

1. INT. MOVING VEHICLE - LATE EVENING

AKIN is riding in the back seat of a moving car that is driven by his SOCIAL WORKER. They sit in silence.

The car's wheels spin along the road; we begin to hear the rhythmic strokes of a paintbrush against canvas as it syncs with the sound of the tyre's friction against asphalt.

END SCENE

2. LOCATION UNKNOWN - TIME OF DAY UNKNOWN

We see a close up of a paintbrush against a canvas, moving in circles. We don't see a hand holding the brush, but the strokes are frantic - tense.

END SCENE

3. INT. SOCIAL WORKER'S OFFICE - LATE EVENING

Akin sits at a desk, slowly writing his first name in cursive on a form in front of him regarding his identity. In the background, we hear Akin's social worker talking about him to another adult.

SOCIAL WORKER

...and if deemed appropriate, we can make an application for international protection on his behalf...

EXTRA #1

He'll need to be placed with a foster family right away.

SOCIAL WORKER

I've been in touch with one placement. We can take him there tonight.

On the form, we see that there is a question relating to Akin's biological parents. It asks: Are you accompanied by a biological parent or relative? Akin answers: No.

After some deliberation over the form, Akin skips to the fourth question. It asks him about his nationality/ethnicity, and this is the one thing he is sure about in the midst of all the confusion he faces. He writes: Nigerian.

END SCENE

4. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Akin sits at his desk. His copybook sits in front of him on the table; his name is written on the front of it.

From beside him, one of his classmates nudges him in the arm to get his attention.

CLASSMATE #1

Hey. What's your name?

Akin, feeling awkward, points to where his name is written on the book.

CLASSMATE #1

Uh, I don't know how to pronounce that.

AKIN

Um, OK.

Akin doesn't want to talk, choosing instead to retreat into himself. His classmate is weirded out by this, and turns to the other classmates with a weirded out expression.

Akin puts his head on his hand, absentmindedly scratching a random shape into the wood of his desk. His knee bounces quickly, anxiously, under the table.

END SCENE

5. INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Akin sits in the PRINCIPAL'S office; his knee continues to bounce. The principal is talking to him, but things are muted at first.

PRINCIPAL

...These panic attacks have been happening quite a lot for you recently, Akin. There's a school counsellor you can talk to about this.

Akin simply looks down at his hands.

PRINCIPAL

Listen, Akin. I know that what you are going through is tough, and I know you're missing your parents. But you can't spend your young life isolating yourself from the people around you.

(MORE)

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PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

This is your home, for now, and as long as you don't make the effort to make friends, to grow up, your anxiety is only going to get worse.

Akin tunes the principal out, choosing instead to gaze at a random painting on the wall behind him. His face is a mask of stone.

The principal notices what he is looking at.

PRINCIPAL

I see you'd rather stare at Kavanagh than listen to me.

AKIN

(mumbling, looking down)
Sorry.

PRINCIPAL

You're looking at Joseph Malachy Kavanagh. He was a famous Irish painter, but his work is rare enough. A lot of it was destroyed during the 1916 Rising.

There is a heavy silence between the two characters as Akin contemplates the painting. The principal also looks at it in thought.

PRINCIPAL

Creativity bears the brunt of war, but it can also be an escape from it.

Akin's anxiety returns as he loses himself in thoughts of the past; his knee begins to bounce quickly, and we become focused on that. In the background, a clock ticks slowly.

END SCENE

6. EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

Akin is walking home from school. He is unsure of his environment, still getting used to the new sounds and visuals Ireland brings. He makes little mistakes that we see have a big impact on him.

He seems enthralled - and slightly terrified - of the new world around him. He stares at fancy cars, shies away from animals, etc. He comes to a crossroads and is fascinated by

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how a stranger presses the pedestrian button at a set of crossing lights - he isn't used to having human traffic lights.

He walks some more, eventually coming to another crossroads. This time he presses the pedestrian button himself, and watches in awe as it controls the traffic lights directing traffic. The green man lights up, and Akin begins to cross the road; for the first time since arriving in Ireland, he feels in control. For that short period of crossing this road, Akin walks with a new rhythm - a confident one.

Suddenly the green man starts to blink, and Akin doesn't know what to do. Every time the green man disappears he does a double take. Can he go, or not? Eventually he just boots it to the other side.

When he reaches the other side of the road, he notices some people on that side of the road staring at him; maybe they are judging him for the way he crossed the road?

END SCENE

7. INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Akin's knee still bounces quickly under the kitchen table where he is sat doing his homework. His FOSTER PARENT comes up behind him with a plate of dinner, and swipes his homework copy from in front of him, ruffling his hair.

FOSTER PARENT

That's enough work for this evening.
Get some food into you, wee man.

Akin seems comfortable, allowing a soft smile to overtake his features.

AKIN

Thanks.

FOSTER PARENT

How was school today?

AKIN

OK.

There is a short, comfortable silence. Akin seems deep in thought, as though he wants to say something but is holding himself back. He plays with his food.

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FOSTER PARENT

Your principal rang me today. He said that you had another -

AKIN

Are there any paints in this house?

FOSTER PARENT

(taken aback)

Uhh...paints? Yeah, there should be some, but they'll be in the attic. I haven't used them in ages.

AKIN

Can I go get them?

FOSTER PARENT

Uh, yeah. Yeah, you can.

Akin is already up from the table before his foster parent has time to finish her sentence. He bolts from the kitchen.

END SCENE

8. INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Akin runs up the stairs quickly, his sock-clad feet thumping against each step. He reaches the upstairs hallway and begins climbing into the attic.

END SCENE

9. INT. ATTIC - EVENING

Akin enters the attic and switches on the light. Immediately he is taken aback by how crowded the attic is with documents, paper, books, boxes, and other administrative things. At first it looks like he doesn't even know where to start.

Akin begins rooting through the documents, physically wading through the piles of dead trees, diving down here and there and coming up with items that might be paints, but aren't. Eventually he disappears again, and then his fist shoots into the air, a small box of paints clutched tightly between his fingers. The rest of his body pops up, and he looks delighted with himself.

END SCENE

10. INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Akin bursts into his bedroom and throws the box of paints on the bed. He immediately starts rooting around his room for something to draw on, but nothing seems good enough. As he pulls a small, white cabinet out from the wall to check behind it for paper, Akin notices something.

His jaw slackens; the smooth back of this cabinet will make the perfect canvas.

Akin pulls the cabinet out from the wall completely and grabs the paints from the bed before settling down onto the floor, cross-legged, in front of his makeshift canvas.

He begins to paint.

END SCENE

11. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A lesson is taking place in the classroom. We hear the TEACHER instructing the students on how to write a letter.

TEACHER

Now. The first step to writing a letter is what?

CLASSMATE #1

We write our address.

TEACHER

That's right. Everyone write your address now in the top left corner of the page.

Akin gets to work, writing his address in the top left corner of the page. The teacher walks around the classroom, looking over students' shoulders to make sure they are doing the exercise correctly. When she gets to Akin, she stops and points over his shoulder at the address he has written.

TEACHER

I think you wrote the wrong address, buddy.

AKIN

Oh...

Akin looks at what he has written and realizes that he wrote down his old address in Nigeria.

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He becomes still, seemingly zoned out, but as time begins to speed up around him it becomes clear that seeing his old address has triggered Akin, and he is beginning to have a panic attack.

END SCENE

12. INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM - DAY

Akin enters the school bathroom, looking around him to make sure he is alone. He walks up to the sinks and looks at himself in the mirror. Then he reveals something from his pocket - a whiteboard marker he seems to have swiped from the classroom.

Tentatively, Akin reaches forward and begins to trace his face on the mirror. Just as he is finishing, a classmate comes in and sees what he is doing.

CLASSMATE #1

Hey, what are you doing? Miss!

The teacher runs into the bathroom and sees what Akin is doing. In a panic, he tries to smudge away the markings on the mirror.

TEACHER

Akin! What are you doing? Principal's office, now! I've had enough of your messing around.

Akin is scared of the consequences of what he has done. He rushes past the teacher and his classmate and out the door.

END SCENE

13. INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Akin can't sleep. He sits on the edge of his bed in his PJ's with his knees curled up against his chest, staring at the moon out of the window. He glances over at the cabinet he has been painting on.

After some deliberation, Akin gets up and turns on a lamp before settling down in front of the cabinet's back to continue his art.

END SCENE

14. INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

Akin paints the back of the cabinet, deep in concentration. Through the window the sun is coming up. He smiles to himself.

AKIN
Messing around, messing around...

END SCENE

15. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Akin is passed out on his desk.

TEACHER
(muted, distant)
Akin...
(louder)
Akin!

Akin awakes with a start, shooting into an upright position with a snort. He looks around him, embarrassed as he realizes he has fallen asleep in class.

TEACHER
Akin. Welcome back. I hope you're
feeling well rested after that nap.

The class chuckle at the teacher's joke. Akin forces a small smile, but we can tell he feels embarrassed as he looks down at his hands and bounces his knee.

TEACHER
Would you mind taking the next
question for us?

END SCENE

16. INT. BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Akin is sitting on the floor in front of the cabinet, staring at what he has created. There is a series of soft knocks on the bedroom door.

FOSTER PARENT
Akin? Can I come in?

AKIN
Sure.

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The foster parent enters the room with a plate of food and looks around. It's a mess. Akin clearly hasn't been looking after himself lately.

FOSTER PARENT

Hey, wee man. I brought you some dinner. Jollof rice. I thought it might make you feel better.

AKIN

How do you know how to make jollof rice?

FOSTER PARENT

(bashful)
Googled it. You wanna try?

AKIN

Sure.

Akin stands up and takes the jollof rice from his foster parent, who looks around the room at the mess.

FOSTER PARENT

What have you been up to in here? The place is a mess!

Akin, who is shovelling forkfuls of rice into his mouth, smiles.

AKIN

Sorry.

His foster parent folds her arms, tutting at the untidy room. Her eyes fall on the unit that has been pulled out from the wall, and her brow raises in curiosity.

FOSTER PARENT

Been doing some redecoration, have we?

AKIN

Uh, no...I -

FOSTER PARENT

What did you do, mister...

Akin's foster parent moves behind the unit to see what he has done, and for the first time she sees what Akin has created. She is truly taken aback.

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FOSTER PARENT
Akin...this is amazing.

AKIN
Oh...thanks. Wait, really? You're not mad?

FOSTER PARENT
I was wondering why I could hear something at two in the morning. You know...you could have asked me for some paper...

Akin scratches the back of his neck awkwardly.

AKIN
Sorry...maybe I can wash it off?

FOSTER PARENT
No! That's not what I meant...I mean, no. It's perfect. I'm proud of you, bud.

AKIN
Thank you.

There is a comfortable, prolonged pause between Akin and his foster parent as she gazes at his work. We notice he is having an inner realisation, an emergence of courage as a thought pops into his mind.

AKIN
Actually, there's someone I want to show this to...but I don't know how to get it to them.

FOSTER PARENT
(smiling knowingly)
I think I have an idea.

END SCENE

17. EXT. BEDROOM - DAY

The hallway stands quiet for a moment. Then, from inside the bedroom, we hear the sound of a wood saw powering up.

END SCENE

18. INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Akin marches through the hallway with a purpose. He turns heads, not because of how he walks with a new confidence, but because of the giant square of wood he is carrying in his hands. It is covered with a sheet.

Akin walks up to the door of the principal's office, standing the wood against the wall as he straightens up his shirt and takes a deep breath.

END SCENE

19. INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

The principal looks up from his work at a soft knock on the door.

PRINCIPAL

Come in.

Akin opens the door, struggling through the frame with the large piece of wood. He shuts the door and leans the covered wood against the principal's desk, noticing the confusion on his face.

AKIN

One sec.

Akin pulls a chair into the center of the office, before picking up the wood and leaning it against the back of the chair. He looks at the principal for a moment, and then he reaches down and flips back the sheet that has been covering his painting. For the first time, we see what it is.

The painting is of Akin's parents, done in a style of art form commonly used in Nigeria. Both Akin and his principal stare at the painting in awe, Akin as though seeing it for the first time.

The principal stands, taking his glasses off and walking around his desk to lean against it with his arms folded.

PRINCIPAL

Akin...I'm...are these your parents?

AKIN

yeah.

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Akin moves to stand beside his work.

AKIN

Look. I don't know if I'll ever see them again.

PRINCIPAL

Akin...

AKIN

And I might not have them with me on paper. But I have them on this...this piece of wood. And that's enough, for now.

Akin's principal's expression is unreadable for a time, but then a knowing smile appears on his face. He holds up a finger - one sec - and then moves around his desk again to open one of the drawers. After some rooting, he pulls out a form and hands it to Akin.

PRINCIPAL

I knew you were painting, but I wasn't sure what.

Akin takes the sheet of paper, looking down at it in confusion, and then apprehension.

END SCENE

20. INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Akin sits at the dinner table. We see his knee bouncing quickly again under the table as he contemplates the application form his principal has given him. His foster parent places a plate of jollof rice in front of him.

FOSTER PARENT

I got it right the first time. Figured we could make it a thing.

AKIN

Thanks.

FOSTER PARENT

What you got there? Hm, an art competition! You thinking of entering your piece?

AKIN

Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Akin's foster parent senses his hesitation.

FOSTER PARENT

Is something holding you back?

AKIN

No...I just...no, not at all.

Akin picks up his pen and begins to fill out the form. Name, age, school, address. He gets it all right, filling in the right address this time. We see that he has skipped nationality, and when he goes back to fill that part out, he pauses.

He writes Nigerian, and then we see him smile to himself. He pauses, and then adds a '-' after Nigerian.

END SCENE

21. LOCATION UNKNOWN - TIME OF DAY UNKNOWN

A pencil signs the bottom right corner of a painting - Akin's painting. In cursive, it says: '-' Akin. He steps back, and we see that his painting has been mounted on the principal's wall, beside Kavanagh's.

FIN