

Born a Slave

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Marian Hoefnagel

Born a Slave

FOURTEEN

The Time of Your Life

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Difficult words have been underlined
and are explained in the glossary on page 93.

Preface

About the age of slavery

This is a story from the age of the slave trade, which started in the 16th century. During this time, a lot of people were transported as slaves from West Africa to America. In the 17th and 18th centuries, more and more people were taken from Africa. Millions. It wasn't until the 19th century that slavery was banned. But the human trafficking went on for a long time.

In all, 25 million people from Africa were sold as slaves. Almost half of these died before they reached the ships heading for America. Twelve million people did make it to the ship. A large number of them got to America. But almost two million people didn't survive the journey. Most of them died from disease.

The largest slave traders in those days were the British. But the Spaniards and the Dutch also brought a lot of slaves to America. The French, Portuguese, Germans, Danes and Swedes were also involved in the slave trade.

The situation in Africa

It is often thought that slaves were caught by slave traders. With nets. The way lions are caught to be put into a zoo. But this rarely happened. It was much easier for the traders to simply buy the slaves.

The slave traders bought the slaves from African village chiefs. During that time there were many different tribes living in Africa. And they were at war with each other. After a battle, the winners took the losers back to their villages and used them as slaves. Then the European traders arrived. They wanted to buy the slaves. They paid the village chiefs with guns and gunpowder, with barrels filled with gin, or with beads and mirrors. Sometimes a village chief didn't have any slaves, because he had never beaten another tribe. If he wanted guns and gin, he would sell people from his own tribe.

About this story

Born a slave takes place in the 17th or 18th century, somewhere in South or Central America. Or in southern North America. Slaves were used in all of those regions. On sugar plantations, tobacco plantations, cotton plantations and coffee plantations.

Because of the free work done by all of those slaves, their masters became rich. Without slaves that would not have been possible. And so, after slavery was banned, lots of plantations went bankrupt.

The Pays and Vree Plantation that features in my story never really existed. The people in my story have also been made up. But the descriptions of living conditions are true. That was what life was like in those days, if you were a slave.

The story is about three generations of slaves:

- **Shani**, who is shipped from Africa to America
- Shani's daughter **Kiesja**, who is born at Pays and Vree
- the twins **Maisa** and **Kwasi**, Kiesja's children