



Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Harriet Ann Jacobs (1813 - 1897)

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl was one of the first books in the slave narrative genre that spoke to the issues of sexual harassment and abuse faced by slave women. The book is addressed to northern white women, with the underlying message that abuse of female slaves by white male masters is corrosive to the family and marriage unit. Jacobs was urged to write her life story by her friend Amy Post and suggested she contact Harriet Beecher Stowe for help. When Stowe suggested instead that the story be part of Stowe's own work, Jacobs started on her own account, writing secretly at night in the nursery of the home of her employer. It was serialized in the *New York Tribune* and then published in 1861 in book form by Thayer and Eldridge under the pseudonym Linda Brent to protect the identity of its author,

who was subject to capture and return to her owner under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Names of all the key characters were changed to protect them from harm. The release of the book in 1861 met with favorable reviews but coincided with the onset of the Civil War and the bankruptcy of the publisher, suppressing awareness and demand. After the war it was considered a novel due to the use of the pseudonym. Interest was revived in the 1970's and 1980's when scholar Jean Fagan Yellin confirmed the identity of the author and historians began to better understand the connection to feminist issues.

Harriet Ann Jacobs (February 11, 1813 – March 7, 1897) was an African-American writer and abolitionist who began life as a slave, escaped, and was finally freed, and is best known today as the author of her autobiographical novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. She was born into in Edenton North Carolina. After her mother's death when she was six she lived with her mistress, who taught her to read, write and sew. When she was 12 her mistress died and she passed into the ownership of Dr. James Norcom, who pursued her sexually. Jacobs evaded his attentions by associating with a neighboring white lawyer, Samuel Sawyer, and bearing two children. She escaped in 1835, seeking refuge in the attic of her grandmother's shack, where she lived for seven years before escaping by boat to Philadelphia and then to New York in 1845, where she became a nursemaid to the family of Nathaniel Parker Willis. After a journey to England and a stay in Boston she moved to Rochester, NY in 1849 to join her brother, who had escaped and was active in the abolition movement. After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 she and her brother returned to New York City. In 1852 she was threatened with capture by her owners and fled to Massachusetts; in her absence, Willis' second wife bought her freedom. Her memoir was published in 1861 to good notices and became popular with abolitionists. During and after the Civil War she was active in support of schools, hospitals, orphanages, and the general plight of freedman as the country grappled with the new reality, dividing her time between the Boston and Washington areas. She died in Washington DC and is buried in Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.