

FLOWER OF FIRE

TITLE OVER BLACK:

Plant a demon seed, you raise a flower of fire.- U2

FADE IN:

INT. A JUAREZ CANTINA - AFTERNOON

JOHN FITZGERALD SULLIVAN, a 22-year-old American, sits on a bar stool, staring at the mirror behind the bar. He shakes his head, picks up a shot glass, and downs a tequila.

A beautiful 17-year-old MEXICAN WOMAN, MARIA RODRIGUEZ, returns from the bathroom. She kisses John's cheek and sits.

MARIA

What ya lookin' at, soldier? Remind you of someone?

JOHN

Yeah, you might say that.

He grabs her hands in his.

JOHN (cont'd)

You're so fucking cute. But so fuckin' young too.

MARIA

Not that young.

JOHN

Where I come from, seventeen is pretty young.

MARIA

Yeah, well, people age differently down here...quicker.

She places his hand on the under side of her breast.

JOHN

What would your mom say about this?

MARIA

My mom's got enough to worry about...dead son...remember?

John stares at her perfect breast.

EXT. A STREET IN TAL AFAR, IRAQ - LATE AFTERNOON - FLASHBACK
GUNFIRE RATTLES. Soldiers and civilians SHOUT. An EXPLOSION punctures the night.

John Sullivan holds the head of MARIA'S BROTHER, ERNESTO RODRIGUEZ, in his arms.

ERNESTO
So much for taking me surfing, huh
bitch?

John shakes his head and says nothing.

INT. A JUAREZ CANTINA - AFTERNOON

John continues to stare at Maria's breast.

JOHN
Yeah...I remember.

MARIA
Besides, I think my mom would be
okay with this.

She leans closer and KISSES John on the lips.

JOHN
Why?

MARIA
Because you're strong...brave. And
Ernesto liked you.

JOHN
Strength is an accident of birth
...bravery just another way of
saying I survived some shit.
(a beat)
Besides, I'm not sure I'd be the
best company right now, Maria. Not
with what I've got planned.

MARIA
Oh yeah? Whadda ya got planned?

JOHN
Just some surfing with a buddy
...and a whole lot of nothin'.

She takes his hand from her breast and holds it.

MARIA

Nothin' sounds okay to me.
It's more than what I got now.

She KISSES John on the lips and pulls back.

MARIA (cont'd)

Take me with you.

The shot GLASS begins to TREMBLE in John's hands. He quickly downs it then reaches for Maria's glass and does the same.

JOHN

Can't. Got some business to take care of...alone.

MARIA

What sort of business?

JOHN

The unfinished kind.
(grabs the money and stands)
Come on...let's hit that college bar you were telling me about.

He leads Maria into the streets of Juarez.

I/E. PLAYA AZUL - CONTINUOUS

John and Maria approach the PLAYA AZUL. A portly BOUNCER sits beside the front door.

MARIA

Hola, Javier.

BOUNCER

Hola, Maria.

INSIDE, they see a hundred or so DRUNKEN COLLEGE STUDENTS pulsing and throbbing to the beat of DMX.

PAN THE SCENE: FOUR BIKINI-CLAD WOMEN play a two-on-two volleyball game on a sand court. Wide-eyed DRUNKEN GRINGOS cheer them on.

A SHIRTLESS MAN rides a mechanical bull in a shaded corner. His FRIENDS hoot and holler in his face.

A WAITER in a white tank runs through the sand with a whistle in his mouth and a bottle of Jose Cuervo in his hand.

FIND JOHN, stunned. Maria grabs his hand and leads him to a long bar.

MARIA
 (screaming to bartender)
 Bucket of Bohemia and two shots of
 Cuervo.

She turns and smiles at John, who stares at the black speaker over his shoulder. He puts his HAND on his HEART.

The beat of the music gets louder and louder until the sounds of the bar recede and we CLOSE In on John's face.

ECU of John as we're left with nothing but John's fearful face and the BEAT, the BEAT, the BEAT, which finally turns to a loud HEARTBEAT, THROBBING in John's ears.

EXT. A STREET IN TAL AFAR, IRAQ - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

John, Ernesto, and TWO OTHER MARINES, PRIVATE HORTON and CORPORAL BANCROFT, stand at a CHECKPOINT.

A CAR ENGINE whines, growing louder and louder until HEADLIGHTS turn a corner.

BANCROFT
 Look alive, people. Every fuckin'
 haji wants your American ass dead
 ...remember that.

HORTON
 Lock and load, bitch...lock and
 load!

John looks at Ernesto, then turns to face the car.

Bancroft signals the car to stop. But the car ACCELERATES. The ensuing chaos fades from earshot as we CLOSE IN on John's face and hear his HEARTBEAT grow louder and louder.

BANCROFT
 Stop! Stop!

FIND HORTON as his eyes dance wildly. John stares at Horton, Bancroft, and finally Ernesto, but he can't hear what they say because the BEAT OF HIS HEART DROWNS OUT ALL NOISE.

ECU of John, face illumined by headlights. As the car approaches, all we hear is the thump of John's HEART in his chest. Tump-tump, tump-tump, tump-tump, growing louder and louder, faster and faster, until we...

I/E. PLAYA AZUL - AFTERNOON

ECU of John's face as he looks at the speakers above him, feeling the beat throb deep in his chest.

WIDEN to Maria handing him a shot of tequila.

MARIA

Salud.

She clinks John's glass with hers.

MARIA (cont'd)

To better times.

JOHN

(coming back)

Better times.

He closes his eyes and drinks.

MARIA

Forget about it, John.

JOHN

Seems the harder I try to forget,
the harder it is to think of
anything else.

A short BLONDE COLLEGE GIRL with a pierced naval and a deep bronze tan approaches John from behind. TWO FRIENDS laugh and hang back ten feet or so, watching.

BLONDE COLLEGE GIRL (ASHLEY)

Excuse me.

John turns on his bar stool to face her. He eyes her up and down, imagining...

JOHN

Yeah? What's up?

ASHLEY

(flirtatious)

Well, my girlfriends and I...

She gestures toward the two girls behind her, who giggle.

ASHLEY (cont'd)
 ...were wondering something. We noticed that you're a tall guy...with big hands and really long fingers.
 (laughs)
 And we wanted to know if what they say is true.

John looks at Maria and then back to the college girl.

JOHN
 What who say?

ASHLEY
 You know...they.

JOHN
 I give up, sweetheart. What do *they* say?

ASHLEY
 Ya know, that tall men with long fingers are, ahh, ya know...hung like donkeys.

The two friends behind her SQUEAL. Ashley turns to look at them. John drops his head, disappointed. He looks up.

SERIES OF SHOTS IN SLO-MO:

- A) The volleyball game.
- B) The drunken college kid on the mechanical bull.
- C) The partying frat boys.
- D) The whistle-blowing waiter.
- E) And finally, John, as he stares at the surreal scene before looking back down at his Marine-issued BOOTS, remembering...

EXT. A STREET IN TAL AFAR, IRAQ - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

FIND John's BOOTS as he sprints across the street from their CHECKPOINT, following the car as it slowly rolls into a curb. The other soldiers follow.

Ernesto opens the passenger side door and an IRAQI WOMAN spills out into the streets, crying, until she finally goes still. Her HAIR is DRAPED across John's BOOT.

In the back seat, a SMALL BOY lies lifeless next to a young girl who cries. An IRAQI MAN lies with his head leaning against the driver's side window, dead.

As John looks down at the WOMAN'S HAIR on his boot, he hears the GIRL...

IRAQI GIRL
(sobbing)
Why? Why are you shooting at us?

John opens his mouth as if to speak, but says nothing.

I/E. PLAYA AZUL - AFTERNOON

ECU of John as he stares at his BOOTS, remembering. Then he looks at the blond and talks to his dead friend.

JOHN
(sotto voce)
None of this is real, E.

ASHLEY
What? You want to know if they're real?

She sticks her chest out, proud.

ASHLEY (cont'd)
You show me yours, I'll show you mine, cowboy.

John shakes his head at her crudity.

JOHN
Maybe some other time, sweetheart.
When a tramp like you doesn't make me sick.

John grabs Maria's hand to walk away.

ASHLEY
What'd you pay for your little Mexican puta anyway? Ten bucks?

John stops but Maria pulls him away.

MARIA

John, it doesn't matter. Let's go.

She pulls harder on his arm until JAKE RAPIER JR., a smug frat boy, confronts them.

JAKE

You ain't goin' anywhere, you little whore.

JOHN

What'd you call her, pretty boy?

JAKE

You heard me, jarhead.

JOHN

(to Ernesto)

Finally, E. Something to fuckin' do.

JAKE

Hey, G.I. Joe, you want something to do? How 'bout this?

The Frat Boy LUNGES forward and SWINGS WILDLY at John. John SIDESTEPS him, then grabs the Frat Boy's hand and PULLS his ARM behind his back.

The Frat Boy winces and SCREAMS in pain. John then SCREAMS and unleashes a DEVASTATING RIGHT CROSS to the Frat Boy's CHEEKBONE. Before the punch lands, we hear the Frat Boy's ARM SNAP.

The Frat Boy goes down in a HEAP, his arm twisted and broken behind him, BLOOD gushing from his CRUSHED NOSE.

The three college girls SCREAM and put their hands to their mouths. Maria pulls at John's arm. He pants like a bull ...alive again.

EXT. PLAYA AZUL - CONTINUOUS

The FESTIVITIES in the rest of the patio area suddenly come to a HALT. The portly BOUNCER near the front door runs to investigate.

FIND the Bouncer over Jake. He takes his gaze from the bleeding kid and stares at John. John stares back. Maria holds John's arm, still trying to lead him away.

BOUNCER
 (to Maria)
 Maria, que paso?

She SHRUGS.

BOUNCER (cont'd)
 (to John)
 What happened, senior?

JOHN
 The kid popped off...got his due.

BOUNCER
 What you mean, senior?

JOHN
 I mean that he needed to bleed.

The Bouncer looks down at the Frat Boy once again then NODS.

BOUNCER
 Perhaps it's best if you and the
 young lady leave, senior.

John nods in return. The moment is broken by Ashley, the
 Blonde College Girl, who slaps at John's massive frame.

ASHLEY
 Ohmigod, ohmigod, ohmigod...you
 fuckin' animal!

John turns to her and flashes a venomous smile.

JOHN
Your animal, baby...

Ashley stops cold, staring into John's eyes. RAGE.

Maria then pulls John through the bar, past the stunned and
 silent faces of the other patrons, and into the streets of
 Juarez.

EXT. COLONIA MEXICO 68 - EVENING

PAN through Colonia Mexico 68, a poor neighborhood in Juarez.
 The shadows of the Maquiladoras figuratively hover over all.

FACTORY WORKERS sit outside, smoking, drinking, passing the
 time until their next shift begins. A pack of wild DOGS,
 liquid, ravenous, runs through the dirt streets, scavenging.

FIND A SMALL CONCRETE HOUSE, smoke rising from a tin exhaust pipe, light issuing from broken windows.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KITCHEN OF MARIA RODRIGUEZ'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

YNEZ RODRIGUEZ, Maria and Ernesto's MOTHER, stands at a small stove in the corner of the kitchen, stirring pozole.

John and Maria sit at the kitchen table, bowls of pozole and handmade tortillas before them.

An OLD WOMAN, leathery face, toothless, sits in the adjacent living room, watching a small black-and-white television. She CACKLES maniacally and John turns to stare at her.

MARIA
Muy bueno, mama.

YNEZ
Favorito de Ernesto.

SUDDENLY, the front door swings OPEN. John bolts from his chair, taut. Maria stands to reassure him.

MARIA
It's okay, John, it's okay. It's just Gabriel...my cousin.

Standing in the doorway, arms over his head in mock alarm, stands GABRIEL RODRIGUEZ. His distinguishing characteristic is a gold tooth that shines when he smiles...which is pretty much all the time.

GABRIEL
No shoot, senor. I may look like a camel jockey, but I assure you, I am Mexican...a friend.

He enters the house and walks past John. John sits as Gabriel walks to the stove, kisses Ynez on the cheek, and reaches for a flour tortilla.

MARIA
You ever knock, Gabriel?

GABRIEL
(laughs)
In the Colonia? No need to knock in the Colonia, Maria.
(MORE)

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For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at
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