

**BACKGROUND:** *Historians speculate that Kate Drumgoold was born in 1858 or 1859, but as is the case for most enslaved people, there is no record of her birth. In her autobiography, published in 1898, her narrative lacks chronological organization, but is instead a series of recollections, stories, and comments centered largely on her Christian faith, family, and education.*

*Family features prominently in her autobiography as she recounts the separation of her family through sale. Drumgoold's unnamed mother was sold near the beginning of the Civil War (1860) to pay for a substitute to enlist in the Confederate Army in her enslaver's place. Her mother left behind her husband, one son, and seventeen daughters.*

*Interestingly, in her narrative Drumgoold refers to her female enslaver as her "white mother." Perhaps a testament to her young age at the time of her enslavement, Drumgoold's earliest memories of enslavement tell the story of young girl who was treated as a popular "pet" among the white people in her neighborhood.*

*After emancipation, Drumgoold's mother returned and together they proceeded in attempting to reunite as much of her family as possible. At some point, Drumgoold relocated to Brooklyn where she worked as a domestic servant and focused on obtaining an education. Later, she worked as a teacher until her declining health forced her to quit the work she loved.*

*The excerpts below come directly from her autobiography.*

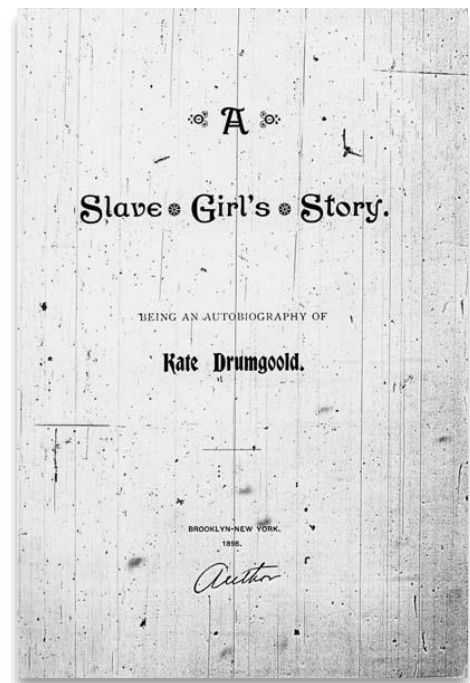
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... I was born in Old Virginia, in or near the Valley, the other side of Petersburg, of slave parents, and I can just call to mind the time when the war began, for I was not troubled then about wars, as I was feeling as free as any one could feel, for I was sought by all of the rich whites of the neighborhood, as they all loved me, as noble whites will love a child, like I was in those days, and they would send for me if I should be at my play and have me to talk for them, and all of their friends learned to love me and send me presents, and I would stand and talk and preach for some time for them.

My dear mother was sold at the beginning of the war, from all of her little ones, after the death of the lady that she belonged to, and who was so kind to my dear mother and all of the rest of the negroes of the place; and she never liked the idea of holding us as slaves, and she always said that we were all that she had on the earth to love; and she did love me to the last.

The money that my mother was sold for was to keep the rich man from going to the field of battle, as he sent a poor white man in his stead, and should



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the war end in his favor, the poor white man should have given to him one negro, and that would fully pay for all of his service in the army. But my God moves in a way unknown to men, and they can never understand His ways, for He can plant His footsteps on the North, the South, the East, the West, and outride any man's ideas; and how wonderful are all of his ways. And if we, as a race, will only put our trust in Him, we shall gain the glorious victory,

and be a people whose God is the God of all this broad earth, and may we humble ourselves before Him and call Him, Blessed.

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My mother was sold at Richmond, Virginia, and a gentleman bought her who lived in Georgia, and we did not know that she was sold until she was gone; and the saddest thought was to me to know which way she had gone and I used to go outside and look up to see if there was anything that would direct me, and I saw a clear place in the sky, and it seemed to me the way she had gone, and I watched it three and a half years, not knowing what that meant, and it was there the whole time that mother was gone from her little ones.

On one bright Sunday I asked my older sister to go with me for a nice walk and she did so, for she was the one that was so kind to the rest of us--and we saw some sweet flowers on the wayside and we began [sic] to have delight in picking them, when all at once I was led to leave her alone with the flowers and to go where I could look up at that nice, clear

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spot, and as I wanted to get as near to it as I could, I got on the fence, and as I looked that way I saw a form coming to me that looked like my dear mother's, and calling to my sister Frances to come at once and see if that did not look like my dear mother, and she came to us, so glad to see us, and to ask after her baby that she was sold from that was only six weeks old when she was taken from it; and I would that the whole world could have seen the joy of a mother and her two girls on that heaven-made day--a mother returning back to her own once more, a mother that we did not know that we should ever see her face on this earth more. And mother, not feeling good over the past events, had made up her mind that she would take her children to a part of this land where she thought that they would never be in bondage any more on this earth.

So she sought out the head man that was placed there by the North to look after the welfare of lately emancipated negroes of the South, to see that they should have their rights as a freed people.

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I shall never forget that lovely Sunday morning when I saw my dear mother returning again to her own native home and her own dear ones once more, but mother would not go to the house with us, as she did not want to take the law in her own hands. So she told sister and I where she was stopping and told us to come to her after we had told the gentleman where we lived, and I went to him and told him that mother had come back and wanted to have us to come where she was staying. He, Mr. House, did not want us to go, and I took my oldest sister and marched out to go where mother was and he did not like that freedom, and he tried to find which way that we had gone to the place, but he did not find us, and we had been to the place where the people were that had homes, and that they would kill us at first sight, and that was all that I wanted to see, and I did not find one thing true of their sayings.

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Mother now has to tell the gentleman where to find all of her own dear ones whom God in His love for had kept for her, and she should have been very grateful to Him that her life had been prolonged and all that she had left alive were still alive, awaiting for her to return, and finding that her children were all over in different places, and now she has to tell where to find them, through the help of the Lord. And when she had gone for them and was told that some of her own were dead, she said that she would go and dig up their bones; but they were not

dead, as was said, and she sent the soldiers after them and sometimes they were told the same as mother was, and some of the little ones had to be sent for two or three times before they were brought. My oldest sister knew where they all were, so she could help to get the rest.

One of my sisters who lived at the same place where we were living was detained and the soldiers had go three times before they could get her, for they said that she had died since we had left, for I would not stay at the place as he, Mr. House, did not want us to go on Monday to see my mother, on whom I should look to, as she had come to claim her own. I told my oldest sister that we would leave, and my sister Annie was at one of Mr. House's sons, who found that we were going to see mother and she came with us, so that left three there yet; that was sister Lavinia and the baby, sister Rosa, and they let mother have the baby, as it was a sickly child; and she had to send there three times before she could get sister Lavinia, and the last time the soldiers, with horses, went, and the House's took off all of her clothing and put them into water to keep them from taking her, and they had to take blankets and wrap her in them, and bring her to mother, and she took sick from that time from the long ride, and getting cold she nearly died.

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One they hid in the garden; one they put in the cellar, and so these were hard times for mother and us, who were in the road one night walking to find some place to get out of the rain and let those wet garments get dried, for it was so dark that we could not see a hand before us.

But after all the hard trials we reached this lovely city, where there are those that love and fear God, and who love the souls of the negro as well as those of the white, the red, the yellow or brown races of the earth, for we have ever found some of the people who do not forget us day or night in their prayers, that God will send a blessing to us as a race.

To my story of a life of slavery:

My dear mother had a dear husband that she was sold from also, and he, not knowing that he should ever see my mother any more, as the times were then, he waited for a while and then he found him another wife, and when mother came and found that he was married to another she tried to get him, but she could do nothing about it; so having to leave him behind to look after the last one and her family, although it seemed hard for her to do so.

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## CHAPTER II.

MY mother did not know where my brother was before she was sold, for we heard that he had tried to get over to the Northern side and had been taken to Richmond, Va., and put into Castle Thunder, and that was the last that we heard of him during the war. When, to our surprise, we were on our way North we learned that he was going to school; that the Northern people had teachers there in the South to teach them to read and to write; and he learning that we had gone North made himself ready and came on, but he did not know where to find us, so getting a place to work, and the same time telling those that he worked for that his people were here somewhere, they found mother and got her to go to the place where he was, and sure enough there was her dead and lost boy, and the joy and love that came to that dear, loving mother and her only son on that day will never be known on this side of the grave, as they have both gone to the land of the blest, for my brother never used any bad language in his life, and when he took the Lord for his own, it was his meat and his drink to live for Him and to follow where He led, and he died a true child of the King.

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Then my sister Annie was given to the gentleman's married son and she was not with us, and sister Tempy Green was with the minister, and she was one of the dead ones that mother had a time to get. Maggie, Susie, Martha and Mary were at the same place where mother was sold from, and she went and got them at once. It was like a dream to them to see how far she had been sold and to see her back there again.

Sister Lavinia was at the same place where I was and she was treated very badly by the man's own daughter, for she would whip her without cause. Sister Rosa was at the same place and she was three and a half years on mother's return. As I told you, she was six weeks old when mother was sold and that made it three years and three months that mother was gone from her own native home to a part of the country where she did not know any one, not even the great God who had been so good to her all of those years when she was gone; and all of her whole life God was watching over her and giving to the world one child who was to help to educate the down-trodden race which was, through Abraham Lincoln, to be God's leader for the children that were in Egypt in the South, and God with this leader and the race, they came through fire and smoke, and now they can see the

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light of another day. Some of the race say that they are sometimes, in their thoughts, ashamed that they belong to a race that has been in bondage, but I have never felt that way, for I am glad that things have been as they were, for God has moved in a way that is unknown to men and His wonders He has performed, and has planted His footsteps in the South, the West, the East and in the North, and is watching the people and asking them what doors are they opening for the Ethiopian.

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To my story of child in House's family:

This Mr. John House had the largest sum offered to him for a girl as I was that was ever offered for any one and he would not accept the whole world of money, on account of the one that had loved me and cared for me, for he well knew that after all of those prayers that he would be sinning; and he would not have had my mother sold away from her children if his brother would have let him know it in time. He went away to attend court and to his surprise found that my mother was sold. He came home at once to let us know of it, and he was the one that called in my sister Frances and sister Annie and sister Rosa, for the two oldest that I speak of fell to a dead brother who had drank himself to death, and these were sold to pay for his drink. He had been dead for some time and those that he owed now came in to get their pay, which was their only chance; and the money that they got did not do them much good, thanks to God, for it was in the time of the war and the money was of the Confederate money, and it was during the great struggle when this money was called in never more to be the money of these United States, for this Union needs the kind of money that will be good in all lands, and I am glad that the people can see it now as they never saw it before.