

# TUBMAN

a series by elizabeth gray bayne



## PERSONAL STATEMENT

Harriet Tubman is a figure whom I've long admired for her courage and contributions to African American history. But for a long time, she was just that, a historical figure in a black and white photo. It wasn't until I became better acquainted with her full biography that I realized what an American hero she was and that her activities spanned from freeing slaves to serving in the Civil War. Other aspects of equal interest were that Harriet Tubman was married, suffered from narcolepsy, had the strength of a man, was only five feet and two inches, was a badass who pistol whipped slaves who wanted to turn back, and built a home for orphans and the elderly after she retired. I began to see a more three-dimensional woman who had to overcome a series of "perceived" handicaps to become a legend in her own lifetime.

When I learned that her first escape attempt North with her brothers had failed, I became obsessed with where this woman discovered the courage to finally take the trip alone. As I poured over historical accounts of her life drawn from her own testimony, I realized that her strength came from learning to trust herself. While few of us can relate to guiding fugitives to freedom across state lines, many of us can relate to learning to listen to our own internal voice.

- Elizabeth Bayne

## LOGLINE

The adventures of Harriet Tubman as she travels along the Eastern Shore armed only with her martial arts skills, a tiny axe and a pistol. Season One explores the year before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which will make it illegal to aid and abet a runaway, when an illiterate enslaved woman named Minty finds the courage to escape an abusive marriage and a failing plantation to join the Underground Railroad.



## PILOT SYNOPSIS

MINTY TUBMAN (29) and her two brothers BEN and HARRY tromp through the woods at night. The master of their plantation has just died and the siblings are on the list of slaves to be sold to cover his debts. Frightened and lost, her brothers insist on turning back before they're caught, but Minty refuses. They take her back by force, tossing her at the steps of her husband's cabin.

Her husband JOHN, is furious at his wife for jeopardizing his status as a freeman. He ridicules Minty's dream of escaping North, questioning whether she's smart or strong enough to survive the trip as an illiterate woman handicapped by a brain injury that left her with chronic narcolepsy or "sleeping spells". Her confidence broken, Minty agrees to wait to see if they can save enough to buy her freedom before she's sold.

The next morning, Minty returns to work with the logging crew where her father OLD BEN is foreman. He convinces Minty to let him train her with fighting and survival skills to make the trip alone. Fast forward three months later and Minty stands at the precipice of a moonlit forest. The plantation looms large behind her. She hesitates for a moment before a voice in her head says, "Go." Minty takes off in a full sprint.

A sleeping spell leaves Minty passed out in a clearing on the first leg of her journey. She awakes surrounded by slave catchers but instead of surrendering, she uses the martial arts skills from her father to fend the men off and escape.

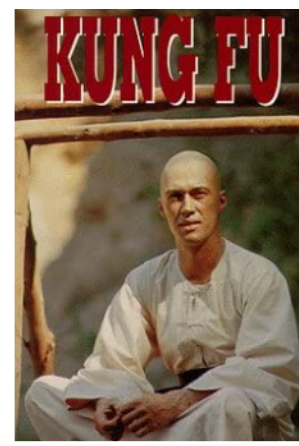
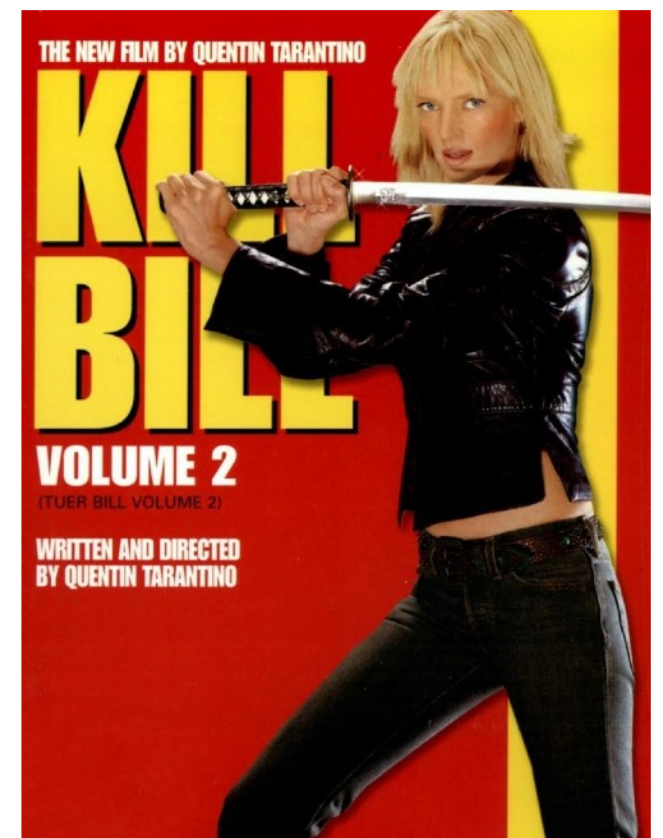
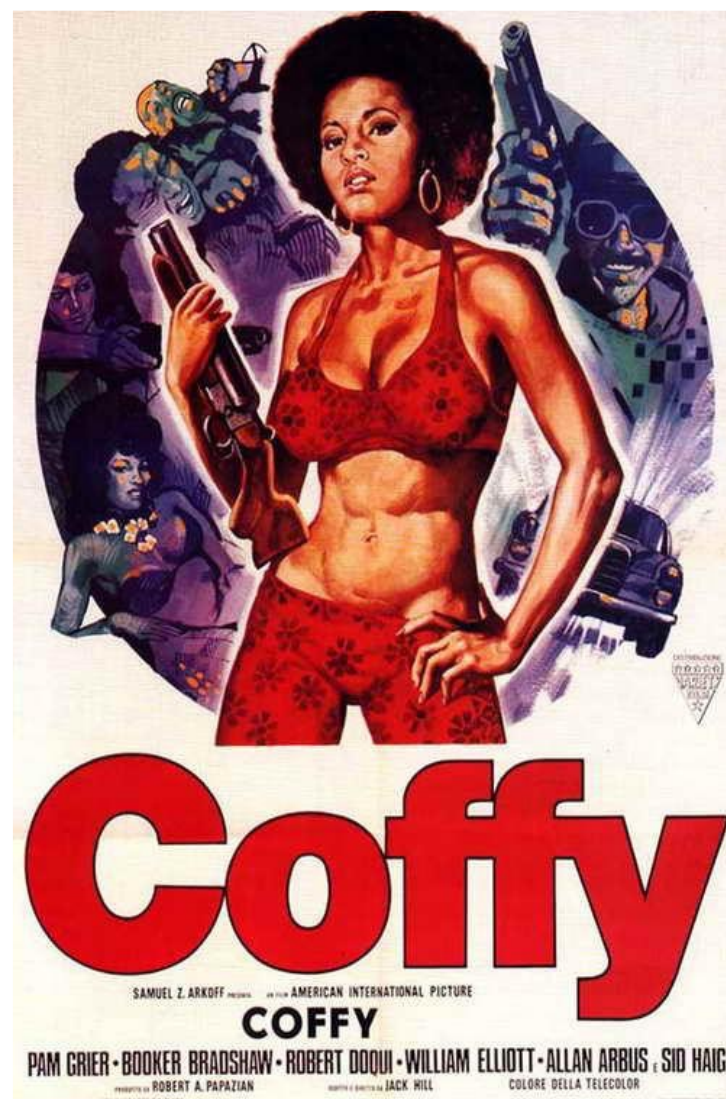
The series follow Minty through her physical journey to freedom, as well as her spiritual journey to self-discovery. As she meets friends and makes enemies along the Underground Railroad, we see flashbacks of the training sessions with her father and how the lessons he's instilled keep her alive.

OCTOBER 1849

DECEMBER 1849







## INSPIRATIONS

As an artist, I would like to tell Harriet Tubman's story as a classic hero's journey, starting with her origin story and followed by the many exploits throughout her career as an abolitionist and soldier. And any good hero's journey has action, adventure and a bit of campy humor. Taking from some of my favorite genres, including action, blaxploitation and kung fu, I've developed a series that will educate audiences about the period leading up to the Civil War and inspire them to become change makers in their own communities today.

My goal is to present a fully fleshed Harriet Tubman, who is as emotionally vulnerable as she is physically strong, because we can only appreciate how awesome her contributions truly were when we grasp her full humanity. By shifting away from the "strong black woman" trope, in which African American women are often portrayed — untiring, self-sacrificing, steely and masculine — I hope to present a healthier, more realistic role model for women, girls. TUBMAN is story for anyone who can relate to facing a daunting challenge and finding the courage to do it anyway by discovering their inner voice.



## FIGHTING STYLE

While much of the inspiration for TUBMAN draws from kung fu classics and blaxploitation films of the late 1970s, the actual fighting styles in the series will be influenced by African martial arts. Training and action sequences will feature Dambe, a West African boxing style, Engolo, a leg-based fighting style from Southern Angola and the predecessor to Capoeira, as well as the American-born style known as Sanuces Ryu Jiu Jitsu founded in 1959 in Brooklyn, New York as a nod to the African American martial arts community.





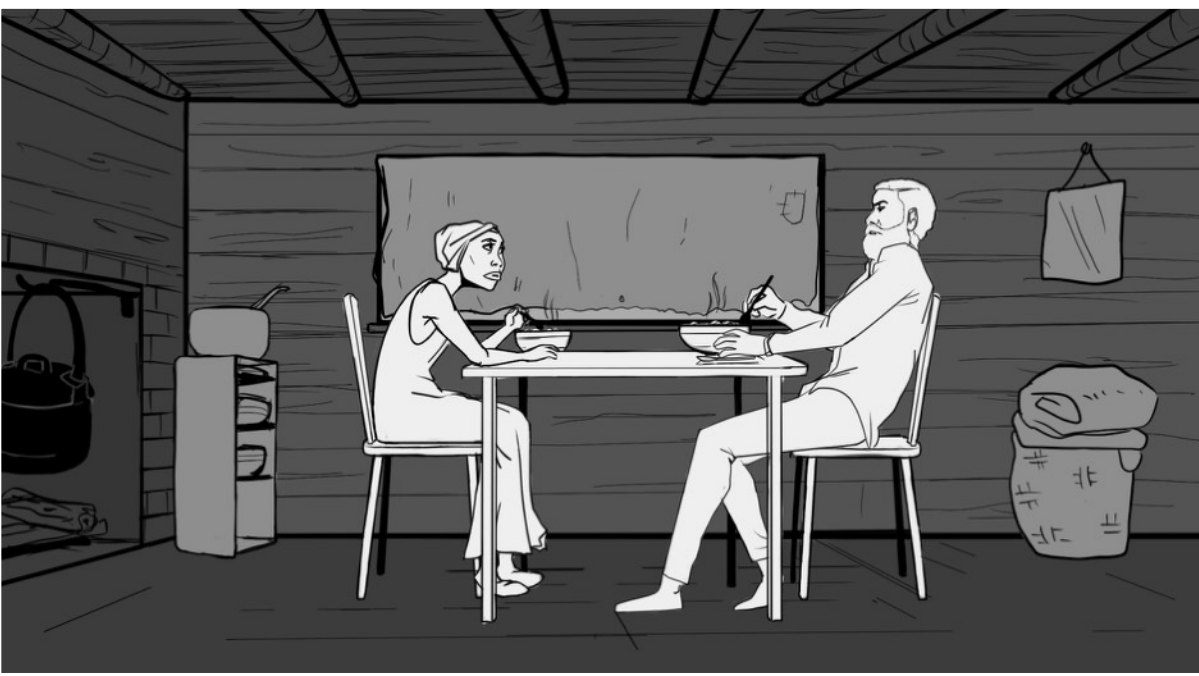


## MINTY TUBMAN

MINTY TUBMAN (29) is reluctant about escaping the plantation after her first attempt with her brothers fails. A young bride, she hopes to flee with her husband, but her father thinks she should make the trip alone.

In this scene, we establish that Minty is no ordinary woman. Not only does she have considerable physical strength, she also suffers from a debilitating condition known as narcolepsy. We learn this condition may be linked to a childhood injury in which Minty helped another slave escape and the subsequent visions that urge her to leave the plantation.





## JOHN TUBMAN

JOHN TUBMAN (37) is a pivotal romantic figure in Minty's life. While many historical accounts of his relationship with Minty present him in a negative light, my goal is to understand and sympathize with his character's motivations for discouraging Minty from becoming a fugitive.

In this scene, John fumes over his dinner, angry with Minty for breaking the law and attempting to escape the plantation.

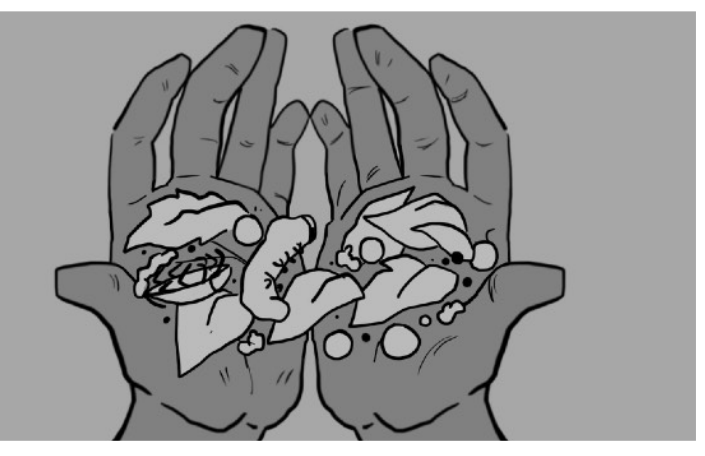




## OLD BEN

OLD BEN (60) is convinced his daughter Minty is ready to escape, but he must overcome her self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy to prepare her for the journey. When her first escape attempt fails, Minty comes to her father for help. In this training montage, Old Ben teaches Minty to forage for food in the woods, move undetected and defend herself in hand-to-hand combat during the trip north.



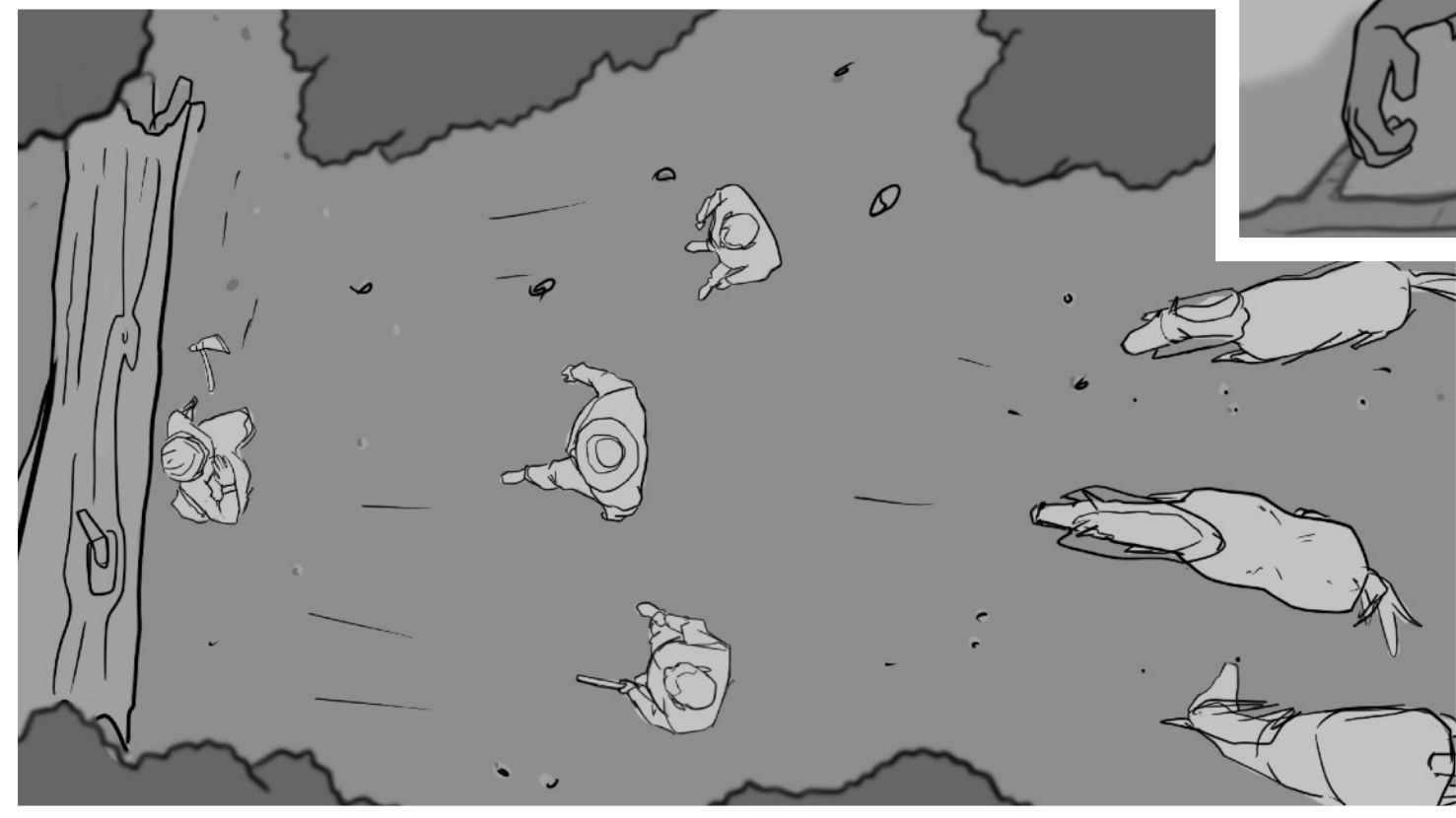
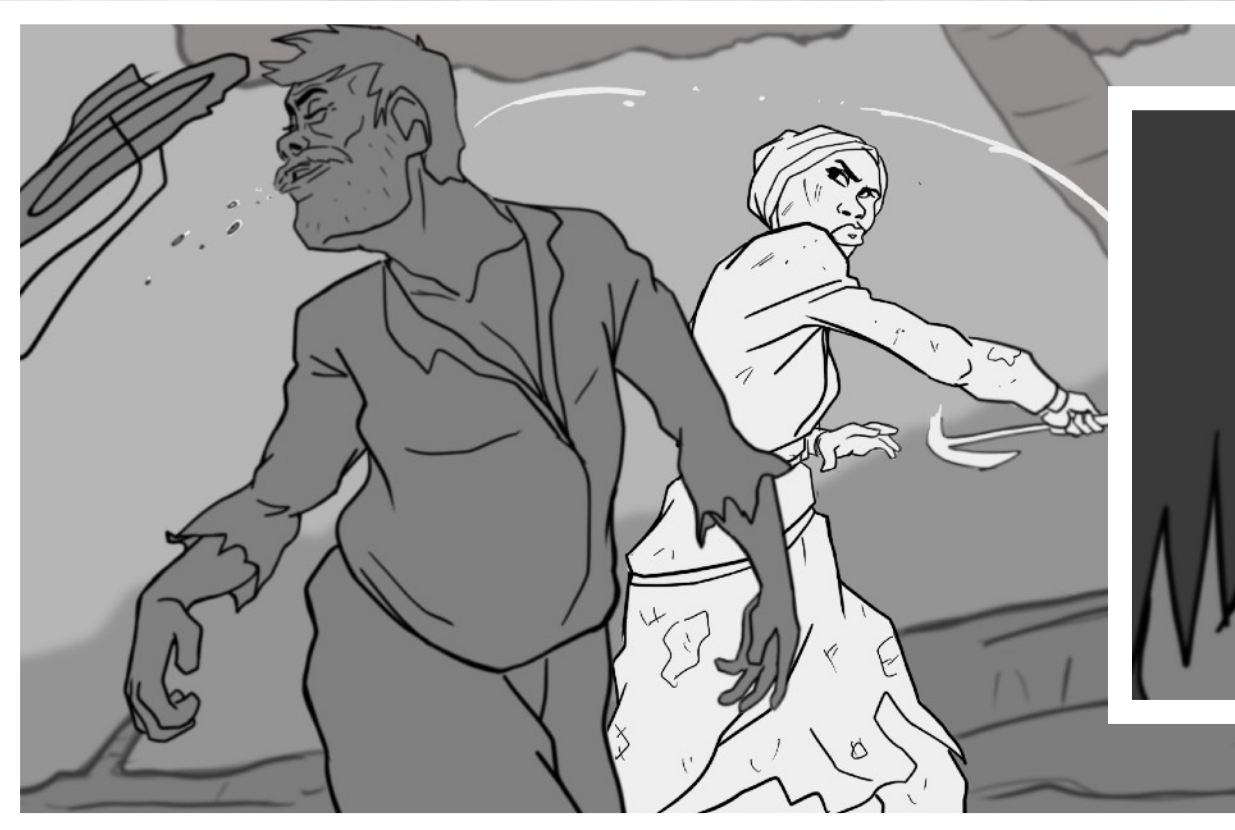
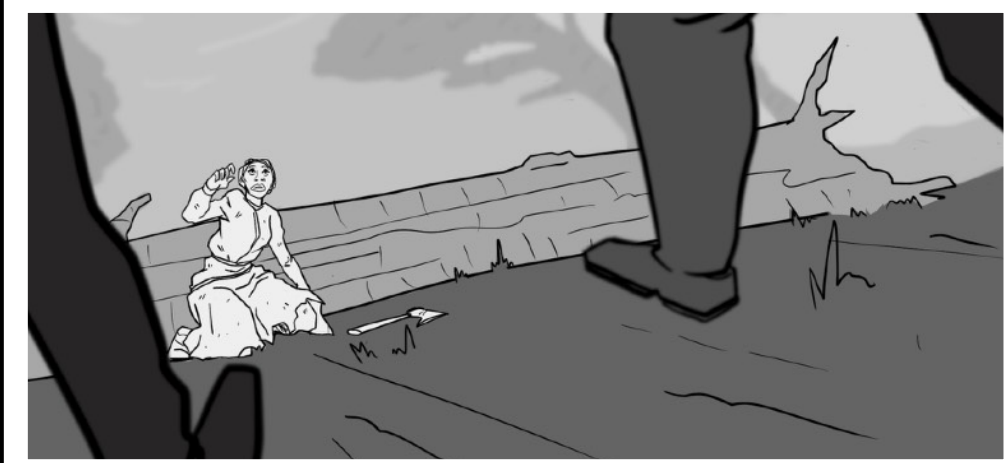


## PILOT: BIG DECISION

When faced with an ultimatum from John, Minty makes her decision to escape alone with nothing more than her ax, a few rations and her father's training.

In this series of scenes, Minty forages for food before collapsing against a tree with a handful of grubs, roots and leaves. She stuffs her face and looks up to check for the North Star. Later, Minty trudges through the swamp at sunrise, taking one laborious step after another until she reaches dry land. She hears a twig snap and the sound of men on horses. Rather than hide, she attempts to run across a clearing to the next station.





## PILOT: CLIMAX

In this scene, Minty awakes from a sleeping spell to find herself surrounded by slave catchers. Now she must decide whether to go with them quietly or fight and put her father's training to the test.

It's a blur as Minty fends them off one-by-one, through a series of strikes, kicks and smacks with the back end of her ax. Minty fights her way towards their horses and cuts the tethers with her ax. She sends most of the horses running, while she mounts another and rides away in the opposite direction.





# THE END

...to be continued

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