon, Estrellita trips up again.

INT. DITA'S HOME- LIVING ROOM- MORNING

Frustrated, Estrellita slaps the top of the piano.

ESTRELLITA

Damn it!

The living room is just about adjacent to the dining room. It's slightly roomier, but the big, daunting piano takes up much of the free space.

Dita slightly concerned, walks in.

DITA

What's that song you got there?

Estrellita is silent for a moment.

Dita takes a step closer to her.

DITA

My Little Star?

Estrellita frowns as she hears that.

ESTRELLITA

It's a song mother used to hum and sing.

DITA

Oh.

A tense, heavy silence hangs over the duo. Dita shuffles uncomfortably.

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Estrellita looks Dita dead centre in his eyes.

ESTRELLITA

How did you know my mother?

A breath catches in Dita's throat. He can't hold Estrellita's stare. He turns away, finding a random painting on the wall suddenly all too interesting.

DITA

What do you mean?

Estrellita notices his discomfort. Suspicious, uneasy, she examines him closely.

ESTRELLITA

You must have known her somehow to get custody of me. What was your relationship with her?

DITA

We were close friends. My foundation supported your family's orphanage, DeeDee's for a while...that was the orphanage where she worked, and where you were born.

Estrellita nods. She understands, but she is not satisfied.

ESTRELLITA

Do you know what happened to her?

DITA

No one knows. She just decided to leave, I'm afraid.

Estrellita shakes her head. She doesn't believe it.

ESTRELLITA

Why? Do you think it could be connected to this new brain disease?

At that, Dita turns around sharply. His eyes, wide and alert, bear down on Estrellita mightily.

DITA

How do you know about that?

Now Estrellita shifts in her seat, uncomfortable under Dita's intense stare.

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ESTRELLITA

Well, it's all over the news, and a couple of kids at my school had it, so...

DITA

Yes, yes, you're right.

Calmed, he nods agreeably.

DITA

Well, while I do not know what happened to her, or where she ended up, I advise you to carry on your correspondence with the French government liaison in Benin. They have the best chance of discovering her whereabouts.

ESTRELLITA

Yes, you're probably right.

Estrellita returns to playing the piano, an entirely different song though.

Dita, in a bit of a rush to escape Estrellita's questions, packs up his coat and other travel things.

DITA

Well, I'm just about off to teach, would you like to join me again? My music class misses you.

Estrellita shakes her head. Her mind clearly distant in a faraway place Dita cannot reach.

ESTRELLITA

Not today.

Dita regards her for a moment, trying to pierce into her thoughts. Failing, he picks up his keys and he's off to work.

Estrellita, at the piano, watches Dita exit the house. Once out, she walks over to a nearby pile of non-descript, inconspicuous letters and things. She digs through them, quickly arriving at one from the French liaison office in Benin. The letter is torn on one end, clearly having been opened quite roughly by someone before.

Estrellita tears the letter open once more. In a fury, she reads through it, and the letter says:

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“Thank you for reaching out to the French Liaison Office in Benin! Unfortunately, the information you have requested is classified.

Estrellita tosses the letter aside out of frustration and folds her arms together under her chest.

She spends a moment sulking. But then a lightbulb goes off somewhere in her mind.

She leaps off her seat and makes her way to Dita’s office.

INT. DITA'S HOME- OFFICE- MORNING

The office is relatively spacious and neatly arranged with a couple bookshelves. A great oak table sitting right at attention in the centre of the room.

Estrellita walks in. She’s careful as she steps through the room as if not to leave any footprints or handprints. She makes her way over to a particular drawer built into the side of the table, right besides one of its legs.

Estrellita slowly, carefully, pulls the drawer open. A bunch of papers. She digs through it briefly, still just as careful, and she finds a letterhead template with Dita’s place of employment “Vienna Music Conservatory” written boldly in a stylish front right across the head of it.

Estrellita grins victoriously.

Still careful, she gently worms away a single sheet of paper from the stack of templates. Then she puts everything away as she found it, closes the drawer, and makes her way out of the office. Not a single trace that she had ever been there can be seen.

INT. DITA'S HOME- DINING ROOM- MORNING

Estrellita walks into the dining room and sits herself by the table. She writes slowly, careful not to make any errors on the page. When she’s done, she examines her work meticulously. The letter reads: To whom it may concern. Our foundation was a great supporter of the now-defunct DeeDee’s Orphanage. We request the contact information of the re-settled children in order to conduct investigations into their wellbeing. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

The letter, written on the template, looks sharp and professional. Satisfied with herself, Estrellita folds the letter neatly away into an envelope, and licks several stamps straight onto it.

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TWO WEEKS LATER

INT. DITA'S HOME- AFTERNOON

Estrellita is sitting alone at her piano, carefully picking away at the keys. A knock at the door interrupts her. Excited, she leaps off the piano and sprints to the front door.

A letter slides through the letter-box and lands on the floor. Estrellita greedily picks the letter up. Impatient, she rips the envelope off and her eyes race over the text. She mouths the words as she reads them.

ESTRELLITA

(reading)

Dear Estrellita... thank you for your continued support... unfortunately we cannot disclose that information due to policy.

Her nose scrunches up. Unsatisfied. Frustrated.

ESTRELLITA

(Still reading)

However, we have disclosed the country and city each child has settled in. We appreciate your- NO!

Despair. Disappointment. In a fit of rage, almost a tantrum, Estrellita tosses the offensive, unsatisfactory letter aside.

ESTRELLITA

Now how am I going to find mom?

She slumps into her piano chair. She just sits there for a moment, totally bummed out.

Lifelessly, she knocks a few keys on the piano. The music just falls together, like all the random notes she plays just sound familiar. She plays a few more notes and, before she knows it, she's playing the song her mother used to put her to sleep with.

A small smile crosses her lips as she plays on. She warmly remembers DeeDee's orphanage. Her fingers dance across the keyboard, celebrating the memory of a mother.

But then she stops. Her eyes fixed on a newspaper carelessly discarded on the dining table just a few metres away from her.

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Curious, Estrellita stands up. She approaches the newspaper and picks it up. The headline reads: "Aphasia Spread Worsens!" Below, a list of the most badly affected cities: Paris, France; Seville, Spain; Stuttgart, Germany; Basel, Switzerland... Estrellita examines this list for a very long time.

Slowly, almost fearfully, she walks to the letter she tossed aside. She opens it up and re-examines the countries the children have been moved to. She discovers that several of the children were moved to homes in Paris, Seville, Stuttgart, and Basel.

Estrellita frowns deeply, worried what this might mean. She grabs a piece of paper and starts writing. Her face knit into a tight, thoughtful frown of concentration. Hours pass, but she doesn't notice.

A while later, the door shuffles open.

She wrenches her head away from her work- a paranoid light in her eye. She listens to the approaching footsteps. A moment later, she's relieved to discover its only Dita.

DITA

Hey there, my little star. You look a little spooked.

Estrellita shakes her head, uneasy.

DITA

Well, do you want to help me make dinner?

ESTRELLITA

Sure.

She folds the letter away.

A FEW HOURS LATER

INT. DITA'S HOME- NIGHT

Dita and Estrellita sit at opposite ends of the table, eating supper. At least Dita is. Estrellita pokes at her food dully. Lost in her thoughts.

Dita notices. A slight bit of worry coils around his heart.

DITA

Something wrong with the food?

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Estrellita pokes at her food a little more.

ESTRELLITA
No. Yes. Maybe. It's just...

She sighs, unable to verbalize what's on her mind.

ESTRELLITA
Do you believe in coincidence?

DITA
Maybe. Elaborate.

A pause.

ESTRELLITA
I wrote to the French Ministry in Benin, asking about the children of DeeDee's. Originally, I just wanted to approach one of them and ask about my mother.

Dita nods understandingly, empathetically.

ESTRELLITA
They sent me back a letter with all their current locations. Random places, all over Europe. I didn't think much of it at first, but then I opened one of your newspapers and found a list of places hit the hardest by aphasia and the two lists were exactly the same!

Dita nods again, this time impressed.

DITA
That's a very good investigation, my dear. But you have to remember, correlation is not causation.

Estrellita is excited now

ESTRELLITA
I know. That's why I did further research, and what I found was that there were other relationships as well, look.

Estrellita shifts away from the table, picks up a few articles and some paper, excitedly walks over to Dita to show him.

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ESTRELLITA

This is the list of when the first outbreaks started happening in each of these cities, and this is a list of when each of the children arrived.

She shows two, nearly identical lists to Dita.

ESTRELLITA

And, furthermore, you can clearly see that the rate of infection spiked whenever a new child entered the city as well.

Dita looks at all of Estrellita's research. A slightly amused, proud grin stretches across his face.

DITA

And you did all this research by yourself? I'm proud of you.

Dita smothers Estrellita into a warm hug. Estrellita, blushing from embarrassment, pulls away.

ESTRELLITA

This is serious!

Dita chuckles warmly.

DITA

Well, I suppose it is. But if this aphasia is carried by children from DeeDee's orphanage, how do you explain why you don't have it?

Estrellita pauses, unsure.

ESTRELLITA

Well... I don't know. But the first outbreak in Vienna happened shortly after I arrived here. And the fact that I'm not sick is also strange. All those kids at school caught the illness but I didn't... it just doesn't make any sense!

Estrellita is frustrated. Dita puts a hand on her shoulder.

DITA

This is all great detective work, Estrellita. But I think what you're dealing with is coincidence. If

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not, it's definitely too complex for just the two of us. I think, for now, you should focus your big, beautiful brain on music instead. Let the adults figure out the world-ending disease, okay?

ESTRELLITA

Okay.

DITA

Now come on!

Dita scoops Estrellita up in his arms.

DITA

Let's get going to bed.

ESTRELLITA

(yawning)

Okay.

Dita walks to Estrellita's bedroom with her in his arms. Gently, tenderly, he lays her down to bed.

DITA

You did really well, my little star.

He blows the candle out and exits the room, leaving Estrellita in near complete darkness.

But Estrellita can't sleep. She lays in bed, staring out at the distant moon for a long time.

THE NEXT MORNING

A quick breakfast, Estrellita is still a little out of it. Dita leaves for work, she stays behind again. Time for some serious work, Estrellita gathers up some stationery, coloured pencils and pens and a couple of highlighters, and she sets it all out on the dining table.

Estrellita walks to Dita's office and picks up a map of Europe. She also takes a newspaper out and lays it besides the map on the table. Finally, she collects the list of aphasia victims. Armed with a coloured pencil, she begins plotting the spread of aphasia from DeeDee's orphanage, showing how the disease might have spread outward from the orphanage to all the cities (Stuttgart, Paris, Seville, Basel).

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This routine repeats over a few days. Dita leaves for work, early in the morning, and Estrellita furthers her research into the spread of aphasia.

It's about a week later, in the noon, when Estrellita, sitting at her corner of the dining table, surrounded by coloured pencils and paperwork, leans back in her seat finally satisfied. She looks on at the product of her hard labour, several maps which clearly show how aphasia has spread with DeeDee's orphanage as the epicentre, marked with a big red X.

She makes her way to dita's office and returns with one of his foundation's official letterheads. She sits down at the table, amidst her work, and contemplates what she should write.

Just at that moment, the door clicks. Dita walks in on her.

DITA

Good afternoon.

Dita nods to her, but she's staring off into space. Dita, a little concerned, regards her work space carefully. He notices several maps, each of them highlighted with different coloured pencils. Frowning, he steps forward and reaches out to one.

ESTRELLITA

No!

Her hand slaps Dita's away.

Dita is a little taken aback, but more amused than anything.

DITA

Well, what do you have there, my little star?

Estrellita frowns at the name.

ESTRELLITA

Why do you always call me that? I don't like it.

Dita smiles warmly and ruffles Estrellita's hair, much to her growing frustration.

DITA

It's the direct translation of your name. And you like that, don't you?

ESTRELLITA

Yeah, but still.

She folds her arms sulkily.

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Dita bites back the urge to laugh.

DITA

I see your research has advanced. Any new findings?

At this, Estrellita brightens up proudly.

ESTRELLITA

Yes! I've found tons more correlations and, I know, that doesn't prove causation but it could be a really big clue!

DITA

Absolutely.

ESTRELLITA

So, I'm going to put all my findings together and mail them to the officials, one of those doctors or something. I'm sure they'll be able to-

DITA

Tread carefully, Estrellita.

Dita takes a more serious tone.

Estrellita looks up at him. A bit of fright squeezes around her young heart.

ESTRELLITA

Wha- what do you mean?

Dita, realizing he may be a touch too serious, reverts to a casual, conversational smile.

DITA

Your correlations might lead the government to a causation none of us are prepared to encounter. What if they send researchers to pick you up and study you? Experiment on you. That's not something I could bear to let them do, and I'm sure you-

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ESTRELLITA

I don't mind.

Dita looks on at Estrellita, unhesitatingly folding the letters and maps neatly into an envelope. A strong fork of fear appears on his face: *this cannot happen!*

DITA

My little star, why are you so determined to solve this problem?

Estrellita pauses for a moment, as if she'd never thought of that question.

ESTRELLITA

Well. A part of me feels like, maybe... maybe the reason why mother left had to do with this aphasia, somehow. And if I can help get rid of it, maybe I can bring her back?

She looks up at Dita with the most adorable, tear-filled eyes.

Dita's heart breaks a little.

Estrellita goes back to putting all her research together.

Dita looks on at her, furiously debating something in his mind. With a deep, heavy sigh, he makes his decision.

DITA

Estrellita.

He kneels down on one knee besides her. She's startled by the seriousness in his voice, and on his face.

Tenderly, he places a hand on her shoulder.

DITA

You asked me, some time ago, whether I knew your mother.

Estrellita drops the paperwork she was busy with. Her eyes widen. She's suddenly alert, at attention, hanging on to Dita's every word.

DITA

The truth is. She and I were very close. More than that, we were in love with each other.

Estrellita's absolutely stunned. Her disbelieving eyes are stuck to Dita's.

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ESTRELLITA
Do you mean... You're my father?

A tense pause.

Estrellita suddenly pulls away from Dita, angry and hurt.

ESTRELLITA
Then why did you only show up after my
mother disappeared? Where were you when
she needed you most, and- and-

She starts hyperventilating, can't finish the sentence.

Dita approaches her again, apologetic, he tries to place a hand on her shoulder.

ESTRELLITA
Don't touch me!

But she pulls away. Still too hurt.

Dita swallows hard, trying to clear his throat.

DITA
It's not that simple, Estrellita.

Estrellita looks up at him with hostile, accusatory eyes.

He sighs deeply.

DITA
Do you remember those nightmares you used
to have?

Estrellita's eyes go a little blank. She shivers slightly. Fear is in her heart. She meekly nods her head.

DITA
They were caused by me, my little star.

Estrellita can't believe it. Confused, and terrified, she steps back from Dita. The room suddenly feels too small, as if all the walls are closing in on her and she has nowhere to go.

ESTRELLITA
What... what do you mean they were caused
by you? How... why?

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Dita sighs heavily, reliving a former life.

DITA

I knew your great grandmother, Josephine. We were around the same age when my regenerative cycle started and we met by chance. You see...I am what you call a daemon...not a demon. I am a background process that makes your world possible. Every couple centuries, I have 2 regenerative cycles...your great grandmother was present for one, by chance, and your mom was around during a milder cycle, by my design. When you were younger, you heard tales about an Ita, a demon?

He steps towards Estrellita, she backs away. But she backs into a corner, fearful. She weakly nods her head.

DITA

Well, my dear, your great grandmother started those tales from our encounter. But, I'm no demon. I seek to influence this world and help its evolution as I see fit. We briefly knew each other only because I ran away from what would have been my demise. I was later found in the forest and encouraged to join the Druids by a Druid sympathizer and bystander who witnessed my stupor while I was in church with Josephine. I lived with the Druids and worshipped with them to better re-orient myself with a world I had forgotten after my rebirth.

Right in front of Estrellita's shocked eyes, Dita's face transforms into an old, weather-beaten man before reverting back to normal.

Estrellita is shocked out of her mind. She just stares numbly back at Dita as he relays the story to her.

DITA

I met your mother while I was in Benin, looking to pay my respects to your great-grandmother after all those years. I met her while I was escaping from an angry mob of French Legionnaires and locals in Benin, who believed me to be some sorcerer or witch.

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Dita reflects.

DITA

For me to perform my regenerative rituals, I need to be in the presence of an oak tree. Its roots are treasured by the Druids in Europe and the Voodoo Men in Benin for good reason. If it wasn't for your mother, I would have been captured.

His face softens in warm nostalgia.

Estrellita relaxes a little.

DITA

Your mother's aura was kind, gentle... pure. I returned to her in a different form, determined to see more of her, and we quickly fell in love. A few months later, she fell pregnant...

A melancholic frown, laced with anger, quickly falls over Dita's face.

DITA

But this body, no matter how it transforms or changes, cannot father offspring. I am not even human. I just look and age as one, although very differently than a normal human.

Dita looks away from Estrellita, the pain of betrayal still fresh in his heart like a wound. He quickly grows angry.

DITA

Your mother tried to convince me the baby was mine, but I knew it wasn't! I couldn't bear living a lie with her or embarrassing her, so I left.

He smashes his fist against the table. Estrellita jumps in fright. Papers go flying. A few glasses topple over and shatter.

DITA

Her aura was tainted. I could not bear to see her lie to me. So, I fled.

Exhausted by his emotional outpour, Dita pulls out a seat and sits down, his eyes gazing far into the past. He seems to have completely forgotten about Estrellita.

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Estrellita takes a moment to piece all the new information together. She comes to a startling conclusion. Rage bubbling just beneath the thin mask on her face, she levels a hot, accusatory glare at Dita.

ESTRELLITA

What did you do to my mother?

Dita looks back to Estrellita, as if suddenly remembering her existence.

DITA

The real question is, what did YOU do to your mother?

This confuses Estrellita.

Dita, unbothered by Estrellita's lack of understanding, slowly pours himself a glass of water.

DITA

You see, my little star. You are a curse.

Estrellita is hurt, in disbelief.

ESTRELLITA

A curse?

DITA

Well, it might be better to call you a blessing. After all, I unleashed you into this world to put an end to the horrible human curse known commonly as deception. That is the true curse all you humans suffer from! All you do is lie, lie and lie to each other. I decided it was time to put an end to that. That was to be my contribution to your kind's evolution.

ESTRELLITA

You're not making sense! Just tell me what you did to my mother. And to me!

DITA

I unleashed the disease of aphasia into this world. Your mother was the catalyst, she made me see the truth, awakened me to my purpose, and you were my carrier. All those nightmares you suffered when you were young, they were from me assessing your thoughts and

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experiences while you slept. I could experience your mother through your eyes.

Estrellita is angered.

ESTRELLITA

You took my mother from me, and now you're blaming her for this... this epidemic! How dare you?

Estrellita's anger fizzles out into tears.

Dita sits back, watching her calmly.

She wipes the tears off her face and bravely faces Dita once more.

ESTRELLITA

What will happen to me when your aphasia has infected everyone on the planet? Will there still be a world left for me?

Dita smiles warmly.

DITA

My dear, you speak as if aphasia is deadly. The disease simply strips away your ability to use formal language to communicate. Taking you all back to a place of purity. Once the aphasia has spread to everyone in the world, you will have influence over its restart.

Estrellita doesn't buy it.

ESTRELLITA

A world where nobody understands each other, how exciting.

She pouts, clearly unhappy.

Dita rises from his seat, all the way excited, he approaches Estrellita.

DITA

This is simply the next phase in human evolution, an advancement in communication.

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To avoid chaos, I need your help to conjure up a new, simpler communication method.

Tenderly, he places both his hands on Estrellita's shoulders. She shudders, but she allows him.

DITA

This is why I focus on music education. Music has the potential to build strong bonds between people, you know that. You have a gift, Estrellita. A gift I put in you. Let me nurture it. Together, we'll discover its potential as a means of communication.

He looks intensely into her eyes. A fervent passion burns deep in them.

Estrellita, though uncomfortable, stares back at him.

ESTRELLITA

How do I spread aphasia? If I can't get it, can I still spread it.

Dita's disappointed, but he hides it behind a smile. He releases Estrellita, and steps away from her.

Estrellita is still curious.

ESTRELLITA

And what did you mean by "music as a means of communication"?

Dita pauses, tosses a glance at Estrellita over his shoulder.

DITA

I invite you to my next lecture. We've missed you in class.

He walks away, leaving Estrellita confused.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC CONSERVATORY CLASS- DAY

The class is packed with eager-eyed students, all obediently watching Dita give his lecture at the front. Estrellita, sitting off to the back, alone, dazes into space. A lot on her mind, she tunes in and out of the lecture.

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DITA

A lot of human existence is mundane,
uninspiring. That is why the arts, and music in
particular, exist.... To allow us to transcend the
mundane!

A pause.

Estrellita's ears perk up.

DITA

However, music is often reserved for the
transitory and celebratory aspects of life. So,
the question I want to pose to all of you bright,
wonderful minds...

He seems to stare directly at Estrellita on this part.

DITA

Can music, or aspects of music, become a tool
of consistent specificity? Or, in other words, a
possible replacement for everyday speech?

The students look at each other quizzingly.

RANDOM STUDENT #1

You mean singing *our words*.

He sings the last part, spurring an eruption of laughter from the other students.
Even Estrellita manages a small chuckle.

Dita smiles back at the laughing students.

DITA

Interesting thought, but I don't know if *you have
the range*.

Dita sings right back, much to the random student's embarrassment. The
children applaud and cheer raucously.

DITA

Settle down now, students.

The students' laughter dies down.

DITA

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Now, let's take a look at how cultures from around the world have used music to communicate, and maybe we'll get a few more ideas.

Dita reaches onto his desk and pulls up several paintings and depictions accompanied by a graphophone

DITA
(To a random student)
You mind helping me?

A random student in the front row gets up and helps Dita set up the graphophone.

DITA
(To random student)
Thank you.

DITA
This is the Venda fertility dance ritual, from Africa.

Rich, tribal music blares from the graphophone while Dita holds up an artist depiction of the Venda fertility dance.

The students are awed.

The music suddenly changes to sweet bird songs.

DITA
And, no, these are not real birds, but their mimicry by the people of Papa New Guinea!

He shows an image of the Papa New Guinean people performing the bird mimic songs.

The students are intrigued. Estrellita looks on, fascinated.

DITA
And this, is from the Sámi people of Scandinavia!

The music changes again, to the angelic Sámi music, while Dita holds up a third image.

A few moments later, he puts the image down, turns the graphophone off.

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DITA

All these examples highlight the cohesion created in these groups via music. A cohesion that would put an outsider out of place, instantly.

The students, attentive and intrigued, nod along agreeably.

DITA

In a sense, this would provide a degree of security to the group. Perhaps similar to what an infant feels for his mother's singing voice?

The students nod thoughtfully.

STUDENT #1

But, Sir, what instrument would work best at executing such an idea?

STUDENT #2

What about the human voice? That seems to a pretty universal instrument to me.

STUDENT #3

Well, yes, but wouldn't that just lead us back to speech?

Dita, satisfied with his student's thinking abilities, nods along gladly.

DITA

Indeed! The human voice makes a wonderful instrument. However, language and speech are too complex. They only aid in creating miscommunication and distrust. Deception... war. So, we would need to find a new instrument to replace it. Any thoughts?

The class is stumped. Some of the students nibble the backs of their pencils, deep in thought.

DITA

Anyone?

He casts his eye over his class once more. All the students avert their eyes.

Timidly, Estrellita lifts her hand up.

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Dita's face brightens as he sees her.

DITA
Yes, Estrellita?

All eyes turn to Estrellita. A lump forms in her throat, making it difficult to speak.

ESTRELLITA
Uhm... I think the best replacement would be the flute? Or any woodwind, really.

Dita's smile widens even further. He is very pleased with Estrellita's answer.

DITA
Excellent choice! Flutes are, arguably, the oldest instruments known to man. And every culture, be it the Scandinavians or the Vendas, has some variant of the woodwind. Universality: check!

A student sitting next to Estrellita smiles and gives her a thumbs up, encouragingly.

DITA
Now that we've found our magical, universal instrument, we can move on to the next challenge:

The students lean in, hooked on Dita's every word.

DITA
How would you go about creating a universal language with it? I'd like to leave you all with that question, and I'll see you next time!

The class is dismissed. The students begin to leave.

Estrellita smiles back at the students welcoming her back after her hiatus from class.

DITA
Ready to leave?

ESTRELLITA
Yes. Sure.

CUT TO:

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INT. DITA'S HOME- EVENING

Dita and Estrellita eat dinner together at the dinner table. Estrellita barely touches her food, poking and prodding it around.

Dita notices. He's worried about her.

DITA
Something troubling you, my little star?

Estrellita pokes at her food a little more. Dita maintains his worried gaze on her.

ESTRELLITA
I just don't feel good turning the whole world
into mutes.

Dita's a little taken aback.

DITA
But, Estrellita, you were in class today. We
won't be turning them into mutes, but liberating
them from a limiting language!

Estrellita is unmoved.

ESTRELLITA
I'm not hungry.

She walks away, leaving a stunned Dita all on his own at the dinner table.

INT. DITA'S HOME- ESTRELLITA'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Estrellita walks into her room, shutting the door behind her. She climbs into bed and curls up into a ball. She feels sad and isolated.

The moon, bright and full, breaks through her window. She looks out at it longingly.

ESTRELLITA
Mom... where are you?

She cries herself to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. DITA'S HOME- ESTRELLITA'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

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Alone in her room, late in the night, Estrellita can't sleep.

She stands off her bed and paces, debating something internally. A moment passes. She stops, listens carefully to the dull ambience.

Faintly, she can hear Dita's snores echo in.

Now, she's determined. She gathers a few of her things, clothes and trinkets, into a bag and slings it over her shoulder.

Slowly, carefully, she opens the door to her room and walks out.

INT. DITA'S HOME- NIGHT

In the dead silence and deep dark of the night, Estrellita slowly creeps her way out of Dita's home.

Each step is careful and cautious, and her eyes stare widely into the darkness.

She steps on a wonky bit of floor and it creaks. Terrified, she freezes. Listens carefully. Doesn't seem to be any action from Dita.

She walks forward again, eventually making it to the front door. She opens that very carefully too, then she steps out and closes it, ever so softly, behind her.

EXT. DITA'S HOME- NIGHT

Estrellita, just outside her home, steps out of the shadow of her house. Grateful, she takes a glance up at the moon and stars above her and smiles gleefully.

She takes a deep breath to gather her nerves. Then, with only her bag slung over her shoulder, she sneaks away into the world.

Estrellita briskly strolls away from her home, occasionally throwing a glance back.

The house grows smaller and smaller. An excitement bubbles in her. She starts taking quicker steps. Quicker. Now she's jogging. Now she's sprinting.

A bright, happy smile plastered on her face.

She runs down the street at a full sprint. She turns the first right and she squeaks in fright, trips over herself trying to stop.

Fallen over, she looks up as if seeing a monster

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Standing right there over her is none other than Dita. Wearing that “I’m not mad, I’m disappointed face” parents do.

DITA

What are you doing out so late?

Estrellita looks up at him.

ESTRELLITA

I... I need to find my mother.

Dita frowns, angered.

DITA

Even if you did find your mother, miraculously, how would you recognize her after all these years? And if she does have aphasia, as you suspect, she will not be fit to see you. Estrellita, you are wasting your time.

Dita approaches her, she recoils back. Frightened.

ESTRELLITA

No! I want my mother; I want my mommy!

Estrellita breaks into a temper tantrum.

Dita approaches, she recoils. He pauses for a moment, considering. Barely concealed rage bubbles up on his face.

DITA

Estrellita.

He crouches down near Estrellita, she turns. Tries to run away. His hand flashes out and catches her arm.

ESTRELLITA

No! Leave me alone!

He doesn't.

DITA

Estrellita, we are going home. I can let you run but you forget that I am always watching...I care about your safety especially at this hour.

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He points to her head signifying that he always has a means of getting her whereabouts through her nightmares.

They both walk home.

INT. DITA'S HOME- MORNING

Dita walks up to Estrellita's door, knocks.

DITA

Time to wake up, my little star.

No response. Dita is disappointed.

He knocks again. No response, again.

DITA

I'm off to class. Are you sure you don't want to join me? We all enjoyed your company and insights yesterday.

ESTRELLITA (O.S.)

No. I don't want to help you spread aphasia.

Dita is stumped, no clue how to respond to that.

Awkward.

DITA

Well, just make sure you don't stay in bed all day, okay? I left your breakfast in the kitchen.

He leaves her.

INT. DITA'S HOME- ESTRELLITA'S BEDROOM

Estrellita is lying in bed, eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling. She doesn't move, nor does she make any attempt at moving.

She just lays there, in her bed, watching the sun rise.

She watches the sun rise, then she watches the sun fall. It becomes night. Estrellita doesn't move

It becomes morning again. Another day passes. Estrellita still doesn't move.

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Several days go on just like this, with the sun rising and falling and Estrellita refusing to get out of bed. Her hair grows messy and dishevelled. Her eyes grow sunken and hollow.

DITA (O.S.)

Estrellita.

He knocks once more. Estrellita numbly looks at the door.

DITA (O.S.)

You have to come out sweetheart. It's been a week.

Estrellita hides under her covers.

DITA (O.S.)

I have to go to class, but when I come back, we're going to deal with this.

Estrellita stays hidden, carefully listening to Dita's footsteps as he exits the house. The front door closes, and she waits a little longer.

Then, she steps out of bed. Gloomy and weak, she drags herself to the mirror. She looks at her reflection for a long time, unable to recognize the person she sees.

She sighs. Walks out of her bedroom, and makes her way to Dita's storage closet. She pulls it open, staring blankly into it with a dull, morbid curiosity.

The storage closet is filled with all sorts of odds and ends. Pieces of old musical instruments and an assortment of tools lay littered about. Estrellita's hand, gigantic in proportion, reaches down into the closet.

Estrellita, still stuck with the same blank stare pulls out a sickly blue container of automobile coolant. Closes the storage closet behind her.

Estrellita stares into the bottle of coolant, wrestling with an undefeatable fear in her belly. Separated from her mother, and the world, she wants to commit suicide.

Her heart races (LOUD). Her dead eyes steel in cold resolve. She raises the container to her lips, gulps the automobile coolant in one fluid motion!

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC CONSERVATIRY CLASS- DAY

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Dita, dashing and suave as always, is presenting a lecture to his class.

DITA

Yes! And always remember, the key to striking the feeling of divinity, is a harmonious chord-

A cold sweat suddenly falls over him. He frowns deeply. He looks over his class, sees a girl that looks just like Estrellita sitting in Estrellita's seat. He blinks. The girl disappears. His heart races, same pace as Estrellita's. An inexplicable panic sets in.

STUDENT #1

Professor...you OK?

A random student sitting up-front, real innocent and concerned looking, peers up at Dita.

STUDENT #1

Are you okay?

Dita's paranoid mind slowly returns to the present moment of the classroom. He looks out at all his students, who look blankly back at him.

DITA

Yes, I just had a...

He searches for the correct words

DITA

premonition.

He is extremely worried. He inhales deeply to steady his nerves.

DITA

Excuse me, students. There is something I must attend to. Dismissed.

Hastily, he walks away from the gathered students. Perplexed, they turn to each other in discussion.

CUT TO:

INT. DITA'S HOME- DAY

DITA

Estrellita!

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Dita bursts through the front door. Looks like he ran here. Huffing, puffing, and sweaty.

He heads straight for Estrellita's room. Opens the door.

DITA

Estrellita?

She's not there. His frown deepens.

CUT TO:

INT. DITA'S HOME- DITA'S ROOM- DAY

Estrellita is lying in a pool of her own vomit, the coolant container spilled out besides her. Sweating profusely, bright red. Her eyes are open but they stare limply into the distance. Breathing quick, shallow.

Dita, worried out of his mind, bursts through the door.

DITA

Estreli-

His eyes suddenly land on Estrellita's frail body. Horror washes over him. He rushes to her, picks her up tenderly.

DITA

Oh, my little star. It's going to be okay. Don't worry about anything, it's going to be okay.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM- EVENING

DOCTOR

Your daughter ingested quite a bit of poison and is suffering from methanol poisoning.

In a hospital ward, Estrellita is strapped up to a whole army of tubes. Tubes for breathing, for extracting toxins, for dripping medicine into her blood-stream, all hooked up to her body.

Dita, dull and lifeless, holds onto her hand while the Doctor, an old, sour-faced man, explains her condition to him.

DOCTOR

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Her body has also metabolized the coolant into other dangerous chemicals. Glycolic acid, acetone, form-

DITA

Please, Doctor. Just tell me if you can save her.

The Doctor is slightly offended to be interrupted.

DOCTOR

We are working our hardest to treat her, and we are confident that she will survive. However, we are not sure how badly her body has already been damaged. She may suffer from a chronic illness after this.

Dita nods sharply, rubs Estrellita's hand lovingly.

DITA

As long as she lives.

DOCTOR

Indeed. She's currently in a coma, but we believe she will awaken from it in three days. If you'll excuse me, I must attend other patients. This aphasia really has us out-gunned!

The doctor exits, leaving Dita all alone with Estrellita. He looks at her tenderly, all wrapped up in tubes and weak-looking. A wall of guilt slams into him, and he breaks down into tears.

A FEW HOURS LATER.

Dita has fallen asleep, his head rests heavily on Estrellita's bed.

JOSEPHINE

It's your fault, you know.

Startled, Dita jumps awake. He quickly finds Josephine, aged but dignified, standing over Estrellita's bed.

DITA

You! What are you doing here?

JOSEPHINE

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It's your fault she tried to kill herself. The little baby has been crying for her mother for weeks, and what did you do? Locked her up and threw away the key, that's what!

DITA

It wasn't like that! I was protecting her.

Josephine charges at Dita aggressively, stares straight into his eyes.

JOSEPHINE

Only thing this child needs protecting from is you!

Dita flinches.

He wakes up. Josephine is gone. It was just a dream.

DITA

Just a dream.

He looks around the room. Trying to convince himself. Sighing, he stands up and walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. ASTRID'S HOME- NIGHT

Dita, carrying a whole heap of luggage, knocks on Astrid's door.

A young woman, no older than her mid-30s, opens the door. She smiles warmly at Dita.

ASTRID

Hi, Dita! Long time!

She eyes the luggage, and Dita's stressed face. She's a little worried.

ASTRID

What's wrong?

DITA

Something terrible has happened. Estrellita and I need your help.

ASTRID

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Of course! What happened? And where is she?

Astrid glances around for Estrellita.

DITA

She is at the hospital. She... She tried to kill herself.

Astrid gasps, horrified.

DITA

I need to go to Paris for some time to deal with something important. Please, take care of her for me. As her old music teacher, she always had a special bond with you.

Astrid nods sincerely.

ASTRID

Yes, of course. Are those her things?

She points at the luggage. Dita nods. She starts picking some of it up.

DITA

Tell her you don't know where I went, I'll return in a few months.

Dita notices Astrid's suspicious glance towards him.

DITA

I'll explain when I return. Can I trust you?

Dita levels a fierce, penetrating stare at Astrid. A moment's pause.

ASTRID

Yes. I'll go to her right now, just let me get my shoes.

DITA

Thank you. I have a train to catch.

Dita heads off.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM- DAY

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A FEW DAYS LATER

Estrellita is sleeping in bed. Most of the tubes are off, but she still looks sickly and frail. She starts squirming. Wriggling around as if in a nightmare (because she's in a nightmare).

ESTRELLITA

No, no. Leave me... leave me alone!

She bolts upright. Terrified. Her eyes are wide open, but they're pale and unfocused; she's blind.

ASTRID

Calm down, child. No-one is here but me.
You're safe.

Astrid reaches over, embraces her. Estrellita calms down. She starts sobbing.

ESTRELLITA

Why can't I see anything? Who- who are you?

ASTRID

The doctors said that liquid you drank might make you blind. It could be temporary... or permanent.

Estrellita sobs louder in Astrid's arms.

ASTRID

And I'm offended you don't remember me!
Didn't I teach you to play the piano so well?

A look of realization on Estrellita's face.

ESTRELLITA

Astrid? It's you?

She keeps crying onto Astrid's shoulder. Astrid, as patient as a mother, calmly strokes her hair and gently rocks her. A loving look in her eye.

ASTRID

Did you know, this is the first time we've embraced like this? Your dad took care to warn me against making skin to skin contact with you due to some disease you had via your albinism...? Happy to see you've rid yourself of the disease and I can finally hug you!

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Estrellita's sobs die down in volume and intensity.

ASTRID

He was always tight-lipped about your condition. What was the skin disease name again?

Estrellita suddenly realizes that she is the main spread of aphasia and its via skin-to-skin contact.

Astrid pulls on Estrellita's nose tenderly, jokingly. Estrellita smiles.

ASTRID

Well anyway, you beat that skin condition and you can beat this too.

Astrid and Estrellita keep hugging.

CUT TO:

INT. ASTRID'S HOME- NIGHT

A FEW WEEKS LATER

Estrellita leans back against Astrid, as Astrid twirls her hair into long, interesting braids. She looks far out, into the distance. Completely zoned out, barely hears a word Astrid says.

ASTRID

And I still remember trying to teach you how to identify middle C, and you just kept giving me this big goofy confused face. From that to now being able to play complex pieces in such a short time is nothing but extraordinary. I'm so proud of you.

Astrid laughs warmly at the memory. Estrellita barely registers.

ESTRELLITA

If you had to pick an instrument to replace speech, which would you use?

Astrid is tripped up by the suddenness of the topic-change. She furrows her brow in thought.

ASTRID

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That's an odd question. Whatever made you think of that, Estrellita?

ESTRELLITA

It's a question Dita used to ask.

ASTRID

Oh.

A pause.

ESTRELLITA

Okay. Let's say you already had the perfect instrument; how would you create a non-verbal language with it? Where would you even start?

Astrid ponders the question seriously, her eyes knitting into a contemplative frown.

ASTRID

Well... I'd think of it as the relationship between a mother and a child. They often use music as a medium. They both have their own language, but they still manage to communicate with each other. You can't really think of them as two separate individuals communicating, more like... one being. Creating a system of meaning, as a unit. In the end, the mother's language over-influences the baby's though.

Estrellita seems to have some understanding.

ESTRELLITA

I think I get it... sort of?

Astrid laughs heartily.

ASTRID

For example. My people, the Sami, have used the joik as a way of communicating how we feel about the world to each other. Our deepest feelings about nature, or each other, are captured in the music of joiks, and those are spread orally through our whole community.

ESTRELLITA

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Yes, I think Dita spoke about the Sami a little bit in his class...

A calculating, thoughtful look crosses her face.

ESTRELLITA

Your people are from Lapland, aren't they?

Astrid smiles happily.

ASTRID

Yes!

Astrid twirls another braid on Estrellita's head.

Estrellita stares out, deep in thought.

ESTRELLITA

I would like you to take me to Lapland and help me start a new life, there.

Astrid pauses her brushing mid-stroke, regards Estrellita with surprise and a fair bit of confusion.

ASTRID

I don't know if I could do that. What would I even say to Dita-

Estrellita swivels sharply around, face-to-face with Astrid.

ESTRELLITA

He's not the person you think he is.

She pleads with Astrid. She's deeply pained, and afraid.

Astrid sees it.

ASTRID

You know... there's an orphanage out there I helped sponsor. I bet they could use someone like you. You'd make a brilliant music teacher.

Excited, Estrellita leaps into Astrid's arms. They embrace warmly.

ESTRELLITA

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Astrid gives a little warm laugh.

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ASTRID

Perhaps you can get a music programme up and running, get the children learning about music, instruments and even culture! Your eyes may be gone...

Astrid taps Estrellita's forehead.

ASTRID

But you're still that talented student I met all those years ago. Share your talents with the world, my dear! Leave me to deal with Dita.

Astrid and Estrellita hug once more, Estrellita smiling hopefully.

CUT TO:

PARIS, FRANCE

EXT. PARISIAN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL- DAY

Dita arrives at the hospital. Built on the former site of La Pitie Orphanage, the golden flagpole and French flag still stand, extending high above the ground. He walks into the hospital.

INT. PARISIAN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL- DESANGE'S ROOM- DAY

Desange, older and frail, is lying in bed. Peacefully. She stares out blankly at the ceiling above her.

The door creaks open.

DITA

Hello, stranger.

Desange turns around, realizes its Dita. Distraught, she screams for help.

DITA

Now, now. No need for all that noise.

Dita quickly folds out a picture. Takes two steps forward, shows it to Desange: it's Estrellita. She stops screaming.

Dita looks down at her, utterly curious.

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DITA

I must say, this is the first time I've interacted with somebody with a case of aphasia this bad.

He steps forward, reaches a hand out to touch her face.

Desange is terrified, unable to communicate. She shrinks back and retreats to a corner of the room like an abused dog. Stares at him defensively.

DITA

I've tried my hardest to raise the girl well, but I think she might need her mother. Though I'm not sure how much help you could be in this *condition*.

Desange's glare daggers in Dita's direction.

Dita sets the photo down besides Desange's bed, and he walks out of the room.

CUT TO:

INT. PARISIAN PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL- ADMIN'S OFFICE- DAY

The office is uncomfortably small, and mostly coloured in a dull, brown tone. Dita sits in the office across from a bushy-browed, serious looking fellow in a suit. This is the hospital administrator.

ADMINISTRATOR

While I understand your worries, Sir. We cannot simply discharge Miss Desange to your care without proof of direct relation.

DITA

Well, that's going to be difficult. I've loved her many years, but we have never been married. We did, however, have a child together. And it would be in her best interests for her mother to return.

The administrator's face stiffens.

ADMINISTRATOR

I sympathize with you, Mr Dita. But I do not believe it would be in her interest to release her to you or the public.

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Dita slides his hand into his coat. Pushes an envelope across the table to the administrator.

DITA

Perhaps, but I'm certain it would be in yours'.

The administrator glances at the envelope at the table, then back at Dita. A wry smile pulls on his lips as he reaches out to grab it.

ADMINISTRATOR

Why, yes. I think you may have a point.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARISIAN STREETS- DAY

A horse carriage pulls away from the hospital, Dita and Desange riding within. Dita looks back longingly at Desange from up front. She stares up hatefully at him.

DITA

Don't worry, my dear. You will be reunited with your precious little star in no time in good health.

The horse carriage drives off, Dita at the reins. He whips the horses up to a quick trot, and off they go on the journey back to Vienna.

CUT TO:

INT. DITA'S HOME- DAY

A COUPLE MONTHS LATER

The door swings open, sending dust flying all over the place.

Dita walks in.

DITA

This is the place she called home for most of her life.

Desange, timid but curious, follows in Dita's steps.

Dita leads her through to Estrellita's room.

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DITA
And this is where she slept.

He gestures towards the open room, and Desange follows him inside.

INT. DITA'S HOME- ESTRELLITA'S BEDROOM- DAY

Desange walks into Estrellita's room, tears threatening to fall from her eyes at any moment.

She bends down next to Estrellita's bed, and she tenderly caresses the covers.

Desange notices the piles of letters and correspondence that Estrellita had with the French Liaison Office in Benin on the dressing table. Curious, she heads over towards the letters, skimming through them.

ESTRELLITA (V.O.)

Tears freely stream down Desange's face.

DITA
What is it?

Dita steps towards her, concerned.

She whips around, tosses the letters at him in a huff of rage and walks off.

Dita, alone in Estrellita's room, mulls over the letters. He sighs, exasperated, frustrated.

CUT TO:

INT. HORSE CARRIAGE- DAY

Desange sits down in the horse carriage, her arms folded over her chest and her face puffed out angrily.

Dita cautiously enters the carriage besides her.

DITA
I'm sorry, about that...

Desange shoots a strong look at Dita. He instantly shuts up.

A moment passes between them in silence.

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Dita hears a smooth, flowing sound. A moment later, Desange taps him on the shoulder, hands him a small note, neatly folded in two.

Dita unfolds the note, it reads: Take me to her now.

Dita sighs again.

DITA
As you wish.

He urges the horse forward. They leave the home.

CUT TO:

EXT. ASTRID'S HOME- EVENING

Dita's horse carriage pulls up outside Astrid's home. The lights are off.

DITA
Now, stay inside while I go fetch Estrellita,
okay?

Dita steps off the carriage, walks to the door, and he gives it a firm knock.

DITA
Hello, Astrid? Estrellita?

No response.

Impatient, he knocks again.

DITA
Estrellita!

The door swings open, revealing a dishevelled, unkempt Astrid standing behind it.

ASTRID
You, you! Dita!

Dita grimaces.

DITA
The aphasia has caught you too, has it?
Terrible news. Where's Estrellita?

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ASTRID
Here, here! She here!

Astrid tries to point at something, Dita runs out of patience, pushes her out of his way.

INT. ASTRID'S HOME- EVENING

Dita storms past Astrid

DITA
Estrellita! Where are you, my little star? I have
a surprise for you.

Dita walks all over the house. He opens several doors- a bedroom, a bathroom- a study- before he returns to the main lobby, fuming.

He approaches the aphasia-inflicted Astrid.

DITA
Where is she?

ASTRID
Here! Here! She here!

Astrid pulls out a letter and hands it to Dita.

Dita snatches the letter from her, and he read through it quickly.

ESTRELLITA (V.O.)
Dear Dita, I left this letter in case you return,
and Astrid is no longer able to speak. By the
time you find this letter, it will be too late. I
thank you for taking care of me all these years,
but I cannot allow myself to be a part of your
scheme to bring aphasia to the world. I only
hope my self-isolation will minimize the impact.
I know my mother hurt you ...I hope you can
forgive her someday. Please don't come
looking for me.
I will never forgive you for what you have done
to me, my mother, or the world. Goodbye.

Dita tosses the letter aside in a bout of fury. His eyes lock on Astrid and he pounces on her, grabbing her by the scruff of her neck.

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DITA
Where is she! Where is Estrellita!?

Astrid is terrified.

ASTRID
LKhjk hkjhb hkb klhj-

DITA
Where is she!

ASTRID
Kjgcdb ksxjkb as igxsbjl

DITA
The aphasia... you can't tell me because of it,
can you?

Astrid looks back at Dita, helpless.

Dita is furious, but he suppresses it deep in his heart.

DITA
Fine. I'll find her myself.

He pushes Astrid away, walks to a corner of the room with a shelf, and he starts ripping books off of it.

In a furious flurry, he removes books, paperwork and letters, sending paper flying into the air.

His eyes move frantically from one book, one letter to the next, and when he's done with it, he tosses it into the air, collecting the next one.

Within moments, the room is an absolute mess.

DITA
Found it!

Dita's eyes suddenly lock onto a very small detail. An empty envelope has a stamp addressed from Sweden. He turns to Astrid.

DITA
If I remember correctly, your family runs an
orphanage in Sweden. Lapland, wasn't it?

Astrid's eyes widen, she shrinks away from Dita.

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Dita grins smugly and he walks out.

Astrid, still lying on the floor, starts sobbing to herself.

CUT TO:

INT. HORSE CARRIAGE- EVENING

DITA

Well, there seems to have been a slight complication, but don't you worry...we'll be with Estrellita in no time.

Desange's hope is crushed. She visibly deflates.

Dita urges the horse carriage forward, and they leave.

CUT TO:

INT. LAPLAND ORPHANAGE- PLAY ROOM- DAY

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

Estrellita is with a group of children.

The playroom has been fully converted into a music room. Rows of students sit orderly in stools, playing music together in a beautiful, broken melody.

A child sits on a stool, playing sweet, beautiful music. However, his tune only lasts a moment.

From the other side of the room, another child plays a different, somehow complimentary tune, as if in response to the first one.

The first child hears this tune, nods his head, and proceeds to play an entirely different, yet still oddly harmonious tune in response to that also. This tune sounds joyous, like a laugh.

The entire class of children, half a dozen or so, erupt into laughter at that final tune.

Standing in front of them all, Estrellita smiles proudly at her students.

ESTRELLITA

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Well done, children! You have taken the first, crucial steps. Now, the next important thing will be to-

Dita walks into this room, a broad proud smile beaming from his face.

Desange, trailing behind, marvels at the beautiful music being played. Her eyes suddenly widen in marvel as she sees

FRONT and CENTER of all this beautiful music, Estrellita stands with a conductor's rod.

Pure, unbridled admiration on Desange as she watches on.

Dita looks smug, proud.

DESANGE

Oh, Estrellita.

The children are startled at the strangers in their presence.

ESTRELLITA

Who, who's there?

A young boy, no older than 10, plays a quick tune. To Dita, the tune is just music, but Estrellita here's the message hidden in it.

YOUNG BOY

(Via music, subtitle)

Stranger!

A worried frown appears on Estrellita's face.

ESTRELLITA

How many?

The boy plays another tune, slightly longer this time.

YOUNG BOY

(Via music, subtitle)

Two. Man and a woman.

Estrellita now appears visibly scared.

Dita, per the young boy's music, realizes that he is communicating with Estrellita via the music. He smiles proudly at the realization.

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He walks over to an instrument (e.g., piano) and begins playing Manuel Ponce's "Estrellita".

ESTRELITTA

Dita?!

Dita smiles warmly.

He pushes and prods Desange along.

Uncertain and cautious, she hesitates, glances back at Dita.

He nods.

She races across the room, scooping Estrellita up in one giant, warm hug.

Estrellita is confused, caught off-guard.

Desange hums a little tune. A warm, nostalgic tune she used to hum when Estrellita was a child.

Estrellita feels comforted, warmed by the familiar song. She hugs Desange back, and sobs into her embrace.

They hold each other for a moment, just savouring how much they'd been missing from each other's lives.

Dita stands back, conflicted and begins to walk away from the group.

DITA (TO HIMSELF)

The worst is yet to come, regardless of what I do next. It's your nature...not my doing.

THE END.

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