

*June 19, 1865 Galveston Island*

*“We’s free.”*

Marcus stared down at the cracked gravestone. He cursed himself for not getting to it sooner and knew that he wouldn’t have any time to take care of it now. He also knew that his grandma would understand. “We’s free now,” he whispered.

Weeds grew through the cracked headstone, the same weeds that always came back, no matter how many times he, or someone else, yanked them out. Marcus bent down on one knee, wrapped his fist around a clump of bedstraw and pulled, bringing up a bit of the marker with it; a small piece that fit in the palm of his hand. He stood up to examine it, noticed a few letters etched into the stone, but couldn’t call their names. Marcus spat on the cracked edge, not really knowing why, maybe thinking this bit of him would be enough to seal the piece back in place. He whispered a prayer, the only one he knew, and bent down to fit it back in place, when he heard his son calling out for him. “Daddy! Momma looking for you and she’s mad.”

Marcus sighed. Only his wife would be mad on a day like today. He stood up and turned to see his youngest running towards him. His left hand clutched a short piece of sugar cane and, by the looks of it, Marcus figured Buster had sucked the sweetness clean out. Buster’s teeth weren’t strong enough to tear at the strands, so he had used one of his father’s hammers to smash the fibers loose, releasing its sweetness. Marcus pointed to the withered and depleted stalk. “What you carrying that around for? Toss it away and get back to the cabin. We got packing up to do.”

Buster frowned and whipped his arm around his back to hide his treat. “Mamma made us stop. She say we ain’t going nowhere and you’s a—”

“Where she at?”