



*Combat et prise de la Crête-à-Pierrot, 1802.* Original illustration by Auguste Raffet, engraving by Ernst Hébert, depicts battle between Haitian and French forces over the fort of La Crête à Pierrot

**A slave saved his owner's life. Then what?**

# Rebellion

**Anonymous / French-Haitian**

**Retold by Nartana Premachandra**

**W**ords wavered between them.  
*You said what Monsieur?*  
The Frenchman replied, *Do it.*

Moros didn't reply. He only looked into his master's eyes, who was staring beyond his slave, into a landscape of chaos.

Escaped slaves ran with torches through darkened streets while others held machetes, screaming in rage. The machetes soon found their mark; fair throats slit, golden curls sodden in blood.

*The syrup crafted here used to be made of the sweetest sugar, said the Frenchman. Now, the only syrup I see is boiled from blood.* He added ruefully, *White blood.*

Moros turned around. The world hung upside-down; slaves hunting masters. Slaves killing owners.

He turned back to his master.

For a moment, he was silent. His master waited, in fear and confidence. He *knew* his slave.

And yet.

Liberation was exploding behind Moros like the treasure chests bursting open with coins made from the labor of bodies like his. His mind wavered.

And then.

Moros said steadily, *Monsieur Guibourd. I will do it.*

*Moros*, replied the slave's master, *Merci. Merci bien.*

As the fury flared through the night, as people who thought it right to own others were to their astonishment murdered, Moros carved a small opening in the lid of a wooden barrel.

*So you can breathe Monsieur.*

Monsieur Guibourd nodded. *You think of everything. You always have.*

Moros nodded, blinking. He motioned to the barrel. *Quickly. Get inside. Tell me if you're okay.*

Monsieur Guibourd poured his being into the barrel. He took a deep breath and nodded, looking into the whites of Moros's eyes.

*My life depends upon you.*

Moros nodded.

*Seal the barrel.*

Moros shut his owner inside the carapace of oak.

Rolling it along as if it were a barrel of sugar alcohol, he made his way to the docks.

As he spied the ship bound for France, a former slave crossing his path said proudly, *Brother you will own your own sugar plantation one day.*

Moros nodded. Worlds wavered in his mind once more.

From inside the barrel, he heard a sigh.

It was twelve days' journey to France.

Once out on the open sea, Moros released his master from the barrel.

*I owe you Moros.*

Moros nodded. *You do*, he replied.

The sea offered them a spare moment in which to dream. Monsieur dreamed of his home in Angers, along the Loire, and of its fine wines. He had left France long ago, to be a private secretary to a sugar-plantation owner in Saint-Domingue. No one in the world made more money than those involved in the sugar trade.

The world craved sweetness. And the sweetness—not of cakes but of gold, sumptuous, thickly rich gold—craved slaves.

But the human property in Saint-Domingue had had enough.

Monsieur had never seen such terror. It would be good to return to France.

Moros dreamed of his freedom. For a couple of days he had held his master captive in a barrel.

He had possessed complete control over the man who controlled him.

*I could've thrown Monsieur-in-the-barrel into the sea. Or set it on fire. Set him on fire like my brothers on Saint-Domingue have set their masters on fire.*

*But I did not.*

He stared into the pearl-gray waters, azure in spots highlighted by the sun. The sea appeared a wide endless mirror to him.

*I did not.*

They disembarked in La Rochelle, Monsieur planning whether or not to stay in Paris or Angers. Moros of course was dependent upon Monsieur's decision.

But even here, rebellion.

Blood ran through the rutted streets of Paris. The sharp slice of guillotines mutilated the thoughts and dreams of its many fearful inhabitants.

As in Saint-Domingue, justice gave birth to terror.

As Moros and Monsieur watched heads roll, worlds wavered between them once more.

In a café, amidst smoke and glasses of whiskey, a bartender advised, "America. Go to America. They have lost their senses here."

Monsieur and Moros both drank.

They looked at each other. *You are not my slave Moros. Do as you will.*

*Monsieur my freedom does not lie in terror.*

On the ship to Louisiana, Moros and Monsieur chatted with the passengers.

At night, under bright stars, they spoke, looking out over the vast quiet.

Once more, the sea a mirror.

*So Toussaint L'Ouverture is ruining Napoleon's dream of empire. A slave humbles a French ruler. You are pleased Moros?*

Moros laughed before replying.

*What do you think will happen Monsieur? Slaves will rebel, dividing Napoleon's army and destroying his dream of ruling the territory of Louisiana. France will sell Louisiana to the United States for pittance. The new United States will be twice as large. But then they will need more slaves.*

Monsieur Guibourd spoke, tentatively.

*Moros you could've thrown me into the sea. Plugged my airhole in the barrel.*

*You could've refused to hide me in a barrel. You could've acted as the rest.*

*You didn't. Why not?*

Moros stared into the waters. They reflected back only himself.

**T**his story is based on legend mixed with truth. Jacques Guibourd did sail back from Saint-Domingue (today's Haiti) to France. Once in France, he experienced the post-revolution Reign of Terror and departed for the United States, specifically Sainte Genevieve, Missouri, the oldest French colony in the U.S. His slave Moros was supposed to have saved him from the 1791 slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue by concealing him in a barrel.

It is not clear if Moros accompanied Guibourd to the U.S. The Guibourd house still stands in Ste. Genevieve. ♦