

AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BY RAH CRAWFORD



SHORT
EXCERPT
DIGITAL
COPY

GANGEE
A LOVE STORY

SHORT
EXCERPT
DIGITAL
COPY

SCREENPLAY READING GUIDE

EXT. Exterior
INT. Interior
V.O. Voice-over
CONT'D Continued

PRONUNCIATION

Gangee (Gan•jee)
Ayeelah (Ah•yee•la)
Dondai (Don•day)
Uree (Yoor•ree)
Makeeb (Ma•keeb)

Please refer to the rear section
of the book for a full list
of character names.

// WRITER'S EDITION //

WGAE REGISTRATION #1366438

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info@worldowned.com

In a war-torn land
of fear, hatred,
and deceit,
a young couple's
unbreakable love
overcomes the
greatest of
obstacles.

GANGEE

written by

Rah Crawford

EXT. DEEP SEA – NIGHT

Aerial view of a large battleship from the 1800's. It sits motionless in the calm open sea, the ships large white sails are still and quiet under the starry sky. No crew or passengers can be seen.

Surrounded by twinkling stars that reflect on the surface of the water, the vessel appears to be floating in space.

WOMAN (V.O.)
Since the beginning of time,
destiny has always found a way to
run its course...

The large white sails of the ship flutter as a soft wind travels across them.

WOMAN (V.O. CONT'D)
...and true love is a force no
power on earth can stop – once it's
been set into motion.

The ship's wide sails swell from a powerful gust of wind.

(closeup) The wooden hull of the ship slowly moves through the water. The words "U.S.S Ganges" is inscribed on its side.

The reflected stars turn into rippling white waves alongside the ship, as it cuts through the water gaining speed.

FADE OUT:

EXT. DEEP SPACE – NIGHT

The infinite cosmos, swirling constellations, and glowing galaxies stretch out towards infinity. The earth appears as a small dot in the far distance as the sound of African tribal drumming grows louder. Earth's round silhouette comes closer into view then fades into the pupil of an eye.

The Camera pulls back slowly for a tight shot on the face of a beautiful brown skinned girl named Ayeelah (age 17). She squeezes her eyes closed tightly, smiles, and breathes deeply as if she's inhaling the universe for the first time.

AYEELAH
That was beautiful.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP – NIGHT

Drums beat in the distance.

Under starry skies, two young lovers gently caress one another. Hands touch shoulders and arms, lips kiss forehead and face.

AYEELAH
(whispering)
Why do we have to keep hiding? I
want to be with you forever. I want
our children, and their children to
know love like this.

The camera pulls back from Ayeelah's face, she's embraced tightly with her lover, Dondai (age 17). Their forms are as one. Her chin rests intimately on his shoulder, her lips are close to his ear. Dondai's back is to the camera.

DONDAI
They will.

AYEELAH
You say that so easily.

DONDAI
That's because they will... the
ancestors are looking out for us,
they brought us together didn't
they?

AYEELAH
I wouldn't give them credit for
that. We found each other and chose
love. They chose to start a war
that's been killing our people for
generations.

AYEELAH (CONT'D)
Honestly babe, I'm tired of hearing
stories about dead ancestors and
their old ways. That was the past,
this is our time now.

DONDAI
Esam and Maleek too? You're tired
of our brother's story?

Ayeelah pulls away from Dondai.

AYEELAH
Of course not. I think of them
everyday. We're right here where it
happened. I just wish things were
different.

A shooting star cuts across the sky.

DONDAI
There you go wishing on stars
again.

AYEELAH
You are not funny...

The distant drumming has stopped

AYEELAH (CONT'D)
(worried)
How long have the drums stopped?!
I have to go.

DONDAI
(sarcastically)
But I didn't get to finish drawing
your picture.

Dondai picks up a broken piece of chalk from the grass and
holds it up to Ayeelah.

AYEELAH
(flirtatious)
That's because you're too easily
distracted.

AYEELAH (CONT'D)
We'll finish it next time like we
always do, I promise. Keep me in
your dreams. I love you.

Ayeelah grabs Dondai's face, kisses him deeply and hurries
down the hill. Dondai watches her as she runs quickly across
the plains far into the distance.

DONDAI
(yelling)
I, Dondai, prince of the Makeeb
village, loves Ayeelah, the future
queen of the Uree tribe! And I want
the whole world to know!!!

EXT. UREE TRIBE — EVENING

A large group of (100+) villagers are gathered around a
massive bonfire. The ceremonial drumming has stopped and
people are confused. Four women sit on a woven blanket
chatting amongst themselves.

LENORA
Why have the drums stopped?
Where are the drinks, the plum
beer? Pass me that blanket for my
mother — tonight has such a chill.

Lenora (age 72) places a blanket onto the shoulders of her
mother, Amani (age 118) who is staring ahead into the flames.

WOMAN 1 (age 30)
There's no plum beer this season.
I heard the crops were over
harvested, the lands have dried up.

LENORA
How can this be?

WOMAN 2 (age 40)
This is not a good omen.

WOMAN 1
Not for you anyway — you always
drank too much!

LENORA
Where's my granddaughter? Ayeelah
will not have plum beer for her new
lights festival? It's her coming of
age — she's a woman now!

LENORA (CONT'D)
All of the male heirs before her
had plum beer, so my granddaughter
should too — it's only right!
The drumming should not stop until
everyone has had their fill of plum
beer. Please check and see if
there's more? This is Uree
tradition!

WOMAN 2
I'll check, but it's hard to
celebrate knowing our peace treaty
with the Makeeb ends tonight. Plum
beer and war don't mix well.

Lenora adjusts the blankets on her elder-mother and touches
her cheek tenderly.

WOMAN 1
(speaking to Lenora)
It's ok, we'll make do without it
if we have to.
(MORE)

WOMAN 1 (CONT'D)
I'm sure the rains will return and we'll have plum beer again next season.

LENORA
Next season?! That's too far away! This will be the last new lights festival with my dear mother. She's so far along in years. She'll be looking down on us from the stars alongside the ancestors soon enough.

Lenora wipes a tear from her eye and pats the hand of her mother who is staring blankly at the fire.

WOMAN 1
I don't think elder-mother Amani is concerned with plum beer Lenora...

LENORA
Don't let her fool you. She may look like she's not paying attention – but she knows exactly what's going on.

EXT. AFRICAN PLAINS - NIGHT

A mouse cleans its whiskers in the moonlight. A giraffe yawns and laps its tongue. The silhouette of wild dogs move across the horizon in small packs. Lightning bugs glow and scatter into the air as Ayeelah dashes through the dry brush running towards her village.

A semi-transparent figure of Ayeelah's brother Maleek, (age 9) runs alongside her. His form gradually becomes solid as the surrounding plains transform from night to day, from brittle dryness into a lush and vibrant green environment.

(FLASHBACK) EXT. AFRICAN PLAINS - DAY

A young Ayeelah (age 9), sticks her tongue out at her brother as he tries to slow her down by extending his arm out in front of her.

MALEEK
(singing)
No, no, you're way too slow; stuck in mud, you cannot go; compete with me, why would you try; you saw me soar – now watch me fly.

Maleek increases his speed and runs ahead of Ayeelah.

(FLASHBACK) EXT. AFRICAN PLAINS - DAY

Ayeelah (age 9) squats watching a long trail of ants. Her younger brother is crawling on the ground toward her preparing to pounce from behind.

AYEELAH
I see you Maleek.

MALEEK
Hey!!! How'd you see me?

AYEELAH
'Cause you're a dumb boy – not a lion.

MALEEK
Roar!!!

(FLASHBACK) EXT. BASE OF MOUNTAIN - CLOUDY DAY

Ayeelah (12 years old) is running with her brother up the mountain and sees the silhouettes of two boys of a similar age standing at the top. One of the boys is holding a drum in his hand.

MALEEK
I think those are Makeeb boys Ayeelah. Let's go back.

AYEELAH
You think they are?? I've never seen a Makeeb boy our age before. You're not scared are you?

(END FLASHBACKS)

EXT. AFRICAN PLAINS OUTSIDE THE UREE VILLAGE - EVENING

Closeup of Ayeelah's face running at top speed. Beads of sweat trickle down her forehead. Distracted by the beauty of the shining stars above, she trips and falls clumsily to the ground.

Less than six feet away, the large yellow eyes of a lion are transfixed on Ayeelah. Sprawled out on the ground and frozen in fear, she sees the cosmos reflected in the lion's eyes.

The palms of her hands press firmly against the earth, as she lies motionless on her stomach holding her breath.

Closeup shot of the lion's focused eyes.

A flaming torch swings in circles high above the lion's head. Ayeelah's cousin, Onu (Age 24) bravely approaches to save her.

ONU
YAAAAAA!!!!

The startled lion jumps to its feet, revealing a freshly killed gazelle dangling in its jaws. The lion dashes away into the tall grass with its prey.

ONU (CONT'D)
She's over here! I found her!

Several warriors and villagers carrying torches hurry over.

ONU (CONT'D)
Ayeelah! By the grace of the ancestors you were not eaten alive!

AYEELAH
(speechless and startled)
...

ONU
You're going to be ok, cousin.
Let's get you back inside the village where you'll be safe.

The Uree villagers escort Ayeelah back to the village while the warriors reposition themselves on the watch at the perimeters.

EXT. UREE VILLAGE — NIGHT

The Uree tribe's shaman, Matikula, paces back and forth in front of a raging bonfire. His silhouette is long and menacing. Villagers keep a respectful distance.

Matikula blows out a large cloud of smoke through slits in a wooden mask that cover his entire face.

He walks toward Ayeelah and a group of women seated on a blanket.

His eyes are barely visible through the narrow opening in his mask. Matikula's breaths are deep and menacing.

Bright flames from the fire cast his shadow across the faces of the villagers gathered around. He holds his long smoking pipe in one hand and a walking stick in another.

MATIKULA
(sneezing)
I'm glad you weren't harmed princess. I can still smell that lion on you. The ancestors are keeping a watchful eye — but they say your path has many dangers ahead.

Matikula moves quickly away from Ayeelah and her grandmother while sneezing violently several more times. The wooden mask rattles delivering a slightly comical effect with each sneeze.

AYEELAH
(whispering to Lenora)
I don't like him.

LENORA
(whispering to Ayeelah)
Don't you worry about Matikula. He's a descendent of the Hazeem, spirit walkers who can talk with the ancestors. He's the last one, so we need him.

Ayeelah smiles politely and hugs her grandmother Lenora.

LENORA (CONT'D)
(whispering)
You're safe here with your people. Your grandmother knows how to deal with his kind.

Layers of beads around Matikula's neck swing back and forth, making a swishing sound with each of his steps. He walks the perimeter of the bonfire, blowing clouds of smoke towards the villagers gathered around.

MATIKULA
Is this how it would have ended?

Matikula paces around the flames, his long black shadow stretches across the ground towards the people.

MATIKULA (CONT'D)
We almost lost the princess on the final day of the peace treaty! Her death would have ended the Uree bloodline.

Matikula points his finger at the gathered crowd.

MATIKULA (CONT'D)
But your ancestors saved her from
the jaws of a beast! They say, the
Uree are forever!

VILLAGERS
(in unison)
The Uree are forever!

MATIKULA
The Uree are forever!!

VILLAGERS
(louder)
The Uree are forever!!!!!!

MATIKULA
...and you will destroy your
enemies.

Ayeelah squeezes her grandmother's hand tightly. She is
uncomfortable by the influence Matikula has on the people.

MATIKULA (CONT'D)
Beware! The Makeeb tribe is
deceitful and treacherous.
You must prepare for the future.

Matikula holds a cup high into the air.

MATIKULA (CONT'D)
This new lights festival will
transform the princess into a
woman! A queen who will choose
a mate and one day birth a new
generation of Uree warrior sons!

MATIKULA (CONT'D)
This elixir from the ancestors will
help guide her.

Closeup shot of the faces of several young men who's
expressions range from nervous, excited and fearful.

(FLASHBACK) EXT. TOP OF MOUNTAIN - DAY

Closeup shot of the eyes of a younger Dondai (Age 13).
He is focused and intent without blinking.

AYEELAH
I like the way you look at me.

DONDAI
And I like...

Dondai's hands fly quickly across the paper as he draws
Ayeelah. Closeup shot of the tip of the chalk creating lines
for her eyes and long lashes.

AYEELAH
What do you like??

DONDAI
I like how your skin glows. Your
eyes look like they belong in the
stars... and I like the way your
braids lay on your shoulder when
you pull them away from your face.

Ayeelah blushes and nods her head affirmatively.

AYEELAH
Those are nice answers.

Dondai looks up repeatedly, smiling widely with each new
glance. He hums a soft melody while drawing.

(Montage) Wild orchids glow in the bright sun. Butterflies
dance in the tall grass. Soft winds blow through the trees.
Clouds float leisurely in the blue sky. A lady bug ends her
long journey delicately on the curled leaf of a flower.

AYEELAH (CONT'D)
Can I see it now?

DONDAI
Nope.

AYEELAH
Come on. Don't be like that.

DONDAI
You always ask too early. You gotta
wait until I'm all the way finished
this time.

Dondai looks up from his drawing and is startled. Ayeelah is
directly in front of his face. The tips of their noses touch.

AYEELAH
But what if I don't want to wait
anymore?

Ayeelah gives Dondai a quick peck on the lips before
snatching the paper and chalks from the ground.

AYEELAH (CONT'D)

Now I'm going to draw you. Let's see how you like sitting perfectly still and not moving.

Dondai sits dumbfounded on the ground with a large smile on his face, like he's still processing what's happening. His hand touches his lip gently in the spot where Ayeelah kissed him.

DONDAI

You know how to draw??

Closeup of Ayeelah's eyes in deep concentration.

AYEELAH

Never tried. But I know what your face looks like. I see it in my mind all the time.

(End Flashback.)

EXT. UREE VILLAGE — NIGHT

Closeup of Ayeelah's eyes focusing deeply.

Matikula extends a cup to Ayeelah and she smacks it away, splashing liquid onto both her grandmother and elder-mother. The villagers gasp in disbelief. Outcries of disrespect are shouted from the crowd.

AYEELAH

I'm not drinking that! Choose a husband?! Birth more warriors?! Keep fighting the Makeeb village?!

Ayeelah shakes her head in disbelief and looks at the villagers with a heated glare.

AYEELAH (CONT'D)

And this is what my people want?! I think we'll be better off if I only have daughters.

Ayeelah steps into the center of the circle towards Matikula with clenched fists. Matikula takes a half step back.

MATIKULA

We mustn't question the will of the ancestors. Each of us has a role to play.

AYEELAH

My children are not going to kill Makeeb children! My children are not going to walk the ancestor's path of death!

AYEELAH (CONT'D)

That's what killed my brother and this war is what's killing all of us!

Ayeelah looks around at the angry faces of the villagers.

AYEELAH (CONT'D)

The Uree aren't the only people on these lands! My children will learn to love beyond the walls of their own close-minded village!

Ayeelah feels a cold stare from her grandmother and loses her train of thought.

AYEELAH (CONT'D)

Because I found love, and...

The villagers shout objections. Heads shake in disbelief. Ayeelah's father, King Marteen, raises his hands to the sky in a pleading gesture.

KING MARTEEN

Great ancestors! We are grateful for Ayeelah's heart of fire.

KING MARTEEN (CONT'D)

As our future queen, we know that you'll continue to impart wisdom and temper her flames with discretion, and patience.

King Marteen smiles pleadingly at the crowd.

KING MARTEEN (CONT'D)

Uree people... the princess will not choose a mate tonight. This is her right. With our prayers and support, she will have more clarity with this important matter soon enough — I promise you.

Closeup shot of the young suitors faces which range from relief, disbelief and anger.

KING MARTEEN (CONT'D)
(clearing his throat)
Great ancestors, we thank you, and
come before you in celebration of
the new lights festival. On this
night we honor each of you in
peace.

MATIKULA
Peace?! The treaty ends tonight!
The Makeeb could attack at any
moment – you must be ready! The
ancestors are demanding protection
of their bloodline! They have told
me this!

AYEELAH
You can tell the ancestors that I
would be safer if they never
started this war!

MATIKULA
You want the war to end? But who
here will do the work to end it?
You're just *one cut away* from ever-
lasting peace. The Makeeb have but
a single male heir. Clip his vine
and this war ends tonight!

Closeup shot of Ayeelah's hands covering her mouth in
disbelief.

Matikula takes a deep inhale from his pipe and blows a
seemingly never ending cloud of smoke at the crowd.

{SONG / MATIKULA: "One Cut Away"}

Thick smoke floats among the angry villagers. The Shaman's
song overtakes their minds, putting them in a war-like
trance. The flames from the bonfire burn taller and brighter,
whipping into the night sky. Unknowingly, the men have
gathered into formation and now hold weapons in their hands.

The King reaches out for his spear. Ayeelah snatches the
spear from her father's hand and throws it to the ground.

AYEELAH
Father! You just said there would
be peace during the new lights
festival. What's wrong with you?!

The king and villagers snap out of their trance. King Marteen
coughs and waves away the smoke from around him.

Ayeelah's warrior cousin, Onu pushes his way into the center
of the crowd.

ONU
What is going on here?!

AYEELAH
The Shaman is calling for war!
He wants father to attack the
Makeeb village tonight.

Onu walks bravely up to the Shaman and stares directly into
his masked face.

ONU
Know your place Matikula. You are
not Uree. You do not command our
warriors, or our king! Your job is
to speak with the dead... and when
we need you to do that – we'll
summon you!

Onu snatches the smoking pipe from Matikula's hand and breaks
it before throwing it down to the ground.

ONU (CONT'D)
The new lights festival is a
celebration for the living...
Leave now!

King Marteen fans away the remaining smoke in the air and
pats Onu on the back. Matikula withdraws into the crowd.

KING MARTEEN
Yes, yes, of course. Enough talk of
war tonight. The warriors are
guarding the village. Calm
yourselves... Let us celebrate the
new lights festival! Beat the
drums!

King Marteen gestures towards Ayeelah.

KING MARTEEN (CONT'D)
Ayeelah, will you please lead the
women in dance? This is supposed to
be a celebration.

Closeup of hands putting down spears and picking up drums.
Ayeelah grabs the hands of a few young women to join her in
dance.

WOMAN 1
(whispering to Woman 2)
You see? No plum beer – and this is
what happens.

END OF EXCERPT.

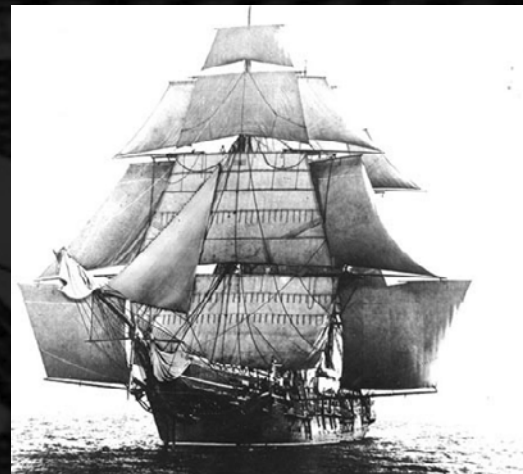
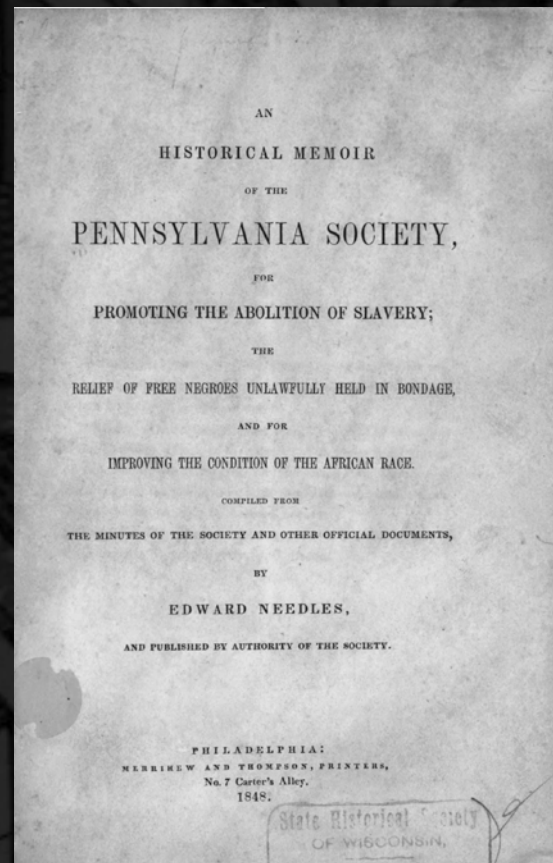
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In August of 1800, the naval ship USS Ganges captured two illegal U.S. slave ships, *Phebe* and *Prudent*, off the coast of Cuba. After a spectacular rescue, both ships were brought to the port of Philadelphia because of the city's well-known anti-slavery sentiments.

By an absolute miracle, families that had once been torn apart and stolen from Africa, were reunited in America as free citizens. The survivors took the surname of Ganges and were taken in by abolitionist families across the state of Pennsylvania.

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*"Love is more than a word.
It is an action, a cosmic
force that balances
the world."*

Rah Crawford