

Underground Freedom

By

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A frail white woman risks it all to free a slave.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

An African American male, SLAVE (30s), CRASHES through the WOODS. A pack of DOGS and angry MEN in hot pursuit.

The Slave breaks through the tree line and halts. He quickly surveys an old small cabin with one lit candle in the window. He hesitates, trembling. The RUMBLE of men and dogs closes in.

The slave dashes to the cabin out of breath. He quietly KNOCKS on the DOOR. A kind elderly but frail white woman, HAZEL, (60s), opens the door ushers him in and blows out the candle.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The slave stands in the middle of the room terrified, his pants torn and shirt shredded. The woman hurriedly moves the small bed and rug in the corner of the cabin.

HAZEL

How close are they?

SLAVE

Don't know ma'am. Stone's throw?

Hazel reveals a hidden trap door in the floorboards, opening it...

HAZEL

Get in. Whatever you hear, whatever happens, you don't move, you don't make a sound no matter what.

The Slave barely fits in the small dug out hole. He stares up at her with fear.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

If I don't let you out, you wait as long as you can. Understand? There is a map and a can of beans tucked away there.

She points to one of the corners of the hiding place.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

You wait as long as you can and then you follow the map. You understand?

SLAVE

Yes'm.

Hazel covers him with the floorboard, replacing the rug and the bed. She takes her bible and hobbles to an old rocking chair near the fireplace and begins to read.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The pack of dogs and men clear the woods and surround the cabin. ANGUS, (50s) a bitter, mean man, steps forward from the crowd.

ANGUS

Hazel you in there?

(pause)

I said you in there? You hiding slaves again?

Angus stomps up the steps and BANGS on the DOOR.

INT. HIDING PLACE - CONTINUOUS

The slave jumps in his hiding place, shaking quietly.

INTERCUT - INT. CABIN/EXT. CABIN/HIDING PLACE

Hazel calmly lifts herself out of the chair and opens the door.

HAZEL

You got no right banging on my door Angus.

ANGUS

I know you're hiding that nigga.

Hazel plants her feet in front of Angus, they face off in the door way.

HAZEL

You hush up Angus.

ANGUS

Get out of my way.

Hazel doesn't move.

ANGUS

(Yelling)

Get out of my way!

He grabs her and throws her down the porch steps. She yells from shock and pain as she lands hard on the wet ground.

The men storm the cabin tearing the place to pieces searching for the runaway.

MAN #1

Got it!

The slave braces for capture.

From the ground, Hazel looks up sharply through the open door, anxious to see what they found.

The men gather as Man #1 opens a secret slat. Nothing. It was another hiding places in the wall next to the closet. Hazel smiles. Panting, she gets up, climbs the steps and stands in the doorway, muddy.

HAZEL

Get out. Get out of my house.

ANGUS

I know he's here. You never learn do ya? Stupid ol' woman. You'd think you would after what happened to your husband. We'll find him.

Hazel takes one step into the cabin, grabs the shot gun mounted above the door. Her small frame barely reaching it. She steps back into the door frame and fires a warning SHOT out the door.

The slave shrivels in his hole.

HAZEL

You get out of my house and don't ever talk about my husband again.

ANGUS

What you gonna do Hazel? You gonna shoot me?

HAZEL

God knows I want to.

(quietly and menacingly)

Now you get out and don't bother me again. I was reading the Word about loving your enemies but I don't quite grasp what the good Lord is sayin'. But I got a real good understanding of an eye for an eye.

She COCKS the GUN.

ANGUS
 Alright, Alright Hazel. Hold your
 horses.

He slowly approaches her, his hands in the air in mock
 surrendered, switching tactics.

ANGUS
 (Sweetly)
 Let's talk about this. You know
 how much money that slave is worth?
 Tell you what, let's split the
 profits, huh?

Angus is now inches from Hazel, she looks tiny in front of
 him.

ANGUS
 You and me, we could make a
 fortune. You catch 'em, I sell
 'em. We'd be set. Wha'da ya say?

Hazel slowly slides her gun in the only space between them,
 the barrel propped dangerously under Angus' chin.

HAZEL
 I don't want none of your filthy
 money and I don't want your filthy
 person in my home. You get out,
 you hear? I won't kill you, but I
 don't mind shooting you in the leg.

ANGUS
 You're a dumb, crazy ol' woman.

HAZEL
 (Yelling)
 I said get out!

The men reluctantly leave.

She is left alone in the messy house. Her body begins to
 quake. She hobbles over to the bed and sits down, the
 shotgun still in her grip.

HAZEL
 You stay in there you hear? They
 will be watching the next few days.
 I'm sorry but you got to stay in
 there a while.

SLAVE (O.S.)
 Yes'm.

INT. CABIN - NEXT MORNING

The cabin is put back together. Hazel looks out the window for signs of slave catchers. Satisfied the coast is clear, she moves the bed.

HAZEL
I'm going to lift it up ok?

SLAVE (O.S.)
Yes'm.

She lifts the trap door. The slave is in the same position from last night. He is too big and too scared to move in his hole.

HAZEL
You can't go outside but I've made some coffee and breakfast. Wash up.

She points to a wash bin.

SLAVE
Yes'm.

Hazel moves the table away from the window and sets it for two. The slave is frozen in the corner.

HAZEL
You can sit down. I ain't going to bite.

He slowly sits, uncomfortable at a table with a white woman.

SLAVE
You got a bruise on your face.

HAZEL
Must have been from the fall last night.

SLAVE
Why do ya hide us slaves?

HAZEL
Because it's right.

SLAVE
That don't make people do it.

HAZEL
No it don't. But we do.

The slave raises his eyebrows confused by "we".

HAZEL

My husband and me. This was all his idea.

SLAVE

What happened to him?

HAZEL

That man never backed down from anything...

FADE

EXT. CABIN PORCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

SUPER - "30 YEARS AGO"

JOHN, a strong determined man (30s), and a young Hazel are sitting in chairs on the front porch enjoying the view.

HAZEL (V.O.)

...He didn't see why we should enjoy our freedom when other's weren't free. He never believed in slavery.

John gets up, kisses Hazel on the top of her head and walks inside the cabin.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He would say: "The greatest thing I've got is my freedom. It would be a crime if I didn't share it."

INT. CABIN - DAY

John is digging a hole under the bed for a hiding place.

LATER

John is building a secret wall space in the closet.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was his idea we start hiding slaves and sending them North.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

A young slave couple with a tiny baby come running up to the cabin. John and Hazel usher them in.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

One night a family comes to us,
they had a little baby not a few
months old. The slave owner was on
their tail with a herd of men,
young Angus in the midst. John
stood at the doorway and didn't let
them in.

CABIN PORCH

John is standing on the porch guarding his house, Hazel
hiding behind him. The crowd of men in the yard.

SLAVE OWNER

They're my property.

JOHN

Nobody is anybody's property.

SLAVE OWNER

If you're hiding them I'll make you
pay. There be laws about stealing
things.

JOHN

And there are laws about
trespassing. Get off my land.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

HAZEL

I thought they were going to have
to leave, I thought we were safe.
(her voice cracks)
But then the baby cried.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The young slave mother is desperately trying to quiet her
baby in their hiding place.

HAZEL (V.O.)

The baby was crying. Everyone
could hear it.

EXT. CABIN - PORCH

Everyone outside freezes.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

John couldn't keep them from
getting in the house. I told you

(MORE)

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

that man never backed down.

A rush of motion as the men storm the door and John fights them off as best he can.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He knocked down a few before someone clubbed him in the head. I thought he was dead. I couldn't do anything, just stood there screaming.

One of the men clubs John in the head, he falls unconscious. Hazel screams frozen in place.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

They found the slaves.

The men drag the slaves out of the cabin and tie them in a chain line.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Before they left, they branded John's hand with "SS". I tried to stop them...but I'm not so big. I just had to watch.

The men hold the barely conscious John down and brand his hand. One of the men is holding the fighting Hazel in the background. The Slave Owner bends down and whispers in John's ear...

SLAVE OWNER

That's what you get for being a Slave Stealer. Ya nigga lover.

They leave and Hazel rushes to John. Crying and holding him in her lap.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I tried to nurse him back to health, but his head never healed.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT - LATER

John's head is bandaged in white cloths but a bright blood spot soaks through. Hazel is cleaning his burned hand. He reaches up with his good hand and touches her chin.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He never recovered.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Hazel is wide awake laying next to the sleeping John. Her eyes big and fearful, her head on his chest which is moving to his ever slowing breathing.

B) Hazel is digging a grave in her backyard.

C) The grave is covered with a mound of fresh dirt, and has a small cross. She is weeping beside it.

HAZEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I buried my husband three days later. The SS still red and sore in his hand.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

The slave has tears in his eyes.

HAZEL

I loved that man. I loved that man so much I thought my heart would bust. It was John's wish to see every man as equal. So I can never using whatever I have, whatever the good Lord has given me to help you slaves. I can never stop sharing my freedom.

The CLAMOR of DOGS and MEN reaches the cabin.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

You have to go now. This time he won't leave so easy.

The slave hesitates.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

Oh, I'll be alright.

She grabs a map and a knapsack of supplies, shoves them in his hands and pushes him outside.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

HAZEL

You know the big dipper and the North Star?

The slave nods.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

Good. That way is North. I've marked the safe houses for you on the map. Get as far away as you can, then hide and wait for night.

SLAVE

(Overwhelmed by her love,
shaking his head)

Why Miss Hazel? Why ya doing this for me?

HAZEL

Because sugah, my freedom inspires me to love.

She pats his cheek, turns, walks back to the porch, grabs the gun and stands and waits. The slave runs North.

FADE OUT

