

12 YEARS A SLAVE

Written by

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CARD: 1841

FADE IN:

1 INT. TOWNHOUSE/STUDY - DAY 1

-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:

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.

INT. NORTHUP 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)

2.

3 CONTINUED: 3

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)

3.

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)

A new cravat, Solomon? Pure silk
by way of the French.

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)

4A.

5 CONTINUED: (2) 5

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...

(CONTINUED)

5.

5 CONTINUED: (3) 5

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.

6 6

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) (CONTINUED)

5A.

6 CONTINUED: 6

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

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)

5B.

6 CONTINUED: (2) 6

The family all tuck in to their meal. The scene is one of warmth and happiness.

6.

7 INT. NORTHUP HOUSE - NIGHT 7

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.

7A 7A

INT. NORTHUP HOUSE - NIGHT

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.

8 OMIT 8

7.

9 EXT. NORTHUP HOUSE - MORNING 9

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.

10 10

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)

8.

10 CONTINUED: 10

BROWN

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)

(CONTINUED)

9.

11 CONTINUED: 11

BROWN (CONT'D)

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)

10.

11 CONTINUED: (2) 11

SOLOMON

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

BROWN

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

12 12

INT. NORTHUP HOUSE/BEDROOM - LATER

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

13 INT. NORTHUP HOUSE/STUDY - LATER 13

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.**

14 14

EXT. SOLOMON'S HOUSE/INT. COVERED CARRIAGE - LATER

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.

HAMILTON

No letter to post?

SOLOMON

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

BROWN

We're off then.

15 15

INT. PUB - EVENING

-MID TO LATE APRIL, 1841-

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."

11.

16 INT. PUB - LATER 16

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)

12.

16 CONTINUED: 16

HAMILTON

Entertaining at pubs and inns has
it's 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)

12A.

16 CONTINUED: (2) 16

BROWN

We'll go to the Customs House in the morning, then travel on. Good business all around.

13.

17 OMIT 17

18 EXT. WASHINGTON - DAY 18

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.

19 19

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)

13A.

19 CONTINUED: 19

BROWN (CONT'D)

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.

(CONTINUED)

14.

19 CONTINUED: (2) 19

Both Hamilton and Brown hold up their tankards to drink. Solomon, a bit reluctantly, does the same.

HAMILTON

Cheers.

BROWN

Another. Our departed President deserves all the salutation we can imbibe. Hamilton and Brown drink again, and Solomon does as well.

20 20

OMIT

21 OMIT 21

22 EXT. ALLEY - LATER 22

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.

15.

A23 INT. GADSBY HOTEL - STAIRCASE A23

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

23 INT. GADSBY HOTEL/SOLOMON'S ROOM - NIGHT 23

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.

24 24

INT. BURCH'S DUNGEON - DAWN

(CONTINUED)

16.

24 CONTINUED: 24

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.

25 25

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)

17.

25 CONTINUED: 25

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)

18.

25 CONTINUED: (2) 25

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

(CONTINUED)

19.

25 CONTINUED: (3) 25

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.

26 26

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.

27 27

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.

28 OMITTED 28

(CONTINUED)

20.

28 CONTINUED: 28

29 MOVED TO SC. A32 29

21.

30 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)

21A.

30 CONTINUED: 30

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.

22.

31 OMITTED 31

A32 INT. BURCH'S DUNGEON - EVENING A32

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.

32 32

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)

22A.

32 CONTINUED: 32

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 inquiries 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 kidnapers. They were artists. Fellow performers.

CLEMENS

You know that? You know for certain who they were?

(CONTINUED)

23.

32 CONTINUED: (2) 32

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.

(CONTINUED)

24.

32 CONTINUED: (3) 32

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)

25.

33 CONTINUED: 33

Eliza turns to her children:

ELIZA (CONT'D)

My poor, poor babies.

34 INT. BURCH'S DUNGEON - NIGHT 34

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)

26-28.

35 CONTINUED: 35

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.

A36 A36

EXT. BURCH'S DUNGEON/INT. WAGON/FLAT BED - LATER

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.

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. DOCK - NIGHT

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.

37 37

INT. ORLEANS/HOLD - CONTINUOUS

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.

38 38

OMIT

26-28A.

38A INT. STEAMBOAT - NIGHT 38A

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.

38B EXT. SEA - DUSK/DAWN 38B

The steamboat is en route between Washington and Norfolk.

We tilt up from the violent water foam to the powering
paddles of the boat.

39 MOVED TO 43A 39

29.

40 OMIT 40

41 OMIT 41

42 OMIT 42

43 INT. ORLEANS/HOLD - LATER - NIGHT 43

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)

30.

43 CONTINUED: 43

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.

43A EXT. NORFOLK/PORT - DAY 43A

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.

44 INT. ORLEANS/GALLEY 44

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.

45 INT. HOLD - LATER - DAY 45

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)

31.

45 CONTINUED: 45

CUT TO:

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.

46 OMIT 46

47 OMIT 47

47A EXT. SEA - DAY 47A

The steamboat paddles pound the water, filling the whole frame. The vessel ploughs on south.

32.

48 OMIT 48

48A INT. HOLD - NIGHT 48A

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.

49 OMIT 49

50 OMIT 50

33.

51 EXT. ORLEANS/DECK - DAY 51

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.

51A EXT. NEW ORLEANS HARBOUR - DAY 51A

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

52 EXT. NEW ORLEANS/PORT - DAY 52

-MID MAY, 1841-

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)

34.

52 CONTINUED: 52

CLEMENS

...My master... Master Ray, sir!
Master Ray!
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)

35.

52 CONTINUED: (2) 52

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

Oren. John. Lethe. Eliza.
Randall. Emily. Platt... Platt!
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.

36.

54 I/E. CART - LATER 54

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.

55 55

EXT. FREEMAN'S SLAVE PEN - LATER

"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.

56 56

EXT. FREEMAN'S SLAVE PEN - LATER

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.

57 57

INT. FREEMAN'S SLAVE PEN - LATER

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

(CONTINUED)

37.

57 CONTINUED: 57

frocks of calico and handkerchiefs to bind about their heads.

58 INT. FREEMAN'S/GREAT ROOM - LATER 58

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)

38.

58 CONTINUED: 58

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.

59 59

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)

39.

59 CONTINUED: 59

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)

59 CONTINUED: (2) 59

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.

(CONTINUED)

40.

59 CONTINUED: (3) 59

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.

40A.

60 EXT. FORD PLANTATION - LATER 60

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.

(CONTINUED)

41.

60 CONTINUED: 60

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'?

FORD

Separated from her children.

MRS. FORD

Oh, dear.

FORD

It couldn't be helped.

MRS. 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)

(CONTINUED)

42.

60 CONTINUED: (2) 60

FORD (CONT'D)

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.

A61A A61A

EXT. FORD'S WORK AREA - DAY

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

TIBBEATS

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)

42A.

A61A CONTINUED: A61A

Oh run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Nigger run nigger flew
Nigger tore his shirt in two
Run run the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Nigger run, run so fast
Stoved his head in a hornets nest
Run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Nigger run through the field

Black slick coal and barley heel
Run nigger run the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Some folks say a nigger won't steal
I caught three in my corn field
One has a bushel? And one has a peck
One had a rope and it was hung around his neck
Run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Oh nigger run and nigger flew
Why in the devil can't a white man chew
Run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away
Hey Mr. Pattyroller don't catch me
Catch that nigger behind that tree
Run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you?
Run nigger run well you better get away
Nigger run, run so fast
Stoved his head in a hornets nest
Run nigger run well the pattyroller will get you
Run nigger run well you better get away

61 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.

62 62

EXT. WOODS - LATER

The slaves now load the timber onto a horse drawn wagon. Again, hard work done under the ever present sun.

42B.

63 EXT. ROAD - LATER 63

As Sam drives the wagon, the other slaves trudge along side by foot. We should get the sense the travel is long and tedious.

64 EXT. FORD'S WORK AREA - LATER 64

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.

65 65

EXT. FORD PLANTATION - DAY

-EARLY TO MID JUNE, 1841-

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

(CONTINUED)

43.

65 CONTINUED: 65

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.

66 66

OMITTED

67 OMIT 67

68 OMITTED 68

44.

69 OMIT 69

70 EXT. FORD'S WORK AREA - DAY 70

-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 thief 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)

45.

70 CONTINUED: 70

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.

71 71

OMITTED

72 EXT. ROAD - DAY 72

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 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)

46.

73 CONTINUED: 73

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

74 EXT. RIVER BANK - CONTINUOUS 74

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.

75 75

EXT. FORD'S WORK AREA - DAY

Just beyond the WORK AREA Solomon speaks with Ford as Tibbeats 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'?

(CONTINUED)

47.

75 CONTINUED: 75

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.

76 76

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.

77 77

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.

78 78

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)

48.

78 CONTINUED: 78

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.

79 79

EXT. FORD PLANATION/SLAVE SHACK - EVENING

-END OF JULY, 1841-

The slaves eat. All tired from a days 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 keeps 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)

49.

79 CONTINUED: 79

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)

50.

79 CONTINUED: (2) 79

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

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?

80 80

EXT. FORD PLANTATION - MORNING

-AUGUST, 1841-

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)

50A.

80 CONTINUED: 80

FORD (CONT'D)

the world because of offences!
For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

BLACK

51.

81 EXT. FORD PLANTATION - DAY 81

-JANUARY, 1842-

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)

52.

81 CONTINUED: 81

SOLOMON

Yes, sir.

FORD

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

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)

53.

82 CONTINUED: 82

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.

83 83

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.

84 84

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'.

(CONTINUED)

54.

84 CONTINUED: 84

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 its wrong
with your instructions.

TIBEATS

Yah black bastard! Yah goddman

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)

55.

84 CONTINUED: (2) 84

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)

(CONTINUED)

56.

84 CONTINUED: (3) 84

CHAPIN (CONT'D)

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)

57.

84 CONTINUED: (4) 84

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 TIBEATS - 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)

58.

84 CONTINUED: (5) 84

CHAPIN (CONT'D)

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.

85 85

EXT. FORD PLANATION - LATER

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)

59.

85 CONTINUED: 85

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...

86 86

OMIT

87 EXT. FORD PLANATION - LATER 87

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.

88 88

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.

89 89

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)

60.

89 CONTINUED: 89

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.

90 90

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.

(CONTINUED)

61.

90 CONTINUED: 90

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 Scriptor!

91 91

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

(CONTINUED)

62.

91 CONTINUED: 91

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 SOUNDTRACK 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?

92 92

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)

63.

92 CONTINUED: 92

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?

TREACH

...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)

64.

92 CONTINUED: (2) 92

EPPS

How much he pick yesterday?

TREACH

Two hundred twenty nine pounds.
Wiley is pulled from the line, huddled with Solomon.

93 93

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.

94 94

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.

95 95

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.

96 96

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)

65.

96 CONTINUED: 96

EPPS

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

97 97

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

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!

(CONTINUED)

66.

97 CONTINUED: 97

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.

98 98

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.

99 99

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY

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

100 EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE - LATER 100

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

HAND.

(CONTINUED)

67.

100 CONTINUED: 100

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)

68.

100 CONTINUED: (2) 100

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

A101 A101

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)

68A.

A101 CONTINUED: A101

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

101 INT. BARTHOLOMEW'S - LATER 101

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.

102 102

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.

103 103

OMIT - MOVED TO A105

104 EXT. SHAW'S HOUSE - DAY 104

-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.

69.

A105 EXT. ROAD - DAY A105

Solomon is running flat out along the road. Running as though his life depended on getting to his destination in

beyond a timely manner.

B105 EXT. SHAW'S HOUSE - DAY B105

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)

70.

B105 CONTINUED: B105

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)

71.

B105 CONTINUED: (2) B105

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.

105 105

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)

72.

105 CONTINUED: 105

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)

73.

105 CONTINUED: (2) 105

EPPS (CONT'D)

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 BLEAKNESS 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)

74.

105 CONTINUED: (3) 105

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.

106 106

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.

107 107

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

-OCTOBER, 1844-

(CONTINUED)

75.

107 CONTINUED: 107

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.

108 108

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.

109 109

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.

110 110

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.

76.

111 OMIT 111

112 INT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE SHACK - DAY 112

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.

113 113

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)

77.

113 CONTINUED: 113

MISTRESS EPPS (CONT'D)

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.

114 114

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)

78.

114 CONTINUED: 114

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)

79.

114 CONTINUED: (2) 114

PATSEY

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.

BLACK

115 115

EXT. 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)

80.

115 CONTINUED: 115

EPPS (CONT'D)

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!

116 116

RE-OMIT

117 EXT. JUDGE TURNER'S PLANTATION - EVENING 117

-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'.

118 118

INT. SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

81.

118 CONTINUED: 118

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.

119 119

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...

120 120

EXT. CANE FIELDS - DAY

-NOVEMBER, 1846-

ABOUT THIRTY SLAVES are working the field. They are divided into THREE GANGS. 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.

121 121

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)

81A.

121 CONTINUED: 121

to Solomon's. After a moment of seemingly reacquainting herself with genuine human contact, the woman TAKES

(CONTINUED)

82.

121 CONTINUED: (2) 121

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.

122 122

OMIT

123 EXT. JUDGE TURNER'S PLANTATION/GREAT HOUSE - EVENING 123

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?

(CONTINUED)

83.

123 CONTINUED: 123

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.

124 EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - LATER (MOVED FROM 124) 124

Work over, the slaves congregate to eat.
As Solomon eats, he takes note of the JUICE FROM SOME

BERRIES ON HIS PLATE.

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

84.

126 EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NIGHT (MOVED FROM 126) 126

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.

A127 A127

OMITTED

A127A INT. SLAVE SHACK - DAY A127A

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.

127 INT. YARNEY'S HOUSE - EVENING 127

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.

128 128

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

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.

(CONTINUED)

128 CONTINUED: 128

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.

A129 A129

EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NIGHT

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)

86.

A129 CONTINUED: A129

129 OMIT 129

130 EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - NIGHT 130

-FEBRUARY/MARCH, 1847-

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 ta Massa Carey, and 'ave been two days among da palmettoes. Celeste is sick and cain't work, and would rather die in the swamp

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

87.

130 CONTINUED: 130

CELESTE (CONT'D)

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 aight 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)

130 CONTINUED: (2) 130

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.

131 131

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.

132 132

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 your 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)

89.

132 CONTINUED: 132

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)

90.

132 CONTINUED: (2) 132

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.

133 133

OMIT

134 OMIT 134

135 EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - EVENING 135

Solomon is picking at the bark off a WHITE MAPLE.

136 EXT. TURNER PLANTATION - EVENING 136

In a tin cup, over a fire, Solomon boils the white maple
bark in just a bit of water.

137 INT. JUDGE TURNER'S PLANTATION/SLAVES CABIN - NIGHT 137

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.

138 138

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)

91.

138 CONTINUED: 138

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 welcomin'. Dey too was free, 'n I thought dey greeted me like a sistah. Lately, dey cries have turned horrifyin'. 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.

(CONTINUED)

92.

138 CONTINUED: (2) 138

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 in 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)

93.

138 CONTINUED: (3) 138

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

139 139

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.

94.

140 EXT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/COTTON FIELD - DAY 140

-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.

141 141

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)

95.

141 CONTINUED: 141

EPPS

A good days labor would average
two hundred pounds.

ARMSBY

Yes, sir.

EPPS

I'm sure in time y'll develope 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.

142 142

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 to 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)

96.

142 CONTINUED: 142

ARMSBY (CONT'D)

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,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

97.

142 CONTINUED: (2) 142

ARMSBY (CONT'D)

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.

143 143

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.

144 EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY 144

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.

145 145

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)

98.

145 CONTINUED: 145

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.

146 146

OMIT

147 OMIT 147

A148 EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/SLAVE CEMETERY - LATER

A148

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."

148 148

INT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/WOODS - NIGHT

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.

149 149

OMIT

99.

150 INT. EPPS'S PLANTATION/ARMSBY'S SHACK - LATER 150

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)

100.

150 CONTINUED: 150

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.

151 151

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.

152 152

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.

153

153 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)

100A.

153 CONTINUED: 153

EPPS

Well, boy. I understand I've got a larned nigger that writes

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

101.

153 CONTINUED: (2) 153

EPPS (CONT'D)

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)

102.

153 CONTINUED: (3) 153

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.

154 154

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.

A155 A155

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.

B155 B155

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

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)

102A.

B155 CONTINUED: B155

Bass gives a laugh.

EPPS (CONT'D)

I meant no joke.

(CONTINUED)

103.

B155 CONTINUED: (2) B155

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 ill's 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)

(CONTINUED)

104.

B155 CONTINUED: (3) B155

BASS (CONT'D)

evil. But this question of slavery; what right have you to your niggers when you come down to the point?

EPPS

What right? I bought 'em. I paid for 'em.

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)

105.

B155 CONTINUED: (4) B155

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.

155 155

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)

(CONTINUED)

106.

155 CONTINUED: 155

EPPS (CONT'D)

the deaf and dumb. Speak! Speak!
Not a word spoken.

EPPS (CONT'D)

My best cotton picking nigger! My best.
A beat.

EPPS (CONT'D)

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.

EPPS (CONT'D)

She gone... My Pats gone.

156 156

EXT. EPPS'S PLANTATION - LATER

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.

EPPS

Run off. Run off, did you?

PATSEY

MASSA EPPS--

EPPS

You miserable wench! Where you been?

PATSEY

I been nowhere.

EPPS

Lies to your misdeeds!

PATSEY

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

EPPS

Bring the Lord into yer

deceptions? Yah Godless...
Shaw's. Comin' from Shaw's
plantation weren't yah?

(CONTINUED)

106A.

156 CONTINUED: 156

PATSEY

...No...

(CONTINUED)

107.

156 CONTINUED: (2) 156

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)

108.

156 CONTINUED: (3) 156

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)

109.

156 CONTINUED: (4) 156

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)

156 CONTINUED: (5) 156

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.

157 157

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.

158 158

MOVED TO A155

159 MOVED TO B155 159

111.

160 INT. MASTER EPPS'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)

112-115.

160 CONTINUED: 160

Solomon holds a moment. Hasn't he heard the same promise before? Prior to Solomon stating his case, WE FADE TO:

161 INT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION / ADDITION - DAY 161

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)

116.

161 CONTINUED: 161

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.

162 162

OMIT

163 OMIT 163

164 OMIT 164

A165 EXT. SWAMP TBD A165

Solomon walks a path he has walked a thousand times or more on his way back from Bartholomew's - sack familiarly slung over his right shoulder. Drearily he walks. His eyes acknowledge something we yet cannot see to his left. Almost simultaneously, his eyes retract back to the path

(CONTINUED)

116A.

A165 CONTINUED: A165

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.

165 165

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)

117.

165 CONTINUED: 165

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.

166 166

OMIT

167 OMIT 167

118.

A168 EXT. ROAD BY EPPS' PLANTATION - EVENING A168

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.

168 168

EXT. MASTER EPPS'S PLANTATION/FIELD - DAY

-FEBRUARY, 1853-

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.

SHERIFF

Do you know that man?

(CONTINUED)

118A.

168 CONTINUED: 168

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...?

(CONTINUED)

119.

168 CONTINUED: (2) 168

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)

119A.

168 CONTINUED: (3) 168

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 is finally broken by Epps, who has moved over with the Sheriff.

(CONTINUED)

120.

168 CONTINUED: (4) 168

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)

120A.

168 CONTINUED: (5) 168

EPPS (CONT'D)

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)

121.

168 CONTINUED: (6) 168

start up. As they move on, Patsey sinks down to the ground, where she remains in a weary and half-reclining state, the other slaves around her.
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 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 breaths 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.

169 169

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) (CONTINUED)

122.

169 CONTINUED: 169

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

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)

123.

169 CONTINUED: (2) 169

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 -