

To Live Free

By

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In 1863, trapped between death and rescue, a slave shows both North and South what it means to be free.

FADE IN:

EXT. NATCHEZ MISSISSIPPI PLANTATION - DAY (1863)

The plantation house stands on a hill overlooking the property. A row of slave huts is lined up nearby.

Mr. Gentson (42), plantation owner, stands on his balcony scanning the tree line beyond his fallow fields. SOUNDS OF BATTLE drift from the woods.

GENTSON
(to himself)
Come on, boys.

Fifty feet away, Hennesey (30), the plantation headmaster, guards one of the huts. A SLAVE GIRL (9) peeks out the window. Hennesey cracks his whip, she scurries back.

HENNESEY
I said stay down.

Hennesey looks to the tree line. Confederate soldiers break from the woods, sprinting across the field.

HENNESEY
(shouting, to Mr. Genston)
Here they come.

GENTSON
No!

Mr. Gentson slams his fist on the balcony railing.

GENTSON
Like rabbits. They run like rabbits.

He storms back into the house.

INT. SLAVE HUT - DAY

Nine slaves lie crammed on the floor.

Molly (38), a matronly figure, lies next to Tobias (25), a muscular man with many scars from the whip. SOUNDS OF BATTLE draw closer. Tobias starts to get up. Molly rests her hand on his arm.

MOLLY
The Lord is my shepherd.

Tobias sinks back down. Shadows and heavy footsteps announce Confederate soldiers running by.

COMMANDER (O.S.)
Form a line. On Me.

A rifle volley frightens the slaves. The youngest screams.
Molly begins singing *Steal Away (to Jesus)*.

MOLLY
(singing)
"Steal Away."

A few slaves join in.

MOLLY
(singing)
"Steal away."

The sound of battle outside increases. More slaves sing, keeping their heads down.

SLAVES
(singing)
"Steal away to Jesus. Steal away."

A BULLET tears through the hut over their heads. Molly keeps the singing going.

SLAVES
(singing)
"Steal away home."

EXT. PLANTATION HOUSE - DAY

Mr. Gentson storms from the front door. The Confederate COMMANDER sits horseback overseeing his forces. The soldiers in the field retreat to a center berm.

GENTSON
You. You will not let this property
fall into the hands of those
Yankees.

COMMANDER
(to his troops)
Hold the line men.

Mr. Gentson grabs the horse's reins.

GENTSON

Did you hear me, sir. You will not let this land fall.

COMMANDER

At the moment sir, that is not entirely up to me.

GENTSON

I will not have my property in the hands of invaders. None of it.

Mr. Gentson looks to the slave hut. The commander follows his gaze and turns to a squad of soldiers rushing by.

COMMANDER

You there.

The soldiers stop. A canon fires from the tree line. The soldiers flinch. The canon ball explodes out in the field.

COMMANDER

Do what this man tells you.

SQUAD LEADER

Yes, sir.

The commander jerks his horse from Gentson's grip and rides off down the firing line.

GENTSON

(yelling, to Hennesey)
Get them out here.

The soldiers look to Hennesey who throws open the hut door.

HENNESEY

Out! All of you.

As they exit, Hennesey grabs them, shoving them forward. One slave stumbles and falls. Hennesey strikes the slave.

HENNESEY

Get up!

The squad leader turns back to Mr. Gentson.

GENTSON

Do you understand your duty, boy?

SQUAD LEADER

Yes, sir.

The slaves move in a line to the house lawn.

MOLLY

Master Gentson, you don't want to do this.

The soldiers line up. Some slaves cry, others pray. A Confederate canon returns fire to the tree line.

MOLLY

Master Gentson!

Hennesey stride forward and strikes Molly.

FOREST TREE LINE

General Grant rides his horse to the tree line. The movement of the slaves near the house catches his attention. He turns to a GUNNER and his CANON CREW.

GRANT

How accurate are you with that, soldier?

The gunner salutes.

SOLDIER

Knock a fly off a horse sir.

General Grant points to the Confederate firing squad.

GRANT

As long as you leave the horse.

Grant turns and rides away.

PLANTATION HOME LAWN

The slaves stand before the firing squad. Molly is on the ground. Hennesey grabs her and stands her up.

MOLLY

(to Mr. Gentson)

For all that is right before God.
Do not condemn yourself by this.

One of the soldiers hesitates. He lowers his weapon. Hennesey cocks his arm to strike her again. Molly braces.

Mr. Gentson walks to Molly. Raising her head up, he looks her in the eye.

GENTSON

There is no sin in a man disposing of his property.

He turns to the squad leader.

GENTSON
Get on with it.

Gentson returns to his place. Hennesey smiles and retreats to stand by the firing squad.

MOLLY
Dear Lord, save us.

SQUAD LEADER
Ready!

The soldiers snap to attention. A canon FIRES in the distance.

SQUAD LEADER
Aim!

The squad trains their weapons on the slaves.

SQUAD LEADER
Fi--

A canon ball explodes behind the squad. Soldiers and Hennesey are thrown. Mr. Gentson and the slaves fall.

EXT. / INT. PLANTATION HOUSE - DAY

HOUSE LAWN

Molly crawls from the smoke and destruction. The ringing in her ears gives way to the sounds of battle and screaming.

Molly spots the body of Hennesey on top of a slave.

MOLLY
Lord Almighty.

She scrambles over and pushes his body off. The slave is dead.

Molly surveys. Three soldiers are still alive, but gravely wounded. The other slaves slowly regroup. Mr. Gentson lies on the ground, injured but alive.

Tobias rises, shaking out the cobwebs. He spots Mr Gentson and looks to the whip scars on his arm. Picking up a rifle, he walks toward Mr. Gentson. Molly cuts him off.

MOLLY
We need bandages.

Tobias tries to sidestep Molly, avoiding her gaze. She places a hand to his chest.

MOLLY
Tobias, we need bandages.

A WAR YELL erupts from the battlefield as the Union army breaks from the treeline.

Tobias allows Molly to take the gun. She nods toward the house. Tobias moves off.

Molly grabs the two closest slaves and points at one of the injured soldiers.

MOLLY
This man, lay him here.

Confused, but obedient, the two slaves grab the injured man.

SOLDIER #2
No. No. Mercy. God, have mercy.

The slaves lay him down in a clear area. Molly throws the gun away. The two slave tend to the soldier's wounds.

PLANTATION HOME ENTRYWAY

Tobias stops in the doorway, surveying this world he has never seen. MRS. GENTSON (35) and her young SON (6) rush in.

MRS. GENTSON
Tobias!

Tobias takes step forward. A WHIP rests on a side table near the window. Mrs. Gentson pulls her son tight, eyes wide in fear as Tobias approaches the table.

MRS. GENTSON
No. You wouldn't.

The boy begins to cry. Tobias reaches up and pulls the curtain down. He gathers up the fabric and leaves. Mrs. Gentson falls to her knees.

PLANTATION HOME LAWN

Molly tears fabric from her skirt to tie a tourniquet on a soldier's leg. Tobias returns as General Grant and an officer, with a cut to his upper arm, ride up.

GRANT
By proclamation of the United
States of America, I declare you
freed.

The slaves, still in shock, look to one another for understanding. SLAVE #3 steps forward and shakes Grant's hand.

SLAVE #3
The Lord bless you, sir.

As Grant looks up, he spots Molly tending to the soldier.

GRANT
You there. I have a wounded man
here.

Molly looks at the Union officer.

MOLLY
(to Grant)
Put him over there.

GRANT
This man is an officer of the Union
Army. I will have you tend to him
now.

MOLLY
(tending to the confederate
soldier)
This man will die in the time it
take to bandage that man's wound.

Grant nudges his horse forward to Molly. Tobias, still holding the fabric, steps to Molly's side.

GRANT
Do you have no gratitude for your
saviors?

Molly tightens the knot and stands to face General Grant.

MOLLY
What I have sir, is the saving
grace of my Lord, Jesus. You say
that you have set me free?

GRANT
By the law of the United States of
America you are free.

MOLLY

Then I shall do what is right in
the eyes of my Lord. Put him over
there. He will be tended to in
turn.

Molly turns to Tobias and checks the fabric.

MOLLY

(to the slaves)

Everyone, bandages, lots of them.

The slaves take the fabric, tearing it into strips. General
Grant nods to the officer who dismounts. Grant rides off.

The young slave girl struggles to tear the fabric. The Union
officer pulls out a knife. She shrinks back. He turns the
knife, offering it to her handle first.

OFFICER

Please.

Taking the knife, she cuts a strip of cloth and binds the
officer's wound.

OFFICER

Thank you.

Molly approaches Mr. Gentson. One leg broken, he pushes
himself away with his good leg.

GENTSON

No.

She kneels beside him placing a calming hand on his
shoulder. Mr. Gentson stares at Molly, at a loss for words.

GENTSON

Why?

MOLLY

The good Lord did not set me free
to hate, Mr Gentson. He set me free
to live. To live as He intended.

Mr Gentson falls back, accepting Molly's care.

GENTSON

After all I've done.

(beat)

Thank you Molly.

FADE OUT

