

AND GRACE WILL LEAD ME HOME: THE AMERICAN POW DRAMA"

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Originally Produced, June 1996, at Georgia Southwestern State University, Americus, Georgia, as part of the State's Cultural Olympiad for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games and around the opening of the National POW Museum at Andersonville.

Original Creative Team:

Director:	Geoffrey Hitch
Costumer:	Set and Lighting Design: Dr. W. Joe Stell
Music Director:	Joanna Schmink
Dramaturg:	Deanna Higgins
	Production Stage Manager: Ron Martin
	Robin Bates

CHARACTERS:

EX-PRISONERS OF WAR:

BILL FORNES: An ex-POW, not an actor. During the Korean War, Bill spent over a year in solitary confinement at the hands of the Chinese after being shot down over North Korea.

HAROLD THOMPSON: An ex-POW, not an actor. In World War Two, Harold was captured by the Germans in France while undertaking a spy mission behind enemy lines. Throughout his captivity, he was bombed by friendly fire. He was released through a prisoner exchange.

POW ACTOR: This character is the universal POW, occasionally dramatizing the narratives of the various characters and ex-POW's in the play, and also bridging the generations of experiences by articulating universal themes, struggles, and experiences. Later in the production, he enters the Andersonville narrative as a new POW, who is taken advantage of, which then transforms him into a Raider -one of the band of thieves who terrorized their fellow prisoners at Andersonville. The POW Actor is chameleon, becoming whatever the stories require of him.

CIVIL WAR POW'S:

EDMUND: New Yorker of English descent fighting on Union side. His life creed appears to be, "the best defense is an offense," hiding whatever hurt and cowardice may lurk beneath the surface with a wall of strong opinions and aggressive behavior.

SEAMUS: Irish immigrant fighting on Union side. Caring, determined, sentimental, egalitarian. A victim of prejudice, fighting to prove his own worth and equality. A true believer in the American dream.

SOLOMON: African-American, fighting for the Union in the 54th Massachusetts. Injured when captured after the battle of Fernandina. Intelligent and well-educated, occasionally haughty.

THADEUS: Union prisoner who had been there before the arrival of the other three. Eccentric and idiosyncratic, he is wise in a practical way, but not educated. He is a survivor from the hills of southern Illinois. He is fair, and likely to give people the benefit of the doubt again and again until they cross a certain line -and then watch out.

THE ANDERSONVILLE HOUSEHOLD:

MR. SINGLETARY: Southern Gentleman, respected citizen of Sumter County, Georgia. Owns some of the land on which Camp Sumter (Andersonville Prison) is built. Embodiment of a time that has past.

MRS. SINGLETARY: Southern Antebellum woman. Gracious, but like most women of her time, she must manipulate to keep control, and does both. Also like most women of her time, she is most excitable over things that don't matter, and absolutely stone-cold focused when confronted with things that matter a great deal.

SARA: Child of the Singletary's, around seven years of age. She is youthful still, and innocent, despite the threat to both that surrounds her.

TOM: Older brother, off fighting for the Southern cause.

INEZ: The slave/maid of the Singletary house, she is Abraham's wife. Nanny and care-giver to Sara, she is thoughtful and practical.

ABRAHAM: The slave/butler of the Singletary house. Inez's husband; Righteous, but not for a cause so much as for day-to-day human decency. Religious, in a quiet and convicted manner.

AT CAMP SUMTER:

CAPTAIN SMITH: He is a competent soldier, wounded, and bitter now because his wounds have kept him off the battlefield, and instead at this much lesser post, where he struggles to keep order among the young boys and barely competent who are left to guard the stockade.

YOUNG GUARD: A kid, nervous, ignorant of the world and in way over his head. Hostile to cover his fear.

GUARDS ONE, and TWO: Angry and fed up. Want to end the war themselves if they could.

TOWER GUARD: A guard in the pigeon roosts as Camp Sumter. Authorized to shoot any prisoner who crosses the 'dead line.'

PRIEST: The definition of Good Samaritan. Originally from Ireland, learned of Camp Sumter and its plight while serving in the diocese of Savannah, Georgia. A fighter who works tirelessly.

CONFEDERATE SOLDIER: Southern soldiers in various units of the Confederate Army who capture the Union POW's early in the play. (Not specifically soldiers assigned to Camp Sumter)

ARRIVAL: Union soldier under General Stoneman (who reported to General Sherman) among the forces who were expected to liberate Camp Sumter, but instead were captured and imprisoned there.

CHINESE INTERROGATOR: Red Chinese interrogator in Korea during the Korean War.

GERMAN INTERROGATOR: German interrogator in Italy and Germany during World War Two.

RAIDERS: Union soldiers/prisoners, who were among the band of thieves within Camp Sumter who terrorized their fellow prisoners. Fearless, ruthless, amoral, self-serving.

REGULATOR: A Union soldier/prisoner --one of the unofficial militia among the prisoners of Camp Sumter who banded together to stop the terrorism of the Raiders. Determined, focused, righteously indignant.

SOLDIERS: Union soldiers at Camp Sumter who have been prisoners.

NOTE: All of the characters who don't have a specific name can be double cast into any of these roles.

SETTING: The play mostly takes place in and around the Andersonville -Camp Sumter- Prison stockade -a confederate prison which began as a holding pen for Union soldiers taken prisoner, but which soon became overcrowded and disease ridden as the prison exchange system between

the north and the south broke down. In addition to the life in the prison, we also oversee life around the prison through the narrative of a local SINGLETARY family and their slaves, ABRAHAM and INEZ.

In addition, the narrative extends into the lives of the two ex- POW'S whose stories are juxtaposed to the Andersonville narrative throughout the play. Generally speaking, the main Andersonville narrative introduces various issues of freedom and captivity, which are then commented upon by the stories of the two actual POW's. These men, thus, provide us with an immediate and intimate lens through which to view a more distant history, and also establish the universality of the POW experience.

NOTE: The actual ex-POW's featured for any given performance can, and has varied. The ex-POW for a particular year is interviewed, and his narrative is fit into the various slots of the drama according to the particular idea or theme of each passage. The actual words spoken are scripted through an interviews and discussions with the playwright.

SET: The set for this show consists of three large, triangular towers, "A", "B", and "C", which when faced in one direction, form the exterior walls of the Andersonville Stockade; when faced another, form the interior walls; and the third side of each holds a large projection screens (about ten feet high and six feet wide) -each at different heights. These units are placed on a unique caster system which allows them to be moved about freely throughout the production, such that their movement becomes a part of the general presentation of the show. This arrangement allows for a general seamless transition between the various narratives, thus further accentuating the universality of the theme between these different histories.

Duel projectors are housed inside the towers themselves, and thus move with the units. The projections help set the stories of either ex-POW', with pictures from their particular conflict, and sometimes with pictures from their own personal collections. In addition, issues like starvation, and the masses of people at Andersonville -while almost impossible to portray on stage -are effectively represented with the panoramic use of historic photos from the national archive. Finally, the circumstances of the war surrounding Andersonville are shown through similar historic photos.

It is difficult to include all of the set movements and projections used in this production. Thus, such will occasionally appear when they are integral to the script, or when their description does not significantly impede the reading of the play.

ACT ONE –MIDWAY THROUGH

Well into their captivity now, the Andersonville POW's are having to deal with the hunger and pain of prolonged captivity. The Andersonville narrative is the central story that all the others

orbit around. The epic nature of the play is shown through this section as the story then moves outside the prison to the SINGLETARY FAMILY who have donated their land for the prison. The themes common to all then extend to the story of the family slaves, INEZ and ABRAHAM, and finally to one of the ex-POW's who performs in the play. Throughout, the spiritual music of the period is used to further comment on the themes of freedom and captivity. Also, the historic context for the narrative is provided by CAPTAIN SINGLETARY's reports to Captain Henry Wirz, the commander of the stockade who is never actually seen but is an implied presence. The rotating sets along with internally generated rear-screen projections provide for a seamless transition between scenes.

(Offstage voices. Spiritual: Lights up on scene of the Prisoners, which has evolved to a nighttime around the campfire. There are long silences through the activities of scraping bad food off their plates, etc. YOUNG GUARD is in the prison roost overhead.)

SOLOMON:

(Suddenly swatting)

Bugs! These damned...

(Pause)

EDMUND:

(Suddenly throwing food down)

God, I can't eat this stuff!

THADEUS:

Cornmeal's unbolted. Got husk, cob. Eatin like a cow, you are. Need six stomachs.

SEAMUS:

(Admonishing EDMUND, handing him back the food)

Whatever it is, there ain't no more of it till tomorrow.

(EDMUND slowly picks up his fork and plate and struggles to get down the rest of his food. There is a pause as they all watch -frightened. SEAMUS finally addresses that fear.)

SEAMUS

Why doesn't somebody tell a joke!

(Pause, no response)

Solomon?

(SOLOMON turns away)

Thadeus?

(THADEUS turns away, pause, then reluctantly SEAMUS turns to EDMUND:)

Edmund.

(Beat)

EDMUND:

Colored joke or Irish joke?

SEAMUS:

Why don't we just make it a funny joke, O.K.?

EDMUND:

O.K. there's this Irishman sleeping in bed with his wife...

SEAMUS:
(Interrupting)

How about we make it someone besides an Irishman - that all right with you?

EDMUND:

You're right. An Irishman wouldn't be sleeping with his wife, someone else would.

SEAMUS:

Now, I'm gonna have to kill ya..

THADEUS:
(Intervening)

Wistful! Wistful!

EDMUND:

O.K. so there's this 'Scotsman' sleeping in bed with his wife, and this guy breaks in, gets the stinkin Scotch bastard outta bed, and draws a circle on the floor. Tells the drunken son-of-a-alcoholic if he steps outta the circle, he's gonna kill him, and him being almost an Irishman himself, he listens to whatever somebody else tells him to do.

SOLOMON:

Get on with it!

EDMUND:

(Matter of fact)

So he takes the guy's wife and he makes love to her -three, four times (Beat, then with real emotion) Then, he gets her outta bed, see, and tells her to make him some breakfast: biscuits, sausage, eggs, syrup over all of it, more eggs, another biscuit, sausage in between the biscuits, and molasses on top of maple syrup....

SEAMUS:

That ain't how it goes!

EDMUND:

(Matter-of-fact)

So he goes back in bed, makes love to the wife again, maybe a second time, even. (Beat, then with passion) And he smells something downstairs. So he takes the old bag with him, and sure enough, she's got a roast on the fire -beef, thick as her fat ass; and potatoes -hundreds of 'em -roasted, hot and steamy, cause it turns out the old bitch was expecting the 54th brigade.

SEAMUS:

That's not how it goes!

EDMUND:

(Matter-of-fact, one run-on thought)

So the guy makes love to the wife again, steals everything he can and destroys whatever he can't take with 'em, and the drunken Scotts bastard, still in the circle, is laughing his head off. So the guy says to him, 'what's-with-you-you-stupid-lump-a -haggus,' and the pickled Scotts herring, says, "Well, when you wasn't looking, I stepped outta the circle five times." (No response, beat, then with mocking emphasis) "ha, ha, ha -ha." .

SOLOMON:

Boy, that's a stich.

SEAMUS:

Ain't nothing funny in this world no more

EDMUND

(Looking at the YOUNG GUARD)

I'd like to pop that little pimple up there in the pigeon roost...

SOLOMON:

(Suddenly, in pain)

Damned this leg!

EDMUND:

(Suddenly)

Here! You want to see a joke? Watch this!

SEAMUS:

Hey!

EDMUND:

Look cracker! The sky is falling!

(EDMUND throws a rock in the direction of YOUNG GUARD)

YOUNG GUARD: :

I'll kill ya!

(Out of fear, YOUNG GUARD suddenly fires his gun wildly, as the prisoners scatter all about and react with terror)

THADEUS:

Take it easy, son! Weren't nothing, nohow!

PRISONER TWO:

Quick-he's reloading!

YOUNG GUARD:

They give me a gun! They give me a gun!

SEAMUS:

Somebody make him stop!

(CAPTAIN SMITH enters)

CAPTAIN SMITH:

Soldier, cease fire!!

YOUNG GUARD:

(Reloading)

I'll kill you! They give me a gun! I'll kill you!

CAPTAIN SMITH:

I said cease fire, dammit!

YOUNG GUARD:

(Finally stopping)

Sir...There's... Somebody threw something...

CAPTAIN SMITH:

That will be enough, Private!

YOUNG GUARD:

Yes, -sir. It's just...there's so many of 'em down there, and...there's so damned many of 'em.

(Drum cadence begins in background)

(Lights down on them; set shift where the pieces of the stockade break apart and reveal the projection side, as CAPTAIN SMITH addresses an implied CAPTAIN HENRY WIRZ over the head of the audience, and the PRISONERS and GUARDS all exit in the dark behind him. Drum cadence underpinning)

(A projected picture of Captain Wirz looms behind CAPTAIN SMITH)

CAPTAIN SMITH:

Captain Wirz, there is a problem with the guards. They are either boys, too young to wear the uniform, or old men -weak, injured, barely competent. All of the good men are needed at the front, and there...

(As CAPTAIN SMITH continues, projections mark the progress of the Union campaign through the South in historic slides progressing across all three screens)

...the reports we have received indicate the Southern cause has taken several, severe blows. More than eighteen-thousand killed or wounded at Chickamauga, the first in a series of defeats through Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia. (Beat, then feigned enthusiasm) But I am confident that the Confederate soldier will react to these set-backs and reassert the Confederate cause...Atlanta?. Yes, sir, I am aware. (Projections of the destruction of Atlanta) Atlanta has fallen. It is hard to imagine. I see myself, standing as I often had, along the stone streets, I feel the flames burning in my sleep. (Beat. Collecting himself, then continuing) Sir, there is a rumor gaining force among the prisoners that General Stoneman might try to liberate them. Their numbers have swollen now to well over 15,000 -fifteen thousand sir -in a space intended for about half of that -and I feel it is my duty to remind you that to fend off such an advance, to keep order among a hostile and savage lot, we have only...children, injured soldiers and reservists. (Beat) No sir, General Winder has not responded to your requests for supplies. Apparently, there is scarcity throughout the Confederacy. (Beat) Yes, sir, I am aware of the death rate in the prison. I will make the request again. Yes, sir... I will sir... Good day, sir.

(CAPTAIN SMITH salutes and exits)

(The lights cross fade to MR. and MRS. SINGLETARY who appear in soft light implying nighttime. MRS. SINGLETARY is at the window with a lit oil lamp. MR. SINGLETARY is distant, caught in a continuing silence)

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Finally)

It is said that in silence, the mind is left to wander.

(No response)

Well it has -mine anyway. Over a range of things. (Beat) Inez and Abraham

MR. SINGLETARY:

They perform their tasks well enough.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Yes, well enough. But have you noticed, when there is nothing for them to do, as is now the case, what are they then -I mean "now."? I mean, what is a slave when there is nothing to do?

(MR. SINGLETARY looks at her, puzzled, then simply looks away)

MR. SINGLETARY:

I prefer the silence.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Impatient)

And in this silence, have you not noticed there is a markedly different smell in the air since they have built the prison?

MR. SINGLETARY:

(Avoiding)

Sara?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

You'll not call her again for that same thing!

MR. SINGLETARY:

Sara, confound it, where are you?

(SARA enters, albeit reluctantly. She has the letter in her hand)

SARA:

I'm right here, Papa.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Yes. (Beat) from the middle.

SARA:

"And when I have a child, I shall name it, 'Virginia' is she is a girl, or if a boy, 'Manassas...'"
(Pauses, then stops) Oh, Papa.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Yes, dear, it is time for bed.

(MRS. SINGLETARY ushers her daughter out of the room)

MR. SINGLETARY:

Sara...Sara! (Pause, as MR. SINGLETARY is left alone in the room. His cadence continues, but towards his other child) Tom....Tom!

(YOUNG TOM appears, a boy, but dressed in Civil War soldier's uniform, all oversized, a young boy wearing a man's clothing)

YOUNG TOM

Word is, Papa, we're taking it to 'em on all fronts, for all the reasons you told me, Papa.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Bully for you, son!

YOUNG TOM:

Good reasons. A way of life: "the right thing to do." .

MR. SINGLETARY:

Tis a glorious fight...

YOUNG TOM:

But that.

MR. SINGLETARY:

But what, son?

YOUNG TOM:

The fight, Papa.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Son?

YOUNG TOM:

The guns.

(Pause)

The bullets.

(Pause)

MR.SINGLETARY

It couldn't be anticipated.

YOUNG TOM:

You never told me, Papa.

(MRS. SINGLETARY has entered)

MR. SINGLETARY:

How was I to know?

YOUNG TOM:

We never once talked about these things.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Well, then, you must remember (Beat) You must always keep in mind...

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Interrupting)

Excuse me for interrupting.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Sara is asleep, then?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Have you noticed she no longer has to read from the letter to know its contents

MR. SINGLETARY:

She is a bright girl.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

That is not the point.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Her tone resonates beyond this... stench.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

So you do smell it!

MR. SINGLETARY:

I don't know why we couldn't simply continue.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

They look at our slaves.

MR. SINGLETARY:

(Erupting)

Look at their "slaves": Irish, Polish, Italian indentured servants, locked in factories, held down in mines -working from sun up to sun down to fuel their crude industrial machine.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

They look at our slaves.

MR. SINGLETARY:

They build their railroads and dig their mines off the servitude of these men while clearing their own conscience by denouncing our slaves!

MRS. SINGLETARY:

My goodness, there is another whiff of it!

(MR. SINGLETARY gets up to leave)

MR. SINGLETARY:

I suggest as you have always done.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Which is?

MR. SINGLETARY:

Magnolia blossoms, lavender -mask that which is unpleasant!

(MRS. SINGLETARY is left alone, takes a deep whiff and is troubled. Reacts by calling Inez)

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Desperate)

Inez! Inez!

INEZ:

Miss Rebecca, what is it?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Suddenly assuming gracious, non-concerned air)

Ah, Inez, talk with me a moment.

INEZ:

“Talk” Miss Rebecca?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Yes. Let’s you and I just -talk.

(Long pause)

Am I keeping you from anything?

INEZ:

No Ma’am.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

I thought that, in all the years you have worked (Catches self, struggles) -we’ve lived... that you and I have ‘been’ together, we have never had the opportunity to talk. And now with the times being as they are -there being so very little for us to do- we have the opportunity, you and I to take a load off our feet, and just -talk!

(Again, long pause)

We have never just talked, have we, Inez?

INEZ:

Well Ma’am, one way or somehow, you always let me know what you want me to do.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Snaps)

Inez, I want to be free of all that!

INEZ:

You want to be what, Ma'am?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Shifting)

Let's talk about your husband, then -Abraham. I'm sure this is a very difficult time.

(INEZ is touched. ABRAHAM appears in isolated light, begins spiritual song, "Steal Away.")

ABRAHAM:

(Singing)

Steal away, steal away to Jesus
Steal away, steal away home

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Inez, do you have a thought you want to share with me -woman to woman?

INEZ:

No. cept that ever since they took away my Abraham, them big walls of the prison, they holding me, too.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Yes Inez -exactly! A most profound point!

INEZ:

Ma'am?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Prisons hold more than the people inside, don't they? The mere act of confinement extends in many directions, confining those like us, who cling to the illusion of walking about unimpeded.

INEZ:

Ma'am, I don't believed I've ever walked around no 'unimpeded.'

MRS. SINGLETARY:

What I am trying to say, Inez, is that because of this, neither have I.

ABRAHAM:

(Singing)

I ain't got long to stay here.

INEZ:

Well, I done talked with you like you asked. Anything else I got to do?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

But it was not a command.

(INEZ begins to kneel before her, greatly upsetting MRS. SINGLETARY)

No, please, don't do that!

INEZ:

(On one knee)

I said, is there anything else, Ma'am?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Trapped. Assumes common aire)

No. No Inez, that will be all.

(MRS. SINGLETARY exits quickly. Lights go down on all but INEZ, who breaks down and cries. Spiritual "Steal Away," continues offstage, single woman's voice)

SINGER:

(Offstage)

Steal away; steal away; steal away to Jesus; Steal away; steal away home: I ain't got long to stay here...(Continues underneath)

(ABRAHAM appears in isolated spot, as if INEZ's memory of something said earlier)

ABRAHAM:

What? What are you crying for? I be back. And when I do, things'll be different, you hear me? Don't you know our suffering in this life's only gonna make the joys of the next that much sweeter. Look up in the sky, woman, you see that eagle soar? Them is the wings of eagles we aim to ride one fine day, straight on up to heaven: Free, free as a mighty bird!

("Steal Away," continues)

INEZ:

(Rising)

You talkin 'bout freedom. Well, I be watching that bird, Abraham, flying up high -all by hisself, and he don't look free to me. He looks like he's trying to find somebody he lost. Lessen I get you back beside me somehow, there ain't no kinda freedom I can know.

SINGER:

(Offstage)

Steal away; steal away; steal away to Jesus. Steal away; steal away home. I ain't got long to stay here.

(Song ends. BILL FORNES enters in the scene transition)

BILL FORNES:

Many times I thought to myself Nancy, does Nancy know I'm still alive?

ABRAHAM:

You got to have hope, girl. You best find something to cling to in this life, lest the living gonna take you down hard.

(Lights fade out on ABRAHAM and INEZ)

(Cue of B-29's. Sound of the planes overhead. POW ACTOR enters, reacts to the sound)

POW ACTOR:

You hear, that? There, they are by God! They're coming in for me! They haven't forgotten me yet! "Here I am boys! I'm right down here!"

(Spiritual song, group in the background: "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child." Slide appears with the word, "SURVIVAL")

(Return to Andersonville POW's. Set pieces are moved far back in the distance, revealing walls and walls of tents or "she-bangs" that over-filled the prison. Some are three dimensional; many are projected. We get a sense of the crowding through the positioning of photographs)

(PRISONERS enter, slowly, dragging. Time has passed. The sound of wind is heard blowing through the camp)

SINGERS:

(Offstage)

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
A long ways from home, a long way from home.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone
A long way from home, a long way from home

(The PRISONERS settle into their chosen places. Their clothes now are ripped. Prisoners have black splotches on their faces from the pine tar in the burning wood)

(THADEUS is alone in light first, while others enter around him)

THADEUS:

Wanna know? I'm a lighting on ole chuck-a-luck. Way I bet is, I lay down a card, every time it don't come up, I double my bet on the same one -keep on doublin' till finally, there it is, and I won me a bushel a money. Same way with this here prisoner exchange: Every day it don't happen, the better the chance it'll happen tomorrow.

Continue scene in the stockade...

ACT TWO

Act two begins in the most desperate state for the prisoners. Solomon, the African-American prisoner, arrived injured and has become critically ill. More than one-quarter of the prisoners at Andersonville died of disease or exposure. There were no barracks, only makeshift tents as best as could be constructed.

The role of the POW ACTOR is featured throughout this section. He moves among the action of the play, separate, but connected thematically to what is happening. He also provides the bridge between the Andersonville POW's and the actual POW's, thus helping to establish the universality of experience. Also, the ex-POW's move in and out of this section adding their own actual memories to the stories being told.

Continuing to weigh on the souls of the SINGLETARYs are the events at Andersonville and the events on the unknown battlefields where their son, TOM is fighting. Each of them responds in their own way. Finally, CAPTAIN SMITH provides the latest update of the war's progression.

ACT TWO

(Begin with dead wagon being brought out among the prisoners. Counter to that, ABRAHAM enters and begins singing, "Ain't That Good News," which is echoed and continues offstage in and out of the scene.)

ABRAHAM:

(Singing)

I got a home in the kingdom; ain't that good news
I got a home in the kingdom; ain't that good news
I'm gonna lay down this world; gonna shoulder up my cross. Got a home in the promised land;
ain't that good news

(ABRAHAM turns the wagon around which reveals the POW ACTOR behind the wagon. Sweeping spotlight pans audience, then lights up on POW ACTOR.)

(SLAVES enter and appear in red lights as part of broader stage picture, alongside projections of over-crowded prison.)

(Enter BILL FORNES and HAROLD THOMPSON)

(Enter CHINESE/GERMAN INTERROGATORS)

CHINESE INTERROGATOR:

Good morning comrade...

POW ACTOR:

Let's see, there's Airedale... Alsatian... Basset Hound... Dogs that begin with "B"...

GERMAN INTERROGATOR:

...How many dead?

ABRAHAM:

Dead...

POW ACTOR:

(In response to the image)

Basset Hound...Beagle.. Blenheim -no...Basenji? That right? Is there a Basenji?

BOTH INTERROGATORS:

I said, how many dead!?

POW ACTOR:

(Trying to concentrate)

Basenji...Basset Hound...Beagle...Blenheim...

(Projection of the word, "ENDURE". In background, the PRIEST delivers the Last Rites to a dead prisoner. INTERROGATORS and BILL FORNES and HAROLD THOMPSON exit)

(SEAMUS is trying to feed SOLOMON, whose food has been accumulating on his chest. Wagon begins moving through the scene, calling out for the dead, as GUARD TWO and SLAVES are bringing bodies to the wagon.)

SEAMUS:

We'll break it up into little pieces. (No response) Come on, man, you got to eat somehow.

SLAVE:

(Calling beside the wagon)

Dead...Dead?

(A group of RAIDERS sneak up on the dead wagon and begin looting things from the bodies)

POW ACTOR:

(Incidentally, monotone: causing shift of focus)

Hey, what the hell. Stealing clothes from dead. Stealing whatever they got.

GUARD TWO:

(Noticing the RAIDERS)

Hey you, get away from there!

THADEUS:

(Weakly)

Raiders...Raiders....

(RAIDERS exit reluctantly, without fear)

SEAMUS:

Solomon, you've got to eat.

EDMUND:

(To SEAMUS)

You're wasting your time.

(To SOLOMON)

Pretend like they're little pills for you to swallow.

EDMUND:

It's food the rest of us could divide up.

SEAMUS:

So long as he's alive, it's nothing we got a right to.

SLAVES/ GUARD:

Dead... Dead, where's the dead?

POW ACTOR:

(Suddenly, intensely)

Cocker Spaniel! Collie!

(SLAVES move a dead body near EDMUND)

EDMUND:

(Jumps up)

Keep that the hell away from me!

(EDMUND, in reacting, almost crosses the deadline, which causes reaction from YOUNG GUARD who is in the pigeon roost)

YOUNG GUARD:

Halt you!

(YOUNG GUARD shoots at EDMUND)

EDMUND:

Hey? What the hell?

YOUNG GUARD:

Anyone crosses that deadline, I got orders to kill! I said I got orders to kill!

GUARD TWO:

(To SOLOMON)

You, fifty-fourth. Get over here and lend a hand.

POW ACTOR:

(Trying to concentrate)

Basenji...Basset Hound...Beagle...Blenheim...

(Projection of the word, "ENDURE". In background, the PRIEST delivers the Last Rites to a dead prisoner. INTERROGATORS and BILL FORNES and HAROLD THOMPSON exit)

(SEAMUS is trying to feed SOLOMON, whose food has been accumulating on his chest. Wagon begins moving through the scene, calling out for the dead, as GUARD TWO and SLAVES are bringing bodies to the wagon.)

SEAMUS:

We'll break it up into little pieces. (No response) Come on, man, you got to eat somehow.

SLAVE:

(Calling beside the wagon)

Dead...Dead?

(A group of RAIDERS sneak up on the dead wagon and begin looting things from the bodies)

POW ACTOR:

(Incidentally, monotone: causing shift of focus)

Hey, what the hell. Stealing clothes from dead. Stealing whatever they got.

GUARD TWO:

(Noticing the RAIDERS)

Hey you, get away from there!

THADEUS:

(Weakly)

Raiders...Raiders....

(RAIDERS exit reluctantly, without fear)

SEAMUS:

Solomon, you've got to eat.

EDMUND:

(To SEAMUS)

You're wasting your time.

GUARD:

Hey you down there! Stop or I'll shoot!

EDMUND:

I'm claiming his jacket.

THADEUS:

Priest...Priest!

(ABRAHAM enters, sees what is happening, and suddenly runs to stop SOLOMON)

ABRAHAM:

No!

GUARD TWO:
(Calling after ABRAHAM)

Hey you!

ABRAHAM:
(Struggling with SOLOMON)

Help! Over here!

(PRIEST and SEAMUS both see what is happening and run to help)

SEAMUS:

Solomon!

(POW ACTOR suddenly rises, continues the names)

POW ACTOR:

Daschund...Doberman...

SOLOMON:
(Crying)

I got a home in the promised land...I got a home in the promised land!

(Finally, they succeed in pulling SOLOMON away from the deadline)

ABRAHAM:

That's it now. That's all right

SOLOMON:

(To ABRAHAM)

Why...Why?

(GUARD TWO suddenly walks over and hits ABRAHAM with the butt of his rifle)

GUARD TWO:

That's one more Yankee mouth to feed!

ABRAHAM:

(Disconnected from intention)

Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. It won't happen again.

(GUARD TWO and ABRAHAM exit)

PRIEST:

(To SOLOMON)

My God, man! Don't you know it's a sin!

EDMUND:

(Yelling, accusatory)

Priest!

(Pause, shift focus to EDMUND, threatening)

What is it, Priest! 'Fraid of missing out on the last rites? Last confession? Another soul to save - another bead on your rosary!

SEAMUS:

Think before ya talk, Edmund!

EDMUND:

Shut-up ya paddy!

SEAMUS:

No, see there's no more going on like that. We ain't none of us got it in us. Whoever you are and whatever you done, it don't matter cause I'm laying out me hand to ya. We're either all making a go of it together, or we're each of us, dying alone.

EDMUND:

(Surprised)

Yeah?

SEAMUS:

(Extending his hand)

We gotta stay together.

(EDMUND is about to shake hands when THADEUS gets in between them)

THADEUS:

He's callin' at the priest with no respect! Dividing up the food of the living. Claiming the coat of the dead man, he did! He'll turn on you in a minute:. Handed me my Wirz jewelry, handed me my Wirz jewelry!

PRIEST:

Hold soldier, remember the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

THADEUS:

Christ ain't here! (Beat) And that man's no good. He ain't no damned good!

EDMUND:

Yeah, well, I don't need you. I don't need nobody, or nothing.

(RAIDERS have come upon SOLOMON, who they are taking for dead, and shifting through his things, trying to get his jacket off)

RAIDER ONE

My jacket!

RAIDER TWO:

I got it first!

SEAMUS

(Suddenly throwing or swinging object to scatter RAIDERS)

He ain't dead, damm ya!

THADEUS:
(Calling GUARDS)

Raiders! RAIDERS!

RAIDER ONE:
(To SEAMUS, threatening)

He will be -and you're going down with him.

THADEUS:

Quick guards! Raiders!

RAIDER TWO:

Come on, let's beat it.

(RAIDERS exit, reluctantly)

PRIEST:
(To EDMUND pointing in the direction of RAIDERS)

You see, there's them don't need nobody: The Raiders, carving their own special place in hell as they're preying on the misfortunes of others too weak to stand up for themselves! They're bound by the chains of their evil acts. Is that the life you're wantin', son?

EDMUND:

Priest! Nothing you say makes sense here: It's all just a bad joke, and I ain't taking it, no more. As for them Raiders, I don't see no chains on them. I see new clothes and healthy stomachs and smiles I ain't seen on no faces round here, nohow!

SEAMUS:

Edmund, please...

EDMUND:

I ain't dying this way -you hear me? I ain't dying this way.

(EDMUND exits towards the sound of the RAIDERS. There is a lull, in which the PRIEST addresses the others)

PRIEST:

(Kneeling)

Boys, come kneel with me. We need to pray for that man's soul.

(THADEUS turns away. SEAMUS simply remains standing, ignoring. The PRIEST wilts)

PRIEST:

I see I'm not needed here, then.... (Rising) But I'll tell ya this much: Without forgiveness, evil's a rock that's starts rolling down a hill, and soon, you can't stop it, even if ya suddenly have a change of heart.

(PRIEST exits.)

SEAMUS:

(To no one in particular)

Oh my God....where are you?

THADEUS:

(Warning)

Seamus...

SEAMUS:

What have we got left?

THADEUS:

(Grabbing SEAMUS)

We ain't dying here, Seamus. We ain't going down like this!

(POW ACTOR and BILL FORNES have entered. Light up on them and POW ACTOR)

POW ACTOR:

(Yelling)

Newfoundland! New...New... -Collie! Beagle!

BILL FORNES:

When it all hit a certain point, you had to concentrate: you had to work at not losing your mind. One POW from Vietnam told me that he tried to memorize all breeds of dogs in alphabetical order. Me? I made mental plans for my dream house.

POW ACTOR:

It's shaped like an "H", you see. Single level -air conditioned. There's four bedrooms and four bathrooms -and all the toilets flush...

(Enter CHINESE INTERROGATOR)

CHINESE INTERROGATOR:

Comrade...

POW ACTOR:

(Continuing, concentrating)

You walk from the kitchen and there's a little hall that connects the dining room. All along that hall -a full bar. Every kind of drink you could imagine -three of 'em.

CHINESE INTERROGATOR:

Comrade...how many...

POW ACTOR:

Let me tell you about the sink: Running water; hot and cold.

CHINESE INTERROGATOR:

...how many dead.

POW ACTOR:

Not me!

BILL FORNES:

Not me!

POW ACTOR:

(Finding solace; completely different tone)

Newfoundland. Norwegian Elk hound. Old English Sheep dog. Pekinese...

(House unit flies in amongst the prisoners so there is an overlap of visual images: the Singletary scene taking place amidst the prisoners in shadows. MR. SINGLETARY is sitting, lost, while MRS. SINGLETARY is uneasy before him, trying to draw him back.)

MRS SINGLETARY:

There is a smell in the air now that is greater than the smell of the prison.

(No response)

Do you know what that smell is?

(No response)

Food -our food -rotting in our fields with no hands to harvest it, no trains to deliver it, and no mouths to eat it.

(No response)

Have you ever thought that our son may be in need as well?

MR. SINGLETARY:

Sara does not know of Tom's capture?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Those were your adamant instructions.

MR. SINGLETARY:

She couldn't have found out somehow -a slip of the tongue? A thoughtless comment?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Mr. Singletary, I can assure you, every lie has been faithfully executed.

(Lamp goes out)

MR. SINGLETARY:

Confound this light.

(Pause. MR. SINGLETARY does nothing to replace the oil or otherwise light the light)

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Well, since we allow the darkness to engulf us, perhaps we should entertain ourselves, Mr. Singletary?

MR. SINGLETARY:

Mrs. Singletary.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

I think we should tell stories, Mr. Singletary.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Stories...fine.

(In her Antebellum way, she is about to make a point by running circles around it; tricking her husband to seeing that which is very important for her to have him see. She pursues him among the prisoners)

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Shall I go first?

MR. SINGLETARY:

Mrs. Singletary...stories...Yes -fine.

(For his part, MR. SINGLETARY remains uninterested, reacting more than talking. This increases MRS. SINGLETARY'S resolve)

MRS. SINGLETARY:

I want to tell a story about a man who dies, and is met at the pearly gates by Saint Peter. Saint Peter takes this man into a room where there is a great feast: Lots of food extending across a very great table. But none of it is being eaten, because the people at the table are shackled at the elbow so that their arms are straight -impossible to bend. The men go mad with hunger, for that which is right before them yet forever out of reach. This, the man understands to be hell.

MR.SINGLETARY:

Hell, yes...I've heard of such a place.

MRS.SINGLETARY:

Then, Saint Peter brings this man to another room, and again, there is a great feast placed before men shackled at the elbows. Only in this room, the men are happy.

MR.SINGLETARY:

Happy? (Beat) The room for idiots.

MRS.SINGLETARY:

Happy, satisfied, and even well fed, because in this room, each man's arms extend straight to the plate of the men beside them: they feed each other. They feed each other! (Pause) Heaven.

MR.SINGLETARY:

(Defeated)

And the reason for this story is...

MRS. SINGLETARY:

I want to bring our food to the prisoners.

MR. SINGLETARY:

(Suddenly)

We will NOT feed the Yankees who have imprisoned our son!

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Think of them as men -boys -needing desperately that which is in our grasp.

MR. SINGLETARY:

Inez!

MRS. SINGLETARY:

And if we don't, I am afraid there is a sin of omission for which we will be held accountable!

MR. SINGLETARY:

Inez! Inez! Is there nothing or no one in this house...

(Enter INEZ)

INEZ:

Right hard finding my way in the dark Masser...

MR. SINGLETARY:

Damm it, where have you been?

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Mr. Singletary!

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Composes self)

Inez, the newspaper.

INEZ:

The newspaper. Yes, sir.

(INEZ exits)

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Your agitation should not be her peril. We do not live like that; we have never lived like that.

MR. SINGLETARY:

It isn't a problem, don't you see.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

What isn't a problem?

MR. SINGLETARY:

The prison -it's nothing.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Are you mad?

(INEZ enters with the lamp)

INEZ:

The newspaper, sir; and I found me a lamp with oil in the kitchen.

(As INEZ turns the light up, it brings up with it YOUNG TOM)

YOUNG TOM:

Papa!

MR. SINGLETARY:

There, you see, we have light now, and everything is fine.

YOUNG TOM:

It's a whole other hour before the sun sets, papa. We can still catch us some fish!

MR. SINGLETARY:

Hours of light before the sun sets!

INEZ:

Sir?

YOUNG TOM:

I'll be on ahead, Papa! I know where the earthworms lay. Hurry, then! Hurry.

(Lights fade on YOUNG TOM)

MR. SINGLETARY:

(Different meaning as YOUNG TOM disappears)

No, wait! I'm coming as fast as I can.

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Mister Singletary, please!

MR. SINGLETARY:

(Confused)

Excuse me?

INEZ:

The newspaper, sir. I light the light.

MR. SINGLETARY:

(Fumbling through the newspaper)

Yes, of course. It says right here, the Macon Gazette. I read that the prisoners were treated well. (Then, finding article) You see, "Prisoners Treated Well: Three Days Among the Yankee Prisoners."

(One of the screens moves forward, projecting the actual article in Macon Gazette, about which he spoke)

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Treated well? A wartime newspaper!

MR.SINGLETARY:

(Continues; oblivious)

"Nearly all the prisoners have made very comfortable little houses out of pine tops. Some of them have displayed a great deal of ingenuity and they are really quite pretty..."

MRS. SINGLETARY:

Listen to me!

MR. SINGLETARY:

(Ignoring)

"...They all express themselves very highly pleased with this place, and call it a beau ideal of a prison..."

MRS. SINGLETARY:

(Faltering)

Open the window...Smell the air.

MR. SINGLETARY:

...ten-fold better than `Belle Isle.' (He continues reading article, then fades.)

(POW ACTOR enters and begins to change clothes into that of a new prisoner at Andersonville)

(The newspaper projection fades, and house unit flies out. Juxtapose POW ACTOR's narrative with historic projections of the emaciated prisoners from Andersonville, then onto other pictures of POW atrocities from modern wars)

(Enter BILL FORNES and HAROLD THOMPSON)

POW ACTOR:

Time (Beat) -has substance, form. Immovable, it sets itself upon your shoulders and watches as you grow deformed beneath its weight. In time, you become different than the person who entered the camp such a long time ago.

BILL FORNES:

I remember when I hit bottom: It must have been around Christmas, because it was snowing. Except for the interrogator, I hadn't talked to another human being in ten months. They came and got me, and I thought for sure that I was going to be put with the other POWs. But no. When I saw that same type room, and those same four walls --I couldn't take it anymore and I broke down and cried.

HAROLD THOMPSON:

I think the lowest point was being bombed by our own aircraft. The idea of getting killed by your own fire was very traumatic. It seemed like you were getting it from both sides; like all the cards were stacked against you, and there was nothing to hope for.

(Enter CAPTAIN SMITH, who, again, speaks to an implied "Wirz" over the head of the audience. In this sequence, the projection screens and hence the units are slowly moving about, coming together to create one picture between two screens. These include the photos of mass graves at Andersonville. The subject isn't entirely clear at first, until the two screens come together to add to the impact. In this projection sequence, the historic photos are created as the set pieces move about)

CAPTAIN SMITH:

It's true, sir, the number of prisoners is close to 34,000. Thirty-four thousand in a prison meant to hold 10,000 at most. The death rate? (Pause) Astounding. One in every four. Amid the starvation, disease, and suicide, fighting has developed among the prisoners. There is widespread theft and murder. No, sir, whatever food or supplies are available have been sent to the front. They need all that can be mustered as General Sherman continues to the sea, cutting a swath of death and destruction here-to-fore unknown in modern warfare. "Total War." There is scarcity of even the most basic resources, and where there is not, it cannot be moved. (Beat) The railroads, sir. No trains what-so-ever. Yes, sir. No, sir. Thank you, sir. Tis a glorious...tis a glorious fight we fight.

Play continues.

Grace Will Lead Me Home is Available for independent production. For more information, please contact tdetitta@earthlink.net

*Also, see Andersonville
And Articles and Letters*