

The recollections of Elphas, son of Mubarik,
of that fateful day in 1701 when I became a slave

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Dual Enrollment US History

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A warm breeze sweeps over my face, and the straw in our roof comes into my line of sight as my eyes open. I roll over on my straw tick to see if Evans is awake yet. He, Elias, and Jangul are still sound asleep, snoring loudly as usual, and the girls on the other side against the mud wall are not even stirring. Their birth mother, Miriam, sleeps beside them. Father must have slept with Mother tonight.¹

I carefully stand up and stretch my tiredness away. Then I remember: Father should be waiting for me. I throw on my shirt and robe and grab my sandals, pulling them on as I shuffle to the mud-hut door, careful to not step on any of my sleeping family members. Sure enough, Father is standing outside waiting for me.²

"Look who decided to show up," chuckles Father.

I grin, nodding my head in a bow of greeting. "I am sorry I overslept, Father."

"Grab your spear; we need to get going. You are sixteen years old now, and you need to help feed the family."

I am around the hut to grab my spear and back at Father's side in seconds. Many people don't know how to read my Father and sometimes think him stern because of his rank as a leader in our Igbo tribe, but Father is actually a nice man although solemn at times. We tramp through the tall, yellowish grass that looks dull in the semi-darkness of morning towards the draping trees

¹ "Igbo." Countries and Their Cultures. 2016. Accessed September 21, 2016.
<http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>.

² "Igbo." Countries and Their Cultures. 2016. Accessed September 21, 2016.
<http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>.

in the distance. Tall and slender with horns and a black, brown, white fur pattern, these antelope are the beasts that we seek, lurking innocently in the savanna. ³

"You go first. Show me how it is done," Father whispers as we crouch in the tall grass.

I scoot forward with my spear, careful to not make any noise yet hearing my heart bang loudly against my chest. I try to calm myself, breathing slowly as I focus on all the proper mechanics of hunting with a spear. Suddenly, I hear shuffling and shouting, not from the antelope grazing in front of me, but behind me where Father is. I turn quickly and see two men dragging my father through the grass in some sort of net. Before I can stop myself, I start sprinting in his direction, my spear upheld. ⁴

When the two men see me, they advance, leaving Father tangled in the net. I see greed in their eyes as they look at me, and in that moment, I know exactly who they are. Slave traders. News had reached our home of slave traders along the coast, but I did not realize they had reached so far into mainland Nigeria. As they slowly approach me, I can see that they are both tall and strong, so I know that my chances of escape are slim. My first thought is to run, as hard as I can and as far away as I can; but then I see Father, trapped in the net. I have to free him. Turning quickly, I dash away from the two horrible men, and chancing a glance over my shoulder, I see that the men are on my heels. I circle back, my legs churning and burning from the effort. I see Father, lying helplessly in the tall grass. As I reach him, I hurriedly fall to my

³ "Igbo." Countries and Their Cultures. 2016. Accessed September 21, 2016. <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Igbo.html>.

"Nigeria Geography and Wildlife." Our Africa. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.our-africa.org/nigeria/geography-wildlife>.

⁴ Bos, Carole. "Amazing Grace - Horrors of the Middle Passage." AwesomeStories.com. October 07, 2013. Accessed September 19, 2016. <https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Grace-Horrors-of-the-Middle-Passage->

knees, grabbing my spear and starting to cut at the tight net surrounding my father. But as soon as I begin, I feel hands on my shoulders, and I am sent flying backwards, slamming into the hard ground. I feel a net being forced onto me, but I cannot hear anything above my own helpless screams.⁵

As we are dragged away through the savanna, I see the antelope scurrying in all directions, just like my chaotic thoughts. My heart pounds as I think of my family, asleep and unaware that two members of their family are being hauled off to most likely be sold as slaves to foreigners. Minutes seem like hours as we are wrestled from our homeland until finally I feel myself being thrown onto something hard. My back aches as I land on the hard wood and am shoved between two other bodies. I hear many sharp yaps of what must be dogs nearby, and my vision swims as my whole head seems to throb. I can only imagine the pain my father is experiencing; his body is older than mine. From my awkward fetal position on the floor, I can see that we are in a kind of cart, and my guess is confirmed when the floor begins to move, slowly but surely, accompanied by a loud clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop.⁶

"Father?" A hoarse whisper issues from my dry throat as I call out. No answer. I turn my head all that I can in my cramped position. The heat of many other bodies overwhelms me as I search for my father, but I cannot make him out with all the other dark figures lying about. The seconds tick by as the sun climbs higher and higher into the sky, baking my skin as I lie exposed

⁵ Bos, Carole. "Amazing Grace - Horrors of the Middle Passage." AwesomeStories.com. October 07, 2013. Accessed September 19, 2016. <https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Grace-Horrors-of-the-Middle-Passage->

"Slave Trade: the African Connection, ca 1788" EyeWitness to History. 2007. Web. Accessed September 18, 2016. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/slavetrade.htm>

⁶ "Slave Trade: the African Connection, ca 1788" EyeWitness to History. 2007. Web. Accessed September 18, 2016. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/slavetrade.htm>

in the cart. Hunger creeps into my stomach, and I begin to itch all over in places that my cramped hands cannot reach. When will this misery end?

I lose count as the days and nights pass by in rapid succession. Our little band of slave traders would travel by day and sleep by night, giving us insufficient food and lots of mistreatment; but they did switch our bonds from the dreaded net to strong chords fastened around our hands and feet. I had finally called out to Father and in gaining an answer knew that he was still alive. Soon enough, I notice the excitement of our captors and realize that our dusty transport has finally arrived at the destination marked out for us. Looking around at my new surroundings, I see many swamps and a sign sticking in the mud that reads "Sierra Leone." Now I understand why it had taken so long to arrive; Sierra Leone is many, many miles away from my home in Nigeria. The coast is packed with many ships and many slave traders, both black and white.⁷

Our captors drag us off the cart and line us up, shoulder to shoulder, in front of the crowd of ship captains. As they strip us naked for inspection, my first experience of a slave auction begins, with rough white men as well as black men, speaking different languages and touching me all over, seeing if I am strong and healthy enough for their liking. I look to my right to see Father, several people down, with his eyes closed. I want to call out to him, to comfort him, but I know that I cannot. My head snaps back to attention as a white man approaches me. His eyes are as dark as his black hair, and his skin looks overly white in contrast; speaking in a strange language that I cannot understand, he starts poking me and slapping me around my shoulders and legs. I stand still, awaiting a result. I see money change hands, and my eyes widen in horror as

⁷ "Sierra Leone" Infoplease. 2000 - 2016. Accessed September 20, 2016.
<http://www.infoplease.com/country/sierra-leone.html>.

the realization hits me: I am being sold. As the white man takes me away, I look towards Father, and my voice begins to work.⁸

"Father! Father! Help! Help me!" I shout with all my might, struggling against my new captor.

"Elphas! Elphas!" Father starts to march towards me but is struck by the slave traders. Through the harsh beatings, I hear a muffled shout, "Be strong, Elphas! Be strong for me!"

Tears spring to my eyes as I continue to struggle and scream while being dragged from my only family member within reach. My body is pushed into a boat, but as I continue to struggle, my captors pin me to the bottom of the boat. We arrive at the ship, and I have one more glimpse of the coast where my Father is still being beaten severely. "Father. Father," I whimper helplessly as I am shoved into the ship compartment. Many other Africans are there, some older and some younger than I - men, women, children. I squeeze in between two other men, one burly and tall, the other smaller and younger than I, just a child. Wiping the tears from my face, I turn to the younger boy.

"What is your name?" I whisper, my voice coarse and dry in my parched throat.

The boy looks up at me with scared eyes. "I am called Anas. Do you know my mother? Do you know where she is?"

⁸ Bos, Carole. "Amazing Grace - Horrors of the Middle Passage." AwesomeStories.com. October 07, 2013. Accessed September 19, 2016. <https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Grace-Horrors-of-the-Middle-Passage->

"Slave Trade: the African Connection, ca 1788" EyeWitness to History. 2007. Web. Accessed September 18, 2016. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/slavetrade.htm>

He starts to cry, and I put an arm around his shoulders, trying to comfort him, and in doing so, attempting to comfort myself. His simple question made me think of my own mother. Did she yet know that Father and I had been captured? I feel the hot tears on my face again, but I leave them where they are, crying alongside my new companion, Anas.

Suddenly, our somewhat peaceful moment is shattered by the intrusion of loud shouts as many white men file through the compartment door, shouting orders in an entirely different language. Chains are strapped onto my ankles and wrists, linking me into a single-file line with my fellow captives. Pain shoots up my already pain-wrecked body as the white men shove our naked bodies to the ground. Screams permeate the ship as our bodies slide along the slippery wooden floor of the ship. The many bodies form aisles along the floor of the ship, and the cries of pain are somewhat reduced when the white men come around with food, or what they call food. The grainy mush does not taste flavorful at all, and the crew misses several people's outstretched hands as they file down the lines. Anas, who is chained beside me, starts to cry again as he is skipped by the white men bearing the food. I lean over and give him some of mine, deciding at that moment that I would look after this young boy like a brother.⁹

That night as I lay on my back in the darkness, swaying with the ship as it is tossed by the waves, my thoughts wander, drifting from Father to my family to my tribe. I wonder where we are going in this horrific ship and how long it will take to get there. Will I even survive until that point? How will my new life be? My heart sinks with every thought as our ship moves ever onward, gliding into the unknown where my new life lies waiting for me.

⁹ Bos, Carole. "Amazing Grace - Horrors of the Middle Passage." AwesomeStories.com. October 07, 2013. Accessed September 19, 2016. <https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Grace-Horrors-of-the-Middle-Passage->