

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

Screenplay by

Nate Parker

BLACK, THEN-

Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever.

Thomas Jefferson, 1785

CHILD'S VOICE (V.O.)
My mama, she was runnin'. Runnin'
fast as she could...

FADE IN

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

Moonlight sifts through the tall pines, illuminating the fog blanketed marsh.

CHILD'S VOICE (V.O.)
But the white man, he caught her.
Caught her an' throwed her to the
ground...

Through the bosage, four shrouded figures emerge, pacing stealthily through the brush.

CHILD'S VOICE (V.O.)
But he ain't know that another man,
big like my daddy was behind him...

CLOSER to reveal the shadowed features of an African WOMAN. She pulls a YOUNG BOY alongside her- both of whom's features we cannot yet clearly see. *

CHILD'S VOICE (V.O.)
He took a big ol' stick and hit
that white man all about his head
with it...

INT. SMALL CABIN - NIGHT

Three SLAVE CHILDREN sit together under candle light. They wear long TOW SHIRTS that reach to their knees. The smallest, YOUNG NAT TURNER (9) continues as the two others listen rapt.

YOUNG NAT
Then they dug a hole, roll him in
it and walked on back.

An UNKNOWN POV watches from outside the cracked cabin door. One of the other slave children, YOUNG HARK (10) pipes up.

SLAVE CHILD
They got lynched?

YOUNG NAT

Naw. They went on back and didn't
never say nothing on it.

(he giggles)

Say they ain't seen master all day.

The cabin door opens to reveal NANCY TURNER (20's). She regards Nat, spooked.

NANCY

Who told you that?

No answer. She rushes to him, grabs him hard by the arm.

NANCY (CONT'D)

You tell me who told you that right
now, 'fo I tan your hide!

YOUNG NAT

Nobody, mama. I just... remember-

Nat winces against her grip, terrified. His eyes flood. Nancy releases her grip, pulls him into a hug. Her eyes mist.

NANCY

I'm sorry...

EXT. DISMAL SWAMP - NIGHT

The four figures continue. They slow as the soft glow of a distant flame illuminates their faces. We recognize the young woman as Nancy, Nat stands at her side. They are flanked by an African MAN (30's) and an African OLDER WOMAN, (50's).

*
*

EXT. DISMAL SWAMP - CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Nancy, Nat, Isaac and Bridget step into the clearing to find a group of ELDERLY AFRICANS huddled around a humble fire in fervent prayer. Among the elders, we find EZEKIEL (90's). As if sensing their arrival, his eyes open. He motions them forward. Ezekiel speaks in his Native Ghanaian tongue.

EZEKIEL

(subtitled)

(Is this he?)

She nods.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

(Remove his garb.)

Nat looks terrified as Nancy removes his shirt. Ezekiel inspects Nat's arms and back before arriving to his chest.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
(to surrounding elders)
(*Come closer.*)

The Elders nudge in, the mouthing of passionate prayer never ceasing. Ezekiel points a thin finger to the boy's sternum.

ANGLE ON THREE SLIGHTLY RAISED KNOTS.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
(In the time of our ancestors, the cycle of our people lay in the hands of the children... A man's position was left to the signs of the maker. Children bearing marks were presented before counsel. It was there they were given their assignments in the tribe- assignments that would last a lifetime...)

He points to the first bump on the Nat's chest.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
(Wisdom...)
(the second bump)
(Courage...)
(the third)
(Vision...)
(a long beat)
(This boy holds the Holy marks of our ancestors past... He was born to be a prophet.)

At the word **PROPHET**, the surrounding Elders' bodies arch and rock, the intensity of their prayers growing to fever pitch.

We PUSH IN on Nat as he struggles to digest the magnitude of his words. CLOSER. As divine exaltation fills the surrounding blur, we-

CUT TO BLACK

SUPER: BASED ON A TRUE STORY

INT. UNKNOWN BARN - DAY

Sunlight cuts through crooked slats, casting golden lines across the dirt floor. Whispers lead toward a corner where we find several shadowed figures crouched in the darkness. Their whispers cease when SOMETHING crosses outside, disrupting the light.

The broad barn door creeks open to reveal-

JOHN CLARKE TURNER (11, white)

He squints into the shadows as he pushes deeper inside. His eyes snap toward a slight movement in the dark. He smiles big-

JOHN CLARKE
I see you!

EXT. BARN - DAY

Giggling children, slave and free, burst from the barn door, as John Clark gives chase. We lock in on Young Nat as he sprints ahead of the group.

SUPER: SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1809

We follow him, as he passes the TURNER MANSION, cutting into a maze of cotton stalks. He passes the SLAVE QUARTERS where SLAVE COOKS prepare meals, dodges FEMALE SLAVES who beat soap from steaming laundry and a group of MALE SLAVES chopping wood in tandem.

He finally slows near a fallen tree. As he approaches, he spots a WHITE DOVE perched on one of the dead limbs. The bird tilts it's head slightly, studying Nat. A beat before it flies away. Nat smiles, watching it disappear over head. He then burrows below the tree's exposed roots, settling into his hiding place.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DAY

John Clarke stands in the courtyard resigned. He offers a final scan of the plantation.

JOHN CLARKE
Nat!
(no response)
All right, you win again! Come on out!

Several moments pass before Nat emerges. He and John Clarke share a smile as-

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
John Clarke!

ELIZABETH TURNER (40's) exits onto the 'Big House' porch. *

ELIZABETH TURNER
Get in here for supper.

JOHN CLARKE
Yes'm! Bye Nat. *

YOUNG NAT

Bye.

Nat watches as John Clarke bounds the porch stairs. He and Elizabeth disappear inside.

Nat lingers a moment, his eyes fixing on a hardcover BOOK draped on the back of a rocking chair.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CABIN - DAY

Nat arrives to find his grandmother, BRIDGET "NANA" TURNER (We instantly recognize her as the older of the two women from the opening scene). She sweeps the dirt-floor entrance of the cabin.

YOUNG NAT

Hey, Nana.

A loud BELL rings in the distance.

BRIDGET

Go on and get washed up.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DAY

On the porch, the wooden rocking chair rocks lazily. The hardcover book, gone.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE MEAL HOUSE - DAY

Nat arrives to a long table overcrowded with slave children. A MAN approaches, drops a LARGE BOWL of CORNMUSH at the table's center. As the children surge, Nat struggles to push his way through. Within seconds, the kids disperse, leaving Nat in front of an empty bowl.

ANGLE ON

-a slave man across the courtyard. This is ISAAC TURNER (we recognize him as the MAN from the opening scene). He stands sweat-covered wielding an axe over a chopping block. He watches as Nat meanders away.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CABIN - NIGHT

Isaac enters, caked in dirt and sweat. Bridget, Nancy and Nat lie asleep. A soft MOAN rises from Nat's direction.

Isaac studies Nat a beat before grabbing a small wooden box from a shelf. Within, he finds a CRUMPLED SQUARE OF PAPER. He smooths it against his leg, before slipping out the cabin.

A long beat until- Nat stirs awake, sits up.

*

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - OLD ROAD - SAME

Isaac pushes through the woods, staying close to the main road. A SOUND in the distances stops him in his tracks. He grips a bulky stash under his shirt as he squints into the dark. As his eyes focus on a shadowed figure ahead-

*

*

*

CLICK.

He turns to find several men, THE PATTY-ROLLERS, on horses. They're dressed similarly in worn pea coats. RAYMOND COBB (40's, the leader) holds a pistol leveled at Isaac's head.

COBB

You so much as bat your eyes I'll
blow you from here to hell.

*

Isaac stands frozen as he takes in the group of five men.

*

COBB (CONT'D)

What you doin' out here, boy?

ISAAC

Runnin' a errand for my massa, suh.
Massa Benjamin Turner.

He opens his shirt to reveal CANNED GOODS and SALT PORK.

COBB

Where yo' pass at?

Isaac produces a piece of paper we recognize as the CRUMPLED SQUARE from the cabin. He hands it to Cobb who studies it.

COBB (CONT'D)

Can't read, can you boy?

ISAAC

No, suh.

COBB

And how you s'pose I know that?

ISAAC

Don't reckon I know, suh.

COBB

I know cuz if'n you could read, you
woulda' known that this pass is
damn near a week old.

He lets that sink in, calling to one of his men, JESSE (20).

*

COBB (CONT'D)

Jesse, what we call a nigger, think
he can outsmart a white man?

JESSE

...a dead nigger.

COBB

(to Isaac)

Turn around. Get on your knees.

Isaac turns toward the woods. Cobb dismounts behind him.
Isaac squints toward the shadowed figure. Recognition sets in
his gaze. It's NAT. *

COBB (CONT'D)

On yo' knees. *

WITH ISAAC as he slowly lowers. Just as his knees touch the
ground, he-

-lunges for the gun. BANG! The gun goes off, catching Jesse
in the shoulder. Isaac and Cobb wrestle for the pistol as the
others struggle for a clean shot. Isaac headbutts Cobb,
sending the gun flying. Before Cobb can recover, Isaac grabs
a nearby branch, CLUBS him across the face. A gash opens,
spilling blood. Isaac sprints into the woods. Cobb and the
patty-rollers fire wildly into the treeline.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON - WOODS - SECONDS LATER

Young Nat runs for his life. As he crashes through the brush
a HAND scoops him up from behind. WIDER TO REVEAL Isaac
sprinting, Nat dangling in his grip. *

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CABIN - NIGHT

Isaac and Nat burst in. Bridget and Nancy jolt up to see
Isaac, blood speckled clothes, Nat terrified at his side.

BRIDGET

Oh, Jesus!

NANCY

What happened?!

Nat trembles as Isaac pulls rations from his pants. A few
SEALED TIN CANS tumble to the floor.

ISAAC

Hide all this.

(re: Nat)

Clean him up. Get him in bed.

NANCY

Isaac!-

Isaac grabs Nancy gently by the arms.

ISAAC

I hurt some white men. Didn't have
no choice... They'll be here soon
looking for me. If I'm here they
ain't only gon' hurt me...

NANCY

What you gon' do?

ISAAC

Only thing I can. I gotta go.

Nat breaks free, clings to his father's leg. Isaac kneels to
Nat's level.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

You take care of your mama and
Nana, hear?

NAT

When you comin' back, papa?

*

ISAAC

I'll be back, directly.

Isaac takes his son in.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

No matter what, you remember this:
You a child of God. You got
purpose.

(touches his chest)

It's in ya. The Lord put it there
and they ain't nothing nobody can
do to take it away, ya hear?

NAT

Yessir...

The Turner dog, LEE is heard barking in the BG. Isaac hugs
Bridget, moves to Nancy who chokes back tears.

ISAAC

I'll get back soon as I can for
y'all.

(then)

I love you, woman.

And with that, Isaac slips from the cabin. A deafening beat,
until- The sound of GALLOPING HOOVES approach in the BG.

Bridget hurries Nat onto his cot, ushers Nancy, who stands catatonic, to hers. She quickly pulls back a corner mat, pulls a board loose to reveal-

A SMALL COMPARTMENT

She hides the stolen food, replaces the board just as-

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CABIN - NIGHT

Benjamin Turner opens the cabin door. Cobb trails, holds a blood-soaked handkerchief tight to his face.

BENJAMIN TURNER
Bridget, Nancy, get on up.
Isaac is in a lot of trouble. I
need y'all to tell me where he is.

BRIDGET
He ain't here massa. We ain't seen
him all night.

A beat as Benjamin looks to Cobb.

COBB
I'm gonna ask you to step outside,
Ben.

BENJAMIN TURNER
...any harm done'll be taken up
with the sheriff.

As Ben exits. Cobb removes the cloth to reveal an ugly gash.

COBB
None of y'all seen him, huh?

OLD BRIDGET
No, suh.

NANCY
No, suh.

COBB
(to Nat)
What about you, boy?

NANCY
He ain't seen nothin-

SMACK! Cobb backhands Nancy who lands across the room.

COBB
You seen yo' daddy?

No response. Cobb squats down nose to nose with Nat. Nat holds his gaze, seemingly unafraid. Shakes his head 'no'.

COBB (CONT'D)
You that nigger's boy, alright.

Cobb stands, still eyeing Nat. Bridget's eyes flit just past Cobb's boots. We follow her gaze to see a small SEALED FOOD CAN lies just several inches from his heel. Cobb unsheathes a menacing blade, waves it like a finger from Nancy to Bridget landing on Nat. As he leans in, his weight shifts on the wooden plank, the tin can slowly rolls towards his foot.

COBB (CONT'D)
If I find out y'all's is lying, I'm
gonna come back here...

Bridget watches as the can picks up speed, rolls closer.

COBB (CONT'D)
...and the things I do might not be
so nice-

Inches away until-

Bridget dives at Cob's feet.

BRIDGET
Oh' massa please! Please! We don't
know nothin'! Oh Lord!

COBB
Get off me!

Cobb struggles from her grip. Benjamin pushes in.

BENJAMIN TURNER
That's enough!

COBB
(straightens to exit,
then)
Teach that boy some manners. Next
time he looks me in the eyes, he's
gon' to get the same thing that's
waitin' for his pa.

And they're out the door. Bridget's hysteria switches to a chilling calm in an instant. She sits up on the floor, opens her palms to reveal the FOOD CAN.

ON NAT as his mind struggles to process the night's events.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NOTTAWAY RIVERBANK - DAY

Young Nat stands on a riverbank. He looks up to reveal DARK CLOUDS swirling above. THUNDER rolls and a drizzle peppers Nat's face.

He glances down at his white tow shirt, notices the drizzle isn't rain, but a RED, BLOOD LIKE LIQUID. He holds out his hand and the bloody fluid pools in his palm. The red drizzle picks up, blotting Nat's shirt and face RED.

Movement from the river draws his eyes to a MAN (30's) standing waist deep in the river, his back to us. As the Unknown Man slowly turns, Nat, spooked, backpedals, falls-

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CABIN - NIGHT

Nat jerks awake, to find himself in Nancy's arms. Nat bursts into tears as she holds him, rocking him in her grip.

NANCY

Shh... you're OK. It ain't real.
It's in your mind. It ain't real.
I'm here, now.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Nancy stretches wet cotton sheets across a long clothes line. As she reaches into the basket, she rises to find a smiling Elizabeth Turner.

ELIZABETH TURNER

Mind if I help.

NANCY

No, ma'am.

Nancy and Elizabeth string the sheets in silence until-

ELIZABETH TURNER

How's Nat doin'?

NANCY

He doin' fine I reckon... Somethin' wrong, Missus?

ELIZABETH TURNER

No. Nothin' wrong.

(then)

John Clarke told me something this morning I thought I'd ask you about.

(beat)

He said Nat knows how to read.

NANCY

Read? Oh no. He don't know how to read. He don't know nothin'. He just pulling John Clarke's leg.

ELIZABETH TURNER
John Clarke said he found him with
a book. Said he knew letters.

NANCY
Nat don't know nothing 'bout no
books. He just shiftless. Act like
he ain't got no sense half the
time.

ELIZABETH TURNER
A part of me couldn't believe it
either... So, I tested him.

*

A sheet slips from Nancy's grasp. She catches it before it
hits the grass.

NANCY
Ma'am?

ELIZABETH TURNER
Sure enough, there he was sounding
out letters.

An excruciating beat. The two continue hanging sheets in
tandem. Nancy's hands tremble.

ELIZABETH TURNER (CONT'D)
Have him come by the house after
lunch-

NANCY
Please, Missus. He didn't mean no
harm. I'll whip him good when I see
him-

ELIZABETH TURNER
Whip him? Nonsense. I'm going to
teach him. If the good Lord gave
that boy a gift to read, we'd be
remiss to let it go to waste. Now
have him at the house after lunch,
hear?

(then)
And don't expect him back for a few
days. Reading can be tricky.
Lessons best not be disturbed in
the beginning.

Nancy forces a smile.

NANCY
Yes'm.

And Elizabeth saunters away as cheery as when she came. On
Nancy, her face falling.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

Nat wears a pair of sack cloth pants; the first time we've seen him without his tow shirt.

BRIDGET

Now you listen to everything Miss Elizabeth say. Keep ya head down and stay out the way, hear?

YOUNG NAT

Yes'm.

Nancy arrives with a newly sewn shirt, tugs it over Nat's head. As Nat regards his new outfit with pride, Nancy produces a folded piece of cloth. She and Bridget share a look before she kneels, hands it to Nat.

NANCY

Yo' daddy gave me this... And yo' Nana gave it to him.

Nat unfolds the cloth to reveal-

A SMALL WOODEN RELIC. Tribal signs carved on its face.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Don't you go losin' it, ya' hear?

YOUNG NAT

Yes'm.

She gently takes his face in her hands. Despite her best efforts, she breaks down, runs out of the cabin.

YOUNG NAT (CONT'D)

What's wrong with mama?

BRIDGET

She just gon' miss you, is all.
(then)
C'mon.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DAY

Bridget and Nat stand on the Big House porch. She knocks and a house servant JANICE (20's) pulls open the door.

JANICE

(over her shoulder)
Miss Elizabeth-

Elizabeth arrives, regards Nat with a smile.

ELIZABETH TURNER

There you are.

(to Bridget)

You tell Nancy not to worry, he'll be fine.

BRIDGET

Yes'm.

Bridget watches as Elizabeth guides Nat inside.

ELIZABETH TURNER

First, we gotta get you outta those rags...

Bridget and Nat share a fleeting look before he disappears inside, Janice pushing the door shut. And we HOLD on Bridget.

INT. BIG HOUSE - STUDY - DAY

Hundreds of books line the walls. Nat wanders, mouth agape.

YOUNG NAT

This shol' is a lot of books.

ELIZABETH TURNER

They come from all over.

Nat reaches out to touch one when ELIZABETH CATCHES HIS HAND.

ELIZABETH TURNER (CONT'D)

These books in here are for white folks. They're full things that your kind wouldn't understand. But, I do have a special one, just for you.

She produces a worn HOLY BIBLE, hands it to Nat.

ELIZABETH TURNER (CONT'D)

And guess what? It's the best book ever written.

YOUNG NAT

Can I look?

ELIZABETH TURNER

Of course. It's yours.

YOUNG NAT

Thank you, Missus.

He flips delicately through the thin pages, his eyes scanning the foreign words.

ELIZABETH TURNER
You're a special boy, Nathaniel.
(beat)
Study hard and heed my instruction,
hear? Your life, it'll never be the
same. I'll see to that.

YOUNG NAT
Yes, Missus.

ELIZABETH TURNER
Well come on. The good book won't
read itself. Let's start with the
beginning.

Nat, all smiles, as he joins Elizabeth on a nearby couch. *

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - TURNER FAMILY CHURCH - MORNING

Nat stands stark still in a black servants suit, chin high.
White-gloved hands rest at his side.

NAT
Draw nigh to God, and he will draw
nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye
sinners; and purify your hearts, ye
double minded. Be afflicted, and
mourn, and weep: let your laughter
be turned to mourning, and your joy
to heaviness. James four, chapter
eight and nine.

A white congregation offers polite applause. Elizabeth,
seated next to Benjamin, beams. She gestures to Nat to take a
bow. He obliges before joining her in the FRONT PEW. A house
servant, ISAIAH (50's) and other fair-skinned SERVANTS line a
BACK pew.

ON BENJAMIN who pours with sweat, wipes his neck. He coughs
into a handkerchief, it spots with BLOOD. He quickly pockets
it. A fleshy PREACHER regains the pulpit. *

PREACHER
Idn't that nice. Well, we might as
well carry on in James. Turn in
your bibles to James one. 'Holding
on to the goodness of God.'

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - HORSE STABLE - MORNING

We recognize Nancy, Bridget and Young Hark among the crowd.
Nat lags by the entrance. Young Hark notices him, smiles and
waves. Nat looks away, sinks further back. Hark's smile
fades. The Preacher mops his brow before opening his Bible. *

PREACHER

Slaves, obey your earthly masters
with respect and fear, just as you
would Christ.

(as if still reading)io

Don't steal your master's chickens.
Don't lie to your masters or keep
nothing secret.

(then)

Y'all want to go to heaven, don'
cha?

*

Various responses of "Oh yessuh" and "We sho' do Marse'"

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Alright, then.

*

He snaps a rehearsed smile, bounds out. Nat and Nancy share a
quick look before he follows.

INT. BIG HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Nat, Nancy and Bridget stand in front of Benjamin who lies
pale and dead in the bed. Elizabeth weeps quietly by his
side. An UNKNOWN MAN, SAMUEL TURNER (20's) is the only other
person in the room. He leans against the wall in a far
corner. Elizabeth smiles at Nat.

ELIZABETH TURNER

He was most proud of the young man
you're becoming, Nat.

Nat glances toward Samuel. Elizabeth catches it.

ELIZABETH TURNER (CONT'D)

That's Samuel. You were a little
young when he left.

(beat)

He won't be returning to school...
but will be taking Ben's place as
your earthly master.

*

Bridget and Nancy offer Samuel smiles of acceptance. Nat
looks to Samuel again, who stares back. Then-

*

SAMUEL TURNER

How old are you, boy?

YOUNG NAT

Ten, suh.

SAMUEL TURNER

(to Nancy)

I want him in the field come
mornin', ya hear?

NANCY

Yes'suh.

Nat's face falls. He looks to Elizabeth gut-punched. She looks to Samuel who meets her gaze.

SAMUEL TURNER

(to Bridget and Nancy)

That's it, yall. Go on.

Bridget and Nancy start off, Nat lingers, bewildered. A final glance to Elizabeth before Nancy ushers him out. Samuel closes the door firmly behind them.

ELIZABETH TURNER

That boy, I've spent quite a bit of time with him. He reads, quotes scripture.

(beat)

John Clark's taken a liking to him. And so have I...

Samuel studies Elizabeth through a furled brow.

ELIZABETH TURNER (CONT'D)

Maybe the field isn't a place for a child of his ability.

(no response, then)

The young man he's becoming-

SAMUEL TURNER

He ain't no young man, mama. He's a foal. And if we're lucky, he'll grow to be a stud.

(beat)

We owe. We need more of that swamp drained so we can seed more crop.

Maybe have a season that'll get us outta' this hole daddy left us

in... A reading nigger doesn't get that done.

With that he strides out of the room. On Elizabeth, a portrait of defeat.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAWN

Nancy and Nat stand in a row that seems to stretch to eternity. Nat dons a cotton henley and burlap pants. She regards him with sad eyes.

NANCY

You gon' start here and work your way down yonder.

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)
(motions to adjacent row)
I'll be right over there, ya hear.

Nancy pulls him into a helpless hug before crossing into the next row. ON Nat as he pulls at a bale. A dried bristle punctures his wrist.

YOUNG NAT
Dang it.

Blood trickles, absorbs into the white cotton.

A female VOICE from the field strikes up a spiritual and is quickly joined by others. We move in TIGHT ON Nat's hands as he starts picking, AND WE-

TIME LAPSE MONTAGE

--On Nat's small hands as they feebly pick cotton, following them as they stuff blood speckled cotton into the long sack.

--STILL TIGHT on Nat's hands, SLIGHTLY BIGGER, as they move faster, separating the cotton from the bulb, following them down to a half filled sack.

--AND STILL TIGHT on Nat's hands, now FULL GROWN as they breeze expertly from bulb to bulb, stuffing the snow white tufts into a COMPLETELY FULL sack.

--We follow his hands up bulging forearms and a sweaty muscular torso to reveal- NAT IS NOW A TWENTY-SEVEN-YEAR-OLD MAN. Matured African features frame piercing eyes. Nat pulls two full sacks over his shoulder. *

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Nat stops outside of a familiar cabin. He takes a knee beside a wooden bucket of water. He peels off his shirt, uses it as a rag to rinse his upper body. *

VOICE (V.O.)
"I had fainted, unless I had
believed to see the goodness of the
Lord in the land of the living..."

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BARN - DAY *

Turner slaves populate the wooden benches. An overseer, JETHRO (40's), sits watch in a back corner.

ANGLE ON Nat who somberly addresses the small congregation.

NAT

Wait on the Lord: be of good
courage, and he shall strengthen
thine heart: wait, I say on the
Lord."

(beat)

Let us bow our heads.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - TURNER FAMILY CHURCH - DAY

CATHERINE TURNER (20's) in a white gown, stands with her new
husband GUILLES REESE (30's) on the church steps. Family and
friends line up to well-wish. Samuel stands off to the side
with REV. WALTHALL. *

REV. WALTHALL

Catherine'll make a fine wife,
indeed. It's been a blessing seeing
her develop into the woman she has.

SAMUEL TURNER

Will be an even better blessin'
seein' her and mama puttin' their
feet under his table 'stead of
mine.

They share a laugh.

REV. WALTHALL

How's John Clarke? *

SAMUEL TURNER *

Still in Carolina. Should graduate
next year. Volunteering in the
local militia on his off days. *

REV. WALTHALL *

The Lord rejoices over that. *

SAMUEL TURNER *

Yeah, so does my mama- No so much
the militia part. *

(sotto) *

"Those boys running around with
guns'll find themselves a war." *

Walthall watches house servants quietly exit the church.

REV. WALTHALL

I gotta say, Sam, your niggers sure
do know how to behave. More
impressed by 'em ever' time I make
it 'round. *

(beat)

Old Ben would be proud. *

SAMUEL TURNER
They God fearing. Simple as that.
Gotta nigger preacher that keeps
'em reminded.

REV. WALTHALL
A nigger preacher? That the remedy?

SAMUEL TURNER
That's it.

REV. WALTHALL
Well, I don't gotta tell ya' times
are tough. With the drought, it's
getting harder for whites all over
the county to feed and clothe their
niggers good.

A passing family waves to Walthall, who smiles big.

REV. WALTHALL (CONT'D)
(to passing family)
Bless you.
(back to Sam)
Talks of insurrection's got folks
scared. I'd think people'd pay good
money to have 'em calmed down a
bit. Especially by one of they own.

As Samuel ponders this thought, he squints toward the barn in
the distance where slaves disperse. We see Nat emerge,
leading Bridget by the arm.

SAMUEL TURNER
Nat!

WITH NAT, who turns to see Samuel.

NAT
Yes, suh!
(to passing slave)
Hark. Get Nana on to the cabin?

Hark, now fully grown, complies as Nat hustles over, joins
Samuel and the Preacher. He avoids eye contact.

REV. WALTHALL
I hear you love the Lord, boy.

NAT
Yessuh.

Walthall and Samuel speak as if Nat isn't present.

REV. WALTHALL

If this boy is responsible for your
nigger's actin' the way they do,
then I'd say you might have an
opportunity on your hands.

SAMUEL TURNER

Start askin' around about that.

REV. WALTHALL

Will do.

(then)

Guess I should git. Got a few other
services in county.

SAMUEL TURNER

Busy man, Reverend.

REV. WALTHALL

Never too busy for the Lord's work.

Nat lingers, awaiting dismissal.

SAMUEL TURNER

Want you to get the wagon ready
first thing in the mornin'. We
goin' into town.

NAT

Yes, suh.

We stay with Nat as Samuel heads off.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - MAIN ROAD - MORNING

Nat steers two colts, as he and Samuel ride in the front of a
covered wagon. Samuel leans back, asleep.

In the distance- SEVERAL GUN SHOTS. The horses fidget.

NAT

(to horses)

Whoa. Whoa, now...

Samuel stirs awake, and we-

ANGLE ON

The far end of the road where four men approach on horses.
PATTY-ROLLERS. Nat slows the wagon.

As the men arrive, we recognize the leader as Ray Cobb. A
scar stretches from his right eye to his chin, his sun-aged
skin looks more like tanned leather. Jesse and the two others
stop at his flank, bloodthirsty.

COBB

You seen a nigger run by here?

SAMUEL TURNER

Naw. Then again I dozed off a few...

COBB

(to Nat)

What about you, boy? You best not lie. I know when ya'll is lying.

NAT

No, Suh.

Cobb studies Nat through a familiar squint.

COBB

Couple niggers went missing off Johnson's place this mornin'.

(nods behind him)

Just caught up with one. Thinkin' the other's close by.

JESSE

(excited)

I got a shot off at him. Saw some blood on the leaves yonder.

COBB

If y'all see somethin', let us know.

SAMUEL TURNER

Will do.

Cobb whistles, his horse snaps to. Sam lies back, covers his face. Nat loosens the reins. As the wagon rounds the corner-

ANGLE ON

A SLAVE MAN, dead on the side of the road. A dozen bullet wounds perforate his face, chest and legs. Nat's eyes well, but don't look away. He snaps the reins, presses on.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - MARKET - DAY

The town square is in full swing. White business men haggle. Porcelain women angle satin umbrellas against the sun, while dozens of wagons and slaves crisscross the dusty streets around them. We spot Nat anchoring the horses to a wooden corral. He follows Samuel into a storefront.

INT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

Nat stands a step behind Samuel, his eyes averted to the ground. We notice several other slaves maintain similar postures as Samuel bargains with the store owner BUD JOHNSON. *

BUD
Can't do it, Sam.

SAMUEL TURNER
Sure you can. You still own the place don't ya'.

BUD
I gotta make a living, too.

SAMUEL TURNER
How often you come by my place for church when my daddy was alive?
(re: his no answer)
I can tell ya' how often, every goddamn Sunday.

BUD
Sam-

SAMUEL TURNER
Week after week you sat in them pews calling on the Lord, playin' blind and dumb when it came time for collection.

BUD
Now you hold on-

SAMUEL TURNER
Bud, all I'm saying is work with me. *

Bud pulls a breath.

BUD
This is the last time, Sam. Your daddy did a lot for me- hell, all of us. But, I still got a business to run.

SAMUEL TURNER
I'll square up come season's end.
(then)
Nat. Go'on and load that up.

Samuel nods to an oversized pile of wooden slats and fence wire. Samuel exits, leaving Nat to the work.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

Samuel rests in the wagon, his hat pulled low. As Nat loads the last of it, something catches his eye.

ANGLE ON

A LINE OF EXHAUSTED SLAVES at the center of the town square. Iron shackles squeeze their necks, while rusted chains connect them three feet apart. Nat's eyes fall on a BEAUTIFUL AFRICAN SLAVE WOMAN (20, sad eyes, hair matted). A thin dress reaches past her knees. Even in captivity, she walks with a quiet dignity. Nat looks away. A moment before he tosses the last of the slats into the wagon. *

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - TOWN SQUARE - DAY *

Nat steers the wagon past an elevated auction block. Spectators crowd around it. *

SAMUEL TURNER *

Hold on. *

Nat slows the wagon to a stop as he and Sam look on. The slaves, unshackled and naked, stand on a display. A seedy AUCTIONEER fishes for buyers. Nat eyes the beautiful woman at the end of the row. *

AUCTIONEER

...I guarantee you'll never see a deal like this again!

He slaps the backside of a strong male slave, spins him.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

Strong as an ox! Nothing but good seed flowing from this buck!

(sotto, to slave)

Smile nigga!

(the slave obeys)

And look at that set of teeth!

He fondles the breast of a female slave, milk dribbles.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

This one's pregnant! Two for the price of one!

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Four-hundred for the nigger male!

AUCTIONEER

I got a mind to refute that offer, but the business man in me knows the customer is always right!

(MORE)

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

How about we say four fifty and we
can march this buck straight from
this block to the back of your
wagon!

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Four twenty-five.

AUCTIONEER

Four twenty-five goin' once! Twice!
SOLD to the gentleman in the hat!

The auctioneer nods quickly to his twenty-something AFRICAN
SLAVE helper who shackles the male slave, leads him off
stage. The auctioneer arrives to the woman Nat saw earlier. *

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

Consider this comely wench! Not a
day over eighteen!

(fondles her backside, she
tenses)

An abnegation of such grandeur
would be a crime, indeed!

A REDNECK #1 (40's) pipes up.

REDNECK #1

Give ya two hundred for her!

REDNECK #2 (O.S.)

Two-fifty! *

ON NAT as he glances toward the bidding red necks and back to
the woman. A beat, until- *

NAT

Massa, Ms. Catherine could shol'
get use outta that wench there.

AUCTIONEER (O.S.)

I hear Two-fifty! Do I hear two-
seventy five?

SAMUEL TURNER

She look right young to me.

REDNECK #1 (O.S.)

Two-seventy-five!

AUCTIONEER (O.S.)

Two-seventy five! Do I hear three-
hundred?

NAT

You right, suh. She young, but with
the right teachin', a wench like
that could be working a long time.

AUCTIONEER (O.S.)

For all you stepping up, you're
seeing a good ol' Southampton
clamber for this honey delight!

A greasy REDNECK #3 joins the group, a wad of snuff pushed
deep beneath his lip.

REDNECK #3

(spits)

I got three-hundred for the wench.

Redneck #1 and Redneck#2 lose interest, disperse.

ON THE STAGE

The auctioneer, excited at his growing fortune, pulls the
woman slave to the edge of the stage; closer to the crowd.

AUCTIONEER

That's three-hundred here! Do I
hear three twenty-five?!

Nat looks to Samuel who squints toward the stage.

NAT

Massa, it'd shole' be a shame to
watch her go to waste for such a
low price.

SAMUEL TURNER

What the hell you know about what's
little and what's a lot?

NAT

Suh, I just-

*

SAMUEL TURNER

Boy, the next thing come outta yo
mouth is goin' to be followed by a
lashin' ya' hear?

NAT

Yes, suh.

AUCTIONEER (O.S.)

Alright! That's three-hundred,
goin' once!

Nat stares helplessly toward the stage, where the woman
suddenly GLANCES UP TO CATCH HIS GAZE.

AUCTIONEER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Three-hundred goin' twice!

Nat and the woman's eyes remain locked. The auctioneer raises his hand high-

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
And-

SAMUEL TURNER (O.S.)
Three-twenty-five!

The auctioneer freezes. Nat's eyes flit to Samuel in disbelief. The greasy Redneck eyes Samuel.

AUCTIONEER
(ecstatic)
We got three-hundred twenty-five!
Do. I. Hear. Three-fifty?!

All eyes on the Redneck, who mulls.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
Three twenty-five goin' once!

ON NAT who holds his breath.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
Three twenty-five goin' twice!

The Redneck finally spits in rebuke, turns and walks off.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
And SOLD to the fine gentleman in
the back!

Nat breaths a sigh of relief, as he and Samuel make their way to the stage.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DUSK

The wagon grinds to a stop and Samuel hops down.

SAMUEL TURNER
Have your mama get her cleaned up
and fed; start breaking her in.

NAT
Y'suh.

SAMUEL TURNER
You and Hark get started on that
fence first thing tomorrow.

NAT

Y'suh.

Samuel trudges toward the house. Nat scrambles to the back of the wagon, pulls back the flap to reveal the woman. Frail body, her eyes weak. He reaches for her and she recoils.

NAT (CONT'D)

C'mon. I ain't gonna' hurt you.

He helps her from the wagon. Just as her feet hit the dirt, she faints. Nat catches her, lifts her off her feet as he marches toward the slave quarters.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CABIN - DUSK

Nancy hurries a pot of water onto the stove as Bridget prepares a cot. Nat holds the unconscious woman in his arms.

NANCY

Lay her on over here.

Nat complies.

NAT

She's burning up.

Bridget pulls out a pouch of herbs, hands a few to Nancy who drops them into the boiling water on the stove.

BRIDGET

(to Nancy)

Cut me three of those onions,
yonder.

(to Nat)

Go'on and stay with Hark a spell
'til we get this child on her feet.

NAT

Yes'm.

As Bridget pulls the filthy dress off the young woman, Nat retreats toward the door, exits.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DAY

Nat kneels, hidden in an inner corner of the front porch. He applies a fresh coat of white paint to a peeling column.

VOICE (O.C.)

Now you just smile ya' hear. Let
them do all the talkin'.

VOICE 2 (O.C.)

Yes'm.

Nat stands to find Nancy and the SLAVE WOMAN climbing the front porch stairs. She stands in stark contrast to the time we last saw her. Her caramel skin covers full, healthy features. Her hair is combed and pulled into a braid.

Nat stands just out of their sight. Nancy knocks. Within seconds, Samuel emerges.

NANCY

Afternoon massa'.

(re: Slave Woman)

This here Cherry Anne.

CHERRY

(courtesies)

Massa'.

Samuel looks Cherry up and down.

SAMUEL TURNER

They sure cleaned you up.

(then, into house)

Catherine! C'mon out here!

Samuel glances in Nat's direction. Nat quickly returns to work, watches from the corner of his eye. Catherine arrives.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

This here is Cherry Anne.

CHERRY

(courtesies)

Missus.

CATHERINE

Hello.

(then, realizing)

She launches into a Samuel with a mammoth hug.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

She's perfect!

(then, re: Cherry)

Cherry... I bet they named you that because you're so sweet.

Cherry smiles politely, Catherine grabs her hand.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

C'mon, I want you to meet mama.

Catherine and Cherry disappear inside, followed by Samuel.
Nancy stands on the porch for a beat. As she turns-

NAT (O.S.)

Mama.

NANCY

(turns, startled)

Boy, you scared me.

NAT

Sorry.

(then)

Thank you.

NANCY

For what?

NAT

For getting her better... For
making her so beautiful.

NANCY

I didn't do nothin'. That child was
brought into this world already as
beautiful as she could be. But you
knew that already, huh?

Nat smiles.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Love you, Nat.

NAT

Love you, mama.

Nancy descends the stairs. A BEAT before Nat returns to work.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DAY

Guiles preps a covered wagon. Catherine hugs Janice as Samuel
looks on. Isaiah stands close, carries an arm full of bags.

JANICE

We shol' is sad to see you and the
missus go.

CATHERINE

Oh, we'll be just down the road.
After we get good and settled,
we'll be back to visit. Sundays for
church and that.

SAMUEL TURNER

Won't be a second too soon.

Catherine playfully jabs him in the arm.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)
I'm messin.
(then, sotto)
You need anything, or he ain't
treatin' ya right, you let me know.

CATHERINE
Yes, "big brother".
(they embrace)
Love ya.

SAMUEL TURNER
You too.

Guiles helps Catherine onto the wagon as Cherry guides Elizabeth through the screen door.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)
You ready mama?

*

ELIZABETH TURNER
I'm worried about you, Sam. It's a
big place to be here all alone.

SAMUEL TURNER
I'll be fine.

They embrace. Guiles helps Elizabeth onto the wagon as Cherry climbs into the back.

GUILLES REESE
Well, guess we'll be getting on.

SAMUEL TURNER
All right, then. They give you any
trouble... don't bring 'em back
here.

A shared laugh as Nat arrives with two pails of horse feed.

NAT
Massa Sam.
(re: feed)
For their trip.

SAMUEL TURNER
Go on and toss it in the back.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BACK OF WAGON - MOMENTS LATER

Nat pulls back the canvas flap, sees Cherry sitting on a wooden box. Their eyes connect. He loads the buckets of feed.

NAT
Hi.

CHERRY
Hi.

NAT
I'm Nat.

CHERRY
I know.

Nat pulls a small bouquet of flowers from beneath his shirt, offers them. She accepts.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
They pretty.

NAT
Found them around here.

CHERRY
Thank you.

Nat nods, offers a gentle smile before he backs out.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - SAME

Guiles climbs up, takes the reins. Catherine, Sam and the house staff trade waves as the wagon pulls off.

NAT stands on the dirt road, watches them ride away.

VOICE (V.O.)
And the rib, which the Lord God had
taken from man, made he a woman,
and brought her unto the man...

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BARN - DAY

A dozen slaves crowd the wooden benches. Nat stands before Hark and a beautiful slave woman ESTER (20's). Hark beams.

NAT
And Adam said, "this is now bone of
my bone and flesh of my flesh: she
shall be called Woman, because she
was taken out of Man. Therefore
shall a man leave his father and
mother, and shall cleave unto his
wife: and they shall be one flesh."
(to Hark and Ester)
Go on.

Hark and Ester share a gentle kiss, before facing the crowd.

NAT (CONT'D)
(to all)
I present: Hark and Ester Turner.

Attendants applaud as Hark and Ester join hands and hop over a STRAW BROOM.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - LATER

Dozens of slaves stand in two parallel rows. Ester dances down the middle as a fiddler and a drummer work instruments. Hark pulls Nat onto the dance path.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Embers hang over a dying fire. Hark sits on a hollow log. Nat approaches.

HARK
Hey, Nat.

NAT
Hey, brother...

Nat takes a seat next to him.

NAT (CONT'D)
Shouldn't you be somewhere *getting*
to know your new wife?

HARK
I'll be getting there directly...

NAT
It was beautiful today. Ester is a
good woman.

Hark studies the smoldering fire.

HARK
I'm scared, Nat...

NAT
Of what?
(playful)
Ester?

HARK
Naw... It's just, I ain't never had
no needs to look after nothing or
nobody but massa's horses and pigs.
Now I got a wife.
(MORE)

HARK (CONT'D)

And when she go on and get the 'big belly,' I'll have that child too...

Nat pulls a measured breath, gathers his words.

NAT

The Bible says, "take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

(re: Hark's blank look)

Means worrying ain't gon' do you no good. Trust in the Lord, and try to live your best for him, right now. And speaking of right now, you need to go and see to your wife, 'fore she go and change her mind.

Hark stands, noticeably relieved. A strong embrace before he heads off.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BARN - DAY

*

Nat stands before a dozen brown faces.

NAT

Just as the planted crop is harvested in its own time, so too has the Lord planted us...

The back door opens and several slaves walk in. The last of them is Cherry. Nat stammers as he watches take her seat.

NAT (CONT'D)

Yes. The good Lord...

(glances to his Bible)

...the good Lord will finish his work in us.

(then, rushing)

As I close, I urge you, brothers and sisters to take heart. For God is at work in your life. And he will not stop until the job is done. Amen?

ALL

Amen-

NAT

Dismissed.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - DAY

Nat and Cherry walk in silence.

NAT
I'm happy to see you.

CHERRY
I'm happy to see you.

NAT
You look beautiful.

CHERRY
Thank you...

Nat and Cherry arrive to an arching oak. Nat lies down his vest for Cherry. They sit.

NAT
So much time passed... I battled
thoughts that you might've been
sold off...
(then)
How is it there?

CHERRY
It's fine. Nothing like what I come
from 'for here. Most days I'm just
tending to Missus Elizabeth, or
fetchin' this or that for Miss
Catherine.

NAT
You know if ya'll are coming back
next week for church?

CHERRY
I know as much as you. I s'pose if
Missus is suggestin' and Massa
Reese don't mind the trip.

NAT
I surely wouldn't want to wait
another season to see you.

CHERRY
Me neither...

They study each other, spellbound. Nat extends his hand to her. ANGLE ON A CLOTH WRAPPED OBJECT. Cherry eyes Nat before unwrapping it to reveal NAT'S WOODEN TRIBAL RELIC.

NAT
My Nana got it from my granddaddy.
She brought it here when she was
taken from Africa.

CHERRY
Africa?

NAT

(nods)

She kept it hid. Said it was the
one thing that kept her mind free.

CHERRY

It's pretty.

She offers it back.

NAT

I want you to have it.

(then)

In case I don't see you for a
while, you'll have somethin'
reminds you of me.

CHERRY

I don't know if it's right I take
it. 'Sides I don't have nothin' to
give you to remind you of me.

NAT

I spend all my time thinking about
you already.

A frozen moment as they stare and smile. Until-

CATHERINE (O.C.)

Cherry?!

Cherry slowly stands. A warm smile before she disappears
toward the Big House.

We stay with Nat as he looks and longs after her.

EXT. REESE PLANTATION - NIGHT

A farm house stands adjacent to a small barn- both set before
a vast field. We spot Cherry who empties plates into a slop
bucket before toting it toward the barn.

She arrives to the pig trough, scrapes in leftover food. She
suddenly stops, turns.

CHERRY

Who's there?

CHERRY'S POV as she gazes into a thicket of trees until-

NAT SLOWLY EMERGES FROM THE TREELINE ATOP THE COAL BLACK
HORSE, JUPITER.

Cherry nearly drops the plates. Nat climbs down, as Cherry
glances toward the house.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
Nat? What you doing here?

No answer. Nat walks boldly to her, his eyes glued to hers. He leans in, kisses her softly on her lips.

NAT
I shoulda' done that earlier today.

CHERRY
You came here to kiss me?

Nat slowly sinks to one knee.

NAT
I ain't got much. The Lord. My faith. Mamma. Nana. Up until the moment I saw you, it was enough.
(beat)
Cherry, I'd feel right honored if you'd be my wife. I'd treat you right. I'd protect you with my life... if you'd have me.

CHERRY
(smiles)
Yes. I will.

Nat rises. Kisses her lips again.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
What now?

NAT
I'll talk it over with Samuel. Figure Hark and I can get us a cabin built.

CHERRY
OK.

A final kiss before Nat slowly backs away from her, shadows engulfing him into the night. Cherry smiles, breaths deep, as if for the first time and we begin a-

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Rev. Walthall stands on the porch steps, Nat and Cherry before him. He finishes the vows and Nat kisses Cherry gently on the lips.

-- Nat and Cherry are knelt in front of Bridget who prays fervently. Dozens of slaves "lay hands" on Nat and Cherry's shoulders praying along silently in support.

-- Nat and Cherry are in Nat's cabin. He moves to her, she flinches. He gently takes her as they make love.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DAY

Reverend Walthall climbs the porch steps, knocks. Samuel arrives, pushes open the screen door.

SAMUEL TURNER

Reverend. What brings you around these parts during the week? Wouldn't expect to see you til Sunday.

REV. WALTHALL

There's never a wrong time bring a blessing to a brother in Christ.

SAMUEL TURNER

Oh, Lord. Is this blessin' gonna cost me money?

REV. WALTHALL

Ha! Not a penny. The contrary in fact.

Sam joins him on the porch. They sit on adjacent rockers.

SAMUEL TURNER

Isaiah! Run some waters out here.

REV. WALTHALL

Gin, if you please.

ISAIAH

(from inside)
Yes'suh.

REV. WALTHALL

I put the word out about your preacher. Got a couple farmers willing to turn a good coin.

SAMUEL TURNER

That right?

Isaiah serves the drinks, before disappearing into the house.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

How much they offering.

REV. WALTHALL

A bit. And these days every bit counts.

(then)

(MORE)

REV. WALTHALL (CONT'D)

If your boy does to these fellas' liking, you could bounce back from the drought, pay off some debt and put the rest in your pocket.

Samuel stares off toward the cotton fields as he considers.

SAMUEL TURNER

Whereabouts are we talkin'.

REV. WALTHALL

All in Southampton to start.

SAMUEL TURNER

An all I gotta do is have Nat preach?

REV. WALTHALL

That's it.

(beat)

Now, I'm not vouching for the character of these fellas, what business they running or how, I'm just telling you there's a opportunity here, one you got the means to capitalize on.

SAMUEL TURNER

(finally nods)

Sounds good enough.

REV. WALTHALL

Alright, then. I'll send you the details- names, locations and dates by tomorrow.

SAMUEL TURNER

You already booked the dates?

REV. WALTHALL

I figured you'd say yes.

SAMUEL TURNER

You're going mighty far outta your way make sure my cabinets are stocked full. What's in all this for you.

REV. WALTHALL

Just the joy of knowing I'm helping my fellow brother. And...

SAMUEL TURNER

Here it comes...

REV. WALTHALL

If I were to receive a "gift offering" following the successful completion of such trips, I certainly would not object.

A shared smile.

SAMUEL TURNER

You're something else Reverend.

REV. WALTHALL

I am but a servant.

(then, rising)

First trip'd be day after tomorrow, if you can pony up by then.

SAMUEL TURNER

Shouldn't be a problem.

REV. WALTHALL

Good.

The men shake hands before Rev. Walthall climbs into his carriage. His slave driver snaps the reins and Samuel watches the carriage advance down the driveway.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - AFTERNOON

It's dawn. Nat loads the last of supplies onto the wagon, while Hark feeds apples to the two secured horses. Bridget stands close. Nancy arrives with a cloth sack.

NANCY

Got some salt pork and tomatoes in here, for when you get hungry.

NAT

Thanks, mama.

(then)

If Miss Catherine brings Cherry on Sunday, tell her I'll be back directly.

Nancy nods solemnly.

NAT (CONT'D)

Don't y'all go getting worried, now. I'll be back soon enough.

BRIDGET

I know. The Lord bless you, child.

At that, Samuel emerges from the Big House. Nat wraps Nancy, Bridget and Hark into a hug before heading off.

BEGIN TRAVELING MONTAGE

--AERIAL SHOT of the wagon as it makes its way across the Eastern Virginia landscape.

--The sun sets as they travel alongside the Nottaway River.

-- We watch as the wagon presses through overgrown hemlocks and moss covered oaks.

EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - NIGHT

A rusted fence leans on either side of the plantation opening. Nat guides the wagon through and is met by a slave JASPER (13, tattered clothes, rail thin).

JASPER
You Marse Turner's nigger?

NAT
I'm Nat.
(re: back of wagon)
Master Turner is restin' in here.

Jasper cranes his neck to see inside. He eyes Nat suspiciously, then-

JASPER
Come' on.

EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

Nat slows the wagon to a stop.

JASPER
Stay here.

Jasper runs up the porch stairs of the main house, disappears inside. Samuel emerges from inside the wagon. Looks around.

SAMUEL TURNER
We here?

NAT
Yes' suh. A youngin' just went
inside to fetch Mister Randall.

SAMUEL TURNER
What time is it, bout?

NAT
I'd say eight or nine.

Seconds later a plump man, JOSEPH RANDALL (50's) emerges, followed by a muscular house servant ABNER (40'S) and Jasper.

JOSEPH RANDALL
Sam Turner. You made it. And right
on time.

Randall sticks out his hand. Samuel shakes it.

ANGLE ON ABNER Who stares daggers into Nat.

JOSEPH RANDALL (CONT'D)
Joseph Randall.
(re: house servant)
This here's Abner. The little one
there's Jasper.
(then, re: Nat)
This the 'nigger preacher'?

SAMUEL TURNER
(to Nat)
Nat?

NAT
Evenin' Suh-

JOSEPH RANDALL
A little young ain't he?

SAMUEL TURNER
He's old enough. Been studyin' the
Word a while.

JOSEPH RANDALL
Studying? Hell, I can barely train
my niggers to learn their own
names... C'mon.

Samuel and Nat follow Joseph, Jasper and Abner toward the
back of the main house. Joseph walks and talks.

JOSEPH RANDALL (CONT'D)
It's hard times for small farmers
like you and myself. Breaking even
is hard enough, gettin' ahead is
impossible. To save some, I cut 'em
down to a meal a day, per head. A
few of 'em started gettin' fidgety,
so I had my Abner come down on 'em.

The group approaches a dilapidated barn, a PADLOCK secures
the door FROM THE OUTSIDE. Joseph stops short.

JOSEPH RANDALL (CONT'D)
They done got more restless
everyday since.
(MORE)

JOSEPH RANDALL (CONT'D)
I wanna say it's all in my head,
but you know like I do, you can't
trust niggers as far as you can
toss 'em. Abner here's provin' my
only real protection.

Joseph turns to Nat.

JOSEPH RANDALL (CONT'D)
You ready, boy?

SAMUEL TURNER
He's ready.

JOSEPH RANDALL
Aight. Now, they needs to mind me,
so you speak on that. They treasure
in heaven from submittin' and all.
(then)
If they gets to moaning and
carrying on, don't pay 'em no mind.
They lazy as all hell and'll do
anything to get out of work.

With that Abner keys open the padlock; opens the barn door.

INT. RANDALL PLANTATION - BARN - CONTINUOUS

Joseph and Abner lead Nat and Samuel in. Abner lights a lantern. Under its glow, we see nearly two-dozen EMACIATED slaves- men, women and children. They scatter deep into a corner. Nat's jaw drops.

JOSEPH RANDALL
Listen up. Got a preacher here
tonight.
(to Nat)
Come here, boy.
(Nat slowly approaches)
He's a nigger just like yall, and
is going to talk to you about the
Lord. Listen to him and you just
might make it to heaven, ya hear?

Joseph rejoins Samuel and Abner, leaving Nat standing in the center of the room. Nat looks to Samuel who looks away. Through sad eyes, Nat studies the sea of skeletal faces and festering whip wounds. He swallows, peels open his Bible.

NAT
...Brothers and sisters...
(re: slaves, unblinking)
I lead you to 1 Peter 2:18:
Slaves...

(MORE)

NAT (CONT'D)

submit yourselves to your masters
with all respect, not only to those
who are good and considerate... but
also to those who are harsh...

Nat glances toward Randall who smiles and nods him on.

INT. RANDALL PLANTATION - TOOL SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Jasper leads Nat in. Various landscaping tools line the walls. A small cot fashioned on the floor.

JASPER

I made yo' cot myself.

NAT

Thank you, brother.

Jasper starts for the door, hesitates.

JASPER

If'n I ask you something suh, you
won't tell Marse?

NAT

I won't tell.

JASPER

Is you a real preacher?

NAT

Yes.

Jasper offers a proud, toothy smile.

JASPER

I ain't never seen no nigger
preacher befo'. None of us did.

With that, Jasper exits. Leaving Nat alone with his thoughts.

EXT. VAST CORN FIELD - DAY

Deafening silence. Nat lies asleep, shirtless.

ANGELIC VOICE

Nat...

Nat's eyes flutter open as he sits up. He gazes towards the sky. The clouds rush past at an impossible speed. Nat shields his eyes from the intense sunlight, until-

THE SUN IS SLOWLY COVERED BY AN ECLIPSE.

Nat stares at the eclipsed sun. Only a thin ring of light surrounds the circle of darkness and-

INT. RANDALL PLANTATION - TOOL SHED - NIGHT

Nat jolts awake, covered in sweat. He takes in his surroundings as he catches his breath.

EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - FRONT HOUSE - MORNING

Nat pulls the wagon to the front, just as Samuel and Joseph descend the porch stairs. Abner trails a few steps back.

JOSEPH RANDALL

You sure you don't want to stay another night? Got some fine brandy in the cellar. We can get Abner to strike up the fiddle, sit around the fire and tell old lies.

Just then, Randall's daughter LILLY (9) emerges from inside. She dons a white dress with a matching ribbon in her hair. As she gleefully descends the stairs, we notice a tweed rope in her grip. We follow its length to the opposite end to find-

It's tied around the neck of a NINE YEAR OLD SLAVE GIRL.

The slave child giggles as she follows Lilly to the front yard where they frolic through a game of follow the leader.

ANGLE ON NAT who watches on, abashed.

SAMUEL TURNER

We best be gettin' back before nightfall.

JOSEPH RANDALL

Alright, suit yourself.

SAMUEL TURNER

But I would take a bottle of whiskey if you can spare it.

JOSEPH RANDALL

Sure can.

Abner disappears inside. Randall produces a wad of bills, hands it to Samuel. He studies it a beat, before pocketing.

JOSEPH RANDALL (CONT'D)

You're a smart man, Sam. Bound to make a fortune off that boy.

(extends his hand)

Good doing business with ya.

SAMUEL TURNER
(shakes)
Sure.

As Samuel climbs onto the front of the wagon, Abner returns, hands him a bottle of whiskey.

ANGLE ON ABNER

His eyes locked tight on Nat. Nat holds his gaze a beat, then snaps the reins. The wagon lurches forward. Samuel wastes no time popping the cork, pulling a long, desperate swig.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NAT'S CABIN - NIGHT

As Nat approaches, the cabin door opens to reveal Cherry. Nat allows the first smile we've seen from him in a while.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NAT'S CABIN - NIGHT

Nat and Cherry lie beneath a wool blanket. Wood crackles in a small stove. Nat's gaze is fixed outward, his mind heavy.

NAT
When I was a boy, I used to see things. Sometimes in my dreams. Sometimes in the middle of the day. I'd remember events that happened in the past... Only to find out they'd happened before I was even born. Visions, my mama called them.
(beat)
She'd said they was from the Lord. That they was leading me to something... Breaking the spirit of my brothers in His name? That can't be it.

Nat looks to Cherry, she looks away.

NAT (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

CHERRY
...I'm gonna have a baby.

Nat sits up, eyes her.

NAT
A baby? You sure?

Cherry nods. Nat slowly swings his feet off the bedside, closes his eyes.

CHERRY
You mad at me?

NAT
Mad? Naw.

He pulls her into a tight hug.

NAT (CONT'D)
I ain't mad.

He holds her close. We PUSH IN ON NAT, Feeling the weight of his fortune.

MONTAGE

-- Nat and Samuel navigate the wagon on a country road.

-- A slave owner stuffs a wad of bills into Samuel's palm.

-- It's night. Nat paces outside Nancy and Bridget's cabin, when door opens and a smiling Nancy waves him in. He enters to find Cherry, wet with sweat, holding a baby girl.

-- Samuel and Nat stand in the crowd of a slave auction. Samuel makes the winning bid on three slaves.

-- Samuel watches as several slave owners raid a female slave quarters. They tackle the scurrying women, ripping their clothes away, raping them on the spot.

-- Samuel pulls violently from a whiskey bottle.

-- Bird's eye view as Nat leads the wagon down a desolate country road, the sun setting in the BG.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Nat steers the wagon along a swamp-flanked road. Samuel, sits next to him studying a map.

SAMUEL TURNER
We should be coming up on it...

Nat arrives to a splintering sign before an open gate.

FOWLER'S

Nat guides Jupiter onto the side road.

EXT. FOWLER PLANTATION - MOMENTS LATER

As Nat presses on, something catches his eye.

NAT
(to horses)
Whoa...

The wagon slows to a stop, whatever Nat sees, makes his eyes go wide. Samuel sees it too. As they stare, we-

REVERSE TO REVEAL-

A BLACK MAN tied, hands over his head, to a wooden post. His lifeless body droops motionless. We assume he's dead, until-

HE GASPS FOR AIR.

Nat and Samuel visibly jump. Then-

SAMUEL TURNER
Ain't none of our business. Go on.

Nat snaps the reins and the horse continues on.

The trees clear away to vast tobacco fields speckled with brown faces. The dirt road finally gives to an opening. A two story estate greets us.

EXT. FOWLER PLANTATION - DAY

Nat pulls in front. Samuel looks around.

SAMUEL TURNER
Wait here.

He drops from the wagon, approaches the front door.

Nat climbs down, strokes Jupiter's mane when the horse suddenly backtracks, spooked. Nat instinctively turns to find-

A GERMAN SHEPHERD races toward him, full tilt!

Nat falls to the ground, scurries backwards. Just as the dog lunges, canines peeled-

He's yanked back. The dog fights against the weight of a choke chain, inches from Nat who retreats, pinned against the wagon wheel.

Nat glances up to find HANK FOWLER (early 30's, a wad of chew wedged between rotted teeth). A bullwhip rests on one side of his hip, a pistol stowed against his other.

HANK FOWLER
(calm)
Nigger, what you doing on my land?

Samuel arrives as Nat pulls himself to his feet.

SAMUEL TURNER
He's with me.

HANK FOWLER
Who the hell are you?

SAMUEL TURNER
Samuel Turner. Reverend Walthall
sent us.

HANK FOWLER
You the fella with the nigger
preacher.

Hank regards Nat with a smug grin.

HANK FOWLER (CONT'D)
You lucky, boy. I like to've let
Buster rip yo' ass to bits.
(then, to Samuel)
C'mon. Let's go find Earl.

Hank, dog close, heads toward the tobacco fields. Samuel and
Nat follow.

EXT. FOWLER PLANTATION - TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

Hank leads Samuel and Nat down a row of tobacco plants.
Ahead, terrified slaves scatter as Hank approaches. Buster
lurches, snapping after them.

HANK FOWLER
Niggers is niggers, here. We don't
treat none no different than
another. Preacher or no preacher.
We got rules. The cost of breakin'
'em: stealin' sassin'- or any other
thing Earl or me thinks is worth
dealin' with'll be paid for in
skin. You interfere with that,
we'll shoot you where you stand.

Hank stops, locks eyes with Samuel.

HANK FOWLER (CONT'D)
Any problems with that, you can
stop right now and go on back to
where you came from.

Nat looks to Samuel who doesn't budge.

HANK FOWLER (CONT'D)

Good.

PRELAP CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

EXT. FOWLER PLANTATION - TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

Hank, Samuel and Nat arrive to find EARL FOWLER (Early 40's) on horseback, hurling his whip down at toiling slaves. The whip snaps like gunfire inches from the ears of men, woman and children as they pull leaves from the tobacco plants.

CRACK! CRACK!

EARL FOWLER

Come on!

CRACK!

EARL FOWLER (CONT'D)

C'mon, nah!

CRACK! The whip slashes the shoulder of a SLAVE TEEN MALE. The skin rolls back, exposes flesh. The teen picks faster. Earl dismounts, holsters his whip. A slave man, ELIJAH loads leaves on a gurney-like device attached to a mule.

HANK FOWLER

Earl, this here's Sam Turner. Fella with the nigger preacher.

Earl nods, breezes past Samuel and Nat, Elijah follows, mule in tow. Hank, Nat and Samuel catch up.

EARL FOWLER

Where you say you come from?

SAMUEL TURNER

Here in Southampton. South of Nottaway.

Tobacco leaves slide near the end of the gurney. Elijah doesn't notice. Earl does.

EARL FOWLER

(over his shoulder)

Elijah, if one of them leaves hit that dirt, I'ma lash you raw.

(then to Samuel)

Nottaway huh? ...Lotta Yankees makin' their way down those parts. Come down here, rabble-rousin', stirring shit on our way of life.

An OVERSEER arrives on horseback.

OVERSEER

Earl, got a little problem.

INT. FOWLER PLANTATION - BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Earl leads the men through a dark hallway. Light permeates occasionally from thin slivers in the barn's slats. Silence, save the moan of livestock. Earl's voice in the dark.

EARL FOWLER

You ever work a tobacco farm
Samuel?

SAMUEL TURNER

Can't say I have. We work in
cotton. Think my daddy tried
tobacco once, but quit. Said it was
a lotta toil.

EARL FOWLER

Damn right it's a lotta toil.
Most of these malignant Yanks never
worked a man's wage in his life.
Show up under the trickery of a
visitor. Next thing you know, they
done talked your nigger into
slittin' your throat.

They finally stop. The loud moans of livestock ever present.
They stand in the dark for a foreboding moment until- CLICK.
Earl pushes open a door. Dim light glows.

INT. FOWLER PLANTATION - BARN - BACK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Earl, the overseer and Hank push in. Nat and Samuel freeze in
the doorway, their eyes fix on something we don't yet see.

EARL FOWLER (O.S.)

Which one?

OVERSEER (O.S.)

That one there.

EARL FOWLER (O.S.)

How long?

OVERSEER (O.S.)

Been about a day or so.

REVERSE TO REVEAL

A half dozen MALE SLAVES chained to the walls. A couple wear
IRON COLLARS, bells on the tips of the reaching horns.

Others wear IRON MASKS; saliva seeping from the perforated steel. Earl squares up with one in particular.

EARL FOWLER
You ain't gon' eat?

No response. Earl grabs the nearby bowl of cornmush, puts the spoon to the slave's mouth. He turns away.

EARL FOWLER (CONT'D)
Aight.
(then, more to himself)
If it ain't one thing, it's the
other.

Earl pushes past Nat and out of the room. ON NAT as he studies the tortured men. Earl returns carrying a thick CHISEL, HAMMER AND FUNNEL.

EARL FOWLER (CONT'D)
(to Samuel)
You wonderin' why we could use that
boy of yours, you're seeing it
first hand.

EARL FOWLER (CONT'D)
(to Overseer)
Open his mouth.
(to Hank)
Grab that cornmeal.

Nat and Samuel watch on horrified, as-

Earl hammers out the male slave's teeth.

EARL FOWLER (CONT'D)
If it ain't the Yanks, it's the
drought...

The overseer holds the slave's mouth open, as Hank forces the cornmeal through the funnel and into the man's throat. Blood, teeth and cornmeal seep as he gags.

EARL FOWLER (CONT'D)
If it ain't the drought, it's
goddamn mutiny.

Earl wipes his hands, regards Nat without missing a beat.

EARL FOWLER (CONT'D)
Truth is, even the meanest nigger
fears the gospel. A good word from
your boy here... a disciplined word
might go a lot further than my
pistol would.

SAMUEL TURNER

Well, Nat... he's a good preacher.

EARL FOWLER

Don't right mind how good he is.

(pointed)

Long as he say what he s'pose to.

EXT. FOWLER PLANTATION - SIDE PORCH - DAY

Nat stands on the wooden porch flanked by Earl who cradles a shotgun. Samuel is a bit further back.

A dozen slaves stare wide-eyed. In the BG Hank trots up on a horse. He holds a rope tied to the shackled wrists of WILL (20's, dangerous eyes, a scar bends from his temple to his cheek).

THIS IS THE MAN WE SAW TIED TO THE POST AT THE ENTRANCE.

Will stands marred and exhausted, his trembling legs struggling to support his body.

NAT regards the assembly, then turns to Earl, eyes averted.

NAT

(low)

Mr. Fowler, suh. Regarding my sermon, my plan is to foment in them concupiscence for song.

EARL

Concup what?

Samuel, out of earshot, looks on with growing concern.

NAT

Massa I'm askin' if you's opposed to me using singin' to keep yo' niggers down? As means to sing away any 'malignance.'

EARL FOWLER

That's fine. Ain't got no quarrel with singin'. Long as it don't interfere with they workin'.

NAT

Yes, suh. Thank you, suh.

Nat turns to the slaves, his subservience thaws, his jaw tightening slightly.

NAT (CONT'D)

Brethren... I pray you sing to the Lord a new song. Sing praise in the assembly of the righteous. Let the saints be joyful in glory; Let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouths of the saints, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the demonic nations, and punishments on those peoples!

Nat builds, as Samuel studies Earl, who watches on seemingly oblivious to Nat's innuendos.

NAT (CONT'D)

To bind their kings with chains,
And their nobles with fetters of
iron; To execute on them this
written judgment—

Crowd members observe, rapt. Will glances toward Nat.

NAT (CONT'D)

This honor have all His saints!
Praise the Lord! Sing to Him a new
song!

CROWD MEMBERS

-Hallelujah! -Amen! -Yes Lord!

On Nat, regaining his bearings.

EXT. REESE PLANTATION - BACK HOUSE - DUSK

Cherry pumps water from a well near the forest's edge. As she fills a bucket, she hears a SOUND. She glances up to see—

COBB, eyes glued on hers.

COBB

What you doing out so late, girl?

CHERRY

Evenin', suh. I'm just pulling
water for the missus.

COBB

I don't suppose you got a pass
anywhere under that purty dress?

CHERRY

No suh. I belongs to Massa Guiles
and this here his property.

COBB
You sassin' me, girl?

CHERRY
No suh.

COBB
Anybody that knows nothing, knows
state law says "if a nigger is less
than ten paces from the treeline,
that nigger needs a pass."

Cherry eyes the treeline, which lies only a few feet away.

CHERRY
Well suh, I can go get one-

COBB
You aint goin' no where. Either
you're gonna show me a pass...
Or you gon' show me something else.

Cobb takes a step forward. Cherry steps back, right into-

JESSE

TWO MORE of Cobb's men emerge from the trees surrounding her.
Off Cobb's contorted smile, we-

CUT TO:

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NIGHT

Nat guides the wagon to a stop in front of the big house.
Samuel, drunk, holds a beat.

SAMUEL TURNER
Nat...

NAT
Suh?

Only the sound of Samuel's labored breaths until he steps
down, heads into the house. As the door closes-

ON HARK, who sprints over. Nat sees terror in his eyes.

NAT (CONT'D)
What's wrong.

HARK
It's bad, brother...

INT. BIG HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Isaiah pulls a robe tight as he reaches the front door. He opens it to find Nat, distraught. They speak in whispers.

NAT

I need to talk to Samuel.

ISAIAH

Samuel has retired for the evenin'.

NAT

Cherry's been hurt. I need a pass to go see her.

ISAIAH

I just said, he's retired.

NAT

And I just said Cherry, my wife, your sister in Christ has been hurt-

ISAIAH

It's going to have to wait til mornin'.

NAT

Isaiah, if you don't go get Samuel, right now, I'm gonna go get him myself.

ISAIAH

And what if he doesn't let you go?

(re: Nat's no answer)

Let me guess, you gonna go anyway?

(no answer)

Nat, I'm real sorry for whatever happened to Cherry, but you can't run around here with your chest poked out making demands. We are niggers! I'd have thought you'd learned by now.

NAT

We ain't niggers, Isaiah. We men. I'd have thought you'd learn *that* by now.

And with that, he strides past Isaiah and into the house.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - STAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

As Nat bounds the stairs. Isaiah races to get in front. They arrive in front of Samuel's bedroom door.

ISAIAH
(harsh whisper)
Alright, damn it! I'll get him.

Nat steps back. Isaiah pulls a measured breath, straightens his robe and KNOCKS.

SAMUEL TURNER (O.S.)
What?

ISAIAH
(his best docile voice)
Yes, massa, it's Isaiah. I'm so sorry to disturb you, suh, but Nat needs to speak to you, suh. Something awful has happened.

SAMUEL TURNER (O.S.)
Alright, have him here first thing in the mornin'.

ISAIAH
Yes, suh...
(a quick glance to Nat)
Suh, again, I'm so sorry, but if you could just see Nat for one moment-

SAMUEL TURNER (O.S.)
God damn it Isaiah... Go on and get him. I'll meet him on the porch.

NAT
I'm right here, suh.

Silence. Then-

SAMUEL TURNER
Well you might as well come in.

Isaiah pushes the door open. Samuel lies on the bed fully clothed. Liquor bottles litter the night stand.

Isaiah enters with a hesitant smile. Nat follows, takes in the room he hasn't been in since his captivity was extended.

ISAIAH
Again, suh, I'm so sorry-

SAMUEL TURNER
What's wrong Nat?

NAT
Just got word from Reese's farm.
Cherry... she's been hurt real bad.

SAMUEL TURNER

Hurt?

NAT

Yes, suh... A group of men...

SAMUEL TURNER

When'd this happen?

NAT

Just this evenin', I reckon'.

SAMUEL TURNER

(beat)

Isaiah, fetch me some paper.

Isaiah promptly snaps to.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

Don't you go down there stirrin' up trouble? Take Jupiter, stay the night, get on back in the mornin'.

NAT

Yes'suh.

Isaiah arrives with paper and pen. Samuel jots a note and hands it off to Nat.

NAT (CONT'D)

Thank you, suh.

Nat exits, followed by Isaiah who smiles, bows as he exits.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Nat rides like a man possessed, pulling every bit of speed possible from the colt.

EXT. REESE PLANTATION - NIGHT

Nat arrives atop Jupiter. Before the horse can properly stop, he hops off, sprinting up the stairs to the Big House. He knocks, until a solemn Catherine opens the door.

INT. REESE PLANTATION - SERVANT QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Nat follows Catherine in to find-

CHERRY. She lies in a narrow bed, her face swollen and unrecognizable. Elizabeth, eyes wet, holds Nat and Cherry's infant daughter.

CATHERINE

We're prayin' for her, Nat. All of us.

(beat)

Monsters... God's going to punish whoever did this. He will...

OFF NAT, catatonic, we-

FADE OUT

OVER BLACK

A loud BOOM!

EXT. VAST CORN FIELD - DAY

Nat sit among the corn stalks. A loud rumbling in the sky directs his gaze UPWARD. To find the eclipsed sun. The wind picks up speed around him.

ANGELIC VOICE (O.S.)

Nat! STAND!

Nat struggles to his feet, suddenly noticing blood painted across the cotton stalks. LOWER, to witness blood seeping from the ground, swelling up to his shins.

ANGELIC VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The last will be first...

INT. REESE PLANTATION - SERVANT QUARTERS - NIGHT

Nat snaps awake. He sits bedside as Cherry sleeps. She stirs and he moves to her. She mumbles inaudibly through swollen lips. Nat places his ear over her mouth.

CLOSE on Cherry's mouth as she mumbles unheard words into Nat's ear. We watch Nat's eyes darken. He gently kisses her cheek, uses a nearby sponge to dab sweat from her brow.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NAT'S CABIN - DAY

Nat kneels in prayer. A KNOCK on the cabin door. Nat doesn't respond. Hark enters, holding a plate of food. Nat remains unmoved. Hark notices another plate of food, untouched. He sets the new plate down next to it.

HARK

Nat.

Nat's eyes open.

HARK (CONT'D)

You gonna have to eat sooner or
later, brother...

Nat stares forward. Hark glances out of the cabin door.

HARK (CONT'D)

(a whisper)

Ray Cobb. Him and the P'trollers.
Nelson and me asked 'round. Some
folk saw 'em close by where Cherry
was that mornin. Suspect it was
them-

NAT

It was.

HARK

(beat)

Word on the vine is Cobb got a
shack just off town square. Can't
be too hard to get to 'em if we
careful. He end up in a hole, I
can't even 'magine the whites
missin' that cracker.

NAT

You sound like them. Murdering a
man. Burying him.

HARK

Wasn't that long ago you told me a
similar story.

NAT

We not kids Hark. We men. More than
that, men of Christ. Killin' out of
anger, can't be the Lord's will.

HARK

But a lifetime of them killin' us
is?

(no answer)

I love the Lord, Nat. Much as
anybody, but I'm tired-

NAT

You think I'm not? My wife beaten
and ravaged, half-dead in that bed,
still ain't woke up?

HARK

So why not do something?

NAT

Prayer is what I'm doing! I'll pray
and keep praying. I'll cry out 'til
He tells me what to do.

HARK

And if *He* tells you to strike?

NAT

(beat)

If it be his will... But as of now,
I can't see that as the answer.

HARK

It's the answer for them.

NAT

Yeah... But we not them.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

A few dozen field slaves and house servants crowd the porch,
evidence of a plantation that has grown in prosperity. Samuel
stands at the top step, Jethro at his right.

SAMUEL TURNER

I'm having a get together tonight
for some important people. For
ya'll who were here when daddy was
alive, you know what I'm gon' want.

Nat and Hark watch from the crowd.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

Jethro's got list of things for the
hands and a list for the house.

(beat)

You do your parts and it all goes
well, you get tomorrow off.

Mild hoots and cheers ripple through the crowd. As Jethro
steps forward to bark orders-

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

Nat.

Nat makes his way over. Samuel radiates anxiety.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

Cherry alright?

NAT

Yes'suh.

SAMUEL TURNER

Good. Not many would've let you go,
but...

NAT

Thank ya, suh.

SAMUEL TURNER

It's a big night tonight. For all
of us. I'm gon' want you in the
house. You got experience with
servin' and respect with help. We
get this right, the Turners'll be
back on top.

NAT

Yes, suh.

And Samuel disappears into the house.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DUSK

Several carriages pull into the freshly flowered courtyard. Prominent whites are greeted by rows of smiling servants, among the greeting servants, we see Hark's wife Ester. We recognize Abner as he pulls a carriage to a stop. Samuel stands, tuxedo clad, greeting his guests.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

Nat and Isaiah stand amongst other servants, holding silver trays of hors d'oeuvres. A dozen well-to-do guests populate the dinner table. We see Elizabeth, Catherine and Guiles. We recognize Reverend Walthall, as well as the plantation owner Joseph Randall. GENERAL CHILDS (50's a commander of the state militia) is also present. Samuel stands, clinks his fork against a crystal wine glass. The room settles.

SAMUEL TURNER

As you know, this annual dinner was
a tradition of my daddy years ago.
For all he believed, he made sure
family, faith and tradition were at
the top of his priority list. Now,
near twenty years later, the same
priorities have kept this property
afloat.

JOSEPH RANDALL

That, and a cash cow of a nigger-
preacher.

A few chuckles.

SAMUEL TURNER

All right, that too.

Samuel smiles, nods to Reverend Walthall, who winks back. Samuel raises his glass high.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

May God continue to bless us for more generations to come.

GUESTS

Here, here!

SAMUEL TURNER

Nat, lead us in prayer.

The guest bow their heads. Nat looks around at the guests who sit, eyes closed. He studies their pasty, smiling faces. He glances then to the servants, who also have their heads bowed. Nat prays directly to them, HIS EYES OPEN.

NAT

Heavenly Father, we come to thank you for your word and your will. We understand it is written that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard- neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them, that love him." We pray for and thank you for your protection and your promise that in our obedience, you will be an enemy to our enemies that you will oppose those who oppose us.

Isaiah's eyes snap open, rack to Nat.

NAT (CONT'D)

Continue to guide us oh, Lord and we will continue to follow. Through fire and tribulation, we will push forward, recognizing you alone as our source and strength. In your Holy name we pray...

ALL

Amen.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

The party has wound down. The women have left the table, leaving only a group of inebriated men, Samuel being the worst off. Samuel covertly signals Nat who steps forward, sets a bowl of peppercorn on the table. Samuel drops three into his glass of port wine.

SAMUEL TURNER

Daddy always said:

(sotto)

"Three black peppercorns to a glass of port, and you got yourself an excellent digestive."

Ester brings coffee to the table as the men talk. Joseph Randall eyes her closely.

JOSEPH RANDALL

Black is always tasty... Especially a nice piece of black meat. Juicy. Sweet...

As she pours for Joseph Randall, he runs his hand up her dress. She casually steps away. Nat notices, trades positions with her. Ester stands with the other servants. Joseph doesn't take his eyes off her.

GUILES REESE

Pepper in my port is worth a try. But fornication of that kind... Frankly, I find it uncivilized.

GENERAL CHILDS

Give it time, son. I suspect it won't be long before you find yourself slipping from the banal chaise to find a tastier treat in mammy's harem.

SAMUEL TURNER

When that day comes, make sure you have some money saved. Cus' if my sister catches you and tosses you out, you won't be coming to stay here.

And another round of laughs.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NAT'S CABIN - NIGHT

As Nat sleeps, we hear a hurried KNOCK OS. Nat stirs awake, goes to the door. He opens it to reveal Ester's younger brother NELSON (18), out of breath.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - HARK'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Nat arrives to find Hark guarding his front door, arguing with Isaiah. They speak in whispers.

NAT

What's going on?

HARK

I ain't doin' it Nat! I'd have 'em
lynch me first.

NAT

Doin' what?

Nat looks to Isaiah who hangs his head.

ISAIAH

One of Samuel's guests... has
requested Ester.

NAT

Requested her for what?
(re: Isaiah's look)
No. Just go and tell Samuel. He'll
straighten this out.

ISAIAH

Samuel sent me personally.

HARK

I can't do it Nat. I won't.
(to Isaiah)
Who the hell you think you are?!

ISAIAH

You think I wanted to come out here
for this?!

HARK

You here ain't ya?! You'd sell your
soul if a white man told you!

Nat abruptly beelines for the Big House.

ISAIAH

Nat!

EXT. BIG HOUSE - BACK PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Isaiah catches up to Nat, who strides toward the back door.

ISAIAH

What the hell are you doing?!

NAT

I can't let this happen, Isaiah.

ISAIAH

You don't have a choice in the
matter!

Before Nat can rebut, the back door swings open to reveal Samuel. He stumbles toward them.

SAMUEL TURNER
Where is she?

ISAIAH
Oh, I'm fetchin' her directly, suh-

NAT
Samuel, please. You can't do this.

SAMUEL TURNER
The hell I can't!

Joseph Randall appears at the door, grips a glass of wine.

JOSEPH RANDALL
Everything alright?

SAMUEL TURNER
Everything's just fine. I'll be inside directly.

JOSEPH RANDALL
Hope you won't be alone.

SAMUEL TURNER
I certainly won't we.

Joseph Randall disappears inside. On Samuel, full of rage.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)
Boy, you mess this up for me, my hand to God, I'll have every goddamn nigger on this plantation lynched come mornin'! You don't believe it? Try me.
(to Isaiah)
Fetch her. Now!

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Nat, Nelson and Hark watch Isaiah walk Ester to the Big House. She glances back, eyes filled with sorrow, Hark's with shame.

HARK
Where is He, Nat? Where God now?

ANGLE ON NAT

Something changing behind his eyes.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NAT'S CABIN - NIGHT

Nat sits leaned against his cabin. Looking out at-

Hark, who stands in the exact spot we last saw him, his eyes fixed on the Big House. A few long moments pass, before-

The back door of the Big House opens. Ester slowly emerges. She notices Hark and slows to a stop, hanging her head. Hark closes the gap, takes her into his arms.

Nat watches as Hark walks her to their cabin.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - DAY

We open on a thick log, propped up on a tree stump.

THWACK!

An Axe splits the log in two, it tumbles off the stump.

WIDEN to find Nat, as he places another log on the stump. THWACK! He glances up to find a WHITE DOVE perched on the nearby fence-post. Nat squints at the bird which seems to look directly at him. Further away, Hark crosses, pushing a wheelbarrow.

NAT

Hark.

No response, as Hark continues on, his eyes fixed forward. As Nat watches Hark trudge away-

VOICE (O.S.)

Excuse me.

Nat turns to find a white man ETHELDRED "E.T." BRANTLEY (50'S), hat in hand.

E.T. BRANTLEY

I'm looking for a preacher called
Nat.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - FOYER - LATER

Nat stands before Elizabeth and Jethro. Just past Nat, Brantley mulls on the other side of the screen door.

NAT

He's been banned from every church
in the county for his sins-

JETHRO

He's lucky it's all he got for what he done.

NAT

The world has its way with dealing with the immoral. Above all, those who cast that immorality onto children as he has. But, no one is without sin, Miss Elizabeth.

(lets that settle)

This man wants to repent and be delivered. As a shepherd of the Lord, it's my duty to serve... So, I'd like to baptise him.

JETHRO

The hell you will!

ELIZABETH TURNER

Jethro, you will mind your mouth.

JETHRO

With respect, Ms. Elizabeth, a nigger can't baptise no white man.

(re: her no response)

I just think you should wait for Mr. Samuel to get back.

Elizabeth studies Nat.

JETHRO (CONT'D)

Ms. Elizabeth, you can't let this go on-

ELIZABETH TURNER

Jethro, go wait in the front yard.

JETHRO

But ma'am-

ELIZABETH TURNER

I won't ask you again.

Jethro seethes. A murderous glare as he passes Nat-

JETHRO

Boy, you gon' get it.

And he's out the door, leaving Nat and Elizabeth alone.

ELIZABETH TURNER

You sure you want to do this, Nat? Samuel may not like it, nor will a lot of other folks around here.

NAT
Don't think I have a choice,
Missus. This man still belongs to
God. And to stand between God and
his people is a dangerous place to
be.

A long beat, until-

ELIZABETH TURNER
You have my blessing.

NAT
Thank you, Missus.

She watches him go, her eyes betraying a hint of melancholy.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - RIVERBANK - DAY

Nat leads Brantley into the shallow water. A dozen locals
gather near Nancy and Elizabeth. Jethro lingers further back.
If looks could kill.

NAT
You confess your sins before God?

E.T. BRANTLEY
Yes.

NAT
Cross your arms.

Brantley complies. Nat squints toward the sky for a long
beat, as if searching. Then-

Nat bends Brantley backwards into the water, covering his
face before propping him back upright. A few people clap.
Brantley wipes his face, offers Nat a misty-eyed smile.

E.T. BRANTLEY
Thank you, sir.

NAT
Go and sin no more.

Brantley nods as Nat leads him back toward the riverbank.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - HORSE STABLE - DAY

Nat is sat on a narrow stool, stares forward. Samuel, Jethro
and Reverend Walthall stand before him.

SAMUEL TURNER

I've been good to you, ain't I? My whole family has. And you go and do this to me?! A nigger, baptizing a white man on my property. You know how this makes me look?!

Nat only stares forward.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

Boy, you had better say something and quick.

NAT

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Silence. Samuel and Rev. Walthall share an incredulous look.

REV. WALTHALL

"Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again--"

NAT

"You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men--"

REV. WALTHALL

"But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger--"

NAT

"Beware of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravening wolves!"

REV. WALTHALL

YOU BLACK BASTARD!

SAMUEL TURNER

Nat!-

Nat looks Samuel straight in the eye, leans in.

NAT

"He that stealeth a man, and selleth him--"

SAMUEL TURNER
Don't you eyeball me, boy-

NAT
-or if he be found in his hand, he
shall surely be put to death."

Samuel backhands Nat.

SAMUEL TURNER
(to Jethro)
Get him in the stocks.

Nat doesn't resist as Jethro snatches him by the shirt.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Slaves gather around as we reveal Nat, clamped into a wooden stockade. Hark and Nelson arrive, soon joined by Simon. Jethro paces behind Nat, dragging a ten-foot long whip. He looks to Samuel who nods, then exits toward the Big House. Jethro goes to Nat and rips down his shirt.

JETHRO
Told ya' you was gon' get it.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - PORCH - SAME

Samuel bounds toward the Big House, spots Elizabeth. A sudden CRACK in the distance. Samuel stops, locks eyes with her. The cracking of the whip continues over their silence. She holds his gaze.

CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

He strides past her and into the house, slamming the door SHUT.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - SAME

SPLASH! As Jethro hurls a bucket of cold water onto Nat's face. He gasps for air.

Nat's back is a massive open wound. Blood pours from different angles onto the dirt. We spot Nancy in the crowd. She begins to moan audibly. Bridget pulls her close.

Jethro grabs a small sack from his waist. He pours a heaping portion of SALT into his palm, approaches and pours it over Nat's exposed flesh. Nat writhes.

Jethro, breathless, addresses the crowd.

JETHRO

Listen up. This is what happens
when niggers forget they's niggers!
Now, he's meant to stay right where
he's at. Anybody touches him, feeds
him- even looks at him, you'll find
your place right by his side!

(beat)

Not get back to work. Now!

Jethro staggers off. The crowd lingers, uneasy. Hark looks as if he might step forward to help, but a look, 'NO' from Nat stops him. The crowds slowly disperses. Nancy is the last to depart. Off her tear-streaked face, we begin-

A SERIES OF SHOTS

-- As the sun sets, Nat sags in the wooden stocks, a swarm of flies perched on his wounds.

-- Cherry serves dinner to Guiles, Catherine and Elizabeth. Her mind clearly somewhere else.

-- Nat's body trembles against the cold of the night. We see his breath through his purple-hued lips. His eyes close.

EXT. VAST CORN FIELD - DAY

Nat drifts through the row of a corn field, towering stalks reach skyward on either side. CLOSE on his hand extended, brushing past the plants, until we see-

THE CORN EARS BEGIN TO SPOT WITH BLOOD, WEEPING DOWN THE STALK, COVERING NAT'S HAND-

VOICE (V.O.)

Hey, boy.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - WOODEN STOCK - NIGHT

Nat's eyes open to find Jethro, hovering, drunk.

JETHRO

You best just go on' and die. It'd
be easier on you. You make it
outta' this alive, I'm gonna ride
you like hogs on slop.

(beat)

Die.

Jethro straightens, staggers away.

We move in CLOSE on Nat's near-lifeless eyes. His eyes slowly drift closed, until-

A FAINT GLOW OF LIGHT ILLUMINATES HIS FACE.

REVERSE to reveal-

A CANDLE HAS BEEN PLACED IN FRONT OF NANCY'S CABIN.

Nat wills his eyes open. THE LIGHT ACROSS HIS FACE BRIGHTENS.

We again REVERSE to reveal-

More candles have been placed in front of various slave cabins. We see the door of another slave cabin open, an arm produces a candle. Another cabin and another- until the entire courtyard glows.

Nat's body responds- his chin lifts, his muscles tighten, legs supporting his body's weight. Off Nat's determination-

CUT TO:

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

Samuel and Jethro arrive to find Nat alive and fully alert. Despite his gaunt features and the infected puss bubbles protruding from his back, he supports his own weight.

SAMUEL TURNER

You learned your lesson, boy?

Nat, wild eyed, looks just close enough to Samuel to avoid eye contact. Something unnerving about his subservience.

NAT

Oh, yes 'suh. I've learned.

SAMUEL TURNER

(to Jethro)

Get him out.

Jethro unlocks the stock. Nat stands up straight for the first time in days, his entire body trembling involuntarily.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

You done preachin' for a while.
Don't want you goin' off with no
groups unless me or Jethro is
there, ya hear?

NAT

Yes, suh.

SAMUEL TURNER

Go on and get cleaned up. Want you
back in the field come mornin'.

NAT

Yes, suh.

As Samuel and Jethro walk off, Hark approaches.

HARK

Nat, you alright?

Nat collapses, face-planting in the dirt.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NANCY & BRIDGET'S CABIN - DUSK

Nat lies on a cot, his back covered with steaming strips of cotton. Bridget sits at his side. Nancy arrives with a thin blade and a bottle of brown liquid. Bridget slowly peels back the cotton strips to reveal the infested wounds. She takes the blade, cuts shallow incisions into his bubbled flesh.

BRIDGET

I watched your grandfather die. In
the old land. Saw him give up the
ghost with my own eyes. And he saw
me. He harnessed the Holy Spirit
that day. Yes he did.

She applies pressure to the wounds, sending maggots and puss
oozing from his flesh.

BRIDGET (CONT'D)

I was proud of him. So proud. I
still thank God he died that day.
That he didn't live to see what I
seen... To watch a strong man
broken down is a terrible thing.

The brown liquid steams as she pours it across his wounds.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NANCY & BRIDGET'S CABIN - DUSK

Nat staggers in from the intense day of work. Sweat and dried
blood crust his shirt to his back. He spots Bridget in her
chair, faced toward the stove.

NAT

Hey Nana.

Nat grimaces as he peels off his shirt. Several lines of
fresh stitches.

NAT (CONT'D)
Stitches held up good...

Nat rinses his hands and face in a nearby pot of water, suddenly stops. He looks to Bridget, walks to her.

NAT (CONT'D)
Nana?

Her lifeless eyes fixed forward. A needle and thread rests between her fingers, a half sewn pair of pants in her lap.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NANCY & OLD BRIDGET'S CABIN - DAY

TIGHT on Nat's face. His eyes cast down at something we don't yet see. We PULL BACK to reveal Bridget's body wrapped head to toe in linen on a plank table behind him. We continue to pull back to find his eyes set on his closed Bible. He flips toward the back.

"Ephesians 6:5-6 - Servants, be obedient to them that are masters..."

"Matthew 5:38 -If anyone strikes you on the right cheek..."

"Luke 6:27 Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you..."

ON NAT as fix forward.

A SERIES OF QUICK FLASHBACKS

- The slave's teeth hammered out-
- The perforated slave on the dirt road.
- The young slave girl led on a leash-
- Cherry beaten and bruised-
- The blood swelling to Nat's shins.

WITH NAT as he flips the Bible again... His jaw tightens.

He slowly rises, moves to Bridget's wrapped body. He lifts it and carries her out of frame. We move in close on the Bible. Closer until a verse fills the frame:

"Samuel 15:3 Now go and strike... and devote to destruction all that they have... Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child..."

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CEMETARY - DAY

Bridget's funeral has long ended. Nat stands before her fresh grave. Dozens of flowers litter surround a wooden cross. In the BG Hark arrives.

HARK
You alright?

NAT

Mostly.

(beat, then)

I need you to round up a few men we
can trust. Have 'em meet us near
the big cyprus at Cabin Pond, night
after next.

Hark eyes him, nods. A beat before Hark turns to leave.

NAT (CONT'D)

Hark...

(Hark turns back)

He's still here, brother. Even now.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - WOODS NEAR CABIN POND - NIGHT

Nat sits alone in front of a small smoldering brush fire. A
few seconds pass before Hark and FOUR OTHER MEN emerge from
the dark. Nat stands, meets them. Hark is flanked by SIMON
(24), Nelson and WILL (THE SLAVE WE RECOGNIZE FROM FOWLER
PLANTATION).

*
*

HARK

This is Simon. Samuel bought him
about two months back in Norfolk.

NAT

I remember.

HARK

You know Nelson. And this is Will.

*

NAT

(remembering)

Word travels fast.

(then)

You weren't followed?

Will shakes his head 'no'.

NAT (CONT'D)

Good. Welcome. Glad you're here.

SNAP

All eyes open and fix into the darkness towards the sound.
Nat stands. A tense moment passes before JASPER emerges from
the shadows.

HARK

(to Jasper)

This a grown folks meetin'. Get!

Jasper slowly backpedals, until.

NAT
Hold on. You come from Randall's.

JASPER
Yessuh.

HARK
He just a boy.

NAT
So was David.
(then, to Jasper)
Have a seat.

Jasper timidly complies. Nat studies the faces before him.

NAT (CONT'D)
Let's pray... Heavenly father, we
come to you this evening to thank
you for the gift of your Word. We
pray you guide our hearts and minds
that we may follow your will alone.
In Jesus' name...

ALL
Amen.

NAT
I been followin' the Lord a long
time, now. Preachin'. Citin'
scripture. Sharing the word through
the few sections and pages I've
been allowed...

Holds his worn Bible up high.

NAT (CONT'D)
But, I've gone back into this Word.
All of it. With new eyes. I see now
that for every verse they use to
support our bondage, there is a
truth demanding our freedom. For
every line they use to justify our
torture, there's another that damns
them to hell for those actions.

(beat)
They say by the blackness of our
skin, we've been cursed. That God's
called our children and our
children's children to be beast of
burden until death. That He's
called our wives and daughters to
warm their bellies in the night...

(beat)
This isn't the word of the God I
serve.

He lets this sink in.

NAT (CONT'D)

The Lord has spoken to me; visions of what is to come. A rise of good against evil. "The first will be last and the last will be first"...

(pointed)

We've been chosen.

NELSON

What we gon' do?

NAT

The same as David and Gideon-Sampson and Saul...
We will fight.

SIMON

The five of us?

*

NAT

At first. But once it begins, our brothers and sisters'll join.

NELSON

They a lot of whites.

*

NAT

How many slaves you think here? On all the plantations in-county?

NELSON

Whole lot.

*

NAT

How many white?

SIMON

But they got guns.

*

NAT

We'll take the armory in Jerusalem. We'll have guns too.

HARK

Jerusalem?

NAT

That's right. We'll start at Turner's, then fight our way there. By then we'll number in the hundreds- thousands even. The grapevine's ablaze with talk of fightin'.

(MORE)

NAT (CONT'D)
Slaves just like us, all over,
havin' meetings. Waitin' for
somethin'. Waitin' for us.

The others don't look so sure.

NAT (CONT'D)
If ever there was a time to have
faith my brothers, it's now.

WILL
We make a stop at Fowler place?

NAT
We will.

WILL
I'm witchu.

HARK
(beat)
Me too.

NELSON
When we fight?

NAT
Soon. The Lord will provide a sign.
Until then, remain steadfast, ready
to strike at the moment of the
Lord's call.
(beat)
With the strength of our Father,
we'll cut the head from the
serpent... We'll destroy them all.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - NAT'S CABIN

Nat lies asleep when a SOUND stirs him awake. TAP, TAP, TAP.
Nat slowly rises, moves toward the cabin door. He opens it to
find Isaiah.

ISAIAH
May I enter.

Nat allows him in, but not before a quick glance outside.

NAT
Something wrong?

ISAIAH
There's much wrong.
(beat, then)
Whether you consider me a friend or
not, I don't know.
(MORE)

ISAIAH (CONT'D)

But I care what happens to you. The same way I care about what happens to every other soul on this property...

NAT

If there's something you need to say, Isaiah, I'm listening.

ISAIAH

There was a meeting earlier tonight.

Nat offers no reaction.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)

While I'm not privy to what was said, I can assume by it's secrecy, it couldn't have been entirely... productive.

(no response)

Now, I don't know what ideas swirl in your head, but I've lived enough to know the result of *certain* ideas won't lead to what you want.

NAT

All I want, I want for the oppressed people of God.

ISAIAH

Do you want death for them? For you wife and daughter?

NAT

If it be God's will.

ISAIAH

God's will? Who's selected you the instrument of such things?

NAT

He has.

ISAIAH

You walk a dangerous line.

NAT

In his ordered steps.

ISAIAH

And you're sure it's him doing the "ordering".

Nat only stares.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)

I may live in the house, but my head isn't in a hole. I know whites are wrong for what they've done and continually do. But I also know a man of God is called to lead in love. Anything else will only leave us all worse off.

(beat, then pointed)

He is a God of love. Don't forget that.

NAT

I won't.

(beat)

Nor will I forget he is a God of wrath.

Isaiah studies him a beat before he turns and exits.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - FIELD - DAY

Nat pulls a near full cotton bag through a row. Jethro trots by, eyeing him momentarily before moving on. Suddenly the wind picks up. Moderately at first, but then gains intensity.

Nat braces against the violent wind. Hats are blown off, cotton sacks tumble down rows, tossing freshly picked tufts into the air. Jethro's horse bucks, violently.

Nat looks skyward to see-

THE MOON PASSING IN FRONT OF THE SUN IN A BRILLIANT ECLIPSE.

ANGELIC VOICE (O.S.)

(to Nat, as if carried by
the wind)

The serpent is loosed.

The eclipse passes, the wind calms. Jethro looks skyward, trying to process what he just saw, while others begin restuffing the escaped cotton into their bags.

Hark, steps into Nat's row. Nat holds his gaze, nods.

INT. REESE HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cherry sleeps next to Joanna in their narrow bed. A light KNOCK on the window, stirs her awake. She moves to the window to find Nat. She quietly pulls open the window. He climbs in.

Nat gives Cherry a soft kiss, before taking Joanna into his arms. He offers a rare smile as Joanna wakes touches his face.

CHERRY
Everything all right?

NAT
Yes.

Nat gives Joanna a final kiss before handing her to Cherry.
He lies Cherry down, hugs her from behind. For a moment they
just rest, Nat holding Cherry, Cherry holding Joanna.

NAT (CONT'D)
The Lord's called me... to stand.

CHERRY
(beat)
They'll kill you.

NAT
Maybe. I have a plan.

CHERRY
Will we see you again?

NAT
Yes. In this life or the after.

Cherry weeps as Nat pulls her and Joanna in closer.

INT. REESE HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cherry wakes. She sits up to find Nat gone.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Nat, alone, is knelt in prayer.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON VIRGINIA - WOODS NEAR CABIN POND - NIGHT

Nat arrives atop Jupiter to find Hark, Nelson, Simon and
Will. They wait around a small fire. Jasper's stands, just
past the others. He nears as Nat dismounts, smiles.

*

NAT
Tonight, we stand in the strength
of our Lord and savior... We walk
in the prideful steps of our
ancestors... we strike against the
tyranny and destruction of our
people.

Nat looks into each of their eyes. All except Jasper return
his intense gaze. Nat studies Jasper, sees his fear.

He places a comforting hand on his shoulder before producing a HAND DRAWN MAP. He kneels before the fire. The others join.

NAT (CONT'D)

We'll start at Turner's, here and move North striking every house we pass. Once we reach Jerusalem, we'll take the Armory. By then, their militias will be formed and dispatched, but so will ours.

NELSON

We'll burn the farms?

*

NAT

No fires. No guns. Both would alert the town. We strike quietly, gather weapons, free our brothers and sisters and move on.

Nelson nods. Nat continues.

*

NAT (CONT'D)

To Jerusalem is about eight or so miles. We should get there by dawn. If we stumble, or get separated, we'll regroup here.

(beat, then)

Our destiny lies before us.

Their valiant looks take us to-

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - SAMUEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Samuel sleeps. A few seconds before he stirs awake, reaches for a glass of water. He suddenly freezes. As he squints into the dark, his eyes adjust and he sees the shapes of men.

SAMUEL TURNER

Who's there?

Nat takes a half step into a shard of moonlight.

SAMUEL TURNER (CONT'D)

Nat?

NAT

(directly into his eyes)

Yes.

Before Samuel can utter a response, the glint of a swinging axe, and we-

SMASH CUT TO-

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - OVERSEER'S BACKHOUSE - NIGHT

OVER BLACK we hear a KNOCK. Then another.

A lantern flashes on to reveal Jethro, sat up in bed.

A YOUNG SLAVE GIRL lies beside him. Jethro rubs his eyes-

KNOCK! KNOCK!

JETHRO

Wait a goddamn minute!

He staggers to the door, shirtless and half asleep. Just as he pulls the door open-

THWACK!!!!

BLOOD SPRAYS THE WALL AS JETHRO'S HEAD IS NEARLY CUT FROM HIS BODY. Hark takes a step inside wielding the bloody AXE. Will steps in beside him. Will, shouldering his own axe, lifts it high over his head, brings down the finishing blow.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Samuel crawls weakly along his stomach, blood seeping from mouth. Nat walks behind him, axe in his hand. Samuel props himself against a the wall and we see the deep gash in his chest. Samuel and Nat's eyes stay locked a long beat. Nat turns, exits. On Samuel, left with his thoughts until his eyes slowly sag shut.

INT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Nancy lies asleep under dim candlelight. Nat sits bedside.

NAT

Mama.

She wakes; instinctively reaches for her field clothes.

NANCY

Nat? Oh, Lord, I slept too late?

Nat gently catches her hand.

NAT

You don't have to work today, mama.

NANCY

What?

NAT

You're free.

She stares closely at Nat, suddenly noticing the blood on his face, clothes and hands.

NAT (CONT'D)
The battle has begun, ma.
(toward the cabin door)
Simon.

Simon pokes his head in.

NAT (CONT'D)
Simon's gonna take you to Reese's.
I need you to take care of Cherry
and Joanna until I return...
(re: Nancy's sad look)
What's wrong?

NANCY
Nothin'. I'm proud of you.

She pulls Nat into an embrace.

NANCY (CONT'D)
You fight. I'll pray.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Nat and Nancy join Simon who sits atop a horse.

NAT
(to Simon)
Stay off the main road and don't
stop til you're there.
(then)
You remember what to say if they
ask why you come?

SIMON
Yes, sir. That "Massa Samuel told
me to bring Miss Nancy to help out
for a day or two".

NAT
You got the pass?

SIMON
Yes, sir.

Simon pulls a forged travel pass from his pocket.

NAT
Good.

Nat helps Nancy onto the horse.

NANCY

I love you.

NAT

I love you too, Mama. I'll see you
before too long.

And with that, Nat slaps the horse and they take off.

PRELAP - SOUND of intense vomiting.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Nat stands keeled over, steadying himself against a tree.

VOICE (O.S.)

Nat.

Nat turns to find Hark.

HARK

Everybody's ready.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - SLAVE QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Nat, atop Jupiter, stares down at the many faces. Hark, Will, Nelson and Jasper are mounted at his flank. As Nat opens his mouth to speak- Isaiah arrives in his blood-streaked robe. Delirious, he CHARGES Nat, Will steps in his way.

ISAIAH

Boy, what did you do?!

No answer.

ISAIAH (CONT'D)

You killed him... You killed us!

(to all, in tears)

He's killed us! Every one of us is
already dead!

He lunges for Nat, but Will catches him, shoves him to the ground. Isaiah staggers away, distraught, leaving a somber feeling over the group.

NAT

Your earthly master is gone.
You are now free men and woman,
servants of only the Lord.

A murmur spreads throughout.

NAT (CONT'D)

As the sword of the Lord bears down
on our enemies, our ancestors and
unborn children rejoice.

(beat)

Are we dead? No. I say we are now
alive, seeing through eyes that
have been denied us since being
born into the darkness of bondage.
Stand with us... that your other
captive brothers and sisters may
also know freedom. Stand, that our
children, for generations to come
will know that with the
supernatural power of God, we
straightened our backs against the
works of the evil one.

A male steps forward. Then another. And other, until every
able man has stepped up. Off their determined looks-

A SERIES OF SHOTS

-- Nat, Hark, Will, Nelson and Jasper on horseback, galloping *
toward camera. They are flanked by a dozen other newly freed
men, also on horses.

-- Hark and Will club and stab a man and woman to death as
they sleep in their beds.

-- Nelson and another rebel clear rifles from a gun cabinet.

-- An overseer runs for his life. Hark, on horseback, nears
him, hacks him down with the swing of his axe.

-- Nat stands in a room of a mansion, eyes a military sword
mounted on the wall.

-- Nat and his army advance, armed, through the night. Their
numbers near thirty. ON NAT, the SWORD fitted to his belt. *

EXT. FOWLER PLANTATION - NIGHT

Nat and the men stop a hundred yards short of the Big House.
Will trots up to Nat, a darkness in his eyes.

WILL

Can I do this m'sef?

NAT

Go on.

Will dismounts, walks calmly toward the Big House, his blood
stained axe gripped firmly in his hand. He casually climbs
the porch steps, enters.

Several long moments pass. Hark crosses past Jasper to Nat.

HARK

Should we go check on him?-

SMASH!

A BODY explodes through the second floor window, lands in a bloody, lifeless heap! Jasper nearly jumps out of his skin.

Before anyone else can react-

The front door crashes open and a man we recognize as Earl Fowler sprints toward us. Will bolts through the doorway in pursuit, gaining on him with every step.

EARL runs wildly, until he suddenly STOPS, realizing he stands in front of Nat and nearly forty armed rebels. *

EARL FOWLER

No...

(stumbles backward)

NO!

Just as he turns, SHUNK!

Will's axe hacks into his neck. Will straddles Earl's body, raises his axe and chops with measured focus. He finally rises, holding Earl's steaming head by the hair. He tosses it into the nearby brush, before remounting his horse.

For a moment, no one even breathes. Then-

HARK

The boy!

All look around. Jasper's nowhere in sight. Hark, who kicks his horse to pursue. *

NAT

Wait.

(Hark halts)

Doesn't matter. *

Hark looks to Nat who avoids his gaze.

NAT (CONT'D)

Alright... listen up. Will, you take half the men, see what brothers and sisters you can free here, then head to Parker's. Hark, you, Nelson and me will take the others down to Randall's. *

Hark's jaw tightens at the sound of Randall's name. *

NAT (CONT'D)
By the time we meet back, you
should be finishing up. From there,
it's straight on to Jerusalem.

*

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - WOODS - NIGHT

A FIGURE sprints through the dark. He burst into a clearing, approaching the back section of a large, familiar house. As he arrives to the back door, he bangs repeatedly with all his might. The door finally swings open to reveal-

ABNER

We reverse to see our messenger is JASPER.

EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - NIGHT

Just as Nat and his men arrive to the plantation entrance-

NAT
Wait.

The men stop. Nat stares out at the Big House and surrounding structures. He squints into the dark. Did something move?

BANG!

Nelson is catapulted from his horse. Gunfire erupts.

The men scramble for cover. Hark dismounts, scurries to Nelson who lies dead; a bullet hole cut into his temple.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

RANDALL (O.S.)
Hey, "preacher". I know you out
there! C'mon. Me and my boys is
ready!

Nat sees several slaves appear on the lawn with guns.

RANDALL (O.S.)(CONT'D)
Ya'll are gonna hang! You hear me?!
All of ya!

NAT
(whispers)
Hark!

Hark joins him.

NAT (CONT'D)
Tell the men to fall back.

HARK

What?

NAT

If we have a gun fight now, we'll never make it to the armory.

HARK

That man had my wife- now her brother! I want my revenge, too!

NAT

This ain't about revenge, Hark. They have all had our wives and killed our brothers!

(beat)

The root, not the branch. We must stay focused, brother.

A long beat before Hark nods.

HARK

(to others)

Pull back.

EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - BARN - SAME

John Randall squats beside Abner and Jasper. They level rifles toward the trees.

TIGHT ON JASPER

His face, a picture of shame.

EXT. PARKER PLANTATION - JUST BEFORE DAWN

Nat, Hark and the others arrive to find a REBEL waiting. *

NAT

How long they been gone.

REBEL

A little too long. *

NAT

Any gunshots?

Henry shakes his head 'no'. A tense moment passes, until Will, and the others come galloping to join them.

NAT (CONT'D)

Was there trouble?

WILL
Not with the whites. None of our
'brothers' would join up.
(beat)
Slaves.

As Nat takes this in, a REBEL SCOUT arrives, out of breath. *

REBEL SCOUT
Buncha white men wit' guns comin'.

*

Nat eyes the distant forest.

NAT
(to all)
Line up, men! Ready your rifles.

The rebels, mounted, line up in two rows straddling the narrow road. Those on foot stand postured. All hold their weapons at the ready. Nat is front and center.

SILENCE AS THEY WAIT

Finally, a GROUP OF OVER FIFTY ARMED, LOCAL WHITES emerge from the forest. Many atop horses. *

CLOSER TO REVEAL-

THEY ARE LED BY RAYMOND COBB!

Nat's jaw tightens.

The armed whites see the rebels lined across the road and halt. A quiet stand-off as Cobb and Nat regard each other across the hundred yard stretch. Nat addresses his men.

NAT (CONT'D)
The LORD is our light and our
salvation, whom shall we fear?!

We slowly track across the faces of the rebels as they eye their adversaries. *

NAT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
When the wicked, even our enemies
and our foes, came upon us to eat
up our flesh, they stumbled and
fell...

We pass Will...

NAT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Though a host should encamp against
us, our hearts shall not fear:

We pass Hark....

NAT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...though war should rise against
us... in this will we be confident!

We arrive back to Nat, eyes focused and wild. Cobb has lined up his men. As they raise their guns-

NAT (CONT'D)
REBEL!

Nat charges toward Cobb and his men, his rebels close behind. Cobb lets out his own battle cry as he and his men charge!

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Men from both sides are killed instantly.

The two sides slam into each other with the sound of thunder! Nat, wielding an axe in his right hand and sword in his left, hacks and stabs at men from his horse.

Cobb wields a RIFLE with an attached BAYONET. He plunges its point into passing rebels.

Will, having dismounted, crushes a white man's head with the broad side of his axe, before burying the sharp side into another man's chest.

*

FURTHER AWAY-

Nat spots Cobb, gallops straight for him, when-

Cobb raises a derringer, shoots Nat off his horse. Cobb rushes Nat, lunges at him with his bayonet. Nat catches the barrel, flips Cobb from his horse and pounces. The two tumble until Cobb lands on top. Cobb locks both hands around Nat's neck in a choke. Nat spots his sword just feet away, but just out of reach. He fights at Cobb's grip, finally separating two fingers, breaking them backwards with a SNAP!

A monstrous left slumps Cobb to his side. Nat springs up, snagging his sword on the way. Cobb tries to rise, but it's too late. Nat drives his sword deep into Cobb's neck pinning him into the ground below him. Nat pushes the sword deeper as he leans in. Nat watches until the last sign of life is gone.

Nat slowly rises, his shoulder stained red from the gun shot. As he looks around, we see only rebels stand- the ground littered with bodies, black and white. A few white men can be seen retreating in the distance.

Hark let's out a battle cry. Nat, Will and others follow.

*

EXT. PARKER PLANTATION - DAWN

Rebels collect weapons, tend to the injured. Newly freed slaves meander about.

INT. PARKER PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - SAME

Nat and Hark stand in the foyer studying the map. Will stands watch at the door, but listens.

NAT

With all the gunfire, we can expect more folks are getting mobilized. We leave now, ride hard, we can get to Bethel bridge, cross into Jerusalem in twenty minutes time. Armory's a stones throw from there.

HARK

And if they waitin'.

NAT

A chance we gotta take...

HARK

What about Cypress Cross.

NAT

Too far. Three miles down, three miles back up after crossin'. They'd be waiting on us for sure.

HARK

They can't guard 'em both at once.

Nat considers. He looks from the map to Hark. Smiles.

EXT. JERUSALEM - MORNING

A thick fog rests on the town floor. The ARMORY sits quietly on a cul-de-sac.

EXT. JERUSALEM - BETHEL BRIDGE - MORNING

Silence, save the chirps of waking birds, until-

A figure on a horse trots near the bridge entrance. CLOSER to reveal its Will. He squints to the other side, sees nothing. He glances below the bridge to find SEVERAL REBELS creeping along the river bank, out of view. A dozen mounted rebels join Will at the bridge entrance. On cue they all FIRE BLINDLY toward Jerusalem.

WILL
Fall back!

He and the rebels turn, ride the way they came in retreat.
Within seconds-

GUNFIRE ERUPTS FROM THE JERUSALEM SIDE as a dozen MOUNTED
WHITES chase after, followed by more on foot.

Rebels rise from the riverbank, picking off the white
townsmen. Will and the rebels return, engaging, pushing the
whites across bridge towards town.

As the whites are pushed back, we ANGLE ON their flank where
NAT AND HARK ARRIVE OVER 50 STRONG. Chaos ensues as whites
are picked off on both sides.

NAT
(to Hark)
Now!

Hark and several others split the rank, ride toward the Cul-
de-sac.

Nat and the others battle as Hark positions himself and
others just outside the Armory. Hark WHISTLES.

Nat and several others break off, gallop toward the Armory
while Will and the remaining rebels chase down scattering
whites.

EXT. JERUSALEM - ARMORY - MOMENTS LATER

Nat dismounts and jogs to the Armory entrance, joining Hark
and his men.

NAT
Line up!

HARK
Guns comin'!

The rebels toss axes and shovels aside as Will and the others
arrive. Nat nods to a Rebel who aims, shoots the lock off the
Armory door. Nat surges the entrance.

INT. ARMORY - CONTINUOUS

Nat, Hark and others storm in to find dozens of stacked
crates.

NAT
Open em' up and pass 'em back!

The men begin cracking open the crates. Nat opens one himself and his face falls.

HIS POV to reveal-

The crates EMPTY, HEAVY STONES sit in place of guns.

NAT (CONT'D)
Get outside-

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Gunfire rips through the slat walls. Three rebels are hit.

Nat sprints out, just in time to see-

EXT. ARMORY - CONTINUOUS

-a bullet tear into Will's chest. Followed by another. And another. Will, lifts his rifle, returns fire before a bullet rips into his face. He falls, dead. Nat crawls past him, grabs a rifle. He eyes the treeline.

Over fifty INFANTRY OF THE STATE MILITIA stand, guns raised. *
Their fire power continues to perforate the Armory as Nat and the rebels duck under the hail of bullets. Hark crawls close. Nat has gathered three loaded guns.

NAT
Fall back past Nottaway. Regroup at
Cabin Pond! I'll keep 'em busy.

Hark crawls back as Nat fires at the militia. As he reloads, he looks back to see Hark leading the men backward, when-

BA-BA-BANG! Gunshots from the opposite direction. Hark is hit in the neck. Three others fall. Nat crawls to Hark, applies pressure to his neck, struggles to pull him to his feet.

NAT (CONT'D)
Come on, brother.

HARK(spits blood)
Go on. You gotta lead.

Nat looks around, scattered rebels lie flat avoiding the crossing bullets. Nat offers Hark a final look, before sprinting for the trees.

NAT
Come on!

Nat scoops an axe, darts for the trees. Several rebels rise and follow.

INT. SOUTHAMPTON VIRGINIA - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Nat darts through the woods alongside a few of his men. Finally, they stop. Only three rebels remain. Gunshots ring out in the distance. The men crowd in. Nat barks instruction, using his finger to draw a map in the dirt.

NAT

OK, we're right here, about three miles away from Cabin Pond. That's there we'll regroup. Any other survivors'll meet us there...

Nat takes in the faces of his men. A closer look shows they aren't men at all, but boys.

NAT (CONT'D)

How old are you?

REBEL BOY 1

Fifteen, suh.

REBEL BOY 2

Fourteen, suh.

Nat studies their scared faces. A long beat until-

NAT

You've done good. You've been brave in fighting...

(beat)

But, it's time to go home. If you get stopped on the way, tell them you didn't have anything to do with this. Tell them you ran when the killing started.

The boys slowly stand, unsure.

NAT (CONT'D)

Go'on, now.

They run off into the woods, leaving Nat alone.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - DISMAL SWAMP - DAY

Nat runs through the swamp, splashing through the soggy marsh. He stops at a massive overturned tree, catches his breath. He burrows beneath the tangled roots.

EXT. ARMORY - DAY

The militia men, led by General Childs, aide the injured and capture live rebels.

ANGLE ON a YOUNG WHITE SOLDIER, musket raised, as he arrives to Hark who holds his seeping wound. Hark eyes the soldier.

HARK
John Clark?

JOHN CLARK
(lowers his weapon)
Hey, Hark.

EXT. REESE PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

General Childs, joined by his LIEUTENANT, sits before Cherry. Elizabeth stands close, flanked by John Clark. We notice their hands clasped. Catherine and Nancy hover just behind. Nancy holds Joanna who cries.

GENERAL CHILDS
You don't know where he is?

CHERRY
No, suh.

CATHERINE
We haven't been to Samuel's in days.

GENERAL CHILDS
And he never mentioned nothing on a insurrection.

CHERRY
No, suh.

ELIZABETH TURNER
She's told you she doesn't know anything General.

GENERAL CHILDS
Elizabeth, I've known you a long time, and got a lot of respect for you and your family, but you're interfering with something real important. A lot of people were killed the last twenty-four hours.

ELIZABETH TURNER
I know. One of them was my son.

GENERAL CHILDS
(to Nancy)
So Samuel sent you here to 'help out'?

NANCY

Yes, suh.

GENERAL CHILDS

How long before the killin' did you
and the boy leave?

NANCY

Oh, suh, I don't know nothing about
no killin, suh-

GENERAL CHILDS

(to Lieutenant)

You got that boy outside, right?

LIEUTENANT

Yes, sir.

GENERAL CHILDS

Bring him in here.

(to Nancy)

Why would Samuel send a field hand
to help in the house?

CATHERINE

Our hands often go from field to
house when needed. Not every family
treats their slaves with your level
of savagery.

GENERAL CHILDS

Not every slave treats their
masters with the level of savagery
yours done.

Childs' lieutenant returns with a terrified Simon.

GENERAL CHILDS (CONT'D)

(to Simon)

Boy, what did Samuel tell you that
night? You lie to me, I'll kill ya.

SIMON

Massa Samuel told me to bring Miss
Nancy to help out for a day or two.

GENERAL CHILDS

And he gave you a pass?

SIMON

Yes, suh.

GENERAL CHILDS

You still got it?

Catherine goes to a nearby drawer, produces a crumpled piece of paper. General Childs examines it.

ELIZABETH TURNER
If you're done with your questions,
we'd like to get back to mourning.

General Childs tosses the paper, onto the table, along with several coins.

CATHERINE
What's that for?

GENERAL CHILDS
We're taking the boy.

Simon's face falls.

ELIZABETH TURNER
You most certainly are not!

GENERAL CHILDS
(to John Clark)
Let's go.

JOHN CLARK
Everything will be alright, mama.

They embrace before he joins General Childs, his Lieutenant and Simon. A long beat, until-

A BANG OS.

EXT. REESE PLANTATION - BIG HOUSE - SECONDS LATER

Simon lies dead on the lawn. General Childs mounts his horse, joins the other soldiers. John Clark lingers a bit, eyes Simon. Elizabeth exits, followed by Catherine, Cherry and Nancy. Elizabeth and John Clark lock eyes before he moves on.

A SERIES OF SHOTS

--A group of SLAVE TEENS kneel, hands tied, as a firing squad of VIGILANTES open fire.

-- A young black man is tied to a tree. White men douse him with kerosene. Tight on the white man that holds a flame.

-- We TRACK BACKWARDS on a country road. As we WIDEN, we see massive Cyprus trees on either side. Then- black bodies of all sizes hang like ornaments on the passing branches.

EXT. REESE PLANTATION - BACK YARD - DAY

Cherry hangs clothes near the treeline. Catherine sits on the porch in the distance, drifting in a rocking chair.

VOICE (O.S.)
(whisper)
Cherry...

Cherry freezes.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's Nat, love.
(then)
Keep on working.

She quakes visibly as she returns to the hanging clothes.

CHERRY
They looking for you.

NAT (O.S.)
Did they hurt you?

CHERRY
No.

NAT (O.S.)
How is Joanna?

CHERRY
She fine.

NAT (O.S.)
And Mama.

CHERRY
She fine too.

Cherry shoots a nervous glance toward Catherine.

NAT (O.S.)
You heard anything on the others?

CHERRY
They been hanged... All of them.
They killing people everywhere. For
no reason at all, but being black.
Say the killin' won't stop til they
get you...
(then)
All this time, I thought... I
thought you were dead, too.

NAT (O.S.)
I'm here... I'll always be.

CHERRY

I miss you so much...

No answer. She stops.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Nat?

CATHERINE (O.S.)

Cherry, who are you talking to?

Cherry turns to find Catherine just behind her. Cherry wipes her face. Catherine surveys the area, sees nothing.

CHERRY

I was just talking to myself...
wishing things was different.

Catherine regards her with compassion.

CATHERINE

Me too...

A long beat until-

Catherine pulls a wet shirt from the clothes basket, pins it to the line. They silently work in tandem.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON VIRGINIA - SWAMP - DAY

Militia men scour the swampy woods. We spot John Clark among them crossing a trickling creek. He slows to a stop, looks to his left and right.

A POV watches him.

A long beat before John Clark continues on. We follow a moment before drifting below the bank to reveal Nat crouched low. We linger on him, taking in his sunken eyes, overgrown beard and gaunt frame. His bullet wound festers, spills puss.

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON VIRGINIA - SWAMP - DAY

Nat shivers against the cold as he burrows in a frosted over hole. He pushes a few berries into his mouth chews as his eyes grow heavy and he drifts to sleep.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Nat stands waist deep in a lazily flowing river. His body healthy, without the festering wound. He slowly turns squints at something we don't yet see. WE REVERSE TO REVEAL-

A YOUNG BOY STANDS ON THE RIVER BANK. CLOSER TO REVEAL-

THE BOY IS YOUNG NAT. As Nat studies his younger self he smiles. As Young Nat smiles back-

EXT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Several stores have reopened, while others remain closed.
Scattered locals crisscross the dusty square.

Suddenly Nat enters frame. We take in his sunken eyes and gaunt frame as he lumbers forward. His bullet wound festers, spilling puss.

In the BG patrons notice him, break into hysterics.

ANGLE ON

A group of white men who approach.

WHITE MAN

Hey!

Nat continues to walk. As the mob grows, the men pounce.

One MAN cracks Nat in the jaw with a right. Another strikes him in the back of the head. A woman rips at his shirt. Within seconds, he is pulled to the ground, trampled beneath the feet of the rapidly growing crowd. The energy of the lynch mob intensifies, until-

BANG!

The crowd freezes. We REVERSE to reveal GENERAL CHILDS, holds the smoking gun. He's flanked by his lieutenant.

GENERAL CHILDS

I know you're angry, trust me, I understand. But, this man has committed mass murder and will stand trial.

As he approaches, the mob reluctantly backs off. General Childs arrives to Nat who lies in a bloody heap.

EXT. JERUSALEM - COURTHOUSE - DAY

A violent mob has formed a dense ring around the court house building. General Childs' soldiers stand disciplined guard.

INT. JERUSALEM - CELL - SAME

A narrow, windowless cell- just beneath the building. We find Nat shackled to the cell's floor, his face severely swollen. His eyes closed in prayer.

In the BG, we hear the steel door UNLOCK. The door swings open and THOMAS GRAY, (60's) a lawyer and slave owner) enters. He carries a stack of papers and a wooden chair.

THOMAS R. GRAY
Nathaniel Turner, My name is Thomas
R. Gray, and I'm here to represent
your interest in the charges
against you.

Gray plops the chair down. Nat's eyes open.

THOMAS R. GRAY (CONT'D)
May I sit?

No response. Nat just stares forward. Gray sits.

THOMAS R. GRAY (CONT'D)
I haven't been sent or appointed by
anyone. I'm acting completely on my
own conviction.

Gray flashes a duplicitous smile. Still, Nat doesn't respond.

THOMAS R. GRAY (CONT'D)
I'm gonna ask you some questions
about the incidents that've taken
place over the last few days. My
hope isn't to exploit, but to
properly inform. Cus, you see, if
the story isn't properly told by
you, you can bet it will be by the
mischievous reports of others.

(no response)
I'm trying to help you tell your
side, while you got time.
(beat)
Boy, don't you know you're about to
die?

NAT
Was not Christ too crucified?

Gray, realizing his time is being wasted, stands abruptly.

THOMAS R. GRAY
(toward the exit)
Deputy!

Gray exits, leaving Nat in the same position as when he came.

*
*

EXT. JERUSALEM - COURTHOUSE - MORNING

THOUSANDS of spectators- white men, women and children flood into the area surrounding the courthouse.

INT. SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY - CELL - DAY

Nat sits in his cell, his eyes fixed forward. A SHERIFF appears just past the bars.

SHERIFF

It's time.

EXT. JERUSALEM - COURTHOUSE - DAY

Nat is led up a narrow staircase and onto the wooden platform. He studies the multitude of people that stretch as far as the eye can see.

Nat spots John Clark. A million words unspoken as the Sheriff fits a noose around Nat's neck. Nat's eyes then drift to Jasper who stands just off Joseph Randall's shoulder. He studies Jasper who struggles to hold his gaze.

Nat's face softens a beat, as he offers the faintest nod of forgiveness.

The sheriff motions for the roaring crowd to settle. Within minutes, the area is near silent, save a few scattered slurs.

SHERIFF

(to Nat)

Somethin' you wanna' to say first?

Nat regards the people. Then, with a firm voice-

NAT

I'm ready.

The sheriff exits and the crowd's energy escalates to near fever pitch. The UNDERTAKER draws the rope of the pulley and Nat's body rises several feet above the platform.

SOUND DROPS. Not a limb or a muscle moves as Nat hangs still as a stone.

CLOSE On Nat's face as he stares forward, as if frozen. UNTIL-

Something above catches his eye. His eyes flit upward toward something we don't yet see.

Nat's POV to reveal-

A WHITE DOVE CIRCLES JUST ABOVE.

ON NAT. Even through the pain, the slightest smile grows. Seconds later, we watch his eyes slowly CLOSE.

ON JASPER, who squeezes his eyes shut, his body trembling through sobs.

PUSH IN on Jasper. CLOSER until his face fills the frame.

We watch as he AGES before our eyes. His features mature, his jaw widens, age lines crawl across his brow. He slowly opens his eyes and we see Jasper, now a grown man. The shame gone, only a fierceness remains.

We slowly pull back as sound gradually returns. Muffled blasts and explosions permeate. We continue our pull to reveal-

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Jasper dons a blue FORAGE HAT and SACK COAT, white-knuckling a bayonet-fitted rifle. We reveal other black soldiers on either side. The explosions are now deafening as the group of men clinch their jaws in anticipation. After an arduous beat-

VOICE (O.C.)

CHARGE!

Jasper and his fellow soldiers belt out battle cries as they rush the camera, bayonets pointed. Jasper raises his rifle and BANG! A cloud of smoke takes us to-

BLACK

SUPER:

After Nat Turner's hanging, his body was skinned and dismembered. His skin was sewn into wallets and purses, his flesh churned into grease- all to be sold at the local market.

FADE IN

NAT TURNER, healthy and strong, stands staring into camera for a long beat.

SUPER: A prophet. A preacher. An American hero. His flesh was destroyed, but Nat Turner's legacy of resistance will live on forever.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END