

CHARACTER PROFILES

Major Characters

Whitechapel

Whitechapel is an old slave who has worked on the same plantation his whole life. He has buried two wives, many children and his only son throughout his life. The novel begins after he was forced to witness the whipping death of his son. Whitechapel blames himself for his son's death – he believed he needed to be punished for running away, but not with a whipping.

Whitechapel had faith that by treating a master with respect and kindness that eventually it would be reciprocated. He had lived his entire life this way and was treated with greater respect by his master than many of the other slaves. Whitechapel made the most of this arrangement when his son ran away and he approached the master in his house to be lenient.

While the plantation workers are out searching for Chapel, Whitechapel believes he has done the right thing, but when the overseer returns with Chapel he realises that he is in fact responsible for his son's death.

At the end of the first chapter Whitechapel comes to the realisation that by being the model slave he has actually become his own slave master, keeping himself in the position that he is in.

Chapel

Chapel was raised as Whitechapel's son, even though he was forcibly conceived when his mother was raped by the overseer (Mr Sanders' father). No one ever spoke of the matter and Chapel did not know that Whitechapel wasn't his biological father.

As a child Chapel would go with his mother to the master's house. While there he started watching Lydia reading in the library. Over time she started to teach him to read and write, even though it was forbidden. When they were caught by Lydia's father, Chapel was banned from seeing Lydia anymore and from reading or writing. Chapel kept his promise and began composing poetry in his head. When he would meet with Lydia they would do so in darkness, back to back. Chapel fell in love with Lydia and they decided to run away together to the north where they would be free to live together.

Chapel ran away from the plantation after the death of his mother. He had had a fight with Whitechapel and decided that there was nothing holding him there anymore. He was seeking freedom. He did not want to be a slave.

When he was caught Chapel was sentenced to receive two hundred lashings as punishment for running away. His father had warned him of the risks of running away, but he did not listen or heed his warnings. He was determined that he knew better and that he would succeed in his plan. Chapel's punishment was to serve as a lesson to all of the other slaves who may have been contemplating running away.

Lydia

Lydia is Mr Whitechapel's daughter. She is the youngest of his three children and only daughter. Lydia is responsible for teaching Chapel how to read and write. When they are caught by Lydia's father they are forbidden from seeing each other anymore. But Lydia has fallen in love with Chapel. They meet on clear nights behind the wooden shed. She memorises books for Chapel and he composes poetry for her.

Lydia is much more forward thinking than her father and she would like to believe that there is chance that she and Chapel may be able to be together.

Minor Characters

Mr Whitechapel

The plantation owner. Married with two sons and a daughter. Mr Whitechapel's view of slaves is different to most other slave owners – he believes that if you treat slaves with kindness and respect they will repay you with hard work and loyalty. This view was also shared by his father, who owned the plantation prior to him. However, even though he manages his plantation the same way as his father did, he still seeks vindication from the other plantation owners who are much more violent with their slaves.

Mr Whitechapel is shocked when he finds Chapel reading to Lydia in his library. He forbids them from seeing one another anymore.

Mr Sanders (the overseer)

Mr Sanders was the overseer at Mr Whitechapel's plantation. He refused to listen to the orders given by his master, from a slave, and was determined to ensure that Chapel was punished as a lesson to all the other slaves about running away. Mr Sanders does not share his master's view of threatening slaves with respect. In the first chapter he hits Whitechapel across the face and threatens to lash him. In the second chapter Mr Sanders learns that Chapel was in fact his half-brother.

Sanders Senior

Sanders Senior is Mr Sanders' father. He worked as the overseer at the Whitechapel plantation when it was run by Mr Whitechapel's father. He lost his wife when she gave birth to their son. Sanders Senior does not agree with the way Mr Whitechapel runs his plantation and treats his slaves, however he only reveals this in his diary entries. He is happy to use physical punishments against the slaves and complains when their rations are increased and they are given an extra break in the afternoon. Sanders Senior rapes Cook and she falls pregnant. When she gives birth he is required to remarry so that people do not assume that he is sleeping with Cook.

Cook

Cook was bought at the market at the age of 15. She was to work in the fields but ended up working as Sanders Senior's cook when his old cook became ill. Whitechapel was attracted to Cook and was granted permission to marry her. At first she rejected Whitechapel's advances, thinking him too old, but eventually she agreed. Cook was raped twice by Sanders Senior, once before her wedding and once afterwards. She became pregnant to Sanders Senior, but Whitechapel stood by her and raised the child as his own.

When Cook finds out about Chapel's reading to Lydia she is extremely proud, but also fearful. She knows that Chapel should not know how to read and that she should put a stop to it, but she is so pleased that she chooses to keep it a secret.

Plantation Owners

There are many other plantation owners, who Mr Whitechapel knows. They regularly treat their slaves harshly in an attempt to maintain control through fear.

Thomas

Lydia's older brother. Travels to the north to conduct business on his father's behalf. Tells Lydia of the free blacks who associate with white women in the north.

William

Lydia's other brother.

Lydia's mother

Lydia's mother is very protective of her daughter and wants to ensure she grows up to be a proper lady. She begins trying to arrange a man for her to marry, but Lydia rejects them all.

Great Granddaughter

We do not learn this character's real name, we only know her as the youngest of Whitechapel's great grandchildren. She tells us of Whitechapel's death.

Relationships between Characters

Whitechapel and Mr Whitechapel

This relationship is one of mutual respect. Whitechapel worked for Mr Whitechapel's father and has always been a hard working a kind slave.

Whitechapel and Chapel

Technically speaking this is a father-son relationship, however we know that Chapel was not Whitechapel's son but Sanders Senior's. Nevertheless, no one on the plantation is aware of the truth about Chapel's parentage, other than those directly involved. Whitechapel raised Chapel just as he did all his other children. Chapel was respectful of his father, but he also thought him old and lacking in a desire for things to change or improve. He therefore did not heed the advice that was given him.

Chapel and Lydia

This relationship started as a friendship between a young girl and boy who shared a mutual interest in books and reading. After they were banned from seeing each other they continued to meet in secret. They fell in love and decided to risk it all to run away together and live in the north.

Mr Whitechapel and his slaves

Mr Whitechapel is different to most other slave owners – he believes in treating his slaves with kindness. Happy slaves are less likely to revolt or runaway. Mr Whitechapel reprimands his overseer when he uses physical violence against the slaves. Mr Whitechapel ensures that his slaves are well fed and have comfortable quarters.