

ESCAPE OF THE PLANTER

The story of Robert Smalls

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FADE IN:

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY - AUGUST 1862

BEGIN TITLES:

In the distance, we can see the recognizable but unfinished dome of the Capitol Building. We PAN over to a METHODIST MINISTER (52) and a young sharply dressed AFRICAN AMERICAN (23) leaving the crowded and smelly Willard Hotel. The minister removes the handkerchief from his face as they enter the fresh air.

The construction on the Washington Monument is suspended because of the war. It appears on the horizon, also half completed.

The two men walk the short distance to the War Department. They pass numerous (thousands) of white raw volunteers as well as many professional white soldiers. We see cavalry and hear the hooves on the brick streets. We see cannons attached to wheels. We encounter several amputees and other wounded soldiers.

Slavery has been abolished in the capital, and in the city we see many freed slaves. Many former slaves seem employed in constructing the ring of fortresses that surround the city. They have work clothes on.

The two men pass the White House. At this time there is no gate or fence. There seems to be a lot of activity. Both men strain to look at the second floor windows. They walk past Lincoln's home.

END TITLES:

INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

LINCOLN is in his office on the second floor. He has TWO SENATORS and a CONGRESSMAN in his office.

LINCOLN

Gentlemen, I'm thrilled that you have
asked for my thoughts on the blacks.
(contemplating)

You know I am the first U.S. President to ever meet with black men in the White House who were not servants. It was only last week I had a meeting with a group of free blacks from Washington and Philadelphia. I asked these black men to lead an effort to resettle freed slaves in a new Central American colony. And so, I will make the case to you men - as I did the black men sitting in those very chairs - that after this bloody dispute, blacks and whites can never hope to live together in a free society here in the United States. Too much blood will be spilled, I fear.

The Congressmen are taken aback a bit. They look at each other and are puzzled.

SENATOR

So, you are opposed to enlisting freed men in the ranks of the Army?

LINCOLN

Well there are more meetings; I've promised Secretary of War Stanton that I will not to divulge anything, but I'm disposed to tell you now that I'm leaning against it.

CONGRESSMAN

Well, that's unfortunate.

LINCOLN

I must hold off and not announce anything, but you men know I have an open mind, and if there are some persuasive arguments, I will slowly and deliberately come around to changing my mind.

LINCOLN

You have some persuasive arguments?

CONGRESSMAN

They are needed to win the war and
establish a legitimacy.

LINCOLN

Win the war?

(pause)

I'm told the middle states, those slave
states siding with the union but
wishing to maintain slavery (Maryland
and Kentucky), we will lose their
support for the war if we use the freed
blacks as soldiers.

CONGRESSMAN

We certainly hope not.

LINCOLN

If we lose the war it will be for
legitimacy's sake?

The Congressmen are speechless.

Lincoln walks to the window and peers outside. Down on the
sidewalk he sees our minister and African American man
walking toward the War Department. Lincoln seems to know
their purpose.

LINCOLN

I once knew a good sound churchman,
whom we will call Brown, who was on a
committee to erect a bridge over a very
dangerous and rapid river. Architect
after architect failed, and, at last,
Brown said he had a friend named Jones
who had built several bridges and could
build this. 'Let us have him in,' said
the committee. In came Jones. "Can you
build this bridge, sir?" "Yes," replied
Jones. "I could build a bridge to the
infernal regions if necessary." The
sober committee were horrified. But
when Jones retired, Brown thought it
but fair to defend his friend. "I know
Jones so well," said he, "and he is so
honest a man, and so good an architect,
that if he states, soberly and

positively, that he can build a bridge to Hades, why, I believe it. But, I have my doubts about the abutment on the infernal side." Gentlemen, when politicians say they can harmonize the northern and southern wings of the democracy, why, I believed them. But I have my doubt about the abutment on the southern side.

The congressmen chuckle, but they are not happy with Lincoln's answer.

While the guests are laughing Lincoln eases them out the door.

The congressmen look very worried out in the hall. The image of Lincoln inspires a great deal of confidence today; at the time his leadership was doubted.

Later in the film, Robert Smalls will meet with Lincoln and change his mind and the course of history. That is the central focus of this film.

EXT. WAR DEPARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

The War Department building is already too small for all the functions of the wartime War Department. It is being expanded from two stories to four. There is a significant amount of construction. Everything seems rushed.

SUPERVISOR
(to construction workers)
Get it done. There is a war on you
know!

We see a great deal of military foot traffic entering and exiting the building. The minister and a young African American enter the building.

END TITLES:

INT. WAR DEPARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: War Department, August 1862

ROBERT SMALLS enters the building with Reverend MANSFIELD FRENCH. Smalls is short and thick. Smalls looks overwhelmed. Only a few weeks ago, Smalls was a slave in Charleston, South Carolina.

The two men walk through the part of the building being remodelled. We see carpenters and painters milling about. The floors are bare hardwood and the painters are not careful enough to stop dripping paint. The carpenters are remaking the mouldings. Robert Smalls dodges a worker carrying moulding, but some strike the minister in the head.

The War Department is also a beehive of military activity. There are messengers coming and going.

The construction is complete near Secretary Stanton's office; plush carpeting on the floor and battle-scene painting on the walls.

The Reverend French mentions they are here to see Stanton to an AIDE; Smalls and French sit and wait.

REVEREND FRENCH

General Hunter insists that you will meet with the President, but I don't know. They say what's in Lincoln's mind at this point is that the sole purpose of the war is the preservation of the Union, and several states don't want you to fight.

ROBERT SMALLS

I understand that.

FRENCH

Secretary of War Stanton will not issue an order allowing the enlistment of freed men into the Army without Lincoln's approval. But we have to see Stanton first.

SMALLS

I understand.

FRENCH

I'm sure you have been thinking about this, but how can we convince them to allow freed men to enlist in the Army?

SMALLS

They say I was famous within 48 hours.

FRENCH

You were.

(pause)

You are.

(pause)

Maybe you should practice.

Smalls has a strange look on his face. He isn't sure he needs to tell his story over and over again.

FRENCH

Humor me.

SMALLS

Tell you what I'm gonna tell Stanton and the President?

FRENCH

Yes, but start at the beginning.

SMALLS

Well okay.

(pause)

I don't appear mulatto, but my father was my owner, and the owner of my mother. He was Jewish. My mother was his nanny and she was considerably older.

FRENCH

I have read and heard that.

SMALLS

He was a property holder. He had a nice house on Prince Street in Beaufort. I watched him growing up.

FRENCH

Was he as dandy a dresser as you?

Smalls smiles.

SMALLS

Yes, he was. More so.

INT. JOHN MCKEE HOME BEAUFORT S.C. - MORNING - 1845

FLASHBACK:

There is a much older black slave woman, Robert's mother, LYDIA POLITE (46). She is in the kitchen. JOHN MCKEE (28) is dressing in front of a full-length mirror. Robert Smalls (6) is watching. John turns and gives Robert a kind (fatherly) smile.

INT. JOHN MCKEE HOME BEAUFORT S.C. - MORNING - 1848

Later, we see John McKee on the front porch sitting in the rocking chair. Southern business men come to transact business with McKee. Robert is taking it all in and observing from a distance.

Robert is hiding in the hedges. Robert seems like he is straining to hear. This is Robert's early education. The men are pointing in the direction of some land and seem to be talking about land and the rice harvest.

After the men leave, McKee motions for Robert to approach.

MCKEE

You are afraid of business?

(pause)

Don't be. I noticed when they arrived you lit out and hid.

SMALLS

I was watching.

MCKEE

Business is between a buyer and a seller, and it isn't anyone else's business. And they both have to like it, or else they will not enter into the bargain. If they don't like it, they walk away. Understand?

Robert Smalls nods.

MCKEE

But be honest. Take your fair share,
they will take their fair share and
everyone benefits. Both families have
dinner that way.

(pause)

But you have to be honest.

(pause)

You know what bought me this big house?

SMALLS

Rice harvest?

MCKEE

(chuckling)

Yes, but also my reputation. Don't
cheat anyone... never ever... and don't
steal.

SMALLS

Yes, sir.

MCKEE

That is a good boy. I'm going to make a
businessman out of you yet.

White McKee hugs his black son. This is a very rare
situation, where a white father invests so much time and
affection in a black son, but it appears to have been the
case for Robert Smalls.

Some snooty society ladies pass on the sidewalk and gawk up
at the house. McKee releases his son from the hug.

BACK TO:

INT. WAR DEPARTMENT BUILDING - DAY - 1862

SMALLS

Until he died.

FRENCH

His son Henry brought you to work in
Charleston?

EXT. RAIL STATION, BEAUFORT S.C. - MORNING - 1851

FLASHBACK:

When Robert turns 12 years old, HENRY MCKEE and he leave for Charleston. MRS. MCKEE, the wife of John McKee, is there, stone-faced, watching. Robert's mother, Lydia Polite, is crying. Robert has tears in his eyes as the carriage pulls away from the house. He waves goodbye to his mother. Nothing is said it is simply matter of fact.

INT. HOTEL IN CHARLESTON S.C. - DAY - 1851

When Robert and Henry McKee arrive at the hotel everything seems like it's already arranged. McKee is leasing out Robert's labour to a Hotel owner MRS. LEVY.

HENRY MCKEE

This is Robert.

MRS. LEVY

Strong?

Robert shakes his head in the affirmative.

LEVY

He seems confident.

MCKEE

Yes. He is mighty strong for a young man. He is very able.

There are two suitcases by the desk, waiting to be hauled upstairs.

LEVY

Take these up to #202.

(pause)

Knock on the door and give them the suitcases.

MCKEE

(to Levy)

He can do that easily.

MCKEE

(to Robert)

You can do this. In fact, you work for Mrs. Levy now. You do what she tells you to do.

Henry McKee looks a bit worried.

The suitcases are heavy but Robert manages without hesitation. He scrapes one of the stairs with one case but manages to get to the 2nd floor without another bump.

Mrs. Levy thinks the kid is adorable.

LEVY

I will send you his wages every Saturday, and he eats here of course.

INT. HOTEL/RESTAURANT - MORNING TO EVENING - 1854

Robert (14) is a polite and proper waiter in the hotel restaurant. He has excellent posture. Mrs. Levy coaches him with a gesture to remind him to stand straight. At Dawn, Robert serves breakfast and the instant the last customer pays he runs into the back room and takes off his outfit. He gets into work clothes and runs down to the wharf. He seems excited about this work.

He has a second job as a dockworker - a manual laborer who is involved in loading and unloading ships. He works like a dog loading and unloading ships.

Robert runs back to the hotel, hot and sweaty from the longshoreman work. He sees a WHITE COUPLE enter the hotel for lunch. Robert runs to the back entrance and undresses. He throws a bucket of water over his head uses a minimum of soap and towels off. All this is done in a few seconds. Smalls dresses in his waiter's uniform and is at the table just in time to take the couple's order.

SMALLS

And for the lady?

MAN

She will have the same.

SMALLS

Excellent. I'm sure she will be happy.

After Robert has the couple's order, he is very gentle, gracefully walking it back to the kitchen. One would never guess he is also a rough and tough dock worker.

Later, Robert hustles between tables quickly. He is the waiter and the busboy. And finally, there is only one last customer who is taking his sweet time.

HANNAH, the cook, is twenty something with an infant and a toddler. She manages to cook and care for the kids at the same time. The toddler is outside in a small back yard eating leaves. Hannah is busy juggling plates and only glances out the window at her toddler.

HANNAH

Stop that. Don't eat those leaves.

Robert runs out to the back yard and takes the leaves from the boy's mouth and hands. He puts a ball in the boy's hands. The toddler is distracted from eating the leaves and Robert runs back into the hotel.

Robert takes the plate to the customer and returns to the kitchen for his plate.

There is a table in the kitchen for Robert to sit down, but Robert eats rapidly standing up.

HANNAH

Boy, slowdown. You are gonna give yourself angina!

ROBERT

No ma'am. I just need to eat and get down to the wharf.

HANNAH

You gonna be old soon enough if you don't slow down.

Robert smiles and winks at her. Then, finished with lunch, he bolts from the room and out the back door.

HANNAH

(yells after him)

Boy, you listen to me, you gonna work yourself to death.

Smalls goes to the street in front of the hotel. Smalls is almost running. No one works this hard to get down to the wharf unless they love the sea. And, of course, he is looking to make money.

INT. CHARLESTON DOCKS - AFTERNOON - 1854

Smalls works hard loading a ship. He is paid a few coins and is plenty satisfied. Clearly, he is a good worker.

INT. HOTEL/RESTAURANT - NOON - 1854

In the hotel/restaurant Robert is sedate and very much the elegant and proper "house boy". It is almost as if he was educated and from the upper classes. Voice and diction, perfect. He appears a bit bored however with the routine.

SMALLS

(muttering to himself)

All I do is sit and wait, watching
white people eat.

INT. CHARLESTON DOCKS - AFTERNOON - 1854

After the lunch crowd is finished, Robert repeats the procedure and runs down to the dock and does more work loading and unloading ships. Again he is handed a few coins.

At the dock, Robert works harder than the others. He is 5'5" and very young for this work. The other older men doing this work are much larger and -- they work slowly. Robert is a regular dynamo. Robert clearly loves this work. The docks are an interesting place to be; Smalls only stops work to notice a new ship. After his work, he stops to listen to a traveler's story. Of course, at the dock there are always new "different" people milling all about.

All day Robert runs back and forth working two jobs. Each time Robert passes one of Hannah's kids he stops and pats the child on the head or makes a face at the infant.

A boat captain (Ralyea) notices Robert enthusiastically working hard and with a smile on his face. He stops to watch the boy work. It does seem odd to the captain.

INT. HOTEL/RESTAURANT - EVENING - 1854

After work, we see Robert serving dinner.

EXT/INT. CHARLESTON HARBOUR SHIP WHEELHOUSE - DAY - 1856

CHARLES RELYEA is the captain of an unnamed ship. He seems to have adopted Robert (18). The ship captain is showing Robert the harbor. He seems to be educating him, pointing out this and that feature and referencing things on a nautical chart.

The captain is at the wheel and young Robert is by his side, watching. After a time, Relyea allows Robert to steer the ship. Robert is proud of the responsibility; it is the high point of his life thus far.

This is not The Planter, which was not built until 1860.

INT. HOTEL OFFICE - DAY - 1857

Robert is standing in front of Mrs. Levy with a business proposition.

LEVY

I always liked you, since you were a boy and Mr. McKee brought you to work here.

(pause)

But now for you to work on a ship full time?

(pause)

And to buy Hannah and her two children?

SMALLS

Yes. Respectfully ma'am.

LEVY

Hannah and her mother have been dear to me as servants in our hotel, there isn't the distance one generally feels between slave and master.

SMALLS

Are you sure this sentiment isn't designed to raise the price?

LEVY

Oh, no. Seriously, I'm very attached to Hannah. And you want to buy her?

SMALLS

I can pay you \$700, \$8 per week.

LEVY

I've never heard of a slave buying another slave. You are a slave yourself.

SMALLS

I don't see how that really matters. Mr. McKee treats me almost like a free man.

LEVY

How can you get \$8 per week?

SMALLS

By working of course.

(pause)

Mr. McKee doesn't require all the money I earn. We've had an arrangement for years.

LEVY

And Mr. McKee is aware?

SMALLS

Yes, ma'ma. I'm not a thief. He has always been very generous with me. He will have an arrangement with Captain Relyea, just like he has had with you. He knows the pay I keep and the bargain I'm proposing to you. I wrote him two weeks ago.

LEVY

Well, you might have some white in you after all. I suppose that is what it is. But there is nothing more disgusting to me than a man who would lie with his slave (black or white).

Levy pauses and regrets what she has said and she doesn't want to lose the deal. Her voice becomes calm.

LEVY

But, that's neither here nor there. It happens enough, and what comes of it is something like you, poor Robert, a part-white soul living in a slave's body.

SMALLS

I'm devoted to her, and I want to, if I can, marry her.

LEVY

Oh, good Lord. Three things now! You want to leave my service. You want to buy my woman and her children; and you yourself are still a slave. And marry her, third.

There is a long pause.

LEVY

You are very open, very polite, quick-witted, and certainly an able worker - inside the hotel and out.

(pause)

I understand those who employ you along the waterfront and as a wheelman have the highest confidence in you.

SMALLS

Thank you, ma'am.

LEVY

But your dogged interest in Hannah mystifies me. She is noticeably older than you, and she already has two children - quite obviously fathered by some other slave.

SMALLS

We want to be a family.

LEVY
Oh, good Lord.

Levy contemplates.

LEVY
It is not entirely outside of my
imagination that the institution of
slavery might not outlive us.
(pause)
Maybe I should sell when the price is
right, or anything at all?

Robert gestures that is a valid point to consider.

There is a very long pause.

LEVY
I will consent...
(pause)
after consulting with Mr. McKee. He
seems to think highly of the idea, too.
Evidently he feels you are a good
earner for him?
(pause)
If his return correspondence seems to
betray genuine concern for your welfare
and happiness, then I will agree.

Robert is elated.

SMALLS
Thank you, ma'am. Thank you.

EXT. CHARLESTON HARBOUR BRITISH MERCHANT SHIP - DAY - 1856

A ship arrives from Europe with some extraordinary cloth.
The ENGLISH CAPTAIN of the merchant ship might be corrupt,
and has held back some cloth. We see Robert Smalls in his
cabin looking it over.

SMALLS
You don't have any white?

ENGLISH CAPTAIN
No.
(pause)

What do you need white for?

SMALLS

Getting married.

The English captain is awed at the idea of a black man getting married. Clearly this never occurred to him.

ENGLISH CAPTAIN

Boy, you don't need white. You need something like blue.

He hands Robert a bolt of blue cloth.

SMALLS

This all you have?

ENGLISH CAPTAIN

Take it or leave it. This is all that I have.

Smalls considers and is about to back out of the deal.

ENGLISH CAPTAIN

It is a good price, and just think how delighted your misses will be.

Wedding enthusiasm arrives. Robert purchases it with some coins. He brings the cloth home and presents it to Hannah. Of course, she is delighted.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY - 1857

Hannah and Robert are dressing in different rooms. It isn't quit a "white person's" wedding, but Robert seems to have invested some money in clothes for himself. These clothes might double for wedding AND working clothes now that Robert is a wheelman/pilot. We see the dress, made from the imported cloth. We don't know who has made the dress but it is fine.

The "slave wedding" is about to begin. The wedding is to be officiated by the slave owners - McKee and Levy.

MCKEE

Are you sure we are doing the right thing here?

LEVY

Sure, encouraging marriage among slaves make the male slaves less of a "*flight risk*".

MCKEE

Robert? Never.

LEVY

Working around those boats all day?

MCKEE

It will never happen. My father and I didn't raise him to run off.

LEVY

You speak of him as if he were your son.

MCKEE

It is just an expression. He lived over in Beaufort the first 12 years of his life.

LEVY

Well, now he won't run off; he loves those kids like they were his own.

MCKEE

Worst comes too worse, marriage between slaves is not legally recognized.

This gets Mrs. Levy's dander up.

LEVY

There will be no more of that talk. What God puts together let no man, Jew or not, separate.

When Robert and Hannah come into the hotel lobby, there is very little pomp and circumstance. It is very informal. Perhaps it is formal for Robert and Hannah. But McKee and Levy are just going through the motions.

The couple - Robert and Hannah - are asked to hold hands while Bible verses are read.

MCKEE

Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, ' for she was taken out of man." For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

LEVY

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

There is some hesitation and nothing left to say but..

MCKEE

I now pronounce you man and woman.

LEVY

You are hereby declared married.

They jump over the broom, kiss and the wedding is over.

A slave lady we don't know takes Hannah's children out of the hotel. Hannah and Robert also exit the back of the hotel and they take a short proud walk around the neighborhood. Whites just glare at the couple. Black servants offer congratulations. Hannah and Robert retire to the shack behind the hotel where Hannah lives.

Naturally, honeymoons for slaves are not an option, and in fact both husband and wife were expected to resume their duties as normal the following day.

EXT. DOCK CHARLESTON - DAY - 1860

Robert Smalls takes Hannah with infant ELIZABETH and the older two step-daughters down to the dock. Smalls is showing them the sights and educating them. Smalls points out The PLANTER and brings them on board for a tour.

Hannah's daughters aren't toddlers anymore. They casually glance at Fort Sumter, but the real attraction for the Smalls family are the various ships. There may be a political storm brewing but they seem to be immune from it. We see a happy unconcerned family.

EXT. HOTEL - EARLY MORNING - 1860

It is morning, there is a strange sound that wakes Hannah and Robert. Wagon wheels on the cobble stone street. Confederate cannons are being rolled through the streets and soldiers are marching outside as they prepare for an assault on Fort Sumter.

The couple step out into the street.

A boy runs telling everyone he passes in the street.

BOY

South Carolina has left the union.

Robert is offered a newspaper, but declines. Robert Smalls can't read. He has never been interested in politics.

A white couple walks into the hotel for breakfast. Hannah and Robert don't dare kiss on the street but they squeeze each other's hands.

Hannah runs back into the hotel's back entrance, the kitchen. Robert walks down to the wharf.

Robert works all day; he observes all the artillery being positioned and prepared for bombardment. They unload cotton and load the ship with cannons. This ship is The Planter.

At the end of the day we see Robert walk into the back of the hotel and into their shack.

EXT. HOTEL - AFTERNOON - 1861

Each \$8 payment that Robert gives to Levy gives Hannah and Robert the greatest joy and pride. When Robert arrives home Hannah knows because of the regular pay and the expression on Robert's face. She drops what she is doing. She gathers her kids and accompanies Robert to hand the payment to Mrs. Levy. Hannah has a delighted look on her face.

EXT. STREETS OF CHARLESTON - NIGHT - 1861

Bells ring and alarms cry out. The midnight sky is as bright as dawn. A huge fire is burning 163 acres of Charleston. The fire is very near the hotel. Mrs. Levy is in a panic. She can do nothing but watch and cling to Hannah and her children. Robert leaves to fight the fire.

Robert fights it all night.

In the morning, Hannah and Mrs. Levy find Robert has only laid down to rest next door. The edge of the fire burned right up to the hotel, which narrowly escapes burning.

Mrs. Levy fetches a blanket and commandeers some MEN to bring Robert into the hotel. Robert weakly objects.

The men are automatically going to take Robert around back.

LEVY

This is my hotel bring him in here!

Levy gestured to the front door.

SMALLS

Hey, take me around back.

LEVY

That is ridiculous. We have just had a tragic fire. No one gives a care about that now.

She is very liberal in her statements, but still she looks left and right to make sure no one is watching.

Robert is slightly burned on his hands and arms. His clothes are unrecognizable and half charred. He is exhausted. The men, with Mrs. Levy and Hannah, bring him in the front door of the hotel.

If not for the fire, he would have only been let in the back door.

The men bring him up to Mrs. Levy's luxurious personal room. They put him in the bathtub.

LEVY
(to Hannah)
You get those closes off him.

Mrs. Levy leaves to bring medicines and water.

SMALLS
(weakly)
Hey, this is sort of nice.

Mrs. Levy returns with two buckets of water. It is a strange reversal of roles. The audience will be certain that in the past, Hannah has been the one of the two hauling buckets of water.

HANNAH
Thank you!

EXT. C.S.S. PLANTER - DAY - 1862

RELYEA
You own how much?

SMALLS
\$80

RELYEA
Ten more weeks? That seems a bit silly.

Without another word, Captain Relyea walks to the safe onboard the ship and opens it. He counts out \$80.

EXT. HOTEL KITCHEN - AFTERNOON - 1862

SMALLS
I have the last payment. Captain Relyea lent it to me.

Hannah is about six months pregnant and showing.

Robert, Hannah and the two children, as tradition, are about to bring the \$8 (or \$80) to Levy.

Robert puts his hands on her belly and is about to say something...

But he hesitates, thinking the value of the unborn child was not included in the price. Robert fears that Levy will extort more money for the unborn child, which legally Levy would own.

SMALLS

You stay here.

HANNAH

Why, I'm going with you. We are going with you. I'm not going to miss seeing this! You are my man and now you own me. You worked for us to be a family.

SMALLS

Hey, think...

Robert gestured to her Hannah's belly.

SMALLS

Mrs. Levy is only going to want more money if she sees you like this.

Hannah contemplates. She is terrified but doesn't let it show.

HANNAH

Okay, I will wait.

Several confederate officers - Generals and Colonels walk though the lobby to their rooms. The hotel is occupied by the army.

EXT. HOTEL OFFICE - AFTERNOON - 1862

Levy looks warn and worried. The war has started and she has changed from the woman she was before.

SMALLS

I have the last payment Mrs. Levy.

LEVY

What?

(pause)

You can't pay early and leave. What will I do for a cook?

SMALLS

No one said anything about leaving. You can pay Hannah a fair wage. We are sticking with you Mrs. Levy.

LEVY

What about the child?

SMALLS

What child?

LEVY

The child she is carrying. Your child I would presume.

SMALLS

Well, you wouldn't charge me for my own child that ain't even been born yet would you?

Mrs. Levy takes the \$80.

LEVY

Well I will. And she isn't to leave with that child.

SMALLS

Mrs. Levy, that is just wrong.

LEVY

No, it's just business. You understand business. The army has commandeered the hotel and I'm totally tapped of money. Those officers don't pay.

SMALLS

But we been good workers for you. Hannah was born here. I've been here since I was twelve.

LEVY

We should maybe negotiate a price for the new child?

(pause)

Say, another \$700.

SMALLS

I done paid you \$700 for the three of them and now you want another \$700?

Robert is catatonic and can't respond.

LEVY

You are of fine genetic stock. Look how strong, fit, and smart you are. That child might be worth more than \$700.

Robert is defeated. He walks like a zombie from the room.

LEVY

Do we have deal?

(pause)

Robert?

(pause)

Do we have a deal?

There is a long pause.

LEVY

(shouting)

I bet I can sell that child for \$700 someday!

BACK TO:

INT. OUTSIDE STANTON'S OFFICE - DAY - 1862

Robert Smalls and Reverend French are sitting where they were before - waiting to see Stanton.

FRENCH

So, this is when you decided to take the Planter?

SMALLS

Yes.

FRENCH

Well that makes sense. You tried to live by the law.

SMALLS

There comes a time... When things snap
you know?

FRENCH

Well, I don't, but I can understand
your anger at that particular moment.
Psalms 127:3 - Lo, children are a
heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of
the womb is his reward.

SMALLS

The baby, my daughters, belong to
Jesus. Baptized and safe in Beaufort.
(pause)
My infant son has passed and is in
heaven.

FRENCH

Well that is a better place than
Beaufort. Right?

Robert takes a great deal of pleasure in this talk. They
are called into Stanton's Office.

INT. STANTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Just as they enter Stanton's office, before the door is
shut, Robert Smalls turns and looks out in the telegraph
room. Lincoln is reading a telegram. Smalls sees him for
just one second. The aide to the secretary closes the door
and Smalls turns back to face Stanton.

STANTON

(to French)

I have been informed that Mr. Smalls is
a complete illiterate, so I assume you
will do much of the talking.

FRENCH

No...

SMALLS

I can speak perfectly well.

Stanton is surprised but recovers quickly.

STANTON

Yes, you can.

SMALLS

(to French)

No offence.

FRENCH

None taken. You are the reason we are here. It is your story. I'm just decoration.

(to Stanton)

Please continue.

STANTON

You are quite young.

SMALLS

Twenty-three, sir.

STANTON

And you escaped from bondage only a few weeks before?

SMALLS

Yes, I brought you a ship and 4 guns.

STANTON

Tell me about this ship.

SMALLS

She is The Planter and was a cotton steamer, owned by John Ferguson. Then she was commandeered by the Confederates.

EXT. CHARLESTON HARBOUR - THE PLANTER - DAY - 1859

FLASHBACK:

The owner MR. FERGUSON comes aboard and immediately bristles at the sight of a black man in the Wheelhouse. He gestures to Smalls.

MR. FERGUSON

What is he doing up there?

RELYEA

He mans the wheel when I'm occupied elsewhere.

MR. FERGUSON

Get him down.

Relyea motions for Smalls to leave the wheelhouse. Relyea accompanies Ferguson as he inspects the vessel and disembarks.

RETURN TO:

INT. STANTON'S OFFICE - DAY - 1862

Smalls continues...

SMALLS

We were taking her up and down the Pee Dee River. And then the war started. It was chartered by the Confederate government along with its crew, including me, and put into service running supplies (primarily munitions and ordnance) between the widespread Charleston fortifications.

STANTON

So, you know these fortifications well?

SMALLS

Yes, sir. I've related all that I know to General Hunter.

STANTON

Yes. He has let me know how helpful you have been.

(pause)

Now about this ship, what else?

SMALLS

Red cedar and oak. Three hundred tons and 147 feet. It draws less than 4 feet of water - you can use it for service in the creeks and rivers. The navy will not like it; it burns wood and not

coal. It has a 32-pounder cannon and 22-pounder howitzer.

STANTON

You do know your stuff, don't you?

SMALLS

Yes, sir. I've been around boats in Charleston since I was 12.

STANTON

You must have been terrified, the certainty of torture and death if your escape failed.

SMALLS

One member of the crew didn't want to risk it.

STANTON

What was the likelihood of passing the forts in the night with their system of coded signals?

SMALLS

The signals were not too difficult. Looking like a white captain, that was the difficult part.

Everyone chuckles.

STANTON

They said you put on his uniform and hat.

SMALLS

Yes, sir. I think the hat was indispensable.

STANTON

How did you navigate the mine field in the dark with the strong tidal currents sweeping you toward the bank?

SMALLS

There was a minefield and we were swept toward the bank a bit. That is true.

STANTON

We certainly appreciate your handing
over the Planter and the cannon.

(pause)

But, you are here about enlisting
freedmen in the Army?

SMALLS

General Hunter seems to think it is a
good idea.

STANTON

What do you think?

SMALLS

Everyman wants to do his part.

STANTON

What about character?

SMALLS

Sir, what do you mean?

STANTON

You boys actually fight?

SMALLS

I've seen a few white men try to
surrender, if that is what you mean.
They would have fewer stakes in any
battle than a free black man.

STANTON

What real stake does a black man have
in a battle?

SMALLS

The south can't be allowed to win.
Nothing will happen to a white man if
the south wins. If they win there will
be hell for my race forever. They will
blame us for any child or uncle or
father lost in the war. If you think it
was bad for our condition before the
war, consider the possibility the South
will win.

STANTON
Never crossed my mind.

SMALLS
Well, it comes across a black man's
mind. Often.

STANTON
Now there is one concern. That is will
a freedman - many of whom were only
recently slaves like yourself - take
orders from a white officer.

SMALLS
So long as the order is justified and
they see it beneficial.

Mr. French sits up straight; he looks concerned.

STANTON
Tell me about the Stono River and your
actions there.

EXT. PORT AREA, BEAUFORT - DAY - MAY 1862

FLASHBACK:

General Hunter's camp is full of soldiers and former
slaves. Two GULLAH MEN are working on the dock.

GULLAH MAN
Me ole peepul chuse de hebby box wuh
hol' de mo'res. En' de box hab ax en'
shubble en' hoe.

*(My ancestors choose the life of manual labor. Precisely,
my old people chose the heaviest box - the box with the ax,
the shovel and the hoe.)*

The Gullah men stop talking when they see a ship on the
distant horizon. They strain to make it out. It will be
some time before the ship is clearly viewed.

EXT. SOLDIER'S CAMP AREA, BEAUFORT - DAY

Some of the GULLAH WOMEN are selling food and some are simply wandering about the camp.

GULLAH WOMAN

Bittle?

(Vittles or food?)

GULLAH WOMAN

Buckruh, bayre bones.

(You white men are bare bones and thin.)

We see several Gullah women offering soldiers shrimp, crabs, flounder, and chicken. And one particular woman has turtle meat.

GULLAH WOMAN

We blan ketch 'nuf cootuh der.

(We always catch a lot of turtles here.)

GULLAH WOMAN

Tas'e 'e mout'

(Tastes good.)

One of the soldiers tries to bargain with the woman and he offers her less.

GULLAH WOMAN

Haa'dly' kint.

(I can't.)

She shakes her head "no" and holds her hand out demanding more money.

We can hear remnants of the conversations as the Gullah women converse with the soldiers in a strange language, utterly incomprehensible at first. Some more experienced soldiers seem to be figuring it out. We will have to hire Gullah actors.

EXT. PORT AREA, BEAUFORT - DAY - MAY 1862

GULLAH MAN

Dry 'long so. F'um de haa'buh ob de
lan' wuh uh lub'.

*(Without a reason or explanation. From the harbor of the
land I love.)*

GULLAH MAN

Kumbayah. Boy.

(Come here.)

The GULLAH MAN stops a young black boy (presumably his son) running through the streets.

GULLAH MAN

Tek'e foot een 'e han. Tell me lawfully
lady, Planter come sailin'.

(Run tell my wife that the Planter is coming into port.)

The Planter is steaming into Port Royal.

It docks and we see a group of freed slaves and a few whites gather around to watch.

We watch the crew of the Planter shuffle off the Planter, under guard.

GULLAH WOMAN

(to the guard)

No nee' two-time-one-gun.

(No need for that shotgun.)

There are eight men, five woman and three children - all in line. Hannah is the woman with the three children (one is an infant). They are frightened and very sedate. Smalls does not look frightened!

At the rear of the procession is Smalls. He is wearing the uniform of the Confederate Captain and also Relyea's large straw hat. Smalls walks off the gangplank like a man who was stepping in to his rightful existence, proud and confident.

Smalls expects to be greeted as a hero, but word hasn't spread sufficiently yet. He smiles and tips his hat to everyone like a politician might. Most of the people are just puzzled and offer no celebration.

EXT. SOLDIER'S CAMP AREA, BEAUFORT - DAY

A rookie union guard approaches an officer.

UNION GUARD

Sir, where do you want me to put the contrabands?

OFFICER

There is a myriad of contraband in our camp.

(pause)

Let them loose but bring the Captain to General Hunter.

INT. GENERAL HUNTERS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

As Robert Smalls is presented, he walks right up to the edge of the General's desk. Without looking from the map, Smalls extends his black hand enthusiastically across the desk. The General, who it seems has never shaken the hand of a black man, looks down at the hand with a momentary look of amazement. He regains his composure and grasps Smalls' hand. And then suddenly an enthusiasm and a grin arrives across the General's face.

The camera pulls back and we see that General Hunter, a few OFFICERS and Smalls are standing over a desk with an unrolled map.

Smalls points to a location on the map. Without being asked, Smalls knows the information the General needs.

SMALLS

The cargo - cannon - came from here. Cole's Island. The Confederates have abandoned this fortification.

General Hunter's interest suddenly rises.

SMALLS

The rebels think it is un-navigable.

LIEUTENANT

But it is?

SMALLS

Certainly it is. Before the war we used to float cotton up all these rivers.

EXT. RIVER BOAT NOT THE PLANTER - DAY - 1858

Robert Smalls is at the wheel and Captain Relyea is sleeping. Robert has assumed rather a lot of responsibility. He is very alert and is constantly comparing the charts to the river and features.

The boat is taking hundreds of cotton bales down the river. Eventually they reach the sea and then they are up to Charleston. Relyea wakes up just in time to make an appearance at the wheel. They unload the bales.

INT. GENERAL HUNTERS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

SMALLS

The army will want this ship. It burns wood. It has a shallow draft, a river and coastal steamer, not really fit for long sea passages, but able to manoeuvre handily in the shallow waters of these parts.

Small points to the rivers southwest of Charleston.

HUNTER

I can float troops up the Stono River and attack Charleston from the Southwest?

SMALLS

I don't know why not, sir.

HUNTER

Can you tell us anything else?

SMALLS

Certainly. What else do you want to know? All the charts are on board The Planter.

EXT. GENERAL HUNTERS CAMP - DAY

As the crew of The Planter mixes into the camp's population, people naturally question them. The story of their escape spreads rapidly through the camp.

GULLAH #1
Charleston? Past them forts?

GULLAH #2
Naw?

CREW MEMBER
(pointing to the ship)
Yes. On board the Planter.

GULLAH #1
(laughing)
T'engk' Gawd fuh Chaa'stun! Now the'
done stol' yankee gun boat. I bawn en
Chaa'stun!

GULLAH #2
Swonguh.

(Proud.)

The news takes fire among the blacks, as if it were the most unbelievable of revelations. It is something like the story of the Resurrection among Jesus' followers. There is a look of utter incredulity in the escaped slave portion of the camp. But there is also a look of humor, irony, and hope as the story spreads. Finally, it all builds to cheers and celebration. Laughter.

INT. GENERAL HUNTERS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Robert Smalls is let out of the office to wait outside.

Hunter looks at his officers for advise.

HUNTER
I have been told that Smalls is a
mulatto, fathered and raised by his
owner.

COLONEL

I must say that I don't see any white features in the man. He is as dark as any of the other slaves. His hair is as kinky as any full-blooded Negro.

MAJOR

But, that might, perhaps, explain some of his awareness and demeanour here a moment ago.

LIEUTENANT

It must be something to be unfazed when debriefed by a United States general.

COLONEL

You can't take him into the Army, sir. Washington has strictly forbid it.

HUNTER

Who would know?

MAJOR

You remember what happened last time, sir.

General David Hunter, in charge of the assault on Charleston, had previously enlisted freed slaves and was publicly rebuked by Lincoln. Lincoln had perceived a public backlash against it from the middle states.

HUNTER

(to the Major)

How many blacks have we enlisted?

MAJOR

None. Officially sir.

HUNTER

I'm a commander in a war. They want me to fight, and I require troops. Stanton, nor Congress, nor any Kentucky legislator is going to interfere with my operating in this theatre. Understood?

COLONEL

Yes, sir.

HUNTER

In this hastily swollen army, built of necessity from a population of farmers, attorneys, shopkeepers, and schoolmasters, one sees much artificial swagger. The uniform, the unearned rank, and the unaccustomed command lead to comic displays of puffery and preening. But there is nothing of this in Smalls, and two days ago he was a slave.

(pause)

He will fit in perfectly around here.

HUNTER

Give him a uniform and make him the pilot of the Planter.

(pause)

We are going to take troops up this river and attack from the southwest.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO THE STONO RIVER - DAY

Smalls is piloting The Planter, in the lead of several boats. There are two SOUNDING MEN casting lead on both sides of the bow, "three fathoms!"

The sea is smooth as glass. There are two escaped slaves from the original crew still on the boat.

CREW MEMBER #1

E study 'em papers all da time.

CREW MEMBER #2

E can't read no more than you.

CREW MEMBER #1

But he learned to recognize numbers and seemed to be able to read how deep the water is and which direction we be goin'.

CREW MEMBER #2

But he really don't need those maps.

(pause)

He knowed these water bedde' than any
U.S. Navy papers will show 'em.

Robert Smalls is at the wheel and there is a crewmember standing beside him ready to take the wheel if Smalls must leave.

Smalls drives the boat past what appears to be the entrance to the river and then suddenly turns the wheel and the boat crosses over what appears to be a sand bar.

There were sea islands close by on either side of the inlet, covered with sand dunes, sea oats, and scrub.

When the sounding men call "two fathoms", everyone's muscles tense. The white soldiers seem the most nervous.

SMALLS

We are entering on a rising tide,
hoping it will carry us off if we are
grounded.

CREW MEMBER #3

How far back we got to go?

SMALLS

Five or six miles. But this is the only
shallow part right here where the sand
has built up.

When the sounding men began calling "one and a half", everyone waits for the thud of the keel on the sand bar. But it never comes.

Smalls is fearless. Everyone is glancing at Smalls for some clue of danger. He gives them no clue. Smalls moves his steamer with skill and confidence, and we see a tight formation of troop transport ships behind him.

They pass over the sand bar safely, into the inlet, and within minutes they are in a river that will lead them to the back door to Charleston.

Everyone is sweating in the steamy, early-summer heat, which seemed unbearable. Nerves account for a lot of the sweating however.

White soldiers are on the deck of the ship.

The Planter passes fortifications on a small island in the salt marsh. Two white soldiers converse.

DOUBTFUL SOLDIER
I expect a fierce battle.

He gestures to the fort.

CONFIDENT SOLDIER
The darky said it is abandoned.

DOUBTFUL SOLDIER
And you believe that?

CONFIDENT SOLDIER
They aren't firing.

DOUBTFUL SOLDIER
They will, just you wait.

There is a pause while they pass the fort.

CONFIDENT SOLDIER
Nothing.

DOUBTFUL SOLDIER
Here is what is going to happen. The Planter stops or is beached and we are just sitting here, ducks on a pond.

CONFIDENT SOLDIER
The river is wide enough for manoeuvring, but not wide enough to evade artillery fire.

The ship slowly progresses up the river. Soon the riverbank to port is covered in the deep forest.

DOUBTFUL SOLDIER
Still there is no enemy fire. I can't understand this. They are just letting us walk up to their back door?

CONFIDENT SOLDIER

Riding.

(pause)

We are ridding up to their back door.

DOUBTFUL SOLDIER

Seems like it.

But at this time, the first artillery shells begin to thunder into the river ahead of The Planter. Smalls stops the ship, and they back up a quarter mile or so back down the river.

They beach The Planter. We had behind us an expanse of river sufficient to hold our entire fleet, miles of unoccupied land on the south and west side of the river, and the sea island on the north side of the river entrance. We are within sight of the city.

SMALLS

(to the Army Officer)

We are seven miles from the city of Charleston.

ARMY OFFICER

You just advanced Federal forces farther in a morning than we had advanced in months of campaigning. And without suffering a single casualty.

They unload the troops off the starboard side onto James Island.

RETURN TO:

EXT. STANTON'S OFFICE - DAY

Stanton seems to have heard this story. He shuffles through some papers and finds the report he is looking for.

STANTON

I'm sorry. I didn't mean Stono River I meant Morris Island.

SMALLS

Okay.

(pause)

I was told that the re-supply of Morris Island has always been a problem. Landing on the ocean beach was impossible in all but the calmest of weather. The inlet, likewise, was unapproachable from the sea with any sort of swell running. We were bringing supplies for our sizable garrison there, along with ammunition for the heavy guns that were shelling Charleston and Fort Sumter, had to be offloaded on Folly Island, dragged by wagon along the miring sand tracks of that island, reloaded on to small boats, and rowed across the inlet to Morris.

STANTON

And it was your idea to re-supply Morris by running the creeks on the inside?

SMALLS

I knew I could pilot The Planter through at high tide and steam down to the inlet between Morris and Folly islands. Scouts were sent one night to sound the passage in small boats. They found the plan viable.

EXT. MORRIS ISLAND INLET - DAY

FLASHBACK:

Robert Smalls, as famous and as able a man as he was, he is not trusted with anything more than the wheel during these early adventures. The Captain of The Planter is a white man named, Nickerson.

Smalls is only the man at the wheel of USS The Planter. There are three white officers on board; the same exact arrangement as when the ship was in the Confederate navy - three White officers.

The Planter is loaded with supplies for the garrison shelling Charleston - mostly ammunition, but also food. The ship steams up the inlet between James and Foley

islands. It is broad daylight, everyone on the boat have their eyes on (or in the direction of) the Confederate batteries at Secessionville. Nothing happens for a time. But as the ship gets well within their range, the Planter begins taking hits.

The inlet has become Folly Creek and within minutes, it was clear they may be trapped. They are under fire and the creek is too narrow to turn around.

NICKERSON

Back out of here.

Smalls follows orders but the tide is coming in and the current is swift. In reverse, the ship simply remains in the same place.

SMALLS

We can't back down the stream against the current. The tide.

NICKERSON

Back out of here now!

SMALLS

She can't be steered in reverse and we aren't moving.

The tide current is actually slowly carrying the Planter closer to the guns at Secessionville. The ship is taking furious fire, and the ship does not have any armor to withstand the onslaught. There are wood and splinters flying everywhere.

Captain Nickerson feels that he has no choice but surrender. Smalls is clearly worried about this possibility.

CAPTAIN NICKERSON

(to the white first mate)

The ship is loaded with gunpowder and in a minute one of the confederate shells will find the mark and there will be a huge explosion.

FIRST OFFICER

This nigger has gotten us into this and now can't extract us.

SMALLS

We press on through, supply the garrison and exit the creek here.

Smalls points to the map. Nickerson hardly looks. He has made up his mind not to listen to Smalls.

The strain and dismay on the Captain Nickerson's face is remarkable; he is clearly not much of a fighter.

NICKERSON

(to the first officer)

Continuing will only result in the destruction of ship and unnecessary loss of life. Neither of us want to become a prisoner of war, but that is the only choice other than certain death, and I feel as the Captain it's my duty.

SMALLS

We should press forward until we are out of range.

NICKERSON

Strike colours and raise a white flag.

SMALLS

Don't do it.

Smalls engages the engine moving the ship forward north again and the boat begins to move away down the creek, but the shells are still falling.

Five black members of the crew see it all. Smalls is in a heated argument and an actual physical (pushing and then fists) struggle for control of the wheelhouse. They run to Smalls' assistance.

Smalls is willing to push the First Officer for control of the ship, but when it comes to fists he backs down. Smalls absorbs the blows and the Officer wins control.

The First Officer puts the boat into reverse again and the ship slows. At that very moment a cannon ball decapitates the first officer.

Now the five crew members, loyal to Smalls, arrive at the Wheelhouse. They surround Smalls and the controls.

There is a second White Army officer there who does nothing. He simply watches as Smalls reengages the engine forward.

Smalls says the prayer with eyes open and talking in all directions and aspects of the ship.

SMALLS

(with his crew members)

We Fada wa dey een heaben, leh
everybody honor your name. We pray that
soon ya gwine rule over de world.
Wasoneba ting ya wahn, leh um be so in
dis world, same like dey in heaven.
Give we the food what we need dis day,
yah, an eb'ry(every)day. Forgive we for
we sin, cause we da' forgive dey what
do bad to we. Let we don't hard tests
wen Satan try we. Keep we from evil.

More projectiles from the Confederate guns' crash into the ship, the creek water and the surrounding marsh.

Smalls quickly has the steamer moving at flank speed. He can hardly take his eyes away from the water in front of the ship. The tidal creek is very tight and twisting.

Two more of Smalls' colored crewmen gathered around the wheelhouse.

Smalls loudly explains to the Captain.

SMALLS

You white men risk little in
surrendering, but me and my crew face
execution at the hands of the Rebels
for stealing The Planter. We can not,
under any circumstances, surrender.

The Captain reacts with astonishment and growing rage.

NICKERSON

Nigger, you will hang for this mutiny
and insubordination.

The ship is shattered by cannonballs. Exploding shells burst around them, spewing shrapnel and wood splinters. The Planter continues at flank speed up the river.

NICKERSON

Stop the ship!

Smalls does not react.

NICKERSON

(to the second officer)

Strike colours and hoist a flag of
surrender.

The officer hesitates - frozen. Smalls acts.

SMALLS

(to his black crew)

Take the Captain below and lock him in
the wood hold.

The crew does not hesitate.

The Second Officer has been standing quietly in the Wheelhouse all this time. Now he is looking at the shells explode left and right. He looks at the marsh speeding past. More shells explode. Smalls is determined to steer the ship out of danger.

SECOND OFFICER

We're not going to make it!

The ship steams down the river under even more ferocious fire now, sustaining heavier and heavier damage. It looks as if they are doomed.

However; Smalls is determined and concentrates at the wheel. Suddenly, he turns sharply to starboard, into one of the even more narrow creeks headed east. The crew expects at any moment to run aground and be left entirely at the mercy of the Confederate bombardment, but Smalls keeps the

ship moving at flank speed down an increasingly narrow winding creek.

The second officer stands there sweating, shaking. He expects his life as an officer is finished. He might be incarcerated at best, executed at worst. He appears to be in shock.

Within minutes, Smalls has steamed out of range of the guns. The shells spew up water, marsh grass, and mud behind them.

Finally, it becomes clear that the shells are falling short. They have outrun the danger and then the guns go silent.

Smalls slows the ship and pilots it down the creek carefully.

The second officer stares at Smalls, his eyes as big as saucers.

SMALLS

What are you looking at?

SECOND OFFICER

I have allowed a mutiny on a United States ship of war. I should act to stop it, I know that.

SMALLS

But you are not?

SECOND OFFICER

You are no longer a slave. No longer the coloured pilot of this ship, a civilian in the service of the army. You have, in a space of a couple of minutes, become the commander of the thing. I was not able to react in any appropriate way.

(pause)

No, you are right.

SMALLS

Thank God, you didn't stop me. Had you, we would all be dead.

SECOND OFFICER

Each of us has a role to play. In almost any interaction with any other human being, we must know our place in order to function.

They land the ship and unload the supplies for the garrison on Morris Island.

EXT. GENERAL HUNTERS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The ship has just returned from Morris Island. Several dead bodies are taken from The Planter. We see the headless body of the First Officer. The second officer quickly exits the ship and makes a bee-line for the General's Office.

CREW MEMBER #1

Let's git ouda of here.

SMALLS

No.

CREW MEMBER #1

You locked up a white man! They are gonna hang us.

SMALLS

Where are you going to run to?

CREW MEMBER #1

The country. A northern city. Who cares, there is chaos. Who is going to look for us in a war?

Then, out of the headquarters building, the General emerges. He points to the boat and some armed soldiers begin walking in the direction of The Planter.

Smalls is resigned to be arrested. He leaves the wheelhouse and is standing on the deck waiting for the soldiers to arrive. The soldiers walk past Smalls and down the steps to the wood hold. They bring up Captain Nickerson and escort him to the general.

From the POV of Smalls on the boat, the general is pointing and yelling at the former Captain. Clearly he has been

removed from command. Finally, the guards take the Captain to the guardhouse and lock him up.

INT. STANTON'S OFFICE - DAY

STANTON

And that is when you were appointed
Captain of the Planter?

SMALLS

Yes.

STANTON

And that makes you the first coloured
Captain of a United States ship of war.

SMALLS

If you want to make a big propaganda
point about that, I won't object.

Stanton nods in agreement.

STANTON

Nickerson was later court-martialled
for cowardice under fire.

SMALLS

As well as he should be.

STANTON

Let's do see if the President is
willing to meet us.

(pause)

Is that okay?

SMALLS

That would be wonderful.

Reverend French reaches out and shakes the hand of Smalls.
It seems their immediate goal has been reached.

INT. UNION CLUB - WASHINGTON D.C. HOTEL - DAY - AUGUST 1862

Robert Smalls, lectures the organization. It is something
like the modern day The National Press Club lecture.

SPEAKER

Of course there have been many articles about his daring escape with his steamship from Charleston harbour, under the very guns of the Confederates. When I first meet our guest yesterday, I was not really prepared for what I would find. It was as if a hunter from the jungle has been dressed meticulously by a Fifth Avenue haberdasher for an evening on the town.

The audience is in awe and we actually hear a collective "awe" at the description.

SPEAKER

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Robert Smalls.

The audience enthusiastically applauds.

Sure enough, Smalls has a shiny, new suit. He is well-groomed and perfectly-mannered. I picture him actually as a speaker in the style of today's Ben Carson. He is soft and not a harsh man at all.

He speaks with the accent and the clear diction of a Southern gentleman. If you close your eyes you might think it is Jefferson Davis addressing the group.

There is no visible stage fright, even though the crowd must be four- to five-hundred persons. He is clearly a born politician.

SMALLS

I hold no animosity towards those who had held me in bondage. Actually, I would be in Charleston still today, and I wish it were not being levelled with union artillery. But I was asked to purchase my own yet to be born son. He was at that time unborn, but I was contracted to buy my wife who was carrying our child. So think what you will, but it was a simple business dispute.

(pause)

I had bought my wife, but the owner wanted more money for the unborn infant - \$700.

The audience is flabbergasted.

SMALLS

I understand you have all attended lectures by abolitionists in the past, where the horrors of slavery, the depravity and cruelty of the lash, the indiscriminate rupturing of family ties, are recounted vividly by those who had survived them first hand. I'm afraid I can't measure up to that, my life has actually been blessed.

I can't really speak at all of any aspects of my earlier life; they are not remarkable at all.

I can tell you I was treated in a way to make me think of myself as a free man, rather than a slave.

I was a sailor, first as a rigger, then as a deck hand, and for many years as a wheelman, on steamers along the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. In this manner, although I was a slave, I seemed to have become accustomed to the authority of command and decision-making due to the generosity of a ship's captain.

I'm a river boat captain, and I've faced aquatic challenges beyond those presented to most men. But no one will see anything but profound humility.

I have a profound Christian faith. I understand the only religion allowed by the slave holders among their Negro charges is that based upon the Apostle Paul's admonition to slaves to serve their masters willingly. As Paul was a

slave of Christ, so should the loyal Negro be to his white master.

I can tell you, there were some fervent prayers as I piloted the steamship out of the harbour, past the forts and torpedoes that would almost certainly blow me and my fellow fugitives to eternity. I would not dare such desperate of endeavours without consulting the Lord before, during, and after. And I did.

There was virtually no way we could escape. Any rational man could see that, and I was the most rational of the men. If, by some small chance, we were not killed by the guns or the exploding mines, we would have been publicly tortured to death upon capture. The others, because of this, they took an oath not to be captured alive.

I'm sure my faith and my constant prayer overcame this rationality and this fear of capture. There is in me, the most irrational belief in deliverance by the Almighty - the same Almighty who did deliver me. From my birth, through servitude, and who had held me, my loved ones, my forebears, in said condition quite without hope of recourse up to that point. No matter how unlikely, he did deliver me.

I did take matters into my own hands, and I prayed throughout this journey for deliverance by this same God.

Against all reason, I can attribute our deliverance entirely to that same God. I attribute none of it to my own daring, courage, or skill. And I respectfully hope you don't either.

There is a standing ovation. Smalls is very popular with the group; his voice, his heroism, his intellect, and his demeanor only enforce the key idea that for the unionists/abolitionists this war might be worth fighting.

INT. IRONCLAD WARSHIP KEOKUK - NIGHT - APRIL 1863

Inside, the ironclad warship Keokuk is like a giant tomb. First, it is as hot as an oven. Second it is dark, and finally the sea is rough. In the wheel house above one of the gun turrets stands a Union Navy Captain and his wheelman, Robert Smalls.

CAPTAIN

How did I go from a farm in Indiana to this rolling, stinking, clanging hell off the coast of South Carolina?

SMALLS

What sir?

CAPTAIN

Nothing. It doesn't matter.

(pause)

I understand you have your own ship. That you are a captain yourself.

Yes.

CAPTAIN

I hope you don't begrudge my position.

SMALLS

No, I understand. This is far too expensive a ship to entrust to me. I just drive a tiny wooden boat.

(pause)

Actually, if we are going to get this close to Fort Sumter, I prefer to be at the wheel.

CAPTAIN

I sure hope it works out.

SMALLS

Not a problem, sir. This is a marvellous ship. We should pound the fort to submission.

CAPTAIN

You obviously have extensive knowledge of the harbour.

SMALLS

I did. I grew up here.

CAPTAIN

I know your story. Everyone knows what you did.

(pause)

Why aren't we in the lead of the fleet? We are going to be the last in line.

SMALLS

Does that mean we are last out or first out?

CAPTAIN

It means we are the last out, I'm afraid.

The captain looks out across the swells to the beach and dunes along the shore, toward Fort Wagner - a gruesome pile of sand and logs, bristling with artillery.

SMALLS

You've been in here when they fired the guns?

CAPTAIN

Yes. Once a week we fire the guns.

SMALLS

What's that like?

CAPTAIN

Firing those guns inside this tomb is like sticking your head in a bucket and setting off a stick of dynamite in your teeth.

Smalls breaks out in the biggest belly laugh, his white teeth flashing.

SMALLS

That don't sound like too much fun.

CAPTAIN

I'm sure glad you are here as the pilot. They say you know the waters of Charleston Harbour better than any man.

SMALLS

Thanks, I hope we are in and out. Fast and clean.

CAPTAIN

Do that for us will you?

SMALLS

I will try, sir.

The other officers are in a state of tension. It is December; they are freezing but are still assembled on deck regardless. They know they are steaming into battle. They can see the Union fleet of ironclads rolling before them in the gray. The Keokuk is the last of a line of ships making their way to Fort Sumter.

The Black smoke is rising from the stacks. The rebels can see the line of attack forming up, too. The confederates in the fort are preparing their guns.

The deck is pitching in the cold spray. We hear the boatswain calling a cadence and there is fear in his face as he does.

SMALLS

There will be no surprise in this, no trying to sneak through like the blockade runners in the night.

CAPTAIN

If you know the harbour better than any man in the Navy, why did they have you in the last ship in line?

Everyone moves below deck, with the hatches bolted shut, and the gun ports opened. Then we hear the first gunfire. It rolled across the water like thunder. Boom... Boom... Boom... Spaced apart at first, and then coming thicker and thicker.

Smalls could see Fort Wagner, built of sand and logs. He can see the guns' fire before he hears the boom. First a spout of flame, then a cloud of smoke, then the sound of the gun, then the splash of the ball just short of the Keokuk.

They begin to fire from Sullivan Island. And after a time also from Fort Sumter.

The whole harbor - 20 square miles - are clouded with smoke from the cannons and steamers.

The Keokuk pulls right up to the Fort Sumter and begins to fire their cannon. They are so near, the rebels must to turn their guns down to shoot at the sea.

They are firing the guns as fast as the sailors can load them. All the while, there are rebel cannon balls hitting the side of the ship making a sound inside like the ringing of a huge bell.

A sailor is counting the strike. In the end, the Keokuk is struck with 91 cannon balls.

Then the battle begins, the fort is four stories tall. The battle brings it down to two stories. The Keokuk withdraws with the rest the fleet, but the Keokuk is taking on water. The sailors try to keep her floating.

Finally, the situation is hopeless. They abandon ship. The Captain and Robert are the last men in the freezing water. Fortunately, the union fleet isn't too far. They don't freeze to death or drown. It is however, not a pleasant experience.

EXT. FOLLY ISLAND - THE PLANTER - DAY - MAY 1863

Robert Smalls is back on The Planter. The ship is loaded with black troops for transportation to Folly Island. There are barrels of salt pork, beans and flour aboard, but primarily frightened young novice warriors.

The river is wide, with expanses of green marsh and tall grass spreading along the banks for miles. Beyond were deeply forested islands, only occasionally punctuated by a glimpse of a plantation house or outbuilding. But obviously there is a battle ahead. The sound of it, and the smoke reaches them. The new black soldiers have clearly not seen battle before; their faces are wretched.

Robert leaves the wheelhouse and tours the ship. He looks into the faces of the young men.

A Massachusetts frightened colored soldier reaches out to Robert Smalls.

FRIGHTENED SOLDIER

Excuse me, Captain? You been under fire before?

SMALLS

Cajon.

(On occasion.)

Smalls is preoccupied with the battle. He isn't thinking clearly and answers as he would to a South Carolina Gullah. The soldier looks at him strangely.

SMALLS

Where you from son?

FRIGHTENED SOLDIER

Massachusetts, sir.

SMALLS

Occasionally. I've been fired at occasionally.

The ship stops at Folly Island, where the Union army is encamped. The camp is picturesque. White canvas tents arranged in perfectly straight lines among the palm trees. The dunes are covered in waving sea oats. The soldiers quickly disembark and the supplies are delivered.

The soldiers Robert Smalls has delivered are ordered to assault Fort Wagner. After marching up the sandy, narrow

island, small boats take them across the inlet and they take up their positions in trenches besieging the fort.

Robert Smalls is watching the battle from The Planter through field glasses. Fort Wagner is not an impressive sight. There is a palisade of sharpened palmetto logs ringing it, almost like a frontier fort in the west. Behind that, the sand has been piled into mounds some fifteen or twenty feet high. Smalls can see the Confederates' flag and guns, and here and there the tops of their tents peek over the dunes.

The bombardment begins. Six monitors closed within a quarter mile of the beach, and for the next seven or eight hours they unleashed a continual bombardment on the fort. The bombardment of these sand walls is negligible.

There was no sign of the rebels. The shells exploded in their fort, spewing clouds of sand into the air.

The black soldiers arise out of the trenches. They attack the wall of the fort. And suddenly a brutal rebel firing commences. Smalls can see the rebel troops massing now along the tops of the sand walls, emerging from the shelters where they have weathered the bombardment. Black men began falling by the dozens and then the hundreds. For most, their moment of heroism lasts only seconds. The remaining brave troops press forward.

Robert Smalls is near enough for several spent bullets strike the Planter.

The black soldiers fight to the top of the tall sand fort. Then they tumble in retreat back down it, across the moat, scrambling through the sand dunes, attempting to drag their wounded, being mowed down by incessant fire. The screaming of the wounded and dying is horrible.

Finally, in the pitch dark, the firing stops. Fort Wagner remains in rebel hands.

The next day, Robert Smalls watches the rebels bury piles of corpses in front of the fort. There are thousand of bodies in one long, shallow, sand pit.

The next day there is more Union bombardment and it unearths these rotting corpses of the dead. Smalls watches

them tumbling through the air, whole or in pieces, along with the sand churned up from each blast.

REBEL SOLDIER

Damn, those dead niggers smell.

Soon the stench becomes unbearable; the rebels are forced to abandon their position. They evacuate Fort Wagner by boat in the dark of night.

Robert Smalls leaves his ship to tour the battlefield. He witnesses the Union rebury the remains as best they can.

The union then rebuilds the fortifications, and they begin the bombardment of Charleston. This is the end of Mrs. Levy's hotel.

We see the continuous bombardment of downtown Charleston. The range of their guns ran nearly as high up the peninsula as Broad Street, and all the fine homes south of Broad are reduced to rubble.

Most of the town relocates to Ansonborough, where they are safely out of range.

INT. BEAUFORT HOME - DAY - 1863

Smalls receives an order by messenger.

SMALLS

I have to take The Planter to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard for refitting.

HANNAH

You can do that, right?

SMALLS

I know the waters of South Carolina and Georgia better than any Navy cartographer has ever drawn them. But, to handle a sextant or compute a sight, that is an entirely a new thing. And my navigating from South Carolina to Philadelphia is ridiculous.

HANNAH

Tell them you are busy.

SMALLS

You can't tell the Army that. It doesn't work that way.

(pause)

And it is dangerous. The Planter herself is not suited for that voyage. Her low free board, shallow draft, wide beam, and top-heavy house would make her a death trap in a Hatteras gale. The mission is a suicide run.

HANNAH

Well then it is hard to believe no one up the Army had the where-with-all to trash that order.

Smalls is a bit angry - perhaps at the Army or at himself for being illiterate.

HANNAH

Robert, you are by far one of the cleverest men I've ever known.

Suddenly Smalls has an idea. He bolts from the room. He remembers, and returns to kiss Hannah.

INT/EXT. SHIP - PORT ROYAL, SC. - DAY

Smalls is standing before a British merchant officer.

CAPTAIN

I know who you are, and I am amazed at your request. You have three weeks to prepare for the voyage? Three weeks in which you will have your normal duties?

SMALLS

I want you to teach me all I will need to know to navigate the Planter to Philadelphia.

CAPTAIN

I can try, but I'm at a loss exactly how to teach you what you needed to

know in that period of time. It takes years to learn.

SMALLS

But I must insist, that we keep our lessons confidential.

CAPTAIN

Quite rightly!
(pause)
We begin tonight?

SMALLS

Probably should.

CAPTAIN

Bring that sextant.

Robert takes the sextant from its wooden box and follows the Captain to the deck. The British Captain is somewhat philosophical and simply spills it all at the climb the stairs to the deck. Smalls follows.

CAPTAIN

I have long felt that there is a special hatred for the Negro in the American. Why this should be, I have never fathomed. The Indian must be exterminated. The Chinaman is a subhuman that must be exploited for labor. But they have a special hatred for the Negro. The poor Negroes are so beaten down, so broken, you would think the whites would pity, rather than despise them. Why would one not despise the plutocrat and feel compassion for the downtrodden? But, this is distinctly not the American way. The average American, unlettered, rough-hewn, and rough-mannered as he is, thinks of his wealthy oppressor as his friend and hero. The poor man he thinks of as a problem, and the lowly Negro is a thing to be feared, despised, and humiliated at every opportunity. This is as much a part of American culture

as the Fourth of July. It is perhaps a defining component of American culture.

Once on the deck...

CAPTAIN

There's nothing mystical or complicated about a sextant. All it is, is a device that measures the angle between two objects. The sextant allows celestial objects to be measured relative to the horizon. This allows for excellent precision.

Robert listens intently.

CAPTAIN

To measure the sun's altitude, stand facing the sun with the sextant in your right hand. With your left hand on the quick release levers of the index arm, look through the eyepiece at the horizon and move the index arm until the sun is visible through the two mirrors and index shades.

Robert fumbles about it, but the Captain is patient.

The crew who are cleaning the deck at the other end of the ship, pause to watch. They look confounded at their captain teaching a black to use a sextant.

CAPTAIN

What are you looking at? Get back to work!

INT/EXT. SHIP - PORT ROYAL, SC. - DAY

MONTAGE

Smalls is working sight mathematics with difficulty. The Captain corrects the work.

On deck, we see them practicing the use of the sextant from the steady deck of his ship anchored in the Beaufort River.

We see Smalls working his way through the tables and computing the lines of position with more ease.

In the Captain's quarters, there are a dozen books out on the desk and the Captain is quizzing Smalls from them. The names of the capes, towns, lights and islands.

Smalls asks various questions - what vegetation the shore had, what elevation it has. If he doesn't know then the Captain looks the information up in a book and relays it to Smalls. Smalls asks about the color of the water, its depth, the currents, and the way the sea rose and fell in which wind patterns at each location.

Smalls has studied the pictures of the lighthouses in a book and the Captain quizzes him. He is excellent at identifying light houses.

END MONTAGE

Three weeks later ...

The Captain and Robert Smalls are standing over a chart.

CAPTAIN

Okay from south to north beginning with Charleston.

Robert turns away and is quizzed. He has memorized the ports from the map.

SMALLS

Charleston
Wilmington NC
Norfolk
Newport News
Baltimore
Wilmington DE
Chester
Philadelphia

CAPTAIN

And?

SMALLS

Philadelphia is as far as I'm going.

CAPTAIN

Other men seek to limit you. Why would you limit yourself?

SMALLS

Perth Amboy
Newark
New York
New Haven
Providence
Boston
Portsmouth
Portland

CAPTAIN

Excellent! When your silly war is over you can come work for me.

(pause)

You are as able a navigator as any green lieutenant emerging from any naval academy.

Both teacher and student are happy and this is something of a graduation ceremony.

EXT. THE PLANTER - DELAWARE BAY - DAY - 1863

The Planter hails a pilot off of the entrance to Delaware Bay three days after its departure from Port Royal.

PILOT

Where are you coming from?

SMALLS

Port Royal, South Carolina.

PILOT

Wow, all that way.

SMALLS

Here in three days. Seen a lot of lighthouses.

The pilot surveys the battle damage to the ship.

PILOT

You encounter anything untoward?

SMALLS

Not a thing.

PILOT

Lucky it is a long voyage up that treacherous, war-torn coast.

SMALLS

Oh, I've seen fighting around Charleston, but nothing up to here.

PILOT

Glad you are here safe. Sit back and relax. It is my job to bring her in. Really, sir. Just don't worry. I won't hurt your baby! But it looks like she's already been hurt.

EXT. STREETCAR - PHILADELPHIA PA - DAY

Captain Smalls, in his Captain's uniform, is riding on a streetcar on his way into town from the Philadelphia Naval Yard.

ELDERLY LADY

You are that negro captain!

SMALLS

I am a negro and a captain too. Yes, ma'am.

ELDERLY LADY

No, you are THE negro captain! That the famous negro who stole his ship from the Confederates.

SMALLS

Yes, but how did you know it was me that took the boat?

ELDERLY LADY

Well, really? How many Negro captains are there?

Suddenly, the street car screeches to a halt. The conductor walks aback. He speaks to Robert Smalls quietly and respectfully.

CONDUCTOR

I'm sorry, sir.

ELDERLY LADY

Captain! He's a navy Captain!

SMALLS

Army.

CONDUCTOR

A city ordinance prohibits negroes riding on a public conveyance.

SMALLS

Really?

ELDERLY LADY

He's the famous negro captain. He stole an entire ship from the rebels.

SMALLS

I'll walk.

CONDUCTOR

I'm sorry. I'm just doing my job. I don't want to get fired.

ELDERLY LADY

You can't do that; he is a war hero!

CONDUCTOR

Lady, I'm ...

Smalls exits the streetcar and is a block down the street and the lady is still arguing with the conductor.

ELDERLY LADY

The ordinance is ill-advised and should be changed.

As Robert Smalls walks in the streets, we see that Philadelphia is a haven for runaway slaves. We encounter so many in a short time, we realize that the city probably

could not function in its current state without their labor as cooks, maids, stewards, delivery boys, gardeners, and so forth.

Captain Smalls visits a shop. He purchases some things for his wife and children, kitchen tools and knives and toys. The owner rarely has encountered such a distinguished man as Smalls.

When Smalls exits the shop, the owner comments to his wife..

OWNER

Such individuals are a rarity in their race, but must we upset the natural order of society to make room for the rare exception?

WIFE

What in the world will we do with all these negroes if they are, indeed, freed?

EXT. HARBOUR AND SOUTHERN WARF - DAY - 1864

The war is over and Robert brings the USS Planter steams back into Charleston, overloaded to the gunwales with drunken African Americans and carpetbag-toting Yankees. Coming into the harbor is a huge celebration of their victory.

The southerners watch as if they are in a nightmare.

The ship comes steaming in from Fort Sumter, absolutely overflowing with people. There are one thousand people on The Planter, carrying on the wildest celebration. The southerners can hear cheering and singing a mile away as they approach the Southern Pier. This is the same pier where the ship had been stolen years before.

Smalls himself is the captain again but he is not at the wheel. He is standing on the quarter deck with his family. The drunken celebrating wheelman can't avoid a crash when another steamer approaches the dock. It isn't a serious crash but it sends the crowd scrambling to the far sides of each ship. The ship rolls as the crowd moves, and for a moment The Planter might capsize.

Smalls runs up a flight of stairs to the Wheelhouse and takes the wheel. He backs the ship away, with a crunching and tearing of wood, and the rowdy crowd cheers him.

He steps out of the wheelhouse and waved his hat, quite the dandy.

The Captain of the other ship is a southerner. He surveys the damage to his ship, which isn't severe.

SOUTHERNER

It's that god-damned nigger again. Damn uppity baboon.

Smalls brings his ship to the pier as the crowd cheers and a Yankee band plays welcoming them.

SOUTHERNER #2

The inmates have taken over the asylum.
We are to live the next decade or more
in a state ruled by these drunken,
carousing darkies?

The Southerners are disgusted. Smalls however is jubilant.

EXT. CHARLESTON STREETS - DAY - 1864

Charleston sees the first Yankee soldiers marching up East Bay. The 54th Massachusetts is a sharp phalanx of colored men in new blue uniforms. They march with white Union officers at the head of each company. They march up the street to drums and fifes, the Stars and Stripes flying in front of them. You can imagine the look on the southern faces.

Robert and his family "struts" through streets as a conqueror. Clearly, Captain Smalls has a feeling of patriotism.

Many of the former slaves have returned. They run in the streets, cheering and dancing and singing, as if the whites don't even exist. Most whites are watching from upstairs windows and balconies, afraid to be on the street level.

This is a great scene if done properly. On one hand you have the chaos of the freed slaves and the fear of the new "black anarchy". But, at the same time we have colored

soldiers very orderly marching down the main street with their white officers leading them. We see the American flag and hear Yankee Doodle Dandy playing on the fifes. There is plenty of contrast in the two picture merged in this scene.

As the camera pans away from the street, we see the destruction the Union Army shelling has brought. It is far worse than the fire before the war. The shelling has leveled the Levy hotel.

Mrs. Levy leaves the slave shack in the backyard.

Mrs. Levy meets Robert in the street by accident, in front of the destroyed Hotel.

SMALLS

Mrs. Levy, ma'am. How are you?

Robert looks at her; Mrs. Levy has aged 20 years in the 4 years of war. And Robert looks at the hotel in ruins.

LEVY

This war has been the darkest period of my life. And after you left and opened up the assault on Charleston, the slaughter and the shelling and battles made life even worse.

(pause)

The shelling has stopped of course, but there was not enough food, and no one has any money.

Robert can't take his eyes off the collapsed hotel. Smalls eyes begin to tear up.

SMALLS

I'm very sorry about the hotel. If I played any part in this destruction, I'm very sorry. You are a good, honest woman. I never even thought of you as the enemy. Never occurred to me to harm you, or this street.

LEVY

(to Hannah)

I can see he has lost none of the
charisma.

HANNAH

Oh, no. He's lost nothing.

LEVY

I drew up the papers and took your
money, realizing I myself might be
breaking the law in having drawn up
such a contract. Slaves were
prohibited, by state law, from owning
any real or personal property. But who
would know, right?

Mrs. Levy without a hotel, without being too forward, is
angling for some money.

SMALLS

We appreciate everything you did for
us. Saw us properly married. It was the
greatest day of my life.

LEVY

(under her breath)

Others would say different.

(to Robert)

The money I'm owed is uncollectable?

SMALLS

Utterly.

LEVY

You seemed to be such decent people.

SMALLS

We were slaves.

LEVY

Even in defeat, I cannot help but like
you. I can't celebrate your freedom;
look at my Hotel, but there is a spot
of happiness in my heart.

(to Hannah)

And Hannah you seem almost as happy as
he. Nothing in me begrudges you this.

(to Robert)

I loved you two.
(to Hannah)
Look into my own soul, I admit I love
you two still.

HANNAH
We love you too, Mrs. Levy.

LEVY
Thank you. Thank you.

The street is very crowded, and the crowd is bumping into the Smalls family. The Smalls family begins to move away with the flow of the crowd.

Mrs. Levy turns back to watch the Smalls family in the Street. The family has stopped and Smalls seems to be introducing a Yankee general to Mr. Ferguson and Captain Relyea - the men from whom Smalls stole the ship. From a distance it is clear that Smalls talks with the white men as if he were a welcome guest in their own home. Now that the war has finished, every businessman seems to have the most courteous manners.

LEVY
(mumbling and out of ear shot)
You've got to be a damn fool to love a
nigger.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - AFTER THE WAR - DAY - 1867

There is a tax auction. There is bidding back and forth. It appears that Robert Smalls is going to win.

One white member of the crowd lives next door.

NEIGHBOUR
I'm gonna have a black man for my next-
door neighbour!

CITIZEN
This the house where he lived as a
young slave?

NEIGHBOUR
Damn prize money the Yankees paid him
for stealing The Planter, I hear.

CITIZEN

He will be living there with his mother,
wife, and children, I guarantee it.

NEIGHBOUR

He will be living better than me as a
Yankee ship captain.

CITIZEN

The world has turned upside down.

The bidding ends and Smalls is the winner.

AUCTIONEER

And the winner is Robert Smalls. If you
will be at the county tax office in the
morning, please sir.

Robert Smalls nods. He isn't jubilant just poker
faced. He is careful not to gloat.

AUCTIONEER

And now if you will all walk with me to
the next home up for auction. It is
just two blocks in ... that direction.

However, Smalls walks right up on the porch as the crowd is
walking away and sits in McKee's old rocking chair.

The citizen leaves with the rest of the crowd, presumably
to the next house. But, he looks back at the neighbor and
Smalls. The neighbor seems to be pointing toward his home
next door, extending his hand to shake and introducing
himself. Everything seems cordial on the surface and from a
distance.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - AFTER THE WAR - DAY

Beaufort homes are in disrepair after the war. The owners
have been bankrupted, or killed in the rebel army. The
yards and gardens are grown up and the paint on the homes
has faded and chipped.

Six days later, Smalls is sitting on the porch again.

There are painters and workers milling about the house. We can see that Smalls' house is quickly in better repair than the other houses in Beaufort.

Smalls' former owner, MRS. MCKEE (73), appears at the house. She is hiding behind a tree, watching Smalls and the workers. She had been widowed since 1849; she is older and mentally diminished. She is physically exhausted from wondering the streets. She is destitute.

We see her sneaking around the trees in the front yard. She is afraid to approach.

Finally, she works up her nerve. She walks right up on the front porch as if she still owned the place. Smalls is taken aback but doesn't flinch for long.

MRS. MCKEE

Boy, stop lolly gagging' and get to work.

SMALLS

Yes, ma'am.

Smalls tips his hat to the elderly woman.

Smalls remains in the chair and Mrs. McKee enters the home. She storms past Hannah who has been cleaning her new home.

MRS. MCKEE

I'm ill and I'm going to lay down.

(to Hannah)

Finish your work, Lydia. And then you rest also. You have been a very good worker.

Mrs. McKee walks to the master bedroom on the second floor and lays down on the bed.

Hannah walks out to the front porch.

HANNAH

She is in there laying on our bed.

SMALLS

Amazing.

HANNAH
She out of her head.

SMALLS
She's old. She was old when I was born.

HANNAH
That don't mean nothing.

SMALLS
The humiliation must have been beyond bearing.

HANNAH
What are you going to do?

SMALLS
I'm not sure she has her wits enough to survive out there. Her husband's been dead since I was a boy. Her son died in the war.

HANNAH
She called me by your momma's name.

SMALLS
She seems to entertain the delusion that she is mistress and owner of the home still. My momma worked in this house you know.

HANNAH
Well?

SMALLS
We can be gracious.
(pause)
Let her be. This is a very large house. Our family has the rest of the place.

Hannah is not happy but she is a shy diminutive woman. She doesn't bicker. She reluctantly nods and returns inside.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - DAY - 1867

A young white man approaches Smalls' house on some business. He finds Smalls sitting in a rocking chair on the

front porch. Smalls had become by that time, a portly, older man. His hair is graying.

WHITE MAN

You the negro man who owns the plantation on Lady's Island and that store downtown?

Smalls bristles. He rises to his full height from his chair.

SMALLS

I own three plantations. And I own this house and ten rental houses too.

WHITE MAN

No offence sir. I'm here on business. My father left me his marine store down at the dock. And I was wondering if you wanted to purchase it.

SMALLS

Why me?

WHITE MAN

You are in the state legislature, right? As much as I've heard you excoriated or praised for your politics, I never heard anyone accuse you of dishonesty in business dealings.

There is a long pause.

SMALLS

We might be able to work something out. Come up here and sit down.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - NIGHT

We see Mrs. McKee who is clinging to life brushing her hair by lantern light.

EXT. BEAUFORT SIDEWALK - DAY - 1867

Just as Robert Smalls is walking by on the sidewalk, a white man is thrown out of a barbershop.

BARBER

Scalawag!

REPUBLICAN

This is the first time anyone has called me a "scalawag" to my face.

Robert Smalls stops to visit with the man.

REPUBLICAN

I just walked in there and there is this fat white lawyer in his suit sitting in the corner, and he said out loud, to everybody, "Well, and here come the scalawags."

REPUBLICAN

Maybe I should a called him outside?

SMALLS

No, no. You are an elected member of the legislature, and you did right to just carry yourself like you are above it.

REPUBLICAN

Truth be told, I am above it.

(pause)

I am a member of the Republican party. I seen the tide a shiftin', and if a man can't go where the wind blows, then he oughtn't be out in the wind.

SMALLS

That's where a politician is all the time, out in the wind, a tryin' to make his way like a sailor on the sea. You go where the wind will take you.

REPUBLICAN

Course, right now, the wind is blowin out of the north, and if a man is to run for public office in South Carolina, which I'd always had a hankering to do, then he might as well count on joinin up with the Republicans.

(pause)

Now, the fact of the matter was, and it still is, that the majority of the population of South Carolina is coloreds. And if them coloreds are free men, and citizens of the United States of America, which the Constitution of the United States says they are, like it or not, it wouldn't be any great surprise to find that most of the Representatives in the state legislature would turn out to be colored after a free and clear election.

(pause)

Say, you ought to run for the state house.

(pause)

We can use a good man like you.

SMALLS

I never really thought too much about it before now.

EXT. HOTEL IN COLUMBIA SC - DAY - 1867

Robert Smalls enters a hotel banquet room with his white state legislator friend. They pass a sign that says "Republican Party in South Carolina".

MINISTER

Certainly aren't many people here.

SMALLS

This is the first meeting. No worries, pastor, we will grow.

POV a journalist on the other side of the room who is watching Smalls. At this first meeting, Smalls is in an element to which he was clearly unaccustomed. We can never guess from this scene Smalls will become the eloquent, fiery politician.

Smalls is far from the most talkative man in the assembly, and he may feel hampered by his own lack of education. Various papers are being handed around the room, Smalls

looks interested but it causes Smalls to ponder. Smalls seems distracted and off in space.

SPEAKER

Politics is a dirty business, unfortunately, and in the years to come after the war, it will become far dirtier than any of you can imagine. But I remember The Planter and think Brother Smalls can tell us something about that.

Suddenly Smalls is called upon to speak. He isn't the smooth talking man we expect. He is nervous.

SMALLS

Mr. Lincoln was a saint. The Great Emancipator. As a receiver of the Emancipator's gifts, we must do everything in our power to spread, cultivate, and maintain that gift in this world and amongst the future generations.

Smalls sits. There are times when a man speaks the simple truth and audience just falls silent.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - DAY

We see a tutor visit Smalls' home every morning. We see him teaching Smalls how to read and write. And after the tutor leaves Smalls studiously reads a newspaper.

EXT. COLUMBIA SC - DAY - 1867

It is the convention called to write a new state constitution. Many of the delegates are black and the other mostly white Republicans. There are a few token Democrats. One of the old school southerners has the floor. He speaks but there are hoots and hollers and he is heckled. But the bitter man continues to speak.

DEMOCRATIC DELEGATE

A convention is gathered here in Columbia to write a new constitution, so that we, at the point of a bayonet, may submit to rejoin the Union.

Virtually no whites- none of my personal acquaintance- have voted for delegates to this sham gathering. I understand the majority of the delegates are ignorant darkies, field hands and barbers and blacksmiths, gathered now in fine suits of clothes to rewrite our state constitution.

(pause)

The new constitution, I hear, gives near universal suffrage to the Negro, placing our government in the hands of illiterate former slaves, who by their sheer numbers will drive us toward chaos and oblivion. Universal, free education is promised. As if these nincompoops could be taught anything. They plan to take the spawn of the ignorant bluegum, send him to a school, and convert him into something other than the field hand he was born to be?

(pause)

The absurdity of the current situation evades imagination.

(pause)

No good will come of it. No good could possibly come of it. The able statesmen and politicians of our noble state are simply biding their time, awaiting the hour when reason will prevail and law and order are once again restored.

Robert Smalls sits quietly. He might hoot and interrupt the speaker like the others, but he knows the Republicans will win any vote. He is very dignified. Actually, the majority is clearly blacks and scalawags and they will write the new state constitution.

What is film worthy in this scene is not Smalls' speech, but that of the opposition.

However, there was one interesting part of Smalls participation. At the same constitutional convention...

SMALLS

I would like to propose that the illegitimate children of white fathers

and Negro mothers be given legal status
as heirs of the white fathers.

The mostly white (both Democratic and Republican)
convention delegates roundly laugh at that particular
proposal. Without white votes everything is out of
consideration. The black delegates in the room do not
laugh and many gesture their appreciation to Smalls.

Many of the delegates are mulatto - sons of their former
white owners.

INT. STATE LEGISLATURE - DAY - 1868

Robert Smalls is a legislator giving a speech on the floor.

SMALLS

Whereas, thirty states of the American
Union have ratified the fifteenth
Amendment to the Constitution of the
United States; and whereas, this action
of the American people fixes our
government firmly on the side of right,
and makes it a beacon of light to the
nations of the earth, and our flag the
emblem of liberty, and the aegis of
every citizen beneath its fold
throughout the length and breadth of
our land and the world over, and
whereas, it is eminently proper that
this great event should be hailed with
joy and thanksgiving; therefore:

Be it resolved... that, as an expression
of our deep sense of gratitude to the
Almighty God for this victory of right,
and in honour of this event, His
Excellency, the Governor, be requested
to set apart a day of Thanksgiving and
prayer immediately after the official
notice of the ratification has been
promulgated.

INT. SMALLS' GENERAL STORE - DAY

A black farmer enters Smalls store in Beaufort. Smalls is
always smiling and welcoming to clients and others.

FARMER

My God, Captain Smalls, Klan came for me last night.

The smile is erased from Smalls' face and he listens.

EXT. RURAL AREA OUTSIDE OF BEAUFORT - NIGHT

The Klu Klux Klan has begun terrorizing the black population.

The black farmer and family sneak out the back of the house and into a cornfield.

They burn a cross and then the house and ride into the night.

INT. SMALLS' GENERAL STORE - DAY

Smalls gathers a lamp, cooking pot, forks and spoons, a canvas tarp (tent), a bag of rice and puts it all in a box on the counter. He takes a wad of paper money and gives it to the farmer.

The farmer just can't believe it.

FARMER

Thank you, Captain Smalls. Thank you.

EXT. BEAUFORT ARMOURY - DAY

The local militia is headed by Robert Smalls. It is official and part of the South Carolina State Militia. Now it is General Smalls'.

The black militia meet every Saturday morning. They arm themselves to the teeth with the most modern of rifles. Every man (black or white) gets a little giddy with a new weapon. They march through the streets in their brand new, clean blue uniforms. Their super shined brass buckles and buttons gleaming in the sunlight. General Smalls has the best of the uniforms, and he strides in front up and down the streets.

EXT. BEAUFORT FUNERAL - DAY

Smalls has organized a brass band - the Allen Street Band. His band has a set of uniforms similar to, but more spectacular, than the militia, with belts and buckles and buttons that were bigger and shinier and more audacious. The band members all have brass helmets, polished until they sparkle. On top are long white egret feathers that swayed and dance as they marched.

General Smalls' band plays a funeral. We see Smalls slowly stride at the head of that band as it marches (morns) down the street. The funeral procession leads to the graveyard and the band traditionally plays slow, doleful music.

After the burial, the band explodes in joy. Smalls steps high, and his jowls giggle to the music. Smalls brandishes his sword as if it is a band leader's baton. He doesn't walk down the street with his band; he dances down the street.

INT. WHITE STATE LEGISLATOR'S HOME - NIGHT - 1868

Robert Smalls has to work with these people - Republicans and Democrats. He simply is there; he is polite and listening to all the nostalgia. It seems that the host POLITICIAN is taking the men on a tour of his home. They stop the tour at a framed map on the wall.

POLITICIAN

My father served in the 13th South Carolina infantry. I've of course known him my all my life. His folding desk stands in the living room. A framed map entitled "The Seat of War in South Carolina" hangs in our hallway, marked by his sweat stains. He carried it in the breast pocket of his uniform. His name and rank - Lieutenant - are written in cursive on the back. My mother spoke of these items often and explained their significance to me.

They move to a different room.

POLITICIAN

His powder horn is hanging by the fireplace. It isn't really a horn. It is a metal bottle with a brass spout on

one end. There is a trigger on the spout that discharged the correct amount of powder for the rifle. My mother showed me how it worked, and I was fascinated by it as a boy.

The politician turns to Smalls. It is something of a test question to determine if he can be one of the inside gang of politicians. Will he get-along and go-along with the crew? Several eyes are on Smalls.

POLITICIAN
(to Smalls)
So what do you think?

Pause. Smalls contemplates what anything other than a positive response will mean.

SMALLS
Impressive.

That seems to have been the correct answer.

POLITICIAN
(to everyone)
He was on the front lines of nearly every major battle of the war in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, all the way up to the surrender at Appomattox.

EXT. BEAUFORT STREET - DAY - 1870

It is July 4th and there is a parade.

Smalls is a Major General in the militia, which gives him the opportunity to dress in a flashy uniform and arm a phalanx of similarly-dressed blacks to march behind him in parades.

WHITE
(sarcastically)
Look at him, the King of Beaufort County.

Beaufort County is a very black part of the state. And the county has a four-fifths black majority.

Smalls of course is wealthy. He has a number of businesses and investments. The blacks in Beaufort look up to him as a war hero, a savior, a god of sorts. When Smalls arrives in the parade, they cheer, wave small flags, and dance.

EXT. BEAUFORT COUNTY COURT HOUSE LAWN - DAY - 1874

Smalls is the founder of a marching brass band, which he produced for public performances on any convenient occasion. There is a political rally. We see and hear his delightful band, playing the liveliest music in an upbeat fashion. The crowd starts clapping, swaying and dancing, transported by the rhythm. Smalls bounces as he leads the band, smiling and lording over his exultant subjects. The music ends and Smalls becomes rather dignified and walks to the rostrum.

SMALLS

Friends, distinguished associates, fellow Americans. Ten years ago the Constitution of this nation was changed and a few simple, eloquent, and unequivocal words were added. The amendments will long be stencilled on the mental sheets of succeeding generations. For all men of goodwill, those amendments are a joyous daybreak to end the long night of human captivity. They came as a great beacon of light and hope to millions of disinherited people throughout the world who had dared only to dream of freedom.

(pause)

Unfortunately, this noble and sublime amendment has not gone without opposition. This opposition has often risen to ominous proportions. Many states have risen up in open defiance. The legislative halls of the South ring loud with such words as "interposition" and "nullification."

(pause)

But even more, all types of conniving methods are still being used to prevent black Americans from becoming

registered voters. The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic tradition. And so my most urgent request to you is to get out and exercise your right to vote.

(pause)

Give us your ballot, do not stay home, and we will no longer have to worry the government about our other basic rights. Voting can be heard in Washington and Columbus and inside the County Court House here in Beaufort County. But you have to help us, by voting.

The black crowd goes wild and the band plays again.

Clearly Smalls has magic over the black voters of Beaufort County. And of course, This makes him a demon to the whites of South Carolina. The whites in the crowds for the most part are silent.

INT. US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - DAY - 1877

Robert Smalls is a U.S. Congressman.

SMALLS

Everyone knows about the massacre - the massacre at Little Big Horn. And every member of this House knows the public outrage across the United States. I mean, blond-haired white men have been murdered. We must resist this hysteria to pull U. S. Army units out of the South and send them to the West to fight the Indians.

(pause)

Let me plead, the Army units are the only thing standing between Southern blacks and widespread slaughter.

(pause)

Let me relate what has happened in my home state... I have a letter here from an eye witness.

EXT. HAMBURG SC - DAY - 1876

There is a parade and Centennial Celebration of the Declaration of Independence. The parade is about to begin and a Negro militia is drilling on the public street when a white planter demands to pass through in his carriage.

PLANTER

Get them damn niggers out of the way!
The parade isn't for an hour.

The black commander of the colored militia refuses.

PLANTER

Now, nigger!

The commander refuses to take this order from a passing citizen, a mere civilian.

PLANTER

I'm gonna whip you here in public,
uniform or not, if you don't get these
niggers out of my way!

One white man in the crowd sees this, turns his back and runs down the street to the saloon for some white help.

The militia, dressed in their fancy uniforms, move to the side behind the commander. They fear he will be whipped so they move. When the commander sees the soldiers have moved out of the way, he relents.

There is a short disturbance but the planter in the carriage is eventually allowed to pass. But that doesn't end things.

A Democratic politician, TILLMAN, in a saloon hears the circulating story and seizes the opportunity.

TILLMAN

What? They didn't let him pass.

RUMOUR MONGER

No! They didn't; he is still out there
waiting for them.

Tillman rouses a rabble of Red Shirt (white) militia.
Tillman takes a bottle over to an old Confederate General
drinking at a table.

TILLMAN

You take these men and get back some of
our southern pride.

The half drunk General leads the rabble into action against
the black militia.

After the parade, the Red Shirts attack, chase and corner
the black militiamen into the town hall.

GENERAL

(half drunk)

We have re-established the rule of the
white man in this corner of Edgefield
county!

After they are besieged in the town hall for a while, the
blacks surrender.

MILITIA COMMANDER

We are coming out.

They exit the building with white handkerchiefs.

MILITIA COMMANDER

We are walking away.

After the black militiamen surrendered, the Red Shirts
summarily shot half a dozen of them in their backs as they
walk away.

INT. US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - DAY - 1877

The letter Congressman Smalls is reading was anonymous.

SMALLS

(reading letter)

I'm a witness of these events. The
Hamburg coloured militiamen were
murdered.

A fellow Congressman (a Democrat) challenged him several
times in the debate to supply the name of the author.

DEMOCRAT

Supply the name of the author of this alleged letter.

SMALLS

I will say to the gentleman, if he is desirous that the name shall be given in order to have another Negro killed, he will not get it from me.

This is greeted with great applause on the floor of the House.

DEMOCRAT

The people of South Carolina are hopping mad!

SMALLS

Why? I just told the truth about what happened in Hamburg.

DEMOCRAT

Listen, there are things you talk about, and things you don't.

EXT. EDGEFIELD SC - DAY - 1878

There will be a political rally soon. The Republican (carpet bagging) Governor CHAMBERLAIN, and Smalls exit the train to campaign.

There is a huge crowd of blacks out to meet them. There are several thousand of them gathered around the train station, waiting for their heroes to speak.

But at the same time there are several hundred armed, white militiamen in red shirts there.

As Chamberlain and Smalls walk down the train station to the rally..

GOVERNOR CHAMBERLAIN

I thought you said this was a black area.

SMALLS

It is. These Red Shirts are outsiders.

GOVERNOR CHAMBERLAIN

This doesn't look good.

SMALLS

We better face the fact that one white man with a gun can handle all my black friends without much trouble. They'll fall in line and leave if just one starts waving a gun around.

As they walk past, Red Shirts shout insults at them.

RED SHIRT #1

Chamberlain, you the chief of all the thieving Republicans.

RED SHIRT #2

You been looting our state for eight years.

RED SHIRT #3

Yankee!

RED SHIRT #4

Harvard man, go home!

Chamberlain tries and tries to give his speech, but they keep shouting him down. The black crowd tries to applaud but the red shirts make their guns more obvious and the crowd is subdued. Every time Chamberlain tries to speak, the whites shut him up, shout him down.

After a while, the Whites start calling for Smalls. Red Shirts are...

RED SHIRTS

Kill the nigger!

Finally, the Red Shirts started moving into the crowd with their rifles, dispersing the blacks and white Republicans who have showed up. Smalls supporters are scattered in all directions, leaving their leaders alone and in some danger up on the platform.

And then the platform itself starts rocking. The platform rocks back and forth. It is Red Shirts; they have five or six men under the platform and are starting to chant in time..

RED SHIRTS
Heave, heave, heave...

The supports crack, and the back of the platform starts sinking towards the ground.

Governor Chamberlain and Congressman Smalls manage to get off the half collapsed platform and run inside the train station. The Governor then boards the train headed to Columbia. A bunch of Red Shirts get on the train with him. Another bunch run into the station looking for Smalls. Smalls has disappeared.

The Red Shirts give Chamberlain hell on the ride back to Columbia. One Red Shirt repeats saying..

RED SHIRT
Wasn't that Congressman Robert Smalls?
Where is that's the famous nigger
Congressman. I just want to ki----

He makes it sound like he is going to say, "kill him," but then he'd say..

RED SHIRT
Kiss him!

CHAMBERLAIN
I'm the duly appointed Governor of this state and we may have some political differences but that is no reason for you to threaten anyone.

OTHER RED SHIRTS
(to each other)
I just want to kiss him. Don't you just want to kiss the Congressman?

Chamberlain takes it like a man, the Red Shirts have guns and the governor has brought only one security man. He has his hand on his pistol, but they are surrounded by eight or more Red Shirts.

Smalls is no coward. We learn he has simply boarded the baggage car of the train. We see him riding comfortably talking to the black baggage handlers. It appears he is unaffected by the event. It is all par for the course. He arrives in Columbia alive.

EXT. COLUMBIA TRAIN STATION - DAY

The red shirts exit the train and storm off toward the nearest saloon. Smalls exits the baggage car. Governor Chamberlain exits also.

They make eye contact on the platform. Smalls waves at the governor and chuckles a bit. The Governor waves back reluctantly, not enthusiastically. He has been frightened. Chamberlain finally chuckles at the smile and "unshakeability" of Smalls.

EXT. DAY - BEAUFORT HOME - 1879

Congressman Smalls has come home during a recess. He is sitting on the front porch of his home. A large, white policeman walks up to the porch. There are other police with him. They are dressed in ill-fitting, woolen suits. They are armed with the writ, which in this case is worth more than a weapon. They are armed with "whiteness" also.

HANNAH

My Husband is a United States
Congressman.

POLICEMEN

No man is above the law. This is an
arrest warrant. Bribery and corruption.

Smalls rises to meet the men. He looks very black surrounded by six white policemen. His nappy hair stands out. But his suit is immaculate. It fits with tailored precision. He offers his hands to be handcuffed.

The black crowd has gathered just off the property. They already know what is happening. The buzz of threat pulsates through the crowd. Smalls, with a nod, denies them the impulse to interfere.

His wrists are locked in the hand cuffs.

The neighbors watch. The crowd watches.

Robert Smalls is taken to the train station. The gloating members of the press follow.

WHITE IN THE CROWD

The uppity nigger is chained. Haha!

Smalls is put on a train to the capital.

EXT. COLUMBIA SC TRAIN STATION - DAY

It is a rainy, South Carolina winter. The majority of the onlookers are black; they look and then look away. The minority are white. The Whites at the train station recoil. The man is chained, but they are thinking "what if he breaks loose?"

WHITE #1

Did he rape a white woman? Did he ransack a house?

Someone recognizes Smalls. One person recognizes him by sight. They would all know his name.

WHITE #2

He is the General. He is a Congressman.

BLACK

That's General Bob Smalls!

Now the majority, the black ones, change their minds and look again. It is their hero who is led before them. He is to be placed amongst the thieves in a wagon. But they know already, it is the natural order of things. Slowly they move about their business.

Former General HAMPTON, and the current Governor, prances up on his fancy white horse. And he glares at General Smalls as he is displayed for the people in chains.

WHITE #2

Ain't he the one been running Beaufort County like he was king?

EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

Two teenage white boys are selling newspapers with the headline "Negro Congressman charged with accepting a Bribe."

TEEN #1

You never can tell about niggers.

TEEN #2

My daddy told me all politicians were crooks. Maybe he was right.

TEEN #1

Then that makes General Wade Hampton a crook? You don't want to think it, but what is a General except a politician?

TEEN #2

What about Robert E. Lee? Or General Washington? You don't really want to go there, do you?

TEEN #1

But then you've got General Grant. He's a drunk and a crook.

TEEN #2

You think Smalls is the thief?

A man who has been listening to the boys buys a newspaper.

MAN

His sin is theft, for sure. He stole a Confederate ship. He stole himself. He stole his wife and baby. He stole other men's property. He stole white men's pride.

The boys look at the man for an answer.

MAN

It has all been arranged. The jury has been selected. The jury has been paid. There are sufficient negroes bought to assure the correct verdict. The witness has been suborned. The gallery has

gathered. The press are here. Everyone has a role to play.

(pause)

Even you boys selling these papers you are part of it too. And let this be a lesson to you.

He puts out his cigarette and enters the courthouse.

INT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

The jury is returning from deliberations. We also see two reporters are in the gallery.

REPORTER #1

He is not guilty. There is a predominately African-American jury. You can take what you will from this trial but the only witness against Smalls is a convicted felon. This man claims he paid Smalls five-thousand-dollars in exchange for a government printing contract he never even received? Really? The witness's testimony, is so filled with contradictions and skilfully refuted by Smalls' attorneys.

REPORTER #2

He is guilty.

REPORTER #1

I don't see how.

REPORTER #2

Just sit back and watch.

REPORTER #1

It is a joke. A sham. The witness read from what he claimed was a diary written in a code known only to him. He looks like an idiot to me, how would he know any code?

The defendant Smalls rises. He is judged guilty.

JUDGE

The jury finds the defendant guilty of the crime.

Smalls is remarkable. He stands there and stares at the judge in the face. He stares at the judge for a full minute. There is silence in the courtroom.

The judge looks to be the "guilty" one and cannot return Smalls' look. The judge turns away, and is about to rise and leave.

LAWYER

Your honour, we request our client remain on bail while we appeal.

JUDGE

Granted.

The judge beats it out of the courtroom rapidly.

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Out of the courtroom, in the secluded chambers, the judge throws a fit. He has done what his political bosses have asked yet he is enraged.

JUDGE

That is the most uppity nigger in history. He stares me full in the face as if I knew better my whole life. As if he were in the right and I were in the wrong. The bloody audacity.

EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

Next day, the two white boys are outside the courthouse and have finally settled down to read the newspaper they have been selling.

TEEN #1

(reading the news)

Smalls is convicted by a jury made up largely of his fellow Negroes... blah, blah, blah... He never did really steal The Planter. He made up the story and told it to the Northern papers when he

got to Hilton Head. Another slave piloted The Planter out of the harbour while Smalls hid below in the hold. It looks like the man is a complete fraud.

TEEN #2

And all I can say is thank God Almighty for General Wade Hampton. He knows a crook when he sees one!

TEEN #1

Wait! Wait.

(reading more news)

Afterwards, Smalls claimed a messenger from Governor Hampton offered to drop the charges and pay him ten thousand dollars if he would step down from his seat in Congress.

(pause)

Smalls claimed this envoy admitted the Democrats held no personal hostility toward Smalls. Smalls said that he had always treated white people fairly and honestly. But, according to Smalls, the envoy said, "We must have this government. We will have this government."

TEEN #2

This envoy said that twice?

TEEN #1

You know for emphasis.

Both teenagers sit and ponder the newspaper.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - DAY - 1881

Small loves his front porch and the rocking chair. Watching John McKee sitting there is one of his favorite memories as a child. Two telegrams arrive with the Western Union boy.

SMALLS

Two telegrams?

HANNAH

That doesn't happen everyday.

SMALLS
Where they from?

WESTERN UNION BOY
Uh, Washington DC and Columbia.

SMALLS
Lets' have the one from Washington
first.

Smalls opens the first telegram and ...

Our appeal was certified to the United
States Supreme Court. They will hear
the case.

Hannah is very relieved. Robert is happy too.

SMALLS
(joking)
Okay, now for the bad news.

Smalls opens the second telegram and reads...

SMALLS
Governor Simpson has pardoned me. Whole
and free pardon.

HANNAH
Did you know that was possible?

SMALLS
It was a possibility.
(pause)
I'm sure, we were pardoned as part of
an agreement in which charges were also
dropped against several Democrats who
were accused of election fraud.

HANNAH
That means it is over?

SMALLS
Never gonna be over, honey.
(pause)

Every time I stand up they will always say "there goes the bribe taker."

HANNAH

Does that mean you are done with politics?

SMALLS

I didn't say I was done, honey. I said they never gonna just drop it.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - DAY

The Smalls exit their home and notice a new baby on the neighbor's front porch. The neighbor has his first grandchild. Smalls and Hannah come over to his front porch to congratulate him.

SMALLS

Congratulations.

NEIGHBOR

This is my daughter.

SMALLS

This your first grandchild?

NEIGHBOR

Yes, it is.

SMALLS

Wonderful looking child. Very healthy.
(to the daughter)
You did a great job, mom!

Smalls is making faces and entertaining the baby with noises.

Hannah reaches out to the neighbor's daughter for the child. His daughter betrays a momentary look of terror. She glances to her father for guidance. The new grandfather nods his approval.

The two women focus on the baby. Hannah cuddles and kisses the baby. The men step away and focus on the politics.

NEIGHBOR

They said you are going to run for Congress again.

SMALLS

Yes, I've been gone two years. Time for me to get back.

NEIGHBOR

You think you can win after all that legal mess?

SMALLS

I don't know why not. But we will see.

Time passes. MONTAGE.

Smalls walks the streets.

He stops and talks to citizens, even children. Clearly he is trying to repair his reputation.

A hurricane strikes the coast. Smalls helps neighbors clean their property and donates items from his general store - blankets, tents, coal oil, other items.

Smalls walks to the dock and visits with fisherman.

We see him in church Sunday mornings.

We see him debating and giving public speeches.

Beaufort County is 64% African American at this time.

INT. BEAUFORT HOME - NIGHT

He has been running for Congress again. Banners. Signs. Propaganda. Campaign volunteers.

Robert Smalls is having a party. Smalls, Annie and daughter ELIZABETH are host to an election celebration. There is a very large bowl of fruit punch.

Word comes by telegram.

SMALLS

We won!

There is good cheer. Smalls will be returning to the Congress.

NEIGHBOR

Congratulations. I have to give it to you; I thought you were finished.

SMALLS

I wasn't sure either way. But I feel blessed.

NEIGHBOR

I read the letter you wrote to President Arthur.

SMALLS

I told him I was opposed by the lowest aspects in Southern politics. Carpetbaggers, the Rum element. Adulterers, drunks. Gamblers.

(pause)

Opposing them is something of my duty to God and my people.

NEIGHBOR

Well you have always done your best for your race.

(uncomfortable)

For Beaufort too.

Time passes.

INT. THE HOUSE CHAMBER, WASHINGTON D.C. - DAY - 1882

We see Smalls on the House floor. There are two black men in the 330-member body. The other African American member is from North Carolina. They cling to each other and certainly stand out in a sea of white men.

CUT TO: Smalls is speaking informally to other members in the cloakroom.

SMALLS

I am a Negro and nothing could make me otherwise and when the time comes, I have no doubt that I still will be a

Negro; no matter what a Negro does he is still nothing. He, in the white man's estimation, can do nothing that can make him a great man. I believe that the prejudice against the Negro today in this country is because he is improving, for in every case where he is put alongside the white man...

(pause)

...he comes out ahead or stands his equal. For this reason, he is feared. This is the reason why every white man, especially in the South, seems now willing to see him relegated to the rear before he becomes too powerful and strong. But notwithstanding all this, the same God still lives, in whom we place our hope.

We can tell which of the Representatives are Southern and which are Northerners by the expressions on their faces.

EXT. BEAUFORT STREET - DAY - 1887

Smalls is walking down the street in Beaufort.

LONG SHOT: POV is from a BLACK POLICEMAN who is at least a block away. A DRUNK WHITE GUY comes out of a liquor store and bumps into Smalls.

Smalls seems to apologize and clearly doesn't want an altercation. But it appears from a distance the white man calls him a "nigger" but this is only speculation.

Smalls again seems to apologize and begins to walk away. But the white man yells after him something - an insult.

This time something snaps in Smalls, who returns to the white man and beats the shit out of him, right there on the street.

Smalls wears this big signet ring. He turned the heavy part of the ring in toward his palm, and he slapped the guy up side the head. Then Smalls beats the hell out of him with his cane.

The policeman arrives and could interfere but stands back a few feet. When Smalls is finished, the policeman.

BLACK POLICEMAN
Congressman, you okay?

Smalls shakes his head.

BLACK POLICEMAN
He call you a "nigger"?

SMALLS
Yes, but then he called me a "thief".

Pause. Smalls is an old man and is out of breath after the fight.

BLACK POLICEMAN
And that is when you came back for him?

SMALLS
I was born a "nigger" heard that many times before. But I ain't never been called a "thief". Never!

The policeman signals that he understands. Smalls walks away. Two white policemen come running in that direction. The black policeman signal for them to come arrest the drunk man. By the time they arrive Smalls is more than a block away.

The white policeman picks up the drunk and half beaten white man. They take him down the street, presumably under arrest.

INT. COLUMBIA - CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION - DAY - 1895

Robert Smalls is sitting at a chair at the convention. He has a number of papers and he is listening to the speeches. Someone comes to his side and whispers in his ear. His eyes become large and he immediately leaves. He drops the papers and leaves them.

INT. BEAUFORT HOME - DAY

Here in the upstairs bedroom, Smalls is a portly, gray, battered man. Robert Smalls is standing at the bedside of

his ailing, beloved wife, ANNIE, nearly twenty years his junior.

His young son WILLIE (3) stands beside him, sobbing, holding his grown step sister's hand.

The doctor looks puzzled and he give Smalls a very pessimistic look. Smalls drops to his knees and begs/prays.

SMALLS

Lord, I come before you today in need of your healing hand. In you all things are possible. Hold my heart of my wife within yours, and renew her mind, body, and soul.

O God, think of our mother and wife who is ill, whom we now commend to Your compassionate regard.

Comfort her upon this sickbed, and ease her suffering. We beg for deliverance, and submit that no healing is too hard for the Lord, if it be His will.

We therefore pray that You bless our Annie with Your loving care, renew his strength, and heal what ails him in Your loving name.
Thank You, Lord.

And, she dies. Smalls is inconsolable. He throws himself across the body. Smalls is suddenly old and weak. Sobbing. He is wailing; the bed and the corpse of Annie quake beneath him. Robert Smalls is a hero and an apparently strong man. Be he wails and comes apart in this scene.

Robert Smalls is dressing in front of the same mirror as Henry McKee. Young Willie is watching, much in the same way Smalls watched McKee. Smalls turns to young Willie and gives him a very loving look.

SMALLS

We have lost your mother, Willie. I was a United States congressman. My reputation, they largely took that. I'm the collector of the port. But I've got

you, boy and you are a fine young man.
And we got this house. They can't take
this away from us.

(pause)

I used to stand right there where you
are and watch Mr. McKee dress.

WILLIE

Your daddy?

SMALLS

(pause)

Yes.

WILLIE

A black man?

SMALLS

(pause)

A white man. He owned my mother.

Pause. Willie is quiet and tries to contemplate things.

WILLIE

No body owns another person anymore.

Smalls is proud of this young boy.

SMALLS

You are right. How do you know that?

Willie shrugs.

WILLIE

I just know about the old days. And I
know about today too.

Smalls finished buttoning his shirt and kneels down and
hugs the boy.

They walk downstairs and they sit on the front porch of the
house. There is a large rocking chair and a smaller one for
the boy. Smalls has gone through this elaborate ceremony of
dressing to just sit on the porch.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - MORNING - 1898

After serving in Congress, he is appointed the tariff collector at the port. Smalls' daily routine is clear in this scene.

He rises promptly at 7:00 am; we hear the ringing of the town bell. He takes a cold sponge bath using water brought to his room by a housekeeper.

At 8:00 Smalls has a large breakfast - hominy grits and pancakes, and was in the office at the customs house on Bay Street by 9:00.

INT/EXT. CUSTOMS HOUSE - DAY

When Smalls arrives at the office, the OFFICE ASSISTANT raises the U.S. and customs flags. Smalls has two deputies who do much of the actual work. We see Smalls sitting in the office, watching the ships come and go and collecting the money.

Customs duties involved inspections by deputies in Beaufort Bay of vessels coming from foreign ports or carrying wood, phosphates, and cotton overseas. Smalls sends assistants to inspect the ships.

Smalls gets an excited look on his face when the assistant returns from a British ship. Smalls likes English lime juice.

Smalls eats lunch at noon, usually a sandwich and malted milk at the drugstore near his office. He walks in, with out hesitation, right past a "Whites Only" sign. An UNKNOWN BLACK MAN, follows him and tries to enter and is stopped. Smalls is the only black served.

Smalls conducts some business at the bank then at his dry goods store.

The custom's office closes at 4:00 with a ceremonial lowering of the flags.

Smalls never shaves himself in the morning, but goes to a barber after work.

Smalls then walks directly home.

EXT. BEAUFORT HOME - AFTERNOON EVENING

We see several dogs at 511 Prince Street; they are Willie's pets. There are dogs and turkeys, chicken and geese running free in the yard.

Daughter ELIZABETH is married to the POSTMASTER. They have numerous children. Smalls is joined by daughter Elizabeth, the Postmaster and the children. They live just down the street. They all sit down for dinner.

SMALLS

Come Lord Yesus, be out guet and let
the' gawes to us be bress. Ahmen.

(Come Lord Jesus, be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.)

The dinner is seafood, particularly shrimp mull (a stew). Smalls is a wealthy man and has several servants - a COOK, a MAID and a CARRIAGE MAN.

Smalls was clearly diabetic. Despite what seems to have been a modest diet, Smalls weighs well over two hundred pounds. He drinks no alcohol, but gallons of lemonade. His thirst can't be satisfied.

After dinner, Smalls sits in the living room. The camera focuses on a large painting of The Planter above the fireplace.

Smalls reads the newspaper. He must strain to read the small print. He is effectively blind.

His daughter, Elizabeth, is his secretary and she enters the living room.

SARAH arrives.

SMALLS

Your husband is a doctor. Respected.
Are you ever going to return to him?

SARAH

No papa. Who will type your letters?

Smalls drops the subject and doesn't seem too condemning. He shrugs, a mater of fact, okay.

There is a long pause. He gestures for Elizabeth to grab the pencil and paper. She is ready to dictate to him.

SMALLS

I feel gratified to know that I have lived and so conducted my office, with the assistance of deputies, for all these years and have not had a single complaint. During my twenty odd years that I've held the position of collector, I have managed the affairs with credit for myself, my family and the race. When we go out of office we go clean.

Elizabeth finishes. Smalls smiles, which is Sarah's signal to sit at the piano. Smalls loves the song "Coming Through the Rye."

This is very subtle and there isn't much dialogue; Smalls in his old age is a very regimented man. He lives by a strict schedule.

EXT. HARNESS RACES - DAY

Smalls has no hobbies, he is far too large a man to swim or ride a horse, but he did participate in what we now call harness racing. He races a trotter, Major Beaufort, at meets around the state, but his coachman does the driving.

EXT. REVERE HOTEL - BOSTON, MASS - DAY

Robert Smalls is in Boston for a gathering of the Shaw Guard Veterans Association (the black soldiers he ferried into battle). Two association veterans greet Smalls at the train station and escort him to the Revere House.

SMALLS

They know I'm coming?

VETERAN #1

The committee has engaged rooms some weeks ago.

When they arrive at the hotel, the clerk in the office disappears, and General Smalls and his friends waited some

time, during which it is alleged that no one recognized them.

They finally see the clerk.

VETERAN #1
We are here for a room.

CLERK #2
I'm sorry, all the rooms are filled.
(pause)
The only room we have has been engaged
for a union General, a Robert Smalls.

VETERAN #1
This is General Smalls.

The white clerk turns even more pale and he slips away.

A REPORTER is in the lobby and begins to listen intently and take notes.

The second veteran leaves to scout out another hotel.

Another clerk, however, comes to the desk...

CLERK #2
I'm sorry we can't accommodate the
General. The room is being painted and
everything is out of the room.

They all leave for a different hotel.

Out on the street, walking to the next hotel...

VETERAN #2
I'm sure, when we engaged the rooms
they thought that General Smalls was a
white man; but when they saw he was
coloured, some excuse was necessary.

VETERAN #1
Well, they gave a poor one. Painting!
Ha!

Smalls takes it like it is an everyday occurrence. He isn't mad at all. Judging by their body language and voices, the younger back men are angry.

Smalls simply is a cool character.

VETERAN #2

I have to give it to you, sir. You seem unphased by all this.

SMALLS

Oh, these things happen. And, you have to remember, I'm from the South and accustomed to it.

INT. QUINCY HOUSE HOTEL - BOSTON MASS - DAY

The reporter has followed Smalls to the next hotel. He is interviewing Smalls.

SMALLS

To tell the truth I do not think that were I to resort to the 'civil rights bill' I would have any chance of action. In fact, I am satisfied that they were all turned upside down and painting, but you know that perhaps were I of the Caucasian race they might have squeezed me in somehow.

I am satisfied, however, with my apartments here. You see here there are in the dining-room say thirty or forty tables. I can go to one table by myself and sit down, and parties who object to sitting with a coloured man have plenty of seats at other tables.

Now in Washington I stay at a private house, but the line is not drawn there at the leading hotels between the races as here. When I and my family are in Washington we stay at Willard's and like our meals at the same table with other senators, members of Congress, etc. But I am satisfied.

I leave tomorrow evening for Washington, where, after a short stay, I will take a trip home and try to win my House seat back.

REPORTER

Wonderful, thank you.

SMALLS

You can say I like Massachusetts. And hope to return again shortly. My daughter graduated at West Newton, where she made many warm friends, and where I will, if possible, visit tomorrow.

EXT. RURAL PLANTATION HOME - DAY - 1802

Former Governor of South Carolina and Civil War General Wade Hampton is speaking to a JOURNALIST on the front steps of his mansion. Hampton was behind the false charges of bribery brought against Smalls.

JOURNALIST

There is the allegation you were behind the false charges of bribery brought against Congressman Smalls. Any truth to this?

HAMPTON

This memory is repulsive to me. Politics is a filthy thing. Politics in South Carolina is as filthy as politics gets.

JOURNALIST

After all these years, you are willing to admit this?

The general chuckles at his young naivety.

HAMPTON

The Negro Smalls was a most obvious case. We took him under our control and broke him. We broke him completely. We had him handcuffed, led from his home. We jailed him. We tried him. We had him

convicted. We offered him absolution, if he would merely renounce the madness in which he had been engaged.

JOURNALIST

But it did not work with Smalls.

HAMPTON

He was sentenced to three years at hard labour. I never had any intention of having him serve that. The bargain had been made at a national level. Imprisoning one of their heroes was never really an option. So his appeal, his release during his appeal, and his eventual pardon were all part of the plan. Inevitable.

JOURNALIST

Inevitable?

HAMPTON

What was not inevitable, or at least not predictable, was that he did not give up his seat in Congress. Instead, he simply became more defiant. It was as if the man were infused with the Spirit of the Lord.

JOURNALIST

Spirit of the Lord?

HAMPTON

You know God! We had him. In every public confrontation for the rest of his life, he would be the convicted bribe taker. Yet he continued to stand up in public, stand up in elections, stand up in Congress, for God's sake, as if he were a man who should be listened to. It was remarkable, and, while it was an ugly spectacle, there was an enchanting mystery to it.

JOURNALIST

What do you think is Robert Smalls place in history?

HAMPTON

He will be forgotten like all the other Negroes who took their moment of power and glory after the war. We Whites will write the history, and we will set the story straight.

EXT. SMALLS' BEAUFORT HOME - DAY - 1815

Smalls weighs over 200 lbs. He is very nearly blind. Smalls has lost his left foot to diabetes. He is walking on crutches. He still dresses and grooms himself immaculately, but he sits, fat and aged, in his chair.

There are nine grand children running left and right. Despite his poor health, Smalls has a huge smile on his face.

The same journalist, who interviewed Smalls' arch political enemy (Hampton), now arrives at the home of Robert Smalls.

JOURNALIST

You know it's amusing. How after Lincoln's assassination, all sorts of people claimed to have met with him and influenced him in making some historic decision.

SMALLS

Democrats in South Carolina had that published that it was all made up. The meeting with Lincoln and The Planter both. They said another "shy man" piloted the ship. And they brought me to the papers because, well... I'm not shy.

JOURNALIST

You did meet with Lincoln?

SMALLS

I did. I met with Stanton and then we walked over to the White House to see Lincoln.

INT. WAR DEPARTMENT & WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON D.C. - 1862

FLASHBACK:

Smalls, Stanton and French exit Stanton's office and then the front of the War Department. They walk across the street to the White House.

STANTON

I can tell you he has been opposed.

FRENCH

But he is open to reconsideration?

STANTON

Yes, he is very open-minded. Everything is considered. Always. He moves very slowly. He is a careful man. He feels the weight of the office and doesn't want to make a mistake.

FRENCH

Make matters worse.

STANTON

Yes. But keep your head. In the end, he might come around.

(pause)

There will be a time when we have to stand up to the middle states and take the freed men into the army.

FRENCH

We will do our very best, Mr. Secretary.

SMALLS

Yes, we will.

INT. LINCOLN'S OFFICE - DAY

The audience will be surprised to see how short the Robert Smalls is next to Lincoln. Smalls was a short thick powerfully built man (5'5"). Of course Lincoln was very tall for the time (6'4").

Seward, Stanton, Lincoln, French and Smalls are in the office. John Hay and John Nicolay are there as well.

The president summons a steward with his pull cord.

LINCOLN

Don't worry son, everyone is a bit deferential and quiescent here in this office. The longer we stay here the less it is like being transported to the surface of the moon.

SMALLS

Now, that would be something.

Lincoln chuckles.

LINCOLN

Yes, it would.

A steward brings them coffee.

LINCOLN

You are much interviewed, celebrated, and written about in the papers. A famous and dashing man.

SMALLS

Thank you, sir.

LINCOLN

You have boldly stolen a Confederate steamer from the heart of their most heavily fortified port.

SMALLS

And I have rescued a cargo of unmounted cannons, eight men, five women and three children.

LINCOLN

This is remarkable because of the risk you and your associates took in taking the ship.

SMALLS

They surely would have tortured us and hung us.

LINCOLN

True.

(pause)

And you took the ship directly from in front of the office and home of Brigadier General Roswell Ripley?

SMALLS

I did.

Lincoln takes a newspaper clipping and glances at it.

LINCOLN

And you took the ship with a white Captain, a man named Relyea; a white officer a Mr. Samuel Smith; and a white engineer, a man called Zerich Pitcher?

SMALLS

Well of course, I waited until they were ashore.

LINCOLN

Of course. No need for spilling blood.

SMALLS

It wasn't the blood, sir. Not in my mind. I just weighed it out for risk.

LINCOLN

So, you would be willing to spill blood?

SMALLS

Well, sometime there is more risk in not killing.

LINCOLN

True. True.

EXT. SOUTH WARF, CHARLESTON - THE PLANTER - NIGHT

The three White officers leave the Planter. They walk innocently down the wharf toward the town.

The Planter is long and big as any six or seven houses. When it was a cotton ship, it could carry 140 bales.

Tonight, she has as cargo four unmounted cannons. There are two cannons (one 32 pounds and the other 22 pounds) mounted on The Planter.

A crew member stands in the wheelhouse beside Robert Smalls, JOHN. Robert is very calm as he looks out on the harbor. Robert looks at the sentry on the wharf, who seems only a boy.

The two men now look over a harbor chart.

SMALLS

You are my first officer. You know what that means.

JOHN

It means we are in a lot of trouble.

SMALLS

No. It doesn't mean that. It means you stand here the entire night in case I need you.

(pause)

If something happens to me take this unmarked, middle channel across the bar, the shortest way out of range of our guns from Moultrie or Wagner.

SMALLS

There are mines here, here and here. Nets here. And shoals, here.

JOHN

In the dark I can't tell you I can do that.

SMALLS

Just don't leave this wheelhouse.

On the deck, the rest of the crew are standing around looking up at Smalls and John. They are all sweating profusely.

Smalls puts on the captain's coat and straw hat. The crew look at each other for confidence before launching.

Robert stands in the wheelhouse door.

CREWMEMBER #4

It is a cool, spring night, and I'm running a sweat like cutting rice in the noonday summer sun.

CREWMEMBER #3

You will be alright.

CREWMEMBER #4

That kid could shoot Robert down with that rifle.

CREWMEMBER #3

He thinks he's white.

They look up at the bright moon.

CREWMEMBER #4

A jet black man with curly hair.

CREWMEMBER #2

Standing in Captain Relyea's uniform wearing that big straw hat?

CREWMEMBER #1

He's still darkish, but you would think one of them would notice it is a black man standing up there.

CREWMEMBER #4

I am shaking like a boy in a rice field when the overseer raises the whip. A little boy, not hardly big enough to do a day's work in a field. I remember the hot piss running down my legs into the stinking, gray mud of the rice field, and the way I shook, and the way I froze there when he swung that whip.

CREWMEMBER #3

Don't think about that, think about getting out of here.

CREWMEMBER #4

I don't wanna die. Get tortured.

CREWMEMBER #2

I knowed they crazy with war, now. They been crazy and hungry, with the Yankee ships blockadin the hahbuh and the Yankee army downaway shellin' 'em. And they done got harder on us colored folk.

CREWMEMBER #4

I sket. Sket to death. Sket UH death, but mo skettuh what they goin do to me and my chap ifn they ketch us. I done watch em whip and beat and bury live and hang and half-hang plenty runaway before. I can't do this.

Crewmember #4 bolts from the boat. He walks down the gangplank and onto the wharf. There is a bit of suspense whether he will inform on their escape, but #4 walks past the sentry and into the city.

There is a longer wait. But then Robert whistles and the deckhands cast the lines off the bollocks and we see them pulling the ropes back on board.

They get underway, the captain (or the one they think is the captain) gives the whistle signal.

We hear the ship's wheels churning the water, and the steam blowing out from the pistons. Then a splashing of the paddles on the water.

The boy sentry is not a hundred yards away and has seen all this in the darkness. As the Planter is pulling away from the dock, a Confederate lieutenant steps out from one of the offices and looks down the wharf. The lieutenant can be seen from the Planter; he looks puzzled but returns to the office. Lieutenant is returning to a poker game.

The Planter doesn't head out of the harbor but turns back up the Cooper River, where they will pick up the women and the kids.

EXT. INTRANSIENT TO THE NORTH WARF - THE PLANTER - NIGHT

It is half a mile up the waterfront to pick up the women and children.

EXT. AT THE NORTH WARF - THE PLANTER - NIGHT -

The women and children are hiding on The Etowah. They scurry from one ship to the other and everyone is anxious to get under way.

SLAVE WOMAN #1 is the first women to board the Planter and is the pregnant women of a crew member. When the ship pulls away from the wharf, she becomes overly excited.

SLAVE WOMAN #1

I never been on a ship. I holdin my baby inside me. The ship rumble and jolt and sprung and shook like it goin shake itself slam apart.

CREW MEMBER

Calm down woman. Brace yourself back again a wooden wall.

SLAVE WOMAN #1

I done pray to Jesus. I hopin' and prayin to Jesus uh deliver me laud God awe mighty please. I can't swim and I got a baby on the way.

SLAVE WOMAN #2

Robert and John and tother men knowed what they wuh doin, I reckon. It wuh they work, evvy day, runnin this ship.

SLAVE WOMAN #3

I can see they frad, though. John and them other plenty frad. But I ain't see no fear in Robert.

SLAVE WOMAN #2

He young, and short, and slander, and a fine lookin black man. And he aint uh fed of nothin. You gots a fine man.

HANNAH

Thank you.

SLAVE WOMAN #1

We done all greed we goin kill ourselve
foe we let em take us.

Hannah does not respond. Perhaps she doesn't agree.

BACK TO:

INT. LINCOLN'S OFFICE - DAY

LINCOLN

Mrs. Lincoln wanted me to ask about
your wife.

SMALLS

Hannah.

LINCOLN

Was she there as you planned the theft
of the Planter? Did she, like the
others who made the escape, agree to
blow the ship up rather than allow
herself to be captured? If so, she was
agreeing to kill her own children, her
husband's stepchildren.

Smalls is speechless. He doesn't know the answer to the
question.

LINCOLN

This is the part people really want to
talk about, because it is eating at
their hearts and digging at the
foundations of their faith.

SMALLS

I don't know; she never talked about
it. The war has been on and she is at
home, dealing with the death of our
infant son. The child died around the
time of the Folly Creek incident.

LINCOLN

I'm sorry. I lost my son Willie in
February.

SMALLS

I'm aware and I'm sorry.

LINCOLN

By all accounts, you are the most faithful of people.

Smalls nods.

LINCOLN

I will tell Mary, there is some doubt about Hannah agreeing.

(pause)

What were your ideas about that?

SMALLS

Me? Exploding the ship and drowning everyone? Mr. President, I was busy and didn't give any attention to blowing up the ship. I was trying to avoid considering it, if you know what I mean.

LINCOLN

I do. I certainly do.

EXT. INTRANSIENT OUT OF THE HARBOUR - THE PLANTER - NIGHT

FLASHBACK:

The crew members are still watching Robert Smalls in the Wheelhouse.

CREWMEMBER #3

You think somebody woulda figured out we done stole that boat and sent some sort of signal.

CREWMEMBER #2

It done been an hour since we left the wharf. and we took all that time

CREWMEMBER #1

What is that ship up ahead?

CREWMEMBER #3

Some merchant ship.

From the Wheelhouse, we hear Robert's voice.

SMALLS

Pass the Planter!

And then close after, from the merchant ship, another voice - one of those down home Southern twangs.

SOUTHERN SAILOR

Blow them Yankees to hell!

The shouting in the middle of the night and in the middle of the harbor puts the crewmembers on edge. But Robert just gives a wave, and shouts back..

SMALLS

Aye, Aye!

Smalls steps back into the wheelhouse, took again the wheel, and steers on.

They pass Fort Sumter. The crewmembers watch Smalls blow the code on the whistle. Smalls waves to the sentries on Fort Sumter in the moonlight.

There is an Officer on the walls of Fort Sumter. He is watching the Planter carefully.

The dawn approaches and some light appears. After Smalls passes in the Planter, he sees the Planter strike the flag of the Confederacy and raise a large white bed sheet in its place.

The Officer gives the command to fire.

OFFICER

Fire!

There is no cannon fire. His battery officers are totally confused by the situation. It takes them too long to comprehend.

OFFICER

Idiots, Fire!

The battery officers can't wrap their understanding around the complexity of the situation. There is still no cannon firing.

OFFICER

That ship is escaping!

The battery officers understand finally, but then it takes the enlisted men at their command an even longer while to find some understanding and to act.

By the time the guns' fire, the Planter is out of range.

The shells make geysers in her wake.

EXT. APPROACHING THE BLOCKADE SHIP - NIGHT/DAWN

All the women have a crewmember beside them, but Hannah. She has her eyes on the wheelhouse. Hannah begins to sing "Amazing Grace".

HANNAH

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.

T'was Grace that taught...
my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear...
the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares...
I have already come.
Tis Grace has brought me safe thus far...
and Grace will lead us home.

The Lord has promised good to me...
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be...
as long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years...
bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise...
then when we've first begun.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me....
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.

The women and crew then all together sing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot".

ESCAPED SLAVES

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home;
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan,
And WHAT did I see,
Comin' for to carry me home,
A band of angels comin' after me,
Comin' for to carry me home.

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home;
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Comin' for to carry me home.

If you get there before I do,
Comin' for to carry me home,
Tell all my friends I'm comin' too,
Comin' for to carry me home.

Suddenly The Planter is near enough to the Union warship Onward, for the escaped slaves to see the men in blue uniforms aiming down on them holding their rifles. The singing stops abruptly.

And Robert shouts to the Onward.

SMALLS

You Union boys, figure Uncle Abe can
use this ship?

And they have the strangest looks on their faces.

SMALLS

What is the matter? You never seen coloreds in a stolen confederate ship before?

There is a long pause. No one really moves.

SMALLS

We are runaways, slaves!

Still there is no reaction. Everyone on the Union ship is in shock, including the officers. The marines with rifles are very disciplined and hold firm.

There are officers there but they are waiting on the CAPTAIN to sort it out. No one wants to interfere and chose a course.

Two naval officers, on the quarterdeck, are trying to figure out the ruse.

OFFICER

It's a trick.

OFFICER #2

That cannon shot was a miss on purpose?
Part of the ruse?

They both scan the horizon with field glasses, looking for another confederate ship looking to run through the blockade. This picture is so odd; they fear The Planter is a diversion. It is not however.

There is an even longer pause.

SMALLS

I sho don't feel free with you boys pointing them rifles.

CAPTAIN

Lower your weapons. It is okay.

There is a great relief among the passengers of The Planter. There is a short celebration - chatter and singing.

SLAVE WOMAN #2
Praise the Lord!

They are brought on board the Onward, but once again the soldiers point their rifle at them.

And again the escaped slaves become sedate and afraid. The pregnant woman throws up on the deck of the Onward and it splatters at the boots and pants of a sailor.

SLAVE WOMAN #1
I ain't feel no diffunt than I done
feel befoe, sceptor I wuh sket, and
sick, and shakin, and that ship wuh
rollin.

They hold the escaped slaves, even the women and children, on deck the longest time.

Robert is taken away to the captain's quarters.

CREWMEMBER #2
And them soldier look at us like we
some kina strange animals, just unload
off Noah's ark.

JOHN
They ain't really lookin' at us no
diffunten any white person in
Charleston ud look at you.

HANNAH
But things altogether are gonna be
different the rest of our life.

BACK TO:

INT. LINCOLN'S OFFICE - DAY

LINCOLN
You don't know how much I appreciate
The Planter.
(pause)
Secretary Stanton and the Navy
Department immediately drafted a bill
for congressional approval to pay you
and your associates a portion of the

value. Just six days after the *Planter* was surrendered, I gladly signed it.

SMALLS

Not to worry, sir. I've been paid.

LINCOLN

"Here, sign this and ten freed slaves will bring us confederate ships." And I've been waiting for others to also act so boldly. They told me the bill would encourage such actions. I'm still waiting.

Lincoln chuckles.

LINCOLN

President's are told a lot of things you know.

SMALLS

You are the man with the candy jar.

Lincoln chuckles again.

There is an odd pause.

LINCOLN

So, what did you purchase? They said you bought a store.

SMALLS

Yes. I bought a store in Beaufort to sell goods to the newly freed slaves.

LINCOLN

Good idea. Resourceful.

STANTON

Captain Smalls has also assisted us in the assault on Charleston.

LINCOLN

Captain?

STANTON

Yes, civilian Captain.

LINCOLN

I don't know if you will have a pension after this war. Okay. I understand.

There is another odd pause.

LINCOLN

Go ahead, Captain Smalls. What happened next?

INT. CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS - THE ONWARD - DAWN

FLASHBACK:

CAPTAIN

I was on deck just then and this must be one the oddest things I've seen.
(pause)
You are lucky we didn't open fire.

SMALLS

I will admit that might be true. But couldn't very well signal you, I mean other than the white flag.

CAPTAIN

And you in your Confederate captain's uniform. I think I'm gonna remember this for my entire life.

Robert's smile is contagious and the Captain grins as well.

CAPTAIN

I tell you, I'm amazed. We have been lying at anchor here in an open roadstead with no real protection. The stinging rain and spray. And the only respite a few days in the mosquito-filled fens and jungles of Port Royal or Hilton Head, with their voodoo-worshipping, jet-black contrabands speaking their unintelligible gibberish.

SMALLS

And here comes along an educated group of Christian, singing and newly free jet back contrabands.

EXT. SOUTH WARF, CHARLESTON - DAWN

A humorous scene might be the captain, the real captain of The Planter, stomping and throwing a fit standing on the wharf in the early morning light. And his ship is gone.

The Captain Relyea turns and catches the sight of the sentry. They are both in panic. Both men will be a laughingstock for the rest of their life; consider the look of a fool at another fool.

BACK TO:

INT. LINCOLN'S OFFICE - DAY

Lincoln chuckles.

LINCOLN

I sure would hate to be those fellows.

SMALLS

I'd sure hate to be Jeff Davis.

LINCOLN

Jefferson reminds me of the tiger hunter who has picked a place on the wall to hang the tiger's skin long before he has caught the tiger. This tiger has other ideas.

They all chuckle at Lincoln's wit.

LINCOLN

I better be careful. The newspapers, even the one's in the north (on our side) have been critical of my joking in time of war. But Jefferson Davis is rigid, cold and austere and they have no critique. I never heard anyone but his wife Varina ever think Jefferson had a sense of humour.

Lincoln pauses, thinks and begins again.

LINCOLN

There are two Quaker women discussing presidents Lincoln and Davis. The first Quaker lady says, after some contemplation, that she believes the Confederacy will win the war because "Jefferson Davis such a serious and a praying man." "But Abraham Lincoln is a praying man too," the second Quaker lady protests. "Yes," the first admitted, "but the Lord will think Abraham is joking."

Lincoln stands, as do the others. Lincoln walks to the window and gazes out.

STANTON

Thank you everyone. We will let you know what is decided.

SMALLS

Thank you, Mr. President.

LINCOLN

Thank you.

The meeting is over. The participants exit the room. Hay and Nicolay return to the room next door. Seward disappears.

INT. HAY AND NICOLAY'S OFFICE - DAY

Hay and Nicolay are possibly the smartest men ever to work in the White House. They are able to write in journals and carry one such a discussion.

HAY

Should we accept the argument that his father must have been possessed of some high-caliber, supercharged genetic material, the Ashkenazi Jew, perhaps?

NICOLAY

Or would he, alternatively, have been borne with the genes of the black field

slave, an unheralded, unrecorded man by the name of Smalls, whose progenitors survived the brutal, alligator-infested, super-heated hell-fens that were Beaufort's rice plantations? Natural selection would have ensured that the Negro father, coming from a string of survivors in such otherworldly conditions, could spawn the most magnificent of human beings.

HAY

So, on top of that, can we say that Smalls' unnatural courage, joie-de-vivre, his ability to transcend his enemies, ability to inspire even the whites around him, will ignite vast conspiracies dedicated to his destruction?

NICOLAY

I will predict a few controversies along the way. Sure I can agree to that.

INT. LINCOLN'S OFFICE - DAY

Only Lincoln and Stanton remain in the office. Lincoln is still at the window. He looks down and sees French and Smalls exiting the White House and walking across the lawn to the street. Lincoln is in deep thought.

There is a long pause.

LINCOLN

I think I've reconsidered.

(pause)

I want you to issue that order.

STANTON

To enlist the black soldiers?

LINCOLN

Yes.

STANTON

If you think that is prudent, I will do that in the next hour.

Stanton hesitates.

STANTON

Mr. President I've seen you sit through most of your war meetings. You are polite and inquisitive, but with little prospect of your core beliefs changing. On those occasions when I have seen you reverse yourself, the change came slowly and deliberately. I'm surprised here today.

LINCOLN

Actually, I'm just astonished as you.

Lincoln returns to look out the window. French and Smalls are just walking out of sight.

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE:

Within minutes of meeting Robert Smalls, Secretary of war Stanton issued an order allowing African American's to enlist in the armed forces.

Within a month of meeting Robert Smalls, Lincoln issued a proclamation promising to free all slaves in the Confederacy as of the first the New Year. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the proclamation now known as the Emancipation Proclamation.

Smalls, who had learned to read and write while serving in the military, went into business and then politics. He served in both houses of the South Carolina Legislature and in 1874 was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Robert Smalls was one of only five African Americans elected to Congress from the South in the Jim Crow era, as disfranchisement reduced black voting. After reconstruction, no African Americans would be elected from the South until 1872.

Robert Smalls was the last Republican to be elected from South Carolina's 5th district until 2010.

Robert Smalls was the longest serving African-American member of Congress until Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. in the late 20th Century.

CREDITS:

HISTORICAL NOTE: Robert Smalls was a very charismatic man. He was a large man as he aged. Any filmmaker will have an interesting dilemma? Hire a charismatic thin man like Chris Rock. Rock can charm people like Smalls. Ideally we can find a large charismatic man.

Also, if anything is missing from this script it might be dialogue. In this matter, I would hire someone like Chris Rock and allow that actor to adlib. I've read through hundreds of historical accounts. Almost everyone who knew Robert Smalls wrote about his wit and how cheerful and optimistic he was. But there aren't many specific examples of this wit in the historical record.

MEETING WITH LINCOLN LAST IN THE FILM: Stealing The Planter was an important historical event. It was a great publicity coup for the North, but Smalls' meeting with Lincoln and Stanton trump that in historical value. The decision to use black troops in the fighting was pivotal.

Because Smalls' meeting with Lincoln is the dramatic climax, I have not proceeded in chronological order to keep the escape of the Planter at the end of the film. I feel it might be less effective, but it is possible to reorder the scenes into a chronological order.

SPEECH NOTE: Robert Smalls does not speak to the whites as the other slaves speak. Smalls is completely bilingual and could speak to his fellow slaves in their pidgin Gullah.

Smalls can talk to any white man as if he was in possession of education and good breeding. He could be very "white" in voice and diction, but Smalls could neither read nor write. He appears to have had some special background, some rare upbringing that separated him from the mass of the slaves we will encounter in this film.

GULLAH LANGUAGE NOTE: One of the things that can make this film unique would be to capture the Gullah language in this and some other scenes. Gullah is a Creole (half African and half English) language heard on the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. About 250,000 people speak Gullah today. It is NOT nearly an extinct language. Academic sources list the East Battery neighborhood in North Charleston as best of the surviving enclaves of Gullah culture.

Why is this worthy of inclusion in a film? This area of South Carolina is where the slave population retained most of its African language, food and culture. Retaining the language might have been a form of rebellion against the slave holders. It is up for debate. But clearly, it was an effort to maintain something uniquely their own.