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Law Day Writing Contest

Freedom Written in Fire

August 1793 — Saint-Domingue

I do not know if what I am writing is dangerous, but everything feels dangerous now. For as long as I can remember, the law told me I was not a person. It told me I could be owned, traded, punished, erased. I learned early that survival meant silence. Now the law is changing, and silence feels just as terrifying as speaking.

They say slavery is over. They say the law has finally broken. I repeat those words in my head, but they do not sit easily. If I am free, why do I still flinch at every raised voice? Why do I still feel like my body is not fully mine? Freedom is supposed to feel like relief, but mostly it feels like standing on ground that might collapse beneath me.

Daily life has not become easier. The plantations are burning or abandoned. Food is hard to find. People argue about power while others simply try to stay alive. Before, my suffering was ordered and controlled. Now it is chaotic. I am grateful not to be owned, but I am exhausted from uncertainty. No one tells us what tomorrow will look like, only that it will be different.

I have heard of the American Revolution, where men fought over laws and rights and then wrote new ones to protect themselves. They spoke of liberty while still owning people like me. Their laws promised fairness but stopped short of freedom. Here, our revolution had no choice but to go further. The law that enslaved us had to be destroyed completely. There was nothing worth saving.

That makes our fight messier, bloodier, and harder to survive. But it also makes it honest. We are not asking the law to treat us better—we are forcing it to recognize that we exist. If this revolution fails, it will not be because we asked for too much. It will be because the world could not accept that people like me deserve everything freedom is supposed to mean.

Do I believe this revolution will make our country fairer? I don't know. Fairness feels like a word meant for the future, not for now. But I know this: I would rather live with fear and freedom than safety and chains. If the law says I am free, why do I still feel hunted? Whatever happens next, the law can never pretend it did not know who we were. We have written ourselves into history, whether the world is ready or not.