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The others were warned, but I was clueless, the stories left on the trail still haunt me like the river that flowed beside it. The tale I tell is not one for the weak, in fact I'd say this tale is only for those who will endure. This tale draws lines in the sand, leaving nowhere to hide, a decision, the fate of our pride. In your time, you call it a song, in our time, we call it survival. To you, it's a hymn, to us, it was a map, a blueprint, perhaps even the cost of freedom itself, this is the tale of *Wade in the Water*.

I was taught just like the others, not like my ancestors, by those who controlled them. I was told this song was a "traditional African spiritual", but the truth can only be obfuscated for so long. But They didn't lie, no this was far worse, they buried. This song was not buried by tradition, rather it was buried by the voices, but not the voices of the dead, this was worse, it was buried by the voices of the naive, those misled to think this song was for fun. It's not their fault, they know no better, they too were victims of the pedagogy. This song, its history and message all lead back to a trail, a trail now buried underneath schools and railroads, a trail that is more symbolic than physical, like a moth to the flame, it calls us, yet the wisest among us would turn back. But I'm not like the others, no, I don't want to turn back, I want to burn like my ancestors on a stake, and I want to feel the weight of this trail, and carry it on my back like a hound. I want to understand why the train moves forward, plowing forward on the tracks, even when its conductor is running on foot, I want to know why they choose missing limbs and speechless crimes over the shackles that bound them. Perhaps the cost of freedom was worth more than its weight in flesh, and perhaps there are fates worse than death. I challenge you, yes you, to get on this trail, not as a spectator, but as a witness, I want you to know what happens when God troubles over water. I want you to feel the tide as it washes away our fear, and returns the scent of hope. Join us as we run from the shackles, knowing we can't turn back, we must put as much faith in God as we do the tide, may it wash our scent like it washed our

history, and return us back onto the trail. I want you to meet the conductor, perhaps you already have, but no, this one isn't waving their hands and holding fermatas. This one still sings, but only to those who listen. She waves her hands indeed, but only to wash the scent, and only holds to let the hounds pass. History won't forget her name, but it will forget her song's story, she is Harriet Tubman. She will indeed put on a performance, though not for show. She would risk far beyond shackles to save those who no longer have ears to hear her song, she moves the train forward with one conviction in her heart, God IS going to trouble the water, and when he does, be ready to move.

So, let's move, no, let's run, and trust in our own divine authority, Harriet. We must be careful, it's dark, yet she needs no eyes to see the tracks she laid down, and she is not alone, no even back then women didn't move alone, still fearful, but for much different reasons. We stop at a crossroads, the river deafening, but not over Harriet's voice, she tells us God is gonna trouble the water, trust in her. But we split up anyway, some of us chose the wrong path, we can hear their screams, but we don't know their fates and we must continue forward, no matter what the cost. We hear sounds from behind us, the river, still ever-deafening, is still no match for Harriet's cry, Wade in the water she says. Some of us hesitate, we don't know what that means, but Harriet, ever smart, jumps in the water, and we follow suit. We sit in the water, and wash like it's dawn, then we sit, ever still, uncomfortable, and blind. Harriet and the others are watching over the trail, but we don't know what they see, then we hear it, the hound. We hear it sniff and sniff and sniff, then it stops, perhaps even looks her dead in the eye, and retreats back to its master, and they continue on the trail, still looking for slaves. We move for days on end, hugging the river like a shackle. Some of us will never make it off that trail, executed for wanting freedom, how fragile the concept. But for those like us? We survived, for now.

When we did make it, some of us were returned because of that dreaded Scott decision. Yes my reader, I fear that there is no land that is not the white man's land, and we were sent back on

a boat on that same river. There were others on that boat, like those who ran with us, and those who had only ever known freedom and yet both are sent to a life they were always meant to live. Some of us would return to the trail after we made it, risking it like Harriet, though most never returned. We had made it, but we were not made for a white man's world. Even the freest of slaves could not vote, no that would be giving too much power to your property, and that is not a good business decision. Even freedom had become another chain, imagine if you could not read or speak properly because you weren't allowed, now imagine then trying to work a job and start a family. I agree dear reader, let's just send them back on the boat, too much work for an object not designed for the great white man's world.

Perhaps the only true way to free ourselves from the chains is a revolution, yes dear reader, I fear we too must partake in bloodshed in the name of our property and our rights. I see no other avenue; war is my only remedy. But that is where I must leave you dear reader, my time has passed. The Line has been drawn, and the tale has been told, now what lies beyond the sand? What will you do with this tale, I'll never get to know, I'll never make it off the trail, I too must burn at the stake in front of the townsfolk, like a moth to the flame, fate arrives all the same. perhaps you'll take my tale as fictitious. Perhaps you'll preach it like the bible, I'll never know. I only wanted to be free, and yet I must hang from the tree. Like a bloodhound, the townsfolk pounced on any opportunity to remind us of what we are, property, nothing more or perhaps even less. They can kill us, but not our voice, and yet I fear it now falls on deaf ears. I ask you to set aside your pride and sing our song because you now understand. I ask you to preach it not from the heavens, but rather to speak it to yourself, because without understanding, there is only silence for us. Like a coffin sunk beneath the deafening river, ever present, but not everlasting, swept under like the message that was supposed to save us, yet another chain that binds us. History remembers our conductor, but not us, it remembers our song, but not our story, and that is the tragedy of *Wade in the Water*.