

# First Light

by

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FADE IN:

A MAP (1800'S)

of North America west of the Slave Triangle. ZOOM to South Carolina, a slave state.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In the southern states a movement challenges the institution of slavery. They are the Abolitionists. Some believe their cause is the work of a higher power.

EXT. WINSTON PLANTATION - NIGHT

A Silvery Owl glides over the Big House, outbuildings, slave quarter. This owl, more likely an albino Giant Eagle Owl with a broad wingspan, alights on a moss-laden oak.

SLAVE QUARTER

White slavedrivers gather around an aging OVERSEER and ABEL, a Black slave with hateful eyes.

OVERSEER

Listen up. Abel, here, says his people betrayed him. Now he wants to be a slavedriver.

Slavedrivers laugh. Overseer hands Abel a cat-o'-nine-tails.

OVERSEER (CONT'D)

You might not be a griot, but you hafta prove yourself a slavedriver.

ABEL

Yessuh.

INT. SLAVE HOUSE

A candlelit coop. Frazzled Gadsden flag hangs as a curtain. Black women and children on one side; men on the other.

Weatherbeaten BILL OKEY hums an early bluesy tune. BOB KAMUZU strums banjo. RACHEL DADA rataplans wooden spoons.

At the table IFE, 7, missing fingers, paints a silhouette of her mother ZHOSA who poses for her.

Moonlight beams on elderly JOHN WOODCRAFTER. He glues alabaster owl onto wooden TALISMAN etched with pictoglyphs. He turns to the cracked window, holds up talisman against the moon, whispers a prayer, grabs cane, approaches Zhosa.

WOODCRAFTER

Daughter Zhosa, for da next griot.

Woodcrafter hands talisman to Zhosa who glances at Okey.

Slavedrivers storm in. Candles blow out. Music stops.

Abel notices wood shavings on table. He sweeps shavings off table and into Ife's frightened eyes.

ABEL

Woodcrafta, where's da juju charm?

WOODCRAFTER

Juju charm?

Abel grabs Woodcrafter's ear, drags him outside. Kamuzu and Okey exchange seething looks.

INT. BIG HOUSE

Exquisite Antebellum furnishings, oil lamps.

At dinner table DAVID WINSTON, 12, recites Declaration of Independence to REVEREND KIRK, his garbed tutor.

DAVID

Reverend Kirk, why does it say all men are created equal when Negroes and Indians are not?

KIRK

A compelling question, young David.

DAVID

Are they not like us?

CUPBOARD

Maid servant MAINNY climbs up and down ladder, sets cans on shelves. Urbane LADY WINSTON, 30's, appears, hands her cans.

LADY WINSTON  
You should rest, Mainny.

MAINNY  
Beg'n your pardon, ma'am, yu needs my help.

LADY WINSTON  
You're as stubborn as I.

MAINNY  
When'z Massuh Winzton comin' home?

LADY WINSTON  
First light ...

Commotion outside draws their attention.

KIRK  
Lady Winston, there's a flogging.

LADY WINSTON  
Sweet Jesus, no.

Lady Winston darts through side door.

EXT. LAWN - NIGHT

Slavedrivers gather. Overseer critically watches Abel rope Woodcrafter to the oak.

WOODCRAFTER  
Yu iz angry 'cuz Okey iz the griot. Don't give into hate, brutha Abel.

ABEL  
Ain't yur brother, John Woodcrafta.

Abel spits on Woodcrafter, glances at Overseer who nods, steps backwards, slings cat-o'-nine-tails.

Zhosa, Dada, Kamuzu and Okey watch through window.

Woodcrafter's back and neck slice with stripes. His jugular vein disgorges blood. He lets out a strangled cry, tearfully looks up at the half-moon, chants under his breath.

LADY WINSTON (O.S.)  
Stop this flogging immediately.

Slavedrivers step aside as Lady Winston approaches Overseer.

LADY WINSTON

What is the meaning of this?

OVERSEER

Lady Winston, it came to my attention that ... that darkey is plotting against us.

LADY WINSTON

Who told you this?

Overseer points at Abel who nods.

ABEL

No m'am, dat ain't true.

LADY WINSTON

Yet you brandish the whip.

Slavedrivers seize Abel. Lady Winston goes to Woodcrafter whose body slumps.

LADY WINSTON

Mother of God, this domestic nears death. Overseer, bring my doctor at once. Somebody assist me.

Okey and Kamuzu exchange angry looks, step away from window.

OAK TREE

Silvery Owl HOOTS under the moon.

Kamuzu and male Blacks, armed with field tools, sneak up on unsuspecting slavedrivers, hack them and Abel to shreds.

Lady Winston watches in shock, scurries toward Big House. Kamuzu beheads the Overseer, starts after her. Okey stops him, tugs him to oak tree where Woodcrafter hangs.

Okey unties Woodcrafter, lays him down gently. Dada and Zhosa appear with water and poultice.

WOODCRAFTER

Yu iz da griot, Okey. Keep our stories alive.

OKEY

Dada, Zhosa, help him.

KAMUZU

Dem whiteys goina hear our drumz.

OKEY

Kamuzu, drumz iz forbid'n.

KAMUZU

Dey iz goina shoot us anyway fo' wut we  
juzt done here. Okey, da warrior spirit  
runz thru our veinz.

(lifts Overseer's head)

Dem damn whiteys stole our freedom. But,  
dey can't take our spirit.

Kamuzu tosses Overseer's head across lawn.

A Black climbs to the slave house roof. Blacks toss him  
field tools. Black BEATS a rhythm. Other Blacks POUND  
on fence post and oak, same rhythm.

Gleam of fear in Okey's eyes turn to rage.

INT. BIG HOUSE

Ashen-faced Lady Winston closes doors, goes to David,  
hugs him. Rev. Kirk peeps out window.

KIRK

They're drumming.

LADY WINSTON

I must stop them before more blood is  
spilled.

Lady Winston rushes to front door. Kirk stops her. Lady  
Winston jerks away.

LADY WINSTON

Step aside, Reverend. My husband is  
liable of his chattels' actions.

KIRK

Their actions will be justified. It's  
best you remain inside.

MAINNY

Rev. Kirk iz right, ma'am. My people's  
put'n da word out.

LADY WINSTON

What word?

MAINNY

Dem drums yu hear say yur slavedrivers  
killed da griot.

House domestics gather.

LADY WINSTON

Define griot.

MAINNY

Da one dat tellz storiez of da old  
country. Dey killed Woodcraft'r.

Rock SMASHES through window. Kirk locks front door.

KIRK

Lady Winston, I suggest you lead us to a  
safe hiding place.

LADY WINSTON

Why must my husband be absent at a time  
like this? Come, all of you.

Lady Winston grabs David's hand, leads everyone through  
the hall and into the

LIBRARY

where she grabs key from behind family portrait, inserts  
key behind book, slides open a bookshelf, enters a

SECRET ROOM

where cobwebs hang off Freemason symbols on walls.

KIRK

Hurry.

LADY WINSTON

Wait. We have no water, food -- or my  
medicine. I need my medicine.

KIRK

No time, Lady Winston.

David slinks away as domestics crowd inside.

INT. SLAVEHOUSE

Zhosa pats a poultice on Ife's puffy, bloodshot eyes.

ZHOSA

Ife gots a splinter in her eye. Gotta get her to a doctor.

DADA

T'ain't a good time to go nowhere, Zhosa. Dem Whiteys will shoot uz all down.

ZHOSA

I'm takin' my chances.

Zhosa lifts Ife, rushes outside. Dada follows.

SHOTS - AROUND TOWN

-- Blacks DRUM on houses, barrels and fences.

-- Blacks march out of slave houses to the streets.

-- Blacks storm the General Store. They seize bottles, oil, linen, Kentucky rifles, ammo, tools.

-- Rioters set fires to buggies and a warehouse full of hay. Fire spreads fast. Dense smoke fills air.

-- Rioters throw flaming liquor bottles through windows of the town hall and the Hospital.

-- White posse fires GUNSHOTS.

ALLEY/MAIN ROAD

Zhosa, carrying Ife, and Dada stop by main road. Across street is the Hospital; its second story on fire. Frantic nurses bolt out. In front yard a NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN hobbles on one leg, pounds on window.

Zhosa and Dada scurry across yard, stop under an oak.

TURNPIKE - NIGHT

Mounted bluecoats halt at the GRACEBORO signpost. In command is Lieutenant BRECK, late 20's. Corporal SPIVEY and Sgt. COXCMB flank him.



Breck scans the fiery town, taps his finger to the DRUMBEATS.

BRECK

Hear the pattern? They're talking to each other.

COXCOMB

Sounds illegal to me, sir.

SPIVEY

Heads up.

A volley of flaming bottles explode nearby. Horse bucks off Coxcomb whose left leg SNAPS at the knee. A medic dismounts, tends to him.

BRECK

This rebellion ends tonight. Spivey, take your men, form a perimeter.

SPIVEY

Yes sir. Move out.

Breck aims flintlock, fires GUNSHOT at rioters. One rioter presses on side, limps away.

ALLEY

Okey and Kamuzu load Kentucky rifles. Blacks stuff linen in liquor bottles. Everyone pauses wild-eyed as bloodied rioter stumbles around corner and keels over.

Okey drops rifle, catches rioter, gently lays him aground, watches death empty his eyes.

KAMUZU

We'z gonna get dem White folks.

Kamuzu leaps toward the corner. Okey stops him.

OKEY

Look 'round yu, Kamuzu. Our revenge is done.

KAMUZU

It juz started.

Okey shoulders rioter, plods away. Kamuzu and Blacks exchange surprised looks, follow him.

KAMUZU

Dem whiteys killed our father.

OKEY

T'wuz wrong of uz to blame all fo' the  
actions of a few.

Kamuzu glances at wounded White women and children, and  
Bluecoats converging on rioters.

Okey and Blacks pass David hiding behind tree. David  
darts across road to

HOSPITAL

where a bucket brigade passes water. David notices  
Native American Woman begging a fireman's help. He  
notices Woman has a missing foot.

YARD

Zhosa watches fireman shove away Woman who falls on  
ground. She hands Ife to Dada. Ife cries. Zhosa  
caresses her hair back, kisses her forehead. Ife lulls  
to a whimper.

ZHOSA

Mama's gotta do sumthin', Ife.

DADA

Zhosa, don't ...

Zhosa rushes across road, slaps away embers, unties  
apron, covers hand, shatters window, looks away as smoke  
belches.

David lifts Woman to her feet.

ZHOSA

Wutcha doin' here, Massah David?

DAVID

My mother needs medicine.

ZHOSA

Wait here.

Apron over face, Zhosa climbs on sill, enters through  
window.

## INSIDE HOSPITAL - WARD

Smoke-filled room. Eerie RUMBLE in walls. Fiery spicules at bottom of door.

Zhosa grabs shawl, looks underneath bed, finds JACY, a terrified Native American boy. She tugs Jacy, wraps him in shawl, rushes to window, hands him to David. Woman grabs Jacy from David whose arm rips talisman off Zhosa's neck.

Zhosa chokes, goes to apothecary cabinet, grabs jar of herbs, climbs on sill, hands jar to David who reaches for her; their fingertips connect. MIGHTY HANDS sweep away David.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Zhosa.

Zhosa pauses, glimpses back at a MAN'S FACE forming in the fire. Fiery ceiling collapses on Zhosa.

## EXT. YARD

Transfixed with horror, Ife buries head in Dada's arms as hospital roof caves in.

## ROAD

Breck sets down David, peers out corner of his eye, quickly draws pistol at CHERAW, a sinewy, tattooed Native American who vanishes behind a waft of smoke.

BRECK

Identify yourself.

In a sad frenzy David drops jar, untangles talisman.

DAVID

David Winston, sir.

Breck picks up jar, hands it to David.

BRECK

We need to find your parents. C'mon.

Breck clamps David's hand, drags him away. David drops tosses talisman, stares at burning hospital.

Cheraw appears from behind oak, glimpses around, picks up talisman. Owl HOOTS, flies off oak treetop.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Cheraw. Cheraw.

Cheraw joins Woman and Jacy, shoulders Jacy. They vanish into woods.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Spivey and other Bluecoats supervise a chain-gang of Blacks cleaning up the town. Among them: Okey and Kamuzu who wear leg irons and copper bells on their heads.

WINSTON PLANTATION

Breck approaches MR. WINSTON, businessmen, and a constable standing by guard house. One businessman is MR. CLINT.

BRECK

Mr. Winston?

Mr. Winston turns to Breck who hands him scrolled document.

MR. WINSTON

Lt. Breck? My son's rescuer. My wife and I are indebted to you. Your heroism deserves compensation.

BRECK

Unnecessary, sir. Is your son well?

MR. WINSTON

He is, thank you. How long is martial law in effect?

BRECK

Until the marshal completes his assessment.

MR. WINSTON

(reads document)

A release form? So, you have six of my domestics detained?

BRECK

I do. Upon signing this you agree to administer corporal punishment upon those who participated in the uprising. Refusal entitles me to incarcerate under the Slave Code.

MR. WINSTON

If you stood in my shoes what you would do? Would you be merciful?

BRECK

I'd do what's best, Mr. Winston.

Mr. Winston signs document, hands it to Breck.

MR. WINSTON

If you have time I welcome you to tour the plantation I've succeeded.

MR. CLINT

Mr. Winston, I assumed we'd discuss your selling the savanna.

MR. WINSTON

That was my father's arrangement, Mr. Clint. Now I'm in charge, there is no further discussion.

Mr. Winston and Breck start towards the field.

BRECK

The savanna?

MR. WINSTON

The lower end of my property near the river. It's a lowland swamp that separates the river from Mr. Clint's land.

BRECK

Perhaps you can lease it to him.

MR. WINSTON

Mr. Clint is a competitor. If he gains direct access to the river, I'd be out of business.

LAWN

White and Black children, 6 to 9 years, play tag. PEARL CLINT smacks David's butt.

David shyly skitters around oak, tags Pearl, grabs limb, scales up oak. Pearl chases him.

FLOWER GARDEN

Mainny serves tea to Lady Winston and sickly MRS. CLINT as they watch children. Lady Winston nibbles on twig.

MRS. CLINT

Your son is as restless as a squirrel.  
The uprising must have been terrifying  
for him.

LADY WINSTON

He dreads the punishment that awaits him.

MRS. CLINT

Why punish him when he risked life and  
limb to acquire your medicine?

LADY WINSTON

True, however, he left home without  
permission, Mrs. Clint.

Mainny sets down tray of teapot and cups.

MAINNY

Lady Winston, yu look better today.

LADY WINSTON

I thank my son for that. Did you attend  
your family's funeral?

MAINNY

Yes ma'am. It iz a sad loss.

LADY WINSTON

My condolences, Mainny.

FIELD

Mr. Winston and Breck pass Blacks leaving Zhosa's and Woodcrafter's burial near Slave Quarter.

MR. WINSTON

I lost two of my best workers: a father  
of four and a mother of one.

Breck studies Mr. Winston pausing with misty eyes.

BRECK

You actually care for them.

MR. WINSTON

Why wouldn't I? I grew up with them.  
Allow me to show you my crop.

They enter

BARN

where Blacks process cotton.

MR. WINSTON

I facilitate the South's largest  
plantation second to Mr. Clint. I owe  
success to the workforce. To stay  
competitive there must be discipline, and  
that requires a strong overseer.

BRECK

I heard your slaves murdered your  
overseer and slavedrivers.

MR. WINSTON

An internal matter I'll personally  
justify.

EXT. LAWN

Pearl and other kids gather beneath oak.

PEARL

You're such a monkey, David Winston. Come  
down here at once.

David climbs to the breezy top, marvels at the field and  
lush Countryside beyond.

IFE

Massah David.

David jerks, turns to Ife feeding owlets in an aerie.

DAVID

Ife, what are you doing up here?

IFE

Feed'n da owls.

David moves closer to the aerie, looks over the owlets,  
smiles, reaches for one. Ife stops him, nods no.

IFE

Their mama would smell yur touch and  
leave 'em to die.

DAVID

You're touching them.

Albino owlet crawls out of aerie, drops. David jerks to catch it. Foot slips. He grabs limb, which snaps. He falls onto limb below. Owlet drops.

Ife scales down. David follows Ife to the ground.

Pearl picks up stick, goes to swing at SHRIEKING owlet. Ife catches Pearl's arm half-swing, shoves her, kneels beside owlet. Pearl yanks Ife's knotted hair.

PEARL

Off me, you crippled darkey.

DAVID

(jumping from limb)  
Pearl Clint, let her go.

Ife jerks away, gently lifts and cuddles owlet.

Pearl punches at David who steps aside. She stumbles. Mrs. Clint nabs Pearl's ear. Lady Winston goes to David.

MRS. CLINT

We're leaving, young lady.

A WHISTLE. Lady Winston and David turn to Dada on veranda.

DADA

Mistress Winston, some redskinz look'n  
fo' David.

LADY WINSTON

Indians looking for you?

EXT. THE GATE - DAY

David and Lady Winston meet Cheraw, Jacy and the one-footed Woman. Cheraw holds up a leather-wrapped box.

CHERAW

Cheraw thanks Pale One for saving my son  
Jacy.



David and Jacy exchange looks. Cheraw hands David the box. Mr. Winston snatches box, stands in front of David.

MR. WINSTON

We don't accept gifts from savages.

Mr. Winston hands Cheraw the box. Cheraw and Breck exchange unwavering stares.

BRECK

You.

CHERAW

We leave now.

Cheraw takes Jacy's hand, walks away.

LADY WINSTON

That was rude.

MR. WINSTON

No more than their stench. David, I'm assigning you to the Landing.

DAVID

But, Pappy, I hate fishing.

MR. WINSTON

You and Okey will return by curfew.

LADY WINSTON

Okey? He was one of the rioters.

MR. WINSTON

And he's our best fisherman. Rest assured they'll be supervised.

Mr. Winston and Breck walk away. David kicks gate, pouts.

DAVID

Pappy's always mad at me.

LADY WINSTON

His job makes him that way. He takes it out on me too.

(kneels to David)

Know this - he's proud of you for saving that boy. In the eyes of this town you're a hero. Now that's something feel good about, yes?

David glances at Cheraw, Jacy and Woman walking into town.

DAVID

Yes ma'am.