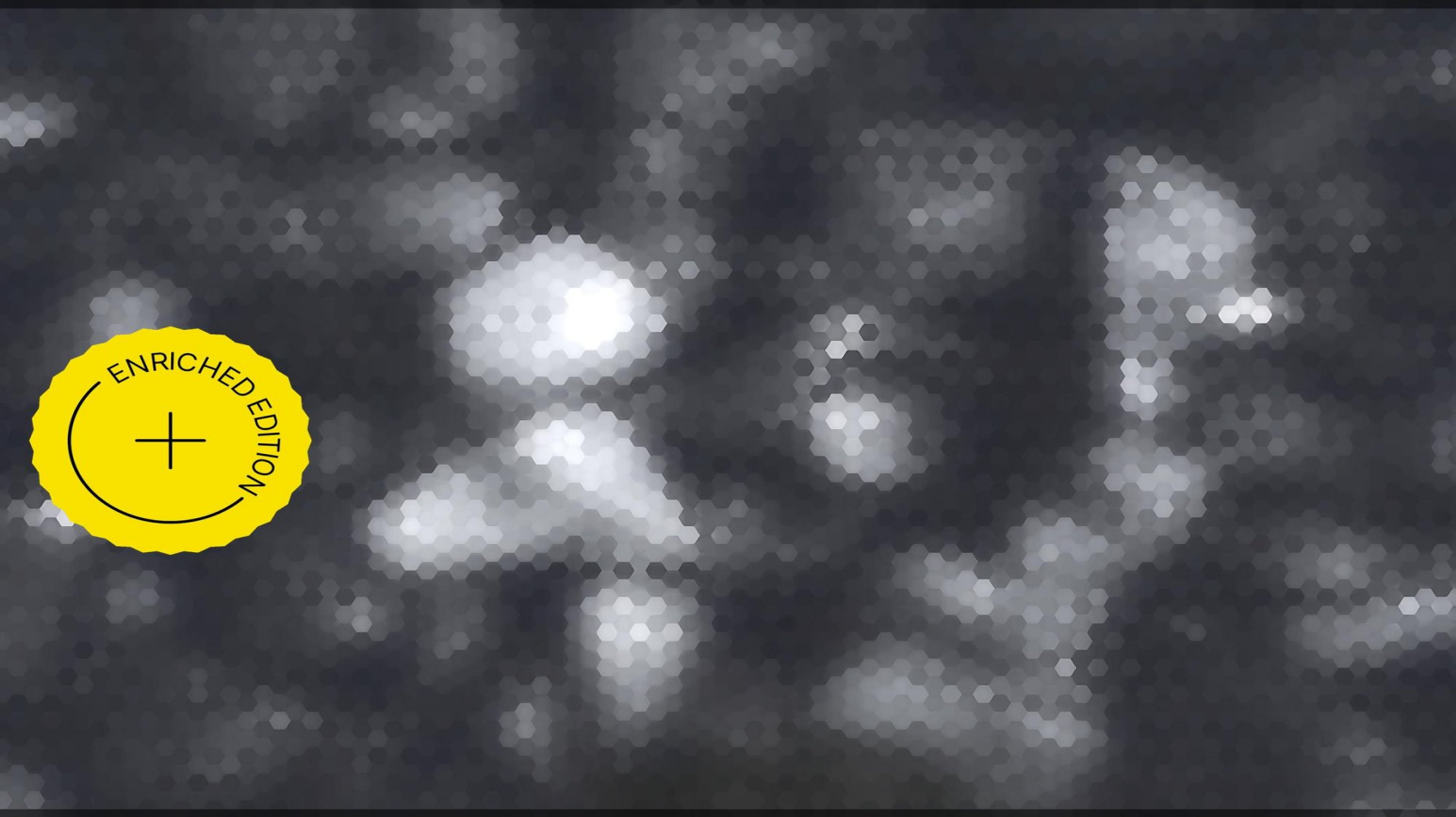
MARTHA GRIFFITH BROWNE



THE LIFE OF A FEMALE SLAVE

Martha Griffith Browne

The Life of a Female Slave

Enriched edition. Biographical Novel Based on a Real-Life Experiences

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Erin Holloway

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Introduction

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At the heart of The Life of a Female Slave lies the struggle to preserve personhood in a world that insists a woman can be owned. Martha Griffith Browne's work belongs to the antislavery novel tradition, presented as a first-person account set in the slaveholding American South. First published in the late 1850s, on the eve of the Civil War, it participates in the abolitionist print culture that sought to make the private cruelties of slavery publicly undeniable. The book's framing as lived testimony, even as it is a crafted literary work, positions it between documentary urgency and moral persuasion.

The premise is stark and intimate: a woman born into slavery narrates her life as it unfolds under a system that treats her body, labor, and relationships as commodities. Readers enter a sequence of domestic and plantation spaces where the most ordinary routines carry extraordinary risk. The voice is direct and confiding, the pacing episodic, and the tone alternately restrained and impassioned. Scenes accumulate with the momentum of lived experience rather than melodramatic spectacle, producing a reading experience that is vivid, morally focused, and attentive to the textures of everyday endurance without relying on sensational revelation.

Browne writes in the first person to simulate the authority of a slave narrative, a choice that reflects a common abolitionist strategy of the period. The book's hybrid status—as fiction that adopts testimonial conventions—invites readers to consider how literature mediates suffering while

striving to convey truth. Its sentences are purposeful and unadorned, turning on specific observations, brief introspections, and the steady pressure of circumstance. The result is a narrative that feels both composed and immediate, where the ethical appeal grows from closely observed detail rather than authorial intrusion, and where silence and suggestion often carry as much weight as explicit description.

Thematically, The Life of a Female Slave confronts the transactional logic that reduces human ties to ledger lines. It traces how law and custom transform kinship, sexuality, and motherhood into instruments of control, illuminating the gendered vulnerabilities that slavery intensifies. The narrative dwells on the fragility of family bonds under the threat of sale, the constant negotiation of bodily safety, and the moral dissonance of those who benefit from bondage. Yet it also registers acts of care, self-assertion, and mutual aid—quiet gestures that contest the system’s totalizing claims and sketch possibilities for dignity within constraint.

For contemporary readers, the book remains urgent because it clarifies how structures, not just individuals, produce harm—and how those structures are felt most acutely at the intersection of race, gender, labor, and law. Its attention to reproductive autonomy, sexual coercion, and familial precarity resonates with ongoing debates about bodily sovereignty and justice. As a crafted testimony, it models how narrative can mobilize empathy without substituting sentiment for analysis, and it asks readers to weigh the ethics of representation alongside the imperative to remember and reckon with slavery’s legacies.

Historically, The Life of a Female Slave stands among antebellum antislavery works that repurposed the popular sentimental novel to reach broad audiences. Its deployment

of domestic scenes and moral argument aligns it with a tradition that sought reform through feeling while documenting lived realities. The book converses with slave narratives by adopting their testimonial form, yet it also reveals the period’s porous boundary between reportage and fiction. By centering a woman’s experience, it helps map the gendered dimensions of bondage and contributes to the archive through which historians and readers reconstruct everyday life under slavery.

Approached today, the book rewards a readerly stance that is both empathetic and critical: empathetic toward the narrated life and critical about how authorship and genre shape what can be said and heard. Its power lies in illuminating the costs of a society that legalizes human ownership while tracing the stubborn persistence of selfhood within it. Without disclosing later turns of the plot, it is enough to say that the narrative’s moral clarity and steady voice make it a durable witness. Reading it now strengthens historical memory and sharpens the ethical questions we bring to stories that seek to reform the world.

Synopsis

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The Life of a Female Slave, attributed to the abolitionist writer Martha Griffith Browne, is an antislavery novel of the mid-nineteenth century that adopts the intimate voice of an enslaved woman to indict the institution that confines her. Framed as a personal history, the narrative blends the conventions of sentimental fiction with reformist purpose, guiding readers from the narrator's earliest recollections through the routines and terrors of bondage. Without claiming documentary authority, it situates domestic labor, plantation discipline, and the daily regulation of Black life within a broader critique of ownership, presenting slavery not as isolated cruelty but as a sustained system of power.

In its opening movement, the narrator recalls a childhood shaped by maternal care and community, shadowed by the dawning recognition that her body and time are owned. Household tasks, fieldwork, and service inside the master's home reveal hierarchies policed by overseers and by proximity to white authority. Small acts of tenderness, meals shared, and moments of play offer brief relief, yet the uncertainty of punishment always intrudes. The narrative observes how affection is made fragile by property claims, as even family names and relationships can be rearranged at a whim. Early lessons in deference and silence become survival skills learned far too young.

As the girl grows, the market logic of slavery becomes visible: value is calculated, health appraised, obedience monitored, and kinship treated as a negotiable asset. The story charts rumors of sale and the dread of separation,

portraying auctions and inspections as routine humiliations rather than exceptions. Religious language appears on both sides of the divide, with the narrator contrasting the piety of slaveholders with the spiritual resources cultivated among the enslaved. Scenes of discipline and sexual menace underscore the gendered dimensions of power, while careful attention to gesture and speech reveals how dignity is preserved under the constant risk of reprisal.

Adolescence brings harsher workloads and new vulnerabilities, alongside deepened ties to friends and elders who coach the narrator in prudence and quiet resistance. Transfers between households, or the threat of them, display the precarity embedded in every relationship, for affection cannot shield anyone from a ledger. The text lingers on negotiations—pleas, bargains, promises—that momentarily delay abuse or sale, exposing how moral appeals function within a commodified world. The narrator’s observations widen to include the surrounding economy and the complicity of bystanders, recording not only blows and commands but also silences, omissions, and the everyday calculations that sustain bondage.

Encounters with sympathetic whites and free Black people, though limited and uncertain, introduce alternative possibilities and fragile lines of aid. Risky lessons in letters and numbers, when they appear, are presented as both practical tools and moral awakenings, enabling the narrator to name what had been only felt. She weighs duty to loved ones against the pull of self-preservation, mapping routes in thought long before any step is taken. The book carefully balances hope with fear, keeping the stakes legible: surveillance is near, laws are harsh, and betrayal can come from those who have seemed benevolent, even familial, in daily life.

Crises accumulate until a pivotal injustice compels decision, and the narrative tightens around the hazards of asserting a claim to one’s own body and future. While withholding final outcomes, the novel choreographs flight, concealment, and negotiation as moral as well as physical trials, measuring courage against the costs of failure. Browne’s sentimental strategies—lamplight vigils, broken trinkets, the sight of a child asleep—are mobilized to indict an order that fractures homes and markets grief. Testimony from multiple scenes of labor, punishment, and trade coalesces into a sustained argument: slavery corrupts every role it touches, from master to minister to merchant.

Without collapsing into melodrama, The Life of a Female Slave occupies a pivotal place in antebellum antislavery literature, amplifying a gendered perspective on captivity, coercion, and care. As a work of fiction written for reform, it prompts ongoing questions about voice and representation while insisting on the irreducible humanity of its protagonist. Its enduring resonance lies in the clarity with which it exposes the contradictions of a society that prized domestic virtue yet commodified women and children. The book remains significant not for a single revelation, but for the cumulative weight of experience it marshals to challenge readers’ conscience.

Historical Context

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The Life of a Female Slave is set against the antebellum United States, when chattel slavery structured law, economy, and daily life across the South. In the 1850s, slavery remained legal in border states such as Kentucky as well as the Deep South, upheld by slave codes, patrols, and courts. Enslaved labor underwrote commercial agriculture, household service, and artisanal work, while racial hierarchy permeated churches, schools, and civic institutions. Published in 1857, the work addresses a society convulsed by sectional conflict, in which Northern free states debated slavery's expansion and Southern legislatures fortified property claims in human beings.

The internal, or domestic, slave trade dominated enslaved people's movements by the mid-nineteenth century, sending thousands yearly from the Upper South to markets in the Lower South. Traders organized coffles along roads and rivers toward hubs such as New Orleans, while auctions, bills of sale, and jail pens enforced separations that contemporaries reported widely in newspapers and reform tracts. Kentucky, as an Upper South state on major river routes, was deeply entangled in this commerce. The book's attention to sales, transport, and the power of traders reflects conditions historians call the 'Second Middle Passage,' central to slavery's expansion.

National politics in the 1850s intensified slavery's reach into everyday life. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 compelled officials and citizens in free states to assist in recapturing escapees, with high-profile renditions such as Anthony

Burns's return from Boston in 1854 galvanizing Northern protest. The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) repealed earlier limits on expansion, provoking violent conflict over slavery's legality in new territories. In 1857, the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision denied Black citizenship and restricted congressional power to ban slavery in the territories. These rulings and clashes form the legal and political horizon against which the narrative's urgencies register.

The work also belongs to an organized antislavery movement that used petitions, lectures, and print to build moral suasion. The American Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1833, coordinated campaigns alongside periodicals such as William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator and Frederick Douglass's North Star. Activists aided fugitives through informal networks later termed the Underground Railroad, while mass meetings and lyceum circuits reached mixed audiences across the North. Women reformers played visible roles, and debates over women's public speech intersected with the emerging women's rights movement after the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. These intertwined publics shaped both the author's milieu and readership.

Antebellum print culture turned slavery into a literary battlefield. Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) sold in the hundreds of thousands and spurred proslavery counter-novels, revealing the reach of sentimental fiction in shaping opinion. Publishers issued slave narratives, memoirs, and fictional testimonies that emphasized family bonds, Christian ethics, and scenes of separation to move readers toward reform. Southern states censored abolitionist literature and criminalized distribution, yet Northern presses sustained a broad market. Within this milieu, a first-person account by a 'female slave' aligned literary technique with moral suasion, inviting readers to weigh law and conscience.

Martha Griffith Browne, known earlier as Mattie Griffith, was born in Kentucky and wrote as a white abolitionist steeped in border-state realities. Her 1857 book appeared amid rising tensions, and she used royalties and abolitionist assistance to emancipate people she legally held in Kentucky, relocating them to a free state. She later lived in the North, participated in antislavery lecturing, and engaged Boston's reform circles associated with William Lloyd Garrison. After the Civil War she married journalist and Union official Albert G. Browne Jr. Her career links the novel to networks that combined authorship, activism, and practical emancipation.

The narrative's emphasis on a woman's experience reflects documented gendered dynamics within slavery. Laws across slaveholding states followed partus sequitur ventrem, making children inherit the status of the mother and exposing enslaved women's reproductive lives to owners' economic interests. Sexual coercion and assault were pervasive and rarely punished under criminal law; testimony by enslaved people was often restricted or excluded in courts. Domestic service placed many women in constant proximity to slaveholders' households, intensifying surveillance and vulnerability. By foregrounding a female voice in 1857, the book highlighted abuses that abolitionists increasingly publicized and that later accounts, such as Harriet Jacobs's, elaborated.

Appearing the same year as Dred Scott, the book channels the urgency of an era moving toward open conflict. Its depictions of sale, forced labor, and constrained mobility mirror institutions that statutes and markets sustained, while its appeals to conscience address readers shaped by churches, newspapers, and reform meetings. As abolitionists sought to humanize enslaved people and expose legal cruelty, the narrative operates as cultural evidence and

argument, critiquing property claims in persons and the social order that defended them. It exemplifies how antebellum literature invited Northern publics to confront slavery's realities before war decided the question.

The Life of a Female Slave

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CHAPTER I.

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THE OLD KENTUCKY FARM—MY PARENTAGE AND EARLY TRAINING—DEATH OF THE MASTER—THE SALE-DAY—NEW MASTER AND NEW HOME.

I was born in one of the southern counties of Kentucky. My earliest recollections are of a large, old-fashioned farm-house, built of hewn rock, in which my old master, Mr. Nelson, and his family, consisting of a widowed sister, two daughters and two sons, resided. I have but an indistinct remembrance of my old master. At times, a shadow of an idea, like the reflection of a kind dream, comes over my mind, and, then, I conjure him up as a large, venerable-looking man, with scanty, gray locks floating carelessly over an amplitude of forehead; a wide, hard-featured face, with yet a kindly glow of honest sentiment; broad, strong teeth, much discolored by the continued use of tobacco.

I well remember that, as a token of his good-will, he always presented us (the slave-children) with a slice of buttered bread, when we had finished our daily task. I have also a faint *reminiscence* of his old hickory cane being shaken over my head two or three times, and the promise (which remained, until his death, unfulfilled) of a good "*thrashing*" at some future period.

My mother was a very bright mulatto woman[1], and my father, I suppose, was a white man, though I know nothing of him; for, with the most unpaternal feeling, he deserted me. A consequence of this amalgamation was my very fair and beautiful complexion. My skin was no perceptible shade darker than that of my young mistresses. My eyes were

large and dark, while a profusion of nut-brown hair, straight and soft as the whitest lady's in the land, fell in showery redundance over my neck and shoulders. I was often mistaken for a white child; and in my rambles through the woods, many caresses have I received from wayside travellers; and the exclamation, "What a beautiful child!" was quite common. Owing to this personal beauty I was a great pet with my master's sister, Mrs. Woodbridge, who, I believe I have stated, was a widow, and childless; so upon me she lavished all the fondness of a warm and loving heart.

My mother, Keziah the cook, commonly called Aunt Kaisy, was possessed of an indomitable ambition, and had, by the hardest means, endeavored to acquire the rudiments of an education; but all that she had succeeded in obtaining was a knowledge of the alphabet, and orthography in two syllables. Being very imitative, she eschewed the ordinary negroes' pronunciation, and adopted the mode of speech used by the higher classes of whites. She was very much delighted when Mrs. Woodbridge or Miss Betsy (as we called her) began to instruct me in the elements of the English language. I inherited my mother's thirst for knowledge; and, by intense study, did all I could to spare Miss Betsy the usual drudgery of a teacher. The aptitude that I displayed, may be inferred from the fact that, in three months from the day she began teaching me the alphabet, I was reading, with some degree of fluency, in the "First Reader[2]." I have often heard her relate this as quite a literary and educational marvel.

There were so many slaves upon the farm, particularly young ones, that I was regarded as a supernumerary; consequently, spared from nearly all the work. I sat in Miss Betsy's room, with book in hand, little heeding anything else; and, if ever I manifested the least indolence, my

mother, with her wild ambition, was sure to rally me, and even offer the tempting bribe of cakes and apples.

I have frequently heard my old master say, "Betsy, you will spoil that girl, teaching her so much." "She is too pretty for a slave," was her invariable reply[1q].

Thus smoothly passed the early part of my life, until an event occurred which was the cause of a change in my whole fate. My old master became suddenly and dangerously ill. My lessons were suspended, for Miss Betsy's services were required in the sick chamber. I used to slyly steal to the open door of his room, and peep in, with wonder, at the sombre group collected there. I recollect seeing my young masters and mistresses weeping round a curtained bed. Then there came a time when loud screams and frightful lamentations issued thence. There were shrieks that struck upon my ear with a strange thrill; shrieks that seemed to rend souls and break heart-strings. My young mistresses, fair, slender girls, fell prostrate upon the floor; and my masters, noble, manly men, bent over the bowed forms of their sisters, whispering words which I did not hear, but which, my mature experience tells me, must have been of love and comfort.

There came, then, a long, narrow, black box, thickly embossed with shining brass tacks, in which my old master was carefully laid, with his pale, brawny hands crossed upon his wide chest. I remember that, one by one, the slaves were called in to take a last look of him who had been, to them, a kind master. They all came out with their cotton handkerchiefs pressed to their eyes. I went in, with five other colored children, to take my look. That wan, ghastly face, those sunken eyes and pinched features, with the white winding sheet, and the dismal coffin, impressed me with a new and wild terror; and, for weeks after, this "vision of death" haunted my mind fearfully.

But I soon after resumed my studies under Miss Betsy's tuition. Having little work to do, and seldom seeing my young mistresses, I grew up in the same house, scarcely knowing them. I was technically termed in the family, "the child," as I was not black; and, being a slave, my masters and mistresses would not admit that I was white. So I reached the age of ten, still called "a child," and actually one in all life's experiences, though pretty well advanced in education. I had a very good knowledge of the rudiments, had bestowed some attention upon Grammar, and eagerly read every book that fell in my way. Love of study taught me seclusive habits; I read long and late; and the desire of a finished education became the passion of my life. Alas! these days were but a poor preparation for the life that was to come after!

Miss Betsy, though a warm-hearted woman, was a violent advocate of slavery. I have since been puzzled how to reconcile this with her otherwise Christian character; and, though she professed to love me dearly, and had bestowed so much attention upon the cultivation of my mind, and expressed it as her opinion that I was too pretty and white to be a slave, yet, if any one had spoken of giving me freedom, she would have condemned it as domestic heresy. If I had belonged to her, I doubt not but my life would have been a happy one. But, alas! a different lot was assigned me!

About two years and six months after my old master's death, a division was made of the property. This involved a sale of everything, even the household furniture. There were, I believe, heavy debts hanging over the estate. These must be met, and the residue divided among the heirs.

When it was made known in the kitchen that a sale was to be made, the slaves were panic-stricken. Loud cries and lamentations arose, and my young mistresses came often to the kitchen to comfort us.

One of these young ladies, Miss Margaret, a tall, nobly-formed girl, with big blue eyes and brown hair, frequently came and sat with us, trying, in the most persuasive tones, to reconcile the old ones to their destiny. Often did I see the large tears roll down her fair cheeks, and her red lip quiver. These indications of sympathy, coming from such a lovely being, cheered many an hour of after-captivity.

But the "sale-day" came at last; I have a confused idea of it. The ladies left the day before. Miss Betsy took an affectionate leave of me; ah, I did not then know that it was a final one.

The servants were all sold, as I heard one man say, at very high rates, though not under the auctioneer's hammer. To that my young masters were opposed.

A tall, hard-looking man came up to me, very roughly seized my arm, bade me open my mouth; examined my teeth; felt of my limbs; made me run a few yards; ordered me to jump; and, being well satisfied with my activity, said to Master Edward, "I will take her." Little comprehending the full meaning of that brief sentence, I rejoined the group of children from which I had been summoned. After awhile, my mother came up to me, holding a wallet in her hand. The tear-drops stood on her cheeks, and her whole frame was distorted with pain. She walked toward me a few steps, then stopped, and suddenly shaking her head, exclaimed, "No, no, I can't do it, I can't do it." I was amazed at her grief, but an indefinable fear kept me from rushing to her.

"Here, Kitty," she said to an old negro woman, who stood near, "you break it to her. I can't do it. No, it will drive me mad. Oh, heaven! that I was ever born to see this day." Then rocking her body back and forward in a transport of agony, she gave full vent to her feelings in a long, loud, piteous wail. Oh, God! that cry of grief, that knell of a breaking heart, rang in my ears for many long and painful days. At

length Aunt Kitty approached me, and, laying her hand on my shoulder, kindly said:

"Alas, poor chile, you mus' place your trus' in the good God above, you mus' look to Him for help; you are gwine to leave your mother now. You are to have a new home, a new master, and I hope new friends. May the Lord be with you." So saying, she broke suddenly away from me; but I saw that her wrinkled face was wet with tears.

With perhaps an idle, listless air, I received this astounding news; but a whirlwind was gathering in my breast. What could she mean by new friends and a new home? Surely I was to take my mother with me! No mortal power would dare to sever *us*. Why, I remember that when master sold the gray mare, the colt went also. Who could, who would, who dared, separate the parent from her offspring? Alas! I had yet to learn that the white man dared do all that his avarice might suggest; and there was no human tribunal where the outcast African could pray for "right!" Ah, when I now think of my poor mother's form, as it swayed like a willow in the tempest of grief; when I remember her bitter cries, and see her arms thrown frantically toward me, and hear her earnest—oh, how earnest—prayer for death or madness, then I wonder where were Heaven's thunderbolts; but retributive Justice *will* come sooner or later, and He who remembers mercy *now* will not forget justice *then*.

"Come along, gal, come along, gather up your duds, and come with me," said a harsh voice; and, looking up from my bewildered reverie, I beheld the man who had so carefully examined me. I was too much startled to fully understand the words, and stood vacantly gazing at him. This strange manner he construed into disrespect; and, raising his riding-whip, he brought it down with considerable force upon my back. It was the first lash I had ever given to me in anger. I smarted beneath the stripe, and a cry of pain broke from my

lips. Mother sprang to me, and clasping my quivering form in her arms, cried out to my young master, "Oh, Master Eddy, have mercy on me, on my child. I have served you faithfully, I nursed you, I grew up with your poor mother, who now sleeps in the cold ground. I beg you now to save *my child*," and she sank down at his feet, whilst her tears fell fast.

Then my poor old grandfather, who was called the patriarch slave, being the eldest one of the race in the whole neighborhood, joined us. His gray head, wrinkled face, and bent form, told of many a year of hard servitude.

"What is it, Massa Ed, what is it Kaisy be takin' on so 'bout? you haint driv the *chile* off? No—no! young massa only playin' trick now; come Kais' don't be makin' fool of yoursef, young massa not gwine to separate you and the chile."

These words seemed to reanimate my mother, and she looked up at Master Edward with a grateful expression of face, whilst she clasped her arms tightly around his knees, exclaiming, "Oh, bless you, young master, bless you forever, and forgive poor Kaisy for distrusting you, but Pompey told me the child was sold away from me, and that gemman struck her;" and here again she sobbed, and caught hold of me convulsively, as if she feared I might be taken.

I looked at my young master's face, and the ghastly whiteness which overspread it, the tearful glister of his eye, and the strange tremor of his figure, struck me with fright. *I knew my doom.* Young as I was, my first dread was for my mother; I forgot my own perilous situation, and mourned alone for her. I would have given worlds could insensibility have been granted her.

"I've got no time to be foolin' longer with these niggers, come 'long, gal. Ann, I believe, you tole me was her name," he said, as he turned to Master Edward. Another wild shriek

from my mother, a deep sigh from grandpap, and I looked at master Ed, who was striking his forehead vehemently, and the tears were trickling down his cheeks.

"Here, Mr. Peterkin, here!" exclaimed Master Edward, "here is your bill of sale; I will refund your money; release me from my contract."

Peterkin cast on him one contemptuous look, and with a low, chuckling laugh, replied, "No; you must stand to your bargain. I want that gal; she is likely, and it will do me good to thrash the devil out of her;" turning to me he added, "quit your snuffling and snubbing, or I'll give you something to cry 'bout;" and, roughly catching me by the arm, he hurried me off, despite the entreaty of Master Ed, the cries of mother, and the feeble supplication of my grandfather. I dared to cast one look behind, and beheld my mother wallowing in the dust, whilst her frantic cries of "save my child, save my child!" rang with fearful agony in my ears. Master Ed covered his face with his hands, and old grandfather reverently raised his to Heaven, as if beseeching mercy. The sight of this anguish-stricken group filled me with a new sense of horror, and forgetful of the presence of Peterkin, I burst into tears: but I was quickly recalled by a fierce and stinging blow from his stout riding-whip.

"See here, nigger (this man, raised among negroes, used their dialect), if you dar' to give another whimper, I'll beat the very life out 'en yer." This terrific threat seemed to scare away every thought of precaution; and, by a sudden and agile bound, I broke loose from him and darted off to the sad group, from which I had been so ruthlessly torn, and, sinking down before Master Ed, I cried out in a wild, despairing tone, "Save me, good master, save me—kill me, or hide me from that awful man, he'll kill me;" and, seizing hold of the skirt of his coat, I covered my face with it to shut out the sight of Peterkin, whose red eye-balls were glaring with fury upon me. Oath after oath escaped his lips. Mother

saw him rapidly approaching to recapture me, and, with the noble, maternal instinct of self-sacrifice, sprang forward only to receive the heavy blow of his uplifted whip. She reeled, tottered and sank stunned upon the ground.

"Thar, take that, you yaller hussy, and cuss yer nigger hide for daring to raise this rumpus here," he said, as he rapidly strode past her.

"Gently, Mr. Peterkin," exclaimed Master Edward, "let me speak to her; a little encouragement is better than force."

"This is my encouragement for them," and he shook his whip.

Unheeding him, Master Edward turned to me, saying, "Ann, come now, be a good girl, go with this gentleman, and be an obedient girl; he will give you a kind, nice home; sometimes he will let you come to see your mother. Here is some money for you to buy a pretty head-handkerchief; now go with him." These kind words and encouraging tones, brought a fresh gush of tears to my eyes. Taking the half-dollar which he offered me, and reverently kissing the skirt of his coat, I rejoined Peterkin; one look at his cold, harsh face, chilled my resolution; yet I had resolved to go without another word of complaint. I could not suppress a groan when I passed the spot where my mother lay still insensible from the effects of the blow.

One by one the servants, old and young, gave me a hearty shake of the hand as I passed the place where they were standing in a row for the inspection of buyers.

I had nerved myself, and now that the parting from mother was over, I felt that the bitterness of death was past, and I could meet anything. Nothing now could be a trial, yet I was touched when the servants offered me little mementoes and keepsakes. One gave a yard of ribbon, another a half-paper of pins, a third presented a painted cotton head-tie; others gave me ginger-cakes, candies, or

small coins. Out of their little they gave abundantly, and, small as were the bestowments, I well knew that they had made sacrifices to give even so much. I was too deeply affected to make any other acknowledgment than a nod of the head; for a choking thickness was gathering in my throat, and a blinding mist obscured my sight. I did not see my young mistresses, for they had left the house, declaring they could not bear to witness a spectacle so revolting to their feelings.

Upon reaching the gate I observed a red-painted wagon, with an awning of domestic cotton. Standing near it, and holding the horses, was an old, worn, scarred, weather-beaten negro man, who instantly took off his hat as Mr. Peterkin approached.

"Well, Nace, you see I've bought this wench to-day," and he shook his whip over my head.

"Ya! ya! Massa, but she ha' got one goot home wid yer."

"Yes, has she, Nace; but don't yer think the slut has been cryin' 'bout it!"

"Lor' bless us, Massa, but a little of the beech-tree will fetch that sort of truck out of her," and old Nace showed his broken teeth, as he gave a forced laugh.

"I guess I can take the fool out en her, by the time I gives her two or three swings at the whippin'-post."

Nace shook his head knowingly, and gave a low guttural laugh, by way of approval of his master's capabilities.

"Jump in the wagon, gal," said my new master, "jump in quick; I likes to see niggers active, none of your pokes 'bout me; but this will put sperit in 'em," and there was another defiant flourish of the whip.

I got in with as much haste and activity as I could possibly command. This appeared to please Mr. Peterkin, and he gave evidence of it by saying—

43 The 'Decalogue' is another name for the Ten Commandments in the Hebrew Bible (Exodus and Deuteronomy), and here the phrase refers rhetorically to those biblical moral laws.

44 A 19th-century political/legal phrase meaning mutual courtesy or reciprocal recognition between U.S. states (or between states and other jurisdictions); it was invoked to describe respectful treatment of outsiders or visitors across state lines.

45 Refers to Parian marble from the Greek island of Paros, prized in the 18th–19th centuries for sculpture and funerary monuments; here it denotes a white, classical-style grave monument.

46 A reference to a popular early Christian legend (often called the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus') about youths who miraculously slept for centuries; by the 19th century the phrase was used idiomatically to mean a very deep sleeper.

47 A 19th-century medical term for a sudden loss of consciousness or paralysis, commonly caused by a stroke or cerebral hemorrhage; in modern medicine this would generally be classified as a stroke or cerebrovascular event.

48 An explicitly derogatory term for Black people; the narrator notes it as a "gross pronunciation of the word negro," observing that in 19th-century Kentucky it was commonly used to express contempt. Cultural and historical usage of this word is offensive.

49 Refers to Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a key figure in Liberia’s founding who became the first president of the independent Republic of Liberia (elected 1848) and was an important 19th-century statesman associated with the colony-to-nation transition.

50 The building in Philadelphia where the United States Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were debated and adopted; the phrase "the old bell" alludes to the Liberty Bell historically housed in its tower.

51 William Blackstone (1723–1780), an English jurist whose Commentaries on the Laws of England were highly influential on Anglo-American legal thought and often cited in 18th- and 19th-century legal and political arguments.

52 Organizations such as the American Colonization Society (founded 1816) that promoted relocating free Black Americans to Africa — an effort that helped establish Liberia — a movement that was supported by a mix of abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates and was subject to substantial contemporary debate.

53 Whalebone here refers to baleen (the horny plates from certain whales) which in the 19th century was used to make stiff but flexible rods for items like corset stays, whips, riding-crops, and canes; such implements could inflict severe wounds when used for corporal punishment.

54 A half-dollar is a United States coin worth fifty cents; in the 19th century this denomination was typically struck in silver and would have been a common unit of payment or fee of modest but meaningful value at the time.

55 A traditional term for the Ten Commandments in the Judeo-Christian tradition; here it refers to those biblical moral laws (e.g., "Thou shalt not...") invoked in moral argument.

56 Likely referring to the Maine Law of 1851, an early U.S. state statute that prohibited the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors and became a model for later temperance/prohibition measures.

57 A local institutional facility (also called a workhouse or poorhouse) where paupers, vagrants or some offenders were confined and set to labor; 19th-century practices and conditions varied by locality and could include forced work and basic housing.

58 A 19th-century racial classification meaning a person of mixed white and Black ancestry; the term is now considered outdated and offensive and is avoided in contemporary usage.

59 In 19th-century American slavery, a “pen” was a holding facility or jail where enslaved people were kept temporarily by traders or owners before being sold, hired out, or moved elsewhere; such pens were often in city lots or near markets.

60 A ‘negro-trader’ was a person who bought and sold enslaved Black people as a commercial business (also called a slave trader), participating in the domestic slave trade of the period.

61 Chickering refers to Chickering & Sons, a well-known 19th-century American piano manufacturer based in Boston; a ‘Chickering’ piano was regarded as a high-quality, status instrument in that era.

62 A 19th-century horse-drawn passenger vehicle or large carriage used to carry multiple people within a city or between nearby points; here it denotes the coach that carried the enslaved people to the wharf.

63 A popular mid-19th-century song by Stephen Foster (published 1851), commonly called "Swanee River"; period sources often described such pieces as an "Ethiopian melody," a contemporary label for songs performed in minstrel or imitative African American styles.

64 In 19th-century usage, “pest” likely abbreviates “pest-house,” an isolation hospital for people with contagious diseases; “alms-houses” were charitable institutions or lodging provided for the poor, typically funded by local authorities or private benefactors.

65 Here the "green pump" denotes a communal hand-operated water pump typical of 19th-century American towns; such pumps supplied drinking water and commonly served as local meeting places and familiar landmarks in period writing.

66 A type of coarse whole-wheat bread promoted in the early to mid-19th century by dietary reformer Sylvester Graham as part of a regimen for health and moral improvement.

67 In 19th-century U.S. usage, this typically denotes a slave-pen or holding facility where enslaved people were confined temporarily prior to sale, transport, or punishment.

68 Legal documents (often called manumission papers) that recorded or conferred a person’s freedom from slavery; in the 18th–19th-century United States such papers were typically required as proof of free status for travel, residence, or legal protection.

69 In 19th-century print, authors often used dashes to obscure or partially redact a proper name; here "G—— House" denotes a hotel (the passage even calls it a hotel) whose full name is withheld, a common practice rather than a specific, identifiable establishment.

70 A 'charnel-house' is a vault or building used for storing human skeletal remains (an ossuary); 19th-century writers often used the term to evoke places filled with bones or decaying corpses.