

Amelia Opie, "The Negro Boy's Tale" (pub. 1802; repub. 1824)

'Haste! hoist the sails! fair blows the wind!
Jamaica, sultry land, adieu! . . .
Away! and loitering Anna find!
I long dear England's shores to view!'

The sailors gladly haste on board,
Soon is Trevannion's voice obeyed,
And instant, at her father's word,
His menials seek the absent maid.

But where was 'loitering Anna' found? . . .
Mute, listening to a Negro's prayer,
Who knew that sorrow's plaintive sound
Could always gain her ready ear; . . .

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Who knew, to sooth the slave's distress
Was gentle Anna's dearest joy,
And thence, an earnest suit to press,
To Anna flew the Negro boy.

'Missa,' poor Zambo cried, 'sweet land
Dey tell me dat you go to see,
Vere, soon as on de shore he stand,
De helpless Negro slave be free.

'Ah! dearest missa, you so kind!
Do take me to dat blessed shore,
Dat I mine own dear land may find,
And dose who love me see once more.

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'Oh! ven no slave, a boat I buy,
For me a letel boat vould do,
And over wave again I fly
Mine own loved negro land to view.

'Oh! I should know it quick like tink,
No land so fine as dat I see,
And den perhaps upon de brink
My moder might be look for me! . . .

'It is long time since lass ve meet,
Ven I vas take by bad vite man,
And moder cry, and kiss his feet,
And shrieking after Zambo ran.

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'O missa! long, how long me feel
Upon mine arms her lass embrace!
Vile in de dark, dark ship I dwell,
Long burn her tear upon my face.

'How glad me vas she did not see
 De heavy chain my body bear;
 Nor close, how close ve crowded be,
 Nor feel how bad, how sick de air!

'Poor slaves! . . . but I had best forget.
 Dey say (but teaze me is deir joy)
 Me grown so big dat ven ve meet
 My moder vould not know her boy.

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'Ah! sure 'tis false! But yet if no,
 Ven I again my moder see,
 Such joy I at her sight vould show
 Dat she vould tink it must be me.
 'Den, kindest missa, be my friend;
 Yet dat indeed you long become;
 But now one greatest favour lend, . . .
 O find me chance to see my home!

'And ven I'm in my moder's arms,
 And tell dee vonders I have know,
 I'll say, Most best of all de charms
 Vas she who feel for negro's woe.

'And she shall learn for you dat prayer
 Dey teach to me to make me good;
 Though men who sons from moders tear,
 She'll tink, teach goodnesss never could.

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'Dey say me should to oders do
 Vat I vould have dem do to me; . . .
 But, if dey preach and practise too,
 A negro slave me should not be.

'Missa, dey say dat our black skin
 Be ugly, ugly to de sight;
 But surely if dey look vidin,
 Missa, de negro's heart be vite.

'Yon cocoa nut no smooth as silk,
 But rough and ugly is de rind;
 Ope it, sweet meat and sweeter milk
 Vidin dat ugly coat ve find.

'Ah missa! smiling in your tear,
 I see you know vat I'd impart;
 De cocoa husk de skin I veer,
 De milk vidin be Zambo's heart.

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'Dat heart love you, and dat good land

Vere every negro slave be free,
 Oh! if dat England understand
 De negro wrongs, how wrath she be!

'No doubt dat ship she never send
 Poor harmless negro slave to buy,
 Nor would she e'er de wretch befriend
 Dat dare such cruel bargain try.
 'O missa's God! dat country bless!'
 (Here Anna's colour went and came,
 But saints might share the pure distress,
 For Anna blushed at others' shame.)

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'But, missa, say; shall I vid you
 To dat sweet England now depart,
 Once more mine own good country view,
 And press my moder on my heart?'

Then on his knees poor Zambo fell,
 While Anna tried to speak in vain:
 The expecting boy she could not tell
 He'd ne'er his mother see again.

But, while she stood in mournful thought,
 Nearer and nearer voices came;
 The servants 'loitering Anna' sought,
 The echoes rang with Anna's name.

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Ah! then, o'ercome with boding fear,
 Poor Zambo seized her trembling hand,
 'Mine only friend,' he cried, 'me fear
 You go, and me not see my land.'

Anna returned the artless grasp:
 'I cannot grant thy suit,' she cries;
 'But I my father's knees will clasp,
 Nor will I, till he hears me, rise.

'For, should thine anxious wish prove vain,
 And thou no more thy country see,
 Still, pity's hand might break thy chain,
 And lighter bid thy labours be.

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'Here wanton stripes, alas! are thine,
 And tasks, far, far beyond thy powers;
 But I'll my father's heart incline
 To bear thee to more friendly shores.

'Come! to the beach! for me they wait!'
 Then, grasping Zambo's sable hand,
 Swift as the wind, with hope elate,

The lovely suppliant reached the sand.
But woe betides an ill-timed suit:
His temper soured by her delay,
Trevannion bade his child be mute,
Nor dare such fruitless hopes betray.

'I know,' she cried, 'I cannot free
The numerous slaves that round me pine;
But one poor negro's friend to be,
Might, (blessed chance!) might now be mine.'

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But vainly Anna wept and prayed,
And Zambo knelt upon the shore;
Without reply, the pitying maid
Tevannion to the vessel bore.

Mean while, poor Zambo's cries to still,
And his indignant grief to tame,
Eager to act his brutal will,
The negro's scourge-armed ruler came.

The whip is raised the lash descends
And Anna hears the sufferer's groan;
But while the air with shrieks she rends,
The signal's given . . . the ship sails on.

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That instant, by despair made bold,
Zambo one last great effort tried;
He burst from his tormentor's hold,
He plunged within the foaming tide.

The desperate deed Trevannion views,
And all his weak resentment flies:
'See, see! the vessel he pursues!
Help him, for mercy's sake!' he cries:

'Out with the boat! quick! throw a rope!
Wretches, how tardy is your aid!'
While, pale with dread, or flushed with hope,
Anna the awful scene surveyed.

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The boat is out, the rope is cast,
And Zambo struggles with the wave;
'Ha! he the boat approaches fast!
O father, we his life shall save!'
'But low, my child, and lower yet
His head appears; but sure he sees
The succour given and seems to meet
The opposing waves with greater ease:

'See, see! the boat, the rope he nears!

I see him now his arm extend! . . .
My Anna, dry those precious tears;
My child shall be *one negro's friend!*"

Ah! Fate was near, that hope to foil: . . .
To reach the rope poor Zambo tries; . . .
But, ere he grasps it, faint with toil,
The struggling victim sinks, and dies.

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Anna, I mourn thy virtuous woe;
I mourn thy father's keen remorse;
But from my eyes no tears would flow
At sight of Zambo's silent corse: . . .

The orphan from his mother torn,
And pining for his native shore, . . .
Poor tortured slave . . . poor wretch forlorn . . .
Can I his early death deplore? . . .

I pity those who live, and groan:
Columbia countless Zambos sees; . . .
For swelled with many a wretch's moan
Is Western India's sultry breeze.

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Come, Justice, come! in glory drest,
O come! the woe-worn negro's friend, . . .
The fiend-delighting trade arrest,
The negro's chains asunder rend!