

GLORY ROAD

Written by

Ronald Lee Oliver

Based on a True Story

8825 Golden Ridge Road, Lakeside, CA 92040
1-(619)920-5197

FADE IN

EXT. MISSISSIPPI FARM -- DAY

1925

The damp black clay of a Mississippi field spills off of the blades of a plow driven by a tall, rugged man, CECIL WARE. He curses at the TWO LABORING OXEN straining at their yoke. Behind, a barefooted boy, JAPHETH WARE, nine or ten years old, follows. He is carrying a wicker basket. He lifts his voice to attract the attention of the man, who is very absorbed in his work.

JAPHETH

Papa!

Cecil does not acknowledge.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

Papa!

Again, no response.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

Papa! I got your lunch!

Cecil calls the oxen to a halt and pauses for a moment, taking off his slouchy hat to wipe his brow. His face is ruddy, and the forehead pale and white. Japheth holds the basket up. Cecil finally acknowledges his presence with eye contact. He is neither warm nor cold to his son.

CECIL

Your Mama all right?

Japheth takes a cloth from the basket and spreads it on the unturned ground. He has done this before.

JAPHETH

Yeah, she's all right.

He spreads the items on the cloth. There is a mason jar of cold milk and a tin mess kit. The hot food steams as he removes the lid.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

She said to tell you we're
havin company at supper, an
she says, "Make sure He wears
his hat, cause if He gets
sunburnt agin, I'm really gonna
tan His hide."

Cecil smiles, takes off his hat, and puts it on Japheth's head. He pulls the brim down over Japheth's eyes. SFX A FLOCK OF CROWS take flight, raucously, from the trees at the edge of the field. Japheth pulls the hat brim up and looks in the direction of the birds, as does Cecil.

SFX A LOW DRONE is heard in the distance.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

What's that?

CECIL

(shoveling food down)
Train.

The boy cocks his head, listening.

JAPHETH

That's not a train, Papa.

The drone gets louder. The boy stands. Japheth continues to eat.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

What is it Papa?

The drone, very loud now, is getting nearer, louder. Cecil stops eating and lays the empty tin on the cloth.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

Look!

He points off and upward. A BIPLANE comes over the tops of the tall pecan trees, flying low.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

An airplane! It's an airplane,
Papa!

The boy is jumping with excitement. He has ripped his father's hat off and is waving it as the plane passes across the open field.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

An airplane!

The plane passes just over the tops of a windbreak row of pecans and is landing in the adjacent field, perhaps a half mile away. Japheth drops his father's hat and sprints toward the plane.

CECIL

Japheth!

Japheth has gotten perhaps twenty yards distance. He stops and turns.

CECIL (CONT'D)
You got chores, son.

The plane has landed and is taxiing around to face in the opposite direction. There is a moment of silent confrontation between the two. Japheth turns and runs toward the plane. Sprinting, he does not look back. Cecil picks up his hat, dusts it off, and returns it to his head. One of the oxen lows impatiently as Cecil disapprovingly gazes in the direction of his son.

CUT TO:

Follow as the boy sprints madly, barefoot, over the freshly plowed field. He encounters a row of brambles--blackberries--but knows just where the gaps are. He shoots through a barbed wire fence and sprints continuously toward the plane which is...

CUT TO:

PLANE Turning about and --

CUT TO:

JAPHETH

Japheth stops running, panting --

CUT TO:

The plane turns toward him and --

CUT TO:

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

Japheth waves at the pilot and --

CUT TO:

PLANE

the plane accelerates toward him and --

CUT TO:

JAPHETH: we see his astonishment as --

CUT TO:

PLANE: the plane accelerates directly at him and lifts off the ground before him, flying almost directly over his head, the pilot waving, and --

CUT TO:

JAPHETH: we see the boy's excitement, awe, and disappointment as --

CUT TO:

PLANE: the plane rocks its wings left and right, as if to say "Good-bye," and--

CUT TO:

Japheth looks after, longingly, for a moment, then takes off running for the forested hills near the cotton fields. We see him running, dappled by cathedral-like forest light, down forest paths, his arms straight out from his sides, mimicking an airplane. He is silhouetted, backlit, as he runs along a ridge. He runs over a rise, and looks down over the panorama of the broad Mississippi river valley. He heads down a path toward it. He runs over another small rise, and below is a sloping, hollow that has been occupied by squatters. There is a shack, some chickens, an extensive garden. A small black boy, OTIS, is hoeing in the garden patch. Japheth calls to him.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

Otis! ... Hey, Otis!

Otis looks up from his work and Japheth waves for him to come. Otis looks around, not wanting to be caught leaving his chores, and runs toward Japheth. They greet with an elaborate "secret handshake."

OTIS

What's up, Jay?

JAPHETH

I saw an airplane!

OTIS

No you didn't.

JAPHETH

Cross my heart and hope to die. I just came from seein it. It was red, and noisy as a train, only it was up in the sky.

Otis looks up at the sky skeptically.

OTIS

I been out here all morning and I aint seen nothing.

JAPHETH

Honest, I saw an airplane and the pilot waved at me. I'm gonna be a pilot one day...

At that moment a large black man, OTIS' FATHER, steps out of the shack and calls out to his son.

OTIS' FATHER

Son, you aint got time for
monkey-shines. Now tell that
boy there you got work to do.

OTIS

I gotta go.

JAPHETH

Alright.

Japheth turns to leave and then calls back to Otis.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

Meet me down at the swimmin
hole this afternoon?

OTIS

If I can!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

Japheth is walking along a country road; ahead is an orphanage. A once nicely painted, now peeling, wooden sign at the side of the road reads, YAZOO COUNTY ORPHANAGE. There are children playing near the large Ante-bellum style building, which dominates the large estate. One pretty young girl, about Japheth's age, SUZY MITCHELL, sits alone, reading a book apart from the other children. Japheth approaches her, quietly. From behind, he puts his hands over her eyes.

JAPHETH

Guess who?

She lifts her hands to feel his. She smiles.

SUZY

Is it...a knight in shining
armor, come to take me away on
his big black horse?

JAPHETH

Better than that.

SUZY

What could be better than that?

JAPHETH

How bout a fearless pilot,
come to fly you up to the
clouds in his roaring
airplane.

DISSOLVE TO:

TIGHT SHOT OF DAISY PETALS LANDING ON WATER, CREATING
GENTLE RIPPLES

CUT TO:

EXT. POND -- DAY

Japheth and Suzy are sitting, very close, on the end
of the small dock that extends into the pond on the
orphanage property. Their feet dangle below. Suzy is
weaving daisies into a wreath, and some of the petals
fall into the water as she talks with Japheth.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

...and then it just went
zoooooom...and took right off
into the sky, and then the
pilot waved at me.

SUZY

(dreamily)

Where do you think he was
going to, Japheth?

JAPHETH

I don't know...maybe
Timbuktu...or Mexico...or
Memphis...or probably wherever
he wanted to go eat his lunch.

Suzy giggles, she likes Japheth. Her mood suddenly
changes.

SUZY

I wish I could go anywhere
Japheth. I wish I could go
away from here--from the
orphanage.

Japheth takes the daisy wreath from Suzy and crowns
her with it.

JAPHETH

We will, Suzy. You and
me. I'll take you away from
here. I promise--you're my
girl.

Japheth hugs her and the extra daisies splash into
the water.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BIG BLACK RIVER -- DAY

Huge splashes go up as Japheth and Otis swing from a rope tied to a massive tree that overhangs a protected cove, their secret swimming hole, on the river. The boys swim ashore and lay on their backs, warming in the afternoon sun.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

Otis.

OTIS

What?

JAPHETH

I know where there's some ripe watermelons.

OTIS

You does? I aint got no money.

JAPHETH

Neither do I;

The boys look at each other and break into devious smiles.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. NEAR WATERMELON PATCH -- DAY

Japheth and otis are laying on their bellies, peering through the weeds at an abundant patch of full-grown, striped, snake watermelons--huge ones--maybe seventy pounds each. Behind is the farmhouse of the mean MR.PHELPS. An old and grizzled hound dog lays, asleep, snoring on the porch. Japheth and Otis begin to crawl into the patch, heading for two prize melons. They reach their goal. Japheth pulls a pocket knife from his pocket and saws at a stem.