

LA
NEGRA
(The negress)
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Advisory: This play contains explicit language, violence and sexuality.

A shack made of strips of pladur and moisture. A small room, dirty and disordered. The sound of traffic in the background signals the proximity of a large motorway. At the back of the room a doorframe without a door leads to another interior room, even smaller and darker. An American motorbike with a large engine sits in the middle of the room.

ISABEL, reeling, goes up to the record player and puts on some music. A tango. RAY watches her from the motorbike. ISABEL's body swings to the rhythm of the music. She's clothed scantily in leather that clings to her skin. She beckons him to dance. RAY obeys and surrenders to ISABEL's seductive embrace. Their bodies are so glued together they seem to melt into each other. They kiss hungrily. ISABEL surrenders herself to him, wrapping her arms and legs around him, but suddenly pulls away and slaps him.

ISABEL: Asshole!

RAY stares at her, picks up his jacket angrily and starts to leave.

ISABEL: Don't leave, you faggot.

RAY: What do you want?

ISABEL: Your hand, baby.... I want your hand.

RAY: My hand. What for, Isabel? What the fuck do you want my hand for?

ISABEL: To get my pussy wet, honey. That's all. To make me horny and get my panties wet.

RAY: You're a witch.

ISABEL: No, Ray. Get it right. I'm just a fucking junkie.

RAY: You think you can lord it over everyone 'cos you're the little princess. The Captain's princess.

ISABEL: I'm no princess, baby. I'm the queen.

RAY: But you don't love him. You don't love the Captain. You're just with him out of self-interest. You don't love anyone, the only thing you care about is the dough.

ISABEL: Queens are made of flesh and blood. My pussy still drips like a sponge when I'm in love.

RAY: You're twisted.

ISABEL: Give me your hand, sweetheart. Rub me up a little.

RAY: Goodbye, Isabel.

ISABEL: Don't leave, you faggot. Dance with me. Heat up my panties a bit.

RAY: Fuck off!

ISABEL: You don't know how much I'd like it, Ray. Feeling a man's dick ram up me. But it's not gonna happen, Ray, there are no guys fit for the job. With a real dick. So all I can do now is dance. Come on, Ray. Let's do it. I wanna brush up against your dick. I wanna get you horny. I want to feel your hard dick. Come on, Ray... Let's do it, while my pussy's still hot.

RAY obeys, approaches ISABEL and they start dancing again..

RAY: Does the Captain know you fuck everyone? That you fuck in bar toilets to get some coke? Does the Captain know you're a slut?

ISABEL: I don't know, honey. Wanna ask him?

RAY: Are you afraid he'll find out sometime?

ISABEL: Are you gonna tell him, Ray?

RAY doesn't answer. ISABEL gives him a French kiss. He doesn't respond.

ISABEL: Don't worry, Ray. You'll never fuck me. You're a comrade. You're the Captain's confidante. His confidante. Relax, Ray, I'll never fuck you. You'll always give me the coke for free. Isn't that right, Ray? You'll never leave me high and dry.

ISABEL kisses RAY again.

ISABEL: Cut a few lines.

They separate. RAY takes out a paper and spreads the white powder on a dirty mirror. ISABEL walks up to the little back room and peers in. The groans of someone snoring. ISABEL opens a big knife and goes up to RAY.

ISABEL: Cut it off!

RAY: What did you say?

ISABEL: You want to. I can see it in your eyes. It's what you want to do. You've had it with him. Cut it off! Cut it off, Ray! Cut it off!

RAY: You're nuts, Isabel.

ISABEL: I'm on to you, Ray. It's what you want. Come on, cut off his dick!

ISABEL gives RAY the knife.

RAY: What the fuck is up with you? You're gone. You're up to your ears in coke.

ISABEL: If you had the balls you'd be the boss, and if you were the boss, I'd be with you. I'd let you fuck me and then leave me when you fall for another little wet princess. But you have to have balls, Ray. That's the only way you can be the boss. You have to kill him. You have to have balls. Cut his throat! If you can't do it, Ray, if you don't have the balls....then you're fucked. You're fucked and you have to put up with it. You'll keep on being a flunky, Ray. A fucking secretary. And I'm a whore, Ray. You know that. I'm a whore. The queen of the sluts. Come on! What are you waiting for?

RAY takes the knife. He gets up, walks towards the back room and peers inside. He looks at the knife and closes it. ISABEL laughs, takes the knife and starts cutting a line of cocaine.

RAY: You're a real bitch.

Someone knocks at the door. No one responds. RAY looks at ISABEL, but she continues cutting the line of cocaine. Another knock. No answer. The person knocks insistently, wearily, desperately. ISABEL rolls a paper and snorts the coke.

ISABEL: Shit, Ray, can't you hear? Open the fucking door!

RAY: Hide the fucking coke.

ISABEL stashes the paper as RAY goes up to the door and opens it. ANA, a young woman, stands at the entrance. She is dressed casually but impeccably.

ANA: Hi, Ray. Is the Captain in?

ISABEL: He's not the Captain anymore.

ANA: But everybody...

ISABEL: He's not in.

ANA: He's not in? But I...had an appointment with him. At twelve o'clock.

ISABEL: Oh yeah? You had an appointment with the Captain? Today?

ANA: Yes.

ISABEL: Did he give you the appointment? Did he give it to you in person?
The appointment, duchess. What I mean to say is, did you talk to the Captain? In person.

ANA: No.

ISABEL: Did you talk to me maybe? Did I set up the appointment for you?
Have I seen your ass before?

ANA: No.

ISABEL: So why do you say you have an appointment with the Captain?

ANA: I spoke with Ray.

ISABEL: Ray?

ANA: Yes.

ISABEL: You spoke with Ray?

ANA: Yeah, with Ray.

ISABEL: And?

ANA: Well, it's twelve o'clock now.

ISABEL *yawns.*

ISABEL: It's twelve o'clock now. Twelve o'clock. The Captain likes our fresh young pussies, but I'm afraid it can't be today. Ray can tell you that, he's our... our accountant. The deputy accountant.

RAY: Yeah, I'm afraid today's not possible.

ANA: Not possible?

ISABEL: Who do you think you are to be disturbing the Captain? The Captain does whatever the fuck he wants to. The Captain is the Captain, duchess. He doesn't need permission from anybody. He doesn't answer to little brats like you. You tell her, Ray. Tell her and get her out of here. Get her the fuck out of here, Ray. Get that slut out of here.

ANA: I left a deposit.

ISABEL: A deposit? A deposit, Ray?

ANA: Two hundred bucks.

ISABEL: Well, two hundred's not that much.

ANA: It's my money.

ISABEL: It's a quarter.

ANA: A quarter of what?

ISABEL: Of what it's gonna cost you. The gram. What's your name?

ANA: Ana.

ISABEL: Ana? Ana... Ana quarter gram. Alright. Come in, quarter gram, come in and check it out for yourself. Let her see him, Ray. Let her see him. Today's not going to be possible. Better another day. Yeah, it'd be better if you came at another time. Not twelve o'clock. Another time.

ISABEL *moves aside and lets ANA in. She gestures to her to go into the back room. ANA does but stops at the door. She looks back.*

ANA: He's sleeping.

ISABEL: I told you. Today's not possible.

ANA: Yeah, but...

ISABEL: You scared? He won't bite. Try waking him up.

ANA: No.

ISABEL laughs and sits down on a pile of clothes and cushions in the middle of the room..

ISABEL: It's you that wants to get your quarter gram.

ANA: We'd agreed he'd tattoo me today. Ray told me...

ISABEL: Ray told you... Our dear friend Ray told you. Well, go in. Go in and remind him. Remind him of what Ray said. Remind him of what Ray decided, remind him Ray asked for a deposit of two hundred bucks and remind him also that Ray said today, from twelve to twelve-thirty, the captain would tattoo you. Go in and tell him.

ANA goes into the back room. The CAPTAIN's body, curled up, turns a bit on the floor, covered by a pile of blankets and foam rubber. ANA shakes him but nothing happens. Not even a slight reaction.

ANA: Captain... Captain...

A murmur and a hoarse groan is the only reaction ANA gets. Defeated, ANA goes back to the main room.

ANA: He won't wake up.

ISABEL: Hit him. Hit him hard.

ANA: I can't do that.

ISABEL: Get a load of Miss Preppie. What's the matter? You got money to throw out the window? You want to lose two hundred bucks just like that? Does it turn you on to see a couple of dirty hairy guys pocketing your dough? It makes your pussy drip, doesn't it?

ISABEL gets up from the floor and walks determinedly into the back room, where she starts kicking the body lying under the bundle of clothes and cushions. ISABEL, tired and panting, comes back smiling to where ANA is standing. ISABEL leans against the doorframe, as if she'd just made a big effort.

ISABEL: You go in. It's your business.

ANA: Is he sleeping?

ISABEL: He isn't sleeping. He's high. He can't sleep. He needs some more smack in order to sleep. He's hibernating. Like a bear. It's not the first time the Captain leaves a little duchess out in the cold.

ANA: What about my money?

ISABEL: Your money? Ray. Ask your friend Ray. Ask him what he's done with the dough.

ISABEL laughs mirthlessly to herself.

RAY: I'm sorry, I can't do anything.

ISABEL: Come on, Ray. This is your big opportunity.

RAY: It'd be better if you came back another day.

ISABEL: Now, why does she have to do that? You gave her an appointment and you took her money. Ray, you can't let this happen. This princess can't leave without her tattoo. She's paid for it in advance. The customer's always right.

RAY: I'm sorry, Ana, I can't do anything.

ISABEL: You've got no balls, Ray.

RAY: Not now.

ISABEL: You've got no balls, Ray... No fucking balls.

RAY: The captain is not disposed right now. You'd better come back...another day.

ISABEL: Well said, Ray. I'm gonna do a line in your honor.

RAY: I promise you the Captain'll tattoo you.

ISABEL: Search his pockets, baby. Get your little quarter back. He's carrying at least two hundred bucks.

RAY: You want your money back?

ANA: I want the tattoo.

ISABEL: Then stay.

ANA: Stay? What for?

ISABEL: To wait.

ANA: Wait? Wait for what?

ISABEL: Wait for the time to go by. The minutes...the hours... Wait till he wakes up.

ANA: Is he going to wake up?

ISABEL: Why wouldn't he? He's not dead.

ANA: When? When's he going to wake up?

ISABEL: In Spring maybe, when the ice thaws. He's got to catch up on his sleep. If you stick around, you'll be the first in line.

RAY: It'd be better if you came back another day. Another time...

ANA: I'll wait.

ISABEL: Very good. That's what I like. A woman with a mission. You don't happen to have a cigarette?

ANA: No, I don't smoke.

ISABEL: Pity. Want a coffee? Does the little duchess desire something while she's waiting?

ANA: No, thanks. Coffee gets me wired.

ISABEL: Well I sure as hell need one. Something to wake me up... I don't want to sleep. I don't want to crash anymore. I've been out of it all day. It's like dying...of heat. Unbearable heat. What the hell do you want to have tattooed, sweetheart?

ISABEL opens the paper and starts making a line.

ANA: A flower... a rose... on my back... on my left shoulder blade.

ISABEL: On your left shoulder blade? That's original!

ANA: Well it isn't really a flower... Not quite... It's a bud. A red flower bud.

ISABEL: Cool! A flower bud!

ANA: It was in one of those catalogues.

ISABEL: And you think the Captain's gonna tattoo that bullshit for you?

ANA doesn't reply.

ISABEL: The Captain tattoos whatever his fucking dick desires. The Captain'll rub his dick on your quarter gram.

In the backroom on the other side of the doorframe, snores can be heard coming from under the pile of sheets and blankets covering the CAPTAIN.

The two women look towards the place the snores are coming from. ISABEL smiles.

ISABEL: Just listen to that. Sounds good, huh?. Sounds good to hear him snore, huh?

ANA: He's like a bear.

ISABEL: He is a bear!

The CAPTAIN lets out a gigantic snore.

ISABEL: Sounds real good to hear him snore. As long as he's sleeping, he's harmless.

ANA: It's possible, if you look at it that way.

ISABEL: Possible? What's possible?

ANA: What you just said. That it sounds good. That you like hearing the Captain snore.

ISABEL: He's not the Captain anymore. I'm managing on my own now. But I'm not paying for anything. Last night I fucked everyone who treated me to a line and I fucked the ones who shot me up with smack too. In toilets, in cars... out in the fucking street... The night's long. I don't remember very well. The night's big. The Captain likes his queen to come home hot and well-fucked. At sunrise. So I fuck them, I shoot up and I do a few acts of charity. I'm like an NGO. I owe it to my people. I'm a professional. Like a queen. It's my duty. I'm the queen.

ISABEL snorts the line.

ISABEL: You want a line?

ANA: Is it coke?

ISABEL: I like to have it for breakfast. It cleans all the smack out of my system.

ANA: If it's coke, no... It gets me wired.

ISABEL: I've begun to quit doing it, but I like to have it for breakfast.

ISABEL spreads the rest of the coke, which is a sizable amount, on the mirror.

ISABEL: When I quit doing smack, I'll quit doing coke too... I won't need it anymore... I won't be afraid to crash out for the entire day. Don't worry, I'm not afraid to sleep for days on end.

ISABEL, still talking, desperately searches the disordered table top for what turns out to be RAY's knife. She uses it to cut another line of coke, which she proceeds to snort very quickly. She inhales it avidly and, with her index finger, wipes up the remains of the coke that are on the mirror and the knife, depositing it in her mouth as if it were toothpaste.

ISABEL: Come on, Ray, Queen Isabel of the hairy men has prepared a line for you.

RAY: I can't do anymore. I'm going to explode.

ISABEL: Men! They've got no stamina!

ISABEL goes ahead and snorts RAY's line too. Behind her back, leaning on the doorframe, the CAPTAIN looks on.

CAPTAIN: You're gonna stuff the whole world up your honker.

ANA and RAY, surprised, look at the CAPTAIN who, hobbling and half asleep, goes up to the motorbike and sits on it.

CAPTAIN: What the fuck?... Who are you?

RAY: I'll explain...

CAPTAIN: No. No explanations. Let her...talk.

ANA: My name's Ana.

CAPTAIN: Ana.

ANA: I don't know if you remember me. You know me. In fact I spoke with Ray. We talked about tattoos and he told me...

CAPTAIN: Ana.

ANA: Ray told me... He said you'd do a tattoo for me.

CAPTAIN: Ana and Ray.

ANA: Yes.

CAPTAIN: A tattoo for Ana.

The CAPTAIN gets up from the motorbike and searches among the sheets and cushions for where ISABEL is lying.

CAPTAIN: Where is it, Ray?

RAY: You got an advance. Two hundred bucks. Two hundred up front. For the tattoo.

CAPTAIN: I don't care if I got paid or not. Can you tell me where the fuck you put it, Ray? What's up, Ray? What's on your mind?

RAY: Business. Just business... Why are you getting all worked up?

CAPTAIN: Where the fuck did you put the syringe?

RAY: I don't know. I've no idea.

ISABEL: You've got it there, under your ass. If you're not careful, it's gonna prick your balls.

The CAPTAIN finally finds the syringe and some rope among the mess.

ANA: My name's Ana, and I spoke to Ray about your doing a tattoo for me.

The CAPTAIN watches her for a while in silence. A monastic silence. Then he starts laughing. A coarse, rasping laugh.

ISABEL: Ana. A tattoo.

ANA, silent, and watches the CAPTAIN, who keeps laughing.

CAPTAIN: The smack, Ray? Get it out, it's time to air it a little.

RAY goes up to the CAPTAIN and gives him a fold of paper. The CAPTAIN, his hand trembling, takes it and opens it. ANA goes up to him and holds up the fold of paper for him.

ANA: I don't mind waiting, but I want it. I want one of your tattoos. I want a tattoo done by you. I want it more than anything. I'm ready to pay for it. Whatever you want. I'm ready.

CAPTAIN: Stand up.

ANA: I'm ready, captain.

ANA stands up.

CAPTAIN: Take your clothes off.

ANA, not knowing what to do, looks at RAY and ISABEL.

ISABEL: You deaf? The captain's told you to take your clothes off. Take your clothes off. Didn't you say you wanted a tattoo?

ANA looks at RAY as a last resort.

RAY: Do what they tell you to.

ANA obeys and takes off her shirt.

CAPTAIN: Your clothes. All your clothes.

ANA strips in silence and stands naked facing the CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN: Turn around.

ANA obeys.

CAPTAIN: Kneel down.

ANA kneels down, covering her breasts with her arms. The CAPTAIN looks at the girl's back, his eyes very close to her skin. Finally, he stretches out a trembling hand and caresses the young woman's back.

ANA turns around decisively, takes the CAPTAIN's hand and brings it to her breasts, caressing them with the CAPTAIN's coarse hand. But when she lets go of his hand, it falls to the floor like lead, as if it were lifeless.

CAPTAIN: No. There's no rose... No rose...

ANA slumps and drops to the floor.

ISABEL: The Captain just does tattoos when he's in the mood.

ANA starts to cry, picks up her clothes and stands up. The CAPTAIN looks at her again.

CAPTAIN: Who told you to get dressed?

ANA doesn't reply, but drops her clothes to the floor and shows herself to the CAPTAIN.

CAPTAIN: Now... You can get dressed now...

ANA doesn't respond. ISABEL starts laughing as RAY picks up ANA's clothes and dresses her.

The CAPTAIN wraps a piece of rubber tightly around his arm, holding the end in his mouth.

ISABEL: I'm sorry, baby, but the Captain's not up for the job. He's been wearing it for a long time. A long time. He's got *la negra* on him.

RAY: Shut up, Isabel.

ISABEL: The loyal servant. The captain's obedient lackey and *la negra*.

RAY: Come on, Ana.

ISABEL: Yeah, that's it. Get out of here! Beat it! Split. Let me get high in peace.

RAY: You'll be back... You'll be back another day.

RAY gets on the motorbike and turns on the engine. ANA gets on behind him, half naked. ISABEL turns on the record-player and starts dancing, singing along to Peggy Lee.

ISABEL and the RECORD-PLAYER: You had many money on 1922
you let other women make fool of you.
why don't you do right?
like some other men do.
Get out here
and give me some money too.

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In a concrete lot, the Captain and a gypsy beggar are sitting on a bench, trying to stay calm.

CAPTAIN: Dark.... It's dark... Very dark.

GYPSY: That's not surprising... It's night time.

The GYPSY picks up his guitar and starts strumming without playing anything in particular. The Captain turns and stares at the gypsy, as if he'd been mulling over his companion's words.

CAPTAIN: But it's dark. Darker than usual...

The GYPSY keeps strumming his guitar, ignoring the CAPTAIN.

GYPSY: Do you remember?

CAPTAIN: Sure do.

GYPSY: Everything? You remember everything?

CAPTAIN: Dimly... more and more dimly. But I don't forget. Nothing. Nothing's missing.

GYPSY: Wow! That's incredible!

CAPTAIN: Nothing. Nothing's missing.

GYPSY: That's incredible!

The GYPSY starts strumming the guitar again. The CAPTAIN picks up a bottle and tilts it over his gullet.

CAPTAIN: Like a wolf's mouth.

GYPSY: Just think what we've been through, Captain!

CAPTAIN: Yeah... It's something else!

GYPSY: How many times have we crossed the Equator, Captain?

CAPTAIN: Seven.

GYPSY: Seven?

CAPTAIN: Seven times.

GYPSY: Seven times. Do you realize, Captain? Do you realize I'm the only gypsy that's crossed the Equator seven times?

CAPTAIN: Gypsies are like cats... They don't like water.

GYPSY: Seven times.... Seven times... You say it as if it were nothing, but it's seven times. No more and no less than seven times... One after another. Seven. Seven times over and seven times back. We even saw the green line. Remember, Captain?

CAPTAIN: Yeah... I remember... Very dimly... But I see it...

GYPSY: Right now?

CAPTAIN: Now everything's black.

GYPSY: Just think what we've been through!

CAPTAIN: It takes time... everything takes time... each time a little longer, each time it takes a little longer.

The CAPTAIN drinks from the bottle as the GYPSY picks at the strings of the guitar.

GYPSY: I haven't forgotten either. I don't forget either, captain. Things just stay stuck there... in my head. It's like a spider's web; sometimes I've got no words for it, my tongue won't respond, but everything stays in there. Everything. There are things I'll never forget, no sir. They stay stuck in here, trapped forever. I don't forget them. I'll never forget the green line, no sir. Or the crew chanting. Or the fights, or the drunks in the ports. I haven't forgotten her either. Her hips...her black fiery hips, swaying in the dark, dancing in the night. No sir, I'll never forget that. No matter how much time goes by, no matter how many years, no sir, I'll never forget that. Never.

CAPTAIN: Never.

GYPSY: No sir. Never.

CAPTAIN: The moon.

GYPSY: At last the moon's come out. The mountains are covered in snow. They're shining in the moonlight. It's not all that dark.

CAPTAIN: No... not all.

GYPSY: It's getting cold. It's not good for drunks to sleep on the street, captain. It's getting cold. We've got to find a nice warm place to drink. Winter's almost here.

CAPTAIN: Not all...

GYPSY: I've got to say what I miss the most are the fights. Yes sir, the fights. You got things out of your system, you calmed down, and then you could just enjoy being drunk. But nobody hates anyone now. Someone sees a gypsy cross the street in front of them and you know what happens, captain? Nothing, nothing happens. Now everyone just gets on with their own business. Nobody hates anyone. That's why

there are no fights anymore. There's no solidarity. No sir. And that's what I miss the most. What about you?

CAPTAIN: What?

GYPSY: What do you miss the most?

CAPTAIN: The speed... The speed...

GYPSY: Just think, Captain... Just think what we've been through.

The GYPSY picks at the strings of the guitar. The CAPTAIN starts to mumble something unintelligible that turns out to be a song. Seconds later, the GYPSY sings along with him, off key also.

GYPSY: The passing of time's nasty business, a kind of revenge, seeing what we once loved fall apart. And meeting up with you has hit me so hard that if I think about it I'll get all bitter. Tonight I'm gonna get drunk. Yeah, good and wasted, so I won't have to think.

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On Ray's motorbike, full speed. ANA holds onto RAY's waist. He drinks.

ANA: I want it, Ray... I want it.

RAY: I've already heard you. I've already heard you.

ANA: You just get it. Just get it.

RAY: It costs more than two hundred bucks.

He drinks.

ANA: With his signature... His signature is what counts.

RAY: I'll do it... You'll have it.

ANA: I want it, Ray... I want it...

ANA holds onto RAY more tightly.

RAY: Your time's come.

ANA: What do you mean?

RAY: You'll have your tattoo, you'll have a great tattoo, you'll have the best tattoo in the western hemisphere. A tattoo like *la negra*.

ANA: What do you mean?

RAY: You'll be my princess. It'll be you now.

ANA: What are you going to do, Ray?

RAY: We've got to hurry. It's all settled.

RAY accelerates and throws away the bottle.

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ISABEL heats a knife over the flame of a candle, as she smokes a joint.

ISABEL: Last night I had a dream... I dreamt about your crew last night. Where are they now? Where are they all now, Captain? Last night I saw them. I saw them all again. Their faces, all ugly and smirking. Why were they laughing? When they laugh, they're even uglier. They were like ghosts in my dream, they seemed to be dead but they didn't stop laughing. I don't know why they were laughing. Where did you leave them, captain? Where'd you leave the crew?

CAPTAIN: The crew...

ISABEL: Now you don't have anyone to order around, no one to call you captain. Where are they, where've they gone?

CAPTAIN: One of them's still around...

ISABEL: You've just got a wimpy drunk gypsy and an underground drug dealer. You've just got the dregs now... The dregs of the shipwreck. Where'd you get stranded, captain? Your ship ran aground a long time ago.

CAPTAIN: Memories... I've only got memories now...

ISABEL: Memories... Just that... The little battles of an old has-been. And a thief who's going to steal them from you. Memories... Dreams... You've just got drunks and traitors around you... And a sleeping beauty for a queen...

CAPTAIN: That's the way it goes.

ISABEL: I'm sleepy... really sleepy...

CAPTAIN: In dreams... everything's scripted... like in a movie... you know everything... you know what's going to happen... like in a dream... it's already happened... you've already lived it... it's already dead...

ISABEL: But my dream wasn't mine, it wasn't my dream... The crew... I didn't recognize anyone... they were like strangers, foreigners... but it was them. It was definitely them. Really ugly... and all smirking... They didn't stop smirking. What were they laughing about?

CAPTAIN: It was them.

ISABEL: What about him? Ray? What does he remember about your crew, what does he remember about the captain? He hadn't even been born when you became captain. He didn't see anything, he doesn't remember anything about your crew. Ray's not a man... he's not a man of the sea... he's a city rat. He's just waiting for the moment when he can stab you in the back....

CAPTAIN: That's the way it goes.

ISABEL: Captain, of what? Captain of nothing. There's no boat, there's no crew. There's nothing.

CAPTAIN: Memories... just memories now.

ISABEL: He hides in your shadow, he crouches like a cat waiting for the moment to leap. Just like he hid during the fights, when there were fights. He'll keep your name and all your stuff... He'll be the Captain.

CAPTAIN: That's the way it goes.

ISABEL: You have to kill him. Yeah, you. You're gonna have to kill him...
You're gonna have to kill him.

The CAPTAIN stares at ISABEL.

ISABEL: It's either you or him. If you don't kill him, he'll kill you.

CAPTAIN: Me.

ISABEL: It's either him or you.

CAPTAIN: That's the way it goes... that's the way it goes...

The CAPTAIN cuts a big chunk of hash with his knife. His hand trembling, he cuts it into equal pieces.

ISABEL: I'm really sleepy now.

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Daytime, the Captain's studio. ANA and RAY observe the tattooing gun.

CAPTAIN: You see, Ana? You see the needle? Really fast. Hundreds of pricks a minute. You'll just feel a tickling sensation. Fast. A thousand small stabs... small, short, minuscule. Thousands of darts. The skin bleeds. Sweet... the blood oozes, the whole skin is a wound. A black wound. Blood. Black blood. It's hard to trace the drawing, get the lines right... each incision, each cut, each prick... each spot is a wound, an indelible wound. It's not paint... It's blood. Blood. A machine gun. Thirteen shots a second, seven hundred and eighty stabs a minute. It's a mortal weapon.

ANA: It's scary to think about.

CAPTAIN: You see?

ANA: What?

CAPTAIN: My pulse. My hand. See how I'm shaking?

ANA: Yeah.

CAPTAIN: I can't work. I can't work well...

ANA: Come on! You can't fool me. I've seen tattoos you've done recently.

CAPTAIN: What you've seen aren't tattoos.

ANA: They have your signature.

CAPTAIN: They're crap.

ANA: No... They were really good. Believe me, they're really good, among the best I've seen. Among the best.

CAPTAIN: I could kill you...

ANA: It's a risk I'll have to take.

CAPTAIN: Any little movement, any blink, any dozing off and it's... goodbye little Ana..

ANA: I'm not a child. You can't scare me.

CAPTAIN: Goodbye, Ana. Just like that.

ANA: You're a coward.

CAPTAIN: I'm a has-been.

ANA: Stop feeling sorry for yourself, captain.

CAPTAIN: I've been responsible for quite a few deaths.

ANA: I'm not interested in your regrets, grandpa. Are you the captain? Then act like it.

CAPTAIN: The captain works when he wants to. With whom he wants to.

ANA: You can't escape, captain. You're not a coward. You know that. You know this time you can't escape.

CAPTAIN: Get out of here.

ANA: You can't abandon ship, captain. You can't escape from yourself.

Whether you like it or not, you're the captain, and you can't stop being that. You know that. There's no way out. You've got *la negra*. You've known that for a long time. You can't escape, you can't escape from yourself, captain...

ANA leaves. RAY watches the CAPTAIN, who switches off the small gun.

CAPTAIN: Who told her? Who told her about..?

RAY: No one, as far as I know.

CAPTAIN: How does she know? How does she know about her?

RAY: Everyone knows. Everyone knows about *la negra*, though perhaps it's just a made-up story. I'm not even sure what *la negra* business is all about.

CAPTAIN: You don't know?

RAY: I know what everyone knows... what everyone says... That's all.

CAPTAIN: That's it?

RAY: That's it. You've never spoken about her. You've never said anything.

CAPTAIN: Never. I've never said anything.

RAY: About *la negra*. Nothing. Ever.

CAPTAIN: Last night I had a dream... odd, very odd... I dreamt...I dreamt about her. It had been a while, a while since I'd dreamt about anything... It was very odd...

RAY: Why?

CAPTAIN: Why? What?

RAY: Why was the dream odd? Why was it odd?

CAPTAIN: Were you there?

RAY: You were talking about a dream... A dream with her in it...And that it was odd. Odd. What's so odd about dreaming about her?

CAPTAIN: Nothing.

RAY: So... why? Why was the dream odd?

CAPTAIN: The dream... It was just a dream. Just an image. An image that haunts me. Many times... I've dreamt it many times. I dream that I'm walking in the street, at night... Sometimes I'm not even dreaming, I'm awake. Confused. I see the shadow of the trees on the ground. Swaying in the wind... In the night... I open the door to my house and go in.

RAY: What's so odd about that?

CAPTAIN: It happens a lot... The dream. A lot...

RAY: Is that what's odd about it?

CAPTAIN: The odd thing was her... Yesterday she was there...

RAY: Who is she?

CAPTAIN: She?

RAY: Yeah, who is she?

CAPTAIN: *La negra.*

RAY: *La negra?* So *la negra* exists?

CAPTAIN: No. Not anymore.

RAY: She was a real person.

CAPTAIN: A real... person.

RAY: And what did she do in the dream?

CAPTAIN: It wasn't the right place. She was out of place.... That's why the dream's odd...

RAY: I see.

CAPTAIN: She opened the door and I went in. It was dark inside. I went in but... the one that was looking on in my dream, the man that looks on in dreams... me... I stayed outside. The door closed, the captain entered, but I stayed outside...

RAY: That's odd.

CAPTAIN: She went in. She entered my house... my parents' house. But my eyes stayed outside. That machine. That machine that films dreams stayed outside. The door closed, and the dream ended.

RAY: *La negra* closed the door.

CAPTAIN: Everything was dark.

RAY: That's odd.

CAPTAIN: It'd been a while since that happened...It'd been a while since I'd dreamt... about her...

RAY: That's what you have to do.

CAPTAIN: What, Ray?

RAY: That's what you have to tattoo, what you have to tattoo on her. *La negra*.

CAPTAIN: What do you mean, Ray?

RAY: Enough with the simple lines and the little kiddy doodles.

CAPTAIN: Kiddy doodles?

RAY: You're the best, and the best doesn't do that crap. You have to do your masterpiece... the captain's masterpiece.

CAPTAIN: A family of junkies is living off those doodles.

RAY: Tattoo that. Her. Paint her. Another *negra*.

CAPTAIN: Her?... It'd be like death.

RAY: Painting death?

CAPTAIN: It'd be my death...

RAY: It has to be you. No one's going to do it for you... no one's going to help you. Who's the captain?

CAPTAIN: I was just talking about a dream...

RAY turns about face and goes to the door. ISABEL enters at that moment.

CAPTAIN: Ray! Where are you going?

RAY: Nowhere.

CAPTAIN: Give it to me. Give me my quarter.

RAY goes through his pockets and gives the CAPTAIN a fold of paper. The CAPTAIN takes it and sits down to inspect its contents. RAY looks at ISABEL and leaves. The CAPTAIN starts to shoot himself up.

RAY: It has to be you, Captain. It has to be you.

ISABEL goes up to the CAPTAIN and caresses his body, his chest, trying to arouse him. The CAPTAIN pushes ISABEL away violently, making her fall. The CAPTAIN's pulse trembles and he can't hit the vein. He gets desperate and in a fit of rage throws the syringe across the room.

ISABEL: You realize, don't you? It's her age. She's ripe. The best age for a woman. Just budding. She's boiling. She's fresh. Her blood's boiling, just about cooked. You know it. Yes, you know it.

CAPTAIN: Stop babbling.

ISABEL: Ana. I'm talking about Ana.

CAPTAIN: Ana.

ISABEL: You don't have to do it. Who is she? What does she matter to you? You're the captain. If you get a hard-on, you fuck her and that's that. But you're the captain, no one can tell you what you have to do.

CAPTAIN: No, no one...

ISABEL: It's him... He's waiting for your downfall. He's not interested in her.
Who says you have to do it?

CAPTAIN: You want to see her again?

ISABEL: Who?

CAPTAIN: You want to see her dance again?

ISABEL doesn't respond. The CAPTAIN grabs ISABEL violently by the arm and strips her naked.

▲ ▲ ▲

The GYPSY and RAY are sitting on the same bench as before.

RAY: Did you know her too?

GYPSY: I know a lot of people. There aren't many people in this world I don't know.

RAY: What was she like? What was *la negra* like?

GYPSY: *La negra*?

RAY: Yeah, her. You knew her, right? You had to know her. What was she like?

GYPSY: *La negra* is the tattoo the captain has on his chest.

RAY: I know that. I mean the real one. The real *negra*.

GYPSY: *La negra*?

RAY: Yeah. What was she like?

GYPSY: Black.

RAY: I guessed as much. If she weren't, why would they call her *la negra*?

GYPSY: That's what I say. If she hadn't been black, they wouldn't have called her *la negra*. They'd have called her White. *La blanca*. Yeah, if she'd been white they'd have called her *la blanca*.

RAY: Who was she? You knew her, you must have known her. You must know what happened. Come on, tell me. We're buddies, aren't we?

GYPSY: Come on, Ray. I'm just a poor gypsy, a dry land gypsy, a poor wandering gypsy. Did you bring me my little gram, Ray? Come on, Ray, pass me that little gram. Do your good deed of the day. A gram for a poor old gypsy who doesn't even have a place to go off and die.

RAY: So you don't want to tell me? Ray doesn't forget. Ray's got a good memory. Ray doesn't forget. Ray knows who his buddies are.

GYPSY: I don't know anything. I'm just the cook. The crew's cook. The cook never knows anything, not even what waters are being navigated, what island the ship's anchored on, what sun's burning him. I'm just a poor gypsy. I just prepared the vegetables. Lots of vegetables and orange juice. To treat the scurvy. Come on, give me the gram. Give me that little gram you cut in the garbage for the gypsy junkies. Come on, Ray. I've told you everything. I've told you everything I know. What more do you want to know about a fucking *negra*? What do you care about a filthy *negra*? Come on, give the gypsy his filthy gram of smack.

RAY: You owe me five hundred bucks.

GYPSY: Oh, come on, Ray! Are you gonna charge a buddy? Are you gonna charge a poor gypsy who's got nowhere to go and die? Come on, Ray! How am I going to pay? I'm just a poor gypsy, a poor gypsy junkie.

RAY: The merchandise's finished. The crew's finished. And the captain's finished.

GYPSY: The captain was finished a long time ago.

RAY: The captain's working. He needs to concentrate.

GYPSY: The captain's hand isn't even steady enough to jerk himself off.

RAY: The captain's an artist. He's doing a tattoo.

GYPSY: The captain, working? I'd have to see it to believe it.

RAY: You can't disturb the captain while he's working.

GYPSY: What about you, Ray? The dealer? Are you gonna strike a business deal? Are you going to sell the gram to a museum? Come on, Ray, give me that fucking gram! Can't you see I'm a dead man? You're not going to have to put up with me much longer, Ray. One of these days this shit'll do me in, and I'll be grateful to you for that. Grateful to be dead...

The GYPSY picks up his guitar and plucks the strings without playing anything as he tries to sing a flamenco tune.

GYPSY: Ray, my friend Ray, Ray from the crew, sent me sweetly to my death. You'd be glad! Proud! Come on, Ray! My ration... the gypsy junkie's little ration.

RAY gives the GYPSY a fold of paper.

RAY: You owe me a half grand, gypsy. And you're gonna pay up.

GYPSY: How am I going to pay, brother? I'm a lazy son of a bitch....

RAY: Sing.

GYPSY: I don't know how to. I'm a gypsy, but I don't have a good ear.

RAY: Sing, gypsy. Live and be happy. Sing, but don't forget. Ray'll come to collect the money. Whether you sing or not. Ray doesn't forget. Ray never forgets. Ray always comes to collect.

The GYPSY prepares to shoot up.

GYPSY: Bit by bit, bit by bit, brother. Don't be in a rush. A little Christian charity. Bit by bit. You won't regret it, brother, you won't regret it.

▲ ▲ ▲

The CAPTAIN watches ANA, who's standing naked.

CAPTAIN: The chest.

ANA: On the chest?

CAPTAIN: Under the tit. The left tit.

ANA: My breast?

CAPTAIN: Get dressed.

ANA: What are you going to do there?

CAPTAIN: A tattoo.

ANA: A tattoo?

CAPTAIN: Didn't you want a tattoo?

ANA: Of course I want a tattoo, but I don't want it there. I don't want a tattoo on my breast, it's not... it's not a good place for a tattoo. It's much better on the back, on the back you can see it better... I want... I don't want it there... on the shoulder blade, under the left shoulder blade...it'd be engraved there...

CAPTAIN: Forever.

ANA: It hurts a lot there.

CAPTAIN: A hell of a lot.

ANA: I want it on my back.

CAPTAIN: There isn't anything back there. It's here. On your beautiful little tit. In the shadow of your nipple.

ANA: But I don't want...

CAPTAIN: Get dressed.

ANA: What are you going to do? Will you tell me what you're going to tattoo?

CAPTAIN: No.

ANA: Is it going to be very big? I don't want it big, I want it small, I don't want a big stain, I don't want to be a walking exhibition. I just want a little drawing, a flower, a bud. Look, will you tell me what you're going to do?

CAPTAIN: I just know the coordinates, but I don't know what's there.

ANA: What are you talking about?

CAPTAIN: Get dressed.

ANA: I don't want to. I don't want that tattoo, I want another one. Small... on my back. Who has the last say here? Who's paying for this?

CAPTAIN: This is free, baby... This tattoo and death are the only things you'll get for free in this lifetime.

ANA: I'm going to talk to Ray.

CAPTAIN: Yeah... you go talk to Ray.

The CAPTAIN picks up his spoon and goes into his room. ANA follows him but doesn't dare go into the room. ISABEL goes up to her and hands her her clothes.

ISABEL: You're happy. I can tell you're happy. I can see it in your face.

ANA: No, I'm not happy. You know what he wants to do to me? Did you hear? Did you hear him?

ISABEL: Me too. Both of us. We're both happy. I like you. You're a bit of a slut but I like you. I know what you're after, I know exactly, but I like you. I'm happy too. Yesterday I saw her again...I saw her dance again.

ANA: What are you talking about?

ISABEL: *La negra*. She danced again yesterday. She danced again for me yesterday. But you get dressed. You're gonna get cold.

ANA gets dressed.

ANA: *La negra*?

ISABEL: He's got her on his chest.

She places her arms on the nape of her neck and dances sensually. An exotic languid dance.

ANA: A tattoo?

ISABEL: She only dances for the princess the Captain fucks. Just before you come, she moves her hips from side to side, slowly, rocking her body, rocking it... softly, from side to side. First this way, then that. Unbearable. Then it gets unbearable. Everything starts spinning and I come. Everything disappears. Everything gets cloudy. *(She sings)* Tell me the deep mystery that no one will tell, tell me why you shut your eyes when you kiss me. It's the best tattoo in the world.

ANA: It sounds incredible.

ISABEL smiles maliciously.

ISABEL: Imagine. Can you imagine it? The Captain impales you violently, splitting you in half. The light disappears. Darkness. Shadows. No reference point, you only see, facing you, a gaze shining from deep in his heart. Half-closed eyes. A simple movement, two or three swings of the hips. Back and forth. Once, then another time. A touch of class, little duchess. And then the shadows come back. It's death. Paralysis. A dream of what lies beyond. A cloudy dream.

ANA: It sounds good.

ISABEL: That's why I'm happy. Like you. Everyone gets what they want.

ANA: I don't understand you.

ISABEL: You're already a little princess, you're getting a tattoo from the Captain. You'll be able to show off your ass on a motorbike, from now on you'll be a real little slut and you'll be able to get all the smack in the world for free. Not everyone can show off a tattoo of the Captain's. It's a symbol. A medal. A stripe. It's priceless. Pedigree, countess. Privileges. A slut, a beautiful little slut with princess privileges.

ANA: You've got it wrong. I don't want it. Not me.

ISABEL: OK, OK, here.

ISABEL gives her a fold of paper.

ANA: What's this?

ISABEL: A quarter. Your quarter. We're quits now.

ANA drops the paper to the floor. She leaves.

▲ ▲ ▲

First tattooing session. ANA lies on a plinth, naked, face up. The CAPTAIN goes up to her and turns on the tattooing gun. The mechanical sound of the weapon sounds ridiculous. The CAPTAIN sits astride the girl and begins to tattoo her. At first ANA grimaces in pain. Soon she is groaning and shaking her head from side to side. Her feet move and kick, but she is trapped under the Captain's weight.

Finally, Ana is screaming. The Captain is sweating. Ana tries to break free and push the CAPTAIN, but he slaps her till she is almost unconscious.

ANA sighs plaintively.

The CAPTAIN turns off the weapon and ties up ANA. He turns on the tattooing gun again and continues tattooing.

ANA screams until she goes hoarse.

The CAPTAIN sweats.

▲ ▲ ▲

ANA is lying on the plinth. The light is very dim. The only light that's on is the CAPTAIN's work lamp, under which he cleans his tiny instrument carefully.

It's almost night. In the semi-darkness RAY heats the heroin in a spoon with his lighter.

ISABEL tries to relieve ANA's pain by applying some cotton compresses on the bloody mark on her chest. ANA lets out a small scream.

ISABEL: Does it hurt?

ANA nods. ISABEL applies the cotton on the wound again, this time more carefully.

RAY gets up from his corner and offers the CAPTAIN a syringe. The CAPTAIN stares at him and refuses the heroin, giving RAY a slap that makes him drop the syringe to

the floor. RAY picks it up and prepares himself to smoke it.

The CAPTAIN gets up, glances at the women and goes into his room.

ANA: Don't you have any tattoo?

ISABEL: My skin and veins are immaculate, they're the only clean things in my body, the only untouched parts...

ANA screams. ISABEL stops dressing her wound and lights up a cigarette.

ISABEL: I wouldn't know what tattoo to get. Probably a mark, yeah, like cattle. A word... maybe a word... A name. A man's name. A name is like a mark. The mark of the owner.

ANA: Why don't you do it?

ISABEL: I still haven't got the name.

ISABEL looks at ANA. RAY, slumped in his corner, is in a hallucinogenic sleep. ISABEL enters the CAPTAIN's little back room.

ANA stretched out on the plinth. The CAPTAIN takes the needle and mounts it on the pistol, but his fingers shake and he is unable to arm the instrument. ANA watches him from the plinth. At last he manages to put the needle onto the tattooing gun; he turns it on but can't control his pulse. His hand trembles. He raises his arm and tries aiming at an invisible spot, but his arm is still shaking.

He turns it off. He is cold, so he covers himself with a jacket and a blanket. He turns on the tattooing gun again, but his body reels as he tries to get his balance. He needs to sit down.

ANA watches him, inert, pale, afraid.

The CAPTAIN turns off the machine again. He shivers.

ANA sighs and rests her head on the rack, but all of a sudden the tattooing gun switches on again, and this time it keeps going.

▲ ▲ ▲

ANA regains consciousness. RAY is alone in the living room, half drunk and high. ANA sits up and sees her naked chest covered in blood. RAY stands up and looks at her.

ANA: What's happening?

RAY: You're bleeding.

ANA: What tattoo do I have? What do I have?

RAY: Just blood... Coagulated... blood.

ANA: Untie me, Ray.

RAY: Untie you?

ANA: Untie me, Ray. I can't take it. I can't take it anymore.

RAY: I can't do that.

ANA: Untie me, Ray. I can't go on.

RAY: Tell him that.

ANA: What do you want, Ray? Why are you making me do this? I don't want a tattoo anymore, not from the Captain or from anybody. I hate tattoos, keep the money. The pain. I can't take it. I can't go on...

RAY: There's no turning back now.

ANA: For whom, Ray? For whom?

RAY doesn't answer.

ANA: What have I got to do with any of this? What have I got to do with this, Ray?

RAY: I can't do anything now...

ANA: Untie me, Ray. Untie me.

RAY: Tell him that.

ANA: I want to look at myself... I want to see what it is... I want to see what I have.

RAY: Only he knows.

ANA: No... not even him. Not even he knows what it is. Untie me, Ray.

RAY turns around and reclines again in his corner.

ANA: What do you want, Ray? What do you want from me?

RAY watches her in silence, opens a bottle and drinks.

▲ ▲ ▲

The CAPTAIN and the GYPSY, drunk on a bench. The GYPSY plucks at the guitar.

GYPSY: Repent, brother. Repent.

CAPTAIN: I don't have time.

GYPSY: There's always time, brother. It's all we've got left. Time. There's always time to repent.

CAPTAIN: No... not me. I don't have time.

The GYPSY continues playing the guitar, singing as he speaks.

GYPSY: Are you going to die, brother? Sure. That's a sure thing. Repent, brother. You're going to die. We're going to die.

CAPTAIN: What kind of a fucking religious gypsy are you? Did you get so much sun poisoning that you've converted?

GYPSY: Maybe... maybe I got a bit of sunstroke, but I doubt it. Yeah, I doubt it. We gypsies always wear hats. We don't even take them off when we sleep. We're always protected. Always protected. Repent, brother.

CAPTAIN: What for? Why?

GYPSY: Renounce Satan.

CAPTAIN: Renounce? Renounce...? Yeah, OK, fine... I renounce...

The CAPTAIN tilts the bottle to drink up the last drops. The GYPSY accompanies him on the guitar.

GYPSY: Brother, the forests are burning, the rivers and oceans are getting polluted. The earth is heating up. The glaciers are melting. There are

floods, earthquakes, wars, hunger, diseases. Life on earth is coming to an end.

Repent, brother and listen to the Gospel. Hear the word of God, that's what's gonna judge you when your time comes. It can transform your heart of stone into flesh. Repent, brother.... Repent... Give up alcohol, tobacco, sex, drugs. Join Christ. Come to Jesus, follow the righteous path. Repent, brother.

▲ ▲ ▲

ISABEL and RAY, stretched out on the floor, wait for night to fall.

ISABEL: Roll a joint, Ray.

RAY: Fuck off.

ISABEL: Smoke, Ray. I need a little high.

RAY: I'm not going to roll any more joints. Never again. I'm not going to roll them for anybody.

ISABEL: Someone'll end up making them for you. For you and your little princess. But hurry up now, Ray. One more. One joint before it gets dark. One joint to lighten things up a little.

RAY: The shop's about to close.

ISABEL: No, Ray, that'll never happen.

RAY: I'll ban drugs.

ISABEL: What, Ray? How are you going to do that?

RAY: What do we need them for? What do we need drugs for?

ISABEL: What do you mean, what for? To deal with pain. With despair, with vertigo, with the darkness.

RAY: When I'm the captain.

ISABEL: You... captain.

RAY: No drugs on board. Drugs kill everything. They killed the crew and now they're going to liquidate the captain.

ISABEL: Yeah, you'd be a good captain.

RAY: Clean veins, clean noses. Junkies aren't good for anything. I've got no time for them. No way. I'm gonna do away with drugs.

ISABEL: OK, Ray, but roll a joint now.

RAY: I don't like junkies. There won't be any junkies on my crew. What are they good for? They get seasick, they can't even cope with a few waves, they want to get out, they vomit over board, their teeth fall out, they get scurvy, they jump ship the moment there's a little danger or there's work to do... real seaman's work, that is. They can't cope. What do I want them for? Why do we need drugs if we're the crew?

ISABEL: Precisely because of that, Ray. Because you're the crew. The drug crew. Alone at sea.

RAY: What do you mean?

ISABEL: You'll find out... When you become captain.

RAY: You're nuts.

ISABEL: When night falls... Your night. But roll a joint now, Ray. Roll a joint and we'll smoke it so we don't feel, so we don't suffer, so we don't feel any more pleasure. Do it, Ray... Do it now.

ISABEL *gets the shivers.*

RAY: This never ends.

ISABEL: No, Ray. Never... I wish it would end once and for all. I wish it'd end... But it doesn't...

RAY *takes a large silver paper out of his pocket.*

▲ ▲ ▲

ANA rests on the plinth. The CAPTAIN cleans the gun under a small work lamp.

CAPTAIN: How're you doing?

ANA: It hurts a lot.

CAPTAIN: It hurts... That's good... It's good that it hurts. It's forming a scar...

ANA: It's unbearable.

CAPTAIN: You're still alive.

ANA: Your words... They don't seem to speak. They say things, but they don't speak. It's like the words are loaded.

CAPTAIN: Loaded?

ANA: Your words... your words weigh.

CAPTAIN: Weigh?

ANA: A lot.

The CAPTAIN goes up to the girl and puts his hand on her forehead to see if she has a fever.

ANA: Who is she?

CAPTAIN: Who?

ANA: *La negra.*

CAPTAIN: It's... an old story.

ANA: Tell me...

CAPTAIN: You wanna hear it?

ANA: I'm listening.

CAPTAIN: It was a long time ago.

ANA: Stories always happen in another time.

CAPTAIN: Everyone tells stories the way they want to. Or the way they remember it. Or the way they imagine it. Some people tell them one way, others another way. The same story... Each person says different things, but the story... the story is always the same. It didn't happen at sea. There was no sea. There were just roads, we were all together... the crew. On motorbikes. Our motorbikes. The road... is as huge as the sea...as space.

ANA: Was she there?

CAPTAIN: She doesn't exist. She's my weight... She's my star... She guides me. That's why I'm the captain.

ANA: The black queen.

CAPTAIN: My heart... my heart is black. *La negra, la negra* is in my heart.

ANA rests her arm on the CAPTAIN's chest. The CAPTAIN looks at the tattoo on her chest and nods.

ANA: They say she's... alive.

CAPTAIN: Her blood runs in my veins, her muscles move in my chest, her lips get moist from my sweat, her legs stretch under my skin... And her heart is my heart... my black heart.

ANA: Everybody knows her because of that tattoo.

CAPTAIN: It's a good tattoo.

ANA stretches out her hand and touches the tattoo with her fingertips, then places her palm on the Captain's chest.

ANA: I want to hear your heartbeat. I want to hear how a black heart sounds.

ANA rests her ear against the Captain's chest, stroking it with her hands. The CAPTAIN, motionless, does nothing. ANA looks him in the eyes.

ANA: I can't hear anything.

The CAPTAIN doesn't respond, but turns on the tattooing gun he has in his hand.

▲▲▲

The GYPSY and RAY, clutching a bottle, look up at the sky.

GYPSY: Do you hear it? Can you hear that?

RAY: Just the wind... the wind in the trees.

GYPSY: It's in the wind... In the heart of the wind... Hidden in it. Don't you hear it, Ray? Can't you hear it?

RAY: What am I supposed to hear? Can you tell me what I'm supposed to hear? I just hear the wind, the wind. Just the wind.

GYPSY: The wind. The wind's carrying it. The messenger.

RAY: What the fuck do you mean by that? What the fuck is the wind carrying? Tell me, for fuck's sake.

GYPSY: Don't you hear anything, Ray?

RAY: No, nothing. Well, yes; the fucking wind. Just the wind. That's all there is. The wind. You want to tell me what the fuck you hear? What the fuck does that hairy calloused ear of yours hear?

GYPSY: The wind. Just the wind.

RAY: What else? Apart from the wind, what else?

GYPSY: Nothing, Ray. Nothing else.

RAY: What's the wind carrying? What the fuck is the wind dragging along with it?

GYPSY: Their voices.

RAY: What voices?

GYPSY: They're singing.

RAY: Who? Who's singing?

GYPSY: The crew.

RAY: They're all dead.

GYPSY: Yeah... They're dead... like the captain... Like me. They're all dead.

RAY: Your greasy junkie neurons have gone a little soft.

GYPSY: Can't you hear them sing? Can't you hear the crew sing?

RAY: The crew? Singing?

GYPSY: Do you hear them? They're wailing, they're in pain... their souls are suffering, wandering, restless... it's a sad song... everyone together... as if they were struggling...

RAY: Yeah... now I hear it... in the whistle of the wind, as if the waves were carrying it, like the voices of a shipwreck in the middle of the ocean. Jump ship! Land in sight! Lost, terrified, shouting, swimming, splashing about desperately... but I don't hear them singing.

GYPSY: You don't hear anything.

RAY: Yeah, I hear them, I hear them perfectly.

GYPSY: What you hear are motorbikes. Sounds on the road. There's nothing else to hear. Just the road.

RAY: Just for a moment... A big swell of voices.

GYPSY: You can't hear anything.

RAY: I've got much better hearing than you. And imagination, I've got a much better imagination than you too. And I can hear everything I want, and even see it, much better than you, because I've got better sight, and better hearing; and more imagination.

GYPSY: And heart.

RAY: A lot more. More than you.

GYPSY: To hear it you have to lose your heart.

RAY: Each day you're harder to take, gypsy. Each day that passes by I find it harder to take your junkie crap, your drunken crap and all your bullshit. I can't take you, gypsy. I can't take your people or your crew either.

GYPSY: Come on, Ray. Don't get that way. Don't get that way for no reason.

RAY: You're an idiot.

GYPSY: Come on, Ray... I'm just a poor gypsy.

RAY: I'm going to stab you, gypsy.

GYPSY: Fine, Ray... but give me some acid now. So I can keep listening to you... the wind, the whistle of the wind... it's all I have left, Ray... the only thing this poor gypsy's got left... A little imagination, Ray. Some acid, Ray... some acid so I can remember... imagine.

RAY: Fuck off.

▲ ▲ ▲

ANA rests, unconscious, on the plinth. She's naked. Her chest is bleeding and looks like a huge scab. The CAPTAIN looks at her and goes up to her. ANA murmurs something in her sleep, what sounds like a nightmare at moments then seems pleasurable. The CAPTAIN stretches his hand out and touches her stomach. ANA registers the man's touch but is still delirious. The CAPTAIN caresses her breasts and ANA laughs. She roars with laughter in her sleep.

The CAPTAIN stares at ANA's face. He doesn't understand what is happening, but he keeps caressing her until he reaches her crotch. ANA's mood shifts suddenly and the pain turns the dream into a nightmare again. She screams. She screams in her sleep.

The CAPTAIN withdraws his hand from ANA's body and she gradually calms down.

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ISABEL feeds ANA.

ISABEL: It's almost over.

ANA listlessly tries the soup ISABEL offers her, but it takes a lot of effort. It's as if she were chewing a thick piece of steak.

ISABEL: Will you let me see it?

ANA unbuttons her shirt. ISABEL removes the gauze and looks with consternation at the black stain. Without saying a word, she covers the wound again and offers ANA another spoonful of soup.

ANA: What is it?

ISABEL: Eat up. You're still very weak.

ANA refuses the food ISABEL offers her.

ANA: What did you see?

ISABEL: Eat up!

ANA: Tell me. Just tell me.

ISABEL: I couldn't see anything. Everything's black.

ANA: Are you sure?

ISABEL: Why would I lie to you?

ANA: Because I have what you want.

ISABEL: You have to eat now. The worst is yet to come. He's going to tattoo you with special needles now. By hand. I've seen it. I've seen how he's held on to them and cleaned them. I thought he'd sold them off to get smack.

ANA: Me too... I've seen it too.

ISABEL: What did you see?

ANA: *La negra*. I've seen her too. I saw her dancing.

ISABEL: Dancing?

ANA: While he was tattooing me.

ISABEL: You must have dreamt it. You were delirious. Last night you were delirious.

ANA: He was sweating. He was sweating like a pig... His chest was soaked. The hair on his chest was dripping like a sponge... as if it were fat. He was burning hot and the sweat evaporated in a fog. She was behind him. In the middle of the fog. Dancing... She moved her hips... first to the left, then to the right. Then she repeated the movement... to the left... to the right. She didn't dance anymore, but I saw her. She smiled... Her white teeth smiled in the fog.

ISABEL: You turn the Captain on. I'm sure you could fuck him, no problem. You're a real little princess now. If you want some action, I'm sure he'll oblige.

ANA: The captain isn't the captain anymore.

ISABEL: You're wrong, pussy cat. The captain'll always be the captain. He may be in decline, but a captain's always a captain.

ANA: There might be another... another captain.

ISABEL: He'd have to earn it... He'd have to kill him.

ANA: Kill him?

ISABEL: That's the law of the jungle.

ANA *sits up and buttons her shirt carefully. She stares at ISABEL.*

ANA: I'm not going to fuck him.

ISABEL: You don't have explain anything. Princesses don't ask for permission.

ANA: Whatever, I'm not going to fuck him.

ANA *lies down again and closes her eyes.*

ISABEL: You rest up, princess.

ANA: I don't want to be *negra*.

ISABEL: Too late now.

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Stretched out on the floor, the CAPTAIN does push-ups. ANA, lying on the floor among cushions and blankets, watches him in silence.

CAPTAIN: Thirty-six, thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty, forty-one, forty-two, forty-three, forty-four, forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty...

The CAPTAIN finishes his push-ups and collapses onto the floor. He looks up and observes ANA, who is drinking a milkshake through a straw.

The CAPTAIN stands up and wipes his sweat off with a towel.

ANA finishes her milkshake and lets it drop onto the floor, as if her hand were lifeless.

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In a corner, ISABEL opens a piece of paper containing heroin and makes a huge fuse with a roll of toilet paper.

Sitting on his bench, the GYPSY, half asleep, strums on his guitar. RAY goes up to him and tries to wake him up by giving him little pushes.

RAY: Hey you! Gypsy! Wake up... The collector's here... The collector's here.

The CAPTAIN goes up to ANA and removes the gauze covering the wound on her chest. He ties her hands tightly with rope.

ISABEL lights the fuse and pours the heroin, dissolved in lemon juice, into a spoon.

The GYPSY wakes up and looks at RAY as if he didn't know him.

RAY: Wake up, gypsy... I'm going to read you the meter.

GYPSY: Leave me alone.

The CAPTAIN takes out a small needle from a black case, hitches it onto a kind of engraver's chisel and dips it in ink.

ISABEL withdraws the fuse from the spoon and fills a syringe with the spoon's contents.

RAY takes out a knife and shows it to the GYPSY

RAY: I've brought the bill.

The GYPSY picks up his guitar and brandishes it as if it were a shield.

GYPSY: Repent, brother. Don't back out of the fight.

The CAPTAIN applies the needle to ANA's chest. She shrieks with pain.

ISABEL observes the contents of the syringe and applies it to a vein in her neck.

RAY slashes the GYPSY's guitar strings with his knife.

GYPSY: Keep it up, brother. Keep it up.

The CAPTAIN pierces ANA's chest again. She screams, even more terrified than before.

ISABEL finishes injecting the fluid in her neck. Her hand drops limply to her lap, leaving the syringe dangling from her neck.

RAY finishes destroying the GYPSY's guitar.

RAY: You won't be singing any more, gypsy.

GYPSY: You've got no future with me, Ray. I'm just scum.

RAY: Stand up, brother. Stand up.

Reeling, the GYPSY stands up, holding his wrecked guitar.

The CAPTAIN etches another line. ANA screams again.

ISABEL faints, falling on the cushions and blankets.

RAY hurls himself at the GYPSY and stabs him repeatedly until the latter falls on his guitar.

ANA screams, terrified, as the CAPTAIN continues tattooing her chest.

The GYPSY heaves his body along the floor, turns around and looks at RAY.

GYPSY: What have you done, Ray?...What have you done, brother? What are you going to do, Ray?

RAY: I don't know yet, brother. I don't know yet... I just have... I just have an idea. A vague... idea.

The CAPTAIN sits up, cleans the needle and puts it back into the black leather case.

FADE-OUT

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RAY and ISABEL. She dances on the plinth and sings along to the music on the record-player. As usual, they are drunk and high.

ISABEL AND THE RECORD-PLAYER: Why shouldn't they know
That I love you, my darling?
Why shouldn't I say it
If your soul and mine melt into one?
Who cares what happens later?
Who cares what happens later?
They saw me crying one day.
They saw me crying one day.

RAY rolls a joint while ISABEL dances. RAY's hands shake, various times the cigarette's contents are about to spill onto the floor. ISABEL keeps dancing.

ISABEL AND THE RECORD-PLAYER: If they asked me
I'd say I still love you.
One just lives once
One has to learn how to love and live.
One has to know that life
Is short and leaves us crying over our dreams.
I don't want to have regrets later
About what might have been and wasn't.
I want to enjoy this life
Have you near me till you die.

Finally, RAY finishes rolling the joint, and seals the paper with his saliva. He lights it with difficulty, as if he were threading a needle.

ISABEL, still dancing, jumps from the plinth onto the floor and snatches the joint from RAY. She smokes it as she dances.

RAY: What crappy music!

ISABEL doesn't pay attention to him and keeps dancing and smoking. RAY looks at a heap of blankets on the floor.

RAY: She's going to wake up. With all this noise she's going to wake up.

ISABEL AND THE RECORD-PLAYER: One just lives once
One has to learn how to love and live
One has to know that life is short
And leaves us crying over our dreams.

RAY unplugs the record-player. ISABEL keeps dancing, unaware that the music has stopped.

ISABEL: I don't want to have regrets later...

ISABEL stops dancing and looks at RAY, realizing it was him who turned off the record-player. She takes a puff from the joint.

RAY: How's she doing? How is she?

ISABEL: What do you care? Live and let live.

RAY: She's resting. Isn't she resting?

ISABEL: No, I don't think so. Not anymore.

RAY: She's sleeping.

ISABEL: Wake her up.

RAY: Don't be stupid.

ISABEL: Wake her up. Wake her up and look at it.

RAY take the joint from ISABEL and finishes it, dropping the stub to the floor.

RAY: What is it?

ISABEL: What is what?

RAY: The tattoo. What did he tattoo?

ISABEL: Nothing.

RAY: What do you mean, nothing? He almost killed her.

ISABEL: She just has a stain... A black hole... A burning hole.

RAY: The dope's blackened your neurons. What the fuck is a burning hole?

ISABEL: Roll another one, Ray!

RAY: You're gonna OD.

ISABEL: Sweet death... Death high. You're very close. Roll another one!

RAY obeys and rolls another joint.

RAY: Women... Why are you so complicated? Why aren't you like whores?
They never talk about death...

ISABEL: That's why they don't feel any pleasure.

RAY: They don't feel any pleasure 'cos they're working. Dough, baby, money rules. It colonizes them. If they weren't working, if whores weren't working when they fucked, if whores were free, you better believe they'd come. Yeah, they'd feel all the pleasure a woman feels, what with all the dicks they've known.

ISABEL: That'd be death. Coming is like dying. Each fuck's a little death.

RAY: You're out of your mind. All of you. You're all nuts.

ISABEL responds singing.

ISABEL: One just lives once,
One has to learn how to love and live.

RAY: I want to see it.

ISABEL: Give it to me. Don't finger it.

RAY: Is she asleep?

ISABEL: She's all yours.

RAY: Wake her up.

ISABEL: You wake her up.

RAY goes up to ANA, who is sleeping under some blankets. He lifts the blankets, uncovering ANA's naked and bandaged body. ANA wakes up.

RAY: What are these bandages?

ANA: Don't touch me.

RAY: What did he do to you?

ANA: Leave me alone.

ISABEL: Take them off.

ANA: Stop it, Ray. Leave me alone.

ISABEL: Go for it, Ray.

RAY uncovers ANA's wound. ISABEL smokes a joint.

ISABEL: There it is. A work of art. You've never seen anything like it. Leave it open, so it gets a little air, so it breathes. It's like a live being. It needs to breathe. Leave it, Ray, let it breathe.

RAY gets up and vomits behind the plinth.

ISABEL: What's up, Ray? Don't you agree with her? Don't you think it's a work of art? What's the matter? Don't you understand art? Don't you know you have to suffer...? What's up with you, Ray?

ANA: Be quiet. I have a headache.

ISABEL sits down on the plinth.

ISABEL: What a pity, Ray! You're not cut out for this. You're not cut out for art.

RAY gets up, leans on the plinth, and looks at ANA.

RAY: He's destroyed her!

ISABEL: No, Ray, he's branded her. He's marked her. Just like with cattle. Now everyone knows who her owner is. He's deflowered her.

RAY rushes out of the room.

ISABEL: Where are you going, Ray? Leave me some dope. Don't be a wimp, Ray, leave me something at least...

ANA: Be quiet... Be quiet, Isabel. Please.

ISABEL goes up to ANA.

ISABEL: It's time for your treatment

ANA: Let me sleep, let me sleep a little more.

ISABEL: The wound's got to be cleaned.

ISABEL takes a dirty bundle of alcohol and bandages and gets to work.

ISABEL: You can scream if you want.

ISABEL cleans the wound, ANA writhes in pain but doesn't scream.

ISABEL: You're a brave girl.

ANA: I'd give anything not to feel this pain.

ISABEL: You disappoint me. I thought you were more macho.

ANA: I don't give a flying fuck what you think.

ISABEL: Watch your tongue. It doesn't befit a princess to talk like that.

ANA: You go ahead and try it. You'd get one for free.

ISABEL: I'm not a real woman. I'm not brave.

ISABEL puts the bandages on ANA's chest again. ANA takes her hand.

ANA: Take care of him. Take good care of him. He's your man, after all. You haven't got another one. Take care of him.

ISABEL looks at ANA and caresses her face.

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The CAPTAIN is standing, holding the GYPSY's body in his arms.

CAPTAIN: Did you know? You're just a bag of bones. A bag of bones. You hardly weigh anything. I can barely feel you. How can someone hate a lazy junkie? You don't even have any blood. Not a drop. What makes people hate? What's a gypsy worth? Nothing now... He's not worth anything... Not a drop. It's all over. Nothing's left now. Nothing of her. We're closing shop! Nobody wants to die. Nobody... There's no story. Everything's empty now.

FADE-OUT

▲ ▲ ▲

ISABEL searches the GYPSY's body.

ISABEL : What a loser! Not even a fucking stub.

ANA: What's a dead man worth?

ISABEL: What's he worth alive?

ANA: Five hundred bucks.

ISABEL: Five hundred bucks? That's all? For the sake of dignity. Half a grand. At least that. The world's not going to end because you die and owe a half grand. We're not brutes, we've evolved for a reason. We're not like monkeys anymore. You can get into debt now. At least for five hundred bucks. Trust, it's all about trust... You've got to have faith in the man that goes into debt... Human dignity. Five hundred bucks' worth of human dignity. But... this guy was a gypsy.

ANA scratches her chest. ISABEL watches her.

ISABEL: Does the chick itch? Soon the scab'll break and she'll be able to breath. To live. To dream.

FADE-OUT

▲ ▲ ▲

The CAPTAIN, sitting on his motorbike. RAY is standing opposite him. (Or vice versa)

CAPTAIN: Everyone told me about you, but nobody said it was you.

RAY: Your time's up.

CAPTAIN: Can you tell me... can you tell me who I am?

RAY: You're finished, captain. You're nobody now.

CAPTAIN: Nobody.

RAY: You're just a zombie. You're not alive and you don't even have a place to go and die.

CAPTAIN: No.

RAY: What do you want from me?

CAPTAIN: We've got to settle... settle things once and for all.

RAY: Fuck off.

CAPTAIN: The settlement, Ray.

RAY: You're finished now, captain. What the fuck have I got to do with it?

CAPTAIN: You're the witness. You've got a lot to do with it.

RAY: Witness of what?

CAPTAIN: Of me...

RAY: I haven't seen anything. Everything I know is second-hand. What that junkie gypsy told me, what the dead said.

CAPTAIN: They're all dead.

RAY: All dead.

CAPTAIN: All of them

RAY: The crew.

CAPTAIN: All of them...

RAY: There was never a crew. That was all an invention. That gypsy junkie's invention. A phantom crew.

CAPTAIN: There's just *la negra* now.

RAY: Just her.

CAPTAIN: Just you.

The CAPTAIN takes out a knife and approaches RAY, who responds by starting the motorbike. The CAPTAIN punctures the motorbike's wheels.

RAY: Do you care so much about one man?

CAPTAIN: I've got to get there... I've got to get to the end...

The CAPTAIN stabs him, but RAY dodges him behind the motorbike. They fight.

RAY: I don't know anything. I never knew anything.

CAPTAIN: You should have killed me. You should have killed me before. You would have done me a favor... You would have done me a big... very big... a big... favor...

RAY: I wouldn't have known... I wouldn't have known... anything. Ever.

They fight. RAY plunges his knife into the CAPTAIN's chest.

CAPTAIN: You've got the stripes now...

RAY: You have black blood.

CAPTAIN: You've also... you've also...got her... *la negra*.

The CAPTAIN dies.

RAY: What are you doing? What the fuck are you doing? Get up... You can't do this... You can't do this to me... Get up... I... didn't want... I didn't... You made me, you made me do it... I didn't want... Get up, get up... I didn't want to...

RAY tries to lift the CAPTAIN. His hands are covered in blood. He brings them up to his face, staining it in blood.

RAY: I don't want the stripes... I don't want them... Not this way... I didn't want to get them this way... Not this way... I didn't want them this way... Not this way... I didn't want to get them this way...

The wind whistles.

▲ ▲ ▲

A suitcase open on the floor. A scattered pile of clothes. ANA, leaning on the plinth looks at the clothes, tries to pick up an item of clothing but is in too much pain. ISABEL takes her by the waist.

ISABEL: You shouldn't get up. Not till the scab drops off. Not till the chick is born.

ANA: Where are you going?

ISABEL: I don't know... Maybe to the sea... I'm looking to the sea. Crowds of people wait for me...

ANA sneezes.

ISABEL: You should get some bed rest, sweetheart. Even if you feel OK. Even if you feel strong; even if you think you can do things, don't. Stay in bed. Let people wait on you. Let people do everything for you. You're a princess. You've got a tattoo from the captain and your defenses are low. Rest up. Rest up for the rest of your life... All your life... Rest. Leave my soul down by the sea... Lost control leaving free... I'm looking to the sea.

▲ ▲ ▲

ISABEL looks at ANA and uncovers her bare chest. The scab is black. ISABEL takes a plain leather top out of the suitcase and puts it on ANA, with the future tattoo showing in the middle of the low neckline.

ISABEL: From now on you're gonna be a hot chick...

ISABEL kisses ANA.

ISABEL: Goodbye, sweetheart. I have to leave. I have to go to the sea... I'll leave you this hut. You can sell it or set up a foundation. You're the queen now...

ANA: Stay here. With me. There's space...

ISABEL: Palaces are big, but there's only room for one queen... Only one...

ANA: At least you won't deny me half a line.

ANA gives ISABEL a piece of paper.

ISABEL: Of course not.

ISABEL opens the paper and spills its contents onto the suitcase. She snorts the coke. ANA snorts too.

ISABEL: Goodbye, sweetheart. I have to leave. I have to go with him... I saw my baby... she was turning blue. I knew that soon her young life was through. And so I got down on my knees-down by her bed. And these are the words to her I said. Everything will be alright tonight. Everything will be alright tonight. No one moves, no one talks, no one thinks, no one walks, tonight.

THE END

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