

CONFIDENTIAL

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Freedom Code

Based on a True Story and the Book
Lizzie's Story: A Slave Family's Journey to Freedom
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EXT. BRENT SLAVE CABIN - NIGHT

SUPER: KENTUCKY 1861

Moonlight shines on a 10 x 15 wooden shanty. An embroidered quilt on a clothes-line flaps in the wind.

At the edge of neighboring woods 2 Black men in ragged clothes, SAM and BILLY, (both 20s), hide in the bushes on their bellies, faces etched with fear as they wait for the quilt to settle.

Dogs bark in the distance.

SAM

Can you see the code?

BILLY

The wind keeps blowing it.

The barks grow nearer.

SAM

Go closer before we're dog meat.

BILLY

Why me? At least we're hidden here.

SAM

This is the only station for days.

A gunshot rings out behind them.

They dart towards the quilt, trying to stay low.

Male voices shout as a hound dog breaks through the tree line.

Billy catches sight of a pattern of blocks on the quilt.

BILLY

It's the tumbling blocks! It means a wagon's close by. We gotta go.

SAM

Which way?

BILLY

I don't know. I just read the blocks. Don't you know any codes?

SAM

I know the codes. I just thought if you saw the blocks, you saw the rest! Boy, I taught you the codes.

The dog howls.

Sam makes a dash for the quilt, grabs a corner to hold it still. He darts back and grabs Billy crouched in the grass.

SAM
Wagon wheel.

BILLY
Pray the blacksmith is near. Run!

EXT. SKY - TWILIGHT

Squawking Canadian geese fly in V-formation in the direction of the North Star and Little Dipper.

Back silhouettes of LEAH BRENT (30s), petite and calm, in a meager slave dress and apron with a burlap bag slung over her shoulder, and DELCY BRENT (7), an adorable, mischievous, spirited, headstrong girl, walk side by side along a dirt path. Leah tenderly takes hold of Delcy's hand.

Whistling wind shakes branches of trees along the path. The silhouette of Delcy is shivering. Leah reaches into the bag, pulls out a quilt with colorful square patterns and wraps it around the backs of Delcy and herself. They keep walking towards the North Star. Above them, squawking geese fly in that same direction.

INT. BRENT CABIN - TWILIGHT

What's left of daylight shines through a single front window illuminating a wooden table with jars of fruit in the middle.

On the floor across from the hearth a hanging sheet separates one double straw mattress from three small straw mattresses. This is a one-room home for the entire Brent family, but not by choice. They are enslaved.

Leah sits in a pecan rocking chair quietly sewing a square into a quilt. It is a pattern of triangles depicting flying geese that point to an adjacent square of the North Star.

Delcy leans on Leah's knee, watching the stitches poke through. She tests Leah by repeatedly putting her hand in the way of the needle. Leah calmly moves it each time and Delcy giggles.

DELCY
I want to make a quilt.

LEAH

Don't wish for that. By the time
you can handle a needle, no one
should need these quilts.

Delcy is confused by what she means, but more focused on the pattern. She fingers the square of the Flying Geese and her hand moves upwards to the square with the North Star.

DELICY

What are these, Mama?

LEAH

These are geese flying to the
North Star. But that's our secret.

DELICY

I want to fly.

LEAH

I want you to fly too, Delcy.

Delcy flits to the table and reaches for a jar of red poke-berries. Her hand can barely wrap around it, so it falls to the wooden plank floor and shatters. Shards of broken glass and red juice explode. Leah leans over to grab Delcy away from the broken glass, but pricks herself with the needle. She winces, and grabs her finger to stop the bleeding.

Delcy is delighted at the red pattern of the spill, bends down to touch it, and cuts her finger on the glass.

DELICY

Ow.

No matter, it's all too intriguing. So ignoring the pain, Delcy smiles, mixes her blood with the juice as if finger painting and dabs a bit on her face and dress. In fun, she grabs the quilt, dripping blood and juice on it.

LEAH

No! Delcy, no!

Leah moves to strike Delcy but sees the blood from her own cut finger mingle with Delcy's on the quilt and pauses. Before Leah can strike Delcy, ELI BRENT (30s), strong, ruggedly handsome with loving, kind eyes and a calm protective presence and wearing farm clothes, enters and gently grabs Leah's hand away from Delcy.

ELI

Don't Leah. She'll get enough
slaps in her life from Massa Lloyd
and Miss Sarah.

Putting down her hand, Leah considers the quilt stain and looks down in defeat. Delcy smiles mischievously, dances with joy, and runs to hug Eli, smearing blood on his shirt.

Sounds of horses and men's voices outside startle them all. Leah quickly hides the quilt under a floorboard. Eli looks over, shakes his head and whispers.

ELI

You're gonna get us killed, Leah.

Leah closes the floorboard, covers it with a mat, pulls Delcy close and covers her mouth to keep her quiet. Delcy squirms to speak and tries to free herself from Leah's grip.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Catapulting out the door, closing it behind him, Eli plants himself protectively on the front stoop, tucking in his shirt to hide the blood stain.

FOUR WHITE MEN on horses ride to Eli on the stoop. In the lead is LLOYD SHEFF (50s), a well-groomed plantation owner in a Laredo hat, long dark jacket, and boots. He is bitter as hell at not being richer than he is, despite his obvious wealth. Behind Lloyd are his two sons, PAUL (26), and TOM (24), and a disheveled neighbor, GEORGE (40). Eli eyes their guns.

LLOYD

George here says his two slaves ran away. See anyone pass by, Eli?

ELI

No, Massa Lloyd. Sure didn't.

LLOYD

You know what happens to anyone who helps them run away?

ELI

Yes, sir.

GEORGE

(dismounting)
Maybe we should have a look inside.

Eli masks his nerves. Lloyd starts to push past Eli when, in the distance, dogs bark, distracting the men.

LLOYD

Sounds like the dogs found 'em.

Lloyd leads the group off at a gallop.

EXT. KENTUCKY WOODS - NIGHT

Emerging from the distant woods, Sam and Billy see a house with a clothes line and a hanging quilt. Getting closer, a "Circular Wagon Wheel" code pattern comes into view.

SAM

This is it. Means the wagon's here,
so it's safe.

Tiptoeing to the back of the house, the boys meet PETE (50s), the blacksmith, a dignified Black man with a mule-drawn wagon who waves them into it. Sam and Billy climb into the false bottom of the wagon and lay in the cramped space holding each other close, eyes wide with fear. Pete covers the false bottom with tools and straw, climbs aboard, and drives off.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

A wagon with a WHITE DRIVER heads towards the mule-drawn wagon and slows. He looks over into the back of the wagon. Pete also slows, takes a deep breath. Eyeing Pete, the white driver speeds his wagon away. Pete exhales with relief.

EXT. SHEFF TOBACCO FIELDS - DAY

Delcy joyfully runs wild in the field, carelessly yanking at tobacco plants as brothers REUBEN (20), tall and responsible, with controlled anger, and JOSH (18), small but strong, impulsive and sensitive, carefully pull up plants to keep the roots intact.

REUBEN

Delcy, stop it! If Massa Lloyd
sees you breaking them, we'll get
a whipping... and so will you.

Delcy pulls out a plant, strokes its stalk and thick leaves, then waves it like a magic wand, raising it high like a flag and marching with it. Then with a flourish she lashes her backside with it, laughing.

DELCY

Well, Reuben, I'll just take these
plants and whip him right back!

JOSH

(laughing)
I'd love to see someone do it.

REUBEN

That bad man will be no match for
Delcy, right Josh?

INT. SHEFF MANSION PARLOR - DAY

Leah, in a long grey servant dress and white apron, serves tea to Lloyd's wife, SARAH (40s), a prim Southern belle.

Sarah looks down her nose at Leah, at first glance critical and a bit snooty, but cracks of a fragile, unstable, conflicted interior and hidden torment hover just beneath.

Delcy plays nearby and knocks over a vase. Sarah slaps Leah.

SARAH

How many times must I tell you to keep that child still and quiet?

LEAH

Sorry, Miss Sarah, it won't happen again.

SARAH

Better not, or they'll be more to come.

Leah yanks Delcy hard to cling to her skirt as she serves.

DELCY

Owww!

LEAH

Hush, child. Behave yourself.

Delcy scowls, pushes Leah away, and runs out.

INT. PEARLIE'S CABIN - NIGHT

PEARLIE (50s), a motherly Head house slave, helps Leah carry a basket through the front door. Pearlle then lifts a floorboard and pulls out a "Sampler" quilt made up of squares of all the quilt code patterns.

PEARLIE

These squares came with me from Tennessee tucked in my underwear.

Leah's eyes go wide.

PEARLIE

If I put 'em back now, I may never find 'em again.

Leah smiles.

LEAH

Thank you for caring for us,
Pearlie... and for teaching us the
language after we were sold and
brought here.

PEARLIE

You're family to me. And you've
proven trustworthy. So it's time you
learned *all* the secret quilt codes.

LEAH

I feel I must do *something*, but if
I know *all* the codes won't it put
my family at risk? Maybe I
shouldn't learn any more of them.

PEARLIE

Leah. We're all at risk every day,
codes or *not*. It's the burden we
carry... but it's lifted knowing just
how many I freed by sewing these.

Leah looks out the window at the fields where Eli works. She is
thoughtful, wondering if the risk to her family is worth it.

PEARLIE

I'd rather be remembered for
showing you and the others how to
find freedom, than for teaching
you how to be a good house slave.

Leah exhales the weight of the world and considers the sample
patterns.

LEAH

So we don't have to sew *full*
quilts?

PEARLIE

No. Not always. The code squares
travel better.

EXT. BLACKSMITH'S BARN - NIGHT

Sam and Billy climb quickly out of the blacksmith's wagon and
duck into the open barn. Pete does a quick scan of his
blacksmith property to make sure no one is lurking. Then he
follows the boys inside and shuts the barn door.

INT. BLACKSMITH'S BARN - NIGHT

Pete pitches a pile of loose hay on the ground.

It reveals a small hidden panel in the floor. He opens it and pulls out a flour sack and, out of that, a wrapped bread loaf.

PEARLIE (V.O.)

The blacksmiths help deliver the squares to quilt-makers and then the quilts to safe houses. The quilts help guide those seeking freedom.

Sam and Billy break into the bread and eat it ravenously. They look at Pete in surprise when they find a quilt square hidden in the loaf of bread. The pattern on the square is that of a "Bow Tie" code.

PETE

That's for your next stop. Make sure to keep it somewhere safe.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

SUPER: MICHIGAN

Sam and Billy wade through a shallow part of a river, gripping onto each other as they jump to the riverbank where a small house sits. Distant dogs bark.

Sam reaches down into his underwear and pulls out the "Bow Tie" quilt square. They look at the house where a quilt with the same code hangs in the window.

PEARLIE (V.O.)

The Bow Tie code means the station-masters will change the fugitives' clothes for those of freed Northern people's clothes.

EXT./INT. MICHIGAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Sam and Billy slowly approach a house with a quilt in a window like a curtain. Checking the area, they knock on the door. A Black couple opens the door, hurries them in and hugs them. Sam and Billy change into freed people's clothes.

EXT. CANADIAN BORDER - DAY

SUPER: CANADA

Crossing the Canadian border, Sam and Billy in fresh clothes see a quilt hanging on a clothesline with a "Rose Wreath" code in its pattern. They breathe a sigh of relief and jump up and down. A Canadian family steps out - and teary-eyed, they all embrace.

PEARLIE (V.O.)

The Rose Wreath code is the best.
When fugitives see this, they know
they have made it to freedom.

INT. PEARLIE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Leah watches Pearlle proudly smooth out the sampler quilt.

LEAH

Where d'ya learn these codes?

PEARLIE

In Tennessee. Before I was sold here, I was a trusted 'Head' house slave, so my owner didn't watch me too close. The blacksmith got the codes from abolitionists and taught me. Then I taught the enslaved women to sew without telling them what the pictures meant.

LEAH

Why couldn't you tell them?

PEARLIE

People could snitch for money. And if word got out anyone involved would be killed, for sure. So only the stationmasters and the trusted blacksmiths know what's to know. That's why fugitives have to memorize them exactly. It's not always easy to do though.

LEAH

And the spiritual songs?

PEARLIE

Yes. Many are musical codes too.

LEAH

Do you ever worry for your children if you get caught?

PEARLIE

The first owner raped me so many times it damaged my insides, so I couldn't have any.

Leah embraces Pearlle.

LEAH

How come you don't use the codes to escape yourself?

PEARLIE

I chose to stay here to help.

Leah thinks on that and hugs Pearlle again.

PEARLIE

I got to get blacksmith Pete a new batch of quilt codes soon. I could use some help, and *you'd* be doing some good.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

As Delcy, Reuben, and Josh sleep, Leah and Eli sit at the table in serious discussion.

LEAH

I'm gonna stop quilting. Got some slaves caught and killed. It puts our family at risk.

ELI

I'm not going to say it's not dangerous, and *I* thought that too, but on the other hand, don't we want freedom and a better life for our children and for other slaves?

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT - LATER

In front of the hearth's fading fire, Leah sits alone, her hands in prayer.

She lifts her head and stares into the smoldering embers. The red and orange flecks morph into the quilt patterns from Pearlle's sampler: Flying Geese, Bears Paw, Crossroads, North Star, Tumbling Blocks, Sailboat, Log Cabin, Bow Tie, Broken Dish.

Shaking her head clear, she folds up the stained quilt with the "Flying Geese" pattern and puts it under the floor board, gently humming, "*Now Let Me Fly.*"

EXT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Pearlie hangs laundry on the clothes line, struggling with a big quilt. Leah comes out and helps her.

PEARLIE
Made up your mind about the codes?

LEAH
(with conviction)
Yes. I'll keep doing it.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

As Leah sews while in her rocking chair, Delcy sneaks up from behind and puts her arms around Leah's neck.

DELICY
Boo!

Leah is startled, but seeing Delcy smiles lovingly at her.

DELICY
What you making, mama?

Leah holds up a small corn husk doll with a scrap of fabric for a skirt.

LEAH
A surprise. A new friend for you.

DELICY
I love it! I don't have any friends, except for my brothers.

LEAH
When you don't know what to do or say, hug her and ask, what would mama want me to say or do? That should keep you outta trouble.

DELICY
What's she sayin' now?

LEAH
She says, Delcy, don't ever talk back to Massa Lloyd and Miss Sarah, no matter what, or they'll whip you.

DELICY
Dolls don't talk like that!

LEAH

This one tells the truth. That's what makes it special.

DEL CY

I'll call her Me-Ma. For me and you, Mama.

Bursting with joy, Delcy hugs the doll and Leah. Leah calms her down and hands her the quilt she was working on.

DEL CY

What are those pictures?

LEAH

Bear paws. A mama bear protects her babies and she will attack if they are in danger. If you are ever in danger, I'll make a bear paw sign with my hand to warn you.

Making a fist, Leah holds it out with fingers pointed down. Delcy makes a clenched fist and holds it up in the air like a boxing pose and punches it forward.

DEL CY

Like this?

LEAH

No, baby, that fist is when you're angry and ready to fight. When I turn my fist down, that'll be our secret code to warn of danger.

Ignoring Leah, Delcy turns her fist up, bends her elbow and punches it forward in the air as if she is sparring.

DEL CY

This is what *I* do to protect us.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Delcy plays with the doll and quilt, singing to herself.

DEL CY

Just me and you Me-Ma. Like me and Mama, together.

Delcy turns her fist down like a bear paw and holds it up as a warning to the doll.

EXT. FIELD BETWEEN BRENT CABIN AND SHEFF BARN - NIGHT

Under moonlight, Leah tiptoes to the barn and enters. Delcy follows with her doll and watches unseen from the barn door.

INT. SHEFF BARN - NIGHT

FUGITIVE SLAVE 1 (20s), trembles in a hay pile. Leah holds out the Monkey Wrench quilt pattern.

LEAH

Memorize this. Cross the field.
You'll see a safe house with this
Monkey Wrench quilt code. From
there a wagon'll take you to the
river to cross to freedom.

She hands him the square.

LEAH

Take it with you, match it to a
quilt that looks the same hanging
from a clothes line. That'll be the
safe house. Just be sure and keep
it hidden.

FUGITIVE SLAVE #1

Thank you. You're mighty kind.

Leah gets in his face, serious enough to scare him.

LEAH

Don't you tell anyone what it is,
or where you got it, or we'll all
be dead!

EXT. SHEFF BARN - NIGHT

At the door, Delcy pulls back in horror and races away.

EXT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Lloyd sits haughtily in a tall armchair surrounded by THREE MALE PLANTATION OWNER GUESTS (50s), on chairs, clearly all lower than his. All laugh at the conversation as Leah serves drinks.

Delcy clutches her doll and peers through the open door to listen. Pearlie holds her back from running into the parlor.

LLOYD

I hear old man Andrew done catching
more than coon in the woods.

The Four Men laugh.

PLANTATION OWNER GUEST #1

At least coon you can eat.

PLANTATION OWNER GUEST #2

It's a lot-ta work catching runaways.

LLOYD

Not to mention the waste of money
using up quite a bit of rope and
good firewood. Better not find *my*
slaves runnin' away.

INT. KITCHEN, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Pearlie wrangles Delcy away from the door.

PEARLIE

You can't be seen when Massa has
guests, or your mama'll be whipped
again. And don't you be listening
to grown-up talk.

Delcy wiggles loose from Pearlie, pouts, and sneaks back to
the cracked open parlor door to watch Leah serving the Guests.

PEARLIE

Girl, you are a handful.

As the Guests stand to leave, Leah sees Delcy in the doorway
and thinks fast.

LEAH

Delcy, bring buttermilk for Massa.
He loves his buttermilk.

Guests depart. Pearlie hands Delcy a glass of buttermilk. Delcy
hesitates, gripped with fear.

DELICY

I can't. I don't want Mama whipped.

PEARLIE

Slave children ain't allowed in
the room when guests are there.
But it's okay if Lloyd is alone.

DEL CY
Stupid rules!

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy stomps in with Me-Ma to hand Lloyd the milk. He glares at Leah, then at Delcy and her doll.

LLOYD
Oh, pickaninny! What you got there?

Delcy hides the doll behind her back.

LLOYD
I'm talking to you, girl. Answer me.
What are you holding?

She looks at her mother who stares at the floor. Then, slowly reveals the doll to Lloyd.

DEL CY
My friend, Me-Ma.

Before Delcy completely reveals the doll, he grabs it.

LLOYD
What's a Me-Ma? Let me see.

Without a glance at it, Lloyd throws it in the fire.

DEL CY
Noooooooo! Me-Ma!

LLOYD
That's what happens to runaway
slaves when we catch 'em.

Horrified at the sight of her burning doll, Delcy darts back to the kitchen straight to Pearlie and cries hysterically.

EXT. SHEFF TOBACCO FIELDS - DAY

Laughing, Eli, Leah, Josh, Reuben and Delcy race through fields, fall down, rolling and hugging each other. Leah spreads out a blanket, basket and food, as they sit to eat.

LEAH
(to Eli)
I love Sundays. We can all be
together for a few hours.

ELI
Thank You, for keeping our family
together, O Lord.

The family sings the spiritual, "*Let Us Break Bread Together.*"

DELICY
I wish Me-Ma was here. *She was*
family and mean old Massa Lloyd
killed her!

Leah puts her arms around Delcy and kisses her, then reaches out to pull Eli, Josh, and Reuben, for a family hug. Reuben and Josh tickle Delcy to try and cheer her up.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

The family enters from the picnic and sees Delcy's singed doll on her bed. Delcy's eyes light up. She runs to it, hugs and kisses it.

DELICY
Me-Ma's back!

Leah and Eli look at the doll and at each other, unsure how it got there. Both shrug.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Eli and Leah sleep on one side of the hanging sheet, and Delcy, Josh, and Reuben on the other. Eli tosses, grunts and snores. His arms thrash as he fights his way through a nightmare. His scream wakens Delcy. She rushes to Leah, who hurries her to the rocking chair.

DELICY
Why does Papa scream at night?

Eli wakes and wipes the sweat from his brow.

LEAH
He remembers our capture in Africa.

ELI
Stop. She don't need to know that.

LEAH
Yes, she does. Who's gonna tell
the story *after* us so no one ever
forgets?

EXT. SHEFF TOBACCO FIELDS - DAY

Delcy and her brothers race through the field, laughing and chasing each other. Delcy skips to a creek and sees a rope hanging from a tree. She runs to it as her brothers catch up.

DELICY

Lift me up so I can swing.

Josh looks anxiously at Reuben.

REUBEN

She don't know.

DELICY

What don't I know?

JOSH

We don't play with ropes hanging from trees.

DELICY

Are you afraid?

Delcy starts to climb the tree. Josh pulls her back down.

DELICY

Why's everyone so scared?

REUBEN

Don't ask so many questions.

DELICY

That's what Mama said when I saw her in the barn showing a man a quilt.

REUBEN

Shut up about *that* or you'll get us all whipped by Massa, or killed!

DELICY

That's what *she* said.

Swatting Josh's hand away, Delcy runs off and taunts them.

DELICY

Stupid old quilt can't hurt nobody. Mama makes quilts. Mama makes...

REUBEN

(threateningly)

Say that again and they will be the last words you'll ever say!

DELCY
No one gonna shut *me* up!

EXT. SHEFF TOBACCO FIELDS - DAY

As Josh pull up leaves, Lloyd approaches him.

LLOYD
Josh. You're doing a mighty fine
job with those plants.

Lloyd strokes Josh's head in a loving way, then pulls a cookie from his pocket and holds it out to Josh. Josh takes the cookie. Lloyd pats his head.

LLOYD
We're friends, right?

JOSH
Yes, sir.

Josh eats the cookie, crumbs all over his mouth. Lloyd smiles.

EXT. KENTUCKY RIVERBANK - DAY

FLASHBACK:

YOUNG LLOYD SHEFF (10), wanders the bank alone, until he sees a YOUNG BLACK BOY (10), who looks a bit like Josh. Young Lloyd sits close by him and they watch the river flow. Young Lloyd pulls a cookie from his pocket and hands it to the boy. The boy is both surprised and afraid. Young Lloyd smiles and nods. The boy's eyes light up and he eats the cookie.

YOUNG LLOYD'S FATHER (O.S.)
Lloyd! Get your behind over here! I
better not catch you playing with
Nigras again. Ever!

Young Lloyd and the Young Black Boy look at each other with fear and quickly part. The Young Black Boy runs to hide in nearby trees, and a scared-to-death Young Lloyd runs to his father - an imposing plantation owner. His father takes out his belt, whips Lloyd, making a lash that goes from the boy's back around to his stomach. The boy screams.

EXT. SHEFF TOBACCO FIELDS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Lloyd watches Josh enjoy the cookie, shakes off the memory.

LLOYD
I miss my little friend.

Lloyd leaves. Josh resumes pulling up tobacco leaves. Delcy runs to him.

DELCY
(looking closely)
Why are there cookie crumbs on your lips?

JOSH
Don't have any crumbs on me.

DELCY
Look at you. They dripping from your lips like puke. Where d'ya get them from?

JOSH
From nowhere.

DELCY
Take me to nowhere then so I can get some too! Where's nowhere?

JOSH
Can't tell you.

DELCY
I'm telling Mama you taking cookies from that evil snake. And why are you so special? You get cookies from Massa... and I get my doll burned.

JOSH
Maybe coz I'm a boy and you is just...

DELCY
Just *what*?!

Enraged, Delcy tackles Josh and knocks him down, pinning him.

JOSH
An angry girl that's gonna get us all in trouble.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

In a mule-drawn wagon, Eli and Reuben ride down a main street bustling with shops and horse-drawn buggies driven by slaves in uniform for White Socialites.

ELI

You and your brother are at a point where you should see life outside the farm. The Good Lord willing, one day it'll be easier for the whole family to be free to come to town.

REUBEN

Whoa! Look at the fancy jackets on those drivers... and those white women dressed like princesses.

ELI

Son, never, and I mean *never*, look at a white woman. Not even a peek!

REUBEN

Why they dressed like that if nobody can look?

ELI

Listen, Reuben. Negro men are tortured and hung for just looking in the same direction as a white woman.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy peeps out from under her blanket where she's supposed to be asleep. Leah and Eli are whispering to each other.

ELI

They're at an age where boys look. One slip-up and they'll be killed.

LEAH

They're more at risk on the run. I will not be the one who gives them a ticket to death.

ELI

How you think it sits with them knowing that their mama is helping others go free?

LEAH

And what happens when Delcy wants to join them?

Leah turns to the window to hide her tears, but moonlight makes them shine. Eli kisses her.

Reuben pops an eye open and nudges Josh.

Josh throws off the covers. He is dressed to go. Reuben does the same and they tiptoe over to Eli.

ELI

(soft)

Go to Pearlie's. She'll give you the codes for the rest of the way.

Delcy bounds out of bed.

DELICY

I want to go, too!

Leah gets up. Eli deflates at the scene.

REUBEN

When will you learn to be quiet?

LEAH

Don't yell at her. Can you imagine my heartache not being able to say goodbye to my boys?

Leah embraces them.

JOSH

You'll let us go, though?

LEAH

A mama knows when it's time for her babies to leave the nest.

DELICY

I'm going too!

REUBEN

(to Delcy)

We want to fight to make sure no man is made a slave.

DELICY

Or girl.

LEAH

Army won't take you. You too young.

JOSH

Besides, once we free we'll find a way to bring the family away from here.

DELICY

I don't want to wait.

Leah embraces the boys. Delcy squeezes in. Leah's heart-wrenching whimper make the boys tear up and hold her tight.

LEAH

A life of slavery is no life.

As Eli tears up, he wraps his arms around the family for a long embrace. After one last hug, the boys slip out.

LEAH

Oh, God, keep my babies safe. Don't let my babies die.

INT. PEARLIE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Josh and Reuben are on edge as Pearlle quickly explains the codes on a quilt.

PEARLIE

It's best to memorize these, but I know how you feel right now, so I'll give you the first one to take with you. Your mama sewed it.

They study the quilt. From beneath the floorboard Pearlle takes a "Log Cabin" quilt square with a black circle in the center.

PEARLIE

Follow the creek north 'til you reach the first house with this Log Cabin code. Look for a quilt hanging on a clothes line. If the center is red, don't stop. If it's yellow, be cautious and wait 'til they switch the square. A black center means it's safe. Knock four times on the door. White stationmasters will welcome you and hide you in their safe house 'til it's time to go. They will tell you what code to look for next.

Pearlle studies Reuben's and Josh's faces. Next, she points out a "Crossroads" pattern on the quilt.

JOSH

How does it end?

PEARLIE

When you see the Crossroads code in Cleveland, choose either to go through Michigan to freedom in Canada, or stay to fight in the war in Pennsylvania or New York.

JOSH

Mama says we too young to fight.

Pearlie with a sympathetic looks puts her arm around the petrified Josh and Reuben.

PEARLIE

You know not to breathe a word of these codes to anyone, don't you, or we'll all be killed?

The boys nod.

PEARLIE

At each safe house, stationmasters will show you different quilt codes to guide you to the next safe house. Some quilt codes are for directions, some for the time when it's safe to move, and some give warnings of places to avoid. Follow the codes exactly to stay safe.

Reuben tucks the log cabin square into his pants.

REUBEN

Don't worry... and thank you.

PEARLIE

I'll miss you both. You're like my own sons. May God watch out for you both and keep you safe.

Josh and Reuben hug Pearlie and slip out. Gazing through her window, Pearlie sings "*Steal Away*," wiping her tears as the boys disappear into the night.

EXT. SAFEHOUSE - NIGHT

Josh and Reuben peep out from bushes near a safe house with a quilt with a Log Cabin code with a black center hanging on a clothes line. Dogs bark in the distance.

REUBEN

This is the place.

JOSH

Hope those dogs not coming for us.

Suddenly in the darkness, something jumps on their backs. Josh and Reuben struggle, pull out their knives, whip around ready to attack - and stop short when they see Delcy tumble off their backs, giggling with delight.

REUBEN

You crazy girl! What you doing out here? You'll get us all killed!

DELGY

I'm not letting you go anywhere without *me*.

REUBEN

You *can't* come with us.

DELGY

Why not? Coz I'm a girl?

Josh believing that's true, pivots quickly with a reason.

JOSH

No, coz someone has to take care of Mama and Papa. They need you.

Delcy stands with pride.

REUBEN

Go back home and don't get caught. We'll come back for you, and Mama and Papa, and show everyone the way to freedom.

Swiftly, two large hands snatch Delcy from behind. Delcy screams and squirms as a large hand covers her mouth. Reuben is fast with his knife until they see it's Pearlle.

PEARLIE

You are outta your mind, Delcy! Go on boys. That black center means it's safe.

Pearlie holds Delcy and they hide in bushes, watching as the boys hurry to the door. A white stationmaster couple invites the boys in. Turning back towards the bushes and with a slight gesture so the couple doesn't notice, the boys give a quick wave.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Leah rocks in her chair, quilting and singing, "*Now Let Me Fly.*" Delcy plays at her feet.

DELGY

Why did Josh and Reuben go North?

LEAH

They didn't. They went to work on another farm.

DELICY

Don't lie to me, Mama. I saw where they went.

LEAH

Hush, child. Anyone asks, you didn't see nothing.

DELICY

What's freedom, anyway?

LEAH

The most beautiful feeling after love.

DELICY

Aren't we *free*?

LEAH

We was free in Africa. Not being beaten and not sleeping in fear until we were dragged here in chains and sold. I pray you'll be free one day, when you're not owned like an animal and told what to do or say.

DELICY

But I can talk all I want now. Why you hiding quilts in the barn?

Leah is exasperated and snaps, angrily.

LEAH

Until you're free, and if you want to stay safe, you obey me and do what I say!

Not used to this tone, Delcy, alarmed, swallows hard.

EXT. HOUSE AT A CROSSROAD IN FRONT OF A FOREST - DAY

Josh and Reuben see a house with a zigzag pattern made of curved fabric pieces: the "Drunkard Path" quilt code.

REUBEN

That's the *Drunkard Path* code. It means it's not safe and we gotta go another way.

JOSH

But I'm tired, and hungry.

REUBEN
Better than being dead.

Reuben grabs Josh. They back away and run into the woods. The noise of approaching horses, gunshots and men, carries from a distance.

EXT. SHEFF MANSION - MORNING

Leah, Delcy, and all the slaves gather around, their faces creased in pure anguish. Before them, Lloyd cracks a whip against Eli's back.

LLOYD
This is for your boys.

Delcy screams.

LLOYD
Let this be a lesson to all of you
if you help anyone run away. I lost
good money for what I paid for 'em.

DELICY
Stop it!

Delcy lunges toward Lloyd. Leah follows and pulls her back. Lloyd turns on his heel and catches Delcy with a single lash. She wails.

ELI
Massa Lloyd!

Lloyd gladly whips Eli once more. Leah does her best to contain her anguish and to be strong for Delcy. She shows her the bear paw fist, as if willing her the courage to go on.

INT. BRENT CABIN - TWILIGHT

Rattling chains from outside the cabin draws Eli and Leah to look out the window. They see a plantation owner, MR. CALHOUN, in a top hat, seated beside Lloyd in a mule-drawn wagon.

Mr. Calhoun snaps his whip at the mule. Eli and Leah pull away from the window in panic.

LEAH
That's never a good sign.

ELI
Delcy, run to Pearlie's and
hide.

DELICY
But...

ELI
 (shouts sternly)
 Do it now!

Eli grabs her to hug her tightly, pushes her towards Leah, who hugs her tighter, and then they push Delcy out the door to slip around the cabin unseen.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - TWILIGHT

Eli steps out and Leah clings to him from behind as the wagon settles to a stop. Delcy is nowhere to be seen.

In the distance, Sarah watches from the main house porch.

ELI
 Good day, Massa Lloyd.

LLOYD
 Eli, you know times are tough here for me. I got a plantation to keep up and children to feed.

LEAH
 So do we.

Eli darts a look at Leah to shush.

LLOYD
 We're strapped for cash now with the start of the war.

ELI
 What you saying, Massa Lloyd?

LLOYD
 Mr. Calhoun got a plantation owner who'll pay me good money for you so we can buy tobacco seeds.

LEAH
 Don't take him away! Please don't take my husband away!

LLOYD
 I'm gonna do you a big favor.

Leah and Eli clutch hands.

LLOYD
 I'm gonna sell you together.

Leah nearly buckles.

LEAH
Praise the Lord.

LLOYD
I want God to be happy with me.

LEAH
Thank you, thank you.

LLOYD
He'll buy you both and take you
right away.

LEAH
Let me get Delcy.

LLOYD
Delcy stays with us.

LEAH
But she's just a child. She can't
stay here without us.

LLOYD
Miss Sarah needs a house maid and
we ain't buying another slave.

Calhoun shackles Eli and Leah's legs and hands to the cart.
Leah dissolves in hysterics.

LEAH
(ear-piercing scream)
No! Please, let me get Delcy!

INT. PEARLIE'S CABIN - TWILIGHT

Pearlie hangs onto Delcy as she watches the scene unfold.

DELCY
Mama's screaming. I'm going back.

PEARLIE
Stay here!

Breaking free from Pearlle's arms, Delcy runs out.

EXT. ROAD LEADING OUT FROM SHEFF MANSION - TWILIGHT

Delcy darts from the cabin and sees the mule-drawn cart
disappear down the road into the twilight.

Pearlie catches up with her and holds her back.

The figures of her parents in chains following behind the cart get smaller and smaller. Geese fly overhead, squawking.

DEL CY
 (screaming)
 Mama! Papa! Don't leave me here!

Leah's agonizing wails fade as they disappear from sight. Delcy lunges to chase after them when Lloyd grabs her from behind. Pearlle knows better than to get between them.

Delcy struggles and breaks free to run down the road. Lloyd grabs her again. She screams, swings her arms in rage, and Lloyd smacks her.

On the porch, Sarah averts her eyes.

LLOYD
 You better stop crying and be still
 or I'll tar and feather you and
 give you something to *really* cry
 about.

Delcy frees herself from Lloyd's hold.

DEL CY
 Devil Massa! You're gonna pay for
 this one day.

Lloyd shakes his head and laughs.

LLOYD
 I already have. You're all mine.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy sits alone in the rocking chair and sobs with her quilt, then talks to her charred doll.

DEL CY
 It's my fault. For being bad they
 took Mama and Papa away. I'm
 scared, Me-Ma, I've never been
 alone before.

Delcy is alerted to a noise outside.

DEL CY
 Mama?

Delcy rushes to look out the window, but no one is there. Crushed, she cries and hugs her doll.

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - LATE AFTERNOON

Delcy is dressed properly with an apron over a prim pale colored dress. Pearlie hands her a tray with tea fixings on it and guides her to the table to serve tea to Sarah.

Sarah smacks Delcy's hand.

PEARLIE
 (whispers to Delcy)
 How many times have I told you how
 to set their cups and silverware?

Delcy throws a fit and knocks a cup to the floor. Sarah shoots Pearlie a concerned glance.

PEARLIE
 Sorry, Ms. Sarah. Delcy didn't pay
 no mind to learn this when her mama
 was serving here.

INT. KITCHEN, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Pearlie pulls Delcy in and reprimands her.

PEARLIE
 No matter where your anger comes
 from, and child you got it coming
 from everywhere, you cannot let them
 see it. Your place is different now.

DELICY
 I don't care if they see it. I'm
 not like all of you, 'Yes ma'am,
 yes sir', pretending to be happy.

PEARLIE
 You better care if you want to stay
 alive. Your mama wouldn't want you
 to act this way.

INT. DINING ROOM, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Pearlie hands a tray to Delcy. Delcy serves Lloyd and Sarah. Tasting it, Sarah throws a fork at Delcy.

SARAH
 This food's not hot enough. Don't
 ever bring me food that's not
 properly heated.

DEL CY
Yes, ma'am.

Delcy turns back to the kitchen.

DEL CY
(under her breath)
Witch.

Delcy returns with a steaming plate of hot food and slams it down in front of Sarah, knocking over a glass to the floor.

LLOYD
You gonna let her act that way, or
do I need to step in?

Sarah is as disgusted with him as she is with Delcy. She slaps Delcy's face. A tinge of regret has Sarah wipe her mouth.

Delcy screams and runs to the kitchen. Lloyd smiles, vindicated.

INT. KITCHEN. SHEFF MANSION - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Delcy's face is strewn with tears as she clings to Pearlle, who holds her tight. Sarah bursts through the door from the parlor to the kitchen, banging it open. Delcy panics in fear of another slap and screams, breaks free from Pearlle, and runs out the back kitchen door.

SARAH
You're gonna have to be a mama to
her now. She's a wild child, but
you must control her... at least
when Lloyd's around.

Pearlle is taken aback. Sarah shoots Pearlle a look pregnant with a silent message.

SARAH
If you get what I mean, Pearlle.

Pearlle grasps her meaning. She gives a knowing look and a nod.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

In a rocking chair, Pearlle hugs Delcy in her arms.

DEL CY
I'm gonna get him.

PEARLIE

Getting even's a battle where
nobody wins. Just do what they say
to save yourself. The woman you
grow up to be will thank the little
Delcy you are now.

EXT. SHEFF BARN - NIGHT

At a campfire behind the barn, a GROUP OF YOUNGER ENSLAVED people joke, laugh, and sing spirituals. DELCY (now 13) watches with TWO YOUNG TEEN MALES, one of whom wears an old straw hat too big for his head.

DELCY

They're all weak sheep. Laughing
and singing like they's rich.

TEEN MALE #1

What d'you expect them to do?

DELCY

They're slaves. Why they so happy?

TEEN MALE #2

We need to laugh, so we don't cry.

Delcy stands, mimicking them, to act out her point.

DELCY

They act like bound sheep to Massa
and Miss Sarah, always, "*Yes ma'am,*
this" and "*Yes sir, that.*"

TEEN MALE 1

Sit yo'self down, girl. You'd rather
see them say no and get a whipping?

DELCY

Why don't they stand up and fight?

The two Teenage Males roll their eyes thinking she's crazy.

DELCY

You're just like the grown-ups.
Scaredy cats. If you don't fight,
you'll be like your mama and papa.

TEEN MALE 1

If you don't watch what you say,
you'll get yo'self and all of us
whipped and made to work longer
hours with no food or water.

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy serves Lloyd's MALE GUESTS tea and eavesdrops.

LLOYD
Hear what happened on old Smith's
plantation yesterday?

GUEST 1
Those two runaway slave boys they
caught? I'da lynched 'em, myself.

Delcy's fear rattles a tea cup on its saucer.

LLOYD
Mind what you're doing girl, or
you're gonna spill hot tea over my
mighty fine guests.

Standing up tall, Delcy steadies her grip.

GUEST 1
They whipped the younger one until
he collapsed.

GUEST 2
The older wearing a big ol' straw
hat was strung up.

Delcy freezes, then drops the tea cup. It smashes into pieces
on the floor. Lloyd tosses her a look.

LLOYD
My slaves have it too good to run,
right, Delcy?

DELICY
(mutters)
Go to hell, you devil.

LLOYD
What you saying, girl!

DELICY
Would you like more tea, sir?

INT. SITTING ROOM, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy brings one of Leah's quilts to Sarah.

DELICY
I thought you'd like one of the
quilts mama made.

SARAH

That's nice of you. Thank you. I know your mother enjoyed making them.

Sarah looks at Delcy, who is frozen in place wondering if Sarah knew about the quilt codes. Sarah reaches out to pat Delcy's head just as Lloyd enters. Sarah quickly pulls her hand back and turns her back to Delcy so Lloyd doesn't see her caring gesture.

EXT. FIELD BETWEEN LLOYD'S HOUSE & BRENT CABIN - TWILIGHT

In the field, Delcy sees a young Black man, DANIEL (20s), in agony, blood seeping through his brown jacket.

DEL CY

Lord! What happened to you?

DANIEL

Fainted from fever working in the field. Massa called me lazy and whipped me.

Using her apron, Delcy wipes at the blood and comforts him.

DANIEL

If I don't get to freedom, I'll die.

DEL CY

Meet me in the barn tonight.

DANIEL

I'm not going after no slave girl and risk getting slaughtered!

DEL CY

This ain't for nothin' like that.

DANIEL

Pretty one like you? Hoping it was!

DEL CY

Don't be silly. I know a way to help you. Wait in the barn after dark... but don't tell a soul.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Owls hoot. Delcy creaks open the door and sees Daniel in his blood-stained jacket peep out from the hay. She pulls a quilt from a burlap bag, and spreads it out.

Daniel gets excited and sits up.

DANIEL
Where's the pattern?

DEL CY
What you talking about?

DANIEL
The *code* in the quilt.

DEL CY
What code?

DANIEL
Girl, you gonna get me killed! I
can't escape North without no
codes. I'll be back in a week and
you better have a quilt with codes.

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy serves Lloyd, Sarah, and Neighbors GEORGE and his well-dressed wife, KATHERINE (40s). Pearlie listens at the parlor door, out of their view.

GEORGE
I hear the South's losing, and some
of our young men are going North to
join the Union army.

LLOYD
And why white abolitionists are
helping slaves go North, I can't
imagine.

SARAH
Some of them have a heart.

Delcy freezes. The Guests look with shock at Sarah. Glaring at Sarah, Lloyd turns to his Guests apologetically.

LLOYD
Excuse me, please. Sarah dear,
follow me.

Delcy watches as Sarah and Lloyd step into a side alcove. Two slaps. Sarah whimpers.

LLOYD (O.S.)
Keep your *nigra* loving thoughts to
yourself or there'll be plenty more
of that.

EXT. SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Lloyd shows his Guests out and throws a newspaper into the trash bin before he strides inside. Pearlie sneaks behind him and, acting as if she has something to add to the trash, takes out the paper and hides it under her apron.

INT. PEARLIE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy watches Pearlie read the newspaper, then pulls a wadded scrap of material out from her waistband.

DEL CY

I got you these from Miss Sarah's sewing room.

PEARLIE

Leave the scrap hunting to me. I don't want you to get caught.

DEL CY

Why d'ya take the newspaper?

PEARLIE

The only way us folks get news is listening to the owner's talk, or to take their newspaper. I'd rather read than listen to what comes outta those mean old mouths.

DEL CY

Wish I could read. How d'ya learn?

PEARLIE

Watching them teach their children.

DEL CY

Sneaking! Everyone else can sneak, but when I did it to watch Mama give her quilts to blacksmith Pete for the runaways, I got in trouble.

Pearlie tries to avoid the subject by studying the paper.

PEARLIE

She did no such thing. And never say anything like that again.

DEL CY

I know what I saw. I tried to be like Mama and give one to a boy who got whipped, but then he said it was missing some codes...

DEL CY (CONT'D)

(she pauses)

Said he'd be back for 'em. What did he mean?

Pearlie tosses the paper aside, dead serious.

PEARLIE

You shouldn't be doing that! You put that boy's life at risk promising to show him a quilt, and not knowing what you are doing...

DEL CY

Then tell me.

PEARLIE

You're putting yours, and too many other lives at stake. You're not ready to handle it.

DEL CY

My life's already in danger with that ol' devil Massa and witchy Sarah.

PEARLIE

You're too loose with your talk and too headstrong for secrets.

Pearlie collects up the scraps of material and the paper.

DEL CY

I saw you show a quilt to my brothers the night they ran away. Must be codes to help them escape.

PEARLIE

(stern)

Forget the quilts! There were no codes. They just knew where to go.

DEL CY

Don't lie to me. You told the boys. A girl's as smart as a boy. I'll find out from someone else if you won't tell me.

PEARLIE

Lord have mercy! *Never tell anyone! Your life and the life of everyone who escapes, and the lives of every one who helps the boys, depends on keeping this secret!*

Delcy nods. The gravity finally sinks in.

EXT. CABIN OF ANOTHER SLAVE - DAY

Pearlie, with a burlap bag and Delcy in tow, approaches another slave's cabin on the plantation.

A mule-drawn wagon pulls up with Pete the Blacksmith. Pearlie exchanges hushed words with Pete.

PEARLIE

She promised that boy, Daniel.
She'll get us all killed if I don't
tell her.

PETE

Someone will have to carry on
Leah's work and your work someday,
and it must be someone smart. Codes
are difficult to learn, changing
with the day, the time, direction,
and which routes are safe.

PEARLIE

Delcy's so smart, it's scary.

Pete lifts a false bottom in the cart and puts Pearlie's bag of quilts into the opening below.

PETE

I'll put the word out that Daniel
needs to cross into Ohio.

MONTAGE:

BLACKSMITHS DISTRIBUTE QUILTS - From Missouri, Kentucky and Virginia safe houses, North to Canada.

- Pete rides his wagon to another BLACKSMITH and unloads tools with quilts hidden under hay.

- A WHITE COUPLE in a Northern town picks up a parcel from a Blacksmith's shop.

- The WOMAN from the White Couple takes out quilt code squares from the parcel and sews one into a quilt.

- BLACK WOMEN sit in a quilting bee.

- ANOTHER BLACKSMITH fills a wooden crate with quilts and covers them in hay, puts chains and horseshoes on top of the hay.

- A BLACK WOMAN hangs a quilt with her laundry, making sure it faces the woods.

- A WHITE WOMAN hangs a quilt in an upstairs window of her home and lights a lamp behind it.
- Pearlie takes Pete a loaf of fresh baked bread.
- In the woods, A RUNAWAY FAMILY shares the loaf of bread and finds a quilt code square in it.
- Pearlie pulls out her sampler quilt from the floorboard and shows all the codes to Delcy. Delcy studies them and is excited when she recognizes The Flying Geese code, then the Bear Paws. Delcy makes her fist.

INT. DAISY'S CABIN - DAY

Sitting in chairs in a circle in front of a hearth, FOUR SLAVE WOMEN each work on sewing quilt squares. Frail, DAISY (80), works on quilt squares on her lap.

QUILTING SLAVE WOMAN #1
Who was arguing in the Sheff house?

DAISY
The usual. Miss Sarah having a fit.

QUILTING SLAVE WOMAN #2
From one moment to the next you don't know if that broken woman will be Miss Witchy or Miss Nice. Like a fish outta water flipping from one side to another.

DAISY
She should-a married into a wealthy family like her own, but Lloyd courted her pretending to be richer than he was.

QUILTING SLAVE WOMAN #3
He was quite the handsome charmer then. Had all the women after him.

QUILTING SLAVE WOMAN #4
Yep, Miss Sarah should-a known he'd be a ladies' man. Even now...

Pearlie and Delcy enter. Pearlie sets down a burlap bag.

PEARLIE
Ladies, we have a new member of our Sunday quilting group. Delcy's ready to learn quilting like her mama.

Slave woman #1 gives a welcoming nod.

DAISY
Pearlie? You out of your mind?
Delcy's too wild.

Delcy lunges toward Daisy, but Pearlie holds her back.

PEARLIE
She'll be fine. Sit *down*, Delcy!

The Women work on the same quilt as they sing a spiritual.

DEL CY
(tears in her eyes)
Mama sang that all the time.

The sound of dogs barking grows nearer. The Women stop sewing. Pearlie grabs the quilt.

PEARLIE
Keep singing.

Pearlie, unseen by the others, hides the quilt under floor boards. Delcy comes up behind her and startles her.

DEL CY
Don't they know how to hide them?

PEARLIE
(whispering)
They don't know they're sewing
freedom codes... 'cept for Daisy.
When your mama left I couldn't
trust no one 'coz they could snitch
for money and we'd all be killed.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Delcy sneaks to the barn with a burlap bag. Daniel emerges from the hay. Delcy pulls out a quilt square with a sailboat on it.

DEL CY
This means go to the river and get
on a barge with a sailboat quilt.

DANIEL
Praise God! This is what I need.

He commits the quilt's "Sailboat" code to memory.

DANIEL
God bless you, girl.

She pulls out a smaller square of the "Tumbling Blocks" code.

DEL CY

These mean there is a conductor in the area who will lead you to safety. So you have to be ready.

DANIEL

They look like these other squares.

DEL CY

No. Those are something different. Pete says you have to go with the conductor who shows you this code. Take it with you.

DANIEL

I wish I could repay you.

DEL CY

You can. When you find my brothers, you tell 'em to come and get me. Go.

He takes the quilt square and hides it in his pants.

DANIEL

Why do you show me how to get outta here but don't escape yourself?

Delcy stares. Longing turns to frustration as she doesn't have an answer.

DANIEL

'Coz you a scaredy cat?

DEL CY

Ain't scared of nuttin'!

DANIEL

You make fun of everyone else, calling them scared if they don't leave, but you talkin' 'bout your own self.

He leaves. Delcy hears him singing softly '*Wading in the Water.*'

INT./EXT. DINING ROOM, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Sarah sits alone at the table. Delcy serves her lunch.

SARAH
 (nonchalant)
 A man and his wife were caught
 helping a young slave escape.

Delcy does her job, without engaging.

SARAH
 Quite a pity. For helping him
 escape the couple was killed. Don't
 know if the slave was lynched.

Delcy, gripped with panic, steadies herself.

EXT. DAISY'S CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy's hand lingers on the outside door. Confused, she turns to leave, turns back, hesitates, then steels herself to enter.

INT. DAISY'S CABIN - NIGHT

Daisy, Pearlie, and the other quilting Women stop sewing to look at Delcy's distraught face.

DELCY
 (off Pearlie's look)
 I can't do this no more.

Delcy runs out. Concerned, Pearlie passes her quilt to Daisy and rushes after her as best she can.

EXT. FIELD BETWEEN BRENT CABIN AND BARN - NIGHT

Lighting a small fire in the field, Delcy sets down a burlap bag and pulls out a quilt. She is about to toss it into the flames when Pearlie comes huffing up to her.

PEARLIE
 What you doing, child?

Ignoring her, Delcy lifts the quilt up to throw it into the fire. Pearlie hits her arm, knocking the quilt to the ground.

PEARLIE
 Why you burning the first quilt you
 made?

DELCY
 Won't do nobody no good but get
 people killed.

PEARLIE

No. They got thousands *freed*.

DELGY

Giving the codes...

(choking back her pain)

All I'm doing is sending them and
the stationmasters to their death.

Delcy lifts the quilt again to throw it in the fire. Pearlleie grabs it from her and hides it behind her back.

PEARLIE

Sewing these codes makes you a
hero, just like your mama. It was
her way of doing something in the
name of freedom.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Rocking in the rocker, Delcy fingers the quilt on her lap and then snaps up in a fit and hurls it across the room. She trounces all over the straw mattresses with Me-Ma until she falls down in a heap.

INT. BARN - DAY

RUTH, a thin Black woman (30s), cries and pleads with Delcy.

RUTH

You don't understand. My master's
going to sell me and my husband and
leave my girl with him.

Anguish crosses Delcy's face. She closes her eyes, thinking.

DELGY

Sorry, I can't do it. You don't
understand. Just one person dead
because the quilts weren't enough
is one too many.

Delcy looks away, turns, and walks out as Ruth weeps.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Angry, Delcy lifts her sampler quilt to throw it into the fire, but she has a change of heart and hugs the quilt tightly.

EXT. ROAD LEADING OUT FROM SHEFF MANSION - DAY

FLASHBACK: The mule-drawn cart, with Delcy's parents walking in chains behind, disappears far down the road into twilight as flying geese squawk overhead.

DELCY (V.O.)
Mama! Papa! No! Don't leave me!

END FLASHBACK

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The anger returns. She is paused by her clenched fist. She flexes her fingers in and out of the bear paw signal

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Sunlight streams in on Delcy asleep on the floor wrapped in the sampler quilt in front of the spent fire. She stirs, looks at the spent embers, stands and gathers the quilt into her sack. With confident resolve, she leaves.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Delcy hangs a "Bear Paw" quilt on a clothesline. Ruth, her HUSBAND and LITTLE DAUGHTER, watch from a crouching position hidden in the woods as Delcy hums "Steal Away" and turns the quilt right-side up.

The three stand to head into the woods when suddenly a wagon with BENJAMIN (70s) and Sarah come down the road. When the three see Delcy quickly turn the quilt upside down they freeze and crouch down to hide again.

As Sarah's cart slowly passes, Sarah looks at the hanging quilt as Delcy nonchalantly strokes creases out of it and calls out.

SARAH
Make me one like that.

Delcy smiles and nods, and Sarah's cart keeps driving. The three anxious slaves, still crouching, watch and wait. When Sarah is out of sight, Delcy turns the quilt right side up and continues to hum 'Steal Away.'

When the three see the quilt turned right side up, they stand to run through the woods. Ruth and her daughter look at Delcy, folding their hands in a thankful prayer.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

SUPER: 1865

Pete arrives in his wagon. He beams as he holds up a newspaper. The FIELD SLAVES stop picking to look at it.

PETE

Lincoln gave the Emancipation
Proclamation. We're free.

The Slaves gather together, cheering '*Hallelujah*' and dancing. Delcy watches from the edge of the field and calls to them.

DELCY

We're as free as a hog tied to a
spit. Ol' Massa and Miss Sarah will
never let us go free.

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

SUPER: 1868 - 3 YEARS AFTER EMANCIPATION

DELCY (15), serves tea to Lloyd and Sarah in a proper way.

LLOYD

Girl, you're so slow and clumsy. We
should've got rid of you long ago.

SARAH

She never does anything right but
it's hard to find good help these
days.

LLOYD

Delcy's the worst of the litter.
Not worth anything now with people
paying them as sharecroppers. In my
house they're still slaves to me.
Set 'em free? Over my dead body.
Should-a sold her off long ago.

DELCY

(sotto)

I wish you *had* sold me, you bastard.

LLOYD

What you saying? Say it to my face.

Lloyd removes his belt and whips her back. He sees Sarah look away. Delcy peers out from doubled over and sees Lloyd grab a "Bear Paw" quilt from Sarah's sofa and throw it into the blazing fire.

DELCY

Miss Sarah asked me to make that.

Delcy and Sarah quickly look at each other, then both turn to stare at the quilt burning in the fire.

DELCY

Throw *me* in the fire! It's the most warmth this house will ever get!

LLOYD

Maybe I will, you ungrateful pickaninny.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Delcy slams breakfast on the table for Lloyd.

LLOYD

And bring me a fresh glass of buttermilk.

INT. SHED - DAY

The lid is off the buttermilk barrel. Delcy holds her nose at the foul smell. She bristles at the flies in it, pours a glass and puts the lid back on.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Delcy sets the glass of spoiled buttermilk before Lloyd. He takes a sip, spits it out on the floor, and spots a fly in it. He grabs Delcy, puts the glass to her lips and forces her to drink the whole thing. She vomits on the floor.

Grabbing a buggy whip, Lloyd pushes her down to beat her. Delcy's face winces and she screams with each lash on her back. She stares at the buttermilk and vomit. Vengeance will heal her wounds. With gritted teeth, she nods to herself.

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Delcy flinches as Pearlle applies balm to the welts on her back and shoulders.

PEARLIE

That man's capable of much worse.
You best not to poke at him.

INT. PARLOR, MANSION - DAY

Delcy brings Lloyd tea. He sets down his newspaper to stare at her.

LLOYD

You have it good here. Don't have to travel far to look for work like those freed slaves... never knowing where they will find some.

In silent rage, Delcy purposely knocks over his cup of hot tea on his lap. He yells and jumps up. He backhands her face, pulls off his belt, and lashes her back and arms.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy clutches Me-Ma and her quilt, crying herself to sleep.

The door opens and a man's boots cross the floor. Footsteps wake Delcy. She hides under her quilt. Heavy breathing sends her into a shivering state of terror.

Lloyd pulls the covers off her and beats her mercilessly.

DELCY

Massa, stop it! Stop! Please.

Lloyd is panting hard and is sweaty.

LLOYD

You think you can get away with sassing me and breaking my things?

Lloyd mounts her as Delcy screams and struggles. He takes out a handkerchief and stuffs it in her mouth. Delcy struggles with muffled screams as he violently rapes her. Beneath him, her hands close in a clenched fist bear paw facing down as she grabs the bedding. When he's done, Lloyd pulls up his pants and smiles. A clenched fist turns to face upward wanting to fight.

LLOYD

Tell Sarah or anyone about this and I *will* throw you into the fire. Mind your place, or I'll give you more of it!

INT. SARAH'S BEDROOM - DAY

SUPER: 6 MONTHS LATER

Delcy washes Sarah's face and hands her a mirror.

Sarah holds the mirror up to Delcy's stomach tilted so Delcy can see her own belly in the mirror.

SARAH

You're fat as a house. You're with child.

DEL CY

No, ma'am.

SARAH

Think I'm blind? Or stupid? Who you been foolin' around with? Someone in town? You're just a child and you already laid with someone, didn't you?

DEL CY

No, ma'am.

SARAH

(slapping Delcy)

Don't lie to me. You're here to serve us. How can you do your duty to us with a child in your belly?

Sarah slaps Delcy.

SARAH

Whore. I knew you were trouble, but Lloyd kept you to save money from buying another slave. What a fool.

DEL CY

Yes, ma'am.

SARAH

Don't get cute with me. Better not catch you fooling around again.

DEL CY

No, ma'am.

SARAH

And you better not let this little bastard baby of yours get in the way of serving us, or I'll beat you 'til the cows come home.

INT. KITCHEN, MANSION - DAY

Delcy enters and tosses the dishes from her tray into the sink.

Pearlie comes to see what happened. Delcy breaks down and sobs.

DELCY

How can I ever love a baby in this hell? Every time Massa Lloyd looks at my belly I feel sick. Is my baby a child of the devil, or a child of God? Do I hate it, or love it? Wish Mama could tell me.

Pearlie hugs her and shushes her.

DELCY

Did Mama ever wonder whether or not to have me?

PEARLIE

She did. She wondered whether to have you or send you North with a runaway so you could be free. No mother should have to make that choice.

DELCY

What did she choose?

PEARLIE

Well, you're here, aren't you?

INT. DINING ROOM, SHEFF MANSION - NIGHT

Christmas decorations adorn the dining room. A howling snowstorm whips the windows as Sarah, Lloyd, their two sons, Paul and Tom, and meticulous daughter LIZA (30), all sing, "*Silent Night*."

Pregnant and ready to pop, Delcy sets out Christmas dinner. She clutches her belly, wincing.

DELCY

Owww!

LLOYD

(to Sarah)

Can't you keep that wretch quiet while we're singing?

Delcy connects with Lloyd's stare and shoots him a glare to kill. She turns her back to him and faces Sarah.

DELCY

I don't feel well.

Sarah balances Lloyd's demands and her hidden compassion.

SARAH

Ruin our Christmas Eve dinner? Oh,
well, if you must... just go.

EXT. FIELD BETWEEN HOUSE AND CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy fights through the snowstorm to reach her cabin and falls down in agony.

DELICY

Mama, I need you! I don't know how
to have a baby. O Lord, please help.

Delcy staggers through the blizzard to Pearlie's cabin and bangs on the door.

EXT. PATHWAY OUTSIDE PEARLIE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Aging Pearlie clutches her coat and scarf as she holds Delcy while the pair trudge through 6 inches of snow in the blizzard.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Pearlie boils water and finds cloths as Delcy screams with the pain. Pearlie rushes a pan to the bed as Delcy continues to wail in agony, and comforts and coaches her through the birth of the baby.

With a final scream, Delcy delivers the baby. Pearlie cuts the cord, washes the baby, and holds her up. Noticing the almost white skin Pearlie and Delcy exchange a silent glance.

PEARLIE

A beautiful baby girl on Christmas
day. No better gift. What d'ya want
to name her?

DELICY

Why don't you name her?

PEARLIE

I've delivered many a baby. But no
one's ever asked me to name a baby
before. Um. Let's call her Lizzie.

DELICY

Lizzie. At least you're born free.

INT. KITCHEN, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy places baby Lizzie in a box padded with cotton and a small quilt. She moves the box near the stove for warmth. SALLY (20s), the other kitchen help, watches.

INT. LIVING ROOM, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Exhausted, Delcy serves Lloyd and Sarah.

SARAH

Bring me more tea right now! And make sure it's hot.

INT./EXT. KITCHEN & LIVING ROOM

Frazzled, Delcy rushes to the kitchen with the tray, sees Lizzie sleeping, makes tea, returns to the living room, and returns back to the kitchen with an empty tray. Lizzie fusses and Delcy lifts her to step outside to nurse her.

LLOYD (O.S.)

Bring me more pie, girl! If I hear that baby cry again, it'll end up like your ugly doll baby.

Delcy freezes. Unseen by him, she raises her clenched fist in his direction, rushes to the kitchen with Lizzie, sets her down in the box, and picks up a pie to take to Lloyd.

SALLY

Who do those bastards think they are, working you like this? We're freed women now. You got your own baby to care for!

DELICY

I'm so tired. If I don't nurse Lizzie, she'll cry and they'll beat me for not keeping her quiet.

SALLY

So, leave.

Delcy looks at her as if she's lost her mind.

DELICY

Where am I gonna go? I got no money, no place to go, and a baby to look after.

SALLY

You won't have a baby to worry about
if you don't take the time to nurse
her. I'll give him his damn pie.

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Lloyd and Sarah sit in matching armchairs. Delcy brings tea.

LLOYD

I need you to work more hours.

DELICY

I need time to care for my baby.

LLOYD

No one told you to go and whore
yourself to make a baby.

SARAH

It's your own damn fault, Delcy,
enticing other slaves like that.

DELICY

(under her breath)
I'm not your slave anymore.

Lloyd launches out of his chair and gets in her face.

LLOYD

What you saying? Remember what
happens when you talk back?

SARAH

What happens?

LLOYD

She *knows*.

Sarah studies the two of them to unpick the meaning.

LLOYD

Gets all the Nigras so excited
they'll get her pregnant again.
Right, little miss whore?

SARAH

Darling, you're talking this way in
front of a fine lady.

LLOYD

She ain't no lady.

SARAH
No. But *I* am.

LLOYD
I can talk to you, or anyone else,
however I want. You are under my
roof. I'm the man here and don't
you forget it!

Delcy and Sarah exchange a brief glance of shared abuse, but Sarah quickly recovers her poise.

SARAH
Of course you are, my dear.

INT. SITTING ROOM, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy dusts. Lloyd sneaks up behind her, rubs his body against hers. She jumps and screams. Lloyd puts his hand over her mouth. Delcy eyes the fireplace tools.

LLOYD
What did I say about you or your
baby screaming? Don't make a sound.

Lloyd rubs on Delcy as she freezes in fear.

LLOYD
You know you want it.

Delcy shakes her head trying to yell, but Lloyd muffles her.

LLOYD
And when you get too old for me, I
look forward to little Lizzie
coming of age.

Delcy breaks free from Lloyd's grip.

DELICY
Touch me again, or touch her, and
that 'll be the last woman you ever
touch!

Lloyd steps back. Once the shock of her words passes, he erupts in laughter.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Pearlie sits with Delcy, rocking Lizzie to sleep in her arms. Delcy breaks down.

DELCY

Everything I've done to help others
find freedom was a waste of time.
Look at me. Lizzie will never be
free. I'm scared what he'll do to
her... but I have nowhere to go.

A knock at the door. Pearlie opens it and sees Pete. He
whispers to her, she smiles, and whispers something back.

PEARLIE

Delcy, come out. Pete has news that
will cheer you up.

Delcy wipes her eyes and carries Lizzie to the door.

PETE

I got word from that girl Ruth and
her family you helped years back.
They living free in Canada.

Delcy exhales a sigh of relief. She looks at Lizzie sleeping
in her arms and then looks up at the North Star and smiles.

DELCY

(to Lizzie)

One day you'll lead us to freedom.

Suddenly, Sarah appears. Rushing up with her lantern through
the darkness, she grabs Delcy's arm and drags her towards the
mansion. Delcy tries to break free. Pearlie pulls Lizzie out
of Delcy's arms.

INT. SHEFF MANSION - NIGHT

Sarah pulls Delcy inside and up the stairs. Sarah takes a key
out of her apron and unlocks and opens an attic door. A scream
comes from inside the room.

INT. ATTIC, SHEFF MANSION - NIGHT

Lying on a bed is ANNA (16), pale white and emaciated, with
crippled arms and legs and staring blankly at the ceiling.
She is blind. Delcy peers inside, shrieks, wets her pants and
turns to run. Anna responds with more screams.

Sarah pulls Delcy back with surprising strength. Delcy cowers
and hides behind her.

DEL CY

Please ma'am, I'm so sorry. Please don't beat me and lock me up here like you did this poor girl. I'll be good.

SARAH

This poor girl, you fool, is my daughter. This is Anna.

Delcy grips the door jamb to hold herself up.

SARAH

Your mother used to take care of her, then Pearlie... but she's too old. And now you're old enough.

DEL CY

How is it they never told me?

SARAH

If they had, we'd kill them. No one outside this house knows about Anna. And you mutter a word to anyone, Lloyd will lock you up here with her. Understand?

Delcy is in shock. Sarah shakes her.

SARAH

Do you understand me?

DEL CY

Yes, ma'am.

SARAH

Get the attic key from my pocket each day and feed and bathe her. Understand?

DEL CY

Yes, ma'am.

SARAH

She's blind and crippled, so you must do everything for her. Your mama took good care of her.

Delcy can't help but stare at Anna. Shortly, curiosity and compassion trump fear. Sarah turns to leave, closing the door behind her. Delcy considers Anna and speaks aloud, her voice quivering from the shock.

DELCY

Mercy me. I thought I had it bad.
Your own mama and papa done locked
you up here all these years? I
guess slaves aren't the only ones
who get abused in this world then.

Delcy's eyes land on the quilt she had made for Sarah, now used as a curtain in the sealed attic window. The "Log Cabin" pattern with the red circle takes on a new meaning.

INT. ATTIC ROOM - DAY

Delcy enters with a food tray in one hand and baby Lizzie in the other. She sets the tray on a table by Anna's bed, and Lizzie in a chair. She feeds Anna with care, then gently and lovingly combs Anna's hair and sings a spiritual to her. Anna smiles and reaches to stroke Delcy's cheek, with what motor skills she has. She leans into Delcy and clings to her with affection. Delcy hugs her.

DELCY

Being blind lets you love no matter
what color someone is, or you'd
never touch a person looking like
me. You're lucky to have that
special gift.

Delcy settles in the chair and nurses cooing Lizzie. Anna reaches out to touch Delcy and feels Lizzie being nursed in her arms. Anna looks wistful and sad.

ANNA

Baby Lizzie... lucky to have a
mother like you.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Pearlie, now withered with age, and Delcy sew. There's a comforting rhythm to their craft and bond.

DELCY

Miss Sarah said nobody knows.

PEARLIE

Yo' mama took care of her every day.

DELCY

What kind of mama locks up her own
child? Any child?

PEARLIE

The same kind who'd keep and beat slaves, even after they're freed sharecroppers. The same kind who think if you're not white or you're crippled, you're less than human.

DELCY

Ain't fair to Anna to be locked up.

PEARLIE

Then do something about it.

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

SUPER: 7 YEARS LATER

DELCY (now 23) cleans a table with light-skinned LIZZIE (7) at her heels. Sarah runs her finger on the table and holds it up. She's disgusted with the dust on it.

SARAH

Look at this! Why do we feed you and Lizzie when you're so sloppy?

DELCY

Sorry, Miss Sarah. Guess I'm tired.

SARAH

Tired? Doing what? All you have to do is cook for Lloyd, Anna, and me.

LIZZIE

Mama has no time to play with me.

Sarah side eyes her.

SARAH

She shouldn't have had you if she couldn't care for you.

Delcy gasps and hugs Lizzie to her side.

SARAH

From now on, stay after dinner on Sundays and bake Lloyd those fine sweet potato pies he loves.

DELCY

But that's my only night to spend time with Lizzie.

SARAH

Don't be ungrateful. If it weren't for us, you'd be out in a field tending tobacco like the others... half dead from the sun... and half dead from whippings.

DEL CY

Yes ma'am. I'm thankful for that.

Sarah studies her. Lizzie clings onto Delcy's legs and stares Sarah down.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Lizzie follows Delcy inside and gives Anna a hug. Lizzie pulls out Delcy's burned Me-Ma doll and hands it to Anna. Anna pulls her hand back at the feel of the burned parts.

LIZZIE

She's messed up 'coz he threw her in the fire. Did he throw you in the fire, too?

ANNA

I think I was born this way.

Lizzie looks at Anna, back at the doll, and back at Anna, then reaches out and pats Anna's hand.

DEL CY

How d'ya learn to speak?

ANNA

Some kind lady who cared for me taught me.

DEL CY

Did you ever think to scream for help so people visiting could rescue you?

ANNA

I was warned they'd kill me if I screamed. Besides, it's not as though I could escape alone.

DEL CY

How'd they keep you quiet as a baby?

ANNA

Open the top drawer and pull out the handkerchief.

Delcy opens the drawer and takes it out.

ANNA

They tied that around my face to
cover my mouth to keep me quiet.

EXT. BACK OF THE OUTHOUSE - DAY

Lizzie sits with Sarah's GRANDSON (7), and GRANDDAUGHTER (9),
sharing a picture book.

Hearing MALE VOICES from the mansion, Lizzie jumps and hides
the book under the granddaughter's backside.

GRANDSON

What's wrong with you?

LIZZIE

If they catch me reading, they'll
whip me.

GRANDDAUGHTER

No one's ever whipped *us* for reading.

LIZZIE

'Coz you's white.

GRANDDAUGHTER

That's stupid... and not fair!

LIZZIE

You talk more sense than your
grandparents.

INT. ATTIC ROOM - DAY

Slipping a newspaper from her dress, Delcy sits down on the
bed with Anna and Lizzie.

DELCY

(to Anna)

I want you to feel this. People
read stories from this paper.

ANNA

What's reading?

DELCY

It's letters to make words on paper.

ANNA

Sounds like a secret code.

Delcy pauses and looks at the quilt that hangs in her window.

DELICY

That's right. A code on paper. If you learn the code, you can read what's going on everywhere. It's freedom for your mind.

ANNA

I want to learn to read.

DELICY

I only know a few words Pearlle showed me from this old newspaper.

LIZZIE

I can read lots of words. Miss Sarah's grandchildren been sharing their book behind the outhouse.

Delcy is stunned at Lizzie but keeps quiet.

ANNA

Teach me, too. Can you read to me?

DELICY

Okay, here's your first lesson. President Lincoln freed the slaves after a terrible war where soldiers died so slaves would be free.

ANNA

What is a slave?

DELICY

When someone owns another person and won't let them leave and makes them do as they say. That person is called a slave.

ANNA

Oh, like me. I think I must be a slave.

DELICY

You and me both.

(hugs Anna)

I'm gonna help you feel free.

Slipping the newspaper back under her dress, Delcy turns to leave, opening the door. Lizzie turns back to Anna.

LIZZIE
 We gonna be freed for real one day.
 Mama says I'm gonna be our code to
 freedom someday.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Delcy, without Lizzie, approaches the kitchen. Sarah and Lloyd stop Delcy at the door and the newspaper drops from Delcy's dress.

LLOYD
 What do we have here?

DELICY
 I was just cleaning up.

LLOYD
 (reads)
 President Lincoln issues the
 Emancipation Proclamation. What are
 you doing with this?

SARAH
 Did you take this to Anna?

DELICY
 It's old, I was just taking it with
 me to wrap...

SARAH
 You know she's blind, you fool.
 You're only supposed to feed and
 bathe her, not teach her anything.

DELICY
 That's right. Teaching would be
 your job.

SARAH
 You mannerless upstart!

Sarah slaps Delcy across her face.

LLOYD
 About time you stopped pampering
 this slut. Two types of people have
 no right to read: slaves and girls.

Sarah shoots Lloyd a look and takes her anger out on Delcy.

SARAH

If I catch you bringing newspapers
to Anna again I'll lock you in with
her for good.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Delcy carries a food tray through the room. Lizzie follows her. Sarah stops Delcy and lifts up a napkin from the tray. Sarah pulls out a small book from her apron pocket and discreetly slips it under the napkin to cover the book.

SARAH

I hope Anna enjoys this fine lunch.

Sarah saunters out of the room with an air of pride. Delcy and Lizzie share a moment of shock.

DELCY

Wonder of wonders!

EXT. SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy hands a basket to the driver of a wagon. Sarah sits in the wagon ready to go to town.

SARAH

Clean my bedroom before I return.

DELCY

Yes, ma'am. Have a nice time at
your sister's.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY, MANSION - NIGHT

Delcy carries cleaning supplies towards Sarah's bedroom. She hears female moans from inside and puts her ear to the door. She quietly cracks open the door and sees Lloyd on top of a beautiful brown-haired WOMAN (30s).

Shocked, Delcy quietly shuts the door and leans against it.

INT. PARLOR, MANSION - DAY

Lizzie is on the floor next to the sofa where Lloyd reclines. He stretches out his foot, and tickles her body.

Delcy rushes in, grabs Lizzie, and runs out. Lloyd laughs.

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Delcy and Lizzie's clothes are strewn on the floor. Delcy studies the North Star on her quilt. Pearlie enters and Delcy quickly shoves clothes into a sack.

PEARLIE

Runnin' away? Can't hide nothin'
from these old eyes that's seen it
all. And you don't need quilt codes
or safe houses. We're free.

DELICY

I've never been beyond the creek. I
don't know the way, but I know it's
North.

PEARLIE

It's one thing to risk your own
life, but you willing to risk
Lizzie's life too?

DELICY

If I stay, what's her life gonna be?

Pearlie takes Delcy in her arms and holds her.

PEARLIE

O Lord, keep my two darlings safe.

EXT. FIELD BETWEEN BRENT CABIN AND BARN - NIGHT

Crickets and frogs break the silence under a full moon. Delcy and Lizzie carry burlap bags across the field.

DELICY

Don't make a peep. I'll get you a
doll if you stay quiet.

Lizzie follows Delcy into the woods. She treads fearfully and jumps at every sound.

EXT. WOODS, KENTUCKY - NIGHT

Loud rustling and a sudden long shadow sends Delcy and Lizzie hiding behind a tree. The shadow nears. Delcy covers Lizzie's eyes. A buck runs by. Delcy exhales and frees Lizzie's eyes.

LIZZIE

Remember all the people you gave
freedom codes to. If they made it,
so can we.

DELCY

Yes, Mama and Lizzie gonna be free.

EXT. OPEN FIELD & EDGE OF WOODS - NIGHT

Delcy and Lizzie reach a field. In the distance a gunshot rings out. Delcy grabs Lizzie's hand and runs to a tree across the field. Delcy and Lizzie catch their breath at the tree.

Delcy sees a noose hanging limp. Panicked she scans around. Her eyes land on the remains of a brown blood-stained jacket by the tree, battered by the years. Delcy inches closer to the jacket and finds the pocket. She pulls out a scrap of the "Tumbling Blocks" code she had given Daniel.

DELCY

Daniel? No! I'm so sorry. This is all my fault.

Delcy collapses to the ground in tears.

LIZZIE

Shh. If you're quiet I'll give you my doll that you was gonna give me.

Grabbing Lizzie's arm, Delcy runs with her for their lives, back into the woods, back the way they came, and back home.

EXT. FIELD BETWEEN BRENT CABIN AND BARN - NIGHT

Pearlie rushes to a bonfire where Delcy is about to toss a quilt into it. Pearlie grabs it from her.

DELCY

Because of these, I made Daniel die.

PEARLIE

He knew the risks. So did your mama. You both led more to freedom than not. You're heroes. If brave colored women hadn't quilted freedom codes, thousands would have died by a whip or a noose.

DELCY

But why should I keep these reminders of all that pain?

Pearlie grabs her in a rare show of force.

PEARLIE

You want to burn our history?
Someone needs to tell the story so
it's not forgotten... else it will
happen again.

Lizzie peeps out from a hiding spot behind a tree.

DELZY

Oh, my Lord! You've been listening!

LIZZIE

I'll help Mama be free. And *I* will
tell the story.

PEARLIE

(to Delcy)

At least your daughter has sense.

EXT. SHEFF TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

A strapping freed Black man, NEUT (24), walks along the dusty
road toward the Sheff farm, singing a spiritual.

TWO FEMALE SHARECROPPERS notice, stop chopping tobacco, look
at each other, and smile to watch him.

FEMALE SHARECROPPER #1

There goes a good catch for someone.

FEMALE SHARECROPPER #2

Wish I was single myself.

FEMALE SHARECROPPER #1

He won't be single for long.

INT. PARLOR, LLOYD MANSION - DAY

Entertaining his Neighbor, Frank, Lloyd holds up a newspaper
to make a point.

LLOYD

We ain't the only ones. All
plantation owners are suffering
economic collapse after the war.

FRANK

It costs too much to pay these
sharecroppers.

LLOYD

It's getting hard to feed my own family. But I still need at least one more to work my fields.

EXT. SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Neut passes old sharecropper Benjamin working the field.

NEUT

I'm looking for work. Know where the owner is so I can talk to him?

BENJAMIN

You don't want to work for Massa Lloyd. If you got a choice, keep walking.

NEUT

Heard he's looking and pays well.

BENJAMIN

No amount of money gonna make up for what you'll have to pay working here.

Neut takes heed and moves on. Lloyd opens his front door and sees Neut heading away from his house.

LLOYD

Hey! Boy!

BENJAMIN

Don't say I didn't warn you.

Neut nods and keeps walking, pretending not to hear.

LLOYD

You deaf? Can't trespass through my farm without answering. Get shot... or talk! Your choice.

Neut stops and turns around.

LLOYD

You won't find many others paying for help around these parts.

Neut walks back cautiously.

LLOYD

I can offer your own cabin, pay, and food to eat. What more can you ask for these days?

Benjamin sighs and gets back to his work.

NEUT
Mighty fair. I'll take it.

LLOYD
You ain't so dumb after all.

BENJAMIN
(sotto)
Yes, he is. He sure is.

INT. KITCHEN, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy and Sally prepare lunch as Lloyd and Neut approach the door from outside. Delcy stops chopping to listen.

LLOYD (O.S)
Here's the kitchen. Just keep your hands off the help.

As they enter, Delcy snaps to attention, putting on servile airs focused on food prep with her back to them.

LLOYD
This is Delcy, our Head house slave.

Delcy keeps cooking with her back to them.

NEUT
'scuse me, Sir. Don't mean to be rude, but slavery ended years ago.

LLOYD
Right, right. Hard to stop calling 'em slaves when they were born and raised here. Once a slave, always a slave.

Delcy swallows her rage.

NEUT
Pleased to meet you, Miss Delcy.

Delcy turns. As her eyes meet Neut's, she sucks in a breath, sparks fly, a bowl slips from her hands and shatters with sauce all over the floor. Neut quickly reaches down with her, brushing her arm.

NEUT
Let me help you with that, Miss...

DEL CY
Got it. But thanks.

LLOYD
No better a maid than a slave, that
one!

As Delcy picks up the broken bits, a piece between her fingers
cuts her.

LLOYD
Move on now. Got a lot to show you,
so you can get started. What did
you say your name was?

NEUT
It's Neut, sir.

LLOYD
Neut. I'm real easy to work for.
There's just one rule. Keep your
hands off the help.

NEUT
Yes, sir.

Neut turns slightly back to steal one more glance at Delcy as
he follows Lloyd. When he sees her raising a clenched fist at
Lloyd behind his back he smiles and looks up at the ceiling,
pretending not to see. After they exit, Sally speaks up.

SALLY
Never saw you act like that before!
Getting all mushy, dropping dishes.

DEL CY
Shut up.

SALLY
Delcy's in love. Delcy's in love!

Delcy throws a cut onion at Sally.

DEL CY
That'll give you something to cry
about so you stop laughing at me.

SALLY
You sure do need a man in your life.

INT. SHED - DAY

Delcy empties the cloth of broken dish fragments into a can.

The can has broken glass bits in it. As she brushes the cloth clean, she can't help but notice the shimmering powder of finely crushed glass. She rubs it between her fingers and is shocked when tiny cuts emerge with spots of blood.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - TWILIGHT

Neut comes off the field from work as Delcy carries Sarah's laundry with Lizzie by her side.

NEUT

Can I give you a hand, Miss Delcy?

DEL CY

No, thanks. I can take care of myself.

NEUT

That's a big load to carry.

DEL CY

No one's helped me before. No need to start now.

Neut raises his palms to back off.

NEUT

All right, all right. But if you ever need something, don't be too shy to ask.

Delcy keeps walking. Neut watches her, smiling. Lizzie peeks back, waves gently, and smiles at Neut. Delcy doesn't notice.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - NIGHT

A FEW SHEFF SHARECROPPERS sit around a bonfire, eat roasted corn, and sing spirituals. Delcy sits off to the side alone. Neut walks over and sits next to her.

NEUT

Is this acceptable?

DEL CY

Better not let the old bastard Lloyd see you with me, or he'll whip the pants off you.

NEUT

I been whipped many times.

Neut lifts his shirt. Delcy gasps at his scars.

DEL CY

Why'd you come *here* and not go North?

NEUT

It's dangerous both ways. Lots of plantations short of help. Bounty hunters are capturing freed slaves as sharecroppers to sell for profit. Plus, the Ku Klux Klan don't even look to get paid for us. They just hang us for the fun of it.

DEL CY

I've seen that happen to someone I helped escape.

Neut studies her.

NEUT

So, you're one of those great women who makes quilts, eh?

DEL CY

I'm nothing. Don't ask me about it.

NEUT

But if you did help others...

Delcy gives a stern look and raises her finger to his mouth.

NEUT

...What about you? If you helped others, what kept you from going North yourself?

Delcy is unnerved and cuts the topic short.

DEL CY

Got Lizzie's safety to think about.

NEUT

Pardon my asking, but where's her father?

DEL CY

Don't ever ask me that again.

NEUT

Sorry, but is there *anything* I can talk to you about?

INT. ATTIC ROOM - DAY

Delcy collects Anna's lunch dishes. Lizzie brushes Anna's hair. Lizzie sees an old quilt on Anna's bed with "Flying Geese" and traces the pattern with her fingers. Delcy turns away to collect herself. Anna holds Lizzie tight.

ANNA

Let's run away together.

DELICY

Anna dear, you can't even walk.

ANNA

Carry me. Or find someone who can.

DELICY

Your parents would kill us all.

ANNA

I'm already dead. And so are you and Lizzie if we don't get away.

INT. NEUT'S CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy quietly opens the door, sees him sleeping and tiptoes inside. She sits and watches him. He startles Delcy with a loud snore. She hops up and quickly leaves.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

At sunset, Delcy leaves Sarah's house, passing Neut in the field. He sweats as he carries a big basket of tobacco leaves.

DELICY

Need a hand with that?

NEUT

I think I do.

Delcy smiles and helps hold part of his basket, leaning close so their bodies touch. They walk towards the sunset. A squawking flock of geese fly North.

INT. PEARLIE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy watches Pearlise sew a white dress.

DELICY

That's so kind of you.

PEARLIE

Your mama'd be so proud and happy
you and Neut gonna jump the broom.

Delcy goes to Me-Ma lying on her pillow and picks at the
dried remnants of its burns.

DELCY

I wish she were here. And papa,
Reuben, and Josh, too.

PEARLIE

Only God knows where they all are.
But God heard my prayer and sent
this mighty fine man to marry you.

DELCY

He's going to take Lizzie as his
own child... no questions.

PEARLIE

You didn't tell him?

DELCY

I told him never to ask me about
her father.

PEARLIE

Don't keep no secrets from your
husband.

DELCY

I have to. Neut would kill Massa
Lloyd, and then they'd kill Neut.

Me-Ma fractures under her stress and she panics. She tries
to force the doll together, but can't. She shoves the old
doll deep in her bosom.

EXT. FIELD BETWEEN HOUSE AND CABINS - DAY

Sharecroppers sing a spiritual, while a Black man as a
PREACHER awaits the bride.

EXT. SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy in her white dress, waits with Pearlle and Lizzie. Sarah
exits the mansion with a flower bundle for Delcy.

DELCY

Thank you. From your garden? They're
beautiful. And thank you for the day off.

Lloyd rushes outside, furiously angry.

LLOYD
I cannot believe my wife is
betraying me like this by letting
them run off.

SARAH
They're not running away. They're
getting married.

Lloyd whips off his belt.

LLOYD
All of you! Turn around. You too,
Sarah.

Delcy, Pearlie, and Lizzie look at Sarah who motions for them
to turn their back to him. They do so, but Sarah doesn't.

SARAH
Lloyd, stop! It's not what you think.

LLOYD
Don't you ever talk back to me. Go
on! Turn around with them.

When Lloyd whips his belt in the air, Pearlie flinches and
Lizzie whimpers. Delcy steps between them and Lloyd.

DELCY
If you gonna beat anyone, beat me.
It's my wedding day. They just
coming with me.

LLOYD
So you're gonna get married, and
then run away...

SARAH
No one is running away.

LLOYD
Shut up. What's gotten into you?

SARAH
I was thinking only of you, dear.

LLOYD
I always knew you were crazy.

SARAH

Delcy and Neut are getting married.
That means more children to work
for us when they grow up.

Annoyed and embarrassed, Lloyd whips his belt in the air,
then turns and storms back inside his big house.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Delcy carries the bouquet. Pearlie and Lizzie follow her along
a path between seated Sharecroppers singing on the grass. She
stops at Neut and the Preacher. A decorated broom lies on the
ground in front of Neut.

PREACHER

On this joyous day, we unite these
two loving souls, Neut and Delcy.

LIZZIE

Don't forget *me*...

PREACHER

And Lizzie... to be man and wife,
and daughter. You may now jump the
broom.

Neut takes Delcy's hand and they jump over the broom. Lizzie
follows with her own jump.

PREACHER

You are now man and wife.

LIZZIE

And Lizzie...

All cheer as Neut kisses Delcy - and both embrace Lizzie.

INT. NEUT'S CABIN - NIGHT.

Delcy in a new nightgown climbs into bed with Neut.

NEUT

Sorry I can't take you to a faraway
place for our first married night.

DELCY

Just having Pearlie care for Lizzie
to give me one night in your arms,
is far away enough.

Putting out the lantern, they embrace.

Neut gently rolls Delcy on her back and snuggles on top of her. Delcy panics and wiggles to get out from under him. Neut doesn't notice her fear and continues to kiss her. She shoves him off and pulls the covers over her head.

NEUT

What? It's okay. We jumped the broom and we's legal to do this.

DELICY

(starts to cry)
I can't.

NEUT

Why you acting this way?

DELICY

You promised to never ask.

Neut processes what she means.

NEUT

I promised not to ask about Lizzie's father.

Delcy darts a troubled look of warning. Neut reads it and has a flash of insight. He stands, lost about what to do. Delcy pulls him back into bed, conflicted by her past rape trauma and wanting so badly to show Neut her love.

DELICY

Just hold me for now. I need some time to get used to a good man. I'll let you know when I'm ready.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

SUPER: 8 YEARS LATER

Neut and Delcy snuggle into bed.

LIZZIE (now 15), CHARLEY (8), MARY (4), and MARTHA (2), pretend to sleep, snuggled on every inch of floor space. Then they jump up, surround Neut and Delcy and tackle them in bed as they all giggle. Little Martha pokes Lizzie, who pokes her back.

NEUT

Lizzie, be nice to Martha.

Lizzie makes a face. Charley pushes Mary off the bed.

NEUT

Charley, be nice to Mary. Delcy,
when will you admit we've outgrown
this cabin so we can move?

LIZZIE

He's right, Mama. Get us outta here
to our own home, far away from Massa
Lloyd and Miss Sarah.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

Neut approaches Lloyd off the field. Lloyd uses a sizable
pocket knife to cut into a plant and check its freshness.

NEUT

A moment of your time, sir. We
have four children squeezed
together in one small cabin. The
girls need their own room.

LLOYD

Things are not looking good for me.
My family can't make ends meet.

NEUT

Sir, I'm letting you know, as a
courtesy...

Lloyd knows where he's going with this and cuts him off.

LLOYD

I can't let you leave. My family'll
go broke and our farm will be
bankrupt.

Neut stirs.

LLOYD

You think I don't know you've been
looking for work?

NEUT

Well, we is free to choose. We're
not slaves anymore.

LLOYD

If I ever catch you looking for
work elsewhere, I'll beat you to a
pulp... or worse. Understand?

Neut bites back rage but remains stoic.

LLOYD
Freedom doesn't give you the right
to what's mine. You're lucky to
have a cabin, and a job so you can
feed your family.

Lloyd gets up in Neut's face and presses the knife with tobacco
sap to his face.

LLOYD
It's *your* choice.

INT. KITCHEN, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy prepares a tray to bring up to Anna. Charley plays with
a jumping jack string man on the floor.

DELCY
Be good, Charley. Stay right here.

As soon as Delcy goes upstairs Charley goes through the door.

INT. PARLOR, SHEFF MANSION - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Charley arrives in the parlor where Lloyd sits in his armchair,
reading a newspaper.

LLOYD
Looky what we have here. Come sit
next to me, boy.

Charley nervously inches towards Lloyd.

LLOYD
Don't be afraid. Come here.

Charley sits and Lloyd strokes his head.

LLOYD
You remind me of my old friend when
I was a boy like you. Same curly
hair and skin.

Lloyd strokes his body. Charley flinches. Delcy peers through
the cracked parlor door and is horrified to see Lloyd touch
Charley. She stops short of lunging and watches unseen.

LLOYD
We'd sneak to the river and play in
the water every day. Until one day,
my father caught me.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

He said, "*Don't ever let me catch you playing with a Negro again.*" He whipped me so bad with his belt I bled for days.

Lloyd pulls up his shirt and shows a long scar that stretches from his back across his belly.

LLOYD

Touch this, boy.

Charley resists.

LLOYD

Yep, my daddy gave it to me real good.

Charley stares at him puzzled.

LLOYD

I still miss my friend.

Delcy falls back against the door.

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Neut, Delcy, Lizzie and Mary, sit around the table.

LIZZIE

Where's that pie I made? Charley done steal it again?

Lizzie searches and finds Charley in his bed, sleeping.

LIZZIE

Papa, Mama, come quick!

Sleeping Charley has crumbs on his lips with ants crawling on his face carrying off the tiny fragments of crumbs.

NEUT

Guess you found your pie-eater.

The family laughs as Delcy brushes crumbs and ants off his lips. She looks at her fingers and stares at the crumbs.

DELCY

These are not pie crumbs. They're cookie crumbs.

She shakes Charley awake.

DEL CY
Where d'ya get these cookies from?

CHARLEY
From nowhere.

DEL CY
Where 'd I hear that before?

MOMENTARY FLASHBACK:

Delcy as a child is asking her brother Josh, with cookie crumbs on his mouth, where he got them from - and Josh says, "From *nowhere*." END FLASHBACK

DEL CY
Who gave you cookies?

CHARLIE
He told me not to tell anyone.

DEL CY
Uh-huh. Massa!

LIZZIE
Why don't Massa give *me* cookies?

DEL CY
Maybe 'coz he's a boy and you's just a girl.

LIZZIE
We need to change that, Mama.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Using Lloyd's wagon, Neut and Delcy pick up supplies in town. They pass other wagons filled with freed slaves.

NEUT
Where y'all going?

MAN IN WAGON #1
Going North. Lots of jobs there.

NEUT
What about bounty hunters and the Klan?

MAN IN WAGON #1
A Northerner paid good money to the man we worked for, so we can work in his factory up there. I'll take the chance.

MAN IN WAGON #2

We got space for you both. I'm sure they need more help.

Delcy looks at Neut with determination.

DELCY

It's our chance. Let's go.

NEUT

Can you wait for us to pick up our children? There's four.

MAN IN WAGON

Only got room for two. But if he wants all six, we can tell them to come and get you.

The Man prods the horse to move the wagon off.

DELCY

We gotta do something to help our children be free from Massa Lloyd.

NEUT

But each time I try to move us, you're the one with some excuse.

Delcy looks away from Neut.

NEUT

I'm *done* trying.

DELCY

What do you mean you're done trying? You're the man of this family. Be a man, for God's sake.

Shocked by her words, Neut snaps.

NEUT

You dare tell *me* to be a man? After working hard, taking care of you and our children, and I don't mean sweating in hot fields, I mean keeping silent and acting like a goddamn slave to please that bastard and witch just so *they* keep our family together. He deserves every curse coming, but I can't do nothing... 'coz you too afraid to leave that box we live in.

NEUT (CONT'D)

I bite my anger, live like a slave
to please you, and if that's not
being a man, I don't know what is.
If our children aren't free, that's
because of you!

Neut whips the mules and rides off leaving Delcy behind.

DELCY

Neut! Come back! Don't leave me.

Slamming the cart to a stop, Neut looks back at Delcy.

NEUT

Think you're so brave? You be a man
and find your own way home.

INT. BEDROOM, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Delcy dusts Sarah's room and hears a woman's voice through
the walls.

FEMALE (V.O.)

Oh, Lloyd, don't stop. Tell me I'm
your only woman.

Dropping her duster Delcy puts her ear to the wall.

DELCY

(laughs)

Only woman, my foot! You be part of
a long line of women... colored,
white, and Lord knows who else.

INT. SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Sarah enters with shopping bags, climbs the stairs and stops.

FEMALE (O.S.)

When can I see you again?

SARAH

Who's in there? That you, Delcy?

The woman's voice stops talking. Dead silence as Sarah rushes
into the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM, SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Sarah bursts through the door and sees Lloyd and a WOMAN in bed.

SARAH
You bastard!

Sarah throws his spittoon at them.

SARAH
You whore! Get the hell out!

Covering herself with the blanket, the Woman grabs her clothes and runs, passing wide-eyed Delcy outside the door.

LLOYD
Now, Sarah, it's not...

SARAH
You unfaithful bastard! After all I've put up with for you, this is what you been doing?

LLOYD
It'll never happen again.

SARAH
Damn right it'll never happen again. 'Coz I'm gonna grind up your toolywag and put it in a pickle jar. Now get out of my house!

LLOYD
Last time I checked it's me who owns this house. If anyone's gonna leave, it's gonna be you.

Sarah throws a glass jar at him. It grazes his head, hits the floor, and shatters. He yelps and runs out. Sarah slams the door and throws herself onto the bed in tears. Delcy gingerly opens the door.

DELCY
Miss Sarah? Let me help you.

SARAH
You? You're to *blame* for this! You were the first whore he slept with, and he's been doing it ever since.

DELCY
No, ma'am. I'd never do that.

SARAH
Look at your daughter. Always saying Lizzie is light cause bleach spilled on her while doing laundry.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Her daddy is white... and her daddy
is my bastard husband.

Sarah throws a bedside pitcher at Delcy.

SARAH
I never want to see you in my house
again.

DELICY
It wasn't like that, Miss Sarah.

SARAH
(screams)
Get out of my house!

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

Delcy works in the field alongside Neut. He has a leather strap over his shoulder as a harness hooked to the mule as if he were the plow.

NEUT
Why do you want to work with me in
these hot fields?

DELICY
I like being close to you.

NEUT
Come on now. What happened?

DELICY
You don't want me here?

NEUT
Don't suppose it has anything to do
with why Miss Sarah sent someone to
our house to get an attic key back
from you? Said you weren't allowed
in the house no more.

DELICY
I don't have no keys. Must be 'coz I
asked to work with you in the fields.

Neut eyeballs her, not buying it.

NEUT
You sure are a hard one to figure
out. More than enough puzzle for me.

Delcy pokes Neut in the ribs to tickle him.

He tickles her back. They fall down laughing amidst the tobacco.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy hands Lizzie an old newspaper.

DELICY

It's time to give your brother and sisters a reading lesson.

Lizzie studies the paper and smiles.

LIZZIE

Lesson one. Remember these words about President Lincoln before they shot him. "*Lincoln gives the slaves freedom.*"

CHARLIE

What's a slave?

DELICY

Someone owned by another person.

MARY

Are we slaves?

DELICY

Me and your dad used to be, but now we free.

LIZZIE

Then why we still living like slaves for Massa Lloyd and Miss Sarah? You gotta get us properly free.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT - LATER

Delcy has all the family's clothes and belongings strewn about the cabin when Neut comes in weary from the day.

NEUT

What you doing?

DELICY

Packing up our things.

NEUT

I'm too old.

Delcy is taken aback.

DELGY

Is there something I need to know about from yesterday that aged you?

NEUT

Now it's too late. And, like you say... too dangerous.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Under moonlight, Delcy cries on the steps and looks up at the North Star. Lizzie comes out bleary-eyed from waking. She puts her arms around Delcy.

LIZZIE

Why you crying, mama? Daddy said he'd find us a farm.

DELGY

Since I was a bold little girl, I told everyone to run toward freedom. I'd make fun of anyone who stayed to be a slave.

LIZZIE

That's why you sewed secret quilt codes, you said.

DELGY

I sewed codes in quilts for others to escape, but I never used them to leave myself.

LIZZIE

Why not?

DELGY

Stupid as it sounds I can't explain it. Maybe I'm a scaredy cat. Maybe an unknown life of freedom is scarier than putting up with evil Massa Lloyd. As bad as living here is, it's the only life I know.

LIZZIE

Even though Papa was there to protect you and help you leave?

DELGY

(blinking back tears)
Whenever he tried, I'd find an excuse to stay. I don't know what's wrong with me.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

Delcy brings a basket out to the field. She sniffs, smelling smoke. She looks around for the source before spotting flames shooting out of the downstairs window of Sarah's house.

DEL CY
 (screams to Field Workers)
 Fire! Fire! Quick! We need buckets
 of water.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Delcy runs to the cabin door and yells inside.

DEL CY
 There's a fire in the mansion.
 Lizzie, get me some quilts then
 take the children to the edge of
 the field.

Lizzie grabs some quilts then ushers Charley, Mary, and Margaret out of the cabin.

LIZZIE
 Aren't you coming with us?

DEL CY
 Lloyd's not home. I gotta help get
 them out.

Taking hold of the quilts, Delcy rushes to the mansion.

LIZZIE
 Anna!

EXT. SHEFF MANSION - DAY

Sarah's adult sons, Paul and Thomas, stand with a coughing and dazed Sarah in front of the house. Delcy runs to the lawn with the quilts.

FIELD HANDS run into the house with buckets of water. Delcy tries to approach Sarah but Tom and Paul block her path.

PAUL
 You're not allowed in!

DEL CY
 Please, I have to go upstairs to
 save Anna. No one else knows she's
 there.

The bucket brigade keeps coming, but the fire grows. Embers and smoke drift over the fields. Flames shoot from the attic.

Delcy in a panic tussles with Paul and pushes past him. Paul slaps her. Flames continue to spread in the house. Delcy pushes past Thomas and Paul and shakes Sarah.

DELCY

Please Miss Sarah, give me the key to get Anna. The fire is reaching the attic.

SARAH

(dazed and confused)
I already told you that you can never go into my house again.

Paul pulls Delcy away from Sarah. A fiery blast blows out the windows. Delcy sees the shattered attic window. Anna's quilt with the danger "Log Cabin" code burns steadily. The attic collapses into the house. Flames engulf the entire structure. In no time, all that can be made out are a few bits of furniture and a rocking chair.

SARAH

(screams)
Where's my Anna?

She intercepts the Field Workers who made it out of the house just in time.

SARAH

Where did you put Anna?

BENJAMIN

I didn't see anyone in there.

SARAH

(to Paul)
Didn't you get Anna?

PAUL

Did you give the key to one of them?

SARAH

(confused)
What key? Where's Anna?

TOM

Didn't anyone get her out?

BENJAMIN

We didn't see anyone else upstairs.
We checked all the rooms, except
the attic because it was locked. If
we'd known someone was in there...

SARAH

Oh, my God. Anna!

PAUL

Mother? Do you have the attic key?

Benjamin looks at what's left of the house.

BENJAMIN

There's not much left of the attic.

Delcy cries. Sarah is increasingly unhinged and confused.

SARAH

Why didn't you let Delcy in?

PAUL

You said we should never let Delcy
in again, or father'd whip the hide
off us.

Reaching into her apron, Sarah pulls out the attic key.

SARAH

Anna! Oh, Anna.

Sarah faints. Benjamin rushes to her while other workers put
out the blaze that has spread to the fields. A thick vapor of
scorched tobacco hangs in the air.

Delcy stares into the ashes of what's left of the house.

DELICY

Dear sweet Anna, God must have
heard your prayer for freedom. Just
not the way we would have wished...

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Delcy and Lizzie clean up the other children from ash and soot.

LIZZIE

Why'd you try to go into the fire
to save that white family after all
the bad they done to us?

DELCY

'Cause we's all God's children, no matter what color our skin.

LIZZIE

They let Anna burn! If they can let their own child die, what do you think they're gonna do to us?

EXT. SHEFF MANSION - DAY

The mansion is charred ruins with the few furniture items, including a pecan rocking chair amidst ashes on the ground.

Field Workers carry a casket into the rubble and lift the charred remains of Anna into it with part of a burned bit of a quilt. Sarah throws herself at the casket, weeping. She grabs a corner of the charred piece of quilt, holding it to her cheeks, then hides it in her bosom.

Lloyd returns in a wagon, rushes to Sarah to hold her up as they survey what's left of their mansion.

SARAH

Anna's gone. What have I done?

LLOYD

It's Delcy's fault for not being here to take care of you and Anna.

SARAH

If I hadn't thrown her out of the house she'd have been here to get the key to save Anna.

LLOYD

Who told you to throw Delcy out? I never told you to do that.

Sarah shoots him a cold stare and turns her back on him.

LLOYD

Answer me! Why'd you get rid of her?

SARAH

Because she betrayed me by sleeping with you.

LLOYD

That's a lie! That never happened.

Sarah turns on a dime from grief to enraged.

SARAH

You're the liar! I know Lizzie's your baby. That's why she's half white and half Nigra. When I found out Delcy seduced you, I fired her.

LLOYD

All right. The whore did force me to give her that baby. I didn't want to tell you and upset you.

SARAH

Having caught you with that white woman in my bed, I don't know what's true anymore. Maybe it's time for me to start believing the women's side of the story.

INT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Benjamin and a YOUNG WORKER carry in two broken chairs and a table with a broken leg. Lloyd and Sarah follow inside. Benjamin and the young worker set down the furniture and leave. Lloyd and Sarah are disgusted by their new accommodations.

SARAH

Why are you bringing me here?

Lloyd, knocked down from his high horse, hangs his head.

LLOYD

This abandoned cabin is the only place we have to live in until we rebuild the house.

SARAH

You're putting me in a damn Nigra cabin?

LLOYD

Everything has been destroyed and we're bankrupt. It'll take time to rebuild. Everyone is going through hard times now.

SARAH

I'm not living here! It ain't fit to put our cows in.

EXT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Outside, Benjamin and the young man listen and share a smile.

BENJAMIN

It's done good enough to put their slaves in. After all these years, they finally get a taste of their own medicine.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

Neut works in the part of the field that remains unburned, when Lloyd approaches.

LLOYD

Sarah's health is declining. She's had the nervous disease since Anna died. She's losing her mind and mixing up everything.

NEUT

What do you expect *me* to do?

LLOYD

She's saying if she hadn't thrown Delcy out, Anna'd still be alive.

NEUT

That's right. Delcy risked herself going in to save Anna, but your own sons done stopped her.

Lloyd ignores the comment.

LLOYD

It'd be good if Delcy takes care of Sarah again.

NEUT

Ask Delcy yourself. She don't like anyone speaking for her.

LLOYD

If I ask her, she'll say no. I need you to ask her.

Neut stares at Lloyd - incredulous.

INT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Delcy grooms a mentally unstable Sarah who is in bed.

SARAH

Can you go to the attic to bring Anna her food?

DEL CY

Anna's gone. Don't you remember?

Sarah's mood turns to sorrow and she breaks down.

SARAH

My dear, dear Anna.

DEL CY

If you loved her so, why'd you lock her up for years?

SARAH

I didn't.

As Delcy's jaw drops and she's about to reply, Lloyd enters.

LLOYD

What you crying about now?

DEL CY

She's still upset about Anna.

LLOYD

Anna's death is no loss. She was a loss to us the day she was born. She was already dead to us.

It's the tipping point for Sarah. She grabs a glass from her bedside and hurls it at Lloyd, just missing Delcy.

SARAH

Get out!

Delcy turns to flee, but Sarah grabs her arm.

SARAH

Not you! I'm talking to my pathetic husband! The two-timing bastard.

LLOYD

You've become a sick woman, Sarah. I can't take your crazy spells anymore. I'm calling the doctor.

Lloyd rushes out, pushing past a surprised Delcy.

SARAH

There's no need to call the doctor!

Delcy picks up the broken glass, carefully brushing the finer crushed fragments into a cloth.

SARAH
 (softening)
 Do you think I'm all right?

DELGY
 You've never made more sense than
 you did just now.

INT. PEARLIE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Pearlie sweats with a fever. Lizzie and Delcy use cool towels
 on her head.

PEARLIE
 I'm fading, Delcy.

DELGY
 Don't leave me. You've been a
 second mother to me.

Instead of dipping her cloth in the bowl of water, Delcy hurls
 the wooden bowl crashing against the wall.

LIZZIE
 Why you so angry all the time?

PEARLIE
 Your mama used to be a joyful
 child, unafraid to speak her mind.
 Now she's tough toward everyone.

DELGY
 Mama taught me that. When she was
 captured in Africa, other slaves
 told her not to show weakness, as a
 weak slave would be killed. So, she
 taught me to be brave and to fight.

Pearlie pulls Delcy to her chest.

PEARLIE
 Oh, baby, that was meant so you
 could act brave towards *enemies*,
 not toward your loved ones. You
 need to open your heart to Neut and
 Lizzie, and your other children and
 let them in.

DELGY
 I don't know how.

PEARLIE

If you let go of hate and revenge,
you'll have room to let love in. A
child without parents has no one to
show her how to love. It's my fault
too, being so strict with you.

LIZZIE

She's angry how Massa Lloyd treated
her. And even though the laws say
we're free we're still living like
slaves.

PEARLIE

Remember. We were never slaves. We
were people who *lived in slavery*.

DELGY

Ain't that the same thing?

PEARLIE

No! 'Coz slaves have no choice. But
we people can choose how we see
ourselves. And I choose not to be
angry. Anger won't free you.
Courage, forgiveness and love *will*.
Remember this, Lizzie.

Lizzie acknowledges and looks to see if Delcy does, too.

PEARLIE

Do you think by staying here, Delcy,
that Massa Lloyd will one day feel
sorry and treat you and Lizzie right?

Delcy is stunned with the truth of the matter.

PEARLIE

That'll *never* happen. That coward
gets power from torturing the weak.
He'll never change. It's *you* who's
gotta change.

Pearlie points to her quilt.

PEARLIE

Use your Mama's freedom code as the
map to free yourself from slavery.
If you won't do it for yourself, do
it for Lizzie. She'll show the way.

Lizzie beams.

PEARLIE

And do it for me.

DEL CY

But what if my mama and papa and
brothers come back here to find me
and don't know where I went?

LIZZIE

I'll make sure they know.

Pearlie does her best to take them in her arms, then closes her eyes, breathes deeply, and dies. Delcy lays her head on her, hugs her, and sobs. Lizzie cries and rubs Delcy's back, comforting her mama.

INT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Delcy checks on Sarah and weighs her words.

SARAH

Losing Pearlle must feel like me
losing Anna.

DEL CY

I did try to get into your house
to save Anna you know.

SARAH

You tried, just like your mama did.

DEL CY

Mama? How 'd she...

SARAH

Remember to bring Anna her dinner.

DEL CY

Anna's gone. What did you mean my
mama tried to save Anna?

SARAH

I told you.

DEL CY

Tell me again. *Please.*

SARAH

I just did. Bring Anna her food.

EXT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Delcy pushes Sarah in a wheelchair to a sunny spot outside her cabin and wraps a shawl around her.

SARAH

Bring Anna out to get some sun.

DELICY

She's resting now.

SARAH

Good. And make sure you feed her.
You're the only one I can rely on.
You've been good to me.

Sarah takes Delcy's hand in love.

DELICY

Why'd you lock Anna in the attic?

SARAH

Lloyd forced me to. When he saw
Anna was blind and crippled, and
not the perfect girl he wanted, he
forced me to lock her in the attic.
He thinks crippled people are like
Negroes... They're less than human.

DELICY

Maybe that's why Anna and I
understood each other.

SARAH

You're a free woman with a husband
and children. Why don't you all buy
a farm and leave here?

DELICY

You know about that? A farm is Neut's
dream.

SARAH

I know everything that goes on here.
What I don't know... is why you
don't leave.

DELICY

I don't know why. And if Massa
Lloyd made you lock up your
daughter, beat you, and had other
women, why didn't you leave?

SARAH

I suppose I suffer from the same
victim's disease that you do.

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Delcy enters and sees Lloyd standing over Lizzie lying on her mattress in tears, his foot tickling her. Lizzie's fist is clenched in a bear claw symbol on the sheet.

Delcy screams, lunges at Lloyd and beats on his chest. He pushes Delcy against the table, knocking a glass to the floor. Lloyd kicks the glass and it shatters into pieces. Delcy manages to shove him out the door.

LLOYD

You are gonna pay for this!

Delcy throws broken glass at him, and grabs Lizzie, cradling her and wrapping her in the "Bear Paw" quilt.

DELICY

If he ever touches you again, you
run like the wind to me or to your
pa. Understand?

LIZZIE

He does it all the time.

Delcy is stunned.

DELICY

How long's this been going on?

LIZZIE

Since I was little. I'd make my
fist into a bear paw like you
showed me, but Mama Bear never came
to protect me.

DELICY

Not my baby! Please God help us!

LIZZIE

If you want God to help us, Mama,
then get us out of here.

INT. SHED - NIGHT

Delcy, in anguished rage, throws a drinking glass at the shed wall. The sound of it shattering pierces the silence as it crashes to the floor.

Staring at the shards, Delcy gingerly steps lightly on one, and it crunches under her foot. She bends down to pick up the shard and it cuts her hand. She watches as drops of blood fall to the ground. Then, she slowly looks up and out the small shed window to the North star. A revelatory look crosses her face. Slowly, her lips widen into a knowing smile. She looks down at the drops of blood and nods her head.

INT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

DOCTOR WILLIAMS (50s), dressed in clothes that once were distinguished, examines Sarah in bed as Delcy watches.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
(to Delcy privately)
She's declining and her memory's going.

DEL CY
Is there any hope for her?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
The medicine will ease any pain, but she'll need 'round the clock care. Lloyd can't do it, so he'll have to commit her to a sanatorium.

SARAH
What is the doctor saying?

DEL CY
He said you'll be fine.

SARAH
You were never good at lying. Lloyd's gonna lock me up just like he did Anna. And what will he do to you and Lizzie if I'm gone?

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Neut snores. Delcy pokes him awake.

DEL CY
Go and buy that farm.

NEUT
Lloyd'll send the KKK after me.

DEL CY
I talked to Sarah.

NEUT
She's loony.

DELCY
She still knows what's what. You
deal with the farm. I'll deal with
them.

Neut sits up, serious and concerned.

NEUT
I am not gonna let you get in a
showdown with that rapist.

Delcy is surprised by him calling Lloyd a rapist and motions
for him to keep his voice down.

NEUT
You think I can't see and figure it
out? You think your children don't
hear you cry out in your sleep?

Delcy bites back tears.

NEUT
Now I understand all the pain
you've been holding in. You don't
have to hide anything from me
anymore. I *know* what that bastard
did to you!

INT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Delcy enters and sees a large object on the floor with a
blanket over it.

SARAH
Got some surprises for you.

Sarah pulls off the blanket to reveal a charred pecan rocker.

DELCY
My mother's old rocking chair.

SARAH
Sit in it. It'll hold.

With a faraway gaze, Delcy sits and rocks, softly singing
'*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, coming for to carry me home.*'

DELCY
Mama would sing to me in this
chair.

SARAH

When your mama was sold, I liked it, so I took it for myself. It survived the fire and Anna wanted to return it to you. Rock her and sing to Anna. She'd like that. I got something else for you.

Sarah rifles through a trunk, searching, and affectionately takes out a quilt. Holding it up, Delcy gasps seeing a red pokeberry stain between Flying Geese and North Star codes.

DELICY

Mama made this when I was a very young. There's the pokeberry stain I dripped on it.

Delcy points to a spot between the Flying Geese and North Star. Sarah smiles as Delcy clutches it to her chest.

SARAH

Your mama gave it to me for Anna. She loved Anna just like you and me do. She hoped one day someone would use it to help Anna escape.

DELICY

You knew about the quilt codes?

SARAH

Shhh. Don't tell anyone that I knew. Lloyd would kill me.

Delcy shares a knowing glance with Sarah.

SARAH

And one more thing, I'm not just giving you this quilt for memories.

Sarah's hidden message in her eyes is grasped by Delcy. After a pause, Sarah reaches into her bosom, pulls out the charred remains of Anna's quilt, kisses it lovingly, and with a resolute look and nod, puts it into Delcy's hands. Delcy stares at it, recognizes it and with an understanding look of revelation Delcy smiles and nods her head.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

As Delcy looks on from a distance, Lloyd, Paul, Tom, and Lizzie load Sarah from the wheelchair into the wagon.

LLOYD

We're taking you for a little ride.

SARAH

No, you're locking me away, just like you locked Anna away.

LLOYD

No one locked Anna away but you.

SARAH

You *made* me do it. She wasn't *perfect* and now I'm not perfect anymore. What will you do when the wenches and nigras you whore around with see that *you're* not perfect?

LLOYD

Keep quiet in front of our boys.

SARAH

I've kept quiet long enough, and before I die, I need to speak my peace. Delcy, come here.

Cautiously, Delcy approaches Sarah who whispers in her ear.

SARAH

Do you understand, Delcy?

DELCY

I sure do, Miss Sarah, I sure do.

EXT. TOBACCO FIELD - DAY

Lloyd nonchalantly waves his rifle as he inspects the field where Neut works.

LLOYD

Now that Sarah's in the sanatorium, Delcy can help you with the crops.

NEUT

I should tell you that Delcy and me...

LLOYD

You ain't gonna start that crazy talk about leaving here, are you? I thought we settled that.

Lloyd grasps his rifle in a more threatening way.

NEUT

And I thought we agreed my debt to you was paid when I got Delcy to keep helping Sarah in the house.

LLOYD
I never agreed.

Neut distances himself from the rifle.

NEUT
The government promised forty acres
and a mule to sharecroppers from up
North who return South to work.
Hire those people to rebuild.

LLOYD
I don't have money or forty acres
for a new sharecropper. We got you
and your children, so I don't need
to pay for another.

NEUT
Sir, the law says we slaves have
been freed. No one can stop us if
we leave.

LLOYD
And no one can stop me from killing
you if you do.

A tense stare down is broken by Lloyd lightly slapping Neut with
the end of his rifle and giving a twisted laugh. Lloyd walks away.

LLOYD
(turning back)
And I don't think Delcy wants to
lose her husband... and your
children to lose their father.

INT. SARAH'S ROOM, SANATORIUM - DAY

Delcy enters with a fistful of flowers. Sarah, in a wheelchair,
stares out a sunny window.

SARAH
Anna! They finally let you come.

DELCY
Ma'am, I'm Delcy.

Sarah turns the chair to her.

SARAH
Of course you are. So glad you
came. Did Neut buy your farm yet?

DELCY

No. We still living on your farm.

SARAH

Take your family away. You're a free woman now.

DELCY

I know. Why d'ya let your husband lock up Anna? Why didn't you leave?

SARAH

I would've been beaten or killed for going against my husband... or if I left on my own.

DELCY

But you a white woman.

SARAH

But I'm still a *woman*. If a Negro man counts as three fifths of a person, we women don't count for even half of that.

DELCY

But what kind of mother doesn't risk her life for her child?

SARAH

You... tell... me...

Sarah stares hard at her. She picks up a hand mirror on her night table and holds it up for Delcy to look at herself. Delcy gets her point and covers her face.

SARAH

Your mama risked her life to save others, even the white child of the people who enslaved her. And I couldn't even risk my life to save my own crippled child... although I got your Me-Ma doll out of the fire.

DELCY

That was you? O, my Lord! Thank you.

Delcy reaches out to tenderly touch Sarah's arm.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Returning from town, Delcy sees Lloyd's hat on her doorstep and hears muffled crying from inside.

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Delcy flings the door open and sees Lloyd standing over Lizzie on her straw mattress.

LIZZIE
(hysterically)
Mama, where were you? I've been calling, but you didn't come.

DELCY
Keep your hands off my baby!

LLOYD
Your baby? Did you forget who she belongs to? I can do whatever I want with her.

Delcy beats his chest, pushing him forcefully.

DELCY
If you ever touch her I'll, !'ll...

LLOYD
You'll what? Now you wouldn't want Neut in a wooden box, would you?

DELCY
Get out! Get out!

LLOYD
Since when is it *your* house? It's *my* house on *my* land, and Lizzie's mine... And don't ever forget it!

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

While Neut and the children sleep, Delcy rocks in the chair, stroking the "Flying Geese" quilt. Lizzie awakes and listens.

DELCY
(sotto)
Lord have mercy. Oh, Mama I'm so sorry for all the grief I gave you as a child, and for my anger at you for leaving me... when you were here all along, guiding me.

Delcy strokes the quilt. Lizzie gets up and sits by her.

LIZZIE
Why you upset, Mama?

DELGY

Glory to God. With all the torture,
beatings, and cruelty Miss Sarah
put your Grannie Leah through, my
Mama risked her life to give Sarah
the freedom code for Anna, a white
child, to help her escape.

Delcy points to the Flying Geese, North Star, and red stain.

LIZZIE

How did the red stain get on there?

DELGY

As a child I was playing with Mama
and dripped juice and my blood on it
and Mama never could wash it out.

LIZZIE

That's 'coz she telling you something.
Sometimes blood gotta be spilt to get
them flying geese to freedom.

Startled by Lizzie's wisdom, Delcy looks down.

DELGY

I just don't want it to be any more
of our blood. Massa Lloyd will sure
come after us if we leave.

LIZZIE

Not if he's in bed and he too sick
to get up.

INT. SHED - NIGHT

With great care and deliberation, Delcy spreads a cloth on the wooden counter. She takes out the broken glass shards she kept hidden in a trash can and lays them on the cloth. With calm, careful movements she pulls the ends of the cloth over the shards.

She takes out a hammer. Then, with pent up rage from years of torment, she slams the hammer down with all her might. The steady sounds of glass breaking mingle with her enraged cries as she pounds the shards into a fine powder.

Delcy mixes the powder into a glass of buttermilk, covers the glass, and drapes a cloth over it to hide it.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Lizzie wakes as Delcy returns from the shed.

LIZZIE

What you doing this late?

DELGY

I can't tell you how, but I am doing it for you. If anything happens to me, you need to know two things. First, about your birth...

Whispering to her, Lizzie looks shocked, as Delcy holds her. Delcy then guides Lizzie to a trunk in the back corner of the cabin they have been using as a table.

DELGY

Second, I want to pass on to you what Grannie Leah, Pearlie, and I and the brave slave women risked our lives to make... Quilts with secret freedom codes. Keep these safe so your children and grandchildren will know, and never forget, what we did for others' freedom. And I'm trusting you will be the one to tell the story.

Delcy unlocks a trunk and shows Lizzie the quilts she has saved. In awe and admiration, Lizzie beams at her Mama.

INT. SHED - DAY

Delcy uncovers the glass of buttermilk, holds it, looks at it. The glass refracts a little sunlight like glitter. Delcy steels herself, puts it on a tray, covers it, and carries it out.

EXT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Delcy, her hands shaking, pauses, girds herself stoically, carries the tray to Lloyd's cabin, and knocks.

DELGY

(to herself)

Well, Pearlie, you said I'd need courage one day.

Answering Delcy's knock, disheveled Lloyd opens the door. She pushes past him and sets the tray on his table. Her hands shake as she uncovers the glass of buttermilk and gestures to Lloyd. She watches him drink it all, takes the empty glass and leaves.

INT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

The children are asleep. Delcy gently pokes Neut and sees he is already lying with open eyes. Delcy pulls him close to her and motions him to make love. He snuggles on her side, but she pulls him on top of her. He looks surprised but pleased.

DELCY

No matter what happens, I want to thank you for all you've done for me, and know that I love you deeply.

INT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Dr. Williams rushes in. Paul and Tom stand over a moaning Lloyd tossing in his bed. Delcy watches from behind.

PAUL

Thank God, you're here, doctor. Father's bleeding out.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Delcy, bring some towels.

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Rushing into her cabin, Delcy puts a sack in Lizzie's arms and takes her and Charley back out with her.

INT. ABANDONED CABIN - DAY

Delcy, Lizzie, and Charley return with the sack. The doctor works on Lloyd.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

We have to compress his belly to stop the bleeding. He's got the flux... Bleeding bowels.

DELCY

Will he be in bed for a long time?

Lloyd yells in pain. Delcy wrings out towels until they are all used up.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

I need more.

Reaching in the sack Delcy finds one quilt left in it. She hesitates, then pulls out the quilt. Seeing it's the one with the "Bears Paw" quilt code she holds it up to show Lizzie.

Lizzie looks at it and then at Delcy, puzzled. After a pause, her eyes light up with recognition and she nods yes.

Delcy compresses the quilt on Lloyd's bloody shirt.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
The bleeding isn't stopping.

The doctor lifts Lloyd's bloody shirt, revealing his old scars from which blood oozes.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
My God, Lloyd, how d'ya get so
scarred up? Looks like you been
whipped like a Negro.

As Lloyd's helpless pleading angry eyes mix with pain and sorrow gaze at Delcy, she points out the scars to Lizzie and Charley.

DELCY
Remember this.

Lizzie and Charley move forward to look closer at the scar.

DELCY
(to Lloyd)
If this wound of hate wasn't put
there by your father, things could
have been different. But, like all
hatred handed down to us, you had
the freedom to choose.

Delcy turns to Lizzie and Charley.

LIZZIE
He chose wrong... from right.

Lloyd's head drops to the side with open eyes as he takes his last breath. The doctor feels his pulse and closes his eyes.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
He's gone.

EXT. BRENT CABIN - NIGHT

Delcy and Lizzie sit on a blanket under the stars.

DELCY
I don't believe in violence, but
maybe sometimes, to stop evil,
blood has to be shed. That's the
weight I'll carry.

LIZZIE

No mama, you didn't mean to kill
him. I know you just wanted to keep
him in his bed so we could leave.

Delcy puts her arm around Lizzie.

DELCY

His body may be gone but the wounds
he gave us slaves will last for ever.

LIZZIE

Not if you don't let them, Mama.
Hatred kills everything and
everyone. Only love lasts. Remember?

INT. BRENT CABIN - DAY

Neut, Lizzie, Charley, Martha, and Mary come in and out with
laughter and chatter, carrying the last remaining household
items and sacks of clothes for their move to their own farm,
while Delcy stands motionless in the middle of the room.

Seen through the open door, their wagon is piled high with
their belongings. Neut, Charlie, and Lizzie, lift the last
item onto the wagon - the pecan rocking chair.

CHARLEY

Papa, I hope our farm has a horse
I can ride... and my own room away
from you, Lizzie.

Lizzie pushes Charley playfully. They laugh as they carry out
the chair.

Delcy transfixed, alone, slowly scans each wall of the room,
as memories of living here her whole life dance before her.

NEUT (O.S.)

You coming Delcy?

Delcy hears the walls echo the voices of her mama, papa and
brothers. Lizzie, unseen, watches from the doorway, and steps
to Delcy's side. She pulls from behind her back a 12 x 12 inch
quilt piece and hands it to Delcy - who looks at it, deeply
moved, her eyes pouring out her love for Lizzie. Lizzie takes
back the quilt piece to tack it to the front of the door. Then,
putting her arm around Delcy she guides her out.

Lizzie, her arm around the back of a tearful Delcy, gently
closes the cabin door and guides her to the waiting wagon.
The quilt piece on the door has words sewn into it: *"Delcy is
free. Find me at Neut Smith's farm in Leesburg."*

EXT. ROAD FROM SHEFF FARM - LATE AFTERNOON

Delcy and Neut wrapped in Leah's stained quilt sit ready in the front seat of the decorated wagon. Lizzie, Charley, Martha, and Mary smile from the back. Behind them piled high are clothes, belongings, and Leah's rocking chair. Delcy kisses the quilt and leans into Neut as the wagon sets off.

DELICY

Neut, one more stop. Please.

INT. SANATORIUM - TWILIGHT

Sarah sits in the lobby waiting. Delcy and Lizzie enter. Delcy whispers to her. Sarah smiles and hugs her.

Delcy removes the piece of Anna's charred quilt piece from her bosom and puts it into Sarah's hand. Taking her other hand, Delcy leads her outside. Lizzie follows.

EXT. SANATORIUM - TWILIGHT

Delcy, Sarah, and Lizzie walk along a dirt pathway from the Sanitorium to the road leading to the waiting wagon.

LIZZIE

Mama, why you freeing Miss Sarah?
Don't you hate her for what she did
all these years?

DELICY

Hate never freed anyone. Only love
makes us free. It don't pay to hate
'coz hate destroys you. If you're
destroyed, then who'll be left to
tell the story?

LIZZIE

What story?

DELICY

The story you will tell one day of
how Grannie Leah, Pearlie, your Mama
and all the enslaved Negro women
risked their lives sewing freedom
codes in quilts to lead thousands to
freedom.

Lizzie smiles proudly. Walking down the dirt road towards the North star twinkling in the twilight sky, as squawking geese fly overhead, the silhouette of the backs of Delcy with Sarah on one side of her and Lizzie on the other stand out.

Delcy reaches down to take Lizzie's hand first and then Delcy takes Sarah's hand.

A whistling wind blows through the trees and Sarah shivers. Delcy pulls her mama's "Flying Geese" quilt out of a burlap bag on her shoulder and wraps it around the backs of Sarah, herself, and Lizzie.

MIRROR IMAGE: In the opening scene the silhouettes of the backs of Leah and little Delcy walk together. Leah wraps her quilt around the backs of both of them and takes Delcy's hand as they walk down a path toward the North Star twinkling in the twilight sky as flying geese squawk overhead.

SUGGEST: The song by Marvin Gaye, '*What's Going On*' plays over the epilogue and credits:

CARDS

- Delcy never heard from her parents and brothers again.
- An estimated 30,000 escaped across the Detroit River into Canada looking for Freedom. The quilt remained their only source of a map to direct them to safe houses.
- Delcy and Lizzie passed on the quilts to the next generation to share the legacy of the Freedom Codes which is now continuing through the seventh generation of descendants.
- Lizzie's granddaughter, Dr. Clarice Boswell wrote the book, *Lizzie's Story: A Slave Family's Journey to Freedom*, on which the feature film *Freedom Code* is based, and helped co-write and consult on this film's screenplay with writer Ricki Linksman and later co-writer Laurie Ashbourne with additional material by Joan Lane so the story would be told and no one would ever forget.
- SUGGEST: Photos of the real Delcy, Lizzie and six generations are displayed on the side with their names as credits roll.

THE END