

12 Years a Slave

CHAPTER I Home

I have a story to tell about a slave. It is my own story and I was the slave. This is a true record of the facts.

My name is Solomon Northup and I was born a free man. I lived a free life in a free state in the North of America for more than thirty years.

My father was not born free. He was a slave, and he belonged to a white man named Mr Northup. The Northups were a good family, and when old Mr Northup died, my father became a free man. He took the name Mintus Northup and the Northup family continued to take an interest in him and his children.

My father married and had two sons. I was the second son, born in July 1808. Our family moved around as my father found jobs on different farms. He was a hard worker and everyone said he was an honest man. He earned enough money to send my brother and me to school.

As a teenager, I worked in the fields with my father. In my free time, I read books or played the violin, which I loved. Music has often helped me through dark times in my life.

My father died in 1829. That same year, on Christmas Day, I married Anne Hampton, a girl who lived near us. She could read and write, and was an excellent cook.

I was twenty-one, with no father to guide me and a new wife at my side. I dreamt of owning a house and land, and I decided to work very hard to get it. I worked building

the Champlain Canal, which opened in the spring of 1830. I was well paid, and was able to buy two horses and some equipment. I started a business moving timber from Lake Champlain along the canals and rivers. I employed several men to help me and we built rafts to move the wood. On one trip, I visited Montreal in Canada.

Three years later, Anne and I moved to a farm in a town called Kingsbury. We bought a few animals and planted vegetables. Anne worked in the house and I worked on the land. During the winter, I often played the violin at dances and Anne was sometimes employed as a cook for two or three weeks at a time at Sherrill's Coffee House. Soon we had three wonderful children – Elizabeth, Margaret and Alonzo.

