

THE SYCOPHANT

a television play by

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New York City
Late Summer 2025

FIRST ACT

LIGHTS AND TRAVELING GLARE.

INTERVIEWER (V.O)

Focus. Your focus will keep you
alive.

DARKNESS.

After a moment, a voice in the darkness. A woman's voice. It
might be tape from an interview.

VOICE (V.O.)

So, when he's twenty-eight, Africa
goes to Europe.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL, CUEVA DEL CASTILLO, PUENTE VIESGO,
CANTABRIA

A hand shades the red flash indicator of a small plastic film
camera. Slowly, the flash charges. The dot glows like a
fanned ember. A man, AFRICA (28), raises the camera to his
eye and takes a photograph, leaning over a railing to aim
down into a pit.

VOICE

He's alone. He doesn't *exactly* have
a job, but he has something to do.
There's a reason he's there.

Africa stands on a catwalk in the enclosed area around the
cave entrance. A walkway of scaffolding, currently roped off,
leads to the cave entrance, a metal door set in the rock.
Other tourists are assembling. Two of them, a young couple,
are fighting. The man grips the woman's hand by the wrist and
whispers something to her fiercely. Africa watches and looks
away.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Well, there's his stated goal, if
you want to call it that--the
famous passage from the diaries,
that comes a little later--and then
there are reasons we might
attribute based on what we've found
out since. We know, for example, he
had some sort of covert business,
probably in Corsica. We know there
was a woman he wanted to see.

A TOUR GUIDE (40, robotic enthusiasm) arrives. She moves the rope to the side and gestures people through, counting them. Africa is first in line. Five others follow, then she stops the next person with an apologetic smile, replacing the rope and edging past the tour group to the front.

VOICE (CONT'D)

And there were the caves.

The tour guide walks backwards with impossible grace up the complicated scaffolding stairs and bridge toward the door at the cave's entrance.

TOUR GUIDE

(in Spanish)

The Cueva de El Castillo is the largest of the caves at the complex here. For your safety and mine, I ask you to keep your voice down inside, stay on the path, and please to take no photos. Questions?

No one asks any questions. Africa looks like he may not have understood very well. Tour guide nods, satisfied, and opens the door. They file inside.

VOICE

Right, the caves. Why the caves? I'm going to disappoint: I don't know. We will probably never know for sure. Obviously there are ideas--I will not call them "theories," but ideas, natural ideas, natural given ... the rest. Your audience will be familiar, I think, already.

INT. CUEVA DEL CASTILLO

Inside it is very dark. Only the tour guide is permitted a flash light, and it is not an especially strong one. She gestures with the beam, shaking it sometimes. A laser pointer hangs on a lanyard around her neck. The metal walkways inside are studded with very dim blue lights.

VOICE

I don't like to guess. Some things must be private, even in public stories.

(MORE)

VOICE (CONT'D)

Sometimes a person, especially a young person with a proud streak like Africa, will do something just to show off their privacy.

INT. KITCHEN

A photograph of a woman with black hair, about thirty. She wears sunglasses and a loose striped dress. She might be striking. The photograph lies on a white kitchen tabletop, seen from above. Someone's fingers pin it at the edge.

VOICE

Here's a photograph of me when I was about his age then, the age he went to see those caves. Or maybe I'm a little older. Doesn't matter.

INT. CUEVA DEL CASTILLO

The tour guide points holds out her hand and points to something with her flashlight. She mimes blowing on her hand while explaining something.

VOICE

I think I was like him, more than I knew then. It might be part of what drew me to him--the memory of a quality. A way I used to be. Young-as-the-night. Hah!

At the end of the guide's flash beam are handprints on the rock. Some prints in red, other negatives in white. Together they form a field of hands at full extension, each at its own tilt. Like the heads of sunflowers. Africa looks on.

AFRICA

(to self)

Five.

The tour continues to another chamber and stops by a smooth, bulging overhang in the rock. Everyone presses against the other wall to try and look at it from any distance.

TOUR GUIDE

Look. What does anyone see?

The rock is so thoroughly cross-hatched with erosion marks, cleavages, and shades from varied strata that it is hard to see any figure there. The light scans slowly back and forth across the textured surface.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

When he first explored this cave, Alcalde del Rio only noticed and recorded about half of the figures actually present. One day in town, speaking with some local children about the cave, they asked him which were his favorites, and did he like the bull. The bull? He asked. What bull?

VOICE

The story--which Africa records in his journal, for whatever reason, probably, ha!, to be private about why--is that the cave explorers needed children to come with them and point out the animals.

Africa squints at the wall. He can't make it out.

TOUR GUIDE

Once you see it, you see it. You can learn to see it.
(indicating with laser pointer)
Here's the back.

There are oohs and aahs from the group. Even the abusive boyfriend lets one slip. Africa tilts his head, still squinting.

AFRICA

Um--

TOUR GUIDE

The oldest of the animal figures here are more than forty thousand years old.

The tour guide is walking again, leading the group away.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

Others range to six thousand years ago, so there are different ... active periods. Often, like here--

She points with the flashlight and indicates within the illuminated area with a laser.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

--you have two figures overlapping, drawn on top of each other.

(MORE)

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

These are separated by more than
twenty-thousand years.

These figures are traced in dark red ocher and easier to make
out. Africa holds up his camera.

TOUR GUIDE (CONT'D)

Notice the opposition-motif where--

AFRICA

(in broken spanish)

One can take photographs?

TOUR GUIDE

No.

AFRICA

Ah. Why?

TOUR GUIDE

We already took photographs of
these. Very good ones. There is a
book you can purchase.

Africa nods. They continue along in the cave. The young
couple are arm in arm now, whispering to each other and
pointing out features of the paintings.

VOICE

The caves he visits are in
Cantabria along the northern coast
of Spain. He's staying in Bilbao.
That much is certain.

INTERVIEWER (ALSO V.O., SAME SETTING
AS VOICE)

How many times did he visit the
caves?

VOICE

We don't know. Maybe it was just
once. If so, it's strange he wrote
about it in the journal,
considering how little else ended
up in there. Some people will tell
you he went every day during his
stay; saw every cave in Cantabria
two times, three times. I mean--
maybe. We know how much it impacted
him. But I've never seen any
evidence for that.

Africa stops for a while to look at a trio of running deer.
Two are solid, one is a kind of broken outline.

The group moves on but a STRANGER, an older woman, has stopped with him.

STRANGER
(in French-accented
Spanish)
Don't they look so *fresh*?

AFRICA
Yes. I think the artist is hiding
around here somewhere.

STRANGER
As a tourist perhaps.

AFRICA
We can look to see who's got red
fingers.

STRANGER
Ha!

AFRICA
Do you speak English?

STRANGER
(in heavily accented
English)
Not completely well. Do you speak
French?

AFRICA
(in English)
Not if I can avoid it.

STRANGER
An American.

AFRICA
If ever there was one.

STRANGER
Don't speak that confusing way.
(in French)
You all speak terrible French, do
you know that?

AFRICA
Oui.

STRANGER
(henceforth in French)
Ah, you prove me wrong! You are not
married?

Africa raises an eyebrow. He holds out his hand to reveal no ring. She turns them over.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
Good. And you are not the artist
either.

AFRICA
Non.

STRANGER
What are you here for?

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT, OUTSIDE THE CAVE AND ENTRANCE BUILDINGS

The stranger leans on her car, posing for Africa. He has a book from the gift shop under his arm. The stranger laughs.

AFRICA
Stop laughing. Scowl. There's
nothing funny about a photograph.

STRANGER
I don't scowl. Not for free, hah!

He takes the photo of her laughing. She gets in her car.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
You'll be alright?

Africa nods. She winks to him. He waves as she drives off.

EXT. PATH DOWN FROM CAVES TOWARD TOWN, A LITTLE LATER

Africa walks alone on the winding path down from the caves toward the small town of Puente Viesgo. He stops and looks out at the green valley, dotted with small white houses and falling gently towards the low but rushing river Pas. In the distance some sheep graze.

VOICE
He's been in Spain already. Years
before. Iberia is hopeless.
Desolation, struggle. I found it--I
lived in Portugal for years--I
found it, from an American
perspective, gutting. Not dreary,
like so much of Europe, but very
difficult.

As he continues down the path, coming now to a paved road, a group of cows together with a bull stare back at him from some roadside pasture. They stand very close to the fence. He goes closer and looks a while at the bull. He takes a photo and advances the film, scrolling the plastic wheel.

VOICE (CONT'D)

I was working at a cancer institute in Braga. Only writing copy, though, so I can't take any credit--ha! there was so little to go around back then. I think they would have hung me. The scientists, the men--all men--I wrote for.

Farther still, there are some goats up on a hill, also in an enclosure. Their horns are terribly twisted. They rub them against an equally gnarled olive tree. Africa takes a photo.

VOICE (CONT'D)

If you looked on a map, as I did, Braga appears basically on the coast.

INT. KITCHEN

A map of the Iberian peninsula lies on the table. Bilbao has been circled with red sharpie. A dotted line leads east-south-east from there off the map. There is a star at Puente Viesgo. Valladolid and Granada are circled too. Right now a finger is pointing out Braga in Portugal, just inland.

VOICE

Not so.

Underneath this map and sticking partially out is a LIDAR "photograph" of a cave.

EXT. ENTERING TOWN

Africa wanders into the small town and looks around. He spies a bakery.

VOICE

If you wanted a beach, that is, if you had any human feeling and any sense at all that you were in charge of your own time--those are real provisos for scientist types--you could take the bus or train west to the small coast towns or southwest to Porto.

INT. KITCHEN

A photo of a woman and a man in a white-washed coastal town. The man wears a polo shirt. He is a little older, balding from the front. His arm is around the woman. He smiles broad and easy; she wears a look of pleased annoyance.

VOICE

My husband and I.

INT. BAKERY

The front room of the bakery has no counter. There is a chair in one corner and a basket of pale, flattish baguettes on the floor near the chair. A few seconds after Africa comes in a BAKER comes out from the kitchen and eyes him. Africa points to the bread.

AFRICA

How much?

The baker raises an eyebrow, surprised.

BAKER

Two euro.

AFRICA

It's fresh?

BAKER

Sure. It's fresh bread.

EXT. BRIDGE, PUENTE VIESGO

Africa snaps off the end of the stale loaf and shoves the rest into his pack. He has stopped in the middle of the bridge to take a look at the water. He leans out over, trying to see how to get down.

Eventually, he finds his way down and begins along a path upstream, gnawing at the bread end.

EXT. RIVERSIDE PATH

Africa picks his way along the rocky path. He is split between troubled thoughts and curiosity about his environs. The rock along the river is bleached white and smooth. Africa takes some photos. He touches the rock. It shines like marble when wet. The water has carved it into funny sculptural forms, especially where the course has to bend a little or splits before rejoining.

Up ahead, at one such confluence, there is a small building on stilts. Its walls are concrete and marked with graffiti. A sheet of slanted metal serves as a roof. Africa takes a picture and heads for it.

EXT. BUILDING ALONG RIVER

It must be a public building. The path goes right up to it. Africa climbs the rusted metal stairs.

AFRICA

Hello?

At the top, maybe thirty feet up, Africa can see that the building is open at one wall--the one facing the river. He tosses his pack down by the railing. Perhaps it is some kind of lookout, or was once. He rounds the corner to look inside.

It is a single concrete chamber. There are no windows, but strong indirect midday light illuminates it from the open wall. The walls inside are covered in highly symbolic graffiti. The remains of a fire, maybe from a night or two ago, sit in the middle of the floor. Ash and litter lie inches thick.

A concrete bench follows the three walls of the chamber. Lying on it along the back wall is a person in a long dirty coat with the hood up.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Oh, sorry.

The person does not stir. Africa hesitates.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Hello?

No response. Africa creeps closer.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

He gently jostles the figure. No response.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

God.

Africa maneuvers the body so that he can see the face. It is the face of a woman about his age. Pieces of ordinary string have been tied around her head. The knots dig slightly into her skin. He sits her up a little.

Africa goes to his pack, gets out his penknife. He returns to the body and cuts away these strings, putting most of them in his pocket. A few bits fall into the ashes on the floor. The strings have left red stripes on her face. He shakes his head, backs up and puts his pack on.

He hesitates a long moment, then takes out his camera. Hesitates again. Looks down the river, then back at the body. Takes a photo of it. Then turns on flash, waits. Shades the indicator. And takes another, closer, of the face.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT, BILBAO, THAT EVENING.

MARA (60, older woman of uncertain origin, letting out rooms in her apartment) carries a tray of tea from the small kitchen into the living/dining area, where PRATTON (30s, an American engineer, another guest) and AURAL (30s, another guest, the wife of Pratton) sit together on a couch. Aural writes in her notebook while Pratton looks through the books. Mara sets tea down in front of them. The tea service is all stained imitation porcelain in blue and white. Chinoiserie, chips and cracks, and some kind of hieroglyphic writing.

Past Aural and Pratton and through the open balcony doors, sits Africa, watching the ocean and the boardwalk along it. He is turning his camera over in his hands, fidgeting. On the table is the book with reproductions of the cave paintings. Mara brings him a cup of milky tea.

AFRICA

Thank you.

MARA

You're welcome. Sugar?

AFRICA

No thank you.

She starts to leave. He taps the camera against his palm like a pack of cigarettes.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Actually, sorry--Miss Mara? I'll have some sugar.

She comes back and puts the sugar bowl down on the table.

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT, BILBAO, LATER.

Africa, Mara, Pratton, and Aural sit around the table for dinner. The doors to the balcony are still open, though night has fallen. The sea is dark.

Africa still looks out at it, not paying close attention to the conversation of the other guests.

PRATTON

A dam is a dam. That's what I told them. I can draw up plans in a week. Maybe not a week, but still. It's a wall, for god's sake. You don't need to be an engineer to know how to make a nice strong wall! But if you want plans for some reason, fine. A week, two weeks. That's my end of the bargain. The rest is on you guys, that's what I told them.

MARA

Yes, yes.

AURAL

I'm telling you, they don't care about the cost. They have government money. They want to spend the money.

PRATTON

Well, money is fine. You saw it, honey, we were out there today. The river is plenty strong--

AFRICA

Where is this again?

PRATTON

Oh, along the coast, east from here. Up toward France.

AFRICA

Basque?

PRATTON

(with a blank stare)
Maybe. Not sure.

AFRICA

But anyway, sorry.

PRATTON

Right: the river is so strong, they'll make their money back from the plant. The problem is the floodplain.

Mara nods peacefully.

AURAL

There weren't any houses down there though. It was so steep. I mean, I don't know--I think even the river probably just fell down there one day and couldn't get back out! Ha!

Mara politely chuckles and nods. Africa is watching a slow ferry out on the water.

PRATTON

Well. Yes. That's what I mean-- they'll have to build so high, given the flow rate--

The doorbell buzzes violently. Mara screams, then collects herself.

MARA

Oh, I'm sorry.

She goes to the door, buzzes whoever in after a brief exchange of clicks over the intercom. She returns to her seat.

MARA (CONT'D)

My granddaughter. I'm sorry.

LOW (20s, quiet, jumpy, looks like she's been crying) comes in. She nods shyly to the guests.

LOW

Good evening.

They mumble good evenings.

MARA

Won't you sit, Low?

Low winces. She sits for a second, then gets up.

LOW

(to Mara)

Could you help me find a plate?

Low heads to the kitchen and Mara follows. Through the doorway we can see a tense exchange. Mara is shaking her head.

AURAL

What did you get up to today?

AFRICA

Walked along the water. Looking for jellyfish.

AURAL

I like jellyfish. I always wanted to eat them, growing up.

PRATTON

(smug)

Now *that's* a foolish idea.

AURAL

(annoyed)

I was a child.

PRATTON

Don't worry, I forgive you.

AFRICA

Some places they eat jellyfish. Islands.

PRATTON

(laughs)

Castaways, maybe.

AFRICA

Islanders.

PRATTON

"Children among men," islanders.

AURAL

Pratton...

PRATTON

Sorry, but if there's one thing you'll learn in the navy--

Mara reenters as Low leaves, head down.

MARA

Excuse me. I have to interrupt. Mr. Africa, there's a problem.

Africa looks up concerned.

MARA (CONT'D)

One of Low's ... *friends* ... needs a place to stay tonight. He will have to share the bed with you.

AFRICA

What? Are--

MARA

It's not ideal, I understand. But it is an emergency.

AFRICA

What? No, I'm sorry. I paid for my own room. Why should I ... that's insane! I'm not sharing a bed with a stranger!

MARA

I've promised my daughter. She says he will be gone by tomorrow night.

AFRICA

Well, so will I! You can have my promise too! What the--what the hell is this? What sort of a place is this?

MARA

This is my home. I can do what I like with it.

AFRICA

Make him sleep on the couch! Or in your bed!

MARA

I have made a promise.

Africa gets up, outraged.

AFRICA

Who is this person anyhow?

MARA

A criminal.

AFRICA

A *criminal*?

MARA

There is no other word.

AFRICA

No. No! I can't. I can't! Sleep, how could I relax ... next to some ... what sort of criminal?

Mara shrugs.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

You don't even know. Brilliant.
Maybe he is a thief. A murderer. A
spy.

MARA

Nothing so romantic.

PRATTON

It's not illegal to be a spy.

Africa paces.

AURAL

(to Pratton)
It definitely is.

AFRICA

Why doesn't he stay in your
room?

PRATTON

Honey, if the literal
government engages you to do
something--

MARA

There is no argument.

AURAL

Well, it's not illegal there
but it must be illegal
wherever you're going to go
do it!

Africa throws his hands in the air. Goes to sit on the small
loveseat.

PRATTON

You would still know you're
innocent. By the laws of your own
country.

AURAL

But not if the situation were
reversed.

PRATTON

Like if you're working for a
foreign government?

AURAL

Yeah.

PRATTON

Well obviously.

Africa rises, shaking his head about the whole thing.

AFRICA

When will he get here?

MARA

Soon. Within the hour.

AFRICA

Good. I'm going to go out. Get something better to eat. He had better be in bed and asleep by the time I get back. I don't like this and I will not forgive you. But I have no other place to stay.

MARA

Fine. You'll leave tomorrow?

AFRICA

Yes.

Africa goes to the balcony to collect his book. He spends a second looking out at some teenagers on the beach. They are vaping and tossing a large lit-up bluetooth speaker back and forth in ever higher arcs. It's too far away to hear anything. Before he heads back inside, he does a double take, noticing something in his empty teacup from earlier. He picks it up and stares in at something, tilting his head to the side.

INT. AFRICA'S ROOM IN MARA'S APARTMENT

Africa is packing everything into a small suitcase. He has strangely few things. He takes out a notebook and puts it aside on the bed while he shoves his suitcase underneath. He does what he can to hide it.

EXT. BAR, NIGHTTIME

Africa stands outside the bar by a tall barrel, on top of which his drink, a Vermut, and his notebook, sit. He works in the notebook, looking up now and then at people passing by, at other customers, or over his shoulder through the open window into the bar.

VOICE

The journals *after* the visit--which is usually all anyone reads anyway, just because of the timing--I mean, if you've read any in school or seen them quoted, chances are they were these ones--are, famously, decorated with animal drawings.

Africa is drawing a small animal in the style of a cave painting in the margins of his journal. The text is very hard to read. Only the word "GREECE" is legible.

VOICE (CONT'D)

If you've studied the journals, as I have, you will almost certainly say--not just to be a contrarian, but with conviction, with urgency--that the best material is in fact found in the earlier entries. There is a quality in the rest of it, the mostly unread material, that is, to me, infinitely more appealing than what you find in the final part. Following the caves--again, for me that is just a useful landmark, not some special inflection point, but it's useful so I'll use it--following the caves, the journals become arrogant. Terrible, almost demonic *arrogance*.

A waitress brings a plate of fried squid to Africa, who thanks her and eats.

VOICE (CONT'D)

That brazen, sort of ... it's like someone casting a spell, a spell about their own life. A curse, seriously, this is the feeling of those pages to me; people find this appealing, well, because of the circumstances--what happened, how that's reflected or inverted or conspicuously omitted--but also they find it ... arousing. It *quicken*s. I mean, just after the caves, he writes something like, what is it: 'I am going to intervene...?'

INTERVIEWER

(quoting)

'I am going to intervene, I need to hurt someone, kill people, kill myself.'

VOICE

Yes. All that sort of ... the arrogance he found, that he's inventing here--everyone ties it to what happens. That the one is a price for the other.

A beat in the interview tape.

INTERVIEWER
Which for which?

VOICE
Ha! Don't prices always go both ways?

INT. MARA'S APARTMENT, NIGHT

Africa stumbles up the stairs, already steeling himself for the encounter awaiting him. He unlocks the apartment door and enters without any consideration of noise. He heads for his room, now taking care to open the door quietly.

INT. AFRICA'S ROOM IN MARA'S APARTMENT

Africa creeps into the room and tiptoes toward the bed. There is no one in it. He sighs, annoyed, and kicks off his shoes. He sits on the bed.

AFRICA
Where are you, my prince? Where are you tonight?

He falls back.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
A ditch? A problem?

He gets into a sleeping position.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
No ditch. No problems. No tonight, tonight. Come in onto me, Prince.

He closes his eyes and breathes out.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
(murmur)
I saw some beautiful things today.
I took photographs, to copy. To make copies, prince, prince.

INT. AFRICA'S ROOM IN MARA'S APARTMENT, HOURS LATER

Africa sleeps. His forehead is sweaty. The bedroom door opens and someone comes in. A young man, wearing a baseball hat and carrying a shopping bag.

Africa wakes, realizing someone has entered, but is facing too much the wrong way to get a good look. Rather than turn over and have to speak, he grits his teeth and suffers.

The young man puts his things down and takes off his hat. He runs his fingers through his hair. He takes off his shirt. He's very skinny. His shoulders turn in, as though they want to touch. His movements are weary. For a long minute he stands next to the bed motionless. Finally he climbs in bed quietly. Very gentle, very tender. He is so light Africa barely registers the shift in weight.

INT. AFRICA'S ROOM IN MARA'S APARTMENT, VERY EARLY MORNING

The sun is not yet up, but the first illumination is just begun. Africa stands at the foot of the bed, looking at the crumpled figure lying there with his face in the pillow, snoring. He grabs his suitcase from beneath the bed.

The snoring is concerning. It sounds very close now and then to choking. Fits and starts, wheezing. Africa seems to consider waking the man up, but heads for the door instead.

INT. TRAIN CAR, THAT AFTERNOON

The landscape of central Spain passes outside the train window. Africa sits, suitcase on the seat beside him.

VOICE

I call it arrogance. Because I'm partial to the Africa of all the earlier entries, against which--and to whom--it can only seem arrogance. Others will talk about channeling. "Hearing" a voice. Catching it from somewhere else, somewhere not your internal center or external ...milieu. "Style begins as a wave in the mind." You know who said that?

INTERVIEWER

No. I don't.

VOICE

Ha! Take a guess?

INTERVIEWER

I've really no idea.

VOICE
 (laughing)
 Then I'll keep it to myself.

INT. TRAIN INTERCAR PASSAGE

Africa stands in the area in-between cars. He is on the phone.

AFRICA
 Yes, now. I'm on the train right now. I know it's early. Something happened with the room, I had to leave. They moved someone into my bed. I know. A stranger. A criminal! Hah, I know. No. Just a kid. I'm not sure.

A CHILD (5) walks through, exchanges a glance with Africa. He seems confused.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
 Listen, I'll get to Valencia tonight, then take the boat through Corsica tomorrow morning, then from there to Athens by ... Friday. I already called them and moved my tickets forward. When I--oh. Okay. Okay. So I guess I'll beat you to Athens? That okay?

The kid comes back through. He stops to look out the window. He seems distressed.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
 Kypseli? Let me--Hold on.
 (to child)
 Lost? Perdido?

The child nods.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
 Hablas español?

The child shakes his head no.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
 English?

The child makes no indication.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
 Where are your parents?

The child looks in both directions, unsure. His eyes fill with tears.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
You don't know which way? Hey,
that's okay, it's okay.
(into phone)
This kid is lost, sorry. I'm gonna-
-maybe just text me the address.
Thank you. Okay. See you soon.

Africa hangs up.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
You don't know where your family
is.

The child doesn't respond. He is focused on not crying. He fidgets with a bit of stained string.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Well you're lucky. There's only
really two options. Let's start
this way.

They work their way to the very back of the train. Africa leads, looking at the child now and then. The child scans the faces but already seems to have given up hope.

At the back of the train, at the end of a loud and empty car with the windows open, is a door with a window. The tracks snake away into the distance. Africa watches, then, realizing the boy can't see, awkwardly picks him up to let him look. The child doesn't smile but is interested. He looks comforted also to be held. He leans his head against Africa's chest, as if against his better judgement. An awkward smile rises in Africa's face.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Half the world is that way.

Concern comes over them. A bridge appears under the train, shooting away backwards. A gorge opens below. Africa backs up and turns, still carrying the child.

INT. TRAIN, A LITTLE LATER

They walk the other way. Now Africa carries the child. He stops at his own seat to check his suitcase is still there. It is.

They move into nicer and nicer cars. They pass through the cafe car, where a group of older men are drunkenly yelling insults at each other while uniformed teenagers try and de-escalate even as they deliver them more drinks.

Walking through the wide aisles of the first class car, everyone stares without any recognition, without any reaction at all at Africa and the child. These are businesspeople. They are looking up from their computers just to track the disturbance in their visual field. They stare in slow motion, unblinking. It is silent except for the tapping of keys.

INT. ENGINE ROOM

Africa, carrying the child, opens the door into the engine room. As the door opens a rusted out locking mechanism disintegrates, falling to the ground. The windows are covered in grime, staining and diminishing the light that enters. Great cold coal furnaces against one wall have been repurposed for storage and garbage. They are filled with empty bottles, dirty magazines, news magazines, dirty news magazines, and odd parts. Against the other wall is a newer steel machine, maybe ten years old based on the quality of the LCD displays and oversized buttons. Grime is built up around its joints.

The child puts an arm around Africa's neck. He tentatively crosses the room. There is a lot of broken glass on the floor.

Africa goes to look at the LCD screen on the large steel box. It is dusty, but enough is visible to get a sense the thing is working fine. It even has a Wi-Fi connection.

In the corner, something stirs--a man, a TRAIN EMPLOYEE in the same uniform as the cafe car workers, sleeping on a stool in the corner. He smacks his lips and murmurs to himself. He whimpers. It seems sexual.

Through the open door at the end of the room is the driver's compartment. Africa and child proceed.

INT. DRIVER'S COMPARTMENT

The compartment is empty. Newer screens than those on the engine box take up much of the console. There are two empty seats. The leftmost has trash piled on it--old, mostly empty containers of food from the cafe car, printouts of train schedules with games played in pencil in the free spaces: tic-tac-toe, lots of hangman. Drawings. Africa puts the child down in the empty secondman's chair, takes his photo, and begins pushing around in the papers with idle curiosity.

The drawings are mostly sexual, crude, always featuring the same man--with a distinct balding pattern--and woman--with a distinct hair-lip. She is always drawn larger than him. In one of them, the hangman game--the word is PLOMO--has become sexual, with the hung figure ejaculating, though missing arms. The woman is not present. Africa folds this one up and pockets it.

The child meanwhile has figured out how to operate the door-latch and suddenly the door is thrown loudly open. The child, not expecting the door on which he had put all his weight to move, is draped suddenly halfway out the moving train. Africa looks on with curiosity, making no movement to help. The child does not look to him, but, struggling intensely, works to swing and hook his feet back into the cab. Then, moving his grip to the chair's arm-rest, which moves a little but is steady enough, he finally climbs safely back into the car. He takes a breath and then slides the door shut again with his foot. It makes another loud sound.

The train employee from the engine room pokes his torso through the doorway.

TRAIN EMPLOYEE
(shouting in Spanish)
What the hell are you doing up
here?

AFRICA
Excuse me?

TRAIN EMPLOYEE
You can't be here!

The train employee's hands are stained with ink.

AFRICA
It's our job to be here. What's
your job? To sleep in the engine
room?

TRAIN EMPLOYEE
No...

AFRICA
Do you even work on this train? How
did you get that uniform?

TRAIN EMPLOYEE
I work here! I'm an employee.

AFRICA
I've never seen you before. Why
were you sleeping?

TRAIN EMPLOYEE

I was up late last night working on something.

AFRICA

Alright.

Things have deescalated. The kid turns around, investigating the console again. He has a tattoo on the nape of his neck. It's hard to make it out at this angle.

TRAIN EMPLOYEE

What're you doing with the kid?

AFRICA

That's my secondman.

The kid opens the door again by accident.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWITCHING YARD, BARCELONA

Passengers disembark from the train at the switching yard a mile or so from the station. They walk over the rough gravel toward the station in the distance. Trains in states of assembly and disassembly all around. Africa comes to the door with his suitcase. The child appears at his feet. An employee (12, wearing red cap) tries to help him down. They tumble into the gravel. Africa gets up and looks around confused.

EMPLOYEE

The station is that way, sir.

The employee points to a station far enough away that it shimmers in the heated air.

AFRICA

There's no shuttle? Why can't we get closer?

EMPLOYEE

This is just where the train stops, sir.

AFRICA

Alright. Are there police in the station, do you know?

EMPLOYEE

No idea, sir. Welcome to Barcelona.

He waves them on. Africa puts the child down and they begin trudging through the gravel. He has to drag his suitcase with two hands as the wheels have no purchase. Other travelers do the same or carry theirs.

AFRICA

You're a smart kid. What do you think? What should happen to you?

The child smiles, looks back toward the train.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

How did you end up on that train?

No answer. Africa looks over shoulder at the train too. They are already disassembling it, decoupling cars and hauling out equipment even as passengers continue to disembark.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

It's alright. It's good to be alone.

The undercarriage of his rolling suitcase rips open against the rocks. Clothes, journal, some shells spill out. He groans and stops. Another passenger walking by laughs but makes a sympathetic face.

INT. TRAIN STATION, TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Africa, carrying his suitcase broken-part-up, and the child stand at a police kiosk in the busy station. The kiosk is incredibly small--barely big enough for one person to stand inside. And in fact that's all there is--a single POLICEWOMAN squeezed into this small metal-framed plexiglass box, perforated everywhere in an offset grid pattern. There is absolutely no room to sit down or turn and there is no obvious way in or out. She has a notepad and pen out where she sometimes makes notes, awkwardly contorting her body to be able to write with the notebook pressed against the wall. There are information screens sometimes playing advertisements everywhere, including clipped to her uniform. Her gun lies on the floor of the booth.

POLICEWOMAN

Not all trains are technical partners of the station here--they run on different track sizes. Different style of train. So they can't come in.

AFRICA

How do people board for the next trip? It's a long walk.

POLICEWOMAN

So as I understand it, they just get disassembled out in the switching yard and incorporated into other actual-partner trains. Then they can come in, sort of, as parts of other trains, get passengers, and go away again.

AFRICA

I see.

POLICEWOMAN

And because it's not a partner train--really it's not supposed to be here at all--no one here can reimburse you for the suitcase.

AFRICA

Hmm? Oh, that's fine. I actually have a different problem. I found this child on the train.

POLICEWOMAN

Wonderful!

AFRICA

...Yes. But he doesn't seem to have any *children*. I mean parents.

POLICEWOMAN

Oh how terrible. Okay, maybe there's something we can do.

A long pause.

AFRICA

Yes?

POLICEWOMAN

Is the child Spanish?

AFRICA

(to child)

Are you Spanish?

Child shakes his head.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

(to policewoman)

No.

POLICEWOMAN
(opening her notebook and
writing in it)
"No." So unfortunately there's
nothing we can do for it--

She closes her notebook and fumbles, dropping her pen. It falls to the ground next to her gun. She groans and starts awkwardly trying to bend or squat down enough to reach it but it's impossible.

EXT. PLAYGROUND, LATE THAT AFTERNOON

Africa stands with the child at the entrance to the playground.

AFRICA
I have to go do something. Can you
wait here?

The child looks scared.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
I'll come back in a few hours.
Don't worry. You can play with
these kids.

Africa gestures.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Oh, here.

He takes a baseball hat out of his pack and puts it on the kids head. He takes out his camera.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Don't smile.

The child isn't smiling. Africa takes a picture.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Don't stay too long in the sun. It
weakens the immune system. Okay.
Don't go anywhere!

He leaves. The kid watches him leave without comprehension. The tattoo on his neck is visible now. It looks like a squared bishop's crook or a pictogram of a gallows.

EXT. TEATRO MERCIR, A LITTLE LATER

Africa walks up to the theater and in without breaking stride. It is an older theater (though no piece of cultural heritage) with a simple look to it. On boards to the left and right of the four-door-wide entrance, a palimpsest of past show posters show a unified low-brow style.

INT. TEATRO MERCIR LOBBY, CONT.

The inside is cheap. Pattern clash everywhere. Cheap red carpet, black and white tiles, chintzy stamped fabric bunched and hanging on the walls. MARQUEE (60, tired but caffeinated, an American expat) stands at a veneered lectern-as-podium before the theater entrance, doing something on a smart tablet with a stylus. Whale song plays from visible speakers. Marquee beckons Africa, stowing the stylus in an inkwell, removing and accidentally dropping his reading glasses. Africa moves to pick them up.

MARQUEE

Leave it. Ticket for one?

AFRICA

No, actually, I ... I'm looking for a woman I met here.

Marquee raises an eyebrow.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

An actress. She was in a show.

MARQUEE

O-kay, and this was when? This summer?

Marquee starts to try and do something on the tablet again--looking for some records--but has to squint and lean way in to read the screen.

MARQUEE (CONT'D)

Oh, shit--

The whalesong sound increases and speeds up. A lamp in the corner changes to a blue-green.

AFRICA

Would be six, seven years ago.
2017. Eight years ago.

Marquee looks up in shock.

MARQUEE

2017? Oh no no, our records don't go back that far.

AFRICA

Oh, alright--

MARQUEE

Wait, are you an expat? Because we have these get-togethers, mostly it's cockfighting right now but we do clothing swaps, reviews. You like reviews?

AFRICA

Not really, sorry. I'm just a visitor anyway. I lived here during college; that's when I met her.

MARQUEE

(back to tablet)

O-kay and were you in love? I'm gonna get you information about the club anyway, we could use someone like you. You got an email?

Marquee tries to do something on tablet again. The light bulb explodes.

MARQUEE (CONT'D)

(to self)

Ah come on.

AFRICA

I think now ... I think we were in love. We didn't say it then.

MARQUEE

You were young.

AFRICA

It's true.

MARQUEE

What do you want with her? You're gonna kill her or something--HAH! HAH! HA!

He laughs really hard, closing his eyes, losing his footing, and stepping on his own glasses without realizing. A black smokespot is growing on the lampshade.

AFRICA

No. I need to talk to her about something.

MARQUEE

You're gonna kill her, come onnnn.

Africa gives him a confused, concerned look and shakes his head. Marquee winks.

MARQUEE (CONT'D)

Check it out.

He tries to swivel his tablet but it's on a stand. The lectern rocks. Africa steadies it and leans over.

MARQUEE (CONT'D)

This thing controls my pacemaker.
Watch this.

He is in a bluetooth smart pacemaker app with a slider. As he increases it he starts to hyperventilate. His veins stand out on his arms.

AFRICA

Stop that.

Marquee slides it back to "normal" setting, then much lower.

MARQUEE

(sleepy)
I like to keep it low.
(tapping his chest weakly)
Run this number lean.

ANDENE (35) runs in from the theater, pushing through the separating curtains.

ANDENE

Is something on fire?

The lampshade is on fire. She runs to it.

ANDENE (CONT'D)

Fuck. What the hell.

She looks at it but now that she's here she can't figure out what to do.

ANDENE (CONT'D)

The alarm went off in the theater.

MARQUEE

Andene! I want you to meet a friend
of mine. You two will get along. He
doesn't like reviews.

He gestures her over. She comes over and shakes hands with
Africa. Marquee is finding something else on the tablet.

ANDENE

Andene.

AFRICA

Africa.

MARQUEE

He's looking for an old actress.
From like fifty years ago.

AFRICA

2017.

ANDENE

Ooof. Well. Maybe I know her?
Got a name?

MARQUEE

(without gaining Africa's
attention)
Check it out, this one
controls my neck tilt.
(tilting head to side with
surprise)
Oh, Pershing Gervais?

AFRICA

Pershing.

ANDENE

Oh yeah, she's around! Hold
on.
(calling out through
curtain)
Pershing?

Africa's eyes light up. Marquee is tilting his head left and
right at a continuous speed, wincing sometimes.

ANDENE (CONT'D)

She's here. I just saw her.
(calling out again)
Pershing! Pershing! Pershing!
Pershing! Pershing! Pershing!
(to Africa)
Hold on.

She walks up to the curtain and opens it.

ANDENE (CONT'D)

Persh--

Someone walks into the opening. Slowly enters the room. It's
a shy young GIRL.

GIRL
She went to the garden. The alarm
hurt her ears.

MARQUEE
(nodding himself
mechanically by moving
slider on tablet)
Ah.

In the corner, the metal part of the lampshade clatters to the ground. Ashes from the paper shade flutter down.

EXT. PLAYGROUND

The child goes down the slide. The only kids left playing are a boy and two girls. They all seem natural friends. The boy is emotional, the girls hug him.

EXT. GARDEN AT TEATRO MERCER, EARLY EVENING

Africa is sitting at a metal table in a side garden with PERSHING (33, mature, self-possessed). The garden is overgrown. Paper lanterns with no lights in them hang from a clothesline from which some clothes hang too. The lanterns have mold growing on them.

They seem relaxed.

PERSHING
(laughing)
I don't remember, was it really
that long you lived with me?

AFRICA
Yes, because the program I was in
had to call my parents--

PERSHING
My god. I don't remember it at all.

AFRICA
It wasn't *that* long ago.

PERSHING
Yes, well. Feels like a long time.

A beat.

PERSHING (CONT'D)
How come you're here?

AFRICA

To see you.

PERSHING

(taken aback)

To see me? Africa--

AFRICA

Well, and other things--I just mean, why I'm here in Barcelona. I just stopped. I'm on my way to Greece for something. I'm supposed to work for this woman. Who I've never met, actually.

A beat.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Anyway, I did come here to see you. That's not so crazy. We spent a long time together. And it wasn't that long ago.

PERSHING

Okay.

AFRICA

I have to ask you something. You know, when we...oh my god, it's so embarrassing...well not *embarrassing*...

PERSHING

There's no point being embarrassed. You know. That's my whole thing. That's my life.

Africa looks at Pershing with admiration.

AFRICA

Yes. It was one way you were good for me. You really threw me-- anyway, I'm not embarrassed about it.

(grimacing)

I was, for a long time. About--

PERSHING

Oh God! About me and Rolo, right, wow. I'm sorry about that.

AFRICA

That's okay. I mean, it was sad.
But you did it, so. You didn't know
better. I forgive you, I think.

PERSHING

Well. Thanks. Although ... I mean,
I *did* know better. Everyone knows
not to cheat, like, I knew it
wasn't right. I felt bad about it.

AFRICA

Okay, but you did *do* it. So you,
you then, must have thought you
should do it. Because you did it.

PERSHING

Sometimes I do things I think are
wrong.

AFRICA

How?

PERSHING

I wish I knew. Then I could stop
myself.

AFRICA

Hmm. I don't ... whatever. Not the
point. What I wanted to say was I'm
not embarrassed about any of it
anymore. It was a sweet thing. A
sweet thing between two young
people. So it's okay, even though
it wasn't perfect.

Pershing nods. She wonders why he's here. There is a long
quiet moment. An orange cat stalks through the garden toward
them. Africa watches it.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Listen ... I wanted to know ...
before you left to go stay with
Rolo, like, the actual *day* before
that, before the fight--maybe you
don't remember this. Wow.

Pershing has a blank expectant look. She tilts her head
mechanically.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

You told me you thought you were
pregnant.

Pershing sits back. The cat pounces after something.

PERSHING

Ohhhhh.

EXT. PLAYGROUND

The child sits alone at a large tic tac toe game with spinning symbols on the play structure. It is dark out. He idly spins the Xs and Os. He is setting the diagonals to blank. Inbetween the X and O on the cylinder. The park is empty except for vagrants.

AFRICA (O.S.)

You remember?

PERSHING (O.S)

Telling you that? No. Honestly, no, but--I understand.

AFRICA

So you weren't ... I mean ... was it a lie? A trick or something?

PERSHING

No. I don't think so.

EXT. GARDEN, CONT.

AFRICA

But you weren't ...?

Pershing looks down. She is not going to answer. The cat is perched on the birdbath, drinking water.

END FIRST ACT

ONE-TWO ENTR'ACTE

INT. SHOEBOX DIORAMA

A PLAIN HAND places a MOUSE with a pretty pink bow inside of a shoebox diorama of a museum exhibition space at night. Blue moonlight and lasers in scattered rotation. Bars on the windows cast dramatic shadows. Anxious droning noise building.

VOICE (V.O.)

I don't know that it matters...
what somebody sets out to do. It
doesn't even matter what gets done.
What happens? Oh, come on. What's
gonna happen? Are you serious? You
can't be serious.

The mouse begins at far left. To the far right, across a number of sculptures made of wire and trash, a podium with a miniature ritz cracker under a glass dome.

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Focus, focus.

The mouse explores the gallery with indifferent curiosity, walking through the lasers. A weak spot blinks in on the cracker.

END ENTR'ACTE

SECOND ACT

EXT. STERN DECK OF FERRY, MORNING

Africa stands on the deck of a commercial ferry, squinting into the wind and sun as boat raises its ramp and detaches from the dock.

EXT. BOW OF FERRY, A LITTLE LATER

The ocean breaks against the bow as the ferry churns. Africa watches lifeboats, hanging from straps over the starboard side, lift in the wind and crash back against the blue hull. The name of the boat is visible: *El Teodulfo*. He takes a photo of the disappearing landmass.

INT. FERRY PASSENGER AREA, AN HOUR LATER

Africa sits by the window, looking out. Kestrels execute various maneuvers. He breaks away to look across from him.

AFRICA

I hope this is okay.

The child sits, legs folded beneath him, eating a muffin and drinking a small milk. He is wearing new clothes, all oversized, all "merchandise" from the *Barcelona College of Arts*. The university crest features a crab breaking a paintbrush in half.

On a wall in the large passenger area is a screen showing a live map, interrupted every few seconds by very short, two or three second ads. The map indicates they are about halfway between the port at Barcelona and the island of Corsica. The ads are for election gambling apps, horserace trackers, Spanish lottery, assisted suicide, lottery gambling, insurance, and pain medicine.

VOICE

Corsica stands for retrograde development. And always has.

An island surfaces from beyond the horizon, shimmering in the far distance.

VOICE (CONT'D)

I was so young I could still notice the expression of arbitrary prejudice. A man named Retail, a rebel national my parents knew and housed.

(MORE)

VOICE (CONT'D)

He was gracelessly, ceaselessly hateful, like many people who know they will lose their life-fight; he told us one night Corsicans are worse than dogs. I remember it because he stopped playing the guitar in the middle of a song, as though the music had suddenly reminded him.

The agonizing slow growth of shimmering Corsica on the horizon. The child picks up his milk, having drained it with a straw, and tilts it up, causing the last drops of milk to fall through the straw hole and onto his face. He laughs. Africa smiles at him.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Not being a revolutionary, I liked dogs, so I wasn't sure what to understand by his outburst. I also didn't know who Corsicans were, or even what *kind of a thing* a Corsican might be. Later my parents turned, like everyone in PG, and Retail was hauled off to whatever better world.

Africa goes to purchase the child another milk at the bar.

INTERVIEWER

What do you make of Africa's visit?

VOICE

(disinterest)

I don't know. A stopover.

INTERVIEWER

Okay ... so what about the picture with, um,

(searching through notes)

Ferraignol?

INT. KITCHEN

A picture of Africa with FERRAIGNOL (45, a large, imposing Corsican "businessman") in some back patio, drinking coffee. Both are smiling. There are papers on the table in front of them.

INTERVIEWER

What do you make of that?

VOICE

Ha! The picture with Ferraignol.

INT. LARGE WAREHOUSE, SOME MORNING

Ferraignol paces. He keeps stopping to lean out the window and look toward a square a little ways away, where some government building is housing an event of some sort--perhaps a meeting of some congress, some vote, whatever. Various associates sit against the wall and on the floor in the warehouse with him. Weapons, plans. Some play scrabble on the floor.

A SCRABBLE PLAYER

Quit leaning out the window!
Someone's gonna see!

FERRAIGNOL

(drawing gun, enraged)
Yeah, me, I'm gonna see, by leaning
out the window!

A SCRABBLE PLAYER

Sorry, Jesus.

FERRAIGNOL

Look, if I want to *fall* out the
window, you're gonna let me. If I--

Out the window a bomb explodes. He rushes over to look. They all come running, carefully avoiding the scrabble board.

FERRAIGNOL (CONT'D)

I missed it. You distracted--

EXT. THE PARTHENON AT NIGHT

The eerie sight of the Parthenon lit up along the empty visitors paths, seen from a moving bus.

VOICE

Forget Ferraignol. We don't have
forever; we don't have infinite
space. I want to get to Athens.

INT. SUBWAY STATION

Ancient Greek pottery, discovered during excavation for the subway station, is collected in a glass case by the bend in the stairs. People rush by. One of these items looks like a sort of frying pan with a short split handle.

Its rim is incised with Greek letters. One of them, the capital Gamma, resembles the hook/gallows on the neck of the child, only without the part hanging down. The full word is Γ ρ α φ η .

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE ATHENS FLAT

Africa and the child walk up to a plain halfway renovated apartment building in Kypseli, an area near central Athens. Both are tired. Africa still carries his busted suitcase.

AFRICA

I've never been here before, so. I
don't know what to expect.

He looks around for a lockbox, finds one. Checks something on his phone.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

The woman whose apartment this is,
I don't know her.

He gets in, finds the key, and sets to work on the lock.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

She's an artist. Fine art, you
know. A family friend put us in
contact. Said she was be looking
for some help. And I, who have
never had anything to do, thought
it might be worth trying.

The door finally unlocks.

INT. KYPSELI FLAT

The flat is modest and clean. Africa and the child treat themselves to a quick tour. Paintings and prints hang on the walls. Textiles in earth tones. Nothing in the fridge, nothing in the pantry besides a box of pasta, a bottle of olive oil.

AFRICA

Nice.

He looks at the bed and decides he should not get into it. Returning to the living room, he opens a window and collapses onto the couch.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Let me try and call her again.

He calls. It goes to voicemail immediately.

VOICEMAIL

The number you are trying to reach-

-

He hangs up.

AFRICA

Okay, I really don't know if they're going to get here tonight or what. Last I heard they were on the ferry from Ancona. So I think let's...I'm gonna sleep on the couch.

The kid is still wandering around looking at things. He is stopped in front of a print of Paul Klee's *Der Narr*.

INT. KYPSELI FLAT, DAWN

Africa sleeps on his side with his arm over the child, who is nestled up against him. The first light of dawn catches their sweat-moist faces. Both glow.

Africa's eyelids flutter. From near his perspective, there appears to be a shadowed figure standing in the hall, blurred, just at the edge of view.

INT. KYPSELI FLAT, MORNING

Africa and the child sit with the balcony doors open eating pasta with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Africa looks to have showered and shaved.

EXT. GREEK-AMERICAN ASSOCIATION, LATER THAT MORNING

Africa walks up to the building, alone.

INT. GREEK-AMERICAN ASSOCIATION, LOBBY

Africa approaches the front desk in this '90s-style-sleek building. He looks around. It's hard to tell what the function of the building exactly is--some combination of corporate headquarters, event space, exhibition space, and meeting space. Africa approaches the reception desk, where DOSOE, a man his own age of indiscernable extraction, is taking a phone call. Dosoe nods to him and holds up a finger, then keeps listening.

For a long moment, he listens with attention to the phone. Finally, the other person seems to have hung up.

DOSOE

Good morning. Welcome to the Greek-American Association Lobby. What's up?

AFRICA

Good morning. I think there is an exhibition here I am supposed to help ... undo.

DOSOE

What's the name?

AFRICA

My name's Africa.

DOSOE

Dosoe.

They shake hands.

DOSOE (CONT'D)

Sorry, what's the artist's name?

AFRICA

Corinne Theodolitos.

DOSOE

Aha! Wonderful. Yes, just a moment, I'm going to make you an identification.

AFRICA

Okay. The problem is--to be honest I haven't been able to get in contact with her for a few days. I think she's on the ferry still.

Dosoe is busily tapping away.

DOSOE

Alright and which ferry?

AFRICA

From Ancona, I think.

There is the sound of a picture being taken. Africa looks around confused. There is no visible camera.

DOSOE

Well, the ferries are not *super*
reliable in my experience.
Especially country to country.
(gesturing to computer)
It's processing. Image.

AFRICA

What's wrong with the ferries?

DOSOE

Sometimes there's no trouble. It's
just--there's this ferryman's
league. For the international
ferries, I don't know how it works
exactly. I mean, I know: smuggling,
drug-runners, human movement. But I
don't know *how* that stuff works.
The league is like--they're a
different population. I don't think
they have normal laws.

An ID card with a horribly distorted photo of Africa from an
impossible angle prints out of a machine on the desk. His
face has been twisted into a smile. Dosoe grabs a lanyard
from a drawer, punches a hole in the card, and hands it to
Africa.

DOSOE (CONT'D)

So you'll wear this at all times in
the building.

INT. GREEK-AMERICAN ASSOCIATION, GALLERY, A MINUTE LATER

Dosoe and Africa stand in the dark exhibition space. There
are no windows. Most of the art has been taken down already.
A few things remain: an array of cast bronze figures, about
as large as nutcracker-men and glued to the floor. A man,
MANERA (35, possible Greek, long straight thinning hair), is
working trying to pry these off the floor and put them away
in a crate. In the center of the room is a big metal sphere.

DOSOE

This is the piece.

AFRICA

The sphere?

DOSOE

Yup.

Africa walks up to it. There is a hole in one part big enough
to stick your head inside.

Inside, in a little smaller spherical hollow, there is a video playing. A woman, CORINNE (55, black hair, serious but not severe, gleam in eye) speaks to the camera. There is no audio. Africa sticks his head inside.

AFRICA

What is is?

DOSOE

It was a video.

MANERA

They already took the speakers
apart. And away.

He points to somewhere.

EXT. PLAYGROUND, ATHENS, CONT

The child is lying on the ground beneath a play structure.
Greek children run around. Some gather over him, looking
down.

INT. GREEK-AMERICAN ASSOCIATION, GALLERY, CONT

Africa withdraws from the sphere.

AFRICA

I can't move this. I don't have
anywhere to put it.

DOSOE

There must be somewhere, you know?
Corinne left you in charge. What
about her studio?

AFRICA

I've never been there. This is the
first place I've been.

DOSOE

Well. You'll have to find
somewhere, because it can't stay
here. We need the space for a
contest.

MANERA

Where are you staying?

DOSOE

Corinne's flat.

DOSOE (CONT'D)

Oh, perfect. Where's that?

AFRICA

Um...Kypseli. But I can't get it there. And it won't--

DOSOE

Movers'll be here soon. I gotta run. Nice meeting you!

Dosoe departs. Africa inspects the sphere. Manera continues prying the figures off the floor, tearing up chunks of the floor in the process.

EXT. PLAYGROUND

The Greek children are prodding the child, who now lies face down. He braces into a fetal position. As his shirt moves the symbol on his neck becomes more visible. One child points it out to another, who nods. Things become serious among the children. They stop prodding and discuss what to do. The child rolls over, looking back at them. His expression is sensitive.

VOICE (V.O)

I don't know if you've been to Athens--it's a city. It's not like the insulated capitals of western and northern Europe. Something better and something worse. Something is going on--right out in the open.

INT. GREEK-AMERICAN ASSOCIATION, GALLERY, CONT

Two MOVERS (burly hairy Greek men, don't speak English) are wrapping the sphere in straps. Africa watches.

MOVER 1

You think it'll fit in the truck?

MOVER 2

Sure, sure.

Africa looks to Manera.

MANERA

They're wondering if it'll fit.

AFRICA

Alright.

They keep applying the straps. Manera has finished his packing and is hanging around. Africa checks his phone. No messages. He looks distressed.

MANERA

Maybe I should come with you? To translate?

AFRICA

Oh, that would be helpful.
(pointing to figures)
What about those?

Manera shrugs.

INT. MOVING VAN

Africa, Manera, and the two movers sit four across on the front bench seat. In the back of the truck the large sphere is strapped in. Whenever they stop or accelerate, it strains against the yellow straps.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE ATHENS FLAT

The movers carry the sphere via straps up to the propped building door, next to which Africa and Manera stand. It is obvious from a long ways away that it won't fit. When they do get close, the movers offer it up. Not even close. It's almost twice too wide. They try rotating it to no avail.

MOVER 1

There's nowhere else?

MANERA

He asks if there's really nowhere else.

AFRICA

There's nowhere else.

The movers understand. They shake their heads and start walking the sphere back to the truck. Manera sits close to Africa on the stoop.

MANERA

I guess they'll take it back to the AGA.

AFRICA

I knew it wouldn't fit.

Silence.

MANERA

So how long are you in Athens?

AFRICA

I'm not sure. Waiting to hear from Corinne, still. She's coming over from Italy with her husband. The, uh ... ferry is late.

MANERA

Ha, yes. That'll happen. But you're going to work for her?

AFRICA

Yes. Or actually--I think she mostly was going to set me up with her gallerist, as a sort of assistant. For a month or two, I'm not sure.

MANERA

Which gallery?

AFRICA

Camhi.

Manera snorts. Not mocking so much as amused surprise.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

What?

MANERA

You'll see. She might like you. You are handsome, you know that?

Africa smiles, surprised. The moving truck drives away.

AFRICA

Thanks.

(awkward, via imagined obligation)
... You too.

A beat.

MANERA

I need some coffee.

Africa nods. Another long silence before Manera stands.

MANERA (CONT'D)

Later tonight there is an opening,
a big party on the roof at the
contemporary art museum. Music and
free things. You should come.

Africa nods.

EXT. MOUNT LYCABETTUS

The child walks surrounded by the Greek children from the
playground along a footpath low on Mount Lycabettus. Twisted,
sun-withered pines dot the rocky, eroded hillside. It has
grown into a hot day. The local children chatter excitedly.

INT. CAMHI GALLERY, NOON

Africa waits inside the small modern art gallery's office
area. There are two women here, SYLPH (22, a university
student, very fashionable) and AMNET (24, a recent graduate,
more bookish, employed in a more research heavy role). All
three of them are seated; all are on their phones. Africa is
texting Corinne. A number of undelivered texts precede the
current one, which reads "Made it to Camhi gallery, waiting
to meet. Hope all's well on Ferry." He sends it, watches it
not deliver, then puts his phone down. Sylph notices.

SYLPH

She should be back soon.

AFRICA

Okay, I mean--are you sure? Because
if today is bad, I could come back
tomorrow.

SYLPH

She'll be back soon.

AFRICA

It's just been a long time.

SYLPH

I know.

Africa nods and gets up. He wanders around the small gallery
space. It's all paintings right now. Geometric, mostly. All
colorful.

AFRICA

Is this all new?

AMNET

This is the summer exhibition.
It'll come down soon.

AFRICA

And everything's for sale?

AMNET

What isn't sold, yes. There's a
sheet--

She points to a stack of papers on a little table by the entrance. He grabs one. It lists all the artworks and prices. Some are sold. He wanders some more, stopping in front of a very large orange and yellow painting of a grid deformed by an unseen force. He looks at the sheet.

AFRICA

Oh. This one's Corinne.

He looks up at it again.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Why hasn't anyone bought it?

AMNET

(looking over)
The orange one?

AFRICA

It's Corinne's.

Amnet shrugs.

AMNET

Probably no one needs it.

AFRICA

Well. I like it.

He looks at it again.

EXT. MOUNT LYCABETTUS

The children are higher on the mount now. They stop to drink water, passing around a plastic jug. They make sure the child gets enough.

Here, higher up, prickly pear cactus grows in wide groups. The fruits are ripe, passion purple. One child spikes one with a stick and, pulling a knife from his pocket, carefully peels it. He eventually gets a needle in his hand, swears, and gives up.

VOICE

The woman, Camhi, the gallerist, denies ever meeting Africa. She is well connected and has a reputation to preserve--possibly she really has forgotten, she must deal with lots of visitors.

The child looks out at the city below and the water in the distance. The children finish their pitstop and continue.

VOICE (CONT'D)

When Corinne's husband was interviewed early on--later everyone got their story straight--he said Africa had met with Camhi that first day in Athens.

INT. GALLERY

Africa and CAMHI (60, metropolitan lesbian, art gallery owner) shake hands and walk from the gallery through the adjacent courtyard and into her house. They talk.

VOICE

She explained to Africa that there had been a mix-up. She couldn't use him as an assistant since she was about to leave for her honeymoon--her wedding was tomorrow.

In her house, Camhi greets and kisses her fiancée, LATRINA (same age, similar style). Africa shakes Latrina's hand, then is lead upstairs by Camhi.

VOICE (CONT'D)

And supposedly she offers him the attic to stay in, if he needs it.

INT. ATTIC OF CAMHI'S HOUSE

They stand in a cramped attic. It's very hot, both are sweating. There is some old bedding and a mattress along with boxes and boxes of things. Strong light from a skylight.

VOICE

It doesn't really matter, all of this. I think--I think not every real part of the story, not every detail is going to bear equally on what happened.

Camhi is setting up a fan as if to show how he might cool the place. She points to the skylight and explains something.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Of course, you can find people who stake their whole interpretation on any given event preceding the ... the actual conflict, the *thing*, right. But you've asked me and I have my own set--for me: the caves, Gervais, the ferries, Athens, Styra. Obviously Styra, Evia--this much everyone has in common. Not so much Corsica, not so much the gallery and this potential exchange with Camhi--

In the attic, Camhi comes close to Africa and says something in his ear. She draws him to a storage box in a dark corner. She hands him a small object like a wooden carving. He hands her a thick packet from his bag.

VOICE (CONT'D)

It's interesting, if it *is* true, but I can't see how to connect it. So it doesn't serve the story as I understand it.

INTERVIEWER

What if someone asked you for a neutral accounting?

EXT. MOUNT LYCABETTUS

The children are just beneath the artificial plateau, cafe, and bathrooms at the summit. Tourists circulate up there. Down where the slope is very steep and made as much of concrete supports for the deck above, the children are looking for something, walking slowly along the edge of the cactus groups.

VOICE

A neutral accounting. I don't know what that would be. I don't know how to do *anything* without making choices. Actions, from our perspective, are composed of motivated choices. Perhaps there is some total perspective from which they appear instead as natural and necessary.

(MORE)

VOICE (CONT'D)

Where everything follows without intervention, by the same relationship the nature of a triangle has to the sum of its angles. But I don't know how to reach that space, that perspective. Fine, we are already in it, always in it; it's another thing to get there and another still to account from there.

Suddenly, a narrow space. A little path into the mountain. So easy to miss. The children carefully make their way in. After ten feet or so, the path opens up to allow them to gather in front of a metal door. The door has a small window with diagonal wire reinforcements and, below that, painted in orange, the letter gamma. The child looks with curiosity. Someone pushes the door open.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Did you ever wonder, *account* and *recount*, these words for telling--what they have to do with *counting*? Even *telling*, as a teller, a bank teller--we still say that, thank god--has this sense of numbering. Summing up. A tale is a number. What I am doing for you, since you have asked me to, is really a species of the same activity. Numbering, census, reckoning--what is the precondition for counting? The discovery, the invention of a *class*. A family, a group defined by a common characteristic. *There* the counting becomes possible--the amount is incidental compared to the invention of that class. The ordering of the world--it is this essential connection to classification that ties counting, the discovery of quantity, to recounting and to *making sense*.

The children advance through the dim hallways into the concrete structure. It seems to be some kind of burial facility for toxic, possibly nuclear waste. The floor is polished concrete; the lights are bluish green. Soon they come to a long concrete tunnel like a pipe with rails on the floor. Construction is active along the tunnel; other children in the uniforms of construction workers, engineers, foremen, and scientists work assembling and disassembling various machines, drills, turbines.

Video screens in some places display diagrams and warnings, personnel information, ads. A large cart is being pushed along the rails farther along toward the end of the tunnel. The children head that way.

VOICE (CONT'D)

When I tell you about Africa and his time in Spain and Greece leading up to the eventual deaths, I am gathering for you all the details that fit a certain abstract class. Only as a formality do I refrain from literally counting them up. The important part has already happened: the discernment, by me, according to my own particular rules, of the abstract class. So here is what I mean:

At the end the tunnel opens to a large wall where a small drill is being loaded into a round hole in the rock. On a pallet on the floor are thirty or forty cylindrical containers, about the size of trash cans, each marked with a gamma. The child goes over to look at them and begins unscrewing the top. The boom lift operator loading the drill looks over at this without any fear or urgency.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Everything I am telling you happened. But I am not telling you what happened. I am not telling you everything. I am only telling you about a *class* that makes counting possible.

The container is empty.

EXT. PLAYGROUND

Africa sits on a bench at the playground where the child was earlier, empty now in the early evening. He sighs and shakes his head, looking around.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

You loved your husband?

VOICE

I did. We spent a long time together. It was the first time, also, that I'd had sex with someone who seemed to be in it for the right reasons. Before that I had all these theories--

Africa takes out his camera to take a picture when gets a phone call from Corinne. He quickly answers it, putting the camera down on the bench.

AFRICA
Hello, Corinne?

INT. KITCHEN

On the kitchen table, a photograph of Voice's husband lying naked on a couch.

CORINNE
Yes! Hello, Africa? Oh my GOD I am
so sorry--

EXT. PLAYGROUND

Africa stands up and begins walking away from the playground. He has forgotten the camera.

AFRICA
No, no--

CORINNE
The ferry had to wait to meet up
with another boat for supplies or
something--

AFRICA
Oh, it's okay, not your fault--

CORINNE
So we were just stuck in the middle
waiting for a day and a half! God!
Craziness.

AFRICA
But you've made it now?

CORINNE
Oh yeah. We just got in to the
studio. You got into the apartment
okay?

AFRICA
Yes, there was--

CORINNE
Great, great. Listen, where are you
right now? Camhi already put you to
work?

EXT. RESTAURANT

Africa sits at a table out front of a home-style Greek restaurant. Across from him sit Corinne and MEDIANO (48, dry, British-Italian, an unaffiliated art historian). They eat dinner and drink wine. All are a little drunk already.

CORINNE

(shock and outrage)
I simply cannot believe she messed
this up so badly. The wedding is
tomorrow?

AFRICA

Tomorrow. And then she leaves for
her honeymoon the day after.

CORINNE

Too much, too much. I cannot
believe her.

MEDIANO

I am not so shocked.

CORINNE

I swear I'd spoken to her about you
coming over and over again--she
didn't say anything?

AFRICA

She knew I was coming, she must
have. I don't know. She wasn't
mean--

CORINNE

Unthinkable. And to make you
wait...I mean, we must have talked
about it three or four times!

MEDIANO

Camhi will do as she pleases.

AFRICA

Well, it's not such a problem for
me. I can move my flight forward--

CORINNE

What? But you just got here?

AFRICA

I don't know, I just don't have
much to do if that's gone
through...

CORINNE

You can't end your trip already.
And you've not been to Athens
before?

AFRICA

No.

CORINNE

You don't like it?

MEDIANO

Not everyone likes Athens, Corinne.

AFRICA

No, it's not that, I don't know--I
just ... I don't really
(suddenly almost crying,
quickly collecting)
I don't know what I'm doing here.
Why would I stay here?

CORINNE

That's Camhi's fault, you thought
there would be work at the gallery--
-

AFRICA

No just ... even if I was doing
that. Why would I be doing that?

MEDIANO

Why indeed.

CORINNE

I don't understand. I thought you
wanted some work in the arts or
something? That's what Alty told
me.

AFRICA

Sort of. No. Mostly no. I don't
really want anything.

CORINNE

There isn't anything you want?

INT. MOUNT LYCABETTUS, TUNNEL END

The children sit and watch as the cylinders are loaded into
the hole, presumably following the drill as it has now
disappeared.

AFRICA (ALL O.S.)

I want all kinds of things,
generally. But everything specific,
everything someone already has--I
look at it and I feel glad I don't
have it. It calms me. I like to
travel. To see all the lives other
people are relieving me of living.
All the jobs, families, husbands
and wives I don't have to have.

CORINNE

What?

A beat.

MEDIANO

Corinne, do you remember Seamus?

CORINNE

Mediano, don't.

AFRICA

What?

MEDIANO

(laughing)

Seamus was someone we knew in
London, a friend of mine--we lived
together even after university,
when I first met Corinne. We were
all young. Everyone was young then--
and Seamus was the best at it.
Wonderful, aware of his powers,
charming. He had a sort of Midas
thing going.

EXT. RESTAURANT

CORINNE

(reminiscing)

It's true, Africa, you have this
look sometimes. How old are you?

AFRICA

Twenty-eight.

CORINNE

Probably you can't hold it all the
time anymore, so you will know it.
You will have noticed it sometimes
not there. In a photo, for example.

(MORE)

CORINNE (CONT'D)

Young-as-the-night--the expression on the face, young as the night. You can see it any given bar, any night, sometimes everyone, sometimes just one. Young as the night. And proud of it.

Africa nods, thinking. Mediano pours everyone another glass of wine.

MEDIANO

Seamus was like that. Some people are better than you and you don't mind. And they don't mind; it's a beautiful thing. Life can be very good like that.

CORINNE

It is the only thing that can be good like that.

MEDIANO

To being alive.

They toast. Drink. A long beat. Strangers are smoking in the park, watching them absently.

MEDIANO (CONT'D)

The problem is, if you don't *discharge* your potential, you get a blockage. And soon the whole thing breaks. Seamus became tragic like that. He had all these talents--piano, he could write, draw. He was a better critic than me; he had a fabulous eye, clever *everything*--but he doesn't ... he never finds a way to discharge it. The next phase, after young-as-the-night, is living with potential as an open secret. This is bearable. Depressing but livable, because there is still the potential for discharge.

(MORE)

MEDIANO (CONT'D)

At some point, though, years have passed and there is nothing, same as before, but in all that time two things have happened: first, Seamus has not grown or changed because, so full of secret and holding so desperately, jealously to it, nothing can get in--you see what I mean by blockage--and second, by an unrelated natural path, the potential has expired. Think of a rubber band wound and wound and then just put away. Like, to store it. But you know--time is on the other side--and the thing just degrades. Energy tends to dissipate. The rubber is a different consistency--chalky, crumbly, fragile. All that once stretched it, elastic, made it the picture of ready energy, is now digested--has converted into this powdery texture, this degraded state.

There is a long pause. Corinne is folding her paper napkin into a little shape to stand on its own.

CORINNE

A few years ago Seamus killed himself.

Africa nods.

AFRICA

How?

CORINNE

Pills. Some kind of pills. Do you remember?

MEDIANO

Don't remember.

A pause.

AFRICA

And this is a warning?

CORINNE

No, no.

MEDIANO

It is information. It might change
how you think. If you let it.

AFRICA

Alright. I guess I'll try.

MEDIANO

You should try. Lives are on the
line. Try to see it that way.

CORINNE

Alright, Mediano, enough. We all
know to try our best.

(to Africa)

Seamus's death was hard for him.
For both of us, actually.

MEDIANO

(laughs)

Everything is hard for us. Life is
difficult. Even when its easy.

CORINNE

(smiling)

To being alive.

They toast. Africa looks depressed.

EXT. STUDIO TERRACE - LATE THAN NIGHT

The three of them sit on the terrace of Corinne's very modern
studio sipping ouzo from water glasses. Africa winces each
time. Corinne is making some sketches. Through the glass
walls of the studio, where some lights are on, we can see
various projects underway.

MEDIANO

Do you have anyone?

Africa looks out at the city night. The dark water in the
distance.

INT. MOUNT LYCABETTUS, TUNNEL END

The children lie motionless on the floor at the tunnel end.
The lights have dimmed.

AFRICA (O.S.)

Not like you mean.

MEDIANO

That's alright. You're young yet.

The faces of the children are peaceful and smooth.

CORINNE

Hey! Here's an idea--don't you think he should meet Sugar?

MEDIANO

Ha, yes! How old is Sugar?

CORINNE

About the same age.

EXT. STUDIO TERRACE - CONTINUOUS

MEDIANO

Maybe a little younger.

CORINNE

Maybe. Wow. Now this is an idea.

(to Africa)

Sugar is my niece--my sister has a house in Styra, in Evia, this island just off Athens, and she's there right now with her husband, Bill, and her daughter, Styra. Sugar, I mean. She's amazing--smart, she's very beautiful.

(to Mediano)

C'mon, don't you think they'd get along?

MEDIANO

(making eye contact with Africa)

Sure. You are willing to meet someone?

AFRICA

(laughs)

Sure. Why not?

CORINNE

Amazing. Amazing! This is perfect. Let's go tomorrow.

MEDIANO

Yes! HA! It yields!

He drains his glass. Corinne follows, then screams at the top of her lungs, then smiles. Mediano laughs, then screams.

Africa smiles. Corinne screams again. Mediano goes again.
They look to Africa, who smiles to himself.

END SECOND ACT.

TWO-THREE ENTR'ACTE

A SAMPLE OF OCEAN WATER

Microscope footage of a busy sample of ocean water. Clicking through different levels of magnification, sometimes shifting the sample. All sorts of busy-ness, translucency.

VOICE

Focus. Listen, and repeat. Listen,
and repeat.

A pause.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Focus, focus. Your focus will keep
you alive.

INT. KITCHEN

Another photo on the kitchen table. No hand is visible. A photo of the voice having sex with her husband, taken from her perspective. The photo is graphic, taken with flash. He is reacting to the flash. The image is there very briefly.

A SAMPLE OF OCEAN WATER

Back to the microbial soup.

VOICE

(serene, epiphanic)
This is heaven on earth, this and
this. Violence and pain and
pleasure.

INT. KITCHEN

Back to the photo. Hold for a long time now.

VOICE

(enunciating overclearly)
Here. You have to be there. You
know you have to be there. Pain
beyond pleasure. World without end.

BLACK.

END ENTR'ACTE

THIRD ACT

INT. FERRY CABIN

On board the ferry from Athens to the island of Evia. Out the window, a smaller boat has motored abreast the ferry. Someone radios to a shipmate inside the cabin.

RADIO

(in Greek)

How many barrels, big man?

SHIPMATE

(laughing)

How many heads, rogues?

Laughter from the radio. The water is terrific blue in the midday sun.

All three sit together. Corinne is writing in a notebook, looking out at the waves. Mediano naps wearing an eyemask. Africa just sits, picking at his hands.

AFRICA

There was this sphere--

CORINNE

(waving hand)

Don't worry about that.

Africa nods. He watches Mediano sleep.

EXT. DOCK AT STYRA

They walk along the docks at Styra. Africa carries his busted suitcase.

EXT. BACKROAD

They continue up a road past small country houses, whitewashed and boxy. The grass is tall and starting to turn dry, golden, and is pushed in great fur-like swirls and mats down on top of itself. The whorls and parts reveal sun-baked earth. Occasionally a group of olive trees is seen, silver leaf-slivers flickering in the strong ocean wind. The terrain is mountainous--every direction is either up, toward the bare summits or down to coves protected by the serpentine coastline. Africa stops to take a picture, feels for his camera in his pocket, and realizes he's lost it. Emotion, restraint of emotion.

EXT. THE HOUSE AT STYRA

They arrive. The house is like the others. There is a large back garden, almost a pasture. The land falls off toward the sea.

CORINNE
(calling out)
Wally?

WALLY
(from inside)
Helloooo!

WALLY (50, Corinne's younger sister, high energy but with more corporate edge) comes running out with BILL (65, her husband, a semi-retired tech entrepreneur, a sort of hippie-nerd-businessman, sweet, long hair).

MEDIANO
Hello Wally! Hello Bill!

Everyone is happy to see each other. Hugs and kisses on cheek.

BILL
Hello all.

CORINNE
Everyone, this is Africa, who was going to be working with me in Athens. He comes highly recommended!

WALLY
Hello Africa, welcome. Is this your first time in Greece?

AFRICA
Yes. It's very beautiful here.

MEDIANO
He's a wonderfully sensitive young man.

CORINNE
Where's Sugar? I wanted him to meet Sugar. Don't you think they'd get along?

A big and friendly dog comes lumbering out from the house.

WALLY
Oh, certainly.
(to Bill)
Where is Sugar?

The dog visits Africa, who squats down to say hello, glad to have something to do.

BILL
I think he went down to the beach.

EXT. BEACH - TEN MINUTES LATER

The walk down and onto the beach, now wearing swimming clothes. It is a gorgeous late summer afternoon. The beach is almost empty. Except for one figure a little ways away.

WALLY
(calling to the figure)
Sugar!

SUGAR (24, a beautiful young man, the son of Wally and Bill, lithe, radiating with simple joy) turns and jogs over.

CORINNE
Sugar, hello! My god I haven't seen you in ages.

They embrace, she grins.

SUGAR
What a treat to see you Corinne.
I'm glad you came. And you Mediano-
-you both look very well.

MEDIANO
You too, Sugar.

Mediano and Sugar also embrace.

CORINNE
Sugar, I wanted you to meet a young friend of mine.

She gestures. Africa puts out his hand.

AFRICA
Africa.

SUGAR
Sugar.

CORINNE

I think you two will get along.

BILL

Sugar is not so difficult to get along with.

Sugar is now greeting the dog.

MEDIANO

Africa neither.

Mediano smiles at Africa.

AFRICA

(smiling)

You haven't seen me really freak out yet.

They are all laughing.

MEDIANO

A little bit we have.

AFRICA

That was nothing.

WALLY

Ha! We'll have to think of some way to test you.

SUGAR

What are you afraid of?

AFRICA

Medusa.

(looking to the ocean)

Jellyfish.

Sugar raises eyebrows. Then grabs Africa by the hand and pulls him toward the water.

SUGAR

Come on then there's loads.

They run in and swim. The dog chases them to the edge of the water. The adults stand watching them.

MEDIANO

Sugar is unbelievable.

BILL
(gesturing to Wally and
himself)
Even for us.

CORINNE
You know what's funny?

Mediano laughs.

CORINNE (CONT'D)
I thought Sugar was a girl.

WALLY
What? Really?

CORINNE
No, like. I *knew*, I guess now that
I think about it. It was an
accident. You know?

WALLY
That *is* funny.

BILL
I know what you mean, Corinne.

CORINNE
(to Mediano)
Why are you laughing? You thought
so too!

MEDIANO
I didn't even think about it.

Mediano puts his arm around Corinne.

MEDIANO (CONT'D)
But I'm no innocent.

OCEAN - CONTINUOUS

The boys swim. They splash and go to the shallows. They are acting like children, like young friends. In the shallow water, they drag themselves along, face down, looking for shells, crabs, interesting seaweed. They stand together looking at a broken up old boat pulled into the reeds. They pry barnacles from a rock on a little jetty. They investigate the things they find. The sun is still strong; everyone squints. There are no towels; there is no one around when they get out of the water. They dry in the sun walking the shore. Africa throws a stone at a gull. Sugar wags his finger and grins.

AFRICA

They want us to get stuff for
dinner.

SUGAR

But what to eat.
(feigns look around,
smacks forehead)
Oh! Fish!

AFRICA

(laughs)
Just fish?

SUGAR

Man can live on fish alone.

AFRICA

If properly instructed.

SUGAR

Even without instruction. If you
have ways of getting fish.

AFRICA

Such as fishing?

SUGAR

Bit vulgar for me. There's a market
in town. The town is one expanded
fish market.

AFRICA

Buying fish from the market!
Clever. Good luck none of those
fishermen have thought of that.

SUGAR

We've much to be thankful for.

INT. FISH MARKET

They are buying some fish in town. Africa is relaxed. He
looks around taking in the too-classic scene.

AFRICA

Why don't you move here? It's nice.

SUGAR

(shrug)
Maybe I will someday.

AFRICA
I would. If I were you.

SUGAR
Nothing stopping you.

AFRICA
And something's stopping you?

SUGAR
Oh, you know. I have a girlfriend,
back in *America*.

Africa nods, controlling his reaction. He investigates some fish.

AFRICA
An American girlfriend.

SUGAR
Top of the line.

Sugar points to some fish-steaks, cut thick and gleaming in their ice.

SUGAR (CONT'D)
Look at this.

Africa looks.

AFRICA
What about it? Looks good?

SUGAR
Look at the ...

Sugar presses his finger into the flesh.

SUGAR (CONT'D)
The texture.

He removes his finger. It springs back.

EXT. PATH - A FEW MINUTES LATER, EARLY EVENING

Africa and Sugar walk along a road in the valley carrying some fish in a wax paper parcel.

INT. MOUNT LYCABETTUS, TUNNEL

The tunnel is quiet except for the sounds of some automatic machinery. Whirring, hissing, clicking into place.

Grinding sound from the drill hole. There are no workers about right now.

On a video screen somewhere along one of the tunnel's offshoots, a woman is greenscreened over a presentation in Greek about the storage of nuclear waste. An animation behind her shows a drill diving into the mountain, then small cylinders sliding down in behind it. In the bottom right corner a pair of hands sign, presumably translating what she is saying.

INT/EXT. THE HOUSE AT STYRA - AFTER DINNER

Picked over fish skeletons are piled on an oval platter in the center of the table. Arrayed around them sit a few other dishes, also empty save some leftover juices. To the west over the water, the sun is setting. It is a brilliant view. Africa watches it. His eyes are shiny.

MEDIANO

...don't see how it would help
anyone without changing what do I
know.

WALLY

More of question for the youth.
Sugar?

BILL

Sugar's too young.

SUGAR

I agree.

Laughter. Africa is not paying close attention. He is turned toward the sunset, away from the conversation.

BILL

Maybe Africa ...

No response.

CORINNE

Africa.

Africa turns around.

AFRICA

Hmm? Sorry.

BILL

(smiling)

That's alright. Not important.

AFRICA
No, sorry. I'm back.

BILL
It wasn't important.

MEDIANO
That is a fantastic sunset. You
only get so many.

CORINNE
You get a fortune.

MEDIANO
A fortune is only so many.

Corinne laughs at him. He smiles. Africa has turned around to
look again.

SUGAR
(to Africa)
Do you want my seat? Africa?

Sugar and Corinne are sitting on the side of the table facing
the sunset.

AFRICA
No--

CORINNE
No, take mine, Africa.
(to the other adults)
Why don't we get cleaning up
anyway? The flies are already--

AFRICA
Wait, you have to let me--

WALLY
No! Absolutely not.

The older adults stand and start gathering things. Sugar
smiles to himself.

INT/EXT. THE HOUSE AT STYRA - AN HOUR LATER

The sun has set now. Twilight. Stars out. Africa and Sugar
sit next to each other at the table. Their chairs are close.
Africa takes a sip of some drink and looks sidelong at Sugar.

SUGAR
You ever been star tipping?

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Africa and Sugar walk slowly along a degraded path in the mountains over the beach. They are both drunk, maybe Africa more than Sugar.

AFRICA

You're gonna get us lost.

SUGAR

(laughing)

We can't get lost.

AFRICA

We'll get lost and die. Or I'll die.

Sugar stops abruptly to deliver a playful mock lesson, poking Africa in the chest sometimes.

SUGAR

First of all, stranger, you don't die from being lost. You could die from hunger or thirst or snakebite. But being lost is perfectly safe. Second, we're not lost. You cannot get lost out here. Look.

He gestures around.

SUGAR (CONT'D)

There are no trees. The plants don't come up past your hip. You can see everything--the whole island. You want to go somewhere, just look at it and go there.

AFRICA

(laughing)

I don't understand. Doesn't make any sense.

SUGAR

I am going to crack you. Look--pick somewhere.

Africa looks around and points eventually to some building in the distance on a far hillside.

AFRICA

There.

SUGAR

Good, good. Suppose you wanted to go there. What would you do first?

AFRICA

Die?

An exaggerated sigh from Sugar.

SUGAR

No no no no no no.

He grabs Africa's shoulders and orients him toward the building. Africa pretends to not understand and so the process takes a long time and lots of physical contact.

SUGAR (CONT'D)

Point yourself at it. Okay?

AFRICA

Okay. Why?

SUGAR

Now you can go to it. If you just walk ... in a straight line.

Sugar's arms are still around Africa, positioning him.

AFRICA

Hmm. Won't I trip? If I have to keep my eyes--

Sugar slaps Africa. Africa turns around and draws him in, they kiss. An awkward kiss--clumsy, as if they have different investments. Sugar laughs a little, Africa too, Sugar easily, Africa with nervousness. They try again--something is still off. As if to try and make up for the mismatch, Africa tries to increase the physicality of it, pulling Sugar in closer into a real embrace, grasping at his body, but this only increases the problem. Both are aware of the failure, both are sorry in different ways. They mumble to each other.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

Sorry.

SUGAR

No, I wanted to.

AFRICA

Okay.

SUGAR

We can keep going, if you want.

Africa nods. They try again, but this time pull away practically before starting. Africa sighs, screws up his face as if already suffering at the memory of the just-past moment.

AFRICA

Fuck.

INT. MOUNT LYCABETTUS, TUNNEL

On the video screen, someone makes markings in red pen on a map of the facility. The footage is top down, the map is flat on a kitchen table. The disembodied hands now reach off screen and return to lay down a glossy photograph of a woman, the young Voice, in a large hotel shower. She is laughing and covers her chest partially with her arm. Another photo is laid down on top. The same shower, the other corner--a man we haven't seen before and the voice's husband. Both are naked and smiling.

EXT. FORK

Africa and Sugar are parting ways at a fork in the road. It is late at night. Africa's road lead steep down, Sugar's follows the contour back home.

SUGAR

I didn't get to show you star tipping.

AFRICA

Ah, that's okay.

SUGAR

Are you sure? It only takes a second. It feels insane.

AFRICA

No need, no need.

Sugar comes over, puts a hand on Africa.

SUGAR

Listen, it's not a big deal. Not everything is important. Most things aren't important.

AFRICA

Yeah, okay.

A beat.

AFRICA (CONT'D)

(weak smile)

I just don't wanna go star tipping
alright.

SUGAR

Ha, fine. That's fine. Where are
you going?

AFRICA

Down to the ocean. Clear my head.

SUGAR

Alright. You'll be alright alone?

AFRICA

I'll be alright.

SUGAR

Goodnight then. See you in the
morning.

AFRICA

Goodnight.

They part ways.

Africa descends to the beach. Silent tears well up and begin to fall. When he gets fully onto the beach, he takes off his shoes and shirt and leaves them in a jumble. He walks to the water, crying harder now. He sits down, lets out one sob, then gets back up immediately. There is no one on the beach except much farther down, where some teenagers have a fire going.

He walks slowly down the beach in their direction, zigzagging up to the beach's edge where the grass is, collecting smooth stones about the size of his palm, entering the water again, heading back up, etc. He begins humming to himself, invents a little refrain. He fingers the stones, spits on them and rubs them to see their texture. He puts them in his pocket until his pockets bulge. The refrain comforts him, automates his breathing. He isn't crying anymore.

He returns to the water, wading now up to his knees before turning to continue at this depth very slowly down the beach. His shorts are soaked. He has to tighten his belt to keep them on. It seems he is slowly trending deeper, though the curve of the beach makes it hard to say. He hum-sings under his breath continuously, the same few bars of melody--nothing recognizable, something he made up just to have something.

Now he has drawn closer to the teenagers' scene. He looks and is astonished.

Commotion: a woman, wrapped in a white gauze over black undergarments, is floating a few feet above the fire. Her body seems limp, drugged, though sometimes she twitches as if in response to the heat. She moves as though dreaming. The teenagers are excited, shrieking in whispers, grabbing each other, pointing. They are afraid and amazed. They run constantly around the fire to get different angles. One prods her with a stick and she wobbles, rising frictionless upwards. Africa's eyes are wide. He approaches dumbstruck, holding his wet and stone-heavy shorts up in a waddle-run.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
(under breath)
Witch.

The teenagers turn and notice him.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
(pointing to her, shouting
to them, shooining them
away)
Witch! Witch!

They nod but the comprehension seems partial. Africa mimics casting a spell with his fingers.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Witch! A witch!

She is spinning lazily. The gauze is discolored with smoke. She raises a foot and slows. Suddenly, face alight with fear, Africa takes a stone from his pockets and hurls it at her. He misses.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Witch!

As he screams "witch", he makes the sign of the fig with both hands, thrusting his arms out towards her over his head. He then throws another rock, moving as fast as possible. Misses. Makes the double fig sign again. She rises a little more.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
Witch!

The teenagers have taken a stop back. Africa is animated and manic. He is crying again. He throws another, harder than the last. This one hits her in the ribs. She gasps in pain and recoils but her eyes stay closed. The impact sent her up a little ways.

AFRICA (CONT'D)
(making the sign
vigorously)
Witch! Witch!

He continues throwing stones and making the double fig sign until his pockets are empty. Most miss, but the hits seem to hurt her. She rolls around in her invisible bed, grimacing and shaking, clutching at herself. She is high enough now no stone could reach her. He staggers back to the water's edge, looking up at the small white figure. He falls to one knee and sobs, making the fig sign and squeezing it hard, pulsating. His thumb is purplish. He stretches all the way out and whimpers.

END