

## Silencio

By Marco Antonio Rodríguez

FADE IN:

EXT. VILLA TAPIA, A VILLAGE IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC - HOT AUGUST AFTERNOON

*The year is 1936. The violent dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo is in full swing. A one story, country home surrounded by palm trees and rose bushes resides in the center of town. The front porch has two rocking chairs. A large, wooden door is wide-open giving view to the interior of the home.*

*TWO KIDS play in front using bottle caps to simulate toy medals. Their way of emulating Trujillo.*

TITO

I have more medals than you! El Generalísimo loves me more!

MARGARITA

My mami says when I grow up I'll be pretty enough to get El Generalísimo all to myself.

TITO

He wouldn't pick you over his medals.

MARGARITA

How much you wanna bet?

*AYIDA, a little Haitian girl, comes out of the house and approaches them.*

TITO

Here comes the darkie.

AYIDA

Can I play with your chapitas?

MARGARITA

You're here to clean floors!

TITO

El Generalísimo is gonna kill all of you darkies.

AYIDA

My papi says Trujillo is half Haitian.

TITO

Get out of here before I call my uncle! He'll make sure you disappear real quick!

*They hurl rocks at Ayida. JUANA OVALLEZ, a 13-year-old girl, arrives at the scene.*

JUANA

What's going on?

TITO

Look who's here: El Generalísimo's new girlfriend.

JUANA

Leave!

*Tito and Margarita run away.*

JUANA (CONT'D)

What happened?

*Ayida remains silent. Juana notices bottle caps on the ground and picks one up.*

JUANA (CONT'D)

Did mami send you home already?

I'm sure whatever you helped her cook is delicious.

*Ayida shrugs.*

JUANA (CONT'D)

You want a medal to take back to your papi?

*Juana offers a bottle cap. Ayida grabs it and runs.*

*Juana goes up the steps to the porch and sits on one of the rocking chairs. A gentle breeze whisks by. She closes her eyes and rocks. LORETTA OVALLEZ, Juana's mother, steps out of the house. Large scissors and gloves in hand.*

LORETTA

You alright?

JUANA

Enjoying the breeze.

LORETTA

Did you see your tíos?

JUANA

They said I looked pretty. Papi picked out the dress.

LORETTA

Dinner's ready. Your father is setting up the table by the river.

*Juana heads inside. Loretta stops her.*

LORETTA (CONT'D)

You don't have to do this. We'll say you ran away... that something happened to you in the river-

JUANA

If I don't go papi gets in trouble. We all do. Like the others.

*Juana walks into the house. Loretta approaches a nearby bush and cuts the roses.*

INT. OVALLEZ HOME - A MOMENT LATER.

*Juana walks into the living room area and pauses in front of a large portrait: an altar dedicated to Trujillo. Neighboring the portrait is a large sign that reads: "IN THIS HOME TRUJILLO IS ALWAYS REVERED."*

*KIRINO, Juana's father, enters from the backyard dressed in an impeccable suit and tie.*

KIRINO

Table's ready.

JUANA

When are they coming?

KIRINO

About an hour.

JUANA

I don't need to pack anything?

KIRINO

They'll take care of it.

JUANA

Are you coming too?

*Loretta enters the room. A bundle of roses in her hands.*

KIRINO

Go check on the table, Juanita.

*Juana leaves.*

KIRINO (TO LORETTA) (CONT'D)

I'll take those.

*Loretta places the roses on the table, removes her gloves and places them onto Kirino's hands.*

LORETTA

A lot easier this way.

*Loretta heads to the open kitchen area. Kirino follows. He watches her chop fresh oregano, cilantro and other ingredients into a boiling pot.*

KIRINO

So that's the secret. That's what makes it taste so good.

*Loretta continues to mix ingredients in silence.*

KIRINO (CONT'D)

Fresh oregano.

*Loretta does not respond.*

KIRINO (CONT'D)

He was getting suspicious.

*She tastes the soup then stirs.*

KIRINO (CONT'D)

How many more excuses were we going to come up with? He kept asking to see her. I did everything I-

LORETTA

You're one of his bodyguards! You of all people know what this-

KIRINO

What's the alternative, Loretta? El Jefe wants something and for the sake of-

LORETTA

He doesn't want something. He wants her.

KIRINO

He's given us so much!

LORETTA

What exactly has he given? Running water? That suit? Your Cadillac?

KIRINO

OUR Cadillac-

LORETTA

You cannot compare-

KIRINO

Lower your voice.

LORETTA

She's only thirteen!

KIRINO

They're coming in about an hour. Hurry and finish dinner.

*Kirino grabs the roses and heads to the backyard.*

EXT. OVALLEZ BACKYARD - A MOMENT LATER.

*The backyard is nestled on top of a river. Juana stands by the precipice leading down towards its waters. Kirino watches for a few moments then puts the flowers on the table and walks towards her.*

JUANA

Remember when you would take me down for baths? You'd dip me all the way in.

KIRINO

It was freezing cold.

JUANA

But really nice.

KIRINO

Those were hard times.

JUANA

You think so?

KIRINO

No running water, the well was dry... We had nothing.

JUANA

When it rains the river rises high. One of these days it's gonna take us with it.

*They stand in silence. Juana walks towards the table and grabs the roses.*

KIRINO

Careful. Those thorns...

*To Kirino's surprise, Juana arranges the roses in a quick and efficient manner: bare hands. No pricks.*

*Loretta arrives with a large pot of "sancocho", a typical Dominican hen soup. Kirino puts a mat in the center and Loretta places the pot.*

LORETTA

You ready for some sancocho, mamita?

JUANA

Mmm!

LORETTA

I got us a nice, fresh hen.

JUANA

I know. I watched you kill that poor thing this morning.

LORETTA

If you don't want any I'll just take it back inside-

JUANA

No no! It's just... I don't like it when you kill them like that.

LORETTA

Like what?

JUANA

The way you grab them by the neck and just ring them around like a wheel.

KIRINO

Some things have to die in order for others to survive.

LORETTA

Are we going to eat or talk about killing chickens?

KIRINO

Come on, chulita. You get the first plate.

*Kirino serves Juana a plate then goes to serve Loretta. She grabs the bowl and serves him instead.*

JUANA

You're not hungry?

LORETTA

You know what they say: The cook gets full just from the aromas.

JUANA

Where's the radio?

LORETTA

What for?

JUANA

A little music.

LORETTA

I don't think the chord reaches-

KIRINO

It reaches.

JUANA

Bring it out, mami.

*Loretta goes inside.*

JUANA (CONT'D)

Ow!

KIRINO

What?

JUANA

The sancocho is HOT! But sooo good!

KIRINO

A meal fit for liars, as they say.

*They laugh. Loretta returns with the radio. The chord barely long enough to reach the door. She places it on the ground. Juana runs to turn it on and surfs the radio. It lands on a station that is playing one of Trujillo's speeches. She quickly changes it and stops on a station that is playing a danzón.*

JUANA

Daddy, listen! A danzón! You taught me how to dance this, remember?

KIRINO

Of course.

JUANA

Come on.

KIRINO

Ay, Juana-

JUANA

Come on!

*Juana pulls him.*

JUANA (CONT'D)

Let's see... Ready? And-

*They dance. Juana is somewhat clumsy.*

KIRINO

A little slower. Like that. Very nice... Take your time.

JUANA

One, two, one, two... I have to remember in case he asks me to dance.

*Juana and Kirino dance for a few moments.*

JUANA (CONT'D)

You think he'll like me?

*Silence.*

*A military car arrives. A pair of armed MEN with rifles step out. Loretta turns off the radio.*

LORETTA

You said an hour.

KIRINO

They're early.

JUANA

When it rains that river's gonna rise high right, papi?

KIRINO

Yes.

JUANA

But you'll be safe?

KIRINO

We'll be safe.

*The military men enter through the backyard.*

GUARD #1

Is she ready?

KIRINO

We were just starting dinner. Loretta made a delicious sancocho. Join us-

GUARD #2

El Generalísimo is waiting.

LORETTA

Please-

GUARD #1

Do we have a problem?

KIRINO

She's tired. Cooking all day.

GUARD #2

Share with the neighbors. El Generalísimo rewards generosity.

GUARD #1

El Jefe requires your presence, Kirino. They're erecting another statue in his name.

KIRINO

I'm not sure I can-

GUARD #2

Not a request.

KIRINO

I'll be there.

GUARD #1

Let's go.

GUARD #2

Glory to God and to El Generalísimo Trujillo!

*All the men, including Kirino, salute. They take Juana. No good-byes. Loretta opens her mouth to speak. Kirino stops her with a glance. They stand in silence. From the side of the backyard they watch Juana and the men board the truck. Juana looks straight ahead. No movement in her body. From a slight distance, Ayida arrives and watches the truck take off. She holds the bottle cap Juana gifted her earlier tightly to her heart.*

*Loretta grabs the bundle of roses. Thorns dig deep into the palms of her bare hands. She approaches the ledge leading down to the river and lunges the roses over the precipice. Sprinkles of her blood fall with them. Dark clouds mesh with a cluster of thunder and lightning.*

*It will rain soon.*

FADE OUT