

Born by the River

By

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INT. ABANDONED CHURCH - NIGHT

An OLDER WOMAN (60)(African-American, dressed in black) is on her knees as she bows towards an altar.

She chants unintelligibly, but with ferocity. The only light in the room is from hundreds of dimly lit candles.

In the background are three...five...ten...thirty WOMEN (African-American, all ages) dressed in black. They too rise and fall with the chant, in sync with the initial Older Woman.

The chants get louder. The women become overwhelmed with emotion.

Some cry, some scream. The Older Woman's nose bleeds as she focuses her chant on a large boulder.

A deafening CRACK is heard as the boulder starts to slowly split in half. The women immediately fall silent as they watch the boulder with a frightening intensity.

As it splits, steams of water flow from the boulder onto the floor. It surrounds the women.

When the heavy stream comes to a halt, two bloody black feet step out of the stone.

The feet step,

Slowly,

Towards the Older Woman at the front of the altar.

The Older Woman cries tears of joy as her nose still streams blood.

The bloody hand of OBA (30) (dark-skinned African woman, naked, ethereal) caresses the Older Woman's face, leaving a bloody hand print. She never shows her face.

OLDER WOMAN

Oba...you are born again!

ACT ONE

INT. LEIGH'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

LEIGH (26) (African-American, fragile and haunted) jolts awake. Her room is a mess. Almost every surface and wall space is covered with some sort of religious regalia.

Some for Christianity, Buddhism, Scientology, Wiccan, you name it. Moonlight shines vibrantly through her bedroom window.

Leigh gets out of bed and stares out of her window. She checks the locks.

LEIGH (V.O.)
It's complicated thing, wading
through life as a fungus. I dream a
lot about fungus.

INT. LEIGH'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Leigh brushes her teeth in the sink. She grabs a mug and pours in some soda. She gargles and spits out the toothpaste.

LEIGH (V.O.)
That's what my first foster mom
called me. You could say it stuck.
I thought it was a compliment at
first. But the way she said it, it
was like she coughed it up and spit
it out.

INT. LEIGH'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Leigh checks the lock on the front door. Satisfied, she paces the apartment. She eyes a journal on the small card table in the corner of the room.

LEIGH (V.O.)
I read on the internet once about
it. Some joker said, "Fungus is
disgusting, resilient, and lonely.
In some folklore, fungi is a
harbinger of death."

Leigh writes thoughtfully in her journal.

LEIGH (V.O.)
That sounds about right.

Leigh tries to stop the tears before they come. She heads for the--

INT. BATHROOM

Leigh fixes her hair into a tight ponytail. Her sink bowl is stuffed with hair and body products. More religious symbols align the wall.

LEIGH (V.O.)
I had a dream about mom last night.
She wasn't happy to see me.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Leigh does jumping jacks, crunches, and yoga. She sweats and struggles, but pushes HARD.

LEIGH (V.O.)
After berating me for not
'visiting' her, she told me that
ever since I was a kid, I always
had sticky fingers. I just had to
touch something, anything, that
could stick to me. But nothing
quite did. Nothing good, anyway.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

ANTOINE (25) (African- American, bubbly and warm) lightly bumps into a younger Leigh. The two say nothing, just slowly and profoundly beam at one another. *Love at first sight.*

INT. LEIGH'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT

Leigh writes furiously in a journal at a small table.

LEIGH
If she had any sense...she would
have stuck to me.

Leigh looks over at an Ankh necklace on the desk. She twirls it in her hand. A loud KNOCK jolts Leigh out of her reverie. She stares with absolute dread at the front door, unmoving.

ADAM (O.S.)
You're not answering your phone!

Leigh is immediately relieved, then annoyed. She yanks open the door.

ADAM ROUSEY (30) (Caucasian, cocky and air-headed) looks Leigh up and down. He let's out a wolf whistle and looks over her shoulder.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Who are you working on at this hour?

LEIGH
Nothing worth reporting, Adam. What are you doing here?

ADAM
I've been calling and calling. No answer. Bossman wants us up early prepping to get a comment after the Kohn Brothers ruling.

LEIGH
What time is it?

ADAM
Time to get dressed! Showered, maybe. I could join you, if you'd like.

Leigh slams the door in Adam's face.

ADAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You've got fifteen minutes!

EXT. COURTHOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Adam and Leigh sit in a news van amongst a sea of other reporters and news vans.

Leigh is visibly nervous, dressed in an all white suit. She eyes the vast crowd that continues to grow.

ADAM
Hey. Hey!

Leigh snaps back to attention.

ADAM (CONT'D)
You good, Leigh?

LEIGH
Yeah, let's do this.

Adam places a hand on Leigh's shoulder.

ADAM

It's just people. It's just microphones. You're just getting a comment. Then Chick-fil-a after to celebrate, okay?

LEIGH

Yeah. Chick-fil-a. Okay.

Adam grabs the camera and steps out of the van.

ADAM

I'm gonna go shoot a little B-roll while we wait. I'll be back.

LEIGH

Yeah, sure.

Adam steps away. Leigh watches the crowd. She checks her watch, anxious to pass the time.

She finds a chocolate candy bar and rips it open. She turns toward the crowd and spots Antoine, dressed in a grey hoodie. He stands alone in the distance.

As Leigh looks closer at him, he turns to face her. She looks around the crowd to see if anyone else notices him.

No one does.

Antoine lifts his head and smiles sadly at Leigh. She jumps out of the van and makes her way towards him.

LEIGH (CONT'D)

Antoine? Antoine?!

Two loud SHOTS. Antoine drops to the ground.

LEIGH (CONT'D)

No!

Leigh pushes through the crowd to the spot where Antoine was, but he's disappeared. No one pays attention to her as the crowd rushes the opposite direction towards the courthouse doors.

ADAM

Leigh. Leigh!

Adam finds Leigh in the crowd.

ADAM (CONT'D)

What are you doing all the way over here? The Brothers are out!

She looks around, confused.

LEIGH
Didn't you hear the shoots? Antoine-

ADAM
Who? What are you talking about?
(beat)
Is that chocolate on your top?

Leigh looks down at her chocolate stained white shirt.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Fuck me.

LEIGH
It's okay. I can cover it.

ADAM
We can't blow this again. I need
this job.

LEIGH
No, we won't. I swear. Let's go.

Leigh tries desperately to get her shit together. She leads
as Adam follows her through the crowd.

Two men, KYLE and ANDRE KOHN (40) and their LAWYER (60) have
million dollar smiles and suits to match as they wade through
the sea of reporters.

LEIGH (CONT'D)
What's the verdict?

ADAM
Hung jury. They're walking.

Adam passes Leigh a microphone. She holds it over the
chocolate stain.

LEIGH
We rolling?

Adam nods.

LEIGH (CONT'D)
Good Morning, Chicago. Leigh Banks
here reporting live from WKT News
at the 32nd District Court.
(MORE)

LEIGH (CONT'D)

The Kohn Brothers who were tried on charges of murder, bribery, and racketeering are getting to walk free due to a hung jury. A rare occurrence in cases such as these.

Leigh tries to get closer to the brothers. She sticks her microphone out.

LEIGH (CONT'D)

Excuse me. Excuse me, Kyle. Andre?
Could you--

Leigh accidentally steps on another FEMALE REPORTER'S (40) foot. The Female Reporter elbows Leigh in the nose.

Leigh's nose immediately gushes with blood, all over her white top. She is pushed to the back of the crowd. Adam lowers the camera.

Adam takes Leigh's arm and leads her towards the news van.

ADAM

No Chick-fil-a today, I guess.

INT. NEWS STATION - OFFICE - DAY

Leigh nurses her bloody nose as she sits alone by an office window. She looks worse for wear, completely rung with nerves.

A REPORTER (30) speaks on a TV that plays softly in the background.

REPORTER

Hollywood streets are whispering that renowned Young Adult author, Rhoda Keys', much anticipated series ending novel, '*Under the African Silk Tree*', is up for a movie deal. Could the famous recluse finally be introduced to the silver screen via this script to screen adaptation? More at five.

Leigh looks at the television screen, she stares at Rhoda's picture.

INT. SHABBY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A MAN and WOMAN (30s) wrestle violently on the floor. The Man slaps the Woman.

A book slips from her hands and glides across the floor. The back cover is a picture of Rhoda. The same as on the television. A child's cry is heard.

INT. NEWS STATION - OFFICE - DAY - PRESENT

MR. YATES (45) (Caucasian, stocky and overworked) enters the office and slams the door behind him. He stares at Leigh, furious.

LEIGH

Sir, it wasn't...I can assure you...we were told only four news stations would be present...it will never happen...aren't you going to say something?

Mr. Yates sits at his desk. He motions for Leigh to sit. She does. Mr. Yates turns off the television.

MR. YATES

I can't tell you how many times I've stuck my neck out for you and its come to bite me in the ass.

Leigh can't make eye contact.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

I've tried with you, Leigh. I've been patient...I know you have it in you. You're talented. I know that you're capable.

LEIGH

I can do it! The crowd just threw me off--

MR. YATES

Welcome to Journalism, Leigh. You'll have to deal with a crowd from time to time.

LEIGH

If you just give me another--

MR. YATES

Leigh, I can't. I really can't. I have to let you go.

LEIGH

No. You can't.

Mr. Yates stands up to leave.

MR. YATES

It's beyond me. The network is out for blood. I'll write you a good recommendation letter.

LEIGH

Please, Mr. Yates! I need this job. This is the only thing I can do.

Now Mr. Yates can't make eye contact. Leigh blocks the door.

LEIGH (CONT'D)

I can get a Rhoda Keys interview!

Mr. Yates stares in disbelief. Leigh can't quite believe it either.

MR. YATES

Excuse me?

LEIGH

(beat)

I can make an interview with Rhoda Keys happen.

MR. YATES

You can 'make it happen'? What the hell does that mean? Rhoda hasn't done an official sit-down interview on the record for over 20 years. No one can get her. Absolutely no one.

(beat)

How do you know her?

LEIGH

I believe that I have an in that I can use to get my foot in the door. It will work. I know it will.

MR. YATES

Have you heard about what she does to uninvited guests? She got arrested for emptying a can of pepper-spray on the last guy. She almost blinded the poor son of a bitch.

LEIGH

I can do this! If I can make this happen, will you let me stay on?

MR. YATES

If you can get *the* Rhoda Keys an interview with the station, you'll have a promotion. But I'll be honest, Leigh. I won't hold my breath.

Leigh steps out of the doorway.

MR. YATES (CONT'D)

Off the record, I haven't seen quite a fight like this out of you in a long time. I was wondering if you were still in there...I'll give you two weeks.

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

Leigh packs up her car. Adam runs up behind her.

ADAM

Hey.

Leigh is startled, but keeps her composure.

ADAM (CONT'D)

(snarky)

I heard you were getting the boot.

LEIGH

Don't sound so sad, Adam. You're breaking me all up here.

ADAM

Come on, Leigh. You never were exactly a bullfighter. I'm sure someone will hire you.

Leigh shoots Adam a look that could kill.

ADAM (CONT'D)

I don't mean any disrespect. But this gig isn't for the weak.

LEIGH

I'm not weak.

ADAM

Look, a bit of advice...and a well wish?

Adam takes off his sweatshirt and gives it to Leigh. Leigh takes it, and pulls it on over her bloody top.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Something my Pops used to say, 'The cold strengthens you more than hunger.' Or something like that.

LEIGH

What?

ADAM

Basically means that this isn't the last of you. I know we don't always see eye to eye, but I'm rooting for you, Leigh. Call you later?

Adam gives Leigh a hug. She doesn't return it. Adam walks back into the building.

Leigh fingers the hoodie Adam gave her. She rips it off. Throws it on the ground.

INT. LEIGHS CAR - CONTINUOUS

She gets in. She eyes the string of chakra beads that hang from her visor mirror. She plunks them, and watches them swing.

LEIGH

A little help here?

Leigh smushes her head against the wheel horn. It lets out a long and dejected *BEEEP*.

END ACT ONE