

KING OF THE UNDERGROUND

Written by

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Based on, "The Rev. J.W. Loguen, as a Slave and as a Freeman: A
Narrative of Real Life"

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FADE IN

INT - MORELL'S COOPERAGE - DAY

A light-skinned Black man with red hair JERRY HENRY (49) sands the edge of a salt barrel. White co-workers grab their lunches, exit the rear of shop. One turns to Jerry as he reaches the door, pulls a deck of cards from his pocket and fans it for Jerry to see.

CO-WORKER
Let's break, Jerry.

JERRY
Jus' finishin' up. Don' deal a hand
til' I get there.

CO-WORKER
Way the cards turnin' for you
lately, we're glad to wait.

He smiles and leaves.

INT- SYRACUSE MEETING HOUSE - NIGHT

A huge gathering of agitated townspeople. A protest meeting. Women and men, mixed race. Eclectic group of merchants and farmers, attorneys and members of the clergy. City elders sit at a table at the front of the room. Everyone absorbs the words of the imposing presence commanding the stage; a Black minister, JERMAIN LOGUEN (38).

JERMAIN
What is life to me if I am to be a
slave in Tennessee? Will the
citizens of this city stand idly
beside a United States Marshal to
see me torn from my home and
family, and hurled back to bondage?

A general murmur and shaking of heads.

JERMAIN
I tell you the people of Syracuse
and of the whole North must meet
this tyranny and crush it by force,
or be crushed by it! This hellish
enactment has precipitated the
conclusion that white men must live
in dishonorable submission, and
colored men be SLAVES!

The townspeople react: "We won't have it!" "The tyrants can keep out of our business!"

INT - MORELL'S COOPERAGE - DAY

The front doors of the shop burst open and three policemen set upon Jerry.

COP 1
Come with us, Jerry.

JERRY
What is this? Why are you here?

COP 2
Let's go quietly and you'll be back at the bench before you know it.

INT- SYRACUSE MEETING HOUSE - NIGHT (CONT.)

JERMAIN
The time has come to change the tones of submission into tones of defiance...and to tell the government, if they propose to execute this measure upon us, to send on their bloodhounds!

INT - MORELL'S COOPERAGE - DAY (CONT.)

Jerry continues to struggle as the cops wrestle him into submission.

JERRY
What claim do you have against me?

The third cop puts manacles on Jerry, who's getting more and more upset.

COP 1
I'm sure it's just a misunderstanding with that Colwell girl. Nothing more.

JERRY
A misunderstanding don't require chains. I DON'T LIKE THIS!

COP 2 whacks the back of Jerry's head.

COP 2
Like THAT? Shut your mouth, nigger.

INT- SYRACUSE MEETING HOUSE - NIGHT (CONT.)

The audience is becoming more agitated. The reverend more animated.

JERMAIN

I owe my freedom to the God who made me. I feel no chains, and am in no prison. I received my freedom from Heaven, and with it came the command to defend my title to it. The question is with you. If you will give us up, say so, and we will shake the dust from our feet and leave you. But we believe better things!

INT - MORELL'S COOPERAGE - DAY (CONT.)

Jerry's now resisting arrest. The cops try to contain him. The reverend's words continue over the struggle.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

Whatever may be your decision, my ground is taken. I have declared it everywhere. I don't respect this law. I don't fear it. I won't obey it! It outlaws ME, and I outlaw IT, and the men who attempt to enforce it on me.

Jerry's kicking catches one of the officers in the balls, infuriating him. He boots Jerry in the corresponding place in return. The third officer moves in to pin him down.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

I will not live a slave, and if force is employed to re-enslave me, I shall make preparations to meet the crisis as becomes a man. If you will stand by me—and I believe you will do it, for your freedom and honor are involved as well as mine—I say if you will stand with us in resistance to this measure, you will be the saviors of your country!

EXT - MORELL'S COOPERAGE - DAY (CONT.)

Jerry is dragged outside the shop. Leaning against a dray, legs crossed, guns on his hips, JAMES LEAR (40), a bearded and brutish looking slavecatcher spits tobacco juice. Fixes his eyes on Jerry, who is dazed, head bowed.

LEAR

Why hello there, Jerry. So good to see you again.

Jerry looks up and recognizes the man. His eyes open wide, horrified.

INT- SYRACUSE MEETING HOUSE - NIGHT (CONT.)

The preacher's eyes are filled with passion, voice booming throughout the hall. The crowd is eating from his hand.

JERMAIN

Heaven knows that this act of noble daring will break out somewhere. And may God grant that Syracuse be the honored spot, whence it shall send AN EARTHQUAKE VOICE THROUGH THE LAND!

A raucous cheer fills the meeting hall.

TITLE CARD: **KING OF THE UNDERGROUND**

INT - DISTILLERY - DAY

CARD: **Mansker's Creek, Tennessee 1823**

CHERRY (32), a muscular Black woman is mashing malt in the Logue farm distillery as Jarm (10) - Jermain Loguen as a child - sweeps around his mother's still rig. He sighs repeatedly, trying to make his boredom known.

CHERRY

Jarm! All that huffin'. You spring a leak?

Jarm smirks.

CHERRY

Seems you ain't much for helpin' me today. G'won, git.

Jarm's face lights up. He drops the broom where he stands and bolts toward the open door. Cherry loudly clears her throat. Jarm stops in his tracks, turns to her.

CHERRY

Hang it!

JARM

Yes, Mama!

Jarm hangs the broom then sprints again toward the door, only to hear another loud "PSSSST!" from Cherry. Jarm turns, smirking.

JARM

You spring a leak?

Cherry opens her arms, smiling.

CHERRY

You know we hug when we go.

Jarm runs over and they embrace warmly. Cherry holds him extra tight as Jarm tries to wriggle free.

CHERRY

You my beautiful boy. Don' tell your kin I let you out early to play or ain't nothin' git done roun' here. Have fun.

JARM

Thanks Mama.

CHERRY

Watch the creek. It's all swole from the rain. Come back with mud in yer drawers and yer doin' the washin' yerself.

JARM

Yes Mama.

CHERRY

An' keep offa Betts' land, you understand? Sees a big boy like you and he'll take you fer hisself.

JARM

Mama!

EXT - LOGUE FARM - DAY

Jarm runs off, playfully twirling a stick as he leaves the distillery, taking in the scene at the farm. Past the slave house, the chicken coops and the horse barn, past the Masters' house. Rough, low-slung log structures. Jarm waves to the 10 SLAVES working the soil in the corn fields.

EXT - CREEK SIDE - DAY

Jarm plunges into the dense thickets bordering the Logue farm.

He emerges from the brush to reveal Mansker's Creek, moving swiftly, thick mud on the banks. On the other side is SAM (20), a broad and amiable fellow, holding a crude fishing pole and dipping his line into the water. Jarm's face lights up. Sam sees him and waves with his free hand. A felled tree spans the length of the creek. Water's high. Jarm calls to him from the other side.

JARM

Yo massa let you fish today Sam?

SAM

It's de Sabbath. He prayin'.

JARM

He prayin' you catch dinner?

SAM

Hope so!

JARM

Can I help?

SAM

Betta stay put, Jarm. Dat log no good for walkin' on.

Sam gets a hit on his line and it's a big one.

SAM

Mossback!

The fish bends Sam's pole as he stands unsteadily to get better footing. Excited, Jarm jumps on the tree and begins to cross the creek, Sam's attention on the fish.

Midway across, Jarm slips! He tumbles off the log but grabs a branch, saving himself from being completely submerged. Sam drops his pole and leaps onto the tree, but he too slips, his head landing hard. The rapids carry him away. Jarm panics at the sight of his friend dropping, dazed, into the creek.

The current is too much - it tears Jarm from the log and pulls him under.

Blackness. Churning water. A glimpse of Jarm flailing. A flash of Sam, motionless but for the violence of the rapids. Unconscious.

Then the surface breaks and Sam's face emerges, gasping. Dazed, he looks for where he is, then realizes why he is in the water and panics as he looks for Jarm.

Downstream, Jarm's body appears, churning in the rapids. Trouble. Sam fights to stay in line with Jarm as the current pushes him downstream. Jarm is face down in the water then stops, his leg wedged between two boulders. Trapped!

SAM

Jarm!

Sam struggles to reach Jarm. Pulls on him. Desperation sets in. With a mighty effort, Sam wraps his arms around the boulder and muscles it off of Jarm's trapped leg. Jarm is free! But is he alive? Sam pulls him to the creek bank, pounds on his back.

SAM

Oh Lord, please let him live.
Please, please.

Jarm unloads a torrent of water and gasps. They both collapse on the riverbank, exhausted. After a beat to recover, Jarm's eyes open wide.

JARM

The Mossback!

Sam throws his head back and laughs.

SAM

Pay no mind to the Mossback - I
caught me a Jarm today!

EXT - CREEK BANK - MOMENTS LATER

Sam is on the Logue side of the creek, Jarm out of danger. They are about to part ways.

SAM

Imma get back to de house. You
right?

Jarm nods, but then sees movement under a nearby tree. He runs to it. A HATCHLING has fallen from its nest; it wriggles helplessly.

SAM
Leave it Jarm. You cain't help it.

JARM
We cain't leave it.

SAM
Ain't nothing to be done. Mama's
left it. God is calling that one ta
heaven.

Jarm hesitates, then kneels and pulls some grass to make a bed for the bird. Takes a worm from Sam's fishing basket and leaves it near the bird's head.

JARM
You fine, baby bird. You fine.

INT - SLAVE HOUSE - LATER

Jarm comes home and Cherry sees him covered in mud. Raises her eyebrow and jerks her thumb toward the pump and washbasin.

INT - SLAVE HOUSE - DAY

Early morning light on Jarm, sleeping. He is roused by a commotion outside. Pulls aside a curtain to see Cherry and his sister MARIA (13) rushing into the horse barn.

EXT - SLAVE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Jarm runs, still in his night clothes, toward the barn. Maria motions to him excitedly from inside.

MARIA
Scarlett be foalin'!

INT - LOGUE HORSE BARN - SAME

A shaft of light reveals a mare on her side, giving birth. MANASSEH LOGUE (32), sinewy, menacing and coarse, attends to the birthing as Cherry and Maria comfort the mare.

MANASSEH
Jarm! Git me some rags from the
bench.

Jarm jogs over to the tool wall. Grabbing the rags, he pauses to look at the augered wood SLAVE PADDLES lined up matter-of-factly next to the other farm tools.

Each is engraved with different slave names, all of them weathered and chipped, stained with blood save for Cherry's, which has never been used.

MANASSEH

Jarm! You slow, boy?

Jarm snaps out of it and jogs back with the rags as the mare lets out a loud bleat.

MANASSEH

There we go! There we go! It's a colt!

The slaves look on; awed and joyful.

MANASSEH

And a fine-looking one at that!

Manasseh tilts his head, examining the foal's nether regions.

MANASSEH

Ha! Well I'll be damned. Ain't never seen a foal wit' a dingus big as dat. I'm gunna call you Rock, big boy!

This spoils the mood of the slaves. The kids are confused, but Cherry's look of disgust gives them the idea.

MANASSEH

A'right, I'm back to the bed. If you niggers wasn't sleepin' so hard, I'da not have to be out here for this. Cherry, get me up when breakfast is ready.

CHERRY

Yes, massa. And the mistress?

MANASSEH

Missus Logue is sleeping one off. Get on the loom after breakfast.

CHERRY

Yes, massa, as I intended.

Manasseh gives Cherry a look as if wondering if she was sassin' him, then leaves the barn. Jarm, kneeling next to the foal, touches it lightly, transfixed by the miracle of its birth.

JARM

Rock.

EXT - LOGUE FARM - DAY

Jarm feeds the horses on a beautiful day. Rock is now steady on his feet, a few months old. Jarm throws an extra heap of feed into his trough.

JARM

Dere you go, Rock. Eat up big boy.

EXT - LOGUE FARM - MOMENTS LATER

Jarm is heading back to the slave house when he hears a loud disturbance by the creek. He runs toward the sound of a beating taking place, hears the howls of his friend Sam.

EXT - MANSKERS CREEK - MOMENTS LATER

Jarm scrambles through the thick brush at the edge of the creek. Parting the reeds, he sees four male SLAVES from the neighboring farm watching with horror. Sam is naked, lashed to a barrel, face-down, skin torn to shreds.

The tormentor is ZACHARIAH BETTS (40), a stocky, bushy-haired brute. Disheveled, pink with drink, shirt open to his waist, revealing a broad and sunburned chest. He brandishes a gigantic slave paddle dripping with blood.

BETTS

Ya not so chirp now is ya nigga?
Still grinnin' like a fox? Aimin'
ta mock me?

Betts grabs Sam's hair, pulls up his bloody head to look at his face.

BETTS

Look like I knocked the spit outta
ya proper, ya thin-skinned cuss.
Let's be sure.

Betts pounds on Sam, who can barely move but turns his head toward Jarm's position across the creek. Jarm begins to cry for his friend - petrified and paralyzed.

Between brutal strokes, Betts shouts at his terrified slaves, waving the paddle at them.

BETTS

I'll learn ya to grin when I's
talkin' to ya! All of ya!

Betts teeters unsteadily as he puts all of his heft and rage into every stroke across Sam's bare backside. He points to another slave.

BETTS

And you, ya black cur? Lucky you my
expensivest nigger. Lucky you got
work ta do or I'd lash you to a
barrel next.

SAM

Oh Lord! Oh Lord!

Betts pummels Sam some more, course and bloody flesh flying off the paddle. Sam's moaning weakens. A pause. Silence.

BETTS

Had enough have we? Ya no-good
useless bastard. Take a swim!

Betts gives a shove with his foot. Sam is rolled over the barrel, down the hill, directly into the creek. Sam's head is submerged underwater. Jarm reacts, wants to jump in to help his friend but remains frozen.

BETTS

(to slaves)

Set him loose and clean him up.

The other slaves rush to aid Sam, but when they turn him over, it's clear he's gone. The biggest slave begins to sob uncontrollably.

BETTS SLAVE

He dead! Sam dead! Lawd have mercy!
He dead!

Betts is unmoved. Wipes his brow. Stumbles as he turns to leave.

BETTS

Ain't that a shame. Dig a hole and
bury him, ya damned dogs.

Tears stream down Jarm's face.

INT - LOGUE BARN - MINUTES LATER

Sitting on the dirt floor with their backs resting on the Cherry's WEAVING LOOM. The mother cradles Jarm in her arms, trying to console her heartbroken son.

JARM
Why Mama? Why? Why?

CHERRY
I know.

JARM
He gone now ... Sam ... he-

OS, a door slams. Muffled yells coming from the master's house.

CHERRY
Hush now. Missus Logue on de
warpath tuhday.
(beat)
E'body love Sam, ain't no way Betts
won' pay fo' what he done.

Jarm continues to weep, his sadness turning to anger.

JARM
Ohio.

CHERRY
What?

JARM
You was free in Ohio...you said so.
Before you was stole here. Mama we
need be gettin' to Ohio.

CHERRY
I don' know where's Ohio, Jarm.
'Sides, we get lost, dey sell us
apart fo money and we never sees
each udder ag'in.

Jarm pulls away from Cherry, shaking his head, sobbing some more. Footsteps approach outside and both slaves snap to it, standing up, wiping tears. SARAH LOGUE (30) appears at the barn door, backlit by the sun. She is crass, lumpy, hungover.

SARAH
Hell's goin' on in here? Git back
at it Cherry. Jarm, grab a hoe if
ya know what's good fer ya.

Cherry turns toward the loom. Jarm approaches the tool bench, sets his jaw angrily as he notices the slave paddles hanging next to the farm tools. He flips over Cherry's paddle, hiding her name.

EXT - MANSKERS CREEK - DAY

Jarm returns to the scene of Sam's execution. Looking across the creek, all that remains is the blood-stained whiskey barrel half-submerged in the water.

Jarm stares and his eyes lose focus as Sam's cry of "Oh Lord" echoes in his ears.

MATCH DISSOLVE to full-grown Jarm (20), in a trance, looking at the barrel his friend Sam was strapped to 10 years ago, though it is now completely waterlogged and moss-covered. He's got a hoe over his shoulder. Rock is by his side, a fully-grown, beautiful beast.

Sam's cry of "Oh Lord!" is repeated. The sound dissolves to an exclamation from off-screen, the voice of MARIA (23), Jarm's older sister.

MARIA (O.S.)

Oh Lord!

Jarm is startled out of his reverie and looks over to see his sister staring down at her frock, torn and caught on a branch. She frees herself. Looks at Jarm.

MARIA

Imma take Rock - Manasseh need you
in da field. Best get to it. It's
hot an' he foul wit drink.

Jarm closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, then turns away from the creek.

EXT - CORN FIELD - LATER

The corn is knee-high, the slaves spread out over the wide field, hoeing weeds. Scorching day. Manasseh observes from the edge, shirttail hanging outside his overalls as he leans against a plow. Tips his head for a pull of whiskey from a flask, eyes bloodshot beneath his straw hat. The slaves focus on their work, anxious not to draw attention to themselves.

MANASSEH

Put yer back innit, all a ya!

The slaves look up but don't respond. Heads down. Back at it. Wobbly, Manasseh picks at the dirt. He finds a rock and chucks it toward Jarm. Misses wide, but Jarm sees it was meant for him.

MANASSEH

I smell a storm comin' an' I wan
dem weeds cleared for it drains
proper. Hear me?

More silence. No one wants to engage with this madman. Manasseh pulls on his flask and ambles into the field in Jarm's direction. Jarm keeps his head down but monitors his master with a side-eye.

Another rock comes Jarm's way, missing him but landing square in the eye of a scarecrow. Manasseh lets out a howl.

MANASSEH

See that, niggers? Any you wants ta
lose an eye, keep draggin' ass.
I'll put one a these right in yer
thick skull.

The slaves move faster, Jarm going double speed. But in his haste, the iron flies off the end of his hoe on the upswing, landing at Manasseh's feet.

MANASSEH

Wedge it an' git back to work.

Jarm nervously scrambles off. Thunder rumbles.

EXT - CORN FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Jarm finds a long, sharp wooden wedge and pounds it into the hoe. It's not a great fit but it should do. He runs back toward the field.

EXT - CORN FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Jarm takes a few whacks at the weeds, but the iron falls off. Manasseh is red hot, Jarm's nerves jangled.

JARM

I's sorry, massa. She won' hold.

MANASSEH

You been in tha damn fields since
you was no taller than this corn!
Hell's tha matta with you boy? Huh?

Manasseh gives Jarm a shove, taking him by surprise and sending him back on his ass, landing beside the broken hoe and wedge. The skies darken and wind picks up.

JARM
(Softly)
Massa, I -

MANASSEH
Wha's that? I cain't hear you.

Manasseh leaps onto Jarm, pinning him down with his body, the length of the hoe across his neck.

MANASSEH
Still don' know how ta wedge a hoe,
do ya? Goddammit, I'll show you!

Manasseh fumbles around, finds the wedge. He closes his hand around it and smashes Jarm in the face with his fist.

Jarm looks up at Manasseh through a smear of blood across his eyes, terrified. He's stronger than Manasseh and has no trouble shaking free, but Manasseh bashes him again, sending his face into the dirt.

Manasseh turns Jarm over, face caked with dirt and blood.

MANASSEH
Open yer mouth!

Jarm's eyes go wide.

MANASSEH
Yer mouth, ya bastard!

Jarm turns his head away but Manasseh punches it back with the wedge.

MANASSEH
Open it, ya dumb fool!

Manasseh shoves the sharp end of the wedge into Jarm's mouth, pounding it with the heel of his hand. Jarm screams.

MANASSEH
Eat it!
(pounding)
Eat it!
(pounding again)
EAT IT!
(Repeatedly)

The skies darken. Thunder rumbles. Jarm, nearly unconscious, manages to turn his head away, coughing blood. Manasseh stands and begins laying into Jarm with the hoe handle, beating him thoroughly from head to toe.

Jarm is in fetal position, flinching with every stroke. His face a pulpy mess, he manages to pull the wedge from his mouth.

Skies black, lightning, rolling thunder. Rain pelts the crusted dirt next to Jarm's head. Manasseh is interrupted by a man's whistle from the other side of the field.

In the distance, a horse-drawn wagon leads a coffle of SLAVES down the road. Women and children packed on the wagon, shackled men in a line connected by chains. The driver calls out to Manasseh, waving.

BETTS

Best take cover - big 'un comin'
through!

Manasseh nods then looks down at Jarm.

MANASSEH

I've a mind to put you in the
ground right here you good-fer-
nuthin' dog. Yer lucky I'm
merciful.

A crack of lightning. The skies open up. Manasseh hobbles off to take cover. The other slaves rush in, helping Jarm sit up.

Through bloodied eyes and rain Jarm sees the driver of the slave coffle and realizes it's his friend Sam's murderer.

INT - SLAVE HOUSE - LATER

Cherry cradles Jarm's head and tries to comfort him. His face is a swollen, purple mess. He spits blood into a basin that Maria is holding. Other siblings Henry (17), Abe (13) and Ann (8) rush back and forth bringing wet cloths and dressings.

CHERRY

Henry, fetch the tallow.

HENRY

Yes, Mama.

Cherry strokes Jarm's head as she and Maria clean his face. Cherry puts on a brave face through her anger and distress. Jarm moans.

CHERRY

We git you fixed up son.

Henry hands his mother a tin of melted fat. Cherry applies some to a cloth and gently dabs Jarm's face.

She's practically whispering as she speaks to him. The children stroke Jarm's arm and hair, taking cues from their mother.

CHERRY
This'll hep. Shh, shh. Be still.

Jarm moans, locking eyes with Cherry.

CHERRY
I knows dis won' take yer hurts
away, Jarm, but God made you
stronger den dese mens.

ABE
You strong, Jarm.

As Cherry tells a story from when she was Jarm's age, the children lean in.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT - BREWERY - DAY

Cherry (21) works a heavy PADDLE over a mash tun, MOS.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Before we was sold to Manasseh, I
was workin' mash in a brew house.

A DRUNK NEIGHBOR (30s) enters. Moves in on Cherry, wasting no time with small talk.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Neighbor comes 'round, nasty man.
Been rough wi' all de womens an' he
aimin' to be rough wi' me.

Close on him, the bloodshot, dentally challenged drunk leans into Cherry's face.

CHERRY (V.O.)
He come at me, whiskey fire in his
eyes. Lookin' all nasty like he
fell out de ugly tree an' hit every
branch on de way down.

The drunk spins Cherry forcibly, attempting to assault her from behind.

CHERRY (V.O.)
De man try to do unspeakable things
to Cherry.

INT - SLAVE HOUSE - SAME

Jarm begins to come around. He and his siblings are rapt.

CHERRY
What Cherry gon' do?

The kids shrug.

ANN
What Cherry gon' do?

CHERRY
Cherry gon' clonk dat man wi' de
paddle, dat's what.

HENRY
Cherry clonk dat man!

The kids try to stifle, then burst and laugh out loud. Jarm tries too, but winces in pain.

CHERRY
Dat right!

Flashback continues, with Cherry clocking the drunk with an uppercut to the jaw, then a mighty swing that catches him on the temple.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Clonk him like I's aimin' to take
his head off, which I was, Lord
help me.

The drunk, unconscious on the brewery floor. Cherry, scared, drops the mash paddle and runs.

END FLASHBACK

CHERRY
Jarm, I thought I stoled his life
but by some miracle he don' die,
one eye crooked fo' de rest o' his
life. Ain't got no trouble fo' it.
Dey knows he was a scoundrel and a
whiskey-pickled fool and worth less
than their prized Cherry anyway.

ANN
Why massa clonk Jarm, Mama? He bad
too?

CHERRY

No dear, no. Jarm a good boy. All my babies jus' right de way dey are.

Cherry looks down at Jarm, caressing his head. Speaks softly.

CHERRY

God says t'aint right for a man to own anudder man but that's de way 'roun here.

(beat)

Jus' 'membra, Jarm. Dey keep you but dey ain't own you. Don' never be 'fraid to spunk up when you got to.

Jarm blinks and nods slowly. The children, crowded around their broken brother, stroke his arms and hair as they lean into their mother.

EXT - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A CARAVAN of horses and buggies, carts and pedestrians stretches down a rough road leading to the edge of a meadow. Among the travelers, the Logue family and their slaves ride into a wide canopy of trees at the edge of a clearing where preparations are being made for the big event of the summer.

EXT - METHODIST CAMP - SAME

Families arrive from near and far, excited for the Methodist Camp Prayer Meeting. The mood is bright at the vast compound. Men pitch large tents, build the preacher's stand. Women and children prep food. Dozens of booths line the perimeter, where vendors sell their wares. Slaves and their masters all work in concert, and although the slaves know their place, the Christian spirit of the camp gives them the luxury to move about more freely.

Manasseh oversees the Logue booth. Jarm's face has healed, a pink scar across his mouth. Jarm and three other slaves unload crates of hooch from the cart. Cherry, Maria and Henry arrange rugs on a table. Sarah Logue spreads a gingham cloth over a rough wooden table. She spies Manasseh sneaking a swig of whiskey from a flask.

SARAH

Dear Lord, Manasseh, it's nine in the morning.

MANASSEH

Jes' settlin' my stomach is all.

SARAH

Think 'a what we'd got if every fifth barrel we cook up didn't go down your gullet.

MANASSEH

Think'a what we'd got I'd a listened to you and we was chicken farmers.

(makes the "zero" sign)

Shut yer trap if you know what's good fer ya.

Sarah sees a familiar face a few paces away, handing out programs.

SARAH

Looks like Betts be comin' to Jesus.

MANASSEH

Too late fer him, I reckon. Ain't never heard him speak the Lord's name, 'cept in vain.

Betts approaches, eyeing Cherry and the smaller kids, then zeroing in on Jarm. Betts tips his hat to Sarah and hands Manasseh a program. Jarm pretends not to see Betts. Head down, his hands tremble as he unloads the cart.

BETTS

Chattel's lookin' healthy this year, Mannaseh. Feedin' 'em right?

MANASSEH

Reap what you sow.

Manasseh and Betts, wary of each other, speak like the slaves aren't there, even though they are well within earshot. Betts nods toward Jarm, whose back is turned to them.

BETTS

I never asked you this but...that one - he your boy?

MANASSEH

He's Cherry's kin. My brother's son. Change in situation at home.

BETTS

I see. Matrimonial complications.

Manasseh says nothing.

BETTS
He capable?

MANASSEH
More'n that.

BETTS
I'm not flush presently - maybe
you'll mortgage him?

MANASSEH
I prefers ta keep my chattel
livin'.

Betts winces.

BETTS
Some people cain't let go of a
grudge even when it ain't theirs to
keep. 'Sides, I'm done with
whiskey, you know that.

MANASSEH
Ain' my business.

Betts watches Jarm unload the cart, all muscle.

BETTS
Well keep an eye on him regardless.
Tiger like him liable to break the
cage.

MANASSEH
Him? Mama's boy. Ain' goin'
nowheres.

EXT - METHODIST CAMP - LATER

Jarm watches his siblings play with other slave children,
laughing as two primly dressed METHODIST GIRLS (late teens)
lead a game of "Blind Man's Bluff."

One of the girls tags Jarm's little brother Abe, making him
"It".

METHODIST GIRL 1
Abe!

The children cheer as she takes off her blindfold. Abe
giggles, enjoying the attention of a white girl.

METHODIST GIRL 2
Now Abe's the blind man!

The girl begins tying the blindfold, but Abe squirms away.

ABE
Wait!

Abe turns and rushes to Jarm, who squats to hear what's the matter. Abe whispers in his ear.

ABE
Jarm. I cain't.

JARM
Don't be silly boy, play de game.

ABE
But if I touch a white girl, it's trespassin' an angel. De devil will fetch me off.

JARM
Where you hear dat, Abe? You play de game. I'll kill de devil if I see him.

Abe pauses. Then smiles and rejoins the game.

A whistle rings out from the woods - two quick "tweets". It's code, and Jarm knows who it is. He leaps from his squat and runs toward the sound.

EXT - WOODS - SAME

Jarm enters the woods near camp, whistling in reply. No answer. Whistles again, but silence. He stops, looks around, continues on the path when he is JUMPED from behind. Jarm panics and begins struggling blindly, then his attacker spins him around.

It's JOHN FARNEY (20), childhood friend, strapping, gregarious, always smiling.

JARM
Damn you, John Farney! I might'a killed you!

JOHN
Killed me? It's you was scared to death!

They shove each other playfully, then hug and thump each other's backs. Pulling away, John's smile turns to concern as he notices Jarm's face.

JOHN
Happen here? Kiss a cottonmouth?

JARM
Troubles wit' de massa.

JOHN
Troubles? You gots yer damn toof
kicked out.

Jarm hangs his head. John grabs him by the shoulders and makes him look up.

JOHN
Ain' no shame in it, Jarm. Only if
we don' take action. We gon' take
action, like we says every year?

Jarm shakes off his shame and remembers his anger. Looks John straight in the eye.

JARM
Diss is de year, John. Diss one.

JOHN
Dere's a man willin' ta help
procure what we need.

Jarm raises his eyes in surprise - also worry.

JOHN
You knows him, Jarm. Mista Ross.

JARM
Po' ol' drinkin' man in de woods by
Colonel Wills?

JOHN
De very one.

Jarm takes a deep breath and looks around uneasily.

JOHN
He's had a foul patch, Jarm, he
need things we can trade for and we
need things he can provide.

Jarm considers this, then sees the logic.

JARM
He done right by many of our color.

JOHN
Den we talk wit him. Next Sabbath.
De cave.

Jarm smiles and reaches out to shake John's hand.

JARM
Dat's a deal, John Farney.

EXT - METHODIST CAMP - EVENING

The concessions are closed and no one is minding the tables except for Jarm, guarding his masters' inventory. At a distance, a tremendous bonfire, hymns and preaching.

Behind a tree, John "tops off" several whiskey bottles by relieving himself into them. He stops as he sees Jarm's sister running in their direction, breathless.

JARM
Ann, e'body singin' at de fire -
why you ain't dere?

ANN
Mistah Betts horse gone missin'!

Jarm feigns surprise.

JARM
Shame for dat. Big shame. Anyhow,
you ain't gonna fine him on yer
own. Git back to singin' an' let de
mens find dat horse.

Ann runs off. When she's at a distance, Jarm signals his friend. John jogs over, cradling as many pints of urine-laced bottles of whiskey as he can carry.

JOHN
Ain't nobody gonna complain they
bottle too full o' dat fine Logue
whiskey!

Jarm laughs and shakes his head.

JARM
You hadda be holdin' it all day,
John Farney. Feel betta?

JOHN
A whole lot, Jarm Logue!

They hastily arrange the bottles.

JARM
You best run off 'fore yo massa
find you missin'.

John nods, then runs back to the tree and returns, this time hauling a fine saddle.

JOHN
Hope God don' strike me dead fo
stealin' Massa Betts' saddle.

JARM
Betts stole you. God ain't struck
him dead.

John and Jarm exchange smiles. John takes to the woods, then turns back to Jarm.

JOHN
'Membra - next Sabbath.

JARM
De cave!

Jarm watches his friend disappear into the night.

EXT - LOGUE FARM - DAY

SLAVE CHILDREN scurry about in the early morning, playing "tag" in the patch outside the slave cabin. Sarah Logue crosses toward the cabin from the main house. The children see her and pause their game, afraid of the brusque woman.

SARAH
Cherry!

Cherry appears in the doorway.

CHERRY
Yes, Missus?

SARAH
Tell the mothers I want all the
children in the garden with me this
morning. I need hands for picking
the peas.

CHERRY

We can do that when the day is cooler, Missus.

SARAH

That's not what I said, Cherry.

Cherry pauses a moment. This is not the usual morning arrangement, but she must accept. Abe and Ann look at Cherry, who reassures them with a smile.

CHERRY

Abe, Ann - go wit Missus Logue. See who can pick de most peas.

The children don't want to leave Cherry's side. Sarah gives Cherry a look.

SARAH

Move along now.

CHERRY

Yes, Missus.

Cherry kisses her children on the tops of their heads and nudges them toward Mrs. Logue before turning away from them; her expression changing from reassurance to worry as she walks in the opposite direction.

EXT - LOGUE FARM - HOURS LATER

Jarm is repairing a fence on a road across from the Logue homestead. He looks up to see TWO MEN ON HORSEBACK approaching the property. Manasseh emerges through the garden gate at the side of the house.

Several slave children look on from inside the fence, a few paces back. The riders dismount.

There's some back-and forth between Manasseh and the visitors. Jarm, still carrying the mallet he was using on the fence, walks toward the scene; worry on his face.

Manasseh pushes Jarm's siblings toward the visitors. They recoil and protest. Jarm begins to run toward them.

As Manasseh pockets a MORTGAGE AGREEMENT, another rider approaches, slowly rounding the bend of the road next to the property. The rider is trailed by a wagon, loaded with young slave children, and behind the wagon, a coffle of several dozen older slave children - chained together and walking behind.

JARM

What is this? What is happening?

MANASSEH

Back to the fence, Jarm, you have no business here.

(to the children)

And not a word or sound out of any y'all, ya hear?

Jarm's siblings look at him, terrified, as the slave traders poke at them and inspect their mouths and bodies. Ann begins to sob. Then Abe begins crying, as do the rest of the children looking on behind the fence. Jarm is immobilized, notices the men are armed with WHIPS and GUNS.

From a distance, we hear the commotion of the women running through the fields back toward the children. The TRADER on the horse shakes his head.

MANASSEH

Oh goddamn it to hell.

TRADER

I thought you was goin' to put those black bitches out of sight and hearing.

MANASSEH

I thought I had done it.

TRADER

Never take a calf in sight of the cow.

Jarm steps boldly toward the slave traders, holding his mallet high and shaking it.

JARM

Leave them be!

There's a CRACK and suddenly the mallet is gone and Jarm is bleeding from where the second slave trader's long bullwhip tore into his forearm. Jarm grabs his wound and falls to his knees. The second trader pins Jarm to the ground, binds his hands and feet.

JARM

No!

The traders fasten Abe and Ann to the coffle. The mothers, including oldest daughter Maria, rush from the field, Cherry making a bee-line toward her children, entirely aware of what is happening.

Four other men slaves, including Henry Logue, have also left their work to check on the commotion. Cherry throws her arms around her children.

CHERRY

They shan't take you away! They shan't!

MANASSEH

Let go of those children, they are on loan to that man.

CHERRY

They shall not be taken away - they are my children!

Henry tries to intercept, but he's restrained by Manasseh, who mutters into his face.

MANASSEH

They was two bits short of gettin' you in the deal. Don't move or yer goin' with 'em.

The trader raises his lash over Cherry.

TRADER

Let go, or I will cut you in two!

Cherry holds tighter.

CHERRY

They shan't be taken away!

Jarm's eyes widen with horror as the trader lets loose a wicked blow with the whip, tearing the bare flesh on Cherry's shoulders, which immediately flow with blood. Cherry hangs on. The children bawl, as do the other mothers. Cherry is resolute, clinging tightly to her babies.

TRADER

Release them you black cur!

The trader delivers blow after blow, cutting her clothes and her back to ribbons, but her expression - determined and seething - belies her physical pain. Cherry closes her eyes, rests her head on those of Ann and Abe, tries to soothe them through the torment she is enduring.

CHERRY

(softly)

They shan't take you away.

Manasseh sees this is going nowhere; summons two broad and stout male slaves.

MANASSEH

You two - remove her. Now!

The men try pulling Cherry away but her grip is iron. They struggle. The children shriek. Cherry grunts as she tries kicking the slaves off of her, but then Manasseh joins in, wedging a wooden tool handle between Cherry's torso and her arm, breaking her grip. Cherry lets out a mournful cry as she loses hold.

ABE

Mama!

ANN

Oh Mama no, no, no!

The traders start their horses, one of them wrangling Abe and Ann as they make some distance down the road. Cherry is still struggling with the slaves who were restraining her. She catches one on the face with her elbow and breaks free. Cherry springs to her feet, races to her children, gathers them up in her arms, once again holding on for dear life.

Then all goes still at the sound of a PISTOL COCKING.

Through gritted teeth, Cherry holds her position and turns to face the gun. She looks up at the trader.

CHERRY

You ain't has enough silver tah pay
what I's worth.

TRADER

I got three score and ten children
in dis drove, picked from 25
families. I've a mind to put a plug
in yer skull just so's everybody
clear on my intentions.

CHERRY

Do it.

There's a GUNSHOT and Cherry goes down, clutching her foot. Only now does she sob, finally comprehending that she cannot keep her children with her. The trader mounts his horse. The coffle pulls away again. Cherry, exhausted from the struggle and clutching her injured foot, watches as her children are led away through a cloud of dust from the road.

INT - LOOM ROOM - SAME DAY

A door opens revealing a shaft of afternoon light as Cherry is thrown roughly onto the floor. She is dragged to the loom and shackled to it. The door closes. Cherry moans and weeps.

INT - LOOM ROOM - NIGHT

Maria cleans Cherry's wounds as Jarm and Henry look on, stroking her head. She is inconsolable.

INT - LOOM ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Jarm tries feeding Cherry, who is still chained to the loom. She refuses. He leaves the food next to her.

INT - LOOM ROOM - DAY AFTER

Plate of food remains untouched, save for the flies. Cherry opens and closes her eyes slowly. Her voice is a quivering whisper.

CHERRY

They shan't take you away.

EXT - MOUNTAIN CAVE - DAY

Vines and tree branches obscure the wide opening of a MOUNTAIN CAVE. Hushed speaking voices emanate from within.

INT - MOUNTAIN CAVE - DAY

JOHN

At least try to be companionable.

JARM

Comp ... comp what? Ain't no such word.

JOHN

An' how would you know? You learnt readin' since last Sabbath?

Jarm stays silent. Pouting. His normally cheerful friend is growing impatient.

JOHN

Look, Jarm. Sissyin' won' bring back Ann or Abe. Won' help Cherry none neither.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

An' yer gettin' on my last nerve
wit' how you actin'. It been a
month now.

JARM

But dey gone, John Farney. Gone fer
good.

JOHN

Dey on loan, Jarm, you don' know.
But dat's why you gotta be mad, not
sad. Sad, you good for no ones. Sad
keep you under da lash. Mad git you
places. Mad git you to freedom. You
still wan' dat, right?

Jarm nods and looks down.

JOHN

You mad enuff?

John gives Jarm a shove.

JOHN

Huh? You mad enuff?

John shoves him again. Again. And again. In a flash, Jarm
springs from his crouch and leaps on John, pinning him to the
ground and looming over him with a clenched fist. John
smiles.

JOHN

Dere it 'tis. Dere's de fire. Mad
Jarm stronger den sad Jarm. Dat fo
sho. Put it in a bottle, boy. Keep
dat feelin' wich you. All de time.

There's a SNAP of a branch outside the cave. Jarm and John
sit up quickly and cautiously peer out from behind the brush.

EXT - MOUNTAIN CAVE - DAY

MR. ROSS (40) approaches the cave entrance. He is an unkempt,
unwashed man but there is something gentle and quiet about
him. He moves slowly, speaks deliberately, his worldly
mannerisms out of character with his appearance. He wears
what was once a fine suit and costly shoes, now dingy and
tattered.

ROSS

Gentlemen. I heard your ruckus from
a hundred paces.

(MORE)

ROSS (CONT'D)

If you intend to take flight, you'd best learn the ways of laying low.

JOHN

Mistah Ross. Pleased to see you. Dis here Jarm Logue. We have de procurements you requested for our bargain.

INT - MOUNTAIN CAVE - DAY

Entering the cave, Ross surveys the bundle of bread, bacon, flour and other items supplied by the slaves, then sees what interests him most: whiskey. He reaches for the bottle, uncaps it and takes a long pull with his eyes closed. Jarm and John look at each other.

ROSS

Ah. Just as advertised. This is most excellent. Have you enough access to these goods so as to keep our agreement into December?

JOHN

Yes, sir. My massah's son favors me. I help him wit' tings and he steals his father's cotton and pays me wit' it.

Ross looks at the bottle in his hand, then holds it up toward Jarm.

ROSS

And this here liquid gold?

JARM

Obtained from my massah's still. I's aimin' ta secure a barrel and retail it.

ROSS

Very well. This is good. You will need to supplement these items with cash. You will want to get to Illinois before winter. Best to leave on the first holiday night, when Christian minds are occupied with churchly matters and festivities.

The slaves nod in agreement.

JARM

Dat is our intent.

ROSS

It will be a difficult journey. You must be ready with swift and strong horses, clothing, provisions, money, arms and passes. Let us meet again on the Sabbath as the occasion warrants. But let no one know of our caucus. Not your mother, your brother, your sister or your sweetheart. No one. A discovery in this matter would send you to Georgia, and me to the limb of a tree. Am I clear?

Jarm and John look at each other and nod their understanding.

ROSS

Well. I must be going.

Ross begins to pack up the items the slaves brought to him.

JOHN

Oh. Mistah Ross? Is dere such a word as "companionable"?

Ross pauses his packing, delighted that someone is asking him a vocabulary question.

ROSS

Companionable? Why of course. Com-PAN-yun-able.

Ross breaks off a piece of bread from the stash.

ROSS

"Pan" is bread. Someone companionable is one whom is willing to share bread with you.

Ross pops a chunk of bread into his mouth and turns to leave, waving as he goes.

ROSS

So long, companionable fellows!

ESCAPE PREP MONTAGE

EXT - LOGUE SLAVE HOUSE - NIGHT

Jarm puts the finishing touches on a camouflaged HATCHWAY behind the slave house. The CRATE in the hatchway is empty.

EXT - DIRT ROAD - DAY

A horse and cart loaded with cotton pull away as the driver tips his hat. John nods and pockets the money he's just made.

EXT - LOGUE SLAVE HOUSE - DAY

Jarm deposits pilfered bacon and flour into the hatchway.

EXT - FARNEY SMOKE HOUSE - DAY

John conceals ham beneath some hay in a wheelbarrow. Waves and smiles at his overseer as he pushes the wheelbarrow behind the slave house; tosses ham under cabin.

INT - MOUNTAIN CAVE - DAY

Ross examines delivery from Jarm and John. Nods approval, lays out crude map and compass to review with the slaves.

EXT - LOGUE SLAVE HOUSE - NIGHT

Jarm opens hatchway at twilight. More contraband: Bread, flour. A money box with cash. Closes hatchway.

EXT - LOGUE SLAVE HOUSE - DAY

Opens hatchway. Crate getting full. Root vegetables, several bottles of whiskey have been added. More cash added to box. Closes hatchway.

END MONTAGE

EXT - LOGUE RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Jarm stands on his masters' porch. Knocks on the door. No answer. Walks across porch, looks in window. No sign of anyone.

HENRY (O.S.)
Dey's gone for de night.

Jarm turns around to see his brother leading two milking cows toward the barn.

HENRY

Sendin' off da preacher leavin'
town in da 'morrow.

JARM

Thanks Henry. I need de ox team ta
gather a barrel.

HENRY

I'd wait til you kin ask massa fer
I was you.

Jarm nods then waits until Henry is out of sight before heading for the oxen and cart.

EXT - DISTILLERY - LATER

Jarm loads a barrel of whiskey onto the oxcart. Heads back to the slave house.

EXT - LOGUE FARM - NIGHT

The light of the moon illuminates Jarm and the ox and cart as they make their way toward the slave house. Manasseh and Sarah see him as they return from their evening out.

MANASSEH

What's that infernal nigger doing
with my team and cart? He speak to
you about this?

SARAH

No he did not.

Manasseh grabs his whip and makes a move to deal with the situation, but Sarah pulls him back into his seat.

SARAH

Whup 'em in the morning when
everyone can bear witness.

Manasseh grunts, flaring his nostrils as he seethes and spits out a plug of tobacco.

MANASSEH

That I most assuredly will do.

EXT - LOGUE FARM - DAY

It's early morning. Jarm and the other slaves are toiling in the field when their work is interrupted by the ringing of the DINNER BELL at the Logue house. The slaves look at each other, confused. A voice booms across the farm.

MANASSEH (O.S.)
All hands! All hands!

The slaves drop their tools and begin running toward the house as if there's an emergency.

Jarm arrives at the yard. He presses through the gathering of slaves, who part to make an opening. As they do, Manasseh is revealed standing next to the whipping post, lash in hand and a bundle of sticks at his feet.

MANASSEH
Maria! Ropes!

Jarm's sister rushes off nervously, returning with ropes, shame and guilt on her face. As she hands them to Manasseh, he aims his whip at Jarm.

MANASSEH
Step forward.

Jarm looks around.

JARM
Massa?

Manasseh does not say anything. He squints at Jarm and motions him to step forward.

JARM
Massa, what is it? I did'n make
your fire this mornin' as you was
late returnin' home last night.

MANASSEH
Is that so? And when I'm gone this
means you can steal my team to do
your work?

Jarm's uneasiness grows. He knows he's been busted.

JARM
I did not suppose I should
displease you, else I would not
have took dem.

MANASSEH

Take off your shirt, you black rascal! I'll learn you to steal my oxen! Off with your shirt!

Jarm steps toward the whipping post, but rather than do as he is told he folds his arms defiantly, looking his master full in the face with a steady and firm gaze.

MANASSEH

Don't stand there staring at me, you black dog! Off with your shirt, or I'll whip it off—hide and all!

Jarm stares silently, refusing the order. Manasseh drops the whip and grabs a thick and heavy stick.

MANASSEH

You black scoundrel! Don't you mean to take off your shirt?

Jarm holds his ground. The other slaves look on, including Jarm's family. They are terrified. Sarah Logue looks on with crossed arms. Manasseh is seething now, and stomps toward Jarm, trembling with uncontrolled fury.

MANASSEH

Off with your shirt, you rascal. Do it or I'll take your life, you damned black dog!

Manasseh takes a swing at Jarm, who dodges the blow, spinning his attacker off balance. This infuriates Manasseh even more, and he stomps toward Jarm.

MANASSEH

You will remove your shirt when I command you, you insolent rascal!

Clenching his fists and throwing his shoulders back, Jarm bares his teeth.

JARM

NO!

Then, with disarming speed and overwhelming power, Jarm seizes Manasseh by the throat with one hand and by the ass of his pants with the other, hoisting him into the air.

Manasseh, terrified and shocked, manages to choke out another command.

MANASSEH

Let me go! Let me go!

JARM

I will let you go. And I will go myself!

Jarm squeezes tighter; Manasseh gasps. With one swift motion, Jarm turns his master upside-down, pile-drives him into the ground, then takes off for the woods.

Sarah Logue looks at her wheezing, spent husband with disgust. Turns her head, spits, and walks away.

Jarm's family members look at one another, disbelieving what they have just witnessed. A slight smile crosses Henry's mouth as he watches his brother's retreat.

EXT - MOUNTAIN CAVE - DAY

Jarm is bathing in the creek near the cave hideout. He hears a NOISE in the thick brush, startling him. He grabs his clothes and runs naked to the cave, covering the entryway and cowering in the darkness while struggling to put on his clothes. Footsteps gain on the cave. Jarm holds his breath. Then, blinding brightness and the looming SHADOW of a man.

JOHN

Jarm Logue, you early!

Jarm exhales, relieved to see his friend.

JARM

I thought you was Manasseh.

JOHN

Since when he walk in de woods? He 'fraid of every livin' thing that creeps and crawls out here.

JARM

I fought him. Laid him out but good. I'm sorry John Farney, I had ta eat what we was savin' for mista Ross. Whiskey still here doh.

JOHN

Wait - how long you been hidin'?

JARM

Since de day after our last caucus.

JOHN

Dat's two weeks, Jarm! Whoo, dat musta been one good whuppin' you gave.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Anyways, Mista Ross won' know
what's missin' since he only knows
what we give 'em.

John unloads his heavy duffle.

JOHN

An' I got enough here for da month!

John holds out a biscuit and bacon. Jarm takes it and digs in
eagerly. From outside, two quick whistles. Ross pokes his
head in.

ROSS

Well if it isn't my companionable
confidants. Good day, sirs.

John welcomes him with a smile and a handshake. Jarm greets
him, but without his normal enthusiasm.

ROSS

There is trouble written on your
brow. What is the issue young man?

JARM

I raised my fists at my massa.

ROSS

Indeed! He dead?

Jarm shakes his head.

ROSS

That is unfortunate. Well, you get
back there and lay up your earnings
and provisions until it is your day
of departure. But give him time to
reflect. A fortnight.

JOHN

'Tis been a fortnight, in fact.

ROSS

Then he has been short-handed. And
you need his horse come December,
so return and collect what you will
need. Of course you will also
require the items I obtained in
Nashville on your behalf.

Ross lays out two pistols, munitions, and passes. John and
Jarm's eyes light up and they both reach for the guns. Ross
pushes their hands away.

ROSS

Subsequently. First, the most important things.

Points at John. Hands him his pass, then one to Jarm.

ROSS

You are John Robinson. And you are Henry Robinson. You are free men. Brothers who are journeying to Kentucky. Hold your heads high. Stay in the finest hotels and rooming houses as your finances allow. Behave as though you were any white man passing through any town.

Jarm and John listen intently, eyes wide.

ROSS

Nobody has a right to see your passes but the magistrate. Should you encounter someone wishing to see your papers, you must remain steadfast and calm.

JOHN

We'll blow their brains out.

ROSS

Not until the last moment must your enemy know you have pistols. If it appears you will be seized by your enemy, shoot him without compunction. If he won't give you food, rob him. If he won't give you freedom, kill him.

Jarm's mood brightens.

JARM

Lord, speed the day - freedom begins with the holidays!

JOHN

Amen!

EXT - LOGUE FARM - DAY

Manasseh leads Rock out of the horse barn and looks up just as Jarm emerges from the woods. Manasseh pauses, squints at Jarm. Let's out a "humph," as if he's surprised-but-not-surprised to see his slave's return.

Jarm boldly steps toward Manasseh. Looks up. Meets his gaze. The two regard each other for a beat, each assessing the threat.

MANASSEH

Have you been to breakfast?

JARM

Yes, sir.

MANASSEH

Go into the lot to making fence.

Jarm sets off, holding his head high. As he steps away from his master, a smirk crosses his face.

EXT - LOGUE FARM - DAY (MONTAGE)

Sequence with Jarm working the farm through the fall. Between shots of him building the fence, he's doing other farm chores - feeding the chickens, grooming the horses, baling hay, harvesting crops. He continues making deposits of cash and supplies into the hideaway next to the slave house. The fence gets longer as the days get shorter.

INT - LOGUE BARN - NIGHT

Jarm is grooming Rock, whispering with his face close to that of the horse. We see Jarm's breath. He is wearing warm clothes. He strokes the horse gently with a brush. Henry enters, cradling something in a napkin.

JARM

I smelt de stack cake fore I saw you.

HENRY

I gots some for you too. Come. Sit.

Resting on a hay bale in the barn, the brothers tuck into the Christmas cake.

SLEIGH BELLS jingle as the Logue's horsecart passes by the open door of the barn, Manasseh and Sarah whooping it up, passing a bottle. Christmas presents can be seen on the wagon. The brothers enjoy their cake as the sound of the Logues passes. Jarm speaks in low tones.

JARM

Henry. I know I can trust you.

HENRY
When?

JARM
What?

HENRY
When you leave?

JARM
How you know?

HENRY
I's seen you stash under da house.
Only a matter of when, after what
happen wit' massa Logue.

JARM
Tonight.

This stings Henry.

JARM
Henry, you must take care of
mother. Promise you will keep our
secret? On a future day I will
provide for you all. I cannot be a
slave any longer.

A tear falls down Henry's face.

JARM
Brother ... you knows you must stay.
You de man of de house now. Cherry
needs you. Maria needs you.

Henry breathes deep. Composes himself. Looks at Jarm, then
nods and returns to his cake. Then puts down his cake and
hugs his brother. Jarm hugs him back, tears welling.

INT - SLAVE HOUSE - LATER

Cherry sleeps soundly, illuminated by moonlight. Jarm
silently enters, setting his lantern by the door. He is
dressed for his journey. He kneels next to his mother's bed,
closes his eyes as if in prayer and moves his lips as we hear
his inner voice.

JARM (V.O.)
Oh, my mother! Our bodies must
part, but our spirits, never. Where
I go, you will go with me, always.
(MORE)

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

I will keep you in my heart each
an' every day. An' I will pray for
you. Pray for Maria. Pray for
Henry. Pray for Ann and Abe who was
stole from us. Pray for the Logues
even, for though the Lord speaks to
them, they cannot hear. I mean to
embrace you again, but for now
please forgive me. I cain't stay
longer. Goodbye, mother.

Jarm kisses Cherry on the forehead. She stirs. Jarm silently
retreats.

EXT - COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Lit only by moonlight, Jarm and John make final preparations
for departure, securing the saddle bags to their horses. The
horses themselves are magnificent beasts, especially Jarm's.

JARM

'Tis late. You think it is past
midnight?

JOHN

Will be soon, if not already.

JARM

Christmas.

JOHN

Christmas! Lordie be.

JARM

You holdin' any last thoughts?

JOHN

Meanin'?

JARM

Meanin' you certain about dis?

JOHN

Mo' sure den anything. Come what
will, I resolve to get out dis
country. Life ain't worth nothing
here. I had rather lose it by
escape than be dyin' fo'evah. Dat
is my mind on de matter.

Jarm nods in agreement.

JARM

When de slave is brave, his liberty
is secure. You brave, John Farney?

JOHN

Brave as you Jarm Logue.

JARM

Maybe more!

They mount their horses. Jarm sighs and looks up at the stars twinkling in the cold, clear sky. John looks up too. Jarm closes his eyes and bows his head.

JARM

Lord, spirit us away from dis place
of shame. Learn us how to follow de
drinkin' gourd. To a place far from
de chain and de lash an de men who
keep us as chattel. Please hold our
kin close an protect dem til we can
see dem again. On dese things we
pray, dear Lord.

A beat.

JOHN

Amen.

Jarm leans down and presses his face against the side of Rock's ear, whispering something. He straightens, looks ahead, then spurs his horse. The runaway slaves push off into the night.

EXT - TENNESSEE ROAD - DAY

Jarm and John are riding at a slow trot when they come upon a YOUNG BLACK BOY (5) crying and shivering by the side of the road. They stop to check on him. A sizable HOUSE can be seen not far off.

JOHN

What de matter, boy?

BOY

Dey have been selling mother.

JARM

When dey sell her?

BOY

Dis morning.

JOHN

Did de man in dat house sell her?

The boy nods and sobs some more. Jarm looks up at the house, his eyes narrowing.

JARM

I've a mind to take de man's head
off leave a boy without a Mama.

JOHN

Let's go, Jarm. Ain't nothing to be
done fo' him.

Jarm reaches into his saddlebag, grabs a chicken leg and hands it to the boy, who begins ravenously eating it through his sobbing.

They move on, watching the boy as they pass, heartbreak registered on Jarm's face.

EXT - LARGE TENNESSEE TOWN - DAY

Jarm and John approach a large town center, bustling with late-afternoon activity. They look at each other nervously as if to say "Here we go!"

JARM

Head high.

JOHN

Head high.

They sit upright on their noble horses, as if they own the road. Passersby take notice, but on account of their dress and manner, make way for them without bother.

Passing a GENERAL STORE, an older WHITE FARMER (60) who was tying his old mare to a post notices them and rushes out.

FARMER

Whoa whoa whoa. Where you fellas
headin'?

The fugitives look at each other, assessing the threat posed by the man who stopped them.

JOHN

Kentucky.

JARM

To see our mother.

The man squints at them, their horses, their cargo. Spits out a plug of tobacco. Then reaches toward Rock. The horse snorts and takes a nip at the farmer's hand.

FARMER

Feisty!

JOHN

What is your business?

FARMER

My apologies, gentlemen. I run a stud farm in Nashville.

(points to Rock's hooves)

Ain't no Plantation Walker there.

You gotcher self a fine runner.

John and Jarm stare at the farmer blankly, as if he wasn't worth the time of day.

FARMER

Wouldn't be in the mood for bargainin' would ya?

JARM

Maybe next time. Now we's lookin' for de finest 'ccomodations in dese parts. Gotta rest up fore an early start in de morn.

FARMER

Well that's a shame. You'd a gotten a fair sum for your stallion.

(points down road)

Yonder 'bout four mile. Best lodging in Tennessee. Ain't cheap.

JOHN

It'll do.

They nod at the farmer and continue, and as they depart they realize they are surrounded by several admiring townsfolk who have slowed down to see what's what.

EXT - BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

A stableboy takes the horses as Jarm and John awed by the large tavern in front of them.

INT - BOARDING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jarm and John are greeted in the hallway by the INNKEEPER, who eyes them warily.

INNKEEPER

I assume you gentlemen are in need
of a room?

JOHN

And dinner.

INNKEEPER

This way.

INT - INN HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The sounds of wild celebration get louder and louder. The landlord opens the door to the barroom, revealing a blast of tobacco smoke filtering a scene of drunken revelry. Red-faced traveling businessmen and traders. A song is being pounded out on an upright piano and several women for hire flirt with the patrons.

Jarm grabs the door and pulls it closed.

JARM

Don't take us in there! We is free
colored men and we wants to be by
ourselves, and have supper, go to
bed and be on our journey in the
morning. Early.

INNKEEPER

You will need to pay in advance.

JOHN

Of course.

INT - BOARDINGHOUSE PARLOR - LATER

Jarm and John are seated in the parlor with a table to themselves, a massive banquet before them. Chicken, ham, eggs, coffee, sweet meats, etc. SERVANTS enter with more plates, bow to the guests, then take their place nearby to obey their commands. The fugitives look at one another, not sure what to do. One of the servants makes eye contact with them and nods as if to say "dig in!". The hungry travelers attack the food.

INT - BOARDINGHOUSE ROOM - NIGHT

Jarm and John lie in bunks; Jarm up top, John below. A lantern illuminates the room. Jarm looks up at the ceiling as the shadows from the candleflame. John lets out a loud belch. Jarm notices but lets it go.

JARM

Dis was a good week. A good week.
Warm bed. Full belly. Horses strong
an' rested. Praise de Lord.

John doesn't answer, but passes wind in a long and broken exhalation. Jarm makes a face.

JARM

An' dat's de devil's breath. You
John Farty now. Ugh.

Still no response. Jarm turns over and looks down to see his friend sound asleep, snoring gently, bathed in the lamp's golden glow. Jarm smiles.

JARM

I thank de Lord for you, John
Farty.

EXT. - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

It is a grey and raw Kentucky dawn, a mist hovering in the atmosphere as Jarm and John ford a narrow creek on their horses. They climb a modest hill, returning to the main road, which is surrounded by woods on one side and a crude fence on the other. Jarm reaches into his jacket and opens the map.

JARM

I reckon we kin make de Ohio River
by afternoon. Should be some corn
stacks long de way.

JOHN

Hallelujah. Horses be hungry den.

Jarm studies the map. John watches some hawks circling in the sky. When he looks ahead, he sees three shabbily dressed men emerge from a trail in the woods and senses immediately that they are SLAVECATCHERS.

JOHN

Jarm.

Jarm looks up. Sees the men, realizes who they are.

JARM

Steady.

JOHN

Keep a'goin'.

The slavecatchers, who were heading in the same direction as the travelers, reverse course upon seeing the Black men and begin walking toward them. One has a heavy WALKING STICK. Jarm checks the weight of his HUNTING BAG. The distance between the slavecatchers and the riders gets closer and closer. From 20 paces, the three men on foot spread out, blocking the road. The horses come to a stop. The man with the walking stick lifts it to his shoulder and squares his stance.

SLAVECATCHER 1

Whose niggers are you?

JOHN

We are freemen.

SLAVECATCHER 2

Show us your passes.

JARM

Dey in our saddlebags.

The slavecatcher with the stick motions them to dismount.

SLAVECATCHER 1

Come on, then.

Jarm and John dismount; tie their horses to the fence.

JOHN

Are you magistrates?

The slavecatchers move closer to the fugitives. Jarm and John stand their ground.

SLAVECATCHER 1

None of your business.

John looks at Jarm, then looks at the ruffians in front of them.

JOHN

Den you have no business with us
either.

Two of the slavecatchers close in on John. One of them grabs him by the collar.

SLAVECATCHER 2

Don't blarney with us you black rascals. Git out yer passes or come along to jail.

JARM

Show us a magistrate and we'll git out our passes. Not 'til then.

The slavecatcher closest to John begins pulling him, but John is anchored.

SLAVECATCHER 2

Come along nigger, or I'll end your life.

The other slavecatcher near John sucker-punches him as he looks at the man holding his collar. Just as Jarm makes a move to help his friend, he is CLOCKED from behind with the walking stick.

Jarm hits the dirt hard, blood running from his ear. His lights go out briefly as the sound of the scuffle goes in and out. He opens his eyes and through the daze sees that John is delivering a merciless pounding to one of his attackers, who is screaming for mercy; the second one trying to pull John away. Jarm's attacker steps toward John, making it three on one.

Coming to life, Jarm lunges from behind toward the man who clubbed him. As he does, the man drops his stick, turns, catches his foot on a rock and loses his balance. Jarm's full weight and force drive him hard into the ground, head snapping back as Jarm lands on his attacker's chest with a CRACK, rendering the man unconscious. Jarm gets right into the face of the blacked-out thug.

JARM

You will lay still for a while, I guess.

Jarm turns to see John chasing his attackers. He joins in the pursuit, running several dozen yards until the slavecatchers turn into the woods, limping and coughing. John stops sharply, giving up the chase.

Veins bulging, amped up with adrenaline, he lets out a deafening, guttural, primal scream directed toward his assailants. Panting, he turns toward Jarm, just steps behind him, also breathless, blood covering his face and hands. John is alarmed.

JOHN

Jarm Logue.

JARM
John Farney.

JOHN
You okay?

Jarm leans over to catch his breath, then looks up and smiles.

JARM
Nevah bettah.

MONTAGE - JARM/JOHN ESCAPE ROUTE - WINTER, 1835

EXT - OHIO RIVER - DAY

The fugitives, on horseback, attempt to cross the frozen Ohio River. Ice gives way and the riders panic as their horses begin to sink. Lower and lower the horses go, only their heads and riders above the surface. Their strong steeds get them to the other side. Jarm and John laugh on the Indiana-side riverbanks as they dump freezing water from their boots.

EXT - INDIANA HAYFIELD - DAY

Frost covers a field splayed with early morning light. The horses eat at a CORN STACK next to which is a HAYSTACK. John rolls out from under the haystack. Jarm appears from the other side, stretching, shivering and rubbing his eyes. Both of their faces are badly bruised from a fight.

EXT - CORYDON, INDIANA - DAY

Jarm splits wood for a freeman BLACK FARMER while John reviews their map. The farmer shakes his head and draws out a route that extends their journey into Canada.

EXT - INDIANA BACK ROAD - NIGHT

There's a mighty snowstorm. The pair shiver against the cold as their horses forge ahead. They see in the distance a DUTCH GROGGERY.

INT - DUTCH GROGGERY, INDIANA - NIGHT

Jarm and John warm themselves next to a potbelly stove, their clothing hanging to dry. The proprietor tosses blankets at their feet. They extinguish their candle and sleep on the floor.

INT - SEYMOUR, INDIANA BARN - NIGHT

Jarm and John toasting their hosts at a raucous, all-black BARN PARTY. There's music; the young men dance with the ladies; heavy flirting, stolen kisses. John makes love to a pretty black FARM GIRL (18) in the hay loft.

EXT - WINTER WOODS - DAY

The travelers and their horses are stopped in the middle of nowhere. The mood is grim as they are lost, snowblind in a heavy storm. Their countenances brighten when they discover a road. Two free, friendly BLACK TRAVELERS (20s) on horses encounter them. By pointing at the map, the fugitives learn they are way off course and have been traveling in circles.

EXT/INT - RURAL INDIANA - DAY

A WHITE FARMER sees Jarm and John from a distance and whistles them over. As Jarm dismounts near the man's front porch, he COLLAPSES in a heap, famished and exhausted. Jarm "comes to" next to a kitchen stove. In his delirium, he opens his eyes and sees his mother cooking at the stove. She says something, but when Jarm blinks the woman is no longer Cherry, but is in fact the FARMER'S WIFE.

EXT - MIAMI INDIAN RESERVE, INDIANA - NIGHT

An old Native American woman (70s) wraps an Indian blanket around John, as he and Jarm eat meat with their bare hands by a campfire, members of the tribe looking on.

EXT - QUAKER FARM, LOGANSPORT, INDIANA - DAY

Jarm tearfully kisses goodbye to Rock; turns away from him and collects cash, new boots and a broken-down horse from a Quaker.

END MONTAGE

EXT - DETROIT RIVER - DAY

It is a clear, cold early winter morning. Jarm is leading his old horse a few final steps on the ice-covered Detroit River, crossing into Canada. John comes up the rear, but he is without his horse. Jarm turns to him as he steps onto shore. John stops; remains on the ice.

JOHN

You go. I'll find you. I cain't let dem mens keep my horse an' saddle on account we was short a coin. Tain't right.

JARM

But we here.

JOHN

Dere was too many to fight dis mornin' but I knows where dey took de horse so I'm goin' back.

JARM

Den I'll go back with you.

JOHN

You'll do no such thing. We found North Star Country - go. I will join you subsequently.

JARM

Subsequently? Ha! You talkin' like a regulah white man now, John Farney! Very well den. Subsequently.

They shake on it. Meet each other's gaze. An expression crosses Jarm's face, as if he knows they may be parting for good. He pulls him in and they embrace.

JARM

Make haste for your property.

JOHN

Will do, Jarm Logue.

A beat.

JARM

Loguen.

John squints, confused.

JARM

It shall be Loguen henceforth.
Jermain Wesley Loguen. My free
name.

John smiles and nods.

JOHN

Oh, you fancy now? Two names ain't
nuff fo' you eh? Very well. See you
on de udder side - Jermain. Wesley.
Loguen.

John waves and turns to leave. JERMAIN watches his friend
cross the frozen river, tears gathering in his eyes.

INT - HAMILTON HOTEL - DAY (1850)

Impeccably dressed and groomed, Reverend Jermain Wesley
Loguen composes a letter on HAMILTON HOTEL stationery. The
ENVELOPE next to his note paper is addressed to FREDERICK
DOUGLASS of Rochester, NY.

INTERCUT Jermain's letter writing and voiceover with MOS
scenes.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

Dear Brother Douglass. As my
lecture tour has brought me to
Hamilton, you will not think it
strange that I speak of my case in
contrast with the now state of
things in Canada.

EXT - HAMILTON HOTEL - DAY

Leaving the hotel, Jermain walks through the streets of
Hamilton. He is a celebrity here and he greets everyone with
smiles and grace. A group of YOUNG BLACK CHILDREN rush to his
sides, clinging to him as he tries walking across the street.

JERMAIN

Many years ago I left my chains in
Tennessee and stood on this soil, a
winter tempest swirling around me.
I was penniless, ragged, lonely,
homeless, helpless, hungry and
forlorn ... A pitiable wanderer
without a friend or shelter or
place to lay my head.

EXT - DOWNTOWN HAMILTON - DAY

Jermain walks through the central business district of Hamilton - all of the merchants, workers, men, women and children free Blacks. A shopkeeper shows Jermain an ICE CREAM FREEZER. Jermain reaches for cash to pay him but he is rebuffed. Jermain leaves the store with the machine tucked under his arm.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

The feeling rushed upon me: Was it for this that I left sweet skies and a mother's love? On visiting this place now, I contrast the present to the past. No Underground Railroad took me to Ontario. I could only look to God, and I prayed - "Pity, O, my Father - help or I perish!"

EXT - RURAL CANADIAN FARMHOUSE - DAY

Jermain embraces an elderly white couple on their porch, reuniting with the family who took him in.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

An earthly father took me to his home and his angel wife, who became to me a mother. My benefactors thought a body stout and lusty as mine could brave the cold, cut rails and split wood, and they were right! They paid me better than I asked and taught me many lessons of religion and life. They took me to the Sabbath School at Hamilton and taught me letters.

EXT - CANADIAN CHURCH - DAY

Jermain commandeers his clean but humble horse and carriage. Arrives at a church. Delivers an impassioned sermon that has the mixed-race congregation in tears.

JERMAIN

All the country around is familiar to me, and you will not wonder why I love to come here. I love it because it was my first resting place from slavery and the place where I labored on a farm of my own.

(MORE)

JERMAIN (CONT'D)

Everything after this you are well acquainted with: Laying up my wages at the Rochester House... studying at the Institute in Whitesboro...starting a family with dear Caroline...and joining my brothers and sisters in The Cause.

EXT - HAMILTON ROAD - LATER

Jermain rides out of town, the Hamilton, Ontario WELCOME SIGN receding as townsfolk bid him farewell.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

None of these occurrences would have been possible without having fallen into the welcoming arms of Hamilton. I love this place for all it gave me then...and even more now because it has been - and continues to be - a city of refuge for my poor countrymen.

EXT - HAMILTON ROAD - DUSK

Approaching from the other direction toward town is a STAGECOACH loaded with bedraggled FUGITIVE SLAVES arriving from the U.S.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

I will send a more comprehensive report upon my return to Syracuse after the tour is concluded. Until then, I remain very truly yours, Jermain Loguen.

INT - PRINCE JACKSON'S BARBER SHOP (SYRACUSE) - DAY

Jerry Henry (from opening scene) is getting a haircut by the proprietor, PRINCE JACKSON (30), a Black man of tremendous proportions. Jerry has his eyes closed. Prince holds up the NEWSPAPER he's reading, The Syracuse Standard.

PRINCE

You see dis?

JERRY

Prince, I jus wanna close my eyes a minute.

PRINCE

Free black couple an they baby from Philadelphia 'fraid for dey life on accounta da Slave Law. They comin up da canal on a packet boat. Captain makes dem pay twice fo dey ticket.

Jerry opens his eyes a smidge. Shakes his head.

PRINCE

Hoed still or you lose an ear.

JERRY

Prince...Just a wink or two befo' I's go back to de shop.

He closes his eyes again.

Prince picks up the paper, scans it and then resumes the haircut...and the story. He's extremely animated as he relays the tale.

PRINCE

So dis oysterman from New York and a canalman spook em every hour fo three day, three day Jerry! Sayin' de Marshal gonna come aboard and haul 'em off next stop.

Jerry's respite is disturbed but he lets it go. He knows Prince is just gonna keep talking.

PRINCE

De captain, he involved too. Say de Marshal gonna give him good money for holdin' dese niggas for him. The lady, missus Harris, has a conniption and jumps in de canal wid her baby! An' mistah Harris cuts his neck wid a knife! He bleedin' but he don' die!

Jerry raises an eyebrow.

JERRY

He ain't no runnin' slave, dats fo' sho'. Damn fool don't know how to cut hissef proper.

Prince is surprised by this comment but presses on.

PRINCE

So dey fish da missus from da canal
but de baby gone fo' good. And dey
won't get a doc for Mistah Harris.

JERRY

He wanna die anyway what's da use?

PRINCE

So de mens trow mistah Harris on de
towpath and he stumblin' along da
hole way from Utica while da missus
jes cryin de all de time for her
baby and her mistah Harris.

Jerry shakes his head again. Prince grabs his ear.

PRINCE

Jerry! Don't shake yo head at me
while I's shearin' yo wool.

JERRY

Maybe don' tell me tales 'bout
people don't know how ta kill
em'seff.

PRINCE

Anyways a Good Samaritan picks up
Mistah Harris and takes him to Doc
Hoyt who fixes him up. Dey catch up
wit da missus in Rochester and
arrest dem bad men.

JERRY

See? A happy endin', Prince. Happy
endin'.

Prince's demeanor grows dim.

PRINCE

Hope slavesnatchers don' come afta
me.

JERRY

Ain' no bloodhounds chasin' afta a
freeman like you Prince. No deed,
no deal. You in Syracuse, memba?
'Sides, lookit you...you eat more'n
you worth. No slave massah wanna
lose his profits.

PRINCE

An' you, Jerry? You skinny an
skilled. An' a runaway.

(MORE)

PRINCE (CONT'D)

E'body knowsit. Betta keep ya top eye open.

JERRY

Don' worry bout me, Prince. A genuwine runaway always keep sump'in sharp handy.

Picks up Prince's shaving razor and flicks it open.

JERRY

...an he knows not ta cut dis way...

Jerry mimes the "incorrect" cut straight across the windpipe. Prince's eyes go wide.

JERRY

A real runaway knows if you don' wanna go back in chains...
You jus start here...
(near jugular)
say goodbye, an...
(*thwick*)

Jerry swiftly flicks his wrist, Prince's horrified reaction in the mirror.

EXT - ERIE RAILROAD STATION - MORNING

Next to the train, a porter takes away the trunk and the ice cream freezer as Jermain hands his ticket to the conductor before boarding.

INT - ERIE RAILROAD PASSENGER CAR - MORNING

Jermain walks through the crowded car, a copy of THE NORTH STAR folded under his arm. Several passengers recognize him and smile. Two women whisper to one another as the minor celebrity passes. Jermain scans for an open seat; spots one. He walks toward it and notices a WELL-DRESSED BUSINESSMAN seated across from the open spot. He's manspreading, legs kicked out, reading a newspaper. He gives Jermain the stink eye. Jermain ignores the reproach, smiling at the businessman as he moves to sit.

BUSINESSMAN

It's taken.

JERMAIN

Oh. Understood. I should like to sit here until the gentle man or gentle woman returns.

BUSINESSMAN

He will be back soon.

JERMAIN

Then I will enjoy a brief moment of rest until then, thank you.

The man barely moves as Jermain steps over his outstretched legs. Sitting down, he nudges the guy's feet for some space. The train lurches forward. Jermain opens his abolitionist newspaper. There's silence between the men as the train departs, then the surly passenger snaps his paper shut. He won't make eye contact with Jermain but he is clearly addressing him.

BUSINESSMAN

I know who you are.

Jermain looks left and right.

JERMAIN

Are you addressing me?

BUSINESSMAN

Saw your spectacle in Troy ... all that caterwauling and crocodile tears. Making the ladies sob with your tale of woe so they open their purses for you. What kind of a man lives on handouts?

JERMAIN

A man of the cloth, for one.
(extending his hand)
Reverend Jermain Loguen. African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. To whom do I have the pleasure?

The man ignores the outreach.

BUSINESSMAN

My name is immaterial. But my industry is not: Textiles. If you and your kind are successful it would spell the end of my business, and that of most of the men on this train.

Other passengers take note of the discussion – some in agreement, others agitated. Jermain stays patient; he's heard it all before.

BUSINESSMAN

People like you would let useful producers run amok, only to squander their time in idleness and live by stealth upon the labors of others. But you won't prevail, I can assure you that.

The businessman jabs his finger into the front page of his newspaper. Jermain grits his teeth through a bemused smile.

BUSINESSMAN

The winds are blowing from another direction, judging by the reports from Washington. You and your kind are free to move about for the time being, but that time is running short, of that I am certain.

JERMAIN

Did you rehearse that speech just for my benefit? Because if you are running for office, you are in the wrong state, sir.

A YOUNG WOMAN (25) sitting next to them stifles a laugh, turning away and pulling down her bonnet. The businessman gets more agitated; stands to leave.

BUSINESSMAN

Personally, I regard you a spoiled negro, in every sense of the word and all like you. The political sentiment of this day has little sympathy with Radical Abolitionists and social equality with the most uncongenial and dangerous specimens of humanity. God made the negro race to be respected in the tropics. You should seek preference there.

The businessman walks away, harrumphing. Jermain calls out to him, loud enough for everyone in the car to hear.

JERMAIN

Should I save your seat, sir?
(beat)
No? Well, have a prosperous year! Hope you negotiate a bumper crop of that nigger-picked cotton. "Useful producers," indeed!

Jermain snaps open his paper, shaking his head.

EXT - DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE - AFTERNOON (CONTINUOUS)

Jermain rides his carriage over a BRIDGE crossing the ERIE CANAL, then through the city, where he is warmly welcomed (mostly) by the shopkeepers, civic leaders and townspeople.

Riding past the BOOKSELLER shop, ORMSBEE (38) signs for a delivery on the sidewalk, notices Jermain.

ORMSBEE

Welcome home, Brother Loguen! I'm holding your mail - and there's a pile!

JERMAIN

I'll be by tomorrow, Ormsbee.

Continuing, Jermain passes Prince Jackson's barber shop, where Prince is finishing Jerry Henry's trim from the earlier scene. Prince holds up his clippers.

PRINCE JACKSON

About due, Reverend!

JERMAIN

Soon, Prince, soon. Hello Jerry!

Jerry waves back.

MRS. WHEATON thwacks a rug with a broom outside of WHEATON'S HARDWARE.

JERMAIN

Good day, Mrs. Wheaton. Regards to Charles!

She smiles, waves, and wipes her forehead.

MRS. WHEATON

And to Caroline!

A man yells at Jermain as he passes. CALE DAVIS (40), cheeks bulging with tobacco, is a fireplug of a man wearing a blood-stained apron. He stands in front of his BUTCHER SHOP, hollering incoherently and waving his arms. He expels a gigantic stream of brown saliva, then yells some more. Jermain waves at him cheerily.

JERMAIN

Always good to see you Cale!

Jermain smiles as he continues his ride through town.

AMELIA LOGUEN (PRELAP)
 Papa, Papa! Mama, Papa's home!

INT - LOGUEN HOME PARLOR - DAY

Jermain laughs as he struggles to walk, bogged down by his daughter AMELIA (8), clinging to his back, son GARRIT (3) hanging on to his thigh. LETITIA (9) is dragging his traveling trunk through the front door. Jermain's wife CAROLINE (33) a tall, elegant, light-skinned Black woman, her sister SARAH STORUM (24) and a Native American woman STARLIGHT (40) are prepping gigantic pots of stew in the kitchen. They all drop what they are doing, excited to see him. Hugs all around. Starlight takes his overcoat.

JERMAIN
 Thank you, Starlight.
 (hugging Sarah)
 Dear Sarah, how are you?

SARAH
 Welcome home, Jermain.

Jermain embraces Caroline warmly, kisses her, then pulls back to check on her. She's sleep-deprived but obviously delighted to see her husband.

JERMAIN
 My dear. You look weary.

LETITIA
 Papa! Never say a woman looks
 weary.

AMELIA
 Or old!

JERMAIN
 Of course! Let me re-phrase: My
 dear - you look radiant as ever.
 How are you faring?

CAROLINE
 Let's just say there's been a great
 deal more traffic around here than
 usual. I'm so glad you are home,
 Jarm. I don't know how I'd have
 managed without my sister and
 Starlight.

Jermain smiles appreciatively at the ladies.

JERMAIN

Let it not go unnoticed - I may be the most visible face of this station, but you are the hearts and hands that keep it running, and I am grateful. It is all of you who are truly doing the Lord's work.

AMELIA

Me too!

LETITIA

Not more than me!

GARRIT

Not more than me!

CAROLINE

That goes without saying, children.
(to Jermain)
Your offspring have been most useful preparing the beds and baths.

JERMAIN

Then this calls for celebration. Everyone to the kitchen - I must fetch something.

INT - LOGUEN KITCHEN - A MOMENT LATER

The ladies resume the food prep, the children hopping up and down with anticipation. Jermain bursts in with a big smile and proudly places the ice cream freezer on the counter. Sarah and Starlight's faces light up when they see it. Caroline smiles, but is less enthusiastic.

SARAH

An ice cream freezer?! Jermain!

JERMAIN

Well I don't believe the children should like to eat something so sweet and creamy and cold as ice cream!

The kids celebrate, weighing in with a chorus of "Yes! Yes! Yes we should very much!" Jermain notices that Caroline is not thrilled.

JERMAIN

My dear, I thought it should please you. What is the matter?

CAROLINE

It's just that...the girls and I are making preparations for the donation visit.

JERMAIN

That's wonderful! You will have confections to serve the generous ladies.

CAROLINE

Yes, but on the one hand we are asking for charity while on the other we own this...this...appliance of the leisure class.

Jermain chuckles.

JERMAIN

T'was a gift, my dear. From one of the very men we helped to Hamilton three years ago. This is his contribution to the cause.

CAROLINE

Really?

JERMAIN

Really. I will display the receipt with a note of thanks at the donation party so there will be no clucking among the hens.

Letitia and Amelia begin cheering. Gerrit starts clucking like a chicken. Everyone laughs.

EXT - MANSKER'S CREEK - NIGHT

Jarm runs through moonlit woods, lost. Clipping of hooves and approaching VOICES of slavecatchers. Jarm turns to the mountain cave and begins running toward it. Under his breath, calling quietly for his friend:

JARM

John! John! We must go. NOW!

Just as Jarm reaches the cave, suddenly it DISAPPEARS, as if their hiding place was never there. Jarm panics, looks around. Calls out more for his friend in a loud whisper.

JARM

John! Where are you?

Jarm hears their signal: Two quick whistles. He turns to where the sound is coming from. Two more whistles, from a different direction. Then two more. He panics. Through a shadow, sees a flash of John Farney's terrified face, which morphs into that of his sister, his brother, then back to John as his friend is grabbed from behind by slavecatchers. Cherry's mournful voice rings out.

CHERRY (V.O.)
They shan't take you away!

CAROLINE (V.O.)
Jarm! Jarm, wake up. It's Ormsbee.

INT - JERMAIN/CAROLINE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jermain is startled out of his nightmare, panting and sweating. Caroline comforts him.

CAROLINE
Are you okay?

Jermain collects himself, realizes where he is, and with relief springs out of bed toward the window, spreads the curtains to reveal Ormsbee down below on his horse.

Ormsbee looks up to the window.

ORMSBEE
Sorry to whistle you up at this hour, Brother Loguen. I've left a number of darkies under a certain tree who need looking after.

JERMAIN
Thanks, Ormsbee. I shall attend to them. Good evening.

EXT - THORNDEN PARK - NIGHT

Jermain pilots his horse and cart up a steep moonlit hill. He approaches a grand oak tree at the top of the rise, the shadows of several crouched individuals barely visible, huddled together for warmth. Startled by his movements, three of the fugitives run from under the tree into the darkness.

Jermain dismounts, grabs a burlap sack and approaches the tree; sees only the frightened eyes peering out from the shadowed huddle. Jermain speaks calmly, reassuringly, quietly.

JERMAIN

Call back the others. You will stay
at my home tonight. We have food
and blankets.

He reaches into the burlap sack and extends a loaf of bread
toward the shadows. A scarred hand reach for it. Another hand
reaches out to accept a wrapped bundle of smoked meat.
Someone whistles and the three who left the party come
scampering back. A woman is sobbing quietly. A TEENAGE BOY
(14), crouched behind the tree, shows his face.

TEENAGE BOY

Dat's my Mama. She ain't sad. Jus'
tired is all.

JERMAIN

Bring your Mama along, and everyone
else. You will be warm. And safe.

TEENAGE BOY

Thank you massah.

JERMAIN

It's Jermain. But you can call me
Jarm. Would you like to ride next
to me?

The boy smiles broadly.

EXT - EAST GENESSEE STREET - SHORT TIME LATER

Seven of the fugitives huddle in the cart under burlap as
Jermain drives the horses from up front, the boy next to him.
False dawn breaks the darkness as they steer toward the
Loguen home.

TEENAGE BOY

Mistah Jarm, we's shamed of our
condition. We's not fit to enter
your home.

JERMAIN

You will be soon, son.

EXT - LOGUEN RESIDENCE - DAWN

Jermain hauls a pail of hot water off of a fire pit next to
the Logue's backyard BARN and pours it into the large bathing
tubs in which the male fugitives are washing and shaving.

Through the back door, much activity can be seen in the kitchen as Caroline, Sarah, Starlight and the Loguen girls serve meals to the cleaned-up female fugitives.

Outside, little Gerrit is running afoot, putting his hand in the tubs and bossing his father to put more hot water in the ones he deems insufficiently warm for their bath.

JERMAIN

Thank you, Gerrit, that is most helpful. Now do Papa a favor? Take these clothes to the dung heap.

Gerrit tiptoes toward the pile of dirty slave clothes, wincing and holding his nose.

JERMAIN

Don't make a show of it, son. Just take them to the heap, please.

GERRIT

To the dung heap!

Gerrit happily marches off with an armload of clothes.

INT - LOGUE BARN - LATER

Jermain stands next to one of the ADULT MALE FUGITIVES (30), who is naked from the waist up, his back a tributary of scars. He stands before a crude mirror in the barn.

JERMAIN

The breeches are a good fit. Now let's complete the ensemble.

The interior of the barn is lined with SHELVES OF CLOTHES, neatly folded, with signs to mark their size. Jermain climbs a ladder, retrieves a crisp white shirt and hands it to the man.

JERMAIN

You are near my proportions. Have a try. It is not new, but it is clean and pressed.

The man shyly accepts the shirt; the initials JL embroidered on the cuffs. Jermain turns around to retrieve more clothes for those outside. Steps over to the man, who is struggling to fit the buttons, and assists. The man looks down, embarrassed, even though he looks magnificent. Jermain smooths the shoulders and takes a step back.

JERMAIN

Splendid!

The man is uncomfortable.

MALE FUGITIVE

Dis shirt. I cain' have it, suh.

JERMAIN

But it fits you fine! Look at you!

The man's shoulders shake. His head is bent; he is crying. Jermain realizes what's happening. He reverts to his old manner of speaking.

JERMAIN

I gets it. You from Georgia. Yo massah nevah clothe you proppa, diddie?

The fugitive shakes his head. Jermain grabs him by the shoulders.

JERMAIN

Lookit me. Lookit me an' lissen.

The man looks up, a tear falling from his eye, then looks down.

JERMAIN

You ain' no cotton-pickin' nigga no more. You a big man. A strong man. A free man under God's eye. If anudder man wanna give you som'tin' you take it, ya hear? You a'ready earnt what you gettin'. You earnt it today, tomorrow, da next day and for ten lifetime. You earnt it. You hoed yo head high and nevah look back. Unna stan?

A beat.

The man sniffs. Lifts his chin. Looks Jermain straight in the eye. Nods slowly. Message received.

EXT - APPLE ORCHARD - DAY

A massive CROWD has gathered on the hillside of an apple orchard for the Anti-Slavery Convention in Cazenovia. At the bottom of the hill, there is a makeshift SPEAKERS' PLATFORM surrounded by trees.

Leaders of the convention, SAMUEL JOSEPH MAY (53), GERRIT SMITH (53), FREDERICK DOUGLASS (33), their guest THEODOSIA GILBERT (31) and the owner of the orchard, GRACE WILSON (40), are seated, flanking the stage and facing the audience.

In front of the stage, surrounded by 50 FUGITIVE SLAVES, Jermain Loguen takes in the performance of the EDMONSON SISTERS Mary (17) and Emily (15), both Black and wearing bonnets. The girls conclude their song ("I Hear the Voice of Lovejoy on Alton's Bloody Plains") to rapturous applause. Douglass takes the stage, extending the ovation. The girls shyly take their seats next to the other VIPs near the stage.

DOUGLASS

Again for the Edmonson Sisters!
Thank you, Mary. Thank you, Emily.

Douglass takes a NEWSPAPER from his jacket pocket and holds it high in the air.

DOUGLASS

My friends, one of the newspapers
in the south has declared our
gathering ...
(reading)
"A jubilee proclaimed over our
pilfered and plundered property."
This paper mocked us. Said we'd
never be able to assemble more than
a few dozen people for this protest
meeting, and no more than a handful
of women and children.

A smattering of jeers and laughter. The audience is mixed - men, women, children, fugitives.

DOUGLASS

Yet here we are, in this sylvan
setting ... because our numbers
exceed the capacity of the largest
church in Cazenovia by a
hundredfold! A jubilee indeed!

Applause. Douglass motions to Mrs. Wilson.

DOUGLASS

Mrs. Wilson truly lives up to her
Christian name, Grace, for loaning
us her orchard. Thank you, Mrs.
Wilson.

Mrs. Wilson stands and waves, accepting the applause.
Douglass motions to the young performers.

DOUGLASS

Just two years ago these bright, beautiful, talented young ladies were captured by an armed posse on the Chesapeake Bay. They - along with 75 other children, women and men - were prevented from attaining freedom on The Pearl, a schooner that was hired to bring them to freedom in New Jersey.

The presence of these sisters here today would not have been possible without the generosity of one of the greatest champions of the anti-slavery cause...A man whose immeasurable contributions - of money, land and political influence - have broken many a slave's chains. Mr. Gerrit Smith!

Smith stands. There is much swooning in the audience over his commanding presence and notoriety.

DOUGLASS

I am also honored to welcome a dear friend and champion of the cause - a man who has shaped a good number of the declarations we make today through the strokes of his mighty pen. One of our conductors in Syracuse, the Reverend Samuel Joseph May!

May stands and humbly acknowledges the crowd. Douglass looks at Jermain, surrounded by fugitives, and gives him a nod.

DOUGLASS

There is another conductor from the Salt City whom I would like to recognize. Naturally, he has chosen to stand with the runaways who have gathered with us today, for even though he walks in broad daylight, he too is a wanted man in Tennessee. Reverend Jermain Wesley Loguen!

Jermain grabs hold of the wrists of two of the escaped slaves on either side of him and holds their arms high as the audience cheers.

DOUGLASS

That so many of the most powerful anti-slavery voices in the land have convened for this conference ... and that so many citizens of this region have banded together to show their support for our mission ... surely means that this gathering will cause a howl to go up from all the bloodhounds of our land. Let them howl! Let. Them. Howl. But DARE they to try to take a fugitive from our midst. Should they make such an attempt, they will meet a BLOODY RESISTANCE!

The audience responds with an impassioned cheer.

Douglass points to Jermain and the fugitives standing with him.

DOUGLASS

For you, my brothers and sisters, are prisoners of war, in an enemy's country. Of a war, too, that is unrivaled for its injustice, cruelty, meanness. And therefore, by the rules of war, you have the fullest liberty to plunder, burn, and kill, as you may have occasion to do to promote your escape.

Jermain leads applause. The entire crowd joins in.

DOUGLASS

Compromise or no compromise ... constitution or no constitution ... no testimony short of a Bill of Sale from God Almighty can establish the title of the master to his slave...or induce us to lift a FINGER to aid in his return to the house of bondage! WE WILL NOT LIFT ONE FINGER against our brothers and sisters! Not one finger!

Douglass thrusts his index finger into the sky repeatedly, and within moments, the entire throng is doing the same.

CROWD

NOT ONE FINGER! NOT ONE FINGER! NOT ONE FINGER!

Their chant echoes throughout the orchard.

EXT - APPLE ORCHARD - LATER

Speeches continue in the distance as Jermain, Sam May and Gerrit Smith take a break around a picnic table under a shady tree at the edge of the orchard. A servant pours them lemonade.

JERMAIN

Fred really got everyone going,
didn't he?

MAY

He certainly did. Let us hope he
didn't inflame more than necessary.

JERMAIN

More than necessary? How is that
possible?

SMITH

Brother Loguen has a point.

May nods. The three men pause to sip their lemonade and blot sweat from their brows.

JERMAIN

So gentlemen...why have you called me
aside?

SMITH

Two reasons, mainly. First as
regarding your status as a
fugitive. You have become
indispensable to the cause, and we
truly value the travel and time you
have invested in spreading our
message far and wide.

JERMAIN

It would not be possible without
your funding, sir.

SMITH

But this Bill of Abominations will
make your efforts even more risky.

JERMAIN

A risk I accept knowingly...willingly
...eagerly.

MAY

Understood. But you have refused all offers to secure your freedom. Your own congregation even raised the funds to purchase your mother.

JERMAIN

And my so-called master demanded that I be purchased first.

SMITH

But certainly you love your mother?

JERMAIN

As much as I love my children and my wife and my brothers and sisters.

SMITH

You don't love them so much as to agree with the terms? I would be honored to sponsor you.

Jermain pauses. Holds the cold lemonade to his forehead then sets it on the table, pondering the offer.

JERMAIN

I do not begrudge any man who wishes to purchase his own freedom, but if he does, is he truly free? Or has he but mortgaged his soul to an infernal institution?

Smith and May shift in their chairs. They know Jermain has a point, but worry covers their faces.

JERMAIN

Gentlemen, I sincerely appreciate your concerns. But I will not pay twice for my freedom. I have already earned it, under God. I am not in debt to my so-called master. He is in debt to me, for he raised his crops and livestock and his many barrels of whiskey through the benefit of my labor, for which he has paid nothing. He has earned a living by selling my kin, and he will not earn a penny more from me so help me God.

May and Smith look at each other. Nod in agreement.

JERMAIN

If I cannot be free here I cannot be free anywhere. What are we fighting for anyway? Besides, every week I read about another "free negro" being stolen and dragged in chains back to slavery. I won't have it. I won't have any of it. And I won't hide.

SMITH

We respect your decision, and of course, would respect you no less if you decide otherwise.

MAY

Now, as for the other matter we wished to discuss: You are in Syracuse to stay?

JERMAIN

For as long as I'm able.

MAY

More and more passengers are coming through every day. Mrs. May and I cannot do nearly as much as you and your dear Caroline. I feel the rightful claim to stationmaster is owed to you Brother Loguen, but only if it is agreeable. I would not presume you or your wife with any more burden.

Jermain smiles.

JERMAIN

Burden? It would be an honor for us both.

EXT - DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE - DAY

Townsfolk mingle along the main thoroughfare of downtown Syracuse, near the Erie Canal. Ormsbee is reading THE LIBERATOR in a rocking chair on the porch in front of his bookstore. Next door is Cale Davis's butcher shop. Jerry Henry crosses the road, whistling, heading toward the butcher, when Ormsbee looks up.

ORMSBEE

Nice day, Jerry!

JERRY
Beautiful, Mistah Ormsbee.

Ormsbee motions toward next door.

ORMSBEE
Want me to fetch something for you?

JERRY
That is kind of you. But why?

ORMSBEE
You know Cale...doesn't like runaways
much.

JERRY
Well, I like ham hocks VERY much.
And dis is where to get 'em.

Jerry nods at Ormsbee and continues into the butcher. Ormsbee sighs and gets back to his paper. Headline reads "FILLMORE SIGNS FUGITIVE SLAVE BILL" (Sept. 18, 1850).

A moment later, Jerry emerges from the butcher, smiling and holding up a wrapped parcel for Ormsbee to see. He whistles as he crosses the street. The door to the butcher shop bursts open and Cale Davis storms out, his apron soiled, cheek bulging with tobacco.

DAVIS
What's this you telling Jerry I
don't like runaways?

ORMSBEE
I didn't mean to -

DAVIS
Let me be clear, Ormsbee. It ain't
runaways I have issue with. It's
Free Soilers and Abolitionists like
you. Stay out of my business.

Davis unloads his plug of tobacco and storms off, leaving Ormsbee speechless. Having just witnessed the scene, CHARLES WHEATON (41) crosses from his HARDWARE STORE and approaches Ormsbee, loaded with a sheaf of BROADSHEETS. He hands one to Ormsbee.

WHEATON
For the window?

ORMSBEE
Of course. You'd best not give one
to Cale, though.

Wheaton chuckles as if to say "Yeah, no way."

Ormsbee places the notice on his front window. It says "SYRACUSE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE HEARING VS. THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT," with details for the meeting.

INT - SYRACUSE MEETING HOUSE - NIGHT

The Syracuse Meeting Hall is packed with citizens; this is a pickup from Jermain's speech in the opening scene, with city elders presiding at the front of the room. MAYOR HOVEY, Sam May, Jermain Loguen, Ormsbee and others on the dais. Wheaton holds up a petition as he walks the stage.

WHEATON

Mayor Hovey has presented the petition and I urge all of our citizens to sign it. This act has legislated that our proud state be made the hunting ground for the dealers in human flesh. No fugitive will be granted a trial by jury. And while I know Commissioner Sabine's heart is with us, he will receive twice the sum for sending a fugitive back to the cotton fields than he will for sending him on to Canada. None of this is fair, none of this is just.

Cale Davis stands at the back of the room, face red with anger.

DAVIS

Defiance is a crime! A thousand dollar fine? Six months in the hoosegow? Maybe Gerrit Smith can afford that. I can't. Can you, Wheaton?

A FARMER near the front weighs in, addressing Wheaton.

FARMER

That's a lot of shovels and chicken feed, Charles.

As the audience laughs, one of the side doors of the meeting house opens and Caroline Loguen peers in, making eye contact with Jermain. He nods at her, then turns to Sam May and whispers something to him.

Sam May stands.

MAY

I do not believe the Act shall be enforced here, regardless of what is said in Washington. We must trample this infamous law underfoot, be the consequences what they may. You are as much under obligation not to obey it, as you are not to lie, steal, or commit murder. But I believe brother Loguen can speak to this more clearly than can I, for he has literally been a man of sorrows on this matter.

Jermain rises as if he were about to speak from the stage, but then steps into the audience, getting up-close and personal with those gathered in the hall.

JERMAIN

Neighbors. Friends. I will be brief, as most of you have heard my story many times. Vote this hated monster quietly to death, or its fangs will drive deep into the bosoms of your children. It is the law of divine retribution. You cannot allow that beast to tear out our eyes and preserve your own intact. I tell you the evil is past endurance—the Justice of God cannot endure it. Heaven's gathering vengeance waits your decision to-day. My poor oppressed countrymen are charged with it to the brim.

Jermain sends out two quick whistles. The side door opens, and Caroline enters, ushering in four MALE FUGITIVES and one FEMALE FUGITIVE. As they enter, Jermain takes the handoff from his wife and leads the runaways up the steps of the stage. They face forward, heads bowed, with Jermain taking his place among them. The room goes completely silent.

Sam May closes the sale:

MAY

Men, matrons, and maidens of Syracuse! You see these victims of tyranny before you. All but one arrived here today, and for them this is the first meeting of freemen they have ever witnessed. Shall these fugitives be taken from Syracuse? I call on you to answer!

CROWD

NAY!

The booming response echoes through the hall. There is a pause as the fugitives look to one another. Jermain reassures them with his eyes. The mayor stands.

MAYOR HOVEY

It is settled then: The colored man must be protected and secure among us. By agreement of the Vigilance Committee and near unanimous consent of those gathered here tonight, I declare Syracuse an open city for fugitive slaves.

A huge cheer erupts.

EXT - ERIE CANAL SYRACUSE - DAY (MAY, 1851)

A CANAL BOAT loaded with passengers and cargo eases up to the weigh lock station in downtown Syracuse. Jermain disembarks with several passengers. A LIVERY DRIVER awaits with a horse and carriage; Jermain waves to him as a porter hands off his traveling trunk. The driver loads the cart and they leave the canal station.

As the horse and carriage pass in front of the FEDERAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, the door opens, and out steps JOSEPH SABINE (34). Jermain sees him and smiles.

JERMAIN

Commissioner!

SABINE

Ah, Reverend Loguen - a moment if I may?

Jermain motions the driver to stop, staying in his carriage. Sabine steps off the sidewalk and moves toward him.

SABINE

Successful run, I trust?

JERMAIN

Better than that, praise God. How are things here?

SABINE

Quiet as usual. For now.

Jermain lifts his chin, wanting more details.

SABINE

Daniel Webster's coming through by rail next week. Stumping for the Fugitive Slave Act.

JERMAIN

Well, that's ill-advised. Wasn't the President just here?

SABINE

He was, but Webster was delayed in Buffalo. Still wants to make a big show in Syracuse.

JERMAIN

The man thinks he's Jenny Lind.

SABINE

We both know he just wants to shout and shake his fists. Anyway, I'd rather not give him reason to call attention to our city while I'm on Fillmore's payroll, if you know what I mean.

JERMAIN

I do indeed. We will keep things under wraps. I do appreciate our conversation.

Sabine nods and tips his cap as Jermain motions for the driver to continue on.

EXT - DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE - DAY

A huge throng has gathered near City Hall. From his perch on the second-floor balcony of Frazee Hall, DANIEL WEBSTER (68), casts an imposing presence over the crowd. He's also sweating, his demeanor a mix of belligerence and intoxication.

There's a scuffle among some SALT BOILERS and CANALMEN. Jermain enters the scene, late to the party. He breaks up the fracas on his way to meet Sam May, who has been watching from the edge of the crowd. Jermain claps May's shoulder as he approaches his friend.

JERMAIN

Which way is the wind blowing?

MAY

To and fro. People don't know whether to shame him for what he is saying or praise him because he's the Secretary of State -

JERMAIN

- gracing our humble town with his presence.

MAY

Precisely.

Loguen and May turn their attention to the speaker, who is delivering a stemwinder.

WEBSTER

The Abolition Societies have done nothing but mischief; they have riveted the chains of every slave in the Southern States stronger and stronger; they have made their masters jealous and fearful, and postponed far and far the period of their redemption.

Some in the crowd cheer, but they are overpowered by a chorus of boos and catcalls ("Hypocrite!" "This is not Liberty!").

JERMAIN

Sounds like a rehash of his speech on Capitol Hill last year.

MAY

Without a doubt. Three hours of bellowing about slavery and by the end no one could tell if he was for it or against it.

WEBSTER

We hear of persons assembling in this county who set themselves above the Constitution in opposition to the law. And have they not pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, to defeat its execution?

JERMAIN

Well, I guess we know where he stands with us.

WEBSTER

No! No! It is time to put an end to this imposition upon good citizens, good men, and good women. It is treason, treason, TREASON, and nothing else!

MAY

There it is ... he's thrown the gauntlet.

JERMAIN

It's a warning straight from Washington. They want us to pipe down.

MAY

Well it seems he's wrapping up. Ol' Black Dan needs a tippie.

Webster, red-faced and fuming, shakes his fist at the crowd.

WEBSTER

Depend upon it, the law will be executed in its spirit, and to its letter. It will be executed in all the great cities. Here in Syracuse; in the midst of the next Anti-slavery Convention, if the occasion shall arise. Then we shall see what becomes of their lives and their sacred honor!

The crowd reacts with a mix of cheering and booing.

INT - LOGUEN HOME - NIGHT

Jermain is in his study, writing by candlelight, still in his day attire. Caroline stands next to him, in her nightdress. Touches his hand.

CAROLINE

Come, Jermain. That can wait. I miss you in our bed.

Jermain pauses his work, smiles at his wife.

JERMAIN

Just a moment, dear.

Jermain continues writing, but Caroline doesn't leave. She moves closer to him, brushes his cheek with the back of her hand. Jermain puts down his pen, then looks at her with tenderness.

JERMAIN

What is it, sweetheart?

Worry crosses Caroline's brow.

CAROLINE

Mrs. Sabine says something may be afoot.

JERMAIN

Something is always afoot, isn't it? That is our life.

CAROLINE

Yes, but when the Commissioner's wife pulls me aside and makes a point of it...Well, I'm concerned about you.

Jermain considers this for a moment, then pulls her onto his lap, arm around her.

JERMAIN

I say we spend a long holiday in Busti with your family this year. Wouldn't that be nice? Sam and Lucretia can take on passengers for a while.

There's a knock on the door to the study.

CAROLINE

Yes?

Starlight opens the door. She's in her sleepwear, carrying a lantern.

JERMAIN

What is it, Starlight?

STARLIGHT

It's Miss Amelia. She's in the barn. Very sad.

INT - LOGUEN BARN - NIGHT

Jermain, Caroline and Starlight enter the barn hastily. A lantern casts Amelia's shadow on the wall.

She is laying on hay bales, cradling something and weeping. Jermain approaches with his lamp.

JERMAIN
What is it, Meal?

AMELIA
I'm sorry Papa. I should have told you.

The adults gather around her. The girl is stroking the head of an injured BIRD.

AMELIA
I found her under the chestnut tree. I've been feeding her for days but I don't know what to do.

Caroline hugs her daughter. Jermain looks at the bird, then at Starlight. Starlight nods at him.

JERMAIN
You have already done so much for this baby, Amelia. You did a good thing.

Amelia sniffles. Looks up at her father. He wipes her tears.

JERMAIN
I happen to know Miss Starlight is quite a good animal doctor.

AMELIA
I'm afraid she will die.

JERMAIN
Well there is a chance that will happen. But perhaps not.

AMELIA
May I sleep with her?

Jermain looks at Caroline to see how she feels about that.

STARLIGHT
I will stay with her and the bird.

CAROLINE
Just for tonight, dear. Let's get you blankets.

Amelia smiles and strokes the bird. It peeps.

EXT - DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE - DAY

Seasons have changed and downtown Syracuse shows signs of autumn. Townsfolk mill about. ERRAND BOYS post handbills for the Onondaga County Agricultural Fair and the Liberty Party Convention. Charles Wheaton signs for a large delivery as workers unload a cartload of merchandise for his hardware store. Ormsbee sweeps in front of the bookstore; sees Wheaton and calls out to him.

ORMSBEE

Ready for the big week, Charles?

WHEATON

Not sure if we can keep up, but we'll try. You?

ORMSBEE

Wife's setting up a table at the Fair. Honey this year. A hundred jars.

WHEATON

Impressive!

ORMSBEE

I tell the missus she's busy as a bee.

Wheaton smiles and shakes his head.

ORMSBEE

Then I tell her I'd rather have her busy as a bee than mad as a hornet.

WHEATON

Of course you do. Wish her luck from me will you?

Wheaton waves goodbye to Ormsbee and as he does, notices a rough-looking out-of-towner walking toward Commissioner Sabine's office. Sees the ruffian's guns; realizes something is up. Returns to his work, preoccupied by what might be happening.

INT - PRINCE JACKSON'S BARBER SHOP - DAY

Jermain is in the chair; things are wrapping up.

PRINCE

You sure you don' wan' me to take more off the top, Rev?

JERMAIN

No, this is fine, Prince. I like it this way.

PRINCE

You know, it's not like you need to make ya seff taller.

JERMAIN

Take off too much and it'll be that much longer before I'm in this chair again. It's good to see you.

PRINCE

Good to see you too, my friend.

Prince begins to clean up. Jermain observes him in the mirror; decides to broach a subject.

JERMAIN

Prince. A question for you. In confidence.

PRINCE

In confidence? Sounds serious.

JERMAIN

I saw you at the Webster speech last May. Had quite a crew with you.

PRINCE

Me an' the boys wanted to look dat man in de eye.

JERMAIN

And?

PRINCE

An' all a us, we got a bad feelin' hearin' him. Why you ask?

JERMAIN

I was just wondering how your friends might feel about lending some muscle one day.

Prince stops what he's doing; thinks about what Jermain is asking.

PRINCE

I don' s'pose you means like a barn raisin' at the Loguen house.

JERMAIN

No I do not.

Prince removes the apron from Jermain, snaps it.

PRINCE

You say what. You say when. You say where. Just say it. An' you'll have every negro in the city behind you Rev.

INT - COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE - DAY

James Lear, the slavecatcher seen by Wheaton on the street, strolls slowly around Commissioner Sabine's office, looking at the certificates and memorabilia on the walls. He's brandishing pistols on both hips and walks with a swagger. Spits into a cuspidor as Sabine enters the office.

Sabine stops, looks at Lear, looks down at the cuspidor, then gives the slavecatcher a look.

LEAR

Sorry to interrupt your lunch, Commissioner.

SABINE

I've reviewed your claim.

LEAR

I'd like to take him today.

SABINE

And I'd like a fine beaver hat. But it's not going to happen.

LEAR

I've known Jerry Henry for 20 years. I have a letter from his owner in Missouri. He's a red-headed mulatto with carpentry skills who goes by the same name as his old master. Everybody knows he's who I say he is. You included.

SABINE

I still need written proof of identity and a bill of sale. You can't just take him.

LEAR

You can be sure this will only get uglier for you Commissioner.

SABINE

Come back when you have your papers
in order. Next week's a busy time
in the city. Lodging is full up.

LEAR

Well maybe I will cork up my face
and say I'm a friend with a friend -
surely there's a nigger's hole I
can stay in.

SABINE

I won't lie to you Mr. Lear, most
people 'round here'd rather see you
sleeping under a bridge outside of
town. Make a different plan. And
remember, winter comes early in
Syracuse.

LEAR

I won't need until winter, I
promise. You could do this today
and save me from taking him during
the Carnival of Abolitionists. But
have it your way. We shall get our
man anyway...and the publicity as
well.

Lear turns to leave. As he reaches the door he turns back to
Sabine.

LEAR

This is about to get much bigger
than you want.
(points to the door)
Open or closed?

SABINE

Closed.

Lear slams the door behind him.

CARD: OCTOBER 1, 1851

EXT - MULTIPLE LOCATIONS IN SYRACUSE - DAY

Syracuse is abuzz with activity. The Agricultural Fair is
welcoming throngs of patrons as local farmers show their
wares for sale. Livestock expos, arts and crafts, games and
food all around. A young girl jumps for joy when receiving a
blue ribbon for her piglet.

An open door reveals a packed crowd in the First Congregational Church. A sign outside says "New York State Liberty Party Convention".

In midtown, Charles Wheaton kisses his wife and leaves their hardware store.

There's a line of hungry out-of-towners outside of Cale Davis's butcher shop.

Ormsbee dollops a spoonful of honey into a teacup as bookstore customers purchase the last remaining newspapers on the stand. He licks the spoon and smiles as he rings up the sales.

EXT - DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE - DAY

As Wheaton crosses a main downtown thoroughfare, he's nearly knocked over by a crowd chasing the dray onto which Jerry Henry was thrown outside of his workplace. The mob can't keep up with the horses. Someone yells "Stop the kidnapers!" Wheaton catches a glimpse of James Lear in the carriage, then sees Jerry being handled roughly by the Marshals.

INT - FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Gerrit Smith presides over the abolitionist gathering of the Liberty Party. Jermain sits at a table up front with other leaders. Smith is reading off resolutions.

SMITH

We further state that if it were wrong of the men of Pennsylvania to shoot in order to save themselves from slavery, it was infinitely more wrong for the men of the REVOLUTION to shoot in order to save themselves from TAXATION!

CROWD

Here, here!

Wheaton bursts into the room, sweating and panting.

SMITH

Charles!

WHEATON

They've taken someone.

Jermain stands. Everyone in the church turns toward Wheaton.

JERMAIN

Whom?

WHEATON

The red-haired cooper. Jerry.
They've brought a lot of men. On
their way to the Commissioner's
now.

Smith makes eye contact with Jermain. Jermain nods.

SMITH

Let's ring some bells!

INT - BELL TOWER - DAY

The first signal goes up. Two pulls of the church bell. A pause. Then two more. Pause. Two more. There are a few beats as the sound echoes through town. Then, one by one and joining in quickly, church bells throughout the city begin to ring in response - a cacophony.

INT - MAY RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Sam May is eating his lunch at home. Hears the bells tolling and leaves his meal. Grabs his coat and cane, rushes out of the house.

INT - BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Prince Jackson jumps from his chair; hangs "Closed" sign, runs to join crowd.

EXT - TOWNSEND BLOCK - MOMENTS LATER

Jermain and Smith march quickly down the street toward the Commissioner's office, determined looks on their faces. They are trailed by dozens of Liberty Party attendees, talking excitedly among themselves.

JERMAIN

(to Smith)

I don't understand. If they wanted
to make an example, why Jerry? Why
not arrest me?

Smith shakes his head - no idea.

JERMAIN

I sense there is concert in this
villainy.

Prince Jackson comes up the rear, chasing down Jermain.

PRINCE

Reverend!

Jermain steps to the side as the rest continue on.

JERMAIN

They've grabbed Jerry.

Prince closes his eyes and shakes his head.

PRINCE

No, no, no.

JERMAIN

And we're not letting him go.
Prince, we need to ensure he does
not leave Syracuse in the hands of
the Marshals. Now is when we test
the spunk of the white man. I hope
they are up to it.

Prince lets this sink in for a moment. Then winks at Jermain.

PRINCE

See you soon.

EXT - TOWNSEND BLOCK - MOMENTS LATER

Smith and May converge on the steps of the Commissioner's office as a huge crowd spills out from the downtown hotels, taverns and businesses. Everyone heads where the action is. Jermain catches up and has to push through the crowd.

INT - HEARING ROOM - DAY

A battered and manacled Jerry Henry shifts restlessly on a bench, agitated. Gerrit Smith and Sam May flank him. Jermain squeezes through the crowded entrance and takes his seat next to May, who is alarmed to see him.

MAY

Brother Loguen, are you mad? We
already have one fugitive to fight
for.

JERMAIN

They'd have taken me already if it was their plan.

Jerry is groaning and hyperventilating. Smith tries to comfort him, speaking in low tones.

SMITH

Rest assured, I will defend you at any expense and leave no stone unturned to see that you are free.

JERRY

Are you really Gerrit Smith?

Smith nods. This seems to make Jerry feel slightly better, but then he takes stock of the two dozen Marshals and Federal Agents, some seated, others standing, who have come for him. James Lear is closest to the Commissioner's dais. U.S. Marshal HENRY ALLEN (35) leads the prosecution.

Three ad hoc ATTORNEYS for Jerry try to disrupt the hearing.

ATTORNEY 1

Surrender your weapons!

ATTORNEY 2

Take off this man's shackles. He is not accused of a crime.

ALLEN

He is a fugitive. We are enforcing the law. You are obstructing!

ATTORNEY 3

Commissioner, can you please collect the weapons in this room and instruct these Marshals to uncuff this man?

SABINE

I do not have the authority to insist, but Mr. Allen, Mr. Lear, you are free to comply.

They shake their heads.

LEAR

(to Sabine)

Commissioner, these people are harboring a fugitive and they are deliberately trying to derail this proceeding. Why are you allowing three lawyers to speak for him?

JERRY

This is an outrage! Twenty men have
come for me!

More spectators crowd into the overstuffed room. Smith touches Jerry's arm, leans toward him. Jerry distractedly scans the room.

SMITH

Jerry, please let us advocate for
you. I promise we will get you out
of this.

The crowd, mostly Black, gets bigger and noisier in their support for Jerry, people pushing into the hearing. Prince Jackson makes eye contact with Jerry and motions in the direction of the exit with a nod of his head.

JERRY

(to Smith)

I believe if I should throw myself
upon this crowd they would help me
to escape. They look like friends.

SMITH

They are friends. But this is not
the time.

The spectators get more agitated, begin shouting. "He's done nothing!" "This trial is a mockery!" The attorneys add to the commotion with overlapping objections.

LAWYER 1

Is slavery even lawful in Missouri?

LAWYER 2

Why is there not an agent of the
state here to provide veracity of
those papers?

One of the spectators gets into a shoving match with a Marshal. Sabine bangs his gavel as the spectators get louder and louder. He confers with the clerk.

SABINE

It appears this hearing will need a
bigger venue. We hereby adjourn for
30 minutes.

Sabine bangs his gavel again. Just as everyone begins to stand, Jerry leaps headfirst over the table he is sitting at, scattering papers and landing in the crowd.

SMITH

Jerry, NO!

Chaos ensues as Prince Jackson and his crew attempt to shelter Jerry while thrusting him toward the exit. Jerry trips. They pull him up by his shackled wrists.

INT - STAIRWELL OUTSIDE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jerry's pushed from behind and falls down the crowded stairs. Someone inadvertently steps on him as he tries to get up. There's daylight through the door as Jerry -

EXT - TOWNSEND BLOCK - CONTINUOUS

- Stumbles out of the building and begins running through town. People are cheering; Shouts of "STOP HIM!" But also "MAKE WAY!" "GET HIM OUT!" Marshals try to catch up but their progress is hindered by stiff-arms from Prince Jackson's crew. Jerry is terrified, unsure of where to go.

A crowd runs along, encouraging Jerry. Children, too, egging him on. Jerry moves as quickly as he can, limping and bleeding from his injuries.

INT - COMMISSIONERS OFFICE

Smith, May and Loguen forge their way through the assembly, hoping to track Jerry's whereabouts.

MAY

(to Loguen)

I fear he will be caught.

LOGUEN

I fear he will be killed.

SMITH

Busting him out without a plan is madness. We need to get organized. I'll gather the Vigilance Committee. Dr. Hoyt's. 30 minutes.

EXT - STREETS OF SYRACUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jerry is limping but moving quickly as he reaches the Lock Street Bridge, but he's overcome by POLICE, who tackle him brutally, beat him with their clubs. They throw him onto a FLAT WAGON, hog-tying him with leg irons. Two men sit on him. Jerry is now bleeding profusely.

COP
To the police office!

Jerry is hustled back into the center of Syracuse, townspeople following the action from place to place and reacting in horror at the way the fugitive is being manhandled.

Cale Davis, watching from outside his shop, makes eye contact with the brutalized man as he passes on the wagon. Jerry writhes in pain, his clothing bloody and torn to shreds. Davis visibly upset. He hangs his head.

Church bells ring everywhere.

INT - POLICE OFFICE - DAY

Jerry is roughly hauled into a cell and thrown against the wall. A reinforced DOOR slams, locks click.

Jerry lays in the fetal position, heaving and moaning. His cries resonate through the halls.

EXT - POLICE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A huge crowd is gathering in the city square outside of the police office, a mix of townspeople and attendees from the fair and convention. Prince Jackson is in the mix, leading a Black citizen protest.

INT - POLICE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Sam May kneels next to Jerry in his cell.

MAY
We have some time to make a plan,
Jerry. The Commissioner will begin
the hearing at 7:30 in the
courtroom next door. Will you eat
something if I bring it to you?

Jerry shakes his head. Begins to hyperventilate again. He stands, hands and feet bound, shuffles around the cell anxiously.

JERRY
I cannot go back to slavery, I
cannot! Why are these bloodhounds
trying to drag me away? And how is
this just?

He spits blood on the floor.

MAY

Do calm down, Jerry. We will find a way through this and you will be protected. But you mustn't make any rash moves.

JERRY

Rash moves is all I got.
(rattling his chains)
You ain't wearin' these, and no one's got papers on you.

INT - DR. HOYT'S OFFICE - LATER

Two dozen men of the Vigilance Committee crowd around an examination table in a large doctor's office. Smith, Loguen, May lead the planning. Ormsbee is there, as are COBB and MANSFIELD (late 20s) There's excited, loud overlapping chatter.

SMITH

Gentlemen, please!

The room goes quiet.

SMITH

Let's address the situation with forethought.

Wheaton bursts into the room.

SMITH

Charles. What's happening?

WHEATON

The Marshal means business. Now the county sheriff is involved. Wants to call the National Guard, the Citizen Corps and the Washington Artillery. They are gearing for battle.

JERMAIN

Then let's give them one.
(to Wheaton)
Try to hold them off.

Wheaton nods and dashes off.

MAY

This is preposterous and unnecessary.

ORMSBEE

Dangerous as well.

MAY

Sabine will not want to make an example of Jerry.

JERMAIN

How can you be sure? We're not taking that chance.

SMITH

I agree with Brother Loguen.

Smith lays out a STREET MAP of downtown Syracuse. Calmly begins to mark it up. Smith's normally booming voice takes on a quiet but determined tone. Everyone leans in to hear.

SMITH

Now is the time to make a stand. This city is bursting with brothers and sisters in the cause. We know he won't get due process, so we'll make the process our own.

He draws more X's on the map. Eyes each of the men gathered around the table.

SMITH

You've seen the circus the Feds have brought to town. They mean to make an example of us. We must forcibly remove Jerry.

May shakes his head and sighs.

SMITH

We need two fleet horses and two buggies - identical. One near the police office. This will require force. And darkness. Cobb, Mansfield, you will be in the courtroom. At 8 pm you're going to cut the gaslamps.

Cobb and Mansfield look at each other, then nod in agreement.

SMITH

On signal, we will break into the station.

JERMAIN
Let's use Prince.

MAY
That didn't work so well the first time.

JERMAIN
He has manpower and will follow my lead.

Smith points to an X at Wheaton's hardware store.

SMITH
Wheaton's laid out tools for us at his store, everything he's got.
(points to another X)
The first buggy will be a decoy - give them the runaround through town until their horses are tired, then off toward the Cicero plank road. That will give us time to hide Jerry.

MAY
Where? I mean, all of the routes out of town will be blocked. And we can't take him to Brother Loguen's or my safe houses.

ORMSBEE
Give me time to think on that.

SMITH
If that is all, then, let's set the plan in motion. Are we agreed?

Everyone looks at each other, mumbling assent but seeking affirmation before committing to the plan. Jermain clears his throat.

JERMAIN
Gentlemen, for how many years have we been talking, writing, planning, sermonizing about the very subject we are faced with today? Were our proclamations merely empty words and hollow promises?

Jermain walks around the table, making eye contact with each person as he speaks.

JERMAIN

How cowardly would we be if we
should let this moment pass without
meeting it head on?

Nodding all around.

JERMAIN

I am not so naive to think that we
in this room can save every panting
slave from his return to chains.

(beat)

But we can save Jerry. And we can
send a message.

Jermain stops at Sam May, looking him directly in the eye.

JERMAIN

Are you with us, Brother May?

May blinks, smiles, reaches out his hand to Jermain.

MAY

With my heart and soul.

They shake on it. The committee breaks into applause.

EXT - WHEATON'S HARDWARE - DAY

Vigilance Committee members prepare for battle. On the porch
of his store, Wheaton, his wife and several TEENAGE BOYS set
out iron bars, clubs, shovels and hoes. Prince shows up with
three other big men. Examines the weapons. Consults with the
muscle he brought with him then turns to the shop owners.

PRINCE

Charles, Mrs. Wheaton. Me and the
boys were hopin' to procure
somethin'...weightier?

Mrs. Wheaton looks to her husband, then has an idea.

MRS. WHEATON

Come with me.

Prince goes with Mrs. Wheaton. Ormsbee approaches from his
store. Charles Wheaton nods him over.

ORMSBEE

Any progress?

WHEATON

Sheriff Gardner said he is not authorized to order the guard or the militia but he advised them to stand by in the event of a riot. Vandenburg pulled me aside and said if anything they'd come when ordered...but just for show.

Ormsbee smiles at this good news. Hears a whistle, turns to where it's coming from. Cale Davis, in front of his butcher store. Ormsbee points to himself. Me? Davis nods.

ORMSBEE

(to Wheaton)

Oh boy.

Ormsbee meets Davis.

ORMSBEE

Cale?

Davis deposits his plug of tobacco onto the street.

DAVIS

Take him to mine.

ORMSBEE

Beg pardon?

DAVIS

Jerry. To mine. No one will look for him there.

ORMSBEE

But -

DAVIS

I told you I never had a problem with runaways.

Ormsbee smiles.

ORMSBEE

Glad to have you on our side, Cale.

Ormsbee turns to leave. Davis puts a hand up.

DAVIS

I'm not on your side. I'm on Jerry's. Just so we're clear.

EXT - RAYNOR BLOCK BUILDING - SAME NIGHT

Thousands of protesters, men, women and children, have gathered outside the building where Jerry's second hearing is taking place. Dozens of torches. The supply of weapons at Wheaton's store dwindles as townspeople hastily arm themselves. Tar barrels burn across the main square. White men smear blackened cork on their faces. Prince Jackson gives a pep talk to his men.

INT - POLICE OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Two young GUARDS keep watch over Jerry, whose demeanor has settled. His anger simmers though. Jerry notices an insignia worn by one of the guards.

JERRY
Minuteman?

GUARD 1
Sons of the Revolution. My
grandfather.

JERRY
Whoa. So you muss be a Patriot.
Tell me about this thing I've
heard. "All men are created equal".
Help me unna stan' it.

No response. Jerry motions to the other guard.

JERRY
An' you. Ain' I seen you at the
church suppers?
(guard looks at him)
Can you tell me about the Golden
Rule? "Do unto others" or
somethin'?

No response. He looks down.

JERRY
As I 'spected. All you good
soldiers and good Christians jus'
waitin' for someone ta tell ya what
ta fight for.

EXT - RAYNOR BLOCK BUILDING - SAME

Prince Jackson and crew are tying ropes around a long and heavy beam. Sledgehammers crack against pavement stones.

Hands pick up the broken rock. The crowd is noisy, angry. A chant rises:

CROWD
FREE JERRY! FREE JERRY! FREE JERRY!

INT - COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

The chanting from the crowd is heard inside the courtroom as Jerry is ushered through, still in chains, half-naked in torn bloody clothing. He is sat down next to Jermain and May. James Lear, Henry Allen and dozens of Marshals from other cities sit to one side of the room. Jerry's attorneys sit opposite. Cobb and Mansfield eye the valve for the courtroom's gas lamps.

Sabine strikes his gavel.

SABINE
By order of the U.S. Marshal Henry Allen, this hearing is to determine the merits of the claim by Mr. John McReynolds of Hannibal, Missouri, who in 1845 purchased the deed for a slave in absentia from his previous master, William Henry.

Loud banging echoes through the courtroom. The windows are being pelted from outside. Sabine raises his voice to be heard above the din.

SABINE
Agent James Lear has provided documentation from the slave's owner and has demanded that the fugitive be removed from the city and returned to his owner. Agent Lear, will you please state the name of the fugitive in question?

LEAR
(standing, pointing)
That man. William Henry. Known here as Jerry.

A rock sails through the window closest to Jerry, shattering glass. Jerry spies a piece of glass on the bench where he is sitting. He grabs it, conceals it in his hand. More shouting and confusion. Sabine continues.

SABINE

Mr. Lear, please provide to the court the documentation you have secured to prove this fugitive's identity and rightful owner.

As Lear approaches the bench with papers, one of Jerry's lawyers stands.

LAWYER 1

Commissioner, I do not believe Mr. Lear has provided proof of the status of slavery in the jurisdiction where his so-called owner lives.

Jermain notices blood coming from Jerry's hand. Takes out his handkerchief and as he goes to wipe the blood, sees the shard of glass.

LAWYER 1

I motion that we suspend this hearing until such documentation is produced by the agent.

Jermain tries to pry the shard of glass out of Jerry's hand, but his grip is tight. Looks Jerry in the eye. Whispers in his ear.

JERMAIN

I know what you are contemplating. I think it every day since I stole my massa's horse in Tennessee. Jerry - Let go. We will protect you.

(beat)

They shan't take you away.

Jerry trembles, his shoulders shake. He relents, and Jermain takes the glass from his hand.

A rock sails through another window, barely missing Sabine's head. More commotion in the courtroom. Sabine confers with the clerk, then motions for a conference with the attorneys and Marshals. They approach the bench.

The noise outside gets more intense, drowning out the conference with the Commissioner.

Jermain leans in and says something to Jerry, whose eyes go wide. Jerry looks at May, whose nod is barely perceptible. Sabine motions for the agents and attorneys to return to their seats. Lear and the Marshals are upset, shaking their heads.

SABINE

There has been too much disruption in the city for us to continue, and for the safety of our citizens, I hereby order this hearing adjourned until 8:00 o'clock tomorrow morning.

As Sabine raises his gavel, the clocktower bell rings out. It's 8 o'clock. Jermain springs to his feet.

JERMAIN

Put out the lights!

Cobb and Mansfield leap into action as pandemonium breaks out in the courtroom. Allen and Lear run toward Jerry. The lights go out.

LEAR

Secure him!

JERMAIN

Go, go, GO!

By the light of the moon through the courtroom windows, Jerry attempts to flee, but he is overtaken by Allen and Lear. More guards converge on him, halting his progress as Jermain and May look on helplessly. They are shoved out of the courtroom by the crowd. The Marshals whisk Jerry into the holding room.

INT - POLICE OFFICE CELL - CONTINUOUS

Jerry is once again thrown into the cell. Lear and Allen keep watch, along with the two guards from earlier.

INT - POLICE OFFICE HALLWAY

Jermain and several RESCUERS pound on the walls of the office with heavy sledges and crowbars.

JERMAIN

We must work quickly! Come on, men!

EXT - RAYNOR BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Uniformed militia and government reinforcements move toward the Police Office, pushing angry citizens aside. A CANNON is fired - a warning shot - some of the crowd screams and scatters. May, Smith and Wheaton catch their breath near the canal.

MAY

We need to go back in.

WHEATON

We won't get past the militia -
we're outnumbered.

Smith whistles and a GETAWAY DRIVER pulls up with horse and cart.

MAY

Where's the other?

SMITH

Out of sight but standing by.

INT - POLICE OFFICE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The rescuers begin violently pounding on the doors to the police office, tearing through the walls and the wood with axes. They breach the outer door, charge toward the back room where Jerry is being watched. The Marshals and guards are terrified. Pull out their weapons.

Jermain and Ormsbee frantically pound the thick door of the holding room.

ORMSBEE

It won't give!

Out of the shadows, large figures appear. Heavy footfalls as they approach. Four Black men hoisting a gigantic wooden beam.

PRINCE

Make way, gentlemen! Prince Jackson
is comin' through!

The men swing the beam back and forth with the ropes they've secured to it. They ram the thick door. Once. Twice. On the third heave, Prince lets out a mighty yell and the beam SHATTERS the doorframe, creating a wide opening. The rescuers cheer, but then, a flash of metal juts out through the opening:

ORMSBEE

GUN!

A SHOT is fired, then another. Jermain takes a mighty swing of his crowbar and CRUSHES the hand holding the pistol. The shooter screams in pain, drops his pistol and flees. Silence in the hall. The crowd continues to shout outside, chanting for Jerry. Jermain, Prince and Ormsbee look at each other.

ORMSBEE
(whispering)
Anyone hurt?

All rescuers shake their heads.

ORMSBEE
There must be at least three more
armed men in there.

INT - HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The two young guards cower in a corner, on their haunches. Marshal Allen peers out from behind a closet door. Jerry's form is barely visible as he crouches on the opposite side of the room.

ALLEN
(whispering)
Go, Jerry!

Jerry is frozen; scared.

GUARD
What is wrong with you son? Run for
it!

JERRY
Run? But you have chained me, you
fools!

The guards jump up, rush over to Jerry and push him out the door.

EXT - RAYNOR BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

A huge cheer goes up as Jerry is carried out on the shoulders of Jermain and Prince, surrounded by Ormsbee and the other rescuers. The militia stands down, actually helps to part the crowd as the rescuers hustle Jerry down to the street. A blanket is thrown over Jerry; the crowd surrounds him. The horse and cart take off, a blanketed figure hunkering down as it departs. Crowds surround the cart as it rumbles swiftly through the streets of Syracuse. The slavecatcher Lear limps toward it, clutching the hand that was crushed during the escape.

LEAR
Block that dray! Do not let it
leave the square!

Marshals mount horses and begin the chase.

Amid the excitement and confusion, Prince Jackson's crew takes the handoff of Jerry and secrets him around the corner of the building, where the identical escape vehicle awaits. Jerry is loaded in, stunned, injured, but also relieved. Rescuers cover him with a blanket and we hear the CRACK of a whip, spurring the horse. We see the driver. It's Cale Davis. They speed off into the night down an empty street.

INT - LOGUEN HOME - DAY

Caroline clears plates from breakfast. Jermain sips his coffee, reading the newspaper. Letitia, dressed for school, kisses Jermain on the cheek.

LETITIA

Bye Papa.

JERMAIN

Have a good day at school Tish.

Letitia starts to leave.

CAROLINE

(clearing throat)

Are we forgetting something?

LETITIA

Bye Mama!

CAROLINE

You know we hug when we go.

Letitia runs to her mother and gives her a hug. Jermain smiles at this. Returns to his paper.

CAROLINE

What's the latest on Jerry?

JERMAIN

Cale smuggled him out yesterday morning on his wholesale run. Latest news is he made it to Cicero. Jerry's got his strength back. Stations know he's coming.

CAROLINE

Speaking of...Ormsbee brought a cable over this morning. We have six incoming tonight.

Jermain smiles and nods. Starlight enters.

JERMAIN

Good morning, Starlight.

STARLIGHT

Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Loguen.
Amelia has something she'd like to
show you.

INT - LOGUEN PARLOR - DAY

Jermain and Caroline lean into each other as they look out the window. Amelia is in the front yard, under the chestnut tree. Cradling something in her hand as she looks up, she smiles at her parents. She places the bird on the ground. It hops around. Flaps its wings tentatively. Hops some more. Flies away.

CARD: NINE YEARS LATER

INT - ORMSBEE'S BOOKSTORE - DAY

The bell to the store RINGS as Jermain enters. His hair is flecked with grey, as is that of Ormsbee, who is standing near the register stirring honey into his teacup. Licks the spoon.

JERMAIN

Afternoon, Ormsbee. Anything of
note?

ORMSBEE

I'd say. Was going to bring it over
to you directly.

Hands Jermain a letter. Then a letter opener.

ORMSBEE

Posted from Tennessee.

Jermain looks at Ormsbee, then at the letter. Opens it. As he scans the contents, he begins to grind his teeth. He sighs.

ORMSBEE

Would you like a seat?

JERMAIN

I would. And some writing paper, if
you don't mind. Is it too late to
get something in the next
Liberator?

ORMSBEE

How quickly can you capture your thoughts?

INT - MULTIPLE SETTINGS IN SYRACUSE - DAY

Prince Jackson opens The Liberator newspaper. Sarah Logue's letter and Jermain's response have been printed. Prince raises his eyebrows as he reads.

SARAH LOGUE (V.O.)

To Jarm - I now take my pen to write you a few lines, to let you know how well we all are. I am a cripple, but I am still able to get about. The rest of the family are all well. Cherry is as well as common. I write you these lines to let you know the situation we are in, partly in consequence of your running away and stealing Old Rock, our fine horse.

INT - WHEATON'S HARDWARE

The voice of Sarah Logue transitions to that of Mrs. Wheaton, who reads to Charles, continuing the letter.

MRS. WHEATON

"Though we got him back, he was never worth much after you took him; and as I now stand in need of some funds, I have determined to sell you; and I have had an offer for you, but did not see fit to take it.

EXT - CALE DAVIS'S BUTCHER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Cale reads out loud to Ormsbee, a big plug of tobacco in his mouth. Continues the letter.

CALE

"If you will send me one thousand dollars and pay for the old horse, I will give up all claim I have to you."

(looks up, spits tobacco)

WHAT?!?!

ORMSBEE

Continue.

Cale begins to read again and Sarah Loguen's V.O. returns. We see overlapping reactions from the townspeople of Syracuse as they read the letter (MOS).

SARAH LOGUE (V.O.)

In consequence of your running away, we had to sell Abe and Ann and twelve acres of land; and I want you to send me the money that I may be able to redeem the land. If you do not comply, I will sell you to someone else, and you may rest assured that the time is not far distant when things will be changed with you. You had better comply with my request.

INT - ORMSBEE'S BOOKSTORE - DAY

Jermain is composing his reply to Sarah Logue. His pen scratches along the paper as he hurriedly jots down his thoughts.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

"Mrs. Sarah Logue: Thank you for your letter. It is a long time since I heard from my poor old mother, and I am glad to know she is yet alive, and, as you say, 'as well as common.' What that means I don't know. I wish you had said more about her. You sold my brother and sister, Abe and Ann, and 12 acres of land, you say, because I ran away. Now you have the unutterable meanness to ask me to return and be your miserable chattel, or in lieu thereof send you \$1000 to enable you to redeem the LAND, but not to redeem my poor BROTHER AND SISTER!"

As Jermain continues his letter in V.O., we cut back to previous scenes of him and Caroline assisting fugitive slaves, of Jermain on the speaking circuit, visiting passengers in Hamilton, Ontario.

JERMAIN (V.O.)

"I am indignant beyond the power of words to express, that you should be so sunken and cruel as to tear the hearts I love so much all in pieces. You WRETCHED WOMAN! Be it known to you that I value my freedom more than your whole body; more, indeed, than my own life; more than all the lives of all the slaveholders and tyrants under heaven. You say I am a thief because I took Old Rock along with me. Have you got to learn that I had a better right to the horse than MANNASSEH LOGUE had to me?"

JERMAIN (V.O.)

"Is it a greater sin for me to steal his horse, than it was for him to rob my mother's cradle and steal me? And now you threaten to enslave me again. Did you think you could terrify me? Your proposition is an outrage and an insult. I will not budge one hair's breadth."

CARD: 1865

EXT - TENNESSEE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Jermain admires the beauty of the fields as a STAGECOACH drives him through his old stomping grounds. He glances at a notice that was published, announcing his speaking tour in Tennessee. Folds it and puts it in his jacket.

INT - TENNESSEE CHURCH - DAY

Jermain closes his address to a rapt audience. He holds up the letter, continuing his response to his "master".

JERMAIN

And then I closed my letter to Mrs. Logue thusly:

(reading)

"I stand among a free people, who, I thank God, sympathize with my rights, and the rights of mankind.

(MORE)

JERMAIN (CONT'D)

And if your emissaries come here to re-enslave me, and escape the unshrinking vigor of my own right arm, I trust my strong and brave friends, in this City and State, will be my RESCUERS and AVENGERS!"

Jermain looks down. End of speech. A beat. Then: A huge ovation. Jermain looks up - the entire audience in the church applauding at length. Jermain looks over to the one person in the room not standing. She's clapping, though, and smiling. Tears flow down her old cheeks. She is frail but she radiates pride.

Jarm steps down from the pulpit and kneels at the old woman's side, embracing his mother.

EXT - DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE - DAY

Present day. The Jerry Rescue Monument in Clinton Square, depicting Jerry's escape, Sam May on one side, Jermain on the other.

CARD:

As superintendents of the Underground Railroad in Syracuse, the Loguens helped more than 1500 runaways make their way to freedom, openly defying slavecatchers by widely publishing their address.

For many years, Jermain had notices published in Detroit seeking to reconnect with his friend John Farney. He never saw him again.

After a months-long stay in Canada after the Jerry Rescue, and despite living under constant threat of arrest or a return to slavery, Loguen remained in Syracuse for the rest of his life.

FADE TO BLACK