

THE TRIAL OF JOSEPH KNIGHT BY MAY
SUMBWANYAMBE

SCENE 1. A BUSY COURT ROOM.

AS JOHN SWINTON ENTERS THE COURT, ALL
STAND.

1. CLERK: Silence in the court!

THE COURT QUIETENS.

SWINTON SITS DOWN AND SO DO THOSE
ASSEMBLED IN THE COURTS. A BEAT PASSES IN
SILENCE, WE HEAR A FEW WHISPERS FROM
THOSE EAGERLY AWAITING SWINTON'S WORDS,
THE FEELING OF GREAT ANTICIPATION AMONGST
A LARGE GROUP OF ASSEMBLED PEOPLE...

2. SWINTON: It is a great question, does a Black, the moment he sets foot upon British ground, become immediately free?

3. There are only two questions of law before us today. That is, first: Whether the defender, Sir John Wedderburn has the right to the Persuer, Joseph Knight's services for life without wages. Secondly: the question of whether the defender has the right to send the Persuer back to Jamaica against his will.

SWINTON CONTINUES IN GIVING HIS JUDGEMENT
(FOR WORDS SEE SCENE 14), BUT HIS VOICE
BECOMES MUFFLED UNDER KNIGHT'S.

1. KNIGHT(V.O) My name is Joseph Knight, I was born in 1753. I was taken from Cape Coast Castle to Jamaica in 1760 by a Captain 'John Knight' on a ship called The Phoenix. The man sitting against me in court today was a planter in Jamaica, John Wedderburn. He purchased me at auction around 1762. I was eleven. As I speak to you right now, at the age of 21, I have already been many things in my life: a West African, a Jamaican slave, a runaway slave, a litigant, but this isn't a story about all that, it's a story about how I became a freeman in Scotland. The history books will tell you, that I became free on this day in 1774, when John Swinton laid down the famous judgement I'm sat in the court listening to now. They'll also tell you that when Sir John Wedderburn appealed Swinton's decision, some four years later in 1778, in Edinburgh's Court of Sessions, Scotland struck down slavery entire - some 55 years before Wilberforce would have his Abolition of slavery Act passed in Westminster.

1. KNIGHT (V.O) And whilst all this true, no matter what the history books will tell you, In my heart I became free before the day John Swinton gave his judgement, I became free when I fell in love with a lowly servant in the Wedderburn household called Annie Thompson.

2. For all the years since Sir John had purchased me, we had been as close as father and son, but that all changed in 1772.

SCENE 2. THE PRIVATE STUDY

KNIGHT IS SAT BY A WOODEN TABLE, READING A BOOK. ENTER ANNIE SHE PULLS UP A CHAIR NEXT TO HIM.

3. ANNIE: What are you reading Joseph Knight?

KNIGHT DOESN'T RESPOND, SO...

4. ANNIE: Sir William Blackstone? Sounds fancy.

KNIGHT CONTINUES IGNORING ANNIE.

5. ANNIE: What does it say? That page?

6. ANNIE: Jesus Joseph, there's more to life than just books you know?

ANNIE STANDS, AND MOVES TO EXIT.

1. ANNIE: Well I can see where I'm not wanted. I had better get back to work before my absence is noticed.
2. KNIGHT: Wait.
3. ANNIE: What?
4. KNIGHT: I don't know. Stay a while.
5. ANNIE: Well, some of us have actually got work to do round here. The rest of us all don't get the privilege of time off to read.
6. KNIGHT: Just a little longer. Please.
7. ANNIE: Why?
8. KNIGHT: I don't know...Because.
9. ANNIE: Because what?
10. KNIGHT: Because you've distracted me now, so we may as well talk.

ANNIE LAUGHS.

11. KNIGHT: What? What's so funny?

1. ANNIE: You Joseph. You're so funny. You really do know how to make a girl feel wanted don't you?

KNIGHT LAUGHS A LITTLE TOO, AS THEY SETTLE DOWN.

2. KNIGHT: Sorry Annie.

3. ANNIE: You will be.

ANNIE SITS BACK DOWN.

4. ANNIE: So, what does it say then? Your fancy book by Mr William Blackstone...

5. KNIGHT: "There is nothing which so generally strikes the imagination, and engages the affections of mankind, as the right of property; or that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe"

6. ANNIE: Very fancy. I really must read William Blackstone more.

7. KNIGHT: You haven't read any Blackstone to begin with.

8. ANNIE: How do you know that?

(Pause)

1. ANNIE: Did it take you long to do that?
2. KNIGHT: To do what?
3. ANNIE: Memorise all they fancy words.
4. KNIGHT: Long enough.
5. ANNIE: What other tricks can you do?
6. KNIGHT: I don't do tricks.
7. ANNIE: Oh, do you think I'm impressed? I'm not.
8. KNIGHT: I don't care.
9. ANNIE: And if I could do tricks like that, I wouldn't waste my remembering on boring things. Do you want to know what I'd remember?
10. KNIGHT: No.
11. ANNIE: Things that make you smile. Not the things that hurt your head, thinking about. I don't suppose you know any things like that, you being Mr Serious all the time.

(Pause)

12. ANNIE: I'm sorry I don't mean to criticize you.

1. KNIGHT: It's alright. I don't mind. I like talking to you.

2. ANNIE: Even when I criticize you?

3. KNIGHT: Even then.

4. ANNIE: Good.

ANNIE LAUGHS.

5. KNIGHT: You can talk to me about anything Annie.
You know that.

6. ANNIE: Anything?

7. KNIGHT: Yes. You know that.

8. ANNIE: Good. Well the thing is...

9. KNIGHT: Yes?

10. ANNIE: I'm pregnant.

11. NIGHT: Oh.

12. ANNIE: I think we should talk about it.

13. KNIGHT: Yes...definitely...talk...about it.

14. ANNIE: This is going good.

SCENE 3. A WET AND MUDDY ROAD IN THE
PERTHSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE.

A BROKEN-DOWN HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE.
INSIDE THE CARRIAGE WEDDERBURN IS WAITING
PATIENTLY. MARGARET IS WAITING OUTSIDE
THE CARRIAGE. MARGARET MOVES FORWARD ON
SEEING SOMETHING IN THE DISTANCE... SHE
WAITS A LONG BEAT, TO BE SURE OF WHAT SHE
HAS SEEN. AND THEN...

1. MARGARET: Here it comes.

WEDDERBURN COMES OUT THE CARRIAGE AND
LOOKS ACROSS AND SEES FOR HIMSELF.

2. WEDDERBURN: He didn't find the horses....

(Pause)

3. WEDDERBURN: 'It's' name is Joseph. You should try using it.

4. MARGARET: And why would I do that?

5. WEDDERBURN: Maybe then you would be able to see that all "slaves" are not just items on a ledger book that can be tossed away on an immature whim...I want you to make peace with Joseph. I want you to do it today.

KNIGHT ENTERS FROM UP THE ROAD, HE IS OUT OF BREATH. HE STOPS UPON GETTING CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE TWO AND CATCHES HIS BREATH.

1. KNIGHT: I looked everywhere.
2. MARGARET: If the slave really did look everywhere, the horses would be found.
3. WEDDERBURN: Perhaps you should have gone and looked for them yourself?
4. MARGARET: Perhaps I should.
5. WEDDERBURN: Don't mind young Margaret, Joseph. God often gives wealth and privilege to those whom he forgets to give honour and common decency. Isn't that right, Margaret?
6. MARGARET: The Lord, works in mysterious ways, husband.

WEDDERBURN STARTS TO WALK OFF.

7. WEDDERBURN: Try not to kill each other when I'm gone.
8. MARGARET: Gone? Where do you go now?
9. WEDDERBURN: To get us horses.

1. MARGARET: In country as open as this? Well if your black could not find them they must surely have stretched their legs far. They could be gone a few miles out by now.
2. WEDDERBURN: I do not go for the old horses. We are not far now from Balindean. I'll walk the distance home and return soon with fresh horses.
3. MARGARET: Will you not send your creature?
4. WEDDERBURN: Joseph has done enough today.

WEDDERBURN TURNS AND HEADS OFF DOWN THE ROAD. MARGARET GOES AFTER HIM.

5. MARGARET: Husband? Husband? How long do you think you will be?
6. WEDDERBURN: However long it takes, Wife. However long it takes.

EXIT WEDDERBURN.

MARGARET AND KNIGHT WATCH HIM LEAVE.

AFTER A BEAT MARGARET COMES BACK TO KNIGHT.

1. MARGARET: He thinks leaving us stranded out here together will make me like you. He is wrong. I'll never like you. Not ever.

MARGARET GETS BACK INTO THE CARRIAGE.

2. MARGARET: You will wait in the driver seat. Not in the carriage.

KNIGHT STANDS WHERE HE IS, LOOKING AT THE CARRIAGE FOR A LONG BEAT. HE GOES TO THE CARRIAGE AND SITS BY THE CARRIAGE DOOR.

3. KNIGHT: Lady Margaret?

KNIGHT WAITS FOR A RESPONSE. GETS NONE.
SO...

4. KNIGHT: I know more about your husband than just about any human being in his life

KNIGHT WAITS FOR A RESPONSE. GETS NONE.
SO...

5. KNIGHT: Have you ever thought that it might be in your interests as his wife to maybe ask me a thing or two about him? Because if you asked, I probably would tell you. If I knew the answer.

KNIGHT WAITS FOR A RESPONSE. GETS NONE.
SO...

1. KNIGHT: Well, you know where I am, should you want to talk.

KNIGHT STANDS FROM WHERE HE IS KNEELING,
HE STARTS TO CLIMB UP TO THE DRIVER'S
SEAT, WHEN THE DOOR OF THE CARRIAGE
OPENS. KNIGHT STOPS. WAITS. AFTER A BEAT
MARGARET COMES OUT OF THE CARRIAGE.

2. MARGARET: Why would you do me this kindness, after I have been so unkind to you?

3. KNIGHT: Well, maybe it's as Sir John says, sometimes God gives wealth and privilege to people he forgets to give common decency. But sometimes it isn't their fault that they are that way. It's just because the difficulties and struggles that life has thrown in that person's way have shaped them.

KNIGHT COMES DOWN FROM THE CARRIAGE.

4. KNIGHT: So, what do you want to know?

MARGARET THINKS ON THIS FOR A MOMENT.

5. MARGARET: What's a memory you have of him from Jamaica when he was at his happiest? He doesn't like talking about Jamaica. Not with me.

KNIGHT THINKS FOR A SECOND.

1. KNIGHT: The time I saw him the happiest? Drinking rum at sunset

2. MARGARET: Rum?

3. KNIGHT: His house out there. It had a big veranda. He'd sit out there most evenings, drinking rum punch. With his brother and a few friends. Talking about the kind of woman he was going to marry when he got back to Scotland.

4. MARGARET: Am I what he wanted? Am I what he said he wanted in a wife?

5. KNIGHT: If I closed my eyes and pictured the woman he was talking about back then, I'd say it would have been a lady just like you.

MARGARET LOOKS OUT INTO THE DISTANCE.

6. KNIGHT: What's wrong, my Lady?

7. MARGARET: He'll never let me know him. As well as you know him. No matter what I do. Thank you, Joseph.

SCENE 4. A BEDROOM, IN BALINDEAN

MARGARET IS INSIDE, WE HEAR A KNOCK ON
THE DOOR.

1. ANNIE: Are you ready for your bath, my lady?
2. MARGARET: Yes, Annie, come in.
3. MARGARET: What kind of man would leave his wife out there in the cold, on her own, with his nigger slave?
4. ANNIE: I don't know, my Lady.
5. MARGARET: Do you know what Jamaica is?
6. ANNIE: It's a place on the other side of the world. A place that's warm
7. MARGARET: No. Jamaica, is a perfect Babylon. A place where Negro concubines serve a man's every whim and appetite. My husband went there at 18. That is where he became a man; where his preferences and sense of humanity and morality were formed. Joseph Knight was formed there too.

(Pause)

1. MARGARET: How is he with you?

2. ANNIE: Who my lady?

3. MARGARET: Joseph Knight.

(Pause)

4. MARGARET: I want him gone, Annie. Do you understand? I want him gone. And I need you to help me.

5. ANNIE: I can't do that my Lady.

6. MARGARET: You can't? Are you refusing to serve me?

(Pause)

7. MARGARET: If you will not serve me...

8. ANNIE: I'll do anything. Anything you ask. But I cannot do that.

9. MARGARET: Then you will leave my service.

10. ANNIE: I am with child. Joseph is the father.

11. MARGARET: You are pregnant? You?

1. ANNIE: Yes my Lady.

(Pause)

2. MARGARET: You will do this thing, not for me, but for your child. There is not enough room, for him and me inside my marriage. I can protect you. And your baby. Someone like you who has nothing, needs a woman like me to protect her. But only if you help me get what I want.

3. ANNIE: Protect me? Protect me from what?

4. MARGARET: In Jamaica, when a baby is born from a slave, that young child becomes the property of the slave's Master. A slave itself. Protect you from what? From my husband. I can protect you and your baby.

ANNIE MOVES TO EXIT.

5. MARGARET: You are a smart girl Annie. Think it over.

EXIT ANNIE.

SCENE 5. DRAWING ROOM

WEDDERBURN IS SAT WARMING HIMSELF IN
FRONT OF A FIRE.

ENTER MARGARET

1. WEDDERBURN: You look refreshed.
2. MARGARET: I am. Thank you, husband.
3. WEDDERBURN: You and Joseph managed to not kill each other then?
4. MARGARET: We managed, husband.
5. WEDDERBURN: I don't expect the enmity you have for him to die overnight. That would be unreasonable. But I'm glad to see progress in that regard.
6. MARGARET: As you say, husband.
7. WEDDERBURN: What did you talk about, out there?
8. MARGARET: What it means to be a man.
9. WEDDERBURN: A clever young man, isn't he? Very knowledgeable about many subjects.
10. MARGARET: Indeed. His mind is exceptional. For a black.

1. WEDDERBURN: "His" mind Margaret? So you no longer call Joseph "it"? Progress indeed.
2. MARGARET: I am not unmoved by the quality of his mind. I was thinking today, as I listened to him. That if I were to close my eyes I would be forgiven for thinking that he was white of skin.
3. WEDDERBURN: Of white skin? Ha! I have shaped that boy in my own image. He is as close a thing to a son as a creature formed of my own flesh. But white? No, he doesn't sound white. He sounds educated, articulate, intelligent even. But not white.
4. MARGARET: As you say, husband.

(Pause)

5. MARGARET: The child will need providing for.
6. WEDDERBURN: What child is this?
7. MARGARET: Annie Thompson's. It seems she's pregnant. I have made her a generous offer on your behalf. Well, as Joseph does not earn a wage in your service we will agree to pay all the fees for her laying in whilst the bastard is born.

(Pause)

8. WEDDERBURN: Ah...

1. MARGARET: Had you not heard husband?

WEDDERBURN DOESN'T RESPOND.

SCENE 6. THE DINING ROOM

WEDDERBURN AND KNIGHT ARE EATING.

2. KNIGHT: Have I served you well?

3. WEDDERBURN: You have.

4. KNIGHT: Good.

(Pause)

5. KNIGHT: You made me a promise. The day of my baptism.

WEDDERBURN CARRIES ON EATING FOR A BEAT,
BUT SOON COMES TO A HALT.

6. KNIGHT: That promise that you made.

7. WEDDERBURN: What of it?

8. KNIGHT: Does it still hold true?

9. WEDDERBURN: Of course it does.

1. KNIGHT: You promised me that I could go free,
after 7 years, if I served you well.

WEDDERBURN LOOKS AT KNIGHT.

2. KNIGHT: And if I was to ask you for a witnessed
and signed probative deed to that affect?
Or a deed under seal? Would you object?

3. WEDDERBURN: How many years has it been since your
baptism?

4. KNIGHT: It's coming up to five years.

5. WEDDERBURN: And what are you saying? Are you saying
that you want to leave my service?

6. KNIGHT: No. Of course not.

7. WEDDERBURN: Do you not trust me to keep my word,
Joseph?

8. KNIGHT: Of course I do.

9. WEDDERBURN: Why do you need a contract all of a
sudden?

1. KNIGHT: It's the proper thing to do.
2. WEDDERBURN: Why now?
3. KNIGHT: I just want to know where I stand.
4. WEDDERBURN: Well, now you know.

SCENE 7. KNIGHT'S BEDROOM

ENTER ANNIE

5. ANNIE: Joseph, we need to talk... Oh Sir John!

ANNIE TRAILS OFF, ON NOTICING WEDDERBURN.

6. ANNIE: I'm begging your pardon, Sir.

ANNIE TURNS TO LEAVE BUT BEFORE SHE CAN
GO.

7. WEDDERBURN: The Edinburgh Advertiser.

ANNIE STOPS.

8. WEDDERBURN: It's a newspaper.

9. ANNIE: I know.

10. WEDDERBURN: I found it under Joseph's bed. Would you read that, right there for me?

ANNIE STARTS TO READ TO HERSELF

1. WEDDERBURN: Read it out loud so I can hear too,
Annie.
2. ANNIE: "Lord Mans...Field had said that every
slave brought into this coun...try ought to
be free and that no master had a r...ight
to sell them here".
3. WEDDERBURN: That will do.

WEDDERBURN TAKES ANOTHER NEWSPAPER FROM
THE PILE.

4. WEDDERBURN: Now this one, the Caledonian Mercury.
Read...

ANNIE TAKES THE PAPER. READS OUT LOUD.

5. ANNIE: 'In the case of Somerset, the Negro, the
Court f...ound that his master, Charles
Stewart, had no power to com...pel him on
board a ship, or to send him back to the
Plan...ta...tions'.
6. WEDDERBURN: And now the Edinburgh Evening Courant.

ANNIE HESITATES, THEN RELUCTANTLY TAKES
THE PAPER - SHE KNOWS WHERE THIS TRAIN IS
HEADING. SHE READS OUT LOUD.

1. ANNIE: Mans...field had rul...ed that eve...ry slave
br...ought into the country ought to be
free, and that no master had a right to
sell them here.

AS ANNIE STRUGGLES THROUGH HER READING,
WEDDERBURN SCANS THROUGH THE PILE

2. WEDDERBURN: Oh there is a lot more: The Scots
Magazine, The Gentlemen's Magazine. As
far as I can tell it is every man who has
ever written about the whole Somerset
affair.

WEDDERBURN TAKES ALL THE PAPERS UP IN HIS
HAND AND SLAMS THEM DOWN IN RAGE BACK
ONTO THE BED. ANNIE STOPS READING.

3. WEDDERBURN: Is it true? Are you with child?

4. ANNIE: I would not lie about such a thing.

5. WEDDERBURN: And the father?

6. ANNIE: Joseph is the father.

(Pause)

7. WEDDERBURN: I believe my wife has made you a generous
offer.

8. ANNIE: I cannot say.

1. WEDDERBURN: You will speak. The last I checked it was Sir John Wedderburn who is the master of Balindean. Not Lady Margaret.

ANNIE STAYS SILENT FOR A LONG ENOUGH BEAT
TO THINK THAT SHE WILL KEEP HER MOUTH
SHUT. EVENTUALLY.

2. ANNIE: It was generous of Lady Margaret to offer to pay for my caring. But the terms are...the terms are...

ANNIE HESITATES

3. WEDDERBURN: Speak or be gone!

4. ANNIE: Lady Margaret wants me to encourage Joseph to run away from your service. She wants me to encourage him to betray you...and I told her I couldn't do it. Because I know his mind, even if I told him such a thing. Not for all the gold in the world would that man ever betray you.

WEDDERBURN CONSIDERS ANNIE AND HER WORDS
FOR A LONG BEAT.

5. WEDDERBURN: My wife's offer will stand. With no terms for you to meet.

ANNIE TAKES WEDDERBURN'S HAND AND KISSES
IT.

6. ANNIE: Oh thank you, Sir. Thank you so much.

WEDDERBURN WITHDRAWS HIS HAND.

1. WEDDERBURN: Except one... You must leave my service.
2. ANNIE: No!
3. WEDDERBURN: I will pay for your caring. But it will be away from this home. Your word against the Lady Margaret's. That will not do.
4. ANNIE: I only answered the questions you made me answer. That is not fair.
5. WEDDERBURN: No it's not. The world rarely is.

EXIT WEDDERBURNSCENE 8. THE LIBRARY

KNIGHT IS SAT READING A BOOK. ENTER ANNIE.

6. ANNIE: Joseph, they let me go.

KNIGHT LOOKS UP FROM THE BOOK.

7. KNIGHT: What?!
8. ANNIE: They let me go
9. KNIGHT: For what cause?
10. ANNIE: What do you think?

1. KNIGHT: Sir John did this?

2. ANNIE: Lady Margaret

KNIGHT STANDS

3. KNIGHT: I will speak with Sir John

4. ANNIE: You will not.

KNIGHT STOPS.

5. ANNIE: You will not. It was Sir John that let me go.

6. KNIGHT: You said, Lady Margaret

7. ANNIE: ...helped him on that course. That I go is Sir John's will.

8. KNIGHT: What does that mean?

9. ANNIE: It doesn't matter.

10. KNIGHT: You're right. What matters is what we are going to do about it

11. ANNIE: There is nothing I can do. What is done is done.

12. KNIGHT: That is the wrong answer.

1. ANNIE: I am as powerless in this house as a slave.
2. KNIGHT: You are not a slave
3. ANNIE: I am poor. I have nothing.
4. KNIGHT: You were born free. You were born with a choice. If you were a slave. You would know what that means.
5. ANNIE: Aye, and I am a woman. If you were born free. You would know what that means.

(Pause)

6. ANNIE: There are many kinds of slavery, Joseph. For sure some are worse than others. But that doesn't mean I do not suffer in this world. I mean, what choice does the collier have who works in the mine, or the weaver in the mill, or the worker in the field?
7. KNIGHT: You are not a collier, or a weaver, or a worker in a field.

1. ANNIE: No, but I'm a going to be a mother. She is threatening to take away our child. What would you have me do? Which option should I take? Betray you, help her conspire to be rid of you, so that my child and myself need not worry about the world outside of Balindean. Or should I honour you and condemn myself to poverty, and have the baby growing inside of me, taken away from me as a slave.

2. KNIGHT: You think she can take your child away from you?

3. ANNIE: She has told me how things work in Jamaica.

4. KNIGHT: We are not in Jamaica.

5. ANNIE: If we are not in Jamaica. Then why then are you still a slave?

6. KNIGHT: I need to show you something.

ANNIE COMES OVER, TURNS THE BOOK OVER,
READS THE COVER OUT LOUD.

1. ANNIE: "The Slave Code"
2. KNIGHT: One of many. Out there each colony, each different place, develops one of these. This one. This was one of the first. It's the slave code of Barbados. Most later colonies followed it. These are the laws, Annie.
3. ANNIE: Like the commandments in the bible?
4. KNIGHT: Aye. Issues of slave's families. That has always been outside the written- down law. And it is clear, the status of the mother determines the status of the child. This has always been taken to be universal. They...they they call it ius gentium.
5. ANNIE: Ius What?
6. KNIGHT: Ius Gentium. Ius Genti...
7. KNIGHT: It's very simple. If you are born to a slave mother, that makes you a slave.
8. ANNIE: And so, if you are born to a freewoman...the child is free, even if the father were a slave.
9. KNIGHT: Exactly.

1. ANNIE: Did you ever meet a free "white" woman having a child by a slave in Jamaica?
2. KNIGHT: No. But I find it is difficult to believe it never happened.
3. ANNIE: A general law. That's what it means right? Of People.
4. ANNIE: Of nations
5. KNIGHT: Yes, Annie. Lady Margaret she does not know that. But make no mistake. Sir John Will.
6. ANNIE: I want you to teach me more. I want you to teach me everything.
7. KNIGHT: Everything is a lot
8. ANNIE: Everything.
9. KNIGHT: Everything it is.

SCENE 9. A BEDROOMENTER ANNIE

1. MARGARET: Come in Annie. You may sit.

2. ANNIE: I would rather stand.

(*Pause*)

3. MARGARET: You have made your decision?

4. ANNIE: I have.

5. MARGARET: My lady.

6. ANNIE: I have, Lady Margaret

7. MARGARET: That's better. We need not draw this out any longer than necessary. I have many things to attend to today. You have made the right decision, Annie. In the fullness of time you will understand that.

8. ANNIE: I have decided to leave your service.

(*Pause*)

9. MARGARET: That's very, unfortunate, for your child

10. ANNIE: You're unfortunate

11. MARGARET: I beg your pardon?

1. ANNIE: I said...I said that you're unfortunate.
And I pity you.

2. MARGARET: Take it back. You do not pity me.

ANNIE STAYS SILENT

3. MARGARET: I will not ask you again.

4. ANNIE: They call you a Lady? Only now I see how small you are. You think yourself morally superior but I see you for what you really are. Small, mean and bitter...

MARGARET STANDS CUTTING ANNIE OFF

5. MARGARET: How dare you?

6. ANNIE: How dare you!

7. MARGARET: Do not raise your voice to me in that manner. I say this for the last time. Think about your child. Think before you utter your next words

8. ANNIE: I have thought about it. I've thought nothing else. And I refuse. With every fibre of my being I refuse your offer, My Lady.

SCENE 10. A DINING ROOM

WEDDERBURN IS EATING DINNER. ENTER KNIGHT

1. KNIGHT: She's going to be the mother of my child.

(Pause)

2. KNIGHT: Would you ask me to choose between staying in your service or being a father to my child?

3. WEDDERBURN: And if I do deny you? What will you do then? Will you go the route of the slave Somerset? Will you make me another Charles Stewart? Is my trust in you misplaced, Joseph?

4. KNIGHT: I just want to be able to be a father.

5. WEDDERBURN: I have made a generous offer. Your bastard...Your child will be provided for.

6. KNIGHT: You promised me that I could go free. Why should I be another Somerset? Did Somerset have a promise from his master that was not kept? Was Somerset baptised like me? Because if he was, and if promises were broken, it is not my actions that will be becoming of Somerset, it is your actions that are becoming of Stewart.

1. WEDDERBURN: Your head has clearly been turned by reckless and misguided reporting. You believe Lord Mansfield's Judgement in the Somerset case freed all slaves in Britain. Do you deny it?
2. KNIGHT: I have read some versions of Lord Mansfield's Judgement. Enough to know his decision has not made me free.
3. WEDDERBURN: And why is that?
4. KNIGHT: The 1707 act of Union preserved Scots law and the Scottish law courts, so no decision of any English court...
5. WEDDERBURN: ...in Westminster Hall would have any direct effect in Scotland.

(Pause)

6. KNIGHT: You promised me that I would go free. You gave me your word.
7. WEDDERBURN: And I will keep my word. Just not today. I ask you to be patient.
8. KNIGHT: I am to be a father in six months. How am I to be patient?
9. WEDDERBURN: And whose fault is that? Did I tell you to lie with that woman?
10. KNIGHT: We had an agreement.

1. WEDDERBURN: This is not a court. You will get your freedom, Joseph. Just not today.
2. KNIGHT: No, Sir John, surely you mean just not with her?

(Pause)

3. WEDDERBURN: Do you call me a liar now? In my own house. You call me a liar?
4. KNIGHT: That is not what I said.
5. WEDDERBURN: "That is not what you said"? Again, you call me a liar. Twice now. You ungrateful bastard! Do you forget what a privileged life I have given you? Do you forget?
6. KNIGHT: I do not.
7. WEDDERBURN: Oh, but you do! In the West Indies if a slave talked to his master as you have now he would be flogged. Look, am I missing something here, Joseph? Have I not been a force for good inside your life? Everything good, that has happened to you in your life, has that not been because of me? Do you not owe me some gratitude? Some respect? Will you throw away, all of the dignity that my generosity has given you so that you may be free to live in abject poverty with Annie Thompson? No you will not. Enough now, Joseph. Go to bed.

KNIGHT DOES NOT MOVE.

1. KNIGHT: We are not in the West Indies, Sir John.
I did not ask you to bring me here to Scotland. Nor did I ask for all of the kindness and privilege that you have bestowed upon me. I did not ask because I could not ask. Because I was your slave.
2. WEDDERBURN: Are you no longer?
3. KNIGHT: I did not ask to be captured. Transported off to another world the way I was.
4. WEDDERBURN: And will you hold me responsible for that too?
5. KNIGHT: No. But I will hold you responsible for bringing me here to this beautiful land. To this Scotland. Where I feel free and a full man. For baptising me, I blame you. I blame you, because being in this land has changed everything for me. And though I am grateful for this change - I did not ask for that either. But I am changed. I am changed.

(Pause)

1. WEDDERBURN: I have always tried my best not to ever treat you like a slave. No honest man could accuse me of treating you as low as that. Not since we came back here to Scotland. And no other man has ever treated you as a slave. Because I haven't let them Joseph. I have protected you
2. KNIGHT: What if I didn't ask for freedom? What if I asked for much less? For example, what if I asked for the unused servant's cottages. The ones in disrepair. Annie could stay there...Permanently.
3. WEDDERBURN: And where would you stay, in this arrangement?
4. KNIGHT: With her and our future children. You once talked of gifting me a piece of land back in the West Indies where I might retire and have an independent income. Let me settle then for less than what was promised. Let me settle for this small cottage on your land.

(Pause)

5. WEDDERBURN: And in this arrangement, my providing a lifelong home for Annie Thompson and her child, on my grounds, this would be what?
6. KNIGHT: A gift. A generous gift.

1. WEDDERBURN: No, Joseph. Not a gift. A price. A price for your loyalty. You would be bought then like a common whore?
2. KNIGHT: If that is how you choose to see it, so be it.
3. WEDDERBURN: So, it is a fee that you are asking for? You think I should pay for your loyalty? Have I not been generous enough? All these requests. They come from her instruction. Yes, I see your mouth moving, but it is her voice I hear coming from out those black lips.
4. WEDDERBURN: You think I don't know what you feel. Yes, I know. You felt the veins and flesh and warmth between a white woman's thighs and the irony is, she has made a slave out of you where I had made you free. Oh you have given this plenty of thought. I can see that. But so have I and I'm afraid I have to say no. What would my wife say, if I were to keep that maid in my service after she has contradicted her?
5. KNIGHT: I thought no one forces Sir John Wedderburn?

1. WEDDERBURN: That was once true. In the West Indies.
But this is Scotland. And no, not the
Scotland that you so eloquently paint,
that's green and pleasant and Christian.
That Scotland is just a mirage.
Underneath the real Scotland is a land of
men, of politics a land of mercantile
interests.
2. KNIGHT: You are not powerless.
3. WEDDERBURN: Am I not? All men are slaves, Joseph.
You'll do well to remember that. We're
slaves to our past. For a man cannot
learn to forget but hangs on the past.
And no matter how far or fast he might
run, that chain will run with him...
4. KNIGHT: Free or not. I will marry the one I love.

WEDDERBURN LAUGHS

5. WEDDERBURN: Don't be ridiculous, Joseph. People don't
marry for love. They marry for position,
they marry for status, they marry for
security. Is that what you think, that
she loves you?

WEDDERBURN LAUGHS AGAIN

6. KNIGHT: I intend to sue for my freedom if you
will not let me go free.

1. WEDDERBURN: You intend to sue for your freedom? And how will you do that?
2. KNIGHT: In a court of law.
3. WEDDERBURN: That will not get you what you want.
4. KNIGHT: I disagree.
5. WEDDERBURN: You come back down to earth, Joseph Knight. You may have read books, but you are not wise. Let me tell you what they will say to you.
6. KNIGHT: Please do.
7. WEDDERBURN: They will refuse you on two grounds. Firstly they will say Joseph Knight is clearly outside the King's law. He has no property and is incapable of having any. And no one who is not worth Ten Scottish Pounds can be a witness since he cannot pay the common fine for absence from court.
8. KNIGHT: Then I will tell them that I am no common beggar. I am in service, I have a trade. I will tell them just because I have no resources it does not mean that I must be a slave.

1. WEDDERBURN: Then they will say the onus is not on them to prove that you are a slave. The onus is on you to prove that you are not. How will you establish that you are not a slave? Will you call on me to be a witness?
2. KNIGHT: There is legal precedent of what I speak. And you know it. Fifty years ago, was not the slave Scipio Kennedy freed by his then master, Sir John Kennedy? In the last two years even, the slave Jacky was freed by his master, McNayr, in similar circumstance.
3. WEDDERBURN: Correct me if I am wrong, Joseph. But if my memory serves me, in the case of Scipio Kennedy, the freed slave had a probative deed, signed by the grantor with two witnesses to his signature? And in the more recent case of Jacky, the slave had a deed under seal. Do you have such a document, Mr. Knight?
4. KNIGHT: No. You know I do not.

(Pause)

5. WEDDERBURN: Leave me now. I grow tired of looking at your face.

EXIT KNIGHT

SCENE 11. KNIGHT'S BEDROOM.KNIGHT ENTERS AND GETS INTO A BED

1. KNIGHT(V.O) That night, as I slept, I dreamt I was a child again. I dreamt of the long voyage across the ocean from Africa onto Jamaica... I dreamt of, that ship, the Phoenix.

SCENE 12. EXT. ATLANTIC OCEANA STORM. ON THE ATLANTIC CROSSING

2. KNIGHT(V.O) Lightning strikes. A storm thrashes. The ocean is all turmoil. The ship I'm on is tossed hopelessly where it will by the might of the elements. But I feel safe, because I'm in a comfy bed in a well-decorated room. This is a safe place, somewhere no-one comes and goes, no-one but the Captain. And I stay safe, at least for a while. But eventually I know the door will crash open and he'll come back in to his room. To take shelter from the storm too.

THE DOOR CRASHES OPEN. ENTER JOHN KNIGHT.

1. KNIGHT(V.O) It's HIM! He takes off his coat and sits down on the bed.

2. CAPTAIN: Come here boy.

3. KNIGHT(V.O) I walk over to him. He grabs hold of my wrists and pushes me down onto the bed. I start to breathe heavily. I'm afraid. I'm always afraid when I'm alone with Him. My mind drifts off, outside of the room. It's like my spirit leaves my body. Across the deck and out into the storm; I pass sailors working the masts, moving and calling at one another. And then I disappear beneath the deck.

SCENE 13. INT. BELOW DECK.

SLAVES CRY AND MOAN, WITH TERROR AND
DESPAIR, HUDDLED TOGETHER IN THE DARK,
SEA-SOAKED INTERIOR OF THE SHIP.

4. KNIGHT(V.O) Below the deck now, and the ravages of the storm are visible on the naked men and women chained up to each other; they cry and moan, with terror and despair, huddled together in the dark, sea-soaked interior of the ship. I do my best to move amongst them.

1. KNIGHT (V.O) As I negotiate the hazards of the wind-rocked vessel, I see a naked woman. She's beautiful, something about her reminds me of my mother. She's on her own. A disturbing stillness to her: a reckoning is on her, but it is not hysterical; it is the cold stare of damnation. Her eyes seem to scream out to me that she will die out here. And I recognise her just then as one of the 60 men and woman that the captain would throw over board the day after the storm died to prevent illness from spreading amongst those not already sick. My mind drifts back to the captain's room. But I fight it. I want to be down here with the others. I cling onto the memory of the dead slaves below deck, and suddenly I'm back in there again. But so is the captain. He comes to me and hugs me to Him. An act of kindness. feels like kindness. The look on the woman's face has changed. The Captain takes my hand and leads me back above deck. I go with Him. On my way up, I see the look on every other slave's face as I leave. It is the same as the woman. Shame, pity, disgust. I know then that I'm not 'one of them'. The realization is worse than the pain of the whip.

SCENE 14. THE BUSY COURT ROOM FROM Sc 1.

1. KNIGHT(V.O) I woke up that morning in a cold sweat. Sir John's words from the night before still echoing in my ears, "Leave me now". So I packed a few things, and I did it. I finally became a runaway. When they caught up to me, I was half the way to Dundee, on my way to meet Annie. They brought me back to Sir John, and he asked me why I ran? I could see in his eyes that he was convinced that Annie had put me up to it. I said nothing, just stayed silent. The truth is it wasn't one thing that made me run, it was everything: Annie being forced to leave Balindefean, all the reports I'd been reading about the Somerset case, my dreams of the long voyage the night before. Sir John assembled the justices of the peace, Ogilvy, Kinloch and Smyth to pass judgement on me being a runaway.
2. It went exactly as he said it would, as far as they were concerned I was just a piece of 'thinking property'. They didn't even let me speak. They thought that would be the end of the matter, but they underestimated one thing about me, Annie Thompson.

1. KNIGHT (V.O) She returned to Balindean sometime after the judgement, but this time she was not on her own. This time she came with a minister of Dundee, Mr Small.
2. Mr Small demanded that I should be released to the custody of the church. He told Wedderburn and Margaret, "Though they may be king and queen of their estate here in Ballindean. In the church of Scotland they are just members".
3. Once I was free of Balindean, I gained many more supporters. Together, we appealed the decision to the Sheriff Court.
4. SWINTON: During this case, I have considered a number of authorities put forward in support of the opinion, that slavery was no new thing; that the Romans, those great friends to liberty, understood it well; that even in Scotland in the year 1258 slaves and their children were conveyed from one master to another, in the same manner that sheep and horses are now.

1. SWINTON: (steely-eyed) Let me be clear, it is this court's opinion, that slavery at this day is authorised by the legislator of Great Britain, by various charters granted to the African companies; that it is therefore a lawful trade and that the possessors of these negros had as much property in them, as they had in any other article of merchandise.

2. ANNIE: No!

GASPS FROM AROUND THE ROOM...GASPS THAT TURN INTO CRIES, INCLUDING ANNIE'S OWN.

3. SWINTON: In such Jamaican circumstances our law is transparent and unequivocal. However, it is this Court's judgement that the considerations of property in Jamaica are foreign to the present questions. To quote authorities from the practice of ancient nations, or even from that of our own country, in the more early periods of her history is incorrect; Were such arguments to be listed to, any advocate could have no difficulty in producing an equal number of authorities in support of every one crime of which human nature is capable.

HIS VOICE IS RAISED OVER THE SOUNDS OF A CHAOTIC COURT.

1. SWINTON: The presumption of law must be in favour of liberty. It was therefore incumbent on Mr Wedderburn in this case to prove, that this negro was a slave by one or other of the known modes, required even in the country where slavery is established;

THE NOISE LOWERS TO SILENCE.

2. SWINTON: Every court of justice in Europe has rejected the claim of slavery with indignation; The great judge Holt had said well, "that English air was too pure for a slave to breathe,"; and Lord Mansfield has given a liberal decision in the famous case of Somerset. Human nature spurns at the idea of slavery among any part of our species; and I am confident that the decision now to be given will convince everyone of the rectitude of Judge Holt's opinion.

ANNIE LETS OUT A GASP - BREATHLESS RELIEF.

3. SWINTON: It is my opinion that the state of slavery is not recognized by the laws of this kingdom, and is inconsistent with the principles thereof. Further, that the regulations in Jamaica concerning slaves, do not extend to this kingdom.

1. KNIGHT: Yes! Yes!

2. SWINTON: I find in favour of the persuer and overturn the decision of the lower court.

STUNNED CONFUSION IN THE COURTROOM. THEN,
ALL KINDS OF COMMOTION - ANGER, CHEERS
AMID SHOCK. SWINTON STANDS.

3. KNIGHT: Yes! Yes!

4. KNIGHT (V.O) And that was it, with those words I was free. Whatever that means...

5. Unlike Annie, Margaret would never truly understand what bonded me and Sir John. I heard rumours that she was both surprised and livid with Sir John for launching an appeal against Swinton's decision. I wasn't surprised. Not one bit. It always made sense to me, that Margaret would want me gone; after all, she had seen first-hand how slavery corrupts everything it touches.

6. It had touched Sir John. As surely as it has touched their very marriage bed. He was cruel and perverted. What she didn't understand was that this whole nation had been touched by slavery. Slavery would not be removed from her household. Not by removing Me.

1. KNIGHT(V.O) She only had to look around herself to see that the bricks and mortar that are in her home, the clothes she wore, the food she eat, the servants that attended her. All of these fruits, like myself, are from the seeds of slavery. Sir John made himself from Slavery. Like this nation, would one day soon ask itself, Without Slavery what am I?
2. The answer, for both Sir John and Joseph Knight, for both master and slave, for both Scotland and Jamaica, is FREE.

THE END