



CHAPTER 1

I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, in Talbot County, Maryland. I don't know my age, as I've never seen any record of my birth. In general, slaves do not know their ages any more than horses know theirs, and most masters want to keep it that way. I do not remember ever meeting a slave who could tell me his birthday. The closest most can tell is to say they were born in planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time.

Not knowing my birthday was a source of unhappiness to me during childhood. The white children knew their ages. I did not understand why I should not know mine. I was not allowed to ask my master any question about it. He thought all such questions from a slave demonstrated a restless spirit. My best guess is that I am twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. I base this on hearing my master say, sometime in 1835, that I was

about seventeen.

My mother was named Harriet Bailey. She was the daughter of Isaac and Betsy Bailey. Both of them were colored people and quite dark-skinned. My mother was of a darker complexion than either my grandmother or grandfather.

My father was a white man. That was admitted by everyone. Many people also whispered that my master was my father, but I do not know if that is true.

My mother and I were separated when I was only a baby—before I was old enough to remember anything about her. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to separate children and their mothers at a very early age. Frequently before the child has reached its first birthday, its mother is taken away from it. She is hired out to work on a farm, miles away, and the child is placed under the care of a woman who is too old to work in the fields. Why this is done I do not know, unless it is to interfere with the natural development of affection between the mother and the child. For this is always the result.

I saw my mother only four or five times after that first separation. Each visit was very brief and at night. She was hired by a Mr. Stewart, who lived about twelve miles from

my home. She made her journeys to see me in the night, walking the whole way after working all day. She was a field hand, and field hands are whipped if they are not in the field at sunrise.

I do not remember ever seeing my mother in daylight. She would lie down with me and get me to sleep, but long before I woke up she was gone. We had very little communication. Death soon ended her hardships and suffering, for she died when I was about seven years old. I was not allowed to be present during her illness, or at her death or burial. She was gone long before I knew anything about it. As I had never been allowed to know her as a mother, I heard the news of her death with the same emotions I would have felt at the death of a stranger.

When she died, she left me without the slightest idea of who my father was. The rumor that my master was my father may or may not have been true. True or not, it doesn't matter much to me. What matters is the ugly fact that the children of slave women are slaves as well. Clearly, this is to the masters' advantage. It is profitable for them to satisfy their lust with their slave women. By this arrangement, they become both master and father to a large number of valuable slaves.

It is worth noting that these slaves, with their double relationship to their master, suffer greater hardships than other slaves. They are a constant offense to their mistress. She constantly finds fault with them. She is happiest when she sees them whipped, especially when she suspects her husband of showing his mixed-race children preference over his black slaves.

The master frequently sells these slaves to please his white wife. As cruel as it may sound for a man to sell his own children, it is often the less cruel thing for him to do. For unless he does this, he must not only whip them himself, but he must stand by and see one white son tie up his brother, only a few shades darker than himself, and whip his bloody back. If the master says one word of disapproval, it is said that he is favoring his slave-child. That makes a bad matter worse, both for himself and the slave.

Every year brings with it many slaves of this class. It was because of this fact that one great Southern statesman predicted the downfall of slavery. Whether this prophecy ever comes true or not, it is plain that a very different-looking class of people are now held in slavery from those originally brought to this country from Africa. Thousands are

brought into the world every year who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers.

I have had two masters. My first master was called Captain Anthony, a title that he gained by sailing a boat on the Chesapeake Bay. He was not considered a rich slaveholder. He owned two or three farms and about thirty slaves. His property was under the care of an overseer named Plummer, a foul-mouthed and savage drunkard. Plummer always was armed with a whip and heavy club. I have known him to cut slave women's heads so horribly that Captain Anthony—who was affected by only extreme cruelty—would be enraged and threaten to whip Plummer.

Hardened by a long life of slaveholding, Captain Anthony, too, was cruel. Sometimes he took great pleasure in whipping a slave. The shrieks of my Aunt Hester often woke me at dawn. Captain Anthony would tie her up and whip her naked back until she was covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayer from his victim softened his iron heart. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped. Where the blood ran fastest, he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream and whip her to silence her. He wouldn't stop swinging the blood-clotted whip until he was exhausted.

I remember the first time I ever saw this horrible sight. I was only a small child, but I remember it well. It was the first of a long series of horrible scenes which I was forced to witness. It was my entrance to the hell of slavery, and I wish I could describe what I felt when I saw it.

This first time occurred very soon after I went to live with Captain Anthony. Aunt Hester had gone out one night, and happened to be absent when my master wanted to see her. He had ordered her not to go out in the evenings, and especially warned that she must never spend time with a certain man. This young man's name was Ned Roberts, and he belonged to Colonel Edward Lloyd. You may easily guess why Captain Anthony concerned himself with my aunt. She was a pretty woman of graceful figure. In appearance, she had very few equals among the women, colored or white, in our neighborhood.

Aunt Hester had not only disobeyed his orders in going out, but had been found with Ned. This infuriated Captain Anthony, who was himself no man of pure morals. Before he began whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen and stripped her to the waist. He tied her hands with a strong rope, and led

her to a stool under a large hook in the ceiling. He made her stand on the stool and tied her hands to the hook. Her arms were now stretched to their full length, so that she stood on her tip-toes. He then said to her, "Now, you damned bitch, I'll learn you to disobey my orders!" After rolling up his sleeves, he began to beat her with the heavy whip, and soon the warm red blood (amid heartrending shrieks from her and horrid swearing from him) came dripping to the floor. I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight that I hid in a closet and did not dare come out until long after the whipping was over. I expected it would be my turn next.

This was all new to me. I had always lived with my grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation, where she was placed to raise the children of the younger women. I had, until now, been away from the bloody scenes that often occurred on the plantation.