

0. Harriet's Early Life - Story Preface

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During America's years of chattel slavery, black women often served as "nursemaids" for white children. This image, depicting such a relationship, is from the Library of Congress.

When Minty was only six years old, she was "hired out" as a servant to a family called the Cooks. This was a typical event where the "owner" of slaves could receive income from "hiring out" his slaves to other slave-using families.

Mrs. Cook believed that Minty was "too slow" to be any good with weaving or cooking chores in the house, so the six-year-old went to work with Mr. Cook tending muskrat traps in the river. Even when Minty became very ill with the measles, Mr. Cook still expected her to wade into the river to empty the traps. This made her even sicker and, by the time the Cooks sent Minty home, she was literally half-dead.

When she was seven years old, Minty was "hired out" by her owner to serve as a nursemaid for a family with a small baby—much like the older nursemaid pictured above. A child herself, Minty was expected to stay awake all night so that the baby would not cry and wake the parents. If Minty fell asleep, she would be whipped by the baby's mother. If the baby cried at night, Minty would also be whipped.

Minty was also expected to clean the house and, if any post-cleaning dust was spotted, she would be whipped again. The young child grew to dread the feel of a rawhide whip across her neck.

One day, as Minty was cleaning the kitchen, she saw a sugar bowl full of sugar cubes. Minty had never tasted sugar before and, thinking no one would see her, she took one to taste.

"Thief!" screamed her mistress from the doorway. Minty ran as fast as she could and hid in the pigpen for four days. She was so hungry by the fourth day she had to go back to the house and endured a brutal beating. After that, she was returned to her owner and was labeled a "good-for-nothing."

From this very early age, Minty knew this was not right—and—she craved freedom.

Footnotes:

1) Linnea, Sharon, Harriet Tubman: Moses of Her People,

<http://georgiadisaster.info/Schools/fs%201%20school/Sopris%20West.pdf>, Aug/23/1996, Aug/23/2015,

<http://georgiadisaster.info/Schools/fs%201%20school/Sopris%20West.pdf>

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Harriet-s-Early-Life-Harriet-Tubman-Freedom-Fighter>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Harriet-s-Early-Life-Harriet-Tubman-Freedom-Fighter>



Nursemaid with baby

<http://www.americaslibrary.gov>

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Nursemaid-with-baby>