

FOR MY LOVED ONES

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FADE IN:

TITLE: الكلاب تنبح والقافلة تسير الكلاب تنبح والقافلة تسير.

FADE IN:

TITLE: Os cães ladram, mas a caravana passa.

FADE IN:

TITLE: Dogs bark, but the caravan passes.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CITY STREET, SALVADOR, BAHIA, BRAZIL. DAY.

TWO BOYS (16) hide in a dark alleyway, peeping out at the street. A streak of light reveals two sets of eyes: one GREEN, one BROWN.

A HIGH-CLASS PORTUGUESE WOMAN (30) walks down the street alone.

The boys weave through the shadows after her, silent, unseen.

A bright, luxury PURSE swings from her shoulder.

The boys tighten, like tigers in the weeds...

An item in a shop window catches the woman's eye.

The boys pounce--the fair one, FRANCISCO, rips the purse from her shoulder. The other, JOÃO, trips her when she turns to chase them.

PURSE WOMAN

STOP--THIEVES--

The tigers dash away, the gazelle in their clutches, through the sea of the city: BLACKS, WHITES, CREOLES, all one as Brazilian.

TITLE: January 1835

EXT. QUILOMBO. DAY.

A "quilombo" is a Brazilian shantytown of fugitive slaves, as well as freemen, hidden in the bush so no authorities stumble upon it. CHILDREN run about, ADULTS work and talk, and so on.

In come the two boys, who find a secluded place to stop. They empty the purse and rummage through the contents: cosmetics, a cigarette case, Brazilian reals, and a dainty gold cross necklace. Francisco examines it gently.

FRANCISCO

Do you mind if I take this? My mother will love it.

JOÃO

Looks pricey.

Francisco distributes the contents into two piles: one with most of the money and all the personal effects, the other with a few bills and the necklace.

FRANCISCO

How's that?

João takes his cut.

JOÃO

You could have had it for free. I'm not Christian.

FRANCISCO

You motherfucker, haha.

The boys pocket their loot, give each other their secret handshake, and part ways.

OUTSIDE FRANCISCO'S SHANTY,

BEATRIZ (32), a homely woman, as much a part of the neighborhood as any of the shanties, scrubs laundry in a tin bucket outside. ("F P" is branded on her shoulder.) Francisco gives her a hug.

FRANCISCO

I made some money today.

He hands her the bills. She knows where he got them, and wishes otherwise, but she accepts them.

BEATRIZ

Thank you.

FRANCISCO

I got you a gift, too.

He reveals the necklace. She can't believe it.

BEATRIZ

Francisco.

FRANCISCO

Let me put it on you.

She faces away. With their skin so close together--his light, hers dark--Francisco's father is all too clear in the picture.

Beatriz looks down at her new necklace.

BEATRIZ

It's beautiful.

FRANCISCO

You like it?

She gives him a kiss. A RUCKUS kicks up nearby--MUSIC--her mood lifts even more. She takes Francisco's hand and scurries off.

IN THE STREET,

SLAVE MEN AND WOMEN hold a public celebration. (Their branding and scars differentiate them from the others.)

They play BERIMBAU and SING and perform CAPOEIRA to the applause of SPECTATORS.

Beatriz, ecstatic, arrives with her son, who seems annoyed. She tries to dance with him. He obliges reluctantly.

BEATRIZ

Dance, Francisco.

FRANCISCO

I'm dancing.

BEATRIZ

I know you know how to samba.

FRANCISCO

It's not samba music.

BEATRIZ

Francisco!

FRANCISCO

I'm tired.

BEATRIZ

Ok.

He leaves the celebration and returns home.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S SHANTY. NIGHT.

Beatriz comes home after a long party. The laundry has been finished and hung to dry on a line outside.

INT. FRANCISCO'S SHANTY. CONTINUOUS.

Francisco lies in the single bed, tossing and catching a stone by lamplight. Enter Beatriz.

BEATRIZ

Why do those celebrations make you so upset? Francisco.

FRANCISCO

It's just embarrassing.

BEATRIZ

What is?

FRANCISCO

The way those slaves behave. All day, they clean house and pick sugar, and then at night they sneak out to sing and dance like everything is fine. If they have so much energy, they should be fighting back instead.

BEATRIZ

It's easy to say that when you've never been in their shoes. Even when they sneak out at night, it never goes away, that feeling of being owned. Candomblé is the only time they truly feel free.

FRANCISCO

Pretending to be a sailor doesn't make me a sailor.

Beatriz sighs and gets ready for bed.

BEATRIZ

Thank you for hanging the clothes.

She turns out the lamp and climbs into bed with him.

EXT. CITY STREET. DAY.

The summer is vibrant and full of life. STREET VENDORS sell meat, pastries, clothes--Francisco and João window-shop, wondering how to blow their cash. João grabs a shirt and holds it against himself.

JOÃO

What do you think?

FRANCISCO

It makes your breasts look big.

From down the road, toward our heroes, comes SLAVE-DRAWN wagon. Inside sit a JOLLY PORTUGUESE COUPLE, dressed in the height of fashion, laughing in the summer sun, clinking champagne. The woman can hardly drink, she's laughing so hard.

Francisco is disgusted. João shops.

FRANCISCO

I don't understand why there isn't a revolt every week. If I was a slave, I'd attack someone every chance I got.

JOÃO

You just don't understand. Most people would rather live a poor life than die a poor death.

FRANCISCO

I'd rather live a rich life.

JOÃO

So serious. Look!

João runs to a HABERDASHER with an assortment of hats. Francisco follows, and his friend tries some on.

JOÃO

What do you think? I'm not sure this one says "João".

FRANCISCO

I don't think so, either.

While João shops, Francisco turns his attention to the street of his town--the wealthy and the homeless, the pampered and the sweaty.

Down at the corner bakery, the baker's daughter, ELENA (15), a young Snow White, sets a freshly frosted cake in the window of the shop. Francisco is stunned by her.

FRANCISCO

João!

He appears, wrapped cozily in a wool scarf. Francisco is confused.

JOÃO

He was selling it for more than half off.

FRANCISCO

Maybe because it's the middle of summer.

JOÃO

It's sophisticated.

FRANCISCO

Come on.

ON THE BAKERY WINDOWSILL,

the cake's tag reads "Bolo de Creme de Coco."

FRANCISCO

That's my mother's favorite.

JOÃO

Is it her birthday?

FRANCISCO

No, but I made her upset last night and I want to make it up to her.

JOÃO

You made her upset? Did you steal the necklace back after you gave it to her, or what?

Francisco disregards him and enters the shop.

INT. BAKERY. CONTINUOUS.

Elena frosts another cake behind the counter. Her nose is in her work.

FRANCISCO

Hi.

ELENA

Hi.

FRANCISCO

How much for the cake in the window?

She looks up at Francisco and pauses--he's not too bad himself.

ELENA

Um. Five hundred reals.

Francisco counts out his bills.

FRANCISCO

Five hundred? I have two hundred.

ELENA

I can give you a slice for sixty-five.

FRANCISCO

Sixty-five? For a slice?

ELENA

Either that or five hundred for the cake.

FRANCISCO

Jeez, you're trying to rip me off.

He pays, and she writes him a receipt.

FRANCISCO

Do you live around here? I haven't seen you before.

ELENA

We live upstairs, yeah.

FRANCISCO

What are you doing tomorrow?

ELENA

Tomorrow? Uh... I have work until evening, but after that I'm free. Why?

A RACKET OF FALLEN UTENSILS FROM THE KITCHEN.

FRANCISCO

Do you want to go to the beach or something--?

BAKER O.S.

ELENA.

ELENA

COMING, PAPA--

What's at the beach?

She goes to cut the slice of cake and box it for him.

FRANCISCO

Well, I'll be at the beach, and then so will you. That sounds like fun, don't you think?

ELENA

(smiles)

It might.

João seems uncomfortable around them. Out from the kitchen comes her father, the plump BAKER (45).

BAKER

Elena, I need help with the--Hey! No, no, no, you can't be in here.

He hurries over to the boys and ushers them out of his shop.

FRANCISCO

What are you doing?

BAKER

You can't be in here. You'll drive my customers away.

ELENA

Papa, they are customers. They just bought a slice of cake.

BAKER

I'm sorry. You can have your money back, but you cannot be in here. Elena, put that slice back into the cake.

FRANCISCO

I paid for it already!

JOÃO

Francisco, don't make a scene.

BAKER

Please, listen to your friend. Elena, put that slice back and go get their money.

FRANCISCO

I just want a slice of cake for my mother, what's--

BAKER

Do you not understand what I'm saying? I CANNOT SERVE YOU. You will drive away my business, and my daughter and I will go hungry. Please.

EXT. CITY STREET. CONTINUOUS.

He shoves them through the door. Elena brings the money, and her father throws it after them.

BAKER

Thank you, have a nice day, goodbye.

FRANCISCO

YOU FUCKING COW--YOU'RE LUCKY I DON'T--

JOÃO

Francisco. Let's go.

João pulls him away, and they leave.

FRANCISCO

I can't believe that guy. What makes my money less valuable than anyone else's?

JOÃO

Some people are just like that. You can't get mad every time.

FRANCISCO

Oh, really?

JOÃO

It wasn't a challenge.

ELENA O.S.

(distant)

HEY--

The boys turn around. Elena catches up to them from the shop. She's holding something.

ELENA

I'm so sorry about my father. He's a little old-fashioned.

FRANCISCO

Don't worry about it, please.

ELENA

I wanted you to have this. It's the coconut frosting we used on the cake.

FRANCISCO

Really? That's so sweet of you. Here, let me pay you something for it.

ELENA

If you pay for it then it's not a gift anymore. Take it.

FRANCISCO

Thank you, that's really sweet. I'm
Francisco, by the way.

ELENA

Elena. I have to go.

FRANCISCO

Ok. Thank you, again.

She runs back to her shop, and the boys continue on their
way. Francisco tastes the frosting--

FRANCISCO

Oh my God--this is incredible!

JOÃO

Let me have some.

FRANCISCO

What the hell? This is a gift for my
mother.

JOÃO

Then why are you eating it?

João tries to snatch the bag. Francisco dodges and runs
away. João runs.

DOWN THE ROAD,

the boys are cut off by a flock of MUSLIM BOYS (16-18)
running past. João recognizes one of them.

JOÃO

Agostinho!

The boys stop, and AGOSTINHO (18) returns.

AGOSTINHO

My brother, how are you?

JOÃO

I'm great. Where are you guys going?

Agostinho seems distrusting of Francisco--he pulls João away
and speaks Arabic.

AGOSTINHO

The revolt is tonight.

JOÃO

Tonight?

AGOSTINHO

Dandará received a message from Malam Licutan the other day. The guards have been beating him for converting the inmates to our faith. They'll beat him to death if we don't act now.

João needs a moment to process this. Francisco eats his frosting.

JOÃO

We're meeting at the same spot?

AGOSTINHO

The same.

JOÃO

I'll be there.

AGOSTINHO

See you tonight.

Agostinho runs off with his friends. João and Francisco continue walking.

EXT. QUILOMBO. CONTINUOUS.

The boys reach the outskirts of the quilombo. João has just passed the message on to Francisco.

JOÃO

If we don't do it tonight, they might kill him.

FRANCISCO

A revolt? Over what?

JOÃO

Malam Licutan, one of the leaders of our faith. He's been imprisoned in Ajuda Jail for over a year.

FRANCISCO

And you're breaking him out?

João stops his friend and speaks to him in confidence.

JOÃO

We have three hundred men, Francisco.
Muslims, slaves, freemen--this is real.

FRANCISCO

Are you serious?

JOÃO

You always complain about how everyone is all talk and no action. This is the time to act. From tomorrow on, our candomblé at night will be a celebration of freedom. The way that baker treated you in his shop today? That will never happen again. Tonight will be recorded in history.

Francisco seems intimidated. João puts a hand on his shoulder.

JOÃO

It doesn't matter if you've never been a slave, you're a runaway slave, or what. "Francisco Pereira", "João Naïm", "Agostinho"--this fight is for all of us.

FRANCISCO

Where are you meeting?

JOÃO

We're meeting at Sr. Marinho's tailor shop at midnight. The mosque in the basement is where we'll prepare. If you're not there by dawn, we won't wait for you.

FRANCISCO

I'll be there.

The boys do their secret handshake and go their separate ways.

INT. FRANCISCO'S SHANTY. DAY.

A NEIGHBOR MOTHER speaks with Beatriz about the holes in her son's clothes when Francisco arrives.

NEIGHBOR MOTHER

... and then there's another hole in the knee, here.

BEATRIZ

It shouldn't be too difficult to patch these up.

NEIGHBOR MOTHER

We need them by Friday, if you could.

BEATRIZ

Oh, no problem. Come back Friday, and they'll be ready.

NEIGHBOR MOTHER

Thank you.

The mother pays Beatriz and leaves. Beatriz puts the clothes in her to-do pile and resumes sewing.

FRANCISCO

I bought you something.

He hands her what remains of the frosting. She sets it down and continues sewing.

BEATRIZ

Thank you. Could you sweep for me? This house is a mess.

Francisco grabs the broom and sweeps.

FRANCISCO

(beat)

Can I ask you something?

BEATRIZ

What is it?

FRANCISCO

I was wondering why you named me after my father.

BEATRIZ

(laughs)

I wasn't the one who named you, believe it or not. You don't like your name?

FRANCISCO

I mean, if you ran away when I was born, you could have changed it and I would have never known the difference.

BEATRIZ

Your father is your father, no matter what your name is.

FRANCISCO

He's not my father if I've never met him.

Beatriz has nothing to say. Francisco sweeps.

BEATRIZ

Your father loved a good feast. He would treat the plantation to a feast sometimes, for no reason, and he'd sing with us... But work always came first. You'd never believe how demanding he was about work from looking at him.

Francisco is surprised by his mother's transparency.

BEATRIZ

There was something about him, though. I can't explain it, but it was like no matter how demanding he got, it was out of some desperation. Like fear. I thought it was so sweet. You remind me of him every day.

FRANCISCO

I never knew you thought of him like that.

BEATRIZ

It doesn't make sense, does it?

FRANCISCO

Why did you run away, then?

BEATRIZ

You wouldn't be nearly as pretty as you are now if I'd stayed.

She sews. Francisco sweeps.

FRANCISCO

I'm going out with João tonight after I finish cleaning.

BEATRIZ

Could you bring the clothes in before you go? My knees have been bothering me all day.

FRANCISCO

Ok.

INT. TAILOR SHOP BASEMENT. NIGHT.

Sixty or more MEN (20-30) cramp the dim space, all in white tunics laced with red ("abadá"). The walls are decorated with Muslim symbology and Arabic scripture. DOMINGOS MARINHO (25), a normally submissive creole man, escorts Francisco downstairs.

MARINHO

João! Your friend?

João hurries over, half-dressed in his tunic, and greets Francisco.

JOÃO

You made it! You know Sr. Marinho. Come, let's get you some clothes.

MARINHO

Please, João, finish dressing yourself.
IGNACIO. IGNACIO--

IGNACIO (20), a thin and dark young man, weaves through the crowd to Marinho.

IGNACIO

Yes?

MARINHO

Have this warrior clothed.

IGNACIO

Absolutely.

He leads Francisco (the fairest of the bunch) through the crowd. Some of the men give him wary glances. Agostinho gives him a nod of solidarity.

FRANCISCO

Is that Sr. Juares, the cobbler? And the haberdasher's son?

IGNACIO

You must be new.

FRANCISCO

Very.

IGNACIO

Welcome. Whether you have been with us for a month or for a day, we are grateful to have you. Here.

Baskets of pistols, swords, knives, spears, and clothing line the back wall. Ignacio digs through the clothes.

IGNACIO

You'll need a tunic... a sash...

FRANCISCO

There are a lot of freemen here.

IGNACIO

And yet they don't feel free. Here in Bahia, there is little difference between the slave and the freeman. They still work the jobs that nobody wants, they still are discriminated in the street. Here.

He hands Francisco a tunic, a red sash, a red skullcap, and a pistol. Francisco is confused.

FRANCISCO

What do you mean "they"? You're a freeman, too.

IGNACIO

(laughs)

No, I'm Sr. Marinho's slave. This fight is for all of us.

Francisco is surprised. Enter João with a guest in tow: DANDARÁ (45), more grizzled and hardened than any other in the room, like a military officer. A long scar spans his scalp.

JOÃO

Francisco! I want you to meet Dandar, the leader of the revolt. He took part in the actual Revolt of 1816 and survived.

DANDAR

Al-salaam alaykum, Francisco. We are pleased to have you. It is good to see how much fire burns in the African blood of this country.

FRANCISCO

Thank you.

DANDAR

The meeting will begin soon, so be ready.

Dandar grips Francisco's shoulders with assurance and leaves. Joo takes a look at his friend's gun.

JOO

Oh, you went with a pistol? A little too impersonal for me.

He brandishes the sword from his hip.

FRANCISCO

(nervous)

Nice.

Joo puts the sword away and pulls something from his pocket.

JOO

Look. I made you something.

He hands Francisco a small wooden pendant tied to a leather necklace. Carved into the wood is intricate Arabic lettering.

JOO

"Allah hu akbar." It means "God is great."

FRANCISCO

You made this?

JOÃO

A few days ago.

FRANCISCO

You didn't even know if I would show up
or not.

JOÃO

I had a feeling.

FRANCISCO

Let me put it on.

JOÃO

Let me.

Before Francisco can object, João is behind him tying the
necklace. Francisco stands there like a debutante.

JOÃO

There.

Francisco is admiring it when Dandar CLANGS a tin cup. All
the men gather around him in the center of the room.

DANDAR

In a few hours, at dawn, we will march
upstairs into the street and seize
freedom from our captors.

The crowd pats its thighs in applause. Dandar traces his
plan out on a map of Salvador.

DANDAR

We have three teams hidden throughout
the city. At dawn, each team will light
a fire in the street to distract the
authorities: one by the mosque on
Conceio da Praia Street, one by the
Malam Licutan's mosque on Pilar Street,
and the last one by the destroyed mosque
on Victoria Street. These fires will not
only distract the authorities but signal
our brothers in hiding to join the
attack. Once our full strength has been
gathered--three hundred strong--we will
fall upon Ajuda Jail and free our Malam
Licutan!

The crowd pats its thighs.

CROWD

Inshallah, inshallah...

Dandar lifts a hand, and they grow quiet.

DANDAR

Let us pray for grace and battling
mercies.

All fall to their knees. (Francisco observes and follows
along.)

DANDAR

(Arabic)

Bismillah. Permission to fight has been
given to those who are being fought,
because they were wronged. And indeed,
Allah is competent to give them victory.
Many of our lives have been taken from
us. We beg you, Allah, for our lives.
Return them to us from their captors...!

All eyes are closed and solemn.

Joo's hand finds its way into Francisco's.

Francisco FLINCHES, but he doesn't pull away--he's not sure
if this is part of it or not. He looks around: no one else
is holding hands. He looks at Joo, who acts as if he's done
nothing at all.

A DISTANT AGGRESSIVE POUNDING--Dandar freezes. Worried eyes
pop open throughout the room.

TATTLE SOLDIER #1 O.S.

OPEN UP. WE KNOW YOU ARE IN THE
BASEMENT.

More POUNDING. Marinho shushes his brothers and goes
upstairs to answer.

INT/EXT. TAILOR SHOP, FRONT DOOR. CONTINUOUS.

Three ROYAL SOLDIERS stand in the doorway with a frail,
cowering black man: SULE (55), Marinho's neighbor.

MARINHO

Good evening, gentlemen! Sule. What can
I help you with?

TATTLE SOLDIER #1

We've heard that a group of Africans are conspiring against the government in your basement tonight. Would you happen to know anything about this?

MARINHO

Conspiracy? At this hour? That would be silly, gentlemen. All I have is rats in my basement. Haha.

TATTLE SOLDIER #2

(taps Sule)

Sule. Did you say it was a group of rats or a group of Africans?

Marinho looks at Sule, who catches on to the soldier.

SULE

Rats, yes. I was standing outside my shop next door when Sr. Marinho mentioned the rats that would be in his basement tonight.

TATTLE SOLDIER #1

That's right. We've been sent by the governor to check on your rats. May we come inside?

MARINHO

Gentlemen, please, there's no need...

MEANWHILE, IN THE BASEMENT,

the rebels listen to everything through a cracked-open door. Dandar is at the front.

DANDAR

(whispers)

Soldiers are coming! The lamps, the lamps!

Fists tighten around HILTS and PISTOLS. The LAMPS are turned off leaving DARKNESS.

The party upstairs grows LOUDER as they approach the basement. Marinho continues to stall.

MARINHO O.S.

I'm only confused. No one is ever in my basement except on Fridays for prayer.

TATTLE SOLDIER #1 O.S.

Then you should have nothing to worry about.

Only a few steps to the door... Marinho sighs.

MARINHO O.S.

I'm sorry. You are right. I just get nervous around soldiers, you know. Here, let me get the door for you gentlemen, and you will see I have nothing to hide.

DANDARÁ

NOW.

Dandar flies through the door and plunges a sword into Soldier #1's stomach. THE SOLDIER'S RIFLE MISFIRES--the rebels swarm aboveground and overwhelm them.

Soldiers #2 & 3 drop their weapons and flee while the rebels lay several shots into their fallen comrade. Marinho snatches Sule and beats him against the wall.

MARINHO

WHAT ELSE DID YOU TELL THEM, YOU WORM--
HUH?--WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU HEARD--?

SULE

Nothing! Nothing, I promise--

MARINHO

(punches)

LIAR--WHO ELSE IS COMING--?

SULE

No one, I swear!

Marinho knocks him out and throws the body on top of the fallen soldier. Dandar takes one of the fallen rifles and hoists it in the air.

DANDAR

KILL THE SOLDIERS!

The rebels ROAR and follow him into the street.

EXT. CITY STREET. NIGHT.

The revolt has begun. Midnight is broken by pearls of moonlight off black skin and swords. Francisco runs with João.

FRANCISCO

WHO HAS THE OIL? WE NEED TO LIGHT THE
FIRES AROUND TOWN--

JOÃO

NO TIME FOR THE FIRE.

FRANCISCO

WHERE ARE WE GOING? WHERE ARE WE--

JOÃO

AJUDA JAIL.

Dandar breaks through the crowd:

DANDAR

GATHER OUR BROTHERS--COLLECT OUR
BROTHERS--

He and several other men pound on doors as they pass by. MORE REBELS exit their houses and join the fray.

SOLDIERS flank in from the sides and fire into the crowd. Francisco sees the first of the rebels die, and he runs.

EXT. AJUDA JAIL. CONTINUOUS.

PRISON GUARDS behind the gate and on the prison roof prepare for the imminent assault. The ROAR of the crowd grows by the second.

DANDAR

CHARGE THE GATE!

The order ECHOES through the crowd.

PRISON COMMANDER

FIRE!

The soldiers pick off the rebels, one by one--the revolt grows nearer--the gate CRASHES from the charge of the rebels--but it holds strong.

The soldiers take cover with the gates and continue to pick off the rebels, taking no harm themselves. (One rebel misfires and strikes his own comrade.)

DANDARÁ

CLIMB THE GATE!

Rebels obey and are shot down all the more easily. A body lands on João. He throws it aside.

JOÃO

WE NEED MORE MEN! GO TO VICTORIA STREET!
VICTORIA STREET!

He grabs Francisco by the arm and pulls him away. The new command gains traction--the mob of hundreds pulls away-- UNFORTUNATE CIVILIANS are shoved, struck, trampled--

João looks around: the mob has swelled in size. Many of his brothers are emptyhanded.

JOÃO

WE NEED MORE WEAPONS.

FRANCISCO

THERE'S NO TIME.

JOÃO

MORE WEAPONS! HEAD TP THE POLICE
GARRISON! MORE WEAPONS!

MOB

MORE WEAPONS--THE POLICE GARRISON--

FRANCISCO

THERE'S NO TIME--THERE'S NO TIME--

Half the men follow to the garrison, half continue to Victoria Street. Francisco hesitates, but he ultimately follows his friend.

EXT. POLICE GARRISON. CONTINUOUS.

The police garrison is ahead, and the men fire prematurely. The SOLDIERS are amply prepared and return fire. Their shots don't miss.

FRANCISCO

TURN BACK! VICTORIA STREET! VICTORIA
STREET!

Francisco slows down to catch his breath. They look like fools, the way they charge ahead--

THE VICTORIA STREET MOB RETURNS.

VICTORIA STREET MOB

FREE THE MALAM--FREE THE MALAM--

The two factions of the rebellion unite and head for the jail. SWORDS and RIFLES swing about--Francisco is cut by an errant knife.

EXT. AJUDA JAIL. CONTINUOUS.

Once again, the men storm the jail. The gate is no less fortified than mere minutes ago. The rebels are picked off one by one.

Once again, João appears. He tries to climb to the gate with his sword in his hand.

JOÃO

JIHAD! JIHAD! JIHAD!

He is shot and falls.

FRANCISCO

JOÃO!

Francisco pushes through to his friend.

DANDARÁ

WE NEED AMMUNITION--AGUA DE MENINOS--
AGUA DE MENINOS FOR AMMUNITION--

Once more, the rebels pull away. Francisco pushes through the crowd for João. He tries to rouse his friend. He's dead.

Francisco puts him over his shoulder and runs against the day, dawn breaking at last behind him.

(A SUDDEN MILITARY COMMAND in the distance--a heavy burst of RIFLE-FIRE--the ROAR of the rebellion dies.)

Two soldiers stop Francisco in the street.

STREET SOLDIER #1

Halt! Where are you going?

FRANCISCO

I need to get my friend to a doctor.

STREET SOLDIER #2

He's dead. Come on.

FRANCISCO

Hey!

The soldiers apprehend Francisco, and the body falls. Francisco fights for it, but the soldiers cuff him and escort him (at last) into Ajuda Jail.

INT. AJUDA JAIL. DAY.

Weeks later. PRISON GUARDS patrol the line of cells along the wall of the tiny jail. PRISONERS, all dirty, all malnourished, labeled by ID numbers tacked to their chests, hoot and call for his attention.

PRISONERS

Hey, boss, unlock the gate, huh? I think you locked me here by mistake.

It's a little cramped in here, could we put in a window? Hey!

Boss, why'd you put me in here with all these niggers? Look, I'm Portuguese!

Deep in the corner of the last cell sits Francisco in a shadow. His knees are pulled to his chest, and he hides his face in his arms.

An OLD MAN (50) comes to sit beside him. There is a softness to his face despite its maturity, and he seems as free in the jail as if he had wings--the Malam Licutan.

LICUTAN

You've hardly spoken to anyone since you've been here. I thought I'd say hello.

FRANCISCO

...

LICUTAN

It is wise of you to conserve energy.

Francisco reveals his dirty, gaunt face. Tacked to his chest is the number "11525."

FRANCISCO

I have to if I'm going to fight back.

LICUTAN

Fight back?

FRANCISCO

I'm breaking out of here. And I'm breaking everyone else out of here, too, and we'll all get to see our families again.

LICUTAN

Who, you and the rapists and the killers?

FRANCISCO

Rapists and killers have families, too.

LICUTAN

Who's the first person you would see?

FRANCISCO

My mother, of course. She's the only family I have. I might go see the girl at the bakery.

LICUTAN

Who's the girl at the bakery?

FRANCISCO

Elena. Her father didn't want to serve me when I went in to buy a cake, so she gave me a bag of frosting for free.

LICUTAN

(in Arabic)

"Whomever does you a favor, respond in kind, but if you cannot find the means of doing so, then keep praying for her until you think that you have responded in kind."

FRANCISCO

...

LICUTAN

It's called a "hadith." Words from the Prophet.

FRANCISCO

Oh. You're the Malam Licutan.

LICUTAN

I am.

FRANCISCO

My friend was killed trying to set you free.

LICUTAN

I'm sorry. But know that any death that comes in jihad shall be rewarded with Paradise.

Francisco scoffs.

A UNIT OF PRISON GUARDS unlocks the first cell at the far end of the jail, rifles alert.

PRISON GUARDS

EVERYBODY UP--OUTSIDE--MOVE IT, MOVE IT--

FRANCISCO

I wouldn't have even been a part of the revolt if it weren't for him.

LICUTAN

He must have been a great man.

FRANCISCO

He was.

LICUTAN

He charged to the front with his weapon in his hand, and he shouted for freedom?

Licutan knocks on the jail floor. No echo at all.

LICUTAN

I didn't hear a thing. These walls are cinderblock. I didn't know there was a revolt to begin with until this place got so cramped.

FRANCISCO

I'm glad our friends dying meant so much to you.

LICUTAN

My point is that there was never a chance you all could free me, yet Allah inspired you to try regardless. Something bigger than us--certainly bigger than my freedom--has been set in place for you all that you simply cannot see yet.

The unit of prison guards opens the next cell and escorts them all outside as well.

PRISON GUARDS O.S.

MOVE--OUTSIDE--GO, GO--

FRANCISCO

You really don't care about any of this, do you?

LICUTAN

What matters is the will of Allah.

Francisco puts his face back into his arms.

FRANCISCO

I wish Allah would "will" for you to go somewhere else.

As if on cue, the unit of prison guards arrives at Francisco's cell and orders the prisoners out.

PRISON GUARDS

OUTSIDE--GO, GO, GO--

Licutan rises wearily.

LICUTAN

Inshallah.

EXT. CITY PLAZA. DAY.

The plaza sits right outside the jail. PRISONERS crowd around the perimeter, corralled by the GUARDS. Outside of them is another perimeter of the innocent, free CITIZENS of Salvador. Francisco stands beside Licutan.

BEATRIZ O.S.

FRANCISCO!

Fighting through the crowd comes Francisco's mother. She pushes through the citizens and tries to reach her son among the prisoners. (She's wearing her necklace.)

PLAZA PRISON GUARD

HEY, HEY--

He shoves her away roughly.

FRANCISCO

HEY!

Francisco tries to go to her--a GUARD jerks him back in place. Beatriz is helpless but to watch.

The prison commander (same from the revolt, pp. 21) takes centerstage and reads from a sheet of paper.

PRISON COMMANDER

PRISONER 11548.

Heroically, defiantly, Dandar  emerges from the crowd, bruised and bloodied from the trials of interrogation. The prison commander stands him in the center of the plaza.

PRISON COMMANDER

PRISONER 11489.

Humbly, powerfully, Licutan steps out of the crowd, away from Francisco's side. He takes his place beside Dandar .

DANDAR 

It's good to see you again.

LICUTAN

It is very good.

PRISON COMMANDER

PRISONER 1152...

He can't read the sheet. Francisco doublechecks his number--11525--his heart sinks. He looks to his mother, that her comfort may find him from afar...

PRISON COMMANDER

11526.

No one steps forward.

PRISON COMMANDER

11526!

A commotion somewhere among the prisoners.

IGNACIO O.S.

STOP--HEY!

A GUARD drags Ignacio into the plaza by force--11526.

IGNACIO

I didn't do anything! I'm only a slave,
I wasn't part of anything! Stop!

The guard sets him beside the other two and leaves.

IGNACIO

Please, I'll tell you everything--I'll
give you names! I'll give you the names
you don't have, just send me back to my
cell, please...!

Ignacio goes on and on. Dandar smacks his teeth in disgust.
The commander puts a sack over each of their heads, drops
them to their knees, and steps aside. He cues THREE SOLDIERS
WITH RIFLES to march before them.

PRISON COMMANDER

READY.

Ready.

PRISON COMMANDER

AIM.

Aiming.

PRISON COMMANDER

FIRE.

... Ignacio finally stops talking.

PRISON COMMANDER

CLEAR THE PLAZA.

The guards escort the prisoners back to jail. The spectators
disperse. Beatriz pushes forward.

BEATRIZ

FRANCISCO, I'M HERE!

Francisco looks for her. She is swallowed by the shifting
crowd.

FRANCISCO

MAMA!

BEATRIZ O.S.

I'M HERE, FRANCISCO--I'M HERE--

FRANCISCO

MAMA--MAMA!

She's gone.

Francisco will never see her again.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BELOW DECK. DAY.

A tour of the tenancy:

DOZENS OF BLACK MEN (15-30) are crammed together in the damp, dark space. Sunlight cracks in through the floorboards above.

A YOUNG BOY has a coughing fit--covering his mouth is no use.

SOMEONE vomits on SOMEONE ELSE--CUE FIGHT at the far end of the ship.

Francisco stands as solitarily as he can by the ladder beneath the hatch. He looks at nothing, says nothing, as though he's gone dormant.

THE HATCH OPENS, and a column of light breaks over him. A DOZEN FON CREWMEN (20-30) abovedeck order the slaves up. They only speak the FON language. Francisco leads the way.

EXT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, ABOVEDECK. CONTINUOUS.

The total crew consists of ten to fifteen CREWMEN (including LANRE (22) and OLUWALE (20)).

Francisco watches them argue next to an assortment of mops and buckets over whose turn it is to clean.

(Behind them stand several crates labeled "PÓLVORA.")

Ultimately, some five men lose the argument. They grab the supplies and head for the hatch. The remaining crewmen "stand guard" over the slaves--i.e. talk, joke, enjoy themselves.

RODRIGO (18), a jovial and charismatic boy who is difficult to dislike, is standing beside the coughing boy from earlier when another fit strikes him. Rodrigo maneuvers away and winds up by our hero's side. He takes a deep, indulgent breath of fresh air.

RODRIGO

The sea breeze... Just how God intended, huh?

FRANCISCO

I guess he intended for me to be a slave, too.

RODRIGO

Ah, but the sun doesn't change when you're a slave. And the wind doesn't change. All the beauty in the world is still there for you to enjoy.

FRANCISCO

I guess.

RODRIGO

What did you get caught for?

FRANCISCO

Same as everyone else, right? The revolt.

RODRIGO

You must not have met many people yet.

(points)

Carlos over there had only stepped out of his house to see what was going on when they scooped him up.

(points)

And Paco was arrested months ago for nothing, so they just threw him in with the rest of us.

FRANCISCO

How about you?

RODRIGO

Psh. I didn't even know about it. I'm a carpenter. I was working late that evening, and I cut my hand. I guess a little blood on your clothes counts as "evidence" around there.

He shows Francisco his bandaged hand.

RODRIGO

They should be patting me on the back for being a hardworking taxpayer, haha! Instead they ship me off to Africa. Life is funny, huh?

FRANCISCO

Funny?

RODRIGO

But God always has a plan. I don't like to interfere with it too much. Just let Him do what He needs to do, sit back, and enjoy the ride.

FRANCISCO

There's not much sitting room on a slave ship, don't you think?

RODRIGO

Hahaha! You're right. Not if you don't mind vomit on your pants. What's your name?

FRANCISCO

Francisco.

RODRIGO

Rodrigo.

They shake. Francisco looks at the crewmen.

FRANCISCO

These guys really should have cuffed us. The first chance I get, I'm jumping one of them.

Rodrigo puts his arm around Francisco's shoulders.

RODRIGO

That's a quick way to wind up dead, friend. The reason we don't have chains is to keep us from drowning if we jump overboard. And there are sharks, anyway, so relax!

FRANCISCO

How can I relax when they've shipped us away from our home like cargo?

RODRIGO

You don't even know what Africa is like yet. Let's see what our motherland has to offer before we start complaining.

FRANCISCO

I'm going back. And when I get back, they'll wish they'd never sent me away.

Rodrigo bursts into laughter.

RODRIGO

How do you intend to get back? You're gonna ask your new master for time off? I'm sure you've heard whose ship we're on.

FRANCISCO

Whose ship?

RODRIGO

Félix dos Santos? He's one of the biggest traders from Brazil.

FRANCISCO

So what?

RODRIGO

So everything! Any African who steps foot onto his ship never lives another free day.

FRANCISCO

He's Brazilian?

RODRIGO

I don't know where he's from exactly, but he and Brazil are closer than you and I are right now. He ships their slaves, their rum, their sugar--

FRANCISCO

Their gunpowder.

RODRIGO

And what's worse is...

He lowers his voice.

RODRIGO

... What's worse is I heard he sacrificed fourteen virgins in a voodoo ritual for immortality.

Francisco gives Rodrigo an incredulous look.

FRANCISCO

Immortality? Did it work?

RODRIGO

It must have. That's how he has no
conscience. Nothing can happen to him.

The cleaning crew EMERGES, desperate for air, from below
deck. Their mops and buckets are full of brown sludge. They
send the slaves back down below deck.

ONE SLAVE (30) starts to go mad--he wants anything but to
return below deck.

MADMAN

NO--YOU'RE NOT TAKING ME BACK DOWN
THERE--I'M NOT GOING BACK--AAH!

Three crewmen detain him. They hold his limbs and pin him to
the deck.

MADMAN

I'LL BITE MY TONGUE--I'LL BITE MY
TONGUE--

The man fights and fights--the crewmen wrestle with him--HE
BITES HIS TONGUE AND GUSHES BLOOD.

The slaves jump at the sight. The madman spits up blood and
chokes. Lanre removes his shirt and stuffs it into the man's
mouth to stop the bleeding.

(Francisco watches the man... but he's more interested in
those crates...)

Eventually, the man's body goes limp. The slaves are sent
below deck. The body is removed.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BELOW DECK. CONTINUOUS.

The air is grave--nobody speaks, nobody moves, certainly
nobody coughs. Rodrigo is beside Francisco.

RODRIGO

I've never seen anyone die before.

FRANCISCO

I saw my best friend die.

RODRIGO

I don't like to think about those
things.

FRANCISCO

You'll have to think about it
eventually.

RODRIGO

I'll wait until "eventually" to think about it.

FRANCISCO

Come on. You've never thought you'd just kill yourself and get it over with?

RODRIGO

Are you kidding me? Life is too sweet.

FRANCISCO

(sniffs)

Kind of smells like shit to me.

RODRIGO

Still.

FRANCISCO

Who knows? Killing himself might have been the best decision he ever made.

Rodrigo shoves Francisco.

RODRIGO

What's wrong with you?

FRANCISCO

He was miserable. And it wasn't going to get any better for him as a slave.

RODRIGO

Ok, so why don't you kill yourself?

FRANCISCO

I told you already. I'm going back.

Rodrigo sees at last that Francisco is serious.

RODRIGO

Come on, Francisco. Don't be crazy.

Francisco comes close to tell his plan.

FRANCISCO

Every morning, the crew brings us up to clean this area. That's when we'll take them out.

RODRIGO

"We"? I haven't agreed to anything,
don't say "we."

FRANCISCO

You haven't even heard my plan.

RODRIGO

The answer is no.

FRANCISCO

You haven't heard it!

RODRIGO

...

FRANCISCO

Next to the main cabin is a stack of
crates full of gunpowder.

RODRIGO

How do you know they are gunpowder?

FRANCISCO

That's what the label says. Those
African sailors who are supposed to be
guarding us are lazy, so while they're
telling jokes, I'll attack the one
nearest to me, steal his rifle, and
throw it to you.

RODRIGO

Throw it to me?

FRANCISCO

I can't shoot it if some guy is right
there attacking me. I'll hold him back,
and you shoot the crates.

RODRIGO

You want to blow up the ship?

FRANCISCO

It's our only way off.

RODRIGO

We might blow ourselves up. It's too
risky.

FRANCISCO

We can either take that risk or become slaves.

RODRIGO

They'll be firing back at us, you know? As soon as they see we have a gun, we're dead.

FRANCISCO

That's why we have to be quick. There's no chance for them to shoot at us if we kill them first.

RODRIGO

Have you even thought about what to do once we've blown up the ship? There aren't enough canoes for us all to fit in.

FRANCISCO

I'd rather drown in freedom than to swim in a cage. This is what we have to do to if we want to be free.

RODRIGO

I don't know.

Francisco sighs.

FRANCISCO

That's ok. I just thought we might have a shot if we worked together.

RODRIGO

I'm sorry.

FRANCISCO

Please. It was only a favor.

Rodrigo nods. Francisco gives him space.

Rodrigo wracks his soul...

RODRIGO

Wait, Francisco.

Francisco stops. Rodrigo comes to him and puts his hand out.

RODRIGO

I'll do it. Throw me the rifle, and I'll
take the shot.

Francisco clasps his hand.

FRANCISCO

Thank you, Rodrigo. We'll all be
thanking you soon enough.

EXT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, ABOVEDECK. DAY.

New morning. The slaves climb up, the cleaning crew
descends. Rodrigo and Francisco move to the outskirts of the
group.

The crewmen yawn, light cigarettes, enjoy the Atlantic
cruise...

Francisco snatches the rifle of the burly crewman beside
him, called NOSA (25), and throws it to Rodrigo. Francisco
manages to outmaneuver Nosa and wrangle him into a hold. The
slaves watch in shock.

FRANCISCO

NOW, RODRIGO, TAKE THE SHOT. RODRIGO.

Rodrigo holds the rifle on his open hands, as if any sudden
movement might rouse the beast.

The crewmen scramble to arm themselves.

Rodrigo looks at the crates.

FRANCISCO

RODRIGO, NOW--

CU RODRIGO.

Trembling, Rodrigo drops the rifle and buries himself into
the crowd of slaves.

Nosa FLOORS Francisco with an elbow to the stomach and pins
him.

The slaves watch as several of the crewmen beat Francisco
together.

Nosa and Lanre carry him into the main cabin, right past the
untouched crates.

The cleaning crew ascends at last, desperate for air.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BEDROOM. DAY.

Francisco sits on the bed, bloodied and battered, hands cuffed behind his back. A CUT in his head has clotted. Nosa and Lanre stand watch in the room.

All wait.

MURMURING behind the door between the UNSEEN DOORMAN and SOMEONE ELSE--LAUGHTER.

Enter FÉLIX DOS SANTOS (35), still reeling from laughter with the DOORMAN. He speaks Fon as a language learned late in life. He shuts the door and collects himself.

... There's nothing special about him. He's a tan Portuguese man, full-featured, curlyheaded. He is confused.

FÉLIX

You? You're the rebel?

(Fon)

Nosa, you're sure you got the right guy?
He's tiny!

Nosa laughs.

FÉLIX

What's your name?

FRANCISCO

Francisco.

FÉLIX

I am Félix. I apologize for the laughter, Francisco, but we haven't had any rebels like you in some time. And they're usually a bit... bigger.

FRANCISCO

The ones you underestimate have the greatest advantage over you.

Félix sits next to Francisco on the bed.

FÉLIX

I'm sure. What was your plan, I'm curious? I heard something about an accomplice?

Francisco is hesitant to speak. He looks at the guards.

FÉLIX

Don't worry about them, they can't understand us.

FRANCISCO

You have crates of gunpowder stacked on the deck. We were going to shoot them and destroy the cabin with you inside. From there, we'd sail to Brazil in the canoes.

FÉLIX

You can read the gunpowder labels on those crates?

(Francisco nods)

Do you know how much was in those crates?

FRANCISCO

Enough to kill you.

FÉLIX

You must really love it back there. Even though they sold you into slavery.

FRANCISCO

The ones who sold me into slavery aren't the ones I love. They had no right to sell me.

FÉLIX

And yet they did, and the ones you love could do nothing about it, could they?

Francisco recalls his mother. Félix notices a drip of blood from his cut.

FÉLIX

Your wound is open.

He pulls out a handkerchief and presses it against the wound.

FÉLIX

(Fon)

Nosa, unlock him.

Nosa unlocks the manacles.

FÉLIX

Keep pressure on it, here.

Francisco PUNCHES Félix in the face. Nosa PUNCHES Francisco in the face and bloodies him more. Lanre checks on Félix. Félix assuages concern and works his jaw.

Nosa snatches the manacles and starts to lock Francisco back up.

Félix barks an alternate order. Nosa asks if he's sure. Félix confirms, and the crewmen exit the room. Félix stands.

FÉLIX

You're going to be held separately from the others until we arrive in Dahomey. This will be your room. My men will bring you fresh clothes and lunch in a few hours.

The crewmen return with clothes and water. They take the open manacles from the bed, and all three leave Francisco alone.

Francisco is confused. He examines the clothes, holds them against himself--they fit. He tries the bed, checks under the sheets--clean, and very comfortable.

A drop of blood hits the bedsheet. Blood runs down his cheek. He finds the handkerchief on the floor and presses it against the wound.

INT. SHIP KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Nosa, Lanre, Oluwale, and the other crewmen dine on hot yam and tilapia and play a RAUCOUS game of cards.

Félix interrupts.

FÉLIX

Nosa.

Nosa has not done something he was supposed to do, and he knows it. Nosa fixes a plate of food.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BEDROOM. DAY.

Francisco is asleep in a corner on the floor. A KNOCK on the door.

Nosa begrudgingly brings a plate of fish, yam, tomato gravy, and a lemon tart to his bedside, complete with a napkin and cutlery. Nosa leaves.

Francisco can't take his eyes off the plate, but he doesn't move.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BELOW DECK. DAY.

Meanwhile, buckets of old bread and meat are lowered by pail into Hades. The captives scramble and clamor like animals for dirty fistfuls.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Nosa brings in a fresh set of clothes and lays them on top of the ones from earlier--they remain untouched. He takes the cold fish and yam away with him.

Francisco sits obstinately in the corner.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BELOW DECK. NIGHT.

Rodrigo is working through the cramped space when he slips. He looks at his hands, now coated in a brown sludge...

Nothing to be done. He wipes it on his pants and continues about his business.

INT. DOS SANTOS SHIP, BEDROOM. DAY.

Francisco remains in his corner. Nosa and Lanre carry fresh water into the room. Félix, this time, watches from the door--shirtless, in a towel, still wet. His jaw is swollen. He holds a dish and a fat bar of chocolate.

The crewmen leave. Félix enters and sits beside Francisco. He looks at the neglected pile of clothes.

FÉLIX

You don't like your clothes?

FRANCISCO

...

FÉLIX

I'm guessing you feel the same about the food.

FRANCISCO

...

FÉLIX

You're drinking water, at least.

FRANCISCO

Water is the only thing that's the same
as what you're giving my brothers down
below.

Félix laughs.

FÉLIX

Your brothers? The same brothers who
handed you over to me when you asked for
help? Then watched as my men beat you
and did nothing? If those are your
brothers, I feel terribly for you.

Félix takes a bite of food and offers some to the boy.
Francisco ignores it. Félix eats.

FÉLIX

There are people whose death just can't
be justified. They are so...
insignificant that killing them would
cost more than it's worth. That's who
your "brothers" are, down below. But
then, there are other people whose lives
cannot be justified, and these people
must be eliminated with extreme
prejudice. The risk is just too high if
they survive. I believe that's who you
are, Francisco.

Félix eats as though the world is his to consume. Francisco
is afraid.

FÉLIX

Those beneath us--beneath our feet right
now--their deaths couldn't be justified,
and so they were given to me to dispose
of. Some way or another, you got mixed
in with those people... and I have to
say I'm rather grateful.

FRANCISCO

You're grateful?

FÉLIX

I understand you, Francisco. If I were in a canoe, and I snapped both oars over my knee--it might be a little difficult to get back to land, sure--but would I get in trouble for it? Of course not. With you, on the other hand, I simply put you somewhere you didn't want to be, and you nearly killed me for it.

Francisco doesn't know what to make of this--Félix is making sense to him.

FÉLIX

We understand each other, Francisco. We understand that anyone who tries to break us over their knee is walking away with a broken knee. We understand that your "brothers" are not getting the treatment, the food, the clothes you are getting because property does not deserve the treatment that people get. You're starting to see it, aren't you?

Francisco doesn't want to admit it.

FÉLIX

You understand. Now, I know you've been hesitant to accept what I've been providing for you, but I'm going to take a long shot and guess that you're getting a little hungry... and if you're anything like me, there's nothing better than a sweet dessert.

He wags the bar of chocolate in front of Francisco's face.

BEAT.

Francisco eats the chocolate out of Félix's hand.

Félix pats him on the shoulder and exits.

After a moment, Francisco moves to the bed and finishes what remains of the food.

EXT. OUIDAH COAST. DAY.

Forty-five days of sailing has brought our heroes to Ouidah, a coastal town in the Kingdom of Dahomey. The ship is anchored offshore. Nosa rows Félix and Francisco to the beach in a canoe. Francisco vigorously picks his teeth with a nail.

The canoe beaches, and Félix helps Francisco out. Nosa rows back to the ship.

FÉLIX

Welcome to the Kingdom of Dahomey--what are you doing?

FRANCISCO

You didn't tell me dried goat was so stringy.

EXT. OUIDAH. CONTINUOUS.

Francisco takes in the sights. Mud huts, poor workers, PROSTITUTES, clans of HOMELESS CHILDREN, and so on.

Francisco watches a HOMELESS GIRL (5) scutter between houses, between people, staying hidden.

A target unsuspecting: a FEMALE CORN HAWKER (30) at the roadside, marketing her wares.

The girl stalks after her prey...

The woman's arms grow weary... she lowers her basket...

The girl flies in, snipes a few, and disappears. The hawker chases after her as much as she can, cursing. The cause is already lost.

FRANCISCO

This is Dahomey?

FÉLIX

This is Ouidah, on the coast of Dahomey. I hardly ever go much further in.

EXT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE. DAY.

The nicest house in the town by far--large, brick, fenced by a palisade, and sitting on a healthy lot of property. (A big shed lies in the back--the BARRACON.)

Francisco is in awe. He and Félix enter.

INT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE. CONTINUOUS.

Francisco ogles the home: hand-crafted furniture, artwork, etc. Félix's topless house slave, ANTONIA (25), dusts a table. She is a buxom yet petite woman who might just love Félix more than herself.

FÉLIX

Meet Antonia, the best housekeeper in Dahomey. Antonia, this is Francisco.

FRANCISCO

Hello.

ANTONIA

Good evening, sir.

FÉLIX

I bought her a while back in Brazil to sell from here, but there was just something about her I couldn't let go of...

He squeezes her breasts. Antonia giggles and wriggles free.

FÉLIX

This way.

Félix escorts Francisco to

THE GUEST BEDROOM.

A decent size.

FÉLIX

This is where you'll stay. Washroom is in a separate house out back. Get comfortable, get familiar, and next week I'll show you--

FRANCISCO

Why do you live in a town like this?

FÉLIX

You don't like it?

FRANCISCO

I mean... with a house like this...

FÉLIX

Hahaha! Well, the governor of Ouidah has to live in Ouidah, doesn't he?

FRANCISCO

The governor? You're the governor?

FÉLIX

Listen. Get rested. Sometime in the next two weeks we're meeting with one of my suppliers to stock up. I want you to learn...

Antonia passes by the doorway and (rather flagrantly) bends over to pick something up. She prances off.

FRANCISCO

To learn what?

FÉLIX

Exactly.

He drifts after Antonia and shuts the door behind him. Francisco climbs into his new bed.

It's the most comfortable bed he's ever lain in.

EXT. BUSH TRAIL. DAY.

Félix leads the DOS SANTOS COMPANY (the crewmen) in a horseback caravan through the Dahomeyan bush. Francisco rides beside him.

FÉLIX

Essentially, the Dos Santos Company works as a middleman. Africans like Brazilian rum, sugar, tobacco, and so on, and Brazilians like African workers--the problem is they don't like Africa. They don't speak the languages, they can't take the heat, and they certainly can't take the malaria.

FRANCISCO

So they pay you to bring the slaves out of Africa and into Brazil.

FÉLIX

Precisely.

FRANCISCO

How come you don't mind Africa?

FÉLIX

It's home for me at this point.

FRANCISCO

Brazil will always be home for me.

FÉLIX

Give it a few decades.

The caravan meets TWO TRIBAL WARRIORS on the trail. Félix announces himself to them, and they escort the group forward.

FÉLIX

He's taking us to the chief.

EXT. FON TRIBE. DAY.

The houses are mud and grass, and the doors are open holes. WOMEN cook, CHILDREN play, MEN sit. Félix and Francisco leave their horses with the crewmen and follow the escorts inside the ROYAL HUT.

INT. ROYAL HUT. CONTINUOUS.

Seated on a throne is the CHIEF OF THE TRIBE. He is surrounded by his FOUR WIVES (16-20). Félix bows. Francisco follows suit. They only speak Fon.

FÉLIX

Greetings.

CHIEF

Greetings. Who is this tiny one beside you?

FÉLIX

He's my new employee, I'm showing him the ropes. May I see your offerings?

The chief orders them in. A parade of A DOZEN WOMEN, bound by rope, enter the hut and stand before Félix and Francisco. They are naked, beaten, and trembling. Félix walks about them, probes them, examines them.

Francisco is uncomfortable.

CHIEF

These are high-grade women. Very strong blood, wide hips. And very submissive. You won't have any problem with them.

FÉLIX

(Fon)

This one.

This one.

This one.

And this one.

CHIEF

You will love these women, Félix. Take one more! You'll make a profit one way or another, what's one more?

Félix circles about. He finds one called AZUIKE.

FÉLIX

This one, too.

The WARRIORS cut the women loose and tie his choices back together.

CHIEF

Regular price.

FÉLIX

Excuse me.

(to Francisco)

Wait here.

He steps outside.

Francisco looks at the new slaves. They avert their eyes. He looks at the warriors. They watch him like a threat. He looks at the chief. He talks to one of his wives. He looks to the ground.

Félix returns with a sack. He hands it to a WARRIOR, who escorts it to the chief.

The chief digs out a handful of COWRIE SHELLS and lets them slip through his fingers. He's happy.

CHIEF

A pleasure, as always.

FÉLIX

As always.

(to Francisco)

Take the women.

Francisco does as he's told and follows Félix outside.

EXT. FON TRIBE. CONTINUOUS.

Francisco hands the women to Nosa and mounts his horse.

FRANCISCO

You buy things with seashells around here? I thought you'd use gold.

FÉLIX

They're called "cowrie shells," and they're just as valuable as gold.

FRANCISCO

That's a little weird.

FÉLIX

Gold is just a rock, isn't it? What's the difference?

FRANCISCO

Gold is gold.

FÉLIX

Nothing in this world comes in with a power of its own, Francisco. People have to agree what has power and what doesn't.

FRANCISCO

What do you mean by "power"?

FÉLIX

I mean power like power.

FRANCISCO

What's power to a seashell?

FÉLIX

Power is the number of people who would kill for you.

INT. BARRACoon. NIGHT.

The door opens, and Félix and Francisco step into the dark. Félix holds a lamp and a rifle, Francisco holds the women. Twenty-five wooden poles are erected 5x5.

Félix leads the boy deep into the shed, a sea of darkness. Along the way, MALEVOLENT FACES OF MEN AND WOMEN steal the glow of the lantern for moments at a time, each falling back into the blackness like nothing. All sit on the plain floor, their necks leashed to the poles, their wrists and ankles manacled.

Francisco is just as terrified as the women he escorts.

FÉLIX

Here. Keep your finger by the trigger at all times.

He exchanges his rifle and lantern for the women and, one by one, affixes them to the poles.

Francisco lifts the light to get a good look around. DOZENS of slaves are crammed into the barracoon, several affixed to a pole at once. Francisco feels a thrill, he feels fear.

Félix pulls out a notepad and pencil.

FÉLIX

Row E, column 2... Four women, home-grade... May 1, 1835.

AZUIKE

(Yoruba)

Master. Please may I have some water?

FÉLIX

She says she's thirsty. Bring her some water after we leave.

FRANCISCO

Ok.

Félix takes the rifle back, and the two head out.

EXT. BARRACoon. CONTINUOUS.

Francisco YAWNS.

FÉLIX

Long day?

FRANCISCO

It's just a lot to learn.

FÉLIX

It becomes second-nature after some time. Just part of the routine.

FRANCISCO

Yeah.

FÉLIX

I'll see you in the house.

FRANCISCO

Ok.

Félix goes to the house.

INT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM. CONTINUOUS.

Antonia is knitting in bed with bifocals when Félix enters and disrobes. A lamp glows from the nightstand. Félix sighs loudly.

ANTONIA

Long day?

FÉLIX

You wouldn't believe.

The kitchen was a little sandy when I walked through. Sweep it tomorrow when you get a chance.

ANTONIA

Ok.

Félix climbs under the sheets. Antonia stops knitting. She takes off her glasses.

ANTONIA

Félix?

FÉLIX

Hm?

ANTONIA

I haven't bled this month.

FÉLIX

How long has it been?

ANTONIA

Over a week.

FÉLIX

Really?

Antonia nods. Félix pauses. She's worried. He grins.

FÉLIX

That's incredible.

ANTONIA

Really?

FÉLIX

He kisses her to prove it. She's happy.

She turns out the lamp, and they go to bed.

INT. BARRACoon. CONTINUOUS.

Francisco gives each of the new women some water from a pail.

Shortly, the other slaves start HECKLING in a myriad of languages. They JEER and SPIT--things they would never do with Félix around. Francisco, eager to leave, hurries away with the lantern and pail--

RODRIGO O.S.

So you're a slaver now.

Francisco stops. He turns and shines the light. Rodrigo squints away from it--he is in far direr straits than last we saw. Francisco approaches.

FRANCISCO

I've found a decent living for myself.

Rodrigo scoffs.

RODRIGO

God will punish you for this. You know that, right?

Francisco steps closer to Rodrigo and crouches before him. He breathes in the heat of the darkness, the hecklers, the rage and fear of the barracoon...

FRANCISCO

It looks to me like God is punishing you.

Rodrigo lunges VIOLENTLY forward--

Francisco FLINCHES--

Rodrigo is wrangled by his leash and choked. He can't rise beyond his knees.

Francisco stands.

Rodrigo is knelt before him.

Francisco walks away, leaving Rodrigo and the darkness behind.

INT. NOSA'S HOUSE. DAY.

Crack of dawn. There is little to distinguish their home from a large closet or storeroom--Nosa, Lanre, and Oluwale share a single bed against the wall (brothers? friends?)

A COCK CROWS. The men wake up, stretch, prepare for work--another day, another dollar.

TITLE: January 1836

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

FOUR TEENAGE SLAVE BOYS fill pails with sand under the supervision of Nosa, Lanre, and Oluwale. Each of the three has a rifle. Nosa is in charge.

NOSA

(Fon)

HURRY, HURRY.

The boys hoist the pails across their shoulders on carrying poles. FOUR MORE BOYS return from the sea, their pails full of seawater.

LANRE/OLUWALE

LET'S GO--RUN, RUN--

All trot back to Ouidah.

EXT. BRICKYARD. DAY.

TWO SLAVE MEN run into the MOLDING STATION with wheelbarrows of fresh, wet clay and it add to an extant pile.

TRACK ALONG THE ASSEMBLY LINE:

BRICKWORKER #1 weighs out pieces of clay and passes them down; BRICKWORKER #2 measures out water and massages the clay into dough; BRICKWORKER #3 kneads a sand slurry into the dough; BRICKWORKER #4 presses the mixture through a brick mold and lays it on a cart. He takes the cart, now full, to the

DRYING STATION,

where countless bricks are already lain out to sunbake. While he empties his cart, BRICKWORKER #5, at the other end of the station, loads his own cart with fully sunbaked bricks. He hurries to the

KILN,

where BRICKWORKER #6 pulls out the fresh bricks, dunks them in water, and carts them to the massive stack of finished bricks at the end of the brickyard.

There stands FRANCISCO, older and more assured, inspecting the work of his men. He indulges in FUFU and GROUNDNUT SOUP.

He now wears a mustache.

LANRE O.S.

KEEP IT UP, KEEP IT UP--

Here comes the beach party. Nosa is in the lead. One of the boys lags behind the others. Lanre pushes him along.

They pass Francisco. The lagging boy faints from heatstroke and spills water everywhere. The others run on.

FRANCISCO

NOSA. NOSA.

Nosa returns.

FRANCISCO

(Fon)

Water--bring water--

Nosa obeys.

Francisco takes one more bite of fufu before picking the man off the ground and leaning him against the bricks. He pats the spilled water on the boy's forehead.

Nosa returns with a gourd and dribbles water into the boy's mouth.

Francisco picks up his food and sighs loudly, disappointed.

The condescension of his sigh stokes the silent ire of Nosa... but he obediently continues feeding the boy water.

EXT. OUIDAH STREET. NIGHT.

Long day. Francisco walks alone, carrying the scraps of his soup.

A NOISE FROM THE ALLEY. Francisco checks.

A STRAY DOG gnaws on a rat--more of a ribcage than a dog. He doesn't care that Francisco watches him.

Francisco encroaches.

The dog GROWLS.

Francisco leaves his scraps of soup on the ground and walks away.

The dog sniffs it. He dines on groundnut soup for dinner.

INT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE, OFFICE. NIGHT.

Félix sits at the desk, incredibly frustrated as he balances his books. A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

FÉLIX

Enter.

FRANCISCO

Hi.

FÉLIX

How is everything?

FRANCISCO

Good, but the workers are overworked. Another heatstroke today. I think if we add a few men to the line, it would be better for all of us.

FÉLIX

(sighs)

I don't know if I have a man to spare. The goddamn British stopped another one of our ships. One hundred-plus slaves, two dozen casks of palm oil, a dozen crates of gunpowder...

FRANCISCO

That's the second ship this quarter.

FÉLIX

They think they own the sea. Just because they stopped trading slaves, everyone else has to as well.

FRANCISCO

What are you going to do?

FÉLIX

Well, the festival is in a few days, and I've already paid for that. And Antonia is still feeling ill, so I'm paying for her doctor as well. I can't afford to meet with any of my suppliers right now.

FRANCISCO

We'll have to go on a raid.

FÉLIX

I think it's our only option.

FRANCISCO

Tomorrow night?

FÉLIX

I want to get it over with before the festival.

He counts out some cowrie shells and hands them to Francisco.

FÉLIX

Go to the market tomorrow and buy enough kola nuts for the company. We don't want anyone half-asleep out there like last time.

FRANCISCO

Ok. Goodnight.

FÉLIX

Goodnight.

Francisco leaves. Félix returns to his ledger.

Shortly, he finds a letter on his desk he'd forgotten about. He opens it. Heavy news.

EXT. OUIDAH MARKET. DAY.

A KOLA HAWKER (40) in the street fills a bag with kola nuts for Francisco. He pays and walks away.

The town of Ouidah: HAWKERS hawking, BEGGARS begging, CHILDREN laughing, still naked from the beach--Francisco navigates the town like a native. (Perhaps it has become home more quickly than he anticipated.)

AN OLD MAN on the street begs for money in his language. Francisco gives him some leftover cowries. The man thanks him.

Like vultures, the other BEGGARS circle about him, cawing. Francisco pushes past as if they don't exist.

LAURINDA O.S.

Change, please? Spare change?

The language stops Francisco. He looks around for it.

Over yonder sits an underfed young woman named LAURINDA (20), begging for whatever she can get. Her homelessness has the air not of desperation, but of a mere step in some grander scheme--as if she's in control. Francisco can't resist.

As he approaches, her figure becomes clearer--as does the figure of the HALF-BLACK INFANT (< 1) in her arms, wrapped in a cloth.

LAURINDA

Spare change?

FRANCISCO

(gives her a few cowries)

You're Brazilian?

She's pleasantly surprised to meet someone she can understand.

LAURINDA

Portuguese. I've only come here recently.

FRANCISCO

It must not have gone well.

LAURINDA

Yeah, well... Change?

(She continues begging while he tries to talk to her.)

FRANCISCO

I'm Francisco.

LAURINDA

Laurinda.

FRANCISCO

How did you end up here?

LAURINDA

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

FRANCISCO

I might.

LAURINDA

My husband was a ship captain. I sailed here with him here on a business trip, and his men mutinied before we arrived and killed him. They dropped me and my son off here and left us here to rot.

FRANCISCO

How long ago?

LAURINDA

A few weeks now.

FRANCISCO

I'm sorry.

LAURINDA

What about you?

FRANCISCO

I've been here almost a year now. I manage a brickyard. The governor is renovating Ouidah, and I'm in charge of the brickwork.

LAURINDA

You work for the governor?

(he nods)

Where's all this renovation? The houses still look like shit.

FRANCISCO

It takes a long time to build houses. I can show you what we've done so far, if you want to see.

LAURINDA

Where is it?

FRANCISCO

If you follow the beach--one, one and a half kilometers that way--you'll see it. I'll be out there tomorrow morning. I can give you a tour.

LAURINDA

Ok. I'll try to make it.

A DOG BARKS. The same stray from last night runs over to Francisco and Laurinda. There's something in its mouth. Laurinda clutches her baby.

LAURINDA

Is that thing yours?

The dog arrives and drops a DEAD RAT at Francisco's feet.

LAURINDA

Ugh!

FRANCISCO

Is that a rat?

LAURINDA

Please get that dog away from here.

Francisco kicks the rat away. The dog retrieves it and brings it back.

LAURINDA

Francisco!

FRANCISCO

Ok, ok. I'll see you tomorrow, though, right?

LAURINDA

Please! Yes, I'll try.

Francisco leaves, and the dog follows.

DOWN THE ROAD,

Francisco walks. The dog follows.

Francisco stops. The dog drops the rat.

Francisco walks. The dog picks up the rat and follows.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE. CONTINUOUS.

They arrive at the gate of the brick wall that surrounds his property. Francisco unlocks the gate, enters, and locks the dog outside.

The dog drops his rat. He WHIMPERS and paws at the gate.

Francisco does not return.

The dog lies down.

The gate UNLOCKS, and the dog leaps to attention. Francisco tosses him a chicken thigh, and he devours it.

Francisco watches the dog eat, as a mother may watch an infant to her bosom...

INT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM. DAY.

Antonia lies in bed, drenched in sweat, short of breath. She coughs violently. The MOUND of her pregnancy shows through the blanket--EIGHT MONTHS. The IN-HOUSE DOCTOR (50) removes the damp cloth to feel her forehead and places it back.

DOCTOR

You are taking the medicine like I instructed?

Antonia nods. He gives her a glass of water.

DOCTOR

The fever is not reducing. Do you feel any differently after you take the medicine than before?

ANTONIA

It all feels the same.

DOCTOR

I'm going to give you a stronger dose. If this doesn't reduce the fever, then--

ANTONIA

Doctor... The baby. You're giving me so many drugs.

DOCTOR

We need to worry about you.

ANTONIA

This much medicine can't be good.

DOCTOR

Mr. Dos Santos brought me here to make sure you survive.

This is not comforting. The doctor writes a fresh prescription.

DOCTOR

Tell Mr. Dos Santos to take this to the apothecary. This should definitely knock your fever down some, and from there it will be easier to target whatever is making you feel unwell.

ANTONIA

Thank you.

He hands her the prescription and leaves.

Antonia tears it up and rubs her stomach.

EXT. PLAINS. NIGHT.

The entire company sits on horseback, chewing kola nuts, their iron clubs menacing in the lamplight. Félix sits at the head. Francisco rides up to Félix's side and spits kola rinds into the dirt, disgusted.

FRANCISCO

I hate these things. They're so bitter.

FÉLIX

Your palate is unsophisticated.

FRANCISCO

Please. You like them?

FÉLIX

I can appreciate them.

It turns out I'm going to miss the festival after all.

FRANCISCO

What happened?

FÉLIX

The king's called me to Abomey.

FRANCISCO

Do you know what for?

FÉLIX

Anyone's guess.

FRANCISCO

How long have you been working for him?

FÉLIX

I came to Dahomey when I was seventeen,
and I met him a couple months after
that, so... about eighteen years?
Eighteen years.

They chew. Francisco spits rinds.

FRANCISCO

I met an interesting girl today.

FÉLIX

Hm.

FRANCISCO

Her name is Laurinda. She was begging in
Portuguese when I went to buy the nuts.

FÉLIX

She's Brazilian?

FRANCISCO

No, from Portugal. She said her husband
was a ship captain who was killed by his
crew, and they left her and her baby to
die in Ouidah.

FÉLIX

(laughs)

You believed that? Beggars in Ouidah are
the finest liars in all of Africa. You
should know that by now.

FRANCISCO

She only spoke Portuguese, and she was
holding the baby in her arms. A half-
white baby.

FÉLIX

Did you give her money?

FRANCISCO

Yeah.

FÉLIX

There you go. She probably kidnapped that baby. Better yet, she's probably a whore who didn't have the heart to leave it in the trash.

FRANCISCO

That sounds crazier than her just telling the truth.

Félix examines Francisco.

FÉLIX

Wow. Out of every woman in West Africa, you fall in love with a beggar?

FRANCISCO

Fall in love??

FÉLIX

The only time a man is stupid enough to assume the best with a woman is when he's in love.

FRANCISCO

She's a girl with a baby!

FÉLIX

You're falling in love with your mother.

FRANCISCO

Oh, yeah, and what about your woman? That's right, you own her.

FÉLIX

I would never be with a woman I didn't own.

FRANCISCO

Why is that?

FÉLIX

Every woman I ever loved was stolen from me.

FRANCISCO

...

FÉLIX

Men greater than me were able to steal them from me. I'm afraid that if I don't own her, it might happen all over again.

Francisco doesn't know what to say. Félix spits out the last of his rinds and WHISTLES. The company rides forward.

EXT. YORUBA TRIBE. CONTINUOUS.

The ROARING, FIERY approach of the company rouses THE TRIBESMEN awake.

The company breaks into huts and attacks MEN and WOMEN alike.

A TRIBAL BOY is clubbed and killed.

A crewman is STABBED by a TRIBESMAN.

FÉLIX V.O.

(continuous)

I won't bore you with all the details of my life, Francisco, but when I left Brazil with my mother and sister, it was in fear of these men greater than me. When you are desperate, powerless--on your knees--you begin to understand certain things. The only true way to live is to become Great yourself, and the only thing you dare to love is life. Life itself becomes all you can trust. Life never rebukes you, never condemns you. Life understands that all you're trying to do is survive. There's no sin in trying to breathe.

By the end, all the tribesmen are either WRANGLLED, DEAD, or ESCAPED. The company drags its spoils along by rope through the plains, moonlight glowing off them all the same.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD IN DEVELOPMENT. DAY.

Acres of seaside property in Fabulous Ouidah!

DOZENS OF HOMEBUILDERS (20-30) lay brick in the grueling heat: some on the ground, some on ladders, some wheeling in barrows of supplies. Francisco supervises a wall in the shade of a LARGE-BRIMMED HAT, eating SUYA, when Laurinda & baby approach from behind.

LAURINDA

Francisco!

FRANCISCO

You made it! I'm so sorry, I should have you bought some. Do you want this?

LAURINDA

No, it's fine. You manage all this?

FRANCISCO

Yeah. It's nice, right?

He shows her around.

LAURINDA

You're doing this for the whole town?

FRANCISCO

As much as we can. There are so many poor and homeless in Ouidah, it wouldn't be right to just stand by and watch.

LAURINDA

That's really nice. The governor must be rich if he can hire so many people to work in the sun like this.

FRANCISCO

Hire? No, that would be far too expensive. He owns these workers.

LAURINDA

He owns them?

FRANCISCO

It's usually cheaper just to pay wages, but since Félix gets a good price, he can afford to buy them.

Laurinda is stunned.

LAURINDA

(beat)

What's wrong with you?

FRANCISCO

What?

LAURINDA

I can't believe you're a slaveholder--
you could be a slave!

FRANCISCO

I was a slave. I was Félix's slave, and
if I had to be owned by anyone it would
be him.

LAURINDA

He let you go?

FRANCISCO

I guess he saw something in me.
Otherwise, I might have been right up on
that ladder instead of that guy.

Laurinda is intrigued by his answer. Laurinda's baby
rustles.

FRANCISCO

What's his name?

LAURINDA

Jeronimo, after his father.

FRANCISCO

You're lucky to have a boy. Boys become
very attached to their mothers.

LAURINDA

Really?

FRANCISCO

I loved my mother more than anyone.

LAURINDA

What happened?

FRANCISCO

(beat)

I became a slave.

LAURINDA

And you don't care that you're doing the same thing to all these men here?

Francisco shakes his head.

FRANCISCO

Félix is different. In Brazil, my mother would feed me, clothe me, and take care of me. Then, when I came here with Félix, he fed me, clothed me, and took care of me, the same way he's doing for all these men here. If anything, we're more like children than slaves.

Laurinda laughs in his face.

FRANCISCO

What? I'm serious.

She laughs and shoves him.

LAURINDA

He's really brainwashed you if that's what you believe.

FRANCISCO

It is what I--

SOMEONE RINGS A BELL. The builders drop everything, climb down from the houses, and run off.

LAURINDA

Where's everyone going?

FRANCISCO

Come on, we're going to be late!

EXT. VODUN FESTIVAL. DAY.

The town is rife with festivities. DRUMMERS drum, MEN and WOMEN dance and drink, CHILDREN chase chickens, PERFORMERS wear masks of exaggerated features. Enter Francisco and Laurinda.

FRANCISCO

FÉLIX THROWS THE VODUN FESTIVAL EVERY YEAR. PEOPLE COME ALL THE WAY FROM GOLD COAST TO CELEBRATE.

LAURINDA

IS THIS YOUR FIRST ONE?

Francisco nods.

The crowd makes way for the first ZANGBETO, the mountainous nature spirit who spins and shakes to cleanse the town of evil. The spectators CLAP and DANCE, some so passionately as though possessed.

FRANCISCO

IT REMINDS ME OF CANDOMBLÉ FROM BACK HOME.

LAURINDA

OF WHAT?

FRANCISCO

CANDOMBLÉ IN BRAZIL. EVERYONE GETS TOGETHER TO DANCE AND PRAY.

Laurinda sees one of the homebuilders from the neighborhood getting down and dirty.

LAURINDA

WHAT IF YOUR SLAVES RUN AWAY?

FRANCISCO

AND GO WHERE? IF THEY RUN INTO THE BUSH BY THEMSELVES, THEY'LL GET CAPTURED AND END UP RIGHT BACK HERE.

FOUR MASKED DANCERS form a procession. DANCER #1 carries a GOAT; #2 carries a BOTTLE OF GIN; #3 carries a BOWL OF MILLET; #4 carries a SEALED WICKER BASKET.

They dance themselves into a ring. The DRUMMING changes.

Francisco takes a bottle of gin being passed around and drinks. He pours some into Laurinda's mouth. She swallows and shudders.

FRANCISCO

CAN YOU DANCE SAMBA?

LAURINDA

SAMBA? WHAT IS THAT?

He dances SAMBA to show her. She is impressed.

FRANCISCO

GIVE ME YOUR HANDS.

LAURINDA

THE BABY.

FRANCISCO

IT'S ALL IN YOUR HIPS, LOOK.

He shows her the moves. She laughs and sambas with the baby.

Dancers #2 & 3 dance into the center. They sprinkle the gin and millet atop the soil and return to the ring.

Dancer #1 takes his goat to the center. He SHOUTS a quick blessing and CUTS the goat's throat. He drains the blood into the gin and millet and returns to the ring.

Dancer #4 jumps into the center and prances his basket around--the DRUMMING mounts. He empties FOUR PYTHONS into the bloodied soil. The crowd dances and dances...

ESTAB. EVENING.

Jeronimo is asleep in his mother's arms. Francisco leads Laurinda out of the festivities.

FRANCISCO

He must have partied a little too hard.

LAURINDA

That was really fun, thank you.

FRANCISCO

You're a tourist here, I have to show you a good time.

LAURINDA

I should get going.

FRANCISCO

Going where?

LAURINDA

Somewhere to spend the night. An alley or something.

FRANCISCO

An alley?

LAURINDA

I mean...

FRANCISCO

Come on.

LAURINDA

Come on where?

FRANCISCO

Come on.

Exit Francisco and Laurinda. HOLD FRAME...

ENTER ANTONIA, sweaty and weak, seeking salvation from the spirits.

Three ZANGBETOS center the party, spinning and shuddering in their way.

Antonia kneels and puts her hands forward to the spirits to pray.

The Zangbetos spin and shudder.

Antonia falters in her weakness. She tries to rise again.

Zangbeto SPINS and SPINS...

Antonia faints.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE. NIGHT

The dog is lying outside Francisco's gate with a FRESH RAT. He leaps up and wags his tail when he sees Francisco approaching.

LAURINDA

Ugh! You still have that dog?

FRANCISCO

His name is Kola. He's nice.

LAURINDA

Please don't tell me you let that thing inside.

FRANCISCO

No, he stays out here. Why don't we go inside, I'll show you where you can sleep, and I'll come back out and feed him?

LAURINDA

Ok.

Kola sniffs her on her way in.

INT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

A simple brick house: the family room is connected to the kitchen, and the bedroom is at the end. Francisco leads his guest into

THE BEDROOM.

FRANCISCO

You can sleep here. I'll be in the family room.

Laurinda is touched. She doesn't know what to say.

FRANCISCO

Are you alright?

LAURINDA

Why are you giving me your bed?

FRANCISCO

It would be rude to let you sleep on the sofa.

LAURINDA

Why are you letting me into your house? What if I rob you or something?

FRANCISCO

Are you going to?

LAURINDA

Well, no.

FRANCISCO

Then there's nothing to worry about.

He leaves--

LAURINDA

Francisco.

FRANCISCO

Hm?

LAURINDA

Thank you.

FRANCISCO

Of course.

He leaves--

LAURINDA

Francisco?

FRANCISCO

Hm?

LAURINDA

Would you teach me how to samba again?

FRANCISCO

Of course.

Laurinda kisses him on the cheek.

LAURINDA

Thank you.

He leaves.

ESTAB. LATER THAT NIGHT.

- The moon is high.
- Kola is asleep beside gnawed bones.
- Francisco is asleep on the sofa.

INT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE, BEDROOM. NIGHT.

Laurinda wakes up in a cold sweat. She doesn't recognize her surroundings. She checks Jeronimo beside her--fast asleep.

She settles down and wipes her sweat.

She dresses quickly and steps out of the room.

IN THE KITCHEN,

Laurinda quietly goes through the drawers--she finds the cowries. She scoops them into a bag as quietly as she can...

IN THE BEDROOM,

all the money wrapped in her shirt, she grabs Jeronimo and scrams.

IN THE FAMILY ROOM,

trying to JINGLE as little as possible, Laurinda swipes the key from the coffee table--she almost drops the shells!

Francisco is asleep.

Exit Laurinda.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE, GATE. CONTINUOUS.

Kola lies asleep outside the gate.

The lock CLICKS--Kola snaps awake--Laurinda sees him and groans--she'd completely forgotten. She locks the gate behind her and leaves. Kola follows.

LAURINDA

Shoo! Go away!

Kola neither shoos nor goes away.

Laurinda hurries away. Kola hurries after her.

EXT. OUIDAH. NIGHT.

The PIMPS, PROSTITUTES, BOOKIES, DEALERS have come alive. Laurinda keeps her eyes low and walks on. They watch her but leave her alone.

She stops at some point, fed-up, and pushes Kola away with her foot. He steps forward.

LAURINDA

Go away!

She pushes him away again. He steps forward again. She pushes him away again--SHE DROPS ALL THE SHELLS.

TWO SHADY MEN behind her look up.

Laurinda frantically picks up her money--she struggles with the baby--the men approach--she abandons a few pieces--Kola hurries after.

The men pick up what remains of the pieces... and follow her. Laurinda looks over her shoulder and quickens.

Kola quickens.

The men quicken.

Laurinda turns, Kola turns, the men turn.

Laurinda scurries, Kola scurries, the men scurry.

Laurinda is in a panic--she might lose her life tonight. Distracted, she steps in a hole, SPRAINS her ankle, and drops all the money. She just manages to protect the baby from the fall, who CRIES at being woken.

The men approach. Laurinda scrambles backward.

Kola GROWLS and BARES TEETH.

The men slow down.

Kola BARKS and BARKS--SPIT flies forward--

The men weigh their options... and leave her alone.

Laurinda breathes another day. She scrambles in the dirt for the money. She stands and limps away, trying to soothe her baby.

Kola keeps pace right alongside her.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE. DAY.

Laurinda returns. Jeronimo has settled down. Laurinda fumbles with the key to get the gate open.

Kola lies down in his usual spot. Laurinda opens the gate.

LAURINDA

Come on. Come on!

Kola runs inside after her, and Laurinda locks the gate behind him.

EXT. VODUN PRIESTESS' HOUSE. NIGHT.

A single-room hut, unsuspecting in all regards...

INT. VODUN PRIESTESS' HOUSE. CONTINUOUS.

... on the inside, however, amulets and incense and spare animal parts lie about. THE PRIESTESS herself could be anywhere from 60-80: the deep wrinkles tell one age, the lush black hair another.

On a table, she wraps CUBES OF ICE in a cloth. She takes it across the room to the bed, where Antonia sweats into the sheets, and places it on her forehead. Antonia feebly resists.

ANTONIA

I told you, I can't stay here...

The priestess shushes her and eases her back down onto the bed. She leaves the icepack on Antonia's head and goes back across the room.

ANTONIA

It's so cold. What is this?

The priestess says something in Fon (probably not to talk) and grinds something in a mortar.

ANTONIA

I feel a lot better.

(Fon)

Thank you.

PRIESTESS

(Fon)

You're welcome.

After some grinding with the pestle, the priestess takes a machete and starts hacking at a coconut. At her age, however, the hacking amounts to little.

ANTONIA

I'm sorry, but I have to get home.

Antonia rises from the bed. The priestess hurries to ease her back down and tells her not to go anywhere. Antonia relaxes. The priestess returns to hacking.

Antonia COUGHS a terrible cough. The baby squirms around inside her.

Finally, the coconut cracks open. The priestess pours the water into a glass, and from the glass she pours a bit into the mortar. She resumes grinding.

ANTONIA

Is that some kind of medicine?

The priestess disregards her.

The icepack starts to drip. Antonia wipes the water and opens the cloth. She probes the ice curiously... licks it...

The priestess comes at last with the medicine. She SINGS a prayer as she draws a symbol on Antonia's forehead with it. She pours the rest into Antonia's mouth. Antonia gags but swallows it all. The priestess steps away.

ANTONIA

Ugh. I wish you could tell me--could tell me what was in that--

Antonia's COUGH returns in full effect. She coughs terribly and dry heaves. The priestess returns with a folded blanket and tucks it beneath Antonia's thighs.

ANTONIA

What did you--what did you give me--Ah!

Her water breaks and soaks the blanket. The priestess says soothing words and spreads Antonia's legs to deliver the child...

EXT. ABOMEY, DAHOMEY. DAY.

The capital of the kingdom.

Félix and a cavalry of crewmen have arrived. Even at a glance, it is worlds apart from the lawlessness of Ouidah: PROPER NOBLES, CLEAN MERCHANTS, CARRIAGE DRIVERS--A PLUMP CHILD chases after his FRIENDS.

One of the crewmen asks where they are.

FÉLIX

(Fon)

Abomey, the capital.

Off in the distance lies the PALACE. Félix sees it... lets the old feelings pass through him... rides on...

J-CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH, BRAZIL. FLASHBACK. NIGHT.

Sand and the sea--tall palms line the beach--FLAMES dance in the trees--

Launching forth from the trees comes A FAMILY OF THREE: a fair GIRL (18), a fair BOY (17), and their half-black MOTHER...

THE MOTHER'S STOMACH BLEEDS FROM A GUNSHOT WOUND. The children help her run.

A BLACK SAILOR (30) awaits them at a beached canoe. He takes the mother off the children's hands and helps all three into the canoe. He rows them to a ship anchored at sea.

EXT. SHIP, DECK. FLASHBACK. CONTINUOUS.

TWO MORE BLACK SAILORS on the ship pull up the canoe.

SAILOR #1

GET A BLANKET, GET A BLANKET--

They lay the mother on a blanket on the deck. Her breath is erratic.

The children kneel beside her, worried. The girl maintains composure. The boy is a sobbing mess.

BOY

I'm sorry, Mama... I'm sorry... I didn't...

MAMA

Shh, shh...

GIRL

Are you going to be ok?

MAMA

I'll be fine, just...

The first sailor brings her water and a rag to press against the wound.

BOY

It's my fault. I shouldn't have--

MAMA

Félix. Stop. You did the best you could.
I'm proud of you, you and Bella both--

She seizes with pain. The children wish there was something they could do.

GIRL (BELLA)

Mama, we made it. We're going to be free
once we get to Africa.

MAMA

yes... when we get to Africa...

The rag is soaked with blood already.

BOY (FÉLIX)

I'm sorry...

MAMA

Félix, please... let me rest...

They let her rest.

She falls asleep.

ESTAB. SUNRISE.

Félix looks out at sea alone. He is sleep-deprived. Bella comes to his side.

BELLA

Did you sleep?

FÉLIX

...

They look out at the sea, the crest of the sun over the sea...

BELLA

Look at that, how you can see the whole world at once? That's freedom. That's where we're going. This is what she wanted for us.

Félix might have heard her, he might not have heard her. All he knows is that his mother died because of him, and the sun melts into the sea more beautifully than he ever knew...

L-CUT TO:

EXT. PALACE COURTYARD. PRESENT DAY.

KING (DADA) LENOZAN, the King of Dahomey, stands in a bamboo watchtower that overlooks the palisade. His pinky ring is inordinately large. He puts a TELESCOPE to his eye and watches something. Félix climbs up behind him. Only Fon.

FÉLIX

Dada Lenozan.

LENOZAN

(hands telescope)

Here. You see that house over there, next to the fried pork seller? Look through that window.

Félix puts the telescope to his eye and looks through the window. A YOUNG COUPLE (20s) is arguing.

FÉLIX

It looks like they're fighting.

LENOZAN

They're fighting for now, but wait two minutes and they'll start fucking like animals. And then they'll go right back to fighting! They do this every day. It's incredible.

Félix hands the telescope back, and the king resumes his show.

LENOZAN

How was your journey?

FÉLIX

Fine, thank you.

LENOZAN

Good. And how is Ouidah, fine as usual?

FÉLIX

Fine as usual. People seem to be excited about the new housing.

LENOZAN

Good.

The king watches the window. Félix waits.

LENOZAN

There they go! Take a look.

FÉLIX

I hate to be too abrupt, but I'm curious why you've summoned me.

Lenozan examines him.

LENOZAN

You look terrible, Félix. Long ride?

FÉLIX

A bit.

LENOZAN

Please, settle in before we discuss business. Spend the night, rest, and we'll speak over breakfast in the morning.

FÉLIX

That sounds wonderful. Thank you, Dada.

Lenozan resumes his scoping and cackles. Félix leaves.

INT. PALACE. CONTINUOUS.

Félix strolls through familiarly.

He touches the artwork, the furniture...

He pauses outside the PRINCE'S QUARTERS. The door is open just a hair. He pushes it open...

It's still there: a certain spot on the floor, darkened by a great, viscous spill of something long ago...

He moves on.

EXT. BRICKYARD. NIGHT.

The end of the workday. The crewmen line up before Francisco to accept their wages, bags of cowries. Only Fon.

LANRE

Thank you.

FRANCISCO

You're welcome.

Lanre leaves.

OLUWALE

Thank you.

FRANCISCO

You're welcome.

Oluwale joins Lanre. They wait for Nosa.

Nosa accepts his wages in silence and leaves.

FRANCISCO

Nosa.

Nosa begrudgingly returns. Francisco picks from Nosa's shirt pocket the stub of a joint. He raises his eyebrows at Nosa.

FRANCISCO

Getting high at work?

NOSA

...

FRANCISCO

If I catch you again, I'm going to tell Félix. Is that alright with you?

NOSA

You're lucky he's watching over you.

FRANCISCO

What was that?

NOSA

You're nothing without him. Once a slave, always a slave.

Francisco shoves him.

Nosa tackles him and SLAMS him to the ground. He draws his arm back to swing--he pauses. Francisco holds his hands out to the side, flagrantly defenseless. Nosa knows the consequences of what he's about to do. He stands. Francisco stands.

FRANCISCO

You're fired, Nosa.

Nosa storms away with Lanre and Oluwale.

INT. NOSA'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Enter the three. Nosa is pissed. Oluwale rolls a joint. Lanre strips down to his underwear and jumps in bed. Only Fon.

NOSA

Did you see that smug look in his face?
He thinks he's so much better than us.
He's the one who used to be a slave.

LANRE

We know.

NOSA

What's so special about him that Félix gave him everything? We've been working here longer than anyone else, especially him.

Oluwale lights the joint.

OLUWALE

They're probably father and son, what do you expect? We don't speak whatever they speak, anyway.

(Lanre wags for him to pass)

I just lit it!

NOSA

He thinks he's better than us.

LANRE

You shouldn't have attacked him like that, though, haha.

NOSA

We deserve what he has more than he
does.

Oluwale passes the joint to Lanre and sinks into it.

OLUWALE

What are you going to do about it?

NOSA

I'm going to take what I deserve.

Lanre and Oluwale understand the implication. Lanre blows
smoke.

LANRE

I mean...

OLUWALE

Whatever you say.

Lanre passes the joint to Nosa. Nosa smokes.

INT. PALACE, BEDROOM. DAY.

The next morning. Félix is asleep in bed when the BREAKFAST
BELL IS RUNG. He rises.

IN THE DINING ROOM,

Dada Lenzan sits at the table while his eunuch servant boy,
JOJO (16), sets out cutlery and water for two.

FÉLIX

Good morning, Dada.

LENOZAN

Good morning, Félix. You slept well?

FÉLIX

Just fine.

He sits across from the king.

LENOZAN

You look much better this morning.
Brighter.

FÉLIX

A good night's sleep does a man wonders.

LENOZAN

Indeed, it does.

Jojo brings out breakfast, two steaming bowls of brown porridge.

LENOZAN

Ah, Tom Brown. I can't remember the last time I had this. It's still your favorite?

FÉLIX

I haven't had it in a long time myself. You're really taking me back.

LENOZAN

You used to take it with milk, would you like some?

FÉLIX

Please.

LENOZAN

Jojo.

Jojo leaves.

Lenozan smiles at Félix.

Félix smiles like he's supposed to.

Jojo returns with a pitcher of milk and two glasses. He fills Félix's glass. The king covers his glass with a hand. Jojo stands by the wall.

LENOZAN

Bon appétit.

They dig in. Félix glugs his milk. Lenozan sips his water. Félix has a milk mustache.

FÉLIX

So.

LENOZAN

How long have we known each other now?

FÉLIX

Eighteen years, I believe.

LENOZAN

Eighteen years! Wow. And look how you've grown, like watching a boy become a man. I suppose eighteen years is all it takes for a servant to turn governor, huh?

Jojo's ears perk up.

FÉLIX

I suppose so.

LENOZAN

Tell me the story.

FÉLIX

The story?

LENOZAN

Take me back. I want to feel some nostalgia, too. How did you get from there to here?

Félix glances at Jojo.

LENOZAN

Don't mind Jojo, he's harmless. He's been cut.

Félix clears his throat (nervous?)

FÉLIX

Well, um. I bought my freedom from you after ten years of servitude for... for what my sister did. By then, I had proven my loyalty to you, and you graced me with a position beneath the governor of Ouidah. When the governor... died unexpectedly shortly after I arrived, I happened to be in a position to succeed him. After a little while, I had earned enough money to start my trading business, and here I am. Eighteen years.

(Jojo listens intently, as if to inscribe Félix's words in his heart.)

Lenozan breathes deeply, indulges in the nostalgia. The air around him has somehow darkened.

LENOZAN

Time flies.

FÉLIX

Truly.

LENOZAN

And your loyalty to me has never wavered. I appreciate that.

FÉLIX

Thank you, Dada.

Lenozan sips his water.

LENOZAN

I'm removing you from the governor position.

FÉLIX

What?

LENOZAN

You've done a wonderful job. I remember what Ouidah was like before I put you there.

He shudders.

FÉLIX

May I ask why are you taking away my position?

LENOZAN

The French have made me a very attractive offer to occupy Ouidah. Turn it into a respectable port town, clean up its reputation. We need to make a good impression on these people. They can bring a lot of good fortune to this kingdom.

FÉLIX

But Dada... That is my town.

LENOZAN

That was your town. But now it is time to move on. The French are going to come in with their pastries and their women to make Ouidah more... fashion-forward.

FÉLIX

So I'm being tossed aside for pastries,
after all I've done--?

LENOZAN

Watch your tone... or else I may not
promote you to Chief Lands Officer of
the kingdom once the French arrive.

FÉLIX

"Chief Lands Officer"?

LENOZAN

You will work and live here at the
palace, like you used to. Manage our
property, sell and supervise our
holdings... And no one will think twice
if you happen to end up with enough land
for three Ouidahs in your personal
wealth.

FÉLIX

What am I to do with my business? I
can't run a trading company from the
interior.

LENOZAN

I don't think so either. That is why you
have thirty days to settle your affairs
before you relocate here.

Félix wants to resist... but...

FÉLIX

Yes, Dada.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE, YARD. NIGHT.

Inside the gate, Francisco sits on the ground and CLAPS a
funky rhythm for Laurinda to practice SAMBA. She does well
in spite of her bandaged ANKLE. Jeronimo lies in Francisco's
lap. Kola is sprawled out in the grass.

FRANCISCO

That's it, that's it!
Put more into your hips.
Perfect, like that!

Laurinda smiles and finishes her dance with a flair.

FRANCISCO

That's it!

LAURINDA

That's it?

FRANCISCO

That was great. How is your ankle?

LAURINDA

It's fine. It feels a lot better today.

He gets up and gives her the baby.

FRANCISCO

He's so tired.

LAURINDA

I'm so tired. That was a workout.

They head inside. SOMEONE KNOCKS ON THE GATE. Kola BARKS.

FRANCISCO

Kola.

LAURINDA

Are you expecting someone?

FRANCISCO

No.

(Fon)

WHO IS IT?

NOSA O.S.

NOSA.

FRANCISCO

Nosa?

Tension releases. Francisco opens the gate for him.

FRANCISCO

(Fon)

Is everything ok? I wasn't expecting--

Nosa PUNCHES him in the face. He enters with Lanre and Oluwale. Kola BARKS and SNARLS. Laurinda SCREAMS and clutches her baby.

Francisco orders the men to stop, tries to exert his authority--no effect.

Oluwale goes for Laurinda--

Francisco goes for Oluwale--

Lanre grabs Francisco--

Kola goes for Lanre--

Nosa grabs Kola-

Oluwale pins Laurinda to the wall--

The baby WAILS--

Kola BITES Nosa's arm--

Francisco elbows Lanre--

Nosa SLAMS Kola against the wall--

Lanre KNOCKS Francisco out--

Laurinda SCREAMS--

OLUWALE

Shh, shh...

Nosa and Lanre enter Francisco's house. Oluwale watches over Laurinda.

OLUWALE

(Fon)

Wow. You're really pretty.

You don't understand me, do you?

I'm not going to be back here for a while, so...

He kisses her spontaneously. She lurches back with nowhere to go.

Shortly, Nosa and Lanre exit the house with everything of value. Nosa WHISTLES, and Oluwale follows his comrades out.

Laurinda runs to Francisco's side (past Kola's body) to wake him.

LAURINDA

FRANCISCO! FRANCISCO!

INT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Antonia sits breastfeeding the baby.

Enter Félix, exhausted.

Antonia stands, eager.

Félix sees his daughter for the first time and freezes.

ANTONIA

Welcome home.

IN THEIR BEDROOM, LATER,

Félix lies in bed with the child on his chest. The baby explores her new terrain.

FÉLIX

You haven't named her yet?

ANTONIA

I've been waiting for you.

FÉLIX

Bella was my sister's name.

ANTONIA

That's a beautiful name.

What did the king want?

Félix would rather play with Bella.

FÉLIX

He wants me to work in the palace for him.

ANTONIA

In the palace? That's good, isn't it?

FÉLIX

The only problem is I'd have to give up my business.

ANTONIA

You'll make more money, though.

FÉLIX

An unbelievable amount.

ANTONIA

What's the problem? This is what you built the business for, isn't it? You didn't want anyone to have power over you again. Now the only person you'll have to answer to will be the king himself.

FÉLIX

What would I do with my company?

ANTONIA

Give it to Francisco. He could run it.

Félix grimaces.

ANTONIA

What, you don't trust him?

FÉLIX

I trust him, but... I don't know if he could handle it. Entrepreneurship is worlds apart from supervision.

ANTONIA

Give him a shot. Your only alternative is selling it to someone else.

Félix considers.

FÉLIX

You just want to be a woman of the palace, don't you?

ANTONIA

I mean...

FÉLIX

(laughs)

Ok. We'll invite him and that woman he's found for dinner tomorrow night and see if he's interested.

(to the baby)

Won't we? Huh?

Antonia is in love.

EXT. FRANCISCO'S HOUSE, YARD. DAY.

Francisco buries Kola in the yard with Laurinda. His eye is bruised. He starts to cry. Laurinda holds him.

FRANCISCO

I couldn't protect him.

LAURINDA

You did everything you could.

FRANCISCO

It wasn't enough. I did everything I could, and I couldn't do a thing.

LAURINDA

You're being too hard on yourself. They outnumbered us--

FRANCISCO

What if they had hurt you? I'd never forgive myself.

LAURINDA

Francisco.

FRANCISCO

I need more.

LAURINDA

You need "more"?

FRANCISCO

More power, more money, everything. If I can't keep you and João safe, then what use am I?

LAURINDA

(beat)

Who is João?

FRANCISCO

(realizes)

I meant Jeronimo. I don't know why I...

LAURINDA

What you need to do is get out of the slavery business! That was the devil in those men, you saw it. Is that what you want more of?

FRANCISCO

...

LAURINDA

Promise me you'll get out. After something like this, you need to promise me.

FRANCISCO

Ok.

A KNOCK ON THE GATE--TENSION SPIKES--

FRANCISCO

(Fon)

WHO IS IT?

ANTONIA O.S.

IT'S ANTONIA.

Francisco peeks through the door hinge before opening. Enter Antonia. (She's wearing a pair of gold bangles, but don't mention it.) She's shocked to see Francisco's injuries.

ANTONIA

Mr. Pereira, what happened?

FRANCISCO

Oh, nothing. I slipped outside.

ANTONIA

Are you sure?

FRANCISCO

What are you doing here? You should be resting, aren't you ill?

ANTONIA

I'm fine now, thank you. Félix has sent me to invite you over for dinner tonight.

FRANCISCO

Dinner? That's sounds wonderful, actually. I don't think you've met Laurinda.

ANTONIA

No, I haven't. It's nice to meet you.

LAURINDA

You, as well.

ANTONIA

So you will make it?

FRANCISCO

Of course. Are you sure you're ok?

ANTONIA

Are you sure you're ok? You look...

LAURINDA

Antonia! Is that real gold?

ANTONIA

Oh, these? Yes, Félix bought them for me in Abomey.

LAURINDA

Oh, they're beautiful. What was he doing in Abomey...?

The women chit-chat.

Francisco still doesn't know why he said João.

INT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE, KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Félix sears the fat cap on the fourth of FOUR RIB STEAKS. The rib bones jut out carnally. A pot of water boils to the side. Bella is on Félix's back in a blanket. A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

ANTONIA O.S.

I'LL GET IT.

Antonia appears--she looks stunning: dress, makeup, everything. She opens for Francisco, Laurinda, and Jeronimo, dressed in their finest. All hug. Francisco takes Laurinda to the kitchen.

FRANCISCO

Good evening, Félix.

FÉLIX

Good evening. I'm glad you could make it. Ah, this must be the lovely lady you keep talking about.

FRANCISCO

Her name is Laurinda. Laurinda, this is Félix, the governor of Ouidah.

Laurinda is surprised--she didn't expect Félix to look this way.

LAURINDA

Nice to meet you.

FÉLIX

Equally.

Laurinda follows Antonia to the family room to put her baby down. Francisco watches Félix cook.

FÉLIX

What happened to your face?

FRANCISCO

I fell the other day. It smells incredible.

FÉLIX

Butter-basted rib steaks with boiled potatoes, palm wine, and a pound cake for dessert.

FRANCISCO

I didn't know you could cook. I figured you'd just die without Antonia.

ANTONIA

(laughs)

Please.

Félix winks at Francisco. Laurinda is looking for the baby.

LAURINDA

Where is she, where is she?

Laurinda finally finds her on Félix's back.

LAURINDA

Oh my God, she's precious.

ANTONIA

Do you want to hold her?

LAURINDA

Do I!

Félix undoes the blanket, and Laurinda takes her. She cuddles the baby like her own.

LAURINDA

She's so sweet. How has she been so far?

ANTONIA

Like an angel. And I'll tell you, there is no man I would rather share a child with than Félix. If every woman could see what he's like in private, they would just kill for him.

LAURINDA

Like what, what does he do?

ANTONIA

This morning, for example. I woke up before him to cook and clean, and I was still working when he left the house. I thought he had gone straight to work, but he came back in a few minutes later with a pot of water for me to soak my feet in and take a break. He'd built a fire out in the yard to boil the water because I was already using the stove!

LAURINDA

Félix, you did that? That's so sweet.

He waves it off. Francisco peeks into the boiling water.

FRANCISCO

I hope it wasn't the same pot you're using for the potatoes.

All laugh.

SERIES OF SHOTS. DINNER.

- Laughter, conversation, family...
- Juicy steaks, tender potatoes...
- Francisco pours Laurinda palm wine in spite of her modesty...
- The babies get to know each other in a basinet...
- Antonia brings the cake...

INT. DINING AREA. CONTINUOUS.

The last crumbs of cake are licked up from plates. Mouths are wiped, belts are loosened.

LAURINDA

Antonia, that cake was amazing.

ANTONIA

Thank you.

FRANCISCO

Everything was amazing. Félix, I don't know why you don't cook more often.

FÉLIX

Consider yourself lucky. I only cook for the ones I love the most.

LAURINDA

Oh, am I part of that group already?

FÉLIX

So long as you're with Francisco, you're a valued member.

Francisco goes to pour himself more wine.

FRANCISCO

I think we're out of palm wine.

FÉLIX

I have some in my office. Come with me, Francisco.

INSIDE HIS OFFICE,

Félix grabs a fresh bottle and pops it open.

FÉLIX

It's good to let it breathe for a moment. In the meantime, why don't you tell me what really happened to your face?

FRANCISCO

(beat)

It was Nosa.

FÉLIX

Nosa? This happened at the brickyard?

FRANCISCO

He came to my house with Lanre and the other one, and they attacked me and Laurinda. They killed my dog.

FÉLIX

I'm assuming he's skipped town, then.

FRANCISCO

He'd better have, or else I'd kill him.

FÉLIX

I'm sorry about that. I hope I can lift your mood just a little bit.

FRANCISCO

What do you mean?

FÉLIX

I'm at a turning point, Francisco, and I'll only know in hindsight whether it's for the worse or for the better.

FRANCISCO

What is it?

FÉLIX

The king has offered me the position of Chief Lands Officer for the kingdom. I'm going to be working in the palace.

FRANCISCO

That's incredible! Congratulations.

FÉLIX

There are two problems, however. One is that the king has sold Ouidah to the French, and as soon as they get here, the slave trade is over.

FRANCISCO

That's an easy fix. We'll just cut them in, and they'll leave us alone.

FÉLIX

That was the easy problem. The other is that I can't run a shipping business from the interior.

FRANCISCO

You're going to have to sell it, huh.

FÉLIX

That's right.

FRANCISCO

I mean... I can run it, if you want.

FÉLIX

(deep breath)

I've been thinking about this since yesterday, and the conclusion I came to seemed so obvious once I'd reached it. This business changed when you became a part of it, Francisco. You reminded me, after all these years, why I started this business in the first place. I wanted to make something worthy of a person like you. I admire you, Francisco, and... I don't know, I see you as my son. As far as I'm concerned, this business is your birthright. I wouldn't want anyone else to have it.

Francisco pinches the tears away. Félix goes into a drawer in his desk and pulls a brick.

FÉLIX

This is the first brick I fired at the brickyard.

Francisco accepts it. He hugs Félix.

FRANCISCO

Thank you.

IN THE LIVING ROOM,

Laurinda gives Antonia baby advice.

LAURINDA

You know, sometimes she'll cry, and when you go over, she won't be soiled, she won't be hungry... Children just want attention a lot of the time.

ANTONIA

I can tell already.

LAURINDA

But there's nothing wrong with that. Everyone needs a little attention.

ANTONIA

I get so excited when she cries, though, because I think she's hungry--and I need to get this milk out of me! I've started just milking myself into a glass and pouring it out.

LAURINDA

You pour it out? You can drink it, cook with it--

ANTONIA

Ugh! Am I a cannibal?

LAURINDA

Oh, it's so sweet! I'm not surprised that babies like it so much.

ANTONIA

You are disgusting, haha.

LAURINDA

If it's sweet, I'm eating it, I don't care, hehe.

Enter Félix and Francisco. Laurinda notices the tears.

LAURINDA

What's wrong?

FRANCISCO

Félix just asked me to take charge of his company.

LAURINDA

He gave you his company?

FRANCISCO

He's still going to own it, but I'm going to be in charge while he works in the capital. The king just named him Chief... Chief...

FÉLIX

Lands Officer.

FRANCISCO

Chief Lands Officer for the whole kingdom, and he can't run a trading business from the capital.

LAURINDA

(beat)

You promised me you would get out of slave trading.

News to Félix.

FRANCISCO

I will. I promise. But it will take some time. I can't just drop it all at once.

LAURINDA

Francisco, look at your face. Your employee did this to you--imagine what the slaves would do!

FRANCISCO

Laurinda, it's not like I can put my expenses on hold until I find something new. Life doesn't pay for itself.

Laurinda grabs her baby.

FRANCISCO

Where are you going?

LAURINDA

I'm leaving.

FRANCISCO

Wait. We'll go home together.

LAURINDA

I'm not going back to your house. I'd rather sleep in the street again than live with a liar and a slaveholder!

FRANCISCO

Laurinda!

FÉLIX

Laurinda, wait. You're being hasty. Just sit down, and we can talk.

LAURINDA

You know what? You're both sick. I thought you could change, Francisco. I thought you were just young and misguided, but you really enjoy this.

FRANCISCO

It's not like that--

LAURINDA

If you don't turn down his offer, you will never see me again.

FRANCISCO

Just sit down, and we can talk.

He takes her by the arm.

LAURINDA

Let me go--let me go--the baby!

Félix is annoyed. Antonia is worried.

FRANCISCO

Stop acting crazy. Let's talk.

LAURINDA

What is there to talk about? Either you're a slaveholder or you're not. Pick one.

FRANCISCO

I'm not going to pick between you and Félix.

FÉLIX

I told you, Francisco, this whore is nothing but trouble.

LAURINDA

Oh, did he? It's settled then.

She goes for the door.

FRANCISCO

Félix, please. Laurinda!

LAURINDA

I'm just some dirty whore, you heard him. Go and listen to your master.

FRANCISCO

Stop. You're forcing me to make an impossible choice.

FÉLIX

Impossible? I'm handing you one of the best jobs on the west coast, and you're letting some prostitute whisper in your ear?

FRANCISCO

SHUT UP, FÉLIX--

FÉLIX

My God, you really fell for her hard.

FRANCISCO

Yeah, and what if I have?

Laurinda FREEZES--has he?

FÉLIX

SHE IS A WHORE. You're turning down my offer to suck on this beggar's breast like she's your mother? I promise you, Francisco, this woman--

Francisco SWINGS the brick into Félix's head. He pounces on top and swings relentlessly.

ANTONIA

FÉLIX!

She puts Bella on the sofa and hurries to Félix. She shoves Francisco aside. Blood gushes from Félix's face.

Laurinda is shocked but silent.

ANTONIA

Félix, honey... Please...

Antonia grabs a nearby blanket to pressure the bleeding. The life slowly seeps out of him.

LAURINDA

Antonia...

All watch as she struggles to keep Félix alive.

ANTONIA

Félix... Please...

He falls limp. Antonia falls apart.

ANTONIA

(a whimper, to Francisco)

What is wrong with you? Is this how you
treat people who love you? He loved you!

Laurinda goes to her side.

LAURINDA

Antonia, don't you understand what's
happened? You're free now. You can do
anything you want. Nobody owns you
anymore.

Antonia shoves her, furious.

ANTONIA

Free? What you mean "free"? I live
here--this is the father of my child!

LAURINDA

Antonia--

ANTONIA

Get away from me!

Antonia takes her baby, escapes to the master bedroom, and
locks the door. Laurinda goes to Francisco, who is ashamed
of himself.

LAURINDA

Are you ok?

FRANCISCO

Help me bury him.

EXT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE. CONTINUOUS.

They carry the body through the dark and lay it on the
ground.

They dig a grave in the mud with pails.

They don't speak for a long time.

FRANCISCO

I know what you did that night. Your
first night at home.

LAURINDA

You know?

I'm sorry.

FRANCISCO

I don't know why you came back, but you did. That's the part I care about.

He nods. They dig.

LAURINDA

Did you mean what you said in there?
Just now.

FRANCISCO

I wouldn't have said it if I didn't mean it.

They dig.

LAURINDA

Francisco?

FRANCISCO

Yes?

LAURINDA

Let's set them free.

FRANCISCO

The slaves? You're joking. Laurinda, I'm not going to throw away everything Félix has worked for after...

Laurinda goes to him and takes his hands.

LAURINDA

Let's set them all free tonight.

FRANCISCO

Did you hear what I just said? If anything, I'm going to sell them as quickly as I can and leave it at that.

Laurinda looks at him. She drops to her knees and works at his waistband.

FRANCISCO

What are you doing?

LAURINDA

Nothing.

She pulls his pants down. Francisco pulls them back up.

FRANCISCO

What are you doing?

LAURINDA

Nothing.

She pulls his pants down. Francisco pushes her away and pulls them up.

FRANCISCO

Stop!

She returns to his waistband, pulls his pants down, and puts his penis in her mouth.

Knelt before him in the moonlight, she fellates him.

Francisco doesn't push her away.

INT/EXT. BARRACOON. DAWN.

CUE MUSIC.

The door opens--light spills over sleepy, worn FACES--MEN, WOMEN, BOYS, GIRLS--each awakens in his or her own time and looks into the light--the RATTLING OF CHAINS rouses OTHERS--OTHERS rouse OTHERS--the silhouettes of two SAVIORS stand in the doorway--a lamp breaks light over hopeless captivity--

Francisco pulls a set of keys from his pocket. He looks to Laurinda. He wants to know he's doing the right thing.

She silently affirms. They enter the barracoon.

THE FIRST MAN THEY APPROACH (25) is terrified. He reels back.

Francisco approaches slowly. He unlocks the manacles.

The man can't believe his fortune. He runs out the door and doesn't look back. The nearby slaves see this--their hearts quicken. They all start CHIRPING to be loosed next.

One by one, Laurinda and Francisco free the captives of the barracoon in a halo of lamplight. Some break into tears, some gush with gratitude, most simply dart into the night, never to be captured again...

THE FINAL SLAVE, a girl not more than 12, massages her wrists once the manacles have fallen. She leaps forward and embraces her liberators, both at once.

HER PARENTS (30) stand nearby. The girl runs to them and hugs them next. They exit the barracoon together.

Laurinda kisses Francisco on the cheek, and he leads her outside.

EXT. BARRACoon. CONTINUOUS.

Francisco locks the door behind them. Julia holds the lamp.

FRANCISCO

I hope this makes everything right.

LAURINDA

It does.

They leave. Francisco takes a BULLET to the heart and falls.

LAURINDA

FRANCISCO!

Laurinda drops to his side and puts the lantern down. Francisco bleeds out. Laurinda looks up.

There stands Antonia, reloading.

LAURINDA

Antonia, what have you done?? Francisco!

He is dead.

ANTONIA

First, you murder Félix in his own home. Now, you destroy his life's work?

LAURINDA

His life's work was evil!

ANTONIA

That's not for you to judge.

LAURINDA

Francisco!

Antonia steps forward, the rifle aimed at Laurinda's head. Laurinda puts her hands together and crawls on her knees.

LAURINDA

Antonia... Please... I'm sorry.

ANTONIA

Stand.

Antonia is crying. Laurinda stands.

ANTONIA

Walk.

LAURINDA

Walk where?

Antonia presses forward. Laurinda steps back.

ANTONIA

Inside.

Laurinda walks backwards into the barracoon. Antonia picks up the lamp on the way in.

INT. BARRACOOON. CONTINUOUS.

Antonia pushes her deep into the blackness to a vacant post at the end. Two pairs of manacles sit at its foot beside the cuff of the leash.

ANTONIA

Put them on your ankles.

LAURINDA

Antonia, please.

ANTONIA

If you make me ask again, you're going to be in trouble.

LAURINDA

Antonia, this is wrong!

Antonia jabs her in the face with the butt of the rifle.

ANTONIA

PUT THEM ON YOUR ANKLES.

Laurinda, bleeding from her nose and crying, fastens a pair of manacles to her ankles.

ANTONIA

Now your wrists.

Laurinda does as she's told. Antonia approaches warily.

ANTONIA

If you try anything while I'm next to you, I swear...

She crouches before Laurinda and takes the leash. She struggles to work it while holding the rifle. She sets down the rifle to use both hands.

(Her bangles glisten in the lamplight.)

Laurinda must fight now, she knows, if she is to fight at all. Antonia has opened a sliver of opportunity, and if it is allowed to seal...

Antonia grunts and struggles with the manacle.

The rifle lies complacent on the floor.

The manacle CLICKS shut. Antonia takes her rifle, takes the lamp, and rises.

LAURINDA

Antonia... My baby... Jeronimo...

Antonia looks confused.

ANTONIA

Don't you understand what's happened...?
He's free now.

LAURINDA

Antonia! ANTONIA!

The door of the barracoon slams shut.

LAURINDA

ANTONIA!

EXT. BARRACOOON. CONTINUOUS.

With the rifle in her armpit and the lantern looped around her elbow, Antonia drags Francisco's heavy body, little by little, to

FÉLIX'S OPEN GRAVE.

Félix's body lies in the hole, half-buried. Two pails sit abandoned on a mound of soil.

Antonia throws Francisco's body in the hole and finishes the job.

INT. FÉLIX'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Both infants WAIL for attention. Enter Antonia, coated in mud and filth. She sets down her rifle and lantern and hurries to the children.

ANTONIA

Shh, it's ok, it's ok... Mama's here...

She takes them both to the sofa with her filthy hands and puts them to her breasts to feed.

ANTONIA

Mama's here... Shh... I'm right here...
I'm right here...

FOR MY LOVED ONES