

CAN NOT HAVE ONE

by

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EXT. FIELD, GRASSY AREA - DAY

ARAMINTA "MINTY" TUBMAN, soon to be known as Harriet, tiredly heads home from her chores.

SUPER: "Saturday, September 15, 1849."

A SLAVE WOMAN appears at the edge of the woods.

SLAVE WOMAN
(loud whisper)
Psst! Minty!

Minty turns her head to look.

MINTY
What you doin', woman?! You know we
slaves not supposed to meet out in
the open like this!

SLAVE WOMAN
(vigorously motioning
Minty over)
That why I want you to come here!
Please!

Minty nervously checks for witnesses. Seeing none, she cautiously heads over to the Woman.

MINTY
What you want calling me over like
this?

SLAVE WOMAN
They bein' sold.

MINTY
(alarmed)
Who?

SLAVE WOMAN
Linah's girls. Kizzy and little
'Rit.

Minty catches her breath.

MINTY
You know this for true? For *sure*?

SLAVE WOMAN
Yes! They goin' to the Deep South!

MINTY

Oh, Lord! My nieces bein' sold!
They *always* be goin' after the girls
in our family...!

Worried, Minty again checks for witnesses.

SLAVE WOMAN

An' you the next sister! We wanted
to warn you.

MINTY

'Kay. Thank you. I know what to
think about now.

SLAVE WOMAN

(fearful)
Lord be with you.

The Slave Woman darts back into the woods.

Minty looks around again. Still no witnesses. Minty quickly
leaves the scene of the encounter.

EXT. JOHN TUBMAN CABIN - DAY

Minty sleeps on the porch disturbed by nightmares. Her face
frowns; her head, torso, and hands quiver and jerk.

MINTY

Oh, Lord...! Not them...! Don't
take.... Don't take them! Don't
take *me*!

JOHN TUBMAN, Minty's husband, approaches the cabin. He sees
Minty in a sleeping fit and shakes his head in disgust.

As he mounts the steps to the porch, his final footsteps
fall heavy and loud. Minty wakes with a great start.

JOHN TUBMAN

(an old routine)
What you scared of now, Minty? It's
just your husband coming home.

MINTY

They bein' sold, John! My nieces!
Kizzy and little 'Rit!

JOHN TUBMAN

Ain't nobody goin' to be sold.

MINTY

It true! To the Deep South! I hear
the talk on the vine!

JOHN TUBMAN

You most likely dreamt it again.
Why you so worried now that Massa Ed
has died? You be like "old Cudjo"
laughing at the joke after everybody's
moved on to somethin' else.

MINTY

(indignant)

I not laughing, John Tubman.

(considers)

It must be *Eliza* doin' it this time.
They *always* go after the girls in
the family... and I the next sister
in line! We have to leave!

JOHN TUBMAN

We ain't goin' *nowhere*. Cuz' there
ain't nobody goin' to be sold. How
you think you're going to leave
anyway? You don't even know where
you're goin'.

MINTY

(subdued rebelliousness
and hooded eyes)

North.

JOHN TUBMAN

Do you have any idea of how far that
is? Do you have any idea how *hard*
that is? How you goin' to find your
way in the dark? How you goin' to
fight off the forest animals? The
menfolk may try to escape, but they
always get caught...

MINTY

Some make it.

JOHN TUBMAN

... And I ain't *never* heard of a
woman running away by herself! You
would need a man's help... and I
tell you this! It - ain't - gonna -
be - me!

MINTY

You don't mean that, John. . . .

Minty stops short becoming fearful.

JOHN TUBMAN
(terrible looking
expression)
You - SEE - if I don't mean it!!

John Tubman storms into the cabin.

A shaken and uncertain Minty touches her lips with quivering fingers, thinking it through. Then . . .

MINTY
(under breath)
Then I get my brothers....

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Minty looks all around making sure she's not being watched as she creeps up to the barn door. She opens the door and freezes as it creaks a little. She nervously looks around. Seeing no one, she slips inside.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Minty looks around in the dark.

MINTY
(whisper)
Robert!? Benjamin!? You here?

BENJAMIN (O. S.)
Over here.

Minty looks toward the stall where the voice came from. Her eyes adjusting to the darkness of the barn. She starts toward the stall where BENJAMIN (mid-20's), and HENRY (late teens), await.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Robert not here yet... but Henry is.

MINTY
Where Robert, Ben? Didn't he get the message?

HENRY
He'll be here. Just runnin' late, I guess.

MINTY
That not good to be late! This important! We need to do this together! I don't want to do it alone.

The brothers exchange serious and concerned glances.

HENRY
What you talking about, Minty?

MINTY
Our nieces bein' sold.

The brothers' eyes widen and mouths open in surprise.

BENJAMIN
(serious again)
Haven't heard about that.
(to Henry)
You?

HENRY
(shaking head)
Naw.

BENJAMIN
What we supposed to do?

MINTY
We need to escape. Together!
Tonight! Before they come for us!

The barn door CREAKS again. Heads whip around; hearts in their throats. ROBERT (early 30's), enters.

ROBERT
(low voice)
Hey.
(hesitates uneasily)
Anybody here?

BENJAMIN
We here, Robert.

Robert approaches them.

ROBERT
What's going on? Why meet in the barn? Why not the cabin?

HENRY
Minty wants to run. An' she want us to go with her.

MINTY
I need help.

ROBERT
You want to run?
(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(grave concern)
They goin' to sell you?

MINTY
Not me. Our nieces. Linah's girls.

ROBERT
And *you* want to run?

MINTY
Yes.

ROBERT
Why?

MINTY
I the next sister in line. I know I
gonna be next.

ROBERT
Mmmnn. I see. How you planning to
go?

MINTY
On foot.

ROBERT
How soon?

MINTY
Now. Tonight.

ROBERT
Tonight? Just like that? You have
any idea where you're goin'?

MINTY
North.

ROBERT
(incredulous)
That's it? Just anywhere north?

MINTY
Yes.

Robert offers a ragged sigh as he sorts through what he's
just heard.

ROBERT
Minty... this is all sounding a little
crazy. You can't just up and run
like this.
(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

'Least not if you want to keep from getting caught! You need some kind of plan! You can't just go along roads you ain't even been over!!

MINTY

I *know* the woods. Father taught me good. He show me which is the North Star, how to read the moss on the trees, an' what berries safe to eat. He taught me so much! And I can teach you.

ROBERT

I think we should wait till December. That's when most escapes take place. The nights are longer then.

BENJAMIN

How you going to get away from your husband?

HENRY

I know. He scare me. John Tubman turn us in for sure!

BENJAMIN

I know. He be like the worst husband ever. An' he already free! He *got* to know what it be like.

MINTY

John's not like that. He's a good husband. He just afraid to live without me. He love me too much. And I love him.

ROBERT

He's probably just scared that Massa turn him into a slave if he don't tell what he know. Whatever reason, we can't trust him.

BENJAMIN

When he wake up and you're not there, he gonna know you run away. Then it's just a matter of time before he turn you in.

MINTY

That's why we need to go tonight. It a Saturday night. Nobody do nothing on Sunday, except church.

(MORE)

MINTY (CONT'D)

White or black. The papers don't go out till Monday! We'd have a full day head start!

ROBERT

Who's gonna help?

HENRY

Mama and Pop?

BENJAMIN

Oh, we can't tell ole 'Rit. You know what she do.

ROBERT

No. The way ole 'Rit talks, she cook up nothing but a fuss.

HENRY

It would break Mama's heart if she didn't know.

MINTY

(to Henry)

She would know we in a better place. Imagine how she feel if we were *sold*!

ROBERT

Any other ideas besides us?

MINTY

I might know a person.

ROBERT

It gonna take a lot more than one person, Minty.

BENJAMIN

That's what I thinkin', too.

MINTY

We can find one person to help us who know another person that can help us, and that the way it be with those people. It all done in secret.

HENRY

That goin' to be enough help to get us all those miles?

ROBERT

The north hundreds of miles away, you know.

MINTY

I not know how far it goin' to be.
That just what the white folk say...
all those miles. All I know is they
try to keep us dumb and lie to us so
we be easy to control. The only way
to know how the world really is...
is to try.

Robert falls silent, lapsing into deep thought mixed with reluctance.

HENRY

(to Robert)

She sayin' somethin' there.

BENJAMIN

What you thinking, Henry?

HENRY

I think we can wait twenty years and
maybe we have a chance at freedom...
or we can go now.

A troubled expression befalls Benjamin as he considers.
Then finally --

BENJAMIN

I think that right. I go.

HENRY

Me too.

Minty looks to Robert.

MINTY

What you thinking, Robert?

ROBERT

I got a newborn baby to think of.
If I go, how can I be sure he and
his mama aren't sold away to the
Deep South because of me?

BENJAMIN

I know what you say.

Robert shakes his head. Water comes to his eyes.

ROBERT

I can't go. Not now. Not yet.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Benjamin and Henry tramp through the woods, without concern, making all kinds of noise.

Minty tries to keep up. Her consternation at her brothers' lackadaisicalness grips her.

MINTY

Hey! Wait up!

Benjamin and Henry stop and look back in bewilderment.

BENJAMIN

Minty? Why you goin' so slow? We gotta get as far as we can!

MINTY

(catching up)

You boys makin' too much noise! You gonna get us caught for sure!

HENRY

They not know we left yet. They can't catch us if they don't know we gone.

BENJAMIN

And they sure can't hear us if they way back there!

MINTY

They got the paddyrollers out here lookin' all the time for runaways. They be the ones who hear us!

The brothers glance around somewhat inhibited and uncertain about what they should be afraid of.

BENJAMIN

(vague wave of hand)

They be out there, huh?

MINTY

Yes! It be Saturday night. We got plenty of time to get ahead 'fore the papers go out Monday... *if* we careful!

BENJAMIN

(thoughtful)

Mmmn.

Henry's eyes dart around. Minty stoops down and picks up a long stick.

HENRY
What you doin'?

MINTY
Picking up a stick.

HENRY
What for? To fight the paddyrollers?

MINTY
To act as a guide over the tree roots
and around the rabbit holes. You
both should get a stick too.

BENJAMIN
I'm not blind. I can see.

MINTY
Ben?! It night time!

BENJAMIN
The moon be out.

HENRY
Yeah. We can see fine.

Minty sighs.

MINTY
Suit yourself.

Minty starts forward.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Minty, now in front of her brothers, wears stress and concentration on her face (which she will hide from her brothers) as she forges forward.

The brothers, now stopped, lean into each other for a powwow.

BENJAMIN
(worried)
That moon be bright.

HENRY
It help us see.

BENJAMIN
It help the paddyrollers see, too.
See us.

HENRY

Mmmn. I know what you mean.

Minty returns to her brothers.

MINTY

Why you stop? I thought you wanted
to go as far as you can.

BENJAMIN

We not sure about doin' this no more.

MINTY

What you mean?

HENRY

I be missin' ole Mama, right now.

Minty forces a happy, brave face for her brothers.

MINTY

(soothing, gentle)

Hey. Mama be with us no matter where
we go. 'Kay?

Benjamin and Henry hesitate, uncertain.

MINTY (CONT'D)

Tell you what. When we get to the
north, one thing we goin' to have to
do is change our names.

HENRY

Why we have to do that?

MINTY

That way it make it hard for any
slave catchers to find us there.

BENJAMIN

Lord! I not know I goin' to have to
do that!

MINTY

Hey, hey, hey. You know what I gonna
do? I change my name to Harriet.
From now on, I be Harriet Tubman.
That way you can always feel close
to Mama. 'Kay?

Benjamin and Henry exchange uncertain and fearful glances.

HENRY

(to Benjamin)

What you thinkin'?

The brothers read each others' eyes and silently agree with each other. Benjamin turns to Minty.

BENJAMIN

We decide we're goin' back.

Henry nods his assent to Minty who expects this.

MINTY

Why?

HENRY

It not possible.

BENJAMIN

We're all goin' to be killed.

MINTY

No. That foolish talk. Look. We free right now. We can do anything we want. There nobody here to tell us what to do. We just got to make sure we find a place where it safe to stay.

(pointing)

That place be that way. Forward. So we all go forward. 'Kay?

BENJAMIN

That the foolish talk. We have no idea where we goin'... we probably goin' in circles... we goin' all end up dead!

MINTY

We followin' the North Star! We heading North! That's all we need to know!

BENJAMIN

No. What we need to know is we been away for a long time now....

MINTY

Just a couple hours!

BENJAMIN

We need to get back... where it be safe... *before* we be missed.

MINTY

You be crazy.

BENJAMIN

We turnin' around.

MINTY

No!

BENJAMIN

We turnin' around and you coming
with us!

Benjamin grabs her wrist. She jerks it away.

MINTY

Fine! You go on back if you wants
to! Go on back with you and your
crazy talk! *I goin' to find my
freedom! With or without you!*

Minty spins on her heel and heads off. Benjamin and Henry
gape at each other in shock and amazement. Finally --

BENJAMIN

What you think?

Henry watches Minty continue to walk.

HENRY

She crazy.

MOMENTS LATER, Minty walks defiantly forward in the woods
with FOOTSTEPS COMING UP BEHIND HER. Minty stops and turns
around.

MINTY

Oh? You finally decide that I right?

Ben and Henry each grab an arm of their sister's and start
pulling her back.

MINTY (CONT'D)

Hey! What you doin'?! Stop!

BENJAMIN

We can't let you go on.

Minty resists them. But combined, the brothers get the better
of her.

MINTY

Hey! Let go of me! You holding me
back!

BENJAMIN

Grab her feet!

Henry struggles to do so.

MINTY

This the wrong way! Freedom the
other way!

HENRY

Oh, Lord....

BENJAMIN

You gonna get us caught for sure!
You causing trouble for us all! You
gonna get us all killed!

Henry grips Minty by the ankles and picks her up.

MINTY

You my brothers! You my family!
You supposed to help! We supposed
to help each other succeed!

They carry her away OUT OF FRAME.

BENJAMIN (O. S.)

Hush your mouth! We saving you from
yourself!

EXT. SIDE OF JOHN TUBMAN CABIN - NIGHT

Devastated and dismayed, Minty staggers forward supporting
herself with a hand on the wall.

MINTY

(low and heavy)

Ain't no one gonna help me....

She cannot go on. She stops and slides down to a seat on
the ground. She fights her tears and works on getting through
her bitter disappointment. Her body droops as tiredness
weighs heavy on her. She gradually calms down and finally
becomes resigned. She sadly looks off into nowhere.

MINTY (CONT'D)

That be the way it is, I s'pose....

Now that she has hit bottom, she is surprised to feel the
burning sensation of anger growing deep within herself.
Anger slow burns onto her face as she gradually musters up
to seriousness and determination. Then --

MINTY (CONT'D)

There be one thing more for sure...
freedom only for those bold enough
to take it.

EXT. JOHN TUBMAN CABIN FRONT PORCH - DAY

John Tubman MOVES AROUND INSIDE. He comes to the door, opens it up and exits. He closes the door behind him and turns.

He sees Minty sitting on the porch in the same place as the earlier scene. She is awake this time and staring straight forward.

JOHN TUBMAN

Oh. *There* you are. You up mighty early this morning. You all right?

MINTY

(not moving, still
staring forward)

I fine.

John Tubman watches her and tries to gauge her mood. Then--

JOHN TUBMAN

I guess you not goin' to church this morning.

(watches some more)

Preacher man goin' to be mighty disappointed.

MINTY

I think he forgive me this time.

John Tubman watches her with grave suspicion.

JOHN TUBMAN

(harsh)

I know you thinking you want to run.
It all over your face. Any fool can see that. I tell you this... you *better* still be here when I get back. If you're not, I go to the Mistress and turn you in!

Minty moves for the first time as she turns to John Tubman with hurt, angry, betrayed eyes. He leans into her.

JOHN TUBMAN (CONT'D)

That's right! You heard me! I will turn you in! Your place is here! With your husband! You need to be banishing all these fool notions about the North before it make you crazy! Lord, you crazy enough as it is!

Minty turns her head to stare straight forward again. An inscrutable expression on her face.

JOHN TUBMAN (CONT'D)
You try to run, I turn you in; they
catch you and whip you and sell you
to the Deep South for certain! You
stay here, you still got a chance
they won't.

John Tubman straightens and continues to watch Minty.

JOHN TUBMAN (CONT'D)
You think about what I say. Soon
enough you'll see I'm talkin' sense.

John Tubman turns away from her and looks in the direction he is going to head off in.

JOHN TUBMAN (CONT'D)
I'm goin' to church now. Don't let
your fool notions get the best of
you... and be here when I get back.

John Tubman walks off the porch and heads to church.

Minty continues to stare straight ahead with the same inscrutable expression, as she watches and listens to John Tubman walk away. She is calm, quiet, confident, determined and still.

John Tubman walks out of hearing range.

MINTY
(like cold iron)
There be one of two things I have a
right to. Liberty or death. If I
can not have one... I will have the
other... for no man will take me
alive. I will fight for my liberty
as long as my strength lasts. And
if the time comes for me to go, the
Lord will let them take me.

Minty remains still and motionless and stares straight ahead. Alone. A small speck in an overwhelming world.

SUPER: "The next afternoon, Harriet "Minty" Tubman received word that she too, had been sold to the Deep South. The slave trader would pick her up the next morning."

SUPER: "That evening, Harriet simply walked off the plantation, alone, and started her journey that ended in freedom."

SUPER: "She returned again and again and again, using routes she had 'been over', to help other succeed on the road to freedom..."

SUPER: "...including her brothers, friends, complete strangers"

Then add . . .

SUPER: "-- and both her parents."

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END