

FADE IN:

EXT. JEPPI PLANTATION - DAY

On a scruffy plantation in South Carolina, MARCUS, a slave in his early-twenties, has his hands shackled as he's being chained around the waist behind a wagon by JEPPI, the plantation owner. A group of other slaves is gathered to watch, an overseer with a shotgun guarding the scene. Marcus's wife, TEEKA, is almost prostrate with grief, being held and supported by a slave woman, DELIA, and man, TY. Marcus's and Teeka's two-year-old daughter, RAJEEN, stands looking scared.

TEEKA

Marcus, Marcus!

MARCUS

(to Teeka)

Stay strong. I be coming back for you.

JEPPI

No, you won't, nigga. You ain't never see them again.

(to the group)

This be what you gets you mouth off.

MARCUS

Rajeen, you help your mom.

The little girl nods, tears in her eyes. Ty puts his hand on her shoulder.

TY

We'll take care of them, Marcus. Be well.

Jepi checks the chains and climbs up to the driver's seat. Teeka tries to reach Marcus as the wagon starts, the man with the shotgun stepping forward, Delia holding her back.

TEEKA

Marcus!

MARCUS

This ain't the end.

The wagon accelerates forcing Marcus to hurry to keep from being dragged.

FADE OUT

SUPERIMPOSE: "Seven Years Later"

EXT. STEELFLAME PLANTATION - DAY

A plantation in North Carolina with a large manor house, outbuildings and fields beyond, slaves at work in them.

A closed carriage pulls up at the front of the stately manor house and the black driver hurries to open the door for a woman, IRMA, who walks up the steps quickly and goes into the house.

EXT. BLACKSMITH SHED - MOMENTS LATER

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a blacksmith shed, a corral next to it with a couple of horses in it.

INT. BLACKSMITH SHED - CONTINUOUS

Marcus is working at a forge as DEJU, a young black woman house slave, hurries into the shed.

DEJU

Marcus, Miz Ellie wants you come to house rights away.

Marcus stops what he's doing and cleans his hands on a rag as he follows Deju out of the shed.

INT. MANOR HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Deju leads Marcus to a sitting room then departs. Marcus shyly enters and greets the two women who appear agitated.

MARCUS

Miz Ellie. Miz Irma.

ELLIE

Marcus, Mr. Blake is back, but he's wounded and hiding in the swamp from the Yankees. I need you to take the wagon and fetch him home, keep him hidden. If Yankees find him, we don't know what they might do.

IRMA

Benji stumbled on him. Mr. Blake is by the big dead tree about half way through. Do you know it?

MARCUS

Yes, Ma'am.

ELLIE

Miz Irma would have brought him, but she was worried the Yankees would

(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 stop her carriage. They won't suspect anything with you. You need to load the wagon with something that you can hide him under.

MARCUS
 Yes, Miz Ellie.

ELLIE
 Here's your pass to town.

She hands him a small purse on a cord and he hangs it around his neck.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Please hurry, Marcus.

MARCUS
 I'll get him quickly, Miz Ellie.
 Don't worry.

ELLIE
 Thank you, Marcus.

Marcus nods and hurries out.

EXT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus is loading bags of feed into the wagon over a hollowed out space he's created with some wood, hiding it beneath the bags. When he's satisfied with his efforts, he raises the tailgate, jumps in the driver's seat and gets the horse heading fast for the drive to the road.

EXT. ROAD AT SWAMP - LATER

He slows as nears the big dead tree on the road through the swamp, looking to both sides. Suddenly he hears DERRICK BLAKE call out.

DERRICK
 Marcus! Marcus!

He looks and pulls up, jumping down and hurrying to where Derrick is painfully getting up from his hiding place. Marcus helps him move towards the wagon.

DERRICK (CONT'D)
 Marcus, I'm glad to see you.

MARCUS
 Mr. Derrick, we'll get you home all right.

DERRICK

That sounds like heaven.

MARCUS

I'm just glad your's back.

DERRICK

I go through the whole war, men dropping all around me, and not a scratch. I get a few miles from home at last, and the damned Yankees put a ball through me.

MARCUS

You be all right. Miz Ellie will fix you up.

DERRICK

How is she, Marcus?

MARCUS

She's fine, Mr. Derrick. Everything's fine. And now with you home...

DERRICK

I'll tell you Marcus, nothing is worth the things I've seen. Damn war forever. Now we'll put things right.

MARCUS

That we will, Mr. Derrick.

He lowers the tailgate of the wagon and moves some bags.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Here, I've made this hiding place for you as Miz Ellie told me. We gets you back safe.

Derrick stops before getting in the wagon.

DERRICK

Marcus, have the Yankees come by the plantation? Have you heard what's happened?

MARCUS

No, Mr. Derrick. We sees the Yankees going by, but no one stopped.

DERRICK

But you've heard.

MARCUS

Think it didn't go well for us. The Yankees won we heard.

DERRICK

I know you know more than that, Marcus. You know you're a free man now. No more owning other people for anyone. Marcus, you can go and do anything you want.

MARCUS

Right now, we gets you home, Mr. Derrick.

He helps him climb into the wagon and under the bags, arranging them to cover the hiding spot. He gets in the wagon and turns it around on the road, heading back.

EXT. ROAD NEAR STEELFLAME PLANTATION - LATER

As they near the plantation, a squad of mounted Yankee soldiers come around a bend, and stop the wagon. The LIEUTENANT in charge moves next to Marcus

LIEUTENANT

Where are you headed?

MARCUS

Steelflame plantation, just up the road a piece. Bringing some feed back.

LIEUTENANT

Seen any rebs on the road anywhere?

MARCUS

No sir. Real quiet.

The lieutenant looks at the town pass hanging from Marcus's neck then leans over and pulls it off, startling Marcus.

LIEUTENANT

Don't need this anymore. You can go where you want, when you want. You don't want to go back to your reb's place, you just go on your way.

MARCUS

Yes, sir.

LIEUTENANT

But you're going back anyway.

MARCUS

For a spell.

LIEUTENANT

Can't help you if you're too stupid
to help yourself, boy.

MARCUS

Yes, sir.

The Lieutenant throws the pass in the back of the wagon and leads as the troops ride on. Marcus starts the wagon moving again, glancing back.

EXT. STEELFLAME PLANTATION - MOMENTS LATER

Irma has left and Ellie runs down the stairs as the wagon pulls up.

ELLIE

Did you find him, Marcus?

Marcus looks back to the road to make sure they're safe.

MARCUS

I got him, Miz Ellie.

He lowers the rear of the buckboard and pulls aside the bags covering Derrick's hiding place, helping Derrick get out as Ellie has tears in her eyes trying to assist.

ELLIE

Oh, Derrick.

He gingerly stands, and he and Ellie embrace.

DERRICK

I'm so glad to see you.

ELLIE

I'm so grateful you made it back.

MARCUS

We should have him lays down.

ELLIE

Yes, of course, of course.

He puts Derrick's arm around his shoulders and Ellie slips under his other arm and they carefully head into the house.

EXT. STEELFLAME PLANTATION - MOMENTS LATER

As Marcus heads back to his blacksmith shed one of the field slaves, FERRIS, comes up to talk with him.

FERRIS

Marcus, what you hear?

MARCUS

We be free. Yanks won, no more slaves. You pass the word, but I think we's all get together and talk about what to do. Fine to be free at last, but that don't put food in your belly.

FERRIS

Never thought I live to see this day, Marcus.

MARCUS

World changed for us forever.

FERRIS

And for all our childs.

Marcus looks off, a sad and concerned expression on his face.

FERRIS (CONT'D)

I be sorry, Marcus. I didn't be thinking about your family. No families torn apart ever again. That be a mighty good thing.

MARCUS

The Lord saw over us. Took a spell, but there it be.

Ferris moves off leaving Marcus with his memories.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE - DAY

The field slaves are gathered in front of the manor, the house slaves on the porch. Derrick, bandaged but healing, assisted by Ellie, comes out to address them, sitting on the steps.

DERRICK

Excuse me for not standing, but I think you'll understand.

(beat)

You all know we're together in a new land. The old ways are done and gone. The question for all of us is how do we go on from here? What do we do to make the best of the life God has given us.

Many of those listening murmur "Amen."

DERRICK (CONT'D)

We have a good plantation here, not the biggest, but big enough that it's supported all of us in the past, and it will do it in the future. But it ain't going to happen on its own. The work isn't going to go away. I'm relying on you all to continue with what you've been doing. So, everyone who signs up for a two-year contract will continue to live here. But now you'll also have a plot of land to work on your own, grow your food, even a crop you can sell. You'll have time to work your land. And one-fifth of the crops you grow for the plantation that are sold for cash will be split equally between you all. Those with children will get another share for being a family. I think this all will work best for everyone, let us move forward and prosper together in this new land we'll be building. What question might all you have?

FERRIS

I wants my young-uns to have schooling. What about that?

MARCUS

Ferris, I don't know what the answer is just yet. I heard they been setting up schools for you who've been freed; but I don't know how it's going to go round here. But we can work on it. If they don't build a school for you all, I'll make sure we get a teacher to come round Steelflame so your children are taught reading, writing, arithmetic. At least that.

FERRIS

Mr. Derrick, I knows how it been on some of the other places round here, and I just wants to say that I've always felt the Lord watched out for me and mine by putting us with you. It ain't been easy to be owned like some kind of animal, but if it had to be, we all be glad it be with you and Miz Ellie.

DERRICK

Ferris, I hope we can live up to that going forward. The Lord has seen fit to wipe away the old ways. But He's left it up to us to bring in the new. Let's do the best we can.

Everyone murmurs Amen again and when Derrick and Ellie start back into the house, Marcus follows them.

MARCUS

Mr. Derrick...

Derrick stops as Ellie goes on in.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I likes what you say, Mr. Derrick. It sounds real fair.

DERRICK

Thank you, Marcus. I think it will work out for all of us - least I hope so.

MARCUS

I haves to tell you though, I can't be staying.

DERRICK

Teeka and Rajeen?

Marcus nods.

MARCUS

I haves to find them.

DERRICK

Sit with me a moment.

He and Marcus sit back down on the stairs.

DERRICK (CONT'D)

I wish Jepps would have let me buy them along with you. I wanted to keep you together.

MARCUS

I knows, Mr. Derrick. But old Master Jepps wasn't like you and Miz Ellie. He had a dark soul...mean. He wanted to makes me suffer - and he did. But now I'se can put that right. But it means I can't stay and I'm sorry for that.

DERRICK

No, it's the right thing to do, Marcus. It was never right to split up families, wives from their husbands, children from their parents. There was a lot of bad in the old ways. I understand why the Lord did what he did here.

(beat)

And I want to help you, Marcus. This will always be your home, if you want it. But I know what you have to do now and I'm going to help you do it. Do you know where Jepps's place is?

MARCUS

I know the plantation was in Sayreville, but I don't know where that is. I was in no shape to pay attention to where I was being brought when old Jepps dragged me here.

DERRICK

Understood. I'll write down the directions, get you a map.

MARCUS

That's another I owe you and Miz Ellie for. Reading and writing's going to make it a lot easier on me I expects.

DERRICK

Oh, yes. I'm a little scared to see you going out into the world, Marcus. It can be a hard place, and lots of folks around here are real mad at the coloreds, blaming them for what's happened.

MARCUS

'Spect we had no choice in the matter, Mr. Derrick.

DERRICK

No, you didn't. You had all it done to you. But that doesn't stop some from putting it on you; so any advantage you might have - like reading and writing - is going to help you survive now. I want you to take Briar, too.

MARCUS

Briar? That's a mighty fine horse,
Mr. Derrick.

DERRICK

You raised him, you're the only one
he listens to. I'll feel better
knowing he's with you on the road.
Can be mighty dangerous out there.

MARCUS

Rights generous you being Mr. Derrick.

DERRICK

And I'll get you some cash. Things
are tight for everyone right now,
but I'll get you what I can.

MARCUS

God bless you and Miz Ellie.

DERRICK

Thank you, Marcus.

MARCUS

No, thanks you.

(beat)

I'm a might anxious to get on the
way. Tomorrow be okay? I'll put
everything right in the works.

DERRICK

I'm going to miss you, Marcus, and
not just what all you did. And I
want you to know, you'll always have
a home here. When you join up again
with Teeka and Rajeen, you all come
back here and live. It'll be a joy
to see you all together.

MARCUS

Thank you, thank you, Mr. Derrick.

(beat, glancing at
Derrick hesitantly)

DERRICK

What is it, Marcus?

MARCUS

You know, Mr. Derrick, we haves no
last name. I never would take that
name Jepps. If it's not too much
asking, could I be using your name?

DERRICK

Marcus Blake. I'd be proud, Marcus.

They shake hands and they put their hands on one another's shoulder.

EXT. STEELFLAME PLANTATION - MORNING

Marcus finishes putting a pair of joined saddlebags along with a blanket roll on Briar, Derrick and Miz Ellie and some friends of Marcus's gathered to see him off. Miz Ellie shakes his hand.

MIZ ELLIE

Marcus, Mr. Derrick told you to come right back to us when your together as a family again. You mind him now.

MARCUS

Thank you for all you done, Miz Ellie. I couldn't have been with better folks.

DERRICK

I pray the Lord watches over you, Marcus.

MARCUS

You be righteous people, Mr. Derrick.

They warmly shake hands again and Marcus mounts Briar, everyone says their goodbyes, and Marcus heads down the lane to the road to start the next journey of his life.

EXT. INTERSECTION - AFTERNOON

Marcus comes up where a larger road crosses the one he's on. Union troops are headed down the larger road, the end of the column just going by, a large number of black civilians following the troops. Marcus waits for them to pass, addressing a FOLLOWER.

MARCUS

Where you all be going?

FOLLOWER

(gesturing ahead)

Wherevers they be going. They gots food, keeps us safe. Lucky man riding nice horse like that be. You come, too, you want.

MARCUS

Heading a different way, 'cross the
road yonder.

FOLLOWER

Let me get you 'cross.

He holds up the line a moment and Marcus carefully crosses
the road to the other side.

MARCUS

Thank you, much. You take care now.

FOLLOWER

You, too, brother free-man.

MARCUS

Feels good, don't it?

FOLLOWER

Different day under this sun, praise
the Lord.

Marcus moves off down the road alone.

EXT. ROAD BY FIELD - EVENING

It's dusk and Marcus stops by a clearing beneath the branches
of a large tree, a field of grassland beyond it bounded by a
fence. He tethers Briar and removes the bags and saddle
from Briar, setting up a campsite. He goes and removes the
logs between two of the fences support logs and leads Briar
into the field, replacing the logs. As Briar grazes, Marcus
gathers rocks and makes a fire to cook some of the food he's
carrying.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

It's darker and Marcus has finished his meal, resting before
turning in. Suddenly he hears noise behind him and turns to
see a white FARMER coming over the fence, a bullwhip in his
hand.

FARMER

That your horse, boy?

Marcus rises and nods.

FARMER (CONT'D)

He's in my field.

MARCUS

Sorry, sir. I was just letting him
graze a bit.

FARMER

Eating my grass.

MARCUS

I didn't reckon that would be a problem. I be glad to pay you something.

FARMER

You be an uppity nigra. You think you can just steal and buy your way out of it?

MARCUS

No sir, I didn't see it as stealing. My horse just be eating a bit of grass. Didn't think anyone would begrudge that.

FARMER

Your horse? You must a done stole him. Where would you nigra get a fine horse like that?

MARCUS

(beat, knowing the
guy is trouble)

I'll be taking him and getting on, you feel that way.

FARMER

Yeah, pack yo stuff and start walking.

Marcus goes towards the fence to get Briar. The man steps in front of him, his whip at the ready.

FARMER (CONT'D)

I said start walking, nigra. That horse be mine, now.

MARCUS

No sir, that not the way it be.

The farmer rears back with the whip and hits Marcus in the torso. But Marcus has moved towards the man, not away, and, as the whip curls around him, Marcus grabs it and pulls the man off balance forward. They tussle over the whip and the man raises the handle and tries to hit Marcus with it. Marcus grabs his arm and twists the whip out of the man's grasp and hits him across the side of the head with it. The man stumbles and goes down, unconscious. Marcus throws the whip away and hurries to the fence, removing the logs and running to get Briar, bringing him out and not bothering to replace the logs.

The guy is still out and Marcus hurriedly saddles Briar and puts his things away in the saddlebags and puts them on Briar. He stamps out the fire, gets on Briar and hurries away down the road into the darkness.

EXT. JEPPE PLANTATION - DAY

The Jeppe plantation is a ruin, the manor house and outbuildings piles of rubble, the slave cabins the only thing left standing. As Marcus rides up Ty comes over to him.

TY

Marcus, that really be you?

Marcus dismounts and leads Briar as he joins Ty.

MARCUS

Hello, Ty.

They briefly embrace.

TY

These times be full of surprises.
Didn't expect I'd ever see you again.

MARCUS

Things be different, that's for sure.
Looks like you had some hard times.

TY

The Yanks give it to old Jeppe like you wouldn't believe. He came at them and they shot him dead and burned down most everything he done had. Miz Jeppe and the others picked up and headed for her Daddy's plantation. We's here alone now and it be heaven, Marcus.

MARCUS

Ty...

TY

I know, I know. You be wondering about Teeka and Rajeen. They gone, Marcus. Teeka just wouldn't let it go when old Jeppe done sent you off. She kept running away with the childs no matter how bad old Jeppe beat her when they brought her back. Finally, he sold her and Rajeen to some broker who come through.

MARCUS

When?

TY

I was thinking this last Christmas it was the fifth since we had Teeka with us. Old Jepps sold them just before Christmas that one year.

MARCUS

Five years ago? Who bought her. Where did they go? Does anybody know?

TY

Louanna done read the wagon. She be saying the broker's name on it be Leffert from Charleston. Leffert. She made all of us know of it casing there be any chance of getting Teeka and Rajeen back. Ain't none of us gonna forget that name, the fuss she made.

MARCUS

Louanna, where she be?

TY

Passed on, Marcus. Bout a year ago now. But she made us remember. Maybe she had some vision of you coming back here just like this. Other, why she make us all remember that name?

MARCUS

Leffert, from Charleston. I get on the way there then.

TY

You rest the night with us here, Marcus.

MARCUS

I should be getting on right away, Ty.

TY

Marcus, it be some years they was taken. One night more or less now make no difference. Everyone gonna want to see you. Seeing you again, it's like a soul of loved ones rising from the ground, praise the Lord. You needs be staying least just the one night. Give that fine horse a rest anyway.

Marcus gives in and Ty leads the way towards the cabins, the two men putting their arms around one another.

INT. SLAVE CABIN - NIGHT

A group of Marcus's friends are relaxing, some of the women clearing a table where they had dinner. They are relaxed and upbeat as they talk. Delia approaches Marcus.

DELIA

Marcus...

He smiles at her and she gestures for him to follow her. She heads out to the porch, Marcus following.

EXT. CABIN PORCH - CONTINUOUS,

DELIA

Marcus, I feel so bad for you. Teeka and Rajeen gone this way.

MARCUS

I'll find them, Delia. I won't give up. I'll find them or die trying.

DELIA

That's why I want you to have this.

She takes from a pocket a partially burned photograph on thick cardboard. Marcus looks at it.

DELIA (CONT'D)

After the Yankees burned the house and old Miz Jepp and all left for her papi's place, we looked for anything left. I found this.

CLOSE UP

The photograph is of the Jepp family with their slaves in the background.

BACK TO SCENE

Marcus looks more closely at it.

CLOSE UP

Teeka holding Rajeen at one side.

RETURN TO SCENE

Marcus looks at Delia in amazement.

DELIA (CONT'D)

A photoman came by and the Jepps had this taken. I finally remember it having Teeka and Rajeen showing in it.

MARCUS

(staring at the photo)
Teeka -- Rajeen.

DELIA

Yes.

MARCUS

This will help me so much, Delia.

She smiles and Marcus embraces her. They both look at the photo again.

DELIA

You find them, Marcus. She never get over losing you. That's why old Jepp sent them off. But you find them, Marcus.

MARCUS

I try. I never stop.

Delia embraces him.

EXT. CHARLESTON MAIN STREET - DAY

Charleston has a number of ruined buildings while others are intact. As Marcus rides, the city is busy, many union troops on the streets including blacks in uniform. He reaches a main street with union troops keeping people to the sides, eager spectators, many of them black, looking down the street to where a procession is coming. Marcus sits on Briar to watch the festivities.

The procession is "A Jubilee of Freedom" which took place in Charleston at the end of March 1865, freed slaves marching in celebration. Leading the procession is a group of Marshals on horseback wearing red, white and blue sashes. Behind them marches the 21st Regiment of colored union troops, some 1,000 men along with 100 black marines, many flags being displayed. Next are clergymen carrying open bibles with a beautiful carriage behind them carrying 15 black women in white holding bouquets of flowers. More women walking come next singing from the marching song "John Brown's Body." They're singing the usual verse: "John Brown's body lies a mouldering the grave..." Behind them come children singing a different verse: "We'll hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree..." Next in line are tradesmen of all varieties, and behind them a dilapidated cart carrying an auctioneer's block

with two women and a child sitting on it, a black wearing a bell with a red flag over him pretending to be the auctioneer calling out an auctioneer's spiel. Several women near Marcus cry out in anguish, as if the tableau were real, "Give me back my children! Give me back my children!" The procession to come stretches down the street out of sight

Marcus also is affected and rides off a bit, dismounting and leading briar to speak to a UNION SOLDIER.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

'Scuse me, sir.

The soldier nods.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I be looking for a business that was here in Charleston. Name of Leffert.

UNION SOLDIER

What kind of business?

MARCUS

Traded slaves I been told.

UNION SOLDIER

Well, they wouldn't be in business now.

MARCUS

Might glad of that. And let me say thanks to you and the rest of the soldiers for bringing us our freedom.

UNION SOLDIER

You're welcome.

(beat)

I think they'd probably have records at the city hall. You might try there.

MARCUS

Much obliged, sir. Would you be knowing how I get there?

EXT. CHARLESTON CITY HALL - LATER

Marcus rides up to the city hall and dismounts, tying up Briar, watched by a guard outside the building. Marcus goes to him.

MARCUS

I was told I might be able to find here the whereabouts of a business I be looking for.

The guard gestures for Marcus to go inside.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Much obliged.

Marcus heads inside.

INT. CHARLESTON CITY HALL - CONTINUOUS

Marcus comes in and approaches the desk where a white woman CLERK is working. She looks at him with some apprehension.

MARCUS

'Scuse me, Ma'am. I trying to find the address of a business named Leffert. They was in the slave trade I understand.

CLERK

Why you be looking for them?

MARCUS

My wife and child were sold to this Leffert. I be trying to find them.

The clerk softens, sympathetic.

CLERK

Your family.

MARCUS

Yes, Ma'am. Seven years now. Bout five years ago this Leffert took them.

CLERK

Goodness, that's quite a spell. Let me check the business records. You can have a seat there.

She points to a row of seats by the door.

MARCUS

Much obliged.

He goes and sits while she heads in back.

INT. CHARLESTON CITY HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus stands and goes to the counter as the woman comes back holding some papers.

CLERK

Leffert and Company on Cray Street. Can you read?

MARCUS

Yes, Ma'am.

She turns the papers to Marcus.

CLERK

Thirty-four Cray Street, unit two.
I'm guessing that would be an upstairs
office.

MARCUS

Thank you so much, Ma'am. Could you
direct me to this Cray Street?

CLERK

Terrible for families to be broken.

MARCUS

Yes, Ma'am.

CLERK

I hope you find them.

MARCUS

Thank you. I keep looking.

CLERK

When you go out of here, you make a
left and...

EXT. CRAY STREET - LATER

On a street of small shops, Marcus looks to the second floor
of a building where on the window is *Leffert & Co., Import &
Export*. A doorway leads to a stairway up and Marcus goes
in.

INT. LEFFERT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

At a landing on the second floor, a doorway leads into
Leffert's. Marcus goes in.

INT. LEFFERT COMPANY - CONTINUOUS

There's no one in the office, a door to the back open.

MARCUS

(calling)

Hello? Anybody here?

A sour looking man, LEFFERT, dressed in a shabby frockcoat,
comes out of the back, making a distasteful face when he
sees Marcus.

LEFFERT

What do you want?

MARCUS

'Scuse me, sir. I'se hoping you can help me.

LEFFERT

Why would I want to do that?

MARCUS

Sir, 'bout five years ago my master, Jepps up in Sayreville, sold my wife and childs to you. I'm trying to locate them now and I'm thinking you might be able to tell me where they be at.

Leffert chuckles to himself.

LEFFERT

I had a good business dealing you slaves before all this. You know how many of you nigras I bought and sold? If you could count, which I'm sure you can't, you wouldn't be able to count 'em all. Now I'm suggesting you get on your way.

Marcus glances at several file cabinets along the back wall.

P.O.V. MARCUS - CONTINUOUS

The file cabinets marked with alphabetical letters A to Z.

BACK TO SCENE

MARCUS

Yessir. But I'm thinking a business run as good as it appears you do, you have records.

Marcus points at the file cabinets, Leffert glancing at them. Marcus takes out the photo.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

This here is a photo of my wife and child.

(pointing)

That's them there.

Leffert glances at it and shakes his head.

LEFFERT

All you nigras look the same. Now I want you out of here. Get going while the going is good.

MARCUS

Sir, I understand we's never gonna get along. But you can understand that a man wants to be with his family. I just want to find them to help them and be with them.

LEFFERT

(shaking his head)

Don't make me get the police to drag you out of here, boy. You're free now, but you still be under the law and you're not welcome here -- ever. Now get on your way.

Marcus stares at him and Leffert looks a bit afraid, backing up. But Marcus turns and goes out.

EXT. CRAY STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus is mounting Briar.

MARCUS

(to Briar)

Can't go through the front door, we's try the back, heh Briar?

They set off.

EXT. ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus scans the upper floors of the back of the buildings on Cray street. He notes Leffert's building.

P.O.V. MARCUS - CONTINUOUS

The roof slopes down from a sturdy chimney, rear windows on Leffert's office, a fire escape on a building a short ways beyond Leffert's.

BACK TO SCENE

MARCUS

(to Briar)

'Spect we best be finding us a hardware store, Briar.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Marcus carrying a bag that loops around his neck saunters on Briar down the alley. He checks to make sure he's alone, dismounts and climbs the fire escape to the roof of the buildings. He edges along carefully to Leffert's, climbs to the chimney and takes a rope from the bag, tying it securely around the chimney. He carefully lowers himself over the edge down to the window to Leffert's, checks the street once again, then smashes the window and clears the way with his feet. He swings back and then through the window inside.

INT. LEFFERT COMPANY - CONTINUOUS

He gets into the office and listens for any response. He notes the door marked WC to one side as he makes his way to the outer office and the file cabinets. He opens the drawer marked I-J-K-L and takes out the folder marked J. He goes back to the door marked WC and opens it, going into the toilet and closing the door.

INT. TOILET - CONTINUOUS

There is a lantern that he lights with a wood match, sits on the toilet and opens the folder. He scans through the pieces of paper and finds one that makes him smile.

P.O.V. MARCUS - CONTINUOUS

The written heading says "JEPP - Sayreville, South Carolina." Below that, "Purchased December 8, 1860: Female, mid-20's, called Teeka: \$750.00." Below that is "Female child, young pubescent, \$250." And, "Sold as lot, January 12, 1863, Schumer & Sons, New Orleans, Louisiana: \$1,750.00."

BACK TO SCENE

Marcus nods, folds the paper and puts it in his pocket, stands and blows out the lantern.

EXT. LEFFERT COMPANY - CONTINUOUS

Marcus puts the folder back in the drawer and closes it, making certain everything looks the same, then goes back to the window and drapes the rope out the window down to the street, carefully climbing out.

EXT. ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus reaches the street and makes certain no one has observed him and goes down to where Briar is waiting, getting on.

MARCUS

(to Briar)

Best we be leaving this city I thinks.

They set off.

EXT. WOODED COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

As Marcus on Briar makes his way slowly down the isolated road in the moonlight, a campfire becomes visible up ahead. Marcus is wary, but as he comes up on it he sees it's two blacks, TELLY and WALTER, who've made a camp off the road.

TELLY

Evening stranger. Y'all welcome to
join us you be wanting.

WALTER

Got some hot java going here.

Marcus considers it and then pulls off and dismounts from Briar.

MARCUS

Been a couple of days on my own on
the trail. Coffee sounds good and
the horse needs a rest and food.
Let me get him set.

WALTER

Beautiful horse. You a lucky man.

Marcus strokes Briar and then gets out a feed bag, fills it, and puts it on Briar's mouth then gets his own bags off and sets them down.

MARCUS

Name's Marcus.

TELLY

I be Telly. This here Walter. Ain't
picked no last names yet. How 'bout
you's?

MARCUS

Blake. Marcus Blake.

TELLY

Blake your master?

MARCUS

He was a good man. Give me the horse
when I be setting out.

TELLY

You a lucky man, there. Walter and me's never wants to see no more that damned devil working us.

WALTER

Amen to that.

MARCUS

Where you all heading?

TELLY

Away. Sure be something to just go out on yo own - no master telling you where or when.

WALTER

Amen.

TELLY

Where you all headed to?

MARCUS

New Orleans. My wife be there with my daughter. Seven years since I see them.

TELLY

And you know where they at now?

Walter gives Marcus a cup of the coffee.

MARCUS

Much obliged.

(sips)

Don't really know exactly where they be - just that they were sold to a place in New Orleans.

TELLY

That be a good long ways from here I thinks.

MARCUS

Not sure how far. Been on the road over a week now from Charleston.

TELLY

Never been there myself - or New Orleans - or much of anywhere.

He and Walter laugh.

WALTER

Them yanks come through, the next day we just up and left. Never see that damned master of ours again, we helps it.

MARCUS

Seems like those days ended for good.

WALTER

Amen, amen.

TELLY

You hungry?

MARCUS

I am.

TELLY

You share what we got here. Cooked up some right tasty stew. Nothing fancy, but settles the belly.

MARCUS

Thank you much, brothers. I got some things you might like, too. We'll share.

TELLY

That's how it's going be going on. We gonna help one another - build our own lives in this here new world of ours.

WALTER

Amen, praise the Lord.

Marcus goes in his bags and begins bringing out food.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

Walter's playing a mouth organ (harmonica) with a lively tune. He finishes with a flourish.

TELLY

Righteous.

MARCUS

Real lively. You're good.

WALTER

Wish we had some womens to dance to the tune.

TELLY

That be the dream. We get to some town and gets settled.

(beat)

Well, I'm turning in. Lots more hiking to do come morning.

WALTER

Just glad we can go.

TELLY

Yessir, brother.

Telly and Walter basically just lie down in their clothes while Marcus arranges his bags for a pillow and to keep them close to him, Briar tethered to a tree.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The fire has burned down, Marcus is sound asleep when there is the SOUND OF HORSE NEIGHING. Marcus slowly comes awake and looks to see Briar saddled and being led down the road by Telly and Walter.

MARCUS

(calling)

Hey!

As Marcus jumps up and starts running after them, Telly gets on and gets Briar trotting, Walter scrambling and just getting on behind Telly.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Stop! Come back here!

Telly gets Briar galloping with Walter bouncing around behind him as if he's going to fall off. Marcus manages to catch up as Briar is accelerating, Marcus grabbing Walter's jutting foot, but as he tugs, Walter's shoe comes off in his hand and he stumbles and stops, watching them disappear down the road around a bend.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(calling)

We gets our freedom and this is what we do to each other?

(quietly)

Don't you hurt that horse.

He shakes his head, flings Walter's shoe into the brush, turns and goes back to the campsite, sitting down wearily.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

ESTABLISHING SHOT - DAY

Marcus, carrying his bags, is trudging towards the city of Mobile in the distance.

EXT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - DAY

Marcus is on a street of businesses and sees a blacksmith shop with a sign above the wide doorway reading *SELMER'S BLACKSMITH*.

INT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - CONTINUOUS

SETH SELMER, the owner, is working but stops as he sees Marcus.

SETH

Something I can do for you?

MARCUS

Yessir. You be Mr. Selmer?

SETH

That's right. What you want?

MARCUS

Sir, I be on my way to New Orleans and needs some work to see me on my way. I was the blacksmith on my master's plantation, pretty much know everything there is to know 'bout working iron. I wondering if you could use some help for a spell?

Seth snorts a laugh.

SETH

No one got no money after this damned war that set you all wandering, so...

Seth looks thoughtful.

SETH (CONT'D)

But I might know of 'sumin. My cousin fishes and he's been needin some help. You 'fraid of the water?

MARCUS

Used to swim in a pond some. Never been on the ocean, but it's still just water.

SETH

Okay.

(MORE)

SETH (CONT'D)

You come by an hour or so and meet my cousin Albert. Might work out for everyone.

MARCUS

Thank you, sir. 'preciate it.

SETH

Polite nigger, too. I like that.

MARCUS

(holding his tongue)

Yessir.

As Marcus heads out, Seth watches him go with a sly smile on his face.

EXT. MOBILE WATERFRONT - LATER

Marcus is sitting staring out at the bay as he eats something he's purchased. A white couple is passing.

MARCUS

'Scuse me, sir, could you be telling me the time?

The man looks at him with distaste and doesn't answer, the woman keeping her gaze forward as they walk away.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Guessing not.

P.O.V. MARCUS

The water shimmers in the sunlight below the blue sky with white clouds.

BACK TO SCENE

MARCUS

Still a beautiful world.

EXT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - LATER

As Marcus approaches the blacksmith shop, he sees Seth and another man, ALBERT SELMER, standing out front.

SETH

Made it back, good. This here's my cousin, Mr. Albert Selmer. Whad you say you's name was again?

MARCUS

Marcus. Marcus Blake.
(to Albert)
Nice meeting you.

ALBERT

My cousin says you up for some
fishing, make some pay.

MARCUS

I'm headed for New Orleans and I'm a
bit short. Lost a horse I had, stolen
on the way from South Carolina.
Been a long walk.

ALBERT

New Orleans, huh. That might work
for both us. We head out and fish
on the way to New Orleans. I drop
you there and head back. Take a day-
and-a-half, maybe two we sleeps at
night. I gives you five dollars you
work hard on our fishing, and you
gets a ride right to the city. How's
that sound to ya?

MARCUS

Sounds right good.

ALBERT

We go now, you be ready.

MARCUS

I be ready.

SETH

Okay. I hopes you have good fishing
and you make out in New Orleans.

MARCUS

Thanks for your help. 'Preciate it.

SETH

No trouble. Albert here will take
good care of you.

ALBERT

Sho will. See you when I gets back,
cousin.

He sets off, Marcus following. Again, Seth has the evil
smile on his face, shaking his head in amusement as he turns
back inside.

EXT. MOBILE WATERFRONT - LATER

They come up to a small skiff moored at the docks, a canvas topping covering it. Albert climbs down and removes the canvas covering and then climbs aboard, Marcus following.

ALBERT

You can store you stuff there in the front lockers. If it don't get rough, should stay dry enough.

Marcus opens one locker and sees chains and locks.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Not that one. The bigger one.

Marcus opens that one and puts his things away.

MARCUS

Never fished so you'll have to be telling me what to do.

ALBERT

Yeah, I'm just needing you for the help. Gets tiring pulling up the nets, but you look strong enough. Untie the ropes from the cleats.

MARCUS

The what?

ALBERT

Them metal things on the dock.

Marcus gets off and takes the ropes off the cleats then gets back on board.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

You take one oar and I'll do the other until we get out where we put up the sail.

MARCUS

Never rowed, either.

ALBERT

Just watch me.

Albert pushes off the boat from the dock with an oar and puts it in the oarlock, Marcus watching him and doing the same, the two of them sitting down on the center seat and starting to row, the boat zigzagging until they get synchronized.

MARCUS
This is kind of fun.

ALBERT
Wait till the work starts; we'll see
if it's still fun for you then.

They head out into the bay.

EXT. GULF - LATER

Out of sight of land, no other ships around, Albert scanning
to make sure they're alone as Marcus works hauling in a net.

ALBERT
Marcus.

Marcus turns to find Albert at the other end of the boat
aiming a gun at him.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
I don't want to hurt you so just do
I tell you.

MARCUS
What is this?

ALBERT
I think you're planning on killing
me, Marcus. I'm going to take you
back in and drop you off for my own
safety.

MARCUS
That's crazy. I don't mean you no
harm. Whad I do to make you think
that?

ALBERT
Just the way you been looking at me,
Marcus. Now just do what I tell you
and we'll both be fine. Open that
smaller locker there, the one you
saw the chains in.

MARCUS
I'm telling you the truth. I don't
mean to hurt you no way.

ALBERT
Maybe. But I just don't trust you.
Open that locker.

Marcus undoes the clasp and open the box.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Now put that chain twice around one of your ankles then around that post under the seat and then twice around you other ankle and lock it tight.

MARCUS

Why you doing this?

ALBERT

Do it -- or I'm going to have to shoot you and I don't want to do that.

Marcus sits and puts the chain twice around one ankle and then around the post under the seat then the other ankle.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Make it tighter, just a little chain between them.

Marcus adjusts it so there's only a few inches separating his ankles then locks the lock.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Good. Now you put your hands through them 'cuffs.

The wrist cuffs already have just a short chain between them and Marcus locks on one and then the other, clicking them shut.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Okay, pull your feet and hands apart hard.

Marcus does that and Albert is satisfied he's bound. He puts the gun in his pants and sits at the other end, turning the boat with the rudder so it's headed southeast.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

'Pologize for your uncomfort, Marcus, but nothing be done about that. We gots a bit of a voyage ahead of us.

MARCUS

Why? Mobile not that far behind us.

ALBERT

(smiling)

Well, I told a bit of fib. You be worth a lot of money, Marcus. 'Specting you know that, having been a slave and all. You'll fetch a good price.

MARCUS

But there ain't slaves no more.

ALBERT

Not here where the Yanks done won.
But they still be slaving in the
islands. In Cuba you'll fetch a
good price still.

MARCUS

You're selling me back into being a
slave?

ALBERT

That's what you nigras was made for.
Just plain foolish what been done.
It's your nature, Marcus. You be
going home.

MARCUS

You're wrong, Albert. No man belongs
to another. It's only guns and power
that makes that happen.

ALBERT

Yeah, well, I've got the gun and
that gives me the power. Now sit
back, shut up, and enjoy the beautiful
day while you have nothing to do.
Too soon you be back slaving the
fields.

MARCUS

All for a some money in your pocket.

ALBERT

God done made you the slave, and we
be's the master. That's how god
wants it.

MARCUS

No, the devil. That's whose work
you be doing. And you know what
happen to those that do his evil.
You'll burn in hell someday, Albert.

ALBERT

Might hot sun. Think we'll both be
burning a bit on this journey.
Course, be worse for me, the white
man. You be dark to be working
outside.

MARCUS

I be dark skinned, Albert, but you
be dark souled.

ALBERT

Wooo, mouthy nigger. Be glad to be
rid of you.

MARCUS

I be wishing I never met you.

ALBERT

'Spect that be the truth.

EXT. GULF - EVENING

The seas are rougher as the sun sets.

ALBERT

Supposed to get calmer as evening
come on. Might be in for some
weather tonight.

MARCUS

I'm luckier than you, Albert. I'm
thinking you're scared of dying while
I don't care.

ALBERT

Easy to say when it ain't staring
you in the face.

MARCUS

No, Albert. I been a slave and I be
a free man. Ain't going back to be
a slave, so I'm dead already. But
you...

ALBERT

Alright, shut yo mouth now, boy.
I'm tired of everything you gots to
say.

MARCUS

Death coming for you, Albert. Coming
fast.

Albert shakes his head, but looks apprehensive studying the
sky.

EXT. GULF - NIGHT

The storm is raging, Albert doing his best to guide the boat,
scared stiff while Marcus appears relaxed even as the
following waves toss the boat.

MARCUS

(calling)

Not long now, Albert. I can feel
the hand of god resting on us, getting
ready to take us back.

Albert looks as if he almost believes Marcus, holding on tight as the boat is tossed. Suddenly behind them, a white streak appears racing towards them, a huge rogue wave. Marcus can see it, but Albert doesn't. Marcus begins singing the song he heard in Charleston, "John Brown's Body," except he changes the name: "Albert Selmer's body lies a mouldering in the grave.." Albert suddenly hears the deeper roar over the regular roil of the seas and looks back to see the rogue wave almost on them. He makes a NOISE OF TERROR and ducks, but the water catches him and the boat, the oars and other things going overboard, the rudder torn away. Marcus, secured to the post, stays where he is but Albert is thrown across the boat right onto Marcus who, despite his limited movement, grabs Albert by his shirt, holds him a moment staring in Albert's panicked eyes, knowing what's coming.

ALBERT

No! No!

Marcus flings him up and over over the side of the boat into the raging ocean. ALBERT SCREAMS, but his screams quickly fade as he's carried away.

MARCUS

I'm yours to command, Lord. Do with
me as you will. I be your servant
evermore.

He hunkers down in the boat which is being tossed even more violently.

EXT. GULF - DAY

The battered boat is still afloat, the day windy but clear. Marcus is doing his best to free himself from the post and it finally gives way. Now he can move about though still chained hand-and-foot. He gets to the back but finds the tiller is useless, only the handle remaining. He can't guide the boat, the sail and oars gone. He sits.

MARCUS

Don't believe you saved me to just
die a slow death now, Lord. But I
be in your hands.

He leans back, surrendering to fate. He looks content.

EXT. GULF - AFTERNOON

Marcus is wasted, lying in the bottom of the boat which has been drifting for some days, the calm water lapping against the hull. But then the sound changes and a shadow comes over the boat. Marcus sits up to see a large sailing boat pulling alongside, sailors staring down at him.

MARCUS

(to himself)

Thank you for your mercy, Lord.

The sailors on the boat are using grappling hooks to keep him alongside as they slow. Two sailors climb down into the skiff and help him to his feet, ONE SAILOR saying to him in a BRITISH ACCENT that all the sailors on the British ship have:

ONE SAILOR

Take it easy, Mate, we've got you.

MARCUS

Thank you, thank you. I was thinking I be dying out here.

ONE SAILOR

Not anymore. You're safe.

Others from above reach down and together they get Marcus up onto the sailing ship. CAPTAIN NIVEN gives an order to a couple of his men:

CAPTAIN NIVEN

Get that boat and tie it up behind us.

MARCUS

Might I get my things off it first?

CAPTAIN NIVEN

(to the sailors)

Bring his things topside.

They climb down to the skiff. The Captain turns to Marcus and peers at his chains.

CAPTAIN NIVEN (CONT'D)

What are those chains about? Are you a convict?

MARCUS

No sir. I be a freed slave from South Carolina.

(MORE)

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I be on my way to New Orleans to look for my family and a man in Mobile got his cousin to offer me a boat ride to New Orleans if I work fishing out here with him on the way. Instead, he pulled a gun on me, made me chain myself like this, and says he taking me to someplace -- Cupa -- to sell back into slavery. We hit a storm and he be thrown on me and I threw him overboard. I'se been drifting a couple of days.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

What's your name?

MARCUS

Marcus, sir. Marcus Blake.

The Captain considers him.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

(beat)

Can't see any reason they'd have a criminal chained up in a no-account fishing boat out here in the middle of nowhere.

(to a sailor)

Daniel, take him below, get those irons off him, give him a berth and a meal.

MARCUS

Sir, you're a savior.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

We're not going up to New Orleans. We're headed for Texas -- Galveston. But we'll get your boat in order and drop you at Port Eads at the mouth of the Mississippi and you can make your way up to New Orleans.

MARCUS

You just don't know what that means to me, sir.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

I'm glad we can help you. It's been a difficult few years in America. I hope it can all get back on track now.

MARCUS

Yessir.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

Daniel will take care of you. Let him know if there's anything you require.

MARCUS

Thank you, sir. Bless you.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

Bless us all.

Marcus follows Daniel slowly, working out the stiffness.

EXT. PORT EADS - DAY

Marcus is set to climb down into the fishing skiff fitted with new oars.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

The men got together an offering to help you on your way. It's not much, but it should help.

MARCUS

Thank you so much.

Marcus climbs down to the skiff.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I hope I can repay all of you someday.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

God be with you.

MARCUS

And with you, and all the men. Thank you.

The Captain gives him a salute that Marcus returns and then pushes off. When he's away from the ship, he puts the oars in the locks and gets ready to row.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(calling)

You saved my life and I be always grateful. Thank you again.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

Goodbye, and good luck.

Other sailors wish him well. Marcus begins rowing, glad to be alive and on his way.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS WATERFRONT - DAY

New Orleans circa 1865, a bustling seaport. Marcus looks at the city as he rows towards docks.

MARCUS

My oh my, look at that will you.

Marcus raises the oars and pulls them in as the boat glides towards the end of a dock with other larger boats moored along its sides. Marcus catches the dock and keeps his boat from bumping it, ties off on one of the pylons. He pulls the canvas topping over the boat and climbs the ladder to the dock, taking his bags with him.

EXT. DOCK - CONTINUOUS

He looks down the dock to the busy street ahead.

MARCUS

How I ever gonna find you?

He gathers himself and sets off.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS CITY HALL - LATER

Marcus approaches the building and goes inside.

INT. NEW ORLEANS CITY HALL - CONTINUOUS

Marcus goes to the desk and the CITY HALL CLERK looks up.

MARCUS

'Scuse me. I be's trying to find a business in the city here. Schumer and Son.

CITY HALL CLERK

What kind of business?

MARCUS

They bought and sold slaves. They handled my wife and daughter. Bought them from a Charleston slave dealer named Leffert.

CITY HALL CLERK

We were taken over by the Yanks three years ago. Ain't been any slave dealing here since then.

MARCUS

Well, he would have bought my wife and children 'bout five years ago.

CITY HALL CLERK

Like I said, all slave dealing ended here three years ago. This... What did you say the name of the business was?

MARCUS

Schumer and Son.

CITY HALL CLERK

Well, they would have been out of business soon as the Yanks arrived.

MARCUS

I'm hoping they can tell me where my wife and child's went to.

The clerk seems to sympathize and rises.

CITY HALL CLERK

Let me see if anyone can find anything about them for you.

MARCUS

Much appreciate whatever you can do.

The clerk disappears in back and Marcus moves about aimlessly.

INT. NEW ORLEANS CITY HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The clerk returns with a piece of paper.

CITY HALL CLERK

This here's the address where they was. Don't know if they still be there, doing some other kind of business.

MARCUS

I'm much obliged for you helping me.

CITY HALL CLERK

You know, we had laws that didn't allow children under the age of ten to be separated from their mother. Was your daughter that young?

MARCUS

She would have been four year's old when they was brought here. Be nine now.

CITY HALL CLERK

Well, that's hopeful then.

(MORE)

CITY HALL CLERK (CONT'D)
 I respect your looking for them.
 Family is what counts.

MARCUS
 Yes, it is. I never wanted to be
 parted from them. Wasn't my choice.

CITY HALL CLERK
 No, I expect it wasn't. Good luck.

MARCUS
 Thank you.
 (holds up the address)
 And thank your for this.

The clerk nods and Marcus heads out, but then turns back.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
 'Scuse me again. It's a might big
 city. Do you knows how I might find
 this address?

CITY HALL CLERK
 Yes, of course. When you leave
 here...

EXT. NEW ORLEANS BUSINESS STREET - LATER

Marcus checks the piece of paper and the numbers on the
 business then walks further until he finds the right number.
 The business is marked "DREESEN PRINTING." Marcus goes
 inside.

INT. DREESEN PRINTING - CONTINUOUS

ANDREW DREESEN behind the counter looks at him...with a smile.

ANDREW
 Can I help you?

MARCUS
 I be looking for a company that was
 here, Schumer and Son.

ANDREW
 I've never heard of them.

Marcus shows him the piece of paper.

MARCUS
 They said at City Hall this is where
 they was.

ANDREW

I've been here almost three years.
This place was empty when I took it.

MARCUS

Yessir. I wonder, you rent this
space from someone? Might they know
of this Schumer and Son?

ANDREW

Possibly. Let me write on that where
you can find the landlord.

Marcus give him the slip of paper and he writes on the back
with a thick mechanical pencil.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

You just go down to the next cross-
street, take a right and they're
about half way down that block on
the left side. You'll see that name
there on their window. They own a
lot of the buildings around here.

MARCUS

Much obliged to you sir.

ANDREW

You need any printing done, come on
back.

MARCUS

Thank you.

ANDREW

Anytime. Good luck.

Marcus goes out and heads off briskly down the street.

EXT. CROSS-STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus crosses the cross-street and heads down to a building
with "TRASKER REAL ESTATE" on the window, going inside.

INT. TRASKER REAL ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

A woman at a desk looks up but a MAN FURTHER BACK says:

MAN FURTHER BACK

Here, what you be wanting?

Marcus goes towards his desk and the man looks wary.

MARCUS

Sir, I be told you own the building with Dreesen Printing being in it. I be looking for a business that was there named Schumer and Son.

MAN FURTHER BACK

Why are you interested in them?

MARCUS

Sir, they bought my wife and child from a company in Charleston, South Carolina. Leffert be its name. I trying to find my family, and I hoping this Schumer can give me some idea where they might be.

MAN FURTHER BACK

Schumer's dead. Killed himself after his boy was killed defending the city from the Yanks. Nothing left of his business. We threw out all his records when we cleaned out the place. 'Specting your out of luck there, boy.

MARCUS

Sir, you're sure I couldn't find something written somewhere?

MAN FURTHER BACK

You can read?

MARCUS

Yessir, and write, too. My wife and daughter woulda come through there 'bout five years ago.

MAN FURTHER BACK

Whenever. But there's nothing for you to find. No reason for us to save anything. Schumer and his son were all alone, and when both went that was the end of that. Can't help you.

Marcus feels the man's antipathy, but there's nothing to do. He just turns and walks out.

EXT. CROSS-STREET - CONTINUOUS

He considers then heads back towards the print shop.

INT. DREESEN PRINTING - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus comes back into the store.

ANDREW

Couldn't find the place?

MARCUS

No sir, directions work fine. But they say they cleaned out the place and threw out anything of Schumer after he...after he died. I be wondering, did you find anything when you moved in here?

Andrew shakes his head.

ANDREW

No, I never heard of this Schumer. Never found anything that might be of help to you.

MARCUS

All right. Just thought I'd make sure. Much obliged.

ANDREW

Wish I could help you. Like I say, I feel for what you're doing. Wouldn't want to lose my family.

MARCUS

No. It be painful. Hold to them tight.

Andrew nods again and Marcus goes out.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS BUSINESS STREET - CONTINUOUS

Marcus stands lost in thought, wishing he had a thought that might be useful which he doesn't. The door behind him opens and Andrew comes out.

ANDREW

Hey, I was thinking... This Schumer did business here, someone in the neighborhood might know something about them. If we put a sign up in the window, you might get some useful information.

MARCUS

You be willing to do that for me?

ANDREW

Yes.

MARCUS

I be much obliged to you.

ANDREW

C'mon in. We'll make something up.

They both head inside.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

You give me the information, and
I'll print it up for you.

MARCUS

I really haves to thank you for all
this.

Andrew looks at him.

ANDREW

I never did hold much with slavery.
Just a cheap way of doing business.
And it seemed that those that did it
just couldn't put themselves in
another person's heart. Must have
been a trial for you and all.

MARCUS

Yessir. It was that.

ANDREW

And to be torn from you family...

Marcus nods.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Well, let's set finding them. Schumer
and Son, that was the name, right?
Might be good if we offered a reward
for information.

MARCUS

Sir...

ANDREW

Call me Andrew, please.

MARCUS

Andrew, sir, I don't haves no money.
I can't give a reward.

ANDREW

Where are you living? How are you getting by?

MARCUS

I just gots here tell the truth. I had quite a time. I started out in a small fishing boat from Mobile, Alabama. A man offered to bring me here I help him fish. 'Cept he really wanted to sell me as a slave where it be still happening. Someplace Cupa he says.

ANDREW

Cuba?

MARCUS

That sounds right. We's got in a storm and I throws him overboard. I got loose from where I was chained, but I couldn't get the chains off me. I drifted until I was rescued by a ship dropped me down the end of the river and I rowed up here. Arrived a bit earlier today.

ANDREW

You go through all that, and the first thing you do is look for your family?

MARCUS

Most important thing.

ANDREW

That's incredible.

(beat)

So you're not staying anywhere yet?

MARCUS

'Spect I'll be living on the boat.

ANDREW

You can't. They'll arrest you for vagrancy. They have strict laws about coloreds sleeping outside. You get arrested, it'll be like being a slave again.

MARCUS

Guess I'll have to stay in the country and come in to search.

ANDREW

You know, I could use some help here. You could stay in the back room. I had made it up like a little apartment for my helper before, but he's moved on. I've been looking for someone. It's your's if you want it and don't mind giving me some help.

MARCUS

That's a mighty fine offer, sir. But I need to get on looking for my family.

ANDREW

No, no, the job I'm offering is perfect. I need someone to give out fliers, and I want to attract Negro business. Most are ignoring them; it's good for my business. You give out fliers, make sure your people get them, you can give out information on your family at the same time. I'll print you up fliers for them, too. When you have free time, you can help in the shop, get a bit of a salary to keep you in funds and out of trouble with the authorities. It will be perfect for both of us. What do you say?

MARCUS

I say I be mighty lucky to run into someone like you. I'll pay you back for what you be doing.

ANDREW

Helping me will be enough pay back. Let me show you where you'll be living.

MARCUS

God bless you, sir.

ANDREW

God bless us all.

INT. DREESEN PRINTING - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew and Marcus emerge from the back apartment and go into the print shop.

ANDREW

Like I say, it's nothing fancy, but it should be comfortable enough.

MARCUS

You be a very generous man...Andrew.

ANDREW

Let's get started on your flier.
You know, I was thinking Marcus, I
have a friend does artwork for me.
If you described your wife, he might
be able to draw a decent likeness to
put on the flier.

MARCUS

I could show him the picture I haves
for him to copy.

ANDREW

A picture? You mean a photograph?

MARCUS

Yessir.

ANDREW

You have a photograph of your wife?

MARCUS

And my little girl. My master took
it for hissself and a friend saved it
when his house was burned and gave
it to me. Here...

Marcus carefully takes the photo from his pocket.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I keeps it careful with me.

Andrew looks at the photo.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

That be's my wife and daughter on
the right there -- Teeka and Rajeen.

ANDREW

We won't need to draw anything.
I'll get the photo of them from this
to put on the flier.

MARCUS

You can puts a photo on there?

ANDREW

I sure can. Anyone knows them,
they'll recognize her right away.
This is perfect, Marcus.

MARCUS

I might really finds them.

ANDREW

You might.

(beat)

But if you shouldn't, Marcus, you'll have done all you can and that's all you can do. If it turns out they're not findable, you should go on with your life. That's what the Lord would want you to do.

MARCUS

Yessir. But for nows, I'll work on finding them. If they can be's found, I aim to do that.

ANDREW

Yes, of course. Let's get started on what we need to do. Tomorrow, you can hit the streets giving out my flier and your own. We'll hope for the best.

MARCUS

You're a fine man, sir. I do appreciate all this.

Andrew puts his hand on Marcus's shoulder and then sets to work.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS BUSINESS STREET - MORNING

Marcus comes out of Andrew's with a shoulder bag, some fliers already in his hand. A white businessman is passing and Marcus tries to hand him a flier.

MARCUS

Dreesen Printing meets all your printing needs.

The man snatches the flier and tosses it on the ground, hurrying off. Marcus picks it up and shakes it to clean it then sets off the other way.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - LATER

Marcus is giving out fliers when an attractive black woman, DOLLY TILSON, who is his age, approaches.

DOLLY

May I have one?

MARCUS

Yes, here it is.

She looks at the flier for Dreesen's.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Any of your printing needs. They've been very good to me. I just arrived and they gave me this job and a place to stay, and they printed this for me.

He gives her the flier on his family.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I'm looking for my wife and my daughter. They were brought from Charleston to New Orleans here five years ago.

DOLLY

Oh, you were separated?

MARCUS

Yes, Ma'am. I was sold to a different master and then they were sold here.

DOLLY

Seven years since you've seen them it says.

MARCUS

That be rights.

DOLLY

She's a pretty woman.

MARCUS

Yes, she be that.

DOLLY

You're Marcus Blake?

MARCUS

Yes, Ma'am. If you find anyone who knows anything, they can get me at Dreesen's, the address on there. He's been mighty fine to me. Hope you use him if you need printing.

DOLLY

You know, we do a lot of printing at my church. I think we could try this Dreesen.

MARCUS

That would be wonderful.

DOLLY

I'll let him know it was you who brought us there.

MARCUS

Thank you much, Ma'am.

DOLLY

Dolly -- Dolly Tilson. Please call me Dolly.

She puts out her hand and Marcus shakes it.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

You say you've just arrived. You probably don't have a church yet.

MARCUS

No, Ma'am...Dolly. Don't have one yet.

DOLLY

Marcus, I want you to come by our church, see how it feels for you. Bethany Methodist on Beaufort. Just three blocks south and two to the right. You can't miss it.

MARCUS

Bethany Methodist on Beaufort. I'll remember.

DOLLY

We're having a potluck dinner tonight at six in the parish hall attached to the church. We'd be glad to have you there for that.

MARCUS

Well, I'll ask Mr. Andrew if that be all right...if he don't be needing me. If I can, I be there.

DOLLY

That would be wonderful, Marcus. And maybe we can help with your search. Bring some of these fliers, we can give them out for you.

MARCUS

That's most kind. I'll hope seeing you then.

DOLLY

Yes, please try. If not, Sunday at eleven we have service. Please come by then.

MARCUS

Most certainly. But I'll try for tonight.

DOLLY

Hope to see you there.

MARCUS

If I cans, I be there.

They shake again and Dolly moves off, turning once to wave, Marcus acknowledging it. He watches her go, smiling, then moves to give out more fliers.

INT. DREESEN PRINTING - LATER

Marcus comes back into the shop, Andrew working at a press.

ANDREW

Hello there, Marcus. How is giving out the fliers going?

MARCUS

Fine, fine. I give your flier first then tell my story and give them that one. Most people being real kind. It just might work.

ANDREW

We'll keep our fingers crossed.

Andrew comes over to Marcus cleaning his hands on a rag.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I've got some other news, too. A friend of a friend is interested in your boat. He'll be stopping by shortly, you can show it to him.

MARCUS

I've been thinking, Andrew. It's not really my boat to sell. I don't own it.

ANDREW

Marcus, the man kidnapped you, tried to sell you back into slavery. He got what was coming to him. If anyone deserves that boat, it's you.

MARCUS
You think, sir?

ANDREW
I know, Marcus. It's yours.

MARCUS
(beat)
Not know much about boats. What's
you think I should ask for it?

ANDREW
I haven't seen it. Tell you what,
when he shows up, we'll close up for
a bit and I'll go with you to the
docks.

MARCUS
I don't want to put you out none.

ANDREW
You let me worry about that.

MARCUS
Thank you, Andrew sir. Another thing,
I mets a woman who invited me to a
church social tonight at six. Do
you think I might be able to attend
to that?

ANDREW
You're not a slave anymore, Marcus.

MARCUS
And that be a powerful joy, amen.

ANDREW
Yes, amen to that.

The door opens and a man enters, TONY ANGELO, the person
interested in the boat.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Ah, here he is now. Marcus, this is
Mr. Tony Angelo. Tony is the one
interested your boat.

ANGELO
Yes, I am. Hear you got a small
fishing boat, just what I'm looking
for.

MARCUS
Yessir, I does. It's down at the
docks.

ANGELO

What are you asking for it?

ANDREW

Let's go see it before we talk price.

ANGELO

How big? In good shape?

ANDREW

You'll see. Marcus isn't a fisherman,
doesn't know about boats.

ANGELO

(to Marcus)

Where'd you get it then?

Marcus doesn't know what to say.

ANDREW

He inherited it. Some uncle, isn't
that right, Marcus?

Marcus is hesitant to lie but finally nods his head. Angelo
looks skeptical but he's still game.

ANGELO

Okay, whatever. We go now and look
at it?

ANDREW

Let me put some things away.

EXT. DOCK - LATER

The three of them walk along the dock to where the boat is
tied up.

MARCUS

That's it there.

ANGELO

Kind of beat up.

ANDREW

Needs a sail. Other than that, it's
in good shape.

ANGELO

Kinda small.

ANDREW

Just you fishing from it.

Angelo climbs down and examines things, opening the lockers, using a folding knife to poke at the wood in various spots.

ANGELO

Okay, I give you fifty dollars for it.

Andrew snorts a laugh.

ANDREW

Bet you would. One-twenty.

ANGELO

Ah. Seventy-five.

ANDREW

No beating about the bush. A hundred-ten.

ANGELO

Eighty-five.

Andrew looks at Marcus.

MARCUS

A hundred even and it's done.

ANGELO

Ninety-five.

MARCUS

One-hundred-ten.

ANGELO

Hey, you were already at hundred.

MARCUS

A hundred and we be done then.

ANGELO

You're a robber, but okay. One hundred.

ANDREW

In gold.

ANGELO

Oh, what's next? You want my first-born?

MARCUS

Just the gold.

ANGELO

You write me a receipt.

ANDREW

We'll finish up at the shop.

Angelo climbs back up and they head off.

INT. DREESEN PRINTING - LATER

Marcus gives Angelo the written receipt and Angelo looks at it.

ANGELO

Okay, that looks good. Just sign it. Can you write?

MARCUS

Yessir. But the money first.

Angelo takes gold coins from his pocket and counts them out into Marcus's hand.

ANGELO

Ten. We're all set then.

Marcus signs his receipt.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

The boat is rotten, I'm coming back.

MARCUS

Carried me through a storm. Good as I know.

ANGELO

Better be.

ANDREW

I'll have your printing ready tomorrow afternoon.

ANGELO

See you then.

He goes out and Marcus beams.

ANDREW

That was something the way you raised the price back on him. You're a born businessman, I'm thinking.

MARCUS

Never had any money like this.

ANDREW

Be wise with it. Don't flash it around.

Marcus stows the money in his pocket.

MARCUS

I be sures to be careful with it.

(beat)

Thank you for all you done to help me, Andrew.

ANDREW

Don't mention it, Marcus. I'm glad you're getting on.

MARCUS

Well, I like to get over to this church thing.

ANDREW

And making friends, too. Couldn't be better. Enjoy yourself, Marcus.

MARCUS

Thank you, I will.

Marcus heads out.

EXT. BETHANY CHURCH - EVENING

The modest church itself dark, the attached parish house lit up.

INT. PARISH HALL - CONTINUOUS

Marcus enters the parish main room crowded with people socializing. Dolly sees him and comes over.

DOLLY

Marcus, I'm so glad you could make it.

MARCUS

Thanks for inviting me. It smell mighty good in here.

DOLLY

We have some good cooks in our congregation. What church were you in where you were?

MARCUS

I've never been in no church. We had services we did ourselves, but it wasn't no church like this.

DOLLY

Oh, yes, of course. In the country it's a bit different than here I suppose.

MARCUS

Yes, bit different.

DOLLY

Well, we're glad you're here with us now. Let me take you around and introduce you.

Dolly takes him by the arm and approaches a group talking who smile as Dolly interrupts.

INT. PARISH HALL DINING ROOM - LATER

People are at tables eating, others getting food from the buffet line. Marcus sits with Dolly and a group.

DOLLY

(to the table)

Marcus has fliers he's giving out to locate his wife and children. I've been thinking, we should add a section to the newsletter telling of people searching for their loved ones. There's going to be a lot of that with the war over.

An older man, ORVILLE, speaks up.

ORVILLE

That's a wonderful idea, Dolly. I've seen some ads like that in the paper already. I'm going to get right on that.

(to the table)

We should all ask around, get as many as we can. It will publicize Bethany real well.

DOLLY

And help those poor people.

ORVILLE

Yes.

(to Marcus)

I'll get your information and put that in this week.

Marcus takes one of his fliers from his pocket and hands it to Orville who looks it over.

MARCUS

This is what Mr. Dreesen printed up for me. He's been real kind. If any of you need printing, I be obliged if you used Mr. Dreesen.

ORVILLE

This is very nice. It has the photograph, too. Never seen that.

MARCUS

Yessir, Mr. Dreesen went out his way to do that for me. Like I say, he's a very good man.

DOLLY

Marcus just arrived and this Mr. Dreesen gave him a job and a place to live along with printing that flier.

MARCUS

And a sign in his window. I'se very lucky to have run into him.

ORVILLE

Not all whites are evil.

DOLLY

Well, we all free now. That's got to be better.

A chorus of amen's to that.

EXT. DOLLY'S HOME STREET - LATER

Marcus walks with Dolly up to her home's doorway.

DOLLY

Here we are. Thank you for walking me home, Marcus.

MARCUS

Thank you for tonight, Dolly. I never been to nothing like that. It was real enjoyable.

DOLLY

And we'll see you at service Sunday?

MARCUS

I be there.

DOLLY

Good.

(beat)

Marcus, it's a testament that you're searching for you family the way you are. You're a good man. I just want to say, it's been a long time, a lot's happened. If you shouldn't be able to find them, you need to go on with your life. You have a lot to give.

MARCUS

People telling me that. But not time for that yet.

DOLLY

No, I'm just saying...

Marcus nods and they look at one another.

DOLLY (CONT'D)

Well, goodnight.

MARCUS

Goodnight, Dolly.

She gives him a kiss on the cheek.

DOLLY

See you Sunday.

Marcus smiles and nods. Dolly goes in and Marcus stares after her a second then turns and heads off himself, still smiling.

INT. DREESEN PRINTING - DAY

Andrew is working at a press, Marcus doing odd tasks. A black man, OCTAVIOUS PHELPS, comes in. Andrew goes to help him.

ANDREW

Morning. What can I do for you?

OCTAVIOUS

I been meaning to come in 'bout that sign in your window asking 'bout Schumer and Son.

ANDREW

Yes, that's for my helper here. He's trying to find his family. Schumer was the one dealing them.

(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)

(calling)

Marcus, this man's here about Schumer.

Marcus comes over and he and the black man shake hands.

OCTAVIOUS

Octavious Phelps.

MARCUS

Marcus Blake.

OCTAVIOUS

Nice meeting you.

(beat)

I did a number of dealings with Schumer.

ANDREW

You were a slave trader?

OCTAVIOUS

I was. Free black. Tried to get my slaves placed well. Anyway, Schumer was one of my main traders.

MARCUS

Did you know Teeka, my wife? She might have been using the last name Jepps, the master who sold her. She had my daughter, Rajeen, with her. Would have been four year-old.

OCTAVIOUS

No, don't recall anyone like that. I just wanted to tell you that Schumer dealt almost always out west, the frontier places. That was kind of his thing.

ANDREW

Any communities in particular?

OCTAVIOUS

Texas -- and with the Cherokee Nation, too. Wish I could tell you something more, but that's it. Just thought I'd let you all know.

ANDREW

Well, that's much appreciated.

MARCUS

Sure is. Thank you kindly.

OCTAVIOUS
I hope you find them. I hear anything
more, I'll let you know.

MARCUS
'Preciate that.

Octavious goes out.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
How I'm ever gonna find them?

ANDREW
You keep at it, Marcus. God will
help you.

MARCUS
With or without him, I'll never quit.

Andrew rests his hand on Marcus's shoulder, and then they
return to work.

EXT. BETHANY CHURCH - DAY

Marcus, his appearance spruced up, goes into the church for
the Sunday services.

INT. BETHANY CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Dolly is talking with people just inside the entrance and
goes to Marcus the moment she sees him.

DOLLY
Marcus, so glad you're here.

MARCUS
Thanks for inviting me, Dolly.

DOLLY
Never need an invitation to come
here, Marcus. This is the lord's
house, and he welcomes everyone.
Shall we take a seat?

She leads the way to the pews, Marcus letting her go in first,
and they get settled, Marcus looking around curiously.

INT. BETHANY CHURCH - LATER

The congregation is on its feet SINGING along with the choir,
Marcus enjoying himself, he and Dolly smiling at one another.

INT. BETHANY CHURCH - LATER

The congregation is making its way out of the church, Dolly stopping to thank PASTOR ROLLY.

DOLLY

That was such an inspirational sermon you gave today, Pastor.

PASTOR ROLLY

Thank you, Dolly.
(notices Marcus)
Don't believe I know your friend here.

DOLLY

Yes, this is Marcus Blake. Marcus, this is Pastor Rolly.

PASTOR ROLLY

(shaking hands)
Pleasure to make your acquaintance.

MARCUS

Likewise.

DOLLY

Marcus is new to town. He and his family were separated years ago and he's searching for them now. He was the reason we thought of publishing the announcements for finding lost loved ones.

PASTOR ROLLY

We're pleased to have you join us, Marcus. And I certainly hope your search is successful.

MARCUS

Thank you, Pastor. I'm glad to be here. I told Dolly -- I've never been to a real church. It be real nice.

PASTOR ROLLY

The Lord brought you to us.

DOLLY

Amen.

MARCUS

Amen.

DOLLY

I love your sermons, Pastor.

PASTOR ROLLY

Thank you, Dolly. Nice meeting you,
Marcus.

MARCUS

Pleasure.

Dolly moves off, Marcus following.

EXT. PARK - LATER

Marcus and Dolly walk through a city park.

MARCUS

This is real pretty.

DOLLY

There are lots of nice places here.
I love New Orleans.

MARCUS

How long have you been here?

DOLLY

I was a slave here since I was a
little girl. I won't tell you how
long ago that was. When the Union
soldiers took the city back in '62,
I became free -- Hallelujah. What a
day that was.

MARCUS

I know how that feels.

DOLLY

It was easier being a slave in some
ways; but even with the troubles,
there's nothing beats free -- make
your own way.

MARCUS

Amen, to that.

DOLLY

So, did you like church?

MARCUS

Loved it. Pastor Rolly really moved
me.

DOLLY

Yes, he's wonderful. He was a free black, but not like some of them that acted just like the slave masters.

MARCUS

I met a man like that. He dealt with Schumer and Son, the people that sold my wife and daughter. Can't imagine a Negro being a slave dealer.

DOLLY

The things people will do for money.
(beat)
Any news about your family?

MARCUS

This man said Schumer sent his slaves out west, to the frontier, Texas, the Indians.

DOLLY

(beat)
So you're still on that track, searching for them.

MARCUS

Yes. Not sure how I should go ahead.

DOLLY

Like I said, if the Lord doesn't allow you to find them, you can have a life here.

Marcus knows what she's hinting at and is torn.

MARCUS

I can see that; might be nice. But I have to finish up what I started. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't try.

DOLLY

I can understand that. But keep us in mind if it doesn't work out.

MARCUS

(beat)
I got some money from selling the boat. I'd like to treat you. You know any nice place we could eat?

DOLLY

Do I? You'll love it.

She turns them on a path out of the park.

INT. DREESEN PRINTING - MORNING

Marcus is straightening up as Andrew comes into the shop for the day.

ANDREW

Good morning, Marcus.

MARCUS

Morning, Andrew.

ANDREW

You have a nice Sunday?

MARCUS

Very nice. Went to the service then Dolly and I had a walk and a lunch.

ANDREW

That sounds pleasant. You and this Dolly getting along, huh?

MARCUS

She's real nice.

(beat)

I been thinking, Andrew. I'm getting so comfortable here. You giving me a job and place to live, Dolly and all the folks at the church. Selling the boat I got some money.

ANDREW

All that sounds good.

MARCUS

Maybe too good. I'm not getting any closer to finding Teeka and Rajeen. Got that information that they may be out west somewhere. I'm thinking maybe I should be getting on with the search before I get too settled. It's already feeling harder.

ANDREW

I can see that. You may be right, Marcus.

MARCUS

Just don't know how I find them though.

ANDREW

Marcus, your will is a powerful force. If it can be done, I believe you'll do it. And you have that flier with the photo. That puts you way ahead. In fact, I'm going to print up a new version offering a reward for information that let's you find them.

MARCUS

That would help, but I can't...

ANDREW

I'll take care of that. Now it has my address on it to send information. You'll have to keep in touch with me so I can pass along any leads that come in. When you need more fliers you just let me know, I'll send a new batch wherever you are. Just keep giving them out, posting them wherever you can, see what happens.

MARCUS

You're a righteous man, Andrew. I'll always be debted to you for the help you give.

ANDREW

Marcus, You're a good man. You'll always have a place here. You go on, make your search, if you find them -- and I pray you do -- you can come back here as a family and know you have friends who'll help you. You don't find them, same thing. Either way, you have a place to come back to.

MARCUS

(very moved)

Thank you, Andrew. Anything you ever need, I be there for you.

They embrace.

The door bangs open and DETECTIVE FRANZ and a police officer come in followed by Tony Angelo and Seth Selmer.

ANGELO

(pointing at Marcus)

That's him. That's the guy that sold me the boat. Said he got it from his uncle.

SETH

What did you do to my cousin, you
nigger son-of-a-bitch?

DETECTIVE FRANZ

(to Selmer)

Shut-up.

(to Marcus)

You're Marcus Blake?

MARCUS

Yessir. And I can explain this all.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

(to Andrew)

You're Andrew Dreesen?

ANDREW

I am. And we can guess what this is
about. Marcus got the boat...

Detective Franz puts up his hand to stop him.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

Don't say anything just yet.

(to the officer)

Put Blake here in the carriage.

(to Marcus)

We need to talk to you at the station.

MARCUS

All right, yessir.

The officer takes him by the arm and ushers him out. Angelo
and Selmer stay.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

(to Angelo and Selmer)

Out.

Selmer looks to protest but thinks better of it and they go
outside.

DETECTIVE FRANZ (CONT'D)

(to Andrew)

Now, explain.

ANDREW

I can imagine what this might look
like to you -- but Marcus was
kidnapped. He was trying to get to
New Orleans here looking for his
wife and child that he hasn't seen
in seven years.

(MORE)

ANDREW (CONT'D)

The guy that owned the boat told him he'd take him from Mobile to here if he'd help him fish on the way. Instead, he pulled a gun, chained up Marcus and tried to take him to Cuba to sell him back into slavery. They ran into a storm, the guy went overboard, Marcus was rescued and brought the boat here. I encouraged him to sell it to Tony Angelo. I the one who made up the story about him getting it from his uncle's estate. He did nothing wrong.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

How do you know him?

ANDREW

The slave trader, Schumer, who bought his wife and child from the trader in Charleston used to have this as his premises. The place was empty when I leased it, never heard of Schumer. Marcus came in looking for Schumer and when I heard his story I was...touched. He's working for me now while he keeps looking for his family. He's a good man. He did nothing wrong.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

I'd like you to come down to the station, too.

ANDREW

Gladly. We can get this all straightened out. Let me get the keys, I'll lock up.

EXT. DREESEN PRINTING - MOMENTS LATER

Andrew locks the shop and then Detective Franz escorts him to the waiting police carriage, the officer and Marcus inside.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

(to the officer)

Sit up top with Dreesen here. I'll ride inside.

Andrew climbs up to a seat next to the driver, the officer getting out of the carriage and climbing up to sit next to him. Detective Franz gets in the carriage with Marcus.

INT. POLICE CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Franz sits across from Marcus and the carriage sets off.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

Why don't you tell me what happened.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Detective Franz and DETECTIVE DUCHAINE are in an interrogation room with Marcus.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

So this ship -- what was its name?

MARCUS

I don't know. I think the captain said his name was Evan.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

And it was going to Texas.

MARCUS

Yessir.

DETECTIVE DUCHAINE

Where in Texas? That's a mighty big state.

MARCUS

I think he said...Galston? I don't really know, sir.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

Okay. So your story is that you were headed for New Orleans because this is where your wife and daughter were sold to, and you're looking for them.

MARCUS

Yessir.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

You were looking for work in Mobile...

MARCUS

Them men stole my horse and I've had no money.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

Just wait.

(MORE)

DETECTIVE FRANZ (CONT'D)

This man at the blacksmith shop put you in touch with his cousin who offered to take you to New Orleans in his fishing boat if you helped him on the way. He pulled a gun, locked you up, and said he was going to sell you in Cuba. A storm came, you threw him overboard, and you drifted until this ship picked you up and brought you to Port Eads from where you sailed up to New Orleans.

MARCUS

Rowed -- the sail was gone, so was the oars. They gave me new ones on the ship.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

Then you sold the boat for a hundred dollars.

MARCUS

Yessir. That's about it.

DETECTIVE DUCHAINE

Pretty good price you got for that boat.

MARCUS

I guess. I don't know about the price of boats.

DETECTIVE DUCHAINE

Your friend Dreesen helped you arrange all that.

MARCUS

A very good man. Give me a job, printed those fliers to help me look for my wife and child. I owe him a lot.

DETECTIVE DUCHAINE

Don't owe the Selmers anything?

MARCUS

I don't see that I did anything wrong 'gainst them. The man tried to kidnap me. Guessing the Lord took revenge.

DETECTIVE DUCHAINE

Convenient.

(MORE)

DETECTIVE DUCHAINE (CONT'D)

You get to New Orleans with a boat
to sell for a good piece of cash.

MARCUS

Didn't want to go back to no slavery.
I be free now. No man send me back
to being a slave.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

Okay, guess we've heard enough.

MARCUS

Can I go now?

Detective Duchaine laughs.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

No. You're going to be held on
suspicion of murder. And we have to
figure out who has jurisdiction.
The victim was from Alabama. The
murder took place somewhere at sea,
no one knows exactly where. You're
here now.

MARCUS

I didn't murder no ones. The Lord
took him in the storm.

DETECTIVE DUCHAINE

So you say. We have a witness telling
us you and the dead man were simply
fishing -- and you admit throwing
him overboard.

MARCUS

When he be kidnapping me.

DETECTIVE FRANZ

You'll get your say in court soon
enough. But for now, you'll be in
Parish Prison. Stand up. You're
under arrest.

Marcus does as he's told though he's not happy about it.
Duchaine roughly handcuffs him.

EXT. PARISH PRISON - DAY

It's an ominous old stone prison.

INT. PARISH PRISON - CONTINUOUS

A GUARD is bringing Marcus to the visitor's area, Dolly, Andrew, and a young black man dressed in a suit, BEN LEWIS, already seated as the guard points Marcus the the seat on the opposite side of the table.

GUARD

No touching or passing anything.

He moves off, other guards keeping watch.

MARCUS

Thank you all for coming.

ANDREW

We're here for you, Marcus

DOLLY

Are you all right? This place is dreadful.

MARCUS

I'm getting by.

DOLLY

Marcus, this is Benjamin Lewis. He's a lawyer, belongs to our church. He's going to be your lawyer, free of charge.

MARCUS

That's mighty nice of you, Mr. Lewis.

BEN

Please, call me Ben, Marcus.

(beat)

I've heard all about what happened to you. I'll want you to tell me yourself; but for now, I think the important thing is that we find this Captain Evan that rescued you.

DOLLY

Marcus, Pastor Rolly contacted a pastor he knows in Galveston and the church looked for this Captain Evan and no one could find him. Are you sure it was Galveston where they were going?

MARCUS

I think that's it -- sounds like what Captain Evan might have said.

ANDREW

It's important we find him to corroborate your story -- tell the authorities what you said was true.

MARCUS

I says the truth.

BEN

But we have to convince the court of that, and, unfortunately, your word isn't enough. This Selmer is insisting his cousin was just a fisherman and would never have tried to kidnap you back into slavery.

MARCUS

He be the one lying.

ANDREW

We know that, Marcus.

BEN

But we have to something more than just you saying it.

DOLLY

The church in Galveston will keep looking. And we'll try to get them to look into other cities in case the ship was going somewhere else.

ANDREW

I feel terrible about getting you to sell the boat. It makes everything worse.

BEN

I don't believe that has much import. We have to prove Marcus was a prisoner of this Selmer.

MARCUS

I wants to thank all of you. I don't know what I did to deserve all of you.

ANDREW

You're a good man at heart, Marcus.

BEN

We'll fix this. We won't let this happen to you.

Despite what the guard said, Dolly reaches across and takes Marcus's hand. They smile at one another.

EXT. PARISH PRISON YARD - DAY

Marcus is sitting in the exercise yard, other prisoners milling about, some exercising. A black man, VICTOR, approaches.

VICTOR

You be Marcus?

MARCUS

That's me.

VICTOR

Heard a lot about you.

MARCUS

Really? Where from?

VICTOR

Your wife. She love you lots.

Marcus is suddenly alert and on guard.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Yeah. I heard you be's looking for you wife and child -- Teeka and Rajeen.

MARCUS

Why you care?

Victor sits down next to him.

VICTOR

I not be fooling with you. Schumer owned me for a time, too. I knews your wife. Great woman. She missed you something terrible. I can't believe I meet you.

MARCUS

Where did you know her? You know where she be?

VICTOR

I do. I was there when Schumer sold her and her daughter -- your daughter. Cute as a button.

MARCUS

Where did they go?

VICTOR
The injuns bought them. The Cherokee.

MARCUS
Indians?

VICTOR
Sho nuff. They own slaves, too.
Ain't that something?

MARCUS
When did this happen?

VICTOR
Oh, years on, now. Just after that
war started up. Too bad. I stayed
and the Yanks came in and freed us
up not too long after they were taken
off. Maybe they gots freed then
too.

MARCUS
But they was with this Cherokee
Indians. Where, you know?

VICTOR
Just up north somewhere.

MARCUS
They be well, no sickness or nothing?

VICTOR
No, they was fine. That little girl
of yours, real cute. How long since
you been parted?

MARCUS
Seven years. Rajeen would be nine
years old now.

VICTOR
Yessir, real cute. And your wife,
she was fine. Didn't take nothing
from no one. Stood up for herself
and watched out for the little girl.
Lucky they had laws here they had to
stay together, so both went with the
Cherokee.

MARCUS
I gots to thank you. You done me
the biggest favor I ever had.

VICTOR

Glad I help you. I heard some guys talking 'bout you coming here looking for your wife named Teeka and the little girl. Recognized that right way. Glad it help you.

(laughing)

Now if you's just be able to help me gets out of this place.

MARCUS

What you in for?

VICTOR

They say I rob a store. Well, man's got to eat I says.

MARCUS

I have a lawyer some friends got for me. I see if he can help you.

VICTOR

You do that for me?

MARCUS

That and a lot more for what you did for me just now.

VICTOR

Okay. We help each other. That's the way it should be.

MARCUS

I hear that.

They shake hands.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

The courthouse is busy with people coming and going.

INT. COURTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Marcus is in the prisoner's anteroom at the courthouse conferring with Ben Lewis.

BEN

So what we're doing today is a hearing for the writ of habeas corpus I filed. Basically, it means they have to justify why they're holding you in custody.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

If we can convince the judge that there's no evidence you committed any crime, he could free you right away. Or, he can deny our motion and we'll end up at trial.

MARCUS

Far as I can see, I didn't do no crime.

BEN

Far as I can see, too. Now we just have to make the judge see that. Unfortunately, we don't have much evidence to back up your claim. Mr. Dreesen himself went to Galveston to see if he could find this Captain Evan -- haven't heard from him since he left.

MARCUS

He's a good man. I owe him a lot.

BEN

He is. I just wish he'd found the evidence we need.

(beat)

But -- we'll go with what we've got.

MARCUS

I repay you for all you've done for me.

BEN

No need. I'm glad to help. Your friend, Victor, I'm afraid is going to serve a sentence; but I think I got him a lot less time than he would have gotten on his own. And he picked out your wife and child when I showed him the picture, so we know that he did know them.

MARCUS

Thank you for helping him. I was pretty sure he was telling the truth, but that's good to hear. It made it worth being in jail to get that information.

BEN

The silver lining.

INT. COURTOOM - LATER

The JUDGE is listening to Ben present his case, Dolly, Pastor Rolly, and a few other church members, along with some kibitzers, are in the visitor's gallery, Marcus at the defendant's table where the post Marcus was chained to in the boat stands upright.

BEN

So, your honor, there's simply no evidence to impeach my client's testimony that he acted in self-defense. The post from the boat clearly shows the marks of the chain where he was held, and it shows that it had to be broken free, supporting what he's always maintained. The idea that someone would sail from Mobile here to New Orleans to fish, returning alone to Mobile, is ludicrous. No fisherman would do that. In that small boat, a man would only fish during the day time and return to port at night. That's obvious. But my client doesn't know anything about fishing, so he accepted the offer at face value. But we know such an act is absurd. It's clear the man had evil intentions in mind, kidnapping my client and threatening him with a return to the slave condition from which he'd just been freed. No man would accept that possibility with equanimity, and my client had every right to defend his freedom, as do we all.

The door into the courtroom bangs open startling everyone, Andrew and Captain Niven entering the courtroom, the captain carrying a case. Dolly and the others look on expectantly, Ben relieved as Andrew smiles and nods at him.

BEN (CONT'D)

Your honor, these men who've just entered are witnesses for the defense. I'd like to have a moment to confer with them about possible testimony.

JUDGE

Go ahead.

A bailiff ushers Andrew and Niven to the defense table and Ben joins them, Marcus listening in as they confer in whispered voices.

BEN

You're Captain Evan?

ANDREW

Niven. That's why we couldn't find him.

MARCUS

My fault.

BEN

(to Niven)

You're prepared to testify you came upon Marcus chained in the boat?

CAPTAIN NIVEN

I'll do more than testify. Let them explain these.

He opens the case to reveal the chains cut from Marcus. Ben holds them up and turns to the judge.

BEN

Your honor, I call Captain Niven to the stand.

EXT. PARISH HALL DINING ROOM - LATER

Everyone is enjoying Marcus's meal-of-freedom.

MARCUS

Captain Niven -- not Evan...

CAPTAIN NIVEN

(laughing)

Glad that got straightened out.

MARCUS

And thank you so much for coming all this way.

CAPTAIN NIVEN

Keep a man from unjustly going to prison? Aye, I'd circle the globe for that. You sure you don't want to ship out with us? We'd be glad to have you.

MARCUS

That's generous, Captain. But I've got other places I needs be.

ANDREW

The Cherokee Nation.

MARCUS

Wherever that may be.

BEN

I've been looking into that, Marcus. I telegraphed an attorney up in Fort Smith, the town right on the edge of the Cherokee Nation. He tells me that free coloreds aren't allowed on the Cherokee lands. They think that it encourages their slaves to run away. He said the town has a lot of runaways from the Cherokee in it. Might be the place to see if anyone knows anything about Teeka and Rajeen.

ANDREW

Where is this Fort Smith?

BEN

It's about six hundred miles northwest of us. The railroads can get you near it, somewhat east; but from there Marcus is going to have to hike it.

ANDREW

You'll have your fliers. You can pass them around. Some information might turn up.

MARCUS

Fort Smith. Guess that's where I'll be heading then.

DOLLY

We're going to miss you, Marcus.

MARCUS

(stands up)

I just want to tell all of you my thanks for all you've done. I don't know what would have happened to me without you, but it wouldn't have been good. I never expected to find friends like you on this journey, and I'll never forget any of you and all you do. Thank you from my heart.

The group approves his message.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS TRAIN STATION - DAY

On the platform, Andrew and Dolly are seeing Marcus off, the train behind them.

DOLLY

We're going to miss you, Marcus.

MARCUS

I'll miss you, too, Dolly -- and you, Andrew.

A black conductor, WILL, YELLS:

WILL

All aboard!

ANDREW

When you need money, fliers, whatever, contact me, Marcus.

MARCUS

I'll never be able to repay you for all you've done, Andrew.

ANDREW

Well, in fact you already have. I'm getting so much church business...

DOLLY

And we'll get you more.

(to Marcus)

Don't disappear, now. Let us know how it's going.

MARCUS

I will.

They stand awkwardly a moment, finally hug, and Marcus climbs aboard. Dolly has tears in her eyes.

DOLLY

I hope he finds them. But I will miss him.

Andrew puts his arm around her shoulders and she leans into him.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Marcus finds a window seat where he can see them on the platform. They see him, Andrew waves and Dolly blows him a kiss. He waves back, the train starts, and they shrink and disappear. Marcus sighs and pushes back in his seat.

MARCUS

(to himself)

I'm coming family. I'll find you. We'll be together.

He nods his head in affirmation.

INT. TRAIN - MORNING

Will, the conductor, is shaking Marcus.

WILL
 Marcus, Marcus... Wake up.

Marcus awakens and wonders where he is for a moment.

WILL (CONT'D)
 This is your stop. Close as we get.

MARCUS
 Oh. Thanks Will.

WILL
 Good luck finding them, Marcus.

He stands and begins gathering his things as Will moves off.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus leaves the station and looks at the small country town then begins heading down the main street.

EXT. JOHNSON LIVERY STABLE - MOMENTS LATER

Marcus looks at *JOHNSON'S LIVERY* and heads in.

INT. JOHNSON LIVERY STABLE - CONTINUOUS

JOHNSON, the owner, stops working and comes up to Marcus.

JOHNSON
 Help you?

MARCUS
 Yessir. I be heading west to Fort Smith and I likes to get a horse.

JOHNSON
 Pretty good ways to Fort Smith.
 Don't be needing a wagon?

Marcus considers that.

MARCUS
 That might be an idea. Nice to have something to bunk in, and gonna have some others after a time. A wagon might be best.

JOHNSON

Well, I can fix you up for about
seventy-five dollars, plus the horse.

MARCUS

That's a lot for me. Maybe I'll
just have to stay with the horse,
one not so fancy.

JOHNSON

Okay. Come out back, have a look.

EXT. JOHNSON LIVERY STABLE - CONTINUOUS

Horses in a corral. But as Marcus looks, he notices a broken
down old wagon to one side.

MARCUS

What about that wagon?

JOHNSON

That junk? Needs a lot of work.

MARCUS

I'm a blacksmith. You sell me the
parts and lend me some tools, I'll
take it off your hands.

JOHNSON

Sounds good.

MARCUS

How much?

JOHNSON

Ten dollars plus the parts -- new
wheels and such. I think I can find
you a nag to pull it, too, not add
too much to the cost.

MARCUS

You mind if I bunk in it while I'se
be fixing it?

JOHNSON

Don't see why not.

MARCUS

Okay.

They shake hands, both pleased with the deal.

EXT. ROAD WEST - DAY

Marcus heading west in the creaking wagon pulled by an old horse.

MARCUS

(to the horse)

Wishing you could have met, Briar.
A fine horse. Don't 'spect anyone
be trying to steal you though, Essie.

Essie keeps trudging.

EXT. FORT SMITH MAIN STREET - DAY

Fort Smith is a bussling frontier town on the edge of the Cherokee Nation (which is now Oklahoma). Marcus in his wagon travels down the main street, a mix of whites and blacks.

Marcus pulls up in front of the *FORT SMITH LIVERY* and heads inside.

INT. FORT SMITH LIVERY - CONTINUOUS

The owner's wife, KATE ISAAC, is at the desk.

KATE

What might I do for you?

MARCUS

Ma'am. I needs to board my horse
for a time.

KATE

We do that. Fifty cents per day.

MARCUS

That sound good. I'm wondering,
anywhere to park my wagon where I'll
be staying? Don't have much money.

KATE

Have a place behind the barn, another
fifteen cents. Outhouse, and you
can use the barbeque pit.

MARCUS

Barbeque pit?

KATE

Yes, for roasting whatever. A fire
pit.

MARCUS

Ah. Never heard that word, but that sounds good.

KATE

Where are you from?

MARCUS

Good question. Started out in South Carolina, spent a spell in New Orleans.

(beat)

My wife and daughter, haven't seen them in seven years, I'm searching for them.

From his shoulder bag Marcus takes out one of the fliers and gives it to Kate who looks at it.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I've learned they're slaves now with these Cherokee Indians. I hope to get them back.

KATE

Seven years and you're searching for them. That's lovely.

MARCUS

Painful so far.

KAT

I can imagine. You know where they are now though?

MARCUS

Not really. Just that they were sold to the Cherokee Nation some four years ago.

Kate's husband, EUELL, comes in and up to them.

KATE

(to Marcus)

This is my husband, Euell.

(to Euell)

He's going to board his horse with us and camp the wagon behind the barn. He's searching for his wife and daughter who he hasn't seen in seven years. He's found they're with the Cherokee.

EUELL

Going to be a problem. It's a big piece of territory the Cherokee have. And free blacks can't be there. You try wandering around on their land, you're likely to end up a slave yourself.

MARCUS

I'd accept that if it put me back with my wife and daughter.

KATE

You love them that much. Admirable.

EUELL

Tell you -- you should talk with the military in their headquarters two blocks farther on and a left. Big brick building, guard in front, can't miss it. They might be able to help you, I don't know. Since the war ended, they been dealing with the Cherokee. Had some wild times with them in the rebellion, lots of support for the South.

KATE

Stand Watie, their confederate general leader, just surrendered, last of the rebs to give it up.

EUELL

Tough fighters. But the military can tell you how things are shaping up with the Cherokee.

MARCUS

Much appreciate it. I'll pull the wagon in the back and bring Essie to the corral.

KATE

Essie, huh.

MARCUS

Short for Esmeralda. She's getting on, but she gets the job done.

KATE

Well, we'll take good care of her. Glad to have you.

MARCUS

Thank you. I'll pay you for the week.

KATE

Two dollars. Give you the special rate. We like what you're doing.

MARCUS

That's mighty kind of you. I might tell you, I was trained as a blacksmith. You be needing any help, don't hold back from calling on me. I'd be glad to do what I can.

KATE

How nice. Thank you.

EUELL

(puts out his hand to shake)

Euell Isaac.

MARCUS

(shaking hands)

Marcus Blake.

(beat)

One other thing... I'm going to be giving out them fliers. Be all right if I write on there to contact me here if they have any information?

KATE

Free advertising. We like that. Go right ahead. We'll let you know anybody comes in.

MARCUS

Thank you much.

Marcus gives him the money, they all nod and smile at one another, Marcus goes out.

EXT. FORT SMITH MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Marcus rubs Essie's nose.

MARCUS

Gonna take good care of you here -- very nice people.

He climbs in the wagon and starts up, turning at the opening to go around back.

EXT. FORT SMITH LIVERY - DAY

A weary Marcus trudges down the street and turns into the opening heading towards the back of the livery stable.

EXT. FORT SMITH LIVERY CORRAL - EVENING

Marcus stops to give Essie a treat, the horse coming over to the fence. Euell comes out the back and up to Marcus.

EUELL

Any luck?

Marcus shakes his head.

MARCUS

I'm thinking I'm going to have to go search in the Cherokees, no matter what. They catch me, they'll have to kill me 'fore I'll let them stop me from searching.

EUELL

It's only been two weeks, Marcus. Runaways keep showing up. The government is going to make the indians give up slavery sooner or later. Maybe just wait a bit.

MARCUS

You think that would be easy after seven years apart. But being so close... I just want it to end.

EUELL

But end the right way. Hang tough, Marcus.

MARCUS

Thank you, Euell. You all been real kind to me.

EUELL

I think any family man can feel what you're going through.

Euell departs and Marcus strokes Essie and then heads for his wagon.

EXT. BARBEQUE PIT - NIGHT

Marcus is sitting by the fire going in the barbeque pit as a shadow appears by the livery stable. Marcus looks and a weathered black man, DERAY MONS, appears.

MARCUS
Can I help you?

DERAY
I might help you.

He takes a seat and puts out his hand to shake.

DERAY (CONT'D)
DeRay Mons.

MARCUS
(shaking hands)
Marcus Blake.

DERAY
Marcus Blake. You is the one looking
for your kin?

Hands Marcus one of his fliers.

DERAY (CONT'D)
Saw that, someone read it to me.

MARCUS
And you be knowing something 'bout
it?

DERAY
Sure do. I recognized that picture
of your wife and child. I beens
with them.

MARCUS
Oh lord, where?

DERAY
I wonders 'bout that reward it says.

MARCUS
Yes, of course.

DERAY
How much that be?

MARCUS
Twenty-five dollar. But I got to
know you're not just telling me some
story.

DERAY
No story, just truth. We was slaves
for Stand Watie up at Spavinaw Creek.
I gots away couple weeks ago.
(MORE)

DERAY (CONT'D)

Place was wrecked during the war.
We be brought back up from Texs to
be putting it together again.

MARCUS

Spavinaw Creek. Where this place
be?

DERAY

North and west of here. Was hard
getting out. They come after me,
but I'se just got cross the border
into Arkansas before they caught up.
Little town, Maysville. Heard this
Fort Smith was where I might get
some work, so here I am. Might glad
to be here, too. Just 'fore the war
started up, I was out west, up in
the high Rocky mountains free as a
bird, and stupid enough to head back
east. Worst mistake I ever made.
Shoulda stayed up there in the peaks
of the Rocky Mountains. Never seen
anything like it. Open country,
beautiful, the real West. Then I
crossed into injun land, didn't know
nothing 'bout it, and there I be, a
slave again.

MARCUS

Know that feeling. Man tried to
sail me to islands sell me back into
slavery. Glad to get away.

VICTOR

Fight for freedom. Glad to have it.

MARCUS

That be the truth.

(beat)

I gots to be sure. Let me ask you,
how old be my daughter that was in
the picture on that flier?

DERAY

That be an old picture. She bigger
than that now. She be a little girl,
eight or nine or so. Your wife once
said they come up from New Orleans.
Started out in South Carolina, I'se
think she said. We weren't close.
Nothing like that.

MARCUS
That all be right. I was thinking
I'd never hear anything. I am much
obliged to you.

DERAY
(beat)
'Bout that reward...

MARCUS
Best monies I ever spent.

EXT. FORT SMITH LIVERY - DAY

Marcus is ready to depart, Kate with him as Euell comes out carrying a folded telescope.

EUELL
Marcus, I want to give you this.

MARCUS
Well, thank you, Euell. What is it?

Euell opens it up and hands it to Marcus.

EUELL
Look down the street through there.

Marcus holds it up to his eye and pulls back, startled. He looks again.

P.O.V. MARCUS - CONTINUOUS

The street in close-up.

BACK TO SCENE

MARCUS
I never seen anything like that.

He looks again, moving it about.

EUELL
That's why they call it a spyglass.
I figure it might be handy when you
looking for Teeka and Rajeen. Help
you see without giving yourself away.

KATE
If you run into trouble, Marcus, you
try to get word to us.

Marcus collapses the telescope and gets it secured on the seat.

MARCUS

Thank you, Kate -- and you, Euell.
You been mighty kind to me. 'Preciate
all you done.

EUELL

Good luck, Marcus.

KATE

You find them, Marcus. You make
your family whole.

Marcus nods, gives them a wave, and gets Essie moving, turning
once to wave again, the Isaacs waving back.

EXT. MAYSVILLE - AFTERNOON

Marcus pulls into the tiny town of Maysville.

MARCUS

Well, here we be, Essie. Gonna take
a break from one another for a spell.

He pulls up by a small general store and heads inside.

INT. MAYSVILLE GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

ZACH is behind the counter.

ZACH

Afternoon.

MARCUS

Good afternoon. I'm wondering if
you can help me. I need to board my
horse and wagon for a spell and was
hoping you might know where I could
do that.

ZACH

Well, the Marberrys do that on their
place.

MARCUS

How might I find them?

ZACH

You take a right out of here back to
the crossroads and keep on straight.
They're about a mile on. They sell
produce from a stall in front. You'll
see it.

MARCUS

That would be west. Is that the road that goes into the Cherokee Nation?

ZACH

It is. Their land begins about another mile beyond the Marberrys. Wouldn't go past the Marberrys if I were you. Cherokee don't allow free blacks on their land.

MARCUS

So I've heard. Well, thanks for your help.

ZACH

Anytime. Have a pleasant stay. You need anything, drop by again.

MARCUS

I will.

Marcus goes out.

EXT. MAYSVILLE - CONTINUOUS

Marcus gets in his wagon and heads the way Zach told him.

EXT. MARBERRYS - LATER

FRANK MARBERRY is working in the field next to the rough house, the produce stall by the fence near the turn-in. After Marcus turns in to their drive, Frank heads for him.

MARCUS

Good afternoon.

FRANK

How do there.

MARCUS

The man in the general store said you board horses.

FRANK

Pretty much do anything that pays, long as it's legal.

Marcus gets down.

MARCUS

I need to board Ellie here, and I'd like to park my wagon.

FRANK

Can do that. Dollar a week.

MARCUS

That would be fine.

FRANK

Where you be staying?

MARCUS

Tell the truth, I'm heading into the Cherokee Nation.

Frank frowns.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I've heard they don't like free blacks there. But my wife and daughter are slaving for someone named Stand Watie and I aim to get them back.

FRANK

Do tell. That's something. Stand Watie was the leader of the reb forces for the Cherokee -- Confederate general. Was part of a little battle we had here in Maysvilled back the end of '62. You sure you want to do this?

MARCUS

I've been split from my family for seven years. Now that I can, I'm going to get them back or die trying. If I shouldn't come back, I hope you take good care of Essie here. I'm might fond of her.

Frank rubs Essie.

FRANK

No worries. We'll treat her so good she might not want to leave here when you get back.

MARCUS

Thank you. Should I pull up somewhere? I aim to get going right away, travel at night for the most part.

FRANK

That seems wise. You get your things and I'll take care of it.

Marcus gives him a dollar.

MARCUS

Here's for the first week. Hope I'll be back before then.

FRANK

You know exactly where they be?

MARCUS

Not really. I've been told to follow the road until it bends south. Not going to walk on the road, just trail it from the side. They was at a plantation just past that -- owned by this Stand Watie.

FRANK

Never been in there myself, but we had a passel of trouble in the war, Cherokees fighting one another and everyone else. Heard pretty much ruined most everything in there, lots of people left. You sure they're still there?

MARCUS

I was told they come back recently to put things back right, so... I'll find out.

FRANK

Well, good luck be with you.

MARCUS

Thanks. I'll get the few things I'm taking, leave the rest in the wagon.

FRANK

We'll put your things in the barn for safe-keeping if that's all right with you.

MARCUS

That'd be fine.

Marcus gets the shoulder bag he wants.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

That's it.

FRANK

Traveling light. Good idea.

MARCUS

Be on my way, then.

FRANK

We'll keep a watch for you. You'll know you're on injun land when you see that weaving they put in the tree on your right. Can't miss it. Be careful from there on. And don't touch the injun weaving or you'll have bad luck come down on you.

MARCUS

'Preciate it all.

Marcus strokes Essie and heads off.

EXT. CHEROKEE NATION ROAD - LATER

Marcus sees the woven design attached to the tree, a beautiful swirl of bark and buffalo hair and Indian hemp with beads worked into it. He goes up to it and lays his palm against it.

MARCUS

We'll see who has the bad luck.

He continues on into Indian country.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

There's a pond down in a depression, low hills all around it, and Marcus goes down to it to drink and fill his canteen. He's look ahead at the setting sun, nods, and sets off resolutely, disappearing over the top of the rise into the gathering darkness.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE NEAR ROAD - MORNING

Dawn is breaking and Marcus hurries across an open stretch into a stand of trees. He gets near the edge to see the road but still be hidden. He takes out the spyglass and looks at the road through it.

P.O.V. SPYGLASS - CONTINUOUS

As he moves it down the road, he can see the distinct bend to the south. He scans that direction showing just countryside.

BACK TO SCENE

He closes the spyglass and puts it away then makes a place to rest, laying back and staring up.

MARCUS

Be there, be there.

He shuts his eyes.

EXT. STAND WATIE PLANTATION - NIGHT

Marcus is near the road and across it are tilled fields being readied for planting, a lantern light from one of the rough cabins in the distance, a bright moon giving a ghostly illumination. Marcus scans for a place to watch the plantation from safety, no woods nearby. He moves to a hillock where he can lie concealed while watching over the top. He builds a spot and rests on his back waiting for daylight and whatever may appear.

EXT. MARCUS'S HIDING PLACE - MORNING

Marcus awakens to a CALL-AND-RESPONSE SONG being sung in the field. He carefully positions himself to look seeing the slaves already at work in the field. He reaches for the spyglass and looks.

P.O.V. SPYGLASS - CONTINUOUS

He moves from one slave to another. An Indian sits on a horse towards the rear. He keeps searching among the slaves. There's a young girl and he stops on her. She straightens up and looks behind her and says something. Marcus moves to the person she's talking to. It's Teeka. He goes back and forth between them.

BACK TO SCENE

He lowers the spyglass and cries.

EXT. PLANTATION FIELD - NIGHT

Marcus carefully moves across the field towards the cabins, heading for one in particular. It's very roughly built, just a single room with no windows. He scans carefully to make sure no one is about before opening the door as quietly as possible and going in.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Bedding on the floor has Teeka and Rajeen sleeping on it, Teeka on the outside. Marcus gets on his knees and gently places his hand over Teeka's mouth which wakens her instantly, fear in her eyes, grunting against his hand and twisting to get away. He holds her down with his other hand.

MARCUS

It's me, Teeka. Marcus. Keep quiet.
Keep quiet.

It takes her a moment of staring for her to comprehend that it's Marcus. Her eyes go wide and she sits up, Marcus letting her. They throw their arms around one another. Suddenly, Rajeen is awake and scared.

RAJEEN

Mommy? Mommy?

Teeka turns and hugs her.

TEEKA

It's fine, honey. Stay quiet. This is your dad. He's found us. He's here. We're fine. We're fine.

MARCUS

(to Rajeen)

Rajeen, I've been searching for you for...

Tears spring to Marcus's eyes and he can't speak. He leans across and Teeka hugs him and Rajeen, the little girl still apprehensive. Marcus wipes his eyes and sits up.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

We've got to go, right now. It's a long ways for us to be safe. I'm going to watch outside. Get dressed, get just a single light bag of whatever you want to bring...

TEEKA

We're leaving it all. This life is done.

MARCUS

Bring a few clothes I can leave for a false trail.

TEEKA

I can't believe you're here, Marcus.

MARCUS

We're all free. You should be free already.

TEEKA

How did you find us?

MARCUS

I had lots of help. There's some fine people in this world -- some not so fine, too. But hurry. Get ready.

Marcus goes out.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Marcus stays against the cabin without moving, watching the darkness but all is still. In a moment, Teeka and Rajeen come out, Teeka carrying two small bags. She hands one to Marcus.

TEEKA

Leave this one.

RAJEEN

Are you really my daddy?

Marcus squats and hugs her tightly.

MARCUS

You have no idea how much I missed you. I'll never let you go again.

Rajeen hugs him back tightly. Finally, Teeka touches his shoulder.

TEEKA

We run.

Marcus stands.

MARCUS

We'll leave footprints in the field so we'll head south like we's went that way. The road is hard, they won't know which way we really went.

He leads the way on a curve the opposite way from where they're really heading, finally reaching the road.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

I'm going to run further south to leave the bag like we's dropped it. You both go that way and I'll catch up. You see anything, get off the road into the brush.

Teeka guides Rajeen and they set off. Marcus runs the other way, finally hooking the bag on a branch right next to the road, ripping the bag as if it caught and they left it. Then he turns and runs towards Teeka and Rajeen. He catches up to them, picks up Rajeen and puts her on his shoulders and they move as fast as they can.

TEEKA

Where are we going, Marcus?

MARCUS

This road goes to Arkansas, out of this Cherokee land. We reach there, we're safe. There's no slavery in the United States no more.

TEEKA

We heard rumors of that, but the Indians just kept us.

MARCUS

They got their own nation, the laws don't apply to them. But once we're out of there, they can't get us. But it's a ways, we gots to move fast.

TEEKA

Will we reach it before it gets light?

MARCUS

No. I stopped and traveled only at night. But with them looking for us, we're just going to keep on and try to get away before they reach us. We'll go off the road when it's light. It will be slower, but harder for them to find us.

TEEKA

Marcus, I thought I'd never sees you again. This is like a dream.

MARCUS

Slavery was the dream, now we awake.

They hurry down the road.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE NEAR ROAD - DAY

They're resting in a wood in the countryside, the road nowhere in sight. Marcus uses the spyglass to scan behind them but sees nothing.

RAJEEN

What is that?

MARCUS

It's a spyglass for seeing things far away.

He lets her look through it. Rajeen is startled, looking with her eyes then through the glass again.

RAJEEN
How does it do that?

MARCUS
Don't rightly know. We'll ask
someone.

RAJEEN
Can I go to school? The whites
children went to school.

TEEKA
You sure can. We'll make certain
that happens.

RAJEEN
I think I'll like that.

MARCUS
Right now we got to go. We should
be getting close.

Marcus puts away the spyglas and moves to pick up Rajeen.

RAJEEN
I can walk, daddy. I'm not a child.

That makes both Marcus and Teeka smile and looking at one
another, they hug.

MARCUS
(To Teeka)
You did good.

TEEKA
You did better.

They start off, Rajeen taking big steps.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - AFTERNOON

Their shadows ahead of them show it's later in the day, all
of them going slower, when Marcus sees the pond where he
drank and filled his canteen.

MARCUS
The pond. I stopped here. We're
only a hour or so from the border.

TEEKA
I can't believe it.

They go down to the pond and sit for brief rest, Teeka and
Rajeen taking off their shoes and putting their feet in the
water.

There's a noise, horses, and they all tense, and then a group of Cherokee ride up on the ridge behind them, stop and look down. Marcus jumps up, but there's not going to be any fight. The Indians slowly come down to the pond, spreading out to encircle them. At the center is the obvious leader of the group, STAND WATIE, an older man in a weathered confederate general's uniform. One of the INDIAN men speaks to him in Cherokee:

INDIAN
 (in the Cherokee
 language)
 Those women are the slaves.

WATIE
 (to Teeka)
 You are the slave Teeka?

Teeka says nothing.

MARCUS
 They're not slaves. She's my wife,
 Teeka. And my daughter, Rajeen.
 We're going to Arkansas. They're
 free, just like me. We're a family.

Watie smiles.

WATIE
 (to Marcus)
 How long have you been a free man?

MARCUS
 I been a free man all my life. Just
 was kept a prisoner. Never going
 back -- and they're not going either.

Watie takes out his pistol.

WATIE
 This might say different.

MARCUS
 No. You can use it. I gots no arms
 like you all. But that ain't going
 take them back. Go to the Lord's
 company if need be. But we ain't
 never going back.

Watie lowers the gun.

WATIE
 Could have used some with your courage
 when fighting the Yanks.
 (MORE)

WATIE (CONT'D)

(beat)
How old's the child?

TEEKA

She be nine.

RAJEEN

(defiantly)
I'll be ten next month.

WATIE

(smiles)
Very pretty, child.
(beat)
My son just died. Fifteen years
old. I have to go back to Texas to
bury him.

TEEKA

We're sorry to hear that. May he
rest with Jesus.

WATIE

Lots of burying these past few years.
(beat, then in the
Cherokee language to
his men)
They go free. We leave.

The other Indians are surprised and don't move.

WATIE (CONT'D)

(more forcibly, in
the Cherokee language)
Go. We leave them.

The Indians begin riding up the rise back the way they came.

WATIE (CONT'D)

My son tells me to wish you well for
the rest of your existence. Go in
peace.

MARCUS

Thank you.

WATIE

We meet again someday in the presence
of the spirits.

He turns and gallops up the hill to the head of the group
who gallop after him, disappearing over the rise. Teeka
begins crying and Marcus takes her in his arms, Rajeen hugging
their waists.

MARCUS

It be over. Free at last, free at
last.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

EXT. GREAT PLAINS - DAY

Marcus, Rajeen and Teeka ride in the wagon pulled by Essie
and another horse, all of them staring ahead with eyes wide.

RAJEEN

That's so beautiful.

TEEKA

I never dreamed anything like this.

The CAMERA PULLS BACK to show the wagon moving along at the
end of the plains, ahead of them the majestic peaks of the
Rocky Mountains.

MARCUS

Free forever.

THE END