

THE PALLBEARERS

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FADE IN:

EXT. BOOTHILL CEMETERY - DAY

An empty, freshly dug grave. A shovel pounds a wooden plank into the loose dirt.

Burned into the plank:

CPL. SILAS JACKSON
Ohio 1st Volunteer Infantry
Born June 23, 1844
Died October 13, 1879
Beloved husband and father.

EXT. MAIN STREET / KEARNEY, NEBRASKA - DAY

Nails are driven into the lid of a pine box.

Hands grab rope handles on the sides of the box.

With the initial squeeze of the bag, the first NOTES of "AMAZING GRACE" BLOW forth from bagpipes.

Wooden sidewalks flank a dirt road.

Legend: Kearney, Nebraska; October 15, 1879

SIX MEN carry the pine box down the center of the road. They are preceded by a BAG PIPE PLAYER. "AMAZING GRACE" continues to BELLOW from the pipes.

In addition to the SIX PALLBEARERS, TWO WOMEN and REV. COLLINS (30s) makeup the procession.

We push in on the first pallbearer, CHARLIE CRAVEN (35). In spite of visible physical scars that attest to a hard life, he is attractive in a rugged way. He is smart, persuasive, and enthusiastic.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BANKS OF THE ERIE CANAL - DAY

Charlie (17) sits atop a horse. He bears no visible scars.

Legend: Near Toledo, Ohio; April 17, 1861

Flanking Charlie are SILAS JACKSON (17) and JOSIE ANDERSON (17). They are also mounted on horseback.

Silas is good looking, and has the chiseled physique of someone who embraces a hard day's labor. He's loyal, ambitious, and naive, sometimes an optimist to a fault.

Josie is pretty, but in a plain, natural way. She doesn't wear makeup, nor frilly clothes. She's shunned her dress for pants and rides straddling the horse without regard for decorum. Josie fans her face with a cowboy hat before situating it back on her head.

JOSIE

Betcha a nickel, you little boys
can't keep up.

Josie spurs her horse into a gallop along the canal trail.

SILAS

Little boys?

CHARLIE

Silas, you gonna let her talk to
us like that?

SILAS

I have a choice?

Josie disappears around a bend in the canal. The "little boys" spur their horses into action, giving chase.

They jockey for position as they try in vain to catch Josie. Charlie edges his horse ahead of Silas, blocking the trail.

SILAS

You want some more lead in that
rear of yours?

Silas jerks out his 1836 black powder Colt revolver. Charlie makes the fatal mistake of looking back to see Silas brandishing the gun. He slows, just a little.

CHARLIE

Shit! Put that away lest you shoot
me by accident.

Silas steers his horse to the outside of the trail, furthest from the canal.

SILAS

This iron goes off, you better
reckon it ain't on accident, and
pray it ain't aimed at you.

Charlie's horse loses its footing on the edge of the canal. Dirt rains into water below. Charlie slows down.

CHARLIE

Goddamn you, Silas. You nearly
drove me into the drink.

FURTHER DOWN THE CANAL

Josie rides full gallop. She moves gracefully, as one with the animal. She glances over her shoulder looking for the "little boys." They're not to be seen.

She doesn't notice THREE BANDITS on horseback hiding in the trees ahead. The SCAREY BANDIT yanks a limp rope. It tightens across the trail creating a clothes line.

Josie rides into the rope. She's ripped from her horse. She crashes to the ground.

The bandits ride out from cover. The SMART BANDIT stays mounted. The Scarey Bandit and the DUMB BANDIT leap down from their horses.

DUMB BANDIT

We got one, boss.

The two bandits on foot yank Josie to her feet. Her hat falls off. Her long hair unfurls.

DUMB BANDIT

You're a girl!

JOSIE

Apparently requiring spectacles is
not among your many deficiencies.

DUMB BANDIT

What?

SMART BANDIT

She's saying you're dumb, but you
ain't blind.

SCAREY BANDIT

Bitch!

The Scary Bandit smacks her. Josie winces, but takes the hit in stride.

SMART BANDIT

Check her horse.

The Dumb Bandit checks the saddle bags.

DUMB BANDIT

Empty boss.

SCAREY BANDIT

What you got in these pockets?

The Scarey Bandit shoves his hands into her pants pockets. She tries to pull away. He pulls her close. He rips the pockets open. Empty.

JOSIE

I don't have any money.

SCAREY BANDIT

We aim to get paid one way or the other.

The Scary Bandit shoves her to the ground.

SMART BANDIT

We'll take it in flesh. Yours or the horse.

SCAREY BANDIT

Or both.

SILAS (O.S.)

I don't recommend either. They're both ornery.

Silas and Charlie ride onto the scene. Silas still clutches his Colt. He FIRES. A round rips through the Scarey Bandit's arm and splinters a tree behind him.

The Smart Bandit turns his horse and bolts into a gallop.

Charlie leaps from his horse, tackling the Dumb Bandit.

The wounded Scarey Bandit darts for his horse. He grabs the saddle horn and yanks himself onto the beast, already in stride.

Silas chases after the fleeing riders.

Charlie wrestles with the Dumb Bandit. He forces him face first into the mud. He presses the man's face harder into the ground. The Dumb Bandit struggles to breathe.

JOSIE

Charlie. That's enough.

TWO GUNSHOTS echo down the trail. Charlie and Josie look in the direction of the shots.

The Dumb Bandit takes this distraction as opportunity. He throws Charlie off. He springs to his feet and dives into the canal.

Charlie pulls his own revolver and FIRES after the swimming bandit. Rounds splash around him. All misses.

The Dumb Bandit disappears around a bend in the canal.

Charlie holsters his revolver and helps Josie to her feet.

Charlie steals a little kiss on the cheek. Josie pushes him away, and slaps him.

JOSIE

How dare you!

CHARLIE

A little reward for protecting your virtue.

She backs away. They stare at each other in silence.

Silas rides up.

SILAS

Are you all right?

Charlie waits for Josie to answer. They continue their stare down.

SILAS

Everything all right?

Silas leaps down from his horse and rushes to Josie. She pulls away.

JOSIE

Why did you ride off after them?

She collects her hat. She pulls herself onto her horse.

SILAS

It was my duty.

JOSIE

You should have stayed here. With me.

SILAS

What happened?

CHARLIE

It weren't nothing.

SILAS

Tell me anyway.

JOSIE

I handled it.

SILAS

Handled what?

CHARLIE

Just a little peck on the cheek
for a reward.

SILAS

You bastard!

Silas swings at Charlie. The punch catches Charlie squarely on the nose. He lunges back at Silas, but it's more bear hug than true fight.

They fall to the dirt. Charlie gets the upper hand and rolls over on top of Silas, pinning him to the ground.

JOSIE

Idiots, get out of the muck.

Silas pushes Charlie off. He leaps to his feet. He holds his hands out like a boxer squaring off for a fight.

SILAS

Come on.

CHARLIE

If you want some, I'll give it.

Charlie props up his fists, readying for a fight. Blood trickles from Charlie's nose.

JOSIE

Stop this foolishness. You're practically brothers. I won't be responsible for breaking that bond.

The boys continue to square off eyeing each other with contempt.

CHARLIE

You're right. I'm sorry.

SILAS

Sorry to whom?

CHARLIE

Both of you. But mainly Josie. I was out of place.

JOSIE

It's your fault, Silas. If you were here, I would of gave you a kiss.

CHARLIE

He can't help himself.

SILAS

I went after them for you.

JOSIE

What did you mean calling me ornery anyway?

SILAS

I meant an ungrateful pain in the ass.

Josie rides off in the direction from which they came.

SILAS

But a beautiful pain in the ass.

CHARLIE

Are we good?

SILAS

Just shy of good.

EXT. DOWNTOWN TOLEDO - DAY

There are dozens of brick buildings, some 1 or 2 stories, the largest 4 or 5. One of the more ornate buildings is the two story Jay Cooke and Company Bank.

The street is paved with bricks. Gas lamps line the road. Horses, buggies, ornate carriages and pedestrians meander about their business.

A crowd has gathered in front of the bank.

JAY COOKE (40) has a full dark beard, no mustache, and wears a top hat and long frock coat over his suit and bow tie. He is charismatic and energetic. He addresses the crowd from the bank steps.

Silas, Charlie and Josie ride up and stop behind the crowd.

JAY COOKE

Ladies and gentlemen, neighbors and friends these are trying times indeed. You've no doubt heard that our esteemed President has issued a call for volunteers. For those men who are able, serving to preserve this great nation is the highest noble calling. However unity is not preserved on the battlefield alone. Nor can we liberate the oppressed Negro lest we send our fine volunteers into tarnation well armed, well clothed and well fed. To save this great nation the President calls upon you all. I call upon you all.

Silas and Charlie are riveted. Josie watches Silas.

JOSIE

Silas.

Silas is completely engrossed in the speech. He doesn't respond.

JOSIE

SILAS!

SILAS

Huh?

JOSIE

Hold Belle for me.

Josie hands Silas the reins to her horse. She hops down.

SILAS

Sure.

Josie enters a jewelry store across the street. The guys barely notice her leave. They are riveted by Cooke's words.

JAY COOKE

Regardless of any physical liabilities that may preclude actual service, we can all volunteer for the cause by purchasing war bonds. Without your financial support, our nation will surely remain shattered and torn apart. The great American experiment will fail.

JAY COOKE (CONT'D)

I say to you, do not let the
Southern aggressors, the traitors,
succeed in destroying this nation
born in the blood of our
grandfathers. Do not let their
sacrifices be in vain.

INT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

A JEWELER stands behind a glass counter where Josie studies pocket watches.

JOSIE

Do you have one that can hold a
photograph?

JEWELER

Many. What style are you looking
for?

JOSIE

Something sturdy. Simple.

JEWELER

Your gentleman has plain taste?

JOSIE

It needs to survive.

JEWELER

I wouldn't swear an oath to it.
But this particular one might just
survive a cannon blast.

The Jewler hands her a simple silver plated watch. She pops open the cover.

JOSIE

It's perfect.

JEWELER

That'll be two dollars.

Josie takes off her hat. Sewn into the brim is a small pocket. She pulls out a folded five dollar note.

INT. DINING ROOM / JACKSON HOME - NIGHT

This is a simple, but neatly maintained stone house. A fire burns in the fireplace. A few family photos adorn one wall. This place is warm and inviting.

WILL JACKSON (42) is handsome, with wavy hair, a strong build, but not buff, and sports a neatly trimmed mustache. He wears a suit and tie.

ANNIE JACKSON (35) is petite, pretty, and perfectly groomed. She wears her hair up with an intricate broach and pin. She sports a Victorian dress, with a high collar and long skirt.

Silas sits with them at the table, sharing a meal.

SILAS

I just reacted. I didn't have time to think.

WILL

You did the right thing, son.

SILAS

What if I had killed that man?

WILL

Then he'd be explaining himself to the Good Lord right now, rather than holed up in a whore house somewhere.

ANNIE

Mr. Jackson, I will not have talk of those places at my dinner table.

SILAS

I don't mean what now for him. How could I live with killing a man?

WILL

Like any decision you make in life, the only thing you can do is live with it. If I ever had to kill a man, I'd thank the Lord I was still living to suffer with whatever guilt I had for it.

ANNIE

Perhaps we could find a more suitable dinner conversation?

SILAS

I heard Mr. Cooke speak today.

ANNIE

The banker?

SILAS

One in the same, mother. He was talking about our duty in the War of Southern Aggression.

ANNIE

What does a banker know of war?

WILL

Everything. War is when they make the most profit.

SILAS

Mr. Cooke had a good point. This is a just war. And we can't send our volunteers to fight without proper weapons.

ANNIE

How is talk of war and weapons any more suited to the dinner table?

WILL

These are current events, Mrs. Jackson.

SILAS

Father, I'd like to invest my earnings from the store in Mr. Cooke's war bonds.

WILL

I believe you have around five hundred dollars. How much would you like to invest?

SILAS

I have five hundred and eight dollars, plus 83 cents. I'd like to invest all of it.

ANNIE

You were saving that to start a life with Miss Anderson.

SILAS

Every Sunday we hear Reverend Craven preach about the evils of slavery. Now our President is fixing to carve that sin from our nation's bosom. Shouldn't I do my part?

ANNIE

We are talking about just investing, right?

SILAS

Yes, mother.

WILL

It pains me to say it, Silas, but your mother is right. This is the exact same conversation in which we were previously engaged.

SILAS

How so?

WILL

This is another one of those life decisions. Are you prepared to live with the consequences?

EXT. FRONT PORCH / CRAVEN HOME - NIGHT

This is a small ragged, dark, uninviting wooden house. The porch sags. Boards CREAK.

REVEREND ED CRAVEN (55) is a wiry man with dark, deep eyes and taut skin stretched tightly over bones. He's almost skeletal, yet there's something powerful about his judgmental stare.

Ed rocks back and forth in a wooden rocker. He's drunk.

Charlie climbs up the front steps.

ED

Where the hell have you been? You were supposed to be making me supper.

Ed takes a long pull from the whiskey bottle.

CHARLIE

You seem to have managed.

Charlie goes for the door. Ed leaps to his feet, blocking the door.

ED

What've you been up to?

CHARLIE

Nothing.

ED

So you was whiling away in sloth.

CHARLIE

If you must know, I was listening to Mr. Cooke talk about the war.

ED

The war. Pull up a chair. Tell your old man what you know about the war.

Ed returns to his rocker. He takes a drag of whiskey. He offers the bottle to his son. Charlie refuses it.

Charlie sits on the step.

CHARLIE

I'm thinking about volunteering.

ED

You should. The battlefield is a perfect place for a sinner.

CHARLIE

This is a just war.

ED

What's just about it?

CHARLIE

It's war for abolition.

ED

That coward Lincoln? He's no abolitionist. Why hasn't he freed the Negro?

CHARLIE

Lincoln can't risk losing the border states.

ED

Look here, Secretary of State Seward has arrived. When did you become so smart, boy?

CHARLIE

I know things.

ED

Then you should know all them Washington politicians are liars.

ED (CONT'D)

What's the point of having convictions if when the time comes to stand behind them, you're too afraid to do so?

CHARLIE

Not everyone is as principled or strong willed as you are, Father.

ED

I don't expect you ever could be. But I do hold the President of these formerly United States in such regard.

Ed turns his attentions back to the bottle. Charlie sits quietly on the step, not sure if the conversation has ended.

ED

Even if the war was about slavery, you can't correct one sin by committing another.

CHARLIE

And what of the beatings you give me?

ED

I gladly take on those sins out of love for you.

CHARLIE

So now you're Christ crucified sacrificing yourself for me?

Ed leaps to his feet and smacks Charlie across the back of the head.

ED

That's blasphemy.

Charlie springs from the steps. He faces his father from the front lawn.

CHARLIE

I've had enough of your hypocrisy.

Charlie jerks out his revolver. He clutches it tightly, not actually aiming at his father. His hand trembles.

ED

You go to your war. But you ask yourself before you die, did you have enough time to repent for your sin?

CHARLIE

It wasn't my fault.

ED

Your sin was so great it killed your mother giving birth to you.

CHARLIE

Maybe she was just tired of living with you.

Ed raises his hand, prepared to strike.

ED

Be gone. Before I commit further sins on your behalf.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GENERAL STORE / DOWNTOWN TOLEDO - DAY

A two story brick building bears a sign reading : JACKSON & SONS GENERAL MERCANTILE.

Silas and Charlie bounce out of the store and turn down the street toward the bank.

CHARLIE

I'm not going to the bank, Silas.

SILAS

Why not?

CHARLIE

I ain't got but eight dollars.

SILAS

I'll loan you two notes. Then you got the ten dollar minimum.

CHARLIE

Don't pine over me.

SILAS

Just trying to help.