

PROMISES TO KEEP

(BLOOD KNOT)

pilot

written
by

ADAM RODMAN

*But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

Robert Frost

PROMISES TO KEEP
(pilot)
(Blood Knot)

FADE IN:

CLOSE SHOT - A CIVIL WAR ERA UNITED STATES FLAG

is unfolded. It FILLS THE FRAME. SUPERIMPOSE the title:
1865, then OUT.

EXT. FORT SUMTER - DAY

Burned timbers and crumbling barricades stand as testament to the fierce battling that occurred here. The Civil War has just ended, and for a few final moments the Confederate flag still flies high.

A UNION GENERAL and a regiment of UNION SOLDIERS stand at attention as the Confederate flag is lowered and the Stars and Stripes is raised in its place.

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN and an assemblage of DIGNITARIES watch. It is a somber and formal occasion. Here and there a tear is shed. A grim nod of satisfaction.

President Lincoln and the others salute as the flag is raised.

EXT. THE RIDDELL PLANTATION - DAY

CJ RIDDELL, a slave since birth, his difficult life etched on the features of his face, fits a horseshoe to a reluctant filly's hoof with practiced ease.

ANOTHER ANGLE - MADISON RIDDELL

rides up to the main house at a furious gallop; he is the owner of the Riddell plantation.

As Riddell gets off his horse he is met by WARREN GARLAND, the plantation's overseer, 300 pounds of muscle and scars.

Garland watches Riddell's face for a reaction. The plantation owner nods: it's true.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

A YOUNG BLACK CHILD runs from the main house through the fields. We cannot hear what the Child is saying, but the SLAVES in the field stop what they are doing and gather around when the Child comes to them.

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE YOUNG BLACK CHILD

The Child's path takes him past CJ who is walking a filly around in a circle, making sure the newly fitted horseshoe is seated properly.

CHILD

The war is over. The war is over.

CJ

Child!

The Child stops.

CJ (CONT'D)

Say again?

YOUNG CHILD

It's true. The war is over.
North won! We're all free!

The young Child continues on, yelling out the news, like a ten-year-old Paul Revere.

We HOLD ON CJ for a long, long moment as the import of what he has just heard sinks in. Overwhelmed, he shoos the horse away, sits.

A flood of emotions play out across CJ's face. He shakes his head, not quite willing to believe what he has just heard, even as he knows it is true.

EXT. THE RIDDELL PLANTATION MAIN HOUSE - DAY

MADISON RIDDELL watches the reaction of his slaves as the Young Child runs from one place to another, telling everyone what has happened. Next to Riddell stands Warren Garland.

GARLAND

You want me put a stop to this?
I'll go down there, knock some sense into those nigger skulls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIDDELL

No. Word's going to get out.
Can't stop that. I need to think
on things.

GARLAND

They take it into their heads...

RIDDELL

Leave it be. For the moment.

EXT. A FIELD - DAY

Wheat stalks, golden in the late afternoon light, undulate
back and forth, moved by a gentle, souging wind.

We HEAR a sound, like the buzzing of a mosquito. And then
ANOTHER. And ANOTHER.

A blue hat appears, and then a NORTHERN SOLDIER, the wearer
of the hat, stands, takes aim, and fires a shot. We HEAR the
whining, mosquito-like buzz as the bullet goes on its way.

More NORTHERN SOLDIERS stand in the wheat, fire shots.
Bullets sting through the air.

CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS fire back. No one involved has any way
to know the war is already ended.

DEAD and WOUNDED -- on both sides -- are scattered about the
field.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

Three brothers, EZEKIEL DWYER, barely 20, JEBEDIAH DWYER,
perhaps 18, and ALOYSIOUS DWYER, even younger than the other
two, all in Confederate uniforms, hide in the wheat, waiting
for a moment to take their next shot.

Ezekiel, the oldest of the three, lies on his back,
terrified. His eyes are shut tight; tears roll down his
cheeks. He shakes uncontrollably.

ALOYSIOUS

Zeke. Zeke! Come on, damnit! We
need help here.

ZING. ZING. ZING. A CRY OF PAIN. The SICKENING THUD of
bullets meeting flesh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ezekiel's teeth chatter. His body trembles. Wracked with fear, he cannot catch his breath.

Seeing that he will get no help from his brother, Aloysious stands, takes aim.

A Northern Soldier's bullet finds its mark: Aloysious' head explodes in a red mist of blood and bone.

Flesh and blood rain down on Ezekiel as Aloysious' lifeless body crumples to the ground. Ezekiel tries to scream, but no words will come. He crab-crawls away from his dead brother, slowly at first, then he gets to his feet, runs.

JEBEDIAH

Ezekiel!

Jebediah turns his attention back to the Northern Soldiers, fires a shot. And then... BLAM! A bullet finds its mark.

Ezekiel SEES his brother fall, mortally wounded by a Union soldier's bullet. It is the last thing he SEES before he disappears into the surrounding woods, running for his life.

EXT. THE SLAVE QUARTERS OF THE RIDDELL PLANTATION - NIGHT

Sparks fly high into the night as a pig is roasted over an open fire. Dancing. MUSIC. Exuberant chaos. MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN -- formerly slaves -- celebrate their newfound freedom.

A NEWSPAPER bearing the news of the end of slavery and the South's loss is passed from hand to hand. Even slaves who cannot read want to touch the paper, to somehow viscerally press the moment into their flesh.

INT. A BARN - NIGHT

CJ works a piece of metal into shape. If we knew him better, we would recognize that he is chewing on a problem, trying to lose himself in work as he struggles to decide on a course of action.

Off to the side, resting on a crate, is a small, intricately carved wooden horse, a child's toy. CJ looks at it from time to time as he hammers the metal.

An older slave, NOAH, his gait stiff from arthritis, limps into the barn, brings CJ some food. SOUNDS of MUSIC and CELEBRATION flood the barn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOAH

My, my, my, oh my. You going to work here all night? Hardly seems right.

CJ

Said I was going to have this done by morning. Going to do it.

NOAH

You know they can't make you do nothin' now. Ain't no more slaves.

CJ

I gave my word. I'm going to be a free man, I want to start it right.

NOAH

You are a free man, CJ.

CJ looks at him.

NOAH (CONT'D)

You said "going to be." You are a free man.

CJ

I've been giving some powerful thought to that. What you think it means? To be a free man?

NOAH

You think too much. You ought to be out there, chasin' a pretty young gal. Havin' a good time. Celebratin'. This is a day no one ever gonna forget. And here you are...

CJ

No dignity in that, running around.

The metal glows red; CJ rains down hammer-blows, slowly making the metal take shape, even as he forges his own will.

CJ (CONT'D)

I want...

(silence; after a moment, he begins again)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ (CONT'D)

What I want...
 (silence; after a
 moment, he begins
 again)
 I want...

Each sentence fills CJ with powerful emotions. Still, CJ cannot say it out loud, lest that would make it real. CJ lapses into silence; the only sound in the barn is hammer striking steel. CJ nods at the carved wooden horse.

CJ (CONT'D)

I made that when the baby was
 comin'. Right before Mr.
 Riddell, the old one, sold Sara
 away.

Noah says nothing. CJ chews some more. Finally:

CJ (CONT'D)

I lie awake nights, wonderin'
 what it would be like, to see
 that child. All my children.

CJ hits the metal even harder, angry at the loss, angry at himself for even daring to hope. And yet, there it is, that tiny glimmer of possibility. And finally, CJ says out loud what is on his mind:

CJ (CONT'D)

I want my family back. Sara. The
 children. Build us a place. You
 think it's too late?

NOAH

I don't know. Been what, maybe
 eight, nine years now?

CJ

Nine years, four months. I ain't
 forgot 'em. Not for a day. Not
 for a second...
 (he thumps his chest)
 Here.

NOAH

Might not even be alive. Sara
 was expectin' when they sold
 her. That can go hard sometimes.

CJ nods that this is so.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ

I need to find out. You know
where they sold her to?

NOAH

You serious about this?

CJ

The one thing about a free
man... Ain't no one can take his
family.

Noah nods that this may be so. He looks around, making sure
they are alone and only when he is certain they are not
being watched:

NOAH

Come find me when you're done
here.

CJ nods that he will. Noah goes on his way and CJ is all
alone, pounding a piece of metal into shape, thinking his
own thoughts, hoping his own hopes -- for the first time as
a free man.

EXT. A CLEARING IN THE WOODS - NIGHT

NORTHERN SOLDIERS sit by a fire, passing around a bottle of
whiskey.

SOLDIER #1

What are you going to do when
you get home?

SOLDIER #2

First thing? I kiss my wife.
Then, I kiss my daughter. My
son. I'm going to kiss the damn
ground. I'm going to plant a big
one on every single thing on my
whole damn farm!

SOLDIER #3

Well, there's gonna be one damn
surprised pig.

LAUGHTER all around.

SOLDIER #1

Maybe not. Might not be the
first time?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

More LAUGHTER. A good-natured tousling of Soldier #2's hair. The laughter stops abruptly. Ezekiel stands in the clearing. He points a shotgun at the Northern Soldiers. Wild-eyed, trembling, spattered with blood and flesh, Ezekiel is in an agitated state where anything could happen.

SOLDIER #1 (CONT'D)

Easy there.

EZEKIEL

Lay down your arms.

SOLDIER #3

I think you got that wrong, boy.
War's done. You lost.

SOLDIER #1

We're just headin' home. You
might want to do the same.

Ezekiel's lips are tight. He's angry, desperate, sure that this is some kind of trick.

SOLDIER #3

Just hold on there.

Soldier #3 holds up his hands to show they're empty, then reaches down to his saddle bag, slowly takes out a newspaper to hold up the headline. Before Ezekiel can see what it says:

A twig SNAPS from behind Ezekiel. He turns, FIRES. NORTHERN SOLDIER #4, returning with firewood, sags to his knees as his shirt colors with blood. He falls forward, dead.

Ezekiel pauses, overwhelmed, but it doesn't last long. The other Northern Soldiers go for their guns. Ezekiel lets loose with a shotgun blast.

Down goes Soldier #1. Dead.

Ezekiel takes his pistol from his holster, BLASTS away. Soldier #3 dies quickly.

Soldier #2 is gravely wounded. He lies on the ground, the only Northern Soldier left alive. Blood bubbles from his mouth.

SOLDIER #2

Please. I just want to see my
family.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ezekiel, in a blood rage, hands trembling, manages to calm himself a little. He holsters his gun.

Ezekiel rummages through the camp, taking supplies, whatever he can find he thinks might be useful. He can HEAR the WHEEZING of Soldier #2.

Ezekiel finds some hard tack, rips into it, gobbling it down with barely a chew. He is starving.

Ezekiel rummages some more, and then, coming back to where Soldier #1 lies dead, Ezekiel stops short.

And now we SEE what he is looking at:

CLOSE SHOT - A NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGE

A full page photograph of the raising of the flag and a headline declaring the war is over.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

Ezekiel looks and looks, hoping that somehow if he looks hard enough what he is seeing won't be true. A stricken expression crosses Ezekiel's face as he realizes what he has done.

INT. THE MAIN DINING ROOM OF THE RIDDELL PLANTATION - NIGHT

Madison Riddell sits at a formally laid out dinner table with his wife ELYRIA RIDDELL, their THREE CHILDREN and Madison's wheelchair-bound father AENEAS RIDDELL.

The O.S. SOUNDS of celebration from the slave quarters flood the house. No word is spoken at the table. Tense silence.

INT. THE RIDDELL PLANTATION STABLES - NIGHT

Noah moves past stall after stall. CJ is at his side.

When Noah arrives at the place where saddles are kept, he looks around to make sure he is not being observed, then pries loose a piece of siding. There is a hollowed out area and from this he extracts a piece of paper: a map. He holds it out to CJ. Noah's hand trembles with emotion; this means a great deal to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOAH

Every day I went out with
master, drive him someplace, I
'membered everything, wrote it
down. I figured maybe one day...

Noah shrugs; one day never came for him. He unfolds the map,
shows CJ where they are, where the surrounding plantations
are located. Thoroughfares are marked, great and small.
Railroads. Bridges. Rivers. Mountain ranges. The borders of
neighboring states. This is the work of many years.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Master never guessed. Didn't
have a clue what was goin'
through my head.

(imitating Southern
upper class speech:)

"Noah, I swear you do nothing
but look around. You keep your
eyes on the road, you hear?"

CJ

Come with me.

Noah shakes his head, smiles sadly.

NOAH

It's too late for me.

CJ

It's not. You're a free man now.
You can do what you want.

NOAH

I'm old. Too old. I can't walk
hardly a mile. Not even that. I
waited too long.

CJ

I'll help you. You're my family,
too. You were my own father, I
couldn't love you more. That's
the truth.

Noah shrugs, shakes his head sadly.

NOAH

I wouldn't make it two feet.
Freedom or no, it's going to be
a hard walk...

CJ looks over his shoulder, anxious lest someone find them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOAH (CONT'D)

Pay attention. I think Sara got sold to a peoples called the Hendersons; it's on the map.

(he points to the plantation)

But you head the other way first, then double back. Don't take no chances.

Noah gives CJ a pouch containing money he has been able to hoard over the course of his lifetime. CJ doesn't want to take it, but Noah pushes it into his arms.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Take it. You gonna need it.

Both men look at each other. Tears well up in their eyes. They embrace fiercely.

CJ

I won't ever forget you.

NOAH

(pointing to his chest)

Here. Won't be a minute I don't think about you. Hope the best. Maybe even pray a little.

CJ

You sure you don't want to go? You sure?

NOAH

I wish... Oh, how I wish...

But Noah can't make time go backwards. He can't make himself young again. The emotion is more than he can bear. The moment is broken by the arrival of the overseer, Garland.

GARLAND

What's going on in here?

NOAH

Nothing, boss. CJ and me, we just makin' sure everything's put away right.

GARLAND

You ain't maybe thinking 'bout takin' somethin' that don't belong to you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOAH

No, sir, boss.

Garland eyes them suspiciously, finally decides it's okay.

GARLAND

Okay then. You finish up here.

Garland goes. A relieved CJ and Noah breathe a sigh of relief. Noah takes CJ's hand.

NOAH

First light tomorrow. You go.
Go!

CJ and Noah look at one another, knowing this may be the last time either sees the other. They embrace fiercely.

NOAH (CONT'D)

Godspeed.

INT. THE RIDDELL SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY (MORNING)

The slave quarters are cramped and dark, little more than a roof and some walls to protect against the elements.

It is early in the morning, barely dawn. Everyone in the slave quarters is asleep.

Madison Riddell walks along row after row of beddings. He CLANGS a hand-bell, shocking people awake.

CJ struggles to consciousness.

RIDDELL

Get up. Get up. Get up. Get up.
Get up. Get up. Get up.

EXT. THE RIDDELL PLANTATION COURTYARD - DAY (MORNING)

The former slaves are gathered in a loose assemblage. Madison Riddell stands on the steps of his family's house. Behind him are his wife and children, as well as Aeneas.

Garland, the plantation overseer, stands off to the side.

RIDDELL

When you were slaves, we clothed
you, fed you, gave you shelter.
That's over now. I will expect
to be paid rent.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIDDELL (CONT'D)

I will expect to be paid for food. Clothes, too. Nothing is free any more.

There is MURMURING amongst the former slaves.

CJ

What if a man don't want to work for you?

RIDDELL

Fine.

(to overseer:)

Mr. Garland. What does our friend here owe me, he wants to go his own way?

The overseer looks through a ledger.

GARLAND

CJ? Clothes: three dollars a year. Food: two dollars a week. Cracked an anvil a while back. Twelve dollars for that.

RIDDELL

When you work that off, then you can go. I'm hoping you'll stay.

CJ says nothing, not from fear, but anger. It rises in him like a volcano. He stuffs it back down. A lifetime of experience has taught him the cost of resistance.

CLOSE SHOT - CJ

looks at the path which leads to the main road, then back to the overseer. One way or the other. This is the turning point in his life. Finally:

CJ

(quiet, barely audible:)

No, sir.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

Slave and white man alike are taken aback by this announcement. There are hushed murmurs of surprise from the black assemblage, quiet murmurs of concern from the plantation steps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIDDELL

What was that?

CJ

I worked hard for you my whole life. But I'm a free man now and I am not going to let you hold me here. No, sir.

CJ starts toward the path which leads to the main road. Riddell nods toward the overseer to stop CJ.

Garland steps in front of the former slave.

GARLAND

CJ, I don't want no trouble with you.

CJ keeps walking. Garland moves to block his way.

GARLAND (CONT'D)

We always got along. Don't make it hard.

CJ walks around Garland, trying to avoid a confrontation. Garland grabs him by the shoulder.

CJ looks at Garland, knows that he is going to have to fight the man or else resign himself to a life on the plantation.

SMASH CUT TO:

CJ and Garland are going at it.

Riddell and the former slaves watch to see what the outcome will be.

At first, CJ is tentative; he has never struck a white man and a lifetime of training has prepared him not to defend himself. Every time Garland knocks him to the ground with a blow, CJ gets up, heads for freedom. But he does not strike back.

From his wheelchair, Aeneas motions to Riddell's wife Elyria, leads her and the children inside the house so that they won't have to witness CJ's beating.

Again and again CJ is knocked down. Again and again he gets up.

The former slaves wince with every blow CJ takes.

Riddell nods his satisfaction with the beating.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Noah silently exhorts CJ to defend himself.

As CJ wipes blood from his mouth:

CJ

You going to have to kill me to
keep me from going out to that
road.

GARLAND

That's the way you want it...

Garland picks out a large wooden cudgel. He is prepared to beat CJ to death in order to make sure no one else resists.

Everyone is silent as they wait to see what will happen.

Garland rushes at CJ, strikes at him with the club. CJ barely manages to avoid the blow.

Garland comes at CJ again, aims for his head -- a killing blow. He just misses and glances the wood off CJ's shoulder.

CJ grimaces in pain. A few more shots like this and he will be done for.

CJ gets up from the ground. He looks at Garland. Both men are breathing hard; neither is ready to give an inch.

GARLAND (CONT'D)

You better say your prayers,
nigger. You about to meet your
maker.

GARLAND

comes at CJ once again.

CJ

watches closely as Garland approaches. When Garland tries to strike CJ, this time, CJ hits back. He punches Garland, square in the face.

VARIOUS ANGLES - THE FORMER SLAVES

There is an audible intake of breath from the former slaves watching. No black man in their lifetime has raised his hand to a white -- not and lived to tell about it.

RIDDELL

is stunned to see CJ strike the overseer. This is not a turn of events he expected.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

Garland nods, takes it in. He's angry now.

GARLAND

Nigger, you never going to touch
a white man again.

Garland pulls a knife from his boot, starts toward CJ.

GARLAND (CONT'D)

We're done here, I'm going to
skin you.

Garland comes closer and closer. He slashes at CJ with the knife blade, intending to do as much damage as possible.

GARLAND (CONT'D)

(to the former slave
spectators)

You let this be a lesson what
happens.

CJ manages to avoid the most vicious of the knife swipes with only minor cuts here and there. Frustrated, Garland bulls his way directly at CJ. It's the moment of truth. Garland tries to thrust the knife blade into CJ's heart.

CJ gets hold of Garland's arm. He twists it as hard as he can, until the pain is so great that Garland drops the knife.

A terrible battle ensues. CJ is strong, stronger than he knows. Little by little, through sheer inexorable will, he grinds down the overseer. Blow after blow is traded between them. But finally, Garland is unable to get up.

CJ staggers to his feet. Everyone, white and black alike, watches. No word is spoken. Stunned silence.

CJ, his gait a little unsteady, starts toward the path away from the plantation.

Behind CJ, Garland reaches for the knife, gets to his feet.

NOAH

CJ!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ turns just as Garland lunges at him. CJ wrestles the giant man in a fierce blood knot of desperation. The two of them fall to the ground, with CJ on top of Garland.

As they strike the earth, the force of the impact drives the knife into the overseer's chest. A look of surprise, and then a frozen blankness -- Garland is dead.

There is a shocked silence from black and white. No one can believe their eyes.

CJ is as stunned as anyone by what has transpired. He breathes hard, barely able to catch his breath. Slowly, he gets to his feet. No one says a word.

Bloodied, battered, CJ makes his way toward the road.

Riddell watches for a moment, furious. He takes a pistol from his waistband, takes careful aim at CJ. As he starts to squeeze the trigger:

NOAH (CONT'D)

NOOOOOOO...

BLAM. Riddell fires a shot just as Noah steps in the way. The old man is struck square in the chest. He falls to the earth, mortally wounded.

The former slaves watch, stunned.

CJ looks back, SEES what has happened. He stops, and enraged, starts back toward Riddell.

NOAH calls out to CJ with his dying breath:

NOAH (CONT'D)

GO! Go! Go.

And Noah is dead. Riddell raises his gun again, takes aim at CJ.

First one former slave steps in the line of fire. Then another. And another. A wall of former slaves, standing between Riddell and CJ.

No word is spoken, but the threat is clear. A wordless standoff between white and black.

CJ SEES what has happened. He stands still, a choice to be made. He takes one last look at the fallen Noah, then turns, heads for freedom, heads away as fast as his legs will take him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Riddell is furious, but taken aback, too. In a matter of minutes, his entire world has changed, never to return to what it was before.

Riddell calls after CJ:

RIDDELL

You're going to pay for this.
You mark my words, CJ. You're
going to pay for this!

EXT. THE PLANTATION - DAY - LATER

Half a dozen of Riddell's MALE RELATIVES prepare their horses, strap down supplies. All the horses have rifles tied to their saddles. All the men carry sidearms.

AENEAS AND RIDDELL

Riddell carries a saddle and a rifle, headed to join his male relatives. Aeneas may be confined to a wheelchair, but he is still a vigorous man. He wheels along, keeping pace with his son.

AENEAS

I promised I'd never tell you
how to run this plantation.
You're the head of the family
now. But all I see coming from
this is someone dead.

RIDDELL

You got that right, papa. I'm
going to catch that nigger. I'm
going to tie him to a tree and
I'm going to cut him apart piece
by piece. And our niggers are
gonna watch while he begs for
death.

AENEAS

And then what?

They come to a small family graveyard, surrounded by a white picket fence.

AENEAS (CONT'D)

(nodding toward the
graveyard:)

Soon enough, that's gonna be my
home. Take a good look.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AENEAS (CONT'D)

It isn't a resting place, it's a monument to folly. Two sons buried before their time. The South in tatters. I can't bear any more...

(he looks up at Riddell)

Damnit, boy! There must be something I can do to stay you from this course.

RIDDELL

I've got to get a move on.

AENEAS

Those people ain't never gonna let you make 'em slaves again. I watched CJ this morning. He would've died before he gave up. Sooner or later, they're all going to figure that out. We can't hold 'em any more. Don't make it a war. All that's gonna happen is a lot of people are going to die.

Riddell looks at his father for a long moment, then bends down and kisses him on the cheek.

RIDDELL

We'll talk more. When I get back. And I'm gonna have CJ. On his own or over the back of a saddle, don't make no nevermind to me.

EXT. THE PLANTATION - DAY

Riddell and his Male Relatives head off at a full gallop. A pack of BAYING HOUNDS lead the way. The galloping horses take us past:

Elyria stands at the foot of the steps. She does not look happy. Aeneas is by her side, in the wheelchair. He pats her arm. Both are scared, not able to comprehend what this new world will hold for them.

EXT. A FIELD - DAY

CJ runs as fast as he can. In the distance, he can HEAR the hounds BAYING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ quickly climbs a massive old tree, runs along a thirty foot low-lying bough, hiding his scent from the dogs. When he reaches its end, he jumps off in a different direction than he was heading before.

ANOTHER ANGLE - ANOTHER PLACE

CJ runs through the last edge of farmland before it gives way to forest. There are bee hives here and the LOUD BUZZING of BEES mixes in with the distant BAYING of HOUNDS. CJ picks up a long branch and knocks over the hives as he runs past. The angry bees swarm and BUZZ.

EXT. A NARROW DIRT PATH - DAY

CJ catches his breath for a moment. He can HEAR the hounds HOWLING in pain; they have come across the bees. CJ smiles briefly, then pushes on.

CLOSE SHOT - A PAIR OF RUNNING FEET

as they bolt from a river and quickly disappear into a forest.

ANOTHER ANGLE - TO INCLUDE THE SHORELINE OF A RIVER

We can see that every fifty yards or so there is a set of footprints leading into the forest.

EXT. A RIVERBANK - DAY

CJ runs from the river's edge, disappears into the forest, then carefully walks backwards, his feet exactly filling the footprints leading into the forest. It is a trick, designed to throw off anyone who might be tracking him. He splashes through the shallow water by the river's edge so that if his pursuers are using tracking dogs there will be no scent to follow. Fifty yards later, he repeats the process.

In the distance, we can HEAR the dogs, farther away than they have been, but still in the area.

CJ

Damnit!

EXT. A FOREST - DAY

CJ pushes his way through the thick underbrush as best he can. He drags a branch behind him to hide his footprints.

CJ runs at full throttle, until he can run no more. He stops for a moment to catch his breath and to consult his map.

EXT. A STREAM - DAY

CJ makes his way up the stream, awkwardly splashing through the water.

CJ falls. Out of breath, he drags himself to the rocky dirt bordering the stream. He looks at his legs. They are covered with leeches. CJ picks them off, and as he does, strips of skin pull away from his legs, leaving behind bloody, ugly red welts and bare patches of skin. It is painful and brutal, but it must be done if he is to go on.

CJ's feet are a bloody mess, ripped to pieces by the rocks and loose pieces of wood in the stream bed.

CJ tears a strip from his shirt, grimaces as he wraps his foot. He tears off another piece of his shirt, wraps the other foot.

Exhausted, CJ manages to get to his feet, unsteadily wobbles as he accustoms himself to the pain. The dogs BAY in the distance, coming closer. CJ cannot give in to his exhaustion if he wants to live.

ANOTHER ANGLE - CJ

half-runs, half-walks, every step painful, every breath difficult. He veers into the forest, disappears into the foliage.

The CAMERA FINDS AND FEATURES a bloody piece of cloth, fallen from his foot.

EXT. THE DWYER HOUSE - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

A small but elegant structure, this place has been hit hard by the war. There are holes from cannon-fire. A third of the house is nothing more than charred lumber.

Unshaven and dirty, his eyes filled with tears, Ezekiel, stands at the end of the dirt pathway that leads to the house, looking at the remains of what was once his home.

INT. THE DWYER HOUSE - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Ezekiel ENTERS the house. It has been ransacked. Furniture smashed. Anything that wasn't nailed down, stolen.

Ezekiel looks around, devastated. Even as he understands what he is seeing, he cannot bring himself to acknowledge it.

EZEKIEL

Mama? Father?

Silence. Ezekiel looks around the house, at what's left of it.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DWYER HOUSE - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

The house is beautifully furnished. Silver candelabras and glass, candle-lit chandeliers provide light. Christmas decorations add to the colorful atmosphere. A huge Christmas tree, surrounded by wonderful looking gifts occupies the living room area.

A beautifully set table, with formal linens, is cleared by the HOUSEHOLD SLAVES.

Ezekiel, young, fresh-faced, arm wrestles with his brother Jebediah while their parents WILLIAM DWYER and ELINOR DWYER watch enjoyably. Aloysious roots for Jebediah.

EZEKIEL

Mama. Jeb won't let go of my hand.

JEBEDIAH

It's Zeke, mama. He won't let me go.

A Household Slave brings out a large *buche de Noel* decorated with holly-and-berry shaped whipped cream, dyed in beautiful shades of Christmas green and red.

JEBEDIAH (CONT'D)

Mama, I'm gonna starve, Zeke don't let go of my hand.

The two brothers smile at each other like grinning idiots, neither one willing to give in.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DWYER HOUSE - NIGHT

We are back in 1865. Ezekiel looks at what remains of his world; he is devastated.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

Ezekiel searches through the house, SEES the destruction that has been wrought. He doesn't bother calling for his parents. Emotionally overwrought, he struggles not to cry.

He stops at an upstairs bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. A BATHROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

FIVE YEAR OLD EZEKIEL is in a tub with ALOYSIOUS and JEBEDIAH. A 20 year old slave woman, ELIZABETH, pours hot water over them.

FIVE YEAR OLD EZEKIEL
It's too hot, Elizabeth. It's
too hot.

ELIZABETH
Hush now, Master Ezekiel.

CUT TO:

INT. A BATHROOM - NIGHT

Broken shards of glass litter the floor where once a mirror stood. All that remains of the soaking tub is slivers of wood and the two metal bands that used to hold it together.

Ezekiel stands in the doorway, lost in the long ago time.

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

One wall is gone, burned away. A down mattress is filthy. It has been sliced up and feathers are scattered about the room, adhering to trash of all sorts. People urinated here, defecated.

Ezekiel stands in the doorway. There are tears in his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MASTER BEDROOM - DAY (MORNING) (FLASHBACK)

Ezekiel's father, William, sips a cup of coffee in bed while he tries to read the paper. Elinor holds ten year old Ezekiel in her arms while she sips her coffee, cuddling her oldest son in an affectionate manner. She kisses the top of his head.

Young Aloysius and Jebediah appear in the doorway, wait expectantly.

ELINOR
Come on, sillies!

The two boys run in, jump on the bed, sinking into the down, luxuriating in the hugs and kisses of their mother.

CUT TO:

EZEKIEL

stands in the doorway, looking at the ruined, desecrated room, devastated.

INT. THE DWYER HOUSE - NIGHT

Ezekiel, his back against the wall, legs splayed out in front of him, drinks from a whiskey bottle, looks out at the empty room. His eyes fill with tears and he wipes them away with the back of his hands.

The moment is broken by SOUNDS coming from the back of the house. Dwyer gets up, unsteadily makes his way toward their source.

INT. THE DWYER HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

CJ searches through the cabinets and pantries, looking for food, even if it's just a scrap, something he can eat. There is nothing.

He slumps against a wall, exhausted and desperate.

BLAM. A chunk of plaster by his head explodes. CJ starts to run. BLAM. The wall to the other side of his head explodes. CJ holds up his hands in surrender.

ANOTHER ANGLE - WIDER

Ezekiel stands in the doorway leading to the main part of the house. His knuckles are white around his revolver. CJ slowly to back away...

EZEKIEL

I killed a lot of people. One more... Won't make no difference to me.

CJ

I was just lookin' for something to eat. I'm tryin' to get to my family.

EZEKIEL

Your family. Your family. Well this is my family house. Where's my family? Huh?

Ezekiel LAUGHS; the sound is strained, angry, somewhere between insanity and despair. CJ doesn't know what to do; he just knows he's in a lot of trouble.

EXT. A SECTION OF WOODS - NIGHT

Riddell, followed by his other Male Relatives carefully walks his horse across a river bed. Riddell is focused, intent; the others just look exhausted.

MALE RELATIVE #1

Maybe we ought to bed down for the night? Start up first thing in the morning, when we got light.

RIDDELL

I ain't letting that nigger get more of a lead on us.

From up ahead comes the excited BAYING of the hounds. Riddell splashes over to them. They are gathered around the strip of shirt that CJ wrapped around his bloody foot. Riddell holds it up for the others to see.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM OF THE RUINED DWYER HOUSE - NIGHT

CJ does his best to stay calm as Ezekiel goes through a haphazard pile of items he has gathered.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EZEKIEL

Thirty men left from our town.
I'm the only one left. You know
why? Because I ran away. Because
I was a coward.

CJ

War's over. No one gonna worry
on what people did.

Ezekiel finds what he is looking for: a photograph of himself and his younger brothers, arms around each others' shoulders. They stand before a train in clean and pressed uniforms, bright and shiny and oh so young, their faces filled with hope and dreams of glory. Ezekiel touches the picture, strokes it gently.

EZEKIEL

You know how to write?

CJ shakes his head.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

Well, I hope you got a good
memory. I want someone to
know... You're gonna be the one.
And then... When I'm done... I
want you to shoot me. Dead.

CJ

I ain't gonna kill no one.

EZEKIEL

Don't you worry; you'll do fine.
You just have to get used to it.
That's how it is in war. You or
the other guy... Which one do
you want it to be? You or me?

Ezekiel tosses a shotgun to CJ; he catches it reflexively.
Ezekiel eyes him angrily.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

You think I'm a coward? There's
a lot of dead men know better.
I've done things...

CJ

I just want to get on to my
family.

Ezekiel is going to some dark place now. He grows more and more menacing in manner and tone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EZEKIEL

You don't think I can do it, do you? You don't think I've got the guts to pull this trigger.

CJ lays the shotgun on the ground carefully.

CJ

I ain't goin' to do you harm. You don't really want to hurt me. No one. Been enough of that, I think. Anything, you need to talk with your people. This just going to make things worse.

EZEKIEL

You're breathing. And that's more than any one of my brothers can say. Pick up that gun!

The look on Ezekiel's face is grim.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)

You better, because I'm going to start shooting. Count of three. One...

CJ

Wait, wait, wait... Damn it! Stop! You kill me, who's gonna tell your story? Hnh? I thought you want people to know what happened. I kill you... Either way, no one knows.

Ezekiel thinks about this for a moment, then sits. No warning. No grace. Just boom, butt on the floor. The gun doesn't leave his hand.

EZEKIEL

thinks about what to say, how to make sense of what he has gone through. His mouth opens, no words come out. Each time he tries to speak, he wells up with emotion. Pain and grief overwhelm him. He SOBS.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

CJ is not sure what to do. The situation is volatile and it could end with CJ dead. Even so, the former slave has great empathy for the pain of the man sitting before him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ

I know what it feels like, not bein' able to stand up for someone you love. Bein' afraid when you ought to do some- thin'... It hurts. It hurts so much sometimes you can't bear it... Might not seem like it now. Pain goes away after a while. Gets more tolerable anyways.

EZEKIEL

Maybe there's some things no one should have to know.

Ezekiel puts the gun to his head, pulls the trigger.

CJ

Noooo!

CLICK. A stunned Ezekiel looks at the pistol. The moment is broken when the front door opens. It's not Riddell and the others. Instead:

ELIZABETH CASTLE, 35 not 20 like when we saw her giving Ezekiel and his brothers a bath, stands in the doorway, her arms loaded with kindling.

ELIZABETH

What's going on here?

Ezekiel peers at Elizabeth, trying to reconcile the woman standing before him with the younger, fresher woman of his memory.

EZEKIEL

Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH

Master Ezekiel?

As she and Ezekiel look at one another, taking in the changes time and hard circumstance have wrought we HEAR the SOUND of DOGS BAYING, coming closer and closer.

CJ HEARS it immediately. He carefully edges to the door, not wanting to upset Ezekiel to the point of shooting him, and then he is out the door, gone. We stay with Elizabeth and Ezekiel.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You look like hell.

EXT. THE WOODS NEAR THE DWYER HOUSE - NIGHT

CJ rushes through the forest at breakneck speed. He can HEAR the SOUNDS of DOGS and human VOICES growing closer.

Riddell and the others hurry after CJ. The dogs lead the way, BAYING LOUDLY at CJ's scent.

CJ, ragged, tired, out of breath and strength, finds himself at the edge of a cliff.

CJ'S POV

Three hundred feet below a river rages.

ANGLE TO FEATURE CJ

CJ looks back over his shoulder. The search party is coming closer and closer. He looks over the edge of the cliff. No hope there, either.

ANGLE TO FEATURE RIDDELL AND THE OTHERS

They emerge from the trees. There is no sign of CJ.

The dogs HOWL at the edge of the cliff.

Riddell and the others look around. They do not see any sign of CJ. After a moment, they start to move on.

Riddell stops, comes back. He goes to the edge of the cliff, peers down into the darkness. No sign of CJ there, either. He goes on with the others.

EXT. THE SIDE OF A CLIFF - NIGHT

CJ hangs from the branch of a small tree which grows out from the side of the cliff; its shrubbery hides him from view.

CJ's breath comes in ragged GASPS. He will only be able to hold on for a few moments longer. He listens as the SOUNDS from Riddell and the others recede into the distance. Satisfied that it is safe, he begins to climb back up the side of the cliff.

CJ grabs hold of a rock, tries it, then pulls himself up a few inches.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The route back to the top of the cliff is painstaking. Sweat pours from CJ's body. His hands and legs tremble with effort. CJ looks up: ten feet more and he is safe.

CJ keeps climbing, inch by painstaking inch.

CJ gets a handhold in a crevice, shakily pulls himself up.

A rock pulls loose from the crevice and CJ starts to plummet to the water below.

CJ manages to grab hold of a tree branch. As he struggles to find some footing, the branch breaks off with a resounding THWACK.

CJ grasps at air; there is nothing to save him this time. He bounces off the side of the cliff, tumbles to the water below.

INT. THE DWYER HOUSE - NIGHT

It is several hours later. Ezekiel is asleep, bundled in his travel clothes, and the burlap sack that he has been carrying his things in. For the first time since we met him, he seems peaceful.

Elizabeth sits on the first landing of the stairwell, knees hugged tightly to her chest. She watches the sleeping Ezekiel, wonders what she will say to him when he wakes.

EXT. THE SKY - DAY

VULTURES circle some unseen fallen prey. One after another they light on the ground below, pull at pieces of flesh. Animal or human we cannot tell.

EXT. A RIVER CROSSING - DAY

A terrible battle was fought here. DEAD SOLDIERS, Union and Confederate alike, litter the beach by the river's edge. There are CIVILIAN BODIES, too. A week or so old, the bodies are bloated and discolored. Vultures pull at their flesh. Wind blows through the trees, or is it moaning?

A BROTHER AND SISTER, 9 and 10 respectively, make their way through the bodies, taking items of interest -- scavengers have already been through the battlefield, stripped anything of obvious value.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The children come across CJ's body by the edge of the river. Unlike the other corpses, CJ's body is neither bloated nor discolored.

LITTLE GIRL

You think he's dead?

LITTLE BOY

Naw... Maybe.

The little girl gets a stick, pokes at CJ. He does not move.

LITTLE GIRL

I told you he was dead.

The little girl goes through CJ's pockets. Her younger brother joins in. The little girl finds the carved horse CJ made for his unborn child, and eyes it with pleasure. As she takes it from CJ's pocket, his eyes flicker open. He grabs at her. She SCREAMS, jumps back a few feet to safety.

CJ's head falls back to the ground. Once again, he is unconscious, the wooden figure clutched in his fingers. The little girl cautiously returns to CJ's limp figure. One by one, she pries CJ's fingers loose from the carved wooden horse.

INT. THE DWYER HOUSE - DAY

Elizabeth sits on the landing, standing watch over Ezekiel as she has since the he was born.

Ezekiel wakes. As he reorients himself:

ELIZABETH

There's some things you need to know.

CLOSE SHOT - A DEAD AND BLOATED BODY

It is Elinor Dwyer. Her body is naked mostly. Her clothes have been ripped away; they cling to her in shreds. Her skin is discolored. Her flesh is riddled with maggots.

ANOTHER ANGLE - WIDER

Ezekiel and Elizabeth look down at the body. It lies at the edge of the forest near the river bed where the fighting occurred. She was trying to get away and was raped.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Elizabeth has her own sense of loss, but she is already aware of what has transpired. She watches Ezekiel, wanting to help him even as she knows there is nothing she can do for him.

EZEKIEL

Where's daddy?

EXT. A RIVER CROSSING - DAY

CJ opens his eyes, slowly, surprised to find that he is still alive. It takes a moment before he can focus. He SEES a large shape squatting nearby. At first he thinks it's a bear or some other wild animal. Gradually his eyes focus.

Ezekiel squats near a bloated body. Elizabeth is behind him. Ezekiel SEES CJ looking at him. We recognize the body from the Christmas dinner: it is Ezekiel's father, WILLIAM.

EZEKIEL

There I was worrying what I was gonna say to my daddy. Don't make no nevermind now, do it?

EXT. THE EDGE OF A POND - DAY

The Little Boy and Little Girl we saw robbing the dead people by the river's edge are playing with the toy horse they took from CJ. A shadow comes over them. They look up, SEE Riddell and the others on their horses.

RIDDELL

Where'd you get that toy?

EXT. A RIVER CROSSING - DAY

Two crude, freshly dug graves. Ezekiel arranges some rocks to keep away the animals. He, and CJ, and Elizabeth, each of them dirty, bone weary, look down at the graves.

All around are bloated and disfigured bodies. CJ picks up a handful of dirt.

CJ

(to the graves'
occupants)

Travel safe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ lets the dirt run from his hand onto the freshly dug graves. CJ, Elizabeth and Ezekiel stand silently. Each is filled with feeling.

CJ squats by the river's edge, cleans himself up as best he can, wincing here and there as he finds a sore spot.

CJ checks his pockets, finds that he still has the map. He lays it out, looks at it, trying to figure out where to go next.

Elizabeth comes over.

CJ (CONT'D)
I got to find my wife. My
family.
(pointing)
Sara. That where she is.

Elizabeth kneels down next to CJ. She studies the map for a moment, then touches a location.

ELIZABETH
We're here.

CJ nods. Ezekiel comes over.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
You going to get to your family,
best you head this way.

She traces out a route.

EZEKIEL
I got no family. Not any more.

Ezekiel falls silent, lost in his own dark thoughts. Finally:

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
Nothing.

Ezekiel heads off without a word.

ELIZABETH
Where you going?

EXT. A DIRT ROAD - DAY

CJ makes his way along the road, following after Elizabeth and Ezekiel. They are thirty yards ahead, maybe more. CJ is in bad shape.

EXT. A CROSSROADS - DAY

Ezekiel heads down one of the roads, does not look back to see if Elizabeth and CJ are following.

Elizabeth watches the departing Ezekiel, makes the decision that she has enough time to help CJ.

ELIZABETH

Let me see your map again.

CJ unfolds the map, shows it to her.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Those men still looking for you?

CJ says nothing and her question becomes a statement of fact.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Go through here.

She points at some woods.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Might be hard going, but keep you out of sight. Least for a while.

(after a moment)

You must love this woman some?

CJ nods. Elizabeth considers. There's more she'd like to ask, but she has to catch up with Ezekiel.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Good luck.

EXT. A PATH THROUGH THE WOODS - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

CJ silently makes his way along a path, shakes violently as he goes on his way. He flaps his arms, trying to keep warm.

EXT. A PATH THROUGH A WOODED AREA - NIGHT

CJ falls to the ground. He breathes heavily, too exhausted to get up. From somewhere O.S., A HOWL. Then ANOTHER HOWL. Do the dogs have his scent again? CJ listens carefully; it's wolves HOWLING, not hounds.

CJ shudders involuntarily. He wipes blood from a cut on his face, forces himself to get up, continue on.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The sun is barely over the horizon; it's early morning.

CJ stumbles out of the woods, trudges onto the dirt road; each step is an act of will. Exhausted. Hungry. Thirsty. He does not look like he is going to be able to keep going much longer.

CJ pauses for a moment to gather his strength. He takes out his map, checking the surrounding area against what is drawn on the page. He looks at the map, then at his surroundings, then back at the map again. At first he thinks it must be a mistake.

INSERT - CJ'S MAP

CJ's hands tremble with excitement as he traces out the route he has followed. There is a fork in the road, and then... the Henderson plantation and Sara.

CJ

looks up from the map. The same fork in the road is right before him. A few hundred yards in the distance, just around a sharp bend in the road, is the plantation. CJ LAUGHS softly.

CJ

This is where my wife live. This
is where my wife live!

CJ allows himself a moment to feel the hope of that.

CJ heads off toward the plantation, to his wife, to the possibility that he really will be all right. He limps along as fast as he can go.

EXT. THE HENDERSON PLANTATION - DAY

BLACK MEN AND WOMEN, formerly slaves, dig holes in the ground as WHITE MEN supervise. Jewelry is being retrieved. Silverware. Now that the war is ended, it is safe to bring them back out into the open.

BLACK CHILDREN gambol through the fields, playing tag, laughing. An occasional stern word or harsh glare from an elder slows them down, but only for a moment.

ANOTHER ANGLE - CJ

Using his last reserves of strength, CJ half-runs, half-stumbles down the road. He falls a couple of times, but picks himself up. Finally, he stops, hands on his knees as he struggles to catch his breath.

CJ'S POV - CHILDREN

at play in the fields.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

CJ WATCHES the children. Suddenly it hits him: one of those boys or girls might be his. He fills with emotion as he WATCHES first one child, and then another.

A LITTLE BOY, no more than seven, comes over to CJ. His name is PAUL.

PAUL

Are you all right?

CJ wipes at his eyes, gets control of himself.

CJ

I'm going to be fine. I just need a minute.

PAUL

You want some water?

CJ shakes his head "no".

PAUL (CONT'D)

You sure you okay? You sure don't look so good.

CJ

I've been traveling all night. I fell down a hill, too. I'll be all right. This the Henderson plantation?

PAUL

Yup.

CJ

You know a woman here... Used to be Sara Riddell. I don't know what she go by now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Paul nods that he does know such a woman. He looks CJ over, says nothing more for the moment.

CJ (CONT'D)
You know where I can find her?

PAUL
She up at the big house.

The little boy points the way. CJ starts toward the main house, when:

PAUL (CONT'D)
That's my mama.

CJ stops short. He looks at the boy, studying his eyes, the shape of his mouth, the way he holds his head.

CJ
Say again.

Paul nods that what he has said is indeed so.

CJ (CONT'D)
I been waiting a long time to
meet you.

CJ opens his arms to embrace the boy. Uncomfortable with the behavior of this strange man, Paul runs off.

PAUL
Mama! Mama!

CJ
No. Wait.

INT. THE KITCHEN OF THE MAIN HOUSE - DAY

The kitchen is a nightmare of activity as stack after stack of dirt-encrusted silverware is heaped in tall piles on the floor.

SARA, a natural beauty whose features have been tempered by years of disappointment and hardship, cleans a piece of silver in a washing bin.

Paul rushes into the kitchen. Out of breath from his run, Paul throws his arms around his mother's neck.

PAUL
Mama, Mama, Mama...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARA

Paul. What is it? What's wrong?

PAUL

There's a man...

He doesn't have to tell her anything more. CJ stands in the doorway, looking at her. Suddenly self-conscious, CJ tries to brush the dirt from his filthy and tattered clothes.

Sara says nothing, stunned.

SARA

(to Paul)

You go back out and play.

EXT. THE AREA BEHIND THE HENDERSON MAIN HOUSE - DAY

Sara, heads toward a barn, looking around for prying eyes as they go. CJ walks alongside her.

CJ

I know I must look like hell. It took some doin', to get here. But you know me. You know I'm a hard worker. I'll be a good provider. You won't want for...

SARA

Damn you. Damn you for a fool!

EXT. A BARN - DAY

CJ and Sara are behind the barn. We pick them up in mid-conversation:

CJ

We were married. Church married!

SARA

Didn't stop 'em from sellin' me off, now did it? What was I supposed to do? Nine years, CJ. Nine years! Go home.

CJ

I come too far to give up now.

SARA

And I didn't ask it, did I?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ

You love him, this man?

SARA

He does the best he can by me.
Ain't never hit me. Don't go out
drinkin' or runnin' around. He
been a good father, too. His
children and mine.

Sara looks directly at CJ, making sure he does not miss the import of this last remark.

SARA (CONT'D)

That boy you met by the road:
Paul. He Simon's, not yours.

CJ tries to salvage some hope out of the situation:

CJ

But you don't love him, Simon?

SARA

We ain't kids any more. Too much
gone by. Too much time. Too
much... Too much.

CJ

Do you love me?

SARA

Don't do this.

A HOUSEKEEPER, on her way to the main house, slows to watch the argument, hear what is being said.

SARA (CONT'D)

What are you looking at?

The Housekeeper goes on her way.

CJ

I want to know. Do you love me?

SARA

You want to know, do I love you?
Three years. I cried every
night. Thought about killin'
myself. Pretty much every day.
But finally, there I was. Cry
all I want, nothin' going to
change. I moved on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There is a painful, strained silence as both of them take this in.

SARA (CONT'D)
I had to stop hopin'. And now,
here you are. It's too late.

CJ
I got to know. Do you love me?

SARA
That was a long time ago. Too
long.

CJ is devastated. Sara, trying to maintain a calm outward demeanor, is equally distraught. The conversation has brought back all her long forgotten feelings. She speaks to CJ softly, and it is all the more devastating for its quiet certitude:

SARA (CONT'D)
I don't want to lose what I got.
Go home. Leave me alone.

CJ
That just ain't so. You know it
ain't.

SARA
Everything was broken. And I put
it back together as best I
could.

CJ holds Sara by the arm, looks into her eyes, hoping to see some spark of feeling for him, some sign that all is not in vain. From O.S., comes a male voice:

HENRY
Let go of her.

HENRY, 16 years old, immaculately groomed, dressed in the formal clothes of a house slave, rushes over to his mother.

SARA
It's all right, Henry. He's not
hurting me. This is your...

HENRY
I know who he is.
(pointedly; to CJ:)
No real man puts his hands on a
woman. My daddy taught me that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Henry takes in CJ's shabby clothes, the dirt and dust. He does not approve of what he sees. Looking straight at CJ:

HENRY (CONT'D)
 There isn't anything for you
 here.

CJ looks from Sara to Henry. There is no solace to be found in either of their visages.

EXT. A RIVER CROSSING - DAY

The bloated and rotting bodies are still scattered about. It is a gruesome sight. The hounds are tied up; they sniff the air, BAY unhappily.

Riddell holds the small wooden figurine the little girl stole from the unconscious CJ as he studies a map. The others look around; unhappy and growing unhappier.

MALE RELATIVE #1
 I hate this place.

RIDDELL
 (tracing CJ's route
 on the map)
 What I don't understand. He
 started off north; that made
 sense. But now he's headed
 south.

Riddell falls silent. He tosses the figurine up and down in his palm, thinking. Suddenly:

RIDDELL (CONT'D)
 Come on.

MALE RELATIVE #1
 What?

RIDDELL
 I'm an idiot! He doesn't want to
 go north. He's looking for his
 wife! He's looking for his
 children. Sara. That was her
 name. Daddy sold her... Someone
 around here. Hendersons.

EXT. THE HENDERSON PLANTATION SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

Row after row of wooden shacks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A dejected CJ tosses pebbles at the dirt, trying to figure out what to do now.

Paul watches CJ from the window of one of the slave cabins.

With no warning, a boot catches CJ in the ribs, knocks the wind out of him.

A flurry of kicks and punches send CJ reeling to the ground.

FOUR tough EX-SLAVES look down at CJ. They are the ones who have been beating him.

SIMON HENDERSON, younger than CJ, dressed in the formal clothes of a butler, signals for them to stop. He grabs CJ by the hair, pulls his head up from the dirt so that they are looking at each other eye to eye.

SIMON

Sara is my woman now. I don't want you hanging around here causing trouble. Don't be here when I get back.

Simon tosses CJ face down into the dirt.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER - RIDDELL AND HIS MALE RELATIVES gallop along a muddy trail.

INT. SARA'S CABIN - DAY

Sara wipes some blood from CJ's face. He smiles his thanks. Paul watches silently from the back of the room. CJ's map is spread out on her wooden table.

SARA

You got a little girl you ain't never met: Mara. Got sold away last Spring. She here, with the Traubs.

(Sara points out the location on the map)

You gonna have to cross the river.

(She points to another spot on the map)

This is probably the closest place. Harrison.

(to Paul)

You go get your father.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARA (CONT'D)

It's almost time for dinner. And don't say nothin' 'bout this.

Paul nods his assent. Sara waits until he has left the cabin. She goes to a corner of the room, pulls a few coins out from their hiding place.

SARA (CONT'D)

You gonna need money to get across.

CJ accepts it reluctantly.

SARA (CONT'D)

Rachel sold to the Samuelsons. Here.

(she points it out on the map)

Best thing is probably get Mara first. She the closest.

CJ looks at Sara. If there were a moment for her to change her mind, this would be it. Instead:

SARA (CONT'D)

You give those girls a big hug and a kiss from their mama. You tell 'em I love 'em.

CJ and Sara look at each other for a long, long moment, knowing that this may well be the last time they ever see one another. Both of them are filled with emotions and regrets.

INT. THE HENDERSON PLANTATION - NIGHT

Riddell and the other men, their hats politely held to their chests, stand sweating and dirty in the hallway before the lady of the house, MILICENT HENDERSON.

RIDDELL

Mrs. Henderson, I'm Madison Riddell. I believe you know my father, Aeneas.

MILICENT

Oh, of course! I'm sorry. I should have recognized you. Aeneas' boy, of course. I don't like to wear my glasses. They make me look so plain. Is that just too awful of me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIDDELL

I don't mean to be rude, but I don't have the time for proper formalities. This is very important. My father sold your husband a slave girl: Sara. Is she here now?

INT. SARA'S CABIN - NIGHT - ANGLE ON THE DOOR

The door is kicked off its hinges. Riddell and the Male Relatives ENTER. Sara, Paul, Henry and Simon look up from their meal.

RIDDELL

Where is he?

Sara and the others are silent. A furious Riddell kicks at furniture shattering their simple belongings.

Simon stands in front of Sara and the children, protecting them with his body, even as he knows he cannot raise a hand to defend them.

RIDDELL (CONT'D)

Where is he?

No one says a word. The little boy, Paul, stares Riddell. Tears fill his eyes, not from fear, but rage. He balls his fists even as he stands mute.

EXT. A DIRT ROAD - DAY

A PLATOON OF NORTHERN SOLDIERS rides down the road. The horses bring us to:

CJ

trudges along, silent, numbed and overwhelmed. Tears stream down his face. He makes no attempt to brush them away.

EXT. A MAKESHIFT TOWN - DAY

A general store. A saloon. One or two small storefronts. Not much more than that.

Elizabeth looks through the window of the saloon.

ELIZABETH'S POV - EZEKIEL

sits at a table by himself. He finishes a drink, shakes the now-empty bottle of whiskey, demanding another bottle.

ELIZABETH

watches for a moment longer, trying to decide what to do.

INT. THE SALOON - DAY

Elizabeth ENTERS the saloon. The OTHER PATRONS watch her with open disdain. Elizabeth takes in the tension, moves quickly to Ezekiel's table.

ELIZABETH

It's going to be dark in a while. Maybe we ought to be gettin' back.

EZEKIEL

I'm never going to step foot in that house again.

He pours himself another drink, deliberately shutting Elizabeth out of the possibility of any further conversation.

As Elizabeth stands over him, chewing on her lip, trying to decide what to do next, the BARTENDER comes over, grabs her by the wrist, hard, and with deliberate cruelty.

BARTENDER

Nigger, get your black ass out of my bar.

He shoves Elizabeth to the floor. A ferocious Dwyer is instantly on his feet. He smacks the Bartender across the face with the butt of his gun. As the bartender crumples to the floor, Dwyer is on him. We SEE the terrible rage that is consuming him as places the barrel of his gun into the man's face.

ELIZABETH

No...

EZEKIEL

You touch her again, that's going to be the last thing you ever touch. We clear on that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ezekiel looks around the bar.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
Anyone got somethin' to say?

The Other Patrons quickly lose themselves in their drinks; none of them dares even look in Ezekiel's direction.

EZEKIEL (CONT'D)
(to Elizabeth)
I'm goin' to be drinking for a while. I feel like any company, I'll let you know.

Elizabeth nods. She looks at him for a long moment, concerned, understanding that he is going to a very dark place, but there is no way to reach him.

EXT. THE SALOON - DAY

Elizabeth heads across the street so that she will not possibly impede the progress of any white person and cause another confrontation.

There is a bench, but she does not dare sit on it. Instead, she finds a small patch of grass, sits down there, and waits.

EXT. A MAKESHIFT TOWN - DAY

CJ trudges along the dirt path that borders the town. Each step is an act of will. He is inconsolable.

ELIZABETH (O.S.)
Hey!

CJ looks up, SEES Elizabeth. She SEES the look on his face, understands that it didn't go well.

EXT. A DIRT ROAD - DAY

The Male Relatives talk quietly amongst themselves as Riddell, his pants around his ankles, squats to shit in the woods to the side of the road. Finishing his business, he pulls up his pants, heads back to his horse.

The Male Relatives look at one another. No one wants to be the first to speak. They kick at the dirt, refuse to look Riddell in the eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RIDDELL

What?

The Male Relatives look at each other. Finally, Male Relative #1 steps forward.

RELATIVE #1

We had enough. We're going home.
We got wives. Children. Waitin'
on us. You do, too. You got any
sense, you ought to quit chasin'
after this crazy nigger.

RIDDELL

I ain't lettin' him get away
with this. You got any sense,
you wouldn't either.

Male Relative #1 shrugs. He sees there is no point arguing with Riddell. He gets on his horse. The others do, too.

As they ride away:

RIDDELL (CONT'D)

Long as that nigger's breathin'
ain't a one of us going to be
safe.

No one stops. No one looks back.

RIDDELL (CONT'D)

Cowards!

EXT. THE MAKESHIFT TOWN - DAY

CJ and Elizabeth sit side by side, two unhappy people, their features a silent study of pain and loneliness.

INT. A SALOON - DAY

PEOPLE talk, share news of the day, swap jokes at the bar. Ezekiel sits at a table, by himself, lost in the dark, faraway places of his mind.

Several UNION SOLDIERS ENTER the saloon. The place goes quiet as the Union Soldiers head to the bar for a drink.

EZEKIEL

Will you look at that? You won't
let niggers in here, but these
scum...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

UNION SOLDIER #1
 You got something to say...
 (drawing it out,
 making it an insult)
 ...Reb?

Union Soldier #1 is obviously angry about more than the immediate insult -- we will shortly find out why. He stands over Dwyer's table; Dwyer refuses to look up from his drink.

Union Soldier #2 comes over, holds his friend by the arm, trying to stop him from committing mayhem.

UNION SOLDIER #2
 (to Dwyer)
 You got a big fucking mouth,
 friend. And today ain't the day.

Dwyer raises his shot glass in a mocking toast.

EXT. A MAKESHIFT TOWN - DAY

CJ and Elizabeth, side by side, only a few inches apart and yet in different worlds. Abruptly, Elizabeth breaks the silence:

ELIZABETH
 You must love this woman some.
 Your wife?

CJ
 The moment I first saw her; she
 was the one. Can't much love
 someone, they don't want you.

Silence. After a while:

CJ (CONT'D)
 You got anyone?

ELIZABETH
 Not any more. Ran away up North
 with some high-yaller woman.
 Ain't seen or heard from him
 since. Don't care if I ever do.

Elizabeth shrugs, wanting to believe what she said is true even as she knows it is not.

EXT. A TOWN NEAR A RAILWAY STOP - DAY

It is a good-sized town, with a hotel, several stores, and two well-appointed saloons. Right now, there seems to be a town-wide celebration. PEOPLE are out in the streets, CHEERING, FIRING guns into the air, drinking, and so forth.

A FEW UNION SOLDIERS are clustered together at one end of the town. They look dark and angry as they talk amongst themselves.

Riddell rides down the center of the town's street. He is dirty and tired.

INT. A HOTEL - DAY

The HOTEL MANAGER is in the process of opening the hotel safe and removing a fine bottle of cognac when Riddell RINGS the bell on the hotel counter.

HOTEL MANAGER

I'll be right with you.

The Hotel Manager carefully lays the bottle on the counter, and also a single, fine-cut-crystal glass. O.S., there is a VOLLEY OF CELEBRATORY SHOTS and A RAUCOUS REBEL YELL.

RIDDELL

What's going on?

HOTEL MANAGER

You haven't heard?

When Riddell shakes his head "no":

HOTEL MANAGER (CONT'D)

President Lincoln is dead. An actor shot him. Southern boy.

The Hotel Manager carefully opens the bottle, pours a neat drink for himself. He raises it in salute, then downs it.

RIDDELL

Celebrating?

HOTEL MANAGER

Commemorating. I don't celebrate any man's death.

The Hotel Manager marks the level on the bottle: there are four other marks higher up on the bottle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOTEL MANAGER (CONT'D)

(of the other marks:)

My grandfather died. The war started. My son was killed. My father. And now this.

RIDDELL

Serves those damn Yankees right. I say God bless whoever killed him for a good shot.

HOTEL MANAGER

You mark my words. Blood for blood. The North is going to take their pound of flesh. Lincoln may be dead, but we still lost the war. And this isn't going to make those Union soldiers any too happy.

RIDDELL

You might just be right. In the meantime, I'd like a room. Maybe away from the street. In case one of those bullets goes astray.

(as he signs the register:)

I'm lookin' for someone. Is there a place here could maybe make me up some handbills? Runaway nigger. There's going to be a reward.

EXT. THE MAKESHIFT TOWN - DAY

CJ sits next to Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Where you going to go now?

CJ pokes at the dirt. After a while:

CJ

I don't know. I got a little girl I ain't never seen. An older one, too. Gonna find 'em. Guess I'll see what happens after that.

ELIZABETH

You still want your wife?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ shrugs, nods.

CJ

I keep thinkin'... Maybe,
somehow...

He falls silent, uncomfortable at having revealed so much of himself. Elizabeth looks over at the saloon. After a moment:

ELIZABETH

I been takin' care of Zeke since
I was a little girl. My mama
brought me up to the big house.
Said Mrs. Dwyer need some help
with the baby. That' all I ever
knowed. Now? Ain't nothin' left.
Ain't nowhere to go. And
Ezekiel? He's in a bad way.
Can't no one help, I don't
think.

Elizabeth shrugs. She picks up a small twig, pokes at the dirt, her dissatisfaction with the world inchoate, but not any less real for that fact. She looks over at the saloon.

INT. THE SALOON - DAY

The Union Soldiers have gathered around Ezekiel. One of them hits him in the head, a hard slap.

Ezekiel drunk, his reflexes slowed, lurches to his feet, swings at one of the Union Soldiers.

EXT. THE MAKESHIFT TOWN - DAY

CJ gets up. Elizabeth stays where she is, thinking.

CJ

Good luck.

CJ goes on his way. Elizabeth looks over at the saloon, then back at the departing CJ. She wages an internal struggle, comes to a conclusion.

ELIZABETH

Hey!

CJ turns to face her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

You think I could go with you?
Maybe just for a ways.

CJ shrugs, thinks about it. After a moment:

CJ

Might be a hard road.

ELIZABETH

What road ain't?

CJ nods, motions for her to join him. As CJ and Elizabeth head off, behind them the doors to the saloon swing open.

ANGLE TO FEATURE THE SALOON

The Union Soldiers heave a drunken, struggling Ezekiel into the street.

One of the Union Soldiers punches Ezekiel in the face, brutally. Blood springs from Ezekiel's broken nose. As he falls to his knees, a Union Soldier kicks him in the ribs.

ANOTHER ANGLE - TO FEATURE CJ AND ELIZABETH

CJ stops, looks back at Ezekiel. Elizabeth watches the Union Soldiers beat Ezekiel.

CJ watches for a moment longer, then turns away, starts down the road.

Elizabeth is torn, but then she comes to a decision, and runs over to help Dwyer.

ELIZABETH

Hey! Hey! Stop that!!

Elizabeth tries to get to Dwyer, but ONE OF THE SOLDIERS holds her back while the other Union Soldiers viciously beat Dwyer.

CJ stops, looks back. CJ is appalled by what he SEES, but uncertain what, if anything he could do to help. CJ heads back on his way.

VARIOUS ANGLES - TO COVER

The Union Soldiers beat Ezekiel viciously. Elizabeth tries to help, but she is no physical match for the Soldiers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CJ, stops. After a long moment, he turns, looks back at Elizabeth then over at Ezekiel, and comes to a decision. He makes the internal transition from human being to slave. He walks over to Ezekiel, his posture pulled in, subservient, his head bowed, his voice pitched higher than normal.

CJ

Young Mr. Dwyer. Young Mr.
Dwyer. There you is.

CJ stands in front of the Union Soldiers, takes off his hat, and waits to be acknowledged. Elizabeth watches, not sure what CJ is up to.

UNION SOLDIER #1

What you want boy?

CJ

That there young Mister Dwyer. I
come to fetch him.

UNION SOLDIER #2

Well young Mr. Dwyer here got a
big damn mouth.

CJ

(carefully choosing
his words)

Yes, suh. Could I ask, suh? When
you done, could I take him home?

UNION SOLDIER #1

You're free now, son. Don't you
know you don't have to do their
"fetching" anymore?

CJ

Yassuh, I knows that. But a big
mouth still gettin' him a heap
a' trouble. Free don't change
that I 'spose.

Union Soldier #1 grunts a half-laugh; CJ has broken the tension of the moment. Union Soldier #1 kicks Ezekiel one more time, and then, he unbuttons his pants, pisses on the barely conscious Ezekiel.

UNION SOLDIER #1

(to Ezekiel)

I killed better men than you.

(to CJ)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

UNION SOLDIER #1 (CONT'D)

You tell his people, they best
ought not to let him come back
this way again. We might not be
so forgiving next time.

CJ nods, says nothing.

UNION SOLDIER #1 (CONT'D)

You hear me, now?

CJ

Yes, suh.

Satisfied, the Union Soldiers go back inside the saloon.

CJ looks at Ezekiel lying in the street.

Elizabeth rushes to Dwyer to see if he is okay.

Ezekiel GROANS, barely conscious, in a lot of pain.

CJ would like to just go on his way now that the beating has stopped, but he cannot bring himself to leave Ezekiel like this. Instead, he goes to Ezekiel, picks him up, and hoists him across his shoulder.

EZEKIEL

Whaa...

CJ

It's all right. I got you.

Carrying Ezekiel across his shoulder, CJ goes back to the dirt road heading out of town. Elizabeth goes with them. And as the three of them make their way along a dirt road that disappears in the distance, headed toward an uncertain future, we:

FADE OUT.

THE END

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Rodman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large, connected letters.