

UNDERGROUND

by

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&

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OVER BLACK

A HIP HOP COVER of "WADE IN THE WATER" rises on the track. It's SOULFUL. GUTTURAL. And DRIVES us relentlessly through the following...

SMASH UP ON:

An IMMEDIATE, HAND-HELD, FRENETIC angle of a
BLACK MAN RUNNING

through the PITCH BLACK woods. His weathered feet pound the dirt like a machine. Nothing in the world but what he's running from, or to. MEN'S SHOUTS and BARKING DOGS echo through the trees, clashing with the HIP HOP BASS.

The Black Man (NOAH) cuts left, bulldozing through the thick branches, clearing a path for the

BLACK WOMEN (BOO) and 14-YEAR-OLD BOY (DAVID)

on his heels. The two are connected by interlocking hands. A death grip. They're not letting go of each other. Fear fills their eyes. Boo throws her head back. Has to know --

BOO

Which way they comin' from?

SUDDENLY -- a BLUR comes at Boo. Drags her to the ground in a fury of SNARLS. Her tight grip on David snaps him to the ground as well. He scrambles back as the BLOOD HOUND tears viciously into Boo. She SCREAMS as it rips her to shreds.

Noah grabs a THICK LOG. Swings. The dog FLIES off Boo with a whelp. Teeth snapping. David squeezes his eyes shut as Noah brings the log down -- SILENCING the dog's snarls with a sickening crack of its skull.

NOAH

David, we got to keep runnin'.

David opens his eyes. Noah pulls a bloody Boo into his arms. She WAILS. In excruciating pain. One of her legs hang by the SINEWY LIGAMENTS, almost ripped completely off.

There's no running to be had now. Just quick stumbling -- through branches, over thick roots. David side by side with Noah, and Boo moaning in his arms. The SHOUTS and BARKS close in. Noah and David stop on a dime.

FIRE LIGHT BOBS IN THE DISTANCE

like a ghost. Coming their way. The fire splits into two. Noah spots a small cave of OVERGROWN MANGROVE ROOTS --

NOAH (CONT'D)

Get down in there. Quick --

David crawls in. Noah drops to his knees. Tries to soothe the still MOANING Boo --

NOAH (CONT'D)

You got to be quiet now. They comin' for us.

He shoves her into the tiny space. Jagged roots dig into her shredded body. She cries out in pain as he climbs in behind her. David panics as the fire light inches closer --

DAVID

They gone hear her.

Boo writhes in pain. Continues to moan. Too out of it to know she's going to give them away. David pulls her into his arms. Puts a hand over her mouth, MUFFLING her cries.

From this low angle, Noah and David get just a faint outline of the FIGURES carrying torches in the distance. They trace the light with their eyes. The PULSING HIP HOP BASS highlights the TENSION. SUDDENLY --

A PAIR OF DIRTY BOOTS

step into view not five feet from them. CLOSE ON Noah and David as they stop breathing. Boo continues to moan, she's going to give them away. Noah tightens his grip on Boo. Keeping her as still as possible. As quiet as possible.

It's a breathless moment. The boots linger. Turn to towards the overgrown mangrove roots. Firelight washes over half of Noah's face. Every muscle in it is TENSE with anticipation...

A beat. Then a SHOUT from the Figures in the distance draws the owner of the boots attention. He moves quickly off.

As the footsteps recede in the distance, Noah and David take deep, relieved breaths. Noah checks to make sure the coast is clear. There's no time to waste --

NOAH

We got to keep movin' --

DAVID

Noah...

David's staring at Noah with wild, confused eyes. No, he's not staring at Noah, he's staring at Boo. She's staring back at him with DEAD EYES. Noah's hand still over her mouth. Noah stares down at her, a sick realization coming over him --

NOAH

Boo...?

He removes his hand. Moonlight bounces off the BLUE TINT of her lips. Her head slumps to the side. LIFELESS.

NOAH (CONT'D)

No no no no...

He grabs Boo up in his arms. Propping her up. Trying to shake some life into her. David just watches. Shell shocked. NOAH SUFFOCATED BOO WHILE HE WAS ATTEMPTING TO KEEP HER QUIET!

SMASH TO BLACK.

The cover of "WADE IN THE WATER" reaches a CRESCENDO as 11 letters assault the screen --

UNDERGROUND

As the MUSIC DROPS OUT, only a soft HUM lingers. It's SOOTHING. HYPNOTIC. And DRIFTS like a lullaby, carrying us to...

EXT. MACON PLANTATION - DAY

The sweltering August sun beats down on a show piece of the South. 20,000 acres of WILLOW TREES and rolling GRASS interrupted by -- THE BIG HOUSE, BARNS, SLAVE QUARTERS, a SILO, and the snow white COTTON FIELDS.

SUPER: **ALABAMA 1857.**

DOZENS of SLAVES fill the burlap sacks hanging around their necks. An OVERSEER sits tall and proud on his horse, a hand on the WHIP at his side as he moves along the field's edge.

From this BIRD'S EYE VIEW, we see a BLACK MAN plow out of the field, running towards the Big House in the distance.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - THE BIG HOUSE - DAY

Find the source of the HUMMING -- a MULATTO FEMALE HOUSE SLAVE tends the flower beds lining the rail. It's obvious she takes pride in these flowers. We get the sense this is a "stolen moment" for her. Not just another of many chores.

This is ERNESTINE WRIGHT. Late 30's. The head house slave. A woman with bearing, she has a fire inside of her that could warm a house. Or burn it down. Whatever's necessary.

The Black Man stumbles onto the porch. Ernestine's eyes shoot to the open screen door --

ERNESTINE

Henry, what are you doin'? You can't
be up on this here porch.

HENRY desperately sucks in air in an attempt to speak.

HENRY

I's sorry momma...but it...done come
early...

Ernestine's eyes WIDEN. "Early" is not a good sign. The
AGONIZING SCREAMS of LABOR drag us to --

INT. SLAVE SHACK - DAY

A YOUNG SLAVE GIRL (SERAPHINA) clutches her stomach in a
fetal position on the straw bed. Her face distorted in the
kind of pain only a mother can know. Her HUSBAND (BO) paces.
Raw with nerves as Ernestine blows in with Henry in tow --

ERNESTINE

Tell me what happened --

BO

We's was out in the field. She fell
holdin' her stomach.

Ernestine notices BLOOD between the girl's legs. Not a good
sign. But she remains calm, in control, she looks to Henry --

ERNESTINE

You seen Rosalee?

HENRY

I thought she was with you.

ERNESTINE

Go find her. Tell her to come quick.

Henry's out the door as Ernestine turns to Bo --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Where you keep your clothes?

BO

In that corner over there.

Ernestine unceremoniously strips out of her dress as she
moves to the corner. Bo's eyes WIDEN --

BO (CONT'D)

Miz Ernestine --

She pulls on one of Seraphina's raggedy dresses.

ERNESTINE

Ain't nothin' bout child birth polite,
Bo. You ain't gonna be no help you
stand around slack-jawed at every
turn. Now go fill this bowl with as
much water as you can.

She hands him a bowl, as Bo leaves, Seraphina MOANS in pain --

SERAPHINA

It hurts... It hurts so much...

Ernestine rolls up her sleeves. Softens --

ERNESTINE

Shhhh. It's alright now. You goin'
be alright.

SERAPHINA

It's too soon.

ERNESTINE

That's for the baby to decide, not
you or me. Go on an open your legs
for me now.

Bo returns with the bowl of water just as Ernestine gets
Seraphina into birthing position. He sets it at Ernestine's
feet. Shaking with nerves. Spilling too much of the water
in the process.

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Seraphina, you got to push for me
now. Push as hard as you can.

Seraphina SCREAMS in agony as she pushes. Henry comes in.
Shakes his head to Ernestine. He couldn't find Rosalee.
Ernestine refocuses on Seraphina --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Keep pushing for me...

Another push. Another agonizing SCREAM. Ernestine's features
register TROUBLE --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Hold on hold on hold on...

SERAPHINA

It hurts...

ERNESTINE

I know it hurts, but listen to me.
You got to stop pushing now.

BO

What's wrong?

ERNESTINE

Baby's turned about. Got to come out head first. Or neither them gone make it.

Seraphina WAILS in despair. Bo is struck dumb by the news. Henry just observes quietly. Ernestine takes a deep breath. Steeling herself --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Henry, get the clothes in the corner. Bo, you get something to put in her mouth. Miz Suzanna gonna throw a fit she hear all this noise up at the big house.

BO

Whatchoo's gonna do?

ERNESTINE

I got to turn the baby around.

As she reaches DEEP between Seraphina's legs --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

(under her breath:)

Where are you when I need you, Rosalee...

CUT TO:

A FEMALE HOUSE SLAVE opens a felt box, revealing a SILK TIE. This is ROSALEE WRIGHT. 19. She has a quiet, shy bearing. As delicate as the flowers her mother cultivates. As she runs her fingers over the tie with reverence, POP WIDE to...

INT. BEDROOM - OVERSEER'S CABIN - DAY

...a WHITE MAN stands before the mirror in his Sunday best. Admiring himself. He's handsome and knows it. This is JACKSON MEEKES. 21. The type that swaggers even when he's standing still. But there's depth in his soulful eyes. They're full of dreams and promise. Ambition.

JACKSON

The sales lady said this was the look "du jour" in New York city. It's some kind of French word. Don't know what it means, but it sounds fancy.

Jackson throws Rosalee a proud smile as she brings the tie over. Wraps it around his neck.

Deftly loops it over, under, and pulls it through.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Well, how do I look?

They both stare at his reflection. Both not used to what they see. The clothes don't quite fit.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Who am I kiddin'? I'm not going to fool anybody. My father's poor roots run through and through.

He fidgets. Uncomfortable. Pulls at the sleeves.

ROSALEE

I think you look handsome.

Jackson stops. Catches Rosalee's eyes in the mirror. They stare at each other for quite a long time, until...

Rosalee gets self-conscious. Breaks the look as she goes to tighten his tie, but Jackson pulls her into a

KISS

instead. Rosalee melts into it. Then she's pulling off his tie. And he's undoing the buttons on the back of her dress. As they drag each other's clothes off...

INT. OVERSEER'S CABIN/SLAVE SHACK - DAY (INTERCUT)

We'll juxtapose Rosalee and Jackson's LOVEMAKING with CHILD BIRTH. Both SWEATY. Both INTENSE. Both incredibly INTIMATE.

Ernestine is a force to be reckoned with. Barking orders to the men. Soothing Seraphina. Elbow deep in blood and sweat. In full control of the risky delivery.

Rosalee rolls on top of Jackson. Their bodies glistening with sweat. She moves with purpose. Writhing. Grinding. The passion from this quiet girl surprises. Glimpses of her rich inner life spill out into her desperate lovemaking.

As Rosalee CRIES OUT at CLIMAX, Ernestine holds up a CRYING, HEALTHY BABY BOY. It's a CACOPHONY of LIFE, that contrasts...

INT. BEDROOM - OVERSEER'S CABIN - DAY

...the SILENCE now filling the air. Jackson casually pulls on his pants as Rosalee grabs up her undergarments. Dressing quickly. Tension rolling through her body. It breaks Jackson's heart to see her like this.

JACKSON

He's out in the field until sundown.

Rosalee steps into her dress. Reaches behind for the buttons.

ROSALEE

I been gone from the big house too long already.

Jackson moves to her. Helps with the buttons that are hard for her to reach. Rosalee relaxes with his hands on her.

JACKSON

I hate that you're scared when you're with me.

ROSALEE

I ain't scared of you.

JACKSON

I know. You're scared of getting caught. And that's smart. The longer we keep sneaking around here, the more likely that's going to happen.

A beat. Jackson takes a full breath, he's going to need it for what he's about to say --

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I don't want to wait anymore. I just want to do it. Run.

Rosalee turns to him. Is he serious? He is.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

We go Sunday. Everybody'd think you was at church, by the time they wise up, we on a stage coach. Got enough saved for two tickets and then some.

(re: his Sunday bests)

Just a wealthy southern gentlemen traveling up North for business with his slave. It's a good plan.

Rosalee is FLOORED. Doesn't know how to respond. She grabs JACKSON'S SHOES off the floor. Displays them to him --

ROSALEE

Anybody see these shoes, all old and ratty, they know you ain't wealthy.

JACKSON

Then I'll get new ones.

ROSALEE

In four days?

Jackson takes the shoes from Rosalee. Tosses them --

JACKSON

We've been planning this for months,
Rosalee. I know it's going to work --

ROSALEE

They gone send somebody after me...

JACKSON

The stage coach will take us through
Georgia. We'd have a two day lead.
Be cross the Ohio before they even
realize we ain't on foot.

Jackson watches Rosalee struggle with the decision. He takes
her hands --

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Up North, you're going to be free.
Nobody's going to care if we're
together. And you remember those
pictures I showed you? All them
cities up there are built with iron
and steel. With my trade, we ain't
never going to want for money. I'll
live like a king, not just some
overseer's son. I'm sick of dreaming
about it, I want it...

Jackson's enthusiasm is contagious. Rosalee smiles.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

And I want you with me. Always.
And not scared, just happy. Say
you'll come be happy with me.

A beat. Then Rosalee nods. She'll come. Jackson breaks
into the widest grin. Embraces her.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Up North, everything's gonna get
better...

PULL IN on Rosalee's reflection in the mirror as the DOUBT
creeps back into her features...

CUT TO:

An EAGLE crests the deep blue, Northern sky, REVEALING a
sweeping view of the NATION'S CAPITAL. Up this high, it's
PRISTINE. ICONIC. And we SWOOP DOWN...

EXT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

...all the way down, to the marble steps outside the north wing. Things are less iconic down here. MUD traipsed all over the steps. Horse drawn WAGONS push through the CROWDED STREET. Too many PEOPLE, with too many places to go.

CLUNK. SCRAPE. CLUNK. SCRAPE.

A WOODEN PODIUM is dragged up the steps by a WHITE MAN in an impeccable suit. He's already sweating through it, but he's determined to get to the top of those steps. Because he's got something to say.

This is JOHN HAWKES. Mid-30's. His brow creased from too much thinking. A man constantly trying to reconcile the way things are, with the way they should be.

INT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

Wigs and powder. Pomp and circumstance. Several WHITE BARRISTERS conference at a table. A GALLERY of WHITE FACES sit in the pews behind them.

On the other side of the room, the only BLACK MAN sits at a table by himself. He's old and tired. Intimidated, but no stranger to a courtroom.

All rise as NINE WHITE SUPREME COURT JUSTICES file in...

EXT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

Busy CITY DWELLERS eye John as they pass. Who is he? Why did he drag that podium all the way up there? John explains --

JOHN

My name is John Hawkes. I am a lawyer from Ohio. I stand before you today, because the future of our country is being decided inside that courtroom. Dred Scott, by law, is not allowed a defense, and he is not allowed to defend himself. But I believe someone should speak for him...

INT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

The SANDFORD LAWYER paces. Speaks with Yankee confidence --

SANDFORD LAWYER

Mr. Sanford has respectfully rejected the suit, and is requesting his rightful property be returned to him post-haste, in compliance with the Missouri Supreme Court decision...

DRED SCOTT tries to maintain his dignity as the white men in the room speak about him, but never to him...

EXT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

A few People have taken interest. Stopped to listen. Others walk on, considering it nonsense.

JOHN

There are three legal questions in front of this court. The first, is about jurisdiction. Does a federal court even have the right to hear Dred Scott's case?

INT./EXT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - DAY (INTERCUT)

As John makes the unofficial case for Scott outside, the Sanford Lawyer makes his case where it matters --

SANFORD LAWYER

Article three, section two of our constitution deems all negroes are beings of an inferior order. So far inferior, that they have no rights in which the white man is bound to respect. So excuse my frankness, but what in God's name are we even doing here today?

John orates the counter to that argument --

JOHN

If the Negro has no rights in this great court, then he, by definition, is not bound by its laws. Therefore...

That statement is met with some VERBAL DISSENT from the SMALL CROWD that has formed. John plows through it --

JOHN (CONT'D)

Therefore, Mr. Scott should be let back to Illinois, the free state in which he made his home after his master's death. And that speaks directly to the second question posed, that of geography. Since Scott lived in the free state of Illinois, did he become free while living there? Should Missouri have to recognize that freedom? Exactly how united are our states?

The Sanford Lawyer carelessly tosses some documents to the FEMALE CLERK. Gives her a lascivious smile.

He knows he's got this in the bag --

SANFORD LAWYER

The provision of the Missouri compromise declaring it to be a free territory was beyond Congress's power to enact in the first place. Not much more to elaborate on that...

John looks over the crowd. Makes eye contact with a BLACK MAN -- late 30's. Dignified. Eyes burning with knowledge and secrets. A strong presence. And not just because he's the only black face as far as the eye can see.

JOHN

The third question, is actually not a questions at all. It is what we solicitors call a "parade of horrors..."

BAM! The Sanford Lawyer slams his hand down on the table.
RILED UP --

SANFORD LAWYER

Let us not belittle what we are contemplating here today. Siding with Dred Scott would mean any person of the negro race has the right to enter into any state that they damn well please...

John is deeply ashamed by this ploy --

JOHN

It's a trick in which we declare that a decision we do not agree with, will open the floodgates to hell. Promising the end of the world if the attorney does not get his way...

The Sanford Lawyer gets HOTTER as he winds up to his finish --

SANFORD LAWYER

...to hold public meetings upon political affairs, and to keep and carry arms wherever they go. The fundamentals of our economy would collapse, ending every Christian way of life as we know it. We let one run, they are all going to run.

And it's John's turn to finish up --

JOHN

Our nation was founded by those fleeing religious persecution across the Atlantic, the grandest of state lines. I ask you, is not the plight of Dred Scott but a noble extension of that same manifest destiny?

John looks to the crowd. Expectant. But it's already dispersing. His passionate words met with indifference.

EXT. LIVERY STABLES - DAY

Tired GENTLEMEN ready their horses for the commute home. John's stripped out of his suit jacket. Struggles to drag his heavy podium onto the wagon attached to his two horses --

DIGNIFIED BLACK MAN (O.S.)

That was a thought provoking speech.

The Black Man grabs the other end of the podium. Helps John slide it into the wagon.

JOHN

Good to know at least one person was listening. Thank you.

The Black Man holds out a hand --

DIGNIFIED BLACK MAN

Allow me to introduce myself. The name is William Still.

John stops mid-handshake. He knows the name.

STILL

Did I say something wrong?

JOHN

I've heard of you. Of what you do.

STILL

Through discreet circles, I hope.

Still's eyes move to the other Gentlemen readying and mounting their horses. He lowers his voice --

STILL (CONT'D)

What I do, is why I have sought you and your horses out this evening.

JOHN

Is that so? Are you in need of a lawyer or a nag?

STILL

I'm in need of a home. Yours, in particular. It's location along the Ohio river could be very advantageous to the cause.

JOHN

I'm afraid I don't follow you.

John packs his bags, finding himself some busy work. Still is used to this exact response to such requests.

STILL

I believe you do. You spoke passionately about the rights of all men, today. And it fell on deaf ears. You don't seem like the type that sits well with.

John stops. Still's right. That doesn't sit well with him.

STILL (CONT'D)

There will always be a time for words, but what actions are you willing to take now?

John considers for a beat. Finally --

JOHN

I admire what you do, Mr. Still. And in another life, I'd like to think that I could be a man that would help your cause...

STILL

But not in this one?

JOHN

As a lawyer, my entire foundation is built on respect for the law. Not just the ones I agree with. And it's my aim to move the legal-line in my professional capacity. But to do so, in earnest, I cannot cross it. I hope you can understand that.

Still nods. He does understand that. But --

STILL

Mr. Hawkes, you might be telling yourself that you're just one man. That you wouldn't matter.

(MORE)

STILL (CONT'D)

But our cause only works with people
like you. Who are smart enough to
know the system is broken...

CUT TO:

DRIFT ACROSS a BULLETIN BOARD covered in YELLOWED ESCAPED
SLAVE POSTERS. A visual compliment to Still's last words --

STILL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...and there are those who don't
have the luxury of waiting until it
is fixed.

The NEWEST POSTER reads --

"From subscriber residing in Georgia county.
\$500 Reward!
NEGRO MAN SLAVE, NAMED NOAH
NEGRESS SLAVE, NAMED BOO
& NEGRO BOY, NAMED DAVID"

A crude sketch of LEGS IN CHAINS accompanies descriptions of
the escaped slaves in question. POP WIDE to find...

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

...a WHITE MAN looking over the poster with concern. This
is AUGUST PULLMAN. Early 40's. Tired and textured by life,
but still handsome enough to turn an eye. Two REVOLVERS are
ever present at his sides.

POSTMASTER (O.S.)

Alright, August, let's give it a
read.

August turns from the bulletin board, a LETTER in hand. He
gives it to the POSTMASTER as he settles in behind his desk.
The Postmaster opens it, quite used to reading to illiterates --

POSTMASTER (CONT'D)

"Mister Pullman, thank you for your
prompt payment of Charlotte's bill
for the last quarter. She is an
important patient to us, and we want
to continue to give her the attention
her condition requires. We have
made great steps forward, but she
takes one or two backwards from time
to time, her latest, injuring one of
our orderlies at lights out."

That breaks August's heart as he continues to listen --

POSTMASTER (CONT'D)

"We have included costs for his medical bills on top of fees for her treatment, which is at a critical stage. We have nothing but high hopes for her future. And you are a big part of that. As always, your prompt payment is appreciated."

The Postmaster slides over the INVOICE. August pulls out a small coin purse. Starts counting out coins.

POSTMASTER (CONT'D)

If I may say...this is the third time they've asked for more money.

August nods. He knows he's probably getting scammed, but --

AUGUST

She needs help. And it's the best hospital in the country.

And that's the simple truth that trumps all, so he finishes counting out coins. And it's everything he's got. The Postmaster looks at him in pity. August hates that look --

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Would you send a letter as well?

The Postmaster nods. Grabs pen and paper. A beat. August struggles to find the words, then --

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Dear Charlotte. I hope you are well. Getting well. Ben...Jay...and I, we all miss you. Your loving husband.

Short. To the point. But moving. The Postmaster looks to August. That all? August nods. That's all.

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE - OF ATLANTA - DAY

August rides his horse, pulling a small covered wagon. He slows to navigate around a wagon in the middle of the road. BOO'S BODY is slung carelessly in the back. Sitting up front is JIM MCNULTY. The leader of the McNulty brothers.

August makes eye contact with him. Years of HATRED passes between the two men as the BAYING OF HOUNDS fill the air.

The other 2/3's of the McNulty brothers (HAROLD & PETE) burst from the tree line. Harold holds the leashes of THREE BLOOD THIRSTY HUNTING DOGS. Pete drags Noah along. He's been CHEWED bloody by the dogs.

PETE

Wooweeee. We got us another one,
Jim. Means that last nigger gotta
be close.

August tenses. Doesn't like the fact that they've caught Noah, but he forces himself to continue on his way as Jim hops off the wagon, and Pete pushes Noah to the ground.

JIM

Where the rest of your filthy kin?

Noah's mouth is shut tight. Harold loosens his grip on the dog's leashes. They bite at Noah's heels.

HAROLD

You better open your mouth, boy. Or
I'mma let my dogs get another taste...

August rounds a bend in the road...

EXT. ANOTHER PART - OF THE GEORGIAN WOODS - DAY

...to NOAH'S SCREAMS echoing through the trees, and he kicks his horse into a full TROT now. His eyes going to the ground. Desperately searching... searching...until he sees

FOOTPRINTS

Barely noticeable if you didn't know what you were looking for. But August knows. He hops off his horse. Leads it between the trees. Making sure to cover the footprints with his own tracks as he goes.

The footprints stop suddenly, but August continues on. Leading his horse to the edge of a small stream a few feet ahead. He strokes her gently. As she laps up the water --

AUGUST

About a hundred yards down the road,
there are three slave-catchers making
their way towards here. They got
your friends, and they got dogs.

Is he talking to his horse? A beat. There's some RUSTLING from the bushes where the footprints stopped, and --

David steps out. HEAVY ROCK in hand. And he's ready to use it. August has 100 pounds on him, but he's not going to go down without a fight. August doesn't reach for his guns.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Where you headed?

David remains silent. Doesn't trust August. The BAYING of HOUNDS rise in the distance.

AUGUST (CONT'D)
 Alright then, good luck to you.

He goes to climb on his horse, but --

DAVID
 We's tried to follow the drinkin' gourd...

David's still wary of August, but desperate.

AUGUST
 You did a fair job at that, but you wound up on the wrong side of the city of Atlanta. Here.

August grabs a nearby stick. Outlines the EASTERN SEABOARD in the dirt. He traces their route --

AUGUST (CONT'D)
 From where you stand, there are two routes north: Chelsea Savannah, or Ohio River. This time of year, best bet is the Ohio. She's low, and easy to cross. And once you do, there are far more people willing to help you along the way.

DAVID
 How you know so much?

AUGUST
 I've made the trip a few times myself. Usually at night, when the hiding's easier.

David sends August a bewildered look. Could he have lucked out and found a Conductor on the railroad?

AUGUST (CONT'D)
 Your only clear route to the river from here is back through town.

DAVID
 Ain't no way I's gone make it without someone seeing me.

A long HOWL reaches them through the trees. Closer now. The McNulty brothers and their dogs are on the move. August makes a quick decision.

AUGUST

You will if I take you through hidden in my wagon. Wipe your hands hard on the trees over there. Get all your sweat and stank on them. Then walk your footprints off into the stream. Got to throw off the scent for the dogs.

While David does exactly that, August adjusts his SACKS and BLANKETS, making room for David. VOICES float through the trees. The McNulty's are dangerously close. August signals David to hurry up --

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Make sure you step in your same footprints. No new ones.

David hops back through his footprints. Scrambles into the wagon. August takes a sack filled with COFFEE BEANS, pours it over David, then covers him with a blanket. He quickly throws a few more coffee beans on the ground around the wagon. Masking the scent. And --

THE DOGS

burst through the trees, on the hunt. Harold tugged along by their leashes. Then comes Pete. Followed by Jim on his horse, Noah running after, tied by a rope to the reigns.

The dogs come across the area August dumped the coffee beans. They circle in confusion for a moment, then pick up the FALSE SCENT August had David plant. Harold sees the footprints into the water --

HAROLD

That nigger took to the stream.

Harold disappears down the stream, dragged by the excited dogs. Pete moves to follow but --

JIM

Hold up.

He dismounts from his horse. Eyes August with suspicion. August is about to climb on his horse, but --

JIM (CONT'D)

August, helluva random place for you to stop to water your horse.

AUGUST

It's the last stop on the way home.

PETE

You seen any niggers round here?

Pete has circled around August, so they've got him boxed in now. He remains casual --

AUGUST

You know I wouldn't tell you if I had, Pete. Now I don't want any trouble. I'm gonna be on my way...

JIM

Not before I take a look in your wagon --

Jim reaches for the blanket, and -- August's hand shoots out like LIGHTNING -- grabs Jim's, and TWISTS. Something CRACKS as Jim screams in agony. Pete reaches for his gun, but August already has one of his REVOLVERS pointed between Pete's eyes --

AUGUST

Like I said, I'm gonna be on my way.

August lets go of Jim, and before he can even straighten up, August has his second revolver aimed at his head. As August motions for the McNulty brother to get on, it's pretty clear he's not a man to be fucked with...

EXT. THE BIG HOUSE - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

White columns. Wrap-around porch on both levels. Flower beds line two dozen windowsills. "Big" doesn't do it justice. "Grand" might. Rosalee slips inside through the back door...

INT. KITCHEN - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

A bustle of activity surrounding dinner preparation. HOUSE SLAVES prepare dishes for serving. A BLACK BOY sits at a small table in the corner, pushing green beans around on his plate. This is JAMES WRIGHT. 7. Ernestine's youngest. As Rosalee enters, slipping into an apron --

JAMES

Momma was lookin' for you.

A HOUSE SLAVE (CORRA) pulls fresh rolls out of the oven. Rosalee sets about placing them into a bread basket.

ROSALEE

(Mind your business.)
Eat your green beans.

Ernestine blows through the door leading to the dining room.

ERNESTINE

They ready for the next course.
Sarah, Liddy...

Her eyes fall on Rosalee. Narrow in disapproval. Nice of her to join them. Rosalee avoids her mother's stern gaze.

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

...Rosalee. Let's move.

Ernestine holds the door open as LIDDY and SARAH carry salad plates out. Rosalee follows with the bread basket, but --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Fix your hair.

An awkward beat. Ernestine waits while Rosalee quickly tightens a loose braid. Satisfied once it's finished, Ernestine ushers Rosalee into...

INT. DINING ROOM - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

...where their demeanors change completely. Eyes down. Demure posture. Light steps. Quiet as mice. So as not to disturb the MACON FAMILY in the middle of their lavish dinner.

TOM MACON (early 50's) sits at the head of the table. Across from him sits a very pregnant SUZANNA MACON (late 30's). A HOUSE SLAVE at her feet, rubbing away. Also at the table are MARY MACON (15) and T.R. MACON (8).

SUZANNA

Why don't we just invite all the slaves? Seeing as we're inviting everybody else.

TOM

Honey, don't be ridiculous. We're not inviting everybody, just the important bodies.

As Rosalee and the other Slaves serve, Ernestine takes her spot in front of the kitchen door. Arms crossed. Eyes scanning. Ready to anticipate the needs of the MACON FAMILY before they have them.

SUZANNA

Please explain to me how the Willowsets are important.

It would be easy to blame Suzanna's mood swings on the hormones, but she's always been uptight and bitchy.

TOM

Carver Willowset is about to become a deacon. And you know how important the church vote is. You can't be mayor in this county unless you kiss the lord's...ring.

Tom has all the breeding of a fine southern gentlemen, and an easy disposition that conceals his ruthless ambition.

MARY

Surely you're not inviting Willow Willowset to my party? That girl is as much fun as a Sunday sermon.

Mary will be pretty once all her baby fat goes away. Until then, she'll hide it under the brightest, frilliest dresses she can find.

SUZANNA

You could use some less excitable friends.

MARY

Does anybody care that this is my sweet sixteen party, not a campaign rally for daddy to be mayor?

Nobody's paying attention to T.R. sneaking his green beans under the table to the dog.

T.R.

I don't.

Mary sticks her tongue out at her little brother.

TOM

Sweetie pie, trust me, Friday night will be all about you. And remember, the more guest, the more presents.

SUZANNA

This thing has turned into a circus. I'm exhausted just thinking about it.

TOM

The last thing I want to do is exhaust my beautiful pregnant wife. That is why I asked Avery to send over his house niggers --

SUZANNA

As if the slaves can do anything without my constance instruction.

Ernestine feels the sting of that, but keeps her vacant smile on as Rosalee, finished serving, quietly takes her place beside her mother. T.R. is hit with a wonderful realization --

T.R.

There's going to be cake, isn't there?

TOM

At least somebody is excited. There's definitely going to be cake, son.

SUZANNA

Vanilla, your favorite.

MARY

I've been thinking on it, and I want a chocolate cake.

Suzanna's obvious annoyance makes Mary smile.

SUZANNA

We already decided on vanilla.

MARY

It's whatever I want, right Daddy?

All eyes turn to Tom. And ever the politician --

TOM

Indeed. We'll have the kitchen make both. That won't be a problem will it, Ernestine?

ERNESTINE

No suh, won't be a problem at all.

OFF TOM and his placating smile...

EXT. BANKS OF - THE OHIO RIVER - NIGHT

Moonlight sparkles off the calm river. Its quiet serenity is disturbed as John's horses SPLASH through, pulling John and his wagon along. As they make their way up the bank, a

BEAUTIFUL COLONIAL HOME

comes into view in the distance. Warm lamp light fills the windows. It's cozy. Inviting. A beacon of safety in a world of dark wilderness. John takes it in. William Still's words fresh in his mind.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - HAWKES'S HOME - NIGHT

Ornate furnishings. This is obviously the home of someone with good taste, and enough money to satiate it.

John lets himself in. Sets his suitcase by the coat rack --

JOHN
Elizabeth...?

John is answered by a loud *THUD!* His features register more curiosity than concern. He heads down the...

INT. BACK HALLWAY - HAWKES'S HOME - NIGHT

...to find a GAPING HOLE in the wall. *THUD!* A SLEDGEHAMMER plows through the wall thisclose to John. As he ducks back, definitely concerned now --

JOHN
Elizabeth!?!

A beat. PLASTER DUST hangs in the air, then -- ELIZABETH HAWKES (early 30's) sticks her delicate head through the hole. She's usually a coifed society lady, but right now, her blonde curls are filled with plaster flakes.

ELIZABETH
You are home early. I thought you weren't due to arrive until tomorrow.

John gives the WOOD and PLASTER lining the hallway a wide berth. Peers through the hole at a DESTROYED ROOM.

JOHN
Where I would no doubt have found my home in complete and utter ruin.

Elizabeth attempts to laugh it off --

ELIZABETH
I know this all looks unpleasant...

John steps into the...

INT. FUTURE NURSERY - HAWKES'S HOME - NIGHT

...with wary eyes. Twice as much wood and plaster in here. There's a TINY HOLE on the opposite wall as well.

ELIZABETH
But once my intentions for the space are fully realized...

John looks skeptical. And Elizabeth counters that with hopeful enthusiasm --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You see, I woke up this morning, and
I thought, the baby should have light.
More light than it can stand...

Elizabeth, noticeably NOT pregnant, flits from the hole in
the wall, to one of the small windows.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

And I came to the conclusion, the
nursery must have french doors.
These windows are simply not enough.

JOHN

French doors?
(re: the tiny hole)
And over there? A veranda...?

ELIZABETH

Oh, that...was an unfortunate mistake.
This sledgehammer is quite heavy.

JOHN

Elizabeth --

ELIZABETH

What do you think about curtains?

JOHN

Curtains? Well, I believe, strongly,
that they should cover the window.
Keep the light out. Protect against
the cold.

ELIZABETH

You tease. I meant colors. It is a
challenge to decide without knowing
if it will be a boy or girl, but I
was thinking green.

Elizabeth considers the windows. Imagining green curtains.
She turns to John. He just stares at her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You're angry with me...

JOHN

No, I'm not. It's just...

ELIZABETH

What?

John chooses his words carefully --

JOHN

Maybe we should wait...until you're actually with child again.

It was the "again" that has Elizabeth's hand involuntarily going to her belly. She turns away so John doesn't see the hurt in her eyes.

ELIZABETH

You're right...that is sensible. I just got a bit carried away.

She starts cleaning up the mess. Has to do something with her hands. John watches her. His heartbreaking. And Elizabeth can't stand for that --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Well, if you are going to stand there looking at my backside, you can at least tell me how your trip went.

John takes another beat, then --

JOHN

I couldn't even get inside the courthouse. But I heard that it is not likely to go his way.

ELIZABETH

That poor man. To think, the negros fight to get North, and we cannot even protect them once they're here.

JOHN

And as long as slavery is directly linked to the economic prosperity of the South, it is hard to see how anything's going to change.

John sighs. The weight of the world on his shoulders --

JOHN (CONT'D)

What is a man supposed to do when he feels so helpless?

Elizabeth takes in the destroyed "nursery." Both her and John drown in their respective helplessness for a beat, then --

ELIZABETH

Well, I do not pretend to know anything about the ways of men. But as a dainty little lady like me? I pick up a sledgehammer. Pray for the best. And hope God is listening.

She holds the sledgehammer out to John. Gives him a challenging grin. John takes it. Turns to the "future" french doors. As he brings the hammer down with a smile --

INT. KITCHEN - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Rosalee washes dishes at the sink. Liddy and Sarah enter, bringing in more dirty dishes, followed by Ernestine. She fusses over James and his empty plate --

ERNESTINE

Look at my big strong boy. Ate all his food.

JAMES

Can I go play with T.R.?

ERNESTINE

He getting ready for bed, same as you gonna be in a minute.

JAMES

But I ain't tired --

Ernestine starts putting LEFTOVERS in a basket.

ERNESTINE

I don't want to hear none of that whining, now.

(to Liddy:)

Warm up some milk and take it up to Miz Susanna.

Rosalee hands Liddy a clean pot. Not looking at her mother. Knowing a "talk" is coming. A beat. Ernestine waits until Liddy's on the other side of the kitchen, then --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Needed you earlier. Seraphina had her baby.

Rosalee REACTS. Surprised.

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

You didn't know? Could have heard the screamin' all over the slave quarters had you been there.

Rosalee remains quiet. Doesn't take that bait.

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

You don't have to tell me where you going. You're practically a women grown.

(MORE)

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

But you do have to tell me you're going. Miz Susanna asked after you. I told her you walked down to Miz Bee's for extra thread for Miz Mary's party dress.

Ernestine pulls a SPOOL OF THREAD from her dress pocket. Sets it on the counter. Rosalee is touched by the fact her mother is always looking out for her --

ROSALEE

Momma, I...

She wants to confide in her mother. Wants to tell her about Jackson and running. But she can't. She can't. So instead --

ROSALEE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Ernestine nods. Wants to push, but doesn't. She hands Rosalee the basket of leftovers --

ERNESTINE

Go on now. Walk your brother back.

EXT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Jackson sits in a chair on the porch. Flips a small GOLD RING in his hand. Eagerly watching. Waiting for something.

The OVERSEER slams out the door. Whiskey sloshing from the jug in his hands. This is BILL MEEKES. 40's. 230 pounds of barely bottled, and usually whiskey-tinged rage.

BILL

Get your ass outta' my chair.

Jackson palms the ring, hiding it from his father as he moves to the porch edge, still watching for

ROSALEE

and James walk down the road past the cabin. Rosalee's got the basket in one hand, and James's hand in the other. Her tense body language says it all. She can feel Jackson's eyes on her.

She steals a quick glance his way. Won't risk any more than that. It's enough for Jackson. She *had* to look. A smile crests his lips, but it doesn't last long --

BILL (CONT'D)

It ain't right. How soft he is on them house niggers.

Bill takes a swig of whiskey. His eyes narrowed at Rosalee --

BILL (CONT'D)

Look at that get up he's got em' in.
Nicer than anything your mother ever
wore. Goddamn disrespectful is what
it is.

Rosalee and James disappear down the road as Jackson grinds his teeth. It's taking everything in him not to tell his father to shut the fuck up.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Fire light leaks from the 18 x 18 SHACKS that line both sides of the dirt road. Now that the plantation chores are finished, SLAVES tend to the chores of their own households -- cooking, washing, tending their tiny gardens. Rosalee lets go of James's hand now. Let's him run ahead...

INT. SAM & HENRY'S SHACK - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Filled with more furniture than the space requires. Quality handmade wood pieces. Somebody has taken a lot of pride in the craftsmanship, and even more in the displaying of it.

That person sits at a table in the center of the room, carving a HORSE from a piece of mahogany. This is SAM WRIGHT (21). Ernestine's oldest. A wiry and thin carpenter's apprentice.

His brother HENRY WRIGHT (20), who we briefly met earlier, lies on one of the straw beds, a tattered book open before him. The opposite of Sam, he's built like a tank, but mostly a quiet observer.

Rosalee and James duck in. James eyes light up when they fall on the half-carved horse --

JAMES

Is that for me, Sam?

SAM

When it's finished.

Rosalee sets the basket on the table. Acknowledges Henry with a warm smile as she grabs two plates.

JAMES

Wait til T.R. sees it.

Sam stops carving. Going COLD --

SAM

This ain't for playin' with in the
big house. It stays here, or you
can't have it, you hear me?

James gives a small nod. Chastised by Sam's tone.

ROSALEE

Hand carved like that. Better than
any of those toys T.R. has up in the
big house.

Rosalee's hit at the root of it. Sam's insecurity. But
that's linked to his pride, so he deflects --

SAM

(re: the basket)

Scrapes off the massa's table. I
ain't no dog.

ROSALEE

Food is food. Even a dog got enough
sense not to bite the hand that feeds
him.

Rosalee divides the leftovers onto the plates. Turns her
attention away from Sam's disgust --

ROSALEE (CONT'D)

What you reading there, Henry?

Sam snorts. Continues to carve --

SAM

He ain't readin' nothin'. Less he
went and got some learnin' the rest
of us didn't.

HENRY

I's lookin' at the pictures is all.

SAM

Best be some pretty pictures. Worth
the trouble we be in, someone catches
you with that.

Rosalee takes some food over to Henry. Sits next to him.
Throws a pointed look Sam's way.

ROSALEE

Let me see some of those.

Sam roll his eyes. Turns his attention to James watching
him carve the horse --

SAM

What you think so far?

JAMES

It's real good. I'ma have me a live one too. Just like T.R.'s.

Sam and Rosalee trade a look. Neither has the heart to tell their younger brother that the world doesn't work that way.

INT. BEDROOM - HAWKES'S HOME - NIGHT

John and Elizabeth have sex. Missionary style. Very CLINICAL --

ELIZABETH

Let me know... When you are near to... So I can make sure to --

JOHN

What the doc said. Right.

John closes his eyes. Concentrating. Elizabeth feels bad. Knows she's taking the sexy out of sex right now, so she kisses John. Long. HARD. And it works. For a moment they both lose themselves. PASSION rises, but --

ELIZABETH

Hold on. Wait. Laney Briss told me that if you put a pillow under my bottom, it increase the chance of --

JOHN

You're talking to Laney Briss about our marital bed?

John hovers over her. Waiting for an answer.

ELIZABETH

Which one is it? The amendment which prevents incriminating one's self?

JOHN

The fifth.

John rolls off of her. Elizabeth sighs --

ELIZABETH

I'm sorry. You've just got home. We should be enjoying each other. And I cannot seem to get out of my head.

JOHN

You don't have to apologize. You're not the only one...

Elizabeth lays her head on John's bare chest. He strokes her hair. A beat, then --

ELIZABETH

This trial seems to be eating at you from the inside. I have never seen you like this.

John considers that for a moment, then --

JOHN

A man came to see me today. William Still. From Pennsylvania.

ELIZABETH

The one that aides runaway slaves?

JOHN

The same. He asked about our house. About using it, to help people.

ELIZABETH

You mean to harbor fugitives from the law.

JOHN

I mean both, I suppose. I told him I couldn't be any help. But upon further consideration, what if we did aide in his effort? We could make a real difference.

ELIZABETH

It is a noble cause. And somebody has to do it...

For half a beat, John marvels at his wife. How straight, and unwavering her moral compass is, then --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

But it doesn't have to be us.

John deflates. Elizabeth pulls back. Honestly surprised by his reaction --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

John...we could be thrown in jail. I don't have to tell you it's breaking the law.

JOHN

That same law allows people to own other people. It's immoral and uncivilized. And it's not enough just for me to speak about it anymore.

ELIZABETH

It has to be. Now I'm sure this Mr. Still has a network of people behind him. His endeavor will continue to work fine without risking our home.

JOHN

Our risk would be nothing compared to those we aide. You know most runaway slaves are recaptured or killed? I've heard some horrible things.

ELIZABETH

I've heard some things too. From my friends. About angry Negroes who kill the owners of safe-houses and make away with their possessions.

John tries a softer tact --

JOHN

What if we go up to Pennsylvania. You and me. And just hear him out.

ELIZABETH

Absolutely not.

John climbs from the bed. His frustration mounting --

JOHN

You are more than supportive when I head into the district to rail against the inhumanities --

ELIZABETH

This is different. This is our home. Our family --

JOHN

What family, Elizabeth?!

Too far. John tries to bite off the words, but it's too late. They hit Elizabeth like a slap to the face. She barely maintains her composure as she slips into her robe. As John watches her go, feeling like a heel...

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

All's quiet as everyone has settled in for the night. Rosalee hurries back towards the big house. Slows as she notices Seraphina. She's walking aimlessly. Head down. MUTTERING to herself in a daze.

ROSALEE
Seraphina...?

Seraphina keeps walking. Keeps muttering. Rosalee places a hand on her shoulder --

ROSALEE (CONT'D)
Seraphina, you okay?

Seraphina looks up. TEARS in her eyes.

SERAPHINA
I washed him clean of the sins of
this life...

The front of Seraphina's dress is DRENCHED IN WATER.

ROSALEE
What...who are you talking about?

SERAPHINA
I couldn't have him growing up like
this. Not like this...

Rosalee steps back. HORROR filling her eyes as the realization hits her. She takes off at a DEAD RUN.

INT. SLAVE SHACK - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Rosalee tears inside. The dirt floor is slick with MUD from spilled water. There's a COPPER BATHING TUB in the corner.

ROSALEE
No no no no no...

Rosalee runs to the tub. Slips in the mud. Goes down HARD, sliding into it. She pulls herself up by the edge, SEES --
THE BABY BOY FLOATING FACE DOWN IN THE WATER!

Rosalee pulls him into her arms. Frantically checks for signs of life --

ROSALEE (CONT'D)
Come on... Breath for me, please...

It's no use. The baby lies limp in her arms. Dead.

EXT. MACON PLANTATION - DAY

The SUN RISES, throwing soft light on the SLAVES already hard at work in the fields.

INT. KITCHEN - THE BIG HOUSE - DAY

Rosalee absentmindedly whips batter for Mary's birthday cakes. The nightmare of last night replaying in her mind.

Ernestine enters. Pauses in the doorway. Watches her daughter for a concerned beat, then shoulders Rosalee out of the way. Starts whipping the batter correctly --

ERNESTINE

I can guess where your heads at, but you got to bring it back here. Right here on this cake, cause we using all the eggs we got. Have to get it right the first time.

A moment. Rosalee's trying to get her mind right, but --

ROSALEE

I just can't understand how someone could do that to their own baby.

ERNESTINE

I can.

Rosalee stares at her mother in disbelief. Ernestine cracks another egg into the batter as she explains --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Fear is something powerful. And we live hard lives. From a young age we think we know fear. But I never truly felt it until I had you and your brothers.

Ernestine tosses some more sugar into the batter. Really puts her back into mixing it well as she continues --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

From the minute ya'll were born, I was afraid of losing you. That ya'll be sold or killed. That your brother's would be worked and beat to the bone. That you'd be too pretty. Cause that's a curse for us as well. There ain't no fear like that you have for your child. Make it so you can't see straight.

The batter's done. Ernestine finally looks at Rosalee --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

You can't change what you saw last night. Focus on what's in front of you. Lose yourself in the work.

And with those words of wisdom, Ernestine is on her way. There's always more chores to be done.

EXT. PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

August leads his horse down a thinning path towards a modest LOG CABIN and BARN. Both are dirty and tired from their long journey. August allows a small smile, happy to be home.

That smile fades quickly as he sees JAY (67), his black ranch hand, hobble out of the barn towards him. Even with his cane, it's difficult for Jay to walk with the arthritis.

August kicks his horse into a trot. Meeting Jay so he doesn't have to walk any further. Jay pats August's horse down --

JAY

Best we keep her away. For her own welfare.

A SQUEAL from the barn draws August's attention. It sounds like a dying animal...

INT. BARN - PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

...but it's worse than that, ALL the livestock is dying. SQUEALS and WHINES fill the air. August, satchel over his shoulder, takes in his ailing DAIRY COW and PIGS. His son, BEN (12) tends to them. Sad to report --

BEN

They all gone sick, Papa.

AUGUST

What is it, Texas Fever?

JAY

Milk poisoning, I think. Couldn't say for sure.

AUGUST

How did this happen?

BEN

Don't know. It just happened.

Jay's face tells us that's only half the story. But he keeps mum. August takes a beat. If it's not one trouble, it's another. But he'll deal with it as it comes. Always does.

He pulls one of his REVOLVERS. Checks the bullets. Jay nods. Moves across the barn and pulls a SHOTGUN. Begins loading it. Ben doesn't get it yet --

BEN (CONT'D)

What are you going to do?

August pauses. Looks into his son's big INNOCENT eyes.

JAY

Ain't nothin' left to do but to --

AUGUST

You know what, Ben, I almost forgot.
I got you something from up North.

August digs around in his satchel. Pulls out a BROWN LEATHER BALL, stitched at the seams.

BEN

What is it?

AUGUST

It's called a baseball. Whole new sport was invented a few years ago. Some regulars in a yankee tavern were going on about it. Here.

He tosses the ball to Ben, who just barely catches it, then pulls out a folded PIECE OF PAPER from his satchel. He unfolds it, excited to share this with his son --

AUGUST (CONT'D)

They had a clipping of the rules from a local paper on the wall, I bought that too. And here, a glove to catch the ball in. Slide it on.

He pulls out a BASEBALL GLOVE. Ben's eyes light up as he tries it on. It fits. August smiles --

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Now you and I, we need to break in the leather, like on a saddle, so it works right. The fellow at the tavern suggested we tuck the ball in it, so they get to know each other.

Ben nods, staring at the prize in his hands. That innocent awe burning bright in his eyes. Jay gets it. August wants to protect his son from the horror that's about to happen.

JAY

Why don't you go wrap it right now? You know where the leather is above the cupboard. And take your father's horse up to the house with you.

Ben takes off. Full of excitement. August watches him go as he returns to readying his guns...

EXT. PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

Ben plays with his ball and glove, clumsily, as he heads for the cabin. A GUNSHOT. Ben pauses. The answer to his question of what has to be done hitting him HARD. They have to kill all the animals. As a BARRAGE OF SHOTS ring out...

INT. KITCHEN - THE BIG HOUSE - DAY

T.R. and James peer around the door jam with mischief in their eyes. Just Rosalee, a GIANT VANILLA CAKE, and the CHOCOLATE CAKE she's putting the finishing touches on.

T.R. signals James to be quiet as they tip-toe towards the vanilla cake. They get within striking distance of their prey, Rosalee seemingly oblivious, but --

ROSALEE

Get your dirty little fingers any closer to that cake, I'll have to lop em' off.

The boys freeze. Exchange looks. A beat, then -- T.R. reaches. Rosalee's quick with her spoon, but T.R. pulls back. Grinning from ear to ear. Proud --

T.R.

You missed me.

TOM (O.S.)

Rosalee... Did I just see you swat at my boy with a spoon?

Tom stands in the doorway. Rosalee tenses --

ROSALEE

I'm sorry, Mister Macon. I didn't mean no harm...

Tom smiles. Not angry at all. Ruffles T.R.'s hair --

TOM

I'm sure it's this one that meant the harm. What you and James worrying Rosalee about now?

T.R.

We want some cake.

TOM

You know those are for your sister's birthday tomorrow.

T.R.
Please? I'll die if I don't have a
little bit.

Tom LAUGHS --

TOM
I guess you feel the same way, James?

JAMES
Yes, suh.

Tom takes the spoon of frosting out of the bowl --

TOM
You know, if you ask me, the
frosting's the best thing about the
cake. Where all the sugars at. I
give ya'll this, promise to stay
away from the cake?

The boys nod eagerly. Tom hands the spoon over. Watches
them run off with their prize.

TOM (CONT'D)
Must be nice when it only takes a
little bit of sugar to make your
world.

Rosalee smiles politely, but doesn't respond. Tom watches
her cover the cakes with an admiring eye --

TOM (CONT'D)
You look more and more like your
mother every day.

Is he flirting with her? Rosalee doesn't meet his gaze.
Grabs a pitcher of lemonade.

ROSALEE
I should take this to Miz Suzanna on
the porch.

EXT. BACK PORCH - THE BIG HOUSE - DAY

The heart of the plantation -- cotton fields, barn, expansive
lawn -- is on PANORAMIC DISPLAY from the wraparound porch.

Suzanna sways in the porch swing, fanning herself. Mary
holds up a hand mirror, inspecting the job Ernestine's doing
on her hair. Rosalee comes out with the pitcher of lemonade,
Tom right behind her.

MARY
Daddy, you like my hair?

Suzanna clocks Tom's eyes falling over the curve of Rosalee's ass as she bends to refill glasses.

TOM

It's beautiful, sweetie pie.

Suzanna bristles --

SUZANNA

Rosalee, make yourself useful, and come over here and rub my feet.

Rosalee and Ernestine touch eyes. Wondering what Rosalee might have done to incur Suzanna's wrath. Rosalee sets the pitcher aside, and gets down on a knee at Suzanna's feet.

ERNESTINE

There. All done. We'll pull the back out tomorrow. All curled up, you'll look like a princess in them picture books.

Mary stands. Excited --

MARY

My hair. My dress. My party. Everything's going to be perfect. And it's all thanks to you, Stine.

Mary gives Ernestine a big hug. Her eyes catching her mother's over Ernestine's shoulder. You get the feeling she said it less to compliment Ernestine than to annoy Suzanna.

And it worked. Suzanna looks off. Notices T.R. and James running from around the side of the house --

SUZANNA

James is sure getting big these days. How old is he now?

Mary heads into the house as Ernestine warily answers --

ERNESTINE

Gone be eight this year.

SUZANNA

And already bigger than T.R. We get him out in that field. Get him big and strong like that other son of yours. I bet he'd fetch us a good price at the market.

It's said casually, but Ernestine and Rosalee trade a worried glance. Hearing the threat loud and clear.

SUZANNA (CONT'D)

What do you say to that, Tom? Finally
make some money off of one of these
niggers.

Tom gives a noncommittal grunt as he lights the pipe in his
mouth. T.R. and James continue running around the lawn.
LAUGHING. PLAYING. Oblivious of the divide between them...

EXT. BACK DRIVE - MACON PLANTATION - DAY

A horse drawn wagon hobbles up, carrying bushels of cotton.
Bill drives. A few SLAVES ride in back. Henry among them.
They pass the...

BARN

...that doubles as the carpentry and blacksmith workshop.
Bill throws a nod to Jackson busy molding a SMALL OBJECT in
the fire with a hot rod. Sam is nearby, focused on his own
work. Sawing away on a thick tree trunk.

SUDDENLY -- T.R. and James DASH out in front of the wagon.
Bill pulls the reigns. The horses REAR to a sudden stop.
TIPPING the wagon enough to toss some of the Slaves and more
of the cotton from the back.

ON THE PORCH

Suzanna and Ernestine straighten up. Concerned for their
boys. They watch as Bill climbs from the wagon. Red with
fury. The situation going to 11 fast.

SUZANNA

Rosalee, go down there and tell my
son to come inside.

Rosalee shrinks two inches under the weight of the command.
Ernestine pipes up --

ERNESTINE

I'll go, Miz Suzanna.

Suzanna waves her off --

SUZANNA

I told Rosalee to do it, so Rosalee
will do it. Quickly now.

ON THE DRIVE

T.R. steps out of the way, eyes WIDE as Bill yanks James to
him. Roughly shakes him --

BILL

You see what you done? Got the cotton everywhere.

Bill pulls the LEATHER WHIP from his belt loop. Henry hops off the wagon --

HENRY

Mister Bill, ain't no harm done.
I's get the cotton back on the wagon
in no time --

Bill points his whip hand at him. VENOMOUS --

BILL

You better do just that, and shut
your fuckin' mouth while you're at
it.

Tears spill down James's cheeks as Henry backs off. Bill starts wrapping the whip around his hand. Shortening it up --

BILL (CONT'D)

Hold out your hands, boy.

AT THE BARN

The scene has drawn Jackson's and Sam's attention. Jackson tenses as Rosalee comes down the drive. Heading right into the fray. Sam is incredulous --

SAM

What the hell is she doing?

ON THE DRIVE

Rosalee takes a deep breath as she approaches. Tries to swallow her rising terror --

ROSALEE

Excuse me Mister Bill, but Miz Suzanna
wanted Mister T.R...and James to go
on back up on that porch with her.

T.R. takes off for the house. But Bill blocks James --

BILL

This boy's gonna pay for wasting my
time.

(to James:)

Get your hands out like I told you.

Bill's finished rolling the whip around his hand. Snaps it out. Testing it. Rosalee and James both flinch.

ROSALEE

It's my fault, Mister Bill. I gave them the sugar that's got em' runnin' wild. If somebody gone be punished, it should be me.

And Rosalee puts her hands out. Palms up. Shaking like a leaf. Bill burns her a look --

BILL

That's how they do it up at the big house, is it? You just talk to me any kind of way you want? Come down here and tell me how it's gonna be?

ROSALEE

I'm sorry, but Miz Suzanna was the one that ask me --

Bill SNAPS the whip across Rosalee's hands. She CRIES OUT from the sudden shock more than the pain. As Bill pulls back for another swing...

AT THE BARN

Jackson's hand balls into fist. He moves to stop this, but --

SAM

You go out there, only going to make it worse.

They lock eyes. Jackson's surprised. Sam knows about him and Rosalee.

ON THE PORCH

Tom casually continues to smoke his pipe. Ernestine winces slightly at every hit. Suzanna's eyes are on her. A smile curling. This is what she was hoping for. Sending Rosalee out was less about hurting her, than Ernestine.

ON THE DRIVE

Henry pulls James next to him by the wagon. Rosalee continues to take the LASHINGS. Once. Twice. Again and again. Her knees buckle. But she remains standing.

Bill lets up. Winded. Stares at her. She just stares right back. Lips trembling in silence. Glimmers of the defiant courage she'll soon embrace within herself shining through.

Bill lets the whip line out. His intentions to use its full force evident...

ON THE PORCH

Ernestine cuts a desperate look to Tom. Stop this. *Please*. Tom hesitates as Bill cocks his arm back to strike, but --

TOM

Bill! That's enough. She's going to need those hands to serve supper tonight.

ON THE DRIVE

A beat. Bill just burning a hole into Rosalee with his rage. His whip hand twitching, then -- he begrudgingly turns for the wagon. Pushes past Henry, who towers over him --

BILL

Get your nigger ass back on the wagon.

As BLOOD pools in Rosalee's lacerated palms...

EXT. "BELLE OF LOUISVILLE" RIVERBOAT - DAY

The tables usually reserved for gambling have been covered with white linens, and a sophisticated spread of BRUNCH FOODS. Tea cups have been shunned in favor of champagne glasses.

Elizabeth stares out at the river, her mind elsewhere, as her high society friends -- LIBBY, MARGOT, & BERNADETTE -- manage a conversation between sips of champagne --

LIBBY

Can you imagine? My George says if a slave could just run to freedom, Ohio would be overrun in a fortnight. He is looking into buying more guns.

MARGOT

Stan and I should look into the same. Or moving further north.

BERNADETTE

Well, Ohio is about as far North as my southern roots will extend. I can't take any more Yankee than this.

Light laughter. Shared smiles.

LIBBY

Does your family own slaves, Bernadette?

BERNADETTE

I will admit, they do.
(MORE)

BERNADETTE (CONT'D)

And it's not something I'm proud of.
But it is an economic issue for them,
and not a moral one. They treat
their slaves like family.

Elizabeth takes a sip of her champagne. Margot eyes her --

MARGOT

You have been quiet, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

My John, of course, is on the other
side of this argument.

Margot's face creases slightly with sympathy for Elizabeth --

MARGOT

And as his wife, it is only right
that you support him.

ELIZABETH

John and I actually share the same
view on liberty for all.

LIBBY

That is very worldly of you, but it
is a little naive. I am afraid to
imagine what it would mean for our
country if a slave could just free
himself. What it would mean for our
children.

Elizabeth's eyes drift two tables over, where her friend's
ROWDY CHILDREN have a food fight while not minding their
BLACK MAIDS.

ELIZABETH

Perhaps they would see their mothers
more often.

Everything stops. The girls stare at Elizabeth in disbelief --

LIBBY

Tildy is not a slave. She is my
house maid. And I am offended you
would question my devotion to my
children.

BERNADETTE

As am I. Surely you and John will
feel differently on the matter, if
you ever have children of your own.

ELIZABETH

When. We have children.

BERNADETTE

Yes. Of course. When.

Bitch. Margot tries to be the peacemaker --

MARGOT

Now Elizabeth, all Libby and Bernadette are trying to say is that the slavery argument is just not, and excuse my obvious word choice, black and white.

They say your friends are a reflection of thyself. And Elizabeth is not liking the reflection she sees.

ELIZABETH

No. I suppose it is not.

EXT. HILLSIDE - PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

The sun drops from the sky as August and Jay, shirtless and sweaty, shovel dirt into a hole piled high with ANIMAL CARCASSES. Below, in a FIELD that hasn't held crops for years, Ben and his FRIENDS play a makeshift game of BASEBALL.

AUGUST

Seems like such a waste. You sure we shouldn't cut their flesh off the bone and use it for fertilizer?

JAY

For what crops?

AUGUST

Maybe we try our hand at wheat again.

JAY

Things not pan out up North?

AUGUST

A lot of what I was able to scrape together went to Kentucky.

JAY

And how is miss Charlotte doing?

August shakes his head. Can't talk about it...

EXT. DEAD FIELD - PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

Ben and his FRIENDS have the rules tacked to a HORNBOOK against a tree, and makeshift bases approximate a diamond.

Ben and some others have some sort of glove. Most are bare-handed. The bat is a well selected piece of hickory, with the word "BAT" carved into it with a jackknife. Nobody has any idea what they're doing, but they're all loving it.

Ben hits the ball and runs-out for a double. Smiling, a competitive nature in his blood. His friend JODY is up at bat next. A pitch and a wild swing --

BEN

Come on, Jody!

EXT. HILLSIDE - PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

Jay has to take a break. Sits down, rubbing his hands as he takes in August shoveling --

JAY

May I speak frankly?

AUGUST

No sense in asking, you've been doing it for the forty years I know you.

JAY

Perhaps it's time you chose one profession and done stuck to it.

AUGUST

Wish that were an option.

JAY

That big heart of yours is going to put you in the poorhouse.

AUGUST

Well, what am I supposed to do?

JAY

Your money is your own matter. Your home is mine. The boy's at that age onto becoming a man. Now would be a good time for his father to be here.

August stops digging. He knows Jay has more to say.

JAY (CONT'D)

It was Ben. He took the animals the wrong way. My guess is they ate the white snakeroot and caught sick.

AUGUST

You told him which way to go...

JAY

He only listens to me when it suits him. And his instincts, they want.

AUGUST

You're worried that he doesn't have it in him to become a farmer?

JAY

No, I know that right off. No mother, a father that comes and goes. I'm worried that the boy doesn't have it in him to become a man.

August looks down to the field. And is surprised to find the game has stopped. The boys crowd around Ben, who's got another boy on the ground -- BEATING THE SHIT OUT OF HIM!

EXT. DEAD FIELD - PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

Ben sits firmly on top of the slightly SMALLER BOY. Lands punch after punch. SUDDENLY -- he's ripped off the boy by --

AUGUST

What the hell is going on here?

August is angry and wants answers. The boys remain silent.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Ben. Why were you hitting this boy?

BEN

He called me a cheater.

SMALLER BOY

That's because he cheated. I had a play on the ball, and he tackled me to stop me from it.

August reads Ben's face. Enough shame to confirm the story.

AUGUST

Who's the best reader here? Go get me the rules. See if this point of contention is in there.

Jay hobbles over on his cane as one of the boys obliges August. He reads from the Hornbook --

BEST READER

Rule number fourteen says a player running who shall prevent an adversary from catching or getting the ball before making his base is a hand out.

AUGUST
You hear that?

BEN
Yes sir, but --

AUGUST
It says it right there, you're a
hand out.

Ben stews. Won't admit that he was wrong. Jay cuts August a look. See what he's talking about? August keeps a good grip on Ben as he takes in the bloody nosed Smaller Boy and his tenderized face. He drags the Smaller Boy to his feet --

AUGUST (CONT'D)
Go on and get your shot in. So you're
all even.

Ben looks up. Surprised. Is his dad serious? Like a heart attack. The Smaller Boy dusts himself off. Plants his feet preparing for a good swing.

BEN
Papa. Please.

AUGUST
Rules are rules, son.

All Ben's friends watch. This is the ultimate embarrassment. As the the Smaller Boy PUNCHES Ben, HARD --

INT. ERNESTINE & ROSALEE'S ROOM - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Moonlight shines through the window onto a big feather bed. Rosalee, wide awake, her hands treated and wrapped, lies next to her sleeping mother.

ROSALEE
Momma...

ERNESTINE
Hmmm...?

ROSALEE
With daddy...how did you know when
you loved him?

Ernestine snuggles into her pillow. Doesn't even open her eyes as she answers --

ERNESTINE
You're father, he used to look right
through me.
(MORE)

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Every other man before him, they eyes were always following me. He worked out in the field, and I always found myself on the porch, watching for him. Watching him. That's when I knew I loved him. He still ain't looked at me twice, even then. But I got his attention.

Ernestine smiles at the memory. A beat. Rosalee absorbs that, then --

ROSALEE

Did ya'll ever think about runnin'?

Ernestine turns to her with a wild stare. Suddenly very much awake --

ERNESTINE

Don't you ever talk about that in this house. Or out. That's the kind of foolishness that's going to get you killed. If this boy you're sneaking off with --

ROSALEE

There's no boy --

Ernestine grabs Rosalee by the shoulders. Tries to shake some sense into her --

ERNESTINE

You disappear. Don't tell no one where you going. Always flushed when you come back. Ain't nothing wrong with what you're doing. You steal all the happiness you can, lord knows there's enough sadness to go around. But you get runnin' out of your head, you get it out now --

ROSALEE

Momma stop, you're hurting me.

Ernestine softens. Pulls Rosalee into a motherly hug.

ERNESTINE

We got it better than most around here. I've worked hard to see to that. Ain't worth risking, when you just gone get caught, beat, and dragged right back here. And that's if you're lucky.

Over Ernestine's shoulder -- a small FLICKER of light appears in the woods out the window. It disappears and reappears. It's a SIGNAL. As Rosalee eyes it, TORN...

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Rosalee moves through the trees. Making as little noise as possible. A quick whisper --

JACKSON (O.S.)

Rose...

She turns. Sees Jackson hiding among the trees. Half runs into his arms.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Are you okay? Let me see your hands...

He inspects them. Goes red with fury.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Goddamnit.

ROSALEE

I'll be okay.

JACKSON

Sonofabitch...

ROSALEE

Jackson...

JACKSON

I ain't even been home. If I see him. I swear, I'll kill --

Rosalee won't let him finish that sentence. Kisses him as a distraction. It seems to work. When he pulls back, he's lost some of his steam.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

I got something for you. I was going to wait, til we got North....

He pulls the small GOLD RING from his pocket. Rosalee stares at it with soft surprise.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

It was my mother's. I shaped it for you. Should fit nicely. If you want it to.

He's suddenly nervous as all hell. And the trepidation in Rosalee's face isn't helping. Is she having second thoughts?

The moment drags out. Finally, Rosalee takes the ring, but --

ROSALEE

I can't wear it...

Jackson's face falls as Rosalee stares at the gold shining in the moonlight.

ROSALEE (CONT'D)

Not yet. But I'll keep it on me.
Close to my heart til I can.

Jackson sags with relief. That's good enough for him. As they share a gentle kiss...

EXT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

HEAVY RAIN beats down on the marble steps. ANNOYED CITY DWELLERS move around the ABOLITIONIST PROTESTERS that have assembled. They wield signs -- "FREE SCOTT." "ALL MEN EQUAL."

CLUNK. SCRAPE. CLUNK. SCRAPE.

John drags that wooden podium up the steps again. But his heart is heavy this time. It feels like a stone he's been rolling uphill forever. Just as he gets to the top --

The DOORS SWING OPEN. GALLERY MEMBERS pour out. John flags one down --

JOHN

Has there been a decision?

GALLERY MEMBER

Eight to one for the defendant. And the Negroes have no inherent rights in any of the states. Free or otherwise.

The news spreads through the Abolitionist like a virus. They're ANGRY. The Pro-Slavery Gallery rubs it in. Both sides start to YELL INSULTS at each other as

DRED SCOTT

is dragged out in chains. Flanked by POLICE. They drag him right past John and his podium towards a CAGED WAGON. The Abolitionist attempt to block the way --

POLICE

Stand aside. Clear the way.

The Abolitionist start to push. Fighting the Police and the Gallery. The situation is getting out of control FAST. An OFFICER fires a SHOT into the air.

An attempt to quell the crowd, but it only accelerates the situation into a

FULL BLOWN RIOT

that spreads out into the street. CITY DWELLERS are dragged into the mayhem. John's podium is knocked over --

JOHN
Stop this. This isn't the way to
effect change --

He catches a STRAY PUNCH. Goes down. DAZED. The time for words has clearly passed.

The Police manage to get Dred Scott into the Caged Wagon. Once the doors are slammed shut on him, it's away in an instant, and the Police turn their iron fist on Abolitionist.

JOHN

pulls himself into a sitting position. From this low angle, he sees a

FALLEN WOMAN

being trampled in the chaos. The HORSES attached to the Caged Wagon run her down. The DRIVER doesn't see her. He's just trying to get Dred Scott the hell out of here.

John springs into action. Steadfast. Fearless. Not thinking of himself. He YANKS the Woman out of the way just in time. Gets her to safety. There's only a beat of relief, then --
JOHN'S HIT FROM BEHIND BY A POLICE OFFICER WITH A BILLY CLUB!

He goes down on the muddy steps. A BLOODY GASH open on his forehead. As he loses the battle to stay conscious, we hear a HYMN, as if HEAVEN was calling him back --

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS/FRONT LAWN - NIGHT (INTERCUT)

SLAVES surround a tiny grave, singing the HYMN. The melody is haunting. Full of pain. But also of HOPE. As the Slaves begin to clap, bringing rhythmic energy to the words, there's a deep sense of culture and liveliness in the air...

In contrast, Mary's birthday party is a stuffy affair. A BAND plays. White tables litter the lawn. GUEST mill about. Everyone in their finest, even the SLAVES doing the serving.

Mary, in the frilliest pinkiest dress she could find, giggles with her GIRLFRIENDS. Suzanna fusses with T.R. as he has a tantrum about having to wear his "nice clothes." Tom glad-hands with some STUFFY COUNCIL MEMBERS. Ernestine discreetly gives Slaves orders.

Jackson sips some wine, sticking out like a sore thumb in this crowd.

It's all a WHIRLWIND of CELEBRATION that lands us at --

EXT. FRONT PORCH - BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Rosalee and Liddy come out with trays of food, but --

SUZANNA

Rosalee, what are you doing?!

Suzanna waddles over and grabs the tray from her.

SUZANNA (CONT'D)

I will not have you serving my guest
with your hands in such a state.

As Suzanna shoves the tray into Liddy's hands --

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

The funeral proceedings have turned into a lively wake. A bonfire. Plenty of food. Music. Everyone happy their hearts are still beating in the face of death.

Rosalee moves through the heart of it. Taking it all in. EMOTIONAL. Can't shake the feeling that she will miss this. This is home. She spots James being chased playfully by Henry, that carved horse in his hands.

SAM (O.S.)

That was brave of you. Taking them
lashes for him.

He's got a plate of food. Holds it out to her. A peace offering. She accepts with a smile. As Rosalee takes in her brothers, she's hit with a pang of guilt. She's going to be leaving them behind soon...

EXT. FRONT LAWN - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary basks in the glow of the candles from her TWO BIRTHDAY CAKES. Devours the attention as everyone crowds around singing her "HAPPY BIRTHDAY." She blows out the candles with a big flourish as the crowd claps.

TOM

What did you wish for, sweetie pie?

MARY

For a handsome southern gentlemen to
come and sweep me off my feet.

Mary's Girlfriend's giggle as Ernestine moves in to cut and distribute the cake.

SUZANNA

Then you should skip the cake. So that handsome gentlemen won't break his back.

Mary's Girlfriends titter in disbelief. Can't believe her mother just said that to her. Suzanna flits off, not thinking twice about it. Mary grabs a piece of cake. Takes the biggest bite she can in defiance of her mother.

JACKSON

'Cuse me, Miss Mary.

He slides past Mary, putting a hand lightly on her waist. She blushes at the touch. Grins like an idiot, revealing a mouth full of cake as Jackson takes a slice.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

(to Ernestine:)

Thank you.

Mary throws an excited look to her Girlfriends. Has her birthday wish been granted already? Mary and her Girlfriends discreetly follow Jackson as he moves off.

TOM

You have outdone yourself tonight, Ernestine. They're going to be talking about this one for the rest of the year.

Ernestine hands Tom a slice of cake --

ERNESTINE

That's kind of you to say so, Mister Macon. And if I'm not mistakin', didn't you promise Mister Kane a taste of your finest burgundy before the end of the night?

She holds eye contact with Tom. The look is INTENSE. And this is the first time we feel the CHEMISTRY between them. He gives her a coy smile --

TOM

I did, didn't I? Why don't you go down and bring it up from the cellar.

Ernestine nods. She'll do just that. Tom can't pull his eyes off her as she crosses the field toward the barn. It's as if she's suddenly got him under some spell...

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Rosalee stands over the baby's grave. Just a small mound of dirt and a wooden cross. Henry joins her. They stand in quiet reverence for a moment, then --

ROSALEE

It just don't make no sense.

HENRY

Not everything does.

A beat. Rosalee's trying to keep it together, but her eyes are swimming. Finally she cracks. All the emotion she's been repressing starts to POUR OUT --

ROSALEE

I've been with Jackson. For months now.

(off Henry's look:)

And that don't make no sense either. But the way he looks at me, like I'm worth something. It fills me up. But how can I know if that's love?

(a pause, then:)

He wants to run. Tomorrow. Up North so I can be free. I don't even know what being free means. I ain't never been more than two steps from this plantation. Momma says we just gone get caught. Even if we don't, I ain't never goin' see ya'll again.

All that just hangs in the air for a beat. Finally --

HENRY

If you stay here with us, or run, both gone be the hardest thing you ever done. Seems to me, the only thing left to do is choose.

ON ROSALEE. This is a profound moment. A LIFE CHANGING MOMENT. She been holding on to something so BIG, that here, now, it still feels impossible to say --

ROSALEE

I'm gonna stay.

Henry just nods approval. It feels like whichever side of the coin Rosalee had landed on, Henry's reaction would have been the same. Rosalee takes a deep breath. Steels herself --

ROSALEE (CONT'D)

I have to tell Jackson.

EXT. BACK OF - BARN - NIGHT

Tom approaches the cellar doors. Drags them open. Makes sure the coast is clear, then ducks down into...

INT. WINE CELLAR - MACON PLANTATION - CONTINUOS

...at the bottom of the stairs, he finds a trail of UNDERGARMENTS hanging from bottles in the wine rack. At the end of it, he finds one of ERNESTINE'S ROSES. Tom grins. Grabs the flower, turning the corner to

ERNESTINE. NAKED.

A bottle of burgundy in hand. A demure smile on her lips. Tom drinks her in with his eyes --

TOM

Like my wine, darling, I swear you just get better with age.

ERNESTINE

Take off your clothes.

Tom doesn't have to be told twice. He sticks the flower between his lips. Pulls at the buttons on his shirt. Ernestine showcases the bottle in her hands --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

We don't want to waste something this fine on old Mister Kane, now do we?

She pops the cork. Tips the bottle. Red liquid slides down every curve of her body. Tom's only got half his clothes off, but fuck it. He grabs up Ernestine, pushing her back against the wall.

She rips the rose out of his mouth. The thorns draw a tiny bead of blood. The shock of pain springs to Tom's eyes. Ernestine melts it away with a grin so devilish it makes Tom's blood boil. His mouth is all over her in an instant. Blood mixing with wine.

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

I don't want James out in the field.

She undoes Tom's pants as he licks wine off her breast.

TOM

I try to ignore her when she brings it up, but you know how Suzanna gets. She's a dog with a bone.

Ernestine's got her hand in his pants now. Stroking him.

ERNESTINE

She keep pressing, you tell her James
has been showing some skill with
woodwork. He can go work with Sam.

Tom throws his head back. Eyes closed in bliss. Ernestine abruptly stops. Grabs his lip. Hard. Pulls his eyes down to hers. Deadly serious --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

He ain't going out in the fields.

Tom stares into her eyes for a long beat. Is he in love? Is it just lust? It's hard to tell. Finally --

TOM

He'll be wherever you want him.

Ernestine smiles. Playful again. She opens her legs. Slides Tom inside of her. He buries into her neck. Losing himself in her. And she clings to him. Moaning. Playing the roll.

But we see the TRUTH in her eyes. This is just one of the many sacrifices she makes to protect her children.

EXT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Rosalee, half-hidden by a thick oak tree, stares at the cabin 15 feet away. Lamp light shines through the windows. She peeks on her tippy toes. Is Jackson in there? She can't see anything. But this is as close as she dares to get.

BILL

stumbles around the side of the porch, JUG OF WHISKEY in hand. Oh shit... Rosalee turns on a dime. Hurries off, but --

BILL

Girl...whatchoo' doing?

Rosalee's anxiety accelerates from 0 to 11 in a heartbeat. She's just far enough away to pretend she didn't hear him. And that's just what she does, so Bill YELLS --

BILL (CONT'D)

Hey, I know you heard me ask you a question.

Rosalee reluctantly slows. No pretending she didn't hear that. She turns back --

BILL (CONT'D)

Get your ass over here.

The celebrations on opposite sides of the plantation echo in the night, highlighting how all alone Rosalee is with Bill as she steps up onto the porch. His eyes are blood shot. He sways slightly where he stands. Obviously drunk.

BILL (CONT'D)
You watchin' me?

ROSALEE
No suh.

BILL
Speak up, girl.

ROSALEE
No suh, I wasn't watching you. Miz
Susanna expecting me back at the party.

Rosalee attempts to leave, but Bill steps in her way. A lethal beat. He takes a generous swig of his whiskey.

ROSALEE (CONT'D)
Mister Bill, please...

Bill grabs Rosalee by the arm. RAMS her through the door...

INT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - CONTINUOUS

...and shoves her hard across the room. She SMASHES into the mirror. Cracking it down the middle. The impact knocks the wind out of her. She slides to the floor on her ass.

BILL
(mocking:)
Mista Bill, please. PLEASE!
(then:)
Ain't no massa around to save you
now, huh? So you wanna beg.

He unbuckles his belt. Swigs whiskey --

BILL (CONT'D)
I'm sick of you and your nigger mama
sticking your noses up at me. Someone
got to knock some sense into ya'll.

Bill yanks his belt free. Advances on a still dazed Rosalee. As he starts to BEAT her with the belt...

EXT. FRONT LAWN - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary and her Girlfriends have cornered Jackson. Mary's doing her best to flirt. Snaps Jackson's ratty suspenders --

MARY

I like these.

Jackson smiles politely --

JACKSON

Ain't nothing compared to that dress
you're wearing. Sure is pretty.

Mary's excitement at that sentiment is sweetly pathetic, and
unnoticed by Jackson. His eyes move over the slaves --

JACKSON (CONT'D)

If ya'll ladies would excuse me.

Mary and her Girlfriends swoon as he moves off, looking for
Rosalee...

INT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Rosalee, BEATEN and BLOODIED, attempts to shield herself
from the vicious lashes of Bill's belt. He lets up so he
can down the last of his whiskey. Rosalee tries to crawl
away. Bill laughs --

BILL

You goin' somewhere?

He tosses the empty whiskey jug onto the bed. Nudges Rosalee
in the side with his foot. Toying with her --

BILL (CONT'D)

Where ya goin', huh? I didn't mess
up that pretty face, did I? Wouldn't
want to piss off the massa. Everybody
knows Tom's a nigger lover.

Rosalee has crawled to the foot of the bed. Uses it to drag
herself to her feet. She can barely stand.

BILL (CONT'D)

I bet you fucked him, didn't you?
That's what's got you up on that
high horse, huh? Got that white
dick in you, make you think you worth
something.

Bill laughs at that. Moves to her. Slow. Predatory --

BILL (CONT'D)

I always thought he was giving it to
your momma. Hell, he probably fucking
the both of you. Maybe I outta get
a taste. See what the fuss is about.

He shoves Rosalee back onto the bed. Forcefully climbs on top of her. She's hit with a surge of adrenaline now. Fights back. SCREAMING and CLAWING. But Bill's easily got 100 pounds on her. Flips her onto her stomach underneath him.

As he savagely rips the back of her dress in two...

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Jackson stands on the edges, scanning the still lively wake. He sees Sam with James...Henry...but no Rosalee...

INT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Bill's got his pants down. Gropes at Rosalee with one hand, and holds her down with the other. Rosalee tries to twist out from under him --

BILL

Come on now, I want to see how much you goin' enjoy this.

He flips her over, ripping her undershirt in the process, and he FREEZES...his eyes on the RING hanging from a string between Rosalee's exposed breasts.

BILL (CONT'D)

That's my Peggy's ring...

He touches it delicately. Confused as hell --

BILL (CONT'D)

How the fuck did you get this...

He reads the look on Rosalee's face. Knows instantly. Jackson. RAGE replaces his confusion --

BILL (CONT'D)

I'mma kill him...

Rosalee takes advantage of Bill's pause. Gets her hands on that WHISKEY JUG, and -- SMASHES BILL OVER THE HEAD WITH IT!

Unfortunately, it only stuns him for a second. As he wraps his hands around her throat, and SQUEEZES...

EXT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Jackson passes the oak tree Rosalee hide behind earlier, walking at a casual pace. Completely oblivious that just 15 feet away, Rosalee's fighting for her life...

INT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

...that's fading fast as Bill CHOKES her to death. And this is the moment. The moment where Jackson bursts in and saves Rosalee at the very last second.

We HOLD ON the door. Waiting... And waiting... But there's no Jackson. Rosalee's going to have to save herself. She has just enough strength to make one last desperate thrust with the broken whiskey jug in her grip, and --

Bill TENSES UP. His fingers loosen on Rosalee's neck. She sucks in air as he coughs up BLOOD in her face. She pushes him off. He rolls onto his side, REVEALING -- THE SHATTERED JUG SHARD LODGED IN HIS NECK!

EXT. OVERSEER'S CABIN - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

BAM! The front door burst open. Rosalee runs out. Fleeing in BLIND TERROR. She stumbles off the porch right into the arms of a bewildered Jackson.

JACKSON

Rosalee...?

It takes him a moment to process her. She's covered in blood, sweat, and whiskey. SHELL SHOCKED. Clutches her torn dress to her battered and bruised body.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

What happened? Oh god...tell me what --

ROSALEE

We have to go...now...we have to run...

Jackson is so confused. Has so many questions. But one look into Rosalee's terrified eyes, and none of that matters --

JACKSON

Let me get the clothes -- the money --

Rosalee grips his arms --

ROSALEE

No...please...

Jackson looks to the open cabin door. Back to Rosalee. And he makes a decision. The only one he can. He takes Rosalee's hand. AND THEY RUN --

INT. D.C. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

-- and Elizabeth matches their stride as she moves through the crowded hallway. The place is beyond capacity with VICTIMS of the riot. Elizabeth is single-minded. Find John. She grabs a DOCTOR --

ELIZABETH

John Hawkes. He was by the Capitol...

She gets a shrug, so she heads to a BUSY NURSE --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I am looking for my husband...

Nothing. She fears the worst. Then --

JOHN (O.S.)

Please, I'm fine. I'm sure there are others in more need of your help. The women and children...

Elizabeth follows her husband's voice. Pulls back a CURTAIN to find a NURSE applying iodine to the stitches over John's eye. Elizabeth sags with relief --

ELIZABETH

John Francis Hawkes. You let her do her job, or I will open up those stitches myself.

He's so happy to see her. She's so happy he's safe. But there's still a subtle barrier between them. Remnants of their fight. Elizabeth takes the iodine from the Nurse --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Thank you, I can take it from here. He's stubborn as a mule some times.

The Nurse leaves, closing the curtain behind her. Elizabeth sits on the edge of the bed. Takes John in. He has more than a few CUTS and BRUISES. Tears well in Elizabeth's eyes --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

When I heard about the riot... I was so scared. I feared the... I rode as fast as I could...

JOHN

Look at me. I'm okay.

ELIZABETH

And yet my heart is still pounding.

John takes Elizabeth's hand in his. Squeezes it. Looks into her eyes. He forgot how beautiful those eyes were.

JOHN

You're going to be a great mother
someday. Someday soon.

That brings the tears and a smile from Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

I have been thinking a lot about the
idea of children. About what kind
of world we want to leave ours.
That Nursery. I want it to be a
place for life. Not just when God
graces us. But now.

John straightens up. It hurts a little, but he doesn't care --

JOHN

Are you saying what I think you're
saying?

She nods, biting her lip. Scared. But committed. He kisses her. She kisses him back. It has all the excitement of a first kiss. The HEAT builds. Elizabeth's hand drifts below the sheet. John pulls her dress down. Freeing her breast.

ELIZABETH

We have to be quiet.

JOHN

We had better get used to it.

Elizabeth straddles John. They might be in a hospital, but there's nothing clinical about this. It's URGENT, NECESSARY LOVEMAKING. As their BREATHING increases, MATCH TO...

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

...Rosalee and Jackson's HEAVY BREATHING. They're running so fast they're almost falling. Jackson takes a sharp turn --

JACKSON

This way. I heard about a man that
might help us...

INT. PULLMAN CABIN - NIGHT

A modest dinner of cornbread and beans. Ben sulks over his plate. The poor kid's BLACK EYE has come in, solid, and tender. August tries to look at him with kindness, but Ben is embarrassed. He hates his father for it. Mostly because he knows he was right.

The tense silence is only broken by the sounds of food shoveled into mouths. SUDDENLY --

BANG! BANG! BANG!

At the door. It startles everyone at the table. Jay rises to answer it, but August waves him off. Grabs one of his REVOLVERS from the mantle. We fully expect to see ROSALEE AND JACKSON as he cautiously opens the door, but --

IT'S A MESSENGER! Sweaty. Breathless --

MESSENGER

I've got an urgent telegram from the Macon Plantation in Alabama --

August takes the telegram. Hands it to Ben at the table --

AUGUST

What's it say?

BEN

A slave hurt a white overseer. Bad. And now she's gone running.

MESSENGER

Look at the reward...

Ben's eyes light up --

BEN

Five hundred dead. Two thousand dollars alive!?

The Messenger excitedly spills the gossip to August --

MESSENGER

They got word that you was the best South of the Mason Dixon line when it comes to catching Niggers. I had orders to find you straight away. And there's a white man running with her if you can believe that.

August considers. The Messenger and Ben wait with bated breath for his decision. Jay is concerned --

JAY

You don't have the money to go after this slave. Sent it all to Kentucky you said. What we's to live off here?

August pulls out a BILL from his satchel hanging off the mantel. Unrolls it onto the table, REVEALING -- some COINS and that it's that ESCAPED SLAVE BILL from the post office.

AUGUST

I found some work on the way home.
One of 'em fell into my lap. Let me
drive him right into town. And I
picked the pocket of the McNulty
Brothers, which sweetened the pot.

And it's right around this time that it really sinks in --
August is NOT a conductor on the underground railroad. Just
the opposite, HE'S A SLAVE CATCHER!

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Ben. Go to your room, grab your
sack. I want you to pack two pair
of socks. Two pairs of pants. Two
shirts. Undergarments. Your most
comfortable boots. You got all that?

Ben loses his excitement. Suddenly scared, like the little
boy he is --

BEN

I'm to go with you?

JAY

You think that's a good idea? With
so much money on the line?

AUGUST

You told me to pick a profession.

August is steadfast. Determined. He's got a job to do. He
grabs his second REVOLVER from the mantle --

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Go on now, Ben. And grab your rifle.
Those two make it to the river before
we do, you're going to need it.

Ben nods. Nervous, with false bravado. His first hunt will
be the one for Rosalee and Jackson...

INT. CABIN - WOODS - NIGHT

Rosalee and Jackson stand in the doorway. Crest-fallen.
Cobwebs cover every inch of the empty space. This place has
been abandoned for some time now. No help to be found here.

Rosalee takes Jackson's hand in hers. The realization sinking
in. Their long, hard journey is just beginning...

SMASH TO BLACK.

THE END.