

Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl Book Summary, by Harriet Jacobs

by Allen Cheng

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1-Page Summary of Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl

Overall Summary

Linda Brent grows up in a loving family. She also lives near her grandmother, who buys her own freedom when Linda is young. When Linda is six, she loses her mother and has to live with the mistress of the house where she works as a slave. The mistress treats her kindly and teaches her about religion. Six years later, the mistress dies; Linda hopes that she will be freed in her will but instead goes to live with someone else's family, which isn't as good for her because they don't treat slaves well there.

Linda's life was very different from what she had experienced before. She and her brother had to work hard, there wasn't much food for them, and their mistress treated them badly. Her grandmother tried to keep the children happy but things were about to get worse; William started getting angry at his mother's restrictions and Dr. Flint began sexually propositioning Linda while threatening that she belonged to him.

Benjamin is enslaved. He runs away from his master and ends up in prison. His grandmother tries to buy him, but he escapes again before she can do so. She saves money for years until she manages to get her son Phillip out of slavery.

Linda was able to make her life in the Flint household more bearable, but as Dr. Flint's sexual interest

became obvious, his wife took out her jealousy on Linda. Mrs. Flint interrogated Linda about her interactions with her husband and forced Linda to sleep in a different room from them at night. Although she feared that Mrs. Flint might one day kill her, Dr. Flint continued to berate Linda for not "obeying" him sexually or otherwise pleasing him enough. Such situations were typical of Southern culture, where it was common for male slave owners to have many illegitimate children with female slaves and for their wives to exact revenge on those unwilling mothers by killing them or otherwise mistreating them so much that they died from illness brought on by stress and lack of food/sleep/medical care (which is what happened).

When she is fifteen, Linda falls in love with a free black carpenter. He wants to marry her, but Dr. Flint refuses to allow it and threatens the carpenter if he doesn't leave. Moreover, Linda is afraid of having children with him because they would legally belong to Dr. Flint and be under his power as well; thus she breaks off the courtship out of fear that something bad will happen to both her and the carpenter. She focuses on caring for William instead while plotting an escape for them from slavery together.

Linda tells the story of a young runaway slave in her city who was locked inside a cotton gin until he died. Nobody cared about this man, and his master wasn't punished for it. Slavery is especially hard on women because they are at risk of sexual violence from their masters and have no legal protection to stop it. This shows how slavery degrades not only slaves but also white society that allows such things to happen.

Dr. Flint decides to build Linda a cottage of her own outside the town, as he knows that without his wife in the vicinity she will be powerless. However, Linda is desperate and accepts Mr. Sands' advances thinking that he'll protect her from Dr. Flint's wrath; even though it means sacrificing her sexual purity. She keeps this decision a secret from everyone except for herself and Mr. Sands until she becomes pregnant with his child; when she announces this news to Dr. Flint, he runs her out of the house saying "I had rather see you dead". Her grandmother also disapproves of her actions but takes pity on her and allows Linda to stay at their home during the duration of her pregnancy by Mr. Sands so long as they keep it a secret from Dr. Flint who leaves them alone for that period of time while Linda gives birth to George Harris Jr., whom she names after one of Frederick Douglass's heroes—George Washington Harris, an escaped slave who became famous for swimming across icy rivers in wintertime (which was extremely dangerous) just so that he could escape slavery and freedom-seeking slaves later followed suit in doing likewise (as noted by Harriet Tubman).

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