

BREAKING THE CHAIN

By Suzanne Hawkes

CAST

Thomas Clarkson]
Captain Pascal]played by same actor

Olaudah Equinano

Granville Sharp]
Joseph Plymley] played by same actor
Richard]

Katherine Plymley [
Mary Clarkson]played by same actor

Slave Trader]
Robert King] played by same actor

Equiano's Sister]
Elle]played by same actor

Other parts played by members of the company:
Male Slave, Henry, Haydon, Pierre, Collingwood,
Kelsell, James Somerset, James Arnold, Slave Woman,
Sophie, Currie, Slave Owner

The stage is set with a heavy wooden arm chair stage left and two black cubes pushed together stage right. At the back is a lectern. A heavy chest is by the chair containing implements of torture and African artefacts

During the performance there are projections of slavery/maps/scenes etc onto a screen stage left. Elle in slave dress and sometimes headgear or collar often on stage, walking across, doing slave work and suffering as part of the performance.

Sound effects where necessary. Slave songs drums and libations where appropriate.

Two Africans in slave dress enter attached to each other by a wooden neck brace. They sing a libation as they walk awkwardly across the stage. The libation merges into sounds of slaves, of the sea, a ship, shouts, cries and moans. Rises to a crescendo.

Thomas Clarkson is sitting in a chair with his head in his hands.
Equiano is sitting on the cubes chained.

There is knocking on the door (off)

Kath Mr Clarkson, Mr Clarkson. Please, open the door.

Clarkson lifts his head but makes no sound.

Kath Thomas, my dear, please. I need to speak to you.

Clarkson looks to the door but does not move.

Kath You have friends arriving Thomas. Mr Wordsworth will be here for lunch. And his sister Dorothy. Thomas, what shall I say?

Equiano Do you not hear her calling?

Clarkson Of course. But I am of no use to her now.

Equiano She is a good woman.

Clarkson One of the best. And from a good family. I should send her back to them.

Equiano Would she go?

Clarkson I suppose so. If she realised it was futile. And it is.

Equiano She has waited a long time for you.

Clarkson All the more reason to make her see the hopelessness.

Equiano She is a tenacious woman. And you invited her here. Perhaps she is what you need?

Clarkson I have been on my own too long. A man should marry in his youth. The best years of my life are spent.

Equiano Its never too late to marry.

Clarkson Ah, you have someone in mind?

Equiano Possibly.

Clarkson At least you have something to offer.

Equiano Money isn't everything.

Clarkson I wasn't speaking of money.

Equiano Then you have riches beyond compare

Clarkson No my friend all I have is failure.

Kath(off) Thomas, Thomas please open the door. Just for a moment. It is so sunny today. The Wordsworths suggest a walk.

Clarkson You are right, she is tenacious.

Equiano Maybe you should answer.

Clarkson If I answer I will have to start a dialogue. And I am so tired. If it was just her, but the Wordsworths.

Equiano I thought you enjoyed their company.

Clarkson In some measure. But their obsession with nature above all things. You cannot have a decent discussion without it being permeated by daffodils.

Equiano Daffodils?

Clarkson He has a poem on the subject. I suppose its all well and good but what do I care for daffodils when my failure drags another thousand to destruction?

The sound of African drums begin and chanting.

Equiano Can you hear that?

Clarkson What is it?

Equiano The sound of my homeland.

Clarkson Do you still remember?

Equiano Of course. Do you think that chains and beatings can take your homeland from you. It is in your blood, in your bones, in the spirits of your ancestors that whisper in your ears during the long dark nights chained below the decks. Would you not still remember England however far you travelled?

Clarkson I suppose I would remember Wisbeach. The level fenland and the huge sky. Some do not like it. It can look eerie - solitary. My father's home. He was a good man. He had hopes for me. He died before I could know him well.

Equiano My father was a prince among princes. An elder of his tribe. I was born in Ebo land south Nigeria. I was the youngest son of a family of seven. My mother's favourite. I was always with her. She took trouble with my education - the arts of agriculture and war. And she would adorn me with emblems after the manner of our greatest warriors. Oh how I miss her still.

Clarkson stands and points to a map.

Clarkson Gentleman. That part of Africa known by the name of Guinea to which the trade for slaves is carried on stretches along the coast for more than 3400 miles, from Senegal to Angola and includes a variety of kingdoms.. It runs back into the interior of Africa to a distance hitherto I believe unexplored by any traveller. It was from here that my friend Olaudah Equiano was at the age of 11 forcibly removed from his family and put onto a path of no return.

Equiano's sister enters

Sis Olaudah?

Equiano Sister - I was so worried. Have they hurt you?

Sis Come and play Olaudah

Equiano We cant play - we are in chains.

Sis All the grown people are away today. We have to mind the house but you can watch from the tree.

Clarkson I am reliably informed by my friend Equiano - and this he also writes in his Narrative which I would encourage you all to read - that he was forcibly removed by raiders from an enemy tribe, a common occurrence in that part of the world, and that the children captured were then sold into slavery as a matter of course.
He had never seen a white man before he was taken to the coast.

Slavery gentleman is a fact of life in Africa. But it is us gentleman that have made it a thriving business.
So it is up to us to see that as a business it becomes unprofitable again.

Equiano I thought I would never see you again.

Sis I did not like it when they put sacks over our heads. I could not breath. They made us walk so far, so far.

Equiano I will kill them before I let them harm you.

Sis Don't be afraid - I had a dream that you would become a chief also and have slaves of your own like father did. Then you can buy me back.

Equiano I will find a chance to run away - I'm sure we cannot have travelled far from our home.

Sis Maybe father will send warriors to find us. As long as we can stay together.

Equiano I will not let us be parted. I promise you. I will look after you. We will see our home again. Don't be afraid.

Sis I will always remember our times together.

A sailor enters and pulls her roughly away

Sis Wait. Don't take me. He is my brother. Don't part us, please don't part us.

Sis screams as she is pulled away.
Equiano tries to follow but he is chained to a post

Equiano What could I do? I promised but I could do nothing, They took her - bound. And I was overcome by grief. The pain was so intense I thought I would die. I grieved for days, ate nothing but what they forced on me.

Clarkson Did you ever see your sister again?

Equiano No, nor have I ever found out what has become of her.
My sister, my sister - everything that has happened to me since has not eased the pain that your tearing from me caused. All the pleasure I have had since then has been tainted by your pain.

Clarkson I have failed you Equiano and your sister. And millions more. Every day armies of the dispossessed arrive at those African ports and are incarcerated into those wretched forts on the coast. Wives are split from husbands - children from fathers, brothers from sisters. Half will die on the journey, even more once they arrive on the plantations and are seasoned for work. Husbands will watch children being beaten, wives raped, brothers abused.

Equiano Then stand up. Fight on. The battle is lost but not the war. Fight on.

Clarkson With what? I am almost bankrupt.

Equiano Will your friends not help?

Clarkson How can I ask for money at a time such as this? All England is ablaze with talk of the revolution in France. I am known to agree with the rebels. Everywhere there is talk of traitors and sedition.

Equiano You were never afraid before.

Clarkson I never had a price on my head before. It can rattle the most determined of spirits let me tell you. They would take me for treason if they could.

Equiano You said you would give your life.

Clarkson Spend my life. Spend it. And that is what I have done.

Clarkson stands.

Clarkson Gentlemen. You are all at this meeting today because you believe that the slave trade is morally evil. What shall we do then? We can petition government and we will - I can present evidence to parliamentary committees and I will. Wilberforce can speak in the house and he will. But more than this you the people of Great Britain have a remedy in your own hands. These islands consume more sugar than the rest of Europe put together. If a family using five pounds of sugar a week and the equivalent in rum would abstain for 21 months the murder of one fellow creature would be prevented. Abstention by 38000 families would stop the slave trade.

Equiano Can you still hear them?

Clarkson Who?

Equiano My brothers. Crying. Listen.

Clarkson We relied on public meetings to stir up interest. These have been banned. The Abolition Committee can no longer meet more than twice a year. And the authorities are out to get my life. If this wretched illness doesn't take me first. What would you have me do?

Equiano I am still in chains

Clarkson I travelled 35000 miles on horseback. I have raised petitions, collected witness statements, spoken at meetings, raised committees, written hundreds of letters and pamphlets. Yet once again Wilberforce's motion to the Commons to take up the abolition question has been lost.

Equiano But we are still dying.

Clarkson Don't you think I know that? Don't you think the cause has taken over every waking minute of my life My mind has been bent like a bow to one gloomy subject and has affected my whole system.

Equiano You said you would give your whole life.

Clarkson I have. There is nothing left - physically, mentally or financially. 8 years. 8 years and nothing to show.

Equiano But we are still dying.

The door bursts open and Katherine enters

Kath Thomas. I'm sorry but I could stand it no longer. You are in here shouting and railing. It is so unlike you. My brother is on his way directly. I sent word to him

Clarkson Katherine!

Kath You look terrible Thomas.

Clarkson Kind of you to say so.

Kath Here drink a little of this. It should ease some of the shaking.

Clarkson I am obliged to you Katherine but I would prefer to be left alone.

Kath Alone you shall not be. Are we not good friends? Have we not been good friends in this cause of all causes. It is obvious to me you need looking after.

Clarkson And you would be my nurse?

Katherine My dear friend. I am, we are here for you. Yes now things seem a little bleak. But once you are rested that will pass.

Clarkson Do you not realise. I am not just tired. I have giddiness and cramps. Ringing in my ears, my hands tremble, cold sweats suddenly come upon me. I am easily out of breath, my powers of thought and recollection decline daily. Yet still he speaks to me.

Equiano It is dark, so dark. We are laid out, cramped, trembling in the dark. I am chained by the wrist to a man beside me, but I cannot see him. I hear him groaning. And whispering curses in a dialect I do not recognise. He smells of faeces and sweat. I smell of urine and vomit. The stench makes me retch until there is nothing left in my stomach. The lack of food makes me tremble and shiver, I want to scream but my throat is parched and no sound comes. My ankles are chained and I feel the fresh blood on my wrists where the iron bracelets have rubbed them raw. My whole body cries out for relief.

Equiano lays on the floor and starts to moan in pain. He pulls a blanket over him.

Clarkson See, he torments me still.

Katherine Who does, who do you speak of?

Clarkson Do you not hear him?

Katherine There is no one here Thomas. It is all in your head. You must rest. I will see if my brother has come.

Katherine exits

Equiano groans again.

Clarkson What's the matter?

Equiano I don't know. I feel so cold. So cold.

Clarkson Do you want another blanket?

Equiano My mouth is burning. And I cant focus. Do you know where my wife is?
Please you must fetch my wife, Thomas.

Clarkson What's her name? Tell me and I will send for her.

Equiano Suzanne Cullen. From Soham in Cambridgeshire.
I cannot die without her.

Clarkson You're not dying, my friend. Just a chill. You will recover.

Equiano Thomas, fetch my wife.

Clarkson You will be well soon. Then you can go to her.

Equiano You must find her for me. She is beautiful and I need her to comfort
me.

Clarkson Is she a freed slave?

Equiano She is a free woman. A white woman of good family. I married well
Clarkson. It proves all barriers can be overcome. You can use this
in your arguments. It proves our equality.

Clarkson And enrage some of the more bigoted of our detractors.

Equiano It has its precedents. Look at Othello

Clarkson I'm not sure that is a good example. It didn't work out well for
him.

Equiano But it will work out well for me.

Clarkson Not if you married her just to make a point.

Equiano She loves me. And she is a good woman. She cares a great deal for me
and the work.

Clarkson And do you care for her?

Equiano I learnt a long time ago that it was not wise to care too much for
anybody. They teach us this, our white masters, It is an early
lesson.

Elle is hauled in by a sailor and flung roughly onto the floor
beside Equiano. She blinks in the light.

Equiano What is this place? Are we in hell?

Elle Yes. Or the closest to it.

There are screams and the sounds of a whip.

Equiano What is it? What is happening?

Elle Two brothers tried to jump over board last night.
One drowned. The other is receiving his punishment.

Equiano Are you on your own?

Elle I am now. My husband died in the fort on the coast. I am sure of that. I looked and looked when we were taken out onto the ship but I could not see him. We had been married for five years. He was a good man. My daughter is lost. The baby died a few days ago. She was only 18 months old. I had nothing to feed her.

Equiano I'm sorry.

Elle I am not. She will be spared from any more suffering. And me as well. Now when I am down in the stench of that hold, I do not have to worry how she will breath. Or whether when we get to land the whites will use her for their pleasure. What about you?

Equiano I had a sister. We were separated. I do not know where she is now.

Elle You are only a boy. Keep out of trouble and maybe you will survive.

Equiano Stay with me. I am afraid of the whites. They seem to have no natural feelings of mercy.

Elle I do not think they see us as human like them. Otherwise how could they humiliate us so?

Equiano Do they have no women like themselves?

Elle Their women are kept away from the vessels. That is why they are so hungry for our woman and girls. But they are brutes.

A sailor forces Elle to her feet.

Elle is stood in the room. The sailor looks her up and down.

Sailor Time to dance my friends.

Equiano What is he saying?

Sailor Time to dance.

He cracks his whip.

Equiano What is he saying?

Elle We have to dance.

Equiano Why?

Elle It is exercise.

The sailor cracks his whip again and there is the sound of a drum beating time.

Sailor Dance damn you, dance you heathen scum.

Equiano begins to dance.

Sailor (to Elle) Not you. I have other exercise for you.

Equiano No, stay with me. Please.

Sailor Get back, get back.

He beats Equiano away. Elle protects him.

Elle Its all right. Don't be afraid for me. I have nothing left to loose.

The sailor drags Elle off. She does not scream.

Equiano sits on the floor rocking backwards and forwards

Equiano Who will help us now? What sacrifice can I make?
Were all the libations in the world poured out would you see our sorrow and return us to our home?
Or find my sister for me?

Joseph enters

Joseph Clarkson my friend. I came as soon as I could.

Clarkson You should not have troubled yourself on my account.

Katherine enters

Katherine Oh brother, I am pleased to see you. He is in much turmoil of mind and body. I think he has taken the last Commons defeat very badly and seems little inclined to continue.

Joseph He does not look well. And what of those swellings on his face.

Katherine Apparently he was caught in a storm in the Bristol Channel.

Joseph You need rest my friend. You can stay as long as you wish. And I would advise keeping a low profile for a little while anyway. Your views on the French revolution are causing consternation.

Clarkson Its over Plymley. I will not live to see the trade abolished. Now Dundas has scuppered all our hopes.

Joseph You know that Henry Dundas sees your involvement as little short of treason.

Clarkson He has his opinion and is welcome to it.

Joseph My friend, he is the home secretary. He took Wilberforce to task on the matter.

Clarkson I'm sure he could cope.

Joseph It did not help that he knew you had attended dinner at the Crown and Anchor to celebrate the second anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. I am afraid you did make an enemy then. Events were against us. News of the uprising in Saint Domingue created the worst of all problems.

The spectre of spreading revolution terrifies all of them - you know that. But the people are still behind us. Your paper on the uprising generated a petition 9 and a half feet long.

Clarkson And yet in a moment Henry Dundas's amendment to insert the word gradually into Wilberforce's motion destroyed all we had carefully built. He has always been against us but he chose the perfect moment to launch his attack.

Dundas I am as you know a warm friend to abolition even in the face of

its deluded petitioners. That itinerant clergyman who in spite of appearances raises a suspicion to his loyalties - we know he supports all that happens across the channel in France and does his cause no good - they have extorted signatures from the sick, the indignant, the traveller. Gentlemen, we all know that we live in dangerous times and such men make it all the more difficult for this motion to succeed. However I support my right honourable friend Wilberforce in all but the means to the end. Yes the trade should be banned and probably slavery too but moderation must be the rule gentleman. That's sets makes the British out from the rest of the European rabble - our moderation. My motion is to gradually abolish the British slave trade and this motion I commend to the house.

Loud cheers

Katherine Please Thomas. Do not give up. You are bigger than this man. Than all these men. The cause is still a noble one and I still believe we can succeed. If only I was a man I would ride beside you whatever the weather or the terrain. I would not leave your side night or day.

Clarkson Dear Katherine. I believe you would. But my choice is stark and it is this. And you can and should advise me on this. For I trust your judgment as would trust any of my male colleagues. Do I carry on almost certainly toward ruin and an untimely grave or do I retire to be tormented in my own mind and censured by others for abandoning the cause.

Katherine You have nothing to torment yourself with. You have worked tirelessly and wholeheartedly.

Clarkson He is always here you know.

Katherine Who? Who is here?

Clarkson Equiano. He waits in the corner there to upbraid me.

Katherine Your illness brings you delusions. You need care and rest. That is all. And some ointment for those bruises. You will stay with us until you are fully recovered.

Clarkson But it is not just exhaustion that prevents me. I do not like to speak of it but I must. I have no funds left. I have spent all in the work.

Katherine Then funds must be found. I will speak to my brother.

Joseph I don't understand Clarkson. You are a man of humble tastes and I understood the Abolition Committee was supporting your travel expenses.

Clarkson You have no idea how expensive it is to provide witnesses to the House. They have to be brought by coach, and put in accommodation. And although the committee gives them a small allowance they are often not satisfied.

Joseph Are you telling me that you make up the difference? Then in some respects you only have yourself to blame. All those coach loads of witness. No wonder you are drained. But don't worry I will set about the task immediately. Meanwhile I suggest further solution to your health problems. Complete rest in the Lake District. I have a friend who has a cottage at Ullswater - a Quaker called Wilkinson. He writes of how beautiful it is there just now. I will write to him directly.

Katherine I am sorry you are leaving us so soon.

Clarkson I don't think I have yet agreed.

Joseph Of course you agree. Katherine and I can come to visit. And I have a feeling that awful times are approaching and those will be safest who are found in cottages. Come Katherine. Let us leave Mr Clarkson to his rest while we sort out some details.

Joseph and Kath exit
Equiano groans again.

Clarkson Take heart. This is just a passing illness.

Equiano Not so. I know poisons. In my country we are extremely cautious of poison. I have seen many such deaths. And healings. Our doctors have the arts. But not so in your country. And the poison goes too deep. Oh how I wish my mother was here. She was ever fond of me.

Clarkson Hush, take this drink. You are feverish.

Equiano In my country during her periods a woman had to remain separate but I could not bare to be parted from her so would remain in the house made for that purpose with her until we were both purified.

Clarkson You need a doctor my friend.

Equiano I need to make my will.

Clarkson You have wealth enough to require a will?

Equiano My Narrative has done well. The ninth edition will be published next year. Susanna and her daughter will be well supported.

Clarkson You have a daughter?

Equiano Ann Maria Vassa.

Clarkson Vassa?

Equiano I married using my legal name. The name Captain Pascal gave to me. Gustavus Vassa. That is what they do to us. Take our names to make us their own. And that is not all they take. Dignity, family, homeland. We are left with nothing. Stripped to the bone.

There are sounds of the market continuing and bids being offered.
A slave owner enters with Elle. He stands her on the cube and hauls Equiano up next to her

Owner What am I bid, what am I bid for these fine specimens?
A female negro about 18 years old. Name Elle. Recently given birth. No sign of disease. Good teeth. Fine breasts.
Negro man name Samuel. Mark to one shoulder. Strong legs and buttocks. A good worker.
Negro boy. 12 years of age. Name Jacob. No disease.
What am I bid? Come on gentlemen, give me a starting price.
You sir, you want another look at the female slave. Certainly sir.

Owner pulls Elle off

Equiano cowers in the corner of the room.

Richard enters

Richard Hello there. Hello. Are you all right.

Equiano peeps out of his blanket and hides back.

Richard My name is Richard Baker. Captain tells me he has named you Gustavus Vassa

Equiano My name is Jacob.

Richard Not on this ship my friend. You must not be resistant to the name. It has noble connections. You are named after a great king of Sweden who led his people to freedom from the Danes.

Equiano My name is Jacob.

Richard I expect you will get used to it.

Equiano I will only answer to Jacob. I have told the Captain so.

Richard And received many a cuff around the ears for your trouble I do not doubt. I don't expect your mother gave you the name Jacob, so you have no real reason to hang on to it. How old are you?

Equiano 12

Richard Me I'm 16 years. So as the eldest you must respect me. My first time at sea too. So we have that in common.

Equiano I came from Africa on a ship, so we are not the same.

Richard I mean as a sailor. Why are you hiding down here?

Equiano They plan to eat me?

Richard Who do?

Equiano The sailors. The captain. I hear them talk.

Richard Eat you. That is ridiculous.

Captain Pascal enters

Pascal Vassa! Gustavus Vassa! Come here boy.

Equiano doesn't move

Pascal Vassa come here!

Equiano My name is Jacob.

Pascal gives him a cuff.

Pascal You are on my ship now Vassa. So listen and listen carefully. This is a long passage don't you know and we are short of provisions. I cannot have my men go hungry so if we do not see another ship soon we will have to eat you.

Equiano No, please sir. I am not good to eat.

Pascal Really. I would have thought you were used to it.

Are you not all practicing cannibals in your Country?

Equiano

No sir.

Pascal

Well be that as it may. We will keep you clean and plumped up.

Richard

He will not eat you.

Equiano

Why can you be sure?

Richard

If they eat you, who would they have to sacrifice to the great sea spirits?

Equiano

There had been a storm the night before and as the waves were very high I thought the ruler of the sea was angry. Then some strange sea creatures appeared called grampus or whales and then the waves died away so I believed that the white people would have to make sacrifice to this creature. Who better than me?

Pascal

Richard Baker here. We would eat him, but he is far too skinny.

Richard

Come Vassa, we are only joking with you.

Pascal

Come boy. I mean you no harm. After all, I paid forty pounds for you. An expensive meal if I were to eat you, don't you think.

Equiano

Am I going home?

Pascal

London, this ship is bound for London. A trader.

Equiano

And are there slaves in the hold?

Pascal

Good lord no. You can smell em a mile off. Would not put my sailors through that stench.

Richard

Captain Pascal is a navy lieutenant.

Pascal

And I mean to get back to a war ship soon. Miss the guns, the chase. You'd like a war ship wouldn't you Richard?

Richard

Very much sir.

Pascal

And you boy. If we don't eat you, maybe you can give us good sport. Have you ever fought with fists? Well, you will. We will put wagers on you boy. If you fight well, we may not eat you after all.

(To Richard)

Look after him. Find him a good birth on the sails. And don't let the others tease him too much.

Pascal exits

Equiano

What does he mean to do with me?

Richard

I think he means you as a gift for some of his friends in England. If we can find a shark or some other fish to stave off our hunger.

Equiano

Richard Baker was not a cruel boy. He was just teasing. He did not know how troubled I was in my mind. We became the best friends. If it hadn't been for his companionship I do not think I would have survived the journey.

Richard Vassa, wait for me here. I will return very soon.

Richard exits

Equiano I had many names before Gustavus Vassa. Michael on the ship that brought me to the West Indies. Jacob in the house of my first master. It was my job to fan him as he fell off to sleep. Once he was asleep I could explore my surroundings and it all at once amazed and frightened me.

Equiano acts out now what he talks of.

Equiano A watch hung on the chimney. It made such a ticking noise I thought it to be alive and was afraid it might inform the master about anything I did. Then I observed a picture which appeared constantly to follow me with its eyes. I thought it was white men's magic - some way they had of keeping their great men when they died to offer them libation. As I wondered, the slave woman appeared who did the cooking. I would have tried to speak but she was loaded down with all kinds of iron machines - one on her head which locked down her tongue. She scurried away when I approached.

Clarkson I have such instruments in my travelling case gentlemen and I would like you to take a look at them now. These can be bought in any ironmongers shop in Bristol, Liverpool and London. I would not wish to use them on a dumb animal and yet they are regularly in use amongst the slave masters in the West Indian islands.

Enter Sharp

Equiano This is my good friend Granville Sharp.
Mr Sharp this is Mr Thomas Clarkson.

Clarkson Ah the famous lawyer.

Sharp Pleased to meet you sir.
Are you for us or against us?

Equiano Mr Clarkson has written an essay.

Sharp Good for you - what about?

Clarkson It is called An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species particularly the African.

Sharp Snappy title. Any good?

Equiano He won first prize for it at Cambridge.

Clarkson It answered a question set by the vice chancellor Dr Peckard - Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?

Sharp And your conclusion?

Clarkson Well, obviously I used many arguments.....

Sharp But basically?

Clarkson No.

Sharp Eureka a convert at last. And what brought you to this conclusion?

Clarkson I must admit that when I started out I was totally ignorant on the subject. I saw it purely as an intellectual challenge and sought to win the prize. However as I immersed my self in the Quaker writings on the subject especially Benzerat's Some Historical Account of Guinea...

Sharp Yes yes go on!

Clarkson I found myself immersed in such a heart sickening topic that I found I thought about it day and night. It had such impact I could not get the thoughts from my mind. The facts overwhelmed me. I sometimes never closed my eyes for grief.

Sharp If only the impact on all men was the same.

Clarkson Maybe it would be if only they knew the full horrors. I am a clergyman and an intellectual and yet this was the first that I had known.

Sharp Our friends the Quakers have been banging on about this subject for years. 1671 George Fox encouraged his fellow Quakers to desist slavery.

Clarkson Yes but with the best will in the world they are too quite about it. Their attitude of causing no one harm or ill will does them proud but they have been working far too much behind the scenes.

Sharp I have tried to tell them.

Clarkson Anyway, as I wrote it became not so much a trial for academic reputation as the production of a work that might be useful to injured Africa.

Sharp So you mean to publish and be dammed.

Clarkson Exactly. After I had read my winning essay to the Senate house in Cambridge I was riding back to London still absorbed by my subject. Above Wadesmill I took a rest by the side of the road in much agitation of spirit. I felt that if this all were true someone should take up the cause and work to end it.

Sharp And you think that person is yourself?

Clarkson It has taken me a year. More than a year of deliberations. I had a master of arts degree and a future in the church in front of me. Yet I could not shake what I had learnt from me. I decided to translate my essay from the Latin and have it published.

Sharp And who has taken it up?

Clarkson James Philips

Sharp The Quaker. I tell you, I think our Friends are the answer.

Clarkson In what way?

Sharp You obviously don't realise that there is quite a body of Quaker activists. They have 50,000 members and a yearly London meeting to promote total abolition of the slave trade

Clarkson Yet the whole world remains in ignorance.

Sharp I agree. So they need a higher profile. Someone outside of the Quaker circle who is not afraid to rattle the public cage and is prepared to make it their life's work.

Clarkson Like you.

Sharp I dabble sir, merely dabble.

Clarkson I have heard of your dabbling. The case you put forward for James Somerset is legendary.

Sharp To be honest Clarkson. it was something I could get my teeth into. I did not want to follow my father into the church and as apprentice to a linen draper I was bored ridged. I have worked as a clerk in the ordinance office. Equally tedious. But the cause of slavery now. That was a big subject.

There is knocking on the door.

Sharp goes to open it.

James Somerset falls in.

James Mr Sharp? Is you Mr Sharp?

Sharp Granville Sharp at your service. And you are?

James You must hide me Mr Sharp. They coming after me. They comin and you must hide me.

Sharp Who are coming?

James My master Mr Stewart. He never give up. If he find me, he will kill me.

Sharp Is he behind you now?

James He will kill me Mr Sharp. If he find me he will kill me.

Sharp All right. Take your breath man. Sit down and take your breath. Here a glass of brandy. Now, where have you come from?

James Prison

Sharp You've escaped jail?

James No, not escaped, let out. My trial is very soon. I need your help Mr Sharp. I heard what you did for Jonathon Strong.

Sharp Did you now. Well it wasn't much let me tell you. Less than I wanted. And the man is now dead.

James Yes, but not through anything you do. You try to help him. You found him in the street after his master left him for dead. You helped him back to

health and got him freed.

Sharp For all the good it did him.

James He would have died in the street. You let him taste a few years of dignity - free from beatings That would have been everything.

Sharp So what is your story? Why are you in jail?

James I was a slave in Virginia to one Charles Stewart. He was a bad master and a bad man so I took my chance and hid on a ship coming to London. I soon found a number of men like me and we lived on the street. It was cold and hard but still better than slavery to that evil man. But then just as I was thinking I had escaped he came to find me and put me in prison while he got permission to ship me to Jamaica. I don't want to go back to slavery. I cant go back to slavery. I would rather die, Mr sharp.

Slave Trader And how are we to keep them in check? They are savages used to living as savages. They do not understand reason. They lie, cheat, steal, rape and run away. Only the other day I had to cut off a negro mans leg so that others should not be encouraged by his actions

Sharp How can you sir answer before God for such an act. Surly the Christian doctrine states that we should do to others as we would have others do to us..

Slave Trader What do I care? I do what I have to do to live in this world. And there is no doubt it stopped him running away. The punishment should fit the crime

Equiano I have seem a negro man staked to the ground and castrated for having lain with a white woman Yet the sailors take their fill of black women, even children, all the time.

Sharp It is very common in several of the islands for the slaves to be branded with the initials of their masters name especially St Kitts and a load of heavy hooks hung about their necks. The iron muzzle, the ankle chains and the thumb screw are applied for the slightest faults.

Equiano I have seen a negro beaten till his bones were broken for letting a pot boil over. Another pinned to the ground and dripped on his back with sealing wax.

ST page 125 329th Act of Barbados reads 'That if any negro or other slave under punishment by his master or his order for running away or any such crime or misdemeanour towards his master unfortunately shall suffer in life or member and no person whatever shall be liable to fine.

Sharp This is unacceptable.

ST They are not sir like you and me and therefore

not under the same jurisdiction. They are an expendable commodity. Nothing more. To be replaced like a worn out part.

Sharp Surely if they were better treated they would not be so expendable?

ST With such a plentiful supply what is the point?

Equiano 20,000 new negros are needed annually to fill up the vacant places of the dead.

ST They bring it on themselves. They could reproduce their own stock but they refuse to do so. The women that do become pregnant miscarry - deliberately I have no doubt.

Equiano I asked some of the men who often go several miles back to their wives late at night after a wearied days labour with very little food why they live so far apart. Their answer was that when their master chose to punish the women they make the husbands flog them and this they could not bare to do.

Sharp It has been noted sir that you have many mulattos working for you in your fields.

ST I admit they are the product of my own loins.

Sharp Your children?

ST No my home produced beasts of burden. I replenish my stock without paying a penny more for their purchase. And they are treated no different to my other slaves let me assure you.

Equiano In other words cruelly.

ST They are mine twice over. I can treat them how I like. Anyway, you are a fine one to talk. You come from a country that invented slavery and you criticise me. You admit in your book that your own father had slaves.

Equiano Yes that is true. My father was an elder or chief. These met together to decide the fate of those punished for crimes. The proceedings were generally short. The law of retaliation prevailed ie being made a slave or submitting a member of his family to be a slave. Adultery was punished by slavery or death.

ST I rest my case.

Equiano But our slaves are treated as members of the household. They work but are well fed and rested. When I was captured by enemy tribesman and made a slave I was put as a companion to the son of the house. and treated almost as well as he. However, once I was sold to the white men, things changed. As I neared the coast my treatment became more de humanising, I had never seen such cruelty as the whites have towards both black and white. Everyone becomes contaminated by the corruption of this trade.

Equiano And the case. Mr Sharp, the case of James Somerset. We won.

You are a genius.

Sharp Ever since the case of Jonathon Strong I had been studying the law. Everything I could lay my hands on. I knew the arguments. This could be a landmark victory. And Lord Chief Justice Mansfield was presiding over the case. A conservative but firmly independent. I knew he would not be bribed by the slave owners and that he would make a fair ruling.

Equiano And the decision is decisive.

Sharp Yes. He ruled that Stewart had no right to transport Somerset back to Jamaica. A precedent has been set. No runaway slave can be forced back into slavery if he set foot on English soil. A victory my friend but in the battle not in the war. We need concerted effort, a committee in short formed to bring about total abolition. And we need evidence. Lots and lots of evidence. There is so much ignorance my friend. People turn a blind eye because it happens so far away. They think it does not affect them. We must show them that it does.

Equiano Mr Sharp. Mr Sharp you must look at this.

Sharp What is it Equiano?

Equiano The Zong - in the newspaper.

Sharp The Zong - who or what is the Zong?

Equiano It is a slaver Mr Sharp. A slave ship. There has been wickedness done on this ship Mr Sharp.

Sharp There is wickedness done on every slave ship my friend. That is why I confine myself to individual cases.

Equiano I think Mr Sharp, that this might be the case you are looking for. The one that will turn all eyes on the trade and see it for what it is.

Sharp (reading) One Captain Collingwood discovered that many of his crew and his cargo had succumbed to disease.

Enter Collingwood

Collingwood Are they all like this Kelsall?

Kelsell A number sir. And the crew are suffering likewise. Its a worry sir as we are not long into our journey and the stench below decks is too much for the men to stand sir.

Collingwood What does the ships doctor say? This is my profits we are talking of. Does he think anything can be done?

Kelsell The ship was overloaded sir. The doctor says 70 have already died and many more will not recover sir.

Collingwood Then we cut our losses I think. Put them over the side Kelsell.

Kelsell The dead have already gone sir.

Collinwood Not the dead. The sick. Sick niggers are no good to me. Take up resources and I wont get a penny for them even if they do survive the journey.

Kellsell But sir. Its murder.

Collingwood Of course its not murder. They are cargo and cargo have to make money. They are worth more to me off the ship than on.

Kellsell But if its profits your thinking of wont it be better to wait. Some might survive yet.

Collingwood I'll say we were short of water. That we had to jettison the cargo for the good of the crew. I can make an insurance claim if that holds. I cant claim on them if they die on board. Natural death means no claim. Set to it Kellsell, 50 will do. See how we go with 50.

Kellsell I cant do it sir.

Collingwood Its an order Kellsell. Pick 50 and throw the baggage over.

Kellsell Its murder sir. I cant do it.

Collingwood Then I will find sailors who can.

Equano (reads) Collingwood informed his crew that the water supply was running low. With the exception of James Kellsell they all obliged and 132 Africans perished. When the ship finally got to Jamaica it was found to have 400 gallons of water on board. Nevertheless the insurance claim was ruled in favour of the plaintiffs Gregson, Collingwood and co. Soliciter General John Kee declared This is a case of chattels blacks are goods or property. The case is the same as if horses had been thrown overboard

Clarkson So you took up the case?

Sharp I appealed to Lord Mansfield, unsuccessfully as it turned out. But this is not the point. For every case that comes to trial the profile of slavery comes more into the public eye. I believe Clarkson my friend that the time is right. We have mountains to climb and dragons to fight. Yet there is a gathering of opinion and I believe that we owe it to people like our friend Equiano here and to ourselves to take up this cause. But be warned. A little labour now and then will not suffice. It will be all or nothing my friend. All or nothing.

Clarkson I knew from what Sharp had said that this was a life long commitment. And I was not without my ambitions. I had a thirst after worldly interest and honours. I knew my family would be disappointed that I would sacrifice my church career. Yet as I turned over possible exceptions my enthusiasm like a flash of lightning consumed them. I knew what I had to do.

Sharp Gentlemen of the committee. We are met today to

hear the evidence that our friend Clarkson has been gathering. As I may remind you our aim is to get a parliamentary enquiry to bring the subject to the public notice and in the first instance we have distributed Clarkson's essay amongst MPs. However, hard facts are as important as opinion and this is what our friends have been gathering.
Mr Clarkson

Clarkson Thank you Mr Sharp. Gentleman as you know we are not only fighting ignorance, we are fighting a hydra headed monster nursed by the worldly interests of many bodies of men. It will not be enough to argue that the slave trade is evil unchristian and an affront to humanity and dignity. It is all these things and more. But there is so much wealth at stake, that we must be as wise as serpents and attack on many fronts.

ST It is well known that Africans are of a lower intelligence and therefore suited to slavery. Blumenbach study of human skulls indicates that the five types or races that make up the human race the negro are at the bottom of the scale

Clarkson I will never forget the first African trader I boarded. The Lively. Its cargo of ivory beeswax palm oil and melegueta pepper almost overwhelmed me. And then I was showed beautifully rich dyed cloth woven by skilled African hands, I have purchased a number of samples which you see before you. If ever proof were needed of the skill and humanity of the African here it is.

ST They only respond to brute force. If we were not so free with the whip how would we get them to work. The negro is known to be lazy and uninterested in work.

Clarkson Adam Smith in Wealth of nations argues that the work done by free men is always cheaper in the end as he has no interest in doing more than that which is squeezed out of him.

ST And what of the sailors? If God forbid the slave trade was outlawed think how many men would be out of work.

Clarkson It is more dangerous to work a slaver than a whaling ship. The toll on the crew is immense. We have gained access to customs records and have discovered that half the sailors never return and one fifth perish from disease.

Sharp A good argument. A very good argument. Sailors suffer as well as Africans. This might make parliament sit up and take notice.

Clarkson I have only gathered evidence in London. I need to go further a field. Bristol, Liverpool. These are the major ports. If I can get eye witness accounts, sailors testimonies to back up my research. And I have other news. I have spoken to Wilberforce. He has read my essay and thought long and hard on it.

Sharp Rumour had it that his conversion to Christianity was giving him cause to doubt his role

in parliament.

Clarkson I determined to approach him at Langtons dinner party. I knew that the talk would turn to the slave trade. When it did I was ready with my samples and my figures on the mortality of seaman.

Sharp So he defiantly agreed to speak in the House for us.

Clarkson He said he would if no more suitable person could be found.

Sharp Then the time has come. My proposal is to launch a nationwide movement led by a London based committee. We shall be called the Society for the Effecting the abolition of slavery.

Clarkson Do you not think we should tackle one thing at a time? Slavery is so entrenched within all nations. If we can abolish the trade, slavery will follow. And it is a more specific task.

Sharp I will never give in on this issue but for now to effect success I will back down. Effecting the abolition of the slave trade it is, my friend.

Clarkson I will speak at meetings wherever I find supporters, inspire and cajole. We will make this a nationwide campaign and we will not be ignored. Lives depend on it. Let us shake them up gentlemen. Let us shake them up from their very roots. And such a public surge of opinion will shatter their foundations that it will bring this evil trade crashing about their ears.

End of Act 1

Act 2

Banana Boat Song

Lights up to

Equiano couched down sleeping. He suddenly wakes screaming.

Richard comes to him.

Richard Wake up wake up Vassa, you were only dreaming.

Equiano Richard?

Richard Here, have a little water.

Equiano Leave me alone.

Richard Come on my friend. This is no way to carry on. You are on The Illustrious Bee now.

Equiano I was dreaming of the slaver that took me from Africa. There was a woman who was kind to me. I don't know what happened to her.

Richard Take some food wont you. To revive your spirits.

Equiano I cannot eat . I can still smell the stench in the hold. Here the groans of the dying. The screams of those being whipped. Do you know that we were all chained in our own shit and vomit for days on end. We are not animals. I cannot eat.

Richard Of course you can. If you don't you will become weak, the captain will be displeased and want to sell you on.

Equiano He means to sell me on anyway.

Richard He means you as a present to some of his friends in London. But he is a good captain. If you work well maybe he will keep you himself and you can learn to be a sailor. Would you not like that?

Equiano I know nothing of it. The country where I was born had no sea. I think it is all magic arts and spirits who will eat me in the end if the whites do not first.

Richard They will not eat you.
Come on I want to show you something.

Richard takes Equiano and gives him a telescope to look through.

Equiano This is magic arts. The clouds appear as land.

Richard laughs.

Equiano When I was in my fathers house my mother taught me all she knew. I was hungry to learn. But she had this knowledge in her head. Handed down to her from the ancestors. White men are different. They ask questions of these

He holds up a book.

Equiano I have asked questions of it too. And listened but it does not tell me the answers. Perhaps it only speaks the white mans language

Richard You have to learn to read. I can teach you.

Equiano Where is this ship headed?

Richard London.

Equiano I do not want to be sold again in the slave market

Richard That wont happen. Not in London. Captain Pascal is a good man.

Equiano To you. But will he be a good man to me?

Clarkson Gentlemen, I have been on a slaver. This is the picture that I have had drawn up to show you how the cargo is stowed. There is three feet square for each adult. Slaves are chained hand and foot like herrings in a barrel with the result that putrid and fatal disorders occur. This picture of The Brooke shows 482 bodies no space has been allowed for necessary tubs. We are looking to cut this number to 454. I would like to point out that on a previous voyage the Brookes carried 609 bodies. It has been argued to me that traders will be ruined if they cannot ship two adults or three smaller persons per ton but their own figures show better profits from voyages carrying fewer slaves.

Enter James Arnold

James Mr Clarkson. James Arnold - ships mate.

Clarkson Mr Arnold thank you for meeting me. I know it could be dangerous for you.

James I'm not worried Mr Clarkson. Not after what happened to poor William Lines. They need to be showed for the bastards they Are, scuse my language.

Clarkson You are a surgeons mate are you not?

James I am that.

Clark And how many voyages have you made?

James Enough. I can let you have my journal. I have kept it from the first day.

Clark And you have witnessed cruelty to slaves during the voyage?

James Savage beatings sir so as you wouldn't stomach, and for the least thing. They gets chained down in that hold for 16 out of 24 hrs in the heat and the stench. No wonder some of them think its better to risk jumping overboard.

Clark And what happens when they are caught?

James Sometimes they are cut. Sometimes beaten with cat o nine tails till you can scarcely recognise it's a human. Rebellion is worse. If any rise up there is no mercy. I seen one slave fatally scalded with hot fat. Another nailed to the deck in the sun and then nailed alive into a coffin.

Clark And can you tell me what happened to William Lines?

James He couldn't take it. He wouldn't beat them or take the women. He said it wasn't right. He was beaten so bad he tried to jump so was chained to the deck for the rest of the voyage. I'll take you to see him sir, if you like. His lodging isn't far. But it would have to be today sir as I don't think he's long for this world.

Clark He was right, I have never seen such injuries. So I took the ships officers to court. Unfortunately we lost through lack of witnesses. But while in the court I knew they had it in for me. If looks could kill.

Enter Currie

Currie So, we have in our midst the great Rev Clarkson who comes to Liverpool to deride us over something of which he knows next to nothing.

Clark Sir, I have spent many hours talking to sailors surgeons and ships mates. I have studied records and taken down witness statements. If sailors are being treated thus does the public think that the negro is being treated any better. This is a trade in cruelty that dehumanises those that partake in it. It destroys a mans humanity so that he will perform any task however barbaric.

Currie But have you men who will testify?

Clark Certainly

Currie I doubt that. And if you have they are the drunken ramblings of the occupants of The Kings Head. And you sir have never been to Africa so how do you know what goes on?

Clark I have the testimony of Dr Falconbridge,

Currie A surgeon?

Clark He was on a slaver for four voyages. His records make me sick to read them.
He gave up the slavers because he could not stomach the cruelty. I have collected the names of more than 20000 seaman. I have spoken to every one. And my petition carries 11000 names. Your trade is numbered my friend. We will succeed because the cause is just. Today the African drinks the cup of sorrow and drinks it at our hands. How can we pray for Gods mercy when we show none to them.. This is an evil trade and I will work unceasingly until it is stamped out.

There is an uproar of voices drowning Clarkson out.

Katherine And they nearly killed you for your pains.

Clark My life is not important.

Kath I think it is if we are to succeed. Were you not afraid?

Clark Of course. I was alone on the pier head and as those men came towards me I was sure they intended to throw me into the waves but I pushed through them and escaped as you see me now. While God has work for me, he will keep me from harm.

Kath But you cannot do it all on your own.

Clark Are you suggesting that you can tour the shipyards with me?

Kath If I were a man I most certainly would.
But no, we need a nationwide campaign. We need to stir up public opinion. We need to motivate women.

Clark Women?

Kath We have no voice in parliament but we have influence with our men folk. There needs to be something. We need a public campaign. And a slogan. And Mr Wedgwood has come up with the very thing.

Clark Am I not a man and a brother?

Kath Don't you think it is fitting? There are plates and buttons and broaches. We can wear them and make our campaign felt without having to say a word.

Equiano Am I not a man and a brother? This is the question I put to you my friends. The West Indian slave owners would have you believe that we are but animals, that we wouldn't know what to do with freedom if we had it. That we need their whips to keep us in line. But I stand before you today

as one of the many examples of Africans that have been taught to read and write, who have worked to earn their freedom. Who through their own skill and ability have worked their way up in society aspiring to be an Englishman and succeeding. Read my narrative gentleman. I do not ask you to work for us but to work with us. I was born a prince in my own country. I stand before you a prince now.

Kath Sir, it was good of you to join myself and my family for a meal.

Equiano It was kind of you to invite me.

Kath That speech. It was so moving. I cannot tell you. I had no idea of the plight of the slaves. We know about slavery of course, but not its brutality. This has always been kept from us.

Equiano It is the partings that were the worst.

Kath You have family?

Equiano I was captured with my sister. We were parted early on in the journey and I have never seen her again.

Kath But that is dreadful. Have you ever tried to find her?

Equiano What chance does a slave have? We have no money or even time of our own. Of course I told my good friend Richard of my plight. I often spoke of my sister to him, and of our life together before we were taken. He promised he would ask in every port we landed for news. I held out little hope. Then one day...

Richard enters

Richard Vassa, news my friend. We have found your sister.

Equiano What?

Richard Some of the men have been making enquiries ashore. There is a woman serving in the house who is as you described your sister and has been a slave for the same time as you. And she comes from the same part of Africa.

Equiano Are you sure?

Richard I will take you to her. Come now. Do not weep. You will soon be reunited.

Elle enters

Equiano Sister?

Elle The boy from the boat?

Equiano The woman from the ship who comforted me.
Elle. Oh Elle

Equiano and Elle hug

Elle I'm sorry, you were expecting someone else.

Equiano They said you were my sister.

Elle We all look alike to them I think.

Equiano How are you being treated?

Elle Not as bad as some. I keep my head down.
It has not been good lately. The girl I was sharing
the chores with became pregnant and then broke
a jug. She was so badly beaten she lost the baby
and has not risen from her bed since. So all the
work falls to me.

Equiano Did you ever find your daughter?

Elle No, nor heard of her again. I try not to think
of her, or imagine what might be happening.
But sometimes in the
night I feel her calling me, and I have to stifle my sobs.

Equiano Oh Elle. I wish there was something I could do.

Elle We just have to endure here. But you must get
yourself free and live a life. Get to England.

Equiano I will, I have served Captain Pascal well.
He has always been pleased with me I know.
I have fought bedside him in the war
and I am sure I have earned prize money
enough to buy my freedom, and then I will come back
for you.

Elle Promise me you will not think of me again
It is useless. We slaves do not have a life.
We have no choices. If we do have a man they
are chosen for us. And do not trust them.
They might show us the occasional smile but
they still think of us less than their dogs.

Equiano But Captain Pascal is not like other whites.
He has always treated me well. We have fought
many battles together. And once he rescued me from
a press gang.

Elle They are only good to us if it suits them,
Don't trust them. I warn you.

Richard Come on, we must go. The captain wants to see you
and I don't think its good news.

Equiano What do you mean?

Richard I have heard he has sold you on.

Equiano He cant have done. What have I done wrong?
I have always served him well. I have earned
a right to choose.

Richard I'm sorry. But I overheard him talking. He means
to sell you on, I know it.

Pascal enters

Pascal Vassa, get your things together, you leave my ship tonight.

Equiano Sir, you cannot mean to part with me. Have
I not always pleased you in what have done?

And what of my wages and prize money?

Pascal You get above your self Vassa. You think because I have treated you well that you had become something other than a slave? You will always be a slave. I bought you and I can sell you.

Equiano But sir, I beg you. I have been happy on your ship. I have worked hard and will work harder but I thought to gain my freedom eventually.

Pascal Everything you own is mine. Don't forget it. Including your life.

Equiano Sir, give me my prize money so that I may buy my freedom and I promise you I will continue to work for you.

Pascal You have no prize money. Even if you had gained £1000 it would be mine. But enough. You are Captin Dorans now. He plans to sail to the West Indies and sell you on when he gets there.

Equiano Please sir, no. Don't do this to me. My heart would break to leave you sir.

Pascal You have had it to easy boy, and have got above yourself. I know you have been taught to read. Its a dangerous thing, to give a slave an education. But that might make it easier for you on the plantations if you behave yourself.

Equano Please sir.

Pascal shakes him off.

Pascal Get him on the long boat Richard. Captain Doran wants him immediately.

Pascal exits

Equiano So, that was that. Without so much as an acknowledgement of all I had done for him, he sold me, like so much rum, or a barrel of dry goods. As we left England, and the land disappeared from view with all my hope, I felt overwhelmed with grief. I prayed to God that I might die and be where slaves are free and men oppress no more Fool that I was, inured so long to pain To trust to hope, or dream of joy again.

Kath So what happened to you?

Equiano I didn't die of course. I was sold in the West Indies to a Quaker called Robert King, a slave owner but a fair one who did not meet out cruelty in buckets. And I decided that my only recourse would be to buy my freedom properly for so many times I heard stories of free slaves who were taken into slavery again and their freedom disregarded.

Kath And what of your friend Richard?

Equiano I never saw him again. He died on board The Preston of

the fever. I was allowed to keep his trunk.

Kath So, how did you set about buying your freedom?
I understood that slaves held no positions.
And had not Captain Pascal refused to give you
your prize money?

Equiano There are always means for the resourceful man.
One of my masters vessels commanded by a Captain
Thomas Farmer made him much money by carrying
passengers between the islands. But often the
sailors would get drunk and make him short handed.
I was a good and trustworthy steward and my master
knew I had been a sailor with Captain Pascal so
allowed me to go on these trips. The captain told
him I was worth three white men as I never got
drunk. So was often allowed and saw it as my chance
to try some merchanting.

Kath But surely you need capital for such a venture?

Equiano I had one half bit, about 3 pennies in English
money. But with that I bought one glass tumbler
to trade and when I came to Montserrat I sold
it for one bit. I had made my start, and my first profit.
And providence smiled on me. For a while.

Kath You are a believer?

Equiano My master was a Quaker and sought to teach me
his holy book. It amazed me that so many of the
rules of my country were incorporated into it.
I tell you Miss Plymley, it never ceases to
amaze me that these men can read the words of
this book and yet behave so barbarically to
other human beings, made in the image of the
God they say they believe.

ST June 14th. Got up early. Read two chapters
of Homers Odyssey and two chapters of Hebrews.
Beat Joseph severely for coming to work after
sunrise. His excuse was he had been to see his
child who was ill with fever. But I could smell
the liqueur on him and so beat him again for lying.

June 18th
Said my prayers for king and country and read
two chapters of Hebrews. Beat Maria for breaking
a glass yesterday. She told me Joseph's child
had died.

Equiano carries a bag and tries to pass by.

ST So, what do we have here.

Equiano Please sir, I mean no harm

ST The nigger means no harm. But he's
a stranger. And seems to be on his own,
A runaway perhaps. With a price on his head.

Equiano I am no runaway. My vessel lies in harbour just
there. My master for the voyage is Captain Thomas Farmer.

ST And he lets you on shore by yourself?

Equiano Yes, sir, he trusts me.

ST More fool him. You cant trust niggers in my experience. All they understand is the whip and the cane. Now what have we here?

He takes the bag from Equiano

Equiano That is mine sir.

ST Yours? I told you he was a runaway. Lets see what he's got.

Equiano Just oranges and limes.

ST Your lunch nigger?

Equiano Good to trade. They are mine. I bought them honestly. In Montserrat from where I am come.

ST A strange nigger out of his territory carrying fruit. Do we believe him?

Equiano Please sir, let me pass I am expected back on my vessel.

ST Speaks good English don't he, for a dog. You know me Boy, that I am your superior?

Equiano Yes sir

ST And that I have your life in my hands?

Equiano Yes sir

ST Good. Well, lucky for you I feel in a benevolent mood. Be on your way then boy.

Equiano And can I have my bag of fruit back.

ST I said be on your way before my benevolent spirit turns nasty

Equiano Its mine sir.

ST Be on your way boy, before I take my stick to you

Equiano Sir, the goods are mine and are all I have in the world. I must have them returned to me.

ST Must have them. Must have them. See how he speaks to me. As though he is my equal in stead of a black beggar. I think he needs to be taught a lesson.

Slave Trader lifts his cane. Equiano backs off and trader comes at him. Sounds of cries merging into Swing Low Sweet chariot.

Black out

Lights up

Equiano is lying on the ground beaten being tended by a black woman.

Equiano groans

Woman Hush there. It is bad but it will heal.

Equiano Where am I?

Woman You were found on the dock. You were brought
to my masters house where I have been tending your wounds.

Equiano How long have I been here?

Woman Two days.

Equiano Two days, but my vessel will be ready to leave.
He tries to rise and cannot.

Woman Lay still. It will be a few days yet before you can walk.

Equiano Please, has word been sent to my master?

Woman I'm surprised you are worried. Anyway, I think you
belong to a new master now.

Equiano No, my master is Robert King. He would never part with me.

Woman And what makes you think that? We are all expendable to them.

Equiano He is a good man. A Christian. You must have heard
of him. He treats his slaves well.

Woman I only hear of beatings and pain and death.
To them we are only worth what they paid for us.
Slavery debases the best and most upright.
Even good men turn bad.

Equiano What happened to my fruit?

Woman What are you saying?

Equiano I had a bag of fruit to sell.

Woman And this was why they beat you?

Equiano I suppose so. Please. My vessel might still lie in
harbour. Send word to my master. He will come and rescue me.

Woman Hush now. Let your wounds rest.

Equiano I must get back. My master might think I have run
away and he would not trust me on a voyage again
and that would be fatal as I have begun to plan to buy my freedom.

Woman Is this why you trade in fruit?

Equiano Not just fruit. I have barded all type of goods. Glass, pig, all
manner.

Woman And you think they will let you buy your freedom?

Equiano They have to. If I have the money saved.

Woman For all the good it will do. I tell you this.
Even if you buy your freedom and carry with you all
the time, the piece of paper they give you in this
land you will never be free. I had a husband. He
married me as a free man. We had two boys, twins
and a girl child. But I still belonged to my master.

One day I was told that my master was to move to another island. He would take me and sell my children. My husband said he would not allow it and went to seek an audience with him. He did not come home. I was frantic with worry. I searched and found he had been taken on a ship and made a slave. I have never seen him since. Then they came and took my children. It is though my heart had been torn from me.

Equiano That is why I have decided I must go to England. Only in England can a black man be truly free.

Woman You know of England?

Equiano I have been many times. There are whole communities of black men who live in London. On the streets but as free men. I was taught there as a boy by a teacher on an island called Guernsey. They were very kind to me. They had a daughter of my age who seemed much attached to me, I was afraid they might consider our betrothal.

Woman Now that is a foolish notion.

Equiano I don't see why. In England I believe all things are possible. And I mean to get there.

Woman Give me your hand.

Equiano What?

Woman Give me your hand. I have a gift and I think you might be in need of it.

Equiano I believe now in god. This is witchcraft.

Woman It is the old ways - our old ways. Never loose the sight of it. You are an African. Remember this Equiano.

Equiano You know my name. I have not heard that name for so long

Woman Olaudah Equiano, son a prince. From Ibo state. Never forget your ancestors. And remember your suffering brothers. Now ask me what you need to know.

Equiano Will I get to England?

Woman It depends on your choices. Two ways will be opened and two dangers that take you close to death. If you overcome both I can tell you certainly, you will not be a slave much longer after that.. And another thing. Your wife will be a white woman.

The Captain and Robert King are having breakfast. Equiano enters

Captain Why look its our friend Vassa come to pay us our early morning respects. Good morning Vassa. Are you well?

Equiano Very well sir. And yourself? And Mr King?

King Passing well Vassa, passing well. Have you brought us news of Jeremiah and Daniel? They have been gone three days now and I feel sad they could not come to me.

Equiano They were in love sir.

King Love is a luxury none of us can afford Vassa. Remember that. Nevertheless I was planning to buy her. The girl was a fine specimen but her master would not part with her. I think he had designs on her as a housemaid.

Equiano I think he wanted her for other duties.

King Be that as it may. I cannot heal all the hurts. What is it you want of me then Vassa?

Equiano Sir, this is hard for me to say. You have been a good master and I have known only kindness at your hand. But I am still a slave and long to be a free man. When you first bought me you promised me that if I saved enough you would allow me my freedom..

King Your freedom? What is this? Have you got forty pounds?

Equiano Yes sir?

King And how did you come by this money?

Equiano Honestly sir. By trade.

Captain He is right Robert. I can vouch for that. A harder worker amongst the blacks I have yet to see. And a careful trader.

King If I had known you would gain the money so quickly I would not have made the promise. Do you think I can afford to part with you? It would cost me three times your worth to replace you. See Thomas, this is what comes of being Haydonevolent. Thrown back in your face.

Captain Come, come Robert. You promised the fellow and he has worked hard on it. What does it say in the good book about keeping your promise? I think you must let him have his freedom. He has earned you more than 100 a year and I guarantee that he will earn you more still as he has no reason to leave your service.

King Very well. Go then Vassa to the registrar and get the manumission drawn up and I will sign it.

Equiano It was the happiest day of my life. To hold in my hand that document that declared me free. The happiest day. You cannot imagine, nor can anyone who has never been a slave what it is like to be tied to a master. To have no goods or life of your own. To be in someone else's total control. The price of my freedom was 47 pounds yet it was priceless. And I knew that I had to get to England in order that I would never loose it again.

ST You see gentlemen, how revolution spreads. News from France could not be kept from the slaves in the colonies. In the richest island of the Caribbean unrest began to spread. Now there is carnage. And I lay this all at the door of the abolitionists.

Clarkson There have been slave insurrections before.

none of which have been inspired by our movement.
The cause is the thousands who pour into the
islands every year deprived of their rights.

ST But good honest planters are being slaughtered
All because the slaves hear of your activities in
lobbying parliament and believe that there is a
chance they will be freed.

Clarkson We seek to abolish the trade, not slavery itself

ST Thin end of the wedge my friend. There is too much wealth in this
trade you know. Big names, MP's, bankers. You cant fight our
influence and power. Anyway, no one is interested.

Clarkson We have hundreds of petitions, thousands of
signatures and witness statements by the case load.
We will bring it before parliament again and again.

ST How would we continue to supply sugar and tobacco? No race is better
suited to the task than the blacks. Once seasoned they make first
class workers. We would want compensation.
The government could never afford it.

Clarkson Once we present our witnesses and it is clear how damaging
This trade is to both slaves and sailors...

ST You will find it impossible to bring witnesses
forward. Now it is known that abolition
is on the cards, even gradually, three times as
many ships are sailing and all experienced hands
are pressed into service. We have won Clarkson.
You might as well admit defeat. We were always going
too be too strong for you and your little band of Quakers.

Equiano groans loudly

Clarkson Equiano?

Equiano You were wrong. This sickness is unto death.

Clarkson Why?

Equiano I do them harm. I am living proof they are wrong and
you are right. They had no choice but to get rid of me.
I go to my ancestors now Clarkson. You have been
a friend. I leave the cause of my fellow slaves
in your hands. Be rested. Be at peace. This is not the time.
But there will be time again. Time for you to take up this
cause once more. Time to make an end of all our pain.

Clarkson Equiano? Equiano?

Joseph enters

Joseph Clarkson, are you all right?

Clarkson I'm not sure. I think someone just walked over my grave.
You know Plymley, I have been thinking

Plymley About time I say.

Clarkson With the climate as it is the work will of necessity have to go on
hold. This body can do no more at present. I must recognise that.

What better time to get myself a wife.

Plymley And you have someone in mind?

Clarkson Possibly

Plymley Come on man, you can tell me. As if I haven't already guessed. Let me put it to you. Someone involved in the campaign, who you know well and who cares for you and its outcome in equal measure. In who's house you have always been welcomed.

Clarkson I am not decided but there is a very amiable woman to whom I have been attached for along time.

Plymley Not decided. Then perhaps you should. For as well as my sister I hear of another amiable lady at Bury St Edmunds to whom your name has been linked.

Clarkson Your sister?

Plymley Surely you cannot be surprised. It is obvious how she has felt for some time and I thought you were the same.

Clarkson And the lady at Bury? Who pray might she be?

Plymley Catherine Buck. You have stayed with her family I believe. Wait a moment. You are blushing.

Clarkson Do not push me Plymley. I am not ready to say who the object of my affections is yet. I will settle at Ullswater as is suggested, then we shall see.

Plymley You do not have to say more, I think I know of who you speak.

Clarkson You have both been good friends, the best of friends to me. Dear Katherine. We have always understood each other so well. I am sure she knows my mind before I speak it.

Gentlemen, my friends are right. I need rest, and there is no better time than this when the campaign has lapsed and the country is gripped with fear of revolution. So I propose to get settled in the lake district and take up farming. And possibly married life. But this is not the end. The cause is still there. I cannot cease this fight while thousands are dragged into a bitter night of bondage. I will continue to watch and pray that in a few years time we can continue this fight.

There is no place on the planet where slavery should be tolerated. It is an evil practice and I intend to never cease my strivings until all men can stand free and as equals. So help me God.

End of Act 2

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ACT 3

Clarkson as an old man is sitting wrapped in a blanket.

Mary enters

Mary Good morning Mr Clarkson, how are we today.

Clarkson Troubled my dear Mary. Troubled and full of pain.
I hate old age. I want nothing more than to be free
of it. How is my wife this morning?

Mary Mrs Clarkson is well sir. She wants to remind you
that the painter Mr Haydon is to come this morning
to start work on your portrait.

Clarkson And why should I want another portrait?

Mary You agreed to it sir. Anyway, its a good idea.
Before you give all your hair away.

Clarkson People request a lock here and there. I see nothing
wrong with it. And here, I have done another
batch of autographs. I fear they are in a more
shaky hand than the last ones, but then I am 84.

Mary No one would think it, the amount of correspondence
you still get through.

Clarkson There is still so much to do. If God granted me
another ten years, even then I think I would feel
the time was too short. And how is my grandson
this morning?

Mary Tommy is well sir, and hard at his school work.
I will send him into see you later.

Clarkson He is a good lad, Mary. A chip of the old block
Don't you think so?

Mary I hope so sir. But it would do him well to have
another parent to look to.

Clarkson Please Mary, do not bring up the subject of
that man Dickenson again. With my son, your husband,
Tom scarcely cold in his grave.

Mary Its been 8 years sir. And Mr Dickenson is a good
man and a local curate.

Clarkson But why would you want to marry again Mary. You
have a home here with us in Playford . You have no
fear on that score. You are my son's wife and my brother's
daughter. You have a double claim on my affections.

Mary You have been kindness itself sir, but I am
still young enough to want another home of my own.

Haydon enters and Mary goes across to him

Mary Good morning sir, Mary Clarkson. Very pleased to meet you.

Haydon Benjamin Haydon. The honour is all mine. Your mother said I would
find you here.

Mary Mother in law sir. I was married to Tom, the late Mr Thomas

Clarkson, their son.

Haydon Ah yes, tragic circumstances. I'm sorry

Mary It was a long time ago sir. Life has had to move on.

Haydon And then that was your delightful little boy I saw in the parlour just now?

Mary Yes sir, Tommy is nine.

Haydon And a fine lad too I see.

Mary The apple of his grandfather's eye to be sure sir. If you want Mr Clarkson's cooperation I suggest you speak of his grandson.

Haydon Are you saying that the venerable Mr Clarkson can be a difficult subject?

Clarkson Are you talking about me? I can hear you. I'm not all that deaf you know.

Mary Sorry, this is Mr Benjamin Haydon. Mr Haydon, my father in law, Mr Thomas Clarkson.

Haydon Very pleased to meet you sir.

Clarkson Have you met my wife?

Haydon Yes sir, she let me in herself

Clarkson A gem of a woman, we have been married almost 50 years you know Have you had breakfast?

Haydon Yes sir, but I could take a little tea.

Clarkson Tea Mary, if you would be so kind.

Mary I shan't be long.

Mary exits

Clarkson A good girl, the best daughter in law a man could ask God for. But such tragedy, as none of us deserve. If I could have spared her the half of it.

Haydon Life is never as we would wish it. And so often we do not know the reasons.

Clarkson God keeps his secrets. Perhaps in the judgment day the reasons will be revealed. I would like to know for instance why it took us so long to pass the Abolition Bill - so many more perished in the years it took. So many broken lives could have been spared.

Haydon I don't think sir, that anyone could have worked harder.

Clarkson I'm not sure the Wilberforce brothers would agree with you. You know I suppose about their plans to write a biography of their father that all but cuts out my involvement?

Haydon But your History of the Abolition is the definitive

writing on the struggle.

Clarkson They do not seem to think so.

Enter Robert Wilberforce

Robert My brother Samuel and I thank you for the packet of letters but we find much in your history that excites us to great surprise.

Clarkson But that sounds encouraging does it not? I have no wish than do anything other than encourage the children of my great friend and confident.

Robert The impression which your history is calculated to convey is that my father was originally engaged in it by you and that he was subsequently a sort of parliamentary agent of whom you availed yourself.

Clarkson It is true that I began the work and persuaded him into it...

Robert We have decided that you have fraudulently left out our fathers role, and the role of many other noble fellows from a share of the honour. In fact because of your Jacobean stance we believe that you did in fact do as much to frustrate and delay the abolition as ever you did to promote it.

Clarkson That is not true.

Robert We intend to prove you a liar and an abuser of your position. Our father will take centre stage. We will write you out of the history of abolition just as you tried to write him out. Do not think we will spare you any detail. When we have finished any part you played in this glorious story will be a distant tarnished memory.

Katherine enters

Katherine (reading) I must tell you Katherine, Mr Thomas Clarkson, and Miss Catherine Buck are perfectly matched. They spent a few days with us in Cambridge. Miss Buck is a spirited woman and a great politician and her sentiments are in perfect unison with Mr Clarkson. She argued with great strength and vivacity yet with most perfect good humour.

Henry enters

Henry Katherine. I have been looking for you.

Katherine So, Henry, it is to be your friend Catherine Buck that he is to marry.

Henry Yes, I have tried to put her off but she wont listen to me.

Kath Put her off?

Henry Catherine Buck - the most witty woman in England tying herself up with a man who wears nothing but black and speaks of only one subject.

Kath But what a subject!
I have heard that ladies in general on the eastern side of the kingdom are well versed in politics.

Henry She makes her own whatever she learns and can give an opinion on almost anything .

Kath And I also hear she sings well

Henry Do I detect a touch of jealousy?

Kath I never considered my relationship with Mr Clarkson to be exclusive. My brother and I have been good friends to him, and would wish him well in any venture.

Henry But you would prefer him to remain unmarried. Or at least choose a different bride.

Kath I have never met Miss Catherine Buck but I can see you have a high opinion of her.

Henry She is simply the most gifted conversationalist and dearest friend I have. It will be a great loss to our young persons circle. A glorious tribe of intrepid thinkers.

Kath But you can still be friends.

Henry Yes, but will she continue to write to me signing herself love in a lump?

Kath If your friendship is as strong as you say, I'm sure that will not change.

Henry Maybe if she was marrying someone else. Well, you know Thomas Clarkson better than anyone. A more single minded obstinate man I have yet to meet. But I think he feels he is at the end of his campaigning road whereas Cath and I are at the beginning. This is the start everything - the revolution is signalling the way. And he intends incarcerating them in the Lake District.

Kath Then I am surprised you have not proposed to her yourself and saved her from this misery.

Henry If she wasn't so in love with the fellow I might have. But I think as well that she considers me more of a brother. Anyway, they are perfectly matched.

Clarkson enters as a younger man

Clarkson Katherine it is good to see you again. Is your brother here also?

Kath Joseph has much to do in his parish work, but he sends his best greetings.

Clarkson And my young friend Henry. Was my dearest Catherine well when you last saw her?

Henry Very well Reverend sir.

Clarkson You mock me.

Henry Never.

Clarkson I thought it was well known that I had abandoned that title.

Henry You have left the church?

Clarkson As a clergyman. I felt that I could not sufficiently devote myself to the service of a body that still owns slaves. Or to labour in it sufficiently when I have given my life to another cause.

Henry Then how will you and Miss Buck live?

Clarkson I intend becoming a farmer. I have a house being built in the lake district. And we have set a date for the wedding.

Henry I hope sir that this does not mean the end of your involvement in the campaign.

Clarkson My commitment is no less my friend. But I am worn out with it. And the committee is dormant. It is illegal to hold meetings with more than 50 people present and the press is closed to abolitionist propaganda. In fact I am here to ask my good friend Plymley what else can be done before I return to my farm and wait for the war to end. Or my health to improve.

Kath I think you were born for public use. And I look forward to the time when you once again are engaged in benefiting mankind.

Reporter In a singularly dispiriting finale in spite of a circular letter from Mr Clarkson encouraging supporters to attend a bill introduced by Mr Wilberforce to fix the end of the slave trade for 1st March 1797, the motion was lost on a third reading by four votes. It should be noted that at least a dozen abolitionist MPs were out of town or at the new comic opera. The matter seems now to have been dropped and Mr Clarkson has retired.

Clarkson sits down and puts a blanket on his knees.
Haydon enters

Haydon Mr Clarkson sir, if I may trouble you we arranged for your second sitting today.

Clarkson Haydon, yes come in, may I call you Ben?

Haydon Certainly. I hope I find you well sir.

Clarkson Tolerably, but I long to have some of my old vigour left. Old age is a curse Ben, let me tell you. There is nothing to recommend it. Nothing. Shakespeare was right, sans teeth, sans hair, sans everything. Nothing to recommend it.

Haydon But it does not stop your activities sir. I understand you have finished writing your reply to the Wilberforces.

Clarkson With the help of my good friend Henry Robinson. It was a book that caused me pain to write, but I hope it will make an end of it now. I would find it easy to forgive them if they did not

find it necessary to ceaseingly malign my part in abolition. I have to reply. What else can I do?

Haydon You have a lot of support sir.

Clarkson A new edition of my history, and a portrait commissioned by the Central Negro Emancipation Committee.

Haydon I do admire you, I think I would have given up long before. What keeps you at it sir?

Clarkson The same thing that brought me back into the campaign from the lake district. A still small voice. Or more accurately a resounding strident voice. A voice that has forced me on through all the set backs and tragedies. Time and time again.

Equiano enters

Equiano Thomas, Thomas, wake up. There is work to be done.

Clarkson Equiano?

Equiano You have been here too long. You have taken your rest. It is time to go back.

Clarkson I have not been idle. I have written a full study of the Quakers. I have had a son.

Equiano Ah yes, little Tom. Did you know that I had two daughters? Ann Maria and Joanna. I left them well supported. But I cannot do any more. My untimely death has taken me out of the frame. You can.

Clarkson But Catherine is not well. She is at the moment consulting Dr Thomas Beddoes in Bristol. She is too ill to travel back home at present. I am very afraid she will never come back to Ullswater again.

Equiano This illness is not unto death.

Clarkson How do you know?

Equiano I have my sources. But they are still dying in their thousands, my African people, on slave ships, in stinking holds. On plantations.

Clarkson I am a farmer now. And I have a life here. Friends - Wordsworth, and his sister, Coleridge.

Equiano We have no friends. We are not allowed friends.

Clarkson Its been 8 years.

Equiano The Abolition Committee is waiting for you. Things have changed but 8 members are still available. You said when the time was right

Clarkson You said that.

Equiano But we are still in chains.

Clarkson I don't know. After all this time. Are there not other, younger men who would be better suited?

Equiano Come my friend, I want to show you something. Look, look at this girl. She is only young.

Enter Sophie

She has no birth certificate so I cannot tell you her exact age. She is probably 16. Her name is Sophie. She lives on a plantation belonging to a French slave trader. Every year this trader allows the slaves to have a celebration party at the end of the sugar growing season. At this party he encourages all the girls around Sophies age to dress in their best clothes and dance.

Sophie My mother has made me a white dress. It is the first new dress I have ever had. I was excited about the party. I had not been before but the master said I was old enough. I wanted to go and dance with Eustace. He works in a second gang but will soon be moved to the first. I wanted to catch his eye. Instead I seemed to catch the eye of the master's Son Pierre. Everytime I looked up he was watching me.

Pierre Sophie, that is your name oui?

Sophie Yes sir. My mother works in the house.

Pierre And you help her no doubt.

Sophie Yes sir.

Pierre But you are getting a big girl Sophie. Come on its warm in here. Lets go for a walk.

Pierre put his arm around her

Pierre Soon you will have to be sold to another master.

Sophie I would not like that sir.

Pierre I can help you with that. I can speak to my father if you like. You can come and work for me.

Sophie That would be good of you sir.

Pierre Sit down Sophie. Here, beside me. Come on now girl a bit closer. I wont bite.

Sophie I need to get back I think sir.

Pierre There's no rush. As I was saying, I can help you But if I do that for you, you must do something for me.

Sophie Please sir. I would work hard at whatever you told me, but I am a good girl.

Pierre I am sure you are Sophie. Now, lay back. This wont hurt if you lay still, and in time, you may come to enjoy it.

Sophie No sir.

Pierre Do you want to be sold? I can do it.
I can make sure you never see your mother again.
Or I can have her sold. A house maid is a good job.
It is not so good in the fields.

Sophie Please, please do not make me.

She bites his hand

Pierre You bitch, so you want to play rough. I'll show you how
to play rough.

Pierre drags Sophie off screaming

Clarkson My friends, I have begun campaigning again
because stories like Sophies are happening all over
the West Indies. Families are torn apart,
young children violated. We have no hope that
slave traders in the West Indies will give
up this lucrative trade voluntarily.
Hence I come to seek your support. This vile
trade must be ended. We intend writing a pamphlet
highlighting the wickedness of slave traders.
I need you now to spread the word. Sign petitions,
lobby MP's. Do all in your power to raise the
profile of this campaign again. This trade must be
ended, but with it the institution of slavery too.
We must not rest until the transportation of
human chattels are ended and all slaves are freed.

Enter Slave Trader with Sophie and Male Slave. He throws them
roughly to the ground

ST So what have we here? Two runaways.
My man tells me you were found ten miles from here.

Slave We were getting married. We would have returned

ST I had already refused you permission to be married.
I have plans for Sophie here. And my son Pierre
has an interest.

Sophie We love each other.

ST Love? What do you people know of love?
You know the punishment for runaways. But I
know what you were really up to. You were going
to join the rebels.

Slave You have no rights over me. I have heard that
in England slavery is ending.

ST Do you think I care what they talk about in
England? They can pass what they like. But
they are not here to see it happen.

Slave It will happen. We will have our freedom.
Any day now.

ST You black bastard. You think you have any rights?
Your race is destined for slavery. That's the only
thing you know. Do you think you would know what to
do with freedom if you had it. How would you live?

I provide your roof, your food, your work.

Eust You are a beaten race. Everywhere soon we will rise against you.

ST And why do you think that. You have tried to rebel and you have been crushed. The clergyman you trusted in is hanging by his thumbs from the gallows. The men who are not dead are staked out in the sun. Where you will be too very soon.

Eust You may kill our bodies, but you will not kill our spirit. In Jamaica The Maroons under Nanny have risen. Other islands will follow. And in England the parliament are campaigning for us again.

ST No one cares. In England all they care about is their wealth. You think they will give this up for you?

Reporter This is truly a momentous day. A day which the abolitionists scarcely believed would ever come. After the death of William Pitt, Mr Grenville and his foreign secretary Charles Fox have become the saviours of the movement. His bill on 23 May 1805 banning the slave trade to the captured colonies began the process that was completed today 25 March 1807. Let us pay tribute to the leading figures of abolition. Mr Wilberforce, Mr Grenville and of course Mr Clarkson.

Clarkson Thank you gentlemen. But can I just say that this is not the end of the story. This is but the first step towards what must now be our ultimate goal. Emancipation. And we must keep up pressure on our European neighbours to follow our example. We need a treaty signed at Vienna and I intend going personally to see all the heads of state. There are only two classes of person. The friends and the enemies of Africa. I recognise no other political barriers.

Reporter And now for some tragic news. On 9th March the only son of Thomas and Catherine Clarkson was thrown from his gig and killed instantly. He was 40 years old. He leaves a wife Mary and a five year old son. The circumstances surrounding the accident, and the identity of Mr Clarkson's companion remain shrouded in mystery.

Clarkson collapses into a chair moaning

Clark My son my son, my son is taken from me.

.

Equiano enters

Equiano What are you sitting here in the dark for my old friend?

Clarkson Who is that, is somebody there?

Equiano You know who it is. Why are you here in the dark?

Clarkson Its easier on my eyes, since my operation.
Who are you?

Equiano Lets have a little light. Now can you recognise me?

Clarkson Equiano. I might have known. Here to haunt me
again

Equiano The same.

Clarkson Don't torment me. I am old and I have just lost my
son. There is no point in my life continuing
now. So if you have come to take me to my maker
then do so quickly, otherwise leave me to my
misery and pain.

Clarkson. Oh my son, my son. I still remember that morning
in the lakes when I held you in my arms. So much joy then.
You know he almost died of smallpox. Catherine sat by him day
and night.

Equiano Get up, wash your face. You still have work to do.

Clarkson No, I have finished my work. The trade is abolished
Others must take up the final push to abolish slavery.

Equiano Don't you remember what you promised? Your whole
life.

Clarkson Go away, let me mourn my son.

Equiano This is not how it must end.

Clarkson But it has ended. The bill is passed.

Equiano But what about the apprenticeships. We are still tied
to our masters for 12 years.

Clarkson I would have wished for the period to have been
shorter. But we cannot always have what we want.

Equiano And the traders have been rewarded. £20000000
compensation.

Clarkson And how else do you think they would
have agreed? It will be a sum worth paying if
it will secure their cordial cooperation.

Equiano What about our compensation? It is an insult.

Clarkson It is a result. So now leave me.
Everyone is dead.
My good friend Sara Hutchinson
who was my confident and secretary. Without her
how can I continue my wealth of correspondence.
Wilberforce, my old friend who's family now
want to drag my name through the mud.
My brother John, and six out of his ten children.
And my son, who I thought might take up the cause
with me.

Equiano Mourning will not bring him back. But do
you not think it would be better tribute to finish the work.

Clarkson He always spoke sense to me. And had
a way with him I could not refuse.

He was a very powerful speaker you know.

Haydon Who?

Clarkson Olaudah Equiano. Have you ever read his Narrative? You must read it. And he worked so hard with the freed slaves in London. He became an English Gentleman but never forgot his roots. That's why I have decided I must speak at the congress next week.

Haydon Then that will be the subject of my painting.

Clarkson How can a speech be a subject?

Haydon I will paint you speaking triumphantly. That will be the greatest tribute and a change from all those studies at desks.

Mary enters

Mary Come now, its time Mr Clarkson took his afternoon rest.

Haydon He is a remarkable man. Does he ever stop?

Mary No. He still writes constantly, still studies, Demands, cajoles. Five years ago his doctor told him that he must give up writing as his mind was worn out. Since then he has written about baptism, emancipation in the West Indies, the ill treatment of blacks through prejudice and the conditions of British seaman.

Haydon He is brave taking on the clergy.

Mary He knows how they think. He used to be one of them. For that reason nothing goads him more than the use of the bible to defend slavery.

Haydon I know how I shall do my painting. 138 portraits and Mr Clarkson as the central orator.

Mary I'm not sure if that is how he will want to be remembered. He sees himself as one of a team. All valuable, all worked together. Without whom nothing could have been achieved.

Clarkson Gentlemen, I introduce myself as the originator and now unhappily the only surviving member of the 1787 committee. I would like to pay tribute to my Quaker Friend's on the committee without whom this campaign would never have got off the ground, to my fellow worker Granville Sharp, a brilliant mind and lawyer, Wilberforce who's tireless efforts in parliament finally achieved the results we have and of course Olanoh Equiano, my friend and conscience. We buried the slave trade and have since policed the waters off Africa to make sure it is eradicated. The West Indies no longer is held in sway by the Slave Owner.

But in America slavery still exists. Let us by all justifiable means make them feel their guilt. I am an old man as you see. I have given my life in the pursuit of this cause.

Now I pass on the baton to you. See I have my grandson here on the podium with me. His is the generation you must educate so that prejudice can be eradicated from culture and conscience. Take courage, be not dismayed go on persevere to the last. Ahead lies the extermination of slavery from the whole world. It is up to us - all of us whatever race and colour - to achieve that.

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Fight on my friends. Fight on until it is truly day and the night of bondage is gone forever.

Suzanne Hawkes

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