

Reparations

By

Will Ball

FADE IN:

EXT. PLANTATION, ESTABLISHING - DUSK

SUPER: Atlanta, Georgia - October 7, 1865

A white mansion sits atop a cotton plantation. The fields are overgrown and should have been picked weeks ago.

ELI (7) plays with a rolling hoop through the rows of crop.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - DUSK

A lanky man with a grizzled face and burly mustache sits at a table. He wears a gray confederate uniform and cuts a piece of steak with a spoon and fork. This is COLONEL HENRY GIBBS (50's).

MELINDA (40's) sits next to Henry. She is robust and homely. She observes Henry as he struggles to cut his meat with the dull utensils.

MELINDA

You know, you could use a knife.

Henry points to the left side of his head. His left ear is missing.

MELINDA

(louder)

I said you could use a knife.

HENRY

Heard you the first time.

MELINDA

Then why did...

HENRY

Because every damn night I tell you no knives. And every damn night I have to repeat myself. Annoying, ain't it?

Henry finally tears a piece off. He puts it in his mouth and gnaws on it.

HENRY

Meat's a bit tough.

(CONTINUED)

MELINDA

Don't blame me. If you hadn't lost the war then maybe we'd still have some extra hands round here.

HENRY

Christ woman. They've been gone for months now and you still don't know how to cook a decent stake. Them slaves made you incompetent.

Henry abandons the utensils and picks up the hunk of meat with his hands.

MELINDA

Better than being impotent.

Someone KNOCKS at the front door.

HENRY

Someone's at the door.

Another KNOCK. But this time, it's louder.

HENRY

Ain't you going to get that?

MELINDA

Don't you talk to me like I'm some house negro.

Melinda gets up and shuffles out of the room.

Henry looks around the dusty dining room. He swipes his finger on the table and looks at it. It's covered in a thick coat of gray. Henry grimaces.

Melinda walks back in and returns to her seat.

HENRY

Who was it?

MELINDA

No one. I opened the door and looked outside, but no one was there. Eli didn't see no one either.

HENRY

Strange.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Melinda starts to get up.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Sit back down. Don't come near
unless I say so.

Henry gets up from his chair.

HENRY

You better hope someone's there or
else I'm gonna beat a tar baby out
of you...house negro.

Henry walks into the-

INT. MANSION, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Henry heads towards the front door.

Yet another KNOCK, even louder than before.

HENRY

Keep your knickers on. I'm comin.

Henry grips the doorknob with his left hand and his
holstered pistol with the right.

He opens the door. No one's there.

Henry peeks outside the door. He looks to his left. Then to
his right. No one.

He steps outside onto the-

EXT. PLANTATION - CONTINUOUS

Henry steps out into the setting sun. Fiery beams of light
cast elongated shadows on the fields of cotton.

HENRY'S POV

Henry scans the plantation. There's not a soul in sight.

Henry's eyes settle on a stationary rolling hoop.

BACK TO SCENE

HENRY

Eli!

No answer. Henry's face mirrors his sinking stomach.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Eli!

Henry darts around the mansion and into the backyard. He approaches an overrun and abandoned slave quarter. The front door is wide open.

Henry draws his pistol and cocks it.

INT. SLAVE QUARTERS - DUSK

Nervous yet alert, Henry lurks into a vacant room with his firearm raised.

In the center of the room, a plumb-line hangs from the ceiling. Henry secures the room and approaches it.

He kneels down and picks up the suspended weight. He examines the plumb-bob.

HENRY

What in the hell?

Henry releases the weight. He stands up, turns around, and-

BAM! Henry jolts back as he fires his gun instinctively. In front of him, the words, "WHAT SEEST THOU?" drip on the wall in crimson red.

Sheer horror overwhelms his face.

HENRY

Eli!

INT. MANSION, HALLWAY - DUSK

Henry slams the front door shut.

HENRY

Melinda! Get yer ass over here,
now!

No response. Henry huffs and storms into the-

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Henry's eyes grow as big as dinner plates.

(CONTINUED)

A sickly looking black man sits in Henry's seat. He wears a tattered blue soldier's uniform and a scarf around his neck. He has yellow bulging eyes and bounces a weary Eli on one knee. This is AMOS (20's).

Melinda sits across from Amos, frozen with fear.

HENRY
Holy Christ on a cross.

AMOS
Evenin' Colonel.

MELINDA
Henry, do you know this man?

Henry mouths the words but nothing comes out.

AMOS
Go on, Henry. Tell your wife who I am.

HENRY
H-h-h-how did you get here?

AMOS
You made a promise to me Henry.

HENRY
Where in god's green earth did you come from?

AMOS
I came to hold you to your word.

Henry glances at Melinda then back at Amos.

HENRY
Word? I ain't promised shit. I don't even know who you are.

AMOS
Maybe this will remind you.

Amos unravels his scarf to reveal a large cut down the side of his neck. Jaundice colored puss and thick red blood dribbles from the wound and onto Eli.

Eli tries to escape but Amos holds him tight.

Melinda screams.

MELINDA

Henry? What's going on here? Who is this?

AMOS

Just some dead nigger.

HENRY

Just some dead nigger.

HENRY

This can't be true. You ain't real.

AMOS

Not real? Tell me Henry, does this look real to you?

Amos plunges his hand into his coat pocket. He retrieves something black and throws it on the floor in front of Henry. It's a severed left ear.

Henry jolts back in fear. Amos nods to the chair across from him.

AMOS

Sit.

Nervous and hesitant, Henry sits at the table. He conceals his pistol from Amos' view.

AMOS

Tell me Henry, are you familiar with the book of Amos?

HENRY

Not particularly. Why?

AMOS

Amos lived during the peak of Israel's prosperity, around 750 BC. Despite their wealth, the people of Israel had grown increasingly greedy. In fact, their devotion to God, or Yahweh as they referred to him back then, had reached an all time low.

Henry glances at the pistol in his lap.

AMOS

Well one day, Amos was working the fields when Yahweh approached him. He told Amos that he must go to Samaria and tell them that "The Day of the Lord" is nigh.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Why are you telling me this?

AMOS

Up until then, "The Day of the Lord" was a highly anticipated event by the people of Israel. It would be a time when Yahweh would punish Israel's enemies and God's people would reign victorious. Israel thought that they were exempt from God's judgment. But, as Amos, revealed, they weren't.

Henry pulls the hammer back on his pistol.

AMOS

God told Amos to inform the people of Israel that they too will be punished on "The Day of the Lord." Israel had shown injustice to the innocent and they were to be destroyed, just like their neighbors. Even though they were God's chosen people and he loved them dearly, Yahweh could not exempt them of their sins.

HENRY

Is that why you're here? To enact God's judgment?

AMOS

(laughs)

Turns out, God ain't too fond of folks like you and me.

HENRY

Then what in the hell do you want?

AMOS

Find out for yourself.

Amos reaches for his pocket. Henry whips out his pistol and BAM!

A sizable chunk of Amos' right shoulder spatters the wallpaper behind him. Amos doesn't even flinch as he retrieves something from his pocket.

Melinda screams. Eli cries.

Henry pulls the trigger again. CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! Henry drops the empty pistol. His hand shakes uncontrollably.

(CONTINUED)

Amos slams a dull, rusty knife onto the table. There is a picture of General Lee on the handle. Amos slides the knife towards Henry.

AMOS

Pick it up.

HENRY

Why?

AMOS

Because I want you to fulfill your promise Henry. I want you to kill yourself.

HENRY

Get the hell out of here. I don't care what you are or where you're from. Just get! And don't you ever come back!

AMOS

Do it. Do it and I'll spare you your reputation. I won't tell her what you really are.

MELINDA

(to Henry)

Henry? What's he talking about?

Henry's demeanor changes from resistant to hesitant. He picks up the knife and examines it.

HENRY

Ain't no way.

Amos whips out a flintlock pistol from beneath his jacket. He points it at Eli.

AMOS

You either kill yourself or I shoot your son dead in his tracks and tell your wife what you really are.

HENRY

I'm sorry. Just, please, don't hurt my boy.

AMOS

Kill yourself and both your wife and son will live. Your past will go with you to the grave.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

And what if I don't? What will happen to me then?

AMOS

I'll shoot you square in the forehead. Either way, you're a dead man.

Henry sobs.

HENRY

Why are you doing this to me?

AMOS

The day of Lord is upon you Henry. People like us can't exist in this world. You said so yourself.

Amos pulls back the hammer on his pistol

AMOS

Now fulfill your promise. If you meant what you said, you'll do it.

Henry dries up his tears and grows some balls.

HENRY

To hell with you. Tell her. I don't care. You'll never take me with you.

AMOS

(to Melinda)

Ma'am, your husband is a-

Henry slits his wrists. Streams of crimson flow from the fresh wound. Henry's eyes roll back as he falls out of his chair and onto the floor.

MELINDA

Henry!

Melinda rushes to her husband and cradles him.

Eli kicks and screams. Amos releases him from his clutch. He runs to his mother.

MELINDA

(to Amos)

What did you do to him?

Amos stands up and holsters his pistol.

(CONTINUED)

AMOS

And the Lord said unto me, Amos,
what seest thou? And I said, a
plumbline.

Amos walks towards Henry's fading body. He's still alive but his breath becomes more shallow with each passing moment.

AMOS

Then said the Lord, behold, I will
set a plumbline in the midst of my
people Israel.

Amos rips open Henry's jacket and retrieves a small, green Bible from an inside pocket.

Henry sees the Bible and jolts back to life. He must retrieve that Bible. Henry reaches for it, but keels over.

Amos hands the Bible to Melinda.

AMOS

I will not again pass by them any
more.

Amos stands up and walks toward the exit. He looks over his shoulder before leaving completely.

AMOS

Amos chapter seven, verse eight.

EXT. CAMP SUMTER, ESTABLISHING - DAY

SUPER: Anderson, Georgia - April 7, 1865 (six months prior)

Henry rides into a POW camp on a black horse. He wears a gray confederacy uniform decorated with a wide array of medals. He has both ears.

The camp is packed with thousands of union soldiers fenced in by a stockade wall.

INT. CAMP SUMTER, CORRIDOR - DAY

WALT (14) guards a door. He dresses like a soldier though he barely looks like a man.

Henry approaches him. Walt salutes him.

(CONTINUED)

WALT
Afternoon Colonel.

HENRY
At ease soldier.

WALT
Would you like me to retrieve your whip?

HENRY
That won't be necessary.

Henry takes off his white gloves.

HENRY
I'll just be using my fists this time.

WALT
Any word from General Lee?

HENRY
It's over. Lee's planning to surrender the day after next. There's simply no way for the confederacy to rebound. Not after losing Five Forks and Sayler's Creek.

WALT
What will happen to the prisoners?

HENRY
There will be an exchange at Union headquarters in Jacksonville. All prisoners are expected to be transferred there.

WALT
Should I notify the camp commander?

HENRY
No. Let me talk to my brother. Gotta alleviate some frustrations first.

WALT
Beat him real good for me. Beat him before he's a free man.

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

I'll make note of it. Do me a favor
and stand guard. And don't come in-

WALT

No matter what. Same as always.

INT. CAMP SUMTER, PRISON CELL

Amos sits in a vacant cell and reads a green Bible.

He's strong and muscular, nothing like before. His eyes are
focused and white. For a prisoner, he's in good condition. A
bit rugged, but well maintained.

Henry walks in and locks the door behind him. A heavy shadow
hides his face.

Amos jumps to his feet and backs into a corner.

AMOS

Who is it?

Henry stands still, face covered. He fiddles with something
in his pocket.

AMOS

Don't come any closer or I'll hurt
you. I know people. Important
people.

Henry steps forward and into the light. Amos breathes a sigh
of relief as a huge smile forms across his face. He leaps
forward and the two embrace.

AMOS

They don't treat me as well as you
do when you're gone. No one treats
me as well as you do.

Henry and Amos kiss.

AMOS

What did Lee want? Good news I
hope.

HENRY

The war's expected to last through
the Summer months. Possibly longer.

(CONTINUED)

AMOS

But I thought it was nearing the end? I overheard the soldiers talking about Sayler's Creek. They said it was the confederacy's last stand.

HENRY

It was...until the French decided to help. That's why Lee wanted to meet. Reinforcements are on their way now.

AMOS

That means-

HENRY

Everything will stay the way it is...at least for a little while longer.

AMOS

This is wonderful news. Kiss me Henry.

HENRY

You still got those letters I wrote to you?

Amos pulls out several pieces of paper from the back of the green Bible.

AMOS

I hide them in the back of this Bible. The guards don't suspect a thing. I read them all the time when you're gone.

HENRY

We'll be together forever soon. I promise.

AMOS

I love you.

A tear wells up in Henry's eye.

HENRY

I love you too Amos.

Henry and Amos kiss. But this time, more passionately. Hormones escalate and the two have each others' tongues down their throats.

(CONTINUED)

Henry pulls a rusty kitchen knife out of his pocket. Lee's face is on the handle.

Suddenly, fear grips Amos' face. His eyes bulge. He tries to pull away from Henry's face, but Henry has his tongue clenched in his teeth. Amos screams.

Henry takes the knife and slices it down the side of Amos' neck. Blood sprays everywhere.

Henry breaks down. He weeps violently, but quietly. He cradles Amos in his arms and runs his fingers through his hair.

HENRY

It would never work. Not here. Not now. People like us just can't exist in this world. Ain't no way. But we'll be together soon. I promise.

Henry kisses Amos on the forehead and closes his eyelids. He lays his body on the ground.

Henry steals the Bible and nestles it inside his jacket.

Henry stretches his left ear and draws the knife to its edges.

INT. CAMP SUMTER, CORRIDOR - DAY

Henry bursts from the prison door, cradling the left side of his head. Blood pours from between his fingers.

WALT

Sir! Oh my god!

HENRY

God damn it! He cut me!

WALT

What happened?

HENRY

He came at me with a kitchen knife. How in the hell did that bastard get a kitchen knife?

WALT

Where is he?

(CONTINUED)

HENRY

Dead. I wrestled the knife from him
and stabbed him in the throat.

WALT

But I thought you said we needed
him. Something about it being
crucial to the war that he stay
alive?

HENRY

Not anymore. Now he's just some
dead nigger.

CUT TO BLACK.