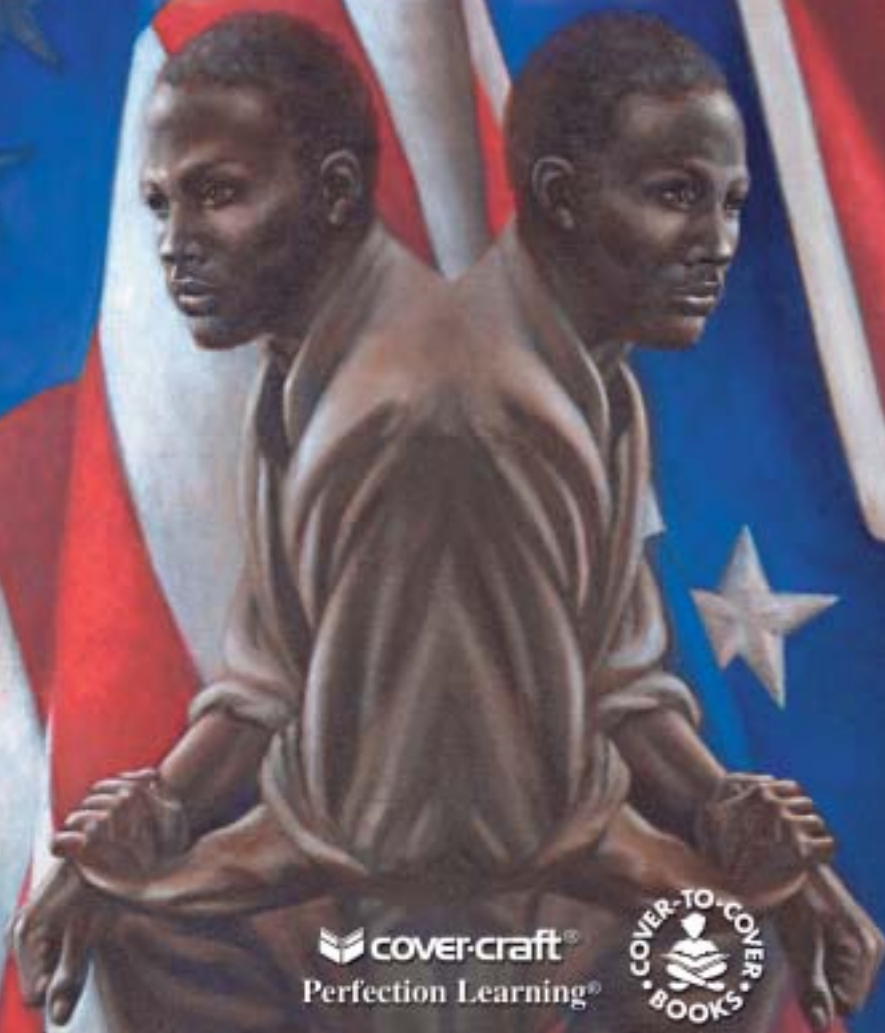



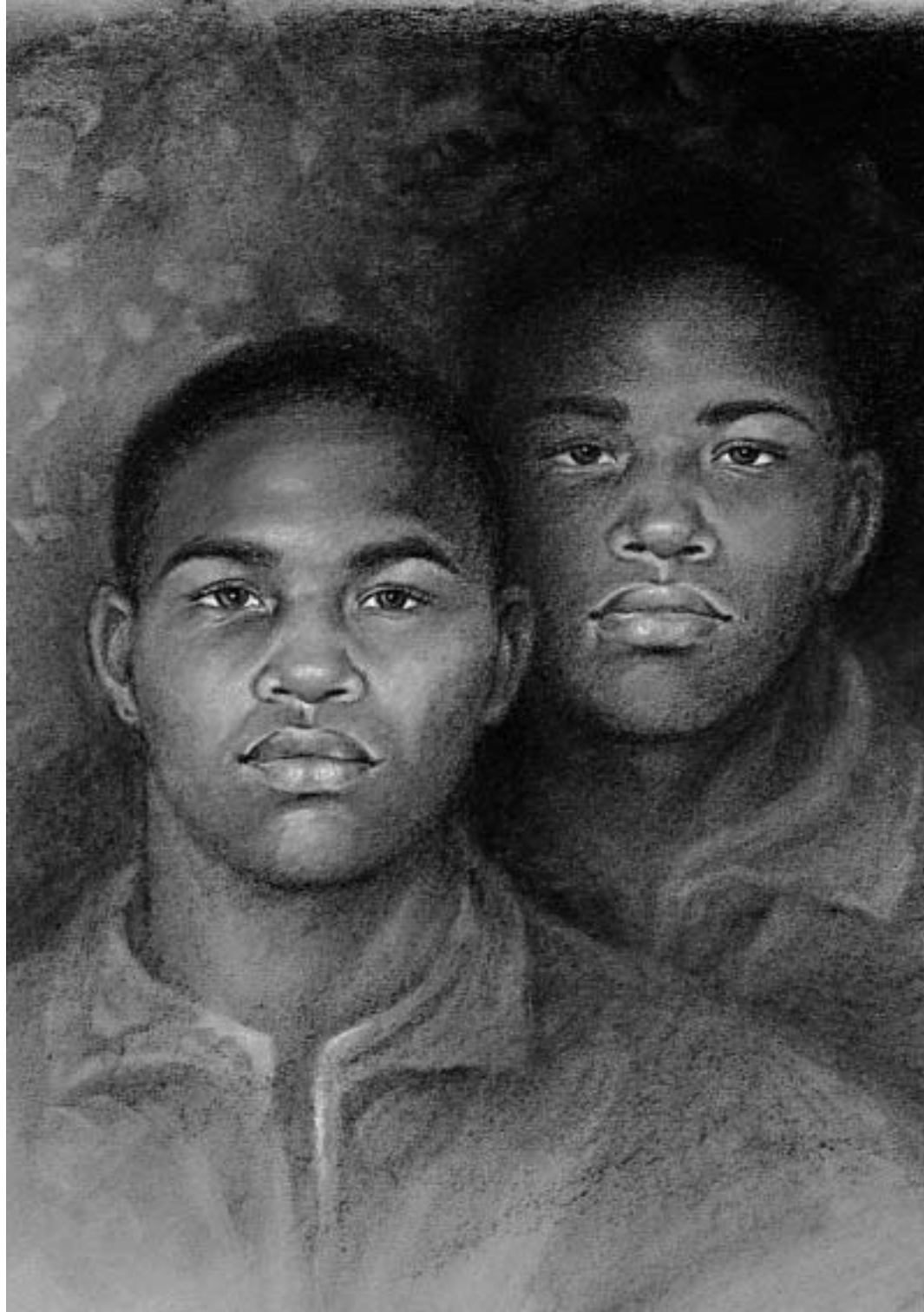
# UNITED IN FREEDOM

Marcia  
Lynch



 covercraft®  
Perfection Learning®







# 1 Chapter

## THOMAS'S CHANCE

Now's my chance, Thomas thought. He tiptoed down the back steps.

The master's family was at a Fourth of July party. And all the slaves had the day off.

Six-year-old Thomas hurried out the back door of the Big House. He ran to the cookhouse. There he searched for food to take with him.

## UNITED IN FREEDOM

Thomas spied some corn bread on the table. He grabbed as much as he could hold. But that wasn't very much. So he found a napkin and wrapped it around more bread.

After searching some more, Thomas found some ham. He unwrapped the napkin and put the ham inside too.

It sure smells good! Thomas thought. He put a small piece in his mouth. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the seldom-tasted meat.

Then Thomas ran back to the Big House. He quickly climbed the stairs. He was careful that no one saw him.

Thomas remembered there was a traveling bag in Master Paul's chest. He quickly found it.

Looking through Paul's clothes, Thomas found a shirt and a pair of pants. He stuffed them into the bag. Then he put the food inside. Now he was ready!

Thomas planned to escape just as his dad and his twin brother, Henry, had. They were the only family he had, and he would find them.

It was late afternoon and sunny. But clouds had begun to form in the west. Thomas looked at them, but he gave them no thought.

Thomas knew where north was by the position of the sun. So he began to walk across the huge fields.

Thomas walked as fast as he could. His only

*Thomas's Chance*

thought was that he would find his father and brother. But he had little idea of where they might be.

Thomas had looked in Paul's geography book. When the tutor was showing Paul the northern states, Thomas had tried to listen. He remembered Pennsylvania. And he knew that was where he was going.

By the time Thomas had walked a while, he was tired. He was also hot, dirty, and hungry.

Great dark clouds began rolling across the sky. The sun began to go down. Thomas was a little afraid. But he bravely tried to remember why he was running away. And this helped for a little while.

As soon as the sun set, the thunder began. Huge raindrops hit Thomas. He knew he had to find cover. But where? Where could he find a place out of the rain?

Thomas was soaking wet. The ground beneath his feet was muddy and slippery. He could hardly see ahead of the pouring rain. And it was dark. Thomas began to get scared.

Then Thomas saw a large dark shape ahead. A tree! He ran to it and stepped under its branches. The thick, heavy leaves of the tree protected him from the rain.

Gratefully, Thomas sat down. He leaned against the huge tree trunk and dug in his bag for food. He was really hungry. Without thinking of tomorrow, he ate all

## UNITED IN FREEDOM

the food.

The thunder and lightning continued, and Thomas was still scared. He took Master Paul's shirt and pants out of the bag. Then he lay on the ground and covered himself with the clothes.



“Wake up!” someone was yelling. “Wake up, you little thief!”

Thomas was being roughly shaken. He opened his eyes and looked into William's mean face.

“What are you doing, boy?” William yelled as he shook Thomas. “Were you trying to run away? How far did you think you could go?”

Thomas began to cry. He couldn't have answered any of William's questions even if he wanted to.

As overseer on the plantation, William often treated the slaves harshly. William roughly jerked Thomas to his feet. He stuffed the clothes into the bag and slung Thomas onto a horse. Then William got on. He jerked on the horse's reins, and it galloped back to the plantation.

William rode around to the back of the Big House. He stopped in front of a little-used shed that was almost covered with brush. He jumped down and then jerked Thomas down off the horse.

William thrust Thomas inside the shed. Then he

*Thomas's Chance*

slammed the door. Thomas could hear something heavy being dragged in front of the door.

Thomas knew he was in trouble. Would he be beaten as Ezekial had been? How long would he have to stay in this horrible place?

Thomas tried to control his crying. Then he felt something small and furry run over his legs. A rat was in the shed!

“Get off me!” Thomas cried as he jumped up. “Get off me!” Thomas jumped up and began banging on the door. But no one heard him.

Afraid to sit down because of the rat, Thomas stood by the door. He hoped that someone would rescue him soon.



After a long time, the shed door opened. William grabbed Thomas and dragged him out.

“Now you’re in for it,” laughed William. “We’re going to see Master Walker.”

Thomas began crying again. He tried to get his arm free from William’s firm grasp.

Then Thomas saw something that took his breath away. He was being taken to the whipping post!

William tied Thomas’s arms around the post. Then Master Walker came and stood in front of Thomas.

“Thomas,” Master Walker said. “What happened to

## UNITED IN FREEDOM

Ezekial when he tried to run away?”

Thomas was so afraid that he couldn't answer.

Master Walker took Thomas's chin in his large hand. He tipped Thomas's face up and looked directly into his eyes. "You tell me, Thomas," Master Walker demanded. "Right now!"

"He g-g-g-got a wh-wh-whipping," Thomas managed to get out between sobs.

"You're only six years old," said Master Walker. "And I'm not going to whip you this time. But you must never try to run away again.

"I've let you be with my son, Paul," Master Walker continued. "But you could be working in the tobacco fields."

Thomas nodded his head. The tears still streamed down his cheeks.

"Now, Thomas, give me your promise," ordered Master Walker.

"I won't ever run away again," Thomas sobbed. "I promise."

"Untie him," Master Walker ordered William.

"But, Master Walker," said William. "He's got to be punished."

"I make the decisions around here!" said Master Walker. "Now untie him!"

William untied Thomas. But he did it slowly.

"I'm not going to whip a six-year-old boy,"

*Thomas's Chance*

continued Master Walker. "Now go wash your face, Thomas. And take your place with Master Paul. He needs you."

"Yes, sir," Thomas said as he ran off.