

The Underground Railroad

A LIMITED SERIES

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&

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Adapted from the novel By

Colson Whitehead

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Mabel

First, OVER BLACK --

YOUNG CORA (V.O.)
*One thing I wish my mama hadda told
 me: "The mind'll break before the
 body ever will."*

And on that final word, a SCREAM nearly bursts our eardrums.

SMASH TO:

1 EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAYBREAK - MOVING

Hurrying with MABEL (25, Cora's mother), moving down a row of slaves, hands picking cotton but eyes straining to see the source of that SCREAMING.

On her heels isn't an overseer in pursuit, but her daughter. CORA at 10, struggling to keep up until they reach...

An extremely pregnant woman, POLLY (20s), curled up in a ball mid-contraction. Beside her, a sack half-full of cotton.

When Mabel kneels, we take a moment to look at her careworn face. Beautiful and burdened. She squeezes Polly's hand.

MABEL
 They coming fast or slow?

POLLY
 Was fast... but... gettin' slow.
 (embarrassed)
 I wet myself, Mabel.

MABEL
 Uh-uh. I bet you did.

Mabel moves to her feet, pushes up Polly's skirt expecting to find wetness but instead there is... blood. A lot of blood.

From her expression we know this is NOT normal. But Mabel hides her worry, speaks calmly but *firmly* to Cora:

MABEL
 Go tell Moses.

2 OMITTED

3 INT. MABEL'S CABIN - SAME

TIGHT ON --*Polly's sweat-drenched face, hands dabbing her brow with wet towels.*

-- Mabel's face bobbing in and out of frame, as we HEAR...

Discordant SOUNDS, Polly's alternating *groans, quickened breaths, whimpers, moans and tears, then...*

Everything goes silent, quiet enough to hear and SEE...

Blood and tissue splashing and spattering over that familiar BIRTHING STAIN.

A beat, then...

UP CUT TO:

4 OMITTED

5 INT. MABEL'S CABIN - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The cabin is solemn; laden with the overpowering scent of blood, feces and sweat.

We take in the cause of this solemnity: over in the corner, Polly rests on a cot. Wrapped in blankets as she cradles the swaddled baby to her breast.

And looming over that cot is stone-faced Moses. Looking down on Polly and that child with a face that connotes all the darkness bringing about those laden feelings.

A beat then... Moses spits at the floor, right down at Polly's feet, at that mess of afterbirth.

A beat of eyes, Moses looking at Polly with the hardest eyes, then... he takes up that baby, brings it close so we can better SEE the reason for such silence in here --

A shriveled, blue face. This baby didn't die in childbirth. Polly gave birth to a stillborn.

Moses searches the face of the child in his hands; the room, the whole world seeming to grind down on itself for a moment.

MABEL (O.C.)

We all sad he born still, Moses.

He looks to Mabel. Such a hard man; soft tears in hard eyes.

MABEL

But your woman gonna bleed to death
if you don't call on a doctor.

Silence. Moses looks from Mabel to Polly. A beat, then...

...he tucks that baby under his arm carelessly, like a rag.
Heads out from here.

MABEL

Moses!

But he's gone, Mabel moving to the threshold, steps out into quarter after him but...

...Moses keeps on moving, dangling that baby at his side.

VOICE (O.S.)

Clean her up.

Mabel turns back to see CONNELLY standing out here smoking a cigarette, had been out here the whole time.

A nod from Mabel, deferential.

MABEL

Yes suh.

Mabel makes her way back inside the cabin, finds those women assembling around Polly's cot. RUTH, a woman we recognize from our Georgia episode, bows her head to lead them in prayer, reaches for Polly's hand, but... Polly hisses:

MABEL

Polly--

POLLY

Leave me be.

Beat.

POLLY

Y'all keep them prayers.
Got no use for 'em.

The women fan away from here, clearing the space around Polly, clearing this room.

Alone, Mabel and Polly regard one another. All that's left is emptiness.

Off Mabel...

UP CUT TO:

6 OMITTED

7 EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - WOODS - NIGHT

JOCKEY (who looks the same age he did in *Georgia*), holds his lantern low so as not to be noticed.

Peppered nearby are a dozen Women and Men, standing silently as...

...the *CRUNCH* of rocks signals approaching steps, the gathered watching as Mabel steps from the wake of a giant cypress cradling a cotton sack with both arms.

JOCKEY

Praise the Lord, you found him.

MABEL

(shakes her head)

Moses gone and brought him back to Polly.

JOCKEY

Where she be now?

MABEL

With the doctor. Moses begged Connelly, promised him we'd all pick double-time if he sent for him.

JOCKEY

Maybe both of 'em found a little bit of God in that child's face?

RUTH

Amen.

MABEL

Well... best thang we can do now is bury this child proper in a dignified way.

Solemn nods and low murmurs sweep across the group.

Mabel steps forward, down on her knees beside Jockey. Sets that baby into a shallow, unmarked Grave.

Silt quickly, if delicately spread over it. In the anxious eyes of those standing, this burial an illegal act, an act of protest.

As Mabel sweeps her hand across that grave, settles the earth atop Polly and Moses' loss...

7A

INT. MABEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Mabel entering from that burial, finds Cora staring at the bloody sheets of Polly's cot.

The blood has soaked through the thin mattress, the girl staring at a Rorschach of concentric blood circles.

CORA

I tried so hard to pull the veil
off fast, Mama.

The "veil" she's referring to is also called the *caul*, which is when part of the amniotic sac covers a newborn's face.

CORA

(remembering)

Ran my fingers over the back of his
neck like you said, but...

The child's eyes get wet as the memory surges forth.

CORA

I killed Polly's baby, didn't I?

Quick as a cat, Mabel down on the floor beside Cora.

MABEL

No, girl.

Cora is dubious so Mabel assumes a more confident tone --

MABEL

You saw how his body was smaller
than it shoulda been, didn't you?

Cora stares blankly.

MABEL

And his skin, it weren't soft like
a healthy baby. It was hard and
shriveled like a prune. Veil or no
veil, that baby was never gonna
breathe. He dead long before we
pulled him out of Polly.

Cora nods but the tears still come. Mabel pulls her in closer.

MABEL

You was born with a veil, too. And
look at you. You *here*.

Cora is surprised and curious. Mabel's gambit is working.

MABEL

They slipped it off easy-like. You
screamed so loud it near burst my
ears.

Mother and daughter share a smile.

CORA

How come you never told me before?

Now Mabel's expression tenses. Beat.

MABEL

Because I didn't want you thinking
you was special.

(off Cora's look)

Some folk say a veil means the
child was born with the sight.
That they can hear the spirits and
see the future. That's what they
say but...

CORA

Is it true? Am I special?

Mabel takes in her daughter a moment, leans back from Cora in
an exaggerated way. She smiles.

So much history in this face, so many roots.

MABEL

I reckon you is baby.
I reckon you is.

Off this pristine display of motherhood...

CUT TO:

POLLY -- clinging to a post.

8

EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAY

Harsh light. From the image alone, a searingly hot day. Polly
back out in the field, back to work.

Mabel, Cora, and several other slaves stuff their cotton
hauls into Polly's sack.

As Polly's knees start to give out, Mabel grabs her under the
arms. Polly *whelps* in pain.

Mabel scans the field, makes sure no one's watching before
easing Polly to the ground. Eye contact, consent --

MABEL

Need to check you over.

Off Polly's nod, Mabel's hands at Polly's breasts, nickel shaped wet spots blossoming across the fabric of her smock. Polly yelps at the touch.

MABEL

Your bosoms sore because the milk coming in.

Polly looks down at her chest and weeps.

POLLY

God ain't done punishing me for laying with Moses outside of marriage.

MABEL

That's nothing but nonsense.

(then)

I'll dig up some herbs that can dry up your milk. Meantime, don't drink any more water.

(to Cora)

Keep filling Polly's sack, you hear?

Off Cora's nod.

9

EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - BIG TREE - DAY

A great big tree, Spanish moss dangling like window-washers on a Skyscraper.

Mabel and Cora at the base of that tree, on hands and knees, hands in the dirt; tilling. Sifting. Cora gestures a root at Mabel:

MABEL

No baby. That's just old pine-root. Keep lookin'.

The two continue their foraging when... Connelly and Moses appear. Deliberate. They're looking for Mabel.

A tap at Cora's back, Mabel rising, pulls the girl up too, behind her. Mabel between Cora and those men.

MABEL

Afternoon Master Connelly. Moses.

MOSES

Where you been?

CONNELLY

Never mind that, you need to come along with us.

MABEL

Yes, suh. Where we goin'?

Off Connelly's look.

MABEL

On account of my girl, suh.

MOSES

Master Randall heard about Polly and said we stepped into some good luck.

Mabel is miffed by the suggestion a dead baby would signify anything but tragedy.

CONNELLY

He means to say everything happens according to God's plan.

(and)

Down on the Hicks plantation, woman give birth to two pups; twins. Seed of a big ole' buck but they mammy died in the birth. Now see they got a midwife but no wet nurse on the plantation, so... Mister Randall offered Polly to nurse 'em until a time comes they need no nursin'.

(and)

Got a good rate for her, too.

Mabel can see the strain in Moses' face.

MABEL

Polly can't do it, she not strong enough, see? I'm happy to hand feed those babies *pap*. My Mama taught me the best recipe. Make 'em strong just like from the breast.

CONNELLY

Master and his missus want to raise these babies in the image of they daddy; need milk, not *pap*.

MABEL

Moses: tell him your woman lost two other pregnancies before anybody but us know'd she was carryin'.

(off his silence)

MABEL (CONT'D)

Forcin' her to suckle someone
else's babies before her mind can
heal up ain't right, it's cruel,
Moses, tell him!

THWACK! Moses backhands Mabel.

MOSES

Master say what it's gonna be and
that's what it gonna be, damnit.

ANGLE ON: CORA, watching Mabel rub her raw cheek.

Connelly gets into his shirt, bides his time by retrieving a
homespun cigarette. As he lights it...

CONNELLY

Gon' need you in the house for a
bit. Look after the babies.

MABEL

What about my Cora?

CONNELLY

She stay back with the other
pickaninnies. Shouldn't be but a
couple of weeks to see this
through.

Mabel looking from Connelly to Moses. Moses intimidating.
Through a puff on that cig, Connelly indifferent.

What choice does she have? Off Mabel resigned to her fate...

CUT TO:

TWIN BABIES, asleep in a wicker buggy.

10 INT. RANDALL PLANTATION HOUSE - CHAMBER ROOM - DAY

We may remember this room and we may not -- the Randall
study, that same room where Ridgeway and Cora had their first
meeting.

Polly and Mabel in here, Polly staring at those babies from
across the spare room -- a bed and bassinet, as though the
room has been set specifically for this purpose.

Mabel allowing Polly her space. As Mabel picks up one of the
sleeping babies from the bassinet:

POLLY

(sotto)

They can't kill me. How'd they feed
those things if they did?

Mabel brings the baby over to her friend.

POLLY

See that's the secret, Mabel.

Beat.

POLLY

Death ain't never been the worse
thang to befall any nigger.

An implied acceptance of that truth between these women,
joined as Mabel hands over the baby, Polly relenting,
accepting its presence.

Both women's attention going to...

THE DOORWAY -- where Moses has entered, door held aloft.

POLLY

(whispered)

*I don't want him here, Mabel.
Please.*

MABEL

(at Moses)

Never had mens look on while's
show's a woman how to feed.

MOSES

(shakes his head)

Master put me in charge of those
babies. Each one of those little
bucks worth more than five of you.

MABEL

Go on and ask Connelly who spent
two weeks teaching his wife how to
feed.

His arrogance softens but Moses maintains his front.

MOSES

That may be but I'm no fool -- get
on with it and get it over with
so's you can get back to your'n,
you hear?

Moses *yelled* that last part, wakes not one, but both babies, a cacophony of hungry *cries*.

Despite being strangers to her, their *cries* instantly activate Polly's milk supply. She *winces* as her breasts fill with even more milk.

MOSES

Alright now, get on with it. But you still gotta pick your fair share, Mabel, Connelly tell me to see to it.

Mabel picks one of the wailing infants up and waves Moses away.

MABEL

(to Polly)

Go on and move on to the cot and untie your blouse.

Moses leaves.

Beat. A beat for Polly to look about herself, hands on her blouse but frozen, unmoving.

MABEL

What?

(and)

Polly what's wrong with you?

A nervous shake of the head. Polly looks... embarrassed?

POLLY

Nothin', just... body's been changin'. Seems like I don't know my own bosom. Everything gettin' low and dark.

MABEL

That's alright Polly, it's just nature. Body change cause it know you in need. Ain't nothin' I ain't seen, now... please?

Polly demurs but... exposes her engorged breasts, darkened breasts. Mabel regards her for a beat; *just* a beat, then...

MABEL

First thing first, we gotta get them to latch onto you. Lemme see the size of your nipples.

(and)

MABEL (CONT'D)

Roll up the blankets and tuck 'em
under your breasts.

Polly rolls up the blankets and places them as instructed.

But Mabel is focused on the crying baby's mouth. It's much too small for Polly's nipples. So Mabel slides her thumb and forefinger down the baby's cheeks, opening his jaw as wide as it will go.

Then with one fell swoop she attaches the baby to Polly's breast in a cradle position.

Polly grunts in pain as Mabel adjusts the baby's body, guides arms underneath it.

MABEL

Hold him like that. Nobody tells
womens but nursing is something you
learn, not something you know.
Same for the babies.

Polly squeezes her eyes shut -- she's in physical and emotional pain.

MABEL

It's gonna hurt like the devil for
a while but when they drain the
milk, you'll feel better.

Mabel checks on the latch, sees the baby is suckling.

She picks up the second crying baby and expertly attaches him to the other breast. They rest in a cross-cradle position.

11 EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAYBREAK

With heavy lids, Mabel plucks a fluffy boll of cotton from the top of the plant. On her next try, she slices a finger.

MABEL

Mercy.

Beat. A *beat* of red drifting into white, Mabel's blood running onto that cotton. As she brings her finger to her mouth to stanch the bleeding...

...a man next to her passes out from the heat.

Nobody moves, nobody startles as the man lies unconscious in the soil. As a small boy hurries over, tosses water onto the man's listless face...

CONNELLY (O.S.)

Ma-BEL!

12 OMITTED

13 OMITTED

14 EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - BIG TREE - DAY

Mabel and Connelly beneath that massive oak from earlier. We catch them in medias-res.

CONNELLY

I know you like mid-wifin' over
sweatin' in the field, but she
Moses woman and Moses aim to take
care of her hisself.

MABEL

Yes, suh, I know suh, but...

Mabel is compelled to try and help but doesn't want to get beaten for insubordination.

CONNELLY
Finish your thought.

Beat.

MABEL
The babies gettin' all the milk
they can handle, Polly don't need
me, you right, but... Polly's not
well.

CONNELLY
How you mean "not well?" Her milk
bad?

MABEL
No suh, that's not the well I mean.
A woman's mind a tricky thing, and
see... I got doubts about Moses
capabilities in this matter, suh.

Her eyes meet his for effect.

Beat.

CONNELLY
Be that as it may, it's for Moses
to deal with and he'll deal with it
as he see fit.

15 INT. SLAVE QUARTER - MOSES'S CABIN - LATER

Mabel enters to find Moses and Polly in bed, one of the
babies sprawled on the cot. The other cradled in Moses' hand.

Beat.

MOSES
Polly in here now. Babies too.
Ain't no fresh niggers in here to
bring no sickness, just us and
these children, so....

Polly smiles when she sees Mabel.

MOSES
As of today, you can go back to the
field. Full time. Won't be needin'
your help no mo'.

Beat. Mabel looking from Polly to Moses, like a cop stepping
onto the scene of a domestic violence call.

A deep breath, mindful of the air in here...

MABEL

Alright.

(and)

Just wants to collect my tinctures,
that's all.

MOSES

They over there.

Mabel moves in the direction Moses proposed, thinking on her feet. Puzzling a look at Moses and the plate of food there -- Moses is feeding a bit of mash to one of those babies.

Mabel finishes grabbing her things, turns back to Moses and Polly there, when...

VOICE (O.S.)

Mo-SES!

*Moses, boss Connelly aim to see
you!*

From outside that came, a boy's voice calling out, SOUND of his feet hurrying off. Moses jumps up and kisses Polly's head before pushing past Mabel on his way out.

MOSES

(on his way out)

Leave us be now, Mabel.

Moses goes.

Polly adjusts, then pulls that baby off her body, sets him into a straw bassinet alongside his brother.

Polly looks to Mabel, smiles again; a strange, saccharine expression that raises the hair on Mabel's neck.

MABEL

Polly. You okay?

A nod. That smile again.

MABEL

What's goin' on?

POLLY

I'm good. Real good. Our babies
healthy and Moses wants to get
married so we can have more.

MABEL

Who babies?

POLLY

Me and Moses.

MABEL

But... *Polly*. Them babies ain't yours, you see? Babies belong to Hicks and they gone' sell 'em down the river just as soon as they can walk upright, now --

Mabel stops herself, SEES herself in the reflection of Polly's eyes -- *glassed over, whites bulging.*

From the strain in the creases at the corner of her mouth, Polly *heard* her, clearly heard her in the bound up way her eyes lock into oblivion, but... something off.

A smile from Polly. Wider, brighter than the occasion calls for. Again, *off.*

POLLY

Time to feed my babies, Mabel.

There was no term for postpartum psychosis in this era and yet, Mabel clear about what she's seeing, the concern etched all over her face.

A nod from Mabel. Resigned.

16 EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - PLOT - DAY

Cora pulls sour grass and weeds from the simmering red dirt as Mabel stares into the middle distance

Cora tries to cheer her mother up by pulling a young turnip from the ground.

CORA

Mama, look?

When Mabel does, Cora holds the turnip up with pride.

Beat. Mabel sees but doesn't register the turnips, thoughts churning in her head. Off her far-away stare...

17 INT. MABEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Cora's body is sprawled across the entire cot. A dog-tired Mabel pushes her daughter's body to make room then crawls into bed.

A moment of Mabel lying here, staring at her daughter's sleeping face, something on her mind, a reflection of all the things we see in *Cora's* face -- innocence.

An uncorrupted life, then...

18 EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAYBREAK

Familiar faces down the rows. Mabel among them. Her head down. Hands moving. Eyes focused on her work.

As Mabel continues her work...

CUT TO:

19 EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY - MOVING

Crossing the quarter with Moses, a contended look on his face as he nods approval at the random people he's passing by, folks tending to livestock, minding cane.

A beat more of this crossing and his destination becomes clear -- Mabel's plot.

Moses stoops down to a knee, a knife from his pocket, carefully digs up a pristine vegetable.

Satisfied, he stands. Continues on his walk again, away from Mabel's plot, along this stretch of cabins to the far end, to his own cabin.

As Moses carries those prizes from Mabel's plot inside...

We remain out here -- looking on at that cabin.

An uncommon quiet in the quarter. Too much quiet, the time passing like inert clouds in clear sky, then...

Moses stumbles from that cabin, takes a few steps, drops to his knees. As he slumps to the ground in agony...

CUT BACK TO:

20 EXT. RANDALL PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAY

Here with Mabel, working as diligently as ever on the row, Cora beside her.

A voice kicks up in the distance, nondescript, loud and feverishly pitched.

Mabel stands upright, SEES a boy hauling ass along the cotton, approaching like his life depends on it.

As that boy nears...

21 EXT. SLAVE QUARTER - DAY - MOMENTS LATER - MOVING

Arriving here with Mabel, Cora on her heels as always. It feels as though the other slaves are parting just for Mabel, people stepping aside, giving berth as she and Cora cross through the quarter.

As Mabel nears Moses' cabin, she stops, turns back to Cora.

MABEL

You get back home, you hear?

CORA

But mama, I--

Mabel flicks her wrist -- *THWACK* -- slaps Cora's cheek. Not hard but the message delivered, damage done.

As Cora runs away, Mabel looks back at that cabin door. Girding herself, she ascends the porch, continues into...

22 INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MOSES' CABIN - DAY

We enter with Mabel, glued to her. Rather than SEE what Mabel sees...

WE SEE MABEL -- moving deeper into the room, our peripheral vision catching glimpses of blood on the walls; BLOOD all over the walls.

Mabel stoops to the floor, brings us close enough to SEE...

Polly's lifeless body. The self-inflicted slashes.

We will not see the two dead children in any great detail. Just SOFT FOCUS glimpses at the edge of frame.

Take's Polly's head into her hands, somehow remaining outwardly stoic. No crying, breathing steady. But on her face? We SEE it: Her heart is splintering.

UP CUT TO:

23 EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - MOSES' CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Mabel stumbling from that cabin, just as Moses had before. Sits on the porch, hands covered in Polly's blood.

Moses still on the ground across from her. Up on his tail now, knees at his chest, like a child at rest.

Tears in his eyes. Just these two here waiting, processing as the quiet recedes, the commotion of others approaching, Connelly's disparate voice, then...

24 EXT. SLAVE QUARTERS - LATER

Moses tied to the whipping post.

Some things have evolved from Cora's time on this plantation in our pilot to this extended look back with Mabel, but the whipping post is not one them.

Connelly here watching a slave bring that whip down on Moses. To our surprise, that slave is PRIDEFUL -- *CRACK!*

The lash swift, indifferent. And again -- *CRACK!*

Prideful dutiful but unsure, growing into it.

Most of the slaves gathered, Mabel among them but Cora nowhere to be found; the children hidden away as the adults watch the administering of this beating. Jockey stands beside Mabel.

Finally, Connelly raises a hand to Prideful, halts the whipping. Reaches into his pocket, patting himself down.

CONNELLY

(to himself)

Shit.

(and)

Ezekiel, fetch Jockey and have him roll me some more tobacco.

VOICE (O.S.)

Yes suh!

Connelly stares down at Moses now, his *aide de camp*:

CONNELLY

Cut him down, fix him to the stake, Prideful.

PRIDEFUL

Yes suh, boss.

Prideful waves a few other men over to that whipping post, the three of them working at Moses's hands. But rather than watch what comes of this, we follow a commotion, a round of gasps drawing us to...

...Polly's limp, bloody body, two field hands carrying her corpse from the threshold of Moses' cabin.

Mabel and Jockey looking on, eyes following those field hands as they disappear behind a bend.

JOCKEY

(plain)

Y'all did everything together.

Beat. The coldest beat. Meant nothing by it and yet...
everything in it.

As the pair hold one another's gaze here...

UP CUT TO:

25 EXT. MOSES' CABIN - LATER

The commotion from earlier long sub-sided, Mabel standing at the foot of this cabin - even from just the exterior, can sense, can *feel* the horror contained within those walls.

As Mabel steels herself...

CUT TO:

26 INT. MOSES' CABIN - DAY

Mabel on hands and knees. Scrubbing.

Scrubbing these blood-soaked floors, in many ways, reminiscent of our opening, of Cora's birth, of Polly and those babies' deaths.

It's quiet in here; just the sound of Mabel's work scratching and sloshing over that wood.

The blood is thick. It moves like oil at her touch.

More scrubbing, more wiping, then... Mabel stops. Goes completely still.

There's a look in her eyes. At once near and far. She's gone somewhere, *someplace* away from here. As a thought, a feeling settles over her...

27 EXT. MOSES' CABIN - DAY

Mabel stepping from that cabin, hands free.

Steps down from the porch, turns right, heads up and away from the quarter.

As she disappears beneath that massive oak on the quarter's edge...

UP CUT TO:

28 EXT. DENSE FOREST - DAY

Mabel *moving through dense terrain.*

Hands still free. One foot in front of the other. A march.

UP CUT TO:

29 EXT. FOREST VALLEY - DAY - LATER

Mabel still on that march, further along and, if it weren't clear before it will hopefully be clearer now -- in the framing and the surrounding wood, Mabel is walking the same journey Cora and Caesar ran before her.

Or after her? "Chicken or the egg" as Mabel crosses the same valley Cora was chased through by those boar hunters.

A beat more of this crossing, then...

30 EXT. SWAMP - LATER

Of all the places we're journeying with Mabel, this one unmistakable -- narrow trees and black water, algae bathing the surface in electric green phosphorus.

Mabel out in the swamp. *Deep* out in the swamp, moving at a steady pace. Sturdier than Caesar and Cora in their crossing but still no faster. Arduous terrain.

She's crossing frame in the same direction as Cora. If you superimposed the images on top of one another, she may as well *be* Cora.

Mabel pushing the frame; leading us. Guiding us, then...

We leave Mabel. Continuing on a ways before STOPPING.

A beat then... we REVERSE SCREEN DIRECTION, double back to FIND Mabel frozen to her spot.

ANGLE ON: MABEL -- and for the first time this journey, something awakening, alive in her eyes.

As the epiphany spreads, she covers her mouth, a release of pain, of horror and shame; her breaths quickening, everything coming at once. A beat more to process, then...

Mabel turns, begins trekking back in the direction from whence she came. Via screen direction should be clear: back to the plantation.

Mabel moving through the water, wending through a cluster of thick reeds when... she stumbles, caught in the muck of the swamp.

Mable bent at the waist, braising herself on a bramble of stumps beneath the surface, when... her body seizes.

No SOUND but *pain* as Mabel looks down at the meat of her biceps, just above the elbow and bearing the distinct markings of a snake bite.

Unfurled on the surface of the water, a COTTONMOUTH SNAKE. The creature winds away, moving silently through green algae.

Mabel clutching a near tree for support, eyes on her rapidly swelling arm. Takes a step forward; slower than before but moving, making her way. That arm limp.

Up ahead, the run of the swamp seemingly endless, brackish water for miles. A few more steps, then...

Beat.

Mabel stops again. This time her mouth drops open. And fear rises for the first time...

Looks skyward, her breaths easing as her exertion plateaus and yet, her breathing going shallow, the venom doing its work.

She settles onto the trunk of a scarred tree; lets her body fall backward, slumps down onto the tree bed for support.

The SOUNDS of the swamp here. A chorus of sounds, a song of disparate expression, of *free* expression.

Mabel takes in the world around her. She's never been freer, and yet... tears.

MABEL

(sotto)

Lord. Please forgive me.

(and)

See to it lord. Ask her my forgiveness, lord.

Beat.

Mabel lying in the mingle of trees, of phosphorous green and still water. Lifts her head bittersweetly. Mabel sings --

MABEL

*Kwaa Ni Kwaa Ni
Moo Li Moo Li
Nii Goeh Nye Tey
Wo Te Ablotsriri
Mii Ni Nye Yaa Fee
Wo Jaa Shwek
Mii Ba ei
(repeats)
Mii Ba ei... Mii Ba ei....*

And if that singing sounds familiar, it should: this is the same song Cora sang to Grace in the attic back in North Carolina.

Though from the timbre of Mabel's voice here, muted into a song of life, a song of death; an elegy for this fading life.

Fading light. We draw back, give Mabel her space, her dignity. As she lays dying, we...

DISSOLVE TO:

MOSES -- lying in the dust, on his side, hands and feet bound around that whipping post.

31 EXT. MABEL'S CABIN - DUSK

Cora out here on the porch, waiting as adults come in from the fields, the closing of the day's work.

She's waiting. Alone. *Completely* alone.

From the look on Cora's face, an understanding: she knows her mother isn't coming home. So instead of this waiting, she...

Moves off that porch, small feet padding across the dusty quarter, brings her finally too...

MABEL'S PLOT --

Does the only thing she can think to do here; gets down on her knees at that plot, starts working, sifting the soil beneath freshly budding okra.

Just a child and yet, there's something in this work. An understanding that Mabel... is gone.

Cora looks down at her tiny hands. A beat to process then...

CUT BACK TO:

32 OMITTED COMBINED WITH SCENE 31

33 EXT. SWAMP - LATER

Daylight but just barely, the light nearly gone. Mabel absolutely still, the life gone from her.

These are tidal waters. The swamp has risen.

OUR VIEW -- Mabel's bodice, drifting in the drink. Slowly but fluidly, her body slipping from that tree-bed, swallowed by the swamp.

Beat. A beat of brackish water, that green drowning in the inkiest black, the shimmer of the water's surface; bright white at the crest of black ripples; saturation and contrast, the call and response of light and dark as we...

DISSOLVE TO:

DARKNESS -- of a different sort, opaque. And a familiar SOUND, a SQUEAK as we reveal we're...

34 INT. GHOST TUNNEL - DAY - MOVING

And the source of that SOUND clear as we TILT DOWN from earth and steel tracks, SEE CORA AND MOLLY on a handcart.

That *same* handcart from the conclusion of *Indiana: Autumn*.

No clue where we are from the subterranean confines of this cave, but... it's clear they've come a long way.

They drift a few feet further, ahead of us, emerging from darkness and pushing toward that light.

With a final *SQUEEEEEEEEEEEEEAK...* the track ends, short of the mine's mouth.

Cora and Molly exit the handcart, completely in silhouette. We watch as they walk away from us, further away in darkness toward the opening of this mine, toward that light.

35 INT. CEMENT CAVE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Looking back in at the darkness from which they just emerged, our two heroines stand, dirty and weak.

The duo is enveloped by warm air. Each looking around at their new environs.

A prolonged beat of them taking in this new world, then:

MOLLY

Cora.

Cora looking to the girl.

Molly gestures at a thing in her hand, a small cloth sack, knotted like a group of nickels in a towel: Molly is holding Cora's keepsake.

MOLLY

When the fightin' was happenin', I
found it. Took it up off the
ground.

Passes the sack to Cora, unaware of the weight, the history of this gesture.

Cora reaches back, takes the girl's hand:

CORA

Come on. Let's get ourselves up
above.

We watch as Cora and Molly set out across the rocks, begin up the incline of this atrium.

36 EXT. CEMENT CAVE - PLATEAU - DAY

At first, lushness, a *different* green; fertile. Plenitude.

And now... Cora and Molly appearing, climbing out from a small thicket of trees, like two spirits hiking out from the Garden of Eden.

Or is it? The grass tall and lush here, swaying in the breeze, but... something dark, barren about the place, like souls washed out from shore.

As they scan this hillside, a small compound appearing, three structures gathered below a TOWERING TREE.

Cora looking back to little Molly, thinking, then...

UP CUT TO:

36A EXT. OLD BARN 1 - DAY

Cora standing before the crumbling edifice of an old barn.

Small. Lean-to. A door ajar at the barn's center.

Cora steps up to this opening, enters cautiously, careful of her surroundings. In the shadow within, Cora slips into darkness, disappears for a moment.

A beat, then...

...Cora reappears, stepping back into the light. The slightest moment to herself then... a thought: *Molly*.

Cora moves left, around the corner of this barn, opens our view so that we SEE...

UPHILL -- little Molly making her way alone against the worn green of this hillside, up toward that towering tree.

Cora watches her ascend a moment, then follows after her. As she does, our view RISES, up above, just Cora and Molly here against the quietude of this hillside, that tree -- auburn leaves and slim branches.

In a place so barren of life, an oasis: no bodies have ever hung from this tree.

36B EXT. TOWERING TREE - DAY

Cora arriving, finds Molly here looking up into the verdant canopy.

A beat to observe the child's wonder, then... Cora sinks to her knees. Scans the ground, sights whatever she can find, an oblong rock.

She's digging. Molly looking over at the sound of Cora's scratching. Molly approaching as Cora digs into the ground, scraping and scratching at the earth.

If this seems like the spitting image of our heroine from our pilot episode, it should -- Cora is preparing a plot.

Molly watching as Cora finishes this work, unfurls the small piece of burlap we've seen in evidence many times before.

She passes the okra seeds from hand to hand a moment, then...
Cora plants those okra seeds.

A heavy planting, waves passing through her, the spirit of things, the history, all of it going there into the soil; a life past, a present but... not future.

It ends here. The burden, the pain of it all. It ends *here*, beneath this tree. An oasis in a land of death.

Molly watches quietly as Cora covers her legacy. As Cora looks to the girl, at Molly's innocence...

CUT TO:

37 INT./EXT. OLD BARN 2 - DAY - LATER

Empty. Just a shell.

Cora and Molly searching the skeleton of this place, as abandoned from within as it seemed from without. Molly illuminating what needs no saying:

MOLLY

I'm hungry.

CORA

I know baby, just...

THWOP, THWUMP, THWOP -- from outside, the SOUND of wooden wheels bumping on the road.

Cora edges up to a break in the wood, looks out and SEES...

A WAGON APPROACHING -- curving around the trail like a snake. Heading west into the sun. Laden with gear, inventories lashed to the sides.

As it nears, Cora sees that it's commanded by an older black man smoking a pipe (OLLIE), grizzled and dressed in a heavy ranchers coat.

Cora steps into the road, a piece of detritus from the barn in hand; a rod, a pipe. After what's she's been through, a moment to gauge whether this wagon is friend or foe.

Ollie halts the wagon. Cora looks into his eyes. A prolonged beat between them, then:

OLLIE
Y'all hungry?

MOLLY
We very hungry, suh.

Cora looking to Molly there, an innocent betrayal.

CORA
Are you kind, mister?

A beat as Ollie considers that, holding Cora's gaze. She's serious in her questioning. *Dead* serious.

OLLIE
Most days, yes. But like anybody, I falters, of course.

Ollie reaches into the wagon behind him, into a small basket. Passes down small provisions, a hand torn piece of bread and cured meat.

Cora passes both to Molly as Ollie takes in this hilltop, these worn down structures. His eyes come back to Cora.

OLLIE
Where y'all headed?

Nothing from Cora.

OLLIE
Ain't much here so I figure you either runnin' from or runnin' to.

A beat, then:

CORA
Where you goin'?

OLLIE
Down to Saint Louis. From there, trail to California.

OLLIE (CONT'D)

Going to meet some people in
Missouri on the way. That good with
you, *miss*...

A studied beat, then:

CORA

...Cora.

OLLIE

Nice to meet you, Ms. Cora. Name's
Ollie. I mean no harm to you.
I promise you that.

After a beat of deliberation, Cora gestures Molly forth, the girl climbing up to the wagon and onto the bench seat behind Ollie.

MOLLY

(as she climbs)
I'm Molly.

OLLIE

Howdy Ms. Molly.

Finally Cora steps onto the box. Up close now, Ollie can see the state of these two, the soot and grime, the scar on Cora's temple. She ignores his curiosity:

CORA

Headed west, huh?

OLLIE

Yes ma'am, headed west.

Beat. Cora and Molly find each other's eyes. A silent agreement.

CORA

Okay then, Mr. Ollie.
(and)
Okay.

Ollie flicks the reins with a light touch, then...

OLLIE

Giddyup. Go on now.

The horses resume and the wagon proceeds on the rut.

OLLIE

If y'all are cold, I got blankets
under the seat.

Cora locates two blankets. Hands one to Molly, then wraps the other around herself. The wagon continues on. Wheels moving slowly but moving forward nonetheless.

The rickety rock of this wagon, Molly and Cora and Ollie jostling with the contours of the road.

Cora and Molly. Sharing that blanket under the kindness, the protection of Ollie.

Cora and Molly... together.

As the little girl nestles into Cora, so many images conjured; generations of black women in the spirit of this image...

...from the garden at the feet of that ghost tunnel...

...to the swamps of Georgia and the beauty of Valentine, all of it carried to parts unknown; manifest destiny as writ in the image of Cora and the child she refused to leave behind, the one who escaped that attic and...

...yes, the girl Mabel so wanted to return to as we...

CUT TO BLACK.

38

OMITTED - COMBINED WITH SC. 37

END SERIES.