

Black Alligator

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The following is based on true events that occurred in Louisiana from 1865 to 1878.

- TEASER -

FADE IN:

SUPER: THE WILDERNESS, VIRGINIA. THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR NEARS.

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - DAWN

A white man in his late 20's peers through binoculars, surrounded by tall trees and dense underbrush, scanning the wilderness through low hanging mist.

MARSHALL TWITCHELL lowers the binoculars and turns to face the long line of NEGRO SOLDIERS positioned along his column:

H COMPANY of the United States Colored Troops, of which he is the only white member.

TWITCHELL

(low)
Bayonets.

The order is echoed down the line in whispers, as every soldier fastens a blade to the end of his rifle. Each of their faces exude a range of emotions; fear, courage, rage...

The Wilderness is littered with fallen soldiers in both blue and butternut uniforms. Crows pick at intestines as the sun crests the river to the east.

Stalwart CORPORAL WASHINGTON whispers to Twitchell-

WASHINGTON

You see Rebs, Lieutenant?

TWITCHELL

No. But they are certainly there.

TWIGS SNAP, BRANCHES SWAY. The troopers are edgy, waiting in silence. Washington glances back to them as Twitchell's perceptive eyes continue scanning the opposing tree line.

WASHINGTON

We can wait.

TWITCHELL

Captain ordered us in first.

WASHINGTON

We always first in.

Twitchell glances to Washington, hiding something.

TWITCHELL

Nothing we can do about that.

Twitchell adroitly raises his Enfield and attaches its bayonet- pure muscle memory.

He SIGNALS down the line and his men push forward through the tangled underbrush, staying low, stepping over carcasses, using their rifles to cut through branches which CRACK.

Twitchell stays in the back with Washington, raising his binoculars again:

WHITE FACES appear from behind trees far ahead. Hard to spot. Twitchell snaps his rifle into firing position, mind racing, heart red-lining.

A black soldier in the lead stops short, tightens his grip on his rifle. Glances at the men behind him as *KCHH--!*

A minie ball bursts through his forehead, sends him flying into a tree, spraying pink mist everywhere.

Gunpowder smoke rises from the treeline as another fusillade ERUPTS and ten more black men go down at once. Those still standing FIRE blindly toward muzzle flashes.

Blasts and volleys pierce the soundscape as the Wilderness quickly becomes a bloodbath. While the blacks reload, the angry battle cries of ONE HUNDRED WHITE MEN steadily rise.

Before the blacks realize it, an entire company of CONFEDERATES emerge, bearing down with blades and rifles. POP! K-CHRR! Bullets whiz from both sides as men collide into each other, a full blown melée erupting.

And this is unforgiving, close-quarter, primitive warfare. The blacks are violently overrun, fighting an enemy much more familiar with the terrain.

TWITCHELL, eye down his barrel, pulls the trigger and places a bullet square in the chest of a Rebel sprinting at full speed, whose momentum allows him to skewer a black soldier with his bayonet before both men collapse into a bloody heap.

TWITCHELL

FALL BACK!

Men in his platoon backpedal, laying down cover fire, impeded by thick clutches of oak and pine. One is sliced down the back as he turns and scrambles, falling to the ground, desperately crawling away from the onslaught. A rebel stomps his boot into his neck and fires a round into his temple.

Washington runs forward, grabs a fallen comrade, and pulls him away from the skirmish--

WASHINGTON
Stay with me, Louis-- RETREAT!

The men continue to stagger away from the smoke and gunfire. Another fusillade erupts and Washington takes a knee, clenching his teeth as a round tears through his thigh and, moments later, a second rips through his shoulder.

Twitchell sees this out of the corner of his eye-- pulls his Colt and takes potshots at any butternut uniform he sees.

He rushes toward Washington, screaming to anyone alive:

TWITCHELL
GET TO THE RIVER!

He reaches the Corporal, heaves him over his back and struggles out of the woods.

Twitchell sways as he reaches the treeline, daylight bleeding through the thinning canopy, revealing soldiers bleeding out beneath it.

He lowers Washington onto the grass and surveys his wounds. Blood gushes out of the two bullet holes.

TWITCHELL
Christ.

He turns back to the smoke-filled woods, helplessly watching what has become a full-blown massacre.

WASHINGTON (O.S.)
(weakly)
Lieutenant.

Twitchell turns to see Washington straining to open his eyes.

TWITCHELL
Stay calm. Preserve your strength.

Washington locks eyes with Twitchell just as the darkness takes him.

WASHINGTON
I know what you done.

A noise- something whizzes through the air- SLICES Twitchell's face and his world suddenly goes BLACK.

- ACT ONE -

EXT. NEW ORLEANS HARBOR - ESTABLISHING - DAY

A STERNWHEELER chugs into the busy harbor of New Orleans, horn BELLOWING.

SUPER: ONE YEAR LATER

EXT. PORT OF NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Twitchell traverses the bustling port on foot, dressed in a top hat, tailored three piece suit, and alligator skin boots. He now bares a striking SCAR running from his eye to his ear.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREETS - DAY

The unpaved streets are overrun with BLACK REFUGEES who have traveled to the city from across the south. Women cradle crying babies as they stand in line for food.

A fence has become a makeshift bulletin board, pinned full of names, addresses, and the occasional drawing penned by those in search of loved ones.

Twitchell strolls past refugees in his crisp suit, drawing looks. He stops in front of a three story ADMIN BUILDING, squinting up at the stars and stripes flapping in the warm breeze. A prominent metal placard reads:

Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands

He removes a vial of "Potassium Bromide Nerve Tonic" from his pocket and sips it. With an exasperated sigh, Twitchell marches up the steps of the admin building.

INT. BUREAU RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Twitchell doffs his hat at a FEMALE RECEPTIONIST, who greets him with a perfunctory smile.

TWITCHELL

I was told this is the place to come for military men seeking employment.

The Receptionist nods and gestures towards a staircase.

RECEPTIONIST

There is a waiting area at the top of the stairs. The Commissioner is with someone, but should be finishing presently.

Twitchell nods, makes his way up the staircase. As we follow him, we hear SHOUTING and YELLING. Twitchell sits on an ornate wooden bench outside of the Commissioner's office, but we push past him, through cracked window blinds, into the

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Where a heated argument rages. We take in Commissioner THOMAS CONWAY, a long bearded man of fifty-two, entrusted with an arduous task only a man of his character has the means of solving.

He leans back in his chair, puffing on his pipe, as a defiant barley-haired FIELD AGENT in a blue suit argues back-

FIELD AGENT

You are not understanding, I will not go down there- not without an entire company at my behest!

Conway gives him a hard smile.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY

Washington has its hands full with Lincoln's assassination, Agent Wilcock. This position I am offering is a promotion. And to be frank, we can argue back and forth all day, but I am giving you a direct order.

The agent, chest heaving, barely able to contain himself, moves closer to Conway-

FIELD AGENT

Don't play me for a fool. We both know this deployment is no promotion. It is a *suicide mission*, and I would sooner resign than accept it.

A tense beat as Conway considers his options.

FIELD AGENT

Is that what you want?
(unpins his Bureau badge)
Fine. I resign.

The field agent slaps his badge on Conway's desk. He moves for his belt, begins removing his holstered sidearms. Conway motions for him to stop with a sigh.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY

Keep your irons, Agent. We both know I need every man I have.
(MORE)

COMMISSIONER CONWAY (cont'd)
 (hands him his badge back)
 I will find someone else.

CUT TO:

An EXTREME CLOSE UP of Twitchell, his inscrutable expression filling the entire frame.

FAMILIAR VOICE (O.S.)
 It appears you have a healthy
 disdain for authority.

REVERSE ANGLE TO REVEAL the owner of that voice, Commissioner Conway. *We're still in his office*, but now Twitchell sits across from him. Conway looks up from Twitchell's dossier, expecting a response.

TWITCHELL
 (raises an eyebrow)
 Might do. Depends on whose
 authority.

Conway removes his glasses, wipes them down with his kerchief.

COMMISSIONARY CONWAY
 (not making eye contact)
 Tell me why you were passed over
 for Lieutenant while you served in
 the Vermont brigade, Mr. Twitchell.

Twitchell looks away, out the window of the third floor building, high enough for us to catch the enormity of the MASS OF REFUGEES on the streets.

TWITCHELL
 I had a disagreement of sorts with
 the Captain.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
 Mmm. Have you a wife?

TWITCHELL
 No.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
 Education?

Twitchell scratches his nose-

TWITCHELL
 Lotta schooling, as it says there.
 Was a teacher myself.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
 And after you were not promoted,
 you applied to become an Officer in
 the Colored Troops?

Twitchell passes a dangerous look back at Conway, cautioning him to tread lightly.

TWITCHELL
Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
You were at Richmond.

TWITCHELL
I was.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
Petersburg?

TWITCHELL
Yes. And the Wilderness.
(Twitchell's eyes harden)
That is where I lost most of my
men.

Conway catches the red in them.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
Says here you lost *all* of your men.
Disobeyed your Captain.
(beat)
But I'm sure you had your own
reasons for doing such a thing.

Conway puffs on his pipe.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
Tell me something, Twitchell. Are
you interested in the advancement
of Negroes?

Twitchell takes his time with this. Leans in, candid-

TWITCHELL
I have worked alongside them
plenty. They are a resolute people,
but not without inherent
bitterness. This freedom that has
suddenly been thrust upon them... I
must admit, I do not know if they
are ready for what comes with it.
Whether any of us are.

Conway strokes his long beard.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY
Lotta schooling, indeed. Quite a
shame...

With that, Conway stands, slams Twitchell's dossier shut,
and slides it back across his desk.

COMMISSIONER CONWAY

I have no tolerance for insubordination. Chain of command exists for a reason. What we are trying to accomplish has never been tried before. We will fail if we deploy Freedmen's Bureau Agents who do not measure up.

(taps Twitchell's dossier)
You are educated and experienced, but unpredictable, and that is a very dangerous combination, as evidenced by your combat records. I have no use for you.

Twitchell takes a moment to digest this. Then gives a curt nod. Collects his things and leaves, shutting the door behind him. Commissioner Conway, finally alone, lets out an exasperated sigh and rubs his temples.

INT. ADMIN BUILDING - MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Twitchell splashes water onto his face. Pats it dry with his kerchief. Stares into the mirror, his own visage a literal patchwork of haunting memories.

HE FOCUSES on that scar along his cheek as WE FOCUS on his gaze: eyes as hard and flat as nailheads. *Unsettling.*

He removes a small leather pouch from his vest pocket. Turns it upside down, and a lead minie ball falls out, CLANKING onto the porcelain counter top. We can't help but notice a blot of rust-colored DRY BLOOD marring the bullet's otherwise clean surface.

Twitchell places the bullet, curved-side down, onto the counter and spins it like a top. It whirls and whirls, finally losing centrifugal force, CLANKING as it falls and spins to a stop, bloody side up.

INT. COMMISSIONER CONWAYS' OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Twitchell barges into Conway's office, eyes somehow even harder and darker now.

TWITCHELL

Tell me of this 'suicide mission.'

Conway scratches his beard, gears churning.

CONWAY

(hint of a smile)

You were eavesdropping earlier?

TWITCHELL

Call it active listening.

(MORE)

TWITCHELL (cont'd)
 (closing the distance)
 Now tell me, Commissioner: Where is
 this place that none of your Bureau
 agents are willing to go?

EXT. RED RIVER - DAY

A paddle steamer CHUGS up the Red River, the main artery that flows from the Gulf of Mexico up through northwest Louisiana. The steamer cuts through log jammed waters, lurching into an isolated area of dense bayous as the sky darkens.

INT. PADDLE STEAMER -- BELOWDECKS - DAY

Shoveling coal into a roaring furnace is PRIVATE GEORGE FREEMAN (38), a devout, dark-skinned man born in Africa with an affable demeanor. He dons copper rimmed spectacles, which he removes to wipe sweat from his brow.

Nearby sits baby-faced PRIVATE ISHMAEL 'ISH' TURNER (19), peeling potatoes. A cigarette is passed to him by CORPORAL 'UNCLE' HARRIS (30's), a testosterone-fueled ruffian. Each man dons a frumpy blue cap and uniform with brass buttons.

CORPORAL HARRIS
 C'mon now, boy. This that sweet,
 spicy, Virginia-picked tobacco.

Ish wipes potato peels from his hands and leans in to take the cigarette. As he does, we notice the marred skin of a runaway R branded into his forehead.

Freeman stops shoveling for a second to watch as Ish puffs, coughs, and hands it back to Harris.

CORPORAL HARRIS
 Ain't you never smoked 'fore?

PRIVATE ISH
 No, suh.

CORPORAL HARRIS
 Shit, youngblood. You gon' grow up
 real quick round Harris. And don't
 call me suh, just call me Unc.

Freeman, unimpressed, shakes his head and goes back to shoveling coal.

CORPORAL HARRIS
 (to Freeman)
 What you gettin sore over, Jaheem?

PRIVATE FREEMAN
 (African accent)
 I have told you already, my name is
 Freeman.

CORPORAL HARRIS

Well alright, Mister Freeman. You know anything about where it is we headin'?

PRIVATE FREEMAN

Up the river it would appear.

CORPORAL HARRIS

No shit we goin up the Red. That might mean Shreveport, might mean Natchitoches. Big difference.

PRIVATE FREEMAN

I don't know Louisiana.

CORPORAL HARRIS

Don't know Luzana? Where you from anyhow?

PRIVATE FREEMAN

You call it Liberia.

A black man, clean cut and compact, wearing a crisper blue suit with a chevron on each arm, steps down into the hold: SERGEANT ELI (28). Fiercely loyal, obedient, and literate.

SERGEANT ELI

Harris, make yourself of use and get to haulin' the gear updeck.

CORPORAL HARRIS

Be plenty of work when we arrive where we going, Sarge. War's over, ain't it?

Eli steps up to the bigger Harris, earnest-

SERGEANT ELI

This is not paid leave, Corporal. Do you understand?

(addressing all three)

Agent Twitchell says we should arrive in a few hours.

CORPORAL HARRIS

(snorting)

Twitchell. Hell kinda name is that? What you know 'bout boss anyhow?

SERGEANT ELI

I know that he served as a Lieutenant in the Colored Troops, and I don't know any more than that.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL

Sergeant?

SERGEANT ELI
Private Ishmael?

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
You know where it is we goin'?

A beat.

SERGEANT ELI
I do not- nor would it affect our
mission if I did.

Harris stubs out his cigarette, leaning in close to Ish-

CORPORAL HARRIS
Somethin' he don't know, but Unc
knows...

Ish manages a nervous laugh. Harris lowers his voice,
motions to the worn pocket-bible peeking out from Freeman's
coat pocket.

CORPORAL HARRIS
Bes' wipe that smile off your face,
youngblood- we headed straight into
the lake of fire.

He steps away and grabs a crate, whistling merrily as he
hoists it updeck.

EXT. RED RIVER DOCK - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

FLOATING over this isolated region of Northern Louisiana
dotted by dense forests, bayous and farms. We come to a dock
where our paddle steamer has stopped, our four troopers
unloading equipment and mules.

SHERIFF DON SAMUELS, 32, white, but clad head-to-toe in
black, waits at the landing. He removes his hat and slicks
his hair back as Twitchell approaches in his crisp blue
uniform, colt dangling at his side.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
(half-teasing)
Hide the silver, here come the
Yankees!
(extends his hand)
Sheriff Don Samuels, at your
service.

TWITCHELL
Agent Marshall Twitchell,
Freedmen's Bureau.

Samuels eyes the black troopers as they lug boxes past him.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Wasn't made aware you'd be arriving
with four negro soldiers.

Ish overhears the remark as he passes Twitchell, who grabs him by the shoulder, rights the box of medical supplies he's carrying upside-down, and motions for him to continue.

TWITCHELL
Can you escort us into town?

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Surely.
(re: black soldiers)
But they may want to remove those
uniforms before we arrive.

Twitchell narrows his gaze, drilling Samuels with those nailheads for eyes, turning his face slightly as he reaches for something in his coat pocket, Samuels staring at that jagged, high-gauge scar. The Sheriff breaks eye contact.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Or perhaps that isn't necessary.

Twitchell nods and removes an ornate cigarette holder. Lights two cigarettes, and hands one to the Sheriff.

EXT. FOREST OUTSIDE COUSHATTA - DAY

BIRD'S EYE VIEW as Twitchell's column follows the Sheriff, trotting along a forest trail. As they approach a bend, they come upon a crime scene:

TWO WHITE CONSTABLES chat with each other in a clearing, a tall oak tree beyond them.

From a distance Twitchell glimpses THREE LIMP BODIES swinging from the tree, lynched. Two black men, one white.

The troopers react: Ish covers his mouth. Harris spits. Freeman averts his gaze and Eli shakes his head.

SERGEANT ELI
Shit.

Sheriff Samuels dismounts and greets the Constables, who haphazardly survey the area.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Where ya at, Bill?

CONSTABLE 1
Nothing yet.
(re: Twitchell and troops)
Who are they?

SHERIFF SAMUELS

Visitors.
 (nodding to the bodies)
 Any of these boys look familiar to
 either of you?

Harris pulls his horse alongside Twitchell's.

CORPORAL HARRIS

Ain't right ta just leave them up
 there, boss.

Twitchell dismounts and treks past the Sheriff and
 Constables to the three hanging men, flies BUZZING around
 them, peering up into their vacant eyes, their limp bodies.

TWITCHELL

Any idea who did this?

Samuels keeps his eyes up on the bodies, flies buzzing.

SHERIFF SAMUELS

No, Sir. Welcome to Coushatta.

- ACT TWO -

EXT. OUTER COUSHATTA - DAY

Now breaching the town limits on their horses, our group
 takes in their new station. Beside the Red River, the valley
 narrows to a width of two miles.

A SERIES OF SHOTS as they ride past:

A plantation where a dozen slaves breaking soil look up from
 their work, confused by the black soldiers.

Naked black children stand nearby, bathing with buckets and
 soap, singing a hymn.

A white man standing on the porch of his house, shotgun
 hanging down by his side, wary of the caravan.

An old white woman lugging buckets of water breaks into a
 fearful jog as she sees Twitchell and his troopers, unsure
 if it's some sort of Union invasion.

Three white teenagers waiting by the side of the road glare
 at the black soldiers, snickering, flashing rotted teeth.

EXT. FRONT STREET - COUSHATTA - DAY

The group trots down Front Street. Downtown Coushatta's
 street plan resembles a backwards F.

They pass a two story office building, the words ABNEY & CO. etched into a metal placard over its front door.

They pass a SALOON, BILLIARD PARLOR, POST OFFICE, GENERAL STORE, *THE CITIZEN* newspaper, COUSHATTA HOTEL, and a TEN PIN BOWLING ALLEY, among other establishments.

The outsiders catch looks left and right as they make their way toward the newly built PARISH COURTHOUSE.

There's a pervasive feeling of race separation; blacks walk quietly, heads bowed, staying out of the way of wealthy whites in high-wrought attire conversing and laughing.

A MASCULINE MULATTO MAN stands in an alleyway sanding a table. He catches Twitchell and his troop riding past in their blue uniforms.

He sets his tools down and steps out onto the street, gazing up at the troopers as they ride past, his perceptive eyes settling on Twitchell. *More on him later.*

INT. PARISH COURTHOUSE - DAY

Sheriff Samuels leads Twitchell, without troop, into the second floor offices of the courthouse.

A group of white CONSTABLES sit at desks, gabbing with each other. One has his feet propped up, newspaper in front of his nose. Samuels stops in front of him-

SHERIFF SAMUELS

O'Brien.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

Busy.

Samuels reaches out and slides CONSTABLE O'BRIEN's feet off the desk. O'BRIEN slightly lowers the newspaper from his face and we get a better look: 40's, thinning red hair, face bloated from drinking.

He licks his finger and turns the page as the other constables watch on.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

Who the hell is he?

SHERIFF SAMUELS

I'd like you to meet--

Twitchell leans in.

TWITCHELL

Agent Marshall Twitchell.

He extends his hand to O'Brien, who tosses the newspaper aside and stands. Clamps Twitchell's hand with a vice grip.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN
The coons' long awaited savior from
the north.

Twitchell sighs, his patience wearing thin.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN
(re: badge)
"Freedmen's Bureau." Looks like
you're in the wrong place, Agent.
Ain't no freed men 'round here.

Twitchell sizes up the other Constables, all shooting him icy glares. Samuels averts his gaze as the air bloats with tension. O'Brien, having made his point, attempts to release Twitchell's hand, but Twitchell doesn't let go.

Rather, *he squeezes tighter*. O'Brien's macho facade begins to crumble, finally breaking under the intensity of Twitchell's bearclaw grip.

O'Brien cracks, guffawing-

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN
Just a' larking, lad!
(pats him on the shoulder)
Be good to have you 'round. Train
the niggers how to act and all.
Just don' go stickin' that nose
where it don't belong. Samuels will
see to that, right, Sheriff?

Twitchell's knuckles are bone-white as O'Brien's eyes glaze over- anything to keep from screaming out in pain.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Come, Twitchell. I'll show you to
your office.

Twitchell finally releases O'Briens mangled, discolored hand.

TWITCHELL
(pointedly, around room)
See you around, boys.

INT. CONVERTED JURY ROOM - TWITCHELL'S OFFICE - DAY

A well-dressed clerk, TOBIAS (19), assists Twitchell in setting up his office. He pulls a file cabinet in, shifts a desk around as Twitchell peeks through the blinds at the downtown streets.

TWITCHELL

I'll need a register of plantation owners and sharecrop holders, maps, as well as a telegraph to relay messages to the Commissioner. Are you getting all of this?

TOBIAS

Yes sir, Agent Twitchell. I'll have those to you presently. Telegraph may take a day or two.

Twitchell pulls that ornate gold cigarette case from his jacket. Offers one to Tobias, who holds a hand up-

TOBIAS

No thank you. Prefer my chaw.

Tobias chews as he reaches into a closet and pulls out a spittoon. Spits into it and places it under Twitchell's desk.

TOBIAS

(re: cigarette)
Hell, why not.

Twitchell lights his cigarette for him as Tobias packs the chewing tobacco further back in his cheek, takes a puff, and resumes working.

EXT. HORSE DRAWN CARRIAGE (MOVING) - DAY

A jaded lawyer with hollow cheeks, JOHN STEPHENS (40's) turns toward us with a conspiratorial twinkle in his eye as our carriage jostles through a CONSTRUCTION SITE.

He speaks in an unorthodox Louisianan accent to an unseen traveling companion:

JOHN STEPHENS

They escaped last night. Five total.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Who was on watch?

JOHN STEPHENS

Morley... poor boy's slow as a mosquito. Had our loyal niggers take a wrench to his knees.

The carriage pulls to a stop and Stephens hops out, businesslike, opening the door for his confidant-

FORMER CONFEDERATE MAJOR THOMAS ABNEY (38), who steps down at 6 foot 2 in a gleaming three-piece suit and stove pipe hat- a walking testimony to a fortune built on the whip-shredded backs of slaves.

He takes in the construction progress of one of his new real estate ventures.

ABNEY

Don't make me wait, Johnny.

Stephens leads Abney through the construction site, where THIRTY GRIZZLED, MENACING BLACK MEN work under inhumane conditions, performing back-breaking labor in sweltering heat.

Two of these men hold each other up, heaving, having inhaled toxic chemicals.

Abney follows Stephens past the workers towards his overdressed LOYAL NEGRO LIEUTENANTS; a group of blacks who work for Mr. Abney and, though devoted out of pure fear, would turn on him in a heartbeat if given the opportunity.

They part for him as though he were Moses himself, snorting and nudging each other in their excitement, vying for position. Abney comes to the wooden frame of a future office.

In a chair struggles poor, white, overseer MORLEY. His kneecaps have been bludgeoned by Abney's Loyals, who take seats around the room, shabby top hats on their heads.

Lawyer Stephens reaches into his jacket and pulls a flask of whiskey, takes a sip, and hands it to sweaty Morley.

OVERSEER MORLEY

I- I am so sorry about this, Major Abney. I swear to Christ, if I had known they was fixin to escape-

Morley takes a swig, buying time.

ABNEY

Preventative measures should have been taken.

OVERSEER MORLEY

Prevent-a-what, sir? We tracked them to the swamp, down yonder-

Abney draws his ornamented revolver, levels it casually at Morley's chest.

ABNEY

Go on.

OVERSEER MORLEY

(terrified)
I couldn't do nothin! It's this
freedom notion.

(MORE)

OVERSEER MORLEY (cont'd)
 They been hearing about it from the
 underground, the papers. Spreadin'
 like a disease. I can't stop it
 alone.

Abney cocks the hammer.

ABNEY
 You are far from alone, brother. We
 are many.

Morley takes another sip from the flask. Abney smacks it
 aside.

ABNEY
 (eerily calm)
 Look at me.

Morley, sniveling, gazes up at Abney- but he struggles to
 maintain eye contact, grimacing, like he's staring directly
 into the sun.

ABNEY
 Our Lord God bestowed upon myself
 and my fellow countrymen the
 ability to own property. Property
 is important to a man; we must have
 a home in which to live and pray,
 we must have a rifle with which to
 hunt and to protect ourselves and
 our family, we must have land to
 till and to sow and farm- and we
 must have animals and slaves with
 which to tend to that land.

(then)
 You see, our Lord defined animals
 and slaves as one in the same. Yet
 now we see the Union government
 attempting to redefine the language
 of our Lord. But they cannot, for
 He has spoken and His words will
 never be modified by Man. If my
 steed or my pigs or my hounds turn
 on me, I will put them down. If
 they flee, I will chase them down.

(then)
Five of my niggers have fled. Chase
them down or put them down... But
do not return without them.

OVERSEER MORLEY
 (nodding)
 Yes, Major. I promise tha-

Abney pulls the trigger- blows a gaping hole through
 Morley's chest, who slumps forward and falls off the chair.

ABNEY

Not you.

The Loyals laugh and exchange looks of shock and excitement like Hyenas. Abney addresses them.

ABNEY

(a warning)

Don't go on imagining freedom is a place coming to meet you half way. I want you to search that bayou until those five are mine again.

Abney tastes some of Morley's blood on his lip and wipes it with his handkerchief, taking his time, inspecting it, then walks away with Stephens, who's completely unfazed.

ABNEY

I'd like to see those blueprints.

- ACT THREE -

EXT. UNDERGROUND NEGRO CHURCH - NIGHT

A ramshackle hovel down near a bayou. Frogs, owls and crickets all chirp at once as the glow of yellow candlelight emanates. Passing by, you'd barely notice it.

INT. UNDERGROUND NEGRO CHURCH - SAME

CLOSE ON ANDY BOSLEY, 37, hyper-alert eyes, a mulatto with a tad more black than white in his blood and *the man we noticed earlier*- tenacious, determined, and self-educated, a man who's seen more suffering than most.

He stands in front of a diverse constituency of black slaves who sit atop apple crates. He holds up a torn newspaper touting news of the 13th Amendment.

BOSLEY

I have news for ya'll... Ya'll free now.

The men and women around the room just blink back at him. The notion too foreign to believe or make any sense of.

BOSLEY

A man from De Soto smuggled me this newspaper. Says the government passed an amendment months ago that says slavery shall no longer exist in this country. This is written confirmation of what I have told you is coming.

An old man in the back suddenly leans up on his cane, rising to his feet. Starts shuffling around, singing:

OLD BLACK MAN
We free! We free! Oh Lordy we free!

Others join in, dancing and singing. Some are too shocked to dance along. Bosley smiles, raises his hands and quiets them.

BOSLEY
I saw a Yankee ride into town
yesterday. Had Negro soldiers with
him. I suspect he's here to deliver
the news.

A curious young zealot, JEREMIAH, pipes up-

JEREMIAH
Them Negros had guns?

BOSLEY
Indeed, Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH
I heard there was Negro soldiers,
ain't never did see any during the
fighting.

BOSLEY
I believe that they have been sent
here by the government to enforce
this new amendment.

A beat as this sinks in around the room, eliciting varied reactions; old people scared, young people excited, house slaves confused, beaten field slaves misty-eyed.

BOSLEY
Change is a frightening thing, and
this is the biggest change of our
lives. Ain't no white people 'round
here gonna be happy about this new
freedom of ours. I can read fear on
some your faces even now. Fear
cause ya'll ain't got no idea what
to do or where to go now that you
the decider of your own fate. So I
quote to you the book of Psalm:

He opens an old bible to a marked page and reads:

BOSLEY

*Why should I fear when evil days
come, when wicked deceivers
surround me, those who trust in
their wealth and boast of their
great riches? No man can redeem the
life of another.*

(closes it)

Our great redeemer is not the
government. Nor is it the white
Yankee and his troop who has been
sent here. They are not our angels
in blue. They may give you things;
food, clothing, land- but we know
not what they want in return. We
cannot trust them. Not yet.

(then, growing louder)

Lord Jesus the only one who can
redeem us. Jesus the one who made
us free long before Mr. Lincoln
proclaimed it. So it is up to you
my brothers and sisters to pick
yourselves up by your bootstraps
and claim this freedom that always
been rightfully yours!

CONSTITUENTS

Amen!

OLDER MAN

You sayin' we can leave the
plantation and massah can't do
nothin'?

BOSLEY

Can if you choose. But where you
gonna go? Ain't gonna get too far
walkin'. I hear they send
patrollers out with orders to kill.
Secesh men and poor white folk who
will do anything for a hot meal and
a bottle of whiskey. Before now
they didn't kill you because you
was someone's chattel. Now you
ain't owned by nobody but fate.

The constituents murmur among themselves. A middle-aged
woman with a scarf covering her head speaks up:

CONSTITUENT WOMAN

And if we stay with massah?

BOSLEY

He obligated to compensate you for
your work. Pay you fairly, that is.
Says right here in the paper that
all the owners are receiving
proclamations attestin' so.

CONSTITUENT WOMAN

They jus' trying to get us wool-gathered. Lemme see that.

JEREMIAH

You can't even read!
(then to Bosley)
What you gonna do, Father Bosley?

The others pipe up-

CONSTITUENTS

What you doing?/You staying?/You
runnin'?

ON BOSLEY, a poignant look in his eyes. The answer is simple.

BOSLEY

Gonna find my Ida. I been prayin'
and I know Jesus gonna guide me to
her, wherever that may be.

The lively congregation goes from jubilant to dead silent.
Who will lead them?

Industrial strength tension grips the small, packed church
as Bosley, realizing he's hit a nerve, tries to recover--

BOSLEY

Ya'll got missin' loved ones, too.
Children, wives, husbands, sisters,
brothers, parents.

As he scans, he notices their hopelessness, their fear. He
tightens his grip around the pulpit, clears his throat.

BOSLEY

Look, I- all I'm sayin' is there is
nothin' to fear. If I leave for a
period of time, I will return.
(holds up bible)
I swear on this, do you understand?

HOLD on Bosley's face, usually assured, now wavering, a stew
of conflicting emotions bubbling just under the surface.

EXT. UNDERGROUND NEGRO CHURCH - NIGHT

The congregation sneaks away quietly into the night. Bosley
and Jeremiah walk up a dirt path through the bayou.

JEREMIAH

I heard they lynched two Negroes
and a white man for preaching 'bout
freedom, just south of the bend.
Best be careful.

Bosley clasps his hand over Jeremiah's mouth and points as he notices MOVING LANTERNS in the distance. HORSES stamp their hooves into the dirt, their riders silhouetted in fog.

JEREMIAH
(whispering)
Who they?

BOSLEY
... Patrollers.

Bosley looks to Jeremiah, then back to the PATROLLERS shrouded in darkness, ominously tracking them from afar.

JEREMIAH
We allowed to carry guns now like them Negro troopers?

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

WHITE TOWNSPEOPLE sit and stand in the packed courtroom. Business owners, planters, merchants. A sizable cross-section of the town's upper crust, including several veterans donning well-worn Confederate fatigues.

Twitchell stands in the corner with his aide Tobias as Sheriff Samuels continues addressing the room:

SHERIFF SAMUELS
... and as we know, the past few months have been an escalating series of trials and tribulations for our residents, a great number of whom did not return home from their service. Their brave sacrifices will live on in our hearts. Gentlemen, if you could please rise.

The veterans stand as the crowd claps for them, removing their hats. One is missing an arm. Twitchell removes his hat and applauds just the same, drawing indignant stares.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
As some of you are aware, the men in Washington have been making adjustments to the laws governing the southern states. This is all so recent that I admit I am still versing myself in these drastic changes. Hence, the government has created a new bureau and assigned an agent to our parish to assist us during this time of transition.
(nodding to Twitchell)
It is my distinct pleasure to introduce you to Freedmen's Bureau Agent Marshall Twitchell.

(MORE)

SHERIFF SAMUELS (cont'd)

Twitchell moves to the center as the Sheriff steps aside. The courtroom goes quiet. Twitchell steels himself.

TWITCHELL

Thank you very much, Sheriff.

Twitchell scans the hostile crowd. Struggles momentarily for the right combination of words.

TWITCHELL

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to first thank you all for welcoming me to your fine parish. I understand that this is a confusing and challenging time for many of you, and I assure you that I will do all I can to ease this transition now that the institution of slavery has been abolished by our Constitution.

A veteran pipes up:

CONFEDERATE VETERAN

Your Constitution, cur!

Those around him nod, glaring back at Twitchell. One of the men feathers the hilt of a large BOWIE KNIFE on his belt.

But Twitchell remains stoic. He stares right through them, brimming with confidence in the face of overwhelming adversity.

TWITCHELL

The Constitution of the United States of America. So I have been stationed here to acquaint you with the changed relation of master and slave to employer and employee.

A radiant YOUNG WOMAN draped in pearls and an elegant dress perks up, studying Twitchell. The look in her eyes says she's both intrigued and taken aback by his confidence. Twitchell doesn't notice her, *but will in due time*.

TWITCHELL

Some Negroes will remain where they have been and labor as usual in the harvesting of crops. It is my goal to restore agricultural production to pre-war levels as soon as possible- to build this town up in this new age.

Twitchell paces up the center aisle now, peering down each row of bitter white faces.

TWITCHELL

But I speak of a free labor system to be governed by yearly contracts negotiated under the Bureau. If disputes arise over pay, working conditions, or punishment, it is I and my men who will act as arbiters. Arcane instruments of punishment such as the lash and noose will be strictly prohibited.

MURMURS rise. *This is heresy.* Twitchell arrives at the veteran who spoke out, settling his fearsome gaze upon him.

TWITCHELL

We earnestly request your cooperation as employers of the freed Negroes in aiding the Bureau with its tasks.

CUT TO:

EXT. CROSSROADS - ANOTHER DAY

Twitchell stands atop a pulpit, mid-speech amidst drizzling rain. WHIP PAN around to find an entirely DIFFERENT CROWD, this one consisting of white plantation owners and their black field hands, including our familiar Jeremiah.

TWITCHELL

I urge you to recognize your former bondsman as free laborers, each with his own agency, and understand that the system you have relied upon for centuries has changed.

Twitchell's four TROOPERS stand in a row before him, the crowd completely rapt. This is the most important announcement of their lives.

Twitchell turns his attention to the FIELD HANDS in back.

TWITCHELL

To you, freed men, I would like to warn against the notion that freedom from slavery implies freedom from work. You should all continue to labor.

The blacks trade glances. A LARGE PLANTATION SLAVE snorts.

LARGE PLANTATION SLAVE

Hell with that. I ain't goin back to ol' Crowley's plantation.

JEREMIAH

Wonder how many pounds this Yank could pick on my field.

The LARGE PLANTATION SLAVE steps forward, bare chest a constellation of scars, face half-covered in crusted scabs.

LARGE PLANTATION SLAVE
I see jus' five of you. Where the rest? Ain't the army coming to rescue us?

TWITCHELL
The war ended several months ago.

LARGE PLANTATION SLAVE
What you mean?

A perplexed look overcomes the slaves. *This is a revelation.* Their outnumbered OVERSEERS trade uncomfortable glances as grumbles and mutinous glares spread throughout the crowd.

SGT. ELI
(low to Twitchell)
The Union Army never made it this far South, Lieutenant.

TWITCHELL
It would appear not, Sergeant.

The crowd grows restless. Angry murmurs rise up.

PRIVATE FREEMAN
(to former slaves)
Hold now! Listen to me!

Private Freeman draws their attention, his voice booming...

PRIVATE FREEMAN
This is time to rejoice. Have we not seen enough weeping? Enough fighting? Enough separation? Enough bloodshed? Hold together now.

An angry yell from somewhere in the crowd. A ROCK WHIZZES straight into Freeman's forehead. He grimaces, reaches up and feels warm blood seeping from his matted hairline.

Corporal Harris snaps his rifle up, alert, fuming.

CORPORAL HARRIS
Who threw that? Show yourself!

SGT. ELI
Easy, Corporal.

Harris ignores his Sergeant, edging forward, hackles raised, brimming with adrenaline. Twitchell's eyes dart to BLADES, SHOTGUNS, SPIKED HAY RAKES...

Time DILATES like his pupils as we momentarily jump into TWITCHELL'S POV: a real-time threat assessment of the rapidly escalating situation, scanning the hostile crowd's faces and firearms.

CORPORAL HARRIS
Which of you crackers thought that
was funny?!

Harris levels his rifle at a WHITE FARMER.

CORPORAL HARRIS
Try it again, Reb.

Suddenly a WHITE HAND grabs the barrel of Harris' rifle and snaps it toward the dirt. TWITCHELL grits his teeth inches from Harris' face.

TWITCHELL
Never without my command, Uncle.

A tense BEAT between them.

CORPORAL HARRIS
You ain't no kin to me.

Harris re-levels his rifle at the farmer, ignoring Twitchell.

Snake-fast, Twitchell unholsters his Colt, spins it around his index, and pistol-whips Harris with so much force he knocks him flat on his ass.

Shock washes over the faces of Twitchell's troopers at the violent outburst. Twitchell doesn't skip a beat-

TWITCHELL
(to Ishmael and Eli)
Lift him.

Sgt. Eli and Ishmael take a moment to snap into action, hoisting Harris to his feet, who spits blood.

TWITCHELL
(recalling Commissioner)
I have zero tolerance for
insubordination. Do you understand?

Harris' barrel of a chest heaves up and down as he browbeats Twitchell, but Twitchell stares the bigger soldier down with those hard, flat eyes. Harris finally lowers his eyes.

TWITCHELL
(holds arm out)
Private Freeman, would you hand
over Corporal Harris' rifle?

Freeman picks up Harris' rifle and hands it to Twitchell as the white farmers and their black ex-slaves watch on, completely fascinated.

Twitchell ejects the rifle's clip, pockets it, then yanks the rifle's bolt, ejecting the lone bullet from its breech before handing it back to Harris.

TWITCHELL

Here. Now you can point your rifle wherever you please- a child with a toy gun.

(lets that sink in)

Learn to heed my commands, Harris, and I will return your ammunition. Now, fall in.

Harris spits another mouthful of blood onto the dirt and reluctantly falls in line.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Constable O'Brien gambles at a table with a PRISON GUARD as Twitchell enters the jail and removes his jacket, revealing his pit-stained undershirt. O'Brien sets his playing cards down.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

Ah, our very own Savior from the North- here to inspect our jail I suppose. Make any new friends?

TWITCHELL

(ignoring the instigation)

Haven't spent this much time on a saddle since I was a boy.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

Up in the green mountains of Vermont, was it? Must be beautiful this time of year.

(turning)

Here it is then. Not much to look at. Only one nigger locked up at the moment.

(to Guard)

Who is she again?

GUARD

Ann. Ann Pearce.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

Ah, ol' Annie girl.

TWITCHELL

Mind if I have a word with her?

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

You can try.

Twitchell pushes past them, assessing the jail's state. Hears WHISPERS from the third cell down, where he comes upon:

A bruised young mulatto woman, ANN, sitting on the floor in the dark, shivering as she talks to herself.

GUARD

She one of Mr. Pearce's house niggers. Seen more time than most in that cell.

TWITCHELL

On what charges?

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

Jefferson Pearce is a man of great means. I assume you ain't familiar.

TWITCHELL

Not in the slightest.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN

He served as Lieutenant Governor during the fighting.

TWITCHELL

Very well.
(to Guard)
Open the cell.

The Guard looks to O'Brien for permission.

TWITCHELL

That's an order.

O'Brien nods, absentmindedly massaging his still-bruised knuckles from earlier. The guard unlocks the gate, which CREAKS open.

Twitchell grabs a lantern, steps into the darkness, and kneels down next to Ann, examining her wounds under the light, searching her eyes.

She's a pitiful sight: tears stream down her bruised face, dirty rags cover her body.

ANN

(shivering)
She ain't gon' accept me til hell takes her.

TWITCHELL

(low)
Who?

(MORE)

TWITCHELL (cont'd)
 (to O'Brien)
 A blanket, please.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN
 There's a reason she in here, and
 it ain't to be comfortable.

TWITCHELL
 I asked for a blanket. I won't ask
 again.

O'Brien grumbles and goes to fetch a blanket. Ann finally
 levels her gaze on Twitchell.

ANN
 She hate me down to my soul, cain't
 stand to see me breathe. Beats me
 like a dog in heat- I cain't take
 no more. Take me out back 'n shoot
 me s'what they do...

Twitchell unpins his SILVER BUREAU BADGE and places it in
 Ann's trembling hand.

TWITCHELL
 Can you read that?

Ann just looks up at Twitchell, lost. He taps it:

TWITCHELL
 Freed Men's Bureau.
 (then, breaking the ice)
 That includes women, too.

The joke is lost on Ann. She's mentally and emotionally
 broken.

ANN
 You don't know nothin! Git away-

She slaps at him but he GRABS her by the wrists.

TWITCHELL
 Hey! Calm down. I'm here to listen.
 You see? I'm not going to hurt you.

He holds her gaze and she slowly emerges from her stupor.
Someone is finally helping.

LATER

Outside the cell, Ann sits at a desk with a blanket over her
 shoulders, sipping hot tea, alone with Twitchell.

ANN
 Whenever pappy leave town, Mistress
 has her friends over and orders me
 into the drawin' room.
 (MORE)

ANN (cont'd)
 Make me strip off all my clothes,
 sayin' she gotta check me for lice.

Ann sets down her tea cup, hand shaking too violently.
 O'Brien and the Guard glance over from their poker game.
 Twitchell gets up and approaches them-

TWITCHELL
 From now on, no Negro will be
 jailed for an extended period of
 time without a written indictment
 or trial. Are we clear?

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN
 God dammit, Twitchell. You ain't
 even aware of the powder keg you
 lightin'.

Ann, choked up, gets out a few words:

ANN
 (loud)
 He my father.

GUARD
 (to Ann)
 Shut your mouth, Bitch!

Twitchell turns back to her.

TWITCHELL
 Jefferson Pearce is your father?

OFF Twitchell, puzzle pieces finally falling in place.

EXT. PEARCE ESTATE - DAY

Twitchell, flanked by Privates Ishmael and Freeman, rides
 his horse onto the well-manicured PEARCE ESTATE under the
 shade of thick trees that lead toward a tremendous mansion.

He checks his sidearm as he trots, past rows and rows of
 slaves picking cotton, unregistered and working under harsh,
 illegal conditions.

TWITCHELL
 I want you two monitoring the
 perimeter while I have a chat with
 the Pearces. No one goes in or out
 of the big house while I'm inside.

OVERSEERS watch as they pass- trained ROTTWEILERS run up and
 snap at the black soldiers through a rusted fence, barking
 viciously. Ishmael's distracted and overwhelmed.

TWITCHELL
 You hear me, Ish?

PRIVATE ISHMAEL

Yessuh. 'Em dogs always got it out
for me. Must smell the runaway.

He mimes shooting one of the dogs in the head.

INT. PEARCE MANSION - DAY

MISTRESS PEARCE, a potato sack of a woman draped in diamonds and lace sits at the far end of the dining table as a FEMALE HOUSE SLAVE serves her afternoon tea.

A MALE HOUSE SLAVE stands by, eyes cast down. Twitchell chooses to remain standing, hat in hand.

Mistress Pearce reads an affidavit that Twitchell has served her as she sips her tea, tapping her foot anxiously.

MISTRESS PEARCE

My husband should be the one
assessing this document, not I.
Please, have a seat.

TWITCHELL

May I ask where he is?

MISTRESS PEARCE

Be back soon. Have some tea, Agent
Twitchell, I insist.

Twitchell slowly approaches, walking past portraits of the Pearce clan in all their glory.

TWITCHELL

I'm afraid my schedule does not
permit such luxuries. But I can
spare you the tedium of slogging
through the bureaucratic
formalities of that affidavit.

(sternly)

Ann is no longer your slave. Under
the authority vested in me by the
Federal government, I have taken
custody of her, and will be
relocating her to a more hospitable
work environment.

(lowering his voice)

I know who she is, Miss Pearce.
And I know the wrath she's incurred
because of that relation.

Mistress Pearce avoids Twitchell's guarded gaze- horrified, embarrassed, yet defiant. Some truths just never sink past the surface.

The nearby house slaves keep their heads down, but cast their eyes up at Twitchell. *Who is this man?*

Twitchell dusts his hat off, puts it back on. Mistress Pearce rises, fire in her veins.

MISTRESS PEARCE
How dare you come into my house and
take my property, you... you Yankee
plebeian!

PRIVATE ISHMAEL (O.S.)
Lieutenant!

Twitchell turns and hastily exits.

EXT. PEARCE PLANTATION - DAY

Private Freeman chats with a small group of slaves at the front of the Big House as they take advantage of this reprieve from work. Some are chained together at the ankle.

Freeman continues speaking with a man missing a hand-

PRIVATE FREEMAN
Where are you from, Nicodemus?

NICODEMUS
Georgia, suh.

PRIVATE FREEMAN
How long have you been here?

NICODEMUS
Say... 'bout four years since I was
traded to Massah Pearce.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL (O.S.)
Lieutenant, come quick!

Freeman immediately steps away from the slaves and sees Twitchell jog alongside Ishmael towards a SHED.

A few OVERSEERS approach. Twitchell flicks his Colt up, cocked and loaded.

TWITCHELL
Stay where you are!
(to Ishmael)
What is amiss?

Ishmael gets close to Twitchell, speaking low-

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
There something evil below that
shed.

TWITCHELL
How do you know this?

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
Foreman told me so...

Twitchell discreetly peers past him to a gray-haired FOREMAN who backs away quietly, disappearing into the mass of slaves.

Time DILATES once more as we jump into Twitchell's real-time threat assessment, his steely eyes scanning the scene...

White OVERSEERS inch forward, armed with MACHETES, WHIPS, PICKAXES. Several of them struggle against taut leashes attached to vicious dogs, barking and frothing at the jowls.

TWITCHELL
Cover me.

INSIDE THE DARK SHED

Twitchell nearly retches and pulls his kerchief from his pocket, shielding his nose.

MISTRESS PEARCE (O.S.)
Stop him! Stop the Yankee!

OUTSIDE

Ishmael and Freeman snap up their rifles, guarding the shed from the overseers and their dogs, which edge toward them.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
Stay back I say! Less you want me to blow a hole through you.

PRIVATE FREEMAN
Listen to him! Keep back!

INSIDE

Twitchell bends down to a dirt covered HANDLE in the floor. He glances outside, the situation rapidly escalating. Grabs that handle and HEAVES, but it won't budge. Notices a lock.

He backs away, aims, and SHOTS it off. Bends down and opens the trapdoor. It's pitch black. Twitchell gags and nearly dry heaves. He strikes a match on his jacket, leans down into the crawl space...

The light from the match barely pushes back the darkness, but as his pupils adjust, Twitchell recognizes the faint silhouettes of CORPSES piled below. Too many to count. Some much smaller than others.

TWITCHELL
Good God.

Twitchell loses his breath as the flame flickers out.

- ACT FOUR -

INT. JAIL - DAY

Ann lies on the cot in her jail cell, shivering once more. A key is inserted into the lock. Iron bars swing open. She sits up to find Twitchell standing there holding freshly folded clothes.

TWITCHELL
Come along, Ann. You're free.

ANN
... You came back.

She stands on wobbly legs and Twitchell bends, slings her arm over his shoulder.

EXT. JAIL - DAY

Ann shields her eyes from the sunlight as Twitchell walks her out in fresh clothing, past a livid Constable O'Brien.

As they walk, Twitchell nods to Sergeant Eli and Private Freeman, who stand guard outside an enclosed carriage. Eli opens the door.

SERGEANT ELI
Let's go. Move!

MISTRESS PEARCE and her husband, former Lieutenant Governor JEFFERSON PEARCE are yanked out of the carriage by Eli and Freeman, their hands cuffed.

CONSTABLE O'BRIEN
Don't worry, Governor Pearce.
Guarantee I'll have this
straightened out at once.

Pearce doesn't say a word. As he passes Twitchell, TIME DILATES and the men stare through one another. Pearce's lip curls into an almost imperceptible, razor-thin smile.

O'Brien reluctantly nods to the guard to escort them inside the jail.

INT. JAIL - DAY

O'Brien, puffing on a cigar, sits behind a desk with a TELEGRAPH, tapping a coded message on the transmitter...

INT. TEN PIN ALLEY - NIGHT

CH-CLACK! Pins fly as Stephens bowls a strike in the smoke-filled three lane bowling alley. He turns and grabs his drink just in time to notice BEN MARSTON (40) power through the front door.

He heads past the bartender and straight for the backroom. We notice his left ear is missing, skin disfigured, blown off in battle.

INT. TEN PIN ALLEY - BACK OFFICE - NIGHT

A coded set of KNOCKS on the door. A brutish, white CRONY opens it and lets Marston past, into a large back office where more cronies smoke, drink, chat, and gamble.

A Confederate Flag is nailed to the wall, boxes of booze, weapons and tobacco stacked about.

Major Abney sits at one of the tables, blending in with the others, save for his imposing figure and stove pipe hat.

Marston leans down to Abney, whispers something.

ABNEY
(to dealer)
Gonna sit out a few hands.

Abney folds his cards, pushes out his chair and rises. Marston, red-faced, turns to the group-

MARSTON
Everyone out!

The men grumble as they get up and leave.

ABNEY
Go on, bowl a few rounds, on the house.

Abney nods at the men as he indulges Marston, patting a pal on the back as he leaves, slipping a few bucks to the dealer on his way out.

With everyone gone, the brute closes the door. Abney moves to his desk and takes a seat, clearing papers, settling into his chair.

MARSTON
Got a wire from the Mick. Says there's a Yankee in town causing trouble, going around establishing contracts on behalf of the slaves.

ABNEY
Don't tell me what I already know, Ben.

MARSTON
You aware he put Jefferson Pearce in custody? His wife as well. Let their house nigger go free.
(MORE)

MARSTON (cont'd)

(then)

The man's staying at your own damn hotel.

Abney finishes organizing his desktop and looks up at Marston.

ABNEY

Keep your enemies within arm's reach.

(then, hint of a grin)

So you can slap 'em around every now and then.

MARSTON

You think this is a joke? Let me tell you somethin'-

Abney makes a quieting motion with his hand.

ABNEY

Relax.

MARSTON

Don't tell me to relax, Tom. This is a huge God damn problem.

ABNEY

We knew this day was coming. Have you not once wondered what they will do to us given what we've done to them?

MARSTON

The Yankees?

ABNEY

The niggers.

(then)

But to your point, the Pearces are protected under the law.

MARSTON

Sitting in jail?

Abney shoots Marston a look that says "tread lightly."

ABNEY

I don't usually entertain hypothetical situations, but you're a chum, Ben. So, for the sake of easing your mind, let us assume the Yankee does actually take the Pearces to trial. The Yanks say a nigger is a free man, let 'em say it. But a free nigger now wasn't a free nigger before the amendment.

MARSTON

I don't follow your logic.

ABNEY

Not even the federal government can free dead men. Those are the bodies of property, not freed slaves.

Marston considers this. Crosses his arms.

MARSTON

What about that house nigger he's lookin after? We both know at least half those slaves were put down after the thirteenth passed. She's a prime witness.

Another coded KNOCK. A young COURIER hidden under a newsboy cap quickly enters and lays a stuffed envelope before Abney.

He raises his gaze, and we see it's TOBIAS, Twitchell's aide.

TOBIAS

Last week's Starlight take, Major.

Marston SMACKS Tobias in the back of his head.

MARSTON

You wait til I say enter.

Tobias seethes. Abney watches, entertained.

TOBIAS

Ain't got yourself but one ear. Didn't think you'd catch it.

Marston scowls. Abney leans forward.

ABNEY

Tobias. The latest please.

TOBIAS

(produces folded documents)
Twitchell wired the Bureau Commissioner after he found the bodies at the Pearce Plantation. I brought a copy of the telegraph.

Marston snatches it from Tobias, reads it aloud:

MARSTON

Care of State Commissioner Thomas Conway, New Orleans.

(MORE)

MARSTON (cont'd)

Wiring to inform you I have taken Lieutenant Governor and Mistress Jefferson Pearce into custody for the murder of dozens of innocent men, women, and children. I have a witness under my personal protection. Requesting a federal prosecutor and additional troops as soon as possible.

Marston looks from Tobias to Abney, ready to explode. Abney, sensing this-

ABNEY

Cool your heels, Ben. We will send a message to this- *messiah* in blue.

Abney removes a wad of cash from the delivery and counts it. Passes one of the bills back to Tobias. A small reward.

ABNEY

His witness won't be saying a thing.

TOBIAS

What you planning, Mr. Abney?

Abney gets up and grabs his coat off the rack, ignoring Tobias.

ABNEY

(to Marston)

Did anyone see you come here tonight?

MARSTON

Course not.

Abney moves past Marston and Tobias toward the door.

MARSTON

The boy asked you a question, Tom. What are you gonna do!

The door slams shut. Marston KICKS the table over. We HOLD on Tobias, the young spy much harder to read now.

INT. COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

Ann stands in the ladies' powder room, staring into the mirror. Her face is washed, her hair clean. She wears new, crisp clothing. A whole new person.

She emerges to find young Trooper Ishmael standing there, taken aback at the transformation.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL

I ain't got no words.

Ann blushes, though still uncomfortable around men.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
We gon' help you get back on your
feet. I see to that myself.

She swallows, tries to keep the emotion bottled inside. But it overcomes her, and she breaks down, sobbing.

Ish wraps his arms around her, his eyes misting just below the R branded into his forehead.

Twitchell marches over, all business.

TWITCHELL
(interrupting)
Listen to me very carefully, Ann.
(glances at Ish)
Both of you.
(back to Ann)
I've secured a room for you at the
hotel I'm lodging at. Just across
the hall from my own. You are to
stay in your room at all times.
Keep the door locked. And do not
leave the room for any reason.

ANN
Am I-- in-- in danger?

Twitchell doesn't answer, conscience-stricken. Turns to Ishmael.

TWITCHELL
Escort her to the room. Here, the
number is on the key.

Twitchell hands the key to Ish, wraps Ish's hand closed around it.

TWITCHELL
You are personally responsible for
her care, Ishmael. Check on her
three times a day, minimum.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
(nodding confidently)
Won't be a problem, boss.

TWITCHELL
Very well. On your way.

Private Ishmael nods and escorts her out the door. She turns back and passes a wilting gaze in Twitchell's direction.

He clenches his teeth, removes his vial of his potassium bromide nerve tonic, and takes a long sip.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. UNION BASE - DAY - FLASHBACK

A RIDER on horseback takes a long sip from a canteen as he trots through low hanging mist. A MAN jogs alongside him.

We get a better glimpse as they cut through the fog. The rider is white, in his late twenties. As he draws nearer, we see him clearly: It's Twitchell. Clean shaven and confident. No scar on his face.

Twitchell glances down to the black infantryman jogging alongside him, PRIVATE WASHINGTON, 20's, wise beyond his years and Twitchell's closest and most loyal confidant.

They approach the Officer's Tent and Twitchell dismounts. Tosses the reins to Washington.

TWITCHELL

Wait for me. I won't be long.

Twitchell marches towards the tent.

WASHINGTON

Remember to ask for that stretcher.

TWITCHELL

(without turning around)

Don't hold your breath. You're in the colored troops, remember?

WASHINGTON

Lieutenant!

Twitchell turns.

WASHINGTON

So are you.

Twitchell sets his jaw. Pivots and charges towards the tent.

INT. OFFICER'S TENT - DAY

CAPTAIN LILLIE, 40's, white, confers with other white OFFICERS. Been fighting for his country since the Mexican-American war. A hardened veteran despite his name.

He's hunched over a large map spread across a table.

LILLIE

(pointing)

Hill's got his men coming up this road here.

TWITCHELL (O.S.)

(clears throat)

Captain Lillie...

LILLIE
We will form a blockade with our
infantry on this end-

Twitchell steps forward, into frame.

TWITCHELL
Captain Lillie.

The other Officers turn, irritated. Twitchell salutes.
Lillie doesn't look up from the map.

LILLIE
I don't like interruptions,
Lieutenant.

TWITCHELL
This is urgent. I've scouted two
large regiments traversing the
Wilderness. They are headed right
at us. I suggest we drive them back
until our reinforcements arrive.

Twitchell steps forward and hands Lillie a hand drawn map.
Without looking at it, Lillie crumples it into a ball and
drops it on the floor. The other Officers can't hide their
amusement.

LILLIE
Those regiments are not a threat.

Twitchell grits his teeth. Refocuses.

TWITCHELL
The Rebels are moving out now. We
cannot allow them to pass through
the Wilderness and take the high
ground beyond the creek. My platoon
can stop them.

Lillie slams his fist onto the table, scowls at Twitchell.

LILLIE
My platoon will do no such thing!
Know your place, son.

TWITCHELL
Captain, if you don't deem me
capable of-

LILLIE
Fighting in those woods eliminates
our ability to use artillery, which
is our main advantage. Close
quarters combat shifts the odds
into their favor. They're baiting
you, Twitchell, and you're fallen
for it.

Lillie shakes his head in disappointment.

LILLIE
It is exactly this type of
shortsightedness that forced me to
deny your promotion.

This hits Twitchell like a semi. He swallows his
embarrassment. Struggles to project strength.

LILLIE
(motions to other Officers)
Do you want to be one of us,
Twitchell?

TWITCHELL
I am one of you, sir.

Amused grins from the other white Officers. Lillie narrows
his gaze.

LILLIE
Delusional is the only thing you
are, Lieutenant. And until you
start following my orders and not
your own, that Negro company is
where you'll stay.

Twitchell stands there in stunned silence. Too shocked to
move. Or even blink. Lillie shifts his focus back to his
map.

LILLIE
That is all.

Twitchell still stands there, unmoving. Lillie shoots him an
icy glare.

LILLIE
I said that is all, Lieutenant.

Twitchell shakes the cobwebs loose. Reluctantly salutes
Lillie and turns to leave.

LILLIE
Don't forget your drawing.

The other Officers stifle laughter. Twitchell snatches his
crumpled-up map off the floor and bolts out of the tent as
artillery shells bombard an encampment in the distance.

PRE-LAP: BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

INT. LOVE HOTEL - TWITCHELL'S ROOM - NIGHT - SAME

Twitchell snaps upright in bed, drenched in oily sweat.
BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The door flexes with each knock.

SHERIFF SAMUELS (O.S.)
Agent Twitchell? You there? Agen--

TWITCHELL
I'm here.

He rubs his eyes and slides out of bed.

INT. DIAMOND RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Twitchell and Sheriff Samuels dine in the private back room of the Diamond, the three-star restaurant in Coushatta, wearing their Sunday best.

Samuels guzzles beer. Cuts into a filet from the hind of a freshly slaughtered steer.

TWITCHELL
Let me ask you something, Sheriff:
do you like it here?

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Can't say it's all bad. We've got a
sweet spot on the Red, the trading
is good. Our land wasn't affected
by the fighting, no scorched earth.

TWITCHELL
(pragmatic)
You would like to see this parish
prosper.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Surely.

TWITCHELL
Good. Because it is my duty to see
that it does. And, though your
pride may say otherwise, the only
way both of our goals will be
accomplished is through Northern
capital. Schools must be built, not
only for whites, but for black
children, too. Housing,
reunification of family members,
land redistribution...

Samuels drops his fork. Wipes his mouth with his napkin.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
Easy now. I caution you not to let
your mouth overload your tail.

TWITCHELL
Keep eating, Don. I shall expense
it to Washington, along with
everything else I bring here.

Twitchell lets this sink in. Samuels studies him.

TWITCHELL

My deployment may very well become more than temporary. If it does, we will need to work together. I'll... need your assistance.

(then)

You are one of the few who have proven trustworthy so far.

SHERIFF SAMUELS

I'm flattered, truly. But the citizens of Coushatta built this town with their bare hands. They will not accept the notion that you and your Yankee money will bring further prosperity to the parish.

TWITCHELL

(raising his beer)

They will, Don. Inevitability can only be resisted for so long.

Twitchell sips from his stein as a young woman enters carrying an expensive bottle of Bordeaux.

Twitchell looks up at her, catches her radiance like sunlight, her long emerald earrings brushing past freckled cheeks.

It's the same woman who took an interest in him at the courthouse. Samuels turns and doffs his cap at her.

SHERIFF SAMUELS

Ah, Ms. Coleman.

This is ADELE COLEMAN (26) and behind the sparkle in her eyes we get the sense that she's been waiting for something more than what life has offered up thus far.

ADELE

Pardon me for interrupting.

(then, to Twitchell)

My family runs this restaurant, and... I wanted to welcome you to town.

Twitchell is at once smitten and unable to answer. Completely in awe of her beauty.

Adele simpers, intrigued by this well-dressed Northerner, though not wearing it on her sleeve as he does. She sets the bottle of wine on the table.

TWITCHELL
 I don't know...
 (recovers a bit)
 Thank you.

Twitchell stands, nervously slicks his hair back.

TWITCHELL
 My name is--

ADELE
 Marshall Twitchell. I was at the
 courthouse when you gave your grand
 introduction.

Twitchell awkwardly stands there, still completely
 awestruck, as Adele offers her hand.

ADELE
 I'm Adele Coleman.

He takes it in his and kisses it softly. Hard for her to
 keep from blushing or her hand from trembling so-

ADELE
 I'm sure you gentlemen have
 important matters to discuss.

Just then, a rugged man with seen-it-all eyes similar to
 Twitchell's storms into the room- he's heard part of the
 conversation and comes in hot.

This is Adele's brother, GUS COLEMAN (early 30's), a widely
 respected Confederate veteran who's killed his fair share of
 Yanks in the war.

GUS
 Adele, a moment of your time.

Caught off guard by his intrusion, and more than a little
 annoyed, she addresses him.

ADELE
 What could possibly be so important
 that you need to speak with me this
 second?

GUS
 Come. Now.

Gus marches out. She gives a quick nod Twitchell and Samuels
 and follows after him, through the bustling restaurant, past
 the bar, and down a hallway into the KITCHEN.

A COOK looks on as Adele reaches Gus and snickers.

ADELE
 What is the big-

Gus' arm lashes out like a whip, BACKHANDING her across the face- bringing her to her knees.

The cook look on. Gus bares his teeth. He hurriedly goes back to work.

Adele gets back up, cradling her swollen, crimson cheek.

GUS
(seething)
You will not bring shame to our family. You will not bring shame to me. Do you know who that man is?

ADELE
He's not a Union-

GUS
(softening a bit)
They are all Union snakes. They have taken everything, and now they are here to finish us off.

Gus takes a step toward Adele. Her breath quickens, but he leans down slowly and kisses her on the forehead.

GUS
(re: her cheek)
I am sorry, sister. I truly am. Please don't make me lose control like that again.

Gus takes a few deep breaths- suppressing anger.

GUS
You have always been my sunshine. I would hate to have to hurt an innocent man, even a Yank, just because you fancy an exotic romance with a Northern stranger. If you care about him you will ignore him.

He gets up, disappointed. She cradles her cheek as he exits.

EXT. COUSHATTA - ESTABLISHING - SUNRISE

WE GLIDE PAST the Red River as the sun comes up, spreading morning glow over sprawling plantations, farms, and homes.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Twitchell arrives to work in his blue uniform and is greeted by the sight of a seemingly endless line of SLAVES and TOWNSFOLK snaking its way up the steps to his second floor office. Tobias hurries toward him-

TOBIAS

They have been lining up for hours,
Mr. Twitchell. An array of cases.
Caught me with my pants down.

Twitchell leads Tobias back to his office, passing soiled
black slaves, white planters and businessmen...

TWITCHELL

Register them, log their
complaints, and prepare them for
inquisition.

TOBIAS

Right away, boss.

INT. TWITCHELL'S OFFICE - DAY

A wrinkled OLD BLACK WOMAN overstays her appointment as
Twitchell walks her out his door.

OLD BLACK WOMAN

I tell you somethin' else, Mister
Agent, I ain't able to read what
you wrote down on this paper.

TWITCHELL

Miss Hunter, I must attend to my
next inquisitor. I will have one of
my troopers follow up in a week-

He signals down the hall, turns, and shuts the door behind
him, exhausted. Walks back to his desk. Tobias hands him a
cigarette, which he accepts. Lights it for him.

TWITCHELL

(takes a drag, exhales)
This is a circus. We must implement
a better system. How do you suppose
we organize contracts?

TOBIAS

Perhaps we create book volumes?
Organize them alphabetically with
the employer's name, number of
slaves- pardon me- employees, date
of signature, date of closure, and
terms of agreement. We could use
reference numbers and keep a
running index along the margins to
track cases.

Twitchell raises a brow, impressed.

TWITCHELL

Ever think of going into law?

Tobias opens his mouth but there is a KNOCK at the door. Twitchell hangs his head.

TWITCHELL

I have not even eaten lunch.

Another loud KNOCK. Twitchell stalks over to the door and opens it to find Bosley standing there in dirty overalls. The two hardy men soak each other in for a moment.

BOSLEY

Good day, Agent.

TWITCHELL

My apologies, sir, but I am now on my lunch break.

BOSLEY

That's a pity. I believe you would want to hear what I have to say.

Bosley's accent is subtle, his voice more elegant than the other slaves Twitchell's encountered. Despite his exhaustion, he can sense this man may be worth talking to. He steps aside and Bosley enters.

BOSLEY

I apologize for my soiled state. Engine work... may I take a seat?

TWITCHELL

Certainly, Mister...

BOSLEY

Bosley. Andrew Bosley. How do you do?

Bosley offers his dirty hand. Twitchell hesitates, then meets it with his own.

Bosley sits and unfolds some papers as Twitchell wipes his hand with his kerchief.

BOSLEY

Since the Thirteenth Amendment passed, I have recorded fifty-two cases in which it has been violated within this parish.

Twitchell studies Bosley intently. Notices his callused palms, questionable bruises along his neck, the blood clot in his left eye.

TWITCHELL

Why you?

BOSLEY

For one, I am the minister of a Negro church. My constituents have come to me with exhaustive questions and concerns, many of which I am in no position to answer.

TWITCHELL

May I?

Bosley slides his papers across the table.

TWITCHELL

You wrote this yourself?

BOSLEY

I can read just as well.

TWITCHELL

Is that common around here, Mr. Bosley?

Twitchell hands the lists to Tobias to peruse.

BOSLEY

Not at all. Now, something pressing has come up. I've heard scuttlebutt that many of the planters are going to dismiss their 'vicious and idle' slaves now that you have arrived to enforce labor contracts. Judging by those who have told me this, the individuals who will be put out of work are simply mothers with children. Many of whom will certainly starve without government aid.

Twitchell leans back from his table.

TWITCHELL

I'd say this merits investigation.

BOSLEY

Do you have the resources and logistics necessary for distribution of food and medicine?

TWITCHELL

I think that action may be a bit premature. Even if I were to hypothetically agree with everything you are saying, I would need to kick this up the chain, so to speak- wait to hear back from my superiors in Washington.

BOSLEY

Then I suggest you do so sooner
rather than later... Sir.

Twitchell considers Bosley. Motions toward the door.

TWITCHELL

Thank you for this information,
Mister Bosley. If you have any
other reports you feel merit my
personal attention, you know where
to find me, and my office hours are
posted outside the door.

Bosley rubs the nape of his neck. Expected more.

BOSLEY

As you wish.

He goes to exit, then stops at the door, grabs the knob, and
without turning-

BOSLEY

If you are looking for your message
to reach the ears of the Negroes,
Mr. Twitchell, you will need to
bend mine first.

TWITCHELL

That so? You speak for all of them?
I did not know I need to report to
you on matters regarding Negroes in
the parish.

BOSLEY

(cracks a small smile)
You are a harbinger, that is for
sure. Whether you are a herald of
Jesus or Lucifer, well, that
remains to be seen. G'day.

He exits and shuts the door with force, leaving Twitchell
standing there, pondering what's just occurred. After some
internal deliberation:

TWITCHELL

Tobey?

TOBIAS

Uh, yes sir?

TWITCHELL

You mind if I call you Tobey?

TOBIAS

Not at all, Mr. Twitchell.

ANGLE ON Twitchell's desk, where a TELEGRAPH sits.

TWITCHELL

I would like you to prepare another telegraph for me. And do me a favor- in your spare time, dig up whatever you can on Mr. Bosley.

TOBIAS

Yessir.

EXT. QUIET ROAD - DAY

Bosley turns down a dirt road, resolute, eyes up to the heavens. Twenty yards back, a balding, short WHITE MAN trails him, smoking a cigarette.

Bosley stops and turns, makes eye contact with the man, who stops as well, takes a drag. They say nothing to each other.

Bosley continues on, more annoyed than shaken.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Bosley removes a few salvaged coins from his pocket as he waits outside the post office, counting the scant money as four WHITE PATRONS finish conducting their business with the POSTMAN.

They shuffle out past him and Bosley quickly slips-

INSIDE

Where the white postman passes him a cursory glance then heads into the back. Bosley waits silently until the postman returns holding a LETTER.

Bosley anxiously reaches for the letter, but the postman pulls it back, holding out his hand. Bosley hands him the coins, which he counts carefully, then finally hands Bosley the letter and shoos him out.

INT. NEGRO CHURCH - NIGHT

Inside the same hovel church from before, Bosley pours over the letter. A young black woman's invigorated voice reads:

IDA (V.O.)

My dear love Andy who jumped the broom handle with me: massah has dismissed us since the freedom come, and I feel like a bird outta its cage. I will make my way by foot and ferry to Coushatta as soon as I am able to join you again. I must tell you now, as I have already waited too long, that I am bringing a little girl with me. She is mine, but she is not yours.

(MORE)

IDA (V.O.) (cont'd)
*I am sorry this is the way you have
 to find out. I hope you can care
 for her as your own. Her name is
 Mary.*

Bosley lowers the letter, digesting this. Looks up to the wood cross he made with his bare hands. Swallows his fear.

EXT. NEGRO CHURCH - NIGHT

Bosley exits, folds the letter and places it into his coat pocket as a dark silhouette silently closes in from behind. He hears a twig snap- suddenly a bicep squeezes tight around his throat- he GASPS.

The larger attacker viciously kidney punches him over and over again. Bosley yells out each time the man's fist hammers him in the side. The brute lets go and Bosley hits the floor like a sack of grain.

Bosley claws at the dirt, blood pooling in his mouth, desperately trying to crawl away. The attacker stomps after him, bends over-

Something shiny flicks into Bosley's palm- a small, razor-sharp whittling knife. He whips around and stabs his attacker in the neck, twisting the blade as he yanks it out.

The man stumbles back, and the moonlight illuminates a LOYAL NEGRO- one of Abney's overdressed droogs. He falls to the ground, trying to stem the avalanche of blood that's flowing from his neck, gurgling curses in Bosley's direction.

Bosley jumps to his feet, realizing he knows the man, recovering his breath as he grabs his side.

BOSLEY
 That you Damien?

LOYAL NEGRO
 ... Get... away from me.

BOSLEY
 How far back we go? What's gotten into you?

LOYAL NEGRO
 They kn-know... how dem pitiful
 Negroes look at you. How they...see
 you.

BOSLEY
 Do they? That why they sent a Tom
 like you kill me?

Damien gives a weak nod. Bosley wipes himself off with a rag, agitated, as Damien's blood pools into the dirt. He tosses the rag onto the dying man.

BOSLEY

Then go on and tell them how that worked out.

- ACT FIVE -

INT. TROOPER BARRACKS - DAY

Black hands deftly load lead balls into a rotating cylinder, spin it, and flick it shut. Sergeant Eli inspects his Navy Colt revolver, then fastens it into his holster. Turns to the other troopers prepping their gear.

SGT. ELI

Two minutes! Make haste.

The troopers have converted a local house into their barracks. Freeman finishes oiling his Burnside Carbine, pulls a .54 caliber cartridge from a box of ammunition and slaps it in, pulls another cartridge and tosses it to Ish.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL

Where boss at?

SGT. ELI

Lieutenant had important business to attend to across the river. I shall supervise the distribution.

Harris lugs bags of rice past them out toward the front.

CORPORAL HARRIS

On the day we got a target on our backs. That make perfect sense.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL

He set us up?

CORPORAL HARRIS

Shit yeah, Negro. You know the whites gon' come round askin' for they own handouts.

Freeman rests his rifle over his shoulder, patting it.

PRIVATE FREEMAN

As long as I have my Carbine, they can ask all they want.

SGT. ELI

(discreetly)

Ishmael.

Eli pulls Ish aside, quickly eyeing the R branded into his forehead.

SGT. ELI
 Nothing foolish out there from you.
 Harris looks only after himself. Do
 not look to him as a mentor.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
 (like a slave)
 Thank ya for ya undyin' trus' in
 me, massah. I do jus' as you say.

Ish rolls his eyes as he moves off. Eli sighs, shakes his
 head, turns around.

SGT. ELI
 Hustle up! On the double!

EXT. PEARCE ESTATE - SAME

The secret shed has been torn down. Dozens upon dozens of
 rotting BLACK CORPSES in various stages of decomposition are
 lined up adjacent one another in the cotton field.

Slaves watch in disgust as overseers pull a never-ending
 stream of bodies up from below the cavernous crawlspace.

Twitchell and Sheriff Samuels stand at a distance, surveying
 the situation, speaking through kerchiefs clasped over their
 mouths and noses.

Constables assist as former slaves exhume bodies of people
 they once knew. One woman starts vomiting. A man collapses
 in the heat. Another woman bursts into tears and faints upon
 recognizing one of the corpses as a missing family member.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
 Jesus Christ. I knew Pearce had
 skeletons in his closet.

TWITCHELL
 Had a lot more in that crawlspace.
 We need to make an example of him.

Samuels pulls the brim of his hat down.

SHERIFF SAMUELS
 I respect your ambition, Agent
 Twitchell- but the target on your
 back is big enough as is...

TWITCHELL
 (staring into distance)
 I've wired for a federal prosecutor
 and more troopers.

SHERIFF SAMUELS

(stuffs tobacco in cheek)
Pearce is untouchable. You might
get away with throwing him in jail
for a few days... a slap on the
wrist... but do you have any idea
what would happen if you take him
to trial?

Twitchell, unfazed, lights a cigarette.

TWITCHELL

No...
(takes a drag)
But I intend to find out.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

The troopers have set up food distribution carts near a busy crossroads.

A MASS OF SLAVES congregate around the cart, forming lines as the troopers distribute rice, bread, and potatoes. Many are rail thin, tightening twine they use to hold their pants up.

On an ADJACENT PLANTATION, slaves dripping with sweat start dropping their tools, heading off towards the free food.

OVERSEERS head after them, yelling, whipping the slower ones to their knees with their cat-o-nine tails.

Sergeant Eli grows nervous, realizing they've just stirred a hornets nest as WHITES head toward the crossroads, PUSHING through the crowd. Exactly what Harris warned would happen.

He cups his hands around his mouth:

SERGEANT ELI

Step back and form a line!

Freeman pulls up his Carbine, edgy. Notices the sun glinting off a revolver held by a white overseer. A shotgun held by another.

PRIVATE FREEMAN

They're armed, Sergeant!

SERGEANT ELI

(to whites)
We have orders from the Federal
Government to distribute this food
solely to Negroes!

Ishmael notices a white farmer BEATING a slave back from the carts with a stick. He breaks off, advancing on him-

PRIVATE ISHMAEL

Hey Reb!

The farmer turns- Ish THWACKS him across the face with the butt of his rifle, sending him to the ground.

He offers his hand to the slave and pulls him up.

A shotgun BLASTS BUCKSHOT behind them. Women SCREAM and run in terror. THREE WHITE FARMERS surround Ish and the slave, leveling shotguns at them.

WHITE FARMER

Down on the ground, both you!

ON ISH... sizing them up, gripping his rifle tight. BACK ON ELI, realizing they've been overrun, not sure what to do.

Harris thrusts a white man back from another cart and grabs the mule's reigns, snapping them, as Freeman loads food back into the donkey-cart as fast as he can.

BACK ON ISH and the slave, split off from the group, surrounded by the three farmers, chaos all around them. He finally tosses his rifle to the ground.

CLICK. The sound of a pistol's hammer being cocked.

BOSLEY (O.S.)

I got reason to give a beatin' to
some white folk. Don't make
yourself the one who gets it.

BOSLEY digs his Derringer deeper into the back of the farmer's skull. He looks to the other farmers, HELLFIRE emanating from his eyes-

BOSLEY

Best leave before you wearing his
brains on your boots.

Corporal Harris huffs over just as the three whites lower their weapons and back away. Harris tails them, nudging them with the bayonet tip of his empty rifle.

CORPORAL HARRIS

Go on now, cracka.

Ish approaches Bosley.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL

Looks like you got the hell beat
out of you.

BOSLEY

If I'm standin', I've had worse.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
You standin', alright.

BOSLEY
Then I've had worse. So will you if
ya'll keep pickin' handout spots as
bad as this.

(then)
Where's Agent Twitchell?

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
Left us on our own this one.

BOSLEY
(vexed)
May as well have tied you to a log
full of red ants. Let's get these
people to safety.

PRIVATE ISHMAEL
Yessir.

Together Ish, Bosley and Harris fan out, gathering the slaves as Eli and Freeman steer the two mule carts down the road.

INT. BALLROOM -- LOVE HOTEL - DAY

The elegant ballroom is being prepped for a celebration. A banner reads:

WELCOME HOME SOLDIERS

Abney pridefully directs his white cronies and their wives as they assist in the setup. He teases one of their young daughters, handing her a chocolate bar.

A string quartet sets up near the dance floor as a few of Abney's slaves set tables.

EXT. LOVE HOTEL - NIGHT

Moonlight shines down on the hotel entrance as dozens of carriages pull up, hailing from all around the state.

INT. LOVE HOTEL - HALLWAY OUTSIDE TWITCHELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sgt. Eli stands outside the door of Twitchell's room, cap in hand. Twitchell is in a white undershirt. They are mid-conversation regarding the incident:

TWITCHELL
And that is when Mr. Bosley showed
up?

SGT. ELI
Yes, Lieutenant.

TWITCHELL

And led you all to safety and told
you what a buffoon I was for having
picked that spot?

SGT. ELI

(hesitant)

That's right, Lieutenant.

TWITCHELL

Thank you for your report,
Sergeant. That'll be all.

Twitchell turns and heads back into his room. Eli stands at full attention and salutes as Twitchell SLAMS the door inches from his face. Eli remains stoic, but a contempt-filled glint flashes across his eyes.

INT. BALLROOM -- LOVE HOTEL - NIGHT

The gala is in full swing. The WHITE ARISTOCRACY of Louisiana mingle, drink, and dance. Abney plays host well, glad-handing plantation owners, socialites, and glitterati with fervor and charm.

A CONFEDERATE VETERAN GENERAL strolls up to him in full regalia, sword on his waist. Abney greets the vet with a secret handshake, then glances at a BLACK SLAVE WAITER who steps forward and clears his throat.

ABNEY

What is it, Charles?

BLACK WAITER

(trembling)

I... I must... I am very grateful
for everything, Massah Abney... you
know I am. It just... I am supposed
to have you sign this. It what they
havin' us all do now.

He shakily hands Abney a contract with an official government seal on it.

ABNEY

You must have *me* sign something?

Abney gives the slip of paper a cursory glance.

ABNEY

What is this absurdity?

BLACK WAITER

(swallows fear)

A labor contract. It... it outlines
my payment for services for
tonight... and... in the future.

(MORE)

BLACK WAITER (cont'd)
 (gathering courage)
 Agent Twitchell asked that I insist
 you sign the last two-

Abney turns away, taking a moment to read the contract in earnest. A deeply troubled look overcomes him. The quartet raise their bows and count themselves in, beginning a melancholy waltz.

Abney turns and thunders away from the waiter and General without saying a word, letting the contract slip out of his hand, exiting through the back kitchen. He barely misses--

TWITCHELL, wearing his tailored three-piece suit, as he enters the ballroom with the Sheriff by his side, making a statement.

White men look up from their dinner plates, noticing the dapper Yankee. Adele's brother, Gus, tracks Twitchell as he walks past, the two men locking eyes- Twitchell doffs his hat.

GUS
 (sotto)
 Charming.

Twitchell can't help but notice Adele standing by the bar because she's absolutely ravishing. He cuts toward her and we follow him from behind, every man and woman he passes sizing him up.

CUT TO:

INT. ANN'S ROOM - LOVE HOTEL - SAME

The unmistakable sound of a key slipping into a door lock, tumblers CLICKING into place, Ann fast asleep on her bed.

BACK TO:

THE GALA - SAME

Where Twitchell bellies up against the bar, flags down the bartender.

TWITCHELL
 (to bartender)
 Gin and tonic, please.

Adele turns at the sound of his New England accent, watching him stand there as he waits for his drink, tapping on the wooden bar top. She saunters over.

ADELE
 Something on your mind, Mr.
 Twitchell?

He pretends not to be surprised- takes his drink and hands over a bill.

TWITCHELL

I wouldn't want to spoil this moment with the obscenities of my work, Ms. Coleman.

CUT TO:

INT. ANN'S ROOM - SAME

The door creaks open, but the chain lock catches. Ann snaps awake, a look of sinking horror flashing across her face as an unknown attacker sledges his boot into the door- BOOM!

BACK TO:

THE GALA - SAME

Adele drinks, stares into Twitchell's dark, brooding eyes.

ADELE

You know what I realized today? You and I have something in common.

TWITCHELL

And what would that be?

ADELE

We are both out of place here.

TWITCHELL

You seem perfectly situated, what with your family owning the restaurant.

ADELE

Surely... but there is a whole world out there. I imagine you've seen a good deal more of it than I.

He studies her for a beat. She eyes his scar.

ADELE

Would you think me nosy if I asked how you received that scar?

Twitchell takes a sip of his drink.

TWITCHELL

Would you think me brazen if I asked you to dance?

She glances down at her feet to hide her smile. He tenderly takes her calfskin-gloved hand and wraps it around his arm. Nods to the dancing couples.

Adele looks off and catches her brother's burning gaze-
vacillates for a moment.

TWITCHELL
One waltz.

ADELE
I don't mean to be rude.

TWITCHELL
But what?

ADELE
But I can't. I am sorry.

Twitchell looks deep into her eyes, gives her a reassuring
nod.

TWITCHELL
Yet you want to.

ADELE
(low)
Yes, I do. Some other time perhaps.

She smiles at him- then unwraps her arm from his.

TWITCHELL
Guess I'll have to find another
partner.

He looks around the room and finds his target, nodding to a
OLD WOMAN wearing a mink. Adele follows his gaze.

TWITCHELL
(playful)
You think she'd be up for it?

He steps past a charmed Adele toward the woman.

EXT. FRONT STREET - NIGHT

Twitchell exits the hotel, whistling, tipsy. He ambles
toward the town square, pulling a cigarette from his gold
case. He stops to light it, but the wind blows out his
match.

TWITCHELL
(slurring)
God dammit.

He catches something out of the corner of his eye. Peers
over to the small town square, where the silhouette of a
person lays, draped head-to-toe in a blood-soaked, white
linen sheet, barely moving.

The wind blows, rustling the sheet. Twitchell, head on a
swivel, looks around- the streets are empty.

He hears voices from the gala echoing behind him. His hand immediately reaches for a holster that isn't there.

He slowly shuffles toward the body. Notices a blood-spattered note pinned to it. He hovers for a moment- steels himself, bends down, and pulls the note off. It reads:

GO HOME YANKEE

GURGLING sounds escape from under the sheet. Twitchell yanks the sheet off in one swift motion. Stumbles backwards, face pale, sickened.

Ann lays there, crying, bottom half of her face drenched in blood. She coughs and a fresh gush spews from her mouth, runs down her chin, and soaks deeper into her crimson-stained blouse.

Twitchell bends down and scoops her head up, getting a closer look. Sees that her tongue has been cut out.

TWITCHELL

No.

We rise away from Twitchell, all alone, kneeling over Ann on the cobblestone.

SMASH TO BLACK.

- END PILOT -