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### **The Pit of Despair**

Linda Brent, Ms. Jacobs' pseudonym while writing "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," became so entrenched in hatred of slaveholders and slavery that she lost sight of the possible good actions of slaveholders. When she "resolved never to be conquered" (p.17), she could no longer see any positive motivations or overtures made by slaveholders. Specifically, she could not see the good side of Mr. Flint, the father of her mistress. He showed his care for her in many ways, most notably in that he never allowed anyone to physically hurt her, he built a house for her, and he offered to take care of her and her bastard child even though it was not his.

Mr. Flint tries to take care of Ms. Jacobs as well as he can. He always protects her from physical abuse that anyone would wish upon her. She states this fact explicitly many times. She writes, "Sometimes I so openly expressed my contempt for him that he would become violently enraged, and I wondered why he did not strike me" (p. 32). He does not strike her because he cannot bear to. Even though slaves are thought of as nothing more than property, and any white man can impose anything upon a slave, Mr. Flint looks upon her as a human being. He also says: "I have never allowed you to be punished, not even to please your mistress" (p. 34). Punishing slaves was a standard course of action, it was not evil, and did not make the punisher a monster, or even cruel. In fact, he even kept her out from having to do hard labor in the fields. Although Ms. Jacobs puts a different spin on it, "jealousy of the overseer had kept him from punishing me by sending me into the fields to work." (p. 41), he may very well have his own reasons for not forcing her to work in the fields. "If I wept, he would say, 'Poor child!

Don't cry! don't cry! I will make peace for you with your mistress... Poor, foolish girl! You don't know what is for your own good. I would cherish you. I would make a lady of you. Now go, and think of all I have promised you." (p. 34)

He offers many times to "make a lady" (p. 53) of Jacobs. He builds her her very own cottage, at his own cost. "He told me that he was going to build a small house for me, in a secluded place, four miles away from the town." (p. 53). However, her vow still keeps her from ever even thinking rationally about accepting his offers. "I vowed before my Master that I would never enter it.... I would do any thing, every thing, for the sake of defeating him."

After she commits the sin of procreation outside of a marital household, he still is so much entranced with her that he offers to take care of her. Even offering to take care of ones' own child with a slave was a rare occurrence as told by Jacobs. And yet here Mr. Flint is, offering to take care of, not only her child, but a bastard child with no relation to Mr. Flint himself: mentions. "'Linda,' said he, 'though you have been criminal towards me, I feel for you, and I can pardon you if you obey my wishes.'"(p. 59) When he learns of her conspirator, and realizes that the man does not "care a straw" for her, he proposes one final offer to her: "On one condition I will forgive your insolence and crime. You must henceforth have no communication of any kind with the father of your child. You must not ask any thing from him, or receive any thing from him. I will take care of you and your child. You had better promise this at once, and not wait till you are deserted by him. This is the last act of mercy I shall show towards you!" (p. 60-61). All that Mr. Flint longs for is that she be his, and faithful to him. He has built a house for her, he has never let anyone lash her, and the only thing he asks is

that she not communicate with the father of her child, who will probably not communicate with her ever again. "He asked, for the last time, would I accept his kindness? I answered that I would not." It is her own choice, and her own nature that spurns all his efforts to take care of her, to make a lady of her.

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