

FADE IN:

EXT. GEORGETOWN DOCKS - DUSK

SUPER:

"Demerara, 1823"

A busy dock.

Scores of enslaved men unload supplies from 'Fame' a large schooner docked in the harbour. The gangway bustles with 'ant like' traffic. High in the rigging of the tallest mast the crew go about lowering the sails.

SUPER:

"False news of colonial emancipation reaches the Plantations"

EXT. SUCCESS PLANTATION, CANE FIELDS - DUSK

Silhouetted against a burning sugar cane field a young boy races towards a distant settlement. Flames meld into a sunset sky, punctuated by plumes of thick smoke.

A hundred yards covered at pace. Bare feet scatter embers as they contact the ashen ground.

Breaths heavy from exertion.

Several enslaved men control the burn with birches, slapping the flames as they encroach. They ignore the boy as he sprints by.

The settlement grows closer.

EXT. SUCCESS PLANTATION, SHACKS - MOMENTS LATER

The boy, KOFI (late teens), born into servitude, but with the attitude of a free man races between his enslaved brothers, few pay him heed.

Out of breath he enters a crudely built Coopers shed.

INT. SUCCESS PLANTATION, COOPERS SHED - CONTINUOUS

Two sweaty men toil over half formed wooden barrels.

JACK GLADSTONE (late 20's) tall, skinny and toned. The scars on his upper arms, from previous whippings, visible under a soiled vest like top. Grime and sweat hides his aesthetic features. He whacks a wooden stave into place.

A workbench. QUAMINA GLADSTONE (late 40's) glides a plane over a newly formed stave. Experiences beyond his years reflected in his eyes. He looks across to his son, who in turn acknowledges Kofi. They both forge on with their work.

KOFI
Boats' come in.

Quamina and Jack exchange a glance. Frustrated, Kofi crosses the shed and fronts up to Quamina.

KOFI (CONT'D)
Quamina, the boat--

QUAMINA
I hear your noise boy, what am I to
be doin' with the news?

He smirks at Jack, they tease Kofi some more.

JACK
Boats come. Boats go. Nuttin'
special 'bout this one?

An isolated bell tolls in the distance. Jack and Quamina lay their tools on the bench, not waiting for the second toll. Jack wipes beads of sweat off his brow with a dirty forearm.

KOFI
Jack. The boats' from England. Sent
by the King 'imself.

The ragtag entourage head for home.

EXT. SUCCESS PLANTATION, SHACKS - CONTINUOUS

Clusters of people assemble after a hard days graft. A line of workers streams back from the fields.

JACK
I know one thing. King's news will
wait till my belly's full.

QUAMINA
He'll wait a mighty while son.

They enjoy the banter as they amble towards the communal shacks. Quamina reaches the homestead first.

A small cluck of women fuss over a fire, stirring pots of stew and soup for the family meal. Quamina kisses his mother, TONISEN, on the top of her head. The modest woman of some sixty summers prods her spoon into the steaming pot.

QUAMINA (CONT'D)

Hear me Tonisen...

Amused she moves her attention to her son. He gestures towards Jack.

QUAMINA (CONT'D)

Your grandson needs a full belly so that he might give the King an audience.

TONISEN

His belly will stay as empty as the boat.

Jack squats beside his grandmother. He holds her scrawny hand in his.

JACK

Food cooked with love will always fill me. They say this ship brings--

TONISEN

Empty souls to replace the weak and frail.

Jack surveys the vast cane fields. The glow of the fires give an eerie hue to the settlement.

JACK

Talk of emancipation.

TONISEN

(dismissively)

Talk

QUAMINA

Chatter. They know nothing of what they speak of.

Tonisen ladles watery stew into a crude wooden bowl and hands it to Jack.

EXT. SUCCESS ROAD - DAY

Jack hauls a reluctant mule, who in turn drags a barrel laden dray cart. Secured with hemp, they wobble precariously as the cart jolts in and out of pot holes.

Dressed in his Church clothes, Jack navigates his nag through the piles of horse crap, between the carts and wagons from other plantations.

The regular sight snakes its way past a sign that reads "Georgetown 5 miles".

EXT. GEORGETOWN, GENERAL STORE - LATER

A now empty cart trundles along at a quicker clip than before. Jack yanks the tired mule up to a stop outside the storefront and encourages him to drink from the stagnant trough.

The store door creaks open. The store owner deliberately steps onto the veranda and stares at him. Jack scoops a handful of the green water and splashes it over his face, takes a hanky from his pocket and proceeds to dry himself.

The store owner snaps a birch switch against his boot. The message clear. Jack wrenches the thirsty mule's head from the water trough.

The two men eye each other. Jack walks the animal away, the store owner talks a walk down the steps to where Jack was. Jack commits himself to head for the trough on the other side of the town square.

EXT. GEORGETOWN, TOWN SQUARE - MOMENTS LATER

Jack inclines on the post his beast's tethered to. He squints in the bright sun, towards the store. His tormentor's glare fixed on him.

Situated in front of a large whitewashed house, Jack's new watering hole adjacent to the Governor's residence.

The large front door pushes open. Freeman DANIEL (mid 20's) bustles out of the house and towards him. His well turned out appearance gives away his elevated status among their community.

DANIEL

Hey!

Jack cranes his neck, spies Daniel and revolves to face him.

They embrace.

JACK

Daniel, my Church brother.

DANIEL
Jack you know it makes things
tricky to be seen with you.

JACK
The lot of a freeman is such a
difficult one.

Daniel admonishes him with a look.

DANIEL
Manumission is only possible by the
whim of dead men Jack. My fortunes
can change as easily as yours.

JACK
I hear rumours from England.

DANIEL
Not all rumours are true my friend.
(pause)
What have you heard?

Daniel brings Jack by the arm towards the side of the house.

JACK
What do you know.

DANIEL
Only what the newspapers tell me.

JACK
The King decrees freedom for his
Colonies. Is Demerara not among
them?

Daniel checks for prying eyes and attentive ears.

DANIEL
This will get me beaten Jack.

Jack maintains eye contact. Daniel sighs.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Continue in what you have learned
and have become convinced of,
because you know those from whom
you've learnt it.

Jack's overwhelmed with the confirmation.

JACK
"All things working together for
good for those who love God".

DANIEL
Romans. JACK (CONT'D)
Chapter eight.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I must go before I am missed.

EXT. LE RESOUVENIR PLANTATION, BETHEL CHURCH - DAY

The congregation trickles into the small church. The Pastor, a cold devout man, oversees their arrival.

An air of joy and reverence about his flock.

Whisps of smoke rise from the previous evenings burn. Men still tend to the fields and ignore the bell that calls them to worship.

Quamina, Tonisen, Jack and Kofi corral the few who attend from Success Plantation, Kofi skips around Jack.

INT. BETHEL CHURCH - DAY

AMBA, a proud freewoman (late teens) passes Bibles to the congregation. She has a fire inside her that's not yet been extinguished.

Her eyes meet the Pastor's as he prepares to address his flock. He attempts a flirtatious smile which gets ignored by Amba. As a gesture of nonchalance he pulls his wife to his side and resumes his preparations.

Jack accepts a Bible, he scans the room for familiar faces. He edges his way along the pews, Quamina slips in behind him and the pair greet comrades. They huddle and conspire in unheard hushed voices.

Kofi converges on Amba's station. His eagerness to attract her attention he knocks a pile of Bible to the floor. Amba drops to her knees to scoop them up.

After a second of hesitation Kofi, embarrassed, helps her.

AMBA
Kofi.

KOFI
Miss Amba... excuse me.

Kofi hands over the books he's collected, their fingers brush against each other. Kofi reacts as if shocked and jumps into the nearest vacant pew.

Amba 'reserves' the seat behind him with a Bible paced atop her shawl.

INT. BETHEL CHURCH - LATER

Amba perches on the pew behind Kofi, one hand rests on her belly. The Pastor's preaching echoes through the hall in a rhythmic cadence that fills the air, his words indistinct.

Kofi desperate to turn to face Amba, his sense of place keeps his face forward. She taps him and, amused, he feigns ignorance of her touch and mimes 'brushing off' the annoyance at his shoulder.

Amba gives him a determined prod.

AMBA
Don't you be ignoring me master
Kofi...

He smirks and half turns.

EXT. BETHEL CHURCH - NIGHT

The pair cavort with each other as they leave the service prematurely. Kofi takes her hand and playfully pulls her into the tall cane fields.

Joyful voices of the congregation fill the air with 'All hail the power of Jesus' name'.

CONGREGATION (O.C.)
Bless him, each poor oppressed race
that Christ did upward call;
His hand in each achievement trace,
and crown him Lord of all!

The Pastor emerges from the hall and scours the fields from his top step vantage point. No sign of Amba. This irritates him.

EXT. CANE FIELDS - MOMENTS LATER

Kofi and Amba gambol through the canes, Amba feigns protest at the liberty Kofi takes with her. She twists to him, arm out stretched to keep him at bay. He tugs her close, they sink to the ground.

A kiss. A protest. Another embrace.

AMBA

You forget yourself Master Kofi.

Kofi feigns shock, takes to his knees and removes his top. His torso illuminated by a sweep of torchlight, he hits the deck. Amba rises and peeks through the canes. The Pastor's face contorts in anger as the flame arcs in front of him.

He watches for movement and see none. The flaming torch gets thrust into a bucket by the door and he returns inside.

The conflagration fades and leaves the lovers in moonlit darkness.

EXT. LE RESOUVENIR PLANTATION, MIDDLE ROAD - NIGHT

A line of attendees snake their way across the plantation. In the distance the light of the oil lamps illuminates a figure in the church doorway.

The congregation is closely watched by two mounted guards. They circle their restless horses and observe the exodus home. They don't see a group of men gather in the shadows.

Jack ushers them to leave the path and venture into the darkness of the bush.

EXT. THE BUSH - NIGHT

The men huddle together.

JACK

I have news from Georgetown.
Emancipation.

Reactions vary, some elated others unsure and sceptical. One among them steps up.

OUTSPOKEN MAN

How did you come by such news?

JACK

Freeman Daniel, he speaks openly with the ship's crew and reads the newspapers from England.

OUTSPOKEN MAN

We should trust the words of one who eats with the Buckra?

JACK

With my life.

A younger scrawny looking man shakes his head and reties his neckerchief.

SCRAWNY MAN

If your word hold true we would
hear it across the plantations.

JACK

The King's words rest with those in
power.

Hooves clatter on the rocks in the road. The disparate band of men scatter. A couple make cover before the horses round the bend at a gallop.

The lead rider brandishes his horse whip above his head. He swings it and a runner takes the whip across his face, he spins and collapses.

The rider moves on to the next man and swipes him across the back.

The two struck men scramble into the scrub and lay low. Those spared the rod make good their escape through the tall cane.

Horsemen dismount in search of wounded prey.

EXT. THE BUSH - CONTINUOUS

Every breath fought for, every movement kept to the minimum. Their tormentors search for them, switches whack the bush away as they advance.

The Scrawny man looks feverishly about at his fellow men. He bounces on his toes, knees bent. His eyes fix on the road and the cane field on the other side.

They know what he wants to do and they silently urge him to stay put.

Sweat glistens on his brow. A crack of boots on brittle wood resonates across the stillness. Scrawny man spooks and rises from the Gorse.

He runs.

Muffled shouts of glee from the riders, the chase on. They too scramble through the undergrowth and head for the road.

Everyone helpless as he's tripped down and set upon.

EXT. LE RESOUVENIR PLANTATION, MIDDLE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A tethered horse paws the dry earth, its companion shakes its head. The riders return and untie the reins. In the road lies the still body of the Scrawny man.

They mount and without care walk their horses over the limp body.

SCRAWNY MAN

Help...

The horses stop. A job unfinished.

One rider dismounts and hogties the Scrawny Man's feet together with a length of rope. He kicks the dying man and hands the loose end to his companion.

With that cue the mounted rider digs his heels into the ribs of his horse and it sets off at a gallop. The Scrawny man silenced at last.

EXT. THE BUSH- MOMENTS LATER

The yellow gorse punctuates with shocked yet relieved men as they rise from their cover. Glances exchanged and blessings counted they trudge back to Middle Road.

MIDDLE ROAD

Jack reaches down and scoops up Scrawny man's neckerchief, he runs it through his fingers as they stand for a moment in the middle of the road.

INT. BETHEL CHURCH - DAY

Amba pootles between the pews, collects the odd missed Bible. She cradles her tummy. She's content and sings gently to herself.

AMBA

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,

She's watched. Amba collects a switch that leans against the wall and sweeps though the pew.

AMBA (CONT'D)

From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and power.