

FREE TO DO

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. PLANTATION - DAY

Sun-drenched fields stretch to the horizon.

ORIAN (20s), his face etched with quiet intensity.

Working with several other slaves, farming the land, ORIAN can't help but find himself gazing longingly out towards the 'big house' off in the near distance.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

ORIAN, bare-chested, washes himself off, cleaning his hands, arms, and face. There's a knock on the door.

ORIAN
Not now. I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

The door opens all the same.

Another slave, JOBBY (40s), peers in at him, holding a candle in his hand.

JOBBY
Miss Sarah has sent for you.

ORIAN can't stop the happiness that's now filling his face. A huge grin from ear to ear.

ORIAN
Alright, let me get dressed properly.

JOBBY scowls at him.

JOBBY
You're a damn fool, Orian. You keep on this path, you're going to get yourself hung and maybe the rest of us too.

ORIAN
And what path is that?

JOBBY
You're the smartest man I've ever met, don't play stupid, don't disrespect me, Orian. This fantasy you're in, it can't happen.

(MORE)

JOBBY (CONT'D)

She can't love you, so you need to stop loving her.

ORIAN

I grew up with Sarah.

JOBBY

Don't use her first name around her father, you'll get nothing but a beating.

ORIAN

We're friends.

JOBBY

You're her father's slave, don't ever forget that.

ORIAN

I need to go. Close the door and leave me alone.

INT. MR. JOHNSON'S LIBRARY - DAY

Surrounded by books, SARAH (20s), bright and curious, leans back on a lounge chair, listening.

ORIAN holds a fantasy novel, reading.

She lets out a long, deep breath.

SARAH

Orian, I could listen to you reading all day long. There's something about your voice that always brings me back to earth.

ORIAN

And I could read to you all day long.

SARAH

We make a perfect team.

He smiles at her, but there's a clear sadness in his eyes.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

In the same field that ORIAN was only recently toiling with the other slaves, he now strolls along with SARAH.

SARAH

I love when you read those fantasy stories to me. I don't like to think of the real world. I just want to forget it. Escape. How I wish I could see into the future. A hundred, two hundred, a thousand years from now. Can you imagine living on the moon or living at the bottom of the sea?

He chuckles.

ORIAN

I often think about the future.

SARAH

I bet all you want is your freedom.

ORIAN

What I want I can never have.

SARAH

The world is such a horrible place. Unfair. Unjust. Why are we so cruel to one another?

ORIAN

Then let's not talk about the real world.

SARAH

Then what?

ORIAN

Tell me more about this future world you envision. A thousand years from now. What else might there be?

SARAH

Don't tease.

ORIAN

No, not you, never. You see beauty in everything, even in a cruel world. That is why...

He stops himself.

SARAH

Why what?

He speeds up, and she chases after him.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

ORIAN leads SARAH into the woods. He glances back at her.

ORIAN
Being this far from the house, I
could now be considered a runaway
slave.

SARAH'S face lights up, excited.

SARAH
Then keep going. And don't stop
until you reach the free states.

ORIAN
Come with me.

She stops.

SARAH
My father...

ORIAN glances back, coming to a stop with her.

ORIAN
He's sick.

SARAH
You know.

ORIAN
Everyone knows. Every morning
coughing up blood. The whole house
hears it.

SARAH
The first doctor who saw him only
gave him six months to live. So I
got a second doctor. He gave him
three months. I was too scared to
ask a third. And when he dies, all
of this will be mine.

ORIAN
And all the slaves too.

She shakes her head.

SARAH
No. I've already made up my mind.
I'm getting rid of all of it. The
house. The land. And the slaves
will be free.

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

I've already written all the letters I need to. Once my father dies, all this dies with him.

ORIAN

You can't say that and not mean it.

SARAH

I swear.

ORIAN reaches down and takes her by the hand. She lets him. Both blushing a little.

ORIAN

I want to show you something.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Deeper into the woods, ORIAN brings SARAH towards a large oak tree. Her face lights up, instantly recognizing it.

He shows her roughly carved initials, his and hers.

She traces a hand over it.

SARAH

Oh wow, I can't believe you knew where this was. How long ago was this?

ORIAN

It was on your tenth birthday. After the party was over and the guests were sent home, I brought you out here and we carved our names in this tree together.

SARAH

I remember it now.

(Turning to face him)

But how were you able to find it so quickly?

ORIAN

I come here almost every Sunday, like a pilgrimage. No matter what happens, I'll always have this moment.

SARAH

Orian, you made my life bearable. I hope I've done the same for you.

ORIAN
A million times yes.

SARAH
Last time I was here with you, we
were just little kids. Now look at
us.

ORIAN leans in and tries to kiss her. She pulls back, turning
her head away.

SARAH (CONT'D)
We should get back to the house.

ORIAN
You know how I feel for you. I
can't hide it any longer.

SARAH
You'll be hung.

ORIAN
Do you feel nothing for me?

She nods.

SARAH
And I want you to live. I care for
you, Orian, so please, don't ask me
to give you a death sentence.

She moves away from him. He tries to take hold of her hand
but she hurries back the way they came.

INT. MR. JOHNSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MR. JOHNSON (60s) is fast asleep in his grand four-poster
bed.

He suddenly sits upright. A terrible coughing fit causes his
whole body to go into a spasm. Then a huge amount of blood
fills his mouth before spilling out and running down his
chest, staining the bedsheets.

MR. JOHNSON then collapses back, lying down and looking up at
the ceiling.

MR. JOHNSON
The angels, they come for me. My
time is running out.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

ORIAN sits by a flickering lamp, reading. Another knock on the door. ORIAN'S eyes stay locked on the words.

ORIAN
Go away, I'm reading.

The door opens. Again, it's JOBBY.

JOBBY
He's asking for you.

ORIAN sits up, putting his book down.

ORIAN
Me?

JOBBY
Don't say I didn't warn you.

INT. MR. JOHNSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MR. JOHNSON coughs weakly into a handkerchief. Speckles of blood splash against it.

ORIAN stands by his side.

ORIAN
Let me call you a doctor.

MR. JOHNSON
I don't have time to waste. I need to make my peace with God. You're not like the other slaves, Orian. You have something in your eyes, I saw it even when you were just a child. That's why I allowed you to be educated alongside Sarah, you're special. It's a shame you're a Negro. I never had a son.

One wife, one child, maybe that's my mistake. Maybe I should have remarried. Try it again, but it's too late now. Orian, I grant you your freedom. You're a free man. Don't waste any more time staying here. Go north and go quickly.

ORIAN is stunned.

ORIAN
I don't know what to say.

MR. JOHNSON

I have done terrible things to a great many people. And now, in my final hours, I know that God is watching me closely. You're free, Orian. All that I ask is that you live a better life than the one I have lived.

MR. JOHNSON, with effort, extends a trembling hand, gripping ORIAN'S arm. A parchment is pressed into ORIAN'S hand.

MR. JOHNSON (CONT'D)

You're free.

INT. HOUSE - SARAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dressed for bed, SARAH is busy writing letters by candlelight. There's a knock on her door.

She hurries to answer it. On the other side stands ORIAN. She clearly wasn't expecting to see him. Stunned.

ORIAN hands her the parchment that MR. JOHNSON gave to him.

SARAH

What is this? You can't be here.

ORIAN

Read it. And then come find me. I need to speak to you where no one else can hear us.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

ORIAN digs around his bed with a desperate urgency.

JOBBY watches on, unable to mask his disgust.

JOBBY

You never listen to me. You don't listen to nobody. That's what makes you a damn fool.

Hidden inside the mattress, ORIAN finds a small box. He grips onto it tightly. Turns to JOBBY, smiling.

ORIAN

There is nothing that you could say to me now that could possibly put me in a bad mood.

ORIAN hurries out. JOBBY watches him with narrowed eyes.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Rain lashes down. Thunder rumbles. ORIAN is picking flowers. SARAH watches him, under shelter, she crosses her arms and shakes her head.

SARAH
Orian, you're going to catch your
death out there.

ORIAN now hurries over to her, joining her under the shelter. He's soaking wet. He hands her the roughly gathered bouquet.

She takes them, bringing them up to her nose.

SARAH (CONT'D)
They're beautiful.

ORIAN
Not as beautiful as you.

SARAH
Orian, what are you still doing
here? You're free. Go.

ORIAN drops down onto one knee. He pulls out the small box, opening it to reveal a handmade ring, looks to be made of silver.

ORIAN
Will you marry me?

SARAH
Orian...

ORIAN
Don't tell me that you can't. I
just want to know if you will.

She thinks, then nods.

SARAH
Of course I will.

He slowly gets back up, slipping the ring onto her finger.

ORIAN
I have loved you since we were
young. Every summer when you were
sent away to study, I feared you
would come back with a husband.
(MORE)

ORIAN (CONT'D)
I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep.
I've never yearned for freedom.
I've only ever yearned for you.

SARAH
Well, now you have your freedom.

ORIAN
And you?

SARAH
And now you have me too.

He cups her face, pulls her in. Their lips meet in a loving kiss.

EXT. PLANTATION YARD - NIGHT

JOBBY watches from afar. And he sees everything.

INT. MR. JOHNSON'S STUDY - DAY

MR. JOHNSON sits in front of a fireplace, a blanket over his legs.

ORIAN hands him a glass of whiskey and MR. JOHNSON settles back into his chair, looking perfectly relaxed.

MR. JOHNSON
Would you like me to make some travel arrangements for you? You've worked so hard for me. Always been truthful and an eye for business that I wished that I had. Talked me into putting my money into investments that I never would have made alone. I feel like I should be doing more for you.

ORIAN
No travel arrangements, sir, but another kind of arrangement. I'm going to get married and I would like to do it here. And much more than that, before you reach the end of your life, I would like for you to be a witness.

MR. JOHNSON'S face lightens. He sits up a little.

MR. JOHNSON
A Negress from another plantation?

ORIAN takes a deep breath and puffs his chest out.

ORIAN
Your daughter. I have asked her to
marry me, which is my right as a
free man.

MR. JOHNSON'S face contorts in rage.

MR. JOHNSON
That isn't something to joke about.

ORIAN
This isn't a joke. I'm going to
marry her and I'd like you to be
there.

MR. JOHNSON erupts in a violent coughing fit, clutching his chest. His eyes burn with fury as he points a trembling finger at ORIAN.

MR. JOHNSON
Get out of my house, get out!

The coughing fit gets worse.

ORIAN
I'll give you some time. But I will
marry her.

ORIAN turns and leaves, softly closing the door shut behind him.

MR. JOHNSON doubles over, coughing hard. He then stands up out of his chair.

MR. JOHNSON staggers over to another door on the other side of the room. Opening it to see JOBBY standing on the other side of it, crouched down, like he's been listening.

JOBBY
(Straightens)
Master, are you going back to bed?

MR. JOHNSON shakes his head.

MR. JOHNSON
(To JOBBY)
Can you ride a horse?

JOBBY
Yes, sir.

MR. JOHNSON

You know the Smiths farm? Gather the father and his three sons. Bring them back here. I will pay you well.

JOBBY

Yes, sir, my pleasure.

EXT. PLANTATION YARD - DAY

Four men, a father and his three sons, arrive on horseback. All looking stern and focused.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DAY

ORIAN is lying on his bed, fast asleep. His door is kicked open. The four men rush in. Throwing themselves on top, they quickly overpower him, tying his hands behind his back and putting a gag into his mouth.

JOBBY, laying in his bed beside him, now leaps up, almost celebrating. Pointing at ORIAN as he's dragged away, kicking his legs and wriggling his body, but with no way of getting free.

JOBBY

I warned you. This is what you get. You think you're better than the rest of us, but look at you now. Now you're going to learn. But it didn't have to be this way. All you had to do was listen to me but you wouldn't.

INT. MR. JOHNSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MR. JOHNSON is in bed, sitting up and looking like a man on his deathbed. SARAH, on her knees, is on the floor beside him, her hands clasped together in prayer.

SARAH

(Crying)

You gave him his freedom. He's a good man. He's never done you any wrong. You don't have to do this.

MR. JOHNSON

Leave me be. I need to sleep. Go to your room and forget he ever existed.

SARAH

I can't, I won't. I love him.

MR. JOHNSON

Impossible. In time you will forget him.

SARAH

Father, don't do this.

MR. JOHNSON

In the morning he will be hung until dead. Then you, you shall be sent away to live with your aunt.

SARAH

Father, please. I will be his wife.

He turns to face her, his face twisting with rage.

MR. JOHNSON

Get out! I can't even look at you. You are threatening to destroy everything I have built. I disown you. I renounce you. Get out!

INT. DARK BARN - NIGHT

ORIAN lies broken, bruised, and barely conscious in the darkness of the empty barn.

Suddenly, dim candlelight shines out as someone enters.

ORIAN rolls over onto his side to try and see.

ORIAN

Who is it, who's there?

SARAH drops down in front of him, holding a candle in one hand and a jug of water in the other. She gives him the water, which he promptly gulps down.

SARAH

I can get you out of here. Put you on a horse and you ride all night. But we must move now.

ORIAN

No.

SARAH

Orian, they're going to hang you.

ORIAN

I can't leave. I'll only come back.
No matter what, I'll only come
back.

SARAH

For what? There is nothing here for
you. And I'm sure he's already
rewritten his will so there will be
nothing for me here either.

ORIAN

I love you, Sarah.

SARAH

I love you too, that is why you
must go.

ORIAN

I can't leave you. If I don't have
you then I have nothing.

SARAH

I'm not worth dying for.

ORIAN

Yes, you are.

SARAH

What's your plan, Orian?

ORIAN

Hope that your father changes his
mind. I used to be so filled with
fear. But I'm not afraid of
anything anymore because you love
me too. All the fear is gone.

SARAH

That's a terrible plan.

ORIAN

Do you have a better one?

She stops, thinking. After a moment, she nods.

SARAH

Yes, I think I do.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - NIGHT

SARAH, her face determined, stands before a gathering of
slaves, including JOBBY.

SARAH

My father plans to hang Orian in the morning. He is sick, old, and dying. And when he goes I shall be master of this place. Help me and I shall grant freedom for all of you.

JOBBY

She lies, the Master still lives. So all that matters is what he says, not her.

SARAH

He is dying. You all know it. But hear me now, if Orian hangs, I will sell this place and never look back. But if he lives, all of you will be free even before my father's body has been buried. But Orian must live. Dead, I grant you nothing.

JOBBY

You're a liar.

SARAH

I love him. I will be Orian's wife.
(To JOBBY)
Now tell me, would I really lie about that?

JOBBY, stunned, falls silent.

Slowly, hesitantly at first, the slaves nod, a shared resolve hardening their features.

EXT. EXECUTION GROUNDS - DAY

A makeshift gallows stands ominously. ORIAN is led forward, his head held high despite his injuries.

But SARAH, flanked by the united slaves, steps forward.

MR. JOHNSON

(To SARAH)

Back to the house!

SARAH takes out a gun, holds it to the side of her head.

SARAH

He hangs, I die.

The four men who captured ORIAN all share looks of confusion.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I love him. And I will be his wife.
As God as my witness, I, Sarah,
take Orian to be my lawful husband.

MR. JOHNSON tries to stand, his face contorted in a final, furious gasp, clutches his chest, and collapses.

SARAH takes another step forward, closer to ORIAN and his captors.

SARAH now aims the gun at the men. The slaves continue to gather around her.

SARAH (CONT'D)
He hangs, you die.

The four men hold up their hands in surrender and move away.

SARAH and ORIAN share a look, both smiling.

EXT. PLANTATION YARD - DAY

SARAH and ORIAN exchange gold wedding rings and then kiss under the hot, baking sun.

The slaves look on, a quiet understanding dawning.

SARAH turns to face them.

SARAH
Why aren't we celebrating? You're
all free and I've just married the
man I love.

ORIAN
Let's get some music going.

The slaves now yell out, cheering and celebrating. Even JOBBY can't hide his joy.

SARAH and ORIAN share another kiss.

FADE OUT.