

Freedom to the Moon
By Vivian L.

My mama always said to look up at the moon. Keep your head high. Papa was always watching.

I remember those days when Papa came home from work with red slashes on his face. That day he told me to raise my chin up high and speak my mind -whenever, wherever, and whoever I was talking to.

Every night, James and I huddled around the dusty carpet to listen to Papa's stories. He told us how cruel and unfair Mister and Mistress were, and how they whipped you even for the slightest things.

Papa always reminded us, "You are not their dogs, and they are not your owners."

I remember vividly the night when Papa never came home. We stayed up until the sunrise. No Papa in sight.

Next morning, a scroll was placed in front of our one-bedroom shack. It read,
Dearest, Ida

Mistress has alerted me to inform you that John has been hung for his incredibly rude behavior.

Mistress wishes for you to replace John at once.

Sincerely,

Jane

I saw my mother's soul leave her body right on that spot. She froze, dropped the letter, fell on her knees, and didn't move for the next five minutes.

Slowly, she began to gasp for air. James squatted next to Mama, trying to help her breathe. I did the same.

"What does the scroll say?" I asked, but James' yanked it away from me. "What did I do?! Let! Me! Read it!" I struggled as I attempted to pull the paper from his clutch.

"It's nothing. You're too young," he said, shaking his head meaningfully.

"I'm five and a half years old! I am not too young!" I argued back.

Mama gave James a good look, and nodded sorrowfully.

"Here. Don't freak out," he handed me the scroll. I could see his hands shaking.

I opened the scroll. Right at that moment, I saw the word I just learned recently from Papa. The word, "hung".

I slowly read the scroll. Word by word. When I put them together, my eyes widen. I can suddenly feel a knife poking a hole through my heart.

Mama had to go serve. Otherwise, we're thrown out.

Four Years Later...

Now I'm nine. -The age when you're qualified to become the next slave. James reassured me that everything would be alright, as long as I followed instructions. I could still hear my heart pounding in my ears.

Mama, limps over to me and says,

"You'll be alright. Just remember to do everything you are told."

"But Papa always said to-"

"Shhhh... forget that," Mama whispered.

I nodded and left the shack and into the entrance of the manor.

James bowed deeply, and I followed.

"Good," he said, giving me a subtle smile.

Humongous gates open, and we go inside.

"Remember, they are your owners. They decide where you go, what you do with your life, and when to end your life," he spoke strictly.

I shivered and kept moving.

Another woman named Martha had been serving for two years. She was older than Mama, but looked much healthier than her.

"This is Mister, Mistress, and Daisy," Martha said, as she gestured towards an old married couple and their golden retriever.

I bow, even to the dog, and smile at them.

SMACK!

Mistress smacks me across the face.

"You are not to make eye contact with me, call me by my name, or talk back to me," she scolded as she stared me down.

My head low, I curtsy and say "Yes, Mistress,".

After they leave, Martha treats me with a cold towel to rest on my face.

"Ah... rookie mistake Mary. Rookie mistake," Martha tuts as she blots the cool towel against my face. Unexpectedly, she laughs.

"Hah... even their dog is white," Martha murmurs under her breath.

This is going to be harder than I thought.

"See, the key to success is to look down, silence yourself, and suppress all your feelings. You are neutral in any and all situations," Martha explains.

I nod understandingly.

"Alright, now... take it gently off your face, yes- oh, yes very carefully," Martha instructs as she takes the dripping wet towel from my hands.

Later that day at Home...

"Oh, I was so worried about you! Wait what-" Mama sighs, as she tucks my hair behind my ear to examine the scar.

"It's- it's nothing, I-"

She tsks disapprovingly as she turns my face in her hands.

"Just remember this as a warning into the real world," James says calmly, putting his hand on Mama's shoulder gracefully.

Next day, I do as I'm told. Keep your head down. Suppress yourself. You are neutral.

"Ah, isn't it the little looker," Mistress sneered evilly, "just like your father." Her skirt was sliding on the ground silkily.

My face burned with embarrassment, fear, anger, and possibly sadness. This was the woman who killed my father. If it weren't for her, I would still have a father.

"Bring the girl and the brother to the chamber," Mistress ordered lazily.

Slowly, Martha took my hand -my hand taking James'- and we were scurrying off to a small room with a soft, dirt floor.

"Why are we here?" I asked in fear.

"I'm sorry, but this is the chamber where Mistress... punishes people..." Martha explained sadly.

"But I didn't do anything wrong!" I retort.

"Well, you did look her in the eye yesterday-"

"I *smiled* at her! Is that illegal?!" I yell.

"I don't make the rules, Mary. I'm sorry," Martha said as she closed the door, leaving us in darkness.

"I'm so sorry James, I dragged you into this-"

James put a finger over his lips.

Ah, charades.

James scribbled down two words.

"Let's Escape."

I shrugged in confusion.

"This is where she sells slaves like us. Mama made me promise that I'd get us to freedom."

My eyes widen.

James unfolds a note tucked in his pocket.

"Love you forever. Look up, children. For your parents are up here."