

LOOT ON SHOW

By

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TITLE: LOOT ON SHOW

FADE IN:

EXT. THE BRITISH MUSEUM - DAY

The front of the British Museum is moderately busy with a few tourists bustling in and out of the building. The view of the building looks imposing and powerful. ZOOM OUT to reveal a group of Ghanaian men protesting near the entrance of the museum. At the front of the crowd are two men, ADJO and KOFI. They are both wearing shirts made of kente cloth and black pants; Adjo has short black hair while Kofi has longer hair and a goatee. All of them look weary, angered and are holding picket signs with slogans; ADJO is also sternly staring down the museum while holding a megaphone.

ADJO

(angered, rhythmically)

The land of Kumasi, a drum came from!

MEN (IN UNISON)

THE LAND OF KUMASI, A DRUM CAME FROM!

KOFI

(loud, rhythmically)

Return the land of Kumasi the drum!

MEN (IN UNISON)

RETURN THE LAND OF KUMASI THE DRUM!

PAN TO a teenage boy, NEVADA MILLER, entering the museum - he passes by the men repeating their chant and meagrely frowns before going through the gate. He has combed blonde hair and is wearing a white T-shirt under a navy jacket with the British Museum logo embroidered on it, jeans and Nike trainers.

CUT TO:

INT. STAFF ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Nevada goes through the staff entrance of the museum and taps a blue card on a machine to pass through a turnstile that lets him in. He glances at the security guard EDWARD, half-asleep in a booth on his left, as he goes through the turnstile.

NEVADA

(grim)

Good morning, Ed.

EDWARD

(sleepy)

Huh? Oh. Morning, Nevada.

INT. STAFF AREA - CONTINUOUS

Nevada exits an elevator and walks through a corridor towards a door at its end. The door reads 'CURATOR'S OFFICE'. Nevada enters the room.

CUT TO:

INT. CURATOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

There are many historical objects on shelves around the office. There is a big window on the left of the door and in front of it is a desk where a suited man, MICHAEL PYRE, is talking to someone on the phone. He has combed brown hair and a slightly pale face. He notices Nevada walk in and momentarily waves him towards a seat.

MICHAEL

(annoyed)

Look, get it sorted, I don't have time for archival work. Okay? -- Cheers, bye.

Michael puts down the phone and looks to Nevada who's patiently sitting on a divan on the right of the desk.

MICHAEL

Nevada, remember to knock next time. Fortunately, that wasn't an important call.

NEVADA

Alright, sorry Michael.

MICHAEL

(miffed)

You know you don't have to call me Michael now, right?

NEVADA

I know, it's a personal choice.

MICHAEL

What's with your attitude this morning? -- Is this about those

protestors again?

NEVADA

(frustrated)

They've been outside for the past 4 days! You told me that you would help them so why are they still here?

MICHAEL

Look, Michael, I know I said I would but I've got a lot going on at the moment. Rather than me responding, they would be better off contacting the museum directly with their qualms instead of disrupting the peace. In the end, stunts like these only happen to seek attention.

NEVADA

I'm not an idiot, Michael, I've heard things about this place's *history*. Attention-seeking or not, what they're saying is probably true. Why do I even bother with you? I'm only here for Mom's sake at this point.

There's a momentary silence between the two. Michael sighs and gets up to sit next to Nevada. He tries to put his hand on Nevada's shoulder but Nevada instinctively moves back.

MICHAEL

(empathetic)

Nevada, I know that it's been difficult adjusting to living in London and you might villainise me for being responsible for moving on such short notice. But your mum has sent you here over the summer so that we can bond and get to know each other which involves a *two-way* understanding. So while I understand the source of your anger, please take to heart that I'm busy and don't normally have time to deal with situations like this. Okay?

Nevada looks up at Michael with fury in his eyes.

NEVADA

(stern)

I'm tired hearing shit like this from

you. Look, I'm just going to get to work. I'd rather do that than have to try and reason with you.

Nevada gets up, straightens his jacket and leaves.

NEVADA (CONT'D)
Bye, *Michael*.

He slams the door, leaving a miffed but emotionally hurt Michael.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRITISH MUSEUM ENTRANCE - DAY

It's later in the day and the British Museum is now packed with tourists looking to get a free break from the weather outside that's hotter than usual. Nevada is at a kiosk next to museum employee KAREEM, selling guides and maps. Nevada pauses, using a map to fan himself and looks out of a window near him. He notices the group outside leaving the premises and freezes for a moment.

NEVADA
(mumbling)
He doesn't have time but I do.

Nevada puts his map down and taps Kareem to get his attention.

NEVADA
(chipper)
Hey Kareem, you don't mind if I go on lunch break?

KAREEM
(jovial)
And leave me to all these maps to me? -- Kidding! Yeah, you can head out. See ya!

Nevada dashes out of the museum and looks for Adjo and Kofi who are just exiting the courtyard. He sprints towards them.

NEVADA
(panting)
Excuse me, sir! Hold on!

Adjo and Kofi turn around and are taken aback by Nevada running in their direction. Nevada stops in front of them to catch his breath and they notice his British Museum uniform.

KOFI

(amused)

Oh! They *finally* send someone after this long and it is a child! Leave us now, we're done for the day.

ADJO

(curious)

Hold on, Kofi. Let him speak.

NEVADA

(polite)

I want to help you guys, where's the nearest place we can talk?

Adjo and Kofi exchange looks of thought.

EXT. MCDONALDS - DAY - TO ESTABLISH

This McDonalds branch is bustling with customers.

INT. MCDONALDS - CONTINUOUS

Nevada, Adjo and Kofi are sitting at a table and the other Ghanaian men are sitting on the tables next to them eating lunch.

ADJO

We never got your name, son.

NEVADA

Oh, Nevada. Nevada Miller.

KOFI

(fascinated)

Like the state, in America?

NEVADA

Yeah, I was born there before I moved here. My dad used to say that he named me after it so that the two things he's loved the most would share the same name.

ADJO
 (touched)
 Wow, that is so sweet.

Nevada tenses up slightly - it's a bittersweet memory for him.

NEVADA
 And you guys are?--

ADJO
 Well, I am Adjo and my
 friend here is named Kofi.
 Now, why did you want to meet
 us?

NEVADA
 (confident)
 For answers. Explain everything.
 Who are you guys and what
 is the drum?

Adjo and Kofi take deep breaths and their smiles morph into stony frowns. Adjo looks directly into Nevada's eyes as he readies himself to talk. As Nevada looks at Adjo's face more closely, he notices the pain in the man's eyes.

ADJO
 (serious)
 Our group is made up of people
 from Kumasi, the centre of the
 Ashanti region of Ghana. The
 drum we speak of is the Akan
 Drum which was made in our region.
 However, it was taken from our land
 a few hundred years ago when our
 people were enslaved by the
 Americans.

KOFI
 As part of the transatlantic slave
 trade, a number of our people were
 taken to Virginia, in your country.
 As for the drum, an infamous British
 collector named Hans Sloane was present
 and requested to take the drum back to
 England -- as a collector's item.

ADJO
 That is how it is in the museum. It

was not rightfully taken, not even earned as a spoil of war. It was undoubtedly *stolen* to be put on display as some exotic trinket. -- To this day, the drum is still the oldest surviving West African object. So, the way we see it, it is a vital symbol of our country's past and these people have no excuse to keep it.

NEVADA

Why didn't you contact the museum then?

KOFI

(sarcastic)

Ha! Contact them? Give them a phone call or send a kind letter by post? Our country has attempted contact for years and the museum refused to give the drum back. There came a point where they stopped giving a response. Why else do you think we were making such a ruckus this morning?

ADJO

Our country may have given up on this but our people have not. That drum is the oldest surviving piece of Ghanaian history and we cannot stop until it is back where it belongs. So, how can you help us?

Nevada sits back and thinks for a moment. Suddenly, he perks up and looks back at them with devilish joy.

NEVADA

(excited)

I know! I forgot to mention but I have close links to the curator so they've given me a special access card to get into the staff areas and places like that.

Nevada whips out the card he used this morning and shows it to Adjo and Kofi who look upon the card with interest.

NEVADA (CONT'D)

Now, I haven't seen the drum anywhere around the Africa exhibit so it has to be in the archives. So, all I have to take the drum and take it out of the museum to you guys!

ADJO

(skeptical)

Are you suggesting a HEIST? You must be pulling our legs, we came here to get it rightfully, not to end up in British jail!

NEVADA

Look, I know it sounds bad but I'll take full responsibility. And even if I get caught, my da- I mean, the curator can buy me out of it. All you guys have to do is sort out a way to receive the drum.

Adjo and Kofi exchange looks of thought as they consider the proposal.

NEVADA

Come on guys, for the Ashanti?

ADJO

(saddened)

I am sorry, Nevada. Thank you for reaching out to us and your empathy but -- this plan of yours is too risky to work and would end up with either you, us or all of us in deep trouble. We need that drum but it is not worth breaking the law to obtain it.

A defeated Nevada looks at Adjo's eyes, now misty - the man was losing hope.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE MCDONALDS - CONTINUOUS

Nevada leaves the restaurant and heads down the street deep in thought and with determination in his eyes - he's not given up on this cause.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE BRITISH MUSEUM - NIGHT - TO ESTABLISH

It is late in the evening and the British Museum has closed for the day. Excluding a few security guards, there doesn't seem to be a soul in sight.

INT. CURATOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Michael is sitting in his office on his laptop looking at e-mails with a dejected look on his face - he's still hurt from his son's words this morning. All of a sudden, his phone starts ringing and he answers the call.

MICHAEL

(weary)

Hello, this is Michael, curator of the British Museum speaking, who is this?

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)

(menacing)

Listen to me very closely, you *tyrant*. I have captured your son Nevada. If you want him back, bring the Akan Drum to the Ghanaian Embassy near Highgate Hill by 9:00. Make it on time or we'll kill him. If you contact the police or anyone else about this, he'll be dead before you arrive.

Michael suddenly wakes up from his dreary state and his face drops in shock.

MICHAEL

(fearful)

Hello, who is this? You want me to just give the drum to you? How do I even know you're not bluffing?

The caller pauses and after a moment, Michael hears Nevada.

NEVADA (V.O.)

(terrified)

PLEASE HELP ME! I was just getting to the Tube station and these guys kidnapped me! Please just get the drum to them! I DON'T WANNA DIE!

As Nevada pleads for help, Michael hears a sound of a gun loading. He gets more panicked.

MICHAEL

(incredibly shook)

My goodness, um, don't worry, I'll be there as soon as I can, you're going to be OK!

The call ends and Michael closes his laptop and rushes out of his office.

EXT. HIGHGATE HILL STREET - NIGHT

The street is empty and the only light in the area come from the dingy lampposts and the pale moon. A small truck swerves onto the road and parks abruptly in front of the Ghanaian Embassy. Michael jumps out of the truck and quickly takes out a glass box containing the Akan Drum from the back of the vehicle. He carefully places it on the steps of the Ghanaian Embassy but pauses. He hears a rustling in the bushes behind him but passes it off as the wind. He then frantically calls the unknown number.

MICHAEL

(angered)

I've placed the drum down in front
of the embassy. Now, WHERE IS MY
SON?

UNKNOWN VOICE (V.O.)

(calm)

Good. He'll be arriving shortly.
Thank you for your compliance.

After a few minutes, Nevada comes running down the street towards Michael. They embrace in relief.

NEVADA

Michael, you came for me!

MICHAEL

Oh, thank god you're fine!
Alright, let's go home,
don't tell your mother that
this happened, okay?

Nevada and Michael go into the truck and head home, leaving the drum on the doorsteps of the embassy. As they leave, a young African lady comes out of the building and notices the drum in the box.

AFRICAN WOMAN

(confused)

What is this?

As she looks around the box, she notices a label stuck to the back of the box somewhat out of sight. It reads 'To

the country of Ghana, please bring this back to Kumasi,
Best regards, The British Museum' in rushed handwriting
like a child wrote it.

INT. THE BRITISH MUSEUM COURTYARD - DAY

It's the next day and the British Museum is once again
filling up with tourists. Nevada goes down his usual
route of entry, but this time he has a grin on his face.
As he enters, he looks to the front area of the museum
and stops in confusion. Instead of seeing Adjo and Kofi
protesting with their people, he sees police officers
escorting Adjo and Kofi in handcuffs with Michael staring
them down with fury and the other protestors frozen in
horror. Nevada realises what's going on and rushes in.

NEVADA

(shocked)

What's going on? Don't they have
the right to protest?

Michael notices Nevada but doesn't take his eyes away
from Adjo and Kofi.

MICHAEL

(furious)

Not to worry, Nevada. I'm
just working with the police
to find out who kidnapped you
last night. These people seemed
like top suspects to me so I'm
sending them for questioning.

NEVADA

What do you mean 'top suspects'?
There's no evidence that they did
it!

MICHAEL

They had all the reason to do it.
They probably had enough of their
activism so they kidnapped you to get
that drum illegally. Kareem even told me
you met them yesterday so they know who
you are. Besides, I've had enough of this
commotion of theirs, it's been a real
nuisance.

Nevada looks down at Adjo and Kofi and they look back in
betrayal - they both know what he's done. Nevada stares
into the distance in utter panic - he's got a hard

decision to make and fast. He suddenly begins to run towards the police officers taking the men away.

NEVADA

(desperate)

Guys, please stop! It was me!

POLICE OFFICER #1

What do you mean it was you?

NEVADA

(teary)

I'll confess! I wanted to get these guys the drum but they didn't want to go with my plan so I faked a kidnapping to trick the curator into giving it up! Just unhand these men and take me in, they're innocent! I'll prove it, I swear!

The police officers exchange looks of thought, racking their brains on whether to believe him. They look back at Nevada in disappointment.

POLICE OFFICER #1

(disappointed)

Bobby, release them.

The second police officer releases Adjo and Kofi and escort Nevada to the police car parked outside. Nevada turns back to see Michael frozen in shock but visibly livid - he had connected the dots now.

SMASH CUT TO:

TITLE: 3 DAYS LATER

INT. HOLDING CELL - DAY

Nevada is now in a holding cell at the local police station looking devastated - this is not how we wanted his plan to turn out. Michael enters the police station entrance and calmly walks to Nevada's cell. Nevada doesn't look up at him but can tell the man is trying his hardest to keep his voice down.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

(livid)

You *abused* my trust in you by manipulating me into handing back an

item from the Sloane collection to another country. Not to the people themselves but the BLOODY EMBASSY! You've not only shamed yourself, but you've shamed *me* in front of the police, my colleagues and the museum owners who will likely demand my resignation as soon as they get word of this DISASTER! Why would you do such a thing?

Nevada feels his sadness turn into anger as he processes what Michael has said. He feels a fury fill his bones and gets himself up, staring directly at Michael.

NEVADA

(confident)

Let me rephrase what you said:
I got you to hand back the Akan
Drum back to Ghana, the country
where it belongs. The way I see it,
I did the right thing. Besides,
working at the British Museum isn't
the privilege you think it is,
Michael.

Michael stares down Nevada with such anger, it looks like his eyes are going to burst out of their sockets.

MICHAEL

Really? So now *theft* is the
right thing to do? Did you even
think about the repercussions of
that? At least when it was in our
museum, it could have been seen by all
when we put it on exhibition. Now,
it'll probably be taken to some small
village where it'll be hidden from the
world.

NEVADA

As long as it can be seen by the
Ghanaian people whose ancestors made
that drum hundreds of years ago,
there's no issue.

MICHAEL

Since you think you're so smart, how do
you even know if it'll be transported
safely or taken care of or preserved

properly like the museum has done for
HUNDREDS OF YEARS?!?

NEVADA

Doesn't matter, at least it's with the
right people.

MICHAEL

QUIT TRYING TO QUIP BACK! You should be
utterly ashamed of what you have done.
I've just talked with the police, you
have a court date tomorrow. Just know
that whatever you're given won't even
match what waits for you at home. Sit
where you are and THINK ABOUT WHAT
YOU'VE DONE!

Michael leaves in a huff, leaving Nevada to sit down
and continue staring at him - he doesn't feel shame
for himself but rather for his racist, misguided
stepdad. Then, he looks towards the floor and obeys
his father's orders - he thinks long and hard.

CUT TO BLACK:

JUDGE

(solemn)

May Nevada Miller please come to
the stand?

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Nevada looks up to the stand with confidence, ready to
give his statement. He looks around the room before
going up - the back of the room is filled with
reporters and museum affiliates patiently waiting for
what he has to say. He spots Adjo and Kofi on his
right and they give him a thumbs up - they don't seem
offended by what happened. In front of them sits an
angry Michael Pyre. Nevada looks at his dad, takes off
his British Museum jacket and goes up to the stand.
Murmurs fill up the room as he walks up to the stand.
He takes one last breath and starts.

NEVADA

(jovially)

Hello everyone, my name is Nevada Miller and I
moved here from the US about 2 weeks ago. I'm
gonna be honest, the only things I knew about

London before arriving were fish and chips, rainy weather, and the fact the country it was in took over mine back in the day. -- I'm only kidding about that last part, of course the British Empire isn't relevant nowadays because we've all moved on, haven't we? -- Well, us Americans have, the rest of the world has but I don't think you guys ever finished savouring being colonials.

Nevada looks down at his dad with a smug glance, knowing he has the high ground - morally and literally. His dad stares back, his face tense with rage - he's highly offended.

NEVADA

The evidence behind that claim? My dad's workplace, the British Museum.

Nevada looks to the camera as his slight smirk turns to a genuine scowl and he musters up all the anger inside of him.

NEVADA

(infuriated)

Throughout that longstanding building contains artefacts from across the globe, marketed as a *celebration of human culture* across history. Despite the curator's focus on the past, he seems to gloss over one major detail -- how these objects were obtained. They don't think we know better but most of us *do*. That's why when I browsed the museum for the first time, my feelings didn't resemble fascination but rather discomfort as I walked around, realising that these objects were inanimate prisoners. Pages ripped out of the history books of other cultures and countries. Practically loot on show.

Nevada looks to the camera, seemingly breaking the fourth wall - he's talking to the people in the court but looking at the viewer.

That's why I did what I did. I didn't steal the drum, I simply returned it to its rightful owners: the country of Ghana. Specifically, the Kumasi region, home of the Akan religion whose people created the drum hundreds of years ago before it was stolen by American slavers and taken by Hans Sloane. This is bigger than the drum though. When I mean items should be

returned, I mean all *those* items. The Amaravati Marbles, the Rosetta Stone, the Benin Bronzes. There's no reason why those artefacts shouldn't be in the countries where they came from. Because as long as that drum and these objects are in that museum, the curators and owners of this museum co-sign the conquering and pillaging that got them there. Lock me up if that'll make you feel better, but I've made my message clear: the Empire is finished, get over it.

CUT TO BLACK:

THE END.

