

## What should we do when all is lost?

### -“Twelve Years A Slave”

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**Abstract:** The movie of Twelve Years A Slave tells us a dreadful, but also an inspiring story. Solomon is a fabulous character in the film. At first, he had a decent and elegant life. After being kidnapped as a slave, he chooses forbearance and perseverance with a strong determination. After being enslaved for 12 years, Northup is restored to freedom and returned to his family.

#### Introduction

In 1841, Solomon Northup is a free African-American man working as a violinist, living happily with his wife and two children in Saratoga Springs, New York. Two white men, Brown and Hamilton, offer him short-term employment as a musician if he will travel with them to Washington, D.C. However, once they arrive, they drug Northup and conspire to deliver him to a slave pen (American slavery) run by a man named Burch. Northup is later shipped to New Orleans along with others who have been detained against their will. A slave trader named Freeman gives Northup the identity of "Platt", a runaway slave from Georgia, and sells him to plantation owner William Ford. Due to tension between Northup and another plantation worker, Ford sells him to another slave owner named Edwin Epps, called Nigger Breaker. Northup picks cotton day by day, seeing many tragedies of slaves. At the plantation, Northup meets Patsey, a favored slave, whom Epps regularly abuses. Later an outbreak of cotton worm befalls Epps' plantation. Unable to work his fields, Epps leases his slaves to a neighboring plantation for the season. When Northup returns to Epps, Northup begins working on the construction of a gazebo with a Canadian laborer named Samuel Bass. Bass is unsettled by the brutal way that Epps treats his slaves and expresses his opposition to slavery, earning Epps's enmity. Northup later reveals his kidnapping to Bass. Once again, Northup asks for help in getting a letter to Saratoga Springs. Bass, risking his life, agrees to send it. One day, Mr. Parker, a shopkeeper Northup knew in Saratoga with the help of the local sheriff has come to free him. After being enslaved for 12 years, Northup is restored to freedom and returned to his family.

The film's detailed plots are as follows:

#### Scene I After being drugged and drunk, Northup wakes up and is so agitated...

Solomon: "My name is Solomon Northup. I am a free man, a resident from Saratoga Springs, New York, the residence of my wife and two children who are equally free. You have no right whatsoever to detain me."

Trafficker: "You're not any free man."

Solomon: "I promise. I promise upon my liberation. I will have satisfaction with this wrong."

Trafficker: "Resolve this. Produce your papers. You're not free man. You're not from

Saratoga. You're from Georgia, a runaway nigger."

The trafficker beat him heavily, shouting: "You are slave. You are a Georgia slave! "

Solomon: "Help! Help! Somebody helps me!"

In order to make money, a trafficker can make a free man into a runaway slave. They can trample laws freely. How frightening and dreadful!

### **Scene II During the boat ride...**

A trafficker is going to rape a woman nigger, one slave tries to stop him. The slave is stabbed with a knife, dead. His body is thrown into the sea like a dead fish in a minute. Nobody is responsible for his death. Niggers can't fight against the white men, giving up any resistance. Niggers have no freedoms and lives. How poor they are! What a law!

### **Scene III At the destination port...**

Master Rays: "I am Mr. Jonas Ray. My solicitor has documentation verifying that the nigger known as Clemens Ray is my property.

The captain: I know nothing of this arrangement."

Master Ray: "You are ordered to return that property immediately or will be charged with thievery."

The captain: "Free him!"

A Nigger is a property. He can be freely traded in the market. Clemens is lucky, returning to his old master. Solomon is so jealous of him and so cast down.

### **Scene IV At the Master Ford's plantation...**

Mr. Tibeats (overseer): "For all of you rotten niggers that don't know. I am Master Ford's chief carpenter. You will refer to me as master...Nigger run, nigger flew, the pattyroller will get you. Stoved his head in a hornet nest. Some folks say a nigger won't steal. I caught three in my corn field. One has a bushel and one has a peck. One had a rope and he was hung around his neck."

Master Ford: "I am the God of Abraham, and a God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, ask him a question, temping him."

In plantation, both overseer and master use superstitious or religious stories to prevent the niggers from running away. In their views, niggers, born and bred slaves, are "blind, dumb, illiterate and stupid."

### **Scene V At the creek...Platt = Solomon**

Platt: "The creek is plenty deep enough to sail, even with a boat full of load. The distance from the work area to the point on the latter bayou is several miles by the water fewer than land. It occurs me that the expense of transportation would be materially diminished if we use the water way."

Mr. Tibeats: "Are you an engineer or a nigger?"

Mr. Ford: "Let the man say his piece."

Mr. Tibeats: "It's a scheme. Plenty of engineers have schemed similarly. The passes are too tight."

Platt: "I reckon at more than twelve feet at their most narrow, wide enough for a tub traverse for a team of niggers cleared it out."

Mr. Tibeats: "And you know that of transport and terra forming?"

...

Mr. Ford: "I'll admit to being impressed even if you won't. Collect a team and see what good you can do."

Platt succeeds. The log can float along the creek, saving half of the expense. Facing misery, forlornness and drudgery, he tries to hold up his head. He wants to live, not only survive.

## Scene VI

Eliza had her former Master Berry's favor for nine years, he blessed her with every comfort and luxury in life, silk and jewels and even servants to wait upon her. She bore for him a beautiful girl Emily. But Master Berry's daughter always looked at her with an unkind nature. She hated Emily, no matter that she and Emily were kin. As Master Berry's health failed, his daughter gained power in the household. Eventually, Eliza was brought to the city on the false pretense of their free papers being executed. In this scene, Eliza is crying for missing her children.

Platt: "Stop! Eliza, stop your wailing! You let yourself be overcome by sorrow. You will drown in it."

Eliza: "Have you stopped crying for your children? You make no sounds, but will you ever let them go in your heart?"

Platt: "They are as my flesh..."

Eliza: "Then who is distressed? Do I upset the Master and the Mistress? Do you care less for my loss than their well being?"

Platt: "Master is a decent man."

Eliza: "He is a slaver!"

Platt: "Under the circumstance"

Eliza: "Under the circumstance he is a slaver! But you truckle at his boot."

Platt: "No!"

Eliza: "You luxuriate in his favor."

Platt: "I survive! I will not fall into despair! I will offer up my talents to Master Ford. I will keep myself hearty until freedom opportune!"

Eliza: "Ford is your opportunity? Do you think he does not know that you are more than you suggest? But he does nothing for you, nothing. You are no better than prized livestock. Call for him, call! Tell him of your previous circumstances and see what it earns you, Solomon. So you are settled into your role as Platt, then?"

Platt: "My back is thick with scars from protesting my freedom. Do not accuse me!"

Eliza: "I accuse you of nothing. I can't accuse you. I have done dishonorable things to survive. And for all of them I've ended up here. No better than if I had stood up for myself. God, forgive me. Platt, let me weep for my children."

Mr. Ford (reading the Bible): "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And who so shall receive one such little child in my name."

At this moment, Eliza is crying loudly.

Mrs. Ford: "I cannot have that kind of depression about."

Due to the shadow of the law- as long as the law considers all these niggers, with beating hearts and living affections, only as so many things belonging to a master. Finally Eliza is taken away from Mr. Ford's plantation. Eliza's resistance is useless. Because of the tension between Platt and Mr. Tibbeats, Master Ford sells him to Master Epps, a nigger breaker.

## Scene VII A dancing ball at Mr. Epps's plantation...

Mrs. Epps: "A moment from the dancing. Come and sample what I back for you all. There is none for you, Patsey. You see that look of insolence she gives me?"

Mr. Epps: "See nothing but her turn away."

Mrs. Epps: "Are you blind or ignorant? It was hot, hateful scorn. It filled that black face. You tell me you

didn't see it, then you choose not to look or you say I lie."

Mr. Epps: "Whatever it was, it passed."

Mrs. Epps: "Is that how you are with the niggers? Let every ill thought fester inside them. Look at them. They foul with it. They foul with their hate. You let it be, it's going to come back to us in the dark a night. You want that? You want them black animals leave us gut like pigs in our own sleep? No, you are manless. A damned eunuch if ever there was. If you won't stand for me, I'd pray you'd at least be a credit to your own kind, and beat every foul thought from them." She uses the fingernail to scrape Patsey's ear, shouting "Beat it from them."

...

Patsey: "I have a request, an act of kindness. All I ask is end of my life. Take my body to the margin of the swamp. Take me by the throat. Hold me low in the water until I am still without life. Bury me in a lonely place of dying."

...

Patsey: "There is God here! God is merciful and he forgives merciful acts. It won't be hell for you. Do it. Do what I haven't got the strength to do myself."

Not only Eliza and Patsey meet with misery, forlornness and drudgery, but also Platt does. For Example, the trafficker ever beats Platt heavily. Overseer Tibeats insults him, and wants to hang him to death. Mr. Epps wants to stab him with a knife. Facing all the distress, Platt keeps tolerant and optimistic, although his partners are too despaired to death or crying.

## Scene VIII

Mr. Bass: "The condition of your labor is hard. It's all wrong. Mr. Epps."

Mr. Epps: "They aren't hired to help. They are my property."

Mr. Bass: "You say that with pride."

Mr. Epps: "I say it as fact."

Mr. Bass: "This conversation concerns what's fact and what's not. Then it must be said that there is no justice, or righteousness in this slavery. But you do open up an interesting question. What right do you give to your niggers when you come down to the point?"

Mr. Epps: "What right? I bought them, I paid for them."

Mr. Bass: "Of course you did and the law says you have the right to hold a nigger. But begging the law pardon, it lies. Suppose they pass the law, take away your liberty, making you a slave."

Mr. Epps: "Suppose, that isn't a supposable case."

Mr. Bass: "Laws change, Epps. Universal truths are constant. It's a fact, a plain and simple fact that what is true and right is true and right for all, white and black alike."

Mr. Epps: "You compare me to a nigger, Bass?"

Mr. Bass: "I am only asking, in the eyes of God, what is the difference?"

Mr. Epps: "You might as well ask what the difference is between a white man and a baboon. Now I have seen one of them critters in Orleans that known just as much as any niggers I got."

Mr. Bass: "Listen, Epps. These niggers are human beings. If they are allowed to claim no higher than brute animals, you and men like you will have to answer for it. There is an ill, Mr. Epps. A fearful ill, resting upon the nation, there will be a day of reckoning yet."

In today's society, we hope everyone is born equal regardless of races, colors, religions and so on. There are still injustices in some areas. Governments must make fair laws to ensure justice of distribution of wealth, equal opportunity and equality of outcome upon taxation, social insurance, public health, public school, labour public services, law and regulation of markets and so on.

## Scene IX

On Sabbath Day, Patsey just came back from Mr. Shaw's plantation...

Mr. Epps: "Run off, Patsey, did you? You miserable wench. Where have you been?"

Patsey: "I have been nowhere."

Mr. Epps: "Lies to your misdeeds!"

Pats: "Sabbath Day, master. I took me a walk to commune with the Lord."

Mr. Epps: "Bring the lord into your deceptions. You were coming from the Shaw's plantation, weren't you?"

Patsey: "Yes. You know why, I got this soap from Mistress Shaw. Mistress Epps won't even grant me soap to clean with. I stink so much I make myself gag. I pick five hundred pounds of cotton day in, day out, more than any man here. And for that I will be clean. That's all I ask. And you blind wit your own covetousness. I don't lie, if you kill me, I'll stick to that."

Mr. Epps: "Yeah. I'll set you down. I will learn you to go Shaw's. Treach, go and fetch some line. Edward, strip her. Strike her bare lash her to the post. You had done this to yourself, Patsey."

Mrs. Epps: "Do it. Strike the life from her."

Mr. Epps turns to Platt: Beat her. "Give her the whip. Give it all to her. Give it all to her. Platt, you come here and you beat her now!"

Patsey: "I would rather it you, Platt..."

Mrs. Epps: "He pantomimes. There is barely a welt on her. That's what your niggers make of you, a fool for the taking."

Mr. Epps uses the gun pointing to Platt: "Strike until her flesh is rent...And meat and blood flow equal or I will kill every nigger in my sight! Until I say no more! I haven't said anything!"

Platt: "You are a devil, sooner or later, somewhere in the course of eternal justice. You should answer for this sin!"

Mr. Epps: "Sin, there is no sin. A man does how he pleases with his property. At the moment, Platt, I am of great pleasure. You be goddamn careful. I don't want to come lightening my mood no further."

Patsey was stripped only for a soap to clean with. She picked five hundred pounds of cotton day in, day out. How cruel! How bloody! A Nigger is a property! Mr. Epps is vulgar, narrow-minded and tyrannical.

Though it's a cruel world for Platt, he still believes there are some people like Mr. Bass who brings warmth the world like a beacon guiding him going. With the help of Mr. Bass, Platt is restored to freedom and returned to his family.

General Patton always said: "Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom." Solomon (Platt) gives the best connotation for it. The world is not always gentle to us and we should adapt ourselves to the adversity calmly. We can be gentle to ourselves and determined. Although facing misery, forlornness and drudgery, through wind and rain, ups and downs, we never lose heart, fighting all kinds of inequalities and demanding those equal rights which belong to us. .

## References

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