

It is night and the year is 1750. At a village in The Gambia, West Africa, lean, black thirty-year old Omoro Kinte watches his hut with anticipation. Inside, his wife Binta is giving birth. Sweating, Binta gasps for breath and the midwife raises the newborn babe before her. Binta takes the crying infant to her breast and Omoro enters, looking upon his wife and son with pride.

The women of the village gather around the hut to see and touch the new babe and its mother. Meanwhile, Omoro presents a problem to Brima Cesay, the village schoolmaster. "Should the child be named after a person or a thing?" The child will take on seven characteristics of whatever name (person or thing) Omoro chooses. The schoolmaster is of little help to Omoro in the choice of a name. Brima Cesay suggests that, if the child is truly Omoro's, then so is the problem.

In the village compound, Brima Cesay tells the people that Omoro has decided upon a name for his son. Omoro lifts the child to his lips and whispers: "My son, you are named Kunta," after Omoro's father's father. An outburst of approval rises as the drum comments on the scene.

With Kunta secure in his embrace, Omoro moves carefully through the jungle night. In a clearing, he stops and holds the naked, wriggling infant up to the sky: "Behold the only thing greater than yourself."

Fifteen years later it is the Winter of 1765 in Annapolis, Maryland, and a ship broker, Mr. Vilars, is reviewing the career record of forty-year-old Captain Thomas Davies. The Lord Ligonier will be shipworthy in two months and Mr. Vilars needs a captain to take her to the West Coast of Africa and bring back a cargo of slaves. Impressed with Captain Davies' record, Vilars hires him on the spot.

Now fifteen years old, Kunta Kinte is excitedly chasing a baby goat when Binta calls him into the hut to finish his breakfast. At the table where Binta is feeding three-year-old Lamin, Omoro asks Kunta about the she goat. "She will have kids soon." When Kunta has finished with his bowl, Binta tells him that the goats are waiting. The boy moves off to work and Omoro reminds Binta that she might tell Kunta what a good job he is doing with the goats. Binta thinks Kunta tells himself that often enough.

Followed by Sitafa, a boy his own age, Kunta drives his herd of six goats to pasture. Kunta greets his old grandmother, Nyo Boto as he passes her hut. Beside the pot where she is dyeing cloth, Nyo Boto lovingly taunts the boys--both of whom claim to be nearly men--then sends them on their way.

Joined now by other boys shepherding their goats in the grazing meadow, Sitafa asks Kunta if he knows what will be done to them when they are taken away to become men. Another shepherd named Kalulu, smaller in size but of the same age, describes how they will be covered with a hood and taken to the secret place of manhood. There, they will be taught all the things men must know.

Sitafa wants to know if Kalulu means they will be taken by the white men he has heard Brima Cesay mention. No, those who take them into manhood training are not the white men who steal black people. Sitafa does not understand why people would steal people. "The stolen people are taken far away and made to work as slaves," explains Kunta Kinte.

Kalulu continues his description of manhood training with the fate of each boy's foto. Solemnly, Kunta and Sitafa steal glances at their crotches. The difference between boys and men is accomplished by cutting--and blood. An uneasy silence is suddenly interrupted by a bizarre high-pitched scream.

The she goat has been mauled by a leopard which Kunta now assaults with his slingshot. Kunta so baffles the leopard by throwing mud at it that the animal leaves the area and its prey. Staring down at the dead she goat, Kunta tells Sitafa and Kalulu that he must go and tell Omoro what he has allowed to happen.

With the skin of the she goat in his hand, Kunta approaches the field where Omoro and the other men are attending crops. Kunta describes the death of the she goat and his assault with the slingshot. Omoro is furious. He tells Kunta that he has two lessons to learn: first, that all men make mistakes; second, never run toward a dangerous animal. Omoro regards his son in silence

then returns to his work. That is all that needs to be said on this matter. "Do not forget to bring firewood to your mother." "Yes, Papa, I will not forget."

Aboard the Lord Ligonier, Captain Davies and his third mate, Mr. Slater are making an account of the wrist shackles, neck rings, thumbscrews and branding irons now loaded on the ship. The Lord Ligonier is ready to leave for Africa tomorrow: but Captain Davis prefers to bless the voyage by leaving on Sunday. "Seems the Christian thing to do."

With sleepy Lamin in her arms and Kunta following behind her, Binta leaves Nyo Boto's hut where they have just finished their evening meal. Kunta thinks that the sound of wood-chopping he has heard in the forest is made by men who are building the secret place for

manhood training. He asks Binta if she agrees, but she sharply says that women do not know, and should not talk, of such things.

Studying his mother's grave manner, Kunta is unprepared for her next words. "I want you to know that you have been a very good boy, Kunta." When Kunta steps into the hut, a dark figure approaches him and a hood is thrown over his head. Kunta does not know that it is his father who is spiriting him away. Binta tells the awakening Lamin that her boy, Kunta, has just left. A man will return in his place.

The men of Juffere drive the hooded boys through the jungle heat. Only when they have arrived at the specified location are the hoods removed and the boys confronted by Kintango, the mentor and trainer who

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