

UNDERGROUND

Episode 101

"The Macon 7"

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&

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ACT ONE

"BLACK SKINHEAD" by KANYE rises on the track. It's HARSH. 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 shoes pound the dirt like a machine as MEN'S SHOUTS and BARKING DOGS echo through the trees, clashing with the HIP-HOP BASS.

The Black Man (NOAH) cuts left, runs into a HORSE tied to a tree. He quickly unties it. Clears some brush behind it, revealing -- a WOODEN WAGON.

SUDDENLY -- the horse REARS up. Spooked. Takes off through the trees, pulling the wagon with it. Noah moves to follow --

A BLUR comes at him. RIPS him to the ground in a fury of SNARLS. The BLOOD HOUND tears viciously into his leg as he struggles to grab...

A THICK LOG. He SWINGS it back -- SILENCING the hound with a sickening CRACK of its skull!

Noah scrambles to his feet. Favoring his CHEWED UP LEG. There's no running to be had now. Just quick stumbling -- through branches, over thick roots -- he stops on a dime...

FIRELIGHT bobs in the distance like a ghost, coming his way. He desperately scans the darkness around him. Spots a small cave of OVERGROWN MANGROVE ROOTS. He crawls in.

FROM THIS LOW ANGLE -- just an outline of the FIGURE carrying a torch in the distance. Noah traces the light with his eyes. It's getting closer... CLOSER... And just when every nerve ending in Noah's body is focused on that firelight...

A PAIR OF DIRTY BOOTS step into view not five feet from his hiding spot. Killing the breath in him. TENSION builds with the PULSING HIP-HOP BASS as the boots linger.

A SHOUT draws the boots away. Noah sags with relief, but -- a SHOTGUN BARREL is pressed into the back of his head!

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Get yo' ass on out of there...

NOAH

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Please...I wasn't tryin' to run. I --

Before Noah can plead anymore of his case, he's SHOTGUN-WHIPPED from behind. He slumps forward. OUT COLD --

SMASH TO BLACK.

The song reaches a CRESCENDO as 11 LETTERS assault the screen --

U N D E R G R O U N D

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 sun beats down on a show piece of the South. That soothing HUM guides us across 5000 acres of WILLOW TREES and rolling GRASS interrupted by -- THE BIG HOUSE, BARNS, COOK HOUSE, SLAVE QUARTERS, and the snow white COTTON FIELDS.

SUPER: **GEORGIA 1857**

SIX DOZEN SLAVES fill sacks hanging around their necks as a BLACK SLAVE DRIVER, wearing a TOP HAT, HOLLERS MOTIVATION.

A WHITE OVERSEER sits tall on his horse, a hand on the WHIP at his side as he lords over his kingdom. THREE PAIRS of PADDY ROLLERS [*hired slave police*] with SHOTGUNS at the ready patrol the fields on horseback.

SUDDENLY -- a BLACK TEENAGER (HENRY) plows 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 ROSALEE (19). She has a quiet, shy bearing. As delicate as the flowers she cultivates. Henry stumbles onto the porch, breaking her reverie. Rosalee's eyes shoot to the open screen door --

ROSALEE

What are you doin'? You can't be up
on this here porch.

HENRY

I's sorry Miz Rosalee...but it...done
come early...

Rosalee's eyes WIDEN. "Early" is not a good sign.

ROSALEE

Find my momma, tell her to come quick.

As AGONIZING SCREAMS of LABOR drag us to --

INT. BO & SERAPHINA'S SHACK - SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

A SLAVE GIRL (SERAPHINA, 22) 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 GIANT of a HUSBAND (BO, 30) paces. Raw with nerves. Rosalee enters --

ROSALEE

What happened?

BO

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

SERAPHINA

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

ROSALEE

Shhhh. You goin' be alright --

Rosalee helps Seraphina into birthing position. BLOOD runs down Seraphina's legs, staining the straw underneath her.

BO

There supposed to be that much blood?

Seraphina MOANS in pain. Rosalee just stares. A deer caught in the headlights as a WELL DRESSED MULATTO SLAVE blows into the room. Rosalee sags with relief at the sight of her.

This is ERNESTINE (Late 30's). Rosalee's mother. Head house slave. A woman with bearing, she has a fire in her that could warm a house. Or burn it down. Whatever's necessary.

ERNESTINE

Bo, where you keep your clothes?

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

BO

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. Go on outside and wait.

Bo reluctantly leaves. Ernestine shakes her head --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Men are useless at times like these.

She nudges Rosalee out of the way, getting between Seraphina's legs, undaunted by the blood.

SERAPHINA

It hurts...

ERNESTINE

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

ROSALEE

What's wrong?

ERNESTINE

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

Seraphina WAILS in despair. Rosalee is struck dumb by the news. Ernestine takes a deep breath. Steeling herself --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Put somethin' in her mouth. Miz
Suzanna gonna throw a fit she hear
all this noise up at the big house.

As she reaches DEEP between Seraphina's legs --

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MACON PLANATION - DAY

18 x 18 SHACKS line the dirt road. Bo paces as the MUFFLED SCREAMS of his wife echo through the cracks of his wooden home. SUDDENLY -- the SCREAMS stop. And so does Bo.

A DREAD SILENCE settles. Bo just stares at his door. A beat, then -- it swings open. Rosalee steps out. A SMILE on her face. A NEWBORN wrapped in a blanket in her arms.

ROSALEE

It's a boy.

Rosalee stares down at the baby. Emotional overload. In the best possible sense...

CUT TO:

A sweeping BIRD'S EYE view of the NATION'S CAPITAL. Up this high, it's PRISTINE. ICONIC. And we SWOOP DOWN...

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EXT. SUPREME COURT JUSTICE HALL - 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 stone steps by a WHITE MAN in an impeccable suit.

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. He gets to the top of those steps. Stands tall behind his podium, and --

JOHN

My name is John Hawkes. 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 legal defense. He is not even allowed to defend himself. Someone should speak for him...

He continues with the simple conviction and natural cadence of a damn good lawyer --

JOHN (CONT'D)

This nation was founded by those fleeing religious oppression from across the Atlantic. Escaping those who would deny them their freedom. I ask you, is not the plight of every runaway slave but a noble extension of that same manifest destiny?

John pauses, hoping for a reaction from the crowd... REVERSE ANGLE: there is no crowd. His impassioned words are being met with indifference. As he presses on --

JOHN (CONT'D)

There are three legal questions in front of this court. The first is about jurisdiction...

A DIGNIFIED BLACK MAN (30's) watches from across the street. A strong presence, his eyes burn with knowledge and secrets...

EXT. LIVERY STABLES - DAY

Tired GENTLEMEN ready their horses for the commute home. John's stripped out of his suit jacket. Drags his heavy podium towards his wagon and two horses in the back.

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The Dignified Black Man readies his own horse in the stall next to John's. Discreetly observes him. We get the distinct feeling he parked his horse here for a very specific reason. He watches John struggle with his heavy podium, then --

DIGNIFIED BLACK MAN
Can I offer a hand?

As he helps John slide the podium into the wagon --

JOHN
Thank you.

DIGNIFIED BLACK MAN
Not a problem, Mister Hawkes.

John raises an eyebrow. *How does this man know his name?*

DIGNIFIED BLACK MAN (CONT'D)
That was a thought provoking speech
you gave back there.

JOHN
Good to know at least one person was
listening. Mister...

The Black Man holds out a hand.

DIGNIFIED BLACK MAN
Still. William Still.

John stops mid-handshake --

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
A home. Yours, in particular. Its
location along the Ohio river could
be very advantageous to the cause.

JOHN

I am afraid I do not follow you.

John packs his bags, finding himself some busy work.

STILL

I believe you do. You spoke with passion about the rights of all men today. But your words fell on deaf ears. Did that sit well with you?

John stops. Looks at him. Of course it didn't.

STILL (CONT'D)

Words aside. What actions would you be willing to take to back them up?

John considers for a beat. Finally --

JOHN

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

STILL

But not in this one?

JOHN

My career, by nature, is built on respect for the law. Not just the ones I agree with. And it is 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

You might be telling yourself that you're just one man. That you would not matter. 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 do not have the luxury of waiting until it is fixed.

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The NEWEST POSTER reads -- "*From subscriber residing in Georgia County. \$100 Reward! Negro man slave, Named Charles. Negress Slave, Named Annie.*" POP WIDE to find...

INT. POST OFFICE - CITY OF ATLANTA - DAY

...a WHITE MAN looking over the poster with concern. This is AUGUST PULLMAN (Early 40's). Tired and textured by life. Two REVOLVERS are ever present at his sides. But it's the sizable BONE-HANDLE KNIFE on his hip that we're drawn to.

POSTMASTER (O.S.)

Alright, let's give it a read.

August hands a LETTER to the POSTMASTER. 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 has 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 not included costs for her medical bills, but moving her to a more secure ward has increased the cost of 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. Sincerely, the Washington Hospital."

August counts out COINS from his SACHEL.

POSTMASTER (CONT'D)

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

AUGUST

It's the best hospital in the country.

He finishes counting out coins. 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 grabs pen and paper. 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.

The Postmaster looks to August. *That all?* August nods...

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE - OF ATLANTA - DAY

August rides his horse, pulling a small covered wagon. Slows as he approaches another wagon in the middle of the road with a CHAIN GANG OF RUNAWAY SLAVES tied to its rear. Noah is among them. He looks BEAT. Not tired. Beaten. By life. And some of that same look is reflected in August's eyes --

JIM MCNULTY (O.S.)

August...

JIM MCNULTY (50's), the leader of a gang of slave catchers known as THE MCNULTY BROTHERS, tips his hat with a smirk from the front seat of his wagon. Years of HATRED passes between the two men as the BAYING OF HOUNDS fill the air.

The other 2/3's of the clan (HAROLD & PETE MCNULTY) burst from the tree line. Harold holds the leashes of THREE BLOOD THIRSTY HOUNDS. Pete drags a RUNAWAY SLAVE along --

PETE MCNULTY

Wooweeee. We got us another one,
Jim. Saw a nigger bitch with him.
She gotta be close still.

August tenses. Doesn't like that the McNulty's are on another runaway's trail, but he forces himself to continue on...

EXT. ANOTHER PART - OF THE GEORGIAN WOODS - DAY

...and he kicks his horse into a FULL TROT now. His eyes going to the ground. Desperately searching... searching...

Until he sees FOOTPRINTS. 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 abruptly...

August leads his horse to the edge of a small stream a few feet ahead. He strokes her gently. As she laps up water --

AUGUST

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

Is he talking to his horse? A beat. There's some RUSTLING NY Callings For educational purposes only
from the bushes where the footprints stopped, and -- a SLIGHT

RUNAWAY (ANNIE) steps out. HEAVY ROCK in hand. She's not going to go down without a fight. August remains calm --

AUGUST (CONT'D)
Where you headed?

Annie stays silent. So August moves to climb on his horse --

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

ANNIE
We's tried followin' the *drinkin'*
gourd...

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.

ANNIE
How you know so much?

AUGUST
I've made the trip a few times myself. At night, when the hiding's easier. Your only clear route to the river from here is back through town.

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

The BAYING of hounds reaches them through the trees. The McNulty's are on the move. August makes a quick decision --

AUGUST
You will if I hide you 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~~ FW Galding - For educational purposes only to throw off the scent for the dogs.

While Annie does exactly that, August adjusts his SACKS and BLANKETS in the back of his wagon, making room for her.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

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

Annie hops back through her footprints. Scrambles into the wagon. August pours a sack of COFFEE BEANS over Annie, then covers her with a blanket. He throws a few more coffee beans on the ground around the wagon as --

The hounds BURST through the trees, on the hunt. Harold tugged along by their leashes. Then comes Pete. Followed by Jim on his horse, the Chain Gang pulled behind him.

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

HAROLD MCNULTY

That nigger took to the stream.

Harold's dragged off by the hounds. Pete follows but --

JIM MCNULTY

Hold up...

He eyes August in suspicion --

JIM MCNULTY (CONT'D)

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

AUGUST

It's the last spot on the way home.

PETE MCNULTY (O.S.)

You seen any runaways round here?

Pete has circled around August, so they've got him boxed in.

AUGUST

You know I wouldn't tell you if I had...

Noah catches just the slightest MOVEMENT under the blanket. There's a flash of surprise in his eyes, but he remains otherwise poker faced.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Now I don't want any trouble. I'm gonna be on my way...

PETE McNULTY

Not before I take a look in your
wagon --

Pete reaches for the blanket, and -- SCREAMS bloody murder as August's bone-handle knife SLICES through his hand, PINNING it to the wagon. Jim reaches for his gun, but -- August already has one of his REVOLVERS pointed between Jim's eyes.

AUGUST

I'll put a hole in you too.

More fact than a threat. August never takes his gun off Jim as he walks over to Pete, and wrenches his knife free. Pete clutches his bloody hand, can't even straighten up before August has a revolver aimed square between his eyes as well.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

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

A tense beat, then -- Jim nods. He has no choice. It's pretty clear -- August is not a man to be fucked with.

As the McNulty's retreat, dragging the Chain Gang with them, Noah glances over his shoulder for one last look at this white man who helps runaways...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**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 team of meticulously dressed HOUSE SLAVES (all wearing cotton gloves) prepare dinner for serving. At a table in the corner, a MULATTO BOY pushes green beans around his plate. This is JAMES (7). Ernestine's youngest. As Rosalee enters --

JAMES

Momma was lookin' for you.

Rosalee slides on gloves. Dismisses her brother with --

ROSALEE

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 takes a moment to fuss over James --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

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

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

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

Here. Let me fix your hair.

Rosalee pauses as Ernestine quickly tightens a loose braid.

ROSALEE

I wanted to stay with the baby, 'til
Seraphina woke up.

Ernestine nods. Motherly but stern ^{TV calling} - For educational purposes only

ERNESTINE

I covered for you, but there ain't
no excuse for not being here when
dinner's on that table.

(then:)

And you should know, there's some
trouble going on with one of the
field niggers...

The curiosity is in Rosalee's eyes. *What kind of trouble?*
Ernestine dismisses the question with a shake of her head --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

It's got the white folks on edge, so
you mind yourself.

And with that, Ernestine ushers her daughter 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 (late 40's) sits at the head of the table, surrounded by
his VERY PREGNANT wife SUZANNA (late 30's) and his children
MARY (15) and T.R. (8).

SUZANNA

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

TOM

Darling, 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. 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
elevated hormones, but she's always been uptight and bitchy.

TOM

Carver Willowset is about to become
the next bishop of Atlanta. You
can't get elected in this state unless
you kiss the lord's...ring.

Tom's southern accent is a little too theatric, and his easy disposition conceals a ruthless ambition.

MARY

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

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

SUZANNA

You could use some less excitable friends.

MARY

Does anybody care that this is *my* birthday, not some campaign rally for daddy to be mayor?

TOM

Senator, sweetie pie. And trust me, Friday night will be your night. You've always wanted to go to Europe, right?

(off her nod:)

Well, I've spared no expense to bring it all the way to you.

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

SUZANNA

This has turned into a circus. I am 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 constant instruction.

Ernestine feels the sting of that, but keeps her vacant smile on as Rosalee quietly takes her place beside her mother...

EXT. YARD - JAILHOUSE - NIGHT

Impossibly high stone walls surround a DOZEN RUNAWAY SLAVES, corralled like cattle, shackled hands to feet. The barred door slides open. A CONSTABLE roughly pushes Noah in. Slides the door closed with a definitive CLANK! behind him.

In the eerie quiet, a TUNE reaches Noah's ear. The delirious HUMMING comes from a haggard OLD MAN crumpled in the shadows.

Noah, favoring his HURT LEG, hobbles over. Moonlight reveals a BLOOD-SOAKED ARROW stuck clean through the Old Man's back and out his gut. He stares off. Eyes glazed. DYING. Noah examines the arrow --

NOAH

Let's get this out of you...

The Old Man continues HUMMING. Stares right through Noah as he gently breaks the arrowhead off, and -- WRENCHES the arrow free without warning!

The Old Man screams in agony. Tries to get to his feet. Noah holds him in place --

NOAH (CONT'D)

Don't try an' move...

The Old Man pushes against Noah. His determined gaze fixed over Noah's shoulder at a PILE OF HAY against the far wall.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Listen to me old man. You gone hurt yourself more. You need to stay put --

OLD MAN

Those words done found me too late boy. But I's seen't it. The promise land...

Noah stops fighting the Old Man now. Struck by that.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Took me awhile. Only time to go was by night. Always runnin'. Always lookin' over my shoulder...

The Old Man uses the wall to support himself, taking one pained step at a time. Noah follows, quietly fascinated as the Old Man continues --

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

I's kept on singin' my song. Wore down all what God done give me. But I's done it right. Made it to that river. Freedom on the other side. It was within reach...

The Old Man reaches out for that pile of hay he's never taken his eyes off. As if freedom is waiting for him there, then -- a VIOLENT COUGH over takes him. TV-14 His knees give out. Noah catches him. Eases him to the ground. For educational purposes only

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
I's washed up on the shores like a
stuck pig. *You hear my song...?*

The Old Man is barely coherent now. The life fading from
him fast. Noah tries to make him comfortable --

NOAH
Shhhhh. Go on and rest now.

SUDDENLY -- the Old Man SEIZES Noah's arm. His eyes WILD --

OLD MAN
You seen't where the arrow got me?
Tell me you seen't it --

NOAH
I saw it. It was in your back.

OLD MAN
Ain't no one was watching it...
That was my mistake...

The Old Man goes STILL as Noah absorbs his warning. And
with his last breath --

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Be ready when you get to that river...

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. Hangs his coat by the STACKED SUITCASES against
the wall. Someone's taking a trip...

JOHN
Elizabeth...?

John is answered by a loud THUD! His features register more
curiosity than concern as 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 were not due to arrive until just before the train.

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

JOHN

When 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, but once my intentions for the space are fully realized...

INT. FUTURE NURSERY - HAWKES'S HOME - NIGHT

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

ELIZABETH

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) Calling - For educational purposes only
And over there? A veranda...?

ELIZABETH

Oh, that...was an unfortunate mishap.
This sledgehammer is quite heavy.
(not missing a beat:)
What do you think about curtains?

JOHN

Curtains? Well, I believe 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. So I
was thinking green. Here --

Elizabeth pulls a GREEN RIBBON from her hair and holds it up
to the the window. Imagining green curtains. She turns to
John. He manages a PAINED SMILE --

JOHN

Green is a lovely color.

There's more he wants to say. But he's biting his tongue,
for his wife's sake. She feels it regardless.

ELIZABETH

Of course we will not pick anything
out until I am actually with child
again...

It was the "again" that has her hand involuntarily going to
her belly. She starts cleaning up. Has to do something
with her hands. John watches her. His heart breaking.

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 could not even get inside the
courthouse. But I heard it is not
likely to go his way.

ELIZABETH

Poor man. To think, the negros risk
everything to get North, and we cannot
even protect them once they're here.

JOHN

And as long as slavery drives the prosperity of the South, it is hard to see how anything is going to change it. The least of all, me.

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

Ernestine brings a COVERED BASKET to Rosalee washing dishes --

ERNESTINE

Miz Suzanna wants her bath early. You gone have to take James out to your brother. And when you get back, warm up some milk for Miz Mary.

Rosalee looks down at the basket with DREAD...

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Now that the plantation chores are finished, SLAVES tend to the chores of their own households -- cooking, washing, tending their tiny gardens.

Rosalee's got that basket in one hand, James's hand in the other as they walk towards a Shack at the end --

JAMES

You can let go of me now...

Rosalee reluctantly does. He runs ahead, at home here as much as in the big house. Rosalee on the other hand...she's getting more than a few side looks from the Slaves as she passes. It's not hard to see why she was dreading this trip.

A MOTHER (PEARLY MAE, 30's) picks cabbages in her garden while her SIX-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER (BOO) dances around her. Pearly Mae gives Rosalee a warm smile and a nod as she passes --

PEARLY MAE
Miz Rosalee, we don't get to see
your pretty face enough around here.

Rosalee's about to respond to the kindness, but --

MOSES (O.S.)
Pearly Mae...

The FATHER (MOSES, 40's) stands in the doorway to their shack with wary eyes on Rosalee.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Time for our evening prayers.

Rosalee clocks the BIBLE in Moses's hands. When he sees her noticing it, he hides it behind his back...

INT. SAM'S SHACK - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

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

Rosalee and James duck in. James's 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. Pulls the napkin away, revealing LEFTOVERS from the Macon's dinner.

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~~ TV © 1999 For educational purposes only
any of those toys T.R. has.

Rosalee meant it as a compliment. But she's hit the root of Sam's insecurity, which is linked to his pride, so he deflects --

SAM

(re: the basket)

Scraps off the massa's table. Might be good enough for you, but I ain't no dog.

A COMMOTION outside draws everyone's attention. PADDY ROLLERS on horseback gallop past the window carrying torches. Sam and Rosalee move to the window, sibling bickering fading away as they hide. They both catch a lashing if caught looking.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: PADDY ROLLERS violently toss a shack as the White Overseer and that Top Hat wearing Black Slave Driver roughly question Henry (15), the teenager that ran to Rosalee earlier, in the shacks doorway. SUDDENLY -- the Overseer BACKHANDS Henry hard enough to send him to the dirt.

SAM (CONT'D)

That's Noah's place. Massa sent him on some work down the way. Was due back this morning...

Rosalee registers the implication in that. This was the "trouble" her mother was speaking of...

EXT. YARD - JAILHOUSE - NIGHT

Noah sits on the dirt beside the Old Man's body. His mind churning behind inquisitive eyes. It's subtle, but his disposition is different. *Stronger perhaps? More knowing?*

He takes in the dejected BLACK FACES around him. All spread out. ALL ALONE. All lost in thought, past, present, and future as they wait to be dragged back to slavery in chains.

Noah's eyes catch on that PILE OF HAY pushed up against the wall. The one the Old Man seemed to be fixated on. He gets to his feet. Hobbles over to it. There's one WORD scratched into the stone wall visible through the gold strands:

FREEDOM

Recognition floods Noah's eyes. He knows that word. He brushes the hay out of the way, revealing more words scratched into the wall. A few jump out at us:

FOLLOW RIVER BANK DRINKING GOURD PEG FOOT

PUSH IN on Noah as he traces the words reverently with his fingers. He doesn't know what they mean, but he senses they're important. *Why else would the Old Man hide them?*

SUDDENLY -- an idea strikes Noah. He rips off the bottom half of his shirt. Lifts his pants leg. DARK DRIED BLOOD crusts his wound, but it's not bleeding anymore.

Noah doesn't hesitate as he DIGS his fingers deep into the wound. Bites back the pain as BLOOD starts to ooze out. The sight of which, makes him SMILE. And just as we're wondering what the fuck he's doing re-injuring himself --

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

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

ROSALEE

Seraphina...?

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

ROSALEE (CONT'D)

You should be restin'...

Seraphina looks up. TEARS in her eyes.

SERAPHINA

I washed him clean. Of the sins of this life. Of the pain...

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

SERAPHINA (CONT'D)

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

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

INT. BO & SERAPHINA'S 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 out. Frantically checks for signs of life...it's no use. The baby lies limp in her arms. Dead.

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END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE OF - MACON PLANTATION - DAY**

Noah rides in the back of a CAGED WAGON, shackled hands to feet as the bumpy terrain gives way to a rhythmic roll he's familiar with. He pulls himself up, taking in...

The BRIDGE over the TRIBUTARY that leads through a decorative stone archway with the "MACON" name carved into it. PADDY ROLLERS man posts on either side of it. They sneer at Noah as the caged wagon rolls past.

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 her 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 these cakes, cause we using all the eggs we got.

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. From a young age we think we know it. But I never truly felt fear, *real fear*, until I had you and your brothers.

Ernestine really puts her back into mixing as she continues --

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

From the minute y'all were born, I was afraid of losing you. That y'all be sold or kilt. That your brothers would be worked and beat to the bone. And that you'd be too pretty.

(MORE)

ERNESTINE (CONT'D)

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.

INT. STABLES - BARN - DAY

TIGHT ON a pair of PADDY ROLLERS as they drag Noah in. Throw
him face first into the muddy ground.

TOM (O.S.)

Thanks for bringing him back boys...

Tom stands by as Henry, now sporting a SPLIT LIP, saddles
his horse. That BLACK SLAVE DRIVER leans against the wall.
Head bowed. His face obscured by the brim of his Top Hat.

The WHITE OVERSEER (BILL, 40's) hovers over a small FIRE.
Turning a HOT POKER in the flame. He's 230 pounds of barely
bottled, and usually whiskey-tinged rage.

BILL

Stand up.

Noah's leg wound is wrapped in the BLOODY bottom half of his
shirt now. He tries to stand. Can't. Splashes back to his
knees in the thick mud.

TOM

I put my trust in you, Noah. You
were supposed to take that wagon to
the Ludlow plantation. Drop off
that anvil and come right on back...

NOAH

I's sorry, massa'. That's what I
intended to do --

TOM

Now Noah, don't you lie to me. They
said they found you outside of
Atlanta. That's two counties over.

NOAH

Massa, I got lost...

BILL
 Bullshit, yo' nigger ass was runnin',
 and you know what we do to runaways...

Bill pulls the poker from the flames. An iron "R" blazes hot at its tip. Noah throws up his hands --

NOAH
 No, please... It was dark. I was
 scared. They sicked dem dogs on me
 before I could show em' my pass --

Bill is on Noah in one SHOCKING MOTION. That fiery red "R" inches from his face --

BILL
 You wasn't lost. You've made that
 trip six times now --

NOAH
 And I always come back. I *always*
 come back. *I-I* got turned around in
 the dark, that's all --

Bill JABS the hot poker. Noah winces. Bill hasn't stuck him -- not yet. Not quite. But boy does he want to.

NOAH (CONT'D)
 I swear. Massa, please...

Noah breaks down into SOBS. It's a horrible sight to see. A man at the end of his rope. Pleading for his life. Tom casually pulls on his riding gloves --

TOM
 Bill... How many miles you reckon
 between my plantation and the North?

BILL
 Hell, more than I can count.

TOM
 My guess? At least 600. On foot?
 There isn't a man on earth who could
 make that. Especially not being
 hunted by those whose sole aim is to
 drag him back in chains, dead or
 alive, so they can put food on their
 tables. Add to that, there isn't
 anywhere to hide as a darkie in a
 white man's world, and you've got
 yourself an impossible feat.

Bill keeps the heat of that hot poker on Noah as a boastful smile spreads Tom's lips --

TOM (CONT'D)

Almost as impossible as getting off my plantation. Yellow river on one side. Stone mountain the other. Three hundred acres of thicket and swamp everywhere else.

(with a laugh:)

I swear, on the fourth day, the Lord our God blessed me with a fortress.

(a beat, then:)

Fifteen years I've been the master of this plantation, and I have not had one runaway. Not one...

He locks eyes with Noah. Lets that sink in. The utter impossibility of escape. Finally --

TOM (CONT'D)

And he ain't the first.

Bill reluctantly backs off. That Black Slave Driver (CATO, 30's) lifts his head now, REVEALING -- one side of his face is covered in GNARLY BURN SCARS. His dead eyes are sleek, feral. Like a great white shark. All seeing.

CATO

Only takes one bad nigger to spoil 'em all.

Noah tilts his head, just enough to burn Cato a look. There's a special place in hell for those who turn on their own kind.

TOM

He can barely stand, he ain't runnin' anytime soon. But you and Bill keep an eye on him all the same.

Tom hikes himself up onto his horse --

TOM (CONT'D)

I'll send someone down here to tend to that leg. Then you get back in that shop. There's still work to be done today.

NOAH

Yes, massa'. Thank you --

TOM

I had to pay five dollars to those slave catchers because of your terrible sense of direction. A lash for each dollar seems fair.

Noah's face falls. He just can't catch a break. Tom gallops off as Bill unravels the whip at his side with a smile...

EXT. PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

August leads his horse towards a modest LOG CABIN and BARN. Both man and horse are dirty and tired from their long journey, but 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.

JAY
(re: August's horse)
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, best I can tell.

A beat. August pulls one of his REVOLVERS. Checks the bullets. Jay nods. Retrieves a SHOTGUN. Begins loading it. Ben doesn't get it yet --

BEN
What are y'all going to do?

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

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

August pulls a BROWN LEATHER BALL from his satchel.

BEN
What is it?

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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 BASEBALL GLOVE --

AUGUST (CONT'D)

This here is for catching the ball.

Ben's eyes light up as he figures out how to try 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. Jay gets it now. August is trying to protect his son's innocence --

JAY

Why don't you go on up to the house and do it now...

EXT. PULLMAN RANCH - DAY

Ben clumsily plays with his ball and glove as he heads for the cabin. SUDDENLY -- a GUNSHOT rings out. Ben stops. The answer to his question of "what are they going to do" hitting him HARD. As a BARRAGE OF SHOTS echo...

INT. STABLES - BARN - DAY

Rosalee enters with a BOWL, a RAG, and a bottle of ALCOHOL under one arm. Bill takes a swig from a FLASK as he kicks over a pail next to him --

BILL

Get up so she can look at that leg.

Noah's face down in the mud. FIVE SLITS cross the back of what's left of his shirt, exposing the RAW SKIN underneath. He crawls toward the pail, dragging his bad leg with him. Bill LAUGHS at how pathetic Noah looks as he heads out.

Just Noah and Rosalee left. They lock eyes. She fidgets under his stare. Uncomfortable. A little scared of him --

ROSALEE TV Calling - For educational purposes only
You gone have to take off your shirt.

She moves behind Noah as he struggles for a beat, then --

NOAH

It seems I need some help. If you
don't mind...

Rosalee hesitates. It was the way he said, "*If you don't mind.*" Like it was a challenge. She slides his shirt up and over his head. Can't help but look over his toned body...

She was expecting the SCARS. The marks telling the story of the punishment slaves must endure. She wasn't expecting the intricate TRIBAL TATTOOS covering them. The way Noah has found of making the story his own.

There's a palpable tension as Rosalee begins picking off loose pieces of fabric that have broken into Noah's welts --

NOAH (CONT'D)

It's Rose...right?

ROSALEE

Rosalee.

NOAH

I'm Noah. I know your brother...

Rosalee has a job to do, that doesn't include small talk.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Don't think we've ever spoken before,
you don't leave the big house much...

Rosalee bristles at the implication as Noah continues --

NOAH (CONT'D)

I always wonder what it was like up
there. Must be real nice sleeping
in dem comfy beds --

ROSALEE

We still slaves, don't matter where
we sleep.

Noah smiles. There it was, the first flash of personality in Rosalee. But his smile is quickly replaced with a grimace as she pours alcohol down his back.

Rosalee moves to Noah's leg. Unwraps the bloody shirt half. Tosses it aside. As she carefully rinses the wound, she notices something strange --

ROSALEE (CONT'D)

This ain't that bad...TV Calling - For educational purposes only

There's only TWO SMALL puncture marks in Noah's leg from the dog's teeth. It's not severe enough to hobble him.

NOAH

It ain't?

He said it playfully. Rosalee looks up at him. Confused, uneasy...and maybe even a little bit intrigued. Noah takes the bottle of alcohol from her --

NOAH (CONT'D)

Then hell, I guess I should put this to better use then.

He takes a long deep swig as a REALIZATION washes over Rosalee --

ROSALEE

Why is you's pretending?

Noah just smiles knowingly. Stands without any trouble.

NOAH

We all pretendin' in some way.

And we're finally going to introduce him properly, because really, this is the first time we're meeting the real NOAH (25). He's the type that swaggers even when he's standing still. His eyes always burn bright with awareness...except when he doesn't want them to.

He reaches over Rosalee, grabs the bloody half of his shirt she tossed aside.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Nice to meet you properly, Miz Rose.

And he walks toward the door. No limp. As Rosalee stares after him, quietly fascinated...

EXT. STABLES - BARN - DAY

Noah emerges into the day light, and -- he's limping again! He folds that bloody half of his shirt. Tucks it protectively into his pocket as he continues on.

PULL BACK to find Cato watching from the cotton fields. His eyes narrowed in suspicion. A TRAIN WHISTLE pulls us to...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The last rays of amber daylight shine down on an America still untouched, save a RAILROAD TRACK carving up the frontier. BLACK SMOKE billows as a TRAIN approaches...

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INT. SLEEPER CABIN - TRAIN - DAY

It's a bumpy uncomfortable ride, even in 1st class. Elizabeth straddles John on a cushioned bench. Her dress is hiked up. His pants around his ankle. But this doesn't feel like a spur of the moment tryst, it's more clinical than that --

ELIZABETH

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

JOHN

What the doctor said. Right.

John closes his eyes. Concentrating. Elizabeth feels bad. Knows she's taking the sexy out of sex right now, so she kisses her husband. Long. HARD. And it works. For a moment they both lose themselves. He flips her, so he's on top --

ELIZABETH

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

JOHN

You are 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 rolls off his wife. Losing the mood. Elizabeth sighs --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

I am sorry. I know we should be enjoying ourselves with the little time we have before we are surrounded by your family, but I cannot seem to get out of my own head.

JOHN

You do not have to apologize. You are not the only one...

Elizabeth lays her head on her husband's chest. He strokes her hair.

ELIZABETH

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

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John considers that for a moment, it's not just the trial --

JOHN

A man came to see me at the capital.
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.

JOHN

I mean both, I suppose. I told him
I could not be any help. But 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 does not have to be us.

John deflates. Elizabeth feels it and pulls back --

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

John... we could be thrown in jail.
I do not have to tell you it is
breaking the law.

JOHN

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

ELIZABETH

It has to be. Now I am sure this
Mister Still has a network of people
behind him. His endeavor will
continue without risking our home.

JOHN

Our risk would be nothing compared
to those we aide.

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(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

You know most runaways are recaptured or killed? I have heard horrible things --

ELIZABETH

As have I. From my friends. About angry Negroes who kill the owners of safe-houses and make away with their possessions.

JOHN

What if, on the way back, we stop over in Pennsylvania. Just hear the man out.

ELIZABETH

Absolutely not.

John stands in the cramped space. Frustration mounting --

JOHN

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

ELIZABETH

This is different. It is our home. You need to think about our family --

JOHN

What family, Elizabeth?!

Too far. John tries to bite off the words, but they hit his wife like a slap to the face. Elizabeth barely maintains composure as she hurries from the cabin. John watches her go, feeling like a heel...

INT. NOAH & HENRY'S SHACK - SLAVE QUARTER'S - NIGHT

Henry does PUSHUPS on the dirt floor. Sweat glistens his back. He's been at it for a while.

NOAH (O.S.)

How many?

Noah stands in the doorway with a pail of water.

HENRY

Two hundred. Every night. Six hundred since you left.

NOAH

Time to add fifty more! ^{TV} Calling - For educational purposes only

Noah hands him the pail of water. He drinks. There's a closeness here. An us-against-the-world vibe --

HENRY
You said you'd be back before they knew you was gone.

NOAH
I ran into some trouble, didn't make it to the city like I planned...

He grabs Henry by the chin. Eyes his SPLIT lip --

NOAH (CONT'D)
You all right?

Henry pushes him away. Puffing out his chest --

HENRY
I ain't no baby. What about you? That limp...

NOAH
I got to let them think I'm weak. That I ain't a threat. So they stop watching me so close.

This is about the time we realize Noah is playing a very deep game. And we're just cracking the surface of it.

NOAH (CONT'D)
I think I found it. The way to the promise land...

Noah pulls out that bloody half of his shirt. Unfurls it on the table to REVEAL -- the words that were carved into the wall of the jail are printed on it in NOAH'S BLOOD!

QUICK FLASHES -- *Noah digging deep into his wound until blood oozes out. Noah traces his blood over the letters on the wall. Noah pressing the white shirt against the wall using the blood as ink to make a copy of the words.*

NOAH (CONT'D)
This was carved into the jailhouse wall...
(pointing to the word:)
I don't know much, but I know that says freedom.

HENRY
We gots to find somebody to read this for us.

NOAH

We got to do more than that. That jailhouse was filled with poor souls being dragged back to bondage in chains. You know what they had in common? They's was all *alone*.

Noah's taken the Old Man's words to heart --

NOAH (CONT'D)

It's not enough just to find which way to go. We gone get a group of us. Be clever about it. Find a strength in numbers. And when we run, ain't no white man gonna be able to stop us.

And there it is. They're going to plan an escape. And their first mission is to gather a team...

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. MACON PLANTATION - DAY**

The cotton fields are EMPTY...because the entire plantation is in PARTY PREP. The lawn's being cut. Tables set out. LANTERNS hung in the trees. A PARADE OF WAGONS line the drive with CRATES of party goods. FIELD SLAVES flit about making things pretty as PADDY ROLLERS keep vigilant watch.

NOAH (O.S.)

Paddy Rollers always move in twos.
There were three of them slave
catchers who got me...

FIND Noah holding a LADDER while Henry hangs a LANTERN in a tree. They're on a mission to recruit their team --

NOAH (CONT'D)

Means we need at least two more
runnin' with us.

HENRY

Seems like more people just goin' to
slow us down...

NOAH

It's not about speed. We ain't goin'
to get off this land by just running.

Noah looks up to the peaks of STONE MOUNTAIN looming over the entire plantation, Tom's words echoing in his head --

NOAH (CONT'D)

And we ain't going to make it 600
miles north without help.

Henry climbs down the ladder. Picks up the box of LANTERNS at the base of the tree --

HENRY

So who you thinkin'?

Noah carefully and judiciously scans the Slaves moving about as he limps with Henry toward the next tree. His eyes find MOSES, the bible hiding slave, unloading crates from a wagon.

NOAH

Moses...

HENRY

The preacher man? The one that keep
sayin' every Sunday that god said to
obey thy massa'?

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NOAH
 You said yourself, we need somebody
 who can read...

As Henry's eyes widen in surprise --

EXT. BACK OF THE - CHURCH - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Moses has worked up a sweat as he fervently preaches to the SLAVES sitting on blankets in the dirt.

NOAH (V.O.)
 You seen the way the holy spirit
 catches him on Sunday. Those words
 ain't coming from God. They coming
 from that book he always hiding.

Moses's sermons are so powerful, a few WHITE PARISHIONERS come from the church to listen.

EXT. MACON PLANTATION - DAY

Henry's climbed another tree. Hangs another lantern --

HENRY
 I guess having God on our side
 wouldn't hurt none neither.

NOAH
 If he's picked a side, it ain't ours.

Henry scans the plantation now. From atop the ladder, he's got a perfect view of the WORKSHOP where SAM is busy smoothing out the underside of a LONGBOAT.

HENRY
 How 'bout Sam? He smart. Clever
 building things. He could come in
 handy...

INT. WORKSHOP - MACON PLANTATION - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Sam works diligently. Carving intricate designs in a well-crafted MAHOGANY DESK that would go for hundreds at auction.

NOAH (V.O.)
 He save up what little they give him
 in the shop. Fool thinks the massa'
 gonna let him buy his freedom...

Tom inspects the desk. It's flawless. A thing of beauty. He hands Sam a single PENNY for all his labor...

EXT. MACON PLANTATION - DAY

Noah and Henry are on the move again. Noah studies Sam --

NOAH
He play by the rules, might not be
able to trust him.

Noah watches as BO lifts up the heavy longboat, all on his own, and carries it off.

NOAH (CONT'D)
We go for Bo. He big as a house...

EXT. COTTON FIELDS - MACON PLANTATION - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Bo pummels a WHITE LABORER almost his size. A mountain. With fists like boulders. BAM. BAM. BAMBAMBAMBAMBAM --

HENRY (V.O.)
*I once saw him near kill a man tried
to have his way with Seraphina.
He'd destroy anything in our way...*

Bill, Cato, and some other SLAVES try to pull Bo off the laborer, but it's a struggle even with all of them...

EXT. MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Noah clocks the broken detachment in Bo's eyes as they cross with him --

NOAH
And right now he ain't got nothin',
save a wife who killed his boy...

Noah considers that for a beat, then --

NOAH (CONT'D)
Everybody be payin' their respects
when they put that baby in the ground
tonight. That's goin' be our one
and only chance to talk to --

CATO (O.S.)
How's that leg?

Noah and Henry stop. Trade a glance. *How much of that did Cato hear?* The frown on Noah's lips disappears as he turns --

NOAH
Doing fine, Mister Cato. Appreciate
you askin'.

TENSION rises as Cato silently scrutinizes Noah. There's a chance their recruiting mission is about to end before it's even started. Finally --

CATO

They find your wagon. They know you ain't been to the Ludlow's. Know you wasn't lost.

If that worries Noah, he doesn't let it show --

NOAH

Ain't my wagon, it's the massa's. And it been out there for days. All kinds of bandits on that road. You think there's anything left to find?

Cato picks up on the smugness under Noah's feigned ignorance --

CATO

You think you smart --

NOAH

No suh --

CATO

(mocking:)

No suh. Please, massa' please. I's just a big ol' dumb nigger don't punish me.

(then:)

Might have fooled them, but I see you. You a trouble-maker, and you got the itch.

Cato steps into Noah's personal space now --

CATO (CONT'D)

Yeah that's about right, ain't it? You think you smarter than the rest of us. You think you a *free man*.

A lethal beat. Henry looks back and forth between Noah and Cato staring each other down. Things could get ugly, but --

NOAH

You have a nice day now, Mister Cato.

He turns to limp off with Henry. Cato calls after them --

CATO

You ain't as smart as you think. So I'mma give you some advice *boy* --

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Noah finally snaps. Wheels on Cato --

NOAH

Don't you play "big nigger" with me --

Noah bites off his anger as a GRIN spreads across Cato's lips. He was aiming to prove "Noah the good slave" was nothing but an act, and Noah just played right into his hands.

Cato tips his hat to them. As Noah and Henry watch him saunter off...

NOAH (CONT'D)

We got to play this just right, or
we's dead before we step one foot
off this plantation.

EXT. BACK PIAZZA - THE BIG HOUSE - DAY

The heart of the plantation -- cotton fields, barn, expansive lawn -- is on PANORAMIC DISPLAY. Suzanna sways in the porch swing, fanning herself, watching the party prep come together.

Mary holds up a hand mirror, inspecting the job Ernestine's doing on her hair. Rosalee comes out the back door with a pitcher of lemonade, and Tom right behind her.

MARY

Daddy, you like my hair?

Suzanna clocks Tom's eyes falling over the curve of Ernestine's ass as she bends to grab a brush off a stool.

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.

ERNESTINE

There. All done. We'll pull the
back out right before the party.
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? Nine?

Mary heads into the house as Ernestine warily answers --

ERNESTINE

Gone be eight this year.

SUZANNA

Eight. And already bigger than T.R.
We get him out in that field. Get
him strong. I bet he'd fetch us a
good price on the block.

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 to the divide between them...

EXT. WORKSHOP - MACON PLANTATION - DAY

A horse drawn wagon hobbles up, wooden CRATES rattling in the bed. Bill drives. A few SLAVES ride in back. Bill eyes Noah busy molding a horseshoe in the fire. Sam is nearby, focused on his own work. Tinkering with what looks like a home-made GIN-STILL.

Once Bill's wagon clears the workshop, Noah inches towards Sam, keeping his voice low, conspiratorial --

NOAH

Tonight. At the funeral. We need
to talk.

Sam raises a questioning eyebrow -- *what would they need to talk about?*

EXT. BACK DRIVE - MACON PLANTATION - DAY

Bill's spider-sense tingles. He feels like something's up. But when he glances back to the workshop, Noah's already back to work. SUDDENLY -- T.R. and James DASH in front of the wagon.

The horses REAR to a sudden stop, TIPPING the wagon enough to toss some of the Slaves and a crate from the back. It SHATTERS on the ground -- BRIGHT, ORNATE MASKS spill out.

ON THE PORCH

Suzanna and Ernestine straighten up. Concerned for their boys. Watch as Bill climbs from the wagon. Red with fury.

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

Rosalee shrinks two inches under the weight of the command.

ERNESTINE
I'll go, Miz Suzanna --

Suzanna waves her off --

SUZANNA
Quickly now, Rosalee.

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 em' all
dirty. Them things worth more than
yo' life, boy.

Bill pulls his WHIP. Starts wrapping it around his hand. Shortening it up as tears spill down James's cheeks --

BILL (CONT'D)
Hold out your hands, boy.

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

ROSALEE
Excuse me Mister Bill, Miz Suzanna
wanted Mister T.R...
(deep swallow, then:)

...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.

He's finished rolling the whip around his hand. Snaps it out. Testing it. Rosalee sees her brother FLINCH in fear --

ROSALEE

It's my fault, Mister Bill. I gave em' 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 ain't mean no disrespect, 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...

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

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 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

A MALE HOUSE SLAVE pokes his head out the back door --

MALE HOUSE SLAVE

Massa', guests are coming up the drive...

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 now. She's going to need those hands to serve at the party 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.

As BLOOD pools in Rosalee's lacerated palms, she looks up. Locks eyes with Noah standing in the opening of the workshop. A gamut of EMOTION runs across his face -- anger, concern, awe, PRIDE. As their look holds...

EXT. FRONT PORCH - THE BIG HOUSE - DAY

Tom's already heading towards the Stagecoach to greet the arriving guests as the Male House Slave opens its door, and --

John and Elizabeth step out!

TOM

Can the handsome devil standing before me really be my brother? Lizzy what have you been feeding him?

As the brothers hug with great admiration for each other --

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS/DOWN BY THE RIVER - NIGHT (INTERCUT)**

SLAVES surround a TINY COFFIN adorned with FLOWERS singing a HYMN led by Moses. All the faces we've been introduced to -- Noah, Henry, Pearly Mae, Bo, even Cato, keeping his distance in the back. The melody is haunting. Full of pain. But also HOPE. Under the shadow of this death is an affirmation of life. There's a deep sense of culture in the air as the Slaves begin to CLAP, bringing rhythmic energy to the hymn.

As we go to MARY'S BIRTHDAY PARTY the clapping MORPHS into the beat of the Italian rap song, "FEMMINA ALFA" by BABY K, and it feels like we've been transported to the canals of VENICE during CARNIVAL. HUNDREDS OF GUESTS mill about on the grass between the Big House and the RIVER in gowns, tuxedos, and ornate COLORFUL MASKS. Ernestine, Rosalee (her hands treated and wrapped), and the rest of the Slaves serving wear PORCELAIN WHITE MASKS covering their black faces. A parade of MUSICIANS and DANCERS entertain. The longboat we saw Sam shaping earlier, is just one of SEVERAL GONDOLAS,

The shallow tribute to Mary is the antithesis of the emotional outpouring for a baby who never even had a name...

EXT. DOWN BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

Bill sits off to the side, swigging from his flask as T.R. and some ROWDY BOYS run around the tables displaying the half-eaten FIVE TIER BIRTHDAY CAKES. Ernestine and Rosalee cut and distribute slices.

Rosalee notices T.R. and his friends ROUGHHOUSING, knocking into the cake table carelessly. One of the cakes is dangerously close to tipping over on an unsuspecting Bill.

Rosalee moves to say something, but -- Ernestine touches her arm. Shakes her head subtly. *Don't*. They watch as T.R. slams back into the table again, and -- the cake topples over on Bill!

BILL

Son of a bitch --

The GUESTS laugh at him uncontrollably. Rosalee and Ernestine swallow their own laughter as they share a look. *They'll take a little comeuppance where they can get it.*

EXT. FRONT DRIVE - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Party's over. The last of the DRUNKEN GUESTS stumble into their carriages, heading home. Cato moves with purpose to a BURLY PADDY ROLLER waiting at the end of the drive.

BURLY PADDY ROLLER
I went all the way down to the
riverbank, looking where you said...

Cato hands over a FIFTH OF WHISKEY. Payment for this covert
run. He sent this man to investigate Noah's story!

CATO
Well. Did you find it?

As Burly opens his mouth to respond --

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE - NIGHT

PUSH THROUGH a gaggle of GOOD OLD BOYS to find John off to
the side, pouring himself his fifth drink.

TOM (O.S.)
Here. Put that horse piss down.

John turns to his brother's drunken smile --

JOHN
That is a twelve year old whiskey
you're talking about.

Tom displays the bottle in his hands --

TOM
My brother treks all the way from
Ohio. Good enough reason as any to
to open some twenty-four.

He pours. John samples. Nods. It's damn good. As they
walk along the riverbank, gondolas sailing past --

TOM (CONT'D)
You're not doing much talking tonight.

JOHN
I've been having a hard time opening
a conversation with your fellow slave
owners. "Pleasure to meet you, I
speak when I can against your very
way of life."

TOM
All the more reason I appreciate you
making the trip.

JOHN
Mary's birthday is not a matter of
politics. It is a matter of family.

TOM
 Couldn't help but notice you and the
 wife weren't talking much either.

John takes a sip, shamefully admits --

JOHN
 You ever say something so
 reprehensible that you could not
 possibly take it back?

TOM
 Why do you think I own so many acres
 of land? More places to hide.

John laughs. He's missed his brother's "wisdom".

JOHN
 I love the accent you have adopted,
 by the way.

TOM
 Remind me again, who was the one who
 came home from Oxford adding a
 superfluous "u" to the word "color"?

JOHN
 I was a long way from Ohio.

TOM
 So am I. You know that. Just trying
 to embrace the culture.

JOHN
 That a part of the bid for Senator?
 Show 'em you're one of them.

TOM
 They know I ain't one of them, that's
 why the Democrats approached me.
 They think I can speak the language
 of the North. I hope I still can.

JOHN
 Who's running your campaign?

TOM
 The smartest guy I know.

JOHN
 Good. What's his name?

TOM
 John Hawkes.

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John is speechless. He knows his brother isn't kidding.

TOM (CONT'D)

Well. What say you, little brother?

INT. PARLOR - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Elizabeth stares up at the ceiling, a LIGHT BREEZE fluttering through her hair. Her mind is elsewhere, as Suzanna and her southern belle neighbors, BERNADETTE and MARGOT, wind down with tea and birthday cake --

BERNADETTE

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

SUZANNA

It's not a competition.

MARGOT

Says the woman who always wins.

Light laughter. Shared smiles. Except from Elizabeth.

BERNADETTE

Elizabeth, tell us about the weather up North. Do y'all get anything like this heat?

A beat. Suzanna's friends throw a look Suzanna's way. Her sister-in-law is not making a good impression.

SUZANNA

Elizabeth...

The sharp tone snaps Elizabeth out of her daze. All eyes on her... and she doesn't know why --

SUZANNA (CONT'D)

Bernadette was asking about the weather up North...

ELIZABETH

Right. It does get hot, but nothing like this heat. It is, a bit...

(discarding a few words before:)

...Oppressive.

Suzanna's eyes narrow. "Oppressive" was an interesting choice of words. Elizabeth's eyes flit back to the ceiling for a second. *What keeps drawing her attention up there?*

MARGOT

Is your husband a planter like his brother?

ELIZABETH

Oh no. John operates a law practice in the city.

The women nod. Impressed. Suzanna adds her own two cents --

SUZANNA

He's also quite the activist...

BERNADETTE

That's wonderful, for what cause?

SUZANNA

Rights for niggers.

That's a party stopper. Bernadette and Margot stare at Elizabeth in disbelief. She smiles politely --

ELIZABETH

It is true, my John is an abolitionist, but I try not to talk politics at social occasions...

Margot nods with sympathy for Elizabeth --

MARGOT

Of course, it is our wifely duty to support our husbands. No matter how trying it can be sometimes...

ELIZABETH

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

SUZANNA

I suppose you have the luxury of such ideals, given your condition.

Suzanna places a hand on her round belly as the blood drains from Elizabeth's face. She looks to the other women. They don't make eye contact.

SUZANNA (CONT'D)

God knows we free the slaves, the North is going to be overrun in a fortnight. They are animals. Sure to loot, rape, and murder.

Elizabeth hates hearing that. Hates how much she sounded a little like Suzanna on that train. ^{TV} Calling - For educational purposes only

SUZANNA (CONT'D)

And I promise you this. You and John will both feel differently on the matter if you ever have children.

ELIZABETH

When. We have children.

SUZANNA

Yes. Of course. When.

Suzanna turns back to her friends. As they go about their conversation, Elizabeth's eyes drift up again...

REVEAL -- James, sitting in a swing hanging from the vaulted ceiling, FANNING the women with a feather fan. Like he's part of the furniture. It's an arresting sight. And it strikes a deep cord in Elizabeth...

EXT. BY THE BONFIRE - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

The funeral proceedings have turned into a lively wake. Simpler food, but plenty of it. MUSIC. Everyone happy their hearts are still beating in the face of death.

The flames of a BONFIRE dance across Cato's burned face as he watches -- Noah, Moses, Sam, and Bo dig a grave under a willow tree in the distance.

SAM (PRELAP)

(a hushed whisper:)

You must be crazy. You tryin' to get us killed...

EXT. GRAVE SIDE - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Noah and Sam are in the half-dug grave putting shovel to dirt as Moses and Bo stand by on either side. The enormity of the bomb Noah has just dropped is reflected by the alarm on Sam and Moses's faces. They speak in hushed tones --

MOSES

The lord saw fit to show you mercy after you were dragged back here, and now you talkin' like this --

NOAH

I wasn't tryin' to run. I was just tryin' to get into the city. Find a connection to the freedom train...

Noah discreetly pulls out his BLOODY HALF-SHIRT. Displays the words to Moses, making sure to keep the shirt hidden out of sight below the grave line --TV Calling - For educational purposes only

NOAH (CONT'D)

I need you to tell me what this say...

Sam REACTS. Alarmed. Scans the area. *Is anybody watching?*

SAM

Now I know you crazy. Massa' find you with somethin' with words on it, he gone have your back peeled.

MOSES

I don't know who told you's I could read, but they's mistaken --

NOAH

I thought God don't look kindly on tellin' lies.

A beat. Moses's silence is confirmation. He can read.

NOAH (CONT'D)

I ain't goin' to tell nobody.

Noah holds his half-shirt out to Moses --

NOAH (CONT'D)

This is the map to freedom, and I'm trustin' you with it, you got to trust me too.

Moses reluctantly takes the half-shirt. Slips it into his jacket as Noah and Sam climb out of the grave. Bo's remained silent this entire time. Continues to do so as he lowers his son's casket into the ground.

NOAH (CONT'D)

We all gone have to trust each other. This whole thing. It don't work no other way.

SAM

It don't work any which way.

NOAH

That's what they want us to believe. But we do this right, and we do it together, we can stand as free men.

Moses and Sam are affected by Noah's words, but still wary. Bo stands over his son's grave with a hand full of dirt, finally speaks --

BO

An ugly death. That's the only thing TV calling for educational purposes only all of us gone find we stay here...

Bo lets the dirt fall through his fingers as that truth hits home for everyone standing around this too small grave. A moment of quiet reverence, then --

NOAH

You all think on it...

Noah respectfully drops his own dirt on the casket before leaving. As he turns to walk away, he spots --

Rosalee standing on the fringes of the wake. A modest bouquet of flowers in hand. He stops and looks at her.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Rosalee's EMOTIONAL but trying to mask it as she watches the other slaves mourn. She feels Noah's presence as he joins her, but she doesn't look at him. She can't.

NOAH

That was good of you to take them lashes for your brother.

They stand together in silence for a moment. Both outsiders in their own way. Tears well in Rosalee's eyes. This next part has been festering ever since Noah said it --

ROSALEE

You says we all pretendin'. What did you mean?

NOAH

We's all know we supposed to be free.

That just hangs for a beat, then --

ROSALEE

I ain't been more than two steps off this plantation in my life. I can't even imagine what being free would be like.

Noah just stares at her. Silently measuring her. *Can she be trusted? Is she brave enough to run with them?*

NOAH

All them cities up North are built with iron and steel. A free man, say with the skills I got, he could live like a king. Go anywhere his heart leads him. Live a life is his own, and nobody else's... 'Cept his wife's when he finds her. And their children? They ain't never gonna have to think about runnin'.

As Rosalee's tears finally spill over...

INT. GUEST ROOM - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Elizabeth holds onto the sides of an ORNATE MIRROR as a HOUSE SLAVE unlaces her intricate corset. John comes in. Pauses in the doorway, watching his wife. He can read her discomfort with the fact a slave is waiting on her. He moves in --

JOHN

Thank you, I will take it from here.

The House Slave nods. Leaves. John starts to unlace. Elizabeth pulls that Green Ribbon from her hair, letting it down. A beat of silence, then --

ELIZABETH

The cake was delicious. Just how you like it. Did you get any?

JOHN

I have had a scotch in my hand since we stepped off the stagecoach.

Then, sheepishly, he looks at her through the mirror --

JOHN (CONT'D)

Despite my efforts, it was not nearly enough to forget what I said to you. I am sorry. And you are right. I need to start putting my family first.

(then:)

Tom asked me to manage his campaign run for senator.

Elizabeth locks surprised eyes with her husband in the mirror's reflection.

JOHN (CONT'D)

If I want to make a difference, a real one, having the ear of a Senator could help me. We move down here, and I could be at home more. And we would be surrounded by family when we finally have our own.

It would seem John has already accepted Tom's offer, but Elizabeth studies him. She knows her husband too well --

ELIZABETH

You turned him down.

John's finished unlacing Elizabeth's corset. Turns her to face him, so he can explain himself. falling - For educational purposes only

JOHN

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. I want light to shine in...

Elizabeth takes in the passion in John's eyes. Mirrored in hers now as well.

ELIZABETH

They had a little boy up in a swing. Fanning us in the parlor like he was just another piece of furniture. You are right. We can no longer be passive. We need to do more.

John takes Elizabeth's hands in his. *Are you sure?*

She nods, biting her lip. Scared. But committed. John kisses his wife. It has all the excitement of a first kiss. The HEAT builds quickly. And there's nothing clinical about this. It's URGENT, NECESSARY LOVEMAKING.

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

The last embers of the bonfire smolder as Slaves return to their homes. Noah walks with Henry --

BILL (O.S.)

Hey boy... Boy. I know you hear me talkin' to you --

Noah turns --

BILL (CONT'D)

Mister Macon wants to see you up at the big house.

Noah and Henry trade a look. *This can't be good...*

INT. MOSES & PEARLY MAE'S SHACK - SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Cozy. A "home" more so than any of the other slave shacks we've been inside. Boo sleeps soundly in the straw bed. Pearly Mae sits in the glow of the lamp. That BIBLE open before her. She gives Moses a soft smile as he enters --

PEARLY MAE

We left off at John 15:13...

Moses pulls the shirt half from his jacket ~~—~~ Twinkl.com For educational purposes only

MOSES

I got somethin' else I want you to
read to me tonight...

Pearly Mae is the one that can read, not Moses! He joins
her at the table. They look at the shirt half together.
Her expression turns serious --

PEARLY MAE

Where did you get this?

MOSES

Noah.

PEARLY MAE

It's a song. My momma used to sing
it to me. When I was no older than
Boo.

MOSES

He thinks it's the way to freedom...

Pearly Mae looks into her husband's eyes with soft surprise.
Back to the bloody words. With reverence --

PEARLY MAE

All this time, I didn't think it
meant nothin'...

She HUMS out the tune as the memory washes over her. And we
recognize it right away -- it's the same tune the Old Man
was humming in the jail before he died!

MOSES

Sing it to me, ma.

Pearly Mae looks at Boo, sleeping like an angel. Then, with
a voice soft and pure she begins to sing "FOLLOW THE DRINKIN'
GOURD..."

EXT. MACON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Pearly Mae's haunting voice fills the world as Noah limps to
the Big House with Bill at his side. As they turn the corner,
Noah's stomach drops at the sight of -- THE WAGON.

The Paddy Roller found it for Cato. Now with each step
towards the big house, the DREAD builds. This is starting
to feel like a walk to the gallows...

INT. PORCH - THE BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

Rosalee tends to the roses. It's gone. Whatever ease once
allowed her to get lost in this activity. TV Filming - For educational purposes only An awareness has
been woken up in her. Nothing's ever going to be the same.

She pricks her finger on a rose thorn. BLOOD beads as Bill leads Noah up onto the porch. TIME SLOWS as Rosalee and Noah lock eyes. Everything is in this CHARGED look. *It's like they're already lovers...*

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE OF - TOM'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Bill and Noah approach. Cato materializes from the shadows as Pearly Mae's song ends. Noah has to clench his fists to keep from killing Cato where he stands. Cato responds with a slow, easy smile.

BILL

Y'all wait here.

He slips into the office. The candlelight flickers across Noah and Cato's faces as they stand in silence, then --

CATO

This can go one of two ways. I tell the massa' what I found in yo' wagon. We see if that slick tongue of yours can talk yo' way out of a hangin' --

NOAH

You don't know nothin'...

CATO

Know enough to know you plannin' something.

A beat. Noah's not giving anything away, so --

CATO (CONT'D)

I think you runnin' and you gone take that boy with you. The way I see you's watchin' everybody, talking in hushes, maybe you gone take some others too. A thing you ain't consider, you get caught or not, it's gone be the slaves left behind that pay the price --

NOAH

Don't act like you care bout nobody else. You only care about yourself.

CATO

You dead right. That's why I don't mean to be left behind. You get me?

It takes Noah a moment to process that -- Cato wants to run with them! And he's going to blackmail him to do it.

NOAH
Ain't no chance in hell.

Bill opens the door. Motions for Noah and Cato to come in.
Cato moves past Noah, lowers his voice --

CATO
Guess we's gone find out who the big
nigger is now.

Off Noah, between a rock and a hard place...

INT. JAILHOUSE - NIGHT

A HAND wrapped in a BLOOD-SEEPED BANDAGE. WIDEN to find it
belongs to Pete McNulty. He and his brothers stand in front
of a CONSTABLE, reconciling marked-up ESCAPED SLAVE BILLS --

CONSTABLE
That's five dollars from the Macon
Plantation. And here's fifty for
that one from Alabama way.

PETE MCNULTY
Hold on now. The notice said one
hundred dollars. Dead or alive.

CONSTABLE
That's for the pair. Male *and* female.

He showcases the bill in question -- it's for Charles and
Annie, the runaway August helped elude the McNulty's earlier.

JIM MCNULTY
That bitch, we done chased her over
a cliff. She fell, must'a been fifty
feet...

CONSTABLE
Is that so?

HAROLD MCNULTY
I reckon it was seventy-five. Ain't
no way to get that body.

The McNulty's look to the Constable, hoping to catch a break.

CONSTABLE
Well, the good Lord must have been
looking out for her, 'cause she ended
up in here without a scratch on her...

CREEAK! The stone door to the jail yard opens. PADDY ROLLERS
drag first Charles, then -- Annie out in chains! TV 14 Rating For educational purposes only

CONSTABLE (CONT'D)

Rest of this money owed to the man
who brought her in.

JIM MCNULTY

And who is that, exactly?

AUGUST (O.S.)

That would be me, Jim.

They turn to August in the doorway. He locks eyes with Annie. She's shattered. Tears of anger in her eyes. She thought she could trust him. He remains stoic. A man doing a job.

August is NOT a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Just the opposite, HE'S A SLAVE-CATCHER!

JIM MCNULTY

You stole her right from under us...

CONSTABLE

Y'all ain't the only ones tricked.
He walked her right in here with his
coat over her head. I swear I heard
that dumb nigger call him a "saint".

HAROLD MCNULTY

That true?

AUGUST

Not at all. She called me an "angel".

And with that simple statement, we --

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE