

THE GREAT PLOT

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FADE IN

EXT. BUSY STREET - DAY

SUPER - NEW YORK, PRESENT DAY

A typical, congested work day... SOUNDS of HONKING CAR HORNS... FUSSING... RUNNING MOTORS...

A CABBIE, stuck in traffic, sticks his arm out the window, BANGS on the door... YELLS at drivers before him...

CABBIE

Come on, move ya' selves! Come on.

Leaving a cafe, a MAN IN THREE PIECE SUIT bites into a donut. The jelly spills on his collared white shirt. He spews a heavy sigh. Checks to see if anyone is looking...

Blazing past the man, a BUSINESS WOMAN, dark sunglasses and a sloppy corporate ponytail, huffs on her cellphone.

BUSINESS WOMAN

You idiot, we closed at three and a quarter. Why did I hire you, numbskull? Three and a fuckin' quarter --

She passes a bank; it's doors closed for the morning rush.

A BLACK HOMELESS MAN

Sits with his back against the bank. He holds his head inside his hands, his face hidden. He bares no shoes upon his crusted feet. Beside him, an empty canister. He goes unnoticed by the working class.

A yuppie passes the homeless man, jams to his personal music player. The high spirited fellow spins with his air guitar. Simmers to just a bob of the head at a crowded crosswalk.

GREEN LIGHT...

The crossing guard sounds a WHISTLE and waves for pedestrians to proceed.

NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE BUILDING

Leather and deerskin loafers, heels and pumps of executives and professionals, men and women -- one at a time -- through the revolving doors. A nonstop display of mechanical America's shoes.

MATCH CUT:

EXT. ROADWAY - NIGHT

Ashy Negro and Caucasian feet, pairs of half eaten shoes with exposed toes scamper over a dirt ground -- quiet enough to hear only a tiny SCUFFLE.

SUPER - NEW YORK, SAME LOCATION: 1799

The angry and sweat provoked militia of roughly 25 "poor folks" (as the locals call them) bear axes, shotguns, and clothes tied to the ends of branches.

The frontrunner, CECIL (29), husky black male slave, whip mark across his eye, handmade bracelet made of yarn and rocks around his arm. He's considered the town "troublemaker."

He huddles his group in a circle. One slave floods a pail of kerosene on the clothed branches.

An aged white man, with shaky hands, lights his allies' torches. Another slave, behind them, places his lit torch to the merchant's low rooftop. He SHATTERS the window and tosses a piece of burning cloth inside.

RESIDENTIAL AREA

Cecil places his torch against a home.

CECIL

We are human, just like you!

All poor folks join in:

POOR FOLKS

We are human, just like you!

Buildings ignite in bright orange glow over a block of area. HOWLING DOGS -- louder CHANTS...

Now, SCREAMS of terror erupt through the chants: "WE ARE HUMAN, JUST LIKE YOU..." repeated.

A WHITE MAN darts behind the stampede with a shotgun. He FIRES. The bullet lunges into the back of a poor woman. She tumbles to her death.

A stampede of confused and frightened slave owners, carrying armaments, fire SHOTS. People scatter...

Cecil falls to the ground, rolls in the shadow of a nearby horse buggy. Peeps out into the mayhem...

He stands from his hideaway, aims into the ruckus. An unexpected BULLET pierces through his leg. He lessens to the ground.

Unstoppable Cecil rises; a slight limp but no real visual pain. FIRES his rifle at the crowd. One more CLICK of the gun -- no bullets...

The SHERIFF and his LAWMEN gallop on their horses, FIRING.

One of the lawmen reaches down to help a fellow POOR WHITE MAN to the horse. The man KNOCKS the officer to the ground and rides to the aid of his friends.

POOR WHITE MAN
Come on -- Let's go!

The sheriff helps his officer to his feet. They look on as a group of frightened, desperate people, all trying to fit on one horse, emerge from behind trees... houses... horse carriages...

SHERIFF
What the hell is going on here?

The sheriff and his men aim at the rowdy flock... multiple SHOTS... no regard for color of the skin, now.

Dead locals scatter the small town, some white some black, some privileged some not. The lawmen cease fire, stare at the monstrosity of bodies, still befuddled.

Hiding underneath a porch's stairs, a slave girl shields her brother's ears from the noise. She grabs his hand. They run opposite of the commotion.

The sheriff catches the two. Points toward the runaways.

SHERIFF
There --

One lawman FIRES two shots, one for the girl, one for her brother. The children collapse dead on their cheeks.

Cecil flinches. He trembles and keeps his attenuate whimpers to a minimum.

The sheriff sees the bottom of Cecil's shoe. Points a gun in the slave's direction.

SHERIFF

Come out from your covert -- I'll
blow ya straight ta' hell.

Cecil rises. His hands up. Limpes toward the officers on his wounded leg. He sees the massacre of bodies on the ground. Drops to his knees... surrenders indefinitely.

Innocent and unaware locals (both black and white) hurry to the scene. A curious slave boy, PIPER (10), hates violence, already lost his entire family, watches the policemen intimidate Cecil... their guns targeted directly in his face.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

A spacious white room of benches with oriel windows... a miniature gallery, but all the occupants are on the ground level... Whites on the front benches, poor whites and indentured servants on the back benches; Negroes stand along the walls...

Cecil with his head dipped to the floor, before a JUDGE in a long black robe. The judge reads from a paper in his hand...

JUDGE

Cecil... you are, hereby, sentenced
to death by public hanging on the
thirteenth day of April, 1799.

SIGHS of sanction amongst the whites. A few SNIVELS from the suffered in the back room... hunched grief stricken heads...

EXT. PUBLIC HANGING - DAY

Upright and horizontal beamed gallows high on a wooden platform. The platform large enough for six convicts, at the most.

Cecil, escorted up the stairs by a LAW OFFICIAL. The EXECUTIONER flings the burly man by his arm. Cecil's handmade bracelet tumbles into the pit of people.

The HANGING JUDGE displays Cecil to the crowd he once betrayed. The executioner places the noose around his neck.

Amongst the mirthful and the doleful, the elder and the youth, the prosperous and the penniless, the mahogany and the pearly, one face... just one melancholy soul catches Cecil's interest -- Piper.

CECIL

We are human, just like you! We
are human, just like you!

White people BOO and SPIT at Cecil. The executioner removes the ladder -- the chanting ends with GAGS... APPLAUDS amid the town's upper crust.

Piper flinches as Cecil's body jolts, blood pours from his mouth but refuses to take a last breath.

Cecil's eyes gyrate to the back of his head. The gagging ends. His muscular physique dangles limp -- soulless.

The townspeople walk away in jovial conversation, enlightenment on their faces; mourning on the impoverished.

A very inquisitive Piper pushes his way opposite the residents. Picks up the bracelet from the ground. Strengthens his eyes upon Cecil...

EXT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - DAY

SUPER - NEW YORK, TEN YEARS LATER

A sunny, spring day, atypically warmer than usual.

Three field slaves, Piper, (now 20) TIMMY and DR. BOOTS dig crop holes into their master's yard... a perfectly kept yard from a family that doesn't own much, but takes pride in their yard.

Timmy, 32, thickset and dreadfully lazy, throws his shovel on the ground; takes a seat on the porch stairs. Lies his arms upward, his head back; enjoys the morning breeze.

Dr. Boots, 65, simple, stereotypical "Uncle Tom" slave... grossly distinctive limp. Stops working and rests his folded hands on the shovel's handle.

Piper, the only intellect, shakes his head in contempt for the pair.

TIMMY

Sure could go for a cool
lemonade... or cold beer.

DR. BOOTS
 (foolish laughter)
 Yeah... yeah...

PIPER
 Timmy, you learn to read that book
 I's gave you, yet?

Timmy and Dr. Boots turn to one another.

TIMMY
 Naw. Gots no time for that, Piper.

PIPER
 Well, you's better make time.

Timmy rolls his eyes, waves Piper off. Dr. Boots smirks.

A dirty little white kid, WEBBY JONES, 12, friendly
 troublemaker, runs to the gate. WHISTLES with his fingers.

WEBBY
 Piper...

Timmy leaps from the stairs, back to his shovel. Dr. Boots,
 like a tortoise, picks his spade from the ground. Both,
 scared of even the most menial of white people.

Piper seethes to the child.

PIPER
 Webby, how many times I's gotta
 tell ya' not to hang 'round here?

WEBBY
 I overheard paw talkin' to
 Christopher McCormick 'bout some
 place called Canada. Said people
 could live like kings and queens
 there... all people.

Timmy and Dr. Boots wave to Webby.

TIMMY
 Hey, there, Webby. You sho'll look
 mighty fine today. How be yo'
 daddy?

Webby rolls his eyes. Whispers to Piper.

WEBBY
 Ooh, I sure don't fancy the likes
 of that Timmy. I know he be
 fucking that Jane Franklin --

PIPER

Watch your filthy little mouth.

Piper walks back to the yard. Webby looks behind his shoulder. Lowers his voice to a whisper.

WEBBY

Miller hit her again, Piper.

Piper turns swiftly to the child...

WEBBY

Got a bruise the size of Delaware
on her arm.

Piper clinches his fists. Stares at the Miller house, about three minutes away on foot. He grinds his teeth inside his closed mouth.

WEBBY

Piper... Piper?

Out of his trance, Piper breaths with heavy rage.

WILLIAM HIGGINS, 56, a "friend to all" slaveholder, straight from the southern states, steps onto the porch, tucks his hands in his pockets, takes a whiff of the air.

William's a regular working man who wants to be rich and important, but has no clue of how to get wealth.

Down the road, HANCOCK, (domineering, egotistical entrepreneur) being driven by his Negro Driver, DADOO, in a carriage towards Higgins' home.

Piper pushes Webby from Higgins' land. Keeps his voice at an ultimate minimum.

PIPER

Gone now, fo' you gets in trouble.

WEBBY

What about --

Piper points toward the roadway. The slouched child passes Hancock.

HANCOCK

Good day there, Webby.

Webby barely waves. Piper picks his shovel from the ground.

HANCOCK

Higgins --

WILLIAM

Hancock...

Dadoo stops. William and Hancock shake hands.

WILLIAM

What brings you through these neck
of the woods?

HANCOCK

Dropping in to say my good-byes
before heading north... got some
new developments going up, as we
speak.

Hancock turns to the slaves.

HANCOCK

Ay! Yer missed a spot.

He LAUGHS. William smiles nervously.

WILLIAM

Come now, Hancock. They're good
boys.

HANCOCK

Higgins, stop treating your cattle
like people. 'Sides, I play with
Dadoo like that all the time.
Ain't that right, boy?

Hancock pokes Dadoo with two fingers.

HANCOCK

Ain't that right, boy?

Dadoo (apparently annoyed) keeps composure. Looks to the
sky. Expressionless.

DADOO

Yas, suh. I's reckon ya has a good
sensa' huma'.

WILLIAM

So, Hancock... you'll be gone
awhile --

HANCOCK

A few months. I'm exploring
different areas, but I gotta make
sure these developments are right.
(turns to the yard)
Timmy, come on over here.

HANCOCK (CONT'D)

Give my boots a good 'ol shine, why don't you.

TIMMY

Yes, suh, Master Hancock, suh.

Piper grinds his teeth. William looks to the ground with a nervous smile.

Timmy dashes toward Hancock's already propped foot on the rim of the carriage door. Hancock pulls his handkerchief from his suit jacket. Tosses it at Timmy.

HANCOCK

Higgins, I tell you, some of those people can't understand a lick, I tell you, a licka' English.

Piper, angrily, watches Timmy from a distance; a gently, dumb degraded smile on his face.

HANCOCK

It's hard to communicate with them. They grunt, like wounded beasts.

WILLIAM

Say, these developments... well, I guess you'd have to have a good amount to purchase property like that, eh?

Hancock LAUGHS heartily... his perfectly shaven chin patronizing Timmy's every move.

HANCOCK

Higgins, we're both from the south, yeah? Anyone can be bought. It's all about who you know and what you're willing to pay in exchange, if you know what I mean?

William shrugs with a clueless smirk. Hancock LAUGHS. Kicks at Timmy with his foot. Timmy flinches and hands him the handkerchief. Walks to his shovel.

HANCOCK

Higgins, just owning a farm is equivalent to picking the cotton that grows on it. Think big, Higgins... Think big.

Hancock nods to Dadoo. Dadoo rides off. Hancock, disrespectfully, tosses the handkerchief in William's yard.

William places his disheartened head down. Walks into the house.

MILLER'S FARM

Timmy's wife, MARTHA, (30-ish) very protective over her loved ones, and ELIZABETH, 19, Piper's girlfriend, (delicate and physically appealing) picking cotton...

Behind them, MISSY, a malnourished older slave, dark bags around her eyes, COUGHING wretchedly.

Piper taps Elizabeth on the shoulder. She jumps.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Piper.

Missy COUGHS again, loud and dry. Elizabeth peeks at the house and lowers her voice.

ELIZABETH

You shouldn't be here --

PIPER

Let me see your arm, 'Lizabeth --

Piper raises her sleeve. A giant blue bruise stares him in the face. She pulls away and pulls her sleeve down. Martha looks to the house; turns to Elizabeth.

MARTHA

Lizzie...

ELIZABETH

It's nothing now, Piper. Let it alone.

MR. MILLER, a 60-ish, beet faced slaveholder (father of Martha's two youngest children) steps onto the porch, folds his arms in an authoritative manner; a glacial expression upon Piper. He steps off the porch.

ELIZABETH

I's got to talk to you later --

MILLER

Piper, the girls got work to do.

PIPER

Mr. Miller, sir, I's just wanted a few seconds with 'Lizabeth --

MILLER
Go on! Git --

Miller throws rocks at Piper. Piper shields his face with his arms.

Like a frightened puppy, Elizabeth keeps her eyes on the cotton. She glances upward as Piper looks back at her from the roadway.

INT. HIGGINS HOUSE - DAY

A small, very quaint living room... overdone flower patterns on the couch and window curtains... pictures of three Higgins children ranging from their childhood to their adulthood on a mantle piece.

William, in his personal favorite worn chair, lights a cigar.

LOUISE, a poor white indentured servant (15), hands William his mail. Her corset pushed bosoms stare above eye level at him. He licks his lips.

WILLIAM
Thank you, there, Louise.

William's wife, MARY JO (motherly, hair tied back in a bun, apron) enters with a hot cup of tea. She stops; watches William gawk over Louise. His hand inches toward the young girl's.

Mary Jo CLEARS HER THROAT...

William's hand moves quickly to his side. He grabs his cup from his wife. Louise places her shameful head down.

WILLIAM
Thanks, dear.

William sips the tea. Mary Jo stares at the embarrassed child, still with her head slumped.

MARY JO
Goodbye, Louise.

Louise runs out the room. Mary Jo fixes her eyes upon William. He pulls a cigar from a case on the table. Strikes a match... smokes...

MARY JO

Speaking of which, we need to buy less cigars and more feed for the pigs, William. We're not wealthy southerners. Just hard-working.

Just as he opens his mouth, a KNOCK on the door. He answers. Piper stands before him, his eyes anxious.

WILLIAM

Piper, what's the matter?

Piper walks in. The curious faces of Timmy and Dr. Boots from the yard look on eagerly. William breaks a smile. Closes the door.

PIPER

Mr. Higgins, sir, I's need to talk to you. It's about Miller's farm.

Mary Jo wipes her hands on her apron. Eavesdrop on William and Piper with concern. William pulls Piper to the side.

MARY JO

How are you this fine morning, Piper?

PIPER

Hello, Madame Mary Jo. I's fine, ma'am.

(to William)

Sir, I's have reason to believe 'Lizabeth may be in some trouble.

WILLIAM

Okay. Let me mosey down to Miller's. I'll have a set down with him --

PIPER

Sir, we's already tried that. Is there some place to hide the girls, just fo' a bit of time?

William escorts Piper to the door. Keeps his voice at a minimum.

WILLIAM

Give me some time, and --

PIPER

Please, Mr. Higgins. Time is something I's don't have.

Mary Jo leans in her seat for a better listen.

WILLIAM

We'll have a meet... in the saloon.

Piper nods. William closes the door and takes his seat. Mary Jo stares at him.

MARY JO

William, what's happening?

WILLIAM

Nothing for you to be concerned about, my dear...

SMOKE

From William's mouth gently blows into the air. An unsettled gaze out the window, into the blue sky.

WILLIAM

...but there's something in train.

INT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary Jo and Louise carry two trays of kettle tea and glasses. Mary Jo turns her nose up at the bordello girls across the room. A SNARL slips out.

Timmy, in an elegant tuxedo shirt and a pair of dress pants, gleams naively at his accomplishment: his mistress, JANE FRANKLIN, white woman in a long socialite dress, on his arm...

Dr. Boots and two giggly, white whores, no older than sixteen, stumble in drunken stupor....

Piper, alone by a window, frowns at the girls. He and Mary Jo catch eyes. She wrinkles her brow at him. He gently shakes his head. They're both confused.

Louise stands frozen in time. Ogles the whores.

MARY JO

Louise, don't be rude. Offer our guests some tea.

LOUISE

Yes, madame.

William comes downstairs nonchalantly smoking a cigar. Jane extends her hand to Mary Jo.

JANE

Madame Higgins. It's a pleasure
being in your abode again.

Mary Jo's eyes creep from head to bottom of the home
wrecker's dress.

MARY JO

Good evening, Jane. A bit
overdressed for booze?

Jane raises her eyebrow. Pulls her hand away and takes back
to Timmy's side. Mary Jo rolls her eyes toward Timmy.

MARY JO

Timmy, Martha and the children are
doing well, I take it?

He places his head down.

TIMMY

Uh, yes ma'am... Madame.

Louise pours tea from the kettle into a cup. The tea spills
on the floor. The brothel girls GIGGLE.

MARY JO

Oh, Louise... Hurry, now, and get
that up. You'll ruin my rug.

Louise dashes out the room. Mary Jo wipes her brow. Leans
into William's ear.

MARY JO

May I speak with you... privately?

HALL

WILLIAM

What's the matter?

Louise runs past with a damp towel and a bucket of water.

MARY JO

The matter is... I don't want these
brothel girls in my home.

William turns away from Mary Jo. MOANS...

MARY JO

Why does Timmy have a girlfriend
when he's a married man with young
children? Why do you condone this?
Do you have a jezebel, too?

WILLIAM

No... and I don't condone it, but I
can't tell the boys how to live.

She tightens her mouth.

WILLIAM

Listen, dear. Surely you
understand --

MARY JO

What I understand is... you'll be
the one to explain which merchant
sold them the fancy habiliments.

She leaves a distressed William with his mouth open.

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

Piper watches everyone from a bar stool...

William pours shots of whiskey for his friends. Looks like
an oversized idiot at a candy shop...

Timmy and Jane at a private table, canoodling...

At a nearby table, Dr. Boots glides his fingers through the
long hair of one of the young girls. The other girl on his
lap. He speaks obscenities in their ears. Both girls
GIGGLE...

William introduces a viola case from behind the bar. Places
the instrument under his chin. Serenades his friends with a
ROMANTIC SONG.

With anger, Piper tightens his mouth, downs his shot of
whiskey.

PIPER

Mr. Higgins, sir?

William glances at Piper, a silly smile on his face. Places
the viola back in its case.

PIPER

(lowers his voice)
Listen, Mr. Higgins, sir.

PIPER (CONT'D)

I's didn't come here for this. If this ain't serious to you, I's be forced to take matters into my own hands --

WILLIAM

You're right, Piper. I'm sorry. Let me talk to some people. Now, I can't guarantee anything, but I'll do what I can.

Piper stares at William. Never blinks. Pressured, William pours himself a drink and downs a shot. Tries not to make eye contact with the aggressive slave.

INT. MILLER'S BARN - NIGHT

Lying in the hay, Piper and Elizabeth stare upward at the ceiling. Her head rests on his chest. Fantasizes...

ELIZABETH

And there was a big porch on the top floor where you's could sit and have lemonade, and look out onto the road...

PIPER

Uh-huh.

ELIZABETH

A big ol' rocking bench on the downstairs porch, like ol' Miss Covington had when we were kids...

PIPER

Yeah.

ELIZABETH

I could see all the youngsters running around this apple tree behind our white picket fence.

Piper peeps down at her.

PIPER

White picket fence? This what you want, 'Lizabeth?

ELIZABETH

Ah, it was just a dream, Piper.

Piper looks to be in deep thought.

ELIZABETH

Other than raising a family with you someday, the rest of that dream will never come true.

PIPER

What about that place Webby been talking about... Canada?

ELIZABETH

Canada? Piper, why would ya's listen to Webby? Last year he was killing squirrels 'cause he said we all need food to survive when the monsters from the planet Quado attack us.

She glides her hand sweetly across his face.

ELIZABETH

I's not saying Canada don't exist. I's saying it don't exist fo' people like us.

Piper places his eyes down.

PIPER

Yeah. Ya's probably right.

He WHISTLES. She, gently, squeezes his nose.

ELIZABETH

You always do that.

PIPER

What?

ELIZABETH

Everytime ya' with me, ya whistle.

PIPER

Cuz' I's only whistle when I's happy.

She smiles sweetly.

PIPER

Gots something to really make you smile...

He digs in his pocket and pulls out Cecil's bracelet. Puts it in her face. She shoos it away, and Piper laughs.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Piper. That thing smells --

A LOUD BANGING on the door. They jump. She pushes Piper behind the stables.

She runs to the front of the barn. Martha rushes her CHILDREN (2 black, ages 6 and 5; 1 mulatto, age 3) in their beds, tossing blankets on them. The baby (a mulatto 1-year-old) already sleeping.

Missy, still sick throughout the ordeal, just sleeps.

MARTHA

(to the kids)

Close ya eyes. Now --

The door flings open. Martha and Elizabeth stand with their arms at their sides. Miller smiles.

MILLER

Ain't it time you turn that lamp out?

ELIZABETH

Yes, Master Miller. Right away.

Elizabeth runs to the lantern. He grabs her arm and GRUNTS upon her high cleavage.

In the back of the stables, Piper peeks around the corner. Sees Miller holding onto Elizabeth's arm.

MRS. MILLER

Bertram?

MRS. MILLER, outside the barn, a shawl wrapped around her arms. Looks in...

MRS. MILLER

What are you doing?

MILLER

Be 'der in a minute.

Miller looks into Elizabeth's frightened face one more time. Leaves. Martha holds Elizabeth's hand. Piper comes from behind, already angered. He hugs Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Piper, you's need to get out here
'for you get caught.

He holds her tightly. Rubs her back. He won't let her go.

INT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - DAY

Piper sits across from Higgins in the living room. Piper talks, Higgins listens. Sips from his mug. Just listens...

INT. GENERAL MARKET - DAY

A totally random place of housing necessities...

On the floor, tall, brown barrels of sugar and flour lined in rows...

Containers of rice, boxed bread, and coffee on shelves...

In the back, saws, wrenches, hammers... some hung, some rummaged through... thrown around...

Another room with a closed curtain supplies whiskey and tobacco, kept out of sight...

William slips in. At the counter, CHRISTOPHER McCORMICK (35), headstrong Englishman, very sarcastic. He's just checking out a customer. The customer leaves.

William picks up a box of screws. Pretends to be interested.

William hands Christopher cash. Stares at the young buck in admiration.

WILLIAM

I can recall when me and the misses came to this town. Your people run this place well.

CHRISTOPHER

Grandsire and father took this more seriously, perhaps.

WILLIAM

Anytime you'd be willing to entertain the possibility of a second mate...

CHRISTOPHER

Ha! If only we were that busy... your usual cigars?

WILLIAM

Uh...

William looks down at his money. An embarrassed smile takes over. Christopher catches on.

WILLIAM
Ah... maybe next time.

Christopher hands him a box of cigars.

WILLIAM
You're too good to me, Christopher.
(lowers voice)
So, any news?

Christopher peeps around William's shoulder. Bags the cigars and the screws.

CHRISTOPHER
Not here... maybe a meeting of some
sort... Friday night?

Christopher hands change to William.

CHRISTOPHER
After shop... keep the change.

William shakes his head at Christopher's erratic sense of humor.

TWO CONVERSING CUSTOMERS enter as William leaves.
Christopher, cleverly, wipes the counter with a towel like no discussion ever took place.

INT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary Jo paces the living room. Nervously pats her fingertips together. In his personal chair, William holds his head in his hands; ignoring his wife's annoying behavior.

MARY JO
William, I just cannot believe you
promised the Negroes you would lead
them to freedom. They will kill
us, William. They will find out,
and they will kill us. I did not
leave my most beautiful home in
Alabama to be a part of freeing
slaves!

She stops pacing. Becomes panicky and her breathing becomes stunted. Flops into a seat and holds her head.

WILLIAM
This pathway to Canada --

MARY JO

Canada... What is this, some great plot against white people? What does the pathway look like, exactly?

WILLIAM

Well, I haven't seen it, but --

She shakes her head and turns away.

WILLIAM

It's worth trying --

William drops his chin to his upper chest... sighs... Her lips quivers, tears roll down her cheeks. She moves to the window, looks out and cries in her hand.

WILLIAM

It'll be different this time. Ten years ago, Cecil had no idea of what he was doing. We tried talking him out of it, remember?

She continues sobbing.

WILLIAM

There are plenty of people taking part in this, Mary Jo... Christopher McCormick...

MARY JO

Christopher McCormick can't even run his father's shop.

William rolls his eyes. Closes his mouth shut.

WILLIAM

...John Gallagher...

Swiftly, she turns around. She walks back to him.

MARY JO

John Gallagher? John Galla --
(closer to William)
John Gallagher is a catholic priest, or did he forget?

He places his head inside his folded hands... continues...

WILLIAM

Thomas Stanford, Angeline Whitmore.

MARY JO

William, these are our friends and neighbors --

WILLIAM

Mary Jo, I know this sounds absurd, but --

Louise walks in, drying her hands on a piece of cloth; startles the bickering couple.

LOUISE

Will there be anything else, Mr. and Madame Higgins?

MARY JO

No, Louise. Why don't you go help yourself to whatever's left.

LOUISE

Thank you, madame.

Mary Jo flops back into her chair. She slowly sedates, makes a low MUTTER; rubs her head. William grabs her hands.

He falls to his knees beside his downhearted wife.

WILLIAM

Mary Jo, I love you and the kids, and I make a vow that I'll never do anything to harm you... but if there's anything a good Christian man can do for these people... honey, I have to try.

Mary Jo wipes her tears.

WILLIAM

You know how we feel about treating all people fairly. Why did we leave our home in Alabama?

She turns to him with ration.

MARY JO

Very well, then. A woman's place is said to be beside her man... so beside you... I shall stand.

He gives her a hug. Her doubtful eyes shift... worries...

INT. MILLER'S BARN - NIGHT

Martha sits in the hay feeding her baby. The other three children asleep in their wooden beds.

To the back of the stables, Missy lies on a cot, COUGHING. Elizabeth sits on the floor beside her, trying to feed her water from a jar. Missy turns her head, pushes the jar away.

Back where Martha and the kids are, a KNOCK on the door. A protective Martha places the sleeping baby inside a blanketed tin pan disguised as a bed. She stands before her eating baby. Closes her eyes... breathes deep.

MARTHA

Yes?

Piper pokes his head in.

PIPER

Martha?

She sighs. Smiles.

MARTHA

Piper. Everything alright?

PIPER

Everything fine.

She sits down, dips her index and middle fingers into a bowl of mush concoction. Places it into the child's mouth.

PIPER

He sure is getting bigger by the day.

MARTHA

Yeah. It's hard to try and raise them on my own. Ain't seen Timmy in four days, now.

He looks at her; his smile vanishes.

MARTHA

I's figured Master Higgins had him busy on the farm.

Her brown eyes gleam upward, almost awaiting validation.

PIPER

Yeah... lots of spring planting.

Martha beams in assurance. Piper places his hand on her shoulder. Walks to the back of the stables.

Elizabeth places a wet towel on Missy's forehead. She stands beside Piper.

ELIZABETH

She getting better. She can talk,
now. Don't know what it is, Piper.

He steps closer... the perspiring slave, unable to keep her eyes from a flutter.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Miller said he call a doctor
tomorrow. Tonight, she just be
sick.

Piper stoops beside Missy.

PIPER

Missy... Missy...

She reaches for his hand, and smiles. She turns her head and COUGHS wretchedly. Piper stands. Heads for the front of the stables.

PIPER

I's tell Mr. Higgins to get a
doctor --

ELIZABETH

Piper, no --

He turns to his woman. Now, Martha comes in. She just stares at Elizabeth. Piper waits for someone to speak.

Shamefully, Elizabeth's head drops; her eyes fearful. Martha gives her the duty.

ELIZABETH

Mr. Miller don't like Mr. Higgins.
Says he a nigga lover. Say there
be funny things going on at Higgins
farm.

Now, his head drops to the floor. The women wait for him to speak, this time.

PIPER

I's planning a move...
(gives eye contact)
...north, maybe.

Martha's pleasantries morph to doubt... turns to Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Piper, has ya' lost ya ever-lovin'
mind?

PIPER

I's know it sounds like nonsense --

MARTHA

I's heard people in town talking
about peoples being killed in some
place west. You can read. Is it
true?

Piper sinks his head even lower.

MARTHA

Ya think this place in the north is
gonna be better?

His eyes shift between the inquisitive girls.

ELIZABETH

It's that damn Canada, ain't it?

PIPER

(to Martha)

What if there's some place out
there? Would you want a better
life for you's and ya' family?

Martha smiles, very pure and sincere.

MARTHA

Piper, I's think ya' heart's bigger
than the sun... but my chillins
lives is real. This place... might
not be.

Missy looks upward, her voice weak and raspy.

MISSY

Piper, you's like a youngen
reminder of my Richard, shot dead
on his face trying to find a home
for me and the kids.

Piper walks closer to her.

MISSY

You...
(coughs)

MISSY (CONT'D)

...don't ever stop... 'til you made it, Piper. 'Til you made it.

Elizabeth shakes her head at Missy, walks to Piper, tears in her eyes. She shoves him in the shoulder blades, angrily.

ELIZABETH

No, don't you's do this. Don't you's go to that place. I's can't lose ya'. I's lost everybody. You's lost everybody --

She cries into his shoulder. He holds her.

PIPER

I's don't know how, but I's promise... no matter how long it takes, nothing will keep me from coming back for you.

She stares into his eyes and caresses his face.

ELIZABETH

Piper, I'll pray for you.

PIPER

Come on, girl. You's know how I's feel about that praying stuff.

Elizabeth rolls her eyes.

PIPER

You can do it all you's want, but in the end, who's gon' save you?

She embraces him.

ELIZABETH

Someone will... someone will...

A tear rolls down her cheek. Piper closes his eyes. A mimicked tear escapes his eye.

INT. HIGGINS' BARN - DAY

A brown, timber framed lumber building with a gambrel-roof. The mow holds dozens of pounds of hay. Underneath the hayloft holds OBNOXIOUS LAUGHTER and asinine jokes between Timmy and Dr. Boots.

Piper secures the windows shut. Timmy points to Dr. Boots' shoes.

TIMMY

Damn, Dr. Boots. Fo' somebody who shine shoes, youn look like you's been playing in the swamp with them black vultures.

Timmy bursts into LAUGHTER. Piper stands before the uneducated buffoons.

TIMMY

Ooh-wee... You's 'spos to be working on the pig fence, not playing with the pigs --

DR. BOOTS

You's the only black vulture Master Higgins wants me to play with --

The two laugh. Piper closes his eyes, sighs.

PIPER

Is you done?

The laughter continues. Timmy holds his stomach.

PIPER

I says is you done?

They roll their eyes and position themselves before Piper. Timmy HUFFS ignorantly.

PIPER

I's planning a move.

Now, their brows drop, dramatically. Dr. Boots limps toward the door. Timmy shakes his head and follows his crippled friend. Piper grabs Dr. Boots by his arm with force.

PIPER

You like being a slave? You like living in a damn barn?

DR. BOOTS

Naw, but I like living. I's ain't dying like Cecil!

Piper looks at the old, frightened slave, releases his fragile, bony arm.

PIPER

There's a place called Canada --

They cut Piper short; flag their arms at him; migrate toward the door. Piper rushes in front of them.

PIPER
You fools... What is you scared of?

TIMMY
Mr. Higgins been good to us. He
supply us with friendship, food --

PIPER
White women and booze...

TIMMY
I ain't puttin' my wife and
chillins in danger, Piper.

PIPER
How is Martha and ya' chillins,
Timmy?

Timmy becomes evasive. Looks to the floor. Makes sure Dr. Boots isn't looking at him.

PIPER
I's just saw Martha. She ain't
seent ya in four days.

DR. BOOTS
Come on with that, Piper.

PIPER
Had I's not talked Madame Mary Jo
to ask Miller's wife why them kids
look mo' like Miller than you, he
still be trying to fo'nicate her.

Timmy PUNCHES Piper in the jaw. Piper trips, regains stability and football CHARGES Timmy to the floor. He HITS Timmy in the ribs with full velocity...

TIMMY
Mr. Higgins, help... Piper, stop --

Piper POUNDS Timmy, over and again.

DR. BOOTS
Piper, stop before you kill 'em...

Piper stops. Looks down at the giant crybaby. Timmy holds his stomach, his lip busted, wipes tears from his face.

PIPER
I's was the one who stood up fo'
yo' family when yo' ass was scared.

Piper storms out the door.

EXT. HIGGINS' BARN - CONTINUOUS

Piper almost trips over his "below eye level" visitor, Webby. He shoves the child away from the barn.

PIPER

Webby, how many times I's gotta --

A SLAVEOWNER and Miller rides past on their horses. Eyeballs Piper and Webby with suspicious smiles.

MILLER

E'rething okay in that barn, Piper?
Sounds like someone needin' help,
eh?

PIPER

Uh, no sir, Mr. Miller. Everything
good.

The slaveowners look to one another. Ride off, but keep turning back.

WEBBY

We gotta plan this Canada thing
right, Piper. I made this map --

PIPER

Listen, I know's yo' family fo' a
long time. Yo' mammy was killed
years ago... taken away from you
and yo' daddy --

WEBBY

Right... because Cecil taught her
to be a free thinker.

PIPER

The hell you know about Cecil? You
was just a baby when he died.

Piper can still see Miller and his friend, speaking amongst themselves, looking back at the barn.

WEBBY

Canada is a place where you can
have fresh fish everyday, and --

PIPER

Listen, this ain't no game, Webby.
We's talkin' 'bout our lives...
something neither of us gon' have
if you keep telling lies...

PIPER (CONT'D)
and bringing up a name in a town
where people will hang ya fo' it --

Piper walks away. Webby's head falls low as he heads for the road.

INT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - DAY

William peeps outside from his curtain.

WILLIAM
What in the world is going on out
there, Piper?

Outside, Miller, back on his horse, sees William. He waves with a suspicious sneer. William waves back, guilt-ridden.

William closes the curtain. Takes a cigar from a table drawer beside him; lights a match.

Piper sits in a seat across from him.

PIPER
Martha told me she be having a hard
time raising them kids by herself.

William eases back into his seat... blows a puff of smoke...

PIPER
She all by herself, and Timmy out
there messing 'round with Ms.
"trollop" Franklin.

WILLIAM
I'm sorry about what's going on
with Timmy and Martha, but another
fight like that just might make
some people suspicious...
(raises his eyebrows)
...might even make Timmy leak some
information he shouldn't.

Piper lowers his brow from strain.

WILLIAM
Don't worry. Timmy listens to me.

Piper shrugs. Almost smiles at the truthful statement.
Leaves...

INT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - NIGHT

A rather dim, mysterious mood... all curtains closed. William, in his favorite chair, TAPS nervously against the table closest to him...

Mary Jo across from William. Places her nails to her teeth. Upon realizing her actions, she folds her hands in her lap.

On the sofa, JOHN GALLAGHER (67), the family doctor and a catholic priest (no one knows except the Higgins')... skeptical about the whole thing. Pretends to scratch his forehead, but is really hiding...

ANGELINE WHITMORE (40), the neighborhood seamstress. An eerie woman, always in black... too much make-up... capability of not being very sane...

She stares at Piper with compassion. Piper just observes the audience of unknown faces and demeanors.

Beside Angeline, Christopher peeks at the dumbfounded plea of sorrow on her face. A real head case. He shakes his head and shrugs "why?" at William...

Trying to be suave, a pipe in his mouth, THOMAS STANFORD (clumsy mediator), British accent, BUMPS his hand on the edge of a table.

THOMAS

Great...

Angeline scoots closer to the front of her seat.

ANGELINE

Piper, I can't imagine what you and your people must be going through.

PIPER

It's very hard, Ms. Angeline. We just want freedom.

A compassionate Angeline reaches her hands out to Piper. John raises his eyebrow at Christopher. Christopher sends a sarcastic bright smile to John.

Thomas' pipe falls from his mouth, onto his trousers, causes smoke to arise.

THOMAS

Damn it!

Thomas leaps from his seat. Mary Jo pulls the drapes of the window back, allowing a smidgen of the moonlight in. Thomas pats ashes from his pant leg.

MARY JO

Oh, Thomas... not again.

THOMAS

Mary Jo, if I had two coins for every time I've done this...

John, embarrassed by the charade, sinks lower in his seat... his hand covering one side of his face... mumbles lowly...

JOHN

Oh, can we get on with this show already?

Louise enters with a tray of drinks. John hides his face behind his scarf.

Louise's eyes gleam upon Christopher. She fancies him. He stands from his seat.

CHRISTOPHER

Louise, haven't seen you much in my shop for your weekly treats.

He digs in his pocket and hands her some candy. She smiles in adoration. Her mouth open...

MARY JO

Oh, Louise, hurry and set the tea on the table, now.

Louise rushes to the table, her embarrassed head down to the floor.

While John knocks ashes from his pants, Mary Jo's eyes watch Louise out of the living room. She and William catches eyes. She follows the young girl.

KITCHEN

Louise wipes down the counter. Mary Jo startles her...

MARY JO

Uh, Louise, don't worry about those dishes, there. As a matter-of-fact, you're done for the evening.

LOUISE

Are you certain, Madame Higgins?

MARY JO

Yes, yes. Now run along to your quarters. Shoo, shoo, shoo.

Louise wipes her hands on her apron. Leaves. Mary Jo taps her fingers on the side of her leg. Exhales...

LIVING ROOM

Mary Jo takes her seat. Looks around the room. The conversation already in progress.

CHRISTOPHER

You and your friends will be given a map --

PIPER

Sir, uh, I's going by myself.

The guests look around, baffled.

PIPER

Some of the women is scared they chillins might get hurt. The men just scared... they don't want to end up like Cecil.

A roomful of nods...

CHRISTOPHER

I see. Well, if you wish to go alone, I'll let my friend know.

JOHN

Wait a moment, now. How do we know this is real? What if this is a hoax?

Mary Jo raises her eyebrows to William -- "I told you so" written all over her face.

JOHN

Has anyone ever seen this pathway?

CHRISTOPHER

No, John. It's an imaginary path, and Canada is a fictitious land at the bottom of the sea --

John erupts from his seat. Glares angrily over Christopher. Christopher displays a tiny smile. Shows, not even, a minute bit of worry.

JOHN

Listen, you little contemptuous
piece of sludge --

CHRISTOPHER

If you weren't feeling confident,
you could've stayed home and hid
behind your hands, for heaven's
sake --

WILLIAM

Please, settle down, gentlemen.
This is helping Piper none.

Shamefully, John sits; looks around the room. Christopher
pulls a piece of paper from his suit jacket... hands it to
Piper.

CHRISTOPHER

This is the name of the fellow
who'll be waiting for you. It's
pronounced --

PIPER

Charlie Armstrong.

John Gallagher lifts his brow toward the proud parents,
William and Mary Jo.

CHRISTOPHER

Right, Piper... Charlie Armstrong.

MARY JO

So, what's next for Piper?

EXT. BATTERY PARK - NIGHT

AN OPEN PROMENADE OVERLOOKING THE BAY. Dark with a tinge of
early moonlight. Piper steps off a horse carriage with a
white CARRIAGE AGENT, dressed in black, a hood on his head.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

Piper, you have to be ready by
dusk. This will allow enough time
to be on your way by morning... an
agent will be waiting...

Both Piper and the Carriage Agent search hastily behind one
another. Piper straps a bag to his back.

CARRIAGE AGENT

Here we are.

No sign of an end past the huge body of water. Piper frowns in confusion.

PIPER

What is this?

CARRIAGE AGENT

Gotta pass the bay before you can get to Cana-der...

Piper looks at the humongous water; his face tightens.

The agent leads Piper closer to the bay. Upon seeing Piper, a CANOE AGENT hurries to grab his oars.

CARRIAGE AGENT

This route will take you to Newark.

PIPER

Wait -- how do you know it's even there?

CARRIAGE AGENT

Mr. McCormick and his family have friends in Canada --

PIPER

I mean the route... do ya know, for sure, it's there?

Both agents look to one another again. Carriage Agent places his head down.

CARRIAGE AGENT

No.

Piper stares into the bay. Turns around to his old surroundings. His frightened eyes back to the canoe. He pulls Cecil's handmade bracelet from his pocket. Stares at it. Grasps it tightly.

He closes his eyes... exhales... places one foot inside...

Canoe Agent glances behind Piper, into the promenade.

CARRIAGE AGENT

We should be moving now, yeah?

Piper hurries into the canoe, but keeps looking behind.

Canoe Agent rows away from New York, deeper into the large body of misty water. Piper sees the Carriage Agent galloping back toward hell...

Piper, has a moment of weakness. Turns to Canoe Agent.

CANOE AGENT
Is everything alright?

He's silent. Looks at the midnight blue water -- the endless, intimidating bay...

Then, back to Canoe Agent's concerned expression. Turns to New York. No longer sees Carriage Agent.

PIPER
Nothing, sir... nothing.

Piper clings to the bracelet. He looks at it again. Sighs silently and keeps his attention forward...

EXT. A NEWARK HARBOR - NIGHT

Fairly quiet with docked ferries. A few unattended canoes... Nearly 100 BRITISH IMMIGRANT SETTLERS piled in a 25-30 seated boat, just arriving at the harbor.

Canoe Agent pulls up, and Piper hops onto the landing.

CANOE AGENT
Are you able to understand the map?

PIPER
Uh, yes, sir. I's think I got it.

Canoe agent hands Piper a pouch of money from his pocket.

CANOE AGENT
It's six pence per ferry. Stick with that map, and you won't go wrong.

PIPER
Thank you, good sir.

Piper looks past the trees to his destination. Canoe Agent nods and reverses the boat.

A family of sullen faced immigrants (mother, father and young girl), just stepped off their boat. Stare blankly at Piper. He glances at their dirty faces while the rest of the group empties onto the new land.

Piper, a bit ruffled by their appearance, grabs his map. Never takes his eyes from the little family. Takes off running.

PIPER (V.O.)
 Dear Elizabeth... The pathway is
 real. It was cold, though, and I's
 been walking forever...

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

HUMAN BONES huddled under a tree. A bit of flesh still
 present. Piper walks closer...

...three adults, two small children, and a baby held in the
 arms of a deteriorated mother...

...buried in mud, a knapsack. Piper digs it out and opens
 the bag.

A MAP

equivalent to Piper's, but more intricate. Ranges from
 Mississippi to Canada. A runaway slave family...

Piper drops his head into his hands. Stares at the departed
 one last time before running off...

EXT. NEWARK BAY - DAY

A ferry large enough To fit roughly 50 passengers. A
 CONDUCTOR collects money at the dock.

Piper runs, just in time, behind the last people boarding.

The conductor focuses on Piper's heavy breathing, filthy
 clothes -- dark skin. Says nothing...

PIPER
 How much for the ferry, sir?

The conductor turns to the FERRY DRIVER. Both men prune up.

CONDUCTOR
 Where you from, boy?

PIPER
 New York, sir. I's just visiting
 friends... that's all.

He shows the conductor his money.

PIPER
 How much for the ferry, good sir?

CONDUCTOR

Six pence, but t'ain't stupid. Ya'
ain't ridin' on this ferry, nigga.

PIPER

Sir, I's not here for trouble.

The Ferry Driver pushes Piper away. The ferry pulls off.
Piper watches.

EXT. NEWARK BAY - LATER

Piper sits behind a tree, his head slumped. The HORN of a
ferry sounds. Piper jumps up and goes back to the dock.

Piper trying to blend in with the whites, digs in his sack.
He approaches the new CONDUCTOR. Hands him the money. The
conductor frowns his face.

CONDUCTOR 2

That'll be ten pence.

Digging in his bag, Piper walks back and hands the conductor
the rest of the change. They stare at each other. Piper
places his head down and continues to the ferry.

FERRY

Passengers MUMBLE to one another. Piper takes a seat. A
white man frowns and scoots away from Piper.

The ferry takes off.

HARBOR

Piper exits the ferry with the passengers. Dismantled, Piper
looks out at the hundreds of white people, their wondering
eyes following his every move.

Piper tries to ignore their sharp and cruel scorns. Walks
through them without looking at anyone. TWO LAWMEN watch
Piper graze elbows of upset people while passing through.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

HARD RAIN pouring aggressively. Piper continues to run. His
foot slips in a patch of mud and he falls on his back.
Covered in mud, Piper sits up, grabs his back in pain.
Continues running...

EXT. PATHWAY - DAY

A well lit, quaint House...

A sharp beam of light projects from an upstairs room. Piper's tired eyes stare, shivering, worn and physically surmounted...

...afraid to step closer to the residency. Too tired to continue the path...

The owner of the home, a white man, CLARENCE, steps onto the porch with a rifle. Piper places both hands up... hasn't the vitality to escape...

The men look into each other's eyes -- two deer in the headlights of a tanker truck.

Clarence walks off the porch, inspects Piper from head to foot. Piper's body shakes furiously.

CLARENCE

You a runaway?

Piper, too cold and frightened to speak.

CLARENCE

Come on in for a warm wash and some grub.

Piper slowly places his arms down. Clarence walks to the house. Turns and finds Piper still dumbfounded in one place. Clarence looks behind Piper, toward the woods.

CLARENCE

Well, don't just stand out here. Come on in, now.

Clarence opens the door wide. Piper inches in.

INT. CLARENCE'S HOUSE - DAY

A diminutive layout with cracked walls and poor sunlight, but a very hospitable feeling. The house of abolitionists.

Clarence's wife, ABIGAIL (bone straight hair, timeworn face) watches a, now, clean Piper devour potatoes and chicken on his plate.

Abigail smiles warmly at Clarence seated across from her.

ABIGAIL

Been gone a long time, Piper?

PIPER

Yes, Ms. Abigail, but I's can't say how long. All's I know is I's been moving day and night.

He scoffs his food.

PIPER

You's people is abba... abba...

ABIGAIL

Abolitionists...

PIPER

I's never heard that word a day in my life.

He continues to chow on the chicken bone, starting to chew on the marrow.

CLARENCE

Headed towards Canada?

PIPER

Yes, sir. You wouldn't happen to know how far away I's be from Ontario, would you?

CLARENCE

Shouldn't be too far. This is Buffalo... maybe a few hours away?

ABIGAIL

Longer, on foot. Perhaps another day or two of travel.

Piper wipes his mouth on a towel beside him.

PIPER

Thank you -- for the warm bath, the food and the clothes on my back... I's should be heading out, now.

ABIGAIL

The sun'll be going down soon. Clarence and I would be more than happy to have you stay awhile.

CLARENCE

We have spare rooms.

BARKING DOGS from afar. Abigail and Clarence look to one another. Piper jumps from his seat.

PIPER

I's gotta go.

Piper, in a hurry, fastens his pack to his back. Abigail wraps some chicken in a cloth and hands it to Piper. Piper stops his busy cycle for one crucial moment of sincerity.

PIPER

Thank God... for beautiful people
like you.

Abigail's eyes fill with tears. Clarence beams... nods... leads Piper to the door.

EXT. CLARENCE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The door opens and Clarence's head peeps. Piper darts back into the gloomy woods...

THREE WHITE MEN and their leashed BLOODHOUNDS run about the timber, close behind Piper. Not direct enough to see him.

Piper rushes through trees and bushes, his feet at a maximum speed. The ferocious slave-eating BARKS... the mutts lead their owners on Piper's trail.

Piper, with the folded cloth in hand, pinches a piece of chicken from the bone; places it on the ground. He darts to his right, bypassing the route.

The dogs suspend their journey with a sniff, hungrier for the meat than for Piper. A GRUMPY FACED MAN pulls his dog's leash closer to him.

GRUMPY FACED MAN

What you got there, boy?

He grabs the chicken from the dog's teeth, shows it to his friends. All three men look out into the woods.

EXT. SMALL POND - DAY

A potpourri of colored butterflies flutter in sway. A soiled Piper pauses to watch their dance against the string of light on the water. A butterfly lands on his finger. He smiles.

PIPER (V.O.)

I's met some good people along the
way. It was nice to know everybody
ain't like what we used to.

EXT. LAKE ONTARIO - NIGHT

Trembling with chills, Piper looks at the massive water. Sees no canoes, no ferries. Unfolds his map and studies it.

He breaths a sigh of relief and continues along the outer parts of the lake.

PIPER (V.O.)
The walk is cold and long,
Elizabeth. Most of the time, feels
like ya' legs is dead.

EXT. LAKE ONTARIO - DAY

Piper's weary eyes struggle to open. Through a mass of trees, he finds a boulder to rest and rub his head.

He pulls the old, worn bracelet of Cecil's from his pocket stares at it.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)
Oh, Piper. That thing smells...

He smiles. Places is back into his pocket.

A quiet SLITHER of a rattlesnake between the tree branches. So silent, Piper doesn't hear it. The snake slides to Piper's foot while he continues to try and adjust his eyes with his fists.

He looks down and SCREAMS...

The frightened snake immediately grabs hold of Piper's leg with his teeth. He falls to the ground, and the snake slithers away.

Piper GRUNTS... holds his bitten leg. Uses the boulder to push himself to stand. He PATS his injury with the palm of his hand. Continues his journey...

He limps through a forest. From a distance, SOUNDS of FAST DRUMS and smoke rising to the clouds from behind trees. Now, Piper picks up speed.

PORT CREDIT

A mass of aboriginal people in breechcloths and leggings buying and selling maize, beans and squash at various mini-markets. Some markets consist of everything from hominy and raspberry jams to tea-dyed bones and porcupine quill...

THREE NATIVE MEN beat on elkskin hand drums, SINGING in their land language...

Lived in tepees, wigwams, even a couple of hogans behind the markets...

Along the lake, turned upside down on land, hundreds of birchbark and spruce bark canoes...

Indigenous people smoke hand made calumets; some gathered around making peace pipes. Unprejudiced white people buy from the markets and intermingle with their crafty friends.

Piper, completely mesmerized by the Canadian life, stands silently -- tries to relish the whole thing.

A NATIVE CHILD holds a mask to Piper. Begs, with his innocent eyes, for a monetary exchange...

Piper digs in his bag and hands the kid a couple of coins.

NATIVE CHILD
(in Native tongue)
Thank you, good sir.

The child runs off. Piper scrolls his fingers along the uniquely crafted mask.

A tall, handsome, predominantly white looking Native man slowly walks toward Piper with wonder. Too busy admiring the mask, Piper doesn't even see him: CHARLIE ARMSTRONG (25).

CHARLIE
Mr. Piper?

Startled, Piper quickly looks at the big gent. Piper drops his brow. Confused...

CHARLIE
Are you Mr. Piper?

Piper steps away from Charlie.

PIPER
What if I is?

Charlie extends his hand.

CHARLIE
Then I'm Charlie... Charlie
Armstrong.

PIPER

Calls me what you want, but you's
sure ain't Indian.

Piper examines Charlie, hat-to-shoe.

PIPER

Ain't no white man ever called me
sir, either.

CHARLIE

I am part Iroquois.

PIPER

Iro - what?

An apprehensive Piper observes Charlie's long straight
hair... thin nose... thin lips...

PIPER

How long you been here?

CHARLIE

Not too long. According to when
you were leaving, I gave you enough
time to walk the pathway, through
the waters... to the safe houses...

Piper releases facial tension, but another wrinkle of the
forehead appears.

PIPER

What if I's didn't make it?

CHARLIE

Christopher spoke very highly of
you. I knew you would... Come,
comrade.

Charlie leads Piper to his tepee. Some of his ABORIGINAL
MALE FRIENDS not too far away, gathering food into their own
tepees... picking trash from around their personal spaces...

Charlie turns to his friends.

CHARLIE

Comrades... this is Mr. Piper.

They stop what they're doing and place one hand up, each.

ABORIGINAL MEN

Oy, Piper --

Piper places his hand up, exactly like them.

CHARLIE

Come. Let's get you to your destination.

Charlie leads Piper to two horses, one for each man. Piper stares at the beast... hesitates...

CHARLIE

It's okay, Mr. Piper. He won't bite you.

Charlie places his foot inside the saddle and hops on his horse. Piper stares doubtfully at the beast. He attempts to place his foot in the saddle of his own horse, but can't quite climb upward.

Charlie steps down from the saddle and extends his hand to help. Piper holds his hand for Charlie to keep distance. He struggles to try again.

Once on, Piper notices he's seated the wrong way... He faces the rear end of the creature.

Charlie shields his mouth with his hand, tries not to laugh. Piper turns to Charlie, hopelessly.

PIPER

Uh, I's think I's need some help, sir.

Both men burst into LAUGHTER.

EXT. AN ONTARIO STREET - DAY

Piper, an uncomfortable gallop of his horse, rides beside Charlie through a predominately white area. With a pained look upon his face, Piper's breathing staggers...

Natives sweep shop fronts, clean windows, drive white people in carriages...

A WHITE LADY arrogantly sticks her nose up at Piper. Curious WHISPERS among crowds of people, but they keep distance.

PIPER

Is there some law that I's shouldn't be here?

CHARLIE

No. Why you ask?

FOUR WHITE CHILDREN point at Piper, whispering fear into the ear of their MOTHER. She looks away from Charlie and Piper, like a carnival freak show.

CHARLIE

You mean because of the harshness in their eyes? They don't understand us. They're just as afraid as we are.

PIPER

Why would they be afraid of us?

CHARLIE

The pale skin man wants to keep wealth and knowledge to himself. Imagine a world of no slavery... no hatred... no fighting...

Piper's eyes wander freely. Brings a satisfying smile to his face.

CHARLIE

...Everyone would be parallel. Why would a dominating group of people want equality?

This thought pulls Piper's smile to an unsettling sulk.

EXT. TORONTO TOWNSHIP, ONTARIO - DAY

An affable underdeveloped town. A mixture of people with different racial backgrounds, different religions... same love for the land...

Piper rides his horse with a more comfortable gallop. Wipes his extremely sweaty brow on the sleeve of his shirt.

Charlie and an elderly NATIVE WOMAN beside her fruit stand greet each other with a respectable nod and smile.

Confusion surfaces Piper's face upon the small town.

CHARLIE

This is Toronto Township, Ontario.
This is how we live.

Down the road, THREE MEXICAN and NATIVE CHILDREN (ages 4-6) quiet their barefoot game of kick the rocks... greets Piper and Charlie with a smile and wave.

PIPER

I's never seen a place like this
before.

On a porch, two elderly WOMEN (an American Negro and a European immigrant) drink water, reminisces on a rocking bench... in their yard, a NATIVE MAN on his knees, plants tulip bulbs along their fence.

PIPER

I's still don't understand why
white folks brought ya's over here,
then allowed ya's to build homes
and markets.

CHARLIE

I'm a native of Ontario, even
though this is considered Ojibwa
territory.

Piper wrinkles his brow, stares at Charlie. Charlie notices his strange reaction.

CHARLIE

This land, the land where you once
stood, and many other lands
belonged to different tribes. It
was taken from all of us... My
cousin didn't speak with you about
this?

PIPER

Cousin?

CHARLIE

Christopher McCormick...

Now, Piper's brow rises in bewilderment.

CHARLIE

His father's brother married an
Iroquois woman, who is my mother.
I'm Charlie Armstrong McCormick.

A stare of disbelief from Piper to Charlie.

CHARLIE

When Christopher is here, it's
easier for the locals to address me
as Armstrong... He and Thomas
Stanford are highly regarded in
this part of the world, you know.

PIPER

Thomas Stanford... the clumsy one?

CHARLIE

He almost burned down one of our developments a few years back.

Piper LAUGHS. The men continue riding down the dirt road.

CHARLIE

So, we were all gathered for a night of good music and food...
(voice slowly vanishes)
...Stanford and his pipe decided to have a better time without us...

EXT. AZUELOS' FRONT PORCH - LATER

A drab, navy blue and white colonial cape house... spotty grassed yard... mud patches... a handful of CLUCKING chickens and small pigs randomly roam with their dog counterparts.

Sounds of a BANGING HAMMER inside the home... cracked wood stairs and an unsecured handrail... chipped paint on the porch... children's toys scattered along the steps...

A RED GRIZZLE BORDER TERRIER in a corner by a rocking bench, very obedient... another corner, a WINDOW with an off-white, dingy curtain.

Charlie KNOCKS on the wooden door. Piper, beside him, sweating profusely, practically out of breath.

PIPER

Is you sure I can stay with these people?

CHARLIE

Not to worry. You'll stay in my house once the builders rid the rats.

PIPER

Now, I's just need to get cleaned up and find a house for my friends. Then I's has to get back to Port Credit.

A SMALL FIGURE peeps from behind the curtain -- closes it as soon as Piper notices.

CHARLIE

Mr. Piper, it's also important that you get yourself well before heading back into the freezing waters --

PIPER

Listen, I's appreciate everything you's done, but my health is the last thing I's thinking about right now.

CHARLIE

Mr. Piper, even now, you look as though you're quite ill. I understand your desperation to help your friends, but --

PIPER

No buts, Mr. McCormick. That's it.

CHARLIE

So be it... If this is what you need to do, then I will be back after you've bathed and eaten, and we will find a home for you.

Piper nods his head and a slight smile surfaces throughout the perspiration.

The door opens. Standing before them, a short Mexican woman, braided ponytail to her mid back, GUADALUPE (Lupe), in a long, floral gown. She delivers an ardent smile to Charlie.

Charlie removes his hat. Piper mocks his chum. Removes his hat, too.

LUPE

Ah, Charlie --

CHARLIE

Madame Lupe.

A sincere hug. Lupe SMOOCHES Charlie on the cheek. She looks at Piper.

LUPE

(in Spanish)

Mister Piper... Welcome to Toronto Township.

PIPER

(confused by the language)

Uh, yes ma'am... It's a nice place.

She embraces Piper with a big hug. She doesn't let him go. Piper's concerned eyes look to Charlie for help. Charlie just smirks.

LUPE

Come. We have plenty to eat and drink.

CHARLIE

I must return to Port Credit.

Lupe clutches her folded hands close to her heart.

LUPE

Oh, you've saved so many. So many.

CHARLIE

Thank you.

Charlie extends his hand to Piper.

CHARLIE

I'll be back for you, comrade.

Piper shakes Charlie's hand and smiles.

Piper and Lupe watch as Charlie hops on his horse and rides off. Lupe grabs Piper's arm.

LUPE

It's wonderful to finally meet you, Piper. You came to me in a dream two weeks prior, you know?

He just stares at her.

LUPE

Do you remember what you wanted me to tell Elizabeth?

His eyes practically bulge from their sockets. He goes stiff.

PIPER

How do you know 'Lizabeth?

LUPE

I'll give you time to remember. Come on in. Meet the family.

INT. AZUELOS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Minimum sunlight in a very humble living room/dining room concatenation.

Lupe's husband, RODRIGO, stands behind the racket... HAMMERS a long, uneven piece of wooded board over a partial hole in the floor.

Their children, JUAN (9), ESPERANZA (7), and MIGUEL (4), at the dinner table eating... mischievous LAUGHTER; mannerly youngsters. They smile at Piper.

LUPE

(in Spanish)

*No, no Rodrigo... Mr. Piper is here
and need not be bothered with this
kind of noise --*

RODRIGO

(in Spanish)

*You made me promise to fix the
floors before the rats come back.*

Lupe and Rodrigo, great companionship, but slightly irritated with each other, sometimes... a couple who has known each other since childhood. Lupe pats Piper on the shoulder.

LUPE

We have a rodent problem, but I promise to have peace and quiet for you.

PIPER

It's no problem, ma'am. I's can sleep through a hurricane.

RODRIGO

See, Lupe. He can sleep through a hurricane. This noise won't --

LUPE

Señor Piper is a guest in our home, and he has just traveled many miles to get here.

Rodrigo, apologetically, wipes his hands on his pants... shakes Piper's hand.

RODRIGO

I'm sorry. Bienvenido, amigo.

Rodrigo extends his hand to Piper. Piper (no idea what Rodrigo said) improvises... shakes Rodrigo's hand.

PIPER

Nice to meet you too, sir.

LUPE

Piper, these are our children Juan, Esperanza, and Miguel.

Esperanza GIGGLES, shies away. She has a crush on Piper. Juan (the oldest boy) and Miguel (the youngest) wave. Piper kneels on one knee for a better look at their delightful faces.

PIPER

Well, it's nice to meet you all. Hope we's can all be friends.

Esperanza GIGGLES again, bashfully hides her blushing face inside her hands. Lupe shakes her head at her daughter's puppy love.

PIPER

Ya's some handsome chillins.

All the children LAUGH now. Brings a beam to both Lupe and Rodrigo, as well. Piper breaths heavily and wipes his sweaty brow.

LUPE

Let me show you to your room, Piper.

PIPER

Uh, I's don't mean to impose for long. Just wanted to get clean and grab a small meal, if that be okay.

RODRIGO

Piper, you are a guest in our home. We'd like for you to stay awhile --

PIPER

Thank you, sir, but I's gone meet Mr. Armstrong in a bit so he can help provide me with a home --

Lupe grabs Piper's face and looks deep into his eyes with concern.

LUPE

Piper, you've been bitten... a rattlesnake?

PIPER
 (breathy)
 Uh, yes... ma'am.

Piper lifts his pant leg. A red tumor looking, pulsating lump replaces the area where his ankle used to be.

PIPER
 Oh, sh --

Piper closes his eyes and passes out to the floor.

LUPE
 Rodrigo --

The entire family rushes to Piper's aid.

EXT. BONFIRE - NIGHT

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, some MEXICANS, WHITE IMMIGRANTS, and NEGROES gather for a celebration. An OLD NATIVE MAN, long grey hair, beats on a cow hide drum. Smacks his hands, adroitly on both palms and backsides...

...a NATIVE GIRL (early teens) sits beside the man, plays along on a double headed drum with powwow beaters...

...SMALL CHILDREN, different cultures and ages, create dances of their own, fluidity of their arms and legs -- Esperanza, Juan and Miguel join their underage companions in childish, unrhythmic dancing.

Natives in a tribal twirl... SONGS SUNG in DIALECT... adults passing along a large pipe.

Piper, asleep near a tree on a blanket. Lupe and Rodrigo talking amongst some of their own friends. Charlie smoking from a snake looking instrument.

Piper slowly opens his eyes and sees the fiery celebration. His concerned eyes search for a familiar face.

He sits up. Rubs his leg. Lifts his pant leg. Notices the gigantic lump is gone from his ankle. Not... one... trace...

Charlie notices Piper.

CHARLIE
 Mr. Piper --

Esperanza hears Piper's name and runs to him. Gives him a huge hug. He kisses the youngster on the forehead. His new friends run toward him.

CHARLIE

Piper, how are you feeling,
comrade?

PIPER

Fine, I's guess. All I's remember
was seeing two of Madame Lupe, then
falling to my knees --

Everyone LAUGHS. Piper smiles, now. Rodrigo pats Piper on
the back.

RODRIGO

Well, it's good to have you back
with us, son.

LUPE

Come join us in festivities, Piper.

Charlie and Rodrigo help Piper from the ground and closer to
the bonfire.

A VERY OLD NATIVE WOMAN, band around her head, two long
feathers in her hair, passes Piper a Lakota peace pipe.

INDIAN WOMAN

You are imbalanced. This will
relax your nerves.

Piper inhales an enormous puff, and hands it back to the
woman. He COUGHS... catches his breath... a simmered smile.
The lady LAUGHS heartily, her mouth bearing very few teeth.

PIPER (V.O.)

There's this thing the Natives call
a peace pipe...

She contains herself and offers the pipe to Piper again.
He's indecisive -- takes it anyway.

PIPER (V.O.)

...it makes you feel good. Ya's
just gotta be careful cuz ya's
think you seeing things that ain't
really there.

Charlie leans into Piper's ear.

CHARLIE

I guess we'll have to see those
homes at another time, is that so?

Piper hands the pipe to Charlie, smoke coming from his nose.
Piper COUGHS and nods at the same time.

Already toasted, Piper looks out into the joyful dancing. He sees the mirror image of Elizabeth, following along to the rhythmic beats. He squints for a better view...

She turns to Piper. It is Elizabeth. She smiles and waves. She keeps dancing.

Piper waves. His smile diminishes. He just watches her enjoy herself in his imagination.

INT. AZUELOS' HOUSE/PIPER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Quiet and dark, the light of the kerosene lamp burns. Piper writes with a feathered quill pen against a piece of paper. A glass of inkwell beside the letter.

PIPER (V.O.)

You will love it here, Elizabeth.
Ain't nothing like what we used to
in New York. People on this side
of town don't look at you strange
cuz you a Negro.

A content beam takes over his face.

PIPER (V.O.)

I's promise to be back for you's
real soon. You can't read yet, but
when ya's learn, this note will
make sense.

He dips the pen into the inkwell.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - NIGHT

Elizabeth, fear in her face, runs fiercely, holding her dress from hitting the ground. She's got tears running down her face, but she never stops running.

Close behind her a MAN, can't see his face, just his
BOOTS...

Chasing, running almost as quickly as her.

She hides behind a tree and ducks into the shadows of a bush behind an old, abandoned barn.

The man slows his pace. Elizabeth sits silently in the dark, out of breath, PANTING very quietly. Holds her heart...

PIPER (V.O.)
 When everything is right, I promise
 to marry you and we's can have a
 family of our own. I love you,
 Elizabeth... Love... Piper.

Now, the man has lost her. He leaves. She places her head
 in her hands. Cries...

EXT. ONTARIO STREET - DAY

Piper, on his horse, is accompanied by Esperanza. On
 Charlie's horse, Miguel and Juan rides while Charlie walks
 alongside. Piper WHISTLES a tune.

ESPERANZA
 Uncle Piper, what you whistling?

PIPER
 Oh, just a song I's know from New
 York.

Charlie points to an unfinished home from a distance. The
 house, small and wooden, like a cabin.

PIPER
 Naw... gots too many coming back.
 That little hut ain't gone fit
 them.

They continue down the road. Piper WHISTLES. Charlie wipes
 his brow with a handkerchief. Piper notices Charlie's
 distress.

PIPER
 I's promise to find something soon,
 Mr. Armstrong.

CHARLIE
 There's no pressure to rush. I
 understand the severity of you
 having to find a place --

Piper rolls his eyes and stops riding.

PIPER
 Mr. Armstrong, we's been searching
 for hours today. Hours yesterday.
 Ain't found nothing.

Charlie sighs. Removes his hat.

PIPER

I's know ya tired, and it's hot.
To make matters worse, I's being a
bothersome by heading back to New
York in a few hours --

CHARLIE

You're not a bothersome, Piper.

Esperanza points behind Charlie. Excitement lights her
little eyes. No one sees her.

CHARLIE

What's more important is that we
make sure you've fully recovered
from, not just the snake, but the
long route --

ESPERANZA

Uncle Piper --

Piper, still, doesn't hear Esperanza.

PIPER

I's think whatever was in that pipe
I smoked two nights ago killed
every infection, every bug...
probably my stomach --

ESPERANZA

(screams)

Uncle Piper --

Everyone turns to the gleaming little girl, pointing out into
the field...

A TWO-STORY BRICK HOME

Staring at them. THREE MEXICAN BUILDERS in the divine
greenery of the yard. Yellow, white, pink and purple tulips
neatly align a white picket fence.

VISION OF ELIZABETH on the porch before Piper. She waves at
him, in her usual long maid's dress, broom in hand. She
disappears...

One of the builders, a MEXICAN planting a tree, nurtures a
baby tree upright in a hole. He steps back to examine its
preciseness. Back on his knees, he pats the soil, rotates
the tree upward.

PIPER

Excuse me, sir.

The startled builders turn around at the same time.

PIPER

Uh, just wanted to know who this house was for.

The men look around at each other, clueless. Charlie walks closer to them.

CHARLIE

(in Spanish)

Uh, my friend wanted to know who this house is for.

MEXICAN PLANTER

(in Spanish)

Mr. Ruskin is in charge of these buildings, but he's gone. He'll be back in two or three weeks.

PIPER

What he say?

CHARLIE

A Mr. Ruskin is in charge of these buildings, but he won't be back for another two or three weeks.

Piper sighs and rubs his head.

PIPER

Two or three weeks? I's got to leave today, and that's it --

Piper paces before Charlie and the kids like a complete mad man. The children nervously watch Piper finally lose his cool.

PIPER

My girls can't spend one more day in hell than they should --

A distraught Piper sits on the ground and holds his head, practically crying. Esperanza wipes her own teary eyes as Piper falls to pieces.

Juan and Miguel look to Charlie for a solution. Charlie places his understanding hand on Piper's shoulder.

CHARLIE

I know this doesn't compare to the struggle that you're facing in New York, but God knows what's best.

Piper turns a cheek to his new buddy.

CHARLIE

God always provide ways of showing
you what's best for your spirit...

He leans even lower to Piper's ear.

CHARLIE

...and there are three youngsters,
right now, who would love to have
your spirit back.

Piper lifts his head at a smiling Charlie. He looks over to the kids and sees Juan and Miguel's frightened eyes... Esperanza wipes tears from her face.

Piper redeems his pride and pulls himself from the depths of the ground. He gazes into the sad and confused eyes of the children.

PIPER

I's real sorry about that. Uncle
Piper lost himself.

A smile forms from their innocent faces.

PIPER

That won't happen again.

Piper hops on his horse with Esperanza as his passenger. He closes his eyes and sighs. He smiles at the kids, bringing joy back to the atmosphere.

He sighs and musters himself to WHISTLE. The group proceed down the road.

INT. AZUELOS' HOUSE - NIGHT

The Azuelos family and Piper at the dinner table. Esperanza gives Piper giddy eyes. Piper, too indulged in his plate to notice.

Lupe nudges Rodrigo; points her head for him to observe the lovesick child.

MIGUEL

Mo' bread!

LUPE

Miguel, we have a guest. Be
polite.

MIGUEL

Can I have some mo' bread, please?

LUPE

Yes. Now, you may have bread.

Esperanza slouches in her seat, her youthful eyes waiting for Piper to notice her.

RODRIGO

(in Spanish)

Esperanza, sit up in your seat.

The fearful child jumps upward in her seat, stares at her food. Embarrassed.

PIPER

Is you people natives, too?

RODRIGO

No. We're from California... now Baja, to be exact.

LUPE

What about your family, Piper?

PIPER

I's don't really know where my peoples is from, ma'am. We's only know what the white man want us to.

Lupe looks to Rodrigo for support. Rodrigo peers from his plate, saddened.

PIPER

But I's hear the west is even worse.

RODRIGO

Yes. The land... it's so beautiful, they would rather fight for it than to allow the white man the satisfaction of taking it from them.

An uncomfortable silence around the table. The children's innocent, fearful eyes toward the adults. No one touches their food. Lupe lightens the atmosphere with a smile.

LUPE

But it is pointless to dwell on things we have no control over, right, Miguel?

Juan nods, bringing joy back to the table. Playfully, Rodrigo rubs his hand across Juan's hair, completely messing it up.

JUAN

Oh, paw --

Everyone LAUGHS.

INT. GENERAL MARKET - DAY

Christopher stands at the counter, tending to a customer. He looks up. Sees William stroll in.

Christopher finishes bagging his customer's groceries. William is next in line.

WILLIAM

Any word?

CHRISTOPHER

Are you expecting a telegram?

WILLIAM

No, no. It's just...

(lower)

...the boys and I were wondering if he even made it. It's been weeks --

CHRISTOPHER

William, you do understand that inquiring about something as big as this could only spark suspicion --

WILLIAM

I understand.

CHRISTOPHER

I know you mean well, but this is something that can be discussed no further --

Miller and a friend walk through the door, LAUGHING; conversing. They look at William and Christopher.

MILLER

Higgins.

WILLIAM

Miller.

Miller's friend goes to the back of the store; shops. Miller stays with William.

MILLER

How's your Piper, there? Hope he ain't got the same son-bitch my Missy had.

WILLIAM

Well, we're not sure, at this moment. John Gallagher's looking at him, and he said it looks like it may be an infection --

MILLER

John Gallagher? That Gallagher is a fraud. Can you believe he tried to sell my wife some oil from a lizard and told her it would cure her back aches? Listen, you need a real doctor --

WILLIAM

It's quite alright. John has been a friend of the family so many years.

MILLER

Now, William. Please don't make me judge your own character by the company you keep.

Miller nudges William's arm.

Miller's friend goes to Christopher. Gets checked out. Christopher and William briefly catch eyes. Both seem a bit tense.

EXT. MARKET AREA - DAY

Piper, practically bouncing, WHISTLES. Holds Esperanza and Miguel's hands; Juan, in front of them with Lupe and Rodrigo.

Esperanza attempts to WHISTLE, but it comes out light and airy...

ESPERANZA

Uncle Piper, why do you whistle?

PIPER

Well, I's only whistle when I's happy.

Miguel looks at Esperanza. They both GIGGLE.

JUAN
Don't laugh at Uncle Piper.

The two LAUGH harder.

PIPER
What you's laugh at? I's say
something funny?

ESPERANZA
I thought you said you could read.
Why you talk like that?

PIPER
What I's say?

ESPERANZA
Like that!

Juan rolls his eyes. Piper shrugs to Juan.

JUAN
They're being mean, Uncle Piper.

ESPERANZA
Why do you say funny words? You
shouldn't put "s" at the end of
"I".

PIPER
What you mean?

ESPERANZA
Don't say, "I's going to the
store." Say, "I am going to the
store."

PIPER
I am going to the store.

Miguel CLAPS.

ESPERANZA
That's good! That's good! Now,
every time somebody ask you a
question, you can say "I" or "I am"
or "I will." Okay?

PIPER
Okay.
(points to himself)
I understand.

Piper stops at a fruit stand. The kids run off to a candy stand close by. Lupe slants toward Piper.

LUPE

If they ask for candy, tell them to get jobs.

PIPER

(smiles)

Yes, Madame Lupe.

Piper picks apples; Lupe and Rodrigo search for corn and squash a few stands away.

Behind Piper, a MAN'S VOICE, very familiar... very abrasive... very much like New York...

MAN'S VOICE

I don't like the atmosphere here, Richards. Not very clean, but perhaps we can do something about that, if you know what I mean.

Piper glances slightly. The familiar, abrasive voice belongs to Hancock talking to his buddy, RICHARDS.

Piper, keeps his wide, frightened eyes straight forward.

HANCOCK

What is that peculiar smell?

RICHARDS

It's something the land people call hominy --

HANCOCK

Putrid... putrid is what they should call it.

Piper stands still, pretending to look at the apples. His eyes search and finds Esperanza and Miguel pushing each other over a small toy.

On the opposite side, Lupe walks toward Piper. She stops and examines a piece of squash inquisitively. Piper sweats, his eyes shift...

HANCOCK

We could take these... land people, and see how well they know farming. Perhaps a northern version of New York?

Lupe stands next to Piper. She turns her nose at the squash in her hands. Piper's head remains straight, as to not look in her direction.

HANCOCK

We wouldn't keep too many, though.
Send alot of 'em west... Depends on
how well they know crops... what
they can do for us, you know?

Piper's widened eyes tries to signal to Lupe, but she only sees the squash. She opens her mouth to speak. Sweat drips from Piper's head onto the apple in his hand...

Miguel knocks the toy from Esperanza's hand in a heated argument.

ESPERANZA

(wails)
Momma!

Lupe and Rodrigo run to the bickering children. Piper closes his eyes. Relieves a small sigh.

RICHARDS

I really don't think the rich
heritage of the aboriginal people
will allow for us to take this
away, if I must say so, Hancock.

HANCOCK

Oh, pooey, Richards. Anyone can be
bought. It's all about who you
know and what you're willing to pay
in exchange.

RICHARDS

Be it what it would... the soil is
richer in Quebec. For what other
reason do you believe the land
hasn't been conquered? 'Sides,
McCormick and his family already
engraved their name on the ground.

HANCOCK

Well, they can have this swamp. I
will never return.

Piper's hand begins to shake. Hancock looks at a FRUITSTAND MERCHANT, his eyes with usual abrasiveness.

HANCOCK

Get me one of those apples, there.

The fruitstand merchant hands Hancock an apple. Hancock turns his nose up.

HANCOCK

No, no, no -- The damn thing is
bruised. Here... I'll pick my own.

Piper makes a small movement away from Hancock, without being noticed. He turns to the Azuelos family and sees Rodrigo scolding Miguel.

Hancock moves closer to Piper for a ripe apple. Piper shakes nervously.

Hancock hands money to the merchant and steps away from the market with Richards. The two hop on their horses. They're gone...

EXT. TWO STORY BRICK HOME - DAY

No workers this time. Piper, on his horse, stares at the almost completely finished home gazing back at him. His face, sad and drained... the face he once held in New York.

He hears the sweet voice of his Elizabeth:

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

A big ol' rocking bench on the
downstairs porch, like ol' Miss
Covington had when we were kids...
and I could see all the kids
running around this apple tree
behind our white picket fence.

Charlie gallops from the roadway -- stops beside Piper.

CHARLIE

Had a feeling I'd find you here.

Both Charlie and Piper glare at the house in amazement.

CHARLIE

Your people will be very happy with
what you've done for them.

Piper remains fixed on the home.

CHARLIE

We're having a celebration tonight
in Port Credit --

PIPER

I really would like to, Charlie.
 (turns to Charlie)
 It is time, though... for me to go
 back to New York.

Charlie's smile disintegrates. His eyes dip to the ground.
 Then, back to the house.

PIPER

Today, I was reminded of fear and
 injustice... I ask of you to look
 over this house for my friends.

CHARLIE

What happened?

PIPER

Listen, I's gon' need some men, Mr.
 Armstrong. I am going to bring the
 women and chillins back first.

CHARLIE

When will you be returning?

PIPER

I will come back with the mens...
 (corrects himself)
 ...men. Should be right afterward.

CHARLIE

You will be fully supplied with
 everything you need, Piper.

Piper nods. Both stare forward at the home of a bittersweet
 beginning.

INT. AZUELOS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Dinner winds down. Piper, muted in thought, at the dining
 table with Lupe, Rodrigo and the children. Miguel tries to
 impress Piper by resting his foot on the table.

LUPE

Foot off the table, Miguel.

MIGUEL

Don't want to --

RODRIGO

Off...

Miguel, quickly, places his leg back onto the floor.

JUAN

Maw, can I have more corn, please?

Lupe adds two spoonfuls of corn to Juan's plate. Looks to Rodrigo, everyone noticing Piper's unusual silence.

RODRIGO

Everything well, Piper?

PIPER

Yes, sir. I did want to thank you all for your hospitality.

Piper turns away, closes his eyes in regret.

PIPER

I'm leaving tonight.

Everyone silences; halts.

PIPER

Going back to New York.

The plate FALLS from Lupe's hands onto the table... a few kernels fall onto the cloth.

LUPE

Tonight? You'll be back right away?

PIPER

I's be back. Look here, I was 'sposed to be here for two days only. Here I is, three weeks later, huh?

Piper catches a glance between Lupe and Rodrigo. Esperanza's eyes shift frightfully... a problem even her parents can't solve.

RODRIGO

Well, you've been here for weeks. Feels like you're 'part of the family. We can't wait until you return.

Lupe tries to replace her disillusion with a smile. The children sit completely quiet. Lupe folds her hands on the table, jittery and anxious. Piper wipes his mouth on a piece of cloth.

PIPER

Well, I's guess I better get ready
for my long trip so I can come on
back home.

Piper stands from the table. Lupe, Rodrigo, Juan, and Miguel
right behind him. They walk as his shadow to the door,
uneasiness on all their faces.

PIPER

Now, I don't want y'all to worry
about me. I know the route well,
now.

LUPE

Guess you're right -- Before you
leave --

Lupe dashes out the room. Rodrigo and Piper stand before
each other awkwardly.

RODRIGO

I guess we'll have to finish those
squeaky stairs when you get back,
huh?

PIPER

Yeah -- guess so... Don't start
without me.

Rodrigo pressures himself to smile. Shakes Piper's hand.

RODRIGO

Vuelve pronto, friend.

PIPER

(not very fluent)

Muchas gracias, Señor. I ask that
you all make a promise to me. No
matter who comes here and try to
take over your land, let them know
that the people of Ontario can't be
bought... for no amount of money.

Piper bends down to give Juan and Miguel a hug.

PIPER

Now, you two be nice to your
parents, you here? No
misbehavin'...
(to Miguel)
...and keep ya feets off the table.

JUAN AND MIGUEL

Yes, Piper.

Lupe hands Piper a bag; wipes her wet eyes on her shirt.

LUPE

Just a little something for your trip. I can't imagine how long it must be.

Piper hugs Lupe. She straightens his shirt collars, tries to keep her tears at a minimum.

LUPE

You come back to us, Piper.

PIPER

I will, ma'am.

Esperanza runs behind him; grabs his arm; her face pouring with tears, as well.

PIPER

Esperanza. How could I's forget to say goodbye to you?

He kneels for a hug. She clings tightly to him. Lupe tries to pull her away by her waist.

LUPE

(sniffles)

Come now -- Piper has to go so he can hurry back.

Lupe moves away -- allows the girl her goodbye.

ESPERANZA

(silently; in his ear)

Please, Piper. Don't go.

PIPER

Listen to ya' mother. You think I wouldn't come back to a place like this?

Esperanza continues to cry, silently but harder; an unrestrained bounce of her shoulders.

PIPER

Listen, now...

He grabs her hand and walks her to the window. Points at the roadway.

PIPER

You see that road there?

She nods her head, her crying, somewhat, slowing down.

PIPER

You keep looking up that road.
Real soon, on a light, windy
Ontario evening, you gon' hear me
whistling, and I want your face to
be the very first thing I see --
okay?

She doesn't respond.

PIPER

I wants you to run out the house,
and you give me the biggest hug you
can. Then I know that I's home --
you promise?

Hesitantly, Esperanza nods.

ESPERANZA

Promise...

PIPER

That's what I's...
(smiles; corrects himself)
... I want to hear...

Piper walks to the door, turns to the five dispirited faces.
He waves... they wave back.

EXT. AZUELOS' HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Piper stands and takes a breather. Lupe, right behind him.

LUPE

Now, do you remember what you
wanted me to tell Elizabeth?

Piper turns around; shakes his head; just as confused as the
first time the subject was brought up. Lupe moves closer to
him.

LUPE

You asked me to tell her that it
works... that prayer does work.

Piper stares at Lupe... speechless. A waterfall runs down
her cheeks. They hug tightly.

LUPE
You hurry back to us, Piper.

PIPER
Yes, ma'am, Mrs. Lupe.

EXT. PORT CREDIT - NIGHT

Not nearly as many people as when Piper arrived. Only a few Native scavengers picking scraps from a previous gathering.

Piper runs toward Charlie and TWELVE VOYAGERS strapping their packs and weaponry tightly to their backs. Their canoes await them in the ocean.

CHARLIE
Here he is.

Piper's eyes protrude upon Charlie's help.

PIPER
Thanks... these guys are giants.

CHARLIE
When should I expect you, Piper?

PIPER
I have Mr. McCormick send you a telegram.

Piper looks to the mammoth sized men, their war faces on.

PIPER
Everybody ready?

All the men nod, their warrior stances, ready for battle... fearless... Piper turns back to Charlie.

PIPER
I need one thing from you, Charlie.

CHARLIE
What's in your spirit?

PIPER
I want you to take care of 'Lizabeth.

CHARLIE
Everything will be fine, Piper --

Piper grabs Charlie's arm. Looks intently into his eyes.

PIPER
Take care of 'Lizabeth.

Piper smiles -- one last calmness before the storm.

PIPER
Thank you for everything.

Charlie watches as the heroic group set themselves into their canoes, into their dark quest.

INT. MILLER'S BARN - NIGHT

Elizabeth sweeps a corner, Martha on the other end asleep with her four kids.

A RUSTLE from outside startles Elizabeth. She runs to the window. Nothing. Continues to sweep. Now, a KNOCK. Piper at the window looking in.

Her mouth drops, and she tosses the broom on the floor. She clutches her heart and runs to the door.

ELIZABETH
Piper --

Immediately, the lovers hug. Elizabeth carries no concern for Piper's filthy clothes all over her dress.

PIPER
'Lizabeth, we got no time. I's
gettin' you all out, now --

ELIZABETH
Wait --

Piper runs to the side of the barn where Martha and her four kids sleep.

PIPER
Martha...

She awakens.

MARTHA
Piper? That really you?

PIPER
Martha, wake the chillins --

MARTHA
What's going on?

PIPER

I wants you to pack everything you need, but not too much cuz it's a long trip.

Piper rushes back to the front of the stables... tosses whatever clothes he finds into his backpack.

PIPER

Y'all get Missy.

Martha and Elizabeth look to one another.

ELIZABETH

Piper --

Piper, still too busy tossing random clothes into his backpack.

PIPER

Martha, wake the chillins.
'Lizabeth, ya gotta help me, girl.
I don't know what you's need here.

ELIZABETH

Piper... Missy dead.

PIPER

What?

ELIZABETH

Missy died... two nights after you left, as a matter-of-fact.

Piper takes a better look at Elizabeth, now notices she has a black eye.

PIPER

Who did this?

He walks to her. She shields him with her hand.

ELIZABETH

People asking 'bout you. Mr. Higgins lying for you, saying you been sick in bed. Mr. Miller and others think Mr. Higgins lying.

MARTHA

Should I still wake the chillins?

PIPER

Yeah... I gotta get y'all outta here, now.

EXT. BATTERY PARK - NIGHT

Piper runs through the field. Behind him, Martha carrying her baby, holding the hand of her second oldest child. Elizabeth carries the other youngster and holds the hand of Martha's oldest child.

They approach the giant Canadians accompanied by the Canoe Agent and three more AGENTS with their boats. Fearful, the women stop. Martha pushes Elizabeth and the kids behind her.

MARTHA

Piper... who they?

PIPER

These my Canada friends. They here to help. We got mo' boats back in Newark.

Elizabeth and Martha turn to each other and grab hands. Their eyes in thrill and disbelief.

MARTHA

It's real...

Webby, from practically nowhere, runs out. Mouth drops upon seeing the Canadians.

WEBBY

They're from Canada, ain't they?

An upset Piper grabs Webby by his shirt.

PIPER

Webby... the hell you doing here?

WEBBY

Piper, I think I'm in trouble. Can I go? Please?

Piper turns Webby around, raises his arm to give the child a thrashing on the butt.

ELIZABETH

Piper, stop! He's just a child.

Respecting his lady, Piper pushes Webby away.

PIPER

Go on, boy... and don't be causing no problems... I see y'all soon.

ELIZABETH

Wait a minute... where you going?

PIPER

I gots to go back for the mens... I
be there as soon as I can.

ELIZABETH

No... you ain't said nothing about
letting us go by ourselves, Piper.

PIPER

Elizabeth, I be right behind you --

WEBBY

Piper, come on! Forget them --

ELIZABETH

Piper, don't do it. I's don't
think you should --

Tears pour from her eyes. Piper digs in his pocket and pulls
out Cecil's bracelet. Places it in her hand. A burst of
laughter surfaces from behind her tears.

ELIZABETH

Oh, Piper. That thing smells.

They hug tightly.

ELIZABETH

Piper, I love you.

PIPER

You wait for me, hear? Got this
big, beautiful house we's all gone
pile up in, for awhile.

Martha turns to Piper -- astonished.

PIPER

I left something for you. I read
it when I get there, okay.

(to his crew)

I don't want their feets to touch
the water, understand?

MARTHA

You bring Timmy back with you,
right?

PIPER

Don't worry 'bout nothing.

Martha bear hugs Piper with her right arm; her left arm
occupied with her baby. Webby grabs Elizabeth's hand. She
looks down at the youngster. They have a secret.

MARTHA
 (in his ear)
 Thank you.

Martha tends to her children, helping them into the canoes.
 Elizabeth grabs Piper's hand.

ELIZABETH
 I's pray for you, Piper.

PIPER
 Oh, 'Lizabeth... you can do it all
 you's want, but in the end, who's
 gon' save you?

Elizabeth smiles brightly.

ELIZABETH
 Someone will... someone will...

Elizabeth walks toward the Canadians. Piper draws a thought
 wrinkle to his forehead.

PIPER
 'Lizabeth --

She comes back. He looks around nervously; curious to speak.

PIPER
 What if you pray... and you think
 no one hears ya'?

Elizabeth's eyes swell with tears. She holds her shivering
 lips together inward.

ELIZABETH
 Pray anyway.

She smiles and gently squeezes his nose. She heads toward
 the others. Piper watches as his Canadian crew help the
 women and children onto the canoes. Elizabeth turns to
 Piper, tears on her face. They wave to one another.

Piper runs back to the grounds of slavery -- his friends, the
 waters of freedom.

Webby, not in the boat yet, watches Piper disappear behind
 the trees of New York.

INT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - LATER

Piper enters through the kitchen door. He and Louise catch eyes. She looks down at his filthy pants and shoes. He walks past her.

LIVING ROOM

MUMBLING between Timmy and William. Timmy's long, pathetic face consoled by William. They look up and see Piper in the doorway. William (excited) jumps from his seat.

WILLIAM

Piper, you're back --

Timmy's face frozen in a gloom... furious.

WILLIAM

I told the boys you'd be back.
Good to see you, son.

Piper's eyes linger on Timmy. Timmy looks away.

PIPER

Thank you, sir.

WILLIAM

What was it like?

PIPER

Beautiful, sir. Real beautiful.
The peoples was real nice.

Piper's eyes can't seem to stay away from a grumpy Timmy.

PIPER

Sir, should we get ready to go?

WILLIAM

Well... here's the thing, son.

Timmy, now, turns back to Piper... listens carefully.

WILLIAM

People 'round here been asking
about your whereabouts. You've
been deathly ill... understand?

PIPER

Uh, sure, sir.

WILLIAM

Perhaps you can just show face
tomorrow on the farm. That way we
don't look suspicious, you know?

PIPER

Yes, sir. Tomorrow night will be
fine.

Timmy addresses Piper with a roll of his eyes. Piper stares
at both men before walking back toward the kitchen.

EXT. HIGGINS' FARM - DAY

Piper, Dr. Boots and Timmy plant flowers in the yard. Piper
peeps (from the corner of his eye) at Timmy and Dr. Boots,
both staring at him.

Mr. Miller passes by on his horse, inspects Piper; a smirk on
his face.

MR. MILLER

Piper... welcome back.

Piper stands from the ground.

PIPER

I ain't never went no where, sir...
just been bed ridden for awhile.

Mr. Miller looks around at the house, suspiciously. William
steps onto the porch.

WILLIAM

Good morning, Miller. Anything I
can do for you?

MR. MILLER

Oh, I was just telling Piper, here,
how well he looks for a,
practically, dead man.

WILLIAM

Yeah, well, Piper bounces back
fast.

Mr. Miller LAUGHS, shakes his head.

MR. MILLER

I don't know if I'd call that a
quick recovery, Higgins.

Miller begins towards the road. Comes back.

MR. MILLER

Oh... anybody happen to know what happened to my girls Elizabeth and Martha?

Timmy drops his shovel.

MR. MILLER

Just noticed this mornin' both girls was gone... and the kids.

Mr. Miller stares precisely at Piper. Piper looks down at the grass.

MR. MILLER

If my girls happen to come this way, can you see them back to my farm... Higgins?

WILLIAM

I will.

Miller rides off. Timmy panics.

TIMMY

Mr. Higgins, where is my wife? Where could she be?

WILLIAM

I don't know, Timmy, but I promise we'll find her, okay. Now, just calm down.

Piper waits for Miller to leave, walks closer to William and Timmy.

TIMMY

My kids? Where be my kids? Oh, Lord! Where be my kids?

Piper huffs at the drama act.

WILLIAM

We'll find them, Timmy.

PIPER

I know where they is. Calm yo'self down.

Timmy directs himself like a bull in front of Piper.

PIPER

They on they way to Canada.

Timmy clinches his fists.

DR. BOOTS

Canada?

TIMMY

You sent my family to Canada
without me?

PIPER

I thought you be happy they
struggle is over.

Timmy PUNCHES Piper -- knocks him to the ground.

TIMMY

You sent my family off without me?

William grabs Timmy. Piper holds his jaw, his mouth bloody.
Piper looks up at Timmy, confused.

WILLIAM

Timmy? You got to calm down. Dr.
Boots, help me take him in the
house.

TWO LAWMEN on horses, (one, the SHERIFF) speak to Miller.
Miller points toward the Higgins' home.

WILLIAM

Stop now, Timmy. Pretend like you
got some sense.

Piper stands from the ground. Timmy gets a grip, straightens
up.

The lawmen approach William and his boys; William smiling
suspiciously.

WILLIAM

Good morning, sheriff.

SHERIFF

Good morning, Mr. Higgins. We need
to ask your Piper, here, some
questions.

WILLIAM

Uh, what's this about, sir?
Piper's been extremely ill... just
got out of a coma.

Both lawmen examine a very healthy Piper.

SHERIFF

He looks fine enough to answer a few questions.

William fidgets his fingers.

WILLIAM

Uh, what do these questions pertain to, sir? I can guarantee you Piper's been in bed for almost a month.

Mary Jo creeps onto the porch from the house, overhearing the discussion.

WILLIAM

Why, you can even ask John Gallagher, our family doctor.

MARY JO

William, what's happening?

WILLIAM

These officers wanna ask Piper some questions, Mary Jo.

SHERIFF

Richard Smith's shop was robbed a couple nights ago. Mr. Miller told us some of his Negroes came up missing this morning.

Guilt is written all over the faces of Piper, Timmy, Dr. Boots, William and Mary Jo. They all have a different secret.

MARY JO

Why is Piper being questioned?

SHERIFF

Apparently, some of the locals are telling us they ain't seen Piper in awhile. Elizabeth was your girl... right, Piper?

PIPER

Yeah, but I been real sick. Maybe she got tired of waiting.

SHERIFF

And what about the other? Wasn't she your wife, Timmy?

Timmy looks at Piper.

TIMMY

Yes, suh. I's don't know where she is, though.

WILLIAM

It comes as a surprise to all of us, sheriff.

The lawmen look at one another. They're not convinced.

SHERIFF

Let's take Piper in, anyway --

Mary Jo runs hysterically off the porch.

MARY JO

Piper didn't do anything wrong --

SHERIFF

Piper, we're taking you with us --

WILLIAM

Sir, you think we're lying about Piper being sick? Sir?

The sheriff grins at William.

SHERIFF

Maybe.

Mary Jo runs in front of the lawmen's horses; a desperate woman.

MARY JO

Sir, we didn't do anything...

William grabs his wife by her arm... his rapid breathing... a tinge of fear in his forced smile. The lawmen smile, devilishly -- their suspicions unravel before their eyes.

SHERIFF

Follow us, boy.

Sandwiched between the lawmen's horses, Piper turns to William and Mary Jo. The couple hold each other -- Mary Jo sobs in William's arms.

Timmy and Dr. Boots, silent as two mice (and just as frightened) watches...

INT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Mary Jo's foot taps at an accelerated speed... bites her nails... takes long, deep SIGHS...

William paces... stops by the window and pulls the curtain back. Runs frantically to the door.

Mary Jo springs from her chair behind him. An anxious Piper stands before them, out of breath.

MARY JO

Piper --

PIPER

They let me go. They said there was no way I robbed that market.

Mary Jo pulls Piper in and shuts the door.

MARY JO

Piper, you listen to us. You have to leave... now.

PIPER

Ma'am?

KITCHEN

William follows behind the two. Mary Jo hurries to an empty bag, tosses bread and fruit inside.

WILLIAM

Piper, do you remember that route to Canada?

PIPER

Of course, sir --

Mary Jo hands the packed bag to Piper. This time, both her and William shove Piper out the door.

PIPER

What's happening?

WILLIAM

(stutters)

Listen, son, it's quite a long story, and, well --

MARY JO

Timmy may have gotten himself into some trouble.

William shakes his head at his wife's blurted words...

PIPER
What kind of trouble?

She saddens her eyes toward William to finish.

WILLIAM
Piper, you have to trust us. Don't worry about them. Just save yourself. We'll handle everybody else.

EXT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

PIPER
Sir, I can't leave my friends --

WILLIAM
Piper, you have to. Please trust us.

Piper rubs his forehead... contemplates...

MARY JO
Promise us you'll be on your way.

Piper looks at the two. Catches his breath.

PIPER
Yes, ma'am... I promise... I be on my way.

A released breathe; Mary Jo smiles, still a nib of nerves present. William extends his hand to Piper.

WILLIAM
Be safe, son.

Piper grabs and holds a grip on William's hand. William smiles and watches his friend off.

INT. HIGGINS' BARN - NIGHT

A distraught Timmy sits on a pile of hay, his hands folded under his chin... Jane rubs the back of his neck...

...Dr. Boots trembles in a corner across from them.

THE BARN DOOR

Remains closed. No sign of salvation for any of them. They stare at each other. Their eyes drop...

Piper BURSTS in anxiously. Timmy runs to him.

TIMMY

Piper, they let you go?

PIPER

Yeah, and we gotta go... Come on --

Piper holds the door for his friends. Timmy grabs Jane's hand.

Finally noticing Jane, Piper lifts his brow. He places his arm between Timmy and Jane. Piper stands face-to-face with Jane. A sudden cockiness takes over him.

PIPER

Where you going, Ms. Jane?

JANE

I'm going with you all, Piper. I thought it would be --

PIPER

No.

Jane turns to Timmy.

DR. BOOTS

Piper, Timmy and Jane been together for two years... Don't break them up.

PIPER

Timmy a married man. I rescue us... not that bitch.

Jane, completely shocked. Timmy clinches his fist, this time, Piper stands still, sticks his chin upward to Timmy. Dr. Boots grabs Timmy's arm.

DR. BOOTS

Naw, we ain't got time for this, y'all. We gots-a-go --

PIPER

I rather die a slave than live with a chippy. Ms. Jane, you is on your own.

TIMMY

I's ain't going without Jane.

Piper squints at the lovestruck nincompoop.

PIPER

Timmy, who's more important to you?

Timmy says nothing. With confidence, he grabs Jane's hand. Opens his mouth to speak...

The CLICK of a shotgun... Two LAWMEN aims at the group, finger on the trigger. One eye closed, positioned for a "sure" shot.

Jane lets go of Timmy's hand and hides inside the barn in just enough time to not be seen.

LAWMAN

You niggers got some 'splaining to do to 'da sheriff.

They slowly erect their arms. A soft WHINE emerges from Dr. Boots, barely able to stand straight.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

An unethical, prejudiced judicial system in session...

Piper, Timmy and Dr. Boots on a bench. Behind them, William and Mary Jo, crestfallen.

Among the faces in the crowd, Jane (looks at Timmy from afar, hides behind a huge touring hat)... John Gallagher peeps the room suspiciously, taps his nails against the bench's armrest...

Thomas Stanford (an unnerving twitch of the eye)... Angeline Whitmore (her eyes magnified; her elbow on knee, her chin in her hand)... Christopher McCormick, looking over his spectacles, shakes his head at her.

Piper pivots behind him. The faces along the back wall full of misery; the ones seated around the court display unforgivingness and bitter. A WHITE MAN frowns and shakes his head in disgrace at Piper.

Piper tends back to the front of the room. Places his head down.

The JUDGE takes a glass monocle from a storage pouch and scans the papers before him.

MR. GEORGE, an arrogant attorney, addresses the jury.

MR. GEORGE

So what we know, at this moment, is on the night of July the ninth 1809, Piper claims to have attempted to try to escape...

Piper's lips quiver, his eyes teary, but never allowing the sorrow-thirsty white man a drop.

MR. GEORGE

...and that he tried to get his friends to go, but they refused.

Dr. Boots and Timmy smile confidently at one another.

MR. GEORGE

And Piper tells us that after coming out of his illness, he had nothing to do with Mr. Smith's shop being robbed or helping the missing slaves to freedom.

William grabs Mary Jo's hand. Mr. George turns to the judge, a rather smile on his face.

JUDGE

Please call your next witness, Mr. George.

MR. GEORGE

Yes, your Honor... the court would like to call... Ms. Louise Burden to the stand.

Total silence in the room. Mary Jo and William as pale as ghosts. Not one breath...

Louise keeps pace, comes in from a side door. Ignores eye contact with everyone. Takes her seat on the stand.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden, could you tell the court who you are?

LOUISE

Yes, sir. I'm the indentured servant of Mr. and Mrs. Higgins... Louise Burden is the name.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden, I'm going to cut to the chase... ask only the important questions.

MR. GEORGE (CONT'D)

What type of relationship does the Higgins' have with their slaves?

LOUISE

I'm uncertain, sir.

MR. GEORGE

Do you know anything... about Piper robbing Mr. Smith's shop on July seventh?

LOUISE

I'm uncertain, sir.

Mr. George and the Judge share a glance.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden... Do you know what perjury is?

Her eyes shift. She fiddles her fingers. Looks down. Stutters...

LOUISE

They're all friends.

The court becomes outraged. ANGRY CHATTER around the room. The judge BANGS his mallet twice.

JUDGE

Come to order...

The room quiets.

MR. GEORGE

They're all friends, you say... The night of July seventh, when Mr. Smith's shop was robbed, was Piper involved in that?

LOUISE

No, sir.

Piper exhales lightly.

LOUISE

Piper was a runaway while the store was being robbed.

Piper's short-lived relief intensifies in his eyes.

MR. GEORGE

Piper was a runaway? Well, wasn't he in bed, deathly ill, like the Higgins' claimed, time and again?

LOUISE

No, sir... He was... in Canada.

GASPS around the room. Piper calmly, yet resentfully stares into Louise's soul. Her head slouches in dishonor.

JUDGE

Quiet -- Quiet --

The room silences.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden, how long would you say Piper was in Canada?

Louise catches Piper's intense eyes upon her. Her eyes fall to her lap.

LOUISE

A bit over a whole month.

Mr. George uses the courtroom as his stage, keeps a content pace from one side to the other.

MR. GEORGE

So, if Piper was a runaway in Canada, who robbed Mr. Smith's shop?

LOUISE

(taps her fingers)
...Timmy and Webster Grant...
Webby, they call him.

Timmy ejects from his seat.

TIMMY

Your honor, that is a lie! I's ain't never robbed no store in my life --

JUDGE

Quiet in the court! Quiet in the court!

SHUSHES across the room. When everyone silences, Mr. George resumes.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden, who was a part of this great plot?

Mary Jo's eyes plead, her head gently shakes "no." Louise directs her eyes toward Mary Jo -- a personal vendetta.

LOUISE

Mr. and Mrs. Higgins...

WHISPERS amongst the court. Mary Jo grabs William's arm.

LOUISE

...Timmy, Dr. Boots... Webby...

Dr. Boots trembles in fear.

LOUISE

...Ms. Jane Franklin... Uh, Angeline Whitmore... John Gallagher, whose a catholic priest...

Now, the room fills with GASPS and CHATTER of the mimicking words, "CATHOLIC PRIEST" like an ongoing echo. John places his head down. The tightness of his unforgiving mouth, his repulsed eyes all over William. William takes a stand.

WILLIAM

Don't you bring my wife into this --

TIMMY

I's ain't got nothing to do with this! She a liar! Piper already said he done did everything! He sent everybody to Canada --

Piper looks to Timmy, hurt; befuddled. The judge BANGS his mallet.

JUDGE

Quiet! No more outbursts, or you'll all be sent to confinement!

Timmy and William take their seats. Timmy turns to William and Mary Jo.

MR. GEORGE

Anyone else, Ms. Burton?

LOUISE

There was... but I don't know him.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden, would you recognize his face in this courtroom today?

Her eyes scales the room. Thomas Stanford sweats profusely. A tremble of his hands... GULPS...

LOUISE

No, sir. I'm sorry. It was fast and fairly dark in the room.

MR. GEORGE

That's fine... Please tell the court what part each individual took in this plot?

LOUISE

Yes, sir... Piper was in search of a better life for him and the Negroes.

A smirk of failure from Piper. He twists his eyes. Almost laughs.

LOUISE

Mr. and Mrs. Higgins brought the others to their home...

Mary Jo closes her eyes, WHIMPERS.

MARY JO

(silently)

I told you I didn't like this idea, William.

He grabs her hand tightly... holds back tears...

LOUISE

Ms. Jane Franklin is... is Timmy's mistress... Mr. Higgins allowed... he allowed them to encounter night time trysts in his saloon.

The white people in the room shake their heads. MOANS and GRUMBLES. Total disgust on their faces; "My dear God" reads from the lips of a WHITE WOMAN'S unsatisfied mouth...

Jane slides lower in her seat.

LOUISE

Timmy plotted to kill all the white men... and take the white women for himself...

Piper swings toward Timmy, total shock. Timmy's head droops, WHISPERS a prayer to himself. Jane frowns upon this revelation. Her disgusted lips saying, "WHAT?"

LOUISE

...And two night before Piper came home...

(looks up at Piper)

Timmy talked Webby Grant into helping him rob Mr. Smith's shop for weaponry and food...

Piper looks back at his friends; their faces sinful. Piper sits in complete disbelief.

LOUISE

...Timmy felt that Piper had betrayed them... He kept plans to try to... deflower Ms. Elizabeth...

Timmy gulps. Dr. Boots' eyes scuffle between Timmy and Piper. Piper, with numb intensity, stares at Louise. His pain and infuriation won't allow him to turn to Timmy any longer.

LOUISE

...and... and Dr. Boots was to supply them with arsenic to kill themselves... in case they were caught.

Dr. Boots shivers... Piper closes his eyes, just subdued by the unveiling.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden, you spoke of someone else being in that room. Could it have been... Christopher McCormick?

Now, the youth arrives in Louise. Her eyes widen and fall down to her folded hands. Christopher still stares over his spectacles.

LOUISE

No.

MR. GEORGE

Ms. Burden, I shall ask you once again. Do you know what perjury is?

She nods, briefly looking at the attorney. Then back down to her hands.

MR. GEORGE

In your situation, you would spend your early adult years in jail only to come out and continue paying off your indentures... Was... Christopher... McCormick... there?

She places her head up, her eyes watery. Her voice weak.

LOUISE

Yes...

CHATTER around the room. Christopher closes his eyes. Exhales...

MR. GEORGE

All of this information with the fact that you, Piper, was positively identified by six different people on the Newark Harbor should be everything we need... Thank you, your Honor.

JUDGE

You may step down, Ms. Burden.

Louise, escorted out the same side door she came in by TWO OFFICERS, keeps her eyes well away from everyone.

Angeline jumps from her seat, points to the judge, enraged.

ANGELINE

You're wrong! You can't treat people like this! You can't!

Everyone in the court turns to the demented voodoo queen. Her voice becomes eerily gruff and brutal. She points to every white face in the room.

ANGELINE

You will all burn in hell! You can't treat people like this!

Two officers grab the deranged woman... yelling and kicking... her hat falls to the floor.

ANGELINE

You're all evil! You'll burn in hell --

Piper's eyes swell with tears. An OFFICER positions himself over Piper and his friends. Dr. Boots CRIES like a baby.

DR. BOOTS

Dear God! Please... save me...
Save me...

EXT. PUBLIC HANGING - DAY

William, Mary Jo, Christopher, Angeline, John and Jane stand between two LAW OFFICERS escorting them onto the platform -- the exact platform that finalized Cecil.

JUDGE (V.O.)

William and Mary Jo Higgins, John Gallagher, Angeline Whitmore, Jane Franklin, Christopher McCormick, Timmy, Dr. Boots, and Piper -- you are sentenced to death by public hanging on the seventeenth day of July, 1809.

A HANGING JUDGE, white man in a bow tie and long black suit jacket waits until the nooses are tied around the necks of the convicted by an EXECUTIONER.

Mary Jo, insuppressible tears, looks at the CHEERING crowd... LAUGHING, CLAPPING at the group. The six convicted step onto individual carts underneath their individual ropes. Their arms and legs banded together by rope.

The slaves: Piper, Timmy, and Dr. Boots on the side of the steps. They watch their tortured friends; their arms bounded behind their backs.

TIMMY

Piper, I's should have obeyed ya'
when ya' said --

PIPER

Don't talk... I die a most happy
man if I know I never have to speak
to you again.

Angeline CHANTS a spell of words, voodoo gibberish. Christopher stares at her, deep fear in his eyes.

Keeping a sense of humor, through even the worst of times, Christopher turns to the executioner.

CHRISTOPHER

Can we hurry this up, my friend?

Mary Jo, her eyes sealed, tears down her cheek, speaks softly to William.

MARY JO

How could you let them do this to us, William? How could you?

William's stricken eye drips a single tear.

WILLIAM

I've failed you, Mary Jo. Can you ever forgive me?

She opens her eyes.

MARY JO

In all of my life, William... I --

HANGING JUDGE

Now --

The executioner moves the carts from underneath the felons' restricted legs.

Their bodies swing helplessly on the ropes. Their faces turn blue... sounds of GAGGING. A YOUNG WHITE GIRL turns away, places her head in her mother's bosom... WHITE PEOPLE APPLAUD LOUDER, their sneers grow stronger.

While the bodies are being removed, Piper stares directly into the sunlight. Timmy (sniffling tears), Dr. Boots (still tottering)...

TWO LAWYERS push the slaves up the stairs toward their termination. CHEERS from the crowd as they spit in their direction, blood all over the platform.

Piper closes his eyes, steps onto a ladder... a noose placed around his neck. Next, his friends... their arms and legs binded...

...from behind the crowd, a LAWYER carries a squirming Webby to the platform. Webby SCREAMS.

Piper's jaw drops, his entire calm disposition in an uproar.

WEBBY'S FATHER in the mass of people, tries to run to his son... held in place by the townspeople...

WEBBY'S FATHER

No! Not my son! Please --

Piper, in disbelief, watches the lawyer mistreat the child as severely as the adults.

PIPER

Webby! No!
 (under his breath)
 No, damn it -- no -- no...

Piper looks into the eyes of the beasts, starving for his blood all over their wretched bodies.

Throughout the vicious faces, a BLACK SLAVE BOY (13), his eyes expressing personal woes... begs for something from Piper...

Piper looks at him and smiles... the biggest, brightest smile he could ever erupt from his miserable, tainted face. His tears like running water.

Piper smiles lively and painful. He opens his mouth. A bone-chilling SCREECH felt for miles...

PIPER

We are human... just like you!

Laughter ceases... applauds cease... smiles cease... complete silence... a deliberate reminder of Cecil.

PIPER

We are human, just like you! We are human, just like you...

The grin of a young boy diminishes into fear.

PIPER

We are human... just like you!

Timmy and Dr. Boots watch their friend bring justice to an inhumane situation. Their fight, not as strong as Piper's. Place their shameful heads to the pit of the platform.

Webby stares at Piper, a bright glow of pride alongside a courageous smile.

HANGING JUDGE

Now --

PIPER

(under his breath)
 Dear God, please reduce the pain of the weary. Please reduce the pain of the weary -- reduce the pain of the weary...

The executioner hesitates to remove the ladders; turns to the hanging judge. The hanging judge lifts his eyebrows sternly.

With guilt, the executioner pulls the ladders from underneath the guilty's feet.

GAGGING... Blood rushes to Piper's face, causing him to turn blue. The young slave watches Piper powerless on the rope.

Webby's tiny body goes into convulsion. His father SCREAMS in almost inaudible pain. Collapses to his knees.

Webby's legs shoot upward... his head slumps over... no breath left.

Dr. Boots, already dead.... Timmy's husky body ceases to battle the strangulation.

Piper can still see the young slave, this time more desire in his face. Piper struggles one last time before releasing himself from the physical world. His body refrains from the fight -- his eyes fall short of existence...

As the townspeople begin to walk away, the young slave hops onto the platform. While no one watches, he walks behind Piper's hanging body, unhooks the bracelet from his arm.

He moves before Piper. Fixes his eyes upon his lifeless body... just stares...

FADE TO WHITE:

INT. TWO-STORY BRICK HOME, ONTARIO - DAY

In the, now, completely finished home, Charlie (in a bedroom) folds a telegram in half and turns to Elizabeth and Martha. Elizabeth bursts into tears, Martha consoles her in her arms.

Charlie walks to the window, wistfully looks down at the beautiful yard. A row of the yellow, white, pink and purple tulips across the picket fence.

The planted little tree already starting to produce little buds. It is an apple tree.

THOMAS (V.O.)

Charlie, I regret to inform you that your cousin and my friend, Christopher McCormick was sentenced to be hung, along with William and Mary Jo Higgins, Piper, and a few other slaves.

INT. AZUELOS' HOUSE - DAY

Lupe rocks Miguel in her arms, silently fighting her tears. Rodrigo, Juan and Esperanza practically motionless on the couch. The bad news like a nightmarish echo:

THOMAS (V.O.)

The slaves were convicted of trying to runaway. The white men and women were convicted of helping. Included was a young boy trying to rescue his family from poverty.

EXT. BURIAL GROUND - DAY

Three dirt graves, side-by-side, lie in an open field. Inside the graves, the pale, ashy, lifeless bodies of Piper, Timmy and Dr. Boots thrown inside their final resting places.

THOMAS (V.O.)

I'm writing this to you, solely, because the girl couldn't recall my face that night.

A shovel tosses dirt on Piper's face. Buries him...

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Louise collects her money from an OFFICER.

OFFICER

There you are, Ms. Burden. That will be enough for you to pay off your indentures.

LOUISE

Thank you, good sir.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - SAME

Louise lifts her head to the sky. The bright sun reflects in her teary eyes. She ascends into the street, counts her money.

THOMAS (V.O.)

For her service, the girl was paid her entire indenture...

Louise breaths; vanishes into the day...

THOMAS (V.O.)
...and some believe she has left
town, in fear for her own life.

INT. AZUELOS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Esperanza, alone on the living room couch, stares down at her
beaten shoes.

THOMAS (V.O.)
Once again, I'm very sorry for your
loss, Charlie, and if there's
anything that can be done, let me
know... Thomas Stanford.

A familiar WHISTLE from outside. Esperanza stands from her
seat -- runs to the window.

Piper struts toward the house on the distant pathway, his
usual bag strapped around his shoulder.

She races to the door, unable to unhook the latch fast
enough.

ESPERANZA
Piper --

The WHISTLE continues. She finally opens the door, but no
Piper on the pathway... the WHISTLE SLOWLY FADES until it's
gone... completely...

ESPERANZA

in the doorway, her face -- confused; gloom.

She closes the door and sits on the rocking bench.

Dolefully, her head topples inside her hands, cries silent
tears. She holds herself tightly, imaginatively hugging her
best friend in the entire world... on a light, windy Ontario
evening.

EXT. HIGGINS' HOUSE - DAY

The once lived-in home stands completely empty. Quiet.
Untouched... The once well-kept yard now with withered
flowers and uneven grass...

MATCH CUT:

EXT. BUSY STREET - DAY

SUPER - NEW YORK, SAME LOCATION: PRESENT DAY

The black homeless man, still sits against a closed bank building. He continues to hold his head while people pass by.

A BLACK MAN, business suit and briefcase, speaks on his phone...

BLACK MAN

Hun, I can barely hear you... I'll call you back when I get to my office...

(louder)

I said I'll call you when I get to my office... Love you... Bye.

He ends his call and pulls a bill from his pocket and holds his hand to the homeless man. The homeless man finally lifts his head.

They catch eyes. Share a smile.

The corporate man continues his path. WHISTLES, exactly like Piper. Enters the revolving doors of the New York Stock Exchange with everyone else.

FADE OUT