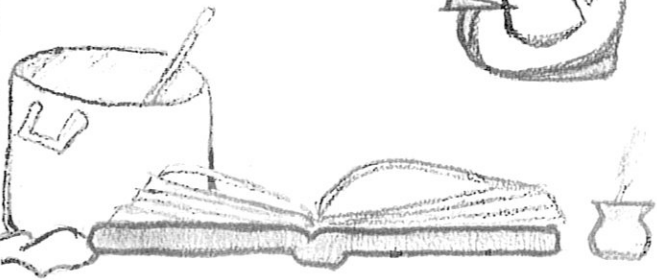




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# **Historical Character File: A Slave's Freedom**

Dear audience member,

This learning product was created by a PIONEER School for Expeditionary Learning 8<sup>th</sup> grade student in the spring of 2004. And while I have been trying for several years to intertwine historical inquiry, literacy, and craftsmanship in the curriculum I develop, this is my first attempt at facilitating the development of a product of this complexity. I am truly honored by the academic and creative risks these students were willing to take as we learned from this process together. Please take a moment to read their introductory advice below, as it will help you understand the context of our endeavors. And thank you for sharing in our learning!

-Matt Strand, PIONEER 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Humanities

## **PIONEER 8<sup>th</sup> Graders' Introduction**

### **What is a historical character file?**

- A historically/geographically accurate, fictional story about a character we created; it includes a portrait of the character, a narrative/biography, a character map, a bibliography, and the option of including artifacts from the character's life
- Our way of showing what we are learning
- An experiment in learning based on educator Ron Berger's character file project
- A project about slaves in United States history

### **What were we trying to accomplish?**

- To build our schema (background knowledge) about slavery
- To educate others/ourselves about the slavery era
- To bring back the history through every detail instead of bits and pieces
- To challenge the notion that slaves were merely stereotypical "victims"; they were human beings with complex emotions that often used various "forms of freedom" as a way to experience power and dignity
- To feel the personal, human level of history rather than simply memorizing dates and facts in order to gain a different perspective of and respect for the real people that endured this system

### **What else should the audience know?**

- Our intent is not to be racist or offensive; some of us have chosen to portray the physical and verbal abuse slaves experienced; sometimes this involves violence and racial slurs that, according to the primary, secondary, and expert resources we used in our research, were commonplace; these elements were included to convey historical realities
- We worked for 2 months on this project: asking questions, researching, discussing, drafting, drawing, critiquing, revising, and creating artifacts
- We went deep. And we'll remember it because we spent so much time on it. And we actually enjoyed the process; almost all of us would be willing to do a project like this again in the future.

# Inside the Black Skin

*An African Woman's Story told by a Young Writer*

By Carrie

Dear Journal,

November 14, 1821

There is something particularly special about this young black woman. I can see it buried away under layers and layers of protection. The way she works with such graceful movements. The way she talks, picking her words carefully in a solid and confident way. There must be a story she wants to tell. I can feel it inside of me; the tips of my fingers are just aching to feel the feather scratch scratch from the flow of a story. Underneath those long black eyelashes that reach out and over her cheek like ferns, her eyes capture me. I want to hold the connection and breathe in those large, dark chocolate eyes. I never can, they always look away and down to the floor. Her lips are fair and full creating gentle shadows around the corners. Wisps of coal-colored hair fall from the tight knots at the base of her head, kissing her neck that stretches out long and elegantly. Her hands fold over her stained apron and she soothes the wrinkles from the edges. Her posture I must say is quite pleasing. She waits quietly over by the sideboard next to the door of my room. All these delicate and exquisite things about her are only to be wasted away by the evils of slavery. It saddens me so to watch her spend long hours everyday working, scrubbing floors, dusting the mantels and assisting the cook with the food. She is an instrument of labor. How can she let them steal her life? How can she do this day after day? So many questions. Only most of them will be left unanswered.

Sincerely,

Thomas P.

Sitting at my desk, I carefully close the worn leather journal and tuck it under some books in a drawer. It holds my greatest ideas, my thoughts, the highest dreams I could ever possibly imagine. I would be lost without it. Over my shoulder, I watch her, the black maid yawning and rubbing her face with her hands. She looks ever so tired and worn out. Bags drop from her eyes and her shoulders sag.

"Hey girl, come here," I call her.

"Ya sir?" Her eyes travel to the floor.

"What's your name?"

"Dey calls me Nancy, sir," she says.

"Ahh, and do you like it here, Nancy?" I ask, growing more interested by the minute.

"Eh, it's fine. Massa's good to me." Her expression told me that not all of this was quite true.

"Do you have family around working with you?"



"No. 'Cept for me brother. He's at de next plantation." Her words are saddening and full of despair. "He got sold off to anotha massa."

"Do you ever see him?" I said. She didn't seem comfortable talking to me about her brother. Wrapping her arms around herself she hugs her chest and mumbles.

"No sir."

"Goodness, you can't even see your own family? How long has it been like this?"

"Well uh, I 'ave been workin' for Massa for one an' a half years now. Befor' dat I was switchin' around from Massa to Massa. An' befor' dat..." She broke off. Her nose flared and tears swelled up in her eyes. She looks off into the distance.

"I was...I-I...Africa," she stammers, "Africa. I lived in A-Africa."

My jaw fell to the ground. Thoughts swirl around in my head and all I could manage to get out was.

"You lived a free life in Africa and then you were captured by the slavers." The stinging words echoed in the air.

"Yes," she whispers, breaking the silence.

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A bell rang on the creamy eggshell wall.

"Perhaps that is supper?" I turned to Nancy waiting by the door.

"Yes sir," she answered.

"Well then, shall we?" I half bowed, nodding my head towards the door. She seemed confused by my politeness and shifted weight to her other foot.

Biting her lip she said, "May I go den, sir?"

"Yes, be about your chores," I replied. She silently walked out of the room. I reached for my coat and pulled it over my long outstretched arms. Looking in in the mirror outlined with gold patterns I rubbed my brown mustache, pondering. The skin on my nose was burned from the South Carolina's sun and my freckles outlined my eyes. My Father's eyebrows extended out from my face as I combed my bangs over them. Closing the door behind me, I strode down the stairs.

The dinner table was a grand scene. Two long candles stood above the blue china with a fiery dance upon the wick. A silk tablecloth was spread out on the table and each place contained squeaky shining silverware carefully laid out. Roast lamb, potatoes, and vegetables gave off a mouth-watering smell. My brother Ben, sat at the head of the table sharpening his knives to slice the lamb.

"Ahh Tom, so glad you could join us." His puffy cheeks were rosy with pride.

"Indeed." I pulled out a chair, eager to begin eating. Ben's daughters watched me with large eyes. Fifteen year-old Victoria proudly sat next to her father. Her lips pinched together atop of her ravishing creamy skin. Brown hair locks brushed along her shoulders. Only two years younger, Anne giggled shyly, setting her blonde curls to bouncing. The green bow with smooth pearls in the center

that sat on her head matched her eyes. Lace circled her pudgy neck and ended with a neatly tied bow on the back. They both watched my every move. Pushing open a swinging door in the back, Nancy walked in carrying a small plate holding a stick of butter.

"Mmm, someone has been sleeping by the fireplace again." Victoria smirked, "Look at you, covered in dirt. Why don't you sleep with the dogs if you insist on looking like one." The sisters giggled at the sight.

"Ooh that was harsh, Victoria," her mother noted. "But I must say, as a matter of fact, what a sight you are child!" She glanced at her husband, "Don't you think so, my love?" Ben stared at her over a fork full of peas.

"I have no say in this, Rebecca. Goodness, women. Now, Thomas what is new in New York? Are they treating you well?" He said chuckling.

"Uh, very good. The writing business is running very smoothly," I said eyeing Nancy who was settling back at the sideboard again. An angry look was planted on her face and her lips were pressing together. Her hands tightened up as she grasped her apron.

"Ever thought of moving back down here again?"

I looked at him with surprise. "No, no I'm not. I am very secure in New York. I do not wish to stay here only to see all of these slaves..." I stopped so abruptly. The whole family looked up from their supper plates. Nancy stared at me from the other side of the room.

"I just cannot live here." I mumbled.

"Ah well, who knows what will happen. Do write me if your plans have changed." Ben said. Victoria and Anne seemed to have no interest in the discussion and their curiosity of me faded away.

"Nancy!" Anne yipped. "These rolls are extremely cold! Take them away. I expect some hot ones in seconds." Shooing her away with her hand, Anne passed her a sour look. Nancy walked over solemnly and retrieved the basket of rolls. When she turned to saunter back to the kitchen, I noticed Victoria pushed her leg out, right in Nancy's path. Nancy stumbled from the table, sending rolls in the air.

"Nancy!" her Mistress cried. "Oh Ben, the carpet!"

"Do pick those up!!!" Ben blasted. "What is wrong with you?!"

Once Nancy collected herself, she hurriedly picked up the scattered rolls. Her breath was quick but her hands tired.

"It was not her! Victoria tripped her," I said to them.

"How could you accuse my daughter of doing such an absurd thing?" He narrowed his eyes at me. "Why, my daughter is a perfectly mannered young lady and does not do foolish little tricks." I looked at Victoria who smiled at her food as she to be innocent. Stuffing my mouth with potatoes, I held back wrathful feelings and bit my tongue so that the thousands of words in my head did not fall out of my mouth.

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Sipping at my strong coffee, I watch my brother shovel in forkfuls of breakfast ham, potatoes, eggs, and griddle cakes. The sight was disgusting. He wiped his scraggly beard with his napkin and called Nancy for some more coffee.

"So Tom, how did you sleep?" he questioned me. His squinty eyes cut through his chubby face like sharp, cold razors.

"Well good, considering the fact that I heard quite a bit of noise from outside last night." I looked at him suspiciously.

"Oh!" he chortled, "That was another one of them runaways. Four men escaped from Andrew McGregor's plantation just next door. Two days ago, he sent word to all surrounding plantations that they were supposedly armed and that they might be violent. I just had a few men out making sure they didn't come close to our land."

"Was one of those men Nancy's brother?" I asked.

His high spirits evaporated. He looked at Nancy and then back to me again. "Uhh, Andy." He cleared his throat with a grunt, "Why, yes. What has you so interested in him?"

"Oh!" I laughed nervously. "Just talk, that's all."

He seemed to be cutting his slice of ham furiously now. "Yes. He was among those men. Feisty one, I heard. I was told that he was the leader. There's a reward for him for \$800."

I knew I was not the only one listening. Nancy's expression was frightened. Her eyes were wider than saucers and she silently beckoned me to ask him more. Obeying the order, I thought of what else I could ask him.

"A-And where do you suppose they went?" My focus returned to Ben.

"They went over by the coast. The other four men were caught. One almost drowned in the bay, another got caught by a dog, and so on and so forth," he declared.

"But Andy is still missing?"

"Yes, he disappeared, they sensed he headed north."

A smile broke out on Nancy's face.

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Still full from breakfast I wandered around the magnificent, tall house and found myself thinking about Nancy. Her reaction towards the news of her brother confused me. I stepped into the dining room where Nancy was clearing the table.

"Um, Nancy?" I tapped her lightly on the shoulder. She swung around, "Ahh!" Glasses and plates went flying through the air, and splattered on the ground into pieces. I stumbled back.

"I'm so sorry!" she gasped. "You jus' gave me an awful good fright!" She bent down to pick up the bits of glass. Suddenly, Anne ran in with her mother at her heels.

"Oh my goodness! What has gotten into you, you horrible thing!" Her Mistress was boiling

with anger. "This has gone far enough! Spilling and breaking things in all directions! Oh! There will be no more food for you for a long time!" Enraged, she sighed and stomped out of the room. Stifling a laugh, Anne followed her skipping on her toes.

"Dis wouldn't have happened if I wasn' 'ere," Nancy muttered under her breath.

"What?" I asked.

"Oh I didn' say nuttin'."

"Nancy, I apologize for everything. First about the news of your brother, Andy, and then this. I'm awfully sorry."

"She did what?" Ben's voice rumbled from outside of the room.

"Please sir. Leave me alon', it will only cause mor' trouble..." Nancy whispered, her voice filled with panic.

"Could you tell me more about it? About your family and what it was like in Africa?" I whispered back.

"No!...NO! Oh sir. I couldn't! Massa doesn't like dat! I musn' talk 'bout Africa. Oh I couldn't!" She shivered at the thought. She ran and pushed herself through the kitchen door, leaving it swinging in her trail. Reluctantly, I shuffled to the door and quietly pushed it open. Stepping into a small breezy kitchen, sunlight filled the room and dishes were everywhere to be seen.

"Nancy?" I called out. Then I heard a low gasp from the corner of the room.

"Sir!" she cried out in disbelief, "Dis is de kitchen! Much trouble would happen if you..."

"Nancy, Nancy, I know," I calmed her. "Look, my study is writing and literature. I have great interest in the stories of people. Yours seems to be so remarkable that I cannot seem to relax without hearing it. I am willing to risk much to hear your piece. If you will tell me, I promise you I will make sure trouble will not cross your path."

"But sir," she insisted, "You don' understand."

"Then help me."

She seemed hesitant but suddenly something seemed to have refreshed in her mind.

"Al'right, but we cannot do it 'ere. Beth, the cook wou 'ave a fit."

"Then come with me to my office," I said.

We sneaked up the through the parlor and up the stairs where I locked the door and closed the drapes.

"Sir, you must know that this is beyond the most...improper," she gulped.

"Lets just start at the beginning, piece by piece. Let the poison out of you, Nancy."

"It's jus, I 'ave seen many things: horror, threats. It was a nightmare dat you couldn't escape, ya couldn't wake up." She spoke with venom in her voice. "People did things ta me and otha' Africans dat will never 'scape my mind. Everyday dose memories are dere. Dese memories did not only scar my back but my life..." She broke off. Large tears tumbled down. She chewed at her lip.

"Al'right. I was Fanta, daughta of Binta an' Wahamki of de Ashanti Tribe of deh Gold Coast

of Western Africa..."

*Thomas's Journal Entry*

November 15, 1821

*Fanta's (Nancy's) brothers were Kincha and Decomba. They were both her heroes and protectors. They were very brave and masculine, carrying much courage and determination. They feared nothing of any force but inside they carried the most gentle heart. Decomba was the head warrior of their tribe. He was so proud and greatly honored to have much respect and responsibility. Kincha was the head explorer of the group. He knew all the danger signs and ways throughout the Gold Coast. Decomba and Kincha were Fanta's (Nancy's) everything. Lives would be lost without them and her soul, her heart, her life would be devastated.*

*The warm tropical heat enwrapped their home. Fanta (Nancy) ran around on the savanna when she was a little girl. The grassland stretched out around her. Mahogany, odum, and ebony trees stood towering over her. The big blazing sun would set in the west and ripples of gold, pink, ruby, and violet would wrap around it. Right at the horizon, she could see the black outline of the antelope grazing. They leaped and jumped after one another, dashing streaks of sun everywhere. Monkeys chattered away in the trees and vines. Munching and squeaking they peer at her with inquisitive eyes. Elephants would stand in groups, splashing muddy water on each other and thundering down through the tall grass. The eyes of the crocodiles would sit on the surface of the lakes watching your every move. Africa was the home to many. They treasured their lives in which they cherished each day.*

*The day the slavers came and kidnapped Fanta and her brothers was one of the most appalling days of her life. She was working with her brothers in their hut. They had many jobs to do and with their parents spending most of the days out in the fields, they had the house to see to also. It was one bright late morning and Fanta was tending to the fire that would make their supper and her brothers were just outside sitting on the dirt ground carving and sharpening knives for their father, when all of a sudden Fanta heard an abrupt straining and struggling from outside. She quickly shot out the entrance of their hut. She saw her brothers being snatched by white men into the forest behind the hut. They pulled at them in a violent way; jerking and wrenching at them. Ropes grasped her brothers' bodies as they struggled to release from the grip. She charged toward them; an uncertain fear swelled up inside of her. Her vision directed only on them. She jumped and hobbled after them in a fearful rage. The slavers frightened her, for their presence was disturbing. Dark wild hair whipped across their faces, their squinty eyes were like black marbles and they spoke threatening words from untamed mouth, across ghastly white skin. She was now on their heels when unexpectedly a slaver turned around, looking in her direction. Fanta plunged behind a nearby bush and rolled to her feet. A heavy stick laid on the ground at her heels. She snatched it up and with all of the strength that was in her little body, she hit the man that was clenching her brother Decomba. Dropping Decomba, he tumbled to the ground that was cushioned with broad leaves. Blood rushed from his face and he lay there motionless. Fanta struggled to free Decomba from the tight ropes that*

*held his wrists together. He broke away from her hold and insisted she go to help Kincha. She ran towards her other brother still in the hands of another man when a gunshot whistled by her ear. Dropping to the ground on her hands and knees she let out petrified scream. In a flash, another white man threw his hands over her mouth and drove her into the ground. His body spread out over hers and he grasped her mouth, thrusting her into the ground. Then it was all quiet and they lay there very still. All that was heard was the heavy breathing of Fanta's brothers and their slavers. Slowly and gradually, the man twisted her hands to her back and pulled her to her feet. Great force powered into her and she fought to keep at his pace. Her brothers resisted against the force but the grasp of the slaver was too vigorous. Their teeth were clasped together and their eyes were filled with flames. Decomba rolled his head violently and challenged his slaver by pulling back at the ropes. They emerged into the heart of the forest where the sun had seem to be lost. Trees closed in around them and the darkness thickened. Decomba and Kincha seemed to weaken within every step of the way. The color left their faces and blood dripped from the burn of the ropes that clenched their limbs. Their eyes turned white and sweat fell from their hair line and slid down their necks. The large roots weaved within the surface of the ground. They grabbed at Fanta's feet and pulled at her legs, sending her stumbling and tripping. Thorns jabbed at her flesh and trickles of blood ran down her legs. Sores on the soles of her feet became raw and painful. Every step felt like knives were thrust at her feet. Her slaver tugged at her wrists with every turn of the path. His hand pressed hard against her mouth and his fingers dug into her cheek. Stifling a cry, she tried to ease the pain by releasing from his grasp a little bit, but he only seized her harder. They pushed through the stabbing forest where the the mist swallowed them up.*

The knocking of the door startled us in our seats. Nancy instantly rushed back to her post by the sideboard next to the door.

"Yes, please do come in," I announced, turning back to the literature books on my desk. I sat there in a daze, moved by what Nancy had described. The door swung open and in bustled Ben.

"Thomas! I have excellent news. Why, everyone is talking about it and--" he stopped so abruptly.

"Girl, what are you doing still there?" he said to Nancy. She didn't answer. "Get out of here! Go feed the chickens or something!" She jumped and scurried out of the room.

"Good lord, Ben. You're so demanding." I snapped back to reality. I was growing irritated with this.

"What? She is a nigger, Tom. Just like the rest of them. We have to keep them in order."

"Have you no respect for this country? Have you not read the Declaration of Independence? It so happens to say that all men are created equal." I bolted at him. Ben raised his eyebrow, lifted his chin, and brushed his hand through his thick chestnut hair.

"I have read the Declaration of Independence, if you don't mind, but the Constitution refers



to slaves as three-fifths of a person, therefore the whole United States doesn't even think of them as a whole human," he said snarling. "You're just jealous because Father didn't give you as much money in his will and provided me with a land and a handful of slaves. It's not my fault you're so interested in writing this little book of yours. You know Father was embarrassed that you never cared about working a plantation."

Some thing inside of me snapped. Ben knew bringing up our late Father in a discussion made me very angry. When I was young, our parents had sent me off to college and over the years my interest in education grew. But my Father's did not. His plan for me was to carry on with the rice plantation, keeping it in the family while business was good. I wanted to write books about life and literature, so I packed my bags only at the age of 19 and moved to New York where I could learn to be a professional writer. My father and I had not spoken to each other since. "I have nothing more to say."

Ben however, only took this as an advantage. Laughing out loud he grumbled, "The poor little writer has no words? He doesn't know what to say, hmm? I can see you are really heading for a downfall. Father was right, you are a madman."

Smiling, I replied, "Well, I may be mad, but..." I added with a low growl, "at least I don't steal lives."

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The glare of the broiling sun the next day burned my eyes. It raided every bit of shade and the slaves seemed to be as worn out as ever. Nancy however seemed to be in the utmost behavior. She seemed to be glowing when she raised the windows of my room to let hot air escape. She wiped my desk and handled my books ever so carefully.

"Do you read Nancy?" I asked looking over my newspaper.

"Eh, no sir. We ain't supposed ta."

"I am sorry to hear that. Books hold so many stories that seem to strengthen the human mind. It is very educational and especially pleasurable." I picked up a book and held it in my hands.

"Do you suppose maybe you could finish your story about Africa? I was sorry that my brother had intruded. You have piqued my interest."

"Oh but sir, stories neva' really end. Dey go on an' on. De spirits com' alive. My story has no endin'," she replied.

"And right you are. I guess perhaps I should say, please continue the story. Will you?"

"Sir, I don' know why I even tol' you de part abou' Africa. Dere's no nee' to go on." She went back to her dusting.

"Please?" I said, and for the first time our eyes met. I looked in them and saw sadness and fear. They were dark and scarred for life.

"Al'right." She broke the gaze and stared out the window. "De ship was a glance of hell. De



crew worked for de evils, they're eyes 'ere scorched with fire, they're hands 'ere like claws. Dey 'ere cursed an' brought torture an' pain...dey are our enemy...".

*Thomas's Journal Entry*

November 16, 1821

"Bang!" Drops of blood run down Decomba's chest as he falls forward into the mass of bodies, both Africans and white men.

"Decomba!" Fanta screams, pushing through crying and shrieking women huddling together. Their shrill cries echo in the sails as they cling to each other, frightened by the gunshots surrounding them. She staggered towards her brother and turned him over to see him drenched in his blood. His rich black skin is as smooth and tough as leather under her grasp. Scarlet red scars cover his back and legs like lace. His body is cold and limp in her arms.

"Decomba! Decomba! Decomba!" Her tears flood into his short rough hair as she rock his head back and forth. She pounds the boards of the ship's deck and crawls to the railing. Her head jerks over the side and she hugs it to her chest, violently crying and yelling into the ocean. Loud sharp bangs roar around her. Men, black and white, were charging at each other shouting and fighting. The white men carried whips attached to their pants that would unfold and give a piercing crack. Broken wood from boxes is scattered around the deck among the dead bodies. A pool of blood surrounds the ship like a red ink spilling from a bottle. A sudden hand jolts Fanta around and she becomes face to face with the man who shot her brother. The white killer! She shouts and punches his stomach with all her might. He grabs her hands, pulls them to her back and pushed her back to the crowd of frantic women. At once an explosion roared from the other end of the boat. Everyone flew back with astonishment and terror. Fanta gaped at the broken part of the boat and the scattered bodies of the dead lying around. The fighting had stopped. The black men were no longer revolting; all what was left on their face was fear.

One by one, the crew re-shackles the people. They are like ghosts. They sullenly climb back down below deck; they show no expression. Fanta turns to see some white men whipping a black man. Over and over they slash the whip at his back. Blood flies through the air and splatters on her face. Tears roll down her cheek and her body shakes. She looks to the side and watches the lacy sapphire water with splotches of thick red move along. Sharks follow the ship and waits for their next meal. She feels her feet being wrenched together and she turns to see a man with sandy colored hair on his face and a silky scarf tied around his neck chain her feet together again. His eyes seem intimidating as he reaches for her hands. She starts to cry and releasing from his grasp, she waddles over to her brother's body. He isn't there. Her eyes search the boat. Suddenly she sees him. The crew is hauling him up and over the railing.

"NOOOO! DECOMBA!" She falls to the floor. Her chest clogs up and she is unable to breathe. It feels like someone had just crushed her heart to a million pieces. Tears stream from her eyes and fall to the wooden boards. She lays there trembling, her body weak from pain, until one of

*the crewmen comes and pick her up to take her back down to the dark world.*

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The sound of voices spiraled up the stairs. I hear my brother slamming the door and a rustle of excitement grow. Excusing Nancy, I shuffled down the hall and watched the scene from the top of the stairs. Ben was just returning from a trip to town and came back furnished with boxes of all sizes. Victoria, Anne, and their mother bursted out of the parlor and ran towards him. The girls were flooded with excitement. Greed seemed to have controlled them as I watched the family open the boxes. Victoria and Anne threw off the lid of the boxes and ripped through the thin wrapping. Their screams of pleasure deafened me. Out came dresses of all colors and styles, trimmed with satin ruffles and lacy necks. Squealing with delight, the sisters rubbed the satin against their cheeks and admired the fancy bows. Their mother stood by her husband beaming with pride. They bustled about preparing for a fancy dinner party where they could show off their new clothes. Watching them, I felt a feeling of grief. I wondered what would happen when reality hits. I turned away chuckling when Anne sprinted up the stairs.

“Oh Uncle Tom! Look at my new clothes!” She stood twirling around in circles.

“Why it’s...lovely, Anne. It’s...” Anne’s expression suddenly changed to a disgusted look.

“What is SHE doing here?” Her attitude became snotty towards Nancy. “Ugh. It’s too bad she works here. It’s so embarrassing, she can’t even afford shoes!” She guffawed with laughter. Picking up her other dresses she sailed into her room.

“Nancy...” I started, but she wouldn’t let me finish. Her skirts twirled fiercely as she turned sharply and dashed down the stairs.

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Rain poured from the sky the next morning. Lightening licked the edges of the dark clouds. I watched from the parlor window. Smoke rose from my mouth as I puffed on my pipe. Nancy sauntered in and leaned against the pane of the window.

“I’m sorry abou’ yesterday, sir. It wasn’ your fault. I jus get so mad!” Unfolding my arms, I rest my hand on her shoulder.

“I understand. You had every right to be angry.”

“I wou’ like to tell ya mor’ of my story tho. It feels like de pain leaves me afta I tell ya.” she admitted to me softly.

“Please do,” I said.

“Well, down dere under deck, it was horror dat you wouldn’ even believe with your own two eyes...”

*Thomas’s Journal Entry*

*November 17, 1821*

*The thought of death hangs in the air as thick as the smell of feces, urine, and blood. They lay there in the blackness side by side, packed like cargo. Her hands and feet are clamped down to the hard splintered board, attached to the women next to her. She stares up at the board above her, only a measure of 18 inches. She cannot move. She cannot shift sides. She cannot stand. She can only lay there on her back for endless hours. The air is suffocating and the heat is almost insufferable. Moans and groans are all around her. Different languages from other tribes speak out into the darkness, yet they all mean the same thing. Death is more preferable than this living hell.*

*Tears swell up in her eyes and cut down her cheek as she remembers the revolt her brother had planned. His anger towards these white men was strong and powerful, as was the group of men that followed him. He hated this curse that was brought upon them and was willing to die for his love for Africa. One day, they brought them up one day to the blinding sun that was high in the sky to dance. Decomba told her, "Fanta, what did we do to deserve this? We can't let these people take us away from our families and our home. We can't let them have our soul and our faith. We can't let them control our lives. They are brought on by evil. They are the lions that we must kill." It all happened so quickly. Her hands forms into a tensed fist that made her wrists bleed at the thought of her brother running towards that white man.*

*She hears voices and clanks of metal from the first row. Yelling and the rattles of the chains echo down the rows. She sees white men dropping slops of food on the board next to the other shackled people. People were eating, crying, and begging for more. They plop some white mush next to her head on the right. She turns her sore neck and licks up the mush. The taste is foul and it left a salty sting in her mouth.*

*Days and nights continue to pass when suddenly a new speck of land comes into view on the horizon. They are encountering a new world. The air that surrounds the city is dirty and stifling. It fills up every corner of the town. People scurry around, wagons and horses flying in all directions. Women sail around in wide skirts and much horseplay is among the men. Young children scoot around or rest in the shade from the scorching sun that bakes the town.*

*Forcing her to wear a blue flannel dress, white men throws her up on an auction block and orders her to be still. Her back aches from when they scrubbed her clean with soap and oil. She flinches when tall men comes up and inspects her like cattle. They touch her all over. They look in her mouth and peer in her eyes. She has to jump up and down and throw her arms out. Soon they leave the board and starts yelling things out. They talk and bid on her as if she is only a horse. She is no longer a human being, but an animal that works for the white men.*

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Dear Journal,

I just realized it. It makes my heart so weak and my lungs seem to rattle like an animal in a cage, squeezing my breath. Victoria accused Nancy of poisoning her and Anne by placing

fine tiny pieces of glass in their tea. I remarked that Nancy wouldn't even think of such a thing. Of course none of them bothered to listen to me. What surprised me the most was Nancy's behavior. She did not resist or talk back. Without a word, she calmly pulled off her apron and put down her rags and followed the overseers out the door. They ripped off her blouse and tied her to a wagon. Other slaves dropped their baskets and tools and formed a half circle, watching. Scars covered her back like a spider web. Her skin was bruised and I could tell she had been badly beaten. I watched in horror as Ben called the orders. A man unfastened the black whip from his belt and brought it back and with a hard, sharp, crackling swing, he whipped her. On and on and on. She stared at me. She stared right through me. Her eyes started to drip with tears. She did not yell nor scream only her lip quivered. Her body shook. Tears swelled in my eyes and my arms hung at my waist. The everlasting whipping suddenly stopped. Ben sighed and drew the overseers inside.

"Back to work for the rest of ya!" he boomed. Clearly they saw this as entertainment. His rotund body heaved as he and the other men roared with laughter as they walked up the white steps of the house. The simmering anger in my veins was now boiling over. To think, my own brother shows so much cruelty to a human being whom he likes to call, "nigger." I turned to see some other black women bending down to help Nancy. She was crumpled up in a tight ball. Blood drenched her back. Her weak body fell into their hands and they struggled to lift her up. A little boy stared at the women from behind a tree. Big wet tears flooded from his eyes. This has gone far enough.

As always,  
Thomas P.

"Ben!" I shouted over the noise from their talking and laughing. "Ben, a word," pointing to the porch of the elegant house.

"My dear little brother, what is wrong?" he chortles, "Oh I know what we need, some whiskey to celebrate." He supplies two miniature glasses and begins to pour. A strong aroma lifts in the air.

"No, that is not why I'm here!" Alarmed, Ben slammed the bottle onto the table.

"Alright Tom, this is the way we're going to do it. Okay? You either accept what goes on in this country. No, not just my plantation, but this country, okay? Or you get off my land." He was quiet but threatening.

"I would rather die a painful death than to see my brother treat men and women like dirt," I snapped.

"Well, if that's the way you want it, I'll remember that."

\*\*\*

I walked into the cabin slowly, unsure of what I was about to approach.

"I don't know what to say," I said. Glancing at the wet rags that were well doused with blood, I sat down on a small stool next to Nancy.

"Dere's nottin' ta say. It's life. I'm nuttin but a nigga who's story means nuttin." Her face was blank. She stared at the light streaming through the holes in the wall.

"How can you say that?! You are a beautiful woman who was taken from her home and must put up with this torture everyday. You are a woman of courage and hope...".

"No I'm not."

"Yes! Yes you are! You are not a nigger! Don't ever say that again. You are a human being and you deserve so much more."

"NO I'M NOT!" Her body jerked up to me and she pushed her face into mine. "You don't know what it's like. You've never seen what our lives are like! We live on courage, and bein' a slave, ya don' get much of dat. Der are times I wish I wasn't alive. But I don' know how ta die. Der ain' no plug to pull out. I is 'fraid ta go to sleep cause I don't know if Massa is gonna come in angry an' drunk an' take it out on my body. I don't know if someone is gonna come in an' kidnap me again! A-An' every day, I have ta pull myself from my mat an' face the unpredictable. I don't know what will happen! Maybe I'll get...another.. I'll get anotha' whoppin' or I'll get sold ta another massa. No. Our story does not matta'. We're just niggas and we're put on dis earth to suffer an' work for you gentlemen' who jus' sits on dere silky couches every day, drinkin' and smokin'!"

Her words shocked me. I had never seen her attack me like this. I got up slowly and retrieved my hat.

"Oh sir I'm sorry. Please don' tell Massa!" She fell to my feet, wincing from the burning pain of her back. "I'm so sorry!"

"Of course I won't," I say quietly. My words felt like sand on my tongue. I straightened my coat and walked to the door of the cabin. Turning back, I recalled what message I was bringing for her.

"Oh and uh, Nancy?"

"Ya sir?"

"I will be leaving this afternoon. New York is the only place where I can live. I simply cannot stay here."

"I understand sir." I pivoted towards the door and put the hat on my head.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Nancy?" I called back.

"Thank you. You did much for me. An' I thank you for dat. You were my voice. You spoke for de people of Africa. You spoke agains' slavery an' you stay true to yourself. Dat's a true hero in my eyes." She smiled weakly and nodded her head towards the door.

"Thank you...Fanta." I gazed at her then walked out the door and into the crisp Southern Carolina's sun.

Dear Journal

For the first time, my paper is dry. I am speechless. I can't tell you how much Fanta has taught me. She is slave that influenced my life. She is a leader within slavery; she is a woman of pure courage.

Sincerely,

Thomas P.

Fingering the watch in my pocket from my father I smoke my pipe, smoke rings wander up only to fade away...







Carrie  
April 11, 2004  
Matt Strand

## Character map

### **Personal Description**

- African name: Fanta
- American slave name: Nancy Adams
- Sex: Female
- Age: 18 years old
- Height: 5'6"
- Appearance: Dark blackish/brown hair tied up in miniature knots at the base of her head  
Skin is very dark and is smooth but as tough as leather  
Eyes have the big mysterious look- soft chocolate color  
Lips are fair and full creating gentle shadows when she smiles
- African clothing: Sandy-colored cloth that wraps around her body
- American clothing: Blue flannel dress at the auction and her white like clothes for work
- Dreams/Hopes: She hopes to see her brother Kincha/Andy again and have them return to Africa.
- Fears: She fears men (especially white) because they whip her, abuse her, and take beloved ones away from her. She is afraid of the unpredictable of the next day.
- Jobs/responsibilities: She is a maid in the Big House and finds work in the kitchen and with waiting on guests.
- What would others say about her?: She keeps to herself. She does a good job without complaining and is a very respectable person. She puts up with too much.

### **Family History**

- Immediate family: Father Wahmaki  
Mother Binta  
19 year old brother Kincha  
22 year old brother Decomba

Are they with their family now?: Mother and Father are still back in Africa, alive or dead is unknown. Fanta, Kincha, and Decomba were captured by the slavers. Decomba was killed on the slave ship during a revolt.

Fanta and Kincha got split apart at the slave auction.

American Family: Master- Benjamin Adams

Mistress- Rebecca Adams

18 year old daughter Victoria

14 year old daughter Anne

\*Benjamin's brother of New York- Thomas P. Adams (writer)

## Historical/Geographical Frame

-1st home: Africa, Gold Coast\* Ashanti Tribe

-Weather: Tropical, warm/hot, very sunny

-Plants/Animals: Covered by Savannah

Trees- Mahogany, Odum, Ebony

Animals- Elephants

Lions

Monkeys

Snakes

Antelopes

Crocodiles

\*Home- Round huts with dirt floor and big leaf roof

-2nd home: America, Charleston, South Carolina

-Weather: Either really really hot or rainy storms

-Plants/Animals: Crops- Rice, Tabacco, Cotton

Animals- Raccoons

Skunks

-Type of home/work environment: Sleeps in a slave cabin with two other women.

They have a high quality cabin because they are house servants which includes boarded floors, waterproof roof, better and newer wood walls.

## Narrative

-Form of freedom: She tells her story to Thomas about her past, spending her childhood in Africa, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and what her life is like as a slave. She feels as if the burden is releasing from her. The pain and the suffering is slowly leaving her body.

-Potential risks: First of all, she is talking rather than working. Thomas is treating her with respect, not lowly like a slave. She goes against her master and talks about Africa.

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