

(A day in the life of an enslaved girl at the Ten Broeck Mansion)

Caroline woke up to her mother gently nudging her shoulder. The small attic space they slept in with about seven others was chilly that early March morning.

“We need to **stoke** the fires,” Mama said. “You go outside and collect the **kindling** Saul gathered yesterday.”

Caroline sat up. As much as she wished she could go back to sleep, she knew her mother needed her help. She didn’t want either of them to get in any trouble for the house being too cold when Master Abraham and Mistress Elizabeth woke up.

Caroline crawled out of the attic behind her mother, then the pair tiptoed downstairs. Caroline could feel the cold wooden floorboards through her thin shoes. Her mother had promised that the next time she had some fabric to spare, she would **mend** Caroline’s shoes, but so far they’d had not even a rag to speak of.

After the fires, which had dwindled in the night, were once again roaring, Caroline and her mother made their way to the damp and chilly basement, where the other **enslaved** women were already gathered.

“Good morning, Susannah, and good morning, Caroline,” an older woman, Bet, greeted them.

“Good morning,” Caroline mumbled back. She trailed behind her mother over to the **Dutch oven**, where the black cast iron pot filled with the stew the Ten Broecks would eat for breakfast was already hanging over the fire.

“Help Bet with the bread and cheese,” Mama instructed.

Caroline went over to the large wooden table in the middle of the room and stood next to Bet. Bet smiled down at the young girl.

“Can you help me slice the bread?” Bet asked Caroline.

Caroline nodded and took the knife Bet offered her. She sliced up the rest of the loaf as Bet readied the serving tray.

Once the bread and cheese were on the tray, Bet handed it to Caroline. “You bring this upstairs to the dining room,” she said.

Caroline carefully ascended the stairs. She did not want to trip and ruin all of their hard work or upset the mistress. When she entered the dining room, the Ten Broecks were not there, but Caroline’s brother, Saul, was. He had just finished setting the table.

“Hey, Caro,” he said with a grin. “I got a special task for you.”

“What is it?” Caroline asked.

“Emptying the **chamber pots!**” Saul said with a laugh.

Caroline stuck her tongue out at her brother. “Ew, no!”

Emptying the chamber pots was the worst task of all. It meant bringing the heavy pots, full of urine and feces, down from the bedrooms and emptying them outside.

Saul shrugged. “It was worth a try,” he said, before disappearing up the stairs to retrieve the chamber pots.

Just as he left, Mistress Elizabeth, followed by her son, Dirck, and her daughter, Lizzy, entered the room. Caroline’s mother entered the room from the door nearest the cellar, with the family’s stew breakfast in hand. She nodded for Caroline to step aside, so Caroline stood by the wall and watched Mama.

Mama ladled the stew from the large bowl she’d carried up from the cellar into smaller bowls for the family to eat out of. She placed the bowls in front of each person, then placed one at the head of the table, where Master Abraham would sit and take his meal when he came downstairs.

Caroline watched Dirck and Lizzy chatter and eat off of their nice porcelain dishes in the bright, spacious dining room. She thought of the cellar, where she and Mama would go to eat their breakfast once Mama was done serving the family. It was stuffy, dark, and damp down there. Mice and rats often ran past their feet. And, to make matters worse, she and Mama only got the leftovers. Their food was never as fresh as the food the family was served.

Caroline sighed as she followed her mother back down into the cellar. She wondered, not for the first time, why her life was so different from Dirck and Lizzy’s.

Later that afternoon, when Caroline was helping Mama weave **textiles**, Saul excitedly burst into the room.

“I’m gonna be a **courier**, Mama!” he exclaimed. “Peter is up at the Ten Broeck’s other estate, helping **till** the fields, so Mistress Elizabeth asked me to deliver the letter,” he said with a proud smile.

“That’s great, baby,” Mama said, though Caroline could tell that Mama wasn’t entirely happy.

“It’s a letter to Mrs. Schuyler, so I get to go ‘cross town,” Saul added.

“You be careful out there,” Mama warned, her tone very serious.

“Yes, Mama,” Saul said before dashing off to retrieve the letter from Mistress Elizabeth.

Caroline watched her mother for a moment longer. She noticed that Mama was barely weaving, and that there was a sad look on her face.

“Why’re you sad, Mama?” Caroline asked.

“Oh, Caro,” Mama said with a sigh. “I’m sad because we’re still **slaves**. I know Saul is plenty excited about delivering the letter, but even if he weren’t he would still have to do it ‘cause Mistress told him to.”

“How can we stop being slaves?” Caroline asked.

Mama set down her weaving. “If Master and Mistress **manumit** us, then we’ll be **free people**.”

“When are they going to do that?” Caroline looked at her mother with wide, hopeful eyes.

“I don’t know, baby girl. I don’t even know if they will.”

That evening, as Caroline helped Mama scoop hot coals into the **bed warmer** that Mama would then run under the covers of the Ten Broeck’s beds to make them toasty on such a chilly night, she couldn’t help but think about how unfair it all was.

While Dirck and Lizzy slept on the second floor in warm beds, with fires dwindling in their fire places throughout the night, Caroline, Saul, and Mama slept in the chilly attic. There were no fires and no beds. There were only straw cots, thin blankets, and body heat from the other enslaved people who also slept there.

Why did Dirck and Lizzy get such nice, warm beds while Caroline and Saul shivered atop uncomfortable cots?

After Mama had warmed each of the Ten Broeck’s beds, she and Caroline climbed up the steep attic stairs to retire for the evening. Caroline shook from the cold as she crawled onto her cot and settled down between Mama and Saul. Saul nestled close to her, and Caroline burrowed closer to him. Mama wrapped her arm around both of her children as they shared what little body heat they had.

As Caroline drifted off to sleep, she wondered if she and her family would ever be free.

Lesson Three c

What was...

New Netherland?

New Netherland was what the Dutch called New York when it was still a Dutch territory.

Half-freedom?

Half-freedom was part of a system for leaving slavery invented by the Dutch. When someone was declared a "half-slave" they were half-free, meaning they were able to buy land and be paid for the work they did for their master. When they were fully freed they were granted a parcel of land by the Dutch.

The New York Conspiracy of 1741?

The New York Conspiracy of 1741 was when a series of unrelated events were thought to be a slave revolt, leading to the imprisonment and execution of numerous black and white people thought to be involved. There is no evidence that a revolt had been planned.

The New York Manumission Society?

The New York Manumission Society was founded by New Yorkers in 1785. It served to help protect the rights of enslaved and free black people. Its goals were to stop the slave trade and make abolition the law of the land. It was also responsible for founding the first school for black people in the USA. This school, The African Free School, was located in New York City and served free blacks and the children of enslaved people.

Gradual emancipation?

Gradual emancipation refers to laws that slowly freed enslaved people. Typically, a law would state that all enslaved children born after a certain date would be born free, but have to act as indentured servants to their mother's master until they came of age. Freedom for all enslaved people was granted in 1827.