

# COTTON

by Sandra Pavlic

Translation from Slovenian language (*original: Bombaž, by Sandra Pavlič*)

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“Don't resist!” shouted a horrible man, who was dragging me somewhere. He was white, with moustaches, brown hair about 40 years old. A real old man! I tried one more time to get out of his hands. All for nothing.

“Kate! I told you something!” he shouted one more time. Then they covered my eyes with black scarf. I felt they were dragging me somewhere. All of the sudden I heard a noise. They untied me. I found myself in ship's deck. I was free but couldn't go nowhere because I was already at sea. I walked to the back and I saw the coast was far away. Not one person stood there. Or maybe they weren't there in the first place. There were a few people on the ship. Black people. We were all black people. Mostly man, but some female as well. They were all looking at me feeling sorry for me. It looked like they knew where we they were going. What about me? Am I going there also? Why were they looking at me so strange? In the evening we get a very poor meal. For me it was OK, because I was eating only bread for a long time. Just to survive. Time on the ship was passing very slowly. It felt a month but it was only just a week. It was warm outside and I wanted to sleep on deck.

“Where are you going Kate?” asked a watcher.

“I want to sleep on the deck.”

“No you won't. You will sleep where others are.”

“But it's warm enough.”

“Obey and go back to the rest.”

“Okay.” I was upset but went back under the deck. There was a big room with wooden beds where people slept. I found my bed and went to sleep. I couldn't sleep because it was hot like hell and they wouldn't let me go upstairs. I closed my eyes and hoped everything's going to be okay.

“Poor girl,” said a woman.

The next day I again tried to sleep on deck, but I couldn't. I wanted to throw myself over board! I don't want to sleep there! At night you hear everything – people talking in sleep, snoring, some people smell because they don't wash up,... and with them I must sleep, I don't even speak to them.

Someone got seasick. I think his name was Joe. It was raining outside, so everyone has to be downstairs. Joe started to throw up, coughing, sneezing, heating and he had a hallucinations. He looked to others and me. He looked me as he wanted to say “poor child.” Some people were beside him – probably the ones who knew him. The Captain told some people to clean the room and he personally examined Joe. After a week it was still raining. More than ever. Joe was feeling worse. He died that night. Some keepers came downstairs and lift Joe with his bed and throw him overboard. They said: “amen” and we repeated the word. Strange silence was that day. Everyone was mourning, even me who didn't know Joe.

**A**fter a month we finally saw the land. I was excited but I was the only one. I thought the nightmare was over. But I was the only one who thought so. Again they were feeling sorry for me. I started questioning if hell is waiting for me?!

The ship landed and some people were waiting for it. First ten people went down. Few man came to them and dragging them. The rest of us were waiting. Another ten went down. At land there were no more people. The closed the entrance and said: "You will have to wait a little longer."

We waited for few hours and the next ten people went down the ship. I was with them. They opened the door and pushed us. I was thrown to the man not so old. I wasn't resisting because I knew it won't help so I simply walked beside him. He drove me to some family.

"This is Kate. Your new maid." said the man.

"But she's just a child. She must be ten at the most." said the lady who seem to be very nice.

"I am 11 years old." I corrected her.

"Quite!" yelled a man who brought me.

"No, she can speak." said the other man – probably husband of the nice lady. And then the man who brought me left.

"We're Jane and Paul. We have two children, a boy and girl. Their names are Mary and Ray." said the nice lady.

"Your job is to work on field and help around the kitchen. Understood?"

"Yes." I replied. It doesn't look that awful. Or I just thought so. So far they were nice. In the even I looked around where I have to be working. When I was walking on the road it seemed endless. It's like space – it never ends! The field seemed abandoned. They probably didn't cultivate it. I wondered what would be growing here. I went to bed early and other maid brought me something to eat.

"Watch out girl. Jane is nice but is under influence of her brother. And he is very tough! Better keep out of his work." she warned me.

"And who is her brother?" I asked.

"The man who brought you here. His name is Jake. Careful around him. If you don't do well he can kill you." It gave me the creeps. I wondered what could I do so that he can murder me cold blooded – as the maid said. The next day they were waking me up very early to work on field. First I ate a piece of bread and then I went to the field. Jake expected me there.

"So Kate, they said your place is here. Today you plough up half a field." said Jake and showed me the equipment I am working with. I started working. In the morning it was okay, but then it get really hot. I am used to that kin fog weather but not to work but sit in the shadows. It was unbearable. I was sweating everywhere – from forehead, armpit, legs, arms, nose, face,... I barely had the time to clean it up from the forehead. The time was almost midday and I wasn't even in the middle of my middle of the field. Jake will be really unhappy! They called me for lunch.

"Yes, I'm coming." I left everything and went to lunch. I quickly ate because I had a lot to do. I went back to the field and worked one or two hours in the night, but I finished my job. All tired I went to my room to wash up, but unfortunately Jake was there first.

"A little faster next time, don't you think?" he scolded me.

"I'm sorry sir. I didn't mean it..." I tried to apologize.

"Well, it was okay for first day. At least you accomplish your goal, right?"

"Yes, I suppose so." I didn't understand what he tried to say, because he was surprisingly nice. The next day I had to plough the rest of the field and then the seeding began. It was summer when first sprout came to day. By now I knew what to do. I must water each sprout separately everyday and nursing a neighbor's baby.

It was a hot day. I worked on field when I heard noises from neighbors. I let go off the watering pipe and ran over there. It was the babies home alone and very hungry. I fed them and ran back to the field. Jake was there.

"What is this? Flood? Do you think water is free? Where have you been?" he yelled at me.

"I'm sorry sir. I heard noises..."

"Noises you say? I think so too yes. It will never happen again! You hear?"

"No, sir, never."

It was only then that he noticed my suite. It was covered with milk.

"Do you steal?" he again shouted.

"Ne, it's not what it looks like..." I tried to explain but he wouldn't listen. He slapped me twice. Hard. It hurt a lot. I started to cry so he slapped me again – harder. He beat me until I stopped crying.

"Tears do not cut off your punishment." he said and walked away.

I started crying again and some girl came to me.

"I watched you. Why do you cry? Because of Jake?" I knocked.

"I know, my uncle is very mean to people. You're the new maid, right?"

"Yes, I am. So what if I am?" I was a little angry. I started watering the rest of the field.

"You don't have to be mean, you know." said the girl.

"I know, I'm sorry. Please don't tell Jake. Please."

"Don't worry, I won't. I'm not like that. My name is Mary."

"I know, you said that when you told me Jake is your uncle."

"He was beating you up? He doesn't like black people."

"Yes, no one does. What about you? Why do you talk to me?"

"I love people in general. Nothing special."

"Yes, of course."

"Look it's best to put tears behind you. They probably aren't the first one, am I right?"

"No, of course not. I cried a thousand times before."

"Come with me to my hiding place. I'll clean you up and soothe your bruises."

"I can't. The neighbor's babies are home alone."

"Did you know that before? Probably not. So you're free for one hour. Come quick." said Mary. I followed her. I trusted her. She is same age as me, has brown hair, blue eyes and about the same height as me. We went to her hiding place. It's an abandoned shack. She had a lot of staff there.

"When I'm very sad I come to this place."

"Really? Do your parents agree with this?"

"They don't know where I am. One time I was here for a week and they didn't even notice I was gone."

"Strange. How come?"

"I guess they were very busy. You know, a little while ago we produced cotton here. But then my uncle went away and my parents didn't do that anymore. Now my uncle is back and we have a lot of work to produce cotton again."

"Yes I noticed the field hasn't been cultivated for long time. So you live in your uncle's estate?"

"No, on my dad's. But my uncle has a big influence here."

"How come?"

"I don't really know. He gained respect somehow."

We talked for about an hour and she soothed my bruises. I thought about why Jake has that much influence on people. Probably because he is strong, tall, knows what he's doing and knows the punishment for wrong actions. I went to lunch and then to the neighbor's. I was there until dusk. Parents weren't home at all and the children were very hungry. They lay in bed and waited to be fed. Fortunately I was there to help.

It was a Sunday, which means that we all get up early and go to mass. In this church only a few black people went. I guess they were all slaves, just like me. I sat next to Mr. Jake. Everyone thought I belong there since he is my boss and he decides of my future. After Mass there was a lot of people in the restaurant, and women have returned home. This time Jake went there, which meant that I was free as long as no one gave me work. Yet I must ask for permission from lady Jane.

"Of course my child, you must rest a bit. Such moments you must cherish, you know. Rarely Jake isn't around." lady Jane said.

"Thank you ma'am. Thank you. May it be possible ...." I was so embarrassed to ask.

"What Kate?" Jane asked kindly.

"Would it be okay if I play with Mary?" Well, I just said.

"Of course, Kate, why not. You deserve it. " She said and called Mary. She was obviously delighted. Her closest classmate is 10 miles away. I went into my room. Indeed I did not dare go to her room. Mary took the two dolls and with them we played. Time has passed quickly, and Jake came home. Drunk of course. With Mary we hear him when he went into the kitchen. We went there as well. From the half-closed door we listen to what Paul and Jake were talking about.

"So Paul, where you said Kate is."

"Come on Jake leave her for one day in peace. Can't you see that girl as old as Mary. You just torture her, that's all. Beside you're drunk and I'm afraid you would do something bad to her again." said Paul.

"What I had already done to her?" Jake asked.

"You know how many times have you beat her."

"Hey, this girl deserves it. Look at her. She's black. Don't you see? Black women deserve to be tortured, you know, "Jake shouted at Paul.

"Please don't do that. She's also a human. "

"Human, right. She's inferior. You know. Moreover, blacks are a good workforce. "

"Well, she is still a child," begged Paul.

Jake hit him.

"You didn't know I dare to hit you? Do not worry, I dare everything. And believe me, you are not the last, that I hit today. " said Jake.

Mary and I exchanged glances, then start running to my room. Jake went to us shortly after we were in it.

"What are you doing here Mary? Go away! "said Jake.

"No uncle. I'm not going! "she cried to him.

"Yes you are. Now! In your room! Do not be friends with her, she is a bad company. "Jake yelled.

"No she's not. She is a really good friend to me," she was on my side.

"She's black! Enough! Go now. "Jake insisted.

Mary sat down on the floor in front of the door and said, "I'll be here. As long as you're not going out, I will be right here. "

"Okay, but do not say I did not warn you." This time I felt he stopped yelled at Mary and now will get me.

“So Kate. You rude negress. You think she'll be converted, ha you were wrong. “Before I can say whatever he was already in front of me. He said something else, but I didn't listen to him, because I felt awful.

“Can you hear me,” Jake yelled at last.

“I hear, I hear ....” I fought back. But unfortunately in vain. Again, I was beaten up so much that my blood began to flow. I tried to keep the tears, but I couldn't. I was hurt too. My heart hurt and my whole face was painful. Finally, Jake pulled the waist of trousers and beat me with it.

“Never hang out with white people!” he told me last and went out of the room. I burst into tears. This time more than ever before. This time, I didn't even worry how Mary must have felt when she saw it all.

She quietly left the room. After a while Stash appeared in the room. She had the first aid kit with her. She had also the pot of cold water and some ice.

“Poor girl ...” she said.

“I know you warned me Stash. But really, I did not do anything wrong. I really didn't. “

“I know child, I know.” she comforted me.

“If you only know how everything hurts. I am really so inferior because I'm black? “I asked.

“No one is inferior due to the color of their skin. Do remember that. No one! “

“How do you know Stash?”

“You know, my parents died when I was little. Then I was inferior because of this, because I did not have parents. But not in this family, somewhere else. “

“Have you been beaten up Stash?”

“No, Kate. Never. “Stash said. For some time we were silent. She did what Jane ordered her to do. Later Jane also appeared in my room.

“Mrs. Jane, do not look at me. Please look away. “ I was embarrassed.

“Kate, but do not be like this. I'm here to help you. “

“But how. You must be the same as him. Of course you are. You have the same blood. “

“Kate, please. Who set you up against the whole family? “

“You know who. I'm not allowed to speak to no one. Never. From now on I'll keep quiet. I don't trust people anymore, “I said and turned away. Jane sat down on the bed and turned my head toward her.

“Kate. Do not talk like that about people. We are not all bad as Jake is. In addition, Paul should have him stay away from you. “

“I know he tried. We heard what they were talking. “

“And what was it?”

“Nothing, Jake hit him, then Paul shut up and let that man come here to beat me. Icing on the cake was Mary was with me. “

“Yes I know. Don’t worry, I will make sure that this will not happen again. “Said Jane.

Otherwise, she gave me some hope, but still not enough. Every day was the same song. More and more he was drinking, forgetting his duties on the farm and every day he found me, and then beat me, so I had bruises all over my body. Slowly I really have to get used to this life. This was my destiny and nobody can change it. Otherwise, Jane said that she would change things, but don’t have enough courage. Her brother has too much influence over it.

**T**he day to pick cotton approached. This was the end of summer. Just last night I was beaten by Jake again so that I won’t make problems the next day. This time he beat me up so much I couldn’t get out of my bed. This morning I was waken up for breakfast. I was all puffy from the previous days, I had a lot of bruises, not just the face but all over the body. I still get all hurt and I could hardly get out of bed but I came to breakfast. Of course it was my time to even serve breakfast. Then I find it difficult to sit down at a table to eat it.

“Nothing today for you Kate. Today you stay without breakfast, did you hear? “Jake told me. I understood him and went to my room. Many times he done that, so I'm well accustomed to this already. After some time Mary came into my room with a piece of bread.

“Here you go, Kate. Eat a little. “

“No thanks. When Jake says that I better work hungry, then I will. “

“Kate, don’t be so hard on yourself. Take a piece of bread. You will be able to work better. “

“Thank you Mary. I just hope that something will not go wrong again. “I was sad.

“Don’t worry, it will not. We'll take care of it, right? “

I nodded. She’s right and it is very important day today, I have to eat. Today we harvest cotton. The whole family will be harvesting, not only me, the neighbors will come to help. In the end they throw a party only Stash and me will not attend. This is not an appropriate place for maids, maids will have to go to sleep for another day of working. Who brought me here, to this end of the world? Neighbors came and we went to the field. Each had one end of the field, and of course they gave me the biggest one. But still. I tried several times to harvest. But I couldn’t. I was still hurting from all the previous days. Neighbor came to me.

“What's wrong with you girl? You can’t pick up anymore?“

“No, but I will manage somehow.“

“I see you’re in a lot of bruises. What are they doing to you?“

“Nothing, really. Leave me alone ... “I defend myself.

“I know that may not concern me. But I know everything. That was Jake, right? “

“No, not really, I fell down the stairs when I crawled to Mary. That’s not a big deal. “

“Ah, fall, I think so too yes.” Neighbor said thoughtfully.

“What can I do to make it stop?”

“Well, it was nothing. I really fell down the stairs. “

“You say I remove steps and you will never fall down again?”

“Madam, come, leave me alone. You see what I have to do. “I turned to work but she was already on the other side.

“Are you convinced that nothing can be done?” she insisted.

“Yes, sure.”

“How it was when you fell down the stairs?”

“You know, painful, ...” why you keep poking me?

“Painful, yes. I imagine I know how it is if you got a strong hit. “

“But no one slapped me, I’m alone when I fell down the stairs.”

“Yes, yes. I know you are alone, but ... “Again I turned to the other side.

“You see, my lord gave me this work until dawn and I have to really work.” I tried to go out of this conversation.

“If you don’t do it, you will fall down the stairs again, right?” She still didn’t stop.

“Oh no ma'am. You really don’tt know how to be quit? “I was direct this time. She already went on my nerves, but I did not know what to do to save myself from her.

“I’ll stop, when you admit that Jake did it.”

“Yes it was him. Now can I work in peace? “

“Of course. And I’m going to go talk to him. “

“No, please don’t.” I asked.

“Of course I am. That’s not how to work with slaves, let alone with the girls. “

And she went. I was not able to convince to the contrary. She just turned and went. Now I know I will be beaten again. You never know how much, but I know I will. I shouldn’t have tell her. Never, ever. How stupid I am. How could I do that? Now I have to give all of myself to work really hard.

I was the first who succeeded my part of the field, so I was sent by Jake to help others. Of course I had to do it without objection. In the evening we all picked up the whole field. Children and maids, went to bed, the adults had fun outside, and of course lots of alcohol.

**T**he time was around midnight. All has been quiet. I thought, thank god, Jake has gone to bed already. But I was wrong! He came into my room. At he sneaked quietly to my bed. I'm already half asleep. I turned. There he was. Half-naked. With him he had a stick.

"Do what you have to. I knew that I will be beaten again." I said and pulled back the sheet. Then it happened, something that I really did not expect. He told me: "Shut up." He gave me handkerchief in the mouth so that I could not say a word. Then he started ... I felt it everywhere ... I was quite scared. I'd like to scream, but I couldn't ... I tossed and turn but it didn't help ... it was even worse because he beat me because I resisted ... I felt it inside and it hurt like hell. Suddenly he stopped.... In the end he said: "You asked for it." Before he left the room he tied me up, so I couldn't go nowhere for help. I cried crocodile tears. They ran as in streams. Neither I did not dare to go to sleep. I was scared of next day. Will it be the same, or different? The children are going to school next morning, so he will have much more time for me... Oh no...

It was dawn. Finally. The night was so long. That morning, earlier than usual, Mary came to my room.

"Kate, what happened?" she was shocked.

"Nothing much Mary. Really. "

"Well, the bed is quite wet. Did you cry? "

"Yes I did. But nothing significant. You know today is two years that I no longer have parents and I am therefore a little sad. "

"God. If I knew how to console you. "

"It's nothing you can do. Going to school right? "

"Yes, I am. In fifth grade I know. "

"Yes I know. I would go fifth grade as well if I was still in Africa. "

"Really? Nice. I'll teach you something when I have the time, okay? "

"Thank you Mary. Have fun at school. "She went out. Ray had already gone to school if I am correct. Jane showed me where cotton is processed into textile. She showed me how to do that, then just leave me there and I have from dusk till dawn to work. Some days it was very pleasant between wood but it got cold quickly. Luckily I could fire the fireplace. Autumn holidays were approaching when I stopped weaving and got white textile from our cotton.

"Jake will be travelling to Africa, because he got a job there." said Jane.

"Really? To our people? What will he do there?"

"He is supposed to help them with something." Jane explained.

“The right man, yes.” I imagined. He will go there to help them, but he is treating me so badly and he always says bad words about us. Is he really the right man to help them?

“Kate, if you want you can have a free time. This is about two weeks. “

“Yes ma'am? You would give me free time “

“Well, you should still be on our property, but yes. You don't need to work constantly. “

“Thank you ma'am. I will be grateful for life! “I was very happy when I was offered 14 days of free work days. Of course I will help, if anyone on the estate said that he needs assistance, but still. This kindness means a lot to me. Jake went to Africa, Mary and Ray were on vacation. This time I truly really get to know Ray. He was a little older, he should have about fifteen. He had blue eyes and brown hair like his sister only shorter. Although it was cold, we liked to play outside.

“So Kate, you're from Africa right?” Ray asked me.

“Yes I am.”

“Tell us how is living down there?” Mary wondered.

“If you could only see. For me is fantastic. In a village of course. I could never live in the city. There are racial discrimination, you know. “

“Yes I do. I wonder what work has Jake got in Africa. It's already common knowledge that uncle does not like blacks. “ said Ray.

“Yes, probably true. I notice it myself. “ I wondered for a bit. Can humans really hate someone just because of skin color?

“I wonder what it would be if I were one of you.” I said.

“Then I probably would not know you . You would live elsewhere. You might be very rich ... “ even the thought of it touched me.

“It would be nice. And different ... “ I dreamt with them.

“Yes, it would be completely different.”

I must say that I have in these two weeks spoiled and almost forgot how it is to be hit. Well another thing I still feel it on myself when I think about it. Towards the end I decided that I sought refuge elsewhere. Mary's house is quite close. There I could spend my leisure time of day and night, without Jake knowing it. I really like that thought. The day before he returned, I carried my things over there and sleep over night. The next day I heard from Mary that a lot of people were looking for me, but she didn't tell them my secret. Since textiles were already done, Jane told me that I should turn it in different colors.

“And how do I do that if I may ask?”

She explained to me that we get colors from various flower. For example I can get purple color from violets. Jane helped me to color our textile. We painted it with four different colors. Fifth of the

violet, another fifth in red (from poppies), the third-fifth we painted in yellow (I do not know exactly from which flowers), fourth we let white, and last fifth we did colorful. We worked from morning till night, as the painting of goods and production of a color is long. Of course, this does not mean that the goods are finally colored. It dried up all night. The next day we'd have to paint again for the color to be more vivid. Again it dried up all night. The second day I had to let go of textile, because we cut down wood for the winter. Actually I was the one to cut them. It is true; they started to give me harder work. They thought, I am 12 years old, I should be working. Anyway, I cut wood all day and into the night, but Jake still worry me about how I don't do everything right. When a man can only flee! Only now I understand all of those views, which were given to me on the ship, only now I know exactly where I've departed.

**P**aul began to suffer from pneumonia. Serious matter. Everyone in the house took care of him. even me and Stash who didn't know well Paul. He was suffering for a very long time and we had to call the doctor everyday to examine him. Every time he said: "I'm sorry, there's not much left for him. "But we still hoped. Especially me, because Paul was the only one who told Jake to stop fighting me. He died on Monday. We prepared a funeral for him. Everyone who knew him was saying something about him. They all remembered him in good light. All have spoken, but I'm somewhere in the background behind the people watching. Otherwise, I should work, but I was too upset. When everyone had gone to the house to eat a little, I went to his grave.

"Dear Mr. Paul. You always take good care of me. You have pulled for me. Who will now? Would I ever have such a protector, as you were? .... " I was like everyone else at the funeral, I burst into tears. I could not understand how he could die so quickly. In fact, all the ones who somehow liked me died in the end. In the end I am alone. Why am I punished by God? Why do I deserve this? I'm still in Mary's house, although it's little cold, I take good care of myself. Mary came to visit me in the evening.

"Kate, how are you holding? Is it any better? "Otherwise, I really have been quite satisfied, but I told her that I do not want to talk to her and to go away. I was also visited her brother, and I told him the same words. I can't be allowed to repeat the same mistake again. I lost three people already. Should there really be four people? As I said that day, all close to me are dying. From now on, I won't talk to anyone anymore. I won't hang out with anymore people! Jake found me in a couple of weeks.

"So here you're hiding? Why aren't you in the house with the others? Are you really that afraid of me? " I don't know how he should even ask if I'm afraid of him. Of course I am! After so many wounds that he caused me... love him or what?

"You know girl, tomorrow officially winter starts." He continued. He was still speaking but I'm stopped listening at the word winter. I've heard of that word, but in Africa it doesn't have any meaning. Despite the winter it was hot out there. Why are some people afraid of winter?

"Did you hear what I said?" Jake distracted me.

"Yes, yes, sir I heard everything."

"Repeat," he said. I did not know where to begin, nor how to begin. All I heard from his speaking was the word winter. Jake unfortunately noticed that I was away. And again as many times previously, I was an ugly one, Kate. Again, beaten, again sentenced to beaten. Again, I was guilty of this world that

exists, that other people suffer because of me. Although the final word is true. People suffer because of me. I am really guilty of so much death. Am I a witch (as they say in Europe)? If I am, then why have not burned me yet. Let it be over with. Or just kill me, all together! It's how I feel right now. Nasty, dirty, guilty ...

At night I dreamt about my father. Dream that he returned to me. Next to him was my mother. We were all happy family and we lived in Africa. All the time we just sit around, laughing. We lived very simply. Everything was so rosy. But unfortunately, when I woke up it was all off again. Again I found myself in a small lodge (more like a little room), I was lonely again. I looked out the window. It was snowing. Apparently it was snowing all night because everything was already white. It was very beautiful. And unfortunately, I may just enjoy so much to see it. I'm not allowed playing with Mary in the snow. Nothing. Again, I was caught in my black thoughts. I got up, dressed and rushed to the house for breakfast.

"Did you see Kate. Snow began to fall! "Mary was happy.

"Yes I did." I answered her coolly.

"Aren't you happy?"

"No" I told her, turned away and walked to the table. For breakfast it was polenta. Every time you turn the polenta Mary and Ray ate very little. Of course, two of them can always come up that will not eat it. And I, if I say that I do not like the meal I'm left without it.

"Today Jake isn't around, so you free. If you want you can play with Mary in the snow. "Jane told me.

"No thanks, I will be alone today."

The next day, Jake found out that I didn't do anything previous day. He was furious.

"You should be working!" he yelled.

"Sorry, I thought ..."

"No thoughts, no thoughts." Jake told me. He was thinking about something and then decided: "You will be all week without food."

"You know that I have already once overcome that." I stepped in.

"I'm not done yet! And all week you will be outside in the cold. I don't care about snowing and even if it is -40 ° C. Nothing. You will be outside. Do you understand? "

"Yes, of course."

It was pretty taught for me, because I'm not used to cold. It's the toughest penalty so far. I spent two days outside in the cold. Jake has always watched me from a window. I was so frozen that I could not even move. He came out. I thought to myself, now what. What punishment will he now give me? What did I do this time?

"What girl, are you cold? Come to me, I'll warm you up. "Jake said.

For some time I resisted with my words, but unfortunately nothing has changed. For the second time in my life I was "raped".

I lived like this for three years. I was a slave. As were all blacks. At fourteen, I finally decided. I will run away. I don't know where. I only have to go away. Away from Jake. Away from the current life. Jake has not only few times a year, but every week, "intercourse" with me. With every day I feel uglier, guilty. So I decided to run away. I don't know how since I pushed away Mary and Stash, but I'll manage somehow. There is still hope inside of me. I can feel it. Deep in my heart. It's getting smaller day by day, but it's still there. It exists.

It was spring. Late spring. The whole family has decided to go on vacation again before the start sowing of cotton. I have to do this work while they were gone. They left on Monday and are expected to return on Friday. I have just enough time for my plans. I'll leave cotton and field alone. Let others work. I took my stuff. I went to the sea. The path was quite long. I walked day and a half. My legs hurt me. I was hungry. But I kept walking. I knew that I need to walk. I knew I could. I came to the port. There was no ship. I look for accommodation. I found and entered to the warehouse. It was cold. I'm already accustomed to the cold anyway. I met a few people. All have been neglected, although quite nice. They were looking at me very strange. In my whole life I've never such strange looks. I could read them from their eyes they wondered what such a young black girl is doing here. Shouldn't she be working somewhere on field? Then someone surprised me by talking to me.

"What about you girl, did you run away?" A very young lady talked to me. For some time I hesitated whether to tell her the truth, or rather to deny everything.

"Yes, I escaped. I was treated badly there. "Then someone else spoke up:" People do nasty things to us."

I didn't see his face clearly, but in fact it seems to me it was better that I didn't.

"Let him go. This one is drunk every day. I don't know where he gets it. "said again the nice lady.

"I don't either." I replied.

"Come to me to settle in. I will protect you."

"No thanks." I withdrew again. I waited for any ship to board. One came in the evening. She took the load at, but I was delighted. In fact I could not cope with these people. That woman is always compelled me. So much so she wanted to go with me. In the end I even loosen up to her and learned her name was Kelly. Together we went to the ship. No one knew where the ship is going, but we both knew that we have to escape. We boarded on the ship. We ran to the other side of the ship so no one will find us. We have a blanket with us and with it we cover ourselves in emergency boat. The ship has sailed early in the morning. It sailed only one day. So I know that I still landed somewhere in America. Although I was secretly hoping we would land in Africa. There is better, at least to me. And I know Kelly would enjoy it also. First, Kelly fled the ship, and I stay a while just in case. When I saw didn't see Kelly anymore, I crawled from the ship. But unfortunately I was caught by a guard who walked around the ship. Obviously I had overlooked him.

"So, have we smuggled? Don't think you won't get punished. Where did you escape from?" He asked. Obviously he got cases like me before.

"Well aren't you going to answer me?"

"Yes, sorry. But where am I?"

"I'm asking now and you reply. Otherwise, you're in Mexico. In English colony in Mexico. "

"Thanks for the reply. I'm coming from somewhere in North America. "I was too scared not to tell the truth. You never know what can happen to me.

"Tell me the name of the man from where you came."

"Jake." I said.

"OK. I know him. Come, I'll take you away. "

And I really thought that I will succeed, and we will not have to work extremely hard. But I was obviously wrong. I still have, and this is nothing I like hoped. Even if the master be like Jake. He drove me towards someone named John. He was a single and had quite a few girls who have worked for him. On first look he was nothing special. He had a beard, around forty years old, about medium height and brighter complexion.

"This is John. John this girl was smuggled, so I brought her to you. You said yourself that you are missing girls, right? Well this is Kate. " Said the warden.

"Thank you." John said. His voice was deep. And initially I was very scared him. He was quite the opposite of Jake.

"Sally and Pru, bring the new little girl drink she looks really thirsty." The man said to two women who immediately gave me a glass of water. The man seemed nice.

"Here you go." Said the readhaired girl. She was Sally. Spoke very quietly and timidly. Is she afraid of me or what? I drank a glass of water, while John told me what I do.

"You will clean and serve me beverage. You see I don't have the fields and I have so many girls in charge of such tasks. Once a week you free. You're going to share this day with the older Pru. She is free Tuesdays. "

"Thank you." I said. Again Sally came to me and showed me where I'm sleeping. This time, Sally was less formal to me.

"Look here we're sleeping. You're going to share a room with us. Why did you come here if I had the opportunity to escape I would immediately" Sally explained.

"Is he that severe?" I wondered.

"But that is the problem. For some things he can be very defiant and for other things he is very nice. Well you have me and Pru to protect you. You'll be fine."

“Okay, but how old are you two do?”

“I'm fifteen, and Pru is sixteen.”

“So?”

“Yes. What about you? “

“Fifteen. How many girls work for him? “ I've got the feeling I'm asking too much but she kindly answered: “With you, we were five. We are Pru, Nelly, Rose and me. “

“How old are Nelly and Rose?”

“Fifteen as are we.”

“So the oldest is Pru.”

“Yes, she really is. Come on let's go downstairs to see if the lord found us an appropriate job. “

I thought it was just nice that I came here. Everything seems more like at home. Although I know this is only first impression, however, the very first impression makes me a lot calmer. It was lunch time. We all gathered around the table, Pru has served us and then eat with us. Of course, the master was not there.

“Hi, hi, look at her. She's so strange. “ Laughed one of the girls that I haven't managed to get to know.

“Leave her alone.” Pru said. I was just watching them. It was obvious that they don't understand each other. I basically don't even know am I good or evil. I belong somewhere. And I must say I really like Pru and Sally. I soon realized that Nelly and Rose, are "the evil ones". Sally told me they love machinate. I somehow survived the first day but I was more interested in what happens next. It looked like it was nice, but ... Too good to be true. I think.

The next day I held tight to Pru. Together we cleaned dust and prepared the table and served. The work was not even hard. In the evening, when I lay down in bed, I felt as if someone shouted.

“Someone shouted?” I asked Pru and Sally.

“Oh no, you probably heard something from the forest.” Pru answered.

But I know that it was a woman. She was already on the ground. It seemed as if I already know these cries, but I was so foreign. Why? However, Sally and Pru said nothing, although it seems to me that even Sally doesn't know everything.

After one week I know the truth. Even John is similar to Jake. He also abused his servants. He didn't get to Sally because she's white, but he abused the black ones. Are all men equal? How I became aware of his doing? I saw their signs. They weren't just natural, they were psychic. I felt it, because I went through this myself. Slowly John came after me. I think I was even the first to resisted not so loud.

**P**ru and I had our free day. We decided to go into town. It was twenty minutes away. We came into town. There were all sorts of races. Blacks were begging for money. I would have given them, if I had one. We went to her friend.

"Hi Pru. You finally got here," he said.

"Yes I did. This is Kate, our new maid. "Pru introduced me.

"Hi, I'm Rusty," he said and handed me his hand. This time I was hugged by a strange feeling. As if I was afraid of something, but I don't know what. Perhaps convergence? Was this even possible? However, I presented to him and handed him my hand. Together we went to stroll around town. Suddenly, I saw a poster. On it was my picture.

"Anyone who see this girl please tell that to address written below (below the picture was Jake's address)." I get very scared. I see he is already looking for me.

**I**t wasn't even a month that Jake found me.

"So, you came here to hide. Is it better here? "Jake said with his severe look in his eyes.

"No, sir" I replied. I know it's very silly and strange, but I was scared as ever. A lot of things happen to me, but I'm still scared in this moment.

"Come on let's go home." Jake said.

"No, she'll stay here!" Said Pru, who just entered to offer him a drink.

"No, she's coming with me and she can say anything but it won't make any difference. And don't think you will escape from punishment. "I shook my head. I knew that severe punishment awaits me. He took me. On the way he told me that today new neighbors come and join the territory, so I should serve them as well. Finally we came to the old territory.

"You see what you did, and now this year we are late with cotton. You should have never ran away! "

"Sorry," I said.

We walked into the house.

"Kate," Mary cried immediately. All stood up but three people calmly sat down. I saw these people for the first time. He was an old man about the same as Paul, in addition to the woman about the same age as Jane, maybe year old, and boy Ray's years.

"These are our new neighbors." Said Mary, whispered in my ear: "Isn't Matt good looking?" I laughed at her. Apparently the guy's name is Matt.

"Hello." I said.

"If you want you can eat with us. Stash eats too. "Jane offered me.

"I don't know. Can I?" I asked, and looked at Jake.

"Sit down already." Jake said.

So far, I have a feeling like after my escape something changed. We had lunch together and then they told me that I will probably work more hours in the neighbor's home, but here only in the field.

I thought a lot about today. Is it good that I came back? John and Jake treated me about the same. But other people here are friendlier. And I really hope I will see less Jake since I'm going to work with neighbors. I'm also hoping my escape opened his eyes and he changed. I think I deserve at least a better treatment. If I'm punished for something I could at least know what I did wrong. Don't I deserve a little more? Is there really no justice to us – black people? Is it our fault that the world became so rude? I should just kill myself. No one would miss me anyway. Unfortunately, it was already summer and cotton was not seeded yet. I had to seed it. I worked the entire next day and neighbor's son Matt helped me. I found out that the neighbors are not so rich and that's why Matt will also help on field.

"You see, Kate, how nice we will complement. Even in winter we will sew together." Matt told me.

"Don't you go to school?"

"Last year I was the last year."

A week later I found out that Mary and Matt are together. She sounded really happy so I was happy for her too.

**M**ary was forced to go to a summer school over the summer, while others will be working on field. Matt and I were still watering the cotton field. It lacks about one day before ripening, and then it will be picked up. Matt and I got closer and become friends. Even at night we were outside and made little "stupid" things. We really enjoyed having each other's company.

It was a day when we should be picking up cotton. All villagers came to help. In the evening, when the work was done everyone stayed outside to have a party, but me and Matt went to his place to talk. But this time I felt something different. In fact, I don't know what exactly it could be. We talked normally. I think I was just interrupted by his eyes. It didn't feel like a normal look. I told him about Rusty whom I met in Mexico. He wasn't really happy about this, and I didn't know why. Did I say too much? Did I trust him too much?

The next day Mary returned. She asked me if I watched over Matt well, and I said yes.

Matt and I haven't been talking for a week. I hope everything is still OK. We were sewing cotton into fabric. In quiet of course. Sometimes he looked at me. With that ugly look. I don't know why he would give me that look. Maybe it was something else. Or maybe he said all he wanted to say to me. Time by time Jane came in to check on us. She was surprised she found us in silence but didn't say anything. Finally he spoke to me. Different random things but still. That day came a counselor to Mary. Something was obviously wrong, since she was a bit tight lately, and I couldn't say if she was happy or sad. Then a social worker wanted to speak to me. What would it be?

"Hi Kate. I am a counselor Susan." She said kindly. I can't remember that anyone was ever so kind to me as she.

"Hi. You wanted to see me." I asked.

"Yes I did. In fact, I've been interested in you for two years. Or I should say I was interested on the way you live. You're sixteen years old now, right?"

"Yes."

"If you want, I can send you away from this life. It won't be lot further but it will be more to the north."

"More to the north? Is there even more to the north than this?"

"Oh of course it is."

"And how can you save me, without Jake finding out where I am?"

"Simply, I can make certain securities that are talking about how Jake work with their slaves, and because you are one of them, I thought that you'd interested."

"Yes of course I'm interested. In fact, I even ran away once, but unfortunately without success. "

"Yes, I heard. Has anything changed since then? "

"He's still very strict, but thank goodness some things omitted."

"So he doesn't hit you anymore?"

"Hit me? Well, he did one or twice, but this time he has at least better and smarter reasons. "

"So nothing has changed."

"I would say that it has a lot."

"Do you know it is wrong hitting someone, sometimes for no matter?"

"Of course I know, but I don't deserve better. Take a good look at me. I have no future. "

"The future waits for you. A nice one. And never more, you won't need to work in the field anymore."

"Oh well, I think it would be wonderful to give up that work."

"Well, you said that some things has changed, although he is still hitting you. What exactly did he do to you before you ran away?"

"Well ... it difficult to talk about this ... Well you know what young people shouldn't do before the wedding ..." I tried explaining.

"Yes, I understand what you want to say. Now I'm in hurry, I'll come to pick you up tomorrow and be ready, okay? "

"All right. Where exactly you will take me? "

"In New York. Of course, there are no fields, but can we can go to the countryside, if you prefer. "

“No, no, that’s okay. What’ll do there? “

“So you want to work?”

“Somehow I have to survive?”

“Yes, you’re right. We’ll talk about this tomorrow, ok? “

“Okay, see you Mrs. Susan.”

“Goodbye.”

So, ultimately a better solution to get rid of all evil! The next day, Susan came to me and we went away with her car. Along the way she explained that I will help her work. I really love her job and she said if I’m good enough I could have her place in the company one day.

**W**e arrived in New York. For me a whole new life started! Susan and I walked around the houses in town, the houses in the suburbs and I was of course in her office, where every day was a lot of people. We lived alone somewhere near her office. She had a flat, fairly large but we can live peacefully in it. I really liked her work and if I had an advice for someone she let me give it. It wasn’t that difficult.

After two years, Susan was attacked by a strange disease, so I took the job for some time until she recovers. All her clients are asking why I’m alone every day, and every day I have to tell them the same thing that she is sick and I don’t know when she will get better and now I’m replacing her. But the truth was crueler. Susan was slowly dying. A month later she died and I was very sad, because another person who cared for me – died. I announced in newspaper her death and told where the funeral will take place. There were a lot of people. All people wore black of course. The funeral was really sad, but I survived somehow. Then I invited some people in our (actually now it’s my) apartment. All wanted to know what will happen with her company. I told them that I’d took it myself, in addition I’ll have help from her best friend Amy. Amy was still a trainee for social worker, but I think we will work together perfectly. I think they were all satisfied with the answer.

Week after the funeral, I went straight from the store and I bumped into a man. He was Matt. First, I didn’t know what to say, because we didn’t even say goodbye before my departure.

Then he just said, “Kate! How nice to see you! “

“Matt! What are you doing here? “

“I moved here half a year ago. You know I got very rich making cotton and now I have production here.”

“Really? And I’ve never seen you before. “

“Me either. Would you go to a cup of coffee with me sometimes?”

“Sure, you say when.”

“... Let 's say tomorrow at one o'clock.”

I looked in my itinerary.

"I'm sorry but I have a client at one o'clock, maybe at two o'clock?"

"Okay, two o'clock it is."

The next day we go to lunch, not the coffee. It was that time of day and we were hungry. It was a good chat with him again. I learned that Jake was arrested, although the family still have maids. In time we got really close. More than ever before. In other words we fell in love with each other. And I finally got the answer why two years ago he didn't want to speak to me anymore. Obviously he liked me then but didn't want to admit it. But let's forget the past. The present is what counts. And it is rich, beautiful, calm and in love,...

In work Amy covered up for something.

"What do you know Amy? Something about clients?"

"No."

"What then? Will you get married?" she had a boyfriend for a long time but he didn't ask her for marriage yet.

"Not me, but you." she slipped.

"What? How?"

"Well I said enough already. Yes, Matt is going to propose to you. I even helped picking up a ring."

I was really happy but I still couldn't believe it. But it happened. The same evening Matt and I had a dinner and there he asked me: "Kate will you marry me?" Of course I said yes. Finally life is good for me.

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