

Tubman: Road to Freedom (excerpt)

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Man 2: When Harriet was just five years old, her master started renting her out to other families, families who would put her to work doing little jobs in their houses.

Harriet: But a lot of these other families were cruel people, people who would beat you if you didn't do things exactly the way they wanted.

Woman 3: You are to be my baby's nursemaid. Whatever the child needs, you take care of. Watch over him— and mind you not to let him out of your sight.

Harriet: This lady, Miss Susan, she wasn't very nice. If that baby cried, she'd whip me. If that baby spit up, she'd whip me more. But the worst thing was being cooped up in her old house...when all I really wanted to be was outside.

One day, when I was six...I was walking through the kitchen, and I spied something I just had to have.

Woman 2: *(the cook)* You stay away from that bowl there, girl. That's Miss Susan's favorite sugar bowl, and if you knock it over, you're gonna have a world of hurt on you.

Harriet: A sugar bowl? I never seen one so beautiful.

Woman 2: Mm hmm, come all the way from London, England. The master says it belonged to his grandma there.

Harriet: It's got the most beautiful ladies on it...and horses. And...*(stops)*

Woman 2: And what?

Harriet: And...nothing *(she turns for a second, mimes taking a lump of sugar out of the bowl, and puts the imaginary bowl down on the counter)*. I got to go now, and see if Master William is up from his nap.

Woman 2: You mind that one, girl. Miss Susan very particular about that new baby of hers.

Harriet: *(walking out of the scene)* I felt so bad, I knew it was wrong, but I needed to know what it was like to have me a whole lump of sugar to myself. *(suddenly the sound of a baby crying in the background)*

Woman 3: *(enters, frantically, the bawling" baby " in a white blanket on her shoulder, patting it)* Mamie, where is that Harriet? She was supposed to be watching William.

Woman 2: I don't know, Miss Susan, she was here a minute ago but I thought she was headed back to the nursery.

Woman 3: Well, don't just stand there, go find her and bring her to me!

Harriet: Standing there, alone under that big ole locust tree, I put that sugar in my mouth, and.....(*sighs...*)

Woman 2: (*enters, harshly*) There you are! We been looking all over creation for you. Miss Susan, she's bout ready to rip your hide, here you telling me you're gonna see on that baby and out here doing....what you got in your mouth girl?!

Harriet: Nothing...

Woman 2: Nothing my foot...you spit out what you got there...right now! (*Harriet slowly spits out her little bit of sugar*) You littlestealing the Master's sugar from that bowl.....You know what they gonna do when they find out you been stealin? You gonna get whupped but good!

Harriet: Please, please don't tell Miss Susan! I just wanted to know what it tasted like, I ain't never had no sugar before!

Woman 2: You ain't had lots of things before, but stealin is stealin!

Harriet: Please! Please don't tell her! She'll beat me. (*sound of Woman 3, off, calling "Minty!"*) No...I can't stay here, I've got to go!

Woman 2: You come back here, right now! Minty! (*to audience*) But it was no use – she was off and runnin! We searched all over the plantation for her, but couldn't find hide nor hair of her.

Woman 3: (*enters on this last line*) When she turns up, you bring her to me straight off! (*and she goes back inside the house*)

Harriet: I was so scared of what she'd do to me that I ran to the hog pen....got down in their with them, and buried myself in their hay! I stayed there with them, hiding like that, for five days until I finally couldn't stand it anymore. I was cold, and hungry, and no whipping was so bad that it made living with hogs worthwhile.

Woman 2: And sure enough, Minty got the hiding of her life.

Woman 3: I give up Tobias. This little one is useless as a nursemaid. She can't seem to remember anything she's told to do. Give her to Mr Oliver and see if he can turn her into a field hand.