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THE DIVIDE

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A plantation owner's son runs away from home after hurting the girl he loves, only to return five years later at the close of the Civil War to face his tyrannical father.

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EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAWN

Long rows of cloud-white blooms. Peaceful. Serene.

A pair of bare feet protruding from cuffed up trousers rushes through the white puffs of cotton. Each footfall THUDS against the dirt.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Two simple, wood buildings with CLOTHES LINES strung up between them. WORKER WOMAN #1 and WORKER WOMAN #2 pull clothes off the lines.

The door to one of the buildings CREAKS open. LUCY--African American, beautiful, about fourteen years old, with a braided ponytail and a simple, homemade dress--slips outside. Glances both ways. Puts her head down and hurries off.

WORKER WOMAN #1 and WORKER WOMAN #2 exchange a concerned stare.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

We tail the PANTING boy, who darts down the narrow dirt path through the lines of cotton. DAVID PATTERSON--Caucasian, sixteen-years-old, long sleeve white shirt, suspenders, and brown trousers--sprinting.

Then we SEE the entire field. Row upon row of white and brown stripes.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Pitch black. Can't even tell we're in a barn.

CAPTION: Georgia, 1861

The barn door opens just a crack. Bright light explodes through the slit. A SILHOUETTE sneaks inside. Closes the door. Shrouds everything in darkness.

A beat.

The door opens again, this time wider. Lucy's silhouette peeks inside. The morning light illuminates stacks of HAY. She enters cautiously. Looks around. Steps further inside.

David tackles her into the hay. She gives a startled, but muted SQUEAL. They LAUGH. David rolls over, takes a knee, and feigns solemnity. He's hiding something behind his back.

He grins broadly, draws out a BOUQUET of WILDFLOWERS. Only, they've been crushed from his roll through the hay. He's crestfallen. Lucy snatches the flowers out of his hand. Sniffs them. Giggles. Sheepish, he flops down beside her. They share a smile, but the mirth fades quickly.

They drink one another in with their eyes. He runs the back of his hand down her cheek. Her fingers slide over the top of his. Then, slowly, she pulls his hand away from her cheek and looks away. His hand graces her chin. She looks back up at him. His expression darkens, as if he's losing hope, as if reality has begun to choke out their fantasy.

David rests his head on her shoulder. She pulls back. Puts a hand on his chest. Gently pushes him away. Shakes her head. He looks off. Purses his lips. Then, goes in for the kiss.

A huge hand takes hold of David's shirt and suspender. Yanks him up onto his feet. Another hand SLAPS him across the face. Wide eyed, he stumbles back and away. His ankle buckles and he falls, face first, into a RAKE.

We SEE the powerful silhouette of a man looming over him.

David scrambles to his feet. BLOOD drips down his forehead. His hand jumps to it. He fixates on his bloody hand. Fear becomes defiance. He sets his jaw. Then bolts for the door.

SAMUEL--African American, strong, mid-forties--watches David flee. Then turns to Lucy. She's terrified, WHIMPERING.

INT. PATTERSON PLANTATION HOUSE DINING ROOM - MORNING

Southern luxury. Expensive china. Glassware perfectly placed around the rectangular wooden table.

JOHN PATTERSON--Early fifties, handsome, salt-and-pepper hair, dressed in period clothing--sits at the head of the table. At his right, GEORGE HARRINGTON--Early fifties, bald and fat, dressed neatly.

JOHN  
You sure?

GEORGE  
Rumors are everywhere. They're growin' bolder by the day.

JOHN  
God help us.

GEORGE

(Lowers voice)

If they think the Yankees stand a chance they will surely revolt. We'll have ourselves a war with the North and with the Negro.

We HEAR a SCREAM from the adjacent room. MARTHA PATTERSON--plump, worrisome--bursts into the room with David in tow. DRIED BLOOD smeared by TEARS covers his cheek.

John and George jump up. John's face flushes with fury.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

With a firm grip on David's arm, John drags his son to the cotton field. George and TWO MEN armed with RIFLES follow. They approach a group of slaves. Worried glances pass back and forth between the workers.

John seeks a target. His eyes dart from face to face. He takes David by the shoulders. Stares at him. David's gaze goes from the ground to Samuel. He points. John nods to the two riflemen. A woman SCREAMS as they step forward. David's lip quivers with anger and fear as he watches them grab hold of Samuel. John marches back toward the house. The others fall into step behind him.

EXT. PATTERSON PLANTATION HOUSE - MORNING

John rolls up his sleeves. A small crowd of onlookers--slaves and neighbors--has gathered. Martha stands with an arm around David. The slaves are silent. Some mouth silent prayers. Lucy stands beside her MOTHER. Their eyes brim with TEARS.

Two men strip Samuel of his shirt and force him to face a LARGE TREE. SCARS run up and down his back.

JOHN

This animal struck my son! His filthy hands drew my son's blood!

Silence. A WHIMPER.

JOHN (CONT'D)

A slave, rebellin' against his master! Let the Yankees free their dogs! I will not!

George steps forward and hands John a BULLWHIP.

JOHN (CONT'D)

We must have order! What does the  
Good Book say? An eye for an eye!

John spins. The whip strikes like a rattlesnake. We HEAR the sickening SLAP of it striking flesh.

David. Eyes as wide as saucers. He cringes with each blow delivered. He finds Lucy. CRYING. Face buried in her mother's bosom. She looks up. Her eyes meet David's. His quickly find the ground.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Freedom? The black man wants  
*freedom?* Mark my words! No slave  
will be freed on this land. *My*  
land!

John walks to David. Shoves the bullwhip into his chest. Horror registers on David's face. He starts to shake his head. John grabs David's chin. Forces their eyes to meet. David stops fighting. Takes the bullwhip. Walks, in a daze, toward Samuel. Holds the bullwhip out at arm's length, as if it might truly be a snake.

Lucy begins to SOB. David hesitates. He looks at Lucy. Then at his father. David's eyes brim with TEARS. His lip quivers. He draws the whip back.

LUCY

(screaming)

No!

She breaks away from her mother as David sends the whip. She's headed straight into its path. David's jaw drops. We HEAR the SNAP of the whip.

Lucy collapses. Samuel spins. Takes a knee next to her. Her hand covers her face. She's BAWLING. Samuel pulls her hand away from her cheek. Blood drips from a WELT. Samuel stands, glares at David. Strides to the tail end of the whip, which lies dormant in the dirt. He snatches it off the ground.

JOHN

Stop!

Samuel yanks the whip from David's hand. Samuel's eyes smolder.

David blinks. SOUND fades.

John shouts and points.

The two riflemen lift their guns.

David shuts his eyes.

GUNSHOTS shatter the silence.

Samuel lies face first in the dirt. Lucy SOBS over him.  
Lucy's mother runs to his side.

David looks at his father, who watches with arms crossed.  
David turns. He runs. John sees, but says nothing. Just  
frowns. Martha takes a few halting steps forward.

MARTHA

David? David!

John turns his back. David doesn't stop. He keeps running.

EXT. FIELD - DAWN

BOOTS, running. We HEAR HEAVY BREATHING, distant GUNSHOTS,  
the THUNDER of CANNON FIRE, and SHOUTS of anger, pain. A  
SOLDIER, RIFLE in hand. No coat. A BLUE UNION KEPI on his  
head. He's sprinting. DIRT sprays skyward as a MORTAR ROUND  
plows into the ground nearby. The soldier dives forward.

CAPTION: 5 years later...

EXT. FIELD - AFTERNOON

David--five years older, wearing a uniform without a coat or  
kepi--face down in the dirt. He stirs. Pushes himself up.  
Stands. Squints. Gets his bearings. A HAZE drifts across the  
field. In the distance, COLUMNS of SMOKE rise into blue sky.  
BODIES everywhere. David spots a BLUE UNION KEPI. He picks it  
up. Brushes it off. Then slides it onto his head.

WILLIAM (O.C.)

(shouting)

David!

David turns. WILLIAM--Union soldier garb, round, youthful  
face--waves at David from across the field. Motions for him  
to come over. David grabs a RIFLE off the ground. Jogs over.

When he reaches William's side we SEE NOAH--young soldier,  
skinny--on the ground, GROANING. BLOODY leg. BULLET wound.

NOAH

Is it bad? Hurts real bad.

William and David exchange a worried glance. David pulls a  
STIP of CLOTH from his trouser pocket. Kneels to wrap it  
around Noah's upper thigh.

WILLIAM

Naw. Naw, it ain't bad. Make a good story, won't it? Red badge of courage. Shows you got grit. Women like that! Ain't that right, David?

DAVID

Yeah, that's so.

William signals David. The two step aside. Talk QUIETLY.

WILLIAM

He needs help. Fast. Regiment's long gone. Got to be something closer. You're from here, right? Know where we are?

David looks around. Nods. He hesitates.

DAVID

I know a place, but-

WILLIAM

How far?

DAVID

Two, three miles. But, Will...they ain't friendly to Yanks.

William looks over the field. Turns to David. Pulls the Union kepi off David's head and tosses it into the dirt.

WILLIAM

Maybe we ain't Yanks.

William moves back to Noah. David stares at the horizon.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EVENING

David and William carry Noah on a MAKESHIFT STRETCHER made of a CONFEDERATE FLAG with TWO TREE LIMBS on either side.

William and David wear CONFEDERATE GEAR. GRAY COATS, KEPIS.

NOAH

(struggling)  
I'm awful thirsty.

WILLIAM

We're gettin' close. We'll have you fit as a fiddle, soon enough. Say, Noah, you ever been in love?

NOAH

Love? I-I don't know. I don't think so.

WILLIAM

No? Never? Handsome man like you? Shame. I was in love once. Course, she was lovin' a lotta fellas... Chargin' us all for it, too.

David shakes his head and arches an eyebrow. William grins.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

What about you, David? Ever been in love?

DAVID

I guess so. Once.

WILLIAM

(Mock Southern accent)  
Southern belle?

DAVID

Not exactly-

A GUNSHOT. David and William stop. George steps out from the BUSHES on the side of the road. Aims a RIFLE at them.

GEORGE

Stop right there! State your business!

DAVID

Injured soldier, sir. We need help.

GEORGE

Yankee or friend?

WILLIAM

Friendly as a friend can be, sir.

George frowns at William, then squints at David.

GEORGE

I know you, son?

INT. PATTERSON PLANTATION HOUSE DINING ROOM - EVENING

David and William sit at the dining room table. The china is DUSTY. The glassware DIRTY. The room looks WORN. A Confederate KEPI sits on the table in front of David. He runs his fingers over the cap's gray cloth.

John enters. The five years have been harsh. He looks ten years older--deep wrinkles, a wild look in his eyes, uses a CANE. He pauses. Takes note of the Confederate clothes. Walks to the head of the table. Sits. Sets the cane on the table.

JOHN

The prodigal son returns... I see you're fightin' for the right side. That's good. Thought maybe you'd headed north after-

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DAVID

Where's mamma?

JOHN

Your friend's injured. You've seen battle. How long ago? Are they close?

David stares. William squirms, looks down. We SEE him realize that he's still wearing a UNION BELT BUCKLE stamped with "US." He covers it with his coat. CLEARS his throat.

WILLIAM

Pretty close.

John stares through William. His frown deepens. His fingers wrap around his cane. Knuckles grow WHITE. His teeth GRIND.

JOHN

(Muttering)

They're gonna try to take everything from me. They're *here*. On *my* doorstep.

William fidgets. COUGHS nervously. Fakes a smile.

WILLIAM

Well, not *that* close.

John's about to respond when LITTLE SAMUEL--three-year-old African American boy--appears in the doorway. He pauses, assesses the three men, and then runs inside. A SNARL appears on John's lips. He lifts the cane as Little Samuel passes, as if to strike the boy. David jumps out of his chair.

LUCY (O.C.)

Samuel!

Lucy appears in the doorway. Runs to her child. Picks him up. David stares at her. Still beautiful. The blow from his whip now a FADED SCAR.

LUCY (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, sir-

She sees him. The words catch in her throat.

George enters. Sleeves rolled up. Wiping his hands with a BLOODY TOWEL. All eyes jump to him. Lucy uses the moment to slip out of the room. David watches her go.

GEORGE  
I done all I can do. We'll see how he does throughout the night.

DAVID  
I-I'd like to see momma.

A beat of silence.

GEORGE  
David, your mother-

John SLAPS his open palm against the table. PLATES RATTLE.

JOHN  
She's dead. Smallpox. Got it from the Negroes three years ago.  
David's countenance drops. Another beat of stunned quiet.

DAVID  
I- Pardon me.

David starts to leave. John stands. Turns to George.

JOHN  
Tonight may be the night. They get nothin' from me. They get nothin' of mine.

He turns to David.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Glad my son is here to help me.

EXT. FAMILY PLOT - DUSK

David kneels at a HEADSTONE. Sets a BOUQUET of WILDFLOWERS down. Buries his head in his hands. Starts to CRY. William approaches. Kneels beside David. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

George washes his hands in the WASHBASIN on the DRESSER. On the bed behind him, Noah sleeps restlessly. George is about to leave when something catches his eye. Noah's TROUSERS rest on the dresser beside the washbasin. George frowns. He looks at Noah's BELT BUCKLE. Picks it up. It's stamped with "US." A Union buckle. Fury crosses his features. He rips the buckle off the trousers and stomps out.

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INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

David awakes. He's sweating. He bolts upright. We HEAR SCREAMS and SHOUTS. An ORANGE GLOW dances across the bedroom ceiling. He jumps out of bed. Rushes to the window.

Outside, John and George watch as TWO MEN holding LIT TORCHES collect all the slaves and force them into the barn.

David bolts for the door.

EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

John's shadow, a wraith dancing in the torchlight, seems to herd the terrified slaves into the barn. David sprints up.

DAVID

What are you doing?

John spins. He's holding a RIFLE.

JOHN

The Yankees. They'll be here by mornin'. But you already know that, don't you, David?

George stands nearby with a RIFLE of his own. The two torchbearers close in on the barn. Ensure the slaves can't escape.

DAVID

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Don't do this. Haven't we done enough to them already?

JOHN

What is it you feel for them? Sympathy? Compassion? Or-or is it more than that? Do you love them, David? Do you love these...*animals*?

David's eyes dart to the barn. He SEES Lucy. Their eyes meet. Her's wet with TEARS. Just like five years ago. Only now she's holding Little Samuel. Her HUSBAND stands beside her.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 That why you came back? To rescue  
 your precious little pets?

David's eyes jump back to his father. John digs into his pocket. Whips out Noah's UNION BUCKLE. Holds it up high.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 Betrayed by my own flesh and blood!  
 You did run north, you coward!

John hurls the buckle at David's feet.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 The Union will not take what is  
 rightfully *mine!*

John lifts the rifle. Aims at the slaves inside the barn. They SCREAM and SHOUT. One male slave runs. John SHOOTS him. He falls and grabs his leg. John reloads.

David sets his jaw. Stares at Lucy. Little Samuel BAWLS in her arms. David walks between the slaves and his father. Jaw set. Chin held high. He faces his father.

John's countenance turns ice cold. The rifle dips for a second. He brings it right back up. David is squarely in the line of fire.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 Step aside, Yankee dog!

David doesn't move. John GROWLS. He FIRES.

The BULLET plows into David's shoulder. He stumbles down to his knees. Clutches the wound.

John SEETHES. Throws the rifle aside. Stomps over to the men carrying the torches. Commandeers both torches. Walks to the barn. Throws the torches into the hay. It IGNITES, spreads. John strides to George. Rips the rifle out of his hands.

DAVID  
 Father, please.

John turns on him. He's livid. Hatred spews from his eyes.

JOHN  
 Don't! Don't you call me father!  
 You're no son of mine!

John lifts the rifle. Aims at David.

A GUNSHOT. David flinches. But he hasn't been shot.

John's eyes grow wide. He topples forward. Face plants into the dirt. William stands behind him aiming a SMOKING RIFLE.

David stares at his father's body. His shoulder sag. A beat passes.

We HEAR the CRASH of a GIANT BEAM falling inside the barn. David turns. The FIRE has spread. Slaves run for their lives. Lucy and her husband remain inside. She's frantic. David grimaces, stands with difficulty, and hobbles toward them.

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INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

David rushes into the barn. Goes to Lucy and her husband.

DAVID  
You gotta get out, now!

LUCY  
My baby! Samuel! I can't- I don't-

David spins. Starts searching. Another GIANT BEAM crashes down. SMOKE SWIRLS. David SEES movement under a WAGON. Kneels. We SEE Little Samuel.

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DAVID  
I got him! Now, go!

Lucy's husband grabs her and the two run out. David lifts Little Samuel with his good arm. Stumbles outside.

EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

David exits the barn. Lucy rushes to him. He hands Little Samuel to her. Their eyes meet. They lock. In that moment, all is forgiven. She retreats back to her husband and her boy. Her life as it is, not as it could have been, but preserved by the man she loved. As they walk away, Lucy gives David one last look over her shoulder.

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Behind him, the flaming barn COLLAPSES.

FADE OUT.

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