

Freedom: A One-Act Play

by Aaron S.

Setting:

The play is set outdoors on a plantation house in the deep South near the end of the Civil War. Downstage right there is a small simple cabin (one wall open to the audience) with a middle-aged woman and a younger man inside. Backstage left is the front porch of a mansion.

At Rise:

As the curtain rises, full lights come up on the two slaves inside a small, one-room cabin. The woman, Louise, sits churning butter while the younger man, Elijah, stands mending a leather harness. Backstage left, lower lighting reveals a group of soldiers, engaged in conversation with a well-dressed, older man. They speak softly or in pantomime so that their conversation is not audible to the audience.

Louise

It's too hot. This butter's never gonna set. I've been working it for....

Elijah

(Elijah waves his hand and frowns) Shhh! I can't hear them!

Louise

(Stopping angrily) Oh please. They're too far away for you to hear anything.

Elijah

(waving dismissively, under his breath) Yeah, yeah.

Louise

(Rolls eyes, starts back up churning butter, speaks mostly to herself while shaking her head)
I can't believe you're still watching them, I looked at it all right, and yeah, I saw those men. But you know what else I saw? I saw Mr. Randall's face, and that's all I needed to see, because that'll tell you anything and I can tell you exactly what those men are saying and it's called bad news, plain and simple. Whatever it is, it's bad news.

Elijah

(as if he didn't hear her, quizzically) Maybe they're from the North.

Louise

Ha! From the North! Now you're just buying into dreams.

Elijah

(glares at her, annoyed)

Louise

(Looks at his as if he is stupid) Elijah, there's a war going on. Ain't no Yankees coming down here not gonna get shot.

(Lights come up backstage right as Mr. Randall swears audibly and enters the house—exiting stage right. The shoulders look at each other. One points to the other, who shrugs and walks toward where Elijah and Louise are working.)

Elijah

(Looking startled, hurriedly tries to look busy)

Look! They're coming over towards us!

Louise

(Newly worried, sets aside the churn and nervously smooths her dress) What could they possibly want from us?

(one of the soldiers approaches the cabin and knocks. Both Elijah and Louise stiffen and look at each other with some panic. Neither moves to open the door.)

Private Williams

Ma'am? Are you in there?

Louise

(Confused, calls out from behind the closed door) Ms. Randall is in the big house, sir.

Private Williams

(Soldier looks uncertain) Actually, ma'am, I'm looking for Elijah and Louise Washington. Is that you?

Louise

(nervously leaning on the closed door, reluctantly replies) Yes.

Private Williams

Ma'am? Could you open the door?

(Louise slowly opens the door and backs away. Rays of 'outside' light enters the doorway, backlighting the soldier as Louise nervously backs away from him. The entire room brightens slightly but noticeably with the light from the doorway.)

Private Williams

(notices Louise backing away, frowns slightly, stops and straightens) Ma'am, I'm Private Williams, from the Northern army. *(smiling)* I've come to free you.

Louise

What do you mean, "free me?"

Private Williams

You're, uh, you are free.

Louise

Free to do what?

Private Williams *(Grins brightly)*

Oh! Free to do whatever you want once you sign this list. *(holds out list)* Nobody'll own you.

Louise

(amazed) And what about Mr. Randall?

Private Williams

(backing out of door, Louise steps into light when he says "doesn't matter.") He, uhm, he doesn't matter anymore.

Soldier 2

(shouting) Williams! Can we go? We've got three more farms to do.

Private Williams

(starts towards the group, pauses, turning toward Louise) Hey, why you can go into town *(pointing stage right)* The Union'll be there, get supplies 'n stuff, get you a new life.

(Private Williams joins his group and walks off stage left. Louise looks at Elijah and begins to gather items from around the cabin)

Louise

(Picking up the things she has gathered) Let's go.

(Elijah and Louise exit the cabin and Louise very deliberately closes the door firmly. They walk slowly, pause to look for a moment at the great house, then silently depart stage left without another look back.)

The End