

SLAVE STORY

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I used to have a good life, a free life, a life where peace and tranquillity was rich and vibrant, but then they came, the men with guns. They destroyed entire tribes and reduced them to dust. Our most powerful soldiers couldn't escape the cold wretched grasp of their white hands. My name is Jabari and I am going to tell you about my life as a slave ...

I lived in a western African tribe called Abubakar where we were all civil and convivial people. We did not mistreat others and always thought of everyone as equal. I had recently completed my man training which was very difficult even for the strongest of my brothers. After completion, I returned to my village and said my farewells to my mother because once you become a man you leave your parents and get your own hut to live and sleep in. I felt happy and sad at the same time; I would have a whole hut to myself, but I would be alone. At least I would always have a chance to go and help my mum out if she ever needed anything. I never fully understood why it was compulsory for men to leave home at a certain point in their lives, and I would've preferred it if I could've chosen when I thought the time was right. But rules are rules, I guess.

The hut I received was crafted by hand and was composed by some straw for the roof and mud for the walls and base. Straight away I got to work decorating the hut. Firstly I added some shelves to hold my pottery (bowl, cup etc.). After doing that I fell asleep on a stack of hay when I was shortly disturbed by my father, who burst through the hole in the side of my hut and told me "Come quick, a leopard had come and it is trying to eat all of our livestock!". At that point I felt very scared because after eating all our livestock, it could sneak its way into the hut complex and hurt someone. We ran alongside each other until we reached the far end of the village where we were faced by an angry, towering giant of a creature. My father looked me in the eyes and told me that this was my issue to resolve and to this day I'm not exactly sure what he meant. I may have just needed to prove my work to him by taking on a leopard so he could fully accept me as a man. I took my bow and hurled myself towards the creature but it barely seemed to notice my presence. So I picked up a reasonably heavy rock off the ground and prepared myself to throw. Just before I did it the leopard saw me and I think it knew of my intentions because it started rushing towards me. So I took aim and threw the rock hoping that the leopard would be knocked off its tracks. Luckily, it was and I felt more happy than I had ever felt before, but there was no time for that so I ran up to the leopard with a sharpened stick and started waving it. At this point the leopard started to show signs of anxiousness. I progressively got closer and started moving the stick with more sudden and belligerent motions. As I was closing in on it I stumbled across a rock so I picked that one up and made it completely visible to the leopard, which was a very good move because the leopard twirled around and ran for its life through the maze of trees and plants. Just to make sure it wouldn't return, I ran after it with my stick.

I followed it into the far reaches of the forest to a part I didn't recognise. I thought it was okay because the leopard had only been running in a straight line and so had I. SUDDENLY, I tripped over something that wrapped around my ankle with supreme strength. No matter what I tried it was useless. Obviously I had to have left my bag of equipment back on the floor where my dad was, and my stick had flown out of my hands when I tripped. I only had one more idea so I began it immediately. I took my pristine, sparkling white teeth and started gnawing at the rope. I was so relieved when the rope began to break apart after only a few seconds of gnawing. Before the rope completely broke I heard footsteps and voices approaching me, but the weird thing was that the voices were just speaking a load of gibberish.

I managed to release myself just before the men got too close to me, I got up and lunged myself towards my stick and held it with a firm grasp, and then I prepared myself for a battle. Two young henchmen emerged from the bushes with weird machines and a bundle of rope in each of their hands. They sniggered at the sight of me and I was thinking, what's funny? You're the odd ones out around here. I started sprinting away from them because the looks in their eyes displayed sinister intentions. I had no time to think so I just kept running, with no idea which direction I was going in. I just kept running with my eyes facing forwards, but when two more men appeared from nowhere and started charging towards me, I had no idea what to do. I couldn't go backwards and I couldn't go forwards, so I decided to try and curve to the side but it was no use, two more men were standing on both sides, now I was completely surrounded.

However, I was not going to give up easily, I started spinning my stick very fast to protect myself, but they had this net with four lead balls at each of the corners and they hurled it over my head. It was so heavy, I could not lift it up. All six men looked over my exhausted body and laughed. And then I fainted because I was so scared and tired ...

Soon I awoke in this cage made of tied together bamboo sticks, I was surrounded by other people from lots of different tribes. They looked so hungry and dirty, they were desperately shouting at the people sat in little huts. They were wearing leather jackets and boots and some trousers, it looked so weird, I had no idea who they were or where they came from.

I was in there for two long dreadful weeks before I was released; for the whole time they did not let us get exercise and all they fed us was a measly bread roll twice a day. The Baracoons were progressively packed with more and more people that had also been captured. We had no room to go to the toilet so there was a huge pile of poo and pee resting on the sand. Once we had been freed we were chained to each other and laid on board a huge metal vehicle. We just stood still for hours whilst one by one people were being taken onto the ship. There was just so many of us, I could not even have imagined what someone would do with that many people.

Once I was taken on board I saw 5 bunks all with connected chains, everyone was lying down with their heads facing upwards. I was placed on the third row up and there was about 10 people on both sides of me. Soon the ship started swaying and I had no idea what was happening.

Straight away people started to scream wildly as they had abruptly been abducted, and haven't seen their families in such a long time. It had almost been three weeks since I was captured and I really missed my family. Although we had only been on the ship for a few hours I was already starting to lose my mind. I kept telling myself "you can get through this, you are a man now."

For our meals we were given a small plate, with a blob of goop on it, every time I breathed in I could smell its disgusting aroma and it made my stomach turn upside-down. But I wanted to live through this, so I ate my food every meal no matter how terrible it was.

After a few days we were taken outside the ship to be washed, it took such a long time to get all of us out; all the chains were connected, so we were connected and whilst we were chained we could not move at all, so when people were eventually released they just flopped on the floor with no energy for standing, but the white men would not have any of that, they picked these people up and shoved them up the stairs and I had no idea what happened next. The rest of us had to be chained up again so none of us would escape. I thought of a plan to find the nearest land and swim towards it, I was so happy. When we were all re-chained, a small group of us went on the deck at a time and were hosed down, and when I say that, I mean buckets of salt water were poured over our heads. I was in one of the last

groups to go up, so I had a pretty clear idea of what was to happen from the look of the people that came back down. Afterwards we were led outside into the sun. Oh, it was so beautiful, but nevertheless it was bright, I was temporarily blinded, obviously because I had spent days in a dim room. Once we had recovered I saw the sea, just the sea, I was so scared. Where was the land? Where are we? I attempted to run and jump off but the sailors held me and beat me badly. I pulled myself together and walked past the crew who whipped us as we walked by and stood patiently on the deck. I heard the captain of the ship say "People are only going to buy these n*****s if they are clean, so let's make them so".

Suddenly water was being thrown over us and at that moment I felt the most pain I had felt in my entire life. The pain was excruciating, the water crept into our wounds and burned like nothing I had ever felt before.

Eventually it was over and all of us were chained up but this time in different places, I was on the bottom this time. For days and nights I was staring at a plank of wood that was supporting the man above me. It was so soul-destroyingly tedious. I just wanted to get out.

A few days later I continued with the routine, but at this point all the excrement and urine was swishing about the ship. Also a lot of people got sea sick so that didn't help. One of the people sat next to me was sick all over me shortly before he died. He was one of the first to die. They just unchained him and dragged him outside, and by the huge SPLASH sound he was thrown overboard. I couldn't tell them that I wanted to be cleaned because they seemed to not know what I was talking about. I would've wiped my face but I couldn't, not with my hands in chains. For every meal I bent my head over my shoulder and took a big bite of my slop, and got that extra delicious bit of sick in my mouth that I got on my face.

A month in, or maybe a few years, I couldn't tell, the captain came down and started shouting. I didn't know what was going on, but then he pulled out a few of the women and they started to cry relentlessly. I didn't know what was going to happen, but I think they did. A lot of the men started shouting in their own individual languages. After about five minutes the entire cabin was in uproar, I decided to join in too. BANG!! BANG!! we heard from outside and then everyone momentarily stopped chanting. BANG!! BANG!! I thought that something bad must be happening to the women. I don't think I was the only one that thought this, we continued chanting louder than we had before. The captain didn't have any of it. A lot of people got beaten that day, and henceforth we kept quiet.

The voyage was almost over, although half of us had died from disease, hunger or suicide, but the crew still seemed quite happy with their return. I heard someone shout "Land Ahoy!" and then the whole crew came down with smirks and started laughing and smiling. After tormenting us they left and then on the spur of the moment the ship stopped moving.

The first thing on my mind was where would we be? The crew boisterously and ecstatically jumped down the stairs and started yanking on our chains, eagerly trying to get them off. Soon after we were taken onto the shore and we had to walk to a building named "Auction Room". I was crying when I got there because I saw so many people from my village that had been captured as well, and then I saw my parents. I cried so hard but the ship crew just said "Man up".

Once inside the auction room we were all stripped naked and then we stood in a line getting ready to stand on a podium with two other people. One person was bought at a time, the person that was sold was replaced by another person, but the other two stayed until they were sold. It was my turn. I stepped onto the podium and someone started speaking and then people held up panels. Then he announced "Sold" and I was shoved off the podium and then taken into a beautiful carriage.

My owner took me to his big house and said my name was now Nathan. Also he said that I would work for him for the rest of my life ...

And I did continue to work for him, and in time I learnt how to speak and write in good English. Up until I was 37, I worked and worked, but then I managed to escape and for the rest of my life I lived in America.

My name is Jabari, and this was my life as a slave.