

The Weight of Water

\$TWOWX



In 1970s New Orleans, longshoreman Elijah Moreau teaches himself to read in secret until his grandson Marcus is framed for arson, forcing him to break thirty years of silence against the port bosses and police.

ONE SENTENCE

Logline

In 1970s New Orleans, longshoreman Elijah Moreau teaches himself to read in secret until his grandson Marcus is framed for arson, forcing him to break thirty years of silence against the port bosses and police.

Treatment

Act 1: Elijah Moreau, 58, has loaded cargo at the Port of New Orleans for three decades without complaint. Nights in his Treme shotgun house he traces primer pages with a pencil while Ruth sleeps. His daughter Lena brings fourteen-year-old Marcus over on weekends; the boy runs the docks with other kids. When a warehouse fire kills a foreman, police pick Marcus as scapegoat. Elijah watches the arrest from the loading platform and says nothing.

Act 2: Elijah visits the parish jail with Lena. Marcus swears he was playing by the levee. Elijah begins carrying a library book in his lunch pail. At the docks Samuel warns him to keep his head down. Elijah sneaks into the main library after shifts, spelling out newspaper headlines about the case. Midpoint: he testifies at a preliminary hearing that Marcus was with him, a lie that unravels under cross-examination. Bosses cut his shifts; Ruth stops speaking to him. Harlan Shaw, the lead detective, visits the house and reminds Elijah of past union troubles.

Act 3: Alone on the night dock, Elijah reads the full police report aloud to himself. He finds the witness who saw white teenagers near the warehouse. At trial he stands and names the real culprits, his voice cracking on each syllable. Marcus is released. Elijah returns to the water's edge at dawn, the primer book open on his lap, watching a new ship come in.

Beat Sheet

- p. 1 Opening Image**
Elijah's callused hands turn the page of a child's primer under a single bare bulb, lips moving without sound.
- p. 5 Theme Stated**
Ruth tells Elijah at the kitchen table that silence has kept the roof over their heads for thirty years.
- p. 10 Setup**
Elijah loads crates at the port, eats lunch alone, returns to Treme, hides the primer when Ruth enters.
- p. 12 Catalyst**
Detective Harlan Shaw arrests Marcus at the Moreau house for the warehouse arson.
- p. 15 Debate**
Elijah sits on the porch steps all night, weighing whether to speak or keep working the docks.
- p. 25 Break Into Two**
Elijah enters the public library for the first time and asks for a reading card in his own name.
- p. 30 B Story**
Librarian Miss Pearl quietly corrects his pronunciation during after-hours sessions.
- p. 30 Fun and Games**
Elijah practices aloud on the loading dock at lunch while hiding the book from coworkers.
- p. 55 Midpoint**
Elijah lies under oath that Marcus was with him the night of the fire and is immediately impeached.
- p. 60 Bad Guys Close In**
Harlan Shaw threatens to reopen old union cases; Ruth packs a bag and stays with Lena.
- p. 75 All Is Lost**
Marcus attempts suicide in his cell; Elijah learns of it from a dock rumor.
- p. 80 Dark Night of Soul**
Elijah burns the primer in the backyard incinerator then stares at the ashes until dawn.
- p. 85 Break Into Three**
Elijah retrieves the unburned page that lists the real witness names and walks to the courthouse.
- p. 95 Finale**
Elijah names the white teenagers in open court; Marcus walks free while Harlan watches from the gallery.
- p.110 Final Image**
Elijah stands at the water's edge at sunrise holding the open primer, no longer hiding it.

Opening Scene

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - NIGHT

A single bulb hangs over a Formica table. ELIJAH MOREAU, late 50s, sits in a wife-beater and work pants, his forearms mapped with old scars. He holds a dog-eared primer. His lips shape each letter without sound.

The front screen door creaks. RUTH MOREAU, early 50s, steps inside carrying a paper sack of okra. She stops when she sees the book.

RUTH

You still playing schoolboy at this hour?

ELIJAH

(closing the primer)

Just passing time.

RUTH

Time don't need passing. It needs sleeping. Marcus coming tomorrow. You gone be too tired to watch him.

Elijah slides the primer under a stack of dock manifests. Ruth sets the okra down, washes her hands, and moves to the back room without another word. The bulb swings slightly. Elijah listens to the ceiling fan until the house is quiet again, then pulls the primer back out.

Characters

Elijah Moreau **PROTAGONIST**

late 50s

LOOK Stocky frame, skin the color of wet river clay, forearms corded from decades of lifting. Wears faded denim work shirts buttoned to the throat and a flat cap pulled low.

VOICE Low, deliberate baritone with a soft New Orleans drawl. Speaks in short sentences, pauses between words as if measuring each one. Rarely raises volume.

ARC Starts as a man who has survived by never volunteering information. Wants only to keep his job and protect Marcus quietly. Learns that withholding words can condemn the people he loves. Ends willing to speak his son's name in court and accept whatever follows.

Marcus Moreau **DEUTERAGONIST**

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LOOK Lean, quick-eyed, tall for his age. Wears hand-me-down Saints jerseys and canvas sneakers already splitting at the seams.

VOICE Fast, slightly nasal, full of unfinished sentences. Uses dock slang he doesn't fully understand.

ARC Begins cocky and silent around adults. Fears his grandfather will never defend him. Discovers Elijah's hidden lessons and realizes silence is a choice, not a condition. Leaves the courthouse lighter, already starting to talk more.

Ruth Moreau **SUPPORTING**

early 50s

LOOK Small and straight-backed, hair always pulled into a tight bun. Dresses in crisp cotton house-dresses and sensible shoes.

VOICE Clear alto, precise consonants. Every sentence ends like a period, never a question.

ARC Initially enforces Elijah's silence to protect the household. Grows angry when his lie endangers Marcus. Reconciles only after hearing him speak in court.

Harlan Shaw **ANTAGONIST**

early 40s

LOOK Tall, pale, sweat-stained khaki suit. Keeps his hair military short and his badge polished to a mirror finish.

VOICE Smooth, educated Southern accent used like a weapon. Smiles while delivering threats.

ARC Represents institutional power that punishes Black speech. Loses the case but promises to watch Elijah forever. Remains unchanged.

Miss Pearl **SUPPORTING**

late 60s

LOOK Silver hair pinned back, reading glasses on a chain. Wears a cardigan over a library smock even in humidity.

VOICE Gentle, patient alto. Corrects pronunciation softly, never condescending.

ARC Gives Elijah the first space where his voice is welcomed. Represents the world outside the docks.

Locations

Port of New Orleans Docks EXT.

Rust-streaked cranes, stacks of wooden crates, oil-slick water. Forklifts rumble between ships. The river smells of diesel and rotting fish.

Harsh sodium lights cut through humid night air, turning everything the color of old brass.

Elijah Moreau's Shotgun House INT.

Narrow rooms lined with faded floral wallpaper. A single window unit rattles. The kitchen table holds dock manifests and one primer.

Dim yellow light from a single bulb, shadows pooling in every doorway.

Main Branch Public Library INT.

High ceilings, long oak tables, rows of card catalogs. The children's section is cordoned by a low wooden gate.

Cool fluorescent hush broken only by turning pages and distant typewriters.

Orleans Parish Courthouse INT.

Marble floors, dark wood benches, ceiling fans turning slowly. The witness stand faces a raised bench and American flag.

Stifling air, light filtered through tall dirty windows, tension in every creaking chair.

Style

PALETTE

mud-brown dock water, nicotine-yellow bulb light, faded denim blue, rust-orange metal, bone-white pages under dim fluorescents

REFERENCES

Lighting like *Killer of Sheep* (Burnett) - practical sources only, faces half in shadow. Pacing like *The Piano* (Campion) - long silences between lines. Framing like *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen) - tight on hands and water.

TONE

Quiet, humid, and patient. The film moves like a man who has learned never to hurry. Tension lives in withheld words and the sound of water against pilings.

SOUND DESIGN

Score limited to sparse harmonica and distant foghorns. Ambient texture dominated by crane hydraulics, river slaps, and the creak of old wood. Silence is used as punctuation; entire scenes play without music until Elijah first reads aloud.

Director's Vision

I grew up hearing my grandfather's stories about the riverfront in the seventies. He never learned to read until he was fifty-three. The silence he carried was not emptiness; it was a calculated weight. This film is about what happens when that weight shifts onto the next generation. I want the audience to feel the humidity on their skin and the cost of every unspoken sentence. When Elijah finally speaks in the courtroom, I want viewers to understand that the victory is not loud justice but the simple act of a man reading his own name aloud for the first time. They should leave the theater heavier, and clearer.

Dialogue Samples

- > Elijah Moreau: These crates don't care what I say. They just need lifting.
- > Ruth Moreau: You keep that book out of this house when Marcus is here.
- > Marcus Moreau: Granddad, you seen the fire? I was down by the levee, swear.
- > Harlan Shaw: Your grandson has a record of being in places he shouldn't. Just like his granddaddy used to.
- > Miss Pearl: Sound it out. The river doesn't hurry; neither should you.
- > Elijah Moreau: I was wrong. The boy was not with me. I taught myself to read so I could say that out loud.

Screenplay

Title: The Weight of Water
Credit: Written by
Author: Anonymous
Draft date: 12 April 2026

FADE IN.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - NIGHT

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INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Ruth and Elijah sit at the table over coffee. Ruth folds laundry.

RUTH

Silence kept this roof on for thirty years. Don't go shaking the walls now.

Elijah nods once. He stares at his hands.

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS DOCKS - DAY

Elijah loads crates onto a pallet. Forklifts rumble past. He eats lunch alone on a piling, watching the brown river. Other longshoremen laugh in the distance. He keeps his head down.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Elijah hides the primer under dock manifests when Ruth enters from the back room. He stands, stretches, and heads to bed without a word.

EXT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - NIGHT

A squad car pulls up. DETECTIVE HARLAN SHAW, early 40s, steps out with two officers. He knocks. Ruth opens the door. Marcus stands behind her, fourteen, eyes wide.

HARLAN SHAW

Marcus Moreau. You're under arrest for arson at the port warehouse.

Marcus looks at Elijah on the porch steps.

MARCUS

Grandpa-

Elijah says nothing. Harlan cuffs the boy.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Elijah sits alone on the steps. The river fog rolls in. He stays there until dawn.

INT. MAIN BRANCH PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

Elijah, cap pulled low, approaches the desk. MISS PEARL, late 60s, looks up.

ELIJAH

I need a reading card. In my name.

Miss Pearl studies him, then slides the form across.

MISS PEARL

Sign here.

Elijah prints slowly, letter by letter.

INT. MAIN BRANCH PUBLIC LIBRARY - CHILDREN'S SECTION - NIGHT

Miss Pearl sits with Elijah at a low table after hours. She corrects him gently.

MISS PEARL

"Warehouse." The 'h' is quiet.

Elijah repeats the word.

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS DOCKS - DAY

Elijah practices aloud on the loading dock at lunch, book hidden in his lunch pail. A coworker walks past; Elijah falls silent.

INT. ORLEANS PARISH COURTHOUSE - PRELIMINARY HEARING - DAY

Elijah sits on the stand.

ELIJAH

Marcus was with me that night.

The prosecutor rises.

PROSECUTOR
Where exactly?

ELIJAH
By the levee.

The prosecutor produces a time-stamped dock log. Elijah's shift is listed elsewhere. Harlan Shaw smiles from the gallery. The lie collapses.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ruth packs a bag.

RUTH
You lied and made it worse.

She leaves for Lena's house.

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS DOCKS - NIGHT

Harlan Shaw corners Elijah near the water.

HARLAN SHAW
Old union files don't stay closed forever. Keep quiet or I reopen every one.

INT. ORLEANS PARISH JAIL - DAY

Lena visits Marcus. Elijah waits outside. A guard delivers news: Marcus tried to hang himself with a bedsheet.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Elijah burns the primer in the incinerator. He watches the pages curl until dawn.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAWN

One unburned page remains. It lists witness names. Elijah folds it, stands, and walks toward the street.

INT. ORLEANS PARISH COURTHOUSE - COURTROOM - DAY

Trial. Elijah rises from the gallery.

ELIJAH
I saw the white boys. Three of them. Names on this page.

He reads the names aloud, voice cracking. Harlan Shaw watches from the back, jaw tight. The judge calls a recess. Marcus is released into Lena's arms. Ruth steps forward and takes Elijah's hand.

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS DOCKS - WATER'S EDGE - DAWN

Elijah stands at the river holding the open primer. No longer hidden. A new ship comes in. He watches the water.

FADE OUT.

Shot List

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - NIGHT

- | | | | |
|----|--------|-----------|--|
| #1 | WIDE | STATIC | Single bulb hangs over Formica table in dim shotgun house, Elijah seated with primer.
<i>Establishes quiet isolation and practical light source casting half-shadows on the room.</i> |
| #2 | CLOSE | STATIC | Elijah's scarred forearms and silent lips shaping letters on the dog-eared primer.
<i>Tight focus on hands and hidden effort reveals his private struggle and dignity.</i> |
| #3 | MEDIUM | STATIC | Ruth entering with paper sack, stopping at the sight of the book.
<i>Introduces tension through withheld words and the weight of her gaze.</i> |
| #4 | CLOSE | TILT-DOWN | Elijah sliding the primer under dock manifests after Ruth leaves.
<i>Shows concealment and the return to solitary practice amid silence.</i> |

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

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|----|--------|--------|--|
| #1 | MEDIUM | STATIC | Ruth and Elijah at table with coffee and folded laundry in nicotine-yellow light.
<i>Sets domestic routine and the quiet pressure of her warning.</i> |
| #2 | CLOSE | STATIC | Elijah staring at his scarred hands resting on the table.
<i>Emphasizes internal conflict and the burden of silence through framing on hands.</i> |

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS DOCKS - DAY

- | | | | |
|----|-------|--------|--|
| #1 | WIDE | STATIC | Muddy brown river and rust-orange metal pilings with Elijah eating alone.
<i>Establishes humid dock environment and his isolation among distant laughter.</i> |
| #2 | CLOSE | STATIC | Elijah's hands on the piling, watching water slap against wood.
<i>Tight water and hand framing builds patient tension like the style references.</i> |
| #1 | CLOSE | STATIC | Elijah practicing aloud from book hidden in lunch pail.
<i>Reveals secret determination amid risk of discovery.</i> |

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

- | | | | |
|----|--------|--------|---|
| #1 | MEDIUM | STATIC | Elijah hiding primer under manifests as Ruth enters from back room.
<i>Reinforces pattern of concealment and emotional distance.</i> |
|----|--------|--------|---|

EXT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - NIGHT

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|----|------|--------|---|
| #1 | WIDE | STATIC | Squad car arriving, Harlan and officers approaching the porch.
<i>Introduces external threat with slow, patient framing.</i> |
|----|------|--------|---|

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

- | | | | |
|----|-------|--------|---|
| #1 | CLOSE | STATIC | Elijah alone on steps as river fog rolls in until dawn.
<i>Captures quiet endurance and the weight of unspoken consequences.</i> |
|----|-------|--------|---|

INT. MAIN BRANCH PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

- | | | | |
|----|--------|--------|---|
| #1 | MEDIUM | STATIC | Elijah at desk asking Miss Pearl for a reading card.
<i>Marks the first public step toward literacy with subdued hope.</i> |
|----|--------|--------|---|

INT. MAIN BRANCH PUBLIC LIBRARY - CHILDREN'S SECTION - NIGHT

- | | | | |
|----|-------|--------|---|
| #1 | CLOSE | STATIC | Miss Pearl correcting Elijah's pronunciation of 'warehouse' at low table.
<i>Shows gentle mentorship and incremental progress in shadow.</i> |
|----|-------|--------|---|

INT. ORLEANS PARISH COURTHOUSE - PRELIMINARY HEARING - DAY

- | | | | |
|----|--------|--------|--|
| #1 | MEDIUM | STATIC | Elijah on stand testifying, prosecutor rising with dock log.
<i>Builds courtroom tension through the collapse of his lie.</i> |
|----|--------|--------|--|

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

#1 **CLOSE** **STATIC** Ruth packing bag while telling Elijah he made it worse.
Conveys fracture in the marriage through tight domestic framing.

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS DOCKS - NIGHT

#1 **MEDIUM** **STATIC** Harlan cornering Elijah near the water's edge.
Heightens threat with practical dock lighting and looming confrontation.

INT. ORLEANS PARISH JAIL - DAY

#1 **CLOSE** **STATIC** Guard delivering news of Marcus's suicide attempt to waiting Elijah.
Delivers devastating blow through shadowed reaction on Elijah's face.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

#1 **CLOSE** **STATIC** Elijah watching primer pages curl and burn in incinerator.
Symbolizes despair and destruction of his hard-won progress.

INT. ELIJAH MOREAU'S SHOTGUN HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAWN

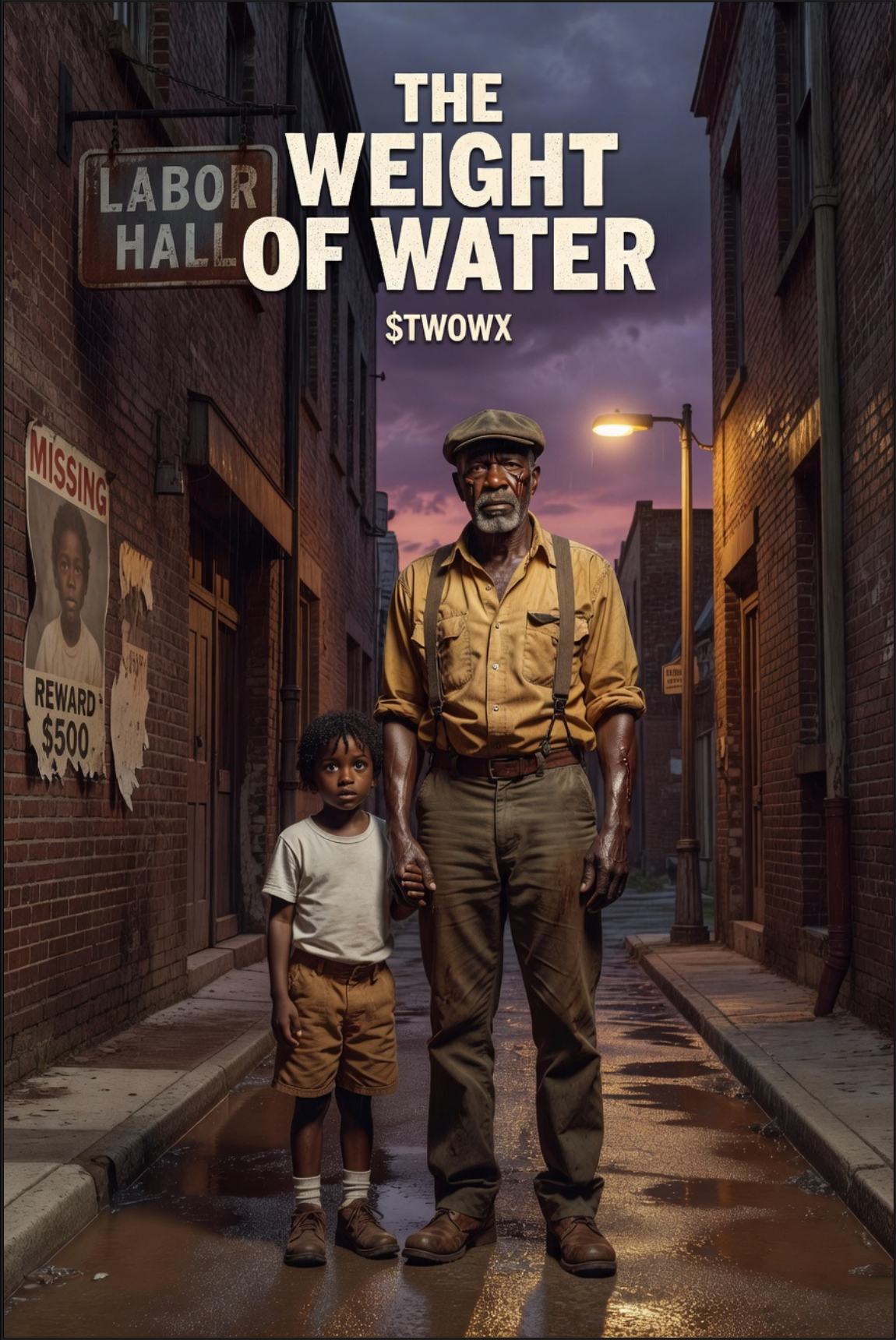
#1 **CLOSE** **STATIC** Single unburned page listing witness names in Elijah's hands.
Reignites resolve with bone-white page under first light.

INT. ORLEANS PARISH COURTHOUSE - COURTROOM - DAY

#1 **MEDIUM** **STATIC** Elijah rising from gallery to read names aloud.
Climactic release of truth breaks long silence.

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS DOCKS - WATER'S EDGE - DAWN

#1 **WIDE** **STATIC** Elijah at river holding open primer as new ship arrives.
Resolves arc with open primer and patient river vista.



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Characters

5 PRINCIPALS

CHARACTERS

PROTAGONIST

late 50s

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Lean, quick-eyed, tall for his age. Wears hand-me-down Saints jerseys and canvas sneakers already splitting at the seams.



CHARACTERS

SUPPORTING

early 50s

Small and straight-backed, hair always pulled into a tight bun. Dresses in crisp cotton house-dresses and sensible shoes.



ANTAGONIST

early 40s

Tall, pale, sweat-stained khaki suit. Keeps his hair military short and his badge polished to a mirror finish.



CHARACTERS



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Silver hair pinned back, reading glasses on a chain. Wears a cardigan over a library smock even in humidity.

Locations

4 SETTINGS

LOCATIONS



EXT.

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Narrow rooms lined with faded floral wallpaper. A single window unit rattles. The kitchen table holds dock manifests and one primer.

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Cool fluorescent hush broken only by turning pages and distant typewriters.

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Marble floors, dark wood benches, ceiling fans turning slowly. The witness stand faces a raised bench and American flag.

Stifling air, light filtered through tall dirty windows, tension in every creaking chair.

Storyboard

6 FRAMES

STORYBOARD

FRAME 1



FRAME 2



STORYBOARD

FRAME 3



FRAME 4



STORYBOARD

FRAME 5



FRAME 6

