

## **Master and Slave**

**by**

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*(Note: The characters of Master and Slave are deliberately written so that they can be played by any actor irrespective of sex or colour.)*

*Master enters. Slave follows behind head down. Various blocks are randomly around on the floor. Slave is dragging/pushing a heavy large trunk. Master carries on walking letting slave do all the work. Master stands and watches as Slave struggles to try and move the trunk. Slaves attempts should be comical, almost slapstick. After a while Master starts to get angry.*

*Master: Come on! Come on!*

*Slave looks at Master. Master paces up and down. Slave carries on trying to move the trunk.*

*Master: Will you get on with it!*

*Repeat of before.*

*Master: Put your back into it!*

*Repeat of before*

*Master: You are starting to make me angry!*

*Slave tries again. Master brings out a whip and a very long stick. Master cracks the whip on the floor and pokes Slave with the stick. Slave falls to the floor hands up pleading for mercy. Master cracks whip again, pokes Slave again. Slave starts to tremble. Master walks over to Slave who now has head down and is on all fours. Master puts foot in Slaves back and forces them to the floor.*

*Master:* You know what?

*Slave looks up*

*Master:* You are useless!

*Slave looks up again*

*Master:* You are a waste of space!

*Slave continues staring*

*Master:* So useless that.....

*Master releases Slave*

*Master:* I am going to get rid of you.

*Slave stays down.*

*Master:* On your feet.

*Master is beating stick against hand*

*Slave:* No, please, I.....

*Master:* On your feet.

*Slave:* (*Standing*) Don't kill me please, don't kill me.....I'm too young to.....

*Master:* Kill you? Why would I want to kill you? You are worth something to me alive.  
Look at these people here. I mean, one of them will want you, even if you are a  
lazy piece of nothing.

*Master takes Slave to front of audience area*

*Master:* Show them your hands.

*Slave shows hands*

*Master:* See. Good quality ladies and gentlemen. *(To Slave)* Show them how strong you  
are.

*Slave does strong man act*

*Master:* Nice and strong. *(To Slave)* Turn around, all around so they can see you.

*Slave turns round in a circle.*

*Master:* See ladies and gentlemen, what we have for you today, a fine specimen.  
Wouldn't you agree? *(To Slave)* Show them your teeth.

*Slave bares teeth.*

*Master:* They're all there. Won't cheat you out of a molar. So ladies and gentlemen.  
What do you think eh? Who's going to start the bidding. You, sir, ten pence, ten  
pence, twenty at the back, thirty, forty.....

*Master starts to auction Slave, in true auctioneers patter*

*Slave:* *(Softly)* You can't do this.

*Master carries on*

*Slave:* (Louder) You can't do this.

*Master carries on.*

*Slave:* (Shouting) You can't do this!

*(They exchange a look. Fear from the Slave that the words came out, anger from the Master that he has been challenged)*

*Master:* Don't you ever tell me what I can and can't do. I own you. You are mine. If I want to sell you, I will.

*Slave:* No.

*Master:* (Reaching for whip and stick) I will pretend I didn't hear that.

*Slave:* (Falling to knees) I'm.....sorry.

*Master:* Did you say "No"?

*Slave:* No. I just.....

*Master:* (Slaps Slave around the face) Don't you ever say "No" to me again! I think I'd better wash my hands. After all, I've touched you. Don't want to catch anything nasty.

*Master exits*

*Slave:* I don't know....how long....its been....since the Master bought me. I don't know. I don't even know who I am. I haven't got a name any more. Not one that I'd know. Not one that I'd recognise. I was given a name before I was taken but they changed it. Time and again. They changed it. The Master bought me from

someone who was good to me. They didn't beat me or use a whip to scare me. They were.....kind.....I suppose. *(Pause)* And this trunk. We carry it with us everywhere. But I've never seen inside. Never dared to look. I don't know what's in there. I dare not look. *(Pause)* Dare I? *(Pause)* But what if he finds out. He'll beat me again. Hit me. I mustn't but.....I suppose.....He's not here.....and if I just lift the lid a little then.

*Slave goes to trunk and opens it. Master re-enters and watches Slave. Master waits until Slave is looking through things inside.*

*Master:* What are you doing?

*Slave:* I....just....

*Master:* Who said you could look?

*Slave:* No-one. I.....

*Master:* You know you don't do anything without being told.

*Silence*

*Slave:* *(Muttering)* But that means I don't think.

*Master:* What?

*Slave:* Nothing

*Master:* No. You said something, something about thinking.

*Slave:* Yes.

*Master:* About you not thinking.

*Slave:* Yes.

*Master:* Well, you don't think do you? You don't need to. You get food. You get clothes. You get all that you need. You don't need to think. You just have to do as you are told. You just have to do your work. You just have to follow orders.

*Slave:* *(Pause then hesitant)* But I can think.....I...I...I...I do think. I know things. I understand things. And.....

*Master:* And you are talking too much. See this is what happens if you are allowed to think. This is what happens. You talk. You talk and before we know it you talk to everyone about how you live and they all feel sorry for you and it means that you and I have to part company. Can you imagine your life without me? What would you do without me? To clothe you? To feed you? To look after you?

*Slave:* *(Pause)* I'd survive

*Master:* You would die. I'm looking after you. Like I look after all my animals.

*Silence*

*Slave:* I just wanted to know what was inside.

*Master:* You don't want to know.

*Slave:* Why?

*Master:* Because inside here.....is the truth. About you. About me. Do you think you can face the truth about your wretched life?

*Slave:* I'd like to know.

*Silence*

*Master:* Open it then. Go on. But don't say that I didn't warn you.

*Slave goes to open trunk. Master stops him.*

*Master:* Be warned. You are not going to like what you find.

*Slave opens trunk. Slave pulls out a family picture and a sack. Slave sits looking at the picture for some time*

*Slave:* I know these people....I think.....For some reason, I know them.....They all look familiar, but I don't know why.....

*Master:* *(Thrusting sack at Slave)* And you know this?

*Slave smells sack - immediately becomes frightened.*

*Slave:* Yes, yes I do. *(Pause)* I was eight years old, playing in my village. Hide and seek. With my sister. I hid and was waiting and then.....darkness came.

*Master and Slave are at separate sides of stage. Master mimes putting sack over Slave's head. Slave struggles as if trying to get free. Master ties sack and throws it over shoulder.*

*Slave:* Inside in the darkness, I heard screams. The screams of my sister. They had taken her as well. And I heard their voices. But I couldn't understand what they said. They didn't talk my language. Then I must have fallen asleep.

*(Pause)*

Light. Bright light in my eyes. Talking. More foreign words and people who looked different to me. Faces. I did not know. Where was I? Where was my sister? Where was my family? Where was my village? Help me. Help me.

*(Slave starts to cry)*

*Master:* Crying? For yourself? Ah! That's your problem you see. You're weak. No strength. You're a loser! Boo hoo! How sad? Face up to the truth you are nothing.

*Slave:* But I was something once. I was somebody's child. I had a name.

*Master:* You have a name now. The name the weak and the losers have had for thousands and thousands of years. SLAVE! The same name that millions have had before you. SLAVE! That's the only name your kind deserve!

*Slave:* Before me?

*Master:* What?

*Slave:* Millions before me?

*Master:* Of course.

*Slave:* When?

*Master:* All through history.

*Slave:* You mean I have a history?

*Master:* Look!

*Master goes to trunk, pulls out Egyptian head-dress. Puts it on. Picks up whip and cracks it.*

*Master:* Pharaoh commands you slaves to build.

*Slave starts pushing blocks together to form a pyramid.*

*Master:* Come on! Pharaoh's tomb must be finished. Get that dead slave out of the way. Work around him. Get rid of the body and carry on.

*Slave builds a pyramid out of the blocks in the centre of the stage area.*

*Master:* It is finished. Now we have a tomb for the body of our dear beloved Pharaoh, our dear beloved leader, our dear beloved God in human form.

*Slave:* What about the slave's that died?

*Master:* Just get rid of the bodies somewhere. They are of no importance.

*Slave:* They're like pharaoh.

*Master:* How?

*Slave:* Men.

*Master:* Pharaoh is a God!

*Slave:* He's a man! The same as these were men. They're all humans.

*Slave repeats "He's a Man! Etc." Master goes to hit slave who cowers away. Master returns to trunk and pulls out Roman centurion's helmet.*

*Master:* So this is Britain. What do you think of Britain, slave?

*Slave:* *(Shivering)* Its cold Master.

*Master:* Cold? Cold? Its freezing. Not like Rome. But then if Rome wants to expand its empire it must take over these places and we must build temples to educate these poor heathens. Build it over there.

*Slave takes blocks and starts to build a "temple"*

*Master:* Look at the people slave.

*Slave:* Yes, master

*Master:* What do you think of them?

*Slave:* They seem friendly.

*Master:* Friendly? They don't need to be friendly, if they are going to be slaves. (Points to groups of children) These shall serve me in my villa, these shall work in mines, these shall work on farms and these shall build roads, straight roads, roads that lead to Rome.

We shall turn this Britain into a part of the empire. It shall be part of the glory that is Rome. These slaves shall make me rich and if I am rich then Rome will be rich and when we are allowed to return I shall be declared a hero, a brave soldier of Rome who has turned Britain from a disgusting stench hole into a glorious part of the Roman empire.

*Slave:* Master?

*Master:* Yes.

*Slave:* Will you treat them well?

*Master:* (*Menacingly to slave*) Are you saying I do not know how to treat my slaves? I know what a slave needs, I know that they need to learn, to be taught. There are those in Rome who treat their slaves with kindness. Kindness? They trust

their slaves. Trust them? You cannot trust a slave. You must beat them if they do not work. And if they have not learnt then use them for sport. Put them in the Coliseum to fight against lions, tigers, other wild beasts or gladiators. Treat them well and they will defeat us.

*Slave:* But why....can't we....all just....be free?

*Master:* No! Do you know what it means if the slaves are freed? The slaves will take the jobs of the working men. Society will collapse. Rome will collapse. We won't be able to cope. No money. High taxes. No work. Riots in the streets. Rome will collapse.

*Master knocks down the "temple" and removes helmet. Slave sits.*

*Master:* Clear this up!

*Slave starts to tidy boxes. Master sees a piece of paper and picks it up.*

*Master:* The licence! (Pause) Do you know what this is?

*Slave shakes head*

*Master:* This is the most wonderful document. The start of the glorious beautiful marvellous transatlantic slave trade. This is a licence. A licence from the year 1517. (*Reads*) "The king of Spain proclaims that Africans can be taken as slaves to work in the new world."

*Slave:* The new world?

*Master:* The Americas, the Indies, the colonies that Spain, Britain and other countries owned around the world.

*Slave:* You took people from Africa?

*Master:* To the New World.

*Slave:* Across the ocean?

*Master:* To the New World. Across the Atlantic. The Trans-Atlantic Slave trade was born and 200 years later was one of the most powerful trades in the world.

*Slave:* But the people from Africa had no choice?

*Master pushes slave's arm up back and forces them to the floor.*

*Master:* No slaves have choice. Haven't you learnt that yet? Because they are the weak, the feeble, the stupid, like you.

*Slave goes to say something. Master stops slave by shouting*

*Master:* You are lower than me!

*Slave:* I am lower than you.

*Master:* You are stupid

*Slave:* I am stupid

*Master:* You are thick

*Slave:* I am thick

*Master:* You have no sense

*Slave:* I have no sense

*Master:* You are an animal

*Slave:* I am an animal.

*Master:* You are lower than me!

*Slave:* I am lower than you.

*Master:* You are stupid

*Slave:* I am stupid

*Master:* You are thick

*Slave:* I am thick

*Master:* You have no sense

*Slave:* I have no sense

*Master:* You are an animal

*Slave:* I am an animal. *(Pause)* I am lower than you. I am stupid. I am thick. I have no sense. I am an animal.

*Master:* If you say it enough times you believe it! And when you believe it then anyone can control you! You become a slave!

*Master brings out Captain Newton's hat and puts it on. As Master is talking, Slave takes boxes and arranges them into a ship shape. Slave then goes to trunk and pulls out a scroll. Slave sits reading whilst Master continues.*

*Master:* (To audience) Crew, you must pay attention. Listen to every damn word I am about to blooming well say. I, Captain Newton command you to listen to every blooming sentence. (*Master stops and stares at them*) And if any of you are thinking, "He's swearing!" Well, I blooming well am. I have a damn good reputation to keep up as one of the hardest men of the seas. I drink harder, I live harder and I swear harder than any other man alive. That is why they call me The Great Blasphemer! It's my damn language and I will use it how I blooming well like!

Tomorrow we set sail on the first part of the triangle of trade as it is blooming well known. We will take godforsaken gunpowder, blooming brandy, cursed cloth and flaming firearms to Northern Africa.

These we will trade for slaves. We will gather some 300 Negroes, store them in the hold, in the very same place as we had the godforsaken gunpowder, blooming brandy, cursed cloth and flaming firearms and then embark upon the Middle Passage, as it is known.

*Slave starts to sing "Amazing Grace from a scroll found in the trunk*

*Master:* (*Trying to continue*) This live cargo.....we must take to the Indies.....It will be chained beneath the decks.....It will be allowed only a few times onto deck in the 13 weeks of the.....voyage.....It is your duty.....to ensure.....that it is.... well looked after . A dead slave has no blooming value.....Do I make myself.....What is that infernal damned song you are singing?

*Slave:* Amazing Grace.

*Master:* But that is a song of the Negro. One of their spirituals.

*Slave:* That is a song of a sea captain, a former slave trader who saw the errors of his ways. You!

*Master:* Me?

*Slave:* It says here written by Captain Newton who was a slave trader.....

*Master:* True.

*Slave:* With the foulest tongue.

*Master:* Blooming well true.

*Slave:* Far worse than many other sailors.

*Master:* Flaming well, bleeding well true.

*Slave:* But he saw the error of his ways gave up his ship and became a vicar.

*Master:* Tr.....? Eh?

*Slave:* He saw what he was doing was wrong! He realised the treatment of slaves was inhuman and he turned to God for help!

*Master snatches sheet from Slave*

*Master:* Give me that! He realised the treatment of slaves was inhuman and he turned to God. He wrote the song Amazing Grace about his experiences. He even became a member of the movement to abolish slavery. What a load of.....

*Slave sings last verse of Amazing Grace. As Slave sings, Master slowly sinks to the ground, shaking head in disbelief. Song ends.*

*Silence*

*Slave goes to Master. Master looks up at Slave. Slave thinks Master is beaten.*

*Master suddenly stands.*

*Master:* Captain Newton was only one captain.

*Slave:* But he saw that it was wrong.

*Master:* But many others didn't

*Master puts hat back on and walks down to the audience.*

*Master:* First mate. Come here.

*Slave walks up behind.*

*Master:* *(Pointing to audience)* Why are these slaves here still waiting on the quay?  
Put them below decks come on.

*Slave takes and stacks them two high on either side of the audience. Possibly - Slave places a plank over the top of them. Slave persuades front row of audience to lie down beneath the height of the blocks. Master is frozen as the Captain.*

*Slave:* That's Captain Collingwood, commander of the slave ship Zong. There are 297 of you slave that we have to chain beneath the decks. You each have only 18 inches of head room. You must lie still. There is a bucket for your necessities but I don't think you can get to it. That's why it stinks so bad down here. Many of you on the weeks of our voyage well you just do your toilet wherever you are. After some days out to sea, you will be allowed up for exercise. Mind you'll still be chained. See Captain Collingwood he says.....

*Master:* It is important that the cargo is healthy. No-one will buy it if it is damaged or has no strength. It cannot work in the fields or do any labour if it is sick.

*Slave:* Trouble is with 297 of you all chained down there together, all it takes is for one of you to get sick, have some disease and loads of you will die.

I beg of you please, don't make my job any harder by refusing to eat. You see I'll have to make you eat.

*Master:* Get the thumbscrews.

*Slave:* We use them tighten them down upon your thumbs and when your screaming, when your mouth is open we will feed you.

*Master:* Fetch the cat of nine tails.

*Slave:* The more stubborn you are, the worse things he will use. You don't want to be lashed with the whip do you?

*Master:* Still not eating? Time for the speculum orum.

*Slave:* That's a special device what the Captain has. It forces open your jaws to make you eat. I pray you do not refuse. I know the food is not good. But it is all we have for you. I do not want to do the Captain's bidding and make you suffer.

*Slave uses boxes to build ship shape. They start to sail.*

*Master:* It was some weeks out to sea when I was informed of our difficulties.

*Slave:* Sir, some of the slaves Sir, poor souls, they have a sickness Sir.

*Master:* Sickness amongst the cargo. Take the damaged goods and throw them overboard.

*Slave:* Sir?

*Master:* You heard what I said. Throw it overboard. If a cargo is not fit for purpose it must be disposed of.

*Slave:* But sir, they're.....

*Master:* Surplus to requirements, damaged goods and in danger of damaging the rest. Get rid of the waste.

*Slave:* We had to take 130 slaves, men, women and children. Some were already dead and their bodies we threw over the side. But others had the sickness and we threw them into the water weak but still alive. We watched as the heavy chains dragged them down beneath the waves. None of them had any strength to fight as the sea closed in over their heads. The Captain said

*Master:* We must do this as we have insufficient water.

*Slave:* But in two days we would land and take on fresh water. This was his excuse. His reason for doing what we done. But sir we will have water in two days.

*Master:* The insurance company will not pay for cargo destroyed if we have water for it. We have no water, do I make myself clear?

*Slave:* Yes, Sir. The last 10 men, they stood proud on the deck. I stood and watched as still chained together they leapt over the side. It seemed that they preferred to have those chains pull them down beneath the waves rather than die beneath the decks. I suppose whatever God they believed in would be with them.

*Master:* We arrived at the Americas, the remaining cargo was sold and we set sail laden with cotton, tobacco and rum for England. Shortly after our return I found myself in court.

*Slave:* But it wasn't for the murder of the slaves.

*Master:* Murder? Good God man no. It was claimed I had tried to defraud the insurance company. By throwing damaged cargo over the side I was called a crook. I ask you. Many of them were dead already and a dead slave is of no use to no man.

*Slave starts working, turning the blocks each one has a crop upon it: - Cotton, tobacco, sugar, coffee. Each time they are mentioned Master points to the crops.*

*Master:* Work harder slaves. England needs cotton, tobacco, sugar and coffee. These crops are making me a rich man and despite the fact that some people oppose the use of you slaves, they still buy the crops.

*Slave:* People oppose the use of slaves?

*Master:* What?

*Slave:* You said people oppose the use of slaves?

*Master:* Yes, but they still buy cotton, tobacco, sugar and coffee.

*Slave:* Well can't they set us free?

*Master:* *(Laughs at first and then gets angry. He drives Slave back across the stage to the trunk)* What are you talking about? What are you talking about? Free you? Free you? If I free you who will work on the plantations? If I free you who will grow the crops? If I free you how will these people get their *(Rushes back over to the blocks)* cotton, tobacco, sugar and coffee?

*Slave notices something in the trunk. Slave pulls out Granville Sharp's wig and a pamphlet with the word "Abolition" on the front. Slave puts on the wig and starts to read. During the next exchange Master and Slave adopt adversarial roles. They circle each other and use the blocks to build a structure. When the exchange is finished the word "Freedom" should be spelt out on the blocks and Master is at the base of the structure defeated.*

*Slave:* No human being should be forced to work

*Master:* The only way to get cheap goods is to use forced labour

*Slave:* No human being can be owned bought or sold

*Master:* Ownership of humans is as old as the story of Noah in the Bible.

*Slave:* No human being should be beaten, tortured or ill treated to make them work.

*Master:* You have to treat the slaves in a hard manner in order to get the lazy amongst them to work

*Slave:* Slavery and the slave trade are against English Law

*Master:* There is no law in England which says that definitely that slavery cannot exist

*Slave:* Slavery is not necessary anywhere

*Master:* Slavery is necessary in the colonies where you cannot get labour except slaves

*Slave:* Slavery is not the same as working for a wage.

*Master:* We the masters have to provide homes, clothes and food for the slaves. They don't have to buy anything. In some ways they are better off than the working man.

*Slave:* Slavery should not exist if we are all born equal!

*Master:* All born equal? Who told you that?

*Slave:* No human being should have their freedom taken away

*Master:* To have freedom taken away you have to be free first. Who is free?

*Slave:* Slavery must be.....should be.....abolished!

*Slave stands proud in front of the blocks making the word "Freedom".*

**Slave:** In this year 1807, the Transatlantic Slave Trade is abolished.

**Master:** But the slaves aren't free. They are still working on the plantations in the West Indies, in the Americas.

**Slave:** We must have freedom. The trade has stopped and we need our freedom.

**Master:** But what will happen if we give you freedom. You'll have no money. No place to live. You will die.

**Slave** Give us freedom!

**Master:** We will fight for the right to keep slaves.

**Slave:** Give us freedom!

**Master:** You are our property! We own you!

**Slave:** We are human beings! Give us freedom! Give us our freedom!

*Slave repeats "Give us freedom" over and over. Master shrinks until they are on the floor defeated. Master starts to laugh, a long evil laugh. Master crawls over to the blocks and starts without Slave noticing to pull the bottom blocks out. The word Freedom collapses in a pile on the floor.*

**Master:** You are fools! All of you. (To Slave) and you more than any of them. No slavery. You really believe that its over. That slavery doesn't exist because of some stupid laws.

*Slave goes to trunk. Brings out copy of the Declaration of Human Rights.*

*Slave:* But all the countries signed this. Look! It says " All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. "

*Master:* Words! Words! Words!

*Slave:* "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

*Master:* Words! Words! Words! Words can never beat actions. I can still get slaves to do my bidding. From all over the world I can get slaves. I can get slaves any time I want. Do you know there are more people now who are slaves than ever before?

*Slave:* That can't be. It's illegal! We are all free!

*Master:* Listen! I haven't gone out and counted them all but there are more than 12,000,000 people who are in some kind of slavery today.

*Slave:* But that can't be right?

*Master:* Can't it? Why because of some words on some paper? Words mean nothing. Power is the secret. Power is what you need.....and money.

*Slave:* Money?

*Master:* Look at them. All these people sitting here. You all want trainers don't you? You all want mobile phones? You all want.....**(list items)** And who makes them for you? Who grows them for you? You can never win slave. You can never ever win. There will always be masters unless people change their ways.

*Pause - Slave is sitting head in hands. Master stands over Slave. Master pokes Slave with stick and cracks the whip.*

*Master:* Now put these things away and lets get going. Come on! Come on!

*Slave puts items back in trunk. They exit, Slave dragging trunk.*

***End***

**Note:** *Feel it's important that after performance there is a break and then a 20 -30 minute workshop in which children can discuss and examine issues raised in performance. Importantly what they can do to stop modern slavery.*