



Based on Andrew Ward's epic "Dark Midnight When I Rise," *Steal Away* is the legendary true story of **George White, Ella Sheppard** and **The Fisk Jubilee Singers**, a spectacular choir of young former slaves fighting the KKK's reign of terror against their schools not with bullets or bombs but sensational songs of faith and freedom. *Steal Away* follows the choir's titanic rise from the darkness of slavery to the glittering ballrooms and throne rooms of Europe as they conquer the world... and must then conquer their own demons.

One of the most breathtaking stories ever known, *Steal Away* will feature a spectacularly diverse international cast, the strongest Black female lead ever onscreen, and a sweeping soundtrack by multi-Grammy winning composer **Billy Childs**.

JONAS STONE

Black, British, 45-55, written as male but could be female. Publisher of an activist newspaper in London.

Well-spoken, sleekly attired, and impeccably groomed, Stone is polish personified. His magnetic eyes shimmer like crystal pools.

Stone presents himself to the Jubilee Singers as a fellow crusader in their civil rights cause, promising that his pro-Black, power-to-the-people newspaper will liberate them from their oppression under the AMA. Quoting Scripture, he presents himself as an angel of light they can trust.

So why does Stone somehow unsettle us?

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In reading Stone, avoid shallow characterizations - he mustn't come off as an obvious deceiver. Subtlety and nuance are the key to nailing Stone.

Though polished and well-spoken, we detect a raw, earthy edge in Stone, as if he came up from a hard-knock life. There's clearly more to Stone than meets the eye, yet when he speaks we believe him. Those hypnotic, mesmerizing eyes tell us he's truthful, trustworthy, even fatherly in his apparent care and protectiveness for the choir.

Only that's not the full story.

"JONAS STONE"
AKA "ENGLISHMAN"

81.

12/14/21

EAST ROOM

SCENE 1

ANGLE ON CRAVATH - Sporting a fine suit and fat cigar, he swaggers about with dignitaries bragging about *his* amazing choir.

We PAN to Loudin and Georgia glaring at him. As they fume, we hear:

START →

ENGLISHMAN (O.S.)

Look at him soak it up. You'd think he was the *author and finisher* of your tour.

They turn to find a sleekly attired black ENGLISHMAN beside them. Not sure what to make of him, Georgia takes his program to sign it.

GEORGIA

Name?

ENGLISHMAN

It's there.

He extends his card. Before she can take it --

ENGLISHMAN

If only the people knew the truth.

LOUDIN

The truth?

ENGLISHMAN

I hear Cravath made it a little rough for you out on the road, that when you were sick, starving and sleeping on sidewalks, he wouldn't toss you a nickel sideways.

LOUDIN

(seething)

You've got hungry ears.

ENGLISHMAN

Ravenous. It's my work.

GEORGIA

Which is?

He again extends his card.

ENGLISHMAN

It's all there... Now of course you're his "goodwill niggers."

LOUDIN

What the hell?? Look, I don't know what you *think* you know --

STEAL AWAY

ENGLISHMAN

I know when you were dying out on those streets to save his sinking school, that two-faced fraud disowned you like syphilis until you *whored up* twenty-five grand, then took every penny without leaving you a cup to crap in. Which explains why he's sporting a new three-piece *Herriman*, you're bleeding through cheap burlap, and behind their nods and applause folk are saying Fred Loudin *took it up the cargo*.

Unbelievable! Loudin hauls off to destroy this guy --

ENGLISHMAN

You *could* turn that around.

-- but Georgia stops his fist. They look the Englishman over. Impeccably groomed and bejeweled, he is polish personified. His coarse, quarried face is set off by magnetic blue eyes.

GEORGIA

Go on.

ENGLISHMAN

The enemy has come to steal, kill and destroy; let no weapon formed against you prosper.

Georgia and Loudin trade weighty looks. The Englishman grins.

ENGLISHMAN

It's all right there.

His card hovers before them like a pendulum, and we

CUT TO:

A HIDDEN ROOM - SOMEWHERE, SOMEPLACE

Wallace and Ella breathlessly enter. Alone at last, they devour each other with ravenous eyes. The attraction is nuclear.

She quivers as he reaches for her, then quakes as his rugged hands make gentle contact. As his fingers brush and probe her throbbing flesh she silently screams, her body a crush of sensations.

His fingers stop on a wound. The wound angers him, but she shushes his lips and pulls him deeply into herself. Her mouth waiting, he penetrates her with a blistering kiss that melts time, space and them into one. Fused inseparably, they writhe and moan as if awakening to life.

INT. *THE LIBERATOR* NEWSPAPER PRINT ROOM - JUST AFTER

SCENE 2 A cavernous, echoey space. Oddly, the place is dead - no workers, the machinery idle. Still, Stone shows off the printing presses.

START →

STONE

How great a forest a little fire kindles.

BENNIE

And these "force the AMA's hand" how?

Stone hands Bennie the draft of an article. His eyes widen at the title:

"BIGOTRY, BRUTALITY, CRIMINAL ABUSE: THE AMA'S SHOCKING NEW SLAVERY"

It's a tell-all exposé. He reads the lead paragraph:

BENNIE

"Cash-strapped Missionaries prey on the lives of eight black students, including a fourteen year-old minor, their ~~treasurer and~~ music professor sending them cross-country ~~into violence-plagued territory without provisions or protection from bloodthirsty vigilantes,~~ subjecting them to sickness, starvation and near-slaughter on a deadly moneymaking mission the AMA director himself called reckless."

Thunderstruck, Bennie breaks off. Ike shrugs uneasily.

IKE

"Truth is a mist."

STONE

The cornerstone of journalism. This hits the stands, the fallout is fatal. Cravath, White, the Sheppard girl --

BENNIE

They're crucified.

IKE

~~We inherit the kingdom. The scandal forces them to surrender the choir.~~

Bennie is floored, disturbed yet torn. He paces, processing it all.

BENNIE

So why am I here?

STONE

The Prime Minister loves you as a son -
hell, he's all but adopted you. You
have his ear *and sword*; you cry foul,
his wrath puts us all behind bars.

IKE

Your endorsement bulletproofs us;
The Liberator can't run it without
you.

Pacing, thinking, Bennie looks around.

BENNIE

Where is everyone?

STONE

Church, if they know what's good for
them. We shut down for Holy Week.

Stone's eyes draw Bennie's gaze. Stone's face is coarse, but his
crystal blue eyes, rare for a black man, glisten like hypnotic
pools. Bennie wrests himself from their pull.

BENNIE

~~What's our fate to you?~~

GEORGIA

Bennie! The Liberator is a crusader
for justice!

STONE

(defending Bennie)

Now, now, we're to be *wise as serpents* --

BENNIE

-- *and harmless as doves*. You're a man
of Scripture.

STONE

Oh my father was a great preacher.
The Jubilees are the pride of our
people, but your oppression sets
back the race.

(holds up the exposé)

This is an axe, but it takes one to
break the chains of injustice. The
Liberator stands with you in the
struggle, to give you hope and a
future.

BENNIE

(chastened, his head swimming)

Right... sorry... I'm just trying to...

STONE

Figure it all out, I know. You have been all your life, wondering where you belong, how you fit in.

Bennie's eyes go misty; Stone's eyes sweep his soul.

STONE

I see you, son; your faith is frail, beaten down by empty prayers and promises. You bow the knee day and night crying, "*Use me, please use me!*" But heaven's silence mocks your tears. Truth is, you'd end the torture today if you could be sure you were worth the funeral. *Hope deferred makes the heart sick --*

BENNIE

But longing fulfilled is a tree of life.

STONE

Amen, Amen. The world worships a victim; expose their abuse and become a living martyr on the world stage, high and lifted up. *You think you're famous now...* Get off those knees! Take to the mountaintop and claim *your Jubilee!*

Stone's words stir Bennie. Everyone holds their breath as he wrestles his thoughts. But in the end...

BENNIE

We promised the world a monument to freedom; I won't rest until I touch those bricks.

He takes a breath, owns his decision, and exits. The others seethe.

STONE

(hands Loudin the exposé)
Not to worry, sweetness, he'll come around. When his cage gets too tight, this is the key. Cable me and I'll bring the world to your feet. Remember, *I am with you always.*

They shake on it. Then ominously...

LOUDIN

Meanwhile, if it's fireworks they want, let's start the show.

END