A Slave's Tale: From Rags to Revolt

I'm trapped. I sit on my worn-down cot, stuck behind the cold, iron bars that hold me inside my tiny cell. The cell is damp, dimly-lit, and incredibly dirty. There is an enormous thunderstorm raging outside. The rain pours down, the thunder roars, and blinding flashes of lightning periodically illuminate the room with a flood of white light. All of this contributes to the eerie conditions of the Southampton County Jail. But I am not writing this to describe my current surroundings. I am writing this to tell about my extraordinary life.

My name is Nat Turner. I was born a slave onto the Southampton County Plantation on October 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1800. My owner's name was Benjamin Turner. He was a very reasonable and compassionate owner. I shared a diminutive shack on the plantation with my mother and my grandmother (who most people called, “Old Bridget”). My mother was completely against slavery. She was absolutely ashamed that she and my father (who had been sold before my birth) had brought me into the awful life as a slave. I was extremely close to my grandmother, however, for she was my main caretaker.

My master had a son, who was just a few years older than I. Therefore, if I had any free time, I spent much of it with him. During our time together, he taught me all about how to read and write. Over time, I began to realize that being able to read and write as a slave was a huge privilege! These skills could help me a lot in life. During the lessons, I paid very close attention to him, and in about two years, I had become a master at it. One day, my master's son showed me the Bible, and thoughtfully gave it to me as a gift. I took it home and read it five times in the course of the next year.
Reading the Bible really changed my perspective on life as I knew it. It exposed me to religion, and showed me the biased ways of white people and their unfair acts towards us African-Americans. Then, in the year of 1821, I couldn’t take being a slave anymore, and I ran away. About a month later, I received a vision, and the Holy Spirit of the Lord appeared to me.

"Nat," moaned the Spirit.

"What? Who are you? What’s going on?” I questioned as I backed away in fright.

"You must not ask questions. Do as I say. You must return to your master. Go! NOW!” it shouted.

And then the Spirit was gone. I didn’t know what to do, and I stood there in shock. Then I recovered, and made my way back to my plantation. Later in the year, my master died and I was auctioned off to a man named Thomas Moore. I missed my old master, and resented the fact that I had been sold. One day, while working in the fields, I had my second vision. I saw peculiar lights in the sky and I prayed to find out what they meant. I discovered drops of blood on the corn, as though it were dew out of the heavens. Then, I found blood on leaves in the surrounding area. But the blood on the leaves was in a certain shape. I soon discovered that the pools of blood were in the forms of men. I was absolutely horrified.

A few years later, my master passed away, leaving his wife a widow. She was very quick to remarry, and she became the bride of a man by the name of Joseph Travis. As a result, I, along with the other slaves, became his property. Out of all of the owners I had, Travis was by far the cruellest and most prejudice. He hated us for no apparent reason. Soon after he became my master, I received my third vision. The Holy Spirit presented itself to me yet again.
“It’s time, Nat.”


“The time has come for you to arise and slay your enemies!” it stated triumphantly.

“You mean the whites?” I asked.

“That is correct.”

“How will I know when the time is right?”

“You will know. Trust me,” the Spirit responded mysteriously as it disappeared.

After that, I immediately started plotting a revolt. I gathered four of my closest friends, and we planned the uprising for July 4th. However, as the date neared, I became very ill, and we had to put it off. On August 13th, the sun appeared bluish-green, and this was interpreted as the final sign to start the revolt.

Therefore, on August 21st, my friends and I met at 2 a.m. and the uprising began. We started in the Travis household, and slaughtered every white within it. We then freed all the slaves, and moved on to the next house. We continued this process throughout the town. We gained over 70 African-Americans and killed 60 whites in total. That’s when we were captured by the local militia. We were no match for them at all. I was one of the few rebels who escaped and went into hiding. I didn’t last long though. They eventually found me and threw me in jail (where I still am today).

When I first got here, a doctor by the name of Thomas R. Gray interviewed me about my life. I don’t remember much of what happened during that, but I do remember when he asked me
about my views on life, I told him that whites have no right to discriminate against African-Americans due to our race and color.

So that is how I got to where I am at this very moment. I sit on my cot on this stormy night. The guards are coming to get me. They will then take me to the gallows and hang me. This is going to be my final moment. So, goodbye.

-Nat Turner