

Day 3

Section 3: Surviving a Tyrant for a Master Chapters 10-14

Vocabulary and Terms:

Supplication- *the act of begging or asking in a humble way*

Appellation- *name or title*

Celerity- *rapidity of motion*

Superfluity - *something more than is needed, an extra*

Weevil - *a small beetle that is harmful to plants and plant products*

Tallow - *a white solid fat from cattle or sheep used in making soap or candles*

Axe-helve -*a handle for an axe*

Debauch - *a party of excessive indulgence*

Behoove - *to be necessary or proper for*

Avaricious - *greedy for riches*

Furrow - *a trench made by (or as if made by) a plow*

Licentious - *lewd, immoral*

Excoriate - *1. to denounce and censure violently*

(example: Epps excoriated Solomon, even though Solomon was working as hard he could.)

2. to remove the outer skin from

(example: Epps excoriated parts of Patsey's back with the whip.)

Detail Questions:

Chapter 10

- 1. What happened after Solomon's second fight and subsequent physical altercation with Tibbeats? Why?
Was Solomon followed? What did he see as the primary threat in the swamp, though he felt a temporary respite from the danger Tibbeats presented?**
- 2. Were slaves usually successful escaping through bayous and swamps? Why or why not?**
- 3. What paper did Solomon lack that would allow any white man to arrest him?**
- 4. Late that night, deep in the swamp, Solomon decided on a particular destination. Where did he go, and why? Who did he intend to see there?
On the way, he asked an unknown master and his slave for directions. Why did he keep his plight from them? Did they give him directions?**

5. What was his reception upon reaching Ford's plantation? What kindness did Solomon most appreciate?

Chapter 11

6. What did Solomon do to repay the kindness and sympathy the Fords showed him? What was Mistress Ford's reaction, and Solomon's response?

7. When Ford took Solomon back to Tibbeats, what did Ford offer to Solomon on the journey back to the bayou, again showing him great kindness?

8. On their journey back to the bayou, who did Solomon and Ford pass? What had this person been doing? What was Ford's response?

9. To whom did Tibbeats hire Solomon out? Where did he live?

10. What was Solomon's job upon reaching Big Cane Brake? What were his feelings regarding this plantation?

11. What did Eldret offer Solomon as a reward for working hard and well? Who showed up during this month? What was his response to Eldret's offer to Solomon? What was Eldret's response? Did Tibbeats, as owner, write the necessary pass for Solomon to go visit at Ford's?

12. While visiting his friends at Ford's plantation, Solomon was told that one of the slaves had died. Who was it, and what was Solomon's reaction?

13. On his journey back to Big Cane Brake under the conditions of his arrangement with Eldret, who did Solomon encounter on the road? What did this person say?

Chapter 12

14. Describe the personality of Edwin Epps. What was his primary business? Where was Epps' plantation located? What was his main crop for business?

15. Was picking cotton the only job of particular slaves, or was cotton-picking in addition to the slave's regular chores for the day? How long during the day were slaves required to work?

16. What did Solomon sleep on while at Master Epps' plantation? What was the slave cabin like?

17. Plantations had their own gardens, providing for the families there. What food did planters in the South get from the North, due to inferior sources in the South?

Chapter 13

18. When Solomon got sick, did Epps pay any mind to his being ill? Why? What finally made Epps respond to Solomon's illness?

19. What job did Epps give Solomon at this point? How adept was Solomon at this task? Did Epps keep Solomon at this task? Why or why not? Who was excellent at picking cotton, daily coming in with over twice the acceptable amount for an ordinary slave?

20. What skill of Solomon's did Epps employ on the occasions he demanded the slaves to dance for him? After these late night dances, were the slaves allowed to take a rest from the next day's duties?

21. How long did Solomon work on Epps' plantation?

22. When it was proven to Epps that Solomon was truly a free man with a wife and children, what was his reaction?

23. When Epps purchased a different plantation and moved, he took a group of slaves with him, most of whom had been together for years. How did they all end up in the possession of Epps?

24. Describe Patsey. What kind of person was she? What was her existence like at the Epps plantation?

Chapter 14

25. The first year Solomon worked for Epps, caterpillars destroyed most of the area's crops, leaving very little for the slaves to harvest. Where were many slaves sent to be hired out to earn wages for their masters, and what kind of plantations were these? To whom was Solomon hired? Did Solomon find this work to be as difficult for him as cotton-picking had been?

26. What portion of a slave's wages was that individual allowed to keep, rather than earning money for the master?

27. Besides saving his Sunday wages, what other method of earning money did Solomon have?

28. Solomon tried again to escape, speaking to a steamer captain after overhearing the man was from the North. Did Solomon tell the captain his whole story? What was the captain's response?
29. Patsey suffered a great deal at the whim and demand of Mistress Epps. The mistress wanted nothing more than to have Patsey gone, either by selling (which Master Epps refused to do based on her value, he said) or by the slave dying. What was Solomon's view of Mistress Epps? Why do you think Epps would not send Patsey away?
30. What did Solomon invent and construct that provided him and other slaves with an additional food?

Discussion Questions:

1. In your opinion, what did Solomon think about the system of slavery and slave owners as a group? Where did he believe the blame lay, with the system itself or with the slave owner in particular? Did Solomon believe that most slaves were aware of their situation, or did he seem to agree with many slave owners in that slaves were non-human? Give specific passages to support your answers.
2. In your opinion, why did the ghostwriter choose the particular words he used in given passages? For example, on page 75 when Solomon described Tibeats's mood, he used the word "venomous". Why was this word chosen, instead of "mean" or "hateful"? Could the meaning of the sentence or the visual image conveyed by the description possibly have changed by using a different word? How? For another example, refer to page 91 as Solomon received the pass from Tibeats and is headed to Master Ford's plantation for a visit. He described himself as "wholly destitute", instead of "unprosperous" or simply "poor?" In your opinion, what might have been the ghostwriter's purpose in selecting the words he used over other choices? Select one or two phrases in this section in which the meaning would have been altered had the word choice been different. Describe the meaning as written, then describe the meaning with synonyms of your own choosing.

Detail Questions: Key

Chapter 10

1. What happened after Solomon's second fight and subsequent physical altercation with Tibeats? Why?

Solomon knew that if he killed Tibeats, he would pay with his own life. He also knew that his own death would be the only way Tibeats would be satisfied in matters regarding Solomon. Solomon fled on foot, running to and through the Pacoudrie Swamp. (p80)

Was Solomon followed? What did he see as the primary threat in the swamp, though he felt a temporary respite from the danger Tibeats presented?

He was followed, to the point where Tibeats' hounds could no longer get through the bayou. He felt that the alligators and snakes were a bigger threat to him at this point than Tibeats. (p80)

2. Were slaves usually successful escaping through bayous and swamps? Why or why not?

Escapes through the swamps and bayous were not usually successful, ending either with the slave drowning or being recaptured and possibly attacked by the master's dogs. Slaves were not allowed to learn to swim and therefore cannot cross even the smallest stream. (p78)

3. What paper did Solomon lack that would allow any white man to arrest him?

He did not have a pass from his master with him, stating his business and granting his permission to be away from the plantation. (p81)

4. Late that night, deep in the swamp, Solomon decided on a particular destination.

Where did he go, and why? Who did he intend to see there?

He went to the Great Pine Woods, to the plantation of Master Ford. He knew he would be safer there than he was with Tibeats. (p81)

On the way, he asked an unknown master and his slave for directions. Why did he keep his plight from them? Did they give him directions?

He knew that the white master could have him arrested for being without a pass. They did give him directions to Ford's. (p82)

5. What was his reception upon reaching Ford's plantation? What kindness did Solomon most appreciate?

Mistress Ford did not recognize him, for he was in such a worn-down and disheveled condition. Master Ford listened to Solomon's (Platt's) troubles with Tibeats, his fleeing, and listened well. Ford had him fed and gave him a place to rest in the cabin, but Solomon was most grateful for the kindness and sympathy of Ford. (p83)

Chapter 11

6. What did Solomon do to repay the kindness and sympathy the Fords showed him?

He trimmed the fruit trees and weeded the gardens surrounding the trees.

What was Mistress Ford's reaction, and Solomon's response?

She said his actions were worthy of praise, but he was not in any shape to work. Mistress Ford suggested he just rest until it was time to go with Master Ford. Solomon agreed he was in poor shape, but that such exercise would not harm him. He also told her it pleased him to work for a kind mistress such as she. (p85)

7. When Ford took Solomon back to Tibeats, what did Ford offer to Solomon on the journey back to the bayou, again showing him great kindness?

Ford pressed Solomon to take his place on the horse, knowing Solomon needed to rest. Solomon declined, saying it was better for him (Ford) to ride than Solomon. Ford did keep the horse at a slow pace to make it easier for Solomon to keep up with him. Ford also showed his kindness to Solomon by saying kind, cheering things to him. (p85)

8. On their journey back to the bayou, who did Solomon and Ford pass? What had this person been doing?

They passed Tibeats, who then came back to ride with Ford. Tibeats told Ford his version of Solomon's fleeing, and that he had been riding up and down the bayou looking for him, thinking he was probably dead, having drowned in the bayou. (p86)

What was Ford's response?

He told Tibeats that Solomon (Platt) had always been eager to please and faithful for him, and that by Solomon's (Platt's) account he had been treated very cruelly, stating this was Tibeats' fault. Ford told Tibeats that violence and hatred was no way to treat slaves, that they might all attempt escape rather than live under such conditions. He emphasized that kindness was much more effective, that all slaveowners should use this instead of brutality. He also made it clear that he knew Tibeats intended to kill Solomon (Platt), and instructed Tibeats to sell him or hire him away for his (Solomon's) own safety. If he did not, Ford promised to take Solomon away from Tibeats' possession. (p86-87)

9. To whom did Tibeats hire Solomon out? Where did he live?

Solomon was hired to Mr. Eldret, who lived at Big Cane Brake. (p88)

10. What was Solomon's job upon reaching Big Cane Brake? What were his feelings regarding this plantation?

Solomon and the other slaves worked to clear land of cane, then proceeded to build cabins for the masters and the slaves. Big Cane Brake was too quiet, far removed from everything else, with a tremendous amount of very bothersome small bugs. Even with all of this, however, Solomon likened it to paradise because he was away from Tibeats. (p89)

11. What did Eldret offer Solomon as a reward for working hard and well?

He offered the chance to go to Ford's plantation to visit his friends, in a month's time.

Who showed up during this month? What was his response to Eldret's offer to Solomon?

Tibeats arrived, still the owner of Solomon (Platt), and said he couldn't go.

What was Eldret's response?

He said that he had given his promise, and that Platt (Solomon) had worked faithfully for him. (p90)

Did Tibeats, as owner, write the necessary pass for Solomon to go visit at Ford's?

Yes, begrudgingly. (p91)

12. While visiting his friends at Ford's plantation, Solomon was told that one of the slaves had died. Who was it, and what was Solomon's reaction?

Eliza had died, grief finally taking her over. She had become unable to work effectively at anything, for which her master whipped and abused her, to no avail. Her master did not end her life, but rather let her wither away with no provisions or protection of any kind, lying on the floor of the slave cabin for weeks. The slaves found her dead one night upon their return. Solomon was grateful she was finally free of her grief. (p92)

13. On his journey back to Big Cane Brake under the conditions of his arrangement with Eldret, who did Solomon encounter on the road? What did this person say?

Solomon encountered Tibeats, who told him that he (Solomon) had been sold to a man named Edwin Epps, and was no longer Tibeats' property. (p93)

Chapter 12

14. Describe the personality of Edwin Epps. What was his primary business?

Epps had loathsome manners and a very coarse nature, and his vocabulary was that of a very uneducated man. He enjoyed drinking a great deal, and when drunk was obnoxious and loud, forcing his slaves to dance for him, or whipping them just to hear them scream. Sober, however, he was silent, attuned to his slaves and delivering only whippings for need instead of thrill. Solomon saw no justice or compassion in Epps at all. Epps saw slaves as property, not people at all. (p94-95, p107)

Where was Epps' plantation located? What was his main crop for business?

The plantation was located on Bayou Huff Power. Epps was in the cotton business, primarily. (p94-95)

15. Was picking cotton the only job of particular slaves, or was cotton-picking in addition to the slave's regular chores for the day? How long during the day were slaves required to work?

Cotton-picking was an additional chore, with the other chores to be completed after the day's cotton-picking. Slaves picked cotton from dawn until dusk was past, only stopping when the order was given to cease work, however late in the night that might come. (p98)

16. What did Solomon sleep on while at Master Epps' plantation? What was the slave cabin like?

His bed was a wooden plank, with a stick of wood as a pillow. His only bedding was a rough blanket. The slave cabin has only walls and ceiling, no floor or windows. The wall boards have such significant gaps between them that a window to let in light is unnecessary, but these gaps unfortunately let in harsh weather as well. (p99)

17. Plantations had their own gardens, providing for the families there. What food did planters in the South get from the North, due to inferior sources in the South?

Southern planters got their cheese and butter from the North, buying it at the market of New Orleans. There were many cows in the South, but none provided well enough. (p101)

Chapter 13

18. When Solomon got sick, did Epps pay any mind to his being ill? Why?

No, he continued to whip Solomon to compel him to work so the total labor for the day would not be less. (p104)

What finally made Epps respond to Solomon's illness?

When he was told that Solomon would die, Epps knew it would be a great financial loss for him if that happened. Then, and only then, did Epps send for a doctor. Even then, Epps ordered Solomon back to work long before he (Solomon) was in good enough shape to work. (p104)

19. What job did Epps give Solomon at this point? How adept was Solomon at this task?

Epps assigned Solomon to the cotton fields, in which Solomon had never worked before. Picking cotton was very challenging for Solomon, requiring certain hand-eye coordination skills that did not come easily to him. He continually came back from the fields with much less than was acceptable. (p104)

Did Epps keep Solomon at this task? Why or why not?

Epps finally decided Solomon was more trouble than he was worth in the fields and ordered him to other tasks. (p105)

Who was excellent at picking cotton, daily coming in with over twice the acceptable amount for an ordinary slave?

Patsey. (p96)

20. What skill of Solomon's did Epps employ on the occasions he demanded the slaves to dance for him?

Solomon was ordered to play his violin for these dances. (p106)

After these late night dances, were the slaves allowed to take a rest from the next day's duties?

No, the next day's duties would have to be carried out as usual, with the usual punishments and whippings if they were not. (p107)

21. How long did Solomon work on Epps' plantation?

Ten years. (p107)

22. When it was proven to Epps that Solomon was truly a free man with a wife and children, what was his reaction?

He thought only of the money he himself would lose upon losing Solomon as a slave, giving no thought at all to the years of his life that Solomon had lost. (p108)

23. When Epps purchased a different plantation and moved, he took a group of slaves with him, most of whom had been together for years. How did they all end up in the possession of Epps?

Epps had been a driver and overseer, and as payment for a debt, Epps' employer gave him the slaves. They were of varying ages, some men, some women, and a great combination of skills among them. (p108-110)

24. Describe Patsey. What kind of person was she? What was her existence like at the Epps plantation?

Patsey was in her early 20's, standing tall with a great inner strength. She was skillful in many things, "queen of the field" in cotton picking, quick and efficient in her chores. Her temperament was a joyful one, cheerful and faithful. However, her existence had a torturous side, as well. Patsey was the object of a twisted affection of her master and extreme jealousy of the mistress. She was very valuable financially, therefore Epps would not sell her, and Mistress Epps took great pleasure in Patsey's suffering and pain. (p110-111)

Chapter 14

25. The first year Solomon worked for Epps, caterpillars destroyed most of the area's crops, leaving very little for the slaves to harvest. Where were many slaves sent to be hired out to earn wages for their masters, and what kind of plantations were these?

Many slaves were sent to the sugar plantations in a parish on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, slaves being hired at various plantations along the way. (p112)

To whom was Solomon hired?

He was hired to Judge Turner (Tanner), whose sugar plantation was on Bayou Salle. (p113)

Did Solomon find this work to be as difficult for him as cotton-picking had been?

No, cutting sugar cane came much easier to him. He became one of the fastest at the task. (p114)

26. What portion of a slave's wages was that individual allowed to keep, rather than earning money for the master?

As was customary of the time in Louisiana, a slave keeps the earned wages on Sundays only, and may use these to purchase a knife, a cooking pan, hair ribbons for the women, tobacco for the men, or other such things. The only items a master typically provides is a blanket, and anything else a slave needs must be found or purchased with these saved wages. (p114)

27. Besides saving his Sunday wages, what other method of earning money did Solomon have?

He was hired to play for a party of white people, and received donations for doing so.

28. Solomon tried again to escape, speaking to a steamer captain after overhearing the man was from the North. Did Solomon tell the captain his whole story? What was the captain's response?

Solomon did not tell the captain his whole story, he only told him wanted to hide on the steamer to escape to a Free state. The captain was sympathetic to Solomon's request, but said that he would never get past the security officers, that he himself would be punished, and that the ship would be searched.

29. Patsey suffered a great deal at the whim and demand of Mistress Epps. The mistress wanted nothing more than to have Patsey gone, either by selling (which Master Epps refused to do based on her value, he said) or by the slave dying. What was Solomon's view of Mistress Epps? Why do you think Epps would not send Patsey away?

Solomon saw the beast of jealousy in Mistress Epps, but also saw another side, that of an educated, beautiful woman, with kindness shown to all but Patsey. (p116-117) Master Epps lusted after Patsey, and would not send her away because of this. (p111)

30. What did Solomon invent and construct that provided him and other slaves with an additional food?

He made a fish trap to put in the bayou, and it worked even better than he anticipated. (p.118-119)

Discussion Questions: Key

Correct answers include the following, and additional correct answers are possible.

- 1. In your opinion, what did Solomon think about the system of slavery and slave owners as a group? Where did he believe the blame lay, with the system itself or with the slave owner in particular? Did Solomon believe that most slaves were aware of their situation, or did he seem to agree with many slave owners in that slaves were non-human? Give specific passages to support your answers.**

Solomon blamed the system of slavery, not the slave owner, for the lot in life that slaves were forced to bear. The institution was to blame for the injustice and the brutality. He knew that there were good-hearted men (such as Ford) who were very sympathetic to the plight of the slaves, who treated them well, and still owned them as property. On the other side, there were cruel men (such as Tibeats and Epps) who almost delighted in the suffering of the slaves, who saw the slaves as property and not human at all, just as a means to make money. Solomon knew and saw for himself that most slaves were well-aware of their situation and coveted freedom as much as their masters enjoyed theirs.

- 2. In your opinion, why did the ghostwriter choose the particular words he used in given passages? For example, on page 75 when Solomon described Tibeats's mood, he used the word "venomous". Why was this word chosen, instead of "mean" or "hateful"? Could the meaning of the sentence or the visual image conveyed by the description possibly have changed by using a different word? How? For another example, refer to page 91 as Solomon received the pass from Tibeats and headed to Master Ford's plantation for a visit. He described himself as "wholly destitute", instead of "unprosperous" or simply "poor?" In your opinion, what might have been the ghostwriter's purpose in selecting the words he used over other choices? Select one or two phrases in this section in which the meaning would have been altered had the word choice been different. Describe the meaning as written, then describe the meaning with synonyms of your own choosing.**

For the example on page 75, the word "venomous" is a deeper, more vivid word than just "mean" or "hateful". Though negative in meaning, "mean" and "hateful" are both much milder adjectives than "venomous", leaving the reader/listener with the understanding that the man described as "venomous" is not simply disagreeable or in a bad mood, but seems almost evil to the core. "Venomous" conjures up images of snakes and of long-lasting, painful poison. Snakes can be a symbol of evil. In the second example, "unprosperous" or "poor" can carry the implication of one just down on his luck temporarily. Possibly one has been prosperous before, and is not now, but will return to prosperity at some point in the future. "Poor" people generally do have some food, clothing, and shelter, though perhaps not the best; they have something to work with in establishing a better life. At this point, Solomon saw himself as "wholly destitute," "without money, property, food, water, or supplies of any kind. Further, Solomon had no relatives or friends from which to get help, at least not any that he could reach, so he was destitute in that sense as well. He also did not yet see how this situation would change. Thus, "wholly destitute" could have been chosen to give more desperation to his situation than other choices might have provided.