

## Explanatory Notes

When commissioned by The Drum to write a contribution to the 2007 Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, Ava decided to try a format which differed from a traditional 3 act drama.

With the luxury of a cast comprised of two seasoned performance poets and a recently graduated BA Hons Drama student, she aimed to showcase the strength and versatility of the actor's voices within an intimate frame which required all three of them to be on stage for the duration of the piece.

Consequently, *Field Slave 139* is written mostly in monologues with occasional interaction between the actors which increases towards the end of the play.

In full costume and make-up, the actors read from their scripts which were placed on podiums before them.

The dramatic effect was heightened with the use of lighting and sound effects (written as SFX in the script), such as background music, horses, dogs, wolves, streams, rivers, wind and background chatter.

# **FIELD SLAVE NUMBER 139**

**By**

**Ava Ming**

**Commissioned for the**

**2007**

**Bicentenary of the Abolition**

**of the**

**Slave Trade Act**

**Premiered on**  
**Thursday November 22<sup>nd</sup>**  
**The Drum, Birmingham, UK**

**SCENE 1:**

**INT/EXT. KITCHEN/ YARD. NOON**

*SFX: Music*

*Actors enter stage left and stage right*

*Spots on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

**NOLA:**

**I move from the cupboard to the kitchen table where I** have placed flour, salt and yeast so I can bake bread for my Master's family. Before I begin, I go outside to wash my hands under the tap of cold water at the side of the house.

In the shadow of the noonday sun I see the shape of you. Strong, tall black man. Your hands and feet shackled, bruises rising from your flesh. Your guarded eyes cast barely a glance at your new slave brothers and sisters. You look only at me and your gaze is so intense I can neither look away nor look directly at you.

Where have you come from?

I have heard that at auction, slaves are inspected like cattle; the men's teeth and muscles, the women's breasts and stomach and that if they are weak or ill they are left there to die.

Were you also on the auctioneer's block, African man?

Master says that while I continue to cook and clean and serve him well, I can stay here until I die. I am told that I must be grateful that there will be no auction block for me.

Do you have a wife? A mother or a father? Brothers and sisters? Children? Or are you alone as I am?

How long before you are sold again?

Questions which no-one can answer run through my mind. Questions which I will never be brave enough to ask out loud.

I should return inside but I stand here a moment longer and dare to steal another look at you.

**NOLA:**

**Suddenly my heart thumps hard inside my chest and my cheeks burn with red-hot fire, yet I am no-where near the oven furnace!**

Should I be afraid of this new slave that Master has brought to my home? Has he cast a spell on me?

Has he cast *his* spell on me?

*Continued*

**FSN139:**           **Massuh says I am to be called Field Slave Number One**  
Hundred and Thirty Nine.

When he brought me up the hill along the dirt track I saw men, women and children toiling for another man's wealth, their backs bent, the African melodies of their slave songs carried on the wind, their black skin shiny with the sweat of their labour.

But I care not about the Great House, nor the money or the lands spread before me. I see only the huge wealth that this massuh has in you who stands apart from the rest, like pure gold.

What do you do here?

Will I, a mere field slave, get a chance to utter one word to you or will they surely keep us apart?

In the beauty of your face and the depth of your eyes there is no plantation, no massuh and no wrench from my homeland. Seeing you has given an ounce of sweetness to this bitter life.

Too soon my eyes lose sight of you as they send me to sup with the other slaves. Tomorrow I begin my endless toil in the fields. It is no different from the life I have always known..

.....except that now there is less despair.

*Field Slave Number 139 and Nola make eye contact for the first time*

**FSN 139:**           What is your name?

**NOLA:**             My name is Nola.

**FSN 139:**           I have loved you all my life even though until I saw you, I had not known it.

*Spots dim on Field Slave Number 139 and Nola*

**SCENE 2:**

**INT/EXT. KITCHEN AND YARD**

*Continued*

*Spots rise on Davis*

**DAVIS:**           **For more than twenty years I've cleaned up my massuh's**  
stinkin' sick night after endless night, when he comes in  
from his slave women's shacks drunk on cotton gin an' lust.  
  
Long time ago when I was 'bout fifteen an' she was just a  
tiny little thing toddlin' roun' here trailin' after big mammy's  
skirts, massuh done promised Nola to me!  
  
Even den there was something about her that set her apart  
from the rest, know what I mean? She was, she is, special.  
With a big S.  
  
Now I's nearly thirty-five an' Nola is twenty one. I done  
watched her blossom from an awkward young gal, all skinny  
limbs an' big teeth, into a woman who's ripe! Yassuh, an' all  
the men slaves roun' here knows it too! But dey couldn't  
handle her.  
  
All these women wanna be with a handsome house slave  
like me; my skin so pretty an' red, my hair so fine an' wavy.  
  
I get the best food an' the best hand me down clothes an' I  
get to walk right behin' massuh's horse.  
  
More times I know what's going on roun' here even before  
he do.  
  
Who you think keeps a eye on dem no good, downright  
unruly field slaves, always plottin' to run away? Who you  
think tells massuh when dey plannin' something? Who you  
think stopped the last uprisin' in dem there cotton fields?  
  
Massuh even said that one day, he gon' free me.  
  
Maybe.



**DAVIS:**

**But I've had too many years of bowin' an scrapin' an  
sleepin' at the foot of Massuh's bed like I'm a boy 'stead of  
a grown man!**

Now it's past time to get what I been promised.

Massuh gots to give me what's mine, an' that high yella filly,  
Nola, she's it.

Yuh see what I'm sayin'?

*Spots dim on Davis*

**SCENE 3:**

**INT. KITCHEN. ONE MONTH LATER 3PM**

*Spots rise on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

**NOLA:**                   **Field Slave Number One Three Nine has been here for almost four weeks. No longer is this just a place to work from sun-up to sun-down toiling for my master. Now this place is come alive.**

He has grown strong in the fields. In the evenings when I enter the slave shack to bring the men their food he hushes their awful comments.

Sometimes I steal a glance at him. He is always watching but yet I feel no danger from him.

Instead I feel longing, as if something or someone that was once special to him has gone and nothing can take its place.

Until now.

Last week he held my hand for less than a moment.

His meaning was in his gaze, in the brush of his fingertips, in the way he placed his cheek next to mine.

And three days after, when he held me close in the moonlight, I let him kiss me, sweetly and deeply.

For the last three nights he has come to my cabin. Oh, he knows I am still innocent and he will not force me, but he has held me in his arms until just before sunrise when he stole back to his shack.

I could leap into the air and shout with joy!

Is this how true love feels?

**FSN139:**

**Whilst we toiled in the field my mind was on her.**

I asked gentle questions of the other slaves but no-one knew of her ma or her pa, just that she had always been in the Great House.

They told me that the massuh wouldn't allow it, but who is he to tell my heart what to feel?

Her goodness has taken hold of me.

Before they brought me here my heart was stone. Ever since that day when my wife and my sons were taken far away to a place I shall never see.

Every night I prayed for death and every morning disappointment came upon me because I was still alive.

Now, finally Nola lies within my arms and loves me.

We have no control over our lives. We are black slaves first and foremost, human beings second. it's not for me to choose my mate, that's up to the massuh.

Perhaps I should pull away and stop this love while I still can?

But again the beating my chest reminds me; who is the massuh to tell my heart what to feel?

*Spots dim*

**SCENE 4:**

**EXT. FIELD. MIDNIGHT**

*SFX: Music*

*Spots rise on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

**NOLA:** **Just to hear my name on your lips makes my heart so happy!** I never knew such a thing was possible.

Tell me again, why do you love me? Is it my hair? Or my smile? Is it the way I look at you when we....?

**FSN139:** **Don't tease me.**

**NOLA:** I have loved you from when you told the men slaves to leave me alone, so many weeks ago now. Their words used to frighten me.

**FSN139:** They were wrong to speak to you that way.

**NOLA:** I love you because my heart thinks you're wonderful!

**FSN139:** And I have loved before but never like this.

**NOLA:** Who?! Beulah? Mary? Charity? I have seen them looking at you, trying to get your attention and-

**FSN139:** (small laugh) – I am not interested in them.

**NOLA:** They would be jealous if they knew about us-

**FSN139:** -there is only you.

**NOLA:** Then who did you love before? You are my *only* love and always will be.

**FSN139:** It was a long time ago on another plantation. She was my wife-

**NOLA:** -your wife?!

**FSN139:** -we had four sons.

**NOLA:** (*gasps*)

**FSN139:** **We were both so young and did not really understand.**  
Love just grew between us.

**NOLA:** **More than what we share?**

**FSN139:** Different, Nola. What we have is here and now. You must not worry about the past.

**NOLA:** Where is she?

**FSN139:** The massuh sold them. My sons, my wife. My family. My life.

*Beat*

**FSN139:** My flesh and blood were money in my massuh's hands.

**NOLA:** Maybe one day you might see them –

**FSN139:** -no. It is too painful to hope.  
Where are your people, Nola? Why are you all alone?

**NOLA:** This is all I know. I have no mother, no father, just Master and this place.

**FSN139:** Has the massuh treated you well?

**NOLA:** I rise before the sun seven days a week. I cook, clean and am a good slave. He has never whipped me.  
But if he knew about our love-

**FSN139:** -we must continue to steal away and we must tell no-one.

**NOLA:** It is not easy for us to be alone-

**FSN139:** -if they should rip us apart-

**NOLA:** -that will not happen-

**FSN139:** -they would have to kill me lest I burn this whole plantation down!

**NOLA:** Shush, we cannot know who is listening.

**FSN139:** I am a friend to all. I help the weaker slaves and the women and children in the fields.

**NOLA:** **Not everyone wishes us well. There is one we should be careful of.**

His name is Davis. He is tall and slender and forever running behind the Master.

**FSN139:** **I think I have seen him. He runs with a leaning gait? Like a dog with only three legs?**

**NOLA:** He has eyes and ears everywhere. He thinks he is Master's favourite. Many of the women fight over him.

**FSN139:** Including you?

**NOLA:** I despise him. He tells me that one day I will be his. He watches me slyly, tries to get me alone, and-

**FSN139:** -has he?!

**NOLA:** No! But he is a threat to me. To us.

**FSN139:** Would he tell the massuh?

**NOLA:** I believe so. We must be careful. Danger is everywhere.

**FSN139:** There is a solution.

**NOLA:** Yes?

**FSN13:** We should jump the broom before Davis gets to the massuh with his tales.

**NOLA:** Jump the broom?

**FSN139:** We will be together and no-one could say a word against us.

**NOLA:** How do we-?

**FSN139:** I will ask the other slaves.

**NOLA:** When could we-?

**FSN139:** As quickly as possible.

**NOLA:** We would live together as man and wife. Have children, be there to comfort each other.

We could walk hand in hand and no-one, not even Davis could interfere.

**NOLA:**                   **We could grow old together?**

**FSN139:**               **-one step at a time, my darling.**

*Beat*

**FSN139:**               It will soon be sunrise.

I should go.

*Spots fade on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

*Spots rise on Davis*

**DAVIS:**               **I see'd em! Kissin' an' a huggin' an' a carryin' on in the moonlight, believin' dat everybody else is asleep!**

My Nola, with dat low down One Three Nine's hands all over her!

How long he been sneaking in an' out of her shack! An' how come nobody never tol' me!

Field slaves musta known somethin'! Why dey protectin' him? Dey all know Nola's promised to me! TO ME!

Dey ain' getting' away with it! I'ma remind Massuh dat Nola's mine, an' dat One Three Nine is a rotten field slave!

His butt's so black you couldn' find him in a coal shack. Hasn't he heard? If you's black, get back! But if you's brown; like me an' Nola, stick aroun', an' if you's white – like the massuh, you's all right!

The best place for One Three Nine is to spread his seed. Give massuh more slave children. It's been ordain' by God hisself, massuh showed me in his big bible. He had to read it for me, but I know's he tellin' the truth.

**DAVIS:**

**When I saw dat big, black slave a comin' from her cabin, I was so mad I wanted to fight, somethin', someone, anybody!**

But I ain't got his muscles or his strength. He been raised in the fields an', I ain' used to rough work.

Massuh says dat we mulattos got superior brains an' I'm gonna use mine.

I been thinkin' up a plan, but massuh's dogs kept on a yappin', 'bout to drive me up the wall!

So I tied 'em up.

I stoned 'em till dey didn't have no breath left to bark no more! Dragged dem dead dogs out to the fields and left 'em there for the wolves to finish off.

It shoulda bin One Three Nine's butt. Those dogs was just animals after all.

I gotta get massuh to get him outta here, den things will be back to normal. Yassuh!

*Spots dim*

*SFX: Music*



**SCENE 5:**

**INT/EXT. KITCHEN/YARD. THREE WEEKS LATER. 6PM**

*SFX: Music*

*Spots rise on Nola*

**NOLA:**           **You didn't come. I waited for you night after night, but you didn't come. The moon grew dimmer, the sun a little cooler with each day spent away from you.**

You're no longer in the field, singing songs of Africa and you're no longer around to protect me as the men pull at my garments.

The thought of being your wife slips further away the longer I do not see you and the more I cannot find you.

Davis leers at me as if he can see into my soul, as if he knows how lonely I am without your arms around me.

Was it me, my love? Have I done something wrong? Did I give in too easily, too quickly?

What can I do to make it right?

If only I knew more about the ways of men and the ways of love.

Last night I closed my eyes and felt your spirit surround me.

Has the joy in my life ended when it had barely begun?

You are here, but you are nowhere. I wait and you do not come.

*Beat*

Until this morning.

I feel you before I see you and turn to greet you with a smile.

**NOLA:** **But your head is bowed, your shoulders droop and you are** less than my proud man. You are tired and weary and you do not respond as I whisper your name.

You hold me so briefly that I wonder if it is just my imagination. Then, slowly, so slowly you walk away.

I do not follow you, my heart feels your rejection and bids me stay.

*Nola is forlorn*

*Spots fade on Nola, rise on Field Slave Number 139*

**FSN19:** **You are just as beautiful now as you ever were and if your** sweet shyness had not already captured my heart, I would have held it in my hand and given it to you.

Within your arms I am strong enough to move mountains, tall enough to reach up and grab a piece of the sky, because this is no less than you deserve.

Do you know that I would grant you freedom in an instant even if it meant that I would never see you again? But do you know that I cannot imagine a world without you?

I see the hurt in your eyes but I cannot respond because I am nothing except alone, Nola, always alone.

The only thing a black man has is the power of his mind.

But now I am weak and unable, brought low by this life.

I'm forced to be with many, many women but add them all together and they cannot make one of you.

It has been months since we touched. I hold onto the memories as I do not know if I will ever be close to you again.

*Spots fade on Field Slave Number 139.*

**SCENE 6:**

**INT/EXT. KITCHEN/YARD. LATE EVENING**

*Spots rise on Davis and Nola*

**DAVIS:** Save your tears woman! Why you cryin' anyhow?

**NOLA** I see the slaves working from sun-up to sun down and my heart burns for them.

**DAVIS:** You cryin' over dem? Woman you mus' be crazy! Look out there, massuh's got more field slaves than you or I can count. Dey work, dey die, an' he gets more, straight off the boat from dat Africa!

**NOLA:** Field slaves are human, just like us

**DAVIS:** Like us? Dem blackened cotton pickin' no-gooders? We's almost kin-folk to massuh, jest look at the colour of our mulatto skin! We gets almost as much to eat as massuh's hogs!

**NOLA:** I would rather die free and starving, than live the rest of my life this way.

**DAVIS:** Don't you ever let him hear you talkin' like dat! You want him to sell us to some massuh who don' care like he do?

**NOLA:** No, I-

**DAVIS:** -girl, you ought ta 'preciate when you got a good thing! Don't you think dem field slaves wish dey was us?

**NOLA:** I *had* a good thing. Now he won't even look at me.

**DAVIS:** One Three Nine is just good for-

**NOLA:** -I never said his name.

**DAVIS:** Er, sure you did.

**NOLA:** No. I didn't.

**DAVIS:**               **Massuh had plans for dat slave from the start. Why you think he brung him here? The blackest slaves have the biggest-**

*Nola silences Davis with a look*

**DAVIS:**               Er, I mean the blackest slaves have the strongest seed. Ever'body knows it.

**NOLA:**               **What plans?**

**DAVIS:**               'Bout time massuh had some more slave children...

**NOLA:**               What!

**DAVIS:**               Pay no min' to massuh's business.

**NOLA:**               But-

**DAVIS:**               Look here, I got news to make you smile again.

Put on your best frock an' plan a party! Get to bakin' an' kneadin' an' sewin' an' roastin' an' vegetable pickin' an' flower sortin', there's gonna be a weddin'...

**NOLA:**               He's getting wed?

**DAVIS:**               Why you still got dat no good, waste of time slave on your mind girl?

**NOLA:**               Then who?

**DAVIS:**               Do I have to explain ever-thin'? You got to prepare your own weddin' party, young lady. Dis ho-down tonight is gonna be for you an' me!

**NOLA:**               What!

Tonight! No! I can't! I won't! I-!

**DAVIS:**               Use the sense you been born with! Massuh promised you to me an' you can forget all 'bout One Three Nine 'cos you won't be seein' him again! Massuh got him good an' busy... if you know what I mean!

*Davis laughs, but Nola is horrified*

*Spots fade on all*

**SCENE 7:**

**EXT. THE YARD. SAME DAY**

*Spots rise on Nola*

**NOLA:**           **The knife was heavy in my hand. I imagined stabbing Davis**  
once, twice three, four times, until he lay before me,  
lifeless.

He watched me, daring me to attack and to let loose a  
lifetime of being less than human.

Endless days of being the property of first one man then  
another.

Never, ever mistress of my own path.

African drums beat fierce within me, pushing me to let loose  
the anger that sours my heart.

I will never know of the life I could have had. The seas I  
could have sailed or the world I could have lived in as a free  
woman.

I will never walk through the town whenever I choose, or  
marry for love, or know that my children will be born in  
safety and security.

Old mama used to say that in Africa I would have been a  
Queen sat at the side of my King, our children royalty. But  
here I am regarded as less than cattle.

I wanted to stab Davis's heart with my knife. To plunge it  
into his chest and then into my own until this miserable life  
was finally all over.

*Beat*

*SFX: Footsteps building*

**NOLA:**           I ran as hard and as fast as I could to get away from that  
devil. Everything within me told me that he had somehow  
done this to you, to us.

**NOLA:** I asked the slaves and they pointed; east, west, north and south. Nothing made any sense.

Then suddenly I knew.

The old slave hut, beyond the stream at the back of the fields. *That's* where he would put you to sire.

I approach slowly, hearing sounds uncomfortable to my ears.

A man and a woman becoming one.

I push the door and my eyes confirm what my ears have already heard.

You lie on top of a field slave. She is no more than thirteen.

**FSN139:** **Nola!**

**NOLA:** Oh my love, what have they done to you?

I send the child away.

*Beat*

**FSN139:** Thank you Nola, for knowing that my heart is with you always, no matter what my body is forced to endure.

We must find a way.....to live.

**NOLA:** It is too late.

I am to be married tonight to Davis, Master's house boy, the one who caused you to be here. I am to prepare my own wedding supper and then I am to practice jumping the broom.

I am promised to a man no better than the devil.

**FSN139:** NO!

**NOLA:** It is all arranged. But I will never stop loving you.

**FSN139:** You would choose him over me? You would live with him and bear his children, after everything we have shared?

**NOLA:** I have no choice!

**FSN139:**           **We must fight! We cannot give in.**

**NOLA:**           **How are we to fight?**

**FSN139:**       Together we can find a way.

**NOLA:**           There is none.

**FSN139:**       There must be.

**NOLA:**           We are powerless.

*Beat*

**NOLA:**           What is it?

**FSN139:**       Perhaps I was wrong.

**NOLA:**           Darling?

**FSN139:**       It was surely my silly mind that made me think you would consider me.

**NOLA:**           How can you say this thing?

                      Have I not been with you night after night? How many times have I told you that I despise Davis?

**FSN139:**       Perhaps it was just pity for a lowly field slave.

                      At least with Davis you would be comfortable. Your life will go on, as it is.

**NOLA:**           I would rather have you than-

**FSN139:**       -I cannot guarantee a roof over your head, food in your stomach or freedom.

**NOLA:**           All I care about is-

**FSN139:**       I am a fool.

**NOLA:**           No.

**FSN139:**       Go.

                      House slaves belong together. I should never have dreamt that one day we could...

**FSN139:**       Go.

**FSN139:**           **Go to him.**

**NOLA:**             **No!**

**FSN139:**           LEAVE ME!

**NOLA:**             No!

**FSN139:**           You stay here to torment me!

                          GO!

**NOLA:**             Do you think I want that man?! He only cares for himself!

**FSN139:**           Once again, everything my heart has is taken from me.

**NOLA:**             Master is not selling me! I will stay close to you for as long as I can.

                          Do you hear me, One Three Nine? We cannot give in! We must find a way!

**FSN139:**           If you really mean what you say-

**NOLA:**             -I do.

**FSN139:**           Then we have only one true choice.

**NOLA:**             Tell me.

*Beat*

**FSN139:**           It may not work. Perhaps it is better that we leave things the way they are.

**NOLA:**             *Trust* me. Whatever is in your heart is in mine also.

**FSN139:**           Then let us run away! Let us break these chains and leave this place!

**NOLA:**             YES! We can find and follow the trail I have heard of; the railway underground, the stars and the light of the moon above.

**FSN139:**           We can journey to that place called Canada where many white people see us as equals.

**NOLA:**             There is such a place?



**FSN139:** Yes, my love.

**NOLA:** When shall we go?

**FSN139:** As soon as night falls.

I will hide in the woods beyond the cabin. You must gather food and whatever you need, but not too much.

Pretend that you will be his wife but do not appear too happy for he is not a fool. Make him drunk on gin then slip away and we will flee to the north.

**NOLA:** What if he sees? What if he tells? We could be whipped to death!

**FSN139:** Can we live like this? You in his arms, me in this shack?

**NOLA:** I could not bear it.

*Beat*

**NOLA:** Let me speak to Master. Let me plead with him. He has known me all my life and always been kind to me.

**FSN139:** Has massuh not promised you to a man you hate?

Escape could mean death but I can think of nothing else.

**NOLA:** Shall we risk death?

**FSN139:** Do you trust me, Nola?

**NOLA:** Yes, I trust you. I want to trust you.

**FSN139:** Field Slave Number Eighty-Nine will distract them as I run. When the moon is high I will look for you.

Come to me.

I will be waiting.

*Spots fade on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

**SCENE 8:**

**INT. KITCHEN. SAME DAY. 9:30PM**

*SFX: Music*

*Spots on Davis*

**DAVIS:**           **...Jump dat ole' broom!...(laughs and sings) hey diddle**  
diddle, the cat an' the fiddle, the cow jumped over the  
broom!

I'm a happy man!

Nola, Nola, Nola. Every slave from dis here plantation wants  
you, but in an hour, I'ma gon' have you!

Course she's been a little dirtied by dat One Three Nine, but  
a few baths in cold salt water should kill his germs, make  
her fresh an' ready for me.

Where are you woman?

Are you preparin' for your new, better man?

Pull dat corset tight so your stomach's flat an' everythin'  
else is sticking out, inviting me to come over an' dig right in!

Are you doin' your pretty hair? Are you practisin' your  
lovely smile? Lookin' like a sweet southern belle!

Better be ready to pucker up an' kiss me real good!

Wash your feet, Nola 'cos I'm a foot man an' pretty, clean  
feet definitely gets me goin'!

I'm gon' be kind our first night together, not like some  
men's who just takes it as dey feels.

I'm gon' check wit ya every step of the way 'cos ya gots to  
like it as much as me, okay?

Min' yu, after dat barbarian field slave, yu gon' be thankin'  
your lucky stars, cos I got magic hands!

**DAVIS:**

**First we'll have a boy, made on our weddin' night. Den a girl. No, two girls, dey can help Nola aroun' the house.**

Den another boy, no, two boys so dey outnumber the girls.

Handsome sons who look like me. Winsome girls who look like my wife, my Nola.

Not many men been as patient as dis slave here! I knows dat when massuh says somethin' he does it. Just like one day he'll give me my freedom, me an' my wife an' our chil'rens.

Can ya hear the banjos an' the fiddles? Can ya smell the chicken a roastin'? Can ya hear the women gettin' ready to weep an' the men getting' ready to moan? Can ya hear it, can ya?

The cream of dis here crop of slaves is gettin' together tonight!

We gon' make some pretty babies, an' if we ain't see freedom, please God almighty dey will.

Hey you there! You, dirty black slave! Brung me another glass of dem spirits, now!

*SFX: Music*

*Spots fade to black*

# ***INTERVAL***

**SCENE 9:**

**EXT. WOODS. SAME DAY. 10:30PM**

*SFX: Music.*

*SFX: Feet running across grass and gravel, coming to a standstill*

*Spots on Nola and Field Slave 139*

- NOLA:**                   **It seems as though we have been running forever.**  
Surely we are safe here under the shelter of these trees?
- FSN139:**               **The moon is too bright, we must go further and deeper in.**
- NOLA:**                   I do not know the woods at night. I am afraid.
- FSN139:**               It is not safe to tarry. Davis may have already told the massuh.
- NOLA:**                   He is drunk. He won't notice that I'm gone.
- FSN139:**               He planned to make you his wife this same night, of course he will miss you!
- NOLA:**                   I would cut off my right arm before I marry him!
- FSN139:**               Let us keep on.
- NOLA:**                   The ground is so uneven. I fear I might fall. The shadows are frightening. They could be fierce animals.
- FSN139:**               If you fall I will catch you. Stay close behind me and keep your head down lest these branches scratch your eyes.
- NOLA:**                   I am tired, my love.
- FSN139:**               Try, Nola. We must keep going.

*SFX: Feet splashing through water*

- FSN139:**               I have heard that if we follow the moon, it takes us to a river and from there....

*Beat*

**FSN139:** Sh.

**NOLA:** What is it?

*Beat*

**FSN139:** I thought I heard....

*SFX: Wind whistling through the trees*

**FSN139:** Never mind. Come. At the river we must look out for-

*Beat*

**NOLA:** -what do you hear? Wolves?

**FSN139:** Shushhh....

*Beat*

**FSN139:** Faster, Nola. We should keep moving.

*SFX: Feet running through undergrowth, getting faster. Wolves howl in the distance.*

**NOLA:** It is so dark, I can barely see.

**FSN139:** Hold my hand. Don't let go.

**NOLA:** Is it many miles to Canada?

**FSN139:** I do not know.

**NOLA:** Are there really white people who will help us?

**FSN139:** I have been told it is so.

**NOLA:** I would never have believed such a thing.

*Beat*

**NOLA:** **Please may we stop? Just for five minutes? I am so tired and so thirsty.**

*SFX: Feet running through undergrowth, fades*

**NOLA:** Have you run away before?

**FSN139:** **Once. After my last massuh sold my family.**

When I came in from the fields and my family was gone, I ran to the hills, desperate to feel the wind on my face.

Searching for my blood, my kin, I ran through the night and into the morning. I hid in thick forests, sleeping only for moments at a time.

**NOLA:** You were running to find your family?

**FSN139:** I was running to find my life.

I vowed to die amidst the trees rather than go back to the place where my life had been ripped from me.

**NOLA:** How far did you go? To the edge of Canada?

**FSN139:** When I finally reached the other side of the forest, after many days, massuh was there waiting for me.

**NOLA:** Oh, my love.

**FSN139:** That is why we have to keep going, Nola.

I could not bear to be captured twice and I do not know what the massuh would do to you.

**NOLA:** I told you, he has always been kind to me.

**FSN139:** You know so little of the ways of the world. I pray that you will never know massuh's anger.

*SFX: Feet running through undergrowth*

**NOLA:**                   **The moon is hidden by those trees.**

**FSN139:**               **But still light shines through. Stay close to me.**

*SFX: Feet running through undergrowth. Dogs barking in the distance. Horses galloping*

**FSN139:**               Oh no!

**NOLA:**                   The Master?

**FSN139:**               Davis! RUN! As fast as you can! RUN!

**NOLA:**                   The dogs are almost upon us!

*SFX: Multiple feet running. Dogs barking loudly. Horses galloping and neighing.  
Spots on Davis*

**DAVIS:**               **Dey cain't go nowhere. I know dese woods too well.**

Come on dogs dis way! We'll catch those no-good slaves!  
We'll get 'em an' drag 'em back to where dey belong.

Cain't believe the wench ran out on me. Don' she know that  
no-one escapes me?

Maybe I should just leave 'em out here to starve, if the  
wolves don't get 'em first.

What did he promise her? What can he give her? Nothin'!  
Not even spit!

How she gon' fall for him, a slave who can't do nothin'  
except pick cotton an' sleep? He musta hit her upside her  
head an' den dragged her off.

**DAVIS:**               She don't know what love is. She needs me to make her see  
right again. That's my duty an' I'ma see it through.



*SFX: Fast flowing river*

**FSN139:** **Faster Nola! I can see the river. Don't you hear it?**

**NOLA:** **I cannot swim!**

**DAVIS:** After 'em, dogs. Catch 'em! Dey can't escape, we're gonna get 'em! Whoo hoo!

**FSN139:** Jump over the rocks to safety, Nola! To safety! Don't look back.

**NOLA:** JUST LEAVE US ALONE, DAVIS!

*Beat*

**NOLA:** Run, beloved, run!

*SFX: Shots fired. Dogs barking. Footsteps splashing through water*

**DAVIS:** GOT YA!

You really thought you could get away with my woman?

You stupid, good for nothin', ugly, black-skinned slave. Dark as night an' just as useless!

Massuh's gonna whup you good.

**FSN139:** Take me back if you must. That's the only life I know. Let Nola go.

**DAVIS:** Oh no! You's *both* comin' back with me.

Chain his feet an' bind him to the horse. Leave her feet free, jes' tie her hands.

*SFX: Sound of shackles*

**NOLA:** It seems as though we had come to the end of the world, but we have barely left the plantation.

Let One Three Nine go. I will face the Master. Please.

**FSN139:** Sooner or later, I will surely kill you, Davis.

**NOLA:** He is bleeding. The chains are too tight.

**DAVIS:** Shut-up, hussy! Massuh gon' punish you both. Maybe den you'll realise what a fool you've been, puttin' dat worthless field slave over me.

**NOLA:** Let him go, just take me back. I-

**DAVIS:** He deserves a whuppin' 'an dat's exactly what he's gonna get from massuh at dawn.

**NOLA:** NO!

**DAVIS:** Hush! The only reason massuh won't whup you is cos I pleaded for ya. Made him see you was just a silly little girl fooled by sweet talk from dis big negro.

**NOLA:** But that's not true. We must-

**DAVIS:** Nobody cares about the truth! Massuh got two runaways on his hands an' I gots to give him twice good reasonin' not to whup you both, you hear?

Told massuh One Three Nine musta got you drunk, even scared ya, how else would you a left the man dat's been so good to ya all a these years?

**NOLA:** The man that sold my parents when I wasn't even old enough to remember them and made me his slave!

**DAVIS:** I don' tol' you a hundred times, be grateful!

When we get wed tomorrow, everythin'll be as it's supposed to be aroun' here.

**DAVIS:** And you better get ready to show me some real gratitude. Yessir!

*SFX: Feet walking slowly through undergrowth. Music rises and fades*  
*Spots fade on all*

**SCENE 10:**

**INT. KITCHEN. NEXT DAY. DAWN**

*Spots on Nola and Davis*

**DAVIS:**               **Wake up Nola!**

**NOLA:**               **What time is it?**

**DAVIS:**               Git yo' behind up! Massuh's got a whuppin' to be gettin' on wit an' he needs some hot porridge.

**NOLA:**               A whupping?

**DAVIS:**               You's so trustin'.

Let me help you out here.

Who's had his grubby hands all over the best house slave on the plantation? Who's been put out to sire an' been firin' blanks cos he ain't made a single woman pregnant?

Who ran off in the middle of the night thinkin' he could make it to Canada, 'cept Canada's in the other direction?

Who you think massuh's gon' whup before he sells him off?

**NOLA:**               NO!

**DAVIS:**               Massuh's still thinkin' 'bout what to do wit you.

**NOLA:**               We have to stop him.

**DAVIS:**               -we ain't have to do no nuthin'.

**NOLA:**               We can't let master beat him! You have to do something!

**DAVIS:**               You want me to take a whuppin' for the slave dat ran off wit my woman on my weddin' night?

What you gonna do for me?

**NOLA:**               I can never be your woman.

**DAVIS:**               Dat's's what you think. Massuh gon' marry us soon as he finish dealin' wit One Three Nine.

**NOLA:** Marry us?

**DAVIS:** Wear dat pretty frock you got. The pink one wit' the bows on it.

An' wash your feet good.

**NOLA:** How can we let him suffer? A whipping could kill him. He's been captured before and-

**DAVIS:** -I don't care! Even someone as stupid as him knows the risks.

Forget him. He'll be gone in a few days den you an' me can get on with our lives.

**NOLA:** I'll marry you if-

**DAVIS:** -already told ya, you ain't got much choice about dat.

**NOLA:** I'll be a good wife. I'll do my duty, anything you say,

*Beat*

**NOLA:** ..if you'll just.....

**DAVIS:** Boy you got it bad.

**NOLA:** I'll-

**DAVIS:** Enough! I don't wanna hear no more of yo' sugar coated lies!

You're a sorry bit of a woman.

Don't stand there wit yo' mouth open. Massuh's waitin', git a move on!

*Beat*

**DAVIS:** Dammit, Nola! You think One Three Nine's the only slave ever to take a whuppin?

I seen slaves get whupped to within less than an inch of dey natural lives.

**DAVIS:** Seen 'em whupped so bad their tongue's hangin' out dey mouths an' dey can't even cry no more cos all the sweats just lef' outta their body.

Seen em whupped so hard dey skin look like it's turned inside out cos all the blood's come to the surface an' is jest pourin' like a river.

**NOLA:** You talk about it as if it's just....normal.

I could never stand by and watch while a poor slave suffers so.

How can you be so unaffected?

**DAVIS:** ...Whuppin's, feet chopped off. Hands, limbs; chop, chop, chop! It's the times we live in.

An' it is normal.

You an' me, we got a chance here, Nola. With skin like ours an' livin' closer to the massuh, it don't get much better than dat.

We privilege an' we gots to hold onto dat.

**NOLA:** I would rather die.

String me up with Field Slave Number One Three Nine. Let me bear the pain with him.

**DAVIS:** Don't you ever let anybody roun' here ever hear you talkin' like dat!

Don't you know how many of dem field slaves just waitin' to take your place?

**NOLA:** They can have it.

**DAVIS:** An' what you gon' do? Go to One Three Nine? He can't do nothin' for you, never could. Ain't you learnin' dat?

If you know what's good for you, you stick with me.

**NOLA:** I CAN'T!

**DAVIS:** **Damn, Nola! Why you makin' dis so hard?**

I promised your ma an' pa-

**NOLA:** **What about my parents? What did you promise them?**

**DAVIS:** Nothin'. Forget it.

**NOLA:** You must tell me! No one ever talks about them.

*Beat*

**DAVIS:** If we were all as soft as you an' One Three Nine, wouldn't be no blacks left on dis plantation.

**NOLA:** Please, what about my parents?

**DAVIS:** Dey's gone.

**NOLA:** Where? Why did he send them away and leave me here all alone?

**DAVIS:** You better grow a thick skin real fast or you'll end up the same way as your mammy an' daddy, the same way as One Three Nine an' the same way as a whole lot of other black slaves.

Including me.

*Davis shows Nola the scars on his back*

*Nola gasps in shock*

*Spots fade to black*

**SCENE 11.**

**EXT. YARD. JUST AFTER DAWN**

*SFX: Whips lash Field Slave Number 139 who screams in agony*

*Blackout, no spots*



**SCENE 12:**

**INT. KITCHEN. ONE WEEK LATER. 9PM**

*Spots on Nola and Davis*

**DAVIS:**               **Since we jumped the broom seven days ago you ain't even looked at me.**

Look at dis fine hut the massuh give us for a weddin' present; bed off the floor, curtains at the window, a wood-stove for the winter an' you ain't even grateful!

Do you wanna go back to your shack?

You ain't eatin', you ain't sleepin'.

You certainly ain't givin' me what a wife's supposed to give a husband!

How much longer you gon' make me wait?

You jes' need some chil'rens runnin' roun' here, keep you busy, git under your feet an' take you mind offa things.

Nola! Look at me!

Cain't you put dat no-good black as coal, field slave out of your head once an' for all?

He's a broken man since dey whapped him half to death. He ain't even sire-in' no more.

You two 'bout as useless as each other.

Woman, you better quit dis here behaviour before massuh realise you costin' him money, steada makin' him some. He likely to sell you off too!

Nola! Look at me!

*Nola weeps*

**DAVIS:**               **Damn, you're beautiful.**

*Beat*

**DAVIS:**                   **Hush dat noise, now! Stop those tears.**

Who you cryin' for? Him? Or me, a husband without a wife?

Or you jes' cryin' for yourself?

Gawd, woman. I don't know nuthin' 'bout feelins'. All I know how to do is be me.

I could be good to ya but you ain't never given me a chance.

I loved ya ever since you was knee high an' dey took your parents away. I looked after ya, watched out for ya.

You's special, Nola. *We's special*. Dey call us mulatto, light-skinned. Chosen by God to have a better life than dem negros out there.

We's stronger together than apart, don't you see dat?

Goddamn woman! Do you think I like dis life! All dis 'yassuh, massuh, no suh massuh!' Bowin' an' scrapin', spyin' on the slaves, bein' hated by everyone, black an' white?

I ain't never had no choice!

An' you ain't got none neither so you better wise up an' get 'quainted with me, cos dis here is the best you're gonna get!

*Beat*

You been cryin' for 'bout forty days an' forty nights, like a well dat cain't run dry.

What do you want from me, woman?

You wanna see him? Is dat it?

*Nola stops crying and looks at Davis for the first time in this scene*

**DAVIS:**                   I know I'm a regret dis. But I cain't take no more tears an' carryin' on.

Get to movin' 'fore I change my mind.

*Spots fade*

**SCENE 13:**

**INT. SIRE-ING SHACK. SAME DAY. 11PM**

*SFX: Music*

*Spots on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

**NOLA:** I have warm water and salve, for your wounds, my love.

**FSN139:** How did you get here?

**NOLA:** He brought me.

**FSN139:** Who?

**NOLA:** Davis. My husband. We were married the night after we were brought back.

**FSN139:** Oh no!

Has he?

Nola?

*Beat*

**NOLA:** It doesn't matter.

**FSN139:** Are you very unhappy?

**NOLA:** Davis leaves me alone most of the time. I do not care whether he is there or not.

**FSN139:** If only I could break these chains.

**NOLA:** Your skin is ruined. So is your face and your back. What have they done to you, my love?

**FSN139:** Don't look at me.

**NOLA:** Scars, bruises, they don't matter. I know your heart and that's where your beauty is.

**FSN139:** We are worse off now than before. At least if we hadn't tried to escape I could have been near you, even though you would have belonged to another.

**NOLA:** I belong to you and you belong to me. That is all that is important.

**FSN139:** Davis was right. I am nothing but a fool.

**NOLA:** There is nothing foolish about love.

**FSN139:** I had such great plans for us in the freedom of my mind.

**NOLA:** Tell me of your pictures. Let me share what you see.

**FSN139:** Shall we talk about a life we'll never know?

**NOLA:** Where did we live?

**FSN139:** We lived close to the sea and the earth. Our home was a farm with wide open spaces. We built a hardy wooden shack to keep us warm in the winter and pitched it beneath the shade of leafy trees. We ate fish from the ocean. The sun shone down on us every day.

**NOLA:** Who else was there with us?

**FSN139:** Everyone we have ever loved and cared about-

**NOLA:** -my parents? And your sons?

**FSN139:** Oh yes.

*Spots dim on Field Slave Number 139 and Nola. Rise on Davis*

**DAVIS:** I can hear every word dey're sayin'. Why did I bring her here? I must be turnin' stupid or somethin'.

Dey's talkin' about love an' all dat mushy stuff.

She better tell him how lucky she is to be married to me. She better get to it, quick.

I ain't standin' here all night. Soon be time for us to be goin' back to our shack, me an' my wife, Nola.

*Spots dim on Davis, rise on Field Slave Number 139 and Nola.*

**NOLA:** **How did we spend our time in this place?**  
**FSN139:** **Helping freed slaves back to Africa. Telling white people** that in God's eyes we are all the same. We are equal.

**NOLA:** Equal? I never heard such a thing.

*Beat*

**NOLA:** Was there music?

**FSN139:** Music, singing, laughter, love, friendship and even books!

**NOLA:** Books? But slaves may not read!

**FSN139:** In the freedom of my mind, we are not slaves.

I have always wanted to learn to read.

**NOLA:** And what about our love?

**FSN139:** Our love gave us children.

**NOLA:** Girls?

**FSN139:** Boys.

*(Both laugh, gently)*

*Beat*

*Spots dim on Nola and Field Slave Number 139, rise on Davis*

**DAVIS:** **Talkin' 'bout livin' on a farm, makin' their own food an'** readin' books! I never knew dreams could be so fanciful.

Nex' dey be talkin' 'bout overthrowin' the plantation an' stagin' a uprisin'. Well, dey can just forget it, cos me an' massuh would never let dat happen.

Dey actin' like dey forgot where dey is. Like dey cain't see the four walls aroun' 'em an' the slaves on the fields an' the misery of all these negroes.

The everyday cruelty of our massuh an' his friends.

Yep, these fools gon' blind, deaf an' dumb to real life.

*Spots dim on Davis, rise on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

*Nola cries, softly*

**FSN139:**           **Do not cry, my love.**

**NOLA:**           **It can never be.**

I am so sorry.

If you had never seen me –

**FSN139:**       -I would have died inside a long time ago.

**NOLA:**           But now you are whipped and chained, waiting for auction. I did this to you. Can you forgive me?

**FSN139:**       You have brought light and love into my life. What is there to forgive?

*Spots dim on Nola and Field Slave Nine, rise on Davis*

**DAVIS:**           **Did you hear what he just said to her? Where did dat stupid, no-thinkin' black slave get such pretty words; 'you brung light an' love into my life?'** Dat's what he said, ain't it?

She did dat for me too, but I never did the same for her, just didn't know how.

Nola would never a whuppin' for me an' she knows I'd never do it for her.

But,

*Beat*

What am I thinkin'? I must be crazy outta my mind!

*Beat*

Oh hell.

*Davis moves forward between Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

**DAVIS:** I think I got somethin' I might wanna say.

*SFX: Chains rattle. A key turns in its lock*

**NOLA:** He has broken the chains!

**FSN139:** It is a trick! Davis, if you take one more step towards me, I will-

**NOLA:** Wait!

*Beat*

**NOLA:** Let us hear him.

*Field Slave Number 139 moves to stand beside Nola*

**FSN139:** I will not trust a single word that comes from his mouth. I should rip your throat out, Davis! You betrayed us both. You deserve to die!

**NOLA:** Remember, Davis brought me here to see you.

**DAVIS:** Yeah, I done many things. Few of dem good. I just ain't dat kinda guy.

But Nola, if I can do one thing to make you realise I ain't all bad.

Massuh's away till tomorrow. Dey other slaves dey asleep.

**NOLA:** What are you saying?

**FSN139:** We cannot trust him!

**DAVIS:** Stay or go, do whatever you want.

*Nola and Field Slave Number 139 exchange looks of uncertainty.*

**DAVIS:** Fools! Your freedom is out there! Y'all gon' be sold at auction when the massuh returns, or whupped an' put back in the fields. Is dat what you want?

**NOLA:** We must trust him. What choice do we have?

**FSN139:** If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't be here now.

Tell me more, Davis so I can decide for myself that you mean us no more harm.

**DAVIS:** Ain't gotta prove nuthin' to you, field slave!

**FSN139:** I knew it!

*Beat*

**NOLA:** Davis?

*Beat*

**DAVIS:** Follow the woods north. Last time y'all went south, ain't no freedom dat way. Stay close to the river an' keep movin'. After two, three days you gon' see the first shack-

**FSN139:** -of a slave catcher!

**DAVIS:** Of the underground railway. Dey give you food an' clothes, show you the way to the place dey call Canada, where you can find freedom.

If you make it dat far an' don't get caught by some other massuh.

**NOLA:** Will you come too?

**FSN139:** If this is another trick I swear I will come back and kill you with my bare hands.

**NOLA:** What is Master is angry and-

**DAVIS:** -massuh been angry all my life, ain't nuthin' new.

**NOLA:** Thank-



**DAVIS:**               **You cain't thank dis slave till yuh gets to the other side.**

**NOLA:**               **I was wrong about you-**

**DAVIS:**               -no you were right. I's selfish an' uncaring' an' I'm too old to change.

Go wit your man. I'll fin' me another slave gal to warm me at night. You know dey all wanna take yo' place.

*Nola steps forward and kisses Davis cheek*

*Davis and Nola look at each other but Davis' words are directed at Field Slave Number 139.*

**DAVIS:**               You a lucky man.

**FSN139:**           **Because you're letting me escape?**

**DAVIS:**               Because dis woman loves you.

**DAVIS:**               I'm the one dat's watched out for her all her life. She should be lovin' me.

**FSN139:**           Your jealousy and hatred is strong. Why are you helping me?

**DAVIS:**               Nola is pure, true, beautiful an' wiser than she knows.  
The day you set foot on dis plantation was the day I lost her. You better look after her, y'hear?

**FSN139:**           No man could ever stop me from protecting her.

**DAVIS:**               Before Nola, all I wanted was a fresh, young woman with sass.

*Field Slave Number 139 and Davis share brief and slightly bitter laughter*

**FSN139:**           Before Nola, I loved the sound of my sons laughing because I never knew how long it would last.

**DAVIS:** I loved walking massuh's horses in the meadows at dawn when no-one else was around. Seem' like there was no-one else on the face of the earth, just me an' dem animals.

*Beat*

**DAVIS:** Since dis woman...

**FSN139:** The bad has faded away.

*Beat*

**FSN139:** Nola, I fear I cannot make this journey with you. I am still too weak. You must find freedom for us both.

**NOLA:** I will never leave you.

**DAVIS:** Go. Both of you, before dis here fool comes to his senses. Jes' start walkin' an' don't look back.

**NOLA:** Come, beloved, before he changes his mind

*Spots dim*

*Davis returns to his former position*

*Spots rise on Nola and Field Slave Number 139*

*SFX: Footsteps walking across grass, through undergrowth and crossing a stream.*

**NOLA:** Can you make it, my love?

**FSN139:** For freedom's sake I will try.

**NOLA:** Let me be your strength. I know we will get there.

*SFX: Music*

**END**

