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Brown Condor

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APPROVAL TO ADVANCE TO CANDIDACY

The following student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy
for an M.F.A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Screenwriting

Student: Anand Fozard-McCall Date: 5/9/19

Committee Co Chair (690):  Date: 12-12-18

Committee Co Chair (691):  Date: 5/9/19

Advanced Screenplay Project Title:

Brown Condor

Criteria for advancement to candidacy:

Student has demonstrated sufficient ability and knowledge to complete the thesis project.

Approved to Candidacy

Not Approved to Candidacy

Comments


ADVANCED SCREENPLAY PROJECT APPROVAL

The Advanced Screenplay Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting submitted by the candidate fulfils the requirements and standards set forth in the University Bulletin by the Division.

Screenplay Title: Brown Condor

Student: Anand Fozard-McCall Date: 5/9/19

Committee Co Chair: SCWR 690 Patricia Meyer

Signed:  Date: 12-12-18

Committee Co Chair: SCWR 691 Beth Serin

Signed:  Date: 5/9/19

Director of Graduate Screenwriting: Patricia Meyer

Signed:  Date: 5-9-19

Dean: Peggy Raski

Signed:  Date: 5-9-19

This feature length screenplay written by

Anand Fozard-McCall

under the guidance of a faculty committee from the School of Film & Television at Loyola Marymount University, and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the thesis requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting.

Advanced Screenplay Project Committee:

[REDACTED]

Committee Chair: SCWR 690

Committee Member: SCWR 691

[REDACTED]

Director of Graduate Screenwriting

[REDACTED]

Dean, School of Film & Television

Date

5/9/19

Brown - Corder

A Screenplay

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Film & Television,
Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles, California

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

By

Anand Fozard-McCall

BROWN CONDOR

Written by

Anand Fozard-McCall

Based on the life of John Robinson

EXT. BIPLANE - FLYING - DAY

SUPER: GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI 1910

JOHN MOISANT, Caucasian, 40s, slight-build, peers down from the cockpit to view his captive AUDIENCE. From his point of view the PEOPLE look like little dots surrounded by a rich carpet of green pine forest and grassy plains.

Hundreds of LOCALS have gathered in the rural low-lying farmland to witness the barnstorming performance.

ON THE GROUND

The difference in the CROWD is far more distinct. The nucleus of the Observers are white, while a smaller section of black Citizens hover around the outskirts.

Amongst them is JOHN ROBINSON, African American, 7, wide-eyed and full of wonder. Next to him is CELESTE ROBINSON, African American, 30s, stands tall with a dignity about her.

Robinson looks on in amazement as Moisant performs a series of loop-the-loops. Two WHITE MEN talk within earshot.

MAN 1

You know he built that plane from the ground up.

MAN 2

You don't say!

MAN 1

Takes a man of real intelligence to pull that off.

Celeste grabs Robinson's hand and tries to pull him away.

CELESTE

It's time to go.

Robinson won't budge. He's frozen in awe.

CELESTE

C'mon, Johnnie.

ROBINSON

Just a few more minutes, momma.

CELESTE

I've gotta get supper goin' before your dad gets off work.

A reluctant Robinson allows Celeste to guide him away from the Crowd, but his eyes never stray from the plane.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Robinson excitedly runs in front of his mom with his arms out like a plane.

ROBINSON
I'm gonna fly when I grow up!

CELESTE
(vexed)
Boy, keep your head outta' them
clouds. Ya hear?

Robinson frowns.

CELESTE
You ain't got no business flying in
one of those things, it's
dangerous.

Robinson's arms drops to his side. His pace slows as his mother's harsh words appear to weigh him down.

EXT. ROBINSON HOUSE - DAY

The quaint one story house, painted in a dull white, blends in perfectly with the neighboring homes in the rural community.

Robinson explodes through the screen door. He holds a wooden model airplane high and leaps off the porch. "Pilot Johnnie Robinson" is written on the wings of the toy.

ROBINSON
Nnneaoooww!

Robinson mimics the sound of a propeller as he runs down the street. Not a care in the world other than his toy plane.

Robinson crosses over the train tracks as he heads toward downtown.

EXT. DOWNTOWN GULFPORT - DAY

Downtown Gulfport has an open landscape due to the large roads that run between the buildings. The area is complete with a wide variety of businesses.

A tall-steeple church stands high amongst the structures.
CITIZENS, mostly white, frequent the many establishments.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Two white KIDS have a CAT cornered on top of a window ledge.
JERRY, 11, freckled, chubby, tosses a stone at the cat. It narrowly misses. The cat HISSES.

JERRY

Damn it!

KEVIN, 12, buzz cut, cackles at Jerry.

KEVIN

I knew you couldn't hit it.

JERRY

Let's see you try.

Kevin pulls his arm back and prepares to sling the rock until something catches his eye. Jerry follows his line of sight.

At the end of the alleyway, Robinson runs around in a circle, his plane overhead.

Jerry and Kevin share malicious smiles.

Robinson absentmindedly plays when...

KEVIN (O.S.)

Hey!

Robinson turns to see the two Boys bearing down on him. He pulls the plane down and clutches it close to his stomach.

JERRY

What ya doin' out here?

ROBINSON

(nervously)

Nothin', I was just--

Kevin snatches the toy plane from Robinson.

ROBINSON

No!

Robinson tries to take the plane back, but Jerry pushes him to the ground.

KEVIN

What's a porch monkey need with a plane anyway?

Kevin reads the words on the toy.

KEVIN

Pilot Johnnie Robinson?

Robinson's chest rapidly falls up and down in panic. Kevin looks from the plane to Robinson; puts two and two together.

KEVIN

You think you gonna be a pilot or somethin'?

Kevin smirks and holds the plane out. As Robinson reaches for it, Kevin drops the plane ground and crushes the toy beneath his heel. Robinson's eyes well with tears.

JERRY

You wanna fly? Maybe we could find a tree for you to hang from.

Robinson's eyes go wide in fear. He scrambles to his feet and makes a break for it.

Jerry and Kevin run in pursuit. Robinson dashes into the street as a horse and buggy rolls past. The COACHMAN pulls on the reins to stop the horse from running over Robinson.

COACHMAN

Whoa!

Robinson races around the carriage. Jerry and Kevin are blocked by the buggy.

COACHMAN

Y'all kids watch where you goin'!

Jerry and Kevin nod, then sprint around the buggy. They look around for Robinson.

CRAWL SPACE

Robinson hides under the wooden church steps in a sitting fetal position.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Where ya at, Johnnie?

Jerry and Kevin move further away from Robinson's hiding spot. He's in the clear as they travel down the street.

JERRY (O.S.)
Come out, Robinson!

KEVIN (O.S.)
Robinson!

GRACE (PRE-LAP)
Robinson.

Tears fall from Robinson's eyes as we transition to...

EXT. RECEPTIONIST DESK - DAY

SUPER: CHICAGO 1927

Robinson blinks at the sound of his name. He is now older, but there is still a boyish charm about him.

GRACE
Robinson?

GRACE SMITH, 30s, Caucasian, willowy frame, gives Robinson a contemptuous look. He stands, hopeful, in a suit and blazer.

ROBINSON
Yes, ma'am.

GRACE
Take a seat. I'll tell Mr. Bates you're here.

ROBINSON
Thank you.

Robinson takes a hard look at the sign that hangs behind the desk: "Curtiss-Wright School of Aviation."

Robinson turns and makes his way to the hallway and settles down in the chair outside the office.

INT. ADMISSIONS OFFICE - DAY

RYAN BATES, 50s, Caucasian, sits behind his desk and skims through paperwork with a bored expression.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

BATES
Yes.

Grace pokes her head in the door.

GRACE

Sir, there is, ah...someone here about an admissions application.

BATES

Just give him one to fill out.

GRACE

He's already done that.

Bates finally looks up from his paperwork with a realization.

BATES

Don't tell me he's back.

INT. RECEPTIONIST DESK - DAY

Bates and Grace sneer as they scowl through the window at Robinson.

GRACE

Do you want me to call him in?

BATES

(scoffs)

No, let him sit.

Bates heads back to his office.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Robinson's leg bounces as he waits. He looks up at the clock on the wall.

INSERT - CLOCK READS 9:00.

WHITE STUDENTS walk past Robinson, some eye him curiously while others glare as if his presence is an insult to them.

Robinson takes in their piercing stare with a look of callousness. He's used to this.

Students make their way into a classroom. The hallway goes quiet and Robinson is left isolated in silence - something else he has grown accustomed to.

INT. ADMISSIONS OFFICE - DAY - LATER

Bates packs up the paperwork on his desk. He strolls to the office door and opens it.

RECEPTIONIST DESK

BATES

Is he still there?

Grace glances to the office window, Robinson sits patiently. She nods.

Bates rolls his eyes.

HALLWAY

Robinson looks up to the clock.

INSERT - CLOCK READS 12:00.

CHATTER fills the air as Students flood into the hallway.

The last person to leave is BILL HENDERSON, 40s, Caucasian, with unusually straight posture, almost like he's in a military march.

Henderson fumbles as he stuffs papers into his bag. The papers fall right in front of Robinson.

HENDERSON

Damn.

Robinson helps Henderson pick up the papers.

HENDERSON

Thank you.

Robinson picks up a FLIER. It reads "Civilian Flights by World War I Pilot Bill Henderson. Location: Acres Airport."

ROBINSON

You do flights at Acres?

HENDERSON

That's right...

Henderson takes in Robinson as he hands him the flier.

HENDERSON

...on the weekends. You familiar with the airport?

ROBINSON

Very. Sometimes I go just to spectate.

GRACE (O.S.)

You can see Mr. Bates now.

Robinson turns to see Grace standing at the office door. Henderson expresses a look of discouragement.

HENDERSON
(tentatively)
Good luck.

Robinson gives him a small smile and a nod. Henderson saunters off.

As Robinson heads for the office door, he notices JERRY WASHINGTON, 60s, African American, with a full head of grey hair, in a janitorial uniform.

Jerry enters the empty classroom with a broom and dustpan.

GRACE
(terse)
This way.

Grace's sharp tone snaps Robinson's attention off the janitor. He follows Grace into the office.

INT. ADMISSIONS OFFICE - DAY

Robinson sits across from Bates with a look of apprehension.

Bates flips through Robinson's application.

BATES
This is an impressive resume.

ROBINSON
It was good enough to get me
accepted into the school this past
summer.

Bates gives him a cold look.

BATES
Uh-huh. If I'm not mistaken there
were extenuating circumstances that
prevented us from enrolling you at
that time.

ROBINSON
Circumstances that came up after
you saw me in person?

Bates flippantly tosses the application to the side.

BATES

I'm sorry that you made the trip out here because unfortunately--

ROBINSON

There's no more space available in classes? Did I just miss the deadline or was the money for my application fee lost?

BATES

(smirks)

Feel free to try again next semester.

Robinson stands up with his jaw clinched. Clearly holding back his anger. He takes a breath.

ROBINSON

Thank you, Mr. Bates. I'll just grab another application on my way out.

This time it's Bates' turn to clench his jaw as he watches Robinson grab an application as he strides out of the office.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Robinson trudges down the hall, when a bulletin board catches his eye. He stares at one of the signs.

INSERT - "Hiring Janitor"

Robinson ponders for a second, then snatches the paper off the board.

EXT. ROBINSON'S AUTO GARAGE - SOUTH SIDE CHICAGO - DAY

AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVILIANS bustle through the lively streets. Black owned businesses line up throughout the neighborhood.

Robinson's Auto Garage is among those establishments. A tall impatient African American CUSTOMER waits outside the garage.

The Customer looks down at his watch and lets out a sigh. He strolls to the garage door and peeks inside.

INT. ROBINSON'S AUTO GARAGE - DAY

There's not much to be seen in the garage other than a work station, scattered car parts, and a few model airplanes.

EXT. ROBINSON'S AUTO GARAGE - DAY

The Customer shakes his head and gets into his car.

Robinson ambles around the corner and sees the Customer closing his car door. Robinson races over.

ROBINSON

Hey! I'm here!

CUSTOMER

Man, I've been waiting for a half hour.

ROBINSON

Sorry, Cornelius was supposed to open up for me.

CUSTOMER

You're lucky you do good work.

Robinson unlocks the pad on the garage and lifts the door.

INT. ROBINSON'S AUTO GARAGE - DAY - LATER

Robinson, now in his mechanic uniform, works under the car while the Customer inspects the model airplanes.

CUSTOMER

You really are a big fan of model planes huh?

ROBINSON

I'm an even bigger fan of the real thing.

CUSTOMER

I always thought it was crazy. The idea of people flying.

ROBINSON

I'm sure at some point people thought the idea of riding on something with an engine and four wheels was also crazy.

The Customer shrugs. It's a fair point.

The garage door swings open, and CORNELIUS COFFEY, 20s, African American, scrawny, barges in.

Cornelius drops his hands to his knees and wheezes as he catches his breath.

CORNELIUS
 (panting)
 Sorry...I'm late...I
 ran...from...across...across--

ROBINSON
 Town.

Cornelius nods.

INT. GARAGE - ROBINSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Upstairs above the garage is a drab bedroom, sparsely decorated with airplane posters.

Robinson folds his suit on the bed. FOOTSTEPS march up the steps. Cornelius enters in his oil-stained mechanic overalls. Cornelius spots the suit.

ROBINSON
 I needed you to open up the shop
 this morning.

CORNELIUS
 I over slept. I did a late shift at
 the dealership. Dean's really been
 riding me lately.

Robinson puts the suit in a drawer.

CORNELIUS
 I see you went to the school today.

ROBINSON
 Don't know what you're talkin'
 about.

CORNELIUS
 Only time you wear that suit is for
 church or that admissions office.

ROBINSON
 Maybe I went to a morning service,
 you should've joined me.

CORNELIUS
 I've done way too much sinning
 lately to step foot into a church.

ROBINSON
 I think that's the whole purpose of
 church.

CORNELIUS

Seriously Johnnie, I want to fly as bad as you, but they're never gonna let a Negro step foot into one of those classrooms.

ROBINSON

Maybe, but I know I'd rather try and fail than fail to try.

CORNELIUS

You should burn whatever nursery rhyme book you got that from.

(a beat)

We're gonna have to find another way.

ROBINSON

When you find that path let me know.

Robinson plops down on the bed. Cornelius frowns at Robinson's resigned state.

CORNELIUS

Is that your plan for the rest of the night?

ROBINSON

I'm not goin' out to the club with you.

CORNELIUS

Actually, I was gonna say you should join me and Willa tonight at the YMCA. It's a community meeting, a place where you'll be accepted.

ROBINSON

Who's Willa?

Cornelius looks hurt.

CORNELIUS

Willa Brown, the new love of my life. She's beautiful, intelligent, an activist...and she smells amazing.

Robinson LAUGHS.

CORNELIUS

C'mon, Johnnie, you're not doing anything else.

Robinson gives an annoyed sigh.

INT. YMCA - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The room is filled with a BLACK AUDIENCE, all listening to Reverend JAMES AUSTIN, 40s, BUZZING with energy. He stands at the front of the room.

Robinson sits with Cornelius and WILLA BROWN, 20's, beautiful, composed, and elegant. They all listen intently.

AUSTIN

I don't know about you, but in my history books I was taught that Africa had no history before Europeans came to save them from their savagery. I'm sure you all learned the same thing.

The Crowd MURMURS in agreement.

The back door of the auditorium OPENS and EARNIZE SENAI, Ethiopian, 20s, stunning, with an air of confidence, enters the auditorium.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Different classrooms but the same lesson.

Robinson spots her in the back. His eyes widen as he tries to take in all of Earniize.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

Being instilled with that ideology only serves to plague the mind with a false sense of identity. But there is a nation in the motherland that refuses to be colonized. Refuses to lose its identity. I'd like to invite a special guest who can elaborate on this subject from a personal level, Earnize Senai.

Everyone APPLAUDS as Earnize makes her way to the front. Austin steps to the side and allows Earnize center stage.

EARNIZE

Thank you, Reverend Austin. And I agree, as a teacher I realized that there are parts of history that are omitted, and some parts that are outright lies...

Cornelius leans over to Robinson.

CORNELIUS

(whispers)

You know she teaches at my old high school, Lakewood. It's not far from your shop--

Robinson SHUSHES him. Cornelius raises his eyebrows, taken aback at Robinson's dismissal.

EARNIZE (O.S.)

It is up to us to ensure generations after us do not forget.

Robinson leans forward and listens keenly.

EARNIZE

As the Negro fights for equality against the laws of Jim Crow, let us look to the great Nation of Ethiopia as our example. The Italo-Ethiopian War was fought a little over three decades ago. Ethiopia refused to be subjugated by western colonizers. They fought, and they won. That same fight for freedom and equality is happening right outside these walls and we must be prepared.

GRUMBLES of support spread through the Crowd. Robinson applauds enthusiastically.

EXT. YMCA - NIGHT

The Crowd exits. Robinson, Cornelius, and Willa walk out together.

CORNELIUS

I don't know about you all, but I'm fired up. I feel like...I don't know, marching to Washington and demanding my forty acres. They can keep the mule though. Right?

ROBINSON

Sure.

Robinson scans the Crowd.

WILLA

Were you not moved by the speech?

Robinson brings his attention to Willa.

ROBINSON
Oh, I was, definitely.

WILLA
Cornelius tells me that you're both
mechanics.

ROBINSON
That's right.

CORNELIUS
But we've got bigger goals in
mind...

Robinson spots Earnize shaking hands with Austin. She walks
off after they exchange their good-byes.

CORNELIUS
We're reaching for the clouds you
might say. Isn't that right
Johnnie? Johnnie?

Cornelius turns to see Robinson running off.

CORNELIUS
What the hell?

Robinson catches up to Earnize as she gets into her car.

ROBINSON
Excuse me.

Earnize turns around.

ROBINSON
It's Earnize, right?

EARNIZE
Yes.

ROBINSON
I just wanted to say how inspiring
your speech was.

EARNIZE
Thank you.

Cornelius and Willa approach within earshot.

ROBINSON

It makes me wanna, I don't know,
march to Washington tonight and
demand my forty acres, they can
keep the mule though.

Earnize chuckles.

Cornelius turns to Willa, upset.

CORNELIUS

He stole my joke.

Earnize reaches her hand out for Robinson to shake.

EARNIZE

What was your name?

ROBINSON

Oh, it's John Robinson.

EARNIZE

I'm glad I could inspire you, Mr.
Robinson.

ROBINSON

My friends call me Johnnie.

Earnize gets into her car.

ROBINSON

You know, I would love to learn
more about Ethiopia. Maybe we could
go out sometime and you could teach
me.

Earnize gives him a very small flirtatious smile, he's going
to have to try harder.

EARNIZE

That's a tempting offer, but I'm
already pretty busy teaching my
students.

Earnize starts her car.

EARNIZE

Have a good night, Johnnie.

Earnize waves and drives off, leaving Robinson enamored.

EXT. ACRES AIRPORT - DAY

The tranquil private airfield sits on a large pasture of grass. A row of planes and PILOTS line up along the airstrip in front of a hangar.

Robinson leans against his motorcycle and eats a sandwich. His eyes are glued to a plane as it rolls down the runway and slowly takes off. There is a longing in his eyes.

Robinson finishes his sandwich. Satisfied with his spectating for the day, he mounts his bike and takes one last glimpse at the airstrip. He squints as something catches his attention.

Toward the back of the row is Henderson. He stands on a ladder and works on the engine of a biplane.

Robinson starts the motorcycle. He sees Henderson slam the wrench in frustration. Robinson hesitates as he gets ready to ride off.

AIRSTRIP

Henderson GROANS as he shakes his head at the engine.

ROBINSON (O.S.)
Need some help?

Henderson peers down to see Robinson smiling up at him.

HENDERSON
Come to spectate?

ROBINSON
Thought it was a nice day for it.

Henderson turns his attention back to the engine hood.

HENDERSON
You know anything about internal
combustion engines?

Robinson studies the plane.

ROBINSON
This is a Jenny, right?

HENDERSON
My pride and joy.

ROBINSON
That means it runs off a V Eight
engine.

(MORE)

ROBINSON (CONT'D)

The valve gears on those can be pretty fragile, which leads to short overhauls.

Henderson raises his eyebrows in surprise.

ROBINSON

I'm a mechanic.

Henderson climbs down from the ladder.

HENDERSON

I'll tell you what, Mr. Mechanic, if you can get that engine to turn over, I'll be happy to pay you for the labor. How does five dollars an hour sound?

ROBINSON

That sounds good. But what if I can do it in under an hour?

HENDERSON

Then I'll really be impressed.

Robinson rolls up his sleeves and strides to the ladder.

LATER

Robinson stands on a ladder and works on the biplane engine.

TOM SCOTT, 20s, racist hatred oozes from his pale face. He gives Robinson a death stare as he walks up to Bill.

TOM

What's going on here, Bill?

HENDERSON

Just trying to get the plane up and running.

TOM

(scoffs)

Good luck with that.

Robinson and Tom lock eyes. Tom shakes his head and struts off.

HENDERSON

Don't mind him.

ROBINSON

I've been dealing with men like that all my life. At this point a mean look don't bother me none.

Henderson glances to the plane.

HENDERSON

How's it looking?

ROBINSON

Good. I just gotta tighten the bolts on the cylinders and you should be ready to go.

HENDERSON

(checks watch)

In under an hour. You're a man of your word.

The engine of a plane ROARS to life. Robinson and Henderson watch as it cruises onto the runway with CARL ROGERS, 30s, stocky with beady eyes, in the cockpit.

The plane accelerates down the runway. Robinson watches in awe as the wheels slowly lift off the ground.

Henderson takes notice of Robinson's astonished face.

HENDERSON

Have you ever flown, John?

Robinson shakes his head.

EXT. CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

New Cars are lined up outside of the dealership.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - ASSEMBLY LINE - DAY

MECHANICS are hard at work around the busy shop. Cornelius, the lone man of color, sits in the corner at a table eating a turkey leg.

ALBERT DEAN, 50s, stout, with a head of white hair, pokes his head out of the office.

DEAN

Cornelius, you're obviously not busy.

CORNELIUS
 (mouth full)
 I'm on break.

DEAN
 I need you to help me with
 something.

Cornelius looks from his food to Dean.

CORNELIUS
 (sotto)
 But...I'm on break.

Dean heads for the back door.

DEAN
 Hurry up.

Cornelius rolls his eyes as he gets up from the table.

EXT. BACK OF CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

Cornelius stands beside Dean. TWO TRUCKS pull up full of
 spare parts.

DEAN
 I want you to go through these used
 parts and see if you can find
 anything useful.

CORNELIUS
 This is busy work.

DEAN
 Then you better get busy.

Dean takes his leaves.

Cornelius steps into the back of one of the trucks. He
 mutters to himself as he digs through the parts.

CORNELIUS
 (sotto)
 I should've called in sick...
 Always asking me to do this type of
 work-- I'll tell you what--

Cornelius stops talking when he notices propeller blades of a
 plane. Cornelius picks it up and examines it.

His eyes scan the rest of the scrap, he spots the tire of a
 biplane. A smile spreads across his face.

EXT. ACRES AIRPORT - DAY

The sun sets as Robinson uses a rag to wipe the grease from his hands. He stands next to the plane and looks up to Henderson in the cockpit.

ROBINSON

Go ahead and give it a start, Mr. Henderson.

HENDERSON

Fingers crossed.

Henderson cranks it and the engine turns over. Robinson watches the propeller spin, satisfied.

Henderson tosses Robinson an aviator helmet.

HENDERSON

Let's give it a test run.

Robinson looks from the helmet to the plane, frozen.

HENDERSON

What? Don't tell me you're afraid to fly.

Robinson stands resolute as he puts on the helmet.

RUNWAY

The Biplane sits at the start of the airstrip. Henderson and Robinson strap into the cockpits. Henderson looks back at him.

HENDERSON

Here we go!

The Biplane rolls down the runway, gaining speed. Robinson looks down as they separate from the ground.

The Biplane glides through the air. Robinson smiles like a kid in a candy store as he opens his arms and takes in the clouds.

HENDERSON

Hold on!

Henderson does a barrel roll. Once the plane is right-side up Robinson's excitement can't be contained.

ROBINSON

Woo-hoo!

GROUND

Carl and Tom watch as the plane soars in the sky.

CARL

I guess Henderson is giving rides
out to anyone.

TOM

You know he had him working on that
engine earlier, I'm surprised they
haven't crashed.

The Men sneer as the plane makes its descent.

INT. HANGAR - NIGHT - LATER

Robinson takes off the helmet. He looks ecstatic.

HENDERSON

I see you enjoyed yourself.

Robinson takes in the plane with admiration.

Henderson pulls out his wallet and retrieves five dollars.

HENDERSON

Here you go.

ROBINSON

I don't want your money, Mr.
Henderson.

HENDERSON

Nonsense, I owe you.

ROBINSON

Would you be willing to consider a
different method of payment?

Henderson gives him a curious look. Robinson steels himself
to ask a tough question.

ROBINSON

I want flying lessons?

Henderson furrows his brows.

HENDERSON

What about the school?

Robinson looks at the ground bitterly.

HENDERSON
 Trouble with admissions huh?

ROBINSON
 (irate)
 They keep giving me the same damn
 excuses and...

Robinson stops himself before his anger completely spills out.

ROBINSON
 This would be a temporary solution
 until I can figure out a way to get
 into the classroom.

Henderson gives him a sympathetic look.

HENDERSON
 It's unfortunate that's the way
 things are. War was simple in that
 aspect. You depended on the man
 beside you to survive, regardless
 of what color he was.

ROBINSON
 Can I depend on you to help me?

Henderson takes a deep breath as he carefully considers his next statement.

HENDERSON
 I like you John, I really do. In a
 perfect world I would say yes, but
 this ain't a perfect world. Save
 yourself the heartache cause...this
 country ain't ready for a Negro
 pilot.

Robinson's head falls to shield the disappointment on his face.

HENDERSON
 Sorry.

Henderson hands Robinson the five dollars and walks out of the hangar.

INT. LAKEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Earnize sits at her desk grading work. She writes a B at the top of the paper and circles it.

Finally finished with the last paper, Earnize packs her bag.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

As Earnize makes her way through the heart of the lively South Side neighborhood, she passes by a number of businesses including, restaurants, nightclubs, and theaters.

One small business that goes unnoticed by Earnize has a sign that reads Robinson's Auto Garage.

EXT. ROBINSON'S AUTO GARAGE - NIGHT

Robinson, mounts his motorcycle.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

As Earnize turns a corner, there is a loud BANG. She is forced to pull over.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Earnize gets out the car to find one of her tires is flat.

EARNIZE

Great.

She bends down to inspect the tire.

A motorcycle engine BELLOWS down the street. Robinson cruises past Earnize. He does a double-take.

Robinson slows down and turns around. He pulls up beside her.

ROBINSON

You stranded, Earnize?

Earnize looks up in surprise at the sound of her name. Robinson gives her a bright smile.

EARNIZE

(grins)

Do I know you?

ROBINSON

You tellin' me you don't remember
who I am?

Earnize looks him up and down committed to feigning recollection.

EARNIZE

You look vaguely familiar, was it
Jim, James--

ROBINSON

Johnnie.

EARNIZE

That's what your friends call you,
right?

ROBINSON

So you do remember.

Earnize can't hide a small smile.

LATER

Cars past by them as Robinson kneels and works on the tire.
Earnize studies his motorcycle.

EARNIZE

This is nice.

ROBINSON

Thanks, I got it off a wildcatter
from Texas. He got into a pretty
bad wreck and totaled it.

EARNIZE

This was totaled at some point?

ROBINSON

Yep, it was in pieces. Halfway
through me fixin' it he up and
bought a brand new Ford T, said he
was swearing off motorcycles, too
dangerous.

EARNIZE

Looks pretty dangerous to me.

ROBINSON

It can be, in the wrong hands.

Robinson stands up.

ROBINSON

All finished.

Earnize checks the tire.

EARNIZE

I guess I owe you a thank you.

ROBINSON
It was my pleasure.

EARNIZE
Hope I didn't ruin your Friday
night plans.

ROBINSON
Nah, where I'm headed it's gonna be
alive all night.

EARNIZE
And where is that?

Robinson gives a cheeky smile.

ROBINSON
My shop is right around the corner.
You could leave your car there and
join me if you wanna find out.

Earnize squints at Robinson, her interest is clearly piqued.

EXT. MOTORCYCLE - MOVING - NIGHT

Earnize holds on tight to Robinson as the motorcycle travels
through the streets.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

They come to a stop near the outskirts of the neighborhood in
front of two apartment buildings. Robinson parks the
motorcycle on the side of the road. They dismount.

Despite the relatively late hour there are still PEOPLE out
and about. Most hover near the alleyway.

ROBINSON
How was your first ride on a
motorcycle?

Earnize looks at the motorcycle with a mixture of fear and
reverence.

EARNIZE
It was strangely...invigorating.

ROBINSON
(beams)
C'mon.

Earnize looks around skeptically as they stroll down the alley.

EARNIZE

Seriously, where are we going?

They stop in front of a side door. Robinson knocks five times in a specific rhythm.

DOORMAN (O.S.)

Password?

ROBINSON

Bronzeville pride and glory.

EARNIZE

Is this a Speakeasy?

Robinson winks at Earnize. The door opens and they head in.

INT. SPEAKEASY - BASEMENT STAIRS - NIGHT

Jazz music BLARES as Robinson and Earnize make their way down the steps and enter...

INT. SPEAKEASY CLUB - CONTINUOUS

There is a pulsing energy in the club. The dance floor is packed with an all BLACK CROWD moving to the blend of the harmonious instruments from the JAZZ BAND.

Robinson holds Earnize's hand as they maneuver through the Crowd toward the bar. The BARTENDER approaches them.

BARTENDER

What are you havin'?

ROBINSON

A gin cocktail.

The Bartender turns to Earnize.

EARNIZE

Make it two.

Earnize turns and ogles all the festivities. Robinson smiles as he watches her.

The Bartender comes back with the two drinks.

ROBINSON

Thank you.

Robinson takes the drinks and pays the Bartender.

The Two head over to a table in the corner.

ROBINSON

This isn't my usual scene, but my friend Cornelius recommended it.

EARNIZE

Seems like a good place to blow off steam.

ROBINSON

Yeah, which is what I needed.

Robinson takes a long sip of his drink.

EARNIZE

Hard day?

ROBINSON

(frustrated)
One of many.

EARNIZE

Is it work? The garage?

ROBINSON

Nah, being a mechanic is easy.

EARNIZE

You don't sound enthused about it.

ROBINSON

The garage is great, but it's too grounded. I belong in the skies.

Earnize takes notice of the slightest twinkle in Robinson's eye behind his sorrow.

EARNIZE

What does that mean?

ROBINSON

I wanna be a pilot.

EARNIZE

A pilot? You're the first man of color I ever heard say that.

Robinson takes another sip.

ROBINSON

Yeah. Most people think I'm in pursuit of a pipe dream. Maybe I am. All I know is that I used to think only birds and angels could fly until I saw my first barnstormer. The idea that man could join them in the sky to me was...life changing.

EARNIZE

So, what are you gonna do to reach this dream?

ROBINSON

Feels like I've done all I can. Aviation schools won't accept me. I can't get lessons. I'm tired of running into the same roadblocks.

Earnize searches his face. The twinkle in his eye dwindles.

The JAZZ MUSIC dies down as the Band finishes a song.

EARNIZE

If you truly care about something then you don't give up on it.

Robinson looks up from his drink.

EARNIZE

So if conventional methods can't get you in that classrooms, maybe it's time to think outside of the box.

The Band starts back up with a lively SONG.

Robinson gives her a small smile. He glances over to the dance floor.

ROBINSON

You wanna dance?

EARNIZE

I don't know...

Robinson stands up and holds his hand out.

ROBINSON

I'm not giving up until you join me on the dance floor.

Earnize gives in and takes his hand. They join the Crowd.

Beaming smiles stretch across their faces as they dance to the rhythm of the MUSIC.

INT. CURTISS-WRIGHT SCHOOL OF AVIATION - HALLWAY

Robinson walks with Jerry, both wearing janitor uniforms as they tour the hallway.

JERRY

You have any experience?

ROBINSON

My mom used to clean houses back in Mississippi. Sometimes I helped.

JERRY

That's not necessarily professional experience.

Robinson peers down at the marble floor and smiles.

ROBINSON

Well, I know you're probably going too acid heavy in your cleaning material. The trick is to mix a little ammonia with warm water. The diluted solution will have these floors sparkling.

Jerry raises his eyebrows. Why didn't he think of that?

JERRY

Alright, kid. Your shift starts at five on Saturdays. You'll be responsible for the rooms on this floor. I'll handle the top floor.

ROBINSON

Sounds good.

Robinson glances into each classroom they pass. He peeks into Henderson's class.

JERRY (O.S.)

Here you go.

Jerry holds out a broom and dustpan.

ROBINSON

If I work quietly, do you think I can start in here?

JERRY

(shrugs)

Up to you. And I wouldn't worry about disturbing the class. Trust me, no one's gonna bat an eye at a Negro janitor.

Jerry saunters off.

INT. CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Henderson faces the STUDENTS.

HENDERSON

Bernoulli's theorem states that as the velocity of air increases, its pressure decreases, and as the velocity of air decreases its pressure increases...

The door to the classroom opens. A few Students turn around to see Robinson pushing a trash can.

As Robinson starts emptying the trash the students turn their attention back to the instructor. Henderson is momentarily sidetracked as he watches Robinson.

HENDERSON

(clears throat)

As I was saying, the air above the wing of the plane travels faster than the air below it. Once that high pressure generates enough lift force to become greater than the planes weight, you have flight.

Henderson draws a diagram on the board.

Robinson's eyes are glued to the board as he empties the trash.

HENDERSON

Now, can anyone tell me the name of the thin layer of air that flows over the wing?

A few STUDENTS raise their hands.

ROBINSON

(sotto)

Boundary layer.

HENDERSON
Yes, Mr. Moore.

MOORE (O.S.)
The boundary layer.

HENDERSON
Correct, and there are two parts to
that layer...

Henderson writes notes on the board and Robinson continues to pay close attention under the guise of cleaning.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Students pack up their bags and shuffle out of the class. They stroll right past Robinson as he dusts the desk.

The room empties, leaving Robinson and Henderson.

HENDERSON
I've never seen anyone clean with
such attention to detail.

ROBINSON
Just trying to be thorough.

Henderson gives him a leery gaze.

HENDERSON
Uh-huh. So a mechanic by day and a
janitor by night?

ROBINSON
I gotta take opportunities wherever
I can get them.

Henderson turns to erase the board.

ROBINSON
You don't have to worry about that.
I'll take care of it. It's my job
after all.

HENDERSON
(smirks)
I guess it is.

Henderson grabs his bag.

ROBINSON
You have a good night.

Robinson nods and watches Henderson exit the classroom.

Robinson walks up to the board and studies the diagrams. He pulls out a notepad and jots down everything on the board.

INT. ROBINSON'S AUTO GARAGE - NIGHT

Cornelius BANGS at the garage door. BANG BANG BANG. The door opens. Robinson steps out.

ROBINSON
You better be dying, hammerin' at
my door like that.

CORNELIUS
Where have you've been? I gotta--

Cornelius takes in Robinson's janitor uniform.

CORNELIUS
What the hell are you wearing?

Robinson shrugs off the question.

ROBINSON
What do you want, Cornelius?

Cornelius gives him a sly smile.

EXT. SIDEWALK OF CAR DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

Robinson and Cornelius stand outside the tall fence that surrounds the dealership. Robinson eyes the lock on the fence.

ROBINSON
Are you sure about this?

CORNELIUS
Of course I'm not sure. Now, let's
do it anyway.

Cornelius climbs the fence. Robinson follows behind him.

EXT. BACK OF CAR DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

Cornelius leads Robinson to a stack of parts covered by a tarp.

CORNELIUS

Mack had me dig through a bunch of scrap. I gave him all the car parts, but I saved this for us.

Cornelius pulls the tarp off a pile of airplane parts. Robinson's eyes light up.

ROBINSON

Whoa.

Robinson inspects a rusted propeller, he smiles.

ROBINSON

One man's trash is another man's treasure.

Robinson stares at the parts like they're pure gold.

INT. ROBINSON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Earnize sits at the small round table in the middle of the room. She takes in the modest setting.

Her eyes fall on the images of all the different posters: Biplanes, the Wright Brothers, and John Moisant barnstorming.

Robinson stands at a rusted stove preparing food.

EARNIZE

Your place, it's...

Robinson turns to see Earnize studying the place.

ROBINSON

Not much, I know.

EARNIZE

(re: airplane posters)

I was going to say distinctive. I like it.

Robinson smiles as he turns back to the food. He loads the plates and brings them to the table.

ROBINSON

Fried catfish, collard greens and black-eye peas. You won't find better southern cookin' than this in all of Chicago.

EARNIZE

So you said.

ROBINSON

You'll see.

Robinson sits. They grab their utensils and dig in. Robinson watches as Earnize takes a bite of the collard greens.

EARNIZE

Okay this is...this is good.

ROBINSON

Don't be shy, I got plenty. There's about four more pieces of catfish as well.

EARNIZE

I'm not a big fan of fish.

Earnize takes a bite of the catfish. She expresses delight as she chews. She notices Robinson's smug smirk.

EARNIZE

It's not bad.

ROBINSON

C'mon, you can admit it.

EARNIZE

(rolls her eyes)
Alright, it's delicious. What's your secret?

ROBINSON

Maybe I'll tell you on our next date.

EARNIZE

That's presumptuous.

Robinson grins as he watches Earnize devour the catfish.

ROBINSON

Not a fan of fish, huh?

On the stove sits four pieces of fish.

SAME - LATER

One piece of fish is left. Dirty dishes are stacked between the two of them.

ROBINSON

Kidfoo?

EARNIZE

Kitfo. It's marinated minced beef,
I'd have to say it's my favorite
dish from back home.

ROBINSON

You're gonna have to make it for me
sometime.

EARNIZE

Maybe I will.

They share smiles.

ROBINSON

So, how does an Ethiopian woman end
up in Chicago?

EARNIZE

Actually, I was part of a handful
of students chosen by the Crown
Prince to study in America.

ROBINSON

They must've seen something special
in you.

(beat)

Are the other students still here?

EARNIZE

No, most of them have gone back to
Ethiopia, but I'm still in touch
with my friend Melaku Bayen. He's
an advisor to Emperor Selassie.

ROBINSON

It's good you still have those
connections.

EARNIZE

I have to. Everyday I worry the
next time I hear from home will be--

Earnize stops herself as she is overtaken by sadness.
Robinson watches her curiously.

ROBINSON

What?

EARNIZE

The last letter I received from
Bayen, he told me he's traveling to
America soon.

ROBINSON
Is that a bad thing?

EARNIZE
Italy is preparing to annex
Ethiopia. He's coming to try to
stop a war.

ROBINSON
That's terrible.

EARNIZE
With the League of Nations
reluctant to intervene, Bayen is
hoping to get support from the US.

ROBINSON
Do you think they're gonna help?

EARNIZE
I don't know.

Earnize stares at the dishes but her focus is clearly somewhere else. Robinson reaches across the table and gives her hand a sympathetic squeeze.

Saddened, Robinson lets go, picks up the dishes and takes them to the sink. Earnize helps.

ROBINSON
You don't have to do that.

EARNIZE
I want to.

Earnize and Robinson do the dishes together. Robinson takes notice of the sadness lingering in her eyes.

ROBINSON
I'm sorry. I guess this turned into
a sadder occasion than I wanted.

EARNIZE
No, this was nice, really.

She smiles at Robinson. The two share a long look, Robinson glances from her eyes to her lips. Their faces inch closer until they find themselves sharing a passionate kiss.

INT. CURTISS-WRIGHT SCHOOL OF AVIATION - CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Henderson stands in front of the class.

HENDERSON

All right everyone, be prepared for the exam next class.

The Students exit, ignoring Robinson, who sweeps in the corner.

Henderson walks up to Robinson.

HENDERSON

Did you learn anything tonight?

ROBINSON

Yeah. I learned that this corner seems to collect a lot of dust.

Henderson furrows his brow incredulously.

HENDERSON

Well, I'll leave you to it. I'm guessing you'll wipe down the board.

ROBINSON

Naturally.

Henderson heads for the door. Robinson turns and looks at the plane diagram drawn on the board.

ROBINSON

Mr. Henderson.
(Henderson stops)
Can I ask you something?

HENDERSON

Sure.

ROBINSON

Placing the top wing of a biplane ahead of the bottom wing, is that always necessary?

HENDERSON

It depends on the size of the plane.

ROBINSON

Let's say a small single-seater.

HENDERSON

Then the top wing should be placed ahead. It will reduce the effects of aerodynamic interference between the two wings.

ROBINSON

I imagine the positive stagger would also help with downward visibility.

HENDERSON

Exactly. Why do you ask?

ROBINSON

For a plane I'm working on.

HENDERSON

You servicing more planes?

ROBINSON

I'm building one.

HENDERSON

(stunned)

You really aren't going to let this go.

ROBINSON

I was advised not to give up on what I care about.

HENDERSON

(sighs)

I still say you're only going to make life harder for yourself.

ROBINSON

Probably.

(beat)

I know you don't want to give me lessons, but what about storage?

Henderson raises his eyebrows curiously.

EXT. BACK OF CAR DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

Robinson nervously bounces as he stands beside a shabby Ford truck. He spies Cornelius stumbling toward him from the other side of the fence.

Cornelius drags the tarp of parts with him.

ROBINSON

I still don't know about this.

CORNELIUS

These parts are just going to be shipped to some scrapyards.

Cornelius hands Robinson parts over the fence.

CORNELIUS

Might as well get some good use out
of them.

Robinson stacks the parts in the back of the truck.

They continue the back and forth until the truck is nearly
full. The sunlight pierces the skyline as dawn approaches.

Cornelius picks up the last part, which is a piece of the
tail of a plane. As he approaches the fence, Robinson notices
the lights of the dealership come on.

ROBINSON

What is that?

Cornelius spins around. His eyes go wide.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

Dean yawns as he inspects the assembly line.

EXT. BACK OF CAR DEALERSHIP

Cornelius rushes to lift the part over the fence.

CORNELIUS

We gotta hurry.

He practically tosses the part over the fence. Robinson
fumbles and it drops to the ground with a a loud CRASH.

Cornelius and Robinson stare at each other wide-eyed.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP

The sound of the CRASH gets Dean's attention. He looks to the
back door.

EXT. BACK OF CAR DEALERSHIP

CORNELIUS

You think he heard that?

ROBINSON

I think my family in Gulfport heard
that. C'mon!

Cornelius grabs the tarp and climbs over the fence.

INT. CAR DEALERSHIP

Dean sleepily makes his way to the door.

EXT. BACK OF CAR DEALERSHIP

Robinson and Cornelius hastily use the tarp to cover the parts in the truck bed.

AROUND THE CORNER

The back door opens. Dean peeks outside.

DEAN

Is someone out here?

TRUCK

Cornelius looks to Robinson

CORNELIUS

Does he actually expect a trespasser to answer that?

ROBINSON

Just get in the truck.

They race into the truck, Robinson turns over the engine and mashes the gas.

Dean reaches the edge of the fence just in time to see the truck turn down a side road. Dean's face scrunches up suspiciously.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

Robinson directs the truck as it backs up to the far corner.

Tom and Carl shoot daggers from the other side of the hangar.

INT. TRUCK - MOVING

Cornelius looks out the window as he drives in reverse.

HANGAR

ROBINSON

You're good.

Cornelius stops the truck and gets out. He looks around at the other WHITE PILOTS glaring at them.

CORNELIUS
How did you pull this off?

ROBINSON
I told you, Henderson gave me his word that he'll cover for us.

CORNELIUS
You say that like his word is supposed to mean something to me. I don't even know who Henderson is.

ROBINSON
Don't worry. They all think Henderson hired us to help him build a plane.

Cornelius gives him an apprehensive look. Robinson smiles.

ROBINSON
(condescending tone)
Of course, if you're too scared then...

CORNELIUS
Scared, scared?
(scoffs)
I ain't scared of nothin' but my mama with a switch.

ROBINSON
All right then, let's get to work.

Robinson drops the tailgate. They admire the pile of spare parts.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

-- INT. HANGAR - DAY - Robinson and Cornelius rummage through the parts.

-- INT. LAKEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY - In the middle of erasing the board, Earnize turns and sees Robinson in the doorway, holding flowers. She beams at him.

-- INT. CURTISS-WRIGHT SCHOOL OF AVIATION - CLASSROOM - NIGHT
As Henderson lectures, he smiles at Robinson, who dusts in the back, clearly paying attention.

-- INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT - Earnize is cozied up close to Robinson as they watch a movie.

-- INT. HANGAR - DAY

Robinson and Cornelius read through his notepad as they work on the plane, which now looks more than halfway complete. Cornelius looks to Robinson concerned.

CORNELIUS

What are we going to do for an engine?

Robinson surveys the plane. His eyes slowly fall to his parked motorcycle.

ROBINSON

Do you think we could use the motorcycle engine?

Cornelius considers this for a moment.

CORNELIUS

Possibly, but we'd have to make a lot of modifications. Those engines weren't designed to sustain power at max rpm for long.

ROBINSON

But if the engine is air-cooled, we switch out the camshaft, and add turbochargers then...

CORNELIUS

(smiles)

That could work. Just have to get a hold of some turbochargers.

-- EXT. CHEVROLET DEALERSHIP - DAY - Dean watches Cornelius curiously as Cornelius gathers spare parts. Cornelius spots Dean and gives him an awkward smile. Dean rolls his eyes and walks off.

-- EXT. ROBINSON'S AUTO GARAGE - DAY - Robinson works on the modifications to the engine.

-- INT. HANGAR - DAY - Robinson and Cornelius step back and admire their work. The plane is finished.

END MONTAGE.

INT. CURTISS-WRIGHT SCHOOL OF AVIATION - CLASSROOM - NIGHT

As the Students leave, Robinson approaches Henderson.

ROBINSON
Fascinating lecture, Mr. Henderson.
Especially the bit about the stall
speed.

HENDERSON
(laughs)
I'm happy you liked it.

Henderson packs up his stuff.

ROBINSON
Your class has been a real help.

HENDERSON
You mean in your plane building
endeavor? I haven't been out to the
airport in a while, how's it
coming?

ROBINSON
It's finished.

Off Henderson's shocked expression.

EXT. HANGAR - DAY

Henderson walks around the biplane, inspecting every inch.
Robinson and Cornelius watch him with anticipation.

HENDERSON
I can't believe you built it.

ROBINSON
I told you I would.

HENDERSON
Yeah, I guess you did.
(a beat)
How does it fly?

CORNELIUS
Like a beauty...in my mind.

Henderson looks back to them.

ROBINSON
No idea. We just built the thing.

Realization dawns on him.

HENDERSON
Right, you need a pilot.

ROBINSON
Will you do it?

Henderson skeptically looks at the plane.

ROBINSON
If it wasn't for you allowing me to listen in on the classes, then this plane wouldn't have been built. If it can get your stamp of approval, then I know we accomplished something.

Henderson's expression softens.

CORNELIUS
Plus, he said you were a pilot in the World War, we figured if there's anyone who'd know how to escape a potential crash-- Ouch!

Robinson gives him a hard elbow to the ribs.

ROBINSON
What do you say, Mr. Henderson?

Henderson sympathetically glances from the plane to Robinson.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

Robinson and Cornelius stand next to the plane as Henderson dons an aviator helmet and goggles.

Many of the White Pilots step out of the hangar to observe. Tom and Carl are amongst the onlookers.

Robinson stands in front of the propeller and selfconsciously peers at the other Pilots. He looks to Cornelius, who gives him the thumbs up.

Henderson CRANKS the engine as Robinson manually spins the propeller. The engine JERKS and then stalls. The propeller rotates once and stops.

The Pilots SNICKER and JEER. Robinson gives Cornelius a discouraging look. Cornelius glances around at the Pilots then back to Robinson

CORNELIUS
Try it again.

Robinson step up to the propeller. Henderson nods and CRANKS the engine again. Robinson spins the propeller.

The engine SPUTTERS for a second and finally turns over. Robinson steps back as the propeller rapidly rotates.

The Pilots exchange looks of disbelief. Cornelius pats Robinson on the back excitedly.

CORNELIUS

This could be history in the making.

Robinson looks at Cornelius curiously as he considers the statement.

The Plane rolls forward. They watch as the wheels lift off the ground.

CORNELIUS

Here comes the moment of truth.

Henderson lifts up and the plane takes off. Robinson's eyes light up as he watches the plane ascend. Cornelius lets out a triumphant CHEER.

The Plane levels off and Henderson flies a lap around the airport.

ROBINSON

I can't believe we did it.

Robinson stands in shock as a bright smile stretches across his face. Henderson does one more lap.

Out of all the shocked faces in the Crowd, Tom and Carl are the most aggrieved.

Robinson and Cornelius bounce excitedly as Henderson makes his return.

The plane comes to a stop. They rush to Henderson and practically drag him out of the cockpit in excitement.

CORNELIUS

The fact that you didn't crash means so much to me.

HENDERSON

Me too.

Robinson holds out his hand.

ROBINSON

Thank you, Mr. Henderson.

Henderson shakes his hand.

HENDERSON

There's no need to thank me, this was all you.

Robinson takes a deep breath as he soaks in the moment.

The Pilots disperse, clearly not willing to engage in the celebration of this accomplishment.

Tom and Carl remain by the hangar door, sneering at Robinson.

INT. ROBINSON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Earnize lies on the bed while Robinson paces back and forth.

ROBINSON

Watching the plane take off it felt like, like...

EARNIZE

An accomplishment?

Robinson shakes his head and sits down beside her on the bed.

ROBINSON

Before today, I never really questioned why I wanted this so bad.

EARNIZE

Why was that?

Robinson turns to her, his expression dead serious.

ROBINSON

Growing up in Mississippi...I saw things as a kid, things no kid should see. I'll never forget the night I woke up to our neighbor's screams.

Earnize looks at him sympathetically as if she knows where the story is going.

ROBINSON

My parents told me not to look out the window. Of course you tell a kid not to do something then...

(MORE)

ROBINSON (CONT'D)

(beat)

The sight of their bodies hanging
from that tree...I'll never forget
it.

Earnize wraps her arms around Robinson.

EARNIZE

I'm sorry.

ROBINSON

I told myself that would never be
me. They can't put a noose around
my neck if I'm soaring in the sky.

(beat)

But today was the first time I
considered what my childhood dream
could mean for other people of
color. And that was never my
intention. This was just supposed
to be my own personal escape. Does
that make me a bad person?

Earnize looks at him with pity in her eyes.

EARNIZE

(softly)

Of course not. But you can't fly
away from the problems of the
world.

Robinson averts his gaze as he contemplates this assertion.

INT. CURTISS-WRIGHT SCHOOL OF AVIATION - HALLWAY - DAY

Robinson, in his janitor uniform, walks past the admissions
office. The door opens, and Henderson exits. He spots
Robinson.

HENDERSON

Mr. Robinson!

Robinson spins around.

ROBINSON

Mr. Henderson? You're here early.
Your class doesn't start for
another hour.

HENDERSON

Never mind that. Your days of
sitting in on my class are over.

Robinson nervously glances over to the admissions office. Bates shakes his head as he watches them from the office window.

ROBINSON

I don't understand. You didn't tell them about me, did you?

HENDERSON

I sure did. And I told them I would not leave that office until they agreed to take action.

Robinson stares at Henderson in complete shock.

HENDERSON

You are no longer a janitor here, Mr. Robinson.

ROBINSON

Why would you do that?

HENDERSON

Because I can't have one of my students dusting while learning about gyroscopic precession.

ROBINSON

But-- Wait, did you say student?

HENDERSON

That's right. There was one spot left and Bates agreed to allow you entrance into my class.

Robinson gawks at Henderson in disbelief.

INT. TRAIN - MOVING - DAY

MELAKU BAYEN, 30s, slim frame, with jet black hair, and a thin mustache sits alone in a train car reading a newspaper.

The train horn BLARES as it enters the station. Bayen takes a look out the window and sees a sign that says "Chicago."

INT. CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Henderson stands at the front of the class as White Students enter. The room BUZZES with conversations as students settle in.

The door opens and Robinson strides into the room. All the TALKING ceases as Robinson takes a seat at the front.

Every eye is on Robinson. Robinson takes out his notebook, completely focused on Henderson. Henderson smiles.

HENDERSON

Let's get started. Now, can anyone tell me the difference between a barrel roll and an aileron roll?

Everyone glares as Robinson's hand shoots into the air.

EXT. ACRES AIRPORT - RUNWAY - DAY

Cornelius stands on the strip and watches a plane in the air. The plane does a barrel roll.

CORNELIUS

Oh c'mon! Now he's just showing off.

INT. PLANE - IN FLIGHT - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Robinson sits in the pilot cockpit while Henderson is in the passenger seat in front of him.

Robinson levels the plane out of the roll.

HENDERSON

Nicely done.

Robinson grins proudly.

PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Tom and Carl stand by their car and watch Robinson and Henderson fly.

TOM

This ain't right, I tell ya.

Carl watches the plane fly around the airport.

TOM

How many times did we come here and it was just those two boys? Henderson ain't foolin' no one, that plane won't for him.

Carl's face scrunches up in anger.

TOM
 Sharing the hangar with such filth--
 (spits)
 Somebody needs to teach those
 niggers to stay in their place.

With a last hateful look at the plane, Carl gets in the car.

CARL
 Let's go.

Tom slides into the passenger seat.

INT. BIPLANE - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

Henderson looks down to the runway. Henderson points to the ground.

HENDERSON
 Take it in!

Robinson looks down at Cornelius and smiles.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

Cornelius shakes his head as the plane descends and lands.

CORNELIUS
 (to Robinson)
 I feel like you're rubbing it in.

ROBINSON
 I would never. I'm just trying to
 get my flying hours. Besides, if
 all goes right, you'll be in the
 classroom next semester.

CORNELIUS
 Yeah, yeah.

Cornelius opens his arms and passionately hugs the plane. He
 WHISPERS to it.

CORNELIUS
 Soon we'll have our time together.
 Just me and you.

Robinson laughs as he hops out of the cockpit followed by
 Henderson. The three push the plane into the hangar.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - LOBBY - NIGHT

Robinson, Earnize, Cornelius, and Willa walk through the lobby together.

WILLA

If I'm being honest, I'm jealous.

ROBINSON

Of what?

WILLA

You built a plane and you're both on a path to get your pilot's license. I would love to have that opportunity.

Robinson looks to Earnize.

EARNIZE

You're inspiring others.

She gives him a reassuring smile.

INT. MOVIE THEATER

The Four settle into their seats.

The theater goes dark. The projector plays a newsreel.

ON SCREEN

Fascist Italy Invades Ethiopia.

Italian Soldiers march through the terrain.

Ethiopian FIGHTERS with spears are gunned down by Italian SOLDIERS.

BACK TO SCENE

BOOS and CRIES of anger toward the screen fill the theater.

Robinson looks over to Earnize. Her eyes well with tears.

ROBINSON

Earnize--

Earnize stands up and races out of the theater.

ROBINSON

Earnize, wait!

Robinson rushes after her.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - LOBBY

Robinson steps into the lobby and looks around. He spots Earnize in the corner, dabbing her eyes. Robinson approaches.

ROBINSON
Earnize, I'm sorry.

EARNIZE
Those are real people being gunned
down, my people. The world is
standing by and letting it happen.

Earnize breaks down as tears trickle down her cheeks.

Robinson gives her a consoling hug.

INT. CURTISS-WRIGHT SCHOOL OF AVIATION - CLASSROOM - DAY

Robinson sits in anticipation as Henderson grades his test.

HENDERSON
All finished.

There is a long awkward pause. Robinson waits in anticipation.

ROBINSON
I hate uncomfortable silences. Just
tell me, did I pass?

HENDERSON
(picks up papers)
You passed.

ROBINSON
Yes!

Henderson hands him the test. He admires the passing grade.

HENDERSON
Congratulations.

ROBINSON
(tepid)
Thanks.

Henderson looks taken aback by Robinson's tamed response.

HENDERSON
Is something wrong?

ROBINSON
No, it's...it's everything I ever
wanted.

HENDERSON
Well, try to contain your
excitement.

ROBINSON
It's just...Now that I have it
feels insignificant when I think
about what's going on in the world.

HENDERSON
It's only insignificant if you
don't make the most out of the
opportunity.

Robinson nods solemnly.

EXT. CHICAGO - CITY HALL - DAY

BLACK PROTESTERS march through the streets with signs that
read: "Down With Mussolini," "Fight For Ethiopia," "Unite."

CROWD
Death to Fascism! Death to Fascism!

Robinson and Earnize are amongst the Protesters.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

EDWARD KELLY, 40s, white, stern with cold eyes, stands at the
window and watches the Crowd.

KELLY
Your presence has fueled chaos in
my city.

Kelly turns to the person he is addressing, it's Bayen.

BAYEN
It's a natural response to
injustice.

KELLY
(guffaws)
Injustice?

Kelly sits down.

KELLY

What is it you want from me, Mr. Bayen?

BAYEN

I've been recruiting for the Joint Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia--

KELLY

Yes, I've heard all about your Committee. It's a Communist front.

BAYEN

It's no such thing!

KELLY

Lower your tone when you're talking to me.

Bayen takes a deep breath in frustration.

BAYEN

Italian forces march through Eritrea into Ethiopia as we speak.

KELLY

Perhaps your emperor should take this up with the League of Nations.

BAYEN

We already have. I fear that we are simply pawns of Britain and France. A sacrifice used to secure the allegiance of Italy.

KELLY

Well, you've once again darkened the wrong doorstep. I assume you've been informed of the President's policy in regards to sending aid to Ethiopia?

There is a KNOCK on the door. A SECRETARY enters.

SECRETARY

Sir, we're ready for you.

KELLY

Thank you.

(to Bayen)

(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)

If you want, you can hear me relay
the President's message.

Bayen drops his head.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Kelly stands at the top of the steps of the building to address the Protesters. He gestures for silence. Bayen stands off at a distance behind him.

Earnize and Robinson stand near the front of the Crowd.

KELLY

Now I understand there has been a lot of frustration over foreign affairs but you need not worry about wars overseas. As announced by President Roosevelt, the United States will not send any official aid to Ethiopia. This in not our fight--

OUTCRY erupts. Earnize and Robinson join in as the CROWD SCREAMS over Kelly. Bayen shakes his head in disappointment.

EXT. HANGAR - DAY

Robinson and Cornelius walk toward the hangar door.

CORNELIUS

How's Earnize?

ROBINSON

Not good. I'm a mechanic, I'm used to fixing things, but I don't know how to fix this.

CORNELIUS

Some things can't be fixed by tightening bolts or changing tires.

INT. HANGAR - DAY - CONTINUOUS

They enter the hangar.

ROBINSON

(angry)

What Italy is doing to Ethiopia is...

CORNELIUS
Tragic, I know--

Robinson and Cornelius stop when they notice their plane.

The propeller is detached, parts of the wings are broken off, and there are multiple holes through the exterior.

"Niggers" and "Monkeys" have been painted all over the plane.

Robinson and Cornelius stare in disbelief at the wreckage.

BAYEN (PRE-LAP)
Hatred of the others is a strong
tool...

INT. YMCA - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Bayen addresses a room full of PEOPLE from the community. REPORTERS and PHOTOGRAPHERS stand along the edge of the crowd.

BAYEN
...It fuels contempt.

One reporter, THOMAS DOYLE, 30s, lanky with glasses, is keyed in on Bayen.

Robinson and Earnize sit together near the front of the crowd. Robinson is clearly lost in thought.

BAYEN
This leads to a breeding ground of
indifference. We reached out to our
allies and they have turned their
back on us...

QUICK FLASHBACK - ROBINSON HOUSE MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT

Kid Robinson looks out the window and sees TWO BODIES hanging from a tree. The neighbors burning house is the only source of light.

BACK TO SCENE

BAYEN
America refuses to send military
assistance, but we are looking for
new allies. If we can't look to
leaders to do what is right then we
must find others to take up the
mantle.

An AUDIENCE MEMBER hand shoots up.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1
I'm willing to donate!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2
Me too!

AUDIENCE MEMBER 3
Whatever you need!

There is a CHORUS of support throughout the crowd.

EARNIZE (V.O.)
You can't fly away from the
problems of the world.

Robinson looks at Earnize. There is a glimmer of hope in her eyes as she looks around the supportive Audience. Robinson stands.

ROBINSON
I will fight for Ethiopia.

The Crowd goes silent as everyone turns to Robinson.

Earnize looks stunned.

BAYEN
I thank you, but we cannot take
military volunteers. The President
will not support--

ROBINSON
I'm not a part of the military and
I don't need the President's
permission. Surely your air force
could use a good pilot.

BAYEN
What's your name?

ROBINSON
John Robinson.

The Reporters, including Thomas, jot down his name and cameras FLASH photos of Robinson.

INT. NEWSSTAND - DAY

CUSTOMERS pick up the local paper with the picture of John Robinson on the front. The headline reads: "Negro pilot volunteers to join Ethiopian Air Force."

INT. CURTISS-WRIGHT SCHOOL OF AVIATION - CLASSROOM - DAY

Henderson sits at his desk, grading papers. KNOCK KNOCK.
Henderson looks up to see Robinson.

HENDERSON
Hey, it's the Bronzeville hero.

ROBINSON
I'm no hero.

HENDERSON
The newspaper says otherwise.

ROBINSON
I'm just doin' what I think is
right.

HENDERSON
I'd expect nothing less from you.

Robinson stares at Henderson as he wrestles with his
thoughts.

HENDERSON
What?

ROBINSON
I was wondering what it's like?
War?

HENDERSON
(sighs)
It's not as glorious as epic tales
would have you believe. When you're
in the middle of a war zone it...it
feels like a cemetery in the
making.

ROBINSON
But you were a fighter pilot and
you made it back.

HENDERSON
I did but...Being in a dogfight was
a reminder of how objective death
can be. I watched my comrades and
enemies fall all around me and I
realized something...

ROBINSON
What?

HENDERSON

That my survival wasn't determined by my skills as a pilot. Sometimes it's just pure luck of the draw.

ROBINSON

Well, I'm hoping to increase my luck. I wanna know everything you do. Strategies, air-to-air combat tactics, everything.

Henderson studies Robinson's look of determination.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

Robinson, Cornelius, and Henderson work on the plane.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Robinson sits at a desk while Henderson draws a plane doing a loop-the-loop.

HENDERSON

You got to pull hard to convert that speed uphill. This is a good fainting move to catch a pursing aircraft off guard.

Robinson writes down notes.

EXT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

Robinson peers through the glass into the store.

ROBINSON

You got this, Johnnie.

Robinson enters the jewelry store.

INT. LAKEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Students dash out of the class and pass by Robinson. Earnize smiles when she spots him in the doorway.

ROBINSON

I got something I want you to see.

Off Earnize's curious look.

EXT. ACRES AIRPORT PARKING LOT - DAY

Earnize holds on to Robinson as the motorcycle comes to a stop.

EXT. ACRES AIRPORT HANGAR - DAY

Robinson leads Earnize to the rebuilt biplane.

EARNIZE

You finished it.

ROBINSON

Yep. New engine, new paint job. We even got a new hangar we're going to leave it in. It should be safe there while I'm gone.

Robinson discreetly reaches in his pocket.

Earnize shakes her head, her frustration mounts.

EARNIZE

Why are you doing this?

ROBINSON

Doing what?

EARNIZE

You're about to go to war. Why are you doing it?

ROBINSON

You were the one who told me I couldn't fly away from the problems of the world.

EARNIZE

But this is different.

ROBINSON

Not in my eyes.

EARNIZE

What if Italy wins and you end up just a casualty of war? It's bad enough that I'm probably going to lose my country, but if I lose you...

ROBINSON

I was given an opportunity to become a pilot. I gotta make that count for something.

EARNIZE

(exacerbated)

I don't want you to go.

Robinson recognizes that Earnize has put her foot down.

EARNIZE

I can't support you running toward death.

ROBINSON

Earnize, I gave Bayen my word. I'm going.

Earnize sadly drops her head as she turns and storms off.

ROBINSON

Earnize!

Earnize doesn't turn around. Robinson pulls the box out of his pocket. He opens it and dolefully ogles the engagement ring. He shuts the box and watches Earnize leave.

INT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - DAY

Cornelius, Willa, and Henderson are gathered around Robinson.

HENDERSON

Don't forget, hypervigilance. And follow your instincts.

ROBINSON

Will do.

Willa steps up and gives him a hug.

WILLA

You know she loves you. I'm sure she'll be here to see you off.

Robinson gives her a not-so-reassuring smile.

Cornelius approaches. They embrace.

ROBINSON

You better have your license the next time I see you.

CORNELIUS

Oh I will. Not only that, but me and Willa been looking into property to start our own aviation school. We've even come up with a name--

WILLA

He came up with a name.

CORNELIUS

What do you think about this? Cornelius Coffey School of Aeronautics.

ROBINSON

Subtle.

CORNELIUS

I thought so.

They LAUGH.

CORNELIUS

Be safe, brotha.

Robinson throws his rucksack over his shoulder. He shoots a hopeful look toward the station entrance.

INT. ROBINSON HOUSE - DAY

Earnize gathers her belongings with puffy eyes. She's clearly been crying. Earnize stands and walks to the dresser drawer.

She opens a drawer and searches until she finds a shirt. She pulls out the shirt and prepares to close the drawer, but something catches her attention.

Earnize pulls out the engagement ring buried at the bottom of the drawer. She looks at the ring in disbelief. Earnize races out of the room.

INT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - DAY

The CONDUCTOR waits in the doorway of the train.

Robinson looks from the station entrance to the train in desperation.

CONDUCTOR

All aboard!

Cornelius, Henderson and Willa look at him sympathetically.

EXT. OUTSIDE TRAIN STATION

Earnize is in full sprint as she burst through the station.

Earnize frantically looks around the platform. Her heart falls as she watches the nearest train roll out of the station.

ROBINSON (O.S.)

Earnize!

Earnize spins to see Robinson on the railing at the back of the train. She sprints toward him with the ring held out.

Cornelius, Henderson and Willa watch with bated breath.

EARNIZE

(re: ring)

Why didn't you say anything?

Robinson shakes his head sadly.

ROBINSON

Would you have even said yes?

Earnize considers this for a moment.

EARNIZE

No.

Robinson averts his gaze as his fear is confirmed.

EARNIZE

Not unless you promise me you'll
come back.

Robinson gives her a bright smile, looks deep into her eyes.

ROBINSON

I promise.

EARNIZE

Then I'll say yes when you come
home to me.

The train horn BLARES. Robinson leans down over the railing and kisses Earnize. The wheels start to churn.

Earnize and Robinson separate and she takes a step back to join Cornelius, Willa and Henderson. Robinson gives a final wave as the train departs.

EXT. ERITREA - DAY

SUPER: ERITREA - 434 MILES FROM ETHIOPIA'S CAPITAL

Hundreds of thousands of ITALIAN SOLDIERS, equipped with machine guns, march through the terrain.

Tankettes and tanks roll along side the Soldiers.

EXT. ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA - DAY

SUPER: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

INT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - HALL - DAY

Bayen stands in front of two tall doors with a saddened look. He takes a deep breath as he gathers his nerve, then pushes the doors open.

INT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Inside the decadent room is HAILE SELASSIE, 40s, his proud and confident demeanor makes up for what he lacks in stature.

Selassie CHATS with TWO MEN as Bayen enters.

BAYEN
(in Amharic)
Emperor, I have news on Italy.

Selassie studies Bayen's serious look. Selassie turns to the Two Men.

SELASSIE
(in Amharic)
Leave us.

The Men exit the room.

SELASSIE
The severity of our dilemma is
written on your face.

BAYEN
Italian forces are marching through
Eritrea as we speak.

Selassie walks over and sinks into his throne.

BAYEN
What are you thinking, cousin?

SELASSIE

We've been here before. Faced impossible odds and came out on top against this very same foe. But these are different times. Technology has changed.

(a beat)

Do you know the proverb about God and the tiger?

BAYEN

Don't blame God for creating the tiger – instead, thank him for not giving it wings.

SELASSIE

The old adage was wrong. The tiger has been given wings, and they're soaring toward our homeland.

BAYEN

You sound like you're losing hope.

SELASSIE

Could you blame me. We've been abandoned by our allies.

BAYEN

Not everyone has abandoned us. We have another pilot on the way.

SELASSIE

I don't think one man will make much difference.

Bayen's head falls at the disparaging statement.

INT. TRAIN - MOVING - DAY

Robinson's eyes are glued to the window. The Statue of Liberty stands tall in his view.

Robinson turns his attention to the blank piece of paper in front of him. Robinson writes on the paper...

ROBINSON (V.O.)

Earnize, the train ride came and went, now the real journey begins.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

Robinson stands in the boarding line for an ocean liner. He steps up to the CAPTAIN and shows his ID.

The Captain glances from Robinson to the ID. He nods and ushers Robinson up the ramp.

ROBINSON (V.O.)
So far Bayen has been true to his
word with my accommodations.

INT. OCEAN LINER DECK - MOVING - DAY - LATER

Robinson leans against the railing of the deck. He looks out onto the vast ocean view.

ROBINSON
I never thought I'd get to see the
world like this. It's amazing.

There is no land in sight, just clear blue skies with matching water.

EXT. OCEAN LINER - MOVING - DAY

The ship sails toward a port.

INT. TRAIN - MOVING - DAY

Robinson stares out of the window, only this time it is a completely different landscape.

It is colorless desert, with little vegetation, distinguished only by endless rocks and sand.

EXT. DIRE DAWA TRAIN STATION - DAY

Bayen sits in a car surrounded by a half dozen LANCERS on horseback. They all watch as the train comes to a stop.

Robinson steps off the train and he is greeted by Bayen.

BAYEN
Mr. Robinson, how was the trip?

They shake hands.

ROBINSON

Good, though I'm sure under better circumstances I would have appreciated the journey even more.

Bayen holds the car door open for Robinson, he enters. The convoy proceeds forward.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS - MOVING

ROBINSON

Where are we?

BAYEN

Dire Dawa. It's not far from the capital.

The car cruises through the dirt road with the Lancers following close behind.

ETHIOPIAN CIVILIANS run beside the car. KIDS wave at Robinson. He reciprocates with a bright smile.

They drive into the bustling city. Robinson soaks in the ancient architecture.

BAYEN

Welcome to Addis Ababa.

CITIZENS observe as the convoy makes its way through the town.

BAYEN

We've booked you a room, I hope its to your liking.

EXT. HOTEL DE FRANCE - DAY

The car pulls up and stops in front of a quaint hotel.

BAYEN

The emperor is hosting a dinner this afternoon. Once you're settled, we'll send a car to bring you to the palace.

Robinson climbs out of the back seat.

ROBINSON

I look forward to it.

Bayen gives him a nod and closes the door. The car drives off. Robinson throws his rucksack over his shoulder and saunters to the entrance.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Robinson ties his tie in front of the mirror. He turns to his bag and takes out a blazer. The same blazer that he wore every time he went to the Curtiss-Wright Admissions office.

ROBINSON
Old reliable.

Robinson smiles as he puts on the blazer.

INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

Robinson fiddles with his thumbs in the back seat. His jaw drops as the car pulls up to the palace gate crowned by large carved lions.

EXT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - DAY

Robinson steps out of the car and peers at the regal structure in awe. Bayen stands at the top of the steps, waiting.

INT. PALACE DINING HALL - DAY

Robinson follows Bayen into the extravagant dining hall.

Dozens of GUEST occupy rows of tables. Selassie sits at the head of the hall and watches everyone enjoying their food.

Next to Selassie is his wife MENEN ASFAW, 30s, round faced, with glowing golden skin.

Further down the table are their children: PRINCESS TSEHAI, 15, PRINCE MAKONNEN, 11, and PRINCE SAHLE, 3.

BAYEN
Come, let me introduce you.

Robinson nervously adjust his shirt as they approach.

BAYEN
Emperor Selassie, this is the pilot
I was telling you about. John
Robinson.

ROBINSON

It's an honor to finally meet you.

Robinson gives a small bow. Selassie barely looks in his direction as he nods then continues to eat. Robinson is taken aback by the dismissal.

BAYEN

This is Empress Menen Asfaw, Prince Makonnen, Princess Tsehai, and the young Prince Sahle.

The rest of the royal family smile their acknowledgment of Robinson.

BAYEN

Let's get to our seats.

Robinson and Bayen sit a few seats down from Selassie.

ROBINSON

The emperor seems vexed by my presence. Have I done anything to offend him?

Bayen gives a disheartened look toward Selassie.

BAYEN

No. His mind is heavily burdened with the impending war. That's all.

Bayen turns and gives Robinson an unconvincing grin.

LATER

Robinson takes in the white painted concrete walls and rich marble floor as he finishes off the rice and bread on his plate.

He looks up and notices a pair of eyes glaring at him from across the hall.

The eyes belong to HUBERT JULIAN, black, 30s, with an intense stare.

Robinson's eyes move further along the table. He notices MISCHKA BABICHEF, 30s, mixed race, and handsome. Next to him is LUDWIG WEBER, 40s, German, clean shaven, and meticulously dressed.

Another guest that stands out is HILAIRE DU BERRIER, white, 30, sports a thick moustache with slicked back hair.

SELASSIE
(Amharic)
Excuse me!

All CHATTER ceases as Selassie stands.

SELASSIE
Out of respect for our guests I
will deviate from our native tongue
and use English, I believe everyone
can understand?

Nods and soft MUMBLES of yes reverberate around the hall.

SELASSIE
I show them this respect because of
their reason for being here.
Unfortunately, it is not a joyous
occasion that has gathered us here
tonight. You all are aware of the
enemy at our door. The world has
resigned us to defeat, but they
don't understand our pedigree. Many
have tried to conquer our
motherland and all have failed.

The Crowd MURMURS support.

SELASSIE
As we prepare for war I acknowledge
that this is a different era.
Battles will be decided in the sky.

Selassie raises his glass and all the Guest follow suit.

SELASSIE
I thank our foreign pilots for
helping us enter into this new age
of combat.

They all take a drink.

SELASSIE
As a treat, Mr. Julian has offered
a flying exhibition.

Julian gives a smug smile.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The sun sets on the horizon as Everyone gathers in the open
space to watch Julian take flight.

Robinson joins Bayen.

ROBINSON

I didn't realize Hubert Julian
would be here.

BAYEN

Yes, he's an excellent showman. Mr.
Julian has performed aerial
exhibitions here in the past. When
I reached out to him for help, he
didn't hesitate.

The plane Engine CRANKS. Everyone watches as the planes rides
through the grass and gathers momentum.

ROBINSON

Has he been training your pilots?

BAYEN

That would fall under his
responsibilities as colonel, yes.

ROBINSON

Colonel?

BAYEN

Appointed by the emperor.

The plane's wheels rise off the ground.

Robinson squints as the plane shakes violently on the
takeoff.

INT. PLANE - MOVING

Smoke starts coming from the engine. A flustered Julian is
engulfed in smoke.

JULIAN

Oh, shit!

Julian struggles as he steers the plane back to the ground.

SCREAMS spread through the Crowd.

Robinson watches with bated breath. The plane is on a
collision course with a tree.

ROBINSON

Bank left, bank left!

PLANE - MOVING

The smoke obstructs Julian's vision. At the last second he spots the tree and turns left to avoid the head-on crash.

The left wing clips the tree and slows the plane's momentum. Julian pulls up just enough to soften the impact as he crashes to the ground. It slowly slides to a stop.

Everyone races over. Robinson is the first one to the plane. He helps Julian out of the plane.

ROBINSON

Are you okay?

Julian stumbles away from Robinson. Clearly his pride is more damaged than his body.

JULIAN

I'm fine, I'm fine.

SELASSIE

What happened?

JULIAN

I don't know.

ROBINSON

Probably a valve cover gasket leak.

JULIAN

And how would you know?

ROBINSON

I've got some experience with this. I'd have to inspect it, but I'm willing to bet the smoke was caused by oil dripping onto the manifold.

Robinson takes off his blazer. He climbs up into the plane and uses the blazer to protect his hands as he opens the engine hood.

Robinson fans away smoke. The Crowd watches him examine the engine.

ROBINSON

Yeah, there's definitely a leak. In fact, I'd say this whole thing could use maintenance. When was the last time this plane was serviced?

Julian shrugs.

BAYEN

I don't think it has been, nor have any of the other planes in the fleet.

Robinson raises his eyebrows.

ROBINSON

As you can see that's pretty dangerous.

SELASSIE

Can you fix it?

Robinson takes a deep breath and looks from the engine to Selassie.

ROBINSON

Get me the right set of tools and I'll see what I can do.

SELASSIE

Bayen will get you everything you'll need.

Robinson nods. Selassie leads everyone back inside.

Julian sneers at Robinson, then turns to join the rest of the Crowd.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Robinson sits down at the desk and continues his letter.

ROBINSON (V.O.)

I've arrived in Ethiopia. I have to admit that I was underwhelmed by the arid outskirts of the capital at first, but the city of Addis Ababa is as beautiful as you said it would be. Most impressive are the ancient sights, especially the stone mausoleum of Emperor Menelik.

INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

Robinson and Bayen sit in the back seat. The car passes by the statue of Emperor Menelik sitting gloriously on a horse in the middle of downtown square.

ROBINSON (V.O.)
There is something charming about
the agrarian society.

Robinson surveys a caravan of camels to his right and a
HERDSMEN overseeing his herd to the left.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Back in America, Earnize sits on the bed and reads over
Robinson's letter.

ROBINSON (V.O.)
But I fear that they are ill-
prepared for the impending war.

Earnize sighs at these last words.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

Robinson and Bayen stand in front of eleven tattered planes.

ROBINSON
This is it?

BAYEN
Yes, the Imperial Ethiopian Air
Force.

ROBINSON
Eleven planes?

BAYEN
Well, technically only eight of
them work.
(a beat)
Your tools, as requested.

Bayen points to a box of tools next to one of the planes.
Bayen observes Robinson's skeptical expression.

BAYEN
I know that it's a lot to ask...

ROBINSON
I'll just have to take it one plane
at a time.

Robinson strides to the tool box and starts working.

INT. BASE - DAY

Inside the classroom like setting is Julian and two dozen other PILOTS. Hilaire, Ludwig and Mischka are amongst the Ethiopian aviators.

Julian stands in front of a map and goes over flight plans.

JULIAN

Today, fliers need to stay in these zones.

Julian circles the areas on the map.

JULIAN

Each pilot will have an hour of flight time. Mischka and Kaleb--

Mischka steps forward along with KALEB, 20s, Ethiopian, and wiry.

JULIAN

You two get the first flights. You'll be practicing maneuvers and--

The sound of HAMMERING cuts off Julian. Everyone turns to the window to see Robinson working on the plane.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

Robinson HAMMERS out the dent to the wing. He looks up to see Julian, Kaleb, Hilaire, Ludwig, and Mischka approaching.

JULIAN

You're disrupting my lessons.

ROBINSON

Sorry bout that.

(re: plane)

But this isn't gonna fix itself.

MISCHKA

Where did you learn to do this?

ROBINSON

Fixin' planes? Half of it I picked up in the classroom and the other half through trial and error.

LUDWIG

(heavy German accent)

Trial and error? What does this mean?

ROBINSON

It means I had a lot of bumps along
the way when I built my own plane.

There is a CHORUS of impressed WHISPERS.

HILAIRE

You built your own plane, from top
to bottom.

ROBINSON

Well, technically from the bottom
to top. You're American?

HILAIRE

Born in North Dakota, but my last
few years were spent in France.

Robinson leaps down from the plane.

ROBINSON

I think proper introductions are in
order. John Robinson.

Robinson shakes hands with Hilaire.

HILAIRE

Hilaire.

Robinson repeats the process with the others.

LUDWIG

Ludwig Weber.

ROBINSON

Is that a German accent?

Ludwig stands up straight with pride.

LUDWIG

Freiburg.

Kaleb steps up and zestfully shake Robinson's hand. Robinson
looks surprised by his enthusiasm.

KALEB

Bayen has spoken of your
accomplishments. It is a pleasure.

ROBINSON

Thank you. I'm sorry I didn't get
your name.

KALEB

Kaleb.

ROBINSON

Nice to meet you, Kaleb.

Robinson turns to the last man in the group, Mischka.

MISCHKA

Mischka Babichef.

Robinson notices two pins clipped onto his shirt. One is a double-headed eagle. The other is the Lion of Judah holding the Ethiopian flag.

ROBINSON

I like the pins you have there.

MISCHKA

Thank you. They were gifts from my parents.

JULIAN

(terse)

Now that introductions are over, we have work to do. We'll be needing some of the planes.

ROBINSON

Just find one that works, I guess.

Julian frowns as he ushers the others back to the base. Robinson returns to work on the plane.

AIRSTRIP - LATER

Mischka sits in the cockpit. He looks over to Kaleb who is in the plane across from him.

The plane engines BELLOW. Mischka and Kaleb propel their planes forward and into the air.

Julian watches them cruise through the sky.

JULIAN

C'mon. Barrel roll! Barrel roll!

Robinson looks up from the hood of the engine. He watches as the planes attempt simultaneous barrel rolls. They are sloppy and out of synch.

Robinson climbs down and makes his way over to a frustrated Julian.

JULIAN

How many times have we been over this!

ROBINSON

I think I know what will help. When they're pushing on the throttle during the turbulence they--

JULIAN

I don't remember asking for your help.

ROBINSON

Do you have a problem with me?

JULIAN

You may have gotten everyone else on your side, but I'm no fool.

ROBINSON

What are you talking about?

JULIAN

I keep up with the news, Bronzeville Hero. John Robinson Headed to Ethiopia. You're good at stealing headlines. But I'm the one who's been here working for the emperor.

ROBINSON

I'm not here to steal headlines. I just wanna help--

JULIAN

You can help by not stepping on my toes.

Robinson shakes his head in disgust as he walks away.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The sun rises on the deserted roadway. Bayen and Selassie are in a car followed closely by the security, which consist of a Dozen horseback LANCERS.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

Robinson works under the engine hood. The sound of a car ENGINE and hooves GALLOPING draws his attention.

Robinson spots Bayen and Selassie.

All the Pilots working with Julian, stop and stand at attention as the convoy comes to a stop.

Selassie and Bayen step out and approach Robinson.

ROBINSON
Your majesty.

SELASSIE
Is this the plane that crashed the other night?

ROBINSON
Yes.

SELASSIE
You fixed the wing?

ROBINSON
And the engine.

Robinson closes the engine hood.

SELASSIE
But you just started yesterday.
You're saying you managed this in twenty-four hours?

ROBINSON
I've gotten pretty good at refurbishing these things.

Robinson pats the plane.

JULIAN
But can we be sure it's safe to fly?

Julian joins the group with his arms crossed.

ROBINSON
You're free to take it for another test flight.

JULIAN
Fine.

Julian steps forward.

SELASSIE
No.

Julian stops in his tracks.

SELASSIE
(to Robinson)
You're a pilot. I want you to fly
it.

Julian looks offended.

Robinson bows his head.

AIRSTRIP - LATER

Robinson straps into the seat. Kaleb shuffles over to the propeller.

ROBINSON
Ready.

The engine ROARS and Kaleb spins the propeller. Everyone clears the way.

PLANE - MOVING

Robinson's face contorts with concentration. The plane rolls into a smooth takeoff.

As he evens out Robinson performs a barrel roll. He moves through the air with the fluidity of an eagle.

GROUND

The Crowd OOHS and AAHS at his maneuvers. Even the other foreign Pilots are rendered speechless due to Robinson's flying skills.

Selassie's eyes widen, he's impressed.

Julian frowns as he watches the plane descend.

PLANE

The wheels touchdown. The plane comes to a stop. Robinson takes off his pilot helmet and jumps down from the cockpit.

Selassie and Bayen saunter up to Robinson.

SELASSIE
I see your abilities as a mechanic
are rivaled by your skills as a
pilot.

ROBINSON

Thank you.

Julian looks like he is about to blow his top.

SELASSIE

I trust that you will be able to prepare the rest of the fleet?

ROBINSON

It's why I'm here.

SELASSIE

Yes, it is. And your efforts are appreciated.

Selassie walks off. Bayen turns to Robinson.

BAYEN

When you first got here you asked me if you had offended the emperor. In truth, he has become wary of foreigners. But I think you pulled off a great feat today.

ROBINSON

And what would that be?

BAYEN

You're gaining his trust.

Bayen gives him a smile.

INT. HOTEL DE FRANCE - DINING - DAY

A few REPORTERS sit in the area eating breakfast and fiddling with their cameras.

Hilaire and Ludwig sit at a table together. The Two shovel down a plate of scrambled eggs.

HILAIRE

My go to was an omelet with pressed caviar and sour cream while I was in France. But this isn't half bad.

LUDWIG

(mouthful)
Uh-huh.

Robinson enters the dining area. He spots Ludwig and Hilaire.

ROBINSON
Mind if I join you?

HILAIRE
Feel free.

Robinson takes a seat.

ROBINSON
Any recommendations?

HILAIRE
The enqulal tibs.
(off Robinson's confusion)
Basically, it's scrambled eggs. But they add a little chilli and Ethiopian spiced butter. It gives it a nice kick. Right, Ludwig?

LUDWIG
(mouth full)
Uh-huh.

ROBINSON
I'm sold. Excuse me.

A WAITER comes over to the table.

ROBINSON
Can I order enq-- anquell tabs--

WAITER
Enqulal Tibs?

ROBINSON
Yes, thank you.

The Waiter nods and walks off.

ROBINSON
So you all were both recruited by Bayen?

HILAIRE
I was. Bayen saw me performing with the flying circus. A job I don't miss by the way.
(a beat)
He told me what was going on out here and my conscience wouldn't let me sit on the sidelines.

LUDWIG

I've been here for years as the Emperor's personal pilot. Only fitting I give them an extra body in the fleet.

ROBINSON

And how many pilots do we have?

HILAIRE

Including you...twenty-four.

Thomas, the reporter from back in Chicago, listens in on their conversation from the next table.

ROBINSON

(scoffs)

So there are only twenty-four pilots and about half as many planes?

HILAIRE

Yep. Welcome to the Imperial Ethiopian Air Force.

Thomas stands up and beelines for their table.

THOMAS

Hi. I'm Thomas Doyle with the New York Times. Did I hear you say that you all are pilots?

ROBINSON

Yes, sir.

THOMAS

Great! Most of the press is just starting to arrive and I would love to get an early scoop on the Air Force here.

Thomas pulls out a pencil and pad from his pocket.

THOMAS

Do you have anything you want to say regarding the impending war?

Ludwig shakes his head and dives back into his breakfast.

HILAIRE

All I have to say is it's a damn shame how the rest of the world has decided to turn a blind eye.

Thomas scribbles down this quote.

THOMAS

You all must be worried about the
daunting fight ahead?

ROBINSON

No one is in denial about what
we're up against. It just means we
have to be twice as diligent in our
preparations. Right now we are
still working out the kinks.

Thomas rapidly writes down these comments.

EXT. BASE - DAY

Two new planes descend on the runway.

INT. BASE CLASSROOM - DAY - MINUTES LATER

Robinson and the other twenty-three Pilots are gathered
around two large crates.

Robinson takes note of the foreign language written on the
side of the box.

ROBINSON

What language is that?

LUDWIG

(smiles)

German.

Julian uses a crowbar to crack open the crate. It is full of
guns and ammunition.

ROBINSON

(to Ludwig)

Two planes and rifles, not bad.

LUDWIG

I've called in a few favors.

ROBINSON

I guess that's a start. But we
could really use more.

LUDWIG

Stay tuned.

Julian cracks open the second crate of weaponry.

JULIAN

Alright, today we'll be doing courier missions. We have to get these supplies to Dire Dawa, Gondar, Dessie, and Debre Tabor.

Julian points at the different pilots.

JULIAN

Ludwig, Hilaire, Asfaw, Mischka, Kofi, Negasi, Yonas. Each of you will make the trip. The last plane will stay here and be used for training.

Robinson's eyes are locked on the ammunition.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

Ludwig, Hilaire, Mischka and the other Pilots stuff the weapons into bags and pile them into the planes.

Meanwhile, Kaleb watches Robinson closely as he works on an engine.

ROBINSON

And then you bolt each individual cylinder onto the engine. Got it?

KALEB

(nods)

Yes.

ROBINSON

Let's put it to the test.

Robinson nods over to an unused biplane.

ROBINSON

You can probably tackle that one on your own.

Kaleb enthusiastically races over to start working on the unused plane.

Engines ROAR. Robinson watches as the planes take off.

Robinson puts his tools away and walks over to join Kaleb. Kaleb notices Robinson's sad face.

KALEB

You look troubled. We have more supplies. Today is a good day.

Robinson squints at the planes as they turn into dots in the sky.

ROBINSON

We shouldn't have to rely on left over weapons from other countries...I can't believe the League of Nations are okay with ignoring a humanitarian crisis.

KALEB

But Ethiopia has always fought it's own battles...and won.

ROBINSON

This is different.

Robinson notices Kaleb's small smile.

ROBINSON

What?

KALEB

You speak as if you are from Ethiopia.

ROBINSON

(smiles)

I guess it's rubbed off on me from someone I know.

Robinson looks off into the distance as if he can see Earnize from across the world.

INT. CHICAGO CLASSROOM - DAY

Earnize stands in front of her STUDENTS. The school bell RINGS. The Students pack up their belongings.

EARNIZE

Don't forget you have a quiz on Genghis Khan tomorrow. Be prepared.

As the Students pour out of the classroom, KAYLA is the last one left. She pulls out a newspaper and approaches Earnize.

Earnize eyes her curiously as she approaches the desk.

EARNIZE

Did you need something, Kayla?

KAYLA

I picked this up at a newsstand
this morning.

Kayla hands her the newspaper and the headline reads
"American Negro Pilot Speaks Out About War."

Earnize skims through the highlights of the paper.

"John Robinson claims the Ethiopian Air Force is ill-prepared
for war."

"Is colonel Hubert Julian fit to be the leader?"

"Robinson claims the Air Force is still working out kinks."

Earnize looks up at Kayla.

EARNIZE

Thank you.

Kayla walks out of the room. Earnize sits down and continues
reading the article.

EXT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - GROUNDS - DAY

Bayen and Robinson stroll through the extravagant garden,
complete with tall, winding hedges.

BAYEN

How are the repairs coming along?

ROBINSON

Good. Kaleb's been helpful.

BAYEN

I'm not surprised. He admires you,
you know? You've made quite the
impression on him.

Robinson smiles. A few seconds of silence passes between
them.

ROBINSON

I noticed the German's have been
sending us supplies.

BAYEN

Ludwig has connected us with a
manufacturing company he worked
with in Germany. We're expecting
more supplies from them soon.

ROBINSON

Hard to believe they're sending us planes.

BAYEN

They have their personal reasons for helping us against Mussolini.

ROBINSON

(scoffs)

Of course they do.

BAYEN

It's the way the world works. Men don't often follow their moral compass, They're usually dictated by self interest.

The sound of a plane ENGINE gets Robinson and Bayen to look up. A two-bay biplane does laps around the palace.

BAYEN

Speaking of Ludwig.

Robinson and Bayen watch as the biplane descends and lands in the clearing outside the palace garden. They approach to see Selassie in the passenger seat and Ludwig in the cockpit.

Robinson takes in the aircraft with admiration. It's a good looking plane.

ROBINSON

This is a beautiful aircraft.

SELASSIE

It's my personal plane, not weapon equipped. Ludwig often takes me on what he like to call joy rides.

Ludwig smiles and gives Robinson a small salute.

LUDWIG

Robinson, we have a mission.

Robinson looks curiously at Ludwig.

EXT. BASE - DAY

Kaleb wipes the sweat from his brow as he works on the plane. The other Pilots bustle around the base.

Robinson and Ludwig wander onto the base headed for Kaleb.

ROBINSON
(re: plane)
How's she looking, Kaleb?

Kaleb looks down with a grin as Robinson inspects the plane.

KALEB
Good. I followed your instructions.
I think it's ready to fly.

Kaleb notices the duffle bag Ludwig is carrying.

LUDWIG
This is good timing then. We have
two more planes coming, but we must
fly to meet them.

Mischka joins the group.

KALEB
Where?

LUDWIG
Yeha.

MISCHKA
What's in the bag?

Ludwig opens it and reveals a stack of Ethiopian money.

ROBINSON
The universal language.

Ludwig nods and zips the bag up.

LUDWIG
Can this plane make the trip?

Robinson looks from the plane to Kaleb.

ROBINSON
I have faith. Kaleb, you're flying.

Kaleb smiles.

Ludwig and Mischka walk off in the direction of another plane.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The two biplanes soar through the air. Mischka flies one plane with Ludwig in the front passenger seat.

Kaleb pilots the other with Robinson in the front passenger seat.

INT. BIPLANE - FLYING - DAY

Robinson looks down as they fly over a rural village. Villagers look up at the planes in awe.

Robinson waves down at the Villagers. Kids wave back and try a futile effort to chase after the planes.

EXT. YEHA AIRSTRIP - DAY

Two GERMAN PILOTS stand next to two planes on the dissolute dirt runway. The Pilots kick up dust as they wait.

The faint sound of plane ENGINES ROAR in the distance. The Pilots look up and see the incoming planes.

MINUTES LATER

Robinson, Kaleb, and Mischka stand under the wings of a plane. They watch Ludwig converse with the German Pilots.

Ludwig inspects the planes as he talks to them.

ROBINSON

Getting support from the Germans doesn't sit right with me. You've heard the stories about Hitler, right?

KALEB

Are you familiar with the ancient saying about the enemy of my enemy?

Robinson scoffs as Ludwig hands over the bag of currency and then strolls over to join them.

LUDWIG

We can count two more planes to the fleet.

ROBINSON

Good, let's get back to the capital.

They each head to a plane.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

On the outskirts of the town of Adwa sits the small rural village they flew over earlier. The VILLAGERS shuffle in and out of their huts.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

A young ETHIOPIAN BOY stands in the middle of the hut and plays with a leather slingshot. The Boy loads a rock into the leather pouch and twirls it above his head.

His eyes are glued to a clay bowl. He slings the rock and POW! The bowl cracks, but that wasn't the source of the noise.

POW! POW! The Boy turns to the door of the hut.

BOY
(in Amharic)
Mama.

Rapid GUNFIRE and SCREAMS fill the air. The frightened Boy races out of the hut.

EXT. HUT - CONTINUOUS

Villagers sprint past him in a panic. He keys in on the source of their fear.

ITALIAN SOLDIERS followed by TANKS, steamroll forward. Villagers are gunned down as they run for cover.

The Boy stands frozen as the Italian forces barrel down on him. Suddenly the Boy is scooped into the arms of his sobbing MOTHER. They join the horde of fleeing Villagers.

Four planes fly above the fray. Robinson, Ludwig, Kaleb, and Mischka have a bird's-eye-view of the devastation.

INT. PLANE - FLYING

Robinson's eyes are glued to the Italian Army below them.

ROBINSON
No.

Robinson banks right and the plane drops closer to the village.

The Italian Soldiers curiously look up as they fly over.

Robinson looks in disbelief at the Dead Bodies strewn across the ground. The plane ascends and he rejoins the others. Looks of rage reflect on all their faces.

INT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Selassie, Bayen, and Julian stand around a map.

SELASSIE

I've sent every able-bodied man we have north.

BAYEN

How long until our soldiers reach Adwa?

SELASSIE

A day.

ROBINSON (O.S.)

We don't have a day.

Everyone turns to see Robinson at the doorway.

ROBINSON

On our way back from Yeha we saw them. Thousands of Italian ground troops marching for Adwa.

BAYEN

In the heart of the night? They'll never see it coming.

(a beat)

It'll be a slaughter.

SELASSIE

A preemptive strike.

BAYEN

What do you want to do? If our ground forces aren't going to be able to get there in time then--

JULIAN

Send us.

BAYEN

But is the fleet ready for combat?

ROBINSON

Looks like we'll have a trial by fire.

Selassie ponders his options for a second. He then stands up straight as he comes to decision.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - NIGHT

Selassie and Bayen stand in front of Robinson and the Pilots.

SELASSIE

We are in a dire situation. This is the moment we've dreaded, but this is also what you've all been preparing for. You are the only ones that stand in between Italy and the destruction of Adwa. It's time to send Mussolini a message.

The Pilots nod in agreement. Robinson glances over at Julian, who looks extremely nervous.

INT. BIPLANE - CONTINUOUS

Robinson straps himself in. The engine of the plane ROARS to life. Robinson nods to Selassie and Bayen, they return the gesture.

Selassie and Bayen watch the planes takeoff into the night.

EXT. ADWA - NIGHT

It is utter chaos as the Italian forces march through the streets of Adwa with a menacing fleet of tanks behind them. The PEOPLE of the town scramble for cover.

ETHIOPIAN SOLDIERS, armed with swords, bravely race toward their Italian adversaries. ITALIAN SOLDIERS raise their guns and lay waste to the Ethiopians. Bodies and swords fall to the ground as the Italian bullets hit their marks.

An Italian COLONEL directs the Soldiers.

COLONEL

(in Italian)

Flush them out!

Italian Soldiers storm into different establishments. Citizens race out of the buildings and are gunned down.

The People of Adwa are herded like sheep out of the town. As the Citizens try to escape, the faint sound of plane engines RUMBLE over the cacophony of GUNSHOTS and SCREAMS.

Everyone looks up to see a row of planes in the night sky.

INT. BIPLANE - NIGHT

Robinson looks stoic as they soar toward the turmoil-ridden city.

JULIAN (O.S.)
(into headset)
Okay, everyone. This is it.

INTERCUT PILOTS IN PLANES

ROBINSON
It's a massacre.

LUDWIG
Auf einen groben Klotz gehört ein
grober Keil.

HILAIRE
None of us speak German, Ludwig.

LUDWIG
You must meet roughness with
roughness.

HILAIRE
Something tells me that sounded
better in German.

The planes descend on the Italians.

ROBINSON
Here we go.

Robinson's hand inches toward the trigger.

ADWA STREETS

Italian Soldiers look perplexed as the planes beeline for them.

Bullets from the planes rain down on the Soldiers. The tables have turned, now the Italian forces are running for cover.

Italian Soldiers falter under the onslaught of rapid fire.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson leads the charge through the town.

ROBINSON
 Don't let up! Keep driving them
 back!

The planes continue to hit their marks as Italian Soldiers scatter like roaches.

HILAIRE'S PLANE

HILAIRE
 We got em on the run now!

Hilaire fires in the middle of a group of Soldiers sprinting for cover in the nearest building. Before they can get inside - BANG! BANG! BANG!

The power of the bullets throw the Soldiers around like rag dolls on impact.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson has his sights set on Soldiers in retreat. As his finger moves to the trigger he notices the convoy of tanks.

The tanks FIRE at Robinson.

ROBINSON
 Oh Shiii--

Robinson barrel rolls out of the line of fire.

ROBINSON
 They've got tanks! Watch out!

The tanks FIRE at the Planes. The Planes all perform maneuvers to avoid being hit.

JULIAN (O.S.)
 (into headset)
 Take those things out!

All the Planes converge on the Tanks. They fire, but their bullets appear to do no damage to the armored vehicles.

The tanks continue to move forward through Adwa.

ROBINSON
 We're just wasting ammo.

MISCHKA'S PLANE

Mischka fires nonstop as he flies toward one of the tanks to no avail. The tank takes aim at Mischka.

ROBINSON (O.S.)
 (into headset)
 Mischka, pull up!

The tank FIRES right as Mischka pulls up and narrowly avoids the rounds.

MISCHKA
 How do we stop them?

JULIAN'S PLANE

JULIAN
 We can't pierce the armor. We can't stop them.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson circles around and surveys the tanks tracks.

ROBINSON
 I think we can. If we aim for the tracks it'll immobilize them. They'll be sitting ducks.

Robinson's plane descends toward the convoy. He takes aim at the wheels and SHOOTS.

The tanks halt as the wheels take on severe damage.

Ethiopian's on the ground CHEER at Robinson.

HILAIRE'S PLANE

HILAIRE
 That's good shooting, Johnnie!
 Everyone follow his lead!

The planes aim at the tracks. It doesn't take long for every tank to be rendered useless.

HILAIRE'S PLANE

HILAIRE
 Good call, Johnnie.

MISCHKA'S PLANE

MISCHKA
 Yes, it worked.

JULIAN'S PLANE

Julian's face tightens in anger.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson looks down at the tanks. Armed Ethiopian Citizens run up to the tanks and attack the Italian Soldiers.

Italy is in full retreat.

LUDWIG'S PLANE

Ludwig finishes off the tracks for the last tank and WHOOPS.

LUDWIG

Wir gewinnen!

HILAIRE (O.S.)

(into headset)

English, Ludwig.

LUDWIG

We are winning.

Ludwig lets out a triumphant LAUGH.

EXT. ADWA - STREET - DAY

HOURS LATER

The sun peeks over the horizon. Robinson and the other Pilots are out of their planes amongst the People of Adwa.

Robinson takes in the aftermath of the battle. Bodies, Ethiopian and Italian alike, maimed by bullets.

Robinson walks through the street in a trance like state.

Ludwig and Kaleb help carry an injured MAN on a stretcher.

Hilaire bends over an Ethiopian Soldier and tries to put pressure on an abdominal bullet wound. Hilaire turns and yells out, but his voice is inaudible.

Robinson approaches two bodies in the street. He bends down, it is a MOTHER laying over her SON as a shield. They are both dead. Sadness sweeps over Robinson's face.

MISCHKA (O.S.)

Mr. Robinson! Mr. Robinson!

Robinson comes out of his trance and turns to Mischka, who is trying to lift a large branch off the leg of an Ethiopian Soldier, HAJI, 30s.

MISCHKA

I need help.

Robinson rushes over.

MISCHKA

I'll lift. Can you pull him out?

Robinson nods. Mischka's face tightens in concentration as he lifts the branch. Robinson pulls Haji out.

Mischka drops the tree and joins Robinson in inspecting the leg. Blood seeps from his wound.

MISCHKA

(in Amharic)

Just stay still.

Mischka desperately looks around. Haji ogles at Robinson.

HAJI

(in Amharic)

It was you, in the sky.

ROBINSON

What's he saying?

HAJI

(in Amharic)

The way you flew was majestic.

MISCHKA

He's complementing your skills as a pilot.

ROBINSON

Thank--

(in Amharic)

Thank you.

Mischka spots an Ethiopian MEDIC.

MISCHKA

(in Amharic)

Hey! He needs medical attention.

The Medic rushes over and takes over as he immediately examines the wound.

Mischka stands up. The double headed eagle pin falls from his shirt. Robinson picks it up for him.

MISCHKA

Thanks.

The two walk the streets in search of others in need.

Mischka pins the emblem back to his shirt.

ROBINSON

I've noticed you constantly have those insignias on your person.

MISCHKA

They're a reminder of where I come from.

(re: Lion of Judah)

My mother was Ethiopian.

(re: double headed eagle)

And my father was Russian. These honor both sides of my heritage.

ROBINSON

Having a strong connection to your heritage is admirable. It's a constant reminder of what you're fighting for.

Mischka nods.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

Selassie, Bayen, and MEMBERS of the press are there to greet the fleet as they arrive. Pictures SNAP as the planes land.

Julian exits his plane and he looks perturbed as everyone heads for Robinson.

Selassie greets Robinson as he leaps down from the plane.

SELASSIE

Word has traveled of our triumphant battle. They say you were integral in our victory.

ROBINSON

You're giving me too much credit.

Thomas rushes up to Robinson and FLASHES photos.

THOMAS

Congratulations, Mr. Robinson, or would you prefer the name the locals have given you?

ROBINSON

And what name is that?

SELASSIE

A predator in the sky. Daring and
brave. The Brown Condor.

Off Robinson's surprised expression.

EXT. RESTAURANT/BAR - NIGHT

Robinson, Kaleb, Ludwig, Hilaire, Mischka and the rest of the
Ethiopian Pilots, cheerfully sit around the restaurant.

HILAIRE

(raises cup)
To victory.

KALEB

(raises cup)
To the Condor.

Robinson gives a humble smile. Everyone CHEERS as they clank
their cups together.

Julian sits and drinks by himself in the corner. He bitterly
glares at Robinson.

Robinson takes a big gulp and looks at the drink, impressed.

ROBINSON

That's not bad. What's this called?

MISCHKA

T'ej. It's a honey wine.

LUDWIG

(hiccup)
I usually prefer something
stronger.

Ludwig downs his drink. He leans over and greedily stares at
Hilaire's cup.

HILAIRE

How many cups have you had?

LUDWIG

Four...teen.

Hilaire gawks at him in shock.

LUDWIG

(re: Hilaire's cup)
You going to finish that?

Hilaire slowly slides his cup away from Ludwig.

KALEB
 (to Robinson)
 I have never seen a tank before.

ROBINSON
 They're definitely an imposing
 weapon.

KALEB
 Not so imposing thanks to you.
 Those Italians were running scared.

Julian has had enough. He jolts up from his chair. Everyone turns to him.

JULIAN
 While you all are busy praising
 Johnnie boy here, Italy is no doubt
 preparing to retaliate. As your
commander, I want to remind you
 that we're trying to win a war not
 a battle.

Julian downs the rest of his drink and storms out, leaving the setting far more somber.

ROBINSON
 He's right. This is far from over.

The Pilots exchange tense glances.

EXT. ITALIAN AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

A fleet of Italian planes are line up along the runway.

SUPER: ITALY, AIR FORCE BASE

One by one the planes take flight.

EXT. ADWA STREET - NIGHT

The town is still recovering from the battle. CITIZENS work together to clean up debris.

Plane engines ROAR in the distance. The Citizens look to the sky. Haji smiles.

HAJI
 (in Amharic)
 Brown Condor!

The name prompts others to look up to the planes in excitement. They wave and CHEER as the planes race toward the town.

The smiles slowly fade as the Citizens take in how many planes are headed their way. The Air Force descends on the street of Adwa. Pure devastation ensues.

ITALIAN FIGHTER PILOTS FIRE nonstop. The Citizens don't stand a chance against the aerial assault. Haji mounts a horse and races away from the city.

INT. HOTEL DE FRANCE - DINING - DAY

Robinson sits alone and eats. Out of the corner of his eye he spots Julian, who storms over to him with a newspaper in hand.

Julian throws the paper on the table in a fit of rage.

JULIAN

How dare you!

ROBINSON

What are you talking about?

JULIAN

You've been questioning my fitness to lead!

Robinson glances at the paper. The headline reads: "Brown Condor."

JULIAN

They have quotes of you saying the Air Force is ill-prepared.

ROBINSON

I didn't--

JULIAN

Ever since you arrived, you've been undermining my authority. You're a snake.

Robinson has had enough. He stands up in anger.

ROBINSON

Do not call me out of my name again.

Their argument gets the attention of Others.

JULIAN

I just call em' like I see em'!

ROBINSON

Don't put your insecurities on me.
You want respect as a leader? Then
do a better job of earning it.

Robinson tries to leave, but Julian grabs him by the arm.

JULIAN

We're not done here!

ROBINSON

Yes, we are!

Robinson yanks his arm out of Julian's grip.

Julian shoves Robinson. Robinson stumbles back and responds by pushing Julian in the chest.

Ludwig, Hilaire, Thomas and other MEMBERS of the press rush into the dining area to intervene.

Julian swings and punches Robinson in the face. Before Robinson can get the chance to counter, they are separated.

HILAIRE

Cool it!

Robinson and Julian can't reach each other, but their eyes are locked. If looks could kill.

EXT. ADDIS ABABA - OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

A disheveled Haji, slumps over his horse, his clothes torn, and splattered with dry blood. Haji's horse slowly trots through the forest toward the capital.

INT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Robinson walks along the hall with two ETHIOPIAN GUARDS to his left and right. Robinson sports a cut on his lip from where Julian punched him. The Guards lead him to...

INT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Selassie concentrates over documents as the doors open. He looks up as Robinson enters. Selassie waves off the Guards.

They turn and leave, closing the door behind them. Robinson nervously steps forward.

Selassie looks to the moon shining through the window.

ROBINSON

Emperor, I want to offer my apologies for my role in the altercation with Julian. I understand how much embarrassment it--

SELASSIE

What are your thoughts on dreams?

Selassie continues to gaze out the window.

ROBINSON

(confused)
I'm sorry?

SELASSIE

Dreams, what significance do you believe they play on our lives?

ROBINSON

I...I don't think that I've ever thought about it.

SELASSIE

There are some who say that dreams are prophetic, which is both fascinating and terrifying. The idea of literally knowing what the future holds for you. I'm not sure if I want that knowledge.

ROBINSON

I suppose it would depend on the future that you see.

SELASSIE

I had a dream last night. I was in the clouds flying.

Selassie finally turns to look at Robinson.

SELASSIE

You were there.

ROBINSON

Really?

SELASSIE

(smiles)

Someone had to fly the plane.

ROBINSON

Well, any dream that involves me
flying is bound to come true.

Robinson's attempt at a joke fails as Selassie frowns.

SELASSIE

Looking up, everything was perfect.
It was what I saw when I looked
down that frightened me.

Robinson peers at him curiously.

SELASSIE

I saw Addis Ababa, burning. The
entire capital, engulfed in flames.

Robinson raises his eyebrows to this stunning revelation.

SELASSIE

Let's hope we are wrong about
prophetic dreams.

A long silence passes between them.

SELASSIE

However, I don't think it was a
coincidence that it was you
piloting the plane. Mr. Robinson,
you've proven yourself to be a true
leader and it's time for you to
take up that mantle, officially.

ROBINSON

I don't understand.

SELASSIE

I want you to be the commander for
the Air Force.

ROBINSON

But Hubert Julian is--

SELASSIE

Mr. Julian will no longer be
serving Ethiopia.

Robinson gives Selassie an inquiring gaze.

SELASSIE

Hubert Julian proved that he lacks the temperament to lead. Especially after he tried to give me an ultimatum. It was either him or you. I chose you.

Robinson stands a little straighter with pride. There is a KNOCK at the door.

SELASSIE

(in Amharic)

Yes.

One of the Guards rushes in.

GUARD

(in Amharic)

Emperor, I have terrible news from Adwa.

Selassie and Robinson share looks of concern.

MOMENTS LATER

Selassie, Bayen, and Robinson stand in front of a haggard Haji.

HAJI

Ke'inesu wisit'i bizu neberu.

Bayen turns and translates for Robinson.

BAYEN

There were so many of them.

HAJI

Kesemayi milikiti aderegachewi.

BAYEN

From the sky they attacked.

SELASSIE

Ye'adawa mini inide hone?

BAYEN

What has become of Adwa?

HAJI

Hedwali. Adiwa alik'wali.

Bayen opens his mouth to translate, but he pauses.

ROBINSON

What?

BAYEN

It's gone. Adwa is gone.

The somber atmosphere in the room is palpable as they silently reflect on their loss.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - DAY

Robinson races to a two-bay biplane and climbs into the cockpit.

KALEB (O.S.)

Mr. Robinson!

Robinson turns to see Kaleb rushing over to him.

KALEB (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

ROBINSON

To scout.

KALEB

I'll come with you.

ROBINSON

No, you don't have--

Kaleb is already climbing into the plane.

ROBINSON (CONT'D)

Fine, strap in.

They both put on their pilot helmets.

INT. BIPLANE - FLYING - DAY

Robinson pilots the plane over the hilly Ethiopian landscape. Kaleb looks down and spots a small squadron of ITALIAN SOLDIERS.

Kaleb taps on Robinson's shoulder.

KALEB

Look!

Robinson sees them as well.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

Robinson and Kaleb sit at the top of a mountain and peer down at the large valley where the Italian army has set up base.

ROBINSON
I count fifty planes.

KALEB
All headed for Addis Ababa. What
are we going to do?

Robinson ponders on this question.

INT. AIR FORCE BASE - CLASSROOM - DAY

Robinson stands in front of Selassie, Bayen and all of the other Pilots.

ROBINSON
In truth, they have us outnumbered
and out gunned. In a head-to-head
match up we don't stand a chance.

LUDWIG
It sounds like you've accepted
defeat.

ROBINSON
Not at all.

SELASSIE
You have a plan?

ROBINSON
It's a pretty simple one. The same
plan they executed against us. They
attacked Adwa in the heart of the
night before the army could prepare
to defend themselves.

HILAIRE
You want to do a preemptive strike?

ROBINSON
We hit first. Our fleet just has to
hold the fort until the ground
troops arrive.

SELASSIE
They're marching as we speak.

ROBINSON

Do we have your approval, emperor?

Everyone turns to Selassie.

SELASSIE

You're the commander. I'll follow your counsel.

They all turn back to Robinson.

ROBINSON

We leave at daybreak.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - NIGHT

All the Pilots bustle around the base as they prepare for war.

INT. AIR FORCE BASE - CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Robinson stands alone in the classroom. He takes a deep breath as he zips up his flight suit.

ROBINSON

Okay, Johnnie. You can do this.

HILAIRE (O.S.)

Talking to yourself? He might not be fit to lead.

Robinson spins around to find Hilaire, Ludwig, Mischka, and Kaleb.

HILAIRE (CONT'D)

What do you all think? Has our commander gone crazy?

Robinson smiles at the tongue-in-cheek statement.

ROBINSON

Listen, before we go, I just want to say that it has been a pleasure flying with all of you and--

HILAIRE

Save the morose speech for when we come back.

Robinson grins.

ROBINSON

I was going to say that you all
better make it back. If you even
think about dying on this mission
I'll kill you myself.

They all LAUGH.

EXT. AIR FORCE BASE - NIGHT

Robinson straps into the seat. He looks around at the other
Pilots in their planes. Robinson steels himself.

As engines BELLOW and propellers spin, the planes take off.

EXT. ITALIAN ARMY CAMP - VALLEY - DAY

The sun peeks over the horizon as the morning is ushered in.

Most SOLDIERS are still asleep.

ITALIAN SOLDIER ONE emerges from a tent. He groggily wipes
the sleep from his eyes as he walks toward the outskirts of
the encampment.

He reaches a tree to take a piss. While peeing, he looks to
the horizon where the sun rises. Tiny dots are just visible
in the faint sunlight.

Soldier One's eyes go wide as he realizes what he is looking
at. He sprints back for the camp.

SOLDIER ONE

(in Italian)

Wake up! Wake up! They're coming!

Other Soldiers stir. The sound of incoming planes fill the
air. ALARMS go off around the camp. Soldiers scramble around
and prepare for battle. Fighter Pilots hurry to their planes.

INT. ROBINSON BIPLANE - FLYING - DAY

As they approach the camp, Robinson spots some of the planes
rolling into takeoff.

HILAIRE (O.S.)

(in headset)

So much for the element of
surprise.

MISCHKA (O.S.)
 (in headset)
 What do we do?

ROBINSON
 We stick to the plan. Hilaire,
 Mischka, Ludwig, flank the aerial
 planes to the left. Kaleb, and the
 rest of the squadron are with me to
 the right. Draw out their pilots
 and take out as many grounded
 planes as possible.

KALEB (O.S.)
 (in headset)
 Copy that!

GROUND

Italian Soldiers watch as the Ethiopian Planes split. Half engage with the airborne Italian planes, while the rest attack the grounded troops.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson takes aim and fires at the Italian Soldiers.

CAMP

The soldiers scatter. Many Italian Planes takeoff into the air.

Robinson's plane flies over a pair of Italian planes. The PILOTS attempt to get in the planes, but bullets shower down on them from Robinson.

Both Pilots dive out of the cockpits and duck under the planes for cover. One of the Pilots inspects his plane and sees rivulets of fuel running out of the tank from bullet holes.

ROBINSON'S BIPLANE

Robinson smirks down at his handy work. He looks up and notices more Italian Planes in the air and ready to engage.

ROBINSON
 Everyone stay alert! We have
 incoming fighter planes!

Robinson is on a collision course with an Italian plane. They both SHOOT. Robinson quickly ascends out of the line of fire, but his aim is true. He nails the Italian Plane.

BOOM! The Italian biplane catches fire and the tail is ablaze. On the ground, everyone scrambles to get out of the way as the plane spirals and crashes into a stationary plane.

Robinson watches the fiery crash below with a smile.

KALEB (O.S.)
(in headset)
Good shot, Condor!

ROBINSON
Two for one--

Robinson is about to crash into another plane. He barrel rolls out of the way.

ROBINSON
Jesus! That was close.

The Italian plane circles around in pursuit of Robinson. Bullets rain down on Robinson. Robinson performs a number of maneuvers but the Italian plane sticks with him.

ROBINSON
I got a hostile on me! I can't shake him!

ITALIAN BIPLANE

The PILOT has Robinson in his sights. He fires until--BANG! BANG! BANG! The Italian Plane is hit with a barrage of bullets and plummets to the ground.

ROBINSON'S BIPLANE

Robinson sighs in relief. He turns and sees Kaleb flying next to him. Kaleb salutes Robinson and then--

Kaleb's plane gets shredded from a flurry of shots.

ROBINSON
No!

Two Italian Planes in pursuit behind Robinson FIRE non stop. His plane takes damage. With the Italian planes on his tail Robinson goes into a nosedive.

Sadness and anger reflect in Robinson's eyes as the plane plunges toward the ground.

HILAIRE
(in headset)
Pull up! Robinson, pull up!

With the two Italian Planes right behind him in the dive, Robinson pulls up and loops around the planes. It is the same maneuver that Henderson taught him.

Robinson now has the upper hand and he FIRES on the planes. Bullets rip through the wings and the Italian planes crash to the ground.

LUDWIG'S PLANE

Ludwig FIRES rapidly at a row of stationary Italian planes, rendering them useless.

An Italian Fighter Plane flies above Ludwig and SHOOTS at him.

LUDWIG

Shit!

Ludwig banks to the left and the right as he tries to avoid the bullets.

MISCHKA'S PLANE

Mischka FIRES and takes out an Italian Plane. As he watches the plane fall to the ground he notices Ludwig trying to escape the onslaught of bullets.

Mischka beelines for Ludwig's Attacker.

LUDWIG'S PLANE

Ludwig struggles to escape when suddenly the bullets stop. Ludwig looks up and sees his Attacker's plane in free fall. Smoke comes from the plane as it plummets to the ground.

MISCHKA (O.S.)

(in headset)

You're welcome.

Ludwig looks to his side and spots Mischka. Ludwig smiles.

LUDWIG

Don't be cocky. I might be saving your life soon.

The two planes veer off in different directions to continue the fight.

Italian tanks aim for the sky. BOOM! BOOM!

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson watches as two Ethiopian Planes are hit by the tank rounds. The Planes drop out of the sky.

ROBINSON

Damn it!

MISCHKA'S PLANE

Mischka is flying side by side with another Ethiopian Plane. Both are in a head to head fire fight with two Italian Fighter Plane.

Mischka takes out one of the Planes. He turns to see the Ethiopian plane next to him take on a barrage of bullets right into the cockpit. The Ethiopian Pilots slumps over onto the control wheel and the plane falls to the ground.

MISCHKA

This is getting bad!

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson notices another Ethiopian plane plummeting to the ground.

Everything appears to slow down as Robinson looks like he is overcome with despair. The sun shines bright into his eyes, which gets Robinson to glance to the horizon. He smiles.

ROBINSON

Back up is on the way!

Ethiopian ground TROOPS race through the valley toward the battle ground.

Robinson spies Italian Soldiers forming a line of shooters in the direction of the Ethiopian Soldiers.

As the Italian Soldiers FIRE, Robinson banks around and FIRES on the Italian Ranks. The Soldiers are forced to disperse.

HILAIRE'S PLANE

Hilaire WHOOPS in celebration.

HILAIRE

Looks like the calvary's arrived.

The Ethiopian Soldiers rush the Italian forces.

Robinson loops around and directs his fire power toward the wheels of the tanks. The tracks fall apart from the barrage of bullets.

The Ethiopian Soldiers over take the immobilized tanks.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

ROBINSON

That's one less thing we have to
worry about.

Robinson sets his sights on an Italian Plane. He SHOTS and
takes out his target.

There are eight Planes that remain in the air. Robinson,
Hilaire, Mischka, and Ludwig are the only Ethiopian Pilots
left.

The other four are Italian Pilots.

Robinson joins sides with Hilaire. The two of them trail
behind two Italian planes.

ROBINSON

Fire to the left and I'll shoot
when they bank right.

HILAIRE'S PLANE

HILAIRE

Got it.

Hilaire aims to the left of the Italian Planes. Both planes
simultaneously try to bank to the left to avoid the bullets.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

ROBINSON

Gotcha!

Robinson SHOTS and the planes fly right into his line of
fire.

Hilaire and Robinson CHEER as the planes crash to the ground.

Meanwhile, Ludwig and Mischka are in the middle of trying to
take out the last two Italian Planes.

Ludwig trails behind his target. He tries to FIRE but the
Italian Pilot maneuvers and avoids the bullets.

The opposite is happening with Mischka. The Italian Pilot is
in pursuit of Mischka.

MISCHKA'S PLANE

Mischka sweats bullets as he tries to avoid his demise. He turns left he turns right. He can't shake the Italian Pilot.

MISCHKA
I need some help.

LUDWIG'S PLANE

Ludwig takes his eyes off his target and spots Mischka. Ludwig glances from his Italian target to Mischka.

He exhales as he makes a decision.

LUDWIG
Coming.

Ludwig abandons his fight and flies over to Mischka. Ludwig catches up to Mischka and the Italian Pilot.

Mischka is under heavy fire.

LUDWIG
Hold on, Mischka!

Ludwig struggles to aim at the Italian Pilot without hitting Mischka.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson flies toward the fray. He spots the second Italian Pilot making its way toward Ludwig.

INTERCUT BETWEEN MISCHKA'S PLANE & LUDWIG'S PLANE

Ludwig's face scrunches up in concentration. Finally, he has the Italian Pilot right where he wants him and he FIRES.

The Italian Plane goes down.

LUDWIG
You're all clear, Mischka.

Mischka sighs in relief.

MISCHKA
Thanks.

LUDWIG
Now we're even.

ROBINSON (O.S.)
(into headset)
Ludwig, watch out behind you!

Ludwig turns to see the last Italian plane right on top of him. Bullets rip through his plane before he can react.

MISCHKA

Ludwig!

Mischka watches in horror as Ludwig's plane crashes.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson sees red as he flies behind the Italian Pilot and delivers justice. His bullets rip the plane apart.

GROUND

Ethiopian Soldiers have the Italians on the run. The Soldiers look up and see the three Ethiopian planes left in the sky.

They CHEER in victory.

ROBINSON'S PLANE

Robinson looks down at the CHEERING Soldiers. Tears well up in his eyes.

Mischka and Hilaire join his side. Robinson glances between the two of them. They all share the same grief-stricken expression.

The Three of them fly out of the valley.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Robinson sleeps in the bed. The room is filthy, like it hasn't been cleaned in days. There's a KNOCK at the door. Robinson stirs, but elects to roll over instead of getting up. Another KNOCK.

Robinson slowly rolls out of the bed and drags his feet to the door. He opens it and reveals Bayen.

Bayen takes in Robinson's sloven appearance.

BAYEN

Mr. Robinson. How are you?

Robinson responds with an I don't know type of shrug.

BAYEN (CONT'D)

The staff say you haven't left the room since you got back from the valley.

ROBINSON

Yeah, I've been... out of sorts.

BAYEN

I'm sorry to hear that, but the emperor has requested your presence at the palace.

Robinson's head drops. He clearly doesn't want to leave the room.

EXT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - GROUNDS - DAY

Robinson lumbers through the palace grounds. He notices the frenzied state of everyone around the palace.

Robinson stops when he spots Selassie, Mischka, and Hilaire. Selassie stands next to the two-bay biplane that Ludwig used to fly him around in. Robinson's eyes are full of guilt.

SELASSIE

Mr. Robinson. Please, join us.

Hilaire and Mischka turn to look at Robinson.

Robinson plods up to the group. His eyes are averted, refusing to look at anyone directly.

SELASSIE

I gathered the three of you here to express my gratitude. This war has taken its toll.

Selassie looks at the plane in sorrow.

SELASSIE

We've suffered many losses. You have all served honorably and now that the fleet is gone, I can't ask anymore of you.

Selassie reaches out and shakes Hilaire's hand.

SELASSIE

Thank you for your fight.

HILAIRE

I just did what was right.

Selassie gives an appreciative smile. He turns and shakes Mischka's hand.

SELASSIE

Mischka, you made your father
proud.

MISCHKA

Thank you, Emperor.

As Mischka and Hilaire take their leave, they stop in front
of Robinson. Robinson finally looks up.

ROBINSON

I...I don't know what to say.

HILAIRE

I think there is only one thing to
say...

(reaches out his hand)

...it was an honor to fly under
your command.

Robinson shakes his head in sorrow as he shakes hands with
Hilaire.

ROBINSON

You all deserved a better leader.

HILAIRE

(grins)

You mean one that can prevent
casualties in war? Not sure such a
leader exist.

ROBINSON

That doesn't make this any easier.

(a beat)

What will you do now?

HILAIRE

I'm still weighing my options. But
I'm thinking about Spain.

Robinson raises his eyebrows.

ROBINSON

Aren't they on the brink of a civil
war? Why would you rush back into
something like this?

HILAIRE

There's always going to be another
battle. We can't escape them. So, I
chose to pick a side and live with
the results.

Robinson exhales and smiles in spite of himself.

ROBINSON
Take care of yourself.

HILAIRE
Same to you, commander.

Hilaire walks off. Mischka steps up and hands Robinson his Lion of Judah pin. Robinson marvels at the emblem.

ROBINSON
Mischka, I couldn't possibly take this.

He tries to hand it back, but Mischka shakes his head.

MISCHKA
Please, you will honor me and Ethiopia by wearing it.

Robinson pulls the pin close.

MISCHKA
You helped more than you know. I hope our paths cross again.

ROBINSON
Perhaps they will.

Mischka smiles and then turns to leave.

Robinson steps up to Selassie.

ROBINSON
Emperor, I want to apologize for the loss of your air force and--

SELASSIE
Your airmen didn't want to hear your apologies and neither do I.

Robinson looks taken aback by Selassie's terse tone.

SELASSIE
We will mourn those that we lost, but not dwell in regret. They fought and died for freedom. I can't think of a more noble death.

Robinson forces a small smile at Selassie's words of comfort.

SELASSIE

You should prepare to leave.
Probably best if you're gone by
tomorrow.

ROBINSON

Why?

Robinson once again turns his attention to the palace STAFF
bustling around the area.

ROBINSON

What's going on?

SELASSIE

Those loses at our hands has forced
Mussolini to respond. I have
received word from my scouts that
he is sending far more ground
forces. Along with another fleet.

ROBINSON

How many planes?

Selassie shakes his head gravely.

SELASSIE

Hundreds.

ROBINSON

They'll be coming for the capital.
What are you going to do?

SELASSIE

There is not much to do.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

The Ethiopian army treks through the terrain. A dark cloud
shades the Army. The Soldiers look up to see hundreds of
Italian Planes.

SELASSIE (V.O.)

My army has already fallen.

The Soldiers are mowed down by the Italian Planes

EXT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - GROUNDS - DAY

SELASSIE

They will be here soon.

ROBINSON
What about you?

SELASSIE
I've already sent my family to
Jerusalem. I plan on finding my way
there once my affairs are in order
here.

Selassie studies Robinson's doleful expression.

SELASSIE (CONT'D)
Go home, Mr. Robinson. You've done
all you can for us here.

Robinson is aghast as he watches Selassie head back toward
the palace.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A dejected Robinson roughly packs his rucksack. Robinson
tosses the bag over his shoulder and exits the room.

EXT. HOTEL DE FRANCE - NIGHT

Robinson emerges from the front door. He looks back at the
hotel one last time and then turns to leave.

EXT. ADDIS ABABA - NIGHT

Robinson marches through the city of Addis Ababa when
suddenly loud SCREAMS and Plane ENGINES fill the air.

He looks to the sky to see hundreds of Planes soar over the
city like a plague. Robinson sprints into the heart of the
capital.

The Italian Planes rain down bullets against the Addis Ababa
CITIZENS.

Robinson squints at the palace in the distance. He beelines
for the palace steps.

EXT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - NIGHT

Robinson sprints up the steps. Amidst the chaos, all the
Guards have abandoned their positions.

INT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Robinson searches room by room.

ROBINSON

Bayen!

Robinson races down the hall. STAFF and GUARDS run past him.

ROBINSON (CONT'D)

Emperor Selassie!

Robinson desperately continues his search.

EXT. ADDIS ABABA - STREETS - NIGHT

ITALIAN SOLDIERS storm through the streets and gun down ETHIOPIAN CITIZENS.

INT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Selassie gathers up his belongings. He is surrounded by GUARDS.

The doors burst open and the Guards take defensive positions.

SELASSIE

(to Guards in Amharic)

Stand down!

Robinson stands in the doorway.

ROBINSON

Emperor, the capital is overrun.

SELASSIE

I can't leave our history behind.

Selassie stuffs books and paperwork into his bag.

GUNSHOTS come from outside. Robinson rushes to the window. Italian Soldiers approach the palace.

ROBINSON

They're here. You have to go.

Selassie finishes and closes the bag. Everyone rushes out of the Throne Room into--

HALLWAY

ROBINSON
Where's Bayen?

SELASSIE
He took a train out this afternoon.
He is probably halfway to Egypt by
now.

SCREAMS echo around the palace.

The Group turns down the hall and they are met by Italian Soldiers. The Ethiopian Guards engage them to protect their Emperor.

Robinson grabs the Emperor by the arm.

ROBINSON
C'mon.

Robinson leads Selassie away from the skirmish.

As they run through the hall, Robinson glances out the window and spots the two-bay biplane sitting outside.

EXT. GUENETE LEUL PALACE - GROUNDS - NIGHT

Robinson and Selassie sprint for the plane. They waste no time as they climb into the cockpits.

INT. BIPLANE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

ROBINSON
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon.

Robinson fumbles with the controls as he tries to start the plane. The engine ROARS to life.

Italian Soldiers storm out of the palace and beeline for them.

The propeller spins and Robinson drives the plane forward toward the Soldiers. They are forced to dive out of the way as the plane speeds past them and slowly ascends.

As the plane rises above Addis Ababa, Selassie looks down at the destruction of the capital. Sadness is etched on his face.

TWO ITALIAN PLANES converge on either side of their plane.

ROBINSON
Damn it! This plane has no weapons.

Robinson begins to perform maneuvers but the Italian planes match his every move.

Robinson spots a cross sitting at the top of a church.

ROBINSON

Hold on!

He drops the plane into a dive headed for the church. The Italian planes follow suit.

As he looks like he is about to collide with the giant stone cross, Robinson barrel rolls out of the way. One of the Italian plane isn't so lucky.

The Plane flies into the cross and it crumbles. Selassie looks back and watches the plane crash to the ground.

Robinson continues to fly low. They head for the outskirts of the town soaring into the forest.

SELASSIE

You're too close to the trees!

ROBINSON

That's the idea!

The Italian plane FIRES at them. Robinson zigs and zags to avoid being hit. A couple of the rounds from the Italian plane hit the base of a tree. The wood splinters.

Robinson smiles as the tree begins to topple over.

Selassie shakes his head as the plane barrels toward the falling tree. The Italian plane is right on their heels.

SELASSIE

No, no, no, no!

They narrowly squeeze under the falling tree just in time as it hits the ground. The Italian Plane flies into the tree head-on and ricochets into another tree.

Selassie lets out a sigh of relief. They are in the clear.

EXT. DJIBOUTI OUTSKIRTS - DAY

A FARMER ploughs soils. He pulls out a handkerchief and wipes his brow.

An engine ROARING causes him to look up and see a plane descending over his field. The farmer watches in awe as the plane slowly rolls to a stop.

Robinson and Selassie hop out of the plane and approach the stunned Farmer.

ROBINSON
Excuse me, how far is the railway
station?

The Farmer looks at them slack-jawed.

ROBINSON (CONT'D)
(to Selassie.)
I don't think he understands
English.

The Farmer's eyes go wide as he takes in Selassie.

FARMER
(in French)
Emperor Selassie?

The Farmer bows his head.

INT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - DAY

The Farmer sits up front and controls the reins. Selassie and Robinson sit in the back of the carriage.

The carriage approaches the railway station. A few OBSERVERS watch as the carriage comes to a stop.

FARMER
(in French)
The Railway station.

Robinson and Selassie nod their thanks as they step out of the carriage.

The Farmer flicks the reins and the horse trots off.

EXT. DJIBOUTI RAILWAY STATION - DAY

Selassie and Robinson look exhausted as they trudge up to the railway and sit down on a bench.

ROBINSON
What will you do next?

Selassie takes a deep breath.

SELASSIE

Keep fighting. I'll go to Geneva
and directly address the League of
Nations. Make sure my story is
heard and the world knows that as
long as I'm breathing, this war
isn't over.

Four Buick Convertibles pull up in front of the station.
PATRONS curiously eye the convoy.

SELASSIE

This is my ride.

Selassie and Robinson both stand up.

ROBINSON

I guess this is goodbye.

Selassie stares at the Lion of Judah pin clipped to
Robinson's shirt.

SELASSIE

You turned into more than just an
ally to Ethiopia, you're family. I
don't say goodbye to family.

Selassie and Robinson shake hands one last time.

SELASSIE

Until we meet again, Brown Condor.

Robinson watches as Selassie gets into one of the cars.
Robinson smiles as the convoy drives off.

INT. AIRPLANE - FLYING - DAY

Robinson sits with his eyes closed on a commercial flight.
The windows are down so he can't see what is outside. The
wheels touch down and the plane comes to a stop.

An ATTENDANT walks up and shakes Robinson awake. He slowly
opens his eyes.

ATTENDANT

We've arrived in Chicago.

ROBINSON

Thank you.

Robinson stretches as he stands.

EXT. TRANSCONTINENTAL AND WESTERN AIRLINE - DAY

The door to the plane opens and Robinson's jaw drops.

Thousands of PEOPLE are there to greet him on the strip. Many hold up signs.

"Hail the Brown Condor."

"Our Hero John Robinson."

Robinson looks down the steps and sees Earnize, Cornelius, Willa, and Henderson. Earnize rushes into his arms.

ROBINSON

I didn't expect a welcome home like this.

EARNIZE

Well, it's not everyday a war hero returns home.

ROBINSON

A hero? But I failed, Ethiopia is gone.

EARNIZE

You fought for what's right. That's what matters.

Robinson looks to the exuberant Crowd.

EARNIZE

You've given them hope. Plus, you kept your promise to come back to me.

Earnize shows off the ring on her finger.

ROBINSON

Yeah, I guess I did.

They kiss.

Everyone CHEERS for the Brown Condor.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END