

FADE IN:

1 EXT. ANIMAL PEN - DAY**1**

We are outside of a smallish animal pen. It sits in back of some wooden structures. The build and design is that of early 19th century American. It would pass for urban and commercial as opposed to agrarian. Within the pen we see SEVERAL SHEEP grazing.

Into the pen walks a BUTCHER. He is a white man in his mid-forties. Without any particular regard he takes up one of the sheep, and wrestles it into a shack-like structure.

2 INT. ABATTOIR - LATER**2**

The shack is a smallish abattoir. We see the Butcher sitting on a bench next to the sheep. With sheers in hand, the Butcher clears the wool from the sheep.

Once the sheep is clean, in a very matter of fact manner, the Butcher binds the sheep's rear legs, slits its throat, then hangs it upside down allowing for the animal to bleed out. The butcher then pulls the intestine from the animal immediately after slaughter while the gut is still hot. These bundles are put into large containers and await collection by the DRESSER.

3 INT. DRESSER'S - DAY**3**

We see now the DRESSER taking the casings from a pot of cold water. He then removes all membranes except for the muscle fibers. The casing is now ready for sorting; the casing is checked for length, color and general condition.

Selected casings are grouped together in HANKS.

4 INT. STRING MAKER'S - DAY**4**

We see now a STRING MAKER working with the hanks, using a BLADE to split them into RIBBONS. The next step is to whiten the gut with sulphur fumes before they are combed through straightening the ribbons.

Lastly, the String Maker takes some strings and WRAPS THEM IN A VERY NEAT LITTLE PACKAGE.

5 EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON**5**

The String Maker walks the package along the streets of Saratoga, New York. It is best known as the location that British General John Burgoyne surrendered to American General Horatio Gates at the end of the Battles of Saratoga on October 17, 1777, often cited as the turning point for the United States during the American Revolutionary War.

The town line is formed by the Hudson River and is the border of Washington County. Fish Creek, a tributary of the Hudson River, is the outflow of Saratoga Lake. It is a fairly modern township, but in the middle 1800s it is far from pristine.

THERE IS MUD AND MANURE EVERYWHERE, AND IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP ANYTHING CLEAN. This state, however, is the norm for the era and goes uncommented upon.

The String Maker arrives to a TOWNHOUSE. Using a KNOCKER that hangs at the door he raps, then calls to the occupant:

STRING MAKER
Mr. Northup? Are you there Mr.
Northup?

6 INT. TOWNHOUSE - STUDY - LATER

6

We are close on a PAIR OF HANDS. BLACK HANDS. They unwrap the package and display the strings.

WE CUT TO the hands stringing a violin. It's not a high end piece, but it is quite nice.

WE CUT TO a wide shot of the study. Sitting in a chair with violin in hand is SOLOMON NORTHUP; a man in his late twenties. Everything about Solomon, his mein and manner, is distinguished. But he, too, seems a hardy individual.

Someone who has known manual labor in his time.

Solomon begins to lightly play his violin, as if testing the strings, their tuning. Satisfied, Solomon begins to play vigorously. As he does, we make a

HARD CUT TO:

7 INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

7

We come in on a lively affair. A dinner party is being thrown with the confines of a fairly stately house. In attendance are EIGHT COUPLES. All are WHITE and all are FAIRLY YOUNG, in their early twenties. The men and women are dressed in very fine attire. We should get the sense that for the most part they are people of means.

The furniture has been set aside in the living room. At the moment the couples are engaged in the dancing of a REEL. Most likely they would be dancing "the reel of three," in which, as the name implies, three dancers weave in and out of one another, completing a figure 8 pattern on the floor, usually in six or eight bars of music.

The music they are dancing too is being played by Solomon, having cut directly from the tune he was previously playing. He plays with a light determination, and in no way seems possessed with empty servitude.

Solomon concludes the reel, and the dancers break into enthusiastic applause, which is followed by thanks and congratulations by the group. It should be clear that despite their respective races there is much admiration and appreciation for Solomon's abilities.

8 INT. NORTHUP HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

8

It is a Saturday morning. Clad in her "finest attire" is ANNE; Solomon's wife. A few years younger than Solomon.

She is lighter in color than Solomon as well. We see also the Northup children: ELIZABETH, who is ten, MARGARET, eight and ALONZO who is five. They are handsome, and well groomed kids. Anne straightening up the children. She finishes, she rises up and stands behind them, almost as if preparing to pose for a portrait.

They all wait a moment, then Solomon enters the foyer.

He stands, and looks admiringly at his family.

ADMIRINGLY stressed. It isn't that he doesn't have love for them, he does as well. But in the moment, he truly admires his greatest accomplishment: a family that is healthy and well and provided for. He goes to his children, and hands each a coin.

He moves, then, to Anne. Gives her a kiss on the cheek.

The children giggle at the sight.

9 EXT. STREET - DAY

9

Solomon and his family are now out walking along the streets and groves of Saratoga.

The streets are well populated this morning with many people out strolling. Most are WHITE, but there are BLACKS as well. They are FREED BLACKS who mingle fairly easily though not always completely with the whites.

We see, too, a few BLACK SLAVES who travel with their WHITE MASTERS. These pairings are largely from the south and despite the fact the blacks are slaves, they are not physically downtrodden, not field hands. They are well dressed and "leading apparently an easy life" - comparatively speaking, as they trail their masters.

Among the slaves, we see one in particular; JASPER. As he trails his MASTER he can't help but note Solomon and his family as they make their way INTO A STORE. His intrigue of this most handsome and harmonious group should be obvious.

With his Master occupied, Jasper moves slyly toward Parker's store. Clearly his intent is to have dealings with the Northup's.

10 INT. STORE - LATER

10

We are inside the store of MR. CEPHAS PARKER, a supplier of general goods. Solomon greets him with:

SOLOMON
Mr. Parker.

PARKER
Mr. Northup. Mrs. Northup.

Though little is stated, their is clearly familiarity among them.

With money in hand the Northup children move quickly about the store looking for items to purchase.

At the checkout counter sits a portrait of WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON, the edges draped in black crepe. Before the book sits a LEDGER. Mr. Parker asks of Solomon:

PARKER
If you would, Mr. Northup, sign our condolence book. My hope is to find a way to forward it to the Widow Harrison. Sad days for the nation.

SOLOMON
But brighter times ahead.

As Anne looks over some silks and fabrics, Solomon eyes a new violin. He asks of Parker:

SOLOMON

May I?

PARKER

It would be my pleasure. Could I trouble you for a waltz, sir?

Solomon does a quick tuning of the instrument, then into a waltz; lively and well played. The Elizabeth and Margaret clasp hands and dance. There is laughter and smiles.

As Solomon plays, Jasper enters the store. He stands for a moment, again in seeming admiration of Solomon. While far from pathetic, Jasper is the definition of a subservient man.

As Solomon concludes to the applause of Parker and the children:

JASPER

Suh -- A word, suh? I could not help none but take note of yahself and yah family as yah made yah way. My congratulations to yah. Yah Missus and chil'ren be very handsome 'n must be'a great regard. My name, suh, is Jasper. I am travelin' to Saratoga with my massa. Massa Fitzgerald. And I will insist to yah, suh, that I am well provided fo'. Yah can see that jus by my adornments. And I never want for no meal or 'fo warmth at night. Massa Fitzgerald is a fine man. Very fine.

Jasper looks to Parker, then steps closer to Solomon and speaks a bit conspiratorially. The following comes from him as though it is a thought he has wrestled with for some time:

JASPER