

Based on Andrew Ward's epic "Dark Midnight When I Rise," *Steal Away* is the legendary true story of **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 African-American female lead ever onscreen, and an epic soundtrack by multi-Grammy winning composer **Billy Childs**.

For Script, Sides, and Director's Notes, visit [StealAwayMovie.com](http://StealAwayMovie.com)

## **WALLACE MOORE**

African-American, 22-25. Tall, strapping, handsome... and a hardcore militant.

Once a shy, tender boy, the brutal murder of both his birth family, then later his adoptive family, by supremacists has made Wallace a fierce separatist militant. Coarse, crass and full of gangster swagger, he believes "our people have no future among whites."

To Wallace's great exasperation, the woman he hopelessly loves - the prim, refined Ella - is staking her life on an integrated, racially colorblind future. She's siding with the enemy. Star-crossed lovers from violently far-flung worlds, their impossible love is a ticking time bomb set to explode.

### **DIRECTOR'S NOTE:**

In meeting Wallace, we aren't encountering a shallow, heartless, two-dimensional thug. To the contrary, beyond his hate-filled veneer, we see in his aching eyes a lifetime of unshed tears - tears of a tender boy's loss, of searing heartbreak and grief - an ocean of tears that, if ever shed, might douse the fires of hate.

But he refuses to cry.

Bringing together the raging militant and the innocent victim whose kind heart was cruelly destroyed are key to creating this complex, nuanced character.

**START** → At the rear counter is the movement's leader - old COLT COLTON, an indestructible cuss with a scar-racked body.

Ella is gazing at lovely HOME MODELS as Wallace and his gang enter.

WALLACE

Sorry we're late, Colt.

*Damn he's fine, even with fresh scars.* Ella fans herself pretending not to notice - then manically slaps on more rouge. Then --

ELLA

AAAAHHH!!

-- he sneaks up and gooses her.

ELLA

Garden of mercy! You are a rogue!

WALLACE

And you've got rouge on your teeth.

She checks her teeth and gasps. He roars with satisfaction and gets to work marking lumber. Coarse, crass and full of swagger, this isn't the sweet kid we met way back.

Ella turns in a snit, waits in vain for an apology, then hisses back:

ELLA

*Jailbird.*

WALLACE

Gonna waste that preacher and his daddy.

ELLA

Oh now *that's* enlightened.

WALLACE

(points to shattered windows)  
Those crackers shot this place up last night. Don't worry, first I'll bleed out of them what happened to your mother.

Ella can't go there. She *harumphs*, then goes back to gazing at the home model, talking to herself only louder.

ELLA

Fifty-Three-B, I do believe you're the one; you'll be "the finest house in Nashville." Maybe just... extra bedrooms, for children?

She bats Wallace a look.

Steal Away

WALLACE

Why stop there? How about marble floors? Sapphire outhouses? One of those new "toilets" that's all the rage?

ELLA

I can dream.

WALLACE

Dream on.

*Ouch*, his scoffing hurts. Just then, she spots a YOUNG MAN approaching Colt from the back room and gasps.

ELLA

Mr. Turner! Not you!

Turner sees her and ducks out. Ella hits the roof.

ELLA

That's *another* of my students, Mr. Colton, not one of your separatist disciples! He hasn't been to school in weeks! *DON'T SELL OUT, MR. TURNER!*  
(fumes)  
He sold out.

WALLACE

He saw the light.

ELLA

*Moths* see the light. "The Great Black Exodus" is a dead-end.

WALLACE

Your delusions are the dead-end. Add all the "rooms" you want, Nashville is white-man's land; we got no future here.

ELLA

Ah, but a militant *realtor-slash-prophet* and his *carpenter-thugs* herding Negroes off to some Caucasian-free Nirvana in Kansas - sounds like a *real* future.

WALLACE

Just bought a thousand acres; we break ground in the fall.

ELLA

Well *Happy Pitchforks*.

Steal Away

WALLACE

You should see it - blue skies, green fields, freedom like the wind.

ELLA

Thanks, we get wind here. And, by the way, *freedom*. What don't you see?? It's a bright new day!

WALLACE

(beat, his eyes haunted)  
Suns set.

ELLA

This one's not. We'll get the Civil Rights Bill. After that, we'll be --

WALLACE

*"Living the Dream!"*

ELLA

Our friends in Congress are seeing to it; the President has sworn his support. Meanwhile, the AMA --

WALLACE

Your white shining knights!

ELLA

Our *friends*. They're paving our way to the White House.

WALLACE

*The White House...*  
(shakes his head)  
Let me help you --

ELLA

*Garden of Mercy.*

WALLACE

Whites come in two stripes - devils and devils. Your problem is, you think there's a third.

ELLA

You're wrong. Our friends are true friends.

WALLACE

So they seem. But beneath his nods and smiles - *at his core of cores* - every white man fears black flesh. Black is the *color* of white fear, and what he fears he must put down.

Steal Away

ELLA

You're wrong as wrong gets!

WALLACE

He can't help it, it's primal -  
supremacy and domination flow like  
gangrene in his blood. His retinas  
see *us* as threats to be taken out.

ELLA

Hence their orphanage that raised you.

WALLACE

Some suffer flare-ups of guilt, so to  
douse their liberal conscience they  
condescend from on high, take the form  
of a bondservant and present themselves  
as angels of light, casting benevolent  
crumbs at our tribal feet. And long as  
we remain downtrodden niggers looking  
gratefully up at those white wings, all  
is well. But rise up - *stand* to our  
feet and look *across* space into those  
retinas - they'll snap out of their  
stupor and reclaim the throne. Then  
*we'll* wake from ours and see the horns  
we'd overlooked all along.

ELLA

(bristles)

You're the other side of Bishop's coin.  
You hate as much as they do.

WALLACE

Well said.

ELLA

Then I fear for your soul.

WALLACE

Do.

ELLA

*What happened to you??* Your father  
builds here in Nashville, right?  
What does he think of --

WALLACE

Leave Pop out of this!

ELLA

He's not going to Kansas, is he?  
I've never even seen him in here!  
What, after he "taught you everything"  
you're abandoning him for Colt?!

Steal Away

WALLACE  
LEAVE HIM OUT.

ELLA  
(shattered)  
God, what am I doing here?

WALLACE  
O mystery of mysteries!

ELLA  
Come again?!

WALLACE  
Come on - you're here four times a week, every week, on my shift.

ELLA  
(turns bright red)  
To see the models!

WALLACE  
You know those models down to the glue!

ELLA  
Meaning?!

WALLACE  
You're full of sound and fury, but we both know --

ELLA  
What?! What?!

Her mouth agape, he INCINERATES HER WITH A KISS that would scorch a volcano. Her heart blazes; her head sizzles; she flails like a drunken boxer to beat him off but is too disoriented to connect.

He releases her with a wink.

WALLACE  
You'll be chasing me to Kansas.

*Unbelievable!* She stares at the villain, woozy and wobbly, commanding her brain to function. Desperate to regain control, she racks her head for a potent comeback but manages only --

ELLA  
Oh you know that, do you?

WALLACE  
(grins)  
Like water's wet and flies fly.

Steal Away

She SLAPS him, then SLAPS him again. *There!* It took a minute, but she's back on her game.

ELLA  
Get used to flies. When Kansas goes bust you'll be back cleaning latrines.

WALLACE  
Oh will I?

ELLA  
Sewage Services, a *thug's* future.  
Say Hi when you get to the "sapphire outhouse" on Covenant Lane.

He glares at her.

WALLACE  
Covenant Lane??

Something just changed. He looks at her incredulously.

ELLA  
Th-that's the parcel I hope to build Momma's house on.

His eyes go cold. Suddenly, she feels horribly alone.

ELLA  
It sounds far-fetched I know, but I'm cobbling my pennies. Looks like the land's been vacant years. Maybe God --

SNAP!! The plank in his hands SNAPS IN TWO. She flinches as he SLAMS IT DOWN and exits.

**←END**

**INT. MAKESHIFT CHOIR ROOM - THAT NIGHT**

A madcap BIRTHDAY PARTY for Ella. White and the motley choir surround her at the piano, guzzling cider like drunks and howling their way through stacks of wretched American songs:

ALL  
*Let me spank him for his mother,  
He is such a naughty boy!  
He the baby tried to smother  
And he's broken Fannie's toy!  
Oh I'll spank him for his mother,  
For he's such a tiresome braaaaat --*

**GONG!** They murder the foul song with a nasty PIANO CHORD. Uproarious laughs, merciless jeers.

Steal Away

Steal Away

MINNIE  
What is it??

He holds it up. It's a scathing review of their show, with a full-page CARTOON of them as a tribe of howling apes. America reads:

AMERICA  
"The crooning pickaninnies resembled a pack of well-trained baboons striving in vain for lofty expression..."

The singers groan. Loudin bitterly scowls.

GEORGIA  
Fred said *Esther* was a mistake, not that anyone was actually listening.

Loudin nods *Thank you* to Georgia; she nods *I got your back*.

But sated and satisfied, White stretches as if nothing were wrong.

WHITE  
Well, let's get a move-on. We've got Dayton tonight, Springfield tomorrow.

IKE  
Lovely towns to be run out of.

WHITE  
God will prosper our cause.

LOUDIN  
You still believe that?? We didn't make a cent last night and those reviews are going to dog us everywhere!

WHITE  
When God says jump through a wall, it's ours to jump and his to put us through.  
(dabs his lips)  
The Lord will shelter us.

FADE OUT.

INT. SUSAN'S OFFICE AT FISK - SIX WEEKS LATER

← START

SC 2

As Susan works - *BLAM!* - the door blasts open. She flinches as an angry black man barges in.

WALLACE  
Where is she? It's been six weeks!

They inspect each other warily - both are haggard; neither has slept. He slams down a stack of clippings.

WALLACE

Reviews of the tour, city by city.  
Two weeks ago they drop off the grid.

SUSAN

(placing his face)  
*Wallace Moore.* Mr. Cravath pointed you  
out at the send-off. Susan Gilbert.

She extends her hand. He GROWLS. She snatches it back and tells  
herself to smile.

SUSAN

M-Mrs. Wynn, your orphanage mistress,  
wrote us often about you; you were  
the apple of her eye. We all  
celebrated when you were adopted.  
(then, gravely)  
I-I'm so sorry about what --

WALLACE

(SLAMS his fist down)  
Where are they?! It's the dead of  
winter and dangerous as hell out there!

Her heart beats out of her chest. He loathes her kind and she's  
terrified of his.

SUSAN

I-I'm afraid the tour isn't AMA  
business.

WALLACE

Of course not. *You people...*

Disgusted, he starts for the door - then hears SLAM! He turns  
back. Susan has slammed down an even taller stack of reviews.

SUSAN

I lost them in Cleveland. Looks like  
we're both out of luck.

← END

FADE OUT... then FADE UP TO:

**EXT. DECREPIT ALLEYWAY, BEHIND A CLOSED TRAIN DEPOT - NIGHT**

A blizzard rages. Sick, starving and stunned by their failure, the  
devastated choir shivers around a trash-barrel fire, eating the  
dregs from old cans. White is numb with disbelief. Ella stares  
blankly into the snow. Loudin is a powderkeg set to explode.

TOM

What did we miss?

Steal Away

SC 3

INT. WALLACE'S CARRIAGE - CLEAR SKIES - DAY ← START

A bumpy ride on a rural road. Ella is furious at being kidnapped.

ELLA

You have no right! It's *my* life!

WALLACE

*She's* your life.

ELLA

Don't do this to me. She'd know what happened over there; it's a miracle our lawyers got us home on bail.

Livid, she turns in a snit... but can't stop eyeing his shirt.

WALLACE

So, someone walks into the Bureau, tells them where to find her. Doesn't give a name, just mumbles "It's all got to change" and leaves.

ELLA

I know, sounds cryptic.

WALLACE

Sounds like a confession.

ELLA

And you know this, and the way there *how?*

WALLACE

Bureau records are public.

She festers with attitude... yet again eyes his shirt. The air is a powderkeg of emotion.

Wallace has something solemn on his heart. He takes a breath.

WALLACE

Ella...

ELLA

(snitty)  
Miss Sheppard.

WALLACE

Miss Sheppard...

ELLA

(thaws just a little)  
Ella.

Steal Away

He sighs; this is going to be hard.

WALLACE

I know things didn't pan out as you'd hoped...

ELLA

If you came to take a victory lap, you can swagger your six hundred miles back to Kansas.

WALLACE

*Eight*, and that's not why I --

ELLA

How *is* Haystack Haven?

WALLACE

That's what I'm getting at. It's a place of fresh starts.

She *harumphs*. He pushes back.

WALLACE

Granted, it's no Chelsea.

ELLA

Meaning??

WALLACE

No ballrooms, waltzes, *octopusses* named John.

ELLA

You read gossip?!

WALLACE

Some gossip ain't gossip. Maybe I should take up the fiddle!

ELLA

Let's set the record straight - you ditched *me*!

WALLACE

Fact check - I didn't cross the Atlantic for greener pastures!

ELLA

No, you crossed the Mississippi! At least I dress myself.

WALLACE

*Huh??*

Steal Away

ELLA

Don't change the subject. What's her name?

WALLACE

*Whose??*

ELLA

The little strumpet that dolled you up! Don't coil your nose at me! A woman knows!

WALLACE

A woman *imagines!*

ELLA

Men don't wear lilac!

WALLACE

I *like* lilac! You've *seen me* in lilac!

ELLA

Not that shade! Come on: Tish? Latonda?

WALLACE

You're tripping!

ELLA

Kaneesha? Koolaidria?

**BUMP!!** The carriage LURCHES ON A POTHOLE, flinging Ella's dress clear over her head.

ELLA

(flailing in horror)  
AAAUUUGGH!!

She snatches down her dress and SWATS HIM.

ELLA

You looked! I *know* you looked! Did you see anything?!

WALLACE

(biting his lips)  
"Anything"??

ELLA

(SWATS him again)  
Stop grinning! *Anything!! Anything!!*

WALLACE

Nothing Providence didn't want me to.

Steal Away

ELLA

If you did, Scripture abjures you to blot it out of your mind! Philippians 3:13!

WALLACE

"Forgetting that which is behind."  
It doesn't say forgetting *your* behind!

He roars with laughter. She SWATS HIM HYSTERICALLY.

ELLA

Thug! You're no theologian! You did that deliberately!

WALLACE

And bust the carriage? Lose my deposit?

She turns in a huff and fights to stay mad. Getting serious again, he forces a straight face and picks up where he left off.

WALLACE

Look, I know I'm rough around the edges...

ELLA

Oh, at middle, too.

WALLACE

Probably, but...

ELLA

Waaaaay down to the core.

WALLACE

Doubtless.

He reaches for her hand...

WALLACE

This isn't the most traditional way of asking --

ELLA

What is it?!

... but it's all going over her head. He gives up.

WALLACE

No matter.

ELLA

I'm not going to beg.

Steal Away

She turns away in a snit. Wallace grins, then - **BUMP!!** - DRIVES OVER ANOTHER POTHOLE, sending her dress sky-high.

ELLA  
AAAUUUGGH!!

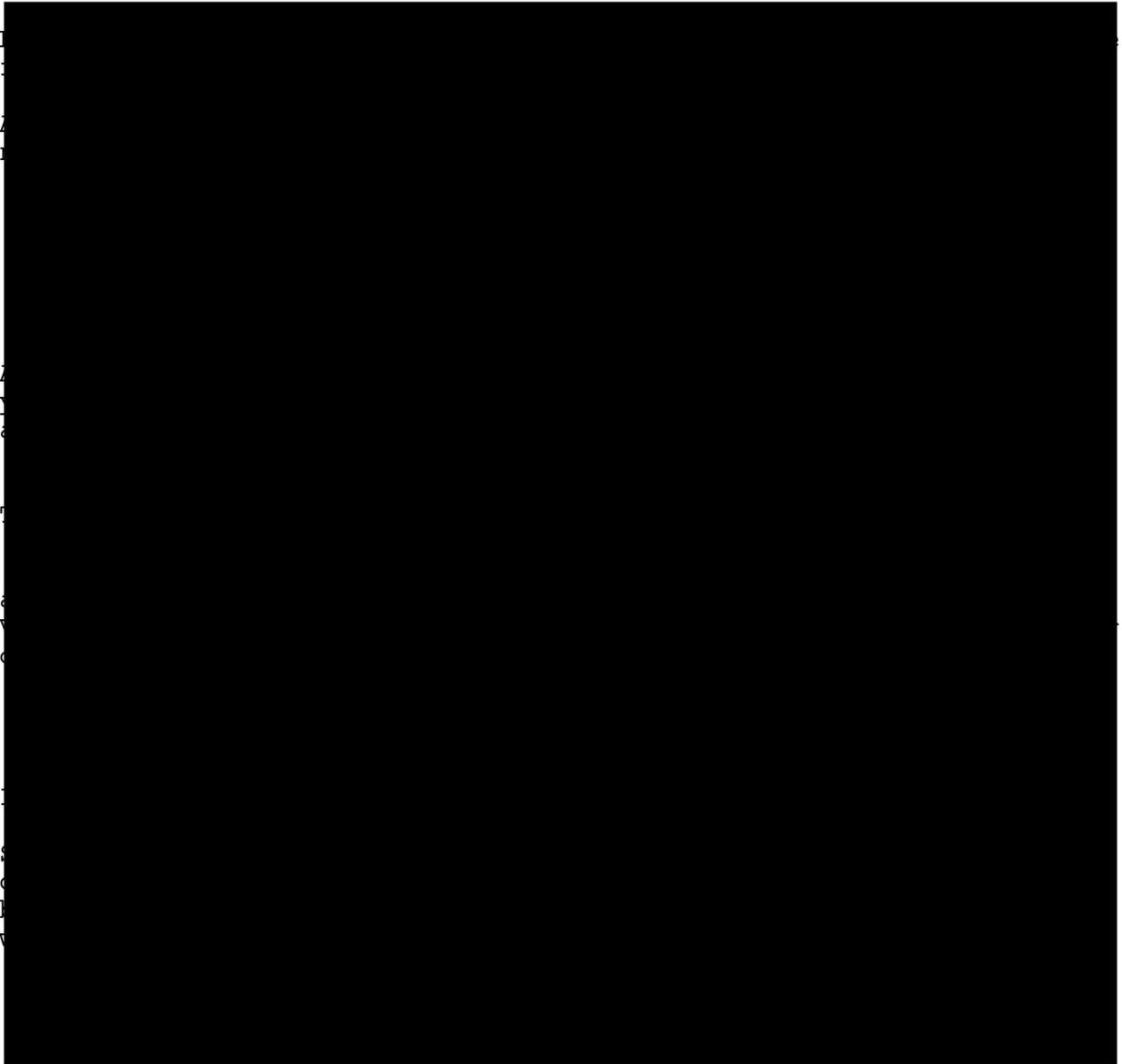
← **END**

**EXT. RURAL MANOR - LATER**

They've arrived. Ella SLAPS Wallace for his mischief, then checks her makeup and asks --

ELLA  
How do I look?

FRONT DOOR



**Steal Away**