

***Americana,
Brazil***

by

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FADE IN:

Sparks and smoke dance in a moonless night sky above a burning warehouse.

A young UNION GENERAL sits in an ornate armchair, close to the flames. He holds a metal coffee cup and a lit cigar. His legs are crossed. Hat is hung on the top knee. Eyes are closed. His threadbare coat is unbuttoned to reveal his red union suit. An exquisite table stands by his chair with a dented, army-issue coffee pot steaming on it.

The haunting strains of "Miserere" from *Il Trovatore* surround him, and he conducts gently, with his cigar, the MUSICIANS of a regimental band, who try to drown out the intermittent gunfire and the clang of sledgehammers coming from . . .

. . . the sprawling Union Army camp that stretches south along the railroad tracks. It pulses with chaotic movement like a hornet's nest.

TITLE:

Milledgeville, Georgia

November 25, 1864

SOLDIERS are ripping up the train tracks, tossing wooden rails onto a smoky bonfire, and bending heated rail sections into unusable steel U's.

BUMMERS, foragers dressed in a mixture of civilian clothes and uniform parts, unload bales of Confederate money from a burning freight car.

A scared horse rears. A DRUNKEN SOLDIER grabs its reins and is dragged along as the horse bolts down along the tracks. Cows in a butchering pen kick at the dogs who lick the ground under the hanging carcasses.

Freed SLAVES sing and play makeshift instruments. A few OFFICERS stand, watching, then laugh and clap as they make an old Slave waltz with a muzzled bear. One of the Officers, with a pet squirrel gnawing a biscuit perched on his shoulder, is reading the Bible.

A CAPTAIN and a black WOMAN move away from the group and lie down together in the shadows.

EXT - DASCOMB PLANTATION - NIGHT

It is just before dawn, and there is barely enough light to see the elegant, Greek Revival plantation house.

INT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

SARAH DASCOMB, 35, clearly once a great beauty but now with a face that holds four years of worry and sadness, lies fully dressed on her bed. Her eyes are open and alert. She wears a coarse, linen dress, buttoned to the neck, and she holds a derringer in her right hand.

A muffled bang in the distance makes her turn toward the window, and she listens hard . . . now a horse's slow hoofbeats, close. She swings her stockinged legs over the side, and hurries over to peer out the window.

SARAH'S POV - OUTSIDE

DANIEL, the Dascomb's main house slave, stands with a saddled white mare behind the house. He stares up, sees her in the window, and gestures anxiously.

BACK TO SARAH'S BEDROOM

as she crosses to a massive wardrobe. She pulls on a pair of men's boots. Then she removes a false bottom from the wardrobe and drags a heavy flour sack, with some difficulty, out of her room and into the hallway.

INT - RAINEY'S BEDROOM

Sarah is trying to wake RAINEY DASCOMB, her 13-year old son.

SARAH

Rainey . . . Rainey, get up.
They'll be here soon.

Rainey props himself on one elbow and groans, reluctant to leave his dreams. Even disheveled with sleep, he is a handsome kid, but thin and sensitive looking.

SARAH (cont.)

If I could fit, you know I would go.
I'm sorry, but it's almost daylight.
Come on now.

Rainey, grunting his compliance, struggles up and pulls clothes on over his long underwear. He is already as tall as his mother. Sarah opens the flour sack to show him what's inside.

SARAH (cont.)

This has the gold and all my
jewelry. We'll gather the silver
downstairs.

As Sarah leaves, Rainey moves to his dresser, takes a spyglass out of a drawer, and hides it in his overalls.

EXT - UNION CAMP - DAWN

The young General is walking through the sleeping camp, looking at his men. Most are asleep, snoring like hogs. A few are up and retching. Some are cooking.

He stops near the Captain still in the arms of his black lover, who shifts fitfully in her sleep as the General stands there looking at them. He deliberates, then he moves on without waking them.

A few yards farther on, the General sees a Bible lying on the ground. He picks it up and rubs the dirt off with his sleeve. Now he opens it and reads for a second, then looks up to where the sky is lightening. Suddenly, he drops the book, returns to where the amorous Captain is sprawled and gives him an impatient kick.

GENERAL

Enough of love, Captain Pierce.
I want to beat Uncle Billy to
Savannah. Sound reveille and start
this pleasure march.

EXT - DASCOMB PLANTATION - DAWN

Behind the plantation house, Daniel is helping Rainey up onto the white mare, as Sarah secures two bulging flour sacks behind the saddle.

The mare is jumpy, sniffing at the air, and Daniel tries to calm her. Sarah sees the top of the spyglass in Rainey's overalls, and she grabs his arm.

SARAH

There and back, nowhere else. Don't
you go chasing off to spot Yankees.

She pulls him toward her and kisses his cheek. Rainey grimaces.

SARAH (cont.)

And run from any soldier you see,
theirs or ours. They've been
stealing boys younger than you to
face Sherman at Macon. I won't have
you-

Rainey spurs the horse and interrupts her, calling back over his
shoulder.

RAINEY

I can outrun them all. Have Rebecca
fry some bacon up for me.

As Rainey rides past the garden, two HOUSE SLAVES are lowering a
squealing sow into a freshly-dug hole.

EXT - PINE WOODS - DAY

Rays from the rising sun slice through the woods and cast long
shadows as Rainey rides.

He stops near a small rise, and ties the mare to a tree. He
looks around, and then breaks a sturdy branch off a low pine.

Rainey marks off fifteen paces from the top, stoops to clear
away some sticks and pine needles, and shoves the branch
straight into the hole he has uncovered. Satisfied it's empty,
he lugs the flour sacks over and works them down through the
opening. He slides in after them, head first.

An explosion in the distance forces Rainey up out of the hole.
He covers the entrance again, and rides up over the rise,
stopping where the woods meet some cornfields.

Columns of smoke punctuate the horizon before him. He unties his
spyglass, and surveys the movement on the road below.

HIS POV - THE UNION ARMY

A couple of miles away, the road is clogged with the advancing soldiers. Surreys and gigs race ahead of the column, accompanied by cavalry. Slower, half-full farm wagons are mixed in among the lines of marching soldiers.

BEHIND RAINEY IN THE WOODS

THREE CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS appear. Two are riding on one horse. The third one walks in front of them. When they spot Rainey, one of the riders jumps down, and the other spurs his horse.

Hearing the hoofbeats, Rainey gallops into the cornfield until the Confederate breaks out of the woods. Then Rainey ducks back in among the trees, hugging his mare's neck.

A squad of UNION CAVALRY spots the chase occurring above them, and races up through the field, firing as they come within range. The Confederate turns back toward his comrades, followed by three Union Riders.

The rest of the Squad pursues Rainey through the woods, and then out into cornfields. He reaches the fence at the far end of the field and his mare clears it easily.

Into a cotton-field now, he is more visible, but he's put some distance between him and the Union Riders. When they reach the first fence, one of their horses hits the top rail and goes down, hard, with its rider underneath.

Rainey is across the cotton-field already, but the fence at the end is higher than the last one. His mare balks, and Rainey can't hold on. The fall takes the wind out of him, and TWO SOLDIERS pull him to his feet and hold him firmly.

A BLACK SERGEANT catches Rainey's mare, and leads her over in front of him.

SERGEANT

You chose one hell of a day for a ride, boy. Ain't you got some mammy keep you close to home?

Rainey doesn't answer him.

SERGEANT (cont.)

Why you in these woods? We shoot spies, you know that?

His first threat not working, the Sergeant pulls his pistol out, puts the barrel to the mare's head, and cocks the hammer. He nods toward the horse.

SERGEANT (cont.)

Be a shame to waste-

Rainey suddenly breaks away and rams his head into the Sergeant's stomach. The gun goes off but misses the mare, and the Sergeant is knocked on his back. The other soldiers grab Rainey again, and the Sergeant gets up, cursing a blue streak, and slowly places the gun barrel against Rainey's left eye.

A close gunshot makes the Sergeant turn, and Captain Pierce, the officer kicked awake earlier that morning, rides up.

PIERCE

Holster your gun, damn you. He's a boy.

SERGEANT

He's a spy, Captain. He won't-

PIERCE

Bullshit, Sergeant. Try to remember you're a soldier now, not just an angry nigger who's out for blood.

Pierce holsters his own gun and turns his horse back toward the column, but stops.

PIERCE (cont.)

He rides with you until we find his home, and I'll hold you responsible for his well-being.

Pierce rides off. The Sergeant climbs onto Rainey's horse, hoists Rainey up behind him, and starts to laugh.

SERGEANT

What was I thinking of? I ain't got to shoot this old mare. She's mine.

EXT - FARM - DAY

As Captain Pierce's company storms into the yard of a small farm, an OLD MAN charges abruptly out of the house, aiming his musket directly at Rainey and the Sergeant.

RAINEY

Mr. Reynolds, it's Rainey Dascomb.

Old Mr. Reynolds becomes confused for a second when he hears his name, and in that instant the Sergeant takes the chance to shoot him.

The Bummers step on his back as they walk in to loot his home.

EXT - DASCOMB PLANTATION - DAY

A few crows lift out of the pecan trees by the road, squawking, and the SLAVE CHILDREN playing by the gates try to hit them with stones as they fly up.

At the house, Sarah comes down the front steps and stares at the columns of smoke to the north.

Suddenly, blackbirds burst out of the cornfield and swirl together in a cloud that moves away, low at first, and then sweeps back toward her. She hears the furious beating of a thousand wings as they pass overhead.

Now the Slave Children are screaming as they run up the stone carriage-tracks toward the house.

On the road, the Bummers' carriage wheels bounce and spin at breakneck speed as their drivers race ahead of Captain Pierce's cavalry company toward the plantation gates. They veer crazily into the drive, hardly slowing, and then race two abreast up toward the house, howling and firing pistols into the air.

At the house, Daniel opens the front door and shouts at Sarah to hurry inside.

One Bummer, wearing a bonnet and a diagonal, Confederate sash over his uniform, leaps out of a gig before the driver even stops. He bounds up the front steps with his knife drawn, but Daniel steps out and blocks his path.

The Bummer stops short in surprise, and in that second Sarah steps out from behind Daniel and shoots the man. Grabbing his shoulder, the Bummer sprawls backwards down the steps, hollering.

But other carriages and wagons are pulling up. Cavalrymen are dismounting. Soldiers are streaming through the gates.

Captain Pierce, firing his pistol at Sarah, rides his horse up the steps and onto the porch, driving Daniel and Sarah back into the house.

PIERCE

I have your boy here. Throw your gun out or I'll kill him right now.

Sarah throws the derringer onto the porch and comes back out, warily. She sees Rainey standing next to his mare, and the Black Sergeant riding her.

SARAH

So Sherman's gallant officers stoop now to murdering thirteen year old boys, is that right?

PIERCE

If their beautiful mothers shoot our foragers. Yes, ma'am, I'm afraid we do.

Pierce dismounts. The Bummings surge past Sarah into the house, and the Soldiers race toward the outbuildings and livestock pens.

PIERCE (cont.)

Have you seen any Rebels today?

SARAH

General Wheeler's men were by here not two hours ago. Don't worry. You'll see them soon enough.

From inside the house come the notes of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again," played on the piano. Pierce stops talking and turns to look. Through the windows, he can see two Bummings dancing to the song.

Pierce directs two Soldiers to lead Sarah and Daniel to the side of the house. He hauls up a bucket of water from the well and takes a long drink. His men are running by them with anything they can carry.

PIERCE

At least we'll be well-provisioned when we die, thanks to you and your neighbors, ma'am.

Pierce, smiling, cuts the well-rope and hands the full bucket to a soldier. Sarah tries to attack Pierce, but the Soldier holds her.

SARAH

My husband will hunt you down like a runaway slave, you white-trash-

PIERCE

No, he won't. General Norris Dascomb is getting his ass soundly whipped in Tennessee, at this very moment, I'll wager. He's the one who'll be running away, and he probably won't quit running until he hits Nebraska Territory, and that might still not be far enough away from you, ma'am.

RAINEY

My father doesn't run from Yankees. He'll kill so many bluebellies in Tennessee, the grass'll turn red.

A Bummer appears on the second-floor balcony, and throws down Sarah's dresses, which billow out, all different colors, as they sail down.

BUMMER

Velvet potato sacks, boys. Come and get 'em.

The Soldiers on the ground pick up the dresses, rip them and tie them into sacks as they run back toward the garden.

One Bummer lugs a large, gold-framed portrait of a young Confederate soldier out of the house. Sarah cries out, but the bummer slams the painting against a crate holding roosters that

is tied on a mule. The canvas tears, but the frame catches there and stays. Pierce smiles.

PIERCE

Our spies tell us your husband is the wealthiest man in Wilkinson County.

Some Soldiers are chasing chickens and pigs, shooting at them or tackling them, while others set fire to the privy and empty the smokehouse of hams.

A few Field Slaves are helping Soldiers break down the white fence along the drive. On the road, columns of infantry continue to pass, followed by an army of freed Slaves, many of them old men and women with all their possessions in bundles on their heads.

PIERCE(cont.)

Mrs. Dascomb, you can save yourself a lot of trouble if you just tell me where you've hidden your husband's gold. I'm authorized to-

Sarah smiles now, ruefully. Motions toward the looting.

SARAH

What trouble will you spare us?

Pierce bows with exaggeration.

PIERCE

Our orders are to suppress this rebellion, even if it takes every last chicken in the Confederacy.

The Soldiers laugh, and Sarah slaps Pierce. He hits her back, and Rainey breaks free but is knocked down before he reaches Pierce.

RAINEY

You touch her again, I'll kill you myself.

PIERCE

I'm sure you will, boy.

(to the Soldiers)

Tie her to the whipping post, and
get some of that cotton over here.
We'll get an answer.

The Soldiers tie Sarah to the whipping post beyond the well, and spread a thick line of cotton from under her feet to about twenty feet away. Pierce sets fire to the far end of the cotton.

PIERCE (cont.)

Now where is it, Mrs. Dascomb?

SARAH

I'll rot in my grave before I help
Yankees make one more rifle. You can
burn me and everything we have.

Rainey struggles to get away, but he's held fast. Suddenly, Daniel pulls off his coat and beats at the approaching flames. The Black Sergeant jumps down off Rainey's horse and pushes Daniel away.

SERGEANT

You ain't her slave no more.

Daniel hits him and the Sergeant goes down. Daniel goes back to fighting the fire. The Sergeant starts to draw his pistol. Daniel doesn't stop.

DANIEL

Go ahead, Sergeant, kill me. That's
your job in this war, right, setting
me free? Kill me then . . . Make me
free.

Pierce, in disgust, walks over and kicks the cotton away from Sarah's feet.

PIERCE

These damned people don't know when
they're beat . . . Sergeant, get off
your ass and tell the men to start
digging.