CARD:  1841

FADE IN:

1  INT. TOWNHOUSE/STUDY - DAY

-EARLY APRIL, 1841-

We are close on a PAIR OF BLACK HANDS as they open A
FINELY WRAPPED PACKET OF VIOLIN STRINGS.

WE CUT TO the hands stringing a VIOLIN.  It's not a high
end piece, but it is quite nice.

WE CUT TO a wide shot of the study.  Sitting in a chair
with violin in hand is SOLOMON NORTHUP; a man in his late
twenties.  Everything about Solomon, his mien and manner,
is distinguished.  But he, too, seems a hardy individual.
Someone who has known manual labor in his time.

Solomon begins to lightly play his violin, as if testing
the strings, their tuning.  Satisfied, Solomon begins to
play vigorously.  As he does, we make a HARD CUT TO:

2  INT. HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - EVENING

We come in on a lively affair.  A dinner party is being
thrown within the confines of a fairly stately house.  In
attendance are EIGHT COUPLES.  All are WHITE and all are
FAIRLY YOUNG, in their early twenties.  The men and women
are dressed in very fine attire.  We should get the sense
that for the most part they are people of means.

The furniture has been set aside in the living room.  At
the moment the couples are engaged in the dancing of a
REEL.

The music they are dancing to is being played by Solomon,
having cut directly from the tune he was previously
playing.  He plays with a light determination, and in no
way seems possessed with empty servitude.

Solomon concludes the reel, and the dancers break into
enthusiastic applause, which is followed by personal
thanks and congratulations from all.  It should be clear
that despite their respective races there is much
admiration and appreciation for Solomon's abilities.

3  INT. NORTHPUP HOUSE/bedroom - MORNING

It is a Saturday morning.  Clad in her finest attire is
ANNE; Solomon's wife, a few years younger than he.  We
see also the Northup children: MARGARET who is eight, and
ALONZO who is five.  They are handsome, and well groomed
kids.  Anne straightens up the children.  She finishes,

(CONTINUED)
she rises up and stands behind them, almost as if preparing to pose for a portrait.

They all wait a moment, then Solomon enters the foyer. He stands and looks admiringly at his family. ADMIRINGLY stressed. It isn’t that he doesn’t have love for them, he does as well. But in the moment, he truly admires his greatest accomplishment: a family that is healthy and well and provided for. He goes to his children, and hands each a coin, then goes to Anne. Gives her a kiss on the cheek. The children giggle at the sight.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Solomon and his family are out walking along the streets and groves of Saratoga.

The streets are well populated this morning with many people out strolling. Most are WHITE, but there are BLACKS as well. They are FREED BLACKS who mingle fairly easily - though not always completely - with the whites. We see, too, a few BLACK SLAVES who travel with their WHITE MASTERS. These pairings are largely from the south and - despite the fact the blacks are slaves - they are not physically downtrodden, not field hands. They are well dressed and “leading apparently an easy life” - comparatively speaking - as they trail their masters.

As they walk, Solomon and his family arrive to an intersection well-worn and muddied from horse and cart traffic. Solomon and his children easily jump across the muck. Anne stands at the lip of the puddle, calls for Solomon to help her across.

    ANNE
    Solomon...

Solomon, turning back to his wife with a broad smile waving her forward:

    SOLOMON
    Come, Anne. Jump.

The children, now smiling as well, egg their mother on.

    ALONZO       MARGARET
    Jump. You can make it. I’ve done it. You can make it.

    ANNE
    I will not ruin my dress. Catch me!

Solomon moves close, holds out his arms. Yet, there’s still just a bit of mischievousness in his eyes. Anne gives her husband a lightly stern look to which Solomon replies.

(CONTINUED)
SOLOMON
I will catch you, Anne.
(beat)
I will.

Again, lightly stern:

ANNE
You will.

And with that Anne takes the leap. Solomon catches her, swings her around grandly and sets her down lightly to the delighted applause of the children. That done, Solomon takes Anne's hand and leads her on.

As Solomon and his family make their way, among the slaves on the street, we see one in particular; JASPER. As he trails his MASTER he can't help but note Solomon and his family as they enter A STORE. His intrigue of this most handsome and harmonious group should be obvious.

With his Master occupied, Jasper moves slyly toward the STORE. Frozen on the spot, Jasper looks on admiringly. Suddenly a voice barks out-

A VOICE (O.S.)
Jasper! Come on!

INT. STORE - LATER

We are inside the store of MR. CEPHAS PARKER; a white man and a supplier of general goods. Solomon greets him with:

SOLOMON
Mr. Parker.

PARKER
Mr. Northup. Mrs. Northup.

With money in hand the Northup children move quickly about the store looking for items to purchase.

(CONTINUED)
Anne looks over some silks and fabrics. Parker suggests to Solomon:

PARKER (CONT'D)

SOLOMON
We are in need of a fresh carry all for the Mrs's travels.

PARKER
A year's passed? Off to Sandy Hill?

ANNE
I am.

Using a long pole, Mr. Parker fetches down a CARRY ALL from an upper shelf.

PARKER
Something to suit your style, but sturdy enough for the forty miles round trip.

Handing the Bag to Anne, she is immediately taken by it.

ANNE
It's beautiful.

SOLOMON
(cautiously)
At what price?

ANNE
We will take it. Children, come see what your father has just purchased for me.

As the children run over - chattering excitedly about the new gift - they RUN PAST JASPER who has quietly entered the store.

At the checkout counter sits a portrait of WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON, the edges draped in black crepe. Before the book sits a LEDGER. Mr. Parker asks of Solomon:

PARKER
If you would sign our condolence book. My hope is to find a way to forward it to the Widow Harrison. Sad days for the nation.

SOLOMON
Yes, certainly. Poor Mrs. Harris and her children. I hope brighter times ahead.

(CONTINUED)
Jasper looks scared, timid. It's as though he'd like to engage, but is unsure of as to how. Noting Jasper, Parker says:

PARKER
A moment, sir, and you will be assisted.

SOLOMON
If we could discuss the price...
PARKER
Forgive me, Mrs. Northup. A customer waits. Welcome, sir.

To Jasper, with good nature:

SOLOMON
Shop well, but mind your wallet.

PARKER
Ignore the gentleman's nonsense. Now, may I interest you in a new cravat? Pure silk by way of the--

Before Parker can finish, the door opens. It's Jasper's Master, FITZGERALD. He's stern, clearly displeased.

FITZGERALD
Jasper!
(to Parker)
My regrets for the intrusion.

SOLOMON
No intrusion.

Fitzgerald looks to Solomon. It is a cold glare as though he wasn't speaking to, and has no interest in a response from a black man. Looking back to Parker:

FITZGERALD
Good day, sir.

INT. NORTHUP HOUSE/DINING ROOM - EVENING

Anne, busy in the kitchen, puts the final touches to the meal, which is just about to begin. Solomon, in the meanwhile, sits at the head of the table reading from a NEWSPAPER. He reads to his children solemn news of the funeral arrangements for the recently deceased President Harrison.

SOLOMON
"Thus has passed away from earth our late President."

Solomon starts from the top of the article.

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
"During the morning, from sunrise, the heavy bells had been pealing forth their slow and solemn toll while the minute guns announced that soon the grave would receive its trust. Our city as well as our entire nation has been called to weep over the fall of a great and good man. One who was by the wishes of a large majority of our (MORE)
people raised to fill the highest
place of trust within their gift.
William Henry Harrison."

A long moment of quiet, the family continuing to eat. Then, from Margaret:

MARGARET
Will you read it again?

ANNE
Not just now, darling.

Anne enters the dining room and places a large chicken at the center of the table. As she takes a seat, all heads are bowed.

MARGARET
For food that stays our hunger,
For rest that brings us ease,
For homes where memories linger,
We give our thanks for these.

ALL
Amen.

SOLOMON
Margaret, that was wonderful.

MARGARET
Thank you, Papa.

SOLOMON
Alonzo, do you have something to say?

ALONZO
Yes, I helped Momma make this.

ANNE
Yes, and you were such a good help. Especially making the gravy.

MARGARET
Papa, I would very much like to learn how to play the violin. Could you teach me?

ALONZO
Me too!

MARGARET
Yes, but I asked Papa first.

SOLOMON
Both of you, calm down. We will have our first lesson after this wonderful dinner. And on that note, let's start eating.

(Continued)
The family all tuck in to their meal. The scene is one of warmth and happiness.
Solomon and Anne have fun and difficulty putting the unruly children to bed. They are tucked in, and each given a kiss good night. As Margaret lays down to sleep, Anne blows out the candle darkening the room. Silhouetted in the doorway, Solomon takes Anne in his arms, holds her tightly as they both luxuriate in the simple, beautiful gift that is their children.

Now alone together, we see Anne and Solomon wrapped in each other's arms. Beyond being physically close, emotionally close, they are just so very comfortable with one another. They are the very representation of a couple who are made for each other.

They look at each other for a prolonged time.

SOLOMON (comically forlorn)
Three weeks. Two days.

ANNE
It is the custom. I wonder what you'll do without me?

SOLOMON
I won't stay idle.

SOLOMON's eyes lower.

ANNE
Darling, it's good money.

SOLOMON
If only I didn't have to share your cooking with other people.

ANNE holds his gaze.

ANNE
You don't.

They kiss.
EXT. NORTHUP HOUSE - MORNING

We are just outside the Northup house. A CARRIAGE waits with a DRIVER. Anne and the children are dressed for travel - Anne sporting HER NEW CARRY ALL. The Driver loads bags into the carriage.

For her parting gift, Anne gives her husband a kiss.

SOLOMON
Travel safely.

ANNE
Stay safely.

Anne and the children loaded up, the Driver chides the horse and the carriage heads off. Solomon waves a hearty good bye to his wife and children.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Solomon is now out for a stroll. He passes two men - two in particular - who stand outside conversing with MR. MOON himself: MERRILL BROWN and ABRAM HAMILTON. Brown is about 40, with a countenance indicating shrewdness and intelligence. Hamilton is closer to 25, a man of fair complexion and light eyes. Both are finely, if perhaps a bit garishly, dressed. Hamilton, as Solomon describes him, slightly effeminate.

Moon, spotting Solomon:

MR. MOON
Call the Devil's name... There he is now. Mr. Northup...! I have two gentlemen who should make your acquaintance. Messrs. Brown and Hamilton.

BROWN
Sir.

MR. MOON
Mr. Northup, these two gentlemen were inquiring about distinguished individuals, and I was just this very moment telling them that Solomon Northup is an expert player on the violin.

HAMILTON
He was indeed.

SOLOMON
Mr. Moon is being overly gracious.

(CONTINUED)
Taking into consideration his graciousness and your modesty, may we trouble you for a moment of your time to converse, sir?

EXT. PARK/PAVILION - LATER

We make a jump to a green space. Solomon, Brown and Hamilton are sitting at a bench.

SOLOMON
A circus?

HAMilton
That is our usual employee. The company currently in the city of Washington.

BROWN
Circus too constricting a word to describe the talented and merry band with which we travel. It is a spectacle unlike most have ever witnessed. Creatures from the darkest Africa as yet unseen by civilized man. Acrobats from the Orient able to contort themselves in the most confounding manners.

HAMilton
And I myself in aide of Mr. Brown; an internationally renowned practitioner in the art of prestidigitation.

BROWN
We are on our way thither to rejoin the company having left for a short time to make a small profit from our own exhibitions.

HAMilton
The reason for our inquiry with Mr. Moon...

BROWN
Yes. We had just a devil of a time in procuring music for our (MORE)
entertainments. Men of true
talent seemingly in short supply.

SOLOMON
Thank you sir...

BROWN
If we could persuade you to
accompany us as far as New York...
We would give you one dollar for
each day’s service and three
dollars for every night played at
our performances. In addition we
would provide sufficient pay for
the expenses of your return from
New York here to Saratoga.

SOLOMON
You understand this is all very
sudden.

HAMILTON
Consider it an opportunity to see
the country--

SOLOMON
It's intriguing...

HAMILTON
If there is any way in which you
would give consideration to the
offer...

Solomon gives the whole deal one last consideration.

SOLOMON
The payment offered is enticement
enough, as is my desire to visit
the metropolis.

HAMILTON
We are delighted, sir. So
delighted. Though we would add
that our travel plans--

BROWN
We would like to depart with
haste.

(CONTINUED)
As luck would have it, my wife and children are traveling. I will write her of our plans.

Excellent! I would beg you collect yourself, then we may proceed.

Back in his house, we see Solomon packing; putting some clothes in a travel case, and collecting his violin as well.

Solomon sits down to write a letter; pen poised over paper with already a few lines written. But Solomon thinks better of it. WITH LITTLE THOUGHT HE TEARS THE PAPER AND SETS IT ASIDE. WE SHOULD GET THE SENSE THAT THE ABSOLUTE VALUE OF BEING ABLE TO COMMUNICATE BY LETTER IS LOST ON SOLOMON. THIS FACT WILL HAVE GREAT WEIGHT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

Solomon enters the buggy, carpet bag in hand. Brown and Hamilton are waiting. They ride in a covered carriage led by a pair of "noble" horses.

No letter to post?

No need. My return will coincide with my family's.

We're off then.

We find ourselves in a roadside pub. It serves the purpose of drinking and diversion, and little more. As Solomon plays his violin, Brown and Hamilton perform a decent, paired magic routine before a SPARSE AUDIENCE NOT OF "SELECT CHARACTER."
INT. PUB - LATER

After the show, the pub now fairly empty, Solomon, Hamilton and Brown sit down to eat. Hamilton and Brown drink, but again Solomon abstains. Though Solomon remains cool, Hamilton and Brown put up a great show of being disappointed as Hamilton counts out what little money was collected.

HAMILTON
Not an additional tip from a one of them. They expect to be entertained for nothing.

BROWN
And not satisfied a bit despite giving them more than what they paid for.

SOLOMON
It's the national mood. There's too much grief to make room for frivolity.

HAMILTON
My sincerest apologies, Solomon. You were promised opportunity, and you were given none.

BROWN
The opportunity is with the circus. A two man show poorly promoted, what were we to expect? But the circus bills itself.

HAMILTON
True.

BROWN
I have told you of the circus with which we are connected. Creatures from the darkest of Africa. Acrobats from the Orient who--

SOLOMON
You have described it, yes.

BROWN
Yes. We need to return immediately to Washington. Solomon...I believe us familiar enough now, but forgive me if I am bold...would you consider making the trip with us?

Solomon gives a bit of a laugh at the idea.

(CONTINUED)
HAMILTON
Entertaining at pubs and inns has its place, but a man of your skills deserves better.

BROWN
Hear, hear.

HAMILTON
And more importantly you would build your own name and following. The circus tends to attract those with the highest of reputations. An introduction here and there could amount to a lifetime of reward. Now would be the time. With your family away, an opportunity presents itself.

BROWN
Said as fellow artists as well as businessmen. Well worth the effort at least.

SOLOMON
You present a flattering representation. As my family will be traveling back shortly, perhaps I might commit only to one trial engagement.

HAMILTON
Oh, very good, sir. Very good. I cannot recall being so excited.

BROWN
There is a practical concern. If you are to continue on with us you should obtain your free papers.

SOLOMON
Not necessary.

BROWN
Here in New York, no. But we will be entering slave states and as a matter of precaution... It's to all our benefit we should not have to come to account for your well being.

HAMILTON
Six shillings worth of effort could well save much trouble later.

(CONTINUED)
BROWN
We'll go to the Customs House in the morning, then travel on. Good business all around.
EXT. WASHINGTON - DAY

The city is a swarm of people. At the moment the populace is displaying both sorrow and anticipation. Sorrow for the loss of the President. Many are dressed in black, and black crepe hangs nearly everywhere. Black armbands are frequently seen, and the occasional American Flag hung at half mast. As well, there are portraits of Harrison at varying locations.

Having arrived in Washington, Solomon, Hamilton and Brown RIDE ONWARD IN THEIR CARRIAGE.

INT. GADSBY HOTEL/DINNING ROOM - EVENING

A decent though crowded, boisterous and smoke-filled joint. Very lively. Solomon, Hamilton and Brown are among several parties drinking in the hotel's bar. As with seemingly everywhere in the city black crepes accessorize the background. Brown counts out $43.00 IN COIN on the tabletop. Solomon is astonished by the amount.

BROWN
Forty-three dollars. All to you.

SOLOMON
That...it's far more than my wages amount to.

BROWN
Consider the remainder an advance from the circus. I cannot tell you...I honestly wish you had seen the expression of our director when I described your abilities. He was fairly overcome with excitement.

HAMILTON
You should have invited him to sup with us.

BROWN
I did. I did, but so many preparations before the company is to depart.

SOLOMON
Gentlemen--

BROWN
Tomorrow we shall prepare for our Washington debut. But tonight, our thoughts are with the great man (MORE) (CONTINUED)
for whom this city prepared solemn
memorial. He has passed from the
praise of men to receive the
plaudit of his heavenly father. A
fine man has passed. Let us
remember him with a drink.
Both Hamilton and Brown hold up their tankards to drink. Solomon, a bit reluctantly, does the same.

HAMILTON
Chairs.

BROWN
Another. Our departed President deserves all the salutation we can imbibe.

Hamilton and Brown drink again, and Solomon does as well.

EXT. ALLEY - LATER
WE MAKE A HARD CUT to Solomon outside of the Pub, in an alley, with Brown and Hamilton in silhouette, back-lit by the street lights. He is violently ill, hunched over and retching horribly.

HAMILTON
That's all right Solomon. No shame in it. No shame at all.
INT. GADSBY HOTEL - STAIRCASE

Hamilton and Brown help Solomon to lumber up the spiral staircase, passing the occasional bemused guest.

INT. GADSBY HOTEL/SOLOMON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hamilton is placing a spittoon near Solomon's bed, where a prone and reeling Solomon lays. Hamilton sits on the bed. As he strokes Solomon's sweaty face, Hamilton speaks sweetly.

HAMILTON
I'm afraid that Brown and I haven't brought you much luck. But rough waters bring smooth sailing. Eventually they do.

SOLOMON
....So...so sorry...

HAMILTON
Shhh. We won't hear it. We won't.

BROWN
Let him sleep.

HAMILTON
Hmm. A good night's sleep. And tomorrow...tomorrow you will feel as well and refreshed as though the earth were new again.

Hamilton lingers a bit too long and a bit too close to Solomon for Brown's taste. With more than a bit of signification:

BROWN
Hamilton! Nothing more we can do for him.

HAMILTON
Such is the pity.

Displaying an odd sort of disappointment, Hamilton slinks away from the bed. He crosses to, and BLOWS OUT A CANDLE. The room goes dark with a blackness more than night. Brown and Hamilton exit. Solomon lays in the dark and moans. His sounds becoming MORE AND MORE DISTRESSED.
Solomon stirs, then slowly awakes to his new circumstances. He finds himself in a nearly lightless room about twelve feet square with walls of solid masonry. There is a thick and well-locked door, a small window covered with iron bars and a shutter. The only furniture is a wood stool and an old fashioned, dirty box stove. As Solomon rises he sees that his HANDS are CUFFED - the chain running to a bolt in the ground - and his LEGS IN IRONS. At first Solomon is incredulous. But that emotion is replaced first by fury and then panic. He begins to pull on the chains, fight against them. He does so with increasing desperation. Solomon flails about, the sounds of the steel chains whipping and beating against the masonry. He grunts and screams without regard as the cuffs and irons bite into his flesh, but he cannot pull himself free.

After several minutes of intense effort, Solomon tires, slows, then finally he collapses. And in this collapsed state he remains.

INT. BURCH’S DUNGEON – MORNING

Solomon again awakens. He hears sounds beyond the door...footsteps. Eventually the door opens. Enter JAMES BURCH - who runs the slave pen - and EBENEZER RADBURN who works as a turnkey and overseer.

As the door opens, this is the first light to seep into the otherwise near-black room. The shine is painful to Solomon’s eyes. With no salutation whatsoever, Burch asks:

BURCH
Well, my boy, how yah feel now?

Solomon rises up as best he can. With all the resolve he can put together he states what he considers to be fact:

SOLOMON
I am Solomon Northup. I am a free man; a resident of Saratoga, New York. The residence also of my wife and children who are equally free. I have papers. You have no right whatsoever to detain me--

BURCH
Yah not any--

SOLOMON
And I promise you - I promise - upon my liberation I will have satisfaction for this wrong.

BURCH
Resolve this. Produce your papers.

(CONTINUED)
With confidence Solomon goes to the pocket of his trousers. He searches one, then the other, but they are empty. He feels quickly about himself, but clearly his papers have been lifted. Solomon’s confidence shifts, but to resolve rather than fear. Papers or none, he will not be easily cowed. Still, Burch asserts:

BURCH (CONT’D)
Yah no free man. And yah ain’t from Saratoga. Yah from Georgia.

A moment. Not a word spoken among the trio, but Solomon and Burch do some serious eye fucking, neither man yielding. Burch says again:

BURCH (CONT’D)
Yah ain’t a free man. Yah nuthin' but a Georgia runaway.

Burch waits for Solomon to acquiesce. Solomon does not in any way. Both men exchange a long and daring stare. The two are clearly at an intellectual stand off. Burch, leans to Radburn, SAYS SOMETHING WHICH WE CANNOT DISTINGUISH.

Radburn walks off-camera and returns with a pair of "instruments:" a PADDLE - the flattened portion, which is about the size in circumference of two open hands, and bored with a small auger in numerous places. He also carries a WHIP. A cat-o-nine tails; a large rope of many strands. The strands unraveled and a knot tied at the extremity of each. Burch says again:

BURCH (CONT’D)
Yah a runaway nigger from Georgia.

Solomon stands with a quiet stoicism. He will say nothing of the kind.

As that is the case, Solomon is seized by both men. He is pulled over the bench, face downward, shirt still on his back. Radburn then STEPS ON HIS CHAINS, holding Solomon down in a bent position.

With no preamble, Burch begins to beat Solomon about the back with the paddle. Burch strikes him wordlessly - no taunting, no sneering. Solomon screaming against each blow. His back immediately SWELLING WITH WELTS AND BRUISES.

This beating continues on and on and on until quite literally Burch WEARS HIMSELF OUT with the effort. Dripping in sweat and panting:

(CONTINUED)
BURCH (CONT'D)

Yah still insist yah a free man?

SOLOMON

...I...I insist...

Burch regrets hearing this. Not from sympathy, but rather because he's nearly too tired to go back to beating Solomon. Yet, as if returning to work, Burch returns to pummeling Solomon. Burch punctuates the blows with:

BURCH

Yah a slave. Yah a Georgia slave!

Burch continues to strike, and strike... This time until the paddle SNAPS IN HALF. Burch then GRABS THE WHIP. Hardly missing a stroke, he whips Solomon relentlessly, the flails cutting into Solomon's back. Again, Burch's arm tires before Solomon "breaks."

BURCH (CONT'D)

Are yah slave?

SOLOMON

...No...

Burch goes back to whipping and whipping, and whipping... SOLOMON'S BACK IS NOW TORN OPEN WITH LACERATIONS AND OOZING WITH BLOOD. Finally Burch can whip no more. He pours sweat and sucks air, leaving himself just enough energy to take up his instruments and EXIT. Radburn lingers for a moment. He takes the irons off Solomon's legs. Opens the window some. As he makes these gestures, in a patronizing and confidential manner, one wrought with poor sincerity:;

RADBURN

I seen a good many of the black kind just where yah're. Sick. Make me sick. Often times the situation was resolved, and I think; what was all the beatin' and abuse for? Things end as they should, and the violence was for naught. So why cause trouble when they ain't no cause for it? Be of a cooperative nature, and things don't need be particularly unpleasant.

(beat)

Or, yah can carry on like yah been, and I fear yah won't live to see Sunday next.

With that thought, Radburn exits. Solomon rests. But to rest seems like giving in to defeat. He begins pulling
on his chains. But for all his struggling, the chain loosens none. Solomon calls out:

SOLOMON
   Help me! Someone help me!

If anyone at all hears him, they do not respond. Solomon continues his plaintive cry for assistance.

EXT. BURCH’S DUNGEON – CONTINUOUS

Beginning with a TIGHT SHOT on the shuttered, barred window of Burch’s dungeon – Solomon’s cries barely eking beyond the space – THE CAMERA PULLS BACK from the building, onto the city until clearly visible is the Nation's capital. It’s icon’s of freedom – the WHITE HOUSE, the CAPITOL BUILDING – fairly mocking Solomon’s captivity. Simultaneously, barren at the early hour and cluttered with litter and the remains of previous day’s procession, the city is a bleak and forboding sight.

INT. BURCH’S DUNGEON – DAY

IT IS DAY NOW. The door to the yard is thrown open. The harsh white light floods all over Solomon.

OMITTED
28 CONTINUED:

29 MOVED TO SC. A32
EXT. BURCH'S DUNGEON/YARD - DAY

30

It is a yard just beyond Burch's. The yard is hemmed in by a brick wall. In the yard are two men, and a boy. The oldest is CLEMENS RAY a man of about 25 years of age. He is well educated. JOHN WILLIAMS is about 20 years old. He is born and bred a slave, is lacking in education, and overwhelmed with fear of the situation. Finally there is a child about 10 years of age who answers to the name of Randall.

Solomon, Clemens Ray, John and Randall ALL STAND NAKED. Though they try to cover their privates a bit, they are all aware of the uselessness of modesty. Radburn is present. He has before him A COUPLE OF BUCKETS OF COLD WATER. He throws water on the naked men.

RADBURN
Go on. Warsh up.

The men, soaking in humility as well as water, begin to scrub with A SINGLE BAR OF HARSH SOAP passed among them.

RADBURN (CONT'D)
The boy, too. Get him clean.

Solomon takes some soap and rubs it over Randall.

RADBURN (CONT'D)
Scrub now. Git 'em clean.

Solomon scrubs harder. Randall - clearly cold and uncomfortable - appeals to Solomon.

RANDALL
Do you know when my Mama will come?

RADBURN
Hush him up!

Seeing Solomon has no answer for him, Randall begins to cry.

RANDALL
Mama ..! Mama! Is she going to come?

Doing all he can to spare the child from a certain beating:

SOLOMON
Quiet, please.

Randall is becoming nearly inconsolable.

RANDALL
Mama!

(CONTINUED)
Saying anything to keep the boy quiet:

SOLOMON
Your mother will come, I swear she will, but you must be silent. Please. Be silent!

On the seeming strength of Solomon's promise, Randall goes silent. Solomon looks to Radburn, who just throws water on the soapy men.
INT. BURCH'S DUNGEON - EVENING

Radburn brings food in to Solomon; a shriveled piece of meat and some water. Just barely enough to sustain Solomon. Radburn also has a SHIRT.

RADBURN
That old thing of yours is just rags and tatters. Need something proper to wear.

Solomon doesn’t move for the clothing.

RADBURN (CONT’D)
Go’won. Put it on.

With slow defiance, Solomon does as instructed. He removes what remains of his old shirt – the one he was wearing when first kidnapped – and puts on the one Radburn brought him. The shirt’s ill-fitting and dirty. Despite that, Radburn says:

RADBURN (CONT’D)
There. Tha’s fine. Tha’s fine. Got no gratitude?

SOLOMON
...Thank you...

RADBURN
Yah keep bein’ proper, yah’ll see how things work out.

Radburn starts to take the old shirt.

SOLOMON
No! It was from my wife.

RADBURN
Rags and tatters. Rags and tatters.

Taking the shirt, the "rags and tatters" as he calls them, Radburn exits, locking the door behind him. Solomon sits with the plate of food before him. He pushes the plate away rather than eat.

EXT. BURCH'S DUNGEON/YARD - DAY

Sitting together out in the yard are Clemens Ray, John and Solomon. Over time they have drawn trustworthy enough to speak with one another. At the moment Solomon is still trying to apply reason to the situation.

(CONTINUED)
Randall wanders about in the background. As usual, he calls out for his "Mama." By now, however, his calls should feel like little more than background noise.

SOLOMON
This can't stand. It is a crime. I believe now someone lay in wait for me. My drink was altered... We are free men. They have...they have no right to hold us.

Solomon waits for a response from the others. They give none.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
We need a sympathetic ear. If we have an opportunity to explain our situation--

CLEMENS
Who in your estimation is that sympathetic ear?

SOLOMON
The two men I journeyed with. I'm certain they're making inquires at this very moment.

CLEMENS
I would be just as certain they are counting the money paid for delivering you to this place.

SOLOMON
They were not kidnappers. They were artists. Fellow performers.

CLEMENS
You know that? You know for certain who they were?
The fact is, Solomon can’t say for certain.

CLEMENS (CONT’D)
How I reckon the situation; whatever past we had...well, that’s done now. The reality to come is us being transported southward. New Orleans if I were to venture. After we arrive, we’ll be put to market. Beyond that... Well, once in a slave state I suppose there’s only one outcome.

JOHN
No.

CLEMENS
I don’t say that to give you empty agitation, John...

JOHN
For y’all. For y’all they ain’t nothin’ but that! But John was’n kidnapped. John bein’ hold as debt, tha’s all. Massa pay his debt, and John be redeemed--

CLEMENS
Boy, our masters will not come for us.

John is nearly beside himself with panic.

JOHN
Now John’s...John’s sorry for y’all, but tha’s how it be. Where y’all goin’, yah goin’ witout John. Massa take care of me. Massa take care.

RANDALL
Mama!

All three men turn and look. At the moment Randall doesn’t call out emptily. At the door to the yard is Burch along with two women. One in her late twenties; ELIZA. She is "arrayed in silk, with rings upon her fingers, and golden ornaments suspended from her ears." Though a slave, Eliza was a mistress and has - to this point - lived well. This is reflected in her airs and her speech. The other is a little girl, light in skin color, of about seven or eight. This is EMILY, Randall’s half sister.

As she enters the yard Eliza squeals with high delight, then breaks into tears of both sorrow and joy. Clearly this is mother and child being reunited.

(continuing)
As Burch locks the yard door, Eliza clutches Randall. She is overcome with emotion.

ELIZA
My darling. My sweet, sweet baby.

INT. BURCH'S DUNGEON - EVENING

Later in the evening. Solomon now shares his space with Eliza and her children. As the children rest, Eliza drops into a lament as if pleading her case to Solomon who lends a sympathetic ear.

Both slyly, and with a bit of aggrandizement:

ELIZA
When I say I had my master's favor, you understand. Above even his own wife, I had it. Do you know that he built a house for me? Built it on the sole condition that I reside there with him. The added promise in time I would be emancipated. And for nine years he blessed me with every comfort and luxury in life.

Displaying the finery she still wears:

ELIZA (CONT'D)
Silks and jewels and even servants to wait upon us. Such was our life, and the life of this beautiful girl I bore for him. But Master Berry's daughter...she always looked at me with an unkind nature. She hated Emily no matter she and Emily were flesh of flesh. As Master Berry's health failed, she gained power in the household. Eventually, I was brought to the city on the false pretense of our free papers being executed. If I had known what waited; to be sent south? I swear I would not have come here alive.

(CONTINUED)
Eliza turns to her children:

ELIZA (CONT'D)
My poor, poor babies.

INT. BURCH'S DUNGEON - NIGHT

It's the deep of night, all are sleeping. A KEY TURNS IN THE LOCK AND THE DOOR OPENS. Burch enters with Radburn beside him. Both carry LANTERNS with them. Hardly giving Solomon and Eliza a moment to rouse themselves, Burch demands:

BURCH
Come on. Get yer blankets. Get up.

Sensing that things will not end well:

ELIZA
No, please don't...

BURCH
I don't want to hear yer talk. Get in the yard.

ELIZA
Please...

RADBURN
Ain't no need for all that.

Putting hand to Randall's head.

RADBURN (CONT'D)
Jus takin' a li'l trip, tha's all. Don't want to frighten the chil' ren none over a li'l boat ride, do yah?

Eliza gives a shake of her head to the negative.

RADBURN (CONT'D)
Alright then. Git yerselves up.

EXT. BURCH'S DUNGEON/YARD - NIGHT

We now have Solomon, Clemens, John, Eliza and the children. They are being cuffed together. As John is cuffed, he pulls back. Scared. He beings in desperation:

JOHN
John's massa gunna pay his debt. John's massa gunna come for him.

(CONTINUED)
Not wanting to hear any of this talk, Burch strikes John several times in the head with a sap-like instrument. Weakened, but again:

JOHN (CONT'D)
John's massa gunna--

Burch again strikes John until he's quiet. Curiously, Emily and Randall don't even flinch. Why would they? They are quite used to seeing this kind of violence.

BURCH
Not a word out of none a yah. Not a word.

Burch and Radburn begin driving the shackled slaves from the yard.

The slaves are lead to a flat bed of the horse and carriage. They are made to lay down side-by-side. We stay with them as some sort of cloth is flung over them, obscuring and blacking out their view.

At that moment, the screen is BLACKENED and we hear the sound of the cart moving in haste.

Led by Burch, the group of slaves arrive to a dock. They are taken quickly up a gangplank and onto the steamboat ORLEANS as the CAPTAIN, CREW and a MULATTO WOMAN WATCH, but do not interfere.

The slaves are hustled down one at a time into a dark, dank hold among barrels and boxes of freight...and RATS. Burch comes around and "checks" the chains; makes sure they are all secure and locked.

Satisfied, he heads up out of the hold. Radburn follows. Alone in the dark in the hold, John cries, as does Eliza.

Solomon stares down Burch for as long as he can, as if wishing bad things. As if wanting to exact some measure of revenge. But the greater insult is that Burch and Radburn, engaged in conversation, take no notice of Solomon whatsoever. He is that insignificant to them. That fact, that reality, makes Solomon boil with a rage he cannot express in words.
INT. STEAMBOAT - NIGHT

We are now in the engine room of the steamboat, pistons pumping, black oily cogs turning, the power and the rhythm are both aggressive and hypnotic. A shovel comes into view, feeding the furnace.

EXT. SEA - DUSK/DAWN

The steamboat is en route between Washington and Norfolk. We tilt up from the violent water foam to the powering paddles of the boat.
INT. ORLEANS/HOLD - LATER - NIGHT

Down in the hold the slaves eat, pray. The MULATTO WOMAN moves among them, catching ELIZA's eye.

        MULATTO WOMAN
        Cheer up and don't be so cast down.

        Clemens Ray and Solomon watch as the Mulatto Woman returns to top deck, the trapdoor locked firmly behind her. Clemens Ray turns to Solomon with a deadpan stern expression.

        CLEMENS RAY
        If you want to survive, do and say as little as possible. Tell no one who you really are and tell no one that you can read and write.

(CONTINUED)
Clemens Ray turns away from Solomon, eyes lost into the distance.

CLEMENS RAY (CONT’D)
(slowly)
Unless you want to be a dead nigger.

Solomon’s face is one of a confused despair.

EXT. NORFOLK/PORT - DAY
We see a flat overhead view of the port of Norfolk. Sardines are laid out to dry in rows, glittering in the day’s sun as if like silver pennies. A chain of slaves enter the frame and are led one by one on to the docked vessel.

MORE SLAVES - about 15 in all, of various genders and ages - are brought on board. Chief among them is ROBERT who fights viciously with his captors. "With all haste" is shoved down into the hold.

Having taken their cargo as far as they care or need to, Burch and Radburn depart. They do so without a word spoken to Solomon or the others.

With this new and sizable batch of slaves on board, the crew again CASTS OFF, and the Orleans makes its way again.

INT. ORLEANS/GALLEY
Solomon is back cleaning in the galley. As he cleans, he again watches Robert prep food. Robert’s skill with a knife is not lost on Solomon.

INT. HOLD - LATER - DAY
The hold is packed tighter now.

Muzzle covering his face, Robert is shackled with his hands tied behind his back. Solomon and Clemens Ray look on.

A sailor descends the staircase and takes off Robert’s muzzle, shooting him a forbidding look. He leaves.

(CONTINUED)
Solomon, Clemens Ray and Robert, now in mid-conversation.

ROBERT

I say we fight.

Robert delivers this in a hushed voice.

SOLOMON

The crew is fairly small. If it
were well planned, I believe
they could be strong armed.

CLEMENS RAY

Three can’t stand against a whole
crew. The rest here are niggers, born and bred slaves. Niggers
ain’t got the stomach for a fight, not a damn one.

ROBERT

All I know, we get where we
travelling we’ll wish we’d died
trying.

CLEMENS RAY

Survival is not about certain
death, it is about keeping your
head down.

Solomon looks at Clemens Ray, agitated -- his voice now
raised above the previous whispers. Grits his teeth.

SOLOMON

Days ago I was with my family, in
my home. Now you tell me all is
lost. “Tell no one who I really
am” if I want to survive. I don’t
want to survive, I want to live.

OMIT

OMIT

EXT. SEA - DAY

The steamboat paddles pound the water, filling the whole
frame. The vessel ploughs on south.
INT. HOLD - NIGHT

The slaves are asleep.

A Sailor descends the ladder approaching Eliza. He bends down and attempts to wake the daughter by caressing her face.

Solomon rouses, and looks across to witness the scene. From his vantage point, we see Eliza stand to interrupt the Sailor. The Sailor looks at Eliza, Eliza looks back at him. Knowingly she leads him off into a corner of the hold.

As she does so, Eliza passes Robert who jumps up to stand between Eliza and the Sailor. Stretching out a firm hand to the sailor’s shoulder, Robert’s look says “No you don’t.”

Clemens Ray is awake now, watching.

There is an odd moment of stillness between the Sailor and Robert, an impasse.

We focus on the Sailor’s face. Slowly, a greasy smile erupts upon it. Back now to Robert’s face, a look of incomprehension.

Robert looks down. We follow his gaze to the knife that has already been jabbed unseen between Robert’s ribs. The sailor withdraws the bloody blade.

A wide shot of the two men. Robert collapses to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

Clemens Ray and Solomon react. Complete horror.

48 OMIT

48A INT. HOLD - NIGHT

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49 OMIT

50 OMIT
We are back up on the deck of the ship. SOLOMON AND CLEMENS RAY dump ROBERT's body over the side of the ship. Solomon watches as the body churns for a moment in the wake of the vessel... then sinks beneath the water. Clemens Ray, with no sentimentality:

CLEMENS RAY
Better off. Better than us.

Solomon’s POV from the back of the steamship of Robert’s corpse slipping gracefully into the water.

A white male, fairly smart, with broad shoulders, stands and bellows—

RAY
Clemens...! Clemens Ray!

We are in the port of New Orleans, one of the busiest in the young nation. On the dock itself there is a bustle of activity as goods are loaded and unloaded from a various ships. It's a bit of controlled chaos as a VARIETY OF LANGUAGES are spoken and shouted while slaves are shuttled from the Orleans to a holding pen. Solomon, and all the slaves are overwhelmed by all that is happening around them.

Two men - among many - are awaiting the arrival of the Orleans. They are JONUS RAY - Clemens Ray's master - and DAVIS who is the solicitor of Mr. Ray. They both look like they mean business. The moment the gangplank is laid, Ray yells for Clemens.

Clemens, seeing his master, is nearly crazy with delight. He is, uncharacteristically beside himself. Ironically, his master now represents "freedom."

(CONTINUED)
Clemens pulls on his chain. As he does so, Several other slaves collapse in his effort to reach his master, like dominos.

RAY
Who is in charge of this vessel?

CAPTAIN
I am the Captain.

RAY
I am Mr. Jonus Ray. My solicitor has documentation verifying that the Negro named Clemens Ray is my property.

As he reads PAPERS handed to him by Davis:

CAPTAIN
I know nothing of--

RAY
You are ordered by court to return that property immediately, or face charges of thievery.

CAPTAIN
My duty is to transport goods. I am not responsible for their origin.

RAY
Remove these contraptions!

To his mate:

CAPTAIN
Free him!

Biddee does as ordered. Once free, Clemens hugs and sobs over his master as would a lost and then found child.

RAY
It's all well, now, Clemens. You will return home with me.

(to the Captain)
Consider this notice and warning.

(CONTINUED)
Ray, Davis and Clemens head away. Solomon seems both desperate and hopeful of some aid from Clemens and Ray. But there is none forthcoming. Ray and Clemens continue on - Clemens not so much as even looking back in Solomon’s direction. Solomon stands and watches as they fade into the environs and are gone from sight.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS/PORT - LATER

Hours later. The slaves sit off on one side of the dock, baking in the sun, awaiting their fate.

THEOPHILUS FREEMAN - a tall, thin-faced man with light complexion and a little bent – moves along the deck calling out names from a list. The slaves STAND as they are called.

FREEMAN


Solomon does not respond. Freeman looks around. He spots Solomon.

FREEMAN (CONT’D)

Captain, who shipped that nigger?

CAPTAIN

Burch.

Freeman steps to Solomon. He gives him a looking over.

FREEMAN

Stand up.

Solomon does as told.

FREEMAN (CONT’D)

You fit the description given. Why didn’t you answer when called?

SOLOMON

My name is not Platt. My name is--

Freeman strikes Solomon hard across the face.

FREEMAN

Your name is Platt, and I will teach you your name so that you don't forget.

(to the Captain)

Shackle my niggers. Get them to my cart.
Solomon is carted off along with the rest of "Burch's stock:" Eliza and her children, John and Solomon.

As they move off from the port in a make-shift cart, it opens up to the frenzic, busy port.

For the first time Solomon sees true and severe slavery. These are not visiting servants, such as Jasper was back in Saratoga. These are humans held in strict bondage - herded like cattle, chained together as if in a "chain gang." Slaves are evident not merely by the color of their skin. The residue and accessories of slavery are everywhere. Blacks almost universally display scars - THICK AND HEAVY DEAD TISSUE FROM LACERATIONS LEFT UNTREATED - brands, and are often missing limbs. Blacks are held in all types of shackles, from simple chains to elaborate bindings, to neck collars that are spiked. Some are muzzled or forced to wear bits. One slave is attacked by a dog and the slave owner. The dog pulls and tears at the slave’s clothes. THESE IMAGES SHOULD BE A CONSTANT AND CONTINUAL CANVAS TO THE PIECE. EVER PRESENT, BUT NOT REALLY COMMENTED ON AS THEY ARE THE NORM. They should be a reminder that not only are people being oppressed, but that there is an entire system of oppression in place.

"Burch's stock:" arrive at Freeman's slave pen. They are led in by Freeman and his house slave CAPE - a mulatto. The yard is enclosed by plank, standing upright, with ends sharpened instead of brick walls as with Burch's. Including Burch's group there are about 30 SLAVES in the pen.

Solomon and the others look around and see nothing but downtrodden and despondent faces. Three men sit next to each other with muzzles and quietly stare back at this new batch of arrivals. One attempts to speak, but all that comes out is a muffled, unintelligible sound.

The slaves are in various states of undress, men and women alike. They clean themselves, scrubbing with soap and water. Women wash their hair. Men shave, skin is oiled. Freeman walks among them, inspecting them as they primp themselves.

The slaves are given new clothes by Cape. The men are given hat, coat, shirt, pants and shoes. The women

(CONTINUED)
frocks of calico and handkerchiefs to bind about their heads.

INT. FREEMAN’S/GREAT ROOM - LATER

It's an odd, ironic scene. The slaves are in a large and fairly ornate room within Freeman's house. CAPE PLAYS A PAINFUL TUNE ON A FIDDLE - background music - as Freeman tries to line up A SMALL GROUP OF THE SLAVES, he becomes less patient, jittery and nervous, knowing that his livelihood is at stake, he wants his slaves to make a good impression. Sometimes his patience gets the better of him, and his hands move freely in direction of the slaves.

The business has the air of an etiquette class, though what Freeman is trying to do is coach the slaves into being more "sellable." He works with them in groups of five or so.

FREEMAN
Tallest to smallest, understand? Are you taller than her? Then you'd go before her. Do it. Move.
(to the group)
Keep your heads up. A sense of direction; that's how you look smart. None of those saucer eyes. Rid yourself of that smile. Look like a goddamn grinnin' monkey. Put the least thought in your head. C'mon, now. Think of somethin'.

Weary of Cape's playing, Solomon moves to Cape. He asks:

SOLOMON
Can you play a reel?

CAPE
(dismissive)
Nah. I don't know no reel.

SOLOMON
If I may...?

Cape looks to Freeman:

FREEMAN
He sick of your caterwaulin'. Let him play, boy. Let's see what he can do.

Cape reluctantly hands the fiddle over to Solomon. Solomon tunes it a bit, then begins to play. His fingers stiff at first, he takes a moment to warm up. But as he warms up he is, despite the circumstances, masterful.

(CONTINUED)
THE SLAVES ALL CLAP ALONG. SOME DANCE ALONG. All admire his work. Freeman chief among them.

FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Keep on. Keep on.

Solomon continues to play.

FREEMAN (CONT'D)
A damn sight better than you, Cape. A damn sight better.

Cape looks bitter as Solomon plays on.

INT. FREEMAN'S/GREAT ROOM - DAY

We come in on an odd sort of sight; A JUMBLE OF ACTIVITY. CUSTOMERS have come to see Freeman’s lot - the room all gussied up with flowers. Freeman moves among them, displaying them as a rancher would prize chattel. Freeman makes the slaves hold their heads up - "look smart" as he previously admonished them. They are made to walk briskly back and forth while customers feel their hands and arms and bodies, turn them about and ask what skills they possess. The Customers routinely make the slaves open their mouths and show their teeth.

At times a MALE or FEMALE SLAVE are taken off to the side, stripped and inspected more minutely.

One of them, John, is stripped and inspected.

Cape, as he’s done previously, plays his fiddle.

A buyer - WILLIAM FORD; a man of middle age, and an attractive nature in his tone of voice - consults a list he’s drawn up and asks of Freeman:

FORD
What is the price for the ones Platt and Eliza?

FREEMAN
A thousand for Platt; he is a nigger of talent. Seven hundred for Eliza. My fairest price.

FORD
You will accept a note?

FREEMAN
As always, from you, Mr. Ford.

Eliza is beside herself as it seems she is about to be separated from her family. She begs of Ford:

(CONTINUED)
ELIZA
Please, sir... Please don't divide my family. Don't take me unless you take my children as well.

FREEMAN
Eliza, quiet!

ELIZA
You will have the most faithful slave in me, sir. The most faithful slave that has ever lived, but I beg that you do not separate us.

A BUYER interrupts the skirmish and approaches Freeman and delivers coolly, eyeing Randall-

BUYER
Your price for the child?

FREEMAN
You see how fit the boy is. Like ripe fruit. He will grow into a fine beast.

Randall is made to run, and jump by FREEMAN - exhibiting his activity and his condition.

FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Six hundred, and that's fair and final.

BUYER
Done.

He reaches into his waistcoat and retrieves his wallet, counting out six hundred dollars, placing them into the already extended hand of Freeman.

Ford sees the distress and panic in Eliza; it visibly touches him. He now tries to buy EMILY to console her.

FORD
How much for the little girl? You have no need for her. One so young will bring you no profit.

FREEMAN
I will not sell the girl. There's heaps 'n piles of money to be made off her. She is a beauty. One of the regular bloods. None of your thick-lipped, bullet headed, cotton picking niggers.

(CONTINUED)
FORD
Her child, man. For God’s sake, are you not sentimental in the least?

FREEMAN
My sentimentality stretches the length of a coin. Do you want the lot, Mr. Ford, or do you pass on them all?

FORD
I will take the ones Platt and Eliza.

Eliza grips her children tight.

ELIZA
I will not go without my children. You will not take them from me.
As if to prove her wrong, Freeman puts a foot to Eliza and harshly kicks her away from Emily.

ELIZA (CONT’D)

Please, don't. No!

Freeman, to Cape:

FREEMAN

Take her out of here.

Cape DROPS HIS FIDDLE, begins to pull Eliza away toward the door of the room, but her screaming and pleading do not abate. IT IS CLEARLY UNSETTLING TO THE OTHER BUYERS.

FREEMAN (CONT’D)

Keep her quiet.

Cape tries to muzzle her with his hand, but Eliza continues to scream for her children as Emily does for her mother.

EMILY

Mama... Mama!

FREEMAN

(to Solomon)

Play something! Get the fiddle and play.

As ordered, Solomon takes up Cape's fiddle and begins to play lightly.

FREEMAN (CONT’D)

Play!

Solomon plays harder and more loudly. Still, it is barely enough to drown out Eliza's cries. Freeman gets the other slaves to clap along with Solomon's playing. Emily frees herself and runs back, crying but endeavoring to be strong-

EMILY

Don't cry, Mama. I will be a good girl. Don't cry. I will keep my head up and I will look smart. I will always look smart.

FREEMAN

Make merry, all of you! Goddamn it, Cape! Keep her quiet or it's your damned hide I will take it out of!

Cape pulls a rag, stuffs it in Eliza's mouth. Clamping both hands over her mouth, he hauls Eliza from the room by the head. IT IS AN UGLY, UGLY SCENE.
EXT. FORD PLANTATION - LATER

Driven in a horse drawn wagon by Ford are Solomon and Eliza. Eliza is sullen to say the least. With the loss of her two children she has dropped into a depression she will not be able to pull out of.
They arrive to the FORD PLANTATION. The main house of the plantation - the GREAT HOUSE as they are commonly called - is sizable. Two stories high with a piazza in front. In the rear are also a log kitchen, poultry house, corncribs and several slave cabins. The plantation is described as "a green spot in the wilderness."

With the arrival of Master Ford there is a flurry of activity - the "excitement" of a new delivery. MR. CHAPIN, a white overseer, instructs a slave named SAM.

CHAPIN
Sam, call to the Mistress.

SAM
Mistress! Mistress, they arrivn'.

MISTRESS FORD EXITS the house - along with her attending slave, RACHEL, who is a cook AS WELL AS SAM'S WIFE - and travels to her husband, kisses him, then laughingly inquires:

MRS. FORD
Did you bring all those niggers? Two of them? You got two?

FORD
Make me something to eat, dear. The day has taken it from me.

MRS. FORD
Let me get a look at them...

FORD
Mr. Chapin--

MRS. FORD
(re: Eliza) This one's cryin'. Why is this one cryin'? Separated from her children.

FORD
Oh, dear.

MRS. FORD
It couldn't be helped.

FORD
Poor, poor woman.

FORD
Mr. Chapin, tomorrow you will take these two up to the mill and start them workin'. For now make them

(MORE)
adequate; fix them a meal, and
have them rest themselves.

CHAPIN
Yes, sir.
(to the slaves:)
C'mon, now. C'mon. Don't dawdle.

MRS. FORD
(to Eliza:)
Something to eat and some rest;
your children will soon enough be
forgotten.

EXT. FORD'S WORK AREA - DAY

John Tibeats, stands before the slaves. Chapin hovers to
one side.

TIBEATS
My name is John Tibeats, William
Ford's chief carpenter. You will
refer to me as Master.

Tibeats nods in Chapin's direction:

TIBEATS (CONT'D)
Mister Chapin is the overseer on
this plantation. He is
responsible for all of Ford's
property. You too will refer to
him as Master.

This plantation covers many
hundreds of acres, and you will
traverse the Texas road between
the forest site and the sawmill in
double time. Any clever nigger on
that path that gets a little
lightfooted, I will remind him
that on one side men and
bloodhounds patrol the border and
on the other the bayou provides a
hard living, with alligators and
little to eat or drink that won't
kill you. No slave has escaped
here with his life. You're here
to work niggers, so let's
commence.

Tibeats begins to sing the song "Run Nigger, Run"
mockingly.

We cut to Solomon chopping logs and into the montage of
the slaves doing manual labor and arriving back to the
sawmill.

Lyrics for "Run Nigger, Run"

(CONTINUED)
EXT. WOODS - DAY

61 -END OF MAY THROUGH EARLY JUNE, 1841-

We are in a wooded area. There is a GANG OF SLAVES chopping trees into timber. It is hard, laborious work made no more easy by the sweltering heat. Solomon is among them as well as Sam.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

62 The slaves now load the timber onto a horse drawn wagon. Again, hard work done under the ever present sun.
As Sam drives the wagon, the other slaves trudge along side by foot. We should get the sense the travel is long and tedious.

It is a sizable work area on the edge of Indian Creek. There is much work being done, the slaves primarily employed in piling the timber and chopping it into lumber. As before, there is little doubt about the rigors of the job at hand.

Working as a carpenter at the work area is JOHN TIBEATS. There are also various CUSTOMERS who move about placing orders.

It's Sunday morning. All of Ford's slaves are dressed with their "finest" clothes - brightly colored and as free as possible of defect. The Slaves are gathered on
the lawn just beyond the piazza. Mistress Ford is present as well. As the slaves listen, Ford reads to them Scripture. His tone is of a man trying to preach by way of compassion.

**Ford**

"But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Despite the lightness with which Ford speaks and the hope in his words, ELIZA SITS OFF TO THE SIDE - SELF-SECLUDED A BIT - WEEPING GENTLY.

We should be able to see in Mistress Ford's eyes that Eliza's constant crying is unsettling.
EXT. FORD'S WORK AREA - DAY

-MID JUNE, 1841-

The slaves have broken for lunch. They snack on smoked meat and drink water from gourds. As they lunch Solomon reads from Sam's Bible to the other slaves.

SOLOMON
But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.

A white customer - WINSLOW - irate at the sight and sound of slaves reading Scripture, crosses over. He grabs the Bible.

WINSLOW
From where did you thieve this?

SAM
Suh, the book is my property.

The White Customer has no interest in Sam's answer. With flailing hands he STARTS BEATING ON SAM. Solomon tries to stop him. That only makes the situation worse, Solomon now the target of the man's ire.

WINSLOW
Take your hands from me!

Ford comes running over.

FORD
What is the commotion?

WINSLOW
Your niggers are either brazen or rebellious. This one was readin' Scripture, and this one claims it to be his.

FORD
It is. A gift from his Mistress.

WINSLOW
You condone this?

FORD
I encourage it. As a Christian I can do no less.

(CONTINUED)
WINSLOW
You can do no worse, Ford. A slave that reads is dangerous.

Winslow moves off. He yells back at Ford:

WINSLow (CONT’D)
And the man who would allow a slave to read is unfit to own niggers!

Handing the Bible back to Sam, very matter of factly:

FORD
Pay him no mind. The word of God applies to all. In that you may take comfort.

OMITTED
71

72
EXT. ROAD - DAY

Sam is at the reigns of the wagon carrying the timber to Ford’s WORK AREA. Slaves trudge alongside, same as it ever was. Only...it’s not quite the same. Sam brings the wagon to a halt. He, and the slaves look up the road ahead of them.

Standing in the middle of the road is a group of CHICKASAWS INDIANS. They are in their "usual" dress of buckskin breeches and calico hunting shirts of fantastic colors, buttoned from belt to chin. They have with them DOGS and HORSES. They carry with them the carcass of a deer.

The two groups stare at each other for a long moment.

73
EXT. FIELD - DUSK/END OF DAY

The groups of slaves and Chickasaws are now intermingled. They "break bread" - actually they work on the carcass of the deer which is now roasting over a large fire. As well the group share a smoke on a pipe.

One of the Chickasaws is playing a tune on an "INDIAN FIDDLE." The Chickasaws perform a customary dance; trotting after each other, and giving utterance to a guttural, sing-song noise.

The slaves enjoy the respite from work, Solomon particularly taken by the music...if not entirely enthralled by it.

(CONTINUED)
After a bit, Solomon rights himself and heads from the group.

Solomon arrives to some tall grass at the edge of the river. Lowering his trousers, SOLOMON SQUATS TO DEFECATE. As he does, he stares out toward the flowing waters of Indian Creek. After a few moments, as though a thought far greater than relieving himself has come to him, Solomon stands and replaces his pants.

Oddly, Solomon stares out at the water as though he were a man possessed.

Just beyond the WORK AREA Solomon speaks with Ford as Tibeats listens. Solomon is drawing in the dirt, making rough diagrams for Ford as he explains himself.

SOLOMON
The creek is plenty deep enough to sail, even with a boat full of load. The distance from the WORK AREA to the point on the latter bayou is several miles by water fewer than land. It occurs to me that the expense of the transportation would be materially diminished--

TIBEATS
"Materially diminished?"

SOLOMON
If we use the waterway.

TIBEATS
It's a scheme. Plenty of engineers have schemed similarly. The passes are too tight.

SOLOMON
I reckon them at more than twelve feet at their most narrow. Wide enough for a tub to traverse. A team of niggers can clear it out.

TIBEATS
And you know what of transport and terra formin'?
SOLOMON
I labored repairing the Champlain canal, on the section over which William Van Nortwick was superintendent. With my earnings I hired several efficient hands to assist me, and I entered into contracts for the transportation of large rafts of timber from Lake Champlain to Troy.

FORD
(to Tibeats)
I'll admit to being impressed even if you won’t.
(to Solomon)
Collect a gang, see what good you can do.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

-END OF JUNE, 1841-

WE HAVE A SERIES OF SCENES in which we see Solomon and a TEAM OF BLACKS working on the creek: CHOPPING TREES ALONG THE BANKS, widening out the shore... It's all just a trial for now. The work is diligent, but it is basic to this point. Still, under Solomon's direction, the slaves go at it like they've got something to prove. And rightly they do.

Solomon also works on a narrow raft of twelve cribs with which he will transport the timber.

Once this is constructed, HE PERSONALLY "SAILS" THEM UP THE CREEK WITH A TEST LOAD.

EXT. FORD'S WORK AREA - LATER

Ford and a group of slaves wait along the river banks just beyond the WORK AREA. All are expectant in their manner. A long moment passes with no sign of Solomon.

Then, from up river, we see Solomon's raft of lumber winding its way. SLAVES CHEER, and Ford literally applauds the effort. Tibeats looks pissed. He has just been shown up after all.

EXT. FORD PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE - DAY

As we come into the scene, Ford is presenting Solomon with a fiddle. Not as grand as the one he previously owned in New York, but a fine instrument none the less. It is a gift of thanks for his hard work. Solomon's gratitude is easily expressed.

(CONTINUED)
SOLOMON
My great thanks, Master Ford.

FORD
My thanks to you, and it is the least of it. My hope is that it brings us both much joy over the years.

Following the statement, Solomon's not sure how to react. He remains grateful, but the thought of "over the years" is just a reminder of the altered state in which he now finds himself.

EXT. FORD PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - EVENING

-END OF JULY, 1841-

The slaves eat. All tired from a day's work they conduct themselves in silence. All except for Eliza who, SLIPPING INTO PERMANENT DEPRESSION, as always weeps. The sound of her sobbing edging him up - particularly after Master Ford's "over the years" observation. Solomon finally snaps:

SOLOMON
Eliza. Eliza, stop!

Solomon goes to her, grabs Eliza. She does not stop. As if to force the misery from her, Solomon SHAKES ELIZA VIOLENTLY.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
Stop it! Stop!

ELIZA
It's all I have to keep my loss present.

SOLOMON
You let yourself be overcome by sorrow. You will drown in it.

ELIZA
Have you stopped crying for your children? You make no sounds, but will you ever let them go in your heart?

SOLOMON
...They are as my flesh...

(CONTINUED)
ELIZA
Then who is distressed? Do I upset the Mistress and the Master? Do you care less for my loss than their well being?

SOLOMON
Master Ford is a decent man.

ELIZA
He is a slaver.

SOLOMON
Under the circumstances--

ELIZA
Under the circumstances he is a slaver! Christian only in his proclamations. Separated me from my precious babies for lack of a few dollars. But you truckle at his boot--

SOLOMON
No...

ELIZA
You luxuriate in his favor.

SOLOMON
I survive. I will not fall into despair. Woeful and crushed; melancholy is the yolk I see most. I will offer up my talents to Master Ford. I will keep myself hearty until freedom is opportune.

ELIZA
Ford is your opportunity. Do you think he does not know that you are more than you suggest? But he does nothing for you. Nothing. You are no better than prized livestock. Call for him. Call, tell him of your previous circumstances and see what it earns you...Solomon.

Eliza uses Solomon’s name quite pointedly as if to underscore his true self. Solomon get her meaning. Yet he says nothing. Again, pointedly:

ELIZA (CONT’D)
So, you’ve settled into your role as Platt, then?

SOLOMON
(defensive)
My back is thick with scars from

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
protesting my freedom. Do not accuse me--

ELIZA
I accuse you of nothing. I cannot accuse. I too have done so many, many dishonorable things to survive. And for all of them I have ended up here... No better than if I had stood up for myself. Father, Lord and Savior forgive me... Forgive me. Oh, Solomon, let me weep for my children.

FORD (V.O.)
At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

EXT. FORD PLANTATION - MORNING

It's Sunday. The slaves are again gathered in the rose garden near the front of the house to hear the word of the Lord as read by Master Ford.

FORD
And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The phrase seems to trigger Eliza's tears. She begins to sob uncontrollably.

Mrs. Ford turns to Rachel in a hushed whisper-

MRS. FORD
I cannot have that kind of depression about.

Solomon, pretending not to have heard, slowly turns to Eliza with worry.

Ford continues to preach over Eliza's keening.

FORD
But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto (MORE) (CONTINUED)
the world because of offences!
For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

BLACK
SEASONS have passed. It is winter now, and very grey out along the bayou. Ford and Tibeats - who we have seen working around the WORK AREA - stand with Solomon, Tibeats giving Solomon an inspection. Ford carries much lament.

TIBEATS
Raise yer shirt.

Solomon does as instructed. Tibeats looks at Solomon's back, at the scars from lashings he bears.

TIBEATS (CONT'D)
Troublesome.

FORD
He's a good carpenter and quick-witted.

TIBEATS
I am familiar with his cleverness.

FORD
You won't find a nigger more humble.

TIBEATS
Ain't found a nigger yet I cain't humble.

Tibeats heads off. Solomon, highly curious over the preceding.

SOLOMON
Sir, have I done something wrong?

FORD
Not your concern, Platt. I say with much...shame I have compiled debts. I have long preached austerity, but find myself hypocritical in that regard. You'll be in the ownership of Mr. Tibeats. You are his now. Serve him as you'd serve me.

SOLOMON
Sir.

FORD
And your faithfulness will not be forgotten.

(CONTINUED)
SOLOMON

Yes, sir.

FORD

Pride and want have been my sin.  
Loss of you is but one of my punishments.

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EXT. FORD PLANATION - DAY

-END OF JANUARY, 1842- [OVER ONE DAY]

We see Solomon working as a carpenter, helping to erect a Weaving House that stands off to the side of the plantation’s Great House.

At the moment Solomon is nailing on siding.  Tibeats arrives and is immediately dissatisfied with the work.

TIBEATS

Make them boards flush.

SOLOMON

They are, sir.

TIBEATS

They is no such thing.

Solomon runs his hands over the boards.

SOLOMON

As smooth to the touch as a yearling’s coat.

TIBEATS

Callin’ me a liar, boy?

SOLOMON

Only a matter of perspective, sir.  
From where you stand you may see differently.  But the hands are not mistaken.  I ask only that you employ all your senses before rendering judgement.

What’s Tibeats to do when faced with fact?  All he can do is spew invectives.

TIBEATS

You are a brute.  You are a dog, and no better for followin’ instruction.

SOLOMON

I’ll do as ordered, sir.

(CONTINUED)
TIBEATS
Then you'll be up at daybreak.
You will procure a keg of nails
from Chapin and commence puttin'
on clapboards.

Tibeats wheels away. Solomon goes back to his work.
After a few moments Solomon notices a bit of commotion in
the drive of the great house. It involves an
inconsolable Eliza who is being herded by Sam onto a cart
DRIVEN BY A WHITE MAN. Mistress Ford and Rachel watch.

Solomon can only watch as the last connection to his days
as a free man is driven away to a location unknown.

EXT. WEAVING HOUSE - MORNING

It is day break. As ordered, Solomon is up and working.
Chapin is rolling a keg of nails off a handcart for
Solomon.

CHAPIN
If Tibeats prefers a different
size, I will endeavor to furnish
them, but you may use those until
further directed.

SOLOMON
Yes, sir.

EXT. WEAVING HOUSE - LATER

As the day gets on to mid-morning, the sun already baking
in the sky, Tibeats makes his way over to Solomon. Even
before arriving to Solomon his mien is one of
belligerence; out of sorts and something less than sober.

TIBEATS
I thought I told yah ta commence
ta puttin' on clapboards this
morn'.
SOLOMON

Yes, master. I am about it. I have begun on the other side of the house.

Tibeats walks around to look over Solomon's work. He is picayune, as if purposefully looking for fault.

TIBEATS

Didn't I tell yah last night to get a keg of nails of Chapin?

SOLOMON

And so I did; and Chapin said he would get another size for you, if you wanted them when he came back from the field.

Tibeats walks to the keg and kicks it. Moving toward Solomon "with a great passion:"

TIBEATS

Goddamn yah! I thought yah knowed somethin'!

Solomon, perhaps inspired by his moment with Eliza, is in no mood for Tibeats.

SOLOMON

I did as instructed. If there's something wrong, then it's wrong with your instructions.

TIBEATS

Yah black bastard! Yah goddamn black bastard!

In an inconsolable rage, Tibeats runs off to the piazza to fetch a whip.

Solomon looks around. He is alone other than Rachel and Mistress Ford who, shocked by that which she witnesses, runs out to the field to fetch Chapin. Solomon's instinct is to run, but he stands his ground as Tibeats marches back whip in hand.

TIBEATS (CONT'D)

Strip yer clothes!

Solomon does no such thing.

TIBEATS (CONT'D)

Strip!

SOLOMON

I will not.

With "concentrated vengeance," Tibeats springs for Solomon, seizing him by the throat with one hand and (CONTINUED)
raising the whip with the other. Before he can strike the blow, however, Solomon catches Tibeats by the collar of his coat and pulls him in close. Reaching down, Solomon grabs Tibeats by the ankle and pushes him back with the other hand. Tibeats tumbles to the ground. A violent struggle takes place as Solomon puts a foot to Tibeats throat, and then in a frenzy of madness snatches the whip from Tibeats and begins to strike him with the handle again and again and again.

TIBEATS
Yew will not live ta see another
day, nigger! This is yer last, I
swear it!

Solomon ignores the threats, continues to beat Tibeats. Blow after blow falling fast and heavy on Tibeats's wriggling form. The stiff stock of the whip wraps around Tibeats’s cringing body until Solomon’s arm aches. Tibeats’s cries of vengeance turn to yelps for help and then pleas for mercy:

TIBEATS (CONT’D)
Murder! It's murder! Lord, God,
help me. God be merciful!

And then suddenly, Tibeats shrieks-

TIBEATS (CONT’D)
Papa I’m sorry!

Chapin comes RIDING IN FROM THE FIELD fast and hard. Solomon strikes Tibeats a blow or two more, then delivers a well-directed kick that sends Tibeats rolling over the ground.

CHAPIN
What is the matter?

Tibeats struggles up and tries to present an air of dignity and control while he keeps a demonic eye on Solomon:

SOLOMON
Master Tibeats wants to whip me
for using the nails you gave me.

CHAPIN
What's the matter with the nails?

With a mix of shame, anger and embarrassment, Tibeats says, as if being exposed-

TIBEATS
They're...they're too large.

CHAPIN
I am overseer here. I told Platt
to use them, and

(MORE)
I shall furnish such nails as I please. Do you understand that, Mr. Tibeats?

Tibeats answer is in the grinding of his teeth and the shaking of his fist.

TIBEATS
This ain't done by half. I will have flesh, and I will have all of it.

Tibeats moves off toward, and then INTO THE HOUSE. Chapin follows. A long moment, Solomon stands alone. He looks around, not sure what to do; to stay or to flee. Anxiety mounts on his features.

A moment more, and Tibeats EXITS the house. He saddles his horse and rides off to beat the devil. Or, worse, to fetch him.

Chapin comes running back out of the house. He is visibly excited, and when he speaks he is quite earnest. Though he tries to project reasoned emotions he gives off an air of impending trouble.

CHAPIN
Do not stir. Do not attempt to leave the plantation on any account whatever. But if you run there is no protecting you.

SOLOMON
Sir--

CHAPIN
If you run, Platt, there is no protecting you. Rachel...!

Chapin runs off to join Rachel. The two converse at a distance from Solomon, then they head off for the log kitchen.

Solomon is now very much alone, and he waits for what is to come. AND WE WAIT WITH HIM. And we wait, and we continue to wait... Moment by moment, the dread of the unexpected mounts.

Solomon's eyes begin to well. He has beaten a white man, and he knows that death awaits him.

A SLIGHT PRAYER TO THE HEAVENS BEGINS TO FORM IN HIS THROAT, but he is too choked up to fully speak it.

(CONTINUED)
Chapin has now returned to the piazza. He stands and watches, but does not move to Solomon.

Solomon waits, and waits...

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF DISTANT HOOFS which grow louder and louder in the manner of rolling thunder. It's Tibeats. He returns with two accomplices; RAMSAY and COOK. They carry with them large whips and a coil of rope.

TIBEATS
Tha's the one. Tha's him.

Dismounting, they move with menace that is tinged with perverse pleasure and wordless malevolence. Solomon tries to fight back, but he is strong armed and tied by TIBBETS - his wrists, and then ankles bound in the same manner. In the meantime the other two have slipped a cord within Solomon's elbows, running it across his back and tying it firmly. Solomon is then dragged toward a peach tree. A lynching is in store. The naked horror of it intensely palpable.

Solomon looks toward the piazza, but Chapin is now gone. Tears of fear flow down Solomon's cheeks. He is on the verge of panic; a man heading toward his own execution, he begins to struggle and fight.

A rope goes around Solomon's neck, then is tossed over the branch of the tree. The trio begin to hoist Solomon. He gasps and gags as spittle flies from his mouth and the life is choked from him.

With suddenness, Chapin comes from the house brandishing a pistol in each hand - Colt Paterson .36 caliber "Holster" pistols with 9" barrels. Chapin moves with determination toward the lynch mob. He is sharp and matter of fact. With the guns in hand, he really doesn't need to be much more demonstrative.

CHAPIN
Gentlemen... Whoever moves that nigger another foot from where he stands is a dead man. I am overseer of this plantation seven years, and in the absence of William Ford, my duty is to protect his interests. Ford holds a mortgage on Platt of four hundred dollars. If you hang him, he loses his debt. Until that is canceled you have no claim to his life.

Directing his attention to Ramsay and Cook:

(CONTINUED)
As for you two, if you have any regard for your own safety...I say, begone!

Ramsay and Cook don't need to be told twice. The pistols Chapin's gripping make the situation real clear. Without further word, they mount their horses and ride away.

Tibeats remains, and his anger with him.

TIBEATS
Yah got no cause. Platt is mine, and mine ta do with as I please. Yah touch my property, I will 'ave yah strung up as well.

Tibeats mounts up and departs. There is a surreal moment as Chapin's not sure what to do about Solomon. He chooses to do nothing. Solomon is left dangling by the neck from the tree as Chapin calls to Sam in the distance:

CHAPIN
Sam! Get the mule. You must ride to Master Ford. Tell him to come here at once without a single moment's delay. Tell him they are trying to murder Platt. Hurry, boy. Bring him back if you must kill the mule to do so!

SAM
Yes, suh!

Sam mounts up and rides off, the mule demonstrating much speed.

HOURS HAVE PASSED. The sun is now at its apex. The sight and smell of the red rose bush is more than vivid as Solomon remains tied and dangling exactly where he was left. The scene is both tranquil and horrific. Life on the plantation continues. The OTHER SLAVES work in the field. CHILDREN make their way playfully in the yard. It should all underscore the fact that a black, hanging even partially from a tree, is nothing unusual in this time and space.

(Continued)
Chapin walks back and forth with the pistols in his hands. Clearly he fears Tibeats returning with more and better assistance. And yet, he does nothing to alleviate Solomon’s suffering. He heeds Tibeats words, and as though caught up in the middle of nothing more than a property dispute, he offers no further aid.

Solomon’s head lolls to one side. He looks toward the sun. The bright light flares off the leaves and branches of the tree from which Solomon hangs. The glare in Solomon’s eyes offering him more pain than solace, but he cannot help but look upward. As he does, his eyes flutter between life and lifelessness...

EXT. FORD PLANATION - LATER

Solomon continues to hang. By now he is drenched in sweat, and nearly delirious with dehydration. His lips dry and parched. He may not die from hanging, but he may very well expire before the day is over.

Eventually Rachel comes over - timidly, and as though she were acting contrary to orders - and offers a drink of water from a tin cup, pouring it in Solomon’s mouth for him. She then takes a small hand towel and dabs at the water which clings to his lips. Rachel then retreats, and leaves Solomon to hang.

EXT. FORD PLANATION - EVENING

The sun is just now arching for the horizon. Solomon remains, as though his torture will not end. Ford, trailed by Sam, finally comes riding up. He dismounts, and moves swiftly over to Solomon. With great heartache:

FORD
Platt... My poor Platt.

Ford produces a blade and cuts Solomon loose. Solomon attempts to carry himself, but he cannot. He falls to the ground and passes out.

INT. FORD PLANATION/GREAT HOUSE - NIGHT

As we come into the scene, Solomon lays on a blanket on the floor. Eventually, his eyes flutter, then open. He is in the foyer of the Ford house. As he gets his bearings, he looks around the interior. THE SPACE IS HANDSOME, AND WELL DECORATED. It is sharp contrast to the bleak surroundings, shacks and dungeons Solomon has largely been accustom to during his time of slavery. It will be the "first and last time such a sumptuous resting place was granted" during his twelve years of bondage.

(CONTINUED)
Solomon doesn't have much chance to luxuriate in his surroundings. He hears a DOG BARKING just outside, and is unnerved. Has Tibeats returned to finish what he started?

From a study, Master Ford appears with a gun in hand. He goes to the door, opens it and looks outside. He can see nothing. Satisfied, Ford crosses back over to Solomon. He is frank with Solomon regarding the situation.

FORD
I believe Tibeats is skulkin' about the premises somewhere. He wants you dead, and he will attempt to have you so. It's no longer safe for you here. And I don't believe you will remain passive if Tibeats attacks. I have transferred my debt to Edwin Epps. He will take charge of you.

SOLOMON
(desperate, urgent)
Master Ford, you must know; I am not a slave.

FORD
I cannot hear that.

SOLOMON
Before I came to you I was a freeman.

FORD
I am trying to save your life! And...I have a debt to be mindful of. That, now, is to Edwin Epps. He is a hard man. Prides himself on being a "nigger breaker." But truthfully I could find no others who would have you. You've made a reputation of yourself. Whatever your circumstances, you are an exceptional nigger, Platt. I fear no good will come of it.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/BACK PORCH - DAY

-END OF JANUARY, 1842-

From the back porch, we come into the scene on EDWIN EPPS; a repulsive and coarse man. His language gives speedy and unequivocal evidence that he has never enjoyed the advantages of an education.
Epps reads the Bible to his slaves, eight of them altogether. ABRAM, a tall, older slave of about sixty years. WILEY, who is forty eight. PHEBE, who is married to Wiley. BOB and HENRY who are Phebe's children, EDWARD and PATSEY. Patsey is young, just 23 years old...though in the era, 23 not as young as in the present day. She is the offspring of a "Guinea nigger," brought over to Cuba in a slave ship. She nearly brims with unconversant sexuality.

MISTRESS EPPS, Epps's wife, is also present. She sits with, holds quite lovingly, some SLAVE CHILDREN. WITH THEM SHE IS VERY "MOTHERLY." We also see Epps's overseer TREACH. Treach constantly sports a LOADED PISTOL. Though Epps reads the word of the Lord, he lacks the tone of compassion with which Ford read.

EPPS
"And that servant which knew his Lord's will...WHICH KNEW HIS LORD'S WILL and prepared not himself...PREPARED NOT HIMSELF, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes..." D'ye hear that? "Stripes." That nigger that don't take care, that don't obey his lord - that's his master - d'ye see? - that 'ere nigger shall be beaten with many stripes. Now, "many" signifies a great many. Forty, a hundred, a hundred and fifty lashes... That's Scripter!

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY

-AUGUST, 1842-

WE START THE SCENE WITH A PAIR OF BLACK HANDS

picking cotton ferociously. As we move out, we identify PATSEY, a 23 year old striking black woman. The camera moves out again to a wider shot. This reveals several lines of slaves picking cotton, with Patsey way out in the lead.

We cut to another pair of black hands. This time, revealing SOLOMON, clumsy and unskilled hands, picking cotton. A lash bears down on him.

It is August, "cotton picking" season.

We are looking out over a cotton field in full bloom. It presents a visual purity, like an immaculate expanse of light, new-fallen snow. The cotton grows from five to seven feet high, each stalk having a great many branches
shooting out in all directions and lapping each other above the water furrow.

There is a slave to each side of the row. They have a sack around their necks that hangs to the ground, the mouth of the sack about breast high. Baskets are placed at the end of the furrows. Slaves dump their sacks of cotton in the baskets, then pick until their sacks are again filled.

EDWARDS
Pick that cotton. Move along now.

THE SOUNDTTRACK TO THE SCENE IS NOTHING MORE THAN THE RUSTLE OF LABOR, THE MALE CICADAS BUGS "TYMBALS" IN THE HEAT and a SPIRITUAL SUNG BY THE SLAVES.

Despite the heat, there is no stopping for water. The slaves are "driven" by Edward, who is himself "driven" by Treach.

TREACH
C'mon. Drive dem niggers.

Edward moves among the slaves, applying the whip to them without regard.

EDWARD
Pick dat cotton. Move along now, hear?

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/GIN HOUSE - EVENING

The day's work is done. The slaves are now assembled in the gin house with their baskets of cotton which are being weighed by Treach. There is anxiety among the slave, the reason for which soon becomes apparent.

TREACH
Two hundred forty pounds for Bob.

EPPS
What yah got for James?

TREACH
Two hundred ninety five pounds.

EPPS
Tha's real good, boy. Tha's real good.

TREACH
One hundred eighty two pounds for Platt.

Epps does not look happy. Treach says again:

(CONTINUED)
TREACH (CONT'D)

One hundred eighty two.

EPPS

How much can even an average nigger pick a day?

TREACH

Two hundred pounds.

EPPS

This nigger ain't even average.

Epps pulls Solomon aside.

TREACH

Five hundred twelve pounds for Patsey.

EPPS

Five hundred twelve. Yah men folk got no shame lettin' Patsey out pick yah? The day ain't yet come she swung lower than five hundred pounds. Queen of the fields, she is.

TREACH

Two hundred six pou--

EPPS

I ain't done, Treach. Ain't I owed a minute to luxuriate on the work Patsey done?

...Sir...

EPPS

Damned Queen. Born and bred to the field. A nigger among niggers, and God give 'er to me. A lesson in the rewards of righteous livin'. All be observant ta that. All!

(beat)

Now, Treach. Now speak.

TREACH

One hundred thirty eight pounds for Phebe.

EPPS

Hit one forty five yesterday. Pull her out.

TREACH

Two hundred six pounds for Wiley.

(CONTINUED)
EPPS
How much he pick yesterday?

TREACH
Two hundred twenty nine pounds.

Wiley is pulled from the line, huddled with Solomon.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/YARD - EVENING

In the distance, a flogging is going on. Solomon, Phebe, and Wiley are stripped, placed in a stockade and now being given a perfunctory whipping delivered by ANOTHER IDENTIFIED SLAVE.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION - EVENING

Evening, but the day is not yet done. Slaves attend their various evening chores; feeding livestock, doing laundry, cooking food. There is no respite from a slave's charge.

INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

A fire is kindled in the cabin. The slaves finally fix their own dinner of corn meal. Corn is ground in a small hand mill. The corn meal is mixed with a little water, placed in the fire and baked. When it is "done brown" the ashes are scraped off. Bacon is fried. As the slaves eat, Abram goes on in great length and with much emotion about General Jackson.

UNCLE ABRAM
Hold my words: General Jackson will forever be immortalized. His bravery will be handed down to the last posterity. If ever there be a stain upon "raw militia," he done wiped away on the eight of January. I say da result a that day's battle is of 'mo importance to our grand nation than any occurrence 'fo or since. Great man. Great man in deed. We all need pray to Heavenly Father da General reign over us always.

INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

The slaves are sleeping. There is a loud commotion. Epps enters, drunkenly, forcing the slaves awake.

(CONTINUED)
INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

Despite the lateness of the hour, the slaves are up and now fully dressed. They take up position in the middle of the floor. They wait, poised like actors. Solomon strikes up a tune; Henry joins in with a pan flute and the slaves dance. They do so very wearily. The whole of it certainly more torture than pleasure.

Epps, whip in hand:

EPPS

Get up! Get up, we dance tonight! We will not waste the evenin' with yer laziness. Get up.

EPPS

Where's yah merriment? Move yer feet.

As the slaves twirl about Epps keeps an attentive eye on Patsey. It should be quite clear that his primary motivation for holding dances is so that he may view Patsey twirl about the floor.

This fact is not lost on Mistress Epps. A few moments of Epps's lust on display is all that the Mistress can bear. Jealousy mounting, she snatches up a CARAFE. With all her might she throws it at Patsey. It hits Patsey square in the face. TOO THICK TO SHATTER, IT LEAVES HER BLOODY AND WRITHING ON THE FLOOR. The dancing, the music stop. The slaves, however, react as though it is not the first time they've seen as much from the Mistress.

Mistress Epps, screaming like a hellion:

MISTRESS EPPS

Sell her!

EPPS

C'mon, now. Wha's this?

MISTRESS EPPS

You will sell the negress!

EPPS

You're talkin' foolish. Sell little Pats? She pick with more vigor than any other nigger! Choose another ta go.

MISTRESS EPPS

No other. Sell her!

EPPS

I will not!
MISTRESS EPPS
You will remove that black bitch from this property, 'er I'll take myself back to Cheneyville.

EPPS
Back to that hog's trough where I found you? Oh, the idleness of that yarn washes over me. Do not set yourself up against Patsey, my dear. That's a wager on which you will not profit. Calm yerself. And settle for my affection, 'cause my affection you got. Or, go. 'Cause I will rid myself of yah well before I do away with her!

Mistress Epps stands irate, lost in fury and unable to even think of what to do. Eventually, optionless, she storms away.

For a few beats there is only the sound of Patsey sobbing.

EPPS (CONT'D)
That damned woman! I won't have my mood spoiled. I will not. Dance!

Epps sends the whip in Solomon's direction. Solomon responds by playing. Treach literally drags the prone Patsey from the floor, blood still spilling from her face. The slaves, as ordered, return to dancing.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION - MORNING

-AUGUST, 1843-

The sun has only just risen above the horizon. FROM THE GREAT HOUSE THE HORN IS BLOWN signaling the start of another day.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY

Slaves are in the field picking cotton. They accompany their work with a SPIRITUAL.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE - LATER

As the slaves make their way in from the field, the Mistress calls to Solomon. SHE HAS A PIECE OF PAPER IN HAND.

(Continued)
MISTRESS EPPS
Platt...

SOLOMON
Yes, Mistress.

MISTRESS EPPS
Can you find your way to Bartholomew's?

SOLOMON
I can, ma'am.

Handing Solomon a sheet of paper.

MISTRESS EPPS
This is a list of goods and sundries. You will take it to be filled and return immediately. Tell Bartholomew to add it to our debt.

SOLOMON
I will, Mistress.

Solomon looks at the list. In a careless moment, Solomon reads quietly from it. He catches himself, but not before the Mistress notes his action. With high inquisitiveness:

MISTRESS EPPS
Where yah from, Platt?

SOLOMON
I have told you.

MISTRESS EPPS
Tell me again.

SOLOMON
Washington.

MISTRESS EPPS
Who were yah Master?

SOLOMON
Master name of Freeman.

MISTRESS EPPS
Was he a learned man?

SOLOMON
I suppose so.

MISTRESS EPPS
He learn yah ta read?

(CONTINUED)
SOLOMON
A word here or there, but I have no understanding of the written text.

MISTRESS EPPS
Don't trouble yer self with it. Same as the rest, Master bought yah to work. Tha's all. And any more'll earn yah a hun'red lashes.

Having delivered her cool advice, Mistress heads back into the house.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Solomon walks along a well-worn path, shopping bag draped over one shoulder. We see his feet. As the walk slowly gathers pace, Solomon suddenly turns left into dense foliage. His tread is now a full blown sprint, trees flash past as Solomon attacks his way through the woods. The sound of branches cracking underneath. His feet, heartbeat and breath almost deafening. He is desperate. The violence of his advance abruptly stops, there is silence. We see in a clearance a posse of patrollers, preparing for a lynching of two young men. Solomon's eyes meet theirs. The two men look back at Solomon with a look of fear as one of the patrollers checks the noose around their neck. Suddenly the bloodhounds start barking and the patrollers turn in the direction of Solomon. Solomon's whole body shakes with anticipation.

PATROLLER (aggressively)
Boy, where are you going?

SOLOMON (almost tripping over his words)
To the store, Sir, to Bartholomew's. I was sent there by Mistress Epps.

The patroller reaches out for Solomon's free pass around his neck, yanking him forward. He looks at it.

PATROLLER
Get there and get there quick.

The patroller kicks Solomon hard, sending him on his way. Solomon walks on, looking one more time at the two young men; again there is a moment of connection.

Solomon turns. The two men are hoisted up, kicking and spitting, behind his shoulder.

Solomon finds himself back on the trail walking towards Bartholomew's, his face now full of shock and

(CONTINUED)
trepidation. He walks, fighting to calm himself down. We move behind him as he continues his journey, a lonely figure.

INT. BARTHOLOMEW'S - LATER

A general store in the township of Holmesville. Solomon stands at the counter as BARTHOLOMEW fills Mistress Epps’s order. Among the items set before Solomon is a QUANTITY OF FOOLSCAP.

The items are collected for Solomon and placed in a sack. Solomon giving little thought to them other than getting them back to the mistress.

As he turns, he glimpses the regalia of slave restraints, of all different guises; chains, muzzles for sale.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE - LATER

Solomon returns and delivers the items to the Mistress.

MISTRESS EPPS

Any trouble?

SOLOMON

No, ma'am. No trouble.

OMIT - MOVED TO A105

EXT. SHAW'S HOUSE - DAY - JULY, 1844-

Sitting on the Grand house's Piazza, Patsey is having tea with MISTRESS HARRIET SHAW, WHO IS A BLACK WOMAN. Though once a slave, she is now comparatively refined though not wholly so. The table where they sit is adorned with white linens, and they are attended by a HOUSE NIGGER. It makes for a tranquil surreal scene.

MASTER SHAW, A WHITE MAN, IS ON THE LAWN GROOMING A HORSE.
Solomon is running flat out along the road. Running as though his life depended on getting to his destination in beyond a timely manner.

Still running, slick with sweat, Solomon comes upon the SHAW HOUSE.

As Solomon arrives:

MASTER SHAW
Platt Epps, good Sunday morning.

SOLOMON
Good morning, Master Shaw. I've been sent by Master to retrieve Patsey. May I approach?

MASTER SHAW
You may.

Solomon makes his way over to the piazza.

SOLOMON
Excuse me, Mistress Shaw.

MISTRESS SHAW
Nigger Platt.

SOLOMON
My apologies. Patsey, Master wishes you to return.

PATSEY
Sabbath day. I's free ta roam.

SOLOMON
Understood. But the Master sent me running to fetch you, and said no time should be wasted.

MISTRESS SHAW
Drink tea?

SOLOMON
Thank you, Mistress, but I don't dare.

MISTRESS SHAW
Would you knowed Massa Epps's consternation ta be any lessened wit your timely return? Sit. Sit and drink the tea that offered.

(CONTINUED)
Solomon knows better, but he sits and the Mistress has tea poured for him.

**MISTRESS SHAW (CONT'D)**
What’n was Epps’s concern?

**SOLOMON**
...I’d rather not say...

**MISTRESS SHAW**
L’il gossip on the Sabbath be fine. All things in moderation.

Solomon is not sure what to say. He struggles to be as diplomatic as possible.

**SOLOMON**
As you are aware, Master Epps can be a man of a hard countenance. There are times when it is impossible to account for his logic. You know he has ill feelings toward your husband.

**MISTRESS SHAW**
He do.

**SOLOMON**
Master Epps has somehow come to believe, as incorrectly as it may be, that Master Shaw is... That he is something of a lothario and an unprincipled man. A misguided belief born out of their mutual competition as planters, no doubt.

**MISTRESS SHAW**
No doubt...if not born outta truth itself.

The Mistress waves to Shaw. Shaw, unsuspecting of the conversation, waves back.

**SOLOMON**
I’m certain Patsey’s well being is Master Epps’s only concern.

**MISTRESS SHAW**
Nothin’ Epps desire come outta concern.

**SOLOMON**
I meant no disrespect.

**MISTRESS SHAW**
He ain’t heard you.

(CONTINUED)
SOLOMON
I meant no disrespect to you, Mistress.

MISTRESS SHAW
Ha! You worry for me? Got no cause to worry for my sensibilities. I ain't felt the end of a lash in 'mo years than I cain recall. Ain't worked a field, neither. Where one time I served, now I got others servin' me. The cost to my current existence be Massa Shaw broadcasting his affections, 'n me enjoyin' his pantomime of fidelity. If that what keep me from the cotton pickin' niggers, that what it be. A small and reasonable price to be paid 'fo sure.

Looking toward Patsey, speaking with great empathy:

MISTRESS SHAW (CONT'D)
I knowed what it like to be the object of Massa's predilections and peculiarities. And I knowed they can get expressed with kindness or wit violence. A lusty visit in the night, or a visitation from the whip. And wit my experience, if'n I can give comfort, then comfort I give. And you take comfort, Patsey; the Good Lord will manage Epps. In His own time the Good Lord will manage dem all. Yes, Lordy, there's a day comin' that will burn as an oven. It comin' as sure as the Lord is just. When His will be done...the curse on the Pharos is a poor example of all that wait 'fo the plantation class.

Mistress Shaw turns her head to the side, catching a slave's attention. As she does so, the slave, a YOUNG WOMAN, commences to pour tea.

As if to punctuate her thought, the Mistress takes a sip of her tea.

EXT. EPPS'S PLANTATION - LATER

Solomon and Patsey are returning from Shaw's. Waiting on the porch of the Great House, a drunk Epps beckons for Patsey, his lewd intentions obvious.

(CONTINUED)
EPPS
**Pats...! Patsey!**

SOLOMON
Do not look in his direction. Continue on.

Epps does not care to be ignored. He lifts himself and moves toward the pair in a rage.

**EPPS**
Patsey...!

Solomon moves between Epps and Patsey, cutting Epps off as Patsey continues on. Playing up his "ignorance" of the situation:

**SOLOMON**
Found her, Master, and brought her back just as instructed.

**EPPS**
What'd you jus now tell her? What'd you say to Pats?

**SOLOMON**
No words were spoken. None of consequence.

**EPPS**
Lie! Damned liar! Saw you talkin' with 'er. Tell me!

**SOLOMON**
I cannot speak of what did not occur.

Epps grabs Solomon.

**EPPS**
I'll cut your black throat.

Solomon pulls away from Epps, RIPPING HIS SHIRT IN THE PROCESS. Epps gives chase. Solomon begins to run around the large pig sty, easily keeping his distance. Epps, however is undeterred. He moves after Solomon as speedily as he can, which isn't very speedily at all. And quickly he tires. Epps is forced to bend over and suck air. Solomon maintains his distance, barely breathing hard. His breath returned to him, Epps starts up the chase again. Solomon runs on out of reach. Shortly, Epps again stops, gets his breath... And now in what should be quite comical, Epps again runs after Solomon. Again, Epps’s vigor leaves him before he can even get close to the slave.

Dropping down to the dirt, in a show of regret and piety:

(CONTINUED)
Platt... Platt, liquor filled me. I admit that it did, and I done over reacted. It's the Lord's day. Ain't nothin' Christian in us carryin' on like this. Help me ta my feet, and let us both pray to the Lord for forgiveness.

Epps extends a hand to Solomon. Cautiously, Solomon moves close, but not too close. As Solomon draws within striking distance, Epps lunges for him. He chases Solomon on until he is again out of breath and once more drops down. And again offering a treaty:

EPPS (CONT'D)
I'm all done in, Platt. I have met my limitations, and I ain't equal to 'em. I concede to yah, but in the name of valor, help yer master to his feet.

Solomon cautiously moves closer to help. Again he is attacked by Epps - this time by knife. Sort of. Epps is too drunk and tired to fully open the folding blade - and chased far around the field by Epps. ALL OF THE PRECEDING SHOULD BE MORE FUNNY THAN SHOCKING. A CHANGE OF PACE FROM THE OTHERWISE NECESSARY BLEARNESS OF SLAVE LIFE.

Mistress Epps comes running from the house to the pair.

MISTRESS EPPS
What? Wha's the fuss?

SOLOMON
A misunderstanding is all. It began when I was sent to retrieve Patsey from where she'd taken sabbatical at Master Shaw's. Upon returning, Master Epps believed Patsey and me to be in conversation when we were not. I tried to explain, but it lead to all this.

MISTRESS EPPS
What is it? Ya cain't remain the Sabbath without her under your eye? Ya are a no-account bastard.

EPPS
Hold a moment...

MISTRESS EPPS
A filthy, godless heathen. My bed is too holy for yah ta share.

(CONTINUED)
EPPS
Wha's...wha's he been tellin' yah?

MISTRESS EPPS
Of yer misbegotten ways.

EPPS
And he would know what of anythin'? I ain't even spoken with him today. Platt, yah lyin' nigger, have I? Have I?

Discretion being the better part and all, Solomon remains silent.

EPPS (CONT'D)
There; there's all the truth he got. Damned nigger. Damn yah.

Epps pushes his way past the Mistress.

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EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY
-AUGUST, 1844-

With the sun yet again high in the sky the slaves are working the field picking cotton. As before THEY SING A SPIRITUAL, the only thing that distracts them from the tedium at hand.

But there is no distracting from the heat. We see Henry begin to falter before it... And eventually collapse right in the dirt. Though the other slaves take note, none move to help him. None dare.

From Treach rather matter of factly:

TREACH
Get him water.

Edward runs to fetch a gourd. He carries it to Henry, DUMPS THE WATER ON HIM, BUT DOES NOT ACTUALLY GIVE HENRY ANYTHING TO DRINK.

Roused, Henry rights himself.

EDWARD
Go'won. Git up.

Unsteadily, Henry lifts himself and goes back to picking cotton. He joins in again with the spiritual, as if the song is all that can keep him going.

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INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACKS - NIGHT
-OCTOBER, 1844-

(CONTINUED)
The slaves are asleep. Epps arrives, again without knocking, with his whip in hand. The slaves stir. Uncle Abram asks:

UNCLE ABRAM
We dance tonight, massa?

Epps remains quietly focused on Patsey. And it's clear from her apprehensive expression just what it is he's come looking for. This time there is no escaping it. As if to acknowledge the badness to come, Phebe lightly cries.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SMOKE HOUSE - NIGHT

On top of a wood pile, in the back of the smoke house - Epps shoves Patsey. He stops, stands as if gathering his manhood, then he's all over Patsey. He is rough and clumsy. It looks like something between an awkward rape and a virgin attempting his first sexual encounter.

Patsey does not respond in any way other than to continually turn her head from Epps, but otherwise remain as still as possible. If there is such a thing, she is vicious with her passive aggressiveness.

Epps's frustration mounts until - as the Mistress Shaw had cautioned - he crosses the line from passion to violence. He begins slapping Patsey to get a response from her. When that fails, he punches her which only leads to him taking up his whip and lashing Patsey MERCILESSLY. Still, she gives him nothing. Beaten, Patsey sits in the dirt among the cotton, Epps deep breathing above her. The desire for sex now having left him.

Epps heads from the field. Patsey is left where she is.

INT. BARTHOLOMEW'S - DAY -NOVEMBER, 1844-

As before, Solomon waits as Bartholomew fills Mistress Epps order. Among the items set before Solomon is another quantity of foolscap.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Solomon is making his way back to the Epps plantation. He carries with him a sack filled with the goods from the store. As he walks, SOLOMON LOOKS AROUND CASUALLY. When he is certain he is alone, he sets down the sack, opens it and appropriates A SINGLE SHEET OF THE PAPER which he folds and places in his pocket. That done, he cinches up the sack and continues on his way.
INT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - DAY

Solomon takes the slip of paper and hides it within his fiddle. Perhaps the safest place he can think of. He acts as though he's hiding away found gold. In reality it's more than that. For Solomon the paper is a first step toward freedom.

INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

-DECEMBER, 1844-

It's another night of Epps's forced revelry. Coming in quick from the previous scene, we go from Solomon holding his fiddle, to playing it as the slaves are again made to dance.

Mistress Epps brings out a tray of freshly baked pastries. She sets them down on a table.

MISTRESS EPPS
A moment from the dancing. Come sample what I baked for y'all.

The slaves, thankful for the rest as much as the food, file toward the tray reciting a chorus of "Thank you, Mistress." As Patsey moves toward the pastries:

MISTRESS EPPS (CONT'D)
There'll be none for you, Patsey.

Patsey merely turns away. Her non responsiveness, however, serves only to incite the Mistress. Screaming:

MISTRESS EPPS (CONT'D)
Yah see that? Did yah see the look of insolence she give me?

EPPS
Seen nothin' but her turn away.

MISTRESS EPPS
Are you blind or ignorant? It was hot, hateful scorn. It filled that black face. Yah tell me yah did'n see it, then yah choose not to look, or yah sayin' I lie.

EPPS
Whatever it was, it passed.

MISTRESS EPPS
Is that how yah are with the niggers? Let every ill thought fester inside 'em. Look at 'em.

(MORE) (CONTINUED)
They foul with it; foul with their hate. You let it be, it'll come back to us in the dark a night. Yah want that? Yah want them black animals to leave us gut like pigs in our own sleep?

Epps isn't sure how to respond to the inchoate berating. It's an invitation for the Mistress to continue.

MISTRESS EPPS (CONT'D)
You are manless. A damned eunuch if ever there was. And if yah won't stand for me, I'd pray you'd at least be a credit to yer own kind and beat every foul thought from 'em.

Epps does nothing. The Mistress lets her anger loose. She moves quickly to Patsey, DRIVES HER NAILS INTO THE PATSEY'S FACE AND DRAWS THEM DOWN ACROSS HER FEATURES. FIVE DEEP AND BLOODY GASHES ARE LEFT IN PATSEY'S SKIN, the moment marked with appropriate screams. Patsey collapses on the floor, covering her bleeding face.

MISTRESS EPPS (CONT'D)
Beat it from 'em!

Thoroughly cuckolded by the Mistress's actions, Epps takes his whip and pulls Patsey out of the house. His intentions are plain.

All the slaves remain silent. The Mistress, however, displaying high satisfaction, entreats the others:

MISTRESS EPPS (CONT'D)
Eat. Fill yourselves. ...And then we dance.

The slaves eat, but without a hint of levity.

INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

We come up on the slaves who lay sleeping. All except for Patsey. She rises from her bedding, goes to a corner of the cabin and removes something from a secretive location. She then moves over to Platt.

PATSEY
Platt... Platt, you awake?

SOLOMON
I am.

PATSEY
I have a request; an act of kindness.

(CONTINUED)
Patsey displays what she took from hiding. It is a LADY’S FINGER RING.

PATSEY (CONT’D)
I secreted it from the Mistress.

SOLOMON
Return it!

PATSEY
It yours, Platt.

SOLOMON
For what cause?

PATSEY
All I ask: end my life. Take my body to the margin of the swamp--

Solomon looks at Patsey as though she were insane.

SOLOMON
No.

PATSEY
Take me by the throat. Hold me low in the water until I's still 'n without life. Bury me in a lonely place of dyin'.

SOLOMON
No! I will do no such thing. The...the gory detail with which you speak--

PATSEY
I thought on it long and hard.

SOLOMON
It is melancholia, nothing more. How does such despair even come to you?

PATSEY
How can you not know? I got no comfort in this life. If I cain't buy mercy from yah, I'll beg it.

SOLOMON
There are others. Beg them.

PATSEY
I'm begging you!

SOLOMON
Why? Why would you consign me to damnation with such an un-Godly request?

(CONTINUED)
There is God here! God is merciful, and He forgive merciful acts. Won't be no hell for you. Do it. Do what I ain't got the strength ta do myself.

Solomon says nothing. Clearly he's not about to do the deed. With nothing else to do, knowing she is damned with every breath she draws, Patsey crawls back to her spot on the floor and lays herself down.

EXTERIOR MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY

-JULY, 1846-

Hard times on the plantation. Where previously the field in bloom was a carpet of white, it is now patchy and under grown.

The slaves move through the field picking not cotton, but rather COTTON WORMS from the plants. The cotton worms have dined on the cotton and nearly destroyed the crop.

We see the cotton worms in extreme close-up, moving among and destroying the cotton crop.

Epps is beside himself as he looks out over his ruined field.

EPPS
It is a plague.

TREACH (O.S.)
Cotton worm.

EPPS
A plague! It's damn Biblical. Two season God done sent a plague to smite me. I am near ruination. Why, Treach? What I done that God hate me so? Do I not preach His word?

TREACH (O.S.)
The whole Bayou sufferin'.

EPPS
I don't care nothin' fer the damn Bayou. I'm sufferin'.

Epps looks among his slaves at work, his enmity growing.

EPPS (CONT'D)
It's that Godless lot. They brought this on me. I bring 'em (MORE) (CONTINUED)
God's word, and heathens they are, they brung me God's scorn.

Crazed, Epps runs into the field, taking himself from slave to slave delivering a whipping to all he can lay his hands on.

EPPS (CONT'D)
Damn you! Damn you all! Damn you!

EXT. JUDGE TURNER'S PLANTATION - EVENING
- OCTOBER, 1846 -

Henry, Bob, Uncle Abram and Solomon sit in the back of a cart. SOLOMON HAS HIS FIDDLE WITH HIM. Epps has delivered the men to JUDGE TURNER, a distinguished man and extensive planter whose large estate is situated on Bayou Salle within a few miles of the gulf. Epps and Turner stand off to one side engaged in bargaining as Henry, Bob, Uncle Abram and Solomon wait and watch.

One of the slaves whisper under their breath.

EPPS' SLAVE
I hear cutting cane is twice as hard as picking cotton.

BOB
But at least we'll be away from Master Epps.

UNCLE ABRAM
Boy, you two have no sense.

Epps returns to his slaves and gives a parting salutation.

EPPS
Yer Judge Turner's for the season. More if need be, until my crop return. Yah'll bring no disrespect to me, and yah'll bring no biblical plagues to him. Be decent, ere mark my words, I will deliver an ungodly whippin'.
Slaves are crammed into the shack - LITERALLY ON TOP OF EACH OTHER - as they try to sleep. Some lay, some sit up. Packed in like cattle, there is barely room to move let alone draw a deep, clean breath. There is a real risk of suffocating in the mass. Some cough and wheeze. A CHILD CRIES...

Among them is Solomon who must believe at this point that his life has reached its very lowest point. The odds of survival are slight, let alone the chance of actually ever returning to his family. This clearly weighs on him as he struggles to find anything like comfortable space in the pen.

EXT. CANE FIELDS - DAY

An OVERSEER is explaining to the new slaves - SOLOMON AMONG THEM - how to cultivate cane. WITH A KNIFE IN HAND he demonstrates the process:

OVERSEER
Draw the cane from the rick, cut the top and flags from the stalk, understand? Leave only that part which is sound and healthy. Cast off the rest...

EXT. CANE FIELDS - DAY -NOVEMBER, 1846-

ABOUT THIRTY SLAVES are working the field. They are divided into THREE GAGNS. The first which draw the cane, the next lay the cane in the drill, the last then hoe the rows after.

Solomon is among a gang that draws and cuts, and he moves with speed and skill. Certainly more so than he displayed picking cotton.

Standing with his overseer, Judge Turner watches.

INT. SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

Again, the slaves have been herded into the shack and pressed together.

As he tries to rest - sleep is nearly impossible - Solomon finds himself face to face with a woman, ANNA. She is awake. For a few beats she avoids eye contact with Solomon. She seems, like Solomon, to be unaccustomed to her surroundings and horribly frightened by them. Eventually her eyes meet Solomon's. She makes no sound, but great apprehension spills from her eyes. Whatever's next, whatever horror awaits, she can barely stand to face. Fear, proximity... They drive her hand.

(CONTINUED)
to Solomon's. After a moment of seemingly reacquainting herself with genuine human contact, the woman TAKES
SOLOMON'S HAND AND PRESSES IT TO HER BREAST. Solomon tries to jerk his hand away, but ANNA HOLDS IT IN PLACE. Manipulating Solomon's hand, she begins to massage her breast. Solomon takes no real pleasure in the act - really, neither does Anna. THERE SHOULD BE A TRUE SENSE ANNA IS JUST SO VERY, VERY DESPERATE FOR HUMAN CONTACT, FOR THE NEED TO FEEL ALIVE AND LIKE A PERSON RATHER THAN AN ANIMAL THAT EMOTIONALLY SHE IS WILLING TO ENGAGE SOLOMON.

The need quickly compounds. Anna presses her lips to Solomon's. Eventually, SHE DIRECTS HIS HAND BENEATH HER DRESS AND BETWEEN HER LEGS. Solomon, with slightly more compassion than a guy making union wages, BEGINS TO MANIPULATE ANNA WITH HIS HAND. The act remains more perfunctory than passionate.

We can see Anna moving toward climax and eventual release. But more - or substantially less - than joyous sex, it is really just a drug-like inoculation against reality. But the feeling quickly fades. All that remains, as with most chance encounters, is regret.

And there is shame, too. This is put on display as Anna turns away from Solomon. As quickly as it began, it is as though the act had not happened at all.

EXT. JUDGE TURNER'S PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE - EVENING

Solomon waits outside the house on the porch. A house servant - ZACHARY - approaches and admonishes Solomon.

ZACHARY
Off the porch. Get off.

Like a dog shooed away, Solomon steps down.

Eventually Judge Turner exits the house and crosses to Solomon.

SOLOMON
...Sir...

JUDGE TURNER
Platt is it? Have you cultivated cane previously?

SOLOMON
No, sir, I have not.

JUDGE TURNER
You take to it quite naturally. Are you educated?
SOLOMON
Niggers are hired to work, not to read and write.

Turner gives that a bit of consideration as he gives Solomon a wary looking over.

JUDGE TURNER
You play the fiddle?

SOLOMON
I do.

JUDGE TURNER
Willard Yarney, a planter up the bayou, celebrates his anniversary in a three week’s time. I will hold out your name to him. What you earn is yours to keep.

SOLOMON
Sir.

JUDGE TURNER
Mind yourself, Platt.

SOLOMON
Yes, sir.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - LATER (MOVED FROM 124)

Work over, the slaves congregate to eat.

As Solomon eats, he takes note of the JUICE FROM SOME BERRIES ON HIS PLATE.

EXT. TURNER'S PLANTATION - EVENING (MOVED FROM 125)

Solomon plays with a piece of cane, fashions it into some kind of writing tool, testing it in the mud. He then brushes over the dirt with his hand.
Secreted away out near the edge of the bayou and sitting by a small fire, Solomon takes the slip of paper from his fiddle. It is yellowed, showing age, but still usable. Dipping the piece of cane—a quill—into the crushed berries, Solomon attempts to write a bit on the paper. The berry juice, too free-flowing, is unusable as ink.

Solomon returns the paper to the fiddle. He has some scraps of food with him, which he snacks on.

We see a sharp object scratching onto a surface. The tool moves on to form another mark. The sound is repetitive and almost unbearable. As we move out, we see the names Anne, Margaret, Alonzo. They are engraved onto the violin, in the hidden area where Solomon would rest his chin.

Solomon looks at it for a moment, moving his fingertips across the engraving. His face full of loss.

Sadly, he lifts his instrument under his chin and leaning his head to the side as if to play.

A party has commenced at the noble home of one MR. YARNEY. A group of REVELERS have gathered and are on the dance floor, in fancy dress. Their faces are covered with a variation of decorative masks. The party is a feast of celebration. As entertainment, SOLOMON ACCOMPANIES A GROUP OF MUSICIANS, no more than three. And as he does so, they all play with jovial liveliness. Clearly a good time is being had by all.

His playing done for the evening, Solomon is returning to Judge Turner's on foot. There is only the moonlight with which to light the way. As he walks, Solomon eats from a HEARTY CHUCK OF BREAD. Obviously part of his haul from the evening. Solomon again hears noises coming from the brush just up ahead of him. Solomon tears off some of the bread, kneels and holds it out before him.

SOLOMON
C'mere. C'mon, boy.
This time, there is no dog. Instead, from the dark and the brush step TWO BLACK MEN. Solomon stands. He looks the men over - their clothes tatters and they themselves covered in dirt. It becomes quite clear they are not just slaves. A fact confirmed when they step menacingly toward Solomon, ONE WITH A SHIV IN HAND.

At first it seems they want Solomon's food or money. Worse, THEY GO FOR HIS FIDDLE.

Solomon has but a moment to brace himself before he is attacked, TAKING A CUT TO THE ARM. Solomon fights back, PICKING UP A PINE KNOT and striking his attacker over the head. That takes the fight out of him, and both men retreat back the way they came leaving Solomon be.

Outside of the slave shacks Solomon's wound tended by Uncle Abram. As he works on it:

**UNCLE ABRAM**
Runaways I would expect. The Bayou full with 'em. They nothin' 'mo dangerous than a nigger in flight.

**SOLOMON**
They acted out of desperation.

**UNCLE ABRAM**
Act outta lunacy. Heads fulla stories 'bout life up north. Yah ever been north, Platt?

**SOLOMON**
...No...

**UNCLE ABRAM**
And never should yah be. I hope that yah never bear witness the sorry condition of the northern black. Got neither no purpose, nor direction. They jus...they jus fall about the streets in search of sustenance of both body and spirit.

**SOLOMON**
You know this to be so?

**UNCLE ABRAM**
Two of my massas tolt me.

(CONTINUED)
Alone out on the edge of the Bayou, Solomon is playing a low air on his violin while snacking on scraps of bacon. As he plays, something appears in the distance. From the edge of the bayou, coming forth like an apparition arisen from the earth, is Celeste. She is a young woman of about 19 years of age and far whiter than most blacks. "It required close inspection to distinguish in her feature the slightest trace of African blood." Beyond that, she is pale and haggard, but still lovely.

Dressed in a white gown, she emerges from the water. Draped on her dress, her period. A line in her skirt. It's very visible, but not shocking. A ribbon of red in her dress.

Celeste moves to Solomon without fear or hesitation. As Solomon, startled, takes her in, Celeste says quite plainly:

CELESTE
I am hungry. Give me food.

SOLOMON
Who are you?

CELESTE
I'm hungry.

Solomon gives Celeste some of his food. Celeste, famished, devours it.

SOLOMON
What is your name?

CELESTE
My name is Celeste.

SOLOMON
What are your circumstances?

CELESTE
I belong to Massa Carey, and 'ave been two days among da palmettoes. Celeste is sick and can't work, and would rather die in the swamp.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
than be whipped to death by the overseer. So I took myself away. Massa's dogs won't follow me. The patrollers 'ave tried to set dem on me. But dey a secret between dem and Celeste, and dey won't mind the devilish orders of the overseer.

Celeste lifts her head from the food on which she gnaws.

CELESTE (CONT'D)
Do you believe me?

SOLOMON
Yes.

CELESTE
Why?

SOLOMON
There are some whose tracks the hounds will refuse to follow.

CELESTE
Give me more food. I'm starvin'.

SOLOMON
This is all my allowance for the rest of--

CELESTE
Give it to me.

Almost as if compelled, Solomon does as ordered. As she eats, Celeste aggrandizes herself:

CELESTE (CONT'D)
Most slaves escape at night. The overseers are alert for such chicanes. But Celeste tricked dem 'n alight in the middle of the day wit the sun up at its highest. The place of my concealment now deep in the swamp, not half a mile from Massa's plantation, and a world apart. A world a tall trees whose long arms make fo' a canopy so dense dey keep away even the beams of the sun. It twilight always in Celeste's world, even in the brightest day. I will live there, and I will live freely. The overseers are a cowardly lot. Dey will not go where their dogs show fear and where it always be night. Others will join me in the twilight, and we ain't gunna be slaves no 'mo forever.

(CONTINUED)
Solomon isn't sure what to say. Before he can say anything:

CELESTE (CONT'D)
Celeste will come to you again in the night. You will have food for her.

Celeste departs the way she came; as though she were a vision.

INT. JUDGE TURNER'S PLANTATION/FOOD STORAGE - NIGHT

Solomon stealthfully makes his way into the storage shed. Dried and smoked meats are hung, and milled corn is about. Taking out a handkerchief, Solomon begins to load it with food. Not too much. Not so much his thievery will be readily noticed, but he does avail himself.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NIGHT

Solomon plays his violin, but plays it with an anxious nature as he waits.

Then, as before, a figure appears in the distance. It is Celeste coming out of the night. She makes her way directly to Solomon. With no greeting, she says:

CELESTE
I am hungry.

Solomon gives Celeste the handkerchief he's filled. She opens it, and begins to devour the food. As she eats:

CELESTE (CONT'D)
I was rude, and didn't even ask yo name.

SOLOMON
Platt. (beat)
Solomon. Solomon is my true and free name.

CELESTE
Was you free?

SOLOMON
I was. I am.

Solomon exposes his wrist, displays his tattoo as he announces:

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
I remain free in my heart.

(Continued)
Giving a laugh as though it's the silliest thing she's heard:

CELESTE
Free heart means nothin if'n yo body gunna die a slave.

SOLOMON
I will not.

CELESTE
How? Celeste knows you ain't gunna run. Celeste knows it ain't your nature.

SOLOMON
I have a plan. I have a letter.

CELESTE
A letter? How'll yah mail da letter? Who yah trust to post it? A nigger that can read and write is a nigger that'll hang.

There is a pause. Solomon can't answer this question. It is the glaring hole in his plan.

Having finished eating:

(CONTINUED)
CELESTE (CONT’D)
Celeste will come again in de night. You will bring her 'mo food.

SOLOMON
I risk discovery to take more.

CELESTE
You will bring Celeste 'mo food.

And with that Celeste again moves back into the darkness.

OMIT

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - EVENING
Solomon is picking at the bark off a WHITE MAPLE.

INT. JUDGE TURNER’S PLANTATION/SLAVES CABIN - NIGHT
As others sleep, by the light of dying coals, Solomon uses the quill to test the boiled bark. The liquid holds as a form of ink. It is no’t ideal, but it is legible on the page. Armed with this, Solomon writes his letter.

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NIGHT
Solomon sits with Celeste. He relates his news to her.

SOLOMON
I have my letter.

CELESTE
Yah has your freedom then?

SOLOMON
All that remains is to contrive measures by which the letter can safely be deposited in the post office.

When Celeste speaks she is quite melancholy.

(CONTINUED)
CELESTE
I have resolved to return to my Massa.

Solomon gives an unnerved look. This is not good news.

SOLOMON
Is it more food you need?

CELESTE
I live in fear.

SOLOMON
None will come after you in the swamps.

CELESTE
It ain't the patrollers I scared of... At all seasons the howling of wild animals can be heard at night along the border of the swamps. At first their calls were welcoming. Dey too was free, 'n I thought dey greeted me like a sistah. Lately, dey cries have turned horrifying'. They mean to kill Celeste.

SOLOMON
The solitude plays tricks. It's your impression, nothing more. If you go back to your master you could face the same.

CELESTE
My freedom been nothin' but a daydream. So was Celeste's thoughts of slaves conjoinin' in the bayou.

SOLOMON
Better the loneliness. You have been free most of the summer. Return now and your master will make example of you.

CELESTE
It is lonely dwellin' waiting for others who won't never come.
SOLOMON
Go north. Make your way by night...

CELESTE
It'll only be worse if'n Celeste don't go back of her own will.

SOLOMON
You won't be caught. The dogs won't track you. You are...you are unique. Celeste...

CELESTE
You got alternatives, Solomon.

SOLOMON
To return is to die!

CELESTE
Celeste got no one to write a letter to.

As if to punctuate her resolve, without a word more Celeste departs toward the swamp. Solomon starts on into the swamp after her.

SOLOMON
Celeste... Celeste!

Solomon continues after Celeste, wading deeper into the dark night and murky waters.

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
Celeste, I will guide you north! Wait, and I will take you.

Celeste is too nimble. She outpaces Solomon, continues on and disappears into the night.

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
Let me take you! Let me go with you!

Solomon runs on, then splashes to a stop. He stumbles around disoriented, calling into the blackness:

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
Celeste...

Nothing. No answer. Not a human one. There are sounds and echoes - some in the distance, some perhaps moving closer - which, moment by moment, become more and more frightening. Soon, Solomon realizes he is quite literally over his head; the water first chest deep, then neck deep. With no way to orient himself, no means to guide him in the dark, Solomon's reserve begins to crumble. He thrashes in the water trying to find his way

(CONTINUED)
back to shore. No longer trying to save Celeste, Solomon calls to her — desperately — for assistance.

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
Celeste! Come to me, Celeste!

In that moment Solomon is quite certain he is nearly done; that he will not find land, nor aid and that this is his final moment. His panic should be that tangible. It is either force of will, or survival instinct...or maybe just pure luck that carries Solomon on until he reaches first muddy ground, then firm footing. Hauling himself onto the swamps edge, Solomon finally collapses in a drenched, worn heap. His life spared, but Celeste never to be seen again.

BLACK

EXT. EPPS’S PLANTATION — DAY

-MAY/JUNE, 1847-

We come up now outside of Master Epps’s plantation. Epps stands in the drive. He’s in surprisingly good spirits as Solomon, Uncle Abram, Henry and Bob trudge their way wearily toward Epps and his other slaves who are gathered.

The cotton field is in full bloom, the crop fully returned.

EPPS
A joyous day. A joyous day. Dark times is behind us. Clean livin’ ’n prayer done lifted the plague.

Indicating to the cotton:

EPPS (CONT’D)
As thick ’n white as New England snow. ’N now my niggers is returned to me.
(to Solomon)
Heard Judge Turner gave you favor.
Oh, did you beguile him, Platt, with your slick nigger ways?
Well, yah won’t stand idle, boy.
Not on my land. Much work to do.
Days of old long since, eh?
Joyous! Joyous indeed!

Throughout Epps’s welcome, Solomon’s focus is on Patsey who is lined up with the other slaves. SHE IS NOW MORE HAGGARD THAN WHEN WE LAST SAW HER. Her face and arms display many new scars. It’s clear that in the intervening years she has quite literally been a whipping boy for Epps and the Mistress.
EXT. EPPS’S PLANTATION/COTTON FIELD - DAY

-JULY, 1847-

The slaves are out working on the field. White hands appear, picking cotton: ARMSBY. He is wholly unskilled at picking cotton, and he puts little effort into the job. As we meet him he seems a decent sort if a little short on self-motivation. In anachronistic terminology, he’d be called a "slacker." He joins in with the slaves, singing a spiritual.

INT. MASTER EPPS’S PLANTATION/GIN HOUSE - EVENING

As Epps said, it is days of long since. The slaves are back to having their cotton weighed in the Gin House

EPPS

Wiley...?

TREACH

Two hundred sixty pounds.

EPPS

Bob?

TREACH

Three hundred forty pounds for Bob.

EPPS

Patsey?

TREACH

Five hundred twenty pounds.

EPPS

Tha’s a girl. Don’t never let me down. Platt?

TREACH

One hundred sixty pounds.

Before Treach is even done announcing the weight, Epps has pulled Solomon aside to where Uncle Abram already awaits his fate.

EPPS

Armsby?

TREACH

Sixty four pounds.

Epps speaks to Armsby sternly, but nothing of the manner in which he would address the slaves.

(CONTINUED)
EPPS
A good day's labor would average two hundred pounds.

ARMSBY
Yes, sir.

EPPS
I'm sure in time you'll develop as a picker, but it takes effort, boy. Put some damn effort into it.

ARMSBY
Yes, sir.

To Treach, regarding Solomon and Abram:

EPPS
Take 'em out. Get to whippin'.

No force is needed. The slaves understand the situation. They follow Treach out of the Gin house.

EXT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

We come in after the punishment has been dealt. Patsey tends to Uncle Abram's back as Armsby applies liniments to Solomon's. As he does, Armsby muses:

ARMSBY
It's a tragedy. How does such come to pass? Working a field and picking cotton like a lowly hand. I'm of a damn sight better station. And my desires never lacked for a grandiose component, though I will admit they have at times been short on ingenuity. But only at times. I've worked as an overseer, you know.

SOLOMON
I did not, sir.

ARMSBY
Not "sir." Just Armsby. Not owed more than any other in the field. I worked plantations from Virginia, down into Alabama. I could manage easy a hundred slaves and have done so. But toil in the field? Never thought that would come to pass. Never. But times are desperate. Where once I had said "no" to Epps and his merger offerings, I returned cap (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
in hand. ...Look at what I've become.

SOLOMON
How did you arrive at such a place, if I may ask?

ARMSBY
Ask. It's just conversation.

From a pocket Armsby produces a flask.

ARMSBY (CONT'D)
I became a little too dependant on the whisky, a little too undependable on the job. Before you say I'm just a sorry drunkard, let me state my case: As reliable employment as overseeing is, it's no easy chore on the spirit. I say no man of conscious can take the lash to another human day in, and day out without shredding at his own self. Takes him to a place where he either makes excuses within his mind to be unaffected... Or finds some way to trample his guilty sensations. Well, I trampled.

Armsby takes a drink.

ARMSBY (CONT'D)
And with frequency.

SOLOMON
Where is your place of birth?

ARMSBY
Maryland. Have you traveled there?

SOLOMON
...I cannot say that I have.

ARMSBY
Fine country. More seasonal than the bayou. A deal less humid.

SOLOMON
Why did you leave it?

ARMSBY
To make my fortune, of course. I gave in to tales of wealth and prosperity that were the lore of the southern states; all that's needed being a patch of land and a few good growing seasons. Cotton,
or tobacco. And then locating a proper bank in which to store your riches. But such profitable outcomes are reserved for the plantation masters. It's the lot of the rest of us to serve. So I settled on being an overseer, and failed as well at that. In the meantime my dreams gave way to reality. Now, I want nothing more than to earn a decent wage.

(beat)
And get myself home.

Armsby takes another drink and leans back.

INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACKS - MORNING

-AUGUST, 1847-

We again hear the sound of the HORN BLOWING signaling the start of the work day for the slave.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY

With the sun yet again high in the sky the slaves are working the field picking cotton. As before they sing a spiritual, the only thing that distracts them from the tedium at hand.

But there is no distracting from the heat. We see Uncle Abram begin to falter and finally drop down to the ground.

Treach calls to Edward:

TREACH
Get him water.

Edward runs to fetch water which he carries to Abram and DUMPS ON HIM...BUT ABRAM DOES NOT RISE. DOES NOT MOVE.

At this point, the sounds of the singing from the others tapers off as they realize Abram isn't getting up.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE CEMETERY - LATER

We are beyond the main of the plantation, the cotton field in the background. We are at the slaves' cemetery, a mixture of crude crosses and unsettled ground.

Solomon, Bob and Henry, now much visually older than when we first saw them, are digging a grave in the dirt. The uncovered body of Abram lays near. Having dug down an appropriate distance, the three men take the body and, very unceremoniously, place it into the ground. Holding (CONTINUED)
the shovel in his hands, and resting it by his feet, Bob tilts his head down and closes his eyes. The others do the same. Almost stutteringly, not really knowing what to say--

BOB
I just want to say something about Uncle Abram. He was a good man and he always looked out for us since we were little. God Bless him. God love him. And God keep him.

That done, they begin to cover it with dirt. It is all the more of a funeral that Abram will receive.

A female voice appears out of the blackness and begins to sing solo, "Went down to the river Jordan." A response of "Oh Yeah" quickly follows. Again the singer continues, "where John baptized three."

The same faces we have seen on Epps' plantation, but now filled with rapture, appear. It's as if the voices have created a new form of awakening and presence. It seems to transcend and translate in a strange way, joy. A joy which has un-yet been seen on screen. A joy which has been hidden, but a joy which is undoubtedly there. It's captivating, infectious.

This should be a moving part of the film, which stirs the audience and, for a moment, relieves them of the seemingly chastising environment.

The singer continues, "Well some say John was a Baptist, some say John was a Jew, but I say John was a preacher, because the Bible says so too, preach on Johnny." And with that, the rest of the congregation chant "I believe. Oh, I believe."

Solomon goes to RETRIEVE THE SMALL PACKAGE FROM UNDER A ROCK AT THE BASE OF A TREE. Solomon returns the letter to hiding. He takes the money with him and cautiously moves from the area.
The door opens. Solomon enters. Armsby is surprised to see him. So much so, he isn’t sure what greeting to give. Solomon gives a blunt introduction. Re: the coins:

SOLOMON
The proceeds of my fiddling performances. A few picayunes, but all I have in the world. I promise them to you if you will do me the favor I require. But I beg you not to expose me if you cannot grant the request.

ARMSBY
What do you ask?

SOLOMON
First, your word, sir.

ARMSBY
On my honor.

SOLOMON
It is a simple enough request. I ask only that you deposit a letter in the Marksville post office. And that you keep the action an inviolable secret forever. The details of the letter are of no consequence. Even at that, there would be an imposition of much pain and suffering were it known I was the author. A patron is what I require, sir.

ARMSBY
Where's the letter now?

SOLOMON
...It is not yet written. I will have it in a day. Two at most, my skill with composition as poor as it is.

Armsby considers the request.

ARMSBY
I will do it. And will accept whatever payment is offered.

Solomon hesitates. In the moment, he’s not so sure he can wholly give himself over to trust.

(CONTINUED)
ARMSBY (CONT'D)
To assist you, I put my own self at risk. I will do so, but fair compensation is all I ask.

Solomon hands over the money.

ARMSBY (CONT'D)
Draw up your letter. We will meet again. In two days?

SOLOMON
In two days. ...Thank you.

Solomon exits.

EXT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/COTTON FIELD - DAY
Solomon and the slaves pick cotton. Armsby is conspicuously NOT laboring in the field. As Solomon works he is watched by Epps. Watched more than he normally is. For a moment it seems it might just be a matter of perspective; Solomon's unease over his actions. But soon Epps is joined by Armsby. The two men stand and talk, their looks locked toward Solomon.

Whatever it is that is occurring between them continues for a long, long moment. But Epps makes no move toward Solomon. Solomon continues with his work.

INT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT
The slaves are at rest. Gripping his whip Epps enters, without so much as a knock at the door. For a moment there's curiosity; is he there for a dance, for Patsey...?

Looking right to Solomon:

EPPS
Get up.

Solomon does. Epps heads back out into the dark. He says nothing, but his directive is clear: Follow me.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - CONTINUOUS
Solomon comes out into the dark. Nearly hidden in the shadows is a bitter Epps. Despite the lack of light, Epps's malevolence is quite clear. His whip attached to his hip. As he speaks, he stokes himself with swigs from a FLASK.

Epps puts his arm around Solomon, as if consoling a friend, and guides him into the woods.

(CONTINUED)
Well, boy. I understand I've got a larned nigger that writes (MORE)
letters and tries to get white fellows to mail ’em.

Solomon, hardly missing a beat, plays this off.

EPPS (CONT’D)
Well, Armsby tol’ me today the devil was among my niggers. That I had one that needed close watchin’ or he would run away. When I axed him why, he said you come over to him and waked him up in the middle of the night and wanted him to carry a letter to Marksville. What have yah got to say to that?

SOLOMON
All I have to say, master, is all that need be said. There is no truth in it.

EPPS
You say.

SOLOMON
How could I write a letter without ink or paper? There is nobody I want to write to ’cause I hain’t got no friends living as I know of. That Armsby is a lying drunken fellow. You know this, just as you know that I am constant in truth. Now, master, I can see what that Armsby is after, plain enough. Didn’t he want you to hire him for an overseer?

A beat.

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
That’s it. He wants to make you believe we’re all going to run away and then he thinks you’ll hire an overseer to watch us. He believes you are soft soap. He’s given to such talk. I believe he’s just made this story out of whole cloth, ’cause he wants to get a situation. It’s all a lie, master, you may depend on’t. It’s all a lie.

For a tense moment we are unsure which way Epps’ll go. Increasingly it become apparent that, shallow minded and equally soused, Solomon has been able to fold Epps’s thoughts. In a low curse that clearly states his ill intentions.

(CONTINUED)
Revealed is a pocket knife, which all through the conversation, unknown to us the audience, was pushed up against Solomon's stomach. As Epps speaks, he closes it and taps it on Solomon's shoulder.

EPPS
I'm damned. I'll be god... Were he not free and white, Platt. Were he not free and white.

Epps heads off. Solomon is left to exhale a deep breath.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/WOODS - NIGHT

Having found a lonely spot, Solomon has struck a SMALL FIRE. He has in his hand his letter. With no ceremony, he casts the letter upon the flames and watches it burn. And with it, at this time, seems all chance of him ever being free. He stands and looks at it as if forever, as ashes descend into the night sky.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE - DAY

-MARCH, 1852-

The slaves are now employed working on an extension to the Great House. The slaves work under the direction of MR. SAMUEL BASS, a between forty and fifty years old, of light complexion and light hair. He is cool and self-possessed, fond of argument, but always speaking with extreme deliberation as well as a Canadian accent.

As the slaves continue to work, there is a conversation going on between Epps and Bass. Bass much skilled in the art of sophistry, while Epps's arguments are fueled mostly by emotion alone. Though at first Epps does little more than joke his way around the facts.

Solomon, working still, can't help but overhear as Epps offers Bass a drink, which Bass waves away.

EPPS
Take it. You look unsettled.

BASS
I'm well.

EPPS
No shame in taking respite from the heat; drink, shade. It's ungodly for travelers. Hearty, or otherwise.

(Continued)
Bass gives a laugh.

EPPS (CONT’D)
I meant no joke.
BASS
Your humor is inadvertent.

Sensing perhaps Bass’s laughter might be at his expense, Epps presses.

EPPS
Then share what’s funny. Or what ills you.

BASS
I’m here to complete the work at hand. As requested, and as paid.

EPPS
Something rubs you wrongly. Before I take further offense, I offer you the opportunity to speak on it.

BASS
You ask plainly, I will tell you plainly. What I find amusing: You worry about my well being in the heat but, quite frankly, the condition of your laborers--

EPPS
"The condition of my..." What in the hell are you--

BASS
It is horrid. It's all wrong. All wrong, sir.

EPPS
They ain’t hired help. They're my slaves.

BASS
You say that with pride.

EPPS
I say it as fact.

BASS
If the conversation concerns what is factual and what is not; there's no justice nor righteousness in slavery. I wouldn’t own a slave if I was rich as Croesus, which I am not, as is perfectly well understood. More particularly among my creditors. There's another humbug: the credit system. Humbug, sir. No credit, no debt. Credit leads a man into temptation. Cash down is the only thing that will deliver him from (MORE)
EPPS

BASS
Of course you did. The law says you have the right to hold a nigger, but begging the law's pardon...it lies. Is everything right because the law allows it? Suppose they'd pass a law taking away your liberty and making you a slave?

EPPS
Ha!

BASS
Suppose.

EPPS
That ain't a supposable case.

BASS
Because the law states that your liberties are undeniable? Because society deems it so? Laws change. Social systems crumble. Universal truths are constant. It is a fact, it is a plain fact that what is true and right is true and right for all. White and black alike.

EPPS
Whoa, whoa, whoa. Yah compare me to a nigger, Bass? Yah might as well ask what the difference is between a white man and a baboon. Now, I seen one of them critters in Orleans that knowed just as much as any nigger I got. Yah'd call them fellers citizens, I s'pose?

BASS
Look here; you can't laugh me down in that way. These niggers are human beings. If they are allowed to scale no higher than brute animals, you and men like you will have to answer for it. There's an ill--

(CONTINUED)
EPPS
Ahhh!

BASS
A fearful ill, resting on this nation--

EPPS
You betray yourself a foreigner!

BASS
That will not go unpunished forever. There will be a reckoning yet.

EPPS
You like to hear yourself talk, Bass, better than any man I know of. Yah'd argue that black was white, or white black if anybody would contradict you. A fine supposition if yah lived among Yankees in New England. But yah don't.

(pointed)
You most assuredly do not.

155 EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION - DAY

It's the Sabbath. The slaves are left to themselves to do their own chores. At the moment the female slaves are washing their clothes in large cauldrons, slapping their clothes against washing boards and hanging them up to dry near to their living quarters behind the plantation. It is a sight of ritual. Missing from the field of labor is Patsey, for whom Epps hollers.

EPPS
Patsey... Patsey!

A drunk Epps asks of the slaves:

EPPS (CONT'D)
Where is she? Where is Patsey?

No one answers.

EPPS (CONT'D)
Talk, Damn you!

PHEBE
We know nothin' of her, Massa.

EPPS
The hell you don't! You know where she is! She run off, ain't she? She's escaped, and you miserable black dogs stand like

(MORE)
the deaf and dumb. Speak! Speak!

Not a word spoken.

My best cotton picking nigger! My best.

A beat.

I'd give yah all up for her.

Where she gone?

The slaves say nothing. There is nothing for them to say. They don't know where she is. Eventually Epps drops into true sorrow.

She gone... My Pats gone.

Epps sits on the piazza looking quite forlorn. He looks up only to see Patsey returning to the plantation. Epps steps up to greet her, with anger rather than relief.

As they hear his angry voice, the slaves step around from where they are hanging their laundry to dry. Treach is near as well.

Run off. Run off, did you?

Massa Epps--

You miserable wench! Where you been?

I been nowhere.

Lies to your misdeeds!

The Sabbath day, Massa. I took me a walk to commune wit da Lord.

Bring the Lord into yer deceptions? Yah Godless...

Shaw's. Comin' from Shaw's plantation weren't yah?
156 CONTINUED:

PATSEY

...No...

(CONTINUED)
EPPS
Yah took yerself ta pleasure Shaw.
Yah gave baser passion to that unblushin' libertine!

Solomon tries to intervene:

SOLOMON
Master Epps--

EPPS
Now yah speak? Now that yah want to add to 'er lies yah find yer tongue.

Epps goes to strike Solomon, but Patsey pulls his arm back.

PATSEY
Do not strike him. I went to Massa Shaw's plantation!

EPPS
Yah admit it.

PATSEY
Freely. And you know why.

Patsey takes soap from the pocket of her dress.

PATSEY (CONT'D)
I got this from Mistress Shaw. Mistress Epps won't even grant me no soap ta clean with. Stink so much I make myself gag. Five hundred pounds 'a cotton day in, day out. More than any man here. And 'fo that I will be clean; that all I ax. Dis here what I went to Shaw's 'fo.

EPPS
You lie...

PATSEY
The Lord knows that's all.

EPPS
You lie!

PATSEY
And you blind wit yer own covetousness. I don't lie, Massa. If you kill me, I'll stick ta that.

EPPS
I'll learn you to go to Shaw's. Treach, go get some line.

(CONTINUED)
Treach runs quickly to the tool shed. In short order he returns with the rope in hand.

EPPS (CONT'D)
Strip her. Strike her bare 'n lash her to the post.

Mistress Epps has now come from the Great House. She gazes on the scene with an air of heartless satisfaction. Now tied to the post, Epps stands behind Patsey with his whip.

EPPS (CONT'D)
Yah done this to yerself, Pats!

Epps hoists the whip to strike, holds it high...but no matter his rage, Epps cannot bring himself to deliver the blow. He looks to Mistress Epps who now stands gloating and spurring him on.

MISTRESS EPPS
Do it! Strike the life from her.

Epps again hoists the whip. It trembles in his hand ahead of the act... But he does not have it in him to deliver such a beating. Turning to Solomon, thrusting the whip at him:

EPPS
Beat her.

Solomon doesn't move. Epps shoves the whip into his hand.

EPPS (CONT'D)
Give her the whip. Give it all to her!

Patsey, begging to Solomon:

PATSEY
I'd rather it you, Platt.

EPPS
Strike her, or yah'll get the same!

(CONTINUED)
Solomon takes a step back. He unfurls the whip... He begins to whip Patsey. Lash after lash, Patsey squirms before it. Epps eyes fill with tears, he is nearly too distraught to watch.

But the Mistress... She is not satisfied with Solomon's half-hearted effort.

**MISTRESS EPPS**
He pantomimes. There ain't barely a welt on her. That's what your niggers make of yah; a fool fer the takin'.

Epps's grief is replaced by fury. **EPPS GRABS THE PISTOL FROM TREACH'S HOLSTER** and draws down on the slaves.

**EPPS**
Yah will strike her. Yah will strike her until her flesh is rent and meat and blood flow equal, or I will kill every nigger in my sight!

Solomon can't strike a blow, even if it means his life. But from the ground, from Patsey:

**PATSEY**
Do it, Platt. Don't stop until I am dead.

What else can he do? Solomon begins to whip, to truly whip Patsey. Her back welts, then tears... Patsey screams in agony. Solomon strikes again and again... After a full thirty lashes Solomon looks to Epps, who is not satisfied.

**EPPS**
Until I say no more! I ain't said nothing!

Solomon strikes another ten to fifteen times. By now, as promised, Patsey's back has been reduced to **LITTLE MORE THAN TORN MEAT AND BLOOD**.

Finally, Solomon holds low the whip. He can and will do no more.

**EPPS (CONT'D)**
Strike her! Strike her!

Solomon will not. Epps takes up the whip and whips Patsey with "ten fold" greater force than he had. The painfully loud and angry curses of Epps load the air. Patsey by now is terribly lacerated, literally flayed. The lash wet with blood which flowed down her sides and dropped upon the ground. At length Patsey ceases struggling. Her head sinks listlessly on the ground.

(Continued)
Her screams and supplications gradually decrease and die away into a low moan. It would seem that she was dying.

Solomon, screaming at Epps:

**SOLOMON**

Thou devil! Sooner or later, somewhere in the course of eternal justice thou shalt answer for this sin!

Though Epps fronts rage, there should be underlying anguish for what he has done to his beloved Pats.

**EPPS**

No sin! There is no sin! A man does how he pleases with his property. At the moment, Platt, I am of great pleasure. You be goddamn careful I don't come to wantin' to lightenin' my mood no further.

By contrast to this horror, the field of cotton smiles in the warm sunlight. The birds chirp merrily amidst the foliage of the tress. Peace and happiness seems to reign everywhere.

Everywhere else.

Epps leaves Patsey to herself. He says not a word to the Mistress as he passes. The Mistress herself heads back into the house.

Solomon unties Patsey, lifts her and takes her to the cabin.

**INT. CABIN - LATER**

Patsey is laid on some boards where she remains for a long time with eyes closed and groaning in agony. Phebe applies melted tallow to her wounds, and all try to assist and console her.

In time Patsey opens her eyes. She looks to Solomon. She does not say a word. She just looks at him...and then her eyes close again.
INT. MASTER EPSS'S PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE/ADDITION - 160
EVENING

-APRIL, 1852-

Solomon and Bass are working together alone on the extension. From the amount of work that's been done on it, it should be obvious that days have now passed.

Solomon makes a cautious approach to Bass. As casually as he can he inquires:

SOLOMON
Master Bass, I want to ask you what part of the country you came from?

BASS
No part of this land. I was born in Canada. Now guess where that is.

SOLOMON
Oh, I know where Canada is. I have been there myself.

BASS
Have you?

SOLOMON
Montreal and Kingston and Queenston and a great many places. And I have been in York state, too. Buffalo and Rochester and Albany, and can tell you the names of the villages on the Erie canal and the Champlain canal.

Bass gives Solomon a long and curious stare.

BASS
Well traveled for a slave. How came you here?

SOLOMON
Master Bass, if justice had been done I never would have been here.

BASS
How's this? Tell me all about it.

SOLOMON
I am afraid to tell you, though I don't believe you would tell Master Epps if I should.

BASS
Every word you speak is a profound secret.

(CONTINUED)
Solomon holds a moment. Hasn't he heard the same promise before? Prior to Solomon stating his case, WE FADE TO:

INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION / ADDITION - DAY

Hours have passed. Bass reflects on the story that Epps has told in the intervening.

BASS
How many years all told?

SOLOMON
Just nearly...just passed eleven.

BASS
Your story is...it is amazing, and in no good way.

SOLOMON
Do you believe, sir, in justice as you have said?

BASS
I do.

SOLOMON
That slavery is an evil that should befall none?

BASS
I believe so.

SOLOMON
If you truly do, I would ask...I would beg that you write my friends in the north, acquainting them with my situation and beseeching them to forward free papers, or take such steps as they might consider proper to secure my release.

Bass looks at Solomon, holding his gaze for more than a prolonged beat.

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
My daughter Margaret is possibly now 19 and my son Alonzo, 16. I miss them so. It would be an unspeakable happiness to clasp my wife and my family again.

Bass hands Solomon an end of a long plank of wood and looks over his shoulder, as if to camouflage the conversation by work. They both lift it toward the floorboards. Finally Bass speaks.

(CONTINUED)
BASS
I have always forgone relationships and family. I did once have a sweetheart who I loved deeply.

Bass points to a measuring tool, which Solomon immediately hands over.

BASS (CONT'D)
But that was a long, long time ago. I've been traveling this country for the best part of twenty years. My freedom is everything. The fact that I can walk out of here tomorrow gives me most pleasure. I see the aching in your eyes, the pain of not being attached to your loved ones. My life doesn't mean much to anyone, but it seems your life means a lot to a lot of people. What you have just said to me scares me, and I must say, sir, I am afraid. Not just for you, but for me.

They continue working, fixing the floorboards in unison. Solomon, slightly confused.

BASS (CONT'D)
I will write your letter sir, for if I could bring freedom to you, it will be more than a pleasure. It will be a duty. Now, would you be so kind as to pass me those nails, sir.

We pull back to reveal the two men dwarfed by the unfinished structure. They continue to work, as if the conversation had never occurred.
towards Epps'. As he passes out of shot, the evidence of what he was looking at is revealed.

FEET hang at the top right hand corner of the frame. A woman, who has been lynched.

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/ADDITION - DAY

-SEPTEMBER, 1852-

SLOW DISSOLVE

To a now virtually complete, half-painted white gazebo.

Slaves continue to work on it. As they do so, Bass peels away from the structure to have an overview. He beckons Solomon toward him, out of earshot from the slaves who are continuing to work on the gazebo. As Solomon approaches, Bass shouts-

BASS
And bring those markers!

Solomon gathers a clutch of markers in his hands and approaches Bass.

BASS (CONT’D)
No letter yet.

SOLOMON
You are certain?

Bass takes a marker from Solomon and slides it into the earth.

BASS
I have inquired thoroughly. More than is safe for either of us.

Bass takes another and pokes it into the ground, improvising a pathway towards the gazebo.

BASS (CONT’D)
Solomon...I have a job or two on hand which will be completed shortly... The work here has grown sparse.

(CONTINUED)
Bass doesn't need to spell things out for Solomon. Solomon's understanding of the finality of the situation should be very clear.

**BASS (CONT'D)**

You must know, wherever I am I will press your cause.

**SOLOMON**

Five months. On top of these years. No cause remains.

**BASS**

If there is any chance...

**SOLOMON**

Mr. Bass...

**BASS**

I will continue to write your people--

**SOLOMON**

Go home knowing you have tried.

The weight of defeat should hang very heavily with both men. Nothing more to do, nothing more to say BASS TAKES SOLOMON'S HAND, GRIPS IT FIRMLY, BUT LOW AND SURREPTITIOUSLY knowing full well he cannot be seen making contact with a slave. But in the strength of their collective grip, in the emotion in which they hold each other's eyes, we should be able to easily see how greatly Bass wanted to be able to help Solomon. Equally, we can see the depth of regard Solomon has for Bass. The moment is made all the more powerful by the fact neither man can openly speak his regret or thanks. A moment longer, and then Bass releases his grip and makes his way marching toward the gazebo, pointing instructions.

Solomon is left, markers in hand, alone.
Solomon sits on a secluded part of the road, fiddle in hand. He stares across the expanse. His eyes fixed on something that is a million miles away.

Slowly Solomon tunes his fiddle, turning the tuning peg tighter and tighter. As the strings are taut, the sound is almost unbearable as Solomon tightens bit by bit, as if bones are being cracked one by one. Just beyond the breaking point of sound, there is a snap.

He then repeats the action.

Solomon holds the neck of the violin. Sliding his thumb and forefinger down the neck, he methodically cracks it at the base. He carefully snaps the neck and removes it from the body, then snaps it in two, placing it on the ground.

He then starts on the body. Heaving it on the ground, it falls apart. Methodically he breaks the violin into small bits - silencing the instrument with a hushed display of violence, rather than aggressive. Seems almost to be, in an odd way, respectful.

The Slaves are sewing the heavily plowed field, making their way in the trying soil. Solomon, too focused to note the arrival of two men by carriage: Parker and the SHERIFF.

While the Sheriff makes his way to the field, Parker remains with the carriage. The Sheriff calls:

SHERIFF
Platt...? Where is the boy called Platt?

SOLOMON
...Sir...

The Sheriff crosses to him.

SHERIFF
Your name is Platt, is it?

SOLOMON
Yes, sir.

Pointing off to the distance.
Solomon looks toward the carriage. He has to shield his eyes from the sun. Recognition is slow coming to him. But when it does, it hits him as a rush.

SOLOMON

Mr. Parker...?
Solomon starts for Parker, but he is pulled back by the Sheriff who is keen to determine Solomon's true identity.

SHERIFF
Say again?

SOLOMON
Mr. Parker?

As he does, Epps makes his way over.

SHERIFF
That man received a letter compiling many accusations. You look me in the eye and on your life answer me truthfully: have you any other name than Platt?

SOLOMON
Solomon Northup is my name.

EPPS
Sheriff...

SHERIFF
Have you a family?

EPPS
What's all this?

SHERIFF
It's official business.

EPPS
My nigger, my business.

SHERIFF
Your business waits.
(to Solomon)
Tell me of your family.

SOLOMON
I have a wife and two children.

SHERIFF
What were your children's names?

SOLOMON
Margaret and Alonzo.

SHERIFF
And your wife's name before her marriage?

SOLOMON
Anne Hampton. I am who I say.

Solomon pushes past the sheriff. As Solomon moves toward Parker, his pace quickens with each step until his (CONTINUED)
personal velocity has him nearly at a dead run. The two old friends make contact with each other, wrap each other in a long and emotional embrace. It if finally broken by Epps, who has moved over with the Sheriff.
EPPS
Nah... You will unhand 'em.
Platt is my nigger!

PARKER
He is Solomon Northup.

EPPS
You say...

PARKER
He belongs to no man.

EPPS
You say! You come here, unfamiliar to me, and make claims.

SHERIFF
Not claims. I have no doubts.
This is Solomon Northup, a resident of Saratoga Springs, NY.

EPPS
To hell with that! My nigger, and I'll fight you for 'em!

PARKER
As is your right. As it will be my pleasure to bankrupt you in the courts. Your decision.

By this time, the slaves in the plantation have overcome their fear of penalty, and left their work and gathered in the yard as witnesses. They stand behind the cabin, out of sight of Epps.

Mistress Epps also bears witness, standing on the veranda next to her house slave. Her face is of a strange mixed emotion.

Epps looks to Solomon. Solomon icily, stoically holds his ground. He makes it quite clear in his countenance that nobody owns him. Sheriff, hand on his gun, is there to back Solomon up. Epps, with no other recourse than to back down:

EPPS
You think this is the last you'll see of me, boy? It ain't.
(to Parker)
Whatever paper you hold about his freedom, it don't mean naught. He is my nigger - and I will have my day in court, sir. As God as my witness, I will have my day in court. Take 'em!

Epps calls to Bob-

(CONTINUED)
Saddle my horse! And bring her up here.

Epps walks back into the plantation.

The trio starts for the carriage. Solomon is pulled back by the call of Patsey's voice:

**PATSEY**

Platt...

Disregarding Parker, Solomon crosses over to Patsey. Under the circumstances, neither really knows how to engage. Finally, suddenly, Patsey throws her arms around Solomon and they embrace.

Epps, now mounted on his horse, witness the encounter. Kicking the stirrups hard into the sides of the horse, he rides off furiously.

Calling from the carriage, mindful of Epps:

**PARKER**

Solomon...if we know what's wise, we should depart.

A moment longer Solomon and Patsey hold each other. They separate, Solomon heading back to the carriage. He and Parker alight. The Sheriff chides the horses and they

(Continued)
WE STAY WITH Solomon as he travels further and further from the slaves - who are diminished by distance. Solomon waves a hand to them, but the carriage rounds a bend and a thicket of trees hides them from his eyes forever more.

BLACK

A169 EXT. NORTHUP HOUSE - DAY

-MARCH, 1853-

We now see Solomon in front of a door. A door we have seen before at the very beginning of our story. Solomon, aged significantly since then, stands nervously, swallowing, and adjusting his attire. He breathes in and holds his breath. He blows out and closes his eyes. A tear falls from his cheek, but this is not the way he wants his family to see him. He gathers himself, and looks to his right. There stands Mr. Parker. He places his hand on Solomon's shoulder. He says gently-

PARKER
Are you ready?

Solomon swallows and nods.

INT. NORTHUP HOUSE - LATER

THE DOOR TO THE ROOM OPENS. Mr. Parker enters, Solomon behind. We first see Anne, in her finest attire; the Northup children: Alonzo, who is now seventeen and Margaret who is now twenty - SHE CARRIES WITH HER A BUNDLE. Also present is MARGARET'S HUSBAND. The family waits patiently, dutifully...but anxiously.

Anne rises to greet him, but holds back. All around, the body language of the family is stiff and awkward. They are, after all - after twelve years - little more than familiar strangers.

SOLOMON
I apologize for my appearance. I have had a difficult time of things these past many years.

Solomon looks among his family; trying to recall them as much as they look to see familiarity within him. To his children:

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
Alonzo... Margaret, yes? You do not recognize me, do you? Do

(MORE)
you...do you even remember the last time we saw each other? I put you on a carriage with your mother...

Margaret, tearing, hugs her father. Solomon almost breaks, but he keeps himself together. Looking to the unknown man:

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
And who is this?

MARGARET
He is my husband.

SOLOMON
Husband?

MARGARET'S HUSBAND
It is very good to meet you, sir.

SOLOMON
We have much acquainting to do.

Margaret rises, she presents her bundle to her father.

MARGARET
And this is your grandson. Solomon Northup Staunton.

SOLOMON
...Solomon...

The fact his grandson carries his name, is overwhelming. Solomon breaks down. Emotionally, physically... But ANNE IS THERE TO CATCH HIM. As she holds him, Solomon says to Anne with all his heart:

SOLOMON (CONT’D)
Forgive me.

ANNE
There is nothing to forgive.

The pair, joined now by the whole family, hold on to each other for life...and one would think for all the rest of their lives.

FADE TO:

BLACK

CARD:

Upon gaining his freedom, Solomon Northup located and attempted to seek legal justice against the men who kidnapped him. The case was tried in Washington, DC where blacks were prohibited by law from testifying

(CONTINUED)
against whites. The charges against the kidnappers were eventually dismissed.

Northup spent the rest of his life working as an abolitionist, and with the Underground Railroad.

Solomon Northup most likely died between 1863 and 1875. The exact date, place, and circumstances of his death remain unknown.

- END -