

FADE IN

EXT. DAY. THE ELEPHANT TRAIL.

Saturday 17 November 1832.

Early morning. The mountains around Franschhoek in South Africa's Western Cape.

Near the farm Zandvliet in the Drakenstein, the slave woman PHILIDA (25) walks along the Elephant Trail, casting a long shadow. She is thin, with a narrow face, wide cheekbones, and large pitch-black eyes. She wears a simple blue dress, thin and faded from many washings. She carries a child, WILLEMPIE (six months old), in an *abbadoek* on her back.

PHILIDA (V.O.)

This is what it is to be a slave.
Just this, and nothing more. This:
that everything is decided for you
from out there. You don't say no.
You don't ask questions. You just
do what they tell you.

Mid morning. The solitary figure of Philida, with the baby on her back, trudges on in the far distance.

PHILIDA (V.O.)

But far at the back of your head
you think: Soon there must come a
day when I can say for myself:
This and that I shall do, this and
that I shall not. But such a day
never come.

Midday. Along a street in the small town of Stellenbosch, Philida's narrow, bare feet stir up the dust as she walks alongside her shadow.

EXT. DAY. THE SQUARE IN FRONT OF THE STELLENBOSCH DROSTDY.

Philida arrives at a planted square in front of the Stellenbosch Drostdy. She stoops at a water pump and drinks deeply. She rinses her dusty feet under the water, and sits on a low wall to rub them.

After resting briefly, she crosses a bridge over the small stream that runs past the front door of the Drostdy.

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INT. DAY. THE STELLENBOSCH DROSTDY.

In the dim interior, Philida approaches a clerk.

PHILIDA
I am here to see the slave
protector.

OFFICIAL
Why?

PHILIDA
I want to make a complaint.

OFFICIAL
What about?

PHILIDA
Are you the slave protector?

OFFICIAL
No.

PHILIDA
I want to talk to the slave
protector.

OFFICIAL
(jerking his head towards an
open door)
Mijnheer Lindenberg is through
there.

Philida crosses to the door and knocks.

LINDENBERG (O.S.)
Yes?

INT. DAY. LINDENBERG'S OFFICE.

Mijnheer LINDENBERG (50s) sits behind a large desk in a hand carved chair with armrests. He is tall, white, thin, and bony, with deep furrows in his forehead, like a ploughed wheat field, and a nose like a sweet potato that has grown past itself. He wears thick glasses. He remains seated, while Philida stands in front of him.

LINDENBERG
(looking at her over his
thick glasses)
Yes?

PHILIDA
I have come to make a complaint.

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LINDENBERG
(pulling a big book towards
him)
What is your name?

PHILIDA
Philida.

Lindenberg writes her name down in the big book, along with each answer she gives. Every now and then, he dips the quill in the ink, or sprinkles fine sand on the thick paper.

LINDENBERG
Where do you come from?

PHILIDA
Before, I was in the Cape, but
then we had to come with the Baas
to a farm here in the Drakenstein.

LINDENBERG
What is the name of your Baas?

PHILIDA
Oubaas Cornelis Brink.

LINDENBERG
What is the name of the farm?

PHILIDA
Zandvliet.

LINDENBERG
How long have you been working
there?

PHILIDA
Since I was nine. Now, I'm twenty-
five. I'm the knitter.

Lindenberg continues writing everything down meticulously.

LINDENBERG
(peering at her over the top
of his glasses)
You're the knitter at Zandvliet,
you say?

PHILIDA
Yes.

FLASHBACK

INT. DAY. PETRONELLA'S ROOM AT ZANDVLIET.

The room is dominated by a high bed, covered with a feather stuffed *bulsak*. In a corner is a hearth for cooking. One door opens to the exterior, and another door leads to the interior of the house. On the smooth dung floor is a small red carpet.

In this flashback, Philida is 10.

PETRONELLA (mid 40s in this flashback) was brought as a slave from Java, but is now a free woman. As such, she wears shoes. She comes quickly into the room from the interior door.

PETRONELLA

(triumph tinged with relief)
Philida – I just talked to Nooi Janna, and she says you can be the knitter. So, you not just a farmyard girl, you a knitting girl. That's *something*.

PHILIDA

What must a knitting girl do, Ouma Nella?

PETRONELLA

You knit the socks and jerseys and cardigans and scarves and everything for the whole household.

PHILIDA

But I don't know *how*.

PETRONELLA

Come, I show you.

From a basket next to a spindle in the corner of her room she takes a ball of wool and two ivory knitting needles. She seats herself on the side of the high bed.

PETRONELLA

(patting the place on the bed next to her)
Come sit by me.

Philida climbs up to sit beside her, her feet dangling.

The needles flash as Petronella casts on a short row.

PETRONELLA

Now watch closely.

(MORE)

PETRONELLA (CONT'D)
 (Philida leans up against
 Petronella to get a closer
 look)

In-over-through-and-off. In-over-
 through-and-off. You see?

Philida nods.

PETRONELLA
 (handing the knitting to her)
 Now you try.
 (Philida fumbles with the
 unfamiliar procedure)
 In. Over. Through. Off. Good girl!
 Try again. Good! Now you just go
 on and make the whole row like
 that. Then, when you get to the
 end, you turn it around and you go
 back the other way. This is called
 garter stitch.

END FLASHBACK

INT. DAY. LINDENBERG'S OFFICE.

LINDENBERG
 Did you get a pass for coming
 here?

PHILIDA
 No. I know I do not need a pass to
 complain.

LINDENBERG
 When did you leave, and how long
 did you walk?

PHILIDA
 I left when the sun came up, and I
 got here just now.

LINDENBERG
 (checks his fob watch)
 So, about seven hours.
 (making note of this)
 Where did you sleep last night?

PHILIDA
 On the farm.

LINDENBERG

What do you think is going to happen to you when you get home again?

PHILIDA

Maybe I will get a flogging.

LINDENBERG

What is your complaint?

PHILIDA

It is Baas Frans that I come to complain about.

LINDENBERG

(an edge of impatience)

What are you complaining about?

PHILIDA

He take me.

LINDENBERG

(peering over the top of his glasses)

How did he take you?

Philida hesitates.

LINDENBERG

I have to know all the particulars. The law demands that I must find out everything that happened. So that it can all be written down very precisely in this book.

PHILIDA

He *naai* me.

Lindenberg gives a dry cough, as if his spit has dried up, and runs a hand over his balding head. Then, he writes this fact down.

LINDENBERG

Did you resist?

PHILIDA

Grootbaas, in the beginning I try to ...

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. EARLY EVENING. BAMBOO COPSE.

PHILIDA (V.O.)
... but that is when Frans begin
to talk to me very nicely ...

FRANS (16) is already tall, with blonde hair and blue eyes. He fumbles Philida (19) against his body, pushing her backwards and down until she loses her balance and topples awkwardly. He falls on top of her, pinning her there, pulling at her clothes.

PHILIDA
No, man Frans, no! Stop it!

FRANS
(with frantic urgency)
You mustn't be scared, I won't
hurt you, I just want to make you
happy. If you let me push into
you, then I shall buy you free.
Then you can walk everywhere you
want to. With shoes on your feet.

He pushes into her, and she cries out.

PHILIDA (V.O.)
And I remember thinking, how can
it be that a thing like freedom
can hurt one so bad? Because it
was my first time and he didn't
act very gentle with me, he was
too hasty. I think it was his
first time too.

FRANS
I promise and I promise and I
promise, from now on you are mine,
for ever and ever, for us there
will never be a slave and a baas
any more, just me and you, I
promise and promise and promise
from now on we shall both wear
shoes, forever and ever, amen.

END FLASHBACK