

The door to the study opened quietly, and the professor looked up from his desk. A man stood in his door. Nothing was in any way particularly special about the man's appearance. He was about average height, but his broad shoulders showed his strength and were made all the more noticeable by his being somewhat small. His eyes, and his skin were the only things remarkable in a university. As slavery was still a deep issue in the regions of the South and even the North, being a young black male in a university in eighteen ten was a very strange sight. His skin was dark, but not the ebony of other Africans, but with a lightness to it that suggested him to have white heritage. And his eyes, eyes so deep and sorrowful that it seemed to drive a knife into the professor's heart. They were dark brown, but with green around the edges, a dark shade of forest green. The man was almost beautiful, but only the hardness around his mouth made him seem almost more demon than angel. He had a warm presence though, a friendliness that the professor had never really experienced with anyone who seemed also so distant.

The boy, for he could be no more than twenty, closed the door politely. The professor closed the book he had been reading and looked over the top of his spectacles at the boy. He took in the boy's dress. He had a slightly impressive suit for someone of his age and position.

The professor picked up a letter lying on his desk. "You must be Charles?" He glanced at the letter doubtfully when Charles nodded.

"Yessir. I asked if you were interested in documenting the life of a slave." He shifted his feet nervously.

The professor looked up again when he spoke. "How do you speak so well and write," he brandished the letter, waving it, "if you were a slave?"

Charles stepped forward, "I was taught, sir, by a man up here in the North."

Though his speech was somewhat hesitant and the Southern accent still lingered around his words, his speech was clear and well formulated. The professor nodded to himself, and then motioned for Charles to sit down. Charles stepped toward the large seat and settled into it, sinking back into the soft, red material. He glanced around the room. It was old and dark, the wood furnishings of dark oak and the old books worn and faded in their dark leather bindings. A fire was crackling in a brick fireplace, the flames warm and bright against the misted windows that sheltered them from the cold December chill.

The professor leaned back in his chair, "So, why do you want to talk to me about your life as a slave? Aren't those memories painful?"

Charles nodded, but sat forward in his chair, the fire kindling in his eyes like a chained spirit behind bars of glass. "Yes, it's painful, but I want all the people to know what goes on down South and even around here, and to know what a horrible thing it is." He looked straight into the professor's eyes. "I received an education and spent four years working and studying for it, and three months running through the wild to get it, just so I could talk to someone like you and show people that we are humans and can have an education."

The professor placed the tips of his fingers together and the barest hint of a frown evident beneath his beard crossed his lined face. "But why talk about it? Is that the only reason?" he asked.

Charles smiled, a sad, secret smile meant for people far away and unknown. "I want people to know what happens to us. I want to tell them why we cry."