



Free To Be: A Novel

Gracie L. Chandler

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November 7, 1861, Federal guns demolish the Confederate forts on Port Royal Sound as white civilians flee to the mainland, abandoning their Sea Island plantations, tons of high-quality cotton, and 8,000 enslaved people. The blacks recognize the “big gun shoot” as their chance for freedom and take to the woods. But not Crecie, a St. Helena Island field hand and medicine woman. Harboring beliefs rooted in centuries of self-denigration and white supremacy, she longs for the return of her master and his orderly paternalism. The military, the government, and abolitionists—perceived by Crecie as “new masters”—commandeer the islands, providing schools, wage labor, and religious freedom. But they also bring murder, mayhem, and deception. When personal tragedy strikes, she becomes the sole provider for her family’s survival, but continues to grapple with the strange notion of self-ownership, unable to claim her own labor, her own mind, her own body. Events of the war lead to a crisis and she is forced to choose a path for her future. Will Crecie remain shackled to tradition, relying on her abolitionist employer for sustenance, or will she embrace freedom’s promises and take control of her own life?

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